

Ch.16 -- Meeting and Having Dinner with Jessica's Mom

We got downstairs and I figured I'd have to hail a cab on such short notice, but we walked out of the lobby and there was Sandy and the limo standing there with a big grin on her face.

"Sandy," I said, "¿Qué Pasa, mi amiga?"

"Nada Señor Roberto," she shot back without hesitation. "¿y usted?"

"Bien, Gracias," I replied. "¡Vamos al restaurante!"

Sandy smiled and said, "Necesitamos hacer una parada"

"¡No hay problema! Vamos."

The girls were looking at us both a bit surprised that we were speaking Spanish to each other. All three of the girls were very fluent in Spanish. Hailey was also good in German, Arabic, Japanese, and Russian, fair in French with a decent background and was also fluent in Mandarin and a couple other Chinese dialects. Very little grass was growing under Hailey's feet.

Sandy just chuckled as she opened the door for us. We got in and started hooking our belts, when Sandy got in the front seat and said, "I've got some bad news guys."

Everything got silent in the back seat.

"What's up Sweetie?" I asked hesitantly.

"I can't get any time off for the 10 days of the show, but I get 2 weeks to a month starting on the Wednesday of the week following. I figured I'd take a week or so and save the other days for other times so we can spread it all out."

"That sounds reasonable Sandy. Are you going to come up to visit us during your time off?" I asked with a grin.

"No Bobby," to groans from the girls. "I thought I'd sit in my house alone and play with myself. That'll be a whole lot of fun."

I was laughing and the girls kicked in too once they realized what she'd said.

"I can't get the time off, but I'm at your disposal while you're in town... go figure."

"It's ok Sandy. We can just do whatever we want when you're there. I think it's just the dickweed fucking with you. He knows you 'want' the time, so he'll give it to you when it's not quite as opportune. We'll fix is little red wagon, Sweetie. It's only a matter of time."

"Oh hell Bob, you know I don't need any 'Special Night'. It was a wonderful thought and I appreciate it girls, but it's really not necessary. Just standard run of the mill, down and dirty sex is fine for me," she laughed!

"Ming Cho Hua, Mel?" Sandy asked.

"That's the one Sandy, thanks."

So we all settled in for the short trip to the Chinese restaurant that had been chosen for this evening's dining. The girls looked really good. They weren't wearing their fancy formal dresses, but each had on a reasonable skirt with a matching top. I guess it was the fact we were having dinner with Jessie's mom that kept the dress code a bit more on the conservative side even though they all knew her well.

Hell. I didn't even know they had those kinds of clothes.

I noticed we were in a residential area and finally stopped outside of a fairly nice home in the 'burbs. Sandy got out and went up to knock on the door.

I noticed the girls, especially Jess, were a bit nervous. Using my powerful male observational skills,

I figured out that Mel had arranged for Sandy to pick up Jess's mother as well.

How astute Bob, I told myself as Sandy walked back to the limo and opened the back door for a very fine looking woman.

She got in and sat down next to Jess and leaned over and gave her a peck on the cheek, and said hello to Mel and Hail, then Jessica made the "formal" introductions.

"Mom, this is Bobby, the man we talked about this afternoon," She looked at me and nodded a cordial hello. "Bobby this is my Mom, Liz."

I held out my hand to shake hers, "It's a pleasure to meet you Liz."

She took my hand as a woman would and due to the confined space I couldn't kiss it like I would have normally, but then there is the breaks!

Liz was pretty much a slightly older version of Jessica, her hair the same blondish, eyes that incredible blue. In the outfit she was wearing I couldn't tell anything else at this point other than her breasts were at least twice the size of Jessie's. Humongous! Her frame was fairly small so I'm sure she'd look a bit less top-heavy when we got out at the restaurant.

She and the girls made chit chat on the rest of the drive, and I answered and participated when asked. I was a bit nervous to be honest.

Sandy would have died laughing if she could have seen me. I was going to have to buck up before I got out at the restaurant to keep her from giving me shit. She might anyway because I'm sure she had talked to Mel and knew the deal. She's probably chuckling anyway.

When we arrived in front, Sandy parked and did her usual thing and as the girls waited patiently I paid Sandy giving her the usual obnoxious tip that she never wanted but wouldn't make a scene over and as usual asked her how much notice she'd need to come pick us up. She said the usual 15 minutes, and I told her we'd try to be out before 11 so that she'd have

some time to get some rest before having to work in the morning.

As I started to turn away Sandy looked into my eyes and with a chuckle said very quietly, "Don't be so uptight and nervous Pops! Mom's cool with things, she just doesn't know you well enough to know how things will shake down. Just be cool!"

I looked into Sandy's eyes, which were dancing and sparkling. Busted, I thought to myself. "Thanks, Baby. I appreciate that."

So I turned and we all walked into the restaurant with Liz in the lead arm in arm with Jessica. I had the other two on my arms so I'm sure it was quite a spectacle for the other diners who were mostly Chinese.

When I looked around the place, I noted that we were the only non-Asian people in the place. That could only mean one thing. Great food!

Mel had requested a private booth away from the main tables because she told them we were celebrating and didn't want to disturb the rest of their customers.

The elderly Chinese woman that seated us was appreciative of the consideration. We all slid into the booth while the woman sent over a server to take drink orders.

Liz sat first followed by Jessica, then me, then Hailey. Mel slid in the other side so she was next to Liz as well. It was obvious they were close friends, which is probably the reason Mel had gone with Jessica to tell mom about her "Problem".

I ordered up my usual lemonade and Liz got a double something or other, the girls asked me if they could have a glass of wine, which raised an eyebrow to my left. I asked Jess specifically what she wanted, and she said she'd like some tea, but would like a little wine with the dinner if it were okay. I looked at the other girls and they nodded their heads, and Mel spoke up, "Sounds good to me Bobby. I'd prefer the wine with the food."

The waitress left to get our drink orders without question and I think Liz was a bit taken aback that

I'd allow the girls to partake.

I noted the look and made sure to tell the server that the girls were only to have half a glass each with dinner, which they accepted readily. She nodded, smiled and started to take our food order. I think Hailey was the only one at the table who understood some of the items - I did too, but I let Hailey practice.

In perfect Mandarin, she placed the food order having a short conversation with the waitress who was obviously Chinese from the old country. English was a struggle for her and it was apparent she was not only surprised but also very appreciative to be able to "work" in her native tongue.

Liz gave Hailey a surprised look, and Hail just shrugged her shoulders and said, "It's one of the languages I've been taking in College. China is becoming a world economic factor so it will be nice to be able to fit in with that inevitability."

"Oh that's right. I'd forgotten you have been taking College courses for a few years Hailey. How's that going?"

"It's going okay. I wish I didn't have to go to the High School classes because they are soooooo boring and for me such a waste of time, but I have to have the units to graduate and they won't let me challenge the last semester."

"Why not?" Liz asked quizzically.

"Something about attendance and money. If I don't go to their stupid classes, they don't get attendance money from the state."

"I'll see what I can do about that Sweetie. Let's talk before it starts again."

"Well," she started very hesitatingly, "I may not finish down here anyway."

Liz looked at her with curiosity, "Why not honey?"

"Well, depending on what my parents do when they get back, I may go to live with Bobby."

"So you won't finish?" Liz asked with some obvious displeasure.

"Oh no, 'Mom'. I'll finish. Bobby has said that there'll be no skating and that education is the most important job we have at this point in our lives, so he's going to make both Mel and me finish, but there really isn't any need because I'll be a junior in college next semester."

"Janet's going to let you go live with him too, Honey?" she asked Mel.

Mel nodded her head, "Mom said if it's what I want to do she won't say no because she knows Bobby, knows he loves us and that he'll make us tow the line."

I interjected at this point, "Liz, nothing has been decided yet. Both Mel and Hailey have expressed interest in coming to live up north with me, but I assure you that if that does in fact happen, they **WILL** be finishing school and will be encouraged at all levels to continue on to college. Hailey has already sent her application to Stanford and her grades are good enough, so we're hoping that she'll have the opportunity to attend.

Liz kind of sat with her mouth open at that point, "You can afford Stanford?" She asked looking at Hailey.

"Well not completely, but Bobby said he'd pay for our education as long as we focused on school and got good grades. I plan on getting a PhD," she announced proudly.

Liz looked at me, "And you'll pay for all of this schooling for them?"

"Absolutely," I said emphatically. "Again, education is the most important thing we can do for our kids, and I want you to know that the same offer goes to Jessica. They will receive a "full ride" Bobby scholarship to ANY school they qualify for and are accepted to. Major is their choice. I'm not going to dictate anything other than they have to maintain grades at C or better. The worst thing I could do is telling them they have to do this or that."

I finished the thought with, "No. I want them to find something they love, something they have passion for and become the best at it."

"Jessica, did you know about this?" She asked Jess.

"Well, I knew the offer was on the table, and I knew Hailey was going to jump all over it." Then looking at Hailey, "Hell, Hailey loves school and learning new stuff." Then turning back to her mother, "I'm not sure about Mel, but she's so smart with computers and setting up business stuff - you should see what she's already done for Bobby's business."

I just nodded my head at that one.

"I never thought about college Mom. I knew we couldn't afford it and I know my grades aren't the best, but I have a little time to bring them up and I can go to a community college to qualify to a good four year school."

"Jess, if you go to a community college first your grades in high school won't count for all that much, I told her. "You'll have to do pretty much straight "A's" in the community college to get into a really good four-year school."

"Honestly, I'd like to see you start college now just like Hailey has, Mel too, but I haven't talked to her about it yet. I also think you're smart enough to challenge most of those few classes you have left and graduate this year. And you know Mel and Hail will support and help you through, and so will I as much as I can."

Liz was starting to show a few tears at this point because I was putting something on the table that she never had and had wanted so badly for Jessica, but knew she could never provide it adequately...and now it was being offered on a silver platter.

"I don't know what to say," she choked out.

"You don't have to say anything Liz. Look, I have the means and it's one of those things, that for me, is more important than any amount of dollars." Then forgetting myself, "Shit, it's only money."

Liz leaned into Jess and hugged her tightly with tears running down her face, "Oh Baby, that has been my dream for you all my life. I just knew that with our situation I couldn't provide it for you adequately. I'm totally speechless."

"I see incredible potential in these 3 young ladies Liz. They are very exceptionally smart women!

"Mel and Jessica are so logical, number oriented, business smart. Mel has, in the space of a month, completely automated my inventory and sales tracking systems. I used to do it on paper or 3x5 cards.

"By the end of the first show, on her own laptop, she was already tracking sales at the level she could tell me how much we'd taken in that day, what products had sold, in what numbers and sizes so that I could plan my replenishment for this show. It's insane!"

Liz just smiled, "I saw the bonus and paycheck you gave to Jess from the first show, Bob. That was awfully generous."

I chuckled and told her, "These three girls increased my sales immeasurably that first show. Yes they did it by wearing skimpy sexy outfits and wiggling their butts around. Any adult will tell you that sex sells.

"Believe me, I'm not above using that as long as the women I ask are willing on their own. Sexist? Yes, so sue me! I don't believe it's "exploitation" of the women either - they know what they're doing, they know their assets and the know how to use them. I'm not forcing anyone to do anything.

"If they had objected, and wanted to wear jeans and a T-Shirt, that's what they would have been wearing. They know it, and they also know the limits they are allowed. I provide them with 'Uniforms'..."

"I've seen those uniforms," Liz snorted with a grin.

"Listen, when I go to a 10 day show like last time, I'm lucky if I make twenty five or thirty thousand, but I don't do it for the money. Hell, I certainly don't need the money. I do it because I love doing the

artwork and the printing. The first show this year... "

Then taking a deep breath, I took a sip of my drink and said, "Let me take a step back for a moment... "

"I'll start at the beginning," I said. "I told the girls that I'd pay them \$100 a day for their work. I had a huge suite at the Marriott, just like this time, so it was no big deal if they stayed so they were close to the show. I did **NOT** expect Janet to drop Mel in my lap with permission to do anything she or I wanted. Trust me that was a total mind-fuck for me..."

Sheepishly I said, "Sorry..."

Liz just smiled at my exuberant outburst.

"I also told Mel and Hailey that depending on their contribution and our income I'd give them one half of one percent up to one percent of the take. Liz, with these girls working for me, we grossed out at nearly five hundred thousand dollars! We made my normal 10 day income in one day."

Liz's mouth dropped to the table and said, "You're kidding?"

"No, I'm not kidding. Because Mel and Hailey were at the show all 10 days, I gave them a full one percent, which was five thousand. Jess got a bit less because she was only there for 5 days out of the 10. Since she plans on working the whole show this time she'll get a full share."

"But Bob, don't you think that's obscene money at their age for the actual work? It was more fun to them than a 'job'"

"Perhaps it is, but in my mind they earned every cent."

"It's supposed to be fun, Liz. I have always had a saying for business or work. 'If you're not having fun doing what you're doing, find something else to do.' Life is too short to be doing something you hate."

"Yes, I agree," she nodded.

"The deal is the same for this show and with Mel's organization of things, our ability to replenish our stock of inventory, I would estimate that we could do seven fifty this show - maybe more, it's a bigger venue, so don't be too surprised if Jess shows up with seventy five hundred or more plus salary in her hands.

"Oh, and just so it's clear, that money is theirs to do as they wish. They are not expected to use any of it for education, that's covered one hundred percent. I hope they'll invest it wisely, and I will help with that if they ask, so that when they get a bit older... well you know what I'm saying."

Then remembering I hadn't finished, "Oh, and the potential I see in Hailey? She tells me she's going to do a dual major in her undergraduate work, psychology and philosophy. Once she has her Masters in those two she said she'll have to decide on which to pursue a PhD. I have no problem if it's both to be honest, but as I said, I'm in for the long haul."

About this time the waitress rolled up with a cart full of our dinner. She just started rattling off to Hailey what everything was and put it all on the large lazy-susan in the middle of the table, bowed and took the cart away.

Hailey chuckled a little, "She brought a lot more than I ordered, but she said it was okay because I spoke Chinese with her the cook wanted to give us some treats."

Mel, Jessica and Liz looked at her with worried questioning eyes. I just dug in, didn't matter what it was after things I'd eaten overseas.

"It's all okay," Hailey chuckled, "There's no dog or cat or monkey brains or any of that stuff. It's just chicken, shrimp, scallops...over there with the pancakes is Mongolian beef, and that's twice cooked pork over there," pointing to dishes as she went.

My plate was full and my chopsticks flashing before she had finished describing it for the ladies at the table. I already knew what it was because I understood what the waitress was telling Hailey.

Mel couldn't help herself and had to ask, "Bobby,

you don't even know what some of that shit is. Oops, sorry Liz," who just chuckled, "you loaded up your plate like there's no tomorrow."

"You never know Sweetie, there may not be!" This got me some strange looks.

"I know there is nothing at this table that can be as bad as some of the things I've eaten in my life - health regulations wouldn't allow it - so it's not a big deal."

Which elicited some even stranger looks, a couple scrunched noses on Jessica and Mel, and a quiet "ewwww" from Mel.

"Look," I said putting my chopsticks down for a moment. "You have to live every day like it's your last because you never know when it will be. You could leave here tonight and get run over by a bus."

"The Buddhists have a saying, 'the process of your death begins at your birth. So enjoy life!' and I couldn't agree more."

"But..."

"Life is precious, Mel. Ask any man or woman who has been in combat, or seen the results in hospitals or morgues. They'll tell you how easily it can be taken, and how for them each day is a gift." Then looking right into her eyes, I added softly, "Mel, each and every day is a gift."

"Yeah, I know Honey. We've seen the scars," she said with a bit of a sarcastic voice, but then slapped her hand to her mouth and her eyes grew huge, "Oh god, I'm so sorry, Bobby. I didn't mean that the way it sounded."

"I know Mel, don't worry about it." I smiled at her because I knew she didn't mean it the way it sounded. Had I said the same thing directly to Hailey, she would have smiled and nodded her head. Therein is one of the differences between two of the women I love so dearly.

Liz looked at me quizzically, but didn't say anything. I could tell that the comment about the

scars had peaked her curiosity.

We continued to sample our dinner options. It seemed like everyone was happy with all the offerings.

"You've been very busy I hear," Jessie's mother put on the table.

Looking at her boldly knowing what she was alluding to, I gave her an honest answer. "Yes. Yes I have." Then took another quick bite of something with my chopsticks.

The look of shock on her face was priceless as I'm sure she expected me to hem and haw and try to play silly games to dance around the subject. Most guys probably would have done just that.

I wasn't going to play games or dance around the subject, "Liz. I tried everything I could to discourage them..."

"I heard about that too," she interrupted.

"There was nothing happening that they didn't demand and actively make happen. I gave them every negative that I could think of including the possibility of pregnancy. None of them cared about that. Mel and Hailey have now done something about it, but Hailey's first night was unprotected, as was Jessie's. I tried to give them every reason they shouldn't be doing this, but they continued on, and in the end, I am a man."

"Yes. I've noticed." she commented with a wry smile.

"Liz, men are pigs. It's in our wiring, we're born with it, we don't learn it."

"Yes. I heard about that as well. You said those very words to Melinda's mother before you showed her a good time."

I started to say something but she didn't give me a chance to get a word in edgewise.

"Bob, I know Janet pretty well. I know how she feels about men and why. She would not bed down with

ANY man as far as I knew, but she said after talking to you before and Melinda after, she couldn't wait to get you in the sack. All I can say is that after talking to her, you must be quite a man."

I blushed a bit at that, but she continued, "Melinda also mentioned that there are some things that none of us will ever know about you. Something having to do with your past."

I looked over at Mel with a frown, but then realized that she had asked about that in one of her question sessions, and I had given her ground rules that I know she would never stretch.

"Yes. That's true. There are things I did in the service that are highly classified, and I take my responsibility very seriously."

"I'm happy to hear you say that Bob, because there are too many loose lips out there trying to second guess anything and everything that goes on. I know a few others like you. I find it's the calm silent ones that everyone should pay attention to, not the willy-nilly flapping gums that seem to pervade everywhere."

"Thank you for understanding, Liz. I have to admit that it took me a bit more convincing when I talked to Mel and Hailey. Jess has not been given, nor will she get that briefing because I think that Mel and Hail have already taken care of the issue."

"Is that part of the story of the scars Bob?"

When I looked at her I could see that she knew the question had hurt a little, and her eyes were recognizing of that and apologizing.

I just nodded my head, and got a faraway look in my eyes. I could see that Liz felt badly about taking me to that place, but what was done was done...

Jessi looked at me, "I haven't heard nothing about nothing. What the heck are you all talking about?"

"Nor will you honey," Liz nearly snapped at her daughter. "Just let it lay there and don't worry yourself about it. There are a lot of men and women like Bob out there doing what needs to be done, behind

the scenes without receiving credit, nor wanting any for that matter, for things you don't even want to know are happening. Believe me, Honey. There are a lot of things going on in this world you don't **EVEN** want to know about."

I just nodded my head and fortunately Mel and Hailey just looked "dumb".

Jessi gave a quick pout, but said she understood and wouldn't bug me about it for which I thanked her.

"Bob, Jessica tells me that she isn't ready to join you and the girls yet."

"Yes. That's my understanding as well, but that doesn't mean I have any intention of abandoning her or the baby."

That brought an appreciative smile to Liz's face, and I continued, "Truth be known I'm absolutely ecstatic over the whole thing."

With that I got an odd look from her, "What? That she's not going to join all of you?"

"Oh no, no, no. I'd love to have her join us, and hopefully when she's ready she will. She just wants to find a man that she won't have to share, and I understand that. I think since that's what she wants, that's what's best for her...and the baby by the way."

That brought another odd look from Jessica's mother.

"Liz, my biggest concern is that the baby has the proper influences in his or her life. Jess knows she is free to choose anyone she wants as long as the baby is taken care of, and that I can have some visitation. I accept my responsibility to the baby as well, and I can assure you that neither Jess nor the baby will ever want for anything if I can help it."

Jessi looked at me with tears in her eyes. It killed me to see her cry.

"Bobby, you are our baby's father. That will never ever change. Any man that I'll allow in my life will have to meet my standards and expectations. He has to

be like you."

Liz kind of snorted at that and said, "You might as well move in now, Honey. You're never going to find another one like this one."

I looked at her totally astonished.

She saw the look on my face and started to laugh out loud drawing everyone's attention. "Bob, if you're half the man that Janet and her daughter profess you to be, Jessi will never find another man to meet those standards. I haven't talked to Hailey directly yet, but from what I can see here at the table I wouldn't find Hailey arguing too strenuously either."

Hailey just took my arm, leaned in to me, and with a huge smile squeezed me tighter.

"I think I have a pretty good handle on the whole thing, Bob, and I have to admit when Jess and Melinda first sat me down to tell me that Jess was going to have a baby, I wasn't very pleased."

"I can understand that," I said firmly.

"It took them a few hours to convince me that I really needed to meet you, talk to you and sense what you're about. Mel also asked Janet to come over to help them. I guess it was kind of 'Gang up on Liz', but they did what they felt they had to do. I also think they were right. I am very positive about Jessica's choice except for your age, but my former husband, Jessie's father was sixteen years older than I am, so I guess I can't be overly judgmental."

Jessica's jaw dropped to the table, "Mom. I didn't know daddy was that much older than you. Wow..."

"Oh come on Jess. Think about it. I'm just 32 and you're what??"

"Just about eighteen."

"Do the math!!"

Then looking directly into my eyes, "Yes Sweetie, he was kind, gentle, passionate, and caring. Everything you've told me Bob is for you, Mel and

Hailey. I don't know how this 'shared' relationship will work out, but as long as you are all happy that's what matters."

Since she was looking at me directly I figured I'd ask, so I asked softly, "What happened, if I might ask?"

She got a faraway look in her eyes then they suddenly got black and cold, "He got greedy. Fell in with the wrong bunch of people and he started to siphon our security for his hair brained schemes. So after warning him, I divorced him when he wouldn't listen."

"I'm sorry..."

"So am I, Bob. So am I."

"He is a wonderful man, but he doesn't know when he is being used, or when he is out of his league. Ego ran the show, and it didn't matter what the brain was saying, ego won out."

"Now he's nothing more than a common drunk. He's still a decent man, still has a decent job making decent money, but it is all squandered away in pursuit of stupidity. 'His people' found an easy mark and they're still milking him, and he's too blinded by ego to see through the mess."

Totally switching gears on us, as some women are wont to do, "I can see Jessi is loved Bob. I mean truly loved. Not only by you, but by Hailey and Melinda as well...and that makes me very happy."

"Thanks Mom, I'm also loved by you too," Jessie said with a teary smile.

"Oh Jess. I'll always love you. I'm going to miss you, but I may as well make my announcement. I wasn't sure how I was going to bring it out, but, Jess honey, I've found a man that I think I'm in love with."

Jessica's eyes got as big as saucers and she started to squeal with excitement. "Oh shit, Mommy. That's fantastic." She covered her mouth knowing she'd uttered one of the "verbotten wörter".

Liz just smiled at her, nodded her head as Jessi slid over in the booth to strongly hug her mother.

"Oh mom, I'm so happy for you. It's been sooooo long since daddy's been gone."

Then she pulled her face back and tearfully said to her mother, "I'm soooo happy for you mommy, I was so afraid that my baby was going to drive us apart, and I know that we've only had each other for so long. I was so scared that you'd be disappointed in me."

"It's okay, Baby," she said softly, stroking through her daughters hair, "There is nothing that could ever drive us apart. I have to admit to being very surprised at your being pregnant, but I'm certainly not disappointed, especially now that I've met the father. Honey, you couldn't have made a better choice, and I honestly think you should seriously consider changing your mind about joining Mel and Hailey with him."

She looked up and smiled at all of us finishing, "The three of you are going to kill this man, but I'm sure that he'll have a shit eating grin on his face when they put him in the ground," she laughed.

Everyone laughed loudly, and I ordered another round of beverages for everyone.

Liz looked at me with an evil eye, and with an equally evil smile said, "I guess one regret would be that I don't get to try you out too, Bob. I couldn't do that to my new man; I'm too old fashioned...but if it doesn't work out?"

"Liz, if it doesn't work out we can talk, but I do hope that you have found love in your life and that you two will be very happy together."

"Thank you Bobby, I appreciate that." It was the first time she'd called me anything but Bob. I liked that.

Suddenly Jessi caught up with the conversation, "Mom," she said loudly, "You'd sleep with Bobby too?"

Looking at her daughter with a fake look of indignation, Liz had a quick retort. "I am a little

closer to his age than you are my dear," then started to laugh at her tone.

Jess kind of whispered to no one in particular, "Wow. I'd never thought about that. Mel's mom slept with him, so why not mine?"

"That's enough of that talk honey. If things work out with Bill and myself, it won't be a possibility."

By this time we had pretty much polished off everything on the table. It has been an interesting conversation through our rice, chicken, pork, shrimp and all. It was also extremely good food.

I looked over to Mel with a grin, "Another Jon recommendation?"

She smiled with the chopsticks in her mouth and just nodded her head...

"Ya know, gay or not, I'm getting to where I really like that fellow."

Liz just shook her head and said quietly, "I don't even want to know."

Mel laughed, "Liz you remember cousin Jon? He's the one that has the high-class place with the 'extra special rooms'. I called in a favor and we did his place one night. It was Hailey's special, so ever since, whenever we're in town, I give him a call and let him know I need a list of decent places to eat. I know he knows every one of them, and will only recommend the cream of the crop to me."

"Hasn't failed us yet, Sweetheart," I added.

Then I had a thought. "Does Jon have a boyfriend?" I asked.

"I'm not sure, but I don't think so, at least not a steady. Although now that I think of it, he's been living with the same guy for years."

"I want to take him and his SO to a dinner Mel."

She looked at me kind of strangely but I clarified, "We need to express our appreciation for his time and

is advice Sweetie. I don't give a shit if he's gay or not. What he does in the privacy of his own home is no more my business than what we do in ours is his."

Liz was taking all of this in with approval. I could see on her face that she was pleased that Jess would be exposed to this kind of open environment.

"I guess we could do that Bobby, but I'm not sure where we could take him that could be something really special. I mean he knows every place in town."

I thought about it for a second, and replied, "Okay. So we don't take him anywhere in town," then looking at Hailey, "You know the area sweetheart, and you think outside the box most of the time, shit, we both live outside the box, so I know you can come up with something cool."

Liz looked at me like I'd grown a 3rd eye.

I started to chuckle and told her, "Hailey and I are birds of a feather in the 'head in the clouds' world. Jess and Mel are the ones that keep us grounded, but sometimes it takes being outside the box to get where you want to go."

Then looking back to Hailey, "Why don't you, Jess and Mel put your heads together and see what you can come up with. Use your imaginations. Being outside the box, you can consider places that we need to travel to. Vegas, San Francisco, Seattle...let it all hang out!"

Hailey looked at me and said, "What about cost Bobby?"

"You know the rule Hail, and you have a card. It's the same for him."

Then looking at Liz, "That will keep them busy for at least 2 or 3 minutes."

She just laughed and asked about the show we were preparing for.

"It's just a standard run of the mill craft show. I lucked into a premium booth last show, which qualified me for premium for the rest of this year and on to

next year if I stay with the promoters. No reason not to."

"So this is the second one this year?" she asked.

"Yeah. It'll start on Saturday and end the following Sunday afternoon. Then we'll have like 3 or 4 weeks before we have to come back."

"What do you do between shows?"

"Get ready for the next one," I said. "Figure out what I need to order and order it, figure out what I need to print or dye and do it. That kind of thing."

Liz looked at me with a surprised or amazed look on her face, "You do that all by yourself?"

"Well up until the last one yeah. Mel set me up on the computer so that I don't even have to think about it anymore. The run of the mill 'canned' stuff I now farm out to vendors that I trust to do the quality I expect. I know what's there, what's not, how much I have to order, and after this show I'm guessing even the ordering will be at least partly automated."

"Jess is working on it with me this week, but it supposed to be a surprise," Mel said.

"And it would have been if you didn't open your mouth," Liz observed with a chuckle.

"Oh yeah," Mel said quietly. "Oops..."

"Anyway - Since Janet cut Mel loose for the summer, and Hailey doesn't have anything else to do, they come up and help me with replenishment."

"I'll bet," Liz choked out laughing.

"Mom!" Jessica hollered.

Still laughing, Liz asked, "How did you manage to get into all of this?"

"Well, when I left the service, I needed to do something. I went back to my artistic roots and started a tie dye business doing shirts, and the like. Then after a couple years of that I added silk

screening to the mix. Last year I had a decent year but decided that I really needed some help if I was going to continue with doing these shows in the LA area. They're huge in comparison to other venues."

I paused for a second to take a gulp of my drink, then continued, "I really only do it because I love it. I don't do it for the money. Hell, I don't need the money."

"I've known Janet's sister for quite a while, and met Melinda when she was like 10 or 11, something like that. We did a beach party a while back and I spent the whole day and most of the night with her glued to me. Come to find out she was madly in love with me and wanted to get into the wild thing right then and there."

Mel piped in, "I wanted to do more than that Bobby."

"What more is there than the wild thing at 10 honey?" I asked her with a laugh.

Mel got that far away disgusted look on her face, and said shaking her head, "Men are such pigs."

"Yes we are Honey, and you knew that going in, so we don't need to re-hash that here and now."

"Anyway, it took a couple years of seeing her and laughing with her, and having a good time with her, I just kind of felt I was in love. But she was like thirteen or fourteen and I was like twenty-six, so it didn't seem like a real sensible thing to me."

Liz looked at me with interest now, and so did the other girls, except for Mel. She just slid out of where she was and came to sit next to me, and hugged into my arm and whispered, "I love you."

"So when I figured I could really use some help, and I was only doing the summer shows in LA this year I thought it would be fun to have Mel help me out."

"I called Janet and talked to her about it and she told me that she'd talk to Mel and see what she had planned for the summer because it sounded like she'd be working all summer if she wanted to."

"Well, to make a longish story shorter, Janet cut Mel loose, then Mel invited Hailey because her parent's didn't give a damn and were out-of-town anyway, and then Mel invited Jess. I got roped by each in turn and I guess the rest is history because here we are a little over a month later."

"Roped?" Liz said incredulously.

"Mom. I told you he fought me tooth and nail, and from talking to Mel and Hail he did the same to them. It was like he didn't want to. I even started to get a little hurt. I wasn't good enough, but it was just his way of making us tell him it was really what I wanted to do and I had no second thoughts."

"And?" Liz asked with an interesting look toward her daughter.

"Well obviously I didn't have any second thoughts and I really wanted to do it. Not only that, I knew I was in my fertile time, and I made sure he knew too. Then it started all over again. Did I know the danger? Yes Bobby. Did I really want to have a baby? If it happens I'll be happy, Bobby. Did I understand the ramifications? Yes Bobby. Did I know what it was like to raise a baby? No Bobby, I'm a virgin, I've never had a baby. I mean it was like the third degree interrogation all over again."

Liz looked over to me and was shaking her head, "Then you did it anyway?"

Before I could say anything, "Well Duh! Mom, I'm pregnant. Of course we did it anyway, and I don't regret it in any way. I'm happier than I've ever been in my life."

Liz looked at her daughter and I could just feel the love between the two of them. They had propped each other up for years, and for Jess to tell her mom that she was very happy about being pregnant at almost eighteen was all she needed to hear to make her day.

They looked at each other and started an incredible hug that migrated into lip locks and what had to be tongue tag between them. It was so sexy, and then the tears started rolling down each of their faces.

"Oh Mommy, I'm so happy, and I'm so happy for you finding a man. I hope he's everything you see and want."

Then with a little girl giggle, "Maybe I should talk to him?"

"You just stay away from my man, you hussy," Liz choked out laughing so hard she almost didn't get it out.

Jessi batted her eyes at Liz and said in a 10 year old voice, "But... but Mommy, I could set you right up with Billy boy."

Liz was almost rolling on the floor by this time and so were the rest of us.

After a few minutes of the laughter, Liz put on a serious face and looked at Jessie and me. Her eyes moved to me then to Jess, then back again. It was hard to get a read on what was going through her head at the moment. She'd be tough to play a game of poker with, and I'm the best at poker face.

She started to smile at us, and I saw a look of love in her eyes, which was a relief, but I wasn't sure if Jess felt it too because she kept her grip on me.

"You know it's going to get awkward don't you?"

I nodded my head to her and felt Jessi pull a little tighter not really understanding. I turned to her and put my other hand against her cheek to look bring her eyes to mine.

"Just listen, Honey. No stress. Okay?"

Through tears she nodded her head then turned back to her mother.

"Honey, you and Bob are a generation apart in age. You have to be ready for some awkward situations."

She paused for a moment to let Jess hear that there was no anger or negativity in what she was trying to convey.

"People are going to think you are his daughter. From a legal standpoint, someone could want to make an issue of your youth, which realistically is irrelevant at this point in time so it would be pointless, but some people have to stir shit. So the relationship, all of your relationships for that matter are probably going to be scrutinized unfairly," she said looking at each of the girls in turn. "So it's probably best for appearances that you don't act like his lover."

After your birthday in a month it can be different, but knowing you were seventeen when you made the baby could put things in a bad light - possibly from a legal standpoint. By the time the baby is three or so, nobody will have a second thought. I love you, Baby. I love your baby. I think you have made an incredible choice in a man - it's a little weird that you three are sharing him, but that's your business."

She stopped there for a minute. I knew exactly what she was saying, and it's one of the reasons I was so deliberate in my questioning before we made love. They'd heard the lecture from me, and it was good they were hearing the same argument, in practically the same words, from someone else.

You could see that the girls were all in "thinking mode" because each was in her mind and there were no smiles or any indication of taking things less than seriously.

"If anyone ever tries to tell you that being an adult is easy, you now know better," I said to them softly, making eye contact with each. Then looked at Liz and gave her a wry smile, which was returned letting me know that she understood we were on the same page.

"I can only hope that you four have a wonderful life together and nothing ever happens to break you apart. I know Jessica has decided to stay at home for now and that she hopes to find a man she doesn't want to share, but I can tell you, personally I think she should just move in now and be done with it."

"Thanks Liz, I appreciate the kind words and the words of wisdom."

The girls only nodded their heads with somber faces, until Liz lightened it all up with, "What the hell is for desert? My sweet tooth is really killing me and I can tell that you all need a sugar rush!"

We all had a good laugh, ordered desert and prepared to pay the bill and leave. I gave Sandy a quick heads up and let her know we'd be out front in 10 to 15 minutes.

Liz leaned over and whispered into my ear so that the girls couldn't hear, "I sense your driver is someone special as well, but I'm not sure I want to go there."

I looked at her and very seriously whispered back, "She is very special Liz. Hailey and Mel know the background, and in some form I'm going to let Jess know as much as I dare. It really can't have any effect on our overall relationship, but she needs to know where Sandy fits. It's part of a past that I'm not at liberty to talk about, so you are absolutely correct that you don't want to go there."

She gave me a very strange look and I guess I could understand that considering what I'd said. There was no way she was going to hear the truth. Ever.

"Liz. If Jess decides to move in with the rest of us, I'm going to have to discuss with her things that I'd just as soon not have to talk about, but it's only fair since the other two girls know some of the facts. It is extremely classified. Mel and Hail only know what they needed to know, which is that Sandy's and my lives depend on nobody knowing anything."

With that Liz understood the conversation was over and that it was best left just where it was.

I looked into her eyes and let her know, "She's safe Liz. They're all safe. I will never let anything happen to them. Period."

She got a nervous smile on her face and nodded in acknowledgment.

"I'm sorry Liz, but like they do, you'll just have to trust me."

Again, she nodded her head and whispered, "I know Bob. I know. I also know that you know what is best on the subject, so I'm just going to pretend the conversation never happened."

Then added, "And Bob?" I looked over to her, "I do trust you, and I know Jess does too."

I smiled at her as we all slid out of our seats to head for the door. I put a \$50 on the table, then put my arm around Liz and looked at her with a smile. When we got outside, there was Sandy holding the door for everyone to slide into the Limo. I stopped with Liz for a moment, and took her in my arms and hugged her tightly and whispered to her, "Thanks Liz. I appreciate your understanding and support. Now go take care of that man that's in your life. I only wish for you the same you have wished for Jess, me and the rest of us, and that you have found your true love and happiness."

As our hug broke I saw her eyes tearing up, but she had a smile on her face and said, "Thank you Bob. I appreciate that very much."

Into the limo we all went, and Sandy dropped us all at our assigned locations. I walked Liz up to her door just because that's what guys did with ladies. She hugged me again, waved at Jess and the girls, and went into the house.

Sandy then dropped us off at our hotel and after a quick chat and payment, was on her way. I know she was bummed out about missing the time with us, but knew she was going to make up for it when we got back up north.

It's just one more #12spk5 12-inch spike for her management's coffin. I was bound and determined now to get Sandy working for "me" in her own contract limo business. It would only be a matter of time, and convincing Sandy that it would be safe to do it with all the other girls around.

We'll figure it out.

It was all good.