

Girl Trouble: A Novella in 3 Stories

by Lillian Ann Slugocki

(1) Silver Corvette

I am fifteen, but look twenty-one. I wear a black velvet choker around my neck. I'm a thinking, dreaming beauty queen in a town that has more bars than Catholic churches. Where the boys graduate from high school and get their girlfriends pregnant, get a job at the factory, get a job at the docks. Summer days are hot, especially in July. My mother calls them the dog days. In the evening heat lightening streaks across the sky, punctuated by iridescent fireflies.

I am fifteen, and have an eleven o'clock curfew in the summertime. I am never late. I'm always at the park with my friends, Hannah and Trudy. There's a velodrome, a pool, a forest, a small waterfall. This is where we kiss boys and smoke joints. My hair has been bleached white by the sun and chlorine. I wear a green and white bikini. One night I ditched my friends, and met a boy at the pool. He whispered his name in my ears, and I liked the smell of his breath; peppermint, chlorine, root beer. We made out, and I made curfew.

But, I start to notice a silver Corvette parked on the street one block from my house. This car is so sexy, I feel it between my legs. The owner is dark, Latin-looking, but not Latin, just very Italian, with wiry black hair. Married. The gold ring glints in the hot sun. Irresistible to me. He is out there almost every day polishing that silver car.

When I walk by, he says, "Hi beautiful."

I hold my breath until I'm past him. I trip on my too long bell bottoms, stub my toe, think, Shit, shit, I look like an ass.

It begins to feel like I enter a zone whenever I come close to him and his car. A zone that is distinct and separate from my world, just

one block away. A world where I am just another teenage girl; brothers, sisters, over-worked mother, too many people in too small of a house.

But as I approach the car, and enter the zone, that world melts away, like a movie, and I become someone else. The air is always so charged by his attraction to me. It bounces off the gleaming metal of the car, hits me in the eye, in the mouth, between my legs. I'm not used to feeling this way. I begin to have a sense of my power.

One day as I walk past, he says, "What ya doing tonight?"

I say, "I have a date," trip, stub my toe and keep walking. So embarrassed. Mortified. I hear him call out:

"I wasn't asking ya on a date, I was just asking what ya were doing tonight, dumb bunny."

And the way he says, "dumb bunny" is sexy and adorable and confuses the hell out of me. After a couple days, we are talking, having conversations, flirting. I find out that he's the uncle of two boys I know from school.

One them says to me, "Stay away from him. He's not playing"

But the zone is irresistible. I'm being pulled into something, powerless to stop it. This is nothing like the neighborhood boys who stick their tongues in my mouth in the woods at night. I am in control of that. They kiss me, their hands move towards my breasts. I push them away, light a cigarette and laugh,

"Get out of here!"

He says, "We ought to go for a ride one night. Down by the lake," and breathless, I agree. On Saturday, I meet him in the drive-way. The sun is just setting. I'm not worried about keeping curfew. Apparently, the Corvette is parked at his mother's house. Wife and children are always somewhere else. Before our date, I take great pains to dress and make-up. I steal my mother's green eye-shadow, her red lipstick. My hair is platinum.

I see us cruising down by the lake, my hair blowing in the breeze, the water now silver and blue in the sunset. We stop at the stone concession stand, he buys me a coke, tenderly brushes the hair from my face. I've seen this in movies, what happens between a man and

a woman. There are close-ups of lips, whispered words of love, a backdrop of tall pine trees, and the air is sweet. I am fifteen, and I am in love for the first time. He sees me down the block, walking towards him. He whistles,

"Baby, baby, baby."

My brand new body, that I've barely had time to get used to, is so smooth and so sexy, it's like that silver car. I barely see the other world around me. Sprinklers cast arcs of cool water over emerald lawns. Children ride by on jeweled colored bicycles. But all I hear is the sound of my footsteps and the beating of my heart. I am acutely conscious of my breasts, my nipples ache. I am in the zone.

He holds open the car door, and says,

"After you, my bunny".

It's strange to sit in a car so low to the ground. I've only ridden in the family station wagon, sweaty little brothers, candy wrappers, babies crying. But the silver Corvette is like the inside of a church. It's a sacred place. The white leather interior is spotless, luxurious. The dash is real wood, walnut, he says. He caresses it like a body, like a woman. He hasn't shaved and a dark shadow covers his chin, and the sides of his jaw, and I can tell his hair is freshly washed. I am his woman.

We shoot off down the street, head east towards the lake. My heart is singing. When he down-shifts, his right hand grazes my knee. After awhile, it remains there. It feels like we are already having sex. I do not object. We pass a group of kids I know and I say "kids" because at this minute, I am not one of them. I cast side-long glances at his forearms, his wrists, his hands, so muscular, covered in a fine net of black curly hair. I can't get over how good he smells.

He leans over and says,

"You having fun, bunny?"

I love it when he calls me that:

"Yeah, I'm having fun."

In response, his guns the engine, veers sharply to the right, and then we are cruising on Lake Shore Drive. The lake to our right, the road twisting and turning. We drive underneath a dark canopy of

pine trees. I am breathless. I tell myself: You remember this moment. This is magic. Remember this feeling of possession, ownership. Remember how when he turns sharply you are thrown against him, and then he quickly moves his hand from your knee and pulls you in closer, how you stay there, his arm around your shoulder, and it is just like the movies, but its somehow better than the movies, because it's your life.

Maybe this is just the beginning in an unending chain of events, where someday soon you will land, New York, L.A. or London. These small town days long forgotten, these days and nights of swimming in an over-chlorinated pool, being groped by little boys in the bushes, getting straight A's, but no hope of escape, because your mother only wants you to learn how to type. You remember this moment, this night. The stars over your head are magic.

He abruptly pulls onto a deserted promontory on the south end of the road. He parks his car in the gravel, practically at the tip, the lake a dizzying swirl beneath us. He pulls me close and begins to gently kiss me. His lips barely touch mine. His tongue delicately explores my mouth. I've never been kissed like this before. I don't know what to do. I follow his lead, as if I've been kissed like this a million times. A butterfly has landed on my lips. After a few minutes, he says,

"Come on," and gets out of the car.

He pulls a leather pouch and a blanket from the back seat. The silver Corvette continues to shine even though it's dark. It must be the moon that lights it up like that. He lifts the blanket with a snap and it magically floats to the ground. He sits, and motions for me to follow. It's not very comfortable because of the gravel. But I settle in next to him while he extracts marijuana from the pouch, rolls a joint. When he's finished, and when he's sure I'm watching, he puts it in his mouth as if he is sucking on it, pulls it out with a twist. Ready for action.

He lights it, and passes it to me. At least this is something I know how to do. I draw long and hard, the tip flaring, glowing in the dark. We sit in companionable silence, knees drawn up, close together,

alone. Alone with the stars and the car and the summer night. The marijuana is potent, more so than I expected. My mouth gets very, very dry, and suddenly I am so stoned I'm not even sure I can talk. He jumps up and gets a six pack from the back seat. I gratefully take it from his hands. I pop the top and drink long and deep. He laughs and says,

"Easy does it bunny."

I am so thirsty, I am so wrecked from that joint.

He says, "Are you OK?"

But I don't answer, I can't.

He says, "Whatsa matter, cat got your tongue?"

His voice sounds so far away. I manage to say,

"I'm just really stoned."

He replies, "Yeah, it's good shit, man" then he lays back.

A second later he pulls me down to him, flips me over on my back, the gravel cuts into me. His kisses are not delicate anymore, but big and wet and devouring, my face covered in saliva. He presses me so hard against him, my breasts hurt. I say, "Ow," but he doesn't hear me. He's not with me anymore. I'm not his bunny. His hand roughly grabs my hand and leads it down towards his erection. I rub up and down. He begins to moan, but this scares me. I move my hand away, but he pushes my body forward, until my head is draped over the edge of the promontory. I say,

"Wait, wait," terrified of falling over into the water. I know that the currents here are fast, the water is deep and cold. Even in the summer.

He says, "Then stop fucking around and do what I tell you."

"Ok," I say, "Ok".

"That's my girl, that's my bunny."

He eases me back away from the edge. A few more sloppy kisses, then he unzips my pants and tries to slide them down over my hips, but they're too tight.

He says, "Godamnit, help me."

I arch my back and slide my pants down around my ankles. He pulls them off. I'm sure that if I remain as still as possible nothing

bad will happen. His breathing is ragged, uneven, he pulls off my underwear. I try to stop him, but he pins my thighs with his knees, spreads my legs. I struggle briefly, but he pushes my head until it is over the edge again. I stop struggling, a bird trapped in his hands. He enters me quickly, forcefully, in one long stroke. This pushes me perilously close to the edge. I concentrate on not falling over.

With a gasp and a sigh, he rolls off me, looks down and says, "Shit, bunny, I popped your cherry."

He gets up, naked from the waist down, and grabs fast food napkins from the backseat, tenderly places them between my legs.

"Thanks," I say.

He replies, "Anything for my bunny." Lights a cigarette.

I dab the napkins between my legs, ask, "Am I still bleeding?"

He looks at me and winks, "You're fine."

I place the napkins to the side. I won't look at them. I sit up to put on my pants, the headlights of the Corvette, look feline, predatory.

He says, "We should get going".

"Sure."

He flicks his cigarette into the lake, and I watch it sail out over the water, hang suspended in mid-air for a second, and then follow its trajectory until it's gone. He grabs the blanket, throws the beer cans in the trash, waits impatiently for me behind the wheel of the car. I get in, and close the car door without making a sound. We drive back to the north side without saying a word. At one point, he turns up the radio, plays air guitar. I practice what I should say to him:

"Well, that was a little rough" or "Next time you should ask", or "I'm really not that kind of girl."

But I don't want him to get mad, gun the engine, or never speak to me again. I'm not sure what I fear most. So I say nothing, absolutely nothing, except when we are a few blocks from my house, I quickly blurt,

"Right here is good."

The car screeches to a halt. I'm thrown into the dashboard. He says,

"Right here is good for me, too."

He leans over and kisses my bruised forehead,

"Be good."

I nod and get out of the car. My watch is cracked, but still running, 10:30 p.m. I can still make curfew. The neighborhood is deserted, kids in bed sleeping, or watching TV, eating blueberry Popsicles, the juice dripping on their chins, their sting ray bicycles thrown at odd angles on the sidewalk, or in driveways, as if stopped in mid-motion. The front porch light is on, but I dread facing my mother. So instead I walk up the drive-way, to the swimming pool in the backyard. I cup my hands, dip into the cool, blue water, and wash my face. At the screen door, I holler,

"Ma, I'm home. I'm sitting on the back porch".

She yells back, "Okay!"

I've never noticed that the porch light is always clouded over by large moths, the blue-gray color of the sky at twilight. And the swimming pool casts an aquamarine glow onto the side of the garage, and the trees whisper as the wind passes through them. I've never noticed how quiet it gets here at night.

(2) Jail Bait

Roosevelt Avenue, adjacent to the park, one story ranch houses. Sitting in the backseat at the drive-in, Trudy and Hannah up front. The smell of wood smoke. Twilight. Pink clouds dot the darkening sky. The waitress, black and white checkered uniform, brings a tray of cheeseburgers, French fries, root beer. Loud music, cigarette smoke floats out the window. Hannah passes me a cheeseburger wrapped in waxed paper. Fried onions.

I say, "My English teacher grabbed my tits". Hannah lights a joint, inhales, says, "Whose tits hasn't he grabbed." Trudy's busy twisting the dial on the FM radio, finds a song, turns it up. The car seems to vibrate, but Hannah's right about the tit situation. I draw deeply on the joint in my right hand, the cheeseburger in my lap. Hannah and Trudy argue:

Hannah, big boobs in silhouette behind the wheel, says, "Tank's on empty, got any money?"

Trudy, almost feline, says, "I have a quarter." Then she laughs.

Hannah, taking another hit off the joint, "So give it to me, I bought the weed."

Trudy unzips a black seude bag, pulls out a five, and throws it on the dash. Of course, out of all of us, her family is the richest. Only three kids, two working parents. She doesn't have to steal money, like I do.

Hannah pockets the money in her jeans, "Thaaanks."

Trudy says, "Your pants are so tight I can see your pussy."

I have to admit this is true. She refuses to wear underwear.

Hannah smiles, "You let me worry about my pussy. My pussy's not bothering you, is it?"

They crack up. I sit back, roll down my window, the sound of leaves down the quiet street, now dark, the old Catholic church next to the park. A car pulls up, the headlights momentarily illuminating our faces. Trudy looks so strange tonight, dark eyebrows, smudged lipstick. She's created a character from outerspace, an alien, draws him constantly, antennae coming out of his head. At first it was funny, but now its unsettling.

And Hannah is sleeping with a tall boy from the south side with long blonde hair, Jessie. Her parents despise him, they call him the Nazi. Her dad, short and dark, immense head of curly hair, wringing his hands in the kitchen,

"Why are you dating a Nazi? Why?"

Hannah laughs at him, "He's not even German."

He yells, "I don't like this boy!"

Jessie and Hannah drop mescaline together, and screw in an abandoned storefront crash pad. We call it the Rock Shop. One night, we found Jessie passed out on a stained mattress. We asked Fingers, the local drug dealer, what happened.

"Horse," he said laughing, "Jessie James is high on his horse."

I whispered in Hannah's ear, "He's not sucking on your titties tonight. "

I looked up, saw the ceiling was splattered with something, and thought, that better not be blood.

Hannah said, "He looks like an angel," and he did--- white hair falling across his face, his arms folded like a pair of wings. And all the other angels slept together on the same mattress in the flickering half light of four candles.

Fingers offered me some cough syrup, "It's got codeine."

"No," I said, "Thanks, I got weed."

"Got horse?" He laughed.

"I don't do needles." Then Hannah and Trudy laughed.

"We can snort it," he insisted, leaning in to me

"No."

But Hannah said yes. He cut a line on a battered coffee table. I left after that. That was a week ago.

I lean forward, ask Trudy, "You stay and do H with Hannah and Fingers?"

She turns to answer, and for a second, she looks like a stranger wearing the mask of Trudy. Trudy but not Trudy. An imposter. I get the chills.

She says, "Don't start that shit."

"What? It's a question. It's not shit."

She twists around, whispers in my ear, "You think I'm crazy, don't you?"

"No," I lie.

Hannah laughs, says, "Both of you are fucking crazy. Let's get a drink and celebrate. "

Trudy says, "If Jimmy comes in tonight, you can show him your pussy. You can say look baby, its smiling for you."

Hannah, says, "My pussy is always smiling."

The last thing Trudy needs is H, like her grip on this earth isn't tenuous enough. Jesus H. Christ. We turn right on 22nd Street, the main drag, going south, but the car still feels like its vibrating. I lean forward, ask,

"That weed wasn't laced with anything, was it?"

Hannah turns to me, "Relax."

"Watch the fucking road," I scream. Hannah swerves and narrowly misses an oncoming truck.

Trudy says, "I'm meeting him tonight."

"Who," I ask, distracted by the near crash.

"The alien."

"Hannah," I say, ignoring Trudy, "either watch the fucking road, or let me out."

We start laughing because we all know I'm too stoned to go anywhere. Time slows down, the light from the stoplights is soft, attenuated, then starts to flicker.

"Stop the car anyway, " I say, sweating.

"The fuck you are," Hannah says, "You are too high. Forget it."

"What's that joint laced with?"

"Nothing," Trudy laughs.

Hannah spells out, "V. A. G.I. N. A."

Jupiter's appears on our right. It's a squat brick building on the corner of nowhere. Neon planets on the façade, the rings of Saturn. We never pay for our drinks. They know we're under-age, jail bait, but good for business. Hannah walks in tits first. The bartender sees her, his jaw drops, says,

"How about a slow screw."

Hannah says, "How about three slow screws for the price of one?"

Bingo. He doesn't even ask to see our fake I.D's. Factory workers and longshoreman stare at us. Trudy leans up against the juke-box, her ass out, her hips shaking. The men shift uncomfortably, it hurts so good. Hannah looks over at Trudy, says,

"She is really out there. And you," she points at me, "You don't let him touch your tits again. Just stay out of his way. He'll get over it. Ask Trudy. She'll tell you."

"Tell me what," I ask.

Hannah ignores this, says to the bartender, "Where's Jimmy?"

He winks and says, "He'll be in later."

I say to her,

"What the fuck do you see in him?"

"Big dick," she says, smiling.

Case closed.

She throws back her drink. Adjusts her bra, her boobs shift right then left. Trudy appears at the bar, picks up an empty shot glass, and throws up in it. Doesn't say a word, doesn't even acknowledge us. Just walks away, and leans over the juke box again.

Hannah grabs me, asks, "Jesus fucking Christ did you just see that?"

"I see it," I say, "but I don't believe it."

A man with a shag hair cut, but almost forty, walks up to Trudy. He puts both his hands on her, as if her ass is a steering wheel.

I poke Hannah, "Look".

She swivels around, says, "Fucking pervert," gets up, walks over to him. Moves his hands from Trudy's ass, tell him to get lost, and walks back,

"You believe that guy?"

Maybe its going to be one of those nights where I sleep with my foot on the floor. Because the room is spinning. Jimmy arrives wearing black leather and Paco Robanne. And then I'm alone. I don't even see Trudy at the juke box. Maybe she decided to walk home. That would be a relief.

Hannah's on her fourth or fifth drink, but it doesn't matter because there's a room over the bar where she'll screw Jimmy. I think Hannah's wrong about the tit situation. I'm just going to walk up to him and say, "Grab somebody else's tits." Its not like I would get detention. But where the hell is Trudy? Don't tell me she left with Shag Hair Cut. I get up to look for her. Ask the other bartender, "Did you see my friend?"

He says, "Crazy girl with nice ass?"

"Yes."

He points, "In the bathroom."

Immediately, I think, Oh shit, she's fucking Shag Haircut in the bathroom, and this has been true in the past. It's ridiculous.

I push open the door, and the first thing I see are her eyes, wide open, almost laughing. And her half smile, as if she might sit up, and say, "What the fuck," but she doesn't. She's perfectly still, draped

across the toilet, like the Pieta, her left wrist dangling on the white tiled floor. A needle and syringe. It's not the first time I've seen this either, but it's the first time her lips are blue. I quietly in a groc close the door, walk over to Hannah, kiss her on the cheek, and say,

"I'm outa here."

I walk north on 22nd Avenue, cut left over to Roosevelt, and soon I'm walking along the park. As if on a dare, I veer left into the darkened woods, lay downve of maple and ash, and cover myself with dried leaves.

I look up, and the stars are so bright tonight.

(3) Playboy Bunny

Hannah and I hitchhike out to Lake Geneva. Hit the highway around noon. Visiting her friend Sonia, a Playboy Bunny. I know her as a pretty girl with pretty tits. Wears gold dust on her eyelids, bladder infections from the costume. Orange fingernails.

We smoke a J and stick our thumbs out on I-94. I'm wearing a sweater with rabbit fur. It's a strange kind of magic. Hannah's fucking another married bartender, but this guy is hot, and I'm jealous. I'd like to fuck him in the bathroom, too. Or was it a closet? I fuck my boyfriend in the backseat of his car, and a few others.

We walk along the shoulder of the highway, headed north. A car pulls up, pulls over. We argue about who sits in the front:

"I can't," I say, "I'm too high."

She counters, "Fuck off."

But I deliberately slow down as he flings open the car door, and she's forced to go first. She turns to me,

"Bitch."

I laugh. But she doesn't get in. Instead, she backs away laughing, her hand over her mouth,

"Oh, my God."

"What?," but I don't move. Two cars shoot past, one going south, another going north. Hannah stomps over and drags me to the open door.

"Hannah, I seriously do not like---"

But I stop because I see what she sees. A thirty year old man, red and blue striped shirt, blond moustache, pants around his ankles, furiously masturbating. Really going at it. Like he's in a cock trance.

"What the fuck."

But Hannah's already got another car pulling onto the shoulder. I don't like it. It's a beat up four door, but according to the rules, I get the front. The passenger door slowly opens, he's watching me in the rear view mirror. Hannah pushes me.

"Hey," I say, leaning in.

"Hey yourself," the man says, "where you ladies heading?"

He's not bad, but definitely married. Maybe a fifty on the perv scale. That can be tricky, but not impossible.

I say, "We're going to Lake Geneva. My mother's in the hospital."

Hannah leans over, joins me, "Yeah, she might be dying."

"Get in," he says, "I can take you as far as the exit."

Hannah jumps in the back, "Thank you soooo much." The faux Catholic school girl routine. Nobody ever buys it.

I grimace, close the car door. "Hi," I say turning to him, "I'm Mary, and this is my friend Delores."

Hannah tries not to laugh because we say Delores Clitoris. He's Tommy. Traffic is sparse, almost non-existent. Above us, bright sky, big clouds. We are very good liars and never trip up on the details once we get rolling. We never use our real names. We say that my mother had a heart attack. She's dangling between life and death. In fact my real mother is hugely pregnant with child number six. And Hannah's mom likes to drink.

We think we got it down with this guy, but then he says,

"You girls ever tried sexology?"

Hannah discreetly kicks the back of my seat. That's our signal. Get the fuck out of Dodge.

Hannah leans over, taps him on the shoulder, "Mister I got my period. I'm bleeding on your car. I'm so sorry!"

He pulls over so fast I almost get whiplash. We both jump out. Laughing. High five! We can't even stand up straight. Sexology!

I say, "That was better than Masturbation Man."

Hannah replies, "As if that is even possible."

"Hannah," I say, "stay off the road, let me do the hitchhiking. Ok? Guys see your tits and it's over. I don't want to be here when the sun goes down."

"Fine," she said, "go ahead."

Men lose their minds when they see Hannah. No panties, no bra, not ever. Favors short shorts, high heeled boots, and big earrings. Even in the middle of winter. Some people call her a gypsy. Some people call her a slut. I walk a little ahead of her, motioning her to keep down. She flips me the bird, it's pretty funny. It's a strange kind of magic.

A blue car zips past, but then slows down. Hannah races to catch up with me. When the passenger door flies open, I jump in the front before she can say shit. This boy is fine. Twenty-five, twenty-six. Long dark hair, blue jeans, beaded bracelets. The smell of something, but not cologne. I'm talking intoxication.

"Hi," I say, "I'm Lizzy. And I'm not lying." My devastating smile.

Sexy Face says, "I'm Jeff."

I love boys named Jeff.

Heading north, again, the sky still so blue. He can take us to the exit, and we can walk from there. Hannah tries to get in on this, this thing with Jeff, but she's no match for me, not this time. I'm riding shotgun. I am next to him. I unbutton my coat so he can see my rabbit trimmed sweater, my long legs. This is nothing like my boyfriend. This is nothing like the others. This is something different.

I don't know what I'm talking about. I turn to Hannah and pantomime,

"I think I'm in love."

Her response? "I dare you to fuck him in the car."

"Jeff," I say, turning back, hand on his knee, "what brings you out on a Saturday?"

"Going to see my woman," he says.

Hannah kicks the back of my seat.

"Oh," I mock pout, "that's too bad."

"You're cute, baby, but you are jailbait," and then he put his hand on me.

I inch closer to him, smile triumphantly at Hannah. She gracefully accepts defeat. After all, it's not often this happens. She sits back. She knows she's not having any of this action. It's all mine.

"Lizzie," he says, stroking my knee, "I bet you get straight A's in school."

When he pulls over at the exit, I grab his face and kiss him, and he kisses me back, open-mouth, tongue on my lips. I stop for a minute, turn to Hannah, say,

"You mind?"

I motion her to get out and give me some privacy. She sighs, grabs her bag, slams the car door. In the mirror, I see her standing on the shoulder of the highway, lighting up a joint. Shivering. Sun's going down. I turn back to him, slowly unbutton my blouse. Pull up my bra. He leans in and sucks on my nipples, immediately I get wet. He kisses my lips, my neck, he unzips my pants. Unzips his own. He slides over, puts me on his lap. I raise myself up as he enters me:

"Oh, Lizzie, you are sweet, baby, so sweet."

A car zooms past, doing 90, going fast, but we barely notice. We are half naked and fucking in the front seat. I can't get over how good he smells. And I've never been this wet before. Ever. It's a strange kind of magic. I stick my tongue in his ear as he starts to come. And then I come. I arch my back. I should be fucking this way all the time. What have I been missing? Fuck me.

When it's over, he flips open the glove compartment, and pulls out a box of wet wipes. Very smart. I am impressed. We are a mess. Sticky and slippery. When we are all zipped up, he says it again, not looking at me,

"Lizzie, baby, that was so sweet."

I say, also not looking at him, "Thank you."

I grab my bag. Kiss him quickly on the cheek and get out of the car. I'm just about to lean in, say good bye, when he guns the engine.

Asshole.

I turn to find Hannah. But she's not there. God, did she fucking leave me? God, did she get in that other car?

I call out, "Hannah!"

No answer. The sun is setting. The lights have come on. I walk back the way we came, calling to her, but she's not anywhere. I'm on a deserted highway, wet panties, and Hannah's gone. Vanished. Why aren't there any cars? I can't go back the way we came. I wouldn't get home till midnight. But I don't want to leave the highway, and walk into town either. I don't know the Playboy Bunny. I don't know where she lives. What if Hannah is hitchhiking back home? Alone? What the fuck has happened?

"Hannah," I call out, "Where are you? Hannah!!"

A car pulls over. I walk up, see that it's a woman, maybe late 40's early 50's. Decent hair, good manicure.

"Have you seen my friend? Curly hair, high heels?"

"No," she says, "But you can't be out here. Alone. Are you crazy? Get in. I'll take you into town."

I close the door, and we head east, toward the lake. But I look back one more time:

Hannah?

It's a strange kind of magic.

(4) Epilogue

The summer she turned 17, she had to hold all the pieces of herself together with a red ribbon she tore off an old dress. It wound its way around her neck, her heart and her throat. It snaked down to her hips, the curve of her thighs, and wrapped itself tight around the muscles in her calves.

She was the darling girl, the blond with the great ass, the small tits and the flashing green eyes who could quote poetry, who wanted to be a singer, who collected fireflies in glass jars, hoarded pieces of broken jewelry, and watched heat lighting dance off the tops of houses.

She was the girl all the local boys followed home from summer school every day, chanting, *wanna take a walk, wanna take a walk?*

This was code to slink down to the woods beyond the public swimming pool and make out. She wasn't feeling it because most of them had sharp noses and acne on their chin and cheeks.

She was the girl the pervert followed, the priest tried to kiss when no one was looking, the girl who inflamed her stepfather, her English teacher, her gym coach and half the football team and all the time she had to hold herself together with that bright piece of red ribbon because overnight, the summer she turned 17, she'd become a stranger in her own body.

