

## -SYLVIA-

At first I was happy to get a fake ID. I could finally get trashed off something that isn't vanilla extract. Getting into clubs at night is now a possibility. Lori and I can get some drinks, maybe for movie night. I tried to score some sauce at a convenience store after I left Loopy's. The teller didn't buy it, even after I told him I was a midget. I left empty handed.

The liquor store guy didn't even let me cross the threshold of the shop. They even took the wine coolers from me at the supermarket. So to hell with it.

Loopy called me Tuesday, just as I left school.

“The secrets are all coming out tonight, Sylvia.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean Arthur, Ken, you, me, the stealing, the stock exchangers,” He starts slowing down like he's thinking more stuff. “The ID I gave you, the big money, the naked gym boy pictures. Tonight everything will be completed.”

“How about tomorrow? I'm working tonight.”

There's no studding going on, but I'm pimping Emanuel, the poodle on Thursday. Tonight is the glamorous side of the job; Scoop the shit, clean the pens, litter boxes, water, feed then I head home.

“Sylvia, I have to do this with you tonight. If you go, and if you play along, I will be completely on the level with you.”

I think of hanging up this phone, then I think of my promise to Arthur. I think of these two creeps doing horrible things to him. I'm the only one who can help. That's why he met me in the gym. I have to keep playing along.

“How late can I get there?”

“No, no na, na, na, na, no. I'm coming over to your place.”

“I'm working tonight. I might not be back until 8:00.”

“Really? That's perfect. Can you be ready by about 9:15?”

“Define ready.” I say

“Just dressed. Something nice.”

He didn't mention anything about how I might smell. Dog shit, cat piss and mom's cigarettes.

“I can do that.”

“Perfect. Also, do something with your hair.”

“Like a scrunchie?”

“God no. Lord have mercy. Something sultry. Sexy.”

“I don't do sexy.”

Hearing that word applied to me and I try to picture myself on the cover of a magazine. Yuck. No way in hell, dammit.

“This night Sylvia, I swear you will be sexy.”

So I agree. I agree to know the truth. Everything about Ken and Loopy. I'll smoke them both out from under their stumps, to burn their hides. I turn them over to Arthur or the cops, then I get my happy ending, just me and Arthur DeLobb. I smile.

“You've got it, Loopy.”

“Lupe.”

“What'd you say, Dave?”

“Lupe.”

“Oh, Loopy.”

“Lupe, ya dumb skank.”

“Lupe is a girls name, shit stick.”

“Sylvia...” He sighs “Can we please?”

“Sure. I'll be there.”

“Of course you'll be there. I'm picking you up at your place.”

I hang up on him.

Work goes by and it's the same old crap and kitty litter. I hate this job. Pimping is fun, but the

endless barking, scratching, possibly rabid critter fiesta just makes it a hassle. Old dogs with no bladder control, young puppies that want to crap all over everything. Bind cats that you have to kick out of the way, and get clawed at by the heels. The dogs all want to leap up, and lick your face. I'm trying to do my job. The animals stopped being cute after about two weeks.

I head home, reeking of the kennel. He's at my doorstep, again. I really don't want to admit to myself that he looks kinda cool. Dark slacks, a white button-up shirt, his vest is the same tone as his pants, hanging loosely off him, with his off-black trench coat open in the unseasonably gentle October air. His hair was jelled back on top, and when he turned his head for a taxi I see that he braided his ponytail. It still looks like his usual 'mullet to rule the world' but at least he tried.

“OK, Sylvia, we've got plenty of time to get you changed, primped and glossy.”

“How about a bath?”

“Probably not. Why?” I stick out my hand.

“Smell.”

At a sniff of my hand he draws back quickly.

“Shit. Is that dog fur?”

“Yep.” I say “I just got out of work at the kennel.”

He sneezes hard, and when he looks at me, his eyes have begun to water.

“Goddamn it, Sylvia, I didn't need an allergic attack.”

“Huh?”

“Good mercy, Jehovah.” He takes a few steps back from me “You dumb skeeze, I'm allergic!”

“Well, fuck, I didn't know.”

“Go take a shower.”

I approach him. “I mean, I couldn't have-”

“Back up, Sylvia. Get in the tub.”

He sneezes hard enough to blow a chunk of his brain out his nose.

“Fine, just wait here a second.”

As I go in he catches the door with his hand and waits for me to get about a 10 foot lead before following.

“And what are you doing?”

“What? Just up to your place. You don't have a dog do you?”

No one is seeing my mother.

“Like hell you are.” I rush up and poke him in the base of the chest. “I am not dating you, you are not welcome. When you said over the phone you would be on the level with me, that is the only reason we're doing this.”

“Yeah, so?”

“So, asshole, I'm not dolling myself up for a weasel like you-unless I have to-and if I have to then you just stay back, and shut up, and let me play along.”

He sneezes again. I've found the motherfucking kryptonite.

“Gleaming! I'll just wait outside then if it makes you happy.” he says. “Please make it quick.”

I move to my apartment, and threaten him with anaphylactic shock if he so much as knocks on my door. I am in no rush. I take care of all mom's needs, then going into the shower, I turn it on and I sing “Love shack” “Just a girl” and “Little Red Corvette” in their entirety. Getting out I hear mother from the living room couch.

“Sylvia” she wrenches “Was there any mail today?”

“No, mom.”

I've payed the bills. There was no rent, no cheques no welfare. I turn on the hairdryer.

“what do you think you're doing in there?”

“I'm going out tonight, with a BOY!”

“You can't do that, Sylvia. It's a school night.”

I just ignore her and pretend that the dryer drowns out her screams.

“Do you hear me, Sylvia?”

She won't leave that couch for anything. I put on my red tank-top a dark gray knee skirt, leggings, I have the junk bracelet he gave me, and I put on my lipstick-red pleather boots. I throw on my long coat, and open the front door. Loopy halts me, his hand at flat stop. He sniffs the air around me like a dog.

“Good. I don't smell any dog.”

“So let's go.”

He opens my unbuttoned coat.

“No.”

“What?” I ask.

“Not sure about the leggings, but, no big boots. Heels are a good choice, but smaller ones, of course. No stilettos. The skirt works, but change the top.”

“What is wrong with you?”

“It's that color is good, but get something slimmer, tighter, with buttons down the front.”

I raise the heel of my right boot and bring it down with twice the force it takes to lift.

“Loopy, dammit, the only thing I have like that is my white blouse.”

“White blouse? Like a short sleeve?”

“Yeah.”

“Oh, like a schoolgirl look, huh?”

He bites his lower lip, thinking.

“Put that on, but with a ribbon tie, and a vest to match. Preferably to match the skirt.”

“You fucker, lets go.”

“Are those stockings or pantyhose? They don't make you look tall.”

Bastard. Nothing does.

“Help me out a little, Sylvia.” He looks me over for a response.

“Fine. I'll be right back.”

I'm about to head in and he grabs my arm.

“Let your hair flow, also, get rid of the pins. Make sure your bra and panties match. No whites; reds, blues or blacks are best. You aren't on the rag are you?”

Arthur DeLobb-  
Arthur DeLobb-  
Arthur DeLobb-

I must always remember what I'm doing this for. I slap Loopy on the chin pretty hard, then reverse and head in to change-again!

## -DAVE-

I had it coming.

The old man who lives down the hall has thick, plastic framed glasses and his eyes looked so engrossed and even longing for a split second. He quickly broke eye contact when I looked at him and walked in my direction as he went down the hall. His eyes now, ashamedly cast downward. His aged white and thin hair blown over his balded crown like a rooftop of melting snow. I don't know how long he watched me and Sylvia argue but I could tell that he was a solitary lonely sort that would love a dash of anything, even arguing in his quiet life.

“The Lord greet you well.” I said to him as he passed. He made a nodding motion and gave a weak smile, almost fearful, as he rubbed his belly, telling of some painful ulcer or hernia in his stomach. He passed me in the corridor and headed for the stairs.

For a moment after he was gone I got that sinking Christian guilt again. It's an unavoidable territory of the faith. Did the Lord want me to reach out to him? Was I supposed to befriend and extend to him the hope of eternal life through our everlasting savior? Outreach to a pathetic hermit, a child of the living God?

“Whatever you do unto the least of these my brothers, you do unto me.”

I'm just too busy tonight. I've made my plans, and I have to stick with them. I have to build up a protection from Sylvia. This is the only time, and the only way I could do it. I shall be a faithful steward, but when I'm in trouble I can't let my balls hang out. Sorry old man.

Sylvia comes out a bit later, and she looks perfect for the occasion. She's got that Lolita-schoolgirl thing with a slender build figure and I know she's short, but she's well proportioned for her height. A matching vest to her skirt, outfitted perfectly with her white buttoned blouse. She's also wearing the bracelet I bought her.

“Sylvia! You get back here this instant!” I hear hollered loudly from inside.

She grabs her coat off the hat-tree “I'm going now, mom. Goodbye.”

The shout from inside of “Sylviaaaa-” is cut off as she shuts the door.

“The bracelet doesn't match.” I tell her, “Put it in your purse.”

She opens her mouth and stares at me.

“What?”

She clicks her tongue, “Jerk.”

When she snaps it off I quickly take and get a good look at it.

“Huh.”

“Yeah. Remember? The one from the pawn shop?”

I check my watch. She got back at about 8:30, and now we're right on the money.

“OK. It's 9:15. Lets head.”

I can't believe I didn't notice it until just now. I stole that bracelet a month ago. Then I went and bought it back? I feel dirty.

We take a cab to across town. It won't take too long. I settle into the blackish gray leather seat, and look out the window, idly.

“So where are we going?”

“Somewhere secret.”

“Great. Any particular reason you couldn't tell me all the stuff we need to talk about? Somewhere not secret? Like at church?”

“Did you bring the I.D.?” The quickness that I ask this is telling of the change of subject. I extended my hand out for the card.

“What? Yeah.” She opens her chinsey pleather purse, moving aside her makeup and candy looking for it, while I make the call. I call our destination.

When the line clicks on I hear the booming of the Heavy Bass amps pumping out Nine Inch Nails' “Closer.”

“Hot Nites” she says.

“I need to talk to Andre.” I reply

“Justasec.”

I nod my head to the beat, as my man gets to the phone.

“Hot Nites, this is Andre.”

“Yeah, Andre, it's me.”

“Me who? Quint?”

I look over to Sylvia holding up the fake ID. I snap it out between her fingers quickly. I look at it closely. Had it made by a local in my area, very no-questions-asked. Pretty good results. Even laminated in the hologram.

“No, the guy bringing in the new material.”

“Oh, yeah, Dave. What’s happening? You got her?”

“Yes I do.”

“She looks young, right?”

“Very. Very.”

“OK. We’ll see if we can set her up, then. You on your way over?”

“As I speak. Is Jessie in tonight?”

“Yes she is, she’s next in the slot.”

“Excellent. Tell her I’m going to be there. See you in 20.”

I fold down the flip-phone, and pass the ID back to Sylvia.

“It doesn’t matter where we go. This thing doesn’t work.”

“I need you to do what I say tonight, Sylvia.”

“Huh?”

“I’m going to trust you with all my details, all my crooked ways, and I’ll show you exactly who you are dealing with. I’ve made arrangements where we’re going.”

“What kind of arrangements?” She asks timidly.

I put my head back and sigh. Seriously what the fuck will this accomplish, I don’t know. My thief’s instinct just tells me that this is the way it has to be played.

“I promise you this. I’ll tell you the whole truth.”

We arrive, and I take her in to the club. Her ID passes the front, and I clear the way to the table off right to the center stage. She takes a drink of her Washington red-apple. Rolling her eyes away from the flashing strobe lights, the reflections of the back mirror and the topless

dancer leaning back into the pole, while White Snakes "Here I go again." booms out overhead.

"You're right." she says, Sliding the empty glass back my way. "Tastes just like an apple."

Andre, across the club raises his fingers in the air. Five. Andre is both DJ and Air traffic control, here. Keeps the girls taking off and landing strip to strip. This place has three stages. Center, right and left, and we're parked next to center stage.

Anything in this club that isn't a reflecting mirror or shined chrome is painted black. I don't even know what color the carpet is. This is my regular spot, I'm here every week or two, half because I feel the urge once in a bit, half because I have friends in the dark.

The song comes to an end, and the girl with the long bangs and ponytail takes up her dollars, stuffs them into her G-string and moves to the right stage, while "Jump around" plays at a lower volume for filler time. The girl on right goes to the left, and the girl on the left goes fishing for lap-dances. I wave to a waitress, and quickly order Sylvia another cocktail. She eyes it silently, pondering, before speaking up.

"Why did we have to talk here?" Sylvia asks.

"What?" I shouted back, like I didn't hear her. I was lucky she asked just as Rantings of Eva's "Fracture" started banging out on the house stereo.

She screams louder "Why'd we have to come here to discuss this?"

"The drink?" I ask "It's a Fuzzy navel."

It's actually a hairy navel. This is overkill really. She's only had one and that's probably got her lubed up enough to go through with the deed.

"Go on. Try it."

She looked into the cloudy booze that had no color but what the house lights were pointing at it at any given time, and chokes back a sip. She pulls back wincing and smacking her tongue.

"Like cough syrup and lip-gloss."

Later on, Starlight rips her shirt open violently, snapping off two buttons in the process while "Crawling" by Linkn Park screams overhead. She bends herself backwards until she's resting on her shoulders and her flowing red hair. She rolls over and unashamedly crawls from man to man, giving out small favors for quick dollars.

"Work it, bitch!" Sylvia says. "Work that ass for that cash. Make 'em scream! Give it. Hell yeah. That's hot!" I'm not sure exactly how much sarcasm she's pouring into it. I do detect a

tinge of jealousy, though. She definitely isn't calling out loud enough to be heard.

“What do you think of her?” I ask.

“She's OK, I guess. At least she's kept her own breasts.”

“You can tell?” I ask.

“You can't?”

Starlight has some gifted assets, Double-Cs at least. I walk over to her with a dollar out. She presses my hand down onto the runway and pushes my face into her chest, and squeezes my cheeks with her melons. As she takes the dollar, I speak up.

“Where'd you get your implants done?” She pouts and flips me off, then runs her hands over her boobs.

“Fuck you, these are real.”

I throw my hands up and walk away, back to Sylvia and I sit down.

“OK. I believe you.”

“Fucking guys.” She says. She leans back. For a while her whole attitude to the place seems to chill. I order her another drink, and when it comes, she pays it hardly any mind. I watch her framing the girls with her fingers. I've seen her doing this before, too. She wants to get a shot of everything. After a while of quiet, she approaches me, with a squinting kind of glare. I'm looking away; I have to cut her off.

“Hey. Hey Loopy! Hey, asshole. Hey.”

“Yeah?” I ask.

“I wanna talk to you.”

“OK, so let's talk.”

“Now you promised me that we'd discuss everything, right?”

“Of course, and I meant it.” Sucker.

A white beam of light shatters off the surface of the overhead disco ball.

“Then let's stop Ken. He's after a lot of money.”

“Is that so?” I take a sip of my drink.

“He's going to try to steal it. I don't know how, but he is going to steal about 10 million dollars.”

I pull my drink away, and try to comprehend what I just heard.

“Ten million dollars?!”

That freaking pretty boy has got ten million in traded cash?

“That's what I've been told.”

“By who?”

“I can't tell you that, Loopy. All you need to know is Ken is going to try to steal all of it.

You bet your ass, I'm gonna steal it.

“Arthur can help you if you give up Ken, he can reward you handsomely.”

Oh, and he shall. “Sex machine” by James Brown starts playing overhead. I love that big brass section opening. I spy a silhouette crossing her way across the club; curvy and with an odd, almost angular cover over her shoulders. She's seen me, and I smile at her.

“I'll think about it, Sylvia.”

“Look, we'll talk about it in a bit. I have to pee.”

She gets up staggering her way to the ladies room., and I direct my attention to Raven, taking up the funky godfather beats. She's a tall black girl with knockers and a thick ghetto-booty ass. Most of the girls here follow the same shape. It's an hourglass club if ever there was one. There are only a few skinny girls, but they get some love. Raven tears a dollar out of a mans hand with her teeth. She snaps two more dollars in her g-string. After she stands there are even more dollars at her feet.

Ten Million Dollars.

Ten Million Dollars. I'm watching Raven dance and all I can think is just how beautiful that sounds. I find myself saying it, and wow, does it just roll off the tongue.

While I'm glaring up at funky sex, and dreaming of filthy wealth, Jessie who's now come from across the club taps my shoulder. She's wearing high-heels, panties and a corset along with a kind of odd throw-over top, almost like a shawl that's the same color as of purple as everything else. That I haven't seen before. Her dusty blond hair flows evenly over he

shoulders. Her face is childish, especially her nose which has a kind of cute hook shape to it.

“Hey, baby.” She says to me.

“Audrey!”

“You don't have to call me that, silly.”

“But I always did think that it fit you.”

She sits on my lap and throws an arm over me.

“What's this thing you got on?”

“You like it?” She asks

“It's not a matter of like or dislike, I have no idea what it is.”

“Here, I'll show you.”

She unfastens the one big button in front, and opens it up, to reveal her topless corset.

“I saw this corset two weeks ago, and I had to have it. It fit me perfectly. Though policy is that I can't be walking around topless until after I dance. So I designed this shawl myself to cover up.”

“Shawl? Is that what you call it?”

“Well, for lack of a better word.”

I smile at her, a bit. As the music dies down slightly

“You look good, Jess.”

She lays her head on my shoulder, flirtingly “Oh, Baby.”

“You can call me Dave, Jess.”

“Oh, can she?” Sylvia says.

Shit. She's back from the toilet, and had even sat down in her seat without me noticing. Or Jess, for that matter. Goddamnit, she's such a fucking spy!

“Who's your friend?” Jess asks

“Well, Jess, this is Sylvia. Sylvia, this is Jessica, but around here, call her Audrey.”

“Jessica. Audrey.”

“So you're friends with Dave?” Jess asks

“Dave. Loopy.” Sylvia replies.

“Actually Jess, I've made arrangements with Andre. Can you give Sylvia the tour?”

“Oh, that's so awesome! Jess bounces up on her feet, and takes Sylvia by the hand.”

“Let me show you the back stage.” the two girls head for the backstage, and I quickly move to the DJ booth. I tell Andre the song it has to be. I want her to know it's me. I want her to get the message. “Lust for Life” by Iggy Pop starts, and I have to scream the song at Andre.

I head back to the table, just as the stage door comes swinging open, and Sylvia storms out and goes straight for me.

“You manipulative, cowardly deceitful little monkey! I am leaving. Go to hell.”

“Ken wants you to do this, Sylvia.” Just to be heard I have to scream as loud as I did at Andre.

“Fuck Ken and fuck you!”

“Sylvia, you're too close to all this. Ken is scared of you. He wants to test you. This is it.”

“Are you out of your mind?”

“I might be, but you need to understand. The only way to catch him, is you have to play along. He's here, in this room. He's watching you.”

Her eyes go suddenly cold, and fearful at this point. She glances at the faces in the crowd.

“That won't work, he's smarter than that. If he thinks you are a liability he'll vanish tonight, and steal the money anyway. This is bigger than you think it is. OK, Sylvia? If you want to catch him, play along.”

“So you're in it together, huh? I hate you, you filthy mutt! I'll get you for this someday, I swear it.”

She turns and heads back to the stage door and inside.

The smile on my face is wide and feels bright as any of the stage lights in this club. Jess

comes back out, and sits in Sylvia's seat.

“What was that all about?”

“She was just a little nervous. Stage fright; nothing serious. I have to send a text.”

False testimony, I know. I've flicked out my phone, and I don't let Jess know that I've turned on the camera.

This is a weird feeling, a rush, suddenly my adrenaline is pumping through me. I've been in total control of everything so far. It worked perfectly, and now it's all up to Sylvia. Wow. What a shock. I'm nervous for her. Little Sylvia Jenks in her topless-bar debut. Knock em dead, kid. Andre comes on the overhead

“Alright all you fellas, and ladies out there, our next amateur on the bill is doing this for the very first time, and she is barely allowed to dance for you all tonight. I don't know for sure, but I hear she's short, legal, cute and evil. Put your hands together for Vylisa.”

Sound bursts over the stereo system. The first two chords of a personal favorite: Jane's addiction, “Been caught Stealing.”

Out comes little Sylvia with a faux look of attitude wearing her button up white top. Her hair tied back so that just her bangs flair out, and she grabs the pole, and spins around it. She's focused, even so I can tell she's still tipsy. She's not falling over, that's a plus. Dollars pop up out of the crowd toward her, and she's actually working it. Back to the crowd, she undoes her hair, opens her shirt and comes right back at them. Her pretty blue bra is out there, and she's working the boys, unhitching her skirt, while I'm clicking off photos, every now and then.

I swear, she might be a natural. She's just one of those people I've met that I don't think I could ever fully explain.

Definition. Define is a better word.

## -ARTHUR-

The Flesh.  
The being.  
This Vessel, it lives.  
This too, doomed.  
The life of one origin, one brief path, and one oblivion.

The air is all our breaths, even the first; even the last.  
That first breath.  
It comes out in fitful cries, wails and screams.  
That final breath.  
It is choked, gagged, struggled, forced, denied life.

We exhale.  
Parched is the wind after the breath.

Life finds suffering. Death finds nothing.  
Life is horror, as is death.

To be or not to be is not the question.  
The answer is mathematic, for it is only a matter of time.  
Let us walk this slow path to our open graves.  
Sing whatever must be sung-  
knowing that our only hope is for echoes.

I tap Martha on the shoulder, and hand her my paper.

“What do you think of this?”

She takes a drag from her cigarette. “Oh, my God. That's fucking deep, man.”

I didn't die my hair, not in the traditional sense. I just broke open a bunch of pens, poured the ink on a comb, and worked it through. Made it as even as I could. Tried to move away from a look like someone shitted in my shampoo.

I didn't eat anything today. It's not that I wasn't hungry either.

It's late. I check the clock. It's still a bit before midnight. I suppose it just feels late.

I deserve to be hungry. I've earned it.

“Read mine.” Martha says

It reads:

Your fault mother, blood on your hands.  
Your fault father, broken my heart.  
Your fault brother, forget, forsake, hate.  
Your fault Brenda, little filthy cunt.  
Your fault Washington, a nation of lies and greed.  
Your fault Percy, died too old-too young.  
Your fault God, raised on sex, rust and fraud.  
Your fault everyone, Martha here, remember me?  
Your fault Martha.

It's all my fault.  
It's all my fault.  
It's all my fault.  
It's all my fault.  
It's all my fault.

She goes on to the bottom of the page. OK.

“Brenda?” I ask

“Fucking bitch. Don't get me started.”

I nod to her and look at the page again.

“Percy?”

“My first cat. She died, and I was the one that found her.”

I hand her back the paper not even trying to look like I care.

“That sucks.”

“Mega-sucks.” She says.

“Title?”

“At pain's doorstep”

Oh, God.

“Or maybe 'All my fault'.”

I could really go for some chili right now. She tries to hand me another sheet of paper, and I just wave it away. So we lay back on Martha's futon in her room in her little 1 bedroom apartment, where everything wants to be black. Dark gray curtains, purple bedspread, off-white paint.

We both have stopped writing, and there's a pile of maybe 20 of our shitty, bitchy, worthless poems that we will certainly throw in the trash before the night is done. It's downright masturbatory. We look up at the slow turning ceiling fan. The same low electric drroll, empty hum of the motor. It's not turning fast enough for me to feel it.

Man, I am depressed.

I take a pill box out of my pocket and flip open one of the canisters.

Prozac. If I take this, I know I'll feel better.

I close the lid, and put the pills back in my pocket.

What am I hungry for?

I get up and head to the kitchen. Through the living room with her little high-school paintings on the wall, her sofa and the TV-that's it-and I go into the five foot narrow kitchen-just as sparse-to open the fridge which is even more so. There's Milk, Green beans, turkey, cold easy mac.

I want chili. There is none to be found.

Misery loves company; well depression loves hunger. Just a little feeling of emptiness in the center of you.

I close the fridge, still starving, and head for the sink where I pour water into a dirty glass, and slug it back. When I walk back into the bedroom, she's staring, waiting for me.

“Strip for me.” She says.

I roll my eyes and take off all my clothes quickly, and moving as little as possible. I'm naked in less than 8 seconds.

“Happy?” I ask.

“Not usually.” She smirks.

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I lie down next to her, holding close for warmth. I can feel the fan now.

She's got a razor blade. She sets it on her arm.

“Wait.” I say.

She looks at me like 'what?'

With her still holding the razor, I set my finger on one side of the blade.

“Put your finger on the other side.”

She does, and we stay like that, pressing our stinging skin against the edge for a second.

“OK.” I say. “One. Two. Three!”

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More Chapters will be made available. <http://14rivers.com/threeweasels.htm>

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