

## 2. EMERALD SHINES

Emerald could feel desire burn all over her body. There was a time when she might have directed her affections towards one particular boy. And there were still guys who she would hang out with in the hopes of focusing her longing. But now she was facing the awakening of a power that was much rawer in its realization.

She stared at a girl in hot pants and knee highs. The strips of bare flesh revealed along the thighs were enough to send her into fits of passion. She could feel her hands reaching over and grabbing the girl's ass.

Emerald was developing a special affection for heels. Bare legs that rose up to the sky did it for her. She was tempted so slide her hand all the way until it went underneath the girl's skirt in started to brush her panties.

"You'd look hot fucking in those shoes!"

She had to catch herself before she said a word to someone that she didn't even know. She was getting ahead of herself all the time.

"I'm not a lesbian, am I?"

She wondered why her desire was so directed outward towards these girls. Guys thought that she was cute, but she could never throw her body out there like that. The girl in hot pants was hardly the most athletic person. She didn't care. She was learning to make her entire body speak sex.

Emerald was surprised how turned on she was by the frankness of the girls. She found it way more attractive than a thinner, healthier frame.

She remembered another time when she had accompanied a bunch of male friends to a strip club. It wasn't so much the naked bodies that impressed her. But she did want to rest her head on the breasts of one of the dancers. She got lost in the exhibitionism. Too much stimulation for her. It made her uncertain about her own feelings. Her eyes wandered over and over a sea of female flesh. She hated to give in to this pleasure palace. But she couldn't hold back. Through it all, she barely noticed the crowds of decrepit men leering around the girls. She was simply overcome by her own agenda.

What was this strange feeling? The more that she wanted men, the more she was attracted to women. It wasn't a feeling that she wanted to act on. In a sense, she manifested it by doing nothing. She remained with her own desires. She stuck to her world of female desire.

She couldn't figure out her attraction to the female form. When she looked at herself, she had none of that flash. It reminder her that she was always in a state of becoming.

She imagined watching these girls with their men. This added another perspective to her naughtiness. Again, she didn't have to do a thing. It was all happening before her eyes. They were performing for her. There was none of that dirtiness that she associated with guys watching. She wasn't leering. She could hardly contain herself. These sensations washed over her.

Her lack of control was refreshing. She had been told by her mother not to have these impure thoughts. Now, she did not have to worry about controlling herself. Her whole body let loose. She floated freely!

There was nothing perverse in her desire. She no longer thought in terms of gender. Her

gaze was universal. Her desire had no bounds. Everyone could join in. Everyone participated. She smiled, and everyone smiled back.

For a moment, she needed to brace herself. She had only drunk a few drinks, but she was way beyond intoxicated.

She had always been used to saying no. There was no opportunity to say no. The body vibrated with its affirmation.

When she was at home, she relived the extremes of her stimulation. She really did nothing all night. She never had to do anything. It was enough to watch.

The blood had rushed to her head. A bizarre moment of hesitation gave way to total surrender. She couldn't even move.

She couldn't remember making it home. Someone had given her ride. She passed out in her bed. The ecstasy had been so intense

All in all, she was so incredibly naive. She had kept to herself. All the pleasure came her way. She still couldn't imagine actually going along with any of it. But she had been included in the secret society, and she felt gratified.

A year ago, she continued to suffer beneath her mother's wrath. She would have burned in hell for simply an ounce of what she now accepted as part of her being. The poison ran through her.

She wanted to embrace the natural order of the body. She had been obsessed by her health. This was something else. It was the body reaching beyond itself. The body existed naturally in these outer reaches where it confronted the raw desires of like-minded souls. Longing was just the beginning. She accepted the realm of the flesh.

Her mother would only remind Emerald of the pain that accompanied physical existence. Each moment of pleasure had to be balanced with an interminable duration of physical discomfort. It wasn't so much that she accepted torturing the self. Instead, there were enough moments of cruelty that were inherent in experience. Emerald was encouraged to increase her awareness of the more detrimental experiences. She was invited to delight in her own anguish.

As she learned more about herself, she was impressed with her sense of being cut off from other people. The world had become her hell.

Her new sensuality worked to cast off her formal strict asceticism. It wasn't as if she was embracing hedonism. She was only facing the facts of her biology. And she liked herself this way. She no longer felt the need to repress her physical desires. She let them spread all over the body.

For all her adventuresomeness, she knew that would have to return to her world of denial. She no longer accepted the strictures with which she had been indoctrinated. That was still not enough. She wasn't going to buy heels and short skirts and start to engage in her own exhibitionism. It was one thing to watch but quite another to participate. She could hardly motivate herself to go any further. At best, she could only turn this into a habit. Maybe someone would take her away from her perch to become a player in a darker pursuit.

What were the consequences of casting off her teaching to espouse this new philosophy? Some of her old friends might find her weird. However, she had been invited into a circle of allies. They were all more experienced than her. For her, all this remained in the world of ideas. But her friends needed the jolt of the real thing.

Emerald wanted real action. She believed that the more time that she spent with her friends was the same thing as being a player in the action.

“If you want to get something, you are going to have to give something in return. What are you willing to share with us?”

“At this point, all that I can give you is my soul.”

“We’ll take that gladly.”

She considered how rigidly her mother had defined sin. Just to have these thoughts was enough to accept an eternity in hell.

She had taken another step. She was creating stories with these feelings. She was piecing together a reality to substantiate her curiosity.

“Do you like to touch yourself?”

Who was asking her questions?

She wanted more than stimulation. She wanted to watch these girls playing along with the game. She wanted to get into their heads.

On her mother’s view such thoughts were the stuff that destroyed a person’s character. They made a person so driven that she wanted nothing less than constant stimulation.

“You won’t want to be with one man. You’ll flit from one man to another in the hope that one will take you the highest point of exaltation. You are replacing your need for salvation with the base desire to stimulate the body. You are becoming perverse. You seek titillation for its own sake. You no longer care for people. You are no different from a killer.”

Formerly, these thoughts would have been enough to drive her to sickness. Her body would have been cutting off the part that made it sinful. If she now reveled in such experiences it was a boon to her transfiguration. She wanted to imagine that she was becoming some kind of pleasure machine.

“Are you ever going to stop acting like this?”

“Why should I?”

“This is making you into something monstrous.”

“I am already a monster. And I love it.”

Her mother had worked her way into the heart of her being. Emerald’s devotion had been like an implant that had been mounted in her brain.

“I only want what’s best for you. You want to get married. You want to be a good wife.”

Her mother told her horror stories about suburban wives who had been overcome by their desires. While their husbands were at work, they sought innumerable trysts. Emerald could easily be influenced to becoming this kind of woman.

“You’re playing with your future.”

She no longer felt as if she had a future. She was living in a constant present. Under those conditions, she wanted only wanted pleasure. She could no longer be patient enough from some future reward.

“It’s your fault. I warned you. But you did nothing about my warning. You are going to pay for becoming this monstrous.”

Was there ever a time that her mother could have really protected her from exploring these feelings? By demonstrating that all this was so forbidden, it only made Emerald believe that her mother was hiding something so astounding. When she had the chance to explore these

feelings, it turned her on more than ever.

“I’m not going to stop more.”

The real pleasure was in the mind. That made it all the more potent. She didn’t even have to touch to feel aroused. And the more that she dwelled on her pleasure, the more that it inspired her.

Emerald had to admit to a perversity to her desire. She was excited by the representation more than the real thing. She valued the dirty stories of other people more than any kind of intimacy in her own experience.

“How can I ever go further in my journey?”

“You need to be able to take more risks.”

Emerald was at the point of no return. She loved the benefits of her new life.

“You’re such an amateur.”

“What do you mean?”

“You have great style. You are so original. Finally, it is your chance to separate yourself from your crowd. To really be unique.”

All the while, she was staring in at herself in the mirror.

“Is there something wrong with me?”

She felt very bashful.

“How do I do what I need to do?”

“You need to lose everything. All your friends. All your well-being.”

“How do I do that?”

“It has to be done to you. It has to be done to you for you!”

She imagined someone pulling a tooth for her. She could never do that herself.

She looked around. It wasn’t as if she had that many friends. She was being asked to cast off the few that she had. What this stranger was telling her seemed unusual. She wasn’t being offered the opportunity to play the social butterfly. Instead, she was being exiled in an inhospitable wilderness.

“Did I do something wrong?”

“This is for you own good.”

She was already alone too much. What good could come of her sentence to solitary confinement?

“Isn’t it better that I look for new friends?”

“Look at the way that you are now. You’ll go right back to the same old habits.”

“It’s not as if I’m whipping myself. What am I really doing wrong?”

“Think about it! You’re not acting the way that you should.”

“I didn’t know that there was a catechism. You’re sounding like my mother.”

“She brought you to this point. You rejected her teaching. So you give in to your most detrimental whims.”

“What have I done?”

“What haven’t you done? You’re lost in frivolity.”

“I’m young.”

“You have to harness your energies when you are young. You won’t be like this forever.”

She had very little idea what to do with her newly acquired knowledge. She didn’t want

to submit to the stranger. But she could lose herself to hedonism. She needed more of plan. She considered going back to school. That could be a good option.

When she had been in school before, she had become distracted. She was studying communications. But none of the courses stimulated her. She just went to class and did her work. There was no hunger inside of her for deeper knowledge. She could switch her major to something more demanding. Something that could explain all the contradictions of her personality. Would her parents help her along her new path. They had been so demanding before. There was no reason to expect them to change.

She liked the movies. She thought that she could contribute to making interesting films. That was what had motivated her to study communications. Most of her classes had little to do with film study. That would come later.

What could she do with her degree? It wasn't as if there were all that many jobs in the movie industry. She would have to fight tooth and nail for a pittance. And that would only be if she was lucky. Of course, she didn't know what would happen when she completed her degree.

She could have started by writing scripts. She had no idea what to say. Where to start. She realized that she was such a great watcher. But she couldn't abstract from her situation to figure out what to say. She knew that she had a story to tell. How would she tell it?

Good stories were based on how the characters acted together. It was boring to watch someone suffering by themselves. You needed some kind of conflict to drive the story. And the action needed to be ongoing. If a girl had just gotten dumped, there needed to be some underlying hope to retain viewer interest. People could watch her sulk for only so long.

If she became obsessed with revenge, the film would have to be either horror or a comedy. No body like watching someone else's depression for very long.

She enjoyed thinking through story ideas, but she hadn't come to any conclusion about what she had to do to make the script happen. She didn't understand the first step in getting her ideas down on the page. They just swirled around in her head.

Perhaps, she didn't really have a story. Loads of people had bad relationships. This was hardly the basis for a good movie. She needed some kind of twist. What was interesting about her own life.

That was the problem. There wasn't enough in her own life to justify a movie script. Who wanted to read about a girl working in a woman's apparel store. She found it boring enough. What would others think?

"What would you think of a movie about the store?"

"I'd think that it was a really cool idea. Is it a documentary?"

"I was just thinking about working on a script. Something fictional."

"I've got loads of stories. Even last night after work. I got so wasted."

"Do you think that people just want to spend all their time watching young adults get high."

"There are a lot of other things that happen here. Rivalries for sales. People hiding things from the manager. All the love life."

"What love life? We're all girls here. And none of us have crushes on each other."

"But there are things that go on outside the store. All that would make a good story."

Franny seemed to have more ideas than Emerald. She would make a better film maker.

They could work together. The two of them could put together a script.

The next day Emerald had put away the idea of being a film maker. As if she really wanted to do something like that. She needed to be more convinced herself.

Emerald had promised herself that she was going to turn over a new leaf. But she had done little to remake herself up to this point. The other girls at the store would have bought some new clothes. That wasn't enough for her.

She was feeling a little guilty about everything that was happening to her. And she hadn't eaten that much. She'd be off from work soon. She was with a new girl this evening. For the moment, she had even forgotten her name.

She wanted to call out to her!

Everything seemed cloudy. Emerald felt as if she was undergoing some kind of initiation rite.

"I wish that there was some way that I could stay alive forever."

"Do you really don't mean that?"

"Yes, I do."

"Is that why you like sex so much? Is that why you can't stay with one person for very long. They make you think that you are mortal."

"It will healthy. You can know me. We can be together forever."

"You can't be me."

She was imagining all these things were happening to her.

"She can't possibly think that way."

"Do you ever think that way?"

"I just think about what he's willing to do for me. Each little sacrifice that he's willing to make."

"Does he think of it as a sacrifice, or as the hell that he's willing to put up with?"

"Sacrifice is only a single step in desire."

"This is going to take forever."

"You are a lot closer than you think."

It had all seemed like a dream. But she woke up in a strange place. She hadn't been drinking. She had no idea what had happened.

"You passed out at work. We brought you here when we couldn't get you to wake up."

"That is so weird. I had the strangest dreams last night."

"It was only a dream."

She wondered what had made her pass out at work. Had she been drugged? Why had she been out for so long?

"You tried to revive me?"

"You seemed tired."

"This made no sense. She had never fainted before. Why would she have passed out like that? She recognized one of her coworkers. But who were these other people.

She didn't have to work that day. She spent the rest of the time recovering at home.

She reviewed the apparent events of the night before. She inspected her body to see if she had somehow been affected. Was this her punishment for impure thoughts? She may have rejected her former friends. But did that make her susceptible to some kind of cult.

After having something to eat, she felt a little more comfortable. She remembered more of the dialogue.

“Why are you letting me go?”

“This isn’t something that you want.”

“But you made promises to me. Now you want to take it all back.”

“These promises only last for the short term. Is that what you want? Do you want to be like us?”

“You seem to enjoy life so much more than I could.”

“We enjoy it for the brief moments that you observe us. Do you think that you could bear to be like this all the time?”

“I don’t feel that fulfilled doing what I’m doing.”

“Are you ready to sacrifice? Do you want to give more of yourself to get what we offer?”

“What would I have to sacrifice?”

The speaker just stared at her.

“What would I have to sacrifice?”

“Are you willing to sacrifice your soul?”

This was her mother’s doing. She had been poisoned by all her discipline. And now that teaching was finally taking effect. Her desire to reject her mother’s teaching had resulted in her revulsion. It had made her unstable. She had fainted at work.

Emerald hated being so melodramatic. It wasn’t as if she was moving heaven and earth. But these thoughts remained with her. They gripped her body.

She believed the worst was over. She couldn’t imagine feeling that weak again. She ate a good dinner and returned to work. Her coworker never mentioned the incident to anyone else. And she quit soon after.

She was living in total hindsight. It amazed her what little contact she had with her present. This had been the transformation that she had been seeking. It meant that nothing could really go wrong.

How could she make plans for herself when she knew that those plans would already be underway as she worked out the plans? Her first inclination was to stop in midstream. After all, she knew nothing of her success. So she must have abandoned her plans along the way. So why start if she was only going to stop in the middle.

She needed a more sophisticated approach to time. She needed to become a time traveler. How could she do that?

She reviewed her plans to be a film maker. What had gotten her started in the business? She had finally realized the appeal of her job as an idea for a movie. It had been tough sledding at first. Once she got going, she had more than enough material to complete the script.

She was getting twisted by the torrents of time. There were too many gaps in her experience. As she thought about her script, she recognized that it said nothing about her real experience. It only made her life into this contest among the people that she knew.

The weird dream experience revealed something else to her. She was among the living dead in this place. No one else knew what she felt. She would have to make this into part of her story.

She recognized that there wasn't enough glamor in any of her scripts. She needed something to appeal to the audience. What could she offer?

The occult girl had been replaced by someone a lot more vivacious. She could be the model for a new character. The script could have a different slant.

Her life needed that new slant. He could try to blend in with the other girls. She could devote all her time to fashion. She could read fashion magazines instead of classic novels. That would improve her marketing skills.

She hated telling herself what she needed to get done. That was her mother's style. She didn't need to future tell the present how to handle itself. She just wanted to live.

She needed help. No one in her environment was telling her what she needed to here. She wasn't losing it. She didn't want help for her psyche. She needed a guide. A life adviser. She thought about where she could find someone like that. It wasn't something that she could advertise. If her friends weren't that together, she couldn't trust their judgement. And she wasn't looking for a traditional authority.

Here he was. He was better than an imaginary friend. He was an honest-to-goodness imaginary guide!

She met Rudi downtown. He was staying at the Hilton for a few weeks.

"If you meet me I'll buy you dinner."

She couldn't refuse an offer like that.

"I'm a teacher. I'm not a disciplinarian. You have to take everything that I tell you with a grain of salt. Try it out. See how it works."

"That sounds reasonable."

"Don't be afraid of your feelings."

"This one guy said that I had to get rid of my friend. That I had to lose everything to discover myself."

"That assumes that you really have something to lose."

"So I don't have to change my whole life."

"It doesn't hurt to take stock now and then. But you have time to learn about yourself and the world. Don't feel that you have to put yourself on a timetable. Things will happen in their good time."

Rudi's advice was very even-handed. Maybe too down to earth.

"I guess that I'm still used to my mother trying to drill things into my head."

"She had her own agenda. And it isn't yours. You have to make your own way."

That sounds a bit like a cliché. I keep running into her way of doing things.

"If it works, go with it. If it doesn't, change it."

"It's more than that. It's the feeling inside. Something that I have no control over."

"You're not going to figure it out by just letting go. You have to explore things."

"Can't you give me more concrete answers?"

"Like what to do about boys?"

She nodded her head.

"I can't tell you what I do. It wouldn't work for you. We're all different. Take things slowly. You don't have to live your life in one night."

"I find that I'm getting caught up in things. And I love them. Things that I feel are



wrong.”

“Are you afraid of your own desires? Things welling up in you that are going to take over your will. You can’t be a frightened little kitty about your world.”

“So I should just let go.”

“Letting go can be the same thing as being afraid. They’re the flip-sides of the same coin.”

“Where do I need to land?”

“You need to guide yourself. Take stock as you get involved in things. Don’t expect that you’re going to find the answer over night. Don’t be betrayed by your own ecstasy. It may seem marvelous for now. But if you can’t translate it into something else in your life, it isn’t much good.”

“Should I go back to school?”

“You should take control over your education. Not just accept what you are taught.”

He was telling her so much. And she tried to keep track. When she went home, her brain was full of ideas. She even made some notes for herself.

The next day she realized how hard it was going to be to implement Rudi’s suggestions. He wasn’t living in the same world as she was. This was going to be really tough!

What if her life had already been plotted out for her? Her mother had just protected her from the inevitable. She was starting to see what life had in store. She’d see these boys who would move her to tears. But the guys who approached her were these ridiculous clowns who needed mothering. She had it with one mother. She wasn’t about to take off along the same path.

That day an appealing yellow sweater came into the store. It was a shade that she had never seen before, and it really gave her a rush. This wasn’t like her. Clothes never gave her that feeling. For once, she felt a garment had been blessed with special properties.

In her mother’s world, this would have been the first step in idolatry. To expect that an object could somehow impart special powers was something that was way out of her realm of understanding. This was the stuff of the non-believer, the infidel. Objects could be the signs of the supernatural. In themselves, they never embodied these characteristics. To think otherwise was the stuff of paganism.

Emerald tried to look away from the yellow sweater. But its glow filled the room. Even the darker reaches of the edifice were touched by this reflective light. Once Emerald recognized the special power, she had to own it. She could not share the magic with someone else. There was a host of girls who filled the store. They all seemed to move closer to this fascinating object.

“I must have it!”

Did Emerald say that to herself? Or did someone else express interest in the sweater. She was so preoccupied ringing up purchases that it was near impossible for her to stake her claim.

“Did you see that?”

“There’s only one.”

Emerald scanned the shelf. There was only one.

“I don’t think that we can order another.”

“I must have it.”

One girl was stacking sweaters to try on. She was so close to the prize. From the register, Emerald reached but she was not even close.

“That is mine!”

“You can’t get in the way of customers.”

“You’re supposed to be helping customers.”

She needed the uplift.

“I must have it.”

“Emerald, go in the back for me.”

“I can’t help you!”

“You have to do your work”

“What happened to the sweater?”

It was nowhere to be seen. It wasn’t even in the hands of any of the customers. Emerald felt dejected.

How did she miss someone snagging her sweater? She wasn’t quick enough to do her work in the back. She should have taken in while she had the chance.

“It’s on the floor!”

“What’s on the floor?”

“Look at that?”

There it was right in front of her.

“I like that sweater.”

“This isn’t for sale. It has to be cleaned.”

Emerald reached down to pick it up.

“I’ve always felt that what I wanted was out of my reach.”

There was something electric about the sweater. She felt the shock when she touched it.

“I need to have this”

“What do you have there, Emerald?”

“Nothing. Just something that I need to take to the back.”

“To the back? We need you up here. We’re being slammed.”

“I’ll be right back. Just a little problem. You know”

“That can wait!”

“No, it can’t.

She had her sweater in a place where no one could take it from her. Her hands were shaking as she put it on.

“For once, I need to do something just for myself.”

“Yeah, but a sweater.”

“Who’s there? Rudi, is that you? Who was that?”

“You should have told me.”

“I did tell you. You just didn’t listen.”

“I never listen.”

As she slipped the sweater on, her body began to tingle. She felt as if she was floating in the air. Her face was flush. Nothing could explain the extent of this feeling. It was beyond rapture. Emerald had been assumed into a higher state of existence.

“Could I ever be this happy? This is something without any explanation. It can’t even be

shared with anyone else.”

“Do you want someone to answer that question?”

“Am I talking to you?”

But she was talking to no one else. The sweater had enable her to transcend her environment so that even her words suggested another state of being.

“That is it?”

“What is it?”

“I can now shine.”

The desire that she had felt the other night with her friends now returned to her. But it was no longer associated with someone else. She was the source of the feeling. She didn't feel self-love. She experienced a need to be desired. A desire to be admired. She wanted someone to complement her sweater.

“Do you like it?”

“Where did you get it?”

“I found it before they even put it on the shelf.”

‘ “It's perfect for you.”

“Really?”

“It's not just the sweater, girl. Your face has a glow.”

Penny had never talked to Emerald like this before. Everyone thought that she was the fashion symbol of the store. Now it was Emerald who was making the most upright statement.

“It is only a sweater.”

“But what a sweater it is.”