

SUPER BORN

Seduction of Being

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Super Born: Seduction of Being

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CONTENTS

1.	The Change Begins	5
2.	The Night My Life Changed Forever	17
3.	How to Get an RFD Killed	37
4.	Miracle of Flight 118 (My Ass)	49
5.	Jennifer Lowe (Bitch): Not My Finest Hour	61
6.	She Reappears (Thank God)	67
7.	Spinderella (Because It Deserves Its Own Chapter)	71
8.	My Website Is Born: But No Seconds on Meat Loaf	83
9.	“We Are No Longer Afraid”	97
10.	The Mob Takes Note of the Black Angel	105
11.	Rebecca Dupes the Simple Fellow	111
12.	The Searchlight Event: Another Magical Night	115
13.	The Mob Gets Even—or Odd... Whatever	127
14.	Frustration, Road Trip, Beer—Did I Mention Frustration?	139
15.	Hazel Eyes, My Ass!	145
16.	We Consider New Possibilities	153
17.	Proud to Be Appreciated, but Not to Be Hunted	167
18.	Frustration and Hell Night for Scranton	177
19.	Who Was I?	185
20.	Jones and I Regroup at O’Malley’s	191
21.	The B.I.B. Is Dead	199
22.	I Start the Wheels to Cataclysm	213
23.	First Contact, Getting What You Want, and Getting Sick	217
24.	Jennifer Fondles Frustration	221
25.	The Trail Leads to the Eastern European Jungle	227
26.	Finally	235
27.	Hung Over and Hung Out	253
28.	Three Superwomen in One Night: Not as Much Fun as It Sounds	259
29.	Calm before the Storm—We All Have a Good Night	271
30.	We’re Blown	279
31.	She’s Not the B.I.B.	283
32.	The Flight to Nirvana	289
33.	The Crash...	301
34.	...And the Burn	307
35.	Plan A	313
36.	We Begin with Donuts	331

CHAPTER I

The Change Begins

The first clue came the day I innocently jumped to get a bowl off of a high shelf. This was not a big leap, mind you, just a little hop. But I found myself chest deep through the ceiling and into my upstairs neighbor's kitchen. Amazingly, my first reaction was to wonder how my neighbors got a new refrigerator and stove out of our cheapskate landlord. And was that a new dishwasher? Mine barely worked.

Until that moment, I was simply a single mom with a dead-end job and a sullen teenager, destined to remain in my hometown of Scranton, Pennsylvania, forever. But stuck halfway up through the neighbor's floor, I began to suspect this had changed.

I looked around their apartment and was glad to see no one was home to see me like this, except their small black poodle, who padded over and dropped his empty food dish for me to fill. Although he was cute as hell, it wasn't going to work out between us, as my hands were still down the hole in my kitchen. When I failed to produce any dog chow for him, he found a little red bouncy ball and tossed it to me. It rolled right up against my chest.

I looked into the little dog's expectant face, sensing a sweet kinship to him. In that moment we seemed connected. I smiled at his pure acceptance and felt the weirdest sensation shoot like a bolt through my body. I saw a blinding flash of blue light, but it did not come from the room around me. Instead it felt like it was coming

out of my eyes at the little dog. While I tried to figure out what was what, another flash blinded me, but this time it was a green, focused light. I saw it beam out of my eyes in my reflection in my neighbor's new stainless steel refrigerator door, while the little dog barked with excitement. Even the flashes didn't scare me. They just left me with a warm feeling that made the dog seem another piece of my new, expanded life.

My face must have told the poodle I was sorry for being unable to move, being unable to play, and for flashing him with bright lights, so the little guy came over and licked me on the nose, just before gravity took over and I returned to my kitchen with a thud. I got a nine point five from the Russian judge for my Olympic performance

My little four-legged friend peered down at me through the hole with beaming eyes and his tongue extended in an excited smile that said, *Let's do that again.* The determined lil' devil barked at me and then dropped his red ball through the hole—it bounced several times at my feet before landing in my lap. I sat on my butt, tossed the little ball back up through the hole, and listened to the clicking made by the nails of the dog's frantic feet on the tile floor above as he ran off in hot pursuit. *Gee, I wish I could meet a man who was so thrilled to have met me and equally as understanding of my little tiny teeny-weeny peculiarities, like making mystery holes in my ceiling.*

That hole took some explaining. I told the landlord my nephew's rabid, over-filled basketball was responsible....Kids. That, and a heavy contribution from my renters insurance, seemed to make the cheapskate satisfied. Anyway, those nasty basketballs are a plague in my town, punching holes everywhere. Best be careful of those lil' suckers.

A few days later when I went out for my annual "I-should-really-start-exercising" jog, it happened again. As usual, I had tucked in my music player's earphones. I began the jog down Henry Street. As usual, I was bored before I reached the corner, my mind drifting into the music and away from the pounding of my running shoes.

I should have known something was wrong right then and there. There was none of the usual burning in my bum knee. In fact, there was no bum knee anymore. Beyond that, I wasn't even breaking a sweat or breathing heavily. But instead of wondering what these clues meant, I was content to drift into the music. I guess ignorance is bliss, for a while.

The next thing I knew, I was bumping into people in a crowded plaza that could only be Times Square in New York City, some hundred and forty miles from Henry Street. The mob of people seemed to be in a frantic hurry to get somewhere. I stood amongst the flashing billboards, loud music, and car horns that echoed down the concrete caverns, wondering how the hell I'd gotten there.

I backed up against a storefront and tried to put it all together and figure out how to get home. But something made the sense of fear and uncertainty evaporate in a second. Suddenly, I was glad to be there. I looked into a nearby storefront, and there they were, the stilettos my little black dress had been missing its whole life. *Are those shoes on sale?*

After that I got smarter. I realized I could use my newfound powers to my advantage and began testing and probing their limits... and expanding my shopping universe to find great shoes. Scranton was hardly the hub of the fashion shoe industry, and seeing those shoes at Times Square made me aware there was a big, bad world out there beyond my commitments to my family, my hometown, and my daughter.

I waited for dark, until my daughter, Paige, was off at her friend's house. I pulled on some black sweats and snuck out into the cool October night. A nearby high school athletic field seemed the perfect "roomy" place for the test; no rabid basketballs in sight.

I stood on the track and began to stretch my thirty-something-year-old muscles before thinking, *Why bother?* I started running and finished my twentieth lap before the dust from the first had hit the ground. My bad knee was fine. I wasn't even winded, so I laughed

and ran fifty more laps. *That should cover me for the whole year!* It was more running than I'd done in the last year...okay, five years...okay, lifetime.

The smile on my face must have been big enough to drive a dump truck through. I was having fun. Do you remember fun? I hadn't felt that simple childish joy of "just doing" for years. With raising a kid alone and trying to keep everyone in my big family from killing one another, there was little room for fun or "just doing." So for years I had hidden behind the limits of those responsibilities and built walls to protect Paige and everyone I knew. Thing is, when you build walls around you, they become a prison.

I remembered the remodeling work I had done to my kitchen ceiling by jumping, so I decided to give it a try again, to see how high I could jump. I gave my creaky ol' legs a bend to find they weren't the least bit creaky anymore, and they propelled me up into the sky. I didn't stop. I just kept rising until Scranton shrank into an irregular circle of lights.

It was beautiful, but when I began to drop, it scared the shit out of me. I panicked as I plummeted. I held out my arms. I flapped them like a bird. But still the image of the ground below began to shoot up at me like a rocket. My arms and legs flailed as I struggled. I remember having the time to tell myself what an asshole I was for doing this.

Then, as I neared the ground, I recalled all the skydivers I had seen in movies, how they always laid out and used their chests to slow their descent. I assumed the position and, just before reaching the treetops, prepared for the crash. I angled my body, and suddenly felt myself banking to the left and rising back up over the neighborhood. I continued the turn until I was back up in the air, high over Scranton.

"Yahoooooooo!" I screamed and proceeded to bank left and right, doing it for kicks. I soon learned even subtle tilts of my arms, legs, and torso would control my flight. After a few minutes of practice,

I was spinning, doing barrel rolls, quick dives, and exhilarating climbs into the starry sky.

I cut my flight short when I began to worry about someone seeing me in the moonlit sky. Hell, the “Barbies” at the PTA had finally just begun to accept me as a single mother in their midst. We do school fundraisers and volunteer work, not loop-the-loops. What if they found out I had a secret?

Everything went fine until I contemplated landing. How? *Pick somewhere soft*—that was the clever advice I gave myself. I fooled with different body positions until I found one that seemed to slow me down. I came in over the football field, flew through the back side of the goalposts—*It’s good! Three points!*—then laid out my body in hopes of slowing. I slowed all right, cutting into the field with my chin, chest, and shoulder all the way from the end zone, down the field, and into the other end zone before stopping.

I shook my head, dizzy and light-headed, amazed I felt no pain, and thought, *Touch down*. That was enough fun for the night.

Other changes appeared. I began eating like a horse, or two—okay, maybe a team of horses. But here’s the good part: I just slowly continued to lose weight. I guessed that my powers sent my metabolism into high gear. I was rapidly eating my way down, dress size after dress size, my pre-baby body slowly returning. It was fun, until Paige caught me finishing off a half gallon of ice cream after dinner. Luckily, she didn’t see the bag of cookies beside me that would have been next.

“Eeeew, Mom, that is soooo gross. No wonder you never have a date!”

“I have dates!”

“I mean with a real man, Mom.”

“What do you call Jason, then?”

She paused reflectively, “Farm animal, some sort of sub-species, pure booty call.”

“Paige! That’s not true!”

“Mom, he burped the alphabet for your birthday! And he takes pride in his farts.”

I began to speak, then closed my mouth and reflected for a moment. “You know...you’re right. I don’t have dates.” I looked at the ice cream and dropped my spoon.

From then on I had to become a closet eater. But my sixteen-year-old’s social schedule gave me plenty of time for snacks, as well as dinners number two and three.

She wasn’t completely right about the dates. First of all, let me defend myself by saying that the men of Scranton my age are like children—okay, morons. We are not talking slim pickings, we are talking no pickings. Long ago I had given up on finding Mr. Right. With so much of my time dedicated to my daughter, all I had time for was Mr. Right Now.

The new part of my problem was the fault of another change the powers brought on, this one...not so good. My current friend-with-benefits, Jason, decided to get frisky as we watched a reality show on TV and he drank my beer. We made a beeline for my bedroom.

Just like I had drifted into the music while jogging, I let myself drift into a potent arousal. It’s all a bit foggy to me still. I wasn’t thinking or planning anything. I just began doing what felt good. I do remember being totally impatient with him and tossing him onto the bed. He bounced like a basketball for a few seconds before I pinned him to the bed and...climbed on board. I remember quickly changing positions, directions, and angles of attack without finding the one that would get me home. I’m afraid Jason’s equipment wasn’t made to handle many of the slants or twists I chose.

When one try failed, I remember offering him various sorts of encouragement before trying again. Somehow I’m guessing his yelps meant I encouraged him a bit too much. And I don’t think my verbal encouragement worked either. (On second thought, “Can’t you do that?,” “Is that it?,” from a woman possessed weren’t the best choices if I wanted “firm” results.) I didn’t snap out of it until

I heard Jason's incoherent jumble of expletives followed by moans of pain. I tried to figure out what had happened. He yelled at me and struggled to get his clothes on as he made a slow escape from my bedroom. He stopped at the door.

"What the hell is wrong with you, bitch?"

"Excuse me? You're calling me a bitch when you couldn't even satisfy your own hand with that little thing? Sure, I'm a bitch and proud of it."

"You're crazy!"

"Yeah, I am. What's your excuse?" As his feet heavily pounded the floor while he left, I imagined hooves hitting the ground. Maybe Paige was right about farm animals.

Surprise, surprise, Jason doesn't call anymore. I figure my new level of sexual desire was a teeny-tiny, itty-bitty, teeny-weeny bit too potent for the average male. And Jason had never even measured up to even an average sexual experience. I'm certain I did some damage to him, though, so I had a complex about that: being afraid to do it to anyone else. Thanks for the complex, Jason. I faked 'em all anyway.

After that, I started dressing in black and practicing my new skills in the mountains surrounding town. I mastered flying, lifting boulders, and running at high speeds through a maze of obstacles. I soon learned that, at the speeds I traveled, it made no difference if I wore running shoes or my Times Square stilettos. So I ran with the most stylishly firm calves you can imagine and a good three inches of extra height. I did it all for that childish feeling of fun—until I was overtaken by the "adult" feeling that there had to be a purpose for this.

I found that purpose while cruising through the sky on my way home one night. I noticed a truck fishtailing down a steep hill, apparently having lost its brakes. Ahead of it lay a hairpin curve above a steep drop into a valley. I had a decision to make—be safe and watch, or change the outcome.

I was tired of being safe. I reached the truck just as it broke through the guardrail and began to plunge into the valley. I told myself that this was no different than catching a boulder, but this was an eighty-thousand-pound boulder traveling at sixty miles per hour that could easily carry me with it to the rocks below. I felt a serious instinct to flee as I approached, but fought it off, locked my arms under the trailer, and pushed as hard as I could, wondering how long I should try this before giving up. But after the initial jolt of impact, the truck responded, and felt no heavier than holding a basket of laundry over my head. I smiled, thinking, *This is easy.*

Then the truck and I began to fall through the air toward the rocks below, and the hitch that coupled the cab to the trailer started to break apart when it realized, *Hey, I wasn't made to fly.* The hitch that connected the cab to the trailer worked fine when everything was touching the ground, but up in the air...not so good. Now I had two pieces to support.

Just at the final creak of the separating metal, I worked my way forward and took a desperate handhold of the cab as it started to drift away. My plan was to drop the trailer if I couldn't manage both that and the cab, but I could, just barely. It wasn't the weight, but the awkward shapes, angles, and poor handholds that made it really hard for me. (If you've ever lifted two laundry baskets over your head and held them out at arm's length, you might know what I mean.) I lifted the truck beyond the lip of the cliff and then set it down. The tail of the trailer held in my right hand and nose of the cab in my left hit first, and then the other wheels came down to a bouncing halt.

But there was no time to gloat. As I ducked out from under the truck, the wide-eyed driver saw me. Cars began to stop. I didn't want to be recognized or have to explain what I had done—or how I had done it—so I flew away as quickly as I could, vowing to disguise myself from then on whenever I flew.

Out came the sewing machine and a homemade outfit, lame by superhero standards. Hell, I was a single mom working forty hours a week in the accounting department of a wireless company and another twenty hours part time at a retail store for minimum wage, not Batman on a Hollywood budget. It was no high-tech suit, but it helped hide my identity. For me—and if there were any more like me, probably for them too—remaining unknown was critical, or these powers would run off with my life.

And so it went, night after night. I would wear a mask and some black clothes and cruise the city. There was always pain or disaster to find. I was shocked how much went on during those “quiet” nights I never had taken notice of before. Once you knew the suffering and violence around you, your view of life was changed forever. Whether it was an accident, crime, or just the simple cruelty of mankind, I was a busy woman.

But the more I changed the fates of the people of Scranton, the more it forced me to hide in the shadows. No one could find out, I knew, or they would find a selfish use for my powers. My life would no longer be mine. And worst of all, Paige and the rest of my family would no longer be safe. It was a horrible, helpless feeling that all my power couldn't contain. I was torn between my two lives: the only one I had known, and the new, attractive one where I felt I mattered. It was hell living paycheck to paycheck working for small minds who I knew I could crush between my hands in a second. Sure, every single mom is already a superhero, considering the mountain of things we juggle daily, but for the first time I felt like I was making a difference. I was moving the world, and not it me.

Batman wouldn't last a day in my world, I thought bitterly, feeling the strain that these newly manifested superpowers had brought to my life. Gone was my known, controllable existence, quietly raising my daughter and making ends meet. Gone were the simple days of drinking, dancing, and partying with my friends. Being “real” and

being a superhero made for a unique combination. Sometimes it was a real bitch.

My new powers were confusing and frustrating, yet wildly seductive, opening my mind to a new world. They filled me with questions and challenges but, worst of all, forced me to face them all alone. I could trust no one with my secret.

How should I use these powers? How to deal with all those who would search for me, wanting to share in or use my strength? Who to trust? What really was right and wrong when the laws of man no longer applied to you? Yet through the dangers and the challenges, more doors opened than closed. Perhaps there was a route to a new level of being—perhaps even a new level of romance.

Oh, by the way, as you get to know me better, you'll probably hear people call me a bunch of different names (or expletives) but for the record, my name is Allie, and Paige calls me Mom. (Call me Ishmael, but I won't answer.) I'm known as the B.I.B.: the bitch in black. And please don't say, "bib." It's "B-I-B." Just say every letter and there won't be any trouble. Remember that, and remember I can break you in half if you don't. (First one I hear saying "bib" gets it. Don't make me hurt you.)

On my birthday, the big thirty-three, I just wanted to feel "normal" again. I was hoping some shopping and errands would help—those open-toed Italian shoes I had been wanting would be a good birthday gift to myself. But after I was told, at my first stop, that the phone Paige had dropped in the pool at swim club would not be covered under the warranty—and getting a new one drained my checking account down to nothing—the joy of being "normal" somehow felt pale. There would be no money left for a birthday celebration for me, and no one with whom to share it.

As I stood outside the shoe store with Paige's new phone, staring down at those open-toed beauties I could have worn Saturday night, I thought about my empty wallet and nonexistent checking balance. Then I thought of flying and catching that truck—and

felt like two different women tearing away from each other: one so powerful, and one so powerless.

As I left the store window, I was feeling alone and sorry for myself. It was my birthday. Not that I expected a national holiday or a parade, but someone who cared, other than my crazy sisters, would be nice. Maybe I would just go home. Maybe that black poodle from upstairs wasn't busy. Instead, I walked into O'Malley's Bar for a drink.

CHAPTER 2

The Night My Life Changed Forever

My name is Logan. This journal documents a quest that has transformed me from the disbeliever that I was to all that I've become.....Okay, still working on the "all I've become" part, but you get the idea.

Even now, just thinking of her absorbs every feeling and thought in my head and hardens my...resolve. There was the way the sun glinted in the various shades of blond of her hair, the way the moonlight shimmered off her lips before that kiss on the rooftop, the way her whole face smiled before she laughed, her sarcastic humor that always left me guessing, and the way her skin glowed wherever I touched her as we flew over the city that night. Yes, mine was the ol' boy meets superwoman, boy loses superwoman, boy spends rest of his life (and money) searching for superwoman story. I'm sure you've heard it a million times before. No? Well then, this is your lucky day.

I should forewarn you. If you are the lucky one who finds this journal, just sit back, get a drink and a snack, and prepare to enjoy a stimulating tale of romance, adventure, and wild, unbridled sex. You can read about all those things *after* you finish my journal. It's not that long.

My tale begins on a cold, cloudy evening last January. I had contacted a budding young PhD professor and researcher in psychology from Pennsylvania State University, Rashid Patel Jones. Dr. Jones was the son of learned immigrants, his father a renowned

environmental engineer, his mother a brilliant psychologist at Penn State, often seen on TV shows.

Dr. Jones was hungry to eclipse the brilliance of his parents. I could sense that hunger in his energy on the phone, and in his determination to convince me of his theory. After years of effort, he had created a startling theory that encompassed cutting-edge research from both his father and his mother's fields, and now he was trying—no, I should say was consumed by the need—to prove his theory to the world.

Personally, I rated him a jack-off, but I thought there was a paycheck in his story. Boy, was that an understatement...the paycheck part, I mean...well, maybe the jack-off part too.

After briefly flirting with success writing for magazines in New York after college, my career had dropped to writing for small newspapers and then to freelance articles to pay the bills. I wasn't a lousy writer, just an unmotivated one.

I sold the editor at the *Times* on the idea that Jones's story had local appeal, and Jones granted me an immediate interview. Even after he found out I was only a freelance, rarely published writer and part-time bartender, he still honored the interview. *Damn, he must be desperate*, I thought. I know now that my not being born in Scranton allowed Jones to use me as Super Born Bait, but at that point I chalked it up to my magnetic personality, dynamic prose, keen intellect, and dazzling charm.

Rather than spend hours on scientific mumbo jumbo that would probably shoot right over my aching head, Dr. Jones insisted that it would be much easier to demonstrate his theory in the field. He suggested that we meet at nine o'clock at a beat-up, fifty-year-old house converted into a bar and grill called O'Malley's in the nearby city of Scranton, Pennsylvania.

Scranton had once been the fourth-largest city in Pennsylvania, but it had been struggling through decades of economic and population decline. Jones had developed a radical theory to explain the

downturn; Scranton was the center of his research, and had become his home away from home. On the phone Jones spoke of Scranton the way a man would speak of the woman he loved—or at least a good, inexpensive mistress.

When I finally arrived at run-down O'Malley's, I had to circle the block to find a parking space on the street. I slammed my car door, case in my hand and laptop bag over my shoulder, the consummate professional writer. (Is that what one looks like? I didn't know, because the articles I wrote tended to end up lining the bottom of birdcages before they were read, if you know what I mean.) When I first saw the peeling white paint, blinking sign, and sagging gutters of O'Malley's, I could see that its decline paralleled the slump of the city itself.

I started the short walk to the front door, determined to make the project with Dr. Jones work. I needed some money from somewhere. The tank was empty, if you know what I mean. I needed to completely focus on Jones's work.

But instead of keeping my focus, I couldn't help but notice this chick walking by. *Whoa, look at the major-league yabbos on her*, I thought as the long-haired brunette slithered by with her coat open, revealing a "Ravage Me" low-cut dress. Not that "Ravage Me" was a brand name or a designer or anything, but maybe it should be. I made a mental note to my Get Rich Quick List to start a line of women's clothing with that name just before I ran head on into O'Malley's hole-in-the-wall entrance. What made it worse was the fact that Miss Ravage Me laughed at me as she walked away, fully aware of what her slinky dress had done. Now where was I? Oh, yeah, focus.

I pushed through the doors of O'Malley's promptly at 9:27 to be greeted by the stale smell of yesterday's beer. I found Dr. Jones immediately, despite the dim lighting in the bar. There was only one man there that could be him. He was a short, dark man in his late twenties, wore glasses with thick frames, and had a gigantic,

endearing smile, like a lap dog ready to pounce. Compared to him, I felt like a giant with my six-foot-two-inch...okay, five-foot-ten-inch cyclist's build...okay, working on the cyclist part. (Hey, I did own a bike...once.)

He greeted me with an endlessly pumping handshake that proved tough to break. After a minute I pulled away, and we sat at a table in the middle of the bar.

Jones gestured with open arms to the room around us. "There, do you see?" he asked.

I looked around, not wanting to feel stupid or intimidated right away. I'd save that for later. "Just what am I looking at, Professor?" I asked, opening up my laptop and trying to look professional.

"Just look, look my friend. Tell me what you see."

I looked around the bar. "Well, over there I see two young men. One is trying, to pull the push door to the backroom—with no success, I might add. The other guy is standing too close to the men's room door and is repeatedly pulling it open into his face. Over there, I see a guy trying to get onto a bar stool, and every time he does, he slides off onto the floor. What assholes!"

"Good, good," said Jones excitedly. "And in the backroom, can you see what is happening there, my friend?"

The lights were starting to come on in my head. "I see five more guys back there. Some are wearing leather helmets with antlers on them, and another has a rifle." There was a loud roar as the rifle fired. "And that guy just shot at the guys with the antlers! Holy crap, let's get out of here!"

Behind the bar, the grizzled old barkeep just shook his head and continued rinsing out glasses, unfazed, as the gunshot rang out.

"I assure you that we are quite safe, my friend. This curious male-only activity is called the Antler Game. They have been doing it for years and no one has ever hit anything...ever, not even a hit song...not even a...."

"Okay, I get it!"

“The odds of one of them shooting and hitting a target is about the same as you winning the lottery...twice. Now tell me what else you see.”

“Man, that guy is a lousy shot! He wasn’t even close!” Just then a different man took hold of the rifle and began the Antler Game over again. The men wearing the antlers scurried randomly around the backroom with beer bottles in hand, some hiding behind others while the rifleman tried to decide which end of the rifle to use and how you loaded the bullet, only succeeding on occasion. Most shots ended up lodged in the floor or ceiling, although the man in one of the beer posters on the wall seemed to have three nostrils and big zit on his cheek. “Holy shit! Somebody should call the cops!”

“These men have been doing this a long time now. It’s tradition in this part of town. I doubt the police would even come. Would you say that is odd?” inquired Jones.

“Odd? It’s freakin’ unbelievable!”

“And, my friend, can you describe these men?”

I looked around the bar. “Yeah, they’re all young men, maybe late twenties, early thirties.”

“Good, good. And what would you say about the women?”

I didn’t see any. I thought, *There are no freakin’ women here. What kind of crappy dump is this?*

Jones could see my bewildered face as I panned across the bar. “No, no, look over here,” His finger directed me to a booth next to the front door.

Kaboom! There sat a luscious, long-haired blond, early thirties, with shining gray eyes. “My God!” I was startled. “Where did she come from?” My eyes locked with hers, and I felt the strangest warmth of connection with her. The air between us felt balmy, fluid, and expectant. I had seen attractive women before, but this one made me feel something electric and special.

Then, as the tension between us built, her eyes suddenly flashed right at me, blue, then green, like the rotating light of a lighthouse.

I had never seen anything like it. Then her eyes flashed at me again. My jaw dropped a bit, and I remained speechless for a long, thrilling moment. *Holy beaver balls!* I thought. *Did that really just happen, or was that another trick my imagination was playing on me, like the time I thought I actually paid my rent on time?*

She gave me a quick smile of acknowledgement, as if saying, “Hello, this way to heaven.” Instinctively, I turned toward her and stood up halfway, all the while feeling something growing and determinedly trying to escape from my pants. I looked over at Dr. Jones, who had also lost his cool—he too was half-standing and looking at her.

“Did you see what her eyes just did? Did you?” I asked Jones full of amazement.

Finally Jones responded, “Oh yes, her hazel eyes are lovely.”

Hazel? Hazel, my ass. They're gray and they flash like mofos, I thought before realizing how crazy that sounded. Sure, she was a lovely woman, and sure, she had five empty Miner's Lite beer bottles on her table. Sure, those eyes melted me as she took a long, sensuous sip of beer—sure, she had an amazing effect going on in my shorts, and sure, her smile was like an angel's. But those factors alone could not explain the dazzling effect she had on me. There was something else about her that drew me in like a discounted beer display.

Jones, ever the man of science, regained his composure, began to sit down, and with his hand on my shoulder, gestured for me to sit as well. “Now, now, let's not forget that we are here to promote a great discovery.” He turned his head to the side and said, “Excuse me a moment.” He mumbled “Think of sports...Hillary Clinton naked,” to himself. He turned back to me, but he might as well have been on the moon. I couldn't take my eyes off of her.

“My friend! My friend!” he said loudly, shaking my arm. “You must be careful. A woman like that could fry you like an insect! Believe me, I know.”

I gave him a smirk of disbelief, then began to wonder, *Do they really fry insects in India? Flour, a little salt... Oh, yeah, focus. You're*

a journalist; type something on the laptop. Finally there was enough blood in my brain to rejoin him at the table. “Okay, what’s the point? You give dating advice now too?” I asked while typing *I’m fucked...I’m fucked...over and over on my laptop.*

“Do you see that woman? What is wrong with this picture?” Jones asked.

“Not a thing, Doc, not one stinking thing.”

“Wrong! Look again. Do you not find this woman attractive?”

“Ohhh yeah.”

“I do as well, but there she sits alone. A room full of drunken young men and a desirable female with five empty light beer bottles on her table, but there she sits alone. How can this be?”

“I can fix that,” I said.

“No, no, this is a scientific experiment, and you cannot alter the controlled conditions we have here. Sit there, my friend, and I will tell you what it is that you’re really seeing, the forces that are at work in this place.”

Jones pulled a folded map out of his leather briefcase and unfolded it on our table. “Do you see all of these numbered locations on this map of Scranton?”

I nodded.

“The small numbers here,” Jones added, pointing to various locations on the map, “are radiation readings for each of these sampling locations I have taken. This is the radiation level of the soil sample on the epsilon ray scale....I see you are puzzled, my friend.”

Not really. The whole time he spoke, I was checking out the blond, and she was flirting back at me like we were getting it on from twenty feet apart. But I did get something about radiation, samples, and epsilon rays, whatever the heck those were. Focus was a distant memory. Had Jones said something? Whatever. Now I wish I had really been listening that night—but the view, oh the view of her shining gray eyes, lips that shimmered in the light of a Miner’s Lite beer sign, a glow of anticipation surrounding her.

“Epsilon rays are a rarely monitored type of radiation whose properties and frequencies are largely unknown. They are nearly unmeasurable in nature, so contamination of this magnitude can only be man-made. Epsilon is particle radiation, so I suspect they learned how to make some sort of beam. Do you see that the radiation levels are highest in the center and slowly lower as you leave the city? Just where do you think the highest recorded level is, here at the center of the circle?” He dropped his little finger dramatically on the center of the map. “Here, the highest levels are right here...and here is O’Malley’s bar, where we sit at this very moment!”

It was certain that something strange was going on. How or why it was happening, I still couldn’t say, but man, I was sure it was happening. As I looked around at the guy on the floor in front of the men’s room—who had literally knocked himself out by opening the bathroom door repeatedly into his own face—and another round of the Antler Game and idiotic laughing from the back room, I began to think that this funny little man had truly uncovered something. When two pairs of young men began a “Chair-idiot” race (a Scranton original, with one man on a wheeled bar stool and another pushing him around the room) that ended in a tragic crash of both the bar stools and a tableful of men, I was certain. Unfortunately for both of us, this type of story required a real journalist, not a little-published freelancer whose biggest breakthrough article had been on the health benefits of drinking beer (a subject near and dear to my heart). But, glancing over at the blond as she downed a light beer in one tilt of the bottle and then licked the bottle’s rim, I was in love, L-U-V, and convinced myself I could fake the journalism part. *I’m fucked...I’m fucked...* the laptop glowed.

“What exactly do you think is happening here?” I asked, trying to seem professional while also halfheartedly beginning to take notes between quick glances over at the lovely blond.

“Don’t you see? Isn’t it obvious, my friend?” asked Jones, frustrated that my intellect could not keep up with his.

I began to smile and nod, then stopped and said, “Sort of,” stroking my goatee.

“Sort of? Sort of?” He began digging through his case and pulled out page after page of calculations and graphs. “You can see from these figures that I have calculated the half-life of the epsilon radiation and thereby pinpointed the exact year this environmental tragedy took place. It began,” he said running his finger over a page, “in 1969 and continued through 1981, peaking in 1976. Do you see now?”

All I could do was rumple my face, embarrassed, and try to listen while I ran my fingers through my long, dark, disheveled crop of hair, as if trying to stroke my brain to life. I began to wonder if Dr. Jones hadn’t been sniffing some of this epsilon radiation himself. Was it time to play my stupid/intimidated card already?

“During that time, the area outlined on my map was exposed to massive amounts of epsilon radiation. This caused the soils to be contaminated for years. Obviously, all young men born in that time frame show reduced functionality disorder, or RFD.”

“RFD?”

“Yes, as you can see, they are morons!” He gestured to the men around us. A young man had fallen over the bar, and now just his legs were showing, dangling over the bar. We watched as the barkeep tried to pull him up. “Their judgment and ability to react to their environment is dramatically impaired. How else can you explain young men in the prime of their lives, incapable of even noticing a woman like that, let alone approaching her?”

I glanced over at her as she texted on her phone and thought that approaching her sounded like a good idea, in fact the only idea I had in my head. But the men around me played like juveniles. “So, the radiation made all the men born in this town develop RFD?”

“Yes, yes. But there is more, much more. The epsilon radiation has turned some of the women here into superwomen. It has had

the opposite effect, based on the chemical makeup of estrogen. Their powers begin to emerge as they reach their sexual hormonal peak in their thirties, and their estrogen levels power them like nuclear reactors. So you end up with a woman like that one over there, at the other end of the scale, with heightened senses and abilities.”

I nodded, but my thoughts were on a different track. “So you’re saying that she’s totally unsatisfied?”

“Yes, yes, that may very well be true. How can she be, by such men as these?” said Jones, gesturing around the room. One man stuck between two bar stools moaned for help as another round of shots went off, and the old barkeep ducked behind the bar, shaking his head.

Then the years of being a cynic crept up on me. “Superwomen? Come on, really?”

“Proof is it you want? Well, try these shoes on for size, Mr. Doubting Thomas,” Jones said, digging for more papers and pulling out a picture. “Take a look at that, Mister!” he said excitedly, pointing at the picture.

“What’s this?” I asked. Jones’s build up made me expect more than a photo of the 1972 Russian women’s Olympic team.

“Do you see the year?”

I nodded.

“Do you see the medals around their necks? Those Russian women won 67.3 percent of all the medals that year. They are all gold!” When I failed to see the importance, he frantically found a video file on his laptop and played it. “The woman in this video is the most famous female celebrity of Russia from 1972 to 1976, Olga Settchuoff. She was their biggest model, their biggest movie star, their record-holding cosmonaut, and a world-class competitive cheese roller.”

He played the video. It was a short film clip from one of Olga’s movies. She said a few lines in her native Russian, then turned to