

## CHAPTER TWO: MONROE

My apartment was just across the street from Dusty's. It made it easy for me to stick to a schedule. I could write when I wasn't at work. Then just jet over to the store. What a setup.

I did my best to keep out of the way of the other residents in my complex. I didn't want to make out that I was unfriendly. I just had too much to occupy my time and I didn't want to get involved in the petty squabbles of my neighbors. From early on, Monroe did her best to bend my personal rule.

"It's not as if I'm over here to borrow a cup of sugar. But I could use something sweet if you catch my drift."

I didn't quite catch her drift. I just did my best to keep up with her innuendos. For the time being, she spiced up my rather drab existence. Sometimes I wondered when she worked. She seems to be around all the time. But she had job at an insurance company.

"They give me flexible hours. It gives me time to work on my acting career."

The only acting that Monroe did was for all the stiff's who haunted her place. She had a couple of girlfriends who were around half the time. These girls would bring lawn chairs out on the patio and sunbathe in skimpy bikinis. Honestly, I came to take it all for granted. They'd spend a good part of the day inside. The way that they acted around each other, I could imagine all kinds of mischief going on beyond those closed doors.

"Lenny, you ought to come join us."

I had to remind Monroe that my name wasn't Lenny. She knew that. But she loved to tease.

She cooed, "You do like to have fun!"

"I give fun a middle name."

"Fun Lenny Fun?"

"Nice try."

"Are you here to borrow some vodka?"

She smiled, "I'm here to get whatever you can give me."

She pulled on her bikini bottom.

"I'm out of pretty well everything that you girls might need."

"Said the stud to the hottie!"

I tried to recover, "Monroe, you just won't let up."

"I hope that you won't either."

With that repartee, she headed for the door.

"My girl are calling me."

I hadn't heard a thing, but she was like a Mom who anticipated trouble for her honeys. As she walked out, she tossed a little wiggle back at me. Whew!

I tried to write, but I envisioned them frolicking just outside my window. I took a peek, but they were not to be found. Monroe had tapped a vague frustration for me. I felt as if I needed more than words on a page to enliven the afternoon. I couldn't imagine myself drinking. But I needed some kind of boost. I just lay back on the couch. This was one of my days off. And I was wasting it.

I pretended that this was part of my research. I was learning more about my world.

Monroe was giving me ideas for my novel. So I gave into the absurd fantasy. It wasn't enough to have the feeling. I needed a clearer picture to supplement my desire. I evoked a super-hearing where all the shenanigans from Monroe's apartment would echo through the walls.

"What do three lusty bitches do when they're bored?"

I was giving into my worst inclinations. My perch as a consummate observer was becoming a liability. I was free to indulge any perversion. I guess Monroe knew something about the real me.

"I have seen you watching us while we're catching some rays. You just put on a suit and come join us."

It wasn't as if this was a beach.

"Maybe, I'll come out and have a drink with you sometime."

"Sometime could be now. There's no time like the present."

I tried to ward off her advances.

"I'm getting by."

"For a writer, you don't seem to live much. You've got to get out. You've got to splurge. You need to pump some real life into those tired words of yours."

She gave me a kiss on the cheek.

"There's more where that came from."

I looked in her eyes, but she turned away.

"How long have you been doing this?"

"Doing what?"

"Living here and doing the job at the insurance place."

She acted as if she didn't want to talk about it, "Three years. Although it's seems like ten."

She told me that she had tried some college, but it wasn't right for her.

"Sweet thing, I was born to party. And I am living up to my reputation."

I wonder how long she could keep on the circuit.

She added, "Boy, don't even think about it. I am not slowing down."

"How do you do it? I just drag myself out of bed every morning."

"A positive attitude. And I go to gym four times a week for some serious work."

"Work?"

"Body work! Don't you know it. I could show you some moves."

I felt a little haggard, "Of course, you could."

"It's the girls again. Got to run."

When Monroe arrived back with her gang, they all started jumping up and down and screaming. I had no idea what set them off.

Their lackadaisical approach was a little much for me. One day as I was going to work, I saw Monroe heading back into the apartment. She was staggering a little.

"Tough night."

"Nothing that this girl can't handle."

"Do you need some help?"

"I just need to get to bed."

I looked at my watch. It was three in the afternoon.

“Were you really partying all night?”

“I guess that’s what they call it.”

“Doesn’t have the same magic for you anymore?”

“If I wanted to quit, I would in a heartbeat,” she snapped her finger to make her point.

“Have a good sleep.”

“You’re sure that you don’t want to tuck me in.”

“I’d love to. But I’m late already.”

“Think about me.”

I watched her stumbling down the walkway. Her heels rose up like a skyscraper. The tower was coming down.

A few days later, Monroe finally convinced me to visit their den of iniquity. As I opened the door, I felt engulfed in a haze. The place was relatively clean. That was surprising given the state of their craziness.

“You do like to party?”

I told Monroe, “Get me a beer.”

“These are my peeps, Dee and Annie.”

They both put out their hands.

“Give him a hug. Lenny’s a great guy.”

I hugged them in turn. Dee was a petite blond with miles and miles of sparkling charm. And Annie was a little more reserved. You could tell that she was always trying to keep up with her friends.

“I love my girls.”

They felt the need to make the point of togetherness. Dee and Annie open-mouthed kissed each other. It wasn’t just for my benefit. They were really into each other.

“You want to get high!”

I shook my head. The room was already heavy with the smell of dope. I tried to catch my breath.

“We’re bitching about guys,” Annie laughed.

“It’s not like any of us just got dumped.”

Monroe scored a legal point, “We don’t get dumped. We do the dumping.”

They all wailed.

Dee tried to moderate their bite, “We wouldn’t mind a guy’s point of view.”

Monroe came to my rescue, “Lenny’s a great guy.”

Annie told the story, “Dee just met this guy at a show. He took her back to his place.”

Dee couldn’t help but join in, “He had real vinyl of all my favorite shit.”

“The Doors?” I asked.

“Yeah, sure. But mostly new stuff.”

“Wow! And he had a turntable to play it on.”

“Sure enough.”

“Dee’s wondering if she should take it any further.”

Monroe tells it like it is, “She didn’t fuck him if that’s what you think.”

“I’m not that kind of girl,” Dee asserts. Annie caresses her neck. She give her a quick peck on the cheek. Almost in unison Monroe runs her fingers through my hair.

“Lenny, you seem like an easy guy. Are you easy?”

All the girls laugh at once.

Annie observes, “You’re not blushing are you?”

I was trying to hide my embarrassment.

“Are you sure that you don’t want to get high?” Dee purrs.

I am tempted to kiss her lip-glossed glowing lips.

“Not now. Maybe later.”

Monroe reminds me, “There may not be a later. We are drug-fiends.”

They all do high-fives together. I try to join in.

“You are going to dance for us, Lenny,” Monroe teases me.

I still wasn’t sure what I was getting into. I had hardly drank my beer, but I could feel the blood rushing to my head.

“Monroe tells us that she like you.”

“I try to be a helpful neighbor.”

I sure didn’t want to complicate things at this point.

“You’re not doing too good with that beer,” Annie notices.

“I’m sort of a slow burn.

“Speaking of burn, pass that joint, Dee”

Dee was a total firecracker when she got high. I could sense her warm body against mine.

At that moment, Monroe rubbed herself against me.

I needed to focus. This could all get out of hand in no time. I needed to find a way to keep it casual.

Dee informs me, “I didn’t tell the whole story. I did let Ryan feel me up.”

“Cool.” I wasn’t sure what to say. Was I even involved in any of this. Or simply a helpless spectator. Annie pulled Dee into the bedroom and closed the door.

“I don’t know what’s into those two.”

“I guess they’re comparing notes about Dee’s date.”

“It wasn’t exactly a date. Dee needs to be more careful with the guys that she meets.”

“Pardon?”

“I’m just talking from experience. Most guys have one thing on their mind.”

“Yeah.”

“The power trip. Like they have this image of how a girl is supposed to be. And if she don’t fit it, they’ll just cut her down to size. Dee is our angel. We have to take care of her.”

“You do!”

Annie came out for a minute and poured a drink and then went back in the room.

“I’m sorry that they’re being terrible hostesses. It’s not like they don’t like you.”

I wasn’t sure what to think.

“I probably should take off. I’m feel a little woozy.”

Monroe was insistent, “I need some company.”

About ten minutes later, Annie came out again and closed the door.

“Dee passed out. First, she seemed all upset about something. Then she was feeling sick.”

“I should really go!”

Annie tried to make up for the weirdness. She gave me a hug and tried to dance with me.

Monroe encouraged her, "Let's play some tunes!"

"Won't it bother Dee?"

"She's out for the night. Nothing is going to wake her."

They put on something really pop. I didn't want to dance much less hear the shit. But Monroe and Annie were tossing me around as they bopped up and down.

"This is fun!"

"Can I get another beer?"

If I was going to play along, I needed more energy.

It didn't take long before both girls lost it completely. Annie curled up in an easy chair. And Monroe's long legs were slung over the couch. She was in high-heeled sandals.

"I love to fuck when I'm high."

I had no idea what to say back to her.

Annie jumped in, "Monroe, quit acting so sleazy."

I sat at the other end of the couch. But Monroe didn't move. Neither girl did. As the music trailed out, they both nodded off. I quietly let myself out.

When I again saw Monroe, she was nothing but apologies.

"We must have been a big yawn. You came to party, and we were ready to snooze. We need to make it up to you."

"I'm good. I had a fun time."

"Fun time, you need to rip. Lenny, you're too uptight.

A few days later Monroe insinuated herself into my apartment.

"You're not going to work, are you?"

"I was in the middle of some writing."

She gave me mesmerized look, a mix of seduction and bewilderment.

"You don't need to write. You need to live."

"I've done too much living."

"You're younger than I am. Did you even go to college?"

"I graduated. And I got this job.

She was insistent, "You're too serious."

I tried to improvise my reaction.

"Don't I turn you on, Lenny?"

I smiled and gave her a big hug, "Monroe, you're a real women."

"That's not enough!"

I wasn't sure what enough was.

"You're in this apartment all the time. Don't you know how to have a good time?"

I answered slyly, "That would be in your apartment?"

"No, come out with us sometime."

I'd love to. I just don't want to be in the way."

Monroe went back to sitting on my counter.

"Don't you have to be at work?"

She stared into space, "I'm looking for a new job."

"How can you survive without working?"

“I’ve got money. I get by with a little help from my friends.”

“I’m sure you do!”

She stared straight at him, “Lenny, you can be a cranky little bitch sometimes.”

Her mood seemed to be quickly changing. She started rummaging through my cupboards.

“Don’t you have anything to drink here?”

“I drink it when I get it. I don’t keep anything around the house.”

She sneered, “I thought that you had some vodka.”

“You’re like a rummy!”

“I just need a little sparkle for the day. Lenny, I’ve never seen you with any girls. Are you a monk?”

She was prying.

“I’m saving myself for you.”

“You don’t think I’m too easy, do you?”

“It’s a little hard for me to ignore you with a body like that.”

She glowed, “You do notice.”

“I hate to be a dick, but I want to finish this chapter before I go to work.”

“Stop by tonight!”

I just got off a long night at Dusty’s. I was staggering around my apartment. I braced myself on the couch as I made my way for my bedroom. I was hardly prepared for what followed.

“Is it real or is it a fairy tale?”

I had locked myself in my apartment on the way in. I was sure that no one had penetrated my inner sanctum all day. But I could hear the vaguest cackle through my place. I guess I had been lucky to get out of my clothes off before I made the bed.

Man Boy seemed to be leading the party. I faded into the mirage. He wore hip-hugging bellbottoms with a snake-skin belt with a big buckle.

“Listen, mother fucker, are you ready to go mad?”

I was hardly in the mood for melodrama. Monroe was doing her own serpentine dance around the place.

“Who let you in?”

“Your brain is like a sieve. Anyone can get in here.”

“Is this what you were warning me about?”

“You are one crazy messed-up mother fucker!”

Man Boy kept asking me for the password.

“Is it *daisy-chain*?”

“How the hell should I know?”

“What was going to happen if I didn’t cough it up?”

He pushed his body into mine.

“Dude, I really love you.”

“That makes me feel good.”

He offered me friendly advice, “She’s ripe for you. You gotta’ take her while you can.”

“Sure, man.”

He high-fived me, "Right on, dude!"  
 If I didn't sit down soon, I was going to fall down.  
 "Baby, I can help you."  
 Monroe was all in my face. Man Boy was scaring me!  
 "How's your dong, boy? You don't have what they call a plumbing problem."  
 "I feel a little stuffed, but I'm cool."  
 "Cool? Call that cool! You're going to have to get naked so we can test you out."  
 He was really getting under my skin.  
 "I don't want to be tested."  
 "Monroe, check to see if it's all there."  
 I could feel myself backing into a wall.  
 Man Boy screamed, "Don't worry, girl. He's got a Moby Dick!"  
 I wasn't worried. I just wanted to get out of this maze.  
 "Lenny, this is your own doing."  
 She had Man Boy calling me Lenny too.  
 "Don't you know anything?"  
 "He's a guest. Treat him nice."  
 "I'm doing my best."  
 Man Boy was going in his own direction  
 "Pretty boy, you are a nosy busy body. You know what we do with busy bodies. We  
 make them get busy"  
 "I didn't take the mushrooms."  
 "It's in the air!"  
 "Boy, you took a wrong turn."  
 The music kept getting louder. An insistent beat on the tom.  
 "Monroe, don't just stand there helplessly!"  
 Monroe undulated around the room in a body-tight fuchsia jumpsuit.  
 "You are one hot little vixen. If Lenny doesn't help, I am going to have to show you the  
 way."  
 I felt surrounded by the deep vibrations of the guitar.  
 "Sanity is a luxury."  
 "Sure it is doll. So is sleep."  
 Man Boy chimed in, "From this point on, you own the world."  
 "I thought that everyone else did to."  
 Monroe slipped out of the body suit. Man Boy started to paint her body.  
 "I'm a cat!"  
 "I thought that you were a snake."  
 "I'm all that."  
 She made sure that she was never going to be wrong again.  
 "You do like my body, Lenny"  
 "I love your body. A fantasy body."  
 "Why don't you give me any?"  
 I told her reluctantly, "Complications."

“What are complications? Is there something wrong with me?”

“You’re perfect as far as I can see.”

I had reached this far just by staring. How far longer was the journey going to be?

“Lenny, are you ready for me?”

She caught another wave of the music. I watched as she floated around the room.

“Can you make time stand still.”

“I am time standing still.”

My eyes were again becoming heavy.

“Dude, you are so heavy. Go get her!”

“I’m just trying to get my own bearings.”

I had just one question for both of them: how close is satisfaction?

“Lenny, I’m a mind reader.”

“Monroe, you can be what you want to be. What am I thinking about right now?”

“You are thinking about me. About being with me.”

I felt as if I was dumping all my problems from work on her.

“Whatever you do, you can’t escape yourself.”

“Monroe, what do you want from me?”

“It is not about wanting. It is about being.”

I asked her, “How am I supposed to be.”

“Stare at the cheap furniture in here and tell me what you see!”

“Monroe, I need sleep. Not a class in writing.”

“You need to look at the things.”

I felt transfixed by a blank spot in space.

“You’re enough of the world for me.”

“You say that you’re a writer. But you just want to remain in your fantasy world.”

I was drifting in and out of sleep. I reached for her.

“No touching.”

“I thought that was why you were here.”

“You’re going to have to give me a lot more of yourself if you think that you’re going to get any.”

“Any what?”

“You know where this is heading!”

I couldn’t catch Monroe’s drift anymore than I could make sense of what I was doing.

“What key is this song in?”

“The key of life.”

“Here puff on this.”

I pushed her away.

“I don’t want any of that shit.”

“This is more potent Kool-Aid.”

History had produced way more wrinkles than I could ever keep track of.

I got to sleep without my two little devils saying another word. I had no idea what had prompted that phantasm.

The next time that I saw Monroe in the courtyard, I gave her a weird look.



“What was that?”

“I didn’t know that you were that funky?”

She batted her eyelashes, “Huh? I thought that I took too many drugs.

I looked back at her, “You’re not teasing me?”

She still hadn’t caught on, “Tell me what you’re talking about.”

I knew I couldn’t explain. There was really nothing to explain. Too much work, too little sleep. I was seeing things.

“Where are you off to?”

“Cheap drinks at the Dinghy.”

“Have fun?”

“You can come along?”

I wiped my brow, “Too many over the top nights already.”

“You never leave your apartment except to go to work.”

“A lot of weird shit has been going on in my apartment.”

“I always thought that you were a freak. Next time, invite me along.”

I gave her a hand signal, “Right on.”

I watched her get into a beat up Toyota. She waved as she drove by. I was sure that she was in for a night of mayhem. I needed to take it easy. By the time I reached my place, I could see her turn on Habersham. Off to the races.

A couple of days later she was hanging around my door when I got home. She was dressed in a string bikini. And she made no effort to hide her body. Modesty would never be her strong suit.

“Hello, Monroe.”

“Lenny, I’m locked out of my apartment. I can’t get my phone to work. The super ain’t in. Maybe I could hang with you while I wait for my girls to get here.

After my nasty dream, I didn’t feel safe with her alone in my place. But I consented.

“Come on in, and have a beer. How did you get locked out?”

I kept trying not to stare at her body. But her bikini bottom could barely stay in place. She kept pulling at the strap. She saw me looking.

“You want to help.”

I played innocent, “What!”

“I’ve got some suntan oil over there if you want to spread it on thick and gooey.”

“I thought that you were coming in.”

“So I am.”

She tried plopping down on my counter, but she missed her trajectory.

“I guess that I’ll take the couch. “ She spread her body along the full length of the couch. “Where’s my beer.”

“Coming right up, my dear.”

“So when are we going to hang out.”

“We are hanging out.”

“You know what I mean.”

“I’m busy a lot.”

“I see you sneaking peeks when we’re all out there sunbathing.”

I offered my advice, "The party isn't going to last forever."

"Don't I know it." She pulled on her hair. "You don't think that I'm looking old."

"Honey, you look like a million bucks."

"I love the flattery. But I'd love a little kiss."

I kissed her on the forehead.

"That wasn't what I was thinking of."

What was she really thinking about? Did she want us to get busy before her friends showed up?

"Weren't you enrolled for some classes?"

"I was. Business techniques. But this instructor started coming on to me. I have enough psychos in my life. You included, Lenny!"

"Cheap shot!"

"Sure thing. But you're not getting any younger."

"I'm still in my twenties."

"Sure you are!"

I wasn't sure about settling down with Monroe. I'd never have time to write.

"The only reason that you're a writer is that you haven't lived. Once you do some real living, you'll realize that you have nothing to say as a writer."

"I could write you love poetry."

"Roses are red, violets are blue, I want to screw, and so do you."

"Is that the beer talking?"

"No, that is this hot bod talking."

I reached over to pull her in. She motioned to kiss me, then I pushed her away.

"I shouldn't."

"Quit being a dick."

I grabbed her and started open mouthed kissing. She tasted wild and nasty. She had been baking outside all day.

"I'm sorry Monroe."

"Sorry for what. I can tell that you want it. You're a little aroused aren't you? Give you something to write about."

"You weren't?"

"Hell no. Unless you want to. We still have time to kill."

"That's what you call it?"

She didn't want to waste too much heart on anyone. I felt weird. It was all so available. No poetry like with Erin. Just raw energy.

"You live in your head too much, Lenny. Every good writer has a sensual side. That's the conflict."

"Pretty deep stuff."

"From a bimbo like me."

"That isn't what I said." I tried to backtrack.

"I read. I have ideas. I work in insurance. I know loads of things about people. What really makes them tick. Not what they say to their minister and such."

"You're the mystery, Monroe. I have no idea what you think."

After that magical day I didn't see Monroe much anymore. Her friends came and rescued her. They had the key.

Every so often, I would see this guy in a Harley pull up to her door. It seemed too much of a cliché to say anything more. I don't want to say that this was the guy that she wanted all along. I really had no idea what was going on with her life.

Occasionally, she'd be outside soaking up the sun. But her gang wasn't with her anymore. They may have had a falling out. Perhaps the guy could have driven a wedge between them.

For some reason, she didn't ever knock on my door again. I wasn't sure what to make of it. I suppose that I should have gone over there to check on her. I just let it be.

I would look over at her apartment, and I would occasionally see the light on. But she eventually quit sunbathing in front of her door. I wondered what was going on. What magical elixirs was she concocting and what were the ultimate effects on her libido.

She disappeared as suddenly as she had appeared. I started to miss her interruptions.

I kept delivering pizzas. I looked for more adventures in my life. But for the time being nothing held the appeal of Monroe. I loved how she was always over the top. She was a constant challenge. It helped break the dullness. I kept telling myself that I was a good writer. But she questioned my complacency. I probably took her for granted. And in a way, she did the same for herself. So she was willing to push up to a point. Then she let it all fade away. One day I passed by the apartment and noticed that it was vacant. She had never even said good bye.