

Kelly

(Inspired by Mike C, based on characters in his novel: “James”
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Chapter 29

Todd was at it early Friday morning. He had left with Ami and Cara shortly after the sun had come up, and they were at the studio before 8:00. Todd had quietly slipped out of bed leaving his two lovers to embrace each other in sleep as he dressed, ate with Ami and Cara, and driven to the studio. Vanetta had come down when she heard the door open and helped Todd as he worked on the gymnasts’ make-up. Then the girls had gone into action.

Robert came down at 9:00 and had breakfast with Vanetta before he headed out the door to get a loaner van from Eric.

Kelly and Laura had slept late after their special day out at the spa and when they arrived at the studio, they found Ami and Cara switching poses nearly as fast as the CrossTrain outfits, and Todd had already gone through four A-12 magazines. Vanetta had been helping Todd out with the girls’ makeup and hair. Todd had said it was important that they look natural, so very little was needed in that department other than liner and charcoal to help define their faces.

When Kelly and Laura arrived at 10:00, Kelly took over adjusting makeup and hair. Todd knew he should have waited for her, but he was eager to get this job done. There were so many things happening in their lives right now that he felt a bit pressured to complete this extensive assignment.

By 11:00, Todd had shot six of the magazines and called for a break.

“You girls are starting to look tired,” he said to Cara and Ami.

“We’re fine, we can keep right on going,” said Cara as she stripped out of another outfit. Todd stopped her and replaced the A-12 on the back of his ‘Blad’ with the Polaplus and shot a picture of her in the buff, leaning against the vault.

Both Ami and Cara had changed in front of Todd so many times already this morning that it felt stranger to be dressed than nude, and Cara casually waited to see the results of the instant photo.

“Shit, Cara. You look wasted!” said Ami. “Your face looks all drawn and your eyes are lifeless!”

Cara looked at the photo, and sadly nodded. “I think a break would do me good,” she finally said. “And some carbs!”

Kelly laughed at them and told them to take a leisurely shower, and when they were done, she would have something full of energy to boost them back up again.

As the two gymnasts left the bay, not bothering to dress, just slipping on Ts, Kelly turned to Todd. “They don’t look that bad, Todd,” she said looking at the picture. “How did you manage this?”

Todd smiled and showed Kelly the exposure meter. “I deliberately overexposed her by two F-stops,” he said. “I don’t want them getting worn out, and they’d keep on working till the job was done. I want them to take a break!”

“You’re a good man, Todd Ayres,” she said as she kissed him on the cheek.

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Kelly and Laura had arrived home late the night before and found Todd asleep on the sofa, static on the TV screen, a half naked girl cuddled up on each side of him, their arms wrapped around him.

“I told you those schoolgirls in those little uniforms would steal his heart,” said Kelly to Laura. Both of them giggled.

“Should we let them sleep?” Laura asked.

“I don’t know,” said Kelly. “I wouldn’t want Ami and Cara to be stiff tomorrow. Todd’s going to be doing their CrossTrain shoot.”

Laura giggled and using just her hands made some suggestions to Kelly, who in turn started to giggle.

They moved behind the sofa and Laura started to stroke Cara’s waist and breasts, while Kelly stroked Ami’s cheek, neck, slowly moving her way down to Ami’s nipples, which were now puckered.

Both Cara and Ami moaned softly in their sleep and cuddled closer to Todd, their own hands dreamily stroking the body between them.

Kelly had to bite her hand to stop from laughing as a very visible tent was starting to appear in Todd’s shorts!

Laura just smiled and continued to stroke Cara until her moans became more pronounced, and she started to squirm on the sofa. Kelly bent over and gently nibbled on Ami's ear, which caused Ami to turn and start to reach for her lover.

Both Ami and Cara were still asleep and responding to unconscious stimuli, and as they turned towards each other, hands started to grope. They found each other's hand right in the middle, on top of Todd's erection!

Ami's eyes popped open with shock. Her hand was on something she had never felt before, and then she realized what it was!

Cara, for her part, was content to stroke the unusual growth till Ami whispered, "Cara! Look at what you're doing!"

Kelly and Laura had dropped to the floor behind the sofa, out of sight, and were struggling not to laugh. Todd managed to stay asleep throughout the entire exchange.

"Oh my God!" whispered Cara, her eyes as big as Ami's.

"Well, take your hand off of it before it explodes or something!" whispered Ami, carefully removing her hand from Cara's.

"It's big isn't it?" asked Cara.

"You're asking the wrong girl about that," said Ami. "You're the one who's seen one before."

"This is definitely bigger," Cara said.

Todd moaned in his sleep now that his hard on was no longer being fondled.

"Quick," said Ami, "let's get to bed before he wakes up!"

"That's not really fair to Todd," Cara said. "We did this to him."

"He'll live," said Ami. "Besides, Kelly and Laura should be home soon and they can take care of him."

With that the two gymnasts sprinted to their bedroom.

And Kelly and Laura had taken care of him. Though both very sated from their day at the spa, they couldn't let a good erection go to waste. They moved around to kneel in front of their fiancé, and as Kelly undid his shorts, Laura pulled his erection free and engulfed it with her mouth.

Todd moaned louder now, still deep in sleep. Kelly shook her head in wonder, and then bent forward to help Laura out, or more precisely, get her share of Todd's very potent baby making juice.

Between the two of them, it didn't take long before Todd climaxed, a load that was equally shared by his lovers. This time, when he climaxed, his eyes opened and he smiled at the two beauties kneeling in front of him. He pulled them both up to sit beside him on the sofa, kissing them both deeply and with passion before asking how their day had gone.

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Laura was busy scrambling eggs in the studio kitchen, while Kelly made a big pitcher of juice full of raw vegetables including lots of red beets. Vanetta finished the call she was making and came to see if she could help.

Robert returned shortly after 11:00, just in time to join the group for a drink of the concoction from the juicer. He told them that he had picked up a courtesy van, another luxury model. He could get used to this kind of life!

Toasted scrambled egg sandwiches with fresh sliced tomatoes on top were served to, and devoured in quick order by, Cara and Ami. Robert hadn't even given them a second glance when they entered after a long refreshing shower; wet hair combed back, and wearing clinging Ts to their still damp bodies, nipples prominently visible.

Robert was scheduled to pick up his 'band' at 12:00, and had been told by Meg that the "Williams Sisters" would try to be at the studio by noon. He had spent a better part of the night calling friends who had horses trying to find the best tack shop in town. The problem was that most of them shopped out of town, and he knew that Todd and Kelly supported local business first. His dad had suggested a number of stores that combined would provide him with what he needed. Of course they were all advertisers in his paper! But Robert had a list in hand, an afternoon with which to see how the boys of the band mixed with the sisters and a lunch to look forward to. Next week he would sit down with the two gymnasts and review their progress through their final year of high school, as he was quite serious about his teaching duties.

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Harry had traded shifts so he could have the morning off, and had loaded Meg and the girls into the car for a visit to "Muriel's Place."

The girls were excited, though not for quite the same reasons as their parents. They knew that this place they were going to look at was important to their folks, and they also knew they would be expected to help out, but what really had them excited was they were getting new clothes today!

Like Laura, neither Sam, Jen or even Kat would ever think to complain, but they had grown up wearing discount clothes from the seasonal sales racks. Today, Laura and Kelly had promised them designer name clothes, and the teacher they were supposed to meet today was taking them out for lunch and then to buy costumes to wear when they sang! Their mother had warned them not to ask for anything, but they had seen what their older sister was wearing, and how excited Todd had been when they sang. He had applauded the loudest and with the most enthusiasm, not giving a damn what any of the neighbors might think. He was a hot looking guy, and Kat especially felt a bit jealous of her older sister. But, she was happy for her as well. The last year had taken a lot out of Laura, and now she positively glowed with life and love.

Harry pulled into the big empty parking lot at the apartment building, and for a while, he and Meg just stared at it. The brick had been sandblasted and then coated, giving the building a rich look. They took a tour around the outside first, checking the lawns and gardens, while Harry mentally calculated how long it would take him each week to keep the grass trimmed. Todd had said they could contract it out, but Harry was looking forward to riding a rear-bagger and keeping the lawns as sharp looking as any golf course he had ever seen.

Meg was looking at the windows and the doorways, doing her own calculating. Then Harry, spinning the keys around on his finger, marched to the front door. With a flourish he opened it and ushered his family inside.

Meg gasped when she saw the hallways and the common room on the first floor. Instead of laying down tile, the builder had taken a lot of effort to pattern a motif on the floor out of polished and grouted stone. She understood that most of the first floor apartments were designated and built as handicapped units and she could see that this would make life much easier for anyone in a wheel chair. Cleaning it would be no problem, she thought, wondering what the other floors looked like.

In the main lobby, just across from the entrance there was a sign welcoming visitors to "Muriel's Place" and a picture of an elderly woman. There was grace in her features and the lines of age said more about laughter and happiness than it did about becoming old. She didn't need to see the photo credit at the bottom of the picture to know it was one of Todd's portraits.

Before risking the chance of falling in love with their brand new apartment, Meg, with clipboard in hand, insisted on a complete checklist of all the chores listed in the contract. She and Harry had decided on what they would subcontract, and a family discussion on sharing of work amongst the three sisters still living at home had followed.

Necessity had made Harry a handyman. He was good with plumbing and wiring, and often Lew would help him on jobs he couldn't do on his own. Talking with Lew after the family meeting, Harry and Meg were surprised to hear that Lew and his wife wanted to apply for an apartment. Harry had mentioned retiring after his 25 years were in, and Lew - who was close to 30 years of service - had expressed a bit of envy. Since

his accident, Lew had been looking for something, anything he could do besides ride a desk. There wasn't much of a future for Lew except learning to love to watch television.

Financially, Lew and his wife were going to be reasonably comfortable, owned their home, and their two kids had long ago finished school and were living on their own.

Lew had always been Harry's friend. When Harry had joined the force Lew had been his training officer, and a few years later, the two had been teamed up as partners. Their friendship had been strong since they first met. Now, nearly 25 years later, they were closer than most couples. It had nearly devastated Harry when the drunk had rammed Lew and forced him to a desk job. Hell, when Laura was born, Lew was the only choice to be her godfather.

Lew had suggested on the phone that if he and Sally could qualify to rent at the new place, Lew would be more than happy to help Harry out, and he'd gladly do it for free, just to have something to do.

Harry had promised to talk about it with Todd and Kelly. Technically, Lew wasn't severely handicapped, and Sally was a few years younger and still working at Mercy Hospital as a nurse practitioner.

Harry and Meg read over the terms of the contract again after the phone call, and it appeared that they would have complete autonomy on running the building except for a few basic regulations. They could technically do it, but Harry felt that if they took it on, he would still feel better asking Todd first.

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As Meg counted off windows and checked access, Kat, Sam, and Jen were riding the elevators up and down, checking out the plush pile carpeting in the halls on the upper floors.

"I could vacuum this hall in 30 minutes," Kat said to her sisters.

"If we went along with you," said Jen, "we could probably dust, and clean the windows at the same time."

"Don't forget there's three floors of carpeting and one of marble," said Sam.

"Two hours then to do all four floors, and the main floor isn't marble," said Kat. "It's some kind of polished stone."

"Okay, whatever," sighed Sam. "My point is, between the three of us we could do the entire building, vacuuming, dusting and washing the windows in about two hours. Mom said the contract called for doing this once a week, but if we do it twice a week, it will never get so dirty that we have to work hard at it. What do you think, Kat?"

“I think you might be on to something, Sam,” said Kat, “but how about this? We do only one floor a day. That means we’d only be at it for half an hour per day between the three of us, and three out of the four floors would be done twice a week while the remaining floor will alternate to the first day of the following week. That way, we can do all the normal stuff we want to do, get our homework done and still have time to perform!”

Both Jen and Sam nodded their agreement to Kat’s suggestion. They walked down the stairs on the end of the building closest to where their own new apartment was going to be.

“Damn,” said Kat. “We have to remember there are two stairwells. We’ll need to maintain them as well.”

“Kid’s play,” said Sam. “Jen and I can do those with dust mops when we finish the hall. We’ll take a stairwell each, and meet you back at the main floor.”

That settled, the girls decided to tell Mom and Dad they had made up their minds!

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The Williams gathered at the “Manager’s” apartment, obviously designed by the builder for his own family. There was a separate office and a giant utility room with access to the apartment and the hall, already set up with utilities and shelving. The master bedroom was large, easily 16 feet wide with a large window that looked out on the gardens. A walk in closet made Meg sigh. There were two bathrooms in the apartment, one attached to the Master bedroom and another located between the other two bedrooms. All brand new fixtures as well, not a single mark on anything. The other bedrooms also had windows facing the gardens at the rear, and both were larger than the ones at their house.

The living room was large, but the windows to the outside world opened up to the main front lawn and part of the parking lot, though it did have sliding patio doors and a raised 8 x 12 foot patio deck, the only one of its kind in the entire building. Flooding would not be a problem as the building’s main floor was three feet above ground level.

The open plan kitchen, filled with all new appliances, made the entire apartment seem larger.

Meg looked at Harry and the girls looked to both of them. Harry was looking around slowly nodding as he took in all the possibilities. Sam and Jen ran for the bedroom they had already tagged as theirs, hollering, “Dibs!”

Meg knelt down on the brand new carpet in the living room feeling the quality texture, then sat on the floor looking at the walls, mentally planning where she would put her pictures.

Harry smiled. "Do we need to take a vote on this," he asked Kat.

Kat looked lovingly at her father. He had been so good to them, and finally understood what Laura had said to her. "Daddy," she said. "The twins and I have decided, and if you and Mom want this, we'll do the bulk of the cleaning. We've already figured out how to do it so that it won't disrupt our school work or interfere with anything else."

Harry listened to his second eldest daughter explain the way they had figured to vacuum and dust and clean windows. He was impressed. Harry had always tried to teach his girls to think for themselves and to be creative and this would take a big burden off of Meg. They would figure out how to manage the common room for the tenants, but Harry figured they would want to take care of much of that themselves. He had seen places like this before, and lonely seniors would rather watch TV together than by themselves in their own apartments and he could already see card games and board games being played through the daytime.

Harry called his troop together, and helped Meg off the floor. "Well, mother?" he asked her. "The final word is yours."

Three young heads were bobbing up and down enthusiastically, and Meg smiled and gave Harry a kiss. "Let's go home and start packing," she said.

"Maybe we should stop at the studio first," he said, "and give them our answer. Besides, we're supposed to be dropping the girls off there so they can meet with the teacher and the boys in the band, and I believe there is a small matter of some second hand clothes for the girls..."

"Daddy! Those are designer clothes!" said Sam.

"I can hardly wait to see if there's anything in my size," said Jen.

"If Laura said there is," said Kat, "you know there is. Laura has never lied to us. Besides... we're also going to be getting stage costumes today!"

"Well, just don't you be letting all these fancy clothes be getting to your heads now girls," Harry gently said. "You're still the same girls. Clothes don't make the person, their actions do."

Meg smiled at him, putting her arm through his as he started locking the doors. "So," she said quietly, "how *is* Annie these days?"

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Vanetta called Kelly away from her work putting fresh makeup on the girls to take a phone call.

“Kelly, you better talk to him. He doesn’t want a model, and I haven’t a clue what he’s talking about!”

“Kelly Jennsen speaking.”

“Miss Jennsen?” said a deep male voice. “I’m David Klassen, executive producer of Miami Blue. Have you seen our show?”

“I’m afraid not, Mr. Klassen, but then I don’t watch much television. Should I be watching it?” she asked with a laugh.

He laughed as well. “It would make my job a bit easier,” he said, “but the basic premise is a cop/private eye/action adventure show set in sunny Miami. Our demographics are straightforward. The show is geared to a male audience age 18 – 35.”

“That’s very interesting, Mr. Klassen, but what does this have to do with our company?”

“Well, we’ve been renewed for a fourth season, which is pretty critical to a series if it hopes to get into syndication. Five years, and we are set for residual checks for a long time to come. But the network thinks there are too many muscle men in the show and want to add a female.”

“Uh, Mr. Klassen, we don’t represent actors, just models, and a show geared to your market, you have no females in it?”

Dave Klassen sighed. “I told you it would be easier if you were familiar with the show.” Then he laughed. “Yes, Miss Jennsen, we have lots of females on the show. After all, it’s part of the appeal for our market. Lots of pretty ladies in bathing suits to give the show color, but the main characters are all male. Miami Blue is set on the waterways of Miami. Lots of boat chases, fancy stunts, you know the style.”

“Ah, yes.” said Kelly. “Bad guys get chased by good guys except instead of on a highway, you use the water. But I still don’t understand what that would have to do with our agency.”

“One of our tech consultants was at Brookhaven a while back, it’s a little island off the...”

Kelly interrupted. “Yes, I know Brookhaven, Mr. Klassen, and I think I know what you’re after. Your consultant was there for the testing of the new wing on the IC boat, and he happened to spot one of our models driving it. Have I got that right?”

Dave laughed. “Yes, exactly! I’ve seen the pictures of course, but my tech guy said they don’t compare to what that young lady can do with a boat. Now, nothing against IC boats, Miss Jennsen, but we don’t use family cruisers on our show except to run into or over them. We use powerful speedboats and cigarette boats when we’re chasing drug smugglers or bank robbers. The network wants us to add a female detective to the squad, but trying to find an actress who can properly drive a boat is impossible. We thought since you represented her, perhaps we could get her as a stunt double. Our cameras are just too good now to use a man behind the wheel, and surprisingly, for all the female race car drivers we have available, we can’t seem to find one stunt woman who can make a boat stand on its nose, which according to my tech consultant your Sara Douglas can do.”

“Hmm... what kind of money are we talking Mr. Klassen?” Kelly asked.

“Ah, right to business. Good. We’d be willing to offer her 10 grand per week during shooting.”

“For how many weeks?”

“We shoot 20 weeks out of the year,” Dave replied.

“I’m sorry Mr. Klassen, I can get double that for her just to be a demo driver for IC or for Regan Boats. Perhaps you’d be better off teaching an actress how to drive a boat.”

Vanetta snickered, which earned her a smile from Kelly.

“Well, can she act?” he asked. “Does she present well on camera?”

“For \$25,000 you can do a week of tests with her,” Kelly said.

“That’s a lot of money, Miss Jennsen,” he said.

“She’s worth that and a whole lot more. Call Regan’s and ask about how she tunes her own boats. Wouldn’t it be worthwhile to have someone who could get her hands dirty and know what part she was holding and make it look like she was totally at ease with it? Or is the network not interested in trying to capture reality? I should also add that Ms. Douglas is a licensed light aircraft pilot as well and flies as well as she drives a boat.”

Dave thought it over for a minute. Hell, his male stars couldn't drive their own boats and they got 200 grand per episode. "Deal," he said. "How soon can we set this up?"

"Let me give you back to Miss Clarke, who will finalize the paperwork with you and I will contact Ms. Douglas and arrange for a week, say the first week of September?"

Dave chuckled. "And if we like her, I'm sure you'll be ready with a contract. Right, Miss Jennsen?"

"Mr. Klassen. I'm shocked. I thought you would like to deal with professionals. If you like the test and you run her footage through your screening group and her TVQ is high, we'd be willing to let you have her for one season at \$50,000 per episode. She won't receive residuals from the first three seasons, so if season four boosts your ratings, we would want \$100,000 per episode for season five and \$150,000 per episode for season six if it goes that far."

"Thank you, Miss Jennsen. We'll see how the test goes and if all works out well, we'll let our lawyers do the rest."

"One more thing, Mr. Klassen," Kelly said. "I know how much the actors on "Friends" and "ER" make per episode, so, please don't think you've managed to slide one by us. This is an opportunity for Sara to gain some national exposure at what she does best, so it works in both our interests to make sure she comes off as knowledgeable and capable, and not a dumb blonde or window dressing. If we are clear on that, we will work with you to give you and the network what you need."

After a moment of silence, a subdued Dave Klassen said, "Thank you for your candor, Miss Jennsen. I will give you my word that if Miss Douglas works out, that she won't be a dumb blonde or just window dressing."

Kelly nodded to Vanetta who took over the line again and arranged for a time and contacts plus flight and accommodations for Sara's time in Miami.

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Kelly called Sara on another line and told her the good news.

"Miami Blue?" screamed Sara. "I love that show! Man! I'd really get a chance to drive one of their babies? Triple Mercury 150 outboards? How much do I have to pay them to let me fly one of those?"

Kelly was laughing as she explained to Sara that the producers had seen her work and wanted to do a screen test on her, and she might land the role of the new mechanic savvy detective. Kelly held the phone away from her ear as Sara squealed.

“I’m glad you aren’t too excited by this, Sara,” said Kelly. “Vanetta’s arranging for you to fly down and a place for you to stay. If you want to take somebody with you, that’s up to you, it’s all covered. If nothing else, you’ll get chance to play with the boats and have a nice vacation in Miami and get to roam the sets.”

Seeing Vanetta hang up from her dealings with Mr. Klassen, Kelly said, “I’ll pass you over to Vanetta now, Sara. She’s got the details and can answer any questions you have. By the way, you are still coming to the company party next weekend, right?”

“You bet, Kelly!” said Sara. “Most of us have arranged to get away from what we’re doing. Hell, with everybody all over the place now, it will be more like a reunion for us! Love you! See you next weekend!”

Kelly smiled as she hung up the phone and Vanetta took over. It was time for a smoke!

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Though Cara and Ami weren’t tired, they didn’t mind the break either. Todd had shot off two more A-12 mags, and they were running out of poses. Todd had suggested they redo some of the more ambitious ones in other outfits, just to cover all the bases.

They were sipping on mineral water listening to Kelly retell the tale of Sara’s good fortune when the Williams family walked in.

Todd looked up and saw the smile on Harry’s face, and grinned back as he got up to shake his hand. Laura was up giving her mother a hug as Kelly introduced the younger sisters to Robert.

“I take it you like the building?” Todd asked.

“The whole family loves it,” said Meg. “I’m curious about the picture in the lobby. Is that Muriel?”

Kelly smiled and said it was. Todd had taken it on Muriel’s 100th birthday.

Robert had tried to explain to the girls that he had a great lunch planned for them, but Laura saw the look in their eyes. She asked him if he could wait a few minutes longer and let the girls have some fun first.

Robert looked at Vanetta who winked at him. “Sure, why not? We have all the time we need, right?” he asked as he looked at Harry.

“As long as you have them home by supper time,” Meg said.

Cara and Ami grabbed the hands of Kat, Sam, and Jen and practically raced them to the storage rooms!

Laura laughed and said to Kelly, "I remember when I used to get so excited by clothes. I guess you were right, Kelly. After a while, you realize it's just something to wear."

"Maybe you could take your mother back after the girls are done and see if there's anything she would like?" suggested Kelly.

Meg tried to protest, but Laura was having none of it. "Let the girls check out the hot new styles, Mom. Then we can look at the swanky stuff in peace."

Meg blushed, but nodded.

Robert introduced himself to Meg and Harry, and told them what his plans were for the girls, along with assurances that this project would not interfere with their schoolwork when summer was over. "After all," he said, "there's nothing more important than a good education."

Todd offered Harry a beer, but Harry said he had to work the afternoon shift. "I'll be glad when I can say goodbye to that job," he added.

"So?" asked Kelly, "are you going to take it?"

Harry smiled at her. "We're going over to your lawyer's office right after we leave here. I only have one question that I really need an answer to."

"And that is?" asked Todd.

"We have an older couple that are interested in moving in, but they aren't seniors, at least not for a little while. You met Lew the other night. It's him and his wife. She works at Mercy Hospital, but Lew, he's my oldest friend. He's coming up on his 30 year mark, and though he can't run too great any more, he can still walk, so he's not exactly handicapped either."

"You don't have to explain, Harry," said Todd. "Look at the contract. You and Meg will have full control over who rents there or not. Kelly and I are not going to interfere at all!"

Harry let out a sigh of relief. He would have hated to turn down his old friend.

Robert went back to his desk and called the boys telling them he would be running a half hour late, but the lunch was worth waiting for.

Harry and Meg sat down to join Kelly, Todd, and Laura for tea. Vanetta finished the New York report and she and Robert joined them. Kelly offered to make lunch for them, but Meg and Harry said they would be moving on soon. They were going to stop at Steve's, and then Harry had to get ready for work. Vanetta brought out a new tin of Belgian chocolate cookies.

"We keep these on hand," she said as she unwrapped the gold foil from the box, "but you'll rarely see any of our models eat them!"

Kelly laughed and said, "Well, we do have to watch our figures!"

They sat quietly discussing Muriel's Place but could hear sounds of laughter coming from the back of the studio. It sounded like the younger Williams girls were enjoying themselves.

Harry looked at the gymnastics equipment and asked Todd about it.

"I'm doing a new clothing catalog for CrossTrain Sports," Todd said.

"Cara and Ami are the models for it," said Laura. "They were world class, medal winning competitors, but with the Olympics still two years away, they were unlikely to make it to the finals. Both of them have sustained minor injuries over the years, and continued competition would have caused more problems. Now, Ami is Todd's apprentice, and Cara works in the office part time for Vanetta and as a personal assistant for Kelly."

Harry looked at Todd for a minute; something was clearly on his mind. Finally he said, "I'm almost willing to bet that when they signed on to model, they thought that was all they had, right?"

Todd laughed. "Well, I'd been thinking about taking on an apprentice for a while. Sometimes the work is too much for me to do all by myself, and when Ami asked about a future in photography..."

Harry nodded. "I thought as much," he said with a smile. "Is there anyone who comes close to you two who doesn't end up better off than before?"

"I can think of a certain man in your jail right now who might beg to differ," said Todd.

Harry laughed a big booming laugh. "No, I guess Mr. Labadie wouldn't think so!"

"But all those with good hearts would," said Meg with a loving look at her husband.

Twenty minutes later, they were subjected to a parade of young fashions displayed by the Williams sisters. Grown up designer clothes for teens. It was clear to see by the beaming smiles on the three girls that they thought they had hit the mother lode. There was nothing like this in the stores in Charlotte! At least not in any stores they had ever seen, and none of their friends had clothes like this!

The adults were expected to applaud each time another of the sisters came out in a new outfit, till finally, Laura followed the girls into the storage area and reminded them that they had an appointment with Robert and the boys in the band. The clothes would still be there next week and more arrived all the time, and not to be too greedy.

“Sorry, Laura,” said Kat. “But you know what it’s like. If I never have to see another pair of Wal-Mart discount jeans again, it will be too soon.”

Laura softened her tone a bit. “I know, Kat, and I promise you, those days are gone. I’m making good money now, and if nothing else, I’ll take care of you guys, but you do have an appointment to buy some clothes.” Laura laughed. “Doesn’t that sound silly? All these clothes and yet Todd and Kelly are going to buy you stage outfits?”

“Are you sure we can have these?” asked Samantha, clutching a pile to her chest.

“Yes, Sweetheart, but put them back on their hangers and I’ll get you proper garment bags to put them in. Then when you guys are gone, I’m going to see if I can’t find something for Mom.”

Cara and Ami helped the girls put the clothes back on the hangers and into the garment bags and after they had replaced all the clothes they had decided against, they were set to go.

“And it’s time for us,” said Ami, “to get back to work!”

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The girls left with Robert, after giving Todd a hug and thanks and they gave Kelly a kiss as well as big hugs and thanks. Kelly smiled, her eyes moist, and reminded them that every week there was more coming, and she would make sure that items in their size would be put aside.

Laura added that she would take them shopping for new shoes next week.

“Now, Mom, how about we see what there is for you!”

Meg was hesitant, till Kelly laid her hand on Meg’s arm. “Do it, Meg. It will make me happy.”

Meg blushed and then kissed Kelly on the cheek and left with Laura.

Kelly and Todd worked on Cara and Ami's makeup again, repairing any damage, and taking their time. Todd had said he was sure that he had more than enough good shots, and now would rather have the girls pick out uniforms that they themselves liked. They would wait until Harry and Meg left before they started the quick change routine again. They weren't exhibitionists.

Harry was looking at the poster of Laura and Kelly in their Star Trek underwear, when he felt Vanetta standing beside him.

"What do you think of your daughter as a model, Harry?" she asked.

Harry chuckled. "It's hard to imagine that the girl in that picture is my baby," he said. "This is a very ... provocative picture."

"Yes it is," said Vanetta calmly. "Do you like it? I think it's one of the best of the recent shots Todd has done."

"It's kind of hard for me to say that I like it," Harry answered truthfully. "I guess I never expected to see my baby look so ..."

"Sexy?" asked Vanetta.

Harry laughed, and blushed a bit. "Yeah. She does look sexy and it's hard for me to separate my feelings as her father, from those of a Star Trek fan."

"She's not nude," said Vanetta. "Nor does she look cheap. I think you should be proud of the beautiful daughter you have."

Harry turned his head to the side still looking at the picture. "You know what I'm proud of, Vanetta?"

"What's that, Harry?"

"Not that I have a beautiful daughter because to me, she's always been beautiful, but she survived, and she looks so happy."

Vanetta slipped her arm through Harry's. "She is happy, and she hasn't forgotten the lessons you and Meg taught her. None of this is going to her head, her ego is stronger than when I first met her, and she's more self confident, but she's still a good person with a level head on her shoulders."

Harry put his arm around Vanetta's shoulder. "Thanks, Vanetta. I think that's because she's around good people." He gave her a quick squeeze then went back to the kitchen just in time to see Meg walk out with a bag full of clothes and wearing a Versace pant suit. He whistled as he saw his darling wife.

Kelly and Laura insisted on putting a touch of makeup on Meg before she and Harry had to leave.

As Laura walked them to the door, Harry pointed out the photo poster to Meg and said, "That's our baby girl. Doesn't she look beautiful?"

Meg smiled and said, "and she looks so happy."

Harry hugged Laura, told her he loved her and then they were gone.

Laura locked the door behind them and Cara and Ami stripped and changed into new outfits. Kelly, Vanetta, and Laura cleaned up the kitchen and then Vanetta went back to work while Kelly sat back and had a cigarette watching the gymnasts do their stuff before she returned to her desk.

Laura booted up her computer and decided to do a few more lessons on line.

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"Annie"

A special by: *Dream Painter*

Laura shut down the computer before her with a resounding and loud oath. "Damn!" she swore. All the heads in the immediate vicinity lifted from their individual work.

"What's up, Sweetheart?" Kelly said looking up from her work.

"Ah, nothing. I just have to run down to the school and pick up some paper-work" Laura groaned. "Everything is supposed to be online now, but I still have to pick up worksheets from just this one professor."

"Yep," said Vanetta, "there's still some who accept work online, mostly through their TA's, but still expect you to show up to pick up the specific assignments."

"Hey, Honey," she said to Todd who was hovering over Kelly at that particular moment, "can I take the Tracker?"

"You have a set of keys, Sweetheart. There's no need to ask." Todd said reassuringly as he looked up from the screen of Kelly's computer. He and Kelly were reviewing some earlier shots deciding on how to do the first month's layout for the magazine. But Laura hadn't quite gotten used to not having the Honda and felt she should ask first. Within minutes she had her purse on her shoulder, and her keys in her hand.

“Don’t forget to turn on your cell,” Vanetta called to her as Laura made her way to the door of the studio.

“I won’t, I promise. Miss me!” and with that Laura made her way to the parking lot and over to Todd’s Tracker.

She had liked the Tracker ever since that day in the park when she had given Todd the mind wrenching blowjob in broad daylight. Laura giggled to herself as she adjusted the seat and clicked the seatbelt into place. Turning the key she remembered his gasping reaction, again she giggled.

She looked at her watch. Damn, it was almost 4:00.

“If I take a short cut, down by the old train depot, and the cotton gin, I’ll get there sooner,” she thought to herself, so rather than the usual right turn out of the business center, she made a left.

A native of Charlotte, Laura knew just about all of the shortcuts in town, despite the fact that many were in some of the seedier neighborhoods. Slipping the Indigo Girls into the CD player she never gave it a second thought. Cranking up the volume and singing to each tune, she rounded the curve to the old rail district.

To her left were the rusted remains of cotton baling equipment, machinery of unimaginable uses with a dull red patina; to her right, the boarded up World War II train depot and processing station, tall weeds rising up past the windows. She noticed the parched dead grass between the rails and ties as she braced herself to glide over the tracks. It was then that the Indigo Girls stopped in mid verse. After a cough and a sputter the drone of the motor in the Tracker suddenly and abruptly halted. There wasn’t so much as a light lit on the dashboard. Laura tried turning the key. Nothing, not even a click.

“Damn,” she said to herself softly then looked over at her purse. Laura dug out her cell phone. Turning it on she quickly scrolled through the phonebook. Daddy, House, Kelly, Todd, Studio... “No, I don’t want to disturb them, they were all so busy when I left.” She scrolled through the various names again, “Daddy! I’ll call Daddy! He’ll know what to do!” and she immediately pressed the ‘send’ button.

After a couple of rings Laura heard the familiar voice of her father, “Williams.”

“Hey, Daddy,” Laura said.

“Hey, Pumpkin!” Officer Williams answered with genuine surprise.

“Want to rescue a damsel in distress?” she asked tentatively.

“Sure, Sweetie. What’s up?” Harry asked.

“Well,” Laura said hesitantly, “I’m sort of out on Slocum Road, just past the gin across from the old train depot and the Tracker is deader than a doornail.”

“Laura Williams, that is no place for you to ... haven’t I told you a million times that...oh never mind. I’ll be there as soon as I can,” Harry snorted; none too happy, but glad his ‘little girl’ had thought to call him. “Stay in the Tracker and don’t open the doors for anyone but me, you understand,” he said firmly.

“Yes Daddy, I promise, I won’t talk to any strangers,” Laura giggled only to hear him groan on the other end of the line. “See you in a bit,” she said as cheerfully as possible and hit the ‘end’ button on her phone.

Laura tossed the phone onto the passenger’s seat to settle in for a wait. She mentally calculated how long until her rescuer arrived.

Within minutes Laura was bored. After the last six months, she was used to doing things and being on the go. Not sitting, waiting, stuck on a railroad crossing. She sighed heavily, played a few games of blackjack on her cell, losing four out of six games until at last she tossed the device back into her purse. That’s when she heard the rattletrap Ford Bronco grumble over the tracks beside her, (the same railroad tracks she hadn’t managed to cross), in a cloud of red dust. It rattled forward a hundred feet before the driver threw the vehicle into reverse.

Laura fidgeted nervously remembering her father’s words. The driver’s side door of the Bronco flew open and out strode a small but muscular woman. Her long gray and auburn hair was flying about her head in the afternoon breeze.

“You okay in there?” the woman yelled through the closed window.

“Yeah, I’m okay, my Dad’s coming to rescue me,” Laura replied through the closed window.

The woman from the Bronco nodded in understanding then strode back to her vehicle. She was nearly there when she turned back returning to the Tracker.

“You know, if you don’t mind my saying so, you picked just about the worst possible place in Charlotte to break down!” She yelled to the closed window, “You got any water in there?”

Laura shook her head ‘no’.

“You want some?” asked the stranger. Laura, feeling a bit on the helpless side, nodded yes. The woman opened the back of her Bronco, revealing about eight Styrofoam coolers. Opening up one of the coolers nearest the back door she extracted two sport bottles of water and returned to the Tracker.

“You know, you’re going to have to open the door or lower the window to take this water, don’t you?” the stranger yelled through the glass to Laura.

Laura reluctantly opened the door and stepped out onto the dusty gravel paved road.

The strange woman offered her a sports bottle of water, saying softly, “easy girl, it’s cool ... relax ... I’m not going to bite you, I promise. You called someone? Somebody’s on the way?”

Laura nodded, “Yeah, my Dad’s coming,” she said softly suddenly feeling shy.

“I think it would be a good idea if we waited here with you until he arrives?” the strange woman said. “Just to make sure everything is okay.”

Laura nodded yes then said softly, “We?” Not seeing anyone else in the colorless rusted Bronco.

“Yeah, me and Bubba... Yo, Bubba!” the woman called back towards her vehicle. Suddenly an enormous black and tan German shepherd dove out through the driver’s side window. “Meet Bubba, I’m Annie...and you are...?”

“...Ah... I’m...ah...Laura” Laura stammered trying to smile while at the same time trying to shove the shepherd’s nose away from her crotch.

“Hey, Laura,” Annie said calmly, softly, “This really isn’t a very good side of town, Bubba and I will just hang here for a while ‘til your Dad shows up, okay? Around here there really is safety in numbers...Bubba! Cut that shit out!!!” Annie sighed, “Just like a man,” she grimaced. “Hey, are you hungry? I’ve some great stuff in the truck.”

“Hungry?” said Laura, somewhat bewildered by her new found protectors, “ah... no... ah... maybe, whatcha got?”

“Lets see,” Annie said while stepping again to the back of the Bronco, “I got potato salad, macaroni salad, coleslaw, ribs... oh, I know! Here, try some of this, sun dried tomato dip; my signature dish!”

Annie posed as though for an adoring crowd and grinned at Laura while her long auburn hair flew madly about her face and shoulders.

She pulled a white plastic tub from one of the coolers along with yet another bottle of water and a bag of pita chips from a paper bag nearby. “Here, munch on this! Bubba, heel!” Annie ordered the dog, slapping her left thigh. The shepherd stepped up close and hung tightly to her thigh. She offered Laura the bag of chips and tub of dip along with another bottle of water.

Laura dunked her hand into the bag grabbing a chip, and then scraped the chip across the tub of pink dip. Hesitantly biting into the mixture and with a full mouth she said, "Damn, this is good!"

Annie couldn't help but laugh at Laura trying to speak with her mouth full of chip and pink cream cheese. "It's different, but it's good!" Annie conceded. "I'm making a delivery... have a catering business... I don't think they'll miss one pound out of twelve at the spa. I won't charge 'em for it, no biggie."

"Oh, hell!" Annie said grimacing as she looked up and saw the squad car pull up behind the Tracker.

"Hey 'ossifer' Wil-liams, don't you have better things to do than write tickets to innocent young girls with car trouble??" She glared at Harry as he stepped out of the squad. Laura whirled around, her mouth still full of dip and chips to greet her father.

"Hey, Daddy!" Laura said happily.

"Hey, Pumpkin, hey, Annie, Bubba," Harry said raising his hand to the brim of his hat.

"Your Dad?" Annie asked under her breath.

"Yep," Laura replied.

Annie emitted an audible groan. "Don't it just stand to reason," she muttered. "Try and be a Good Samaritan, and it turns out to be Harry's kid." Raising her head and her voice, Annie said, "Yeah, well we were just leaving Harry, good to see you again," Annie said as she turned towards the truck, "Oh, Harry, did you guys know there's suppose to be a big wing-ding at the Carson's place the end of the week... Louis Carson's?"

"Ah, no Annie, we hadn't heard anything about it. Are you going to do the party?" Harry said with a familiarity that somewhat startled Laura.

"Me, hell no! I stopped doing parties for him since he stiffed me 2K a couple of months back. No, Gerald's are doing it, but I happen to know they plan to clear out around midnight and Gerald told me they ordered a hell of a lot of booze. You know Carson, he's always got **another** party going on in the back... might be worth your while if nothing else to set up a check point... just a thought Harry," Annie said smugly.

"Thanks for the tip, Annie, I'll mention it to the Chief." Officer Williams then turned his attention to his daughter.

"Bubba! Yo, Bubba! Get your ass over here, you're gonna get ticks!"

Something had drawn the shepherd's attention to the other side of a ditch near the dead Tracker,

"Bubba, come!" Annie ordered. "It's not just a figure of speech. Damn it, dog, I'm gonna turn you into a rug if you don't get your fuzzy butt over here!"

Annie gracefully jumped the ditch to stand beside the dog. "Oh, hell," she said calmly. But in the quiet of the area both Harry and Laura turned their head as they heard her swear.

"Ossifer Wil-liams?" Annie called as she tugged at the shepherd's heavy leather collar, "Lookie what Bubba found. I think you might wanna see this."

Reluctantly Harry parted from his oldest baby and made his way through the weeds, "Now that's **not** what I'd call your regular Saturday Night Special, eh Harry? I say it's a hmmm... lets see, a Glock 9mm?"

"Damn it, Annie, who's the cop here, you or me?" Harry said good-naturedly.

"Hey, I'm just a caterer who is outta here!" Annie tugged the shepherd back towards the Bronco.

"Annie, you know I'm going to have to ask you some questions about all this," said Harry as he stood in the weeds preparing to call in a report on the radio hanging on his belt.

Annie opened the driver's side door and Bubba bounded into the Bronco. "Don't ask me, ask Bubba, he's the one that found it!" she yelled to Officer, (Ossifer), Williams. "Nice meeting you, Laura! Harry, you **know** where I work."

Within seconds the old Bronco disappeared down the road.

Laura looked at the cloud of dust in a complete state of confusion, and then to her Father who was busy calling in a report, finally to the tub of dip she held in her hand. The label on the side of the white plastic tub read:

Sun Dried Tomato Dip

"A Woman's Place Catering"
121 South Harvard Street
Charlotte, NC

Call (704) 555-8470 for your Catering Needs

Annie & Bubba Prince Proprietors

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Laura sat on the passenger's side of the squad car next to her Father as they drove back to the studio from the college. Soon after Annie had left, the forensics team had arrived to pick up and examine the pistol that Bubba had found.

When the tow truck arrived, Laura instructed the driver to return the dead beast to the dealership. The driver of the truck owed Harry a couple of favors and loaded the Tracker up at no charge. TKO could easily afford to pay the towing bill, but it was more a matter of pride that Harry was able to help out his 'little' girl.

Laura called the studio to let her lovers know she had been delayed. Explaining to them that the Tracker had broken down and she was going to take advantage of this opportunity to spend some quality 'dad and daughter time' with her Father. Todd had been concerned, particularly when she told him the area of town she had broken down in but he seemed to understand Laura wanting to be with her Dad for a bit. She didn't see him as often anymore, something that Todd vowed to himself to set right. It was quite clear that Harry loved his kids and they in turn adored him. Besides, Todd had enjoyed the barbeque with the Williams family. Family was important. Chuck had reminded him of that!

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"Hey Daddy, where'd you meet...ah?" Laura began.

"Annie? Oh, Annie used to have a restaurant over on the east side... you know... where they were rehabbing all those old storefronts. I'm the one that closed her down." Harry replied nonchalantly.

"What?" Laura looked at him aghast.

"Well, actually it was the judge that shut her down, but yeah, we had to close her down all the same. Shame too... a nice little place from what I heard. Served beer, wine... frou-frou 'girlie' food. As a matter of fact, that was the name too... A Woman's Space... your Mom loves her coleslaw. I pick up a tub of it every time I'm out that way," Harry said.

"Mom's not making that great coleslaw anymore?" Laura was surprised.

"Your Mom hasn't made coleslaw for years, Pumpkin. That 'great' coleslaw is Annie's!" Harry chuckled. "Hell, I guess I'm the one that convinced Annie to go into the catering business in the first place... guess it was, I don't know, a year ... a year and a half ago." Suddenly he got quiet. "The same day your uncle Lew got hurt."

“Okay, Pumpkin, we’re here,” Harry pulled police cruiser pull into the parking lot at the studio. He leaned over to give his baby a kiss on the cheek. “And the next time you decide to take a short cut... stay the hell off Slocum Road.” Wagging his finger he gave Laura a stern look that took her back to her childhood, and reminded her that her Father was making a point that should be remembered.

She leaned in to return the kiss on his cheek and said softly, “K Daddy, I will. No more Slocum Road for me!” She giggled as she unlatched the seat belt and slid from the passenger’s side seat. Laura waved to her Father as he pulled out of the drive and into the industrial complex.

As she entered the studio Todd was already on the phone with the dealership and chatting away with a mechanic. “No problem Ed, we’ll just pick it up tomorrow, no hurry.” Laura gave him a wave and a quick peck on the cheek as he chatted. She then bounded up the steps to the kitchen where Vanetta and Kelly were sitting at the breakfast bar each sipping a bottle of mineral water.

Laura leaned over to Kelly and gave her a soft kiss on the cheek.

“Well, it sounds like you’ve had a pretty exciting day. Are you all right, Sweetheart?” Kelly asked with genuine concern.

“Yeah, thanks. I am now,” Laura said.

Laura dug in her purse for a few seconds completely preoccupied. “I have just met the most amazing woman!” She said to both Kelly and Vanetta as she pulled the white tub of dip from her purse. She looked at them both then and continued. “And you both have to try some of this!”

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Kelly was reading the label as she dunked her 20<sup>th</sup> chip into the dip. “This really *is* good! You said she caters? What luck! Our company barbeque has just been expanded by all the off duty police officers from your Dad’s precinct. The caterer I have can’t do the extra food.”

“Huh?” said a perplexed Laura. “Just buy some more meat and potatoes,” she said.

“Can’t, Laura,” said Vanetta. This caterer is strictly kosher. A lot of our New York people can’t eat anything but, and a kosher caterer can’t mix foods or serve pork or shellfish.”

“Wow,” said Laura. “I don’t know if she caters anything that big and what if she’s not available? This would be awful short notice.”

“Well,” said Kelly reading the label again, “let’s give Annie Prince a call and see if she’s interested. It’s the least we can do after she saved your beautiful butt!”

Kelly dialed the number but as she did, a frown crossed her face. She looked at the container again as the phone rang on the other end. “I …” and she stopped mid sentence when the receiver was picked up and a male voice answered.

“Hello?” inquired a distinctive southern voice.

Kelly seemed confused. “Ah, is this ‘A Woman’s Place’?” she asked.

“Yez’m, but Mizz Annie ain’t in right now.”

“Ah, is this Bubba?” Kelly asked, and then had to wait for the laughter to stop.

“No Ma’m. I’s Jacob. I helps Mizz Annie.”

Kelly was still shaking her head. Something was out of place. “Er, could you have Miss Annie call me please?” Kelly asked.

“Lemme get a pencil first,” said Jacob, then he said, “Iffin you can hold on a minute, I think Mizz Annie is jus’ commin’ in now.”

Kelly waited as she heard Jacob telling somebody that the person on the phone thought he was Bubba. He started laughing again.

“Hello?” said a female voice. “This is Annie. What can I do for you?”

“This is Kelly Jennsen, I just tried some of your sun dried tomato dip. You gave a package to a friend of mine about two hours ago.”

“I did?” asked Annie. “Oh, that must be Laura! She made it back in one piece then.” It was a statement, not a question.

“Yes, she did. Thank you very much for staying with her.”

“No problem,” said Annie. “Is that what you called about?”

“No, I’m sorry,” said Kelly. “I seem to be addlebrained right now. ‘A Woman’s Place.’ Wasn’t there a restaurant by that name? Closed down about a year ago?”

“Yeah, sorta,” said Annie. “It use to be ‘A Woman’s Space,’ but I changed it to ‘A Woman’s Place,’ after Laura’s daddy shut me down and I went into the catering business.”

“My God, what on earth for?” asked Kelly. “I only had the chance to eat there once and the floors were clean enough to eat off of. I went back about a month later and it was gone.”

“Well, it wasn’t for health reasons,” Annie said.

Laura, growing restless with Kelly’s confusion, picked up another phone and punched into the same line. “Hi, Annie? This is Laura. You’ll have to excuse the girlfriend. She’s had a hectic day. Daddy brought me back and I had to share your fantastic dip with her. Turns out that a party she’s planning is going to have more people arrive than the caterer can handle, and she needs someone to fill in.”

“Well, why in the hell didn’t she just say so?” asked Annie.

“I think it’s because just when she dialed the name of your business brought back some memories,” said Laura. “Anyway, I told her that you were probably too busy and that this was awful short notice, but your signature dip, it’s a hit here!”

Annie took pride in her food, and her tone mellowed instantly. “Okay. I can understand people having a rough day. What day, how many people and why the hell can’t the other caterer just increase their staff.”

Kelly spoke again. “I’m sorry, Miss Prince. You’re right. It just caught me off guard and it has been a very busy day. The caterer doing the company BBQ is strictly kosher. Beef and salmon only. We had to order the beef a month in advance, and we just can’t get enough this close to next weekend to feed everybody that’s now coming.”

“I don’t do kosher,” said Annie. “Too much hassle for too little business in Charlotte.”

“I understand perfectly,” said Kelly. “I don’t need more kosher. That was mostly for our friends from New York. It was easier to go all kosher than mix and match, but the guest list has grown from 200 to over 300. I need some good food for all these people.”

“What day next weekend?” Annie asked.

“Saturday, at Carowinds Park,” said Kelly.

Annie whistled. “Pretty fancy,” she said. “Okay. I don’t come cheap, but I won’t hold out for a ransom either. Good food for a fair price. That’s what I do. How many people do you want me to prepare for?”

“I’d say 150,” said Kelly, “but to be on the safe side, make it for 200. We can always donate the leftovers to one of the shelters in town afterwards.”

Annie liked the sound of that. This woman might be stressed, but her heart was good. “How about this,” she said. “I can get a pig slaughtered this week. Get it all dressed and marinated. I’ve got a giant pig roaster, and we can cut off what people want right on the spot. Start early enough in the day and he should be ready by suppertime. If you like, I can also do up slabs of ribs, maybe a giant kettle of sweet corn as well? How are you set for taters?”

“Annie, you’re a life saver,” said Kelly. “Baked potatoes I’ve got covered, nearly 500 Yukon Gold, but I like the idea of sweet corn, fresh from the pot. We’d like to start eating around 4:00 if that’s possible since the party will go on into the park afterwards. Figure out a price and give me a call back and I’ll get a certified check to you the same day.”

“Well, Miss Jennsen,” said Annie, “it looks like you’ve just hired yourself a caterer. I’ll have the price by Monday, along with a complete menu.”

“Thanks, Annie, and please, call me Kelly.”

“Okay, Kelly, I’ll talk to you soon.”

Laura said goodbye as well and hung up the phone.

“I nearly peed myself when you asked if you were talking to Bubba Prince,” she said. “I’ve met Bubba. He probably weighs as much as you, and has a permanent fur coat!”

Kelly rolled her eyes. “Can you help me get my foot out of my mouth now?” she asked.

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Cara was smiling from behind her computer monitor. She adored Kelly. Loved her actually, though it would always be her secret. Laura was great, like the kind of big sister every girl dreams of, and Vanetta had shown a real interest in teaching Cara how the world of advertising worked. She loved them all, in different ways. She couldn’t remember being as happy as she had been since she arrived in Charlotte. Ami was her soul mate. Cara was positive of that! The love they shared, in all forms, was perfect. She didn’t even get jealous of Ami’s infatuation with Todd. On some level, she understood. Ami was a lot like Todd, and they seemed to share a special bond, but neither Laura nor Kelly had given the slightest hint that they were upset or jealous, so Cara wasn’t either. Besides, she had her own infatuation with Kelly whose deep brown eyes seemed to reach into Cara’s very soul.

Every night, when Cara applied lotion to Kelly’s body, it was with love and reverence. Kelly’s body was so beautiful, so flawless, and Kelly was so casual about allowing Cara to caress her anywhere. Kelly probably knew, Cara decided, but Kelly

also treated Cara as if there was no one else in the world that she would entrust this special job to, and always treated her with love and spoke lovingly to her. It would crush Cara if she ever had to give up the life she had now.

Ami and Todd were in the darkroom. It had been a long day by the time the last photographs were taken, and Cara and Ami had showered, but it was like the two of them couldn't wait to see the results.

It was six o'clock when the green eyed monster showed up.

To be continued...