

Trouble Triangle

by

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An EasyReader Publication
ISBN: 978-1481155717

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Fourth Edition 2019

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This is a work of fiction. The characters, names, events, and places in this novel are used fictitiously or are products of the author's imagination. Any resemblance to real people is coincidental. Don't be so paranoid. It's not you.

**Dedicated to all the brave
servicemen and women**

who have served in any of the Armed Forces. This is the lighter side of
military life and is meant to entertain.

Chapter 1

January 2, 1982

A short, redheaded cop opened the steel door and nudged me in with his nightstick. Shivers ran through my body as the door slammed and he turned the key, metal grinding against metal, engaging the locks. The jail cell had the same smell of stale piss as it did the last time I failed to outrun the sheriff.

A 'Kilroy was here' logo had been scrawled onto the brown cell wall and a single light bulb housed in a flimsy metal shroud flickered the lone source of illumination. A wooden slatted bench ran the length of the walls, with the 'view' into the corridor being a concrete wall on the other side of the ten-foot span of gray iron bars.

One inmate stretched out on the bench in the middle of the cell opposite the bars. He laid in the corpse position with 'Love' tattooed on the knuckles of one hand – 'Hate' inscribed on the other. Another detainee sat in the corner to the right, dribbling and chanting like a drunk monk. My stomach knotted and I moved to the other side where the air seemed less polluted with funk. An hour must have passed before I saw any other life besides my new roommates.

"Chambers," a policeman barked as he unlocked the cell door. He let me out and escorted me down a bland hallway, which felt like an enclosed tunnel, to a large room at the end of the hall. He pushed me inside toward a table with four chairs that sat in the middle of the sparse room. A clock hung on the beige wall and loudly ticked every passing second. The odor of day-old coffee lingered in the air. I sat at the table, trying to look unflustered, but nausea gurgled inside me. Dad had spent some time in the pokey and gave me some tips about the best way to handle situations like this.

I sat waiting fifteen minutes before the 'Incredible Hulk' in uniform came in. He wasn't particularly tall, but his chest was enormous. I could see Hulk's pecs flex under his badge and the nametag that read 'Jones'. His brown hair was cut short and his square jaw jutted out. He offered a lame smile. Another cop stood at the door. Hulk pulled out the chair and sat opposite me. He brushed some donut crumbs off the table then clasped his hands in front of him, resting his forearms on the plastic veneer tabletop.

"Mr. Chambers," Hulk said, "looks like you've been having a little fun." He feigned a sarcastic chuckle. "Well, you might call it fun, but we call it breaking the law. Now, why don't you tell me where you've been tonight and what you've been doing."

I crossed my arms. "I want a lawyer." Dad always told me to never tell the

cops anything. It's their job to figure it out. If they can't, you're off the hook.

Hulk leaned back, locking his hands behind his head. Perspiration marks stained the armpits of his shirt. "You don't need a lawyer, son. We're just having a little informal chat. Now, you wanna tell me where ya been tonight?"

"Not really."

Hulk stood up. His weak smile turned into a vicious snarl. He circled the table in slow, deliberate steps. He stopped in front of me with his squinty eyes focused on my face. He looked down at me for just under an eternity, then in one swift movement, his fist came crashing down onto the table with an almighty thud. I jumped as much as the table did and had that split second of butt-clenching to stop any sudden bowel movements.

"Goddamn it, punk! We know you and your buddy skipped out on the bill at the Pizza Palace. Then you resisted arrest, nearly rammed a police vehicle, causing damage to said police vehicle. Reckless driving..." He threw his arms in the air. "Should I go on?" He stared at me with his upper lip quivering with rage like a snarling Doberman Pincher and shoved a finger in my face. "You're in a whole heap of shit, buddy boy. It would behoove you to cooperate."

I shifted in my seat. "So, if I tell you everything you want to know, you'll let me go?"

Hulk laughed. "Your little accomplice Bobby isn't a hard-ass like you. He spilled his guts, so we already have a confession, not to mention witnesses. Bobby's just a kid. He ratted you out and we're letting him go. Not much of a Bonnie to your Clyde, was he?" Hulk motioned to the cop standing by the door to come over. "And this ain't your first bust either, is it, punk?"

My heart sank as beads of sweat tickled my brow. The Pizza Palace spicy sausage worked its way up from my belly to the back of my throat. I had to fight not to unleash the contents of my stomach onto Hulk's patent leather shoes.

Hulk leaned down. "Let's see how your little candy ass likes it in jail. You know what they do with blue-eyed boys on the inside?" He pressed his knuckles on the table and leaned in closer, his breath saturated by mint. "Well... they won't be looking into your eyes, and you won't be seeing theirs either, if you catch my drift," he said with a sly grin. The smile disappeared and he punched the table again. "You're going down, punk." He stood up straight. "Get 'im outta my face," he said to the other cop.

The realization of doing time began to sink in. I had an aching feeling in the pit of my stomach, and it wasn't from the pepperoni.

"You got one phone call. Wanna make it now?" the cop asked.

I looked at the clock. Near enough one in the morning. "No. I'll leave it."

The cop grabbed my arm firmly and escorted me back to the large holding

cell. The door slammed shut again and the light continued to flicker as the guard left. I found space on the bench to lie down on the other side away from Crazy-man.

After laying on the wooden slats for seven hours, I called my mom at eight o'clock the following morning. She came down for the preliminary hearing and listened to the judge set the trial for four weeks away. She posted bail and we walked through the freshly fallen snow to the parking lot. 1981 sucked bad. 1982 was sucking worse.

We climbed into her Buick Skylark. The pine tree air freshener had lost its scent, yet still dangled from the rear-view mirror. She pulled her visor down, checked her make-up in the mirror and tucked some of her loose auburn hair behind her ear before we headed off. She still had her 'Miss Indiana' good looks, but had become quite bitter since Dad left her last year.

"You just can't help yourself, can you?" she started. "How many times is this, Tyler? Three, four, five? I've lost count. Good thing you didn't try to call me at two in the morning like last time. I would've let your ass sit there. This is the last time, Tyler, so help me God."

I stared out the window, not saying anything. We drove home in silence. Once inside, she gestured for me to sit at the kitchen table. I avoided making eye contact with her by looking at her collection of Norman Rockwell painted plates that ran around the walls just below the ceiling. She sat opposite and stared at me, drumming her fingers on the table.

"Tyler, I don't know what I'm going to do with you. Ever since your father left you've just gone off the rails. Drinking, smoking, doing drugs, in and out of jail. And you're barely nineteen. You're a convict in the making."

I leaned back and crossed my arms. "Why don't you kick me out then, like you did Dad?" I looked at *Whistler's Mother* on the ceramic plate hanging on the wall. Mom knew how to throw daggers with her eyes and I wanted to avoid that. Feeling them was enough.

"John Tyler Chambers. Your father bedded some whore in our bed! I put up with his shit for years." She stood up, pushing the chair away with the back of her legs. "You wanna know why?"

I figured the pause was for effect and the question rhetorical.

"For you. Hoping you could grow up in what you thought was a stable environment. Just because your dad isn't here to give you a clip round the ears you think you can run riot without consequences."

She walked over to the sink and got a glass of water. She came back and sat down. "What's wrong with you? When you graduated I told you to go out and get a job. You came back with some piss ant job making minimum wage." She

placed her hands on the sides of her head. "You know how embarrassing it is to go to church and have the pastor ask me, 'How's Tyler, Mrs. Chambers?' And I have to say, 'Well, Reverend, when he's not drunk or in jail, he's out fryin' fuckin' chicken!" She slammed her hand on the table.

I stared at the top of the table. Looked like the 'You're Useless' speech was coming my way again.

"It's like you have to prove something. Like what a tough guy you are, and you don't need anyone. You're just like that useless father of yours."

I brought my head up to match her glare. It always upset me when she spoke badly about Dad. She was probably right, but he had always been cool to me. He still called me once a week. Usually just to tell me about his latest conquests, but at least he didn't keep telling me I was useless. "I miss him," I said.

"So what. Get over it." She flicked her hand in the air. "He's gone and I see you going down the same loser road as him. How come you never bring the same girl home twice? It's always someone different."

"I dunno. I get tired of 'em I guess."

"That's exactly what I mean. The way your father runs around with women is no way to behave. And I see you acting just like him. You constantly talk back to me, you go out smoking dope, come home drunk at all hours. I can't deal with it anymore. You're never going to amount to anything."

"Why don't you take a Valium like you usually do?"

"You little shit." Her eyes narrowed, and her lips pressed tightly together. "I want you out of my house."

"Oh I get it. Like father, like son." I gave her my defiant look. "Just take turns kicking us out. Why doesn't that surprise me?"

Her face contorted with anger. She lurched across the table with lightning speed and whacked me so hard upside my face I thought she broke a molar.

"I can't take your shit anymore." Her eyes burrowed through my head. "Just get out."

I rubbed the side of my face. "Cool. I'm not a kid anymore, you know. I can take care of myself."

She smirked. "Good. Because that's exactly what you're going to have to start doing. I hope the judge locks you up." She left the table, went to her bedroom and slammed the door.

Chapter 2

Several nights later, my friend Kenny, whose couch I had been crashing on, rented the movie *Stripes* starring Bill Murray and Harold Ramis. It was about two guys who joined the Army to get out of trouble and dead-end jobs. It got me thinking.

After careful consideration, I trudged through the snow in the bitter cold to see the recruiter. Ironically, the office building was across the street from the courthouse. Once I entered, I appreciated the warmth of the building as I shook myself off. Roaming the hallway, I passed by Army and Marine recruiting signs and opened the door that said 'Navy Recruitment Office'.

A prominent poster showed a ship bouncing on the waves with the caption, *'It's not just a job, it's an adventure'*. An American flag stood proudly in the corner of the room.

The man behind the desk stood up. He must have been three or four inches over six feet with curly, short brown hair and a neatly trimmed moustache. His aftershave offered a marked contrast to the pissy jail smell of a week ago that still lingered in my thoughts.

"Hi, I'm Petty Officer Lawson," he said.

I wiped my hands down my pants and we shook hands. "Hi, Tyler Chambers." I looked at the floor and shuffled my feet. "I'm kinda thinking about joining the Navy."

"Sit down, Tyler." He directed me to an empty chair in front of his desk. "So you think you're cut out for military life? Why the Navy?"

"Well, I don't really like crawling around in mud, or shittin' down dirt holes. And the Air Force just seems a bit sissy. Not in a bad way, but it doesn't have the reputation." I scooted my chair forward and rested my arms on his desk. "Is it true what they say about sailors and what they get up to?"

He leaned back and smiled. "I think I know what you mean. The reputation, right? Well, it's not unwarranted, but if you get on a sea-going vessel, you'll spend a lot of time bobbing around on the ocean."

"But we drink and fuck in port, right?"

He sat forward and shook his head. "I think you have your priorities a little mixed-up. You sure you're up to spending a few months at sea with a couple of hundred, or even thousands of other guys? No booze or women for months at a time?"

I thought for a moment. "If it gets me out of this dump, yeah." I looked at him with sincerity. "And I kinda want to get in quick if I can."

He raised an eyebrow. "When's your court date?"

I sat up straight. "How'd you know?"

He smirked. "You're too keen. I've seen it all before. Kids who think they're some kind of badass. Young, dumb and full of cum." He leaned back and laced his fingers behind his head. "You got busted and are scared spitless about going to jail. So you come running to Uncle Sam for help. You're not the first, ya know." He leaned in. "You're not up for a felony, are ya?"

I flicked my hand. "Naw, just baby shit."

He bobbed his head from side to side like a Muhammad Ali taunt. "Baby shit being...?"

I sighed. "Dine and dash, resisting, and the cops don't like my driving style. Criminal damage, maybe contributing to the delinquency of a minor, and I got busted for some pot once. I had to do four weekends in jail for that one. I got busted a couple of days ago for the fourth time."

He leaned away and held his hands up. "Whoa. I'm just a Navy recruiter. The man you need lives at the North Pole. Maybe you should just do your time and try to be a better citizen."

"Please, Mr. Lawson." I clasped my hands together in prayer fashion. "I'm really up against it here. My dad walked out last year, and my mom kicked me out of the house. I don't have anywhere to go. Not to mention some guy named Tyrone might want to make me his Sally in the big house. Pleeeease...."

He scratched the back of his head. "Well, you can't just waltz in here 'cause you're afraid Tyrone might plug ya one. First, you'll have to take an ASVAB test."

"That's okay. I don't have herpes or anything."

Lawson rolled his eyes. "No, ASVAB. Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery test. It mostly checks your math and reading skills. We have standards, ya know. We don't take in stupid people, we send them to the Army." He laughed. "Minimum score for entry is one hundred. If you pass, I'll use my magic pen and get you in." He tapped his finger against his lips. "I'm a bit low on numbers this month, but you would take some seriously creative paperwork. Let's just hope you're not stupid. For your sake."

#

Ten days later, I went back to the recruiter's office to get the results from the ASVAB test. I didn't want to get my hopes too high that I scored well since I rarely applied my brain to the right channel. I preferred to talk shit, a trait I inherited from Dad. A nervous shudder shot through my body as I entered the recruiter's office.

Petty Officer Lawson sat at his desk drinking coffee when I walked in. He looked up. "Tyler, hello. I just went over your scores. Boy, this is tough."

I hung my head and waited for *him* to tell me I was useless.

"You do surprise me, ya know?" He took a sip of coffee. "Two hundred and twenty-seven. So, you're not stupid, but now I have to get you in. I do need to make my quota and a two twenty-seven would look impressive."

"You mean I passed?"

"Passed? Boy, you smoked it. I didn't think you'd do it." He stroked his moustache. "Smart-ass punk comes in here, talking a lot of crap, afraid of taking it up the jacksy in the big house. I gotta admit, I didn't expect much, but you did it." He shook his head grinning at me. "Now I have to do my bit." He smacked his hand on the desk and grabbed a pen. "Okay, let's make you a sailor."

I slid back into the chair and stared at him, not believing that something was actually going right in my shitty life.

"So Whattaya wanna be?" he asked.

"Don't know really? Maybe something in the medical field. Mom would have to be proud of me if I was a doctor or something."

He chuckled. "Well, I don't think we can make you a doctor, maybe a Hospital Corpsman. Let me check." Lawson flipped through a large loose leaf notebook. "Sorry, Tyler. There's no openings for Corpsman training for six months, and I have to be able to tell the judge I can get you in quick." He flipped through the book again. "Besides, you know what they call Corpsmen?" He kept flipping through the papers.

"No, what?"

He stopped flicking. "Pecker checker." He laughed and went back to the book. "Ah, immediate openings. What about a welder?"

I leaned in. "Yeah, that sounds cool."

"Good. After boot camp, you'll go to technical school in San Francisco. It's three months training and you'll learn loads." He counted on his fingers as he spoke. "Welding, pipefitting, sheet metal, carpentry, among other things. Plus, you'll have extensive training in firefighting and damage control."

"What's it called?" I asked, getting excited about the career change from petty criminal to sailor.

"You'll be a Hull Maintenance Technician; HT. You'll be the jack of all trades on the ship and an expert in damage control."

"Do HT's have a nickname?" I hoped it'd be something cool, like Smoker or Flames.

He smiled. "Yup. Turd chasers."

"*Turd chaser?*"

"Yeah, in addition to everything else, you guys will be in charge of the ship's sewage system. And I'll tell ya what, you're gonna be spending a lot of time unclogging toilets and urinals. Seawater and piss goes together like molasses."

I threw my shoulders back. "Oh, like a plumber."

He half-smiled. "Sure."

#

Petty Officer Lawson worked hard over the next few weeks before my court appearance. I took loads of tests to make sure I was physically fit and of sound mind. Fooled them on the last one, and Lawson found his magic pen. Four weeks after my arrest, I walked into the courtroom with Petty Officer Lawson to face judgment. This time, my outlook was a little more optimistic.

The gray-haired man behind the bench held my future in his hands. He looked powerful sitting behind the wall of mahogany with flags at either end of his judicial platform. I stood at the table in a suit, the one I used to wear to church. It had been over a year since I last wore it. I tried to look solemn and respectful, just as Petty Officer Lawson said I should.

"Haven't I seen you in my courtroom before, Mr. Chambers?"

"Yes, Your Honor," I replied.

The judge shuffled through some papers. "Oh yes, here we have it. Three short months ago, on October 9th, you stood before me denying you were in possession of marijuana. But you were found guilty, and I gave you a taste of life behind bars. I had hoped you'd see the error of your ways. It appears as though you haven't. How do you wish to plead to the current charges?"

"Your Honor, if I may," came the anticipated interruption from the man standing beside me. The judge nodded his approval.

"I'm Petty Officer Lawson, the Navy recruiter for Fort Wayne. If you would be kind enough to spare Mr. Chambers a custodial sentence, I have prepared all the paperwork and can have him enlisted in the Navy and in boot camp within ten days. He has agreed to a four-year enlistment."

"Mr. Chambers, is it your desire and intention to enlist in the United States Navy?" the judge asked.

"Yes, Your Honor."

The judge looked at the man sitting at the table adjacent to us. "Does the prosecution have any objections?"

The bald prosecutor in a blue pin-striped suit rose. "No, Your Honor."

The judge returned his look to me. "That sounds like the wisest decision you've made in your young life. But let me tell you something, Mr. Chambers."

The judge leaned forward from his high and mighty position. "If you don't get your backside in the Navy within the next two weeks, or if I ever see you in my courtroom again, in or out of the Navy, or if you get discharged from the Navy in less than four years for any reason other than honorably, I promise you that you will serve a minimum of one hundred and eighty days in the county jail. Maybe even prison. And if it wasn't for Petty Officer Lawson here today, you'd be on your way to jail at this very moment. Do I make myself perfectly clear?"

"Yes, Your Honor."

Three 'Yes, Your Honors' and I managed to avert jail. I got a deal that was in some ways like a plea bargain. Serving four years in Uncle Sam's sailing club looked a better option than serving six months with Tyrone.

I smiled as Lawson and I left the courtroom, walking over the seal of the great state of Indiana etched in the marble floor. A warm feeling fell over me. I beat the rap. Dad would be proud.

Chapter 3

July 1982

After graduating boot camp and technical school, I received orders to shore duty at the submarine repair base in Pearl Harbor. I liked the idea that I would only be fixing submarines and not serving on them. The idea of going to sea on boats that are supposed to sink just didn't sound sane.

I walked into the airport where a Hawaiian girl draped a lei around my neck. Wearing my dress-white uniform, I pushed my way through the sea of tourists in Aloha shirts with cameras dangled around their necks. I made it to the luggage carousel, pulled my large green seabag off the line and slung it on my back.

The duty driver, a sailor from the base, greeted me at the airport. We stepped outside into the baking heat where a distinctive sweet smoky smell wafted through the air. The driver told me to get used to it as that was the burning sugar cane from surrounding fields. We hopped into a gray van and made the journey to the port of worldwide infamy.

The mountains along the horizon reached for the sky, a symbol of the American perception of paradise. Yes, I had arrived. Honolulu offered new excitement. A far cry from trying to outrun the Fort Wayne police department. The prospect of beautiful weather, girls and exotic surroundings excited me.

A lump in my throat nearly choked me as we drove onto the base. The Arizona Memorial lay in the distance. It served as a reminder that I was there on serious and potentially deadly business. A great sense of pride and sadness swept over me.

I checked into the barracks and saw Mark Richards' name on the roster. Mark was my friend from technical 'A' school. We had spent three months together in San Francisco and we got on well. I saw my name on the list alongside his for room 321.

I walked up the outdoor concrete staircase to the top floor of the three-story tan and brown building. A large open-air lanai served as the walkway to the rooms. I entered the room and found Mark sitting on one of the beds with his back toward me. Inside were two metal frame beds, a couple of brown wardrobes with matching chests of drawers, and a table with two chairs.

"Geez," I sighed, "this is supposed to be a high-class place, but they just let any old riff-raff in here, don't they?"

Mark turned around. "Tyler! How ya doing, buddy?" He came over and we hugged. His square jaw and dark brown eyes blessed him with movie star good looks.

"How long have you been here?" I asked.

He ran a hand through his sandy-blond hair. "A couple of days. Got assigned to the flex-hose shop. Great shop, easy work."

"Flex-hose shop? What's that? We didn't learn about that in 'A' school."

"They use flexible hoses around machinery that moves a lot." He interlocked his fingers and moved them in a wave-like motion. "The hoses flex and take the stress that would crack regular pipes at the weld. Anyway, have you seen the hot babe in admin? Man, oh, man. I'd buy her a bike if she promised I could lick the seat after a ride."

"That good, huh?"

"Tyler, this chick is so hot she makes hell look cold. Brown hair, puppy dog eyes, tight ass, flawless face, and tits just the right size." He cupped his hand to about the size of a softball.

"Good inventory. No, I haven't met her. I'm going to check in to the division in a minute, though. I'll look her over. Maybe I'll even ask her out if she's as good as you say."

"Yeah, right." He slapped my shoulder. "She's a third class petty officer, *Fireman* Chambers. She's like a glamour model in uniform. Sorry, pal, you don't stand a chance."

"Wanna bet?"

"She outranks you. You can't ask her out."

"Phbbt." I put my hand on his shoulder. "A third class? That's like a glorified Fireman. That's only one measly rank above me. Besides, she's still enlisted. It's not like she's a commissioned officer or anything, and I paid careful attention to the rules on fraternization in boot camp."

He rubbed his jaw. "I missed that class. I had my wisdom teeth pulled and was in bed all day."

"Well, as long as she's not in my direct chain of command, she's fair game. Frowned upon, but not illegal. And you said she's admin, so she's like a secretary."

"Okay, fifty bucks says you won't get a date with her. I'll even give you a month."

"Done, but if she's a dog, the bet's off." We shook hands. I cleaned myself up before heading over to the admin section of the division to check in.

#

I climbed up the outdoor metal staircase and pushed open the door which identified the space as the 'R-1 Division office'. Numerous photographs of

submarines dotted the walls and the customary flag fluttered from the breeze of the open window. A door labeled 'Lieutenant Johnson' remained closed next to the lone desk in the room. A vision of outstanding natural beauty sat behind an immaculately tidy desk, typing. She looked the perfect specimen of female anatomy. If only I was a cop and could shout, 'Spread 'em'. She would give the phrase a whole new meaning.

She looked up as I stood in front of her desk. Her brunette hair was feathered in the front and tied up at the back. Brown irises filled most of her eyes, not leaving much white around the sides. She had a small nose that sent out the 'cute' message, high cheekbones and perfect 'kiss me' lips.

"Fireman Chambers, reporting for duty." I handed her my paperwork.

She took my orders and flipped through the papers. I admired her stunning good-looks as she searched through the folder. "Everything appears to be in order," she said. "I'll just see which shop you'll be going to."

"Any chance of going to the welding shop?" I asked.

She rustled through her papers. I eyed her name tag above her left breast. 'Knight'. My tongue inadvertently moved across my lips.

"Like, there's no opening there. I'll assign you to the flex-hose shop."

"Thank you, Petty Officer Knight. Any chance of you showing me where it is?" I gave her my best smile.

"No chance. Escorting is not in my job description." She handed me a base map.

"Too bad," I mumbled, before redirecting my words in her direction. "That's cool. But what about the bar on base? That's important, right?"

She glared at me.

I clasped my hands behind my back. "I thought maybe I could take you for a drink for being so helpful. Not to mention that I need to know where it is for future reference."

She scooted her chair back and stood up from her desk, staring at me. She was only about three inches shorter than my six-foot height. She pointed to the third class insignia on her arm. "E-four," she said. She pointed to my blank sleeve. "E-three."

She looked down at my paperwork. Pointing back to herself, "Like, twenty-one." Pointing at me, "nineteen," she said. "Kind of a gap on two counts. I might be a little out of your league, don't ya think? Like, way out."

Okay. So she likes herself. She's still hot and if I can get Mark to pay me fifty bucks to go out with her, well, that kind of makes me a gigolo. The challenge has been set and I was up for it. A little stroking of her enormous ego and she'd be eating out of my hand. I cleared my throat. "I happen to appreciate older, more

sophisticated, higher ranking women. Not to mention gorgeous. You don't happen to have a bike by any chance, do you?"

"As a matter of fact, I do. Why?"

I had a job to keep myself calm at that revelation. "It's just that I used to repair bikes before I joined, in one of my dad's shops. If you ever have any trouble with it, let me know." I checked out her shapely legs below her skirt. "You wanna make sure you get those long legs fully extended. Could give you back problems if you ride it wrong. Might need to have the seat adjusted to make sure you get it right. I'll be happy to have a lic—, uh, look if you like."

"In your dreams, Chambers. Now go to your shop." She shooed me away with the back of her hand.

I left her office slightly dejected, but determined to get a date with her. Not just to win the bet, but also because she was a fine example of a reason to lust. And she had an attitude. The chases were much more fun when a chick had a bit of spunk. I followed the base map she had given me and located the flex-hose shop.

After I checked in to the shop, Mark came into the shop supervisor's office and offered to show me to my work station. He wore coveralls that looked cleaned and pressed but were covered with black powder. The powder also dusted his face and blond hair. He looked like some dirty homeless kid.

He led me toward the back of the shop. "What did you think of her?" he asked as we passed bulky machines.

I gave a thumbs-up gesture. "Yeah, she was practically begging me for it, but I got a month. I'm going to string her along for a while. You know, play hard to get. Make her beg for it. Just make sure you have fifty bucks put away for me."

#

A few days later, I stepped outside the shop door for a smoke break around ten o'clock. A blonde-haired girl from the building next door came out and lit a cigarette. She looked to be about five and a half feet tall and had a petite build. When she glanced at me, I smiled. She smiled back.

She walked over and looked at me with her striking blue eyes. "You're new here, aren't you?" She was well-tanned and her complexion had light acne scarring. Her bright smile and confident manner gave me the impression that she was a fun chick. I guessed she was mid-twenties and she had a mole just above her lip at the right corner of her mouth.

"Yeah, checked in a few days ago." I offered my hand. "Tyler Chambers."

"Debbie Meyers. Aloha." Her soft palm touched mine. "Once you get to know

which bars are sailor-friendly you'll have a great time here. Not all the locals are pleased to see us white people, or haoles, as they call us."

"Are you offering to—"

"Fireman Chambers." Petty Officer Knight appeared and interrupted us. She walked up with some papers. "You need to sign this. It's a form to let disbursing know you're here so you can get paid." She handed me a form. Debbie glared at her. Knight looked the other way. I signed it and handed it back to her. She grabbed it and walked down the street.

As much as I wanted to chat to Debbie, I couldn't let an opportunity like this slip through my fingers. "Excuse me a minute, Debbie." I patted the side of her shoulder and headed off after Petty Officer Knight.

I jogged down the street, calling out after her. She stopped and turned, waiting for me to catch up. She placed a hand on her hip and tapped her foot on the pavement impatiently.

As soon as we stood face to face, I felt a sense of nervousness pulse through my body. That wasn't like me, but her self-confidence and attitude of superiority was somewhat intimidating. I shifted my gaze from her beautiful brown eyes to the ground, then back again.

I shoved my hands in my back pockets. "Umm...Petty Officer Knight, I was just wondering, if you're not busy Friday night, would you like to go out with me? Maybe catch a movie or go see *The Action Men*. They're a band playing down at Bullwinkle's Bar in town. The drummer's a good friend of mine." If she wanted to meet the drummer I'd have to say he was off sick because I didn't have a clue who he was.

"Chambers, I thought I made it clear. I'm a Petty Officer, not a babysitter." She spun on her toe and walked off.

Ouch. For crying out loud. She was only two years older than me. Who the hell did she think she was? I walked back to Debbie with 'babysitter' echoing in my head. A simple 'no' would have been enough.

Debbie took a drag off her cigarette as I walked toward her. Her eyes glued to Knight's back. She tilted her head upward and blew out smoke. "Bitch."

"You know her?"

"Yeah, Holly Knight. Bitch extraordinaire. She thinks she's God's gift to the human race. Give a girl a pretty face and a nice body and she thinks the world should stand in admiration of her. Stay well away from her. She's trouble."

#

After that first morning, Debbie and I made a point of meeting up for our

smoke breaks. We always had a good laugh, and since Holly kept turning me down, I tried to charm Debbie out of her clothes. She slapped me the first few times, but after that it was usually down to her rolling her eyes, which led me to believe that it wasn't completely a lost cause pursuing her; just a minor setback.

We both left work one afternoon around four o'clock and I escorted her to her barracks in the warm sun shower. The light drizzle was refreshing and relieved some of the humidity.

"Ya know, sometimes this Navy thing really sucks." She pulled out a cigarette and lit up as we walked.

"How's that?" I asked.

"I got tickets to the Pat Benatar concert coming up. My supervisor changed my duty day and now I have to work that night." She took a big inhale of smoke. "I begged him to wait until after the concert. You know what he said?" She stopped and faced me.

I shrugged.

She wrinkled her nose. "Tough shit." She resumed walking.

"I'll take 'em off your hands if you want. Not quite the Rolling Stones, but Benatar's all right."

"I should charge a premium. She's been sold out for months, ya know?" She flicked her cigarette to the ground and squished it with her foot.

"How 'bout I buy you a drink. Premium payment kinda thing."

"How about you buy me drinks all night?" She stopped and looked at me. "Only at Dolphin's. It'll be much cheaper if we stay at the bar on base."

"Deal." We shook hands.

After we both went back to our rooms and showered, I stopped by her room and escorted her to Dolphin's. We walked into the bar and crossed the deserted dance floor as *Our Lips Are Sealed* by the Go-Go's played on the jukebox. Tables were lined around the edge of the dance area. Four pool tables sat off to the left, halfway into the club, with the bar off to the right. We stopped and got a beer and a Black Russian before heading to the quieter section in the back. Laughter created a relaxed, happy atmosphere as cigarette smoke swirled in the air hanging over the fake tiffany lights.

We sat next to each other at a table in the corner away from the clacking of the pool balls. After several rounds of drinks and some easy-going conversation, I decided to dig a little deeper and see if she would be game for some fun.

"So, you got a boyfriend back home?" I asked.

"Naw. Long story. What about you? Any girlfriends?"

"No, I'm a free spirit. Besides, I haven't found that girl that makes me go weak at the knees yet." I tilted my head toward her. "Although, I've certainly found

someone who makes me stand up in the right place." I nudged her.

"Why, Mr. Chambers, I do believe you're getting fresh with me. Or am I just drunk?"

"Probably both. You know what? I got some Jack Daniel's in my room. Why don't we go back, do some shots, and play strip poker." I jiggled my eyebrows.

"I can trust you, right?" She placed her fingertip between her teeth and bit down.

I nodded with a big grin. Anticipation surged through my body.

She turned serious. "I didn't mean to lead you on. You've been hittin' on me since you arrived. I like you, Tyler, and I like flirting back." She leaned in and whispered. "But I don't really go out with men, if you know what I mean."

I rubbed my chin. "Oh... Catholic, huh? You just spending some time in the Navy before you go off to the convent?"

She smiled and leaned in closer. Her lilac perfume tickled my nose. Her lips brushed against my ear as she softly whispered. "Let's just say, I probably get as much pussy as you do." She leaned back, grinning, searching my face for a reaction.

My jaw dropped. She placed her finger under my chin and gently pushed it back up.

"Oh... I see." I grabbed a cigarette and lit it, followed by a slug of beer. "So, you like women in the same way I do, huh?"

Her smile broadened. "Since you put it like that, I suppose I do. Nothing personal, I just think men are jerks." She lowered her voice and slurred slightly. "I got drunk one night with a girlfriend of mine. We did...well, you know, intimate things. We carried on seeing each other for a while after that. I never considered myself gay or even thought about it until I did it with another girl." She put her finger to her lips. "Shh.... Don't tell anyone. I don't want to get kicked out."

I nodded affirming my secrecy. "So it wasn't like you saw the head cheerleader naked in the shower at school and got the equivalent of a female boner or anything?"

Debbie giggled. "No, nothing like that. I guess I was a late bloomer."

I puffed on my cigarette. "So... you and me ain't gonna happen then?"

"Not likely."

I play-punched her jaw. "Ah, what the hell. You're too good a friend to drop just because you won't put out."

She slapped my shoulder and smiled.

"You know what?" I raised my beer. "If I were a woman, I'd probably be a lesbian too. Cheers."

We clinked glasses and carried on drinking.

#

My head throbbed the next morning as Mark and I got dressed for work. I made a mental note to myself to take it easy on the booze on workdays in the future. I sat polishing my boots before heading out to work.

"I know you were drunk last night, but do you remember what you said?" Mark asked.

"No, not really. It's all pretty hazy after I left Dolphin's." I spit on the boot and brushed some more.

"You said Debbie told you she's gay."

I stopped brushing. "Shit. I didn't, did I?"

"Relax." He fanned his hand at me. "I'm not gonna tell anyone. I like Debbie."

"Swear."

"Swear. So, how you getting on with the Petty Officer Knight situation?" he asked. "You only got a couple of days left, you know?"

"I know, but I've been spending a lot of time with Debbie." I put my shoe shine kit away and put my boots on. "Anyway, it won't take much of the charm offensive to get Holly wrapped around my finger. I can tell she really likes me, I've just been playing it cool."

"Yeah, right. Maybe you should ask Debbie how she would ask Holly out. I'm sure she'd give you some pointers." He chuckled. "I'm telling you, sunshine, you set the bar a little too high for yourself on this one."

Mark may have been right. Whenever our paths did cross, I did my best to soften Holly up for the killer date line, but she kept blowing me out of the water like she was some kind of princess and I was a frog with some incurable venereal disease.

#

I glanced at the calendar and frowned. One more day and I'd owe Mark fifty bucks. "Okay," I mumbled to myself, "It's today or else." I went to make one final attempt. Not only could I not afford to give Mark fifty bucks, but he'd never let me live it down if I couldn't get a date with Holly after all of my previous talk. If it wasn't for the money I would have given up on Holly and kept the pressure on Debbie, even though the chances of screwing a lesbian may have been slim. But if I could get a date with Holly, she certainly would be the ultimate trophy.

I left the room and walked to Holly's office, mentally rehearsing what I would

say. I walked up the outdoor stairs and nervously opened the door. She sat typing as I entered her office.

I walked over to her desk. "Hi, Petty Officer Knight. I just came over to get the Cost of Living Allowance forms. I'm gonna move off base, so I need to make sure I get the pay adjustment."

She got up and walked over to a filing cabinet. She returned to her desk, stamped the form with dates and handed it to me. "Here's the COLA form. Bring it back to me once you've filled it out."

"Umm...Holly. Do you mind if I call you Holly?"

She glowered at me. "Yes, I do, as it happens."

"Have it your way." I placed my hands behind my back hoping she'd read my body language as a show of openness. In reality, it hid my crossed fingers. "Petty Officer Knight, I have two tickets to the Pat Benatar concert Friday night. Would you like to come with me?"

"You mean, like a date?" She put her hands on her hips. "And how did you get tickets?"

I smiled and shrugged.

"I've been trying for months to get tickets for her gig." She shook her head. "No. Forget it. I thought I made it clear I'm not interested."

"And I just wanted to make it clear that I am. Holly, just give me a chance. One date, and if you think I'm a jerk after that, blow me off and I'll never bother you again. Promise." I raised my hand hoping she'd believe me if I gave her a Boy Scout salute. "In the meantime, you get dinner and get to see a concert that's impossible to get tickets for. Whattaya say?"

Holly rolled her eyes and bit her bottom lip. Her head dropped and she momentarily looked at the floor. "Well, I do love Pat Benatar," she said quietly. She snapped her head up and held up her index finger. "Okay, Chambers, one date. But if you bug me after that, so help me God I'll put you on report for sexual harassment." She tried to look angry, but any furrowing her eyebrows did was softened by those big brown eyes. Her voice went soft. "Pat Benatar is my favorite. You're lucky the concert is sold out or I wouldn't even consider this." She poked my chest and her tone turned harsh. "And if I were you, I wouldn't be expecting anything other than dinner and the concert. So get any thoughts of groping me or a goodnight kiss out of your head. Understand?"

I smiled. *Bingo*. "Cool. What time should I pick you up?"

"I'll drive. I'll pick you up at your barracks at 1830."

"Six-thirty it is. See you tomorrow night."

Chapter 4

I returned to the barracks triumphantly and bounded in to find Mark lying on his bed reading a Louis L'Amour book.

"Uh, huh. I'll take that fifty bucks now." I rubbed my hands together. "I'll need it to take Holly out to dinner." Mark bolted upright. "You didn't. You got a date with her?"

"Of course I did." I brushed my knuckles against my chest. She insisted that it be a non-fucking date, but she hasn't had the Chamber's charm yet. She'll be begging for it before the night's over."

Mark fished in his back pocket for his wallet. "I thought the Navy had sight tests, but obviously not. Holly must be blind." He handed me the money.

"Let's hope so." I ran my hands over my chest. "My whole body can be read in Braille." I took the money and blew him an air kiss. "I'm going to see Debbie. Later."

I walked over to the women's barracks and knocked on Debbie's door. She answered wearing a Betty Boop t-shirt and boy shorts. She nodded for me to come in and shut the door behind me. I sat at the table and waited for her to join me. She sat down and placed her elbows on the table, resting her chin on her palms and looked at me with those swimmingly deep blue eyes.

"So, what's up?" she asked.

I raised my eyebrows. "I got a date with Holly."

"Knight?" she shrieked.

I nodded but suppressed my beam of joy so not too appear too boastful. "Yeah."

"Tyler, I told you to stay away from her. She's trouble. You don't want anything to do with her."

I gave her a wink. "I wouldn't have asked her if you were putting out."

She shook her head and looked down at the table. "Look, you know I told you that I had a thing with a girlfriend?"

"Yeah."

She lifted her head so her eyes met mine. "It was with Holly."

"What? No way. You mean she's gay?" I flicked a cigarette from the pack and lit up.

"I don't think she's hardcore lesbian. Probably more bi. Maybe even straight, but just tried experimenting. I don't know. She was my first woman, and I fell in love with her. I thought she felt the same way. We were together for about four months. In the end, she dumped me, and she got nasty about it."

Holy crap. Trust me to pick all the gay ones. No wonder she braced me for a

non-sexual encounter. But Debbie did say 'Maybe even straight'. Even bi would do.

#

I paced the sidewalk outside the barracks, smoking a cigarette and waiting for Holly. I had recurring twinges in my belly and groin sensing the date could go either way. A great success or a total flop. I hoped for the former.

A red, 1965 Ford Mustang pulled up outside the barracks. What a classic. Holly motioned for me to come over and I got in. She dressed casually in jeans and a buttoned-up blue and white New York Yankees baseball jersey. The baggy shirt didn't offer any outline of the perfect softballs hiding underneath.

"So, this is our big date," I said.

"Like, I guess so. Probably bigger for you than me. But, I must admit, I've been looking forward to it. I am so into Pat Benatar. I still don't know how you got tickets."

I casually shrugged. "Can I just say how nice your hair looks?"

She looked in the mirror and fiddled with her fringe. "Thanks. I thought I'd try something different."

"It's perfect. Hope you like Italian. I asked around and heard good things about Alfredo's down in Waikiki, so I booked a table. Ever been there?"

"No, I haven't, but I love Italian. Wow, you really put some effort into this. I figured you'd just take me to some crappy hamburger joint."

"Are you kiddin'?" I extended my open hand toward her. "A stunning woman like you? I can tell you're used to the finer things in life. And I sense you're pretty special. I only got one shot at this, so I have to do my best."

"I bet you've been charming the girls since, like, puberty." She put her finger on her bottom lip and pulled it down.

I looked down and squeezed my shoulders in. "Naw, I'm pretty shy, really. It's just that my dad always taught me to be respectful of women." Throwing my shoulders back and sitting upright, I said, "I really hope I get to serve under a woman President one day."

"So, you're going to be in for like a hundred years?"

"No, they say Mondale is going to run with that Ferraro woman in '84. If he gets in, then gets popped, we got a woman Commander-in-Chief. I'd be proud."

"Why, Tyler Chambers. You do surprise me. So you don't class yourself as a sexist pig then?" She smiled.

"No way." I feigned disdain. "I detest sexists."

She reached over and patted my hand. "We might get along after all." She

fluttered her eyelashes which sent flutters through my stomach and straight to my crotch.

"I hope so." I knew I could break her down. Good looking and gullible. Figuratively speaking, I had her licked. Now if I could only make it literal.

#

Under my direction, we arrived at the restaurant and the hostess escorted us to a table. Holly reached for her chair, but I beat her to it and slid it out for her, then helped her scoot back in. She looked at me and smiled, running her hand over the red and white chequered tablecloth. "Real linen. Makes a change. I so hate paper tablecloths."

Wax from the candle dripped down its wine bottle holder beneath the soft flame, while Dean Martin singing *That's Amore* softly played in the background. We looked over the menu. When the waitress appeared, Holly ordered spaghetti with meatballs. I ordered fettuccini and a bottle of Chianti. She looked at me and nodded as though I spoke fluent Italian.

The waiter brought the bottle of wine to the table and showed me the label. I nodded my approval. He opened the bottle and poured a small amount in my glass for tasting. I sniffed it as I had seen done on TV, and took a small sip, swishing it around like a mouthful of Listerine. Although there was nothing wrong with it, I insisted it was corked and sent it back. Holly seemed impressed.

After dinner, we went to the concert. Holly danced, sang, flicked my lighter, and waved her arms over her head. She turned out to be quite the rock chick and Pat Benatar went up in my estimation. We left the concert and sat in her car talking for a few moments.

"Tonight was so awesome, dude. Thanks for asking me out. You really know how to treat a girl. Wow!" She looked in the rear-view mirror and ran her fingers through her hair. "Lots of people say I look like Benatar. Can you see the resemblance?"

"Of course I can." I tugged my earlobe. "Hey, I bet you sing like her too. Come on, tell the truth," I coaxed.

"Well, I am a pretty good singer, but my dad made me play in the band at school." She held her head back flicked her hair like a diva.

"Really? What'd you play?"

"The trombone."

"Oh. Do you still play?"

She sighed, seemingly reminiscing about her past brass brilliance for a moment. "I might be a little rusty, but I'm sure it would come back quickly."

"Personally, I like the sound of a rusty trombone." I smiled.

Holly laughed. "That's not how I meant it, but that's funny." She reached over and patted my hand. She started up the car and we drove away heading toward base. "You were such a gentleman tonight. Not many guys open doors for women anymore. And the last guy who took me out made us go Danish. I mean, like really." She threw her hand in the air and rolled her eyes.

"I think you might mean 'go Dutch.'"

"Like, whatever."

"Well, you're a real lady and deserve to be treated like one. It's not often I get to spend time with a classy woman like you." I lifted her hand off the gear shift, laid her palm in mine and gently stroked the back of her hand. "Besides, we wouldn't want you breaking one of those pretty little nails, now would we?"

She momentarily took her eyes off the road and looked down at our hands together. She scrunched her shoulders together and smiled.

So far everything had gone to plan. I was sure I caught her a few times giving me the 'do me' look, so why not. It would be the perfect way to finish off the date. "Umm...can I ask you something? And I hope you don't get the wrong impression."

"Like, fire away."

I got lost in her big brown eyes for a moment, then pushed on. "Is there any chance I could stay at your house tonight?"

Holly gasped and put her hand to her chest. "You're certainly not backward in coming forward, are you?"

"No, I didn't mean it like that," I said shaking my head. "It's just that my roommate snores like a pig. I haven't had a proper night's sleep in weeks. Even if it means crashing on the couch, I just want some peace and quiet for a night."

She lowered her head and looked down. "Well...I guess it would be okay." The corners of her mouth turned up. "Let's go back to my place, have a few drinks, and we'll sort out the sleeping arrangements."

"Thanks, Holly. That's very kind of you. I promise I'll be on my best behavior."

She turned toward me and smiled. "I'm not so sure I want you on your best behavior."

#

After we sucked down a bottle and a half of Chardonnay, Holly suggested we retire to her bedroom. I was impressed with her collection of stuffed bears on the bed. There must have been twenty or more. Everything was very lacey and

feminine and acted as a powerful tool of seduction. Not that I needed much encouragement in that department. Once we got under the sheets, Holly unleashed herself. I never got the chance to find out if she snored, but she was loud in other ways. I worried the neighbors would come banging on the door telling her to orgasm quietly.

Waking mid-morning on Saturday, I found Holly snuggled into my chest with my arm around her. I admired her adorable face, but there was something about her that bugged me. All through our date, she seemed a little dense. And all that Valley girl bullshit talk. It was like really getting on my nerves. *Damn it!* Now she had me doing it. I got the impression we wouldn't be having any discussions about quantum physics. Barbie dolls, maybe.

She awoke and looked at me. A smile crossed her face as she stroked my chest.

"Well, you didn't snore, but I still didn't get much sleep last night," I joked. "That was a great night, Holly. You're a little tigress."

"You're not so bad yourself. You wanna stick around for the rest of the weekend? I can take you back Monday morning when we go to work. We can just stay in bed and like...." She kissed my chest and worked her way down until her head disappeared under the covers.

I let out a quiet moan. "Umm...I know you can't talk right now, but yeah, I'd love to stay."

#

We drove back to base Monday morning and pulled up in front of the barracks. I leaned over and gave her a kiss.

"Thanks, Holly. That was an incredible weekend. Maybe we'll do it again sometime."

Her jaw dropped. "What?"

"You know. Maybe our paths will cross again sometime?"

"Of course our paths will cross again. We're like a couple now." She beamed.

"Umm...a couple, huh?" I wiped my palms on my pants. "Don't you think we should take it a little slow for now?"

"Take it slow?" Her eyebrows knitted together. "We just spent the entire weekend together. I don't even usually put out on the first date. If we were taking it slow you would have never seen the inside of my bedroom...Mr. Slow-Poke. I don't know what you're thinking, but we are so like a couple now." She scowled at me for several moments. "I'm not interested in just getting my brains screwed out. I don't do...you know...*it*...unless the guy is boyfriend material." Her

nostrils tightened. "I'm not a slut."

I shifted uncomfortably in my seat. "No, I'm not suggesting you are. I thought we were just having a bit of fun."

"Are you dumping me? Because if you are—"

"No, not at all," I interrupted. God. Show a girl a good time and they start planning the silver wedding anniversary.

She stroked my forearm and smiled. "No, of course you're not dumping me. You're not that insensitive—or stupid. Look, Tyler, I know it's probably a big step for you to date an older woman. And a higher ranking one as well." She scrunched her nose and leaned in. "Just think of me as the naughty older woman."

Holy crap. She would have never even been old enough to be my babysitter, but she thinks she's Mrs. Robinson. "No, you're right, Holly. I'm probably too young and immature for you. You need an older, more sophisticated guy. Someone who understands older women." I longed to hear her sigh deeply and say I was right.

She stroked my cheek. "Don't worry, I can teach you. Most older women wouldn't bother with someone as young as you. But you can be my toy-boy. I'll sophisticate you." She put her index finger between her lips and slid it in and out.

I swallowed hard and nodded. "Wow. Would you really do that for me? I mean, I don't want to cramp your style or anything." She made me nervous. *She* must have been playing hard to get, and now she wasn't going to let go.

"Hey, we're boyfriend and girlfriend. I'll be patient. And gentle." She giggled. "I only see you, you only see me. Most guys would love to have someone like me hanging on their arm. Don't worry. I'll teach you to act older and no one will be able to tell you're my toy-boy." She raised her shoulders together. "You're a lucky guy."

"Umm...yeah." My eyes darted around the inside of the Mustang. "I'm the lucky one here."

"Damn right you are. You know how many guys try to get in my panties and fail?" She looked at me like she expected an answer.

I don't know. Fifty-one? "Lots I bet."

"Hundreds. But I let you, so start showing your appreciation." Her eyes pierced through any defense I may have offered.

I needed time to think. "Of course. I'll try to do better." I forced a smile, leaned in and gave her a quick kiss. I got out of the car and watched her drive away.

I stood there with my head hung, staring at the ground. How the hell did that happen? Fifty bucks and a weekend of jamming the best looking girl on base. I

was on such a high. Now I was practically engaged.
Someone tapped my shoulder and I turned around.
"Hi, Tyler. Rough weekend? You look like shit."
"Debbie. You got a minute? I really need to talk."

Chapter 5

Debbie walked with me back to my room. We sat side by side on my bed. She looked at me as I stared at the black and white floor tiles.

"Well, you know I had a date with Holly," I said.

"Yeah, with my tickets for Friday night, and I just saw you get out of her car on Monday morning. So, I take it things went well from your point of view."

A corner of my mouth turned up. "Yeah, I guess it did, until about fifteen minutes ago."

"She dumped you, huh?" She held a faint smile. "Well, I told you to stay away from her, Tyler. If it makes you feel any better, sorry." She patted my back.

"Dump me?" I stood up. "No, she wants some kind of committed relationship. I'm not ready to be monogamous." I paced the floor. "You must've noticed she's a bit flaky."

Her smile flattened and she stood up. "Yeah, but I loved her. People in love overlook things. You mean to say she's not the little gold nugget you thought she was?"

I pulled out a cigarette and lit up while I paced. "I only did it for a bet."

"You what? Oh, come on." She crossed her arms. "She's not ugly. Are you trying to tell me you only went out with her to win twenty bucks?"

"It was fifty, and that's not what I'm saying."

She rubbed her chin. "So... you fucked Holly to win some money. Now that mission's accomplished, you want out."

"No, look, Debs, it's not like that." I walked over and put my hand on her shoulder. "It was fun, and I would've taken her out again, but she's a bit whacko."

Her eyes blinked rapidly. "Thank you very much. The woman I loved and you tell me she's a nut job. What the hell does that make me? Debbie the loony lezzy?"

I took a drag. "I'm just saying she's not my type."

"Then tell her." Her eyes held a look of pain.

I sighed and threw my eyes toward the ceiling. "I tried to tell her. Kind of."

"Sorry, Tyler, but I'm not the person to be giving you advice on my ex-girlfriend. Holly really hurt me, but I'd still take her back if given the chance. As long as you're sticking it to her, that's not likely to happen, is it?"

"Debbie, don't be like that. Help me get away from her and you can swoop in and be the hero, give her a shoulder to cry on. Hell, you two can sit around and bad-mouth me and go back to your lesbian ways. Just tell me how to get her off my back."

Debbie chuckled. "Hey, that's pretty good, Tyler." She put her arm around me and looked me in the eyes. "Forget him, Holly," she said sarcastically. "Dump Tyler and let's go back to being lesbians. You know that little switch you have that says gay/straight." She touched my crotch. "Just switch it to lesbo, darling, and come back to being a flaming dyke." She stood up, kicked me in the shin and leaned toward me with her hands on her hips. "It doesn't work like that, Ty-Ty. I gave you the advice to stay away from her, but you ignored it. So figure it out yourself. I have to go."

As she turned toward the door, Mark came in wrapped in a towel and wearing flip-flops, his hair still wet from the shower.

"Hi, Deb—" he started.

Debbie bowled past him, pushing him out of the way and nearly knocking him over.

Mark looked at me and grinned. "What the hell was that all about? Don't tell me you did the double."

I threw my arms in the air. "Why can't a woman just have sex without some deep emotional tie attached to it?" I walked over and sat on the bed.

Mark pulled on his dungarees, grabbed a chair, and sat down facing me. "Okay, start at the beginning. What happened with you and Holly? You score?"

"Oh, man." I gave a little fist pump. "That chick's even better in real life than what you could ever fantasize about. She was sex on legs, all fours, back, knees, you name it."

Mark whistled. "Good job, man."

"Yeah, but..." I stopped to light a cigarette, then noticed the last one still burning in the ashtray. I lit a fresh one anyway. "I took fifty bucks off you and banged the best looking girl on base. When she dropped me off, she made it clear that we're in a relationship. Exclusive kind of thing."

"So? What's wrong with that? You said yourself the sex was good, and you'd have a hard time finding anyone better looking than her." He shook his head. "Good looking pussy on tap and you sit here moaning."

"Boooring. Besides, my dad used to tell me the thrill of the chase was the best part of a relationship. Well, I chased, she thrilled, relationship done, right? I don't need the drama of a full-time girlfriend." I fell back on the bed and kicked my feet in the air.

"I don't get it, man. What's your problem?"

"Man, she thinks she's Joan Collins or some old bitty and I'm a little Jimmy Osmond." I took a drag. "And she bugs the crap outta me. Oh, she's little Miss Efficiency in the office, but it's like she leaves her brain in a desk drawer when she punches out."

He leaned in. "Bugs you? How?"

I sat up. "She's so full of this Valley girl bullshit talk." I put my finger on my jaw and tilted my head. "Like, oh my God, Tyler," I said in a singsong voice. "You like so have to take me to the mall to get my hair and nails done."

Mark's eyes widened. "Like, dude, I get it." He laughed. He cocked his head to one side. "Like, is she totally into astrology, because it's so awesome to know the future from the horoscopes?"

"Probably. I bet she's a Cancer." I took a drag and shook my head. "And she's not exactly the sharpest tool in the box. She wanted to know why they make cars in Detroit and not in California. Because there are like so many people in California, they wouldn't have to ship them as far if they were made there. Yeah, she's good looking, and she knows it. And she has this annoying habit of tak—"

Mark put his hand up. "Okay, I get the picture. Well, she gave you a good weekend, but you're gonna have to dump her. She's going to drive you crazy by the sound of it. Buy her a dildo and tell her that's her new playmate." He smiled. "Anything else?"

"Yeah, I think I pissed Debbie off too. I just told her I'm banging her ex-girlfriend. You're right, I gotta give Holly the elbow. She's schizoid. I'll stop by her office after work, take her down to Dolphin's, and tell her it's over. Thanks, bud."

"By the way." Mark got up, walked over to my chest of drawers, picked up some papers off the top of it and held them up. "I saw these forms laying here. You planning on moving off base?"

"Oh, the COLA forms. No, I just needed an excuse to go see Holly so I could ask her out." I stood up. "I could hardly go in there and say," I grabbed my crotch. "'Hey, baby, want some of this?'"

He smiled. "Don't know. Might have worked."

#

I stood outside Holly's office a moment taking deep breaths. I was already nervous and I wasn't even dumping her yet. That would come later in the day.

I walked in and Holly sat at her desk typing, wearing small-lens glasses perched on the end of her perky nose. It gave her a new, sexy kind of look. Like the sophisticated teacher who gives the naughty schoolboy a spanking. *Mmm... Stop it, Tyler.* You're here to break up with the broad.

She stopped typing and looked up. "Tyler," she whispered. She took off her glasses and raced around to stand facing me in front of her desk. "I was just going to come find you in a minute. I need to talk to you. It's like real

important."

I wiped my sweat-soaked palms on my dungarees. "Yeah, I need to talk to you too."

"I'll pick you up at your barracks at 1700 and we'll go back to my place."

Shit! It's a long walk back to base from her place. "Can't we just meet at Dolphin's?"

"No, this is like super important. We can't let anyone else hear this."

I sighed. "Okay."

#

On the drive to Holly's apartment, I decided to bring up the subject of our future, or non-future as it was about to become. The sooner I told her, the shorter the walk back to base would be.

"Umm...Holly, I think you're a great gal—"

"Get outta the way, you chowder-head!" Holly screamed, shaking her fist at a little old man in a Ford Pinto in the lane next to us, just before she cut in front of him. She glanced over at me. "Sorry, you were saying?"

I gripped the armrest on the door and checked to make sure my seat belt was latched. "Well, I was just sayin'—"

"If this jerk thinks he cuttin' me off, he's got another thing comin'." She looked in her side-view mirror and gunned the Mustang, pushing me further into the seat. "Sorry, you were saying?"

She had enough going on without her 'boyfriend' dumping her while she was driving down a busy highway. "That's okay. It can wait."

We walked into her apartment and I sat on the black leather couch while she went into the kitchen to get us a drink. She flipped on the radio and the new number one song *Don't You Want Me Baby* by the Human League played. How fitting. Although I had been in her apartment before, my last visit focused on big, brown, bedroom eyes. This time, I noticed several brightly colored pieces of furniture around. A big red round chair occupied one corner; a blue bean bag chair rested against one wall and a green leather chair was centered across from the couch with a brass and glass coffee table in between them. Hardly matching, but it offered a retro look. The ceiling fan blew the scent of spring flowers around the room from a big bowl of potpourri sitting on the coffee table.

Holly returned with a bottle of Merlot and two wine glasses. After pouring the wine, she sat.

"I think we both need a drink before we talk," she said as she raised her glass. I raised mine and took a drink, having to stop myself from downing it in one

gulp.

I held up a cigarette. "You mind?"

She shook her head, went into the kitchen and returned with an ashtray, placing it on the table in front of me. I lit up and took a deep drag.

"Holly, there's something I need to say."

"Well, it'll have to wait. There's nothing that could be more important than what I have to tell you." She stopped, downed her drink then refilled it.

My heart skipped a beat. Maybe she was going to dump me. *Yes!* Should I cry? A few tears probably wouldn't hurt. Yeah, I'll think about that movie when the dog gets shot in the end. That always wells me up.

"I had to see the division officer and the assistant D.O., Lieutenant Johnson and Master Chief Steele today," she said. "They wanted me to do some research about you." She reached over and clutched my hand. "Baby, they want to kick you out of the Navy."

"What?" My mind went wild, frantically searching for stupid things I had done. I came up blank. "Kick me out? I haven't done anything." I grabbed the bottle of wine, topped my drink up, took a big gulp, and had another puff of my cigarette.

She turned toward me, kneeling on the couch. She rested her elbow on the back of the couch with her cheek pressed against her hand. "How many times were you arrested before you joined?"

"What difference does that make?"

"Like, a lot. Everyone working on submarines has to get a security clearance. That's why you haven't been allowed down on the subs yet. They go back and re-check everything, and dig a little deeper into your past. Apparently, your police record shows that you'd been arrested four times, but your enlistment papers only document two. What gives?"

"Shit." I leaned forward and slumped my head, studying Holly's orange shag carpet. I leaned back again. "Shit, shit, shit." I drew a deep breath. "The recruiter didn't think I'd get in with four arrests. He said two should be okay. He said if they accepted me, that would be the end of it."

She fiddled with her necklace. "Like, it probably would've been if you never had anything to do with submarines. But now that they know, the charge you're looking at is fraudulent enlistment. God, you are so gonna get busted. After some time in the brig, you'll be dishonorably discharged." Her big brown eyes focused on me as she sipped her wine.

"Well, it's his fault. He said that's what we needed to do, so I went along with it." I took another drink and a puff and forcefully stubbed my cigarette in the ashtray.

"Like, you signed it." She stared at me. "Ever heard of falsifying government documents?"

I dropped my head in my hands. "So that's it then. My Navy career's over before it ever got started. Shit. Now the judge is gonna throw me in the slammer for not doing four years. I'm totally screwed."

She put her hand on my back and rubbed. "Not necessarily." She took a sip of her wine. "It gets a bit boring typing up the same old papers day in and day out and I'm too smart to go brain dead. I need to have adrenaline rushes by doing risky things. I have an idea. I have to write to the recruiting office in Fort Wayne to get further documentation. When they write back, I'll type up a phony addendum. It's a form IP2601. I'll make it look like the recruiter's office sent it. Then, I'll copy their letterhead, and using that, type a new letter saying that you did tell them everything, but they didn't put it all down as they should have. That's why they have this addendum. The letter will say they failed to put it in with the rest of the paperwork."

I looked at her in disbelief. "Are you serious?"

"It won't be easy, but I think I can do it. I'm pretty good with paperwork. We'll have to backdate everything to before you joined, you'll need to sign it, and we'll have to forge the recruiter's signature." She finished her wine and refilled our glasses.

"So, unless you want to go back to working in your dad's bicycle empire," she said, "this is your only option."

Oh, yeah. Some empire. A pokey shop in some backstreet trying to sell reflectors to middle-aged women who take up cycling before they get fat. Now I was stuck. I raised my eyebrows. "Aren't you taking a risk if you do this?"

"Like, that's what girlfriends do for their fella. Besides, I'm a risk freak. Let's put it this way." She slid closer and put her hands on top of mine. "We'll stay in together, or get kicked out together."

She moved her hand behind my head and pulled me toward her. Her soft lips touched mine in a long, lingering kiss.

She eventually backed away and winked. "Deal?"

My mind flashed back to Mom giving me one of her 'you're useless' speeches. Then I slipped into a vision of me sitting in a jail cell with Tyrone smiling at me. I studied Holly's stunning good looks. I couldn't wait to sell my story to Hollywood. *Tyler Chambers starring in 'Fucking for Freedom'*. If that's what I had to do to stay in, I consoled myself that at least Holly was good-looking enough to make it bearable. Even enjoyable. If only she didn't have to talk. "Doesn't look like I have a lot of choice."

"Good. I'll start working on it tomorrow morning." She patted my hand. "Now,

what did you have to say that's so important?"

I ran my hand through my hair and had a sip of wine. "Well, you know when you dropped me off on the Monday morning after our date?"

She nodded.

"Well, that was a pretty asshole thing for me to say. You know, about just hanging together, and 'Can I call you sometime' kind of thing." I looked down. "I figured you must have guys throwing themselves at your feet all the time. You know, me being younger, I thought you might think I was just a kid or something. I didn't think you'd be interested in someone like me."

"That's so nice. I know you're young, but I can help you grow up." She held my face in her hand and turned it toward her. "You're a good-looking guy, thoughtful, and you know how to treat a lady. I would have cried if you dumped me then."

I'd be crying now if I dumped you then.

"I don't sleep around. I hadn't been out with a gentleman for so long, I'd forgotten what it was like. You made me feel, like, really super special."

"You are special." I held her hands in mine. "When you said we should only see each other, I was ecstatic, but shocked. I think the shock showed more than the excitement. Sorry."

"Apology totally accepted." She took my hand and stood up. "Now that we have all life's little problems sorted out, why don't we go to the bedroom?"

I rose to my feet, looked into her eyes for a moment, and kissed her. "Hey, I know a little game we can play. Why don't you grab your glasses and meet me in there."

#

She dropped me off at my barracks the following morning. Mark had just climbed out of bed and stood there stretching when I walked in.

"Where've you been?" he asked. "I thought you were going to dump Holly and come back. I expected you about five-thirty yesterday."

"I kinda had a sleepover with Miss Knight."

"You're unbelievable." He shook his head. "I mean, I've never seen anybody so ruled by his dick. I think you got some kind of illness. You need to see a shrink."

"It's not like that. I need her for a while."

He collected his gear to go to the shower room down the hall. "You need her? They got magazines for those kind of needs." He laughed.

"I can trust you, right?"

He nodded.

"Holly told me they're about to kick me out for lying on my enlistment papers. She's going to doctor up some forms to make it look like a big mistake. She's really joining me in the deep end of the shit. We both stay or both go."

"Wow. That's some girlfriend you got there, Chambers. You got her just in the dick of time. But it sounds to me like this 'relationship'," he used his fingers to make air quotes, "is based on blackmail. I hope you know what you're doing, 'cause it sounds pretty screwed up to me."

"I just hope she can pull it off."

#

Several weeks had gone by since the investigation had begun. Holly kept me posted on how the cover-up was progressing. The process left me in a nervous state, not knowing my future. Holly used the situation to her advantage. She clicked her fingers and I came running like a faithful beagle.

I sat by myself at a table in the back of the mess hall, wondering how many more Navy meals I'd be having. Holly's idea sounded pretty crazy, and why would she risk her entire military career for a guy she barely met? Still, I wasn't in a position to question. My only position was one of prayer.

"Mind if I join you?"

"Debbie." I hadn't seen her since her little tantrum and I was surprised how glad I was to see her again. I stood up and pointed my hand toward the chair opposite me. "Please." We both sat down.

"I may have been a bit of a bitch to you and outta line when I saw you after your date with Holly." She stared down at her corned beef. "I mean, she dumped me, so it's not your fault. I shouldn't have acted like I did. Sorry."

"You don't need to apologize. I should've realized and been more sensitive." I took a drink of milk.

She looked up. "I still see you two around the base together. You change your mind about dumping her?"

"It got a bit complicated." I thought it best to choose my words carefully. I could be dealing with a woman scorned. She might seek revenge if I told her everything. "No, me and Holly, we're cool. I thought I'd try this relationship thing. Beats trying to have to pick up women every time I get a stiffy."

"Too bad." Debbie dropped her head and looked at her tray. She pushed the baked beans around on her plate with her fork. "I caught my girlfriend cheating on me with some bull dyke with tattooed forearms. Lying bitch. So, it's not just guys who can't keep it in their pants." She lowered her voice to just above a whisper. "I'm starting to question my sexuality."

"Wow, Debbie. I don't know what to say." I wanted to say something meaningful, or enlightening, but words failed me. I spooned in a mouthful of corn.

She stabbed at her cauliflower. "I was hoping maybe we could have sex to help me decide."

I spit food all over the table. "What'd you say?"

"Judging by the spray of corn, I think you heard me." She brushed some kernels off her arm. "I'm serious. I really am doubting who, or what I am at the moment. Somehow, I trust you. We were so close until I threw my little hissy fit. And I think you could deal with it just for what it is. Sex, and not expect anything more than that out of it."

"You're serious, aren't you?"

"Deadly."

Chapter 6

The following night I showed up at Holly's apartment as commanded. After she fixed us a drink, we sat on her couch. A stack of papers lay on the coffee table in front of us.

"Boy, you don't do things by halves, do ya?" She picked up one of the papers and put on her glasses.

I steeled myself against the arousal issue of her wearing glasses and stayed focused on the matter at hand.

"This is the letter I got back from the Fort Wayne recruitment office," she continued. "Basically, it says that your recruiter got kicked out for letting people like you in."

I swallowed hard. He did warn me not to take any postings that would require a high-security clearance. I thought he meant CIA or something. How was I supposed to know fixing submarines would uncover my deception? Well, his actually. Painful twinges stabbed at me nonetheless. Guilt or sadness, I wasn't sure. The man who kept me out of jail paid a heavy price for my delinquency.

"Anyway, I made a copy of the letterhead and retyped what we want it to say." She grabbed another paper off the table. "This is what Lieutenant Johnson will see. It says that your recruiter has since decided to leave the Navy and is unavailable to shed any further light on the situation."

I reached over and touched her arm. "Holly, can I just say thanks for what you're doing."

"We haven't pulled it off yet, but this is what girlfriends do." She patted my leg. "Anyway, I put in here that the original form got mistyped, and this IP2601," she grabbed another paper off the stack, "should have been enclosed but got left out. Sign it and date it, January 15, 1982. Then I'll forge Lawson's signature."

I signed the form as instructed and watched as Holly replicated Lawson's autograph.

"There. That should do it," she said. "I'll give it to Lieutenant Johnson in the morning and say I just got everything back."

"Will he still want to see me?"

"No, he like totally trusts me. If I say everything's okay, he'll believe me."

Despite Holly's reassurance, my heart pounded hard and my palms sweated. She really was going out on a limb for me, and I appreciated it. I needed to make a go of this. She showed a daring yet caring side that not many people would have offered me.

Holly readjusted her glasses, sliding them down to the tip of her nose. She looked at me over the top of the lenses. "Now, get in that bedroom. You've been

a naughty little boy and I'm going to have to teach you a lesson."

I stood and headed for the bedroom. "Yes, Miss Knight."

#

"Fireman Chambers," the shop supervisor, Petty Officer Watkins, called out across the shop. I walked over to stand in front of him. His red beard molded around his jaw, and with the absence of a moustache, he resembled a leprechaun. "Just got word the division officer wants to see you. Go report to him now."

Holy shit. This was not good. Holly said he wouldn't want to see me. Damn it.

I walked over to the division office with feet like concrete blocks. His office was the same place as Holly's and I imagined this was my march to death row. I reported in to Holly. Her face had a panicked look about it. Probably not much different from mine.

"What's this all about?" I whispered.

"Like, I don't know," she whispered back. "I gave him the papers yesterday and told him everything looked to be in order. He looked them over and just said 'okay.' I'm as much in the dark as you."

I had the urge to pace, but wanted to appear more composed. I sat down in one of the three gray metal chairs pushed against the wall. My mind searched for that suitable lie that would make all this go away. The problem was, I didn't know what the question would be.

The door opened from Lieutenant Johnson's office. The assistant division officer, Master Chief Steele, stood at the opening resembling a Sherman tank. His hair was a mixture of black and gray short curls, broad shoulders and tattoos on both forearms. His piercing eyes looked like the long barrel of the tank, with me in the cross-hairs.

"Fireman Chambers," he bellowed, "enter."

My legs shook as I stood, and my head spun. In my dizzy state, I cast a glance toward Holly. She had her eyes firmly fixed on her desktop.

I entered his office with Master Chief close behind me. I felt like convict 24701 facing the warden and prison guard in some Burt Reynolds movie. I looked at Master Chief Steele. He wasn't smiling. Lieutenant Johnson sat behind his desk in a tan leather chair. He ran a hand through his blond hair, his face solemn. I stood at attention in the middle of the room.

"At ease," he instructed.

I chose to stand at parade rest, arms at forty-five-degree angles with the back of my hands placed in the small of my back, and legs spread just slightly more than shoulder-width apart. It was a more formal position than 'at ease', meaning I

could have stood any way I wanted. I wanted to appear to be on my best military behavior.

"Fireman Chambers," he began, "you're probably wondering why I called you into my office today."

Please, God. Let him have a heart attack.

Chapter 7

Lieutenant Johnson appeared to be healthy, so my wishing him to drop dead didn't seem likely. He looked like he spent at least three days a week at the gym. He leaned forward and rested on his toned, tanned forearms on the imitation oak desk, his hands clasped together. Master Chief Steele stood in the corner, arms behind his back, his mouth half-way between a smirk and a snarl.

"Fireman Chambers," the Lieutenant started, "there was a discrepancy in your record. It had been documented that you had been arrested twice prior to your enlistment. However, further investigation revealed that you had, in fact, been arrested four times." Lieutenant Johnson paused. His raised eyebrows suggesting he expected me to answer.

I snapped to attention, bar the fact I looked him directly in the eyes. "Yes, sir. That is correct. I am ashamed of my past. However, I am unable to change that. My only desire now is to serve my country with pride."

I hoped Holly got those papers right. I returned my stance to parade rest.

"Admirable." He stood up, all five-feet-eight inches of him. "Petty Officer Knight has been able to retrieve the missing paperwork. However, the new documentation shows that you were arrested for possession of marijuana."

I snapped back to attention. "Sir, a youthful indulgence which shames me. My prayers always include a thank you to God for giving me the opportunity to serve in the United States Navy." I returned to parade rest.

Lieutenant Johnson looked at Master Chief Steele. The corners of their mouths turned up in unison. I caught a glimpse of Master Chief rolling his eyes. Uh, oh. A cow pat too far. They could see I was full of it. I needed to tone it down. My upper lip sweated. I rolled my lips together, trying to clear any visible moisture.

"For your sake, I hope that's all it was, and we're about to find out. The Navy has spent considerable time and money training you. What you've done prior to your enlistment is of little concern to me." He walked around from behind his desk, stood in front of it and leaned his butt against the edge. His hands dropped by his sides, gripping the lip of the desk behind him. "However, anything and everything you have done since you swore your oath to uphold the Constitution of the United States is of great concern to me. And I'm not having any potheads in my division."

I stood motionless except for the odd bead of sweat escaping from various pores.

"I am ordering a urinalysis. Master Chief Steele will take you to the head and watch you fill the bottle. It's standard procedure to have a witness just in case you had any ideas about tampering with the sample."

Master Chief produced a plastic bottle from behind his back and shook it back and forth, wearing a big shit-eating grin.

Snapping back to attention, "Aye, aye, sir."

"Dismissed. Master Chief, escort Fireman Chambers to the head and watch him fill his patriotic duty."

Master Chief pointed his hand toward the door. "Yes, sir, Lieutenant. Come on, Chambers, move it."

I did an about-face and left with Master Chief right behind me. As we walked past Holly's desk, she gave me the 'Well?' eyes. I winked and she breathed a sigh of relief.

Master Chief marched me over to the barracks. We went into an office on the first floor where I signed in. I filled out a label that would identify the piss of Tyler Chambers for inspection of foreign substances once slapped on the bottle of my urine.

Master Chief followed me into the head. A single toilet stood in the middle of the room with no cubicle. Hints of bleach permeated the atmosphere. I took the three steps to stand in front of the toilet. The door shut behind me, and Master Chief bolted it. Hearing the door slam and bolt, the same cold shiver went through me as it had during my last visit to the county jail.

A huge mirror hung directly over the toilet, angled down from the wall, aimed at my crotch. Master Chief handed me the bottle. I took my penis out and prepared to fill it up. In the mirror, I could see my dick, with Master Chief behind me, looking at my dick; so I stretched it a little. I tried to pee, but nothing came out. Master Chief ran some water from the sink, trying to induce my urine to start flowing. Still, nothing. After a few minutes of Master Chief getting a good, long look at my dry dick, I gave up.

"Sorry, Master Chief. Not ready yet."

He unlocked the door and we returned to the waiting bench.

"Looks like you got stage fright," Master Chief said. "Well, we'll just sit here and drink water until you're ready to explode, then we'll try it again."

I drank copious amounts of water. Master Chief held the highest enlisted rank achievable, which I found daunting. He just stared straight ahead, not speaking. His silence added to my nervousness. Given his seniority, perhaps talking to him and learning something about Navy adventures would make me feel more at ease with the man designated to look at my penis. I took a drink of water and wiped my mouth with the back of my hand. "How long you been in, Master Chief?"

He turned his head and gave me a 'Why the fuck are you talking to me?' look. He turned his head back, looking ahead. "Twenty-five years," he replied dismissively.

I cleared my throat. "Wow. I bet you've seen some things. Ever thought about writing a book?"

"In progress. 'My Love Affair with the Navy'." He held his head up toward the ceiling in a reflective mood.

What a crap title. I let the conversation end there and drank more water quietly. Ten glasses of water later, and the desire to pee moved up from a mere order to a full-blown state of emergency.

"I'm ready, Master Chief."

We went back to the head, and I stood there. Penis in one hand, plastic bottle in the other, Master Chief in the mirror. Nothing. Not being able to any pee added to my anxiety. I stood there for two minutes without producing a drop.

"Sorry, Master Chief. False alarm."

We returned to the bench, and I resumed my water consumption. I really had to go, but some guy staring at my dick proved to be a little off-putting, to say the least. Another forty minutes of drinking water, and I was ready to fill a bathtub. I hoped I could make it to the head before I pissed myself.

"Ready, Master Chief," I announced.

Master Chief leaned in, his face inches from mine. He spoke through clenched teeth. "Goddamn it, Chambers. If you don't go this time, I'm gonna personally grab your dick and wring the piss out of it." He held the face-off for several seconds.

In the head, I stood over the toilet ready to fill the little bottle. A sharp pain stabbed my groin. I shifted my weight. Images of Master Chief grabbing my dick like a cow's udder flashed through my mind. I winced at the thought. Closing my eyes, I leaned my head back as far as it would go. *Water fall. Running faucet. Rain. Anything wet. Just piss!*

Piss whizzed through my dick, and I sighed. "Ahhh..." Yes, pure bliss. The relief was nearly orgasmic.

"Chambers! Put your goddamn dick in the bottle," Master Chief screamed, "You're spraying piss all over the place."

I snapped my head down and opened my eyes to see that my hand holding the bottle had dropped out of the firing line and pee splattered everywhere. I lifted the bottle and redirected my aim. Piss came out with such force it hit the bottom of the container and ripped it out of my hand, sending it bouncing off the tiled walls and around the room like a ping-pong ball. I tried to stop the flow of pee while I retrieved the bottle, but failed. Chasing the bottle around the room, dick out, pee spraying, all to the sounds of Master Chief shouting 'goddamn it' in the background. I finally managed to grab the bottle, but not before piss sprayed across the toes of Master Chief's boots.

With bottle and dick back in hand over the toilet, I continued to release the gallons of water squeezed into my bladder. Filling the bottle to the brim in milliseconds, I continued peeing into the toilet. It didn't make a whole lot of difference where I aimed anymore given the amount of urine already on the floor.

With nothing better to think about, I wondered if Master Chief would have a chapter in his book about his duties as a wiener watcher, and, more importantly, if my dick would get a mention. With the show I gave him, it just might.

I did laugh as I spent the next hour cleaning up the head, thinking about Master Chief's sole purpose in life for a time was to look at my dick, and perhaps have footnotes about it. Maybe he'd have to call them dicknotes.

I didn't laugh quite so much when he told me I would be giving his boots a top of the range spit-shine and polish every day for a month.

Chapter 8

Autumn in Hawaii offered a little relief to the heat of summer. It was still very warm, but more pleasant as the heat wasn't quite so blistering. Holly and Debbie kept me guessing what the future may hold, but Mark often had ideas of how to beat the stress of everyday life.

Mark and I got off work one Friday evening and headed back to our room to get cleaned up and hyped for the weekend.

"I suppose you'll be going out with Holly tonight," Mark said.

"No, I need to give it a rest. Man, she's doin' my head in. She's a bit of a control freak. I'll break it off eventually, but I need to stay with her for a while so she doesn't feel like I just used her."

Mark shook his head. "I still can't believe you're going to dump her. After what she did for you, I thought you'd worship the ground she walked on."

I laughed. "No, she does that herself. Yeah, I owe her one, but.... Hey, you want to hear something else? Debbie wants me to slip her the Hot Karl because she's not sure if she's gay or not."

He rolled his eyes. "I don't believe this. You gonna do it?"

"It's tricky." I drummed my fingers over my lips. "If Holly finds out, well, I know she's good with paperwork and could come up with something to get me thrown out. Or Debbie might tell Holly that we slept together just to get back at her. Man, it's a mess. I always wanted to get it on with Debbie, and now that she's offering, I'm scared it might all blow up in my face."

"So you told her no, then?"

I sighed. "Umm...not exactly. I'm stringing her along. I told her I strained a groin muscle doing the six-hundred-yard run during the physical fitness test, and I don't know how long it will take to heal. I need some time to think about this one."

"Well, I know just what you need." He slapped his thigh. "Let's go down to Shit Street and check out some strip joints."

I rubbed my hands together. "Now you're talking."

#

We both showered, changed and got a taxi down to the run-down part of Honolulu, Hotel Street. Known by all sailors and taxi drivers as Shit Street. We got out of the cab and walked past various massage parlors, tattoo artists, strip joints and scam artists, stepping over the odd drunk laying on the sidewalk now and then, and shunning the tatted-up ladies of the evening asking us if we

wanted a 'date.' No wonder it was a popular hangout for servicemen.

Mark and I went into a packed bar, Jezebel's. The place was a dive and reeked of stale beer and marijuana. A heavy layer of smoke made it impossible to see across the room. It was fairly dark except for the spotlights illuminating the stage. The strippers weren't bad looking, but most were strung out on dope or drink, and would do anything for a tip. Military personnel occupied all the tables, with a dozen guys standing at the edge of the stage slipping dollar bills into the stripper's garter belt.

She leaned over one guy at the edge of the stage. The place erupted in cheers when he reached up and pulled both tassels off her nipples.

We pushed through the room and made our way to the bar. I shouted out our order, then with beers in hand, we worked our way down toward the stage and found a spot where we leaned against the wall just to the left of the stage and not too far from the stripping action.

A new dancer came on stage and began her routine. She peeled off her garments in a seductive fashion and was soon down to a bra equivalent and g-string as *Bette Davis Eyes* by Kim Carnes played. She sashayed off stage and clambered down the four steps in her spiked heels and stood in front of us. Cheers went up as she grabbed Mark's hand and led him toward the stage.

Just a few feet before the steps up, she whispered in Mark's ear. He removed her hand from his and walked back to me. He leaned against the wall and took a drink of beer.

"What are you doing, man? She's hot," I pointed out.

"She said she wanted me to have sex with her onstage."

"Well, this ain't no stage." I pushed him toward the limelight. "Why aren't you up there giving her one?"

"If you're such the porn star, why don't you go up and drill her?"

I handed him my beer, ran my fingers through my hair and headed for the stage. I leapt up the steps, walked over to her and began a slow hip swivel, as she did. I undid her bra, revealing her tits to the crowd which received rapturous applause.

As I groped her boobs, she whispered in my ear. "I want you to fuck me onstage."

I leaned down and removed her thong. For a moment, I just stood there admiring her nakedness. She rubbed me through my pants until I was hard. She dropped down on all fours and turned her head back to look at me. "Come on, big boy. Make me scream."

I pulled my pants down, dropped to my knees and moved in behind her. I looked out into the cheering crowd, which proved to be a huge mistake. I

couldn't pee with one guy watching me, now I had about two-hundred guys urging me on to jam this stripper. I turned into a shrinking violet before their very eyes.

The cheers turned to boos. I tried to think of Farrah Fawcett to regain my former glory, but it didn't work. The crowd turned ugly, jeering and throwing cans and ashtrays at me. I quickly did up my pants up and exited the stage.

As I came down the steps, some jarhead connected a left hook with my right eye, sending me crashing to the deck. "Queer," he shouted. I scrambled to my feet while he assumed a boxing pose, fists up and dancing on his toes like a Golden Gloves champion. He looked like he really did know how to box, so I kicked him in the balls. He dropped to his knees and I planted a size ten in his face. Fists flew all around me and I indiscriminately returned fire. Punches landed on me, and mine landed on whoever was closest.

I dropped to the floor and crawled toward the exit, suffering kicks to the ribs and face along the way, but I made it out to the street. I sat on the curb nursing my wounds.

Mark came out and sat next to me.

I looked at him through already swelled eyes. "Yeah, great idea," I said. "Let's go down to Shit Street."

"Look, Chambers, if you didn't try to fuck everything that moved, you wouldn't be in half the trouble you are." He assessed the damage to my face. "Damn, you really got your ass kicked."

"I see you got tagged a few times yourself." I fumbled around for a cigarette and lit it. "What am I going to tell Holly?"

"Tell her you tried to prevent a mugging and ten guys came out of nowhere and kicked your ass."

"Yeah, right." I took a drag off my cigarette. "Like she's really gonna buy that."

"Okay, how 'bout this?" He clasped his hands together. "Well, love of my life, I went down to Shit Street, and some stripper begged me to publicly fornicate her. So, I obliged. Only problem was, I couldn't get it up, so some jarheads beat the crap out of me." He smiled. "Pretty good, huh?"

I took a drag and blew smoke in his face.

#

"What the hell happened to you?" Holly asked as I stood at her front door the next day. She ushered me in and sat me on her couch. She gently touched my two black eyes and swollen lip. "Does it hurt?"

I tapped my eye and grimaced. "Ah, just a little." I leaned back on her couch letting out a slow groan. "Mark and I went down to Waikiki to hear the comedian at The Crow's Nest. When we came out, a gang of locals were harassing a couple of tourist girls. They couldn't have been much more than fifteen. The girls looked pretty scared, so we did what any decent guys would've. We stepped up to the plate and told the Hawaiians to leave 'em alone."

Her eyes narrowed. "Ohhh, those Mokes can be nasty. You'd think they'd be grateful after we liberated them from the Japanese. How many of them were there?"

"About ten or so. They got mouthy, so I punched the biggest one, thinking they'd back off after that. Then they jumped us. Mark got off a little bit lighter than me, but the girls got away. That's all that really mattered."

"Like, you were so brave. Did you call the police?"

"No. You know what they keep telling us about when we're out on the town and not to bring discredit upon the Navy." I looked at her sincerely. It looked like she was buying it. "The girls couldn't act as witnesses, because they split, so it would've looked like we were just fighting for the hell of it."

"You poor thing. Let me get you some ice and a cold beer." She went to the kitchen.

Gullible is good. Maybe she wasn't so bad after all.

#

Debbie and I met up as usual Monday morning, standing between our shops, enjoying the nicotine pulsating through our veins before the workday.

"So, good weekend, Tyler?" She took a drag and forcefully exhaled.

"Well, you know, put on the Superman cape, and saved a couple of chicks from getting raped by some locals." I took a drag and shot her a sideways glance. She smiled. "Actually, I was more Batman and Mark was Robin. But we kept the bad guys from getting into the Batcave. That's what's important."

Debbie choked as she took a drag. "What a crock of shit," she said with a grin. "I happened to have breakfast with Sanchez this morning." Her smile broadened, if that was possible. "He saw your performance at Jezebel's Friday night, or should I say, lack of it."

"Oh, shit." I twirled my cigarette in my hand. "Who else knows?"

"Don't know. You'd have to ask Sanchez."

"If Holly finds out, I'm dead."

She fanned her hand. "Yeah, yeah, whatever. Forget that a minute. Have you thought any more about whether you're going to help me find my true identity or

not?" She pushed her lips to one side. "You're not going to get too many offers to have unconditional sex with a potential, or past, lesbian ya know?"

I laughed. I loved her sense of humor. That had always been part of her attraction. "I'm still recovering from the groin pull, and with the ass-kicking I just took, well it might be a little while before I'm fit for action."

"I think you're trying to put me off. Do you think I'm stupid enough to believe that you're not still giving it to Holly?"

"Oh. Well, umm...well, what if she finds out?"

She laughed. "You go out and try to fuck a stripper on stage, with maybe half the base watching, and you're worried about your girlfriend finding out that you're getting a little private nookie on the side?" She waved her hand around. "Give me a break. Look, I told you, I'm not trying to lure you into any kind of relationship. You get sex, no strings attached."

"Well, except for the fact that I did something stupid over the weekend, I try to be faithful in my relationships."

Debbie smirked. "Bullshit. You've told me about too many of your past exploits, remember? And I don't buy that you're so hung up on Holly that you want her to have your babies. Trust me, she's a user. If you have fallen for her, which I doubt, she'll break your heart. Does she have something on you?"

"Course not." I swiped my upper lip. "I just want to give her a fair shot. Why would you ask something like that?"

"Tyler, we've spent many a night in the Dolphin's getting hammered. You've spilled your guts on more than one occasion. So I know you're not the relationship type. You've conquered Mount Holly, or should I say, you mounted Holly for a jolly. I thought you'd be moving on by now. What happened to the 'find 'em, feel 'em, fuck 'em, forget 'em, Chambers' motto?"

"Don't you believe people change?"

She snickered. "Not you. Now, are you going to help me with my dilemma or not?" She placed her hand on mine. "This is really important to me, Tyler. I want it to be you because I trust you. But if you still insist on shining Knight's armor, I'll just pick up some guy from a bar downtown."

I rubbed my temples. "God. You really do know how to mess with a guy's head. I can't let you pick up some drunken loser in one of the most important issues of your life." I sighed. "If I agree, you promise you won't tell Holly?"

She ran her finger over her chest in an 'x' fashion. "Cross my heart."

Holly wasn't like a real girlfriend. We needed each other for now, but I was sure it would fizzle out soon enough. Debbie never treated me like a baby. She respected me and she was hot. And this was just a favor to her. She needed to assess her feelings, so it wasn't like I was really cheating on Holly. I was just

helping a confused friend.

"Okay. There's a motel in Aiea, away from the base and everything else. A little Mom and Pop place, 'Pacific Breeze Motor Lodge'. How about Saturday night?"

She beamed. "I won't even ask how you know about the Pacific Breeze motel, but thank you so much." She rapidly clapped her hands with excitement. "You really are a true friend. I can hardly wait."

"Yeah, me neither."

Chapter 9

Saturday evening rolled around and I looked forward to my date with Debbie. What a contrast. Holly said there would be no sex on our first date. Debbie insisted our first date was all about sex. I rooted through my wardrobe and went with black parachute pants and a white cotton button-up shirt, only done up halfway. Mark came into the room as I packed my toiletry bag.

"You're a bit dressed up. Where you taking Holly?" he asked.

"Umm, I'm not going out with Holly. Promise to keep quiet?"

He nodded.

"I'm going out with Debbie."

"What? You're takin' *Debbie* to dinner?"

"Well, if you consider burgers in a motel room, dinner, then maybe. I booked us a room at a motor lodge." I smiled.

"So you're gonna do it." He grinned and shook his head. "You know, there's a small matter of the fact that Debbie's a lesbian. Don't tell me you're trying to convert her. She can't help it, you know."

"Hey, she asked me. It's more complicated than that. She's not sure if she's gay or not." I splashed on some aftershave then put the bottle in my bag. "Her head's all screwed up at the moment and she needs some help sorting it out."

Mark laughed. "Yeah, right. So she comes running to Tyler Chambers, the one guy who has his head screwed on straight. Okay, Doctor Freud, I can just hear it now." He deepened his voice and stroked his chin, "Well, Miss Meyers, the recommended treatment I suggest is for you to take all your clothes off, and we have intercourse. If you don't enjoy it, you're gay."

He went to his wardrobe and changed his shirt. "You really do have a high opinion of yourself, don't you? Well, I hope she wants to go back to women after you get done with her. That would teach ya. The more I think about, the more I come to realize that you and Holly are well suited for each other. Except I don't know how the two of you get into one car together. Those ego-inflated, swelled heads of yours must take up one hell of a lot of room." He shook his head.

"Ever heard of justifiable intercourse?"

"No. Justifiable homicide, yeah. 'Cause if Holly finds out, that's what she's gonna plead after she blows your head off. Man, your brain belongs in a museum. It's a piece of work."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence. Gotta go. Motel Sex awaits. Later."

I arrived at the motel and checked in. I nervously waited for Debbie to arrive. Most of my sex had been spontaneous in the past, not on demand. I smiled as I thought about being a long-time married couple and setting predetermined days to have sex.

- *It's Saturday night, dear; you know what that means?*

- *Oh, but of course. Meatloaf and sex.*

- *Could we have hot dogs or tacos tonight, dear? Meatloaf probably isn't the right dish to serve on sex night.*

The room didn't offer any extra frills. A queen-size bed sat in the center of the room, with the wall behind the headboard chipped and dented. A standing lamp on the opposite side, a desk under the window, a table with two chairs on the other side of the room, and a TV. Clean, yet it retained a feeling that a certain amount of debauchery had taken place over the years. The paper strip over the toilet insisting it had been cleaned offered reassurance that there was no VD lurking under the toilet seat.

I cracked open one of the twelve beers I had brought with me and drank from the can. I turned on the radio and waved an imaginary drumstick as Joan Jett sang *I Love Rock and Roll*. A knock at the door raised my heart rate. I checked myself in the mirror to make sure my hair didn't look stupid. I checked my breath and cursed myself for forgetting mints. I went to the door and opened it. There stood Debbie.

She looked beautiful wearing a floral print dress. She wore more make-up than usual. The increased highness of her cheekbones made her blue eyes dazzle. The orchid behind her ear complimented her blonde, shoulder-length hair. The dress stopped just above the knees, showing off the rest of her tanned legs. Her high heels added another two or three inches to her height.

"You look stunning," I said. "Please, come in." She walked past me and looked around the room.

"Nice." She turned around to face me.

I produced a single red rose from behind my back and offered it to her. "For you. Beauty begets beauty."

She smiled, took it out of my hand and smelled it. "It's lovely. Thank you."

"Would you like a beer? They're still cold." I moved toward the dresser where the Coors sat in its self-proclaimed 'Keep 'em Cold Twelve-pack' box.

"No thanks. I want to be sober for this."

"Oh, I see. Hope you don't mind if I have a few." I held my hand out flat and gave an exaggerated nervous shake. "Might help steady the nerves."

"You're nervous? Thank God." She wiped pretend sweat from her forehead. "I thought it was just me."

"Yeah, I am a little. Why don't we sit down and talk for a while? I'd like to know a little more about what's going on."

Debbie went to the bathroom and got a glass of water. She returned to the room and we sat on the chairs by the table. She took a sip. I downed a mouthful of Coors. We both lit a cigarette. I looked at her while she looked at the floor.

"So, Debbie, you're not sure if you're gay or not," I said, trying to lighten the mood. "What happened to the people who say you're born that way and can't help it?"

She looked up at me. "I really do think some people are that way. I thought I was, maybe still am. I don't know. Holly came onto me. I won't go into all the details, but she—"

"No, please." I touched her hand. "Go into all the details you want. I want to hear everything. I can handle it." I smiled.

"You're such a perv. Have you ever thought about two women doing it?"

"Of course."

"Good. I don't want to disappoint you with reality, so let's just leave it in your mind." Her face remained solemn. "Anyway, Holly made the first move and it was the best sex I ever had. Probably the thrill of something new. I can't tell you how flattered I was that a woman as good-looking as her came onto me. I was in awe of her beauty, and she wanted me." She took a deep breath and sipped her water. "Anyway," she continued, "I figured, we were drunk, and it was a one-time thing. But she kept coming 'round to my room or inviting me over to her place, and we always had amazing sex. It felt like we were a proper couple. I fell in love and told her one night. That freaked her out. She started calling me a lesbo, and...well, let's just say she got really nasty. She never spoke to me again."

"So why'd you think Holly played the game?"

She shrugged. "Don't know. Maybe because I kept telling her how lucky I felt and how beautiful she was. She's got a really big ego that needs regular stroking, but I'm sure you already figured that out. I think for her, it was a drunken encounter, then experimental, and then being flattered. I really did idolize her, and she knew it. If she snapped her fingers, I jumped. No doubt she liked the power."

"Wow. I always figured she could be a bit mean, but that's below the belt calling you names and everything." I took another drink and noticed Debbie staring down at the carpet in what looked like a visit to the past. "Sorry, I didn't mean it like that."

"I know how you meant it. No worries. Anyway, we were together for four months, so I figured that was what I was. I had a few other girlfriends after that."

I thought me and Lisa were solid. She turned out to be a lying, cheating bitch, and I started thinking again about what it would be like to be in a relationship where I didn't have to sneak around, keep it hidden and not be able to tell anyone." She wiped away a tear. "Tyler, I don't know if I'm gay or not. I thought you'd be a good way to find out. You strike me as a guy who can turn off his emotions. I don't want a stalker if I turn out to be any good at this hetero stuff."

I took her hand that was resting on the table. "Debbie, I might be doing myself out of free sex here, but you don't need to do this. I don't think you're gay."

"You're sweet, Tyler. Sometimes an asshole, but a sweet, caring asshole. I've primed myself for the last week for this moment, and I want to do it. I need to know, once and for all. I need to know how I feel when...well, you know."

"So, are you going to judge your entire life on one fuck?"

"No, but it's a start." She put her finger on her lower lip and pulled it down. "Tyler, do you want me?"

"Do I want you?" I stood up and unbuttoned my shirt. "Let's find out how gay you really are."

#

We shared a taxi back to Pearl Harbor Sunday morning. I had never had so much sober sex, and I don't think she ever had so much straight sex. It turned out to be a quiet ride back to base. I sensed she was deep in thought and wanted some peace to search her feelings. I gave her a peck on the cheek before we got out of the taxi and headed off to our respective barracks.

I walked into an empty room, which I was happy about as it gave me time to lay on the bed and relive the moments of the night before. I could have really gone for Debbie. But if it wasn't for Holly, I'd be kicked out by now. I had to keep Holly sweet even if she did bug me. And it wouldn't be wise to keep screwing Debbie under the circumstances, no matter how much I wanted to.

Mark interrupted my thoughts as he entered the room. He pulled up a chair next to my bed and sat down. "So, Tyler, screw any hot lesbians lately?"

"None of your business."

He threw his hands up. "Wait a minute, it was my business not that long ago. Is she lezzy or not?"

"The jury's still out."

"Well, while you were standing jury duty, Holly stopped by."

I bolted upright in bed. "What did she want?" I could hear the panic in my own voice.

"Relax. I told her you were probably down on Shit Street dorking some

stripper." He smiled, but returned to seriousness when I didn't smile back. "Just kidding. I told her you went down to Gussie's Bar for dollar/pitcher night. She said for you to call her when you got back."

"Thanks."

"You know, if you gave me a buck for every time I lied for you, I'd get my fifty bucks back in a day or two. So what's the deal with Debbie?"

"No-strings sex. I did my part; now it's up to her which way she goes. I better go call Holly."

"You're a cold bastard."

"Runs in the family. Like father, like son."

#

I arrived at Holly's later that day as per her request, or demand as it was. She greeted me at the door with a certain coldness and showed me through to the living room while she made some coffee. We sat down and her eyes searched my face like an interrogation Gestapo. I practiced my innocent look.

"So, where were you last night?" she asked.

"I went down to Gussie's. Pitcher of beer for a dollar night."

"So, you're going out drinking without asking your girlfriend now, are you?" She flicked her hair with her hand. "Were there any girls there?"

"Of course there were girls there. It's a bar, not a monastery." I instantly regretted saying that. Holly didn't take flippancy well.

She wagged her finger in my face. "Don't get an attitude with me, Chambers. We're like going together." She suddenly gasped and put her hand to her chest. "Oh my God! You weren't looking for a younger woman, were you?"

Holy shit. Much younger than her and they'd still be in high school. "Course not, babe. After a sophisticated woman like you, how could I possibly go chasing after teeny-boppers?"

She smiled. "True, but maybe I wanted to go out for a drink. Ever think of that?" She folded her arms and slightly flexed her arm like there was an SS insignia on it.

"Yes, I did. That's why I'm a bit embarrassed." I hung my head in pretend shame. "I only had five dollars drinking money. I could hardly call you up and say 'Hey, babe, I got five bucks. Fancy a drink?' Now could I?" I pulled my head up, looked at her and flashed my baby blues that I knew she was a sucker for. "You know I think the world of you. You deserve class, not to be asked out to some seedy bar supping suds for a buck."

She sighed. "Well, okay. But you need to be spending your time with me. I

don't like you going around where other girls can get their claws into you." She took my hands in hers. "I know you only want me, but some women can be quite cunning when they want to be. Check with me before you go out next time."

I felt myself snap from the pressure of being under her thumb. I couldn't deal with it anymore. She had to go. I took a deep breath and exhaled slowly, reminding myself to duck if she started throwing things.

"Umm...Holly, can we talk a minute? I'm not so sure that we, umm...what I mean is—"

"Oh-My-God. Wait." She held up her open palm. "Before you say whatever it is you want to say, I'm going to say something. I know you're with me because you like me. I don't know, maybe you even like love me. I'm sure the fact that I risked my military career for you has nothing to do with our relationship. I'm quite happy to sit in my office and make sure that nothing else from the Fort Wayne Navy recruiter's office finds its way onto Lieutenant Johnson's desk. That's what girlfriends do for their boyfriends. Right?"

"I guess so. Sure."

She patted my leg and smiled. "As long as we're clear about our relationship. I'm sure we both want the same things, right?"

I forced myself to nod.

"Okay, like, what did you want to say?"

I wiped what felt like a torrent of sweat from my forehead. "I just wanted to say how much I care about you. I get a little nervous when I try to talk about emotions and stuff. That's why maybe I seemed a little hesitant at first. But yeah, we're cool, and I think you're great." I leaned over and kissed her.

"How sweet. That's what I like to hear." Her smile and the look in her eyes said, 'I got you by the short and curlies'. "Did you bring your swimming trunks like I told you?"

"Yeah. They're in my overnight bag."

"Good. Let's get changed and go to the beach. I know a secluded place on the other side of the island. If you're a good boy, I might let you make love to me on the beach." She stroked my cheek with the back of her hand.

Make love? "I can't believe how lucky I am, Holly. Good looking, smart, adventurous. You're everything a guy could want."

She patted my cheek. "I know. That's what you get for going out with an older woman."

#

Mark laid on his bed as I nervously changed into civilian clothes after work

the day after I last saw Holly. My head was all over the place as to what I was supposed to be doing to whom and when.

"So, who's the lucky lesbian tonight?" Mark asked.

I pulled up a chair next to his bed and sat down. "Can I talk to you a minute? I can trust you, right?"

Mark rolled over to lay on his side, propped his head in his hand, elbow resting on the bed and looked at me. "Let's see. You got me involved in a barroom brawl, all because you wanted to stuff some stripper on stage. I constantly lie to your girlfriend for you to keep you out of the shit. You told me you lied on your enlistment papers, almost got kicked out, but had your girlfriend make up false documents to keep your butt in. And you cheated on your girlfriend with her former lover. I don't know. You sure you can trust me?"

"Touché. That's French for shut up. What am I going to do about Holly? Man, the chick's driving me crazy. Now I need her permission to go anywhere without her. Last week she said she thinks I drink too much. She's really tightening the screws, and more or less told me if I dump her some more papers might find their way to the division officer saying that I'm not the saint everyone thinks I am."

"I told you blackmail was a poor foundation for a relationship. She's got it over you, man." He held a finger up. "But don't forget, her fingerprints are all over the crime scene as well. You could remind her of that, then dump her."

"Yeah, I could. Pretty risky though. She really did save my ass." I dropped my look toward the floor. "I'd feel guilty if I did that."

"You? Feel guilty? Give me a break. I've never heard anything more ridiculous in my life. There's more chance of the Japs bombing this place again before you'd ever feel guilty."

I looked up. "Well, you know what I mean."

"No, I don't, actually. Seriously, Tyler, you're my friend. We have a great laugh together, and you know I'd do anything for you. But I think you've had some kind of surgery to remove—"

"Okay, okay," I interrupted. "I get your point. Maybe it was a poor choice of words. But how else can I shake her?"

"Get her to dump you," he said matter of factly. "Pick a fight with her until she gets so mad she tells you to get out. Or tell her you know about her past with Debbie, and you'll tell the Navy she a lesbian and get her kicked out if she doesn't back off. Or take her to a strip joint, get up on stage and start stuffing a stripper while she's watching." Mark rolled over on his back and started kicking his feet on the bed. "That's if you can get it up!" He laughed and kept kicking his feet. "Man, I loved that."

I laughed too. "I suppose it was funny. It wasn't at the time, though. Fucking jarhead." I smacked his leg. "Thanks, buddy. I needed the talk. I don't know what I'd do without you. But, I have to face it. She's got me by the balls."

"I wasn't much help on this one. I don't think you actually need a girlfriend. You seem to do a pretty good job of fucking yourself on your own. So you going to see Holly now?"

"No, Debbie said she wanted to see me. She probably wants to tell me if she's gay or not."

Mark grabbed the pillow from behind his head and hit me with it. "You're unbelievable."

"Later." I got up and left.

#

I arrived at Debbie's room. She welcomed me with a warm smile and a kiss on the cheek. She looked sexy in high, tight shorts and an orange halter top. She brought out a few beers from her mini-fridge and we sat down at her table.

"I hope you don't think I've been avoiding you," she said, "but I've been doing a lot of thinking lately."

"I thought you would be." I cracked my beer open and took a drink. "Just let me say, I really enjoyed our night together, and I respect whatever you decide to do."

"Thanks, I know you will." She placed her hand on mine. "I don't think I'm really gay. I think—"

"What a minute." I held my palm up. "Before you switch back, any chance of a threesome?" I smiled.

She swatted her hand at me. "I knew I could count on you to come out with something like that. No." She sipped her beer. "I've never had a lot of boyfriends, but the ones I did go out with always treated me like shit. Holly was the first person to ever treat me nicely in a relationship. Overbearing, but nice. I think feeling like I was special for the first time may have misguided me."

"You mean Holly was nice to you?"

"You sound surprised. I know she can be demanding at times, and she does like to control the relationship. She's five years younger than me, but she was so authoritative. That was fine. I liked someone being forceful with me, it was quite a turn on. It made me feel like she really cared about me. Has she ever said anything to you about having gay experiences?"

"Are you kidding? No, and I've never asked. So what happened after Holly?" I took another sip and it was going down smooth.

"Another girl came onto me, and I reciprocated. It didn't last long. I was on the rebound and, well, it just didn't work out. We're still friends. It was an amicable split. Then I met Lisa. I really fell for her, and then she did the dirty on me."

"So what made you think that maybe you're not gay?"

"After Holly, the sex was never as good. Sometimes I didn't even enjoy it. I began to realize that I was more in love with the idea that someone actually cared about me, and not so much the sex or the lifestyle. I felt needed and loved. That's all I wanted out of the relationship. So, when Lisa dumped me, I started wondering what it would be like to have sex with a guy again. I wanted to see if I enjoyed it. It had been so long, I had forgotten."

I lit a cigarette and she slid the ashtray over.

"I've come to the conclusion that anyone can treat you like shit. Male or female. So I'll just have to take the chance. Yes, the night with you, I must admit, I enjoyed the sex more than I did with Lisa."

"And you're sure about this?"

She nodded. "Yes. So, how are you and Holly getting along by the way?"

"Not sure. I like her in some ways, but she drives me around the twist in others. We'll see."

"I know it's difficult, but she is good in bed, isn't she? I'll give her that." She lit a cigarette.

I didn't say anything. I wasn't sure if I was ready to compare notes about a mutual fuck with another girl.

She blew out a puff of smoke. "If you do break it off with her, will you put me on your available list?"

I help a hand up. "Wait a minute. I thought this was all about no-strings, unemotional, non-stalking sex. Are you saying you want a relationship?"

"No, I'm saying I want no-strings, unemotional, non-stalking sex."

"I can do that, Debbie, but somehow I don't think you can. You just told me that you needed to feel loved, and cared about. That was more important than the sex."

She took a drag of her cigarette. "When we did it, I enjoyed it just for what it was. Sex. I can give the relationship thing a rest for a while." Her face lit up with an enlightened idea. "We could be like fuck-buddies, even if you don't give Holly up. I'll need the practice if I'm going hetero." She touched my hand. "Come on, Tyler, two women on the go. I thought that would be right up your alley."

My eyes wandered over her bronze body. There was no denying she looked hot. "Look, Debs, I can't. I was happy to help you out as a friend. You know, helping you find your sexuality and stuff. But I really need to make a go of it

with Holly. She'd kill me if she found out. I think you're great, and if I hadn't already hooked up with Holly, yeah, I'd go for you in a heartbeat."

She pushed her lips to one side of her closed mouth and looked at me with those piercing eyes.

I took a drag and stubbed out my cigarette. "Sorry, Debs."

She pulled the bow behind her head and let her halter top fall, revealing her perky breasts. She walked over and held my face with both hands. She leaned into me, her lips brushing mine, her breasts pressing against my chest. Her subtle flowery fragrance graced my nose. The kiss grew passionate.

She moved away and dropped her shorts, standing naked before me. "One more time?"

I stood up and drew a deep breath. Taking her hand, I led her to the bed. "For old time's sake."

She smiled.

Chapter 10

I arrived at Holly's at seven o'clock Friday evening, just as she had instructed me. She invited me in, kissed me, and informed me dinner was nearly ready. The aroma of simmering tomato sauce filled the apartment and raised my awareness of how hungry I actually was.

The small dining table had an elegant and romantic look about it. Two tall candles sat a third of the way in from each end of the table, soft flames danced over the linen napkins and crystal wine glasses. Most of the meals at Holly's were heated up frozen dinners eaten in front of the TV. I could tell something special was in the making.

I stood admiring a print she had on the wall while she put dinner on the table. A large black and white photograph of Times Square dominated the wall over the fake fireplace. Cars appeared to be whizzing around the city with trails dragging behind each car. Yellow cabs provided the only color.

"Okay, dinner is served." She took a deep bow and extended her arm toward the table.

I walked over, pulled Holly's chair out, and helped her slide in. I poured the wine and sat down at the opposite end. We raised our glasses.

"This looks great, babe. Cheers." I tilted my glass in her direction.

"Happy Anniversary," she said.

I choked on my wine. "Excuse me?"

"Don't pretend you forgot. I'm wearing your present underneath." She tugged at her chiffon blouse and I caught a glimpse of her black lace bra. She smiled broadly and winked.

"Oh, right." I patted my pockets. "Damn it. I forgot yours. I had it sitting on my dresser and I forgot all about it. I got so excited about seeing you, I must've left it behind. Sorry." I hoped she'd tell me soon what it was all about.

"Well, as long as you have it. You can give it to me later. I was afraid you might have forgotten."

"Forgotten?" I feigned a look of surprise. "No chance." *Hmm...November 22. Maybe she marks JFK's assassination as some kind of anniversary. That would explain the black bra.*

"Who would have thought, four months ago today you took me to the Pat Benatar concert, our first date. And we're still together." She scrunched her shoulders. "That is so totally awesome."

"Has it really been— I mean, I know. It's amazing. That's the present I left behind. I got you the new Pat Benatar cassette, *Get Nervous*."

"Like, you are so thoughtful. And so am I." She sipped her wine. "I made us

spaghetti and meatballs. That's what I ordered on our date. You had some foreign dish. Anyway, I added a little something to make it special. My grandma gave me the recipe." She bowed her head. "God rest her soul."

"Yeah, you've really outdone yourself here." I twirled up a forkful and took a bite. I suppressed a gag induced by large amounts of anchovies and spinach. A feeling of sickness washed over me.

"Any good?" She held a nervous, hopeful, and expectant look.

I held the napkin over my mouth concealing facial convulsions. "Wow, I've never tasted anything like it. You got any more of Grandma's recipes?" I dabbed a corner of my mouth with the napkin and hoped she was about to tell me the precious book got destroyed in a fire. I took a gulp of wine trying to wash the salt off my taste buds.

"Yeah, I got the whole book." She beamed. "Grandma left it to me in her will when she died. She was like the best cook ever. She was totally awesome with a spatula in her hand."

"Yeah, well this meal really captures the atmosphere of the occasion."

"What a nice thing to say."

I choked down the spaghetti while she gobbled hers up, periodically emitting a moan of pleasure. A periodic puke would have been more appropriate as far as I was concerned. I never thought Navy roast beef would taste better than spaghetti, but Holly and her grandmother managed it.

After dinner, she insisted we watched *Joannie Loves Chachi* because Chachi was like so totally awesome. Then an episode of *Dallas* before we headed to the bedroom for the real reason I came over.

She made love while I had sex.

We lay in bed the next morning with Holly snuggled into my chest with my arm wrapped around her shoulder. She twirled her finger through my small patch of chest hair.

"Whatcha thinkin'?" she asked.

"If I wanted you to know what I was thinking, I'd be talking."

She smacked my chest and propped herself up to look at me. "I'm serious. What's going on in your mind?"

"Nothing. Just thinking about how good you are in bed."

She smiled and laid back into my arm. "You ever think about children?"

Oh shit. I didn't know what she was going to say next. Exactly four months ago was the first time I coked her. That would be enough time... don't be stupid. She'd be showing if she was up the duff. Her stomach was its usual flat self, wasn't it?

I patted her arm. "Of course I do. I think it's terrible what's happening to the

starving children in Africa."

"You are so thoughtful. But I was thinking more like having kids of your own."

Hell froze over in the time it took me to answer. My eyes darted around the ceiling. "You're not, umm...not pregnant, are you?" I stared at the white stucco ceiling, then closed my eyes and offered a little prayer.

"Would it be so bad if I was?" *Hell just got colder.* She stroked my chest. "No, I'm not with child. I was just thinking, I don't want to be some totally old hag trying to bring up a baby."

I breathed a sigh of relief. Her soft hair tickled my fingers as I stroked the back of her head in comb-like fashion. "Oh, well then. You got plenty of time, darlin'. Beauty like yours doesn't just disappear. It'll take sixty or seventy years for you to become an old hag."

I felt her face tighten into a smile against my chest.

"Besides, I read somewhere that women are waiting until they're twenty-five, thirty even, before starting a family. Gives them time to live their own life before getting tied down with rug-rats."

"Where'd you read that?" she asked.

"One of your Cosmopolitan magazines."

She sighed. "Maybe. I just don't want to leave it too late." She leaned in and kissed my chest. "I want you so bad. I want you to make love to me."

I wished she'd quit calling it making love. Wait. What if she stopped taking the pill? Maybe she wants to get knocked up if she's not already. Shit. That's why she wants to make love. My mind went momentarily blank. I wiped my brow with the back of my knuckle, checking for traces of sweat. An image of Debbie popped into my head. She stood there wagging her finger, saying, 'I told you to stay away from her. She's trouble.'

"Have you ever had sex with another woman?" I asked. *Where the hell did that come from?*

She jumped up from lying down next to me, knelt on the bed, and looked down at me. Her eyes twitched with anger, her lips pressed tightly together. "Where the hell did that come from? I ask you if you want to make love and you ask me if I'm a lesbian!" She threw her hands on her hips, still kneeling. I couldn't help noticing her nice tits, while at the same time my silence seemed to intensify her anger.

I checked my brow for sweat again. A trace. "Sorry, I guess that was just a little foreplay thought. You know us guys, always think about two women going at it and stuff. Thought maybe that would help get me in the mood."

Her hand came across the side of my face. *Hard.* The smack echoed around

the room, and my cheek burned from the sting. Holly jumped out of bed and stood there in her naked glory.

"Great! So now you can't get it up unless you start thinking about me starring in some lesbian porno flick in your head. Is that it? I've never been so insulted in my life. Get out!"

"Holly, I'm sorry. That's not what I meant. I just—"

"I said, get out!" She stood there with one hand on her hip, and the other arm extended pointing to the door. "Grab your things and go. By the time I come back, you better be gone." She shook her cute little ass to the bathroom and slammed the door.

Following her orders, I got dressed and gathered my things. "Sorry," I called out before slipping out the door.

#

I got back to the room around noon. Mark had dressed better than he usually did and splashed on some aftershave as I came in.

"What are you doing back?" he asked. "I thought you were staying with Holly for the weekend."

"She kicked me out. I think it's over." I took off my shirt and threw it on the foot of my bed.

"Congratulations. So you managed to pick a fight with her, did you?"

"Unintentionally."

He stood in front of the mirror combing his hair. "What nerve did you strike to get her to dump you?"

"Sit down." I extended my arm, pointing to the two chairs. Mark looked at his watch as we walked over and sat down. "I think I screwed up, big time."

"You? Naaaw, I can't believe that."

"I know it's hard to believe, but I did. I think Holly can be quite vindictive if she wants to be. She might still get me kicked out. Anyway, she started asking me if I wanted kids and stuff like that. Man, she scared me. She says she not pregnant, but why would she start talking about kids?" I stopped and lit a cigarette.

Mark looked at his watch.

"Anyway, she no sooner says she's thinking about having a kid, then asks me if I want to make love. Not fuck, but make love." I shook my head. "Man, maybe she stopped taking the pill or something. Maybe she's using me as a direct deposit sperm donor." I ran my hand back and forth across my mouth.

"A chick using you? Wouldn't that be funny? Wait...no, you didn't. You didn't

ask her if she's still taking the pill, did you?" He had a worried look on his face.

"No, I asked her if she was a lesbian."

Mark burst out laughing. "You take the biscuit, Chambers, you really do. Do you know when you're going to say something stupid, or does it surprise you as much as everyone else?" He held his stomach as he laughed some more.

"It wasn't quite like that. It just slipped out. I wondered if she dumped Debbie because she knew she wanted kids someday. She slapped my face and told me to get out."

"I don't blame her. Well, I don't think you'll have to worry about Miss Holly anymore. Sounds like you're well and truly dumped. Be happy, that's what you wanted."

I took another drag of my cigarette. "I dunno. I got used to her. She's kinda fun, really. I didn't think about it till she dumped me. Now that I can't have her, I want her. I think I actually like her." She was certainly an anything-goes kind of girl in the bedroom. Like a sex education class with hands-on demos.

Mark looked at his watch again.

"You going somewhere?" I asked.

"As it happens, yeah. While you were poking around the Holly bush last night, Debbie stopped by. I got a date."

I sprang to my feet. "With Debbie?" My heart fluttered and I immediately felt betrayed.

"Whoa. Touch a nerve, did I?" He waved a hand in the air. "Relax, no, it's not with Debbie." He motioned a sit down gesture. "You got a bit worked up, almost jealous like. God, I don't want anything to do with the women you get involved with. None of them seem too mentally stable, much like their boyfriend." He smirked. "She's got a girlfriend, straight, before you ask, who wants to meet a nice guy. She said she thought of me. She probably figured you were too busy."

"So you're taking one of Debbie's friends on a date?"

He nodded.

"Good, I'm pleased for you. Where ya goin'?"

"Museum. Debbie said she's a good laugh and she showed me a picture of her. She's quite a looker. She works in disbursing. I'm picking her up at her barracks at one this afternoon, then we're taking a bus down to the museum, and then dinner. I'm hoping she's nice."

"Museum, huh?"

"Yeah, Debbie says she a real art and history buff, and I'm pretty much into that stuff myself. It should be cool."

"Well, good luck, buddy. I hope it works out for you." I stood up and patted him on the shoulder.

"Thanks." Mark gave himself the once over in the mirror and left, on his way to what sounded like an intellectual date. But I wasn't jealous. My dates were screwed up but fun.

I walked over to Debbie's barracks hoping she'd be in. As I got to her building, she came out.

"I didn't expect to see you this weekend," she said, "I thought you were staying with Holly."

"Long story. You going anywhere in particular?"

"No, just down to the geedunk bar. I like sitting there looking over the harbor at the ships and subs."

"Mind if I join you?"

"What if someone sees me walking and sitting with Miss Knight's boyfriend?"

"I'll tell you all about it when we get there."

We walked down to the geedunk bar which was nothing more than several vending machines and half a dozen picnic tables sitting on a slightly raised concrete patio. Being the weekend, we were the only ones there.

Debbie bought a couple of candy bars, known as geedunk in Navy slang, and I splashed out on the cokes. We sat down and admired the haze gray vessels moored on the other side of the harbor, and the black sails of the subs, menacingly sitting above the surface of the water.

"So, you set Mark up, huh?"

She popped her can of coke and took a drink. "Yeah, I think Mark's a really nice guy. My friend, Lori, wanted to meet someone, so I hooked them up. I think they'll like each other."

"I hope it works out for 'em," I unwrapped my Three Musketeers bar.

"So, you wanna tell me why you're here and not with the lovely Holly?" she asked.

"We kind of had a fight. Well, I didn't do much fighting. I thought she was dropping hints about having a kid and I kinda freaked." I took a bite and enjoyed the texture of the soft nougat on my tongue.

"Please tell me you didn't ask her if she was sure that you were the father." She lowered her head, raised her eyebrows and looked at me from the tops of her eyes. "Women hate that, ya know. May as well call 'em a slut."

"No, I didn't." I softly thumped my fist on the table. "I'm not that stupid." I took another bite of my candy bar. "And I don't think she is pregnant. Not yet anyway. But I think she wants to be, and I was afraid she might want me as the father. I don't do it very often, but I just blurted out what I was thinking at the time."

She put her index finger under her chin and looked up. "Gee, I used to think I

was a pretty smart girl, but when it comes to the workings of the mind of Tyler Chambers, well, it would be like asking Stevie Wonder to identify a suspect out of a lineup. Spill. What magical line did you spin?"

"I kinda asked her if she was gay."

Debbie's eyes widened and her mouth dropped open like she had just seen a flasher. "What? Oh, for crying out loud. You can't be serious." She scrambled for her cigarettes, pulled one out, and lit it. She took a deep drag and sighed as she exhaled the smoke. "For the love of Pete, Tyler. You would have been better off asking her if she was sure it was yours. Oh, nooo, you wouldn't do anything as stupid as asking who the father is. But asking her if she's a lezzy, well that's okay." She shook her head and took another drag. She waved her finger toward an imaginary line-up. "Yes, you were right, Mr. Wonder, it was suspect five. For your next trick, guess what the fuck Mr. Chambers is going to say next. Can't do it, can ya?"

I held my arms out. "I was freaked. I wondered if she gave up being a lesbian so she could have a baby." I shook my head and sighed. "I didn't know she was going to go off her head."

Debbie put her hand under the table and felt my crotch. "Doesn't feel like she cut it off, which does surprise me." She put her hand back on top of the table. "No doubt she dumped you."

I nodded. "After a slap."

She took another puff. "Well, that doesn't do us much good, does it? She'd be very suspicious if she saw us together now. You asking her if she's gay, and then she sees you knocking around with her former lover." She dropped her head in her hands for a moment. She raised up, took a drag of her cigarette and stubbed it out. "I still can't believe you. She'll probably think I put you up to it to get back at her. So did she fess up? 'Yes, Tyler, I'm only screwing you until I find someone with bigger tits.' Is that what she said?"

"I'm really sorry, Debbie. I could be in a world of shit, all the way 'round. I'm going back to my room. I need to think. I'll catch you later."

I left Debbie sitting at the table and went back to the room. One little slip-up and everyone makes a big deal about it. I figured I better give Holly some space. She seemed pretty pissed. God, I hoped I didn't blow it with her.

I laid on the bed with my crossword book. Contrary to what I told Debbie, the last thing I wanted to do was think. I needed some escapism.

I dozed off doing the crossword and fell into a light sleep. A knocking woke me at around five o'clock. I rubbed my eyes, walked over and opened the door. To my surprise, there stood Holly in white hemmed shorts and a pink and white striped blouse.

"Holly? What are you doing here?"

"Can I come in?" I stepped aside and extended my arm. She marched over to the table and sat down. Her Chanel Number Five brought a fresh fragrance to the room. It was her favorite perfume and I had learned to recognize the scent. I followed her over to the table and sat, remaining silent. I figured it would be best if she spoke first.

She drummed her fingers on the table, looking into my eyes. She cleared her throat. "That was like so hurtful what you said. Why on earth would you ask me if I was a lesbian? Am I like a disappointment in the bedroom?" Her lip quivered.

Reaching over, I picked up her hand that was resting on the table. She looked so vulnerable and sexy, I suddenly forgot what it was that bugged me about her. "No, not at all. You're a screaming little vixen. Sex with you is fantastic."

She broke my clutch and slapped the table. "Then why would you call me a lesbian?" Tears formed in her eyes.

"Holly, I'm really sorry. It's just ... before I came over to your house yesterday, Mark came in with a Hustler, you know, the girlie magazine." I dropped my head like a shamed schoolboy. "He showed me this layout with two girls going at it. They were pretty hot pics. I just wondered if you ever did anything with a woman. You know, gay things." I raised my head and caught her gaze. "I got carried away, and I'm sorry."

"Tyler, I might forgive you, but I'm not sure. To answer your question, and just so we're honest with each other, no, I never did anything gay after puberty."

"Oh. Some people just experiment, and I—" Holly's face tightened with anger. "I believe you. It was a stupid thing to say, and I'm sorry. How can I make it up to you?"

"Well, if you're really, super sorry, I might forgive you. This time." She shook her finger at me. "But if you ever..."

I grasped both her hands and nodded. "Yep, I'm really super-duper sorry." I thought it best to speak her lingo to get out of this one.

She smiled, broke out of my grip and rummaged through her purse. She dug out her glasses and rested them on the tip of her nose. "You know you deserve this," she said.

"I know I do, but how about a different game this time?"

She looked at me, leaned in with widened eyes that held an expectant look. "What you got in mind?"

"You remember I said my dad owned bicycle repair shops?"

She nodded.

I got up from my chair and bounded over to my bunk. I took a big jump and

landed on my back on the bed. "It's the bicycle game. It's best if you're naked."

Holly giggled. I watched as she threw her shorts and blouse on the table, followed by her matching white mesh bra and panties. "Here I come, Mr. Schwinn," she said, wearing nothing but a big smile.

We spent the next four hours making up in my room. If Debbie wasn't such a good friend, I would have thought she was a liar. Holly didn't seem to have a gay bone in her body. She was on fire. I'd have to upset her more often if this was what the make-up sex was like with her.

We lay in the bed exhausted. She kissed me. "I gotta go," she said. She got out of bed and walked toward her pile of clothes on the table.

I got out of bed followed her. We both stood naked in the middle of the room, kissing. My hands held each side of her head while my tongue searched for the back of her throat.

"Thanks for giving me another chance, Holly. Tonight was amazing."

"You were amazing," she said. "Wow, I'm so glad your dad taught you about bikes. That was like the best ride ever." We continued our naked kiss when the door opened.

Chapter 11

"Mark? What are you doing back?"

Mark's bulging eyes stared at my nude girlfriend. He looked Holly up and down like he was on an unguided tour. Holly did nothing to cover herself up, just stood there with her hands on her hips. He had a long look at her immaculately trimmed pubic hair. "Thanks for saving me the trouble of having to undress you with my eyes, Holly."

Holly stared back. "Are you like mentally masturbating in your mind?"

He chuckled. "Where else would I mentally masturbate?"

Since Holly didn't do anything to protect her modesty, I grabbed the sheet off the bed and wrapped it around her. I grabbed a towel and tied it around my waist. Holly held the sheet over her shoulders briefly then let it drop to the floor. She reached over and slid her white mesh panties off the table and slipped one leg through, then the other. Slowly, she pulled the panties up her thin, brown legs, stopping just before her neatly manicured bush, leaving it on show. "Well, I hope you got your little jollies, Mark. If we were in an Arab country you'd get your eyes gouged out for looking at my *bibble box*." She eventually finished pulling up her panties.

Mark shrugged and spread his arms. "Hey, this is my room. I just walked in, and I certainly didn't expect to see your...*bibble box* on show."

She finished dressing. She turned to me, put her hands on my chest, then leaned in and kissed me. "Bye, loverboy, see you tomorrow." She stopped in front of Mark. "By the way, you don't need to show him any more of your nasty little porno magazines. As you can see, he doesn't need them. He's got the real thing." She threw her head back and walked past him, letting herself out.

Mark momentarily stood there with his mouth agape. "Wow, Tyler, I see your dilemma. She definitely has the hottest body I've ever seen. But, *bibble box*?"

I grabbed a cigarette and lit up. "Yeah. New one on me too. Glad you approve of my girlfriend's nakedness."

"She certainly didn't seem in a hurry to get dressed or cover up." He rubbed his hands together. "I think she enjoyed that as much as I did. But what was that crack about porno mags?"

I batted my hand at him. "Ah, nothin', just another jam you got me out of. I think she's got a bit of an exhibitionist streak in her. Anyway, how'd your date go?"

He unbuttoned his pale blue Hagar shirt. "Not as well as yours, but yeah, Lori's cool. She knows a lot about history and stuff, and she's pretty funny. Hey, we're going bowling Wednesday night. You wanna join us?"

I flicked my thumb up. "Cool, thanks."

"You could bring one of your girlfriends. I'll leave it up to you which one." He slipped off his shirt.

"It'd be more Debbie's scene, but I better take Holly. If she found out I went out with Debbie, or anyone else for that matter, she'd kill me."

"Man, I don't know how you do it."

I shrugged. "It's a gift."

#

Holly parked her Mustang in front of the barracks. She took good care of that car. It was always immaculately clean and smelled of leather cleaner. Mark and Lori climbed in the back seat, and I jumped in the front, giving Holly a peck on the cheek as I slid across the freshly polished seat. We drove toward the gate to leave base, passing by the women's building on the way. Debbie walked down the sidewalk heading toward Dolphin's.

"Look, there's Debbie," Lori shouted. She poked her head out the back window and waved. "Hi, Debbie," she yelled out as we drove past. I turned away and subtly lowered my head, hoping Debbie didn't see me and Holly wouldn't notice I ducked.

"She's such a nice person," Lori said. "I must admit, I thought you were going out with her."

"Who?" Holly and I said at the same time.

Holly looked in my direction. I kept my eyes firmly on the road ahead.

"Why would you think that?" Holly asked. "We've been boyfriend and girlfriend for over four months now."

"It's just that Debbie—"

"What she means..." Mark trumped in. I heard him pat Lori's leg. "...is that Debbie introduced us, so she thought there was a connection between Debbie and Tyler, him being my roommate and all. But I've known Debbie a lot longer than Tyler. She said she'd try and find me a nice girl, and I'd say she did a pretty good job of it."

Judging by the changing direction of his voice, I sensed he looked over at Lori for the last part of his lie cum truth. Holly and I both kept our eyes on the road.

Mark did a champion job of steering the conversation to talking about the Seven Wonders of the World. I was bored to tears, but Lori was in her element and did most of the talking. Fortunately, Mark didn't nominate my brain as the eighth wonder, and the Debbie topic didn't come up again. Holly did say that she hoped the gardener was well paid for watering the Hanging Gardens of Babylon.

#

We arrived at the bowling alley and the distinct smell of feet hit me as we walked into the thirty-two lane complex. Cheers went up alongside groans. Pins clanked into the backs of the lanes as bowling balls plowed their way down the wooden alleys. Plastic pucks ricocheted off the side of the air hockey tables. We got our gear and went to our assigned lane.

Holly had never bowled before, so I took great pleasure in showing her how to hold the ball and gently roll it down the lane. I loved pressing myself against her backside, and walking her through the phase of drawing the ball back, then thrusting it forward; emphasizing that a premature release would result in disappointment.

She nodded feverously in agreement.

My crash course in bowling paid off and Holly came second after Mark. At least I beat Lori and I hoped my losing to Holly wouldn't be seen as a weakness in her eyes.

After bowling, we went to The Leaning Tower of Pizza. The Hawaiian waitress looked cute in her black baseball cap and showed us to one of the red, imitation leather booths. We all slid in and studied the menu under the fake tiffany light hanging over the table. We ordered an extra-large Mighty Meaty pizza and a pitcher of beer.

We sipped beer and relived the bowling glories and mishaps until the pizza arrived.

"So, how did you two meet?" Lori asked. She shifted her gaze between me and Holly.

"Tyler like really bugged me until I agreed to go out with him." She tilted her head and rested it on my shoulder. "And now we're totally cool."

"I really got that messed up." Lori looked at the tray and reached for a piece of pizza. "I seriously thought you were going out with Debbie." Her eyes were focused on her struggle to separate the long stringy cheese between the pieces of pizza. Lack of eye contact left the statement hanging in the air instead of it being directed at me.

Holly and I looked at each other. She didn't look angry, so she must have held some concern that the question may have been directed toward her. Lori's statement was met with silence. Even Mark didn't come to my rescue this time. I needed to say something but didn't want to walk through the minefield Lori had laid. The third degree awaited me from Holly if I let on that I was chummy with her former lover.

"I think she wants to be fuck-buddies with me," I blurted out.

Their three mouths dropped open in unison and Mark suddenly found himself attacked by a coughing fit. Holly had a piece of crust resting on her back molars, while Lori leaned in, her eyes as wide as her mouth.

"I think she's got the hots for me." I looked at Holly and placed my hand on her thigh. "Working next door to one another, we see each other every day, and she's been coming on to me. I keep shunning her advances and tell her I'm dating you. She's a nice girl, so I don't want to be rude. You got nothing to worry about, babe."

Holly burst out laughing. "I know I don't have anything to worry about, and I think you got your signals mixed, lover." Holly laughed some more. Mark and Lori looked at each other with puzzlement.

"You know her?" I asked.

"I'm in admin. Like, I know everyone in the division. Sorry if this bruises your ego, but Debbie's gay. She's not chasing after you, I'm sure of that."

"Wow," I said, "I had no idea. What a relief." I leaned in kissed Holly on the lips. I caught Mark out of the corner of my eye doing a huge eye roll.

"What did you say about my friend?" Lori snapped. The girls sat diagonally from one another. She rested her palms on the edge of the table and leaned in toward Holly.

"It's a well-known fact, she's a dyke. Like, hardcore."

Lori took off her silver hoop earrings and slammed them on the table. Her round hazel eyes tightened and her jaw clenched as she stared at Holly. "You take that back," she said slowly as she tucked her short blonde hair behind her ears.

"Why do you care?" Holly looked down at her nails as if searching for imperfections. "Afraid she's going to attack you or something?"

"You, bitch," Lori growled. She grabbed her glass of beer and threw it in Holly's face. Amber liquid ran down her hair and cheeks, spilling onto her Jaegar blouse.

"Double bitch," Holly screamed. She leaned across the table and punched Lori on the jaw.

They both stood up as best they could while sitting at a booth, thrashing their arms wildly. Holly got a handful of Lori's hair and pulled her head down, driving Lori's face into the pizza. Lori screamed.

I jumped up and grabbed Holly, breaking her grip from Lori's hair. I held her arms down by her sides.

Lori jerked her head up, cheese dangling from her face and a piece of sausage stuck to her nose. She picked up the pizza tray bashed Holly on the top of the

head with it, sending pizza flying everywhere.

Holly elbowed me in the gut and managed to kick me in the shin with the back of her heel. When I let go of her, she landed another left hook to Lori's face.

Mark jumped up and put his arms into the mix, grabbing the girls' swinging limbs. He slowed their attacks on one another until I managed to subdue Holly once again. I got my arms around Holly and wrestled her back into her seat. Mark did the same with Lori.

"Calm down, girls," Mark said in a smooth voice.

"I'm not having this...airhead...talk about my friend like that. Debbie could get kicked out if this bitch goes around spreading rumors like that. Debbie's not like that." Lori trembled with unused rage.

Holly pushed her face as far toward Lori as she could under my restraining grip. "Look, you little whore, it's a well-known fact that Debbie's a lesbian. Ask her yourself, but don't be surprised if she asks you into bed with her so she can show you."

Lori lunged across the table again so fast that Mark lost his grip on her shoulders. I blocked her fist from Holly's face and Mark pulled her back down into the seat. "C'mon," Mark said, "I think we better go." He guided Lori out of the booth. He stood at the end of the table and threw ten bucks down amongst the pieces of pizza scattered all over the table. "We'll catch a taxi." He held up his arm. "See you later, Tyler."

My heart raced as I watched them leave. God, a catfight in the middle of a double date. I wasn't quite sure who started it, but wow...

"Can you believe that little hussy? Accusing my boyfriend of cheating on me, and then calling me a liar. I think you should tell Mark to dump her. She's trouble." She pulled out a compact and readjusted her beer-soaked hair. "Bitch," she mumbled. She excused herself and went to the ladies' room to freshen up - rubbing the top of her head on the way.

She returned a few minutes later looking a little tidier, but still wore evidence of being in a brawl.

"Can you take me back to base, now?" I asked. "That kind of put a damper on things. I got a lot of work to do tomorrow, so I could do with a good night's sleep."

I paid the bill and we left.

She dropped me off at the barracks and I waved as she drove away. Once she was out of sight, I went over to Debbie's room.

Debbie answered the door in Scooby-Doo pajamas.

"Tyler? It's eleven o'clock. I'm just going to bed." She covered her mouth and fought back a yawn. "What're you doing here?"

"We need to talk. Have you seen Lori tonight?"

She shook her head.

I cast my head toward the ceiling then lowered it to look at Debbie. "Tonight was a bit of a disaster."

She rolled her eyes then motioned to the chairs in the middle of the room. We walked over and sat down. "I saw you with Holly and them leaving the base. I take it you're back with her."

I nodded.

"That being the case, I'm not surprised by the disaster aspect. So, she got over your gay comments, did she?"

"Yeah. Mark wanted the four of us to double date. In the restaurant, Lori said she thought you and I were dating. I wasn't sure at first if she was talking about me or Holly. Anyway, I finally said that you were chasing after me."

"Excuse me," she said calmly, raising her eyebrows. "Can I go get Mr. Wonder out of identifying suspects, 'cause I have a feeling the workings of Tyler Chambers' mind will astound him yet again." She dropped her face in her hands. "Fire away. I can't wait to hear this one."

"Lori obviously knew something about you and me. I thought you might have said something to her. So I said you were coming on to me, but I shunned you."

She raised her head to look at me. "And this is supposed to make me feel better?"

I opened up my arms. "Hey, I had to cover my tracks in case we were seen together as to why. I didn't know what Lori was going to say next."

Debbie pulled out a cigarette and offered me one. We both lit up and each took a drag. "In one way, I suppose it was a clever ploy. I did tell Lori that you and I had a few dates, but I didn't tell her you were seeing Holly."

I took another deep drag and blew the smoke toward the ceiling. "Shit."

"Don't worry, I can straighten it out with Lori. I'll just say that I knew you were seeing Holly, but I was trying to win you over. She met Holly a few times in the past and can't stand her."

"Well, she really can't stand her now." I dropped my gaze toward the floor. "There's a bit more to it than that."

"Oh, God." She waved her arms in the air. "Shoot me now. How could I be so stupid to think that was it?"

"Holly said you wouldn't be coming after me because you're gay. Lori got mad and threw a beer in her face, and they had a fight. I think Lori might come around and ask you if you're gay or not."

"Fan-fucking-tastic!" She took a drag off her cigarette. "I turn over a new leaf, and that bitch is still spitting venom. I have a good mind to go over there and

knock her block off. And who is she to call me gay? She started it all. She's just as gay as me. Maybe even gayer."

"Let me talk to Holly. I'll see if I can talk some sense into her."

"Yeah, right. 'No, Holly, Debbie's not gay anymore. I've been jamming her behind your back. She quit being a lesbian when you broke her heart.'" Debbie stood up and unbuttoned her pajama top. "Tyler, dump Holly. You and I could be so good together. Let's be a proper couple."

She flung her top across the room, then pushed down her bottoms, stepped one leg out, and flicked them across the room with her foot. She stood naked in front of me, her pert breasts and crotch highlighted by the contrasting white triangles against her tanned body.

"I want you, Tyler."

"You have a strange way of getting turned on."

"I always get horny when I'm stressed. Takes my mind off things."

I got up and retrieved Debbie's pajamas and handed them to her. "Look, Debs, I think we better cool it for a while."

Her jaw dropped. "I'm standing here naked and horny, and you dump me?"

I sat back down. "There's nothing to dump. I'm going out with Holly." I closed my eyes a moment trying to take in the disbelief. "Debbie, I really like you, but I think you're getting emotionally involved. We agreed to some no strings fun, but you're getting carried away. And, it's not fair to Holly. You said yourself you hated the cheating boyfriend thing."

"I know, but I care about you too much. I feel so much passion when we make love."

Making love? What is it with these chicks?

"I get so jealous when I see you with Holly, or even think about you being with her if I'm honest. C'mon, Tyler, ditch Holly. You can't tell me you're in love with her."

I shook my head. "No, I'm not. But I can't dump her. You were right a while back. She's got something on me. Let's just say she could get me kicked out."

"Well, I got something on you too. How would you like it if I told your girlfriend that you and I were getting it on? Or that you go downtown fucking strippers? Not to mention that you only went out with her to win a bet."

I briefly rested my head in my hands, then returned my look to her. She stood there naked with folded arms, pushing her breasts up. Her eyes narrowed.

"Come on, Debbie. I really like you, but this no way to have a relationship. Besides, you're a good person. You don't want to screw me over, right?"

"Well, that kind of arrangement seems to be working for you and Holly." She placed her hands on my shoulders and looked me in the eyes. "You'll learn to

love me."

"She'll never believe you. Remember, she thinks you're hardcore lesbian."

She grinned. "I would assume that the only people to see that little half-moon shaped scar just above your pubes are women you're about to bed." She ran her finger along her lower abdomen. "Holly and I could compare notes. I'd bet we match."

"Look, I've never given my mom any reason to be proud of me." I stood up and pushed her hands off my shoulders. "I got a letter from her months back, and for the first time ever, she wrote that she's a really proud mom. She's telling all her friends that I'm out defending America. She'd be so disappointed if I got dishonorably discharged." I dropped my head toward the floor. "I've given her enough hurt, but we're starting to patch things up. Holly could make my mom's pain a reality. I don't want to hurt or shame her anymore."

"Would she be proud of you screwing two women at the same time? Like your dad?"

I looked at her with disdain and swallowed hard.

"Sorry, Tyler, that was a low blow." She put a hand on my shoulder. "I know you've had it tough, and I'm pleased that your mom doesn't think you're such a shithead anymore. We all know different, but she doesn't have to."

I snorted out a laugh. "I'd pimp-slap anybody else for a crack like that." I grabbed another cigarette and lit it.

She refolded her arms under her boobs. I was sure she was pushing them up for my benefit, and it worked. "So what's she got on you? You a Russian spy or somethin'?"

I took a drag. "I lied on my enlistment papers. Holly jiggled it around to make it look like a Navy screw-up; not a Tyler screw-up. I would have been kicked out if it wasn't for her, and she could still do it. I was about to dump her a while ago and she just happened to pick the right moment to remind me that she could have me booted out. After spending some time in the brig, of course. That was shortly after I got that glowing letter from my mom."

"Wow." Debbie lit a cigarette herself. "I think next Halloween you should go as a closet."

I pointed to myself. "Are you calling me a pansy?"

"Not likely. No, I'm talking about all the freaking skeletons you got lurking in there. Graveyards are less populated."

We both took drags from our cigarettes and blew our smoke toward each other. The smoke danced together, like Fred and Ginger. A sadness fell over me as the smoke dissipated.

"So what are you going to do?" I asked.

Debbie looked at me for a while before she answered. "Okay, here's the deal. I can see that you need Holly to hang on to your Navy career. If you get discharged, I'll never see you again. And I don't want that. But you're gonna keep seeing me too."

"Come on, Debs. I got a girlfriend. You and I were just having a bit of fun." I laced my fingers behind my head, trying to look confident and show a 'no fear' attitude. "I was doing you a favor to help you find out if you liked men or women better."

"Yeah, well, thanks. But it's gone deeper than that now. We belong together. In time you'll see that. I'm going to win you over. In the end, you'll dump Holly, consequences be damned. You'll see."

A dizzy spell came over me. We inhaled and exhaled our cigarettes in unison again.

"Why don't you just tell her now?" I asked.

"Because then you'd probably hate me and never speak to me again. I need to win you over fair and square for it to count. You carry on seeing Holly - if you must. As long as I feel there's hope for us, I won't tell her. But, if I feel you slipping away..." She moved her finger across her throat.

"What if I say no?"

"If you don't want to see me anymore, I'll tell Holly about us, and your escapades down on Shit Street, and about the bet. Then you'll lose us both. If I can't have you, I'll make sure she doesn't either. I know you're just using Holly as some kind of fuck-doll that keeps you in the Navy and out of the brig. You and me, we're soul mates. I can feel it. I think in time you'll realize that it should be us together."

She threw her pajamas on the floor and stubbed out her cigarette. "I'm the puppeteer, Tyler. Now get into bed."

#

I woke the next morning without waking Debbie, and shuffled to the door with slumped shoulders, not looking back as I left. A cloud of disbelief enveloped me. I tried to do the right thing and stay loyal to my girlfriend, only for it to be sabotaged.

I walked back to my room, showered, changed and went to work. Mark had to go down on a job as soon as we started work, but asked me to meet him for lunch in the mess hall.

I found him sitting alone at lunchtime and joined him. I sat down as he dipped a forkful of green beans in his mashed potatoes.

"I hoped you'd come back to the room last night so we could talk about what happened at the restaurant," Mark said. "I don't think we'll be going on any more double dates together. Decided to stay with Holly, did ya?"

I stared at my lasagna. "No, I stayed with Debbie."

"You what?" I looked up to see Mark's eyes the size of grapefruits. "You have got to be kidding me. Oh, man, you are unreal." He broke into a closed-lipped smile. "What's wrong? Had to check if Holly was right." He tapped my shoulder with the side of his fist. "That's it, Tyler boy. Now that you converted her, you don't want her going back. You keep plugging her to keep her on the straight and narrow." He chuckled.

"Knock it off. This is serious."

He let out a good belly laugh. "Oh, now it's serious? Up until now, it was just kindergarten stuff, was it? Can I just ask what makes it serious now as opposed to the joke it was?"

I took a bite of lasagna and decided I wasn't hungry. "Debbie's messing with my head. If I don't keep slippin' her the Hot Karl, she's gonna tell Holly about us. She wants to keep me in a relationship with her, thinking I'll pick her over Holly in the end."

He took a mouthful of rice. "Does she know the reason you're still with Holly?"

I nodded. "Yeah, I told her, hoping she'd back off. Didn't work. And they talk about guys just wanting one thing. I think their mind is attached to their trap door. 'He's cute - open'. 'He didn't think about my feelings - close'. It's like a revolving door." I circled my head around, and embarked a chant, "Open, close, open, close."

"Oh what a tangled web we weave, when first we practice to deceive. Sir Walter Scott, I think. At least you use the same foundation for building relationships. Shaky, but consistent. So, whattaya gonna do?"

I noticed a dress white uniform standing beside our table, then a clearing of the throat. "Uh-umm."

We both looked up.

"Oh, hi, Holly." I stood up and held my hand out toward a vacant chair. "Care to join us?"

"No, can't stop. You look a bit bushed, Tyler. Didn't you sleep well last night?"

I jerked a thumb toward Mark. "No, his snoring kept me up." Mark's eyes went wide.

She looked at Mark. "Well?"

"I snore. So what?"

"I don't care what you do at night. What do you have to say about last night?"

She crossed her arms.

"Well, I'm hardly going to say it was a good night, am I?"

"I'm talking about, like an apology. Your girlfriend was well out of line, and you owe me an apology."

He pointed to himself. "Me? If you want an apology, try asking Lori, but I doubt you'll get one."

"Well, I think you should have better control over your girlfriend." She looked back at me. "See you tonight, Tyler. Six o'clock, Dolphin's. Don't be late. Ciao." She walked off.

I dropped my head. "Shit, Debbie always drinks at Dolphin's on Thursday nights," I mumbled.

"You wanna hear something funny?" He leaned in. "Me and Lori agreed to meet at Dolphin's tonight. She said seven, but I'm going to tell her to make it six. I wouldn't miss this for the world."

Chapter 12

I stood at the entrance of Dolphin's ten minutes before six, wanting to catch Holly before she went in and convince her we should go back to her house instead of going inside.

I took a long drag on my cigarette, flicked it to the ground and crushed it under my boot. Pacing at the entrance of the bar, I slid another cigarette from the pack and lit it.

Why did Debbie have to go messing things up? She had to let her feelings get involved. It was her idea and now she held me to ransom. I took another drag and blew out the smoke with exaggerated force. Okay, okay. Let's think about this. As long as Holly doesn't find out, maybe I can make this work. I gotta be nice to Debbie. I didn't want her spilling her guts to Holly.

I moved to one side of the doorway as several people went into the bar. Debbie trudged toward the entrance. Shit. Right on time for her Thursday night booze-up as usual. I could just about set my watch to her drunkenness.

"Oh hi, Tyler." She threw her cigarette on the ground and tapped it with her foot. "Buy me a drink, and I'm yours." She smiled. Her eyes were hazy and her speech slow.

This was one Thursday session I wished she would have missed. "Umm...I'm waiting for Sanchez."

"Oh, I like him. He tells the rudest jokes. Dirty Sanchez. That's what I call him." She giggled. "I'll wait with you." She staggered a little and used me to steady herself.

"If you don't mind, I have to talk to him in private about something." I shifted my head looking into each of her eyes. "Have you been drinking already?"

"I had a few shots in my room to get primed. Should be a good night." She laughed. "See you inside."

Ten minutes later, Mark and Lori showed up. All I needed now was Holly and my nightmare would be complete.

"Waiting for someone special?" Mark grinned.

I ignored his comment. "Hi, Lori. Sorry about the other night. It got a bit heated." I flicked my cigarette butt into the parking lot. "Holly's not usually like that."

"Thanks for the apology, but it doesn't count. I'd need to hear it from your girlfriend, Holly Ali. Even then, I'd probably still like to spit in her face." She rubbed the side of her face. "My jaw's still sore from her bitch-slapping me."

"Man, she really does have you whipped, doesn't she?" Mark said. "I thought Holly was kidding when she wanted me to apologize, but she's got you doing it."

Did she honestly expect me to say sorry?"

"Eat shit and bark at the moon," I said. "I was genuinely concerned for Lori."

She looked at Mark. "Oh, he's good, isn't he?" She looked back at me. "Thanks, Tyler. I still like you, I just wish you had better taste in women." She grabbed Mark's arm. "Come on, let's grab a drink and get ringside. I have a feeling tonight's going to be fun."

Mark pulled out his wallet and handed her a twenty. "Get yourself a drink, and get me a beer. I just want to have a word with Tyler."

Lori took the money. "K." She sashayed into the bar.

"You know what, Mark, she's got a nice ass. Maybe one day I'll walk into the room, and she'll be running around in the buff."

"I haven't even seen her naked yet, so buzz off." Mark motioned for us to move over to the corner of the building, away from the entrance. We both leaned against the brick exterior. I lit a cigarette.

"Those things are going to kill you," Mark said, "but I'm betting you die at the hands of an outraged woman before the cancer sticks ever get a chance to bite."

I touched my eyebrow with two fingers and flicked the wrist out in a saluting gesture. "Thanks for your concern, Mister Surgeon General, but I can handle chicks and sticks. If my liver holds out I might make it to twenty-seven. Morrison, Joplin, Hendrix, Chambers. We all only need twenty-seven years to make our mark on the world."

"How do you feel about twenty?" Mark pushed himself off the wall and faced me. "Lori told me that she and Debbie's been talkin', and Debbie's still pissed about what Holly said at the pizza joint. She confessed to Lori about her past, and they're cool. But Debbie wants revenge."

I stroked my jaw. "Did she tell Lori about her and Holly?"

"I don't think so. Lori would have said something if she knew about Holly."

"Debbie worries me, but I gotta stay nice to her. I'm more worried what Holly could do. As long as I keep playing Debbie's game, I think it'll be alright." I took a drag.

"I'm just warning you, there's going to be a kick-off soon." Mark lightly slapped my cheek twice. "Live by the dick, die by one of the women you put it in. See you inside."

"Later," I said, as he walked away.

I urged Holly to appear so we could get the hell out of there. I walked back over and stood by the entrance. Someone tapped my shoulder. I turned to find Holly standing there with a face like thunder.

"What are you doing out here?" She held up her arm and tapped her watch. "It's ten past six. I said six."

"Sorry, gorgeous. I looked inside but didn't see you, so I waited out here to escort you in, proper like." I flicked my cigarette away.

She put her hands on her hips. "Like, I wasn't hard to find. I was the good-looking one, totally sitting on my own."

I gently reached down and took her hand. "Why don't we blow this joint and head downtown or something?"

"Because I have a drink sitting in there. Now, come along." She jerked my hand and led me in. I pretended that if I didn't see Mark, Debbie or Lori, they wouldn't exist, so I kept my eyes locked on the green indoor/outdoor carpet as Holly guided me to an isolated table in the corner.

"Go get yourself a drink." She dipped into her purse and handed me ten dollars. "And get me another rum and coke."

I strolled to the bar as instructed and placed my order. Maybe I could get Holly to play a drinking game. We'd slam the drinks down in one gulp and leave. Perfect.

"So, did Sanchez show up?" I looked to my left and there stood Debbie, a little unsteadily. I could tell by her glazed look she might be on the road to a night she wouldn't remember.

"Oh, um, no, he didn't." The barman put down the two drinks in front of me, and I gave him the cash.

"So, who's the other drink for?" She took a step closer, and I could smell her priming drinks were more than just a few. "I take it you're with someone," she flicked a finger toward the drinks on the bar, "and not drinking cokie things with a beer chaser on your own. And my guess would be Holly. Am I right?"

I nodded.

"Well, I'm going to go have it out with that bitch once and for all." She pretended to push her sleeves up. "Not about us, but about her."

I grabbed her by the shoulders. "Wait, Debbie, don't make a scene. A quick drink and we're outta here. Please." I set my eyes to begging mode.

She wagged her finger in my face. "I'm not gonna drop you in it, but that bitch deserves a slap." She sighed, grabbed my beer off the bar and took a drink, then put it back. "Okay, no scene. But at least buy me a shot of tequila."

I handed her three dollars. "On me." That sounded better than telling her the truth and saying, 'On Holly'.

She smiled. "If you get tired of her," she pointed to a table at the other side of the room, "I'm over there, drinking with Mark and Lori."

"Gotcha."

I returned to the table with our drinks and sat down next to a stone-faced Holly.

"Like, what were you doing talking to Debbie Meyers at the bar?"

I rotated my beer bottle in place as it sat on the table, staring at the label. "Nothin'. She just asked me if I'd help her study for the E-five test she's taking next month."

"Why you? You're only an E-three, and since when did you two become so buddy-buddy?"

"We're not." I lifted my head and looked at her. "I told you, I think she's stalking me."

"If she wasn't a lesbian, I might be worried. Then again, I know you would never stray from me. We're like two peas on the farm."

"I think you mean 'two peas in a pod.'"

"Like, whatever. Anyway, I'm going to transfer her to the lagging shop tomorrow. At least then she'll be on the other side of the division and can't harass you so easily." She flicked her hair. "You are so lucky to have a girlfriend in high places." She patted my leg.

"Ain't I just. Look, can we go now?" I leaned in close, examining her brown eyes. She smelled of rose petals. "I want to go back to your place and fuck your brains out," I whispered. *Too bad someone already beat me to it.*

She stroked my arm. "Honey," she cooed, "I've told you, don't use the F-word when you talk about us doing the deed. It's making love. Don't you feel that way too?" She fluttered her eyelashes. "Besides, you just brought us back a drink."

"How about, 'I really want to nibble your bibble?'"

She scrunched her nose and shoulders and giggled. I giggled back, feeling myself getting aroused.

"Okay, we'll finish these, then we'll go," she said.

I looked around and noticed we were well away from anyone else, so I slipped my hand under the table and slid it up her thigh. She put her hand under the table and returned the favor. We fondled each other under the table through our clothes, and I got incredibly turned on. The public risk thing was so hot, especially when she closed her eyes and softly moaned. God, I could take her at any time she was so turned on. I had visions of ripping her clothes off, throwing her on the table, and fuc—, making love to her in the corner of the bar for all to see. She would have loved that. Provided I didn't suffer another attack of stage fright.

My mind went wild as we petted each other under the cover of the walnut veneer table. "Let's go," I whispered. My erection would be visible once I stood up, but I didn't care.

"You bitch!"

Holly and I both jumped. Debbie stood swaying at the end of the table. She

glared at Holly - a fight brewing in her eyes. Mark and Lori appeared behind her seconds later.

Uh oh. Time for the kick-off.

"You're drunk," Holly snapped.

"Don't condescend to me, you whore. Where do you get off telling everyone I'm a lesbian?" Debbie pointed at Holly. "Pot." She pointed back at herself. "Kettle."

Mark stood behind Debbie, put his hand on her shoulder, and leaned in. "Keep it down," he forcefully whispered, "this isn't the place for this topic of conversation."

Debbie threw her arm back toward Mark, shaking off his grip. "I'm not taking shit off this holier-than-thou, lesbian slut." Debbie flopped into one of the chairs opposite us. She lowered her voice, which was a relief. She leaned in and looked Holly in the eyes. "Come on, Holly. Tell your boyfriend, Tyyyler, how you used to be a lesbo yourself. Remember all those great orgasms I gave you? Do you still scream like a little nympho when you do it with Tyyyler?"

Holly straightened her back and pushed her chest out. "Look, Meyers, I realize that most guys on this base fantasize about having sex with me. And I accept that women like you probably do too. So, I can understand you dreaming about having sex with me. But you have to separate reality from fantasy." She narrowed her eyes. "Now, shove off."

"Then how come I know your nipples are tiny?" She held her finger and thumb a mere fraction of an inch apart. "About the size of a dime." She slung her look toward me. "Am I right, Tyler?"

Holly's hand came up and smacked the side of Debbie's face. The loud crack sounded like a whip and I cringed. Debbie held her cheek and looked shocked.

"I'm not sitting here discussing the size of my nipples with some brazen dyke. A drunk one at that. Come on, Tyler, we're going." Holly stood up, knocked the rest of her drink back, and stormed off toward the door.

I got up and walked over to Mark, pulling his arm to get him to take a few steps away from Lori. Debbie stayed seated at the table, her back to us. I motioned my thumb toward Debbie. "Is she going to be all right?" I whispered.

"Tequila slammers," he whispered back. "Don't worry, I'll make sure she gets back to her room." He glanced back toward Lori. She had moved and sat with her arm around Debbie. "She was right about Holly's nipples, though. I can vouch for that." He nudged me and smiled.

"Will you knock it off," I said sternly. "This is no time for you to be getting off on my girlfriend's nipples."

The smile didn't leave his face. "Right, Course not." He got a little more

serious. "Look, Debbie's hammered. I tried to talk her out of coming over here, but she got herself in a state. I believe Debbie on this one, Holly seems to be in some kind of denial."

Holly had stopped about ten feet away, turned around, and looked at me with her 'get your butt over here' face. "I gotta go," I said to Mark, and walked over to Holly.

She grabbed my arm and pulled me out the door. We got in her Mustang without speaking. She started it up, and once we left the base she drove like a woman possessed, weaving in and out of traffic, her mouth in full frown, her eyes narrowed, and anger oozing from every pore. We didn't speak and I kept my feet firmly pressed against the floorboard, pushing an imaginary brake.

We pulled up in front of her apartment building and she threw the gearshift into park.

I followed her as she stormed up to the front door, stuck the key in, then kicked the door open once she unlocked it. She threw her purse across the room and went straight to the kitchen. I heard bottles and glasses clanking around. She stood at the counter, poured herself a glass of Southern Comfort, knocked it back, and poured herself another. She stormed over to the table and plopped into the chair. I got myself a glass and poured out my own SC and joined her. It looked like I would need a few drinks myself to get through this one. Her rage made a hurricane look like nothing more than a windy day.

I took a sip of the whiskey. "You, umm...wanna talk about it?" I asked.

"No." She downed the rest of her drink, got up, poured herself another one, and returned to the table.

I bobbed my head. "Drunken sex. Cool, I'm into that."

Holly shot me a piercing look. "How dare she accuse me of being gay. I have a good mind to report her and get her kicked out. Bitch." She sipped her whiskey. "To say we were lovers, how absurd." She looked me in the eyes. "Do I act gay to you?"

"Of course not. You seem to enjoy my body as much as I enjoy yours. But if you wanna find out about any tendencies you might have we could go down to a strip joint. If you get turned on by it, well, we may have to reconsider." I smiled.

She took hold of her whiskey glass, and hurled it across the room, smashing it against the wall. I watched as the brown liquid slowly trickled down the white and yellow wallpaper. She dropped her head onto her forearms on the table. Sobbing slowly built up to loud crying, her upper body jerked as she cried, her face buried in her arms.

That didn't go down too well. I slid my chair around closer, rested my arm on her and stroked her back. "Hey, it's okay. No need to cry, you're probably right.

Debbie just fantasizes about bedding a woman as good-looking as you."

Her voice was muffled as she spoke from beneath her arms, and broken by her continued crying. "She's right—I'm—a les—bian. Or— was." The crying was almost as loud as one of her orgasms.

"Shh..." I held her tighter. "It's okay, babe. I know."

Her head jerked up at lightning speed. Her cheeks soaked by running mascara. She looked at me with black cheeks and red eyes. "What do you mean, *you know*?" Her lips quivered as she glared at me.

"What I mean is, I know a few things about weaving tangled webs. I've done some web weaving myself. We've all made mistakes. It doesn't matter to me what you've done in the past." I pulled her toward me and rested my chin on top of her head.

She wiped her eyes with the back of her hands. "Do I act gay in bed?" It sounded like she was fishing for a compliment or reassurance.

"Quite the opposite." I got up and grabbed a box of tissues off the counter and handed them to her. I got her another glass and poured her a fresh whiskey, handed it to her, and sat back down. "So, you wanna tell me about it?"

She sighed and swigged her whiskey. "You know the TV evangelist, Cornelius Knight?"

"Isn't he that guy that smacks people on the head?" I sipped my drink.

"It's not head smacking, you dope. It's the laying on of hands. Anyway, that's my dad. He—"

"Wait a minute, you never told me about that. I asked about your dad, and you just said he's on the road a lot. I thought he was a trucker."

She wiped her eyes with the tissue. "I wanted to make sure you weren't after me for my money." She sighed. "He's like totally rich. He's been pressuring me to get married, and wants me to bear him grandchildren."

"Umm...did you know that you can't do that if you're a lesbian?"

"Duh."

She pushed her whiskey away and stood up. She walked into the kitchen, turned the stove on and boiled the water in the kettle. She pulled a jar of instant coffee out of the cupboard and aimed the label toward me with her eyebrows raised. The mountain-grown richness looked somewhat inviting, but I was quite happy with the whiskey. I shook my head. She returned moments later with her cup of coffee in hand and dropped back into her chair. "Daddy thinks the world of me and I don't want to disappoint him."

"Wait a minute, if he's loaded, why did you join this sailing club instead of your local yacht club?"

She drew a deep breath. "I shamed the family name. I went out drinking one

night, and I had to pee, like really, really bad. But there wasn't a bathroom like anywhere. So I squatted next to a Mercedes, and some guy got a picture of me taking a tinkle." She sipped her coffee. "The guy knew me and my dad and blackmailed us. Daddy had to pay him like five thousand dollars for the photo and to keep it out of the scandal sheets."

"Wow. So your pussy's worth five thousand dollars?"

To my surprise, she smiled. "You should know." She paused a moment and I mentally agreed. "Daddy said I needed to keep a low profile for a while. I was always under the microscope as a famous preacher's daughter. I needed a break, so I joined the Navy." She rubbed the back of her neck. "About a year ago, he started saying that I should have myself straightened out by now. Anyway, he wants me to present him with a husband and grandkids."

She sipped her coffee. "Then, I started trying to find Mr. Right, but they were all jerks. I told one of my friends at the time about it, and the next thing I knew we were doing lesbian things. I realized I didn't have the pressure when I was with her. It was just a bit of harmless fun." She tore her tissue into small pieces. "I relaxed because I knew it was a short term thing, and I didn't have to worry if she was the one or about getting pregnant." She raised both hands to the heavens and looked toward the ceiling. "It was like an escape from the pressures of the great Cornelius Knight."

I lit a cigarette. "Debbie being the friend, right?"

She nodded. "Then she started getting all clingy and wanted a full-blown lesbian relationship. One night she said she loved me, and I freaked. Daddy would kill me then disown me if he knew. I told her to leave me alone, and I just pretended it never happened."

I grabbed a tissue and tried to wipe some of her mascara off. "If you're so afraid of your dad, why did you take the chance of getting kicked out to help me."

"After our first date, I liked you. You treated me really nice and special. I didn't want to see you get kicked out. Besides, I'm a risk freak and I have a thing for younger guys." She stopped a moment and looked deep into my eyes. I saw a twinkle from her innermost being. I sensed maybe she was falling in love with me, then she returned to her business-like manner. "I'm pretty smart, so putting those papers together and pulling it off was almost like having an orgasm. Didn't you notice how great the sex was when we were doing that?"

"It's always great with you, babe." I leaned in and kissed her. A feeling of closeness washed over me. That must have been exceptionally difficult for Holly to admit. She confided her deepest secrets in me. I respected that and felt even closer to her now. It couldn't have been easy for her. Wow, a preacher's daughter.

No wonder she's so wild.

"I bet you've never been to bed with someone who's done lesbian things before, have you?" She dipped her head and smiled nervously.

I resisted the temptation to say I was experienced in corking lesbians and would she care for a threesome. Instead, I shook my head. I got up and picked her purse up off the floor on the other side of the room, brought it back to the table, and sat down. I took a drag off my cigarette and rested it on the edge of the ashtray then pointed to the purse. "May I?"

She nodded, which indicated the ultimate show of trust. To be allowed to search through a woman's handbag was like giving Jesse Jackson the key to rummage around Klan headquarters.

I dug around and found her glasses. I put them on, resting them halfway down my nose, and looked over the top.

"Miss Knight, you've been a naughty girl. This is going to hurt you a lot more than it does me, but you need to be taught a lesson." I stood up and pointed toward her bedroom. "Now get in that room. You're going to get a spanking, and then we're having a gay check."

Holly smiled, got up and walked to the bedroom. Just outside the door, she dropped the back of her pants to give me a flash of that cute bare ass. I chased her in.

#

Holly dropped me off at my barracks the following morning. After I told Mark snippets of the night before, he waited in the room while I showered and changed, then we walked to the shop together.

"You certainly like your women volatile, don't you? A bit of the ole rough and tumble, eh?"

"I had the perfect chance last night to dump Holly. She fessed up about her relationship with Debbie." I shook my finger in scolding fashion. "I could've used the old, 'You're a lying lesbian' line and dumped her. She wouldn't have had the nerve to rat me out after that. And she thought I might be a gold digger. As if I'd be that shallow." I shook my head. "The perfect reasons laid before me."

"Why didn't you do it? Couldn't bear the thought of having to actually work at a relationship with someone who has a brain?"

I smacked him on the back of the head, looked at my watch, and pointed to a bench just off the walkway. "We got time, sit down." I pulled out a cigarette and lit up. "She was vulnerable. It would have been like kicking a puppy with a broken leg. Besides, she's not so bad, really. I saw a side to her last night I hadn't

seen before. Actually, I really like her."

"Tyler, I'll give it to you straight, dude. The chick's unbalanced. She slapped you, your other girlfriend, and punched mine. And for something that was totally true. I mean, I think the girl has mental issues. Yeah, she's got a hot bod, and I think you've done well to get a piece of that tail. But a relationship? Come on, man, get real." He reached down, picked up part of a leaf from a palm tree, and ripped off little bits of it.

"After you two left," he continued, "Debbie said how much she liked you, and wanted you guys to be a couple. Okay, Debbie's a bit unstable herself, but I think if you went out with her, she'd straighten up. She really is a nice girl."

"I know, but Holly and I connected last night. Besides, she's blackmailing me." I took a drag.

"They're both blackmailing you, and interlocking pubic hairs doesn't count as a connection. You want my advice?"

I nodded.

"You've had your fun with Holly, and now you got the perfect excuse to get rid of her. And she's not going to do anything about it. She's not your type, man. She's a violent control freak. I think you should hook up with Debbie. You two are so alike. Or, dump 'em both and stick to whores and strippers." He stood up and looked at his watch. "Come on, we better go."

#

I went down to the geedunk bar mid-morning to get a drink and a candy bar. I stood at the coke machine putting the change in.

"Sorry about last night."

I turned. Debbie stood next to me. I hesitated answering, trying to decide if I wanted to let her off the hook so easy. "Yeah, me too." I punched the Coke button.

"I was a bit drunk. I shouldn't have confronted her like that, but I'm paying the price." She folded her arms and leaned against the coke machine.

"Hungover?"

She rubbed the side of her head. "Well, yeah, that too. Knight transferred me to the lagging shop. So, I guess we won't be sharing any more morning ciggies before work."

"That's a shame. I'm sorry about that, Debs."

"I think you should come around tonight so I can give you a proper apology? You will do that, won't you?"

Shit. Here we go. "You're still blackmailing me, then?"

She nodded.

In that case, it was kind of justified. Holly had duty so she'd be in the admin building all night. If I had to do it to keep Debbie sweet, tonight was as good as any. "Fine. I'll bring some beer. What time?"

Chapter 13

I had showered, shaved, and put on my best pair of jeans. I came out of the liquor store on base with a twelve-pack of Coors.

To keep Holly, I had to keep screwing Debbie. In some ways I resented her. It's a pretty poor show when you have to threaten someone with under-handed tactics to keep them in a relationship.

Nevertheless, I couldn't take the chance of upsetting Debbie or making her mad. There was too much at stake. Most of our nights together consisted of shot-gunning beers, telling each other dirty jokes, and then going at it like rabbits. If I wasn't cheating on my girlfriend, it would've been perfect. I had to keep reminding myself I was a victim in all of this.

As I walked to her barracks, I knew she would be lighting candles, making her beige room as romantic as possible. I liked that about Debbie. She could turn drab into erotic with strategically placed candles and burning incense. She'd wear teasing clothes that revealed enough to get the blood pumping. Anticipation of her hot, supple body put a spring in my step.

"Hey, sailor, my bicycle seat needs adjusting. Got time to have a look?"

Holly's red Mustang crawled along the street. She pulled up and stopped and I walked over to the curb.

"Hi, babe." I rested my arms against the passenger door and leaned through the open window. Even though I hadn't done anything wrong yet, I felt guilty. I reminded myself that I was like a kidnap victim, merely having sex with my captor for survival. "What are you doing here? I thought you were stuck in the admin building for the night."

"They switched my duty nights, so I'm off tonight." She pointed at the beer. "What are you doing with a twelve-pack?"

"Ah, me and Mark were just gonna knock back a few cans in the room. He's a bit low tonight, so I gotta try and cheer him up."

"Oh, blow him off. Come on, get in. We'll go back to my place and I'll make Grandma's spaghetti for you. I know how much you like that."

You have got to be kidding me. "What a shame. I'd love that, but I already ate." I rubbed my stomach and puffed out my cheeks. "I'm really full."

"Nevermind. We'll just have a few bebies. If you're good, I'll take you to bed. If you're bad, I'll still take you to bed, but I'll have to teach you a lesson first." She smiled.

My mind shifted to Debbie. She'd go mental if she I knew I ditched her for Holly.

"I was just going to have a few beers and go to bed. I'm a bit tired." I stretched

my arms and faked a yawn. "Mark and Lori are having a few problems, and he wanted to talk about it. Sorry, babe, maybe another time."

"Oh, come on, Tyler. You look really handsome tonight and I need a man." She rubbed her hand between her legs. She leaned over toward me, her blouse unbuttoned enough to reveal her cleavage. I could just see the top of her red bra. "Chambers, get your ass in the car," she demanded. "I'm so horny I could fuck a cat toy."

I never heard her say 'fuck' before. I didn't know what this cat toy thing was all about, but it obviously had something to do with pussy and it certainly sounded exciting.

"Okay, you win. Can I just run up and tell Mark I can't make it tonight?"

"You got two minutes, lover." She looked at herself in the rear-view mirror.

I threw the twelve-pack in the back of the Mustang and raced to the room. As I put the key in the door, I heard panicked whispers of "Shit." I entered the room to find Lori frantically putting her clothes on while Mark laid in bed. I caught a glimpse of her bush just before she pulled her panties up, and got an eyeful of her round breasts before she wheeled around and put her bra on.

She didn't put on as good a show as Holly did for Mark, but it was hot all the same. Mark stayed under the covers while his girlfriend finished dressing, her back toward me.

"Nice ass, Lori."

"Piss off! Aren't you supposed to be at Debbie's about now?"

"Yeah, but I got called into work. Can you tell her I can't make it tonight?" I silently mouthed 'Holly' to Mark, while Lori still had her back to me.

"I'll tell her," Mark said.

I gave him a thumbs-up and left.

#

I raced down the steps and jumped in the car with Holly, and we headed off toward her house.

As she drove down the highway, I leaned over and rubbed her crotch.

"So, is this where you were going to rub that cat toy? In your hot little pussy? I bet the cat would like that. I can't wait to get you home and set your tight little box on fire." I leaned down and kissed her thigh through her white linen pants while she continued driving. I kept stroking and kissing her. She periodically let out a quiet, yet desperate whimper. I let out a periodic 'Meow.'

I didn't know how far we had driven, nor did I care. My head was buried between her thighs, and I was in the equivalent of cat heaven. Suddenly, she

violently jerked the car hard right, sending my face further into her lap.

She threw the car into park. "Come on, Catman," she said.

I pulled my head up and looked around. We sat outside a plain white single-story building with a sign denoting that it was a public restroom. Holly opened the door and got out. I followed and she motioned for me to catch up as she headed for the pathway to the ladies' restroom.

"Wait," I quietly called out, "what are we doing?"

She stopped, turned around, and faced me. She grabbed the front of my shirt and pulled me in close to her. She whispered, "You're going to take me into the ladies' room and finish what you started. I told you I was horny."

She grabbed my hand and boldly walked toward the ladies' restroom, me in tow. I threw glances side to side, checking to see who might have been around. I did see people, but I became consumed by the passion and excitement myself. Two middle-aged Japanese women stood next to each other at the sinks, checking their make up when we walked in. Both their mouths dropped open when they saw me.

"It's okay, ladies," I said, "a quick fuck, and we're outta here."

Holly dragged me into one of the stalls. She undid my pants and dropped her own. It was far more thrilling than the glasses or bicycle games. Holly wasn't any quieter in public than she was in private. In between her ecstatic moans, I heard gasps from women on the other side of the stall door. Women came and went from the restroom. Holly just came.

#

We arrived back at her apartment around seven. I agreed when she said she was hungry, but managed to talk her into throwing in a frozen pizza instead of going to all the trouble of making Grandma's spaghetti. She seemed relieved in one way. Perhaps she was running low on anchovies.

After we watched *Magnum P.I.*, Holly was ready for bed and another round with the cat toy. I didn't know if it was me or the thought of Tom Selleck that made her horny again, but it didn't matter; I had the cat in the bag.

We woke up Saturday morning and picked up where we left off the night before. After more amazing sex, we curled together and settled into the comfort of each other's arms. Her head lying on my chest felt fantastic. A twenty-one-year-old nympho goddess. I was glad I won the bet with Mark. She exceeded my expectations.

"Like, what do you want to do today?" she asked.

"We're doing it, babe."

She playfully smacked my chest. "Get serious. You'll get plenty this weekend. I know you're young, but you still need time to reload."

"To tell you the truth, I spent the last of my money on the twelve-pack. I'm broke till payday."

She propped herself up and looked at me. "Don't worry, I got money. Hey, why don't you get a tattoo? My treat."

That was a bolt out of the blue, but if she was offering...."Cool. I saw this tiger down on Shit Street. It'd look really good on my back, but it's two hundred dollars. I could always pay you back though." I got excited at the prospect and hoped she'd agree.

"Hmm..." She ran her finger across my bicep. She spoke slowly. "I was thinking, like, maybe 'Holly', right here."

I momentarily stared at the ceiling. It was becoming quite a familiar sight to me whenever we lay in her bed talking. "Umm...I don't think so. Sorry, darling, I'm all for tattoos to fit the image, but I promised my mom I wouldn't get any tattoos with a woman's name. My dad had 'Mabel' tattooed on his forearm. Mom always made him wear long sleeves." I braced myself for a tantrum.

"Oh. So, you don't think this will last, then?" She laid back down but continued to stroke my chest, which was comforting. I expected the 'Holly Huff.'

I leaned over and kissed her forehead. "You are forever branded in my heart. That's much more significant than a bit of ink on my arm."

"Then maybe we could do something real naughty." I felt her face tighten. "How about...I pose nude for a tattooist, while he does a naked portrait of me on your arm."

I smiled. The girl certainly had a sense of adventure. "Yeah, great, but by the time I'm sixty, your tits will be all wrinkly and saggy. You don't want that, do ya?"

"Oh...probably not." She lifted herself to look at me. "You know what I think?"

"Trust me, I don't."

"I think that's like really super mature. Good for you, sticking by your moral principles. I guess it's like they say; you can lead a horse to water, but you can't make him swim upstream."

"I think you mean...oh, never mind."

She placed the back of her hand against her forehead, closed her eyes, leaned her head back, and faked a Southern accent. "Why, Mr. Chambers. I do declare. I'm crushed, but I respect your decision." She snapped her head down, and looked into my eyes. "Now, fuck me hard and I might forgive you."

After an hour or more, I was forgiven.

#

Holly pointed to the sign, Jezebel's. "Come on, let's go in here."

I pulled her back. "I came down to get a tattoo, remember? This is a nudie bar." I tugged her hand to move her along. Of all the strip clubs on Shit Street, she wanted to go into the one where I had unsuccessfully tried to fornicate a stripper on stage.

She tugged back. "We're going in. I want to see what these places are like, and you need a drink before you get needles stuck in your back." She did a little shoulder shimmy. "I've never been to a strip joint before."

I looked at my watch. Three in the afternoon. Okay, there shouldn't be too many perverts out yet. I had no idea why she wanted to go in. Maybe it was a gay check as per my earlier suggestion. God, taking my girlfriend into a titty bar, and she's paying. It was either sick or a turn on. Hmm...definite turn on.

The layout of the place was different from what I remembered of the last time I was there. Instead of a stage, a catwalk had been installed with chairs down both sides of the runway and tables scattered around in the background. I pulled her toward a table against a far wall. She won the tug again and we sat at the edge of the six-foot-wide, twenty-foot-long catwalk. There was an overhang on each side of the catwalk for placing drinks.

The only real lighting in the place shone on the walkway, with dim lighting over the bar at the far end. A Michelob sign flickered with fading bulbs failing to illuminate the 'h'. The odor of stale beer wafted up from the carpet every time someone walked on it.

A dozen other patrons in the bar stared at the girls on stage offering weak applause and the occasional dollar bill at the end of a routine. Not surprisingly, all other customers were male. I went to the bar and got us a couple of Coors with Holly's money.

I rejoined her just as an attractive Asian girl came out and did her routine, often stopping in front of us and shaking her bits in Holly's face. Holly stuffed a dollar bill in the girl's garter belt at the end of her dance.

She handed me a twenty. "Why don't you get us a couple more beers? This is kinda fun. Let's watch another one."

I got us a couple more beers, and it wasn't long before a slim, dark-haired girl came on stage. Again, Holly got the best view of anyone with the dancer spending most of her time in front of her.

It was so hot that my girlfriend was staring at another naked woman. Holly never took her eyes off the girl on stage which intensified my hard-on. My mind

let Holly have a lesbian encounter with the stripper. What a beautiful moment. I'd have to hold that thought for the bedroom later that night, but would have to be sure not to mention it to her.

At the next interval, I wanted to leave and get the tattoo, but Holly insisted we stay and watch one more stripper. We sat drinking and waited for the next girl.

"Do you think anybody ever tries to get on stage and have sex with them?" Holly asked.

I took a swig of beer. "Umm...I doubt it. Probably not allowed." I looked at her and prayed her next words wouldn't be, 'But Sanchez said....'

A nice looking blonde appeared on the catwalk wearing a St. Louis Cardinal baseball uniform complete with a baseball cap and a ponytail pulled through the hole in the back of it. She walked to the end of the runway, did an about-face, and came to stand in front of us. Holly rocked her head from side to side as *Physical* by Olivia Newton-John played. The stripper squatted in front of Holly, and slowly unbuttoned her top. She slid the top back, revealing well-rounded silicone boobs.

Holly stared at the woman's bare boobs, only a foot away from her face. The stripper stared back at Holly and smiled, then leaned in. In a sexy voice, she whispered, "You wanna give the boys a real show? Maybe do a little girl-on-girl action with me? I'll let you keep half the tips."

Part of me wanted her to get up there, but a larger part wanted to keep her for myself.

Holly stared at the stripper for a moment, looked at me, then back at the blonde. "Like, I don't bat from the other side."

The stripper winked and stood up. She continued to sashay up and down the catwalk.

Holly leaned over and whispered in my ear. "Let's go to the bathroom." She reached under the catwalk and rubbed my crotch. "I'm horny."

A chill rocked me. "What? Here? Now?"

She nodded slowly and smiled naughtily. "I thought this kind of thing was supposed to do it for you guys." She kept rubbing me. "And it feels like it's working to me."

"You kinky little madam," I whispered. "You go on in, I'll be there in a minute."

Holly headed off to the bathroom and I went to the bar and asked for a clean bar towel, stuffing it in my back pocket. I went to the ladies' room, checking to make sure I wasn't seen before entering. "Holly," I quietly called out. No answer. "Holly?" I looked in the stalls. She wasn't there. Oh shit.

I exited the ladies' and walked across the corridor to the men's room. I didn't

see anyone. The stall door to the last cubicle was open. I walked to the end of the room and looked into the open cubicle. Holly stood there naked from the waist down - rubbing herself.

"Holy shit! What if it wasn't me walking in here?"

She grabbed me by the shirt and pulled me in. "Shut your face and get on your knees."

I don't know if I managed to close the door or not. I passionately kissed Holly as I lowered my pants.

She grabbed my face with her hand and squeezed it. *Hard*. "I said on your knees, bitch." Her eyes smoldered with lust.

I lowered myself to my knees. Holly grabbed the back of my head and pulled it into her already wet twat. She tasted sweet as my tongue went to work on her prized bibble box. She certainly got turned on very quickly and to an unusually heightened state.

"Umm..." she purred. "Yes. Eat me up. Oh, you're so good. I love it. Lick me. Oh, yes. God, I'm going to come, baby." She thrust her hips, driving my tongue deeper into her sweet spot. "Oh, yes. Faster. Oh, God. Oh, lick me, Suzie, Yes!"

I pulled my head back, disbelieving what I just heard.

She grabbed my head and thrust it back into her honey pot. "Finish me, bitch," she screamed.

I buried my head back where she wanted it as she rode out her orgasm, twisting and withering – her legs twitching with uncontrollable muscle spasms. She sounded loud, but it was difficult to tell with her thighs firmly wrapped around my head muffling any noise I could hear.

She slowly released her grip around my head as her body quivered. "Wow! That was fantastic."

I pulled my head back and wiped my mouth. I stood up and looked at her. "Who's Suzie?"

Her eyes widened before darting around the stall, looking everywhere except at me. "What?"

"You said Suzie."

"No, I didn't." She pulled up her jeans, her focus firmly planted on her zipper and button.

"Yes, you did. I heard you. You said Suzie."

"She placed her hands on her hips and finally met my eyes. "Tyler, I said 'Do me!'"

Did she? I could have sworn she said Suzie.

"You misunderstood me. Besides, how could you hear me over all that noise I was making?" She smiled and patted my cheek.

Good point. She was pretty loud.

Turning sideways, she scooted past me and out into the open bathroom.

"What about me?" I looked down at my hardened cock.

"I'll close the door. Don't be too long." She left me alone with nothing but a memory and a bar towel.

#

We left the strip joint with Holly smiling. She gave the stripper a wave as we left and headed for the tattoo parlor. At least she stayed with me while I got the tattoo. I was afraid that she might have kept leaving to sneak some more peeks at naked girls.

She paid the tattooist when we left and we went back to her place. I decided that 'Suzie' was more a figment of my imagination and enjoyed the thought of her having lesbian thoughts of lust. But she was mine. Nothing would change that. The night was filled with normal heterosexual sex and no more screams of 'Do me.'

Holly took me back to base Monday morning. I arrived at the room, showered, changed, and went to work. That was the first time I saw Mark since I asked him to lie to Debbie for me. We took a break around ten o'clock and stepped outside into a cooling breeze.

"Where were you this morning?" I asked.

"I stayed with Lori." He leaned his back against the wall. "She got paranoid after you busted in on us. Now we're even."

"Yeah, she was nice." I smiled. "So you guys are good, huh?"

"Yeah, I really like her. I'll hang with her for a while."

"Good." I took a drag of my cigarette.

"Debbie's not too happy with you. I told her you were working like you said. First words out of her mouth were 'Bullshit, he's out fucking Holly.' Just thought I'd warn you."

"Thanks. I'll sort it out with her. But she knows the score. She's practically given me permission to keep going with Holly."

He shook his finger. "Not when you have a date with her already lined up. What was it she said?" He looked skyward in thought, then clicked his fingers. "Oh, yeah. She said 'If he thinks I'm going to be his standby slut, he's got another thing coming.'"

"Can I borrow twenty bucks?" I asked.

He reached for his wallet. "What for?"

"I better get her some flowers."

He handed me the money. "Good luck, you're going to need it." He slapped me on the back.

"Ouch!"

"What's wrong with you?" he asked. "Holly been digging her nails in again?"

"No, she bought me a tattoo, as a gift. A two hundred dollar tiger, and she paid for it. I'd show you, but I still have the bandage on. Hurt like a bitch."

I went to the Navy Exchange store and bought a nice bunch of flowers, then headed for Debbie's room, practicing in my head what I would say to her.

Holly came from the other direction walking toward me. My heart raced, but I wasn't sure if it was from the simple fact of seeing my hot girlfriend or from the guilt of knowing I was about to cheat on her; albeit an act that was out of my control. We stopped when we met.

"Hi, gorgeous," I said. "I was just coming to find you to give you these. Thanks for a great weekend, and the tattoo." I handed her the flowers.

"That's like totally sweet." She smelled them. "That's very thoughtful of you, Tyler. Thank you. I'd love to see you tonight, but I have to work. Maybe Thursday night I'll take you to a movie." She leaned in and whispered. "They have nice restrooms in the cinema." She tapped the end of my nose with her finger.

"Great. See you Thursday." We carried on walking in our separate directions.

That was a close call, but I got away with it.

Debbie answered the door in a Baltimore Colts t-shirt and tight shorts. She stepped to one side to let me in. I brushed past her, my arm kind of accidentally grazing her breasts as I headed for the table across the room. She grabbed a couple of beers from her mini-fridge and set them on the table. We both sat down and cracked open the beers.

"Don't speak," she said, and turned up the radio that was on the table.

We sat there for ten minutes without talking so she could finish listening to the end of the baseball game. After Reggie Jackson struck out, she spoke.

"I thought you'd come around. I half expected you to show up with a bunch of cheesy flowers, but I guess you're not that bothered about missing our date Friday night. And don't give me that line of shit that you were working like Mark tried to feed me. So where were you?"

I took a drink of beer. "Let me explain. I just—"

A knock at the door interrupted me. Debbie got up, walked across the room and opened the door.

"Holly?"

Chapter 14

As soon as Debbie said 'Holly', I dove under the bed.

"Here. I wanted to bring you these. Can I come in? Just for a minute," Holly asked.

I squeezed as tight as I could against the wall hoping she couldn't see me. All I could see was their feet, so I was probably safe.

"You brought me flowers?" Debbie sounded incredulous. I felt the same way.

Holly let out a small chuckle as they walked toward the table. She stopped midway. "I see you have company."

"Oh...umm...yeah. Lori and I were just having a beer. She had to pop down to the store for something."

"Like, maybe I should wait. I'd like to talk to her too."

"Umm...she might be a while. What do you want, Holly?"

"I just wanted to say...sorry. I've been like a total bitch to you. You didn't deserve that. And I'm sorry I slapped you. There, I said it."

"I don't know what to say. I appreciate that, but can we talk about this some other time?" Debbie walked toward the door. I said a silent prayer that Holly would leave. If she were to sit down anywhere she might have been able to see me. "I'd like to talk to Lori before she sees you again. She's still pretty pissed off and might just take a swing at you." Debbie let out a nervous laugh. "Let me calm her down first."

"Like, whatever. I came to say what I had to say, and I said it. Okay? Sorry. And tell Lori I said sorry for punching her." Holly's feet move toward the door.

"Hey, Holly, you still seeing that Chambers guy?"

"Yeah. He like adores me."

"It's serious, then?"

"Yes, it is."

"I hear he's got a bit of a reputation. He wouldn't cheat on you, would he?"

"Like, he wouldn't have the balls to. And if he ever did, he wouldn't have any left when I got done with him. Don't worry, I know how to keep my guy from docking in foreign ports. Gotta run. Ciao." She walked out and Debbie closed the door.

I crawled out from under the bed. Debbie and I sat down at the table.

"What just happened there?" I asked.

Debbie took a big gulp of beer and wiped her mouth with her hand. "Your girlfriend just brought flowers to your bit on the side, and I have no idea why."

"And what the hell was that? Asking if she's still seeing me?" I poked myself in the chest.

She leaned over and ran her fingers across my forehead. "Yep, sweat. That's what I wanted." She wiped her hand on her shirt. "Ya see, Tyler, you will pick me, face it. I won't tell Holly about us as long as I feel we have a future together. Get the picture?"

Debbie smelled the flowers. "Mmm.... Nice flowers. Must've set her back a good ten bucks."

I wanted to tell her they were actually \$14.95. "You don't think they're cheesy, then?"

"No, they're very nice. I just wonder what she's up to."

Yeah, me too. It's like she read my mind.

I shook out a couple of cigarettes out of my pack and offered one to Debbie. She accepted. I held my lighter up toward the end of her cigarette. She leaned in and held the back of my hand as the flame licked the tip of her cigarette; a subtle female hint for 'Let's have sex.'

"So you don't know why she came around?" I asked.

"I haven't seen her since she pimp-slapped me at Dolphin's. You heard her. She said she's been a bitch, and she's sorry for slapping me. You know exactly as much as I do." She tapped her cigarette against the ashtray.

I touched her hand. "Hey, sorry about standing you up the other night. It wasn't deliberate or anything."

She got up and grabbed a bottle of Jack Daniel's and a couple of glasses out of the bottom of her wardrobe. She set them down on the table and walked over to her dresser and grabbed an empty water pitcher off the top of it.

"You can make it up to me tonight. There," she said, pointing to the whiskey. "You get started. I'm going to get some water for my flowers." She walked out with the pitcher, closing the door firmly behind her.

I grabbed the bottle and poured myself a triple shot. I gagged as the sour mash worked its way down to the bottom of my empty stomach. It had a nasty slow burn that went through my entire body. Mmm...nice. I finished the glass and filled another one. My mind went into overdrive.

Why would Holly give away the flowers I gave her? And to Debbie no less? It was all very strange. Holly hates Debbie. She's definitely not gay, Holly I mean. I've never met a hornier chick in my life. Especially after she told me she tried being lesbo. God, she is so hot. Maybe Daddy's been gnawing at her conscience. Turn the other cheek, and all that. Hate the sin, love the sinner. Maybe I've helped her to become a more loving, caring person.

Okay, I needed to regroup and be nice to Debbie. I had to keep her believing she had a chance. Thinking of her tight little body, it shouldn't be too hard.

Debbie came back in, put the flowers in the water and arranged them to her

satisfaction. She walked over to the wardrobe and stripped down. After making sure I got a good look at her naked body, she put on matching pink underwear and bra. She slipped on white three-quarter length pedal-pushers and a turquoise IZOD polo shirt. She came over and sat opposite me as she slipped on a pair of white Reeboks.

"Aren't you a little overdressed for knocking back Jack Daniel's in the room?" I poured her a drink and topped myself up. She downed her shot in one and slammed the glass on the table and stood up.

"Come on, you're taking me out."

My mouth fell open. "What? Where? I don't have any money."

She smacked her back pocket. "I got cash. We're goin' dancing at The Crazy Lazy. Maybe then you'll feel like we're a couple."

I bit my bottom lip. "What about Holly? What if she sees us?"

"Man." She rolled her eyes. "Are you really that lousy of a boyfriend that your girlfriend's gonna go out dancing on her own as soon as you're out of her sight?" She wagged her finger. "I'd be worried if I were you."

I stretched my arms over my head. "I'm pretty tired, Debs. Can we give it a miss?"

"No we can not," she said forcefully. "Oh," Debbie gasped and placed her fingers over her open mouth, her blue eyes widened. She dropped her hand and placed her hands on her hips. "Are you, umm...dumping me?" She dropped her head and shook it. "Is there no hope for us?"

Uh, oh. "No, I think it's a great idea. It's just embarrassing not having any money."

She moved in and pinched my cheek. "Don't worry, honey. I got ya covered."

#

She paid for the taxi and took me by the hand leading me into the club. *Relax* by Frankie Goes to Hollywood reverberated around the packed bar as strobe lights flashed, making everyone look like they moved in slow motion.

Debbie bought a pitcher of beer and a couple of shots of whiskey. The music was so loud there wasn't any point in trying to talk, which I was pleased about. When *Billie Jean* came on, she grabbed my hand and led me to the dance floor. By our fifth consecutive dance, my shirt clung to my sweat-soaked body. We returned to the table and chugged a few beers while we caught our breath. I left her momentarily to go to the restroom.

When I returned to the table, I found it restocked with a fresh pitcher of beer, two more shots of whiskey, and a male visitor sitting next to, and chatting to,

Debbie. His 'Uncle Sam Wanted Me' t-shirt stretched tightly across his chest and sleeves that barely contained biceps that would rip the fabric with the slightest flex of his arm.

Anger pumped through my veins at first, but then it hit me. If Debbie fell for this guy, maybe she'd leave me alone and I wouldn't have to worry about her blackmailing me into fun, but illicit sex. His haircut gave him away as a Marine, but I dubbed her new friend 'Mr. Wonderful'.

I pulled out a chair opposite them, offering a polite nod to the gentleman caller. Debbie narrowed her eyes and scowled.

She leaned over and shouted. "Aren't you gonna do something?"

I shrugged and downed the shot of whiskey.

He looked at me. "Navy?" he shouted.

I nodded.

"Well, why don't you piss off, Popeye?" He hugged Debbie sideways with both arms. "She's got a real man now. She doesn't need your scrawny ass."

Debbie's face went ashen as Mr. Wonderful looked at me with the eyes of a cold-blooded killer.

I stood up and pointed at him. "Yeah, well—"

Mr. Wonderful stood up. I had to look up a good four inches before I noticed a prominent vein pulsating on his forehead. His twenty-something-year-old face looked like a stone sculpture. His fists clenched as tight as his jaw, and his square frame blocked my view of anything that may have been behind him.

I leaned over to the table and poured myself a beer, then gulped it down in one drink. I let out a loud and deliberate "Ahhhh," then wiped my mouth with the back of my hand. "You kids have a nice time," I said. I left the table and headed to the bar under the panicked screams of Debbie calling out my name.

I hopped on a stool next to another sailor who already had far too much to drink. He talked to me but his words were so slurred I couldn't understand him. He had about thirty dollars laying on the counter in front of him. Must've been his drinking money for the night. As he swiveled on his stool to look at the dance floor, I slid a twenty-dollar bill out of his stash and walked to the other side of the bar.

I stood next to three very large Hawaiian guys. All mid to late twenties and sporting big loose curled black afros. I eyed up their size and figured they weighed well over seven hundred pounds between them. One of them caught me looking at them.

"Hey, bra, what you lookin' at, you stink haole fuck?" he said in the traditional Hawaiian pigeon English, with haole being a racial slur for a white person.

"Sorry, I was just gonna ask if I could buy you guys a drink."

The biggest one laughed. "You some kinda faggot, bra."

"No way. Let me get the drinks." I motioned for the bartender and bought them all a beer. They grabbed their beers and circled me.

"Whatchoo want, bra?"

"I felt sorry for you guys." They all took a step in. "It's just that jarhead over there," they turned to look as I pointed to Mr. Wonderful, "was bragging that he kicked all your asses by himself before he came in. Said you 'Mokes', his words not mine, were a bunch of sissies. Said it was his killer training to kick candy asses. He must be pretty tough. I just wanted to buy you guys a beer so you don't think all us military people are assholes."

The Hawaiians looked at each other and set their beers on the bar. They all threw their shoulders back and two of them hitched up their pants. They walked with purpose toward Mr. Wonderful. I kept an eye on them while I walked back to where the drunken sailor sat. I slapped what was left of the twenty bucks on the bar in front of him.

"Have a drink on me, pal," I said as I patted him on the back. He slurred some thanks and I snaked my way back to Debbie's table.

The Hawaiians man-handled Mr. Wonderful and led him outside. I grabbed Debbie's arm.

"Let's get the hell outta here," I said.

"I thought you left me."

"No chance, but he was a little bit too big for me."

We hopped in a taxi sitting in the parking lot. I saw the Hawaiians dragging the Marine around to the side of the building. *Who's scrawny now?* I chuckled.

#

The taxi dropped us off at her barracks. Debbie insisted we go back to her room for a nightcap.

We sat at her table, cracked beers, and lit cigarettes, without speaking. Such was our wavelength.

"Sorry, Debs, hope you don't think I was a chicken-shit back there." I let my baby blues show remorse, pleading for forgiveness.

"Well, I must admit, King Kong was pretty-freakin'-big. Hey, you got me outta there. That's what's important."

She swigged, I swigged. She puffed, I puffed. We looked deep into each other's eyes.

"Tyler, you're such a shit. You're not an asshole, you're the whole ass. What am I going to do with you?"

I walked around to her side of the table. "Here, have a puff." I took a drag of my cigarette, inhaling the smoke. I put my mouth on hers and exhaled. I pulled back and watched as Debbie exhaled my smoke.

She smiled. "We could save on cigarettes that way."

I laughed.

Debbie sighed. "Are you ever going to give her up? It's not easy playing the second string slut."

"Hey, this was your idea, remember?"

Debbie downed what must have been a half a can of beer in one drink. She cracked open another one. "I thought you would have got bored with Dolly Holly by now."

I matched her and downed the rest of my beer in one, then cracked a fresh one. "She's still got it over me, remember? Dishonorable discharge, if she so decides."

"Come on, Tyler, that's crap and you know it. Maybe at first, when she lied for you so you wouldn't get kicked out. But you and I know both know if talking shit was an Olympic sport you'd be a double gold medalist. If you didn't want to be with her, you would have found a way out by now." She reached over and touched my hand. "You're special to me, Tyler. Find a way to dump Holly so we can be together."

I didn't trust Debbie enough to tell her that I really liked Holly. I feared such an admission would send her running to Holly and destroy our relationship. I still had to keep her sweet.

"We'll see," I said.

The nightcap consisted of a bottle of Jack Daniel's and several beers. We started out having blackmailed sex, then moved into drunken sex.

Debbie passed out and I staggered back to my room about four in the morning.

#

Eye soot acted as a powerful super-glue. I eventually managed to create a slit between the top and bottom eyelids. My vision was severely impaired, and my mouth felt like I had been sucking on cotton balls all night. "Ohhh," I groaned. Hung-over as shit, and I didn't even have a good time getting there. I regained enough focus to read the clock. 6:52.

Shit. In eight minutes I was supposed to be standing at attention in front of the shop supervisor for work. I only had time for a "Marine" shower. I hopped out of bed in a panic and gave a blast of Right Guard to each armpit, splashed on some aftershave, took a mouthful of Listerine, swishing it around in my mouth as I threw on my uniform from the day before. Luckily it was heaped in a pile next to

my bed so it was easy to slip on. I spat out the mouthwash into an empty Pepsi can and ran to the shop, arriving for work at exactly 0700.

"Everyone outside," Petty Officer Watkins ordered. "Lieutenant Johnson is giving a surprise personnel inspection this morning. Fall out."

I staggered outside and stood at attention, along with everyone else in the division. Jack and I swayed. There were twice as many people there than had ever been before. Then I closed one eye and half the crowd disappeared.

"You okay?" Mark whispered from beside me.

"Not really. I'm seeing double."

Lieutenant Johnson arrived and moved up and down the rows of personnel giving his verdict on each one's appearance. Master Chief Steele followed him, making notes on his clipboard. Before long, he stood in front of me.

"Well, well, well. Now what do we have here?" His head slowly moved from my boots up to my head. "I hope you don't get writer's cramp, Master Chief. Ready?" Master Chief nodded. "Right. Boots not shined, bottom of pants frayed, belt buckled not polished, shirt not pressed, shirt pocket not buttoned. Do you have an approved chit for growing a beard, Fireman Chambers?"

I only opened the right corner of my mouth to reply. "No, sir."

"Holy cow! What the hell were you drinking last night, Chambers? You smell like a gutter street hobo." He fanned his hand in front of his nose. "Unshaven, dirty cover, and while we're at it, may as well hit you for a haircut. Failed." He stared at me. Fortunately, him being four inches shorter than me, I didn't have to try avoiding looking him in the eyes. I just looked over him.

Master Chief's pen finally caught up. Both of them stared at me. I looked straight ahead. My peripheral vision grew narrower. Blackness came in from the sides, like someone closing a set of dark velvet curtains. Just as the curtains met in the middle of my nose, I went into freefall.

I came to with Master Chief smacking the side of my face. My head throbbed. I wasn't sure if it was from hitting it on the ground or from the Jack Daniel's Debbie forced down me. All I knew was I hurt. From the inside out.

"Come on, Chambers." The patting continued. "You locked your knees, didn't you?"

I jerked my head around and did a quick assessment to make sure I hadn't shit my pants. All clear. I rejoined the land of the living. The rest of the division must have been dismissed. It was just me, Master Chief and half a dozen of my shop mates surrounding me as I lay on the tarmac. I could still shit myself at any moment with Master Chief's breathing his coffee breath on me as fear gripped my bowels about what might happen next. Master Chief grabbed me by the arm and helped me to my feet.

"Move your ass over to sickbay," Master Chief ordered. "Get checked out, then report to the division office."

I followed Master Chief's orders. Sickbay noted that I was hungover, but suffered no physical damage from the fall.

Knowing I was in for an ass-chewing of epic proportion, I stopped by my room, picked up my shower gear, went down the hall to the bathroom and showered, shaved and spruced myself up. I managed to find a uniform that was more presentable than the wrinkled mess I had on. My head still pounded, but I felt slightly better.

I walked back to the division office. Holly looked up from her typewriter when I walked in. She hooked her finger, gesturing for me to move closer. I walked over to her desk and leaned down.

"What's wrong with you?" she whispered. "The Lieutenant came back from the inspection and told me to get the papers ready to send you off to drunk school for a month. You better get your best line of bullshit ready." She picked up the phone and rang through to Lieutenant Johnson to let him know I stood outside waiting. She put the phone down. "You can go through now." She cupped her hand and whispered, "Good luck."

My stomach somersaulted and my hand trembled as I reached for the doorknob. I drew a deep breath, opened the door and walked in. I was hit by the stench of stale cigar smoke. Lieutenant Johnson sat at his desk. Master Chief Steele stood in the corner with his bazooka arms folded across his chest.

I walked to the center of the room and stood at attention, four feet in front of the Lieutenant's desk. I sounded off. "Fireman Chambers, reporting as ordered, sir."

Lieutenant Johnson stood up. "Fireman Chambers, you're a fucking disgrace." He said it in a calm, matter-of-fact tone, which made me feel worse than if he had shouted. The way he said it made it personal. Thirty seconds or more passed in silence; 'Fucking disgrace' left ringing in my ears. I felt dizzy. The room spun and was picking up speed. I reminded myself not to lock my knees. That's all I needed was to topple over again.

"Sir, permission to stand at parade rest," I requested, hoping that would slow the speed of the spin.

"Permission denied. This is the goddamn military, Chambers, not some fucking high school ROTC," he said, his voice rising. "You and your uniform were appalling this morning. And we all know why. You were drunk. Do you have a drinking problem?" He placed his hands on his desk, knuckles down, and leaned in.

"No, sir."

"Then perhaps you'd like to tell me why you go out and get so rat-assed on a workday that you can't even stand up the next morning."

I took a deep breath while I silently thanked Holly for the tip-off. It gave me a little time to come up with something. "Well, sir, I had some bad news yesterday. I got a letter from my girlfriend back home." I dropped my look to the floor and let my voice go soft like I was choked up. "She dumped me. What really hurt...it wasn't the long-distance relationship thing that killed it. She hooked up with my best friend, and he just enlisted in the Marines."

I closed my eyes for a moment and thought of that dog movie. God that was so sad when that dog got shot in the end. Tragic. A little dog taking a bullet to save the baby. Bingo. Tears pooled in my eyes and a tear ran down my cheek. I gave a quick snuffle. "I called back home to talk to my mom. She's always good at helping me through troublesome times." Another tear ran down my other cheek. This was good. "She told me she's got cancer. She started chemo, but it's fifty/fifty whether she makes it or not."

Lieutenant Johnson did some head jerking toward Master Chief. He came over and offered me a Kleenex. I took a couple and wiped my eyes.

"Thank you, Master Chief," I said. "I was just going to have a couple of drinks to help numb the pain, but I kept thinking about the fact that my mom might be dead in six months. In the end, I finished off a bottle of Jack Daniel's." I gave another wipe with the tissue. "I'm sorry, sir. That's no excuse. I shouldn't let my personal problems interfere with my military duties. I apologize to you for reflecting badly on the division. I accept full responsibility for my actions, and am prepared to accept whatever discipline you choose to impose." I gave another wipe with the tissue.

The Lieutenant stood upright and sighed. "I lost my dad to cancer last year, so I know what you're going through. It's tough." He removed his glasses and rubbed his eye, then put the glasses back on. "Okay, Chambers. Under the circumstances, I'm going to treat this as a one-time incident. But if it gets too much for you and you need some counseling, or if you find yourself drinking too much, let me know. We can get you help."

"Thank you, sir."

"Do you want to take some emergency leave to see your mom?"

"No, thank you, sir. Not yet. I'm hoping my prayers will help her for the time being. I might need to go back later if she gets worse."

"Of course. Remember what I said. I'm here to help. I don't like to see one of my men in distress. Dismissed."

I did an about-face and left his office. Holly looked at me as I walked by her desk, searching for anything that would tell her how it went. I clenched my fist

in front of my stomach and gave it a little shake.

She smiled.

I went back to the shop and pretended to work. Watkins cut me some slack for some reason. Wiping down the machines was the easiest job going, but that's what he assigned me to do; a task I was grateful for. I just wanted to get through the day with as little noise as possible. Just as I was about to leave, Watkins came up to me and put his arm around me.

"Sorry to hear about your mom, Chambers. I hope everything works out okay. If you need anything, you know where I am." He patted my shoulder.

"Thanks. I appreciate that. But I have a feeling she's gonna be okay."

Chapter 15

I stood outside the barracks Thursday evening waiting for Holly to pick me up and thought about how to best approach the subject of her going to see Debbie. I could hardly tell her I was hiding under the bed when she paid her a little visit, so I needed to employ a bit of tact.

My Columbo thought process was randomly interrupted by the dread that she would no doubt want to go see some girl movie; or by wondering how serious she was about having sex in the restroom at the cinema. I packed a clean hanky just in case I needed to shove it down her throat to stifle orgasmic cries.

Holly pulled up in her Mustang and I hopped in.

"Recognize this?" she asked, pointing to a flower tucked behind her ear.

"Not really."

"It's out of that lovely bunch of flowers you gave me the other day. That was really thoughtful, Tyler. Thank you." She leaned over to kiss me. Her loose blouse dropped forward and gave me a perfect view of her breasts that were unfettered by a bra.

Yep, looked like restroom sex was on. I returned her kiss. "What did you do with the rest of the flowers?"

"Silly me. I forgot to put them in water and most of them died. This was one of the ones that didn't." She tilted her head down, looked at me from the tops of her eyes, and stuck out her bottom lip. "Forgive me?"

God, she was so cute when she did that. "Forgiven and forgotten." No point ruining the evening over some silly misunderstanding. Yeah, I must be having a good influence on her. She probably felt guilty for slapping Debbie and gave her the flowers to apologize. That had to be it. She's actually a really nice, caring person. I decided to let it go.

We sped off to the theater. Holly's driving was up to its usual erratic standard. I adopted the policy of not talking while she drove as she seemed to need all her powers of concentration to keep the car on the road and us out of hospital. I often closed my eyes when she decided to do a little multi-tasking and put on her make-up while driving down the road at sixty miles an hour.

We arrived at the multi-screen complex in one piece and searched the posters of what was being shown.

"Like, whatta you wanna see?"

"I imagine you probably want to see *Flashdance*, huh?" I commented, pointing to the poster of Jennifer Beals sitting in an oversized sweatshirt.

"Really?" Pure excitement etched her voice. "You really want—" She stopped herself, and her tone turned serious. "No, like this is my treat to you. You pick."

Scarface, starring Al Pacino, caught my eye. I looked at Holly. She nonchalantly looked around, patiently waiting for me to make my decision. She looked sexy, as usual in her loose-fitting white blouse and tight white leggings hugged her every curve. Her pink fluorescent sneakers glowed in the black light above the entrance. Her nearly shoulder-length hair pulled back, showing off diamond stud earrings. I really was lucky to have a good-looking girl like her hanging on my arm. I found it very unselfish of her to let me choose.

"You know what?" I said. She turned with a look of pure innocence, ready to accept whatever I announced. "I'd like to see *Flashdance* myself."

She broke out in a huge grin. "Really?"

"Yeah, really."

"You are so awesome." She kissed me.

I looked at my watch. "Hey, we got forty-five minutes before the movie starts. Why don't we grab a burger across the street before the show?"

Holly nodded, still beaming. We popped across to Billy's Bar & Charlie's Char. Mini-jukeboxes at each booth added to the retro look inspired by black and white photographs of famous movie stars hanging on the walls. We both sat on the same side of the booth and ordered a couple of beers as the hostess seated us. I quickly decided on the Aloha burger, while Holly scrutinized the menu, line by line, cover to cover.

I grew bored, hungry, and eventually horny. Perhaps the photograph of Marilyn Monroe getting her dress blown up over the street vent encouraged my lust. I pulled Holly's shirt out and took a peek at her boobs.

She slapped the shirt shut. "Stop that," she giggled. "I'm trying to make up my mind here."

I rolled my eyes. That could take us into the next millennium. "Did I tell you how gorgeous you look tonight?" I slipped my hand under the table and rubbed her thigh. She lightly pushed my hand away, but the smile she wore told a different story. While she continued to read the menu, I moved my hand to her crotch and stroked her between the thighs. She looked around the busy restaurant.

"Stop it, Tyler," she whispered, but made no attempt to move my hand. I continued to stroke her. "Mmm..." She cast her head back, closed her eyes and opened her legs a little wider. "Oh, you are a naughty boy," she purred. She rested one end of the menu on her flat stomach. The other end laid on the edge of the table, creating a bridge, hiding what my hand was doing underneath.

"You ready to order?" A chubby waitress stood at the end of the table and repeatedly tapped the end of her pen against her order pad.

Holly jerked her head up and looked at the waitress. "Oh...umm...I'm not

ready yet." I slipped my hand inside her leggings and under her panties. "Oop," she shrieked.

I looked at the waitress while I slid a finger into Holly. "Two Aloha burgers, please," I said.

"Would you like French fries or onion rings?"

"Look," I snapped, "can we just have the burgers. We don't care what they come with. Surprise us. Now leave us alone."

"No need to get uppity." She reached over to take Holly's menu.

Holly slammed her hands on the menu and looked at the waitress. "I'm not done with this yet. Leave it."

The waitress tightened her eyes. "Yeah, right." She spun on her heel and left.

"Like, I was just about to come when she walked up." She looped her arm through mine. "Let's go to the restroom. You've really got me worked up."

I gave her a closed mouth smile, leaned in and whispered in her ear. "I'm gonna make you come right here." I grew hard at the thought.

Holly moaned as my hand went to work on her under the table. We got occasional glances from other diners, but no stares. After a few minutes, her moans of pleasure got quicker and rose in volume. Her body twitched.

"Oh my God," she murmured, "this is it. You bastard. Oh God, don't stop now. Oh, God, please." She grabbed a napkin off the table and shoved it in her mouth. Her body went into mild convulsions. She screamed into the napkin as her body jerked. Other diners now stared. Her intensity grew.

The waitress appeared at the table with the manager by her side.

"I think you better leave," the manager said.

Holly yanked the napkin out of her mouth. "Not now, shithead!" she screamed. She finished her orgasm without any silencing aids, and under the gaze of the other patrons in the restaurant.

I pulled my hand out of her pants. She shook her body like she was shaking off a chill, then took a deep breath. She turned and kissed me before we slid out of the booth.

Holly looked at the manager and threw her nose in the air. "The service was lousy anyway."

We headed for the door with the manager right behind us. A few of the male diners looked at us in awe. Everyone else looked at us in disgust.

We went back to the cinema and settled on a bowl of popcorn and a jumbo bag of peanut M & M's as dinner, washed down with the super-sized coke which we shared. Seeing Holly enjoy the movie gave me more satisfaction than the film itself. She was engrossed in it from start to finish, so I resisted the urge to fondle her again.

After the show, we went back to her apartment. When we arrived, she took me by the hand and led me straight to the bedroom.

"That was like so cool what we did tonight. I keep getting horny just thinking about it."

We stood next to her queen-size bed. She unbuttoned my shirt as we kissed; she fumbled with my buttons, and I with hers. She couldn't get my second button undone and just ripped my shirt open, buttons flying in every direction. I returned the favor and sent the buttons of her Liz Claiborne blouse pinging off the cream-colored walls.

She breathed heavy. "I want you, Tyler. Fuck me like you never have before. Treat me like a whore."

I put my mouth on hers, darting my tongue in and out. I stopped the kiss and stood back, taking a moment to admire her round breasts. She stepped forward, unbuckled my belt, unzipped my pants and ripped them down to my ankles. She lowered my underwear and dropped to her knees.

As soon as I felt her warm mouth on me, the phone rang.

She stopped and looked toward the living room. It rang again.

"Ignore it," I commanded.

"It might be important," she said.

I pointed to my hardness. "This is what's important."

"I'll be right back."

She trotted into the living room topless and answered the phone. I shuffled to the door to see her in the living room, my pants still wrapped around my ankles.

"Hello?" she answered.

--"Oh, hi, Daddy." She put her arm over her chest like she was embarrassed to be talking to her father while half nude.

--"No, you didn't wake me."

--"I went out tonight and forgot to call you. Sorry."

--"As a matter of fact, yes, I am still dating him."

--"No, Daddy. Enlisted personnel aren't allowed to date officers. He's a First Class Petty Officer, E-six. I told you that. So he does outrank me."

--"Of course I want you to meet him, but I don't know when we'll both be able to fly back home together."

--"You're coming out here? When?"

--"Oh...yeah, um...that's great."

--"Okay. Call me later with the details."

--"Love you too. Bye."

She hung up the phone. "Shit," she mumbled.

I staggered over to her bed, still shackled by my pants at the ankles. I moved

enough of her stuffed bears to lie down.

Holly came in and took off her leggings.

I looked at her perfect naked body. "That's it, babe, tell me about it later. We got business to tend to."

She went to her chest of drawers and fished out a 'Barbie Rocks' nightshirt, slipped it on, and put on her house slippers.

"Aren't we going to finish what we started?"

"Don't be ridiculous. I can't have sex just after I talked to Daddy."

"How long before this purity thing washes off and we can fuck?"

"Tyler! I told you not to use that word."

Uh, oh, this Daddy syndrome thing was sending her loopy. A minute ago she wanted me to fuck her like a whore. Suddenly she's Saint Holly and I ain't gettin' nun.

"Doesn't he know you're having pre-marital sex?"

"Damn you to hell if you tell him."

"Oh, come on." I held out my hand as if offering a handshake. "Hello, Mr. Knight. I'm Tyler. I'm the one who makes your daughter orgasm in public. Can I just say what a wonderful fuck she is, sir?"

She put her hands over her ears. "Tyler, stop it!"

Uh oh. I pushed a button. She certainly didn't have the same sense of humor that Debbie and I shared. I didn't like seeing her upset.

Sex was definitely off. I rocked myself off the bed and pulled up my pants. I opened my arms. "Come here." She shuffled over in her pink bunny slippers with floppy ears into my awaiting hug. "Sorry, babe. Sit down and tell me what your dad said." I kissed her forehead, and we moved over to sit on the edge of her bed. I briefly rose again to get Yogi Bear out of my ass and tossed him to one side.

Holly sniffled. A tear formed in the corner of her eye.

"I was supposed to call him tonight. He got worried when I didn't, so he was checking up on me. He called to say he's coming out here. He's preaching at the Neal Blaisdell Center next month. He's super excited about it." She left for a minute and returned with a glass of water. "And he wants to meet my boyfriend."

"So, I get to meet the world-famous Cornelius Knight." I cracked my knuckles and let out a triumphant sigh.

"Umm...no. I don't think that would be a good idea."

"Whattaya mean? Holly, I'm like your boyfriend." Shit. She had me talking like her now. "Haven't you told him about me?" I was nervous at the prospect of meeting her dad, but I was her boyfriend. And part of that responsibility meant meeting Daddy.

"Not really. I've been telling him what he wants to hear. He expects someone older, more sophisticated. I told him I'm dating an E-six, and he thinks my boyfriend is into Beethoven and Shakespeare, like him. I've been lying to my dad." She looked to the heavens. "God, I am so going to hell."

I squeezed her in my arms. "Okay, never mind. Come on, babe, tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do it."

She looked at me intensely. "Tyler, my dad is like right next to God. You're like right next to Satan. I'm like totally screwed."

"Oh ye of little faith. You need a boyfriend, right? And I am your boyfriend, right? I just need to act smart and impress him, right? Easy peasy." I crossed my heart. "I'll be on my best behavior, promise."

She let out a deep breath. "So help me, if you embarrass me, I'll never speak to you again."

I gently stroked her cheek with the back of my hand. "You won't regret this. I'll be a boyfriend you can be proud of." I kissed her. "You can count on me."

#

Holly's dad was an iconic man. One of great stature. Holly so wanted to make him proud of her, and to do that she needed to be in a relationship according to him. Holly was a pretty cool chick. She was up for hot sex nearly all the time, she bought me a tattoo, and she could drink nearly as much as me. I had got used to her ways, and all in all, she made a pretty good girlfriend. I wanted to impress Mr. Knight for her sake. Give her something to be proud of me for. And if it wasn't for her, I'd be in an Indiana jail. I owed her.

I went to the library in Honolulu Saturday afternoon to begin my education program. After finding the Shakespeare section, I grabbed a book about his life and sat down. The first one was a little dry, so I found another. Then another, and another. Booooring. Who can read this crap? To be this, to be that. Maybe Beethoven will make more sense.

I moved over to the section that housed books on Beethoven. A bit better. I couldn't hear the music, but I got a feel for the guy. I decided to make symphony number seven my favorite. Five might give me away as a fake. People who don't know anything about Beethoven still know what number five sounds like. I took some notes and thought I should probably buy a cassette to make sure I heard his music before I started talking shit to Reverend Knight.

Before I knew it, four hours had passed and the librarian asked everyone to leave so she could lock up. Who would have thought I could have spent that long in a library, and studying literature and classical music no less? My world really

was turning upside down. My hard work deserved a reward, and having just been paid the day before, I left the library to have a few drinks.

A 'Happy Hour' sign a few blocks away caught my eye. I had an hour to get happy and headed for the sign.

A voice spoke from the entrance of an office building. "Spare a dollar, brother?"

A man sat on the pavement at the entrance with a blanket covering his legs and a bowl placed in front of him. He didn't look old enough to be a bum. In his thirties, I guessed. His scraggly brown hair hadn't seen a bottle of shampoo for some time. His face was weathered and unshaven, and his clothes tatty.

A twinge of sadness hit me. I had over two hundred dollars in my pocket and this poor man sat there with nothing. I envisioned that it could be me one day. "Sure." I reached in my pocket and handed him a dollar.

"God bless you."

"You're not going to blow it on dope, are you?"

"A buck? Get real. Besides, never touch the stuff. A few more kind donations and I'll be able to get a hot meal."

I sat down next to him. I caught a whiff of B.O., but I was intrigued as to how he wound up in his predicament. "So, what's your story? How come you're here and not in a suite at the Hilton? I'm Tyler, by the way." I held out my hand.

"Otto." We shook. "I took a bullet to the brain in Nam. They said it turned me into a nutter. Spent a few years in a psycho hospital, then they decided I wasn't crazy enough to be in there taking up a bed, so they chucked me out. Tried to get a job, but nobody was interested in a loony ex-sergeant. Been on the streets four years now."

"Wow. That's sad. Do you always hang out here?"

"I move around a bit." He moved his begging bowl to the other side, out of my reach.

"Can't you get help from the VA or something?"

"Man, they're so busy with paperwork, they don't have time for people. They kept giving me forms to fill out and say bring 'em back next week. The next week, more forms and more delays. After a year, I quit going. They were quite happy to send me to the jungle to kill people, but they don't want to know about my flashbacks."

I shifted my butt and moved in a little closer. "You ever kill anyone?"

"Yeah, five. Still have nightmares. Don't ever think killing someone is just part of the job description, dude. It seriously fucks with your head." He rolled his finger around the side of his head giving the 'crazy' gesture. "One of 'em was just a boy. Thirteen, maybe fourteen. I can still see his face."

Two cops appeared. "Move along. This ain't no haven for hobos," a big Hawaiian said, his hand resting on the butt of his pistol.

"Hey, show some respect," I said. I put my arm around Otto. "This guy took a bullet in Nam."

"You're gonna take a bullet in Honolulu if you open that smart mouth of yours again. Now move!"

I stood up and helped Otto to his feet. We walked down the street, past my intended happy hour target.

"So, where do ya go now?" I asked.

"Ah, I'll find another doorway somewhere. That's what I meant about moving around. Cops are always pushing me off somewhere else."

"Let's go in here." I pointed to a discount clothing store. Otto stopped and stared at me, so I grabbed him by the arm and led him in. I talked him into letting me buy him a pair of jeans, a shirt, a pair of sneakers and some underwear. And a backpack to store his worldly belongings.

We stepped out of the store and into the humid air. "Maybe we should get a drink. Whattaya think?" I asked.

"Up to you. You know I ain't buyin'."

We popped into the Crow's Nest. Now that Otto was dressed in new duds, he looked somewhat presentable. The next thing was to work on the smell that seemed to follow us around.

Two Australian comedians sat on stools at the front of the room making fun of random customers and singing rude songs. I got us a couple of beers and we cracked complimentary shelled peanuts, tossing the shells on the floor.

Otto and I downed our Coors. He said he wouldn't mind a Jack on the rocks, with a beer chaser. I agreed and got us two JD's and a couple of beers. The comedians went on break.

I liked Otto. He seemed like someone I could talk to. I felt sorry for him, but also respected him. I mean, a bullet to the brain. Wow!

"My girlfriend's dad's coming out next month," I said. "He's one of those TV preachers. Head smacking, fire and brimstone kind of guy."

"Cool." Otto took a sip of his JD, followed by a swig of beer.

"I have to play the sophisticated boyfriend. I'm tryin' to get up to speed on Beethoven. And then I gotta be able to talk about Shakespeare." I threw my arms around in theatrical fashion and deepened the voice. "To be, or not to be; that is the question, that's fucking me."

Otto leaned backed and looked at the ceiling. "To be, or not to be, that is the question: Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune, or to take arms against a sea of troubles, and by opposing,

end them. To die—to sleep, no more; and—"

I leaned over and touched his arm. "Wait, you know Shakespeare?"

"Dude, I love Willie. He's my idol." He downed his whiskey.

"Can you teach me some things about him?" I looked at him expectantly.

Otto looked at his empty glass. He held it by the rim and twirled it while he whistled a little tune.

"Another Jack, Otto?"

He nodded. I motioned to the waitress for two more whiskies and beers. He smiled when the waitress returned and put our drinks down. Otto raised his glass. "Cheers, dude. To Shakespeare."

"To Shakespeare," I said, clinking his glass.

"Tonight we drink, tomorrow we talk sonnets."

We left the bar around midnight and agreed to meet at the entrance of the office building where I found him.

I got a taxi back to base, and on the journey back I decided not to tell Holly about my education program. I had a feeling it was going to cost quite a few whiskeys and beers. A small price to impress Holly's dad. I just hoped Otto would remember to show up.

Chapter 16

Mark invited me to the beach the following morning, and I accepted. After I showered and dressed, we took a bus down to Waikiki. We tried the water, but there was a lot of coral which didn't really make for pleasant swimming. That was cool with me as I was more interested in lying still and resting my head. We chose a spot on the beach to just chill. We spread out towels out and sat down. The sandy beach felt like a bean bag underneath the towel. The midday sun reflected off the water and a slight breeze kept the heat at a comfortable level.

Mark insisted we bring a twelve-pack with us and I didn't argue. After a few cans of the hair of the dog, I felt better.

"Hey, did I tell you I'm studying Shakespeare?" I asked, and lit a cigarette.

"Nope," Mark replied. "Did I ever tell you I'm a part time-brain surgeon? I just fix submarines when I don't have any tumors to remove."

"Haha, very funny. I'm serious, I gotta impress Holly's dad, and he's into all that 'to be' crap. I'm meeting some guy at the Pinnacle building at seven tonight to help me understand all that stuff."

"An office building? Sunday night? How does that work?"

I took a sip of beer. "Some homeless guy who got shot in the head in 'Nam is really into Shakespeare. He's going to give me lessons."

Mark smiled and kind of snorted. "Why did I know that your selection of a tutor would be on par with your choice in women? Well, good luck to both of you."

Mark headed back to base about five o'clock, but I figured I may as well kill time until it was time to meet Otto.

I stopped by a liquor store and picked up a bottle of Jack Daniel's on my way to meet him. JD was his favorite, and it would be cheaper than taking him to a bar and having to pay for shots.

Sitting on the hard concrete in the doorway of the Pinnacle building, I waited for Otto. The doorway had a musty smell with cigarette butts littered all around. I couldn't imagine sitting there as a lifestyle.

Seven o'clock and no sign of Otto, so I got tucked into the Jack myself. The last thing I remembered was looking at an empty Jack Daniel's bottle at about eleven o'clock.

I woke up in a haze. A very dark, unpleasant, 'I must have fallen down the stairs, hitting my head on every step on the way down' kind of haze. It was like coming out of a coma. I needed to regroup. I looked at my watch. 5:20. Right, an hour-forty before I had to be at work. Next question, where was I?

I patted the hard surface surrounding me, then felt a beach towel under my

head and another one covering my body. It dawned on me that I had just spent a night as a homeless person. My stomach growled and I tried to recount the past fifteen hours. I guessed I had about ten beers, a bottle of Jack Daniel's and no food. I got on all fours and puked. I mentally apologized to Otto for soiling his sleeping quarters.

I pulled myself together, staggered to the curb and hailed a taxi. The ride back to base rattled my delicate condition. I arrived back in the room with slightly more agility than a zombie. Another Sunday would have been good to help me part company with Jack and get over the stinking hangover. *I am never, ever drinking again.*

The shower did nothing to help me recover from my pain and suffering. Neither did shaving, brushing my teeth or slapping on the Skin Bracer, hard, just like they did in the commercial. Nothing. I would have to endure the pain on my own.

Each step forward on the way to work felt like a sledgehammer hitting the side of my head. I made it there and sat alone in a corner of the shop, waiting for Watkins to call us for quarters. Eyes closed, hoping another sixty seconds of sleep would help relieve the hangover.

"What happened to you last night?"

My eyes opened to find Mark standing over me.

"You look like shit," he said.

I groaned and grimaced. "Jack."

He held up his hand. "Say no more."

"Fall in," Petty Officer Watkins shouted, breaking up our conversation.

The ten members of the shop stood at attention in the middle of the shop in one row. Watkins went down the line, giving each of us the once over. When he got to me he stopped and frowned. "Looks like you had a good night, Chambers. A bit gentle this morning, are we?"

I had to fake it. No doubt Lieutenant Johnson would send me off to drunk school if Watkins ratted me out for being unfit for duty. "No, I'm fine. Never better."

"Good. That's what I like to hear." His voice was kind and calm. He never did shout much, which was of particular relief considering my condition. "Since you're fine, I need you to go down to the *Miami*. They want someone from the shop to conduct a visual inspection to a flex hose to make sure it looks okay. They're getting underway in an hour and just want confirmation. You can handle that, right?"

"No problem, boss."

I headed off to the *Miami*, but my focus was on the fact that I just wanted the

next eight hours to pass quickly so I could go back to my room and jump into bed. The hangover had to be in the top ten, maybe even a top five.

I got to the boat and the bubblehead on watch checked my ID and was granted permission to come aboard. I crawled down the narrow hatch and found the Chief that I needed to see in the engine room.

"Hey, Chief." I held up my hand in a half-wave and half 'I'm here' gesture. "Fireman Chambers from the flex hose shop. Heard you need my expert eye."

Chief looked at me sarcastically. "Yeah. Right. Follow me."

We weaved our way through to the Main Machinery Space. Chief pointed to some hoses located well below the deck toward the bilge in the bottom of the sub. "You need to crawl down there. Check out the hose labeled 'HYD 589'. We think it might be leaking, but we're not quite sure. Hop down and have a look. Okay?"

"Sure thing, Chief." The lazy bastards. There was a better chance of a rich man getting into heaven than there was of me getting my skinny ass through the narrow openings to get to hose HYD 589. A gnat's ass looked gigantic compared to the slivers of daylight leading to the hose in question.

I wiggled and wormed my way down, buttons being ripped from my shirt by protruding valve handles and my crotch finding solid contact with various pipes along the way, but I made it to my intended target. I examined the hose closely and saw no signs of leakage. Although my mission was complete, I discovered that I was now comfortable and settled in. My eyelids grew heavy, so I closed them.

"Chambers!" A voice shouted. "You've been down there ten minutes. Everything okay?"

Chief's shout interrupted my way to a comatose sleep. Bastard. "Yeah, Chief. Looks good."

"Then get your ass up here. We're getting underway in half an hour."

I lost a few more buttons on my struggle to dislodge myself from the bowels of the submarine but eventually made it back onto the deck with Chief.

"Can you find your way topside?" Chief asked.

"No probs, Chief." I left to go back to the shop.

As I walked through a berthing compartment on the way out, the urge to vomit nearly crippled me. I held my stomach, bent over and battled the heaves, choking back regurgitation. My head spun, and I nearly fell over. Definitely a top five. Maybe even a top two.

Luckily, no one else seemed to be around. I pulled the curtain back to a bottom bunk. Empty. I needed to lay down for a moment until the nausea passed. I'd be okay in a few minutes but needed a moment to collect myself. I crawled

into the bunk, closed the curtain, and curled up in the fetal position. What a relief.

#

"Dive, dive, dive."

What a strange dream.

A funny-sounding siren echoed. I tried to place my whereabouts and expected to find myself down with the flex hose I inspected. My hands patted around and felt a pillow under my head. I lay on something soft. *Shit.* That 'dive' announcement could only mean one thing. My heart sank when I realized I didn't get off the sub and they'd gone to sea. I had to think. I couldn't just sneak off, especially if we were already underwater. There was no place to hide and they would find me sooner or later. Every excuse or lie I thought of had a flaw in it. I would definitely be up on charges for something on this one: dereliction of duty, unauthorized absence, drunk on duty. Lieutenant Johnson would bust my ass, especially with my track record.

My only option was to take the painful way out.

Slowly, I pulled the curtain back and peeked down both ways of the passageway. The coast was clear. I laid on my stomach and leaned my upper body out of the rack. I looked at the steel deck, a mere eight inches below my head. This was going to fucking hurt.

I lifted my head and smashed it into the deck. SLAM! I lay stunned for several moments looking toward the deck which was nothing more than a massive blur. When I regained focus, I noticed a patch of blood stained the deck. I pulled myself back into the rack and burrowed my head into the pillow. My head was ready to explode with the combination of Jack Daniel's and head banging. Now I just had to lay there until I was discovered.

Chapter 17

A hand rocked my shoulder, bringing me out of unconsciousness. "What the hell are you doing here?" a voice asked.

I rolled over to find a bubblehead kneeling next to the rack.

He jumped back when he saw my face. "Egad," he shrieked. "What the hell happened to you?"

"Where am I?"

"You're on the *USS Miami*, and you're in my bunk. Stay there a minute, I'll get the Corpsman. You look pretty bad."

He left.

After looking at the blood-stained pillow for a minute, I rolled onto my back. I did a self-assessment of my condition. My head still pounded, more from the whack than the Jack. My watch read eleven-thirty. I'd been on the boat four hours, and sleeping most of that. Must have slept off some of the alcohol, which was a good thing if I was about to be hauled off to sickbay for an examination.

The bubblehead returned with three other guys, two of them in khaki uniforms, which meant he brought in some high-ranking muscle to deal with the stowaway situation.

The Corpsman leaned in and gently held my face. He pulled out a small flashlight from his top pocket and shined it in my eyes; moving my head from side to side, closely examining each eye in turn. "How you feeling?" he asked.

"Like I just went fifteen rounds with George Foreman."

He poured some peroxide onto a cloth and dabbed my head. "Do you remember what happened?"

"I came down to give a visual check on a flex hose. After that, I went to leave and was walking down the passageway, and tripped over something. Whamo. I hit the deck. That's the last thing I remember until someone woke me up. You don't think I'll be brain damaged, do ya?"

"Probably not. Not unless you were before the fall. How'd you get in the rack?"

"I have no idea."

Another voice broke in. "Son, This is the Captain. Doc will take you back to sickbay and get you patched up. Tilley, get that blood swabbed up off the deck and check the passageway for trip hazards."

"Aye, aye, Captain." Tilley left.

Poor bastard's going to need some new sheets before he goes to bed.

"I need to radio back to see what we're going to do," the Captain continued. "We're only about three hours out of Pearl, so they'll probably want us to bring

you back. What's your name, sailor, so I can tell them you're not AWOL?"

"Fireman Chambers, sir. Flexhose shop."

"Chief, help Doc get him back to sickbay. I'm going to the con to radio back."

"Aye, aye, Skipper," Chief barked as the Captain left.

Doc cleaned me up and applied a bandage to my forehead. "Here's some painkillers." He handed me half a bottle of capsules. "Take them as needed." He finished scribbling and a piece of paper and handed it to me. "And here's a note saying there's codeine and other drugs in your system for medicinal purposes. Hang on to it, you'll need it in case you get called for a piss test to show it's legit and you're not a dooper."

I folded the paper and put it in my shirt pocket.

"But it's only good for thirty days, so don't think you can go off and become a drug addict and not get busted." The corner of his mouth broke a smile.

"Thanks, Doc." I touched the bandage on my head.

"Okay." He opened the door and pointed across the passageway to a bunk. "There's my rack. Hop in and get some rest. I need to keep an eye on you to make sure you don't slip into a coma."

It was quite frightening when he mentioned coma, but I felt in safe hands. I curled up in the bunk and drifted between pain and sleep.

Shaking woke me. Doc stood next to the rack. "Come on, Chambers, you're home. We're back in Pearl to drop you off, then we're outta here."

"Thanks, Doc. For everything."

"No problem. You take care of yourself."

"I will."

I climbed out of the rack and a Chief escorted me out of the sub to make sure I didn't trip over anything else on my way out. I left the *Miami* and returned to the shop ten minutes before time to knock off. Petty Officer Watkins ordered me into his office.

"What the hell did you do now, Chambers?"

"I, er...well," I paused for effect. "I tripped over a cord."

"Really?" He moved closer to study my face for signs of lying.

"Yeah, that's the last thing I remember." My heart pounded. *Come on, Watkins, buy it*, I silently urged.

"You sure it wasn't your own feet you tripped over?" He ran a hand over his beard.

Dad told me once that you couldn't go to hell for telling white lies. This was as good as time as any to test that theory. "No, course not. It was the bubbleheads not keeping a tidy ship."

"What am I gonna do with you?"

Putting my hands up, I shrugged.

As I left work, my head still hurt, but after a good day's sleep, the effects of the whiskey had worn off. Pretty much, anyway. Enough to where I decided to get some beer and go see Holly.

#

I got the bus to Holly's apartment in Wahiawa and arrived at six in the evening. She answered the door in a pink tracksuit with a scarf tied around her head and a feather duster in her hand.

"What are you going to do with that?" I asked, smiling as I pointed to the duster.

She opened the door to let me in. "What the hell happened to you?" she asked, looking at my bandage. "I heard you got like stuck on a sub."

I carried the beer through to the kitchen, took out two cans, and put the rest in the fridge. Holly followed me in as I got a glass out of the cupboard for her and poured her beer. I cracked open my own can and took a drink.

She sipped her beer. "You know we can't drink when Daddy comes out. He says liquor is the devil's brew."

"Come on, Holly, you're twenty-on-years-old. Surely he can accept that you're a full-grown woman." I walked up behind her and placed my hands on her breasts. "And grown nicely, I might add."

She escaped my grip. "Sorry, Tyler, I'm not in the mood." She walked over to the couch and sat down, patting the seat next to her. "So, tell me what happened."

I sat next to her as instructed. "Simple. I tripped, bashed my head, got knocked out, the boat went to sea, the boat came back, and here I am." I swallowed a mouthful of beer.

"Poor you." She stroked my cheek with the back of her hand. "Okay, Daddy will be here in a couple of days. Remember what I said. No smoking, drinking, cursing or rude jokes. And, he likes Shakespeare and Beethoven."

It didn't look like we're going to be having sex, but I gave it one more go. I leaned in and kissed her. She kissed back. The kiss became passionate. I unzipped the top of her tracksuit and slid my hand in, feeling her bare breast. She let out a soft moan.

She pulled away. "No," she said sternly, "I can't. I have too much to do before Daddy gets here." She pushed my hand away and zipped her top up.

She had obviously put on a pair of 'Do Not Disturb' panties. I clicked my fingers. "I just remembered." I took her hand in between both of mine and

looked at her. "You know I'd rather be with you than anywhere else, but I promised I'd help out at the soup kitchen tonight."

She looked at me. "The soup kitchen?" She stroked my hand. "Like, you are so sweet. I think that's awesome. I'd like to do something like that myself, but I wouldn't want hobos perving out on me." Her eyes grew big in a look of sincerity. "And they would perv out, you know?"

"I know they would, darling, and I wouldn't want that either. You stay here and get ready for your father, and I'll go do my bit for the less fortunate."

We kissed and I left.

#

The number fifty-three bus took me down to Honolulu and I made the short walk to the Pinnacle building from the bus stop. Otto sat in his usual position.

"Spare a dollar, bro— Oh, Tyler, what's up buddy?" He stroked his scraggy beard. "Hey, about the other night, sorry about that, dude. I'm surprised you're here. I didn't think you'd bother coming round again after that."

"Hey, not to worry. Guess you got busy, huh?" I asked.

"Drunk, more like. I don't know where I was. But some asshole puked in my doorway. Can't you smell it?" He twitched his nose and made sniffing noises.

I mimicked his sniffs. "No, not really." I felt guilty but decided it was just punishment for him standing me up.

He pointed to my bandage. "What happened to you?"

I shrugged one shoulder. "Ah, just a hazard of the job. I'm okay."

He drummed his fingers against his jaw. "So...it wasn't drinking related or anything?"

"Well..." I lowered my head. "Jack might have been involved."

"Ha." He slapped his knee. "I knew it." He stroked his chin and spoke sheepishly. "Speaking of which, I'll trade a little knowledge of Shakespeare for a little drink of my friend Jack."

I nodded and held out my hand to help him up. We stashed his blanket and cup in his backpack and walked the few doors down to Harry's bar. A beer for me, and Jack Daniel's for Otto. We sat and Otto recited Shakespeare. In between the sonnets, he offered interesting facts about Shakespeare's life. I borrowed a pen and some paper from the bartender and took notes; knowing that once I wrote something down my chances of remembering it were significantly increased. Another reason for staying away from Jack.

Otto imparted knowledge until he slurred so heavily that I could no longer understand him.

I escorted him back to the Pinnacle building, pulled his blanket out of his bag and put it over him as he laid on the hard concrete.

"Good night, Otto," I whispered. "Thanks."

#

Holly's dad was coming out on Friday. The two of them were going to have a day of bonding before he'd meet the respectable boyfriend. This allowed me time to catch up with Mark.

We got off work Thursday and headed down to Dolphin's for a drink. We got our beer and went to one of the four pool tables for a few games. Mark broke and sunk a solid.

"You ready to meet Holly's dad on Saturday?"

"Yeah, I think so. I'm going to her house at noon. She's making lunch and I'm supposed to dazzle him with my brilliance. He's going to be here for a week. Holly already told me that she ain't putting out that week, and I can't drink, smoke or cuss in front of the Reverend." I sipped my beer. "Debbie will probably try to take advantage of the situation." I inwardly prayed that she would anyway.

"You sure about that? She's been hanging out with Sanchez quite a bit lately. I think she might be getting a little side action herself."

"What? You can't be serious. Debbie and dirty Sanchez? I don't think so." I took a big gulp of beer.

He leaned down and took another shot, sinking the four ball. He walked around to line up his next shot. "Apparently, she told Lori that she may need a back-up plan in case you don't come 'round."

"Oh, man." I tried to convince myself that would be for the best if she found another guy, but jealousy ate at me nonetheless.

"After all, you're in a relationship with Holly, remember?" He missed his next shot.

I stalked the table looking for a ball that would drop and lined up an easy one. I missed.

Mark looked across the room. "Speak of the devil. Here she comes now, uhh, with Sanchez. Ask her yourself."

Debbie and Sanchez walked over to the pool table. "Hi, guys," Debbie greeted us.

"Hi, Debs." I intentionally used my more intimate name for her. I nodded toward Sanchez. "Jorge." He nodded back. "Let me get that drink I owe you, Debs. What you having?" I put the cue down, ready to go to the bar.

She looked at me puzzled. "You don't owe me a drink, but if you're offering,

I'll have a Black Russian. Thanks."

"I'll get these," Sanchez butted in. "Two more Coors for you guys?" He waved his finger between Mark and I. We both nodded, and he went to the bar.

Debbie smiled smugly.

"You're not going out with Sanchez, are you?"

"What's it to you? You still playing house with Holly?"

"Yeah, but you know. I might give it a little break for a while. I'm still keeping an open mind about us." I finished what was left of my beer.

She looked toward the floor and slowly moved her head from side to side. "Umm...I don't know. I think Jorge might be all right. And he's not seeing anyone else."

"So...are you dumping me?" The question remained, would she tell Holly?

She lifted her head to look at me. "You know, Tyler, I'm really getting tired of having to play on your terms. I do have feelings in other places besides my pussy, ya know? I think it's about time you made a choice. If you don't, I'm gonna make it for you." Her lips pressed tight together.

"Okay, okay. You made your point. I'll think about it."

She leaned in and whispered in my ear, brushing her lemon-scented cheek past mine. "And I'm going to help you make the right decision. Bring some whipped cream and chocolate syrup. My room. Tomorrow night. Six o'clock." She flicked her tongue in my ear, then backed away.

"Chocolate syrup, huh?"

She smiled and nodded.

I tried to block Holly from my mind.

Mark cleared his throat. I looked over Debbie as Sanchez approached with the tray of drinks. He placed the tray on a table next to the pool table and handed out the drinks.

"Okay, boys and girls. Cheers," he said.

We all touched glasses in the center of the circle we formed. Debbie and I cocked our glasses back and took a drink. Our eyes were firmly locked on one another. She was a very desirable woman, and guilt gnawed at me for wanting her.

#

After gathering all the supplies, I headed over to Debbie's room Friday night. She answered the door and posed for me to admire her in my favorite blue halter top and white shorts that barely covered her unmentionables. She wore her blonde hair in pigtails. She was the epitome of cute and sexy in one go. This was

going to be some night if I could get past the wrongfulness of it all.

Placing the twelve-pack of beer and my rucksack on the table, I reached in and fished out the goodies. A spray can of whipped cream, a squeeze bottle of chocolate sauce, a small punnet of cherries. It dawned on me in the store that cherries, strategically placed, could add a whole new dimension to the word kink. Lastly, out came a half bottle of vodka.

"Wow. You really pushed the boat out," Debbie said with a big smile. She grabbed a cherry and held it by the stem over her head. Tilting her head back, she held it just out of reach of her flicking tongue. Slowly, she lowered it onto her tongue and licked it. "What are you going to do with these?"

"The same thing you're doing to it." I moved in and held her in my arms, passionately kissing her. We ripped each other's clothes off, and after laying her on the bed, I went to work with the whipped cream and chocolate sauce; spraying and pouring on her most intimate parts, then licking it off. She giggled and moaned.

We took turns pleasuring each other and had the most amazing sex. In between sessions, we drank and joked, and before long, we finished off the vodka and beer.

"Well that's a fine how-do-you-do," Debbie said, "You only brought enough booze for half a night. Lucky for you I got a stash."

She sauntered over to her closet butt-naked, bent over, and turned around with a bottle of Jack Daniel's in her hand.

"Oh, Debbie. Please, God, no. Not Jack Daniel's. Me and him aren't speaking."

She strolled back over to the bed, standing over me. She opened the bottle and poured some on her nipple.

"Here, taste that and maybe you and him will make up."

Her Jack-soaked tit was just a tongue length away. I had a lick and the next thing I knew, I had agreed to her pouring me out a glass of my very good friend Mister Daniel's.

All night long we alternated between shots of Jack and shots of sex. By five AM, Jack and I were both emptied. Debbie and I fell into a deep, drunken sleep.

#

My crusty eyes slowly opened. With a pounding head and blurred vision, I attempted to focus on the clock. I couldn't make out the time. I tried something a bit simpler. What day was it?

Saturday. Good, I'm wasn't late for work then. I tried for the time again. Staring at the red glow, numbers began to become readable. One, one, one, one.

Shit. Double vision again. I propped myself up on the bed, shook my head, closed one eye and refocused. One, one, one, two.

My mind clicked like gears churning. 11:12. Shit! I had to meet Holly's dad in forty-eight minutes. Hungover as hell and late. Holly would kill me. I could just hear it.

"Daddy, this is my boyfriend, Tyler."

"I thought military people prided themselves on being punctual," the Reverend would comment.

"Well, sir, I had premarital sex with your daughter's former lesbian lover last night. I would have been fine if I stopped after six beers and a few vodkas, but no. I had to go on to the fucking Jack Daniel's, didn't I?"

I shook my head then Debbie. "Debs, I gotta go."

She groaned and grabbed her head. "God, that was some night." She rubbed her eyes. "Where are you going?"

"I just gotta go. Something I forgot about."

"At least give me a decent farewell. I'm always horny when I'm hungover." She pulled me in by the back of the neck and kissed me. I managed to pull away from her grip.

"I really got to go. Sorry. Thanks for a great night. We'll do it again sometime. But next time don't invite that fucker Jack."

I got dressed and left. Running back to my room, I took a quick shower, changed clothes and ran to the bus stop. Bongo drums pounded in my head as I took the bus to Holly's apartment. Being late would not make a good first impression.

Standing at her front door, I took a deep breath, then knocked.

Chapter 18

I swallowed hard as the doorknob turned. My hangover had kicked in and was in full flight. The door flung open. Holly stood there looking panicked – and mad.

"Where have you been?" she whispered. "You should have been here half an hour ago."

"The bus was late." I moved closer to give her a kiss, but she backed away.

She stood back to let me enter the apartment. I crossed the threshold into the living room - and there he was. Larger than life. Although I had seen him on TV, Reverend Knight looked different in real life. He loomed large in the room at 6'4", white hair, and big wire-rimmed glasses. He dressed in the Aloha spirit wearing white trousers and a tropical print Hawaiian shirt. There didn't appear to be an ounce of fat on his mid-fifty-year-old frame. His eyes assessed my entire being, moving his gaze from head to toe while standing with his hands behind his back.

"Mr. Knight." I moved in with my hand extended. "What a pleasure to meet you, sir."

He thrust his hand out and grabbed mine. Before I could get my palm seated into his, he clamped his grip in an exaggerated show of firmness, pinching my fingers together. It hurt, but I smiled.

"Nice to meet you, son." His voice boomed just as it did on TV. "Holly hasn't told me much about you, so we have a lot to talk about. Sit." He pointed to the chair as he walked around to sit on the couch.

My head spun and my hands shook. I wasn't sure if the shaking frenzy came from nervousness or delirium tremens.

"I'll bring some iced tea over," Holly said and went into the kitchen.

"I always thought you military people prided yourself on being punctual."

"My apologies, sir. I had some urgent business to tend to on base. Those submarines don't fix themselves." I chuckled.

He didn't.

"That's quite a nasty cut you have on your head. How'd that happen?"

"Smashed it on a submarine hatch. Those da—rn things are so tight. Hazard of the job."

His eyes narrowed. "Must you use profanity?"

Darn? This was going to be one long afternoon. "Sorry, sir. Tough day."

"So tell me, Tyler is an unusual first name. What's the story on that?" He leaned back, fully extending his size.

I cleared my throat. "My mom says she's a descendant of John Tyler, you

know, the tenth President. It's actually John Tyler Chambers, but my dad said he's not having his kid named after a toilet. So I've never gone by John, it's always been Tyler."

I had hoped he'd find my story amusing, but he sat there stone-faced.

"Humph," he grunted. "Holly tells me you outrank her."

"Only by military standards." I laughed.

He didn't.

"You look younger than her. How'd you move up the ranks so quick?"

"I'm older than I look. I inherited my dad's genes. All the Chambers men look younger than we really are."

Holly came in with the tea, put the tray on the coffee table and handed us each a glass. I lifted my glass toward Mr. Knight.

"Cheers."

He cast a disapproving look my way. "I'd appreciate it if you didn't make alcohol related comments to beverages I consume."

My hangover intensified. This guy was going to be hard work, and I wasn't even in top form. I took a sip of iced tea and moved to place my glass back on the coffee table. My hand visibly shook as the ice clattered around the inside of the glass. It sounded like a mini-drumroll as I placed the glass on the table.

Mr. Knight raised an eyebrow as he watched my struggle.

Holly sat down next to her father. "Daddy asked if you were coming to his sermon tomorrow. I told him you wouldn't miss it."

I shook my head. "Not for the world. I've been looking forward to it ever since Holly told me you were coming out." I leaned forward in my chair. "What's the topic, or is that a secret?"

He scowled. "God doesn't have secrets." "I think it's important to send a message to the youth of today. Ever since that actor got in the White House, the moral fiber of the United States has been eroding. The generation of today doesn't understand the importance of the family unit." His voice rose as he went into preaching mode, which didn't help my pounding head.

"They need to understand that sex outside of marriage is not acceptable. Lust is generated straight from Satan's veins. *Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral.* Hebrews 13:4."

"What about homosexuality?"

The room fell silent. Holly's jaw dropped and her eyes went as big as hula hoops. Reverend Knight's nostrils flared as he took short, sharp breaths through his nose. Anger deeply etched on his face. His eyes tore through me. He slid himself to the edge of the couch.

He slammed his fist onto the coffee table, sending Holly's glass of iced tea in the air. "Damnation," he yelled, "awaits the sinners engaged in such practices. Women who lay down with other women and do not use their body to bear fruit as the Lord intended, shall perish in the fiery flames of hell." He pulled a handkerchief out of his pocket, took off his glasses and wiped his face. "Men... well, I'd rather not think about that."

Holly ran into the kitchen and got a towel to wipe up the spilled tea.

"Sorry, Princess," he said softly.

Holly wiped up the puddle on the table with a dishrag.

"You know how I get worked up about these subjects," the Reverend said.

Holly patted his leg. "It's okay, Daddy, I know you're totally passionate about these things." She looked at me, and it wasn't the look of a happy girlfriend. "Tyler, can you help me in the kitchen?"

"Sure. Will you excuse me, Mr. Knight?"

He waved his free hand around and kept patting his face with the hanky.

Holly stood with her hands on her hips and fire in her eyes when I came in. "What the hell are you playing at?" she whispered.

"I was taking an interest in his profession." I poked a finger toward her face. "And you better watch it. You just said a cuss word."

"I'm warning you, buster." She jabbed my chest with her finger. "Anymore cracks like that and I'm going to be totally super mad at you and may never speak to you again. You promised to behave." She reached in the fridge and handed me the jug of iced tea. "Go fill Daddy's glass up and be nice to him. Lunch will be ready in a few minutes."

"Sorry."

I returned to the living room and topped up Mr. Knight's glass. I sat down and we both looked around the room, not speaking. It was slightly uncomfortable, but I didn't want to set him off again and send him into another rant disguised as a sermon.

Holly quietly walked behind her father on her way to the bathroom. She shot me a dirty look and moved her hand in a talk gesture, then thumbed toward her Dad.

"So, Mr. Knight, Holly tells me you're a Shakespeare fan."

A broad smile crossed his face. "Ah, yes. That's one thing the British gave us. A literary genius. I thought Hamlet was his best work, but I enjoy it all."

"Yes, Hamlet, of course," I said. "But my personal favorite is *Love's Labour's Lost*.

'Study is like the heaven's glorious sun,

That will not be deep-searched with saucy looks;

*Small have continual plodders ever won,
Save base authority from others' books.
These earthly godfathers of Heaven's lights
That give a name to every fixed star,
Have no more profit of their shining nights
Than those that walk and wot not what they are'."*

Mr. Knight stared at me opened mouth. Not very subtle. "I'm impressed. *Love's Labour's Lost* is an obscure choice as a favorite. You must have studied him intensely."

"Probably nowhere near as well as you, but yeah, I'm a big fan. *Labour's Love* was never the critics' favorite, but I quite enjoy it."

"You guys will have to put a hold on Shakespeare," Holly interrupted. "Lunch is served." She led the way to the dining table and we all sat down.

Reverend Knight said a ten-minute blessing. Once the food had sufficient time to get cold, he offered an Amen.

"Princess, this looks wonderful. Did you marinate the chicken in avocado and walnut sauce like Grandma used to?"

My stomach lurched.

"Of course I did. Getting Grandma's recipe book was the most awesome thing ever. God rest her soul."

The Reverend bowed his head. "God rest her soul."

He patted her on the shoulder and looked at me. "Isn't she the greatest gal ever? You're a lucky guy, Tyler." He playfully grabbed her ear. "This girl's got brains, looks and she's the finest cook this side of the Mississippi. I hope you've thanked the Lord for your good fortune landing this one."

"Yes, sir. I certainly have."

Fortunately, I didn't have to do much talking through lunch. Just as well, I needed to keep my mouth shut to keep the food down. Mr. Knight dominated the conversation, switching between preaching, reciting Shakespeare or praising his wonderful daughter. I wanted to tell him she was a little firecracker in bed but didn't want to crush his belief that twenty-one-year-old virgins still existed.

After lunch, Mr. Knight continued to bore me with more incessant psycho-babble. The combination of a large portion of chicken-ala-crap, fighting off a top ten hangover, and an endless stream of useless information, my eyes continually grew heavy. I kept regaining consciousness either because my head would snap forward, jerking me out of slumber, or a well-placed kick from Holly connected with my shin.

Around six o'clock Holly started making suggestions about rustling up some supper, but I had enough of the chicken crap thingy to carry me through until

tomorrow and insisted it wasn't necessary. Mr. Knight agreed with me.

I dropped some hints about leaving and going back to base, but they weren't getting the message.

Reverend Knight pulled out his wallet and handed Holly a twenty-dollar bill. "Princess, why don't you run down to the store and get us some strawberry ice cream. We'll just have that instead of another meal." He patted his stomach. "You don't want your dear old dad getting fat, now do you?"

Holly smiled and shook her head.

I stood up. "Put your money away, Mr. Knight. I'll go. My treat."

"It's you I want to talk to, Tyler. Run along, Princess." He pointed at me. "You, sit." He pointed to the chair.

Holly took the money and headed for the door. I cringed when it shut. Mr. Knight stared at me in silence.

I felt myself sobering up quickly. "So, what would you like to talk about, sir?"

"I'll get straight to the point. What are your intentions with my daughter?"

I wiped my palms on my pants. "Oh...umm...you don't need to worry, Mr. Knight. I'll look after her."

"I'm not asking your security guard credentials." He leaned forward. "What are your long term plans with her?"

"Well, sir, we haven't really talked about that."

He slid to the edge of the couch. I quickly looked at the table to see if there was anything that would go flying if he decided to have another fist thumping session.

He pushed his glasses up. "Look, son, I'm talking about you. What do you want out of the relationship? She's a virgin you know, and is going to stay that way until she gets married. You'll find out more about that in my sermon tomorrow. If you're out for some quick gratification, you're sniffin' around the wrong tree, pooch."

He took off his glasses and wiped them with his handkerchief. He put them back on and shoved the hanky back in his pocket.

I took a sip of water and waited for the interrogation to continue. I glanced at the door, desperately willing Holly to return and take some heat off me. I slid my hands under my thighs to hide their unsteadiness.

"You don't look like a virgin to me, but I'm not going to ask if you are or not. That would be impolite, and I'm not a rude man. I always hoped that the man she married would be as pure as she is. And maybe you are. So I'll ask you again, what are your intentions?"

"Sir, I really like Holly. I think she's a swell gal and we're taking things slow. I'm sure the good Lord wouldn't want me to defile the girl, in wedlock of course,

and then decide that she wasn't the right person for me. We're getting to know each other really well."

Mr. Knight jumped back when I used the word defile. It must have been too graphic of an image for him. I could have got out of the conversation at any time by giving him a massive heart attack. *Sir, I fucked your daughter silly in the public restroom of a strip club.* Yeah, that would do it. I could see him clutching his heart with that one.

I continued. "What I mean to say is, marriage is a sacred institution. We don't want to rush into anything that either of us may regret later. *Love sought is good, but given unsought, is better.*"

"Ah, Twelfth Night. Well said."

That Otto's a genius. I was going to have to buy him a pillow or something.

"I guess Holly told you that her mother died giving birth to her."

I nodded.

"That means she's very special to me, and I'd like some grandchildren. Her mother died giving her life, and I want her to bear as much life as possible, knowing my wife didn't die in vain. *And God blessed them, and God said unto them,*" his voice shook the foundations of the building, *"be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth."* His fist came crashing down on the top of the glass coffee table, smashing it to bits.

"Holy sh...hsazbar." His outburst nearly rocketed me out of my chair. Broken glass lay on the floor. I pulled myself together. "Amen, brother," I shouted. "Revelations, right?"

"Actually," he pushed his glasses up and spoke calmly. "It's 'The Book Of Revelation'," he emphasized it being singular, "and no, it's Genesis 1:28." He looked at the destruction he caused. "Doggone it. I told Princess not to buy this cheap Chinese stuff. Now I'm going to have to buy her a new table." The hanky came out for the traditional brow wipe. "And by gum, I gonna make sure it says 'Made in the good ole U.S. of A.'"

Holly returned with the ice cream as the Reverend and I picked up the broken glass.

"What the heck happened here?" she asked.

Her father stopped and gave her a stern look. "Princess, I've told you, heck is slang for hell. Pretty girls like you shouldn't curse."

Holly hung her head in shame. "Sorry, Daddy."

Go ahead, Holly. Tell him how you begged me to fuck you like a whore. I dare you. I broke into a chuckle at the thought.

He redirected his angry gaze toward me. "Something funny, young man?"

"Umm...no, sir. It's just funny to hear you say that because I've told Holly the

same thing myself."

His angry look dissipated. Holly looked at me, her lips pursed together and her eyes throwing daggers. I gave her a wink.

Holly dished out the ice cream as her father and I finished cleaning up the broken glass. We sat in the living room holding our bowls of ice cream. I took a bite and enjoyed the coldness. It soothed my head. Mr. Knight shot a look of disgust in my direction. I widened my eyes and returned his look. He bowed his head.

The dessert prayer was only a few minutes. I peeked now and then to see if my ice cream had melted before he got to the Amen. It didn't.

We discussed Hamlet until he announced he wanted to go to bed at eight-thirty. He needed his rest before his service the next morning. After thanking Holly for a wonderful lunch and praising Mr. Knight on his in-depth knowledge of Shakespeare, I made a welcomed exit.

I took the bus back to base. Mark was in the room when I arrived. My bed was a pleasant sight and I walked straight to it and flopped down, trying to wrap my brain around everything that had happened. Talking to Mr. Knight really drained me, not to mention that the hangover had sucked any remaining life I had from my body. I couldn't wait to close my eyes and drift into the land of never-never.

"So, how was Holly's dad?" Mark asked.

"Not sure. He's certainly passionate about his beliefs. I think he wants me to marry his daughter and get her knocked up. He kept going on about having grandchildren. Winning that fifty bucks off you was the worst thing I ever did. I got blackmailed into a relationship I didn't want to be in. Then she turns out to be all right, and God, is she fun in bed. I like her and all, but now Daddy comes to town and he wants us pumping out little Chambers."

"I'd start wearing condoms if I were you. If Daddy wants his little girl to get married and pregnant, she might just do it to please him, but not necessarily in that order."

A knock at the door startled me. Mark and I looked at each other, then he got up and answered it.

"Oh, hi," he said, "come on in." He looked in my direction. "Someone for you, Tyler."

I sat up and scooted to the edge of the bed.

"Tyler."

"Oh...hi, Debs." I hoped my tone came across as more chirpy than surprised. "What brings you to my humble abode?"

"These." She held up a pair of my underwear. "You left in a bit of a hurry this morning." She threw them to me. "Came to ask if you wanted to go to the beach

tomorrow?" She looked at Mark. "You and Lori can come too if you want."

Mark nodded. "Thanks."

"Tyler?"

"Umm...I can't tomorrow. I already got plans."

She walked over and sat next to me on the bed. Her blue eyes looked into mine. "I thought you said you were giving her a break."

"What makes you think everything revolves around Holly? I'm volunteering at the soup kitchen tomorrow. You know, helping the homeless people and stuff."

She didn't react. "Bullshit. Try again."

I let out a sigh. "Okay, I'm going to church."

"Bigger bullshit. One more time."

"No, really, I am."

"Wait a minute, that's right." She clicked her fingers. "Holly's dad's in town preaching, isn't he?"

I nodded.

Debbie folded her arms. "If you're giving her a break, why are you going?"

"She wants her dad to think she's got a boyfriend. So I agreed to pose."

"I guess she doesn't want her dad finding out about her lesbian past, huh? So she calls in the immoral drunk to look respectable and meet her famous preacher father." She laughed. "That's funny. Okay, I'll buy it. But it's going to cost you."

"Cost me? What are you talking about?"

Debs looked at Mark then leaned in and whispered in my ear. "I'm still horny. I got a fresh bottle of Jack in my room, and I'm going to give you some sins you can take with you tomorrow to confess."

"Oh God, please no, Debbie. Not another night on the JD."

She nodded. Standing up, she took hold of my hand and pulled me to the door. "Don't wait up, Mark. Your roommate won't be back tonight." She smacked my ass. "And boy is he going to have a good time tonight."

Chapter 19

Debbie delivered on her promise. It was one of our best nights and she did leave me with a lot to confess for. But why the hell did I agree to do shots of Jack Daniel's with her? Last one to down the glass had to take off an item of clothing. I managed to get her undressed first, but so what? My head throbbed so bad it hurt when my heart beat.

I staggered back to my room, putting my hand down my pants along the way to make sure I didn't forget my underwear this time. The feel of the cotton offered slight relief that perhaps I did maintain some form of coherency. In the shower room down the hall, I stood under the water and assessed the self-inflicted damage. The hangover didn't make it into the top ten, maybe a top twenty, but it still pained me.

I had visions of walking on stage to meet Reverend Knight. Forgive me, Cornelius, for I have sinned. I had sex with a woman with lesbian tendencies, although those tendencies were not on display last night. We stained a non-marital bed and had immoral sex. I defiled her, Corny! I would scream.

HEAL! He would scream back, and smack my hung-over head.

I had to do it, Reverend Knight, I would plead. If I don't keep giving her the hot beef injection, she might go back to ways of homosexuality. And that's worse than sex out of wedlock. Right? He'd probably give me another smack on the head, and not necessarily a healing one.

The shower washed some of the alcoholic poisoning from my pores and I felt slightly better. I swore once more that Jack and I were finished. This time for good. Debbie did pour it into some interesting places on her body that lured me back into his trap. But now I could claim: 'been there, done that' and tell Mr. Daniel's to fuck off the next time he threatened to darken my doorstep.

I stood in front of the full-length mirror and admired how church-like I looked in a crisp white shirt and black pants, even with a head like a bass drum. I remembered to press them when I did my uniforms and was glad I did. A hot iron in my hands in this condition didn't bear thinking about.

I got on the crowded bus and managed to find a seat next to an unsavory character toward the back. He looked like he should be sharing a doorway with Otto, but he obviously had enough money for bus fare and the bottle in a brown paper bag.

The bus managed to hit every pothole in the road, rattling my bones and reminding me that I was still pretty hung-over. The drunk next to me kept unscrewing the cap and taking a drink. It smelled liked *Boone's Farm Strawberry Hill* wine and made me gag every time he undid the top and I got a

whiff. I drank it when we used to shoplift it from stores when I was fifteen. Hardly a man's drink, but it served a purpose: To get drunk. Must have set him back close to two dollars if he didn't steal it. I looked around the bus to see if there was a vacant seat anywhere else. The smell of the guy and the cheap wine made me ill(er). Every other seat was occupied and knowing I was stuck with the guy made his stench even more unbearable.

Halfway to Honolulu, the drunk rang the bell to get off. I swung my legs in the aisle to let him pass. He stood, and cocked the wine bottle back, taking a departing drink. Suddenly, the bus jolted. The drunk lost his grip on the bottle and his cheap pink nectar made a substantial splash on my white shirt.

I looked down at my shirt, mortified. "Look what you did, you asshole." I stood with my arms spread so he could see the full magnitude of his clumsiness.

"Asshole?" His right hand came out of nowhere and connected with my eye. He packed one hell of a punch and knocked me to the floor. Then he ran off. Not that I could do much about it laying flat on my back.

Other passengers helped me to a seat. I held my throbbing eye as my head thumped away. A little while later, the bus pulled up to my designated stop. I got off and looked around, heavily dazed.

There was a restroom not far away. I went in and cleaned myself up as best I could. I walked down to the Blaisdell Center where Holly stood at the entrance waiting for me.

"What the hell happened to you?"

I was growing tired of her greeting me with those words. "Shouldn't cuss," I scolded her. "Some drunken dickhead spilled wine all down me on the bus, then punched me for wasting it."

She cast her head skyward. "All mighty kingdom." She dropped her gaze to look at me and put her hands on her hips. "Daddy wants us to sit on the stage while he preaches. You know, like showing that couples don't have to fornicate out of marriage."

"Holy shit. No one ever told me we were going to be on display as an angelic couple. I'm not doing it." I held my arms out. "Especially in this state."

"Language," she snapped. "Look at you. Black eye, wine-soaked shirt, a gash on the head." She wheeled me around. "Oh, for the love of Moses, look at your back. It's totally filthy. It looks like you've been rolling around in the dirt."

"I landed on my back on the bus floor when that fucking drunk decked me."

She slapped me. "Will you quit swearing? I promised Daddy we'd do it. He needs my support."

"Oh for fuck sake."

"Goddamn it, Tyler." She stomped her foot. "Stop swearing."

I wanted to tell her that goddamns were worse than fucks, name in vain and all, but I could see this really meant a lot to her. She wanted to charade as a twenty-one-year-old virgin and as her boyfriend, I felt obligated to help her with her deceit.

We passed by a souvenir stand on our way backstage. Holly insisted I needed a new shirt, so she bought me a 'Knight is Right, God is Righteous' t-shirt. Reverend Knight's photo at the top of the shirt, and a cross emitting golden rays around it at the bottom. I threw away what had been my best shirt and slipped on the new one.

Holly flashed her backstage pass and security led us to Reverend Knight's dressing room. Another security guy checked her ID again before opening the door.

Mr. Knight smiled as we entered and waved off his make-up artist. Standing up, he extended his hand and locked my fingers in a vice-like grip again.

"Tyler, good to see you, son," his voice bounced off the walls and reminded me I still carried a delicate state. "Hey, I like the shirt." He play-punched my shoulder. "I thought of that design and logo myself. You like it?" he asked.

"Sir, I threw away a five-hundred-dollar Gucci shirt to wear this. I think it's brilliant."

I smiled. He smiled.

He cocked his head to one side. "What happened to your eye?"

"Oh, it's nothing, really." I gingerly touched it. "I was giving a hand to help a disabled person out of the back of one of the vans outside. You know, the vans that bus in the handicapped. I was wheeling this lady down the ramp, slipped and fell, and caught my eye on the handle of her wheelchair."

"God bless you, Tyler. You're a good man. I'm ashamed to say, but I may have misjudged you, and I should know better." He looked toward the heavens, opening his arms to a full stretch. "Judge not, least ye be judged," he bellowed. "By the measure ye judge, so shall ye be judged." He pulled out his hanky, wiped his brow and returned to earth. He laid a hand on my shoulder and looked me in the eyes. "Son, will you forgive me?"

"I don't see anything you need to be forgiven for, sir. My nature has always been one of turning the other cheek." I thought I better throw in some Shakespeare for good measure. "The quality of mercy is not strained."

His glasses came off, the handkerchief came out, and he wiped his eyes. "You really do know your Shakespeare." He looked at Holly standing next to me. "Princess, you've done well. You got a keeper here." He stepped in and bear-hugged me, cracking my back in the process.

"Thank you, sir," I gasped, hoping he'd release me before the spinal column

snapped.

"Come on, kids. We got a show to do and souls to save." He sounded like an exuberant school kid and I admired his passion.

Holly and I sat on tan, metal folding chairs some ten feet behind the pulpit he pounded. His voice rose to that shaky preacher tone, "One does not have to enter the flesh," then spoke softly, "to appreciate the person." He screamed, praised, and got the hanky out every other minute. He damned anyone having sex without a marriage certificate, and blessed those in matrimonial union.

I periodically looked at Holly throughout his sermon. Her head bowed, chin tucked into her chest, looking at the floor. A deadpan expression covered her pretty face. She looked deep in thought and I wondered if her next sexual escapade wouldn't be until after she wore a wedding band. His message that powerful; her guilt that great.

The sermon finished to great rounds of halleluiahs and Amens. He had a satisfied look, and the crowd seemed moved. We returned to his dressing room where he offered a prayer, asking for his message to take root with the sinners. Then he suggested we all go to Red Lobster to celebrate his success.

Holly and I sat together on one side of the booth, her father on the other. She looked sexy in her yellow sundress. Not having had sex with her for over a week drove me crazy. I knew the fine curves that dress concealed, and despite the Reverend's sermon, I found myself getting turned on and wanted desperately to do her right there...or in the restroom. I didn't care, I just wanted her.

After we ordered, Holly excused herself to go to the ladies' room. Having not been invited to join her, I remained at the table with her dad.

"So what're your plans for the future, son? You a career man?" He clasped his hands in front of him, resting them on the table.

I shrugged. "Not sure, sir. Sea time would mean being away from Holly, and that would sadden me." I really would miss her if I was away from her for months.

"You two really do make a fine couple. I think you're well suited to each other. What is it you like most about her?" He reached across the table and lightly tapped the side of my shoulder. His eyes searched my soul.

My mind scanned every part of her body. So many bits to choose from as to which was my favorite. Since he was under the impression I had never seen his daughter naked, I thought it best not to mention her tits or bible box.

"Most guys probably notice her good looks. I've been fortunate enough to have been exposed to her inner beauty. Her soft, caring side. And I admire her strong moral principles." I leaned in and he did the same, like sharing a secret. "She didn't even let me kiss her till our tenth date." I leaned back.

He smiled and shook his head, moving back to sit upright. "Ahhh, that's my girl. I'm so pleased her moral compass is holding course, especially with the pressure of young men in the military who may not share her values." He dug in his pocket and pulled out his hanky. He took off his glasses and wiped his eyes. "God bless you, Tyler." He finished wiping and put the hanky away. He leaned in again, smiling broadly. "Hey, what do you think of her cooking? Pretty good, huh?"

"Sir, if I was a chicken, I'd like nothing better than for Holly to smother me in an avocado sauce and shove walnuts up—"

The Reverend erupted in laughter before I could finish. Lucky for me. Holly returned to find her dad still laughing.

"What's so funny?"

Mr. Knight regained composure. "Princess, treat this guy like a diamond. He is forever."

I stood up to let Holly back in the booth.

"Glad you approve, Daddy." She leaned over and whispered in my ear. "Thanks for making such a good impression. It really means a lot. I owe you one."

The waitress arrived with our food.

I watched Holly as she ate. She had a unique way of eating crab legs. After snapping them in half, she'd suck the meat out of the shell; no fork required. It must have been some suck action. As she sucked one, I was sure she slid it deep into her throat and let out a quiet moan. Mr. Knight was totally engrossed in his surf n' turf, oblivious to anything that may have been happening around him. He ate like he was at his last supper.

Reverend, Father, whatever...I couldn't help myself. I placed my hand on Holly's knee and slowly inched it toward her honey pot. She looked at me with a crab leg jutting out her mouth. She placed her hand under the table and slid it across my thigh, toward my crotch. I grew hard as her hand moved ever closer. Her hand cupped my balls. I smiled knowing she couldn't resist a little public action. Then she squeezed, *hard*. I yelped like a dog that had his tail stomped on.

Mr. Knight jumped and about choked in his lobster tail. "You okay, son?" He sputtered.

I sat doubled over. "Yes, sir. Just had a sharp pain. I think I'll be all right in a minute."

Holly popped the crab leg out of her mouth. "Are you sure you'll be okay, Tyler?" she asked in a concerned fashion. "It would be a shame if it got any worse. And, like, it could get much worse." Her voice had a menace about it and she gave me that look from the top of her eyes with her head lowered. I got the

message and placed my hands above the table.

"No, I don't think it'll be coming back."

"Good." She smiled.

I needed a distraction, and it sat across from me. "That was a really good sermon, Mr. Knight. Holly and I feel much stronger in our vows to abstain from se—, well, you know, because of your words today."

"Thank you, Tyler. Glad to be able to offer some encouragement. I hope other youngsters got the message. I hate to see it." He shook his head. "Teenage pregnancies, single mothers, venereal diseases. All because people choose to have sex out of wedlock." He lightly rapped his knuckles on the table. "Damned be the wicked immoral fornicators, blessed be the husbands and wives."

"Matthew?" I asked.

"No, me." A smile spread across his face. "Pretty good, huh?"

"Wow. Sounded like scripture to me." Holly gave me a sideways kick.

After dinner, Mr. Knight wanted to walk around Honolulu. I suggested Waikiki, but he wanted to see the real downtown, not the tourist area. Said he wanted to feel the city, not the glitz. Holly parked and we got out to walk. He made remarks as we walked around town as to the amount of sinfulness he could feel looming in the air.

Mr. Knight and Holly walked together, a few paces in front of me. I was so caught up in watching her ass wiggle, even in a dress, I lost sight of where we were. All I could think about was shoving my hot co—

"Tyler. How ya doin', buddy?"

Shit. The Pinnacle building. I didn't know how to play this one at first. Holly and her dad wheeled around as Otto looked at me with outstretched arms. Since he called me Tyler, an unusual name as the Reverend pointed out, there didn't seem much point in denying his existence.

"Otto, buddy." I moved in and gave him a hug. He reeked of booze so I realized he may not be in his diplomatic mode. Stepping back, I grabbed him by the shoulders. "How ya doin', pal?"

"Yeah, I'm good. Hey, how'd you get on with the head-smacking preacher man? Manage to bullshit him with Shakespeare?"

I looked at Mr. Knight, standing there with his mouth open. Holly stood there opened mouthed as well, which kind of turned me on.

I slung my arm around him. "Otto." I extended my hand toward Holly's dad. "This is Reverend Knight." I moved my hand toward Holly. "And this is my girlfriend, Holly."

Otto wiped his hand on his pants and extended it to Mr. Knight. "Pleased to meet you." Holly's dad took his hand. "Holy crap. You're one of those finger

pinchers. Lighten up, dude?"

The Reverend's nostrils flared as he looked at me. "Tyler, who is this man?"

"Umm...I help out at the soup kitchen, and Otto is one of our customers." I looked at him. "Isn't that right, Otto?"

He nodded.

"And we often discuss Shakespeare. Isn't that right, Otto?"

He nodded again.

"And you're gonna quit swearing like we talked about, aren't you?"

More nodding from Otto.

"Maybe you should apologize to the Reverend."

Otto stepped toward the Reverend and bowed his head. "Sorry I cussed," he said softly. He looked up at Mr. Knight. "You gonna heal me, Father."

"What manner of healing are you in need of, Mr. Otto? Physical or..." he cleared his throat, "spiritual?"

"Well, my life's pretty fu—"

I kicked him sideways on the ankle. He shot me a sharp look which quickly dissolved. "Oh, right. I mean, my situation is pretty messed up. You know, living on the streets and everything."

Mr. Knight took out his hanky and wiped his brow, and shoved it back in his pocket. He gently laid his hand on Otto's forehead. "When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles."

Otto shifted his look from side to side, his eyes blinking wildly. "I feel different, Father. Did you heal me?"

Reverend Knight put a hand on Otto's shoulder. "Not me, son. A power greater than I. I am but a servant."

Wow. A bolt of lightning striking in front of us wouldn't have surprised me. Something powerful happened, but I wasn't sure what.

Holly's feet twitched. "Come on, Daddy, let's go."

Mr. Knight and Otto stared at each other in a bonding moment. He removed his hand from his shoulder. "God bless you," Mr. Knight said, looking Otto in the eye. He reached in his wallet and gave him fifty dollars. "The Lord says I should trust you to do the right thing with this. I may not trust you, but I trust Him."

Otto's face lit up, staring at the fifty dollar bill as we walked away. Mr. Knight stepped sprightly ahead of us. His shoulders thrown back like a man full of pride.

I wondered if I'd ever see Otto again.

Chapter 20

Holly dropped her dad off at her house and took me back to base. Although I had sex with Debbie the night before, it wasn't Holly. We hadn't had sex for over a week and I missed her wild ways. Daddy may have had a way of healing the sick and disabled, but his presence also acted as a chastity belt.

Holly was unrestrained, uninhibited and full of surprises; an out and out, sex toy. I couldn't believe that she had become so reserved by her father being on the same anything-goes island. I liked Mr. Knight. Maybe because if it wasn't for him, Holly wouldn't exist. He was a bit strange and loud, but full of passion. I admired that. Somewhat like Holly, albeit motivated by different powers.

We pulled up outside my barracks. I wanted to demand that we had sex right there in the back of her Mustang. I had such a burning lust for her but sensed that until Daddy took the skies any passion would be put on hold.

Holly shut the engine off and turned sideways in her seat to face me. I held both of her hands in mine. It was a tender moment looking into her warm eyes. Passion and desire consumed me, but she looked like the vulnerable girl her Daddy thought her to be.

"Hey, babe, I think you're doing really good. It can't be easy with your dad around and his beliefs. I know how much you like a good fu—, I mean fun time. I'm proud of how you manage to maintain your integrity while he's here."

"Oh, Tyler, that's so sweet of you to say that. You barely spoke a word all the way here. I thought you were like totally super-mad at me. I know how much you like...well, you know...and you've done really well at not staining."

"I think you mean abstaining."

"Like, whatever. I even forgive you for trying to touch my bibble box in front of Daddy." She giggled and gave me a naughty smile. She moved in close. "If it wasn't for Daddy, I would have done it right there. You're such a bad...bad...boy." She licked her lips. My crotch twitched. "As soon as Daddy leaves, I'll make it up to you. Promise."

"You're worth the wait. Goodnight."

'Love you' seemed the right thing to say, followed by a hot throbbing, pulsating co— well, that wasn't going to happen, so I left it there. I leaned in and kissed her. She looked quite sad as I left, knowing we weren't going to make love. But I knew she'd be so wracked with guilt if she did consent that it wouldn't be up to our usual standard.

I woke up Monday morning feeling refreshed. The absence of a hangover put a spring in my step as I walked to the shop. It was just as well to be of sound mind as I took the exam for Third Class Petty Officer in the morning. Although I did very little studying for it, I felt fairly confident that I would pass. Most of the test was on firefighting and damage control, subjects I excelled at in 'A' school. Sober and confident, I looked forward to the rest of the day. Returning to the shop, Petty Officer Watkins called me into his office.

"Chambers, I need to send a man down to the *Evansville*. You think you can do a job without getting underway with the boat?" He smiled, obviously amused by my past antics.

"No problem, boss. What you got?"

"The submariners are having trouble with their hydrostatic testing rig. It's on the fritz. Take our rig down there, hook it up and help 'em test it. Okay?"

"You can count on me, boss." I gave him an unnecessary salute.

I took the hydro rig down to the boat and the submariners helped me take it down and get it in position. Some bubblehead named Rumsey and I were in charge of testing the system. We knelt down as we hooked the rig to the system to be pressurized. One of his shipmates, Smith, stopped by.

"Ooh, la, la," Smith said, "Rumsey, you have *got* to check out the fox in the R-one division office." He grabbed his crotch. "She has got to be the hottest piece of tail on this base."

He could grab his crotch all he wanted, but that was as close as he'd ever get to Holly. A certain amount of pride hit me knowing that I was the one getting that hot piece of tail on a regular basis. Well, when Daddy wasn't in town.

"Nice, huh?" Rumsey asked, cupping his hands in front of his chest.

"Perfect. Not too big, not too small, just the right size. I'm gonna give her one before we go to sea." He thrust his hips.

"Hey, maybe we should double team her. You don't mind sharing with a shipmate, do you Smitty?"

"Umm..." I cleared my throat. "If you guys don't mind, that's my girlfriend you're talking about."

"You? Get outta town. What would she be doing with you? She's more likely to be a lesbo than to be going out with you. She needs a real man, not some faggot."

I couldn't figure out where these guys were coming from. I never did anything to them. Just because I had a hot girlfriend didn't mean they could kick sand in my face.

"Come on then, Chambers," Rumsey said, "what's she like in the sack?"

"What?" I looked at Rumsey. "You some kind of sicko that can't get any, so

you get off on listening to other people's tales in the bedroom?" I stood up and looked at Smitty. "And who you callin' queer?"

"Tell me, Chambers," Smitty said casually, "Does she swallow? Like you?"

"Swallow this, motherfucker." A loud crack sounded when my fist connected with Smitty's jaw. He fell to the deck with the back of his head making another loud noise from the full contact of his skull hitting the metal plating.

Rumsey scrambled to his feet and landed a punch on my good eye. I retaliated with a solid right hook to the side of his face. We both lowered our heads and kept throwing punches. Then, a sharp rabbit punch landed on my kidney from behind and I fell to my knees.

"Leave Rumsey alone, you surface puke," the assailant growled.

I rolled onto my back as four more bubbleheads stood over me. I closed my eyes and tucked into a ball when their steel-toed boots came toward my body. They kicked the crap out of me.

An announcement came over the loudspeaker. "Security alert, security alert. All hands stand fast. Security team arm yourselves from the ammunition locker and conduct a thorough search of the *USS Evansville*."

The kicking stopped and a few moments later heavy footsteps came running down the deck.

"Stand aside," someone yelled. I could tell the bubbleheads had stepped back as the air became more abundant.

"Identify yourself."

I opened my eyes to find myself staring down the barrel of an M-16 rifle. Next to the rifleman stood a guy with a .45 caliber pistol aimed at my head.

"Fireman Chambers, flex hose shop," I called out. My voice shook with fear as I trembled with pain and laid there scared out of my wits, hands shaking in front of my chest.

"He attacked me and Rumsey," Smitty yelled, pointing to me on the deck.

"On your stomach, Chambers. Arms stretched over your head and legs straight."

I rolled over as instructed. Someone patted me down while I winched in pain, confirming my belief that some ribs may have been broken.

"Suspect clean," the patter announced.

"On your feet," the gunman yelled.

The bubbleheads stood back as I struggled to stand upright. My body throbbed all over. Severe pain to my ribs made it difficult to stand up straight. No doubt, Rumsey gave me a matching set of black eyes, and my hand hurt from connecting so solidly with Smitty's jaw.

"Let's see what the Captain wants to do with your sorry ass. Move it." Mr.

Forty-five shoved me in the direction he wanted me to go. Armed escorts in front and behind me led the way to the Captain's stateroom. After knocking and receiving permission, we entered.

The Captain's small flip-down desk faced the wall. He moved his chair sideways to look at me. Touches of gray appeared at the sides of his otherwise jet-black hair. Early forties, I guessed, and a face without laughter lines. Not a good sign.

"Captain, we apprehended the suspect. He started trouble with members of the crew and they used necessary force to restrain him until we arrived."

That lying sack of shit. He never asked anybody what happened. Boy, these guys did circle the wagons when one of their shipmates gets the crap beat out of them. I stood at attention as best I could.

The Captain's eyes narrowed and his voice boomed. "What happened, sailor?"

I stood there for a moment composing myself while my mind raced through possibilities. *Well, sir, they talked about my girlfriend, so I started a brawl on a nuclear submarine. Naw. Won't wash.* "Sir, I came down to assist with some hydrostatic testing. One of your men made cruel and sick jokes about homosexuals. I happen to have a brother who was gay. I politely asked him to refrain from making such comments as I found them offensive and in bad taste."

I looked at the Captain. It looked fifty-fifty whether he was buying it or not. *Okay, dog movie.* I closed my eyes for a moment, rerunning the sad ending in my mind. Visualizing the shot dog letting out her final whimpers with a bullet hole in her head. Once I had a proper welling up, I opened my eyes and made a noticeable hard swallow.

"Your man continued with his comments. He said those kind of people should be shot." I let the tears go into full flow. "My brother was gunned down last month in a drive-by shooting outside a gay bar by some bigots. I know the Navy doesn't allow homosexuals, but this was my brother. Shot dead, just as a member of your crew had wished." I sniffled hard. "Sorry, sir. I flipped out. I decked him, then half the crew jumped me, and I just tried to defend myself."

I stood there shaking, more out of fear than pain. The Captain stared at me. He finally instructed one of the security team to bring in the others involved in the fight. A few minutes later, Smitty and Rumsey appeared. They stood at attention. The Captain shifted his gaze between the two of them.

"Did either of you making derogatory remarks about homosexuals?" The Captain's eyes darted back and forth between Rumsey and Smitty.

"No, sir," Smitty replied.

"You fucking liar," I shouted. I had to play this to the end or I'd probably end up in the brig. There must have been some law against lying to a Captain. "You

called me a queer and accused a very good friend of mine of being a lesbian. She could get kicked out because of clowns like you spreading vicious lies."

The room stood silent for a moment.

"Petty Officer Smith." The Captain's tone was slow and deliberate. "Did you make any remarks that could be interpreted as offensive to gays?"

"Only if he is one, sir." Smitty looked at me and smirked, immediately followed by him grabbing his jaw in pain.

"Chambers, I should, but I'm not going to put you on report. But I want you off my vessel. Report back to your supervisor, and tell him to send someone else down to finish the testing, and I don't ever want you on my boat again." He looked at the guy with the M-16. "Petty Officer Thomas, escort Fireman Chambers off the boat."

"Aye aye, Captain."

I left under armed escort and went back to the shop, entering Watkins' office upon arrival.

"Holy crap, Chambers. What'd you do now?"

I looked at the deck. "Have I ever told you about my gay brother?"

Chapter 21

Watkins interrogated me further, but it felt like he just wanted to do some more laughing at the situation. After he had a good giggle at my expense, he sent me over to sickbay. Sure enough, I had three fractured ribs in addition to having to walk around looking like a raccoon. They issued me with a light-duty chit and instructed me to take it to the division office to have it documented that I wasn't allowed to do any heavy lifting for four weeks.

I walked up the all too familiar metal staircase to the division office. Holly looked over the top of her glasses when I came in. She removed her glasses and her mouth dropped open.

"What the hell happened to you?"

I *really* was getting tired of her greeting me with the same old line. She stared as I pulled up a chair next to her desk and sat down. "Some guys were talking bad about you down on the *Evansville*. Some rude stuff. So, I stood up for your dignity and broke his freakin' jaw. He's gonna have a hard time talking shit for a while." I handed her my chit.

She looked it over. "You poor thing. That is so Walter Raleigh. Daddy leaves tomorrow and I'm going to show you how totally grateful I am once he's gone. But I don't know what he's going to say tonight when you come to dinner to say goodbye to him looking like that."

The door to Lieutenant Johnson's office opened and before he looked around, he spoke. "Petty Officer Knight, would you have Fireman Chambers—" He noticed me sitting there. "Ah, Fireman Chambers, would you step into my office?" He didn't sound mad, which usually meant a soft build-up trying to trap me before he blew his stack.

Pushing myself out of the chair with difficulty, I stood and walked to his office. He closed the door behind me and took a seat behind his desk.

"I'm seeing you more often than I would like, Fireman Chambers. I just had a call from the Commanding Officer of the *Evansville* and he told me about a little fracas that happened on his ship. Apparently, you were in the midst of it all. So tell me how you managed to get a submarine to go to a security alert?"

I looked at the floor before I began my well-oiled story. "Well, sir, did I ever tell you about my gay brother?"

#

I patted myself on the back on the bus ride to Holly's apartment after work for coming up with the 'gay brother' story. Everyone had bought it and I managed to

keep myself out of trouble. I always prided myself for being original, but I'd definitely use that story again if I ever found myself in a tight spot. Some people had imaginary friends. I invented an imaginary dead brother.

The Knight gang of two welcomed me when I arrived for dinner. We barely exchanged pleasantries before Holly had dinner on the table. She outdid herself in making a meatloaf stuffed with strawberries and broccoli. Luckily she made gallons of mushroom gravy using canned soup which enabled me to drown the meatloaf with a pleasant enough tasting disguising agent.

"I hate to say it, Tyler," Mr. Knight said with a sympathetic voice, "but you look like you've really been through the wars."

"Well, sir, I'm sure you would agree that I had no choice but to save your daughter's name from being tarnished. If you think I look bad, you should see the other guys." My smile caused me pain.

He leaned in over the table. "What was it they said?"

"It's not important, sir. Let's just say they cast Holly in an immoral light."

His fist came crashing down on the table, jarring a strawberry from the buttocks of the meatloaf. I fought a giggle.

"You did the right thing, Tyler. Damnation awaits those who blemish the pure." He reached over and stroked Holly's hair. "The defenders of purity," he pointed at me, "will gain their place in heaven."

If only he could put that in writing so I could show that to Gabriel at the pearly gates. I lowered my head and shrugged in a show of modesty.

Mr. Knight praised me all through dinner for defending his daughter's honor and said my injuries were a small price to pay to keep the Knight name above reproach. And I had a ticket to heaven, according to him, so I was pleased.

After dinner, he and I went to the living room while Holly stayed in the kitchen doing the dishes. I put on the tape of Beethoven's seventh symphony, my favorite, which I had purchased and brought with me to play as background music. Mr. Knight let it be known that the fifth was his favorite.

He hummed along with the tape for a while then leaned in and spoke softly. "You know, Tyler, I think you're a class guy. I had my doubts about you in the beginning, but you're a caring person. And I can see Holly is really happy with you. So, if you want to ask me anything, fire away." He leaned back and smiled expectantly at me.

What the hell was I supposed to be asking him? How long was his flight home? Did he really think Beethoven's fifth was better than the seventh? Does he really believe in twenty-one-year-old virgins? My mind went blank. It must have had something to do with religion or Shakespeare, but I didn't know where this was going.

"Well, sir...I've been meaning to ask you...what's that aftershave you wear? It has a very nice scent. I've been thinking about getting some myself." God, that sounded so gay, but I couldn't think of anything else. His aftershave was the last thing I cared about. Not to mention I'd never get Holly into bed smelling like him.

The hanky came out and he had a wipe. He sighed. "Tyler, I'm a traditionalist. I like things to be done the old-fashioned way."

"Oh, Brut 33, is it?"

He looked flustered. "Son, I'm talking about old-fashioned in the relationship sense." He smacked the bottom of his fist into his open palm.

"Don't worry, Mr. Knight, I listened to your sermon and wouldn't do anything out of wedlock with your daughter."

He smiled broadly. "Now you're getting the picture. That's what I'm talking about, son. A young couple like you and Princess can't fight urges forever. I'm sure you're ready to plant the seed of your loins. You won't get a better catch than Holly, you know? And I'm a wealthy man. I can help you kids along the way, especially if there's grandchildren involved."

I felt my heart stop. Unfortunately, it started again.

"Umm...Reverend, I really like Holly. I just want us to be sure about any long term commitments."

"Look, Tyler, I'm on a plane tomorrow morning. These kinds of requests for permission shouldn't be done over the phone. They should be done man-to-man." He extended his hand, his finger pointing at me like a mock gun. "And you're a man, right?"

I nodded.

"I won't say anything to Holly about our little discussion. I wouldn't want to spoil your surprise for her. And knowing you're a man of integrity, I'm sure you like to do these things the right way. The way the good Lord intended them to be done. I'd like to leave here a happy man, and I'm sure you'd like to know you've been given the green light. Right?" He winked. "And when I said I'm wealthy, I mean *very* wealthy. Now, is there anything you'd like to ask me before I leave?"

I tried to clear the lump out of my throat, but it was lodged pretty tight. He had a look of anticipation I hadn't seen before. He sat on the edge of his chair, hands clasped together, wearing a big smile and nodding as if to urge me on.

My stomach tightened, sweat engulfed my palms as my hands shook and my head lightly spun. I needed a drink and desperately wanted to run to the kitchen and take a few shots of my very good friend Jack. I wasn't cut out for this sobriety thing. Drawing a deep breath, and fighting a twitching in my butt, I managed to speak. "Mr. Knight, when the time is right, and if it's okay with you,

may I have your daughter's hand in marriage?"

Chapter 22

Tears came down his cheeks, followed by the hanky coming out of his pocket. His head bobbed like a plastic nodding dog on the back shelf of a Chevrolet. He stood up, motioned me to do the same, and gave me one of those back cracking bear hugs. I groaned from the pain he applied to my ribs. He quickly backed away and apologized.

"You've made me so happy. Bless you." He wiped his eyes and blew his nose. "Yes, you may have her hand in marriage. You have my blessing."

A 'What have I done?' feeling swept over me. But, hey, I wasn't under any obligation. I made an old man happy and if I ever did want to marry Holly, that hurdle was out of the way. I wondered how much *very* wealthy was. Was it a million, or more like ten? No matter. It was lots. And I did enjoy seeing the pure excitement on his face.

The thought of marrying Holly gave me strange feelings. I did like her, she was a lot of fun, and I had got used to her ways. Good looking, loads of money, great in bed. But was I really ready to be tamed yet? I wasn't so sure about that, but at least now I had a pretty good backup plan.

I stood in a trance as Mr. Knight wiped the tears of joy from his ice-blue eyes.

"Like, what's going on?" Holly appeared with a pot of coffee and three mugs.

"Nothing, Princess." The reverend shoved his hanky back in his pocket. "Tyler just told me a funny joke."

See? He lied. So if he doesn't rot in the damnation of burning hell, neither will I. What a relief he offered that lying was okay in the right circumstances. That's all I ever did.

"Why don't you sit down, Holly? I'll rub your feet." I quickly turned to her father. "That is, if you don't mind, sir. It's nothing untoward." I looked back at Holly. "They must be tired after making that wonderful dinner."

Mr. Knight took off his glasses and rubbed his eyes. "I used to do the same thing for Holly's mother. God rest her soul."

"God rest her soul," Holly echoed.

I sat on a footstool, my back to the Reverend, massaging Holly's feet. Her foot nestled into my crotch and I had to stop before I became aroused. I moved to sit next to her. The reverend quoted several scriptures and prayed before I excused myself to go back to the base. We said a warm goodbye and I wished him a pleasant trip home. He couldn't keep the smile off his face and it pleased me to be the source of his happiness.

The following morning Mark and I sat together in the shop during some downtime. I lit a cigarette and blew smoke rings.

"Holly dad's leaving today, isn't he?" Mark asked.

"Yep, back to LA. God, I can't wait to give Holly a good seeing to. She must be going mental by being sex-starved for so long."

Mark laughed. "Good thing you had Debbie ransoming your dick, huh?"

"Well, I wouldn't have put it like that. I still feel pretty guilty about it, and she's starting to tighten the screws. Wants me to make a choice between her and Holly."

He laid his hand on my shoulder. "Tyler, Tyler, Tyler. Face it, you're a slut. Albeit through emotional blackmail, but a slut nonetheless. Women like to feel special, and that takes more than a blast of whip cream. So, who's it gonna be?"

I looked around to make sure no one was within earshot. "Reverend Knight made me ask for his permission to marry Holly."

"Marry her?" He squealed.

I put my finger to my lips.

"Are you crazy? Tyler, you can't marry the girl. Screwing her in johns is one thing, but marriage? That's a whole other toilet."

"I didn't say I was going to. I had to ask him to shut him up. I thought he was gonna cry if I didn't. Holly's not really the marrying type. I like her, but I don't know. Not yet, anyway. I'm just impressed that Mr. Knight thought I was worthy of his precious daughter. That's quite a compliment, you know? He wouldn't let just any shithead marry her."

"I would have believed that until you told me that *you* were the chosen shithead." He winked and smiled.

"Chambers!" Watkins called out across the shop, halting our conversation.

I walked into his office wondering if I had done anything recently that would warrant an ass-chewing or a court-martial. I came up empty.

Holly sat in the office with Watkins. She stood up and nodded as I entered. "Ah, Fireman Chambers," she said, "I was just telling Petty Officer Watkins that Lieutenant Johnson needs you for some extra details he needs done around his office. You're assigned to me for the rest of the day."

I looked at the clock showing ten minutes past three.

Watkins nodded. "Try not to piss him off, Chambers."

Holly led the way out of the shop and we walked side by side. I wanted to hold her hand, but that wasn't allowed while we were in uniform.

"Did your dad get off okay?" I asked.

"Yes, that's why I'm here. We're going to your room, baby, and you're gonna

jam me so hard, I wanna feel the earth move." She looked at her watch. "But we only got an hour before I have to be back in my office."

"What about the extra detail?"

"I'm the extra detail, lover. I missed you so much, I can't stand it another minute." She looked at me and smiled as we walked. "I told Lieutenant Johnson I had some paperwork to deliver and other business to take care of, and you're the other business."

As soon as we walked through the door, Holly grabbed me and kissed me passionately. She ripped all the buttons of my shirt as she opened it. I stood back and grabbed the top of her shirt, ready to yank it open.

"No," she said in a panic, "I have to go back to work later." She undid her shirt in record time and removed the bra herself. We both dropped our pants and underwear and moved in to embrace. She pulled me to the bed as we kissed. She laid down and looked into my eyes. "Baby, you got one hour to give me a week's worth."

I got up, walked over to my chest of drawers and pulled out a clean t-shirt. I placed the shirt next to her head.

"Eat that when you're ready to blast off."

She closed her eyes and smiled.

#

After an exhausting hour with Holly, I showered, changed, went to the Navy Exchange and bought a pillow for Otto. I owed him big time for the Shakespeare tutorials, and now that I had some free time, I decided to pay him a visit. Getting off the bus, I walked down to the Pinnacle building. He'd be over the moon with the pillow. Excitement filled me as I got to the entrance.

"Otto?" I called out. Empty. Damn cops must have moved him on. I walked down the street, looking in all the doorways. No Otto. He could've been anywhere. He could even be in a bar, sucking down Jack Daniel's with someone else trying to help him out.

A feeling of dejection fell over me. One of my rare attempts to do the right thing met with failure. A heartfelt thanks was all I wanted to give Otto. I vowed to try again later in the week, but given his circumstances, anything could have happened.

A growling stomach and a whiff of fried chicken enticed me into Chickens Pickens, a fast food joint at the end of the block from Otto's hangout. I went in and stood back from the counter and looked over the red and yellow menu board.

"Tyler?"

The guy at the register grinned at me like an idiot. He looked vaguely familiar. I studied his clean-shaven face.

"Otto?"

"Yeah. What's happenin', dude?" He wore one of the biggest smiles I'd ever seen."

"Otto! What are you doing here?" He must have noticed the unintentional surprise in my voice.

"I'm workin', dude." He gave a little fist pump, then his expression turned serious. "What happened to you? I barely recognized you with those black eyes and busted up face. You get hit by a car or somethin'?"

"Naw, long story. Well, more than one actually." I looked around the restaurant. It was empty. "So you're working here, are you?"

He looked up. "It was like a voice spoke to me after I met that Father Knight guy." He lowered his head, shaking it. "Man, I looked at that fifty bucks and thought me and Jack were in for a good night. But something told me to get a haircut and a shave instead. Don't ask me why. Then I thought I'd get something to eat instead of having a drink. I came in here and saw a help wanted sign. I applied and got the job." He stood there beaming.

"Otto, that's great! I'm really pleased for you. Here, I got you this to say thanks for helping with Shakespeare." I handed him the pillow.

He took it. "Dude, that is so cool. I'm staying at the manager's house until I save enough to get my own place. But this is my new pillow. This all happened because of you and that preacher man."

"Not much to do with me, but I'll be sure to tell Reverend Knight."

"You make sure you do, brother. And I owe you one, Tyler." He offered up his hand and we high-fived.

"Naw, I'd say we're about even."

I ordered some chicken and sat down at a table. Otto kept coming over to sweep around my table as I ate. We chatted when he didn't have a customer to serve. He really did look like a different person. Mr. Knight turned Otto's life around by giving him that fifty bucks. He told me he was happy and hoped to get on the ladder to becoming the assistant manager. I wished him every success in making it.

We gave each other an emotional hug when I left. As I walked to the bus stop, a certain feeling of satisfaction enveloped me knowing that I played a small part in Otto's happiness. And I would tell Reverend Knight. I was sure he'd be delighted.

#

I had a buzz the next day still thinking about Otto and his newfound purpose in life. I met up with Debbie at lunchtime and we sat together in the mess hall to eat lunch. We both had shoe leather disguised as roast beef. Throw in some oranges and mint sauce and Holly could have cooked it. We joked about how bad it was.

"So, did you and Holly manage to con her dad into believing that she's not gay, a nymphomaniac, or a raving lunatic?"

"Pure as the driven snow she is in his eyes." I cut off a piece of beef and popped it in my mouth.

"And he didn't mind her 'boyfriend' looking like a boxer who lost every fight he'd ever been in?"

"No." I looked at her indignantly. "He really liked me. He was impressed with my helping out at the homeless shelter, teaching hobos not to cuss, and not having pre-marital sex with his daughter."

She laughed loudly. "Tyler, you're the biggest bullshit artist going. What's next? You going on tour with him?" She smiled. "So, where does that leave you and Holly? You humpin' or dumpin'?"

I shoved a spoonful of rice in my mouth so I wouldn't have to answer.

She leaned in. "I told you, your time's running out. I think it's about time—"

"This all looks very cozy," Holly interrupted, stepping to the end of our table. "Mind if I join you?" She sat down before we had a chance to answer. Debbie and I looked at each other. Holly placed her napkin on her lap then sawed into her roast beef. She took a bite. "Mmm...delicious," she cooed. "But you know what it could do with?"

"Oranges and mint?" I offered.

"Don't be ridiculous. Coconut and some dates." She looked at me. "I'll make it for you some time, lover. You'll taste the difference."

"I'm sure I will." Nervousness jumped in my stomach, not knowing what Debbie might do or say next. I tensed up.

Debbie lowered her head to conceal her smirk. After feverishly wiping her mouth, she spoke. "How's your dad, Holly?"

"Totally awesome. He rocked the Blaisdell Center and really likes Tyler." She playfully rested the side of her head on my shoulder for a moment then jerked back upright. "So, Debbie, any new girlfriends?"

Debbie's foot brushed up against mine. "Actually, I've been playing it straight, if you must know. I've been seeing this guy. He's really cute. Six-foot, thin but muscular, brown hair and eyes so blue you could swim in 'em." She leaned back

and rubbed her finger over her lower abdomen, just above the right side of her crotch. "And he's got the cutest little— OW!"

Debbie caught the full force of my boot in her shin. She leaned down and rubbed her leg.

"Like, are you okay?"

"Yeah." She narrowed her eyes and looked at me. "But sometimes he's a real asshole. He can be a self-centered, selfish dickhead. I'm still working on that part."

"I'd like to meet him sometime," Holly said.

"Yeah, that'd be great. Maybe we could go on a double date or something." Debbie sounded excited and threw me a crooked smile. I didn't know if she was trying to drop me in it, or if she saw an opportunity to have another woman to woman encounter with Holly, with me acting as the side dish. "Whattya think, Tyler?"

They both looked at me. I dropped my head and pushed my mashed potatoes around with my fork. "Umm...I don't know. Doesn't sound like I'd get on with him."

"Sure you would," Debbie offered encouragement. "You two are so alike, except for the asshole part, of course. He even kinda looks like you. Come on, it'll be fun."

Holly stroked my leg under the table. "I think it would be a good idea, lover. Debbie and I buried the pitchfork and I'd like to see her happy with her new guy." She leaned in, cupped her hand to my ear and whispered. "I want to see her with a guy so I know she's still not lusting after me."

Debbie drummed her fingers on the table. "Care to share your little secret?"

"Oh, she just said maybe we could go go-karting," I offered. "I still don't think it's a good idea. You know, relationships should be just two people. Double dating's not a good idea." I sent Debbie a look and hoped she'd be able to interpret my 'Leave it alone' look.

She waved her finger between me and Holly. "Well, you and her went out with Mark and Lori."

"Yeah, and look how that ended. See? A disaster. Case confirmed. I think we should keep our relationships to ourselves." I glared at Debbie and talked through clenched teeth. "And not involve other people in our relationships."

Debbie turned her attention to Holly. "Okay, forget him. What do you think, Holly? Shall you and I get together with our boyfriend-zzz?"

"Like, sure." She grabbed the back of my head and moved it side to side. "Don't worry about him. I'll talk him round. Why don't we meet at Dolphin's, Friday night, six-thirty? You bring your boyfriend and I'll bring mine. It'll be

fun."

Debbie looked at me and smiled big. "I can't wait to see the look on his face when I tell him."

Chapter 23

Mark and I met up in the room after work. I sat on my bed while he got ready to go out with Lori. He always wore button-down shirts and slacks when he went out with her, never just jeans and a t-shirt.

"Where you guys going?"

He stood in front of the mirror combing his sandy-blond hair. "I'm taking her to the movies. She wants to see *Terms of Endearment*."

I wrinkled my nose. "Bit girlie, isn't it?"

"Hey, if she's happy, I'm happy. Sometimes you just have to do these things. It's a small price to pay to see her smile. She's really cool. I like her a lot."

"I'm pleased for ya, buddy. You seem to handle Lori pretty good. Can I ask you for some advice?"

He walked over, pulled up a chair and sat down facing me. "Well, I don't have a lot of experience on how to handle a love triangle, but go ahead, shoot."

"I got a bit of a problem."

"Just one? Is it mental or physical?"

I flipped him the bird. "Shut up. Anyway, Debbie set me up. Me and Holly are supposed to go on a date with Debbie and her boyfriend. Well, that ain't gonna happen, is it?"

He laughed. "Yeah, like one of those movies where you keep going back and forth between their different booths. At least this way, you'd all be in the same booth and you'd just have to move to opposite sides."

He got up and went to his drawer, splashed on some aftershave then came back over to sit down. "So Debbie finally threw down the gauntlet, did she? Well, can't say I'm surprised. Women like to be the only one, ya know?" He made his hand into a gun replica and pointed it at me. "Showdown at the Pussy Coral. Bang." He blew imaginary smoke from his fingertip.

"There's got to be a way around this. Holly would be crushed if I dumped her. Besides, I really like her. But Debbie could rat me out if I dump her."

"Umm...sorry to be the one to tell you this, but you did this to yourself. Debbie was just a passenger hoping that you'd finally choose her. It sounds to me like you're pretty hung up on Holly. But I can tell you, I happen to know that Debbie has really fallen for you. I wouldn't want to be in your shoes. Sounds like it's gonna get ugly."

I pulled out a cigarette and lit it. "Well, you don't know much about giving advice, do you? That's when I give you one of my problems and you tell me how to fix it."

Mark stood up, straight-faced and narrowed-eyed. "Look, Tyler, I'm a

Fireman, not some guru sitting on top of a mountain answering 'What is the meaning of life' questions. I've given you advice time and time again. You've ignored it every time and did whatever your dick wanted to do. So don't go trying to lay a guilt trip on me. If you had taken my advice earlier, you wouldn't be in this mess. I told you to hook up with Debbie, but you wanted the hot-looking ditz because she was an easy fuck and you didn't have to work your brain muscles. Deal with it."

I stood up and walked over to him until we were nose-to-nose. "That *ditz* you're talking about is my girlfriend. The last guy to talk shit about her got his jaw busted."

Mark cocked his fist. "Back off, Jack. I'll drop you like a bad habit." His eyes filled with anger. I took a step back and he dropped his fist. "You know what, Tyler? I wouldn't really care, but I consider Debbie a friend. A good friend. And I know how much you've been hurting her. So on second thought, you hang with Miss shit-for-brains and leave Debbie out of it. I'll talk to her and convince her she's better off without you. There. That's my advice." He turned around and walked out, slamming the door as he left.

I felt bad. I'd have to sort this out my own way. I went over to Debbie's room and knocked. She answered in a Molly Hatchet t-shirt, tight orange shorts and bobby socks. She did look hot. I pulled out a bottle of rum from behind my back.

"Yo ho ho, and all that," I said.

She smiled and opened the door to let me in. She gestured toward the table and chairs. "Straight, or with coke?" she asked.

"Coke, if you got any."

She went to her fridge, pulled out a couple of cans of Coke and grabbed two glasses off the top. She sat down and I poured us a drink.

"Cheers," I said and we touched glasses. I took a drink. "Okay, you got us into this mess, now how are you gonna get us outta of it?"

"Excuse me, Chambers." She took a gulp. "You got yourself into this mess, how are you going to get yourself out of it?"

"Come on, Debbie. You set me up." I offered her a cigarette, she accepted and we both lit up.

She shook her head. "Tyler, I've been telling you, this has always been on the cards. I called your bluff to pick the muff. Who is it? Me or Holly?"

"C'mon, it's not that easy. I haven't decided yet." I knew it would be Holly, but I couldn't tell Debbie that.

She took a deep drag and slowly blew out the smoke. "Well, Tyler, you treat me like some Shit Street whore. I feel like filth."

"Wait a minute, Debs. You're the one who said no strings, unemotional sex.

Can't blame me for taking that at face value."

"No, I can't." She sniffled back tears. "I'm a slut, a whore, the other fucking woman. I can't get a guy who loves me for me." A tear trickled down her cheek.

Oh shit. Not waterworks. I got up and put my arms around her. "Hey, don't cry." I held her until the quiet sobs had been reduced to sniffing, then stroked her arms a little while longer before returning to my chair.

She regained her composure and took a drink. "Sorry, you're right. It's all my fault. I should have left you to Holly long ago. The girl who already has everything." She looked at me, tears pooled in her eyes again. "I just thought you might pick me over her in the end. Well, that was a stupid thought, wasn't it?" She smacked her head. "How in the hell was I ever going to outdo the wonderful, gorgeous Holly Knight? You've obviously chosen her." Her eyes pleaded with me to tell her she was wrong.

"Look, Debbie, it doesn't have to end like this. Why don't you get Sanchez to act as your boyfriend for the night and we'll work something out."

Sad eyes were replaced by angry eyes. "For starters, you expect me to show up with a five-foot-nine, slightly overweight Mexican with brown eyes, and convince Holly he's the dreamboat I'd been talking about. She's thick, not blind. Not to mention that Sanchez isn't a self-centered asshole as I accurately described."

Boy, first Mark, now Debbie. I took a drag and looked at the floor. The relatively unfamiliar feeling of guilt washed over me. I knew she had been falling for me but chose to ignore it. "I never meant to hurt you, Debs." I looked up and took her hand resting on the table. "I'm really sorry."

Debbie smiled. She took a drink and then a puff. "You know what? I've changed my mind. You're right. I don't want to lose you. This was all my idea. Okay, so I couldn't knock the head cheerleader off her perch. That's just something I'll have to deal with. It's my problem and I just had a thought. That Richardson guy from the weld shop fits your description, I'll ask him out. The four of us will play happy families, Holly will never know, then we'll see what happens. How's that?"

I sat stunned. "Seriously? You'd do that? I mean, is that what you really want?"

She nodded. "Well, it looks like that's the only way I'm going to have you, right? You've enjoyed it, haven't you?"

I nodded.

"So, what the hell? Don't worry about it. Everything will work out. As long as I make you happy in some way, it's good enough for me."

We leaned in and kissed.

"If you don't mind, Tyler, I'm a little emotionally drained right now. Mind if we leave it for now?" She stroked my cheek. "Let's just stay low-key until after the date, then we'll get back on track. Is that okay?"

"You sure you're okay?"

She sniffled and nodded.

"You're the best, Debs. Thanks."

"Good. See you Friday at Dolphin's."

I kissed her and left.

#

I got back to the room and decided to wait for Mark to get back from his date to talk to him. I sat reading a book about the impeachment of Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal. It was amazing how morality was thrown out the window to orchestrate a cover-up. I found it appalling the way he disregarded principles to try to save his own skin.

Mark came in about eleven. He cast me a glance and undressed without speaking.

"Hey, sorry about earlier," I said. "You were right and I shouldn't have acted like that."

"I don't really care." He flicked his hand at me. "I just don't like seeing Debbie getting hurt."

"Hey, we're cool again."

He sat on his bed and looked at me. "Whattaya mean?"

"I went and saw her after you left. She agreed she did the wrong thing. She's gonna get a date with Richardson and get us out of the jam."

"You can't be serious. After all you put that girl through? I'm surprised you're still walking around with testicles. And, see what I mean? My advice was to leave her alone. But..." He shrugged. "Tyler knows best."

"It was her idea. If you don't believe me, ask her yourself. But you won't need to talk to her. I've already smoothed it over. And like I said, sorry about earlier. Night."

I laid down and pulled the blanket over me. My mind went between Holly and Debbie. Debbie was very understanding. Lucky for me I inherited Dad's charm gene.

#

Date night came and Holly and I waited in Dolphin's for Debbie to show up with her new boyfriend, Richardson. We sat next to each other on a padded

bench against the wall, with tables lined up every three or four feet apart in front of the bench and chairs on the other side. Holly sipped her Chardonnay as I nursed a beer. Although Debbie had agreed to be a good sport, my nerves were still fraught.

Holly made casual look elegant as she usually did. Tight red jeans with matching high-top Converse sneakers. A red Indiana Hoosier basketball tank top laid over a tight-fitting, long-sleeve white t-shirt, complimented by a ponytail pulled through the back of her Cincinnati Reds baseball cap. She may have looked a bit like an elf, but my desire to slide up and down her chimney was extremely heightened. Especially now that Daddy's sleigh had left town.

Debbie walked up to the table. Her eyes were red like she had been crying. She let out a little snuffle.

I leaned over to look behind her. "Where's Richardson?" I asked.

"I dumped him, the cheating bastard. I didn't know if I should come, but I'm too upset to be on my own. I hope you don't mind. I can always go if it's a problem." She wiped her eye.

Holly patted the seat next to her. "Sit down and tell me all about it. Tyler, get Debbie a drink."

"Okay, but don't start without me. I want to hear this." I pointed to Debbie. "Black Russian?"

She nodded.

I went to the bar and got her drink as quick as I could and rejoined the girls. Holly encouraged her to tell the story.

"I just found out he's been two-timing me ever since we started going together. He already had a floozy and he never gave her up."

My chest tightened. Damn! I thought she was gonna be cool. I pleaded with my eyes, but she ignored my looks of desperation.

"He was jumping back and forth between our beds, stringing us both along. Why would a guy do that, Tyler? I don't understand." She looked around Holly at me.

"Umm...I don't know, Debs— I mean Debbie." Holly gave me a sharp look. "I mean, maybe he had a good reason. I wouldn't think it would be a straightforward case. Probably had some extenuating circumstances behind it."

"Like, gimme a break," Holly sighed. "How can cheating on a girlfriend ever be justified?"

Debbie shifted her gaze to Holly. "You mean, you feel that way too? There could never be a reason to date two women at the same time?"

"Of course not," Holly snapped. "Tyler would never cheat on me, would you, lover?"

"Uh, no. Course not."

"What would you do if you ever caught your boyfriend cheating, Holly? What if you found out he went off and banged some other girl after he'd been with you?" She looked around her again and locked eyes with me.

I swallowed hard.

"Not likely," Holly said. "I keep my boyfriend so exhausted he doesn't have the energy to look at another woman." She turned to me with seriousness in her eyes. "Isn't that right, Tyler?"

I nodded. "Uh, yeah. That's right, babe."

"But just suppose," Debbie insisted.

"Okay, if he was that stupid," she held my face with her hand, "I'd cut his pretty little face up and make him so totally ugly that another girl would never look at him as long as he lived." Then she smiled. "But we don't have to worry about that, do we?" She kissed my nose. I'd never seen her hold such a meaningful look.

I stroked her leg. "Course not. Why would I need anyone else?"

"Exactly." Her eyes left me as she released her grip on my face and took a sip of wine. She looked back at Debbie. "Like, how'd you find out?"

"His other girlfriend twigged first and confronted me. I told her she was full of it and to take a hike. Then she described a scar he has that can only be seen when he's naked. It was a perfect match." She softly cried.

I was at Debbie's mercy. My stomach flipped. I went to take a drink of beer, but my hand shook so bad I set it back down, hoping Holly didn't notice.

Holly put her arm around Debs. "There, there. There's plenty of other schools in the ocean." Debbie rested her head on the front of Holly's shoulder. She looked at me and smiled. She shifted her look downward, gave a few more sniffles and forced out a few more tears.

"Maybe it's best if you cry this out on your own, Debbie," I said. "That's a good way to get over it, you know. You don't want to have to pretend to be upbeat for our sake."

"Don't be ridiculous." Holly shot me a look of disgust. "The poor girl needs our support. It's a nasty shock. She's like totally devastated. We'll skip the go-karts and go out for a nice meal. I'll just pop to the little girls' room and then we'll go." She got up. "Be right back." As she walked away I couldn't even focus on her cute ass wiggling. I felt sick.

"What the hell are you playing at," I snapped.

"Not so suave and debonair when you're on the back foot, eh? I warned you, Tyler. You wouldn't make a choice. You wanted to build this pussy empire and have everything your own way. Well, you've had your days of having your cake

and eating it too, now it's time to choke on it. I'm not some little rag doll without feelings. I gave you plenty of time. If you dumped me long ago I could have dealt with it. But no. You just kept giving me little rays of hope that maybe you'd be man enough to stand up to Holly and be with me."

"Debbie, please don't do this. We can work this out."

She folded her arms. "What's your idea of working this out? Me on Monday, Wednesdays and Fridays, her at the weekends and probably some street whore on Tuesday and Thursday? You had your chance." Her eyes narrowed and eyebrows held low, her lips pressed tight together. "Hell hath no fury." We sat without speaking any further.

"Ready guys?" Holly stood at the end of the table looking chirpy. I sensed she was on a mission to cheer Debbie up. Debbie was on a mission to destroy me. I guzzled my beer and stood up.

"Looks like I got a date with the two best looking women on the base. Guess I can't complain." I put on a brave smile while nausea took hold.

Holly insisted we went to Pearl's Oyster Grill down in Waikiki. That's all I needed. Two girlfriends, former lovers, both hot, and be force-fed aphrodisiacs when one of them was out to ruin me. It did cross my mind to get them rip-roaring drunk and suggest a threesome. Although Holly might have a few glasses of wine and then drive, she would never drive drunk. And Debbie was too set on revenge to agree to another round of butter-the-muffin.

The girls sat on one side of the booth and I sat opposite. I didn't like the setup, it lent itself too much like facing an interrogation. We ordered and the girls discussed make-up while we waited for the food, which was fine by me. It took me out of the firing line.

A foot stroked my leg. I looked over, expecting the guilty one to give me some kind of smile, but they were looking at each other talking. Neither of them gave a clue who it might be. I slowly leaned down to see whose foot danced dangerously close to my firing zone.

"You okay, Tyler," Holly asked before I got down far enough to identify the foot. I bolted upright.

"Yeah, fine."

The girls went back to talking, this time about boyfriends, which made me uncomfortable. The foot kept stroking me. It drove me crazy not knowing who it was but I was afraid to look again. By rights, it should have been Holly, so it would look suspicious if she caught me looking to confirm it.

The food arrived and the girls decided to include me in the conversation.

"So what do you think, Tyler? Should Debbie give this loser another chance?" Holly asked.

I looked down, spearing my Oyster Rockefeller. "Are you sure you didn't know this guy was messing around on you, Debbie?" I looked up at her. "Sometimes the signs are so obvious, blatant even. Maybe you were living in denial as to what was really happening." I hoped that might shut her up.

"I suppose. But some people are really good liars." She rested her elbow on the table and placed her jaw on her fist, cocking her head to one side as she stared back. "You must know the type, Holly. Good lookin' guy, gift of the gab, flatters you so much you lose track of reality. You feel invincible, believing love will conquer all." She dropped her arm and sat up, straight and stern, still focused on me. "Then you realize that he just talks a lot of shit. Strings you along, saying whatever he has to so you don't rat him out."

"Well, as you can imagine, I've had a few guys like that" Holly said nodding. "Guys will say anything to get in my panties. But I'm a totally good judge of character. I can tell straight away when a guy's lying. A guy tried lying to me once and I smacked him so hard it knocked one of my fingernails off." She reached over and took my hand. "That's why Tyler's so special to me. You'd never lie to me, would you, baby?"

"Course not."

Debbie rolled her eyes. "Of course he wouldn't. You're a really lucky girl, Holly. I wish I had a guy like Tyler. I'd worship the ground he walked on." She looked at me lovingly. "Seriously, I would."

She may as well have stuck a knife in me the pain was that sharp. If she was trying to lay a guilt trip on me, it worked. I felt lower than whale shit. Her sad eyes told a story of pain and disappointment. I wanted to embrace her. She had that soft side I couldn't resist. How was it possible for two women, that I craved so deeply, to appear on the scene at the same time? Either one of them could make me happy in their own right. My lust for each of them made it impossible to choose one over the other.

"If I wasn't already taken, Debbie, you'd be top of my list." Her hand inched toward the center of the table. I had to stop myself from grabbing it.

"Uh-umm." Holly cleared her throat. "I think you two have made your point." Holly slid her plate to my side, got up and moved around to sit next to me. She put her arm on my shoulder. "I'm really sorry about Richardson, Debbie. You want me to like transfer him?"

"No, that's okay. I did come out tonight hell-bent on getting revenge. But I don't think I can go through with it. I guess if you really care about someone it's not as easy to destroy them as you first think."

Holly looked around the restaurant to get the waiter's attention. As she looked away, I mouthed 'thank you' to Debbie. Her foot stroked my leg and she smiled.

Debbie's foot let me know she still wanted me. I could have whichever goddess I wanted. I needed to be fair to the girls and make a choice, but it wouldn't be easy.

Chapter 24

Holly and I dropped Debbie off at her room and Holly invited me to spend the weekend with her. We still had a lot of catching up to do with acts of pre-marital deprivation.

Back at her apartment, she opened a bottle of wine as I sat on the couch, pondering my future. Seeing both Holly and Debbie was sure to end in disaster. Debbie's plan of getting me into a relationship with her was nearly working. She gave me one hell of a fright, and the thought of losing both of them didn't bear thinking about. I would have to choose one and stick with the decision, regardless of the consequences.

Holly came in with the wine and sat next to me. She folded her legs behind her butt and faced me at ninety degrees. We toasted glasses and both took a long drink.

"Mmm..." Holly smacked her lips. "I really needed this. That was some night, huh?"

"You can say that again. Debbie was in quite a state, wasn't she?" I was so glad that Debbie wasn't spiteful enough to go through with her plan. But I wasn't so sure she might not try again at some point.

"Yeah, I like really felt sorry for her. By the way, how did you know what she would have to drink when we were in the Dolphin's? You never even asked her."

"Oh, umm..." I rubbed my fingers over my lips. "We were talking once...and she said it was funny that she's supposed to be fighting communism, but her favorite drink was a Black Russian. It just kind of stuck with me." It felt strange, but I didn't like lying to her. Maybe her dad put a truth hex on me.

"Oh." She put her hand behind me and stroked the back of my head. The index finger of her other hand moved in small circles on my forearm. She studied my arm and her finger moving around it as if searching for cryptic clues. "You'd never cheat on me, would you?" Her somber tone suggested it was a serious question which she didn't know the answer to. She wanted some reassurance as I read it.

I set my drink on her new coffee table and turned toward her. "Why would you even ask such a thing?"

She shrugged. "I dunno. It must be really hard to find out your boyfriend's cheating on you. That made me sad tonight."

She showed a vulnerable side I hadn't seen before. Her head dropped like a kid who just found out Santa Claus didn't exist. Her face stiffened, fighting back tears. She held an innocence as though she believed Ken and Barbie never had sex and Elvis might still be alive. God she was sexy when she pouted; her

bottom lip jutted out and eyelids flicked like a neon sign.

Placing my finger under her chin, I raised her head to look at me. "You're the only one I want, babe. You turn me on, you excite me, you're fun to be with, not to mention a fabulous cook." She smiled. "We're meant to be."

"Do you like, love—" She rolled her eyes. "Sorry. A girl shouldn't ask." I melted in her lust-filled eyes. "I've missed having you inside me so much. I've like been going crazy." She leaned in, our lips lightly touching as she spoke. "Take me to bed."

"I'm gonna make love to you," I whispered. I leaned back to look into her dark brown eyes; maybe even her soul. I kissed her.

"Holly, I lo—"

"Shh..." She placed her finger over my lips. "I don't want you to say it as an answer to my question. I want you to say it when the time's right for you—when you mean it," she said softly.

We stood up, I took her hand, and led her into the bedroom. She had different ideas and stripped on the spot, then ripped my clothes off and pulled me to the floor. She seemed to have additional passion—and more volume. How the neighbors didn't think I wasn't killing her was beyond me.

#

We woke up around ten on Saturday morning. Holly's head rested on my chest. I ran my hand through her soft brunette hair. Her being next to me felt so comfortable. Her perky breasts, soft lips, ponytail, tight ass - none of that mattered at the moment. She was amazing. In need of a few lessons in the kitchen, but she did cook for me. She made me laugh, she was adventurous and willing to do anything to please me. Underneath that hard exterior lived a woman who sought approval and love. She had gone beyond the perfect trophy eye candy. I cared about her. For the first time, I appreciated a woman outside the bedroom.

She got up, made me breakfast, and brought it back to bed. She had arranged the two sunny-side-up eggs with three strips of bacon curled underneath to make it look like a smiley face. I chuckled when I saw it. She looked pleased that I liked her innovation. She only had a piece of toast herself and seemed to enjoy watching me eat.

After breakfast I suggested we go to the park.

We walked to her car and I opened the driver's door for her to get in.

She dangled the keys in front of my face. "You wanna drive?" Her big brown eyes were soft and sensitive like she just popped the big question, and in some

ways she did. After what could have only been a look of shock on my face subsided, I smiled, kissed her and walked her to the passenger side and helped her in.

To be allowed to drive her beloved Mustang was a privilege I had never expected, but was honored. Once we got to the park, I ran around and opened her door for her, then reached in and took her hand to help her out. We walked around the large park with a big lake in the middle. Several people roller-skated along concrete paths, others played games of football and catch in the grass, a few more sat under shady trees with picnic baskets watching children chase butterflies and each other.

We held hands, stopping to buy a bag of bread crumbs from a vendor then sat by the lake's edge and fed the ducks.

"I enjoyed having Daddy out, but it's a relief he's gone. I kept wanting to do the dirty deed, but he makes me so nervous; it's nice to get back to normal. And he totally drives me crazy with all his talk of grandchildren. I'm just not ready for that."

I saw the opportunity to get a gauge on her biological clock. "So, when do you think you will be ready?"

"I thought about what you said before about women waiting till they're twenty-five or thirty. Thirty's probably a good age. I don't see any reason to rush."

"No, I think you're right. Thirty's probably the right age for you." That was a relief; I wouldn't have to worry about condoms for a few years. Neither of us were ready to hear pitter-patters just yet. She kept getting better.

"And thanks for making a good impression. I thought you totally blew it a few times, but Daddy really likes you. He told me so."

I threw a handful of breadcrumbs to the ducks. "He was all right in the end. I liked him. A bit intimidating and quite forceful, but he's a nice man. And he really helped Otto."

Holly reached in the bag and threw some crumbs to the ducks quacking in front of us.

"Thanks again. That was really important to me." She leaned in and kissed me. A 'sample of what's coming tonight' kind of kiss.

I grabbed her, wrestled her to the ground and lay on top of her, ignoring the pain in my ribs. She giggled and screeched as I nibbled her neck and ears and made monster noises while she kicked, screamed, and laughed the entire time. Then we lay on our backs and looked up at the sky.

"Hey, look at that cloud," I said, pointing to the sky. "What do you see?"

"Hmm...like a totally handsome guy." She laughed. "Just like you."

"Yeah, nice one. Look at that one. Looks like two people kissing." She took my hand.

After laying there for half an hour, she suggested we make our way back to the car. I opened the door for her and helped her in the passenger side.

"Wait here a minute." I had noticed a street vendor not far away as we walked to the car. Disappearing around the corner, I went back and bought three red roses. It was all I could afford. Holding them behind my back, I returned to the car.

I presented them to Holly. "For you."

Her mouth dropped and eyes went wide. The look of pure happiness lit up her face.

I leaned in and whispered in her ear, letting my lips gently brush her ear as I spoke. "Roses are red, violets are blue, what you do to me, makes me go whew."

She giggled. "Like, you are so thoughtful." She turned her head and kissed me. "Come on, take me home. We'll play that game you like. You can be the schoolteacher and I'll be the naughty girl that needs to be taught a lesson. I'll even put my hair in pigtails if you want."

I loved her in tails, be it pig or pony.

"Then I'll make macaroni cheese, except Grandma's recipe calls for cherry syrup instead of cheese. It's really yummy. It's the least I can do for the guy who makes me feel so special." Her face was full of excitement as she looked at me.

"That sounds great, babe. I only do these things because you are special. We better hurry though." I reached over and twirled her hair in my fingers imagining her in pigtails. "We don't want school to let out before you've had a proper spanking." I winked.

She settled into her seat, a smile tugging on her lips as she sniffed the roses.

When we got back to her apartment, I decided that she had been *really* naughty and took her straight to the principal's office without even giving her time to fix her hair.

We went into the bedroom and I picked up her reading glasses. I sat on the edge of her bed and put the glasses on the end of my nose, looking over the top of the lenses. "Miss Knight, you've been a bad girl and I'm going to have to teach you a lesson."

She stood in front of me – hands clasped in front of her and her head bowed. She looked up from beneath her dark eyelashes. "I'm sorry, sir. I meant no harm." She bit her lip fighting a smile.

I cleared my throat. "Good girls don't have sex in public places. Now drop your pants and underwear." I patted my lap.

Holly looked at the floor as she slid her pants down her long, toned legs,

followed by her pink, silk panties. Once naked from the waist down, she stepped to my side and lay across my knees. "Please, sir, I won't do it again."

"We'll see about that," I said forcefully as I rubbed the silky skin of her bottom. My hand came down hard. She moaned and arched her back. "You want more?" I asked. She lifted her bottom and nodded. I smacked her again. "Bad Holly." *Whack. Whack. Whack.*

Her moans turned to whimpers of need.

Whack.

Her butt showed signs of redness. "You've had enough."

"No. Please, more."

"Uh-uh. Show me you're sorry."

She stood up, eyes downcast. I removed my pants and tossed the glasses aside. Before I could pull my shirt over my head, she pushed me on my back and straddled me. A wicked twinkle lit her eyes. "Now it's my turn...sir."

#

Before she made dinner, I had her lay on the living room floor and gave her a back massage. She offered to give me one but my ribs were in no state to be rubbed. She made dinner while I watched an *Andy Griffith* rerun.

We ate dinner in the living room in front of the TV. Dinner was much as I expected. Crap. But I did appreciate all the effort she put in to it and told her so. She thought she was a terrific cook and I didn't have the heart to tell her otherwise.

We curled up and watched TV the rest of the night and commercial breaks became kiss breaks. We went to bed around eleven and had tender, gentle sex. A relatively new experience when it came to Holly.

We lounged around her apartment all day Sunday, making love now and then, but mostly we had a relaxing day and did a whole lot of nothing. I just enjoyed being in her company. She asked if I minded if she took me back to base around six. She wanted to do some housework and call her father. And of course the hair needed washing and the finger and toenails needed painting. I was content and exhausted, so I agreed.

We shared a lingering kiss when she dropped me off at the barracks and she left. I stood on the sidewalk and waved as she drove off. Once she was out of sight, I headed for Debbie's room.

Debbie answered and invited me in. We sat down at the table.

"Care for some Jack Daniel's?"

"No thanks."

She put her hand on my forehead. "What? Never seen you turn down a drink before. I bet I could pour it in some places and get you lapping it up." She smiled.

"You probably could, but not tonight. Seriously, Debs, I just came to talk."

"Oh, right." She got up and pulled out the bottle from her wardrobe, grabbed a glass and sat back down. She held up the bottle. "You sure?" I shook my head and she poured herself a drink. "So, what's on your mind?"

I took a deep breath. "I've been thinking about what you said. You're right. I haven't been fair to you or Holly. As much fun as it may have been, I'm gonna have to end our blackmail sessions. It's not right."

She popped her tongue off the roof of her mouth. "Blackmail is such an ugly word." She swirled the liquor around in her glass, staring into it. I had decided not to grovel or try to redeem myself. Just let her say what she needed to say and we'd go from there. "Well, you did have a point," she continued. "It was my idea in the beginning and it wasn't supposed to get emotional. In hindsight, I kinda kidded myself thinking we would just be fuck-buddies without feelings. I always knew I liked you and really didn't know if I was gay or not. I hoped you'd be shit in the sack, I wouldn't enjoy it, and then I could go back to women with a clear conscience. But I did enjoy it and ended up falling for you even more." She looked at me softly and placed her hand in the middle of the table. "You're always so attentive when we're together."

"I know, Debs." I reached across and took her hand. "Never, ever, offer a guy a free fuck. He's always gonna take it, ya know?" We both smiled. "I thought of it as me doing you and favor, and I probably kidded myself too. But I never thought you'd use it against me. You gotta admit, pulling a crap move like that wasn't cool and didn't earn you any brownie points." I lit a cigarette. "But it's okay. You're an all right chick. We almost were a couple, but now, I want to do the right thing. I shouldn't cheat on Holly anymore."

She took a drink. "I knew you'd be mesmerized by her, but I really did think I could win you over. Maybe I still can." She ran her hand through her hair. "Let's give it another month."

"It's not being fair to you. You're a great girl and deserve someone who can to give you everything. I want to see you happy."

She leaned in, resting her arms on the table. "I'm happy when I'm with you."

"It's for the best, Debs. We'll get caught sooner or later. If I hadn't hooked up with Holly before I met you, yeah, we probably would have had something."

She took another drink and lit a cigarette. "Aren't you afraid I might tell Holly about us?"

"Petrified. But I can't keep lying to her and sneaking around behind her back. I

just have to hope you won't." I didn't whimper, grovel or beg, which I thought was very John Wayne of me considering it was eating me alive to break it off with her.

She motioned her head toward the bed. "One more time?"

Temptation ran through my veins. I held my focus on her face and avoided looking over her petite body. I shook my head. "I'm too weak, Debbie. If I jump into bed with you right now, we'd be back where we were and I'd just be waiting for it all to come crashing down. I'm really sorry."

She grabbed the bottle and refilled her glass. "Well, I put myself in danger by making you choose. Probably not the smartest thing I've ever done, but what the hell. We had a good time, yeah?"

"Yeah."

"I can't say I won't tell Holly, but I can't say I will either. I'll have to see how I feel over the next couple of days. You're not going to quit talking to me, are you?"

"No way. I enjoy our chats too much."

Despite her sad look, at least she wasn't crying. Maybe that would come later when she was alone. She sat staring at her whiskey, twirling the glass as it rested on the table.

"Don't hate me, Debs."

She smiled. "No, I don't." Our eyes met. "Hey, good luck with Holly."

"Thanks. I appreciate that." I stood and leaned in to kiss her.

She pulled back. "Uh, I don't think that's such a good idea. Might lead somewhere."

I smiled and nodded, then walked over to the door and looked back. "It's been fun, Debs. I'll miss you."

"Me too." She whispered, choking back the tears.

I opened the door and briefly looked back. "See ya around."

Chapter 25

We sat around the shop Monday morning waiting for Petty Officer Watkins to return from his meeting and give us our instructions and work assignments for the day. He entered.

"Listen up, men. Fallout outside in five minutes for a surprise inspection. And by God, I hope you're all dressed properly this morning and are squared away. The Captain of the base is inspecting the division today.

It was a case of good timing. After I left Debbie, I was upset and distanced my mind from the situation by pressing my uniform and shining my boots. It was good therapy. I held some confidence that I would pass the inspection and not have my ass in the grinder yet again.

"Chambers," Watkins called out, "front and center."

I came from the end of the rank and moved to stand in front of him. He looked me up and down and side to side, then cast his gaze skyward. He clasped his hands shook them in front of him. "Thank you," he said. "By the way, Chambers, you passed the test for Third Class Petty Officer. Congratulations." His leprechaun smile and knowing that I would soon a Petty Officer gave me a warm fuzzy feeling.

He notified the rest of the shop that he posted the results on the bulletin board in the shop. Mark passed as well. He must have singled me out for personal praise from his shock that I had actually passed. Mark and I patted each other on the back and went to the inspection in high spirits.

Mark and I stood next to each other as the Captain moved along the ranks and finally came to stand in front of me. I had only ever seen the Captain once before and that was from a distance. It was a huge base he was in charge of, so having never met him before was a good thing for me. Any meetings with a man of his power would have meant I was in trouble. So far my misdemeanors were handled at lower levels and didn't warrant any intervention from him. He looked me over longer than most of the others he had already inspected. Traces of my black eyes were still evident, and he probably wondered what kind of shitbag he had under his command.

"Hmm..." the Captain hummed. Lieutenant Johnson stood next to him with the clipboard ready to take notes of discrepancies. "You haven't been causing trouble, have you?" The Captain tilted his head back and forth examining my eyes.

"No, sir. I box, or should say, I used to box. Found out I'm not very good at it."

He smiled. "Where you from, sailor?" His voice had a gravelly quality. Gray hair peeked below the edge of his hat. His face hardened from the sea spray, or

perhaps a lack of natural oxygen from lurking beneath the ocean surface riding submarines. He continued to visually search me up and down before locking his eyes on mine.

I swallowed hard. I noticed Lieutenant Johnson getting his pen ready to start the hit list. "Indiana, sir."

"Why'd you join the Navy, son?"

"Patriotic duty, sir."

"I see." He seemed fascinated by my eyes. "Ball State, IU, Norte Dame, Purdue. You should have stuck to basketball instead of jumping in the ring." He looked at Lieutenant Johnson. "Lieutenant, he looks all squared-away. Put his uniform and appearance down as outstanding." He moved on and I let out a quiet sigh.

#

I couldn't wait to tell Holly what a great day I had. I stopped by her office and we agreed to meet at Dolphin's after work.

She sometimes showered in the ladies' locker room after work and showed up at the bar in a white dress with the hemline stopping at mid-thigh. It had white fabric tiles sewn on it that swayed and flapped as she walked. Her tanned legs disappeared into shin-high white cowboy boots. Only Holly could get away with some of the outfits she wore. She did look like the ultimate giddy-up girl. My heart raced when I saw her. I'd been faithful to her for over a week and found the monogamous thing quite a turn on. I stood as she approached the table.

"What would you like, babe?" I asked.

"Umm...sex on the beach."

"In a glass or on the sand?"

"Yes." She smiled and scrunched her nose. She sat down while I went to the bar and to get our drinks.

She had her compact out checking her hair when I returned. I put her drink down and sat next to her.

"Guess what?" I said.

She looked at me blankly and shrugged.

"You are now dating a third-class petty officer who happened to get an outstanding for appearance from the Captain this morning." I rubbed my knuckles against my chest.

Her mouth dropped open. "Really?" She clapped her hands excitedly. "Oh, goody," she squealed. "I knew you could do it. I'm so proud of you, baby." She patted my leg.

The feeling between us was electric.

"I got a little surprise for you," she sing-songed, raising her eyebrows. "I accidentally on purpose forgot something."

She scanned the surroundings. We were pretty isolated. She looked down at the end of her dress and clipped a finger and thumb at the hem with each hand in the middle of each thigh. She looked at me, and then back down. My eyes followed. Slowly, she inched the bottom of the dress up her thighs. Little by little, the dress went higher. My crotch twitched with excitement, my eyes glued on the ever-rising hemline. She slid it back until her perfectly manicured bush was on show. My jaw dropped as I stared.

"Nice pussy, Holly."

Holly yanked the dress down as we both jerked our heads up. Debbie stood at the end of the table, smiling. She still wore her dungarees and held a bottle of Coors.

"Mind if I join you?" She pulled out a chair and sat before we could answer. "Lucky it was me who saw it and not Shore Patrol. What would it be...? Probably..." She lifted her head toward the ceiling and placed a finger under her chin while resting her elbow on the table, eyes looking upward. "CUNT." She slammed her hand down on the table and smiled. "Cumming Under Navy Table. Yeah, that's it." She laughed and took a drink of beer.

"Have you been drinking, Debs, er, Debbie?" I asked.

"You know me, Tyler." She leaned in, resting her chin on the palm of her fist. "I'm a sucker for a stiff one." She sniggered and took another drink.

"I think she's drunk," Holly whispered.

"Drunk? I'm shitfaced," Debbie shouted, and her face hit the table.

"C'mon, we gotta get her outta here," I said.

Holly and I managed to get her up and dragged her out of the bar. We took her back to her room, I dug in her pocket and got her key, let ourselves in and put her into bed. She snored deeply as we closed the door and left.

Holly handed me her keys as we walked to her Mustang. "You drive." She went into fantasy mode. "Okay, I'm like the driving instructor and you're the student. You have to drive slow and steady while you're distracted."

I helped her into the passenger side then got behind the wheel. "Where to, Miss Instructor?" I asked.

She lowered her spaghetti straps and dropped the top half of her dress revealing her perfect tits. "The North Shore."

"North Shore?"

"North Shore," she said sternly. "I wanna scream without you shoving a fucking rag down my throat. And now for the distraction I promised." She

unzipped my pants and the distraction began.

#

No one was at the beach as the night drew in. Pipeline waves crashed off the shore and stars illuminated the sky. Holly kept a blanket in her trunk for just such impromptu romps. I shook the blanket out and we laid down, our bodies settling into the soft sand.

"Did I pass the test?" I asked.

"Umm...not sure. You got a little twitchy when...well, you know when."

"Yeah, I know when. But at least I didn't mow anyone down."

I lay on my back with Holly nestled in my arm laying sideways stroking my chest. The full moon beamed and reflected off the ocean. The sea air smelled of subtle cologne enhancing a rugged outdoors.

"I could lie like this forever," Holly said.

"Yeah, me too."

We laid there for ten minutes listening to the waves, our souls merging into one in the otherwise silent evening. We communicated without talking. We exchanged passion with gentle touches.

I felt so content with her in my arms. "I love you."

Holly propped herself up and looked into my eyes. "What'd you just say?"

My soul got lost in her eyes. "I said, I love you."

"Oh, Tyler, make love to me. I want to feel you inside me."

We kissed passionately as our hands went to work on each other, undressing then caressing until we could not restrain ourselves any longer and we made love. Holly shattered the stillness of the night with screams and moans that ricocheted off the stars. I discovered the true meaning of what it meant to make love. My desire for her increased. Not just for her body, but for her entire existence. I felt like the luckiest man alive.

#

I arrived for work the next day with a smile that wouldn't leave my face. Holly and I had cemented our commitment to one another and it felt good.

Halfway through the morning, Watkins called me into his office. I sat down and he handed me some papers.

"Petty Officer Chambers, these are your orders. I have to supply a man for a clean-up detail to Kahoolawe. It's a ten-day assignment. You're leaving Friday."

"What? Who or what the hell is Kahoolawe?"

"It's a small, uninhabited Hawaiian island that the military uses for target

practice. You're gonna paint rocks for ships to shoot at and for fighter jets to drop bombs on. And there's a lot of shells to be cleaned up. An Explosive Ordnance Disposal team will be on hand to make sure none of the ammunition is still live. It's a pretty good detail. I think you'll like it."

I frowned. "Do I have to? I'd rather stick around here, if you don't mind."

"I thought you'd be pleased. A deserted island, workdays that only go from about eight to noon, and then you got the rest of the day off with beaches where you're the only ones there. You'll be part of a team of about twenty. Marines, Air Force and Navy all supply personnel, plus the explosive team. You'll have a great time. Besides, you don't have any choice. I'm sending you and that's it." He smiled knowing he had the power to do just that.

It felt like I had the wind knocked out of me. It did sound like a pretty good assignment, but I just wanted to spend time with Holly. We had already agreed to meet at Dolphin's after work that night so I'd have to break the bad news to her then. I had a feeling she wasn't going to be too happy about it.

#

My heart skipped when I walked into Dolphin's to find Debbie and Holly sitting together in what looked like meaningful conversation. I walked over and sat at the table across from them. Holly looked up.

"Oh, hi," she said and turned back to Debbie, resuming their conversation. Debbie never even acknowledged me.

I got up, went to the bar and got a beer. I don't think either of them even noticed that I left and came back.

"You two talking about Jesse Jackson's chance of winning the '84 election next year?"

They stopped talking and looked at me.

Holly shrugged. "No, just girl talk. You wouldn't be interested."

"Oh."

Debbie shot me a phony smile.

"Bad news I'm afraid." I drummed my fingers on the table. "I'm getting shipped out on Friday to a deserted island for ten days."

"A deserted island?" Holly repeated.

"See ya later, Gilligan," Debbie said. She and Holly laughed.

"What for?" Holly asked.

"Picking up empty ammo shells and painting rocks."

"Bummer," she replied.

Debbie had excitement in her voice. "Maybe we can do it then, Holly."

My mind went into overdrive. "Do what?" I asked.

"Debbie failed the test for E-five and I promised I'd help her study for the next time. I don't know much about being an HT, but I know military regulations like the back of my hand." She looked at Debbie. "Well, if Tyler's going to be away, why don't you come around to my house this weekend and we'll do some cramming."

Cramming what, where, I nearly asked.

Debbie looked at me and gave a wry smile. "Perfect." She drank the rest of her Black Russian and set the empty glass down. She looked at Holly. "I'll come round about ten Saturday morning, if that's okay." Holly nodded. "Hey, I gotta go." She patted Holly's leg and stood up. "See you Saturday."

Debbie walked behind me, running her hand across my shoulders as she sauntered past. "See ya, Tyler. Don't worry, I'll look after Holly while you're gone."

I watched her leave the building then scooted around the table to sit next to Holly. I took her hands in mine and looked her in the eyes. "I don't think that's such a good idea. I think she's still got a crush on you."

"Don't be ridiculous. We got past that. It was just a little phase we both went through. Have I ever given you any reason to doubt my sexuality?"

I shook my head even though Debbie just gave me serious doubts about hers. But we did have amazing sex the night before and she now knew that I was in love with her. "I love you, babe."

"Me too," she said sincerely and patted my hand. "Anyway, she's still mad about her jerk boyfriend who cheated on her. She was telling me all about him. He's a real asshole. I'm tempted to give him a piece of my mind."

"Did she say who it was?"

She looked at me in disbelief. "Like, helloooo? Richardson. Surely you hadn't forgotten already."

"Oh yeah, right. I still don't think you should be hanging around Debbie. I still think she's gay. Like really gay. I know you wouldn't cheat on me or anything, but other people might talk. You know, guilt by association kind of thing."

"You're so sweet. Don't worry about me. If she tries to touch me up, I'll clock her one." She put her mouth to my ear. "Take me home and make love to me. I'll show you that you don't have anything to worry about." She slipped her tongue in my ear, deep.

"You know that always gets me going."

"That's why I do it, lover."

Holly and I spent every possible moment we could together until I boarded the helicopter. She made me feel special and I gained some reassurance that she was as hetero as they come. I did trust her. It was Debbie who worried me. Even if Debbie didn't try to get it on with Holly, she still held secrets that could blow the relationship apart. I asked Holly several times again not to tutor Debbie, but she remained adamant she was only helping a friend.

The helicopter touched down onto the red dirt after a thirty-minute flight. The isolation could be felt from the destruction the moment I set foot on the ground. Six Navy personnel got off the chopper and we were greeted by the EOD team. Some Air Force guys were already there and Army people and Marines were due to arrive at any time. The faint smell of gunpowder lingered in the dusty air. We grabbed our gear and were led to our cabins. The EOD personnel gave us an indoctrination of what we would be doing over the next ten days, then we were free for the rest of the day to explore the island. A group of us headed for the beach and were the only people around. I had no trouble imagining what it would be like to be sole survivors after world destruction.

The EOD team led the detail and came out every other month to supervise the clean-up. Six cabins comprised the campsite and jeeps along with a few carrier trucks were parked around the perimeter. That part of the island was exempt from getting shelled, provided the missiles remained fairly accurate. All shelling was suspended while we were there, just in case.

The next morning we all boarded the jeeps and took a dusty ride to God knows where. We were dropped off and instructed to pick up the shells and stack them in a designated area.

The sun beat down on the barren land. We all dressed in t-shirts and shorts in an attempt to remain cool. I picked up one of the large, heavy shells and took it to the assigned area. I turned to go pick up another shell and tripped over a rock. I fell and gashed the underside of my forearm. Pressing my bloody arm against my shirt, I notified EOD.

One of the guys loaded me into a jeep and took me back to base for the first-aid person to have a look at it. He pointed me toward one of the cabins and told me to just walk in. A blonde clad in a white t-shirt, green shorts, and combat boots sat at a table reading a Jackie Collins novel. Her shoulder-length hair was tied back in a ponytail. She looked at me with jade-green eyes.

She closed her book. "What happened?" she asked, nodding toward my arm.

"I cut it on a rock."

She grimaced then got up and motioned me toward a small cubicle in the back of the room. "Sit there." She nodded to a chair.

I sat back and watched her pull bandages and alcohol out of a cabinet. My eyes roamed her body. Her t-shirt offered a tight fit at what I guessed to be 32C's. Around five and a half feet tall, unblemished creamy skin and looked to be about twenty-five.

She pulled up a chair and sat down opposite me with her supplies resting on her lap.

I held out my arm for her to examine the cut.

"Wow, that's pretty nasty." She cleaned the wound and wrapped my arm in gauze. "Stay there a minute." She went outside and returned a few moments later.

"Let's sit over there." She pointed to the table at the front of the room where she had been reading her book. We walked over and sat down.

"My name's Jody, by the way."

"Tyler."

She waved her hand at me. "You don't need to be so formal. What's your first name?"

"That is my first name."

"Oh, sorry." She reached behind her head and flicked her ponytail, trying to create a breeze. "Hot, ain't it?"

The question could have been about the weather or about her appearance. My answer would have been the same to either subject. "Yeah, very."

"You look like a Navy guy. Right?" I nodded. "I'm Air Force. By the way, I told the EOD guy that you won't be going back in the field today. You just have to keep me company until everyone gets back." She picked up her book and fanned herself. "There's no one else in the camp right now. Any ideas of how to pass the time?" Jody went back to playing with her ponytail.

I wished she'd quit playing with that damn thing. It may have been cooling her down, but it was making me hot.

I shrugged. "Umm...not really."

"Well, I do. That Jackie Collins writes some really horny stuff. I got worked up reading this book." She walked over and kissed me. "I've never done it with a sailor before. C'mon, show me how you ride the waves."

I put my hand up. "Sorry, Jody, but I got a girlfriend."

"And I got a boyfriend. So what? We're on a deserted island. There's no way they're ever gonna find out. I'm sure Gilligan was sticking it to Mary Ann, and probably givin' Ginger the high hard one as well." She wagged her finger toward my face. "Ya know, people thought that show was fake 'cause they never got rescued. I knew it was fake 'cause those chicks never got knocked up. Even if they had rubbers and birth control pills, they would have run out after the first

season." She gasped, widened her eyes and slapped her hand over her mouth. She dropped her hand and whispered. "You don't think the Skipper and Gilligan were gay, do ya? I mean, that would explain it." She laughed.

I rubbed my fingertips across my forehead. "It wouldn't feel right. I promised my girl I wouldn't cheat on her."

"Promises, smromises." She fanned her face with her hand. "God it's hot. Be right back." Jody went to the back of the cabin and disappeared behind a fabric screen, reappearing a few moments later. "That's better. Whattaya think?"

I looked at her chest. Partly because that's what I do, and partly because she had it pushed out with her nipples poking the fabric of her shirt. Her solution to help cool down was to remove her bra. I grabbed her book and fanned myself.

"I thought they only went like that when it was cold outside," I commented.

"Cold or horny, and I ain't cold." She licked her lips.

I closed my eyes and thought of Holly. It didn't work. All I could picture was Jody's big tits on a deserted island. She had a point. Well, two actually. Holly would never know, and it was getting hotter.

"Doc," a cry came from outside. "We got another one."

"Shit," Jody cursed and ran behind the screen, reappearing with her bra back on underneath her shirt. I made a quick exit and went back to my cabin.

I had to see Jody every morning for her to change my bandage, and every morning she flirted with me and brushed her big tits against me. I always talked about Holly when we were alone, but I could feel myself weakening. She was right, it was a deserted island. A ten-minute walk and we could be totally alone and no one would ever know. This was a sure thing. Could I handle the guilt going back to Holly? Probably. I got over the guilt of being with Debbie. I'd probably get over this one even faster since I wouldn't see Jody again once we left the island.

I had resisted Jody's advances for four days, but the bandage change on the fifth day and she upped the ante.

I walked into sickbay as I usually did. She changed my bandage and rubbed her boobs against me like she did every other morning and everything seemed normal. Then, she moved in, grabbed my crotch and gently massaged me.

"Okay, sailor boy. Tonight. Meet me behind this cabin at twenty-hundred, and we go for a walk." She must have felt my cock hardening. She smiled. "I knew you'd be up for it. Twenty-hundred. Don't be late."

"Umm, Jody—"

"Shh..." She put her finger up to my lips. "Trust me - whatever her name is, she'll be the last person on your mind." She leaned in standing on her toes so our lips brushed together. "I'll give you the best blowjob you ever had. Promise." She

stepped back and looked at my bulging pants. I think it was more of a case of her admiring her handy-work knowing she was the one who got me into that state.

Why couldn't she have been some ugly chick?

After a day in the field painting rocks, I went to the shower shack when I returned and thought about my upcoming date with Jody. She was right. No one would ever know. Just one more fling, then I'd be faithful to Holly forever after.

Before I hopped in the shower, I stood taking a leak while an EOD guy, Bradley, stood a few urinals away.

"Oh, fuck it. Goddamn it," Bradley yelled. "That fucking slut. I'm gonna kill her."

"You okay, man?" I asked.

"No I'm fucking not," he said. "That fucking whore in sickbay gave me the clap. Same kind of burning piss I had in Korea. That's a feeling you never forget."

"You nailed Jody?"

"Yeah, second night."

After the shower, I went to my cabin and stayed there the rest of the day and night. I didn't bother to cancel the date with Jody, I just didn't show up.

The next morning Jody and Bradley were helicoptered off to get treatment and a new Corpsman was flown in as Jody's replacement. Boy was I glad to see a male Corpsman.

#

At the end of my short tour of duty, I loaded up my gear onto the helicopter, hopped in and gave one last glance toward the camp, then buckled myself in. The flight back to Pearl Harbor took forever. A thirty-minute flight felt like thirty days. I couldn't wait to see Holly and tried to imagine how much pent up passion she would need to release once we saw each other. I'd probably need to bring her back to Kahoolawe where she could scream as loud as she wanted without being heard.

Once on base, I raced to my room, dropped my gear off, got changed and stopped by the Navy Exchange store to get some "missed you" gifts before jumping on the bus to her apartment. Excitement ran through me as I drew nearer. Standing at the door with the box of chocolates and a bottle of wine, I waited for her beautiful face to appear.

The door swung open. Holly stepped out, threw her arms around me and cried.

"It's okay, babe. I'm back now. No need to cry." Secretly, I was moved by her crying. It showed me how much she cared and missed me.

She led me to the couch. "You sit. I'll get you a drink."

Ah, that's my girl. She was marvelous. I smiled broadly at having such a wonderful girlfriend. Thank God I passed Jody by. Throwing herself at me the way she did. What a shameless slut.

Holly sat down and put a whiskey in front of me. I took a drink and noticed her glass.

"What? You switch to screwdrivers or something?" I asked.

"Kind of, but there's no vodka in it."

"What, straight orange juice at six o'clock?"

She nodded and started crying again.

"We got a celebration to get on with. What's up?"

She stared at the table. "I'm pregnant."

Chapter 26

"Pregnant! Whattaya mean pregnant?" I took a drink and set the glass down, then decided I needed some more – so I gulped the rest of it.

"You know, pregnant. Like, with child, in a family way, knocked up, up the duff. I mean fucking pregnant!"

"How'd that happen?"

Her head snapped toward me. "Well, Tyler," she said in her kindergarten teacher voice, "you put your penis in my va—"

"I know how it happens," I interrupted, waving my hands. "I mean, how'd it happen? I thought you were on the pill."

"Yes, the pill with a ninety-seven percent success rate. You must have found the three percent that didn't work."

She dropped her head in her hands. "Oh, this is like a nightmare."

"You mean I'm gonna be a dad?"

She looked at me, her lips tightly closed. "Shit, Daddy's going to disown me, after he kills me."

I put my arms around her. "It's okay, babe. We'll figure something out." Shit. She's not even thirty yet. We were supposed to have years of fun before Mr. Stork started making deliveries.

"What's there to figure out? It's not like there's a return policy." She threw both hands out in front of her, palms toward the ceiling. "This isn't what I wanted, can I exchange it for a blue sweater?" she mocked.

I held her tight. "I guess we'll have to get an abortion."

She pushed me away. "Typical! You guys are all for planting the seed, but when it comes time to harvest the crop, you don't wanna know." She poked me in the chest. "And that's exactly what Debbie said you'd say. I'm very pro-life, I'm not havin' a fucking abortion."

My mouth fell open. "Debbie knows?"

Her hand shook as she sipped her orange juice. "I had to talk to someone, and she was there for me. Daddy's probably going to give all his money to charity now. His slut daughter has disgraced him. God, he is so gonna hate me. I'll be cut out of the will."

I slid away a little to give her some space. She wasn't very happy with me at the moment, but I wanted to be supportive. I didn't like seeing her upset. "So, you're going to give up your dad and let him hate you?"

She tilted her head and looked at me like I was an idiot. "You really don't have a clue, do you? I don't have any other choice." She turned away and looked straight ahead, rocking back and forth.

I reached over and stroked the back of her shoulder.

She sipped her drink. "Look, Tyler, you don't want to be saddled with a baby. You've just made that perfectly clear. I don't either, for that matter. My enlistment's up in three months, and I haven't even decided what I'm going to do yet. I'd never be able to afford the medical to have a baby if I get out, and who wants to be a single mother in the Navy? Not to mention the fact that Daddy's going to kill me. This is the shittiest thing that's ever happened to me in my life." She buried her face in her hands.

I got up and poured myself another whiskey and rejoined her. She quietly let out small sobs. We sat in silence. It certainly wasn't the homecoming I had expected or hoped for. She was right, this was a nightmare, but I couldn't stand to see her suffer. Maybe we could make this work. If we played it right, Daddy would look after us. I placed my drink on the table and knelt before her. I took her hands in mine and gazed into her eyes.

"Holly, I love you. Will you marry me?"

Her eyes and mouth opened wide. She looked at me, stunned. After several moments her face returned to normal. She patted the seat next to her. I wanted to stay on my knee until she answered, but eventually gave up and took my seat. She faced me, still holding hands.

"That's really sweet of you to offer to do the right thing. I appreciate it. But we both know you would never have proposed if I wasn't pregnant. You're not ready to play happy families."

"No, Holly, I mean it. I haven't told you this before, but when your dad was out here, I asked him for your hand in marriage. He gave me his blessing. Ask him yourself if you don't believe me. It was always on the cards that I would ask you sooner or later." I patted her hand. "Okay, this may be a little sooner than I expected, but now that it's happened, I'm happy." I smiled. "Marry me, Holly."

She twirled her hair with her finger. "What about the abortion, Tyler the baby butcher?" She scowled at me.

Ouch. That hurt.

I put my arm around her and pulled her close to my side, leaning us both back in the couch. "Look, I said the wrong thing when I mentioned abortion. What I meant was if that's what you wanted, I'd support you. Come on, you don't wanna fall out with your dad, and this would make him very happy. You want to please him, don't ya?"

She nodded and wiped away a tear. "Think about if you and I were married. I'll either get out of the Navy in three months or get shipped off somewhere else. You're due to be transferred in six months, and you got time to serve on sea duty next. So I'll have a husband at sea, and I don't know where I'll be. Besides, I

don't think this is what you really want. I'm not even sure it's what I want. It's a big step just to stay in Daddy's good books."

I grabbed our glasses and went to the kitchen to pour us another drink, swallowing an extra drink of whiskey while she wasn't looking. A numb feeling washed over me. The magnitude of the whole situation slowly sank in. I walked to the living room and put our drinks on the coffee table and sat next to her. We sat in silence for a few moments as my mind churned away. Then it hit me.

I clicked my fingers. "Sleepwalking," I said. "I'll fake sleepwalking and get discharged."

She looked at me. "I know they medically discharge sleepwalkers, but that's the oldest trick in the book. Anyone who doesn't want to go to sea starts sleepwalking."

"Yeah, but I'm a pretty good actor." I stroked her arm. "Your dad also told me that he'd take care of us – financially. You get out, I'll get myself discharged, and we'll move to Idaho and start our family."

"Idaho?" she snapped.

"Oh, all right, Montana then. Oh, I don't care. Anywhere. I just want to be with you and our baby."

"Did Daddy really say he'd help?"

"Would I dare lie about what a preacher said? That has to be a sure ticket to hell."

She smiled. "And you'd really marry me to raise a family? You already know about the overbearing father-in-law." She tugged her bottom lip. "I never dreamt you'd ask me to marry you."

I ran the back of my hand down her cheek. "I really want this, babe. My dad was a shit dad and I want to prove I'm better than him. Holly Chambers. It's got a nice ring to it, doesn't it?"

She placed her hand on the side of my face and rubbed her thumb against my cheek. "We'd have to do it soon. I don't want Daddy figuring out the math. I so didn't want it to be like this."

"You happy?" I asked.

"No, I'm not. But I don't have much choice. I'd rather be married and rich than the alternative." She moved in and kissed me softly. "Thanks, Tyler. Okay, enough of that. How was your assignment?"

"Sucked. I missed you so much. I'll tell you about it later. How did you get on without me?"

"Well, Debbie came around every night. We studied, ate dinner together, we even went to a movie one night."

"Oh." Surely she wouldn't be telling me all this if something happened

between them. "Did, umm...anything happen? You know, down..." I raised my eyebrows and flicked my head toward her crotch.

She put on her angry face. "I'm not even going to signify that with an answer." She folded her arms across her chest.

"I think you mean dignify. I just meant, did she try anything?"

"Like, whatever, and no she didn't try anything. We mostly talked about her shithead boyfriend. That guy really screwed her up. She's been like a really good friend to me. She said you'd run a mile when you heard about the baby."

"Richardson, right?" She nodded, and I felt a rush of temporary relief. "I don't like you hanging around her, babe." I gulped a mouthful of whiskey. "She's trouble. She told me at her last command about a guy who wouldn't go out with her. She made up lies about him and told his girlfriend a bunch of stuff that wasn't true so his girlfriend would break up with him. She's warped."

"Don't forget, I know a bit about Debbie and that doesn't sound like her." She leaned back with widened eyes. "And since when did she start confiding stuff to you?"

"Well, you know drunk Debbie. Get a few drinks in her and she'll tell anyone her life story." I could feel beads of sweat forming over my eyebrows. I wiped them with the back of my hand.

"Debbie never said you and her were buddy-buddy."

Thank God for small mercies. "We're not. I must of overheard her in Dolphin's telling someone else. Can we change the subject? I don't want to talk about Debbie anymore. We should be talking about us and our wedding."

We both took drinks and sat there a little while in silence. It provided a welcome break to the conversation and I hoped she wouldn't bring it up again.

"Will you still want me when I'm all fat and flabby, looking like I swallowed a beach ball?" She rubbed a hand over her stomach.

I pulled her to my side. "Of course I will. I'll just think of it as more of you to love." I kissed her forehead.

She looked at the floor. "Would you make love to me right now?"

"That's all I've wanted to do for the last ten days. Don't worry, I'll be gentle."

"I don't think you have to be yet." She leaned back with a crooked smile. "The baby's probably not formed yet, so I don't think you'll be denting its head or anything."

"Oh, that's all right then. The last thing we want is a baby coming out with a head looking like a golf ball." I smiled, picked her up and carried her to the bedroom. I tried to be gentle, but she was up for a bit of rough. I obliged, figuring I better get it while I still could.

#

Taking a mid-morning break the following day, I went to the geedunk bar. Debbie stood at the coke machine in the corner, pumping in change. I stepped next to the side of the machine blocking her in. She jumped when she saw me.

She grabbed her coke and tried to side-step me. I swiftly moved to stand in front of her. She tried a few more sideways moves, but I kept her cornered.

She slumped her shoulders and sighed. "What do you want?"

"What's your game? Why you gettin' all chummy with Holly?"

She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. "What if I am? What's it got to do with you?"

I narrowed my eyes and my jaw went tight. "Look, Debs, I don't know what you're playing at. Holly and I are happy and in love and we're getting married."

She laughed. "You, married? Don't make me choke. Holly wouldn't marry you. And if she did, you'd have your dick up the first chick who bent over to pick up a quarter, and she'd divorce your ass. It's never gonna work, Tyler."

"I'm committed to our relationship. Stay away from Holly."

"You gotta lot of nerve telling me what to do. I haven't told Holly anything about us... yet, but you keep this up and I will."

Shit, she wasn't backing down. I looked at the ground, thinking of what might pacify her. I lifted my head. "Okay, I'm sorry, Debs. Please, I'm beggin' you, just let me and Holly get on with our lives. I'm gonna try to be a good dad and a good husband." I placed my hand on her shoulder.

She had a gleam in her eyes. "Don't worry, Tyler, I'm havin' too much fun to bring you down yet." She patted my shoulder and walked off.

#

After work, I went to Dolphin's on my own to get plastered. I got a beer and sat in a secluded corner, trying to imagine married life with Holly and a baby. Knowing Daddy had deep pockets helped. The more I thought about it, the more I liked the idea. Yes, I really did love her. As long as I didn't cheat on her again, and provided Debbie didn't open her big yap about us, it could work. I liked the idea of the two of us together.

I got another beer and plotted what I would say to Holly if Debbie spilled the beans. Holly was pretty gullible and I decided that I could talk my way out of it if she ever confronted me. A smile crossed my face as I got excited about having a wife and a baby.

"Mind if we join you?"

Mark and Lori stood beside the table.

"Be my guest," I said, extending my arm to the chairs opposite me.

"So what's new in Chambers-land?" Mark asked.

"Well, Kahoolawe was cool. Easy duty. I got a letter from my mom, she's doing good and congratulated me for making third class. And me and Holly are getting married." I waited to see the look of shock on both their faces. They didn't disappoint. I took a drink and lit a cigarette.

"I didn't think you were serious when you told me about all that stuff with her dad. Guess I should congratulate you, huh?" Mark held out his hand and we shook.

Lori propped her elbow on the table and leaned in, resting her chin on her hand. "This wouldn't have anything to do with Holly getting pregnant, would it?"

"What! How'd you know she was pregnant?"

"Debbie told me. I haven't seen her much lately, but she couldn't wait to tell me that one. I'm surprised you're going to marry her, Tyler. Debbie said you'd be on the first plane outta here." She looked at Mark. "Aren't you surprised?"

"Nope," he said.

Lori leaned away from him, looking at him with raised eyebrows.

Mark shifted his gaze from me to Lori and back again. "One thing I've learned over the past year and a bit. Never try to guess what Tyler's going to do next. You'd have more chance of winning big in Las Vegas." He smiled. "I did say I bet the cart would come before the horse though."

"Thanks, buddy. That's why Holly loves me so much. I keep her guessing. All part of the excitement." I took a drag and blew the smoke toward the ceiling.

"So when's the big day?" Lori asked.

"Don't know yet, but soon. We don't want to hang about."

"More like she doesn't want her dad to figure out that she's been defiled before marriage." Mark snickered. He pointed to my empty beer bottle. "You want another?"

"Naw, I've changed my mind. I'm going to see Holly. She's still trying to take it all in. It's probably best if she's not on her own." I got up to leave. "See you guys later."

"Bye," they said in unison.

#

I knocked on the door and eagerly waited for Holly to answer. She always liked surprises. I held the flowers I bought in front of me as the door opened.

Debbie stood in the doorway, looking smug.

"What the hell are you doing here?" I gasped. Shock didn't even touch the surface of how I felt.

She pressed her open hands against her cheeks. "Oh my gosh! For me? How sweet."

I jerked the flowers back as she reached for them. "Where's Holly?" I pushed my way past her.

"She's in the shower."

I wheeled around and glared at her.

"I know what you're thinking, and yeah." She smirked. "I sat in the bedroom while she got undressed. Damn, I almost forgot how hot she is."

I narrowed my eyes. "Are you going gay again?"

She laughed. "Of course not. You converted me, remember?" She whispered, "Hey, you worried your fiancée might be a lesbian? Wouldn't say much about you as a man, would it?" She laughed again.

"Debbie, would you just leave? I need to talk to Holly, in private."

"Sure. Our business is finished anyway. I'll just say goodbye."

Debbie skipped to the bathroom and walked in. I heard voices but couldn't make out what they were saying, which annoyed me.

Debbie came out. "Yeah, she's hot," she said as she walked past. She closed the door behind her and I flipped her the finger as she left.

I laid the flowers on her kitchen counter and stood there fuming for a moment, confused as to what to do next. A large Jack Daniel's stood out as the best option, but I decided to confront Holly instead.

I walked into the bathroom and pulled the shower curtain back. Holly stood with her back to the water flow as she lathered up her breasts with her eyes closed. I wondered what she was thinking about while she soaped up. She opened her eyes and jumped when she noticed me standing there.

"Tyler, what are you doing here?"

"The question is, what was Debbie doing here?" I stood with my arms folded.

"She just stopped by to see if I was okay. Wasn't that sweet? She's being a really good friend."

She put a finger in her mouth and slid it in and out, slowly. Then she popped the inside of her cheek with it. "I need some help washing my back." She lowered her head and looked at me from the top of her eyes, as she so cutely did. "Any takers?"

I undressed and got in with her. When the 'Oh My God's' started in quick succession, I shoved the bottom end of the shower gel bottle in her mouth. Shower gel shot out as she bit down. It was quite symbolic of the moment.

After the shower, we got dressed and Holly heated up a couple of cans of

SpaghettiO's. We sat on the couch eating from bowls on our laps.

"I really don't like Debbie hanging around here, babe. I think she's still got designs on you."

"God, you're not gonna become one of them controlling freaks because we're engaged now, are you? I can see the little cogs turning in your head, Tyler." She looked me in the eyes with sincerity. "There's nothing going on between me and Debbie. Like I said, she's a friend."

"But doesn't it bother you, her seeing you naked?"

"Why? Girls would kill for a body like mine."

"Exactly! You don't want hobos perving on you, so why would you let lezzies got jollies off you?"

She shot me a look of disgust and shook her head disapprovingly.

I spooned in a mouthful of SpaghettiO's. "I just don't like it," I mumbled.

She rolled her eyes and gave an exasperated sigh. "Fine." She slammed her bowl down on the coffee table. "I love you and we're getting married. I'm not interested in anyone else of either sex. I'm gonna call Daddy right now and tell him the good news."

Holly jumped up and picked up the phone. I set my bowl down and turned to watch her.

"Hi, Daddy, it's me..."

"- Yeah, fine thanks. Hey, I got some great news. Tyler asked me to marry him."

"- I know. It's great, isn't it? I'm really happy."

"- Yeah, he's the one for me." She looked at me. "I love him."

"- Sorry, Daddy, someone's at the door. I'll call you tomorrow. - Love you too. Bye."

She hung up and sat back down next to me, putting her arms around my shoulders. "As you said before, it's a straight ticket to hell for lying to a preacher. You believe me now?" She stuck her bottom lip out.

"Sorry, babe. I trust you, but I don't trust Debbie. You sure you're okay about getting married?"

"I can handle Debbie." She sighed. "I'm not going to kid you, it's not my ideal scenario. But if we don't do this, I'll lose a father and millions of dollars. I'll get used to it. It's just a shock at the moment." She took a drink of water. "One more thing. An insecure guy is like a total turn-off. So quit asking me if I'm happy, sure, or fucking Debbie. Yes, yes and no."

After I did the dishes and put them away, I gave Holly a back rub and we went to bed and made love. Afterwards, she lay in the nest of my shoulder and rubbed her leg up and down against mine.

"So what do you think about my plan?" I asked. "Us getting out and starting fresh."

She played with my nipple. "Yeah, I like it. You sure you can pull off this sleepwalking thing?"

"No problem. Funny isn't it? You and I worked so hard to keep me in, and now I gotta get myself kicked out. And because it's a medical discharge the judge can't throw me in jail. I think we're gonna have a great life, babe." I ran my fingers through her hair. "You're going to be the best-looking mom ever."

She giggled.

"So, have you thought about where would you want to live?" I asked.

"Hmm...maybe Oregon. Just sounds like it would be fresh."

"I could deal with that. Maybe I could be a lumberjack." I stroked her arm. "I know it was difficult to accept, but you getting pregnant was the best thing that ever happened to me. And I'm so happy you agreed to be my wife. I'm gonna be a good husband and father. Promise."

"I'm sure you will."

"We better make the most of our time on the island before we have to leave. Why don't we go snorkeling Saturday? Then I'll buy us a couple of steaks and I'll cook. I can't do much, but I do cook a mean steak. Then we'll take a bath together with those scented candles you like so much, and we can set the date for the wedding. It'll be like our engagement party."

"Oh damn. That sounds great, but I can't. I promised Debbie I'd go shopping with her Saturday and then we're going to a movie."

My heart fell through my stomach.

Chapter 27

Since Holly was busy and couldn't join me for our engagement party, I rented a car and drove around the island by myself. I wanted to explore as much as I could before I got myself discharged. Oregon would be nice, but I doubted it would offer itself to a tropical feel.

A sign pointed up a hill simply stating 'The Chapel'. I turned up the dirt road and followed it to the top. A small white chapel sat alone. After parking the car, I got out and looked around. A light haze settled in the valley, while the ocean played in the distance. The rippled scars on the side of the mountains revealed the violence of the burning hot lava that formed this beautiful island. It now stood lush and green, its fresh air filling my lungs with purity while a hint of pineapple drifted through the air.

The chapel door was open so I walked in. About ten ornately carved oak pews ran down either side of the church. A large stained glass window depicting *The Last Supper* dominated the back wall behind the pulpit with sunlight illuminating the rich colors. I noticed a man in a brown robe kneeling at the altar in the front with his head bowed.

I sat down in the back pew and closed my eyes. Dad always said he prayed when he was in a tight spot, and they didn't get much tighter than this, so I figured I'd give it a shot. I asked for everything between me and Holly to work out, and for her to deliver a healthy baby. *Please, God, let us be happy in a loving relationship.* I asked for the power and means to provide her with everything she desired, and to help me forsake all others. I wanted her to be the happiest woman on the planet. I felt God's hand on my shoulder.

"Blessed are those who seek sanctuary in the chapel."

I opened my eyes to find the man in the brown robe standing next to me with his hand on my shoulder. His light blond hair was ruffled, and hazel eyes offered me a look of comfort. He looked slender, but it was difficult to tell under the long flowing robe.

I offered in a pre-emptive apology. "Hope I haven't done anything wrong, Father,"

"Not at all. You're most welcome here. And it's Brother. Brother Noah. Mind if I sit?" He flicked his finger toward the pew.

I slid over and he sat beside me.

"Anything troubling you, or are you just here to gain inner strength to deal with the world of today?" He spoke in a soft and gentle tone.

"I'm getting married soon and just asking that I'll be a good husband."

"Congratulations." He held out his hand and we shook. "When's the big day?"

"We don't know yet. But I love her so much I want to do it as soon as possible."

"Have you chosen a venue yet?"

"No." My head dropped and I looked at the red tiles on the floor. My head snapped up and looked at Noah. "Hey, do you do weddings here?"

Noah nodded. "Conducting weddings is my favorite service to perform. A lot better than funerals." He smiled. "You could have it here if you wish."

"Really? That would be fantastic. Holly would love it here. When could you fit us in?"

"I had a call this morning. A couple were supposed to get married two Saturdays from today. Apparently, she caught him sowing oats in a neighbor's pasture and called it off. I haven't canceled the pianist yet. It's a two o'clock slot if you're interested."

"We'll take it." I clasped my hands and looked skyward. "Thank you," I said quietly.

We went into a back room and Brother Noah gave me all the information of what we needed to do before we could get married. I gathered up the papers and his card and bounded out of the chapel. Everything was falling into place nicely. I couldn't wait to tell Holly.

#

Holly and I agreed to meet at the Char-Char-Chow in Waikiki Sunday evening for dinner. She said she had things to do during the day and she'd already be out, so it would be easier if we just met there. Holly stood next to a big stuffed grizzly bear in attack mode at the entrance. We kissed and the hostess led us to a table. Exposed oak beams suspended overhead gave it rustic look, right down to the wagon wheels and rifles hanging on the walls. We sat together on the same side of the brown booth and held hands under the table.

"Great news," I said, "I managed to book us the most gorgeous chapel. The setting is incredible. You'll love it."

Her eyes went wide. "You like booked the wedding without consulting me?"

"Well you were out with Debbie, remember? Look, babe, time's a tickin'. If we don't get married soon, your dad's gonna figure things out. There is a limit on how premature a baby can be."

She rested her head on my shoulder. "I suppose you're right. When is it?"

"Saturday after next."

Her head jerked off my shoulder. "That's less than two weeks away."

"Hey, I don't mess around." I offered a reassuring smile.

"Holy crap." She looked at the menu, but I knew she wasn't reading it. "Tyler, are you sure we're doing the right thing?"

I took her face in my hand and turned it toward me. "If we don't do this, no money and no Daddy. But you know the most important thing?"

She shook her head.

My gaze penetrated deep into her eyes. "Even if there was no money or father, the most important thing is that I love you and want to marry you."

She smiled, leaned in and kissed me, slipping her tongue in my mouth. I noticed when we walked in that the restaurant wasn't very busy. A romp in the restroom was looking pretty good.

Someone cleared their throat standing at the end of the table breaking us out of our lip lock.

"You don't look like it, but you folks ready to order?" The red-headed waitress looked at us impatiently.

"Oh, sorry," I offered.

"I'm not sure. Would you order for me, Tyler?"

"Sure. She'll have the sirloin steak, medium, with onion rings instead of fries and a side order of garlic bread. I'll have the T-bone medium rare with a baked potato. A Tab for the lady, and I'll have a Seven-Up. Thanks." I handed her the menus.

"Wow," Holly said. She leaned away as her eyes widened. "You have been paying attention to what I like. I'm impressed. How come you're not having a beer?"

"I decided I probably shouldn't drink when I'm with you. You can't, so I won't either. We're in this together." I patted her leg and smiled.

"That is so sweet. Thanks."

I described the chapel and surroundings to Holly as we waited for the food. Once she got over the shock that I actually showed some initiative, she seemed to get excited about it. We were having a great time and I'd whisper in her ear now and then what I was going to do to her once we got back to her place, provided we could wait that long.

"Well, well, well. Imagine you two being here." Debbie and Sanchez stood at the end of the table. "Mind if we join you?" Debbie asked.

"As a matter of fact, Debbie, Holly and I are making our wedding plans. Since we don't need a flower girl, why don't you fu—"

Holly threw an elbow into my ribs. "Tyler. Don't be so rude. Please," Holly said, opening her hand to the other side of the booth.

"Thank you, Holly." Debbie dipped her head politely toward Holly as she and Sanchez slid in. Debbie sat opposite me. She rested her hand on Sanchez's

shoulder. "You know my boyfriend, Jorge, don't you, Tyler?"

I nodded. "How ya doin', Boy George?" I covered my mouth and whispered in Holly's ear. "Did you invite her?"

She shook her head.

I looked at Debbie. "Boyfriend, huh? Guess we won't be seeing so much of you anymore then."

"Oh, I don't know. Jorge and I don't want to smother each other, do we, Jorge?" She turned to him.

He smiled and shook his head.

She leaned across the table and cupped a hand to the side of her mouth like telling a secret, but she didn't speak softly. "You know what? Jorge is so much better in bed than my last boyfriend." She settled back into the booth and smiled smugly. She looked at me and I rolled my eyes.

I studied her face for clues as to what she was up to. First she wouldn't leave Holly alone, and still won't. Now she brings Sanchez on the scene acting as her boyfriend. Confusion was the only thing that outweighed my anger.

The waitress appeared with our food. She told Debbie and Jorge she'd bring the menu over for them.

"That's okay, I'll have what's he's having," Debbie said, pointing at my steak. "Jorge?"

"Oh, I'll just have a hamburger, please."

"So what brings you to this particular restaurant?" I asked. "I suppose Holly told you we'd be here tonight and you decided to barge in."

"Actually, it was Jorge's idea." She looked at him. "Wasn't it?"

Jorge's eyes briefly widened as Debbie's eyes coached him. "Oh, yeah, it was my idea," he said unconvincingly.

"Are we invited to the wedding?" Debbie asked, looking at Holly.

"Sorry," I said, "it's going to be a small affair. Mark and Lori are our witnesses. It'll just be the four of us."

"Shame," Debbie said. "I love weddings. But you never know, it may never happen anyway." She glared at me.

"Why wouldn't it?" Holly asked.

Debbie kept her eyes locked on me. "I'm not so sure Tyler's the marrying type. He's quite young to be getting tied down. I'm not convinced he's a one-woman guy. He just looks like a heartbreaker, and I wouldn't want you getting hurt." She briefly looked at Holly and returned her look to me, leaning in and resting her arms on the table. "Have you told her *everything* about your past, Tyler? Any nasty secrets lurking in your closet you haven't told her about?"

Her serious tone shook my confidence. She made me nervous and fearful that

she may be able to convince Holly that she and I did have a sordid affair. I thought I had let her down gently, but she seemed hell-bent on revenge. The ice in my drink rattled as I picked it up, wishing it was a large Jack Daniel's instead of a stupid Seven-Up. Why did I pick tonight to quit drinking?

I leaned in. "Some things are shared in confidence between friends. I always try to be trustful with secrets my friends share with me and hope they'll do the same. But yeah, I've been honest with her." I looked at Holly. "We know everything we need to know about each other, don't we, babe?"

"What the hell are you two talking about?" Holly shifted her gaze between me and Debbie. "This conversation isn't making any sense. Why the hell are we talking about his commitment two weeks before the wedding?" She looped her arm through mine and looked at me. "I love him and trust him."

She went back to eating her steak and Jorge was engrossed in examining the salt shaker. I took the opportunity to stick my tongue out at Debbie while they weren't looking.

"Two weeks, huh?" Debbie drummed her fingers on the table. "A lot can happen in two weeks."

The waitress brought their food and I managed to engage Jorge in conversation about football for the rest of the meal. But my nerves were shot. Debbie rattled me, and I had a feeling she was going to try something before the wedding.

It was time to unnerve her a little. I leaned in. "You know what, Debbie? If I was you, I think I'd learn to—"

"Stop it!" Holly snapped. "I'm tired and I have a headache. I want to go home."

I put my arm around her to help soothe her pain. "Sure, darling. Let's go." I slid out of the booth and took Holly's hand to help her. We left while Debbie and Jorge continued eating.

As I drove back to base Holly announced that her head pounded and she wasn't up for any action. She just wanted to go home on her own. Halfway back and I decided I better start laying some groundwork.

"Ya know," I said, "I think Debbie's stalking one of us. I'm not sure who, but she keeps showing up a little too often for my liking."

I looked over. Holly had her eyes closed and rubbed her temples. "Like, it showed. You were quite sharp with her. And since when is the guest list down to you. She's been a good friend. I'm going to invite her and Jorge. They make a good couple. I hope it gets her over that asshole ex-boyfriend."

"Not half as much as I do," I mumbled.

#

She dropped me off, we kissed and she left. I went and sat down outside Debbie's room to wait for her. I just hoped she didn't bring Jorge back with her. She turned up an hour and a half later, alone and surprisingly sober.

"If you're here for some midnight pussy, forget it. Jorge is all man and already satisfied me. So run along little boy." She shooed me with the back of her hand.

I wanted to grab her and shake her. She really did get under my skin and pushed all the right buttons. I slowly got to my feet and looked her in the eyes.

"Okay." After a shrug of the shoulders, I walked down the hall.

"Tyler, wait," she called. "Come on back."

I turned around and walked toward her. As I did, she opened her door and went inside. We followed our usual routine and sat at her table as we had done so many times in the past. She poured out two whiskies which I welcomed with open mouth. I downed it in one and motioned for another. She obliged.

She lit a cigarette. "So, what do you want?"

"I could ask you the same question. Why are you following me and Holly around?" I folded my arms. "If you want to bring me down, why don't ya? What's stopping you?"

"Cause I like seeing you squirm. This is much more fun. Don't you think?" She sipped her whiskey. Her eyes unblinking.

I downed my drink in one gulp, lit a cigarette and poured myself another drink. Maybe she'd trip up and tell me what she was up to if I threw out some awkward questions. "So where does Sanchez fit into all this?"

She took a drag. "Oh, he's just a pawn, but I am screwing him, just in case you do have any feelings for me. I want you to know what it feels like."

"So what's the game with Holly? Is she another pawn?"

"Oh, Tyler. She's scared shitless of her dad. She's only marrying you so she doesn't get cut off from his money."

"Oh, I get it. You break us up, I lose the woman I love, and she gets cut off from Daddy's money. Yep, very clever, Debs. You get back at two ex-lovers in one fell swoop." I took a deep drag and now I understood her motivation. This woman scorned thing wasn't crap after all. Holly and I were living it and Debbie was the conductor.

I took another drink. "Okay, Debbie, you win. Holly and I love each other and are gonna have a baby. No doubt you're gonna try to break us apart and make us as sad and miserable as you. I think our love is strong enough that we'll get through it. I might even be able to convince her that you're the one who's lying, not me. After all, you have been behaving like a psycho lately."

I stood up and downed the rest of my drink. "You hold all the cards, Debs. I don't have any choice but to wait until you play your hand. I'll just have to see if I can trump you." I moved toward the door, resting my hand on the doorknob. "I feel sorry for you." I walked out without looking back.

All I could do now was wait for her to tell Holly. My stomach churned as I walked back to my room. I had finally got my act together but had to wait for the assassin to take her shot and see if Holly and I could dodge the bullet. Nervousness matched my sadness and I regretted ever falling into her trap in the first place.

Chapter 28

Mark and I went to Dolphin's for a drink after work. We got our beers and found a table. I had to make the most of the drinking when I could since I vowed not to do it in front of Holly until after the baby was born.

"How's Lori?" I asked.

He smiled. "Normal. Wouldn't you love to have a normal girlfriend?"

I shook my head. "Boooring. No, I like 'em mixed up, fucked in the head, former lesbian nymphomaniacs, with a touch of Valley. Life on the edge kind of thing." I lit a cigarette. "Well, I used to. Now it's just me and the adorable Holly, bringing up a baby and living happily ever after in the woods of Oregon. That sounds pretty normal."

He stared at his beer bottle. "I guess it does. Honestly, would you really marry Holly if she wasn't pregnant?"

"Probably not now, but yeah, I could have seen us married down the road. I love her."

"You sure you're just not saying that to try and convince yourself?" He looked at me. I made eye contact but didn't answer.

We didn't speak for a few moments until Mark finally broke the lull. "So, you're really gonna get yourself kicked out?"

I looked around to make sure we weren't being overheard. "Yeah, it's the best thing for me and my little family. By the way, I've been meaning to ask you if you'd be my best man."

"Of course I will. I'd be insulted if you asked anyone else." He leaned over and slapped my shoulder as he smiled. "I still can't believe you're going through with it."

I took a drag and forcefully blew out the smoke. "It's what I really want, but I think that psycho Debbie is going to try and ruin it. I'm sure she's trying to break us up. She could get revenge on both of us for screwing her then leaving her. She's quite twisted. You think you could get Lori to talk to her? You know, tell her to back off and leave us alone."

"I'll ask her, but I doubt it'll do any good. You're pretty worried about her, aren't you?"

I nodded. "Man, she's really got me nervous. Why did I ever get involved with her?" I can't believe she's doing this to me. Okay, I got some benefit and pleasure out of it, but I honestly was just trying to help a friend.

I might be a lesbian. Would you have sex with me to help me decide? Ninety-nine guys out of a hundred would say yes. The one who didn't would be gay himself.

Mark took a drink. "Well, you know what they say. A stiff dick has no conscience. As you sow, so shall you reap. Oh what a tangled web we weave—"

"I get the point. And you've already given me the tangled web speech. Don't you have any other lectures in your repertoire?"

"Sure, but they'd be wasted on you." We both smiled.

Sanchez appeared at the table. "Mind if I join you guys?" The question proved to be rhetorical as he sat before either of us answered.

He offered to buy the next round and I didn't waste any time snatching the money from his hand and trotting off to the bar to get the beers. He and Mark were in meaningless conversation about the destruction of the ozone layer when I returned. I sat down and thanked Jorge for the drink.

"How well do you guys know Debbie Meyers?" Jorge asked.

"Umm...not that well," I replied.

He looked at Mark.

"I know her fairly well, albeit a lot of it secondhand." Mark gave me a stern look then looked back at Sanchez. "Why?"

"Well, we're supposed to be going together, but she never wants to be alone with me. She's the one who came onto me, and now I can't get near her. I was wondering if it's her or if it's me." He hung his head, looking at the table.

Mark and I looked at each other. Mark sighed. "Maybe she needs a little time. She just came out of a bad relationship." He threw his gaze to me quickly then back to Jorge. "Her last boyfriend really messed her around. She's probably on the rebound. She wants a boyfriend but's afraid she'll get hurt again. Maybe you should call it off with her for a while. I don't think she's ready yet."

"Bullshit." I took a big gulp of beer and set the bottle down. "You're exactly what she needs, Sanchez. Did she say who her last boyfriend was?"

He shook his head.

Silently, I breathed a sigh of relief. "Well, I know him and he's a pretty decent guy. I don't know what Debbie's problem is with him." My glance caught Mark rolling his eyes. "Debbie's the one with the problem, not her ex. You need to hang with her and bring her out of this self-imposed depression. Get her to fall in love with you and she'll be cured. You can do it, cuz. She needs you."

"I don't know if I can deal with it. He's all she ever talks about. Well, him and Holly Knight. Every time—"

"Wait a minute." I leaned in. "What's she sayin' about Holly?"

"How much she admires her and wants to be like her. And keeps asking me if I think she's as good-looking as Holly. Just envy kind of things. I can deal with that. But this goddamn boyfriend thing is about to drive me round the bend." He sipped his beer.

"Is she out for revenge?" I asked.

"She hasn't said anything specific, unless you count the time when she said she wanted to cut his nuts off."

I puffed on my cigarette. "Her talking about her ex means that she really likes you better. We studied it in psych class. It's a coping mechanism so she doesn't lose you. You're doing the right thing, Jorge. You keep slippin' her the high hard one and she'll come 'round."

"That's part of the problem. I haven't slipped her anything yet. She's either got a headache or has to wash her hair."

My mouth fell open. "But the other night, she said you and her were..."

"Yeah, I know, but trust me, talking about it is as far as it ever gets." He sighed and swigged his beer.

I leant back and looked at the ceiling leaving Mark to carry on the conversation. It was bad enough that I had to deal with a woman scorned, but a pathological liar as well. I underestimated Debbie. A twinge of jealousy did cross over me when she said she was screwing Jorge and I figured that's why she mentioned it. Poor old Sanchez.

#

Holly and I took a day off together to go downtown and get our marriage license. We didn't need a blood test and they issued the license on the spot after checking our IDs.

We went straight to the mall afterwards to shop for Holly's wedding dress. Not a traditional formal dress, just something new. I asked if I should see her in the wedding dress before the service, but she said her dad told her years ago that was just a bunch of mumbo-jumbo voodoo. I always had her pegged as the superstitious type; apparently, I was wrong.

She looked stunning in a strapless, long flowing white dress. Folded material ran horizontally around her bust with wide vertical pleats running beneath the bust to the floor.

She spent over two hundred dollars on new shoes no one would ever see hidden under the dress. Her beauty radiated from beneath the dress and she looked fabulous. I could hardly contain my excitement while looking at the soon to be Mrs. Chambers.

Holly insisted on buying me a suit for the wedding. I would have been quite happy to get married in my dress-white uniform, but she said since I was going to get myself discharged by means not quite so honorable, she didn't want our wedding photos to be a constant reminder of my deceit. So a gray three-piece

suit it was.

We left the mall and I drove us back to her place. Stopping at Larry's Up-Market on the way home, I ran in and bought a couple of steaks, some mushrooms and a frozen bag of French fries, promising her I'd cook dinner that evening. I grabbed a bottle of wine but put it back when I remembered I was on the wagon in Holly's presence.

It was nearly five in the evening when we got back to her place. I poured us some orange juice and we sat on the couch.

"Why don't I run you a bath, babe?" I gently stroked the back of her head. "You look tired, and while you're in there soaking that hot little body of yours, I'll make dinner."

"Are you sure you're not one of those transsexual people?"

Holy crap. Was she suggesting *I* was some kind of gay person? I shook my head under a cloud of bewilderment.

"Sometimes I think you're too thoughtful to be a real guy." She smiled.

I patted her leg and got up. Knowing how she liked her bath, I ran it hot with plenty of bubbles. When it was ready, I called her in. Once she submerged up to her neck and there was nothing more to ogle, I left to make the dinner. I laid the table and set out candles. I called Holly and she came out in a long, white, fluffy bathrobe. Dinner was served and we sat down.

"You cooked these nice, Tyler," she said, still chewing her first bite of steak.

"Thanks." I wasn't sure if she'd like it since it didn't have any disgusting sauces poured over it. "How was your bath? Did it hit all the right spots?"

"Perfect. Just what I needed. You keep it up and you might make a pretty good husband after all." She gave me a wink. "You nervous?"

"About getting married. Yeah, probably. I don't want to let you down. You?" I popped a french fry in my mouth.

"Yeah, definitely. If it wasn't for the situation," she patted her stomach, "we probably wouldn't be getting married right now."

"What?" Panic and insecurity gripped me, but she already warned me that insecure guys didn't get her libido going, so I tried to play it cool. I put my knife and fork down. "You do want to get married, don't you?"

"Sorry, I said that wrong. What I meant was – this is the eighties, for crying out loud. People don't have to get married straight away because they get pregnant, but I couldn't bear to hurt Daddy." She dropped her head. "I'm still getting used to the idea of being pregnant, let alone being married as well." She looked up. "But, yeah, if it had to happen, I'm glad you're the father."

Not really the words a groom wants to hear in the run-up to the wedding, but I could see that she was nervous and I think she still held some doubt about my

genuineness. Why did I ever suggest an abortion? That did me some damage, but I was really happy about her having a baby now. I just had to keep showing her how much I loved her.

After dinner, I escorted Holly into the living room and turned the TV on for her. She put her feet up while I went back to the kitchen, did the dishes and cleaned up. I joined her on the couch when I finished the chores and we watched *The A-Team*. My arm wrapped around her felt so right. I kissed the top of her head and felt her mouth break into a smile against my chest. We jumped when we heard a knock at the door.

"I'll get it." I moved Holly to one side to get up. Walking to the door I mumbled to myself. "If that's Debbie, I'm gonna smash her face in."

Opening the door, two men in suits stood there. One of them, a dark Hawaiian guy in the gray suit, flashed a badge.

"Sergeant Chan, Honolulu PD," he said. He opened his hand toward the pale looking red-headed man in a blue suit standing next to him. "This is Officer Como." He nodded. "Is Miss Knight in?"

My heart thumped, shaking my chest with each heavy beat. Cops at the door was never a good thing. Maybe I had been dating a drug baroness and didn't even know it. "Yeah, would you like to come in?" I stood to one side to let them in. "Holly, it's the police," I called out.

I led them to the living room where Holly sat, still curled up on the couch where I had left her. She didn't seem concerned, so maybe I was overreacting.

The cops sat down at my non-verbal instruction and I sat next to Holly, putting my arm around her.

"Sorry to disturb you, Miss Knight," Chan said, "but I'm afraid we have some bad news. You are the daughter of Reverend Cornelius Knight, correct?"

Holly's lips quivered, shifting her gaze from Chan, to me, and back to him. She nodded.

"It's about your father. He was on a private jet en-route to Dallas. Unfortunately, the plane developed mechanical problems."

Holly dropped her chin toward her chest and shook her head.

Chan took a deep breath and continued. "The plane went down in an open field in Texas with twelve people on board. I'm sorry, Miss Knight, but there were no survivors."

She lifted her head. "No, you've made some mistake. I just spoke to him the other day. You must have him confused with Jimmy Swaggart or someone. Not Daddy. He can't be dead."

"I'm sorry, Miss Knight, but there's been no mistake."

"Daddy? Dead? It's not possible."

Chan and Como stood. "Sorry to bring the bad news. We offer our condolences. The media wants to break the news, but we had to notify the next of kin first. I'm sorry for your loss." He looked at me. "We'll let ourselves out." He nodded at me and they walked out, quietly shutting the door behind them.

Holly jerked in my arms as her crying moved to an uncontrollable state, she pounded my chest and kept crying out "Daddy." I sat stunned, trying to take it in that her dad was dead. I held her, resting the side of my face on top of her head.

I tried to comfort her by holding her tightly. I felt deeply saddened and upset myself. Her pain must have been a hundred times greater. My mouth moved but no words came out. There was nothing I could say that would ease the pain. We sat holding each other, not speaking – just her crying. I wiped away some tears myself. Some were for Mr. Knight, but most were for having to feel Holly's pain.

A crushing feeling swept over me as I realized that Mr. Knight would never know about or see his grandchildren. I could only pray that knowing his daughter was about to get married was enough to let him die a happy man.

Chapter 29

Comforting Holly became my main role. She cried often and told me a lot of it was because of guilt. She didn't bear him grandchildren before he met his untimely death and that really upset her.

I came around to her house after work every day. Passion had been put on the back burner while she came to terms with her grief. We sat on her couch sipping orange juice.

Her eyes were red and the sparkle had disappeared. "I got a call from one of Daddy's assistants. The funeral's on Saturday."

"Saturday? That's our wedding day." I ran my hand through my hair. "Come on, babe, you're the next of kin. Surely you can set the date for after our wedding. Then we'll both fly to LA for his funeral, and you'll have a loving husband there for support."

"Sorry, Tyler." She stroked my leg. "Daddy's aides have gone to a lot of trouble to get this organized. People are flying in from all over the country, I can't just move the date."

Disappointment crept over me, but she did have a point. She'd been too distraught and too far away to make the arrangements herself. The Reverend's assistants planned everything which was probably for the best; sparing Holly more anguish.

"Okay, but I'll still come with you," I said.

She looked at me and stroked my cheek. "That's sweet, but I'm staying with my aunt and she only has a one-bedroom apartment. I'll be okay."

No wedding or funeral. This really was a sad day, but I had to be strong for her sake. As much as I wanted to get married before anything else, I had to consider her sorrow and be compassionate. I tucked her under my arm and stroked her hair. "So, we'll reset the date when you get back then, huh?"

The side of her face rested on my chest as she stroked my stomach. "I suppose so. But, like there's no major rush now. We were just doing this for Daddy."

I put my finger under her chin and lifted it until our eyes met. "I wasn't. I really want to marry you, Holly." I searched her eyes but only saw pain.

She broke our gaze and gently rested her face back on my chest. "We'll see," she quietly whispered. Soon after, she fell asleep in my arms.

I sat still as she lightly snored resting against me. Why couldn't he have died after the wedding? Marrying Holly was what I wanted now more than anything. Not only for me, but I wanted the baby to grow up with a good father. It had become, like, really super important to me. I silently chuckled. My God, we really were suited for each other. Well, they say grief does funny things to

people. I had to give her space and let her mourn. We'd have to talk about it when she came back. She'd be able to think clearer then.

#

I picked Holly up from the airport the following week and we went back to her house. I carried her suitcase in, put it in her bedroom, then made us some coffee and we sat at the dining table.

Holly stirred some sugar into her coffee and stared into the cup. "It's was a beautiful funeral. There must have been five-hundred people there."

"Your dad would have been proud."

She sniffled and nodded. "Yeah, he was well-loved. And Billy Graham gave the eulogy. It was wonderful."

I reached over and held her hand. "I'm pleased. So, now that he's been promoted to glory, have you thought any more about the wedding?"

She glanced up at me then cast her look back to her cup of coffee. "Why don't we leave it for a little while? I'm still upset and sad, and not up for a happy event just yet." She looked at me. "You understand, don't you?"

I didn't expect her to rip her clothes off and lay naked on the table screaming 'Make me Mrs. Chambers', but a little more enthusiasm wouldn't have gone amiss. "I'm trying to, but I really want to get married. You'll be showing soon and you don't want tongues wagging about being unmarried and pregnant." I opened my arms. "You want to be the pregnant Mrs. Chambers."

"You really do want this, don't you?" She studied my face.

I took her hand in mine. "More than anything."

She patted my hand. "Okay, we'll go see that Noah guy and see when he can book us in."

"I love you," I said. We leaned in and kissed.

#

We saw Brother Noah at the weekend and set the date in a fortnight's time. Excitement engulfed me knowing we were back on track and in two weeks time I'd have a wife to care for.

I didn't see as much of Holly as I would have liked over the next week. She said she had a lot to do, but not to worry because we'd have the rest of our lives together. I accepted it and tried to give her the last of her non-marital space.

With Holly busy, I found myself spending more time with Mark drinking beer in our room when he wasn't out with Lori.

"Four more days before the big day then?" Mark commented.

"Yeah, I'm really excited. I'm glad you made me ask her out. She's fantastic."

"I remember you weren't saying that after the first date. She used to drive you crazy, remember?"

"I just didn't know her well enough when I said that." I put a cigarette in my mouth. I pulled it back out and looked at it.

"What's up with you?"

"You know what?" I put the cigarette back in the pack. "I think I'm going to quit smoking for Holly and the baby. I probably shouldn't smoke around them." After crumpling up the pack, I threw it in the trash can.

He whistled. "My-oh-my. What has Miss Holly created?" He tilted his head to one side, then the other, looking at me. "I don't believe it. It's almost human."

I flicked the back of my hand at him. "Hey, man, would you do me a favor?"

"Long ago, I would have just said yes without asking. But knowing you as I do now, depends what it is."

I took a swig of beer. "Would you report me to the Master-At-Arms for sleepwalking? Tell him I've been doing it for months, but you didn't want me to get kicked out. Now you realize I'll be going to a ship in six months, and you don't want me walking off the back of the ship in the middle of the ocean."

He fixed his gaze on his beer. "So basically, you want me to lie to a military cop." He looked at me expressionlessly.

"I wouldn't have put it like that, but yeah."

He turned one side of his mouth up into a smirk. "So you want to get medically discharged, but not that worried if I face a court-martial for perjury." He shook his head, smiling. "Okay, maybe I was a little hasty comparing you to a human. I know I've lied to your girlfriends for you in the past, but I wasn't really putting much at stake personally. This is a different matter. Sorry, pal, you're on your own with this one."

"Oh, come on. It's not hurting anybody."

Mark stood up, walked to the door and opened it. He stood half in the room and half out, looking back at me. "I said no."

Lying on the bed, I thought about how I would start this sleepwalking thing on my own. I drifted off to sleep and didn't wake until time for work the next day.

#

Around ten o'clock, Watkins told me to report to the division officer. Walking to the building, I thought about seeing Holly, which sent shivers through my body, even if I couldn't bend her over the desk and give her one.

When I got to the office, she wasn't there. I gave up waiting for her after a few

minutes and knocked on the division officer's door.

"Enter," a voice called out from the other side.

Lieutenant Johnson sat behind his desk. He stood up.

"Petty Officer Chambers reporting as ordered, sir."

He extended an open hand to a chair at the side of his desk. "Sit down, Chambers."

This was strange. He usually yelled at me while I stood at attention, but I sat as he instructed. He looked at me gently, standing by the side of his desk.

"Petty Officer Chambers, I'm afraid I have some bad news." He took a deep breath and blew it out slowly. "I just got a call from the Red Cross this morning." He looked away. "Your mom lost her battle with cancer yesterday. I'm sorry."

I almost smiled. "That's not possible."

"I should have asked more when you told me. If I had known it was pancreatic cancer, I would have insisted you go home and see her when you told me about it."

I looked at him, my eyes partially closed. "What on earth are you talking about, sir?"

He pulled up a chair and sat opposite me so our eyes were level. "Pancreatic cancer is often diagnosed late. The person seems to die very quickly from it, but probably had the cancer for quite some time before it being discovered. I'm sorry."

"No, Lieutenant, this can't be right. There's been some kind of mistake. She didn't have cancer. I mean, she recovered. They got rid of it. She's fine. Really." Tears pooled in my eyes. "I just spoke to her last month. No, sir, she's fine. Really."

"I've drawn up papers for emergency leave. If you need some money, go to dispersing and they'll advance your pay so you can get to the mainland and back. Take the rest of the day off and start making your plans to get back home for the funeral." He stood, making it obvious that was my cue to leave. "I'm sorry for your loss."

My body went completely numb. I managed to stand and shuffle out of his office. Holly was back at her desk and called out to me as I trudged past. I don't remember walking to my room, but I found myself lying on my bed staring at the ceiling.

I did this. I killed my mom all because of a stupid lie. Maybe I secretly wished it on her. She kicked me out of the house; Maybe she deserved it. *NO!* Don't think that. This is all my fault. I shouldn't have been such a shit. She was a good woman, cursed with a shit husband and a shit son. The pain was so great it managed to cut its way through the numbness. Maybe I wasn't numb because I

also carried the distinct feeling of guilt. I wanted to be numb but felt terrible things I didn't want to feel. Why did I ever say that?

My mind raced for several hours until someone knocked on the door. I didn't want to see anyone, so I ignored it, but they didn't go away. Annoyance forced me out of bed and I flung the door open.

Holly came in and threw her arms around me. "Tyler, I'm so, so sorry. Sit down." She led me over to the bed and we sat on the edge. "How tragic." She put her arm around my shoulder.

"I did it. I killed her." I rocked back and forth, staring at the floor.

"Don't be ridiculous. How can you give someone cancer?"

"I willed it on her. I used my mind to do it. I didn't mean too."

"Now stop that. You can't kill someone through mental telephoning." She stood up. "Get packed. I bought you a plane ticket for tomorrow. I'll take you to the airport. So, get your things ready and I'll pick you up at nine." She kissed me on the cheek. "You gonna be okay?"

I nodded. Another lie.

"See you tomorrow." She got up and walked to the door.

"Holly?"

She turned to look at me as she stood in the doorway.

"I love you."

She smiled, blew me a kiss, and left.

#

Ten days later, Holly was at the airport to pick me up and drove me back to base.

"How was it?" she asked.

"Sad. Me and a group of church ladies standing around a grave. Shit. Dad didn't even turn up." I sighed deeply. "At least neither of us has anyone else left to die and screw up our wedding plans again. How have you been?"

"Like, okay, considering everything. It's been quite tough lately."

"You can say that again. We'll have to go see Noah again and get another date."

"Let's not think about that right now." She kept her eyes fixed firmly ahead on the road.

She dropped me off at my barracks. We kissed and agreed to meet at her house later that night. Luckily I came back on a Saturday. It gave me some time to regroup before having to go back to work.

After dropping everything in the room, I took a shower and got dressed. I lay

on the bed trying to focus on how happy I would be once Holly and I got married, but guilt and sadness kept gripping me.

A knock at the door forced me out of bed. I'd be glad of some company to keep my mind off my mind. I opened it to find Debbie standing there.

"Can I come in?"

Opening the door and standing aside, I let her in. She walked past me and sat at the table. I joined her. She pulled out a cigarette and offered me one.

"No thanks, I quit," I said.

"You what? I don't believe it."

"Can't be smoking around a baby, so I gave it up."

"Well, good for you." She lit up. "Sorry about your mom, Tyler. I mean that." She widened her eyes and pressed her lips together.

"Thanks. I appreciate it."

"I know the timing sucks, and I am sorry, but I'm afraid I have some more bad news for you." She offered me a cigarette again. "You sure you don't want one?"

I shook my head.

She took a drag, leaned in and blew smoke in my face. "Checkmate."

I waved the smoke away. "What the hell are you talking about?"

"I captured your queen." She leaned back and smirked.

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Queen Holly. We're back together again. This time for good."

I waved my hand back and forth. "Get outta here. She hates your guts. And we're getting married." I leaned in, resting my arms on the table. "You really do live in a dream world, don't ya? We're in love, we're getting married and she's having my baby. And she's not gay."

"She sure acted pretty gay when you went off to Kahoolawe." She took a drag and smiled big. "It's like this, Tyler boy. You treated me like something you stepped in. I want you to suffer. What's the best way to do that? Take your prized possession. Holly. You wouldn't play the game, so I seduced Holly. We were at it while you were out picking up shells."

I looked at her through narrowed eyes. "You're a fucking liar."

"We had a great time while you were gone, but she said she couldn't carry on because of her dad. She wanted to, but she wanted Daddy's fortune even more. Oh, I was going to wreck your wedding one way or another."

"So you told her about us, did you?"

"Nope, didn't have to, but I would have. She might not have been so receptive if she knew I slept with her boyfriend. But you know what? I was willing to make that sacrifice if it meant hurting you. Now with Daddy dead, she doesn't have to please him anymore."

I felt sick. What she said made sense. "Yeah, but we arranged another wedding date after he died."

"Yeah, I got a bit worried about that." She took a drag and flicked her ash in the ashtray. "I was going to tell her about us the night before the wedding. You know, for maximum effect. Your mom dying bought me some time. So, while you were attending her funeral, I seduced her again and convinced her she doesn't have to live for Daddy's approval anymore. Face it, Tyler, she's a dyke. She would have accepted it sooner or later."

"But we're having a baby. She's not going to give that up to go play happy homos with you." My stomach churned.

She twirled her cigarette. "We got it all worked out. It's amazing what you can come up with in ten days. Holly's going to get out at the end of her enlistment. Before then, she's going to report that she caught me in a lesbian act. I'll get kicked out, and she and I will raise the baby. Don't worry, I'll take good care of junior for ya." She smiled triumphantly.

"Naw, Holly would never do this to me. We got plans."

"Well, scrap 'em, bud. She let me tell you all this to soften the blow. She'll confirm it when you see her tonight. But don't be expecting any pussy. That's my department now."

"Yeah, right. Two lesbians raising my baby. You'll never get away with it."

"Well, we haven't decided if we're cousins or sisters yet, you know, in public like, but it'll look legit. Who knows, maybe in ten or twenty years' time society will accept us for who we are."

"But I'm the father. I have rights." Oh shit. This was getting scary. She sounded so confident, but this was so devious. Surely Holly wouldn't do this to me.

"You may have rights, but Holly's due to inherit fifteen million dollars."

My mouth dropped. I sat there speechless.

She ran her hand through her hair. "That can hire some brilliant lawyers. And, you'll have to find us. We won't be staying in Hawaii, and we won't be going to Oregon. So the odds of finding us are forty-eight to one." She placed her finger on her cheek. "Make that forty-seven. I think it's safe to rule out Kentucky." She laughed.

"Fifteen million." I took a deep breath and tried to appear calm. "Nope, you're a lying bitch," I said matter of factly. "Holly loves me and we're getting married. So fuck off and get out." I rose to my feet, walked to the door and opened it.

Debbie crushed her cigarette in the ashtray, got up and walked up to me standing inches from my face. She spoke with cigarette saturated breath. "Sorry, Tyler. You lose." She walked out with a swagger in her step.

I slammed the door behind her. *Bitch, bitch, bitch! Lying fucking bitch!* She lived in a fantasy world that didn't exist. I had to see Holly to confirm that Debbie was delusional. I hopped on the bus and went to her apartment.

#

Standing at her front door, my mind went back to other times I had stood there waiting for her to answer. Meeting her dad, finding Debbie standing there, and the time she dropped to her knees and unzipped me in the hallway for all to see. This was a door of mystery as to what may happen next. I knocked.

She answered wearing baggy jeans and a non-revealing sweatshirt. If this was meant to be seductive, it didn't work.

"You're early," she said, opening the door.

My shoulders slumped as we walked to her couch. All I wanted was to hear was Holly scream, 'That lying bitch'. And then scream in ecstasy as I rammed my hot, throbbing... One thing at a time.

We sat, both staring ahead, not speaking. It felt awkward and tense. No welcoming kiss, no offer of a drink. Oh shit. I didn't like it.

"Is it true?" I whispered.

Several moments passed before she answered. "Yes."

I looked to the ceiling. "God?" I asked. "Please strike me down now."

She laid her hand on my leg. "Tyler, I'm really, really sorry. I can't tell you how bad I feel."

I snapped my head to look at her. "Then why do it? You don't want to be a lesbian. And you're not. We've had amazing sex, and you're having my baby. We're suited. Two peas on the farm, remember?"

She drew a deep breath. "Tyler, I'm really sorry. We've had a great time and I love you. But I've always been gay, I've just been fighting it. It's been like I've been an alcoholic in a bar drinking orange juice when I really wanted whiskies. Daddy put so much pressure on me to be the pure daughter and give him grandchildren. He raised me single-handedly and I wanted to please him. I needed his approval. But I've been living a lie. When I was fifteen, I saw the head cheerleader...well, she was the second, I was the head cheerleader. Anyway, I saw her in the school shower, naked with her hair pulled back in a ponytail. I instantly got wet and knew it turned me on. I tried to ignore it, but I still have images of her in my mind."

"Holly, you can't do this. What about your dad? His legacy? And the fact that I love you."

She gently laid her hand on my cheek. "I'm sorry, Tyler, but I don't have to live

a lie anymore. Hey," she lovingly looked into my eyes, "I've had a great time. You're special, the father of my baby, but it's over. If Daddy hadn't died, things would be different. But I would have gone back to women eventually. I can't help it. It's the way I'm made."

"Holly, please. I love you. Don't do this." I looked at her. "We can make it work. And what about the baby? I have rights."

She brushed my cheek. "Sorry, Tyler, I have to be true to myself for once." She pasted on a smile. "I do care about you, but to have you in my life would be too painful. Look at it this way, you will be the last man I'll ever have. Yes, I do love you. The baby will be fine. I have plenty of money and won't ever come after you for child support or anything. You don't want to be lumbered with a baby. You're too young and still want to have fun. Don't hate me." She kissed me, then leaned back, looking deep into my eyes. "Goodbye, Tyler. You'll always be special to me."

It seemed futile to try and argue with her. I started to tell her about Debbie and me, then realized that would make me just as bad as Debbie. As it stood, she still respected me. An admission of infidelity may or may not destroy their relationship, but she'd still be gay. I was the one who cheated on her, not Debbie. It would only serve to give her a reason to hate me, and I wanted her to tell the baby nice things about his or her father. She and Debbie had everything planned out.

I walked to the door and opened it, then looked back at her. "I love you, Holly."

She smiled, and her eyes welled up.

#

I stopped at the liquor store on the way back to base and bought a pack of cigarettes and a bottle of Jack Daniel's. Once back in the room, I lit up and poured myself a large one. The whiskey burned as it slid down my throat, but it was a small step in the healing process. I'd never get over Holly. She'd be taking my kid somewhere and I'd probably never see it. But she had the money to look after a kid.

It felt like a hand had reached inside me and pulled my guts out. Pure emptiness harbored beneath my skeleton. I wished God would strike me down to relieve the pain. Hell seemed a better option than living with this kind of misery. I took another burning drink.

Mark came in and sat at the table with me, pouring himself a drink.

"You okay?" he asked. "Lori told me what happened. Man, that's tough."

"What do you think? Life as I know it is over. No mom, no wife, no girlfriend, no baby, and no point." I eyed my whiskey, then looked at Mark. "I really screwed this up. I'm never getting involved with another woman ever again."

"Hey, if you're turning gay, I'm moving out." He smiled.

An unexpected laugh came out. "No, probably not. But I'm never, ever going to vest emotions in a woman again."

Mark and I talked over how to best handle the situation. He offered me encouragement. We finished the whiskey and I went to bed, knowing what I had to do Monday morning.

#

I asked Petty Officer Watkins for permission to see Lieutenant Johnson on Monday. He made the phone call and my request was granted. On the way over to his office, I wondered what I'd say to Holly. Probably nothing.

Walking into her office, relief swept over me when I discovered she wasn't at her desk. I knocked on Lieutenant Johnson's door.

"Enter," his voice called out.

I went in and stood in front of his desk. "Thank you for seeing me, Lieutenant. I'd like to request a transfer, sir."

He remained seated. "And why's that?"

"Well, sir, I have another six months left here, but the place is haunting me. As you know, I sat here when you told me my mom died. Now, my girlfriend who lived on the island just committed suicide. This place reeks of death for me. Sir, I respectfully request to be transferred to a ship. One that's going to sea for a very, very long time. I don't care if I ever see land again." I looked him in the eyes. "Please, sir. This place holds so many bad memories for me. I'm afraid I'll go loony if I have to stay here."

He rubbed the corners of his mouth with his thumb and forefinger and stared at me for several moments. "It's unusual to grant early transfers, but I think you're an exceptional case. I've always thought you'd be better suited as a sea-going sailor. Leave it with me, Chambers. I'll see what I can do."

"Thank you, sir. I would be forever indebted."

I looked at Holly's vacant desk as I left. Tears pooled in my eyes as I walked past and sadness stabbed my heart. I wondered what the baby would look like. Boy or girl? Would I ever see a picture? A vision of me walking into our log cabin in Oregon flashed through my mind-Holly standing at the stove making spaghetti and asking about my day. I really did love her.

#

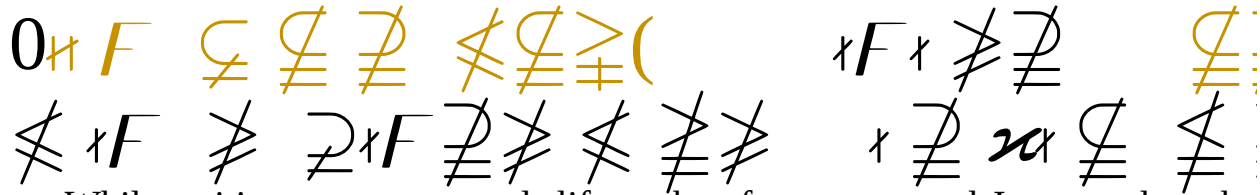
Three weeks later I stood at the bottom of the gangplank of the USS Expectation; a seabag with all my worldly possessions on my back and orders to report aboard in my hand. I would still be home-ported in Pearl Harbor, but wouldn't be spending much time there. Within a week, my new ship and I would be on a six-month deployment to the Western Pacific.

I couldn't wait.

A Note From the Author

My writing career began with *Tyler's Trouble Trilogy* when Tyler Chambers joined the Navy to avoid a jail sentence. His adventures spanned the 1980s and took him to Hawaii in the quirky romantic comedy [Trouble Triangle](#). Wanting to escape the abnormality of twisted relationships, Tyler found himself on a Navy warship sailing around the Western Pacific desperately trying to avoid psychotic shipmates in the comedic suspense novel, [Oceans of Trouble](#). That didn't work out so well and he found himself in Scotland, not only repairing nuclear submarines, but also embarking on an atomic relationship with Darcy Novak—the ultimate forbidden fruit in this full-blown romance, [Forbidden Trouble](#). (For adults only there is an erotic version with the same laughs and a lot more steam in the [Forbidden Trouble 18+](#) edition).

[illegible]



While writing my next novel, life took a funny turn and I returned to the United States after living in England for twenty-two years. While repatriating myself to the USA, I soon felt like a [Foreigner In My Own Backyard](#). So I wrote about it. The complications continued to provide inspiration (and material), so I wrote a sequel, [Foreigner On My Own Front Porch](#).

With the memoirs seemingly out of my system, I finished a novel I had been working on with Melissa Mayberry. We wrote alternate chapters—not knowing what the other one would write and then have to respond in kind—and released the romantic suspense, [Enemy of My Enemy](#).

I finally finished the novel I began working on before we moved to America and released the book about Tyler's and Darcy's son, Oscar, in the romantic suspense, [Southern Harm](#).

After four years in America, we decided to return to England, but not before I had the stupid idea to buy a second-hand RV and drive from Minnesota to Florida. Mark Twain said it best *"It's no wonder that truth is stranger than fiction. Fiction has to make sense."* Those words become a reality in [RV There Yet?](#) The true story of a motoring nightmare.

My current project, *Angels Without Halos*, is a suspense novel set in the Deep South set to be released in 2020.

All of my books are available on Amazon. For more information visit my website at:

www.traviscasey.com

Books by Travis Casey

*[Trouble Triangle](#)

*[Oceans of Trouble](#)

*[Forbidden Trouble](#)

*[Foreigner In My Own Backyard](#)

*[Foreigner On My Own Front Porch](#)

*[Enemy of My Enemy](#) (written with Melissa Mayberry)

*[Southern Harm](#)

*[RV There Yet?](#)

*Angels Without Halos