

DEN OF INIQUITY

By Patrick Gabridge

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ISBN 1-932404-19-8

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SCENE: *A grimy office, with a library table, a computer desk and printer, a typewriter or two. Books and papers strewn about.*

AT RISE: *THALIA, an attractive young woman, writes intently on a few scraps of paper.*

(A loud knocking at the door. Tap. Tap tap tap. Tap. It repeats. THALIA goes to the door and peers through the peephole.)

THALIA: Who is it?

GERALD: *(off stage)* Virginia Woolf.

(THALIA puts away her paper and pen. SHE opens the door, yanks a man inside (GERALD), slams the door shut, and locks multiple locks. GERALD is a mousey looking guy in a sweater, nervous and scared to death.)

THALIA: Can't have you lingering on the doorstep. People get suspicious.

GERALD: Right.

THALIA: You must be Gerald.

GERALD: *(GERALD isn't quite sure how to introduce himself. HE sticks his hand out, awkwardly, and SHE smiles and shakes it gently.)* Yes, I'm Gerald--

THALIA: I don't need to know your last name, Gerald. Better that I don't.

GERALD: Sure.

THALIA: Peter said you might stop by.

GERALD: Right. He told me that you... that if I... I've really...

THALIA: You've never done anything like this before.

GERALD: No. I mean, I've thought about it, but...

THALIA: Lots of people do. People live their whole lives in their heads, but you... Here you are, baby.

GERALD: Yeah. Here I am.

THALIA: First time's a charm. Nothing like the first time.

GERALD: Okay.

THALIA: You're sweet. But that first time doesn't come for free, you know.

GERALD: Oh, right. (**GERALD digs in his pockets, pulls out a wad of cash and hands it to her. SHE counts it.**) Is that enough? Peter said...

THALIA: That'll be fine. Don't worry about anything, all right, Gerald. Everything's going to be fine.

GERALD: Okay. Yeah. Wow. It's just, I have a...

THALIA: Wife. Sure. Lots of them do. That's half the reason why you're here. Kids, too?

GERALD: Three.

THALIA: There's the other half. It's all okay. When you're done, you'll feel like a new man. In the end, they'll be grateful.

GERALD: Gee, you think so?

THALIA: I know so. Do you know how you want to do it?

GERALD: Yes. I mean, I think so. Are there... Are there options?

THALIA: I think I can accommodate most of the basic desires. Do you like to do it by hand or machine?

GERALD: I don't know if I ever... I hadn't really thought about using a machine.

THALIA: We've got two typewriters--a Selectric--good speed, easy to use. And there's also an old manual Underwood. For sentimental types. We've got a computer with a word processor, too. Even a laser printer. You've never seen writing come out so crisp. Bold, black letters on starched white sheets.

GERALD: Oh, wow.

THALIA: But if you're a hand man, I can still satisfy you. Folks like all kinds of tools, and I aim to please. One guy, he won't do anything but pencil. Not just any pencil, but a Mongol Number Two.

GERALD: Aren't those--

THALIA: Hard to come by? Sure. But where there's a will, there's a way.

GERALD: I was thinking about... Well, a pen. (**SHE goes to the desk, unlocks a drawer, and produces a wooden box. SHE unlocks it and opens it for him.**) Oh, yeah. Hmm.

THALIA: Go ahead. They won't bite you. Take one. (**HE cautiously reaches into the box and lifts out a fountain pen. HE unscrews the cap and smells it. HE shakes a drop**

of ink onto the back of his hand and tastes it.) India's finest. One hundred percent pure. Many a heart's been won and lost with that ink. More than a few empires, too.

GERALD: Can I... I really need to... I want to...

THALIA: Put that cap on, sonny. I know you're eager, but don't go spurting that stuff out on the desk.

GERALD: Of course, I'm just...

(SHE lifts a rug to reveal a secret stash of paper. SHE takes out a handful of different types.)

THALIA: Some like legal pads, makes 'em feel in touch with the common man. We've got lined, unlined. Cotton bond. Hand pressed. Parchment. Vellum.

GERALD: Do you think I could try the...

THALIA: Start out slow. Don't get over your head.

GERALD: You're right. I'll take a yellow pad, lined.

THALIA: All right. **(SHE leads him to the desk. HE sits, pen in hand. SHE places the pad in front of him, gently, and puts a steadying hand on his shoulder.)** There's more where that come from, honey. You just open up and...

GERALD: And?

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