

PENTHOUSE

At the climax of the grand re-opening gala Cinema Palace's old roof collapsed. There was a deep rumbling sound from nowhere like the huge back screen bass speakers performing the destruction of the holy temple in a 70mm copy of Ben Hur. The ornate ceiling began to disintegrate. Large pieces of plaster fell down on the guests and panic arose instantly. People in gala costumes and pretty dresses were screaming and running all over the place looking for a safe way out. Rudyard Lipsich in his grey projectionist coat saw his beloved chief, theater manager Mrs. Eileen Vandebrook, standing near the podium in her beautiful black silk gala dress. She looked at the crumbling ceiling, shock and disbelief on her handsome face, unable to move. He rushed towards her and gripped her wrist and began to pull her through the screaming masses.

The back exits were already out of reach. There amid fallen plaster debris people in dusty and torn costumes were fighting each other regardless of age and sex. Back to the hall then and the front of glass doors. Soon Rudyard and Mrs. Vandebrook had reached the closet door hidden in the boarding halfway the theater and entered in a hurry. He grasped the flashlight that he kept above the AC junction box, switched it on and led his boss into the narrow passage that led to the front hall. The outer wall was mortared bricks. The mortar had never been smoothed on the inside. Cement bulged between the bricks like stone fingers, hard and unforgiving. Here the rumbling was much louder and behind him Rudyard heard the lady crying softly in fear as he led her on.

At the crack he stopped momentarily and shone the light on the wall. It had grown a lot wider since last he was here a year or so ago. How could the redecorators have missed it he wondered. But no work had been done on the building's shell. The old man and his arrogant architect crony hadn't even bothered to check the walls. He switched the flashlight off for a moment and saw daylight shining through the crack. A draught drifted towards the open entrance, where more people tentatively entered and shouted at him to stop and come pick them up. 'Just follow one by one...' he shouted back. 'It's narrow but there are no corners. It's straight ahead to the front hall...' He switched the light on again and continued their escape. He should have replaced the burnt out light bulbs but he never got to that.

When they entered the hall there was panic and chaos there too. People fighting for the glass entrance doors like mad men. Only one stood ajar and people tried to worm themselves through it. Why weren't they all open? He turned to the manager. 'Why aren't the doors open..?' he cried. 'I don't know...' she cried back at him. 'Can you see Mrs. Goudvink..? Maybe she closed them...'

Here the ceiling wasn't giving away yet. But soon it would succumb to the weight of the falling stone and plaster on the foyer floor above them. Suddenly Rudyard saw Mrs. Goudvink, the buffet head lady, dressed in a black taffeta silk gala dress, throwing punches on an old man's face he recognized as the theater owner's elder brother. 'There she is... Wait here, I'll go fetch her...' he cried. Rudyard left Eileen

standing near the passage door and dove into the fighting mess. He grabbed the buffet manager by the arm and began to drag her out of the affray. 'Fucking bastard..!' she screamed at the man at the top of her voice and with her leather purse she lashed out at his face one last time as she reluctantly let herself be dragged away. He led both ladies along the wall to the cashier's booth. He took out his key ring and chose a key and hastily unlocked the box office door. They entered and at the bottom of the narrow booth he turned the corner and opened one of the felt back boards of the photo display boxes that hung on the outer wall beside the marquee. He went back and grasped the cashier's stool and with that crashed the glass window in one fierce blow, feeling an unusual pride in his strength in the company of mature silk ladies. Shards of glass stood out from the rabbet. Again he ran back to the booth door. The cashier's used a heavy brick to keep the door open during shows. They'd asked him to set the door closer less tight so the brick could hold it in place. He grasped it in both hands and ran back to the shattered window. He crushed the shards with all his might, sill and side rabbets.

He yanked the felt board from its hinges and covering the window sill with it he helped the two ladies to the street and climbed out after them. After them others came tumbling to the street bloody and dusty and screaming in dirty joy. Some were crying. He took his key ring out again, chose the master key and opened all the doors having to press his shoulder against them with all his power. They gave way to the screaming mass inside and people came bursting out in large numbers.

When the front of the house began to collapse, new panic broke out. Rudyard looked up and saw one of the two tall glass pillars come loose by huge pieces of brick wall being pushed outwards and falling to the street with ear numbing crashes. When the pillar tilted sideways and slowly crashed on the fallen brick with the sound of tearing steel the orange and green neon light flickered one last time and died. Rudyard secretly marveled at the strength of the cables and contacts he had installed to the neon transformers inside the pillars' bottom. Old Harry had taught him well. He led the two ladies further away from the collapsing building.

Here they stood, dirty and dusty among dirty and dusty gala guests and other bystanders looking on to the total destruction of the oldest theater in town. Impossible to say what had triggered it and why it happened at the very moment of its re-opening. It was almost biblical, like his favorite scene from Ben Hur. But maybe he should have checked the crack in the passage way more often. Then maybe he would have seen it widening in an earlier stage and warned the lady he loved most in the world. Maybe she would have rewarded him for it like only she in the whole world could. She held the key to his happiness. It was their little secret. Maybe she would reward him now that he had saved her life. Hers and her pretty friend Marjorie Goudvink's. Maybe both would reward him now. Heaven stolen out of the claws of dusty death and destruction. A four armed four breasted two headed angel from above, all elegance and rustling silk, descending upon him arrogant and amused. Biblical is what it was.

'Well, that settles it for me...' Marjorie said. 'The old man will never forgive me for what I did to his brother.' She stood looking down on her dusty gown. The silk had lost much of its gleam. The dress would have to be cleansed thoroughly. She looked at the projectionist. 'You... Ruby Lips...' she snapped, 'you're not done yet. You may be out of a job but that doesn't affect your status. Office, buffet, projection booth gofer, the order doesn't change, Ruby Lips. Only now you're promoted. You may see that my dress is cleaned up...'

Eileen laughed. She took a pleat of her dirty taffeta gala dress in her hand and waved it at him seductively. 'A new job, Rudyard,' she said grinning. 'It'll require a bit more than plain heroism. The job needs devotion. Of which you have plenty, don't you my little caged friend...' Rudyard Lipsich blushed.

They drove to the airport in Marjorie's car. 'You're gonna clean us up and you're gonna be very careful...' she said over her shoulder. He sat in the back. 'What do you think this is we're wearing, a dime store rag? This is the best silk taffeta money can buy Ruby Lips. So be careful...' The glowing feeling of heroism had begun to sink away, leaving his usual anxieties and shyness in the open again for all to see. Mrs. Vandebrook sat looking at him, clear amusement in her eyes but also searching his face for emotion. He felt like crying and she turned away without a word.

Marjorie parked at the Airport Marketplace Hotel. When Rudyard saw the huge tower his heart fluttered in fear. As wandering ghosts they entered the hall. Their clothes a lifeless dusty dull, their dusty faces runny like a sacked mascara dancer. Rudyard's too, from crying over them. They stood at the reception. Marjorie addressed the receptionist on duty, a young guy that looked frightened when she spoke to him.

'50th floor penthouse!' she snapped. 'It's leased by Rollo Goudvink. Gimmy a key.'

The receptionist looked even more frightened now. He punched in some keys on his desktop computer and a keycard came out of a desktop printer. 'Here you are Mrs. Goudvink...' he whispered in a servile voice and he laid the card on the counter. Then for a brief moment he looked at Rudyard. It was a look of warning like dogs in the wild.

They took the elevator up. 'Rollo keeps the room on for his out of town contacts,' she told her colleague. 'Sometimes we party there. He loves it, all kinds of it, he is one hell of a kinky guy is my Rollo. But most of all he loves receiving it... my end of it... It's stocked properly, you'll see.'

'What on earth did you do to the guy at reception..?' Mrs. Vandebrook asked her. 'He's scared to death of you...'

Marjorie Goudvink grinned lecherously. 'I won't tell,' she replied. 'I hate to give Ruby Lips the wrong idea of me...'

'Why have you closed all the doors but one, Mrs. Goudvink?' he asked. He tried to keep his voice as polite as he could. She looked at him with cold eyes. She had a

somewhat vulgar but very pretty face. Piercing eyes forever finding fault with men. Dark curly hair. A great figure. He had been in love with her before falling for the manager herself.

'None of your business Ruby Lips,' Marjorie replied. Turning to the manager she said: 'who does this little guy think he is anyway..?'

'Look, Rudyard,' Mrs. Vandenbrook said, 'you're a bit above your station asking questions about who's guilty and who's innocent. Rather answer me this. Why have you never told me about the crack in the outer wall? And why haven't you replaced the light bulbs in the passage way? Either way you could have saved many people from harm. The last word hasn't been said about your omissions. It could have grave consequences for you if I told the old man about it.'

'But why didn't the bloody architect see it? I mean it is his fucking job...'

'Never mind that. Now be quiet and do as Mrs. Goudvink tells you...'

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The penthouse on the fiftieth storey was an enormous suite with sliding glass doors that gave out to a large oval terrace with a kidney shaped pool. It lay basking in the sun. Marjorie opened the doors and immediately a gust of wonderfully refreshing air came into the room. The light was bright as a frosty early spring morning. Even their clothes seemed less ghostly. She threw the key card and her purse on a coffee table and said: 'right, little man... off with these dirty rags of yours. I never want to see a grey dust coat again in my life. Undress... NOW..!' Rudyard hastily obeyed and undressed until he stood before her in just his slip.

'Everything you need is in the kitchenette and the bathroom. Get a bucket of cold water and a small towel. You can start on Mrs. Vandenbrook's dress. GO...'

She turned to Eileen and asked her to take off her dress and spread it out on the bed. After a few minutes Rudyard returned and silently began wiping the silk taffeta clean with a carefully wrung towel. He didn't want the silk to become soaked. The ladies might want to put them on in a short while and he was already full of longing for that moment. Meanwhile the two ladies sat down waiting in lounge chairs, Marjorie in her dress and Eileen in a silky full slip over her bra and panty. Marjorie seemed to have taken over the lead from Eileen completely. If that was because they were in her husband's lease apartment or whether with the collapse of the cinema the power structure had vanished wasn't clear. It was probably just her personality, a good-looking and extremely confident woman prone to control the world around her. And that probably was the only reason she had kept the job of buffet head lady in Cinema Palace anyway. Ordering people - men, even Rollo himself - around was her hobby.

The Goudvink's certainly didn't need the extra cash. Rollo - who was from South Africa originally - was one of the richest guys in town. His car rental company catered to the entire state. He had out of state contacts all over the US.

Rollo was a big man. He made out to be boisterous and loud but he could be sweet and sensitive and generous too. When they were all younger and Rudyard had just been hired as assistant projectionist to old Mr. Harry Vandebrook, Rollo had been a regular at the Cinema. Many times during intermissions he stood at the foyer counter on the first floor cracking crude jokes to the female staff. Most of the time he hardly bothered to go see the second half of the movie at all, except with James Bond movies. He preferred to stay at the counter, even helping out with gathering empty bottles and stacking crates with his big hands. After the last show's work was done he'd sit with them in the foyer drinking bottles of beer and cracking sexy jokes in his loud South African accent. Often he would invite the entire staff to accompany him to some club in town. After the public had left he'd make a phone call and ten minutes later one of his cars appeared in front of the glass doors and after Eileen had locked the doors they would all get inside for a night of wonderful laughing and flirting.

Rollo had his eye on sexy Miss Marjorie from the very start. But in a typical show of the Marjorie Way she'd give him what she called 'the look.' It was the one that said 'Man, you don't have a clue and if you think I'm happy with your attention think again...' But Rollo would have nothing of it. With an eerie mix of coming on and polite old Dutch chivalry he persisted until nobody understood why she kept her distance any longer. He was the best man in town, up and coming and rapidly on his way to become top dog. Mrs. Vandebrook, a widow herself - she wore two gold wedding bands on her finger, warned her of missing out the chance of a lifetime.

So one day she finally succumbed and agreed to go out with Rollo. That evening he entered the hall with a bunch of red roses that must have cost a small fortune. He had a stretch limo drive over and a week later they flew to Las Vegas and got married. That was the Rollo Way.

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Having finished cleaning Mrs. Vandebrook's beautiful silk gown Rudyard rummaged through the contents of a wardrobe that stood in a corner. He was looking for clothes hangers for he wanted to hang both dresses in the doorway to the terrace to catch the summer wind. The wardrobe scared him. It faintly smelled of stale perfume and the slightly bitter smell of taffeta silk dresses. It was an unforgettable mix that set the mind to dreaming. He vividly remembered it from his mother's wardrobe when he was young and played hide and seek with her. It was his favorite hiding place. The manager was in the bathroom taking a much needed shower. He felt the need to assist her. Not in any way intruding on her nudity but as a... as a... husband, a husband chamberlain, helping her get dressed, offering advice on combinations, matching blouses with skirts or pantaloons, demurely telling her what underwear to match a dress, to get the costly breast line perfect. It was the stuff of his dreams, the occasional pat on his head in mock approval included. A pat on the head from a hand with two wedding rings, now that was something special. It contained possibilities for the romantic heart.

Mrs. Goudvink's cold voice speaking on her cell phone tore him loose from the daydream.

'Yes little Rolly Polly, Mama is coming home soon...' he heard her say. Little Rolly Polly? The man was six foot six. And Mama..? The richest guy in town..?

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'We're in the Penthouse, Eileen and me. We're just having some fun rewarding Ruby Lips. He saved our lives in a most heroic fashion. I'm sure you've heard of the dreadful Palace thing this afternoon?

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'That's right my darling. Count yourself a lucky little boy Mama didn't want to take you with her. Anyway Ruby Lips deserves a very sweet reward...'

...

'Now don't you fret Rolly Polly. We're just gonna play a few innocent games, nothing seriously sexy...'

Suddenly Rudyard's eye fell on a red silk gown hanging at the back of the closet. It was bigger than the other dresses that hung in the wardrobe, that were more in Marjorie's size. Much bigger. On a shelf he saw two yellow linen boxes that said Amoena D cup on the side. He opened a drawer and saw assorted bras lying in it, in several cup sizes. Sweat broke out on his brow. He took two hangers and hurried to the bed. With trembling fingers he fixed Eileen's dress on one hanger and hung it on the curtain railing above the sliding glass doors. A lovely soft rustling arose from the wide skirt as it swayed and turned weightlessly in the air drift. The silk's gleam was back as if it was just in from the shop. A sudden love of silk dresses rose from the abyss and engulfed his thoughts and he cried out softly in fear, trying to suppress the feeling. There was so much taffeta in this penthouse it was scary.

He caught Marjorie's final words to her husband before she hung up. 'Now don't you cry Rolly Polly, you know Mama loves only you...' Her voice was sheer indifference laced through with a sense of amusement. It was that voice that had made him fall in love with her years ago. A very pretty thirty something that loved playing with men's hearts and souls. A voice as sweet as honey and as treacherous as a whole quagmire of the stuff. Once you'd paid her your respect or signaled an interest she wove a web around you, turned you over and over like a spider until you couldn't tell left from right anymore. She played you as long as it took to destroy your ego and turn you into a scared mouse. She had done it to him until Mrs. Vandenbrook had come to the rescue, sweet natured and motherly. Rudyard felt sure that's how she had destroyed Rollo's, that boisterous man child that she now called Little Rolly Polly and that had to call her Mama. That she made to wear silk dresses and bras with silicone fillings and big high heeled pumps and perfume. She was a queen of humiliation. He shuddered again.

'I want you to do me outside on the terrace Ruby Lips...' Mrs. Goudvink announced out of the blue. He followed her out onto the wide terrace, bucket and towel in his hand. She stood leaning her back to the marble parapet, unafraid of the immense height. He knelt before her and rinsed the towel in the water. But she sent him back inside. 'Go open a bottle of white wine in the kitchenette. It's in the fridge. Corkscrew's in a drawer. Bring two glasses...' He stood up and looked at her face wondering if he still loved her.

She scoffed and turned her back on him, her arms spread on the railing top, her right foot turning playfully on its heel. Her skirt hissed softly and he stared at the swaying pleats that caught a soft cool breeze that made them billow, so feathery light, so brutally sexy even in a heavy coat of dust that tried to wear the silk down. Billowing skirts had always taken his breath away in adoration, as long as he remembered. Billowing skirts were sheer freedom, and he'd always felt like laughing with them at the sudden lifting of a girl's innocence and propriety, as if he too might engage in the freedom and the fun. But Marjorie wouldn't appreciate it and he tore himself loose again with a heavy heart. A heart that was getting heavier each minute he spent in this penthouse in heaven.

When he returned he put one of the glasses on the broad marble railing top beside her hand and poured wine into it. His eyes were fiercely fixed on the pouring, for dizzying heights like these frightened him terribly. Every night in his bed he started awake at least once from the sudden dread of the abyss in his lonely wanderings in search of women. He quickly knelt again behind the marble wall. He took the towel out of the bucket and wrung it out carefully.

'Do you want me to begin with your pumps Mrs. Goudvink..?' he asked.

'Suit yourself little man...' she replied indifferently from above. She drank while he slowly wiped the shining leather and the five inch heels. Women with such money and such immaculate taste in shoes and dress were beyond sympathy or antipathy to Rudyard. They were more worthy than anybody else because of it, because of the marble world they lived in, the world of silk ladies who humiliated their rich sponsors. It was a female world, a female marble terrace in the sky. Even men dressed in silk here and were perfumed as ladies. Again he suppressed the thought with all his might. But the abyss seemed to have acquired a life of its own. It felt at home up here. It kept sending its dreadful messages up without restraint like heartburn.

He did her legs tenderly well into her skirt and when he thought them clean he dumped the towel back into the bucket. He took the hem of the skirt that danced in seemingly deliberate slow motion in front of his face and kissed it, muttering softly to himself. Dust clung to his tongue and gritted between his teeth. He found it hard to swallow and it filled him with a bitter masochistic delight that this rich woman didn't even bother to offer him a sip of her heavenly wine. He felt adoration, and sadness. The latter was the greatest.

Then he wrung the towel and began wiping the skirt clean. He stuck one arm inside, fingers spread to support it, for the skirt was very wide and pleats tended to

escape from the towel. When the back of his hand touched her buttock she turned around and he bowed his head and gave the silk hem another adoring kiss. He looked up into her cold eyes and saw her lips spread in a crude smile. Her beautiful breasts pushed out gleaming and enticing. She held his stare in a cruel ice cold grip. If Eileen hadn't been there he would have fled the penthouse in terror and he felt a pang of compassion for her husband. What untold things went on up here? What cruel and humiliating games did these ice cold eyes imagine when the pair spent playtime in their superb playground? Why had the reception kid looked so afraid? He began to understand.

He stood behind her. She had turned away again and stood watching the world below, either bored or pretending to be. She sighed and sipped from her glass as his toweled hand approached her breasts, the other on her hip, both projecting in wonderful curves. He could almost see her smile though he couldn't see her face. She shook her hair loose and he saw particles of dust floating away down to earth on the soft breeze. She needed a shower but he somehow thought she relished being dirty. He heard Eileen's high heeled footsteps walking out on the terrace. 'You want the key..?' she said.

Marjorie turned around laughing gaily. She looked him in the eye. 'Not just yet,' she replied. 'I wanna see him do me properly...'

When the towel slid up the silky shape of her breast he couldn't take it anymore. The full heavy feel of it was too much, the slide forward the loveliest he had ever seen or felt. An excruciating pain set his genitals and bowel on fire and he doubled down screaming.

'Just try to not think of my tits you dirty little loser,' Marjorie said. 'Just wipe them clean and think of dust and buckets. It's all your fault anyway...'

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When he was done wiping Marjorie Goudvink's dress Rudyard was exhausted. He sat crouching near the bucket. His eyes were fixed on it as if it had saved his life. Marjorie walked past him clean and careless. Her shiny skirt brushed his shoulders and he cried out in fright. The two women sat down at a group of lounge chairs by the swimming pool sipping white wine. 'Okay, it's time...' Eileen said after a while.

She called Rudyard over. She fished a tiny copper key on a thin gold chain from between her bra cups and held it up. Then she removed the chain from her neck. She beckoned Rudyard to take off his slip. Surprise appeared on her handsome face when he refused.

'But Rudyard, don't you want to be set free..?' she asked incredulously.

'No Eileen, I don't...' he replied. 'You are going to break us up aren't you...' He appeared to be close to tears again.

'Oh! Come here silly...' she exclaimed and pulled his slip down. A bright red Perspex chastity tube covered his penis. She inserted the key and took the device off him

and threw it on the lounge table. Marjorie picked it up and sat twisting it in her hands. She looked curious and glanced at Eileen sideways admiringly. 'This I haven't tried yet,' she said and grinned. 'Rollo loves red...'

'Rollo? You think it'll fit..?'

'Why do you think I punish him so much..?' She turned to Rudyard. 'Well, don't just stand there. Don't you want to take a dip? Test the waters so to speak..?' She turned to Eileen. 'How long has it been on him?' she asked. Eileen looked at Rudyard, a sweet smile on her face.

'We were testing three month periods. Right after the gala he would get a short release and I'd lock him up again for three months. Chastity control, it works like a charm. Quite literally. They do anything for you...'

Now Marjorie looked surprised. 'What do you mean "get a release." You let this ugly little dwarf hump you..?'

Eileen laughed. 'Surely not!' she exclaimed. 'I haven't had anyone hump me - you do use some extreme language sometimes - ever since Harry died. So, no humping, not even bosom play. No I ask him to kneel before me naked. This is at home mind, not in my office. I wear my gala dress, or anything in taffeta, nylons, high heels, the works. I wear perfume and make up and I look like I'm the Empress of friggin' Antarctica. I sit down. He is allowed five minutes of sexual worship, kissing my knees, the hem of my skirt, he loves silk skirts, my ankles and shoes. I count down the seconds. He comes in a silk frenzy. Puts his head on my lap and I comfort him. Then a shower and I lock him up again. Within the hour the orgasm is forgotten and chastity starts to work on him again. I'm the only one alive for him, nobody else matters, nobody but me, his key holder.' She took a sip of wine.

'This game has taught me a lot about men. Men are extremely easy to control. Men are as sweet natured and obedient as well trained dogs. Men love to be put on a leash, and traipse behind the skirt wherever it goes. Men do anything a girl says. Men even risk their lives to save a girl when she's in danger. As long as she controls his orgasm. Five minutes' work in three months. Now there's a profit...'

Marjorie put the chastity device back on the table. 'I'll get one myself,' she said. Turning to Rudyard she yelled, 'Oh come on... jump in for Pete sake, you stink like an otter...' Eileen nodded at him, as if she was giving him permission and immediately Rudyard dove into the pool and began splashing around.

'No, you can keep it for Rollo. You'll be surprised. Only when push comes to shove it's fake, it's a hoax. Men aren't only moved by sex and orgasm. Men have genuine longing for happiness, they're capable of real love for women. And real obedience. Take my Harry. Now there was a natural. Never met a man as docile and easy going as him. You know how obedient he was. It was his true nature. He adored me and following my lead was as natural as breathing. I know you weren't very fond of him but you don't like small timid men period. They don't pose enough of a challenge for you. You know, the whole war of the sexes thing...'

Marjorie looked away. 'What's there to conquer..?' she replied.

'Tenderness, intimacy, fun...' Eileen said. 'He did what he was told but sometimes we cracked up laughing all the while. Oh god I still miss him every day, my sweet little Harry. He was one in a million and most guys aren't like him at all. But there are some that don't know yet how sweet and wonderful they really are. Guys like Rudyard. They have great potential for genuine love and obedience, and you know what? Fun. But first they must find their core for it to blossom. The core, you know? Their deepest being. There is real beauty there, believe me, ask Rollo. So I'm done with chastity control. I'm moving on to a bigger game.

'You're gonna find Rudyard Lipsich' core..?' Marjorie asked incredulously. 'I'll tell you what you'll find: nothing but a timid little Chihuahua...

Eileen smiled. 'You're missing the point. I've done some psychology lately. I've talked to Rudyard about his nightmares. He has these recurring nightmares that he's falling into an abyss. I have done some research and found the cure. Strange things occurred when he was a young boy. His mum was quite crazy. She used to lock him up in her wardrobe for hours. She had a little taffeta Cinderella dress made for him and put him in it for punishment. She made him wear it and invite neighborhood girls for tea parties. Cinderella was taught to serve them. It was all a bit cruel. But things went well apparently until puberty. Then things changed.'

'What things changed..?'

'He became lonely and depressed. He ran away from home a few times. He tried jobs but they never lasted. Then finally he ended up with us, at Cinema Palace and Harry took him under his wing and taught him everything he knew. Why do you think he became a projectionist? He wanted to hide from the world, immerse himself in a make shift world of movies. Do you remember how he loved all those James Bond films we played? All those full houses? He stood on the balcony, against the side wall nearly every show. And you know why? There in the dark he could enjoy being among people, in this crazy sexy funny double oh seven spy world. He could laugh with them, enjoy the music with them time and again. Be exhilarated by the action and the stunts. Adore the Bond girls, the cars, the elegance of it all, the worldliness and the sophistication. He was truly happy in the dark. Then came the nightmares. I was going to put an end to them after the last chastity period. Turn his abyss inside out for him, and put him on top of the world. Then Palace collapsed and here we are. On top of the world...'

Marjorie chuckled. 'Piece of cake,' she said with a lecherous little smile. 'I got a Cinderella dress right here in the closet...'

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It was a long time since Rudyard had been swimming. He had been born and raised near the ocean and swimming had been part of his life once. But since his shyness and anxiety had taken over he had avoided the beach and swimming became a rare

delight. If he hadn't felt as anxious and as mentally exhausted by the shocking events of the day he would actually have enjoyed being in the water again.

He swam around under water for a while and after tiring of it he turned on his back and just floated around slowly, using his hands as little paddles, looking at the sky. Suddenly he saw a large group of seagulls in the distance flying around in circles. There were hundreds of them and he could vaguely hear their cries. They seemed excited about something. He remembered someone once telling him about it - Harry? - how occasionally gulls forget about hunting for food in trash cans on warm summer days and just fly around high above the city, playfully chasing each other like kids on a beach.

A pang of anxiety shot through him and he turned around and swam under water again. Looking at the distorted white tiles on the bottom and the sides of the pool, its curves so alien, so hostile, he felt as lonely as he had ever experienced. He cried with his eyes open but his tears dissolved into nothingness.

He surfaced with a heavy heart and wiped his eyes. The terrace was empty. The two women had gone inside. He climbed out and walked to the lounge chairs. He saw something lying on the table, a tiny thing. He looked closer. It was Harry's ring.

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Inside the penthouse the two women were waiting for him. Eileen had gotten into her black gala dress again. 'Are you afraid of spiders..?' she asked him. He nodded. 'A little...' he said.

'I should have thought so,' she replied. 'But do you dream of them every night? If so I could cure you from it. I would get me some huge hairy ones from the Monster Pet Shop and let them run around on your skin for a while. You would get used to them, even start to like them and give them cute little names. The nightmares would stop. So, if it ain't spiders you're so terrified of what is it then..?'

'I don't know Eileen.' he answered shyly. She nodded. 'Okay, time for some experimenting then...' she said. 'Alright, get a towel and dry off.'

Rudyard obeyed and a while later he sat on a chair and Eileen sat down on the arm rest. She pulled him close with an arm around his naked shoulders and slowly draped her wide silk skirt over his thighs. Marjorie joined her on the other arm rest and plied her skirt over Eileen's. A soft and beautiful music of layers of taffeta arose from Rudyard's lap as the women plied their skirts over each other's in a game of silky warfare.

Rudyard sat looking down on the rustling pleats of gleaming silk. He felt an erection coming and with it a deep seated panic rose up. He tried to jump up and escape but strong hands held him down. Meek little cries of agony escaped from his mouth as he stared up into their faces begging them with his eyes wide open. But the women went on with their rustling hissing war game.

'Ruby Lips in her pretty silk dress...' sang Marjorie in a mocking voice and Eileen joined her. '...All the girls love Ruby in her pretty silk dress... Ruby Lips is the queen of the prom in her pretty silk dress... The girls are getting a little jealous of Sweet little Ruby in her pretty silk dress...' The feminine singsong went on and on.

When he came, overwhelmed by his desire for taffeta silk he burst out crying. Eileen took him in her arms and pulled him against her bosom. He lay sobbing desperately and without realizing it his hand crept up and laid itself around her silk breast, seeking a fullness of comfort. Eileen let him. When the sobbing stopped she spoke in a soft voice, full of tenderness.

'You aren't Rudyard, you're not Rudyard material. Marjorie has seen through you from the beginning. You are Ruby, Ruby Lipsich. Well, I will tell you what I like about Ruby Lipsich. I think he is sweet. I think sometimes he has a tiny bit of a rebel inside him. He is a bit angry because of all the missed chances, all the girls he was too shy to speak to. It's plain lovable and I will utterly enjoy squashing it. And now we have seen yet another side of Ruby Lipsich, two actually. He is rather heroic and fiercely loyal. And he has a feeling for women's clothes, an actual talent I would say...'

She looked at Marjorie. The other woman got up from the arm rest and went outside. She returned and handed Eileen the ring. Eileen took Rudyard's hand in hers and shoved the ring on his finger. 'I'm not breaking us up, Ruby,' she said smiling sweetly. 'On the contrary...'

They took him between them and led him towards the wardrobe in the corner of the penthouse. Marjorie slid the panels open and he balked in sudden fear again. But there was something else too. He heard the ladies' sweet silk music so close beside him and he felt their lovely skirts tickling his skin. A sense of sweet surrender seemed to emanate from the gleaming dresses that hung before him in the semi darkness of the closet. He looked up at Eileen and she bent over and kissed him.

'It's alright Ruby...' she whispered. 'I will save you as you have saved me...'

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They stood outside at the parapet, their wine glasses standing on the broad marble top. Ruby wondered at the sudden disappearance of his vertigo. He could look around him, at the world. The seagulls were still circling in the sky, nearer now and crying playfully as they chased each other's tails. He took a sip of white wine and rinsed his mouth. He swallowed Palace's last dredges and dust. He felt liberated when his wide silk skirt began to sway around his knees, and a wonderful cool air stream penetrated his intimate domain with windy fingers. He remembered the feeling as if he'd felt it yesterday. It had never vanquished, never really left him. He knew that now. He had pushed it away with all his might but it had haunted his nights from the deepest pits of his soul.

He looked down in wonder on his breasts. The silicone had warmed up almost immediately and already he felt proud of them. He owned them. They were so damn

real. He felt their weight and saw their silky pertness. He turned and pushed them against Eileen's, taller now in his pretty white sandals and more confident than ever before. She laid her arm around his shoulder and cuddled him. 'Are you trying to seduce me Ruby Lipsich..?' she asked.

In a second wave a heavenly cool fifty storey high gust of summer wind blew across the terrace and made their dresses rustle loudly. Ruby thrust his hands down to prevent his billowing skirt from exposing his underwear.

'Ooh, me nightie's slipping..!' he cried out in mock panic. It was the first thing he thought of, it popped up as if it had waited years and years for an occasion to come out.

Eileen laughed gaily. 'So is your accent, Countess...' she said, 'Countess Lisl von Schlaf from Liverpool...' They shrieked with laughter.

Marjorie scoffed loudly. 'Oh my god,' she said cynically. 'I can see where this is going. She's very pretty but Pussy Galore she ain't...'

By Castre