

My New Girlfriend
Chapter Ten

“What did you do to Courtney?” Aware that I was in the heart of Arman’s den of debauchery where he held all the advantages, I kept my tone as civil as I could. But as he guided me through the labyrinth of corridors, I couldn’t not ask.

“Nothing special – and nothing personal, I might add,” he replied. His sunglasses made his eyes impossible to read. “I’m just running a business, and she’s just a very dutiful employee.”

“Just running a business, eh? That’s what you call this? Looks more like a harem to me.”

“It pays the bills, my friend.” I half-expected a gold tooth in his unctuous smile, he was so insincere. “And I don’t get any complaints from the girls.”

“So how does it all work? You just go out, find some woman and pump her full of drugs, put her to work?”

“A bit like that, but not so casual as you think,” Arman said in his thick Middle Eastern accent. “I look for women who are special – only certain kinds, fill certain needs. I have women – like our Courtney – look for good girls for my stable. She shows them good time, chug chug, pump pump,” he said, pantomiming an injection, “and soon we have new girl, ready to have fun, make rich.”

“Make *you* rich, you mean.”

Even with the sunglasses, I could tell he was arching an eyebrow. “Who the fuck else you think I want make rich, my friend? Besides, the girls, they do not complain of it. We only take girls no one misses, ones already at ends of their ropes. Much happier working for me here than they were on their own out there.”

“Sure, once you brainwash someone and make them your willing sex slave, I’m sure they don’t tend to gripe much any more.”

“Exactly right – but then, you’d know that just as well as I do, from what Erika tells me, eh my friend? First with Courtney, then with Erika, now you come here looking for more. Quite an appetite on you. But hey, I don’t judge. Two of a kind we are, my friend.”

I stiffened. It wasn’t the same at all – I hadn’t sought anyone out. Hadn’t ordered any of it. I didn’t treat them like property. Well, I had some with Erika, but that was different. She wanted it – enjoyed it.

Which I suppose Midriff had as well, and for the same reason.

Still... “I’m not the one who did it to them. I never poisoned anybody, never tried to warp anyone’s mind or take away their freedom.”

“I know, I know – Erika tells me all about it. If you were mastermind, that would make you my competition, and then we would have very different walk.” The hard edge in his voice sent a chill down my spine. “Instead, I let you go home to enjoy one of my best products – our Courtney, she is a wonder, no? Never had another quite like her. My first, and no doubts my best. Luck you, eh my friend?”

We walked past another of his goons, this one a good deal leaner than the behemoth by the door where I’d entered the complex but no less intimidating. Arman raised a hand that

seemed to allay his suspicions about the stranger his boss was walking with. I wondered what would have happened without that hand.

I also wondered another thing, which I went ahead and asked. “So why are you letting me... borrow Courtney? If she’s such a hot commodity, why give away so much of her time to some random guy she met on a bus?”

Arman chuckled at that. “On the bus, you met her? Ha! She always insists on taking public transport – says she likes to be among people, has an eye for clients, eye for new girls. Fitting she finds you there.”

“Answer my question, Arman.”

He gave me a look, and the downward twist of his mouth instantly reminded me where I was and who I was talking to. Still, he replied. “Courtney comes to me and says she has boyfriend now, no longer needs to work here. I say OK – my girls are all free to quit whenever they like. Just that none ever quit before, eh? Besides, I know she will come back. If there is one thing I know about Courtney, there is never enough to satisfy that *kus*. Right, my friend?”

I said nothing, and he continued. I recognized the hall we were in now. It was near the entrance. “So I say, be glad you have good fortune, and enjoy the pussy while it lasts. Most men never get so lucky – they have to come here, pay mighty price. And hey, when she is done with you, you can always come back, pay for a night! Normally I give a first-time discount, but I think you have already had a taste of her, eh?”

“I suppose I owe you for tonight then, huh.”

Arman put a firm arm around my shoulder as he ushered me around the corner to where the man-mountain thug was standing next to the exit. “Very right, my friend – I hope you can afford \$5,000 a night!” Holy shit. Not a bad rate. I wondered what dismal percent of that went to taking care of the girls themselves.

“But I tell you what,” Arman went on. “You do me one small favor, I forgive your debt, you and Erika go home and have good time. Netflix and chill as you people say, eh?”

He stopped in front of the door, conspicuously in arm’s reach of his goon, where he spun me to face him, his hands gripping my upper arms. “What’s the favor?”

“Whenever you see Courtney again, you just tell her Arman misses her. You can do that for me, right? Ha! You thought I would ask for so much, but it is practically nothing, eh my friend? You just tell her Arman misses her.”

He gestured to his guard, and the man shoved the door open. I didn’t have anything else to say, and there was nothing else to do, so I stepped outside. The door slammed shut behind me.

Erika was already waiting for me by the car. “So... you got impatient, huh.”

“No, actually I ran into a friend of Courtney’s and she invited me in,” I said as I let myself in to the driver’s side. Erika settled into the passenger’s seat as I started the car. “Then she begged me to have sex with her, and then I did. She pretended she hated it though, so I don’t think it counted as cheating.”

Erika was quiet. Even if I hadn't stumbled onto the secret of that warehouse, my tone made my dark mood perfectly clear. "Oh, then I bumped into your old buddy Arman, who told me all about his little mind-fucked whorehouse and how Courtney helped him build it from the ground up. Is that how you guys met? I know you said you go way back – all the way to the VIP suites? Tag-teaming clientele for five figures an hour?"

"Master, I... we... you don't understand, it's..."

I let her trail off into silence. Whatever she said would just be bullshit anyway, either Arman's or Courtney's.

"I got what you asked for," she said in a small voice several minutes later.

I held out a hand, and she retrieved a little plastic baggie from between her cleavage containing a small amount of brown powder. She dropped it in my palm. I very nearly threw it out the window – this stuff was either heroin or it was the foundation of a mind control cocktail, and either way I had no intention of taking it.

Still, even though I was no chemist, if this stuff was involved in Arman's brainwashing, maybe I could get it to someone to analyze, maybe even find an antidote. I tucked it carefully into a pocket.

"Are you mad at me?"

I glanced over at her. She looked genuinely afraid – not for her safety, I don't think, but the kind of fear one saw in someone's eyes after hearing their partner say "we need to have a talk."

"Not at you. You tried to keep a secret from me, but it's not your fault."

"Are you mad at Courtney?" That prospect didn't seem to make her any less afraid – and of course it wouldn't. She was more worried about Courtney's well-being than her own.

I thought back to the sound of Courtney's moaning and pleading I'd heard back in the brothel. How long had she been going back there? Had she ever stopped? Was that what she did all day while I was at work, help fill out the day shift at Arman's whorehouse? How long after Erika and I had left the apartment had she waited before sprinting there to sate her urges? Had she really helped Arman enslave those other women?

Was it fair to blame her for any of it?

And did it matter to me if it was fair?

I didn't know the answer to Erika's question, so I didn't bother giving her one.

Courtney didn't come home that night. She had no reason to expect me back, as it was supposed to be my last night out training/celebrating with Erika. Still, I missed her. And wanted to scream at her. And tell her I never wanted to see her again. And kiss her.

It was probably just as well she wasn't there.

Erika didn't have anywhere else to crash any more; I could have put her up in a hotel, but to be honest, I wanted to keep an eye on her. If I turned her loose now, she'd probably just run right out to Courtney and the two of them would start concocting a new battery of lies. As it was, I told Erika to give me her phone and then threw it out the window of my car as we cruised down the expressway.

She didn't say a word.

I went straight to bed once we got home, and as Erika shed her clothes and came to follow me in, I told her she might be better off on the sofa for the night.

"Please, let me help you relax," she offered.

"You're the source of my stress. You can't help me relax."

"Do you wanna talk about it, at least?"

"No, I don't."

"I'm sure whatever it is, I could help clear—"

"You could, if I could trust a word that came out of your mouth."

She made a face. "What does that mean? I've been nothing but straight with you."

"Oh? Does that include not telling me that you really belong to Courtney, and you're only obeying me because she told you to?"

Her jaw dropped. "I... She... No!" She stammered. It was the least convincing denial I'd ever heard. "No, I'm yours! Totally yours – I swear!"

"Save it. You're just doing what you're told to do, but that doesn't make you any less useless as a friend right now."

She sighed; sensing that I'd seen through her bullshit and trying to convince me otherwise would only be more suspect, Erika just made a deep bow of obeisance and closed me in my bedroom.

I'd stopped by a few bars on my way home and just as I'd hoped, I was asleep the moment my head hit the pillow. The entire night passed as a single long, free-form dream, a nightmare adaptation of my recurring dream of the bus ride that had brought Courtney into my life.

The bus positively reeked as I stepped aboard – not the usual unidentifiable sour odor, but the unmistakable scent of sex. The source of it was immediately recognizable – the sight of a man with a snake tattoo wrapping up both arms and then coiled around his bare torso was facing me; his lower half was busily thrusting in and out of someone in front of him, her body blocked by his.

Whoever she was, she sounded like she was loving it.

Before I could take further note, a woman interposed herself between us. Witch lady – I'd seen her before, only now she was younger, my age or so from the look of her apart from two white streaks along the sides of her thick mane of black hair. She was darkly beautiful with her gothic features, ghostly pale skin contrasting with the dark pools of her eyes and black-themed makeup, right down to the lipstick.

She said something, but I discern what language it was, much less its meaning. Still, there was no mistaking her meaning as she parted the front of her black overcoat to reveal a glossy black leather corset underneath, two massive pale breasts unable to be fully contained by it. As I was transfixed by the sight of them, she drew a syringe from her coat pocket and injected it right into her arm at the crease of her elbow.

Her eyes bulged, then rolled back into her head and she trembled head to toe. I glanced away to find that the tattooed man had finished with his own woman, the source of those hauntingly familiar moans. He had been replaced, however, by Dr. Crankenstein, the permanently scowling night-shift doctor. I recognized him by his stethoscope, which was now the only thing he wore.

Craning my neck, I could only barely make out the woman splayed out on her back in the aisle, her creamy smooth thighs spread wide, red-painted nails clutching at his lean shoulders. "Fuck him!" shouted a voice from farther behind in the bus. Did it have an accent? Middle Eastern, maybe?

"Yes master!" came her voice.

Then my cock was in someone's mouth. Witch lady had sucked me in, eyes looking up at me with a vacant, pleading expression. I could hear thoughts whispering into my head, as if she really possessed magical powers. Please master please let me have your cock put it in my mouth put it in my pussy fuck my breasts fuck my mouth fuck my heart and my soul own me fuck me command me let me be yours let me belong to you let me suck you and be the ornament of your perfect cock let me be your toy play with me play with my body play with my cunt play with my tits play with my mind make me who you want make me what you want make me obey let me obey let me serve you let me please you cum in me master cum for me master cum in my chest and fill the hole inside me only you can fill master...

Yet even as she performed her sordid deed, on her hands and knees on the unkempt bus bench worshipping my cock with all the fervor her litany implied, my attention turned time and again to that other woman and her siren song of bliss. Passenger after passenger took their turn with her, and she never said a word of protest, nothing but grunts and moans that could only be interpreted to coax more passengers between her legs.

Never did I get a clear look at her. A glimpse of two perfectly shaped breasts, red with the paw prints of her stream of lovers; a wisp of golden hair, a clump of old gum wadded in it; an azure eye that opened just a moment in the midst of an orgasm, then slammed shut once more as a well-padded businessman took his turn.

Hector sat in the seat nearest her, grinning manically as he watched and shrieking out advice to her, always some variation on his two favorite words: "Fuck him! Fuck him! Now fuck him! Now him! Fuck him!"

Over his words, I could make out the sound of a heavy accent repeating them along with him.

The witch woman never let up, though. Each time she found my attention shifting back to Blondie, she redoubled her efforts, grasping at my buttocks, slurping at my balls, ripping down her bodice and taking me between her tits, deep throating, moaning around my shaft, humping my leg while she worked.

She was relentless, but I never stopped wanting to see if I could get a turn at Blondie. Then my stop came, and the tide of satisfied men who'd had their turn swept me along with them through the front door, even as a fresh sea of leering men surged in through the back to replenish the bus's stores of willing cocks.

I turned to stare in the bus window as it started away, and found the woman looking back at me. Beautiful beneath the well-used and unkempt exterior, but with a face that could only be desperation, all of it aimed entirely at me.

Blondie. I knew her. What was she doing? This couldn't be her. She would never.

"Drew!" she cried as a brown hand pulled her back down beneath the window frame.

"Courtney!" I shouted, sitting straight up as I cast aside the covers.

I was still adjusting to things back in the real world as Erika's form arrived in my doorway, silhouetted against the hallway light behind her. It was still dark outside. "Drew? Are you OK?"

I shook my head, trying to cast out the lingering specters of the dream. "I'm OK."

"Are you? I heard shouting."

"Yeah. I just had a bad dream."

"About Courtney? You said her name."

I laid back down. "Who else," I grumbled.

"You need to talk to her," she said, taking a few steps inside the room, voice soft. "You're operating on some bad assumptions and lousy information."

"Look, we've been over this. I can't take you at your word—"

"Fuck taking me at my word. Listen to what I'm saying and decide for yourself if it makes sense. Look, you love her, right? Or you did before you decide to go looking in your gift whore's mouth. Right?"

"It's complicated."

"Only it's not. You did. I saw you two. You even told me as much – she's your girlfriend, and I'm just some piece of ass. She's more than just another warm place to shove your dick to you, so don't pretend she isn't."

I didn't like having to agree with her, but there was no sense being petulant when she was right. "Sure. I loved her."

"And have you ever been in love before?" Erika asked, sitting down on the side of my bed. She was naked, but I was so used to seeing her this way now that it didn't even faze me.

"Yeah, a couple times. So what?"

"So then you know you don't just throw it away without talking it out first. Even if some bitch tears your heart out, you at least owe yourself the chance to tell her off for it. Or if you think she's been untrue but you don't have proof, you owe yourself and your own goddamn happiness a chance to hear her out and see what's really going on."

"Proof? I just talked to her – and *your* – pimp. Jesus Christ, I just took a fucking guided tour of the brothel where she recruited slaves for some slimy drug dealing asshole and his brainwashed whore slave. I *heard* her in there, Erika."

"You saw and heard what Arman wanted you to see and hear, and that's it."

I sat back up. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Look – I know you've lived your life in your safe little white bread nerf cocoon, but I'm sure you're not stupid enough not to know guys like Arman can be dangerous. He's not exactly

Scarface, but with the game he's playing, he's got a lot to protect, both in terms of secrets and profits."

"Yeah, at five grand a night, I don't know what you two ever saw in me."

"Don't try to make this about that. Not like you weren't perfectly happy having *your* sex slave, by the way – and I don't mean that was an accusation, but just to say nobody in our little web here has their hands completely clean."

"What's your point, Erika?"

"My point is this – your girlfriend's worth a lot to Arman, and you're standing in his way. If he could take you out of the picture and take her, he would, but he can't. So he's trying to get you to give her back."

"If he wanted me dead, Erika, I'd be dead. I'm 'in his way' the same way a bug is 'in the way' of a speeding car."

"And you think Courtney would just go running back to him if he offered you? 'Gee, I guess you murdered the love of my life but what the hey, let's get back to business as usual' – that sounds like Courtney to you?"

"Love of her life? If I was any such thing to her, she wouldn't be out fucking who-the-hell-knows-who at Arman's place."

"Yeah, 'cause you've been a portrait of fidelity there, Drew. You've only fucked... what, three other women this week?" Erika sighed and gave her head a shake. "Or maybe just get her ass over here and tell her she's a skank and you're done with her – but don't play this woe-is-me shit, cutting off your nose to spite your face. It's seriously weak, and you'll regret it forever if you don't at least have it out with her."

"Thanks, Dr. Erika. If you ever get out of the sex slave trade, you'll make a fortune as a talk-show host."

"Be as sarcastic as you want, doesn't make me wrong."

"Thanks. Now get the hell out."

She rose and gave a deep curtsy. "As you wish, master."

I watched her saunter back out of the room; she really did just ooze sexuality in her every step. "And Erika," I said as she made to shut the door.

"Yes, master?"

"My phone's on the kitchen table. Tell her..." I thought a moment. "Tell her whatever you want, but tell her I need some time to think things over. Tell her I need some space for a while."

She nodded. "Of course, master."

As my alarm clock ticked away the minutes from three o'clock to four, I staged a dozen different variants of conversation with her. When I finally fell asleep, I was in the midst of rehearsing a variant in which I was mashing an apology and accusation all into the same monologue. If I dreamed any more after, I was spared the memory of it.

It was a Saturday, but I went in to work anyway. After all, I had no intention of cashing in on either of my cash cows, so I had an actual job to see to. My co-workers were happy to have me back, and while I wasn't in the most social of moods, I was glad for the company of people who had absolutely nothing to do with any secret rings of mind-controlled sex slaves. We talked about football, and the up-coming presidential inauguration, and about Taylor Swift. It was delightfully banal.

When I got home, the apartment was empty. I'd not given Erika any instructions, but I wasn't surprised that Courtney evidently had. I wondered if she was worried about me, or angry with me for digging into her past, or just wanted to screw me one more time for the road, or what.

I could pick up the phone and call her – that's all it would take.

But why should I? Didn't I already know what I needed to know? She'd been involved in taking women as sex slaves. She'd been a willing whore as recently as last night. She'd lied to me, preyed upon my gullibility to worm her way into my life.

I picked up the phone. *Feel like shit – you busy?* I texted.

Stu and Rich arrived not two hours later, the former toting a case of beer and the latter with a commiserating frown. "Lay it on me, brother."

"It's Courtney, right? Finally dumped ya, huh man. Ya know, it was always just a matter of time. Just be glad for what you had while it lasted," Stu said with a few pats on my shoulder.

As we settled in to our usual spots, grabbing a few beers each and making a start on tomorrow's hangover, I couldn't stop the two of them from adding a few more platitudes and condolences. Stu was in the midst of a recollection of our cookout late in the summer where she'd grilled out on the patio in nothing but an apron when I finally had to cut them off.

"We didn't break up, guys. Not yet."

"What? Well then what the hell is going on?"

"Yeah," Rich groused. "Made it sound like you were about to pull the trigger or something."

"Oh whatever, like you guys had something else going on. Now c'mon, I got a story for you, and I need to know what the hell to do."

So I told them everything I knew. About my suspicions, and Courtney's refusal to explain herself, about the serum, about Erika, about Arman's brothel (dashing Stu's intrigued expression with the price tag), about Courtney's role in the organization, about hearing her behind that door.

"Dude, you're a shit detective," Stu said.

"Well thanks, Columbo. If only I'd had you at my side."

"Well seriously. Why didn't you just tail her, or put some hidden cameras around the place, or keep tabs on her texts and email, or—"

"—and why'd you wait a week before that lame-brained stunt with Erika?"

"—or just go back to the brothel without her later, or—"

"—or ask her friends"

"—or just sit her down, look her in the eye and tell her she's got one chance to be straight with ya?"

"Or at least tell her she's a skank and broom her, if that's what you're gonna do."

"Exactly."

We were at our usual height of semi-inebriated creativity, right between the fourth and fifth beers, and they knew when to stop the stream of criticisms. There it was, the same suggestion Erika had given me. It was exactly what I'd wanted to do before she'd said it, but hearing the advice come from her lips had made me doubt it.

These guys were probably the only two people in the world who would side with me over a girl like Courtney. Don't get me wrong, I knew if Stu found five grand laying on the sidewalk he'd fork it over to Arman and bang one of his girls in a heartbeat – but not Courtney. That they were reinforcing my instinct told me it was the thing to do. Have it out.

“Yeah. I'll just have her over, tell her I know what I know, and just... break up with her. Right?”

“Right for the throat, eh?” Stu asked after a sip. “Probably best that way – no tears, no lies, no ambiguity.”

“That how you wanna go? Don't even wanna hear her side of things?” Rich said with a bit more compassion in his voice.

“What is there to hear?” I asked. “What excuse is there for hiding all this? What's she gonna do, justify enslaving other women? Explain why she's still working at the brothel without even telling me?”

Rich finished his beer, letting the silence bring back a bit of my calm. “I'm not telling you how to feel man, and sure, this whole thing... this is about as fucked up a scenario as anything I've heard. Still, just 'cause the details are different... people still have sides. Truth's still got versions.”

“You're fuckin' drunk, man,” Stu said, snapping open another can.

“Listen. I never told you guys, but about six years back, Ellen... I found out she'd been running around on me. Found a few signs, put two and two together. Things got real ugly when I confronted her about it – she denied it, then she said I deserved it, I called her some things and she called me some things.

“But I tell you what. When the dust settled and we'd both had our say, we finally got to really talking about it. Now here we are, doing just fine. As good as we've ever been. If I'd never heard her out, who knows where we might be now.”

“So you're saying I should give her a chance,” I said.

“I'm not telling you what to do – I'm just saying for me, I'm glad I listened and didn't just talk.” He raised his beer can to me, then downed the rest.

We talked through the evening. About relationships, about sex, about the Patriots. It was a good evening, and I was as grateful as I'd ever been to have two solid, level-headed buddies in my life.

I gave myself a little time to sober up, then picked up my phone and stared at it for a long time. This was it. However I handled this phone call could well determine the course of the rest of my life. I had Courtney's number saved of course, but I dialed it manually so I could chicken out before I hit the last number. I did this a dozen or so times.

Then I hit it, and the phone began to ring.