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The lunch was exquisite, and his waitress even more so.

'Liz Brannigan,' her name tag read.

Derek Talbot watched her through hooded eyes as he finished his steak salad. She was petite and slender, barely five feet tall, with a slim waist and narrow hips. Her figure was almost boyish, which he found quite stimulating. Her breasts were nicely sized, and round; not too big, but not "mosquito bites," either. She was tiny -- and fragile.

But it was her face that stopped him in his tracks.

It was the face of a goddess: high cheekbones, almond-shaped jade green eyes, lush lips. Her blue-black hair was short and curly. There was obviously some Asian heritage, and the ethnic combination imparted a truly exotic aspect to her appearance.

'Marlowe's' was the restaurant's name. It was upscale and trendy, and it had the virtue of being close to his hotel. He was glad now that he had come here.

She stood in the order expediting alcove, a pot of coffee in her hand, talking to a fellow waitress, a cute, slightly chunky blonde named Emily. They were discussing him. He could hear every word, as if they were standing right next to his table.

"God, Liz. This is your lucky day. Look at that hunk! He's hott!"

"I know," Liz answered. "He's making me hot. It's hard to concentrate."

Talbot smiled slightly. One of the benefits of his "Curse" was that it gifted him with a muscular physique, and an irresistible animal magnetism. He was lean and lithe; he knew he looked good in his denim shirt and snug Levis. And he could turn on the charm, ensuring that the beautiful Liz Brannigan would be putty in his hands.

He brushed a lock of his bushy chestnut hair off his forehead and fixed his waitress with an appraising, blue-eyed gaze as she approached. She was indeed hot. She was wet between her legs; her musky scent was pungent and arousing. She was also exuding a tidal wave of pheromones, and he could feel his cock harden in response. He fought down the urge with great effort.

"More coffee, sir?"*www.novelaword.com*

"Not just now, thanks," Talbot replied. "I'd appreciate it if you'd check back in a bit, though."

She beamed at him and checked on a nearby table. Talbot followed her with an unabashedly appraising stare. He always chose the best. She was indeed the thoroughbred of this stable.

Yes, he would enjoy breaking her....

The world was Derek Lawrence Talbot's oyster. At twenty-eight, he was the President and CEO of Talbot Industries, a multibillion dollar computer software and internet consulting corporation. The company was becoming a major player in the industry, thanks mostly to his drive and determination. He had taken over the company four years earlier, at the tender age of twenty-four, when his father had disappeared on a vacation to Tibet. Most industry analysts had expected Talbot Industries to go right down the drain. Derek Lawrence Talbot was too young and inexperienced, they said. They started writing the company's obituary*www.novelaword.com*

But Derek had done his homework. He was a prodigy who had grown up with computers and software. He knew as much as -- if not more than - the men and women who designed them. And he was ruthless and driven, with a take-no-prisoners attitude. He relished his new position, cutting the fat out of the company and surrounding himself with people who were as driven as he was. Within two years, Talbot's market share had doubled. This year it had tripled.

Talbot watched the petite Liz Brannigan as she glided from one station to the next. He had never had a steady girlfriend, nor had he wanted one. There had always been plenty of women, plenty of sex. But no relationships. His view of women had been shaped very early on by a cold, brittle mother who had no use for him, and a father who traveled a great deal -- especially during the time of the full moon. His mother tolerated his father only because he locked himself away during the Change - and, of course, she tolerated him for his money.

It was only later that Derek would learn that his mother's icy attitude toward him was molded by fear of what he might -- and eventually did -- become.

Instead of learning about life and the "birds and the bees" from loving parents, he had been exposed to a twisted view that warped and damaged his impressionable psyche. He had stumbled upon it quite by accident. He was only ten years old at the time. He was outside the cottage of the gardener of the sprawling Talbot estate, when he heard a woman screaming. Curious -- and alarmed -- he had peered through the window and gasped in shock.

The gardener was watching a porn video that depicted three men raping a young, naked girl. She was on her hands and knees. One man lay under her thrusting into her vagina, another stood behind her sodomizing her, while a third shoved his organ down her throat. When they finished with her, they ejaculated all over her.

Then the attacker standing behind her yanked her head back by the hair and slit her throat from ear to ear with a huge Bowie knife.

As the girl lay jerking on the ground, blood spewing from her slashed throat, Derek saw that the gardener was masturbating, and he came at the moment the girl shuddered and died on the TV screen, his semen shooting into the air.

At the same instant, as he watched the dying girl convulsing on the ground, Derek experienced a tingling in his groin that he had never known before in his young life. At his tender age, he still had difficulty separating fantasy from reality. He didn't realize that it was only a movie, that the girl was an actress and the death was simulated.

Watching the girl die -- watching the power the depraved men wielded over her -- intrigued and thrilled him somehow.

The next day, while the gardener was out on the grounds, Derek 'liberated' his stash of pornographic videos. All of them were rape and bondage movies, and some "snuff" flicks; some of them featured the simulated murder and sexual mutilation of the victims, which enthralled him even more.

From there, Derek graduated to the Internet, which he could navigate expertly, even as a small boy. He frequented websites like "rapedandroped," "ravishedbrides," and "snuffbabes .com."

In the absence of parental guidance, Derek Talbot developed into a budding sexual psychopath and misogynist. In a society where it was somehow acceptable to dehumanize girls and young women, he was brainwashed into the notion that females were sexual playthings, objects that gave pleasure to men, to be used -- and discarded -- by those men.

Then, when he reached the age of sixteen, something happened that changed his life forever.

Her name was Gretchen Farlow, a hot, sensuous redhead, a senior girl who was the slut of McKinley Academy, the upscale private school near Seattle that Derek attended. She seduced him.

She took him out into the woods under the romantic full moon, and they had sex.

And when Derek climaxed, he Changed.

Pinned under the hulking, metamorphosing body that had been Derek Talbot, Gretchen's agonized screams rang through the woods as the werewolf slaughtered her, tore her apart and ate her. He took special pleasure in devouring her breasts and her sex -- destroying the parts of her that made her a woman.

As news of the "animal attack" spread, Derek's father John surmised what had happened. He took the boy aside and somberly related the story of the Talbot family and the Curse of the Werewolf. As Derek listened, he realized the power he now possessed. He barely heard John Talbot's self-pitying drivel about how the Curse was a terrible burden, and how horrible it was to kill.

Hell, he wanted to kill!

Derek could only remember how exciting, how liberating it had been to watch the redheaded bitch die, blood spurting from her savaged throat and mangled, naked body. He had fed on her fear almost as much as he had her flesh and blood. The expression of sheer terror and agony on her once beautiful, slashed face, the mouth frozen forever into a perfect little "o" of horror, aroused him beyond belief.

Even as he contemplated the freedom he would enjoy as a werewolf, his father had arranged for him to be locked up "for his own good" every month during the cycle of the full moon. He would spend his nights in a maximum security cell, raging and howling impotently, searching vainly for escape, until the sun rose the next morning.

And each night, in a nearby cell, he could hear his father snarling and roaring as well.

Then when his father had disappeared four years ago, Derek Talbot had taken control. He had only recently learned to Change at will, and had kept that ability secret. One by one, the handful of men who were charged with his monthly incarcerations "disappeared," and his secret had vanished with them. Now he was free to run -- and kill -- on his own terms.

His mother had left of her own accord. So great was her fear of Derek that she left it all behind - the money, the houses, the cars - everything.

He sighed. He had enjoyed slaying the sheriff and his slutty wife that morning. He was worried, though, that he hadn't found the silver bullets Tomlinson had purchased. He had torn the police cruiser apart - literally - to no avail. He was fairly sure that most - if not all - of the other law enforcement officers felt that the whole silver bullet scenario was nothing but a superstitious fable, but it would behoove him not to take any chances.

Liz Brannigan was returning.

"Anything else for you today, sir?"

"Thank you, no." He flashed his most disarming smile at her. "Liz Brannigan. Funny, if you don't mind my saying so, you don't look like a Brannigan."

She blushed.

"My mom's Japanese, and my dad's Irish."

"And you're, what, then -- Japirish or Irinese?"

They both laughed.

"I guess I'm a mixed up kid," Liz answered. She stifled a yawn*www.novelaword.com*

"Long day?" Talbot queried.

"Yeah. I work here for another half hour, until one. Then I'm off until five, come back and work until ten. And then I go to my second job!"

"And I thought I was busy!" He scribbled something on a business card, then slipped a couple of bills from his wallet. He handed the money, the business card, and the check to her.

"Well, Liz Brannigan, you are a thoroughly delightful and beautiful young lady. Keep the change."

She watched him go in dismay. Then she unfolded the money.

There was a hundred dollar bill on top -- and... and a thousand dollar bill underneath! For a \$25 check?! She held the thousand dollar bill up to the light, flabbergasted, and she could see the red and blue fibers imbedded in it and the watermark, and the portrait of Grover Cleveland. It appeared to be authentic. The business card was for a Don Mannix of Global Exporters, whose title was 'troubleshooter.' The note on the back read, 'Room 203, Hotel Royale. How about a room service dinner of steak and lobster later, and maybe.... dessert? Before and after dinner? See you a little after one.'

She arched her eyebrows, and her face flushed. The nerve of him -- thinking she would be swept off her feet by a handsome face, a charming smile, those intense blue eyes, and that... that hot body! He was bold, she'd give him that. Super cocky and confident. She didn't know whether to be flattered, incensed, frightened or excited.

She decided she was excited -- very excited.

Liz Brannigan found herself counting down the minutes until one o'clock.

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