

In the bathroom, Ryz'n had covered the sleep circles beneath her eyes with a flesh-colored concealer. Turning her head from side to side, she checked her look in the mirror and grunted her begrudging approval. It was the best she could do under the circumstances. Once she regained her normal sleep patterns, she would no longer need this junk. Then she retrieved the wallet-sized pinup photo of Donna from her purse. She had picked up the photo from where it had been lost under the front seat of the Starfire earlier. Although sorely curious to learn Nick's reaction, she had refrained from mentioning the pinup to her husband all evening and concluded it would be wise for her to maintain her silence for, at least, the rest of the night. Biting her lip and nervously spinning her engagement ring about her finger with her thumb, she briefly considered ripping the picture to shreds and flushing the remnants down the toilet. However, she held onto it as her motivation for the nascent plot that was forming in her brain.

Ryz'n remembered her father's remarks from dinner, which implied that Nick would have already been married to old Double 'D' cups had he not been such a terrific ballplayer. Of course, that was *before* Nick knew he already had a wife. However, which was worse? Because, what had really gotten Ryz'n's goat even more so than Donna Dixon's sexy photo, was that Nick had said he wanted to live at home with his parents, without her, without his wife! They could *date*, he had said, until they got to know each other better. Oooh! And then *maybe*, he'd remember her. *Pickles!* Her blood boiled at the mere thought of his quavering suggestion. She had waited over three years for that boy. She wasn't waiting any longer!

"DATE!?! Oooh!" She blurted out loud.

The more she obsessed on that idea, the angrier she became. She held the Amazon's snap shot at arm's length against the mirror as she studied her adversary's buxom physique under the glare of the bathroom light. Instinctively, Ry straightened her back and neck as she compared her pose, reflected in the bathroom mirror, with Donna's pinup photo. Proudly, Ryz'n thrust back her head. Suddenly, an idea, which had been gestating inside her brain, mushroomed into full blossom. She reassumed the dubious habit of talking to herself, which she had acquired during Nick's long absence.

"DATE, indeed! I'll show him what he's got right here at home. Like I told that incompetent pogeys at the Navy Yard—'what am I, chopped liver?'"

It occurred to Ryz'n that her sister would decry the plot hatching inside her head as "disgusting pandering to blatant sexism."

"So what, Sheena? He's my husband, isn't he? Who the heck else am I supposed to pander blatant sexism to? And anyway, you haven't seen him out there waitin' for me half-naked in those snug, Manila-made, silk suit pants."

Before the imaginary Sheena could retort, Ryz'n cut her off.

"Shut-up, Sheena. Just, shut-up! I don't need any advice from you in the peanut gallery." And Sheena did shut-up. "That's one of the advantages of having a one-sided conversation," whispered Ryz'n softly under her breath. "You never lose an

## *Out at Home*

argument.” Ryz’n chuckled and inhaled deeply, collecting her thoughts before she went out to play the temptress. “Of course, it’s also why Mother has me seeing that psychiatrist, but I can’t deal with that now.”

The floating sensation she had enjoyed during happy hour, followed by a wine dinner with her in-laws had long since worn off. Ry’s head was splitting now and the pony-tail holder was not helping matters any. She had had enough trouble trying to bury her fatigue as well as her headache. She pressed on. Her five night’s worth of insomnia was catching up to her. However, she was looking forward to Nick’s love as the tonic that would cure all her ills, as it had so many times in the past. She hesitated before she opened the door.

“Oh pickles! Raybo’s liquor wore off too soon. My head is just splitting. Mann, sure could use some of Tommy Tux’s magic beans right about now. He’s not much of a road manager, but, Mann, he sure could dip into that magic jar of his and come up with some super stuff. Make a girl feel so-o-o good.”

Ryz’n once more assumed her alter ego in Sheena, speaking loudly to herself in the snooty, sarcastic tone so suited to her sister.

“You mean that so-called prescription medication, Ry?”

“Yeah, that’s exactly what I mean. That stuff picked me up when I was down, helped me perform my best in spite of everything. Yeah, I gave some of my best performances on that medicine. Even your own husband used to say so Sis. Kept me from being up tight.” Then she answered herself as Sheena.

“Yeah, I know. Bryson used to say they loosened you up, helped you ‘let it all hang out.’ Yeah, you let it all hang out so much all right that you incited a couple of riots!”

“Oh Sheena, Sheena. It wasn’t that bad, was it? I declare I never could remember much the next day what had happened the night before after taking that prescription medication.”

“Prescription medication? Come on, Ryzanna! Even someone as naïve as you can’t believe that crap! Baby, that’s medicine you can get on just about any corner up and down Fourteenth Street.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. I don’t know and I don’t wanna know! Besides, like I said, I really can’t recollect it all. It’s kind o’ blank and where it ain’t blank, it’s downright fuzzy.”

“No wonder. But you could read the papers the next day. You felt the fallout. Hell! We all did. And then there was the notorious Tommy Tremain affair ... How could you forget that infamous New Year’s Eve down in Miami? You gonna tell Nick about that one? Hunh, Big Sister?”

“I quit with them pills after that, girl, and you know it. And, well, shoot, you know the rest. I don’t need ‘em for what I got to do with Nicky now. I can let it all hang out for him without the medicine. There won’t be any riot, but there’s gonna be some world shakin’ rockin’n’rollin’. You can count on that Li’l Sister!”

For emphasis, Ryz’n poked the air with her forefinger, but then she winced and grabbed her forehead. Employing both hands, she massaged her head for several seconds. It disturbed her that she was talking to herself again. That dubious habit raised

its ugly head the more fatigued and upset she became and was the major reason her mother wanted her to visit the psychiatrist again. Belatedly, it dawned on Ry that removing the ponytail holder would help her tremendously. She did so and ran her fingers slowly through her luxuriously thick hair.

“Umm, yes that’s better already. Yes it is, Ry.” Her wavy hair tumbled down about her shoulders. She massaged her forehead and her temples. But it was not nearly enough to overcome five sleepless nights and all the emotional pressure she had undergone.

“I just wish I felt even a *little* better, that’s all. Now shut-up and stand aside Baby Sister—Forgive me Mother Mary, St. Brigid and all the saints, but please grant me the strength and wisdom I need to love my man, to win him back, to make him remember me. Please don’t let him slip through my fingers again, like he did last night. The Lord’s will be done, through Christ Our Lord, Amen.”

She crossed herself, inhaled deeply, straightened her shoulders, and began to open the door when she blurted out as though she had made a discovery.

“OH! Yes, that will help.”

With her right hand, Ryz’n reached behind her middle back feeling for the hook and eye at the top of her zipper. When she had found it, she pinched it open and fumbled for the lead to the sundress’s invisible zipper. Then she pressed her left hand against the dress back, while, with her right, she discovered and tugged on the metal lead and unzipped the back of her dress completely down to her tailbone. She had sewed that bodice up so snugly to suit her unique dimensions, that the thing had trussed her up tighter than a calf at roping time.

“Whew! That should make things easier. No awkward fumbling.” She sighed. It had been a long time, but she had not forgotten. She hoped he would remember, too.

Then she cinched up each of her spaghetti straps to compensate a little for the loose, open back of the sundress. “Now calm yourself girl,” she coaxed. “You can do this, Ry. You can do it, Sweetie. Don’t be nervous.” Ryz’n closed her eyes, inhaled, and exhaled deeply three times. Then she remembered—“The honey.”

Nick had always remarked favorably on how her lips tasted of honey. That’s because they really did. She pulled the honey vial from her purse and dropped a double dose of the sweet nectar on the tip and base of her tongue and, with her tongue, rubbed the nectar over her lips and around her mouth. “That ought to do it.” She stopped the vial and replaced it in her purse. Then she opened the door again, confidently, and sauntered out into the alcove, as if she were the sweetest, sexiest animal on earth.

Ryz’n noticed that Nick sat upon the bed closest to the bathroom, with his bare feet buried in the plush carpet. Leaning forward in the space between the beds, he was cradling his chin between his left thumb and forefinger, supporting his left elbow upon his left knee. Dressed only in his suit pants, he was watching the Orioles game on TV. Ryz’n sashayed out of the bathroom across the alcove, but evidently his peripheral vision failed to detect her. Absorbed in the game, he didn’t move. Ryz’n leaned back slightly, up against the corner of the brief, narrow alcove partition wall. She assumed Donna’s voluptuous pinup pose. With her elbows akimbo, Ryz’n placed the backs of

## *Out at Home*

her opened hands flat against the narrow partition wall. Her left leg bent imperceptibly with her left knee just forward of her straight right leg and her left heel resting against the partition. Ryz'n lowered her chin to her collarbone, turned her face leftward, toward Nicky. When he looked up, Nick would glimpse a real live, would-be, sultry vixen studying him through her naturally long, dark lashes. She knew how to pose sultry and sexy. She had had a lot of practice posing for Halo Platters publicity shoots. Again, she inhaled strongly to calm herself. Ry bore her gaze into his head, hoping to attract his attention by the heat of her libido.

Nick acted as if he did not notice her. Then, as he watched the ball game and without looking at her, as if they were in the middle of an ongoing conversation, her groom surprised her by asking suddenly.

"You know that story you told about the two guys who were killed?"

Startled, because he had not yet acknowledged her presence, she managed a sultry "Yes." She intentionally dropped her naturally husky voice an octave lower than normal, but his attention remained obstinately tuned into the TV.

"Well, you never said what started the whole thing. I mean, why would I do something like that? You know, mess up their truck, like that?"

For the first time, he turned his attention from the TV to her to get her response. Ryz'n locked onto his eyes, as she lightly kicked off her shoes for his benefit. Only now, he could see that her hair was down and about her bare shoulders. Ryz'n got that special, tingly, loving feeling deep down inside her. She hoped she was sending him that same romantic message that she was feeling.

"Why, stacked up against that partition, you look like Bobbie Gentry over there posing for one of them album covers." He half smiled. His feeble attempt at humor missed its target.

*Bobbie Gentry?!? That has-been! What happened to Gina Lollobrigida? What about me? What about my album covers? Maybe I am just chopped liver, after all. Ryz'n moaned inwardly. Sheesh! This ain't helpin' my confidence any. Gotta buck up, Baby. Buck up!*

"Oh?" Ryz'n intoned in her naturally smoky voice, fully masking her disappointment.

She placed her hands flat out along either side of her bust and simultaneously slid them languidly down along her torso to her waist and rested them upon the front of her broad hips as she had seen movie stars do. "Is that so?" she asked. She pursed her lips and arched her left eyebrow lazily while she leaned back against the partition. She slid her hands around her hips to rest partly on her backside. He appeared to be taken aback by her sexy, forward manner, for he mumbled.

"Well, ma-maybe not completely. Ja-Just from the na-ne-neck up—ma-maybe, the hair, I guess."

Nick's weak smile withered under her smirking glare. Her frayed nerves were rebounding. He had forgotten the game on TV. That was good. And he was stuttering. That was very good. Her eyes had locked onto his and her visual grip held him in a vice. With her heeled sandals off, she had lost a couple inches in stature. Yet standing

## *Lure of Bathsheba*

less than ten feet from him, she suddenly felt larger than her five-foot, three-inch frame. Still, her laser-like gaze remained locked onto those gorgeous two-toned eyes of his. From his startled, blank expression, Ryz'n knew she had evinced "the look" now, the look of a vixen, just as she had done last night, when she had lured him into this very room. Sober, she was normally too Catholic to show love in this manner. Yet, despite her lack of a high, she was making it happen right now.

"Well," she proclaimed in the sultry kind of husky voice that she was told keep men awake at night, that very voice which had helped GRT to sell millions of record albums.

"Terri and Patti had said the dead men had tried to molest you in the rest room at Duley's, but that you had hurt them instead."

"Molest me?"

A perplexed look had stolen over his face. For a minute, she thought she had seen a spark of recognition in his eyes.

"That was not uncommon for you then Sweetie," she explained. "You were so cute with your long hair. You weren't even shaving then. Sometimes you did look more like a girl than a boy and we played a lot of clubs, where there were men, who, well ..." Again, Ryz'n lowered her voice. "But not now, now you are a man with that handsome moustache, Baby, and that muscular six-foot frame. But it never mattered to me either way. I've always loved your full red lips, your long lashes, your delicate features and I even like that moustache, too."

"Yeah, well I'm glad at least that you didn't mention what some people have glowingly described as my 'occasional, effeminate hand ge-gestures.'"

"Oh, I hadn't really noticed." Ryz'n lied. This was no time to have him doubting his sexuality. He had enough mental hang-ups without that.

Nick listened but Ryz'n forced him to shift his sensory focus from the auditory to the visual. Slowly now, as a new wonder woman of the night, a trollop-like temptress, Ryz'n drew up her skirt and her half slip to wriggle seductively out of a pair of panty hose. Evidently, he was impressed. He remarked he had seen women wriggle into and out of pantyhose before. It had always humored him to watch their struggles, but not this time, not the way she did it. This was progress, she thought. *This was going to work.*

She had kept her eyes upon his the whole time. He was intrigued. How had she managed such a seductively tricky feat? Had she evolved into alluring Bathsheba after all? Yes, she sure had his attention now. As is she were a relief pitcher with a one-run lead bearing down on him in the ninth, Ryz'n bore a hole through him with searing, lustful eyes which screamed—"Green for GO!"

Ry had him almost where she wanted him and she was about to close the deal. By force of will, she squelched the throbbing pain in her head and soothed the aches in her tired bones. She glanced at the way his grey silk suit pants clung snugly to him, revealing the contours of his powerful thighs. Nick's form-fitting, Manila-made slacks also featured his tight, solidly up-turned rump, reflecting the powerful haunches of a thoroughbred race horse, which he always had claimed were the sources of his

## *Out at Home*

fleetness afoot. Ryz'n fairly licked her lips. Why shouldn't she pursue this, this natural love thing she had started to its natural end and let the chips fall where they may? She had and she would. After all, she was Bathsheba now. Ryz'n could feel the blood of that ancient temptress coursing through her own youthful veins. Her play was risky, because she could not be sure how he would react. Another rejection like last night would devastate her. However, she was confident in her assets. They had proven more than ample in the past, so she was willing to take the risk. Moreover, the potential rewards of success would fulfill all her dreams of the last three plus years.

*You can do this Ry, despite this nasty headache—better than that lyin' Amazon. That's for certain!*

Besides, had she not promised herself many times over these long three years that, if he ever returned to her, she would overcome her innate conjugal reticence without the benefit of alcoholic libation? How many nights had she lain awake, dreaming of this very circumstance and all that she would do to prove there would be no barriers between them? She could not count the many hungry, lonely nights she had spent lying upon her bed in the agony of her unrequited solitude. Ry had vowed to break down those barriers through her own self will, without the taste of fermented grape, the aphrodisiac, which they had discovered could release her wildest inhibitions. Married under dubious circumstance at seventeen, her ingrained, Catholic modesty had obstructed their path to marital bliss in the bridal bed. Of course, that was when she had been sober, as she was now, unfortunately. Then, as now, a glass or two of vino would unleash the amorous woman she hid in her soul. Now she had no wine and no magic beans, merely her determination and three years of loneliness to help her overcome her natural reserve.

With her headache barely held at bay, and by sheer will alone, Ryz'n thought positively of how she had incited some of those concert crowds with her raucous performances. She tried to forget that she had ingested the magic beans on those occasions to free her naturally amorous but sublimated libido. Unsure of exactly how to proceed with her seduction now, Ryz'n aptly called to mind the strippers in Double J's burlesque gig over at The Block on East Baltimore Street. She had gone there to audition Jimmy Jax as GRT's new lead guitar player, whom the band needed so desperately if it were to survive. Ryz'n had had no idea J.J. was working in a strip club when she had agreed to hear him audition; otherwise, she would never have gone. Yet Double J had blown her away with his funky, electrifying guitar sound, even as the strippers, whom he had accompanied, repulsed her. Then she had made a life-changing discovery, which stunned her no less than lightning bolt from the sky. She had observed the transforming effect the strippers' bumps and grinds had upon the mostly male patrons in the bar. Much to her righteous disbelief, the strippers, with their erotic movements, had mesmerized those goggle-eyed, stupefied grown men, changing each of them from a Dr. Jekyll into a Mr. Hyde. She never had thought to connect the strippers' vulgar motions with those of the various subtle art forms of the belly dance her grandmothers had taught her and Sheena as kids. Yet her sullen observation of the interplay between stripper and gawking patron had intrigued her, teaching her not to

## *Lure of Bathsheba*

judge those bawdy dancers too quickly. Where first she had found it inconceivable that anyone could have been interested in such trash, later she could not deny the alluring power over men these women had held in the sway of their hips and bounce of their busts.

What Ryz'n formerly had considered personally reprehensible, she later found darkly scintillating. Now she wanted to enslave her long-lost husband by harnessing him through that same erotic stripper's power. She hungered for that identical, stupefying, goggle-eyed look to overcome Nick's face as she had observed on the vaunting visages of those dumbstruck patrons at Naughty Nathan's Burlesque Revue. Yes, she craved the means to make it happen for her own man, even though such a naturally erogenous prescription remained unnatural to her, inhibited by a religious code, she found difficult to shake. Yet, to woo her crippled man now, that erotic trash was precisely what she needed to conjure up and employ.

*Oh! I can't do that with how I feel now, not without goin' into the jar and dialing up some of those magic beans. If only the booze hadn't worn off, then maybe ... no, I can do this, I can do this and I will. I will! Besides, just look at him—Adonis reincarnated, tan, lean, stomach like a washboard, muscles bulging in all the right places, calling out to me so loudly that they shout in my ears. And his eyes! Saint Brigid and all the saints just look at those two-toned eyes, with those long, thick lashes. Those eyes stole my heart back in high school! An angel, he possessed in one and a demon in the other.*

*Come on Bathsheba, I need ya now, Baby.*

Without losing eye contact with Nick, the would-be seductress untied each of her spaghetti straps, one at a time, by pulling out the thread of each one slowly, in succession, then allowing each strap to fall down loosely. Ryz'n had his attention now. Yes and she was not about to lose it. Posing as a diminutive stripper, Ry reached upward along either side of her head slipping her fingers into her thick hair and pushed her wavy locks upward before letting them fall limply back onto her shoulders. All the while, she hungrily eyed Nicky even as he eyed her.

Although her shoulder straps were loosed, the cute sundress remained in place. Bending over from the waist forward, her dense, thick hair also fell about her chest and face. Looking coyly out from behind her dense, wavy tresses, Ryz'n cupped her shoulders while her elbows hugged her midriff and clasped the top of her sundress with both hands. With her head still bowed, she pulled down the top of the dress, yet hid her treasures from his sight behind her loosely low-hanging locks. For a split second, Ryz'n worried about the extra weight she had gained since he had left for Viet Nam. *But he won't remember, will he? No, he can't. And if he does remember, well then my fight is won. I cannot lose either way.* Then, with the dress fallen down about her waist, she stood slowly erect. Ry eyeballed his non-committal reaction with mixed feeling. Then, by wriggling first one hip, then the other, the sundress fell to her feet where she stepped out of it, softly kicking it aside. Wearing only the transparent organza half slip and the equally invisible sheer, strapless, white nylon, demitasse brassiere, both which she now left for her lover to remove, Ryz'n deliberately resumed her pose against the corner of the partition in all her natural splendor. Her diaphanous garb withheld

## Out at Home

nothing from her groom's feasting gaze. She wore nothing else but the ever present gold hair ribbon she wore always in his honor.

Nick's face was implacable. Ryz'n did not quite know what to make of him. Was he stunned, appalled, disappointed or just being cool? She could not tell. The truth was she did not know him at all anymore. He was so strange, so different. Three and a half years ago, he would have been drooling at her feet right now. It was her weight. Yes? No—more! He needs more, that's all. He's shy because of his war wounds. Sure, that stands to reason. They don't bother me, but they bother him. How can I show him? I know. He needs some more of East Baltimore Street. That's the ticket! Her dark side, which she suppressed so successfully when she was sober, beckoned to her now, whispering in her aching head, even though she was far from drunk.

*Be the vamp. Play the tramp, whatever it takes Ry. There's no jar, filled with magic beans now, so you're on your own. He's your long, lost husband, make him know it! Just don't jump on him as you did when he first came back and embarrass the both of you again. Make him want you. Make him come to you. Sheena and Bryson, the guys in the band, they all said you're always too up tight, holding it all in. Let it go, Baby, let it go, just like you walk. Little Nick spotted it first, but now they all say, I've got a super sexy walk. Sure, I have a trick or two left to show. Bathsheba, think Bathsheba.*

And so, the mental whispers went. Ryz'n summoned whatever dark, scintillating demons she had interred deep within her soul, forgetting about her extra weight and the possibility of his rejection, to risk everything. *It's worth the risk. Once he takes me, he'll remember everything. And it will be all right, yes, it will all be all right. And he'll remember!* But getting to that point at this juncture seems impossible. *He regards me now as if I were some kind of an alien.* For the first time, it dawned deep inside her that they might not make it, not tonight anyway. She shuddered.

*Shoot! I thought he'd be all over me by now. I feel like an idiot, standing here nearly naked as a jaybird! Doesn't he know how difficult this is for me? What must I do to break him down?*

Deep down in the core of her being, Ryz'n could feel an ember of resentment breathe into a low flame, as the pains tightly caged in her head began to seep out from deep within her brain, spreading outward as might a creeping jackhammer. Nevertheless, she persevered. Just a sign from him, anything, would be so welcome. She stepped towards him and pivoted again. This time she paused with her backside to him. With no small delight, she watched over her cupped shoulder, as his eyes widened. She felt his star-struck gaze pierce her transparent organza slip that spread tightly across her broad backside. His stare had riveted upon her somewhat lower, upon that Indian heritage, which fell so utterly peculiar to her family's female line. Emboldened by his obvious delight in what she had to offer, Ryz'n raised her arms to her sides. Outstretched to shoulder height, she turned limp palms and fingers upward. She shimmied tightly in a rolling wave from her neck down through her thighs as her gypsy Grandma Jessie had taught her, thus tempting him with an ever so brief foretaste of what lay ahead. She peeped over her shoulder for his reaction. But he made none. His eyes had glazed over, as if he were in another world, another place. Perhaps he is

## *Lure of Bathsheba*

remembering ... *Oh, if only he were!* She stooped to turn off the ballgame playing on the irrelevant tube and pivoted about. He said nothing, did nothing.

Facing him once more, just a few steps away and encouraged by her hope, Ryz'n placed her hands akimbo upon her broad hips. She swayed her hips to her left and with her right knee bent provocatively inward, next to and just in front of her left. She tossed her head back in a taunting fashion, daring him to take her, or at least to do something, *anything!* Stock still, Nick scarcely breathed, as he leered at her, while she completed her runway model turns with all due deliberation. Then, Ryz'n broke the heavy silence.

"Me and the girls here," she cupped her right and left palms respectively under each of her sizable breasts, as she had seen the strippers at Naughty Nathan's Burlesque Review do, "are, uh, looking to get reacquainted, Baby. It's been a long, long time, Sweetie." Too long, she surmised, because the gentle touch of her own fingertips fired off a burst of tingling deep inside her. Tenderly, Ry began to inch towards him.

Then, as she deliberately crept to him, the jealous temptress within her could not keep from uttering the following words in an ominously threatening tone.

"Thirty-seven ... twenty-two ... thirty-seven! Don't forget me, Baby!" She inched ever closer to him, repeating the phrase.

Ryz'n knew she was fudging those statistics in her favor by rounding the figures down or up to the nearest inch to suit her idea of symmetry. She also hoped fervently that he believed her claimed waist size. Over five years ago, he had helped her forge the narrow funnel of a waist, which had become her pride and joy. Once upon a time, Nick had taken an equally great pride in her hourglass figure as she. By the time he had left for Nam, her waistline had dipped just beneath twenty-one inches, as her weight had dipped just beneath a hundred pounds. However, as she knew all too well, now, her pride and joy was mortifyingly closer to twenty-three inches. Her dread of that discovery by him and any subsequent disapproval on his part could serve as no greater rejection of her. Rightly or wrongly, her psyche, her self-image, her self-esteem had always been a product of their pivotal junior year in high school, when he had changed her from a chubby duckling into a sleek swan. And it was the excessive condition of her waistline so many years ago which ironically had formed the initial bond between them. Yet, she coolly pressed forward now, offering him no hint of her misgivings.

His passivity was beginning to infuriate her. Couldn't he see how much she was putting herself out for him, despite her fatigue and her throbbing headache?

"Well Sweetie, you're awfully quiet all of a sudden. Your tongue still works, doesn't it, Nicky? They say uh, that I have, well you know, an hourglass figure. Wouldn't you agree?" She was begging him now. Had she no shame?

Playing the coquette, despite the rising hammer in her head and the slowly aching wave of fatigue sweeping through her body, Ry batted her eyelashes obsequiously toward her prey as the sweet, fetching young model she pretended to be. She confided to him smugly, in a tone that tasted of conceit, but, for her, was just part of the act and remarked coolly as she curled her lips at the corners, recalling a line from an old Kim Novak movie: "Confidentially, I'm stacked." She winked and slid her hands downward

## *Out at Home*

over her shapely torso and hips, while she pivoted alluringly from side to side. However, as a deer caught in a pair of headlights, Nick's glazed eyes showed little sign of life. His lack of reaction irked her, but she vowed to keep her ire in check. Ryz'n felt as if she had been displaying herself as if she were one of Naughty Nathan's exotic nude dancers for hours already, even if, in reality, if it had hardly been a minute or two. And what had she had received so far, for her efforts? Nothing! He showed no appreciation whatsoever, not even a titter.

"Well Nicky, can't you say *anything*? Has the cat got your tongue? You could at least clear your throat?"

Her eyes frowned. Her voice assumed the same hard edge, she had failed to conceal during this afternoon's traffic incident. Finally, her mute Adonis statue spoke.

"Well, I, I, ca-ca-couldn't Ry, my-my heart is in it-t." A faint grin crossed his lips. *Maybe this will come off, after all?*

But it did not. He did nothing further. He said nothing more. He stood motionless with his hands in his pockets and that sickening sweet grin on his puss.

While he gawked, Ryz'n felt the chill from the A/C unit, no less than from her husband's frigid reception. Goose bumps stole up over her otherwise smooth, lightly tanned skin, breaking out upon her in a sudden rash. Her head pounded more strongly due to the tense-inducing cold and her patience was wearing threadbare. His lack of any response to her overtures was really pissing her off now. She was fast reaching the breaking point. She interrupted her seductive act to semi-scold her reticent husband. Keeping her arms akimbo, she rocked her hips angrily.

"You know, Baby, a heck of a lot of guys would give their right eyes to see what you're seeing right now."

"Ba-But wouldn't that rather ... uh, serve to da-da-defeat the pur-pa-pose?"

Incensed by his cavalier quip, her irritability surfaced oddly enough over a minor nuisance. Ry still kept her head and turned her anger elsewhere.

"Well, Nicky? Did you turn that A/C on 'Hi' again? I swear!"

Ryz'n noted she had neglected his request to be called Dixie, but she was too ticked to care. She intentionally bounced "the girls" heavily over the diaphanous demitasse bra, as she strode briskly several steps across the room toward the cooling unit.

"A bit nippley, is it?" He laughed, but she did not. "Here, I can get it for you."

He apologized and started around the bed, but she stopped him. However, at least he had noticed the taut effect of the cold upon her. *Maybe ...*

Impulsively, realizing the cool air helped, rather than hurt her cause; Ryz'n came to an abrupt bouncing halt, near the end of the bed. Her bust stood out, firmly taut, solidly covered with goose pimples.

"No, no, on second thought, it's just fine. Besides Sweetie, I don't plan on standing out here like this very long."

Ever the coquette, she simpered again, as if she were an antebellum Georgia belle. Ry clasped her hands out in front of her waist and, using her biceps, impetuously squeezed the sides of her heavy bosom together, forcing her bust up and partly out of her white lace shelf bra. She asked.

## *Lure of Bathsheba*

“You know Nicky, I believe I finally caught up with Sheena, don’t ya think?”

She arched one brow, turning her torso slightly from side to side, silently clamoring for his reaction. Nicky looked at her quizzically. Dutifully, she explained.

“My kid sister was always ahead of me in the bust department, well, in everything concerning physical maturity for that matter. And that was very exasperating for me, you know. Guess I was just a late bloomer ... So now, Baby ... I’m waiting, waiting patiently for your opinion.” She grinned hopefully.

Nick stood before her with his muscular arms folded across his deeply tanned darkly hairy chest. His grey, snug, suit pants could not hide the hefty bulge beneath that fine silk. Her spirits buoyed tremendously. Talk about six-packs, he had one—no make that a twelve-pack. His muscular frame was not so much massive as it was lean, lengthy and powerful. His triceps and, through his tight slacks, his delts were powerful in their dense width, and not so much by their density itself. He was a baseball player, after all, and his lean, heavily muscled physique modeled that of a baseballer. His hair had tumbled down and been shoved over to one side of his forehead. She had never wanted him more, nor received from him less.

*My gosh! The old Nicky would have been hopping all over me by now.*

A boiling anger over his irritating reticence began to grip her irrevocably, simmering like lava in the bowels of a volcano and raising a flicker of nausea. Yet, Ry persevered. Grinning broadly again, she postured and blinked flirtatiously at him once more, as her headache began to mushroom.

“Well, I think you passed her and left her in a trail of da-dust,” he smirked. “Th-thirty-seven, hunh? Well, somehow I mistook you for a, a thirty-eight C, even though you seem kind o’ short to be so, so ... ba-ba-broad ... chested.” Nick held his cupped hands out before his chest to describe graphically what he had trouble speaking.

Somewhat flabbergasted by his near perfect elocution, a surprised Ryz’n responded by looking down at herself, as if for the first time. “Broad chested?” She asked with a sardonic grin. “Yeah, well, I am ‘so, so ...’ sometimes, anyway. A thirty-eight C? Well, that depends a bit on how much I swim and work out and the time of month, of course. I guess I’m really just an irregular female, if you must know one of your wife’s deficiencies.” She pouted.

“Irregular? Ha! I don’t think I’d say that. Kind of look like ...”

“Like what?”

“Like, well, OK, I guess.”

“OK, *you guess?* That’s the best you can do, Nicholas? Pickles!”

Dixie joked. “No not pickles, more like, uh, uh a couple of fa-fa-fat pa-pineapples!”

“Pineapples? Well, I never heard that one before. Hope that’s a compliment.” Ryz’n pondered a minute as an impish thought came to her. “Well, hey Baby, care to drink a little juice?”

Nick merely smiled and smacked his lips for effect, but he did nothing! “Naw, honestly, I never much cared for pa-pa-pineapp-p-le juice.”

Shoot! She was all but begging him and he's making with lame jokes. She sought to backtrack to the original subject and explain the apparent discrepancy he had uncovered. Perhaps her knowledge could swing things back in her direction.

"Well, I'm in kind o' in between the two then—"

"In between pa-pa-pineapples and pa-pickles?"

"No, silly, in between that thirty-eight *C* and a thirty-six *D*. See there is no thirty-seven *C+* or *D-*, which is the size that would suit me best, if they made them. Does that explanation satisfy you?" (Given her much larger rival in San Diego, Ryz'n felt it was necessary to get this measurement thing out in the open, despite the chagrin it brought upon her, and point out to him that it was not the overall size, but the proportions that really mattered.) She dropped her hands down, resting them once more provocatively on her hips. Then she furrowed her brow, while Nick added.

"In baseball pa-pa-parlance, we'd ca-call you a tweener." His eyes grinned but his mouth did not. "Maybe they should ma-make a ba-ba-bra for tweeners?"

Ryz'n was floored. This was no time to consider his suggestion, but he had a point. She wondered why she hadn't thought of that before. After all, she and Sheena had bought that women's' undergarment factory down near M&L in Bella Vista as a tax write-off. Why couldn't they make such a bra? Why did a tweener like her have to go around feeling all pinched up and swimming out all over the place or sliding around too loose and floppy? Curious, she asked him.

"How did you know that anyway, about my bra size? I thought you had amnesia!"

Nick pointed to his head, "Kidneys!" He explained.

"Yeah, right! I'll bet you've had plenty of experience in determining such statistics," chuckled Ryz'n sarcastically.

"Ah, well no. I wish. Ba-ba-but the thing is, I washed your ba-ba-bra this morning, remember, or was this ma-ma-morning too long ago? Sure seems long, ba-but I can still remember that. It was a la-la-lovely ye-yellow ba-bra." His voice trailed off.

"Oh, yeah, sure, that's right. That's right. Well, for your information, and for your memory of that Amazon witch as well, and just so you don't shortchange me any, I wear that bra more than a half a cup size too small! Yeah, that provides me better support and holds my shape better, if you know what I mean. But I could just as easily wear a *D*! So don't go short-changing me none, because I know you're used to—well Dolly Parton out there—but, yeah, it does seem like a year, more than a day since you came back with the laundry, now that you mention it. Plenty of time us for to have gotten acquainted, hey Honey? So now, whaddaya say, Sweetie, hunh?"

But her husband merely leered and grinned like an idiot. He said and did nothing. She had done everything but throw him down on the bed and rape him and that she would not do. Her pride would not allow it. He must make the next move. *He has to.*

"Well hey, now! It's your turn, big boy," quipped Ryz'n comically ala Mae West, as she turned and stepped directly toward him, motioning him to remove his trousers.

Ryz'n stared at him hungrily now, much as he had been ogling her. He brushed right past her to turn off the light. She could smell his Old Spice after shave lotion,

inhaling the scent as if it were a fragrant, familiar aphrodisiac. Funny, she thought, that he wore the same cologne now as then. That scent reminded her of happier times and really got her juices flowing. She braced for the site of his ugly wounds, which she had inspected last night without his knowledge. Still, his lack of enthusiasm was wearing her patience thin. What was wrong with him or could it be her? Hadn't he always told her "enthusiasm was the key to life," and that was "especially true in love-making?" Was he still thinking merely of dating her? Had she not yet overcome Donna's image? What more could Ryz'n do, but rip off his pants and serve his pleasure?

*No, he must come to me now. He must. I've done enough.*

Ryz'n was putting up a brave front, but her spouse's lack of a positive response to her overt, fleshly advances was cracking her cheery, false exterior from within. On top of all her temporary physical ailments, his coolness, her supposed extra weight and the image of Double D Donna Dixon busting out of her bikini top in his wallet-sized photo, dredged up specters of all her old insecurities. Flashing before her was the nightmarish pudgy, pimple-faced, metal-mouthed teen she had once been and loathed—the ugly, chubby duckling Little Nick had transformed into a svelte swan. Ryz'n wanted to beg for his approval now, but she restrained herself, because she did retain some vestige of pride. Maybe it truly was her extra weight had induced his reticence? But how could he know? She was beginning to feel downright uptight and her head was pounding. She waited for what seemed like years. Then ...

"Gee Nicky, is that honestly all you have to say about me, I mean about my person?" Her tone was tense, edgy. "A lot of guys would love to be in your shoes, right now. You know that?"

Despite all her misgiving and ill feeling, she desperately wanted to enjoy this experience if it was at all possible. For well over three years, she had longed for this moment, to show off for him, to consummate their love. However, now deep within her welled an uneasy apprehension, which went beyond her head and body aches and the cool temperature of the room. As with his homecoming yesterday, out on her parents' curb, she had ignored that small voice within that had urged her to take it easy with her newly found husband. Although outwardly thus far, she had managed to hide her fear, now she was second guessing herself. Little Nick would have gobbled up this masquerade and tried to top her with his own brazen advances, but this Nick, this Dixie, she knew him not. She lowered her chin over her shoulder to gaze through her long black lashes, peering at him sensually.

"Well, for a fairly short girl," he admitted lazily, "I guess, all I'm saying is that you're a little la-la-larger in some pa-places than I would have fa-figured ... That's for sure." He grinned leeringly at her.

Ryz'n beamed, bouncing on her tiptoes as though she were about to dive off the high board, with her ample bust firmly quaking and shaking.

"Well," she answered in a matter of fact manner. "I strap 'the girls' down pretty tight most of the time in public, so they don't attract so much attention—uh, except when I'm on stage performing, of course. I, I do have some, well some costumes I

## *Out at Home*

made special for live performances, ya know, that kind of show me off better, uh, my better points that is? Hope that's, uh, OK with you Honey?"

She was asking his permission for violating her personal moral code to pander to the prurient whims of her lustful music producers and her live, raucous Rock'n'Roll audiences. However, Nick blew her off rather lightly.

"Oh, you thought, I was referring to your, your ..." Dixie cupped his hands in front of his chest but failed to mouth the word.

"Yes. Breasts! Yes! My goodness! Go ahead. You can say it, can't you? If you can't even say the word, well, how can you properly abuse them?" She took a step toward him and grinned wryly. "OK, so what's 'a little larger than what you, uh, figured,' hmmm? Now you tell me, Baby. Go ahead. I wanna hear *you* say it." She sounded just like her prying dad earlier at the dinner table and that recognition made her wince. Her overly tired mind raced wildly with his possible answers.

Although already weary of her short-lived masquerade, as a curvaceous stripper, Ry stepped back mockingly, yet valiantly, once more into her pose for his inspection. Literally, Ryz'n put her best foot forward. With arms akimbo once again, he inspected her coolly, scientifically as a livestock judge measuring a prize hog at the county fair.

"Well, I dunno, maybe, ma-ma-maybe your waist is a little too, too la-large," he remarked dryly.

While Nick grinned lamely, Ryz'n could not. Instead, her provocative pose dissolved abruptly as her shoulders slumped. Her mouth dropped open and her lower lip quivered. She felt the color drain out of her face and her stomach turned to mush. That was it! This was too, too much. That sinking sensation in the pit of her stomach exploded upon her from the inside out, like an erupting volcano. Stunned, she doubled over at the waist crossing her forearms and reaching around either side of her waist with the opposite hand, as if to hold herself in, and retched dryly. It was as if he had kicked her strongly in the stomach. Without realizing his crucial error, Nick had made the one comment that really drove a stake through Ryz'n's heart, no less the pit of her stomach. Amidst her shame and nausea and her mortification from her impetuous actions, Ryz'n sought to hide her embarrassment. Sobbing, she scurried off to the bathroom, where she closed the door behind her, puked her guts out and cried. Shortly there was a tapping on the closed bathroom door.

"Ryz'n! Ryz'n? Are you OK?"

Obviously, she was not. That was a stupid question. Ry's stomach had engaged her in battle and, at that moment, her stomach was winning the fight. This was a complete reversal of their rolls from last night. From outside the closed bathroom door, her husband begged forgiveness for any slight he may have given her. As she finished and slumped back against the wall, a clammy peace rushed over her. While he protested his innocence through the closed bathroom door, offering his most heartfelt apologies, she flushed the former contents of her stomach down the drain and rinsed her mouth at the sink. She could taste those sweet and sour strawberries again, almost as if she had just eaten them. Last night, he had been the sick one in the bathroom. Tonight, it was she. There was irony in that realization, but right now, the irony eluded her, leaving her

## *Lure of Bathsheba*

only with the sour after taste of vomit in her mouth and a clammy sensation in her belly. Physically, she felt somewhat relieved. She wanted to cry, but she would not give him that satisfaction. She squeezed some of his Crest toothpaste onto two fingers and brushed her teeth as best she could. Then she squeezed a gob of the paste onto her tongue and swished it around for several seconds before she spit it out.

Ryz'n gathered herself, wrapped a white cotton bath towel about her body and called to him through the closed door and over the sound of the running water to "please" bring her clothes to the door. When he did so, she opened the door and he found her wrapped in a towel. The burlesque show was definitely over. She received her things from him, asked for her shoes and promptly closed the door rudely in his face. She heard Nick begin stuttering and slurring his speech, even worse than before, as he tried to apologize through the door and regain her confidence in him.

"It wa-was only a pa-pa-pa-poor ja-joke," he pleaded. "I only s-s-said it, ba-ba-ba-because your waist is so unba-bab-ba-believa-b-bly na-na-narrow, so unlike anything I've eh-eh-ever sa-sa-sa-seen."

All his efforts proved to be fruitless. Ryz'n's head was killing her now. She emerged fully clothed and fully ignoring him. It was as though her icy presence had morphed the room into a freezing meat locker. And she made him feel the full brunt of her icy gales, as she garnered her purse and her platform shoes which he had failed to deliver. Ryz'n walked briskly out of the motel room, carrying her purse and shoes, with Nick close on her heels. She did not want to stop to put on her shoes and give him an opportunity to block her exit.

He followed, stuttering and stammering, blathering like an idiot. The more he tried to hold her, the more she hastened her retreat. Was it not little more than thirty hours ago, she had waited for her long lost husband anxiously? But now, she could not even bear to look at him. Stepping barefoot on some loose pebbles in the parking lot, forced her to hop a couple times and mutter a curse. Too irate to talk, Ry resisted speaking to him or even looking in his direction, until she was downstairs in the parking lot, seated behind the wheel of the Starfire with the motor running. She stared harshly at the lame shadow of what he once was. He stood dumb and bare-chested, by the driver-side door.

"You know NICKY, how you were talking about going and living with your parents for a while? Well, maybe that's a good idea." Loudly and angrily, she spoke in a mean-spirited tone. "So, why don't you just run along home to Mama?" She watched her grimly vicious stare cut him to the quick. Then Ryz'n removed the yellow ribbon that she had worn for so long in his honor, the symbol of her loyalty to him for so long, and flung it in his face. She almost burst into tears, but, willed herself to remain in check. Instead, she cried out angrily:

"And, you can stick that where the sun don't shine, Baby!"

Then she jetted backwards out of the parking spot, shifted gears, gunned the engine and peeled out of the motel parking lot, along the way knocking down a trash can and strewing its contents in the motel drive, leaving him to eat the Starfire's blue exhaust.