

Women in Uniform:

Medics and Soldiers



and Cops, Oh My!

**Verda Foster &
Pat Cronin**

Women In Uniform: Medics and Soldiers and Cops, Oh My!

by

Eds. Pat Cronin and Verda Foster

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Special thanks to the wonderful women who participated in this anthology. You've given us a great collection of stories to enjoy.

Dedication

Dedicated to the memory of our sister writer, Lee Coats.

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Fourth and Goal

by Chris Paynter

J.D. MARTIN STOOD on the sidelines, shifting impatiently, awaiting the call to return to defense. As defensive end of a women's professional football team, the Indianapolis Marauders, the coach pulled her out during first downs. Used primarily as a pass rusher, he sent her in for second or third and long--obvious passing situations. Here lately, she'd lobbied to play against the run, but he ignored her pleas.

She had felt a twinge in her groin on the last play where she sacked the Chicago Wind's quarterback, but she shook it off as she often did. Known as the toughest defender on the team, she rarely showed pain, if she felt anything at all.

Football was her escape. She'd recently split up with her cheating, domineering girlfriend, and playing the game provided her with an excuse to take out her frustration on the opposing quarterback. Making jarring hits was like a balm to her bruised ego.

"Martin! Wake up and get out there," her coach growled, motioning to the field.

Asshole. And Rick Donaldson really was a sexist asshole. She had no idea why he'd chosen to coach an all-women's football team other than a sick need to control women and make them miserable.

J.D. sprinted out onto the field, replacing her friend, Monica. "Nail her ass." Monica smacked her on the helmet as she jogged past.

It wasn't a secret that Chicago was a dirty team. Their quarterback, Rollins, was a loudmouth bitch who loved taunting opposing players. She'd pointed at J.D. after three crucial third down completions already in tonight's game, saying things like, "You're too fucking slow, old lady."

At thirty-three, J.D. was one of the oldest on the young Marauders' team. She'd already decided this year would be her last. She hated giving up the game and especially hated it now after her messy break-up with Tonya. She'd need something else to occupy her time and had no idea what it'd be. It scared her.

The quarterback called an audible. Vicki, the defensive captain and play caller, checked off into a blitz. The center snapped the ball, and J.D. bull rushed the left guard to the ground. The only thing that stood between her and a sack was Tilman, the Chicago Wind's diminutive running back. Rollins was unaware of J.D.'s close proximity to her blindside. Tilman made a futile effort to block her. Just when she thought she had a clean shot at Rollins, Tilman threw a low block aimed at her knees.

J.D. attempted to jump over Tilman, but at the last second, Tilman stuck out her leg and tripped her. Pain tore through her right knee, and she landed hard onto the unforgiving turf. She grabbed her knee, writhing on the field.

She spotted one of the officials hovering nearby and asked him through gritted teeth, "You mean you fucking didn't see that tripping?"

"Wait for your trainer and don't worry about how I do my job." He turned his back and walked toward the sideline. Her teammates huddled over her, voicing their encouragement. "Hang in there, J.D., Erica's coming." Vicki leaned over and tapped her shoulder pads.

J.D. pulled off her helmet, freeing her blonde curls that lay plastered in sweat against her head. She squeezed her eyes shut and tried to control erratic breathing brought on by the pain.

Two hands gently grasped her knee. "Tell me where it hurts." A husky voice floated down, prickling her ears with its sensuality.

She opened her eyes to fall helplessly into those of the trainer. She found it hard to speak.

"J.D.?"

"Huh?"

Erica gave her a slight smile. "Where's the pain?"

She almost asked, "what pain?," because the only thing she felt was a throbbing in her groin--and it wasn't from the slight pull she'd experienced earlier in the game. How could she have missed the drop-dead good looks of their trainer? Erica wore her dark brown hair pulled off her face in a ponytail. She had high cheekbones, accentuating her luminous, amber eyes.

J.D.'s attention drifted to Erica's full lips repeating the question once more.

God, she probably thinks I'm an idiot.

"The inside," she mumbled, feebly pointing at the inner part of

her knee. Again, Erica's fingers tenderly probed.

J.D. flinched when she touched one area. "Here?" Erica asked. "Yeah." "Okay. I'm going to bend it a little. I need to feel if anything's

loose." Erica manipulated the knee slightly back and forth, prodding the muscles around the kneecap. "How does that feel?"

Warm. My skin feels warm, J.D. wanted to say. "Not bad."

"I don't think it's a tear or a blown ACL," Erica said. She peered down at J.D. and searched her face. "Do you think you can try to stand?"

J.D. nodded. "Vicki and Theresa, could you please give us some help?" Each teammate moved to either side of J.D. and hooked their arms under hers, carefully helping her up until she stood with her weight on her left leg. Erica bent over and felt the knee some more.

J.D. flinched at the touch as it traveled up the leg to points north. Jesus. She's only doing her job, and I'm getting turned on here.

"Did that hurt?" Erica asked with a concerned expression. "No. I think I'm being a little sensitive." Erica's mouth quirked up in a knowing grin. "Let's get you to the bench."

J.D. moved forward tentatively, putting a little pressure on the right leg. The pain dissipated with each step. Erica had the players guide her to the bench. They returned to the game while Erica continued asking questions. "How did it feel as you walked?" "Better. It's hardly hurting at all now." J.D. raised and lowered her leg a few times. Erica sat down beside her and put her hand on J.D.'s left thigh. "Why don't we take a closer look at this later? There are a couple of minutes left in the game. It may be something I can massage out." A shiver traveled down J.D.'s spine at the way Erica said the word "massage." She never wished so much for a game to end.

J.D. SAT ON the training table, patiently waiting for Erica to finish her ministrations with the other players. Vicki was the last to leave after Erica wrapped her bum knee.

"Ice it down and elevate it when you get home," Erica told her.

"You know the drill." "Will do." Vicki turned to J.D. "Hope everything's okay." "Thanks." J.D. watched Vicki's retreating back as she left the locker room. She and Erica were alone. "I see you've removed your uniform and pads. Why don't we get you in the shower before I start the massage?"

J.D. wasn't sure what to make of the "we" part of the question.

"Uh, I think I can undress the rest of the way on my own and make it into the shower."

"Oh, I think you'll need a little assistance in case your knee gives out. We wouldn't want you to fall, now would we? Management frowns on accidents in the locker room. Since I'm part of management, I'm all you got. Do you want me to take off the T-shirt and bra, or can you handle it yourself?"

In answer, J.D. tugged off the shirt along with her sports bra. Cool air greeted her full breasts, causing her nipples to harden.

Erica's gaze traveled from J.D.'s mouth down her chest to her nipples. "You must be cold." She raised her eyes to lock with J.D.'s. "Which means a nice, hot shower will help even more." She ran her fingers along J.D.'s calves and slowly slid off her socks.

J.D. tried futilely not to squirm on the table, wondering if Erica even knew the erotic effect her touch was having. Erica motioned at J.D.'s sanitary pants. "Stand up, and I'll help take those off." "Really, I think I can do this myself." "J.D." Erica's voice lowered. "Quit arguing and stand up."

J.D. slid to the end of the table and placed her bare feet on the cold tile.

Erica moved forward until she was within inches. Her fingers tugged at the sanitary pants. Hooking her thumb in the waistband of J.D.'s briefs, she rolled the ensemble down J.D.'s legs until they reached the floor. She straightened again, and her eyes darkened with desire.

"Now, it's my turn." Erica didn't speak as she quickly undressed.

J.D. took in her well-toned body and small firm breasts. She stared at the dark hair between Erica's legs, inadvertently licking her dry lips. She raised her eyes to meet Erica's intense stare.

Erica led her toward the showers. "Do you like it warm or hot?" she asked, flipping on the faucet.

Why did everything this woman say sound like a double entendre? Why do I care? J.D. thought. She found her voice. "Hot."

"I thought you'd say that." Erica maneuvered them under the steaming spray. She pressed against J.D. to reach the bar of soap from the holder on the tiled wall. "Allow me." She quickly lathered the soap and placed it back in the holder. "I think I need both hands for this." She started at J.D.'s shoulders, slid her hands along her arms, and then back up. "But I imagine you sweated here, too." She rubbed the soapy suds under J.D.'s breasts, flicking her thumb back and forth across the nipples. "And let's not forget here." She dipped a hand lower and slid into J.D.'s wetness. "Ah, I see I've had an effect on you. I was wondering. You're so under control on the field. Are you always under control, J.D. Martin?"

"N-no."

"No? This could get interesting." Erica lightly ran her finger across J.D.'s clit.

J.D. jerked in response.

"I think you're clean here, too. Step under the water again while I rinse you off."

J.D. dutifully obeyed, feeling Erica's fingers slowly stroke her and discovering quickly that rinsing off was even more stimulating than washing. "Oh, God."

"I think I know what'll make you feel even better, but I need your help. Will you help me?" Erica quirked an eyebrow.

J.D. nodded.

"Don't let me fall." Erica slid down J.D.'s body, holding onto her until she knelt on the wet tiles. She looked up at J.D. with a sensual smile. "Pretend your getting into your three-point stance and spread your legs for me." She pushed J.D.'s legs apart. "Perfect. You're simply perfect. Now, lean against the wall."

J.D. fell back and slapped her hands flat against the tile when Erica's tongue slid into her wetness. Her knees began to shake, and she felt as though she'd sink to the shower floor like a big puddle of goo.

But Erica pulled away before that happened. "Not yet, baby," she said, gazing up at J.D. She rose to her feet and led J.D. to the towels. She grabbed one, handing it to J.D. "You can dry me, if you like."

J.D.'s hands trembled as she took the towel and rubbed it through Erica's dark tresses. Erica kept her eyes closed while J.D. dried her off, lingering over Erica's pert breasts, and then dipping below. She rubbed the towel between Erica's legs and into her short curls.

"I'm not sure, but I think I just made you wetter rather than dryer," J.D. whispered.

Erica held J.D.'s hand in place. "You can finish me later. I want you now." She snatched up another towel and tossed it to J.D. "Dry off, and make it fast."

J.D. quickly rubbed herself down, knowing the goose bumps on her arms and legs weren't from the cool air. They walked back into the training room.

"Up." Erica pointed to the padded table.

"You do realize I'm not used to a femme being in control," J.D. said, taking a seat on the edge.

"Who says I'm in control? You're calling the shots; you just don't know it." Erica folded her towel and laid it on the floor. She grabbed J.D.'s knees and pushed her legs apart, stepping in between and pulling herself closer. "Do you know how long I've wanted this?"

J.D. shook her head.

"From the first day I started with the team. But you were with someone, and despite what you might think of me at this moment, I'm not the kind of girl to horn in on another woman's property."

"I was never her property," J.D. said, sounding uncharacteristically harsh to her own ears. "Sorry, I--"

Erica placed her thin, delicate finger on J.D.'s lips.

"You don't need to apologize. I heard the way she spoke to you."

"I didn't realize anyone was around when she was here."

"You didn't notice," Erica said softly, caressing J.D.'s cheek. "But I was there in the background, picking up equipment the day she went off on you about your need to play football." She leaned forward to within inches of J.D.'s mouth. "I understand. It means something here, doesn't it?" Her hand drifted down to J.D.'s heart.

"Yes," J.D. whispered, aching with the knowledge that this virtual stranger knew her better than a woman with whom she'd shared six years of her life. She reached her hand behind Erica's neck and entangled her fingers in her thick hair. "Kiss me."

Erica gave J.D. one last look before claiming her mouth in a searing kiss.

The electric connection between the two of them ramped up even higher. J.D. moaned as their tongues entwined, each fighting for dominance.

Erica broke away and pushed her mouth against J.D.'s neck, sucking and nibbling greedily before continuing to J.D.'s breasts. She lifted one to her lips, teasing the nipple with her tongue and then taking it fully into her mouth.

J.D. cradled the back of Erica's head, pulling her closer. "Harder. Please."

Erica obliged, but not for long. She quickly stepped away and fell to her knees onto the towel. She ran her hands up J.D.'s calves to her thighs and pushed her legs apart even further.

"I think I need to finish what I started in the shower," she said in a hoarse whisper. She lowered her head and put her mouth to

J.D. again, running her tongue through J.D.'s soaked lips before entering her with the tip.

J.D. grabbed hold of the bench for dear life as Erica plunged in and out, seeming to know just when J.D. was on the edge and then backing off.

"I need to come. God, I need to come so bad." Erica pulled away. "Tell me what you want, baby." "Inside. All the way inside," J.D. hissed. Erica entered her again, but this time with first one, then two fingers. "Like this?" "Yes."

Erica slammed into her and withdrew. "Like this?" she asked again.

"More. I need--"

She didn't finish the sentence. Erica took her clit into her mouth and sucked it hard. She began a steady rhythm with her fingers, plunging deeper with each thrust. J.D. dug her nails into the cushion and screamed out as she climaxed.

But Erica didn't stop. She continued sucking on J.D.'s clit. J.D. grabbed the back of Erica's head, weakly trying to push her away.

"I ca-can't," she rasped.

Erica sucked even harder, putting her other hand around J.D.'s waist and pulling her tight against her mouth.

J.D.'s nails tore into the cushion and the muscles in her legs tensed when she flew into her second orgasm. "Oh, God!"

She shuddered as Erica slowly withdrew her fingers and took her mouth away.

J.D. sank back onto the table, breathing heavy, a little frightened by the bright, pulsing lights inside her eyelids. She felt Erica climb up onto the table and press against her body.

Erica whispered into her ear, "I think that's a first down, don't you?"

J.D. gave her a weak smile. "I see you know the terminology."

"Just because I'm a femme doesn't mean I don't know football terms. Besides, I'm the Marauders' trainer. Would you expect anything less?"

J.D.'s breathing finally returned to normal. She stroked Erica's hair. "I'm sorry. I want to please you, but you've worn me out."

Erica rose up on her knees and straddled her. She grabbed J.D.'s hand and brought it to her mound, pushing it lower. "Just go inside me. It won't take long. I like it fast and hard."

J.D. thrust inside of her with two fingers. "More!"

J.D. added another finger, fascinated by the furrowed look of concentration on Erica's face. "You're so hot," she muttered. She brought her other hand to Erica's left breast, squeezing and tweaking her nipple as she continued to thrust deep inside.

Erica rode J.D.'s fingers with her head tossed back; the veins in her neck bulged prominently, pulsing with each thrust of J.D.'s hand.

God, she's beautiful. "Almost there," Erica said in a shaky voice. "Almost." She bit her lower lip.

J.D. rubbed her clit with her thumb.

Erica's eyes flew open, and they locked onto J.D.'s. "I'm coming."

J.D. almost came with her as she felt Erica throb around her fingers. She remained inside until Erica brought her hand to J.D.'s wrist. "I'm good, baby, I'm good."

J.D. pulled out and brought her fingers to her mouth. Closing her eyes, she sucked in Erica's juices. "I had to taste you," she whispered. She opened her eyes to find Erica staring at her with an animal-like ferocity.

Without any preamble, Erica slid inside J.D. again. She pushed her knee against her hand, crashing into J.D. like a velvet jackhammer.

"Oh, God, yes." J.D. knew it wouldn't take much, but she enjoyed the short trip to another climax. "This--is--called--taking--a--knee." Erica thrust with each word, grinding into her as she uttered "knee" until J.D. cried out. Erica collapsed against her. She held Erica tightly, running her hands down her back and grabbing her ass. "You're an amazing trainer." She felt Erica smile against her cheek. "Don't forget. I still owe you a massage."

Naked

by J.M. Redmann

KATIE TOOK THE uniforms out of the closet. Maryann could use them and she would never wear them again. She had only glanced at them once since the accident, after she and Erin had broken up, when she was packing to move out.

Maryann had held them up, her expression the only question-- pack or not? Katie had responded with a curt nod, then turned away from the blue that had so defined her life. She had limped to the kitchen to help Allen, Maryann's husband and her former partner. The glasses and forks were safer.

I should have just given them to Maryann then, Katie thought. But she knew that she wasn't ready for that kind of practicality, to simply banish the blue uniform from her life. How our past claims us, she thought, fingering the cloth. Or haunts us, she added, removing the sergeant's stripes. Maryann could earn her own. Katie knew that Maryann would take them off--the badge, the insignia, the stripes--strip it down to the essential cloth, and she would return the pieces that made the uniform Katie's instead of generic blue fabric.

Maryann and Allen had two kids, and their cops' salary didn't go very far. As Maryann said, between the perps on the street and the kids at home everything gets dirty more quickly than the laundry can keep up--her explanation for why she sometimes wore a blue shirt with a tomato stain not quite washed out.

Yesterday, the time had just come to let go of the uniforms. Katie had called, talked to Allen. Maryann would have asked her how she was, if she was sure, but Allen understood that she was talking to him to avoid those questions, and he had simply said thanks and that they would be by this evening to pick them up.

It had been a year since the accident, four months since she had last seen Erin, six months since their painful breakup. Time to move on, Katie imagined her therapist saying, although Kathleen would never say any such thing. Sometimes it felt better to have an external voice guiding her, as if the decision was less her responsibility.

Erin just loved the uniform. She never loved you, Maryann had spat out, when Katie told her what had happened.

Katie had agreed at the time, felt the comfort of another voice saying the bitter things that she was feeling. But it was more complicated than that. Erin had loved who Katie was in the uniform. Erin, living in an academic world, surrounded by books and papers, violence contained to arguments about obscure Virginia Woolf essays, had found in Katie a compelling and erotic other.

Katie, working class Katie, a high school diploma, the police academy, her academic accomplishments, had peaked the interest of Erin with her Ph.D.

"I've never dated a woman with a gun before," Erin had laughed nervously on their first night out.

"Do you even know any women with guns?" Katie had answered. Erin had silently shaken her head no. That was when Katie decided that she wanted Erin, to have her for the night--a few months at most. She saw no future beyond that for them.

Erin may have wanted the uniform and the toughness and strength it implied, but Katie also wanted the books and classes and the intelligence and belonging it offered. No, it wasn't as simple as Erin just wanting Katie's uniform.

They had met when Erin's car was stolen. Katie and Allen had taken the incident report. A few days later, Katie had spotted a car fitting the description that Ellen had given--a five year old gray Saab. Katie could have just called it in, but she had a hunch that Erin was a dyke--and Katie liked to follow her hunches. When she got off duty, she called Erin up and asked if she wanted to drive by what might be her car.

It was her car, not in the best of shape. Katie had waited with her for the tow truck, played--no, not really playing, but being, the tough cop, helping Erin through the foreign land of theft and damage.

But it was Erin who called a few days later--to let Katie know what had happened to her car, that it could be fixed, but would be in the shop for a week. Then she added an invitation to coffee. And after coffee, it was Erin who suggested taking Katie out to dinner--to thank her for finding her car, she said.

Katie had both been amused and intrigued by Erin's covering herself--just a thank you dinner, as if there was no sexual interest between them, the glances they had exchanged over coffee, the way Erin had let Katie help her into her jacket, her hands lingering on Erin's shoulders.

Erin's car was still being repaired, so Katie was the driver. Over dinner, she had been content to let Erin keep her middle-class reserve in place. A few veiled references to sex, the mention of an ex-lover, and silence where talk of a current lover would come in.

But when they left the restaurant, Katie had reached out and taken Erin's hand in hers. A simple act, but it had made the physical explicit instead of implicit. They were no longer just two women having dinner together. After letting Erin into her truck and driving away, Katie had again claimed Erin's hand with hers. Letting go to shift, then again taking it, the possession becoming such a given that Erin started reaching for Katie's hand instead of waiting for Katie.

"I've had an enjoyable evening," Erin said as Katie parked in front of her house, letting her hand still linger in Katie's. "Much more enjoyable than I would have thought."

Katie marked that it was both a compliment and an insult. Her reply was to wrap her free hand around the back of Erin's neck, pull her close and kiss her. She knew she couldn't possess Erin with words, all those years with books had given Erin the edge there, but Katie could take her physically, have her in a place where words didn't matter.

Erin allowed the kiss for a moment, then stiffened. Pulling away, she said, "I don't know where this can lead . . ."

"This isn't a marriage proposal," Katie had answered. "I just want to fuck you." Not giving Erin a chance to reply, she kissed her again. For a moment, Erin remained stiff, but then she allowed the kiss, and finally, returned it. She had told Katie that they had no future, and having fulfilled that responsibility, Erin seemed willing to let desire lead her.

Katie had played--no, again it wasn't playing, but an aspect of who she was, a part of her that Erin was attracted to--the aggressor, the one who only waited for the door to be closed before taking Erin in her arms, kissing her, undressing her, leaving Erin's clothes in a heap right on her doorstep. Katie wanted to prove that there was a place where their worlds could intersect--besides the random moment of a stolen car.

It had been a night of fucking, Katie repeatedly taking Erin, the kind of hard, physical sex that blotted out thinking and any idea of the future. Katie knew that it was more than a desire for sex, but also for possession and control that guided her. It gave their sex a hard, passionate edge.

Erin had at first just used just her tongue, until Katie took her hand and guided it into her, pushing deeply inside, then she smeared her juices down Erin's wrist to her elbow, holding fast to Erin's slick wrist with one hand as she used her other hand to guide Erin's head back between her legs and keep it there until she was sated.

Then Katie pinned Erin down on her stomach, holding her as Erin made a token protest of squirming away. Katie languidly ran her fingers down Erin's back, over her ass, then between her legs, teasing her wet opening. Katie stretched herself so that one of her breasts was on the pillow next to Erin's head.

"Take my nipple in your mouth," Katie whispered in her ear, "show me what you want me to do to your clit with your mouth on my nipple." Erin eagerly lifted her head to obey, but Katie arched back, just enough to keep her breast out of Erin's reach. Erin shifted closer, but Katie again moved just barely out of reach.

"You must not want it very much," Katie said, her fingers still slowly stroking the rim of Erin's cunt. "You're awfully damn wet for a girl that's not interested."

Erin muttered a "Damn it," and writhed closer, struggling against Katie's pinning weight. For her efforts, Katie thrust her breast forward, letting Erin finally wrap her lips around it.

Katie rewarded her by plunging two fingers into her cunt. Erin kept her face to Katie's breast for the first few thrusts, but with the third time Katie's fingers went deep, she let go of it with a loud groan, her hips arching into Katie's hand.

Katie pulled out, but didn't go in again. "Thought you wanted it, babe," she whispered teasingly into Erin's ear. "Suck my nipple like you mean it or you don't get any."

Erin let out another groan, but this one had an edge of frustration in it. She roughly twisted under Katie, again clamping her lips around Katie's nipple, then sucking as much of the breast as she could into her mouth. Erin sucked hard on Katie's breast, her tongue rolling Katie's nipple against the roof of her mouth. Katie let her continue just long enough to make her point.

Then she rolled directly on top of Erin, sliding down so that she could better reach between Erin's legs.

"You've been a good girl and good girls get good fuckings," Katie said as she started to again plunge her fingers into Erin. She wrapped her other arm around Erin's waist, using one finger to gently brush her clit, as Katie continued her hard fucking with the other hand. She kept the pressure on Erin's clit very gentle, almost a tease, until Erin began pushing herself onto Katie's fingers, her moans and motion begging for more. Katie gave it to her, rubbing her clit between two fingers. Erin came and came hard, a long shuddering orgasm that left them both drenched in sweat. They made love several times that night, always with that same edge of tease and power that kept it unexpected and hot.

But the night gave way to the clarity of morning, the two of them having breakfast in Erin's kitchen. The silence between them was dense and awkward, as if, with the physical spent, there was no connection between them. Was it just sex, just a quick fuck? Katie wondered if she should just decline the food, say her goodbye and leave it at that. She had thought that making Erin want her, making her allow Katie's hands and mouth between her legs, would be enough, but now in the clear light of day, Katie knew that she wanted something more. Later, much later, she admitted that she wanted Erin to love her. But at that moment, all she knew is that she didn't want to be just some one night fling, the fantasy of a woman in uniform that lasted only until the morning.

Almost at random, Katie had asked Erin about her breakfast cereals, ones that Katie had never seen on the shelves of her grocery store or on TV commercials.

"I get them at the food co-op," Erin had told her. "Healthy and all that jazz."

"So, are they really better than Cheerios?" Katie had asked.

Erin had given a soft laugh, then admitted, "Probably not, but I live in the rarefied world of academics. Appearances count. I can be open about being lesbian, but closeted about eating frosted flakes."

Then they both laughed and some barrier came down. Katie had always been curious about other people, other lives, the right to question was one of the things that attracted her to being a cop. Erin, too, also shared that searching curiosity. The questions, and the willingness to be open and honest in answering them, had taken them through a long, lingering breakfast.

Katie had then offered to drive Erin around, to any errands that she needed to run. They had gone to the food co-op, then to the university to pick up some books, Erin letting Katie have glimpses into her life.

A few days later, Katie had taken Erin to pick up her car, then, in unspoken agreement, had followed her home. This time Erin took the lead, as if having to prove that she could give as well as take. Wordlessly, she led Katie to the bedroom and slowly undressed in front of her, almost a strip tease. Then she knelt in front of Katie, roughly pulling her pants down and began licking and sucking until Katie had no choice but to fall back onto the bed and let Erin spread her legs all the way open to finish what she had started.

When she caught her breath, Katie threw off her remaining clothes and got on top of Erin. She didn't waste time on foreplay, her fingers finding where they wanted to go, Erin's slick cunt welcomed them. Katie quickly followed her fingers with her mouth, her tongue finding a hard, erect clit waiting for it. Erin let out a murmur of surprise when Katie slide one of her fingers into her ass, but she didn't ask Katie to stop. Katie liked the feeling of being inside her as she came, riding the arching hips, the spasm that tightened around her fingers, as if Erin was getting so much pleasure she didn't want to let Katie's fingers go.

They made love again and again, and as Katie was getting ready to leave, they made plans to get together for the weekend.

Somehow, promising that there were no promises made it easy to be together. To Maryann, Katie just said, "Oh, it's a fun affair, maybe some book learning will rub off on me." Katie didn't know what Erin said, probably something equally dismissive, "She's good in bed and I get my tickets fixed."

The sex changed from the burning intensity of the first few encounters to an exploration, learning each other's bodies and pleasures. Katie discovered licking and kissing the soft underside of Erin's breasts, kissing her nipples to full erectness, then caressing and tonguing her entire breast was how to get Erin wet and hot. Just as Erin learned to adjust the pressure of her fingers in Katie, the spread of her legs that signaled she wanted it deep and hard, or the slight pulling back when she wanted less intensity, a softer touch.

Weeks, then months passed, and they were still together, still exploring each other and enjoying the exploration. Their friends started treating them as a couple instead of just an affair.

It was Erin who first said, "I love you." Then softened it by adding, "This must be a lesbian record. We've been sleeping together for four months now and haven't moved in or declared that we're soul mates." Katie glimpsed the fear and vulnerability behind the words, Erin afraid that

she was asking too much, saying words that Katie would never say to her. They had just made love, Erin coming to a shuddering climax.

On hearing them, Katie realized how scared she, too, was. Her response had been to stay away from the words, to kiss Erin, her mouth, neck, cheeks, more than how she usually just held Erin after their love-making. Then she had guided Erin's hand between her legs, keeping her hand on top of Erin's as Erin touched her.

Katie found her own way to the words, the next day, while driving with Erin. She kept her eyes on the road, too scared to look at Erin as she said, "You know I love you, don't you?" Then a quick glance at Erin's face because she couldn't not look, then back to the road again because she couldn't keep looking.

Erin had responded by resting her hand on Katie's thigh, the top of her inner thigh, a place that proclaimed them lovers, before answering, "I know. I was just wondering how long it would take you to notice."

A month later they had moved in together.

Three years later, Katie pulled a child out of a burning car. She didn't save the other child or the mother. The car exploded as she was coming back for them.

She had two clear images from that moment; the car, its hood crumpled into a light post, the trunk gone, replaced by the front end of the speeding car that had rammed it. The woman was slumped over the steering wheel, the rear door was open, Katie had wrenched it free to pull the one child out. The other girl was still sitting there, looking at Katie running to her. The second image was the sudden shroud of orange and red that obliterated the child, the mother and the car.

After that there were no clear memories. Heat, pain, a world that she couldn't focus on, a roaring that never seemed to clear, fire, sirens, people talking, nothing distinct or strong enough to break through the searing pain. One voice close to her saying, "Cut it off, just cut the belt--," and the pain of feeling something like her skin being pulled off, the uniform burned to her skin. And after that, there were no memories.

The ambulance, the emergency room, the first few days in the hospital, Katie knew nothing of them other than the stories that she was told. Her mother and father were there, her two brothers, their wives, a rotation of people as if they felt that someone should be with her at all times.

At first she was too drugged and in pain to comprehend what had happened. But slowly Katie learned to focus again, to listen. She knew the extent of her injuries from one of Maryann and Allen's visits. Maryann talked, almost a constant stream of babble, but it was Allen, silent Allen, the tears streaming down his cheeks that told Katie how badly hurt she was.

"Will I walk again?" Katie had slurred out, the drugs making the words so hard to say.

"Babe, of course, you're going to walk again," Maryann had assured her.

But Allen didn't stop crying.

Erin was there, usually reading or marking papers, which annoyed Katie's family, her father saying, "Miss Professor makes it clear that she doesn't have time for us." His unspoken, "or you," hung in the air, as he had intended.

Katie didn't have the energy to defend Erin. It mattered that she came, that she cared enough to pile the papers together, and haul them along to sit with Katie. As when they had met, they didn't talk about the future, but just let it happen.

Do you think you could have saved your relationship if you had talked about your injuries, Kathleen had once asked Katie.

No, Katie had replied, not wanting to look at a road not taken and that could now never be taken. No, Erin loved the person I was in that uniform. Take off the uniform and it stripped me of who I was. How could she keep loving someone she didn't know?

When Katie came home from the hospital, she was too numb, too much still in pain to understand the faultline that now was part of their relationship. All Katie could do was concentrate on herself, she couldn't tell Erin who she was or who she would be because she didn't know.

She didn't know if she would walk again, how visible the scars would be when they finally healed, what kind of person she could become with the woman in uniform gone.

Katie hated the dependency, the harried look in Erin's eyes as she tried to manage both the life she had, and the needs of taking care of someone...injured. Neither Katie nor Erin would say crippled, disabled.

Katie had forced herself to learn to walk again, a limping shuffle made possible only with a cane. The muscles in her left leg had been badly damaged by the flames, the strength that she had so taken for granted, gone forever.

The scars remained visible, the left side of her face disfigured. The grafts had helped, changed the lumped flesh into a smooth, shiny surface, but it was a new face that Katie looked at every day in the mirror.

Katie got a medal for her bravery and a disability check for her pain.

She didn't see the distance growing between her and Erin. She could barely stand to look at herself in the mirror. They rarely talked--only about what was necessary. Usually, Katie later admitted, about what her needs were, medications she needed to have picked up, arrangements for her to get to physical therapy, things she wanted from the grocery store, what were they going to have for supper that evening. Katie's family helped, but often their offers were like favors, not something that could be counted on day by day.

"I think I just wore her down and wore her out. How could she love me when I resented her for being whole? Guess she got out while she could," Katie had told Kathleen.

"Do you think it would have made any difference if she had been upfront and honest, told you that she was leaving?" Kathleen had asked.

"No," Katie finally replied. "I don't think it would have made me hate her less, just respect her more."

Erin had taken another lover, one of her fellow teachers. She didn't tell Katie, but let the evidence accumulate until even Katie, blinded by the mirror, couldn't not see it--the unexplained lateness, the calls from the same woman always asking for Erin and never giving her name, the tepid way Erin told Katie she loved her. A facade of words.

They hadn't made love since the accident. Erin made excuses, too tired, too busy. Katie tried to believe her reasons. She was often the tired one, not in the mood. It wasn't fair that she demand that Erin perform just because she wanted it.

Then the strange woman, whose voice Katie recognized, came to the door. "I'm going to tell you this because Erin is too much of a coward to do it." And she told Katie that it was over, that Erin no longer loved Katie and that it wasn't fair for Katie to keep Erin chained to...this life, she had finished.

Erin came home only long enough to mutter "I'm sorry," over and over again, as she hastily packed some clothes.

Katie wasn't proud of herself at the end, alternately begging Erin to come back, to not take love along with everything else that she had lost--and screaming at her to get the fuck out of her life.

A month later, Katie, helped by Maryann and Allen and her family, moved out of the place she and Erin had bought together. She couldn't afford to keep it by herself and every room, the walls, the doors, that long mirror in the bathroom, all held too many memories.

The last time she had seen Erin was at the act of sale for the house.

There was a knock on the door, Maryann and Allen, breaking into Katie's thoughts.

She draped the uniforms over her shoulder, picked up her cane and hobbled to the door.

They entered. Maryann, as usual, talking from the start--the latest kitten/kid story, the weather. Katie could tell that Maryann was on alert; her words speeded up from their usual 70 miles an hour to 90.

Allen kissed her on the cheek. Katie had noticed that he alternated cheeks, the good one and the scared one, as if there was no difference.

Katie handed Maryann the uniforms, Maryann started to say something, then stopped. Instead she hugged Katie. Then Allen kissed the other cheek, the scarred one and then they were gone.

Katie hobbled around the apartment, some loss in her coalescing. The problem with the numbness subsiding, she had told Kathleen, is that it lets the pain in. She had thought that she was ready to let go of those uniforms--and maybe she was ready, and maybe it didn't matter whether it was now or ten years from now, taking those uniforms out of her closet and giving them away would be a palpable moment of loss--the uniform and everything it represented in Katie's life gone.

The bare walls of her apartment offered no comfort. She hadn't wanted to put up the pictures that she had bought with Erin, or shelve the books that so often were gifts from Erin. They stayed in boxes and the walls stayed blank.

Suddenly loneliness became a stabbing pain and Katie couldn't stare at the blank walls anymore. She grabbed the keys to her truck and stumbled to the door, moving with too much haste to keep balance, having to stop and right herself at the door frame.

The truck, the one her father, a mechanic, had arranged for her to get in a trade--she could drive an automatic, but not a standard--offered the distraction of motion. The streets, the other cars, all demanded her attention. Katie drove aimlessly for several hours, but even that space of time only diffused her loneliness, changing the sharp pain to an ache that seemed to have found a piece of her soul and wouldn't let go.

She glanced at her watch. It was almost 9 p.m. Maybe I should stop and eat something, Katie thought. She didn't really feel hungry, but she hadn't had much lunch, and nothing since then, so she knew that she should eat. She also knew that the goal of stopping somewhere to eat, the concentration on the menu, watching the people around her, would be another distraction. There was a restaurant that had recently opened right across the street from the lesbian bar that she used to go to. Two distractions in one neighborhood, Katie thought. After eating, if she still couldn't stand the idea of returning to her place, she could have a few beers.

She cruised by the restaurant, then went around the block before coming by again. Not too many cars out front, so it shouldn't be too crowded, Katie thought as she parked. The old Katie would have welcomed a crowded restaurant, wanted to see all the people there. But now Katie was unsure of herself, her welcome, and was afraid of the staring and the pity.

Katie was immediately greeted when she came in and just as quickly led to a table, the young waitress leaving her hobbling behind.

Someday your gait, too, will be slow, Katie wanted to say to her, age or accident, you will be left behind by the young women in a hurry.

Maybe this wasn't a good idea, Katie thought, maybe I should be at home with the honesty of my bare walls--bare walls for a bare life. But the waitress returned with her drink order and Katie

looked over the menu. It was one of those eclectic places, everything from a basic hamburger to tofu and sun dried tomato pizza.

"Katie, would you like to join us?"

Katie turned to the voice. It was Caroline, one of Erin's friends from the university. Katie quickly scanned the faces at her table. She recognized Vivian, Caroline's partner, but no one else.

Caroline got up and came over to Katie's table. "Come on, it's safe," she said softly in a voice only she and Katie could hear.

Katie had always liked Caroline, had found her much more welcoming and friendly than most of Erin's other colleagues. They had had a chance to talk during one Christmas party and Katie found out that Caroline was the first one in her family to go to college and that Vivian, who owned a flower shop, didn't even have a college degree. After that conversation, Katie had sort of taken them on as role models for what she and Erin could be. Caroline had also been the only one of the people that she had met through Erin who had called her even after they broke up.

But Katie hadn't returned the calls, taking out her anger and hurt at everything surrounding Erin and the life that they had had.

"Promise?" Katie asked in just as soft a voice.

"Erin and I were never close. I liked you better," Caroline said matter of factly. "And I hate what's-her-name, so I can't promise that they won't walk in the door, but I can promise that they won't sit at our table."

Katie nodded, realizing that, should Erin and what's-her-name enter, she'd prefer to be sitting with Caroline and her friends than at a table by herself. Caroline picked up her menu and her soda, and Katie followed her back to her table.

There were about eight other women at the table. Katie gathered that they had all been at some lecture that evening and had come from there. She was relieved to discover that they all weren't from the university, but some, as she now liked to think of it, were 'real people with real jobs.' Caroline simply introduced Katie as a friend, leaving it to Katie to decide how much of her history she wanted to have.

"What do you do?" the woman next to her asked.

Katie had learned to hate that question, thinking of it as 'what uniform do you wear--cop, academic, lawyer, salesgirl--that I can use to define you?' She answered, "I used to be a police officer, but now I collect a disability check. So I no longer do, I just be."

The woman vaguely nodded, as if not getting the answer she expected, she could think of nothing more to say. But the conversation drifted to other subjects, movies, books, topics Katie could safely venture into. Sometimes she spoke, other times she was silent, but other than that

first awkward question, she felt like she had gotten lucky and found the level of distraction that she needed.

The evening wore on, Caroline and Vivian left, but Katie was content to stay and let the conversation swirl around her. Finally the restaurant was closing and several of the women suggested that they move on to the bar and keep the party going.

The three women suggesting the bar got up and headed out, and the rest of the women, like a herd, followed them, leaving Katie behind, struggling with her cane and slow gait.

The divide that hadn't been apparent at the table now opened up--Katie couldn't keep up with them, and they weren't going to wait.

One of the women stopped and turned around. She probably left something at the table, Katie thought. She had been at the opposite end from Katie and they hadn't spoken.

But the woman seemed to be waiting for her. Katie felt a flush of embarrassment at this complete stranger and her unasked for kindness.

As she approached the woman, Katie said, "I don't need pity." She regretted the words the second she said them, realizing that her anger wasn't so much at this woman, but at her disability and a world that had no place for her limp and her scars.

"Just as well, I'm fresh out. Had to use it all on those Ph.D.'s who never learned basic courtesy," the woman answered.

"Sorry," Katie mumbled. "I should probably just go on home."

"You can't yet. I never accept apologies without proof that they're really meant. Buy me a beer and I'll believe you."

"A beer?" Katie asked, trying to match the woman's friendly bantering, "Aren't you with the white wine crowd?"

"Does this look like a white wine body?" the woman asked, with a laugh.

The woman was heavy, one of the people that Erin would have referred to as 'shoot me if I get that fat,' but Katie liked her smile and her laugh, and appreciated the grace and compassion the woman had returned for her churlishness.

"Sorry, hang out with academics, and their effectness rubs off," Katie said, allowing the woman to hold the door for her.

"By the way, not that one can manage a truly proper introduction standing on a street corner, but my name is Molly."

"Hi, Molly, I'm Katie." Then the light changed and they crossed the street.

The bar had the usual blast of music, making conversation hard. Molly let Katie buy her a beer, but then she bought the second round. Katie had wondered if she hadn't hooked up with some lush who would con a disabled person into buying her drinks. Erin had proved so false, she now always wondered what lurked beneath a smiling face. But, in this small exchange, Molly seemed to be offering the camaraderie of buying each other drinks without actually spending more money than they would have otherwise.

Halfway through the second beer, Katie realized how tired she was. It had been a long evening for her, as truncated as her life had become, driving, dinner and a few beers was more than she had managed since the accident.

Katie thought about asking Molly for her phone number. The old Katie would have. The old Katie probably would have asked her to dance, asked her to spend the night, been able to find someone who would keep her from going back to her empty apartment with its bare walls.

But the new Katie couldn't even ask her for her phone number. Instead she settled for tapping Molly on the shoulder, thanking her for the second round and nodding a good-bye.

I have too much time to think, Katie thought as she sat in the truck thinking. It was just a phone number. A 'let's go see a movie sometime' phone number. But who would want to even see a movie with a crippled, scarred woman? Molly may have been fat, but she didn't look that needy. Clearly everyone in the group liked her. They all chatted and laughed with her. She had a great smile and beautiful eyes and...

Am I so desperate for friends that I'm making a chance meeting with a kind stranger into something more than it was?

Katie started the truck and drove away. Stop thinking and just drive.

When she got home, she immediately opened another beer and drank it down. With that, sleep came and took away the blank walls.

"You could still get her phone number," Kathleen pointed out later that week. "Caroline probably knows her, call her and ask."

"You really think that if I was too much of a wimp to ask for her number after she'd just bought me a beer that I'm going to announce to all her friends that I'm desperate enough to beg them for the number? Besides she didn't ask for my number, either."

"So, she has to ask first?"

"Makes sense, don't you think? Better to assume that no one is going to be interested in an ugly, crippled woman unless they prove otherwise."

Kathleen had just nodded and they left it at that.

And that was where Katie had left it, until a chance encounter in the grocery parking lot.

"Tell me I'm not wrong. You look like the kind of sensible woman who carries jumper cables." The words brought a set of hands to help her load the groceries from the basket into the back of the truck.

"Thanks," Katie said, turning to look at Molly. It had been almost a month since that night in the bar. "Yes, I have jumper cables. My Dad's a mechanic, so my usual Christmas gift is some new auto thing."

"Jump me and I'll buy the next six beers," Molly said.

The old Katie would have replied. 'I'll jump you for free, but starting the car will cost six beers.' The new Katie just said, "Where are you parked?"

"The beat up red Honda over there," Molly pointed.

Katie pulled her truck around so it was hood to hood with the Honda. It took her a few moments of fumbling--and realizing that she was going to need Molly's help--before she could get the cables set up. The last time she had jumped a car, she'd had two free hands, strong legs and perfect balance. But they managed, and her fumbling was rewarded by Molly's smile of relief when her car started.

"Thanks," Molly said. "You have managed to save my life--or at least my career. I was delegated to pick up the nibbles for the board of directors' meeting. Hence being at the grocery store in the middle of the afternoon. Now, not only will I make it almost in time, but the ice will be only slightly melted."

"Glad to be of service, ma'am," Katie replied, ducking her head in a mock bow.

"A white knight in a green truck." But Molly was obviously in a hurry. She got in her car, and with only a final quick wave, she was gone.

Katie got back in her truck, reminding herself that she had frozen groceries that needed to be kept cool. A lonely white knight in a not so new green truck, she thought as she pulled out.

But later that evening, the phone rang. "Hi. I survived my board meeting. Now I can be a decent person and thank you properly. Oh, this is Molly, by the way, you know, jumper cables in the parking lot? For all I know I was the fifth damsel in distress that you saved today."

"You were the only one," Katie answered. "It was a slow day."

"You probably did twenty and are only saying that to make me feel special. Since, thanks to you, I still have not only a job, but a happy board of directors, I thought it only fair that I repay you by taking you out to dinner."

"Dinner?" Katie repeated slowly.

"Yeah, food, eating, necessary for all living things."

"Dinner. Of course. Really the only reason I keep those jumper cables around. I might starve if it weren't for grateful, jumped women."

They made arrangements for dinner. Was it a date or just a thank you, Katie wondered as she put the phone down. Better to assume the latter. It wasn't as if Molly had gone out of her way to see Katie again. But still, she felt a happiness and lightness that she hadn't felt for a long time. How could one phone call make me so giddy, Katie wondered? It wasn't just the dinner, but that Molly had assumed that Katie could help her. Before the accident, it seemed that all her friends were calling up for favors, could she start their car, give them a ride, help them move, install the new air conditioner. Erin would sometimes get annoyed at yet another phone call, but Katie really didn't mind. She liked being able to help people, to know that she could make a difference.

Now, no one called. Katie was the cripple who couldn't do anything, couldn't rescue damsels in distress. Today, Molly had been in distress and asked Katie to rescue her. Some part of her didn't dare hope that Molly's invitation was anything more than a thank you. But since the accident, Katie had lost friends. Some of them, like Maryann and Allen, even Caroline and Vivian, had stayed. But some either didn't know how to deal with Katie, no longer strong and in uniform, or didn't want to bother. It had been hard to meet new people, make new friends. Some was just time and energy, some was that she no longer had things like work or soccer or any of those other outlets to meet people. Some was that it was hard for Katie to believe that people might have any interest in befriending someone like her. Like who she was now. The old Katie, of course. The old Katie was fun and useful, could tell a great joke, fix the perfect barbecue, impress the girls by taking them on a date to the shooting range. But the new Katie? Who was she and what could she offer?

The dinner was enjoyable, Katie found it easy to talk to Molly, but they parted with a handshake and a murmur of 'this was fun, let's do it again.'

"Still didn't get her phone number?" Kathleen had asked later that week when they met.

"Not officially," Katie admitted. "I did catch it off the caller ID. But I can't call her."

"Why not?" Kathleen had asked.

Katie had just looked at her for a moment. Because I'm a crippled freak living on the government dole, she wanted to scream. Katie finally stammered out, "Because-- I just can't."

"You told me that before the accident, you used to be assertive, calling up people, that you led the way in your relationship with Erin," Kathleen said.

"I'm not that person anymore," Katie had cut in.

"Ah, presto, chango, take off the uniform and the naked Katie becomes a wimp, unable to manage a simple phone call?"

"No," Katie had retorted, "just aware of the realities."

"Katie, the uniform didn't make you who you were, you made you who you were," Kathleen said in that maddeningly calm way of hers.

Katie couldn't think of a reply and the hour ended. She sat in her truck afterward, her thoughts jumbling around Kathleen's words. "I didn't make myself a cripple, I didn't make myself scarred and ugly," she replied, staring at her windshield.

"But I can make myself someone who picks up the phone and calls another woman. I can make myself do something besides stare at the blank walls that only reflect my anger and loneliness back at me."

Katie drove home. She didn't call Molly that night. She started to several times, but never managed to dial all the numbers before her fears caught up with her.

The next evening, she didn't give herself time to prowl around the phone, but instead just picked it up and dialed. Molly answered on the third ring.

"Uh, hi, this is Katie," she stumbled out. "Uh, jumper cables, dinner, beer?"

"How could I forget a combination like that?" Molly replied. "I was thinking about you the other day--and not just because my car was acting up. Are you an adventurous diner?"

"I eat raw oysters, does that qualify?"

"That's not a bad start--"

When she hung up, Katie wasn't sure whether she had asked Molly out to dinner, or if Molly had asked her, but they were going out to eat sushi the following evening.

The week after that it was Vietnamese. And the next week, Indian.

"Is this a date or a friend?" Maryann had asked when she noticed that Katie was usually not in on Friday evenings.

"Just a friend," Katie had answered. "We like to eat ethnic food."

That night, in the Chinese restaurant, Katie watched Molly as she perused the menu. Are we dating or just friends, she asked herself? The old Katie would have passed Molly by, not been interested in a woman who was overweight, not conventionally attractive.

But the new Katie appreciated how Molly matched her steps to Katie's slowed gait, how she picked inexpensive restaurants without Katie having to mention that she didn't have much money, the way she offered to help without taking over and making Katie feel useless.

The new Katie enjoyed the way Molly listened, occasionally asking questions, sometimes just letting the silence invite a response. She and Erin had pushed each other. Who could be wittier, always searching for something interesting or funny to tell about their days, a kidding one-upmanship about who knew more, Erin trumping Katie about books, but Katie mocking her about not knowing the streets. Katie didn't feel she needed to be smart or brave with Molly. She could just be--Katie. She suddenly realized that, just as she was fumbling with a body that had changed, she was also struggling with who the new Katie was. Molly, at least, had no preconceived ideas of her. Didn't see her as the butch cop, or the aggressive lover or any of the other things that she had lost.

As she watched Molly, Katie began to feel desire build. Not just the random desire of wanting sex, but desire for this particular woman.

But she said nothing. Did nothing. Needed the friendship of someone who accepted the new Katie too much to risk it.

As the weeks passed, Katie realized that she was falling dangerously in love with Molly. It was hard not to want to reach out and hold her hand, but the hand on the cane always reminded her that she might not be wanted. The old Katie could have risked it, could have taken a chance on desire.

But I'm not the old Katie, I won't ever be her again, she thought as she stared into the mirror, into the scarred face that stared back at her. The new Katie had lost so much that she couldn't risk losing anything more.

That night, she and Molly again met for dinner. Again, Katie felt the agony of wanting more than she thought she could ever have. They met once a week, a few phone calls in between, calls that had come to matter too much for her. A ring turning into disappointment when it wasn't Molly. There were times when Katie thought she should just back away, not be available for dinner, let the machine pick up when the phone rang, to turn away for the rebuff that she feared she was headed for. Erin, who had promised to love her forever, hadn't. Even the women that had formerly looked at her with beckoning eyes, now averted them, making sure that Katie knew their lust had only been for the woman in the blue uniform, not the Katie who could no longer wear that uniform.

"I am so glad that my weeks end with you," Molly said as she joined Katie at the table. "This has been one hell of a week, funding cuts, berserk clients, including one that we had to call the police on. Then to add that extra dollop of ego destruction, I'm sitting quietly, finally having my lunch,

when the five other lesbians at the office start reading the personals out loud and describing all the words that fat women use to hide their weight--zaftig , rubenesque, big country girl, voluptuous--they're going on, with me sitting there. Like it's perfectly okay to tell fat women how ugly we are to our face."

"You're not ugly," Katie said.

"Thanks. You're a friend, you're biased. You should have seen the women sidle away from me at the lesbian bar, afraid that I might ask them to dance--like they might get my fat cooties."

"You're far from ugly," Katie repeated. "And they don't exactly come running in my direction when they notice the scars and the limp."

"Maybe we should hit them from both sides--me from the front and you from the rear and we could watch them jump out the window," Molly said then added, "You're a very attractive woman, Katie. Any woman that runs from you is crazy."

"You think these scars are pretty?"

"No, they're not, but you are."

Katie looked at Molly for a moment, then looked away. Suddenly she realized that if Erin were standing here asking for her back, and she could choose between the two of them, she would take Molly. She would take Molly with her kindness and humor and compassion over Erin with her gym toned body and hot shot academic credentials. It was a surprisingly easy choice.

A bit of the old Katie came back--or maybe just part of who she was becoming. She reached across the table and took Molly's hand in hers. "You're one of the most beautiful women I've ever known."

Molly just smiled a radiant smile that made her even more beautiful as she entwined her fingers with Katie's.

Katie could barely remember the food they ate, what else they talked about, only the ways the desire that she had so long tried to keep repressed, suddenly sprang free. She could look at Molly and imagine slowly taking her clothes off, touching her breasts. Katie didn't have to hide her desire as she stared at Molly's cleavage. Passing the salt or pepper became a chance to brush their hands together. It felt like a miracle that Molly returned her desire; that she looked at Katie as if she were undressing her.

"This is not a romantic parking lot," Molly said as they left the restaurant. "Too well lit and too many pot holes. I presume you know that I want to kiss you."

Katie laughed, a bubbling laugh of joy, then said, "I'm glad to see that your desire isn't compromising your standards."

They let the desire build as they drove to Molly's apartment, her hand lingering on Katie's thigh, a claim and a promise.

As Molly closed and locked the door behind them, she said, "You know I wanted you the first time I saw you."

"The first time? Really?" Katie asked surprised, remembering that first awkward, angry encounter.

"Yeah, there was something both strong and vulnerable about you." Molly put her arms around Katie, pulling her close. "Smart, no pretensions, gets me every time."

"Not so smart. It took me a little longer to want you." She returned Molly's embrace, but not kissing yet, suddenly shy. Oh, hell, Katie thought, I've never made love with this crippled body, what if I lose my balance or flop down on top of her. This shyness and uncertainty was new to her. She had made so many compromises with a body that could no longer perform as she wanted it to. This would be another one. "Uh--so what do we do now?"

"Scared?" Molly said softly, as if reading Katie's thoughts.

Katie admitted, "I guess. First time I've--made love since the accident."

"Then we need to change that. You don't strike me as the celibate type. Hot babe, ardent lover, cunning linguist, but not celibate."

"Don't think celibacy is an option with you around," Katie said, letting Molly's confidence buoy her.

It became so easy, the flow of passion. Letting Molly undress her, revealing all her scars, didn't become the obstacle that Katie had always feared it would be. Instead, Molly explored Katie, taking her time, letting her hands slowly travel down Katie's back, lingering in the small before sliding down to cup her ass teasingly, then moving to caress her thighs Katie closed her eyes, reveling in the warm stroking of Molly's hands until she could stand it no longer. She wanted more than a gentle exploration.

She wrapped her arms around Molly, their kiss exploding immediately from a touching of lips into a probing and sucking of tongues. They kissed and kissed again, letting their kisses punctuate the no longer gentle exploration of their hands.

Katie slid her hand to Molly's nipples and felt them become hard and erect under her touch. Her large breasts filled Katie's hands, her fingers stretching to encompass the heft of them. Then Katie wanted more than the nipples, running her hand down Molly's stomach, thinking that voluptuous was the word to describe the feel of the flesh beneath her hands. Molly let out a gasp as Katie's fingers circled around her hair.

Suddenly Katie felt a kind of power that she couldn't remember feeling since the accident. She wasn't crippled, scarred Katie anymore. She was someone wanted and capable of wanting and pleasing and giving. She led Molly to the bed, spread her across it, even held her down when Molly tried to be fair and equal and hold Katie the way Katie was holding her.

But Katie wanted the power, to make Molly gasp and groan and shudder as Katie touched her. She slide her fingers into Molly's wetness, then let her tongue follow, licking and sucking and thinking, this woman wants me, wants me so much that she's dripping down her thighs, her clit is huge and filling my mouth. Katie felt a ravening hunger, a need to touch and be touched like this. She took nourishment each time her tongue slide over Molly's clit, Molly's heavy breathing and shuddering gasps when she started slowly sucking on it, the way Molly's rocking hips matched the rhythm of Katie's thrusting fingers and the way Molly started chanting, "Oh, Katie, oh, babe, yes, yes," as her pleasure mounted. Her words dissolved into a grasping cry as her hips arched into an orgasm. Katie continued to lick and suck Molly, reveling in her languid murmurs of "Oh, yes, it still feels good, so good," until Molly finally said, "Can't take any more," then added, "I will die of pleasure if you don't stop."

It was an astonishing affirmation, the strength of their desire. They made love over and over again. Katie reveled not only in her power to so arouse Molly, but also in how much Molly wanted her, the ardor with which she made love to Katie.

She had been quietly laying in Katie's arms, recovering when she suddenly rolled Katie on her back and growled, "I want you. Damn, do I want you!" Her actions proved her words, her hands and mouth concentrating on Katie's breasts, first just the tip of her tongue flicking over Katie's nipples, teasing them. Katie discovered that Molly could be an exquisite tease, dallying with her breasts, a lick with her tongue, then softly blowing on them, making them almost painfully erect before she finally covered them with the warmth of her mouth.

"But I'm not finished with your breasts," Molly said, answering the increasingly insistent writhing of Katie's hips. Her tongue became a soft caress of Katie's nipple as if she could linger there all night.

"Please," Katie said.

"Please, what?" Molly answered, blowing across the newly wet spot.

"Please me," Katie demanded.

"I love women who beg," Molly answered, "but they have to beg explicitly."

"Fuck me," Katie begged. "Fuck me hard, fuck me every way you can."

Molly did, with her tongue and her mouth and her hands. And her voice and her laugh, and her desire.

Katie's body responded, rejoiced in how deeply she felt what Molly was doing to her and the discovery that she hadn't lost desire and passion, instead found a place where they could reach in and touch her soul.

It became one of those weekends that Katie thought she might never have again. They stayed at Molly's place, making love over and over again, and between making love, talking, or just laying next to one another.

"We spent all weekend fucking," Katie told Kathleen. "And I'm going there tonight. And was there last night."

"You look very happy," was Kathleen's comment.

"I am very happy," Katie replied.

It was odd, Katie thought that night, lying next to Molly, their legs entwined, her thigh gently nestled against the wet place between Molly's legs, how fate brought them together. They had just made love, Molly languidly dozing snuggled in Katie's arms. The two of them, the cripple and the fat girl, the undesirables, had found such profound desire in each other. Katie felt no clinging or neediness in their being together. She didn't feel that she had 'settled' for Molly. There was a wonderful emotional connection between them, but there was also an incandescent sexual tug. This evening, Katie had simply walked through the door, taken Molly in her arms and they had fucked right there in the middle of the living room. It wasn't the first time they had so easily just fallen into each other. It surfaced in other brief moments, Katie licking Molly's fingers as they cooked, Molly unbuttoning Katie's shirt as she left for work, kissing both her lips and her breasts good-bye.

The stripping of clothes was one kind of nakedness, but the stripping of all those talismans of self, job, income, the physical, a body that never betrayed you, brought Katie to a place where her soul was naked. They touched each other in that place.

Two months later Katie moved in with Molly. "I'm living over there anyway. I might as well," she told Maryann.

"And here I thought it was because Molly's a wonderful person and you're damned lucky to get her," Maryann responded, as she helped Allan pack up the kitchen utensils.

"That, too," Katie admitted. She had been pleased at how well Molly and Maryann and Allan got along. The four of them had a friendliness and camaraderie that hadn't existed when she was with Erin.

That fall, Katie started college. It had been a scary and hard decision. No one in her family had gone beyond high school. Molly had encouraged her without pushing her, helping Katie with the foreign world of admission testing and application forms. Katie wanted to find some new place for herself, something to replace the blue uniform that had defined her days. She wasn't even

sure where she would go with it, at times she considered being a social worker like Molly, or perhaps a lawyer, finding a different place in the justice system.

"Those are grad degrees, babe," Molly had said. "For now, just learn what you want to learn and have a good time."

"Good time? It's hard enough learning that studying and beer drinking don't actually go together."

It was all part of the new Katie finding a new life.

At the end of the semester, walking across campus with Molly, she had run into Erin. It was sudden, no warning, just a turn of the corner and her past was there.

Erin was with--that woman. Katie didn't even know her name.

"What are you doing here?" the woman exclaimed almost as if Katie had violated some division of territory.

"I'm going to class," Katie had calmly replied.

"Katie, how are you? I've been meaning to--" Erin trailed off.

"I'm fine," Katie replied. "This is my partner, Molly Brannigan"

"I know Molly," the woman said.

"The lesbian community is too small here for us not to know everyone," Molly said. "Hi, Dora, how's the tenure battle going?"

"Still fighting the old farts. How are you, Molly? Have you saved the world yet?"

"Not yet, still working on it."

"Glad someone is. I'll just never understand preferring unwed mothers to libraries full of books."

"Something about living life instead of just reading about it," Molly replied.

"I see you haven't given up your habit of taking in strays," Dora said.

Erin had only enough grace to look abashed, not enough to counter her lover's statement or to even break the mounting silence with banalities about the weather.

"Oh, me and my honesty, seems to have gotten me in trouble again," Dora inserted into the silence her comment had caused.

"You confuse honesty and opinion," Molly retorted, "and honesty and cruelty."

Katie could feel Molly's fury. She didn't even need to look at her to know. Dora's remark had sparked anger in her, but it had only been a quick flash. Katie looked between the two of them, Dora with a slightly smug look on her face as if she knew that she had been outrageous and knew that she could get away with it. Erin was looking down at the ground, her discomfort etched from the slump of her shoulders to the awkward way her hands played with the strap on her purse.

There is nothing that you can do to me that you haven't already done, Katie thought. And you have no power over me.

"We all have our abilities and our disabilities," Katie said. With that, she took Molly's hand and walked away. Dora's brand of cruelty and Erin's waffling and guilt were greater disabilities than her crippled legs or Molly's weight.

"--couldn't do any better," drifted after them.

Molly started to turn and fight, her anger still not abated. But Katie held her hand firmly and they kept walking.

"Odd, but I have to agree with them. I could not do better than be with you."

"Would you--would you really choose me if you hadn't had the accident?" Molly asked softly.

"I don't know," Katie honestly replied. "It would be my loss. Maybe without the accident I'd still be so caught up in appearances, and the externals, job, prestige, all that. All I can tell you is that from where I am now, the idea of still being with Erin, still living that life we led, and missing out on you, is abhorrent to me."

"Abhorrent? Just abhorrent? Okay, I suppose that that will do," Molly said teasingly.

"So, oh, best lover of mine, shall we do it under the kitchen table or spread across the living room floor?"

"Oh, hell, let's be really kinky and do it in bed."

Katie paused for a moment, and leaned over to kiss Molly. And knew that she could spend the rest of her life kissing this woman, this woman who loved her as no other woman had.

They settled for the bed, leaving the kitchen table for another day and the living room floor until after spring cleaning.

Fury

by Jessie Chandler

FURY SIMMERED, A slow boil churning low in my belly. I clenched my hands in an attempt to keep them to myself. JT stared at me from across the living room, her jaw set in stone, her eyes laser-locked on mine.

The muscle in her cheek bulged as she clenched her teeth. "I told you I was working."

"You scared the shit out of me. I thought something serious, something awful happened to you. You said you'd be working late." I stared at her incredulously. "You call three fucking days later late?"

After seventy-two hours of no JT, unanswered messages, and mum co-workers, desperation and terror gripped me by the nape. I overcame my fear of appearing the over-protective girlfriend and drove to JT's place, praying the entire way that she was okay, hoping beyond hope nothing was as horribly wrong as it felt.

My knock was answered by a half-naked stranger wrapped in nothing but a skimpy towel. She was fresh out of the shower, if the water droplets clinging to her tanned shoulders were any indication. Stunned, I took a full step back. What the hell?

JT charged out of the kitchen and skidded to an abrupt stop when she caught sight of me standing in the doorway. She was in one piece, no bullet holes or knife wounds from the looks of her. Whatever she'd been about to say died on her lips, leaving her gasping like a guppy. At least she'd either retained or had reclaimed her clothes after whatever she and drippy had done. Or maybe they were just getting started and she hadn't had a chance to get rid of them.

The expression on JT's face would've been priceless if rage hadn't roared so loudly in my ears that I could focus on nothing else. Before she could formulate some sorry-ass explanation, I beat a hasty retreat, slamming the door behind me. I don't know how I managed to escape without harming her, her soggy slut, or any of her personal property.

Tires burned pavement on the way home. By the time I walked through my front door, steam poured out every available outlet in my body. How dare she make me worry for days, wondering if she were dead or alive. I had just enough time to stalk the length of my living room twice, trying to think rationally, but entirely unable to, before a soft knock sounded on my door.

"Shay?"

The sane part of my brain knew I should let her in, not cause a scene, but the insanely pissed off portion would have none of it. I shouted, "Go home to that bimbo, and on the way go fuck yourself, JT."

Her voice was muffled through the wood. "Jesus Christ, O'Hanlon, just open the goddamn door."

"Go to hell." Righteous anger pounded rational thought right out of my mind.

I heard a jingle, and the sound of tumblers rolled in the lock. I never should have hooked JT up with a set of my house keys. The door creaked open. She stepped inside, and shut it gently behind her. It was a good thing the couch was between us or it would've been all too easy to cross the floor and pop her right in the nose.

Of course, the first words out of her mouth were nothing more than a convenient crock of BS. Late my fucking ass. I vibrated with unrelenting indignation. How could she scare the crap out of me and fuck someone else while I sat home freaking?

"So how long have you been doing her?" I dreaded the answer, but needed to hear it.

One of JT's eyes twitched. "Shay, come on. I'm not doing anyone but you. She just entered witness protection, and the Feebs cut a deal with the police department for us to babysit her. She's just been staying at my place while they finalize her papers. There was nothing I could do. I shouldn't even be here right now. I could lose my job."

I nearly snorted. "And you couldn't bother to pick up the phone and tell me? At the very least let me know you hadn't been shot or shanked, or who the fuck knows what?"

JT slowly rounded the couch, moving carefully, and I shifted, keeping the coffee table between her and me. The very air shimmered with charged emotion. I nearly growled as the ball of heat in my stomach spilled lower, igniting things that had no business being ignited. Great, if JT wasn't betraying me, my body was.

"Listen, please." JT stopped. "Please. It's not what you think."

Electric emotion, mainly anger, flowed from me in waves. It irritated the hell out of me that my nipples were aching hard against my crossed forearms. "I'm listening."

JT moved toward me until her shins butted up against the coffee table. A scant two feet separated us, and I thought I could sense arousal through her indignation or frustration, whatever radiated white hot from her. We had seldom fought, our relationship still fresh and bright, and neither of us knew what to expect when fireworks began in earnest.

"Shay, look at me."

I did.

"I'm sorry I didn't let you know what was going on. I was sworn to secrecy, and I--"

"Oh, that's rich," I interrupted her. "Sworn to secrecy? What a fucking cliché. What was she doing answering your door in nothing more than a towel?"

I watched JT's throat move as she swallowed. "Well," she said, her voice quiet, "I'm having a hard time making her understand what she can and cannot do. She seems to think more with--" She trailed off. "With body parts other than her brain."

Her warning look stopped my smartass reply before I could get it out, and she continued, "All I've been doing for the last three days is fending her off."

Nice. A horny witness. Apparently a horny lesbian witness who had the hots for my woman. I said, "What happened to all your training? Maybe you should've cuffed her to your headboard. You have some practice at that, if I remember right." It wasn't hard to recall her handcuffs she'd playfully snapped on my wrists in her bedroom less than a week ago.

Anger and desire flashed in her eyes. "Listen, Shay, I--"

My patience suddenly evaporated, explosively. I grabbed JT's t-shirt with both hands and jerked. Our mouths crashed together. JT scrambled over the coffee table, using her momentum to drill me backward. The force of our bodies colliding nearly upended the couch and I landed on the cushions, beneath her.

I moved my mouth from hers to gasp, "Don't you dare do that to me again."

"I won't, baby, I swear." JT's hands grabbed at the hem of my shirt and stripped it over my head. I grabbed a fistful of her hair and sucked her lower lip into my mouth, bit down, but not enough to draw blood.

JT snarled, and fumbled for the button on my jeans. I groaned and shoved at her until we switched positions and she was beneath me, splayed on the cushions, one of my legs pressed hard between her thighs. She arched her back, and I hung on as she bucked and twisted under me. I grabbed both her wrists, pinned them over her head. My hips rolled against hers, a grinding push-pull, we were both sucking for air, and then she was coming hard, silently, convulsing against me. That witness really must've wound her up tight. She'd never come from dry humping my leg before.

I watched the tendons in her neck stand out in stark relief. My desire fully unleashed itself, folding into my anger until I couldn't tell what feeling was what. My arms trembled as I propped myself above her. She finally stilled, and I glared down at her, watching her chest rise and fall as she gasped for air. I wasn't ready to get over this yet.

I lowered my face to hers, hands tangling in her hair, so close I could feel her exhale against my cheek. "Don't you ever leave me hanging like that again." I shoved her wrists into the cushion to emphasize my point. Her lust-laden eyes never left mine. Suddenly JT used one of those very

unfair cop moves, and my back hit the couch cushion with a bounce, our positions reversed in an instant. JT's weight on me fired my arousal even higher.

I strained under her as our lips seared together, mouths and tongues battling for supremacy. I again wedged a knee between JT's thighs, this time to lever her closer to me. I gripped the button of her pants, fumbled, gave up. The gauntlet of emotion shooting through me severely impaired my fine motor skills. I reverted to cave woman technique and grabbed the material on either side of the zipper and pulled hard. The thread snapped, the button popped off, spinning through the air. We both grunted as I tugged wildly at the confining cloth.

"Help me," I said, gasping for air. She did. Bras sailed over the coffee table. Her cargo pants pooled around one ankle. My jeans were peeled off inside out. JT ripped my boxers up the inseam, laying me bare for her plundering fingers, the elastic still around my waist. I didn't think that could really be done. With no hesitation she plunged her fingers into me. Air disappeared from my lungs. I caught her head in my hands and forced her lips back to mine.

The rhythm started fast and careened almost instantly into overdrive. Her thumb somehow found my clit, and her mouth swallowed the cry she ripped from my throat.

"I'm so sorry, baby." JT's voice was raw as she mumbled against my lips, gasping raggedly. I lost myself, cried out again. She redoubled her efforts, her hand slamming into me like a piston, her thumb wildly sliding up and down my clit. I was so close. My hips jerked out of my control. My arms locked around JT's shoulders as she latched onto the skin just below my ear with her mouth. My head whipped back, and I wondered if it was possible to snap my own neck in the throes of passion. That thought disappeared as any restraint I had left shattered.

"JT--I--" Incoherent words escaped as I didn't just reach the edge of orgasm, but shot over it, coming so hard all I could do was scream hoarsely. My hips thrashed, spasmed, and literally lifted JT off the couch. She kept up, not missing a beat, until I collapsed under her. She lay across me, her face buried in my neck, panting.

White stars floated in my brain as the last of the contractions passed. JT eased out of me, and propped herself up, elbows by my ears. Heat, love, and wariness shone in her eyes.

I swallowed as I tried to catch my breath and said thickly, "Okay, I think you're forgiven. Roll over."

JT obeyed, her gaze locked on mine as I kissed her hard, then slid slowly down the length of her body, nipping and licking along the way. Her head lolled and a quiet moan escaped her mouth as my hands slid up her thighs, pushing them apart. I didn't tease but used my thumbs to spread her open and locked my lips down on her clit. I gave it to her hard and fast. I wedged a hand under my chin and awkwardly plunged two fingers as deep in her as I could. That move completely undid my cop. Her hips slammed up into my face with lip-bruising intensity. Her hands tangled in my hair, ensuring I wasn't going to check out before she'd had enough.

JT wasn't usually noisy when she came, but this time her keening wail echoed through my small apartment. They probably heard her in the Rabbit Hole, the café directly below us. Give them something to talk about, I thought smugly, as I continued to fuck the breath out of my girlfriend.

JT finally tugged on my hair, signaling she'd had enough, and I kissed my way up her body, pausing to devour one, then the other, of her very erect nipples.

"I take it I'm really forgiven," she whispered as she watched me, her eyes at half-mast.

"This time." I pulled back, then kissed her damp shoulder. "Make up sex is definitely all it's cracked up to be, don't you think?"

She grinned dangerously. "Maybe we should make sure we're completely made up before I go back and play babysitter."

The look on her face made my toes curl and my insides quiver. "What about your witness? Shouldn't you be watching her? Who knows who she might try and seduce if she can't have you."

It was JT's turn to look smug. "I did cuff her to the headboard."

"No freaking way." I eyed JT. "You are going to be in so much trouble."

"It'll be worth it."

"Definitely," I agreed, and then groaned as JT urged me higher, so my chest was at mouth level. Her lips closed around my nipple, flicking the ring that pierced it, shooting fire straight south.

"Protect and serve," I whispered, as JT's hand followed the flame.

A Hard Day's Night

by Pat Cronin

IT WAS THE shift from hell. Three CPR calls, a suicide attempt, two overdoses and one baby that refused to be born in the back of an ambulance, but was coming soon enough for the parents to panic and call 9-1-1 at 4 a.m. Sleep never came. Her shift ended at 8 a.m., but the paramedic coming on called in sick and she had to stay over an extra twelve hours.

Being a paramedic was all she'd ever wanted, but by the time the shift was over, Bailey didn't want to see the inside of another ambulance for the next six months. Reality, as it always does, bites and she knew she'd have to be back in thirty-six hours.

Bailey dragged herself to her car and drove home on autopilot.

Her body was exhausted, but caffeine, her lifeline, kept her going until she pulled into the driveway. It was dark and by some miracle she got into the house without falling. She didn't remember getting to the bedroom, but found herself sitting on the edge of their bed, unable to move.

"Long shift?" Her partner, Amber, was sitting beside her. "Honey?"

"Yeah. No sleep."

"Poor thing," Amber put her arm around Bailey's shoulders and pulled her close. "You need a shower."

"I need sleep."

"No, you need to get clean first. Then sleep." Amber stood and pulled Bailey to her feet. "But I plan to help you with both."

"You don't say?" Bailey felt more awake. "What're you going to do?"

Amber started with the buttons of Bailey's uniform shirt. "I'm going to pamper my woman. She's had a hard time at work and needs a little TLC."

"I like that idea." Bailey tried to help Amber remove the shirt, but Amber shooed her hands away.

"Patience, honey."

"I don't have any patience."

"Then pretend you do." Amber slid the starched cloth off Bailey's torso and placed a hand under her t-shirt and grasped her small breast. "Can you do that?"

The massaging of her breast made Bailey sigh with pleasure. "I'll do whatever you ask if you keep that up."

"Hmm. That's the plan," Amber said softly into her ear, her breath tickling Bailey's skin. "Now, hands up so I can get your clothes off."

Bailey obliged, letting Amber strip away her t-shirt and sports bra. The air hit her skin and Bailey shivered. Her nipples were erect and Amber touched one with the tip of her tongue. Bailey felt a jolt of sensation all the way to her toes.

"Someone's ready."

"Baby, I might be tired, but I'm not dead." Bailey cupped Amber's face in her hands and kissed her soundly. "Just the thought of your touch makes me wet."

"Let's see," Amber unbuckled Bailey's belt, opened the button of her trousers and slid the zipper down. The navy blue cargo pants slid to the floor. Amber gently pushed Bailey to sit on the bed and knelt to remove her work boots, setting them aside, and then pulling her pants off. She left them on the floor and slid her hands up Bailey's legs until she touched her undies. Amber looked up at her and Bailey stood to let her pull the panties off as well.

"What do you think?" Bailey asked.

Amber lightly touched her clit with two fingers and Bailey groaned from the contact. "I think you're very wet, honey. So it's time to get you washed up. Would you like a shower or a bath?"

Bailey had nearly forgotten how tired she was. The thought of a luxurious bath was tempting, but she was sure she'd fall asleep. "Shower. But only if you join me."

"Done." Amber shed her t-shirt and panties and headed for the bathroom, pulling Bailey along behind her.

The water was blessedly soothing the moment she stepped into it and Bailey stood still letting the steaming liquid run along her sore and tired body. Amber got in behind her and started soaping her up.

Amber's hands felt good as they cleaned and scrubbed every inch of her. Bailey kept her eyes closed, pleasantly surprised when Amber used her bare hand to wash her between the legs. Amber made sure to reach every fold, caressing each with a delicate touch that was driving Bailey mad.

Her skin was cold when Amber's hand moved away to finish washing Bailey's legs. A few more strokes and Bailey would've come right then. But it was obvious Amber planned to make her wait.

After her hair was cleaned and rinsed, Bailey stepped out of the stream and dried her eyes with the edge of a towel that hung on the top of the stall. She turned back to Amber and smiled. Her partner was wetting her hair and looked like a goddess as the water fell like silk over her nude form. Her full breasts were too tempting to pass up and Bailey leaned down to take one into her mouth.

Amber squealed with surprise and gave Bailey a little push away. "No, no. This is for you, honey."

"But--"

Amber quieted her with a kiss. "Relax." She cupped Bailey's breasts, one in each hand, and rolled them around with her fingers, sending warm tingles along Bailey's body. "I love these little boobs," Amber said and put her mouth on one nipple and sucked.

Bailey had to lean against the wall to keep from falling over. Amber reached down to her clit and began to stroke her slowly. Bailey's eyes rolled back in her head and her arms wrapped around Amber's shoulders to keep steady.

"Oh god, baby. Yes!" Bailey dug her fingers into Amber's flesh when Amber's stroking got faster. "Please, it's so good. I want to come."

"You will, baby," Amber suckled her other nipple, sucking so hard that Bailey thought she'd take the skin right off. But it felt so damn good.

"I--I want to. If you keep doing that--" Amber stopped stroking her clit and moved her fingers inside and Bailey lost the urge to speak.

Amber nipped and sucked her breasts as she started pumping her fingers into Bailey. Harder and harder until Bailey's mind exploded into a flash of pleasure and sensation like she'd never felt before. She held her grip on Amber and rode her hand as if her life depended on it.

She felt her juices release and Amber's fingers slip a little as she finally reached the pinnacle. Bailey's muscles clamped down on Amber's digits as she slowed her movements. The throbbing stayed long after Amber pulled her fingers out and held Bailey in her arms.

"Oh, baby, that was--that was incredible," Bailey said when her breathing calmed enough for her to speak.

"I know. Told you I'd take care of you."

Bailey kissed her, slowly and sweetly. "You did. Thank you."

"Ready for bed?"

"Sure." Bailey turned off the water and helped Amber dry off. Bailey's body still tingled when Amber ran the warm towel over her skin. Just one more touch and she was sure she'd come again.

"C'mon, honey." Amber led her to the bed and snuggled under the covers with her. "Now this is nice."

"Yes, it is." Bailey nestled her head against Amber's ample breasts and sighed. It was the best. But she didn't feel ready for sleep just yet. Amber had awoken her in the shower and Bailey figured she would sleep later. Much later.

There was a very pink, very pert nipple lying next to her lips. Bailey adjusted her head and placed her mouth over it. She felt Amber react and wondered for a moment if she'd stop her. As Bailey suckled more, she knew that wasn't going to happen.

Bailey replaced her mouth with her fingers and put soft kisses along Amber's belly, her thigh, moving to settle between Amber's legs. She grinned up at her lover. "I think you've had a hard day, baby. Let me help you with that. Okay?"

Amber sat up enough run her fingers through Bailey's short cropped hair. "Sure."

Bailey looked at the very wet tangle of hair and bent close enough to smell how ready Amber was. "Nice." She ran her tongue along the edges of Amber's clit, over her warm, slick skin, enjoying the taste of her.

Amber squirmed beneath her. "Oh, honey, yes. That's nice."

"I know," Bailey said, but her words were muffled since her tongue was busy. She nearly laughed, remembering to never talk with her mouth full.

She pulled Amber's clit into her mouth to suckle on it as she'd done to Amber's nipple. Bailey put her hands on Amber's ass to keep her steady, feeling her lover start to move and twist.

"Honey that's--oh honey, please. Let me come."

"I love a woman to beg," Bailey said, coming up for air. "I bet I could make you keep that up for a long time."

"Do and die," Amber said with a half chuckle. "You're being mean after I was so good to you."

"Okay," Bailey slid three fingers into her lover's opening and grinned at the blissful expression her face. "That better?"

"Yes, oh yes. Much better."

"Thought so." Bailey pushed until she found that special place. She kneaded it as Amber's body continued to wriggle beneath her.

Bailey braced herself with one hand and pumped Amber with all the strength she could muster. Amber screamed with each thrust, moving her hips in time with Bailey.

"Yes! Honey that's--that's it! Please--"

"Come on, baby. Come for me," Bailey was breathless and leaned her forehead against Amber's stomach as she continued to pump until Amber's body shook with the orgasm. Bailey rode the waves, keeping up with Amber until she started to come down.

Bailey let her hand stay where it was and moved up Amber's body until she was pretty much on top of her. "Better?"

Amber grabbed hold of her head and kissed her hard. "You're a shit, but yes. Much better."

"Nice," Bailey smiled, pleased with herself, and withdrew her hand. She settled beside Amber and snuggled close to her. "Now I can sleep."

"Good. But I got to work."

Bailey almost laughed. "Call in sick?"

"I can't call in sick."

"Call in sated?"

Amber laughed at that. "Sure. Um, hi boss. I'm too sated to come to work. Actually, I've already come, so I think I'll just stay home."

"Works for me."

Amber kissed Bailey on the lips. "Of course it does. You want me to stay home and be your love slave for the day."

"Uh, no. I want you to stay home and be my pillow. I think I'm back to being tired now." Bailey yawned to prove it. "See? Just call in and say your partner needs your, um, help today and you can't go in."

"Okay. I'll do that. But you better make it worth my time."

Bailey grinned and gave her a wink. "Promise."

Amber got up to call in to work.

Bailey was asleep before she came back.

Hooah!

by Karen D. Badger

"GET DOWN!" BJ yelled to Kyra.

Kyra heard the bullet wiz by her head as BJ tackled her to the ground. "That was close," Kyra said as she looked at BJ lying beside her. Her eyes widened and her stomach clenched as BJ stared blankly back at her.

"BJ? BJ, talk to me. BJ!"

Kyra bolted awake. "No!" she screamed. The next thing she knew, she was lying on her back. A woman was straddling her, and a hand was pressed hard across her mouth.

"What the fuck are you trying to do -- get us killed?"

Kyra closed her eyes and composed herself.

"If you promise to be quiet, I'll remove my hand. Okay?"

Kyra nodded. She opened her eyes in time to see BJ climb off and sit in the sand beside her. "I'm sorry," Kyra whispered. "I dreamt you took a bullet for me and you were killed."

BJ sneered, "That's ate up. Now why the hell would I take a bullet for your sorry ass?"

"I-- I just thought--"

"You thought what? That I actually care what happens to you? It wasn't my idea to run over a road-side bomb and nearly get killed -- never mind stuck out here with you. We're lucky we got away before the Iraqi's arrived. Look, sister, all I want to do is find a way out of this shit hole of a desert, and get back to our unit -- preferably in one piece."

"I'm sorry,"

"You'd better be. That big mouth of yours could have given our location away. How the hell did you ever make it through basic training? You must have had a real sissy-girl for a drill sergeant."

The hairs on the back of Kyra's neck bristled. She climbed to her knees and faced BJ. "I don't know who you think you are, Miss High and Mighty, but you have no right to treat me like shit. You have no idea what my capabilities are, and you have no right to judge me. Like it or not, we are stuck out here together, and if I were you, I wouldn't be making an enemy out of the only friend you've got right now."

BJ's eyes narrowed. "Get the hell out of my face, and if you know what's good for you, you'll keep that trap closed for the rest of the night. The last thing we need is to be discovered and thrown into an Iraqi prison camp."

KYRA FELT SOMETHING nudge her side. She opened her eyes and realized it was barely dusk. BJ stood over her, her rifle in hand and in full combat gear.

BJ held her index finger in front of her mouth and signaled for Kyra to quietly grab her helmet and weapon. She held up two fingers then pointed to the clearing just beyond the rocks they hid behind.

Kyra nodded as she moved into position beside BJ. They kept their heads low and watched two Iraqi insurgents walk cautiously in their direction.

When they were close enough, BJ sprung from behind the rock with her rifle pointed at them. "Freeze you bastards," she yelled. Kyra instinctively raised her rifle as well and held her aim on the insurgent closest to her.

"Put your weapons down," BJ yelled. "I said, put them down." She reached forward and knocked the rifle out of the insurgent's hands as she held her own gun trained on his head. The other insurgent followed suit.

"On the ground. Hands behind your head," Kyra demanded as she kicked the feet out from beneath one of the prisoners. Soon, both men were lying on their faces in the sand.

"Tie them up," BJ said.

One by one, Kyra pulled their arms back and bound their wrists. "What are we going to do with them?" Kyra asked.

"They're going to lead us out of here, then we're going to turn them over to our commander for interrogation." BJ reached down and dragged one of the men to his feet. "Okay, asshole. Lead the way."

"Fuck you, whore."

BJ backhanded the man across the face. "Say that again, and you're a dead man," she said in Arabic. She could see the defiance in his eyes.

"You speak Arabic?" Kyra asked.

BJ nodded. She pushed the man hard. "I said, move!" She looked to Kyra. "Keep your gun on them and if either tries anything funny, blow their heads off."

KYRA AND BJ kept their rifles trained on the Iraqi insurgents as they followed them through the desert. Several hours later, they stopped to rest. BJ pushed the prisoners into a sitting position in the sand.

"Throw me the canteen," she said to Kyra. She carried the canteen to their prisoners and held it to their mouths.

Kyra sat on a rock with her rifle across her lap. "You surprise me," she said.

"How so?"

"You were ready to kill them back at the campsite, and you pushed them relentlessly all day, yet there you are giving them water to drink."

"I'm not a monster, you know." BJ walked toward Kyra and handed the canteen back to her. "Thanks," she said.

Kyra extracted two K-bars from her shirt pocket and handed one to BJ. "Here," she said. "You need to eat something."

"Thanks." BJ opened the ration and took a bite. She glanced at Kyra. "I'm sorry for being so harsh, but screaming in the middle of the night could have gotten us killed. I guess I was more afraid than angry."

"Apology accepted. I understand. I'm glad you didn't mean what you said," Kyra replied.

"No, I didn't."

Kyra finished her own ration and stuffed the wrapper into her shirt pocket. "You should let me look at your arm."

BJ glanced at the bandage round her left bicep. "My arm is fine. A piece of metal from the bomb grazed me. No big deal."

Kyra wiped the sweat from her brow. "We've been walking all day and don't seem to be getting anywhere. Are you sure they're not leading us around in circles?"

"I've been wondering that myself. Hold on--" BJ stood and approached the prisoners. "How much further to the green zone?" she asked.

The insurgents looked away and remained silent.

BJ dropped to her knees and pulled her knife from the sheath at her side. She grabbed one of the prisoner by his hair and held the knife against his throat. "Damn you! Answer me or I'll slit your throat."

The prisoner relented and told BJ what she wanted to know.

BJ sheathed her knife and walked back to Kyra.

"What did he say?"

"He said we are about a half-day's walk away--over the ridge."

"I see signs of life," Kyra said as she shielded her eyes from the sun.

BJ looked at the horizon and saw a row of low buildings in the distance. "Finally," she said, "but just in case those bastards sent us into a trap, I don't think we should just waltz in unannounced in broad daylight."

Kyra continued to scan the horizon. "Look--off in the distance. I think that's an oasis. Maybe we can camp there for now and move in after dark."

BJ followed Kyra's line of vision. "Well I'll be. Oases are few and far between out here. Lady Luck must be smiling on us. We'll need to be careful going in though--it might be guarded."

"We'd better gag the prisoners then. We don't need them announcing our arrival."

BJ AND KYRA approached the oasis cautiously.

"That's odd. It appears to be abandoned," BJ said.

"I, for one, am not looking a gift-horse in the mouth." Kyra walked into the center of the oasis and dropped her pack into the sand. "Thank the gods--there's water here."

BJ nudged one of the prisoners toward Kyra. "Here, tie this one to that tree over there while I take care of his partner. We don't need them escaping and making it into town before we do."

"Do me a favor and tie him with his back to us and blindfold him. It gives me the creeps to have them watching us all the time," Kyra said.

With Kyra's prisoner securely tied to a tree, she sauntered over to the side of the pool and began to remove her clothing.

"What the hell are you doing?" BJ asked.

"I'm taking a bath. I feel like a total scum-bag."

"You're talking a bath? Right out in the open like this?"

Kyra looked around as she unbuttoned her shirt and threw it on a rock. "Why not? They can't see us, and as for you, I have no problem with another woman seeing me naked."

BJ looked away and ran a hand through her hair as Kyra lifted her desert-tan T-shirt over her head. Her sports bra soon followed.

"Jesus, Kyra!" BJ exclaimed.

"What?" Kyra stopped and put her hands on her hips. "Don't tell me I've been misreading you all this time."

"What do you mean by that?" BJ said without meeting Kyra's eyes.

"I think you know exactly what I mean." Kyra sat on the closest rock, untied her boots and slipped them off. She then unbuttoned her pants and pushed them to the ground. She watched BJ's flustered expression as she removed each piece of clothing, finishing with her panties.

Kyra picked up her rifle and walked toward the pool of water. "Why don't you join me?" she suggested.

"Someone has to stand guard," BJ said.

"Against what--camel spiders? The prisoners are secure, and besides, we can keep our rifles nearby if we need them." Kyra laid her rifle beside the pool. "Come on--you know you want to."

BJ looked at the horizon and back at the pool. "It does look refreshing."

"Here, let me help you," Kyra said as she took BJ's rifle from her hands and laid it beside her own then turned her attention to the buttons on BJ's shirt.

BJ stood immobile as Kyra removed each piece of her clothing. "Relax," Kyra whispered in her ear as she lifted BJ's undershirt above her head and discarded it on the ground. She placed her hands on Kyra's shoulder as Kyra knelt to help her step out of her trousers. Finally, she too was naked.

Kyra stood in front of her and took her hand. She placed her fingertips under BJ's chin and forced her to look at her. "Did I misread you?" she asked.

"No," BJ replied.

Kyra smiled. "I didn't ask, and you didn't tell--deal?"

For the first time since they escaped the car-bomb, Kyra saw BJ smile. "You have a beautiful smile," Kyra said. "Now how about that bath?"

"God, what I wouldn't give for a bottle of shampoo," BJ said as she wrung the water out of her short brown hair.

"Me too, but just being able to rinse the sand and grit off my skin is a godsend," Kyra added.

BJ submerged and came up directly in front of Kyra just as Kyra squeezed the excess moisture from her shoulder-length auburn hair. Their gazes locked as BJ's hands came to rest on Kyra's hips.

"You have beautiful eyes," Kyra said. "They're so dark."

"And yours are so light green, they're almost transparent." BJ fell silent as they stared at each other. "I want to kiss you," BJ whispered.

Kyra, being slightly shorter, tilted her face upward as BJ's lips met her own.

The kiss was light and tender as Kyra opened her mouth to accept BJ's tongue. She felt BJ's hands leave her hips and come to rest on both sides of her face as the kiss deepened.

Kyra suddenly pushed BJ sharply away from her, nearly submerging BJ under the water once more. In one movement, she swung around, grabbed her rifle and fired.

BJ recovered in time to see an insurgent fall to the ground. A rapidly spreading red stain covered the front of his robe.

"BJ--grab your rifle and take cover," Kyra said. "We don't know how many more there are."

They hid themselves behind a large rock and looked around, their rifles at the ready. It appeared to Kyra that they were alone. "He was probably the one who should have been guarding this oasis," she said.

"Maybe-- or he could have been a scout. If that's the case, there're probably more on the way. Get dressed while I cover you, then you can do the same for me," BJ said. "Oh--and shake out your clothing before putting them on--including your boots. Scorpion bites are no fun."

"What are we going to do?" Kyra asked.

"We're going to get out of here before reinforcements arrive."

"What about the prisoners?"

"We're leaving them here. Their buddies will release them when they arrive."

"SHH--KEEP LOW," BJ said as she and Kyra crept through the village. The darkness of night covered them as they moved through the town via narrow alleys, diving into doorways to avoid encounters with the town's occupants.

They continued through the maze of alleys until they came upon a building that appeared to be deserted. They slipped inside.

"What is this place?" Kyra whispered.

"It's certainly not the green zone," BJ replied.

"We need to find a vehicle and get out of here."

"No. Something doesn't feel right."

"What do you mean?"

"Did you notice the Jeep when we first slipped into town?"

"There's no law against them owning Jeeps," Kyra said.

"Agreed if it were the run of the mill Jeep Cherokee, but this was an American military Jeep."

"What are you implying?" Kyra asked.

"I'm not implying anything--yet. I think we need to stay put until daylight then investigate further."

"And how do you propose we do that? I think we'll be a bit conspicuous walking around in public wearing American GI uniforms."

BJ stood beside the window and scanned the lobby. "We aren't going to walk around in public--I am."

Kyra swung around and looked at BJ. "What are you thinking?"

"Cover me," BJ said as she slipped out the door.

"Where are you going?" Kyra's hoarse question fell into empty space as she stood guard at the window BJ just vacated. She strained to follow BJ's shadow as she moved stealthily through the alley. At the end of the alley, she reached up for something, then turned and quickly made her way back to the abandoned building.

Kyra met her as she came through the door. "What the hell did you just do?"

BJ held a garment in her hands.

Kyra's eyes opened wide. "A burqa?"

"You said yourself that my eyes are dark. Dark hair, dark eyes, shapeless sack that completely covers my body--what more could I ask for?"

"Don't tell me you're thinking what I think you're thinking."

"It's the perfect plan, Ky. In this burqa, I'll be able to move around freely. I should even be able to hide my gun under this thing. If anyone gets too close, they'll see I pretty much look like the natives. Trust me. It'll be fine."

"And what am I supposed to do while you're gallivanting around town?" Kyra asked.

BJ put her hand on Kyra's shoulder. "You need to stay here. I don't see a lot of Iraqi's running around with red hair and light green eyes. There's no way we can hide your identity as easily as we can mine."

Kyra yawned.

BJ took her hand. "Come one, let's get some rest. We need to be on our toes tomorrow." She led Kyra to the corner of the room then sat with her back against the wall. "Lay your head in my lap. I'll take the first watch."

"WAKE UP. THE sun is rising."

Kyra lifted her head from BJ's lap and looked around. She sat up and leaned her back against the wall. "Did you sleep at all?" she asked.

"A little."

"You were supposed to wake me half way through the night."

"I couldn't make myself do it. You were sleeping so peacefully."

Kyra smiled and rested her head on BJ's shoulder.

BJ kissed the top of her head. "I should get moving."

BJ climbed to her feet and offered a hand up to Kyra then reached for the burqa. "How do I look?"

"I wish I could tell you, but I can't really see you very well through that veil."

"That's exactly what I wanted to hear." BJ looked down at herself. "Thank god this thing drags the ground. I wouldn't want anyone to notice my combat boots." BJ picked up her rifle and removed the extended barrel and shoulder rest. What was left of the gun resembled a miniature machine gun. "This should fit pretty well under the garment."

Kyra grabbed BJ's hand as she walked toward the door. She pulled her close for a kiss. "Be careful. Come back to me."

"I will--I promise."

BJ pulled the burqa over her head before stepping out into the daylight. She brought her hands together and slipped each one into the opposite sleeve to conceal her weapon. She walked through the streets, with her head bowed, in the direction she'd seen the Jeep the night before. Within minutes, she spotted it. Her gaze darted left to right as she closed the distance between her and the Jeep, which was parked close to a building. She stopped just a few feet short of it by the driver's side entrance. Her attention was immediately drawn to the bloodstains on the steering wheel.

"You--what are you doing by that Jeep?"

BJ jumped and looked into the face of a dark-skinned bearded man. The cold look in his eyes pushed panic buttons in her mind. She quickly looked away.

The man grabbed her arm and squeezed hard. "You dare look me in the face, whore?" he said.

BJ bowed and shook her head.

"Know your place, woman. Now take this to the American. Even dogs have to eat." The man shoved a basket containing two rolls and a water canteen toward her. She nearly dropped her gun as she struggled to grasp the basket with one hand while keeping the gun concealed inside the burqa with the other. "I said go before I beat you!" The man forcefully pushed her toward the building.

"WHERE THE HELL is she?" Kyra muttered to herself as she paced back and forth across the room of the abandoned building. She stopped beside the window and covertly scanned the alley several times in hopes of seeing BJ. She had been gone for an hour and Kyra was nearly out of her mind with worry. "I can't wait here any longer," she said.

Kyra slipped out of the room and pressed herself against the wall of the alley. She waited until there were no signs of life then sprinted several yards to the next narrow passageway. She repeated this maneuver several times until she had made her way to the main street. From her vantage point, she could see the military Jeep BJ had noticed the night before.

BJ PUSHED THE door open and walked into the room, being careful not to look directly at any of the occupants. In her peripheral vision, she noticed two Iraqi captors at the far end of the room. In the center was an American soldier in a chair with his hands bound behind his back. His head was slumped forward. Bloodstains adorned the front of his BDU's. BJ couldn't tell if the man was conscious.

"Give the dog his food," one of the captors commanded.

BJ quickly made her way to the beaten man and knelt at his feet. She placed the basket of food on his lap.

"Feed him, you stupid bitch. Can't you see his hands are tied?"

Avoiding his eyes, BJ broke off a piece of bread and held it to the GI's mouth. "Eat," she said in Arabic, loud enough for the captors to hear her.

The GI lifted his head slightly and took the morsel of food. His eyes narrowed as he felt BJ's fingers trace the side of his jaw.

BJ braved a quick glance into his eyes and winked, then looked away. She leaned forward and fed him another morsel of bread. It was then that she pressed her concealed gun against his leg. "Hooah," she whispered. BJ detected a slight nod, confirming to herself that he was aware of her identity. She took her time feeding the man and giving him sips of water from the canteen. When he was finished, she stood and backed toward the door.

One of the captors approached the GI and untied him from the chair. "On your feet, pig. It's time to negotiate." He looked over his shoulder at BJ. "You can go now," he said.

BJ moved slowly toward the door as the captor pulled the soldier to his feet and punched him squarely in the stomach. She flinched as the soldier doubled over. The second captor laughed and grabbed the GI by the front of his uniform. He dragged him back to his feet and held him while his colleague tied the man's hands.

"You're still here? Go, before I burn you," the insurgent threatened as BJ hesitated at the door. BJ scurried out and walked a few feet away as the insurgents dragged the helpless GI out of the building toward the Jeep. With her back to the Jeep, she grasped the handle of her gun and began to raise her arm. A flash of light from several yards away drew her attention as she looked up and saw Kyra brace herself and aim her rifle. Before she knew what was happening, a shot rang out and one of the captors fell to the ground.

BJ took advantage of the momentary confusion to open fire with her own gun in the direction of the second captor. Angry shouts filled the air as other insurgents descended upon the scene.

"Come on--into the Jeep," BJ heard Kyra say as she pulled BJ along with her.

BJ threw off the burqa and helped the wounded GI into the passenger side of the Jeep, then climbed in behind the wheel. "Get in the back, Kyra!" she shouted as she threw the Jeep into gear.

Kyra dove into the back of the Jeep and scrambled to her knees. She reached for the roll-bar. "Get us the fuck out of here!" she shouted.

"Hooah!" BJ replied.

BJ AND KYRA stood at attention before their commanding officer. "At ease, Sergeants," he said. He walked around them and stopped in front of Kyra. "I have to admit that I was somewhat skeptical when you were assigned to this unit as a sharp shooter. You didn't seem to fit the part-- but you've proved me wrong. Congratulations, Sergeant Benson."

"Thank you, Sir," Kyra said without looking directly at him.

He then turned to BJ. "Sergeant Jenner, your bilingual skills were a tremendous benefit in this case. We will be sure to utilize that asset in the future. Good work."

"I appreciate the compliment, Colonel, Sir," BJ replied.

"I am putting you both in for a special commendation. Rescuing a POW is no small matter. The Chief of Staff of the Army has requested that you both be assigned for the next six months to the position of public affairs liaisons. There will be significant media coverage, so you need to be prepared for the spotlight. I also hope you can tolerate each other because you will be spending a lot of time together for the foreseeable future--at least for the next six months. The Army is proud of you Ladies. That is all. Dismissed."

"Hooah," BJ and Kyra said in unison.

BJ and Kyra walked side by side down the steps of the administration building, turned in opposite directions, and walked away.

"HOLY SHIT! CAN you believe our dumb luck?" BJ said as she jumped onto the bed and crossed her legs.

"Luck has nothing to do with it. You were very brave during the rescue. You deserve the commendation and all the recognition that comes with it," Kyra replied.

"I wasn't there by myself, you know."

Kyra sat on the bed and rubbed BJ's leg. "No, you weren't, but you're the one who set the stage."

"I was just doing my job. We both were."

"True." Kyra stood and knelt on the bed. She crawled toward BJ until their faces were close together. "I'm very proud of you."

"And I'm proud of you." BJ pulled Kyra's face toward hers for a tender kiss and surprised them both by laughing.

"What's so funny?" Kyra asked.

"It never crossed my mind when our Humvee hit that roadside bomb that we'd end up in a luxurious hotel room in bed together."

"It crossed my mind."

BJ cocked an eyebrow. "Oh really? Exactly when did that happen?"

"Several times. Riding beside you in the Humvee, in my dreams while we were hiding from the Iraqis, at the oasis, in the abandoned building, on the Colonel's desk--"

"On the Colonel's desk? Hooah! Are you serious?"

"Dead serious. When he said we'd be spending the next six months together, I could have kissed him. I'm not sure what he said after that because my mind was busy making love to you right there on his desk."

BJ looked around. "Will this bed do instead?"

"Hooah!"

"Come here, you."

BJ took Kyra's face between her hands and kissed her passionately. She rolled Kyra onto her back and straddled her stomach. She could feel Kyra's hips rise. "In a hurry?" she asked.

"I've been waiting a long time for this."

"Relax, we have the next six months, and I plan to take advantage of each and every day." BJ looked into Kyra's eyes and felt a spark jump between them. Without breaking eye contact, she caressed the erect nipple that protruded prominently through Kyra's blouse. A pang of desire shot through her abdomen when Kyra thrust her chest upward in response to BJ's touch.

"You liked that, didn't you?" BJ whispered, drawing an enthusiastic nod from Kyra. "Maybe you'll like this even better." BJ lowered her head to Kyra's breast and bit the sensitive nub through the material of her blouse.

"Oh my God," Kyra exclaimed. She grasped BJ by the hair and pulled her head closer.

BJ slipped her hands beneath the hem of Kyra's blouse and caressed her taut stomach. "This has got to go." She pushed the blouse upward and pulled the garment over Kyra's head. She tossed it aside and cupped Kyra's breasts in her hands. "You are so beautiful," she whispered.

BJ pulled Kyra into a seated position before her. She reached behind Kyra and released the catch on her bra freeing Kyra's breasts from their lace prison then slowly lowered her back to the bed. BJ could feel Kyra's gaze on her as she ran her tongue around Kyra's left breast and sucked the nipple into her mouth. Kyra leaned her head back and moaned as BJ bit down on the sensitive nub.

"BJ-- oh my god!" she screamed. She grabbed BJ's head with both hands and drew it closer to her breast. BJ was encouraged to feast to her heart's content as she moved from breast to breast, biting, nipping, licking and sucking.

Within moments, Kyra was reduced to a quivering mass. Realizing she had the upper hand, BJ placed one knee between Kyra's legs and encouraged her to spread them apart. She shifted her weight to one side and trailed her hand across Kyra's stomach and into the waistband of her trousers. BJ smiled broadly as her fingers encountered the moist crevice between Kyra's legs. "God -- you are so wet," she whispered.

Kyra lifted her bottom off the bed and pushed the waistband of her trousers down over her hips. "Please--help me to take these off. I want to feel your mouth on me."

BJ grinned and she repositioned herself at the foot of the bed to pull on Kyra's pant legs until they were removed. She threw them aside and ran both hands up the length of Kyra's thighs. "You are so beautiful," she said as she pushed Kyra's legs further apart. BJ could feel Kyra tremble as she lowered her mouth between her legs and ran her tongue up and down the sensitive folds.

Kyra arched her chest upward. "Oh my god, that feels wonderful. Harder-- please."

BJ sucked Kyra's pleasure point into her mouth and bit down gently, then held on for the ride as Kyra's hips rose completely off the bed.

"Ah-- BJ-- harder-- harder ... please!"

BJ clamped her teeth a little tighter around the swollen nub and began to suck it in and out of her mouth.

"Oh god--yes!" Kyra screamed.

BJ had all she could do to continue as she fought to synchronize her movements with Kyra's thrusting hips. She found it difficult to maintain her focus as she listened to Kyra's continuous moans of desire. She glanced up at the expanse of Kyra's abdomen and across full breasts until

her eyes rested on Kyra's face. Her heart flip-flopped in her chest as she watched pre-orgasmic emotions dance across her lover's features. BJ felt Kyra's desire peak and just before she reached the precipice, she released the tender bud from between her teeth and sat back on her heels.

Kyra's head immediately popped up. "BJ?"

BJ grinned. "Oh--I'm not finished yet," she replied as she raised her fingers to her mouth and liberally coated each one with saliva. The very act was erotica personified as she watched Kyra squirm more and more with each digit that exited her mouth, glistening with lubrication.

BJ could feel Kyra tense involuntarily when she pushed three moist fingers inside of her. She chuckled as Kyra grabbed a pillow and covered her face with it, effectively stifling her screams as she pushed herself down onto BJ's hand. While BJ met each thrust downward with an upward one of her own, she watched a flush rise over Kyra's breasts, shoulders and neck. When she felt Kyra was ready, she slipped a fourth finger into the fray, which allowed her to penetrate even further. Much to her delight, Kyra responded with louder moans and more aggressive down-thrusts.

Just as BJ felt Kyra begin to climax, she stopped.

Kyra threw the pillow aside. "No! God--no! Please don't stop."

BJ smiled and tucked her thumb inside of the other four digits and once again penetrated Kyra's moist depths. She could feel Kyra tense as the heel of her hand forced its way into the opening. BJ stopped all movement. "Relax," she whispered. "Just relax and enjoy this."

BJ remained motionless until she felt Kyra's muscles relax around her hand. "That's it-- just relax," she chanted as she began to thrust her fist gently in and out of Kyra. BJ felt Kyra's body adjust to her hand as Kyra's response became more forceful. Soon, BJ's thrusts matched Kyra's and they moved as one, increasing the speed and intensity until suddenly, the dam broke.

"Oh my god! Harder. I'm coming!" Kyra screamed.

BJ called upon her reserves, increasing the force of her thrusts until the muscles in her arms felt like they were on fire. She watched Kyra thrash violently on the bed; her hips and buttocks rising and falling in time with BJ's thrusts, her chest arched at an impossible angle, her fists clenching the bed sheets while orgasmic waves consumed her.

Soon, BJ slowed her pace as she felt the ripples of desire fade away, and stopped completely when she felt Kyra fall still. She was rewarded with one final spasm as she removed her hand and lay beside Kyra's sweat-covered body. Kyra's eyes were closed.

"Are you okay?" BJ whispered.

Kyra opened her eyes. "Never better."

"How do you feel?"

"Full-- complete-- and totally satisfied. That was amazing. Thank you."

"You're totally welcome. Now come here and let me hold you while you sleep."

Kyra rolled over, half lying on top of BJ, their faces a mere hair's breath away. "No way. Sleep can wait. It's your turn." She straddled BJ's thighs and slid her hands under her T-shirt. With little effort the shirt slid over BJ's head and landed on the floor beside the bed. "Sit up," Kyra demanded as she peeled BJ's sports bra off.

BJ took advantage of her seated position to bury her face between Kyra's breasts and gently nipped at the tender skin along her cleavage. She placed one hand on the small of Kyra's back and pulled her close while she grasped a handful of hair with the other and pulled Kyra's head back. As Kyra arched backward, BJ sucked her nipple into her mouth.

Kyra placed her hands on BJ's shoulders and gently pushed her back to the bed. She lowered her face to BJ's and kissed her. "This is supposed to be about you--not me," she said.

"I can't help it. I want you so," BJ replied.

"Be patient," Kyra said as she leaned down and trailed her tongue around the perfectly formed mounds of BJ's breasts. She made circles on BJ's skin, avoiding the painfully erect nipples.

In agony from the tender torture, BJ arched her back and pushed her chest into the air as she demanded the satisfaction she craved. "Kyra, please!" she begged.

Kyra accepted the invitation and sucked each of BJ's nipples in turn, biting and nipping as BJ writhed beneath her.

BJ grabbed two handfuls of Kyra's hair and attempted to guide her downward.

Kyra sat up and pushed BJ's hands away. "Patience," she whispered.

"Patience, my ass. You're killing me here."

"I promise it will be worth the wait," Kyra said. She climbed off BJ and knelt beside her to unfasten the waistband of her trousers. She pulled them down, along with the men's boxers BJ wore beneath them. Soon BJ was totally naked beside her.

BJ moaned loudly as she reached out for Kyra. "Ky-- please, I can't wait any longer."

Still kneeling beside her, Kyra leaned forward and lowered her mouth to BJ's abdomen where she left a trail of kisses between BJ's navel and the triangle of dark hair at the vertex of her legs.

BJ instinctively spread her legs and invited Kyra to explore. She fought to maintain control as she felt Kyra's tongue slide into the crevice between her legs, and nearly tumbled over the edge as she felt her engorged clit slide between Kyra's teeth.

Kyra was positioned such that her hip was very near BJ's shoulder, and her own treasure was easily within BJ's reach--an opportunity BJ did not pass up as she slipped two fingers into Kyra's wet folds. Feeling how wet Kyra was served to inflame BJ's passion tenfold.

"Now, Kyra-- I need you now," BJ demanded.

Kyra placed two fingers near her lover's entrance and pushed them deep inside.

BJ's lower body bucked up in response. "More, Ky. Please, I need more!"

Kyra immediately complied by adding a third finger and set up a steady rhythm of thrusting. BJ complied with thrusts of her own.

Several moments later, BJ's body stiffened.

Kyra added a fourth digit and resumed her invasion.

Sweat glistened on both bodies as they moved in unison, increasing in speed and intensity until time halted for a fraction of a second as they hung suspended on the precipice, then suddenly fell over the edge and tumbled in spastic cadence into each other's arms.

For several long moments, neither was able to move.

Finally, Kyra disentangled herself from BJ and lay beside her. "Feel good?" she asked.

"Hooah," BJ replied.

"Hooah, indeed. This is going to be a wonderful six months."

Boi Behind Bars

by Sammo

I HAD NO idea he was a Congressman's son. When I came out of the independent movie theatre with my friends and he was standing there with his "God Hates Fags" sign, shouting that I looked

like a guy, I grabbed the sign from him and swung it round his head. I've never had much tolerance for bigots and the bastard deserved it. It was only when the cops arrived, closely followed by the photographers, that I realized the crying little shit was the son of an elected official. Well fuck that, I'd hit him again, and harder, if I got another chance.

So, after being handcuffed--and not in a good way--and pushed into the back of a black and white, I found myself in a dingy cell in a jail filled with mass murderers--the small jail at the cop station was full--covered by a scratchy grey blanket desperate to pee.

"Hey, I need the bathroom," I yelled through the tiny little hole in the door.

"Wait," came back what sounded like a male voice.

"Come on, I'm gonna piss my pants," I hollered at the top of my voice.

I heard the bars being pulled back from the door and couldn't help but hide my shock as the door flew open. There stood the tallest, widest butch I have ever seen. Being a femme loving butch myself, I wouldn't normally give a fellow butch a second look, but this one was imposing. Dressed in her prison officer uniform, tie neatly under her jacket, *Officer Camden* name badge, stick at her side, I gulped.

"You," she said through gritted teeth, poking me in the chest, "need to shut your mouth and wait. Got it?"

I staggered backwards and sat on the squeaking bed, the springs poking through the mattress and sticking in my ass. She slammed the door shut and I heard her heavy boots on the floor as she walked away.

"Jesus," I mumbled, "she's sexy. And scary as all hell."

I wasn't used to having this reaction. Give me a girl in a short skirt and heels and my packing cock is quickly joined by my hand, but a butch just doesn't do it for me. Until now. The thought freaked me out. I'm a topping butch. I like the feeling of a naked femme beneath me. I like to be called a stud. This prison guard looked like she ate studs for breakfast.

I sat deathly still on the bed, hoping she wouldn't be the one to escort me to the bathroom. Where was the bucket in the cell when you needed it most?

When the door started to open an hour later, I held my breath and quickly wished I hadn't smacked congress-boy with his sign. To my absolute relief, there stood a little Latina prison guard in a neatly pressed uniform and, although still armed with the requisite stick, she was wearing a nice black skirt, which revealed her shapely legs.

My relief was palpable. I was saved. And I was still a femme loving butch.

"This way," she said noncommittally.

I followed her cockily down a narrow corridor, around a corner, and bumped into the solid chest of my nemesis. I jumped backwards, heart racing; panic, I'm sure, etched across my face as she looked me up and down, her gaze slowing slightly over the small bulge at my crotch.

"Bathroom," she stated and stepped back, pointing towards a door.

"Thank you, um, officer."

I stepped inside, nearly closing the door behind me when I felt it push back against me. I turned around and there she was, muscling her way into the small john with me.

"I'd rather go alone," I said as bravely as I could.

"I'm sure you would," she said in a gravelly voice. "But there are rules around here. And they don't get broken. Not even for cocky little bois."

"I'm not a fucking *boi*," I said with as much attitude as I could muster.

"No?" she said with raised eyebrows, gazing down at my crotch again.

"I'm not using the bathroom," I said, covering my parts with both hands like a little kid.

Officer Camden covered the small floor space in milliseconds, grabbed me by my shirt and shoved me up against the wall, the feminine hygiene can sent clattering onto the floor.

"You either piss now, or you don't piss all night," she said in a low voice, her eyes blazing with fury. My hands immediately went to her shoulders to try and push her back. Big mistake. Taking advantage of the fact that my hands were no longer protecting my privates, Camden reached down and grabbed my cock. Arousal surged through me and my head dropped back against the wall.

Her breath warm against my ear, she spoke. "Pee now."

I nodded and she let go of my bulge. I stepped to the stained toilet and unbuttoned my jeans. I took them down slowly, and noticed her eyes never left mine. Standing there with my jeans round my knees was the most humiliating, and yet arousing, thing I'd ever done. I wanted her to keep her eyes away from me and look at me at the same time.

"As you well know," I said sarcastically, "I'm packing, so I'd appreciate you turning around."

She didn't even flinch. "You have two minutes or you're holding it until you're released."

I pulled down the back of my boxers the best I could, hoping to God that (a) my cock didn't fall out in front of her and (b) I didn't piss all over my boxers.

After much fumbling--which reminded me of the first time I changed my nephews diaper--I managed to use the bathroom. She didn't take her eyes off me the whole time.

"Fucker," I muttered.

Camden's gaze didn't move from my face.

"It's going to be an interesting night for you," she said.

"I want a lawyer," I said as I stood and tried to pull up my Calvin Klein's.

To my absolute horror, my cock somehow got tangled in my boxers and ended up somewhere down my left leg. Embarrassed as all hell, I thrust my hand in, pulling the cyberskin back into the pouch.

Once I recovered I avoided all eye contact and buttoned up my Levi's. Camden opened the bathroom door and swept her arm in front of her, insinuating that I should go first.

I walked into the corridor and back to my cell, Camden behind me, her presence exhilarating and scaring me at the same time.

As the hours went by, I sat rigid on the bed in the cell that made the EZ8 Motel look like the Four Seasons, hoping that Officer Camden had gone off shift.

My worst--or best--fears were realized when sometime in the depths of the night, I heard my cell door clanking open.

I stared up into her dark brown eyes as she closed the door behind her.

"I brought you a glass of water," she said.

"You just want to make me pee again," I said with a grin. Then I realized. I was flirting with her.

"Peeing is the last thing I have in mind," she said in a low gravelly voice.

She moved slowly across the cell, her eyes once again roaming down to my crotch. Before I had a chance to stand, she had reached me and pulled me up by my sweatshirt hood. I barely reached her shoulders, but as I lifted my head, I could already feel her gaze.

Her head angled and lowered towards me. I knew she was going to kiss me but what I didn't expect was the ferocity with which she did it. She slammed her lips against mine so hard I tasted the metallic taste of blood immediately. The glass of water she had brought me fell to the floor as she pushed me back onto the bed and settled herself down completely on top of me, her lips devouring mine, her hips thrusting against my cock.

Then her hand went to the buttons on my fly, while her tongue filled my mouth.

"And now," she whispered in my ear, "I'm going to make you my boi."

"Never," I said breathily before she took my mouth again.

She bit my lip as she forced her hand into my jeans, grabbing my cock and starting to jerk me off.

"Stop," I murmured against her shoulder, getting harder and wetter.

"Oh no, baby boi. Not until you're coming in my hand."

The frightening thought of being her baby boi and coming in her hand turned me on in a way I have never felt before. My legs started shaking and I grabbed her ass, lifting my hips to meet her thrusts.

Camden used both hands to pull down my jeans, leaving me in my boxers, my cock miraculously still in place. God, I wanted her so much. This big, strong butch. I wanted her to make me come in her hand. It was the first time I'd ever wanted anything from another butch, and I wanted it so bad. She could have me any way she wanted.

She rubbed the heel of her hand over the top of my boxer briefs, pushing the tip of my own cock against my abdomen. My clit was hard, I was dripping wet and all I could think about was her inside of me.

Camden pulled down my boxers and held my cock in her hand, still pushing it against me as she rubbed and pulled the shaft.

Then, without warning, she slipped a finger from her other hand deep into me. I gasped at the sudden feeling of being filled, wetness gushing down my legs. I lifted my head off the bed to watch her touching my cock while her finger thrust inside me.

"I think I'm gonna come," I moaned.

"I think you'll manage to hold it," she said, adding another finger and pushing further into me.

Her tempo increased as she pulled and pushed on my cock harder, her fingers thrusting in and out of me faster. I saw her add another finger and felt myself tighten around her.

"Relax," she whispered, "there's more to come."

The sound of her voice made me groan and jerk, and surprised myself by chanting, "more, more, more."

When she added another finger I felt like I would either come all over her or break in half. I didn't know where I ended and where I began. My head fell back onto the bed, my legs opened wider.

When I heard her tell me to breathe and felt even more pressure, intense pressure, I knew she was slowly pushing her fist into me. I whimpered and held my breath.

Camden reminded me to breathe over and over again, whispered words of encouragement, and continued her journey into my unknown. As she curled her fingers inside me and slowly began to thrust, I felt the first tingling of my orgasm. Sensing my impending explosion, Camden started to thrust deeper, her other hand still vigorously working my cock against my clit. I raised my head and caught her eyes just as I fell screaming over a deep cliff. My head rolled, my eyes were unfocused and a foreign language I had no idea I knew spewed forth from my lips.

"I'm not done yet, my sweet boi," she whispered.

As my focus began to return, I felt her still deep inside me and realized her head was bobbing up and down over my pelvis.

Jesus. She's giving me head.

The very thought of her fist inside me while giving me head made me instantly wet again, enabling her to thrust deeper and faster. As I moaned and thrashed I saw a shadow at the door. Focusing hard, between the cell door bars I saw the cute Latina prison officer in the skirt from earlier. Her gaze was intense. She watched as Camden sucked me off and fisted me hard. The entire experience drove me completely over and I came again and again, waves of pure pleasure racking my body. I watched as the face at the door flicked from my face to Camden, and then I lost all sense of myself.

I woke up hours later when I heard a man shouting at me to get up. I pushed the scratchy grey blanket off me and swung my limp legs over the side of the bed. I felt my crotch. My cock was safely tucked back inside my boxers, but my nether regions felt like they'd been run over by a truck. I stumbled to my feet, my legs shaking, a heavy feeling in my abdomen. I gritted my teeth and wobbled towards the door.

"Your friend is here. She posted your bail and you're outta here," he said in a bored voice.

When we got to the desk he returned my wallet and watch while I looked for Camden. She must have been off shift because there was no sign of her, or the pretty Latina for that matter.

I was a little disappointed because I wanted to see her again, damn it. Don't just fist me and jerk me off and then disappear.

"Fucker," I whispered to myself.

As I walked out of the prison gate with my friend Ruthie, I looked behind me, hoping for a glimpse of my prison officer. There was still no sight of her.

"Dude," Ruthie squealed, "You knocked his fucking teeth out."

I smiled.

"How the hell was it in there?" she asked excitedly.

I smiled an even bigger smile, "Not as bad as I expected."

The Price of Homophobia

by Lee Coats *Eds. Stacia Seaman and Reese Szymanski

PRESIDENT TRUMAN SENT thirty-five men as military advisors into Vietnam in 1950. I was twelve years old at the time. Before I was thirty, we had more than half a million men and ten thousand women there. Not everybody knows about the women. I know. I was one of those women.

My name is Kerri Shore. I'm a tall gal--5'8"--and my body is good. Least everything is where it should be and there isn't too much of anything. My hair is short, dishwater blond (not a very pretty color), and has an urge to curl no matter what length it is. I have nice eyes--at least that's what Mama says--more green than blue. Politics: liberal Democrat. Religion: Southern Baptist (what else, being from Texas). Sexual orientation: lesbian (but almost out of practice).

I always knew I would go to Vietnam. That's probably the reason I became a nurse. How could I not go? My father is a navy captain on a minesweeper cruising off the coast of Vietnam. My two brothers, both majors in the air force, are stationed in Germany. My grandfather was in WWII, my great-grandfather in WWI, and so on. Military service has been a tradition as far back as we could trace our family.

Still starry-eyed, still naïve, still believing in the innate honor of our leaders (how could I have been so damn stupid?), I joined the Army Nurse Corps. I wanted to do whatever I could for God and country.

Six weeks at Fort Sam Houston in Texas, then on to Fort Ord in Monterey, California, for tech school. Basic orientation and a preview of what would be expected of us in Vietnam.

After seventeen hours in the air, we landed at Tan Son Nhut, an airport just outside of Saigon. When we climbed out of the plane, the heat and the stench hit me so hard I had to forbid myself to throw up.

If you've never been to Vietnam, you can never imagine the god-awful smell. Mix smoke, vomit, rotten barbequed beef, and pig shit. Leave it in the scorching sun for several days and stir the worms around in it. Pour boiling water over it so that it forms steam. Now inhale it through your mouth. It never changes and you never get used to it. You just learn to accept it.

There were four of us nurses on the plane, and when we landed, there was no one to meet us. We didn't know where we were supposed to go, and the pilot didn't know either and just left us to fend for ourselves.

We threw our duffel bags over our shoulders and walked off the runway into an area of Quonset huts, makeshift houses built with scrap lumber and flattened Budweiser and Coke cans. There were people everywhere--noisy, loud people--intermixed with chickens, dogs, pigs, and cats.

Children were running around naked, many with rashes and sores all over their bodies. I learned cellulitis was prevalent in Vietnam. Later I saw a soldier with his abdomen so swollen he looked nine months pregnant. All from a mosquito bite.

Down the block we saw live chickens for sale, their feet tied together. Street peddlers dressed in black pajamas hawked their wares in a language we couldn't understand. On the edge of the dirt road there were buckets of live fish, and strips of meat hung on a rusty wire, all covered with flies. The next vendor had his chunks of meat lying on the ground in the intense sun, also covered with flies.

And the noise! The noise covered the area like a blanket: Helicopters *whop-whopping* as they landed at the airport, missiles blowing things up in the distance, people chattering and laughing, cars honking, sirens screaming, and live music (if you could call it that) coming from somewhere. Girls--some obviously dressed for their trade--laughed behind their hands, pointing at us and whispering, just loud enough for us to hear, to each other, "Look at the funny round eyes." Apparently, they had learned a little English.

A jeep pulled up behind us and the driver, dressed in an army uniform, shouted, "Get in. I'm your escort."

We piled into the jeep and I noticed all the windows were covered with chicken wire. I asked the corporal why.

"Deflects the hand grenades. Don't want one landing under your feet."

Thank God for chicken wire.

We hit a more populated section of Saigon, and the street, which was now paved, was even more crowded with people, bicycles, push carts, jeeps, and the occasional Volvo. Our escort chatted continuously, pointing out hotels, department stores, a Red Cross recreation center, several bars, and one restaurant, Jungle Inn, where the food was so good, he said, that Ho Chi Minh once ate there.

There were so many people on the street I probably couldn't have picked out my dearest friends if they had been there, so I asked our driver, "How do you recognize the Vietcong?"

He laughed and said, "They all wear black pajamas."

I looked through the chicken wire at the dozens of men riding bicycles, walking the street, or hawking their wares. They all had on black pajamas. Guess the corporal was teasing me, or maybe he was trying to tell me something. If you can't recognize the enemy, how can you win?

Many years passed before I remembered that on my first day in Vietnam, a young corporal told me why we would never win the war.

FINALLY WITH ENEMY fire coming down all around us, we arrived at the 24th Evacuation Hospital in Long Binh. Margaret Simple, the head nurse, greeted us. She issued each of us a helmet and led us to the bunker. She told us always to head for the bunker at the first sound of the siren. "Don't bother to dress," she said. "Just grab your helmet and run as fast as you can. Before your year is up you'll have seen all the doctors and nurses half-dressed or naked and they'll have seen you the same way. Send your modesty back to the States--all it'll do here is cost you your life."

Our hooch was in a long L-shaped building on the south side of the hospital, guarded by one lone soldier. Nurse Simple assigned two of us to each hooch, even though each one was barely big enough for one. But I couldn't care less. What with the jet lag and being awake for thirty-six hours, I didn't give a damn about anything except the bed.

I don't even remember taking off my clothes, and I didn't know until the next day that I had slept through the bombardment and screeching siren of the night before. Nurse Simple reamed me out, shouting in my face, "You're no damn good to us dead! You'll be just another body we have to ship back to the States!"

She scared me to death. It never happened again. Even today, sirens wake me.

Thus began my tour in Vietnam.

It was not a happy place--fifteen-hour shifts; torrential monsoon rain; beastly heat despite air conditioners that ran constantly; noise from helicopters landing at all hours with new patients; and, maybe the worst of all, the never-ending fight with flies and bugs--and yet we often found things to laugh about. The soldiers, especially the ones who were not seriously injured, invented all kinds of games and ways to tease each other. They were relieved to be away from the fighting, if only temporarily. Their joy was contagious and they tried to share it with those who were wounded even worse than they were.

Soldiers with fatal injuries are almost always joyful at first at being alive; then, when they realize they're going to die, they go through the stages of grief: denial, bargaining, anger,

depression and, finally, acceptance. They had nobility. My love and respect for them grew to greater heights than I could have previously imagined.

We saved a lot of lives, and that made the fifteen-hour shifts bearable. We fought battle wounds: head injuries, which we called train wrecks; third- and fourth-degree burns; mine wounds; and lots of arm and leg amputations. We also fought other things, including malaria, hepatitis, infections, and parasites (especially worms). Some of the guys lived, some died, and most of them would never be the same. We also delivered babies. We handled the overflow from Saigon's city hospital. In fact, one whole wing of the 24th was set aside for the Vietnamese. In the year I was in Vietnam, I personally delivered at least one hundred babies, half of which their mothers named Kerri. It never occurred to me to ask any of the mothers if they were South Vietnamese or Vietcong.

The second week I was in country, I filled in for the surgical nurse. Dr. Burns--*Major* Burns, the chief surgeon--and I had an immediate warm and affable rapport. Before he removed a soldier's mangled leg he turned to me and said, "Whisper in his ear that we promise not to touch his dick."

I repeated what he said to the soldier, who smiled and went peacefully to sleep.

After that, Major Burns often asked me to assist him. It wasn't new to me. I had spent four years in an operating room and I knew I was good at it.

Major Burns began to depend on me more and more to make decisions about who needed additional surgery, how long to keep patients on antibiotics, when patients could ambulate, who should be returned to the States. He even authorized me to forge his signature on any paper I felt appropriate. He trusted my judgment and I made sure I deserved it.

In spite of all the hard work and frequent heartaches, there were fun times too. A Donut Dolly (Red Cross volunteer) named Rieco often came and entertained the troops. The first time I saw Rieco, I knew she was special, and I had an almost clairvoyant feeling that she was going to be important in my life. She played her guitar and sang, played games with the guys, and wrote letters for the ones who had lost their arms.

Other Donut Dollies stopped by sometimes, too, but Rieco exuded a warmth and tenderness that everyone responded to. She was cute and had such a contagious smile you just wanted to hug her.

"I keep it in a bucket, by the front door," she told me. "And every morning when I leave my hooch, regardless of how down or awful I feel, I take the smile out and put it on."

She also had something none of the other Dollies had: an enticing and exciting sex appeal.

I began to wish I could make her smile just for me.

I didn't know her well. I knew to be a Donut Dolly stationed in Vietnam, you had to be twenty-one to twenty-four years old, single, and a college graduate. Being beautiful was a bonus.

There was no way I could deny my attraction to her, and relying on the tired old cliché, "it takes one to know one," I felt she was attracted to me, too. I kept seeing it in her eyes whenever I caught her looking at me.

I had not been involved with a woman for several years and had begun to doubt if I would ever fall in love again. My last experience had been so painful, so heartbreaking, I didn't think I could risk even the possibility of repeating that torture.

Anyone exposed to as much suffering and death as we were develops a *What's going to happen will happen and there is nothing we can do about it* attitude. I got brave. I asked her if she would go to the officer's club that evening with me for a drink. She said yes, and when I went to her hooch to pick her up, she quickly opened the door. Jesus, she's beautiful! My heart was beating fast.

She took my hand, pulled me inside, faced me, and said, "I'm pretty sure you're gay. I definitely am, but if you aren't, tell me now. I don't play around with straight women."

Dear God, I've died and gone straight to heaven.

She was so serious I had to laugh. I said, "Is the Pope Catholic?"

We went to the club, had a drink, sat and talked and laughed and swam in each other's eyes. I walked her home. I knew she had a roommate, so we couldn't go there. But there was a semi-dark area under an open stairway. We were drawn to it as if by a magnet. I pulled her into my arms and just held her. I could feel both of our hearts pounding. I softly touched her lips with mine.

She pulled back from me, looked up into my eyes, and said, "That's not enough."

"I know, but it's been so long. If I really kiss you I won't be able to stop and we'll end up making love right here on the floor."

She laughed and said, "You are *so* right."

We made a date for the next night to meet at the Roosevelt Hotel. I counted the minutes.

I DIDN'T KEEP that date. Nurses don't cry. You just don't allow yourself to go there. But sometimes I did. Once when the Vietcong bombed a grade school on the outskirts of Saigon. It was probably an accident, but the results were the same. Dozens of preteen kids with painful fourth-degree burns and other equally horrifying and debilitating injuries. We had been overrun the previous day with such an influx of wounded soldiers that our supply of morphine was almost depleted.

It was two hours before we could get a delivery of the drugs we needed for the children. Try watching a child in too much pain to cry.

The reason I didn't keep my date with Rieco: Late in the afternoon, a soldier was brought in with his face blown away. No eyes, no nose, no lips, no tongue. I immediately injected morphine directly into his veins. He made a writing motion with his fingers. I put a pen in his fingers and laid his hand on a pad of paper.

He wrote, "No face?"

I couldn't lie to him. I said, "No."

He wrote, "Let me die," and then added, "Please."

He couldn't have been more than twenty years old.

I pulled a chair close to his gurney, sat down, and placed my hand over his heart. The slight pressure immediately caused blood to swell out of his chest and cover my hand. I pulled my hand away and searched for a less distressing place to put it. I finally settled on the top of his shoulder. I took his hand in my other hand and squeezed it. I didn't want him to think he was dying alone. He squeezed back. He knew I was there.

I'm not ashamed of what I did: I helped him die. I pumped him so full of morphine he couldn't feel any pain. I'm aware I was playing God, but apparently God was busy somewhere else. I only did what I would have wanted that soldier to do for me had our roles been reversed.

I squeezed his hand again. He didn't squeeze back. It took two hours before I let go of his hand. I watched his fingernails turn a bluish color and then the cardiac monitor went flat line. I looked at his dog tags. His name was Charley Stine.

It was after midnight. I went back to my hooch and cried. Not just for Charley Stine, but for all humanity. What were we doing in Vietnam? Would the killing and fighting ever end? Who was getting rich off this war? *How do you sleep, Mr. Nixon?* I don't pray often--I'm not sure He is even listening. But that night I prayed. "God, stop it--please, please just stop it."

REICO AND I had many nights together at the Roosevelt Hotel and lots of kisses under the stairway. At first it was just sex, but it turned into love. Yes, I truly loved her and she loved me. I wanted to shout it from the rooftops, but I was well aware that I couldn't. Why did we have to hide something as beautiful as our love from everyone?

I soon learned why.

Major Burns came to my nursing station one afternoon, grabbed my arm, and said, "Come on, Kerri. The colonel wants to see you and me." He was smiling ear to ear. "Bet he's going to make you a captain. Damned overdue, if you ask me."

We stood at attention before the colonel. He looked up at me but didn't meet my eyes. He said, "Lieutenant Shore. I have some questions to ask you. Rumor is going around that you have an unusual friendship with a Red Cross worker. A Donut Dolly. They claim you are involved in a homosexual affair with the woman." He held up a hand to keep me from replying. "Before you answer, be aware that homosexuality is not accepted in the service: not in the army, not in the air force, and not in the navy or marine corps, either. And it sure as hell isn't accepted in my unit."

Before I could answer--and swear to God, I don't even know what I would have said--Major Burns spoke up and said, "For Christ's sake, who gives a damn who she sleeps with? I've heard the rumors, too, and I have to tell you, I couldn't care less! She's an amazing nurse and an asset to this unit and this army."

"I care," the colonel said. "Homosexuality is dirty and it is not acceptable in this man's army, and you damn well know it, Major Burns."

I didn't know what to say. I was not ashamed of my love, but I didn't want to cause embarrassment for my dad.

The colonel spoke again. "Lieutenant, since you do not deny the allegations, I will assume they are true. I want you to know that I'm going to start procedure for a dishonorable discharge."

"Just a goddamn minute," Major Burns said. "This unit wouldn't be half as good as it is without Lieutenant Shore. She is the best nurse I have ever worked with--smart, tough, and tender. Just what she's supposed to be. She's my right arm. You had better think twice about this, Colonel. Without this nurse, a lot of men are going to die. Your homophobia will cost dozens, hundreds, maybe even thousands of lives. Are willing to pay that price?"

The colonel said, "Lieutenant, you are dismissed."

I walked out.

I walked blindly back to my station. I was crushed and angry, but mostly I was sad. How could he condemn my love as dirty? How could he denounce something that was beautiful and as natural to me as breathing? Guess he skipped over all the "God is love" parts of the Bible.

I loved being a nurse, but I hated Vietnam. I hated the pain. I hated watching boys who were not even twenty die every day. And for what? It already seemed so hopeless and without purpose to me. It was like some kind of game the people in power were playing with toy soldiers. No rational, compassionate person would do this with real people.

Almost immediately Major Burns came to my station. He put his hand on my shoulder, squeezed it, and said, "You're not going anywhere. If he tries, I'll go over his head." He shook his head. "What an asshole!"

I had two months remaining on my tour. There was never another confrontation with the colonel. When he saw me, he was all smiles or acted as if he didn't even know me.

My heart had a mind of its own. I couldn't stop seeing Rieco. She was more important than food. She fed my heart, my very soul. But we were careful. We rationed our time together, which made our stolen moments even more precious to us.

MY TIME IN country was over. I went home. There were six of us who all got out at the same time. When we landed at Travis Air Force Base in California, no one cheered. We were tired and all alone--we didn't care.

When our plane landed in northern California, there were no waving flags, no strains of a national anthem, and no signs of welcome. Instead, we were cursed and spat on. Vietnam protesters were everywhere. We couldn't believe the animosity. Over and over they shouted out at us: "Baby killer! Baby killer!" Previous friends avoided us as if we had the plague.

Some of the girls changed immediately to civilian dress. I refused to hide my uniform. I was not ashamed but almost everyone--if they weren't cursing me--just ignored me.

The people who would talk to me asked such stupid questions: "Was it fun?" "Did you kill any Vietcong?" "Did you see anyone die?" "Were all the nurses gay?"

I was so ashamed of them. They didn't understand. But I didn't understand either. They didn't want us there, neither did the South Vietnamese or the Vietcong, and our guys were dying like flies. For what?

I could talk to no one. Who could answer such confounding questions and give meaning to such a tragic and torturous experience?

There were no answers.

I SPENT THE next forty-eight hours on the base, mostly sleeping. I had two more years remaining in my commission, so, early on the third day, I reported to the lieutenant colonel for reassignment.

After a two-hour wait in his outer office, under the scrutiny of a staff sergeant (God, he looks like he hates me), I was finally admitted. I stood at attention before the lieutenant colonel and saluted.

He returned my salute and said, "At ease, Lieutenant."

I relaxed, spreading my feet and moving my hands, which had been held rigidly at my sides, behind me, holding one in the other. The room was cool, but for some reason, I was hot--very hot. I could feel the perspiration running down between my boobs.

I was nervous. My hands were shaking.

It seemed ages before he spoke. He looked at me, as if trying to figure out what I was. Then he cleared his throat and said, "I know you are supposed to be assigned to another post."

"Yes sir."

He cleared his throat again. He seemed nervous, too. "Well, it seems we have a little problem. No, actually, not little. It's big. A big problem. I received instructions yesterday to initiate discharge proceedings against you. I have here a formal charge, filed by Colonel Schwartz, commander of the 24th Evacuation Hospital in Vietnam. He is charging you with homosexuality and conduct unbecoming to an officer."

I was stunned. That fucking son of a bitch--he just used me!

The lieutenant colonel continued. "I'm sure you are aware that Article 125 of the uniform code of military justice prohibits the practice of sodomy in any branch of the armed services and demands separation in the form of a discharge." He paused--he couldn't go on.

I wasn't nervous any more--my hands were no longer shaking. I was just crushed to the bottom of my soul. "Request permission to speak," I said.

"Permission denied. I don't want you to say anything, Lieutenant. Hear me out. Colonel Schwartz didn't give a shred of evidence to back up his charge. You may be as straight as an arrow, completely innocent and, if so, you will win. I have a letter here that accompanied the colonel's charge. It's from a Major Burns. I don't personally know Major Burns, but I've heard of him. He has a sterling reputation. He didn't make any comment regarding the charge against you, but he stressed, and I do mean *stressed*, your honor, integrity, and dedication to your job." He looked down at the paper on his desk and continued. "He said your performance was outstanding and your conduct exemplary." The colonel smiled and added, "I think he kind of likes you."

He picked up another paper and said, "I also have a letter from Captain Simple, the head nurse at the hospital. She also said you were exceptional, among other praises. I want you to know this isn't easy. You are obviously a competent, dedicated nurse. I want to give you the benefit of the doubt."

I felt faint.

He motioned toward a chair in front of his desk and said, "Sit down, Lieutenant."

I don't think I could have stood another minute. I sat on the edge of the chair.

"I'm not going to ask you if the charges are true--I don't give a damn. In fact, I don't even want to know. I adamantly disagree with Article 125, but my views don't count. I do want you to know what your options are and the gamble involved."

He pushed some papers around on his desk, glanced at one then looked back at me. "The maximum penalty for consensual sodomy, under Article 125, is five years hard labor, forfeiture of pension, and a dishonorable discharge. If found guilty you can challenge your discharge in a federal court through the military appeals process. But I warn you, punishment under Article 125 is almost always upheld. You also need to know that the prosecutor will dig into everything you have ever said or done in your whole life. He will talk to everyone you have ever known, even your childhood schoolmates, all your family and, of course, the Red Cross woman you were supposedly involved with. He will learn if you have ever even been to a gay bar. If you are totally clean and this is just someone making the allegations to get back at you for not going along with his advances, you will win and retain your rank. If not, you will lose, and there's a good chance you will get the maximum punishment."

He offered me a cigarette. I declined. He leaned back in his chair and went on. "Because of your exemplary record, in good conscience, I have decided to give you an option. I am offering to give you an administrative discharge, but only if you do not challenge it. It is not an honorable discharge, but it's not dishonorable, either.

"It is my call whether to begin the procedure immediately or to postpone it until a later date. I'm going to postpone it. I'm putting you on a thirty-day furlough. I want you to have time to think about this and make a wise decision. I'll see you in one month.

"You are dismissed."

I remember standing and saluting. Next thing I remember I was standing in front of the Regency Hotel. I checked in and I started to cry. All I ever wanted was to do was serve my country with honor and pride. I loved being in the Army Nurse Corps. I felt I was doing something important--really contributing. Working fifteen-hour shifts, trying to keep guys from hurting so much, disposing of all those amputated legs and arms--it should have counted for something. But obviously my being a lesbian was more important than my being a good nurse. How could loving someone make me less? Make my contribution worthless?

I wrote to Rieco. I poured out my pain, frustration, and anger, and then tore it all up. I went out and bought blue jeans and a sweatshirt. I didn't want to face the war protesters in uniform and didn't even know if I could ever again wear my uniform with pride. I walked the streets of Monterey, slept on the sand on the beach, and woke up to the sound of crashing waves.

I couldn't go back to the hotel, so I just walked. I walked through the entrance of the seventeen-mile drive, probably the most beautiful stretch of coastline in all the world. But I didn't see the beauty. I just walked along the ocean, and when I got tired I walked out into the water, up to my waist, and then came back out and rested on the sand.

I felt guilty. Maybe it'd be different if I had done more. We'd lost hundreds, thousands of guys who were my age or younger. Maybe if I had been straight I could have saved more. That's insane--it's stupid--and you know it.

Oh God, how I wanted to laugh. Or hear someone else laugh-- loud and long. I wanted to be happy. I wanted to be proud to be me--not ashamed and wondering if all those accusing me, talking behind my back and judging me, were right and I was wrong. I wanted to hold Rieco in my arms. I wanted to cry against her breast.

I walked back to the hotel. At the entrance was a crowd mostly made up of teenagers. They were carrying signs "MY LAI--MY LAI--SHAME, SHAME" and shouting "Stop the killing!" "Get out now!" "My Lai--My Lai."

I was afraid of them. I looked down at my jeans and realized they couldn't know I had been in Vietnam.

One of them shoved a university newspaper in my hand and shouted in my face, "Read it--read what we did--read it and weep!"

I read the editorial and cried.

"My Lai, a small village in Vietnam--500 innocent people-- real people, older men, women holding babies in their arms, children crying and holding on to their mothers' legs, many on their knees praying. We killed them all--some of the soldiers crying as they fired. And for what? To show our power, our superiority. Shame--Shame on the USA. "

I loved my country but I was ashamed. I couldn't stop crying.

A week later, when I was finally able to go back to the hotel, I was awakened by a pounding on the door. I opened the door and Rieco rushed into my arms. I couldn't believe it was really her. I held her tight and started to cry again.

"I'm sorry," I said. "I thought I'd used up all my tears." I couldn't let her go. I just kept holding her. "How did you find me?"

"Major Burns told me you were in Monterey, so I called every hotel and motel in town. I know what Colonel Schwartz did. He did the same thing to me--reported to headquarters that I'd seduced one of his lieutenants."

We both started to laugh and I said, "I think he got us mixed up, since I seem to recall that it was I who seduced you."

"Who cares? I'm here, and if you don't kiss me right now, I'm going to die."

She didn't have to ask me twice. I kissed her long and hard. It felt so good--so right to be holding her again. "Oh, how I've missed you. I love you. I love you." I kept whispering it against her lips.

My heart was pounding and I could feel her heart pounding in the same rhythm through all the layers of clothes and skin.

I wanted her naked body against mine. I walked her toward the bedroom and unbuttoned her blouse. I said, "Let me make love to you."

"Yes--yes--right now and to you."

We lay across the bed, the sun bathing our naked bodies and turning us gold. The desire was too intense. I wanted to be all over her. I pushed my body on top of hers. It was pure heaven feeling her warm flesh against mine. I kissed her beautiful lips, thrills cascading through my body. It was still not enough. I pushed my tongue past her lips for a moment, then sucked hers into my mouth. That wasn't enough either. I held her full, warm breasts in my hands and buried my face between them. Then I sucked each nipple, passion building inside me as my clitoris pushed against her leg.

I had to have more of her. Still holding her breasts in my hands, I made my way down her body.

I laid my face against her stomach and nuzzled into her pubic hair. "Let me see you," I said.

She put her hands between her legs and spread her lips apart. My heart was pounding so hard and fast I could hardly breathe. The sun was lighting her up. I had never seen anything so desirable, so beautiful in all my life. I just kept looking at her.

"You are so beautiful," I said.

"All women are beautiful down there," she said.

"Yeah, you're right," I told her. "But not like you. Not in the least bit like you."

She was pushing up toward me, still holding herself open. She was actually throbbing. I couldn't wait any longer. I touched her clitoris with the tip of my tongue, moved back, and watched it again. It was twitching again, covered with her cream, as if telling me she loved being touched.

"Please, please put your mouth on me."

I pushed her hands away and held her open with my fingers. I touched her again with the tip of my tongue, then swiped my tongue over her. My God, she tastes so good.

She put her hands on each side of my head and pulled me to her. I had her in my mouth, my tongue moving back and forth over her clitoris. I pulled back for only a moment, then plunged my tongue deep inside her. She arched off the bed, forcing all of herself into my mouth. She kept her hold on my head as she pumped again and again into my mouth. She cried out in ecstasy, almost a scream, when she exploded in my mouth, and took me with her.

We held each other for a long, long time before we started talking, and then we talked for hours, hashing over what had happened to us. If I wanted to fight the charges, she was willing to lie and twist the truth no matter how many Bibles she had to swear on. I knew I could never put her through that, the pain and the humiliation. We laughed and we cried and we made love again. No sleep that night--just togetherness. Lovemaking and togetherness again and again throughout the night.

Rieco hadn't been kicked out of the Red Cross. She'd just left. She'd lost nothing because she had received nothing. Red Cross volunteers in Vietnam received no pay, no recognition from our government, no medical treatment at VA hospitals--not even for post-traumatic stress disorder--nor did they receive flags to drape over their caskets in the event they were killed, which some were.

Rieco and I have made a life together in the ten years since we left Vietnam. We have a beautiful home in Monterey, not far from the ocean. We still dance together, we laugh together, sometimes we cry together and, most importantly, we still make passionate love together.

We also remember.

I accepted the administrative discharge. I had no choice. If I had my life to live over again, I would still go to Vietnam. I knew I had saved lives--I had contributed. I knew Rieco had contributed, too, maybe even more than I. I left the soldiers with less pain. Rieco left them laughing and with smiles on their faces.

Maybe someday those who keep making wars and fighting in them will learn that friendship, hope, happiness, and love are more important than money, power, land, and oil. Maybe they'll learn to let people make their own choices about their countries, leaders, and people. And maybe they'll learn that they can't control who people love and who they call family.

The price of homophobia is measured in lives. Lives lost on the battlefield, lives destroyed at home. Rieco and I felt we paid dearly for Colonel Schwartz's homophobia, but we ended up together and happy, so it was worth the price.

Guard Duty

by M.J. Williamz

I SELF-CONSCIOUSLY smoothed the front of my skirt as I walked down the hall to visit my brother. One guard walked behind me and another led the way. We reached the visiting area, and I noticed a woman standing guard who I'd not seen before.

Her olive skin, chiseled features, and cropped salt and pepper hair were enough to make my nipples hard. Add to that the muscular physique in that olive uniform, and I was dripping wet. The way she looked at me with those deep chocolate eyes told me she was thinking the same thoughts about me. I smoothed my skirt again.

"Who you here to see?" Her low voice jolted me back to reality.

"Ambrose," the guard behind me answered.

She checked her clipboard, found him, and nodded curtly. The bulletproof glass doors clicked, indicating they were unlocked. One of the guards stepped inside with me and led me into another room where I saw Thomas seated at a table. The guard stepped back, and I crossed the room to join my brother.

Our visit was short. He seemed well and I know he appreciates my visits. I felt only slightly guilty at my lack of focus on what he was saying. Those hard brown eyes kept floating through my mind, and they induced much happier thoughts than Thomas did.

When it was time for me to leave, I hugged him goodbye and turned, my heart already racing at the prospect of seeing Ms. Thing again.

As I exited the glass doors, I was relieved and excited to see her still standing there.

"Husband?" she asked, her deep voice caressing me.

"Excuse me?"

"He your husband?"

I never wanted her to stop talking. I wanted to touch myself listening to her sensual voice. My girlfriend and I had split up a month earlier, and I was a horny wreck. I masturbated several times a day, but it just wasn't the same.

"Thomas? He's my brother. I don't do husbands." I stared at her, willing my blue eyes to convey my thoughts and desires to her.

"That's good to know." Her gaze made a slow, deliberate sweep from the tips of my pumps to the top of my blonde head.

"Very good to know."

"I was hoping that might interest you." I was being brazen but didn't care. I had no intention of leaving that jail without her fucking me.

"It interests me a lot."

"Is there somewhere we can go?" I asked, my own boldness surprising me.

"Hey, Mark," she called to another guard. "This woman's got issues I'm gonna help her with. You cover the door for a while?"

Mark sauntered over in a bored manner. "You got it."

"Thanks. I owe you."

I owe you, too, I thought as I followed a tight ass in a snug uniform down the hallway in a different direction.

We arrived at a door indicating a break room. She opened the door and stepped aside to let me enter first.

"Is this safe?" I asked, suddenly wary that her intentions were less carnal than mine.

"It's safe," she said, locking the door.

I stepped to her, resting my hands on her strong chest, looking into her eyes, which were much warmer than they had been. She placed her hand on my cheek and lowered her mouth to mine, her lips firm yet soft as they laid claim to mine.

My head was spinning when I felt her tongue pressing into my mouth, demanding entrance into the moist warmth. I welcomed her hungrily, my tongue quickly moving over and around hers.

Her fingers were feather light as they worked at the buttons of my blouse. She was frustrating me. I couldn't wait to be naked for her. I wanted her to see me, feel me, taste me--all of me. And I didn't like her taking her time.

"Please, just rip them off," I panted against her mouth.

"How you gonna walk out of here then? You bring a change of clothes?"

She was right. So I started at the bottom while she continued from the top. We met in the middle and together hastily got my shirt off me. Her kisses grew fiercer yet as her hands skimmed over the satin almost nothing that held my breasts in. My nipples poked at her, longing for the feel of her hands on them. She lifted one cup and took one to roll between her calloused thumb and finger.

She slid her hand up and squeezed my small breast while she pinched my hard nipple.

I moaned low and loud. She was making me feel incredible.

Her mouth moved to my neck, and I felt her take my skin between her teeth and suck on it.

"Oh, god, yes!" I held her head in place while the tingling sensations washed over me.

"You wanna be fucked, don't you? Fucked hard?"

"Please. Please, fuck me."

She pushed me back on the worn couch and pushed my skirt up around my waist. She moved the crotch of my panties to the side and slid her fingers inside me.

"Oh, yeah. You're ready."

"Fuck yes, I am. Do me!"

I watched her hand go to her belt. My hips were bucking, aching for her to be back inside me.

"Why'd you stop?" I cried.

She showed me her answer. She was holding the baton she'd unhooked.

"I want to take it all."

"We'll see," she said, slipping a condom over the tip.

She moved my bra out of the way and bit my breast. I knew I'd be bruised, but I didn't care. Every bit of pain made my cunt drip and my clit harden.

I could feel the nightstick as she teased my inner thighs with it. She dragged it slowly, painfully, lightly over my thighs. And then I felt it. It was sharp and quick, but it was there. She slapped my pussy and I welcomed the sting, arching my back and spreading my legs wider, begging for more. She finally answered my prayers.

At first, I felt only the tip just inside me. Then a little more.

She was biting my other tit and said through clenched teeth, "Beg for it."

"I am begging. I want to feel that all the way inside me. Fuck me hard like I know you can. Please, please, fuck me."

Suddenly, I saw white flashing behind my eyelids as I felt searing pain shoot through me followed by unbridled pleasure. I thought my pussy would explode as hard as she rammed that inside me.

"You like that, don't you? You want it all, don't you? Take all of it. Ride my stick."

She twisted it inside me, sending new sensations rushing through me. Her baton filled me and still my pussy tried to suck it deeper. I could hear it sliding in and out of me, and I thrashed on the couch, overcome by all the sensations--her teeth on my nipple, her hand squeezing my breast, and the feel of the club splitting my pussy.

I held her head to my tit while I moved against her stick. She licked the tip of my nipple, which sent shockwaves to my very core. My hips moved around and around on her stick before bobbing up and down on it, driving it deeper.

My whole body began to quiver and I knew it was time.

"Oh, yes, make me come. Get me off. I need to come for you."

Heat spread through my limbs as the orgasm reached its crescendo. I felt one final thrust, and I screamed as my body tensed up and felt wave after wave of liquid heat course through me.

I lay in a lump on the couch as she slowly withdrew the hard stick from within me. I watched through heavy lids as she peeled the slick condom off.

"When you visiting your brother again?"

"Next week."

"See you then."

And she left the room, leaving me to get myself together and long for the week to fly by.

Ready For Take Off

by Diane S. Bauden

"FINAL BOARDING CALL for flight 1901 to Ottawa, Canada is now at gate H8. Again this is the final boarding call for flight 1901 to Ottawa, Canada. Please report to gate H8. Thank you for flying Amscray Airlines."

God, I know I'm being followed. I've felt her stare for the last twenty minutes, now. So this is what it feels like to be stalked. Let me tell you, it's not a good feeling. I've been on pins and

needles and can't tell if she's really looking at me or someone else. It's only a feeling, but still. Can I report a feeling? Doubtful.

I got here too damn early. I've been sitting at this stupid gate for over an hour and should really learn how to read these tickets. Is the time zone when the plane lands or when it takes off? Crap.

This is my first business trip ever and I'm nervous as all hell. The last time I was on an airplane I was eight years old going to Disney World with my family. Jeez, that was over 20 years ago. I know by the time we land in Houston, I'll have thrown up at least twice.

There she is again. She's sitting on the other side of the waiting area. Just look at her. Dark hair cascading across her broad shoulders, long denim legs stretched out with her feet crossed at her booted ankles. She's wearing a black leather jacket over a white T-shirt and those sunglasses she's wearing aren't fooling anyone either. What exactly does she think she's hiding? I can't believe how arrogant she is.

Her hands are draped in between her thighs. I swear she just touched herself. She's actually smiling. I think it's directed towards me for sure this time.

Why can't I breathe? God, she's gorgeous.

I can actually hear my own heart beating wildly inside my chest. Whoa. Maybe if I ignore her, she'll go away, or start bothering someone else. I'll grab my book and read until my flight starts boarding. Hopefully, she'll get the hint and just go away.

Jesus, make her go away. Please?

Ok, I've still got over an hour before we board. Once I'm able to board I don't have to think about her anymore.

Ugh, I've read the same two sentences for the past twenty minutes. This is not good. I've had to wipe my brow three times already. Maybe I'll get up and walk around, perhaps find a gift shop. I have to do something. She took off her sunglasses and I can feel the burn of her stare. She is making me absolutely crazy. I can't sit here any longer.

Oh my God, she's gone! She's moved from her seat. Now where did she go? She's really not making this any easier on me. I'm nervous enough without having to worry about her shadowing me. I made a subtle attempt to survey the waiting area and I couldn't see her anywhere.

"Looking for me?" A low voice rumbled in my ear from behind me.

I squeaked in response as my head whipped around to face the most beautiful eyes I'd ever seen.

"Wha-- um-- what?" I choked.

"You were looking for me, weren't you?" She asked again.

"I most certainly was not," I said. "I don't even know you." I hoped my flushed face wouldn't give me away.

"No, but you'd like to, wouldn't you--" She paused looking at my carry-on luggage tag. "Terri?"

She purred my name and I gulped loudly. Could it even be possible to feel more nervous than I was before?

I opened my mouth urging something to come out. Unfortunately, nothing did.

"I thought so. I'm not usually wrong," she said with an incredibly overconfident smirk on her face.

"I think you've got me confused with someone else," I stammered.

"Oh, I don't think so. I think I know you better than you know yourself. Isn't that right, Terri?" My stranger whispered again into my ear sending chills throughout my betraying body.

"Look." I swallowed. "I don't know where you came from, but why don't you go back there before I call airport security," I said through clenched teeth. They weren't clenched because of anger, but of frustration and arousal.

Damn her.

"Alright Terri, I'll tell you what. When you think about my offer and realize it's too late when you can't find me, don't say I didn't try. Have a good flight," she said into my ear and sucked my lobe into her mouth before retreating.

I must have moaned audibly because the look on her face tells me she heard it. I watched her swagger back into the throng of people in the airport, until she disappeared.

I blew out a breath and sank into my chair. Strangers looked at me as I tried to get my heart rate back to normal. I've never felt like I was on display until now. Oh, that woman-- that woman--

Christ, did I just make a huge mistake?

She was gorgeous. And she wanted me. Ugh. Nice going, Terri.

I think I should just go to the bathroom and try to wash my face and her memory away.

I walked down the noisy corridor and found the ladies room. I wheeled my carry-on bag in with me and rested it on the far wall right outside of the stall I was using. After I got out, I walked to the vanity to wash my hands then felt eyes on me once again. My temperature rose knowing damn well who it was.

"Well, well, well. Who do we have here?" The stranger said. "I knew you were following me."

"I was not. I came in here like everyone else does, just to use the bathroom." My heart rate increased ten fold.

She needed to go away and fast. I was starting to lose control of my senses. Her scent was driving me wild. Was it her perfume or was it her pheromones? I'm sure I don't want to know. Or do I?

"What's the matter, Terri? You look a little flushed." That damn smirk reappeared.

"What do you mean? I'm not flushed. It's warm in here," I stuttered.

"Oh, you feel it too then? I find it's quite warm in here as well. We should speak to someone about it, don't you think?"

"You're making fun of me."

"On the contrary, I'm agreeing with you. I agree that it's warm in here, but I don't think it has to do with the building. Do you?" I could do nothing but stare at her arrogance.

She walked stealthily behind me and I could feel my body wanting to fall against hers.

NO!

"I can feel your struggle, Terri," she purred. "Just let it go. I promise not to hurt you. In fact, I can guarantee you'll be begging me not to stop." She gently put her hands on my shoulders and I couldn't push them away if I wanted to.

I didn't.

Her hands started a slow massage of the muscles in my shoulders and I could feel my head lolling to the side.

Traitor.

"See? You just need to loosen up a bit. You're coiled like a rattler," she whispered in my ear.

Her voice was a siren song to my body. I was at her mercy and I knew it.

And so did she.

I could feel my jacket being removed from my shoulders as she continued her quiet perusal of my body.

"Do you like to fly?" My mysterious stranger asked.

"N-- no actually. I'm really quite nervous about the whole thing," I dumbly admitted.

Christ, she has great hands.

"Flying is such an incredible rush," she purred as I felt myself being pulled into a large stall.

God, just take me now. I can't believe how turned on I am. can't believe I'm letting a total stranger have their way with me. Oh fuck it, I don't care anymore.

"First, you get settled in your seat and buckle yourself in." She removed my belt from my jeans and draped it over the stall wall.

She moved in front of me and looked at me intently. I almost melted at her stare. I'd only seen that color blue in the center of a flame. Her fingers found the buttons of my 501's and slowly undid each one while looking directly into my eyes.

I slipped off my shoes and felt one leg at a time being pulled from the impedance I called jeans. Her eyes were boring into me as she leaned close to my face. Her fingers delicately slid down my body and removed my wet underpants. She slowly stood, lightly scratching the skin of my legs with her fingernails on her way up.

My breathing hitched as I felt her mouth attach itself to my neck. I heard her moan silently as she nipped the heated skin she found there.

Oh God.

I could feel my toes curling in response to her carnality. I didn't know what to do with my hands as her tongue tasted my throat and hovered dangerously closer to my chin and mouth.

I wanted to grab her face and kiss her senseless, but I didn't want any of the feelings to stop. I kept them clenched tightly at my sides. She must have sensed my dilemma because her hands caressed my arms as they slid closer to my fists. She gently took my right hand and brought it to her lips and tenderly kissed it until the grip loosened. She repeated the motions with my other hand.

She brought my hands to the buttons on my shirt and helped me to undo them. After they were opened, I realized I was standing almost completely naked, in a stall, in an airport bathroom, being ravaged by the sexiest woman I'd ever laid eyes on.

I must be dreaming.

The bite to my nipple brought me back to my unbelievable reality. I hissed out my pleasure and she repeated her actions to my other breast. She moved back and smiled at me with a predatory grin.

She slowly leaned in and gently kissed my lips. I could feel the fire building within us both. Her tongue came out to greet mine and they quickly became friends. We stroked each other orally for many minutes before she pulled back slightly to suck on my earlobes.

"Then you brace yourself against your chair and wrap your fingers tightly around the armrest until you can almost see your knuckles turning white," she said, sending bolts of electricity down between my soaked folds of tender skin.

Flying-- she's talking about flying.

The rest of my clothes were stripped away leaving me exposed and vulnerable to her. Her hands reached down to mine and raised them so I had one hand on each of the stall walls.

"Your mind tells you to hold on tightly, so your hands obey the silent request," she said, looking into my eyes for a sign that I understood what was expected of me.

I did. I was starting to like flying very much.

I held on tightly to the walls of the cramped cubicle and braced myself for whatever my enigmatic lover had planned.

Her lips found my bare nipples and began to suck in earnest. Her tongue flicked at them, teasing me like I'd never been teased. My hips began to gyrate and thrust forward, wanting to press against her. She leaned closer to me to accommodate my voiceless plea. She nipped and suckled my breasts as her fingers slid their way down my body to the place I wanted to feel her most.

She entered me with one finger while she teased my clitoris with her thumb. My body was on fire. I'd never felt such power coming from anyone as I felt coming off of this amazing woman. She controlled me from the very beginning. My breaths were coming in short gasps and my grip on the walls was firm.

She stopped her movements on my breasts and I felt her body move lower. I felt her breath against my heated skin and my body never wanted anything as badly as this before. I wanted her tongue on me, tasting me, entering me, taking me.

She picked up one of my legs and raised it over her shoulder. I held tighter to the stall for balance.

"You feel the plane move beneath you picking up speed as it gets closer to the end of the runway," she said as she lifted my other leg over her other shoulder. I crossed my ankles behind her back and sucked in a huge breath of much needed air. The stall walls groaned as I pulled on them in anticipation.

Oh yeah, take me there.

Her tongue began tasting me lightly at first and I groaned loudly in reply. I felt her hands grab my ass and she held on tightly as she stood, taking me up with her, seating me on her shoulders. My legs instinctively held firmly to her shoulders and my feet hooked around to her sides. Her tongue began to brush against my clitoris repeatedly. The sensations were blinding me. I felt myself falling until I heard her voice again.

"Faster and faster you pick up speed until you are ready for take off," she mumbled as her tongue entered me. She brought my wetness to an all-time high as she held me impossibly closer to suck my clitoris. She scraped her teeth against me and flicked her tongue faster and faster until I knew I was at the point of no return.

"Oh Jesus! Don't stop!" I cried.

She knew I was close and I heard her moaning into my wet skin. I felt the tingling sensations begin and my eyes closed tightly against the florescent lighting close to my face. I thrust quickly and held on for dear life as the tremors shook me violently. I screamed out my pleasure to the dismay of unknowing travelers retreating from the restroom.

"We have lift-off," she growled and dove back inside of me.

She was relentless.

She didn't stop her movements until my second orgasm sent a cramping sensation to my legs. I begged to be put down and she gently lowered me.

"Whoa--" I breathed as my head fell to her shoulder.

"Easy, easy. Take nice easy breaths. That's it, I gotcha," she cooed in my ear as my body tried to remember how to stand.

Her arms wrapped around me filling me with warmth and tenderness I'd longed for my whole life.

"That was incredible," I sighed against her.

"Yes, it was. I told you so." She chuckled.

"You told me what?" I asked as I pulled away from her.

Her eyes were sparkling. "Well, two things actually. First, I told you you'd beg me not to stop." I could feel my face redden from her comment. "You're so beautiful when you blush like that," she said as she stroked my cheek.

"What was the second thing?" I said finding my voice again.

"I told you flying was a rush." She smirked.

"Yeah, well, if flying is like that, I'll make a lifetime reservation right now," I said, making my nameless lover laugh.

She helped me to dress and we casually, well as casually as we could, walked from the stall and gratefully to an empty room. My relief must have been written all over my face.

"Glad we're alone?" She asked.

"Yes," I breathed. "Although, I think we had a few onlookers. Luckily no one stayed for the encore." I laughed in spite of myself then stared at her for a few seconds. "Do you do this often?"

"Do what?" She smiled.

"Take innocent women into airport bathrooms and have your way with them. That's what," I challenged with a hint of teasing in my voice.

"Well, first of all, innocent you are not, Miss Terri." I opened my mouth and grabbed my chest in mock pain. "But to answer your question, usually before I fly I take matters into my own hands, you know, to relax and unwind. It's usually a solo flight, but having a copilot is much more fulfilling." She smiled.

"Ah, I see. Well, I'm much more relaxed now, so I should thank you as well." I sheepishly smiled.

We checked our appearances and I looked at my watch and knew it was close to boarding time.

"You're very welcome, Terri," she said.

I grabbed my bag and she grabbed hers as we headed out of the restroom.

"So, where are you headed?" She asked.

"I'm going down to Houston on business. It's my first real business trip. I'm kind of excited about it," I said not wanting my time with her to end.

"Houston's great this time of year, you'll love it," she reassured.

"Boarding for flight 0704 to Houston, will begin in fifteen minutes at gate G12. Again, boarding for flight 0704 nonstop to Houston, will begin in fifteen minutes. Thank you for flying Amscray Airlines."

"Well, I've got to get ready, and it looks like you'll be boarding soon," she said with a smile. She opened her carry-on bag and put on a white button down shirt and smoothly tucked it into her black pants. A dark jacket quickly completed her ensemble.

"Yeah, it looks that way," I started. "Hey, um, I know it doesn't really matter now, but can I ask you what your name is?" God, I felt so cheap.

My head instantly began to drop as what I'd just done started to sink in. I felt her fingers lift my chin until I came face to face with the beautiful blue eyes that would soon haunt me.

"My name is Charlie." She reached around to her bag. "But you can call me Captain," she finished as she placed her pilot's cap on her head.

My eyes widened like saucers at this revelation.

"You're flying my plane to Houston?"

She nodded. "It seems I'll be your pilot once again. I can guarantee that this flight won't be nearly as fun, but I can make it up to you when we land in Texas." She smirked that sexy smile at me and my blood began to heat up again at the implication.

"You got a date." I leaned in and kissed her lightly on the lips.

She looked at the shocked faces around us. "Oh, you're gonna be fun," she growled as she lightly slapped my ass. She kissed me back then fled to the gate to board the plane with the flight attendants. She caught my eye and winked as she ran through the door.

God, what have I gotten myself into?

Oh, Houston-- we most definitely have a problem.

The Rebels

by V.W. Massie

ALTHOUGH I COULDN'T see her face because the black visor was lowered, her body spoke to me. Long and lean, the soldier had the small firm breasts and slim hips I preferred in a virtual lover. Studying the broadcloth over her flat stomach, I could almost feel the rail of muscle there. Border marchers were forced to train relentlessly. I knew she would be tight and hard beneath every inch of that dark uniform.

Yet I was working out of my element. I was unsure of the exact customs of this rural cross-town. Were the traditions the same as in Bensonhurst? Many of the outposts resented our easy city ways. There was an old-style religious element still active in a number of them, touting the evils of man; very different from our city center, which loudly proclaimed the goodness of man.

The city was easy; you met someone at a glo-light bar or social function, you passed them your Rendezvous chip and retreated immediately to the coupling couches or set up a tryst later using the chip. It hadn't always been this way. According to the history vids, it had started after the

states went to war and implemented the Protocol. When the soldiers had refused to leave their spouses and go fight, the Victor-Ailleng Family Act of 2012 had been put in place to ease the absence of the men and women who had gone off to war. Virtual coupling had become big business very quickly.

So much so that, after the tragic blow of 2043, when the troops did not return, the coupling couches persisted. Even in the face of a rapidly dwindling population. With state borders still needing protection and a shortage of soldiers, genetic blending had produced the border marchers, a tribe of elite soldiers whose sole purpose was to protect the remaining populace from terrorists.

And they were spectacular. Especially this one. I studied the marcher once more, slyly, and wondered if I should simply hand her my Rendezvous as I would back home. I sighed.

Was she watching me? I couldn't tell for sure. I imagined I could feel her gaze on me. My body tingled and I knew with a sudden urge that I had to have her. I reached into my pocket for the Rendezvous.

The low hum sounded and my heart lurched in dismay. The marcher turned right abruptly and trotted away along the border line. I'd lost my chance.

"Commander Isaac?"

I drew my gaze from the marcher's retreating back and saw a young MTF officer waiting expectantly. She was lovely, with small-boned features and a delicate body. She had yet to have the breast enhancements and so must still be very young. I found it odd that the few remaining men no longer wished to be men.

"Yes. Is she ready for me?"

"Yes, my lady, if you'll come this way."

The officer led the way into the huge spartan building that made up this Southwestern checkpoint. An expansive glass wall fronted on the line and I found myself searching for my soldier. She must be a mile or so down the boundary by this point. I thought about her four hours of duty. The constant starts and stops as she patrolled the line, alternately jogging along to a new outpost and standing guard on alert. I thought of her muscular body bucking beneath mine and felt moisture well between my thighs.

The officer was talking so I reigned in my rampant imagination.

"So tell me about the city," she whispered urgently. "Is it as decadent as they say?"

I laughed. "Define decadent. People live in much closer proximity there so there is certainly more--activity in the city."

I kept my voice low not wanting to get her into trouble for talking so familiarly to me. I could only imagine the courage it took for her to ask me such a question.

"I want to go there so badly," she whispered, daring to glance at me with shining, eager eyes. I admired the way her hair was shaved close on one side. She would fit in well in the city, her slight body with its rudimentary penis entered into the virtual schema and enjoyed by many. I told her so, in a low monotone. She trembled with joy as she opened a large set of metal doors.

Gavis was working at a desktop controller, her fingers tracing the touchscreen as she planned the next day's rotation. She heard me enter and glanced up with a welcoming smile.

"Commander Isaac. Welcome."

"Commander," I said politely as the officer closed the door, leaving us alone.

Gavis rose and moved around the desk to hug me.

"Emtha, you work too hard. Travel too much. When are you going to give up that hectic lifestyle and come here to work for me?"

I laughed. "Now Gavis, you know I could never pass the physical, even for office work."

"Ah, we'd get you there," she assured me as she indicated a chair next to the desk.

"And Cleo? How is your beautiful companion?" I sat and crossed my legs, straightening the pressed creases on my uniform trousers.

"She is well. Mentions you often."

"She should, we message enough," I replied jovially. Gavis laughed along with me.

"Everything's ready," she said handing me the full disclosure. I slipped the chip into the breast pocket of my uniform jacket. I would study it later in my room.

"So, no infractions?"

She shook her head, smiling as she spread her hands. "You tell me, oh exalted Inspector Commander Isaac."

I chuckled. "Stop that foolishness. And I will, don't you worry. You'll get no preferential treatment."

"So, I guess you can't stay with us while you're here?"

"No. Ethics violation. You wine and dine me and then I say your facility is perfect. It's bad enough the Council knows we attended Academy together. Flags are already raised on that.

"I understand," Gavis said. "If you find no problems, they would never know why you made that determination, whether it was valid."

"Exactly. Besides, you know I only stay in Pleasure Drones. Suppose some sweet young thing needs my special attention?" My mind flew to Gavis's marcher. I was dying to ask her about the soldier but worried that openly experiencing one of her marchers might be an ethics violation as well.

Gavis sighed and rubbed her cropped hair. "Ah, to be as young as you."

"Don't give me that. I know Cleo. Experienced her quite some time ago while in primary. She is insatiable and will keep you young."

Gavis smiled at me. "All consorts are insatiable. I need to hide my chip from time to time just to have a rest. We poor patrons don't stand a chance when it comes to satisfying them."

"You'll get no argument there," I agreed, smiling. "So, is your line all engineered women now?"

Gavis nodded and pressed a button on the console. The south wall lifted, flooding the room with late afternoon sunlight, and I could see the marchers spaced out across the boundary that separated our peace-vested state from those who would do us harm. The black uniforms of the soldiers far away looked like pinpricks in the distance while others were so close I could see their chests move as they sucked in air. "They are. Research bore out that they react more intuitively to a threat. Older genders tend to be more intimidated."

"And, of course, they aren't as tall." I rose and moved to the glass wall. I looked for her, my soldier, even realizing there was no way she could have travelled the entire boundary this quickly. The hum sounded and the line of marchers moved to my left.

Gavis moved to stand next to me and look outside. "Yes, there's that."

I sighed and realized I needed to get to work. "They're quite impressive, Gavis. Well-trained. I'm pleased." I took her hand and pressed it between mine in farewell. "I will tour now and, after seeing the disclosure, I'll be back tomorrow with questions. If I have any."

Gavis pressed back in the customary response. "Wander at will. Let me know if you need anything."

I left the office and spent the next twenty rotations watching her facility in action. It was a well-oiled engine. I saw no openings inside for terrorists to exploit. My two junior inspectors were on scooters examining the line and reported periodically that all was in order. The interior combat rooms were impeccably well-furnished and filled with drillers working marchers into almost super-human killing machines. I watched them a long time, marveling at the power coiled within their sweaty, scantily clad bodies. My report to the council would be favorable. I felt sure that Gavis and her crew spent every bit of the Council funding on training and maintenance. There was no corruption here.

As I stood by the back doorway making notes into my unit, the wall receded and a row of marchers came inside, bringing with them the heat and the cinnamon scent of the sand from outside. I inhaled deeply as they passed by, their helmets in their hands. The marchers were all of the same type, bred for muscle tone and commanding appearance. Their heights averaged twelve inches above most of the civilian population but as they came through the wide opening, I saw them simply as the beautiful, determined women they were.

She came up to me and rested at my side as I stood there watching the others. I turned and saw finally that her eyes were deep brown and kind, her face tanned and lean. She smiled at me with white even teeth and cute wrinkles appeared alongside her mouth and eyes. It was thrilling to see her without the helmet.

I glanced around and noted that none of her fellow marchers had given us any undue interest. They stood in small groups chitchatting idly as they prepared to leave duty.

"My name is Nora," she said in a low voice that made ripples gather at the base of my spine. She used long fingers to brush back the layers of her damp, dark hair.

"Emtha," I replied. I cleared my throat. "Commander Emtha Isaac."

"Ahh, you're the inspector. I wondered who you were."

I turned so she could read the insignia on my shoulder plate. I smiled.

"Ah, inspector third grade. Impressive."

I shook my head. "Not so important. I've just been doing it since Academy."

"You look young." I could see the hunger in her eyes then.

"Dinner?" I asked.

She studied me. "And breakfast?" she countered.

I looked up at her and smiled my most inviting smile. "Of course, if you wish."

"Oh, I wish," she said softly, causing a burning to ignite down below. I pulled a Rendezvous from my pocket.

"Later," she said, pressing my hand. Her touch flew through me like quicksilver and I began to gasp for air as if overheated. "Where can I find you?"

"Caresses. Do you know it?"

"I'll find it." She took both my hands in hers and pressed her farewell. Then she strode away, her long black clad legs carrying her easily through her crew-mates. Many took her hands in farewell

but she didn't linger, simply smiling and moving along. I admired her presence, her graceful economy of movement. Nora.

I BATHED CAREFULLY, adding scent and pheromones. I wanted to please her in real time as well as virtual. As the dinner hour approached, I grew unusually nervous, checking the coupling chamber several times. I lit glo-candles and set soft music playing. The couches here at Caresses were larger than most with extra padding and sides that sloped in as if cocooning the user. I'd used them before and had enjoyed that aspect. The headsets were top of the line as well and were always clean and sweet-smelling.

I would delay no longer. Everything was as prepared as I could make it. I went downstairs.

The dining room wasn't crowded. It was the off season and most local residents were on work rotation. I found a table that was visible from the entry alcove and took a seat. I didn't wait long.

I knew her the minute she entered. And it wasn't just the fresh, crisp marcher uniform. Even though her hair was now dry and fell in a cascade that hid one side of her face, I knew her by her tallness and the confident movement of her body. She saw me and waved and I knew her smile as well.

"Emtha," she said in simple greeting as she tucked her hair behind her ear. She took my hands and pressed her mouth to them in a lingering kiss. I loved the dry, heated feel of her lips against my flesh.

"Nora." I breathed her name as if whispering a prayer.

I never tasted the food. We ate lightly as we conversed, getting to know one another. Her life was quiet, very different from mine. She'd lived in Clornet for most of her young life, joining the marcher training at eleven, the typical age. Since then she had lived alone at the north end of barrack three hundred. I discovered she was a reader, with more than thirty-five hundred books on her unit. I was impressed. I had considered myself well-read but only carried twenty-two hundred. We had similar reading interests, which, for some odd reason surprised and stimulated me.

I felt her on every inch of my skin. There was a strange stirring within me, far different from what I'd felt for other women. I felt wetness at armpit and groin and sweat beaded on my upper lip. My reaction to Nora puzzled me.

"Shall we go up," Nora asked gently after what felt like ages. I nodded and took her hand.

The elevator was unbearably slow as Nora gazed into my eyes. I saw so many sultry promises there. I ached for my couch and for the release I would find there with this beautiful woman.

I offered her whiskey but she shook her head, smiled seductively, and pulled me through the sleeping couches and into the coupling chamber. She placed her Rendezvous chip in my palm and I handed her mine. I took the couch to her left and we settled in, sliding into the headsets. I inserted her chip and waited, staring up into the muted light of the headset. Inserting both our chips into the same virtual setup would make the experience that much more intense. I gripped my thighs together in excitement, the pressure against my engorged clit making me moan slightly.

Then I saw her. She flickered into being and turned to me in full dimension. She smiled and I was lost. One of her broad, strong hands stroked along my arm and my clothing fell away, seeming to follow her hand. The hand moved inward and cupped my uncovered breast reverently. Her eyes, when they lifted to me, were deep and darkened by desire. Her kiss fell on me and pulled me down into a wanton sea of heat. Her tongue plundered me and my body reacted almost violently to the experience. My pelvis lifted and rotated against the roughness of her uniform and we fell together, spinning until we stopped against a soft virtual surface. I felt her thumb strumming the taut peak of my breast and I felt the music between my legs. The sound of the sea filled me suddenly and waves lapped against my clit.

"I never knew how much I liked kisses," I muttered against her lips as I pulled her uniform away, ripping it from her broad back in one smooth movement.

The kisses continued as she smiled against my mouth. "Now we know," she whispered, tongue pushing insistently between my teeth.

I felt encased in her kisses, held safe in a passionate web of growing ardor. I never wanted them to stop, unusual for me. I was usually more concerned with other aspects of a coupling but with Nora, I never wanted the kisses to end. Indeed, when she made ready to move lower I clutched at her and sought her lips again, falling easily into the cradle of sensation she was creating for me. Her arms were strong about me and we spun gently together, her thigh nestled between mine. The heavy muscle of her thigh moved upward and pressed against my center, causing new wetness to pour from me. She pulled her mouth away and chuckled, pressing her wet hip more firmly against my clit, her thigh sliding across my slick opening. I pressed against her, yearning and seeking release.

My moans and gasps were loud in my own ears. I pulled back and looked at her face. Her eyes were dark, but blurred by the program. A too-close visual always caused blurring; a system bug that irked me. I forced the distracting thought from my mind as I studied her; glad I could see the harsh planes of her face, a face which had been transformed by her own need. She pressed against me, our gazes fixed. I was lost then and a soul-shattering orgasm ripped through me. I arched against the virtual Nora, my curved form reaching heavenward. My teeth ground together until my jaws hurt and nonsensical sounds were escaping my clenched lips. I'd never felt such power. Nora threw back her head and her mouth opened as though she felt it with me. I shuddered and fell back, panting and swooning.

A sudden sensation of closeness puckered my skin. I sensed a new localized heat, a soft fall of hair, the scent of cinnamon. I felt the headset swept away, off my face. My eyes flew open and she was there, preparing to lift me into her arms, her hard body pressing toward me.

"Nora! You can't--it's not the way--."

Her hot hand rested on my waist and her eyes hovered above mine, questioning. I saw the desire clearly. I saw the warmth of her gaze. I felt her need rain down from her gaze and deep into me. I shifted, making more room for her to wrap her arms about me. I offered my lips. We kissed and the real taste of her pelted my senses, waking them keenly.

Nora lifted me easily in her arms and I buried my face in the rough fabric of her uniform. She smelled heavenly. She stood me next to my sleeping couch. Her tanned hands moved to my shoulders and loosened the clasp of my jacket. She slipped it away. My trousers followed under her capable hands. Then my undergarment. I'd never been totally naked in front of anyone before and found it exhilarating.

She watched me, her breathing harsh. I knew that this was the first time for her as well. As if by their own volition, my hands sought the fasteners on her uniform. I needed her to be naked with me. I wanted to see her beauty.

And she was beautiful. So much more beautiful than her virtual schema. My mind registered surprise. She'd kept her hair in real time. I was fascinated and craved to touch it. Instead I touched her face tenderly, my heart pounding in my chest because I wanted her so badly. I pulled her onto my couch.

And the kisses began. Oh, the kisses. So much more than we had experienced on the virtual couches. I hadn't thought they could be better, but now I knew. There was no comparison.

I lifted my pelvis to her and her hand slid down between us to find my wetness. Her fingers teased there, finding resistance. She paused as if understanding that I'd never been penetrated before. This old-type love was new for me.

"Have you?" I asked, wondering if breaking the convention of civilization was common here.

Her breathing was heavy. "No," she whispered. "Never."

I thought for a brief moment. I pressed my hand to hers, insisting she penetrate me. The push forced all the air from my lungs and she waited as I gasped for air, for composure. There was little pain, but certainly the fulfillment of a desire I'd had my whole adult life.

Giving me no further time to think, her fingers retreated and pressed again, one thumb escaping to tease my clit repeatedly. I was still shuddering from the old release even as the new orgasm seated itself. She wrapped her powerful legs around me, pressing her center close. I felt the mat of curly hair there. I had to touch it. Wriggling my arms loose, I explored as Nora stilled. My

hands traced the long hard angles of her body which melted into the softness of her lower belly and the fur of her sex. My fingers lingered there, frolicking in the soft curls.

"Hair?" I spoke against her neck, entranced by the novelty.

"Yeah," she spoke next to my ear, her voice tight. "Is it okay?"

Her hand writhed within me, making me gasp from the renewed sensation. I touched her protruding clit, rubbed it gently. Her breath caught.

"Fuck me, Nora. Now. I want to belong to you." I whispered the request low against her ear.

She shuddered then rose and knelt above me. I marveled at her again, the real her, towering above me. I reached and touched the ridges of muscle that framed her abdomen. They felt better than I had imagined. I studied her small breasts and wanted the prominent nipples in my mouth. The darkness at the apex of her thighs mesmerized me.

She pushed her fingers into me, rotating her hand with gentle insistence. The weight of her whole body regulated the gentle, slow thrusts of her powerful arm. I grunted with each thrust and looked down so I could watch. We watched her fuck me together, her hand expanding me until she was able to curl her palm into a cup within me, pressing upward. The explosive heat in my psyche expanded as my eyes feasted. Then I could watch no longer. Instead I took firm steps toward a bright abyss of pleasure. One that I stepped into gratefully.

I came back to my senses to find Nora resting beside me, holding me, kissing my neck. Her bloody hand rested on my stomach and I could smell the coppery, animal scent of it. She was trembling and I held her close.

"Are you afraid?" I whispered.

She nodded and buried her face in my neck.

"Of me? That it'll hurt?"

She shook her head.

I sighed, understanding finally. "Oh. That I'll tell."

I glanced over at the discarded headset and couches, knowing that this was infinitely better. Our own special secret.

I reached low and found her needy clit and stroked it.

"My beautiful rebel," I muttered. "It'll be our secret." She sighed against me.

I indulged my desire and sucked her nipples into my mouth, one after the other. I enjoyed the hiss of her indrawn breath as they grew firmer beneath my lips and tongue. My fingers sank into her shallow wetness and teased there, drawing moisture high to smooth my passage over and around her clit. She tensed beneath my touch. I felt throbbing there and her moans let me know she was close. I increased my pressure and she pressed her hips harder, rhythmically into my hand. I sucked one nipple into my mouth and let it go, flicking it into coolness with my tongue. Nora sought my kiss and we fell endlessly into one another. I felt her body convulse beneath my hand and her moans were muffled against my mouth. I swallowed her cries of pleasure, imagining my mouth taking over the work of my hand.

I couldn't wait to actually taste her.

Riding the Rails

by Victoria Oldham

DANA STILES STOOD in the chill morning air, her breath coming out in puffy clouds in front of her. The train was supposed to be on time, and she was desperate to hear it coming down the tracks. This out of the way station was barely a stop at all. It was, literally, a hole in the fence. No building to wait in, no shelter if it started to rain, which it was likely to do any second. Behind her there was a shadowy park, home to a half dozen homeless and the current site of a very loud argument between two prostitutes.

She picked up her bag as the tracks began to rattle. She stepped closer to the tracks as the prostitute fight developed into something physical and they began trying to pull one another's hair extensions out.

The train pulled up in a heavy gust of hot air. The door slid open and the conductor yelled to her, "First class or regular?"

"First, please," Dana said, unable to see the woman talking to her because of the florescent lighting behind her.

"C'mon over," the woman said with an impatient wave of her hand.

Dana pressed her lips together tightly to bite back a retort. After all, taking the train across the country was her choice. Hanging out in the sky in a big tin can for six hours wasn't going to happen. She figured three days on a train would give her time to relax as well as get work done without interruption.

She gingerly stepped into the carriage, surprised when the train started moving again almost before the door shut behind her.

"Ticket, please?"

Dana turned and finally looked at the conductor. Her knees went weak and she leaned against the vibrating wall.

The conductor was a solidly built, handsome woman with short, spiky blonde hair and sky blue eyes. Her muscled arms were crossed in front of her, and Dana suddenly realized that she was quite aware that Dana was cruising her.

"Right. Sorry," Dana said, thrusting the ticket at her as heat suffused her face.

The conductor slowly took it, her crisp white button down shirt pulling tight over small, firm breasts. The gold epaulets with blue writing highlighted her broad shoulders. Dana lifted her eyes back to the conductor's face, both mortified and aroused. Maybe three days on a train wouldn't be so bad after all.

"Right this way," the conductor said, giving a sweeping gesture with her hand and grabbing Dana's case like it weighed substantially less than the forty pounds it actually did. As hard as she had tried, she just couldn't pack less than a few weeks worth of clothing. A girl had to have choices, after all.

Dana followed the woman to the rear of the car. They stepped into a room the size of a large bathroom at home. But this room had enormous windows that let her see the countryside as it flashed by. The big bed in the middle would be just right, and the small bathroom meant she wouldn't have to go to the bottom floor of the carriage to shower with however many other people would be traveling in the same car.

Dana watched as the blue gabardine pants tightened across a taut, perfect ass when the conductor placed her bag on her bed. She turned and the light caught the pewter buttons on her shirt, reflecting into her light blue eyes.

"Breakfast will be served in about an hour in the dining car, or you can dine in here if you want to take a look at the menu now so I can get it to the kitchen."

Just as Dana stepped forward to take the proffered menu, the train lurched to the right and she lost her balance. She fell against the hard body of the conductor and instantly felt her pussy clench at the feel of the conductors hands on her hips.

"Whoa, there. You'll get your balance soon enough. Just remember to keep your hands free when you walk down the corridors so you can push off the walls if you need to," the woman said, her voice husky in Dana's ear.

"I--of course. Thank you," Dana murmured, forcing herself away from the tense body against hers.

"I'm Conductor K. Rigs, by the way. Just call me Rigs. I'll be on board until we get to Chicago, so if you need anything, please let me know," she looked down at Dana's ticket before handing it over, "Ms. Dana Stiles."

"Thank you, Rigs. I will. I've never done a train trip like this before. I'm looking forward to it."

"It's a great way to travel. Like being a long haul trucker, but with a helluva lot more company." Rigs grinned, and Dana's stomach flipped when she saw the dimple on her left cheek.

Rigs backed out of the room, and before she stepped out into the corridor, her eyes made a blatant journey over Dana's body.

"If you need anything, there's a button you can push above your bed. I'll come as soon as I can."

Dana nodded, barely keeping herself from telling the conductor that she would gladly push the button from her bed to get her to come.

The door slid shut and she flung herself backward onto the bed. This could be a very good trip indeed.

RIGS WALKED DOWN the corridor, her balance adjusting easily to the bump and sway of the train as it made its way out of California. The train slowed and she knew they had hit the Cajon Pass, a steep grade where the tracks were often iced over and fog obscured the engineer's view ahead.

She made her way to the front car and stepped in to speak with him.

"Hey, Marley. How's it looking?"

"So far so good, Rigs. We've got a multi-switch ahead, but it looks like the ice is waiting till we've passed by to mess anything up. Looks like we'll make good time to the New Mexico stop."

"Awesome. I'm heading down to the kitchens to check on meal prep. Call if you need me."

She slapped Marley on the back and left him to do the job he'd been doing for twenty years. She had done plenty of runs with him, and she knew that in an emergency he'd know exactly what to do.

In the meantime, she had a train to run. And maybe she'd see that new passenger in the dining car, since she hadn't waited for her order. Damn, that woman has some nice tits, she thought.

And what an ass. Initially, Rigs had been a bit irritated that Dana had so blatantly checked her out, but after a moment she decided she liked the hunger visible in Dana's eyes.

There was nothing like meeting a woman going to somewhere, from somewhere, who wanted a bit of pleasure in-between. Rigs loved her job.

DANA GINGERLY RUBBED her sore shoulder. Taking a shower on a moving train was like trying to brush your teeth on a roller coaster. As the train lurched along the tracks she fell against the shower walls, shampoo in her eyes and her hand trying to find the switch to turn the water back on, since it only stayed on for thirty seconds at a time.

Running her fingers through her long, wet, dark hair, she decided to head to the dining car for lunch. She had fallen dead asleep and missed breakfast, and her stomach was making itself heard.

She slid open her room door and made her way down the corridor, steadying herself between the narrow walls. She opened the door between the cars and was thrown forward. She braced herself for a fall and breathed a sigh of relief when strong arms caught her before she hit the rubber floor.

"Not quite got the hang of it yet, do you?"

Dana's pulse sped up and for a moment she was tempted to fake fainting, if only to stay in Rigs' arms a moment or two longer. But just as quickly she threw the idea aside and got to her feet.

Rigs's hands held her a moment longer than necessary, their breasts brushing as the train clacked from side to side around them.

"Thank you," Dana said, trying to regain a semblance of control.

"My pleasure," Rigs said. "Heading to the dining car? Or the viewing car?"

"Dining. I'm famished. I forgot about breakfast."

"Well, why don't I walk you there?"

"I wouldn't want to put you out. I'm sure I can make my way there without falling too much more."

Dana watched as Rigs blatantly looked her over, and when her eyes made it back to Dana's face, Dana ran the tip of her tongue over her bottom lip, biting it gently. She nearly laughed out loud when the conductor's eyes widened slightly and she grabbed the doorway to steady herself. In reality, she wouldn't mind getting Rigs to put out at all. But now wasn't the time.

"Okay, well, like I said, if you need anything, just shout. Or you can ask one of the assistant conductors, and they'll get me."

Dana smiled, disappointed in Rigs backing off. "I'll do that, thank you."

They moved past one another, both careful to keep their body parts to themselves.

Dana moved off down the hall, and before moving through the door to the next car, looked over her shoulder. Sure enough, Rigs was standing there watching her, her gaze locked on Dana's ass. Dana grinned and put a bit of extra sway into her walk as she slipped through the doors.

She sat in the dining car across from an old couple who were more than happy to chat. They told her about their days under the Nixon administration, and she explained her fear of flying. For most of the conversation, though, her body continued to tingle in all the places Rigs' body had touched hers. All the right places.

After a rubbery meal of pasta and half frozen cheesecake, she carefully made her way back to her room. With nothing else to do, she flopped down on the bed and opened a book, occasionally looking up to watch the beautiful scenery flash past.

RIGS STRETCHED AND leaned back in her chair. It was time to do her walk-throughs before dinner. She liked to walk the cars and check in, making sure that all the passengers were happy. Some developed motion sickness, some couldn't sleep, and in the regular carriages, which often began to smell pretty bad by day three, she would check to make sure the walkways were clear and no one was about to throw their neighbor off the train. The last thing she wanted was someone falling and breaking a bone.

That thought made her think of her first class passenger whose balance hadn't been so good earlier in the day. Thank god. Rigs had gone weak in the knees and hot between her legs when Dana's body had literally fallen into her own. She hadn't wanted to let go, but if she hadn't, any passenger going by would have seen both of them in a rather embarrassing position.

Crossing her fingers, she stepped into the first class car and walked through slowly, smiling at those customers with their curtains pulled back and saying a quiet hello to those with their doors open. The smaller first class cabins were little more than large closets, but they certainly afforded more privacy than the general car, where a motley bunch of people slept and ate next to one another in seats for three days. By day three, the bathrooms were far from pleasant.

She slowed at Dana's door and grinned when she saw the menu hanging on the peg outside her room.

DANA WAS STARTLED from her ruminations by the knock on her door. Realizing it was dark outside, she spared a glance at the starlit sky before going to her door.

Opening it, she raised an eyebrow when she saw who was on the other side. "Do you always take room service on yourself, Conductor?"

"Here to serve, ma'am. But only for truly beautiful passengers." Rigs took the opening and squeezed past Dana, placing her dinner tray on the small table in her room. She hoped she hadn't come across too cheesy.

"Smooth. But I appreciate it, nonetheless."

"Not smooth--just true. And you're welcome," Rigs said, crossing her arms over her chest and leaning against Dana's wall. She took a minute to look Dana over. Her hair had dried naturally, and fell in soft waves around her face and shoulders. Her low slung jeans hugged smooth, round hips, and her tank top hugged a flat stomach and beautiful, full breasts. Rigs felt her breath speed up and her thighs tighten in anticipation.

"You didn't order dessert," Rigs said, nodding at the tray but not taking her eyes from Dana's beautiful face.

"But it came anyway, didn't it?" Dana said, her eyes narrowing as she grinned.

"Indeed it did. But let's see who gets to taste it," Rigs said, stepping forward and placing her body against Dana's. Reaching over Dana's shoulder, she deftly slid the door shut and locked it, pulling the curtain across the small window, effectively shutting out all light.

Dana stood stock still, managing to keep her balance as Rigs body left hers for a moment, returning after she had flicked on the lamp. It cast a soft glow, and Dana found herself mesmerized by the look in Rigs's eyes. Her desire was setting her blue eyes on fire, and her jaw was clenched tight.

"I hope you don't mind me coming by. We've only got three days. And I want to feel you underneath me. I want to hear you moan for me. I want to make you feel so damn good," Rigs whispered against Dana's ear as she slowly licked, nipped and kissed from her earlobe, dragging her tongue down Dana's jawline and to her perfect pink lips.

Dana moaned and kissed Rigs back, opening her mouth to let Rigs tongue inside. Rigs pulled away and slowly kissed her way down Dana's neck, moving over the soft cotton of her tank top to her nipple and sucking it up beneath the fabric. Dana threw her head back and pressed her body into Rigs, losing all sense of time as Rigs made her wet and wanting.

Her hands went to Rigs shirt, tugging at the pewter buttons.

"First, you. Then we'll see about me," Rigs said softly, her hand cupping Dana's breast as her thumb and forefinger lightly pinched her hard nipple.

Dana couldn't think. She couldn't even speak. All she knew was that she wanted Rigs inside her. On top of her. Beneath her. She wanted it all.

Rigs walked Dana back toward the bed, their bodies never losing contact. When Dana's legs hit the bed she sat down, and Rigs followed her down onto her back, her weight pressing Dana to the bed.

They both moaned at how good it felt; one woman's body on another's, soft and hard, ultra feminine to beautifully masculine.

Rigs tugged Dana's tank top off and stopped for a moment. Dana's breasts were beautifully held in by sheer black lace, the creamy tops of them waiting for her attention.

She sucked, licked and bit them, one by one, gently squeezing each one as she lavished attention on the other. Dana's hips moved beneath her, bucking slightly in an attempt to get some release.

Rigs froze when her radio squawked to life.

"Hey, Rigs, I need you up front," Marley said, and Rigs could hear his stress in the tone of his voice.

She let her head drop onto Dana's chest for a moment.

Looking up, she pushed off the bed and straightened her uniform. "I'm really sorry, Dana. If the engineer calls, I have to go. Can I come back so we can finish this?"

Dana sat up and pulled her tank top back on. "Yeah, of course. Sure. Do your job. It's not like I'm going anywhere."

Rigs winced at the disappointment in Dana's voice, but when Marley came on the radio again, she pulled open Dana's door. With a last look over her shoulder and a promise to be back as soon as she could be, she took off down the hall, hoping to hell that her wetness didn't show through her uniform pants.

"THIS IS THE Zephyr. Any news?"

Rigs entered to find Marley punching buttons and looking at the onboard computer system, the mic in his hand as he waited for the control center to get back to him.

"What's up?"

"There's a fucking stalled cargo train ahead of us. Wouldn't be a problem except that I can't override the ATPS. It isn't responding." Marley continued punching buttons, his eyes darting from the dashboard to the tracks ahead.

"Right. Okay. Fuck," Rigs said, her eyes on the tracks ahead of them. The ATPS, or Automatic Train Protection System, was like autopilot on a plane, but with the added benefit that it would automatically apply the brakes if it sensed something ahead. But if it was malfunctioning, they could easily careen into the cargo train at 75mph.

"If we hit?" Rigs said, her voice tight and her knuckles white on the handrail.

"Remember train 112 in Washington? Telescope effect. We'd be fucked every way to hell."

"I'll head to the rear car and pull the emergency brake. Then we'll start pulling them up here. Slow her down from the back and then from the front. We'll probably set the brush next to the tracks on fire with the sparks, but what the hell," Rigs said, listening as the control center confirmed that there was no way to get the freight train off the tracks, and there wasn't a line split available that wouldn't put them in the path of another oncoming train before they came to the stalled freight.

"What's the freight train carrying, by the way?" Rigs asked over her shoulder on her way out.

"Cows. It's going to be a bloody mess if we hit."

Rigs winced at the pun and set off down the staff only corridors to the rear of the train. She was uncomfortable with her wet boxers sliding over her excited clit as she ran. By the time she got through the many cars she was out of breath and even hornier than she had already been. Moving to the bright red handle she closed her eyes and prayed. Getting a firm grip she yanked it over, pulling the old lever backwards. Right away the train jerked and single bell alarms began going off.

Sprinting back down the hall as the train shuddered and jerked, she yelled into the kitchen of the dining car as she passed. "Batten down folks. We're making a sudden stop."

She nodded as she heard a few shouted acknowledgments and heard various kitchen implements clang into holding compartments. The staff were trained on how to brace for impact, just in case. Hopefully that training would go unused.

At the last minute Rigs leaped up the stairs to the first class cabin. Without knocking she slid Dana's door open and flashed a quick grin at her surprised face before saying, "Can't stay. Do me a favor and sit on the floor with your back against the closet. The train may stop suddenly. I'll be back soon."

She didn't wait to see if Dana obeyed, but ran off down the narrow staircase and back into the service corridors. She realized that she could really like Dana, and for more than the fact that she had an amazing body and could kiss the ice off an iceberg. She shivered as the arousal from Dana mixed with the adrenalin of getting the train stopped. We'd better get this damn thing under control. I need to fuck that woman senseless.

DANA SLID DOWN the closet door, a pillow hugged against her chest. She heard the screeching as the train jerked and slammed side to side. Even in the midst of her fear, she played back the sight of Rigs in the doorway, her uniform stuck to her body, her spiky hair mussed, her dark eyes lit with something more than just adrenalin as she told Dana what to do.

Dana moved the pillow between her legs. If I'm going out, at least I'll go out satisfied. She pressed the pillow tightly between her legs and ground down against it. Rigs' soft mouth and large hands played in hot images in her mind and she came hard, hoping to god that Rigs made it back to her room to take care of things properly. The train shuddered again and she braced herself.

WHEN RIGS MADE it to the engine room, Marley spared a glance in her direction before returning to the controls. "We've got 1000 yards to get her stopped. The rear drag has helped. Let's get the rest of these brakes pulled."

Together they quickly moved through the room, grabbing switches and pulling the emergency brakes, both of them aware of every second of forward motion. They pulled the white levers to cut electricity to the engine.

Sparks flew down the tracks and smoke billowed as the train slowed. Rigs swallowed hard as the freight train came into sight, emergency vehicles already in place a safe distance from the tracks should either of them derail.

"Shit," Marley murmured under his breath. Sweat dripped from his forehead and onto his chin.

"I'm cutting power to the traction motors," Rigs said, grunting as she began flipping the switches that would cut power to each individual car. In a sudden flash she hoped that Dana was doing as she was told. She wanted that beautiful body in one piece.

Rigs and Marley stood still, watching as the train in front of them loomed larger. With the engine cut off, the only sounds came from the screeching of the metal brakes on the metal tracks. The smell of acrid smoke puffed out around them, temporarily clouding the view ahead.

Rigs let her head fall against the back wall and gave silent thanks to whoever was watching over them. The train had slowed to a stop with only fifty feet to spare. She hugged Marley back when he grabbed her tightly and then said, "Better go deal with the passengers."

BY THE TIME Rigs had calmed all the passengers down, and dealt with the ones who couldn't understand that it wasn't that she wanted to inconvenience them, she was exhausted. The euphoria of avoiding a collision had been replaced by the bone weariness that comes with being responsible for hundreds of lives.

She paused outside Dana's door. It was two in the morning. Part of her wanted to drop into her own bed and sleep for days. But a stronger part of her needed contact. The kind of contact that makes you glad to be alive. The kind that makes you forget anything but your body and the body of the woman under you.

She tapped gently on Dana's door and waited. She grinned when Dana slid open her door wearing nothing but a black tank top and matching bikini panties.

"Sorry it's so late. But I did tell you I'd be back--"

Dana grabbed her by the front of her uniform shirt and pulled her inside. Without a word she pressed Rigs against the bed and began to kiss her ardently. Knowing that there was a bad enough problem with the train that she had to brace herself had scared her, but when the calm voice of the conductor had come over the intercom, saying that everything was okay and staff would be coming through the cars to answer questions, she had stopped being scared and started being thankful.

Now, with this gorgeous woman in front of her who had taken the time, even in an emergency, to tell her to brace herself, she wanted to show her just how good it felt to be alive.

She unbuttoned Rigs' shirt quickly, pulled it from her shoulders and tossed it to the side. Her hands slid over Rigs' flat, solid stomach, over her firm, small breasts, over her shoulders and neck and then to the sides of her face. Lust darkened her eyes to the color of the night sky and Dana whispered, "Let's try again, shall we?"

Rigs moaned as Dana sucked a nipple through the fabric of her sports bra and pulled her hips snugly against Dana's own. When Dana came up for air she flipped her around and pushed her down on the bed, quickly yanking off the tank top. She placed her radio on the bedside table and turned up the volume, just in case someone needed her. God forbid.

Without hesitation she took one nipple into her mouth and sucked it in, hard. She wrapped her arms around Dana's body as her back arched, keeping her hovering over the bed as she continued to suck, bite and tease her beautiful rosy nipples.

She slid her hand under Dana's sheer black panties and found her clit, hard as a rock and already covered in moisture.

She moaned at the same time Dana did when she thrust two fingers inside her easily, her wet pussy clenching around her fingers. She pumped in and out, harder and faster as Dana cried out under her. Rigs covered Dana's mouth with her own to stifle her moan as she came so her neighbors wouldn't hear her.

She gently withdrew and continued to kiss her passionately until Dana began to press against Rigs again, her hips grinding down on the blue uniform pants.

"Not that I'm complaining, but I should probably take these off before they get totally covered in your come," Rigs said, grinning as she stood up and stripped down. She nearly came just from the look of lust on Dana's face as Dana's eyes traveled over every inch of her.

"What's the K stand for," Dana said, her eyes never leaving Rigs' body.

"Katherine," Rigs said, pulling the black panties slowly down Dana's long legs and adding them to the pile on the floor.

"Doesn't suit you," Dana mumbled with her eyes closed as Rigs palmed her hot center again and then slid down her body until her mouth hovered over Dana's throbbing clit.

"You do," Rigs said before taking Dana's clit into her mouth, sucking it hard as she thrust three fingers deep inside her.

Dana yanked a pillow over her face and screamed into it in ecstasy as Rigs took her again and again, fast and hard, slow and deep, her tongue licking up her juice as she came over and over again.

Falling back, she tossed the pillow away and took deep breaths of air. Rigs moved to her side and made lazy circles around her nipple with a fingertip.

"May I taste you?" Dana asked, staring into Rigs open face.

"I did offer you dessert earlier, didn't I?" Rigs straddled Dana's face, placing her hands on the cold glass window, looking out into the dark night where not a soul stirred but a thousand stars lit the sky. She shivered as Dana's arms curled around her thighs and she pulled Rigs down onto her mouth. She let her head fall back as Dana's tongue made small, slow circles around her clit. She pulled on one of her own nipples while Dana's tongue slid inside her, fucking her slowly, holding her hips down as she rocked against Dana's expert mouth.

Dana moved back up to Rigs' clit and sucked it in gentle pulsing motions until she felt Rigs' body stiffen. Then she sucked it into her mouth hard, lightly taking it between her teeth. She moaned as Rigs came with a quiet shout, her thighs spasming under Dana's arms.

Rigs moved off Dana, barely finding the strength to move her legs. She slipped down next to her in the bed and pulled the covers over them.

"That was so amazing," Dana said quietly, resting her head in the crook of Rigs' arm as her hand gently caressed Dana's back.

"Mmm. I haven't come that hard in ages," Rigs said, pressing her lips to Dana's head.

"Oh come on. You must do this all the time," Dana said, only half teasing.

"Are you kidding? Most of the women who ride the train cross country are my grandmothers age. I was fucking ecstatic to see you waiting at the station. And of the women I've known, I can assure you that you're by far the hottest and have the best mouth."

"I like that answer, I think. How long will we be delayed?" Dana asked, hoping that it would be a very long time. She really wanted to get to know Rigs', outside her uniform and work, and maybe even outside the bedroom.

"Don't know, really. I've been delayed as long as 23 hours in one place before. With all the brakes we had to apply, plus the computer being down, it may be awhile. Why? Eager to get rid of me?" Rigs asked.

"Actually, I was hoping to have lots more time to do this," Dana said, sliding a finger through Rigs wet center and grinning when she moaned and closed her eyes.

"Oh, I think we'll have plenty of time for that. And maybe when we get to Chicago you could show me around?" Rigs said, her stomach clenching at the thought that Dana might not want to see her again when the trip was over. She really liked the way Dana made her feel, even if they hadn't spent any real time together.

Dana rose up on one elbow, still gently caressing Rigs' wet folds. "I would like that. Or maybe I'll just show you my hotel room and we can get to know one another, even more intimately?" she said as she pushed her finger inside Rigs.

"Sounds good to me," Rigs said breathlessly. "Hell, maybe I'll even be working on your trip back."

"Conductor, I'll ride these rails anytime if it means getting this kind of personal service."

Rigs arched her back and thrust her hips down to take Dana fully inside her. "Here to serve, ma'am."

Advanced Training

by Ms. M

RONNI TOOK HER first deep breathe of the morning, put her face in her pillow and screamed, "Fuuuuck! That woman's going to be the death of me, and I don't even know what she looks like." All she knew was that since the new arrival last weekend her nose had been assaulted by

the most wonderful smells. There has to be something wrong with anyone who smells that good and cooks. "Damn, I might as well get it in gear."

Exhausted at the end of the day, Ronni dragged into her room, tossed her gear in the chair and headed to the bathroom for a relaxing shower, or at least tried to. The connecting bathroom was locked from the other side. "Dammit, that's all I need." She stomped back out of the room without removing her sidearm and banged on her neighbor's door.

She waited as the peephole darkened and the door was snatched open by a wide-eyed woman in a slightly damp towel. "Is there a problem, Officer?"

"You've locked me out," Ronni said.

"I beg your pardon?"

"You've locked me--" Ronni glanced down and lost her whole train of thought. That had to be the biggest, pinkest, fluffiest fucking towel she'd ever seen in her life, and the most beautiful brown skin. She thought of that song by India Arie and wanted that brown skin up against her skin. And damn there was that tantalizing smell again. She had to will her eyes to look above the woman's neck. "Um, wow. Oh, I'm your neighbor and you've locked me out of the bathroom."

"Oh my God, I'm so sorry. I've been afraid I was going to do that. It's the first time I've ever had an adjoining bathroom. Of course it's much better than the communal bathroom in the barracks but I just knew that one day I was going to forget to unlock it and cause a crisis on the other side."

Ronni watched this whole tirade in amazement. The woman was talking a mile a minute, and waving one hand about frantically talking with it as much as her mouth.

"Oh shit, sorry, I'm talking too much, huh? Wait, I'll go unlock it. Wait! Come in. You can go through my room." Ani smiled. "This is embarrassing."

Ronni's heart quivered.

Ani stepped aside so Ronni could enter her room. As she moved the towel seemed to slip down her chest in slow motion. Ronni didn't know whether to watch it fall, grab it, or look away just in case. She knew for certain which one she wanted to do as she stepped inside the door, heart pounding.

After finally using both hands to make sure the towel was secure Ani extended her hand, "Hi, I'm Ani. Actually, it's Anastasia, but everyone calls me Ani. If you're in a bind you can go on in. If not, you can have a seat and we can visit for a while. I never see you, and barely hear you. I've been here a week and this is the first time-- Shit, I'm doing it again. Sorry." She raised an eyebrow. "So?"

"No," Ronni said. "I mean yes. I mean no I'm not in a hurry, and yes I'd like to visit for a bit." Ronni felt as though all five-foot-nine of her was flushed bright red from the blush she knew was on her face. She cleared her throat to try again. "My name's Ronni." No way I tell her my name is Verona, gawd! Ronni grasped Ani's hand to return the greeting. Oh my god, her skin is like butter, or melted chocolate. Ronni reflexively licked her lips. She shook her head to clear it, realizing that Ani was still talking.

"Here, have a seat. Can I offer you something to drink or to munch on? Water, juice, beer, Glenlivet? No wine. I haven't had time to go to the Class Six store yet. I've got cheese and crackers or some fruit." Ani paused to catch her breath.

"Nah, I'm good on the eats, but a Glenlivet chilled would be very nice."

"Okay, I'll get that for you." Ani turned to the little refrigerator and knelt before it to get what she needed.

Oh my gawd! Those shoulders, and that back. I could just--

Ani straightened and turned as Ronni tried to tear her eyes away from her journey down the back of that beautiful warm brown body. She grinned. "Maybe I'd better put on something a little more substantial first."

Ronni stared in amazement as Ani's full body seemed to break out in goose bumps, her cheeks and eyes taking on a beautiful glow. She's blushing, she thought with a wicked inner grin and an outward blush of her own. Damn! I'd better go put this sidearm away before I spontaneously combust and take the whole building with me. "Okay. While you do that, I'll just go and secure my sidearm. I'll be right back."

"Just come in and get comfortable when you're done," Ani said as she headed toward her bedroom which was behind the lockers that separated the two halves of the room.

Ronni removed her sidearm and secured it, then decided to have a little fun of her own. She replaced her holster with her harness, and her favorite boi toy, her purple two-headed dildo. It fit perfectly in her BDU pants and didn't give off a big telltale bulge. If she was gonna be looking at the woman, at least she could be equipped and fantasize.

Ronni suppressed a groan as she stepped into the room to find Ani bending over, head in the little fridge, glorious ass barely covered. She calls that more substantial. I swear. She's killing me.

It was confirmed that Ronni would surely die as Ani stood to reveal a deep purple robe that was loosely cinched at the waist and barely came mid-thigh. There was something lacy peeking out, just at her breast. Ronni needed to think of something quickly, to keep from having a meltdown.

"Um. What is that stuff you shower in? I smell it and--"

"Oh, shit. Are you allergic? Is it too strong? I'm sorry, I didn't even th--"

Ronni put a hand on Ani's shoulder. "Relax. I'm just asking. It doesn't bother me." Not like you're thinking. " I just don't think I've ever smelled it before. "

"It's Giorgio."

"But it's always smelled like bug spray on other women." Ronni sat in the recliner.

"Only if the woman had the wrong chemistry. " Ani gave a horrified gasp. "Oh! Does it smell like bug spray on me?"

"No," Ronni said, without thinking, "It smells delicious on you." Shit, did I just say that out loud.

Ani gave a delightful laugh as Ronni blushed to her curly black roots, mortified.

Ani handed Ronni her drink and sank to a pillow at her feet. She began to unlace her boots. "I'm sure you're tired of these after having them on all day. Let me help you with that."

Ronni trembled and held tightly to the glass with both hands, afraid she would forget herself and bury her hands in beautiful full curls. I knew she would kill me. Ronni groaned as Ani began to massage her feet. "God that feels good. Your boyfriend is a lucky son of a bitch."

Ani ignored her statement. "So, you're in the Air Force and a cop." Ani said, "Double uniform points."

"What?"

"Nothing, just a game I play with myself."

What's double uniform points?"

"I've got a bit of a uniform fetish, and you just happen to be wearing two," Ani said with a smile. "Help a lady up, won't you?"

Ronni stood, towering over Ani at her feet as she extended her hand. Ani grasped the hand, and glided to her feet, brushing against Ronni's strong body as she came up.

"Oh, my," Ani said. "You must be glad to see me, cuz I happen to know you put your gun away."

"I am," Ronni said as she drew Ani tightly to her body, letting her feel the hardness and length of her desire. She reached behind her back, brought something forward, and showed it to Ani. "And I've got the handcuffs to prove it." Unable to resist any longer, she hungrily smothered Ani's mouth with a kiss, her tongue probing deeply, demanding rather than asking for permission.

Ani gasped, pushing Ronni away with a hand to her chest. She reached down and looped her hand around Ronni's belt. "Follow me," she said huskily.

Ronni pulled Ani back against her, grinding against her wonderful soft ass. She dipped her hand under the robe and past the lace squeezing a heavy breast. She breathed in deeply of Ani's essence. The short trip to the bed seemed to take forever.

Ronni nudged Ani around, her mouth hungrily seeking her lips as her hands undid the buttons of her pants to set her weapon free. Ani pulled one hand from Ronni's hair to help. "Don't help me," Ronni gasped, "I'll come."

Ani saw the dildo free and bent to kiss it gently. "Purple. I love purple."

"Oh no you don't." Ronni grasped Ani's hands, stretching them above her head. She turned her toward the bed, pushed her onto it, and clasped her hands around the headboard with her handcuffs. "You won't be making any trouble, Madame." She tore away the skimpy purple thong, inhaling deeply of the wonderful smell of her captive. She could see Ani's pussy. Gleaming. Calling to her. She ran her hand through an ocean of wetness, flicking her clit, squeezing her lips, playfully placing a finger in her opening.

"Oh damn, Ronni, that feels so good." Ani drew her knees up to make herself more accessible. She wiggled her ass in an attempt to keep contact, straining against the handcuffs. "Come on baby."

"I see we won't need lube," Ronni said. "You're so wet, and you smell so good. Come on baby, what?" she asked as she playfully smacked Ani's ass.

"Come on, baby, please. Please, please Ronni. Fuck me. Fuck me!"

Ronnie grunted as she drove her cock into warm tight pussy. She held Ani's shoulder with one hand, and her hips in place with the other. Ani enjoyed the full feeling from Ronni's cock, and the roughness of her cammies against her ass. She hissed and groaned, swearing and calling deities as Ronnie rode her. "So good, baby. So good." Most of her words were incoherent as her head lolled from side to side, her shoulder rearing up as she thrust herself down on that beautiful cock.

Ronni glanced to her right and saw them in the full length mirror. What a beautiful sight, ebony skin and caramel skin. The sight of her thrusting into Ani excited her further, and she began to pump in earnest. "Look, baby, look! A mi--, a mirr--, look at us. A mirror." Ronni slammed into sweet pussy, driving deep like a piston, now grasping Ani's ass with both hands, riding back on her heels, sweating and grunting. "Ah shit, baby." She felt Ani's pussy tighten around her cock and her body began to quake. "Oh, shit. Oh, shit. Baby. Baby. I'm co--, I'm co--, I'm coming! Oh, shit, oh, shit."

Ronni collapsed on to Ani, cock still buried deeply as they stretched out. She reached up and removed the handcuff, gently kissing Ani behind the ear, "You okay, babe?"

"Triple uniform points," Ani mumbled sleepily, "military, cop, and boi."

Ronni heard a gentle snore as she spooned her new lover. She chuckled while she gently brushed her lover's hair aside so she could nuzzle her neck.

"Just wait until you see me in my softball uniform," she said.

Traffic Cop

by Analza Otis

"STOP TRYING TO pull in, fucker." I growled at the driver in the battered New York City yellow cab trying to edge into my lane. "Where the heck do you think you're going, anyway?" We were practically wedged together in bumper to bumper traffic during NYC's well-known rush hour. We hadn't moved more than 50 feet forward in exactly 47 minutes. I couldn't move to the left, or to the right; a huge delivery truck blocked my view, and there was no indication that things were about to change anytime soon. Worse, I needed to use a restroom ASAP.

I assumed that the self-centered cabbie was worried that he would possibly lose his sole passenger if traffic didn't move pretty soon. I'd heard that jobs were hard to come by for people of Arabic descent in New York since 9/11.

His passenger, a very gaunt and impatient elderly woman with the shakes, wore oversized dark sunglasses, formal gloves and a grey Pashmina elaborately draped over her bony back even though the afternoon was warmer than usual for early fall.

The senior citizen was clearly giving the cabdriver a hard time, loudly lamenting the fact that her personal chauffeur was no longer driving her. I heard her through his lowered window, asking, as if the cabbie had a choice in the matter.

She reminded me of a cross between Katherine Hepburn and Ms. Hathaway from *The Beverly Hillbillies*. I laughed loudly when she smacked the Lucite divider between them. She lowered her glasses and shot me a cold look through her raised window that chilled me to my bones. "What happened to the good old days, when people knew their places?" She haughtily asked the driver. The cabbie rolled his eyes.

I immediately turned away from them, focused on figuring out what the holdup was ahead. I was unable to see very far, even when I exited the car, because the delivery truck continued to block my view. After some time, drivers gave up the futility of beeping their horns and also began to

exit their vehicles, to stretch their aching legs and to figure out what lie ahead. Someone suggested we barbeque and play spades, as it looked like a long wait.

I picked up my cell phone and fumbled with it, annoyed because my battery was too weak to get a signal. I was late for a dentist appointment with a dentist that charged a fortune per hour, whether you showed up or not. Worse yet, if you didn't inform his office 24 hours in advance that you'd be late, you were billed full price. There was just no room for the "traffic jam excuse".

I'd unsuccessfully tried using it before in his office when a Project Runway marathon kept me glued to the boob tube at home way longer than I'd anticipated. That damned Heidi was so hot. Since then, I'd subscribed to TIVO and now, although I was still a serious TV junkie, I was no longer missing my favorite shows, and didn't have an excuse when it came to being late.

Not that he would care, but I couldn't even call to tell the dentist that I was stuck in traffic, because in my haste to avoid being late, I had stupidly forgotten my car charger on my kitchen counter and didn't know the doctor's number by heart. I didn't even have enough juice to Google him. Even though I didn't see a payphone in the near vicinity, using one was out of the question, anyway. Two words. Swine Flu.

I was acutely aware of each passing minute as with each tick of the clock and each change of the traffic light, the dollars seeped out of my pocket.

I impulsively clicked on the radio, scanning the channels while looking for something, anything, to avert my attention from the blaring horns and irate drivers surrounding me. 1010-WINS made no mention of why we were apparently trapped on 53 St. between 9th and 10th avenues for going on an hour now. I had a tiny color TV in my glove box and pulled that out. The batteries were dead in there, too. I sighed deeply, bored and anxious to distract myself from the uncomfortable wait. Let me look around. The sidewalk foot traffic was lighter than usual.

The cabbie was now picking his nose. Gross.

Next, he pulled out a ringing cell phone and spoke loudly in a guttural foreign tongue. The old lady now began to pound on the divider shouting, "Young man, hang up this instant." until he hung up. She was hilarious. I laughed a little; this time with my face averted and contemplated asking him if I could borrow his phone to make a quick call. I wanted desperately to call any one of my friends who could do me the favor of looking up my dentists' number, and calling to postpone my appointment for me. That thought was dashed when Mr. Nice Guy Cabbie closed his window while making direct eye contact with me, as if to say "Fat Chance."

"Thanks for nothing." An enterprising young man approached my car, tapping on my windshield. What now? He was selling bottles of cold water.

"No, Thank you--" I waved him away. He made a face, and asked twice more, but water was the last thing I needed-- nothing like having to relieve your bladder when stuck in traffic.

A couple of minutes later, we hadn't moved an inch, and I turned my mind to other things.

This was to be my third visit to the dentist. I hated going to the dentist. Another drill, another swollen jaw and numb mouth. My tongue would lie heavy in my mouth, unable to move freely, which was something my tongue was normally good at, exceedingly good, in fact, if one listened to the hype.

A very cute girl with a shapely "apple bottom" passed by us on the sidewalk, switching that ample bottom from side to side; catching the attention of several male drivers that beeped their horns and catcalled her. Grateful for the diversion, I ogled her, too. The cabbie busted me checking her out and, for once, I didn't even feel embarrassed. Even though I was fairly certain, based on his reaction, that his country wasn't one of those that tolerated "girl on girl" action. In fact, maybe because of his reaction, I defiantly stared harder at the woman's undulating bottom, imagining my face firmly planted between those ample cheeks. I let a lustful grin spread all across my face. I squeezed my legs together and did a set of "kegels", which helped on many levels. We inched ahead some, but not much. The cabbie was still trying to cut me off, and this time, I let him go ahead of me. Fuck it. I checked my gas gauge, which was inching dangerously lower since I hadn't gassed up that morning. Again, I was cutting corners and living on the edge. I liked living on the edge, but sometimes it came back to bite me on the ass.

Ass-- oh yeah--

Back to my tongue between those cheeks-- I drifted back to memories of the night before last. A girl whose name I couldn't remember, but recognized from my hometown, had recently run into me at a club catering to "mature lesbians, aged 25 and up." She had expressed to me that she'd been having sexual fantasies and masturbated often to thoughts of me going down on her since high school.

That seemed so odd to me because I'd never even given that girl a second glance and certainly didn't think that she was into girls. In fact, I remembered that she used to date the quarterback of our school team, the Wildcats. I guess she remembered me because I was kind of the "town lesbo."

I was one of the first sexually active girls in town that openly had experiences with the same sex. As a result, I became the "Infamous Elsie Morris" attracting all kinds of attention, both good and bad. Boys liked me. Girls from my school and the neighboring areas often made passes at me while alone in school bathrooms during sporting events, at the skating rink and especially at parties when illegally purchased alcohol and bags of weed brought our inhibitions down and our teenaged libidos flared.

During one of our sexually charged and drunken sprees, I "went down" on our homecoming queen, Kimberly Phillips, one of the best head cheerleaders the Wildcats had ever had. That night, the Wildcats won the division championship game. Kimberly's boyfriend, Cary, threw a huge victory party. My classmates were frolicking all over the house and yard, drinking and making out. I was drunk, horny, seventeen, and no exception. There, in the shadows of Cary's wooded backyard, a drunken and flirty Kimberly draped herself over my shoulder, spilling a little of her lukewarm beer down my back. Kimberly shushed me and suddenly became serious, leaning her weight against my chest, her breath ragged as she slurred in my ear,

"Elsie--" she sang, "I know you're gay-- I've seen you look at me-- you're my best friend. Do you think that's fair? You get to be gay and I don't? We're Besties--" she stuck the hot tiny tip of her tongue in my ear.

Besties? I barely ever spoke to the girl. But, I had to admit, she was a hottie and, her tongue had felt hot and delicious in my ear stirring me up and reminding me that I had had more than my share of lewd thoughts about her. If she wanted to be besties, I could definitely deal with that.

"Play along, bestie," I told myself, letting Kimberly pull me into Cary's empty garage where I had my very first taste of what would become an obsession with me.

Something I call the "Honey Pot." Anyway, back then, I was so grateful that my extreme curiosity about sex had led to my reading *The Joy Of Sex*, a book I'd found on my parent's bookshelf when I was a only fourteen years old. I don't know if was my studies or my enthusiasm, but my inexperience was not a factor. Kimberly was at that moment very enthusiastically coming in my mouth, giving a new meaning to head cheerleader.

Suddenly, the garage door flew open, and spilling into the room was one of Kimberly's BFF's with her boyfriend, Sam, engaged in a sloppy deep French kiss, and doing some heavy petting. We froze.

Sam had one hand stuffed deeply in the waistband of her jeans, and the other was groping her under her sweater. They nearly knocked us over in their haste to get into the backseat of the Caprice station wagon owned by Cary's mother. The overhead light turned on when Sam opened the door. I was shocked when Kimberly pushed me away violently and slapped the shit out of me, yelling, "I said no."

The sound bounced and echoed in the mostly empty space.

Sam yelled "What the fuck?" in his husky voice.

I was picking myself up off the concrete floor when Sam found and flipped on the light, illuminating the strange scene.

"Eww. She made a pass at me." Kimberly protested. "I was drunk and thought she was Cary."

"No WAY." Sam guffawed, clearly delighted. He slapped his knee; laughing so hard he was bent at the waist.

Kimberly, red-faced, pushed past the stunned tousled couple before they also turned tail and ran out. In a few minutes time, it was all over that I had made a pass at Kimberly. I was more embarrassed by the red palm mark she'd left on my mug than what people were saying about my sexuality.

I already knew from experience that being outed like that had its good and bad points. I was somewhat publicly shunned, but privately, I was very sought after.

Cheerleading practice took on a whole new meaning. I developed quite the nimble tongue.

So, back to the girl from high school, God, Why couldn't I remember her name? She was telling me in great detail how easy it was for her to imagine what I'd do to her if she took me home with her. She shared stories of make out sessions she'd had with other girls in her car and even once at her apartment over Bennie's Sweet Shoppe.

She wanted to get it on with me, now, and didn't care who knew it.

Ho Hum. Too available. I have to admit my insides surged as I recalled how that girl laid a kiss on me that made my pussy throb even now. I felt a strong pang of desire in the pit of my stomach as I re-lived the way her tongue had chased and caressed mine in return. But Elsie Morris was not into being had, so I ignored her the rest of the night, shooting pool with a cute girl visiting from Canada. I must have played it too cool, being so disinterested and all, because that girl ended up leaving with someone else, watching me for any sign of interest as she exited. I showed her none. That night, alone in bed, I got the chills wondering what she would have tasted like.

A horn blared and a sharp rap on my drivers' side window snapped me out of my reverie.

"Move it along." A male officer gestured, his whistle blasting away in short spurts like a referee in a mistake filled basketball game.

"Seriously?" He was way too intense.

Although I was upset by the fact that the officer had ruined my hot little memory, I was delighted that traffic was finally moving and restarted my engine. I must have taken too long to get going, 'cause the officer slapped the trunk of my car as I drove forward in an effort to make me move faster. I shot him a dirty look. Where do you get off hitting my car? He looked displeased with me, but I didn't care. I wasn't too fond of the police in general.

I felt it was totally out of line slapping my bumper, an abuse of power. I hated abuses of power. Ever since I was a kid, when I was the victim of my father, who used his power to control and dominate women, I made a pact with myself that I would never be dominated by anyone ever again. Male or female.

I was now very aware of my surroundings. I pulled forward, annoyed by the interruption when I had to halt suddenly again less than 40 feet away from the light.

"Yeah, hurry up and wait," I said aloud. My car sputtered and jerked. What gives? I wondered aloud and found, under further investigation, that the long wait had dwindled my gas supply to reserve levels. "Great, just what I need."

The only good thing the traffic had done for me was to cause me to miss my dreaded appointment with Dr. Feelbad. AKA Dr. Feldspan.

Traffic moved like choppy waves towards 9th avenue. A surge here, a surge there until I was finally at the gate to freedom.

There it was--paradise--in the form of an empty wide street in front of me. A bright green traffic light, beckoned to me, blinking, "Come, Come--" in Morse code.

I put the pedal to the metal, flooring it. My car screeched to a halt when I slammed my foot on the brakes a second later. I had almost plowed down a tiny traffic cop wearing a fluorescent green safety vest. Oh My God. Safety vests don't literally save lives.

The diminutive officer was also wearing a bulletproof vest that puffed his chest out like a barrel. He had just appeared almost out of nowhere, almost buying a one-way ticket to heaven when he stepped directly in front of the grille of my malnourished car. He wasn't feeling joyful about my aggressiveness, having just narrowly hopped his way out of a broken leg.

In fact, he was downright pissed about it. Landing a resounding smack on the hood of my car, the officer angrily leaned forward on my hood, glaring at me. I was tired of all of the slapping of my vehicle going on. The first officer passed by the front of my car which was now "blocking the box" jutting dangerously into the intersection.

Pedestrians expressed their discontent with my presence in their crosswalk. Cars behind me sounded their horns, irritated that the cops had again stopped us, this time while the light was clearly green. I looked at my reserve gas indicator, which was now aglow.

"Please, officers, I gotta go." I yelled too loudly, waving the cops out of my way. The small cop shot me a hard glance. They held me in place, not allowing me to cross while the light was in my favor. The light turned red again. I stared them down, rolling my eyes while the Tiny Cop and his partner laughed, exchanged a sweeping mid air "high five" as they passed each other.

How many times had they practiced that?

"This is too easy," I heard one say to the other, who laughed at our expense. The traffic flowed across the intersection while they just held us captive.

When the light changed from red to green again I attempted to move forward, but the cop held us at bay again as traffic moving across 9th avenue inched across the box. The light went red again. "I can't believe this."

Traffic again flowed into the box from 9th avenue. Green light. I began to inch forward, but Tiny Cop didn't move. Hand up, in the universal sign for halt, Tiny Cop held me at bay again as the other officer waved more traffic through from the 9th avenue direction. This is so not fair.

Drivers behind me began to lean on their horns. I rolled my eyes again at the cop and could have sworn that the cop smiled at me. I rolled down my window and tried to get the cops' attention. "Officer. Officer." I called out. He ignored me. "Excuse me, Officer, can you please let us through? I'm running out of gas. Now, please?"

The officer continued to ignore me and approached my driver's side window. That's when I noticed that the tiny officer was a woman. She had the deepest dimples. Shoot, she was a real cutie pie.

"You want me to let you go?" She asked, leaning in too closely. I nodded, frustrated. I was too pissed to speak and kinda getting turned on by her boldness.

"Hey Tony, this woman wants to go. What do you think? Should I let her?"

She is so mean. That's why people hate you guys. To her face, I grinned and said nothing. Finally, the cop stepped away, and when the light changed again, she waved me through. I shot her the bird, middle finger firmly raised as I breezed past, anxious to be on my way again. She saw me do so and pulled a pad from her belt, quickly jotting down something, which I assumed would be my license plate number.

A shiver of impending fear dampened my cocky attitude and I silently prayed that she had just remembered she needed to bring home a gallon of milk or something and had written herself a note.

Oh shoot, why did I have to go and do that? I am so impulsive. I caught her view in my rearview mirror. She pointed straight at me, finger cocked like an imaginary gun with me caught dead in the crosshairs. Damn. I sighed. Can't do anything about that now.

A couple of blocks away, I dumped a million quarters into the "pay in advance" Muni-meter, buying some parking time. The machine spit out a receipt for \$5.50 in quarters, satisfied with allowing me up to 2:01 minutes time in which to get to my dentist's office and be berated and rejected for my tardiness, or be tortured. One way or another.

I hurried up the block into Dr. Feldman's office building. My tension mounted. I hated going to the dentist. And I mean not like your average person hated it; I hated it with a passion reserved for few. With a hand shaking, lip biting, white knuckled chair grabbing cold sweat kind of fear. The kind that keeps you up at night and makes your stomach hurt for hours before you get there, terrified about what lay before you.

Needless to say, I was relieved when upon entering the reception area, I found it completely empty. I took that as a sign that the Dr. was not in.

In fact, the staff wasn't even around. "Hello?" I called out, and Rosie, Dr. Feldspan's cute little Asian dental assistant, poked her head out of the filing room.

"Oh, Elsie," she said, "You missed your appointment. Dr. Feldspan's really pissed at you. He came in 'specially just for you."

"Well, can he take me now?" I ventured.

"Shoot, he just left, let me see if I can catch him." Rosie sprang into action, and I noticed again how tight her lithe little body was.

I've never done an Asian. I put it on my mental list of things to do.

It's shitty, yeah, I know, probably racist, totally not PC, but I was like the guys in the Bucket List. I actually had a list of things and people I'd like to do before I die. The list of people I wanted to do sexually was growing longer by the day, although, I admitted, I might just have to revisit that cop entry. They were on my last nerve today.

"Hey, I'm gonna use the bathroom," I called out to Rosie, who was holding a one sided telephone conversation in the back room as she continued filing patient charts. "I'll be right back." Rosie nodded her head, giving me the okay to grab the bathroom key that hung behind the counter. Her chat was spirited and I was impressed with her multitasking skills. Like the slut I am, I wondered if Rosie could do other things at the same time with the same deftness and ease-- hmmm-- she had the body of a tennis player. I liked tennis players-- While in the loo, I launched into a full-fledged fantasy about both Williams sisters. Now that was some serious Williams on Williams action. T-wentyyyy lovvvve.

When I wiped myself, I was not surprised to find I was a bit wet. My day had been hot. In my mind anyway.

I washed and dried my hands, tossing the paper towel over my shoulder and hitting the basket, like I always do. Two points.

I kicked the door open and sauntered back into the reception area, leaning against the counter, arms folded.

"Any luck?" I flashed my thousand-dollar smile at Rosie, who stopped mid-file, scrunching up her face to say, "Fraid not," she said with a scowl on her face, "and he says I gotta charge you full price for missing your appointment, too."

I grimaced.

"Told ya. Pissed. Well, to be fair," she continued, "you could've called."

"My battery--" I started to explain, "Aw, forget it." I pulled out my checkbook and quickly filled one out. I signed it with great flourish.

"I like your signature." Rosie said admiringly.

"Yeah, most people do--when it's on a check." I said, joking and determined not to let myself get down in the mouth on this particular day.

"Would you like to reschedule?" Rosie, asked, opening the thick black appointment book and flipping past many pages before settling on one filled with appointments marked in pencil. There

were a lot of appointments. I did some quick addition. Damn, I'm in the wrong business, I admitted. Maybe my parents were right after all when they tried so hard to push me towards a career in medicine. But alas, I was both young and stupid, and instead, I dropped out of college after one year and became, "a goddamned photographer," as my impatient and cranky mom put it, over and over again to anyone who would listen. Yup. Wrong move. My profession had its highs, such as when I booked a large job somewhere tropical, capturing the exotic beauty of admired, yet strangely insecure females that treated me like I was the Messiah.

Being revered thrilled me. I loved the feeling of being in control, of being the boss. I liked the built in excuse for lovin 'em and leavin 'em all over the globe that travel for my work provided. I'd single-handedly left more smiling women behind me than FTD Florists' had on Mother's Day.

Besides that great perk, work was exciting. It was also very unpredictable financially. I never knew if I would be flush with cash or broke from one month to the next. I constantly failed to budget my salary, preferring instead to live on the edge. Veuve Cliquot one month, weak Kool-Aid the next.

My long suffering parents had been very indulgent with me in the past, but the last time I went home for a loan, my mom said she was tired of writing me checks.

"You're grown," she said, "get on your own two feet." All this while the lady was ironing a shirt and making a grilled cheese sandwich for my big brother, Kyle, who at 46, still lived in my parent's finished basement and was currently trying to "find himself" after a failed marriage. I guess "himself" was at the bottom of a Grey Goose bottle.

My mom was cooking for and cleaning up behind Kyle. Life was so unfair.

"This is the last one for a while," she admonished, while adding her John Hancock to the check. "Now, go thank your father," Mom said, "while I finish making your brother's lunch."

"Thanks, Mommy." I said and kissed the top of her head. She shooed me away. "The last one," she reminded me. I smiled.

I give 'em hell, but I knew my parents were the best and I knew they would always be there to help me.

That's one of the reasons I found it so easy to refuse to take any crap from anyone outside of the home. Having that much security did a number on me personally and as a result, I was quick to walk out on jobs, relationships and any other unpleasant situation. Plus, I had to admit that I had a serious case of "bored-ism." Everything lately seemed to bore me. Work, women, song. All of it. As the song goes, I needed a "new drug".

I went to retrieve my car, but I had so much time left on the meter, I thought I'd walk around and maybe have a drink somewhere before heading back home. I'd be damned if I was gonna waste \$5.50 worth of parking.

I searched my bag, found a lipstick, applied a quick stripe and got moving. Around the corner there were a few restaurants and some bars. I thought the name of one of them was perfect for my state of mind. Therapy, the simple sign announced.

Perfect. I entered a different world, ready for anything.

To my great surprise, Therapy was a gay bar. The music was pumping and folks were smilin'. What a welcome change. The stone black floors, wooden fixtures and walls gave the place a sophisticated feel.

I wondered why I hadn't heard of Therapy before and then noticed that most of the clientele was male. Hell, Gay is Gay and I want a drink. Right now. I want Therapy. I need therapy. I laughed at my own private joke.

I went straight--well, gaily forward--to the closest bar and hopped up on a stool, grinning when the bartender came immediately to me.

Great service. I thought. Another plus.

I don't know if my brother's newly discovered alcoholism was having a delayed effect on me or not, because out of my mouth popped "Grey Goose Martini. Dirty, please."

That first drink was delicious. Frosty and strong. Three big juicy pimento stuffed olives on a skewer. Lovin it. I felt a little better, so I had another. I figured if one made me feel better, a second would make me feel great. I ate the olives in the second drink, too, realizing that I was kinda hungry. I hadn't eaten much, just a couple of boiled eggs with toast and coffee that morning and some cheese crackers spread with peanut butter before I'd left the house.

The olives were delicious and the world was beautiful. I started feeling pretty damned good. The only thing that could make me feel better, I realized, was getting my flirt on. I looked for a victim.

I spotted a little filly in the rear of the bar that I thought looked delicious, but I thought it would be best if I checked out my appearance before approaching her. It had been a while since I'd looked in the mirror, and I liked being perfectly put together. After all, I was the "Mack Mommy."

I half hopped, half dropped off the stool in search of the bathroom.

"You alright?" the bartender asked.

"Baño." I replied. I could be suave in two languages.

"That way." he nodded and pointed, smiling and raising his left eyebrow when I stumbled a bit.

Wow, were those some strong drinks. I giggled as the room rocked back and forth. Or maybe it was the music that rocked.

"Whee." I was a happy girl. I danced to the pounding beat and worked my way to the bathroom. "Awww, yeah." I sang, bobbing my head with the beat. I was feeling no pain.

Oh, yeah, that delicious cutie is staring me down. I winked in her direction, but I didn't have on my glasses and was a little nearsighted, so I couldn't tell if she responded. I saw her get up and approach the bar as I entered the restroom.

"Oh, yeah, she's buying me a drink." I sang to myself, laughing as I weaved back and forth in the bathroom stall. I checked myself in the mirror, striking poses like I'd seen so many of my model subjects do. I burst out of the bathroom door, making my way back to the bar and my delicious bartender--I mean Martini. I slowed, peeking around the corner and saw that my little filly was still there. She was still alone and I considered that a good sign.

Back on my perch, I ordered another drink and asked for whatever the lady was having.

"Grey Goose dirty and a Long Island Iced--" The bartender informed me as he placed the drinks in front of me moments later.

I tried to pick both glasses up at the same time, but apparently this would prove to be more of an impossible task than I originally anticipated. My Martini sloshed over the rim, wetting my hand, which I licked. The bartender chuckled. "Maybe you oughta get the girl to the drink instead."

I asked the barkeep to watch the drinks for a minute while I brought the filly over. He agreed, and I set off, sauntering across the floor towards my prey. The closer I got, the cuter she got, and I was feeling good. Until I recognized her. The friggin' traffic cop. No way. This was no cute delicious filly. This was a traffic stopping car slapping tyrant in a tight blue uniform.

She broke into a wide smile, revealing again the deepest dimples I'd ever seen. I could not believe that my filly was the friggin' traffic cop. My heart sank, taking my good time along with it. Did she recall me from this afternoon's traffic jam? And if so, was she pissed off that I'd shot her the bird? And just what had she discussed with the bartender? I looked back at the bartender, who was busy pretending to be busy. Was I being set up?

I got pretty mad, until I realized that even if he had now been brought up to speed, he didn't know me and had no way of knowing what my day had been like before she'd spoken to him. I wondered what they'd discussed when I went to the bathroom. Oh God. I could be in some serious trouble here.

I looked at the traffic cop, who smiled at me again in welcome, but I turned on my heel and stalked back to the bar in a huff. I was having none of her games. I could ignore a woman like a champ. I smiled victoriously as I imagined her jaw drop in shock at my hasty retreat.

I sat again at the bar, gulping my drink and then hers, 'cause hell, they cost me over twenty dollars. When I finished both drinks, I pushed my Martini glass back towards the bartender. "One more." I demanded.

"Sweetie, I think you've had enough. Now why don't I bring you some water or a coffee?"

"Good Idea." Then I thought he signaled someone over my shoulder about my drunkenness, raising his hand and pretending to toss back a drink. I looked out towards the growing after work crowd and confirmed that he was sending a sign to the tiny traffic cop that I was inebriated. She immediately excused herself from a conversation, began to rise from her seat and move towards us.

"Forget the coffee." I said and beat it towards the exit. Time to beat it.

I felt tremendously intoxicated and stumbled, wobbling to the doors that led to the cooling late evening air, when I felt a hand on my arm, stopping me cold.

"Hey, Miss, are you all right?" a concerned voice asked.

I whirled around ready to do battle, guessing correctly who had the nerve to stop me. I soberly realized that perhaps coming on too strong with an off duty cop was probably not a good idea. Well, maybe not soberly, but realized nonetheless.

"I'm Fine. Thanks." I answered, slurring my words and yanking my arm away.

"Miss, I think maybe you should have some coffee before you leave." The traffic officer stated gently. "You seem a little buzzed."

"I don't want any coffee." I snarled. The vodka martinis and her strong mixed drink were allowing all of my emotions to rise to the top and bubble over. I was suddenly very angry with the cop and pushed my way past her, half running, half skipping and stumbling out onto the sidewalk. She followed closely behind me.

"Leave me alone. Remember you didn't wanna talk to me before, when I needed to talk to you." I was suddenly so mad. All of my anger from earlier that afternoon resurfaced and I wanted to lash out at her. I again yanked my arm away and she decided to take the high road. Hands splayed, she offered, "Listen, I was just doing my job this afternoon, but I'm sorry, I can't let you drive drunk." She backed up a bit, hands still held aloft. "Don't drive drunk." She pled.

"What makes you think I'm driving?" I spat, bordering on hostility.

"Well, I did see your car outside, and I know you have Jersey plates. Are you with someone who can drive you?"

"Yeah," I lied, "My girlfriend is outside." I stalked off. She followed closely behind me. "What?" I stopped short and she slammed into my back. I almost tripped, but she caught me. I whirled to face her.

"Where's your girlfriend?" she challenged, pulling my sleeve.

"Around." I snapped. "She'll be right back. I'll wait for her in the car." I again had to tug my arm away.

Traffic cop grabbed my arm once more. I looked at her hand with contempt. "Let go." I ordered.

"I can't let you drive," she said, "Let me get you some coffee."

"I don't want any coffee." I yelled, clearly out of control. People began to take notice of us.

"Look," she said, "You know I'm a police officer. I can't let you go like this, you are visibly impaired."

"You are visibly impaired." I mocked.

"You are visibly impaired." She failed to see the humor in it and didn't crack a smile.

"I told you my girlfriend is around the corner. She's driving us home."

"Look, don't lie to me and don't try to play me for a fool. I saw you alone this afternoon, and you also tried to send me a drink in the bar. Or maybe you're in the habit of buying other women drinks when your girl is around the corner?" She contested.

"I must have thought you were someone else. An old friend. I wasn't wearing my glasses." I wasn't giving in easily.

"Oh, another reason to detain you? No glasses, either?" She scrutinized me deeply for a few seconds. "How many fingers do I have up?" She asked, holding up two fingers on her free hand. The other hand had a tight grip on my left sleeve. I tugged my arm away yet again. "Read that store sign aloud." I refused to answer her at all or make eye contact.

"Hey, this is getting old." She said, "You gotta help me help you here. Prove to me that you're okay, or that you're not traveling alone."

She was getting on my last nerve and I kept trying to twist my way out of her grip, to no avail. The woman had a vice grip on me. I twisted my arm more violently.

"Cut it out." She warned, gravely. "I don't wanna have to arrest you."

"Why not?" I struggled, grunting.

"You're too cute to arrest." She grinned, flirting with me. Was she for real? I hadn't expected that. My defenses were wearing down. I had to think of something and quick. No cop was going to control me. I know. Play nice.

I stopped in my tracks and gave her what I hoped appeared to be a sweet smile. The petite cop scrutinized me once more. I guess I gave her the impression of being submissive, so, when I said, "Let go of me" again, she did.

"One coffee." I said reluctantly, holding up one finger. I figured I'd go with her to get coffee and if she got on my nerves again, or was a weirdo, I'd dash while she was standing on line, or while she had both hands occupied by two cups of hot liquids.

"That's cool. One. C'mon." she said, leading the way, "There's a Starbucks every couple of blocks around here. You like Starbucks?" She asked.

"Coffee's coffee," I said, lost in thought over my complete lack of control. "Whatever."

"Yeah, try not to be too grateful," she said, sarcastically.

"I told you I didn't want any damned coffee in the first place. Don't expect thanks from me." She stopped again and I bumped right into her backside. She grabbed my limb again when I wobbled a little.

"Whoa, Nelly." She righted me. "Hey," She grabbed my chin, forcing me to look at her. My eyes wandered, unable to focus. The wind was flying out of my sails rapidly. She shook her head in disgust. "Yeah, you're not drunk at all," she said dismissively. "You know, I'm just trying to do you a favor here, Chickie. I don't have to be so nice and I'm sure you wouldn't like the alternative, okay? So, why don't you try a little gratitude?"

Although the cop tried to calm me, I was agitated beyond belief and at this point wanted nothing more than to escape her presence.

"Gratitude? You want gratitude? You're the reason I wanted a drink in the first place. It's your fault I went to a bar. You make me sick. Cops are such assholes, always abusing your power."

She chortled. "Yeah, by making you have a delicious \$5 cup of coffee, that I'm buying, mind you. Oh yeah, life's tough." she mocked, "Boo hoo, poor you, you've got it soooo tough." She laughed in my face, infuriating me further.

"Go fuck yourself." I growled, with my index right finger in her face. "You fuckin' bitch."

"Yeah, continue to curse at an officer, that's a good move." She said tightly under her breath..

She pulled me along the sidewalk and abruptly changed her course when I resisted.

"Okay, that's it. No Starbucks for you. Now, it's shitty diner coffee all the way. I don't even know why I'm trying to be so nice to you, anyway. You were cute at the beginning. Now, I'm not so sure. You are a horrible drunk. Such a pain in the ass."

She pulled me along as I struggled against her. I twisted to and fro, trying to toss her off balance, mostly causing myself to stagger and stumble over my own feet time and time again. This shit sucked.

People were slowing as they passed, taking notice of the obvious tug of war between us. She waved the concerned citizens away with her one free hand, informing people in an official manner that they should keep on moving.

When I once succeeded in prying her fingers off of my sleeve, she grabbed me roughly; a man stepped between us with the clear purpose of intervening.

"Is she bothering you, Miss?" he asked me, reaching out to grab the Tiny Cops' arm.

"Back away Sir, I'm a police officer," she declared, pulling out her badge and flashing it to the small throng that had gathered, announcing, "This woman is under arrest, and I suggest that you all move along." The crowd immediately dispersed with the exception of one man who required more convincing.

I took advantage of her divided focus, and tried to bolt.

She caught up with me before I reached the curb, snatching my wrist aggressively, and slamming my back against the side of a parked car. Next thing I knew, she was spinning me around to face the car, pinning my arm harshly behind my back. She pushed my legs apart with her feet. Her strength surprised me, because she was so little. Nevertheless, it was so easy for her to handle me, because frankly, I was not on top of my game that day. She was right, I am a bad drunk. She pushed her tight little body against mine to keep me still. Wait, did she just grind against my ass? I froze. Yes, she did just grind on me. I wiggled.

"Listen, stop." Her breath was hot and ragged in my ear. Allowing a bit of slack on my arm, she forced me to be still by pressing even harder against my backside. "That's enough of that. What's your problem? Can't you see that I'm trying to help you, idiot? You are so drunk." Her teeth were clenched. I tried to wrench my arm free. The slack was taken up and let me tell you, if you've never had an arm twisted behind your back, it hurt like hell.

"Don't make me cuff you." She hissed.

"Cuff me, you bitch, or get the fuck off of me."

The last thing that I remember is that I tried to wrench my arm away and in the process, somehow, I hit myself in the face with a parked car.

DAPPLED SUNLIGHT FILTERED into a dark unfamiliar room, which was occupied by yours truly and no one else as far as I could tell. I tried to examine my surroundings, but my eye sockets were filled with sand. I wanted to rub them, but my hands were held in place, and I panicked, trying to twist free.

My natural desire to scream was blocked by a gag and something else that was tightly held in my mouth. It felt like a ball. The more violently I twisted my head, the more dancing midgets stomped on my brains.

I also smelled strongly of coffee although I couldn't remember drinking any.

Oh, this wouldn't do at all. Where was I? In some real life episode of *Dexter*? My head was pounding and I groaned aloud. The room was spinning.

A voice came out of the darkness. "It's about time, sleeping beauty. I'm almost late for my shift." I tried to focus in the direction I perceived the voice as having come from, but I was unable to. How much had I had to drink anyway? Did somebody drug me? A figure rose and moved toward me. My stomach flipped. At last, the figure came close enough to me that I saw it was my miniature cop friend. Or fiend. You pick.

"How are you?" she asked, conversationally, as if it were a commonplace experience to have someone bound to--wait. Just what was I bound to? I wasn't standing; yet, I wasn't lying down, either. I was tied to something rigid, but padded, not very wide, and tall enough so that my restrained feet did not quite touch the floor. It was like being on that carnival ride that pins you against the side by gravity as it spins around. I was just stuck.

I twisted my head and squinted my eyes and tried to take in more of my surroundings. I turned to my captor pleadingly. She laughed.

"I knew this gym equipment would come in handy sometime." She stroked my face. I jerked away and quickly regretted the movement as my head ached.

"Oh, you're still full of spit and vinegar, I see." She chuckled and whistled low and long.

"Ooowee, you were a real wildcat last night. You should have seen the trouble I had getting you in here. If you had been more conscious, it would have been a real turn on, you struggling like that. You sure know how to squirm. So sexy-- "

Perv. I followed her hand with my eyes, as she licked her fingertip, grazed the area of my covered bottom lip and headed towards my right breast. I tried to shrink away from her touch, but the unyielding table did not allow for such movement. Fury coursed through my veins.

"Yup, a real hellcat," she repeated, dreamily. She went for my breast again. I grunted and twisted my head angrily, trying to spit the gag from my mouth. She smiled and spoke lightly. "Okay, okay, I'll wait 'til you beg me." She chuckled, "And beg me you will." she teased.

Beg her? I'm going to fucking kill her. This girl had balls. I'm gonna kill you when I get out of here. I shot daggers.

She was unimpressed. "Oh, poor baby's mad at me." She baby talked.

My eyes darted around frantically for a moment as I tried to get more of a fix on my surroundings. She quietly watched me try to figure out where I was. Yet again she chuckled, leaning so close over me that I could smell her minty breath.

"Yeah, I know, you don't know where you are, do you? Welcome to my humble abode," she said with a dramatic sweep of the hand. "Now, you get to see first hand how some of us asshole cops live. Well, maybe not so much. It is pretty dark in here," She snickered nastily. She quietly studied me for a while, obviously enjoying her little game.

Right then and there, I decided to change tactics. After watching so many episodes of CSI and Dexter, I knew just how to behave. Killers and psychopaths always liked it when you panicked and begged for mercy, so I decided to take a different tack. I'll be damned if I beg. I mentally did a 180°, trying my best to calm down and come across as cool and collected. Then, thank God I was a TV freak, pulling advice given by Tyra Banks that was stored in my brain by a recent episode of America's Next Top Model, "smized"-- smiled with my eyes. In fact, I smized like hell.

That caught her off guard and she jerked just a little bit--then quickly regained her composure. Yeah, I thought, she can be worked just like she's trying to work me. I held her gaze until she averted her eyes. Small victory.

I had won. Yeah, Mack Mommy, back in control.

But she casually straightened, clearing her throat. Stretching her arms above her head and locking her fingers, she yawned and said coolly, "Oh well, It's been fun." She turned her palms towards me, cracking her knuckles in the process.

I hated it when people crack their knuckles. I almost shot her a dirty look, but remembered that I was playing the sweet victim. Tiny Cop leaned a mere inch away from my stretched out mouth. I could feel her warm breath through the thin fabric of the gag on my dry lips, bathing them in a soft burst of cool minted steam.

Her eyes searched mine, devouring my innermost secrets before turning away. She moved across the room slowly, let herself out the door and closed it firmly behind her. I heard a key in the lock and immediately began a desperate effort to free myself.

When I next heard the key in the door, I was lying on the floor, awfully stuck, partially pinned under the piece of Total Gym equipment that I was duct taped to. The lights suddenly turned on. I had no idea how long I'd been there. I had a dull ache in my right leg but that wasn't the worst of it.

"Oh my God, are you okay?" Tiny Cop rushed in, dressed completely in her dark blue uniform from head to toe. She still had her fluorescent green safety vest and little white hat on, too.

"I had to pee." I was screaming, but it came out like "UMmmhp Phhummp phump phumpphh."

Tiny Cop rushed over and with remarkable strength, righted the Total Gym, revealing a wet spot on the floor where I'd relieved myself some time before, unable to hold it in any longer. I was humiliated. The fight just went out of me. A solitary tear of frustration rolled down my cheek, leading to the release of others. I didn't know if I was crying out of anger, fear or frustration at that point.

"Oh, you had to pee." She looked crestfallen. "I forgot to provide for that inevitability."

Is this girl for real? Compassion? I deliberated. She really appeared to be disappointed in herself. Strangely, I started to feel sorry for her.

"Okay. Let's get you out of these wet clothes." She gently wiped away my tears. I let her, and then suddenly realized that unless I was released, she would need to touch me all over in order to get me clean. That made me uncomfortable all over again, not to mention pissed off. She began to remove my socks. "Don't be embarrassed," she said as I wiggled away from her fingers. She bent, taking my big toe in her warm mouth. I wasn't sure what to do this time around. I was still trying to play the sweet victim, and go along with her program, hoping that she'd get careless, allowing me the opportunity to maim her, or at the very least, to escape. I gestured towards my mouth with my eyes. "Take this off." "Oomph umph uumph." in 'gag'anese.

"Oh, you want me to take off your jeans?" she teased, unbuttoning the waistband of my pants.

No, you idiot, not my jeans. The gag. I shook my head no as violently as I possibly could. I wiggled around and although I tried my best, I couldn't even lift a knee to hurt her.

"Ooh, now I get to see what you look like under these jeans." Her voice thickened with sexual arousal.

"Don't..." "Umph..." I was warning her-- If she touched me, it was all over. I am so gonna kill this bitch when I get free.

"I'm just going to pull these down now." She began pulling the soaked jeans down with great difficulty. It's hard to pull down sopping jeans in the best of circumstances, let alone when the person whose bottoms you are removing is duct taped to a bench. What can I say? Life's a bitch. But she got them down, she did, and left me just like that, pants down, pooled around my knees, where silver tape prevented further lowering.

She suddenly left the room again. Damn, don't leave me like this, I cried silently. I was actually glad when she returned, this time carrying a bucket full of what turned out to be warm soapy water. "Relax now," she commanded. Lifting a washcloth from the bucket, she began wringing

the extra water out of it. The warm soap and water felt marvelous against my thighs when she wiped me first on my outer, then my inner thighs.

She had to pry my legs apart in order to reach my inner thighs and as much as I hated to admit it, each time she dipped the cloth again, I looked forward to the feel of the warm water and her gentle touch.

"I need to loosen this tape so I can get these jeans off of you and wash them. Can I trust you?"

I really wanted to be dry again and for her cleansing ritual to resume, so I nodded "Yes."

Tiny Cop carefully removed the tape binding my knees. I still couldn't move my feet and although she hesitated to see how I'd respond, she continued to lower my jeans when I remained still and quiet. I didn't really understand what was going on with me. Why I was no longer furious, I did not know, but I began to relax under her touch.

"By the way, my name is Denise." She informed me quietly, "and I'll be your captor this evening."

Very funny.

"I'm going to remove the tape from your feet one leg at a time, and then tape them back to the table with your knees bent, for circulation. I suggest you don't try to kick me or do anything funny, 'cause nobody knows where you are and I would hate to harm you. If I did away with you, I would never be suspected. I am an officer of the law, after all. So be good, and I'll be good to you. Don't make me cuff you. Again. Got it?"

I nodded.

Denise took a small box cutter from the pocket of her Police Duty Belt and sliced the tape behind my left foot, unwrapping the tape from the leg of my jeans, and removing them. She quickly bent my leg at the knee, which was so stiff I whimpered with pain. Taping my foot to the table, she deftly moved on to the next leg. When the jeans were completely removed, my other leg was fastened in the same way. I smelled the familiar faint acridness of my fluids, and was immediately embarrassed.

Denise, sensing my discomfort, grabbed the bucket and began to wash me all over. "I'm doing this quickly for you, you know. The smell of urine doesn't disturb me. Actually, I find it very erotic." She continued stroking slowly with the washcloth and the warm water, dragging the cloth across my body with exaggerated slowness.

The moment she removed the cloth, I felt a void and a rush of cool air on the water left behind. She worked slowly, methodically, toward my nether region, breathing more deeply with each stroke. Each swab of the warm cloth brought her closer to my muskiness.

"Actually, I enjoy the smell, all the smells of a woman." She parted my legs slightly, wiping her way closer to my privates. All of a sudden, I realized just how close she was to touching me there, and I began to feel an intense arousal gripping me. Denise, speaking in surreal utterances, lightly brushed my loosely coiled hairs. Over and over again, she teased, coming close to wiping me with force, yet backing away time and time again, sometimes letting an errant finger creep its way into my now slick hair.

If I could have bucked, my hips would have danced. I tried to hold back, but all these extreme feelings had gotten me so worked up I was confused to the point of surrender. What was worse, suddenly, I found that I didn't care. I wanted her to touch me as much as she seemed to want to touch me. I opened my legs as wide as they would go. I was going with the moment.

"Oh, you want me to touch you now, huh?" Her voice was husky and filled with promise. "Well, I don't know now. Maybe. Maybe not. Who's to say?" She laughed and kept on stroking. "Like Mister said in *The Color Purple*. Did you see *The Color Purple*?"

What the fuck? What was this woman talking about? For one of the first times in my life, I did not want to talk film or TV.

"Remember when Ms. Celie asked Mister if she had gotten any mail? 'Could be, could be not' he said. Do you remember that?"

I nodded vigorously, wanting her to shut up, to use her mouth for anything besides talking, anxious for the stroking to begin again in earnest. A moment later, it did begin again. This time, Denise placed the warm cloth on my vagina and I forced my legs apart as far as they'd go. She wiped and didn't seem at all surprised when she discovered that my Honey Pot was ready for harvesting. Nope. Lifting the cloth, and sliding her searching hand underneath it, Denise fully experienced my hunger and wetness when she slid across my swollen clit and delicately twirled my soaked hair around and around her index finger. She literally had me wrapped around her finger and as much as I had been through every emotion in the book during this time with her, I was finally sure about how I wanted it to end. Still unable to talk, my eyes urged her on.

Denise ran her digit along my engorged shaft before filling the void between my legs by dropping to her knees before me. She parted my lips and stared at my pulsing and reddened pussy, licking her lips with tiny flecks of her tongue and telling me how gorgeous I was; how she loved the smell of me; couldn't wait to taste me. A groan escaped my belly.

"Please," my eyes begged. She reached up, taking my breast in her free hand, manipulating my nipple through my shirt until my nipple jutted forth like a pebble. Oh My God. I was ripe for the picking. Although I was completely surprised that all of my emotions: fury, hopelessness, fear, hate and humiliation had all morphed into wanton desire, I couldn't wait to feel more of her. Or for her to feel more of me. I wanted this woman to ravish me with her tongue, to fuck me silly with her tiny hands, to take me, control me, make me hers. I was confused by but happy about the turn of events.

Her hot tongue snaked toward my center, trailing languorously up one leg and down the other, above my mons, trailing along my stomach, and in between the quivering line between inner thigh and pubic hair, slowly driving me crazy with lust. It drove me nuts that I couldn't move. I couldn't talk. Everything was out of my control.

Finally, mercifully, Denise moved her tongue lightly against my opening. She stood again and went to kiss my mouth when she realized that the ball gag was still in place. She skillfully trailed her tongue along my lips, leaving my own wetness where she licked. I desperately wanted her to remove my gag, but she was not cooperating. It drove me crazy, but for once, I was not bored silly.

Denise literally tongue kissed my pussy, over and over again, but not giving me complete satisfaction. She licked the inside of my vagina, but not deep enough. She sucked my clit, but not hard enough. She stuck fingers in me, but of course, not enough of them, or for long enough periods of time. I was beginning to drip down my thighs and down the crack of my ass. I writhed, trying to get Denise to do me like I wanted to be done. Still, she refused to cooperate. She teased and played with me endlessly, sometimes stopping to stare into my unfocused eyes. Finally it dawned on me, and I heard her prediction loud and clear, as if she had only just uttered the words again "And, beg me, you will--" By then, I was so desperate for release I was willing to do and say anything she wanted. This time, when I gestured, "Take this off." she leaned against me in a full body press, her uniform smashed against my half nude body, her belt buckle hard against my wetness, my clit jumping at the shock of the direct contact with the cold hard metal. Denise laid her head on my shoulder and uttered a simple word. "Beg." I nodded furiously. After studying me for a moment, she untied a bandanna, releasing the ball gag. My mouth was stiff and sore, but I still managed to mouth the word "Please." roughly against her ear.

As soon as I uttered the magic word, Denise dropped back to her knees, performing the best oral sex on me I've ever experienced. Her tongue was a hot long snake as it entered into all of my orifices; sucked and teased my straining clit; coaxing the juices out of me.

Suddenly, she rose, and shoved her tiny hand deeply into my passage, massaging my G-Spot and filling me completely to the brink. I gasped when I felt her hot little mouth on mine, capturing my tongue and sucking on it with great gusto. I was left gasping for breath.

Finally, she dropped to one knee and pulled her hand out of me, leaving a vacuum that she quickly replaced with her mouth. Her little finger worked its way back, and using my own wetness, lodged itself firmly in my anus. With her other hand, she tweaked my breast.

That was all it took. The air around me shifted and my spirits leapt as I experienced the greatest orgasm of my life. My nipples stood out like spikes. My pussy throbbed and surged against her as I flooded her mouth. Eventually, I fell limply against the TotalGym.

It was the utmost workout of my life.

Denise and I have been together ever since. I confess that I have not been bored even once in our 4 years together. When people ask us who made the first move? Denise likes to tell them, "Oh, she begged me."

I don't mind.

Worth It

by Bliss

SOMEWHERE, THE PHONE was ringing.

"Keep ringing, I'll find you." Cyd made her way through the narrow path left between the partially unpacked boxes. "Damn it. Where is it? Ah, the living room. I've got you now." She tripped and landed hard on her side, the phone a scant few inches from her out stretched hand. "Hello."

"Wow, you sound frazzled. What's up?"

"You mean aside from laying sprawled on the floor with boxes piled all around me? Not much. How are you Dana?"

"Why are you sprawled on the floor?"

"Because I tripped over a box trying to get to the god damned phone."

"Are you all right?"

"Yes. I don't think much more than my dignity is hurt." She sat up and rested her back against one of the offending boxes. "But I swear, these friggin' boxes are multiplying. Every time I think I've got a handle on this, something else happens that slows everything down. It sounded like a really good idea when Mer asked me to move down south with her, but I'm not so sure I'm cut out for this now."

"What do you mean? What's not to like about Charleston? It's got to beat the hell out of the backside-of-nowhere Illinois. Meredith is hot, sexy and you're crazy about her. Has something happened to make you doubt things between you?"

"It's way too hot and humid and the bugs are the size of sanitation trucks. I could probably put a saddle on some of these roaches and ride them, and they fly. I'm hoping the winter will be more to my liking. As for Meredith, I don't doubt things between us at all, but there are so many things I didn't understand when I agreed to move down here with her. Not to mention the fact that I haven't seen her for a week."

"What? You've only been down there for a week and a half. Where the hell is she? Did you two have a fight?"

"No. We didn't have a fight. We got here and started looking for an apartment, and she got called in to work."

"You mean they didn't give you any time to get settled?"

"No. Her ship is being deployed to the Persian Gulf, and I don't exist."

"Well of course you exist, that's a silly thing to say."

"No it's not. I don't exist. Have you ever heard the phrase, 'don't ask don't tell?'"

"Yes, I've heard about it, but I just thought she couldn't be out at work."

"That's the least of it. If she just needed to stay in the closet at work I think I could handle it much easier. We can't be ourselves anywhere because anyone she works with might recognize her. There's a huge Navy population here so she sees people she knows all the time and I just have to sort of fade into the woodwork. I have to be careful about what I say to her on the phone, because any of the phones at her job could be monitored, and get this, the reason she got called in early is because she's single."

"Whoa, wait a minute. You have to be closeted everywhere? You can't even talk on the phone? So what if she's single, what difference would that make?"

"Her boss told her that there are several families that have been transferred here and he wants them to have a little time to get their families settled before they deploy, and because she doesn't have any family, she didn't need to get settled right away. She could have her berth on the ship and just hold her household goods until they come back in six months. Can you believe that?"

"Well that sucks."

"No joke. She told him she'd already signed a lease and needed her household goods delivered right away because there were some things she packed that she needs for the deployment. Do you know what he did?"

"No. What."

"He gave her half a day to have the boxes delivered and told her to find what she needs for the deployment and leave the rest packed until she gets back. So I'm up to my ass in boxes, and she's on watch on the ship and can't come home. Her ship is leaving in three days for six months or more, and I'm probably not going to be able to see her before she deploys. I can't even go down to the dock to see her off like the rest of the families do because I don't have access to the base."

"Why can't you have access to the base?"

"I'm not her dependent, so I can't get an ID card."

"And because of don't ask don't tell, there isn't any way for you to be recognized as someone significant to her, hence your statement--I don't exist."

"You've got it. I'm frustrated and angry, and don't know when I'll see her again, and I miss her so much."

"Jesus, Cyd. I don't know what to say. Is there something I can do?"

"You're doing it. You're listening to me bitch about my life. I can't help wondering if all of this is worth it."

"You mean if all of it is worth her. Did you understand any of this before you moved?"

"That's really it in the nutshell. You're right, I've been wondering if all of this is worth her, and I don't like myself very much for having these thoughts. She explained quite a bit about what her life is like, and I thought I understood what I was getting into, but everything has gone wrong and I'm not handling it very well. At least she was able to get the household goods delivered here so I can have our things while she's gone."

"Do you want me to fly out there and help you unpack and get settled? You have only to ask, honey."

"Christ Dana, that's the nicest thing anyone's said to me in a week, and I love you for offering, but I need to stay busy. If I stay busy, I don't have to think about this whole mess."

"The offer's open, so if you change your mind just let me know. As for Meredith, honey, I know she loves you. I can see it when she looks at you."

"I know she does. That's why I'm not liking myself much at the moment. I'm angry with myself for being angry with her, even though I know these circumstances aren't her fault. Part of what I love about her is her sense of honor, her absolute conviction that no one can do what she does as well as she can and that she can make a difference, save lives."

"You moved halfway across the country and your life has been turned upside down. You have every reason to be angry. That's a completely normal reaction and you shouldn't beat yourself up

about it. Meredith is definitely charismatic, and her self confidence is very sexy, but I can understand why you could feel like you're second best."

"Yes. I can't help asking myself why I couldn't fall in love with a cop or a firefighter. They have sexy uniforms, they have noble causes, they save lives too, but no, I've got to go and fall in love with a woman who is career Navy."

"Now you're feeling sorry for yourself. Not that you don't deserve to have a bit of a wallow, just don't drown yourself in it."

"That's why I'm trying to stay busy. If I work myself to a state of exhaustion every night, I can sleep and not dwell on the fact that she's not beside me. I've been listening to all the rhetoric on TV about how much the families of military personnel suffer, but at least they can be open about it. The Navy has some support programs to help people cope with having their loved ones deployed but I can't participate. At least they can say 'I love you' over the phone. I can't even do that. This all happened so fast that we didn't have a chance to say goodbye. I couldn't tell her to be careful, or come back to me in one piece. All I have is a hole in my heart that only she can fill."

"I had no idea how hard this relationship might be. I doubt many people, other than those who live it, really understand just how difficult it is. I am going to say this though--you are one of the strongest people I know. If there is anyone who can deal with this kind of adversity, it is you. All you need to figure out is whether you want to or not--whether having her is worth all of the secrecy and separation."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence. I think you missed your calling."

"Huh?"

"You would have made an awesome therapist. I'm just really glad to have you for a friend."

"I'm feeling like a part of the mutual admiration society here. But seriously, call if you need me, okay?"

"Thanks Dana. I really should get back to sorting out these boxes. I'm pretty close to having the bedroom put together, and I want to sleep tonight with sheets on the bed."

"All right then, get 'er done and call it a night, you sound tired."

"Will do, thanks again for the call. Good night."

"Nite."

She thumbed the talk button on the phone and yawned hugely. "I guess I really am pretty tired after all. I'll just finish making the bed, put the rest of the linens away and hit the sheets." She navigated the gauntlet of boxes to get to the bedroom.

Once the tasks were finished she stripped, showered, dried herself and looked at the bed. After a long moment, she pulled a well-worn Navy tee shirt out of the drawer and slipped it over her nakedness. She pulled the bedclothes down and tried to get comfortable but sleep eluded her. Her arm kept reaching toward the other side of the bed, the cold side of the bed.

"This is dumb, but somehow it helps a little." She spoke into the darkness as she pulled the other pillow next to her body and wrapped her arms around it. "Good night baby. I hope you have a good watch and have sweet dreams. I love you."

"I love you, too," a low-pitched voice responded.

Cyd sat up in the bed and fumbled for the light, turning it on at last. Meredith stood framed in the doorway in her dress blues. The tailored uniform was immaculate. Every crease razor sharp, ribbons and name tag perfectly spaced and aligned. Her shirt blindingly white, shoes polished to brilliance and her hat cradled precisely in the crook of her arm.

"Oh my god, baby. You're here." Tears welled in her eyes.

"Yes, I am. I needed to see you, talk with you--touch you again."

"How long can you stay?"

"All night, love, and I plan to use every minute of it to make sure you know how I feel about you."

Cyd leapt from the bed to her lover's arms. The hat fell to the floor, forgotten. She felt the press of the polished brass buttons against her body, the crisp starched fabric under her hands and the warmth of the woman so flawlessly enclosed within them. "Get out of this thing. I want you naked beside me in our bed."

"Easy baby, I want to make this last all night. Be patient and I promise it will be worth the wait."

The heat in Meredith's gaze melted the icy core that had crystallized her heart in the last week. For the first time in as many days, Cyd felt whole. She felt her chin being lifted and then the hot wet press of Meredith's lips against her own. She opened her mouth, anxious to feel Meredith's tongue stroking her own, a dance she wanted to feel all over her body.

They stood like that for a long time, kissing, breathing in the essence of the other, and stoking their mutual passion. At last, Meredith broke the kiss.

"Let me undress for you."

"Oh, yes please." Cyd stepped back and sat on the bed, unable to take her hungry stare from the woman before her.

Meredith's sensitive hands moved up the tailored curve of the uniform jacket stopping at the top of the four polished brass buttons. She slowly unbuttoned each, and sensuously removed the jacket, exposing the pristine white of the shirt. She released the tie tab circling her long neck, and then the top button of her shirt. Meredith followed the contour of her breasts down to the curve of her left hip. She unbuttoned and unzipped her skirt and lowered it to the floor stepping out of it to reveal that her sheer black stockings were held in place by garters. Her hands once again trekked over her body to the placket of her shirt. Each button was undone providing tantalizing glimpses of the white lace bra, panties and garter belt beneath. Meredith opened the gold cuff links and finally pulled the shirt from her shoulders.

Cyd's breath caught in her throat as the transformation from supremely confident sailor to incredibly feminine woman was completed. The dichotomy was fascinating. "You're a goddess. You are so beautiful. I need to touch you, taste you, and be on you and inside you right now. Come here love. I want you."

"You can do whatever you want with me after I finish ravishing you. Let me take care of you first this time. Please?"

Cyd couldn't resist the entreaty in Meredith's eyes--the raw need and heat she saw in their depths. "Take me then."

Meredith came to her and raised her arms to remove the Navy tee shirt revealing the tight, well-muscled body that was hidden underneath. "I love your body," she said, trailing her manicured fingernails across Cyd's abdomen.

"I don't know how long I can hold on baby. I'm ready to explode right now."

"Lay down on your stomach," Meredith commanded.

Cyd felt the rough texture of the lace and the warm softness of Meredith's flesh as she covered her. She was treated to a feast of sensations as her lover's hands traced each muscle, as her tongue tasted and warmed her skin only to be chilled by the air.

"Ah baby, I'm so wet and tight. I need to come. Please make me come. Let me come now."

"Spread your legs," Meredith demanded.

Cyd felt her hand caressing her, probing her and finally pressing inside of her, filling her.

"Just touch my clit baby. One touch and I'll be gone. Please? Please?"

"Be patient, when you come, it's going to be in my mouth. I want to fuck you. You're so hot and wet around my fingers. I'm going to take you so high. Wait a little longer."

"I don't know if I can, I need to come now. Oh please baby let me come."

She pulled her fingers out. "Roll over now. I'm going to taste you."

Meredith pressed her fingers back inside, curling them slightly to rake over Cyd's g-spot. She pressed again and again until Cyd's sweat slicked body felt as though it was on fire. Then she lowered her head and took her clit in her mouth, sucking and tonguing it gently. "Now love, come."

Cyd's body arched off the bed taking her lover with her. Surges of pleasure coursed through her body like raw voltage racing along her nerves, electrifying her. It seemed to last an eternity, until finally her vision faded and her body quieted. When awareness of her senses returned, Cyd felt Meredith's body covering her own in a loving, warm embrace.

"Christ baby, I'm wrecked. What did you do to me?"

"I listened to what your body told me it needed and gave it. I want you to rest for a while, and then I want to do it again."

"I'm going to have to rest for a while, no choice there I'm afraid, but then I'm going to love you. I want to make you feel as loved as you just made me feel."

"Shhhhh. Rest for a while love. Let me hold you."

Cyd's eyes closed, and her body relaxed against the woman she loved.

WHEN SHE WOKE, Cyd felt Meredith's arms around her. Her body spooned behind her. A look at the clock confirmed her worst fear, it was nearly four in the morning.

"Shit, why did you let me sleep so long baby?"

"You needed the rest love, and I needed to hold you."

Cyd rolled them until Meredith straddled her body.

"You are so beautiful. So much woman, I want to fill my hands and mouth with you." She unclasped the lace bra, baring Meredith's pink tipped breasts. Cyd rubbed where the straps had been and then caressed her. Her nipples tightened and darkened until they looked like ripe raspberries waiting to be tasted. She could bare it no longer and took one into her mouth lightly biting and sucking on it until she felt Meredith's body quiver.

Shifting to top her, Cyd unclasped the silk stockings, and removed the garter belt and soaked panties. "Baby, you're so wet. Are you ready for me?"

"I've been ready for you since I walked in the door and saw you talking to my pillow."

Cyd kissed and licked her way down her body until she felt Meredith's arousal on her chin. "You smell so good baby. I'm going to fuck you until your eyes roll to the back of your head. I can't wait to feel how hot and wet you are around my hand."

Meredith spread her legs a little farther apart. "God, yes. Take me."

Cyd entered her, first with two, then three fingers, working her wetness on her hand, gently stretching her to accommodate more. She added a fourth finger and reveled in the slick heat surrounding her fingers, and the moans of desire that accompanied each thrust. Meredith drove her hips pressing her farther into her center. Finally, when she felt a surge of wetness against her palm, she tucked her thumb into her palm and pressed into her until her hand was enclosed to her wrist. Cyd closed her fingers creating a fist and rotated until her knuckles grazed Meredith's sweet spot. Her excitement was clear as a new surge of wet heat coated her hand. Meredith started pumping, letting her know she was ready to be fucked, and she obliged. Cyd started slowly, pressing deeper and back again. She pushed harder, deeper and faster until Meredith was writhing on the bed and froth formed around her wrist. She was ready.

"I'm going to make you come now." She stroked her clit lightly, slightly squeezing the base on the down stroke. Meredith tightened around her hand, her body tense and straining until with a tremendous clenching, her body released the energy it held. She shook convulsively. Cyd never felt anything so delicious as the contractions rippling around her hand. She was so hard she ached, and as Meredith cried out her name, her own orgasm consumed her.

Breathing hard, Cyd lay with her head pillowed on Meredith's stomach and her hand held deep in her core. Meredith's fingers stroked her hair and face. It was perfect. They were perfect, each knowing exactly what the other needed and able to provide it at a level of intensity that matched their desire. Cyd started to pull out.

"No. Stay a while longer. I want to feel you there. Deep in me where you belong."

"I love you baby."

"I love you too."

"You know this has been a really hard week for me."

"I know love. I'm sorry I haven't been able to be here to help you, or reassure you, or tell you what I'm thinking and feeling. It's been hard for me too."

"I don't want you to apologize. I love you, just the way you are. I know that part of the drive and fire that I love about you is because of the Navy. I love how strong and competent you are, but I also love the amazing woman underneath the uniform. All I want is a future with you, with us. I'm not sure I really understood what life would be like, but I know I want you in it. Just be careful, and come home to me."

"No matter where I go, or how many times I'm away from you, I believe home is where the heart is. You have my heart, love. So I will always come home to you."

Cyd very gently eased out of Meredith, pulled the covers over them and held her tight. Meredith sighed as she snuggled against her strong, beautifully sensitive woman. Together they slept until the alarm sounded at six.

"Go ahead and shower, I'll get the coffee started."

"Thank you, love."

Cyd just finished making Meredith's coffee when the sailor emerged from their bedroom, looking just as immaculate as she had the night before. Poised, confident, cool and so sexy it made her heart stop. "You are stunning baby."

"Thank you for being willing to make a life with me. After things went to hell last week, I was sure you would run as far and as fast as you could. I didn't know what I was going to do without you because you already own my heart and soul."

Cyd took Meredith into the strong circle of her arms. "I have to be honest. I had some doubts about whether or not I could handle all of this. Sharing the love of my life with the Navy is not perfect, but the time we have together is. The Navy isn't going to be forever, and maybe, just maybe, President Obama will get rid of don't ask don't tell. Till then, as long as you always come home to me, I can handle just about anything." She kissed her, just as long, lingering and loving as the previous evenings kiss had been fierce, demanding and hungry.

Meredith broke the kiss. "I've got to go love. I'll write you, talk with you when I can, and bring you treasures from the far reaches of the globe."

"Yes, well the globe is three quarters water, and you may not have much time for shopping. Besides, you're the only treasure I really want baby. Remember that. I love you."

"I love you too." She pulled out of Cyd's arms and reached for the travel mug of coffee on the counter. They walked down the hall to the front door. "I'll see you in about six months or so. I'll let you know as soon as I can when to expect me home."

Cyd pulled her once again into her arms, holding her tight. She gently kissed her sailor, and then released her to open the door. Meredith stepped over the threshold, very precisely put on her hat and turned back to give her a blazing smile.

Cyd returned the smile. "You're gorgeous. I'll be here when you come home. You're worth waiting for."

Cyd watched the uniformed woman walk to her car and drive away. "I'll miss you baby, but you're definitely worth it."

Five-Star Review

by R.G. Emanuelle

WHOEVER SAID BEING a restaurant critic is the best job in the world didn't know his mandolin from his ass. For all the great meals you eat, you suffer through crappy ones. For all the humble, brilliant chefs you get to talk to, you have to deal with just as many assholes. And with the economy as it was, my freelance review work was thinning out.

It was kismet that my phone rang just as I was paying my bills, trying to figure out which ones to pay with my insufficient funds.

"Hi, Pauline. It's Roz."

"Roz. How are you?" I asked. Not that I was really interested. I was a little miffed at Roz because she'd started giving some of my assignments to someone else.

"I have a gig for you. A new restaurant is opening up downtown. Blossom. I heard it's going to be the next hot spot."

"Okay. When do you want me to go?"

"The opening is tonight.

Tonight? This last minute could only mean her new pet writer bailed on her.

"I'd love to," I said through gritted teeth.

"Great. I couldn't commit them to an interview, but see if you can talk to the chef. Zoe Piteras. She's Greek. The talk is that she's the next Cat Cora."

She? I loved interviews with female chefs. They really worked hard to get to the top--just like women in any field--and they weren't arrogant pricks. Although I was totally unprepared, this might prove to be a good gig.

Outside the restaurant, behind one of the potted pine trees studded with white Christmas lights, I took notes about the appearance of the place, the cleanliness of the sidewalk, and the buzz taking place by the door. Then, I stuck my notebook and pen in my purse and walked in.

The maitre d' showed me to my table, where I began taking mental notes about décor and table setting. As I sipped my watermelon martini, I perused the menu. The choices impressed me. Just as I was deciding, my dinner companion, Lisa, finally made it.

"Hi, Pauline. Sorry I'm late. I got stuck at the office."

"That's okay. See what you want. I'm starving." Lisa knew the drill and I knew she'd order the right things for my review.

Lisa picked up her menu and scanned the offerings. "Do you know what you want?"

"It was a tough choice, but I think I'm going with the butternut squash bisque, and the Portobello paillards in red wine reduction with baby greens and red rice. I'll get us a nice bottle of Riesling." I closed my menu and placed it on the table. "And for dessert, crème brûlée," I said, grinning.

"Ooooo. That sounds yummy."

"Yeah, you know me. Good food gets me excited. Throw in some good wine and I'm in ecstasy."

OUR DINNER WAS fantastic, just as I'd hoped. Everything was perfect, from the presentation of the food to the timing of courses. I was pretending to be on a call on my cell, leaving a message for myself with notes on the dinner, when I looked up in the direction of the kitchen. A woman walked out in executive chef regalia: a black chef coat, a black head wrap, pinstripe pants, and clogs.

That had to be Chef Piteras. *Damn!*

Burnished copper kitchen doors stood as a backdrop to an animated scene. Piteras was discussing something with a man in a suit, probably a manager. She was adamant about whatever she was saying, gesturing with her hands and pointing toward the kitchen. Abruptly, she turned on her heel and went through the doors. The manager walked back through the dining room to the front, a defeated expression on his face.

God, I loved it when a woman took control. It was a monumental task running a restaurant in the first place, doubly hard for a woman. Seeing Chef Piteras in action got me tingly.

I paid the check, and Lisa and I walked out. "Thanks again for dinner," she said. "I love it when you bring me to these things. Listen, I gotta run. I'll call you tomorrow." She kissed my cheek and took off.

I waited a while and went back in, avoiding the maitre d', and walked right over to the manager-type man. "Excuse me. I'm Pauline Rhodes, with the *Daily Reporter* and I was wondering if I could speak to the chef," I said, hoping my presence at a dinner table had escaped his notice. "We'd like to run a story on your opening."

The man looked me over and said, "Do you have an appointment?"

"No, I'm afraid I don't, but--"

"Then I'm sorry. Chef Piteras is very busy tonight. Why don't you call me for an appointment?" He handed me a business card and walked past me to the maitre d' station.

I had to get this interview or I'd lose Roz's favor--what little I had left. So, I went to the bar, which was set about ten feet from the kitchen, and made like the wine list held some interest for me. And I waited. Piteras had to come out eventually.

It took an hour, but she finally did. Immediately, numerous people converged upon her, asking questions and looking panicked. As each person got an answer and left, I surreptitiously inched closer until I was only two feet away.

When the last person had gone and Piteras turned to go back into the kitchen, I stepped up close.

"Chef Piteras?"

She turned around. Her beauty, so much more evident up close, gripped me. The heat of the kitchen had colored her cheeks and a few wisps of blond hair peeked out from her head wrap, while the rest was tied back in a ponytail.

Even in dim lighting, I could see she had light-colored eyes. I couldn't tell exactly what color they were and I had an overwhelming urge to see those eyes looking down into mine as she lay on top of me.

The uniform did something to me, too. I'd always loved chef uniforms, anyway, but Zoe Piteras did something magnificent to them. This particular uniform on this particular chef was demanding of attention. *It must be sprayed with pheromones.* Her chef coat fit loosely, but I could see the curves of her breasts. And she just looked so damn cute in those clogs!

"Yes?" she said. I hadn't realized that I'd been staring.

"Oh, uh, hi. My name is Pauline." I gave her the same spiel I'd given Mr. Manager.

She stood motionless for a moment, her eyes boring into mine and my insides felt as custardy as the crème brûlée. Equally frozen, I wondered if I'd just insulted her. Despite my job depending on this interview, I wanted to talk to her alone. *Please don't send me away.*

Then, almost imperceptibly, her gaze roamed over the length of my body, and goose bumps prickled my arms. The light sheen of sweat on her forehead, just beneath the head wrap, became more apparent from the rosy blush that suddenly appeared there.

I looked into her eyes, and imagined I saw seduction pass through them. *As if.* A small bombshell went off in my panties. *Come lie on top of me so I can see what color your eyes are.*

"Well, I'm very busy right now and I have an interview in an hour," Piteras said, "but if you're available after closing, I'd be happy to speak with you."

Oh, god. And she's well spoken, too.

"Uh, yes. Sure"

"We close at two. Let's say two-thirty?"

"That would be great."

She flashed me a look that could have been interpreted in a number of ways. I don't know if it was the lighting or the warm wetness between my legs, but I interpreted it only one way. It was ten o'clock. It was going to be longest four-and-a-half hours in creation.

I don't know what I did for the next few hours. It was all a blur. At two o'clock, I was already waiting at the bar in Blossom, staring at the burnished copper doors and nursing a strong screwdriver. And I waited. By three, most of the staff had gone home and only the manager, maitre d', bartender, and I were left in the main dining room. The bartender was starting to give me impatient looks.

"I'm interviewing Chef Piteras," I explained sheepishly. "I have an appointment." As if it was the bartender's business. *Idiot*. He put some pretzels in front of me and went about his business cleaning up.

Getting the impression that I'd been misled or dumped, I ate the orange slice from my drink and slid off the barstool. I was walking toward the front doors, when a throaty voice stopped me.

"I'm sorry for making you wait."

I tried turning around slowly so as not to seem rattled, but I didn't think I'd done a good job, if nearly knocking over a potted plant was any indication. Then there was the bemused look on Piteras' face.

"Oh, uh. That's okay." *Say something pithy*. "I was drinking." *Goddammit!*

Her eyebrows rose and I wanted to just run out of there.

"Good night, guys," she said, waving over my shoulder. "I'll talk to you tomorrow." The others said goodnight and left, shutting off most of the lights.

"I'll tell you what. Give me a minute to change and we can talk in my office."

She began unbuttoning her chef coat and was turning to walk away.

"I like it," I blurted.

"Excuse me?"

"I like you in your chef coat. It's very--attractive."

Her hands were on the lapels of the coat, as frozen as her face. Good lord, I was making an ass out of myself.

"I mean, I'd like to take some photos of you in uniform," I said. "If you don't mind."

Her eyes pierced mine like a skewer pierces a tomato. "Well, then, I'll keep it on," she said, smiling rakishly. "You know, I like talking in the kitchen. It's the place I'm most comfortable in. How 'bout it?"

Somehow, the idea of entering the place where this strong, beautiful woman cooked, controlled, and created made my stomach flutter. "That would be perfect."

She pushed one of the doors open with one hand and gestured for me to enter with the other.

It was a nice-sized kitchen, with stoves on either wall, counters, and a steel prep island in the center. A rack was stationed over the prep table with myriad pots and pans and utensils hanging from hooks.

She grabbed a bottle of white wine off a nearby rack and set it on the counter by a giant Viking stove. There was such mastery in the way she uncorked the bottle and I stared as she did it. She'd removed her head wrap and some of her hair had fallen loose and hung down to the top of her shoulders. The strands framed the features of her face, the well-defined, soft angles that gave her the appearance of a Greek statue. *How appropriate.*

My eyes followed those strands down to where they ended, on the lapels of her jacket, which were folded over at the chest. Her sleeves were folded, French-cuff style. The buttons were woven knots and her name was embroidered in silver stitching above her left-breast pocket. Very elegant. The coat was amazingly immaculate, considering she'd just spent the entire evening cooking. My eyes wandered farther, down to her standard chef pants, loose-fitting but not baggy, featuring thin pinstripes down their length. When she turned around to get wine glasses, I saw that her pants were just snug enough to show her shapely ass. *Mmm, nice.*

Zoe poured the wine, picked up the glasses, and walked around the island. "Hope you like Gewürztraminer," she said, handing me a glass.

"Love it," I said. What I loved was her accurate pronunciation of the German varietal. It made me tingle even more.

We clinked glasses and sipped. "Wait here," she said as she put her glass down on the counter. She went out the doors and I heard the clip-clop of her clogs in the dining room and my clit pulsed in time. When she returned, she had four table candles in her hands and she set them down on the counter. She lit them and shut the lights off.

"I like drinking wine by candlelight," she said.

"Me, too." *Good god, this woman is rendering me stupid.*

Zoe picked up her glass. "Now, what was it you wanted to know?" she asked in a tone of voice that was all too sultry for an interview with a reporter.

"Oh." I put down my wine and quickly dug into my purse for my notebook. I'd completely forgotten the purpose of our meeting.

I flipped a few pages of the notebook. "So, Chef Piteras--"

"Zoe."

"Zoe." I smiled, liking the way her name felt on my lips. *I'd like to feel something else on my lips.* "What's your vision for Blossom?"

Zoe didn't answer, so I looked up from my notes. Her intense staring made saliva catch in my throat, and I choked. I turned my head to cough and when I turned back, she took the notebook and pen out of my hands and put them on the counter.

Startled, I didn't understand what she was doing until she stepped closer to me. She cupped my face in her hands and kissed me softly.

Her lips were sweet from the Gewürztraminer. I thought my entire body would turn to jelly. *No, wait. Plum conserve.* The crotch of my pants was soaked.

I pressed my lips harder on hers and her hands went around my back and down to my ass. She squeezed my cheeks, pulling them apart slightly, which I was sure would send a torrent of juice down my legs.

As if we were doing a dance, she pulled me close and led me backward until I was against the wall. Pinned there, I wondered how many times she'd fucked a reporter and if she'd ever done so to get a good review. *Who fucking cares?*

Our mouths were pressed together hard as she pulled me to the steel prep island. My ass hit the tabletop and I scooted up to sit on it. I fell onto my back and Zoe immediately flung my arms over my head. Hungry nibbles on my jaw and neck were sending hot jolts right to my core. With the precision of someone who uses her hands for a living, Zoe deftly undid the buttons of my blouse and flung it open. The cold steel stung my back as my blouse rode up, but then it cooled me as our bodies grew hotter.

"Do you like that?"

"Mmm, yes," I murmured.

She stopped and pushed down on my arms. Looking down at me sternly, she said, "When I ask you if you like something, you say, 'Yes, Chef!'"

There was something slightly comical about it, but the look on her face quickly eradicated any desire in me to giggle. She was serious and didn't move again until I said, "Yes, Chef!" She released my arms and got on her knees to quickly squirm out of her pants. Then, she was on top of me once more.

While her lips were busy up above, her hands went to work on my pants. She had them unbuttoned, unzipped, and undressed as quickly as I imagined she made chiffonade out of basil.

The hanging rack shook as she reached up and pulled something off a hook. A huge rubber spatula with a silicone handle.

How convenient.

She rested it on my stomach, holding it down with one hand. With the other hand, she scooped up some of my wetness, which she then smeared on the handle.

"Do you want me to fuck you?" she asked.

"I--"

Her look stopped me. I'd better answer properly.

"Yes, Chef," I said, demurely.

"What?" She bent her ear toward me dramatically. "I can't hear you."

"Yes, Chef!" I barked, and the silicone handle slipped inside me.

My prolonged moaning seemed to turn her on because she lowered herself onto me and moaned, too.

The silicone handle slid in and out and Zoe kept rhythm, as if the handle were an extension of her body. I ran my hands down her back and when I hit the bottom of the jacket, I slipped them underneath. She was slick with sweat and her skin was on fire. I brought my hands back around to her front and unbuttoned her jacket, pulling it open just as she got to work on my neck again. Underneath, she wore nothing but a lacy purple bra. So unexpected and so incredibly hot. My hands quivered as I squeezed her breasts. She leaned into me for more.

Just then, Zoe gave the spatula a good thrust, then gave each of my nipples a tug with her teeth before sliding downward. The equipment above my head reflected the light from the candles and one long spoon sparkled just as Zoe's tongue glided over my pussy. I closed my eyes and rocked into her licking. I was so wet that her tongue felt thick and soft, coated now as it was with my juices. Long strokes caressed my pussy, while firm circles teased my clit. Up and down and

around, and I didn't know which I liked better. My nails grazed her forearms and my breathing became sharp and ragged. A tremendous force in my belly made every muscle in my body tense up and I clutched Zoe's hands in mine. I cried out as I came and her strokes only stopped when I let out a deep, satisfied sigh.

I lay there, my legs and arms spread-eagled on the table, trying to catch my breath. Zoe gently pulled the handle from my pussy, making me shudder. The tips of her fingers played lightly in my folds, then ran down the center of my torso, from breast to belly, painting me with my own cum.

Zoe crawled up my body, licking the cum as she went along, and stopping to pay homage to my nipples with delicate licks.

Reveling in the sensation, I closed my eyes, expecting her to lie in my arms for a while. But when she didn't stop her ascent up my body, I opened my eyes.

Zoe's breasts were in my face. Then her abdomen. Then her pelvis. She continued moving upward until her knees were flanking my head. Her pubic hair was trimmed close in a rectangle and was wet in the center. Looking up at her pussy, glistening with her excitement, made my clit start throbbing again.

Zoe lowered herself onto my face and as I licked, I started grinding my thighs together. God, I was so turned on! As I licked and sucked, it occurred to me that this was my real dessert. *Fuck the crème brûlée!*

The hem of her jacket rested on my cheeks and I slid my hands around her thighs, back to front, to move it out of my way. I wanted to see Zoe come.

The light from the candles flickered in and out of my line of vision as Zoe rode my face hard, shimmying back and forth. She reached up and grabbed the rack overhead for support. Little moans turned into bigger ones, as she slowed down her grinding and let out a guttural groan and gasped. When she finished coming, she caught her breath and moved off my face to lie on top of me with her head on my shoulder.

After a moment, she lifted her head and looked down at me. "Did you like that?"

"Yes, Chef," I said, grinning sheepishly. Zoe smiled.

I looked up into her smoldering eyes. Blue. Her eyes were blue.

We got up and dressed. She blew out the candles and returned them to the tables. Zoe had shut off the lights in the dining room, but there was enough moonlight streaming through the windows to see us safely to the door.

Watching her lock up, I noticed she still had not changed out of her chef uniform. *She's like Wonder Woman--unable to wear regular clothing, lest she reveal her true identity.*

The rubber spatula stuck out of the oversized pocket of her jacket like a lewd tongue. Seeing my wide-eyed expression, she said, "I'll order a new one."

Heat tickled my cheeks. "Thanks for the interview, Chef."

"How did you like my restaurant?" she asked.

I quirked up one side of my mouth playfully. "Don't think you're going to get a favorable review because you fucked me."

Zoe's blue eyes sparkled with what I thought was a blend of amusement and defiance.

"I expect a good review only if you were pleased with my services." And a twinkle. "Were you pleased with my services?" A devilish smile played across her face.

I pretended to think about it, furrowing my brow and tapping my finger on my lips. "Hmm. Food, excellent. Ambiance, warm and pleasing." I ran my eyes down her body and up again.

"Fucking--spectacular."

"So, I'll ask again." She stepped closer to me and kissed me lightly on the lips. "Are you satisfied?"

"Mmm," I mumbled against her lips. "Yes, Chef," I responded in a sing-songy way.

Walking to my car, I formulated reasons to go back to Blossom. Well, I never got my interview. And, of course, the proper way to review a restaurant's food is to go at least three times. Three different appetizers, three different main courses--three different desserts. *Mmm.*

I smiled to myself.

I wonder if they serve breakfast.

Crème Brûlée

6 large egg yolks

¼ cup sugar

2½ cups heavy cream

1 vanilla bean

¼ cup brown sugar

Preheat oven to 325 degrees F (165 degrees C).

Combine the egg yolks and sugar in a bowl and mix with an electric mixer until thick and creamy.

Pour cream into a saucepan. Cut open the vanilla bean and scrape out the seeds; add the seeds and pod to the cream. Bring to boil and stir over low heat, gently stirring continuously. As soon as it comes to a boil, remove from heat. Remove vanilla bean. Pour cream mixture into egg yolks a little at a time, and stir until combined. Pour into 6 (6- or 7-ounce) ramekins. Place the ramekins into a large casserole dish or roasting pan, then pour enough hot water into the pan to come halfway up the sides of the ramekins. Bake just until the crème brûlées are set, but slightly jiggle in the center, about 45 minutes. Remove the ramekins from the pan and refrigerate for at least 2 hours or overnight.

When you're ready to serve, sprinkle the brown sugar evenly over the tops and brown with a butane torch or under the broiler for about 2 or 3 minutes.

Serve hot after great sex.

Makes 6 servings.

Soldier Dyke

by Lee Lynch

THE SCREEN DOOR squawked and wobbled when she opened it. She called, "Dad?"

"Is that Shannon?"

His house smelled like Cloroxed mildew. She worked the door back and forth a few times. It was dinged at about kick level. "Your hinge is loose on this door. The top screw's stripped." With her index finger, she snagged cobwebs filled with bits of leaves and fly wings.

"That's on my to-do list," her father said in his high, dry voice. He was in the sitting room of his ratty cabin. One of his drinking buddies had inherited a 1930's house with a half-dozen tiny vacation rentals clustered around it. Dad had been living in one of the rental cabins since her mom divorced him right after Shannon, rangy and raring to go, graduated from high school 14 years back.

"I'll get it," she said, and knelt to slide his balky ancient green tool box over wooden snags and splinters. The shelf inside his closet had been built out of a piece of dock that had washed into Pipsboro Harbor on this side of Saturday Lake. She remembered how her dad laughed at the idea of needing a whole closet just for clothes. His one suit and a lumpy hooded parka hung in a slim space next to shelves crowded with power tools, fishing gear, salvaged small appliances and clocks awaiting repair, a stack of Popular Mechanics magazines and his bowling balls, shoes and trophies. Shannon always had to chuckle--the closet in her rented trailer looked really similar, and both had serious water stains from old leaks.

"Never mind, lambie-pie," he said. She always wondered what had stopped his voice from deepening. "I never got to the hardware store for the screws I need."

"My dad ran out of handyman supplies? Are you sick or something?" she asked, moving the few steps she needed to flop down on the trundle bed across from his recliner. A puff of dust hit her nostrils. He had made the bed up as a couch today; his girlfriend Charlene, of the booming non-stop talk, must be coming over. Charlene worked Saturday mornings at a car dealership. Shannon liked to be gone before she came by with lunch.

He was watching a bowling show and she could hear the sharp smack of wooden pins colliding on the T.V. "I'm fine," he said. "Just haven't gotten over to the Aubuchon this week."

They talked off and on during the roaring T.V. ads about how to approach the door problem. Then she reached deep into her rummage sale rucksack for the letter.

"What's this?" he asked, squinting over his glasses.

"From the Guard."

He looked gravely up at her, fumbled the stationary out of its envelope, and then read. When he put the letter down, his eyes were closed. His legs were a little long for the recliner's foot rest. One old brown scuff hung from his toes. The other lay on the floor.

Shannon took the letter, smoothed it out and slipped it back in the envelope. She told him, "I think I'm going to Iraq."

"I wish I could go for you, lambie-pie."

"They say if I don't sign this they'll send me immediately, but if I sign it, you know and I know, they'll send me anyway."

"Well, honey, the Guard did put you through the two-years of college."

"For all the good it did me. And I gave them back all but six months of my time. Marine Technology. Was it worth it when no one will hire a woman to fix engines?"

He used the remote not to silence, but to lower the volume of the TV. "I wish you hadn't put the last of your service off."

"I'm hoping I can put it off till Cindy Sheehan gets us out of Iraq."

He sneered. "That Sheehan woman. God knows I wasn't for lady soldiers, but this is what the bra burners wanted and now you're stuck."

She pushed her fingers through her hair, soft today without any spiking gel. It was confusing. On the one hand she thought it was cool that back when her dad was young all those women did things like protest and start their own bank. In the Guard, she loved learning to shoot and to go hand to hand with the guys. On the other hand, she wished those women could have minded their own business so she wouldn't have been stupid enough to think she could take whatever the Guard dished up.

Her father went on. His eyes had followed her hands and were looking at her bleached hair. "Maybe you can wait it out. Those Iraqis will fold soon."

"Dad, this isn't about Iraq."

"What's it about, then, smarty-pants?" He was giving her his raised eyebrow Daddy-knows-best grin. Her folks had adopted her late, after they'd given up having kids of their own. Sometimes she wished they'd been choosier about which orphan to pick instead of ending up with one who turned out to be gay.

"It's about--" she paused because she hadn't figured out what it was about. "It's like Vietnam. What are we doing over there? Who cares what a bunch of foreigners in a hot country do as long as they leave us alone?"

"Leave us alone?" He grimaced; she felt like she'd been disobedient. He asked, "Did you forget 9/11 already?"

"Dad, Iraq didn't have anything to do with 9/11. You know that was Osama Bin Laden and he's Saudi Arabian. That creep Bush is not going to stop with invading Iraq. He's going to be playing cowboy for a long time. I feel like a piece on a checkerboard."

"You can't tell me the Arabs aren't all in it together. We need to show them who's boss."

"I'd rather have a good job and health insurance than be spending our taxes bossing other countries around."

"Well, at least you're not one of those damn kids yelling about blood for oil. I'd like to see what they'd do if they didn't have gas for their little foreign cars." He was tapping a fist on the arm of his chair.

"Okay, I didn't want to get into this again. I just wanted you to know that I may get sent over there."

Her father bent his head and rubbed a knuckle along the crease in his forehead. Rain, on a lake breeze, briefly spattered the window behind him.

"I never thought I'd see my lambie-pie carrying an assault weapon."

"Did you mind being in Vietnam, Dad?"

"For me, no. For you, I would mind very much."

"Because I'm a girl?"

"Because you're my little girl. "

"You wouldn't care if I was your son?"

"It's different. A man has to go to war."

"What if we could get rid of wars?"

"Ain't gonna happen, lambie-pie. Kids think they can change the world, but nothing's going to change. Bush is a bozo for starting a fight over there that he can't figure out how to finish, but we're Americans. How would it look to lose this one?"

"It would look like staying alive. To me." When she'd signed up for the Guard, she'd never planned to give away her life.

Had she thought her dad could tell her to how to get out of this? No, of course not. Yes, kind of. Now the sun shone. The jumble of old plants and bushes around the cabins could use more of that rain to wash off a covering of gravel powder.

"How's your wheels?" he asked.

"Fine, Dad."

"Keeping those tires hard?"

"Dad, you ought to re-open your bicycle repair shop again. I think you miss it."

"It's not worth trying to figure out how much I'm making, what the expenses are--I could get kicked off social security."

"What if I had a bike shop?" She'd never thought of opening up one of her own. "You could do repairs and teach me more and I'd pay you--real straightforward. You'd only work as much as they let you."

"And where would you get the money to rent a place to work? And pay worker's comp and all the taxes?"

"I don't know if you have to have Workers' Comp if you just hire one part-time employee. Or I could pay you under the table."

"Too complicated."

The rain splashed the roof of the cabin again. "It's not like I've been able to get a job, Dad. You didn't sell your tools--they're still in the closet."

"Not yet, but I can't picture myself lifting bikes all day."

"I could do that part. I could lift them onto a bench or a table so they'd be at your height--I could even find a used lift table on Craig's List. I wonder if having my own business would keep me out of Iraq. The shop would have to close and my part-time employee would be out of work too."

"I'm retired."

"Oh, Dad, you wouldn't really have to work, just teach me."

"I don't know. People go to Wal-Mart to buy a new bike a year. They don't get them repaired any more."

"I was thinking I could rent bikes out to tourists. Maybe do house calls if I bought a little truck."

She could hear the wind, no longer a breeze. Her father was watching someone sell insurance and said, in the direction of the T.V., "It might be worth a try if one of us had some money." When local car dealer ad came on he added, without looking at her, "What you do, is you take out a loan. Then you get a tax write off."

She was annoyed that he didn't use the mute when they were discussing her future. "But I have about \$3,000 saved from when I was working."

"Then apply for \$2,000. Your savings is their collateral. You use \$1,000 of your own money for the business--we can sell you my tools on paper for that much."

"Talk about complicated."

"You'd need a business plan too. I can put my hands on my old one. You retype it and update some costs and it'll look like your own."

Could she do this? Work with her father? She'd watched him repair bikes for hours on end. He'd taught her to do increasingly complex repairs. Some loser had abandoned a three-speed English Racer at the shop--an old Raleigh Humber, made in Ireland forty years before, with a Sturmey-Archer rear hub. She'd fixed it up and promised her dad she'd keep it ship shape. She was still riding it.

Or would she rather go back into the Guard? She'd met more dykes on duty than she'd found in her whole civilian life. She'd met Lina who had money for the motel they found an hour from the base where no one would see Lina's car parked around back. Lina was to drop Shannon off after their two weeks on base. Funny how the car got so hot so fast after she put Lina's free hand on her thigh. Twelve hours they spent in that second story room, curtains closed, the only light coming from the mostly closed bathroom door.

"Better still, find a rich man to marry and take care of your father in his old age."

"Dad, you know I'm gay."

He scowled at the T.V. "Don't push, Shannon Anne."

"I'm not the one who's pushing, okay? You are!" On automatic, she'd removed the shade from the floor lamp and took it to the kitchen sink to clean it. "This is going to look like a 250 watt bulb's in here," she said.

He gave a thin chuckle. "I don't understand why your mother never told you, little girl. It's what life is about, marrying and bringing up grandsons for your father. That's what keeps the world going around. Who are you to re-invent the world?"

"Hey, Dad, you and mom taught me to think for myself. Besides, I can have babies if I want to. If I don't get killed."

"There's your answer."

"Get killed?"

"Have a baby to keep from being called up."

On the T.V., A guy crouched up to the lane, hefted the ball, zeroed in, released the ball. Then came the sound of the pins scattering. A split.

"No!" she said, slamming the shade onto the lamp and screwing on the finial.

"Well," said her dad, "which is worse? Iraq or having a kid?"

Sweat sprouted along her hairline. Her torso felt stuffed into a rigid black box like her dad's T.V., her arms and legs flailing to get free. She couldn't expand her chest enough to suck in air.

She remembered an article in the paper about a guy whose wife sent grass seed to him in Iraq. He watered it three times a day and had a little green plot out in front of his barracks. Who would water it if he got killed? Maybe he'd make it back, grow grass at home again, the heat and explosions that ripped out his buddies' arms and legs and guts shoved into some dark implosion in his mind. Yet, that little plot of grass made the stupid war seem survivable.

You couldn't do that with a baby. You stayed in that foreign country a lot longer than fifteen months. There'd be no getting back to these days of freedom, biking everywhere, hanging with friends, maybe falling in love again. The thought of her trailer hung with baby clothes scared her more than the thought of suicide bombers. Playing soldier was tough and fun compared to that. She'd rather go to a U.S. jail for five years as a deserter than be over there. What difference would a bad record make when she couldn't get a job anyway?

"The baby," she finally said, feeling the box that enclosed her shatter as another set of bowling pins exploded out of their pattern.

Her father turned his head and stared at her through the drug store glasses that magnified his eyes. He told her, "Your mother should never have named you with that in-between name, Shannon."

He'd said that before and she'd always laughed it off, but it was a rusty old barb inside her and today it felt like that barb had been there so long she was infected. She turned away from her father, trying to set the two options side by side and look at them clearly, but the anger was burning up her core. If only she could rant and rave at him, and at her mother too, when they tried to erase her like this. What did she have to do, prove scientifically that it was okay to have grown up to be who she was? It was, wasn't it?

"You got it, Dad," she said, feeling like a walking, talking infection. "That's why they call me queer."

He shook his head slowly, eyes toward a burly guy letting the black ball fly down a lane on the T.V. "Women are made to have babies. Look how many pregnant women they're sending back."

"You see stories in the paper all the time about women who had to leave their kids to go to Iraq."

"Only after they have them. They don't get sent when there's one in the oven."

She wished she could find it in herself to curse him and shock him into listening to her. She owed him too much. She needed to repay her parents. "And what about after?"

"Your mother could take care of him."

Him! Even worse, a boy baby. Shannon exhaled every bit of air from her lungs that she could, then breathed in, deeply and slowly. Just as slowly she said, "It's not going to happen, Dad. We need to think of another way to keep me home. Maybe the bike shop."

"Or you could just keep having them until the war is over."

"Get off it, Dad. I'm not cut out to be a baby machine. Would you teach me the bike business if I was your son?"

"You didn't tell me you wanted the business. I wouldn't have closed it."

"You know, when you're gay, you spend a lot more time working out how to live your life. Straight people practically get handed instructions, starting from birth. We have to figure out who we are, what we are, that's it's okay to be what we are and how to get along in a world where we're not exactly the most popular kids. Besides, I had a job then." A job she thought would last, a girl she thought would last, a home she thought she'd live in forever.

In the motel with Lina, she'd switched the clock radio immediately to country. Lots of guitar: strumming, strumming, strumming. Lina's turn-on trick: sweeping her long blonde hair across Shannon's breasts. Shannon would strum, not a guitar, but Lina's clit, with her thumb, then inside, lunging in with her thumb, shimmying out, slowly, Lina never failing to gasp, ride Shannon's thumb, and come.

Her Dad spoke, startling her out of memory mode. "You talk like you don't have a choice about being--the way you are."

"I don't," she said for at least the hundredth time. If he could see inside her mind he'd be convinced. Short of that, he was never going to get it, was he?

"You really blame it on your mom and me." "No, Dad," she said, seething even as she tried to cool down. "I give you credit. I like being who I am."

"You're a good enough kid," he told her. "We should have had more children. A son for me. A girly girl for your mother. We were too darned old. We thought one was enough."

She stopped herself from rubbing her palms on the denim covering her thighs and wondered if she'd ever make anyone happy by being herself. "How about you finding a cute young thing and having more babies?"

"What young thing would want this retreat?"

"You'd be surprised, Dad," she said, thinking it would be a perfect way to get him off her back.

There was no sound of rain, just the thunder of a couple of skate boarders rolling by. She set aside her anger, bent over her dad's chair and gave him a strapping sideways hug. "I'd better get going. Yolanda Whale's driving me back to Pipsboro. I need to meet her."

"You going to see your mother?" He looked at his watch. She'd given it to him last Christmas and he'd been impressed that it was a Field and Stream watch. "She's working at the bakery this weekend, but she should be home now."

"No time this week. Next Saturday--if I'm still stateside." As she closed the door, she heard her father raise the volume on his bowling show.

What was it to him if she went to Iraq? She thought, easy come, easy go, right Dad?

She'd ridden her green Raleigh around Pipsboro and Laconia so much that it felt like part of herself. She pressed MP3 ear buds into her ears, swung a leg over the bike and rode toward the bar on the edge of town, listening to Katy Perry's *I Kissed a Girl*, anger making her pedal way fast. It was chilly and damp, but the clouds held their rain for the moment. As she rode she breathed in the hot exhaust of a laundromat, petroleum fumes from a quick oil change shop, and the chocolate scent of the famous candy maker. Her father was so stubbornly dense about some things. Babies, she thought in disgust as she tested her hand brakes after splattering through a puddle. A war injury couldn't be worse than what having babies did to your body.

The sky grayed over as she neared the bar and she felt chilled. She got there just as a needling drizzle wet her face and the backs of her hands.

Yolanda hadn't arrived yet. She rolled her bike into the back hall by the bathrooms. At 4:00 in the silent afternoon Dougie and Lew didn't have a problem with that. As she brought her damp rucksack up to the bar she felt her shoulders drop from the direction of her ears. She hadn't realized how tense she'd been until she got to this little beer-swamp.

"You have my grapefruit juice today, Lew?"

"With seltzer or without?"

"With." She wanted to celebrate in some small way, but didn't want to jinx anything by saying why.

Lew raised his pale eyebrows at her. "What are you celebrating?"

"You know me too well."

"Like I could avoid it." He had the gay male inflection down perfectly except for a bit of wheezing from his asthma. "Sometimes you're the only one I see all afternoon." Lew was a balding man who had once had waist-length blonde hair and lived in New York where, rumor had it, he'd been a teenaged hustler. Now his narrow shoulders hunched as if to hide his head and he wore an awful aftershave which he reapplied regularly to cover the smell of his office, as he called the bar. "You don't want to tell me? Try and keep your secrets from your Auntie Lew. It'll be more fun to use my imagination."

They were both silent while he found the grapefruit juice and added the seltzer. Lew put the drink on the counter and said, "Just tell me her name."

She loved the bubbly grapefruit tang. "What name? There is no name!"

"Okay, have it your way."

His teasing eyes made her relent. "Maybe you can come up with a name."

"She didn't tell you? What did you call her in the dark?"

"I need a name for a bike shop."

Lew raised his eyebrows and cocked his head to one side. "Really," he intoned, but she couldn't tell if he was shocked, impressed or skeptical. All three?

"More like maybe," she answered.

"There's a space for rent right next to us here."

"Oh, right, like parents are going to send their kids to a repair shop next to a gay bar."

She imagined the bike shop's back room. Lina, her lost Lina, at the bar. Shannon would lure her next door. Nothing to sit on but an arm chair where Shannon would use a laptop to keep her books. Lina in her lap. Shannon would order her off and tell her to lose the clothes. She'd strip too. Naked, warm, soft Lina, skin to skin. Lina's bottom wriggling against her thighs, seated sideways, legs across the arm of the chair. She'd tell Lina, spread your legs, and put her hand in the hot hideaway between them, let Lina wriggle against the pads of her fingers, legs falling further apart, pelvis seeking the sun, Shannon's lips on hers to dampen her glad shout.

"Besides," Shannon told and Lew, "I want to stay in Pipsboro."

"Don't we all."

"But I think I know a way to make it work."

"Pipsboro Bike Repair," suggested Lew.

"That's short and sweet."

"Why don't you just get a job? Being a small business owner can be a drag." She put the cold glass against a cheek. "So can being on unemployment when it's about to end." "What about the deployment threat that got you drunk last night?"

"Dad doesn't think owning a business will keep me home."

"Could you locate this bike shop in, say, Nova Scotia?"

"You think this is a joke. I checked that out at the library this morning," she said. "Canadian law isn't what it was for Vietnam. I'd have to talk the Canadian immigration board into believing I'm a refugee. Me, the original gay patriot, a refugee from America?"

"I don't see it," said Lew. "You're an apple pie dyke if I ever saw one."

"I don't see it either, but, Lew, the maximum penalty for deserting in wartime is death."

"You're joshing me."

"Usually a soldier gets five years or even less, but her life is ruined. If I can't get a job now, who's going to hire a deserter?" She leaned her face into her hands, elbows on the pitted but highly polished bar.

"Shit," Lew said. His voice, in the dark, silent chamber of the empty bar, startled her. "Yolanda's parallel parking out front."

"Is your rig parked out there?"

"Thank the gods, no."

They both watched as Yolanda rocked her small red truck forward and back, back and forward, time after time. Finally, when the pickup was straight, she went into reverse one last time and rammed the car behind her.

"Girl!" cried Lew as the second car's horn began a pulsating honk.

Yolanda pulled her truck forward and got out. She approached the honking car stealthily, as if pouncing on it might stop the noise. Across the street, a woman burst out of the beauty salon's door, her hair in pink rollers, a jumbo translucent styling cape streaming with her flight, keys in an upraised hand. Shannon and Lew got to the door in time to hear her holler at Yolanda, "I had my keys ready! I watched you! I knew you were going to hit it and make me come out in the rain!" She'd raised her cape till it covered the rollers and her fleshy white face stuck through the hole. The woman turned off the alarm then went around to the bumper, bent over and inspected it minutely.

As soon as the honking stopped, Yolanda crashed between Lew and Shannon into the bar and hid behind Lew.

"Damn gays!" the woman shouted over her shoulder as she lumbered back toward Gabriella's Beauty Grotto.

"There's that too," Shannon said as they left the doorway. "If I went over, you know they'd put me on some damn convoy that might as well have a bulls eye on it. Gay cannon fodder."

"Over where?" Yolanda asked. Lew had grabbed a bottle of Yolanda's ale and opened it for her. The metal cap rattled under the bar. "Oh--the letter. What did your dad say?"

"He wants me to have a baby."

Yolanda said, "Ouch."

"Wait a minute," Lew said. "Let's don't toss the baby with the bath water. Dougie and I would love a baby."

"Don't look at me. I am so not interested."

Yolanda had a booming laugh. "You'd have to stop drinking so much grapefruit juice. The kid would come out bright yellow and spitting seeds."

"You're forgetting the father's genes," said Lew. "It might just have yellow hair, like its incredibly handsome dad," he said, smoothing back his blonde wisps.

"Cut it out, you two. The whole baby thing is disgusting. I would never do that to myself." She mimed sticking a finger down her throat and retching, but she was getting really irritated.

"You'd rather get blown up by an improvised explosive device than have a baby?"

"In a Baghdad minute."

Yolanda held out her mug for a refill. "You could go on welfare if you had a kid." "Oh for crying out loud. Get off it, you bozos. I come to The Landing to get away from this kind of hassling." Yolanda laughed when Lew said, "We could do it by turkey baster."

"Later," said Shannon. She could hear the heels of her basketball sneakers pound the wooden floor with anger. She wheeled her bike by them, fast.

"Hey, don't you want your ride back to Pipsboro?" called Yolanda. It was darker and raining a little harder, but she pushed off on the Raleigh and raced toward the Bay. A driver hit a horn as she streaked onto Weirs Boulevard, her brakes close to useless. The

lake had a swampy smell. Her calves were burning by the time she got to the bridge and she wanted to fly right off it, to dive, bike and all, into the water and be declared DOA at Lakes Region General, where she'd been born to some stranger.

Peddling against the now blustery lake wind along Route 3, she thought about what she'd really wanted her dad to say. "Don't go--we'll do whatever we have to so you can get out of it." She'd wanted him to say, "With the college courses you had and your motor pool work, you can fix more than bikes in your shop: snowmobiles, electric scooters, lawn mowers. We'll take business away from the fellas who won't hire you. I'll bet there's some old foggy around here I can talk into letting go of his small engine tools cheap." She'd wanted Yolanda or Lew to say, "The Guard doesn't give you much choice, do they? That sucks. Go ahead and sign the thing and, if they call, we'll hide you if that's what you need." Instead, they'd all acted like going over there was about as serious as a *M.A.S.H.* rerun.

Maybe, now that Lina was gone, there would be someone over there for her, a love interest in her own *M.A.S.H.* tent. When they weren't dodging incomings, she'd sneak into the un-Lina's cot. Uniform off, maybe she'd have dark curly hair. Maybe she'd welcome Shannon's mouth in the night, in the heat of the desert. Maybe Shannon's tongue would love her taste and lap at her, thirsty for the cream of a woman's excitement.

She pedaled her bike with the energy of her screaming desires. Yolanda didn't catch up with her until the Pipsboro side of the channel bridge.

"We were joshing you," called Yolanda when she pulled over, kicking up water.

She hoped Yolanda would think her tears were rain. It was still five miles to Pipsboro and Yolanda refused to leave until Shannon, who hadn't bothered to don her rain gear, put her bike under the tarp in the truck and agreed to get out of the rain. While Yolanda watched and sucked on her bottle of ale, Shannon took the letter from her pocket and crumpled it. She walked to the lake side of the bridge and bounced the soggy ball of paper into the air, then caught it, hoping the wind would take it out of her hands. She imagined what her Dad and friends must have been thinking when she told them about the letter: *not much of a life to give up.*

The fickle wind had calmed and wouldn't blow it away. With an abrupt movement, she shoved the letter back into her pocket and wiped her runny nose with a soaked sleeve.

She'd show them. There was more to Shannon Wiley than having babies. She was going places. Maybe just Iraq or Afghanistan, but--Going Places, she thought. What a terrific name for a mobile bike service when she came home.

Treehugger

by Catherine Lundoff

THE PARK RANGER who found me was the most beautiful thing I'd seen in three days of tree sitting. Of course, that might have been because I was lying on a ledge right about where I'd fallen 2 hours earlier. I was all tangled up in my harness and I could barely move so she could have been bright blue with tentacles and I would have been overjoyed to see her.

As it happens, she wasn't. No, she was brunette and curvy with dark brown eyes and lips that I would have wanted to kiss under other circumstances. Which these were not.

I still took a moment to appreciate the view, because I'm just that kind of gal. Not only was she hot, but she was wearing the uniform. That was my dirty little secret, something I'd never share with the other members of "Save Our Forests," my affinity group: I had a thing for women park rangers. It might have been the hats. Or maybe those nice snug shorts they wore during the summer. Or the way their shirts hung over their breasts. I'd even admit to liking the belts and the radios and the whole butch persona, at least when I had a shot or two in me.

Right about then, I was longing for anything that might boost my courage as she climbed down and stood over me. "Damn. How the hell did you get yourself this tangled up? Anything feel broken?" She knelt down and started checking my arms and legs.

When she got to my ankle I gathered that rolling my eyes back in my head and turning green was almost as good as a verbal answer. "Sorry." She gave me a charming grimace. "Okay, then. No walking down the mountain for you. I'll go up top and radio for help. Back in a minute."

I had just enough energy to reach out through the webbing and grab her wrist. "Don't."

She stared at me for a few seconds, and then followed my glance up the trunk of the breathtakingly huge old tree I'd been sitting in. My little platform was just visible from the ledge. That and the hazard tape I'd wrapped the tree in to mark it. "Crap," she said at last. "Look, I'll cut you out of the harness, but then I have to call this in. I think you're hurt and it's my job."

"I've got to save the tree. If you call in, they'll just arrest me and cut it down." My voice was raspy what with how dry my throat was, but I knew I had to make her understand.

She stared at me for what seemed like five minutes, but probably wasn't. Then she leaned back on her heels and looked up at the tree. Or, it occurred to me as I looked up with her, maybe she was looking at the massive storm clouds above it, the ones that seemed to have blown in out of nowhere in the last hour or so.

At last she sighed. That was when I registered the nametag on her uniform. It said 'Sandra Rick.' I met her eyes, "Ranger Rick? Really?" I asked. "I thought you'd be shorter and furrier."

She rolled her eyes. Apparently that joke had made the rounds of the department a time or two. "Yeah, yeah, very funny." She scowled and looked away down the hill, clearly weighing her options.

"You could help me get out of this first, then decide." I pulled at the various nylon harness straps with my free hand.

"Or I could leave them on so it'd be less trouble to bring you in." Her dark eyes glistened with an amused look that got my juices going.

My juices must have been what was doing the talking, given what I said next. "Oh, I could think of lots more fun things you could do with me, seeing as I'm tied up already." Then I blushed, just to show how sophisticated I was.

Ranger Sandra (I couldn't bring myself to call her by a raccoon's name) looked a little startled, then intrigued. "How about you introduce yourself first?"

Oh yeah, that. "Cassie Williams." There was giant clap of thunder overhead, like nature was giving me some accompaniment. We both jumped about a foot.

"Okay, that does it. I love the tree too, but we need to get out of here." She stepped out of my reach and grabbed her radio. Lightning flashed overhead and the radio crackled. We could hear bits and pieces of transmission before the static took over. "This is Rick checking in, over." She was yelling into it and the antenna was stretched out as far as it would go.

There was lots more crackling, but that was about it. She groaned as the first raindrops splattered down on us. "Alright, let's get you up and moving." I heard something click and then there was a flash as she opened her knife and started sawing through one of the nylon straps. She followed it up by cutting another and then I could finally move my other arm. The pins and needles screamed through it while she cut away another strap.

Then the rain hit us. In a few minutes it was pouring so hard I couldn't see the trees, mine or the others, anymore. That was when I started crying. This would be what the hill would look like after all the trees got cut down: just a gray bunch of wet nothing. And it was all my fault. If I hadn't fallen asleep and fallen off my platform, I'd still be up there protecting them.

"Hey, come on. Let's get you up top and we'll find some shelter. Can you stand?" Her voice was surprisingly gentle, her breath almost caressing my ear. And she had her arm around me, pulling me close to her warmth.

I sobbed into her shoulder, unable to ignore how good she smelled. It was a combination of flowers and the outdoors and a little sweat and a lot of rain. I wanted to stay there forever, with my face planted just above her breast and her arms cradling me.

She pulled me to my very unstable feet, doing it as slowly and carefully as she could. "Listen, Cassie, I need you to climb up with me. We're in a lot of danger here and we'll be safer higher up. Can you put your hand here?" She placed my hand on an exposed tree root.

I leaned away from her and into the dirt. "Ankle's just sprained. I hope." Then nearly collapsed but she caught me and started pushing me up.

"I'll look at it when we get up there. Come on, bend your knee and pull yourself up with the highest roots you can reach." Sandra bent down and grabbed my bad leg. Then she heaved just as the pain made its way up my numb limbs. I bit back on a scream, or three, but I dragged myself up as best I could. Between the two of us, she managed to get me up on the hill, then crawled up to collapse next to me in the mud.

We scrambled to our feet, or foot in my case, and headed for some bushes under the trees. "Lay down on this." Sandra pulled a plastic poncho from a little knapsack that she had clearly left up top while she went down after me. I dropped like a heap of wet rags and just lay there letting the rain wash the mud off me.

Since my eyes were shut, I didn't see her come back with the pine branches. Or the two logs, on what must have been her second trip. I did sit up and try and help while she put together a lean-to, but I wasn't much use. In the meantime, the rain didn't let up at all so when we were done, we were sprawled on wet plastic under wet branches in wet clothes.

Sandra lay there a moment, then groaned. "Oh great, managed to forget to check your ankle." She started to wiggle out, but stopped when I put my hand on her arm.

"Let's just let it wait until it stops raining. It's already swollen." I tried to smile, but wasn't too successful, judging from her expression.

It was around this time that it finally dawned on me that she was pressed up against me, her uniform clinging wetly to both of us. Those kissable lips were inches away. Did I dare? But maybe this wasn't the time. My ankle throbbed and my clothes were sticking to the plastic. A few drops of rain trickled down through the branches into my eye. I shut both of them and tried to think pure thoughts. And ended up thinking about deforestation again. Another tear ran down my cheek before I could wipe it away.

Sandra sighed. "Alright, so I get it about the trees. But do you really think that sitting in a platform in the biggest tree in this forest until you fall out is really going to do anything?"

"As opposed to doing the lumber company's dirty work and forcing us out?" I snorted and stopped crying. "Yes, of course we can accomplish something: it gets press and attention

and then people find out what's going on. These are old growth trees. Don't you care? I thought that's what being a ranger was all about." That and the babes. But I didn't say that part out loud. I also didn't mention how much I used to dream about being a ranger when I grew up, back when I was a kid. More of a kid.

Sandra tucked her arm under her head and studied me like I was a new species of beetle or something. Her expression was thoughtful and managed to be distant, even though we were all of six inches apart. "Not exactly. It's about educating people about nature and protecting the animals. Looking out for forest fires. And working for the Park Service, which is part of the federal government, also means following its rules and regulations, including the ones that cover timber sales on public land."

I shivered. Then shivered again. Maybe it was getting colder. Or maybe I was just wet and sore and tired. And disappointed. This was as close as I'd ever gotten to a real ranger, and I wanted her to understand. I wanted it very badly. I wrapped my arms around as much of myself as I could reach and tried to think warm thoughts.

There was a flash overhead and I jumped. Then, I was being pulled close and held. Ranger Sandra had reached out and touched someone, namely me. I was being pressed up against her warm, wet cotton shirt, her full breasts smushed into mine. I scooted in closer, letting my hips and legs rest against hers. I buried my face in her shoulder, my heart racing. What if this didn't mean what I hoped it meant?

We lay like that for a while, letting our bodies settle into each other. I could feel her heartbeat and the rhythm of her breathing. The pressure of her body against mine was making me ache, but in a good way. I wanted to take the next step, let my hands wander, let my mouth find hers. But I was too chicken. So instead, I just lay there and imagined what it would be like.

Apparently she was wondering too. Her hand slid carefully around my shoulders, and slowly down my back, leaving a trail of gooseflesh as it went. I could feel her face turn and her lips brush the skin of my neck. "Nice tat." Her voice took on a husky growl that went straight through me, melting my bones and everything else on the way. Soon I wasn't just wet from the rain. I turned my face toward hers and she kissed me.

I kissed back, letting my lips part under hers, welcoming her tongue into my mouth. I twined mine in hers, savoring her fruity rich taste. We shifted and she broke off the kiss. I gasped as she trailed her tongue over the damp skin of my neck, exploring the vine tattoo that ran down my neck and over my shoulder.

I moved my fingers up to the buttons on her shirt and began to unbutton them, trying not to make an idiot of myself. I was getting to touch an actual park ranger, and not just any ranger but the hottest one ever. I stopped unbuttoning so I could caress the fabric of her shirt. The wet cloth rolled between my fingers, softer and tougher than anything I'd ever caressed before.

Sandra bit my breast through my shirt, pulling a moan up from somewhere around my toes. Which in turn made me move my ankle. "Ow!" I pulled away, reached down and banged my head on one of the lean-to branches. Perfect. "Smooth" was my middle name today.

"Oh crap, I forgot." Sandra wiggled away, leaving a big aching empty space in her wake. I whimpered. Then yelped as she started unlacing my boot. "All right. This is going to hurt." I started to brace myself, but it was too late. She yanked and the boot came off in her hand. At the same time, she slipped in the mud and landed in a puddle out in the downpour hammering the woods around us.

We stared at each other and she threw her head back and started to laugh. She had a rich, hearty laugh that shook her whole body. The rain poured into her mouth and down her face and through her hair, transforming her from ranger to nature goddess. I stared at her, wondering if I could crawl out to her, lick the drops off her skin, bury my face between her legs and drink her in until we floated away in the rain.

She tilted her head back up and grinned at me. Then she moved over to check my ankle. She grabbed something out of her pack that made my heart sing: namely, a first aid kit. Of course. I might just be in love.

A few moments of bone-jarring pain later and my ankle had been sprayed down with something cool and numbing and tightly wrapped. I reached out and grabbed her hand just as she finished up. "Beautiful and competent, does it get any better than that?" She raised an eyebrow and I buried my face in my hands. "Oh god, that was sooo cheeseball!"

She unlaced my other boot, then turned them both upside down so they wouldn't fill up with water. She did the same with hers before she crawled back in. We stared at each other for a moment. "Thanks," I said, finally.

Then she was in my arms and we were kissing and biting each other's lips, tearing off our clothes with no time to savor the feel of fabric. Or to think about fantasies coming true. Our bodies slid together, slick with desire and mud and the rain that showed no signs of letting up. I gripped her thigh between mine, riding her muscles so that her skin and my clit ground into a spicy mix that sent shocks through the rest of my body.

Sandra bent her head to take my nipple into her mouth and the suction of her lips pulled every nerve ending I had up with it. My back arched as I buried my fingers in her hair, marveling at how soft it was. She tongued my nipple against her teeth and I grabbed for her breast, desperate to make her feel what I felt.

She caught my hand and pushed it back to pin it over my head. Then I could feel her free hand on my thigh, stroking my skin on its way to where I nearly begged her to touch me. A few seconds more, and I knew I would be pleading with her. I ached inside so much that it felt like nothing was ever going to fill me up. That thought hit me at the same time that she released my wrist and slid lower on me.

I watched, well, gasped for breath really, as she positioned herself between my legs, her naked butt exposed to the rain. Then she swiped her tongue up and over the general vicinity of my clit and suddenly I was on fire. Her tongue circled and I bucked against her mouth as her fingers found their way inside me. Her tongue swirled and caressed while her hand thrust into me until I surrendered completely to the wave of sensation. I came against her hungry mouth, my muscles convulsing so hard, I nearly brought the lean-to down on our heads.

Then I pulled her up out of the rain and licked my own juices from her lips. I managed to get my hand between her thighs, letting her wetness pour down over my fingers like the rain outside. Carefully, I maneuvered her over and climbed on top of her, but I was so awkward it felt like it was my first time ever. My ankle howled but I ignored it as best I could, concentrating on pleasuring her.

I tried to move down her body as she'd done on me, but couldn't stop a hiss of pain from escaping my lips. She grabbed my shoulders and held me in place while I twisted a little to ease the stress on my foot. I concentrated instead on thrusting my fingers into her, letting them find their way inside her like explorers looking for the source of a new and exotic river.

That was when it hit me: I could almost feel the trees around and I could feel the rain and earth. We were taking it back, reclaiming what should have been ours from those who wanted to destroy it. I tried to put that in every stroke of my tongue, every caress of my hands. I licked and sucked and nibbled that awareness into my park ranger until Sandra shivered and shook beneath me.

The ankle caught up with me at last, of course. Well, that and the lack of food. I collapsed down on her as she relaxed from her final orgasm. She caught me, burying one hand in my short wet hair and tilting my face back. "You're pretty amazing considering the condition you're in. How's the ankle?"

I grimaced and my stomach growled louder than the rain outside. I hid my face in her shoulder. "Oops. Guess it's been awhile since lunch." I could feel her laugh under me, her chuckle working its way down into where our bellies met.

Then she slid me off as carefully as she could and went for her pack again. She rustled around for a minute and pulled out a couple of crumpled energy bars. "Looks like this is it."

"Don't they teach you how to hunt and forage in park ranger school?" I took the energy bar she held out. There was food up on my platform, I remembered now. I wondered if I could get up to it.

Sandra was rolling her eyes at me. "Yeah. Hunting and foraging are big. When it stops raining, I'll go out and track a deer for a day or two, then hit it on the head with a rock. Oh

wait, or I can walk two miles down to the highway and another mile into town, then eat at a restaurant."

"Point taken. Maybe we could do that sometime." I was proud of the way I sounded casual and all. Or at least I hoped I did.

"Sure. Right after you get out of jail and I get out of the dog house with my department manager over this little incident." She bit down on the energy bar and stared up at the branches of the lean-to. "At least it looks like it's going to stop finally."

Jail? I twisted around and did some staring upward of my very own. Clearly this wasn't going to be the bonding with the woody goddess of my dreams that I was picturing an hour ago. When I started sitting in my tree, I knew that jail time if they got me down was a very real option, but somehow, it was different when it came out of her mouth. Now I wasn't just hungry, I was cold and depressed.

It must have been coming off me in waves. Sandra reached out pulled me up to her, wrapping her arms around me. "Of course, I've got a better idea. How about we stay here for a little while longer, then you get dressed and head down into town? I'll give you my apartment key and you can wait for me there. In the meantime I'll go back and tell them I couldn't find you in the storm. No jail, no manager problems, all good." She kissed me hard and I kissed her back, savoring the taste of energy bar like never before.

I was hoping that would be enough to ignore the little voice asking, "Then what?", in the back of my head. And for a little while it was. My fingers tingled as I ran them over her skin and I licked the rain off her shoulders. She was smiling when I looked back up; after that, my body decided I'd do my worrying later.

When later rolled around, the wanting had settled down to a pleasant ache, somewhat more intense than my longing for a decent veggie burger. We kissed until she dozed off. I surprised myself by joining her sooner than I expected, what with the cold and ankle.

Of course, when I woke up a little while later, I was freezing. Sandra had pulled away and had tried to wrap herself in the plastic at some point in the night so I was lying partially on the cold wet ground. I reached out for my clothes and found a handful of wet cloth. Still, it was better than nothing. I slipped out of the lean-to as quietly as I could so as not to wake her.

Once outside, I could see that it was pretty close to dawn. The trees were shadowy and gray around the lean-to, everything taking on that pearly glow. I pulled myself together and got some clothes on while I thought about what to do next. The offer of Sandra's apartment was tempting. It wouldn't be too hard to come up with a story that everyone else would believe. And I'd get me a real-live genuine park ranger in the bargain. Not an easy thing to turn down.

I found a slightly drier patch on the ground place to sit on while I struggled with getting my boots on. Then I leaned against one of the big old trees and just let the morning flow over me. God, I needed a coffee. And a breakfast sandwich of some sort. But it was beautiful up there on the hill in the quiet. I could even see parts of Sandra, still naked and sleeping, under the branches, a sight that filled me with a warm happy glow that was almost enough to dry my clothes while other things stayed wet. This had been the best accident of my short clumsy life to date.

From somewhere down the hill, I thought I heard a chainsaw revving up. I looked at my tree immediately, then at my harness where it lay on the ground in a muddy bundle. I picked it up, checking to see what of it was salvageable. While I tried to clean it off, I wondered how long it would be before my friends came to bring supplies and check on me. I thought I should wake Sandra soon if the cold and the dawn didn't do that for me.

Or at least, that was what I meant to do. A few minutes later and I had the harness untangled. It looked like I could get a few of the cut straps tied together and like it might support me once I did. I hoped. I re-laced my boot around my ankle, tightening it up enough that I thought it would support me.

By the time Sandra woke up and came out of the lean-to, I was halfway up the trunk to my platform. It hurt like hell but I was getting closer by the minute. "Shit. Get back down here!" was my first indication that my lovely ranger was greeting the day. I thought about turning around but I didn't think I could respect myself later, especially if it paved the way to cutting my tree down. I scrambled and grabbed and heaved for another couple of minutes until I finally collapsed on my platform.

Then I turned around and looked down. Sandra had been getting dressed while I'd been climbing. Now she was standing at the foot of the tree, hands on her hips while she glared up at me. She looked so fierce and rangery that if I'd been on the ground in front of her, I probably would have groveled. As it was, I was going to settle for drooling, just a bit. I couldn't believe she'd gone for me in the first place, even if she was pretty furious with me right now. I tried my best placating smile. "I left my phone number in your shirt pocket."

She was still glaring as she unbuttoned it and pulled out the little scrap of paper. "So you did." The way she said it could've restored the polar ice caps. I figured I'd blown my only shot at her ever using it and thought about beating my head against the trunk of the tree, just in case it would help.

And it did. That image restored my sense of priorities. I was up here for a purpose and I couldn't imagine any ranger worth my time not secretly sympathizing. Still, I crossed my fingers for luck, up where she couldn't see them, that she wouldn't toss that scrap of paper. That, of course, was when my buddies showed up. Sandra stood aside and let them shout up at me. She didn't stop them from loading supplies into my basket when I lowered it down. From what I could see, everyone was being very polite to each other, if not precisely friendly.

Her radio crackled back to life as I watched and she gave me an unreadable look as she called in. I kept my friends occupied while she kicked in the lean-to's supporting beam. There went the evidence; the lumber company and her boss must be on their way up. After that, it was all over but the shouting. They tried to get me down, I stayed up and it all made for a long day. But at the end of it, my tree and I were still there. And as Sandra left, she tilted her face up and gave me what looked like a wink. I knew I wasn't imagining that she'd patted her shirt pocket as she walked away.

Package Deal

by Andi Marquette

PAVLOV'S DOG. THAT'S what Kristen was like every time she saw the brown delivery truck pull up out front. Maybe it wasn't Maylee this time. Maybe it was some guy instead. And maybe he'd be taking packages to the clothing store next door, and Kristen wouldn't have to deal with her massive, wholly stupid crush.

She forced herself to stare at the paperwork on the counter when the door opened, the electronic ding echoing through the store. Kristen looked up at Maylee and tried to pretend complete coolness. "Oh, hey, girl. What's up?" Besides my libido when you come in here, she finished silently. Stupid. Just another chick with a crush on a delivery woman. What was it about those damn uniforms? And was it the uniform? Or what was inside? Maybe both.

"Got some packages for you. Could be those skateboard decks you've been waiting on." Maylee had pushed her sunglasses onto her head and she watched Kristen with a smile.

"Cool. Alan's been frothing at the mouth for those." Kristen moved the paperwork aside to make room for the first box, trying not to look at Maylee's arms, smooth and tanned with nicely defined musculature from lifting boxes all day. She wore the short sleeves of her uniform shirt rolled up, so that most of her biceps showed. If she moved just right, Kristen could see the bottom of a tattoo on Maylee's left arm, though she wasn't sure what it was.

"I don't froth," came another voice. "We, the staff of Boards and Beyond, never froth. That implies lattes, and I'm a Red Bull man." Alan's grin lit up his sun-burnished California surfer boy good looks as he approached the counter. He pulled a rag from the back pocket of his Hawaiian-print shorts and wiped his hands. "What's the word, Maylee?"

"I'm betting decks." She set the box on the counter next to Kristen. "Be right back. There're a couple more."

Alan waited until Maylee was outside before issuing a long, low whistle. "Damn, she's hot. She could be a poster girl for the delivery company. If everybody that worked for them was that hot, there wouldn't be any others."

Kristen tried to ignore him like she ignored the way Maylee's shorts fit her, and handed him a pair of scissors. "Why don't you do the honors?"

"Gladly." He used a blade of the scissors to slit the packing tape on the top of the box. "Super cool," he announced. "Check this out." From beneath the packing peanuts, he pulled a multicolored skateboard deck that featured different-colored skulls in various sizes. "That is seriously bitchin'. Would you call the *City Beat* and run the ad? Make it for Friday. That gives us a week to get this shit out and priced. Oh, and post to the blog and the regular haunts. Let's do a ten percent discount on decks, fifteen if they buy wheels." He dug around in the box and pulled out another deck, this one sleek black with red gothic letters on it. "Sweetest decks in San Diego," he said with another grin.

Kristen made a note on a sticky pad next to the cash register, thinking about how Maylee left the top button on her shirt undone, though she always wore a white T-shirt underneath. She tapped her pen on the notepad, trying to concentrate. Once the ad ran, the shop would be packed Saturday and Sunday with testosterone. Good business, but it meant she had to nut up, too. She looked up as Maylee pushed the door open with her back, pulling a dolly loaded with two more large boxes. As annoying as Alan could be, he was right. Maylee was definitely hot. And the way her ass looked in those shorts...Jesus. Who knew that shade of brown could look so good?

"Decks?" Maylee asked as she expertly wheeled the dolly around to face the counter. She took her electronic clipboard off the top box and set it next to Kristen. Alan immediately moved to unload the boxes and Kristen tried not to focus on Maylee's crotch.

"You're a winner," he said, placing the first box behind the counter. "How about I take you out for a celebratory dinner for your keen powers of observation?"

"Ah, sorry. I'm working."

"When you're not," he pressed. Kristen suppressed a laugh. He probably wasn't used to women turning him down. Maylee probably had some hot guy stashed away, anyway.

"I work all the time." She smiled and turned the clipboard so it faced Kristen. She took a stylus from her shirt pocket and handed that to Kristen. She signed the display face and handed both items back to Maylee.

"Coffee, then. I'll buy you a cup for the road." Alan refused to surrender.

"I'm cutting back. But thanks." Maylee was too professional to offer anything but a cute little smile to his come-on. Kristen thought that he was about to try another line when the door opened again and a twenty-something skate punk with a green mohawk flounced in, black cargo shorts hanging just below his knees, white Xtreme Games tee covering his waistband.

" 'Sup?" he said to Kristen with a chin bob in her direction.

"New decks are in, Trey. Wanna try one?" Alan shoved the black one in his direction. "You're promoted today to products tester."

"Awesome. But you're warned. It's gonna get thrashed."

"I expect so." Alan made a notation on the invoice that was in the plastic pouch on the outside of the box. "Let me know how long it takes to do so. I want to make sure these stand up to the hype. And we'll blog about that, too. In the meantime, take these in the back and unpack 'em."

"Sweet." Trey picked up the box from the counter.

The phone rang and Alan answered, leaving Kristen with Maylee, which made her super nervous. But then, Kristen was always nervous around attractive women. Stupid, she remonstrated herself. Just talk to her. "Thanks," Kristen said, for lack of anything else to say. "Maybe next time you'll bring in those surfboards Alan ordered."

"Probably." Maylee put the stylus back in her breast pocket. "You surf?"

"Kinda sorta. Just started, actually. I figured I'd better learn since I work at a shop that sells boards."

"Been more the skater girl, huh?" Maylee smiled again and Kristen thought about what her hair would look like out of its tie, cascading in dark waves around her shoulders, and what her soft brown eyes would register if Kristen tracked kisses down Maylee's bare chest.

She cleared her throat. "Um, yeah. That's me. Crazy goth skater chick. Sort of out of place here, but I'm trying to go with the flow."

"Well, if you ever want some pointers on surfing, I'd be glad to show you." Maylee held the electronic clipboard like it was a textbook, against her thigh.

"Serious? You surf?"

"Girl, please. I'm from Hawai'i. If you don't surf from birth there, you're voted off the islands." She laughed then, a sound as warm and inviting as tropical waters. Kristen forced

herself to maintain eye contact, though she was so nervous now she was practically nauseated.

"That'd be really cool. But I warn you, I'm a total novice."

"No sweat. I've taught a couple other people from scratch. Just let me know. And surfing's kind of like skating. Similar principles. You brace on a board and ride. It's about balance."

"Cool," Kristen said again, and then she kicked herself for sounding so lame. "Yeah. Great."

Maylee's pager buzzed and she took it off her belt to look at it. "Sorry, but duty calls. Catch you next time." She waved and left, Kristen staring after her, thinking that before Maylee, she'd never looked twice at someone in a delivery uniform. Now, every time she saw one like Maylee's, she thought about Maylee, and what she'd look like underneath, and what she'd do if Kristen undid that short-sleeved shirt one button at a time. Probably smack the hell out of her, that's what. But in Kristen's fantasies, Maylee welcomed the attention, and in a couple of Kristen's images, Maylee delivered a whole different kind of package than the usual.

Kristen sighed as Maylee drove away from the curb, and she watched the truck for the couple of seconds it was visible out the front windows. Crushes were lonely places to be. At least Maylee had offered to take her surfing, though Kristen would have preferred a different kind of ride. Just one night, she thought. If she could have just one night with Maylee, she'd be more than happy. Nothing serious. Just one hot, sweaty night. She returned to the paperwork. Once Alan had hung up, she'd call the paper and then take some pictures of the decks to post on the blog. And maybe next time Maylee came in, Kristen would at least sound halfway articulate.

"I DO BELIEVE I have a thing for women in uniform," Alan said as a brown delivery truck pulled up in front of the shop two days later.

Kristen didn't respond. She didn't want him to know that she, too, had that same thing. Would it be Maylee today? She tried to pretend she wasn't watching, that she didn't care, but her heart was pounding a little harder than usual and the little ache between her legs echoed it. She saw Maylee emerge from the passenger side door of the truck and walk around the back. Kristen's heart pounded even harder, but she affected an air of nonchalance.

"Hey, hey," Alan said when Maylee entered the shop. She carried a rectangular box under her right arm and her clipboard in her left and she looked so damn sexy in her matching brown shorts and shirt, the collar of her T-shirt visible just above the second button on her uniform. "What do you think?" he asked.

"Wheels," Maylee said with a smile. She set the box on the counter. "Hey, Kristen."

"Hi," Kristen said, liking how her name sounded coming from Maylee. She handed the scissors to Alan and he opened the box.

"She scores. Wheels for my decks." He signed the clipboard with Maylee's stylus and handed it back. "You've got a hell of a batting average. Speaking of which, you like baseball?"

"No time for it," Maylee said, smiling again. It was like a game between her and Alan. He'd ask her out--half-teasing, half-not-- and she'd refuse. Kristen figured it was because Maylee had a regular guy. She didn't dare hope it was because Maylee preferred women, though the thought had occurred to her.

"Come on. One Padres game. I'll buy you a beer and a dog. Peanuts."

"I'm working," she responded as she slid the stylus back into her breast pocket. "But thanks."

"If you change your mind..." he said, raising an eyebrow rakishly.

"You'll be the first to know."

"That's what I like to hear." He picked up the box. "Hey, K. Blog this. Brand new shipment of Birdhouse Wheels, Hawk Falcon Six. Hot, baby. Hot. That and the new boards should bring us some business this weekend."

"Yep," Kristen said in acknowledgment as he headed to the back of the store.

"So I guess you can't do any surfing this weekend." Maylee reached for her clipboard, lying on the counter where Alan had been.

Kristen looked at her, confused.

"You'll be busy," Maylee continued. "Alan probably needs all hands both days. What's your schedule otherwise? Any chance I can take you out next weekend?"

Kristen swallowed hard. Did Maylee know how that sounded? Had she meant to add "surfing" to that question? "Um, I'm not sure. I'll have to check." Kristen hoped she sounded unfazed, like hot women wanted to take her surfing every day. No way was Maylee asking about a date. She had left the "surfing" part out of her request because she just assumed that Kristen knew she was talking about that. Right?

"Cool. I generally have Sundays off, so if that works for you, let me know." She took a business card from her pocket and placed it on the glass countertop in front of Kristen. "My cell's on the back. Give me a buzz as soon as you know."

Kristen stared at the card like it might bite her. C'mon, don't be so lame, she told herself. Pick it up. "Cool. I'll let you know the next Sunday I have off."

"Great." A slow, lazy smile pulled at Maylee's lips and Kristen thought about palm trees swaying over warm beaches and warmer caresses that coaxed more heat from her skin. "Hope you guys sell a ton this weekend."

"Thanks. Catch you next time."

"For sure. Cool shirt, by the way. Love Siouxsie and the Banshees." Maylee motioned at Kristen's tee. "Later." She turned and walked to the front door. Kristen stared after her, and continued staring as Maylee pulled the truck away from the curb.

She likes Siouxsie. Did she like other retro '80s goth stuff, too? Maybe she wore Clash shirts under her uniform. Somehow, that made the uniform even hotter. Thoughts of Maylee sizzled through Kristen's skull. One hot night. Would Maylee be into that? Kristen picked up the business card and slid it into the pocket of her black cargo shorts, afraid to look at the back. Sure, she was probably into it. With a guy. Maylee was probably straight, and all of Kristen's fantasizing was just going to bring her major disappointment. Oh, well. At least with fantasies, she got what she wanted, like images of Maylee in uniform unbuttoning Kristen's shorts and cupping her crotch. Then unzipping her uniform shorts, which were pulled tight over a bulge...

"Hey, go ahead and use the computer in the office to blog the wheels," Alan said behind her. "I'll take the counter 'til Dogstar gets in."

"All right." Kristen logged herself out of the cash register, hoping Alan hadn't seen her flush.

"You wanna thrash a deck, too?" Alan asked as she passed him.

She stopped. "For real?"

"Sure. You're a different kind of skater than Trey, and it'd be kinda cool to have a woman's perspective on the blog."

"Yeah, that'd be great. Which one?"

"Pick one. They're all the same brand. Just sign out the model." He logged himself into the register. "I'm more a board kinda guy. But the more skaters we get in here, the better for business."

"True. Thanks." She headed for the back store room, thinking about the deck she'd had her eye on. White, with a big red skull right in the center of the underside, surrounded by dozens of random red splatters. She'd put wheels on it right now then take it to her favorite skate haunts after work. That always cleared her head.

KRISTIN LANDED A 540 flip with practiced ease before she crouched on the skateboard, gathering speed. She launched herself and her board at the railing, roughly two feet above the ground. She tailslid about five feet before ditching the board and landing on her feet. It clattered to the concrete underfoot. Here it was, Friday, and it had held up pretty well, considering she'd slammed it around, on average, three hours a shot for the past three evenings. She picked the skateboard up and went back to her car, a beat-up red Volkswagen Bug that looked its thirty years. A few of the teenaged guys skating here waved at her and she waved back. They probably thought it was pretty weird for a college-aged woman to come out here and thrash with them, though they never gave her any problems. Some even offered pointers when she asked.

Nice enough guys. One had asked her out a while back. She'd declined, and made up a boyfriend in San Francisco so he wouldn't feel too bad. She drove to her apartment and wondered if Maylee would make up a boyfriend, too, if Kristen ever got the nerve to ask her out. Unless she already had one. Kristen retrieved her bag from the car's back seat, along with the skateboard, and climbed the stairs to her door. Once inside, she tossed her things onto her couch before turning on the alt-rock radio station and showering, where she stood for a while, thinking about how Maylee had said "take you out" instead of "take you out surfing." What did she mean? Nothing, Kristen scolded herself, and she turned the water off.

Done with that, she spent an hour working on a graphic she was freelancing for a skate shop in San Francisco. Before she went to bed, she picked up the business card from her bedside table and studied it for what must have been the thousandth time since Maylee had given it to her.

Kristen had memorized the number on the back, and she'd called it once yesterday. Thank God she'd gotten voicemail. She'd left a quick message, so that Maylee wouldn't think she was an asshole. Alan hadn't posted the next schedule, Kristen said, but as soon as he did, she'd let Maylee know. And then she'd hung up, practically shaking with nervousness. A reprieve, and tomorrow was Saturday. She'd be too busy at work to talk much to Maylee, if she called back. Kristen doubted she would, but just in case she did, Kristen would have a good excuse not to say much. She turned out the light and fell asleep thinking about brown delivery uniforms and a certain woman in one.

THE RAIN STARTED about two hours before closing. Between sales, Kristen stared out the window at it. Customers commented on how weird it was, this kind of rain in San Diego. Maybe El Niño was acting up, Trey said to Kristen as he bagged another set of wheels for a gangly pre-teen boy wearing a Tony Hawk T-shirt. Trey was cranky because he probably wasn't going to be able to ride tonight.

Kristen hadn't driven to work, since she only lived a mile away, but today, she longed for her car. All she had for transportation was the skateboard Alan was letting her ride, and she hated doing that in rain. She checked her cell again, and saw that someone had left a message. It would have to wait a few minutes. The line at the counter was ten deep.

As it turned out, she wasn't able to check it until an hour later. She recognized the number. Maylee. No way would she listen to it here. She'd wait until she was home, where she could listen in private. Even if Maylee decided that waiting for Kristen's schedule to clear was a waste of time, Kristen would get to see her regardless and eventually the crush would fade, but Kristen knew she'd never be able to see a brown delivery uniform again and not think of the summer she'd been into a hot Hawai'ian woman who once asked her if she surfed.

"Damn," Alan said as he cashed out the second register. "Great day, but I'm beat. You want to go for drinks with me and Dogstar?" he asked her.

"No, thanks," she said as she continued wiping the counter. Kristen wasn't much for drinking. It gave her a headache. "You guys go have fun. I have stuff to do."

"You taking a summer class?" He looked over at her.

"No, but I'm working on some songs and a couple of graphics for a local band."

He nodded and wrote something down on his ledger. Alan liked a paper record, too. "Awesome. You should bring your guitar in some time. Play us something."

She smiled. "Maybe."

"Chicks with guitars. Almost as hot as chicks in uniforms." He grinned at her and she bent to wipe particularly hard at an imagined smudge on the glass. She both dreaded and ached to hear Maylee's phone message.

"I have to meet Dog. You okay locking up?"

"Yep."

"You have a ride? This weather sucks."

"I'm fine. Thanks, though." She smiled at him. He was just being nice, but Kristen was always nervous around guys like him, who had ways of charming information out of people. She liked her goth mystique, liked that the skater guys who frequented the shop didn't hit on her and instead treated her as a fellow skater, asking her opinion on decks and shoes. Today she'd worn her Doc Martens, and she was glad for it because they stayed dry in rain better than skate sneakers.

"Okay. Call me if you need to," he offered. She waved at him before he left through the back and finished organizing a couple of displays that had been picked over by hordes of

customers. That done, she dimmed the lights, got her backpack and loaner skateboard, set the alarm, and let herself out the back in the sixty seconds allotted before the security system armed.

The rain had lessened, but it still came down enough to drench her before she would be halfway home. She stood underneath the back awning and slung her backpack on. She could use the board as an umbrella, saving her hair, though she wasn't sure why it mattered. "Whatever," she said softly as she entered the night and went around the building to the front, so she could walk home along a main thoroughfare. As much as she could look like a creepy goth vampire type--especially at night--Kristen wasn't a fan of attracting the wrong kind of attention. She'd rather deal with vampires, actually, than a herd of drunk college guys.

Nine o' clock on a Saturday and, fortunately, lots of traffic cruised by. This close to the beach, and even in the rain, people were out, laughing and bar-hopping. Kristen debated a stop into one of her favorite spots on the next block for a salad and an iced tea, but decided she'd rather be at home, where she could listen to Maylee's message in peace and fantasize about the body underneath that uniform and what she'd do with one hot night with her.

Two blocks into her walk home, a horn sounded behind her. Kristen jumped and turned, thinking it was some jerk-off who thought it would be funny to mess with the goth chick in the rain.

"Hey, girl." Maylee leaned out the side of her truck. "Where are you headed?"

Kristen held her skateboard flat over her head, so it deflected some of the rain. "Um, home." Thank God it was dark out here. Maylee couldn't see her blush.

"How far?"

"Not much. About a mile." She gestured with her head in the direction she had been walking.

"I'll drop you off. Come on. Get out of the rain."

Kristen hesitated. Accepting a ride from Maylee would be more than awesome, but what if she said something stupid? And wouldn't Maylee get in trouble for giving a civilian--is that what non-delivery people were called?--a ride?

"Come on," Maylee coaxed.

Kristen's feet made the decision for her, and took her between two cars parked along the curb to approach the truck. "Are you sure? Won't you get in trouble?"

"Nah. This is my last delivery. Go on in the back." She smiled and Kristen mounted the steps into the truck's interior. She brushed past Maylee and her skin erupted in goose

bumps. She stood next to the driver's seat, nervous, like she was breaking all kinds of rules, but excited, too, that she was going to be this close to Maylee, even though the ride would take less than ten minutes.

"Cool," Maylee said. She went into the back of the truck and took a flat parcel off one of the shelves. "Hang out here. I'll be right back."

"Okay." Kristen waited until Maylee bounded down the stairs before she moved, taking a position about halfway back. A dome light yellowed the truck's interior, which smelled of cardboard, metal, and a little bit of vanilla, like air freshener. Three metal shelves lined each side of the truck and a narrow corridor divided one side from the other. All of the shelves were empty. Kristen clutched the skateboard to her chest, seeking the security of familiarity. On her board, she always felt more confident in herself. Maybe she could get a little bit of confidence from the board's surface through osmosis. A little thrill chased itself through her stomach, though, as she thought about Maylee driving her home, in the truck, wearing her uniform. That kind of ride was just fine with her, though, if she could get a different kind of ride from Maylee...

"Done," Maylee said as she reappeared and hopped up the steps. She put her electronic clipboard into what looked like a saddlebag hanging from a hook on the wall behind the driver's seat. "Sit on the top step, if you want. It's more comfortable than standing."

Kristen complied, and set the board across her knees. "Thanks."

"Sure. Where to?"

"Stay on this street and go about a mile. It's The Palms, on the right."

"Oh, yeah. I know the place." Maylee put the truck into gear and started driving. "Busy today, huh?"

"Totally. We were slammed."

"Did you get my message?"

"I saw you had called, but I didn't have a chance to check voicemail." Kristen glanced up at her, hoping she wouldn't think that was rude.

"I figured. I just said that it was cool with me, and when Alan lets you know, just give me a call back." Maylee kept her eyes on the road. "You're working tomorrow, right?"

"Yeah. It'll be busy again. Even with the crappy weather, people are stoked about the new decks. Good thing you brought 'em. Where would we be without you and your trucks?"

"That's right. We always save the day. Don't you forget it."

Kristen laughed. If Maylee only knew how many of Kristen's days she'd saved.

"So, how long you been in San Diego?" Maylee asked, adjusting her position in the seat.

"Um, two years. I go to school at San Diego State."

"Right on. Majoring in what?"

"Art stuff."

Maylee laughed, now. "Stuff? Like painting? Printmaking? What?"

"Graphic design and multimedia." Kristen kept her eyes on her skateboard. Some day, she'd like to put her designs on skate decks.

"That is too cool." She slowed and stopped at a red light. "You have roommates?"

Kristen looked over at Maylee, trying to figure out why she was asking all these questions. "Yeah. But she's out of town for a month."

"She's a student, too?"

"Yep." Kristen turned one of the wheels on her skateboard. "She's a film major, so she's gone a lot doing projects."

"Perfect kind of roommate." Maylee accelerated as the light changed. "Mine's gone a lot, too. He's trying to be an actor, so he goes to lots of auditions. Plus, his boyfriend lives in L.A."

***Boyfriend.* Kristen stole another look at Maylee. At least she was gay-friendly. That was something. "Has he gotten any big parts?"**

"Not really. A couple of small ones on soap operas, but he keeps trying. Paying his dues." Maylee slowed again. "Here we are. I'll pull into the parking lot. Which one is yours?"

"Um, over there, on the second floor." Kristen pointed through the windshield at one of the blue doors above. The complex looked like a '60s-era Miami motel. All the apartments were accessed from the outside, and the owner kept it painted pink and turquoise. It was cheesy, but cheerful. And clean and well maintained.

"Hold on. Let me get a little closer. Don't want you to get too soaked." Maylee flashed her a smile and drove a few more feet. "There you go."

"Excellent. Thanks." Kristen used the handrail on the wall next to her to stand and she thought about getting soaked with Maylee, and it didn't involve rain. But she didn't go down the steps and Maylee didn't open the door. Kristen looked at her, waiting.

"Thanks for the company," Maylee said. She put her hand on the lever that Kristen knew was the door release. "Before you go-- are you seeing anyone?"

Kristen stared at her, and her tongue felt dry in her mouth. "Um," she managed after a few moments. Her heart hammered in her chest. Get a grip. It's just a question.

"Sorry if that was too personal this soon." Maylee shrugged, sheepish.

"No."

"No, it wasn't too personal?"

"No, it wasn't, and no, I'm not," Kristen said in a rush. "You?"

She gripped her board tighter and forced herself not to bite her tongue for a response like that.

Maylee smiled, and the expression in her eyes seemed to smolder on her lips as well. "No."

Thunder sounded overhead, and both Maylee and Kristen leaned toward the windshield, staring up at the sky. Within seconds, rain pounded the roof of the truck.

"Damn," Maylee said, loud enough for Kristen to hear. "Guess you'll be hanging out with me a little longer. If you don't mind." She caught Kristen's eye and Kristen felt something electrical in the air between them, like the lightning that tore the clouds, dragging another thunderclap with it. Maylee turned on the radio and tuned in the station that Kristen listened to. The rain increased, until it sounded like millions of nails falling on the roof. Maylee turned the music up a little, along with the heat, but she turned the interior lights off. She stood then.

"So we're both single," she said, and Kristen tried to swallow a gulp. Maylee gently pulled the skateboard from Kristen's hands and turned to set it on the seat. "I guess my next question is whether you prefer men or women. Although that probably should have been my first question."

She was so close that Kristen felt the warmth of Maylee's breath on her lips. And even if Kristen had preferred men, Maylee and her damn uniform would have changed her mind long before now.

"Women," Kristen managed. Her heart pounded behind her ribs, echoed in her throat, and she hoped she wouldn't pass out. Maylee, the hot delivery driver and surfer chick. Maylee, who always turned Alan down and who gave Kristen her cell number. Maylee was coming on to her. Even Kristen could see that.

"I thought so," Maylee said, and she leaned a little closer, until her mouth was barely a fingertip away from Kristen's, and Kristen thought about the first time she'd ever kissed a

woman, and how fireworks had exploded in her brain. Fireworks were exploding in her head now, and Maylee hadn't even touched her.

Without thinking, Kristen placed her hands on Maylee's hips, and the fabric of her uniform was smooth beneath her palms. Maylee cupped Kristen's face in her hands and kissed her, tentatively at first then long, slow, and deep. Kristen's blood pounded in her skull like the rain on the truck's roof and the warmth of Maylee's mouth made her wet in places the rain wouldn't. Maylee pushed her tongue between Kristen's lips, and her breath was hard and fast as Kristen accepted and sucked on it and Maylee's lower lip, marveling at how warm and soft both were, at how amazing it was that she was doing this.

Maylee pulled away and retrieved Kristen's skateboard. She handed it to her, a sultry smile on her lips. "Can I take that as a 'yes' to seeing you again?"

"Definitely." Kristen hoped she wasn't visibly trembling.

"Good. Call me when you get your schedule." Maylee brushed a strand of Kristen's hair out of her eyes, a gesture strangely tender and arousing. "I have a thing for skater goth chicks," she said in a way that made Kristen think about long nights and twisted sheets.

"Cool. I have this thing for hot delivery women." Did she sound stupid saying that? Inwardly, Kristen flinched, still not believing that she was here, or that Maylee had just kissed her.

"I think I might be able to accommodate that." Maylee opened the door of the truck. The rain had slowed to a light drizzle. Kristen hadn't noticed. But then, she'd had her mind and mouth on other things. "Hold that thought," Maylee said, brushing her lips against Kristen's cheek. "Sweet dreams." And she waited as Kristen exited, waited until Kristen had ascended to the second story, where she paused at the railing to wave at the truck below, though she couldn't see Maylee from this angle. The truck slowly backed up and Kristen waited now, until Maylee entered traffic and drove out of Kristen's line of sight, leaving her to the rain and her thoughts, which were filled with warm caresses and kisses and the smell of vanilla.

KRISTIN CLOSED OUT the cash register and sighed. She'd been at the shop since noon and they'd been busy most of the day again, just like yesterday, and she'd been on her feet most of it. She didn't feel it, though, because Maylee's kisses from Saturday seemed to linger on her lips and the way her fingers felt on her face overrode any complaining from her feet. What little she'd gotten that night in the truck only left her wanting more. So much more.

She hadn't spoken to Maylee since then, but Maylee had left a message on Sunday thanking her for Saturday and to please call when she got her schedule. Maylee was with family all day Sunday, anyway, so no biggie. Kristen stretched her arms above her and tilted her

head to alleviate cricks in her neck. Her cell rang. She pulled it out of her shorts pocket and caught her breath when she saw the ID.

"Hey," she answered, already wet.

"Closing up, are you?" came Maylee's voice.

"How--" Kristen turned toward the front door. Maylee stood on the other side, holding her phone to her left ear. She held a small brown box in her right hand.

"Think you have time for one last delivery today?" And Maylee's voice was warm and smooth, like a silk sheet falling across a bare thigh.

"Definitely." Kristen hung up and put her phone back in her pocket as she went around the counter to the front door. She unlocked it and Maylee slipped in. Kristen locked the door again. "Are you still working?" She motioned at Maylee's uniform and the oblong box she carried.

"Just finished. Thought I'd stop by and see if Alan posted the schedule."

Kristen grinned. "You're in luck. He did, and I was going to call you once I finished here. I've got Sunday off."

Maylee smiled back. "Excellent. I have a few boards, so if you've got a wetsuit, we're good to go."

"I can manage that."

"I figured you could." Maylee moved a little closer, and Kristen's stomach lurched in anticipation. "Are we alone?"

"Yeah."

Maylee smiled again. "Good. Wouldn't want to burst Alan's bubble."

Kristen laughed. "Let me finish up."

Maylee nodded and Kristen completed the cash register functions, recording everything on the proper form. She took it to the back, aware that Maylee followed her. Kristen put everything on Alan's desk and moved toward the door, but Maylee blocked her exit. "I've been thinking about you nonstop since Saturday," Maylee said, and she pulled Kristen close with her free left hand, fastened her mouth to Kristen's, and kissed her like they'd been apart for months, like she'd been starving for Kristen's lips. After a few delicious minutes, Maylee pulled away, but Kristen kept her hands on Maylee's hips.

"Still have the hots for delivery women?"

"One in particular."

"Oh, really?" Maylee reached behind her head with her free left hand and pulled the hair band off. She shook her head, and her dark hair flowed around her shoulders. Kristen's breath caught in her throat.

"Is it the uniform?"

"Maybe more what's in it." Kristen tightened her grip on Maylee's hips. **"Maybe both."**

"Good answer." Maylee moved gently out of Kristen's grasp and she set the package on Alan's desk. She opened it. **"I'm being a little forward,"** Maylee said as she took something out of the box. **"And I hope this is okay with you. Tell me if it's not."** She turned back toward Kristen, and in her right hand she now held a dildo. A black, semi-realistic dildo with red swirls all along its shaft.

Kristen's clit throbbed. **"That's more than okay,"** she said, images from her fantasies flashing through her mind. She reached for the first button on Maylee's shirt, the one second from the top, above which Maylee's white tee always beckoned. Kristen undid it, then the next, and the next, and Maylee's breath quickened. Kristen then skipped the last couple of buttons of Maylee's shirt and instead pulled on the button of her shorts. It gave way easily, and Kristen unzipped the shorts halfway. Maylee wore black men's bikini briefs, and the lines of her harness showed clearly through the cloth. Kristen's mouth went dry, but her crotch got wetter.

"See anything you want?" Maylee asked, voice low and husky.

"Definitely."

"I was hoping you'd say that." Maylee pulled the front of her briefs down and maneuvered the dildo into her harness, positioning it so that it jutted through the slit in her underwear. She then tugged at the hem of Kristen's shirt.

"Does this come off?" she asked, a sly note in the question.

In answer, Kristen moved her hands away from Maylee's chest and raised her arms.

"As much as I like The Smiths," Maylee continued, **"I'm more interested in what's underneath."** She tossed Kristen's tee onto Alan's desk before she placed her palms on Kristen's bare abdomen, something that made Kristen flinch with pleasure. She covered Maylee's hands with hers and pulled them up to her breasts, scaring herself with her own need.

"Mmm," Maylee whispered. **"As sexy as I guessed."** She cupped Kristen's breasts, and ran her thumbs over the fabric of her bra that covered her nipples, which hardened at the contact.

Kristen whimpered involuntarily, and her knees nearly gave out. Her heart pounded in time with her clit.

"Is this okay?" Maylee stopped moving her hands and pulled them away. "I haven't even asked what you're into."

Kristen took Maylee's hands and placed them back on her breasts. "It's more than okay."

"How about this?" And Maylee's hands made the short trip to Kristen's shorts, and unfastened the button.

"Uh-huh." Please, Kristen thought. Keep going. Please keep going.

"I was hoping you'd say that," Maylee said before she kissed Kristen again, and Kristen melted against Maylee, not even embarrassed that she'd voiced her last thought aloud. Maylee unzipped Kristen's shorts, and Kristen groaned as Maylee traced the waistband of her panties.

"You're so much hotter underneath your clothes." Maylee pushed Kristen's shorts past her hips, and they slid to the floor.

Maylee's fingers were very close to Kristen's crotch, "I want to touch you." Maylee's lips brushed Kristen's again, and her tongue flicked Kristen's.

"Yes." *Oh, God, please.*

And Maylee slid a finger past the seam of her panties, and moved it slowly across Kristen's pussy. Kristen moaned and moved against Maylee's hand. *One hot night.* Hell, she'd take one hot fuck in the back, too.

"Yeah," Maylee said in a half-groan and she moved her fingers--Kristen wasn't even sure which ones--through her juices, tracing her pussy, teasing her clit, and lingering at her entrance. "Oh, yeah," she said again. "Hold on." She entered, filled Kristen with two fingers, and Kristen's breath caught in her chest and her knees almost buckled, but Maylee wrapped her other arm around Kristen's waist, holding her up as she thrust slowly in and out. The dildo nudged Kristen's bare thigh as if it was teasing her, and Kristen dug her fingers into Maylee's shoulders, moving her pelvis in time with Maylee's fingers, her gasps melding with Maylee's. "More," Kristen said between clenched teeth.

Maylee slowed and added a third finger, then increased her thrusts, plunging hard and deep for a few moments before slowing again. Kristen moaned and spread her legs wider, wanting more of Maylee, wanting her to fuck her right there in the back office, where all the guys hung out, probably talking about all the women they'd like to do. Maylee was no doubt one of them, and it aroused Kristen even more, because Maylee was here with her, and not anybody else.

Maylee slowed down again, and traced circles around Kristen's clit with her thumb. "Nice," she said softly against Kristen's ear. "I don't think we'll need any lube." The dildo pushed harder against Kristen's thigh, more urgent. Maylee backed up then and sat down on Alan's chair. "How about a ride?" she asked, positioning the dildo invitingly. Kristen stepped out of her shorts and approached, glad that Alan's chair didn't have armrests. She stood over Maylee's lap, straddling her thighs, her pussy throbbing with need. With her left hand, she pulled the crotch of her panties to the side, and Maylee ran her tongue over her bottom lip. "Oh, yeah," she said as she slid her hand along the outside of Kristen's thigh, her other hand aiming the dildo. Kristen gripped Maylee's shoulder with her free hand and locked her gaze to hers as she lowered herself toward Maylee's lap. The head of the dildo touched her pussy and Kristen moved to better position herself to receive its length.

"There," she said as its head entered and Maylee let go of the dildo. "Yes. Oh, yes." Kristen moaned as she let go of her underwear and slid down the dildo's shaft until she was sitting on Maylee's lap, the cock fully embedded, pleasure roiling through her veins like floodwaters. She fully straddled Maylee, her legs dangling on either side of the chair. Kristen moved her pelvis, savoring the sensations, and Maylee moved with her, breathing just as heavily as she held onto Kristen's hips.

"God, I've wanted you to do this," Kristen said, her words punctuated with short gasps.

"Mmm. Same here."

Kristen tried a different pattern with her thrusts, and she was rewarded when Maylee groaned. She cupped Maylee's breasts, her nipples hard underneath the tee against Kristen's palms. No bra. Kristen rubbed her thumbs over Maylee's nipples and increased her thrusts. She was panting even harder now, close to coming, Maylee's breasts in her hands and Maylee's cock in her pussy, the smell of vanilla mingling with sex and heat.

"Yeah. That's it. Yeah." Maylee thrust harder and faster and the chair moved back and forth on its wheels.

Kristen barely heard her as she came, wave after wave of pleasure washing through her until it tossed her against Maylee like a tide would push her ashore.

"Damn," Maylee said softly after a few moments. "That was a hell of a ride. Any chance we can do that again?"

"Definitely."

"So is it the uniform?"

"Maybe. But then again, it might be what's in it."

Maylee laughed.

"THIS CAME FOR you," Alan said, gesturing toward the small, oblong box on the counter Tuesday afternoon. "Maylee dropped it off." He looked at her, curious.

"Thanks," Kristen said as she picked up the package. "I ordered some art stuff and had it delivered here."

"Oh," he said, and turned back to the skateboard catalogue.

She took the package to the back office, where she used a boxcutter to slit the tape. She opened it and nearly dropped it when she saw what was inside. She took the note out of the box and read it: "Can't wait 'til Sunday. Thought I'd send you a formal invitation. RSVP, Maylee." Kristen grinned, a little ache starting between her thighs. She put the note back in the box, underneath the dildo, then sealed it with more packing tape from Alan's desk. She put the box into her backpack, underneath her books and drawing materials, then put her backpack on the floor next to the filing cabinet, where she usually left it. She thought about last night, and about how things might happen, sometimes when you least expect them. And she smiled and licked her lips as she texted Maylee.

Yep, it's the uniform. And also what's in it.

Penthouse Birthday

by Lori L. Lake

KENNIE McCLAIN WATCHED out the window of the Allen Arms, pondering the fact that in one short week she'd turn forty. Was it any coincidence that while drying her hair earlier she'd found a tuft of gray at her temple in her near-black hair? Time was passing, and she felt out of control, unable to find a balance for her life. She turned away from the window.

Usually she waited at the guard desk for her replacement to arrive, but today she was restless. She paced the lobby, adjusted the cuffs of her uniform, and kept coming back to peer out at the sunny spring day. Simms had been late three days in a row, always with plausible excuses, but she was tired of it. He wasn't the only one who had things to do, people to see, places to go. Actually, as she thought about it, she merely had things to do. The repainting in 4C was taking a lot longer than she'd expected.

The shiny-clean glass entry door opened, and Simms hustled in. He wore the same dark gray suit pants and jacket she did, with a lighter gray shirt and black tie. At five-ten, she was almost as tall as he was, but his shoulders were much broader. While her uniform looked lived-in after an eight hour shift, his was neatly pressed without a single wrinkle. She wondered how anyone could ride in a car and not crease his trousers. Must have something to do with how his wife ironed for him.

"Sorry, sorry," he said, his face red and worried. "It's my wife. She's had morning sickness the whole damn day. I just couldn't leave her until she settled down."

"That's all right," Kennie said. "I understand." She watched him take a seat behind the elaborate wooden desk and stood at the mahogany counter in front of it. "But one of these days I'm going to call on you to come in early to make it up to me."

Simms exhaled, as though he'd been holding his breath in frightened anticipation. "Absolutely. I'll definitely make it up to you. Don't tell management, okay? I can't afford to get canned." His face brightened. "I still can't believe it--I'm going to be a father!"

Kennie smiled at his enthusiasm, but also because she wondered how much longer she could keep up the charade. Two years earlier, she'd bought the Allen Arms, an elderly but sturdy turn-of-the-century building in northeast Portland's Laurelhurst District. The seven-story fixer-upper had needed considerable repair and upkeep, but it had originally been well-built using quality light fixtures, marble in the entryway, wood trim and oak floors in the apartments. The construction was solid. She'd gotten it at a fire sale rate after the market crashed, and she hadn't stopped working on it since. The investment was paying off nicely now, and until recently, she'd been happy for the distraction from the pitiful state of her personal life.

The elevator dinged, and the elderly man from 2A shuffled out followed by his tottering wife. She slowly pushed a walker and stepped carefully. The green tennis balls attached to the front legs of the walker were so worn, they made a squeaking noise across the white marble floor.

Simms said, "Hey there, Mr. Faulkner."

"Good afternoon, young man. How's that wife of yours?" Kennie stepped aside so he could pause in front of the desk, a gnarled fist resting on the wood surface.

Mrs. Faulkner smiled at Kennie. "And how are you, dear?"

"Just fine. Thank you for asking."

"How's the refurbishing coming along in 1A?" When Kennie hesitated, she said, "I've got some friends who would love to move into this building. Neat, quiet, wonderful people."

"I'm sure the management team will eventually get to that one, Mrs. Faulkner. For now, they've got me working on 4C."

"You just let me know when one of them is available then, all right?"

Before Kennie could answer, the front door opened, and Lily Gordon stepped in. She carried a shopping bag with the name of the local art store emblazoned upon it.

Mrs. Faulkner fairly lit up to see her. "Why, Lily, how lovely you look today. How's the painting going?"

Lily said, "I'm making good progress." She gestured toward the bag she held. "Ran out of supplies, though." She smiled, and the lobby seemed a brighter place. Lily's blond hair was pulled back in a loose braid, and she wore a white blouse and tan slacks that showed off her lean body. Kennie swallowed and tried to offer a smile. Her heart beat too hard in her chest and she wondered if the others could hear it as loudly as she did.

Lily was graceful and as beautiful as a movie star--like a young Grace Kelly--but there were dark smudges under her eyes. She seemed to have lost weight in the months since the departure of the police lieutenant who'd formerly lived in the penthouse with her. The lieutenant, a tall, imposing woman, had swept through the lobby every morning and given Kennie the stink-eye. Obviously a mere security guard didn't meet her law enforcement standards. Kennie didn't miss her, but she thought Lily still did.

Kennie wondered how anyone could hurt, much less leave, such a lovely, kind-hearted woman. Lily was creative, a painter with a studio in the penthouse, and she was generous to all. Her art brought in great gobs of money, and she was constantly donating funds to foundations or offering her work for charity auctions. She'd taken on various college student protégés and contributed to various "Art in the Schools" programs.

"--don't you think?" Mrs. Faulkner said, turning and patting Kennie's arm.

Blood rushed to Kennie's face. She stammered. "I-I'm sorry?"

"Wool-gathering?" the older woman asked, a grin on her face.

Kennie could only nod. When she hazarded a glance at Lily, the other woman was pressing her lips together in an effort not to smile. Kennie blushed even further and had no time to pull herself together before Mr. Faulkner stepped away from the desk and said, "Let's go, woman. We've got steaks and baked potatoes waiting for us."

Lily said her goodbyes and headed for the grand stairway. Kennie knew she shouldn't watch, but those long legs were irresistible. When Lily reached the landing and turned to go up the second flight of stairs, she met Kennie's gaze. For a heartbeat, Kennie's world seemed to stop--no sound, no smells, nothing but the sensation of being pinned in place.

Then Lily rose out of sight, and the world came whooshing back in. Kennie let out a shaky breath.

Simms tapped her shoulder. "Jesus, Kennie," he said in a low voice, "get ahold of yourself. You're like a dog in heat."

She looked at him in fury. If ever she wanted to fire a man, it was now.

He put both hands up, palms out, and backed up. "Whoa, whoa, I didn't mean it the way it came out. I'm just saying, you know, you could be a little less obvious. She's gorgeous. You've got great taste. But hey, we're glorified doormen. You're just gonna get your heart broken."

"Simms, you're what? Twenty-five?"

"Yeah, so what?"

"How'd you get so enlightened?"

"I don't know what you mean."

"Never mind." She moved out from behind the desk, stalked down the hall to the right of the elevators, and unlocked a door.

"I've got a gay sister," he called after her.

"It figures."

She closed the door behind her and leaned back against it.

What had come over her? Simms was right. She was like a dog in heat. Her whole body still tingled from the encounter with Lily. Had Mrs. Faulkner noticed? She hoped not. How embarrassing. But wow, who could resist?

Even more disconcerting was the fact that Lily was flirting with her. She was, wasn't she? Kennie had been out of circulation long enough that she'd previously doubted her perceptions, but after today she wasn't so sure.

She stripped off her jacket and hung it on a hook behind the door, then loosened the old-fashioned tie she liked to wear. Simms' clip-on tie was constantly askew; hers was never a problem.

The twenty-by-twenty room was bright from the light of three huge windows. They rose from waist-level all the way to the ceiling. She'd paid a pretty penny for louver blinds to cover them to prevent prying eyes from spying in. Beneath the windows she'd placed a dining table and chairs where she could sit in the mornings and drink tea--or liquor in the

evenings if she felt like it. To her left near the entry sat a couch and a wingback chair. To the right, an alcove contained a full-size bed built into the wall with drawers underneath and overhead. Kennie had slept in it when she'd first moved to the Allen Arms and thought it was claustrophobic. To the left and near the windows was a fully-outfitted galley kitchen. The remainder of the wall was taken up by three closed doors. One opened to a huge walk-in closet. The middle one led to the bathroom. The last was the only door with a lock on it. She took her keys off her belt, opened the door, and flipped the deadbolt behind her.

The Allen Arms advertised 20 apartments, but counting the efficiency Kennie had just stepped out of, there were really 21. She had installed a door between the efficiency where she "lived" and apartment 1A which was where she really spent all her free time. Through the building's back door she'd been able to unload all her boxes and furniture and have other items delivered, and the tenants hadn't noticed at all. Every day she wondered how long that would last. Everyone thought she lived in that small one-room place, and in the rare times when they needed something in the night, they rang there. The buzzer was also piped in to her real apartment for the hours between one and seven a.m. when no one was on duty in the lobby.

Above her, on floors 2 through 5, were four apartments. The sixth floor was composed of two luxury suites, and the penthouse on seven took up the entire floor. There wasn't much turnover, but as people moved out, she'd been making repairs, repainting, and installing new appliances, carpet, or tile. She'd upgraded the laundry room and moved the storage units down to the basement so that the huge room behind the first floor elevators could be used as a party room. In less than two years, she'd made great progress with the Allen Arms, and if she wanted to, she suspected she could sell it for a tidy profit. That had been her original intention, but now--now she couldn't stop thinking about a certain someone in 7A.

IN THE NIGHT the buzzer woke Kennie. She hustled from the comfort of her warm bed, down the hallway, and into the efficiency apartment. The floor was cold under her bare feet, and her flannel pajamas didn't do much to keep her warm. She reached for the doorknob, then realized how things would look. Quickly, she went to the bed and peeled back the covers and rumped the pillow.

When she unlocked the door, she was struck silent by the woman at her door. Lily Gordon, her hair loose and messy, held a paintbrush stained red. She was dressed in a baggy white t-shirt and white painter's pants, all of which were splotted with reds, greens, oranges, and yellows. Even her cheek sported a smudge of something maroon colored.

"I'm sorry to wake you," Lily said. "The power went out in my studio, and I'm on a roll. I can't stop now." She sounded out of breath, slightly desperate.

"What time is it?"

"I don't know. Maybe four a.m.?"

"I'll be right up. Give me a few minutes to throw on some clothes." Kennie closed the door and stood toying with her tie. Oh, boy, she thought. Her heart wouldn't stop racing.

When she'd purchased the building, Kennie's inspector had toured every apartment, but because she hadn't wanted to advertise her ownership, there were several occupied units she'd never been inside. 7A was one of them.

Carrying a Maglite and dressed in jeans, a sweatshirt, and running shoes, she took the elevator up. It opened into a plush foyer with a dark blue carpet, rich wood trim, and crown molding. A crystal chandelier cast prisms of light against muted gold wallpaper. A Tiffany lamp sat upon a shiny cherry table next to an old-fashioned fainting couch. The pattern on the cushions were gold and red and blue. Every time she'd come up to vacuum or wash the windows on either side of the foyer, Kennie wondered if Lily would open her door or come up the elevator. The day that happened, Kennie was pretty sure she'd have occasion to use the fainting couch, and the thought made her both laugh and feel nervous as hell.

Now the apartment door was open, and she poked her head in the darkened entryway and shouted, "Hello!"

"Back here," Lily called out.

Kennie walked across the parquet floor to the hallway, crossed an Oriental rug, and made her way to the right. Every step she took sent her into darker realms. She clicked on the flashlight, then stepped through double doors. The palest light shimmered in through tall windows at either end of a giant room that ran the entire width of the building and was half again as deep.

A white apparition came toward her, slowly materializing with each step. "This has never happened before. Can you do something?"

"Are the lights off throughout the entire apartment?"

"I don't know."

"May I check?"

"Knock yourself out."

Kennie retraced her footsteps and went down a hallway until she came to a doorway which led into the kitchen. She groped around and found the push-button light switch. Let there be light, she thought, and there was. Another switch further down the hallway also worked.

Back in the darkened room, she said, "Lily, I think it's just this circuit. Do you know where the breaker box is?"

"Sorry, I have no idea."

"I'll track it down."

Starting behind one side of the double doors, she systematically swept the light along the wall. When she came to the first window, she found Lily standing close to a canvas on an easel, trying desperately to take advantage of the miniscule amount of light coming in from the streetlights.

"If I knew you didn't need it," Lily said, "I'd snatch that light away from you right now."

Kennie paused and illuminated the canvas. Powerful ocean waves covered the middle, but instead of the customary blue and green hues, the water was also accented with reds and silvers which gave it an angry, bloody appearance. "You're painting this?" As soon as the words spilled out of her mouth, Kenzie felt like a complete dunce. Of course Lily was painting it. If the smell of oil paint and turpentine didn't give that away, the palette in one hand and paintbrush balanced in the other did.

"I've been working on it all night. Watch your step there for cords. I've got some spotlights plugged in."

Kennie stepped past, continuing to search for any evidence of a breaker box. It wasn't until she got all the way around the room that she found it behind the other double door. How typical, she thought. Seems like I always start on the wrong side of things. She cracked it open and shone the light about, realizing that she was looking for a burned-out fuse in an old-fashioned fusebox. When she found the smoky-looking one, she looked for replacements in the bottom of the box, but no luck.

"Lily, I'll be back shortly with the fix." She dashed out, rode all the way down to the basement shop, unlocked it, and grabbed a handful of fuses. It seemed to take forever to make it back to 7A. She had no idea what time it was, but when she returned, the first traces of the dawn were leaking in through the window. Lily had shifted her canvas to take advantage of the pale light.

The first fuse did nothing. Glad that she'd brought four along, she screwed in another and said, "Voilà." High overhead, two lines of chandeliers illuminated. Across the room, three sets of spotlights blinked on.

"Hurrah!" Lily said. No sooner was that out of her mouth than the place was plunged in darkness again.

"Uh oh," Kenzie said. Half-blind even with the flashlight, she carefully crossed the room and pulled the plugs for all the spotlights, then returned to the fuse box to try again. This

time, when the lights came on, they stayed on. "Your extra lamps are overloading the electrical line."

"Oh. Odd." Lily set her palette and brush on a side table covered with tubes of paint and clear bottles full of different colored liquids. "I've never had any trouble before, but I did just recently replace this third one."

Kennie bent over it. "That's a very nice halogen light. These others are much lower wattage. This one pulls a lot of juice."

Lily tucked her blond hair behind her ears. "It worked great. Kept me warm too. Damn thing exuded heat."

Kennie looked around the room, which was big enough to hold a dance. The ceiling was at least sixteen feet tall, and the parquet floor, though worn, looked to be the originally installed flooring. She now realized that a counter she had walked past searching for the fuse box was a wet bar, and that the chairs stacked high in one corner could seat at least a hundred people. In earlier days, the room was probably used as a ballroom. After a hundred years, she could imagine ghosts inhabiting it, still dancing in old time clothes.

But now Lily Gordon had turned it into her painting studio. In addition to the canvas she currently worked on, there were over a dozen canvases on easels in line down the middle of the room. Everywhere an easel sat, plastic overlaid with heavy-duty tarps protected the floor. Lily had obviously made sure she wouldn't stain the parquet.

"Please," Lily said, "don't look at those. They're either unfinished or wretchedly bad."

From what Kenzie could see, every painting was amazing, but she obeyed Lily's request and looked away. "I'll leave you to it then. I know you want to get back to the work. I'll have management send up an electrician in the next couple of days, and we'll get rid of this old electrical system and set you up a couple of circuits so this never happens again."

"Thank you." Lily's voice was faint because she'd turned back to her painting and stood, hands on hips, examining it as though it was the only item of interest left in the whole wide world.

THREE DAYS BEFORE her birthday, Kenzie rose from a night of troubled dreams. Janeen again.

She made a pot of strong coffee, sat at her kitchen table, and looked out at the light rain falling. Would she ever get over Janeen? Would these long, draggy nights ever pass?

Janeen, a highly-sought-after web designer and IT expert, never let anything get in the way of her ambition, whether it was professional, personal, or romantic. She'd set her sights on

Kennie, and she used all her extensive feminine wiles to get her. They both fell hard, and from the moment they committed to one another, neither ever looked at another woman.

Kennie was constantly amazed at all that Janeen could do. She soldiered through any IT disaster, any family problem, and any issue that got in her way.

When she felt ill, however, she ignored the symptoms until she was near collapse. Feeling a bit rundown was something Janeen regularly mocked in others, so when she felt exhausted for several weeks in a row, she continued to say, "Buck up--this'll pass," and "The show must go on." Even the persistent indigestion she experienced was one more thing to conquer. Janeen wasn't going to let an upset stomach derail her projects, not when there were plenty of Tums to be had.

It wasn't until the pain started doubling her over that Kennie convinced her to see a doctor, who, as bad luck would have it, misdiagnosed her symptoms. Acid reflux meds did nothing to stop the spread of cancer from her ovaries through her bloodstream and lymph nodes. By the time Janeen got the final diagnosis, the afternoon before Valentine's Day, it was too late. By Easter she was dead.

Kennie had never really understood the cliché about events making one's head spin, but that's how she'd felt for weeks on end after Janeen began failing so fast. Even when her elderly parents had died, the pain hadn't hurt the way Janeen's final days did. And then her death was unreal. The shock still visited Kennie's dreams, though in her day-to-day life, she'd eventually come to accept Janeen's death.

She'd faced the weeks after losing her lover in a fog of fear and tears. For a long time, she'd been so angry at Janeen. Why hadn't she taken care of herself? Why did she have to be so headstrong? After her bereavement time ran out, she could barely force herself to go each day to her job as a computer installer. But then the insurance policies--one through work, another from Janeen's college days, and a half a million dollar plan she'd taken out on a lark and never mentioned to Kennie--combined to dump \$725,000 in her lap. She only told people about the \$25-grand policy, most of which went to pay off bills from the funeral. She never told anyone about the half-mil that the sale of Janeen's business brought in either. She kept all the money a secret, especially from her money-grubbing older sister Susan and Susan's ne'er-do-well twin, Sterling. The fact that her twin siblings were fifteen years older than Kennie had meant that she'd never felt close to either of them. They treated her like an interloper, and despite all the efforts she'd made throughout her childhood, Kennie was never able to properly bond with either of them. After the deaths of her mother and father, Kennie stopped trying.

Once she'd come through some of the grief about Janeen and stopped being completely immobilized, Kennie quit her job, packed up, and moved from New York to Portland, which had always been a favorite place she and Janeen had visited. Over their thirteen years together, they'd skied Mount Hood, stayed on the Pacific Ocean at Cannon Beach near Haystack Rock, and rented a houseboat and wound down the crystal clear waters of

Lake Billy Chinook. Though Kennie was born and bred in upstate New York, Oregon felt oddly like home.

Nearly three years had passed since Janeen was ripped from her life, and now, facing age forty, Kennie considered herself well past her shelf-date. She spent her days watching out for the residents at the Allen Arms and her nights watching TV or rehabbing the apartments as residents moved out.

Was this to be the extent of her life?

THE DAY BEFORE Kennie's birthday, Mr. Faulkner shambled into the lobby with his wife following in his wake.

Kennie rose from behind the desk where she'd been doing the morning crossword puzzle and greeted them both warmly.

"Whoopsidoodle," Mrs. Faulkner said. "We got some of your mail by accident." Her husband held tight to a bright pink envelope. "Norm, give it to her."

"Kendra McClain, huh? I wondered what Kennie was a nickname for." He held the envelope up to the light and said, "If I don't miss my guess, this is a birthday card."

"Shame on you, Norman!" His wife snatched the card and handed it to Kennie. "He's lost all the manners his good mother gave him, may she rest in peace."

"Well, is it?" he asked.

Kennie frowned. "What?"

"Why, your birthday."

"Tomorrow."

He turned to his wife. "See how easy that was? She's not all worked up about birthdays like you think other women are. What does she care? She's still a whippersnapper." He turned back to Kennie. "You thirty? Thirty-five?"

Mrs. Faulkner clamped a surprisingly strong claw around her husband's forearm. Kennie got a glimpse of blood-red fingernails and a gigantic diamond solitaire before she wrenched him half around. "Norman Martin Faulkner! Shame on you. You never ask a woman her age."

He made a pshaw noise and said, "Happy Birthday early, Kennie. You've been doing a great job here, and we appreciate you."

With that, his wife pulled him away from the counter and continued to upbraid him as she squeaked her walker toward the elevator.

Kennie slit open the envelope and read a card sent by her favorite relative. Aunt Clara, who lived near Niagara Falls, was the one relative she'd kept in touch with, and the fact that she never forgot her birthday brought a lump to Kennie's throat.

She opened the door to her efficiency unit, left it open, and put a kettle on to boil. Her back to the door, she stood looking out the window at the clouds scudding across the sky. She hoped the rain had passed because she felt the need to take a nice long walk after her shift ended.

A tap interrupted her thoughts, and she turned to find Lily Gordon in the doorway. Today she looked much more composed than she had the night she'd blown the fuse. Her hair was swept up and knotted in the back, and she wore a lightweight rain jacket over a Polo shirt and blue jeans. Nary a drop of paint was smeared anywhere on her shapely figure.

"Sorry to bother you, but I wanted to thank you for fixing my lights the other night. And I can't believe how fast the electrician upgraded everything. Thank you for arranging that. Will the owners be charging me a fee?"

"Oh, no--I, we--I mean they take care of that. The building is being gradually updated. You won't be billed."

The teakettle took that moment to whistle, and Kennie hastened to pull it off the burner. When she looked back at the doorway, Lily was smiling hopefully, so Kennie gathered courage and took a deep breath. "Cup of tea?"

"I'd love it." She stepped across the threshold, dropping a satchel inside the doorway, and sat in one of the chairs next to the window.

Kennie asked, "What kind of tea do you like?"

"Anything except lemon. No milk either."

Kennie set out teaspoons, cups, and saucers. "Sugar? Honey?"

"Sure, honey." She grinned at Kennie's befuddlement. "Sorry about that. Couldn't resist. Toss the sugar bowl on the table. I don't need any honey."

No doubt about it, Kennie thought. This woman is definitely flirting. She delivered the sugar, set the kettle on a hot pad, and lowered herself into a chair.

"So," Lily said, "I hear it's your birthday."

"How the heck--"

"The Faulkners were having quite the entertaining row in the elevator." She selected a tea bag and poured the hot water into both of their cups. "I turned right around and came back down to wish you well."

"It's not actually until tomorrow."

"That gives everyone time to track down a gift for you."

Kennie laughed aloud.

"Don't laugh. It sounded to me like Mrs. Faulkner was insisting that her little hubby take her out to purchase a gift to make up for his rudeness."

"That isn't necessary."

"What else have they got to do?" She stirred two generous spoons of sugar into her cup.

"Would you like a snack to go with the tea?"

"No, I just had a huge lunch. Thanks." She paused, meeting Kennie's eyes. "Oh, my, in the olden days, my grandma--and probably Mrs. Faulkner--would say that I'm being awfully forward."

Kennie gulped. She found she couldn't speak.

"You're single, right?" When Kennie nodded, Lily asked, "And available?"

At that point, Kennie felt her heart drop from its normal location in her chest to some place closer to her groin. Was this beautiful woman sitting at her table propositioning her? Her thoughts flashed to her apartment and the dishes in the sink, the unmade bed, the magazines all over the living room table. She felt a touch of panic.

Lily reached across the table and patted her forearm. "Don't look so nervous. I'm just wondering if you might want to go out for dinner tomorrow night, that is, if you don't already have birthday plans with someone else?"

With a shaky hand, Kennie raised the teacup, took a sip, and at last found her voice. "I don't have plans, and I'd very much like to go out with you." She felt an enormous sense of relief that her words came out clearly and unjumbled.

"Excellent. Do you have a favorite restaurant?" Kennie shook her head. "Anywhere you've been wanting to try?"

"I haven't been out much. Why don't we go to your favorite place?"

Lila grinned like a smiling cat. "Shall we exchange phone numbers then? Just in case you change your mind?"

"I'll give you my cell, but don't worry, I won't change my mind."

ON THE AFTERNOON of her fortieth birthday Kennie paced in the lobby, feeling one attack of nerves after another. She hadn't seen or heard from Lily. Every occupant who came down the stairs, every ding of the elevator, every tiny noise from the settling of the building set her heart into overdrive. No amount of exercise the evening before had calmed her down, and during the night she'd awakened several times wondering if she had perhaps dreamed the dinner invitation.

When Simms arrived, early for once, he encouraged her to go off duty and leave the desk to him, so she did. She closed the door to the efficiency, rushed into 1A, and did something she'd never done before: she laid out every stitch of her nice clothing on the bed and agonized over what to wear. She matched shirts with pants, swapped them, laid jackets next to the combinations, tossed a few items on the floor, and grimaced.

The phone rang. She fished it out of her jacket pocket. Lily greeted her warmly, wished her a happy birthday, then said, "I have an unusual request."

"Oh?"

"You may think I'm crazy, but, well, I am crazy. You'll figure that out soon enough. What I'm hoping you might agree to do is wear your uniform to dinner."

"My uniform?"

"Yes. You look handsome in it, and I'd be honored if you'd wear it for me."

"What are you wearing?"

"I'll be in blue pants, a flowered blouse, and some sort of jacket--haven't decided which one yet. The place we're going is very private, so will you do this for me?"

Kennie thought about how much that would simplify things and couldn't think of any reason not to agree. "Where shall we meet?"

"Come up to my place at seven, why don't you?"

"I'll be there."

The next couple of hours were sheer madness for Kennie. She paced, she worried, and after a while, she shucked her clothes and took a long hot shower. When she got out, she donned

an entirely new set of undergarments and a clean shirt, jacket, and pair of pants. Shortly before seven, she was ready.

Standing at the entrance to 7A, she looked sheepishly at the fainting couch, almost wishing it were closer to the doorway. Before she could knock, a man in a classic black formal wear opened the door.

"Ms. McClain, good evening. Ms. Gordon is waiting for you in the dining room."

Disconcerted, Kennie followed him around the corner to the left and was ushered into a formal dining room. The table could probably seat sixteen comfortably, but only two places were set, one at the head, where Lily sat and the other to her left.

Lily rose and guided her to the table, one hand on her shoulder. "I hope you don't mind, but when you said you wouldn't mind going to my favorite place, I took you seriously. This is my favorite."

Surprised, Kennie recovered quickly to say, "I love the flowers." An enormous pot of purple, white, and red chrysanthemums sat in the middle of the table, garnished with other brightly colored flowers Kennie couldn't identify.

"I hoped you would. Come sit while the caterer brings us the first course. I arranged for a couple kinds of soup, a main course of chicken, and the salad course is a variety of cooked vegetables. Do you like cheese? And wine?"

Kennie settled in the comfortable Queen Anne style chair. "Yes, and I could use a shot of that wine any time you have it available."

"Don't be nervous now. It's your birthday."

Despite Lily urging her not to be on edge, it took a glass of wine and a lot of conversation before Kennie settled down, but once she did, two hours blew by without her having any sense of time passing at all. She followed Lily's lead and ate lightly, not wanting to overwhelm her stomach with the savory chicken, the new potatoes, or the vegetables and cheeses. Everything was prepared perfectly and served piping hot. In between bites, she shared information about her life, and Lily told her about her painting and her travels to France, Greece, and Italy.

Kennie was surprised to hear that she'd lived in the Allen Arms for almost a decade, and Lily seemed surprised to learn that Kennie had moved from upstate New York. "You have a bit of a different sound to your vowels than Oregonians, but you definitely don't have the New York accent."

"It's a whole different world when you grow up so close to Canada you could throw a stone and hit a border crossing guard."

"I've lived my entire life here on the west coast. Portland, Seattle, Fresno, and San Francisco."

"San Francisco was Janeen's favorite city." The statement slipped out before Kennie could clamp her mouth shut. "Didn't mean to bring that up."

"Janeen must have been someone who mattered."

Kennie nodded.

"Girlfriend?"

"Thirteen years."

"Where is she now?"

"She died. Cancer."

"I'm sorry."

As if it were the most natural thing in the world, Lily took Kennie's hand, drew it to her, and kissed it. She entwined their fingers and rested their hands on the table.

The tears that had threatened for a brief moment burned off in the heat that suffused Kennie's body from head to toe. She couldn't stop trembling then. A part of her wanted to get up and run to the safety of her efficiency apartment; another part of her wanted to rise from the chair, engulf Lily in her arms, and sweep her off to 1A. The connection with her hostess was so powerful that she couldn't meet her gaze. Kennie couldn't take her eyes off their hands, and she didn't want Lily to stop stroking the top of her hand with her thumb.

After a long moment, Lily said, "Excuse me for a moment. I'll be right back." Kennie let go of her hand and felt a visceral loss. She sat back in her chair, shaken.

The murmur of male voices wafted in, interspersed with Lily's voice, and then a door closed somewhere.

Lily reentered the room, saying, "The caterers are gone now," and then her hands were on Kennie's shoulders. She spoke into Kennie's ear. "I hope you don't mind, but my gift to you is in another room. Do you have time for me to give it to you?"

"Yes." No way did she want this night to end. She'd follow Lily into every room in the penthouse if that's what she wanted.

Kennie put her cloth napkin on the table, rose, and turned to find herself so close to Lily she could almost kiss her. For the first time Kennie realized how much taller she was. Lily

carried herself as though she were much bigger, but Kennie had to lower her head several inches to meet her lips.

The kiss was nothing short of smoldering. Kennie was amazed that she'd been brave enough to attempt it, then was stunned by Lily's passion. She brought her hands up to touch Lily's face, then slid her fingers down her neck until her palms came to rest on her collarbones and her fingers danced lightly on the tops of her shoulders. Lily's reached inside Kennie's jacket. When she tightened her arms around Kennie's middle, Kennie had to pull her mouth away to draw a ragged breath. They had been so close, fitted so perfectly together, that breaking from the kiss felt like a loss she couldn't bear. She leaned in to capture her mouth again, but Lily pressed a finger up to Kennie's lips.

"Your present. Come with me."

The last thing she cared about was a gift, but she followed Lily, trying not to clutch her hand too hard. They passed the ballroom. As they moved down the hall, the smell of oil paint and turpentine gradually receded, supplanted by the fresh, minty scent of eucalyptus.

The room they entered was dark at first. Lily led her across an open space carpeted with a cushy rug. As Kennie's eyes adjusted to the dimness, she saw a cozy queen-sized bed. The coverlet was splashed with reds and oranges. For a moment, she had the impression that perhaps Lily had painted it--and then realized that the spread was indeed cloth, and its hues echoed the vibrant ochres, plums, and golds in the painting over the headboard.

Lily lit a candle, then settled at the foot of the bed. "Come here," she whispered.

Kennie took in the room once more. Though small, it was magnificent. Splashes of color adorned the walls, and as she stepped into the V of Lily's legs, she had the distinct impression that they themselves were in a painting.

Lily's arms encircled her hips, and with a sigh, she relaxed her forehead against Kennie's abdomen. Kennie stroked her hair and tried not to breathe like a racehorse after a derby.

Lily looked up at her, blue eyes full of silent pleading, and for a moment, Kennie felt worry slash through her. Could she do this? She hadn't made love for a very long time. How badly would she mess up?

She leaned down to kiss Lily anyway, soft at first, full of hope and tenderness. Lily responded with a moan. She clutched at Kennie's shirt and deepened the kiss. Lily's tongue, her lips, her hands...suddenly Kennie didn't know how to breathe anymore. She broke away, nearly panting.

Lily smiled, her expression knowing and satisfied. She reached for Kennie's belt and unbuckled it. Mutely, Kennie obeyed her commands to remove clothes and shoes until she stood naked from the waist down.

"Will you undress me?" Lily asked.

"Oh, yeah." She still couldn't believe this was happening, but if it was a dream, it was the most exciting one she'd had in years. In her excitement, the buttons on the flowery silk blouse seemed unusually small and unwieldy, and the silk slipped in her hands.

Lily giggled as Kennie fumbled and finally opened up the blouse, then she unhooked her own bra in front and pulled the cups away.

"Now isn't that wonderfully convenient," Kennie said. "Can I touch you?"

"Please."

Lily's breasts were warm and full, the nipples a deep brown. She pushed Lily back gently until she rested against the coverlet, her feet still on the floor. Kennie's mouth found a breast, and under her tongue she felt the nipple contract. She felt for the other breast and cupped it.

"Oh, yes, that's good. Yes, yes--" Lily choked out her pleasure, words not always making sense, and Kennie felt a surge of power through her chest, down her torso, and into her groin. With a shock she realized she had nothing to fear. She'd forgotten nothing, lost nothing. She stood and slipped out of her jacket, leaving Lily on the bed looking up at her in wonder.

"I'm going to love undressing you, Lily."

"Will you leave your shirt on for a while?"

"Have you got a thing for women in uniforms?"

"Maybe." She sat up. "Let me get some things we might need."

Kennie gripped her shoulders to pull her up and steal another kiss. The silk blouse fluttered against her hands. She stripped it away along with the bra. Lily's skin was hot and felt like velvet under her palms. She rubbed her back, stroked the soft skin, then brought her palms up to cradle Lily's face. "You're incredible, Lily. Absolutely lovely." Kennie slid her hands down under the waistband of Lily's pants.

"Wait a second." Lily pressed against Kennie's chest to hold her back. Rising, she stepped around the side of the bed. With a sweep of her arm, she tossed the coverlet and sheets aside, then bent to open a drawer in the bedside table. "Come here."

The drawer contained a jumble of harnesses, towels, vibrators, and little bottles of lube and lotions. "Wow, that's a lot of toys."

"Will you wear this for me?" Lily asked. She held out a complicated-looking set of straps.

Kennie shrugged. "I'll do pretty much anything you want, Lily."

"How noble of you."

"I aim to please."

Lily laughed, the sound deep and throaty. She came away from the drawer holding a black harness and multi-colored dildo. Once again, Kenzie's legs went weak.

Lily said, "Do you want to put this on, or shall I--"

"You. Definitely you." Kenzie had had enough trouble getting buttons undone. She had no idea how she'd manage an unfamiliar harness. But then Lily's hands were on her hips, teasingly touching her thighs and butt. Kenzie flushed with a mixture of embarrassment and pleasure. With sure fingers, Lily adjusted everything perfectly, then said, "Lie down."

"Yes, ma'am."

Kenzie slid into the bed. The sheets felt slinky and cool against her legs. She settled on her side, her head in her hand and one elbow sunk deep into a pillow. Shivering with anticipation, she watched Lily kick off shoes and step out of the rest of her clothes. Her body looked golden in the dim light. Narrow hiped, large breasted, and with a waist Kenzie envied, she was a goddess. Lily met her gaze, then reached up to release her hair. The golden tresses tumbled down around her shoulders.

Lily crawled across the bed like a lioness ready to devour her. She took hold of Kenzie's tie and pulled her toward the center of the bed.

"Whatever you want," Kenzie said breathlessly. "Whatever you command." She settled on her back, the harness straps snug against her. She glanced down at the strange toy emerging from the flaps of her shirt, but before she could fully consider it, Lily straddled Kenzie's waist and blocked her vision. Kenzie looked into smiling eyes. Lily tucked her hair behind her ears and reached down to explore Kenzie's face, her brow, her jaw. Kenzie felt a gush of her own wetness and wondered how Lily merely touching her face could be such a huge turn-on.

Lily opened one button of the uniform shirt and slipped her hand in "You've got a t-shirt underneath."

"Yeah. Sorry about that. I can take it off."

"That's okay. I'll work around it for now." She pulled up the undershirt, and Kenzie let out a groan to feel Lily's hands on her stomach. She closed her eyes and shivered as warm fingers found their way to explore her hip bones, abdomen, and ribs, and then settled upon her breasts, kneading and pressing.

"That feels so good. Lily. Oh, god, I want you. I want to please you."

"Shhhh...soon enough. Lie still."

"Now this is nice," Kennie said. She reached up, palmed both of Lily's breasts and watched as she arched slightly, eyes closed, moaning with delight.

"So good," she panted. "You've got great hands."

Kennie pulled her knees up until her thighs were against Lily's back. The harness and dildo pressed into her skin, but not uncomfortably. "Just lean back and relax."

"Lucky I do yoga."

Mouth open, knees bent under her, Lily rested against Kennie and gave her free reign. Her skin was warm and moist, and the little bit of padding on her belly was soft. Kennie stroked her sides and felt Lily's abdominal muscles tense. "Does that tickle?"

"A little."

She turned her attention to the tops of Lily's thighs and ran her hands down and back up until her thumbs were close to the patch of hair. Pressing gently, she found the wetness within. Lily let out a whimper, her breathing sped up, and for a moment she rocked against Kennie's hands.

"No," Lily whispered. "Not yet." She came up out of her relaxed position and shifted forward so that her forearms were on either side of Kennie's head. Her breasts hung tantalizingly close, and Kennie gathered them in her hands, then alternately tongued the nipples until she and Lily were both wheezing for air.

"You taste good," Kennie said. "You're so soft."

"You're making me feel wonderful."

"I want you to feel me in every way. I want to be inside you and touching and kissing you."

"Me, too."

She put her arms around Lily, and pulled her against her. They lay for a moment, tightly pressed, and Kennie felt a wave of possessiveness she hadn't expected. "I want you. In every way."

"I'm yours."

Kennie levered herself to the side and guided Lily until she was beneath her. She shifted back onto her knees, suddenly aware of harness straps snug against her skin. She looked down at the shaft and shivered with an unexpected wave of nervousness.

Lily spread her legs wide and met her eyes. She took hold of the tie dangling around Kennie's neck to pull her closer.

Kennie, said, "I don't want to hurt you."

Lily laughed, a warm sound that soothed Kennie. "You won't. Come inside me." She let go of the tie and strained upward to find Kennie's lips.

Kennie couldn't hold herself up any longer. She sank down, her breasts heavy against Lily's, and lost herself in Lily's mouth. Her body burned and shook and pulsed, and suddenly she pushed herself away, grasped the shaft, and guided it into Lily's wetness. Halfway in, she stopped, shocked at her brazenness. "Are you okay?"

"Don't stop, Kennie. Please." Lily's breath came fast in little gasps. She grabbed Kennie's shirt and jerked her forward. Kennie eased in as deep as she could go and paused, holding herself above Lily with strong arms.

Lily let out a sigh. "That's good. So good. Oh, stay right there for a moment." She took a deep breath, then opened her eyes. "Let's take your shirt off. I need to feel your skin against me."

Kennie watched in silent amazement as Lily unbuttoned the shirt, her fingers flying competently. She cooperated in shrugging it off one arm at a time, but when it came time to take off the undershirt, she balked. "I need both arms to get it off. I'll crush you."

"No you won't. Just do it."

"Don't blame me if I knock the wind out of you."

With a smile, Lily said, "You already have."

Kennie relax gradually against the smaller woman, and when she saw that Lily wasn't made at all uncomfortable, she pulled the shirt over her head.

"Ah--" Lily sighed. Her hands found Kennie's breasts and stroked. "This is just what I want."

Kennie arched, pressed the shaft in, and pushed herself up so that Lily's questing mouth could find her nipple. A shot of pure pleasure blasted through her body, straight to her clit and then out to the tips of her fingers, to the ends of her toes. She throbbed with fire. Her whole body was a mass of quivering nerves. She needed to move, to feel her muscles flex and contract.

Lily released her breast and tucked her face into the soft skin at Kennie's neck. "Go," she whispered. "Make me feel you."

Like a wild horse suddenly unpenned, Kennie stiffened and slid back, then fell upon Lily with a passion she thought she'd never feel again. The harness straps tightened as she reared back, then relaxed as she plunged in. The base of the toy jammed against her clit giving her an exquisite pressure she hadn't expected. She rode Lily with an animalistic pleasure unlike anything she'd ever felt before, and Lily goaded her on, at first murmuring quietly, gradually groaning her delight, and then shouting "yes, yes" into Kennie's ear.

At one point, the sensations buffeting Kennie's body became so intense that a sudden orgasm rolled through the center of her and outward, and yet instead of sapping her strength, she was filled up with energy. A white light pierced her vision, even though her eyes were closed, and she felt herself lifted to another level. She drove hard into Lily holding her hips steady. "You're incredible, Lily. I could do this...all night long. You...make me feel...immortal."

Lily's response was guttural. She moved in concert with Kennie as though they'd practiced together for years. Kennie closed her eyes and with each thrust concentrated on the pressure against her own clit. When Lily made a strangled noise, Kennie knew she was coming. Lily's body went rigid, though still she demanded "More, more--"

With every stroke, Lily cried out, over and over, in an orgasm lasting so long that Kennie couldn't quite believe it. With a final whimper, Lily's grip went slack, and her muscles relaxed. Eyes closed, her breathing continued to come fast and hard. Kennie held steady. She eased back a tiny bit, then pressed forward. She rocked gently and Lily cried out. With a wicked grin, Kennie pulled back again, pressed forward, and kept it up.

In a few strokes, Lily responded like a wild cat. She grabbed Kennie's arms and thrashed against her, growling with every plunge. Kennie matched her movements in thrust after thrust until she wondered how anyone could last that long. Once again, Lily suddenly went still. She let out a long groan. "Don't stop...there...there...oh..." With one last yowl, she pulled Kennie's hips toward her and gripped her as she whimpered and panted. Her eyes fluttered open, and she looked deep into Kennie's eyes. The moment was so intense that even though Kennie felt naked to the soul, she couldn't look away.

This time when Lily loosened her hold, Kennie settled against her, still buried deep. Very gently, she rolled them until they lay side by side so Kennie could put her arms around her and nestle her face in the crook of Lily's neck.

"How did you know?" Lily asked, still breathless.

"Know what?"

"That I wasn't finished."

"I don't know. I just sensed you weren't done. Call it women's intuition."

"You really know how to wear a girl out."

Kennie grinned. "Rest then. Sleep if you need to."

"You think I've run out of gas?"

Kennie shrugged. "If I were you, I guess I would be."

With a feline purr, Lily reached around Kenzie, unbuckled the harness, and helped remove it.

"You're pretty good at that," Kenzie said.

"Practice makes perfect. You've obviously spent some time in something similar."

Kenzie felt her face flaming, but she resolved to tell the truth. "Actually, I've never done that before." When Lily didn't respond, she said, "I've always wanted to, but it never was an option in previous, uh--well, I mean--" She trailed off, shaking her head helplessly.

Lily's lips found hers. The kiss was sweet, and when she pulled away, she said, "All I have to say then is you're a very quick study."

She smiled, and in the candlelight, Kenzie was struck once more with how beautiful she was. Never in a million years had she ever expected to have an experience like she'd just had.

Lily kissed her again. "I'm also happy to report that I'm like the energizer bunny, ready to bang that drum as soon as you're ready."

Embarrassed, Kenzie whispered, "I was so excited, I came, you know, during."

"I think you'll have to trust me when I tell you that you're not done." Lily's hands fondled their way down Kenzie's body, stopping in all sorts of sensitive places, and it took only moments before Kenzie realized that Lily was right. Her body responded with heat and a shuddering she couldn't control. Lily's fingers found her clit, and Kenzie groaned with pleasure.

Lily whispered, "Just let me have my way with you. You'll like it, I promise."

"I believe you." She closed her eyes, shifted onto her back, and opened her legs.

Lily straddled one of her thighs and hovered above her, her fingers stroking Kenzie's clit, pressing, driving her wild. Kenzie opened her eyes long enough to see Lily's smile. She reached up and tangled her hand in Lily's hair, then sat up enough to kiss her. With a

groan she sank back down. When she felt Lily's fingers abandon her, she almost called out, but all words were driven from her mouth when she felt the tip of the toy against her. She was so wet that with a little pressure from Lily, the shaft filled her.

"Whoa, that feels--odd. I've never--wow."

"You've never used a toy before?"

"There's a first time for everything."

Lily shifted above her, still straddling her leg, but now one knee was pressed tightly in between Kennie's legs, pressuring against her. "I think you'll like this. Just relax."

And she did like it. Once more Lily's fingers found her swollen clit and pressed. The waves of sensation quickly changed from pleasurable to intense, and Kennie went from moaning and twitching gently to giant gasps for breath. One moment she was rocking gently against Lily, then next she thrashed like a wild thing. Lily rode her like the bucking bronco she was, never letting up the pressure, never allowing her fingers to stray from the one place in Kennie's body that became the focal point of so much energy she felt she'd explode.

She cried out for Lily not to stop, begging, panting, pleading. Every time she thought she'd reached the limits of her ability to bear orgasm after orgasm, she was assailed with a new and even more powerful wall of sensation that took her up to another level of joy. When the final overwhelming climax crashed down upon her, it was like blast after blast of sheer energy crashing through her. Every part of her body pulsed with an amazing sexual electricity that coursed through every vein, every muscle, every limb.

It took a long time to catch her breath. The sensations gradually ebbed away leaving her feeling sated but gleeful. She opened her eyes to find Lily watching her with interest. "Unbelievable."

Lily said, "I thought you might like that."

"I'll have to leave myself in the good hands of the energizer bunny more often."

"I hope you will."

Lily removed the toy, and Kennie felt one last throb before her body relaxed into a pleasant fatigue.

Lily covered her body, kissing her way up to her neck. "Happy Birthday, Kennie."

"I can't think of a better gift you could have given me. Thank you."

"I should be thanking you. What an amazing lover you turned out to be."

"Not bad for a security guard, huh?" The words fell out of her mouth, and Kennie was suddenly struck with a feeling of inadequacy. Lily was a nationally famous painter, a gorgeous, wealthy woman. She could have any woman--any man--she wanted. In contrast, what was so great about Kennie? How could she even hope to have a relationship with a woman like this? She wanted to ask if this was a one-time thing, some sort of temporary diversion before someone else, someone like the lieutenant, came back into her life, but she couldn't make her tongue work.

Lily seemed to understand her unspoken feelings. "Kennie, before I became a painter, do you know what I was?"

Merely beautiful and accomplished? Kennie thought. That alone was daunting. "No."

"Let's see if I can remember in order: waitress, hotel clerk, waitress, telemarketer, art store clerk, waitress, hostess, and let's see, waitress again. It took me a long time to get to where I am now. I'm forty-four years old. I spent the first thirty-plus years of my life just barely making ends meet." When Kennie was silent, she went on. "I'm no prize. I keep odd hours and I get fixated on my

painting. I have plenty of ups and downs."

"Sounds like you're normal then. We all have ups and downs."

"Exactly. What I'm getting at is that if you'll have me, I want to explore a relationship with you. You're different from other women I've gotten involved with. You're like...grounded somehow. There's something real about you. I don't care if you're a security guard-- or a waitress. I don't care what you *do*, I care what you *are*. I care how you make me feel."

Kennie didn't know what to say. She grabbed the sheet to cover them, then wrapped Lily in her arms, a lump in her throat and tears prickling her eyes. She kissed both of Lily's eyelids and pressed the side of her face against her hair, reveling in the softness of the golden locks.

Lily said, "You could move up to the penthouse sometime, when you feel like it, if you feel like it, I mean. Your little apartment is cute, but it's awfully small."

Kennie swallowed and took a deep breath. "About that, I--I-- well, I don't actually live there."

"You don't? But you're always here. Why would you keep another apartment some place else?"

"I live in 1A."

"1A? Here?"

"Yup."

"I don't understand."

"It's like this. I own the building."

"What?"

"I own the Allen Arms."

Lily pulled away. "Since when?"

"Ever since I moved in." The gap between them felt almost painful. Kennie reached out gently and touched Lily's breast with the flat of her palm. "Does that change anything?"

"Yes, it changes everything."

Alarmed, Kennie took a deep breath but she didn't stop caressing Lily's breast.

"Everything." Breathlessly Lily said, "I think that means you can afford a lot nicer uniforms." Kennie focused on caressing the dark aureole. "Much nicer uniforms," Lily gasped out, "with piping and gold buttons." Her breath caught. "And epaulets."

Kennie laughed. "Definitely epaulets because you--"

"Yes," Lily interrupted, as she covered Kennie's body with her own, her hands warm and exploring. "Because I love a woman in uniform."

Author Biographies

Karen D. Badger

Vermont author Karen "KD" Badger's latest book is *In a Family Way*. She's also the author of *On a Wing and a Prayer* and *Yesterday Once More*, the latter a Golden Crown Literary Award Winner for Speculative Fiction.

Diane S. Bauden

Indiana writer Di Bauden is the author of *A Saving Solace*, *A Sacrifice For Friendship*, *Nurturing Souls*, and *Tomahawk'd*, which won a Golden Crown Literary Award for Traditional Contemporary Romance.

Bliss

Currently living in Vermont, Bliss is the author of a number of erotic and romance stories.

Jessie Chandler

Jessie grew up in Wisconsin and Minnesota and has been working on stories and novels for several years. Her first novel, *Bingo! It's Murder*, will be published in 2011 by Midnight Ink. She lives in Minneapolis.

Lee Coats

This late author never got a chance to see her work in print, but before she died in 2009 at the end of a long and interesting life, she did have the satisfaction of knowing some of her work would be published. This is the first of her stories to see print and this work is dedicated to her memory.

Pat Cronin, editor and author

A former paramedic and firefighter, Pat began writing when injuries ended her career. She has published numerous articles for online e-zines and short stories for anthologies. With Verda Foster, she edited the anthology, *Blue Collar Lesbian Erotica*, which won a Golden Crown Literary Award for Erotica. Her first novel, *Souls' Rescue*, will be out in 2010. Pat lives in Ohio.

R.G. Emanuelle

R.G.Emanuelle is a writer and editor living in New York City. She co-edited *Skulls and Crossbones: Tales of Women Pirates* with Andi Marquette, and her short stories can be found in *Best Lesbian Erotica 2010*, *Lesbian Lust: Red Hot Erotica*, *Khimairal Ink*, and the online collection *Oysters & Chocolate*. You can find her at www.rgemanuelle.com.

Verda Foster, editor and author

Along with her co-editor, Pat Cronin, Verda co-edited the Golden Crown Literary Award anthology *Blue Collar Lesbian Erotica*. She is the author of several novels: *The Chosen*, *These Dreams*, and *The Gift*, and co-wrote *She's the One*, *Graceful Waters*, and *Crystal's Heart* with BL Miller. Verda lives in California.

Lori L. Lake

Lori is the author of two collections of short stories and six novels, including *Snow Moon Rising*, which received a Golden Crown Literary Award as well as the 2007 Ann Bannon Popular Choice Award. Lori lived in Minneapolis for 26 years but has recently relocated to Portland, Oregon.

Catherine Lundoff

A prolific story writer, Catherine is originally from Brooklyn, NYC, and now lives in Minneapolis. She started writing professionally in 1996 while in law school, sold the first story she ever wrote, and quit law school shortly after. Her books include *Haunted Hearths & Sapphic Shadows*, *Night's Kiss: Lesbian Erotica*, and *Crave: Tales of Lust, Love, and Longing*.

Lee Lynch

Lee Lynch has been proudly writing lesbian stories since the 1960s when she was a frequent contributor to "The Ladder," the only lesbian publication at the time. She has gone on to publish over a dozen novels, and her new novel, *Beggar of Love*, is a sweeping story of lesbian passion. She currently lives in Florida.

Ms. M

A talented poet and author of many romantic and erotic stories, the divine Ms. M lives in Florida. This is her first published story.

Andi Marquette

Andi Marquette grew up in Colorado where she currently keeps busy as a novelist, short story writer, freelance writer, and editor. Her books include *Land of Entrapment*, which won a Golden Crown Literary Award in the Mystery category, and *State of Denial, Friends in High Places, The Ties That Bind*, and, with co-editor R.G. Emanuelle, the anthology *Skulls and Crossbones: Tales of Women Pirates*.

V.W. Massie

VW is a professional writer and editor who retired from a publishing career in Virginia to relocate to the Rio Grande Valley of Texas.

Victoria Oldham

Formerly from California, Victoria is a poet, essayist, editor, and short story writer who lives in the Midlands of England.

Analza Otis

New Jersey native Ana Otis, the daughter of legendary songwriter and producer, Clyde Otis, is an author, singer/songwriter, film production designer, and artist. Her debut lesbian book, *Trashy Novel*, was published in 2009, and she is at work on a sequel.

Chris Paynter

As an Air Force brat, Chris has lived all over the place. Her first novel, *Playing for First*, came out in 2009 and will soon be joined by a sequel called *Two for the Show*, and another novel, *Come Back to Me*. Chris lives in Indiana.

J.M. Redmann

J.M. Redmann, a Lambda Literary Award Winner, has written five novels, all featuring New Orleans private detective Michele 'Micky' Knight. Her most recent is *Death of a Dying Man*. The others are *Death by the Riverside*, *Deaths of Jocasta*, *The Intersection of Law and Desire*, and *Lost Daughters*. Her books have been translated into

German, Spanish, Dutch, and Norwegian. She lives in New Orleans, just at the edge of the flooded area.

Sammo

This is Sammo's second published story. Her first appeared in *Blue Collar Lesbian Erotica*. Sammo lives in England with her partner, Victoria Oldham.

MJ Williamz

Author of over two dozen anthologized stories, MJ lives in Portland, Oregon, where she writes romance and erotica when she's not at work at her day job. *Shots Fired* is MJ's first published novel.

Another Anthology by Cronin and Foster

Blue Collar Lesbian Erotica

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Several talented authors have joined together for this collection of erotica including Karin Kallmaker, Radclyffe, Ali Vali, Kate Sweeney, Verda Foster, Vada Foster, Trish Shields, Nann Dunne, Sammo, Cheri Crystal, Pat Cronin, Georgia Beers, Anne J. Kingsley, MJ Williamz, Kathy Smith, and Victoria Oldham.

Other Yellow Rose Books You Might Also Enjoy

A Table For Two

by Janet Albert

Ridley Kelsen is convinced she's not destined to find love. The singles scene is old and dating is terribly disappointing. Her closest friend tells her that love comes along when you least expect it and the very last thing Ridley expects when she accepts an invitation to join her friends for dinner, is that she will meet the most beautiful creature she's ever laid eyes on. Will this turn out to be yet another disappointment?

Dana De Marco moves to Philadelphia after her dreams for the future are unexpectedly shattered. Her new restaurant, Cafe De Marco is located on the city's famous South Street and has opened to rave reviews. It seems as if the pieces of her life are finally falling into place, except for one minor detail...she's unable to let go of the past.

The last thing Dana expects is that she's about to meet someone who will force her to face her demons head on. Does she have the courage to open her heart and love again?

Souls' Rescue

by Pat Cronin

Kelly McCoy is a firefighter and paramedic who's lived most of her adult life in New York. After 9-11, she relocates to Cincinnati, nursing a broken heart and looking for a new start. She takes one day at a time, trying not to let her losses overwhelm her.

Talia Stoddard is an insurance wiz who's always been smart on the job, but unlucky in love. After years of being told that she's too big, too tall, too black, too lesbian, and not a very snappy dresser, Talia has resigned herself to a life alone with only her dear gay friend Jacob for a diversion.

When Kelly and Talia's lives crash into one another, it's under the most stressful and threatening circumstances. Talia is in terrible danger, and it's up to Kelly to rescue her. In the horrendous situation they end up in, neither expects to find a friend, much less a soul mate?

Will they rescue one another and heal the wounds of their pasts? Or will they both continue to believe that they're not worthy of the kind of love the other might offer?

***Souls' Rescue* is the story of opening up to love, taking chances, and building a life that everyone dreams about, but few people ever find.**

Storm Surge

by Melissa Good

It's fall. Dar and Kerry are traveling--Dar overseas to clinch a deal with their new ship owner partners in England, and Kerry on a reluctant visit home for her high school reunion. In the midst of corporate deals and personal conflict, their world goes unexpectedly out of control when an early morning spurt of unusual alarms turns out to be the beginning of the shocking nightmare that was 9/11.

Soiled Dove

by Brenda Adcock

In 1872, sixteen-year-old Loretta Digby fled her home in Indiana to escape an abusive step-father. Rescued from the streets of St. Joseph, Missouri by brothel owner Jack Coulter, she turns to the only work available. By twenty she became a much sought after prostitute catering to St. Jo's most influential men and dreaming of the day she can leave her past behind and start her life anew. Jack is enraged when he discovers his favorite employee's plan to leave. Bloody and beaten, Loretta is rescued by a young prostitute, Amelia Benson, and customer Reverend Cyrus Langford. Working with teacher, Hettie Tobias, who is traveling west for a teaching position in Trinidad, Colorado, Loretta and Amelia leave their former lives behind.

In the foothills of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains outside Trinidad, Clare McIlhenney has been struggling for years to make her father's dream of owning a cattle ranch in the west come true. Working with a few ranch hands and her foreman, Ino Valdez, Clare has slowly built the ranch over the last twenty years while overcoming everything that should have stopped her.

In the spring of 1876 Loretta and her friends arrive in the dusty Colorado town. Her first meeting with Clare McIlhenney is less than inspiring. When Clare is injured, over her strenuous objections, Ino hires Loretta as a temporary cook and housekeeper for the ranch. Over the next few months, Clare struggles with her unwanted attraction to the much younger woman, unable to forget the events of her past that led to the deaths of everyone she had been close to. Determined to never lose anyone else, Clare closed off her emotions and became a distant and disliked stranger to everyone around her.

Will Loretta be able to keep her past a secret and find a new life? Will Clare open herself up to loss yet again and put her own prejudices behind her? In a story of the struggles in a harsh and unforgiving time will the two women find peace at last?

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