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IN SEARCH OF AN AUTEUR

Maria was collecting emergency unemployment benefits because of the coronavirus pandemic: her parents flew to Portugal when her grandfather became sick from coronavirus. Maria's parents feared he would die from the condition. When the virus spread like wildfire across international boundaries and borders closed, Toronto went into lockdown. The angry pharmacist her parents hired to manage their drugstores in Etobicoke and North York refused to allow her to work anywhere, including the Kingsway Village pharmacy, where he could personally supervise her. Her parents were in no position to argue with the manager; they were overseas, in Portugal, during the worst pandemic in modern history. They also understood his point of view. Maria thought there was a cultural barrier; he was from India, a devout Muslim, and resented her manner, her crop tops, and her low-rise jeans as well as the fact she helped herself to cosmetics whenever she liked. So, Maria stayed at home and sulked, until she saw the same ad in Craigslist as Enola. Maria felt prepared to start her own cam show, but she wasn't a geek: she didn't understand online streaming technology and video cameras. She didn't have the patience to learn, either, so she decided to rebel in another unconventional way.

Enola said she was on emergency unemployment benefits after the closure of the meat packing plant where, she joked, she choked and strangled chickens and chopped off their heads. The pandemic wiped out a shift, infecting workers, even killing a few. The Toronto public health department closed the meat packing plant, where she worked alongside burly men in white lab coats, face masks, visors, hard hats, and steel toe boots, as they yielded electric cutting tools and long knives. A deadly outbreak of a potent variant of coronavirus sickened dozens and even killed a few mature workers. Later, Enola told Maria the real reason she was laid off: she stabbed another worker who made a pass at her—touched her backside or groped her breasts. She jabbed him in the hand with a fillet knife, a cleaver, or a meat cutting knife, depending upon which version she decided to tell, so Maria wasn't confident which version to believe.

The duo ended up regularly meeting in a Starbucks on Danforth Avenue, near the Pape subway station. Before she moved to Toronto, Enola worked for her uncle in his grocery store in Sioux Lookout as a meat cutter. Enola said she loved to cut red, juicy, bloody meat. "I love chopping through the bones and gristle, carving the meat, cutting pieces of tenderloin and sirloin, trimming the fat from the steaks, but the job didn't pay enough."

Enola's mother was an Ojibway and Metis from the First Nations reserve of Lac Seul; her father was Italian-Ukrainian from the nearby town of Sioux Lookout in Northwestern Ontario. Enola loved to stun Maria with the words she uttered, but she also insisted she was a genuinely shocking person. Enola burst into a heckling laugh, whenever she saw she shocked Maria, saying incredible things about her parents and their relationship, some explicit, but she said her parents loved each other and would die for each other.

Enola also bragged she hunted big game, moose, and whitetail deer. “Do you know how it feels to gut and dress a big bull moose you just shot with a .303 rifle?” Still, Enola said she wanted to pursue something with purpose and meaning in life, but she didn’t think anyone would agree cam shows and porn videos counted.

Maria hadn’t slept around and never had a boyfriend; she felt like she was still a virgin; the only man she slept with—a pharmacist who worked for her parents—felt so guilty in the middle of love making—he stopped when he heard her talking about work and never showed up for a shift at the pharmacy again. She thought she did want to perform on the camera, though.

They both answered the classified advertisement online with vague hopes and expectations. In the middle of the pandemic, in their pursuit of an entrée into the underside of entertainment, they were the only prospective performers who responded to an online classified ad online by an amateur photographer seeking a pair eager to participate in creating short adult video clips. When Enola and Maria showed up at the door to his house for the interview, they stared at each other quizzically. Konstantinos’ face appeared severely scarred, healed from burns, but they both claimed the disfigurement didn’t bother them. In fact, Maria thought his disfigurement offered an explanation and made him more authentic. Maria remembered vividly seeing an individual with similar facial disfigurement, begging on the streets of Lisbon, when she accompanied her parents on a visit to their homeland of the Azores and Portugal. In fact, the scarring prodded Maria to look more deeply into his eyes; she wished to impress him with her belief beauty was more than skin deep; the mind and personality mattered more.

Konstantinos made no pretension to being a professional videographer: he again warned them he was a novice, who never created or edited video. He said he wanted to help an aspiring actress or model, who could

possibly use the video clips for their portfolio or video resumes to help them land an audition or find an agent.

Annoyed, irked, Enola demanded, “You never shot video?”

“If you don’t mind, we’ll learn—stumble through this—together. I said as much in the classified ad.”

Enola complained it appeared they didn’t have a choice, but it also appeared initially they had some quirky meeting of mind and bodies. They were intrigued with the prospect of helping create videos that attracted clicks and views on the Internet. Konstantinos said he wanted to provide a comfort zone for the models, so they didn’t have to worry about he-said-she-said situations.

“You’re trying to cover your ass,” Enola said, “or you’re into threesomes, but what happens if we decide to gang up you.” Enola said Konstantinos didn’t want to admit he was into threesomes, which she enjoyed, but she doubted if he had ever been involved in a true ménage a trois.

“I’m not ganging up against anyone,” Maria said.

They were the only models or actors who answered the ad, Konstantinos said, but he expressed satisfaction. He liked their compact bodies, curvaceous figures, and long dark hair, which reminded him of his favorite adult video star. Konstantinos explained he suffered facial disfigurement from a work-related injury. He was a welder on an oil pipeline near Fort McMurray when an explosion and fiery blast occurred, seriously injuring him, disfiguring his face. A lawsuit filed by his lawyer was settled out of court, since the explosion, his lawyer argued, occurred due to negligence and shoddy industrial workplace practices. Awarded the usual worker’s compensation, he also received a settlement amounting to a few million dollars. If he hadn’t been so upfront, Enola agreed, neither would have followed through with the ad. His face might have been an eyesore to anyone else, she thought, but neither Enola or Maria found his disfigurement repulsive. Besides,

Konstantinos wore his Ironman wrestling mask, or his welding mask. Enola thought Konstantinos was in excellent physical condition for his age, which she figured, to be his late forties, with a lean, muscular body. He looked well-built, toned, and physically fit, like someone who regularly lifted weights and watched his diet or avoided sweet and fatty foods. He was handsome, if you didn't notice his face, a mass of burnt flesh, scarred, which plastic surgery and skin grafts barely corrected. Even his eyes, though, looked as if they were nearly glued shut by the injuries. Enola started to call him their Elephant Man. Konstantinos said he was practically asexual until his injury. While he was still an outpatient in the burn unit of the hospital undergoing rehabilitation, he became attracted to the physiotherapist, but she was married, so he decided to visit a swinger's club, in Edmonton. Conscious of his severe facial disfiguration, he put his clothes in a club locker, wore the monogrammed towel around his waist, and went into the basement dungeon. He saw a bodacious woman, and she approached him and tugged at the towel around his waist so it dropped. If he put on a condom, she said, she would have sex with him. He couldn't believe how easy it had been. Enola didn't think he understood women's psyches. While his face was difficult to look at, literally an eyesore, he had a thoughtful mind and athletic body, which appeared appealing.

They both ended up taking the same bus to and from Pape subway station to his house. Enola asked her deeper and more probing questions, and Maria divulged whatever information she wanted, at least until Enola started teasing her. Enola started calling Maria poor little rich Portuguese girl, but she retorted she was Canadian, born and raised in Etobicoke and North York. Her parents were Portuguese, from the Azores archipelago and the mainland, but she considered herself Canadian. She complained people knew so little about Portugal and especially the islands. Anyway, she didn't have deep knowledge of the place; she only once visited

the Azores and the Portuguese mainland once when she was a child, Lisbon being where her parents met in pharmacy college.

Meanwhile, Enola expressed an eagerness to perform in an alluring style on camera, but Konstantinos kept giving pep talks about social responsibility, being role models, conducting themselves responsibly during the coronavirus pandemic. Enola and Maria both turned and looked at each other, wondering how they landed parts in a public service announcement. He insisted they wear protection while they performed on camera. Enola expected the shoots would entail hardcore action, but Connie said he would try to limit the action to hand jobs. Even then he insisted they wear purple latex gloves, and surgical faces masks, while he wore a purple or orange condom and a wrestling mask, an Ironman superhero mask, or his welding mask. He insisted they use hand sanitizer for lubrication. He could only agree with Enola when she said using hand sanitizer as a lubricant must have hurt. He said he didn't want them to perform if they were on drugs or had been drinking, but he wasn't a good judge of such things because he didn't drink or take drugs. He said they could blame his Greek Orthodox Catholic background; he had a guilty conscience about sex. He started to annoy Enola, drive her nuts, constantly asking them if they were okay with the action, if they were comfortable, if they were certain they wanted to carry through, if they needed a washroom break or wanted a snack or beverage.

Enola mused, "So, these are fetish videos, then?"

"They're whatever you want them to be." He said the videos were about staying safe during the pandemic; hence the face masks and gloves he continued to insist they wear.

Enola said she could never understand why a young woman with Maria's background would become involved in such a shady adventure. Maria didn't consider the venture disreputable, though; she regarded the

action as acting, modeling, maybe performance art. They both wanted to become actors and their troikas with Konstantinos, with the digital SLR cameras on tripods and held in his hand, were their initiation.

Enola wanted more intimacy; the action seemed robotic and impersonal. He didn't reciprocate, aside from stroking their hair, and caressing their faces. Enola tried to pleasure him with her mouth, but he refused. She complained he was paranoid about the coronavirus and neurotic about sexually transmitted infections, and he agreed. She continued to try, but he pushed and even slapped her away, triggering Enola's heckling laughter. All the while he operated the camera, one on a tripod, one hand-held, which he kept focused on the pair.

Konstantinos said he had been an avid amateur photographer ever since he read the photojournalism in *Life* magazine books. He became an even more avid and ardent photographer after the industrial workplace accident, a fiery explosion that occurred while he welded along the length of pipeline, which originated at oilsands project in Alberta. The large out of court settlement he received allowed him to buy expensive photographic equipment and even had plans to build a studio in his garage. Before his injury, he was more interested in photojournalism and street photography. After his extensive hospitalization and rehabilitation, whenever he partook in street photography, though, he felt harassed: he found himself constantly stopped and questioned by the police and security guards. He realized the questions, stops, and detentions were probably due to his facial disfigurement, since, before his welding accident, injury, and surgeries, he had taken pictures in the same venues without any disruption or interruption.

Maria and Enola considered themselves interns, up and comers, struggling to break into a niche of the adult video and erotic movie making and internet. They wanted to be artists and performers, so when he offered

them each cash at the end of the night, Maria felt awkward accepting his money, but Enola had no such compunctions.

The duo walked from his house and waited at the intersection near Centennial College's East York campus, for the Pape bus. When they grew tired and bored of waiting for the bus, they walked down Pape Avenue to the subway station in Greektown and stopped for coffee at the Tim Hortons, or Starbucks, or an all-night Greek café, depending on the hour. Maria was surprised how long their conversations in the cafes lasted. When Enola asked her where she worked, she said she worked for her parents, pharmacists who owned a few drugstores in the Toronto area.

“Your parents are a power couple, girlfriend!” Enola exclaimed.

“No, they're Portuguese.”

Enola jokingly asked her deep dark dirty secrets. When Maria gave her a blank look, she asked her why she wasn't working in the family business, learning the trade, studying to become a pharmacist. Maria told her about her addiction to oxycodone, which, she believed, she had overcome. Maria forced herself to be honest about her dependence; she believed openness was the route to recovering from the condition without a relapse. She also felt guilty her parents were forced to essentially commit accounting and inventory fraud to conceal her addiction to oxycodone and her theft of oxycodone tablets. Her transgressions caused her parents no end of distress, self-flagellation, and argumentation. Maria said she didn't get along with his father, who wanted her to attend university, for many reasons, but also to acquire a wealthy old stock Canadian husband. Her father thought she should be in graduate school studying for her PhD, working as a research scientist, earning several hundred thousand dollars a year, in a research and development lab at a global pharmaceutical company. Maria

said she didn't know what she wanted to do with her life; she wanted to try acting, but her father was adamant and insistent: If she didn't have academic ambitions—didn't want to improve herself and contribute to society—he wanted her to train to become a pharmacist and take over the family business.

“Why don't you just go to, like, community college?”

“My father wants me to go to University of Toronto.”

“What's so special about University of Toronto?”

“It has a pharmacy school father wants me to attend.”

“How does an addict get into pharmacy school?” Enola demanded.

“I study hard, I have good marks, I haven't relapsed.”

“So, you admit you're a drug addict, eh? How about a criminal? You're entitled, a white chick with dark skin, a pampered poor little rich girl.”

Enola made her cry, but Maria felt so embarrassed in the coffee shop she desperately tried to regain her composure. Enola bought her a biscotti and chai tea for takeout and ordered her to shut up and wipe her tears before they left the cafe.

Afterwards, Enola started to complain she could not find or view the videos with their “Ironman” cameraman on the Internet. She checked the adult websites, but couldn't find a single video of their *mélange à trois*. She looked for videos with the purple latex gloves, black surgical masks, gobs of hand sanitizer, pumped from huge clear plastic bottles, and his welding mask or his cloth Ironman wrestling mask, but found nothing. During the video shoot the following Saturday evening, Enola asked him what he did with the data cards on which he recorded the videos of their performances. He put them in a filing cabinet, he said, which she noticed

he locked with a key on a silver keychain slung to his trousers and wallet. She asked Konstantinos why none of their videos had been posted. He admitted he hadn't posted any videos because he wasn't confident they were ready.

"You said you would post the videos to Pornhub," Enola said. "Why are we doing this stuff on camera if we aren't ready?"

"I'm having second thoughts; you're young women, with promising futures ahead of you."

In an argumentative mood, Enola demanded, "What about our futures?"

"Aren't you worried these kinds of videos might affected your prospects if they were posted? Do you want to ruin your lives?"

Enola started to shout and argue. "No. We're wearing face masks—who will be able to identify us? And I'm not worried about my future night now."

"That exactly my point: you're not worried right now, but what happens when you're looking for a better job?" Konstantinos demanded.

"I've no intention of running for political office. I want to be an actor and a model, not an Etobicoke city councilor, like this Portuguese bitch," said Enola, gesturing towards Maria. Shrugging, Konstantinos admitted he now nurtured reservations about the quality of the videos. Looking ready to strike him, slap him or punch him, Enola's argument grew loud and intense. She insisted she wanted to break into modelling and porn and needed to start somehow. "What's the sense of shooting these videos, if we're not sharing them, getting views, clicks, monetizing the videos?"

As they walked to Pape subway station Saturday night, Enola asked how she intended to spend the money Konnie gave her. Maria said the hundred and fifty dollars she received that night would be enough for an inexpensive computer tablet or an e-book reader. Her brow contorted, Enola seemed genuinely puzzled and, more frighteningly, angry. “A hundred and fifty dollars? Konnie gave you a hundred and fifty bucks? That’s what he gives you?”

“Well, yeah. Isn’t that what he gives you?”

“Yeah, of course.”

Enraged, Enola visibly trembled and shook with anger. Maria was surprised she seemed upset about the amount of money received for video shoots; after all, they had essentially agreed to perform for free, if he gave them a video, a copy to use for their portfolios.

The following Saturday night rained splattered the glistening sidewalks and streets, while Maria insisted on leaving early, heading to the warmth and dryness of home in Etobicoke. Enola decided to walk back to Konstantinos’s house and ask if she could borrow the washroom in his house. He said she could use the washroom upstairs. After she went downstairs, Enola discovered that he was in the shower. She crept into his bedroom and found his cargo pants with his keys on the silver keychain attached by another silver ring to his belt loop. She crept from his bedroom, gently stepped into his home office, and opened the filing cabinet. He had a filing cabinet full of camera equipment, including external hard drives. She found the memory cards he labelled with their names, neatly printed with Sharpies, in rigid plastic cases, and pocketed a memory card. Then she took the keys, which she found in the filing cabinet. She went to the closet and opened the fireproof boxes, full of cash. She helped herself to a bundle, which she slipped into a compartment of her handbag. After

she shouted her thanks to him through the bathroom door, behind which he showered, Enola slipped out of the house.

When they returned the following Saturday, Konstantinos, not his perky, energetic self, seemed upset. After he made them wait outside on the staircase and folded lawn furniture for several minutes, he invited them inside his house. After some consideration and soul searching, he concluded, he thought they shot their last video.

“What’s wrong with Konstantinos?” Maria asked. “I think he just fired us.”

“He can’t fire us; it was a partnership, a *mélange a trois*, and we control the content.”

After his debriefing, summing up, and last cash payment, they decided to walk down Pape to Danforth Avenue for coffee at a Starbucks café on the Danforth. “Did you enjoy making videos with Konnie?” Enola asked.

“It was an interesting exercise, and I can’t complain,” Maria said. She couldn’t believe she had started with naïve expectations of intimacy with a handsome Italian, a man like Fabio, who modelled for romance paperback covers. “Didn’t you?”

“He could turn me on,” Enola admitted. “I only wished we went the distance. Didn’t you feel that way? He could have done us both. The videos would have been better that way.”

Maria absently agreed: “Yeah.”

“His sex club story was bullshit. I mean, I believe him, she was hot and they were together, but probably only because she felt sorry for him. It was a charity fuck.”

“Actually, he didn’t say they fucked. He said she was hot, good looking, and they had sex.”

“Same thing. Are you trying to argue with me? If you are, Maria, I could just stab you with this.”

Enola clenched the butter knife she used to spread cream cheese on her bagel. As they locked eyes, Enola grew wide-eyed, and she became fearful of her, as she worried over whatever motivated her passionate anger. After they finished their coffee, Enola led her past Pape subway station, and they walked back down Danforth Avenue. “Let’s go back to his place. I’m worried about him.”

Maria ended up following Enola back down Pape Avenue to Konstantinos' house. Sensing Enola was up to mischief and shenanigans, she thought she should head to the subway station and take the next train to her safe home in Etobicoke. Enola rapped and knocked on the door gently. Observing the door was unlocked, Enola slipped inside the brick house.

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Maria asked.

“Just keep quiet,” Enola said. She crept down the hallway and tried to orient herself in the darkness of the kitchen. She grabbed a sharp boning knife from a drawer of utensils.

“Enola, what are you doing?” Maria demanded, whispering fiercely.

“Keep your whining down,” Enola whispered.

Konstantinos, wearing only his underwear, sensing an intrusion, walked into his home office while Enola rummaged, searching for a key to the filing cabinet and the locked fireproof box. Feeling apprehensive and helpless, Maria lingered and held back in the dark hallway near the back door. Clenching the grip of a baseball bat at his side, Konstantinos walked in on Enola. She figured because of the darkness he didn’t recognize her, since he warned he was ready to call the police. Then Enola lunged from the shadows of a bookshelf behind the door and, through the darkness of the home office, stabbed him, in the neck. Maria went

hysterical when she saw the blood. From the other room, Enola said, “There’s your beloved sugar daddy.”

When she saw the injury and Konstantinos appearing lifeless, as he lay in the dark growing puddle of blood in the darkness, she broke down altogether.

“Maria, get a grip, hold it together. Get your shit together and stop crying. He was ready to attack me.”

Enola somehow managed to momentarily convince Maria she acted in self-defense to protect her own life. Enola also insisted she stay to help her cleanup, so Maria stayed overnight with her in the guest bedroom overnight. In the late morning Enola stripped off his bloodied undergarments and dragged his naked body into the kitchen, while Maria sobbed and wept.

“Get your shit together and stay calm, Maria. We’re in this mess together.”

Enola told her to maintain his composure, lest somebody discover her coverup. Enola warned she didn’t want her father and mother to become involved - their precious reputations and pharmacies dragged into the tawdry affair, as she urged her to keep calm. She started cutting Konstantinos’ body into pieces as if she was working in the meat department of her uncle’s grocery store, or gutting and cleaning a deer or moose she or her father or uncle shot when she joined them on a hunting expedition in northwestern Ontario. She cut the body into pieces, separating his head and limbs from the torso, cutting the limbs at the joints, the knees and the ankles, the wrists and the elbows, and put the body parts, the hands, the feet, the lower legs, the upper legs and arms, into discarded, leftover plastic bags, which she found discarded in a closet, and double wrapped. Enola sweated and grunted as she cut and sawed, while Maria sporadically broke into tears, wiping the salty moisture from her eyes with the back of her hands and hem of her pullover. Then she put the body parts into his freezer. Meanwhile, she sobbed and cried, but she felt too afraid to leave.

“Maria, we did society a service—getting rid of a pervert.”

“How can you say that about him? He was a nice man—never did anything bad to anyone.”

“He made pornographic videos. He made videos of teenagers.”

“But we’re not teenagers—not by a long shot.”

“But we look like teenagers.”

“He asked our permission, and we acted—”

“You act like a teenager. You haven’t grown up. Grow up. Get your shit together. He made pornos, Maria, disgusting, perverted pornos.”

“But it was soft-core, and we wanted to be in the videos, and we’re adults—age of majority.”

“Are you, like, trying to be his lawyer? ‘Cause, if you are—” Enola waved a bloody knife at Maria, who broke down again, wailing uncontrollably. “Maria, get your shit together. I need to get you through this mess, so don’t keep up this crying jag. In fact, keep it up, and I’ll lose my temper, and you’ll be next.” Enola aimed the blade tip at Maria pointedly.

Maria bit the cuff of her wrist through the hem of her pullover, trying to stifle her sobbing. After Enola looked around the house thoroughly, she discovered a woodstove in the basement. She decided to experiment with burning his remains, pieces of his body, in the woodstove. The papers Enola use to start the fire were damp, since they had been left in the recycle bin, upon which rain fell. The fire in the woodstove produced too much smoke and failed to ignite into hot flames. Someone knocked on the front door, and Maria thought initially the police arrived. When Maria saw the young woman dressed in tight black leggings—in contrast to

Enola's distressed, torn jeans—a hoodie, sheepskin boots, and a toque over her dreadlocks, even though it was mild, she didn't know whether she should be afraid or relieved.

“I have so much respect for this man,” the neighbor said, “and I love his ideas for sustainable living, but isn't it a bit warm to be using the woodstove?” This neighbor wore a powder blue surgical face mask and remained socially distanced, which, Maria thought, might have spared her life, while Enola clenched a knife behind the door. The neighbor wondered if everything was all right since she thought the weather was too warm for a fire. Enola said she would inform him of her concerns and managed to convince the worried neighbor to leave without any apparent suspicion. Afterwards, Enola mocked the young women's speech and mannerism and said it sounded as if Konnie had more luck with the ladies than he suggested, even if they were tree huggers and hipster chicks. Anyway, Enola gave up on the scheme of using the woodstove to burn remains. Still, Enola said, they needed to destroy the evidence, clean the ashes and the bones, which didn't burn. Enola disposed of the burnt and charred remains in plastic bags she stored in the deep freezer. She said they needed to clean the house from ceiling to basement and required plenty of bleach.

Enola took Maria on the subway train, virtually empty and abandoned because of stay-at-home orders for the pandemic lockdown, to the Walmart in a shopping mall, the Scarborough Town Centre. In the Walmart, fearing she would break into sobs and start crying spontaneously, Maria looked distressed, but Enola whispered Walmart had security cameras everywhere and insisted she try to act normal. Enola warned her to maintain her composure and a calm demeanor or she would have to stab her in the heart. With her heckling laugh, *sotte voce*, Enola said, at this rate their plans for world domination and breaking into the porn business would be destroyed. Enola had a shopping cart and a list on Konstantinos' index cards. As she checked down

the list in the brightly lit superstore aisles, she loaded the shopping cart with two backpacks, two pairs of hiking boots, sponges, cleaning pads and sponges, bottles of bleach, and large plastic garbage bags, which she paid for with Konstantinos' cash. In a stall of the restrooms, with their plastic shopping bags doubled, they put the bottles of disinfectant cleaner and bleach into their backpacks.

When they arrived back at Konstantinos's house, Enola said they couldn't leave the house until the cleaning chores were complete. They used bleach and buckets of hot water and cleaned, mopped, and scrubbed once, twice, and thrice. Then, at night, they made the first of a series of trips to the bottom of Leslie Street, to the spit. As they walked along the sidewalk on Pape Avenue, several pedestrians, wearing face masks and neck gaiters, averted their eyes and avoided them. They steered away far from their path and stepped onto the street as they carefully walked around the duo, sidestepping them, keeping their distance. Maria felt tainted and dirty and believed she gave off an evil aura. When Maria broke down and cried, saying passersby were deliberately avoiding them, Enola said, of course, they were social distancing, trying to be goodie-goodies, avoiding the risks of coronavirus transmission. They rode the streetcar along Queen Street East to the intersection and hiked to the foot of Leslie Street. Then they walked around the barriers to the gravel road and hiked through Tommy Thompson park, along a route that snaked along the manmade point.

The tip of the Leslie Street Spit was the Vicki Keith Point, named after a marathon swimmer, Enola said. "You should remember to call it that – she's a hero. Imagine swimming across Lake Ontario—it's so big it's like an ocean. How tired and sore would you feel? She was in cold water so long she hallucinated while she was swimming. Come on, Maria, she was a young woman, like you and me, be inspired. Get you're shit together. You're going to make it. I need you to show some courage so we can get through this mess."

Near the nesting and breeding ground of thousands of cormorants and seagulls, they disposed of Konstantinos' frozen body parts. Enola thought his remains didn't stand a chance against so many seagulls and cormorants. Before she tore through the black plastic, Enola said the ravens would pick at the garbage bags and then the other birds would join the posse scavenging his remains.

“When I worked as a meat cutter for my uncle's grocery store, I used to love to make runs in my uncle's pickup truck to the dump. The butcher told me to throw away the tainted product before the big boss, my uncle, saw. I'd watch the bears, eagles, and turkey vultures swoop down to scavenge what I threw out—they'd fight, and rip apart the spoiled meat.”

As she sobbed and cried, Enola snapped and slapped her with the palms and back of her hands. “What is your problem? We're you in love with this guy?”

“He didn't deserve to die,” Maria said.

“We acted in self-defense, Maria. Get your shit together, or I'm going to have to slap you around like you're my bitch and I'm your pimp.”

They disposed of the last of his remains, part of his left leg, including his foot, his penis and testicles, frozen hard as a rock, wrapped in black plastic garbage bags. They made three trips over three days, through the worst parts of the pandemic and lockdown of the first wave of the coronavirus. With the streets, buses, streetcars, and subways silent, virtually empty and abandoned, concealing their transgressions became easier. By the end of the second day the seagulls, cormorants, ravens, and even hawks, eagles, including predators like foxes and coyotes, Enola said, ate and picked apart the wrapped human remains they discarded in the lagoon.

But they couldn't be certain because of the dark, and shredded pieces of black plastic garbage seemed scattered along the bushes and shoreline, several dozen meters beyond the trail and roadway.

"I used to take hikes down this road, snaking along Leslie Street Spit, trying to figure out what was wrong with my life—what direction I was heading. The only discovery I made: this manmade monstrosity of a park is probably a good spot to kill someone and dump their body."

Maria cringed and shivered, as they walked along the dirt road which traversed an artificial point of land built, as Toronto grew like a boomtown, from the landfill excavated for the construction of skyscrapers in the financial district. Then Enola insisted that she accompany her back to the house for one final meeting. Maria broke into sobbing, broken by gasps and exclamations, again. Enola clenched her shoulders and insisted she tell her what was her effing problem. Caught in her clutches, Maria felt too afraid to say she feared she would maim or kill her. Enola tried to reassure her she need not worry; however, if she didn't keep her mouth shut, she would come back and hunt her down. She threatened to inform her parents.

"That would be a disgrace, wouldn't it? Your parents would have to send you to a nunnery. Or I guess Fatima would be the Portuguese equivalent, wouldn't it? Or you'd help the homeless on the streets of Lisbon, with the divine guidance of Mother Theresa, of course."

"Enola, shut up!"

"Oh, I forgot. Mother Theresa died."

"You don't know what you're talking about."

"Trying to provoke me? You want to fight?"

"No. I don't want to fight. Please leave me alone."

Enola gave her a thin wad of cash, but she held up her hands and refused to accept Konstantinos' money. Enola insisted, Maria thought, because she wanted her tainted, contaminated by the evil. Enola offered her his Ironman wrestling mask and welding mask, but Maria merely put the personal protective equipment and costumery aside. Enola took his external hard drives and data cards with the videos and pictures from their video shoots together and put them into her backpack. The evidence was in the videos he filmed, thought Enola, feeling confident she needn't worry because Maria was equally guilty and complicit. Besides, she concluded, self-defense was only natural and acceptable, since he exploited them. Still, she said, "If you say anything, I'll tell your parents what you did on camera with a dirty old man. Do I need to make myself any clearer?"

Maria became teary and cried again. "He was a kind and gentle man and even paid us."

"He was a pervert and it sounds like he paid you more."

Enola started to spout obscenities and rage and, intimidated, bullied, frightened, Maria realized she was safest if she kept quiet. Enola insisted she was giving her half the money he left in the house, so she shouldn't think she was ripping her off, but money was the least of Maria's concerns at that moment.

Enola decided to take the hard drives to her own apartment for her own protection. First, she rented a storage locker where she stored the external hard drives and data cards with the videos and images from their photoshoots and video sessions. Then Enola decided to move to Vancouver. She rented a bedroom in a rooming house, filled with young women, students mostly, plus minimum wage workers deemed essential during the pandemic, including a supermarket cashier and a school caretaker. She struggled to find work until she found position with a meat and poultry packing plant. Based on the experience she possessed as a meat

cutter and merchandiser in her uncle's grocery store and the glowing references he gave her, the slaughterhouse hired her to work as a butcher, operating industrial equipment, replacing a beefy middle-aged man, a bodybuilder, who became infected with the coronavirus and was critically ill, on a ventilator, in a Vancouver hospital intensive care unit. Then she started to have uncontrollable vomiting and nausea while eviscerating chickens. Thinking the kill floor was making her ill, that she had become allergic to live poultry, she decided to quit. Then Enola discovered she was pregnant from a one-night stand with a co-worker, after she worked overtime on the cleaning and evisceration processing line. When the doctor at the walk-in clinic told her the nausea and vomiting was from morning sickness, she tried to return to work, but human resources said she lied on her job application form and refused to hire her back. After an abortion, Enola enrolled in online courses for a pastry chef program at a Vancouver community college, which her employment insurance covered. Then she found work in an ethnic supermarket in Vancouver's Chinatown, cutting and packaging meat and poultry.

Soon Enola felt empty and lonely, when she realized she had no friends and family in Vancouver, only acquaintances, co-workers, and one-night stands. She boarded the transcontinental passenger train with a single heavy suitcase and returned to Toronto to try to resume her life as a millennial during the coronavirus pandemic. When she arrived in Toronto, she emptied her storage locker and took a claw hammer to the external hard drives.

Enola found no word of their benefactor, online, in newspaper reports, no missing posters plastered to utility poles and newspaper boxes. Since their elephant man lived a low-key and anonymous life, nobody noticed his absence. Nobody noticed Konstantinos disappeared. Ready to confess her sins, Enola went to the family physician she found at a walk-in clinic in downtown Toronto when she first moved to the city. The

doctor, hen pecked, hurried, curtly commanded her hush, when she started spouting nonsense about a man who recorded video of their intimate moments together. The doctor diagnosed her as depressed and prescribed Enola antidepressants and ordered lab tests for sexually transmitted infections.

Soon Enola visited Maria's pharmacy, near Royal York subway station, on Bloor Street West, where she worked as pharmacy assistant for her parents, who decided to fly Portugal for her grandfather's critical illness and stayed for his funeral. The coronavirus pandemic changed even Maria's parents, who normally prioritized money: This time they put family and old country friends first, deciding to remain in Portugal to help surviving family and relatives during the second wave of the coronavirus pandemic and volunteering at hospitals and pharmacies during the lockdowns and stay at home orders as infections spread and multiplied.

Enola walked down the narrow, crowded aisles to the back counter and asked for the prescription to be filled. Working behind the counter of the pharmacy, Maria felt her heart beat so rapidly she thought she would faint. Maria wrote on note paper, stationary for a contraceptive from a big pharmaceutical company, "Please go." Hoping she wouldn't make a scene, Maria handed Enola the piece of paper, along with her prescription.

Enola slid the prescription back across the counter, saying, "But I need this prescription filled."

"Please go."

"I need these medications." Enola reassured her she wasn't trying to cause her any problems or trouble. "I need the prescription for my medical condition." Maria closed her eyes and shook her head. Whispering hoarsely, tearing up, Enola pleaded with Maria to fill the prescription, muttering, "Please, my mental illness." For a change Maria felt as if she was the locus of control and the stronger of the pair. Maria filled the prescription, put the bottles of medication, into a paper bag, stapled the receipt and top edges, and asked Enola

not to return to Silva Drugstore. Enola slid her hand across the polished pharmacy counter, and opened it and pulled it away, revealing a small black memory card, in SD format, with Konstantinos' tiny neat handwriting. Maria seized the SD memory card, placed it gingerly into the pocket of her lab coat. Maria placed some candies for dry mouth into a small paper bag, stapled it shut, and slid the bag back across the counter. As if engaged in a competitive chess match, Enola slid her hand back across the counter, opened it, revealing another memory card, which she left beside the cash register. With tears in her eyes, Enola walked out of the pharmacy.

Enola went to the subway entrance next door to the drugstore, stepped down the concrete stairs and flights of escalators, and paced on the concrete platform of Royal York subway station. After Enola boarded the eastbound subway train, she checked the prescription, and realized Maria had given her the entire batch of medication in one dispensation, all the refills for the antidepressants for nine months at once. When the negativity of Maria's words and gesture sank in, Enola figured she could no longer count Maria, who now had power over her, as a friend. She took sips from the tall narrow can of super caffeinated beverage while she downed several fluoxetine capsules. Then she gulped several sublingual lorazepam tablets, prescribed to place beneath her tongue on an as needed basis, and chased the dissolving tablets down with the strong sweet cola. As the medication took effect, Enola grew completely relaxed and drowsy. She ended up taking the subway train back and forth along the Bloor-Danforth line, from Kipling station in Etobicoke to Kennedy station in Scarborough. Then she somehow managed to board the subway train at Bloor station, on the Yonge-University line, which she rode back and forth in a stupor. Somehow Enola ended up disembarking from the subway train at Union station. On the narrow, crowded platform, she got into a shoving match with another subway passenger, a hospital cleaner, who wore a neck gaiter that covered his lower face, and whose mouth was already

protected by a surgical mask. He also wore dark safety glasses and a visor to protect his eyes against the coronavirus and a baseball cap, aside from his scrubs and personal protective gear, which looked like a hazmat suit. He complained Enola wasn't social distancing or wearing a face mask during the dangerous third wave of the coronavirus pandemic. This might have been of little consequence if Enola didn't retaliate. A physical struggle with the cleaner ensued during which she fell onto the tracks before a subway train sped into the station. The hospital cleaner and a bicycle courier, who was transporting coronavirus tests results to the laboratory, and vaccines to nurses in community clinics, struggled to rescue her, she was crushed beneath the train's weight. When the cleaner saw her crushed and mangled beneath the steel wheels, he fled through the turnstiles, corridors, and staircases to street level. Then he found a side entrance into Union station and in a train waiting area washroom, he doffed his uniform and protective gear. He reemerged onto Bay Street in street clothes, from his duffel bag, which he carried like a backpack. He also disposed of gear in the garbage of the Union Station men's room, which had a dozen stalls.

Meanwhile, onlookers and witnesses debated as to whether she was deliberately pushed or fell onto the tracks, a controversy which spilled over into the newspapers. This became a bleak back page story in the Toronto daily newspapers, flooded with coronavirus coverage, the tragic story of an intelligent young woman, from Northwestern Ontario, an essential worker in the coronavirus pandemic, and the defining public moment in her life, as she struggled with depression, anxiety, and an abortion, the sad end—as Konstantinos' disappearance was eclipsed and even dismissed. A part-time worker, a journalism student at Ryerson University, who worked as a pharmacist's assistant alongside Maria, in Silva Pharmacy, filling prescriptions, said it seemed unlikely Enola's demise would have received coverage from the daily city newspapers, if she committed suicide,

without foul play. If it was a case of her deciding in her own conscious volition to end her own existence, news of her demise would have remained unreported.