

Author: Fowler Gray

Title: Give Me That Old Time Religion

Part 4: Plainsong 4: What Would You Have Me Do

Summary: Set in the late Sixties 'Give Me That Old Time Religion,' or OTR for short, tells the story of how joining the Agapemone Bethel, where sex is considered a sacrament, changes young Jake Gledhill's life.

Keywords: MF

To quench any flames before they start raging, this is a work of fiction. The author does not espouse the pseudo-theology contained in this story nor is he an adherent to its practices.

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Please pay attention to the story codes because they may change with each Plainsong.

A few readers have commented (complained) some chapters of OTR move too slow and don't have enough sex. If you're looking for a quick and dirty stroke story (not that there's anything wrong with those), OTR probably isn't for you.

As opposed to a short story, OTR is a novella where the characters will change and evolve. Some chapters will be slower and have less outright sex than others.

Some of the women who have read OTR have written to tell me they have been put off by its religious tenets

and seeming misogyny. Again I can only say OTR is a story about transformation and growth.

While I hope all of you will stick around for the ride, I'll understand if some of you don't.

Reader feedback plays an important role in keeping this story going. It's not necessarily a pathetic attempt at validation of my efforts (although I'd be lying if I said there wasn't at least an element of that involved), the feedback often sparks other ideas that keep the creative juices flowing.

All that being said, it's also nice to know your work has found an appreciative audience. Writing is a lonely, solitary profession. Getting feedback for what you've written is the difference between a writer's literary efforts being masturbation or intercourse.

So remember Celeste's Blow Job Principle which states "If a person expects to get a second blow job, the recipient should make the giver glad to have performed the first." Think of this story, or any story on this site, as the written equivalent of the author giving you head (a handy, gender-neutral phrase encompassing both cunnilingus and fellatio) and be sure to say thank you.

Thank yous for and comments on Gimme That Old Time Religion can be sent to this email address:  
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The story codes for OTR4: What Would You Have Me Do (MF)

Give Me That Old Time Religion, An Oratorio In Several Plainsongs By Fowler Gray

The Fourth Plainsong: What Would You Have Me Do

I didn't want to go out with Edna.

Edna Todd was the second of the junior college girls my father had set me up with. Not that I had anything overt against Edna. That would have been difficult because I'd never met her.

Point of fact, I only knew three things about her: 1, She worked at my father's shop. 2, She was another of my father's many paramours. 3, She'd, as Dad put it, "fuck at the drop of a hat and sometimes liked it a little kinky." I guess counting the "kinky" part that's four things I knew about Edna.

My problem was a bad case of the losts. My view of the world and my place in it had been scrambled as thoroughly as a carton of eggs tossed into a cement mixer. Over the span of less than a year, I'd got religion, albeit not a mainstream theology; gained a potential girlfriend/wife who I hadn't gone out with yet; discovered my parents were, for differing reasons, swingers with a taste for exhibitionism and voyeurism, and with the approval of my mother, lost my virginity to one of my Dad's lovers.

These events had knocked out the underpinnings of my life, robbing me of my sense of surety, leaving only the swirling winds of cognitive dissonance in its place. Without any sort of an internal compass to guide me I was, as the Kinks were to sing several years later, living in mixed up, muddled up, shook up world.

I thought I'd been handling it all rather well in that Sixties nonjudgmental hang loose, do your own thing kind of way. Emotions in check, I'd taken everything in stride, accepted the weird as just another form of normal, proceeded as though it all made perfect sense which, of course, it didn't.

In my more rational, non-hormonal driven moments I knew all of this was seriously twisted, knowledge I buried deep in order not to have to think about it. Instead I soldiered on, unwilling to allow anything to put my relationship with Elle at risk and hoping it would all eventually be come together for me.

It was way Debbie and I parted that really threw me into my tailspin.

After being lovers, Debbie had asked, almost begged, for me to be her friend. The fact I couldn't was haunting me, as was the realization I was treating her

the same way as my Dad did. But soon I might be able to begin chaperoned dating with Elle, an exclusive arrangement that would leave no room for even the most casual of contact with any other woman.

I'd called Debbie at the shop and tried to explain this to her only to hear the hurt in her voice as assured me she understood "...but the other phone's ringing. Gotta go Jake, maybe we'll see each other around sometime."

At first I was mad at her for making me feel the way I did. We both went into this with our eyes open, hers far wider than mine. Just some casual sex with no strings attached, that's all this was supposed to be about; it wasn't my fault it turned into more. But it wasn't her fault either; she hadn't asked me to marry her, just to be her friend.

I sought advice from my parents about what had happened with Debbie, an exercise in futility.

With the exception of my mother, my Dad treated women like facial tissues; disposable after you came in them. He encouraged me to do the same. I had with Debbie and at her own request until the night she revealed the bitter consequences of self-deception to us both.

Dad had a jaded view of the whole thing. "Don't worry about it Jake," he advised me wryly. "Deb's just seizing her chance when she can. Can't blame her for that. Of course, you gave her the perfect opening with that silly gift of yours. Giving flowers is fine, even a small inexpensive piece of costume jewelry is OK. But a book of love poetry, that kinda shit only put thoughts in her head. She went after you, figuring to play on your guilt and the fact you wouldn't know any better.

"It's an age-old scam. At first you're friends, friends who fuck like minks but still friends. The deeper she gets her claws into you the closer she gets to her goal. Shacking up would be the next step and then before you know it you're standing in front of the justice of the peace wondering how in the hell you got there.

"Don't worry about kid, she'll land on her feet just like the cat she is. Believe me, in a while she'll have forgotten all about you and be balling someone else. Hell, I think I'll give her a toss just to help things on their way."

My father had also warned Edna not to play mind games with me. "She knows the score. You won't get any 'just love me for myself' shit out of her but you are going to get some loving of a type Debbie doesn't like to do. Just don't give her another damn poetry book. I've got the perfect gift you can give her"

Mom wasn't any more help, in fact she was harsher than Dad, reminding me of her view liberated women, with their independence and insistence they were a man's equal, if not superior, were perpetuating Eve's error and bringing great unhappiness on themselves.

"Look at Debbie. She claims to be liberated, freed from obedience to any master, able to do what she wanted when she wanted, including in matters of sex. Is it working for her, this 'liberation' she brags about? From what you told me she doesn't seem very happy with her life does she? She doesn't reverence the sex act as a sacrament from God; she uses sex as a way of making herself necessary to someone."

Perhaps realizing I found her lack of sympathy distressing, Mom tried to soften the callousness of her words.

"God does work in mysterious ways, Jake, taking us down paths we can't understand for his own ends. Sometimes the road of excess leads to the Palace of Wisdom. We can only pray these girls' casual promiscuity will bring them to the Lord in his own good time."

Pushing the envelope, I asked Mom how I was any different from these promiscuous women. Wasn't I just having sex for sex's sake, reveling in the physical pleasure it brought me? What made me any better than them?

"Search your feelings, Jake. Was it just sex or was it something more?"

I had to admit to my mother I felt the sacred along with the profane, the bestowal of God's sacrament, when Debbie and I made love.

"Then you are different than them, different but not better. You keep that in mind when you go out with the next girl your father has lined up for you, or any girl for that matter. If I ever find you've been discourteous or contemptuous to someone who shares herself with you it will go hard on you," she warned me sternly. "I mean it Jake. They may be doing these things for all the wrong reasons but they deserve your respect and compassion."

Begging off of my dates with Edna was out of the question, said my mom.

"You still need the experience, more than ever after what happened last time. You have to know its not just lust that attracts you to Eleanor. You're going out with this Todd girl and that's it."

Monday night found me peddling my bike to Edna Todd's. Like me she had no car but she did have a small efficiency apartment carved out of a turn-of-the-century Regency home on the edge of the village.

Along the way I worried about what would happen next, the memory of Debbie foremost in my mind. While that was a wound I couldn't heal, at least right now, the last thing I wanted was to injure Edna as well.

As I rode up the street her place came into view, a white-painted brick three story house, its hip roof covered with grey-green moss on the side shaded by the towering oak trees that dotted the property.

The place cried out for some care, the black paint on the double-hung windows and wooden shutters was peeling, the chimney on its west side badly in need of tuck-pointing where the mortar had crumbled away. Maybe Dad could get a hold of the owner and make him an offer to do the repairs, give us a chance to work together and earn some money at the same time.

Cruising up the crushed gravel drive as it gently curved and dipped its way through the oaks, I pedaled to the back of the home, parking my bike under the back stairs. Taking a brown bag out of my bike's saddlebag I carefully began ascending the stairs, watching for the loose steps I had been told were there, just one more thing for Dad and I to fix.

Passing by the landings at the second and third floors, I reached the end of the steps, a small door offering access to the space under the attic. Pushing my unease aside and after a small prayer all would go right, I knocked on the door.

I might have been troubled by Dad's treatment of his women but I had to admit he sure could pick them.

Edna Todd was a stunner. She was the very definition of "willowy," with just enough flesh to keep her from being bony. Luxuriant red hair framed her elfin face, pouring down her back to end just below her shoulder blade. She wore a thin leather necklace, a shiny metal ankh hanging from it to rest in the hollow of her throat.

Soft dark brown eyes, framed by a pair of slightly rounded tetragonal tortoise shell glasses resting on an upturned button nose, confronted me with a bold and direct gaze.

This time I remembered my manners from the start, extending my right hand toward hers, introducing myself as Jake Gledhill, Leonard's son and asking if she was Edna.

Smiling warmly, she took my hand in hers. "Hello Jake. It's a pleasure to meet you but I'm not Edna," her voice sweet and lyrical.

As I started to apologize for my mistake she laughed. "It's OK Jake, I'm who you came to see. I just hate the name Edna. Why my parents saddled me with it I'll never know. It's not like either of my grandmothers were named Edna. I'm the first 'Edna' in the whole damn family. Just call me 'Toddie,' like everyone else and we'll get along just fine. Come on in and make yourself

at home."

Letting the screen door bang shut behind me, I stepped in and began to check out the place.

Dad had been too kind when he told me her place was small. My bedroom at home was almost as big as her entire apartment and I didn't have to wedge a bathroom, a kitchen and a table in my room. Because it was directly under the attic, with four and half-foot walls running the length of the apartment, the ceiling pitched sharply, making it impossible to stand up straight anywhere but the center of the room.

To the right of the entrance door was what passed for a kitchen, the refrigerator and stove half their normal size, as though they'd been designed as toys for a child's playhouse, and a single sink, just big enough to wash one plate at a time. Two miniscule cupboards were jammed above the sink. The far end of the room was curtained off by a folding plastic door, ajar just enough for me to see a small shower stall and, thankfully, a full-sized toilet.

A daybed with pink tubular scrollwork was pushed against one wall, a squat three-drawer chest framing one end, a rack made of wrought iron pipe, which substituted for a closet, the other. On the wall directly across from the daybed was a narrow table, maybe two, two and a half feet deep and four feet long, with a pair of folding chairs tucked underneath it.

The only natural light came from a window to the left of the door and the glass panels in the door itself. The apartment didn't run the full length of the house, only to its center, another "efficiency" apartment on the other side of Toddie's bathroom wall. Just how efficient her apartment was I couldn't say but there was no doubting the efficiency of her landlord in squeezing out every last penny he could from his building.

As a teenager, I couldn't wait for the day I could leave home and move into my own apartment. Toddie's cracker box added some caution to my desire.



It was fairly warm in the apartment but, despite the lack of windows, not overly hot, the shade from the oaks protecting it from much of the sun's heat. An old beat-up box fan, its blades moving torpidly, blew air from the outside toward the other end of the room where a bathroom exhaust fan sucked it out, the air current not even strong enough to ripple the wall's decorations, photos of rock stars cut from magazines.

I was almost through with my examination when I caught a glimpse of something that was definitely out of place in the apartment, my gym bag. It was tucked in the corner of the daybed next to one of the pillows. I knew it was mine because the name "Jake" was stenciled in blue letters just below the school's Flying Dutchman logo, a red and white depiction of an old two-masted brig under full wind. It was in my closet the last time I had looked. I didn't have the slightest idea of how it got here or what it was doing here.

Determined to be cool, I ignored its presence. Instead I complimented Toddie on having "such a nice place," making her snort with amusement.

"You don't have to butter me up. My apartment is so small the door mat just says 'Wel.'"

Not wanting to be topped, I went into my best Johnny Carson imitation. "Your apartment is so small, even the mice are hunchbacked."

"My apartment is so small my closet is a nail."

"Your apartment is so small when the sun comes in through the window you have to leave."

"My apartment is so small I can use my washcloth for wall to wall carpeting."

"Your apartment is so small you have to go outside to change your mind."

"Now you're repeating yourself."

"How about this one then? Your apartment is so small when you put the key in the lock you stab all the

people inside."

"Much better. My apartment's so small when I walk through the front door I'm in the back yard."

"Your apartment's so small, Barbie did your interior decorating."

Throwing up her hands, Toddie surrendered. "Enough already. I give up. You win. So what's in the sack? A present for me?"

Reaching inside the bag, I pulled out a fifth of Southern Comfort, Dad's gift of choice for my date.

"Oh yeah, very nice. Much more practical than a book of poetry. More effective too. 'Candy is dandy but liquor is quicker.' There's some Coke and ice in the refrigerator and some jelly glasses above the sink. Why don't you make us each a drink while I get out of my work clothes and into something more comfortable."

With no pretense at modesty, Toddie unbuttoned her blue chambray shirt unveiling a chest as flat as the Kansas prairie. Watching me watching her, she grinned. "I hope you're not a tit man Jake. If you are, well I may not have a giant pair of jugs but I make up for it in other ways.

"I don't know how Debbie can stand all that weight pulling on her all the time," she said as she continued to undress, pulling off her brown workpants to reveal a pair of plain cotton panties ala J. C. Penny. "By the time she's 30 she'll be as hunchbacked as my mice. If it wasn't for the fact these damn work shirts rub my nipples raw, I wouldn't wear any bra at all. I mean it's not like I need one for support or anything. Besides, my apartment's so small if I had big tits I'd have to rent the apartment next door too." Leave it to a woman to always have to have the last word or in this case the last joke.

Turning her back to me, she bent over to open a drawer, treating me to the sight of a tight little ass moving under the cotton fabric. Selected clothes in hand, she moved to the daybed. "Not that I don't appreciate all

your attention but it was pretty hot in the shop today. How are those drinks coming?"

Before my time with Debbie, such an inquiry would have sent me blushing into the other room, embarrassed at being caught enjoying Toddie's little strip tease act, stammering out some type of lame apology. But that was before. Even though I was still troubled by the way it ended, my affair with Debbie had given me a measure of self-confidence, even a little bravado.

"You were working so hard at putting on such a tantalizing show, I didn't want to miss a minute of it," I bantered, at the same time letting her know I knew what she was up to.

"Well, the show's over," she responded, "so get us those drinks and then come sit down."

As I mixed the drinks, Toddie finished dressing, putting on a avocado green and white pullover with a matching pair of shorts. Standing in front of her, our drinks in my hand, I casually asked her to move my gym bag to the floor so I could sit down.

"Sure Jake, the floor OK?"

"For now."

Moving my bag, the black plastic bracelets around her right wrist sounding like a baby's rattle, I noticed Toddie's fingers didn't match the rest of her body. Short and thick but with sharp edges, the bright red polish was chipped away in most places, the remaining patches making her nails look like they had the measles. The most striking anomaly was her right index finger, which was missing the entire first joint.

"Camping accident," she said matter of factly. "Chopped it off with a hatchet at Camp Crooked Tree when I was a Brownie. I was cutting down some branches to build a lean-to. They never did find it, probably made a nice little snack for some scavenger. The camp leader made a big fuss over it though, paid all the medical bills and even refunded the camp fee.

"Got a camp joke for you. Know when a Cub Scout becomes a man?" I shook my head no. "When he eats his first Brownie." As I chuckled, she took a sip of her drink.

"Pretty good Jake. Most guys put in too much alcohol; I guess they want to get me drunk as quick as they can. You've got the mixture just right. Are you moonlighting as a bartender nights or is this just a natural talent?"

I explained I'd been making drinks for my parents and their friends since I was 10.

"Well, you've got a real talent for it," she said taking another swallow. I followed suit, the caramel taste of the Southern Comfort softening the sharpness of the Coke.

"I don't know very much about you Jake, other than what your dad told me and I know you don't know anything about me other than what your dad told you which you should take with a mountain of salt. Lennie's a dear but he never lets the truth stand in the way of a good story."

With a final gulp she finished her drink, holding the glass out to me. "Drink the rest of yours then make us both a fresh one. When you get back we're going to play a little game called "Spanish Inquisition" to help us get to know each other better. It's a simple game. We just take turns asking each other questions and giving one-minute answers. I'll be the timekeeper. We're each on our honor to tell the truth. Can I trust you to tell the truth Jake?"

What the hell, I thought to myself. What can it hurt; after all I won't be seeing her again once I start dating Elle. "You can if I can."

"Fair enough," she said her eyes crinkling merrily. "I'll start you off with a simple question while you're getting those refills. What do you like to do for fun," she asked her eyes turning to her watch attached to her left wrist by an inch and a half wide leather band.

"Read, go to the movies. I write a little, fish and hunt some. I like fishing better than hunting. In spring when the floods come I like to canoe down the drainage ditches. It's exciting and scary to go through those big metal culverts not knowing if they're blocked with brush or not, whether or not you'll make it out the other side or drown in the dark. In winter I go snow camping on the weekends. But mainly I read. What do you do for fun?"

"You mean besides fuck," she asked provocatively. "I like to tell dirty jokes; working on the shop floor you learn to be one of the guys if you want to get along. I like swimming, hiking in the woods. I'm into astrology. Listen to the radio. I don't read much, just rock magazines. I'm not a big movie fan, they're OK but there's better ways to spend a couple of hours in the dark. What's your favorite subject in school?"

"Journalism. What was yours?"

"Shop and auto mechanics, I was the only girl in my school they let take those courses, all the others took home economics. But Jake, you can't just parrot my questions back to me, you have to come up with some on your own," she chided me. "What was the best day of your life and why?"

"Gezz, Toddie, I haven't lived that long."

"No fair stalling. Answer the question."

"The day my debate team beat St. Bonaventure in the regional finals last year. They were a bunch of stuck-up rich private school kids who knew they were better than anyone else. They even had a regular debate class with a full-time teacher. We just had Mr. Homn for a few hours after school. They went home and we wound up finishing third in the state." I was surprised at the distaste I felt for those rich little pricks even now; the satisfaction I still got from beating them like a drum warming my heart. "What's your favorite season," I asked her, still keeping the questions fairly impersonal.

"Spring, when everything and everyone seems to get a

fresh start on life. What'd you get away with in school you've still never told anyone about?"

"A friend and I broke into the school. He stole the janitor's key and I made a copy of it at the hardware store I work in. It was a real commando job. We dressed all in black including black ski masks and black gloves. Once we were in we went to the science lab and freed all the frogs they were going to dissect in biology the next day, must have been more than a hundred of them. It was pretty funny; we left little ladders made of pins and string on the edge of the tanks along with a note from the Amphibian Liberation Movement. Let them all go in the creek behind the school. They never did figure who did it or how we got in."

Toddie got a real kick out of my tale; laughing so hard she spilled some of her drink on the daybed. After we got it blotted up I asked her, "What's your favorite clean joke?"

"Clean not dirty huh? OK I'm up to the challenge. Man says to his doctor, 'I can't sleep. Every time I lay on my left I hear 'The Green, Green Grass of Home' and when I lay on my right, I hear 'Delilah.' The doctor says 'I'm afraid you have a case of Tom Jones Fever.' Guy asks the doctor, 'Tom Jones Fever? Is that common?' Doc tells him, 'Well, It's not unusual.' So what's your best dirty joke?"

I thought for a moment.

"A Catholic teenager goes to confession, and after confessing to an affair with a girl is told by the priest he can't be forgiven unless he reveals who the girl is. 'I promised not to tell!' the boy says. 'Was it Mary Patricia, the butcher's daughter?' the priest asks. 'No, and I said I wouldn't tell.' 'Was it Mary Elizabeth, the printer's daughter?' 'No, and I still won't tell!' 'Was it Mary Francis, the baker's daughter?' '"No,' says the boy. 'I'm sorry, son,' says the priest, 'I have no choice but to ban you for six months.' Outside, the boy's friends ask what happened. 'Well,' he says, 'I got kicked out of mass, but Father gave me three good leads.'"

"I knew we'd get around to sex eventually." Toddie joked. "Next question?"

"What's your family like?"

"My dad's a long-distance truck driver, not around home much, maybe a week out of a month although not all at the same time. Mom works part-time at the Topps in Marion. She's a shelf stocker, sometimes a cashier when it's really busy. Rita's my older sister. She's a beautician over in Lumstead. Married with three kids, ugly little buggers every one of them. Her husband's an assistant night manager in the party store there. My brother Chaz is living in an ashram in California trying to find himself. We don't get together much, not what you could call a close family. Now it's my turn to repeat a question. I know your dad real well. What's your mom like and what's she think of all this? Remember, we promised to be honest with each other."

I felt like a butterfly in a net, the killing jar in sight. The questions were starting to get serious now. "Come on, come on. I can't be that hard to answer. One minute, go."

"Mom loves her family, loves Dad even though she knows she's sleeping around. She works hard, keeps the place together. Wants me to be a success and to save you a question, she knows I'm here and she's Ok with it. Says I need the experience." I didn't mention my mother's very active sex life, figuring it's not a lie if you don't say anything.

"Far out. My mom pretends she doesn't know about my sex life. I'm still a virgin as far as she's concerned."

Still stinging a bit from the question about my mother I decided to up the ante. "What's the three most important things I should know about you?"

Now it was Toddie's turn to hesitate. Chewing her lip she answered, "One, I'm not Debbie. I'm happy with who I am. Two, I like my job. I've wanted to be a mechanic all my life and I'm a pretty good one. Three, if we hit it off I might not mind having you for a friend."

Believe it or not, I do have male friends I don't sleep with. But if you can't because of Elle I'll understand."

As the questions continued the level in the Southern Comfort bottle drew lower. We weren't getting drunk but we were getting a little buzz, one that led us to be a little more forward in our questions and unconcerned about our answers.

"What's the most embarrassing thing that ever happened to you while you were having sex," Toddie wanted to know.

That one was easy. "My mom walked in on me while I was spanking the monkey."

"You've got to be kidding me," Toddie said in disbelief.

"Nope, not only was I jacking off, I was shooting my wad just as she came in, everything in plain sight including the fountain of jism from Old Faithful."

Toddie roared in amusement. "Christ, that must have been terrible. What'd you do?"

"Yeah it was terrible, I felt like a pervert, just wanted to disappear off the face of the earth. Had to settle for hiding under the covers. She was cool about it though. Told me everyone does it, including her. Brought me a washcloth to clean up with then started putting a box of tissues next to my bed each night, said it'd save on washing sheets."

Face bright with laughter, Toddie replied, "That's pretty bad all right but I can top it."

"I'd like to see you try," I said, intrigued at what would possibly be worse than my ordeal.

"I'd been dating a guy for about a month, a really vanilla type when it came to sex. Anything but the missionary position was debauchery incarnate. It took four dates before I could get him to let me blow him. He never would eat me. Anyhow, I got him drunk and



convinced him to give it to me up the old Hershey Highway.

"There we were at his place; I'm bent over the edge of the bed, feet on the floor, my hands and arms holding me off the mattress. He's buried deep in my ass, just pounding away like a jackhammer, yelling 'Oh god, oh god, you're so tight, it's so good. Fuck, fuck, fuck.' I mean he was an animal; hands on my hips, pulling me back on his dick as he thrust forward, his pubes scratching against my ass. Really getting into it, pun intended." She stopped, partly to take a drink, mainly to keep me in suspense.

"I'm getting near my climax when I totally lost control and cut one. Not just a little one, a real blue flamer. Sounded like Gabriel's trumpet and smelled like something crawled up my ass and died. Didn't go away either, hung around in the air like Los Angeles smog. About as thick too. Poor Steve didn't just get a whiff; he got a whole lungful. Started coughing and choking, lost his balance and fell right on top of me."

As Toddie told her tale, I was laughing so hard tears were coming out of my eyes.

"He weighed about 180-185 pounds so when he collapsed on me he drove me hard against the bed."

"Oh god, no," I managed to wheeze out between gasps for breath.

"Oh god yeah," she said. "The force of my hitting the edge of the bed made me erupt again, just as bad as the first one, maybe with even more force since his cock came out of me when we fell. Now not only are we both choking, he's a dead weight on top of me and it's getting to where I can't breath. Just in time to keep me from passing out, he pulls himself off me, runs over to the wastepaper basket and pukes his guts out. Between my farts and his vomiting, I'm having trouble keeping my dinner down as well. Talk about a mood killer, the whole thing was really disgusting."

Hooked, I asked Toddie what happened next.

"After we opened all the windows, turned on every fan he had and sprayed the bedroom with a full can of Lysol, we got dressed and he took me home. Didn't say a word to me all the time we were in the car. Wouldn't even look at me. I told you he was pretty square; he'd always get out and open the car door for me. This time he just let me get out of the car myself. As soon as I shut the door he took off and I never did hear from him again."

"What a bastard," I said, meaning it.

"Aw, you can't really blame him. After my performance he probably thought I was a succubus sent by Satan to steal his immortal soul. There was no question about my smelling of brimstone. Still his loss in your gain."

"How so?"

"I was so embarrassed I went over to the woman's clinic over in Robinson County and they taught me all about how to keep that from happening again. There's these little pills the druggist sells for gas, I just take a couple of those and I'm much less explosive."

The secret of what Toddie did that Debbie didn't was out in the open now. She took it in all three of her holes.

"I don't know about you but I'm getting a little buzz from the drinks," she admitted. "Two more questions each and then we'll go for a walk along the creek. It's your turn."

Since the subject had been brought up, "Do you really like anal sex? Doesn't it hurt?" It wasn't just prurient interest, I really was curious.

"Yes, I really like anal sex; sometimes I come the hardest with a guy's cock up my butt. Once you get used to it, it doesn't hurt, although it can be a little uncomfortable sometimes. You need to be with someone who either already knows how to do it or who'll listen to you while you tell them how to do it. You know how they say 'size doesn't matter?' It does with butt fucking. You don't want 'em too long or too thick,

those will hurt. I don't let any really big cocks anywhere near my ass. And you've got to make sure to use a lot of lubrication."

A wicked gleam in her eye, she asked me her next question. "What's so special about this Elle girl you're willing to become a member of the church, swear off other women, even the ones who'll let you jump their bones and all just for her? Lennie tells me you haven't even copped a feel from her. Says you two haven't even gone on a date yet and when you do you'll be chaperoned. Why her and not someone else? I'll even give you two minutes on this one."

"Do you believe in love at first sight?"

"Jake, you can't answer my question with a question."

"Come on Toddie, play along. Do you believe in love at first sight?"

"Nope. Lust at first sight sure. Love at first sight, nah. Doesn't happen."

"That's cool. I don't believe in love at first sight either, so what I'm going to say is going sound really stupid. Elle calls to me. I feel a connection there even though I don't know what it is or where it will lead. When I get to know her she might turn out to be the love of my life or she might turn out to be a total bitch. Could be something in between where we date for a little while, maybe even make love a couple of times and decide we're not right for each other.

"I'm only 17," I said talking to myself as much as I was talking to Toddie. "I've got my whole life ahead of me. What does it hurt me to take a few months to find out if there can be something between Elle and me? So I jump through a few hoops; so we're not alone the first few times we date.

"There's a scene in Casablanca where Rick tells Ilsa if she's not on the plane for Lisbon with Victor she'll regret it; 'maybe not today, maybe not tomorrow, but soon and for the rest of your life?' I don't want to go through the rest of my life wondering what might have

happened with Elle and regretting I let a few inconveniences kept me from finding out. It's not such big a deal because at the end of all this I'll know."

"I guess when you put it that way, it's not that dumb," Toddie said thoughtfully. "At least you'd always have Paris."

"I thought you said you weren't a big movie fan?"

"Puhleez, who hasn't seen Casablanca. They show it on the Million Dollar Movie at least once a month. I'll let you ask two more questions and then we'll get out of here and go for a walk."

"What's my gym bag doing here?"

"That's too easy. Lennie gave it to me. There's some clothes and a fresh toothbrush in it."

"No, not how it got here or what's in it. Why is it here?"

A sly, satisfied smile on her lips, Toddie said, "It's still too easy. It's here so you can spend the whole weekend with me."

"Come on Jake," she urged. "One more question and we'll cut out of here."

"But it's your turn?"

"Nah, I've learned enough for now. Beside, we'll have the next two days to talk won't we? So what's your last question?"

"Why me?"

Stumped, Toddie looked at me in confusion. "What do you mean 'why me?'"

"You asked why I'm willing to do what I do to have a chance with Elle. I'm asking you why you're willing to be with me. You've never met me before this so it's not like we were friends who were attracted to each other. I'm not anybody's idea of a dream date. I'm not

handsome, maybe I'm not bad looking in a slightly goofy sort of way, but I'm not handsome. I'm not very muscular, and for sure not an athlete. I don't come from a rich family. Don't have a car. Hell, you name any desirable characteristic and I'm pretty much a 'not.' Plus I'm what, three, fours years younger than you."

Draining the last of my drink, I continued. "And look at you. You're flat out gorgeous," only to have Toddie hit me with a pillow."

"Watch it with those flat cracks. We can't all be cows like Debbie." Dense as I was, I was getting the distinct impression Toddie didn't like Debbie.

"If it bothers you so much, stuff a pair of water balloons under your blouse."

"Nah, I'd use Jell-O," she joked. "It'd be more lifelike when it jiggled."

"See that's what I mean. You're attractive; you're funny, you're smart. Any guy who spent even a few minutes with you would want more. So what do you want with a gangly pimple-faced high school senior? I know why I want to be with you. Why are you willing to be with me?"

Her answer was a bitter one to hear, leaving me with a feeling like I'd been drinking sour milk.

"Because Lennie asked me to."

Of all the answers she could have given me, that one was the worst. Not that I didn't know that was why I was there but for her to come right out and tell me ... well it was tough to take.

"Jake, if you didn't want the truth you shouldn't have asked the question," she gently scolded me. "There's a reason the game's called 'Spanish Inquisition.' Besides you're wrong about a lot of things."

"Like what," I asked morosely.

"Let's go for that stroll," she said, tugging me up from the daybed. "The fresh air'll do us both some good."

As we walked across the sunny meadow, its patches of wildflowers adding splashes of bright colors to the otherwise monotonous green pallet, Toddie took pleasure in outlining my errors.

She had met me before in a roundabout sort of way. I'd picked up Dad's lunch once by mistake. Since I hated liverwurst, I'd gone to the shop to trade for my lunch. Toddie had seen me then and I'd seen her, not that I'd recognize her since she was in her full welding gear with the mask down when I came by.

Since then she'd seen me around town a few times and thought I was "sort of cute in a sweet sort of way." She also knew more about me than I realized because "Lennie's always talking about you, what's going on in your life. He's proud of you but he's been pretty concerned about this whole religious kick you're on, worried you were going to 'let his hard-on for this girl he met in church fuck up his life. Poor bastard's wearing his passion for her like a hair shirt.' At least that's how Toddie said he put it.

"He thought if you got laid a few times, you'd forget all about Elle or at least decide you didn't have to go through with all of this 'holy roller horseshit' just to get your wick dipped. You already know Debbie and I have both slept with Lennie. He thinks we're easy and maybe we are but that doesn't make us Jezebels. I mean is there some sort of hidden virtue in being difficult? You get the munchies and you eat. You get horny and you screw. In both cases, problem solved. What makes one different from the other?

"I'll tell you this Jake, it's damn unfair. I have an active sex life with multiple lovers and I'm a cheap slut. You do the same and you're a big stud." Toddie caught herself and apologized, telling me she'd gotten "a little off-track but the kind of crap just makes me so damn mad."

I told her I agreed; my question didn't mean I saw her

as a slut. I was only trying to piece things together, seeking to understand women and what drives them.

Tickled by my naivety, she told me "Women aren't meant to be understood Jake; they're meant to be loved. We're creatures of mystery, that's part of our allure. Oh, you can try and figure us out but once you think you've got it we'll change just to confuse you."

We'd entered the small forest bounding Pickett Creek during Toddie's lecture, the early stands of oak, ash and maple along the edge of the field quickly giving way to cedars, tamaracks and ferns as we got deeper into the woods. I took Toddie's hand to help her pick her way through the bog that outlined this section of the creek. The ground here could be tricky; one wrong step and you'd be sinking in the spongy black muck.

The swampland provided the best access to the creek, especially if you were wearing shorts as we were. Other areas might be easier to walk on but they were harder to walk through as they were usually thick with itch weed and sharp thorny brambles.

Once I'd sliced myself open on the brambles then compounded my problem by stupidly hiking not only through the itch weed but also the poison ivy that flourished in the dryer ground. It's not an experience I'd wish on anyone I cared for.

As we walked I was surprised how good Toddie's hand felt in mine, nothing sexual, just a sense of correctness as though somehow it belonged there, its warmth mingling with mine, our fingers entwined, her shortened finger rubbing against my palm.

Navigating our way to the creek, we put our conversation on hold replacing it with short spurts of advice and instructions on where to find the best footing. Things were fine until, just a short distance from the creek, the moss on a downed cedar we were traversing gave way under her left foot, causing Toddie to lose her balance and pitch toward the ground.

As she toppled I grabbed at her, trying my best to keep her from falling. I was only semi-successful; managing

to steady her enough to prevent her dropping face first into the mire but losing my own balance in the process, both of us plunging to mid-calf in the dark goop.

"Shit, I hate it when that happens," she said good-naturedly. "I hope there's no leeches."

Repressing a shudder at the thought of a leech swelling to the size of a peanut shell on a meal of my blood, I wrapped my hands around Toddie's thin waist and lifted her up and back on to the tree, both of her EZ slip-on tennis shoes easily slipping off her feet to remain buried in the muck. A quick glance showed her legs were free of any vampiric swamp creatures.

Telling her to stay on the tree, I pulled her shoes out of the clinging mud then walked the rest of the way to the creek. Bending down I washed her shoes, carefully checking for any little bloodsuckers hidden inside. After Toddie's footwear was as clean as I could get it, I walked back through the bog, thankful I wore tied shoes that stayed on.

Toddie had been watching me with a curious look on her face. "Hold on to these," I said, returning her wayward shoes to her. "No, don't put 'em on, just spread your legs as wide apart as you can and hold still."

I turned my back on Toddie and squatted as low as I could. "Sorry I don't have a cloak I can throw over the mud. I guess I'll just have to do. Hop on and I'll carry you to the creek."

She didn't hesitate for a minute. "My hero," she vamped, swinging her surprisingly strong legs over my shoulders, her crossed feet locking them in place.

I gave a little grunt as I stood up, not because Toddie was heavy, she wasn't, but because of the force with which she grabbed my hair.

"Easy there huh," I asked. "I don't want to be bald before I'm 20."

"Really, and here I thought you wanted to be 'balled' as soon as possible," she replied, wriggling like a



baby in a basinet until she found her balance.

As I carried her to the creek, Toddie began to rub her crotch against the back of my neck. "Keep that up." I warned, "and we're both going to be back down in the muck."

"Why Jake, you're too much of a gentleman to throw me down and take advantage of me here aren't you," she asked deliberately misunderstanding me. "You really don't want to have your way with me in this smelly goo do you? Wouldn't the bed in my apartment be better?" I shifted my balance to the left, eliciting a small screech from Toddie as she tightened her grasp of my hair.

"Behave or you're leech bait."

"Meanie," she pouted, her dry humping of my neck momentarily suspended. "Just when it was getting interesting too."

Stepping into the creek I again knelt down, allowing Toddie to slide off into the running water, watching as it carried the mud on my sneakers and legs downstream.

My gallantry was rewarded with a small kiss from Toddie, nothing blatantly sensual and no tongue; just a soft sweet sample of future delights.

The bed of Pickett Creek's was a combination of gravel and sand, the depth of the creek varying but almost never getting more than four foot in depth. Toddie and I waded upstream, the knee-deep water rippling around our legs, small rainbow-hued minnows darting in and out of our path.

Before too long we reached a deadfall spanning the width of the creek, an old swamp oak blown over by some long-forgotten storm, its limbless bole wide enough to sit on comfortably and high enough above the creek to allow our feet to dangle just below its surface.

Surrounded by a cloud of mosquitoes being kept at bay by the liberal quantity of repellent we'd applied before we set out, we went back to our paused

conversation.

"Why does it bother you we're together because Lennie set it up?"

Suddenly, it was important to me Toddie understood how I felt, even if it meant I'd be riding my bike home that evening.

"I love my dad but I don't want to be him. He thinks he's looking out for me, that he's helping me to 'be a real man.' But a real man wouldn't be anyone's puppet, dancing every time someone pulls his strings. A real man would find his own way; make his own decisions.

"And I want to be more than a piece of meat, a human dildo my dad loans out to his girlfriends to get some experience. Maybe that's too much to ask," I said, my voice tapering off as I wondered if I'd crossed the line, trying to read her face without much success.

For a few moments Toddie looked at me in total silence. Then she laughed.

"My god, and to think you men call us touchy and sensitive," she chided me with amusement. "Just listen to yourself, whining because your Dad set up a date for you. Poor young boy has to waste his time with an old dried up hag like me. Well, boo hoo and cry me a river."

She gave me a straight-arm punch that left my bicep throbbing.

"And what's with this human dildo nonsense? I never said I was going to have sex with you. What kind of a girl do you think I am anyway? You want a sure thing, go see Debbie."

Again I tried to read her face with the same result as before.

'You're kidding me right," I asked my stammer just a knife's edge away from breaking loose. "I asked you why you were willing to sleep with me and you said it was because my Dad asked you."

"No Jake, that's not what you asked me," she said firmly. "You asked me why I was willing to be with you. If you were using 'be with me' as a code for 'fuck me,' you should have given me the secret decoder ring so I'd know what you meant. I told Lennie you could stay with me for the weekend. If you thought that was some sort of carte blanche for sex, that's your interpretation, not mine."

Caught in another of those sudden relationship mudslides, the once firm ground under my feet turning more treacherous than the bog we'd fallen in earlier, I frantically reconsidered our previous conversations. We'd talked about sex. Toddie hadn't been shy, going so far as to tell me about her adventures in rectal loving. She'd been flirty, enticing my interest and stoking my arousal, but never once had she actually said we were going to screw. I just made an assumption based on what Dad had told me and on my experience with Debbie, forgetting that "assume" was an acronym for "Actions Seldom Supported Under Meticulous Examination."

For the briefest moment I wondered if Toddie was just a cocktease who got her kicks from giving guys like me blue balls; ashamed of myself even as the notion flew through my brain. Here I'd just been bitching about not wanting to being treated like a piece of meat, yet was I really treating her any different with my expectations of bedding her like a feudal lord exercising his right of droit de seigneur? So much for showing respect. I deserved her scorn and any abuse she cared to pile on to me.

Humbled, distraught, embarrassed, I stumbled and mumbled my way through an apology; although, unlike my mother had with me, I didn't kneel down in front of Toddie while I requested her forgiveness.

"Jesus, I'm sorry Toddie. I'm an ass, an immature idiot. I suppose that's what I get for believing my old man's stories. No, that's not fair blaming any of this on him," I said in an unsteady voice, hoping she could sense my sincerity. "It's all my fault. I should have known better and you sure as hell deserve better. It's

just, just..."

"Just what," she asked, not unkindly.

Swallowing hard, I replied, "Just I thought you were going to sleep with me?"

"Let's not make any mistakes here. You still haven't given me my decoder ring. By sleep with you I presume you mean have wild, passionate sex with you; that'd we'd suck and fuck and I'd let you screw me in the ass. That is what you mean isn't it?"

Sheepishly I answered with a simple yes, and then continued with my act of contrition, explaining now that she'd made it plain to me we weren't going to fuck I was "cool with it."

Ignoring my apology, Toddie again took my hand in hers, each silken stroke of her fingertips against my skin brushing away some of the tension I felt.

"Did you hear the one about a man driving down a road," she said. "A woman's driving down the same road from the opposite direction. As they pass each other, the woman leans out the window and yells, "PIG!" The man immediately leans out his window and yells, "BITCH!" They each continue on their way, and as the man rounds a curve, he crashes into a huge pig in the middle of the road and dies. The moral of the story is 'If only men would listen.'"

"Jake," she told me, a decidedly wicked smile on her face. "You've really got to improve your listening skills. I never said we weren't going to fuck."

OK, now I knew for sure she was screwing with my head, doing that whole enigma wrapped inside a conundrum thing women seem to love. This time though I didn't take the bait, just sat patiently enjoying the feel of her hand caressing mine, patiently waiting for her to continue.

"But you're going to have to work for it Jake. I won't just fuck you, you're going to have to seduce me to get any loving."

