

LIVING IN REVERSE

by

Charley Appenzellar

CHAPTER 4

I woke to the shrill ringing of a phone. The sound jarred my teeth to their roots and I groaned out loud. My head felt like Mount Vesuvius had erupted inside it, my tongue was stuck to the roof of my mouth, my hair smelled like an ashtray and my face was stiff with the previous day's makeup, which I had neglected to remove. My hand shook as I mashed the phone up against my ear. I didn't say a word, managing only to hyperventilate into the receiver.

What happened last night? Why do I feel so horrible? Did I try and drown my menopause sorrows in a bottle of booze?

An incredibly sexy male voice filled my ear. "Hey, baby, do you miss your sugar daddy?" The way he said it took hours. His voice sidled suggestively over each and every vowel in his one-liner.

My ears buzzed and my head felt woozy. *Jesus*, I thought, *I have no time for this kind of shit – I don't do crank calls!* I hung up the phone. Then, in an attempt to make a much-needed run for the bathroom, I slid my legs over the side of the bed and sat up. The room spun out of control and I fell back onto the bed with a pitiful whimper. I heard a muffled "meow" from the depths of my fluffy quilt. *Ohmygod, poor Louis*, I thought as the cat shifted under the covers. The phone renewed its shrill ringing. My bewildered, alcohol-riddled brain stayed on automatic and compelled me to pick up the receiver.

"Baby, is that any way to treat your boy toy?" said Sexy Phone Man.

I pulled the phone away from my head, gave it good solid glare of disgust and slammed it back down on its base.

“What the fuck is this?” I croaked, seriously dehydrated.

Staggering into the bathroom, I took a long pee. The phone rang again. This time I was clever and ignored it until it fell silent. I made my way to the sink and splashed cold water on my face, simultaneously taking a sip. Just as I turned the faucet off, the phone began ringing for the fourth time. Louis’ head poked out from the soft warmth of the quilt, his furry ears laid back in annoyance. *What if it’s an emergency of some sort? What if it’s Kitty or Freddie?* I thought. *Why haven’t I signed up for caller ID?*

I breathed a large sigh of annoyance and answered the phone, reasoning that I could always just hang up again.

“How was that Chinese food last night?” Sexy Phone Man asked.

That stopped me in my tracks. The mention of Chinese food rang bells in my sodden memory. Either I was still dreaming or this was someone I knew. I decided to listen for a moment.

“Iz, I miss you. When are you going to stop hanging out with your friends and spend some time with me?” His voice had a pouting, poor-little-puppy-dog tone to it.

I don’t have a boyfriend, I reminded myself. Then I realized that he knew my name.

Think, Isabelle, think! My head was full of cobwebs from too much booze the night before. *That dream! Holy shit! That had been some dream!* Images swam through my brain of singing, transvestite hairdressers, me looking as fabulous as Madonna, Louboutin shoes and a parade of colorful little umbrellas.

Phone in hand, I sat down quickly on a nearby chair and put my head between my legs in an attempt to stop the whirling in my skull. The cat wound his way through my legs,

meowing and purring, begging for some affection. I was too dizzy to comply.

“Iz, let’s have lunch together today,” Sexy Phone Man cajoled.

Lunch, I thought, letting out a deep sigh, *ahhh, that sounds lovely. Something greasy. A big, fat, juicy burger from Max’s Diner, fries and about twenty Cokes would do me just fine. Speaking of twenty Cokes, I need liquid, and fast!* Keeping the phone glued to my ear, I got up – nearly tripping over the cat – and fumbled my way downstairs to the kitchen. Orange juice would help clear my head so I could think straight.

“You could come over to my place,” Sexy Phone Man continued.

The thought of having lunch with the mysterious man on the phone was intriguing, but I was no longer paying attention to him. Descending into the living room, I was suddenly distracted by the art on the walls.

It was expensive ... and it wasn’t mine.

My heart began to hammer! I was terribly confused. I clung to the receiver as I walked faster and faster, pacing the living room, looking around me at the foreign objects filling my apartment, desperate to find anything I recognized.

Chocolate-brown leather couches with matching ottomans? No. Matching Chinese jade plates from Gump’s, poised on miniature ivory stands on the fireplace mantel? No. Trendy Swarovski crystal chandelier poised over mahogany dining room table? No, no and no again! I don’t get it! This is my apartment. I’m in my apartment. My cat’s in my apartment. But nothing in my apartment is recognizable as mine!

“Izzy ...” the man on the phone said, his deep sensuous voice sizzling over the two z’s in my name. *The man has a way with consonants*, I fleetingly thought. Then I paused in mid-stride, *Izzy?*

The night before came flooding back to me. *Ohhh*, I rationalized hopefully, *I am still dreaming. I’m still asleep. The fabulous decor, the real-time hangover and the boyfriend ... it*

all makes sense!

Entering the kitchen, I opened the fridge and grasped a cool bottle of orange juice. Twisting the cap off, I eagerly took a long and refreshing drink. My eyes watered and I let out a gasp of hydrated relief.

Apparently my gasp encouraged Sexy Phone Man to continue, “Do you know what I would like to do to you right now?” He drew in a long, hot, raw breath.

I couldn't speak. I was on information overload. My synapses were no longer in working order. I leaned up against the kitchen counter for support. *Mmmm ... that voice, this dream. Just let it go*, I told myself. *No harm in letting the dream unfold*. Plus, I had to admit, there was an animal part of me, way down inside, that wanted to know *exactly* what he would like to do to me right now. I heard myself breathe deeply into the phone.

He continued, “I would like to kiss you long, deep and hard. I would grab your hair and pull your head back so I could lick that sexy neck of yours.”

My eyes widened in surprise. *Well alrighty then*, I thought sarcastically. *You go, boy! Love this dream. Phone Sex 101!* I smirked as I wandered into the living room and sank comfortably into one of the luscious, leather couches.

Sexy Phone Man continued his brazen speech. “Then, I would slowly unbutton your top ... stopping to kiss you, tease you, brush my hands lightly over your hard nipples.”

Wow, I thought, *he's good!* I purred a soft, “Mmmm”

“My other hand would caress your inner thigh ... wandering, playing and rubbing up your skirt until you arched your back begging me to find your”

I coughed. He was getting a bit vivid.

He laughed and playfully purred my name, “Izzzzzzzy.”

I pulled the phone away and stared at it in amazement. *This guy is incorrigible! Dream schmeam! Who cares what's going on, I'm hooked. I haven't heard stuff this good for*

years! I eagerly put the phone back to my ear.

But he had apparently reached the end of his lascivious script and nonchalantly asked, “So Izzy, my gorgeous sexy creature, are we still on for lunch?”

Lunch? I mentally untangled myself from his naked limbs and tousled sheets. I touched the soft leather of the couch in an effort to remind myself that I was, indeed, home alone. I mumbled a weak “Uh-huh” in reply. What else could I have said?

“Great. I’ll have my driver pick you up at noon.” And the mysterious-phone-sex guy hung up.

I was numb. Then slowly I began to panic. *WHAT have I just gotten myself into?* Again, I touched the chocolate-brown leather of the couch.

This seems very real for a dream.

I urged my brain to stop the dream, *Curtain up! Lights on! Time to go home, folks, the show’s over.* It was no use. The art on the walls remained as unfamiliar as the chandelier suspended over the mahogany dining table.

I sat on the couch in a daze. Dream or not, *what* had I just agreed to? I looked stupidly at the cordless phone in my hand as if it would give me answers.

Kitty, I need to speak with Kitty! I had no idea what her phone number was in this “life” as Izzy. Not knowing what else to do, I dialed the number I remembered from my “life” as Isabelle.

Kitty finally answered after ten rings. She sounded groggy. By that time, my brain was wide awake and was able to connect with my vocal cords for actual speech.

I babbled hysterically about a lunch date ... sexy voice on the phone ... man ... crazy man, talking crazy stuff ... blah, blah, blah.

Kitty was unimpressed. In fact, she was downright blasé about the whole thing. She spat out two words, “Stephen Buckley.”

I grasped desperately at the name. “Stephen? Yes ... oh ... Stephen!”

Kitty obviously mistook my “what the fuck...?” tone for “desperately in love.”

She lit into me, “You know how I feel about him, Izzy. Stephen Buckley is a complete jerk! He doesn’t care about you. He only calls you when he’s in town. And that’s what ... twice a month? Why do you always run to him? What is it with you and Stephen? He snaps his fingers and you jump.”

I knew nothing about Izzy’s life and had no idea what to say to Kitty because I knew even less about Stephen Buckley and his snapping fingers. But I was grateful for the bits of information I had gleaned from my conversation with her. I changed the subject to avoid further confrontation. We made plans to meet up later that evening.

I showered and got ready for my lunch date. *This ought to be interesting*, I thought.

My doorbell rang at exactly noon.

The walk down the hallway to the front door seemed to take forever. I felt like I was in some film where the director had decided I should do the long walk in slow motion. Take one! I trudged as though through pudding, my feet landing heavily. *What have I gotten myself into?* I watched my hand in amazement as it slowly reached for the door, grasped the knob and turned. A man in a black suit stood on my doorstep.

He isn’t bad looking, was my first thought. *I had fantasized a much sexier creature attached to that voice, but hey ... Sexy Phone Man is obviously a sex maniac, so who cares!* He smiled at me and I took my cue. I reached up and placed my arms around his neck, giving him one of my best welcoming kisses. As my tongue shot into his mouth, his entire body went rigid and he jerked backwards, almost falling off my doorstep into the street below. Survival instinct clicked in. My arms automatically unclasped from behind his neck and I stumbled backwards, my back slamming against the closed door.

He cleared his throat and said, “Madam ... your car is waiting.”

Oh shit, I screamed to myself, *I forgot Stephen was sending a driver!* I was mortified.

I had French-kissed the chauffeur!

The driver didn't say anything. He simply turned stiffly on his heel and walked toward a sleek, silver Mercedes.

I followed him obediently, cringing inside and mentally slapping myself on the forehead while muttering, “Stupid, stupid, stupid!” He opened the door for me and I looked up at him, laughing nervously as I climbed in the back of the car.

We rode along Jones Street and then headed up Russian Hill. The chauffeur turned onto a narrow out-of-the-way street, pulling up in front of an exclusive-looking residence. Money practically dripped off of each and every leaf in the lush foliage surrounding the building. He opened the door for me without a word and gestured toward a waiting doorman. As I entered the building, I smiled and said, “Stephen Buckley, please.”

The doorman nodded, escorted me to the elevator, and pushed the “Penthouse” button, giving me the once-over as he leaned in.

Charley Appenzeller