

"Gladys Ramock!" Doug called out trying to decipher the warm thin fingers closing his eyes from behind. Actually he ought to have smelt the very distinctive perfume of Gail Woolup, but he was also deceived by the full chest pressing into his back and he automatically thought of Gladys when he felt that soft shape. "Surprise!" - the voice of Wendy Turnfelt, Gail's roommate who had swiped the fragrance as revenge for having lost her shaving cream at the klepto-hands of her friend. He was indeed surprised, and very pleased. In fact so pleased that the enormous grin which he was unsuccessfully trying to conceal forced itself onto his face and displayed his feelings like cold meat in a deli. Wendy, the source of this delight released his eyes and slowly wove her graceful fingers softly down the contours of his cheeks to his solid neck, where she began fingering the thick gold chain decorating his handsome head.

Doug called for one card even though he already had four aces, just to give the other six poker players the idea that he was going for a flush; supremely confident that he had just received the break he had been praying for; and the chance to make up his losses. Wendy, by purest good luck, had entered the sphere of his person at precisely the right time, exempting him from the enormous effort of concealing his pleasure at receiving superb cards. (It is well known that Doug is totally unable to conceal his feelings.) Wendy's finger was in his ear as he was about to double when a cacophonous roar smacked the silence for a six. "Herbert!" peirced the air with the smash of a Boeing, as Unreal Al stomped up to the table and lifted all 210 pounds of Herb Jitspit into the air by his collar. One side effect of this action was that the whole card table splintered into small bits and the poker game came to a halt. Unreal Al pushed his paw into the right pocket of Herb's jacket and extracted a very fat bankroll of notes. Peeling off \$236 he said "Sorry Herb I have to pay my hotel bill" and stomped to the bar.

Now Doug, who was the only one still holding cards at the time, began trying to talk his way out of his losses by parading his four aces. He received as much goodwill as a subway flasher, in fact less, because his audience were not innocent bystanders, but card players who stood to lose very tangible money. His face gave him away: he was on the verge of breaking into tears, when Unreal Al came to his very surprised rescue. "Doug, those your four aces that I spoiled?" he enquired in his bottom base voice. Doug nodded the affirmative so fast that he began fanning some of the cards off the re-errected table. Unreal Al grimaced: "Pologies bud" and then, to everyone in the room: "I'll kill anyone who claims a cent from little Doug here. So be it."

Actually Doug was not at all little, weighing in over the two hundred mark, sporting shoulders a blacksmith would deem scratch, and it would certainly puzzle the ant on the wall if the description "Little Doug" had emerged from any mouth other than Unreal Al's. Doug too was perplexed at the description, but he was far too thrilled to be spoken well for by Unreal Al than to protest; no matter what Unreal Al had called him. More importantly, the net effect was that he was now out of this cut-throat card game, having lost no money at all, and having gained the respect of everyone present. (This respect had two sources: firstly everyone thought him to be in with Unreal Al, and secondly he had somehow captured the admiration of Wendy Turnfelt - a lass well beyond the vaguest hope in one of his more hopeful dreams).

"Where to from here?" These words were racing around inside his head when his good fortune split itself like an amoeba and produced more good fortune: Wendy tugged him out of the bar by his thick neck chain and led him directly to his beige Pontiac parked across the road. Before Doug could speak Wendy said in a very provocative tone: "My place."

Once inside the neat apartment Wendy asked Doug if he would like to do something very special for her. Again Doug's inability to conceal his feelings made it obvious that he was willing, extremely very willing. "I know you're good with your hands" she cooed, "Will you please fix my television set?"

Doug's ego collapsed into a rubble of earthquaked expectations, but before he could speak Wendy made the following announcement: "I know I am beautiful, so I'll speed this up. I shall reward you for fixing the T.V. in the following manner: I'll change into my slimmest and sexiest negligee and sit on the couch while you fix the T.V. You will be able to admire my body from over there. But that's as far as it goes, especially since I am only seventeen; and no-one has ever gotten even that far with me before. But that's not all; my roommate Gail Woolup is by no means as prim and proper as I am, and being as dumb as she is, she usually does what I tell her to do. I shall recommend you to her, and your luck may change for the better. I am sorry that her face is reminiscent of a dog's but she has a great figure and second best will have to do."

Shrugging his perplexed shoulders Doug set about the T.V. and to his great pleasure he discovered that the fault was only a burnt-out fuse. He spent the next forty six minutes pretending to do repairs while he gawked at the magnificent Wendy. He screwed on the T.V. cover the instant he heard Gail Woolup's key rattling in the keyhole and maneuvered himself behind the liquor cabinet so as to give Wendy enough time to beckon Gail to her room and ply her with recommendations. Emerging from the conference Gail snuggled up to Doug and breathed: "I'm really looking forward to getting physical with you" into Doug's blushing ear, "just as soon as my brother here has been taken care of." Doug shifted his eyes in disgusted disbelief to the doorway, which now contained a brainy looking eleven year old, wearing precocious clothing and a sneer.

It turned out that the brainy looking brother was staying with his big sister and her roommate for four days whilst his parents were on vacation. "And how do we take care of Sydney then?" enquired Doug. "Cards. A little birdy has already informed us that you are an incredibly good poker player."

Now Doug may be big, but he is not stupid: "No expert card player would ever reveal his secrets, so forget poker, but what I'll teach you is Swedish Strip Solitaire, which you can play with the Playboy resting on the back seat of my car." Sydney's interest was inspirational, and the lesson took no time at all.

Doug and Gail withdrew in the Pontiac bound for the Middle Aged Beat Club, a punk outfit catering for establishment singles. In the ticket line outside the club Gail nestled close into Doug, over whom a feeling of tremendous well-being began to descend. It was whilst he was whispering in her ear that Herb Jitspit approached him for a loan of \$9. (Herb had lost his fat bankroll in the poker game that had continued after Doug had left the bar). Reluctantly Doug nodded, and as he reached for his wallet he heard himself do a mental scream: he had placed his wallet on the table in Wendy's room before starting the repair of the T.V. set. His face registered the following emotions in this order: worry, relief, foolishness, worry, relief. First he worried that he had lost all his money, then he knew that it was safe with Wendy, then he cursed himself for being such a moron, then he began to worry about how to deal with the situation, and finally he saw Unreal Al beckoning him.

Unreal Al was the bouncer at the Nautilus Imprevue, the very high class Avante Garde club which was next door the rancid Middle Aged Beat Club. The "Naut" as it was known had everything, top food, top cabaret, plushiest decor, and the most sought after band in town. Everyone craved to be a member, but most could not, because apart from it being very, very expensive, membership was reserved for those most snobbish uptown jerks who frequented the club. Hand in hand the couple shuffled up to Unreal Al, and to their amazement they heard the big giant tell the doorman: "Little Doug and this sack of bones here are my personal guests for the night; give 'em free tickets for everything:- food, cabaret, comic show, the works."

Whereas Doug's dial was a fruitsalad of astonished joy, Gail's pan was a bomb of blue murder. Her acne bristled like the fur on the back of a cat. Unreal Al had insulted her figure, her best feature. It took a very hard squeeze on her little hand to make her register that their good luck outweighed the insult; and it suddenly exploded into her head that she was being invited into the "Naut" for the very first time. She softened up immediately and rushed a shallow hug on Unreal Al's belly.

The happy twosome spent the next hour and a half dancing, eating, drinking, giggling at jokes, enjoying strip shows, and generally having the time of their lives. In the dim light of the club Gail's hard features somehow became more acceptable to Doug, and the free Southern Comfort made her all the more witty. It suddenly dawned on Doug that he had better get out of there before he fell in love (and drunk-love is such false love), so he persuaded Gail that it was time to go. Her reluctance almost distracted him into calling for the bill, but the wink from Unreal Al woke him up in the nick of time.

On the way back to Gail's they went through various methods of disposing of Sydney for the next few hours. Gail was of the opinion that he could be bribed to sleep on the living room couch, and the two finally settled for this tentative plan. Pulling up to the building, Doug and Gail, sitting so nice and tight together in the warm car were greeted by Sergeant Falrew, his partner McGlew, and Herb Jitspit. "That's him!" declared Herb pointing a very accusing finger straight into Doug's neck. Sergeant Falrew removed the keys from the Pontiac and told them to get the hell out of the car.

Doug's eyes were aglow with stunned ignorance. Before he could speak Sgt Falrew queried: "How well do you know Albertus Jarts?"

"Who!!?" was the only word that could unhook itself from the rack in Doug's brain. To which Sgt Falrew sterned up somewhat: "Citizen, even though this is not an arrest don't think you can relax for a second." The ever-helpful Herb quickly interjected that Alberus Jarts was in fact the real name of Unreal Al. Seams and folds of enlightenment swept across Doug's over-worked face: "Yes; I sort of know him: he helped me get into the Naut tonight. And yes; first he killed my chances of winning lots of money in the Bar at poker this evening, but then he made it up by cancelling my debts with the other players."

"You look like a liar to me," was Sgt Falrew's reply, "but this time I think you are telling the truth. Mr Jarts has been arrested less than ten minutes ago for car theft as well as defeating the ends of justice. You are implicated in a way that I refuse to divulge at present, but, as I mentioned earlier, this is not an arrest, so you may continue with the rest of your life for the time being. One more thing pal, just like you see on the good old T.V., DON'T LEAVE TOWN."

As the policemen took their exit, Doug suddenly figured out why Herb had been standing so close to McGlew's bad breath: he was handcuffed to the policeman. Doug's legs began to wobble uncontrollably from all the shocks he had just received. This wobbling transformed itself into a violent, rabid, shuddering as Doug fought to regain his composure. His attention was suddenly diverted by the very sudden appearance of Wendy and Sydney who had been watching all the proceedings from behind the mailbox.

"I should never have gone out with a criminal" whined Gail, looking for sympathy in a situation where she was the last person deserving any. Doug looked around for straws but all he could find to cling on to were insurmountable problems. From his viewpoint, his martyr-like innocence was so utterly obvious that he had automatically assumed that his friends would rally together to oath him out of this mess. And here was Gail, all aflutter with nerves and fear, doubting his obvious innocence. Sighing his most injured sigh, he began to explain as simply as he could that since he had spent every second of the evening with Gail it was just physically impossible for him to have committed any crime whatsoever; there being no time available for it.

Unreal Al slammed a crack into the surface of the marble tabletop: "I've got the bail!" This statement generated a great deal of astonishment. "Doug here will be my collateral. He'll stay in jail till I can clear my name."

Sgt Falrew's face was all smirks, "no-one's that dumb," he crooned.

Doug felt the fire of Unreal Al's gaze on him and somewhere in the distance his mind heard Unreal Al say: "Doug, I'll remember your choice until the day I die; whatever you choose."

Doug weighed up the present value of his life in prison against the value of it when Unreal Al got out of jail some time in the future. "O.K." he whispered, "but there are two conditions. One: You don't put me in a cell with a bunch of evil men who would kill me for a toffee, and two: Al, promise me you'll be back by 9.30 a.m. tomorrow morning. I have the most meaningful meeting of my life lined up."

Concesus was reached with Unreal Al swearing on his mother's grave that he would be punctual, and Sgt Falrew leading Doug to the women's custody cell.

That room, with its blaring, stark light-bulb dangling from the ceiling, contained the four most surprised individuals on the planet. No other four other women on Earth were more different from each other, or hailed from more remote walks of life. Their ages ranged from 19 to 48, fairly evenly spread. From the attractive blonde youngster, through varying degrees of experience, to the tough meat of the oldest, they presented only one common denominator: none of them were "good" girls. Doug lurched on his feet and did a forward roll into the cell as Sgt Falrew, spiteful as ever, shoved him in and locked the door with deliberate forcefulness.

"Well, well, well...." barked the old bat, "We'd better make use of this peice of cream-puff before he gets taken him away."

Doug the mild; Doug the shy; Doug the awkward; Doug the embarrassed. These descriptions of our hero disappeared from the English language at pecisely 7 02 a.m. the same morning: the moment he emerged from that fateful cell. The four short hours he spent there matured him a decade: he suddenly became much more confident and soft spoken. His growth thickened and he had to shave every day from thence onward. His eyes acquired a quiet understanding that Freud would have envied. A mystery so powerful pervaded his aura that even Sgt Falrew nodded him good morning as he ushered Doug to meet with Unreal Al.

In the same way that it is a factual statement about humanity to declare that if a person does not eat he will die, so one could say that every person must fantasize at some time or another, or else go mad. Truly, it is a very small number of people that can boast that they have experienced even a small fragment of their fantasies. Well Doug was a man who had passed through an experience that had gone way beyond any of his deepest fantasies.

To this day Doug has withstood the pleading, pressurising, and profferment of enormous financial rewards from family, friends, journalists, and biographers:- he simply will not divulge even a second's worth of the experiences he underwent with those four women in jail. Whenever someone tries to broach the subject, he just smiles his teasing, mysterious smile and tells them they can read his memoirs, if ever he publishes them one day. Tempted by such unusually spicy material for memoirs there are people who are so keen to know his secrets that they have actually gone as far as breaking into his home on several occasions, with the hope of finding draft copies of his biography. Needless to say, they have returned empty-handed, because Doug has had no need to put anything to paper: the images are burnt so deeply in his mind.

Even Unreal Al was impressed when he saw the glowing Doug enter his cell. "Looks like I done you a favour without tryin' to," he boomed.

"Looks like it," was the contented reply.

It turned out that the second charge levelled against Unreal Al was obstructing the course of justice. He was trying to keep Sydney out of trouble by falsifying his statement about the events that led to the stolen Porsche being found in his garage. He might actually have succeeded in keeping things quiet, had Sydney himself not come forward and confessed: "Shucks, this place is so boring I'd rather go back to Reformatory now, instead of having to wait till the long weekend's over."

This simplified things a great deal, because Unreal Al's innocence on the charge of car theft became aparent immediately. Syd even cleared Herb Jitspit, the other accomplice in the crime by explaining that he had given the blind-drunk Herb a lift in the car he had stolen. Herb had been so smashed that he had thought he was being offered a lift home by Mario Andretti's mechanic.

"I'll make a deal with you," offered Sgt Falrew. "If you drop your charge of police brutality in respect of those festering tape wounds on your neck, I'll drop the charge of obstructing the course of justice. If you agree, you can walk out of here right now, a free man."

To which Unreal Al made the following reply: "Listen, little pig, I don't care nothin' about you at all. I'm still going to get my neck photographed as soon as I get outa here, just in case I decide to squash you up one day, and I need evidence that I was provoked. Right now, I ain't angry with you 'cause you done Little Doug here a favour; so I won't need to squash you like a worm. You drop the other charge now, and I won't have no grudge against you; which, beleive me, is much more to your benefit than mine. As soon as Herb wakes up, you let him out of this dump. O.K.?"

It was very O.K. with all of them, so at 7.30 a.m. The two set off in Unreal Al's car. Said Al: "Don't worry nothin' about the damage to the Porsche, my insurance agent, Gladys Ramock, has got it all covered. I will now take you home so that you can clean up before your apointment with the lovely Wendy at ten. I will read this Playboy of yours while waiting for you outside your house. I ain't gonna let my best buddy fall asleep when he has such an important meeting to attend. So be it."

The best news that Doug received as he stepped through Wendy's apartment door was that Gail was going to be absent until Wednesday. She had taken her little rat brother back to the Reformatory, and was going to spend the balance of the weekend with her parents. Wendy gave Doug a generous hug as they waltzed to the liquor cabinet. Some very romantic Mozart was chirping away on the stereo. She had not changed out of her flimsy night clothes.

Beaming, she said: "Doug, never have I dreamed that the guy I would fall for would turn out to be a hero such as you. Although I am much more confident than most women, you must not forget that I am still young and have much to learn. I am hoping that you will play a leading roll in my growing up years."

To which Doug made the following speech: "To begin with, let me say that I am now so tired that my first request of you in this relationship is to wake me up by three o'clock this afternoon, because I fear that if I am not woken up I will sleep until I die. Secondly, please give a kiss quickly, because I can feel myself collapsing on your carpet, and I want your sweet kiss in my dreams."