

Kelly

(Inspired by Mike C, based on characters in his novel: "James"
Characters and situations copyright by Mike C, 2002)

Chapter 11

(Special - Laura 1 written by: MikeC)

I snap awake with the sharp screeching noise. For a moment I am home, and Dad is rushing off on screaming tires to another emergency. The gentle breathing next to me reminds me that I'm not home, but in a luxury suite on a resort island in the Atlantic Ocean, next to the two dearest friends I will ever have.

I smile, as I taste the dried remains of last night's love play on my lips. The frenzy of sex, as we physically tried to show each other the depth of our caring; then the soft touching afterwards, relaxed, but no less meaningful.

I reach and find Todd in the dark; he is soft and childlike in sleep. He is like a child in many ways, one of the many traits I love about him, his openness, his honesty, and his guileless way of looking at life.

I touch his penis and he sighs in sleep, nestling closer to me, warm, and strong and needing me. I smile and blink back tears of happiness. For the first time in my life, I am in love - not the infatuation of a child, but the deep, selfless yearning I have for an individual. Two individuals.

Kelly's head is resting on Todd's strong chest, looking angelic and sweet. I think she would not like me to think this way about her. Kelly is an enigma; she needs love, but has had too many painful experiences to know it when she sees it.

"I will love you forever, I promise..." I whisper to the waiflike goddess who has taught me so much, and in turn given me so much of herself. I kiss my fingers and touch her lips, "With all my love, my darling..."

The screech again intrudes on my daydream; it is the harsh call of a seagull searching for food.

Just past six, the clock says. The sky is starting to brighten as I pad bare-footed to the patio. The slight chill in the air reminds me that I am also naked. But, as Kelly said, if they can see me from six floors down and in this light, good luck to 'em!

I smile again at the ease with which I have grown so comfortable with my body. No, it's not the sex. I'd had sex with another before, but it was furtive, selfish, and

shameful. With Todd and Kelly, it's nothing like that; it is open, caring and something to be prideful of.

Respect. That's what it is. They respect me and my needs, my wants and most of all, my love. I grin and spread my arms wide, "I'm in Love!" I say to the world, softly so I don't wake them. I know that I can give them my all; and know they will unhesitatingly accept, giving all of themselves in return. That is what love is about; what LIFE should be all about.

"Hello, seagull! Lovely day isn't it?" I grin and he looks at me, decides that I do not have food, and circles down to the river. I watch him for a bit, but I am no longer jealous of his ability for flight, "I can fly too, you know? I've had enough adventures these past two days to last me forever!" I laugh.

The seagull joins his mates cruising far up the sea channel but scatters when a group of dark shadows move through the water. Then one of the slim gray shapes breaks surface and blows water up in a fountain. I realize these are the dolphins Bob was telling me about yesterday. "They travel close to shore to feed when it's deserted, mostly during early mornings," he had said, and there they are! My heart jumps as I watch them zoom effortlessly up channel.

I know what I must do. I dash inside, hopping into shorts and pulling on a shirt. With a quickly scribbled note to the two cuddled sleepyheads, I rush out of the room.

I step inside the elevator, then realize I am still shoeless, not to mention braless and panty-less. I shake my head, what a bumpkin! Thankfully, it is early Saturday and most people will no doubt still be in bed.

The elevator doors open and I almost crash into a group of men and their golf clubs.

Oh, shit! I'd forgotten what a bunch of lunatics golfers are! Six a.m. and they are already on the move!

"Excuse me please! Excuse me!" I murmur as I run the gauntlet of colorful golf outfits and outrageous hats, getting a few good-natured whistles as I squeeze past.

Despite my ridiculously inadequate outfit, none of them says anything, perhaps afraid that any distraction may cause them to miss the shuttle.

I wave and run by the two busboys setting up the outdoor cafe and on to the docks, sprinting past the tethered boats as I race my dolphins. For a moment I was afraid I had missed them, but first one and then another sneeze-like spray of water announces their arrival.

"Oh, you are so lovely!" I gush as I stand and marvel at their sleek gracefulness. They angle away from the pier, perhaps sensing me, but to my delight, they stop and cavort about in the bay across. Up close, they are even more impressive with huge, solid

bodies of raw power. They chase each other with lightning forays into the deep, and then shoot up to streak along the surface. I giggle at their antics and joyous celebration of life.

They seem to bring the scent of the deep ocean with them, dark and mysterious, but fascinating and challenging as well.

“You are surely God’s creature!” I cross my arms over my beating heart, “The wonders you must’ve seen!”

I jump as a face bobs up to the surface, not ten feet from me. Smooth gray snout nods in the waves and the dark, unfathomable eyes gaze with glittering intelligence at me. Softly I kneel, afraid to startle him away as he looks with amusement at my earth-bound awkwardness.

“You can laugh, my beautiful one, you have seen so much I will never be able to see!”

His laughing eyes draw me into them and I lean with my hand out over the water. To my disappointment he sinks back into the waves but a moment later, something rubbery, and warm brushes my hand. His fin! He is rubbing his fin on my hand!

My heart threatens to burst through my chest as I chuckle gleefully. Oh, if only Todd and Kelly could be here!

Carefully I lie so I can reach his back and I scrape my nails along the smooth hard flesh there. No warm-blooded creature can resist a back-rub and my new friend is no exception - he quivers and squirms as I rake along his top fin, making raspberries through his blowhole.

I don’t know how long we enjoyed our contact but another gray form, darker, mottled and with more scars of the wild, surfaces and nudges him away.

“Oops, sorry Mommy!” I laugh, “I’m not going to steal Sonny from you! Although,” I sigh, “I’d elope with him if I could!”

I wave sadly as Sonny looks back one more time at me, “Bye, sweetie, think of me now and then!”

They rejoin the pod and swim off. I stand, still waving slowly as they disappear from view.

“Are you alright Miss?” the boy from the hotel asks.

“Yes, I’m fine,” I smile, “Just saying goodbye to a friend.”

Chapter 11

Todd woke up around 6:30 by nature's own alarm clock. As he went to relieve himself, he realized that Laura was not in the room. After taking care of the more pressing urge, he found the note Laura had left behind.

"Hi guys!

Gone to see the dolphins.

Miss me!

Love you!"

Todd walked to the balcony and was surprised to see Laura sitting alone at the end of the pier seemingly surrounded by dolphins. Waking Kelly up he showed her the sight as he took out his camera and mounted a 400 – 600mm zoom sports lens.

Kelly smiled at the sight of Laura. "I wonder what it is about her?"

"I think it's because she loves unconditionally," said Todd, "and I think only little children and animals have the ability to recognize that."

Kelly sat back with a cigarette and watched as Todd took pictures.

Todd mounted the camera with the heavy lens on a tripod and with a remote shutter release snapped off pictures as he saw something interesting. It was a pretty sight. Laura filled a corner of the frame and dolphins, their shadows and fins slicing through the clear water haloing ripples, filled the rest.

"Between Anna and Laura and Peter's requests, I'm going to have a lot of developing to do when we get back," he said, "And who knows what else I'll find of interest this weekend."

Kelly smiled at him. This is what Todd lived for. She gave him a kiss and said, "I'd love to stay and watch, but I need more sleep." Stopping only long enough to empty her own bladder, Kelly drifted back to the big bed and within minutes was fast asleep.

Todd watched Laura until the dolphins swam off, then packed up his equipment and waited for Laura's return.

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

Laura sat with the dolphins for the better part of an hour while the sun climbed above the horizon, then found her feet a little tender when she made it back to the hotel. She wished now she had taken a minute longer and slipped something on her feet. She realized that with just her shorts and a blouse she quickly became a topic of conversation with many of the men in the lobby, but thinking of how Kelly would handle it, she held

her head high and waited for a path to clear before her, with just the hint of a blush creeping into her cheeks from all the admiring glances she received.

As Laura got off the elevator, she was surprised and relieved to see the room door was open; she had not remembered to pick up a room key on her mad rush outside.

Laura grabbed a bottle of mineral water and joined Todd and his coffee on the balcony.

“You looked gorgeous out there,” he said to her.

“You saw me?” Laura asked.

“Watched you for about half an hour before the dolphins took off.”

“Oh Todd, it was so fantastic! I can’t begin to describe it to you.”

“You don’t have to, sweetheart, I can see it all over your face.”

Laura smiled and kissed him. “How’d I get to be so lucky?” she asked as she gently sat down on his lap.

“That’s funny, I was going to ask you the same thing! What did I do to deserve you?”

Her eyes misted over. “Tell me I’m not dreaming, Todd. Pinch me and let me know this is real. I could flip burgers the rest of my life and never leave Charlotte just as long as I can share part of you.”

Todd wrapped his arms around her and gently pinched her arm. “You aren’t dreaming, Baby.”

They sat gently snuggling on the balcony watching the harbor come to life.

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

Kelly slid out of bed.

“Damn, it’s only 8:30. I hate mornings,” she grumbled as she slid on one of Todd’s t-shirts. She liked the bigger size and the comfort and especially knowing it would be on Todd’s body later. It had long been a standing joke between them. He complained that she deformed his T’s with her boobs. She countered with the fact that her itty-bitty titties couldn’t dent the air! But in truth, Todd had always enjoyed her lingering scent.

Todd held a finger to his lips as Kelly stepped out on the balcony. Laura was asleep in his arms.

Kelly gave Todd a light kiss on the head and headed back inside to put on a pot of tea and to get their vitamins and go-juice out. As the tea steeped, she checked her cell phone for messages and decided she could probably last the day without recharging the batteries but would have to remember to plug it in tonight.

“Hi there Dr. Dolittle,” she said as a yawning Laura made her way inside towing Todd behind her.

Laura blushed.

“So, what’s up for today, Kell?” Todd asked.

“I’ve got to drop off the pictures and a package with Sara, find a working computer and see about our little venture and if I have any time left before lunch, I’m going to see about spreading your reputation around, Sweetheart. This place has opportunity written all over it for a talented, handsome photographer like you. I just have to convince them.”

Todd laughed. “You don’t think I’ve got enough work to do?”

“Honey... I’m only trying to find more of the kind of work you really enjoy. Besides, a bit of time on this island would be a nice change.”

“Look out, Todd, Kelly’s in business mode,” Laura said with a laugh.

“And what do my favorite lovers have planned for this morning?” Kelly asked.

“Laura found a brochure on one of those costume photo studios last night, and I called the owner and arranged for us to have it for a couple of hours,” Todd said. “I think it might be good practice for her to do some quick changes before she gets to New York to do it for real.”

“Excellent idea!” said Kelly.

“Gee guys... I just wanted a picture of me dressed like Scarlett O’Hara,” Laura pouted.

“Baby, you’ve got to accept the fact that from now on, when you are in front of a camera, you’re working!” Todd said.

“What time’s your appointment?” asked Kelly.

“10 o’clock. We booked the studio for two hours. Maybe we can meet up for lunch,” Todd said. “It’s not that far from the Marina.”

“Make sure your batteries are charged,” Kelly said, pointing to her phone. “I’ll call you after 12 or you can give me a ring when you’re done.”

“I better get myself dolled up then,” said Laura, “but first I need a quick shower to clean up. I kind of forgot my shoes in my rush this morning.”

“You better take care of those tender tootsies, sweetheart. You don’t want to take chances with the tools of your profession. Jorge would be very unhappy.”

Laura dropped her head a bit. “I’m sorry Kell, I wasn’t thinking.”

“It’s okay, sweetheart. You didn’t damage anything, but you do need to be careful. It takes a bit of time getting used to the life of a model. Now how about I order us up some breakfast and then give you a hand with your make-up?”

“Thanks, Kelly. I’ll only be a few minutes.”

After breakfast, the trio walked arm in arm over to the “Reliving History” photo studio. Kelly had used all her professional tricks of accenting and highlighting Laura’s features to ensure the photos would have a pro model in them.

Kelly saw the sign for ‘Short Creek Marina’ and kissed Todd and Laura goodbye.

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

The owner of “Reliving History” was waiting outside of his studio.

“Todd Ayres?” asked the short stocky man.

“Yes, and you must be Stan,” Todd said shaking the man’s outstretched hand.

“Stan the Man, that’s me. I told my sales staff to take the morning off and put a sign in the window saying I’d be closed till noon. Hey what’s with the big Tourister case?”

“Just my portable travel kit. My Blad, a couple of lens, flash... you know, the standard stuff.”

They slipped in the side door and Todd opened the case, pulled out his camera, and slid the ice packs aside to get at his film.

“Wow!” said Stan. “Temperature sensitive film. The only time I’ve ever seen that was in that Clint Eastwood movie.”

“Bridges of Madison County,” said Laura.

“Yeah, that’s the one.”

“I never travel without a cold pack,” said Todd. “This film is very unforgiving. I know photographers who adjust processing time for temperature variables, but I think you lose consistency, and there are some shots you never get a chance to take over.”

“God, I can’t believe I’m going to get a chance to see the ‘Main Man’ at work. I was on chat with some of my buddies last night and I could have sold tickets to this.”

“I don’t do well in front of crowds,” Todd said. “Especially other photographers... it’s too much of a distraction. It’s you and the model and the only thing that binds you together is the lens.”

“I suppose,” Stan shrugged, “but I’m totally digital here. The people want to dress up in costumes and relive an era. I’ve got a good camera, the best lights totally balanced for 6500K, I let them pick out a costume and move around a bit for 15 minutes while I shoot off 20 or 30 frames and then my sales people just dump the whole thing into the computer. Five minutes later the customer picks out the one they like the best. They pay a minimum of \$50 and they get one print for that. My sales guys are trained to sell them other poses in 8 x 10 color glossies for \$20 apiece. Easy money. People that come here have money and think nothing of dropping a couple of hundred.”

Todd silently sighed. "So we're here for the weekend and my girlfriend has this desire to be Scarlett. Have you got anything suitable for her in that line?"

Laura blushed a bit. This was the first time Todd had referred to her as his girlfriend in public.

"Scarlett?" Stan asked. "You bet. I've got the classic Scarlett from the opening scenes, the Green Curtain Scarlett and the famous "I swear to God" Scarlett." He pulled aside a sliding door that led to a dressing room. "Take your pick," he said to Laura. "One size fits all. You just slide your arms into the sleeves and the Velcro tabs on the back will instantly size you."

Todd had been assembling his camera and had mounted it on his own tripod plugging the flash adapter into Stan's strobe banks.

Stan pulled down a backdrop that duplicated a fuzzy, seemingly distant Tara. "How's that for an authentic souvenir snap shot?"

Laura saw Todd's eye twitch. "I think, if you don't mind, I would prefer something that's a bit less colorful," she said. "Todd, I'm thinking of the ivory one from Ashley's wedding. What do you think would make me stand out more?"

Todd's eye stopped twitching. Thank God Laura had brains. He was about to call it all off. Pompous and arrogant people that wanted to tell him how to shoot he had dealt with a lot. It was one of the primary reasons he had been so open to change when Kelly had suggested they open their own agency and studio.

With a wink at Laura, he turned back to Stan. "Sorry Stan, but Laura is a model as well. She knows what works best to suit her complexion and whatever she is wearing. You wouldn't happen to have a mottled brown background, would you?"

Shaking his head, Stan wound the Tara background back up and pulled down a nondescript plain smudged looking backdrop. "This came with the unit along with a couple of other standards," he said. "I never use them myself cause the patterns show up."

"I guess that's a problem with limited aperture settings," Todd said. "No problem, Stan, I can compensate for that."

Todd helped Laura do up the Velcro tabs pulling tightly on them to 'custom fit' the costume on to her, then moved her four feet further forward than Stan's floor markings. With Stan's consent, Todd adjusted the lights and fired them a few times manually to ensure they captured Laura without casting shadows on her.

Back behind the camera, he said "Okay, Babe, do your thing."

Laura turned and squinted her eyes tightly then pivoted on one foot, her hair moving and eyes wide open with a look of innocence. Todd shot one A-12 magazine during which Laura changed her pose in a variety of ways. She really was a natural and Todd could anticipate when the moment was going to be right.



Slipping the finished magazine off the Blad, he suggested Laura try another costume. As she went to change, Stan asked, "Is it true that Kate is a nudist?"

These were the questions Todd hated to be asked. "She's a top fashion model. I'm afraid I don't know much about her private life. I've only shot her with clothes on."

"Damn. Now you've ruined my dreams, Todd. I was thinking of trying some fashion work cause I figured it would be a great way to meet some of these babes. Don't you get your pick from the best of them? I mean... with your reputation and all."

Todd was holding his feelings deep inside. Laura wanted this and he wasn't going to let this little Napoleon ruin her time here. In sotto voce, he said, "Yeah, if you're interested, there're are a lot of top models that will jump at the chance to hop in the sack with you. They want to curry favor hoping you give them preferential treatment over the other girls." What he didn't add was that most of them did it out of boredom.

"Ah, Right!" Stan said. "I figured you were being careful not to say anything in front of your girlfriend. Is she really a model? I haven't seen her in anything."

"Oh, she's a real model, but she's an exclusive to a company that does specialty clothes. Check out the fall issues of the major women's magazines if you like."

"Seems the place is overrun with models this weekend," Stan said. "While I was waiting for you I heard a bunch of guys talking about going to the marina cause there's supposed to be like, half a dozen models there for some boat promotion."

"Really?" said Todd not letting on he knew the James Gang. "Maybe I'll wander over there later on and scope things out. Never know when opportunity will strike."

"Yeah. Maybe I should grab my camera and head over there right now," Stan said. "You don't need me here for a while, do you? I might be back before you leave, but if I'm not," he snickered and winked, "then you know I got lucky! I'll just tell them that I'm the official photographer for Brookhaven. That ought to impress them!"

"Hey, no problem Stan. Is the door self locking in case you don't get back before I pack up?"

"Nah... it's a dead bolt, but I'll give you a key. After you leave just lock the door and slip the key through the mail slot."

"Luck to you, Stan!"

"Thanks, man!" Stan said as he waddled off grabbing a camera along the way.

"Idiot," Todd mumbled under his breath as 'Stan the Man' went out the door

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

Kelly continued on the path to the marina. It seemed a lot of people were headed that way. As she passed by the barricade separating the parking lot from the rest of the

island, screeching tires coming down the driveway startled her. A bright red convertible flung itself around and stopped inches from the “No Automobiles Beyond This Point” sign, with a familiar blonde behind the wheel.

A guard stormed out of the security booth, “Hey you! Can’t you read? No Park...” he faltered as Celeste looked coldly at him, “Er, no parking...” he tried again but faded as Celeste handed him her car keys.

“Bring the package, would you? Please?” She blinked her eyes and the man rushed to obey.

“Hi, Celeste!” Kelly said to the blonde beauty, laughing as she watched the guard struggle with what was obviously a heavy and awkward box.

“Kelly!” She cried and ran to give her a big hug, “You’re looking good!”

“So do you!” Kelly kissed her on the cheeks. They held each other at arm’s length, laughing at their identical outfits: shorts and shirts, except Celeste had hers unbuttoned most of the way.

“Don’t you feel overdressed?” Celeste laughed as she helped Kelly undo a couple of buttons.

“Enough!” Kelly stopped her, “Everyone is watching already!”

“Hey, they’ll look at you anyway! You’re hot!”

“That’s a nice car, Celeste,” said Kelly trying to change the direction of Celeste’s attention.

“Thanks, it’s a Solara SLE,” Celeste said.

“Sounded like a muscle car when you pulled in,” said Kelly.

Celeste laughed. “It’s got a V6 - 3 liter DOHC and delivers 198 horses at my command.”

Kelly laughed.

“What’s so funny?” Celeste asked.

“I just had a vision of you in a black leather outfit. Micro mini, studded bra, knee high boots with 6 inch heels and a whip in your hand.”

“Hmm... I could do that,” Celeste said.

“You’d look gorgeous.”

As they continued to walk along Celeste looked around. “You know, you’re right. They’re staring just a bit more than usual.”

“Well, I suppose that since this is a boating haven people recognize you from the catalog.”

“No... I see that, but you’re being looked at...” “She checked around, suddenly she giggled, “Like James does at a 20 ounce Porterhouse!”

“Thanks Celeste, but I doubt anybody recognizes me. I haven’t been in print since 1997.”

“I’m telling you, girl, a bunch of these older guys, they’re looking at you like they know you.”

“I... oh-oh.”

“What?” Celeste asked. “Give it up. What did you do?”

Kelly blushed. “Damn. I should have clued in. Duh. This is a sports and recreational island. Sherri’s dad said he remembered me as well.”

“Come on, Kelly... what’s the rest of the story?”

Kelly snickered. “I was the center spread on the swim suit edition of Sports International back in ‘95.”

“Really? Wow, cool! Were you wearing a real tiny bikini?”

“No,” Kelly said smiling, “I was just wearing a one piece outfit.”

“Oh, like one of those real tight ones like that old lifeguard show?”

“No, actually it was just a single piece of material that barely covered my butt.”

Celeste chortled.

“Don’t say anything, okay, Celeste? Don’t tell the others.”

“Why? Did you turn modest all of a sudden or is it just because you were ‘em-bare-assed’ by it?” Celeste said laughing.

Kelly gave her a look that said she didn’t find the crack funny. “No, it’s just that when people find out, they look at me differently.”

“No problem, Kelly, I won’t say anything, but...” she stopped Kelly, took her by the shoulders and carefully checked her over, “I believe you’re right! They’re like wow! Way cool!”

Kelly reached over and slapped Celeste on her cute ass. “I’ll fix you, young lady!”

Celeste was howling now, “Just remember... I’m the one you see in leather! And I’ve got the whip!”

The growing crowd suddenly slowed their progress.

“Gee. I’ve never tried to intimidate a crowd before,” Celeste said, “Think we can squeeze through?”

“Watch this,” Kelly said as she walked right up to the edge of the congested area. With one hand on her hip, she spread her legs slightly and tilted her head to the left and slightly upward, not even looking at the crowd but with an expression of clear indifference on her face. As if by magic, the crowd slowly parted like the sea had done for Moses. She took Celeste by the arm and they walked through. The guard struggled valiantly to keep up.

“Wow. That was really cool,” said Celeste. “I’m going to have to learn that one!”

A cute young girl came running up to them.

“Kelly and Celeste?”

“Yep, that be us,” Kelly said.

“I’m Lucy. James asked me to take you to the boat.”

Celeste shrugged. “She knows us, she knows James...”

“I’m with you. Let’s blow this Popsicle stand.”

Celeste started laughing again. “Jeez, Kelly, you’re not even ten years older than me and yet you talk a whole different language.”

“Too many years of being on the road and picking up bad habits,” Kelly said smiling. “It’s the common lingo of old souls of Rock and Roll.” Softly, under her breath Kelly started singing “Drift Away” to herself.

*“Oh, give me the beat, boys, to soothe my soul;
I wanna get lost in your rock and roll
and drift away...”*

They spotted the boat, and Kelly realized what the crowd out front had been waiting for. Sara and Sherri were sitting on the side signing autographs, as were James and Jules.

Kelly paused for a minute and marveled again at this group of kids. They were all taking this in stride. They earned their reputations by doing things and thinking of more things to do. They all should be role models for the “what’s in it for me” kids that seemed so prevalent in today’s society. These kids all had drive. They were motivated by challenges, not hindered by them. The James Gang.

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

Laura emerged from the dressing room with the most famous of the Scarlett dresses, the one made of the green curtains. As she approached Todd for help doing up the Velcro strips, she asked, “Where’s Stan?”

“He’s gone to see if he can get lucky with one of the girls from the James Gang. They’re here this weekend as well.”

“Aren’t they around the same age as Brenda?” Laura asked.

“Two are, I think. But I’m sure that Amanda and Sherri are younger.”

“You and Kelly keep referring to them as the James Gang. The other night Kelly told me the story about all these girls attached to one guy. How many are there?”

Todd laughed. “Let me see. You met Amanda and Brenda, then there’s JulieAnn, her sister Celeste, Sara and Sherri, all in their teens, and then there’s Nicole, the oldest, but still in her mid-20’s.”

“This James must be something really special. How old is he?”

“I think about the same age as Brenda.”

“And Stan thinks he’s going to get lucky with one of them? Hah! He’s a dirty old man!”

“Well,” said Todd, “some people might think I’m a dirty old man too. I’m nearly ten years older than you.”

“No way, no chance Todd. I’m old enough to vote, but Stan, he’s got to be pretty close to forty and he’s fat and out of shape.”

“But he’s the official photographer for this island,” Todd said, “at least that’s what he told me.”

Laura gave Todd a gentle kiss. “Let him keep the island,” she whispered in his ear, “you’ve got me and Kelly.”

“Damn. Kelly’s down there, too!” Laura said. Then she laughed. “Oh I’d love to see him try to put a move on her!”

Todd laughed as well. “Come on, Scarlett. Let’s do this and get out of here.”

“We can leave now if you want, Rhett,” she drawled. “Suddenly this doesn’t seem so interesting any more.”

“It’s okay, Sweetheart, I’ve already got the film on the camera and you’re already wearing the dress. Let’s do this and pretend that there aren’t more assholes like him floating around.”

For the next half hour Laura went through every Scarlett dress that “Reliving History” had on hand and a few other costumes as well.

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

“So tell me, how did you do that with the crowd?” Celeste asked as they walked to the boat. “What’s the secret?”

“It’s no secret, really, Celeste. Every runway model has to learn it in time. When you’re trying to get everybody’s attention you have to pretend they don’t exist at all. Be right in front of them and then ignore them knowing only that the world is looking at you.”

“I can do that. I ignore people all the time.” Celeste laughed.

Celeste tried a half dozen times and ways to ignore Kelly but would fall victim to the old “Catch-22” of sneaking a look to see if it was working.

“You’ll get it, Celeste,” said Kelly; “You just have to learn how to feel it when you have everybody’s attention. It takes practice.”

As they approached the boat Kelly waved at the four gang members. It was fun to watch them signing autographs. Celeste allowed the guard to place the box on the dock and then dismissed him with a smiling “Thank You.”

The group of autograph seekers dwindled quickly and Kelly looked back and saw Brookhaven staff turning people away. “Keep them wanting for more,” she thought to herself.

Then Kelly had to stifle a laugh. Celeste had taken charge of the gang and roused them in a military formation for inspection. She stood back as Celeste hugged and kissed her way down the line.

Kelly went and gave Sara a kiss, whispering in her ear, “I’ve got a secret package from Chuck for you. I don’t know what it is, but...” she slipped her hand into her pocket and pulled out the plain brown paper bag containing the vial-like object. “Mission accomplished!”

“Yep, good stuff! Worth like 2-300 bucks on the street!” Sara said, as she sniffed the package Kelly just handed her.

She looked at Kelly, “Well, aren’t you going to ask me what it is?”

“With real friends, I don’t ask.”

“Damn it, girl, sometimes you’re no fun at all!”

“Besides,” Kelly grinned, “Chuck would never have asked me if it was the least bit controversial!”

“This is our secret ingredient for the Ribs Cook-off this weekend!” Sara explained, “Saffron from Chuck’s garden.”

“I figured as much!” Kelly laughed, “Now for the really important parcel!” She handed a thick package to her, watching Sara’s face light up in child-like joy as she saw Todd’s picture of herself.

“Like it?” Kelly whispered.

“Oh my GOD! This is so awesome!” Sara cried with quaking voice, “Thank you, thank you so much!” She ran up to the others, “Look at me, look!”

“Yeah, wow!” Lucy said, looking at the photo, “Sara... she’s GORGEOUS!” She looked at Kelly, “Did you take this?”

“My partner Todd did it, see? That’s his name here... He says it’s his best shot of the year, and our client is crazy about it!”

Sara and Jules had cornered Sherri behind James in what appeared to be a groping session. Kelly hugged Lucy tightly.

“What ARE they doing?” Lucy asked, trying to squirm out of Kelly’s embrace.

“Sherri’s got something in her shirt, they’re helping her!” Celeste laughed.

“Sure!” Lucy scoffed.

“Ah, you must excuse them.” Celeste said, as she and Kelly watched the girls tussle and giggle around James. “And this is for you... Release forms for Erin’s gymnast friends.”

Kelly sighed looking at the other girls, “You know, I’ve never really appreciated that sharing happiness can be so rewarding, until now that is.” She looked at Celeste, “The sad truth is that there are way too many people in this world who enjoy causing others pain.”

“Yeah, I think so.” Celeste said slowly, “There’s no such thing as too much happiness, but sometimes, even a little sadness is too much...”

“So, my lovelies,” Kelly hugged Lucy and Celeste, “It means we all have to do our little bit to try and make someone else happy. Although, sometimes I wonder if those guys aren’t generating too much happiness!” She laughed as they watched them fooling around behind James.

~~~~~ //

“You know, Laura,” Todd said, “Changing wardrobe won’t be this easy at Jorge’s. You’ll probably spend an hour getting fitted and pinned before Mike takes his first shot. This stuff here is meant to induce speed as a profit maker.”

“Yeah, I know,” said Laura as she slipped out of the Confederate soldier costume she had put on as a lark. “But tell me... how do the runway models change so fast?”

“Good point,” said Todd as he started to take apart his camera. “On the catwalk, most of the clothes are made for each specific model. And made in a way that they can easily slip them on and off. Then you’ve got all the people backstage that you never see who fix makeup as you walk, and can curl your hair as you slip on an outfit. There are a lot of trained professionals working behind the scenes.”

“Oh. So the ‘ready to wear’ is only that ready to wear if you have help!” she laughed.

“I don’t think the public that watches the fashion scene really cares about that. Those clothes will rarely ever see a normal store where real people shop.”

“Yeah, but then what about the stuff from Sears? How come when I get it, it never looked as good as it did when I ordered it from the catalog?”

Todd stopped his packing for a minute. “Now that’s a fine line,” he said. “The clothes worn by the models must be off the rack and they aren’t allowed to be tailored to suit the models. But... that rule doesn’t apply to pins and tape.”

“Pins and tape?”

“Yep,” he said as he resumed his packing. “You get the catalog and the pictures you see are flat. You can’t see the back or the sides. So when a model gets into one of those outfits, they have people slapping duct tape on their backs to pull in a couple of inches for form fitting and pins on the sides to lift or tighten seams.”

“But you said that I would be getting pinned at Jorge’s as well. I thought he was like the king of a home shopping Business Empire. And now you’re telling me he uses the same gimmicks?”

“No, Sweetheart, Jorge wouldn’t stand for that. Besides, his sales associates, the ones that put on the home parties and display the clothes have to take the clothes with them. When I said you’d be getting pinned, that’s just hems. The regular stuff that people have to do with clothes anyway. There are a lot of women who probably have the same basic build as you, but they might be an inch or two shorter or some might be a bit taller.”

Laura paused and thought for a minute. “I’m glad you and Kelly got me hooked up with Jorge. I know mom adores his clothes, and I don’t think I’d want to be part of a scam.”

Todd laughed. “Hey, we get a lot of work for our models from Sears and companies like them. That’s why Kelly takes care of that part of the business. I don’t think we have too many models that do full outfits for major catalogs but we do have a lot that do special parts work.”

“Say what?”

“Special parts. Like necks or hands or breasts. Stuff like that. We have some that only do legs and feet.”

“You’re telling me that TKO has models that only do boob shots? Like in bras?” Laura asked.

“Yes, that we do. We have quite a few in perfect cup sizes and with flawless skin.”

“Now THAT is something I would love to put on a resume!” Laura laughed. “Qualifications... perfect tits!”

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

“That’s the sea-wing that Sherri designed for the boat. It’s made from a miracle metal that’s poised to sweep the industry,” Jules explained to Kelly and Lucy as she

pointed at the gleaming statuette Celeste was holding. “It’s over two times stronger and more resilient than steel or titanium alloys.”

“What do you call it again?” Lucy asked.

“It’s called PhaseMetal, but it’s really a mix of a lot of different metals. The lab people call it Betty-Z,” Jules laughed, “because it’s mostly made up of Beryllium, Titanium and Zirconium. You should look them up in your encyclopedia!” she said to Lucy.

“To show you how strong it is,” She pulled out a penknife, “This blade was injection molded from PhaseMetal, and after it cools...” she used it to draw a deep gouge in a sheet-metal sign, “it keeps its edge, never needing to be sharpened.” Jules picked up the carton left by Celeste, who had disappeared with James. “Why don’t we take this to lunch - the rest of the toys are for the parents.”

Sara and Sherri stopped on their way to install the ‘wing’ on the boat.

Kelly turned to Sherri, “Hey there, kiddo,” she said with a hug. “Todd and I went to meet your parents.”

“You shouldn’t have gone to that trouble!” Sherri said. “They’re here this weekend, you could have waited.”

“Actually, we didn’t know ~~we~~ we were going to be here,” Kelly said, “But I think it’s better we met them privately first anyway. They’re nice people and they think a lot of you.”

“Yeah” said Sherri, “They were really impressed with you and Todd as well. I don’t think they believed it was a real offer until you guys showed up.”

“It sure is. What we have to do now is set you up for a portfolio shoot with Todd. We promised your folks that for the next couple of years he’d either be doing the shots or one of us would be there if you go on location. We’ll make arrangements soon, okay?”

“Okay, Kelly, see you later!”

Jules spoke up. “Brenda said that you were coming up early. Is Todd here at Peter’s request?”

Kelly turned back to business, “Yes, Peter wants him to take some pictures of... I guess this would be the boat that’s ‘going to turn some heads’ as he put it? Is that what the crowd was doing here and why you guys were signing autographs?”

“Yep, the new JamPC improved IC Monster Cuddy. She’s a crowd pleaser alright.”

“JulieAnn, could I bother you to check on a stock price for me?”

“Sure,” Jules led them into the office, “Which one?”

“InterCoastal,” Kelly said.

Jules stopped and looked at her. “Are you thinking of buying shares?”

“Not really. We already bought some, but a friend, actually our company lawyer, called me yesterday afternoon and said I should check the current price. He sounded a bit enthused, so I promised him I would take a look.”

Jules punched in the numbers and said, “It closed yesterday at \$58 a share.”

“I guess he was right. It’s taken a real climb from when we bought in.”

“Kelly... Why did you and Todd buy IC stock?”

Kelly laughed. “I suppose because JamPC isn’t public! Todd and I, well we just wanted to share in something you guys were involved in.”

“You know, Kelly, if you’re looking to make some quick money on this, you should maybe start selling in a week or so. Then you can buy back when it takes that little backslide as it settles into a slower but steady climb.”

“Thanks, JulieAnn, but Todd and I, we don’t play the stocks. We have some and they’re steady performers. It’s just to help diversify our assets. Most of our money is in GIC’s. For us this is just some fun money. We think if you guys are involved it’s bound to prove our belief in you guys and what we think you can accomplish.”

“That’s really sweet, Kelly.”

“Now I better get a move on. I’ve got some stuff to do before I hook up with Todd and Laura at lunch time.”

“Why don’t you get them and join us at the Clubhouse for lunch. Then you can meet Sara and Brenda’s parents. I know that Sara’s folks will want to meet you guys, and you already know Sherri’s folks.”

“Thanks, JulieAnn. I’ll ask Todd.”

“And I know that some of us are dying to meet Laura. Brenda said she was something special.”

Kelly laughed. “Yes, that she is!”

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

Todd was just sliding the strobe flash units back into their original spots when Stan returned from the marina. Laura had just stepped out to see if she could find a couple of cold drinks nearby.

“Fucking cunts,” he said as he slammed his camera down.

Todd felt the hair on his neck start to bristle. “Who’s that, Stan?”

“Them stuck up bitches who call themselves models, the ones at the marina.”

Todd was now seriously intent on finding out what had happened and if Stan had used language like that around any of them. “What happened?” he asked.

“I got there and I was told that autographs were done for the day. Goddamn Brookhaven staff too. So, I reminded them that I’ve been here over ten years and I’m the island’s only full time photographer. You think they gave a shit? Stupid jerks.”

“So you didn’t get a chance to see them at all?” Todd asked.

“Not in person I didn’t. But one of the staff showed me a catalog they were in. Damn, they looked hot.”

“It sounds like your problem is with the staff then, not the models.”

“Nah, I sat down and wrote a note explaining that I was the official photographer for the island but the assholes wouldn’t even take it to them. Said that the mayor himself had left specific instructions. Wait till I talk to him!”

“Then why are you calling the models names?”

“Because they’re the ones who had to have said how long they would be available for autographs. Stuck up bitches.”

Laura picked the wrong time to return to the souvenir photo stand.

“Who’re the stuck up bitches?” she asked.

“Them cunts down at the marina. Think they’re something special. They’ll be forgotten in a couple of years, but I’ll still be going strong.”

Laura bristled. “Those ‘cunts’ as you call them happen to be friends of mine,” she said.

Stan turned to Todd. “You know them? Couldn’t you clear it for me to get some cheesecake shots?”

Todd picked up his case. “The way you talk about women? Forget it!”

“Hey, you owe me. I let you have the run of my studio.”

Todd put down the case and pulled his wallet out of his pocket. He slowly peeled off five hundreds but instead of handing them to Stan he tossed them on the floor.

“Chump change.”

“You know, Stanley, the pictures you saw in the catalog? I took them. Those girls probably gave up precious time to sign autographs. One of them happens to be an architect, and at least four of them work as design specialists. And I know for a fact that one of the girls is going to be the hottest thing on the catwalks in Europe in two years.”

“You’ve got yourself a nice racket going here. A 4-gig Minolta dImage, hell, any moron can operate that. Then you’ve got a decent computer that your sales staff runs and a color laser printer. The entire cost of the equipment is just spit in the wind compared to what I carry in this case, and this is just my travel case.”

“You asked earlier about Kate... I was the photographer she chose to take the pictures of her first baby as she delivered it. You know why she wanted me? Cause I’ve known her for a long time and she trusts me and knows I respect her.”

“You’ll be around a long time, Stanley, because all you are ever going to be is a cheap tourist trap. You hustle for nickels and dimes. My girlfriend here will clear more in four weeks of work than you will in a year.”

“Guys like you cheapen the art of photography. You’re a hack with a toy. The only kind of artist you’ll ever be is a con artist. You rely on chintzy backgrounds and cheap costumes. People can barely recognize themselves for all the background clutter.”

“When you get on chat tonight to bitch to your online buddies you can tell them that I said if they don’t learn to treat models with respect and take pictures for the love of the craft, instead of the lure of easy cash or a cheap lay, they’ll never get any farther than you... and that’s not much of a career goal.”

“But you know what the real difference is, Stanley. Up until yesterday, I had never heard of you, but you knew me by name and reputation. In the world outside of this little island you are a nobody, and your customers probably forget your name before they get out the door.”

“Before you ever gain any respect, you’re going to have to show it first, but I don’t think you have the ability. You’re just a contaminant in the gene pool.”

Todd picked up his case and headed to the door. “Come on, Laura. Let’s go before we have to watch him get a dictionary out to look up the words with more than two syllables!”

At the door, Laura turned back to Stan the Man. “And I would suggest you get those costumes cleaned once in a while. They stink like putrid garbage.”

Stan the Man watched as Todd and Laura walked out the door. His mouth was still hanging open.

~~~~~ // ~~~~~

“Hi, Kelly?”

“Hi, Todd,” she answered. “Are you still at that studio?”

“No, Laura and I are back at the hotel. We came back to drop off the equipment.”

“Good. We’ve been invited to lunch with Brenda, Sara, and Sherri’s parents. We’re just about ready to go. Are you and Laura up to it?”

Todd turned to Laura, “Want to meet more of the James Gang?” he said with a smile.

“Yeah, I’d like that!”

“Okay Kelly, where at?”

“It’s called the Clubhouse. The hotel has regular shuttles running over, or you can ask at the front desk and they’ll run you over in one of their golf carts.”

“Okay, we’ll head over that way now. See you soon, Babe!”

To be continued...