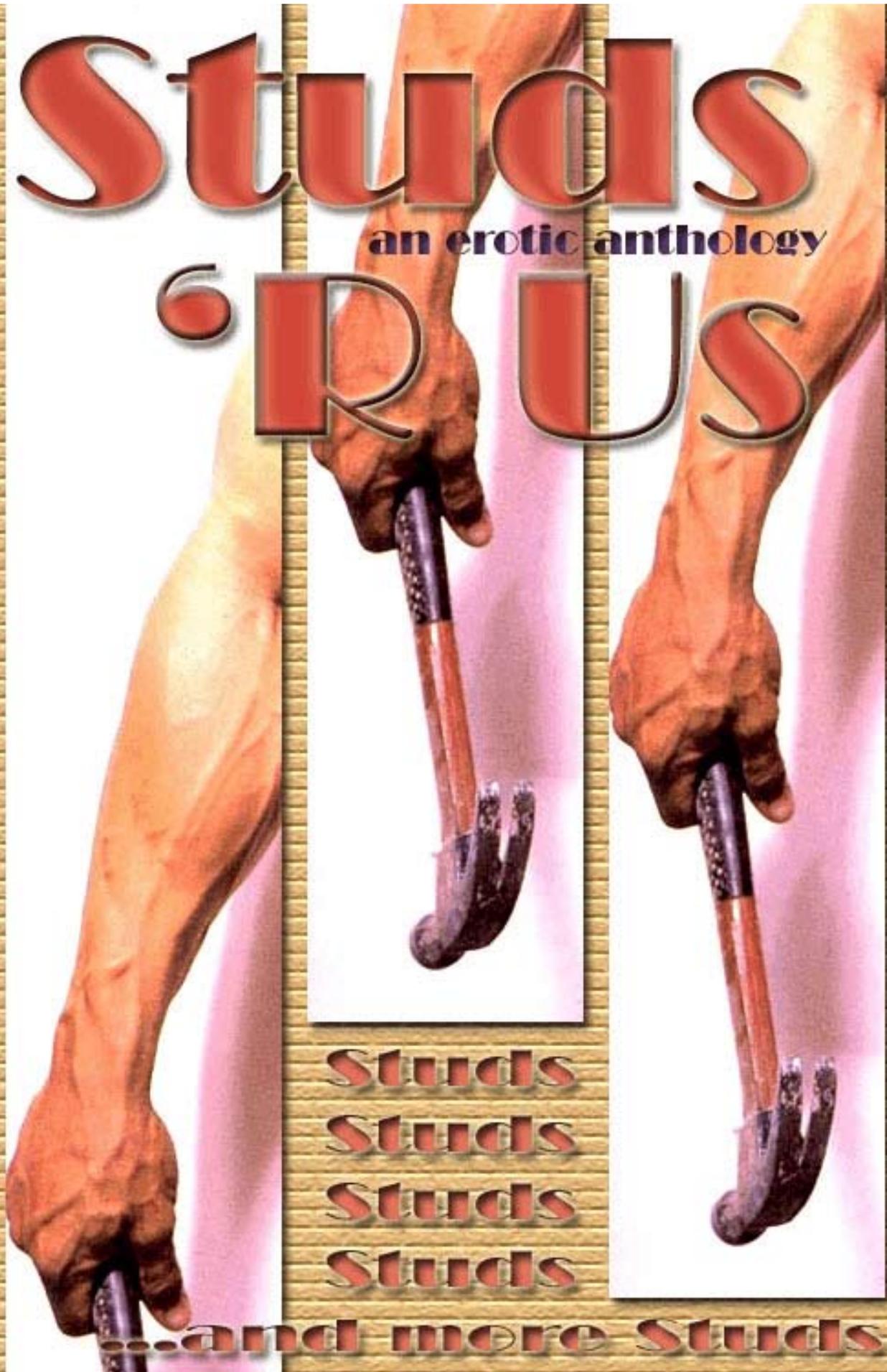


# Studs

an erotic anthology

# 6 PRUS



Studs  
Studs  
Studs  
Studs

...and more Studs



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# FOREWORD

No project like this is ever completed alone, and before you get to enjoying the stories, I'd like to take a minute to tell you about how STUDS 'R US came into being. I was conversing with a friend, who'd been sending me images on a daily basis, and I happened to ask if she was a member of Studs 'R Us and remarked that it sounded like a good name for an erotic romance collection. Before the day was over, the idea had been born, and put into operation.

I posted a call for authors, published and unpublished. A local friend jumped in and did the striking cover that adorns the collection. The folks at **Liquid Silver Books** once again proved why they are the best in the business. The authors came on board and offered their talent, and the wonderful Art Director, April Martinez, offered to put together the book you have just downloaded.

I hope you'll enjoy the collection, and feel free to offer your comments to the wonderful writers who've made this a special thank you for your on-going support and enthusiasm for the romance we love to write and read!! Each and every reader is a gift, and we're grateful to you all for your interest.

Thanks, and ENJOY!!!

Denysé

December, 2006



# PIRATE TO PIRATE

## DARRAGHA FOSTER

ILLUMINADO CONSTANTINE WALKED INTO THE CAFETORIUM with his ever-present smile brightening his darkly handsome Spaniard appearance. He scanned the room for a place to sit. That's when he saw her.

He stopped dead in his tracks.

The sight of her took his breath away.

His arms and legs went numb.

His spine tingled.

His vision blurred until all he could see was her face.

The hard plastic utilitarian school chair next to her was vacant.

The angel turned in her seat, seemingly drawn to his magnetic presence as he bypassed a grouping of his contemporaries—fellow custodians—and took the empty seat next to her.

Their eyes met briefly as they exchanged polite greetings.

The moment lingered between them like a thick blanket of fog, hiding everything else from view, sweetening the heavy air.

He held out his hand. "I am Illuminado Constantine."

The angel smiled. "Nice to meet you. I'm Saber MacLean."

Illuminado shifted his weight to hide the rise in his faded Levi's. "You are new?"

Saber nodded. "I was hired this morning as a long-term substitute teacher to cover for a teacher taking an extended emergency leave."

Illuminado's interest piqued to a higher level. "Hennessey? Mark Hennessey at Lanfaire Middle School?"

Saber smiled. "Yes. He left for Guatemala yesterday morning. Seems his son is in a bit of trouble down there. Married a local gal and is refusing to come home."

"You can't stop love. Hennessey will be unsuccessful. I know Latin people and they love very deeply," Illuminado replied.

"Are you from Central America?" Saber asked. "Your accent..."

"I am from Spain. The Iberian Peninsula," Illuminado replied.

"You're a long way from home."

"Ah, home is where the heart is. You know—I work at Lanfaire, as well. I am the night custodian."

"Do you clean my room?" Saber asked.

"Yes, of course."

"Anything I should know? No paperclips left on the floor and staples in the recycle bin, right?"

Illuminado shot a dark, sultry look at Saber. "Thank you. Take care of your custodian and he shall always take care of your needs, too. Many teachers—they do not understand this."

Like a dry river bed in a flash flood, Saber felt a chilling wash of wet heat course down her spine, through her nipples and belly, finally coming to rest in that sensitive place between her legs. His dark eyes and sexy accent were as good as foreplay.

"I'll do my best to make sure my room is left in good order at the end of the day, Mr. Constantine."

"Call me Illuminado," he replied.

Saber smiled—and blushed. "Illuminado."

"Saber. Saber MacLean," Illuminado said softly. "I am very happy to know you."

Together with fifty or so other school district employees, Saber and Illuminado were gathered together for the annual blood-borne pathogen training. The rule of thumb: *if it's wet and it's not yours, don't touch it.*

They exchanged interested glances and small talk, as the nurse-trainer droned through her lesson. "Who can site an example of when to use protective gear?"

Illuminado chuckled. "When making love," he replied softly.

The nurse shook her head as the good old boy custodians, coaches, noon-duties and teachers in high-risk for exposure settings broke into laughter. "Thank you for that, Mr. Constantine. Now, anyone else...?"

A barrage of replies hit the nurse. She knew they'd all had the training before. It was a pretty simple lesson. Who wouldn't glove-up?

As the meeting concluded, Saber felt a stab in her stomach that reminded her of middle school unrequited love. She'd fallen into a warm, happy place sitting next to Illuminado and did not relish the thought of heading back to her empty classroom to prepare lesson plans. At least they worked in the same school. "I guess I'll see you at the school, Illuminado. It was nice meeting you today," she said, extending her hand.

Illuminado took Saber's hand and raised it to his lips. His kiss was quick and soft, yet more penetrating than an injection. "Today I again learned that to do my job, I must wear protective gear. But as I said, there are wonderful times to use protection as well."

Saber swallowed hard. The lump in her throat wouldn't go down as she whispered, "Such

as when making love.”

Illuminado smiled. He knew he had Antonio Banderas good looks and a voice that sent American women into spirals of ecstasy. With a simple eye movement he could make a woman want him. It was a Spaniard's way. It was something men from Costa Del Sol had in spades. “Are you offering?”

Saber knew better.

She knew better, but she wanted him, and damn it, she wanted him now. “Your place or mine?” The stereo-typical pick-up line sounded as corny as she knew it was. Unfortunately, it fit. Shades of on-the-job sexual harassment and broken school district policies!

The room had nearly cleared.

Illuminado and Saber remained seated, whispering to each other.

The nurse-trainer interjected as she packed up her gear. “Lovely. I've taught twenty six blood borne pathogen trainings and have never walked away with so much as an offer to get a cup of coffee. You two sit next to each other and sparks fly. Tell you what, if it's wet and it's not yours...”

Illuminado and Saber laughed as they replied, in unison, “Don't touch it.”

The nurse picked up her training kit and walked briskly from the cafetorium.

Illuminado took Saber's hand in his. “My shift starts soon. Will you be at work today? Perhaps preparing your classroom for tomorrow? I know Mr. Hennessey left in quite a rush.”

Saber nodded. “I'll be burning the midnight oil. I'll drink lots of black coffee tomorrow morning so that I can keep ahead of my students. They're not expecting me, that's for sure.”

Illuminado smiled. “Some surprises are very good. Your new students will love you.”

Saber rose from her seat. “What's not to love, right?”

Illuminado nodded in agreement. “May I walk you to your car?”

“Gonna carry my book bag, too?” Saber asked picking up her backpack from the floor.

“Not on a first date. Maybe our next,” Illuminado teased.



It was well-after three-thirty when Saber and Illuminado pulled into the parking lot of Lanfaire Middle School, he in his late-model long bed Chevy pick up and her in the brand new PT Cruiser daddy bought her when she graduated from college.

“Do you have your keys, yet?” Illuminado asked.

Saber nodded. “I met the school secretary this morning. She gave me the room keys and my passcode. She seems very thorough.”

“She's very good. A custodian's best friend is the school secretary.” Illuminado walked Saber to her classroom, then set about beginning the evening's muck-out after seven hundred students.

He enjoyed his job. He took pride in keeping a safe and tidy school. And he liked the night shift. An empty school became his playground. No...it became his ship of dreams.

Illuminado had the blood of a pirate in his veins. As a descendent of Benito de Soto, acts of piracy were a part of his DNA. And he ran a tight ship.

When he mopped the halls, he mopped the decks of his forefather's ship, *The Black Joker*. When he found coin or jewels strewn about, the lost and found box became his treasure chest. The climbing structure in the indoor play shed was his Rock of Gibraltar.

The work wasn't difficult, the pay and benefits were great and his imaginings made his nights go quickly as he swabbed the decks and swept away debris in search of buried treasure.

Illuminado had a new treasure map to follow, too. Room 207 was where "X" marked the spot.

However, he had a schedule to keep—and room 207 was off the map in uncharted waters until after his dinner break at sixty-thirty. He'd baked a paella and brought the whole pan with him to work. A fortuitous act, if ever he'd made one.

He picked up the telephone at the secretary's desk as he dusted the office and buzzed Saber's room.

"Miss MacLean," Saber answered.

"First time you've answered the phone in your new classroom?" Illuminado asked.

"Yes. But I suppose it won't be my last. What can I do for you Mr. Constantine?"

"Dinner in the staff lounge at six forty five. Will you be hungry?" he asked.

Saber took a hard breath. She was hungry, all right. Hungry for something other than job interviews, resumes, text books and sensible shoes. It wasn't forbidden for her to have a love affair with another school employee. Not even the school board could stop true love—or the reasonable facsimile—from happening. How could she resist the advances of a handsome Spaniard who knows how to clean and sanitize? Lord only knows what the man could do with duct tape! "All right. What's on the menu?"

Illuminado chuckled. *You are on the menu, Saber MacLean.* "Paella, of course. My mother's own recipe carried to America in her little handbag. I was a teenager, always hungry, and knew that once we were settled, mother would bring out the clay pot and make it for me. It is a food of celebration."

"You came over as a teen?" Saber asked.

"We came from the Iberian Peninsula when I was fourteen. My family home is in the shadow of the Rock of Gibraltar. I still have family in Andalusia region, Spain."

"Here be monsters. *Ne plus ultra. Go no further,* warned the Romans," Saber replied. "The Rock of Gibraltar was once hailed as a pillar of Hercules and the ends of earth. To sail beyond it meant certain doom."

Illuminado laughed. "This is true. Many offerings to the gods have been found on Gibraltar. They hoped to still the seas and tame the beasts that lay beyond. Of course, the

only true monsters are those in our minds—and they can be quite fierce.”

“I’ll see you in a few hours,” Saber said.

“I look forward to your tasting my paella,” Illuminado replied. He hung up the phone.

Saber cradled the handset of her phone for a few moments, feeling the heat of his gaze upon her through the wires and electronic nodes of the phone system. A hot Spaniard with burning charcoal eyes, a sexy accent—and a job. She replaced her handset and continued cutting out laminated room decorations. A pirate theme. The kids would respond to writing prompts on posters emblazon with famous pirates. At least they’d look at the posters. Maybe they’d learn something, too.

Illuminado pulled his cleaning cart to the staff lounge and parked it. He had a full shaving kit at the school in his locker. He quickly washed his hands and face and brushed his teeth. He changed out of his coveralls and into a jean shirt and jeans. He smoothed his thick dark brown hair back into a neat pony tail.

He switched the staff oven onto 425 degrees and slid in his clay baking dish full of paella. He dimmed the lights over the sofa and coffee table area and set out two plates, two forks and two ice-cold bottles of water from the vending machine.

He patted his forehead nervously. “Necesito una vela,” he mumbled. “Where are the damned candles?” There were birthday cake candles in the silverware drawer. They’d have to do. Not very romantic, but when having one minute to set a mood, any candle would do.

“Illuminado?” Saber called.

“Si, Seniorita. Te aguardo aquí,” he replied softly.

Saber giggled. “Gracias, Senior.” She paused as she entered the break room. “Oh, my. Candlelight and what is that heavenly aroma?”

“My paella. Please, be seated.” Illuminado motioned toward the sofa.

“So, tell me about growing up in the shadow of the Rock of Gibraltar,” Saber asked.

“Tell me how you got the first name of Saber,” Illuminado replied.

“You first.” She opened her water bottle.

“I shall speak while I serve our dinner, how’s that?” Illuminado began. “I have stood at the top of the world. From the top of the Rock of Gibraltar you have Europe at your feet. Africa fills one horizon, while the gates to the Mediterranean and the Atlantic are on either side. One understands why the Rock and its sister Mount Hacho in Morocco are called the Pillars of Hercules and are sacred sites in myth and legend. When I marry, it shall be at the top of the Rock, God’s most holy site.”

“You’re getting married?” Saber asked, hoping the disappointment she felt didn’t reflect in her voice.

“Not yet. First I must find a bride.”

*Relief!* “What did your parents do on Gibraltar?” she asked.

“Mother worked for the Brits as a bookkeeper and father ran the tram to top of the Rock.

I grew up speaking both Castilian and English. But my heart is Spanish.”

“It sounds very romantic. Why did your parents move here?”

“First, tell me of Saber MacLean,” Illuminado commanded softly, reaching a serving spoon into the clay pot.

The room filled with the scents of baked rice, saffron and olive oil as he scooped the decadent dish onto their plates.

“I’d better give you an explanation for my name now, because I think I may go into some kind of rapturous state after taking the first bite of your paella. Chicken? Sausage?”

Illuminado smiled. “Rabbit. And mussels and shrimp.”

“Rabbit?” Saber questioned.

“I told you this is my mother’s recipe. Don’t worry. Rabbit is the other white meat. With a name like Saber, you aren’t afraid of trying something new, are you?”

“My mother and father were championship fencers. I grew up at the point of a rapier. I’m Saber after their art. Of course, father was Scottish and I thank God everyday they didn’t name me Claymore. And I’ve eaten rabbit before.”

Illuminado poked his fork into the rice. “I love the color of the rice. Such a perfect golden yellow saffron makes it. Please, take a bite, my woman of steel.”

Saber slid her fork into the golden mound of rice and finely chopped vegetables, her mouth watering. The first bite sent cascades of flavor throughout her body. “Oh, my God.”

“Is good, no?” Illuminado teased.

“Oh, my God,” Saber repeated.

“Mother would be pleased with your reaction.” Illuminado took a bite of his paella, and suddenly felt the urge to join in Saber’s prayer. “Jesus Cristo. Es delicioso.”

“You can say that again,” Saber replied. “So, Illuminado, other than your mother, there is no Mrs. Constantine.”

“Correct. And I assume there is no Mr. MacLean?”

“Only my father.” Saber agreed.

“Well, then we shall have to have a third date,” Illuminado replied.

“Third?”

“I consider the training our first date. I looked at you and...well...I became my own Rock of Gibraltar. You know, I am Spanish, and we live and love passionately.”

“Oh, my. Well, I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“You stir in me feelings I have not had for a very long time,” Illuminado continued. “I do not want to frighten you, but I must get to know you.”

“Well, then we’ll have to have a third date, won’t we?” Saber replied.

Illuminado sat back. He studied Saber’s gentle motions of fork to plate and fork to mouth. He wanted to be that lucky fork, encircled by her soft lips; tasted by her warm tongue. She held her plate against her chest. Oh, to be rim of that plate, resting against her firm bosom.

“Saber,” he whispered.

“Yes?”

*I want to rip your clothes off and make love to you like no man has ever made love to you before. I can give you orgasms better than how my paella tastes.* “I need to finish work now. How much longer will you be in the school tonight?”

Saber withheld a crestfallen pout. *Why doesn't he just rip my clothes off and do me over the coffee table?* “I'm leaving at ten. I've got my lesson plans finished, but I want to finish decorating my room.”

“Ah, what is your theme?” Illuminado asked.

“Pirates.”

“You like pirates? That's good. Very good. I know a pirate,” Illuminado paused. “I'll be in your wing in about an hour. I get off at ten, so I'll walk you out to our car.”

Saber reached for their dishes. “I know a pirate, too. And I'll see you in an hour.”

Illuminado stopped her by gently placing a hand upon hers. The electricity between them held them in place; froze them in time. He encircled her hand in his and raised it to his lips. “I'll clean up. Thank you for having dinner with me. You go to your classroom and make your pirates happy. They like attention, you know.”

He touched his lips to her hand. It wasn't enough. He wanted more of her.

Saber sighed as Illuminado turned her hand over and planted a kiss on the pulse-point of her wrist. Her eyes rolled back and she felt her female parts blossom with readiness. Her hand still in his, she leaned forward, lifting her chin. They were so close she could feel his heat against her cheeks. One slight movement and their lips could touch. “I need dessert before we go back to work.” She breathed the words into his mouth as their lips met.

The electricity of their joined hands arced as their lips touched. As their tongues softly swirled together, the power generated between them could have lit a small city for a week. There was no sweeter or more fitting a dessert to a dinner of paella.

“Thank you,” Saber whispered against Illuminado's lips. “I'll see you soon. Sweep quickly.”

She backed away slowly, then turned and left the break room as calmly as she could. As soon as she knew she was out of sight and earshot, she left loose with a maniacal giggle of pure delight.

Illuminado felt drugged. Drugged by the embrace of an angel. *Muerto e ido al cielo. I am dead and gone to heaven. She is heaven. I could love this woman.*



Saber heard a soft hum coming from the corridor. It was a familiar tune. A sea shanty. A pirate's song.

She closed her eyes and willed her bottom to stay in seated. She wanted to peek out the door. To see him as he breezed her way. She hadn't been playing hard to get—and there was no reason to start doing so now. Saber just thought perhaps it might be more fun if she waited for him to come to her.

She closed her plan book and tucked it safely into her top desk drawer. Her window blinds were drawn.

She began humming the same piratey tune as Illuminado moved closer to her classroom.

“Custodian,” he called as he always did before entering a classroom at night where a teacher might still be frantically working.

“Do you always announce yourself before entering a classroom?” she asked.

“I'm not entering a classroom, in truth. I'm boarding another ship. By the looks of it, a pirate ship,” Illuminado replied.

“Like my décor?” Saber asked.

“I do. Very much. I am a pirate, too.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yes. I am a descendent of Benito de Soto, born in 1800. Spaniard and pirate.” Illuminado paused. “He was a very defiant, hard-headed man. Rather than allow somebody to hang him, he stood on top of his coffin and calmly reached for the gallows and adjusted the noose around his own neck. It is said he smiled to the gathered crowd and exclaimed “Adios Todos!” as he jumped from the cart to his slow painful death. Even as he met death, he was braver than most men are in life.”

“And I am a descendent of William Kidd. In sixteen ninety-nine my foremother, Mercy Sands Raymond, was enriched by Captain Kidd after giving him aid. Enriched, it seems, in ways more than with the gold and jewels he placed in the folds of her extended apron. She bore him a son whose descendant is me! It seems we're both pirates.”

Illuminado emptied her recycle bin without skipping a beat. “So it seems, indeed. No wonder fire sparked between us as we embraced. We are well-suited to each other, lady pirate. And here I thought you were just a lovely schoolmarm.”

Saber burst out laughing. “Schoolmarm? Oh, my God. That word indicates I am strict and old-fashioned!”

“No offense intended. You are neither strict, nor old-fashioned. At least that I'm aware.”

“When I bring out my ruler to slap your hands, then we'll see how strict I am,” Saber replied.

Illuminado's smile grew even more intense. “What must I do to be slapped?”

Saber walked to her classroom door and closed it. She turned off one bank of lights. “You need to ask, that's all.”

“And if I don't ask to be slapped with your ruler, will you make me walk the plank?” Illuminado asked.

Saber approached Illuminado with the full intent of bedding him on the round braided rug in the reading corner of her classroom. She through her left arm around his neck and pulled him down into a long, hard kiss while her right hand went to the rise on the crotch of his coveralls. “Shiver my timbers,” she murmured, dropping to her knees.

Casting reason aside and allowing lust and passion to consume her, Saber reached up and tugged the zipper of Illuminado’s coveralls down. She reached inside the sedate gray cloth and coaxed his hardness from his dark blue boxer briefs.

“I want to walk your plank,” she sighed, running her tongue along the shaft of his smooth, thick member.

Illuminado sucked in his breath and entwined his fingers in the tight curls of Saber’s red hair. He exhaled with a soft, “Argh.”

Saber stroked the shaft of his penis into her mouth, using her hand to heighten the act.

Illuminado slipped out of his coveralls, then replaced his hands atop her head.

One touch of her mouth against his penis and he knew he was going to burst. *I can last so much longer than this! She makes mad with desire. Crap! I’m going to come already!* “Aye, Dios Mio, Saber. I’m going to...”

Saber pulled her lips from his swollen head and stroked him to orgasm. “Thar he blows,” she giggled.

Illuminado quaked in his boots for a moment before coming back down to earth. He looked down into the angelic face Saber. “I can make it last much longer, Saber. I...” he paused, seeing a look of ‘who the hell cares, just do me’ in her eyes. “It is my turn to pleasure you,” he whispered.

He dropped to his knees and took Saber into his arms, pinning her against the braided rag rug. He tore at her clothing, eager to consume her.

He kissed his way down her body, taking great delight in exploring her nooks and crannies, hills and valleys. Saber had a fine, healthy woman’s body; round in all the right places. He’d never cared for thin women. Saber’s flesh beckoned to him like a tapas bar. A nibble here. A nibble there. He was saving his appetite until his lips could feast on the beautiful region between her thighs. He slid two fingers into her. She was ready. She was wet for him.

He moved his hungry mouth to her red tufted mound and buried his tongue between her labial lips. Her swollen clitoris rose to meet the tip of his tongue.

She tasted sweet and fresh. He inserted his tongue into her vagina and moved the bridge of his nose across her clitoris as he pleased her. He could taste her passion and feel her building climax against his lips.

Saber reached for his head. “Illuminado...please...make love to me.”

“I am,” he replied.

“No, now. In me. I want you inside me,” she begged.

He didn’t want to move his mouth away from her. He wanted only to feel her orgasm

against his lips. "I need you this way. Come for me," he whispered before returning to his feast.

Saber obliged him by grabbing his head and pushing it sharply against her pelvic region as she climaxed. He didn't pull away. He lapped at her increasingly sensitive clitoris until her back arched and her hands pulled the rag carpet's ends up into tight balls.



Exhausted and satiated, Saber and Illuminado lay wrapped in each other's arms on her classroom floor. A poster featuring etchings of famous pirates wafted gently in the breeze created by the room's air-conditioner. "Our ancestors mock us," Illuminado said.

"No, they are applauding us," Saber replied.

Illuminado rose. "I'll see you at ten." He helped Saber to her feet and kissed her passionately.

"Until then," Saber replied, reaching for her errant clothing as Illuminado zipped his coveralls and left her classroom.

Hidden behind proper and fairly conservative work attire, the throbbing in Salem's mound teased and tormented her. She felt like putty. Weak as a kitten. She was sure she could purr if she tried, too.

She shuffled a few papers around her desk, unable to concentrate. Not a good sign. She'd certainly slept with handsome men before—and once or twice in college she'd even had the odd one-night stand—but this was different. This was on the job—and so very naughty. With the most incredibly good-looking, sexy man she had ever seen in her life. What would an affair with him be like? This was going to be a great year. A job, a steady paycheck, the ability to use her degree—and Illuminado. Her custodial pirate.

Illuminado had fallen in love quickly before. That was the way of his people. Love was everything to them—and sometimes it could flame up and burn so brightly that nothing was left but white hot ashes. He knew, deep in his soul, that he and the lovely Saber MacLean, were destined to be together. His mind was already made up. Now, how to convince the lady that his intentions were honorable?

This was more than man to woman—this was pirate to pirate.



Ten o'clock.

Illuminado was in the custodial closet near the back entrance of the school securing his equipment when a firm pinch on his rear end caught his attention. "Saber, how nice of you to drop by my closet," he said, pulling her inside the four by six storage area. She kicked the door

closed with her foot as her arms flew around his neck and their lips met.

Illuminado pushed Saber up against the door and lifted her.

Holding her aloft with one strong arm he unzipped his fly and tore away her panties. No other foreplay was necessary. Breathing was all the stimulation they needed.

With one solid thrust, Illuminado buried his penis inside Saber. It was a long, hard upright screw against a door surrounded by mop heads, brooms and plastic garbage liners. They moved slowly against each other, each movement of groin to groin deliberate and breathtakingly pleasurable.

Saber relinquished fear, control and common sense as Illuminado made love to her upside the door. As she felt his hot release deep inside her, she opened herself up to an astonishing orgasm.

Mutual. Simultaneous.

Amazing.



“I need to see you again, Saber MacLean. Away from this place,” Illuminado whispered as he encircled Saber with his arms at the door of her car. “I need more of you than just this. You fill me so well. I am filled by you.”

Saber managed a weak nod of her head. “Yes. Yes.”

Illuminado continued, “You know, from the first moment our eyes met, I wanted you. I have never felt such a strong attraction to a woman before.”

“I understand. I’m not promiscuous, and I’ve never done something like this before—especially not at work! You just...I wanted you, too. I think we could have met anywhere, and still ended up making love,” Saber replied.



They had exchanged loving moments before exchanging telephone numbers, yet it seemed inconsequential. Their ships had formed an armada. To quote a famous movie pirate, they had *made an accord*.

After a few months of dating Saber MacLean, Illuminado wanted their relationship to be made permanent. But to ask Saber MacLean to be his wife, he knew he needed to enlist the aid of others who loved her...her students.

It was one week before spring break. The students were antsy; the staff, more so.

It was time.



Saber's classroom door was blocked from the inside. Never a good sign in middle school. She pounded her fist on the door. "Open up!" she called.

"Say the magic words, Miss Mac!" a student called back.

"Please unblock the classroom door before the assistant principal notices I'm in the hall and my students have locked me out. I do need this job, you know."

She heard a heavy scraping across the floor as the students unblocked the entrance. "Come in!" they called.

Saber opened her classroom door and stopped as the flash of a red light hit her face. "What's going on?"

"Treasure hunt," the students replied.

"No, today is Social Studies and spelling," Saber replied.

Saber looked around her classroom. The students had not only strung up red, twinkling Christmas lights, they'd moved the furniture around. "You know, you can't mutiny. What I say goes."

A student approached her, tugging a pirate eye-patch down over his left eye. He handed Saber a note.

She unfolded it and shook her head. It was a treasure map. "X marks the spot, huh?"

"Isn't that how it's supposed to work?" the boy replied.

"And I suppose I need to decipher the clues on this rather clever map and find the treasure before you'll get on with today's lessons?" Saber asked.

"That's right, Miss MacLean. We're under strict orders of the captain not to acquiesce to your instructions until you've found the treasure."

"And whom, might I ask, is your captain?" Saber asked.

"Captain Constantine," the student spokesman replied.

"I should have guessed he had something to do with this. Look...if I play along are you going to figure out how to tie it all in to our social studies curriculum?"

"Of course," the student replied.

Saber looked at her watch, then at the map. "I have to go outside according to this. I can't just leave my classroom unattended."

Each student in the room held up a bright pink hall pass. "We're going to the library. It's all arranged."

Saber shook her head. "Your captain has thought of everything, hasn't he?"

A girl opened up her backpack and removed a three-corner hat. "Put this on," she instructed.

"I am not going to wear a pirate hat," Saber replied.

The girl looked crestfallen. Saber's heart melted and she donned the black felt hat.

The entire class rose and walked by her, out the door, single file, their little pink passes held aloft. There was no talking in line, no pushing, no shoving. It was perhaps the most orderly

line-up of middle school students she'd ever seen. And Illuminado had arranged it. For her.

Saber looked at the map. From her classroom she was to take seventeen steps forward and three to the left. That would lead her to an outside door.

She followed the trail.

After twenty steps she stood before an envelope which had been taped to the wire-mesh door window. She opened it. Silver and gold confetti spilled out of the envelope, along with a small pebble. Like pea gravel. An odd clue.

Saber opened the door and took thirty seven steps to the right. This put her in the middle of the covered play shed. Another envelope awaited her.

It was heavier than the first, and an odd bulge in the paper told her that something more than pea gravel was inside. She pressed the shape of the object through the envelope, breaking through the paper. "It's a toy airplane. What is going on?"

A little tag had been tied with a string to the fuselage. She read the single word written on the tag. "Will." Saber looked at the map. The next forty steps took her through the play shed and into the teacher's courtyard. "Will who? Will I what?"

The teachers had a picnic table in their courtyard. A large, fairly realistic ball and chain graced the tabletop. Surrounding it was more of the silvery-gold glitter. "A ball and chain. All righty then."

The map took her inside.

Another envelope awaited her in the empty cafeteria set out on a chair in the middle of the room.

She ripped it open. A 3x5 card fell out, baring a single letter. "U." Saber tried to make sense of the clues as she proceeded on the final leg of her treasure hunt.

"A rock. A toy airplane. Will. A ball and chain. U." She opened what she hoped was her final door and climbed the three steps upward. She was in the back of the stage in the auditorium, having walked all the way around the school.

A nautical-sounding bell chimed from beyond the back curtains of the stage. She peered out.

A group of students stood on the stage, in a cardboard pirate ship.

One of the girls in the group giggled as Saber came onto the stage. Illuminado walked out from stage right. "X marks the spot," he whispered. "Climb aboard your ship."

Saber smiled. "Permission to come aboard, sir."

The boy at the helm nodded.

Saber stepped over the three-inch rise of the nicely-crafted stage prop and took a seat on a little bench near the stern. An old-fashioned sea chest, painted with gold glitter awaited her.

"What clues have you found on your journey?" Illuminado asked.

"Ah, yes. The clues. Before I list them, my compliments to your wrangling of my class. How did you get them to keep a secret?"

Illuminado smiled. "I'm a pirate. They love pirates."

"All right. I have a rock. An airplane. A word, a letter and a ball and chain. I have no idea what it all means."

"Open the chest," Illuminado whispered.

Saber looked at the ball and chain she'd hauled in from the cafeteria. Illuminado...this is..."

"Open it, Saber," he replied.

The costumed and play-acting middle schoolers twittered in the background.

Saber opened the sea chest. A spotlight hit the contents. There were kids at the controls. Illuminado was directing quite an epic production!

She sucked in her breath and held it as the contents of the chest became visible.

Tickets. Airline tickets. Two of them.

Saber opened the flap on one of them. Delta airlines to New York. New York to Madrid. Madrid to Gibraltar. "Spain?" she asked.

Illuminado smiled. "Si."

Saber read the ticket details. "These are first class—and for next week! Illuminado..."

"Open the other items. Open them, Saber. You have already put this all together in your heart."

Saber reached into the chest and withdrew a velvet-encased drawstring bag. Inside the bag was the clear outline of a ring box. She didn't open the bag immediately.

The anticipation in the air was so thick it could be cut with a knife—but she waited. Waited and considered.

If this is what it now very clearly appears to be, is it what I want?

If it was not a proposal of marriage from the incredibly sexy Illuminado Constantine, then what could it be?

Do I even want to get married?

He's going to want children. He said as much over dinner two weeks ago.

Do I want children? I may teach them, do I want any of my own? Do I want his children?

All eyes were upon her. She was nervous enough without having the eyes of her class glaring at her in a non-classroom setting. Waiting for her to open the bag.

She slid the polished white ring box out from the velvet. A large "X" marked the lid.

"X marks the spot," she whispered before opening the box.

Inside the box was another note, neatly folded up.

She set the box aside and unfolded the note. It read simply, Look at me.

She looked at the other clues. A rock. Another name for a diamond. A name for Illuminado's choice of venue for a wedding. The Rock. At the top of the Rock. Will. U. Will you marry me? Will you fly to Spain and marry me on spring break atop the rock of Gibraltar? *Then go*

*BDSM with me and the ball and chain.*

Saber giggled. She knew the ball and chain represented one aspect of marriage—but she liked her idea better. She and Illuminado hadn't yet explored the darker aspects of love making. Of course, if she looked up at him, as his note commanded, then she might be sealing her fate and end up having many years with which to explore such things.

I am descendent of a woman who stood up to a pirate and came out wealthy for her initiative and backbone. Why is it so hard to look at him?

“Saber,” he said softly.

She raised her chin, and looked at Illuminado. And the brilliant diamond engagement ring in his hand.

He took her left hand in his, and slipped the ring onto her finger. “Do we have an accord, mate?”

Saber looked at her left hand. The ring's weight was going to take some getting used to. “We have an accord. Pirate to pirate. Man to woman.”

Illuminado kissed Saber, whispering against her lips amidst the applause and joyful cries of the students, “Husband to wife.”

“*Ne plus ultra.* Go no further,” Saber said placing her lips against Illuminado's ear. “At least not in front of the crew.”



# LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

## LILA DUBOIS

“I HATE SEX WITH YOU.”  
“You’re pathetic.”

“If I ever made love to you, really gave you everything I had, I’d ruin you for other women. I think we both know why I won’t.”

“Bitch!”

Lisa’s hand twitched as ‘Mike’ flung a glass across the room. The prop glass exploded on impact with a pitiful popping sound. By the time the episode went to air the ‘pop’ would be covered with a nerve shattering ‘crash.’

Well back from the action, Lisa sat in a director’s chair and mouthed the words along with the actors.

“Don’t call me a bitch!”

“I’ll call you what you are, a lying manipulative bitch.”

“You’re right I am a liar, I lied to you every time I kissed you, you narcissistic ass.”

‘Janet’ pulled back her hand and slapped ‘Mike.’

“Cut.”

The set, which had been still but for the slowly moving camera, came to life. The booms were lowered, lights dimmed, and tapes changed. T.J. and Sarah, the actors behind the on-screen portrayal of Mike and Janet, disappeared among the hustling crew. A moment later Sarah, a robe covering the negligee she wore for the scene, popped up beside Lisa’s chair.

“Hey there writer lady, how’s it going?”

“Good, you were great; I could really feel the energy.”

“I couldn’t do it without you.”

Lisa smiled and shook her head. Sarah was an Oscar nominated actress, even with a terrible script Lisa was sure Sarah could bring out passion.

“Where’s T.J.?”

“Cooling down.”

While Sarah was able to jump in and out of a scene, doing her emotional prep in her head, T.J. always needed some warm-up and cool-down time.

“Now ladies, you know I never cool down.”

T.J. appeared on Lisa's other side. Leaning down he kissed her cheek.

“And how is our most brilliantly twisted writer doing today?”

“Pretty good, there is some crazy stuff coming up and I thought I'd take a break from the writing.” Lisa ended her statement with a saucy smile.

“Oh really?” Sarah asked. “Why don't you be a sweet girl and give Mama Sarah a little hint.”

“Now, Sarah, you know I would get in trouble for that.”

“Come on pretty lady.” T.J. ran his fingers over her cheek, “Why don't you give us a hint?”

Lisa gulped. T.J. was hot, smoking hot, and she was a healthy young twenty-something with a sex drive, but still, she would never give up secrets for sex, even if it would be amazing hot sex with the yummy T.J.

“I—um I can't, you know that.”

T.J. pressed in on her chair from one side, Sarah did the same on the other, her soft long fingers lightly tracing Lisa's neck.

Lisa had a quick fantasy involving her as the filling in a Sarah-T.J. sandwich. Maybe she *would* give up the secret for some hot sweaty sex...

“Back slowly away from the writer and no one gets hurt.”

T.J. and Sarah both turned to look at the man who gave the order. Jay McCoy was one of the assistant producers.

“If anyone gets to seduce her for secrets,” Jay leaned into Lisa, his hips against her knees, “It's me.” He placed a smacking kiss on her lips.

Lisa gulped again as they chuckled. To these three it was a fun game, after all they were Hollywood through and through and used sex, and their sexuality, as a weapon. Lisa knew they did it, and through her writing could make them do it, but it was a skill utterly beyond her, and, as the hard points of her nipples attested, she was easily swayed by it.

“Come on sweet thing,” T.J. cajoled, “just one hint.”

“I hope you like black.”

“Black?”

“That's right. I hope you like black.”

“Well then, that will certainly give us something to think on won't it?”

Knowing that they wouldn't get more out of her, both T.J. and Sarah turned to the talent wranglers who had been hovering anxiously. As Sarah turned away Lisa caught sight of the jagged 'T' on the back of the robe Sarah wore.

The 'T,' emblazoned in blue, was the logo for 'Touch Me' the dark adult drama series that

Lisa wrote for. At 27 she had her dream job. For five years she had schlepped through the dregs of the cinema industry. She'd been an office PA, a set PA, an assistant coordinator, a travel coordinator, and an art department assistant. Even as she worked 16 hour days she'd written treatment after treatment, tirelessly submitting them to studios, hoping they would like her style, love her ideas, and hire her on.

Lisa had been hooked on 'Touch Me' from the moment she saw it. Since it was on a cable only station, and one with a lot of money, they took risks that the other stations did not. The show was based on human connections, the need to touch and be touched. There were over 15 main characters whose stories it rotated between. Mike and Janet were minor characters in the first episode, set-up as the perfect couple with money, no kids, and two successful careers. The original plot line had been set for them to both have affairs, which existed more enhance the characterization of the individuals whom they would sleep with, than their characters. Lisa had seen something different. She started writing the treatment the minute the credits rolled on the pilot episode, and had the full 100 pages done before the second episode aired. Mid season Lisa had gotten the call.

They had incorporated the storyline that Lisa set out for Mike and Janet into the end of season one and season two featured them more than any other set of characters, which meant that Lisa had gained a lot of control in the writers room.

"Black, eh?"

"Hmm?"

"Your hint is black?"

"Yup."

"I don't get any other hints?"

"Nope."

"Lisa, you are a cruel girl."

"I prefer sick and twisted, thank you."

Jay laughed, Lisa, smiling, turned to look at him, her mouth open for another comment, and then she saw him. Or more appropriately *him*.

Marcus Connor, a thick roll of black cord hitched over one shoulder, strode by, listening to the walkie-talkie he held in his hand, his eyes scanning the cords which snaked over the cement floor of the studio. Marcus was tall and muscled, with bulk in his biceps and shoulders from a career that involved hefting heavy electrical and lighting equipment.

He had brown hair, cut short in a no-fuss style and freckles.

Lisa loved freckles, just loved 'em.

"Lisa, earth to Lisa."

"Hmmm?"

"Well, well, well." At Jay's smug tone Lisa snapped her attention back.

"What?"

“Could it be that you have the hots for the head of grip and electric?”

“Marcus? No, no, I was just watching. It’s very interesting you know, watching.”

“Lisa, my love, you gave yourself away.”

“I did? I mean, what?” Lisa winced and Jay smiled.

“There is no good reason for a staff writer to know the name of the gaffer.”

“Don’t be such a snob.”

“Who is the head of camera?”

“Uhhh...”

“My point, exactly.”

“Did you want something? Or just to torture me?”

“Torture you? You torture us enough that I think a little payback is fair.”

“You should be nice. I am deep in writer’s block. Besides, it’s my job to torture Mike and Janet.”

“And keeping secrets about what’s next is just fun?”

“I like to think of it as a bonus.”

“Wicked woman.”

“That’s me, baby.”

“Hey Marcus!” Jay yelled.

Lisa whipped her head around in time to see the head gaffer changing directions.

“Oh my God, what are you doing?”

Jay smiled.

“Hey Jay.”

The warm rumbly voice, belonging to the star of her fantasies, came from just over her shoulder. Turning, oh so slowly, Lisa saw Marcus standing on the other side of her chair, a roll of gaffer’s tape rested on the arm.

“Marcus, how’s it going, man?”

“Not bad.”

“Listen, do you know--”

“Lisa Allen, one of the writers.” Marcus smiled down at her, “We met at the season wrap party last year. How’re you doing Lisa?”

*He’s just so pretty. Pretty, pretty blue eyes.*

“She’s fine. Don’t mind her, she just had her meds.” Lisa realized Jay was referring to her and blushed. Ugh. How long as she sat there, mute, while Marcus waited for her to answer?

“Listen Marcus, Lisa’s having a bit of writers block with some stuff in the upcoming season I was hoping you would help her out.”

“Me? Uh, shouldn’t one of the other writers, or the director, or the producers, be the people helping with the story line? I’m just the hired help.” He flashed a grin.

“Nice try, I know exactly how much we pay you. Damn union is sucking us dry.”

Marcus laughed and with a nod to both of them picked up his tape and walked away, clearly dismissing Jay's words as a joke.

Lisa turned to Jay.

"If you were a character I would kill you for that."



It was nearly one a.m. on Saturday night and Lisa was pacing through the upstairs writers' room. The idea for the storyline was there but she couldn't find the emotion that had to go with it. She had to give them the right words or it wouldn't come through.

With a disgruntled sigh she grabbed her laptop and trudged down the stairs to the set. When the first season's ratings jumped the company gave the show its own studio space, with enough room for their 5 main interior sets and offices and dressing rooms in one end. Most exterior shots and anything special were taken off the sound stage and onto location. The other piece of the warehouse-like studio was the art department. At the foot of the steps Lisa skirted around a parked lift and made her way across the studio. She walked through an upscale master bedroom, an Asian inspired living room, a high tech bathroom and a decrepit kitchen on her way.

She reached the huge pocket doors with their stenciled warning 'Art Department Only' and pushed them open. They had begun construction on the new set her storyline called for and Lisa was hoping that seeing it would help her get a feel for the scene.

"Blue gels?"

"We could go with blue gels but I'm thinking green gels bounced off black reflectors."

"Nice. Set it up."

"Hello?" Lisa stepped into the room.

"That you, Lis?" Miguel, the head of Art Department, asked.

"Yeah it's me, can I peek?"

"Sure thing baby doll, tell me what you think."

Lisa rounded the back of the false wall and stepped into the dark world that previously existed only in her mind.

"Oh Miguel, it's perfect."

"I'm glad to hear that." Miguel nodded to the lighting tech who stood next to him and the other man melted away. "We are doing consults with lighting and electrical now."

"It needs to be shot with a hand cam."

"We know, that's why I'm here, to make sure we can."

Lisa swallowed as Marcus spoke from behind her.

"Ah, hi Marcus."

"Hello again Lisa, second time today, must be my lucky day."

*Ignore it, he's Hollywood, he gives out compliments like candy, he doesn't mean it, don't fall in love with him, don't fall in love with him.*

"Miguel, give us a minute, or ten?"

"Sure thing. See-ya, Lis." Miguel wandered away, a metal clang indicating the closure of the Art Department door behind him.

"How's the writing?"

A pat answer 'oh it's fine' sprang to her lips but Lisa stopped herself. Why not just tell the truth?

"I'm having some problems actually."

"Jay said I might be able to help?"

"He was just teasing me."

"Why? Do you need help on a sex scene?" Marcus flashed a lopsided grin.

All the blood left Lisa's brain and filled her in a blush; this was not a blush of embarrassment, but one of arousal. There was simply something about this man which spoke to her; just his smile was enough to make her weak-kneed.

He cocked an eyebrow, "Is it a sex scene?"

"Uh, yeah, I mean yes, I mean there are sex elements."

"Tell me about it."

Lisa looked at the set they had erected. It was a dark room, purple walls with black lacquer furniture and trim. There were still only the bare bones; the set dressers hadn't finished yet.

"I can see it, but I don't know how to show it, how to speak it."

"What?"

"That love can be dark."

"I thought love was brightness, light."

"It can be, should be maybe, but what if it is not?"

"Why is it dark?"

"Well, you see, they hurt each other, what they have done to get where they are, it is bad, and dark."

"Go on."

"But they also love each other. It's killing him to do this to her, she is dying inside that he is doing it, hating herself, hating him, but doing it for love."

Marcus moved up behind her, slipped her laptop from her arm and then placed it on top of a trunk that sat nearby.

"What is he doing to her?"

Lisa closed her eyes as Marcus moved into place behind her. *What is he doing to her?* That was the problem, she didn't know, but Marcus seemed to be implying that he would help her act something out.

Suddenly it was no longer about what the characters needed, but about what Lisa wanted.

She was seized by the strange fearlessness which came over her when her fantasies took hold. Normally she could barely get out a sentence with this man around but this was different, for tonight, she was different.

“He undresses her.”

Marcus' hands went to her shoulders, slid from her shoulders to her wrists and then back. Then his big hands, hard hands, slid forward over her shoulders, pressing hard over her breasts and down onto her stomach. His hands stopped there and he began bunching her shirt, pulling the fabric up until cool air lapped over her belly.

Lisa instinctively sucked in, almost thrown out of her arousal by the idea of Marcus seeing the little pudge beneath her waistline. One hand moved lower and pressed hard against her belly, covering her belly button, fingertips slipping beneath the top of her jeans.

“Breathe” he whispered pressing his hand against her.

Lisa relaxed into his words and exhaled, her body settling softly against his.

“Good girl.” Lisa shuddered. Normally she hated being called girl, some men used it as an insult, but when he whispered it in her ear Lisa melted.

With one hand still against her bare stomach Marcus drew her shirt up and over her breasts, exposing her bra. Plain pink, the only decoration a scalloped edge, Lisa instantly wished she were wearing something made in ice blue lace, or red silk.

“Pretty.”

Then again, maybe pink was perfect.

With her shirt caught above her breasts Marcus stepped away from her, circled to the front and looked her over. Lisa womanfully resisted the urge to tug her t-shirt down. This felt dirtier than if she had just been naked.

“Take the shirt off.”

Lisa shook her head.

“Ahh, he has to completely undress her?”

“Yes.”

“Is she willing?”

“Yes, but she won't help him do this.”

Marcus placed his hands over her bra covered breasts. “Do what?”

Lisa turned her face away. Marcus gave her breasts a hard squeeze and then pulled her shirt up and off. He was rough with it, jerking the fabric so it rubbed against her skin. Without pause he reached down and unbuttoned her jeans, shoving the fabric down her legs. When they were at her knees he raised his foot and placed it on the crotch of her jeans, using his foot to push them down the rest of the way.

Marcus stepped away. “If you could see how you look—”

“Tell me.”

“You're... ruffled, messy. Like a man just ripped off your clothes, a bra strap hanging

down, your panties pushed down on one side. You look real, a real woman not like a plastic doll with her clothes painted on.”

“Do you want me?”

“Yes.”

“Could you love me?”

“Yes.”

“Would you hurt me?”

“Yes.”

Lisa shuddered in arousal. This was exactly what she needed to understand, this dark sex, dark love.

“Step out of your jeans.”

This time she obeyed, slipping off her flipflops and stepping out of her jeans, kicking them away. Her bra strap was slipping down; her panties pulled askew, the brown curls covering her sex almost exposed.

“Good girl.”

Lisa bit her lip at his words and watched him move away with hungry eyes. He disappeared for a moment and then the lights went out except for the few that his gaffers had set-up. Now the dark room looked almost demonic, like Dante’s hell that burned with cold not fire.

Marcus returned with a gaffer’s toolbox in one hand and a ditty bag in the other. Dropping to a knee before her he opened the toolbox, revealing a complete set of tools. A moment of noisy riffling and he stood, a pair of heavy clippers in his hand.

He opened them, the thick blades making an evil snick as he did. Lisa tilted her head up, and for the first time looked into his eyes, into those pretty baby blues she loved so much. There in his eyes was a sweet man, a playful man.

He pressed his fingers against her cheek and Lisa’s heartbeat sped up. There was a tenderness in his eyes she had not expected, this was rough sex, just that, wasn’t it?

Then he clicked the clippers and the tenderness was submerged beneath a layer of arrogance, of power and passion. He placed the open blades of the sheers against the peak of her breast where it was cupped by her bra. Slowly he closed the blades, the sharp edges sliding over the smooth fabric, pressing against her skin beneath. As they closed in on her nipple the hardened tip pushed out, recklessly thrusting itself into the dangerous path of the blades. For a second her nipple was held and then pinched by the blades before they slid over and closed.

Lisa shuddered, what he was doing was dangerous, frightening, and she had never been so aroused.

Opening the blades he did it again. While her left breast tingled under his attention her right felt alone and friendless. Lisa raised her hand and cupped her breast, squeezing it hard, pushing the meat back against her ribcage.

Marcus made a rumbling sound low in his throat and with a savage jerk pushed her hand

away. The motion pushed the right cup down, exposing her breast. Marcus caught the empty cup and jerked on it, pulling Lisa closer to him. He deftly slid the sheers between the cups and sliced through the fabric. Her bra fell away, catching on her arms but exposing her naked breasts to his view.

For a moment self consciousness returned, *were her B cups big enough? Did he notice the left was larger?* But then Marcus used the sheers to slice the shoulder straps, the cold of the blades on her arms making her shiver.

Lisa arched her back, pushing her hard nipples towards him. *Touch me, please*, but Marcus ignored them, instead dropping his gaze to her sensible gray cotton panties. Smiling, he reached into his ditty bag and pulled out scuffed kneepads. They were heavy duty with hard plastic cups. Dropping the clippers he strapped them on and then dropped to his knees before her, scooping up the clippers once more.

Her legs were slightly spread but he grabbed her ankles and forced her to place her feet wider apart. Leaning in between her spread legs he sniffed. Riveted, Lisa kept her eyes on his head. Normally she was too embarrassed to watch a guy go down on her but she wanted to see this, wanted to see his fingers moving over her.

His index finger traced over the cotton crotch, damp and fragrant, and then began pushing the cotton inside, forcing it up between the lips of her sex. The fabric, which had felt so soft a moment ago, was rough and coarse against the softness inside her sex.

Marcus brought up the clippers and placed the blunted tip of the blades into the fabric groove he had made. Slowly he began running the blade back and forth. The cold hard metal raked over her clit until she moved, following the blades with her hips as she sought a greater touch against her clit.

Her own passion made her a slave to an inanimate object and the man who wielded it. There was something so perverse about the fact that he had only touched her with these things, not his hands. It made her crave the flesh on flesh touch.

The clippers slid along her thighs and under the leg bands on her panties, snipping them so that they were held in place only by the warm wetness of her sex.

“Close your legs.” As he said it Marcus grabbed her ankles and forced her legs together. He shifted to the side and wrapped an arm around her knees and, grabbing the dangling front of her panties, started to pull. Lisa moaned and her panties were drawn through her tightly closed legs, the fabric wiping at her wetness so that the more he pulled the rougher the frictions was against her wiped-dry flesh.

“Marcus,” she whispered, placing her hand on his shoulder. He turned and nipped the flesh at her wrist. When the panties were finally free of her body he stood, running his hands over her hips and waist but avoiding her breasts and sex.

“Then what happens?”

“Hmm?”

“He undresses her, then what happens?”

“I don’t know, yet.”

“Is it still dark?”

“Yes.”

“But he doesn’t touch her, pleasure her, yet?”

“No.”

Marcus wrapped his hand around the back of her neck and led her deeper into the half-done chamber. He walked away and that is when it really hit Lisa that she was stark naked while he was fully clothed.

When he came back he held two rolls of tape, one thin role of electrician’s tape and another of thick gaffer’s tape.

Marcus picked up her hand and slipped the gaffer’s tape around her wrist like a bracelet. Slipping a utility knife from his pocket Marcus cut several short lengths of black electrician’s tape. Lisa looked at him, where was that tape going? With the pieces of tape on his wrist he grabbed the base of her left breast, pinching so it plumped up, full and pink and waiting. Marcus took one of the pieces of tape and laid it on her nipple, pressing it down with his thumb. A second piece went diagonally, forming a cross, hiding the soft pink skin. His hand moved to her other breast, applying the same treatment to that nipple.

Lisa licked her lips as she stared at the soft flesh of her breasts. She was used to them looking warm, and soft, comfortable and safe. Now her breasts looked dangerous, as if he had censored them, as if they were too much, too powerful.

Slipping the thick role of gaffer’s tape from her wrist, Marcus pulled off a length, the ripping sound loud in the stillness that had previously only been broken by her ragged breathing.

“Arms up.”

Lisa lifted her arms, lulled by the promise of dark and dirty sex in his voice. Arms raised straight above her Lisa watched as he pulled a strip of tape taut and pressed the end against the outside swell of her left breast, holding it in place as he stretched it across her breasts. Marcus moved around to her side, holding the tape in place and pulling a longer length off, he wrapped it across her back. When the tape lapped over itself Marcus started walking around her, pulling the tape as he went. Lisa had to brace herself against the floor as the tape pulled against her. He wound it around and around, creating a thick belt that pressed her breasts flat so that they swelled both above and below the black tape. Lisa took a deep breath, and felt the restriction.

Marcus sliced off the tape with the knife and pushed the end into place, rubbing it with his thumb to stick it down. Lisa lowered her arms and felt the pull and push of her flesh now held fast by the tape. His eyes were riveted on her plumped breasts.

“And now?” he asked.

“I don’t know.”

“You’re the storyteller.”

Lisa ran her fingers over her trapped breasts, scraping her nails against the tape she could not feel it on the skin beneath.

“It’s my turn.” Stepping forward Lisa fisted a hand in the short hair on the back of his head and yanked, Marcus hissed out a breath, and his arm twitched, as if he wanted to push her, strike her, in retaliation for the pain, but held himself back. She didn’t want him to hold back.

Lisa grabbed the neck of the heavy weight t-shirt he wore and yanked, trying to rip it. The fabric twisted but didn’t tear.

A smile kicked up one corner of his mouth and Lisa growled at him. The half smile turned into a grin, until Lisa slipped the knife from his pocket, flipped it open and pressed the blunt side of the blade against his throat. Still holding the neck of his shirt stretched tight she turned the blade and tore a slit in the top. Placing the knife between her teeth she grabbed the shirt and ripped it down the center. There was a sick satisfaction in destroying his clothing, taking it away from him, forever.

Knife still between her teeth Lisa moved around behind him, grabbing the fabric on his shoulders and pulling it down and off his back. When he was naked from the waist up she slipped her hands around his waist, popped open the button of his jeans and toyed with the zipper, but didn’t lower it. The front of his jeans was pressed tight by his erect cock. Lisa took the knife from her mouth and pressed the flat edge against the smooth flesh of his belly

“Tell me you want me.”

“You know I do.”

“You never wanted me before.”

“I did.”

“Liar.”

“Never.”

“You are a liar. Admit it and I won’t punish you.”

Marcus turned his head to the side and gave her a speculative look. Lisa rubbed her hand across the fly of his jeans and dropped the knife to the floor. Using both hands now she played her fingers over the fly of his jeans, on a shudder his head dropped forward onto his chest. As his breathing grew deeper, and slower, she lowered the zipper, playing him softly, gently, for now.

“Lisa.”

“Yes?”

“Please.”

“What do you want?”

“For you to touch me.”

“How?”

“I don’t understand.”

“How do you want me to touch you?” she eased down the zipper.

“Whatever way you want.”

“Softly?” With the zipper all the way down Lisa slipped her hand up and over his waist, around to his sides, and then inched her hands under the waistband of his jeans, catching both the denim and soft cotton of his boxers, and inching them down until they caught on his cock. Trailing one hand around the small of his back Lisa came to his front, eyes on the open fly of his jeans where a thin line of coarse hair was blossoming, promising that his cock was close. Tilting her head back Lisa smiled at him.

Marcus’s eyes were closed, his chin nearly on his chest. His eyes opened and focused on her when her soft touches stopped.

“So Marcus, soft?” Lisa fluttered her fingers over her skin below his belly button, ruffling the trail of hair. “Or hard.” Wrapping her hands around the bunched waistband of his jeans she knelt, jerking the fabric down to his knees where the kneepads forced her to stop, abruptly and definitively baring his lower body.

His hips jerked forward as her movement raked the fabric over the top of his cock.

“Liiiisa,” he hissed out.

“Hard or soft?”

“Hard.”

“Strip.” Lisa rolled up onto her feet and headed for the abandoned tool box and ditty bag. Her neck tingled and she wondered if he were looking at her. If he hadn’t obeyed, if he hadn’t stripped by the time she returned, she wasn’t sure she could finish this. She wanted, no needed, him to play, to let her own and mark him, if even just for this moment.

Snatching up the same black gaffer’s tape that wrapped her breasts, she turned. Marcus was bent at the waist, picking up his jeans and throwing them off to the side. He had an amazing ass. It was muscled, but with enough fat that she wanted to bite him, spank him.

Inspired, she turned back to the tool box and peered into it, with the lights in the warehouse off and only the soft stage lighting they had designed for illumination, the toolbox was a dimly lit pit. After a moment of searching she came across several plastic scrappers. Plucking one up she looked at it, considering. It was short and made of slightly flexible plastic; it looked like a slightly longer version of the spackle applicator she’d bought after a picture hanging fiasco.

Carrying the tape and scrapper, now to be known as the ‘slapper,’ Lisa made her way back onto the set. Marcus had not moved but to strip. The kneepads, his jeans, boxers, shoes, and socks were all in a messy pile off to the side.

Lisa slipped in front of him. How odd that they were naked, she with her soft breasts compressed and controlled by the wicked tape. Made bold by his obedience Lisa looked him up and down, not in a patronizing imitation of the way men looked women over, but the way a woman looked at something she coveted. The notch in his collarbone, the smooth swell of his chest and shoulders with their kissable freckles, the fair hair around his dusky nipples, the

smooth cream flesh of his belly and the stark white of his hips that so rarely saw the sun, were all fascinating to her. His cock was erect, angled slightly up, and looked smooth and soft in the dim light.

Lifting the knife, the blade still open, from the floor, and setting the slapper down in its place, Lisa clamped her teeth around the knife blade once more. She ran her tongue against the flat of the blade, tasting metal all down her throat. Lisa moved to his side and with a snap pulled out a long length of gaffers tape. Marcus looked at her, one eyebrow raised. Lisa nodded her head at his arm. Slowly he lifted his arm from his side, extending his wrist towards her, but it was not his wrist she wanted, instead she pressed the tape on his arm, just above the swell of his bicep. Wrapping it around until he wore a stiff black armband of tape Lisa then cut the tape with the knife and pressed it into place.

The next piece went around his wrist, wrapping half way up his forearm. Her breathing shallow from arousal, Lisa gave the other arm the same treatment. He looked dangerous like this, like a warrior of old. Caught up in creating, Lisa wrapped a thin layer of tape around his waist and then drew an X over his chest, a single strip of tape staring at one hip, crossing his chest diagonally, wrapping over his shoulder, and then falling straight down to end at the back of his tape belt. Adding another layer around his waist to hold the ends in place Lisa stepped back, her shallow breathing now closer to pants.

“Is this what you want?” His voice was growly and rough, unexpected. Marcus gestured at himself. Lisa nodded.

Suddenly he lunged, grapping her upper arms and forcing her to her toes.

“Is this what she does to him?”

“Yes.”

“Why?”

“To torture herself.”

“How? Why?”

“Because I, she, can't help but be attracted to this, to him like this.”

“Why is it dark? What stops them from being together?”

“She cannot have him like this, and he cannot have her.”

“You said he hurts her, what does he do?”

“Sells her.”

Marcus dropped her back onto her heels. “What?”

“He sells her.”

A big shit-eatin' grin split his face. “That's the big surprise?”

Lisa nodded, slightly nervous that they were falling out of the rich sensual spell they had so painstakingly woven.

“Lady, you are something else, that's great, everyone's going to love it. You took an already screwy couple and made them screwier.”

Embarrassed, Lisa looked down, only to be confronted by the sight of her own bound breasts, his black wrapped chest, and his hard length.

“Hey,” he tilted her face up, his voice gentle and coaxing, as if he knew that the sensual spell was beginning to unravel, taking her confidence with it. “You can’t stop now, I need to know how it ends.”

Lisa simply nodded, lost in his eyes and the touch of his hand on her face. More than anything she wanted a kiss, but that would be intimate when this was a dark game of sex. Kisses were love, sweaty bodies bringing pain-laced pleasure were sex.

Marcus bent his head, at the last second bypassing her lips and settling on her neck, in a spot behind her ear.

“Tell me.” She shivered as his words and lips pressed against her skin.

“They need the money, badly, so they decide to sell her.”

“That’s cruel. Do they hate each other?”

“No. no. It’s like I said, this is about love, making it dark.”

“Dark,” he whispered, raking his fingers down over her bound breasts and then lower to slip a fingertip over her belly button before the tip of his thumb pushed into her belly, sending an odd tickling tingle over her lower abdomen.

Distracted, Lisa didn’t react when his free hand slipped up into her hair, but when it fisted tight she jerked. Uttering a startled yelp, Lisa looked up into eyes that were dilated to the point they were almost black.

“He loves her too much to share her, but she is too beautiful to be kept, and so lovely in her submission.” Marcus’ voice was low and rough, gone was the willing submission that led to his calmly allowing her to torment him and in its place was a dark masculine mastery.

“Marcus,” she breathed.

“I see, I understand. The darkness is that he loves her and must hurt her. She knows it hurts him to do this and plays against it, torturing him, making it worse, making him love her more, so that he wants to protect her, but he cannot, instead he has to give her away.”

“Yes, yes!” That was it, hearing those words Lisa saw the story come together. In her mind’s eye the scenes flashed by, all on the backdrop of the dark room where she stood. Lisa made for her laptop but Marcus snatched her arm, holding her in place.

“Marcus—”

“You’re mine.”

Dragging her by the arm Marcus pulled her to a low lacquer chest that they had placed in the room.

“Put your hands on it.” Lisa looked at the chest and then up at him. “Hands on it!” When Lisa hesitated Marcus grabbed her wrists and forced her to bend until he could press her hands against the chest.

Lisa uncurled her fingers until she could press her palms against the surprisingly warm

painted wood. Marcus moved away from her and Lisa hung her head between her arms and craned her neck for an upside down view of him. Studded and wrapped in the black muted shine of the gaffers tape he looked oh so dangerous. As he turned to make his way back to her Lisa saw that he held her slapper. Eyes wide she remained silent, there was no way he could know what she intended to do to him with it. Lisa pressed her knees together and then locked them in place. There was just enough soft flesh on her thighs to hide her sex when she stood this way.

“You’re gorgeous.”

*No I’m not, I’m a size 10 in a world of 4s. And you can see my belly pudge, and my chubby thighs... and you said I’m gorgeous.* “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.” SMACK!

Lisa yelped, jumped, and started to fall sideways, but his hand on her hip stopped the movement.

“Ow! That hurt!”

“Really?” Smack! “What about that one?”

“Yes!”

Now that the surprise had worn off Lisa could feel distinctly separate impact points, dead center of each ass cheek.

“Here comes another one.”

“Don—” Smack!

“I’m sorry, what was that?”

“That hurts,” she panted.

“I know.”

“You’re not supposed to spank me, I was going to—”

“Spank me? I got that, maybe next time.”

*Next time?* Smack!

Lisa yelped again. He wasn’t really hurting her, she was so turned on that he could have amputated a toe and she wouldn’t have minded, and these were not brutal smacks, hard but not brutal. It was the whistling of the plastic through the air and the sharp slapping noise which scared her.

“Five more.” His voice had gone dark and deep once more. “I am going to make them harder and harder. Can you handle that Lisa? Can you?”

The arousal in his voice, the forbidden thrill of being treated this way, was enough to make her beg for it, never mind answer with a simple “Yes.”

“Good girl.” When she whimpered in pure arousal he drew his hand back and then brought it down.

“One.” Palms flat on the trunk, ass high, legs locked together, Lisa absorbed the blow.

“Two.” This one was harder, striking the bottom of her right ass check where the crease

would have been if she hadn't been bent forward.

"Three." The same blow as before, repeated on the left side.

"Four." Lisa rocked forward, coming up onto her toes, her hands taking on her body weight for a moment. This blow had landed dead center over her sex, not striking it as her closed legs protected her, but the sting traveled, the force of the blow felt against the swollen pinched lips of her sex and in her clit.

She was close to something, she didn't know what, it might be orgasm but this was different, so very different, than things that had come before. "Now, Marcus, do it now!"

"Five." The flat of his hand met her ass, the first, and last, flesh to flesh blow. It was harder, heavier, than the surface sting of the slapper. As the sound faded he kept his hand in place. Sudden heat against her hip indicating he had stepped close.

"I want you so much I can taste it, taste you."

"Yes." Suddenly the almost upside down position was too much, the blood rushing to her head made it hard to think. His hand smoothed over her reddened flesh.

"I want to take you, here, like this. But it doesn't feel right."

"No, not like this, face to face."

"Yes." Marcus pulled her upright and then slipped in front of her to sit on the trunk. Lisa slid her knees onto the top of the trunk, on either side of his hips. As she did so the lips of her sex parted, the air became permeated with the smell of her arousal, and the moisture that had been trapped inside began to slide across her inner thighs. Hands on his shoulders, petting the freckles that showed on either side of the tape, Lisa looked at him.

Marcus had to drag his eyes away from her sex, and when he did she saw that he was half wild. Half wild from wanting her, craving her.

Hands on her hips he slid her forward, angling his hips so that the tip of his cock grazed her clit before pausing at the entrance to her body. Lisa moved her hand from his shoulders to his neck, her eyes still on his. Shifting her legs just slightly Lisa let him in, sinking down on him so that the thickness of him pushed against muscles that had pulled tight with arousal, guaranteeing that she felt everything inch as it slid through.

His cock now in her, their gaze felt too intimate, so Lisa lowered her head to his shoulder and bit him, hard. With a snarl Marcus forced her hips up before bringing them down again. Lips turned into his neck Lisa rocked with him, they were too impatient to tease with slow thrusts. Feeling him shudder, and, just once, wanting to be able to orgasm at the same time as her partner, Lisa slid one hand down her body, placing her middle finger on her clit.

His hand joined hers, his fingers shadowing hers until he learned what she liked. Afraid that he wouldn't do it, that she would be left frustrated and feeling inadequate, Lisa was reluctant to move her fingers until he nudged them out of the way and plucked her clit between index finger and thumb, the sharp sliding pinch leaving no nerve ending on her clit untouched.

With a high little cry of pleasure Lisa lifted her head. Marcus's hands had gone still, unsure as

to the meaning of her cry, but when she whispered, "Again, please," he repeated the motion.

One hand on her hip, the other on her clit, he helped guide her as she rode him, rocking her hips hard on his, the continued thrust of him feeling so right that Lisa sighed in pleasure. Her nipples ached to be touched, to be included, and it was cruel torture that they were locked away.

"I'm close," he whispered.

"Just keep touching me, so I am."

"I'll wait for you."

"Yes."

"Faster, please, Lisa..."

Harder and faster she moved, until the muscles in her thighs ached and the pounding friction of him inside her made her skin hot. His fingers, pressed against her clit while following her hips, were pinching harder, longer, the pinching broken up by quick rubs with the pad of his thumb. When the muscles of her belly grew tight Lisa threw back her head, concentrating on the feel of his fingers, wanting this more than she had ever wanted an orgasm with a man.

When her muscles drew tight in a pleasure that was almost pain Lisa tilted her head back and screamed her pleasure to the sky. Marcus pressing his thumb down hard on her clit and Lisa's hips jerked, her body drawing tight, and that brought him over.

For a moment she was lost, in a pleasure that she had meant to be dark, and was anything but.



Lisa stirred slightly when Marcus lifted her off him and set her on her feet. Still woozy and thoroughly pleased with herself, Lisa allowed Marcus to lead her to the half assembled bed in one corner. Marcus threw the plain comforter over the plastic wrapped mattress and eased Lisa onto it. Snatching up the folded black duvet cover, in which the completely boring plain comforter would soon be hidden, Marcus crawled in beside her and pulled the covering over them.

Unsure as to the level of intimacy that was expected Lisa didn't move when he settled beside her, but when his arm reached for her she willingly curled against him, placing her cheek on his shoulder, against the black tape they both still wore.

Her body was tired but her mind was rolling at a million miles a minute. Regrets, questions, and nervous excitement bubbled up in her, but those were quieted when he stroked a hand down her back and whispered, "Just a nap."

Willing herself to continue to suspend the outside world, Lisa closed her eyes.



It was the cold that woke her.

“’S cold.”

“I know, but we have to get this off.”

There was a soft snick and a strange lightness around her chest. Lisa opened one eye to see Marcus sitting on the bed beside her, the clippers he had used to snip through the tape in his hands.

“This shouldn’t hurt, the adhesive isn’t fine enough to stick to skin, but tell me if it does.” Marcus pulled at the tape, which clung to her skin, lifting her breast, before it started to peel away. The electrician’s tape came away from her nipple with no pain, and the long concealed bud puckered in the cool air. At his direction Lisa rolled, first onto her side, then her belly, and finally onto her other side, until he pulled the last bit of tape free, exposing the other nipple.

Naked save the covering which came to her waist, Lisa sat up and took the clippers, snipping away at the belt of tape until she could pull start pulling gently at the edges, snipping as she went, stopping to carefully unwrap each arm. As she did Marcus cupped each breast in turn, massaging the soft flesh. It took a while, and there was a dicey part when she reached the tape just bellow his belly button where the trail of red-brown hair was firmly stuck. Scared to hurt him Lisa picked at it until Marcus reached down and ripped it off with a smooth yank.

There were several minutes of deep breathing on his part, while Lisa bit the inside of her cheek, before he chucked the wadded tape off the bed.

Lisa crossed and arm over her breasts, which felt light and soft after the cruel compression, and looked at Marcus. No matter what happened next she would be okay with it, she would MAKE herself okay with it.

“What time is it,” she finally asked to break the silence.

“We weren’t asleep long; I’d guess it’s around 5 or 6 am.”

“Ugh.”

Lapsing back into silence, and suddenly chilled, Lisa pulled more blanket up, trying to cover her exposed back. Long freckled arms slipped around her as Marcus eased them down to lie together spoon fashion.

“So we will have to start with drinks.”

“I’m sorry, what?” she asked.

“The way it is supposed to go is coffee, dinner, drinks, then sex. Since we started with sex we will have to work backwards. How do you feel about drinks then dinner later tonight?”

Lisa’s heart thumped in excitement. He was asking her out. Considering he’d been inside her a few hours ago and that she had exposed some very private fetishes and fantasies to him, her excitement about the date might be a bit ridiculous.

His body shifted slightly away, “I’m sorry, I just assumed...”

“Oh, no, Marcus I would love to. I didn’t think you, well, I mean, you never said anything.”

“I have a good life, I always thought you were pretty, but it can be hard to start something at work, especially in this business where everyone knows everything.”

“Ah I see, but now that you know I put out—”

“It is not like that.” His voice was firm. “I just don’t ever put forth the effort to start something, I’m more of a wait and see guy, and I waited and here you came.” Marcus rubbed his chin on the top of her shoulder. “I just didn’t realize how amazing you would turn out to be. You were worth pursuing, sorry I’m a bit slow.”

“I’ve had a crush on you since I met you.”

“A crush?”

“I know, a bit amateurish but I can’t help it.”

“It’s a huge compliment. The most perfect woman in the world has a crush on me.”

“Most perfect woman?”

“Oh yeah.” Marcus lifted his hand so she could see him count off his points on his fingers. “You’re beautiful, and not fake looking. You’re low maintenance, and I hope you know that in this town that is a huge compliment.” Lighthearted and feeling deliciously wanton Lisa smiled, a little bubble of happiness rising and bursting into giggles. “You’re successful, and smart, and sweet, and sassy, and are nice to everyone.” Giggling again at this laundry list Lisa wiggled against him.

“But do you want to know my very favorite part?”

“Yes.”

“My favorite part about Lisa—” Marcus moved away so she could roll onto her back and look up at him. “—is that while she looks so sweet and wholesome, underneath she is a kinky nympho sex freak.”

Lisa stared at him, open mouthed, and then began to laugh. Head back, hands on her belly, Lisa laughed. As the sound died Lisa looked up, only to be puzzled by the serious expression on his face.

“You are beautiful when you smile.”

His lowered his head, and kissed her.

The kiss was perfect, no tongue, no teeth, just the melding of lips, accompanied by the press of his body above hers.

When he pulled away it was only far enough to look down at her.

“Lisa Allan, could I interest you in dinner with me tonight?”

Lisa cupped his face in her hands. “Marcus Conner, it would be my pleasure.”



# NAUGHTY & NICE

## CHAOS DELIGHT

MISTLETOE HOLLY HAD CALLED SEVERAL SERVICES before getting a response. It was Christmas Eve and she knew she was lucky to find one man willing to come out and look at her fried furnace. He said he'd be there around ten that morning. For that, she blessed him in advance. It would get awfully cold over the holidays if he couldn't fix it.

Returning to the living room, Mistletoe lit the fire. It was snowing outside again, she noticed, as her Christmas tree twinkled prettily in the front windows. Although the colorful lights cheered her and warmed her heart, they did little to prevent the temperature from dropping.

It was another three hours before she heard the crunch of tires in the snow and looked out to see a Santa's Electrics truck pulling up. He was late, although Mistletoe wasn't surprised. It was snowing heavily now and the wind had picked up. Bitter cold seeped into the house as she hurried to let in the Santa-suited man with his box of tools. "I was starting to get worried," she said, swiftly closing the door.

He dusted snow from long, dark hair that escaped from under his Santa hat. "Yeah, you and me both. I almost didn't find you without Rudolph to guide me. It's getting bad out there." He slipped his feet out of his boots and left them on the doormat, not wanting to track melting snow on her carpet. He offered his hand. "Johnny Santa."

"For real?" She grinned, eyeing his outfit.

"Yeah, thought I might as well have fun with it, since everyone cracks on my name the rest of the year anyway."

"Well, I think it's cute." Realizing she was still holding onto that big, strong, warm hand, she added, "And you're in good company. Mistletoe Holly."

"You're kidding?" he grinned.

"Nope."

"I like it."

"I thought you might, Santa. Did you bring your elves? We might need them."

“Gave them the day off for good behavior,” he fired back with a grin, his dark eyes laughing. “Now, where’s this naughty furnace?”

“This way.” Mistletoe led him through to the kitchen and down to the basement. Johnny sniffed the air as they descended. “Smells like it fried.”

“Yeah.”

“Don’t worry. Santa will soon have you fixed up.”

“I’ll be upstairs if you need anything.”

“Okay.” Johnny watched her go, reflecting to himself, “Nice. Very nice.” Then he turned his attention to the furnace. “Now then, my lovely, let Santa see what you’ve been up to, eh?”



Johnny Santa had been down in the basement for nearly two hours. He had to be cold down there, Mistletoe thought as she stoked the fire. It was almost two o’clock, so she went to the kitchen to see about making some lunch. She didn’t have to glance out the window to know the weather had gotten worse, she could hear it. The wind soughed and squealed outside, hunting for ways to get in around doors and windows.

Mistletoe made roast beef sandwiches and heated some vegetable soup. Warm and hearty, it would help ward off the chill if Santa couldn’t fix the furnace. She put on a fresh pot of coffee, then ventured down to the basement.

Johnny was stretched out on his back, his upper half hidden inside the intake vent. He had taken off the Santa suit and lay there clad in some very form-fitting jeans and a T-shirt, which had ridden up to expose his belly button nestled in a flat expanse of taut tanned flesh. Nice.

He muttered something.

“Everything all right in there?” she called.

He scooted out and looked up at her. “Honestly? You’d be better off buying a new one, but that’ll take a week or two to get here, what with the holidays and all. You might want to hit the January sales, eh?”

“So what do I do in the meantime?” Mistletoe asked, worried.

“I’m rewiring what I can. It’s just taking me longer than I’d planned.”

“I have some lunch ready if you’re interested?”

“Thanks.” He looked pleasantly surprised as he peeled himself up off the floor, turned off his work light and set aside his tools. “Lead on.”

“It’ll get dirty down here,” she said, grabbing his Santa suit.

Johnny didn’t comment. He was busy watching the sway of her cute little ass as she preceded him up the stairs. She was a fine looking woman, with soft red hair that curled enticingly around her shoulders and down her back to her waist. She had pale green eyes, and peaches and cream skin. A dainty little nose and a luscious mouth with lips the color of raspberry crème.

He wondered what they tasted like.

He washed his hands at the kitchen sink while she served lunch. Drying them on a paper towel, he heard Mistletoe gasp as she caught sight of his still bleeding knuckles that he'd smacked a little while ago.

"Let me get something for that," she said.

"It's fine."

"It most certainly isn't." She went to a cupboard and pulled down a bottle of hydrogen peroxide. "This will sting but it'll kill any germs," she told him, taking his hand and holding it over the sink while she poured the liquid on. He winced. "Sorry," she said, setting aside the bottle and bringing his hand gently toward her mouth to blow softly on the bubbling wounds.

Johnny didn't mind the sting, but her soft breath was having a profound effect on him and his imagination. He almost groaned aloud at the thought of those luscious lips blowing softly on other parts of his body. Hard, he watched her closely to see if she had any clue of what she was doing to him with her tender Florence Nightingale routine.

She didn't appear to notice anything except his sudden closeness. She looked up at him and their noses almost bumped together as they stared at each other. Their lips were only inches apart and Johnny was very tempted to kiss her. He only held back because he knew if he did, her furnace wouldn't get fixed any time soon. Reluctantly he eased back and retrieved his hand. "Thanks," he managed to say. "Much better."

"Sorry that hurt," she apologized, a little flustered now. She had a charming blush tinting her cheeks.

"It's fine."

"Let's eat before it gets cold. Coffee?" she offered.

"Maybe after."

They sat and ate, Johnny gratefully feeding his hungry stomach. He'd missed breakfast, so was really glad she'd offered. Most folks didn't these days.

"So, what's a pretty little girl doing living way out here in a big old house like this all on her own?" he asked.

"How do you know I live alone?"

"Don't you?" he queried.

"Yes, but..."

Johnny smiled, harmless amusement dancing in his dark mysterious eyes, aware that he'd unnerved her. That hadn't been his intent. "Don't mind me. I'm just being naturally curious."

"Well, I love it out here," she answered at last with a shrug. "It's peaceful and beautiful."

"It is beautiful," he admitted. "But don't you get lonely?"

"No. I keep busy with work. I don't have time to get lonely. And you might regret coming out here."

"Why?" he asked, puzzled.

"You'd better look outside when you're finished. It's getting worse."

He hadn't noticed because he'd been too busy checking her out. Sandwich in hand, Johnny got up and wandered over to the kitchen window to look out. The snow was really coming down now and it was blowing on the harsh wind. "Oh," he said. "Damn."

"I'll turn on the radio and see if there are any road reports. You might be stuck here for a day or two. Is there anyone you need to call?" she asked.

"No," he said absently, watching the snow get deeper while he ate his sandwich, unaware that Mistletoe watched him as he stood there, deep in thought.

"How do you like it?" she asked.

"What?" He gave her a dark sultry look before he realized that she was asking him how he took his coffee. He grinned. "Black and sweet, two, please."

Handing him his mug, Mistletoe said, "Let's go sit by the fire in the other room. You must be cold."

"I'm okay."

Mistletoe led the way, thinking he had to be fibbing, because he was only wearing a T-shirt and had left his boots by the front door. Setting her mug down on the coffee table, she stoked the fire and then sat on the couch and patted the seat beside her. "Sit down, Santa. I don't bite," she teased

"I just don't want to dirty your pretty cushions."

"You're not dirty." She should know, she'd been ogling his cute butt while he'd been contemplating the weather; she'd been entertaining visions of clamping her hands on it.

With a shrug, he sat and they watched the flames lick at the logs in the fireplace.

A hint of wood smoke drifted on the air along with cinnamon and spice, offering a homey sense of comfort, while the warm roar of the flames accompanied by the occasional spark, and the howl of the wind outside kept the silence at bay.

"This is nice," Johnny said. "I'd forgotten what a real fire's like."

"A fright to clean but they are lovely for atmosphere and, right now, warmth."

"I should get back to the furnace. We could be in some trouble if I can't get it running."

"We could lose power too, with the way this storm is blowing. Hopefully we won't, but it has been known to happen out here."

He stood and started for the basement. "Right, I'd best get on with it."

"Finish your coffee first and take a fresh one down with you. I'll be down in a bit to get the emergency supplies."

"Okay," he said, continuing on his way. She heard him pour another coffee, then retreat to the basement.

Finishing her own brew as she returned to the kitchen, Mistletoe decided to get dinner in the oven. She scrubbed a few potatoes and started them cooking in the microwave while she

prepped a small ham and some corn. The news on the radio warned of blizzard conditions and closed roads. “Stay home,” was the message of the day between carols and seasonal tidings.

Once she had everything in the oven, a peek out the window by the front door confirmed it; Mistletoe could hardly see Johnny’s truck in the blowing snow. She could make out enough to see the snow piling up and burying its tires. Even if he could dig his truck out, he wouldn’t be able to navigate the roads now.

Johnny was definitely going to have to stay.

Upstairs Mistletoe closed blinds and curtains in all of the rooms to try and keep as much heat in as possible, then she rummaged in Ryan’s old room and found a sweater that she hoped would fit Johnny.

The acrid sting of solder scratched at her nose as she descended the basement stairs and she almost sneezed. He was back in the vent, soldering wires, flashing that gorgeously lean, tanned, stretch of stomach at her again. There ought to be a law, she thought, wanting to trail her tongue down that dark trail of fine hairs that vanished into his jeans.

“Johnny?”

“Yeah?”

“I have a sweater for you. I hope it fits.”

He scooted out of the vent and sat up. “Thanks.”

She squatted down beside him and handed it to him. Noting his questioning eyebrow, she added, “My brother’s.”

“Why are you all alone at Christmas if you have a brother?”

“We had a falling out a couple of years ago.”

“Why?”

“He said my fiancé was having an affair. Of course, I didn’t believe him. Turned out he was right but not before we’d said some horrible things to each other.”

“Too proud to say you’re sorry?” he asked softly.

“No. He just couldn’t forgive me, I guess.”

“I’m sorry,” he murmured.

“Just put that sweater on, Johnny Santa.”

She stood up and went to find the box of emergency supplies, before he saw that that still hurt too much.

Johnny tugged on the sweater and suppressed a shiver as he got up. He was glad to have it. It was getting damn cold down here.

“How’s it going?” she asked, picking up the box of supplies.

“Almost done,” he said. “Let me take that up for you.” He stole the box from her and carried it upstairs to the kitchen, where he set it on the table. She’d brought up his empty mug and now she filled it again. “Thanks,” he said, when she handed it to him. “Something sure smells good.”

“Dinner,” she explained. “I thought I’d better get it done, in case we do lose power. Plus the oven will help a bit if you can’t get the furnace going.”

“Right,” he said. “But we can’t leave it on all the time, you know that, right?”

“I know.” She gave him a smile and patted his cheek. “Don’t be down there too long.”

For one breathtaking moment, Johnny thought she was going to kiss him, but the moment passed and he turned away before he hauled her into his arms and kissed her. It was an appealing thought and it would certainly warm him up.

“Johnny?”

“Yeah?”

“I mean it. Don’t be too much longer, okay?”

“Okay,” he said, and disappeared, warmed by the affection she had just unconsciously shown him.

Mistletoe unpacked the lanterns, a flash light, candles, a lighter and a box of matches. The packs of extra batteries, the camping stove and its small gas tanks, she left in the box for later, along with the first aid kit and a portable radio.

The candles she set in holders and put at various locations in the living room and the kitchen, so they would be ready if needed, then she went around and made certain every faucet dripped slowly, to ensure nothing would freeze, and closed any doors that stood open, except the door to her own bedroom.

Knowing Johnny would need more clothes, she raided Ryan’s room for several sets and some pajamas. They might all be a bit snug on Johnny, but they were better than nothing.

Returning to her room, she looked at her big king-sized bed and conjured images that were both naughty and nice, of long tanned limbs tangled with hers...

It had obviously been too long since she’d felt the touch of a man. She tried to put the wickedly delightful thoughts out of her head.

Practicalities first, she warned herself. They would stay warmer, however, if they slept together. Just the thought warmed her and she felt a quiver of excitement ripple through her core. She tried to put the thought out of her mind, but that tantalizing glimpse of his belly and his form-fitting jeans had obviously turned her on.

She stacked the clean clothing on top of her dresser, found a new toothbrush for him and set it on the shelf above the sink in the bathroom.

“What are you doing?” she asked herself in the bathroom mirror.

She was saved from having to answer by the sound of the furnace kicking in.



Relieved he’d gotten the furnace to work, Johnny quickly cleaned up the mess he’d made and packed away his tools, leaving them down in the basement for now. He grabbed his coffee

mug and went up to the kitchen, closing the basement door behind him. He'd hardly set the mug down when Mistletoe gave him an exuberant hug. "You did it!"

He slipped his arms around her, hugging her back. "I did. Let's hope she holds. Well now," he said. "This is nice."

Mistletoe looked up at him and sighed.

"Uh oh," Johnny murmured, looking deeply into her eyes, lowering his head slowly.

A thrill of anticipation ripped through her core and she started to succumb to the lure. Then the radio crackled loudly and the power fluxed, dimming the lights, giving them both a sharp warning.

"I'd... better check on dinner." She slipped reluctantly from his embrace and began poking about in the oven, turning potatoes and corn and ham.

A little disappointed, Johnny went into the living room and added another two logs to the fire. "Hey, Mistletoe?" he called. "The wood box is getting low. Where's the wood pile?"

"Just a sec," she called back from the kitchen.

Johnny waited and moments later she appeared. "It's off the back porch," she told him. "Do we have enough for tonight?"

"Maybe but I'd just as soon stock it now incase it gets worse out there and we do lose power."

"Okay, come on." She led the way, going to the front door first to fetch his boots. She handed them to him and he carried them to the back door, where he slipped them on.

"I got it," he insisted. "You stay inside."

"Okay, but there's a little wooden cart on the porch that I use to haul in loads; it saves making fifty trips."

"Glad to hear it," he grinned and disappeared out the door. "Damn, it's freezing out here!" He grabbed the cart and hauled it close to the steps, glad it was somewhat sheltered from the biting wind and the worst of the blowing snow. He quickly loaded the cart and hurried inside, relieved the wheels were clean and dry, and that it didn't leave tracks. He left his boots by the door and sighed at the heat that welcomed him back. The furnace was holding so far, and already taking the chill off the lovely home.

"That was fast," Mistletoe said as she closed the blinds and the drapes behind the twinkling Christmas tree at the front windows.

"It's mighty cold out there," Johnny said.

"I know. I can feel it seeping through the windows."

Johnny quickly unloaded the cart into the wood box and went back for a second load. After adding that lot to the wood box, he left the cart by the back door, then washed his hands in the back bathroom before he secured the door for the night. Pulling across the thick burgundy drape and pushing the draft dog against the bottom of the door, he hoped would cut down on chilly drafts, then did the same for the front door as the wind outside howled viciously and

battered against it.

It was dark by the time he rejoined Mistletoe in the brightly lit living room. She had already touched a match to a few pillar candles, so if the power went out they wouldn't be completely in the dark.

"Do you mind if I hop through your shower?" Johnny asked.

"Of course not," she said, picking up one of the candles. "Come on." Mistletoe led him upstairs and into her bedroom. "I put some clothes out for you on the dresser," she pointed out. "Bathroom's in here." She set the candle on the shelf over the sink. "There's a new tooth brush for you and towels are in the cupboard here," she said, showing him where. She tugged on the wall heater and left him to it with a smile.

Johnny dashed through the shower quickly, glad the water was hot and that the electricity stayed on, although it fluctuated a few times. He quickly towed dry and ventured out into the bedroom to pull on some clean clothes. He was surprised that the borrowed clothes didn't smell musty or damp, although they were a little snug on him. Purposefully he had ignored the big bed. It didn't mean just because she'd let him borrow her bathroom, that she would lend him the same courtesy regarding her bed. Although he hoped she would. The thought warmed him more than the fire as he rejoined her in the living room.

"My turn," Mistletoe said, stealing the candle.

"I turned off the heater."

"That's okay. I won't be long."

Damn, Johnny thought, they could have shared the shower and had some fun. Maybe next time, he grinned to himself. He listened to the water running as she showered and contemplated what it would be like to be a soap bubble, clinging to that luscious peaches-and-cream skin? Sliding down her shapely curves, clutching tenaciously to a nipple...

He sighed. Better stop it. His visual imagination was far too good for his own wellbeing. Shortly, he heard the water turn off, then the low hum of her hair dryer. He stoked the fire, and contemplated the possible sleeping arrangements.

When she joined him a short time later, she was dressed in warm flannel pajamas, a dark green velvet dressing gown and fuzzy reindeer slippers with bells on the antlers. "I hope you don't mind," she said.

"Not a bit," he chuckled. "Those are cute."

"Yeah." She jingled her toes and laughed. "They're very merry."

"They are indeed. Is your hair dry?"

"Almost. Takes it a while, usually. Yours?" she asked, for his was shoulder length, thick, dark and wavy.

"Getting there."

"Would you like something to drink?" Mistletoe asked.

"That would be nice."

She wandered over to the built in bar, where she had several pretty cut-glass decanters filled with various alcoholic beverages and a wide range of glasses to accompany them. “What’s your poison?”

He joined her at the bar, mulling over the decision. “Got any scotch?”

“I sure do. Papa always said a wee dram does a body good.” She poured him a generous dose in a brandy snifter and handed it to him.

“Thanks. And what is the lady of the house having?”

“Mmm, the same I think. Actually, we probably shouldn’t have this, but it is Christmas Eve.” She poured herself some and then grabbed his wrist and dragged him over to the couch. He sat cross legged at one end, facing her, while she folded her legs under her, facing him.

“Merry Christmas, Mistletoe Holly” he smiled.

“Merry Christmas, Johnny Santa,” she smiled back.

They both took a slow sip of the potent drink.

“This is nice,” she said.

“I’m glad I’m here with you.”

“What would you be doing if you weren’t?”

“Probably looking for an open bar, getting into too much Christmas Spirit, going home when they kick me out, sleeping through most of tomorrow, and nursing the glorious hangover for the rest of tomorrow.”

“No one to share the holidays with?”

“Not any more. I was married for a while, but that didn’t work out. No kids, thank God.”

“Why thank God?” she asked softly.

“I’d hate to put any kid of mine through the mess of a divorce. It’s just nasty, you know?”

“I do.”

Johnny looked at her for an explanation but she was sipping her drink, avoiding his gaze.

“You married him, didn’t you?”

“Didn’t last a month.”

“I’m sorry. What happened?”

“I caught him screwing my best friend.”

“Was he nuts?” Johnny couldn’t believe that any man would cheat on her. She was a hot looking woman and full of innate grace. Any man would be lucky to have her. What kind of a fool would cheat on her?

“No, he was just more in love with my pocketbook, than with me.”

“I hope you had a pre-nup.”

“No, but since we were married such a short time, and I had a good lawyer, I managed to escape fairly unscathed, at least, financially.”

“There’s nothing more crushing than discovering that you’re not the center of someone’s

world, like you thought you were.”

“So true,” she sighed. “Well, now that I’ve gone and depressed us both... Are you hungry?” she asked, standing up, finishing her scotch.

Johnny recognized the cut and run tactic for what it was and he caught her wrist as she hurried by, pulling her to a stop, then slowly, as he looked up at her, he pulled her down to him until her lips hovered just over his. “He didn’t deserve you,” he said softly. “More over, he was a fool to cheat on you.”

“Thank you for that,” she whispered back, settling her lips briefly on his. It was a sweet chaste kiss, meant only as a thank you for a kindness. It was also an act of trust and Johnny knew if he chased it and pressed home the advantage, stole the kiss he truly wanted, it might damage that trust, and he knew that damaged trust was tricky to repair.

Reluctantly, Johnny let her go and she slowly straightened.

“I’m starving. Let’s eat,” she said, hurrying off to the kitchen.

“So am I,” Johnny whispered to himself, “but not for food, my pretty little elf.”

Trailing her to the kitchen, he watched her lift the ham out of the oven, followed by the corn and the potatoes. Once she’d closed the oven, he pulled her gently around to face him, cupped her face in his hands and tenderly pressed a kiss to her brow before he wrapped her in a comforting hug. She wrapped her arms around his waist and hugged him back, tightly, settling her face in the curve where his shoulder met his neck. He rested his cheek on top of her head and just held her, amused that she still wore the oven mitts.

“Dinner will get cold,” she said a little while later.

Johnny gave her an extra squeeze and eased back. “Then we’d better eat,” he murmured, not wanting to let her go. “You okay?”

“Fine, thanks.” She smiled up at him, pressed a quick kiss to his jaw, then turned to dish their meal.

“Can I help?” he asked.

“You could set the table.” Mistletoe pointed out the cutlery drawer and Johnny quietly set the table for them.

When he was done, he asked her, “What would my lady like to drink with dinner, this fine Christmas Eve?”

“How about a little wine? There’s a nicely chilled Chardonnay in the fridge, and a lovely Merlot in the wine rack, if you prefer red.”

“The Chardonnay sounds like an excellent choice.” He got the bottle from the fridge and opened it, using the cork puller that sat on the counter. “Hey, I like this thing. That’s pretty sharp.”

“Yeah, sure makes opening bottles a breeze. I hate fighting with a corkscrew and ending up with half the cork floating in my glass.”

“I’m not much for cork in my wine either,” Johnny chuckled as he pulled down two long

stemmed wine glasses and filled them. He set them at their places just as Mistletoe brought their plates to the table. He held out her chair for her and then seated himself. "Looks delicious."

"Thank you." Mistletoe picked up her wine and made a toast. "Here's to a..." The lights dimmed again, "... hopefully toasty Christmas. I hope that doesn't keep up."

Johnny drank to that too. "It is starting to look more likely that we're going to lose it though."

"I know. Let's eat, before it goes."

They ate companionably and when they were done, Johnny helped Mistletoe clean up.

Halfway back to the living room, the power died. They collided in the dark, Johnny wrapping his arms around Mistletoe to prevent her from stumbling. They held still, ostensibly waiting for their eyes to adjust to the dimness and to see if the power would come back on. It didn't. Firelight danced on the hall walls and candles brightened the living room, calling them to the light, but they both stayed standing in the dark.

Mistletoe looked up at him in the dark and Johnny couldn't help himself. With a groan, he lowered his mouth to hers, gently testing her response. She turned in his arms, latching a hand behind his neck and opening her mouth in welcome. She met the eager thrust of his tongue and they both moaned softly at the mutual need they sensed in each other.

Johnny pulled her closer, letting her feel the hardness he had for her as he lifted her and took the few steps to the wall, where he pressed her, his body screaming for him to take her right there in the hall. Already his hands were marauding, pulling open the soft velvet of her dressing gown, finding the warm mounds of her breasts, clad in flannel. When had flannel become so sexy, he wondered? Her nipples were hard peaks against his palms and she moaned her pleasure as he gently cupped and squeezed her bounty.

He slid one hand down, eagerly seeking the waistband of her pajamas. He slipped beneath and discovered she wasn't wearing any panties when his fingers encountered soft curls and warm, moist, willing flesh. Delving into her folds, he made a deep sound of approval as she opened for him and he soon had her sensitive flesh quivering, wet with anticipation. He delved deeper and she rocked against his invasion as he gently slipped in first one finger, then two. Her little cry slipped intimately into his mouth and she rocked more urgently against his invading fingers. He drove deeper in response, feeling her tighten around them.

Taste her. He wanted to taste her. Keeping up the steady pressure of his fingers thrusting deeply inside her, he gave up the glorious sweetness of her mouth and dropped to his knees before her, laving his tongue over her clit. She gasped, her fingers tightening in his hair as he tasted and savored her sweet spicy tang and drove her to a fast and shattering orgasm.

Her cries echoed loudly in the dark hallway and Johnny savored those too, withdrawing his fingers and thrusting his tongue as deeply inside her as he could. He felt and tasted her quivering responses, felt her juices flow just for him, and he drank of her intensely. At last he gentled his tongue as she whimpered and writhed against him in the aftermath of her passion.

He felt her trembling against him as he slowly kissed his way back up her body and lifted her against him, letting her feel how much he wanted her.

“I want you, Mistletoe Holly,” he murmured against her mouth.

“I want you too, Johnny Santa.”

He kissed her deeply then, letting her taste herself on his lips and tongue.

She wrapped her legs around his waist and rubbed herself against his erection with a moan of desire, almost bringing him to his knees. Johnny gathered his strength and carried her into the living room. He set her down on her feet on the hearth rug and kissed her again.

At last, Mistletoe said, “We should probably just go to bed before it gets too cold.”

“Probably,” he agreed. He didn’t want to let her go, in case she changed her mind, but by the longing smoldering look she gave him, he knew she wasn’t about to rescind the offer. “I’ll bank the fire for the night.”

“Okay. I’m going to go up. Don’t be too long, okay?”

“I’m right behind you,” he promised, moving to the fire. He banked it and set the spark guard in front of it, then snuffed out the candles before slowly following her up to bed.

She was in the bathroom, cleaning her teeth, so he sat quietly on the end of the bed and tried not to look too eager or desperate, even though he was. The candles he noted gave everything a warm romantic cast and he was finding it hard enough to keep his mind off of romance at the moment.

### *Romance?*

The word brought him up short and made him nervous. There was no romance. He was just stuck here for a day or two. They were sharing a bed for practical reasons, to keep warm. He’d come to repair her furnace. That was all. Well, that and the lure of some hot sex, he hoped.

Trouble was it didn’t feel like any repair job he’d ever done. And when she’d come apart in his arms, he’d felt something he hadn’t felt in a long time. Intimacy. He hadn’t realized just how much he had missed that in a relationship. To find it with a woman he’d just met was confusing. She felt right in his arms, as though he’d known her for a long time, not just a few hours. He wanted desperately to bury his cock where he’d just had his tongue and his fingers. He wanted to make her scream and come again.

“All yours,” she said when she came out of the bathroom.

“Thanks.” He gratefully escaped, taking with him the pajamas that she had laid out for him. He relieved himself, then brushed his teeth and changed into the pajamas. They felt odd. He was used to wearing nothing but his birthday suit to bed.

As he buttoned up the top, he looked at himself in the candlelit mirror and warned the man there softly, “Be careful, Santa. Don’t misread any signals.” Just because she’d let him touch her, it didn’t necessarily mean she wanted to fuck him.

With that warning ringing in his head, he stepped out of the bathroom into a bedroom

that was now mostly in shadows. Only one candle burned on the nightstand.

“Should I blow out the one in the bathroom?” he asked.

Huddled under the covers, Mistletoe replied, “No. Leave it. It’ll be all right. Just come to bed.”

He walked around the bed and slipped in beside her. She reached over him to blow out the candle. Her breasts were firm against his chest while she paused there and it took all of his restraint not to wrap his arms around her and drag her down into another deep soul searing kiss and screw her brains out.

“Sorry,” she whispered and slid off of him.

Disappointment cut through his core. He’d been hoping she would take the lead.

Instead, she settled down beside him, her back to him. When she shivered, he rolled onto his side and gently wrapped an arm around her.

“Better?” he asked.

“Mmmm, thanks,” she replied, wiggling her bottom against his groin in an effort to get comfortable, until she felt the hard length of him rise against her again. “Oooo.”

Johnny hugged her a little tighter and buried his face in her neck, murmuring, “Sshhh.”

A few moments later, she deliberately rubbed her bottom against him again and asked, “Santa, are you happy to see me or is that a Christmas tree in your pocket?”

So, she wanted to play now? That was promising. He whispered in her ear, “Santa’s special candy cane, little girl.”

“I like candy canes, Santa,” she said, rubbing against him again.

“Careful or Santa’s candy cane might poke you.” He held her tightly against him.

“Even if I’ve been naughty?”

“Have you been naughty, then, my pretty little elf?”

“I’ve been very naughty, Santa, but I think I feel very nice.” She took his hand and slid it down her body until his fingers felt bare skin and soft curls once more. “Do you think I feel nice, Santa?”

“Yes,” he whispered, realizing that she was naked from the waist down. He stroked his fingers deeper into her already moist curls. “Very, very nice.” He stroked his hand down her thigh and lifted her leg, pulling it backward over his thighs, opening her to his eager touch. His fingers delved back into her curls and deeper, into her moist folds. He loved the sound of her breathy little pants as she writhed against his fingers in the dark and he loved the slick warmth of her as he probed deeper, stroking her inside once more. She rocked her hips, wanting more, and whimpered when she rode close to fulfillment again.

Johnny needed to be inside her. He pulled her toward him, under him, withdrawing his hand from her warmth to loosen his pajamas and free his cock. She whimpered at the loss but welcomed him when he nudged her thighs apart and settled between them. She arched up under him, offering herself.

Nudging into her slick folds, he almost groaned as he asked her hoarsely, "Are you sure you want this?"

"Yes, Santa. I promise I'll be very good," she whispered, arching up under him even more.

He drove deep, gasping as her sweet fire engulfed him, glorying in her cry of welcome as she gripped him tightly inside her. "Oh baby," he moaned into her shoulder as she pushed up to meet every one of his strokes. He pushed even deeper and lifted her, latching an arm under her hips, fiercely driving into her quivering heat. He braced his other hand on the headboard for extra leverage and Mistletoe braced her feet against his spread knees, opening herself wide for him.

Wanting to make it last seemed an impossible feat. Johnny couldn't hold back from her heated core. She was coming, hard and deep, and he could not reign in his own orgasm. He'd gone too far. It built rapidly, a torrent awaiting release. Her cry vaulted through him as she clutched him fiercely inside and Johnny exploded deep within her with a shout.

After, his weight pushed her down into the mattress and she sighed her pleasure, wrapping her legs around him. Johnny struggled to find his own skin and the strength to peel himself off of her. At last, he kissed her throat as he rolled onto his side. "You okay?" he asked, still breathless.

"Mmmm, yeah. I love your candy cane, Santa."

Johnny chuckled. "I'm happy to hear it." He pressed a kiss to her cheek then sought her mouth. They both reveled in that kiss, both seeking answers to questions they did not dare to ask one another just yet.

Mistletoe slid her body over his, seeking and finding him ready for her once more. "Oh Johnny," she whispered as she took him inside. "I'm so glad my furnace broke."

"It doesn't feel broke to me, love," he murmured, taking little nips of her lips.

Mistletoe giggled. "I meant the one in the basement."

"Oh, that furnace."

When she pushed up and gripped the headboard, Johnny gladly savored the bounty she offered him while she rode him with exquisitely slow deep strokes. They both moaned their delight, until she gasped, "Hold me, Johnny!"

Complying, he wrapped his arms around her, clasping them over her lower back, holding her tightly to him as he arched up under her, and she picked up the pace and rode him hard. She came with great quivering spasms that curled around his shaft and stroked him with her deeper pulses, squeezing him until he pumped her full her again.

He held her tight for a long time after, just basking in the warmth they had created together, and she snuggled on top of him, content at last. He held her through the night, and when they woke to make love again, they filled the cold dark room with little moans of pleasure while outside the wind continued to howl.



Johnny awoke early, as was his custom, and he smiled in the dark, pressed a kiss to Mistletoe's brow, then slipped out of the warm cocoon they had made together in her bed. He made sure she was covered before he went to the bathroom, cleaned his teeth and took a brief shower that was hardly warm, taking care to keep his hair dry. After, he crept downstairs wrapped in his towel, his way dimly lit by a candle he carried with him.

He stirred the ashes in the fire, opened the flue to its full position, and added some tinder and small logs. Fresh smoke coiled darkly up the chimney.

Spotting his Santa suit, he pulled it on, including the hat, then ventured through to the kitchen. Turning on a lantern on the table, he set about firing up the small gas stove to boil some water for coffee. He put a filter in the coffee pot's basket and measured out the coffee, hoping it would come out okay this way. It wouldn't stay hot for very long, but maybe he could reheat it in a pot if needed.

When the water was ready, he turned off the stove and slowly poured the hot water over the coffee grinds. It dripped through into the pot below and the aroma of the coffee made him feel good. He smiled. It was Christmas morning. Did he ever have a present for Mistletoe?!



Mistletoe awoke alone and felt disappointment seep into her bliss. She didn't really want to move. For a few minutes, she laid there, watching the light from outside seep around the edges of the curtains. It was bright, the kind of light that was reflected off of snow, and shone brightest on the ceiling.

Braving the cold, Mistletoe hurried to the bathroom, muttered at the chilly seat, then tucked her hair into a shower cap and brushed her teeth. Her shower was hardly warm, so she dashed though, scrubbing fast. After toweling dry and whipping off the shower cap, she smiled to herself and slipped into her dressing gown and her reindeer slippers, then she went on a Santa hunt.

She found Santa stretched out on the floor in front of the Christmas tree, wearing his Santa suit and a smile. "Good morning," he grinned.

"Good morning, Santa," she grinned back. "What are you doing down there?"

"Waiting for you to come and unwrap your present."

"Oh. Do you have something for me, then?"

"I most certainly do."

"I think you're a very naughty Santa."

"Would you like to see how naughty?"

"Mmmm, I would." Mistletoe went to him and grabbed his hand, tugging him up.

“Where are we going?”

“I like to unwrap my presents in front of the fire,” she said.

“Uh oh. That could be very bad. What if you don't like my present?” he asked as she dragged him to the rug that lay before the roaring fire.

“Oh, I think I'll like my present, Santa. I'm pretty sure I will.”

“I certainly hope so. It's too late to take it back and change it for something else.”

Looking into his laughing dark eyes, she kissed him and slowly unfastened his coat. She pushed it back from his shoulders and slid it down his arms, then tossed it aside. She smoothed her hands over the incredible deeply tanned chest with muscles honed to perfection. She loved the feel of his chest and placed a kiss in the middle, then trailed her tongue downward as she sank to her knees, and slowly, finally, looked up at him as she unfastened his pants and let them drop to his ankles. With care, she removed his feet and tossed the pants after the coat.

Her attention slowly went to his erection and she licked it from base to tip, enjoying his little shiver of delight. “Mmmm,” she said, savoring his taste. “Santa, I love my present but I don't think it's a candy cane.”

“No?”

“Too big,” she assured him.

“Then what to do you think it is?”

“Well, it's pointing north.” She took another contemplative lick. “Mmmm, I know, you've brought me the North Pole.”

“Ah,” he said. “Well done.”

“And it's all mine,” she whispered, her breath searing over the tip of him.

“Yeah,” he sighed, “all yours.”

She took him in her mouth then and felt him quiver with excitement as she tasted and teased him, as she suckled and licked, and drew him steadily to his peak. His fingers tangled in her hair and she felt the small eager thrusts of his hips as he tried to restrain himself from thrusting too deeply.

He made a sound, part bliss, part frustration, for she knew he was torn in that moment between pulling out and coming in her mouth. His fingers in her hair tightened, a warning that he was too close to the edge. In his defense, he did try to pull her off, but Mistletoe wanted this. She wanted to feel him fill her mouth. She'd never wanted that before. Had always thought it would be gross, but she wanted it more than anything else in the world in that moment. She held him steady, one hand wrapped around the base of his cock, the other firmly clamped on his ass to prevent escape.

She felt the coming eruption begin as a quiver deep in his body, felt it gather down low where she held him, and she sucked him harder and deeper, felt his cock pulse as he erupted, hot, wet, gushing, salty and sweet. She savored it and his deep groans of pleasures as she swallowed each fresh burst in her mouth until he was done.

When she sat back on her heels and looked up at him, licking her lips, she met his dark glittering gaze. He looked stunned and she felt him tremble, and watched as he swallowed hard himself, unable for a moment to even speak as she tantalized him with another stroke of her tongue.

“You’re a naughty little elf, Mistletoe,” he whispered at last. “You didn’t have to do that.”

“It’s my present, Santa,” she told him softly. “I’ll play with it as I like.”

“Mmmm,” he murmured.

Still hard in her hand, she looked at her present and licked a last drop of semen from its tip. He sighed and whispered something under his breath, perhaps a little prayer. Mistletoe grinned. “Yum, Santa, you taste so sweet.”

“Not half as sweet as you,” he whispered as he dropped to the rug and pulled her under him. Parting her robe, he grinned, “Santa’s turn, you naughty little elf.” Then he proceeded to lavish his tongue on her breasts and her stomach, and then he moved lower.

Mistletoe dug her fingers into his thick dark hair and tugged him upward, but he insisted on tasting her again, and she couldn’t help herself. She dug her heels into the floor and offered up her hips, and he eagerly feasted, using his fingers and tongue on her until she thought she’d lose her mind.

Panting hard, all she could do was whimper when he finally withdrew his tongue and fingers, and he at last covered her. His thick hard cock pressed into her soaking core and she came again, clutching at him, her heels still embedded in the floor, her hips still raised for maximum penetration. He slid an arm under her lower back to help support her and hold her there, while he began to thrust deeply inside her.

Looking up at him, she saw that his loving dark eyes were filled with desire, and his smile was seductive and triumphant at the same time. She smiled back at him, sharing the glory. He drove harder and deeper, and she welcomed him, arching her back even more and angling her hips down to make his plundering cock penetrate at a steeper angle. They both moaned at the improvement. She was going to come again. She wanted him with her this time and she squeezed him hard deep inside. A few more thrusts and they went over the edge together, both crying out as their bodies cleaved together fiercely.

When Mistletoe stirred from her languor, she found Johnny leaning over her, staring down at her intently. He was still buried inside her. She smiled up at him. “Hey, Santa,” she said softly.

“Hey, yourself.”

“Is it still snowing outside?” she asked.

“I think so.”

“How can there be snow?” she asked. “When we’re generating all this heat?”

“How indeed?”

Mistletoe noticed an odd look in his eyes and asked, “Are you okay?”

“Sure,” he said, but he looked away and Mistletoe felt her first misgivings tiptoe in late from a wild party with her nerve endings.

“Is something wrong, Johnny?”

“No. I just was wondering.”

“Wondering what?”

He looked uncomfortable for a few seconds, then he grinned, “Well, I was wondering if you’d like to be Santa’s little elf?”

“I don’t know. It depends.”

“On what?”

“Will I still get to lick my candy cane and ride the North Pole?”

Johnny laved his tongue up her throat before replying, “Yes, my naughty little elf.”

“And Santa will still want his elf pie?”

He dipped his head and sucked a nipple into his mouth, assuring her, “Oh yes, my delicious little elf.”

“And can I unwrap my present every day?”

“You most certainly can, my darling little elf,” he whispered in her ear.

“Well then, I’m your one and only elf, Santa.”

“Yes,” he agreed softly, looking deeply into her eyes. “I love you, Mistletoe Holly.”

“I love you too, Johnny Santa.”

“I like it.”

“What?”

“Mistletoe Holly Santa,” he grinned.

Mistletoe loved it too. She told him so with her hungry kiss as she dragged him back down for another round of Pin the Elf on the North Pole...

# MAGIC ON THE ROOF

## COLLEEN LOVE

NATALIE HAD BEEN WATCHING BEN ALL WEEK. He was part of the work crew replacing her roof Mother Nature had been kind enough to rip off during the last storm. She certainly wasn't pleased with the prospects of all the hassle and expense, but just kept telling herself that 'there is a reason for everything', now that reason was coming to a full circle. Over the weeks span of time, her eyes had singled out Ben when they were doing the tear off as a group. But it was his southern drawl that had kept her attention. She worked in her gardens from the safety below with a bird's eye view of what was going on above. To her delight, he was the one to stay to tack on the new shingles, when the crew moved on to the next job.

Karma, fate, kismet, she felt all three joining around her as she now assumed her position in her garden this early morning. She had spoken to him several times. He was a little shy and she was intrigued when he blushed from just approaching him. Just yesterday, when all of the crew had finished a little early, he stayed and was picking up the last of the tools and any mess left behind. She offered him a cold drink, which he accepted gratefully. Her fingers had brushed against his, causing that first tingle of attraction to course through her. She grew restless knowing her time to approach him was growing shorter and shorter.

The heat of the day was beginning to kick up, she was grateful for the shade of the tree she worked under. She stood to stretch her cramped back and legs and treated her vision to a peek at Ben as he toiled above. He was stooped over the shingles, overlapping them carefully and tacking them down with his air hammer. He had stripped off the flannel shirt he wore and the tee shirt had followed a little later leaving him bare to the sun. From the waist up, his skin was deep brown, a tribal tattoo circled the top of his bicep. She watched the movements of his muscles flexing as he worked, she couldn't take her eyes off him, until he looked up. She had been caught. He turned, giving her view of his bronzed chest and abs, flexed and hard muscle covered in a sheen of sweat. She waved and he waved back adding the charm of his lopsided glowing white smile. All of a sudden a plan formed in her head, he wasn't going to get away easily. When he came down for lunch, she was going to talk to him.

The silence of his air hammer stilled the air and Natalie knew that was her queue. She peeled off her gloves and let them land with a plop in the dirt. She went inside and washed her hands and armed herself with her reasonable excuse to talk to him. An offering of an ice cold Coke.

She rounded the corner just as he was coming around the back, and collided into the solid column of his body.

“Oh!” Natalie nearly jumped out of her skin she was so intent on her mission, she didn't watch where she was going. When his arm caught her, she felt a jolt of heat stream into her from his contact. She regained her balance and he moved his arm. “I thought you would like a cold Coke.” She held up the can out to him.

“Thanks!” after the surprise of having her momentarily in his arms, a shy grin spread over his lips, a blush tinted his bronze complexion and disappeared into his bleach blonde hair.

Her fingers were folded into the rough callous of his as he grasped the can, she looked at their hands and then into deep brown eyes. She matched his slow smile as a warm sensual energy flowed through her.

“Would you like to stay for dinner tonight?” She kept her eyes locked onto his, melting into their warm depths.

“Yes, I would.” He didn't hesitate, but he blushed deeper, not taking his eyes from hers. “Thank you.”

Natalie softly pulled her hand free, “I will see you later then.”

She was glad she had taken this week as a vacation. She wanted to be available in case there were questions or whatever else that came up. Besides, her garden was a mess. It was a good excuse for ogling the men at work. She went about her day, finishing her gardening, cleaning her house and fixing a very special lasagne dinner.

Finally the day was done and the compressor and air hammer silent for the night. She stepped out to talk to Ben, more to hear his voice, then to admire his handy work. When he rounded the corner, the first thing she noticed was that he had put his shirt back on.

“It looks very nice!” She stood back in the yard to look at the even stagger of shingles.

“Thank you, ma'am. We will do a final inspection tomorrow and be done.”

“The name is Natalie. Will you be with them?” She gave him a coy smile.

“Maybe.” He smiled slowly. “Probably.”

“Well, Natalie. I'm going to drop off the boss' truck and clean up some. I'll be back in about two hours or so. That okay?”

“Sure. Sounds fine by me. I'll have dinner about ready by then.” She paused, looking again into the liquid depths of those brown eyes. “You know, a girl could get lost in those.”

“Pardon me?” Ben looked a little thrown off.

“Your eyes, they're beautiful.”

“Oh, well...” He blushed furiously, “I should go.”

“Wait.” She smoothed the fabric stretched tight over his pecs. She smiled when they jumped under her touch, she smoothed her hands up and over his shoulders. Standing on tip toes, she pulled his neck down, claiming his lips in a kiss that made his breath catch in surprise. “Hurry back.”

“You can bet I will.” He smiled broadly with less blushing this time.

Ben turned and left her. There was no way he dawdling today. If that kiss was any indication of what she had in mind, well, he was going to cut business as short as possible and get himself back quick. He knew she had watched him all week. He could feel it. He had watched her too. Out of the corner of his eye, of course. No sense in the other guys knowing about it and ribbing him with their endless teasing and tormenting. No, he just kept those things to himself.

He quickly took the company’s truck back to the boss’ house and went home to shower. He made a quick stop to pick up something special for her. He looked down at the time on the CD player of his truck and figured he had made record time as he pulled back into her driveway. He smiled with anticipation when he saw her standing on the front porch.

“See, told ya I’d be back quick.” He grinned as he pulled the fresh roses from the passenger seat.

“I guess!” She stepped onto the walk way and accepted the flowers. “They are beautiful. You are an old fashioned boy, aren’t you?”

“Yes, ma’am. Brought up right by my mama.”

“It’s Natalie,” she corrected with a laugh, “a mama’s boy, huh? Best kind.” She smiled as she walked into the house with her nose buried in the flowers. Ben followed in close tow, softly closing the door behind him. After being outside, the house smelled like heaven. She placed the roses in a vase and took them out to the table set in the garden terrace.

“Would you like to help me with getting everything out on the terrace?” She handed him a basket of warm bread, and she followed with the lasagne from the oven. “If you want to pour the wine, that would be great!”

Natalie felt an easy comfort with Ben. Like he already belonged to her. He moved easily, spoke easily, and god she prayed he was easy. It was all she could do to get through her dinner without reaching over to steal another kiss, or worse, strip the clothes from that tight body and have her way with him. She found herself looking into his eyes again and going through the same thought when he suddenly stopped talking.

“You alright?” He asked her.

“Hmmm? Yes,” Now it was her turn to blush, “maybe it’s just the wine.” So, she was a liar, but there was no way she was going to scare him off by jumping in his lap first thing. He wasn’t like the other boys out there and what’s more, she really liked him and didn’t want him to run screaming into the night.

“Well, if we are all done, why don’t I help you get everything inside? It looks like the sun is going to be setting soon, maybe I could get you up on the roof and have a real view of the

sunset.”

“Oh, that is a lovely idea. I have a blanket we could take up there.”

They cleared the table and got leftovers wrapped and put away, and the dishes loaded in the dishwasher.

“You got that ladder on the side of the house still?”

“Yep.” She watched as he disappeared out the sliding glass door in the back.

Natalie got an old blanket out of the back of her closet. She smiled when Ben stood waiting with the wine bottle by the neck and two freshly washed glasses by the stems.

“That was quick.”

She went out to the ladder supported against the new roof. Ben took the blanket and waited for her to begin the ascent up the rungs ahead of him. He waited patiently at the bottom for her to shakily climb up and onto the scratchy roof. Natalie watched with held breath as he ascended with the blanket slung over his shoulder, wine bottle in his hand and the glasses in the other. He made it to the top with all the grace and ease of a dancer. At the top, she took the blanket from his shoulder and spread it out over the crumbs of the composite roof. Brushing off her jeans and slipping out of her shoes, she stood on the blanket while Ben did the same.

“Hold these for me?” Ben handed Natalie the glasses as he knelt and she followed suit. He pulled the cork from the previously opened bottle and poured the blood red liquid into the deep glasses as she held them for him. He re-corked the bottle and after making a little holder with the corner of the blanket, he rested it there. He clinked his glass against hers in a silent toast and drank deeply. He noticed she did the same as he leaned back on one elbow.

“Thanks.” Natalie looked into the fathomless brown depths of his eyes and knew he would get anything he wanted from her. The smooth southern twang in his voice brought her blood to a boil alone. She leaned back on her elbow, much in the fashion he had done and leaned close to him.

“You know, I was going to ask you out when this project was finished.” The softness of his eyes narrowed down onto her.

“Why couldn’t you sooner?” Heat from his gaze made her flush, and she was glad for the cooler breeze after the sun had gone behind the trees, though nothing could make the temperature subside from her skin.

“I don’t mix business and pleasure.”

“Oh,” she disappointedly looked down into her near empty wine glass, feeling her head beginning to swim. She forced a heavy smile on her lips and looked back into those mesmerizing eyes. “Technically you’re still “on the job” until tomorrow, but you’re up here with me now.” She could feel the intensity of his gaze.

“Well, as far as I see it, when I punched that last tack in, business was done.” He let that slow smile blossom over his lips again.

“So....”

“So, can I kiss you?” His finger tips trailed down her jaw.

“Yes.” She whispered. Her eyes drifted closed when his fingers threaded through the loose strands of her blonde hair. His lips touched hers softly making her breath catch. She gripped the front of his shirt for balance when his mouth became hungry as he covered hers again, lips sliding, molding in the meeting of body and soul. Vining pleasure wound its way through her body, stirring the effects of the wine. She felt the liquid warmth from her sex spilling. She sighed when he pulled his lips from hers, her eyes fluttered open.

“God, I’ve been wanting to do that, and more, since I first laid eyes on you.”

“More? I would love to see what more you have in mind, Ben.” He took the glass from her hand and put it along side his on the roof. Her hands smoothed over the deep brown skin of his neck, fingers threading through black hair. Her breathing stopped from surprise when he suddenly, very savagely took her mouth again. His hungry lips deliciously hard. His wine flavored tongue slid in against hers, she sucked it, making him groan. He broke the kiss to look at her again. She could see a primal need in the liquid dark of his eyes. He rolled her onto her back, taking him with her. She was finding it true, that it is the quiet ones you should watch out for.

“More Ben, more.” She whispered against his mouth. His leg draped across hers and a thick arm pulled her further under him as he took total possession of her, pressing his body to hers. His lips were on hers again, giving and taking from her. Her hands smoothed the tee-shirt drawn taught across the muscle of his back. She could feel the solid strength she had been watching all week and it made her desperate to have him, to feel him inside of her.

Natalie inched his tee shirt up and slid her hands over the warmth of his bare skin. He groaned his approval of her touch as she kneaded the tight muscles. She worked the intrusive shirt up and over his head.

He sat back on his haunches. “Fair is fair, come on, off with it.” That southern drawl grew thicker.

Natalie felt a sultry giggle escape as she peeled off her blouse and add it to his abandon shirt. She unclasped her bra and unceremoniously added that to the pile as well.

Ben took her in his arms and lay back with her, skin to bare skin. Starting at her lips, he kissed her again. Filling his mouth with hers. Feasting and devouring on her lips, her jaw, collar bones and finally taking the silhouette tips of her breasts in his lips. The breeze blew across the wet tips making them harder, sharper. He tormented further by using the razor sharp edges of his teeth against the little buds of her nipples. She arched her back to him, her fingers threaded through his thick hair. When he moved his mouth to the other breast, she gasped and groaned. Dipping his fingers into his wine glass, he dripped a few drops onto her nipple and licked it off, sucking the skin deep into his lips. He repeated the torment to its twin, using more wine than on the first nipple. As he licked it off, a large drop slid over the mound of her breast and trailed

down. He kissed and licked the valley between, his lips trailing to her navel following the liquid trail. She groaned and he felt her belly quiver with sensations when his tongue dipped and caressed within. His hands cradled the firm rounds of her bottom, squeezing the still clothed cheeks until he realized her pants had an elastic waist band. He slid his hands in against the silk flesh of her bare skin. Oh god, she was wearing a G string. He easily circled around to the front and opened her thighs with his hand.

His lips were back on her mouth when his fingers slid into the her moist folds, when his fingers dipped into her wet center. His tongue mated hers, mimicking the motion of his fingers. He swallowed the delicious sounds she made and couldn't help adding his own when he felt her deft hands unfasten his jeans and fish his cock from his underwear. She smoothed and stroked the smooth skin of his head and down the thickly veined shaft, her other hand reached down further and cupped his heavy sac's.

Natalie was surprised when Ben suddenly stopped and pulled her hands out of his pants. But she was delighted when he stood and peeled her pants off and then pulled his trousers off. She bolted to her knees and took his warm, throbbing cock in her hands. His gasp hissed between clenched teeth when her tongue licked his length. She filled her mouth with his naked balls and trailed her tongue back over his cock, taking his head in her mouth. Her tongue caressed and swirled around the flared tip, she pressed her lips over his vein laced shaft, sucking him deeper.

“Oh god, Natalie, let me sit down.”

She let go of him letting him sit, then lay back. She moved in the position he directed her in and found herself straddling his head. He held her thighs firmly when she took the awkward position over him until she was steady and in a good position over him. The angle of the roof made her lean back against him and still be able to reach his penis. Her tongue began licking the column of his cock again, her saliva slicked the way for her lips. She took up a steady rhythm slowly gliding up and down his shaft. His hands released her thighs. She gave a little start of surprise when his fingers spread her folds, the warmth of his tongue slid between. A rough finger slid into her vagina and matched the movements she made on his cock. As her juices began to flow a little more, he slid in a second as his tongue ever so slowly slithered over her clitoris. He suckled the little berry of nerves into his lips, making her squeal. She soon lost herself in an ever increasing urgency as his tongue flickered and danced over her sex. She began to tremble when he moved faster, driving her to the edge. She took her lips off his cock and clung desperately to his tight abs, as she rocked on her knees over the sweet torture of his tongue as she finally felt the slow blossom of orgasm overtake her. A groan accompanied the pulse of her sex. She moved her leg back over his head, but left her body near his.

She lay her head on his abdomen for only a moment before she took him back in her lips again. She held him firmly in her grip as she moved her mouth and hands up and down his shaft. She bobbed her head faster and faster with her palm stroking where her mouth had left

off until his hips began to move. His fingers entwined in her hair and he shivered. She felt him swell just before his release. A low howl escaped his throat as he erupted down Natalie's throat.

Natalie took her time. She trailed her lips over his navel, he twitched. Everything was ultra sensitive now. She moved up beside him and licked over his nipples, nipping and suckling the tender, large oval nipples. She kissed the thick skin of his neck.

"You smell so good." She whispered to him. "And you taste even better." Her lips were on his throat. The scent of her sex on his mouth and chin. She licked her nectar from his skin before sliding her lips over his.

"Come over here." He shifted her over his hips to straddle his hard cock. He held it upright, her pussy swallowed his length in one long slide. He groaned letting his eyes close for the moment she sat still, her tunnel flexing and squeezing his shaft as she gained balance. Then she began to move. She lunged her hips making the clench even tighter. His breath hissed out again as his hands went to her hips. He pressed her down on the sharp angle of his pubic bone making her groan. Once again the slant of the roof working to their advantage. He thrust as deeply into her spread legs as he could, rocking her hard against him. She arched her back to sweeten the sensations even more and he caught her nipple in his teeth. She fell forward, catching herself on her palms over his head as he suck the nipple roughly. He felt the pulsing contract around his cock and she hissed. He hugged her tightly to his body and rolled her in a smooth motion, placing himself between her legs without leaving her pussy. She spread her thighs and flexed her self against him, drawing him deeper, much as her mouth had done. Her hands on his ass drove him in further as her nails bit into his flesh. Her body quaked, she drove him hard as she bucked against the friction of his body. Her slick body slid easily under and against his. He didn't bother to try and quiet her cries which were savage and frantic. He just drove into her until he felt that tell tale tightening and a sudden gush wet his dangling balls. As she quieted, he slowly and nuzzled her throat, jaw and lips.

"What the hell did you do to me?" Natalie laughed, still out of breath.

His laugh was a soft deep rumble as he kissed her.

"Do it again." She whispered.

Ben drove hard and fast into her. The dig in his skin from her nails were little bites of added sensation goading him forward. Her slick passage milking his cock as he slid in and out, he couldn't make his body go fast enough to keep up with the demand of pleasure overriding anything else at the moment. The squelch of her juices was the only sound he heard, along with the sweet gasps and wails coming from Natalie. It switched to something primal in his mind. The need to have her, pleasure her as many times as he could. It was all he could fathom at the moment. His balls swung freely, slapping against her tight ass. He cradled her hips in his hands when her gasps turned to groans, she arched up against him, struggling, too tired and clumsy to move her body against his. She managed to clutch her hands, working the straining

muscles in his back, her heels digging into the hard sinew of his round ass cheeks. Her pussy pulsed and wrung his shaft when she shattered. He groaned with the sensations against his ever swelling cock. She clung limply to him as he felt his own climax approaching. His seed ascended and finally burst from his trembling body. He wilted down on top of Natalie. Rolling them both onto their sides. After pulling his hands from beneath her limp form, he held her to him, feeling her warm breath on his bare chest.

“You all right?”

A soft giggle emanated from her. “Yes.”

“I’m sorry if I hurt you. You just felt so good, I couldn’t stop myself.” He touched her upturned face.

“Mmmm, it was fantastic. Can I ask you something?”

“Sure.”

“Will you stay with me? Come into my bed?”

“Well,” he paused to consider for a second. “I could get up early and come back with my foreman for the inspection. I wouldn’t want to put you in a difficult position.”

“I don’t care. I don’t want you to leave. Ever. I will just tell them I’m a very satisfied customer.”

“The customer is always right. Come on, let’s go inside.” He laughed as he held his hand out to her.

# STARGAZER LILIES

## KELLEY VITOLLO

“I CAN’T BELIEVE I’M BACK IN THIS TOWN,” Lilly Sinclair said with a frustrated sigh to her friend Mandy. Holding the silver and black cordless phone in the crook of her neck, Lilly plopped down on her beige, over-stuffed couch.

“I’m not too happy you left me either,” her friend replied. “Why’d you go if you hate it so much?”

There lay the million dollar question. Why had she returned to the tiny town of River City, Oregon? Living in LA, her life had been everything she ever wanted yet she still felt empty inside. Sure she had a great job, and great friends, but something had been missing. What, she didn’t know. On a whim she quit her job, packed up her condo and come home. *But why?*

Her own head swam with questions, so how could she answer Mandy? The answer eluded her like that damn mouse she had yet to catch running around her new house. She left her posh condo behind for this little house on a cul-de-sac? Not that this wasn’t a nice home because it was, but it wasn’t like the city living she was used to. Since when did she become a cul-de-sac type of woman? *Not since you were a kid. Not since you left your childhood home which is only three streets down from where you’re living now. Shit. How did this happen?*

“It’s just something I had to do, Mand. I-”

Ding dong. *Saved by the bell.* “I have to go. My doorbell’s ringing. It must be the landscaper I hired coming out to give me an estimate.”

Clicking the off button, Lilly stood up and threw the phone down on the couch where she had just been sitting. Her yellow sundress fluttered round her knees as she walked to her front door.

Ding dong.

“I’m coming, I’m coming,” Lilly said annoyed as she swung the large white door open. Her heart stopped. Right there, dead in her chest. Lilly was sure her heart wasn’t the only thing that stopped. At that very second, the Earth ceased to go round. Breath caught in her chest. *It can’t be. Not after all this time.*

The man standing in front of her proved very well that it could be by reaching up to cup her cheek with his calloused fingers. Caressing her skin and tickling her senses. He was back too. Her first and only love. Hayden Michaels. The only regret she had in her life, the man she hadn't seen in ten years. And apparently she had hired him to makeover her yard.



“Damn babe, you’re just as beautiful as I remembered,” Hayden said, as he drew circles on her cheek with the pad of this thumb.

Lilly was more than beautiful. Her long honey brown hair, smooth and shiny hung loose down her back. She was still small and petite, just how she had been when he saw her last. Her soft flowery scent assaulted his senses, wrapping around him in invisible ropes of desire. Perfect. Her unique taste, still on his tongue after all these years. Lilly was every wet dream for the past ten years come true. Typical to character his cock rose to the occasion, straining to burst free from his tattered work jeans.

Hayden had been closing up shop when he noticed the name Lilly Sinclair on one of his employees’ worksheets the day before. He had to know if it was her. Making some excuse to his fellow landscaper he switched their work loads, and it had been so fucking worth it. Just seeing her, touching her after all these years set his body ablaze. The heat from her skin crawled up his arms and straight to his heart.

Sparkling blue eyes the size of quarters bore into Hayden making him even hotter. She was obviously shocked, but the look of wariness in her eyes made him question whether it was a pleasant surprise or not.

“You gonna make me stand at the front door all day, babe or do you plan on taking me around back so I can see what needs to be done.”

Lilly still stood there silent, watching him.

“You used to be a lot more excited to see me, Lilly. I’m disappointed.” Hayden offered his best smile and a quick wink. Lilly trembled ever so slightly, but he felt it against his hand. Every time they touched the sensations were amplified, had been since the first time he had the pleasure of touching her sweet little body.

“I’m just shocked to see you. I didn’t know you were back in town, much less that you worked for the landscaping company I hired.” Lilly stepped back causing Hayden’s hand to drop from her face. “Come on, let’s head out back.”

Hayden was so happy she had finally let him in, he didn’t take the time to tell her he didn’t work for Stargazer Lily Landscaping, he owned it.



*Good God, the rugged, handsome man walking next to me is none other than Hayden. My Hadyen.* How freakin' lucky that she happened to choose Stargazer Lilly Landscaping. She chose this company solely because of the name. *Thank you God.*

Sneaking what was supposed to be a quick glance to her left Lilly admired Hayden's exquisite physique. The man obviously did a tremendous amount of manual labor. He had the body to prove it. A white tank top spread tightly against his muscled chest. Lilly made sure she took the time to observe every detail, every muscled contour of his body. Well, at least as much as she could without making it too obvious.

What was supposed to be a peek, turned into a show, making it impossible to turn away to watch where she was walking. *Oh good Lord look at those arms.* Lean hard muscle that she longed to be wrapped up inside. Those same arms held her so tightly when they said goodbye ten years ago, but my how they had changed. Hayden did a lot of growing between the age of eighteen and twenty-eight.

She longed to touch Hayden's strong, square jaw, littered with day old stubble. Naughty grin in place as if he knew she was watching him. His blond sun-kissed hair, sexily mussed begged for her hands exploration.

Her cheek still tingled from his touch and somehow that tingle started spreading south. Hayden always had that effect on her. After all these years all he had to do was touch her cheek, show some skin, and talk to her in that deep, rugged voice that was distinct to him and she was ready to jump him right here and now.

Boom.

"Damn it," Lilly bent and grabbed for her extremely sore toe after stubbing it on the table.

"You alright, babe?" Long, lean fingers grasped her arm. His nails short, and stained from working in the earth.

"Yeah, I'll be fine." *I just might die of embarrassment.* Tripping over a table and almost eating it wasn't the best way to make a good impression after all these years.

Hayden again winked at her sending her body into internal convulsions of desire. "Better watch where you're going next time. If you want to take a peek, I'd be happy to stand still for a minute."

"I....no....never mind. You're still cocky as ever I see."

"Just making an observation," he replied with a smug smile.

"Come on, the back door is this way," Lilly changed the subject.

When they reached the sliding glass door off her kitchen, Lilly reached out for the handle at the exact moment Hayden did. He grasped her hands and rubbed that same rough thumb on her sensitive flesh. Goose bumps whisked up her arms.

"Let me," he said while moving her hand from the door and letting it fall to her side.

Lilly wished he would have held it for a moment longer. She missed his touch already.

They made their way into the backyard stopping under the wooden roof that protected her back patio from the bright sun light above. Her pool sat about twelve feet in front of the end of the cement patio. Other than the patio and her pool, the yard was barren. Dirt covered the ground; no grass, no flowers, nothing. And Lilly loved flowers.

“You should be happy you called me,” Hayden snickered confidently.

“I knew I needed someone to help. This place is a mess.” Lilly leaned against the wood beam beside her, primarily to get a little bit of space between herself and Hayden. Otherwise, she was liable to do something else to embarrass herself.

“No. Not anyone. Me. I’m the best there is around here.”

Lilly smiled. “You sure don’t lack any self confidence, do you?”

“You used to like that about me.”

“Who says I still don’t.” The moment the words left her mouth Lilly slapped her hand against it to keep it closed. Looking up, into the eyes of the man that stood a good foot taller than her five foot three inches, Lilly blushed. Heat rose to her cheeks.

Hayden reached out to pull her hands from her mouth, a look of desire swimming in his electric blue eyes.

“I...I shouldn’t have said that.”

Hayden, holding her hands, stepped closer. “Damn, I’ve missed you, Lilly.”

The urge to tell him how much she missed him too, how much she had thought about him the last ten years bubbled inside her. But she couldn’t do it. It had been too long since she had seen him last to open herself up so soon.

Hayden’s rich, spicy scent flooded her nostrils. He still smelled the same. After all these years she recognized that Hayden scent.

“Why don’t I show you what I have in mind,” Lilly said backing away.

“I can think of something I’d much rather do, Lil.”

Lilly didn’t have to ask what he wanted to do. Somehow she could still read Hayden and she knew exactly what he wanted.



Hayden walked around Lilly’s backyard with a raging hard-on while she talked about flowers, grass, trees, yada, yada, yada. When she was finished, he asked for a few minutes alone to get a “feel” of things for himself.

Lilly had agreed, sauntering away in that flirty yellow dress that he wanted to rip off her. *Calm down man. You’re slippin’. She’s just a typical woman.* What a crock of shit. Hayden knew Lilly Sinclair was more than a typical woman. Why the hell he had ever let her go was beyond him. He had been a stupid, cocky eighteen-year-old kid who wanted to see what else was out there. She had been the same way. Lilly had stars in her eyes and while he planned to head up

north to Portland, she had gone to LA.

But now she was back, and Hayden was still cocky, but he wasn't stupid. He didn't plan on making the same mistake twice.



Lilly peered out her kitchen window watching Hayden explore every corner of her yard. He wrote on a pad of paper and took measurements, concentrating with skill and enthusiasm. She couldn't concentrate on anything except for him. He was such a masculine, beautiful man. A piece of her past she had never been able to forget.

Though they had dated their entire senior year in high school, they agreed not to get too serious. Neither wanted to stay in their hometown after graduation so they just dated and had fun. Hayden had been her best friend that year and though she had promised herself she wouldn't, she had fallen in love with him.

He was her first everything. Making love with Hayden was magnificent. No other man since touched her soul the way he had. They laughed together, talked together, and dreamed together. Unfortunately, those dreams led them in different directions. As hard as it had been to say goodbye, she felt they both deserved to go and find themselves.

Now they were both back home. Was it coincidence? Or was it Hayden she had been missing all these years? *Don't get ahead of yourself, Lilly. You haven't seen this man in ten years yet you are around him thirty minutes and you decide he is what's been missing from your life? Slow your roll.*

Lilly was so lost in thought she didn't hear the sliding glass door open and Hayden slip inside. His rough and sexy voice snapped her out of her thoughts in an instant.

"You have any plans for today?" he asked.

"Umm...no. I wasn't sure how long this would take so I didn't plan anything else."

"Good." Hayden took two steps toward her. "I'd like to spend the day with you. You know, catching up." Lifting his hand Hayden brushed a loose strand of hair off her cheek. "I have a few ideas for your backyard but I'll have to draw them up for you and see what you think. But that can wait. What do you say, will you let me keep you company today?"

Lilly didn't need to consider his question. She wanted to spend the day with him too; talking, finding out what he's been up to all these years, comparing the new Hayden to the one she knew all those years ago.

"I'd love it if you stayed, Hayden." The words came out a mere whisper. Hayden's fingers played with her hair and the sensation made it hard to concentrate on forming words.

"I'm going to kiss you, Lil. For old times sake."

"Yes." Her acceptance, more of a plea.

Hayden lowered his lips to her temple, placing a soft kiss where his hand had just been.

Slowly and sensually he caressed a path from her temple to her mouth with his lips. Once he reached his destination Hayden urged her lips open with his eager tongue. Lilly let him in savoring the feel of this mouth against hers, his tongue searching every inch of her mouth. Hayden's strong hands grabbed her head and deepened the kiss. Lilly followed his lead enjoyed it every step of the way. *This man could kiss.*

He tasted better than chocolate cake, ice-cream, or apple pie. He tasted like Hayden.

As quickly as the kiss began it was over. Hayden lifted his mouth from hers but still held her face, his eyes connecting with hers. "It's a nice day out. Let's sit on the patio and catch up. I want to know everything about your life for the past ten years."

Out of breath due to her moment in heaven with Hayden, Lilly replied, "Go on out, I'll get us some lemonade and be right out." She watched as Hayden turned and walked out the door nonchalantly as if nothing had happened. How could he do that? Her legs were like jelly. Fearing what would happen if she moved, Lilly stood still until her heart rate slowed to a normal pace before getting their drinks. As she walked towards the door, she wondered what Hayden had in mind for today. And hoped to God it involved more kisses like the one they just shared.



Before Lilly knew it, six hours had passed. They had sat on her patio, in white wicker chairs and talked for six hours? Unbelievable, but true. The breaks in conversation were minimal and she couldn't remember the last time she had smiled so much. Had she ever smiled this much? Just looking at the fine male specimen next to her plastered a smile on her face, but it was more than that.

Lilly was enjoying herself in a way she couldn't remember doing a very long time. She knew more about Hayden now, than she did all those years ago. Boy did she like what she saw. He was funny, kind, hardworking, and generous. Plus, plus, plus and plus. Her heart did a little pitter patter in her chest.

*Calm down, Lilly. Slow that heart rate back down to speed.*

"Beautiful sunset," Hayden said turning to face Lilly.

"Yes it is." The words came out uneven and shaky.

"Go swimming with me?" His voice was smooth as honey.

"I don't even know where my suit is, Hayden. And I know you don't have one here."

"So?" Lilly heard the dare in his reply.

"Hayden!" Lilly playfully slapped his arm. "We can't go without suits."

Hayden rose, grabbed Lilly's arms and pulled her up. Stepping closer he wrapped his muscled arms around her petite body. "Yes we can, Lilly. I've seen what's under those clothes before," he ran his hand down her back. "It's been a while, but I still remember. I want to see

it again. Grant me that pleasure.” As he spoke Hayden’s mouth continued to inch closer and closer to her own. Jackpot. His mouth came down on hers in an urgent, pleading kiss.

Hayden’s tongue swirled around her mouth, diving in before withdrawing again. He was a masterful kisser. Lilly worked her way into his mouth as well, tasting her way into ecstasy.

Pulling back a mere whisper away, Hayden again pled his case. “No one can see us behind your fence, Lilly. I haven’t felt this way in years. I feel like I’m eighteen again. Let’s go skinny dipping.”

Damn she wanted to jump in the pool naked with Hayden, but could she? They hadn’t seen each other in so long and though they had spent the day together, getting to know one another again, she just didn’t know if she could move that fast.

“I have an idea.”

“I’m all ears,” Hayden said nuzzling her neck.

“We’ll start partially clothed. You in your boxers, I’ll wear my bra and panties. It’s pretty much like a swimming suit anyway. We’ll see where that takes us.”

Her heart pounded wildly against her chest like a caged animal trying to break free. Hayden placed sweet kisses on her neck driving her need for him almost to the breaking point.

“Sure babe. If that makes you feel better, we can start out any way you’d like.” His mouth didn’t stop kissing her while his large fingers fumbled with the zipper on the back of her dress.

“Damn I’ve wanted to do this since you first opened the door. I’ve dreamed about you, Lilly. All these year, I never forgot.”

Passion shot wildly through her body. Was she really about to strip down to her bra and panties with a man she hadn’t seen in a decade? *Yep, you sure are.* Her dress fell from her shoulders and pooled around her sandaled feet. This is Hayden, she reminded herself. Not just any man. He was the only one who had ever truly touched her heart.

“I haven’t forgotten either, Hayden.” The words barely escaped her mouth. The pleasure of his strong hands softly caressing her back almost stopped her speech.

Hayden kissed his way down her neck and over the swell of her breasts. Lilly knew she should be feeling self conscious about being half naked outside, but she couldn’t form the thoughts. She just wanted to feel what Hayden was doing to her, the pleasure he was causing her body.

His soft lips kept heading south. Soon he was on his knees and nuzzling her stomach while his hand worked the straps on her shoes.

“You smell good, Lilly,” Hayden inhaled a deep breath. “I can smell your arousal for me. I feel the way you quiver each time I touch you.”

“Yes, Hayden. I want you.”

Her words let loose the caged beast. Hayden stood in a flash, shucked his jeans and boxers, and grabbed a condom from his wallet before lifting Lilly in his arms and walking to the

pool.

“I thought we were starting swimming partially clothed.”

“Not me babe. If you feel more comfortable that’s fine, but I’m not wasting anytime by keeping anything on.” Hayden climbed down the pool stairs with ease before submerging himself and Lilly up their chests in the water. “Especially not when you tell me you want me. I’m doing my damndest not to take you right now.”

Lilly watched as Hayden set her on her feet and placed the condom on the edge of the pool. Despite the cool water heat radiated from Hayden’s skin, snaking around her body. Without thinking, Lilly splashed Hayden wildly, soaking his face and golden hair. Droplets raced down the side of his cheek.

“You’re going to regret that,” laughter coated his words as he lunged for Lilly, dunking her head under the water and letting her immediately up again.

“No fair.” Lilly was almost laughing to hard to speak. Hayden dropped his head back, laughing in his rich and hearty tone. Man had she missed him. She didn’t really know how much until spending time with him today. Hayden lit up her world in a way no one else could.

A good minute later, Hayden’s laughter ended as his eyes transfixed on her chest. Lilly looked down to see her nipples pebbled and hard. She felt the heat of her blush tinge her cheeks.

“Please God tell me you’ll let me take that bra off. I can see through the damn thing anyway.”

Lilly knew he was right. She could see the pick of her areola through the flimsy white bra. *Some much for taking things slow.*

“Not if I beat you to it,” Lilly reached down and unclasped the front hook on her bra. Her breast spilled out as the bra hung loosely on her arms.

“Damn woman. You are so fucking hot. I wish you would have let me do that.” Hayden reached out and pulled the bra from her arms and threw it from the pool. He then sank under the water, splashing slightly as he went. *Good God, he was pulling her panties down her legs.*

Hayden couldn’t stop from opening his eyes under water to watch Lilly’s brown curls spring free as he removed her panties. As he sat there under the water, like an idiot, something struck him. He still loved this woman. After all this time, she was still the one; the one who made him red hot with need, the one who could always make him smile, the one who made him think, made him happy, filled him with love.



Eyes beginning to burn, Hayden rose from the water searing hot, and ready to stake his claim on Lilly, ready to make her see what they should have known all those years ago. They

not only were good for each other, they were meant to be.

“I didn’t want to take the chance that you’d beat me to the punch,” Hayden said while he twirled her panties around on his finger.

“You’re so bad, Hayden Michaels.”

“I think I’m pretty damn good, and you will too when I’m done with you.” His masculine confidence shined through his words. Hayden backed Lilly up until she was against the wall of the pool. The second they could move no further, Hayden’s mouth clasped over one of her breasts.

Lilly moaned. By the time he was done with her, Hayden planned to have her screaming in pleasure, remembering all that they were together. Sucking hard he drew her taunt nipple into his mouth, savoring the feel of her Lilly squirming in pleasure against him. *You haven’t seen anything yet, babe.* Hayden’s hand dove under the water in search of Lilly’s sweet spot. Softly at first, then increasing the pressure he rubbed his finger against her clitoris.

Lilly sank down a bit as though she would fall if he didn’t hold her up. Happy to oblige, Hayden grabbed her arm and placed it on his shoulders. His licking and sucking of her breast, never slowed a bit.

“Hayden.” On her lips, his name was music to his ears.

At her desperate plea, Hayden sank one finger deep inside Lilly’s waiting body.

“You feel so good, babe, even just clamped around my finger. I can’t wait until it’s my cock thrusting inside you.”

Hayden worked her with his finger, in and out, stroking her clitoris with his thumb.

“Please, Hayden. More.”

“Anything you want babe.” Hayden added another finger and nibbled lightly on her beaded nipples. He switched breasts and tugged her nipple with his teeth as Lilly clung tightly to him, riding his hand.

“Oh God,” Lilly cried in his ear as the damn broke free and she fell into oblivion.



The sky, now darkening, was freckled with a few stars; stars that shown down on only Hayden and herself. They were the only two people in the world. The orgasm still shook her body with violent spasms.

She held Hayden tight as he reached for the condom and lifted her into his masculine embrace.

“Where are we going?” she asked a quiver in her tone.

“Inside. I don’t want you get get chilly.”

Lilly wasn’t cold. As a matter of fact, she was on fire, her body burning for this sweet man that was taking care of her.

"I'm...I'm not cold."

"You sound cold to me babe, though I do have to wonder how you could be." Hayden's long legs took smooth strides towards her door while he talked.

"No. It was the orgasm. It was so powerful, my body can't stop moving."

Hayden laughed and kissed her forehead while he entered her kitchen. "That was nothing. I have much more in store for you, Lil. Where's your bedroom?"

Lilly pointed to her hallway. "Down the hall, last door on your left."

Hayden hurried to her room, opened the door and turned on the light. "Holy shit." The room was a mess. Boxes half unpacked littered not only the floor but the bed as well. Shelves were half up, the remaining pieces propped against the wall where they would soon hang. Newspaper wrapped objects were cluttered on the table and dresser. It looked as though a tornado had come through. "You need someone to help you, babe."

"I just moved in!" Lilly defended herself and playfully slapped his arm.

"Can't tell that by the living room or the kitchen."

"I didn't expect anyone to see my bedroom." She again blushed which she realized she did often around Hayden.

"I'm glad you're letting me see it."

They stood there dripping water on her caramel colored carpet. Hayden found an empty corner and set Lilly on her feet. "Towels?" he asked before following where Lilly's pointed finger toward the bathroom. He came out a minute later with a large towel. Lilly wondered if he was going to bring her a towel too, but her silent question was answered as he started drying her off instead of himself. "First thing tomorrow I'll help you get your room together. Then I'll start on your lawn."

Her heart fluttered, practically flying from her chest. "You don't have to do that, Hayden." He dried her arms and chest first. The sensual movements of his hands making her drop her head backwards.

"I know," he answered simply as he moved the towel to her stomach, drying her wet skin, but causing a new wetness to form between her legs. Bending down, Hayden moved to her legs, parting them and rubbing the towel against her mound.

"Hayden." Lilly said his name in a breathless whisper, silently asking for more.

"Don't move," he commanded leaving her to remove the boxes from the bed and place them on the floor. Thank God she had sheets and blankets in place.

Quickly drying himself off, he was back with her in an instant, down on his knees and kissing her flat stomach. "I had to get that out of the way before I get too occupied with you, sweet Lilly."

Flip flop, flip flop. Her heart was again pounding against her chest walls.

"So smooth," Hayden ran his bare hands up and down her legs. "So soft, like the pedals of a flower." Hayden inhaled, "but you smell better. I'm going to taste you, Lilly. Taste your sweet

nectar.”

Her wobbling legs almost gave out. Hayden lightly pushed her to lean against the wall before raising her left leg over his shoulder.

With skill and precision Hayden opened her pink lips with his fingers and licked down the center of her feminine heat. Her heart exploded, more powerfully and beautiful than any fireworks show. Colors flashed in her eyes. It was like Hayden was transporting her to another world with each swish of his tongue.

Lilly grabbed his head tightly. Hayden licked her slowly, sending her body into a tailspin. This man really knew what to do with that tongue. Finally, he nipped at her swollen nub sending rays of delight shooting through out her body.

“You taste even better than I imagined, Lilly. I could live off you, and nothing else.”

Before she had time to even think about what he meant, Hayden had her in his strong arms once more. She had never been carried so much in her life, but knew she could get used to it if Hayden was the one doing it.

Laying her on the center of the bed, Hayden climbed on top of her.

“Wait, I...I want to see you. I want to touch you too, Hayden.”

“Be my guest babe, but make it quick. I’m going to explode if I don’t get inside you soon.”

Hayden lay back on the bed, his hands behind his head, a wicked smile tugging the corner of his mouth. Man he was beautiful. Lilly ran her hands over his body. Long, firm muscles, sun kissed skin; he was like a Greek God. Her breath quickened and Hayden let out a quite laugh, obviously impressed that she was so enamored with him. Light wisps of blond hair speckled his chest, leading down to the prize that she most wanted to feel.

Reaching out, Lilly grabbed his long, firm shaft in her hand, running her fingers over the pulsing purple veins. She tightened her grip and ran her hand up and down his cock, turning to watch the response in Hayden’s gorgeous face.

“Lilly, babe, I’m on a hair trigger here.”

She increased her movements, loving the feel of his velvet steel in her hands. “I can’t help it, Hayden. I love touching you.”

“I love it to. Too much.”

In the blink of an eye, Hayden had her hand off his cock and somehow underneath him on the bed. Grabbing the condom that they had brought in from outside, Hayden sheathed himself and loomed over her. Their eyes made contact and held. Four sets of blue beams staring into each other.

Something passed between them in their held gaze. Something too strong to put into words. Lilly saw the life she wanted reflecting in Hayden’s passionate eyes, and she hoped he saw the same thing in hers.

Not wanting to show too much, too soon, Lilly let her eyes drift closed, trying to block

him out.

“Open your eyes, Lil. I want to see them when we become one.”

Lilly opened her eyes, glossy from the tears she was trying to hold back. She loved him, she had always loved him. She knew that deeply within her heart. As Hayden nudged her legs apart and pushed himself inside, she held those feelings at bay, and dug her nails into his tight back.



Hayden reveled in the feel of Lilly clamped tightly around him. They fit perfectly, like they were made to be together. Nothing had ever felt so right in his life. The only way Hayden knew to let her know what he was feeling, was to show her. Swiftly he moved in and out of her slick, welcoming body, bending to kiss her while he did so. Her claws in his back only egged him to go harder, show her how much she affected him.

“Hayden. God Hayden you feel so good.”

“It’s always been like this with us, babe. It could always be like this.” Hayden slammed into her as she tightened around him and they both came together, him with a groan and her screaming his name.



Lilly rolled over slowly opening her eyes from what had to be the best sleep of her life. She wished she hadn’t passed out after making love with Hayden. But she had. Rolling over, Lilly reached out to hold the man that she knew in her heart was her soul mate, only to realize he was gone. Her heart that had previously been dancing in her chest, dropped to a new found low. Where had he gone? Was he coming back? Had he been using her?

Some how Lilly knew that wasn’t the case so she rose from bed and headed naked for her living room. Glancing at the clock on her way, she realized she must have slept for hours. Reaching her living room she found Hayden sitting naked on her couch, under the light of a small lamp and sketching.

“I woke up. I was afraid you left.”

“No, I just couldn’t sleep. I didn’t want to wake you.” He answered in a somber voice.

“What are you drawing?” she asked.

“Come over here and see.”

Lilly walked to Hayden and he pulled her down on his lap and showed her his sketch.

“This Lilly Sinclair is what I had in mind for your yard.” Hayden pointed to different places on the drawing pointing out what each thing was. “This is a fountain. I’d like to make a little pond next to it, maybe put some little fish in it. Of course, I’ll plant grass and flowers

around as well. Lots of flowers.”

“What’s this?” she asked pointing to the one thing in the picture he didn’t describe to her.

“This is for your lilies, Stargazers. I don’t know if you’ve ever seen them, but they’re beautiful. We’ll just need to be sure they stay shaded in the afternoon heat, maybe add a little bark mulch to the soil to help them stay cool.” Hayden tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “They remind me of you, you know? The lilies I mean.”

Lilly’s heart thumped with joy. “Yes I’ve seen them. They’re actually my favorite. That’s how I ended up picking the landscaping company you work for, because of the name.”

Hayden smiled and kissed her briefly on the lips. “I don’t work for Stargazer Lily Landscaping, babe, it’s mine. My dream and I named it for you.”

Tears welled in her eyes, spilling down her cheeks. “I know we were young when we dated, Lil, but I never forgot you. I loved you. I never told you, but I did. I knew we both had these dreams and I knew we both deserved them.”

“You had stars in your eyes, Lilly. You wanted to head off to LA and that wasn’t me. I knew I’d end up back here one day but I never thought you would.” He lightly tickled her arm with the pad of his rough finger. “I didn’t want to be the one to take those stars from your eyes. So I let you go, and I went. I did what I had to do, came back and opened Stargazer Lily because my company and you, Lilly, were my only two dreams in life. Now I have you both and I hope to God I don’t have to let you go, Lilly. I don’t know if I’m noble enough to do it twice.

Her heart soared, her love expanding to new heights. This man was her destiny, what she had been looking for. Losing him had been the reason she felt empty for the last ten years and she knew in her heart, he was the reason she was home.



# RENOVATION

## R.L. STUEMKE

THE FRASIER ROOM ON THE FIFTH FLOOR of Wellington Library was Noemi Jasper's favorite place in the whole building. It was the smallest of the three designated quiet study lounges, and because it had a reputation for sometimes being unreasonably cold, it was the least used, but it was a corner room, providing a beautiful view of the largest green area on campus. It housed a small special book collection, fairy tales and tomes about fairy tales, and a very gifted alumnus had painted a mural of favorite characters on one wall. To Noemi, this room felt comfortable and homey.

Right now, of course, it smelled of paint, and the wooden bookcases had been moved away from the walls and covered with heavy cloth. Wellington was undergoing a gradual renovation, and the Frasier Room was being repainted. The mural was covered, and after the rest of the walls were finished, a specialist would come in to restore the colorful images. Noemi sat at a table facing the windows, her back to the man diligently painting the opposite wall. Although the encroaching evening darkness made the outside view less appealing, he was a distraction she couldn't afford. Her study time was too valuable to risk watching the poetry in motion that was this man at work.

In fact, she had been surprised to find that she was the only student in the room. There was a group of freshman girls who had been following the painter's progress around the library, supposedly studying but spending a lot of time watching him, whispering and giggling. Noemi had wondered on many occasions how he was able to keep working. He had to know that he was under observation. Days like this, when the girls were absent, would have to be a relief.

She sat back and stretched, checking the time. In less than an hour, she would have to report down to the Circulation Desk, for work. To ease the muscles in her legs, Noemi stood up, walked over to the window and then turned around to return to her laptop computer, something the Graduate School supplied to all its students. Her eyes, however, were drawn to the painter, who was moving his ladder a few more feet over.

Noemi had been introduced to Joshua VanDenEng the previous semester, when he was

painting the walls of the circulation area. Her usual work schedule was Friday evening, Saturday afternoon, and Sunday, but she was one of the grad student employees, and so occasionally provided backup to the regular staff. She had been on duty one afternoon when he was just getting started on the outside wall there, and all the student workers had been called in to help move furniture away from the other walls.

VanDenEng was in his early thirties, a lean muscular man who stood a few inches over six feet tall, with longish black hair that occasionally drifted across his incredible vivid green eyes. His features were as lean as his frame, making the width of his smile a very pleasant surprise. He nodded at Noemi, obviously recognizing her, and then went on with his work. He always wore a white version of a custodian's uniform, the shirt loosely fitted so he could work freely, but somehow you could sense the well-developed muscles beneath the fabric. The work pants weren't quite as loose as the shirt; they weren't tight jeans, but you could still note the nice waist and hips, and the structure of his buttocks as he moved was one of Mother Nature's better artistic displays.

Noemi took a deep breath and turned away. It was time to return to the translation of Chinese ghost stories that the Interlibrary Loan department had emailed to her. Fortunately, she really did enjoy research, and, for the most part, was having fun with this aspect of working on her thesis, although the writing was much more difficult. She was able to push the image of the painter out of her mind and go back to the legends on her screen, but one corner of her brain refused to stop monitoring the sounds of the man working behind her.

"Amy, there you are!" A strident male voice broke her concentration, and Noemi felt herself tightening up. She really wasn't up to handling Derek right now; okay, she was never up to handling her ex-boyfriend, anytime, anywhere. Out of habit, she quickly closed the file she was reading and prepared to shut down the computer. She had learned the hard way that giving Derek Foucek access to her research was a serious mistake.

"I'm almost through here," she said as firmly as possible. "I'm due at work in just a few minutes."

"Oh, you've got more than half an hour. I asked for you down there, and they told me when you were scheduled to start." The slender blond whipped a chair around and straddled it, quickly reaching out to touch her. When she pulled her hand away, he frowned, and a begging tone colored his voice. "Aw, Amy, we're still friends, aren't we? We'd be more than that if you'd just relax a little."

"I don't want us to be more than that. I don't particularly want us to be anything. You're a user, Derek, and users don't have friends." Noemi closed her laptop, and started gathering her notes.

"But I really care for you, sweetheart," Derek said. "Come on, we were good together, you know it, and we could be good again. We make a great combination, as lovers and as fellow grad students. It's always better to have support when working on theses, that's what the

advisors in the grad office always say.”

“They’re talking about support. What you’re talking about is different.”

“Come on, that was just a misunderstanding, and it won’t happen again. I just need someone to talk out my problems with, and you’re so much better at this research stuff than I am.” He reached over to take her hand again. Once again, she pulled free.

“Dammit, Naomi! You are so freaking obsessed with that one stupid paper! All right, so I lied to you. I was running out of time, and I got a little desperate. Grad school pressure. If you’d cared about me as much as you said you did, you’d understand. Why can’t you loosen up a little? I still care about you, and I miss you.”

“You can’t even say my name right! You don’t care about me; you’re just looking for someone to do your research. Or are you far enough along now that you need someone to write the damned thesis for you?”

Derek stood up and angrily pushed the chair away. He leaned across the table until his face was only inches from hers. “Listen to me, No-E-Mi, I’m working my ass off for my Masters! Don’t you dare say otherwise!”

“Hey!” Another voice broke into the conversation. “I think you need to back off!” VanDenEng moved to stand next to Noemi.

“This is a private conversation,” Derek hissed, but he stood up straight, his hands off the table and rubbing his own arms instead.

“You’re not in a private place,” the painter said. “This is supposed to be a quiet study area, and anyway, the lady doesn’t look like she’s enjoying your company all that much.”

“Derek, just go!” Noemi stood up herself. “Please, just leave me alone! I’m not interested in you, and I’m too busy with my own thesis right now.”

“Look, Amy, I’m sorry I lost my temper, but if you’d just listen to me ...”

“No!” She turned her back, once again staring out the windows. Across the campus, the lamps along all the walkways were lighting up.

“Okay, okay, I’m leaving. It’s way too cold in here anyway! Ah, I know, it’s one of your silly ghosts! Hey, Janitor, this crazy girl is actually writing a thesis about ghosts. Some serious scholar huh?”

Noemi waited until she was sure Derek had left the room before she sank back into her chair, shaking. The painter went over to the drinking fountain near the door, taking down one of the little cups and filling it. He brought it back to her table, pulling the other chair back to the table and sitting down himself. “Here, Miss. Drink a little water. I know it sounds stupid, but sometimes it helps you relax.” His voice was quiet, but firm, comforting both in its tone and the masculine strength behind it.

“Thank you,” she whispered, taking the cup. She closed her eyes, took a long, deep breath, and drank. Putting the cup on the table, she raised her eyes to look at VanDenEng, grinning awkwardly for a second. “Ah, my thesis is about the role of ghosts across lots of different

cultures. Listen, I'm really grateful. He can be a problem sometimes."

"I take it he's done this before?"

When Noemi nodded, he shook his head and continued,

"Have you thought about reporting him, at least to your supervisors here? The school has rules about harassment, and you shouldn't let him get away with treating you like that."

"No, I couldn't. I was stupid enough to think he liked me; it's as much my fault as his. And I don't want to make any noise, my poor grandmother might hear about it and I can't have her worrying about me. She's lived on the reservation all her life, and she already worries enough about my living in the biggest city she's ever visited. I don't want to make things worse."

"Your grandmother?" he asked, encouraging her to go on.

"My parents died when I was twelve. Ever since, I've lived with my mother's mother. Gramma's full-blood Ojibwe," she said, proudly. "We're all the family each other has, really. She'd be so disappointed to know how stupid I've been." She abruptly changed the subject.

"So, it doesn't look like you have much more to do in here. Where do you move to next?" She looked straight at him, determined to show that she had recovered and was okay.

The green eyes narrowed a little, and he pursed his lips for a second. Then he nodded, and answered her. "The Montigny Room. They've already moved the books into storage. That's why the bookcases are out in the hall. It's actually the last project left for me here. I don't know yet what comes after that, but there's always some building on campus that needs work. And there's the new academic building going up."

"That might actually be a relief from here, I'd bet. I was surprised not to see the fan club this afternoon. Oh God, I didn't mean to say that!" Noemi couldn't believe she'd actually brought the subject up, but he didn't seem too upset, merely shaking his head a few times and smiling.

"They were around for a while, but they started talking about how cold it was in here, and there was this new movie they all wanted to see. So they left. Seems I can't compete with Batman and Wolverine."

"What?"

"The movie they were going to. The Prestige, it's called. Christian Bale and Hugh Jackman." He laughed. "Fantasy's always better than reality."

Noemi laughed with him. "I suppose. Let me say, you're pretty nice about it. They must be a bother sometimes."

"Only if I pay attention. Look, they're freshmen, I'll bet. Right now, I'm mysterious. By next year, they'll think I'm boring. Strange thing, though. I've never felt cold in here, and I notice you never felt the need to put on your sweater. Well, now, I've got to clean up here, my shift's over, and if I'm not mistaken, you're due downstairs."

Startled, Noemi looked down at her watch, and sighed with relief. "I've got enough time to get down there. Good, I hate being late." She stuffed her notes into the side pocket of the

computer case while the painter unplugged the laptop for her so she could pack that away too. “Really, though, thank you for helping me, but don’t worry about it. Pretty soon he’ll get bored and leave me alone.”

“And find someone else?” VanDenEng asked softly.

She turned and took a few steps toward the door before stopping to respond. “His type always will, no matter what. I guess I just hope the next girl is smarter than I was.” Then she was through the door and walking toward the elevator. In her mind, she saw his handsome figure watching her, and she forced herself not to look back. It would be too disappointing to be wrong.



Noemi’s apartment was only five blocks from the library, straight down Maplewood to Washington Avenue, but she was always grateful after a night shift to have a companion on the walk home. One of the custodians, Sam, lived a few blocks further down Maplewood, and he would wait the necessary fifteen minutes for her to finish closing down, and then walk with her. There was nothing more to it than casual friendship; he was older, and happily married, but he had a daughter in college elsewhere in the state, and always said he could only hope someone was seeing to it she never walked alone that late at night.

Her place was halfway down the block. It was a well-kept up house converted to three single apartments, each with high ceilings, tiled floors, decent kitchen appliances, and big closets. They also shared a bath, but since she had a separate door to the room, the landlord was insistent about there being only one resident per apartment, and it meant the rent was lower than a lot of other housing this close to campus, Noemi had been willing to give it a try. She had a large front room that served as both living and sleeping space, with room for her bookcases, and an equally large kitchen. There were lots of windows, her neighbors were quiet, and she was comfortable there.

She sighed with relief when she walked in and tossed her keys on the side table by the door. Poltergeist, her red tabby cat, came up to her in his dignified way and she scooped him up, kissing the top of his head while she carried him into the kitchen for his meal. She’d adopted the elderly cat, fortunately with the blessing of the landlord who lived next door, a year earlier when the poor thing, obviously abandoned, started sleeping on the front porch. She really loved having the fur-face greet her when she came home, and sleep next to her pillow every night.

While Poltergeist worked his way through his kibble, Noemi made herself a sandwich, set her clothes out for the next day, and got ready for bed. The apartment was simply furnished, but she had some very interesting artwork, purchased at the few science fiction/fantasy and mystery conventions she’d been able to attend. Above her bed were two prints, one of a gryphon

plummeting down from a mountaintop and the other of a winged leopard in a very similar pose. Over her computer was a colorful print of a tiger dreaming of chasing a gazelle, only in his dream, the big cat had wings. These prints, and others with fantasy subjects, made her feel comfortable and at home, but Derek had laughed loudly and long about her 'obsession with flying pussies'. She had very rarely had him at the apartment since that first visit.

Why wouldn't the man just leave her alone? Their relationship had only lasted a few months, and the ending had been ugly, when Noemi discovered that he had taken a research paper she'd written for an undergraduate course, made some slight changes, and then turned it in under his own name for one of his grad courses. Miraculously, no one had caught it; what had been an exceptional 'A+' project for a junior-level course in cultural anthropology earned only a 'B-' for graduate-level English, and Derek's instructor, apparently blind to the difference in writing style, probably never gave the paper another thought. Still, it made Noemi angry every time she thought about it, angry and guilty over not having the courage to report it.

She stopped for a moment and looked at herself in the beautiful old mirror hanging over the bureau. The only indication of her Ojibwe blood was her eyes, deep brown, and wide. Her cheekbones were nicely sculpted, but her face was too narrow. She had nice lips that didn't need much extra color, but her mouth was too wide for her face. Her greatest pride was her hair, dark brown, thick, long, and endowed with a natural curl that she rarely had to fuss with. Her body was slender, nicely curved, but certainly not voluptuous.

Had Derek liked her looks, or was he more interested in her naiveté? Would someone like the painter think she was attractive? What did other people see when they looked at her? Who was being honest, the mirror, or her own eyes? "Silly. Interpretation, it's all interpretation," Noemi muttered, and headed for bed.

Poltergeist finished his meal, and joined her, purring loudly as he curled up in his usual spot. "Gramma, I'm so sorry I fell for his line and then was too chicken to report it. Please forgive me," she whispered, all the while knowing she would most likely never be able to tell her beloved grandmother what had happened. Months had passed, and all she'd been able to say about Derek when she went home on holiday was that he wasn't the kind of guy she originally thought he was.

She set her alarm clock so she could meet a friend at the Commons for breakfast, reached up to turn off the light, and snuggled under the comforter. Poltergeist stirred long enough to lick her hand several times, and then the contented old cat tucked his nose under his paw and went to sleep. Noemi closed her eyes and began her relaxation exercises, determined to follow suit and forget the day's troubles.

She must have gotten used to blocking Derek Foucek out of her thoughts. The memory of the evening's encounter with him faded rapidly. What stayed with her as she floated into dreamland was the image of a solid male body in white work-clothes, bright green eyes under black curls, and Joshua VanDenEng's sympathetic grin.



The next few days went by in the usual blur of classes, research, work, and friends. Noemi's nervous system settled down, but she occasionally caught herself daydreaming about a particular masculine face. It would have amused her if the circumstances of their meeting had been better, but as things were, it was more like a minor irritation. She avoided being anywhere on campus by herself, unwilling to give Derek another opportunity to pester her; she was even reluctant to send her undergrad student assistant away from the Circulation Desk to check photocopiers or look for missing books, afraid he'd be desperate enough to make a move on her there, since he knew her work schedule.

Soon, though, another set of articles came through on Interlibrary Loan, and she sank herself into the unusual afterlife legends of the Australian aborigines. Late one afternoon, she was so occupied with the words on her screen that she barely noticed the last few students in the Frasier Room packing up their books and leaving.

"Always the studious one, aren't you?"

Startled, Noemi looked up, to see Derek standing just inside the double doors. A quick glance around told her what she hadn't absorbed earlier: she was alone.

"Yeah, no janitorial types hanging around today. You've been so careful lately, but I saw those last kids leave, and now here we are. Alone again, naturally," he sang. He swung the doors closed behind him, and then to Noemi's alarm, he turned the locks.

She stood up quickly, shoving her chair back to give herself room to move. "Those doors aren't supposed to be locked. You can bet someone will be complaining to the desk before too long."

"Too close to supper. You have to learn to watch the clock, No-E-Mi." He smiled, and this time, finally, she caught the anger, and the malice, on the handsome face. "I figure I should have all the time I need." He reached over and turned off half the lights. "And if by some odd chance someone does come up, they'll just figure it's been closed off. More renovations."

She grabbed her purse, searching desperately through it by touch, afraid to take her eyes off him. Finally she found the small pair of scissors she always carried, and she yanked it out of the bag, clutching it tightly in her hand as everything else fell to the floor. It was the only thing she had that even resembled a weapon. "I want you to leave, Derek. I told you, it's over."

He laughed, a frightening sound. "You little tight-assed bitch, it's not over until I walk away. Women don't leave me, especially not to drool over some handyman painter or a janitor old enough to be your father! You think I wouldn't notice Old Sam escorting you home at night? Standing there on the corner, watching every step you take until you go through your door?"

"I didn't think it was anyone's business but mine," Noemi cried. "You've been following me!" She moved back as far as she could, trying to put a few more tables between them.

“You are my business, whore, until I say otherwise. What was so terrible about what I did? It was just another one of those stupid degree requirement courses anyway. The only graduate requirement that really means anything is the thesis. We were doing fine until you had your purity attack over that damn paper. You should have been happy you could help me out, but oh no, you had to stand up straight and stiff. Ethical.” He started moving toward her with more purpose. “It’s time someone softened you up properly.”

Words were useless. Noemi held the scissors in front of her, determined to hurt him enough for her to escape.

“You’re such a thin creature, you think I can’t get that thing away from you?” he laughed.

He was so intent on her, he apparently didn’t notice someone trying to open the doors. Noemi did, however, and she started shouting. “Get some help! He’s going to attack me! Help!”

“Nice thing about these special rooms. They were designed to be conference rooms. Soundproof, even the doors.” Derek shook his head. “You’re on your own.” He shoved a table to the side, leaving just one more between them. He reached for it, and then gasped with shock. He doubled over, wrapping his arms around his body. “Shit! When are they going to fix the heat in this place? Trust an ice pussy like you to choose the coldest damned room on campus!”

“I’m not cold,” Noemi said flatly, just as a key turned and the doors were pushed open. The lights came back on, and Joshua VanDenEng stood there, in street clothes rather than his usual white work garb.

“Move away from her, Foucek,” he shouted. “Security’s been called, they’re on their way.”

“Like hell they are,” Foucek shouted back, standing straight again but moving so that he could see both of them. “You guys have to turn in your walkie-talkies when your shift is over.”

“I asked the staff downstairs to call before I came up. I knew there was trouble.”

“Yeah, sure you did.” Derek pulled a knife out of his pocket. “You really think I’m going to let some stupid uneducated jackass take me down?” Moving faster than Noemi would ever have thought he could, he charged the painter. Joshua braced himself, and Noemi began to move forward, her hand with the scissors in it raised and ready for use.

A few steps away from his target, though, Derek once again doubled over as though in dire pain. His face drained of color, and he dropped the knife, falling to his knees on the floor, his teeth chattering like he’d walked into a freezer. Joshua and Noemi approached him slowly and cautiously, the painter kicking the knife out of reach.

Two campus police officers rushed into the room. “Okay, what’s this all about?” one of them called out.

“This man was threatening Miss Jasper,” Joshua said. “That knife there is his. He had the

doors locked, but I still have my work keys with me.”

“Is that right, Miss?”

Noemi took a deep breath and lowered her arm. “Yes. He’s been stalking me too, well, following me around.”

“If you check the records, you’ll find an Incident Report I filed last week about a male student hassling a female in the library. That was Foucek.” VanDenEng finished.

The officers were dragging Derek to his feet. He was still pale, but wasn’t shivering as much. “Which one of you slugged him?”

“Neither of us. We weren’t close enough. He just suddenly, I don’t know, got sick or something,” Noemi answered.

“It was the library ghost!” Derek babbled. “It was all around me and breathing ice at me and cursing in my ear. I thought my heart was going to freeze! I’m telling you, there’s something in this room and it attacked me!”

“Yeah, sure.” Both officers were shaking their heads. “You’ll be able to tell us all about it down at the office. Miss Jasper, do you want to press charges?”

Noemi lifted her head. It was time, she decided. No more hiding. Maybe she should show her grandmother that she was strong enough to fight back when necessary. “What do I need to do?”

“Just come on over to Campus Security and give us a statement. We’ll have to call the city police, and they’ll probably need to talk to you, but maybe they can wait until first thing tomorrow morning. We’ll need a statement from you too, VanDenEng. No telling how long it will take before it goes to trial, but things look pretty simple to me.”

“Give us a little time, will you? Noemi needs to sit down for a bit.”

“Okay, but not too long. An hour or two at the most.” The officers pulled Derek along with them as they left the room. He was still babbling about being attacked and needing a doctor to check his heart.

Noemi sank into a chair, dropping the scissors onto a table. She buried her face in her hands, crying. Joshua rubbed her back, and squeezed her shoulder. “It’ll be all right, you’ll see.” Then she heard him move around, and realized he was collecting all her things. “Come on, let’s get moving. Once word gets around, there’ll be lots of curious people up here.”

Content for the moment to be led, Noemi rose and followed him down the hall a short distance. He pulled out his keys and unlocked a door, gesturing for her to go in ahead of him. He entered behind her and turned on the lights. They were in the Montigny Room, normally the home of a special locked collection, but right now the books were still in storage, the bookcases out in the hall, and familiar drop cloths covered most of the furniture. He pulled the cloth off one of the sofas, and helped her to sit down. For several minutes, she was motionless, quiet, concentrating on her relaxation exercises, trying to slow her almost painful heartbeat and breathe normally again. Finally, she was able to sort through some of the

jumbled thoughts in her head, and pulled out one specific question.

“How did you know I needed help?”

“I was down at Circulation, looking for you, and someone make a joke about the Frasier Room being locked up again, and when was all the painting going to get done anyway. Suddenly I felt cold, and I just knew, so I yelled at the librarians to call for security, and I came up.” He sat down next to her, and held her hand.

“You were looking for me?”

“Yeah, I ... Look, you were so upset last week, and I wanted cheer you up, so I made something for you. I remembered that great fantasy t-shirt you wore the day all the circ staff got together to move desk and everything away from walls, so I could get started on the painting, and ... “ He reached into a pocket, and brought out a small carved wooden figure. “Here. I hope you like it.”

It was an exquisitely detailed winged cat, raised up on its hind legs with wings outstretched and front paws reaching out in a familiar gryphon pose, exactly like the cat on her t-shirt. The long tail was looped around carefully, to provide balance so the figure would stand upright. Individual feathers were carved into the wings, whiskers and other features were detailed on the feline face, and intricate grooves made the fur look real and alive. Noemi gazed at it in rapture, taking it from him and looking at it from every possible angle. “This is absolutely beautiful! Oh, I can’t just take something like this. You could sell it. You should be selling it!”

“I do sell pieces, from time to time, but this one is just for you. I insist.”

“How long have you been carving like this? It must have taken years to learn how.”

“I started back in grade school, but I figured it was, you know, just for fun. I pretty much forgot about it when I went to college. I got my degree in Business Administration from Cornell, went straight into a management position with a pharmaceutical firm in Chicago. I was going to be rich, succeed like my father used to dream about, but he was too busy worrying about raising six kids and taking care of my mother, whose health wasn’t always so good. It took me three years to figure out I was miserable! I hated my life! I came back home to straighten it all out. I needed a job, so I got this one, and found out I actually liked it. It’s physical, I move around a lot, I’m all over campus instead of spending all my time in the same office, I wear comfortable clothes, and it’s a straight 40 hour week. It pays the bills, and I have time to indulge in my hobbies again, like carving. There’s a small gallery downtown that’s giving me a show next month, all fantasy animals or real animals doing fantasy things; that’ll be kind of neat. I’ve been working on stuff for that now for three, four months.”

“That’s really great! What does your family say? Weren’t they upset when you quit your job?” Noemi’s fingers were busy feeling every angle of the carved figurine, but her eyes were watching Joshua’s face, noting the happy lights that showed in his eyes when he talked about carving, and imagining how wonderful it would feel if her fingers could be as free with his face as they were with the wood she was holding. The solid jawbone, the lines around his

mouth and eyes as he smiled while contemplating the gallery showing, the strong curve of his cheekbones; definitely a work of art! One part of her brain realized that he was talking partially to take her mind off the ugly scene in the quiet study lounge, just like he had the previous week, but mostly she was just pleased he liked her enough to trust her with the details of his personal life.

“Maybe a little, at first, but they’d all seen how miserable I was. Mom was first; I think she was just happy that she could see me everyday. My sisters, there are three, gave in I think because now I’m close enough to them, they can nag me about getting married or have me play with their kids, and my two brothers just figured I knew best what I wanted. Dad finally sat me down and told me he envies me, and he’s proud I took control of my own life.” Joshua grinned again; these were obviously happy memories. “God, I love my family!”

“It sounds wonderful,” Noemi said, tears threatening to cloud her vision. Gramma had tried so hard to give her a happy adolescence, but she desperately missed her parents, and there were so few other relatives that she saw or even heard from very often. She’d often felt like she was left out, forgotten, abandoned even.

“Oh, Lord, I didn’t mean ... I’m sorry, Noemi, I forgot about your parents,” Joshua apologized. His arm curled around her shoulders, and without thinking, she turned, buried her face against his soft jacket, and started to cry.

His other arm moved around her waist, and soon her arms were around his neck, as he let her cry everything out. With one hand, he reached underneath her sweater and rubbed her back in gentle circles, while his other hand either held her head against his shoulder or ran her soft hair through his fingers.

Gradually, the tears gave way to more positive feelings, as her fingers sampled the dark curls at the back of his neck and her other hand made its way around to the front. Without any conscious decision on her part, she undid the top buttons of his shirt and slipped her hand inside, the fingers making their joyful way through the hair she found there. Moving remarkably fast, Joshua slipped out of his jacket, and helped her remove her sweater, and then, as their arms once again took position around their rapidly heating bodies, their mouths met.

Lips probed lips, and then moved to allow tongue to sample tongue, each desperately hungry for the taste and feel of the other. Shirt buttons somehow slipped through holes, even as the responsible hands were busily exploring hair and skin and muscle. Noemi’s breasts tightened as her nipples rose; she threw her head back and laughed as Joshua’s mouth left hers to seek those nipples instead, tasting and sucking and even biting, gently, teasingly. He leaned over, and she fell back on the sofa with him above her. Now it was her turn to lick his chest, to nip at his raised nipples and once more run her fingers along the hair that continued down the front of his torso, and beneath his belt.

They shifted position again, now lying side by side on the narrow sofa, with his hands making ever stronger circles against the soft skin of her back while her eager fingers fumbled

with his belt and the zipper of his trousers. His hands moved lower, sliding beneath the elastic waistline of her skirt and slip, then further down to go under her panties, each strong workman's hand cupping one buttock as she probed beneath his boxers, feeling his arousal.

The cold hit both of them like an angry ocean tide, shocking the passionate heat out of them and then pulling that heat away as it subsided, leaving them both gasping for air, shaking, struggling to find their composure.

Slowly, their tense bodies moved away from each other, some muscles relaxing while others took control, and they sat up, instinctively pulling their clothes back into order. "What was that?" Noemi finally blurted, her eyes still wide with shock.

"I think someone ... was trying to tell us ... that this really isn't the right place," Joshua said, between deep breaths as he tried to fill his lungs properly. "We probably shouldn't ... be doing this here."

'Oh, it felt so good!' Noemi wanted to protest, but her conscience had woken up and was telling her the same thing. If they were caught this way, they could both lose their jobs for moral misconduct, however old-fashioned that sounded.

Joshua finished buttoning his shirt, although she noticed that this time, he kept the top three open. He reached for her sweater, helping her get her arms through the sleeves. "How about your apartment, after we make our statements to Security? Think you can remember where we left off?"

"Well, I might need some coaching." She reached over to touch his chest, changing direction at the last moment to straighten his collar instead, as he pulled on his jacket. "You know, I've never felt such a cold draft up here before, not in the lounge or those few times I've been in this room." She stiffened, noticing suddenly that Joshua was sitting straight, perfectly still, his eyes aimed above her head.

"I haven't either," he whispered. "I don't think we're alone."

Noemi turned her head, and her eyes followed his. Right at the corner of the room, just where the wall met the ceiling, there was a strange opaque mist, moving like someone's breath on a cold winter morning. As they watched, almost hypnotized, the mist slowly formed into the shape of a person's head, a woman's head complete with short, wavy hair. She looked down at them, shaking her head slightly but smiling at the same time. A misty hand came up, and she blew them a kiss before fading away. Just before she vanished completely, a comfortably cool breeze swept over them, like fresh air right after a summer's rainfall.

Noemi and Joshua stayed motionless for a few minutes, trying to absorb the implications of the visitation. "The ghost as protector," Noemi whispered finally.

Joshua turned to look at her, saying quietly but firmly, "Tell me this is not going into your thesis."

Noemi grinned shortly. "Not this incident specifically, no. I'm not telling ghost stories, per se, I'm discussing the function of ghosts across many cultures."

Without another word, they each picked up one end of the discarded drop cloth, and spread it over the sofa. Then, they collected all of Noemi's things and left the room, making sure the lights were off and the door securely locked behind them. A few steps down the hall, Joshua asked, "Isn't there a story about a student committing suicide in the Frasier Room?"

"Her fiancé chose that room to ask for the ring back."

"And then she came back a few days later with every kind of pill she could get her hands on," he finished.

Noemi suddenly giggled, and Joshua came to a halt, staring at her. What could possibly be funny about that story?

"Derek," she said. "Everyone's going to think he's crazy."

"Or pretending to be, to get out of charges." He grinned himself. "Real scholarly of him."

"So, you'll drive me home after we get done at Security?" Noemi started walking toward the elevators again.

"You bet. There's no way I'm just turning my back on what we had going in there, ghost or not." Joshua reached down and took her free hand, matching his stride to hers.

"My poor Poltergeist. He's going to have to get used to sleeping on the couch."

"You have a poltergeist in your apartment?"

The elevator doors slid open, and they stepped inside. "Oh yes, a big red striped one." Noemi smiled up at him. "My cat."

The doors slid shut again, and the elevator started down.



# HUBBY FOR HIRE

## PAIGE BURNS

**S**HARDS OF LIGHT PIERCED KINSEY MORGAN'S EYES, bringing her to a foggy wakefulness. She heard an incessant pounding but it wasn't until she tried to move that she realized the pounding was in her head.

She sat up gingerly, shielding her eyes from the sliver of light that escaped the wooden blinds. The sheet fell to her waist and she felt chilled, her nipples beading from the lack of warmth. Puzzled she looked down at her breasts.

"Holy shit!" She lunged for the sheet to cover herself, and was rewarded with more throbbing behind her burning eyes, which she closed tight, afraid to look to her right. To the other side of the bed.

She grimaced as she slowly turned her head, the pounding now encompassing her entire skull. She licked her lips with her dry cotton tongue and peeked through silted eyelids. Empty.

"Phew." It was everything but okay. Waking up naked, and with an I-must-be-dead hangover, meant that her dream last night of getting drunk with Sam, the electrician, then having mad monkey sex all over the house hadn't really a dream.

Kinsey lay back down and pulled the covers up over her head. "Fuck." She'd done it again. Sam was the third contractor in so many months that had ended up in her bed and while they may have left her sated sexually, her house was in an unfinished mess.

Before Sam had been David, the plumber. At least he'd gotten the shower installed before their tryst, but the huge lion claw tub was still sitting there in her master bathroom waiting to be hooked up. Jose had preceded David. There was just something about a shirtless man pounding nails into wood and fashioning the deck of her dreams. Of course the deck was unfinished, though Jose had shown her he knew how to hammer with more than just his hands.

She sighed and rolled over and slowly stood up, taking the sheet with her and made her way to her unfinished bathroom. "Stupid Kinsey, so stupid." She fumbled in her medicine

cabinet for her Tylenol and swallowed five without water. She needed coffee and a shower. She moved to the snail shower and with a slight groan and a sputter, the shower responded to the turn of the dial.

She dropped the sheet and stepped into the rush of water, letting the heat ease her aching muscles and soothe her headache. Unfortunately, the bliss was short lived. David had also left before he installed the new, larger hot water heater. She got out quickly, dried off and moved through the bathroom back to her room. She pulled on her grey leggings and ASU Alumni T-shirt and headed downstairs to make that coffee.

“You’ve got to be kidding me.” She stood in disbelief midway down the hardwood stairs at a discarded condom on one of the steps. By the time she’d picked up the third condom on her trip to the kitchen she was furious with herself. “This house is never going to get finished if you can’t keep your hands off the hired help, bitch.”

She knew talking to herself categorized her on the verge of crazy, but from her antics over the last few months she knew she was already beyond crazy. The house her Great Aunt had left her was the worst renovation project she’d ever done. She had no problem directing hordes of men to complete their tasks when she was working for a client. She was a professional after all. Why the hell couldn’t she do it when it came to her own job?

She pulled the bag of coffee beans from the freezer, ground them and put them in her French press. “What I need is someone I’m not attracted to, someone who’s not attracted to me that can get the job done” She put the kettle on the stove to heat the water and sat down at the kitchen table, taking the yellow pages with her. “How hard can that be?”

Kinsey opened the book and thumbed through the contractor section. She’d used her company, Morgan Renovations, contacts for the previous men who’d worked on her house ... and her for that matter. Maybe she could find the typical overweight, over-forty, bald and married handyman from the yellow pages.

There weren’t any pictures of the contractors in the yellow pages though. What was she supposed to do? “Hello, I need a handyman that can tackle plumbing, electrical, and carpentry. He needs to have a pot belly, be balding, married, and not even remotely attracted to slender twenty-seven year old African American women.” She laughed at the ridiculousness of her situation. If she could just keep her hands, and her body, to herself she wouldn’t be in this predicament.

But she was a healthy woman who didn’t deny her passions, no matter what they were. How else would she have been able to start her renovation company from the ground up in a man’s world? A world she felt comfortable in as a professional, and as an object of desire.

The kettle whistled and she got up to pour the boiling water into the press, set the timer for four minutes and sat back down to the phone book. She called a few places while she waited for her coffee to brew, but no one was available for a few weeks at best. She needed someone today.

She'd given herself four months to get her house in order before she took on any more renovation jobs, and she was already three months into deep shit. She could do some of the work herself, but even then, she'd be pushing the envelope on her timeline. The Twilight Mansion project in Monterey was scheduled to start in a month and she couldn't afford to put that off. This was her dream project, a complete renovation and interior design of a celebrity owned house and nothing was going to stop her from doing the job. Not even her traitorous sex drive.

The timer beeped and she moved back to the counter, pressed the coffee and poured herself a cup, greedy for the life giving caffeine. She turned to the table and shut the phone book with a huff, but the back ad caught her eye.

*HUBBY FOR HIRE – Have a To-Do list but no Hubby to do it? Call now 555-9667. Available on short notice. Skilled in plumbing, electrical, carpentry, masonry. Best rates around.*

“Perfect.” She picked up the phone and dialed.

“Hubby for Hire, this is Samantha speaking, how may I help you?”

“Hi Samantha, I need a Hubby.”

Samantha sputtered on the other end of the line. “I’m sorry?” Samantha cleared her throat.

“Sorry,” Kinsey giggled. “I’m looking at your ad on the back of the yellow pages, I need a Hubby to work on my house.”

“Oh,” Samantha laughed. “You know, I get that all the time and it catches me off guard every time. What exactly do you need done?”

Kinsey sighed. “You got a pen and paper handy?”

“Yes.”

“Good, ‘cause it’s gonna be a long list.”



Jason Roberts pulled his truck in front of the large Tudor home and checked his notes. Unfortunately, he couldn't read his own handwriting. He laughed. “Dad would be so proud.” His doctor father had always lamented the fact that Jason hadn't followed in his father's footsteps. “But my handwriting sure does.”

There weren't any visible numbers on the house, and he couldn't tell if he'd written 1245 or 1248, but he guessed from the piles of wood and construction materials in the driveway, that the Tudor was the house. He grabbed his tool belt, clip board, and headed to the front door.

The exterior of the house looked intact and well restored, the lush yard traditional of the circa 1930's style residence. He was impressed. Whoever owned the home, or at least the

renovator, had done their homework. He knocked on the front door.

“Coming...”

The door opened and Jason felt like he'd been hit in the gut. The woman at the door was stunning, her long curly whiskey colored hair hung in mock dreads, framing her face. Her grey leggings hugged her long, sculpted legs and the tight ASU t-shirt looked as if it were painted on her, molding to her nice rack.

Her eyes met his and his gut clenched again. Her eyes matched her hair. Her bronze skin glowed and looked soft. He wanted to touch her, to bury his nose in her hair and breathe her in. He wanted to bury himself deep—

“Can I help you?”

She had the voice of an angel. He stood speechless for a moment longer until she cocked her hip, and quirked an elegant eyebrow at him.

“I said, can I help you?” She said it slow and deliberate.

“Um, I'm here from Hubby for Hire.”

A look of panic crossed her face. “You don't look like a Ralph.”

He laughed and adjusted his tool belt over his hard cock to hide his arousal. “It's 'cause I'm not. I'm Jason. Ralph couldn't get away from the project Ol' Mrs. Guildenstern had him workin' on, so Sam sent me.” He waved his left hand as an introduction.

She jumped back with a squeal.

“Where's your ring?”

He tilted his head. “I'm sorry, my ring?”

She shut the door a little, standing as if she was going to slam it in his face at any moment. “Hubby for Hire. You're supposed to be married. Where's your ring?” The last question held an edge of manic to it.

“Oh, yes, well, I do work for Hubby for Hire, but I'm not married.” He stepped back in hopes she wouldn't bolt on him. “It wasn't a prerequisite of the job, ma'am.”

She opened the door again and stood there muttering to herself.

“I'm not sure what's goin' on here, Mrs...” He looked down at his clipboard again. “Morgan—”

“It's Ms. I'm not married.”

*Thank God.* “Ms. then, if you can wait 'til the end of the month then Ralph sure can help you. I'll just call Sam and we'll reschedule.” He bent down and set his clipboard on the ground, reached for his phone clipped on his belt and flipped it open.

“Wait.”

He paused and looked up at her, that punch in the gut feeling hitting him again. He prayed to the gods that she wasn't going to change her mind, because his gut feeling was one he couldn't ignore. He wouldn't be able to leave her alone even if she decided she didn't want him to do the job.

“Could you wait right there, for just a moment. I’ll ... uh, be right back.”

“Sure.” He kept the I’m-not-a-serial-killer look on his face and tone in his voice, but he was feeling anything but like a good guy.

She shut the door with a soft click.

“Shit.” He hit a number on his cell phone and waited.

“Hubby for Hire, this is Samantha speaking, how may I help you?”

“Mom?” Jason turned away from the door. “It happened.”

“Jason?” Today seemed the day to put panic in women’s voices for him. “What happened?”

“That punch in the gut feeling you told me the Roberts get when they find the *One*.” He almost couldn’t believe it himself, but generation after generation of Roberts had reported the very same phenomenon and shared the information with each new onslaught of young adults added to the family. His grandfather had told him as soon as Jason’s voice started to change. His mother reminded him his first day of High School, and he’d gotten the “conversation” from his dad when he entered college.

The door snicked open behind him.

“I gotta go mom, I’ll see you tonight for dinner.” He turned around, holding his breath, waiting for his gut to clench again.

She’d changed clothes, gone were the tight fitting leggings and skin hugging t-shirt, replaced by baggy sweats, an oversized sweatshirt, and her hair pulled back in a ASU baseball cap.

It didn’t matter what she wore, she was his. Now, he only had to convince her.



Kinsey shut the door behind Jason, turned and sagged against the closed front door, sliding to the floor. “Why?” She banged her head against the door. “Why me?”

She’s spent the last three hours with smokin’ hot Jason Roberts going over all of the projects that needing finishing. She’d been distracted by his hands, they were strong, callused. She’d wondered what they would feel like caressing her skin.

She’d felt his mocha brown eyes roaming over her body making her feel so naked, hot, aroused, even with the bulky layers of her sweats. Her skin was still flushed and her panties were damp.

When she’d left to change, she’d not only added layers to protect her, but she’d given herself a stern talking to. These repairs needed to be completed, no matter what. She’d lock herself in a cage or even take a vacation to the furthest spot possible if that’s what it took for her to leave Jason alone and have her house fully restored in a month.

The phone rang and she stayed slumped against the door, letting the machine answer.

“Uh. Hi, Ms. Morgan, this is Jason Roberts.”

Her pulse sped up at the sound of his voice floating in from the answering machine in the kitchen, filling the foyer. The image of his tilted smile and rugged blond fat boy looks filled her mind.

“I’ve freed up any other projects our coordinator, Samantha had scheduled for me, so, um...” He cleared his throat. “Well, I’m yours for the month.”

Thirty days, she had to keep her hands off him for thirty days.

“I’ll be over in the morning at seven as we agreed. Don’t hesitate to call if you think of anything ... anything at all that you need.”

Kinsey laughed, her laugh dripping with self-deprecation. “Anything I need huh?” Little did he know that she wanted desperately to call him and ask him to come over and bury himself deep inside her.

She didn’t deny that she liked sex, or even that she’d had quite a few partners, but she’d never had such an immediate reaction as she’d had when she opened her front door to Jason.

“Work.” She picked herself up off the floor and headed for the unfinished back deck. “Working my ass off will keep my mind and my hands off him.”



Jason gave a final push with the wrench, making sure the pipe fitting was tight and secure. He ducked out of the cabinet and stood, reaching his arms in a wide arch, stretching his back and neck. The last four weeks had been the hardest of his life. Not the work, in fact, the work had saved him. He didn’t mix business with pleasure, ever, and keeping that rule had almost killed him.

He gathered up his tools, washed his hands in the new sink, making sure it worked and went to find Kinsey to let her know he was finished. They’d become fast friends despite her proximity rule. He smiled as he stepped out onto the finished deck, thinking of the little squeak she always let out if he came within touching distance of her. The sun was just setting, giving the new wood a soft glow.

The deck was one to rival any he’d seen in a magazine, but Kinsey wasn’t there. After the first week he’d finally softened her up enough to take their lunches together, instead of her shooing him out of the house for an hour. Since that first lunch they’d pretty much been inseparable as friends; laughing at each other’s jokes, having serious discussions about the qualities of using walnut trim over the softer pine, and completely denying the sexual tension that sizzled hot enough between them to light the house on fire.

“Kinsey?” He yelled as he came back into the house, but didn’t get a response. He passed the den they’d turned into Kinsey’s home base for her renovation business. It spoke volumes as to who Kinsey was and what she was all about. Dark wood trim, subtle blue tinted white walls, two large windows looking out into the front expanse of lawn and the lush woods across the

street, showing off her simple and crisp tastes. Pictures of family and friends lined the walls. Her collection of glass perfume atomizers were showcased in a curio he'd built for her for her birthday last week to match the dark mahogany of her desk.

Pleasure rippled through him as he remembered her gasp of joy at his surprise. He'd dreamt that night of hearing that gasp coming from her as he brought her to climax over and over again.

He groaned and adjusted his now hard cock. He'd come so close to taking her in his arms, stripping her naked and having his way with her. Mental snapshots of time flashed through his head. Her laughing at him when he'd hammered his thumb. The look on her face when he'd caught her staring at his ass as he knelt on the tile floor installing her tub. The sight of her beaded nipples pushing against her tight T-shirt, and her intoxicating scent last night when he'd turned around at the front door to say good-bye and ran into her, he'd pulled her close and whispered against her lips that he'd see her in the morning.

"I wonder where she went?" He turned to head to the garage to see if her car was there when he heard a thud and a yell come from upstairs. "Kinsey?"

He took the stairs two at a time and burst through her bedroom door. "Kinsey? Where are...?" The words stuck in his throat as Kinsey limped out of the bathroom, dripping wet with a scrap of a towel clutched closed around her.

"Jason," her voice was breathy.

He gulped, and prayed the towel would slip out of her grasp. "Are you ... okay? You're limping." He stepped toward her. "I heard you yell."

She giggled and sat down on the edge of her bed, the towel inched up her smooth latte legs. "The lion claw tub has been calling to me ever since we finished piping it this morning." She reached up to shake the damp curls framing her face with her hand.

He wanted to do that.

"I guess I sloshed some water out and slipped as I got out of the tub, twisted by ankle a bit." She lifted up her injured foot and the towel spread open, the shadow of the vee of her legs taunting him.

Like a moth to the flame he moved to where she sat on the bed and took her foot in his hands. "It doesn't look too bad." He rubbed with his thumb over her ankle bone lightly, his first skin to skin contact. His senses were on overload, his cock hard and ready, his blood thrummed in his ears.

Kinsey's sharp intake of breath made him look up into her whiskey colored eyes.

"Did I hurt you?" It came out as a whisper.

Her pink tongue peeked out, gliding along her lush lips in a moist sweep.

He wished it were his tongue tracing her lips.

She shook her head no, then closed her eyes in bliss.

He held his breath, the look on her face enough to cause his cock to pulse.

“That feels so good, Jason.”

He froze and looked down at his hands, which were cupped around her calf. How had that happened?

“Oh, God, Kinsey, I’m sorry...” He released her leg.

“Please.” She bent forward and reached for his face, tilting his chin so their eyes met. “Don’t stop. Please, Jason, don’t ever stop.”

Relief washed through him, quickly followed by the rush of fire he’d kept banked for the last four weeks. He bent and placed a gentle kiss on her sore ankle. Inhaling the soft sent of vanilla from her soap and underneath, Kinsey.

He replaced his hands on her calf, gently massaging her muscle, moving slowly up her leg past her knee until he reached the hem of the towel. He forced himself to kneel back down and treat her other leg with the same, slow, sensual massage.

She moaned in delight and her legs relaxed open, pushing the towel further apart.

“I need to see you Kinsey.” He sat back on his heels.

She shook her head slightly, coming out of her massage induced stupor, and with her eyes pinned to his, her lips parted in promise, she released the towel.

It fell in slow motion, as if it too needed to caress her soft skin.

Jason drank her in with his eyes, rooted to the spot, barely even able to breathe over the beauty of her. The long lines of her body meeting soft curves at her hips swerving in at her waist to flair out again at her full breasts.

She reached up with her hands and cupped her breasts, slowly caressing in till her thumbs and fingers met to pinch her peaked nipples. “Please,” she whispered.

It was the only request he needed. He launched at her, in one swoop gathering her up off the edge of the bed and gently tossing her into the middle.

She laughed and wrapped her arms around him, pulling him into her body.

He met her lips in a searing kiss. He flicked he tongue out, tracing the line of her lips and nudged them open, dueling with her tongue in a battle of wills. A battle in which they were both winners.

He pushed off her and knelt between her open legs.

She pouted in protest.

He blew out a deep breath. “I can’t do this slow, Kinsey. I want to; I want to savor you, to touch you everywhere, to discover what makes you squirm.”

She arched up, teasing him with her taut nipples and shimmied.

He growled, and yanked off his t-shirt, tossing it to the floor.

She sat up and unbuttoned his jeans, alternately licking and kissing his stomach. “I don’t want you to go slow,” she whispered against his skin.

He jumped off the bed and was rid of his clothes before she could blink.

She rolled over and reached into her nightstand, pulling out a foil package, and motioned

for him to join her.

He knelt between her legs and bent over taking a nipple in his mouth and suckled.

“Oh,” she moaned.

He released her with a pop and trailed kisses down to her sex. He parted her lips and kissed each side before flicking her clit with his tongue.

She bucked up into his mouth.

He latched on to her clit and suckled as he had with her tit. He moved his hands to under her ass and lifted her up to him, giving him better access. He caressed her ass cleft with his thumbs, inching them into her pussy, and spread her lips wide.

She arched and with a shout came into his mouth.

He sucked and licked, keeping her at a peak until she went limp in his hands. He released her with a kiss and wondered for a moment if she'd passed out. His cock ached and he'd almost come himself.

He laid his head on her leg, willing his cock to relax, hoping that when Kinsey woke up there'd be no regret.

“Jason.” Her voice was breathy and horse. “Come here.”

He crawled up and slid to lay next to her.

“No, baby.” She reached up and held him in place, pressuring him with her hands into the position she wanted him. “Here.”

She moved him until he startled her chest, her breasts teasing the back of his legs with each breath she took.

His cock, which had started to relax, flexed rigid above her parted lips.

“Kinsey...” he warned.

She wrapped her arms around his waist and with her finger tips, pressed into his ass, flexing him forward into her open mouth.

“Shit.” He willed visions of work into his head so he wouldn't come, but the motions of sawing back and forth, and hammering only reminded his body of the motion her fingers on his ass were encouraging him to do.

He eased slowly into her mouth, and back out.

She pushed again.

He repeated a groan escaping as she opened wider and he hit the back of her throat.

He pulled out slowly, his eyes closed in concentration. “So close, Kinsey.”

He heard the rustle of foil and felt her fingers on his cock. He opened his eyes just as she tilted up and licked the seeping head before she rolled the condom on.

She caught his gaze and smiled. “Next time.”

He returned the smile as his heart swelled. Next time.

He scooted down and wrapped her legs around his waist, his cock poised at her hot sex. “Look at me.”

She met his eyes.

He thrust in to the hilt, their held gaze never wavering.

He held her ass up so her back was arched and he could piston into her fully, each advance sending shock waves through his body.

Her breath came in pants, her eyes finally closing to the rising passion.

Her hands gripped his on her ass, her nails digging into him.

She met him, thrust for thrust. "Now, Jason," she commanded. "Now."

He felt her pussy flex around him once, then she arched up, her sex milking his cock, her hands clenched around his and her orgasm spread like fire to him.

He surged into her and stilled as his cock pulsed as together they shouted and came as one.

Jason released his hold on her ass, following her down onto the bed, lying almost on top of her. With a quick twist he had her laying fully on top of him, his cock still snug inside her warmth.

She kissed his chin and rested her head on his chest.

He traced lightly with his fingers down her back to the curve of her ass and back up.

"You're mine, Kinsey Morgan. Mine, you know?"

She snuggled into his chest and squeezed his cock with her pussy.

"I know."

# SUPPORT YOUR FIREFIGHTERS

## COLLEEN LOVE

JOHN PHOENIX SIGHED WEARILY AS HE MOUNTED THE FIREHOUSE STEPS. The station was cleaned and polished. Trucks loaded with fresh supplies and buffed to a fantastic gleam, enough to supply any childhood fantasy of a Fireman and his shining Fire Engine. The neat row of trousers and suspenders pulled over boots stood at attention in line with each helmet suspended from the hook above it. His comrades gathered in the common room around the television and dinner. Thankfully it had been a quiet night.

The only thing on his mind was a hot shower and maybe some dinner. He pushed the door open to the lounge and stopped, startled for a moment by the woman standing with her back to him, looking around the room. He stepped inside and let the door close softly behind him.

She turned, first her head, then the rest of her body with her hand on her hip, a smile quirked on her lovely face as she shook dark hair from her eyes.

“So, what’s it going to be today, Ms. Jane Flowers? Surely reporters have better things to do than hang around the men’s locker room at the local fire station?” A touch of sarcasm edged his statement.

“Oh, I don’t know, Mr. Phoenix.” She brushed his tone off with her breezy answer.

“What now, here to report on my engines? My hoses?” He approached her slowly, standing a breath away from her.

“Are we referring to your trucks, Mr. Phoenix?” Her confidence was displayed by a soft smile playing upon her lips as she peered up at him.

“I can assure you, all are in perfect working order, Ms. Flowers.” He stepped past her, his gaze was sharp and steady, never leaving hers. “Whatever nosey journalist business you have is going to have to wait until I’ve had my shower.” His grin was charming as he pulled the stark white tee shirt over the back of his head and toed off his shoes.

“That’s fine, I don’t mind waiting.” Her soft brown eyes wandered down his bare chest and met his through the fringe of her lashes. She parked herself on a low wooden bench before the

row of lockers, crossing her legs. She saw his breath hitch with the swish of her silk stockings, his eyes riveted on the length of leg exposed when her skirt slid up her thighs, letting the lace tops of her stockings peek from beneath.

His Adams apple bobbed when he swallowed the thickness in his throat. His eyes flashed to hers as he dropped his shirt on the bench next to her as his grin deepened, challenging her.

“Well, you are a seasoned journalist, objective and all, so you won’t mind.” He unfastened his uniform trousers and peeled them off with his briefs and socks and left them in a pile on the floor.

Jane looked down to the pile, then let her eyes travel back up the firm bare legs, his penis hung semi-flaccid, nested in spun gold, he twitched when her eyes stopped there, fighting the urge to meet his gaze now burning into her. The work of the day had chiseled his abdomen into rigid grooves and contours, his pecs were hard, squared planes of muscle, centered with large soft, oval nipples. She finally met his sharp blue eyes, glowing from sun bronzed skin, framed with hair the color of summer sand. Drawing in a deep breath, she leaned back on one hand.

“No, I don’t mind waiting one bit.” Her voice was smooth velvet as she shook a loose strand of hair from her vision. She crooked a brow over one eye in interest as a sultry smile invited him to continue.

“You journalists.” John shook his head slowly.

“It’s a tough job, Mr. Phoenix.”

“Uh huh.” He turned his back to her and walked to the shower on the wall, turning on the spray and ducking under it.

Jane played the attentive voyeur, watching as he lathered his hair and ducked under the spray again to have thick trails of suds course down his back, contouring the grooves and hollows of well muscled cheeks, his legs and down the drain. He turned letting the spray pound his back as he lathered himself, her eyes followed the course of the solid blue bar of soap and the motion of his hands as he rinsed the film away under the sluice of water. Again he turned, with a quick twist of his wrist, the water suddenly snapped off. He grabbed a towel, drying off his face and rubbing his hair and skin - but never covering his ever lengthening phallus. She watched as if in a trance, eyes yearning until he finally wrapped the towel around his waist, tucking it in. She lost herself in his azure gaze as he approached her again.

“Well, if it makes you feel any better, I’m not here in the business capacity of ‘Ms. Flowers’”. She stood to meet him.

“Then what are you here for.” His grin warmed as he stepped closer to her.

“Well, with all of the time we have been away from home and the pressure on the “Youngest Fire Chief Ever Remembered” is under...” She paused, knowing he would interrupt.

“It’s a small town.” His answer was modest through his soft chuckle.

“You forgot something very special.”

“What could that be.” His arms came around her possessively.

“My husband’s birthday.” She smoothed the water droplets beading on his smooth chest.

“Oh, that. I forgot.” He gave her a blank look for a moment and grinned again. “Well, Mrs. Phoenix, what do you plan on doing about it?”

Jane grasped his towel and gave it a good yank, holding it out at arms length when he reached for it. “Game over, Johnny.”

She tucked it behind her back, making him press his warm, moist naked body against her. Just as his arms came back around her, she dropped it on the floor on his dirty clothes and quickly grasped him around the waist. Smoothing and kneading her hands over the bare flesh of his haunches and up his back making her wanton intentions known.

“That’s not fair.” He looked deep into her smoky eyes. His hair began to drip, running in rivulets down his body.

“All’s fair in love and war, baby.” She whispered.

“I have a whole room full of people down there....”

“Who have been properly bought off. They are busy with a large catered Italian dinner.”

“Seems you’ve thought of everything.”

“I’ve had plenty of time for that.” Her hands began inching their way around his thighs. Her lips on his throat gave away his pulse had increased to a nice staccato tempo. She bit his thick skin making him groan loudly.

“Your not going to give me a chance to say no, are you.”

“Nope.” She grasped his thick shaft in her hand as she slid down his front. Before he could protest, she slid his cock between her lips, deep into her mouth. A red stain from her lipstick marked a ring around the base where her lips had stopped. His loud hiss snaked to her ears. She slowly moved her mouth back up, the suction made him groan loudly as his engorged erection grew thicker. Her teeth raked slightly against the ridge of his head making his fingers curl through the long chestnut strands of her hair. Her tongue caressed the underside of the tip to the opening, licking the small clear drop of liquid forming.

“Oh, god woman,” he grated out as he struggled to maintain his balance. He was standing in the middle of the room, nothing to lean on, nothing to gain balance except his woman, kneeling before him inflicting enough pleasure to make him forget where he was. His downward gaze watched as his cock disappeared between her full lips again. The sensations tore another guttural sound from his chest as her lips milked the very sanity from him. His thighs shook and his hands clenched tightly to loose strands of hair and he fought valiantly not to plunge his cock down her throat. The rake of her nails over his clenched ass cheeks made fighting the urge harder. The suede texture of her tongue swirling around his head drove everything from his brain except the sensations she inflicted upon him. He felt the upward pull of his scrotum as his climax began to ascend. His hips began to rock with her motions, he was unable to restrain any longer. Sweat beaded with his dripping hair along his temples. When her hands moved to cup the sacs pulled tight to his body, he groaned again. She kept her pace even,

making exquisite frustration swell within as his glans, ready to burst. He trembled resisting the urge to fall, he focused his mind, not wanting to end the sweet agony. With a final gasp, he felt blessed release pulse down the small tunnel of her throat, and the constriction of her throat as she swallowed.

He shivered when her tongue lapped the streaks of water over his skin as she stood, holding onto his broad form, kissing his neck and biting the thick flesh as she moved her hands back to that smooth, taunt round of his butt, kneading the flesh up his back as she pressed her still clothed body to his. His hands, framing her face, centered her mouth before he slid his lips against hers. His mouth was warm, his tongue a possessive slide against hers, tasting the salt of himself. His balance regained, he pulled his lips from hers and sighed.

“What am I going to do with you?”

She only smiled, her deep brown eyes twinkling in reply.

Sweeping her off her feet, he carried her into the small quiet sleep room in the back of the locker room and shut the door. The soft thud of the lock echoed.

“You’re wearing my favorite suit. You know what it does to me, to see you with that on.” His arms were around her, sliding the skirt up the back of her thighs, his hand cradled her bare bottom. A naughty light gleamed in her eyes, her soft smile seduced.

“No panties?” He lightly slapped the bare flesh. His voice was a whisper against her mouth. His hands smoothed baby soft flesh and one slid over her thigh, under her skirt. A large calloused finger slid between her moist folds to her wet center.

Clinging to his body, she closed her eyes, arching her throat to him as the tingle of pleasure rippled through her. A sharp intake of breath returned as a low groan. She opened her eyes when he took her down on the small bed, his fingers busily working the buttons free and peeling it off of her. His mouth on her throat licked and tasted her soft skin. He deftly opened the front clasp on her bra and took it off, setting her breasts free. He pushed her back, cupping the soft pillows of flesh in his hands and dragged his tongue over the sharp tips of her nipples. He took the blush of her areolas in his lips, suckling and nipping with his teeth until she gasped.

Jane raked her nails over his bare flesh. Threading fingers through his hair as he rooted around her nipples, hungry for her flesh. She felt the wetness slick her thighs and she shifted her hips to make the blossoming ache subside, feeling the swell of her sex when she moved. The heat from John’s breath shifted to the valley between her breasts, beginning his journey downward. She pulled softly on his hair as his hands worked her skirt up around her waist.

“Johnny, this is about your birthday, I came here for you, not me!” She was breathless as she laid her hand over the groomed dark “V” of her thighs.

“I think selfless acts deserve rewards.” His chuckle was a deep thunder. “Besides, it’s my birthday, I’ll do what I please with my gift.” He smiled at her from between her legs. “Watch me open it.”

He opened her knees wider, spreading her thighs and holding her down to stop her

protests.

Her glazed eyes followed him.

His mouth went to first one thigh, licking her honey with wide strokes of his tongue. He followed suit with the other thigh. He felt the tremors from the strain of wanting to close her legs and fighting not too. Relaxing his grip, he delved his tongue into the sex, only to have more of her juices follow. Wedging his tongue between her labia lips he wiggled his way up, her sob excited him, making him want more of her.

Jane was beyond argument now. She relaxed her legs, letting him do as he pleased. Closing her eyes to savored the warm spear of his tongue as he delved into her sex, the feel of his hot breath intensifying the sensations even more as his hands abandon her thighs and opened her lips, exposing the swollen heart within. A sharp intake of breath as he skimmed his fingers along the opening, dividing and exposing. His mouth followed, licking until he got to the little pearl of her clitoris. Taking it in his lips, he rolled gently as he suckled.

“Oh god,” was a soft groan.

One finger buried deeply into her, he pulled it out and added another, stretching the opening as he slowly plunged and retreated. The wetness spilling out made a trail to the pucker of her bottom. His next finger rubbed the spot until it gained a small entrance.

She flexed against him, tightening her restraint and increased the surge of sensations. A louder groan escaped as her hips moved against his mouth. Intense pleasure jumped from nerve to nerve, over coming her.

Her skin glistened as it pulled tight with each plunge of his fingers. He held her hips with one arm again as he licked the juices from her. He circled her clit with his tongue making her gasp as his fingers kept their cadence. Her thighs and belly muscles began quivering and jerking in response as she strained to remain still, she raised her hips up and stiffened as she held onto the pillow above her head. With her final groan, he felt the silk walls contract around his fingers.

Pulling his fingers from her, he licked the spill of wet from within, making her shiver. He unbuttoned her skirt and she lifted her hips for him to remove it, but left her silk stockings on.

Coming up on her knees, she pulled him down next to her. He followed her motions, laying on his back. She slid over his thighs, letting his rigid phallus ride in her cleft and rubbed her sex over his trunk of his phallus, making him glisten with her wetness.

Sitting up, he grasped the cheeks of her bottom, near desperate to be inside her, but willing to play along with her for the moment. When her arms came around his neck, and the slide of her lips melted against his, he found himself nearing the edge of losing control, he tangled her hair in his fingers and pulled her head back, arching her neck for his primal taking. He trailed his mouth down, taking a nipple in his lips, suckling as he pulled her tight against his rigid cock, feeling the split of her labia riding over his rod. She slid so easily, her gasps of pleasure

goading him on. The feel of her stockings barely discernable from the texture of her skin as she slid her legs around his torso.

She rode him like a train on a rail, slipping and sliding up and down his shaft, her lips around him like a hand grasping. But the need to feel him inside of her was greater than the want to ride outside. She shifted her hips at just the right moment and felt his head slip in.

He exhaled with the unexpected constriction around his cock. Laying back as he still held her hips, steadying her as she slowly slid down his shaft, her motion pulling the loose skin downward. He let out long steady groan as her body swallowed his.

She sank to the base, sitting for a second to just enjoy the feel of him stretching her. She reached around and caressed with the tight skin of his balls, rotating her hips around to get as much of him deeper inside as she could. The thick sensation of him filling her made her smile with satisfaction. Her hips rolling the pleasure around her womb, she leaned back on his thighs with her palms, thrusting her hips in sharp little strokes. The sensations of the magic spot within began as a slow warmth. The heat centering in her exposed clit. Looking down the plane of her abdomen, she shuddered when she saw the root of his cock spreading her lips wider, her hood drawn back and the pearl of nerves peeking out. She resisted the temptation to touch it. Just the sensation of being spread and open sent her toward climax, she moved her hips faster.

John moved his hands from her hips to fondle her breasts, bouncing from her little jerking thrusts. He pulled himself up to kiss and lick them again. The little red berry of flesh peeking out caught his attention. He grasped it in his thumb and forefinger pinching it gently, he milked her clit with gentle motions and grinned wickedly when she gasped. His other hand busied with rolling and pinching a nipple, his teeth and lips found the other.

Jane jerked with pleasure boarding pain. The razor sharp of his teeth, the blunt pressure of his fingers teasing made her plunge to orgasm very quickly. Her thrusting became faster, her body tightening as her pussy began to constrict around the shaft she was so deliciously impaled upon. The warm sensations vining through her shot heat straight to her core and finally exploded and she dropped into his waiting arms.

He knew her so well, and knew when she was going to orgasm. Her tortuous thrusting grew erratic, he stopped sucking her nipples and turned his milking to firm pressure with his thumb pad, that was all it took. He caught her with his free arm when the peak of pleasure stole over her. Tucking her beneath him in a smooth motion, he pressed himself into her with an easy slide. He stroked long, even strokes that both soothed and stirred his cock at the same time. The only sound in the room were soft groans of pleasure and the squelching and sucking of bodies wrapped in erotic delight. She wrapped her legs around him thrusting against his rhythm. He stroked harder and faster, his balls slapping her bottom, not feeling the bite of her nails as he dragged her with him, into another wave of orgasmic bliss. He slowed just as he peeked to savor the sensation of his cum erupting into her.

With heaving chest, he lay next to her and Jane closed her eyes.

She was sore and tired in the best way. The way only a gift given of herself could make her feel. Heart and soul, in perfect love and trust. She caressed the golden stubble beginning on his jaw as he lay next to her, wordlessly gathering his breath as he stroked the skin on her back. With his eyes closed he reclined, head propped on the other arm. She caressed the soft pulse of his heart beating in his throat.

“We better get dressed before we’re discovered.” He heard her voice through the fog muddling his brain.

“Mmmm, if you say so. All my clothes are out there, though.”

As she sat up, she picked up her skirt and slid it back on. He watched as she slid on her bra and then her blouse. Her heels were last as she tucked herself into Ms. Flowers perfection again. She held out her hand to him to make him move. He accepted and stood, following her to the door.

The locker room was empty still. Raising up on tip toe she slid a kiss across his lips that threatened to go deeper when his tongue slid in and his hand cradled her neck. Her closed eyes fluttered open. “Happy birthday, Johnny.” She whispered.

“See you in the morning?” He spoke softly against her cheek.

“Come wake me up.”

“You can count on it.” He slid another kiss across her mouth before letting her go as he headed for the shower for the second time.

Jane stole one last glance back at the play of tight muscle as he ducked under the shower head. She sighed deeply and knew that morning was a long way off...



# CAN I LEND YOU A HAND?

## JESSICA JEROME

PUTTING THE LAST OF THE DISHES AWAY IN THE CUPBOARD, Katie Adams noticed two inches of water still standing in the bottom of the dishwasher. She had already called about the washing machine and garbage disposal. Now the dishwasher had decided to give her fits.

She had only moved in a couple of months ago, vacating the small house she had rented with her ex-boyfriend. The memories had been too much for her after he had gone back to his ex-wife. Her spacious two-bedroom apartment had become a sanctuary while her broken heart was mending.

She crossed the kitchen to retrieve the cordless phone and dialed.

“Winterhaven Apartments. This is Yvette. How may I help you?” chirped the singsong voice on the other end of the phone. Katie could almost see her smile.

“Hi, Yvette. This is Katie Adams in 2340, Apartment E,” she replied, pacing the kitchen floor.

“Hi, Katie. What can I do for you today?”

“I’m having a problem with my dishwasher. The water is not draining completely, and I don’t want to end up flooding my kitchen or the apartment below. Would you have one of the guys come over and take a look at it sometime this week?”

“Sure thing, Katie. I’ll put in a work order today, and the problem should be taken care of within a few days.”

“Thanks, Yvette.”

“No problem. Just call if you need anything else. Have a great day.”

“You, too. Bye.”

“Goodbye.”

Katie walked out of the cheerful kitchen and down the long, narrow hallway to the spare bedroom she had converted into a study. She could smell the rich leather of her chair as she settled at her dark walnut desk. Gazing out at the lush, green wooded area that was behind her apartment building, she heard the soft, sexy voice of John Maher crooning: “Something

'bout the way your hair falls in your face. I love the shape you take when crawling towards the pillow case." Humming along, she turned her attention back to her computer and the novel that was begging to be completed.



Lost in her story and characters, Katie barely noticed the loud knock at her door. The antique clock on the desk read 3:47 p.m. She had been writing for hours.

Getting up from her chair, she padded down the lushly carpeted hallway, through the dining room and into the foyer. Positive that she had locked the door after returning from the grocery store this morning, Katie's heart thudded in her chest at the sound of the door opening.

"I didn't know anyone would be home," announced the handsome man in the doorway. "I'm Jake Michaels. I'm here to fix your dishwasher."

His deep voice reverberated through Katie as her eyes traveled over his expansive chest on the way up to his face. "Hi, c'mon in. I'm a writer, so I work from home. Yvette didn't tell me you would be coming today."

"Is now a good time?"

Katie felt like an idiot standing there staring into Jake's gorgeous brown eyes. The musky scent of him caused her insides to warm. She wanted to reach out and run her fingers through the dark, wavy locks of his hair. *So this is the sexy maintenance man I've seen while walking around the complex.*

"Now is just fine. Let me grab another cup of coffee and leave you to it," Katie said as she headed toward the little kitchen.



He followed behind her slender figure as she sauntered off toward the kitchen, her shapely legs drawing his attention. The intoxicating scent of her perfume emanated from her as she walked. *I wonder if she tastes as sweet as she smells.*

Instinctively he reached out to catch her as she stumbled over the furry, gray feline making its bed in the middle of the kitchen floor.

"Smokey," she shrieked.

"Meeoow," replied the fluffy gray feline, looking annoyed at being disturbed from his slumber with a yawn. Stretching, the cat strolled out the door toward the living room.

He felt her body tense as he cradled her in his arms, her back against his chest.

"Are you okay?" he questioned, helping her gain her footing. Jake had to hold back his urge to caress her.

Turning, face flushed, Katie let out a breathy, “Thank you.” The embarrassment made her all the more endearing. He longed to pull her close to him again and cover her mouth with his. *You’ve got work to do; quit gawking at the woman.*

“I had better get to that dishwasher,” he said setting down his toolbox.

Pouring herself another cup of coffee, she left him to his work.



Frustrated and disgusted, Katie attempted to get past the writer’s block plaguing her. Thoughts of how good it felt to be held in Jake’s arms a few days ago continued to dance through her brain making it difficult to concentrate. Safe and secure in his muscular arms. *Mmmmm, nice.*

She hadn’t really wanted anything to do with men in the few months since she called it quits with Brian. His strange behavior that last week told her something was wrong, but it wasn’t until he tried to lie his way out of why he had slammed his laptop shut as she walked into the room, or his late night out visiting friends without a phone call that she felt suspicious. Brian had always phoned to let her know when he would be home and whether or not to expect him for dinner. He blew the computer incident off claiming he was responding to another flaming email from his boss. The tightness and pressure in her chest returned at the memory of his betrayal. Katie had caught Brian on his cell phone in the bedroom returning the call he claimed was a wrong number. He finally admitted to clandestine meetings with his ex-wife after running into her several weeks before at a friend’s funeral. *Not a damn thing you can do about it now.*

Since she wasn’t getting any work done, Katie decided to check on the washing machine. This was the first load of laundry she had run through it. Maintenance had checked to see why it sounded like it was possessed by demons over a week ago. The washer had been taking itself for a walk every time it hit the spin cycle no matter what size load she washed.

Heading toward the laundry room, Katie felt the wet, squishy carpeting on her bare feet at the edge of the dining room.

“What in God’s name?” she shrieked. Yanking the laundry room door open, she quickly turned the washing machine off and began soaking up water with the dirty towels waiting in the laundry hamper. Water had completely covered the floor in the laundry room and run through the walls out into the hallway and dining room. *What a mess!*

She retrieved more towels from the linen closet and placed them over the water stained carpeting in the dining room and hallway. *Time to get maintenance over here.*

In the kitchen, she grabbed the cordless phone and glanced at the clock on the stove—4:20 p.m., the office was closed until Monday.

“Well, isn’t that just peachy?”

Remembering the on-call phone number she had been provided, her fingers dialed the maintenance pager and entered her phone number at the beep. Blowing out an exasperated breath, Katie hung up and waited for a return call.

A few minutes later, she grabbed the ringing phone and answered, "Hello?"

"This is Jake. Someone paged me?"

"Yes, this is Katie Adams in 2340, Apartment E. I paged you because my washing machine just flooded my apartment. I have water in the laundry room, hallway and dining room, and I've put down towels to soak up what I could. You may also want to contact my neighbors to find out if any other apartments have been flooded."

"Okay, Katie, stay calm. I'm on my way."



"Come in," Katie yelled on her way to the front door.

"I got here as fast as I could," Jake responded. Walking into the laundry room, he tested the washer to see where it had sprung a leak. The water hose wasn't loose or detached.

"You may want to turn that back off. The water is leaking from the bottom of the machine again," she interrupted.

"Jeez," he replied, stepping out of the laundry room to keep from getting his feet soaked. "I don't understand. Everything appears to be hooked up correctly. It worked just fine when I tested it last week."

"Have you talked to my neighbors? Did it flood the apartment next door or the apartments downstairs?" she asked.

"The two apartments downstairs have water damage. The apartment next door is dry. Let me grab the Shop Vac out of my truck to get the water around the machine. You won't be able to use your washer or dryer for a few days until we get the problem fixed because I pulled the hose to your dryer vent while I was tilting the washer forward."

"So, how am I supposed to finish my laundry and wash these wet towels? Should I take it to a laundry mat?" she asked.

"Yvette will give you keys to a vacant apartment where you can do your laundry until yours is replaced. She's at the office now. She is also making arrangements to have the carpet cleaners come to remove the last of the water and treat the carpeting."

"I'm sorry you had to come to handle this on your day off. I should have checked it earlier this week." The expression on her face told how badly she felt.

"It's not your fault. You didn't do anything wrong." Walking toward her, he pulled her warm body into an embrace. He caved to his urge, catching her pink, full lips with his, and plunged his tongue into her mouth. Soft breasts pressed to his chest sending shockwaves through his body. He felt her pulse quicken as she melted into him.

His hand reached up to fondle her breast, and she moaned her pleasure into his mouth. The ringing phone brought them both crashing back to reality.

“I have to answer that.” With that she was gone, leaving him alone with his lust and a puddle of water that needed to be vacuumed.



Katie noticed the call tag on her door on her return from the grocery store and realized that Fed Ex delivered the package containing her new curio cabinet to the office. She was afraid that might happen if she wasn't home to accept delivery. If she was lucky, one of the guys would be available to help her get the package from the office to her apartment.

Truth be told, she had been hoping to run into Jake again. He had asked her out to dinner a couple of times while running into her at the pool and fitness center, but she politely refused stating she wasn't ready yet. She felt torn. This was the first time since she and her ex had split up that she had found herself attracted to a man. Maybe he would ask her again. It was high time she put her ex out of her mind for good.

Locking her door, she walked down the hallway and descended the staircase to the exit. She drove the short distance to the office. Leaving her car unlocked, Katie walked toward the glass entryway. Right away her eyes were drawn to Jake's stocky frame as he discussed the work schedule for the next day with Yvette.

“Hi, Katie,” greeted Yvette.

“Hi there. I understand I have rather large package down here for pickup.”

Yvette got up from her desk and headed toward the credenza across the room. “Yes, it just arrived a little while ago. The Fed Ex driver was muttering under his breath about how he was not going to kill himself taking that package up the stairs. He even mentioned something about making a workers comp claim because he thought he may have injured himself when his hand hit the door carrying the package inside. Are you sure you can handle this thing by yourself?”

“I've just finished work for the day, and I would be more than happy to help you, Katie,” Jake chimed in, striding toward her with a sexy smile playing across his lips.

“That would be great. I'd really appreciate it,” she replied. She affixed her signature to the clipboard and turned toward Jake, who had already picked up the package with ease. “Wow, I'm impressed. The Fed Ed guy seemed to have such trouble,” Katie chuckled. He was close enough that she could inhale his scent, sending shivers up her spine. *Wonder if Mr. Strong and Sexy will end up kissing me again?*



Setting the package down, Jake surveyed the master bedroom. Her queen sized four-poster bed was just inside door. A stack of books stood on her nightstand on the opposite side of the bed. More books lined the shelf in the corner. This wasn't quite how he had anticipated seeing Katie's bedroom for the first time, but it did give he chance to look around.

"Thank you for bringing the package to my apartment. It would have taken me forever just to get the darn thing in my car." She twirled her wavy hair in her fingers as he turned toward her.

"How about giving me a proper thank you then?" he quizzed pulling her into his arms with a long lingering kiss. He had ached with need every time he had seen her sporting her little purple bikini at the pool. Her hands splayed across his chest, reaching around to caress his back. His rough hand slid up her shirt and found her breast. He felt her grind her hips against him. Pulling back slightly, Jake tugged her shirt over her head, revealing her black lacy bra and luscious breasts. He pushed her bra out of the way taking her nipple into his mouth.

"Mmmmmmm," she moaned as he suckled, trembling.

Katie peeled off her pants before stripping Jake of shirt. She dropped to her knees before him. His cock was straining against his jeans as she undid the fly and took him into her mouth. It was all he could do to maintain control. He fisted his hand in her dark silky mane feeling it brush his thigh.

"Ungh," he groaned. "If you keep that up, I'll be finished before we even get started."

He pulled her up from the floor and swung her into his arms, laying her on the bed before stripping off his jeans. His eyes raked over her body as he removed her black silk panties. His heart pounding inside his chest.

"God, you're beautiful," he whispered into her ear as he covered her. Jake slid his finger into her moist hot slit, Katie arched against him. He drank in the scent of her perfumed skin. Need poured through him, as he quickly slid on a condom and plunged his cock into her.

"You feel so good. Don't stop," she gasped.

She wrapped her legs around his waist as he drove his shaft in and out. Moments later, he felt the orgasm rip through her body as she shuddered beneath him.

"Ungh," he cried, exploding inside of her. He collapsed on the bed next to her.



Katie found herself cradled in Jake's arm as she awakened. Her heart lurched watching the sexy smile play across his face. She had the distinct impression he'd been watching her for some time as she slept.

"Where does this leave us, Katie?" Jake asked as he caressed her hair.

"How about we order a pizza? I'm starving. Then you can show me again why I should go out with you?" she responded with a wicked grin.

“I can give you a hand with that,” he replied, pulling her into a slow, sweet kiss.



# PIPE DREAMS

DENYSÉ BRIDGER

JILL BOYD STARED OUT AT THE WINDING DRIVEWAY that led into her secluded cabin property, her stomach twitchy as she considered cancelling the service call she'd made only an hour earlier. Buying the cabin had been the fulfillment of a dream when she'd first found the place. Now, it wasn't so much a dream, as the excuse to indulge in a secret fantasy. The second week after she'd moved in, she'd had to call a plumber to fix the ancient pipes. One of the residents in the nearby town had recommended Silverwolf Plumbing and Heating. What they had failed to mention at the time was the owner of the company, and Jill had soon discovered that the heart and soul of Silverwolf was the man himself.

Shane Silverwolf... Just the mental whisper of his name made her tingle in anticipation of his presence. Assuming he'd come again himself, and not send one of his employees to see what was falling apart this time. She'd become a regular customer in the past six months, and most of the time he was the one who showed up when she called. The first time she'd seen him had been the most pleasant shock of her life. Shane was the walking dream man she'd been writing about for most of her adulthood. Unlike her stunning heroines, though, Jill wasn't witty and charming, or irresistible to the men she encountered.

Pulling the mental image of Shane into focus wasn't a difficult task, he was with her most of the time anyway in her heart. But, the vision was hard to ignore when it wanted to be looked at, and she allowed herself the familiar indulgence. At six-feet-three inches tall, Shane towered over her less than five and half foot height. He was pure-bred Native American, with the glossy blue-black hair of his ancestors, and the most incredible ebony eyes she'd ever seen. High cheekbones contoured his face, and there was a sensuality to the curve of his mouth that made her long to know just how sweet his kiss might be.

She was jolted back to awareness by the roar of an engine and stepped back from the upstairs window the instant a van pulled up in front of the cabin. The snarling silver-grey wolf on the side of the truck heralded the arrival of the plumber.

*But who would it be?*

Jill ignored the mocking internal voice and went to answer the knock at her door.

Dragging in a deep, steadying breath, Jill pulled open the heavy oak panel that was the entrance to her home. Somewhere between her mouth and her brain a short-circuit occurred and she stared. Shane's face split into a teasing grin.

"Don't look so surprised to see me, Jill," he drawled, "you called this morning."

Swallowing back the lump that was firmly lodged in her throat, Jill smiled weakly. "It's been a long day already, Shane."

For a moment he was thoughtful, his sharp eyes scanning her features with clear concern.

"You okay, baby?" He asked the question softly, his voice like the brush of roughened velvet over cool marble.

Jill wanted to melt into a puddle at his feel, but given that was both impossible and impractical, she shrugged and offered him a small laugh. "Yeah, I'm okay, Shane. Just tired."

He held her gaze for a moment longer, then nodded. "Where's the leak this time, honey?"

"Bathroom." As he walked past her, she shook her head. How could it be so easy to be near him, but never able to actually express herself?

Following him through the spacious living room that encompassed most of the main floor, Jill watched the play of muscles as he walked, perfectly at home in her space.

"You're going to have let me get a crew in here, Jill," Shane told her as he entered the bathroom and took a good look at the leaking, ancient faucets on her vanity basin. There was a second leak under the flush-box, as well. The pile of wet towels there testified to that. "This whole place needs serious work, honey."

"And I need serious money for that kind of project, Shane," she replied with very mild censure. "We've talked about this before. I can't afford to have the plumbing redone for the entire cabin."

"You keep calling me out here like this, and you're gonna spend just as much in the end anyway, Jill." He was stretching out on the floor as he was talking, and his gaze glanced toward her for a moment. "I don't mind coming out here, I just hate taking your money for things I know are only patch jobs."

"Can you do anything with this?" She indicated the basin and its taps.

He laughed. "I'll have to replace them. It's almost noon, so why don't I fix the leak under the tank there, pick up new gear for the basin, and come back?"

She nodded and drifted off when he went straight to work and pretty much ignored her presence.

While she contemplated the blank page that was the computer screen, she tried not to be aware of every sound he made as he worked, occasionally cursing softly when something didn't go exactly as it should. She was finally able to deafen herself to him and begin working on a new chapter of her current novel when his voice jolted her so badly she actually gasped.

“Jill! Can you come in here for a minute, honey?”

She saved her file and was in the bathroom doorway in about twenty seconds.

“Get me a bucket,” he ordered. “I have to pull this shit apart and there’s gonna be water everywhere even after you turn it off.”

She turned and went to cut the water, then collected a bucket to bring back to him.

“Hang onto the faucet base while I pull things free down here,” Shane requested the instant she returned.

He was sprawled across the floor and the only way to get near the vanity was to step over him so that she was standing with her feet against his hips on both sides, then she leaned in to grasp the fixture.

“Have you got it, Jill?”

“Yes.”

She almost lost her balance when he pulled hard on something under the sink and her grip on the taps slipped. Water sprayed, very cold water, and she was sputtering as she tried desperately to get a solid hold on the fixture again.

“Got it,” Shane mumbled with obvious triumph, and he started to slide out from under the vanity. He got halfway before he had to stop or risk toppling Jill. “You can let go now, honey.”

She did, with a gasp, and stumbled back, groping for a towel. Shane stood up, then touched her arm to steady her.

“I’ll get this cleaned up for you when I come back, Jill,” he said when she was looking at him again, the towel still clutched in her hands.

She nodded. “Thanks. Can I fix you lunch after you’re done?”

He grinned. “Sounds great. I’ll take a run into town and pick up the gear I need, and will be back as quick as I can.”



When he was safely in his truck, Shane crossed his arms over the steering wheel and let a long-suppressed groan escape him. He should have sent someone else to do the repair, he knew that. But, the thought of seeing Jill was a lure he couldn’t resist. When he’d slid out from under the vanity to see her standing over him, her baggy shirt plastered to her skin, he was sure she’d see the sudden strain in the front of his jeans. It has taken all his control not to stare at the thrusting nipples that crested her shapely breasts. Jill Boyd was a pretty woman, in a very down-to-earth, wholly natural way. She seldom bothered with make-up that he’d seen, wore casual clothes with elegance that was simply part of her nature. She was shapely, in a curvaceous, utterly feminine way, though she appeared almost ignorant to her appeal.

Jill’s hair was the color of mahogany, with burnished copper highlights. Her eyes were dark

blue, and when she laughed it was like being kissed by liquid sunshine. Shane had wanted her the moment he'd first heard that sweet, pure happiness, but she maintained distance from everyone, preferring her own company for the most part.

Some part of Shane knew how she'd feel against him. When he was alone in his bed at night, he thought about Jill. How her small, perfect breasts would fill his hands, and her generous curves would fit the long lines of his body like she was made to belong to him. He'd never fantasized about a woman in his adult years, until Jill. Most of the time he didn't have to create a dream, a surprising number of women were more than happy to make him offers. If it had been his nature, he'd get laid by a different woman every night of the week. But none of them would be the woman he really wanted to make love to, so he kept his self-imposed celibacy. The last woman he'd been with had been his wife, and their divorce had been final over a year and half earlier.

Shane took a last look at the closed front door of the cabin, then jabbed the key into the ignition and pulled away, mentally chastising himself for being a complete idiot.



An hour after he'd left, there was still no sign of Shane returning. Disappointed much more than she should be, Jill left the kitchen and went to look out the front windows again. As before, the driveway stood empty. She hugged herself and paced for a few minutes, torn between frustration and the restless longing that always plagued her mood when Shane had been to her home.

She'd changed into a soft, silky sweater and plain denim skirt. Her heavy mane of waist-length hair had been swept into a tidy coil, and she'd even gone as far as applying a little mascara and shadow to accentuate her wide-set eyes. She now felt like a foolish sixteen year old in the throes of her first crush. Try as she might to ignore it, every part of her thrummed with energy, the kind of energy that was born purely in sexual need.

Sighing, she went upstairs and into her bedroom to change again into her usual sweats. She might as well be comfortable. Shane would be back eventually, but there was no way to know when. She was passing the mirror on her way to the closet when she stopped and looked closely at her reflection. The woman in the glass was vividly alive, the spark in her eyes bright with emotion. She was almost pretty, she conceded silently.

Her gaze moved lower, to the front of her pale peach sweater. It was a snug fit, but not tight, and it outlined the soft swell of her breasts, and the visible buds of her very hard nipples. She touched the rigid tips, her fingers a brush of movement over the cashmere wool of her top. She seldom wore a bra, there was no need for one with her small breasts. She peeled off the sweater, tossed it into a nearby chair and looked at herself again. As she caressed her sensitive breasts and tugged on the distended nipples she imagined Shane's beautiful long fingers playing

over her flesh.

She wet her fingers and stroked circles of touch around her nipples, pinching gently, then pulling a little harder as she closed her eyes and pretended the tugging sensation was caused by Shane's mouth, suckling and nipping the tender tips. Falling into the familiar fantasy, Jill unzipped her skirt and let it drop to the floor, then she stepped out of it. She kicked her shoes off and looked at the woman in the mirror again. She wore nothing but lacy underwear now, and between her thighs the steady throb of hunger was seeping wetness into the flimsy silk that covered her.

Jill turned her back on the reflection and went to the bedside table, taking out the sex toy that had been purchased by a friend who loved to torment her about her torrid romances and the lack of any real romance in her life. She'd been mortified when Georgia had sent it, but curiosity had compelled her to actually use it the first time. She didn't take it out often, but more and more, thoughts of Shane sent her for it.

She sat in the center of the bed and contemplated the ridiculous pink dildo for several minutes, all the while squeezing her breasts and caressing them until her nipples felt like they were going to burst. She settled back onto the pillows and wriggled free of her panties. Then she ran her fingers through the damp tangle of silky hair at the juncture of her thighs, spreading her legs wide as she encountered slick, wet heat. The sound of her fingers sliding into her dripping channel was exciting, and she started a slow, steady rhythm of thrusting, stopping occasionally to tease the pulsing bud of her clit.

She picked up the dildo and pushed it into her hungry body, thrusting hard and deep. The effect was amazing, and she closed her eyes while she created the image of Shane's incredible body over hers, his hard length driving into her. Her hips answered the vision inside her head and she was lost, her body striving for desperate release.



Shane went up the stairs cautiously, genuinely curious about why she hadn't answered his knock. She got involved with her work, and some times didn't hear. That had happened before. He'd let himself in and let her know he was back when that occurred. He was about to call out when he saw the partly closed bedroom door, and heard the soft moans and sounds of sex. For a moment he thought his rage would blind him, then through the sudden pounding of his heart, he heard Jill's voice saying his name.

He walked the last few steps and dared to look inside. His cock felt like it was going to split the front of his jeans when he saw her on the bed, legs spread wide, a dildo moving in and out of her dripping pussy so fast that he wondered for a moment if she was hurting herself.

"Shane..."

It was a frantic whisper and every nerve in his body responded to it. He knew he should

walk away and never let her know he'd seen her, but all his mind would focus on was the desperate need to replace the dildo with his dick, and show her how good the real thing could be. He pulled his t-shirt over his head, tossed it, and went to work on the rest of his clothes. When he pushed open the door to her bedroom, he was fully naked, and stroking his rigid cock as he walked to the bed.

Jill's hips were thrusting upward, well into the rhythm of her hand moving between her thighs. When she moaned his name again as she reached her peak, Shane's fingers closed around her wrist and stopped the motion. Her eyes flew open and she stared at him in dazed shock.

"I'm right here, baby," he whispered, barely recognizing the thick rasp of his voice.

Jill gazed at him and beyond the shock he could see the absolute thrill she was feeling at being caught, by him. He pulled the dildo from her body and she opened her arms to him. He tossed aside the toy, and settled between her legs, sliding up and into her with a suddenness that made her hips rise from the bed and her spine arch.

She felt incredible, like a tight vise of molten heat rippling around the thick length of his swollen shaft. He pulled out, drove deeper into her again, and she locked her legs around his waist, pushing upward against him as he started to pound into her with a force that was brutal in its frenzied desperation. Much too soon he was spilling into her, and she was almost screaming his name as she convulsed around his shuddering cock, clutching him so tight it almost hurt. It was the sweetest pain he'd ever felt, and he didn't care how long it went on.



When Shane slid off her and collapsed on his back, still breathing heavily, Jill shivered violently at the loss of contact. Now that it was over, she found herself unable to look at him. She was halfway into sitting up to leave the bed when Shane's hand on her arm made her look back at him.

The concern and worry in his dark gaze was impossible to miss, and she wasn't up to pretending.

"It's okay, Shane," she murmured. "This was my fault, not yours."

His eyebrows rose and he looked at her in what could only be described as stunned disbelief.

"I wanted this from the day we met, Jill," he told her, tone quiet and thoughtful. "I think it would have been better if we'd had a chance to plan it a little, but I sure as hell won't tell you I'm not happy about it."

"Shane," she sighed and continued, "you don't have to say nice things because we've just had a roll in the hay." She pulled away from him and escaped his hold with no effort at all. Somehow that lack of objection from him made her feel even worse.

"Where are you going?"

She stopped halfway across the room. "To take a shower."

He laughed. "There's no water, sweetheart. I have to finish the job you asked me to do."

She wasn't sure, but for an instant she thought she heard bitterness in his beautiful voice.

"How long will it take?"

He pushed himself off the bed and gathered his clothes, dressing while she watched, utterly without self-consciousness about his body. Then again, she mused, why would he be ill at ease with a body that was perfect. When he was dressed and she was still stark naked, she felt even more like crawling into a hole and dying.

Shane looked at her again for several moments, his ebony eyes unsettled and dangerous. She shivered inwardly, a flicker of warning telling her there was a storm brewing inside the handsome man in front of her. A storm that was going to toss her onto the rocks of her own foolhardiness before too much time passed.

In less than an hour, Shane found her in the kitchen, sipping coffee. She heard him, but didn't know how close he was until he had her pinned to the countertop she'd been leaning on. He pressed tightly to her and the solid ridge of his erection nestled between the rounded cheeks of her ass. His hands glided under the loose shirt she'd put on and she spilled her coffee when he cupped her breasts in his hands and started kneading her flesh. She put the coffee mug on the countertop and gripped the smooth, cool edge.

"Shane...?"

"Do you know how many times I wanted to do this?" He growled in her ear. "I dream about this when I'm lying in my bed, baby. I fantasize about what it would be like to suck your lush little tits, and the taste of your pussy, and how fucking good it would feel to drive my cock so far into you that you can't think about anything else for days."

The whole time he spoke, he was tugging her nipples, and squeezing her breasts. His hips pushed into her and she was helpless to stop any of it. He stepped back long enough to turn her to face him, then his hands moved again, lifting her skirt so he could delve into her panties.

"How wet are you now, Jill?" He answered his own gasping query when his fingers pushed aside the crotch of her panties and plundered her seeping channel, the slick wet sound loud in the stillness of the kitchen.

"Tell me you don't want me, baby."

He started gently rubbing her clit and she moaned softly. Moments later an explosive orgasm rocked her and she fell against the broad wall of his chest, gasping and crying. Shane's arms went around her and held her, his soft, purring voice soothing both her fears and the aftershocks of sensation that still shook her.

Finally, she eased away just enough to look up into his eyes. The anger wasn't lurking there anymore, it had been replaced by loving warmth. He smiled, and held her head between his hands as he bent to cover her lips with a kiss that promised her everything she'd ever dreamed about, and more. It was a long time before he drew back and she smiled up at him.

“That was the first time you kissed me.”

“I plan to kiss you a lot more before we go to sleep,” he assured her.

“Shane, this is crazy. You don’t have to stay because of what happened.”

The glitter of anger flickered in his eyes again for a moment, then he smiled. “I have one more call to make, then I’ll be back here. We’re going to have dinner, and talk.” He kissed her again, a slow, sensuous caress that explored the recesses of her mouth and provoked her into a sweet, exotic duel with his probing tongue. “Once you know I’m here because it’s what we both want, then we’re going to make love properly,” he whispered, his mouth still so close she felt his words as much as she heard them. “I’ve dreamed about making love to you, Jill. That’s not what just happened, and I’m sorry about that.”

She touched his mouth and silenced him. “I can’t believe you’re saying things like this to me, Shane.”

“Why?”

He looked genuinely puzzled and she smiled, the expression self-deprecating.

“Honestly?”

He nodded, his eyes never losing contact with her gaze.

“Guys like you have ignored me my whole life.”

“Guys like me?”

“Yes,” she repeated firmly. “The tall, dark, seriously sexy type.”

He grinned. “Nice. I like that. But I’m not a type, honey. I’m just a guy who wants to know the woman he’s falling in love with.”

“Love?” She shook her head. “Don’t start saying things you’re likely to regret, Shane.”

“I don’t,” he assured her, bending to steal another kiss from her lips before she could continue. When he finally drew back, he laughed, visibly pleased by the no doubt dopey look on her face. “The water’s back on, take a bath, relax, and I’ll be back as soon as I can get the rest of the afternoon’s calls reassigned.”



Relax!

Jill was about as relaxed as a tightly strung crossbow...

She peered at the reflection in the mirror and tried not to scream her frustration. Shane’s hour was almost up and she’d discarded virtually every decent outfit she owned as not sexy enough... not pretty enough... not whatever enough... She was presently dressed in the last decent dress she owned, a pretty indigo blue silk number with a full, flowing skirt cut with a jagged hemline and a daring plunged neckline. On the right woman it would have been gorgeous. To Jill, she looked ridiculously desperate to create an illusion of sexy appeal.

She was about to strip down again when the doorbell rang and her heart tried to escape

her chest. She cast a last disdainful glance at the mirror, grabbed her shoes, and ran down the stairs. She was just wiggling her toes into the silver high heels when the bell sounded again. A quick twist of the knob and the door swung open. Her heart did another wild pirouette inside her and she stared, not quite gaping, but close enough to make Shane's contoured features split into a teasing grin.

She couldn't help the sense of shock.

He was even more devastating to her nerves when he wasn't in his casual work clothes. The man standing in the doorway was like a bronzed God from legend. Shane had obviously been home as well as to the office. His jeans and t-shirt had been replaced by form-fitting black pants, and a pale blue shirt that was open at the throat to expose tanned skin. His glossy black hair was tied at the nape, and silver arrowheads dangled from his ears, two on one side, and a third on the other.

"You gonna let me in, baby?"

Biting back a nervous quip, she stepped aside and let him into the cabin. When she gave the door a push and it settled firmly in place, she turned to look at him again. He handed her a single red rose, and leaned forward to kiss her forehead.

"You look beautiful, Jill." He smiled. "You always look beautiful. I don't think you realize that, though."

"I'm starting to feel beautiful around you, Shane."

"Have you got any wine?"

She nodded.

"Good, I'll be right back."

He went out the door while she went to take a bottle from the rack in the kitchen, and headed into her small dining room to find he was already back from his car. He was taking plates from her china cabinet and she smiled at how right it felt to have him in her home, so much at ease. Like he really did belong here. *Maybe he does?* She ignored the whisper in her head and went to get some candles. Before long they were seated at the table, and Shane was smiling at her over the dancing candleflames.

"What made you move to a little place like this, Jill?"

"I wanted to be away from the city. I always wanted to have a mountain cabin getaway, or a ranch. This was the compromise I made, close enough to a town not to be out in the middle of nowhere, but still isolated enough to give me some peace." She picked up her wine and sipped. "What about you?"

Shane shrugged. "I was born in this town. Went to school in Chicago, hated it, and came back."

"That's it?" She was skeptical.

He put down his glass and pushed aside his plate, leaning forward to meet her gaze. "I came home, got married, started my business, and planned a life that didn't quite work out the

way it was supposed to.”

“You’re married.” She thought the words would choke her, but she forced them past her suddenly parched throat anyway.

“Divorced. Over a year ago.”

“Why would anyone divorce you?”

The question fell between them, and Jill was mortified. Shane looked at her for several seconds, then his laughter trembled in the space between them, slowly expanding until she was laughing with him.

“I think I do love you, Jillian Boyd,” he said after he’d wiped the tears from his eyes. “You make me feel like the most wanted man alive.”

“I just can’t imagine any woman wanting to send you away. All I’ve been able to think about was how nice it would be to keep you around.”

He grinned. “Like a favorite pet?”

She made a face at him. “Yeah, pet... Like a wolf... A wild, unpredictable animal.”

“Wolves mate for life, baby, and that’s what I’m banking on here.” He stood up and came around the table to pull her into his arms. “I want you. For life.”

Shane’s whispered words were like a soft breath of air touching Jill’s face as he leaned forward to cover her lips with a tender kiss. Jill moved into the caress with a desperate gasp. She clung to Shane as his tongue slipped into her mouth with a possessive hunger she instantly matched.

Shane tightened the hold, molding her body to his with a thrust of his hips. His hands ran through Jill’s hair then slid over the smooth curve of her back. He felt the edge of the heavy table against his knuckles when his hands cupped her ass and pressed her tighter into him.

Jill broke the intense kiss and her head fell back as a sigh of relief and pleasure slipped from her as a low murmur of sound. She wrapped her arms around Shane’s neck, then buried her face against his broad shoulder. She smiled at the slight hoarseness she heard in Shane’s breathing already, then shuddered when Shane’s hands undid the knot at the nape of her neck and her dress slid down to expose her naked breasts to his touch. She tried to step back, only to find she was trapped by the table behind her.

Jill arched her back into his embrace and let her fingers smooth over broad shoulders, then slip lower to begin opening the buttons of Shane’s shirt. She wanted the feel of his skin against hers, and he wasn’t hurrying about getting undressed. Her fingers clutched at the shirt when he leaned over her, pressing her back to lie on the hard surface of the tabletop. She gasped when he broke their kiss and his lips moved to her throat.

Shane’s tongue played in the hollow of Jill’s throat, feeling her shaky breaths, then he continued his trek downward. He felt the ripples of reaction in her body and let his hands move to her hips in gentle restraint as his lips teased over one taut nipple. His teeth closed on the hard tip and Jill arched in response to the caress, a tiny moan escaping her when he began

to suck on the sensitive nipple. Another shudder shook Jill when his hand moved under the skirt of her dress and began to tug at her panties.

Shane drew back enough to look down into Jill's face, softened by passion and the flickering shadows generated by the fire burning in the adjoining room. Dazed blue eyes stared up at him, and the unconcealed passion he read in her expression made him shiver.

"We're not really going to do this on the table, are we?" Jill asked, both her grin and her voice decidedly shaky.

Shane let his fingers brush over the insides of her thighs, enjoying the sudden catch in her breath. "You got any other suggestions?" he teased.

Jill managed to push up on her elbows and she gazed at Shane with glowing eyes. "How about my bed?"

"We'll work on your sense of adventure later," Shane remarked with a laugh. He hooked his fingers in the waistband of her panties and eased them down the length of her legs.

Shane's eyes closed briefly as he tried to quiet the pounding of his heartbeat. The effort was lost when he gazed down at Jill again, and he lowered his lips to her mouth in a caress that was filled with passion and promise. His hands brushed over the smooth, flawless skin of Jill's body, lingering along the curve of her hips before dipping between her spread thighs.

Jill squirmed on the solid surface of the table, and shook her head in protest at the gentle restraint when Shane's hands closed on her wrists and held them against the wood. "No..." The objection died on her lips when Shane's mouth trailed across the curving plane of her stomach before his tongue slid between the weeping folds between her legs. She gave up on any effort to gain her freedom as her body moved into the waves of euphoric pleasure Shane was creating within her.

Blissful ecstasy arced through Jill's body as Shane's tongue probed into her, then he began to suck the hypersensitive bud of her clit. Her hands clutched the silken darkness of his hair as her hips bucked. Jill's head fell back, and she was completely oblivious to the thud of her skull hitting the oak tabletop. She was too caught up in the spasms of passion exploding throughout her body. Minutes later, Shane's hands moved to hold her hips as release shuddered through her. His name was lost in a ragged cry as Jill's fingers tangled in his hair.

Very slowly, Shane released her and used the tabletop to support himself as he stared down into her flushed features. Tremors still ran through her supple body, and Shane grinned at the slightly parted lips that curved into a shadow of smile as she tried to get her breath back. Jill's eyes opened slowly and she held out her hand; Shane took it and pulled her up and into his arms, holding on with fierce strength.

It was a long time before Jill stirred in the embrace and eased back to look into his dark eyes. She traced the curve of Shane's mouth with her fingertips, then pulled him forward to meet her kiss. He melted into the caress with a soft moan, and Jill let her hands begin to wander. She was fully aware of the shivers of reaction her touch was creating, and she eased

back to stare at him, expression thoughtful.

“Get undressed and fix the fire,” she whispered with a grin, and pulled out of his embrace. “I’ll be right back.”

By the time Jill returned, the fire was blazing with new energy, and Shane was sitting in front of the hearth, wine glass in hand. His clothes had been tossed on the couch. He watched Jill with undisguised appreciation as she unfurled the plush blanket she’d retrieved from the bedroom, then dropped into a cross-legged seat in the middle of the blanket. Shane set his drink on the stone hearth, and stretched out next to her.

“Do you really intend for us to sleep on the floor tonight, baby?”

“We’ll work on your sense of adventure later, Shane.” She laughed, then pulled his head down to hers.

His smile was lost in the thrust of Jill’s tongue as she arched into an embrace that had them molded together in a single motion. He rolled slowly until Jill was pressed against the soft cushion of carpeting and blanket. He was slightly disoriented a minute later when she pulled back with a shake of her head and quickly reversed their positions. Jill climbed across his hips and sat up.

“Tell me what you’d really like right now?”

“I don’t want you to do anything except what you want to do,” he replied, an old hurt haunting him at the worst possible moment.

“I want to give you whatever you want,” she stated, her eyes repeating the simple honesty when she smiled down at him.

He took her hands and closed them over his erection, his breath escaping in a hiss of delight when she started stroking the rigid length. When she bent over him and guided him into her mouth his entire body shook in reaction.

Shane’s hand raked through the heavy thickness of her hair, and smoothed over her back as he closed his eyes and let his body absorb every soft, gentle touch of her loving. His chest heaved with the growing effort to breathe, and he was aching with desire. He shuddered moments later when she really started sucking his cock. Her tongue ran the length of his straining shaft, and he couldn’t suppress a responsive moan at the pleasure that spasmed through his whole body.

Jill’s teeth whispered over the rigid shaft in a barely perceptible touch, and his hips thrust upward in response to the caress, filling her mouth again. She sucked the shaft deep into her throat and continued running her tongue over the hard length. He shuddered again when she released him and moved lower to caress taut balls with her tongue as her fingertips slipped behind them to stroke the sensitive skin there.

Shane arched into the touch as another wave of passion swept through him, and he finally eased her away to pull her back into his arms.

“Is that what you wanted me to do?”

He nodded. “My wife... She’d never...”

Jill put a finger to his lips and shook her head. "Anything you want, Shane," she whispered. "I mean that."

"All I want is to make love with you, Jill. Every night for the rest of my life."

"Why don't we just concentrate on tonight," she suggested. "Then we'll worry about the rest of our lives?"

If he was going to make any objection, it got lost in a low groan of agonized pleasure when Jill shifted position and guided his throbbing cock into her wet heat. She sat up and Shane surrendered himself to the pleasure of watching her writhe over him as she rose and fell in sensual frenzy, taking them both into an abyss of explosive, perfect bliss...



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