

Self Employed

"Bye dear, drive carefully," Bernice whispered as he slipped out the door.

It had been a pleasant session and she felt good. After changing the bedding she put the kettle on to make a cup of tea. The note pad caught her eye and she glanced at the clock. Good, the next hour was free. She tuned in classical music and relaxed. It was nice to sit alone in the apartment and contemplate. Should she go to meditation class later or just veg out here? The kettle was soon boiling and she made a large mug of tea. Who was coming this afternoon she wondered and looked at the note pad. Oh yes, Michael, the professor. She went to the bookcase and got her book on comparative religion. It opened at a familiar chapter describing ancient practices that evolved into modern theology. A quick perusal of the text reminded her of the argument they had discussed during their last visit.

Bernice, or Bernie to her friends, lived above a furniture store on a busy street in a less than opulent part of the city. It was the kind of place that didn't attract attention, downscale enough that people were not nosy, an address acceptable to her clients. They would not want to be seen by people they knew professionally or socially as they parked and climbed the stairs to her door. It was perfect and discrete.

She had moved here after her husband had left. The prick had taken all their savings along with the car and whatever valuables they had accumulated. She had come home from work to an empty apartment and a note.

"Hey, Bernie," it had said, "it isn't working any more. I'm out of here. Sorry about taking our money and stuff but I need it." That's all it said. He left the bed and the fridge belonged to the place so she survived but a chill settled into her heart. It took a long time for her to comprehend the changes that were taking place in her way of thinking. Sure, her family and friends rallied around and supported her. A few men approached her for dates but they were married, in fact married to her friends. She had been brought up to believe in the sanctity of marriage even though she wasn't blind to the reality of life and relationships. She rejected these men but things happened to make her think differently about relationships.

She was having coffee one day with Marie, a woman from work. Marie was upset on the verge of tears. "Okay Marie," she said, "what's up, you don't usually look like that?"

"Frank is seeing a woman," Marie said, tears forming in her eyes.

"Anyone I know?" asked Bernie.

"I don't think so. It's not normal, I think he's paying her," Marie sobbed.

"What do you mean paying her?"

"I don't know, it's weird, he goes out on Saturday afternoon without saying where he's going and comes back a couple of hours later with a guilty look on his face. He always has an explanation but I don't believe him. I wanted to go with him last week but he got flustered and stayed home. I heard him making a cell call and he said he couldn't come today, maybe tomorrow. He looked pretty dejected after that."

"Why do you think he's paying her?"

"There have been withdrawals from the bank account, the same amount every week. What do you think is going on, Bernie?"

"How's your sex life, Marie?"

"It's pretty tame. We haven't done it much since he wanted oral sex. I couldn't do that. Uh, the idea makes me sick. That was a year ago; I think we've made love twice since then."

"Maybe he's getting what he needs outside."

"Oh, Bernie, he wouldn't. What can I do?"

They didn't come to a conclusion. Marie and her husband continued their pattern of unhappiness but Bernie began to think about things. One day, not long after, she noticed a classified ad for men interested in discrete affairs. Her life was not going well and she knew a change was urgent so she answered the ad. Much to her surprise she received a call from a woman. The woman asked for the name Bernie with a weird excuse for calling but she explained that she was Bernie and was interested in a discrete affair. The woman hesitated, Bernie persisted, and they agreed to meet.

Bernie's heart was racing as she entered the coffee shop looking for a woman in a brown jacket. What was she doing here? This is a really stupid idea. Will she actually be here? There, the third table by the window. Bernie approached. "Hi, I'm Bernie."

"Hi, I'm Louise," said a very attractive woman with a smile. Her eyes were blue and her complexion clear and fair. She rose to shake Bernie's hand displaying a slim figure under a tight wool sweater. "Please sit, would you like a coffee?"

Bernie sat and said no to the coffee. "Maybe later," she added.

The women sized each other quietly. Bernie was the first to speak. "This is new to me. I don't know what to say."

"That's okay," said Louise. "I don't often meet women this way."

"What way?" said Bernie.

"I mean I usually meet men who have answered my ad this way. I like to get to know them before we go any further."

"Do you meet many men like this?"

"I don't think I want to talk about that, let's talk about you. Why are you interested in a discrete affair? There are lots of women who you could get together with."

"I don't go in those circles and I'm interested in what you do," Bernie replied. She ordered coffee and they danced around the reason for being there without really saying anything. As they talked Bernie felt a strange and growing attraction for Louise. She was disappointed when Louise ended the meeting abruptly.

"Look, I've got to run," Louise said. "If you want to come over call me at this number. We can have a drink and see what happens. I'll be away till Friday."

Bernie watched her walk, slim hips pressing against a tailored skirt, high heels clicking on the tile. Her nipples felt alive rubbing against the soft silky fabric of her bra. What was happening to her? Was she in love with a woman?

The week dragged by. Bernie went to her job at the hospital, cleaned her home, it was furnished again, and waited till Friday. She hadn't decided yet whether or not to call but in her heart she knew she would. Friday night, she hesitated by the phone wondering what to say and finally picked it up and dialed. The voice mail answered asking for a call back number. She hung up dejected without saying anything. Half an hour later she tried again and again the voice mail answered but this time she spoke. "Hi Louise, this is Bernice, you remember, we met in the coffee shop. I'll call you later." She was perspiring. What was she doing?

Half an hour later the phone rang. She almost tripped over the sofa reaching for it. "Hello," she said meekly.

"Hello Bernice, this is Louise. How are you?"

"I, I'm fine thanks, how are you?"

"I just got back to town. Look, I'm busy tonight but if you'd like to come over tomorrow about three I'll be here. We can talk then."

Bernie wrote the address and spent a long night wondering what would happen, happy in some ways and nervous in others.

She left home an hour early to allow time to find the address on the other side of the city. She took the subway and bus rather than a taxi so it was close to three when she got off at the corner near the address. It was a strip plaza with a convenience store and a bank along with a hairdresser and some other businesses. A door beside the hairdresser had the address and she went inside. Two mailboxes and two pushbuttons greeted her. One had the name L. Knox and the other was a foreign name so she pushed L. Knox. A voice came out of a speaker, "come on up, door on the right."

Louise was waiting at the top of the stairs and ushered her inside quickly closing the door and putting on the chain. She wore a skirt and sweater, matching beige, soft

leather slippers on bare feet. Her brown hair hung loosely at her shoulders framing her round face. She smiled, "would you like some tea?"

Bernice felt herself melt before this woman but managed to say yes.

"Do you like my place? Let me show you around. It's not big but it's enough for me."

"You live alone?"

"Of course, I'm away a lot. I work for an airline and fly overseas three or four times a month. No one could live with me. I also meet my clients here for consultation."

"What do you consult in?"

"Personal problems, I provide a kind of therapy. It helps pay the bills. By the way, you don't work in the travel business do you?"

"No, I'm a hospital administrator. Can you help with my problems?"

"I hoped you would say that but I usually charge two hundred an hour. I don't know how much to charge a woman. You're my first female client."

"Oh, how do you do this consulting if you don't mind my asking?" Bernie wanted to know more about it.

"First, what's your problem, why are you seeking a discrete affair?"

Bernice didn't quite know what to answer so she said, "Look, I'll pay your fee, show me what you do."

"Okay, put it in the envelope and come into the bedroom." She gave Bernice an envelope and left the room. Bernice counted out the money and followed her.

The bed was wide and looked comfortable. The room smelled of sandal wood, the lights were low. Louise was looking in a mirror on the far wall. "My clients usually hang their clothes on the rack there," she said. "If you wish, do the same and lie on the bed."

Bernice flushed but slipped out of her dress, unfastened her bra and was pulling her panties over her knees when Louise turned around moving out of the shadows. Her skin glowed in the pale light, her breasts stood out, her nipples were hard. She was shaved clean where her long legs joined her body. Bernice gasped and fell on the bed shaking, kicking the panties to the floor.

Louise came to her, "call me Lou, dear," she said softly. "I loved a woman once. She looked like you." She kissed Bernice on the lips and then began to suckle her breasts. Bernice moaned and arched her back as tension mounted. She felt long fingers probing between her legs and with a sigh opened them to the soft caress that followed. The hour flew by and an exhausted Bernice rolled out of bed into the shower.

"Was it worth the money?" Lou asked as they drink more tea.

"You are marvelous," said Bernice. "Do you have many clients?"

"I don't want to answer that but I think I provide a service. It's true, there are a lot of men who need me.

"Could you help me get into the business?" Bernice asked breathlessly.

"If that is what you wish, there's room for competition. One thing, dear, I want you for myself, no other women clients for either of us."

"That's a deal," Bernice said smiling. "I think I fell in love with you the minute I saw you."

"I knew you were special. Let's go out for dinner, on me."

The door bell rang bringing her back to reality. Louise was away for a few days and it was back to business. She pressed the intercom knowing full well who would be there but in this business caution is necessary. "Who's there?"

"It's Michael."

"Okay, come on up."

Michael, tall, well groomed, a striking man in his late forties, his craggy face and graying hair giving him an air of gentleness but also power and confidence. Bernice liked him a lot as a client but also as a sex partner because he tried to give as well as receive.

"Sit down, Michael, the kettles on. Would you like a cup of tea?"

"Sure, thanks. You're looking as beautiful as ever, Bernie, I've been anxious to seeing you again."

"It's been quite awhile, have you been away?"

"Yes, I took Cathy on a vacation to Barbados. We were there for two weeks and then went sailing for a week with some friends."

"How are things with you and Cathy?" she asked.

"Oh, about the same, she's fun on vacation but still is not great in bed. Maybe you've spoiled me."

"I hope so. I really like it when you come here.

"Do you miss me?" he asked with a hint of longing. "We could run away together."

"Yes, dear, I miss you and no, we can't run away together. You have an important job at the University."

"Just wishful thinking, my love. Cathy would take me to the cleaners and the kids wouldn't speak to me again."

"Probably, would you like to go into the bedroom?"

"Yes, let's do more interesting things."

He put his envelope on the table and followed her into the bedroom. She went to her closet and began to disrobe. He stood by the door watching.

“What are you doing Michael? Take those clothes off and get into bed.”

“I like to watch you undress. It’s like a strip tease but nicer.” He took off his shoes and then his pants hanging them carefully on the rack. In a few minutes he was in bed and she came to him, her breasts hanging like golden fruit. She swished them over his face and lingered above his mouth as he nibbled and sucked her nipples.

“Umm, that’s nice,” she said and gently rubbed his nipples feeling them stiffen. She kissed each of them warmly and reached between his legs stroking his hard penis softly. “I think you’re ready, dear. What would you like to do first?”

“I want a taste of you. You know how I love your sweet juice.”

They made love gently, each finding satisfaction in the body of the other and finally he drove himself deep into her warm, wet pussy. She arched her body and wrapped her legs around his back as he reached deeper. They roiled in ecstasy until she felt him tighten and disgorge whereupon she let herself go and they came together in a sunburst of sensation and joy.

Wrapped together their bodies relaxed. He kissed her gently on the lips. “Are you sure you don’t want to run away with me?”

“It’s tempting,” she said squeezing him. “We’d better get up, I’ll make some tea. Go and have your shower.”

Michael promised to call her soon as she closed the door listening to his footsteps on the stairs. Yes, she loved him in a way and it would be nice to go with him but it wouldn’t work. He was a socialite professor at the University married to a lovely woman from a wealthy family. Why, she wondered, did so many clients like him come to her in search of physical love? It didn’t seem right but then her only relationship with a male had been unsuccessful. Thank goodness Louise had come into her life. She could give herself to Louise body and soul and not be afraid that something could come between them.

She just finished making the bed when the phone rang. Who could that be she thought; she wasn’t expecting anyone to call? She let the answering machine take it.

“Hi, Bernie, if you’re there please pick up, it’s me, Stan. I need to talk to you. Please.”

Stan always came on short notice. He was her first client and that was five years ago. Louise had shared the package of replies she’d received from her advertisement in the paper, the same one that she had answered and that had brought them together. There were a dozen letters that looked interesting. Louise helped her to parse out the

nuances that the men used when they described themselves and what they wanted. It was as if there was a universal code to say one thing and mean another.

Together they called the reply phone number which usually was a business. Sometimes they got the answering machine. Louise didn't like leaving a call back number but she did it after several tries to get the person directly. When the contact was made they usually played a game in which both parties skated around the subject not knowing what to say. There was always the possibility that the police would pose as a client to make a bust or get free sex, usually the later. In the end they would make an appointment to meet at the coffee shop a few days later. This time Louise told Bernice what to say and promised to watch from another booth.

Bernice could feel her heart pounding as she waited for the man to appear. She was nervous and embarrassed and was sure it would show. She wouldn't ever get used to doing this and could never be cool like Louise. A man approached the booth. He looked nervous and she figured he was the one. She smiled and nodded. He came over.

"Are you Bernice?" he said.

"Yes, you must be Stan, sit down."

He was dressed casually for the weather, medium height, a little heavy, clean shaven and unprepossessing. She made a judgment that he was a square guy, not likely a pervert.

"It's nice to meet you in person, Stan, I had a hard time to get you on the phone."

"I'm sorry, I had people around all the time. It was hard to talk privately in our office. You look very nice. I'm glad you are so pretty."

"Thank you, sir," she said coyly. "Would you like to order?"

"No, I'll just have some coffee."

They chatted and Bernice learned Stan was married, had three kids, was a manager in a large parts distributorship and was lonely for female affection. His wife, busy with the children and her own job had little time for him. This was a story she would hear many more times as she met potential clients.

"Stan, I have to be honest," she said finally. "I like you but we cannot be social friends. This is business for me. Do you understand?"

"I've never thought of a girl friend for money."

She was surprised but said, "Believe me, this is the best way for a married man to get what he needs and keep his marriage. It takes the pressure off your wife even though she won't know why. Maybe she'll become curious and interested in you again sexually. Stranger things have happened." These thoughts came out of her almost as a surprise. She wasn't sure they were true. Did she believe what she said?

He looked at her, his eyes wide, "Maybe you're right," he said. "I'll think about it."

"Call me at this number if you want to come over," she said.

During the next three weeks she met nine men. One was obese and she couldn't visualize being with him for any amount of money. One looked like a cop, another like a hood, but she gave her number to six. She wasn't sure how many would call but eventually they all became regulars. Louise was thrilled that she had established a client list so quickly but now it was time to find a new apartment. The search took several months and in the meantime Louise offered her place when she was away. It worked out very well.

The next hurdle was to actually entertain someone. Stan was the first to call. She nearly lost her nerve talking to him on the phone but she sensed he was nervous too. A time was agreed after her work finished the next day. She had to hurry to the apartment and make sure it was tidy, have a quick shower and find appropriate clothes. One of Louise's camisoles seemed appropriate. The doorbell rang, she answered and told him to come up, her heart pounding.

"Hello Stan, it's good to see you again, please come in."

"I hope I'm not late," he said. "I wouldn't want to be late."

"No, you're fine. Take your jacket off and sit down a minute. How are you?"

They spared around with small talk and she knew she had to take the initiative. "The bedroom's in there with a bathroom. Here's an envelope, put the money inside and take a shower. I'll be in the bedroom."

That wasn't too hard. He did what he was told and in a few minutes was in the bedroom with a towel. She came to him, put her arms around him and kissed him pushing him gently onto the bed. His towel came away and he was ready for sex. She slipped out of her camisole and lay with him stroking his erection slowly.

"Is there anything you would like in particular," she asked.

He was timid in his approach to sex. The missionary position was fine and she was happy to let him have it his way. He pumped as she thought about ways that could have been more interesting and was surprised when he collapsed beside her panting.

"Are you okay dear?" she asked. "Lie here for a few minutes while I put the kettle on."

"I'm fine," he said.

They shared tea and talked before he left. The ice was broken, she felt better and he was locked in as a client. He asked about coming back the next day. It was so easy she thought.

She was always nervous the first time with a new client. They were not all easily satisfied like Stan. There was Robert, middle aged, a physical fitness guy, who liked oral sex and had a long hard tongue. He made her squirm when he stuck it in her pussy. Surprisingly she liked the feel of his cock in her mouth. He didn't call as often as she would have liked but a tall, skinny man named Gil came about once a week. He wanted to fuck her anally. She refused until she realized his penis was long and thin and he needed a tight orifice. They negotiated a protocol. He would lubricate his penis and put lots of Vaseline on her before they started. It was painful until he slipped past her sphincter and then she really didn't feel anything until he was finished.

Louise was her real love. They spent every minute they could together either in one place or the other. She kept her job at the hospital because while they made good money with the men they knew it couldn't last forever. She had developed a strong feeling for Michael that she couldn't shake off. His tender maleness made her feel safe and protected in a way that Louise didn't. It was easy to dream of him but she was realistic enough to not focus on him. The women seldom spoke about their clients except when something unusual or funny happened. Then they would compare notes and laugh at their stories. Bernice told Louise that Michael wanted her to run away with him and she saw a flicker of panic in her eyes. Bernice laughed at the idea saying it was a joke between them but it didn't hide her dreams. Did Louise sense the feeling she had for this man?

The women continued their working careers and their self employment in the evening and on week ends. Occasionally one of the clients disappeared and they would advertise for replacements but in general it was a good life. They had each other for company with enough money to enjoy the better things in life. They loved to travel and thanks to Louise's connections in the airline industry went to exotic and interesting places. Bernice became interested in Mayan culture while Louise was more adventurous and liked to scuba dive and climb mountains.

Michael hadn't called for an unusually long time. Bernice still felt kind of proprietary towards him and often day dreamed of visiting the Andes with him to explore the ancient Mayan cities. She debated calling him and finally did make the call.

"Hello, Michael, it's Bernice."

Silence, then, "Oh, hello Bernice, how are you?"

"I'm fine, how about you, I haven't heard from you for months. Are you travelling?"

"Yes and no, I've been busy."

"Are you going to come over sometime? I've missed you."

"No Bernice, I won't be seeing you again, I've found a woman and I've fallen in love. I can't come over. It wouldn't be right."

Bernice felt a blow in her stomach. "What about your wife, are you leaving her?" she said unsteadily.

"She's a problem, we'll see what happens but for now I'm very happy with Carla."

"You could have told me sooner. I keep time in my schedule for you, you always have first choice," she said trying hard to keep control.

"You've been very good to me and I loved how you made me feel."

"Good bye Michael." She hung up, tears welling in her eyes. Son of a bitch, she mouthed half out loud.

Louise arrived an hour later and found Bernice sitting in the dark, smoking a cigarette, crying quietly. "Honey, what's the matter, you look a mess," she said turning on the lights.

"Oh, Louise, I feel dirty."

"Dirty, what do you mean dirty, why are you crying?"

"I don't want to talk about it. Is there any vodka in the cupboard?"

"I'll get you vodka but you better tell me what happened. Now!"

"The vodka first, I need a stiff one, straight up, no vermouth."

Louise produced the vodka and poured two shots. They each took a sip, choked, and then hugged.

"Okay, honey, tell me what happened."

"It's my fault I guess. I broke the first rule you taught me and fell for a client. You remember Michael?"

"Him, yes, I remember Michael, I never did like him or rather what you were feeling for him."

"He hasn't been around for a long time so I called him to see if he's okay."

"Rule two, darling, don't chase the clients."

"I know, but I really missed him. He told me he has a new girl he loves and won't come to see me anymore." She took a long sip of her vodka.

"Is he leaving his wife?" asked Louise.

"I don't think so. I asked him and he said it would work itself out or something like that."

"He's a real prick. His wife will fix him but good when this gets out and it will."

"He made me feel like dirt. He used me for his pleasure but teased me into thinking I meant something to him."

"Honey, you know I love you more than life but I got to tell you all these guys use us as much as we use them. It's a fair trade as long as it's business. You're not dirty, you're beautiful. Come here, I want to kiss you."

"I don't think I can do it anymore, Louise. I'm finished."

"Maybe you are dear, there's no need to keep on. We can become a normal couple, maybe get married, adopt a kid or something if you like."

"I love you Louise. Shit, I have an appointment at nine o'clock. I can't do it."

"Yes, you can and you will but afterward you and I'll get pissy assed drunk and fuck our heads off. Deal?"

"Deal."