

# Merriment in the Museum

Book One - Rock My Socks Off Trilogy

Jeremy Edwards

# **Merriment in the Museum**

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# **Book One of the Rock My Socks Off Trilogy**

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

Published by Xcite Books – 2012

Copyright © Jeremy Edwards 2010

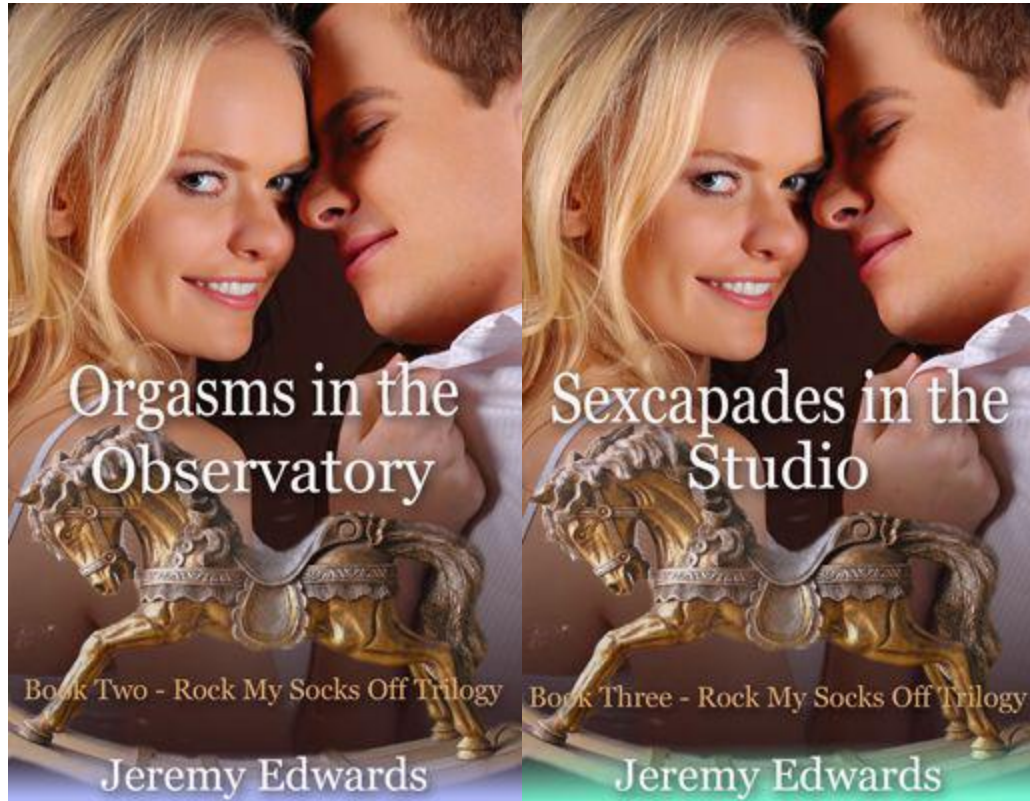
The right of Jeremy Edwards to be identified as the author of this work has been asserted by him in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

The story contained within this book is a work of fiction. Names and characters are the product of the author's imagination and any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrostatic, magnetic tape, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the written permission of the publishers: Xcite Books, Suite 11769, 2nd Floor, 145-157 St John Street, London EC1V 4PY

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## Other Books in the Series



For Helia Brookes, with all my love

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

# Chapter One

NORMANDIE STEPHENS HAD JACOB smiling within moments of shaking his hand.

‘Normandie.’ Jacob echoed the introduction. ‘That’s a charming name.’

‘It’s a silly name,’ she retorted with a laugh, ‘and you know it.’ Normandie had no reason to know anything about Jacob or his opinions, but she seemed unshakably certain of this last assertion. ‘My parents called me Brittany, and when I turned sixteen in a sea of other young Brittanys, I said, “Fuck this” and swapped it for the next French province over.’

He liked the way the word *fuck* had tripped off her tongue.

‘It’s interesting,’ he said. ‘As I understand it, those French provinces don’t have an official meaning any more. They’re culturally and historically significant, of course – but they haven’t been recognised by the French government in centuries.’

She stared at him for a moment, sizing him up. ‘I bet you say that to all the girls,’ she finally replied.

Her hair was a lazy shade of sand blonde. But her eyes, which Jacob later described to her as ‘green-traffic-light green’, harboured the sort of energetic intensity that could get you out of bed in the morning – and then straight back into bed, if you could catch up with her.

Just minutes before, Jacob had been silently resenting Brandon for inviting him to this party.

‘OK, dude, if you have everything you need, I’m going to lock up,’ the San Francisco satellite office contact for *Hip Hip Horizon* magazine had said. ‘I’m supposed to drop by this party at my brother’s. Come along if you want. Open shindig in a big-ass Victorian. Lots of, y’know, grad student types – *you* might like it.’

Jacob had tried not to take the last comment as an insult, coming from this twenty-one-year-old clubber. Brandon was essentially a glorified intern who spent all day in an iPod-and-MySpace trance; but he kept the phones from going unanswered at the token West Coast outpost maintained by *HHH*, and he’d fulfilled his obligations to Jacob by meeting him at the office after his flight got in.

And, since he'd had nothing better to do with his first night in SF, Jacob had tagged along to the party, stopping only to purchase a bottle of wine – of a quality that he knew perfectly well might be wasted on a bunch of twenty-something revellers.

But when he'd jumped into the vicinity of Brandon's elbow to prompt an introduction to the alluring woman who had arrived fashionably late, he was logging Brandon as a friend for life.

The first thing he'd noticed when she arrived was her look of radiant intelligence. The second thing he'd noticed was that everyone seemed to know her. And yet she had an air of self-protective aloofness. She smiled warmly at people but looked past them, laughed politely at their jokes but projected a certain reserve. And though she could not have been taller than five foot four, she gave the appearance of floating above the party.

Jacob had felt at once that she was somehow better than everyone else and more vulnerable. He had wanted to admire her and nurture her. Oh, and undress her.

He had decided that maybe he should talk to her first.

And when he did, he didn't see her eye avoiding his or hear her laughter ringing with overtones of remoteness. He didn't know how or why, but somehow he'd managed to cut through all that.

But after the introduction, she was swept away in a sea, not of sixteen-year-old Brittanys this time, but of convivial grad students. It was a good forty-five minutes before Jacob spotted her standing by the trolley of wine bottles, apparently deciding what to have next.

'I recommend the old-vine Zinfandel,' he said, tapping the label of a bottle that he had taken the liberty of opening half an hour earlier. 'It's excellent.'

'Thank you. I brought it.'

'Ah. I brought a Cabernet Franc, but I don't know what the host did with it.'

'If it's really good, he's probably saving it for a more important party,' said Normandie. 'He's very calculating, you know.'

'No. To be honest, I don't know him at all – though I think he was pointed out to me somewhere along the line. I'm just a tag-along, you see. He's calculating?'

'Oh, yes. Of course, I'm the same way. That's why I can recognise it.'

'Interesting,' said Jacob.

‘Mind you, I’m not *manipulative*. That would be bad. You see the difference, don’t you?’

‘I think so. Now that you’ve highlighted it.’

‘I’m not interested in making anybody do something he shouldn’t do or doesn’t want to do. But I want to see where things are headed, to plan and plot a course, to act with forethought and foresight and maybe a bit of cunning.’

‘Got it,’ he said agreeably. ‘So you’re not manipulative, but you *are* calculating. And have you made any good calculations lately?’

Normandie smiled with what looked like a mixture of pride and sexual appetite. ‘As a matter of fact, yes.’ She hesitated a titillating moment, as if she had a secret. ‘You see, I’m an astronomer.’

‘That’s funny. I always think of astronomers as being tall. Stupid, isn’t it?’

‘Oh, I don’t know. If you’re tall, I suppose you’re that much closer to all those ridiculous objects that are billions of miles away. Yet somehow, I manage. Poor little me, the stars just out of reach.’ She let out a comical, exaggerated sigh. Then they chuckled together. Her hand brushed his elbow as she swayed slightly with mirth.

‘Shall we sit down?’ he said.

‘Sure, Mr Tag-Along,’ she answered. ‘I’ll tag along with you.’

They had settled onto a cushioned window seat. Almost reluctantly, he explained to her that he was a writer from New York.

‘Hmm ... Jacob Hastings. Should I have heard of you?’

‘Whether or not you *should* have heard of me is between me and my ego – or possibly a problem for my publicist,’ he answered with a hint of bitterness. ‘The point is that you obviously *haven’t* heard of me. Which is fine. In fact, there are days when I wish *I* hadn’t heard of me.’

‘Aw,’ she said, patting his cheek. Her manner was at once sympathetic and gently mocking, and Jacob loved it. And, of course, she had touched him.

‘I think you need another drink,’ she prescribed, gesturing at his glassless hands. ‘Or maybe a good screw.’

‘Do I have to choose?’

Her gaze became intent. ‘And here I was just half an hour ago, telling myself I’d have to go home alone and dial my own number for kicks.’ She



stood up. 'But first things first – another glass of Zin for the mysterious, underexposed author.'

Jacob admired her ass as she crossed the room. He decided it was an ass of confidence.

Soon she had parked it back on the window seat.

'You know,' said Jacob. 'I'm usually a one-drink man. The second drink is not unheard of for me, but it's a delicious exception.'

'I like that,' said Normandie. '*Delicious exception.*' She appeared to relish the phrase, much as she was relishing the wine on her tongue.

'It's true,' he continued. 'Like many one-drink people, I've discovered that when I have that second glass, I imagine that I'm enjoying myself more, even if I'm not.'

She looked like she was about to protest, but he caught her eyebrow in mid-ascent. 'In this case, however, I promise you that I am actually enjoying myself as much as the wine makes me think I am.' He patted her knee, in a gesture that both of them knew meant more than simple reassurance.

'It's a good thing I have a PhD, Jacob Hastings. Not everyone would be able to follow your double-talk.'

He laughed. 'At the moment, you're the only one who needs to follow it. Everyone else can go to the movies, as far as I'm concerned.'

She took another sip. 'So what's your claim to fame, as a writer?'

'My claim to fame is that I'm one of the world's foremost authorities on the history of typography. Unfortunately, that's also my claim to obscurity.'

'I never tolerate obscurity in my life,' said Normandie helpfully. 'It just won't do.' She took a decisive gulp.

'Normandie Stephens, are you the sort of woman who always has spare light bulbs on hand? Answer carefully, because a yes may plunge me into love.'

'With me, or the light bulbs?'

'Why are you here?'

'It's where the free food and drinks are,' Jacob explained. 'Besides, all the other houses in the Haight were locked.'

'Smartass.' She said it like a term of endearment, a testimony to how comfortable they'd become in the course of an hour on the window seat. 'I'll try again. Why are you here in *San Francisco*?'

‘To get laid.’

‘Long way to go for it. Are you intent on doing it on the Golden Gate Bridge, or something?’

‘No, the paint job would clash with my polka-dotted pyjamas.’

‘Polka-dotted pyjamas? No deal. Unless we actually get to poke the dots.’

If there was one kind of woman Jacob could fall for, it was a woman who could trump him at repartee. ‘If it’s all right with the dots, it’s all right with me. I’m serious, though.’

‘About the pyjamas?’

‘About all of it. Look, I could have told you I came out here to write a magazine article – and I did – but I turn down offers like that all the time. I took this particular one because it was in SF, and SF seemed like a good place to get laid after a rather discouraging spring in New York.’

‘That’s logical, I guess. For a non-scientist. Did you have anyone particular in mind?’

‘*Did* I have someone in mind? You mean, as in before I boarded the plane?’

‘Yes.’

‘Not *do* I, as in at the present moment?’

‘No – that one I know the answer to, I hope. Otherwise we’ve been wasting a perfectly good window seat.’

He could feel the sexual electricity charging the air around their wine-buoyant heads. ‘Good point. I just wanted to make sure I was answering the correct question. Isn’t that something you scientists are always talking about? To get the right answers, you have to make sure you choose the right questions?’

‘That’s “Who Am I?” you’re thinking of, not science. But never mind. I’ve decided I like the other question better.’

‘The one you already know the answer to.’

‘Yes.’

‘Typical scientist.’

They laughed long enough that other people looked their way, wondering what could be so funny on a window seat for two.

‘So,’ said Jacob when they’d quieted down, ‘why are *you* here?’

‘It’s where the guys in polka-dotted pyjamas are.’

‘That’s all right,’ he said. ‘I don’t care why you’re here so much as I care *that* you’re here.’

‘I should tell you, though. It may not be interesting, but it is only fair.’

With an old-fashioned wave of his hand, he encouraged her to proceed.

‘What’s this?’ She imitated his gesture, making a quizzical face.

‘I was simply indicating that I hoped you’d continue talking. It was supposed to be courteous.’

She chortled into another sip of wine. ‘I guess it is, in an old-school, no-longer-recognised-by-the-French-government sort of way.’

‘Are you making fun of me?’

‘Of course.’ She patted his thigh, and Jacob became even more comfortable with being made fun of.

‘Actually, Jacob, would you do it again?’

‘What – this?’ He imitated her imitation of his quaint gesture.

‘Yeah.’ Her voice sounded slightly husky now. ‘Yeah. Maybe it’s sexy after all.’

‘Let me know when you’ve made a final decision about that.’

She stood up. ‘Let’s get out of here.’

‘So you’re writing a typography-related magazine article.’ Normandie’s voice had a crisp, refreshing lilt to it as they walked. The extra bit of projection she gave to make her voice carry over the traffic added an attractive, theatrical quality to her remarks.

‘I wish!’ was his reply. ‘When was the last time you read a typography-related magazine article?’

‘I – uh – I’m afraid I don’t get much time to read, aside from professional journals.’

He smiled appreciatively, taking his gaze off the stretch of sidewalk ahead of them to meet her eyes. ‘Oh, you *are* smooth. No,’ he sighed, ‘the assignment I’ve taken cannot, by any stretch of even an astronomer’s imagination, be described as “typography-related”. It’s about rocking horses.’

‘How cute!’

‘Rocking horses may, in fact, be cute. Personally, I find them repellent, but I won’t argue that point with a woman I’m hoping to go to bed with shortly. In any event, you have every right to find them cute, and I hope you

have a nice day for it. However – and on this I must insist – being required to write 5,000 words about rocking horses is not cute. It's not even polite.'

'This may be a silly question ... but they *are* paying you, right? And you *did* voluntarily accept the assignment, yes?'

'That's two silly questions.' He took her hand and pulled her into the doorway.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## Chapter Two

‘NICE,’ SAID NORMANDIE, BOUNCING her ass on the edge of a love seat as if it were her personal ‘fuck-me’ bed. ‘Did this place come with the rocking horse assignment?’

‘It came with my old college roommate, Harlan. Who is in Europe for the entire length of my stay in San Francisco, unfortunately.’ He handed her a glass of Harlan’s Pinot Noir and sat down next to her. ‘Or fortunately.’

‘Great kitchen ... great view ... what else does your roommate come with?’

He looked her over. ‘I’m more interested in what you come with.’

‘Me? I usually come with an assortment of screams and giggles.’

‘Excellent. Of course, anyone can say that.’

‘Are you challenging me, Jacob?’ She sipped her wine but appeared to have little interest in it.

‘I’m not sure, but I think what I’m doing is propositioning you.’

‘Too late. I propositioned you way back at 3475 Haight Street.’ She stuck her tongue out. ‘Or weren’t you paying attention?’

‘I do seem to recall something along those lines, now that you mention it,’ he said with affected vagueness. ‘This is indeed a quandary, our having both propositioned each other. How do we sort it out?’

‘Dunno.’ She put her arms around his neck and kissed him. ‘We may have to fuck twice, just to keep it fair.’

‘How about eating your pussy?’

‘Yeah, how about it?’

‘I mean ... does that count as one of the fucks?’

‘Good question. Does your old roommate have a copy of *Robert’s Rules of Order*?’

Jacob eyed the bookcase. ‘All I see is *Joy of Cooking*.’

‘Well then,’ said Normandie, ‘let’s get cooking.’

Judging from the dampness of her panties, things were already cooking in there. And when Jacob pulled her toward him, one hand on her ass and the other stroking her gusset, he felt her pelvis gyrate and her thighs clench. The hot breath in his ear articulated an almost inaudible ‘Eat me, Jacob’. He stroked her clinging fabric again, more forcefully this time, and the breath

in his ear gained volume while losing definition. ‘Oourghmm,’ it said sexily, the amorphous syllables dripping with feminine lust. His cock tingled.

Her fingers were soon on the snaps of his trousers. Avoiding the fly slit in his briefs, she pulled his cock up and out of them. She tugged the elastic down just enough for his balls to rest on top, his package displayed for her over the border. She left him like that, preciously exposed, when she slithered backward onto the love seat to receive his tongue between her creamy legs.

She tasted like an exotic liqueur, and her essence dribbled daintily around his face as he teased and tickled her intimate receptors. When she pushed his head into her cavity with a gentle determination, he was engulfed by the heartbeat of her thighs and the fragrant, liquid gift of her ecstasy. His ears, cuddled by her flesh, might have been insensible to her vocal passion, had she not been shrieking so loudly with pleasure.

Shortly after it finished singing its wild screams, her mouth became the warmest, wettest thing he could remember ever touching him down there. He came almost instantly, a melting Popsicle.

‘I never told you why I’m in San Francisco.’

‘Tell me why you’re in San Francisco,’ Jacob suggested.

‘I’m doing research at Hauser University. Actually, you probably could have guessed this, from the fact that I, for example, am an astronomer, and Hauser University, for example, has a big observatory. Got me an associate professorship there, though it won’t last. Loves me some seminars. Rock on.’ Normandie, after plenty of wine, plenty of oral sex, and only five hours of sleep, was trying out Harlan’s treadmill on a setting so high it fatigued Jacob just to know it existed.

‘Are you sure you’re old enough to have a job?’ he teased.

‘Thirty-one next April, gramps.’

He adored her for being funny first thing in the morning. How could she be his contemporary, thirty-four-year-old Jacob wondered, and yet be so full of an almost juvenile vitality? Already he knew that if he saw more of Normandie, he would be hopelessly taken with her. And he intended to prove that.

He sipped coffee and admired the focussed, dynamic energy of her perspiration-radiant body. She was working out in a minimalist get-up of

bra and panties – panties that Jacob knew were fragrant from last night – and he watched the special sweat mark develop on her crotch.

When she relaxed and stepped off the treadmill, he was ready for her, and it was the work of a moment to slip her panties down and begin the job of kissing from the small of her back on to and all over her glistening ass. Finding a vigour he didn't know he had, he actually carried her to the bedroom, with her panties halfway down her legs. She was kissing his ear as they travelled.

He was now glad that they hadn't, per se, fucked before falling asleep last night, sated with cunnilingus and fellatio. It felt more meaningful to be depositing her on the bed for a sweaty morning shag, with coffee rather than wine in their veins, with sunlight rolling in through the generous windows in Harlan's condo, saying *this is the morning after, this is daylight, this is reality*.

The wetness in her crotch was more than just perspiration. Jacob slid into her easily, and they fucked with all the passion and hunger that they'd saved from last night. Normandie, setting the rhythm and the pace, rocked and writhed as if she couldn't get enough fast enough, and Jacob almost had trouble keeping up with her. She jammed her own fingers between them to make sure her hot spot was in the loop, and the slippery, ticklish sensations soon overwhelmed them both. They exploded together in a reckless, sweaty lushness that left them incapable of anything but a shower.

A shower and a piss. Normandie spread her legs naturally and unabashedly on the seat, avoiding both a posture of modesty and one of display. She chattered casually about her plans for the day, and her eyes met Jacob's with post-coital warmth. Though limpness for the moment prevailed, his cock hardened just a little as he watched the water hiss out of her.

'You know, I didn't come to San Francisco to fall in love,' Jacob confessed between mouthfuls of multigrain sandwich.

'I remember, Prince Charming. You came here to get laid. And, unless it was all a vivid and wonderful dream, I believe that goal has been attained.'

He winced. 'Yeah, well, I think I got a bonus. A big bonus.'

Normandie toyed with the crumbled blue cheese on her salad.

'What do you think of that?' Jacob was asking.

'Needs more dressing,' said Normandie.

He laughed indulgently. ‘OK, we don’t have to talk about this. It’s only my heart, after all.’

‘No,’ she said seriously. ‘It’s not only *your* heart.’

He watched her eat. He noticed how sensuous her lips looked as she flirted with each lettuce leaf before finally committing to it.

‘Am I nuts to want to fuck you while you eat salad?’ he asked.

‘Don’t ask me. Ask the proprietor. People might be waiting for the booth.’

Jacob got up, snatched the bill off the table, and headed for the cash register. He turned to look at Normandie, hoping to catch sight of her expression without her knowing. She was smiling, and her right hand nestled prettily, napkin in hand, at the centre of her denim crotch.

During the walk home, she spoke only once.

‘There’s something different about the way you arouse me. It’s like different hormones are engaged, compared to what I’m used to. It’s interesting.’

It was *interesting*, Jacob repeated in his mind.

He was tracing soft circles along her flank when she confessed herself preoccupied.

‘At least now I know there’s something better than tenure,’ she sighed.

‘No offence, Dee, but from where I stand – er, *lie* – that’s quite a non sequitur.’

‘I’m sure that’s true. But it’s only because you can’t read my mind.’

‘I’ll try to do something about that. Meanwhile ... what’s all this about tenure?’

She sighed again. ‘I’m probably not going to get tenure, that’s all. The budget is tight and the university wants the department to downsize, and even though Kate adores me, she can’t ...’

‘Who’s Kate? You don’t need to explain why she adores you – who wouldn’t adore you? – but just tell me who she is, so I can follow on my scorecard.’

‘My good friend Professor Katherine G. Passky is the brilliant, sexy, silver-haired chair of our department. I sort of idolise her.’

‘She sounds like you in twenty or thirty years.’

Normandie kissed him. It was about eighty per cent sexual and twenty per cent tender, and it made Jacob feel as if he’d taken a slug of scotch.



‘Twenty-two years. I think she’s fifty-three. Anyway, she’s written astrophysics books that would make your head swim.’

‘Trust me,’ said Jacob, holding up a cautionary hand. ‘Even the *title* of an astrophysics book would make my head swim.’

She smiled. ‘I keep forgetting you’re a layman.’

‘So soon?’ He began caressing the smooth globes of her behind, by way of refreshing her memory.

‘Mmm. This is why I said there was something better than tenure. Where was I?’

‘Kate.’

‘Yes. Kate thinks I’m a genius. Granted, I am ... but it’s so hard to find people who properly acknowledge that.’

Jacob got into a rhythm, kneading her flesh. ‘Is there anything that can be done to put you over the top?’

‘Just keep doing what you’re doing for a while, darling.’

‘I mean, to get the university to give you a permanent position.’

‘At this point, I think they’d have to be convinced that I was doing not only important work but spectacular work.’

‘But I don’t understand. If your Kate thinks you’re such hot stuff, why can’t she help?’

‘She can’t pay me a salary with nonexistent money. Even a really good knowledge of quantum physics doesn’t enable *that*.’ Normandie suddenly inhaled sharply with surprise and pleasure. ‘Ooh, do that again.’

## Chapter Three

ALMOST EVERYONE JACOB HAD ever known fell into one of two categories: people who knew exactly what they wanted and were too busy pursuing it to stop and chat; and people who didn't know what they wanted and were happy to talk all night. From the latter population, Jacob had consistently drawn his friends and his lovers.

But Normandie was a strange, wonderful hybrid of the two types. She knew what she wanted – and she wanted a lot. She wanted vast galaxies of knowledge. She wanted acclaim. She wanted the respect of her peers. She wanted a bigger telescope, and a building to put it in.

And she seemed, judging from the past week and a half, to want Jacob. But she didn't seem to want him in the calculating way she wanted these other things. She seemed to want Jacob because something delicate inside her responded to him. Her manner seemed to say that although she couldn't have predicted his existence, he made her smile. And that even though she was very, very busy and very, very focussed, she could always make time to laugh, and play, and perhaps love.

He had never met anyone like her. That had been obvious at once. But the amazing thing, to him, was that she claimed she'd never met anyone like him, either.

'You're not a little boy who's trying to compete with me, and you're not a big boy who's trying to own me, and you're not a selfish boy who wants me just to shut up and fuck.'

'Thank you,' said Jacob.

'You – you just *are*. Do you realise how special that makes you? How easy to be with? How nice to wake up next to?'

He didn't really know if he was special, but it certainly made him feel special to hear her say it.

She was hugging him tightly in her strength-training-strengthened grip. She was almost tearful. 'You make me feel that no matter what happens to all my distant stars, there's something solid and organic in my life.'

Jacob stroked her along the length of her back, laughing. 'I'm like a bag of granola.'

‘Thanks for showin’ up, dude,’ said Brandon. ‘Gary totally wanted me to get your input on the photographer.’ He produced a crisp white envelope of sample photos.

Jacob quickly wiped away the excess beer on their table, trying not to take offence at the vulgar implication that he, a professional writer, might have considered not ‘showin’ up’ for an appointed meeting with a representative of his publisher. Why Gary, his editor back in New York, had chosen this particular individual to represent him in San Francisco remained a mystery.

‘These are the three people Gary likes,’ Brandon explained. ‘They’re all here in SF and available.’

Jacob squinted at the photos in the dim pub lighting, pretending that he gave a damn who was going to take pictures of rocking horses for *Hip Hip Horizon*.

He could tell at a glance that all the photographers were competent, more than capable of doing justice to the appalling subject.

‘Excellent,’ he said noncommittally. ‘Which candidate does Gary favour?’

‘He’s sort of jonesin’ for this one,’ said Brandon, touching the part of the picture you’re not supposed to touch with his beer-moistened forefinger. ‘Susan Weedon.’

‘Oh, good,’ said Jacob, handing back the materials. ‘She’s my first choice, too.’

The lights went down a notch further – though Jacob wouldn’t have thought it possible – and a throb of house music replaced the pop that had been playing. A fluorescent light revealed a DJ rising from his cocoon in a booth in the far corner, and a few figures began to float out onto what passed for a small dance floor.

Their business was concluded, but Jacob hadn’t finished his beer. He was comfortable where he was, and he knew that Normandie might not be done in the lab until almost midnight.

‘So, Brandon,’ he said with forced affability, ‘what are you studying?’

‘Y’know, like, communications,’ Brandon replied absently. The young man’s attention was clearly wandering as the dance floor began to heat up. Now Jacob understood why Brandon had suggested they meet at this particular pub at the hour of 10 p.m. This was evidently where he had planned on spending the next chunk of his evening.

‘Very nice,’ Jacob said drily. ‘Look, I’m going to nurse this beer a while, but you don’t have to babysit me. If you’re eager to get out there and –’

He didn’t even have time to finish the thought before Brandon had hopped up and joined a group of lithe young women.

Jacob could see Brandon through their eyes – an easy-mannered, nimble young guy in hip clothes, as strikingly handsome as he was, to Jacob, strikingly vacant. But Jacob was much more interested in seeing the women – through Brandon’s eyes, his own eyes, or any eyes that happened to be available. They were lovely, indeed, and the knowledge that he probably had little in common with them and that mutual boredom would ensue from any direct interaction did not prevent him from enjoying the sight of ice-cream-scoop bottoms, tickle-me midriffs, and fluffy mops of hair, all bringing sparkles of feminine life to the otherwise drab environment.

He sat there contentedly for forty-five minutes, allowing the beer to mellow him and the women to arouse him. Then he headed for his borrowed apartment, fairly confident that Normandie would eventually invite herself over and finish what the dancers had started.

Sure enough, an hour and a half later, he was sprawled naked on the bed.

‘Relax,’ said Normandie, from the level of his crotch. She kissed the underside of his balls. ‘I want to kiss and lick every bit of you ... show you how much I appreciate who you are, and what you are.’

‘That tickles beautifully.’

‘*Tickles* is only the beginning, my friend. On the scale of pleasure I’m planning on giving you, *tickles* is, like, a one.’

He reclined his head again and closed his eyes.

He heard the lewd *pop* of the massage oil being opened. He heard its drunken, reverse guzzling as it globbed into Normandie’s hand, and he smelled an appetising, oily cocktail of raspberry and banana.

‘Oh!’ The first cool stroke of her moistened fingers around his groin surprised him.

It dawned on him that she was the first woman with whom he felt comfortable being really passive in bed. A dynamo like Normandie was just what it took to make him want to be deliciously inactive sometimes, to glide into a zone where she could spoon dollops of pleasure onto his body and he had no responsibility but to wallow in it.

It used to be that he didn’t like having his ass touched beyond a basic functional grip during fucking. But now she was reaching under and

caressing his cheeks, pinching them, titillating between them. It felt good, and he told her so. He could never remember feeling so relaxed and aroused at the same time.

He hadn't ever trusted a woman in this way. Not that he'd been afraid they would hurt him; but he had always felt compelled to keep his sexual steering wheel in his own hands. With Normandie, he was happy to be taken, to be driven, to let her try things on him, to raise his erection to monumental proportions in whatever way she chose.

'You can play with my ass anytime you want,' he said.

'Thank you. We'll make a note of that.'

With his mind and body at rest, he continued to let her cover him in slickness, caressing him at every turn, stimulating invisible muscles and awakening latent erogenous zones. Never before had he felt so many sensory points being discovered and nurtured – along his ribcage, under his arms, along the inner lengths of his thighs ... He felt that he could lie here and absorb pleasure forever – except for the little matter of his flouncing cock, which she had lubed early on and returned to stroke every so often. It was now craving her full attention, and she took notice of this.

She kissed it. 'Be with you in a moment, baby,' she said sweetly – to Jacob's prick, not Jacob senior.

She reared up on her knees and, quickly but erotically, began to cover her own body in lube, as if it were indoor suntan lotion.

'Would you like me to do that for you?' he asked.

'Not this time. You just lie there.'

Her face rang the changes on tactile delight and sexual excitement as she sensuously finger-painted herself. Her body was sinuous and tense beneath the pressure of her own hands.

She saved her inner thighs for last, and as she moved her hands closer and closer to her pouting pussy, Jacob could not only see but smell how aroused she was.

Then she let herself fall forward, clambering back on top of him and manoeuvring her ass until she had her cunt satisfactorily skewered. She ran her slippery hands all over his slippery body, while her slippery rump bounced against his slippery legs and her slippery love channel clutched at and pumped around his slippery dick. The entire experience was almost frictionless, save for the tight interplay of cock and pussy, and the effect was like that of fucking weightless in space. When Normandie bounced

herself into climax and milked Jacob's own orgasm into her screaming body, he felt as if he would never return to earth.

'Now that was my idea of a good time,' she told him calmly afterward.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## Chapter Four

THE LIVING MUSEUM OF the American Rocking Horse was, by contrast, not Jacob's idea of a good time. His tastes ran to fanciful fonts – not prancing, rococo animals with wild, Victorian-era eyes. But the success of a book on fonts had proved to be a fanciful notion itself; and with Jacob's handsome jacket-flap photo flapping impotently over stacks of unsold books that were now headed back to the publisher's warehouse, well-paid magazine features were something he knew he had to get used to again.

So he was forcing himself to spend this Tuesday morning at the museum, which was housed in a huge warehouse along the city's Pacific frontage.

He was surprised to find that an attendant had to unlock the main display area for him.

'When is the museum open to the public?' asked Jacob.

'Oh, it's not open to the *public*,' said the attendant, a fussy little trout-eyed man whose picture, Jacob decided, probably appeared next to the word 'officious' in any good illustrated dictionary.

'That's an interesting interpretation of the phrase *living museum*, isn't it?' Jacob couldn't help saying. 'But I'm sure it's not your fault. It's just a comment for the curator, really.'

'I am the curator,' the man responded. 'No matter what Sylvia Hodgeport says.'

Jacob had no idea who Sylvia Hodgeport was, or why her opinion regarding who was or was not the curator of an obscure, perpetually closed museum should be a controversial one. Fortunately, as Jacob was a feature writer and not an investigative journalist, he felt no obligation to pursue the topic. So he merely nodded.

The airplane-hangar-sized building was immaculately clean. The floor had been polished, the walls had been painted a delicate shade of cream ... in short, a beautiful space had been designed to house and display these grotesque creations.

God, they were hideous. They really *might* have been cute, Jacob admitted, had they been the size of mantelpiece ornaments. But, large as life, they made his mind run to firewood rather than feather dusters.

They resembled real horses the way a cupcake decorated by a committee of kindergartners might resemble a slice of bread. The wood of their flesh had been carved here into unwieldy braids, there into an impossible gown or an ostentatious waistcoat, and everywhere into mismatched garlands that hurdled the boundaries of good taste and kept galloping on. Their facial expressions all managed to blend some degree of equine arrogance with a healthy dose of human idiocy.

And so many of them! At floor level ... on risers ... some even hanging from skyhooks like absurd, repulsive Pegasuses. For the purposes of the assignment, the setup was ideal – down to the fact that everything was extremely well labelled, with a surfeit of historical documentation. There was good lighting, and, thanks to the never-open-to-the-public policy, there were no distractions. It was enough to make Jacob want to either throw up or take a nap.

He sat down on a bench and closed his eyes to reflect. Would he always have been so devoid of interest in an assignment like this, he asked himself, or was it simply that it could not successfully compete for his attention with Normandie's magnetism? Maybe he was getting too old to divide his enthusiasm efficiently between demanding work and incipient love. And there was no denying that love was what it was – he was certainly old enough to recognise *that*.

He opened his eyes. He shuddered. No, this was not a side effect of love. The rocking horses were simply horrible, and that was that.

By noon, he felt he needed a gallon of coffee and a world full of sunshine to shake him out of the unpleasant combination of nausea and stupor. It was, unfortunately, raining; but he grabbed a latte from the nearest barista and walked briskly in the direction of food. He slipped into a burrito joint he'd noticed in the neighbourhood and sat with his back to the door, testing his reading knowledge of simple Spanish by means of the imported movie posters on the wall.

'Is this seat taken?' Normandie had materialised from behind and glided swiftly into the chair across from him.

'No,' said Jacob. 'Is your ass taken?'

'You took it last night,' she said. 'Don't you remember?'

'Hmm. Yeah, I thought it looked familiar. Hey, how in the world did you know I was eating lunch here?'

'I was about to ask you the same question.'



‘Pure serendipity!’ he marvelled.

‘Or maybe I was subconsciously drawn here by your irresistible, masculine pheromones, luring me across Golden Gate Park.’

‘How did your subconscious know the irresistible animal scent was me, and not those Golden Gate Park bison?’

‘I think you’ve showered more recently.’ She leaned across the small Formica table to nuzzle under his arm. ‘Mmm,’ she said approvingly.

He couldn’t pretend that he fully understood her aversion to planned hook-ups. She had warned him at the outset that he shouldn’t rely on her to commit to premeditated dinners, theatre outings, concerts ... And yet, she had already established a pattern of casually but consistently showing up in his space and in his life – and she welcomed it when he did the same. And, whenever and practically wherever they coincided, they meshed, coupled, and merged. They had begun to speak openly in the language of partnership, but they lived as if the thread of their relationship were quasi-accidental. Normandie seemed to thrive on a predictable pattern of spontaneity, and Jacob was wise enough not to disrupt or even question that.

‘It seems that we’re always walking down streets,’ he said as they headed toward the LMARH.

‘What else would we walk down – the sides of buildings?’

‘I just mean that so much of our interaction occurs while we’re en route from one place to another. Sometimes it seems we spend almost as much time coming from places and going to places as being places.’

‘I see.’ She thought about this for a minute, while their solid, waterproof shoes went *clomp clomp clomp* along slick cobblestones and skimmed the occasional puddles.

‘I have to admit,’ she finally said, ‘I often find it even more fun to be on my way someplace than to actually be someplace.’

‘You’re kinetic.’

She stopped, took his hand, and pressed her body against his. ‘That’s one of the sweetest things anyone’s ever said to me.’

The light rain poured daintily around them while they kissed.

‘They’re enough to make you puke, aren’t they.’ Though he was very glad of her company for his afternoon session with the rocking horses – he

would have been glad of just about anyone's company, with the possible exception of the troutly curator – he took pains to distance himself from the cloyingly precious subjects of his 5,000-word article-in-progress.

‘Remember, Jacob,’ Normandie said valiantly, ‘they were originally made for children.’

‘Quite true,’ he said. ‘I don’t blame the children. Kids just hop on and ride. They can’t be expected to have good aesthetic sensibilities. The important thing,’ he added grudgingly, ‘is that they have fun.’

‘The important thing is that we have fun, too,’ said Normandie, stroking Jacob’s arm. Then she whispered, ‘I forgot to wear panties today.’

He pressed his fingers against the lightweight fabric of her summer skirt, and verified what she’d just told him.

She smirked. ‘And what was that you just said – *hop on and ride*?’ In another moment, she had straddled the largest – and possibly the most hideous – rocking horse in sight, one that had evidently been built to accommodate an entire small family of aesthetically indiscriminating children.

‘Dee!’ Jacob knew that the officious management could walk in at any time.

She looked back at him, with a challenge in her eyes. ‘Hop on and ride,’ was all she said.

It was an offer he could not refuse.

‘Don’t you get turned on by the thrill of possibly getting caught?’ she asked as he snuggled up behind her and the contraption began to jiggle equivocally beneath them.

‘No. Personally, I’m more into the thrill of *not* getting caught. However, I’m turned on enough by your bare cunt on a rocking horse that the getting or not getting caught is incidental.’

While clinging to her waist with one hand, he reached underneath her with the other and nestled his fingers into her wet spot. They would just have to hope that this additional layer of varnish wouldn’t damage the antique finish.

Sensuously, they began to rock, their combined weight easily directing the horse back and forth. Jacob kept two fingers firmly implanted in Normandie’s pussy, and as their bodies travelled to and fro the fingers did the same: a delectable microcosm.

His free arm was wrapped tightly around her, and he could feel her heartbeat reverberating through her entire torso. She was rocking within the rocking – she was evidently using the sculpted saddle horn to generate the friction she needed against her clit. Soon she was coming, her cunt clenching and her firm bottom pressing frantically against his stiff crotch. He wondered how he was going to dismount from the ridiculous vehicle under the burden of such a huge hard-on.

With the grace of a lewd ballerina, Normandie scooted herself 180 degrees, using her slippery, gaping snatch as a fulcrum. Once she was facing him, she unzipped his jeans while Jacob rested his hands on her shoulders. They rocked more slowly now, her ass doing the work. With a glint in her eye, she reached underneath herself to moisten her hand, then stroked him, rocking all the while. She brought him off quietly, directing his spurts of release right onto the summer fabric of her lap. Then she kissed him, as if the mess had been his gift to her.

‘I may have to reconsider my opinions about rocking horses,’ said Jacob.

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## Chapter Five

AFTER ANOTHER DAY OF observing and note-taking at the LMARH – including two delicate hours guiding the efficient but monosyllabic photographer Susan Weedon – Jacob was ready to write the damn article.

*On the shores of the galloping Pacific, in the shadow of San Francisco's most cavalier skyscrapers, lives a curious herd of once-tame horses. Now semi-wild, they have been led to water but show no signs of drinking ...*

And so on, for 5,000 nauseating words that made Jacob himself feel like drinking. Thank goodness it was the editor back in New York who would have to sift through the dozens of pictures that Susan was likely to turn in. Jacob had conscientiously directed the photographer to the specimens he was planning on writing about, but she had taken each one from six or seven angles, and he really didn't want to have to look at the results.

He had not had the courage to inspect the big horse that Normandie had tamed with her delicious wetness for any residual stains. And if Susan had noticed any unusual glimmerings through her lens, she hadn't said anything. But, then again, she would hardly be likely to break her near-total silence to exclaim, 'Look, Jacob! I think that's a *sex stain!*'

The door to the lab admitted him silently. Normandie was, as usual, alone here – the department hadn't been able to grant her an assistant – and Jacob admired her back before announcing his presence. Though she was faced away from him while working at her computer, it excited him to note that her legs were spread apart, that under her desk she flashed the wall from inside her miniskirt. Even if she chanced to be wearing panties – which Jacob was lucky enough to know was a big *if* – he could get into the image of her soft, cotton-clad pussy beaming from between her legs.

Jacob was a man whom many friends and acquaintances admired for his ability to put ideas into words. And yet sometimes he felt that he hid behind the words – or, more accurately, that he used words as a substitute for the vivid emotions he sometimes seemed to lack. But around Normandie, there

were times when he felt that it was the words that were lacking and the emotions that were having their day in the sun.

‘I thought you might like lunch.’ Those words would do, for the moment.

She swivelled to greet him, flashing him in the process. Ah, so we’re in lime green panties today, Jacob observed to himself with a twitch in his groin.

‘You look lovely in lime,’ he said.

She looked confused. Her eyes scanned her aqua top and black denim mini. Then the light went on, and a mischievous, hungry smile shone out.

She glided forward on her task chair until she nearly collided with him. ‘Did you really come here for lunch?’ she asked, using a forefinger to tease a line above his belt. ‘Or did you come here, for example, to get your hands on some lime green panties?’

‘Mm,’ said Jacob, nibbling from the base of her throat toward her shoulder. He loved these low-on-the-shoulder summer jerseys.

‘Or perhaps,’ she said, ‘you came here to tweak some nipples. *They’re itching for it today,*’ she confided conspiratorially, directing his hand onto her chest and positioning his fingers.

Their mouths ate each other while he tweaked.

‘Then again,’ Normandie panted, ‘maybe you came here to touch some soft ass.’ She pushed her chair back, hopped out, and grabbed hold of a nearby filing cabinet, jutting her tight-skirted rump his way.

Jacob had hardly ever seen her quite this randy in the middle of the day, and he congratulated himself on having chosen this particular point in the week for dropping by the lab. He immediately gave her the firm but painless swats she craved. He could see her lime panties again, from behind this time, see them moistening before his eyes. He dropped to his knees.

Cotton had never tasted so good. He was eating her pussy right through the panties – sucking, licking, nibbling. She was saturating them with nectar, and the filing cabinet was rattling ridiculously as she shimmied in place, clutching the damn thing.

He wrapped a hand around her waist to seek her clit. The clit finger did her from above, descending from the waistband of the panties, while his mouth continued to dance against her panty-encased cunt. When she pressed her ass against his forehead and brazenly squeegeed a damp, trembling orgasm across his face, Jacob came in his pants like a happy,

helpless virgin. She collapsed on top of him, and he felt the oily pleasure of her hot, dripping cunt pulsing onto his sticky trousers.

It was a hot day, and they didn't mind taking their lunchtime walk without reference to a change of underwear. Normandie whispered that the warm breeze was tickling her moist panties back to dryness, and Jacob could feel his recent splash of come baking onto his boxers. Her hair was a lewd blonde in the afternoon sunlight, and Jacob felt ecstatically dirty to be on post-fuck parade with her, reeking of sex, knowing her neat little lime panties were stained and sagging as her creamy thighs advanced along the sidewalk.

Back at the lab, he gave those panties extra attention before inching them downward, savouring their aroma and their fatigued limpness as he caressed her through, around, and within them. When, at last, she wiggled them impatiently down and off, he claimed them and held them briefly to his face, before placing them lovingly on her desk.

'Enough with the panties,' she exclaimed, leaping for his fly and hustling him out of his pants. She sank into the couch, oblivious to the heavy reference books scattered to each side of her, and moved him into position, guiding his cock to where it belonged. Jacob took her cues – and her knees – and, within moments, he was pounding her into the cool vinyl, moving like a corkscrew ... until he ultimately popped. In his throes, he wedged the heel of his hand against her mound and pressed, until he felt her inner volcano erupting in response.

'I want your hands all over my body. Isn't that crazy?'

They were talking in the lab bathroom, where Jacob had just unzipped. 'Crazy?' he said. 'Why? I mean, it works for me.'

'It's crazy because we just fucked thirty minutes ago. I can't spend all day, every day, naked beneath you, soaking up pleasure with every cell of my body.'

'Of course not. Sometimes I should be beneath *you*.'

Normandie studied his steady stream of piss. It seemed to soothe, almost hypnotise her. 'Do you think I'll lose my grant if I turn in a pair of sex-stained panties instead of a report next month?'

'I think you should compromise, and turn in a sex-stained report.'

'Has anyone ever told you that you're a very attractive pisser?' she asked.

‘No. Put it in the report.’

But Normandie did resume working, and Jacob sat quietly in her office, making fussy hand-written revisions to the manuscript of his magazine article.

‘What would you do if I discovered a new galaxy?’ she asked, just when he was getting ready to leave.

‘Congratulate you.’

‘Would you feel threatened?’

‘By a galaxy billions of miles away?’

‘By all the attention I’d get.’

‘No. You *should* get attention.’

‘The media might be on my ass 24/7.’

‘For that, the line forms here.’

He stepped forward to kiss her goodbye, then stopped. ‘And what would *you* do if I won a Pulitzer Prize?’

‘Fuck your brains out – same as always. Oh, and maybe we could do some champagne or something.’

## Chapter Six

On Friday, Normandie ‘happened’ to show up at Jacob’s (technically, Harlan’s) when supper time was approaching. Another non-date restaurant dinner was enjoyed, and the couple drifted to Normandie’s place afterward. It became obvious to Jacob, though, that this was a working evening. He grazed at a novel while Normandie attacked her work, biding his time before trying to seduce her.

After about an hour, he put the book down and stood behind her at her desk, just giving her shoulders a hint of erotic massage. ‘So, tell me again why you have to finish going over this research tonight, instead of letting me nibble your ass cheeks like you ought to.’

‘Because, Mr Asscheek Nibbler, tomorrow is the deadline for submitting results to the journal. If I want them to commission my article for the winter issue, they need to see the research results now. And if I want to impress the pants off the tenure committee, I need to be in that issue.’

‘Oh. I don’t suppose you’d settle for impressing the pants off of *me*.’

‘Tomorrow.’

‘I’m expected to stand here in my underwear until tomorrow?’

‘Of course not. You can sit down.’

Jacob had always loved intellectual women, had always loved the way their passion flowed as freely for ideas and discoveries as it did for his brown eyes and his soft caresses to their sensuous zones. Sometimes more freely, he had learned in one or two less-than-satisfactory relationships.

He kept quiet, honouring her work time and the privilege of sharing it, appreciating this opportunity to watch her sink into an orgy of intellectual stimulation ... and quietly counting the minutes till he could screw her intellectual ass off. He was patient, fully aware that if they could fuck in her lab on a weekday afternoon, it was only fair that she could work at home on a Friday night. She had to go to bed eventually, and that was all he needed to know.

He asked if there were some way he could help her, and she thanked him and said she’d let him know.

When her energy flagged, he made her a pot of tea. When her attention wandered, he read her the funniest bit from the novel. It made for a nice,



relaxing evening.

‘Jacob.’

He realised he’d dozed off.

‘Would you do me a favour and proofread this table?’

She passed him a sheaf of documents, fresh from the ink-jet printer.

‘Proofread *what*? This is just a bunch of numbers.’

‘They’d better be numbers – because if they’re colours or ice cream flavours, I’m a lousy scientist. Just check ’em for alignment, decimal places, etc. Please, that is.’ The smile she bestowed was worth a thousand *pleases*.

They were just columns of figures – meaningless to him, or by all rights, they should have been – but they became a sacred text, or an inscrutable poem. They were her art, wrung from absurdly distant galaxies by means of impossibly complicated mathematics.

‘Looks good to me,’ he said when he’d finished. ‘Though the 4.793 in the third column could use a little salt.’

‘So, what’s the next step?’ he said on Monday morning, after he’d given himself breakfast in bed between her thighs.

‘The next step is that I do you, I guess.’ She dipped beneath the covers and grabbed his cock, like a swimming-pool diver grabbing a rubber-coated brick.

‘Actually,’ he said after she’d sucked him dry, ‘when I said “What’s the next step?” I meant what’s the next step in your grand scheme to acquire tenure? While you wait for the journal to give you the green light, I mean.’

‘Oh,’ said Normandie. ‘I hope you don’t regret the blow-job.’

‘Not a concern,’ said Jacob. ‘Technically, though, I owe you one instalment of oral sex. Do you want it now?’ He was already lifting the hem of her negligee.

‘Silly boy. I just had one.’

‘And that’s a problem because ...?’ He enunciated the words between kisses as his mouth played around her upper thighs.

‘Oh!’ she conceded. ‘You’re right, it’s not a problem. Mmm, not a problem.’

Thus encouraged, Jacob proceeded. He officially extended his visit from thighs to tender feminine lips, kissing up blushes and tonguing his way into favourite places, where he was welcomed with libations.

‘No, this isn’t problematic at all,’ she was saying in quick breaths. ‘Wow, goodness, Jacob, I’m having quite a remarkable absence of problems with this. I’m having – ee!’ She ended on a squeal.

It was the wittiest little orgasm she’d ever had for him, to date. He clutched her ass and buried his face in her warmth, wetness, and wit.

Normandie had submitted her research, as planned. But she had explained to Jacob that, as with just about anything these days, it wasn’t enough to do solid work. One had to market. Promote. Schmooze.

In addition to making arrangements to appear at some upcoming conferences, this week’s schmoozing entailed a visit to Kate Passky’s office. Jacob had turned in the final revisions on his article, and his only career-related obligation was mulling over an unappealing but lucrative editorial job he’d been offered back in New York. He was intrigued by the very concept of someone so impressive that even Normandie was in awe of her, and he was pleased when Normandie invited him to tag along. She even made a quick call to Kate to let her know, explaining to Jacob that in the backbiting, super-bureaucratic world of academia, even a phone call was really just a shortcut, a memo being the more usual procedure for announcing events as trivial as putting cream in one’s coffee. ‘You never know when some rival will make a stink because *his* friend didn’t get to sit in on a casual meeting with the chair, and why wasn’t the entire department notified, and how come there’s no paper trail, etc.’ From the exasperation in her voice, it sounded like she might have a particular rival in mind.

It seemed incongruous that one of the most important decisions of Normandie’s life would emanate from such an inconspicuous, insignificant-looking office. Jacob couldn’t have said what, exactly, he’d been expecting, but it was something more along the lines of vaulted ceilings, dancing spotlights, and probably lots of neon that would ask, WILL NORMANDIE STEPHENS GET TENURE? Times Square style.

But the only neon was in Jacob’s mind. And, perhaps, Normandie’s – though she looked cool to the point of seeming blasé. In this dim, bookshelf-crammed room with one window and barely enough floor space to accommodate visitors, Kate sat behind a desk of modest proportions, looking like the most important question on her mind was whether or not it was time to order more paperclips. The cosy array of open reference books,

semi-shuffled manuscripts, and rampant sticky notes did not, collectively, give the impression of holding anyone's career in the balance.

When she looked up, Kate's personal magnetism was as good as any neon. Though his knowledge of astronomy stopped at the fourth-grade level, Jacob could see why this handsome woman with intelligence and humanity shining out of her museum-quality grey eyes would be an inspiring leader in whatever field she might have chosen. Add to that the exceptional professional genius that Normandie vouched for, and it was easy to see why she had used the word *idolise*.

The two of them were of necessity squeezed right up against Kate's desk, and Jacob could smell both the mints on Kate's breath and the sweet, fresh smell of Normandie. The chair nodded graciously at him, but her first words took him aback.

'So this is the writer you've been fucking,' she said to Normandie.

Normandie rolled her eyes.

'Oh, all right. I'm sorry.' Kate smiled indulgently. '*Seeing*. The writer you've been *seeing*. There, is that better?' She patted Normandie's hand, condescendingly. 'Young academics have become so uptight since my day.' She looked at Jacob. 'Don't you think so –'

'Jacob,' he gulped.

'Don't you think so, Jacob?' She winked at him, enjoying the tease around the obvious fact that Jacob had not been old enough to make the scene in her 'day'. Normandie, whose composure never eluded her for more than a moment, was now chuckling into her hand, and her cheeks were rosy and cheerful.

'Maybe I'd better wait outside,' said Jacob, between dry-throated ahems.

'Oh, he *is* cute,' said Professor Passky to Professor Stephens, as though Jacob were already out of earshot.

'Please stay, Jacob,' said Normandie lightly. 'It would be stupid for you to leave after coming all this way, just because Kate used a particular verb.'

Now Kate was chuckling too, and Jacob couldn't help smiling. 'Professor Passky, I'm very pleased to meet your verb, and I hope you'll use it again sometime.'

'That's the spirit,' said the chair of the Astronomy Department, giving Jacob a punch on the arm – an interaction, like the patting of Normandie's hand, that was made possible only by the small size of the office.

Then she became businesslike. ‘Normandie, I have to tell you that I still can’t swing assigning you a research assistant. There just aren’t enough to go around.’

‘OK,’ said Normandie, with a shrug.

‘You don’t mean *OK*,’ Kate argued. ‘You mean *oh, shit*. Because it’s not OK. But there’s nothing I can do about it. And, speaking of things that are not OK but about which I can do nothing: I’ve been given next year’s preliminary budget, and unfortunately it’s looking like I can’t create any new tenured positions. Don’t think I didn’t try. And, hell, I’ll *keep* trying. But unless something changes ...’

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## Chapter Six

On Friday, Normandie ‘happened’ to show up at Jacob’s (technically, Harlan’s) when supper time was approaching. Another non-date restaurant dinner was enjoyed, and the couple drifted to Normandie’s place afterward. It became obvious to Jacob, though, that this was a working evening. He grazed at a novel while Normandie attacked her work, biding his time before trying to seduce her.

After about an hour, he put the book down and stood behind her at her desk, just giving her shoulders a hint of erotic massage. ‘So, tell me again why you have to finish going over this research tonight, instead of letting me nibble your ass cheeks like you ought to.’

‘Because, Mr Asscheek Nibbler, tomorrow is the deadline for submitting results to the journal. If I want them to commission my article for the winter issue, they need to see the research results now. And if I want to impress the pants off the tenure committee, I need to be in that issue.’

‘Oh. I don’t suppose you’d settle for impressing the pants off of *me*.’

‘Tomorrow.’

‘I’m expected to stand here in my underwear until tomorrow?’

‘Of course not. You can sit down.’

Jacob had always loved intellectual women, had always loved the way their passion flowed as freely for ideas and discoveries as it did for his brown eyes and his soft caresses to their sensuous zones. Sometimes more freely, he had learned in one or two less-than-satisfactory relationships.

He kept quiet, honouring her work time and the privilege of sharing it, appreciating this opportunity to watch her sink into an orgy of intellectual stimulation ... and quietly counting the minutes till he could screw her intellectual ass off. He was patient, fully aware that if they could fuck in her lab on a weekday afternoon, it was only fair that she could work at home on a Friday night. She had to go to bed eventually, and that was all he needed to know.

He asked if there were some way he could help her, and she thanked him and said she’d let him know.

When her energy flagged, he made her a pot of tea. When her attention wandered, he read her the funniest bit from the novel. It made for a nice,

relaxing evening.

‘Jacob.’

He realised he’d dozed off.

‘Would you do me a favour and proofread this table?’

She passed him a sheaf of documents, fresh from the ink-jet printer.

‘Proofread *what*? This is just a bunch of numbers.’

‘They’d better be numbers – because if they’re colours or ice cream flavours, I’m a lousy scientist. Just check ’em for alignment, decimal places, etc. Please, that is.’ The smile she bestowed was worth a thousand *pleases*.

They were just columns of figures – meaningless to him, or by all rights, they should have been – but they became a sacred text, or an inscrutable poem. They were her art, wrung from absurdly distant galaxies by means of impossibly complicated mathematics.

‘Looks good to me,’ he said when he’d finished. ‘Though the 4.793 in the third column could use a little salt.’

‘So, what’s the next step?’ he said on Monday morning, after he’d given himself breakfast in bed between her thighs.

‘The next step is that I do you, I guess.’ She dipped beneath the covers and grabbed his cock, like a swimming-pool diver grabbing a rubber-coated brick.

‘Actually,’ he said after she’d sucked him dry, ‘when I said “What’s the next step?” I meant what’s the next step in your grand scheme to acquire tenure? While you wait for the journal to give you the green light, I mean.’

‘Oh,’ said Normandie. ‘I hope you don’t regret the blow-job.’

‘Not a concern,’ said Jacob. ‘Technically, though, I owe you one instalment of oral sex. Do you want it now?’ He was already lifting the hem of her negligee.

‘Silly boy. I just had one.’

‘And that’s a problem because ...?’ He enunciated the words between kisses as his mouth played around her upper thighs.

‘Oh!’ she conceded. ‘You’re right, it’s not a problem. Mmm, not a problem.’

Thus encouraged, Jacob proceeded. He officially extended his visit from thighs to tender feminine lips, kissing up blushes and tonguing his way into favourite places, where he was welcomed with libations.

‘No, this isn’t problematic at all,’ she was saying in quick breaths. ‘Wow, goodness, Jacob, I’m having quite a remarkable absence of problems with this. I’m having – ee!’ She ended on a squeal.

It was the wittiest little orgasm she’d ever had for him, to date. He clutched her ass and buried his face in her warmth, wetness, and wit.

Normandie had submitted her research, as planned. But she had explained to Jacob that, as with just about anything these days, it wasn’t enough to do solid work. One had to market. Promote. Schmooze.

In addition to making arrangements to appear at some upcoming conferences, this week’s schmoozing entailed a visit to Kate Passky’s office. Jacob had turned in the final revisions on his article, and his only career-related obligation was mulling over an unappealing but lucrative editorial job he’d been offered back in New York. He was intrigued by the very concept of someone so impressive that even Normandie was in awe of her, and he was pleased when Normandie invited him to tag along. She even made a quick call to Kate to let her know, explaining to Jacob that in the backbiting, super-bureaucratic world of academia, even a phone call was really just a shortcut, a memo being the more usual procedure for announcing events as trivial as putting cream in one’s coffee. ‘You never know when some rival will make a stink because *his* friend didn’t get to sit in on a casual meeting with the chair, and why wasn’t the entire department notified, and how come there’s no paper trail, etc.’ From the exasperation in her voice, it sounded like she might have a particular rival in mind.

It seemed incongruous that one of the most important decisions of Normandie’s life would emanate from such an inconspicuous, insignificant-looking office. Jacob couldn’t have said what, exactly, he’d been expecting, but it was something more along the lines of vaulted ceilings, dancing spotlights, and probably lots of neon that would ask, WILL NORMANDIE STEPHENS GET TENURE? Times Square style.

But the only neon was in Jacob’s mind. And, perhaps, Normandie’s – though she looked cool to the point of seeming blasé. In this dim, bookshelf-crammed room with one window and barely enough floor space to accommodate visitors, Kate sat behind a desk of modest proportions, looking like the most important question on her mind was whether or not it was time to order more paperclips. The cosy array of open reference books,

semi-shuffled manuscripts, and rampant sticky notes did not, collectively, give the impression of holding anyone's career in the balance.

When she looked up, Kate's personal magnetism was as good as any neon. Though his knowledge of astronomy stopped at the fourth-grade level, Jacob could see why this handsome woman with intelligence and humanity shining out of her museum-quality grey eyes would be an inspiring leader in whatever field she might have chosen. Add to that the exceptional professional genius that Normandie vouched for, and it was easy to see why she had used the word *idolise*.

The two of them were of necessity squeezed right up against Kate's desk, and Jacob could smell both the mints on Kate's breath and the sweet, fresh smell of Normandie. The chair nodded graciously at him, but her first words took him aback.

'So this is the writer you've been fucking,' she said to Normandie.

Normandie rolled her eyes.

'Oh, all right. I'm sorry.' Kate smiled indulgently. '*Seeing*. The writer you've been *seeing*. There, is that better?' She patted Normandie's hand, condescendingly. 'Young academics have become so uptight since my day.' She looked at Jacob. 'Don't you think so –'

'Jacob,' he gulped.

'Don't you think so, Jacob?' She winked at him, enjoying the tease around the obvious fact that Jacob had not been old enough to make the scene in her 'day'. Normandie, whose composure never eluded her for more than a moment, was now chuckling into her hand, and her cheeks were rosy and cheerful.

'Maybe I'd better wait outside,' said Jacob, between dry-throated ahems.

'Oh, he *is* cute,' said Professor Passky to Professor Stephens, as though Jacob were already out of earshot.

'Please stay, Jacob,' said Normandie lightly. 'It would be stupid for you to leave after coming all this way, just because Kate used a particular verb.'

Now Kate was chuckling too, and Jacob couldn't help smiling. 'Professor Passky, I'm very pleased to meet your verb, and I hope you'll use it again sometime.'

'That's the spirit,' said the chair of the Astronomy Department, giving Jacob a punch on the arm – an interaction, like the patting of Normandie's hand, that was made possible only by the small size of the office.



Then she became businesslike. ‘Normandie, I have to tell you that I still can’t swing assigning you a research assistant. There just aren’t enough to go around.’

‘OK,’ said Normandie, with a shrug.

‘You don’t mean *OK*,’ Kate argued. ‘You mean *oh, shit*. Because it’s not OK. But there’s nothing I can do about it. And, speaking of things that are not OK but about which I can do nothing: I’ve been given next year’s preliminary budget, and unfortunately it’s looking like I can’t create any new tenured positions. Don’t think I didn’t try. And, hell, I’ll *keep* trying. But unless something changes ...’

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## Chapter Seven

He'd never known anyone whose personality was quite so revved up. Normandie wasn't overbearing, she wasn't tiresome, she wasn't ridiculous ... she was just, it seemed, one hundred and ten per cent herself. Every word and action had a signature upon it – from the crisp way she chewed, to the elongated posture in which she habitually fell asleep, to her trademark laughter, bright on top with undertones of secret wisdom. Her laughter connoted sex, to Jacob. Not surprisingly, he liked to tickle her all over, and her laughter always tickled him back.

He hadn't noted the precise day on which his centre of gravity had shifted from speculating about the depth of his attractiveness to her to deliberately presenting himself in the way he hoped would please her; or the precise week when striving explicitly to please her had shifted to automatically, unconsciously being the person he wanted to be for her. By now, his every thought and decision reverberated against an image of her, when the real thing wasn't close at hand. His idea or ideal of her had become his touchstone.

'You're my touchstone,' he told her one morning.

'No wonder you touch me so much,' she said with approval. 'But just move your thumb down a few millimetres ... Oh! Yeah.'

'Now I understand why you scientists are always pushing the metric system.'

'Mmm-hmm,' she purred, with an unscientific wiggle. 'Push my metric system.'

It felt strange when he had the epiphany that she was, in some ways, like the sister he'd never had. A buddy. A playmate. An ally through life's uncertainties. He'd never before been romantically involved with a woman who felt so much like 'home'.

'Am I the type of woman you imagined you'd end up with?'

'First of all, let's dispense with that expression "end up with", if you please. It sounds so depressing.'

'Good point. What should we say instead? "Start out with" doesn't convey the full extent of my meaning.'

'How about "go around with"?''

‘Deal.’

‘And, to answer your question: No. Do you really think I could have imagined anything remotely like you?’

‘Ha! I’ll try to take that as a compliment.’

‘Please do. And, while you’re at it, you can take *this* as a compliment as well.’ *This* was a combination lip lock and nipple pinch. ‘So what about you ... Am I the type of man you imagined you’d go around with?’

‘No. I thought I’d end up with a woman.’

‘You thought you were a lesbian?’ She’d told him she enjoyed boy-girl-girl threesomes – as did he – but his understanding was that her primary interest had always been in men.

‘No, I knew I wasn’t a lesbian. But I was a dating-fatigued girl who thought she’d eventually just pack it in and find a congenial housemate – whom I always visualised as a woman.’

‘What did she look like?’

‘Sort of like me.’

‘Why, you vain creature!’ Jacob beaned her with a throw cushion.

‘Hey, I said I wasn’t a lesbian; I never said I wasn’t a narcissist. Anyway, my gorgeous imaginary roommate was quieter than I am. A quieter version of myself. Wouldn’t that make an ideal housemate?’

‘Depends. Do I get to go to bed with both of you at once?’

‘No, we take turns with you. It’s a small bed.’

‘Fair enough.’

‘So, you can see that it’s a big adjustment for me ... giving up on giving up, reorienting myself to “going around” with someone to whom I’m sexually attracted.’

‘Even more than you are to yourself, you mean.’

This time, she beaned him with the cushion. ‘Oh, and I suppose you’ve never indulged in the delicate art of self-love?’

‘Maybe once or twice,’ he conceded. ‘Per day.’

‘Be careful you don’t use it all up, with none left for me.’

‘There’s plenty for you. And your non-existent housemate.’

‘Let’s see.’ She grabbed at his jeans and, with practised fingers, unzipped them in an instant. The zipper made a noise that sounded like ‘*Yep*.’

‘Told you,’ he said. ‘You see, I – ahhh.’ There was that mouth again.

That evening, the sky was scheduled to clear, and Normandie seized the day – or rather the night – to take a trip out to the observatory. She invited Jacob to accompany her, and, for the first time, they held hands on a commuter train.

Her opportunity for serious work would come later in the evening, but they went early enough to ‘play with the big telescope’, as she so scientifically put it. Jupiter was awaiting them in the sky upon arrival, and Normandie made haste to set things up just the way she wanted.

Then she dropped her pants.

‘This is one of the reasons I became an astronomer.’ Her eyes were gleaming like stars.

She had positioned the eyepiece of the monstrous telescope so that she’d be able to gaze on the warm, sensuous shape of Jupiter while Jacob fucked her from behind. She steadied herself with the telescope’s handles and pointed her bottom his way, her feet playing restlessly within the nest of jeans. She was already breathless. ‘You think I’m kidding.’

‘No,’ he said. ‘I think you’re wonderful. Delicious. Irresistible.’ He punctuated the last adjective with a playful slap to her rump. ‘But kidding? No way.’ He peeled the panties down and slapped her again, even more softly this time – sensually.

Then he couldn’t wait any longer. She was so wet, so enticing. Soon his own trousers were at his feet and he was pushing sweetly into her, holding her by the elbows while she continued to clutch the telescope handles.

Even Jacob knew what Jupiter looked like – he loved the famous red spot that resembled a hungry cunt, and the liquid stripes that enveloped the planet in what looked like layers of feminine desire. Though he couldn’t see what she was seeing, he visualised the planet throbbing around him as her moist warmth responded to his thrusts.

‘My clit,’ breathed Normandie. ‘Can’t let go.’

He got her drift: she needed to keep a symmetrical grasp on the handles, and so it was his responsibility to trigger her climax. He’d certainly had far less appealing jobs in his time.

And it was not only an appealing job – it was also an easy one. A tender push of her button made her tremble. Her chasm oozed for him, and the substance of her body seemed to coalesce into an orgasmic homogeneity. She maintained her grip on the telescope, but, apart from that, she seemed to lose contact with the world around her.

The pulsating, striped planet exploded in Jacob's mind, and his corporeal explosion followed suit.

Afterward, he found a blanket in the utility closet and spread it on the floor by the window, so that they could camp there peacefully and look – with the naked eye and the naked everything – at the deepening starscape.

'It's even more beautiful when you understand it,' Normandie said.

'I don't think it would be for me,' said Jacob. 'I think it might lose something if I could analyse its mysteries.'

'I guess I'm just turned on by knowledge.'

'Thank goodness,' he replied, drawing a finger along her slit.

She kissed him. 'Are you sure you don't want me to start rattling off facts about the constellations we're looking at?' she offered.

'No, please don't. I love the stars for their inarticulate beauty. And I love you for your *articulate* beauty. But it's two different kinds of beauty.'

'I understand. How about if I just point and say, "Ooh! I know something about that star!"'

'That will work.'

She immediately tried it out. 'Ooh! I know something about that star!' She specified a particular point of light with an eager forefinger.

'You're brilliant,' said Jacob.

She pointed in a slightly different direction. 'And I know something about *that* star, too.'

'You're gifted.'

'And that one!'

'You are exceptionally well qualified for your job as an astronomy scholar. And you have the cutest fingers.' He took hold of the one she'd been pointing with and brought it to his lips.

She sighed. 'I wish you had something to be as passionate about as I am about all that.' She gestured at the heavens.

'I do. You.'

'That doesn't count,' she said, wagging the famously cute, recently kissed finger. 'Though I'm glad you said it.'

After last night – the telescope had been just the first act – Jacob was not quite sexually depleted, but he was physically exhausted. So, he lay there lazily and watched Normandie, who was reading an astronomy journal and

sliding a finger idly in and out of her snatch. He focussed on listening for the telltale squelchy sound.

‘Is it soup yet?’ he eventually inquired.

In response to this obvious clue that he was awake, she put down the expensive, quarterly periodical and climbed on top of him.

‘Good morning and I love you,’ he said. ‘But I’m tired.’

‘Too tired even for this?’ she said seductively.

‘Maybe.’

‘I feel like a ripe fruit this morning. Grab me and plunge in.’

She was so horny he could smell it. ‘I think I need breakfast.’

‘Fruit is perfect for breakfast.’

Jacob closed his eyes.

‘How about this, lazy boy?’ She crouched over him, a squatter staking her claim and claiming her stake. ‘I’ll do it to you, until you’re doing it to me without even trying.’

‘Well ... if you really don’t mind doing all the work.’

‘Do I look like I mind? Come on, hungry man. A nice, warm cup of cunt for breakfast.’ And she slid herself slowly down his pole.

The feeling was luscious – each up stroke felt, impossibly, more delicious than the preceding down stroke, only to be superseded itself by the down stroke that followed. Jacob could not believe that, minutes before, he had been inclined to turn this down in favour of Cheerios.

‘I’ve decided to stay here for a while,’ he said later, at the lab.

‘I’m afraid you can’t,’ Normandie replied. ‘I need to spread some charts out there in a minute.’

‘I don’t mean here on the couch. I mean here in *San Francisco*.’

Though she was smiling at what had become a favourite running joke, she looked a little concerned beneath her sparkle. He knew she was afraid that he would do his career damage. It was touching.

‘Relax.’ He abandoned the couch to the forthcoming charts and came forward to take her hand. ‘The editorial job in New York would have been too much of a bore, and not what I should be doing with my energy.’

‘As long as you’re sure ...’ She trusted his judgment enough to look relieved, and this, too, made him feel good.

‘*But*,’ he clarified, ‘I wouldn’t have taken a better offer in New York, either. Not under these circumstances.’ He gestured grandly toward

Normandie, his 'circumstances'.

'So what *will* you be doing with your energy?' she asked. 'Such as it is.' She poked him in the chest, the memory of her recent anxiety already submerged beneath the latest wave of puckishness.

'Eventually, I'll find something here. Something, hopefully, that doesn't involve rocking horses. Till then, I thought I could keep myself occupied by helping you.'

'Helping me?'

'Exactly. In a just world, you would have been given a research assistant, and I can think of nothing better to do with my time right now than pitch in around your lab.'

'But you're a writer, Jacob!'

'The glorious and non-existent Freelance Writers' Union has nothing in its rules against members assisting beautiful astronomers. And the non-fiction literary world won't miss me if I wash bottles for you for a month or two.'

'We don't wash bottles in astronomy.'

'Fine. Scrub planets. Whatever. Let's get started.' And he actually rolled up his sleeves.

## Chapter Eight

‘Dude, are you really going out with Normandie Stephens?’ said Brandon, as though the idea surprised him.

This was, Jacob hoped, his final meeting with the *HHH* liaison – a lunch meeting to submit local expense records and make sure the magazine had a complete package for Jacob’s contracted feature story. The Normandie angle represented the only time Brandon had shown any interest in Jacob’s affairs, and this expression of interest did not fill any deep voids in Jacob’s life.

‘What is this – high school? I’m “going out” with her?’ He was sincerely amused, if also irritated. ‘Yes, we’re in a relationship, if that’s what you mean.’ Overall, he preferred the way Kate had put it.

He reflected that, for Brandon, high school was the relatively recent past.

‘It’s cool,’ said Brandon, irrelevantly. Then, in a display of unjustified camaraderie, he helped himself to a handful of Jacob’s french fries.

Jacob absorbed the fact that by having a beer with Brandon the other night, he had evidently cooperated in degrading their relationship from a professional one to a french-fry-snatching one. He sort of wished he’d insisted that the meeting at the pub occur at the office instead, despite the conspicuous absence there of agreeable, house-dancing nymphs.

‘Not that I care ... but what, pray tell, makes you raise an eyebrow – and a fistful of my personal french fries – at my relationship with Normandie?’

‘Y’know, I just never thought of her as your type.’

He knew that Brandon couldn’t help being annoying; but he wondered why the guy couldn’t at least be annoying in a slightly less annoying way. ‘You barely know me, Brandon. Since when do you spend your time thinking about what my “type” is?’

‘Hey, don’t forget, dude, you met her at *my* brother’s party.’

Jacob was blinded by the flash of illogic, and he literally blinked. ‘OK ... Does that mean you’re in on the ground floor? Am I supposed to invite you into bed with us or something?’

‘No can do. Busy week.’

‘Have some more french fries,’ Jacob said.



‘This may be a stupid question ... but if you insist that there are no bottles for me to wash, then why are you wearing a white laboratory coat?’ He had arrived for a working evening to find her absorbed in her latest research, but dressed with uncharacteristic scientific formality. He now looked briefly around the room, pretending that he was still not one hundred per cent convinced that the lab held no dirty bottles.

She turned to face him. ‘Sometimes I just want to feel like a glamorous scientist. It helps when the research becomes tedious.’ She advanced on him. ‘But, on this occasion, I had you in mind.’

And before he could articulate another question, she unbuttoned and shed the garment, revealing an undercoating of purple velvet panties and bra.

‘Wow,’ Jacob said. ‘I don’t believe I’ve ever seen you in *that*, either. Not even when you’ve been out at the *big* telescope.’

‘Tonight I’m dressed for you to do the observing.’

He spun her around, the velvet panties attracting him at once to her velvety ass. He ran his hands over the velvet, and it felt so nice that he was reluctant to move on. But finally he peeled the panties back and gave them a head start down Normandie’s legs, so that she could dance them off and kick them away.

He caressed the crack of her bottom intimately. With his hands on her ass, away from her pussy, he let her experience her arousal privately for a while, her legs closed, her sex warming and moistening in secret. Then he coaxed her thighs apart, so that he could participate in her wetness. First, he did so with his fingers, teasing and nurturing. Then, when she breathed heavily for more, he dropped to his knees and let his tongue do the walking.

When they moved to the couch, she took the panties with her. She clutched them like a talisman while he fucked her, wringing the velvet undergarment into a taut bundle of erotic energy. When she came, it looked to Jacob as if the panties were having an orgasm, too; and when he came, he grabbed them in his mouth and wrestled her for them, dragging their softness across her nipples while he pounded between her thighs.

‘Thanks, Gary,’ Jacob said quietly into the phone. ‘I’ll get this new thing to you as soon as possible. If you feel it doesn’t work, you still have the – ugh – rocking horses. But I think you’re going to agree that those can wait another month.’ He hung up, then joined Normandie, who was posing in front of the Hauser University telescope for Susan Weedon. At Jacob’s

request, she was wearing her lab coat – this time with more than just sexy underwear beneath it, however.

‘This is so sweet of you,’ Normandie said, when the photographer was out of earshot.

‘What you’re doing is important. People should know about it. And it’s a way I can help you that goes beyond just proofreading decimal points.’

After Susan had obtained a variety of shots of Normandie, the telescope, and Normandie with the telescope, Jacob ushered his lover to a chair, claiming a stool for himself en route.

‘I’m going to switch on my tape recorder now, if that’s OK, and you can just officially repeat the stuff you told me the other day.’

‘In bed, you mean?’ She twinkled at him. Susan was twenty feet away, packing up her equipment, but Jacob thought he saw her blush.

‘Uh – no. I was thinking more along the lines of the discoveries you’re making.’

‘I recall making some very *nice* discoveries in bed with you.’

‘Thank you. Um – can we talk about astronomy for a while? Just to humour me?’ He was delighted that she was having such a good time with this, but her flippant attitude was beginning to make him feel a little silly about the whole thing.

‘Oh, *astronomy!* But of course.’ Normandie wriggled in her seat and then, miraculously, became quite serious and scientific. Jacob switched on the machine.

‘Dr Stephens, I believe you’ve been making interesting discoveries about the composition of some distant galaxies.’

The scientist took another break, and the pixie returned. ‘What’s with the “Dr Stephens” shtick? Since when do you call me that?’

Jacob rolled his eyes and switched off the machine. ‘Mere professional rigour,’ he said haughtily. ‘I know that, for now, I’m the only one who will be listening to this tape. But perhaps someday, when you’re world famous and they’re writing books about you, someone will want to listen to the original transcript of our historic interview. That person, whoever it is, might not wish to listen to questions addressed to Sex-cheeks, or whatever I’ve been calling you lately.’

Susan was *definitely* blushing now.

Normandie was laughing. ‘You’re right. OK, let’s get on with it.’ And she became serious again.

On went the tape recorder. ‘*Dr Stephens*, I believe you’ve been making interesting discoveries about the composition of some distant galaxies.’

‘Yes.’

‘Tell me about it.’

‘Most of the galaxies that have been catalogued to date are believed to consist of stars within a certain limited range of compositional matter. However, recently we have been observing some galaxy clusters, new to us, that appear to deviate from this model in terms of ...’

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)

## Chapter Nine

June turned to July. Harlan returned from Europe, let Jacob cook dinner for him his first night back, and in the morning began hinting broadly that he'd like the place to himself.

Normandie opined that Jacob 'might as well' move into her place.

'Are you sure that's all right?' asked Jacob.

'No, I'm sure it's perfect,' Normandie replied. 'Just don't describe it as a "date".'

The first out-and-about day that Jacob returned to Normandie's apartment as 'home' happened to be the day he found the July issue of *Hip Hip Horizon* on the coffee table, staring Normandie in the face.

'Well?' he said proudly.

'Oh my God, Jacob.' She burst into tears.

He folded her in his arms. He had never seen her so moved. 'Aw. Pretty good publicity, eh?'

She looked up at him. 'Oh, darling. Do you realise what you've done?'

It was dawning on Jacob that her intonation was not entirely complimentary. 'I – I thought it ... Oh, shit. No. You'd better tell me. What have I done?' He sat down.

She began to pace. 'You meant well. I realise that. It's adorable, but ... for crying out loud – the *cover*, Jacob!'

'I think it's an excellent likeness.' He stood up again, as if to lend weight to the assertion.

'Yes, all too excellent. There's no chance I can pretend it's someone else.'

'I don't understand. Why would you want to –'

'Jacob. Listen.' She sat him back down on the love seat and perched beside him. 'I am not front-page news. My work is not of earthshaking significance. I assumed you were going to do – what do you call it, a sideburn?'

'Sidebar. Those are just used in conjunction with longer, related articles. Though sometimes what an editor will do is...'

'Never mind. The point is, I thought I'd have a couple of paragraphs, buried in the back of the mag, with a flattering one-inch headshot of me

looking all scientific and sexy.’

‘I wanted to do something big.’

‘You did something big, all right. “Big” as in a monumental embarrassment. “Big” as in a gargantuan gaffe.’

‘Why is it a giraffe?’

‘*Gaffe!*’ she repeated.

She stood up and began to pace again, shuddering as her journey took her past the magazine on the coffee table. ‘No offence to you or those who contract with you ... but what idiotic editor let you get away with this ridiculous puff piece? And don’t you dare ask me what I mean by “puff paste”.’

‘When I told them that what you were doing was immensely important, and that no other major magazine had covered it, they were grateful for the scoop. They, uh, also thought you were better looking than the rocking horse we shot for the other story.’

‘Ugh!’ On this trip past the magazine, she lingered long enough to turn it upside down, thereby replacing her own smiling face with a vodka ad – which, unfortunately, also featured a sexy woman in a lab coat. She shuddered again before resuming her frenzied walk around the room. ‘And the photo spread inside ... making me look like I’m the century’s most glamorous and brilliant thinker, as if I had a bouquet of Nobel Prize medals dangling into my cleavage. And the little series of timeline illustrations that maps the history of astronomy from the Aztecs to Copernicus to *me*. Couldn’t you at least have put Carl Sagan in there somewhere? Maybe then I wouldn’t feel so out of place.’

‘I’m sorry.’ Now that he understood, he was sincerely sorry. ‘I thought I was helping your career.’

‘Sweetheart. I’m proud of what I’m doing. It *is* important. But it’s stodgy-little-journal-article important. It’s tell-other-astronomers-about-it-at-conferences-and-deduct-the-travel-expenses important. It’s *not* hype-it-all-over-the-mass-media-in-a-manner-that-makes-it-look-like-my-mother-has-purchased-the-entire-news-industry important.’

‘Gotcha.’ They were quiet for a moment. ‘So what do we do?’ Jacob finally asked.

‘Short of driving around the country buying up all the copies and destroying them – for which I doubt there’s a grant available – I don’t think there’s much we *can* do. I’ll just have to hope people forget about it before

too much damage is done – to my career, to my reputation among my colleagues, to the integrity of science ...’

She was interrupted by a ringing phone.

‘Hello?’ She listened briefly, then she held the receiver courteously away from her face and shrieked a crisp expletive.

‘It’s someone from *Insomnia With Rhone Preston*,’ she hissed to Jacob, alluding to a ratings-drunk late-night television programme that people promoting themselves in Northern California would do almost anything to appear on.

‘Jacob, you remember Professor Passky, don’t you?’

‘Please, Normandie, it’s all right to call me Kate in front of the children. And of course I remember Jacob,’ Kate added – though that hadn’t been the question. The distinguished professor gave him a glance that Jacob could only have described as raunchy. Fortunately, he saw no reason he was likely to be called upon to describe it.

‘Maybe I should wait outside,’ he said, hovering as close to the door as he could – which, however, still put him practically on top of Kate’s desk.

‘Why does he keep saying that?’ Kate demanded of Normandie.

‘I think we’d both like you to stay, Jacob,’ said Normandie.

Jacob noticed the infamous magazine on Kate’s desk. He winced.

‘I assume you’ve come to see me regarding *this*,’ said Kate, tapping the mag with a noncommittal forefinger.

‘Yes,’ said Normandie. ‘It was really just a mistake. You see –’

The department chair waved dismissively. ‘Who cares if it was a mistake. No one has to know that. All that matters is that this “mistake” has put our department on the map.’

Jacob’s jaw dropped when he realised that Kate was beaming.

‘Cupcake, do you begin to comprehend the prestige ... the grants ... the faculty this will help us attract? The mind reels.’

Jacob’s mind reeled at hearing the department chair call Normandie ‘cupcake’.

Normandie swallowed. ‘It sounds pretty cool when you put it that way ... but I can’t help feeling like a fraud. The article makes it sound like I’m second only to Einstein in my importance to modern science. These findings of mine – well, you know as well as I do, they’re significant but modest, in the grand scheme of things.’

Again, Kate waved her concerns aside. ‘So what! What has the grand scheme of things ever done for us? Can the grand scheme of things write a cheque to fund the tenured position I’m dying to give you?’ She tapped the magazine again. ‘No one’s actually going to read the article, anyway.’

Normandie looked genuinely confused – a rare state of affairs. ‘What?’ She looked at Jacob.

‘What matters,’ continued Kate, ‘is that it was printed, that it looks like a big deal, that it’s on the cover. Right, cowboy?’ Jacob had to infer that she was addressing him, despite his notably rodeo-free background. ‘Nobody really reads those articles all the way through, do they?’ Kate continued.

Jacob made as if to finger his collar nervously, then thought better of it and settled for a shrug of resignation. ‘Uh – no, not really. In the business we think people, ahem, kind of flip through these magazines, for the most part.’

Normandie was shocked. ‘Why on earth do you bother writing the stuff?’

‘I like writing, and I get paid whether or not anyone reads it. Why do you stay up till the wee hours making calculations about bodies of matter that are inconceivably distant from your desk?’

‘Touché,’ said Normandie graciously, but she was shaking her head semi-despondently.

Kate, by contrast, was beaming more brightly than ever. ‘You’ve done a great thing for us, Jacob,’ she said. ‘I’d like to do something nice for you in return. Something very nice.’ She was licking her lips.

‘I think Dr Passky wants to fuck me,’ said Jacob that evening.

‘That’s ridiculous,’ said Normandie, handing him a glass of chilled Sauvignon Blanc.

‘No, I really think so.’

‘Oh, I’m sorry, babe. I didn’t mean that the idea that she wanted to fuck you was ridiculous. I meant saying “Dr Passky wants to fuck me” – here she imitated Jacob’s understated baritone delivery – ‘was ridiculous. It would sound so much better if you’d drop the formality and just say, “Kate wants to fuck me.”’

‘Right,’ Jacob assented, taking a delicate sip. ‘So you agree that she may be lusting after me?’

‘Oh, I’m positive she is.’

‘How do you know? Are there no limits to your brilliance?’

‘There may, in fact, be no limits to my brilliance. But I know that Kate wants to fuck you because she told me so, while you were in the men’s room. I suppose you feel funny about it, because she’s past fifty and you’re still a young sex god.’

He put his wine down. ‘No. I feel funny about it because I think she’s decidedly hot, I don’t care how old she is, and I’d love to hear more about this, at your earliest convenience.’

The warmth in Normandie’s eyes deepened. ‘That’s the spirit.’

‘It’s very nice of you to pat me on the back,’ he said. Normandie responded by swatting him pleasantly on the ass. ‘Or in the general vicinity of the back. Do you really not mind the idea of my screwing one of your colleagues?’

She laughed. ‘In the case of this particular colleague, I think it’s fairly wonderful. I’m a big fan of hers, you know.’

‘Wouldn’t you feel left out?’

She laughed again. ‘Why would I? I’ll be there the entire time, of course.’

She picked up the phone and began to dial. ‘She is hot, isn’t she?’ Normandie was actually flushed. Jacob had, to his credit, seen her equally aroused on many an occasion ... but now she looked aroused like an eighteen-year-old virgin. She was giggling as her fingers spelled Kate’s number.

‘Are you calling to arrange a date for us to hop in the sack with her?’ He was not displeased, but this was all happening so fast. ‘I thought you couldn’t stand dates.’

She stuck her tongue out, prettily. ‘It’s not a date, it’s an appointment. An appointment with my department chair. For cocktails. Here at our place. What happens after cocktails can be spontaneously improvised.’

‘Don’t forget to circulate a memo to the faculty,’ said Jacob.



## Chapter Ten

From an olfactory perspective, Kate was all breath mints from the neck up. But the rest of her had an earthy scent that Jacob responded to with animal interest. There was no one or nothing that could make him forget that Normandie was in the room; but Kate was, like Normandie herself, a personality and a sexuality to be reckoned with. Her hair, handsomely cut and naturally frosty, seemed to frame her as a woman who could be anything she wanted to be. She could be a boss. She could be a colleague. Or, if she chose, she could be a flowering garden of ripe sensuality and erogenous flesh.

Her face glowed with exceptional intelligence and unabashed lasciviousness. She wanted to make you laugh and make you cream. And it was obvious to Jacob that she had always been this way.

‘Relax, Jacob,’ Normandie was saying.

The three of them had finished their round of cocktails. The late afternoon sun was splashing hedonistically onto the wooden floor of Normandie’s bookshelf-and-artwork-heavy apartment. Kate was leaning comfortably into the crook of the sofa, her silver hair kissing her shoulders. She looked magical in a turquoise-trimmed black ensemble of jersey and slacks, with bare feet giving her the perfect bohemian touch. Her nose was proud and her eyes liquid with charm, and Jacob couldn’t imagine that the woman had ever looked lovelier – at forty, thirty, or twenty.

He sat tentatively at the opposite end of the generous couch. Normandie stood behind him, her fingertips pulsing excitement onto the back of his neck, making the little hairs tingle.

‘So, young man,’ Kate said slowly. ‘Are you going to handle me, or do I need to let you put me on a goddamn magazine cover first?’ And, without waiting for an answer, she leaned forward and began, expertly, to handle him, stroking with calm determination through the stiff fabric of his trouser fly and sending electricity through him. After studying his reaction for a moment and seeming satisfied with it, she leaned in and kissed him on the lips.

*She kisses like a teenager,* thought Jacob. It was a revelation that, just by sitting here, he was making a university chair drool and moisten her panties

like the first girl he'd fucked freshman year of college. And this revelation was a serious turn-on for him. He looked over his shoulder to establish eye contact with Normandie, hoping she would see the wildness in his eyes, knowing she would approve.

But Normandie's eyes were closed, and the hand that wasn't on his neck was inside the waistband of her slacks. She was saying something, almost too softly for Jacob to hear. 'Go on ...' She said it repeatedly in a staccato whisper, a breath that rode the gallop of her arousal.

He pulled down Kate's clingy midnight-black slacks, and he noticed how powerful her thighs were. He remembered Normandie telling him that Kate was a jogger, and generally in great shape. He wanted to make those strong thighs pump in spasms of uncontrollable joy, and, toward that goal, he put a tentative hand on her black lace panties. Her tight, muscular tummy peeked out between the panties and the top, and he kissed her there while continuing to stroke her.

Suddenly, Kate flopped herself face down on the couch, pulling Jacob's hand tightly against her crotch. She kicked her feet up onto the armrest and folded her arms beneath her head. She wiggled her ass for Jacob and squeezed the innermost meat of her thighs against his hand.

Out of the corner of his eye, Jacob saw Normandie lean forward from behind him. She began to pet Kate's hair and breathe into her ear, and he felt Normandie's erotic power combining with his own to pleasure this strong, self-actualised, prestigious woman. The rush that he felt watching her wriggle beneath their harmonised touches was incredible.

With every writhe he elicited from Kate, Jacob was conscious that this was a woman who had been writhing for men and women, and making them writhe in return, since more or less before he was born. He wanted to fuck Kate not only for her potent, in-this-moment desirability, but also for her glorious history. It ennobled and excited him to be part of a long parade of her lovers and her orgasms.

He wanted someone to hold his cock. 'Please – unzip me,' he said to Normandie, quietly, as if Kate's ecstasy were a dream he was intent on preserving. Normandie, still stroking Kate's strands of hair with her left hand, moved forward and unzipped Jacob with the right, retrieving him from his jeans, handling his dancing flesh as only she could.

With the phallic aspect of the situation safely in hand, Jacob assessed the needs of two luscious pussies, one of which currently housed his forefinger,

and the other of which was patiently clothed within Normandie's pinstriped slacks.

'I can just reach you if you moon me,' he told Normandie.

She temporarily reassigned the hand that had been petting Kate's hair to the duty of undoing her own jeans, followed by the task of pushing pants and panties to the floor. In one graceful movement, she positioned her ass so that it faced Jacob, bent to receive her pleasure, and resumed stroking Kate. All the while, she continued clutching Jacob's cock.

Jacob began to pat and tickle Normandie all over her glorious bottom, integrating these attentions into the rhythm he was using to titillate Kate's pussy. When his left hand migrated to Normandie's snatch, he removed his right hand from Kate's. Holding Kate by the knee, he moved his face in and tasted her essence.

The department chair banged her face into the sofa cushions, her cries of 'Yes!' almost muffled beyond recognition. Normandie was gasping as Jacob's fingers nurtured her secret spots, and her dexterous interplay with Jacob's prick took on a syncopated quality that made Jacob squirm with delight.

Kate tasted complex. It was a challenge for Jacob to process the sophisticated flavour as she twisted for him and his cock danced for Normandie and Normandie oozed over his fingers. The chain reaction set off by Kate's orgasm left everyone trembling, and the walls echoed with shrieks.

Eventually, the three of them had some supper, and it was over dessert that the tax-deductible portion of the conversation occurred.

'You've accepted that invitation from Rhone Preston, I assume,' said Kate. It was not a question, and it required no answer. 'One little detail I should tell you about. Hube Renkins has been complaining that –'

'Oh, for fuck's sake!' said Normandie. 'Why is he out to get me?'

Kate took another mouthful of coconut cake. 'Be reasonable, Normandie. Renkins has nothing against you personally. He just resents any colleague who gets attention, acclaim, or funding that would, to his way of thinking, be better directed toward his own work.'

It didn't take much mental activity for Jacob to calculate that this Renkins individual must have been the backbiting colleague implicit in Normandie's abstract discussion of backbiting colleagues. 'What, exactly, is his complaint?' he asked Kate.

‘He’s written to the provost, claiming that Dr Stephens’ work has been given exaggerated media attention that detracts from the overall dignity and well-being of the department.’

‘I bet he wouldn’t be saying that if *he* were on the cover of *Hip Hip Horizon*,’ said Normandie.

‘Exactly,’ said Kate. ‘But you have nothing to worry about. I’m doing everything I can to emphasise the importance of your research. Not merely because you and your boyfriend just collaborated to give me the best lick-out I’ve had since the Andromeda galaxy was formed, but because I really do believe in your value to the university. So what if your current research isn’t quite as earth-shattering as the stupid magazine – no offence, Jacob – says it is. We’ll build on it, given the right resources ... and, who knows, maybe someday it will be earth-shattering. In other words, I’m behind you one hundred per cent.’

‘Thank you,’ said Normandie.

‘Luckily, Renkins doesn’t seem to know who author Jacob Hastings is, so at least he’s not going to town with the Jacob-Normandie angle. If he had more friends, he’d probably know all about it. But his aloofness keeps him out of the loop most of the time. Still, if he finds out, I’ll handle it. I’ll use my position of influence and authority to defuse his sordid, if truthful, accusations.’

‘Let me get this straight,’ said Jacob agreeably. ‘The fact that I unintentionally inflated the reputation of the woman I’m fucking will be rendered totally excusable once the department chair, whose pussy we’re licking, says it’s all right.’

‘I don’t know,’ said Kate thoughtfully. ‘It worked for me.’

‘Don’t you think it could look bad?’ asked Normandie.

‘What – were you planning on taking pictures of me sitting on your face, with my finger up Jacob’s ass, and running them as a follow-up in next week’s magazine?’

‘Hey, we didn’t even do that yet,’ Jacob protested.

‘Finish your dessert first,’ said Kate, gesturing with her fork. ‘No, Normandie ... personally, I was inclined to keep this aspect of things relatively private. Though, come to think of it, *I’d* like a few of those pictures.’

‘I know a photographer,’ said Jacob, who was now quite hastily finishing his dessert. ‘She’ll do anything – even rocking horses. But what does the

provost think of all this?’

‘Tommy is on our side, the sweetie – for now,’ said Kate. ‘That’s why we have to make sure my vividly depicted predictions of wonderful, federally funded ramifications to all this come true. That’s why girlfriend here is going on Rhone Preston.’

‘On the *programme*, you mean,’ corrected Jacob.

Normandie slithered warm fingers across the back of his hand. ‘Let’s not rule anything out.’

‘You know, when I was a little girl I often fantasised about being on television. Even after I decided I wanted to be an astronomer – I was ten and three-quarters at the time – I imagined going on talk shows, maybe even variety shows, as a glamorous celebrity astronomer. Of course, I came down off my cloud when I noticed that astronomers didn’t usually go on variety shows. And that they had stopped making variety shows, anyway. But now it turns out I was right the first time, and I’m going to be a famous television-land astronomer. Whee!’

‘Whee?’

‘Well, not “Whee” entirely, I guess. Under the circumstances, there’s also an element of “Holy fucking crap”.’

‘Yes, I thought so.’

‘You’d think that would be my overriding feeling, in fact. But my overriding feeling has been overridden by the overriding feeling of the person who wants to give me a permanent faculty position. So it’s really out of my hands, and I’m trying to get into the spirit of my ten-year-old self. My ten-year-old self would never have forgiven me if I’d turned this down.’

## Chapter Eleven

The man in the impeccable, walnut-coloured suit and severe hipster glasses was, if possible, even more officious than the curator of the LMARH had been. He had certainly landed himself a position of officiousness at a higher level of visibility, thought Jacob. He was also considerably taller, which helped him to be not only officious, but supercilious as well. He was brandishing a clipboard – always a bad sign.

‘So you are Dr Stephens,’ he said, indicating Normandie without looking at her. ‘And where is Dr Normandie?’ The man looked around, as if expecting another scholar to be paraded out for him, with appropriate fanfare.

‘I’m Normandie,’ she clarified. ‘Dr Normandie Stephens.’

‘Oh no, that isn’t satisfactory at all,’ replied the staffer. ‘Our schedule shows a Dr Stephens *and* a Dr Normandie, appearing together, discussing exciting developments in gastronomy.’

‘Astronomy,’ said Jacob, with surprise.

‘Yes, yes, fine,’ said the man irritably. ‘That doesn’t matter. What matters is that we have *two* guest chairs on the set, and we must have two guests to occupy them.’

‘But what do you expect us to do about that? Clearly, someone on your staff has just made a mistake.’ Normandie’s nerves were showing – a rare occurrence, but one that Rhone Preston’s staffer had successfully brought about.

The man looked even more condescending than he had before. ‘The fact that *someone* made a mistake’ – he looked accusingly at Normandie and Jacob, as though it was obvious for all the world to see that they must, somehow, be responsible for the error – ‘is beside the point. I need two of you out there, and that’s the bottom line.’

‘But who?’ said Normandie, her annoyance giving way to incredulity.

‘Oh, I don’t care,’ the man whined, as if Normandie were taking up an inordinate amount of his time with trivia. ‘*Him*, for instance.’ He turned to Jacob. ‘You have something to do with gastronomy, too, don’t you?’

‘I –’ began Jacob, but Normandie cut him off, a glint in her eye communicating to him that she had regained control of the situation.

‘Yes,’ she said fiercely, tapping the staffer’s clipboard with a note of finality. ‘All right. I’m sure *Dr Jacobs* here will be glad to discuss *astronomy* with me on the programme.’

Without even waiting for Jacob to confirm this, the man spun on his heel and, with an air of efficient satisfaction, disappeared.

‘That was easy,’ Jacob said without enthusiasm. ‘Why bother with six years of grad school, when evidently all you really need to become a professor is for someone to switch your first name to your last name?’

‘Sorry, darling, but we don’t have time for dry wit just now. We need to think. What’s your *new* first name, for example?’

‘Uh ... I don’t know. How about Ernie?’

‘That’ll do. And where are you from?’

‘Hmm ... Des Moines?’ He had always liked the sound of that.

‘No, we need the name of a *university* – a non-existent one, so nobody can check on you. And it may be hard coming up with a name for a fictitious university, because chances are there will actually *be* a university by that name, somewhere.’

‘Unless the name is really silly,’ Jacob said helpfully. ‘You know, like “Noodlenoggin College” in Ohio.’

‘It’s real, only it’s in Virginia. Excellent astrophysics group there, as it happens.’

‘Oh,’ said Jacob. ‘Damn. I really wanted to be from Noodlenoggin College.’

‘Please don’t sulk, Jacob. It looks bad on television. Maybe you can be from Noodlenoggin College for your next birthday. For tonight, I think we have to take the opposite approach: we should choose a name that’s so common that the precise institution that employs you will be for ever obscure.’

He saw what she was getting at. ‘You mean like “Mountain College” or something.’

‘Perfect! There’s probably a Mountain College in Colorado and a Mountain College in Vermont, and a Mountain University somewhere else ... and maybe a University of the Mountains and – well, you get the idea. If one college declines to own you, everyone will just think you came from one of the others. You’ll be like someone who crashes a large party, relying on the fact that every guest will assume he came with somebody else.’

You'll be like a rhubarb pie that nobody wants, or an odd golf ball that doesn't match anyone's brand, or –'

'OK, OK. No more metaphors, please. I don't think my ego can survive it.'

'Anyway, great thinking. This solves everything.'

'I'm afraid I must quibble with your definition of "everything". You seem to be overlooking several factors, such as (a) the fact that someone might recognise me, (b) the fact that I don't know anything about astronomy, and (c) the fact that the show will be starting very soon.' He glanced nervously at a digital clock that was, he thought under the circumstances, much larger than it had a right to be.

But Normandie was impressively quick at dismissing his various concerns, counting them off on her agile fingers. 'A. You're a writer, not a movie star. Yes, your personal friends might recognise you, but if you can't trust your personal friends to keep quiet, who *can* you trust? B. If we weren't in such a hurry, I'd take the time to be insulted that you can claim not to know anything about astronomy after having interviewed me on the subject. Just parrot back some of what I told you, for Pete's sake. And C. –'

The insufferable assistant was at their collective elbow. 'We need to get make-up on the two of you. Now.'

The host was affable, charismatic, and all those other television-hosty things. Not only did Jacob feel nervous as hell, but he felt sort of bad that he was about to sit here and lie a blue streak to this guy.

'Dr Jacobs,' said Rhone, 'how long have you been studying the stars?'

'Thirty-seven years,' Jacob said. He had automatically fallen back on his lucky number, without realising that this put him in front of a telescope three years prior to his own birth.

'Really!' said Rhone. 'That's, um, quite some time,' he added pointedly.

Jacob coughed. 'Yes. I'm what you might call the "old guard".'

'You look awfully young for the "old guard".' Rhone got a laugh from the audience, which he acknowledged with a wink to the camera.

'I'm the *young* old guard.' Another laugh, this time for Jacob. 'It's all relative, you know.' The laugh died down, which was the audience's way of telling Jacob that he should have quit while he was ahead and foregone the corollary quip.



‘In a minute, we’re going to hear about Dr Stephens’ work, which has been getting so much attention. But first, tell us about your own research.’

Jacob cleared his throat. ‘Well ... there’s a lot of stuff out there in space. So I’ve spent a great deal of time looking it over. Uh ... a lot of it is quite nice. I think you’d like it, Rhone.’ Somewhere Jacob had read that if one is ever on a talk show, one should use the host’s name a lot.

He realised that more was expected of him, so he forced himself to keep going. ‘Personally ... now, personally, um, I have a weakness for those pinkish nebulas – I mean, *nebulae*. I think it’s because although I love flowers, I’ve always been a terrible gardener. So outer space is my garden.’ He stole a glance at Normandie, who sat beyond their host in the other guest chair, smiling enchantingly but gripping her armrests as if on a rollercoaster ride.

‘That’s beautiful, Dr Jacobs,’ said Rhone, pretending to wipe away a tear. ‘And what have you learned out there in the garden of space?’

Jacob let out a long, low whistle. ‘Ooh ... where to even begin.’ He sensed that he was not performing well. *Just parrot back some of what I told you*, he remembered Normandie saying. ‘I suppose I should mention,’ he said, ‘that the third quadrant of the E997 galaxy cluster is noteworthy for both its asymptotical orientation with respect to the plane of deep space, and its high concentration of neutron-poor gases.’ Jacob looked to Normandie for approval, but she seemed unwilling to make eye contact with him.

Rhone succeeded in looking engaged; but that, after all, was his job. And he wasted no time now in shuffling things into Normandie’s court, which was a relief to Jacob.

‘Now I’m going to talk to Dr Normandie Stephens,’ said the host to the audience. ‘*Normandie* – that’s an unusual name, isn’t it?’

‘I suppose it is – *Rhone*.’ The audience laughed. But given how charming Normandie was, Jacob thought they probably would have laughed even if she’d been doing knock-knock jokes.

‘If I’m not mistaken, Dr Stephens, you’ve discovered a new galaxy.’

Jacob wondered what idiot had prepared such blatantly inaccurate notes for the poor host.

‘No,’ began Normandie, ‘that’s not –’ She stopped in mid-sentence, and Jacob saw something maniacal come over her face. ‘That’s *not* a mistake,’ she said slowly and confidently, to Jacob’s amazement. ‘I have indeed

discovered a new galaxy. Brand new!’ She practically sang the last phrase, in a Julie Andrews sort of voice.

‘Excellent,’ said Rhone, who looked personally gratified.

Jacob could not decide whether he was appalled or delighted. In either case, there was nothing for him to do but stay put and watch her game play out.

‘Can you describe your new galaxy? What’s special about it?’

Jacob saw Normandie’s brow furrow in concentration as she prepared to launch into a repertoire of dry, scholarly information – fabricated but plausible. Then, just as her mouth opened, he again saw something flash across her face – something bright, and intense, and wonderfully mischievous.

‘It’s funny you should ask that, Rhone.’ She touched the host’s hand, and for the first time Jacob saw the polished showbiz face waver – presumably from the thrill of feeling her electricity. ‘In the eyes of astronomers, there are various special – but rather complicated – things that set this galaxy apart. But what’s really interesting about it – and this is something everyone can easily appreciate – is that it looks remarkably like a *rocking horse*.’

‘A ... rocking horse,’ said Rhone.

Jacob struggled to keep from laughing.

‘Yes. You may have heard of the Horsehead Nebula, or the Crab Nebula ... and of course there are many constellations that people have named after the animals and figures they resemble ... Well, this galaxy is shaped like a rocking horse.’ She folded her hands in her lap.

‘But why do you say a rocking horse, and not just a horse?’

‘Because, silly, a regular horse doesn’t have wooden runners.’ She had just addressed Rhone Preston as ‘silly’ on his own programme. And it looked to Jacob, from the honest-to-goodness smile the man was sporting and the hint of an honest-to-goodness bulge he thought he spied in the host’s honest-to-goodness trousers, that Rhone liked it.

‘Are you telling us that you’ve discovered a galaxy with wooden runners?’ the host was asking.

‘They’re really just clouds of gas, but, yes, they look like wooden runners. Isn’t it fun? Mind you, in a few million years they might look like something else. So I say we enjoy them while we can.’

\* \* \*

*'There's a lot of stuff out there in space?'* Normandie teased. She was visibly keyed up after their TV appearance, and she was shifting from one foot to the other out of sheer excess energy. She and Jacob were indulging in a post-mortem, standing by the bar at Kate's favourite martini mecca. Kate was on her way to join them.

'Hey, there *is*. Isn't there?'

'That's not what we astronomers are paid to discover.'

'I'm sorry. Remember, *my* payslip doesn't say "astronomer",' Jacob said, taking a sip of his butterscotch martini. 'I think it says "jackass".'

Normandie bopped an inch closer and patted his cheek, as Kate sidled up to the bar.

*'There's a lot of stuff out there in space?'*

'Shh!' giggled Normandie. 'We did that already.'

'I'm pleased to know that you own a television,' said Jacob drily.

'At any rate,' said Normandie proudly, 'my bit ought to make America happy.'

'A galaxy that's shaped like a rocking horse?' said Jacob.

'Exactly. I told you they were cute.'

'But you just made the whole thing up,' he protested.

'Of course she made it up,' Kate chimed in. 'And even if she hadn't, it would be totally inconsequential, from a scientific point of view. Do you really think scholars get all excited about cosmic phenomena based on how *cute* their shapes are?'

'Well, my mother was an art historian, and she always said that ...'

Kate waved a hand, a gesture that served not only to cut Jacob off in mid-sentence but also to summon the bartender. 'That's fine arts. Art is allowed to be cute. Science isn't cute. It's often beautiful, but never cute.'

'What about the biology of wombats and baby koalas and so forth?'

'Why are you arguing with me, Jacob? Do you really want to stand against a streamlined chrome bar debating baby animals at two in the morning? Personally, I think we should focus on drinking, so I can pay for these martinis and you can take Normandie home and give her a nice Wednesday-night shagging.' She turned to Normandie. 'Or do I mean Thursday-night shagging? I always lose track of what day it is around this time of the week.'

'Sorry,' said Jacob.

‘The point is, if the seduction of the Bay area television-watching public by the merest hint, delivered in Normandie’s breathless, toothpaste-selling voice, that there may be a massive amalgamation of stars 40 million light-years from here that, to our warped minds, suggests a rocking horse ... where was I?’ She took a restorative gulp from her recently delivered martini. ‘Oh, yes. If that hint is going to translate into federal funding for my programme and salaries for the top-notch scholars I wish to retain’ – here she gave Normandie a friendly, unacademic slap on the pert behind of her I’m-going-on-television skirt – ‘then I say, “Bring on the rocking horse galaxies.”’

‘Are you sure the galaxy can’t be a teddy bear?’ asked Jacob, thoughtfully. ‘If it’s cuteness you’re after, that seems safer.’

‘No,’ said Kate definitively. ‘We already said it was a rocking horse. Besides, there are *two* popular constellations named after bears. We don’t want the public to think that astronomers are completely lacking in imagination.’

‘Ursa Major and Ursa Minor aren’t *teddy* bears,’ said Jacob peevishly.

‘No teddy bears in my cosmos, and that’s final,’ said Kate.

‘Come on, dear,’ interjected Normandie. ‘Wednesday-night shagging, remember?’

‘Right,’ said Jacob, brightening. ‘Goodnight, Kate.’

‘Goodnight ... teddy bear.’

## Chapter Twelve

On the subway, Normandie couldn't keep her hands off Jacob. And as they walked from the station to her building, she alternated between dashing ahead of him, then back, like an over-eager puppy, and singing sultry lyrics from a Blondie song.

'Goodness,' said Jacob, 'one might think you were a bit keyed up.'

She kissed him without breaking stride. 'Sitting in front of those cameras, it was like my ass was cooking in my seat, my cunt simmering in its marinade. I could hardly sit still, it was so thrilling.'

'It has been quite a night.'

'No. It's been quite an *evening*,' said Normandie. 'When I get you home, then it's going to be quite a night.'

'You are a dynamo,' Jacob said with admiration. 'It's a wonder you don't leave the earth's orbit entirely.'

'I'm too smart to leave the planet while you're on it.'

'You're sweet. And, yes, smart.'

'It's a fact. But tonight, all I want to be is a giggling, hard-nippled creature with a hungry cunt ... dripping into panties that have been yanked halfway down my ass. Take me there, Jacob. Make me that creature tonight.'

'I'll do my best.'

'Fuck, I'm hot,' she said as she unlocked the door. 'I hope I can keep my fingers out of my panties long enough to let yours in there.'

She was making him pretty horny, too, and he clutched the nearest bottom cheek through her skirt.

'I know!' she exclaimed.

'You do?'

'The jewelled skirt. Oh, damn, Jacob, tonight can be the night you fuck me in my jewelled skirt.'

'I'll check my calendar,' said Jacob, before she grabbed at his cock, as if his jeans didn't exist. 'Ooh,' he said, appreciatively. 'You know, that was my penis you grabbed there.'

'Yeah, I thought it was probably yours.'

The jewelled skirt had been purchased at a flea market. It was a handmade garment of stiff, lilac-coloured cotton, onto which an assortment of colourful glass jewels had been glued. A dry cleaner would not have liked it.

She had never tried it on before, and Jacob was surprised to see that this skirt – now all that she was wearing – was really designed more like an apron. Normandie, who had examined it before purchasing it, must have realised this all along, he noted. Now, her glorious ass was displayed in a luxurious, six-inch swath where the edges of the apron failed abysmally to meet. And this swath of ass, at the moment, seemed to Jacob to be the most appetising thing he'd ever seen.

'I feel so ordinary compared to you,' he said.

'Then put on a towel or something and be exotic like me,' she said with a laugh.

So he did. He went into the bathroom and selected a handsome, but skimpy, burgundy towel and swapped it for his clothes.

Inspired by her exhortation to 'be exotic', he also grabbed a crisp, navy blue pillowcase. Then he emerged, to parade before her in the bedroom, using one hand to keep the towel in place and the other – with pillowcase – to stroke his cock, which protruded through the gap in the towel. When not stroking, he dangled the pillowcase in front of his loins like a veil.

Normandie was convulsed. 'Oh, baby, that's funny ... but it's so sexy. Keep doing it.' Between bouts of laughter, she swayed sensuously, and her jewels glimmered in the light.

He danced slowly toward her, and when he came within reach, she removed his hand from his shaft and replaced it with her own. Then she spun gracefully around and lined the gap in her garment up with that in his. They moaned together as she pulled him forward and his hot, hard cock made contact up and down the cleft that separated the cool cheeks of her behind.

He dropped the towel as she dragged him to the bed. Normandie lay face down on the mattress, managing to keep Jacob's cock precisely in place in her ass cleft, her cheeks framing his sausage like a bleached white bun. He pressed down gently, and she moved his hands under her chest to explore her naked breasts. Her whole body began to vibrate as he squeezed the soft flesh and teased the nipples, while his cock throbbed cosily against her ass, biding its time.

‘Now,’ she said, sounding as if she were so distracted that it was an effort to articulate even a single syllable. She slithered onto her knees, then lowered her front half while presenting her bottom, putting her face back down on folded arms.

Slickness was the dominant attribute that Jacob felt as he slid into the warm channel between her legs. ‘My favourite channel,’ he quipped. He worked his thing wildly inside her and felt her inner flesh respond to every nuance of his movements. Her toes fluttered against his thighs, until they stiffened in pre-orgasmic paralysis. His fingers rendezvoused with hers upon her clit, and the two lovers let themselves through the door of sensory overload. In Jacob’s arms writhed the giggling creature of pleasure.

Jacob was surprised to hear the shy, trembling voice of Susan Weedon when he answered his phone.

‘Is this Jacob?’

‘Susan Weedon?’ he responded. Though she’d spoken a minimum of words to him at the museum and at the observatory, she was unmistakable.

‘How are you, Susan?’

‘This is Susan.’

‘Uh-huh.’

‘So anyway ... I need to talk to you.’

‘Oh. OK ...’

‘About the rocking horse photos.’

That was odd. Though that article had been pushed back to make room for Normandie’s controversial spread, it had been signed, sealed, and delivered, with the layout complete and approved and every photo accounted for. He hoped that Gary wasn’t taking advantage of the slack in the timetable to rip the whole thing apart and make them produce a new set of pictures. Jacob would definitely ask for more money if he had to spend any additional time at the LMARH.

But he assented to the meeting, and within an hour he was on his way to meet Susan at a café. He deliberately left his copy of the proofs at home, since nobody had officially contracted with him to do additional work on what he’d understood to be a completed project. If Gary needed that, he would have to approach Jacob in the proper fashion. Susan did not constitute the proper fashion; nor, Jacob stated in his inner monologue, did young Brandon.

He spotted Susan as soon as he walked into the café. Whether it was because the light of the afternoon sun was catching her auburn hair just right, or because there was something intrinsically intense about her face or posture, he wasn't sure. He waved, then got himself a coffee before joining her at the table.

'Thanks for coming.' She spoke almost too softly for him to hear, above the low rumble of ambient chitchat and a relatively quiet indie rock album.

'No problem,' he said graciously. 'So what's up?'

'On the phone, I said we needed to talk about rocking horse pictures.'

'Indeed you did,' he said with a sigh.

'I was lying.'

She had only spoken some twenty sentences to him in his entire experience of her, and now she was revealing that one of those sentences had been a lie. Jacob sipped his coffee while he tried to decide how to react to this. What he decided was that he didn't know how to react to it.

'OK.' He really wasn't sure if it was OK, but 'OK' seemed the best response he could come up with.

'I have something else to tell you. Ask you.'

Jacob realised that she was shaking, and suddenly his uppermost concern was that he put her at ease. 'Relax. Ask away.'

'You're not angry?'

'No. I was dreading the trumped-up rocking-horse-related meeting, so I'm actually relieved.' He was instantly glad he'd been candid, because he saw her face relax into a smile – possibly for the first time since he'd met her.

'I enjoyed the rocking horse session. And the other session,' she said coyly, as if she were revealing a secret.

'I'm very glad,' he replied noncommittally.

'I liked seeing you and Normandie together.' She paused. 'Which rocking horse did you fuck on?'

Heads turned as Jacob spattered coffee onto a laminated menu.

'I don't remember mentioning ...' he began when he'd caught his breath.

'A photographer learns to observe things. To read between the lines. To pick up on unspoken cues.'

'I see.'

'So which horse?'

'The biggest one.'



She nodded sagely. 'I thought so. It had a special glow to it.'

'I knew I should have sponged it down,' said Jacob. He couldn't believe he was having this conversation with a woman who had, up until five minutes before, been almost too shy to ask him how he liked the house coffee. He wondered what had gotten into her.

'The two of you have chemistry. Know what I mean?'

He assured her that he did.

'I think of you guys a lot, actually. *Know what I mean?*'

This time he wasn't sure whether he did. 'Think about us?'

Her laugh, like fairy bells, surprised him. 'Do I have to paint you a picture?'

'I thought you were a photographer.'

'I *masturbate* thinking about the two of you.'

Jacob looked around the room, wishing that Susan had not chosen this particular statement as the loudest statement of her career. The indie rock record seemed to have hit a particularly quiet moment, and even the espresso machine had gone silent to make way for Susan's announcement.

'So, I was thinking ... maybe we could do another photo session,' she said, very quietly.

## Chapter Thirteen

‘What do you think?’ Jacob asked Normandie.

‘What do I think of the two of us as the subjects of an erotic photography session? I think, “When do we get started?” – that’s what I think. It’s long been a dream of mine to do something like that, to be one of those people in delicious black-and-white tableaux of flesh and pillows and ecstatic facial expressions.’

‘So Susan is helping you attain a lifetime goal. That’s a talent in itself.’

‘What do you think of her?’ asked Normandie. They were sitting on the unmade bed, fully clothed, because the bedroom was where Jacob had found Normandie when he’d returned from his meeting with Susan. The bed smelled like Normandie had jilled off after the nap she’d admitted to; Jacob relished the image of her lounging there in an impromptu diddle, working restless fingers in her panties just because it felt so good.

‘Susan is a terrific photographer, able to capture anything from the beautiful – that’s you – to the inexplicable – those you-know-whats at the museum. I’m sure she’ll do a wonderful session.’

‘What else do you think of her?’

‘What else? Well, she’s a little strange, of course ... quiet – until she starts declaiming in cafés about her sexual fantasies, that is.’

Normandie ran a finger down the length of his chest. ‘Is she sexy?’

‘Oh,’ said Jacob. ‘To me?’

‘No,’ whispered Normandie with polished sarcasm, ‘to “Weird Al” Yankovic.’

Jacob reflected. ‘Yeah, I guess she is. To me.’

‘Tell me about it,’ Normandie said, still whispering.

*Tell me about it* was a cue, in their relationship, for the party of the second part to relate or create a sexual fantasy. So he understood now that he was being called upon to spin a vignette with Susan Weedon at its centre.

Normandie reclined on the bed. Her quasi-golden hair was framed by a crimson pillowcase.

‘Susan is one of the quiet ones that you have to watch,’ he began.

‘I would love to watch her.’

‘She goes about her business, never saying a word ... but she’s tuned in to every detail, especially sexual details. She notices where your skirt clings to your ass. She sees when my cock stiffens slightly in my trousers. When your hands brush casually against me, Susan Weedon can detect minute changes in the composition of my perspiration. And she can smell when you’re aroused, perhaps even before you realise you’re aroused.

‘So she goes about her business, and she logs all of this, never saying a word. She records it and takes it home with her, much like her camera records the things that it’s supposed to.

‘She lives alone. She can strip to her underwear in the living room without anyone noticing. Her underwear is incongruously loud – hot pink thong and lace bra, I believe – and this incongruity is the whole point of Susan Weedon.’

Normandie’s hands had moved to just inside the top of her jeans, and her mouth formed a little ‘O’.

He continued. ‘She’s in her living room, but she doesn’t settle down yet. She keeps in motion, prowling her own apartment in her underwear, thinking in circles about me and you, replaying everything she’s observed. She’s alone – she can take everything at her own speed. She’s restless between her legs, and her hands repeatedly drift to her crotch.’

‘Repeatedly drift,’ echoed Normandie. Jacob could see that she was easing herself into masturbation.

‘Finally, she’s so wound up there’s only one place she can take it. So she buries her little bottom in the corner of her living room couch and kicks her legs up and down while she rubs furiously over the thong – and inside it as well – palm squeezing, thumb pressing, fingers dipping, thighs quaking ... mind reeling with my cock and your scent and the artist’s conception of me fucking you against the wall of the Living Museum of the Goddamn American Rocking Horse.’

‘Oh!’ Normandie was coming, rocking herself on the bed.

‘I want some of that,’ Jacob told her, his cock pounding in his pants.

He got some of it.

‘While you were out, I got a call from another television show. They’ve booked me for August.’

‘You’re going to be the toast of local TV.’

‘This one’s national. *Gimme Some Science!*’

He knew the programme. A network had ingeniously put an accessible, hour-long science programme in the hands of Priscilla Ray, a former supermodel whose intellect was even more impressive than her pout. They'd added a creative team who could find the glamorous, humorous, or fascinating side of any topic, and the result was a prime-time cash bonanza built out of ratings-risky subjects like insect reproduction and alloy composition.

'You'll be great!' Jacob said enthusiastically.

'Yes, we will,' Normandie concurred.

'We?'

'They want Professor Jacobs, too.'

'Why?'

'I guess they think you're "good television".'

'*Good television?* Good grief. I think I need a cup of coffee.'

'You're drinking a cup of coffee, sweet cheeks.'

He shrugged. 'OK, then. Professor Jacobs I am. Why not.'

'That's the spirit.'

'What about you? You don't mind going on national television and continuing to lie about outer space?'

'In for a penny, in for a buck,' she said philosophically.

'Do you mean that?' Jacob asked.

'I think so. It sounded good, anyway.'

'Because I have an idea, if you're interested. It's not exactly honest, though.'

'Then it will fit right in.'

'Suppose we brought an image. You know, a slide of your adorable rocking horse galaxy.'

'Wouldn't I love to! But where does one get slides of non-existent galaxies?'

'One asks one's photographer friend to make them.'

'That's asking a lot of Susan, isn't it?'

'We'd have to pay her, I assume – unless she's as turned on by the prospect of Photoshopping whimsical galaxies as she is by the prospect of photographing our lovemaking.'

'You never know. But, OK, I'll keep my chequebook handy.' She thought a moment. 'This means we'll also have to trust her with the secret.'

‘We’re talking about a woman who’s just confided her masturbation habits to me within earshot of an entire café’s worth of people. If you can’t trust someone like that, whom *can* you trust?’

‘Your grammar is better than your logic, Jacob Hastings,’ said Normandie lovingly. ‘But I believe in your instincts.’



Please review me on Amazon – thank you!

[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)



[www.xcitebooks.com](http://www.xcitebooks.com)

**Click here to join our mailing list**  
**or scan the QR code**



[OceanofPDF.com](http://OceanofPDF.com)