



Printer's Devil Review

Allan Converse. *City of Women*.
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City of Women

THERE ARE MANY DIFFERENT TYPES OF WOMEN IN NEW YORK. There's the type you can see any workday on the big avenues in Midtown like Park, Madison, and Seventh. They're young but not too young, cool but not snooty, stylish but not ostentatious. They tend to be tall, and those that aren't tall are slim enough to look taller than they are. They favor tight jackets and skirts, and most of them wear the latest fashions – but they won't wear something ugly just because a *couturier* says they should. A few of them are secretaries, but more of them are models, office managers, dress designers, and editors. Nearly all of them have college educations, and most are attractive. Those that aren't attractive are beautiful.

I'm one of those women. The men like to watch us, of course. I do, too.

Out-of-towners associate another kind of woman with New York, though they may not say so aloud. Those women can show up anywhere, but you see them most frequently between 14th and Houston. They tend to be young, and those that aren't young are trying very hard to look young. Some wear a kind of uniform: blue jeans or chinos, turtleneck sweaters or open shirts, peacoats with toggle fasteners, mannish jackets and suits, even a leather jacket now and then. Yet you can't always tell such women by the uniform, for many don't wear it. A few of them are

ugly enough to stop a train, some of them are almost indistinguishable from men, and some of them are as beautiful as any women in the world.

I'm one of those women, too – sometimes.

There's one group of women who are almost unknown outside the city, and even inside it a lot of people don't know they exist. They wear a uniform, too, just like other groups of New York women, but theirs is usually blue. You can find them all over town, but you have to hunt for them. You can find them at intersections, waving children and old ladies across the street. You can find them in schools, giving safety lectures and counseling the JD's. You can find them in those grim, battered little fortresses called police precinct houses, typing up arrest reports, wrestling female hopheads into cells, escorting prostitutes to the paddy wagon for the trip downtown. A few of them – a very few – wear plain clothes and look like any other women. But they're not any other women, because they carry guns and handcuffs and can beat up men, and because they know more ugly things about human nature and what goes on in this city than you could learn in a hundred years.

I know what they know, because I used to be one of those women. But I'm not any more. My name is Val Cowan.



I was doing paperwork in the office and listening to the radio news when the first flash about the murder of Adele Phillips came on. It gave robbery as the probable motive, and it identified Adele's murdered maid as Louella Johnson. But Milly the prossie was just "a third victim, as yet unidentified." The story gave none of the interesting details that I'd seen in the Phillips house that morning: little things like the .30 Mauser machine gun shells on the floor and the naked young girl in old Adele's bed.

The dead Milly still made an ugly picture in my head, but not quite as ugly as the picture of May in the arms of Johnny Haynes. I had worked on adultery cases and I had worked on murder cases, but now I had to work on both at the same time. I needed help and information, and I knew a girl who might be able to give me both. What she didn't know about the lesbian scene wasn't worth knowing.

This piece was adapted from *The Dying Nude*, the author's novel-in-progress, set in 1950s New York.

I called the last number I had for Hoppy, gave up on the twelfth unanswered ring, and looked at the 182 Club matchbook I'd found in Milly's purse. That was as good a place to start as any.

The 182 Club was on Second Avenue a couple of blocks below 14th, in a Turkish-style structure built as a theater back in the twenties. It was a convenient location. The fags and lezzies from the Village only had to walk four or five blocks east to get there. The mobsters from Little Italy and the punks and hopheads from the Lower East Side took the IRT uptown and walked east from Astor Place. Queer sailors and rock-hard dykes from the West Side waterfront took the BMT or the cross-town bus along 14th. The uptown lesbians and theatrical queers drove down Second or Broadway. All a tourist had to do was hail a cab and whisper the right words, because every cabbie in New York knew the 182. The 182 got them all, and welcomed them all. Now it welcomed me.

I walked through the door and into a huge barroom with décor straight out of *The Sheikb*. The tile floor was a mosaic star pattern, the large mirror had cut-glass images of carefree houris, and the bar was a long, smoothly carved piece of dark oak with a silver-plated foot rail. Through wide double doors to the left of the bar, I glimpsed a big, modern stage and club floor.

A broad, dark-haired woman in a uniform jacket and bowtie stood behind the bar making a corned beef sandwich. She took one look at me and sighed. "Here comes trouble."

"It's nice to see you, too, Gina."

"I shouldn't even let you in the door. You're a private cop, straight, and a looker. Every time you show up my lezzie staff moan, clutch themselves, and rush off to the powder room. What do you want this time?"

"A bottle of Piels will do for a start."

"Sure, hang on." She went to the far end of the bar to deliver the sandwich to a tourist and came back with a bottle of beer for me. "What else?"

"I'm looking for dope on a short brunette who wears pink. Her name is Milly, and she's nineteen years old, a lezz, and a whore."

"So?"

"So she's been in here. She had one of your matchbooks."

"I order those by the gross, do you have any idea how many people go in and out of here every week? I know all the regulars but I sure don't keep track of every hustler who cruises through, and I don't encourage them to hang around either. If the trade in here gets too rough the city gives us trouble, and Tony doesn't like that."

"I see. Well, I had to ask."

"Why don't you ask your little punk pal Terry Hop? She's got the thickest black book in the city."

"She's not my pal."

"That's not what *she* says."

"Come on, who are you going to believe? You know the old joke about Terry, when her lips are moving she's doing one of two things."

"Lying or frenching," Gina said with a laugh. "Yeah, she's told me how much she wants your clam platter, but she says the same about a lot of straight girls. Have pity on her, at least give her a call and let her have the pleasure of lying to you some more."

"I called the last number I had for her, but it was no good. Where is she hanging out now?"

"God knows. Try Eighth Avenue or Red Hook or Jones Beach. She blows whichever way the ass blows."

"Speaking of thick black books, where is Johnny Haynes these days? I know she's one of your regular performers."

"I don't know what's up with John, maybe she's too busy driving. I'd love to have her sing in here again, and there aren't a lot of venues for a broad who dresses like a guy anyway. You'd think she'd want the work, but she didn't return my last call and she hasn't even been in for a drink."

"Why don't you call her agent?"

"She doesn't have a regular agent. She uses Keystone once in a blue moon, but they're not top-notch and she makes most of her bookings herself. That's one reason why John doesn't make as much money as she deserves, she doesn't have a head for business. She's always getting rooked. Why are you interested in her, though?"

"I like her singing. I was playing one of her records for a guy I know, and he liked Johnny's tenor so much he wants to hear her live."

"He's a lucky guy if he knows you. Does he know that John's a shehe?"

"No, I thought I'd surprise him."

"You cops all have a sick sense of humor." She smiled for the first time. "Six years ago Johnny and May Flowers gave the best show we've ever had in here. Johnny played piano while May lay on top of the baby grand, naked underneath some white roses. They sang Porter, Gershwin, and Berlin, and finished up with *Bill*. When they finally kissed at the end of that song there wasn't a dry eye in the house."

"Or a dry pair of underpants, either," an attractive brunette waitress said as she joined us. "Do you have the chicken salad for Table Six, Gina?"

Gina put a sandwich on the girl's tray. I poked my throat where my Adam's apple would be if I had one. "You're showing, Richie."

Richie blushed and pulled his lacy collar up. "Thank you," he said. "But I prefer to be known as Rita."

"Your nails could use a trim, too, Rita," Gina said.

"Trim yours, Betty Hutton, they're closer." Richie stuck his tongue out and left.

I laughed, but Gina didn't. "Cops, hustlers, and swishes," she said. "Why the hell did I ever take this job?"

I finished my drink and paid for it. "Let me know if you see Terry, Gina. Otherwise I wasn't here."

"You never are. Why were you asking about that little pink hustler, though?"

"For the same reasons the cops will be asking about her."

"So, it's like that, huh?"

"Yes, it's like that."

"Thanks for the word."

Hoppy was living in Chelsea that month, in a shabby brown building on 22nd between Eighth and Ninth. That was a good location, too, for a working girl. It put her within walking distance of the Village, the waterfront, the Chelsea Hotel, and Pennsylvania Station.

I rang a bell labeled T. HOEPNER. I got nothing and was about to ring again when a front window sash next to the stoop flew up and a woman in curlers stuck her head out.

"Hey, what do you want?"

"What makes that any of your business?" I asked her in the same tone.

"I'm the super. My husband was the super but he died, so now I'm the super."

"I'm looking for Theresa Hoepner."

"Not in," she said swiftly, and began to pull the sash down. I grabbed a mop handle from a trash can and stuck it between the sill and the sash so that she couldn't close the window.

"Hey, what's the big idea?"

"I told you, I'm looking for Theresa Hoepner."

"Who wants to know?"

"Somebody with one of these." I gave her a quick peek at my special deputy's badge.

Her mouth crinkled in distaste. "Okay, I don't want no trouble. All I know is she's regular with the rent, she don't make noise, and she's got a real job. Yeah, I checked on that before I let her move in, she works in some big office building. I don't know nothing about what else she does or who she does it with. Nobody can say I don't run a clean building."

"I'm sure you do, Mrs.—"

"Stoyanoff. My husband was Mike Stoyanoff and so that makes me Mrs. Stoyanoff. It's Bulgarian. Look, I didn't mean to be hostile with you or nothing, but she gets visitors, you know. Men, women, everything, and not all of them look right or feel right. A super can't be too careful."

"No, you can't. Where is she today?"

"Not in, like I said, and more than that I don't know. It's her day off, and whatever she does on her days off she don't do it here. Oh, I laid down the law on that, all right. I've seen all the gags over the years, but Mike had a nose for 'em and he left it to me when he kicked. No, ma'am, I run a clean building."

"I'll tell them downtown, Mrs. Stoyanoff. When you see Miss Hoepner, tell her to call Miss Cowan as soon as possible. She knows the number."

"I'll tell her."

"Good. Thanks for your help."

"Don't mention."

I was thirty yards up the block when she called after me: "And tell 'em I run a clean building!"



The sun died as I crossed 14th, and the girls came out under the soft cloak of night. I was back in Lezztown now, a town of long legs and atomic breasts, tight pants and short skirts, wet lips and eager eyes.

A pair of hatchet-faced butches in windbreakers slouched past me, muttering f— this and f— that around their cigarettes.

A trio of well-dressed young femmes stood on a subway grating outside the Loew's. They broke into laughter as a train passed beneath them and blew their skirts skywards.

I wasn't the only one watching them. "I see you seein', Snowy gal," a bosomy Colored girl in a black skirt said to me. I kept walking.

Two high school girls with that suburban look stood close together outside a bar-restaurant on Greenwich, whispering and hesitating.

"Come on, I just want to see what it's *like*."

"Well, okay then, if that's *all*—"

Two middle-aged women in tweed coats stepped past them. One of them wore a lot of makeup, and the other didn't.

"Look," the one with less makeup said, "If you don't *want* to pay for a real dinner, just say so. I don't mind buying."

"So you say now, but then you'll whine about it for weeks. All I want is soup and a sandwich anyway, how many times do I have to tell you that?"

"I need a drink," the other said as she held the door open.

"That's always how it begins with you, isn't it?" They went inside, and the high school girls shuffled in behind them.

I started with Julian's, but I didn't see Hoppy there. I went to Sheridan Square next, but she wasn't in the Lion's Head or the Limelight either. I thought of trying the Café Bohème, but I got an idea and kept going down Seventh instead. I turned onto a quiet side street near Houston and found a working men's bar that I had once known as Morgan's. Now the place had a new coat of green paint and a pale blue neon sign in delicate script that said *The Florence Lounge*.

A few girls chatted in low tones at the bar. A dark-haired woman in an immaculate white ensemble with black trim gave me a quick look when I came in, but she went back to her book when I didn't return her interest. The other booths appeared to be empty. A fat guy in a brown suit and a tie as wide as Queens Boulevard sat on a chair near the door, filed his nails, and occasionally glanced at a *Racing Form*.

I went to the bar and a bartender came to me. He looked even more bored than the mob boy on the door.

"Schaefer draft, please," I said.

"Just used the last keg. Sorry."

"This crowd must be thirstier than they look. A Knick draft, then."

He drew it slowly and he drew it right, and it had a nice head when he brought it to me.

"Good job," I said, and drank.

"It ain't busy. I can do a good job when they ain't in a rush."

"This tomb gets busy?"

"Startin' to pick up on the weekend nights. We reopened a few weeks back. New management, new look."

"New customers too, I see."

"If they pay, I draw the beer," he said.

"I'm looking for a girl."

"You all are."

"You'd notice this one. She's very short, straight black hair, black bedroom eyes. Usually wears all black clothes: leather jacket, jeans, boots, and a little hat, all black. Looks a little like a young guy until she gets up close. That's when you notice how very much she isn't a guy."

"She got a name?"

"They call her Hoppy, sometimes Terry Hop."

"I know the one. She came in the day we reopened, and she's been back quite a few times. She makes friends fast, all right. What's your interest?"

"I want to discuss existentialism with her in my underwear, what do you think my interest is?"

"Hey, no need to get testy. The way you talked, I thought you might be her probation officer or something. She seems like the kind that might have one."

"Hoppy's got one all right," I said with a leer, "but she finds me a little more appealing."

"Your girl ain't been in for a few days. She don't generally come in until late anyways."

I finished my beer, paid him, and passed him a ten spot on top of it. "If you see her, tell her Brunhilde was looking for her. She'll know how to get in touch."

He nodded. "I don't usually do this, but I'll tell her. Is that your real name, though, Brunhilde?"

"Would I be dumb enough to use my real name?"

"No, I guess not. Kind of a wise girl, ain't you?"

"I manage okay. You're pretty wise yourself."

"If I was wise, would I be working in a dyke joint?"

We shared grins and I went towards the door. I was halfway there when I made the mistake of glancing towards one of the side booths. A girl in a dark green pea coat sat there, a girl I knew. I started to turn away, but the girl saw me and signaled me frantically with her eyes.

Katie Cadigan was a certain kind of policewoman. If you told her to stay in one place and do one thing and one thing only and where to put her feet and how many times she could breathe and little things like that, she would do a good job for you. If she had to do anything else – like think – then things might get a little too complicated for her and she would have to call headquarters for further instructions.

I didn't want to, but I sat down opposite her. "Hello, Katie."

"Hello Val," she said quietly. "Boy, am I ever glad to see a friendly face."

"I'll bet." I spoke quietly too, moving my lips as little as possible. "What are you doing here?"

"Undercover," she said between sips of beer. "I hate it."

"Everybody does, but we have to take our turn. Are the boys at the Sixth trying to shake Tony Becker for a bigger share?"

"I don't know nothing about that," she said. "All I know is they put me in here to get a line on the place, and on him." She pointed a pinkie at the mob boy. "Name's Lattaro, word is he might be fencing some hot stuff through the back room. But what are you doing here? Didn't you know this was a lesbian bar now?"

"No, I just wanted a drink. I turned right around when I saw what they'd done with the place and was on the way out when I spotted you. I didn't see you when I came in."

"I was in the ladies till a second ago. Nerves, I guess." She pulled her coat collar up around her neck. "God, lezzies give me the chills."

"Relax, Katie. They won't rape you, at least not in this bar."

"There's worse places?"

"Hell, yes. There are some stone butch bars over by the river I wouldn't go into without a gun."

"Lezzies are all crazy. Hey, speaking of which, did you hear there was a lezzie angle to the Phillips killing?"

"No, I didn't hear. It wasn't in the papers."

"It wouldn't be, but it's true anyway. She was in bed with the girl when they killed them both, and the girl was naked as a snake. She was just nineteen, too. Jesus, can you figure that? I mean, the old lady was seventy-seven years old, for Pete's sake. The things people do."

"Yeah. Who did they give it to?"

"McGilvery. He's a good investigator."

"Yes, and he also knows enough not to step on any big toes."

"But they'll step on some small toes, all right. They gave the lezz side of it to Mutt and Jeff."

"Those two girls should get results fast. All they have to do is blackmail the right women."

"Or use the old sockful of quarters," Katie said sourly. "They were supposed to train me for this job, but they weren't much use. That's why it's lucky I ran into you, Val. I heard you were good at lezz work. Could you give me some tips?"

"That depends on what kind of a lezz you're trying to play. Are you a butch or a femme?"

"Do I have to decide? I mean, can't a girl be both?"

"Sometimes, but being one or the other is a lot safer."

"I guess I'll be a femme, then. It's more like being a real woman."

"If you want to put it that way."

"Do I look it?"

"You're pretty, you're wearing a skirt and the right sort of coat, and you've got enough makeup on. You're unsure of yourself too, and a lot of femmes put on a shy-little-girl act. That's enough."

"But how do I act like women do it for me?"

"You never had any crushes on other girls, did you?"

"Heck, no. I mean, when I was six I had a best friend and I didn't like it when she played with other girls, but that was it."

"But you can look at another woman and tell if she's pretty, can't you?"

"Oh, sure, I always wanted to look like Hedy Lamarr when I was a kid, I thought she was gorgeous. I guess Gina Lollobrigida is the prettiest I see in the pictures now."

"What sort of guys do you like? Who do you feature in the movies?"

"Tony Curtis," she said immediately. "I always go for the dark hair and the dark look. Give me a nice Italian or Jewish boy and I'm happy."

I glanced furtively at the woman in white. She was taking an unusually long time to read the same page in her book.

I pointed at her with one eye. "You think she's good looking?" I asked Katie.

"I'm not sure."

"Saying she is won't make you a dyke, you know."

That embarrassed her enough to be honest. "Yeah, she's very pretty. Nice hair."

"Nice *dark* hair," I said, "like Curtis and Lollobrigida. Just make believe she's the two of them in one."

"That's too weird."

"Okay, pretend that she's Curtis in drag, then."

She laughed. "That's really weird, too, but for some dumb reason I kind of like the idea of Tony in a dress."

"You're catching on. So is the lady in white, too, she's been watching us."

"She has?"

"Uh-huh. She's been watching you more than me. I'd say you've made a friend. She'll probably offer to buy you a drink after I leave."

"And if she wants to do more than just buy me a drink?"

"It's just like a guy who tries to rush you. Say no, or better yet say you'll think about it. From the daggers she's been looking at me, she thinks I might be your butch, or another pursuer anyway. If she gets too aggressive, just say your big blonde friend would get jealous. If she's a regular here, you'll have the perfect excuse to watch this place if you just keep stringing her along. You know how to string a guy along, don't you?"

"Oh, yeah. That I know how to do."

"Maybe you'll get something out of it. She might buy you a coat or take you to a show. Butches do the same sort of things guys do when they want to lay you."

"Meaning they're just as dumb?"

"They'll believe what they want to. Undercover is just play-acting, but queer women are all play-acting too, trying to hide what they are. Sometimes they even try to hide what they are from themselves. A lot of them don't even know what real is anymore, which makes them easy to fool."

"Thanks, Val," Katie said. "I feel a lot better now. Heck, I might even enjoy myself a little on this one, in a wacky way."

"You never know."

"One thing, though: If you run into any of the gang, don't tell them you saw me in here, huh? They've been kidding me enough about it as it is."

"It'll be our little secret." I stood up to go. The woman in white got up at the same time, went to the jukebox next to the door, and began to browse the titles.

Katie laughed again. "What's so funny?"

"You as a lesbian, Val, that's what's funny. You must have been damned good to make them buy that one."

"Like I said, it's all a matter of what someone wants to believe." I bent down and kissed Katie on the cheek. She played along, kissing me back and stifling another laugh.

I headed for the door again. The woman in white dropped some change into the jukebox and punched a selection. She straightened up as I passed, and I got a good look at her. She was pretty, all right, in a tense, controlled way. Her white dress was tight against her waist and bust.

She looked at me without friendliness as I opened the door. Then the box began to play "Three Coins in the Fountain," and as I left I saw her go up to Katie.



I nearly stepped on top of a girl coming in. She was small, she was dressed in black, and she was Hoppy.

She grinned satanically when she saw me. "*Freundin! Schwester!*" she sang out. "*Wie gehts, Brunhilde?*"

"*Bleib ruhig, Dummkopf,*" I said, and pointed my head towards the street just behind her. "*Heraus.*"

She looked puzzled, shrugged, and went back outside. I followed her jangling key ring to a convenient doorway.

"You've still got the worst *Plattdeutsch* accent I've ever heard," she said.

"It's better than your Minnesota *Württembergisch*. You still jockeying elevators?"

"When I'm not jockeying broads," she said with a smirk. "This latest one is real gone, baby. She's a feature writer for *Better Homes and Gardens*, and she spends the day scribbling articles like 'How to Keep Your Man.' She knows how to keep *this* man, all right."

"Sounds like an improvement on your last one, that roller-derby queen from the Immortal Debs."

"It was the Fordham Daggerettes, and we finally split when she came after me with a pool cue. Kind of killed the romance, if you dig me."

"You'd be safer back in New Ulm, Hoppy."

"Yeah, and I'd be bored stiff, too. I'd be married to some cube named Hans Schmidt, rolling piecrust and listening to soap operas all day long. Thanks but no thanks, citizenness, I'll take my chances here in the Big Town. Why do you think I got on the bus in the first place?"

I was thinking of a wisecrack answer to that when a well-dressed young man came up to Hoppy. He had soft, pinkish skin, a woman's eyelashes, and pomaded blond hair that rose from his forehead in three well-sculpted ridges.

"Pardon me," he began, "but do you –"

"I probably do, sugar pie," Hoppy said, "but not for your kind."

"Oh," he said. "Pardon me once again, I mistook you for a boy."

"Maybe I was one in a past life."

"Yes, a pity I wasn't there for it. Oh, well, *c'est la vie*," he said, and left us.

Hoppy laughed, drew a White Owl from an inside pocket, and held it out. I lit it for her. She stuck it into her mouth at a 45-degree angle and blew a thin jet of smoke into the night.

"Even the pansies like you, don't they Hoppy?"

"Like me? Hell, they wish they *were* me, *dahhhling*. But what's the bop, cop? What are you cruising the Florence Lounge for if you're still shacking with that bubble dancer?"

"I was looking for you."

She smirked again. "Changed your mind about me, huh?"

"Don't flatter yourself."

"How'd you track me down, though? I ain't been at my apartment in a couple of days."

"I tried the 182 and a couple of the usual places. Then I remembered that Morgan's just went lezz and I know you like to check the talent in any new lezzie joint."

"Well figured, my dear. So, what can I do you for?"

"I'm trying to get information on a girl who's mixed up in a case I'm working on. She's queer and a hustler, so I figured you might know her."

"I know most of the gay girls in the profesh. What's the specs?"

"She's about five foot three, 110, pale brown hair, medium length with a slight wave, upturned nose, gray eyes, measurements about 35B-23-35, nineteen years old. A girly type, very femme."

"I like her so far, anything else?"

"She likes to wear pink."

"Yeah, now I've got her. I've seen her around."

"Fill me in."

"There ain't much. I noticed her first last fall or early winter sometime. She wasn't wearing pink then but she had a hick accent like me. More Illinois or Indiana than Minnesota, though."

"Where was this?"

"Might have been the 182, but I'm not sure. I think she was mostly Midtown or Broadway, and I don't get up there that much lately. I saw her in the Village again a couple of times after the new year, that's when I noticed that she'd gone all pink. She didn't dress that way when I first saw her in the joints."

"What's her name?"

"She seemed to have a different one every time I saw her: Mickey, Mimi, Michelle, Mindy, Mandy, like that. I never talked to her, so I don't know what the right one was."

"Why didn't you talk?"

"She was competition, not a customer. I'm queer for little brunettes, but I'm not going to waste my line on someone who's in the same bed-racket as me 'cause I know how unreliable us hustlers are. This Mickey

or Mimi seemed kind of screwy anyway. She hung around with drunks and mob guys a little too much. She had a couple of pals, too, kids like her, and they seemed even daffier than she was.”

“I heard she moved into Madge Kennington’s stable. You know anything about that?”

“No, but if she was one of Madge’s fillies that would account for why I ain’t seen her in a few months. Madge caters to the carriage trade, and that don’t mean trolling in Village bars. But what’s this pink trickster mixed up in?”

“Right about now she’s mixed up in the morgue.”

“Don’t crack wise, Hollywood Eyes. What’s the drift?”

“You never did read the papers much, did you Hoppy?” I took the late edition of the *Post* with Milly’s picture on it out of my coat pocket and handed it to her.

“Wow. So that was her out there on Staten Island with the old lady, huh? That must have been one bad scene.”

“It was, I saw it. They used a machine gun.”

“It don’t say that it in here and it don’t mention you.”

“It won’t, and you’d better not mention me either. They’re keeping a lot of it under wraps, especially the lesbian part. Adele Phillips was pretty famous.”

“A machine gun,” Hoppy said. “Man, I know some people hate lezzies, like those punk types I see cruising around. But a machine gun ...”

“I hear the same punks beat up Johnny Haynes. Have you seen her lately?”

“Yeah, I had a steady Nellie gig with him for awhile. I’d given him some business before, but not regular every week like that. Kinda surprising, too, seeing that Johnny’s usually deep in free fluff.”

“That is unusual. What’s up with her?”

“Hey, the only questions I ever ask the customers are if they’re clean and if they’ve got the dough. I guess even the butch Barrymore can hit a patch of ice, but that ended a few weeks ago. I ain’t seen him around since, and he’s not even singing that much. I don’t buy that about him getting beat up, though.”

“Why not?”

“Use your *hübsche deutsche Kopf, lieblich*. Johnny works a lot for Tony Becker, right? Tony works for Frank C, and even a hick like me knows that you don’t get any bigger than the Prime Minister. Any punk that screws with Johnny screws with Tony, and anybody that screws with Tony screws with the PM, and whosoever screws with that hubcap is one real gone coon. I know a lot of punks, baby, and most of them are thicker than a brick wall, but I ain’t never met one that was *that* kamikaze.”

“Since when did you get cautious yourself? You flip around like a Mexican jumping bean, and you know what that can get a butch in this town.”

“You should talk, flapjack. And the stone butch studs gotta catch me at it first.” A gleaming knife blade was suddenly underneath my chin. Then she hit the switch, and the blade vanished as fast as it had appeared. “Besides, flipping is just good business,” she went on. “If a guy or a butch has the bread I’ll wear the skirt, like I did for you a little when we met in Philly, but I showed you then that I’m no femme either. I’m as stony as they come, and so is Johnny Haynes. Nah, you don’t have to worry about him. Johnny’s plenty tough, and he has plenty of cover too.”

“Yes,” I said, “but maybe she’s tough enough not to want to ask for cover. She’s always been kind of a lone wolf.”

“Like you.”

“And you, too.”

“Hell, every butch is a lone wolf.”

“That’s your theory, is it?”

“That’s right. I got another one, too. Want to hear it?”

“No.”

“Tough. I’ve made plenty of pretzels, and a pretzel is just circles of dough that meet and touch each other. Once when I was working in Graeser’s Bakery I had a big tray of pretzels all set to put in the oven. I saw how close they were on the tray and I thought if you could just push them all together they’d make one giant pretzel: thirty or forty little circles, all touching each other. It was a goofy idea, but I couldn’t get it out of my mind. I was out hustling all over town that night, and I was on my fourth session or so when it hit me. It was all just one big pretzel:

straights and queers, citizens and cats, butches and femmes, Whites and Coloreds. They're all just their own little circles of dough, but two kinds touch them all and tie them all up: hustlers and cops. Hustlers and cops are both moving around on all the circles, trying to make connections, but we're above them too. We see the whole tray at the same time."

"You must have had some H in your arm when you dreamt that up."

"Sure I did, Brunhilde, but it's true all the same. Have you forgotten how the circles we're on keep meeting? First when you were undercover in the Three O'Clock and started making eyes at me, then in that Spruce Street dive when we were both drunk and itchy and out of town, and then again on that Capri Club job when you fell for your Maybelle." She laughed nastily. "For a girl who says she don't dig lezz bars, you sure wind up in a lot of 'em."

"Speaking of lezz bars and lezz bartenders, I'd appreciate it if you didn't shoot your mouth off about me to Gina Bravo."

"I didn't spill your lezzbeans at the 182, Brunhilde. All I said to Gina was how much I wanted to open your box, which I still do. I've never finked on a closet lezz, and I never will. That's the code I live by."

"But you hate cops, Hoppy. You'd have made a lot of friends with the hoods, the dykes, and the department if you'd blown the whistle on me, so why didn't you? I know it wasn't because you love me."

She snuffed her cigar out and tucked it in a pocket. "I didn't split on you 'cause you're a queer cop who treated me straight, Cowan, and maybe I like having a hot blonde fairy godmother with an in at headquarters. But how come you never turned me up to the Vice boys? I know it wasn't 'cause you love *me*."

"I'm on the outside and I need someone who's on the inside, that's why."

"Yeah, you're still on the outside even though you're out. Maybe that's why May lets you live in her G-string when I only got into it the once."

"I told you that I didn't believe that story."

"That story's as true as evolution, *Schwester*. She was on the skids with her last husband, and she just wanted a butch to make her well again. She paid me good for it, too. I don't see why it bugs you up, either, even a gay goddess like May can get needy."

"You're jealous of me, aren't you Hoppy? That's why you tell that story."

"It's that Flowers tail that I'm jealous of, baby, and she ain't even seen your best side. I'll be your Siegfried again, Brunhilde, I've still got my spear and magic helmet." She rubbed her left hip against my right leg, and I felt her keys gouging me. "Come on, Valentine pal of mine. There's a handy alley around the corner, just like there was in Philly." Her grin was satanic again, and I remembered her little white body against a black wall.

"You're presuming on our friendship."

"I'll cancel my subscription to *Better Homes and Gardens*, Val, as of tonight. You can have my special fellow-pretzeler rate, too. It's only one big George, you won't find a better deal anywhere."

"This doesn't even work as a gag, Terry."

"No?"

"No."

She made a Harpo Marx face and stepped back. "Okay, but you'll get lonesome again, every Leslie does eventually. Why'd you give me the bum's rush out of the Florence, though?"

"Because it's being watched. A lady cop I know is undercover in there right now."

The comedy left her face. "What's she look like?"

"Mid-sized strawberry blonde, wears a green coat and a white skirt."

"Thanks for the tip. She make you?"

"Yeah, but I fed her a line and she doesn't know I'm out."

"Funny how cops never want to believe another cop can be queer, ain't it?"

"A riot. Watch your step around the joints, Hoppy, they're going to put the pressure on because of the Phillips thing. Manfredi and Johnson are on the prowl."

"Mutt and Jeff? Hell, those two gals shook me before and never got one little rattle out of me."

"They'll be looking for you again, Hoppy, among a lot of others, and they'll shake much harder this time."

"You're not worried about me, are you, Brunhilde? Solicitous for my welfare?"

"We pretzellers need to stick together."

She checked me with her hip, like a hockey player. “The closer the better, ha, ha, ha. You’re right, though. Being a Kraut these days is like belonging to a secret society, and being a Lester on top of it ... well, it’s like we’re both in the CP and the mob at the same time.”

“Let me know if you hear anything about the late Mindy. It’s going to be a bad time in Lezztown, though, Hop, so keep your nose clean.”

“I will, but what about this, though?” She shot her tongue out at me.

“I don’t expect miracles.”

She took the cigar out of her pocket. I sighed and lit it for the second time. “My Indian’s in the alley, Valentine. There’s room on the bitch seat if you want a ride.”

“Beat it, *Schlampe*, before I change my mind and turn you in for mopery.”

She stuck the cigar in her mouth and pulled her little porkpie low over her forehead.

“*Auf wiedersehen, Kesser Vater*,” she said. “*Bleib lesbisch*.”

“*Hals-und Beinbruch, Fraulein Theresa Hoepner*.”

She turned and strode off into the night, singing to herself and the world and moving her hips in time to her own beat:

*Ich liebe ein Maedchen,
Ich weiss nicht, warum.
Mein Maedchen kaut Tabak,
Mein Maedchen trinkt Rum.*

Oh wake him
Oh shake him,
The big buck nigger with the seaboots on.
Oh, Johnny come down to Hilo
Poor old man.

I stared at a rooftop and thought about Philadelphia until the roar of a motorcycle drowned out the memory. 