

BY THE SAME AUTHOR *After*

Delores

GirJs, Visions *and* Everything

The Sophie Horowitz Story

**PEOPLE
IN
TROUBLE**

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It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but their social being that determines their consciousness.

KARL MARX

She heard the challenge, imagined the reason and knew enough to let it go at that. It didn't mean that her feelings never changed. They did, but not because Molly said they should. So the tensions continued, slightly under the surface. This one was resolved some months later in an afternoon when they were ready for love.

"Kate, take my earrings out for me, will you? I don't feel like doing it for myself."

Kate felt the silver slide through Molly's ear, casting shapes on her neck like Indonesian shadow puppets. Then the pieces of metal were lying still in her palm. Kate surprised herself by thinking, *How could two women ever be closer than this?* Later she realized it wasn't so much a sudden closeness but that she had grown to love Molly. She hadn't loved her at first, but she did now.

"What are you thinking about?" Molly asked.

"Thinking about you."

"What about?"

"That you are becoming more real to me."

"Good," Molly said, holding her, holding her head against Kate's chest, so girly and soft. "Now I don't have to be your child anymore. From now on I'll be your mistress."

It didn't feel like a threat.

Molly had done for her. She did it with a shake of her shoulders that she had never used before.

“Hey, you’re in a good mood,” he’d said. He was clearly surprised that she should be so sexy when it was just a regular night, when he wasn’t expecting to make love at all.

But Kate got scared all of a sudden because something brand- new was making itself known. She saw right then that she and Peter knew each other so well sexually that if either of them was to introduce a new idea or act or word or response or fantasy or direction, sexually or otherwise, it would be so disruptive as to be obvious, because these feelings had to come from somewhere. Either she had to tell him the truth or blame it on the movies.

So, she had said it right away, that first night. She said that she had a lover and it was a woman whose name was Molly and she was younger. It would be half a year before Molly claimed he knew what she looked like. But that first night Kate told him that she loved him. That she would grow old and die with him. That he was her best friend and her best lover and nothing was as important or exciting to her in the world as he. Since then she had been losing sleep and walking home in the cold and heat and not having enough time for herself trying to keep all of that true. But it was those statements alone that ultimately convinced him to accept this preposterous situation.

to be a thousand people in vinyl shoes yelling in thick New York accents “Fur is murdah! Fur is murdah!”

“So,” Pearl said, much more softly, “what about the tire cutter?”

“Oh yeah.” Molly woke up, getting back in step. “Yeah, so everyone in the building began to talk about the slasher. Tony, the black guy on the fifth floor, the old one, asked if I’d caught him yet. The yuppie in number ten who is paying fifteen hundred a month asked if I’d called the police. Ralph, the junkie in apartment eight, asked if I had any suspects. Maritza, the super, asked why in the hell I didn’t move my bike. And Kyle, the asshole in apartment one, asked me who I thought had done it. So, I decided that the people who had wondered if I had any suspects were suspects.”

“Why?”

“This is New York City, why would anyone care that much unless they were guilty?”

“I follow your logic.”

“So, Pearl, I told Ralph and Kyle that I had narrowed it down to the two of them and only they, therefore, knew which one really did it. Then the slashing stopped.”

“What a step forward for strategic idealism.” Pearl laughed. “It is the triumph of good over evil,” Molly said. “Isn’t it? I guess that can happen every once in a while.”

“Oh, Molly,” Pearl said, “I’m so glad you’re alive.”

appropriate term.” He dropped his head down on the bar and closed his eyes.

The reporter, however, continued as though at any moment he would say, “But first, the sports.”

“The police have put in emergency requisitions for rubber gloves and are waiting patiently for the supplies to arrive. This is Roland Johnson for Channel Z. More later, but first, the sports.” When the picture switched to Mike Tyson and Robin Givens, the gay man next to Peter took out his Walkman.

“Hold on, I can get WBAI.”

He listened intently and then reported each piece of information to the inebriated bar.

“It took the police forever to get rubber gloves,” he shouted, constantly fidgeting with the dial. “They originally requisitioned them from the Veterans’ Hospital and the BAI guy interviewed someone from the VA saying they don’t even have sheets or pillows, how could the police expect to find a roomful of extra rubber gloves lying around. . . Oh shit.”

“What's the matter now?” asked the bartender.

“It’s marathon week. They’ve stopped reporting the news until they get fifteen new subscribers. Turn on the television set.” Everyone resumed their places at the bar with a new round of drinks, eyes glued to the tube.

furious. Something in what Robert had said reminded him of his loneliness. It reminded him of his helplessness. It told him he was alone. He was sad. He had no friends and no one to take care of him. He had no one to take care of him because he had been abandoned. He was abandoned and overprotected. He was given everything and nothing. It had ruined him. It had made him awkward. Now he was vulnerable as a result. He was lost. He was a lost boy who could not cry. He was hurt and soft. He was soft like a woman but he was not a woman. A woman left you when you were down. She had an affair when you were vulnerable. If he had not been vulnerable he would have had an affair too, but he was so he couldn't.

“Are you all right?” Robert asked, trying not to look worried. “Do you need to take a walk outside in the air?”

“You know, Robert,” Peter said. “It’s not as easy to be a man as it once was. Actually it never was easy and now it’s worse than before. People blame you for everything. But all along you have to keep your perspective. You have to keep your balance.” Peter stood up and took a deep breath. He stretched out his muscular arms and touched his toes. He was in good shape.

“This is New York City,” he said. “The best thing is to focus on the big picture. Just take the long view and don’t get dragged down in temporary details. Do you see what I mean?”

“No,” Robert said. “I don’t see it that way at all.”

