

PAINTED BLACK

by

Debra R. Borys

Chapter 1

"Hey. Kid."

Chris stepped back into the doorway, his foot crunching a shard of broken glass that sliced through the thin sole of his shoe. The man's breath, sour like stale cigarette smoke, puffed an icy cloud, polluting the aroma wafting in from the nearby chocolate factory. Tears burning but unshed, Chris smiled, the metallic taste of blood in his mouth as he bit his lip to keep from cursing out loud.

"Twenty bucks." The man nodded his head toward the alley. "Twenty bucks for a quick bump and grind." Broad shouldered and black, a scar marred his jaw and his hands were large and hard. "You can't beat that deal."

Sewer gas. Stetson cologne. The taste of tears, sweat and semen. Chocolate

dark and bitter as blood. Night after night of standing on Clark Street, waiting, smiling, it all started to smell alike. But the growl of his stomach echoed louder than the screaming in his head. Chris held out his hand.

"Money's up front."

The moonlight painted the alley ebony and pewter as Chris lead the man to a corner hidden by a dumpster. The perv was on him before they even stopped, pushing him face first against a splintered door, groin grinding against the butt seam of Chris's Levi's, humping, humping like a dog in heat. Cheek against wood, obscenities and grunting in his ear, foul breath choking him, Chris gritted his teeth and waited.

Moon and Teach waited, too, waited until the rutting man started to shoot his wad, moaning and dead to the world, before they pulled him off Chris and beat him senseless. Teach dug deep for the guy's wallet, ripped the cash from it. He waved a fan of twenties and fifties and grinned, his broken front tooth a jagged gap in a crooked row.

"Give it up," Chris told Moon who got in one last kick. "We got the money, let's get back to Lakeview."

"Not yet," said Teach. This was his game, he made the rules. "We got time for one more sucker." He jerked his thumb toward LaSalle street. "Next block over."

"Jesus," Chris spit out. "Greedy bastard. You're not the one getting humped by these greasy old pervs. I need me some Captain Morgan to wash the stink out of my throat."

"What you bitching about, Cry? It's not like they're actually fucking you, for Christ's sake."

"Easy to say when all you got's to do is beat the bastard to a bloody pulp. How about taking a turn as the knothole and see how you like it?"

"But, Crybaby." Teach grinned and stepped close to stroke a finger across Chris's cheek. "Everybody knows you're the purty one." He rolled the "r" in an exaggerated purr. "What joker's gonna look twice at my ugly mug?"

Moon laughed and mumbled something about an orangutan's red ass. Teach punched him in the shoulder, but laughed along with the joke, the two of them moving toward the mouth of the alley. Moon looked back at Chris, his face as round and pockmarked as the dark side of the moon.

"You coming, ain't you?" he called. "One more and I'll let you take a poke at Jasmine later when I'm done with her. Deal?"

Chris wiped the back of his hand across his mouth. It seemed like he could taste the tobacco-scented saliva the mark had been spitting while he ejaculated obscenities into Chris's ear. *I'll call*, he'd promised Coleen centuries ago, breathing in the strawberry shampoo scent of her hair. *Once I get a job and a place, you can come too.* The muscles in his jaw clenched and unclenched as he walked off after the others.

God, he hated the smell of chocolate.