



Shara
Bloodstone

My Comic
Valentine

MY COMIC VALENTINE

...He nuzzled himself between her legs and reached down behind her to clasp a hand under each side of her ass. Holding her buttocks, he tilted her upward and leaned himself into her. She clung to his neck for support and opened her legs wider, tilting back. In the balmy heat of Indian summer, they pulled in frustration at each other's garments, sweating and panting their way down to a horizontal position on the cool stone wall.

Penny thought she might lose her mind with desire. She released an arm from Bobby's neck to slide her hand down over his crotch. He backed away just enough to let her grab his shaft through the denim of his jeans.

"Mmm...baby," he muttered, "right there."

Their lips parted an inch while Penny concentrated on pushing and pulling him through the fly of his pants. A sweat bead trickled down the side of Bobby's face as her hand slid up to his waistline. She popped the metal button from its loop, yanked down the zipper and slipped in her hand. When she felt his massive hard-on through his underwear, her pussy tingled and her brain rushed with electricity. She wanted to rip off her own slacks and panties and pull his cock inside of her, right there and then. Her hand eased down toward the top of his underwear.

Just as she felt his pubic hairs brush her skin, she also felt Bobby's hand close around her wrist. She squinted up at him and, through the haze of erotic excitement, tried to figure out why he was stopping her...

BOOKS BY SHARA BLOODSTONE

Gotcha!

My Comic Valentine

Private Audition

Urban Ambrosia

MY COMIC VALENTINE

BY

SHARA BLOODSTONE

AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC

<http://www.amberquill.com>

MY COMIC VALENTINE
AN AMBER HEAT BOOK

This book is a work of fiction. All names, characters, locations, and incidents are products of the author's imagination, or have been used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, locales, or events is entirely coincidental.

Amber Quill Press, LLC
<http://www.amberquill.com>
<http://www.amberheat.com>

All rights reserved.

No portion of this book may be transmitted or reproduced in any form, or by any means, without permission in writing from the publisher, with the exception of brief excerpts used for the purposes of review.

Copyright © 2007 by Shara Bloodstone
ISBN 978-1-59279-669-4
Cover Art © 2007 Trace Edward Zaber

Layout and Formatting provided by: ElementalAlchemy.com

PUBLISHED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*To the stand-ups and staff
at Caroline's Comedy Club, NYC—where I learned
so much, so long ago.*

CHAPTER 1

Penelope Ann Foster rushed breathlessly up the subway steps at Broadway and Fiftieth Street. Hoisting a bag over one shoulder, with two more over the other, she negotiated her way around passengers blocking her way.

“Scuse me, ’scuse me,” she said, pushing past people who politely held the handrails while ascending the cement steps. “Sorry, I’m in a hurry, here. Sorry.” She hoped her feeble apology made up for her rudeness in pushing through the throng of subway riders departing the station.

She cursed the weight of the bags digging into her shoulders as she climbed the long staircase. *I feel like a frigging pack mule! Why do I carry all this junk around with me every day?*

Her handbag—the suede one lined in fake fur—was the least of the problem, but add that to a heavy leather backpack full of books and a glossy pink satchel crammed with a change of clothes, and she was

MY COMIC VALENTINE

seriously challenged.

I carry it around 'cause I have no choice. No wonder my back aches all the time.

When she hit the crowded sidewalks, she groaned out loud. Switching the pink satchel over to her left shoulder, she freed up her right shoulder for plowing into the mass of bodies.

Can't these damned tourists walk any faster?

She caught herself and chuckled. *If I wasn't always in a hurry to get somewhere, I wouldn't care how long sightseers wandered along like cattle. I only want to kill them when I'm late and they're lolling along, taking their sweet time, enthralled by the big city sights so familiar to me.*

She caught sight of the bright lights that signaled where she was headed. The neon letters for Chloe's Comedy Club shone above Broadway, like a beacon in a concrete sea. Holding her bags to her sides, she trotted across the avenue toward the club's entrance. She barely glanced at the comics' headshots displayed in the window and grabbed the metal door handle coated with city dirt. Hauling it open, she stepped inside.

Behind her, the door swung closed. Within the empty vestibule, the sound of rushing traffic evaporated into silence. She turned and padded down the spiral staircase leading to the lobby.

Donny, the friendly bartender, was engrossed in setting up the small bar just outside the showroom. Orange neon lights on the wall behind him repeated the club's name: Chloe's Comedy Club. Their reflection lent an appropriately warm glow to the bartender's cheery disposition.

"Hey, Penny, how's it shakin'?"

"Hey, Donny. It's okay. I'm late, as usual."

"Ah, nobody'll notice. Their heads are all up their asses anyway."

She laughed and charged through the double doors leading into the showroom, rushing past row upon row of black metallic tables. She

MY COMIC VALENTINE

glanced toward a couple of cocktail servers setting up for the show. They chatted while tossing menus and drink tents onto tables. She skirted past Manny, the manager, who was on his hands and knees, underneath a table he was trying to repair. She hurried to avoid him noticing her tardiness.

Lydia's big mouth dashed her hope for anonymity when she called from across the room, "Hey there, Penny Ann!"

Penny glanced back over her shoulder at Manny. He'd shot his head up with Lydia's announcement and cracked it on the edge of the table. She giggled to herself as he mouthed a silent curse and rubbed his noggin. When she turned back toward Lydia, her eyes landed, as always, on those gigantic breasts of hers.

"Hey, Lydia," she blurted. She scolded herself for flashing onto her huge jugs before making eye contact. "Sorry I'm a little late. I'll hurry and get ready."

Lydia shrugged. "No biggy."

Au contraire, ma chère, Penny thought with a smirk.

She rushed down the hallway behind the kitchen, to the back of the club. When she reached the dressing room door, she turned the knob and leaned into it. She expected, as usual, to meet with the sight of her own reflection in the mirrored wall. This time, however, she was caught off guard by a most unexpected scene. In front of the mirror stood Malcolm, the doorman, mauling the naked breasts of the head waitress, Marie.

Penny stopped short and stood still. She felt embarrassed, but figured they'd see her and stop to pull themselves together, before she came inside to change. A beat of time elapsed...still no change in their lustful frenzy.

Don't they know I'm here? she wondered.

The two lovers were either so engrossed in themselves that they didn't see the other waitress, or else they were undaunted by her

MY COMIC VALENTINE

presence. Repelled but also intrigued, Penny waited.

Kneeling on one of the club's wooden chairs, Marie was gripping its back for support. Her uniform top had been stripped down, rendering her naked to her waist. Malcolm was leaning over the chair back from the other side, burying his face between Marie's perky breasts. Penny watched while he pulled away to lean back against the counter top and squeeze Marie's breasts, as though he was checking melons. He further indulged in rotating his thumbs over each of her hardened nipples.

I don't believe this! Penny thought. Don't they know I'm here?

She'd heard some funky gossip about Marie, and even seen minor displays of her exhibitionist tendencies. Not a naïve girl, Penny was nevertheless amazed at how Marie pushed the limits of acceptable sexiness towards hardcore raunchiness. Now, standing there in the doorway, she wondered if Marie was aware of her presence and might be putting on a little show for her benefit. The truth was, she felt mesmerized, somehow, and couldn't help but watch. Marie rolled her head back, groaning in pleasure, a Mona Lisa smile etched upon her lips.

When Penny opened her mouth to speak, she couldn't find the appropriate words for announcing her presence, so she merely sucked in air and shut it again. The enraptured couple still seemed oblivious to her gaze, she noticed, as Malcolm exchanged his tongue for his thumbs. He lowered his head and slurped his lover's flesh, flicking his tongue tip against each of her nipples.

"Oh, baby, yeah," Marie hissed through clenched teeth.

Suckling loudly, Malcolm slid a hand down over the crotch of Marie's skin-tight, black jeans. Penny watched as he pressed his middle finger into the tight seam running over his lover's mound. While rubbing her with his hand, his teeth clasped and pulled at her nipples.

Penny caught her breath. She had to bring her hand to her mouth in

MY COMIC VALENTINE

an effort to suppress the “Yelp!” threatening to escape. The little gasp she let slip out finally caught Marie’s attention.

Nonchalant, she turned her head. But she didn’t halt the activities by putting an immediate stop to Malcolm’s attentions. She took her sweet time and, cool as a cucumber, placed a hand onto her lover’s head. “Hey, honey...”

Dazed by the interruption, Malcolm ceased his suckling. He looked up at his partner, over at Penny, then back at his partner. He seemed to be awaiting the signal for his next move. When Marie offered no reaction, he looked back at Penny and said, “Hi, there.”

Penny was stumped about how to respond. In a split second, she ran down the facts to discern her best course of action.

Here I am, innocently coming in to get ready for a work shift, when I find a smutty little scene between the staff slut—who also happens to be head waitress—and the doorman. This same head waitress is notorious for bragging about her sexual exploits, but also known for getting staff members on her bad side canned from their jobs. So—do I be cool and apologize, laugh it off, or what?

She berated herself for not closing the door and running off, in the first place. Had she feared Marie’s outrage if she’d scrambled out, like a chicken? Marie did, after all, love an audience. And she had a strange penchant for creating a dare with some of the girls. She loved setting up a power struggle between herself and other waitresses. She constantly made trouble so she could manipulate situations to her advantage. Still unsure about how to deal with the mini-porno moment she’d just witnessed, Penny feared that, since she hadn’t moved right away, she might now catch Marie’s wrath.

Even while weighing the situation, she was standing there like a deer caught in headlights.

Finally, Marie shot Penny a bored look and sighed. She took her time in pulling up her top, leaving it just beneath her armpits, barely

MY COMIC VALENTINE

covering her breasts. She didn't bother moving from the chair. Malcolm barely moved, too, while Penny waited and watched, wide-eyed. Marie raised an eyebrow and taunted her with a wicked, little smile.

Penny felt the air thicken around her. She sensed some sort of non-verbal dare, but was still unsure about what she ought to do. The couple watched her cringing in the doorway. Was it her imagination, or were they enjoying her increasing discomfort?

"Oh, fuck it," she finally blurted, "I'll change in the bathroom."

She brushed past the lovers and locked herself in the tiny bathroom on the other side of the dressing room. Through the door, she heard Marie snicker and call out to her.

"Hey," she taunted, "it's all right. You don't have to change in there. You can do it right out here. We don't mind." She laughed a deep, throaty laugh and Malcolm joined in.

From behind the bathroom door, Penny fumed at their insolence, but forced herself to call out sweetly, "Oh, that's all right. I'm good in here." Meanwhile, she couldn't help but think, God, what a pig Marie is!

As she ripped off the jeans and button-down shirt she'd worn to classes that day, she muttered to herself, "I thought those stories I heard were exaggerations, but— apparently not."

After Penny finished changing, she opened the bathroom door. She was now dressed in black tights with a short, black skirt and the black leotard bearing the yellow Chloe's Comedy Club CCC emblem. She had piled her blond mane into a bun on top of her head. She sensed Marie's desire to taunt her some more, so she avoided eye contact with the sex-crazed couple as she stuffed her bags into the first available locker she found. After snapping its metallic door shut, she was startled by a throaty growl and whirled around toward the mirror. Its reflection revealed Marie grabbing Malcolm's dark, thick hair to pull his head

MY COMIC VALENTINE

back. She began undulating her torso, working herself up again as she pushed her hips against him.

Holy, shit, Penny thought, she is insatiable!

Malcolm went down to his knees and looked up at her like a drooling puppy awaiting its next command.

Penny kept her gaze straight ahead and crept toward the door. As she yanked it open, she couldn't resist calling back over her shoulder, "It's all yours, lovebirds!" She pulled the door closed behind her.

She heard Marie hiss, "Bitch!" from inside the dressing room.

The sound of her roommate's voice calling from down the hallway came as a relief.

"Yo, girlfriend! Daughter of the American Revolution! Wassup?"

Penny headed straight for the African-American woman leaning inside the kitchen doorframe. The sight of her roommate's smile caused relief to wash over her. She grabbed one of her bulging, black biceps and pulled her inside.

"Frankie! Come here, come here, come here!"

"All right, all right, all right," Frankie answered with affection.

Penny rushed her buddy back toward a nook in the kitchen, behind stacked cartons of Perrier.

"You will not believe what I just saw in the dressing room," she blurted.

Frankie folded her arms across her chest. "Well?"

"Marie and Malcolm," Penny whispered excitedly, "about to get it on!"

"About to get it on?" Frankie's face registered disgust.

"Her top was completely off," Penny rushed to explain. "You know how she never wears a bra anyway—hello, against the rules, but the head waitress gets away with it? Well, there's Malcolm feeling her up, sucking her boobs, about to take it a step further until I burst in to change!"

MY COMIC VALENTINE

Frankie's initial disgust broadened into a wide smile. "Wait a minute, wait a minute, back it up. Just now, you walked in on Malcolm and Marie getting it on in the dressing room?"

"Yes, hello—what am I saying? Her top was down around her waist and he was bending down, sucking her ta-tas—ready to stick his hands down her pants!"

Frankie guffawed between words. "Oh, Lordy," she said, her shoulders shaking with snorts and giggles. "I thought we left high school ten years ago. That is too much! Those horn dogs doing-the-do right there, in the dressing room!" She giggled uncontrollably. "Oh, Lord—have they no pride at all?"

"Well, we know Marie doesn't. Now we know Malcolm's as big a slime ball as all the rest. And I thought he was nice...kind of cute, too—"

"He's a guy, just like the rest of them. And Marie, we know, is a sex machine."

"A sex machine?"

Penny looked point blank at Frankie, and the two of them burst out laughing. Then Manny walked in, stopped, and faced them. As he stared wordlessly, the two girls forced themselves from their giggling fit.

When Manny was certain they had resumed self-control, he addressed them with a weary intonation. "Is the room all set up, girls? Specialty glasses all stocked?"

"We're working on it," Frankie said, inhaling to suppress the chortles threatening to sneak out again. She smoothed down the sides of her razor-short haircut while regaining her composure.

"Yeah, don't worry, boss," Penny assured him. "We've got it under control." She and her roommate then walked past him with a feigned, officious air.

"Yeah, right," Manny mumbled with a cynical edge. He called over

MY COMIC VALENTINE

to the bartender behind the service bar. “How many specialty glasses you got back there, Bertie?”

“I got, what—fifteen or so?”

“Make sure the girls load you up with at least another ten. I want those bitches to start pushing ’em out there. Got to start driving the numbers up. I got a fuckin’ truckload coming in on Thursday and we haven’t even sold what’s in storage, yet.”

“Okay, Manny. I’ll light a fire under their butts.”

* * *

Out in the empty show room, Frankie grabbed a tray of silverware and plopped down at a booth. Penny grabbed a stack of napkins and followed her. The two girls set about making roll-ups for the night, and Frankie picked up the conversation from where Manny had interrupted them.

“I heard she was schtupping the doorman,” Frankie mused. “Guess the rumors are true.”

“She’ll be on to the next guy in no time, I’m sure. Or do them both at once,” Penny said, with sass.

“Hey,” Frankie said in an abrupt switch of topics, “guess who’s coming this weekend, to open for his brother?”

Penny shot her best friend a dazed look. “Huh? Whose brother? What’re you talking about?”

“Tommy Cutting’s. Didn’t you have a thing for his brother a couple of months ago, when he came in, last minute? Remember? He took Hal Johnson’s place, I think, when he was supposed to open for Kurt Wise. Only Hal couldn’t make it, so they booked Tommy’s brother, Bobby.”

“Oh, yeah...Bobby Deagan...he’s Tommy Cutting’s brother? But he has a different last name.”

“Yeah. His stepbrother or some shit. Anyway, he’s coming this weekend to open for Tommy. Replacement thing, again.”

Penny said nothing as she rolled silverware into paper napkins.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“You not interested, all of a sudden?” Frankie asked.

“I don’t know...I never dated a stand-up before. Not in the six months I’ve been working here. I think it’s a bad idea to mix business with pleasure. God forbid I get a reputation like Marie.”

“Honey, you’d have to work a lot harder at slutdom, to come close to that ho’s reputation.”

Penny snickered. “Slutdom...is that like kingdom? Or, wait—more like stardom?”

“She seems to think so.”

“But aren’t comics, like, angry guys, in real life?”

“Some of them, I guess. Actually, they’re kind of depressing, I think.”

Lydia came over and fell into the booth next to Penny. “Anybody here care if I smoke?”

“Not if you blow it the other way,” Penny answered.

“Of course, Miss Penny. I’ll make sure the poison reaches only my lungs,” Lydia answered. “Sorry—did I interrupt your conversation?”

Frankie filled her in. “We were just trying to figure out if stand-ups are really angry when they’re off stage. Like, they seem more depressed, to me.”

“Oh, they’re plenty angry, too,” Lydia said. “That’s why I wouldn’t go near one with a ten-foot pole. My sweet Manny is just fine for me.”

“But doesn’t he want to be a comedian, too, one day?” Penny asked.

Lydia shrugged. “Maybe. But for now he’s a club manager, and that suits me fine.”

Under the table, Frankie nudged Penny with her foot and nodded her head toward the hallway. Penny stretched her neck to see Marie saunter around the corner, Malcolm at her heels. She shot Frankie a worried look.

“Just be cool, that’s all,” Frankie advised.

“Be cool? About what?” Lydia asked.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Oh, nothing,” Penny said.

“We were talking about mid-term exams coming up in a few weeks,” Frankie fibbed.

“Oh, that’s right. So how’s grad school going?” Lydia asked. “You little intellectuals, you.”

“I’m already calling Frankie ‘Detective,’” Penny answered. “She’s way ahead of everybody else in her program.”

Lydia raised her eyebrows. “Detective, huh? I’m impressed.”

“It ain’t no big thang,” Frankie said with a casual air. “Penny’s the intellectual.”

“Speaking French ‘ain’t no big thang’ either,” Penny joked.

“You’re getting your Masters in French?” Lydia asked.

Penny mumbled, “*Oui*,” just as Marie sashayed up the steps toward their table. Before Malcolm walked off, she reached out and grabbed his ass.

“Later, babe,” she called to him, just loud enough for the girls to hear.

Lydia watched in silence, smoke curling from end of the cigarette she balanced between two fingers. Without taking her eyes off Marie, she brought it to her lips and took a drag. After four years of working together, she was impervious to the other woman’s antics.

Marie draped herself onto a chair across from Penny. She slung an arm over the back of the chair, forcing her taut breasts forward, and emitted her gravelly, trademark laugh. “And how are you girls doing out here?”

Frankie didn’t miss a beat. “We are just hunky dory, Marie. And how is your bad self this evening?”

Marie looked hard at Frankie and tried to figure out how much Penny had told her. Unable to get a read, she squeezed her eyes into little slits and answered, “My bad self is just fine, Frankie, you Amazon.”

MY COMIC VALENTINE

Only Marie referred to Frankie as an Amazon and got away with it. Frankie was, after all, almost six feet tall, with a hard, muscled body toned from four years of serious college sports, in addition to her current workout regime. After working two years at the comedy club, witty, verbal sparring had become the norm for Frankie and Marie.

Penny figured this enabled each to exert her strong personality without stepping on the other's toes. Frankie enjoyed toying with Marie and didn't give a shit about Marie's ego or her power trips. She also knew Frankie possessed the insight to know Marie wore her sexual exploits like a badge of honor, so she'd tease her about them, which served to bring them into the open. Sooner or later, Marie would make sure the entire staff was well aware of her most recent fuck anyway.

Yet Frankie was the only person who came even close to intimidating Marie. Penny noticed Marie seemed to crave Frankie's approval, although she'd be loathe to admit it. Penny cringed as she realized Frankie would now do Marie the favor of bringing to the fore her most recent example of outrageous behavior.

For, while Penny was repelled by Marie's braggadocio, she also feared her retribution. She'd witnessed her vengeful side in the past, and had heard plenty of stories from other girls on the staff. Marie's vindictive behavior included getting servers fired, or driving them to quit by cutting their shifts, in addition to making them miserable on the job. Penny had always avoided much contact with Marie, which seemed only to serve in attracting her attention.

Penny noted Frankie's mischievous expression. She was taunting Marie with silence, and Marie knew it. Marie, in turn, gave Frankie a nonplussed look, staring until Frankie looked away. When Frankie looked back over, however, she assumed a pointed expression. A moment later, Marie took the bait.

"What?" Marie said. "What the fuck you staring at?"

"I'm not staring at anything," Frankie said teasingly. "Whatsa

MY COMIC VALENTINE

matter—got a case of the guilts?”

“The guilts—me? I think you know me better than that,” Marie snarled.

Then Marie looked over at Penny. Penny faltered beneath her gaze. She blinked and turned away.

“Okay. So Miss Sunshine told you what happened in the dressing room, I gather?”

Penny started to protest when Lydia picked up the slack.

“Oh? Something happen in the dressing room? Oh, do tell. You know I must know all.” After working together so long, Marie had ceased to intimidate her. Lydia locked eyes with her, took a long, impudent drag off her cigarette, and blew smoke out the side of her mouth.

“For Christ’s sake, you know I don’t give a crap,” Marie snarled. “It’s little Mary Sunshine, here, who got all freaked out.”

Penny started to protest, but Marie cut her off.

“Malcolm happened to be tasting my titties,” she blasted, “when Sunshine stumbled through the door and got a gander. It’s no big deal. I’ve fucked two or three bastards on the counter in there, before. Who cares if she saw Mal sucking my tits? Actually, I told her she could join us, but she scurried off to hide in the bathroom. Scared of me, I guess—the Big Bad Wolf.”

“I wasn’t scared, Marie!”

“Hell, I’d be scared if I saw that little scene,” Frankie interjected. “A live sex show before work would *not* be my favorite, thank you very much.”

“Oh? Then I guess I won’t be showing you my latest video. The one with my neighbor, that Chinaman, Lee Bogg. I fucked him good and we taped it. He ass-fucked me, too. I was gonna share it with you, Frankie, knowing how deep down you crave me.”

Frankie laughed. “That’s right, sister, I’ve wanted your ass since the

MY COMIC VALENTINE

first time I saw you. I just hate sharing my woman with every Tom, Dick and Harry in the city, though, you know?"

"I know. That's why it'd never work between you and me."

Lydia rolled her eyes and stubbed out her cigarette. "I think I'll go see how many are on the books, tonight." She slipped out of her seat.

"You check those reservations, girl," Marie issued in a throaty voice.

Penny took the opportunity to slide off the banquette seat after Lydia. "I'm gonna get these roll-ups onto the side tables."

Marie mocked her with a sickening, sweet voice. "I'm gonna get these roll-ups onto the side tables. You do that, sweetheart, and try not to cry along the way."

Penny shot her a look of disgust, but said nothing and hurried off. Within earshot, she heard Frankie ask Marie, "Do you, in all honesty, enjoy taunting people?"

Marie emitted the throaty laugh that was her signature reaction any time she refused to give an inch of compassion. "Only when I know I can get to them."

Frankie shook her head and sighed. "You are some piece of work."

"Thank you," Marie said. "I'm a great piece of ass, too."

CHAPTER 2

Students were always hanging around outside Hunter College on Sixtieth Street. They'd be milling along the sidewalks, or sitting around reading and chatting with each other. College youth and grad students could always be seen dotted along the steps and platforms of the buildings around campus. Penny joined them, tossing her book bag onto a cement ledge bordering the administration building. She hoisted herself up beside it.

After situating herself, she turned to Frankie. "I'll take that, now."

Frankie handed her an I-Love-New-York cup of hot coffee and went on with what she'd been saying. "One good thing is, if I have to bust my ass all semester just to pass that class, I won't have time to get in any trouble. Between work and these classes, I won't be pursuing boys or partying too much."

"Something to be said for tough classes," Penny joked.

"Unfortunately." Frankie leaned against the cement wall next to

MY COMIC VALENTINE

where Penny's legs were hanging down. She blew into the hole of the plastic cover on her own coffee and sipped.

Across the street, Penny noticed the striking figure of a tall, thirty-something man dressed in a dark-colored kilt. With several books jammed beneath an arm, he had stopped to stare at her.

Frankie's eyes followed him over the lid of her coffee cup. She nudged an elbow into her buddy's calf. "You know this guy? Across the street?"

"Yeah. Professor MacAlister," she gushed. "He's so fine."

"If you like men in skirts," Frankie said.

"I do. Especially on him."

Penny waved, and Frankie raised a dubious eyebrow. The professor came toward them.

"Ah, the lovely Penelope Ann Foster," he said. His resonant voice was delivered with concise enunciation. "How do you do, today?"

"It's Penny, professor. I'm fine, thank you. This is my roommate, Frankie—as opposed to Francine."

He turned and gave Frankie a little half-bow. "How do you do, Frankie-as-opposed-to-Francine."

"Frankie's just fine, thanks. Nice to meet you, professor."

"Since we're on a first-name basis, please call me Christopher. Or Chris."

"Christopher?" Frankie asked. "Okay. Or Chris."

"Christopher MacAlister. Nice ring," Penny added.

The professor chuckled. "Thank you." He looked with fondness at Penny. "I enjoyed our conversation the other day."

"So did I. I love talking about that stuff."

"What stuff?" Frankie asked.

"Oh, Caesar's conquest of Gaul," Penny said nonchalantly. "It's so interesting how the Roman army affected Gallic culture over time, during and after the occupation."

MY COMIC VALENTINE

"Fascinating stuff," the professor concurred. "Let me ask, are you busy now? I could grab a cup of coffee, too. We could carry on from where we left off, the other day."

"Actually, I do have, maybe, forty-five minutes 'til I have to leave for work. Frankie?"

"Count me out, kids. Ancient history ain't my specialty. I have some reading on modern criminal law I need to catch up on."

"Frankie wants to be a detective when she grows up," Penny explained to the professor.

He raised his eyebrows. "A detective? Good for you."

"I hope it'll be good for me. See you at the triple Cs, Penny. Bye, Prof—uh, Chris. Nice to meet you, sir."

"A pleasure meeting you, too, Frankie. Ma'am."

Frankie headed for the library, eyeing Penny as she walked away. Penny pretended not to notice.

Christopher looked at Penny. "I hope your friend doesn't think I'm rude to butt in. I didn't mean to steal you away."

"Nah, she's fine. I live with her and we work together—I mean, I love her, but I see quite enough of her. You know?"

"If you say so," he said with a smile. "Come on. Let me grab a coffee. We'll have to find a corner in the lounge, since I lent my office to my assistant. He's grading some papers for me."

"The lounge is fine."

The professor reached up for Penny's elbow, steadying her as she jumped from the wall. She thanked him and pulled her bags down.

Christopher reached for her leather book bag. "Here, I've got that."

"No, that's okay," Penny said, but he had already lobbed it over his back and started moving forward.

She followed his impressive frame up the staircase.

"Hey, Christopher," she said, trotting a foot behind him, "what do you people wear underneath those kilts anyway?"

MY COMIC VALENTINE

The professor turned toward her and grinned. “Now, don’t you know that’s an age-old secret? I can’t give that kind of information away.”

“Oh, sorry. I didn’t know.”

“Anyway,” he added, “didn’t you see *Braveheart*?”

“Ye-es...” Penny struggled to remember what they wore beneath their kilts in the movie, but came up with nothing. “I’m still clueless.”

He laughed.

“Well,” she chirped, “we’ll just have to leave it a mystery, for the moment.”

He chuckled slyly. “I guess we will, for the moment.”

Penny wondered if that was some sort of offer.

She hurried to keep up with the professor’s stride. He was, she guessed, six—two. When he stood to the side and held the lobby door for her, she looked up and noticed how his blue eyes sparkled. She also sensed amusement in those eyes.

Okay, professor, we’ll leave that kilt thing a mystery, for now. But, one of these days, I just might have to find out for myself the hidden facts of the matter.

* * *

In the comedy club’s kitchen, Penny loaded up a tray with ten or so of the signature glasses. The tall glasses bore the names of famous comedians who had performed there, into which the bartender would pour one of several specialty drinks. Customers purchasing these drinks were invited to take the glass home when they left the club. Almost a foot tall, the glasses were monsters on a serving tray, especially difficult to carry when empty. Penny was in the process of balancing a tray full of future souvenirs when she was startled by the unexpected sound of a familiar voice.

“Hey,” she heard, “good to see you, too, guy.”

The rich, low timbre of Bobby Deagan’s voice ignited a rush of

MY COMIC VALENTINE

adrenaline through her, and she halted in her tracks. But, in stopping short, a couple of empty glasses clinked into one other. She stood helplessly as one glass teetered precariously into another, setting off another, and another. She held the tray, wide-eyed, as the seconds expanded into an eternity, with glasses circling on their bases. Bobby rounded the corner and caught sight of the teetering little monsters. He rushed over to Penny's side, calling out, "Whoa, whoa, there!"

Penny stood stock-still, since interference might only prove more hazardous. She knew Bobby was beside her, poised like a baseball catcher, but was afraid to turn and look until the glasses had stopped shifting. He'd bent down, expecting to grab a stray glass before it reached the floor. The immobilized couple hovered and watched, waiting for each glass to cease twirling on the tray before they resumed breathing. With the final tinkle of glass, Penny dared to look at him. Bobby relaxed and straightened up.

He chuckled. "That was hairy."

"Man, that could've been ugly," Penny said. "Thanks."

"Why? I didn't do anything. Here, let me get the door for you."

He pushed against the heavy door and held it open, while Penny carefully started to maneuver the tray through.

"I hate carrying these things." She negotiated with care between his arm and the doorframe.

"Well," he said, "they're almost as tall as you are, for crissake."

Penny padded over to the waiters' stand and lowered the tray with caution onto the granite top. Once she'd eased it into a safe position, she set about removing each glass. She could feel Bobby's eyes checking her out, especially her ass, as he leaned against a nearby wall. She kept her attention on her task, however, and lined the glasses into neat rows. When she was done, she turned and faced him. He held her gaze a moment, then smiled and headed toward her. Excitement tickled her insides as an unexpected surge of heat zoomed to her private parts.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

Self-conscious, she turned away in search of another task.

“So, how’re things going, Penny?” he asked.

“Fine, Bobby. Everything’s fine.” She straightened the utensil roll—ups along the sideboard.

Bobby plopped down into the banquette next to where she was working. He watched her with candid appreciation.

She glanced over at him.

God, he’s cute. Those eyes...they’re, what color are they? Such a light brown, they’re almost gold...wow...and his lips are full, but so masculine...

“Hey,” he said in a soothing voice, “I’m sorry I didn’t get a chance to call you when I left. Last time I was here. My agent booked me out at the last minute, and I had to split right away.”

Penny shot him a doubtful look.

“It’s true,” he retorted. “I had to fly out to frigging Indiana at, like, six in the morning. I ended up staying there, a while. Got a slew of bookings, one after another.”

She forced herself to give him the benefit of the doubt. “That’s good. How is it out there? Pretty?”

“I guess. Loads and loads of cornfields. Miles and miles of ’em. Boring as hell, in the long run. Especially not knowing anybody. Wasn’t easy to meet people I’d want to hang with, out there.” He paused and gave her a flirtatious smile. “I thought about you a lot...”

“Oh, really? Whatsa matter—break your dialing finger?”

He smirked at her little dig. “Okay. I know you won’t believe this, but I lost your number. I could’ve sworn I had it, but I couldn’t find it anywhere. Really. I swear.”

Penny examined the features of his face. *God, he has great lips.*

“And you’re not listed in the phone book either,” he added, “‘cause I called information.”

She nodded. “True. I’m not. That’s why, when I gave you my

MY COMIC VALENTINE

number, I told you not to lose it.”

She found it hard to resist the cute look of remorse on his face.

“I’m an idiot,” he confessed. “What can I say?”

Yikes, but she craved those lips on her own. It had been quite some time since she’d been with someone...well, since she’d made meaningful lip contact. She tried to stave off the sudden, encroaching guilt she felt with the memory of her last encounter.

She’d picked up her ex-boyfriend, Kevin Coulton, at a loud nightclub called Zombies. Nothing more than a wham-bam kind of thing: it had simply served to gratify her sexual need. She didn’t even like her ex, really, whom she’d met years before, while waiting tables as an undergrad. She’d been drunk the night she’d picked him up, a few months back, and taken him home with her. A vivacious lay, she learned he was still a lousy kisser.

And the next morning, after he’d forced out loud, obnoxious bouts of flatulence and burping, Penny had recalled some of the reasons why she’d been glad to let him go.

“Been great seeing you again, Kev,” she’d lied, showing him the door.

“You ever think about us?” he’d asked, turning toward her. “You know, spending time together. Just you and me?”

“We just spent time together. In my bed, in case you didn’t notice.”

Kevin had stopped at the door and turned toward her. “Oh, you *know* I noticed.”

Penny had tried to avoid the big, wet kiss he’d nevertheless managed to plant on her lips. “I meant, do you ever think about us as a couple, again?”

The last person Penny wanted sharing her life was the sloppy, ambitionless Kevin.

“Kevin,” she’d said, smiling as she pulled the door around, “I can’t go there right now, honey. I have so much studying to do. With my job

MY COMIC VALENTINE

and everything...let's just keep that door open, until I can see the forest, again."

"The forest?"

She'd sighed at his inability to catch her innuendoes. "You know, 'Can't see the forest for the trees?' Never mind..."

"No, babe. It's all right. I know how you are." He'd pecked her cheek and given her a jaunty look. "Gimme a call anytime you need the pipes checked."

Penny had shaken her head and closed the door with firmness.

From now on, I'll check my own pipes, thank you very much.

She shook away the memory of that night with Kevin and proceeded to straighten the pile of roll-ups along the sideboard. She glanced over toward Bobby. He was still watching her, the hint of a smile on his face.

"What?" she asked.

"Nothing. Just admiring your loveliness."

Penny blushed. "Oh, thanks."

Christ, she thought, if he had any idea who I was just thinking about. And what did he say? 'My loveliness.' What a departure from Kevin.

"Will you be around after the show tonight, for a drink?" Bobby asked.

She shrugged. "Sometimes I hang out for a drink. If I don't have an early class in the morning."

"Oh, that's right. You're a grad student at Hunter, aren't you?"

"Yup."

"What's your major?"

"French history."

"Right, right. When do you graduate?"

"This spring."

The golden flecks in his irises sparkled as he focused the full

MY COMIC VALENTINE

intensity of his gaze into her own blue eyes.

“You drove me crazy when you spoke French, last time.”

She looked away.

He paused and gave her a seductive smile. “Come on. Say something to me.”

Penny pursed her lips. Guys always wanted to hear her speak French. *Must be some demented fantasy about French women being sexier than American.*

She turned and faced him with an expression of intentional blandness.

“Je ne peux plus rester ici en faisant la blague. Il faut que je travaille.”

“Mmm...wow... what does that mean?”

“It means I can’t stand around shooting the breeze anymore. I have to get to work.”

She sauntered off as Bobby called out, “*Au revoir*. See you after the show.”

CHAPTER 3

One of the perks of waiting tables at New York's hottest comedy club was hanging around after hours, drinking cocktails and schmoozing with stand-ups. The more famous the headliner, however, the less likely he or she was to hang around after a performance. Most of the time, only B-list guys stuck around to socialize. Every now and then, though, a big name would linger in the outer lounge and chat with staff members.

Penny noticed that tended to happen if the comic was male and had spotted a waitress he wanted to make time with. But Penny didn't hang around, even when she sensed she was the object of desire. She'd leave to go home to bed for an early class the next day, or to study. But, since Bobby Deagan had taken an interest in her, she decided to stick around tonight.

After the showroom closed, Penny made herself cozy in one of the high-backed booths in the outer bar area. Donny played bartender for a

MY COMIC VALENTINE

while, refreshing drinks for her and other staff members, until he got too drunk.

When Lydia requested another vodka tonic, he looked at her with a goofy smile. "Hey," he slurred, "the bar's all yours."

Penny thought how serendipitous it was that Chloe left the running of daily operations to the managers and allowed her staff quality down time. She didn't mind them hanging around awhile, and let them drink free of charge. Manny, the manager, kept a handle on all activities, making sure the staff never made a ruckus. They, in turn, were good enough not to abuse the after-hours privilege by pilfering ashtrays, glasses, or liquor bottles, loading up their knapsacks as other restaurant employees often did. Penny smiled to think that maybe trust begets trust, after all.

Pushing her swizzle stick around the ice cubes in her madras, she sensed a pair of eyes on her. She glanced up to see Bobby standing by the table, wearing that crooked grin of his.

"Miss Foster?"

"Mmm...?"

"The crowd seems to have shifted over to that video machine. May I join you here?"

"Of course."

She slid in a little, and he slipped in beside her. The oversized bags she carried throughout the city separated them.

"So," she asked, "were you, like, a teacher before you got into this business?"

"No." Bobby laughed. "What makes you ask that?"

She shrugged. "I don't know...my mom's a teacher."

"Oh, yeah?"

"Uh-huh. Maybe it's the way you were talking with the staff before, kind of leading the conversation. You had a nice group chat going there for a while."

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Maybe being one of six kids has something to do with it.”

“Really? Six kids in your family?”

“Yup. Tommy’s the oldest, then me. After my mom remarried—bam!—like instant mashed potatoes, we had two stepsisters and two more brothers. Yee-ha.”

“Wow.” Penny sipped from the swizzle straw in her drink. “Did you change your name to your stepdad’s, and Tommy didn’t? Not to be nosey or anything...”

Bobby chuckled. “I don’t think you’re being nosey. I don’t mind telling you about myself. I feel comfortable around you. Actually, I don’t usually hang out with the staff after work, or share my family history—deep, dark secrets of the Deagan-Cutting clan...”

“Your secrets are safe with me.”

He smiled and held her gaze.

Penny noticed his dimples, and looked away when she felt herself staring. She swirled her drink and listened to what he had to say.

“My mom had me when she got married to Jim Deagan. Before him, she was married to her high school sweetheart, Don Cutting. They got married just after Tommy was born.”

“Uh-huh.”

“That lasted for the blink of an eye. Surprise, surprise.”

“Well, how many high school romances do?”

Bobby shrugged. “True. But we never really got to know either of our dads. It was kind of a taboo subject with Mom, so we quit asking about them.”

“Wow—that must’ve been hard.”

“When I was really young, yeah. But, my mom has this knack for drama, you see. Little things tend to get blown way out of proportion and take on a life of their own. You know Ray Romano’s mom, on his TV show? My mother makes her look sedate, by comparison.”

Penny chuckled. “Ray. He used to perform here a lot. In the ‘old

MY COMIC VALENTINE

days.”

“Sure, I remember. I know Ray pretty well—lucky bastard.”

“He’s a big star, now.”

“Yeah, a good guy, though. A real good guy. He deserves it.”

“Don’t you deserve it, too?”

Bobby shrugged. “I like to think I deserve something. It’s my big brother who wins all the awards, though. His career is moving up and up, like a shooting star. I just hope I can carve out my own niche, somewhere along the line, and quit struggling so much.”

On impulse, Penny dug through her book bag and pulled out a portable mini umbrella. It was closed up tightly in the fat, neat shape of a stuffed sausage.

“Here, this is all I can find. I don’t have my crystal ball with me,” she said, half-joking. “Let’s ask the magic wand what’s in store for you. By the way, you do believe in magic?”

“Not really.” Then he chuckled. “Go ahead—cast a spell on me, baby. I’m game.”

“Hmm...let’s see.” She circled the “wand” in the air a couple of times in an invisible infinity sign, then stopped and held it like a microphone. “Okay, tell me, wand, what the future holds for my friend here, Mr. Bobby Deagan. A very funny guy—who happens to be pretty cute, too.”

Bobby’s eyebrows lifted. “Why, thank you, Miss Foster. Right back at you, by the way.”

“Hey, I’m not fishing for compliments. Just feeding the facts to the magic wand.”

“Facts are facts—you’re a beautiful woman.”

Penny blushed. Rather than follow her inclination to switch the subject, she forced herself to look into Bobby’s gold-flecked eyes.

“Thank you,” she asserted. “That’s sweet of you to say.” When a warm flush engulfed her, she wished she was leaning against him

MY COMIC VALENTINE

instead of the leather banquette.

Bobby perked up as though he sensed her desire.

"Hey," he suggested, "you're way over there. Why don't you come a little closer? I don't bite." He lowered his voice. "Unless you want me to."

Conscious of the other staff members milling around, Penny lowered her eyes. "Maybe later." She straightened up and took a deep breath. "Now, where was I?"

"You were telling my fortune," Bobby said. He lowered his voice and said huskily, "Tell me something good, baby. Don't tell me if it's bad."

She put on a Russian accent. "Let me inquire of za forces to see how zey perceive za future of Bobby Deagan."

Bobby chuckled. "Who are you—Madame Za-za?"

"Ya, Za-za. Zat's me."

Penny wrapped her hand around the umbrella shaft.

Bobby cocked his head to one side. "Are you left-handed?"

"Ya. Vhy do you ask?"

He shrugged, grinning broadly.

She looked down and realized she'd been simulating a hand-job on her umbrella. She stopped and blushed, figuring her cheeks were fuchsia from the heat she felt.

Bobby chuckled quietly. "So, who's going to be richer and more famous—my brother or me?"

Penny cleared her throat and continued speaking with a Russian accent. "Let us see...you vill write your own show, za forces say. You vill be funny man, but more behind the scenes...live in, let's see—Brent-wood? Have a big, beautiful home, many friends, many parties..."

Bobby looked at her, deadpan. "Why did you say that?"

"Say vat?"

MY COMIC VALENTINE

He said nothing for a moment, then, “I didn’t tell you about the deal Tommy and I are working on, did I?”

“I know uff no deal...”

He was quiet a moment before he spoke. “Maybe you *are* psychic.”

She dropped the accent. “Yeah? Why? What’d I say?”

He said nothing, merely watched her with narrowed eyes.

A tad flustered, Penny stuffed her travel umbrella back into her bag.

“Hey,” Bobby said in a sultry voice, “why don’t you and I go out for a night cap? Just you and me...get out of here.”

Penny nodded. “All right. Not too late, though. I have a lecture on French moralists at ten in the morning.”

“Okay, Miss Smarty Pants. Not too late.”

* * *

After a drink at McHale’s, Penny and Bobby strolled up Columbus Avenue. He held her hand and she noted its dry warmth, even on this unseasonably humid night in September.

“I wonder when this heat wave’s going to ease up,” she said.

“Don’t know. It’s good practice for going down to Dallas, next week.”

“Your next gig’s in Dallas?”

“Yup.”

“When will you be back here?”

“Six weeks. After that, I’ll be in and out of New York every so often. Got a lot of things lined up, like a cross-country tour.”

“Wow. How long does that last?”

“I don’t know, exactly. A year, maybe?”

“Good for your career? I mean, is that a good place to be at, doing cross-country tours?”

Bobby slowed down their pace. “This is a good place to be at—with you.”

“What—the Museum of Natural History?”

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Is that where we are? Geeze, I didn’t even realize...did we just walk thirty blocks?”

“Not quite. More like twenty. A mile or so...”

The conversation trailed away as Penny followed Bobby’s lead. They left the avenue and turned toward a tree-lined walkway behind the museum. He pulled her over to the stone wall winding around its perimeter, centered in one of Manhattan’s most posh neighborhoods.

When they reached the end of the wall, Bobby leaned a hip against the slab of gray stone that reached to just below his waist. He swung Penny around to face him. He let go of her hand to cup her face with both of his own and rubbed his thumbs against her chin.

“Mmm...soft,” he said.

“How can you tell? I’m so sweaty from all that walking!”

“I like sweaty.”

She grimaced. “I don’t think so—”

Before she could say another word, Bobby closed his mouth over hers. She gave herself over to the deliciousness of feeling his full lips against her own. When she felt him push, her lips parted to let his tongue in. She let him dominate the kiss until her ardor was aroused, and her tongue explored his. They were turned on fast and, in a few moments, had their bodies pressed up against each other. Bobby leaned back against the wall with Penny’s full body weight collapsed onto him. The shadows from surrounding trees and the building’s turrets swallowed their passionate moans.

Consumed with desire, they writhed against each other. Penny grabbed Bobby’s shoulders to steady herself against his undulating groin. She pulled her pelvis up against him and curled a leg around his buttocks. She tried desperately to feel his cock through her linen slacks and his blue jeans. In one sweeping movement, Bobby shifted his position, lifting her up and around to sit on top of the stone wall.

He nuzzled himself between her legs and reached down behind her

MY COMIC VALENTINE

to clasp a hand under each side of her ass. Holding her buttocks, he tilted her upward and leaned himself into her. She clung to his neck for support and opened her legs wider, tilting back. In the balmy heat of Indian summer, they pulled in frustration at each other's garments, sweating and panting their way down to a horizontal position on the cool stone wall.

Penny thought she might lose her mind with desire. She released an arm from Bobby's neck to slide her hand down over his crotch. He backed away just enough to let her grab his shaft through the denim of his jeans.

"Mmm...baby," he muttered, "right there."

Their lips parted an inch while Penny concentrated on pushing and pulling him through the fly of his pants. A sweat bead trickled down the side of Bobby's face as her hand slid up to his waistline. She popped the metal button from its loop, yanked down the zipper and slipped in her hand. When she felt his massive hard-on through his underwear, her pussy tingled and her brain rushed with electricity. She wanted to rip off her own slacks and panties and pull his cock inside of her, right there and then. Her hand eased down toward the top of his underwear.

Just as she felt his pubic hairs brush her skin, she also felt Bobby's hand close around her wrist. She squinted up at him and, through the haze of erotic excitement, tried to figure out why he was stopping her.

"Huh?" was all she could croak out.

She tilted her head and looked into Bobby's eyes.

Well, she thought, his eyes are smiling, so what gives?

She felt the gentle removal of her hand from his crotch.

She shook off the heat of the moment, looked around, and realized why he'd put the brakes on the heat of their passion. Late-night revelers were walking down Columbus Avenue, and a homeless guy was wandering along Seventy-ninth Street. Penny wondered if anyone had

MY COMIC VALENTINE

caught sight of their heavy petting, just yards away.

When Penny released her other arm encircling Bobby's neck, he stuck his hand down his pants to re-adjust himself and zip up his fly. She slipped off the wall and stood, pulling the seam of her slacks out of her crotch. She straightened her shirt, smoothed down her hair and dug into her handbag. A moment later she extracted a tissue, which she dabbed against her forehead and upper lip.

Bobby ran a hand through his sandy-colored hair and looked at her. "Got another one of those?"

She handed him a fresh tissue, which he used to mop his face and the back of his neck.

"Wow," she muttered, "that felt like we were in a fog, or a dream...too bad we're out here on the street."

"Yeah. We were getting carried away, there, for a minute, weren't we? Not that it wasn't great."

"I didn't want to stop."

"Me, neither. But I'm not quite at that level of exhibitionism, if you know what I mean."

"Me neither. Plus—can't we get arrested for that?"

"I suppose we could." A crease appeared in his forehead. "Not the kind of publicity I'd want to have."

Penny laughed. "Stand-up arrested for public fornication!"

"Hmm...actually, that might boost my career. You never know, these days." Bobby reached around, picked up Penny's book bag from the wall and hoisted it over his shoulder. "Jesus," he said with a groan. "You carry that thing around all the time?"

"Pretty much. I need my books for studying."

They walked along Seventy-ninth Street toward Central Park West.

"You want to go back to my hotel room?" he asked.

"I'd love to, but I can't. Got that early lecture in the morning, remember?"

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Right, right. When do you work next?”

“Friday.”

“So, on Friday, you want to have dinner after the show? We’ll go down to the village. To Blue Ribbon.”

“I love that place. Great food.”

“Mmm. Late night gourmet.”

“Sounds like a plan,” Penny said.

She hooked her arm through Bobby’s. As they strolled toward the avenue, she accepted the fact that tonight wouldn’t end with sexual gratification. The throbbing pulse of her desire would have to wait another day.

CHAPTER 4

Each Friday at six p.m., when the show room doors to Chloe's Comedy Club opened, Penny would think, Let the circus begin.

Tonight was no different from any other Friday. Standing off to one side, Penny waited for her section to fill up. She watched Manny lead customers to an available table and rush back to the door, where Malcolm stood collecting tickets, holding the crowd in check behind red—velvet ropes. She also watched Manny's dad, Vincent, who joined the staff on weekends. He acted as host and helped Manny seat the hundreds of people ready for laughs after a tough workweek.

Manny would crank up the sound prior to opening the club's double doors. As a pre-show warm-up, the huge screen hanging before the stage blasted forth the latest in top MTV videos. Right now, Penny watched some rapper with a gold tooth strutting through a mansion filled with fat-assed girls shaking their booties.

Why, Penny asked herself, does the modern equation for fun reside

MY COMIC VALENTINE

in ear-blasting noise and swirling visual stimulation? Makes me dizzy.

She figured it was all part of America's dumbing down the standard for entertainment, exchanging an adrenaline rush for artfulness. She sighed and berated herself for sounding snobbish. Then she laughed, thinking about the irony of *that* thought: this "intellectual snob" would be running food and drinks all night for the folks she'd just coined as dopes. For three shows, she reminded herself.

I'll be jumping through hoops for demanding dum-dums. She sighed. *Nothing intellectual in earning cash that way.*

She glanced over to see Bobby stick his head out of the kitchen. The sight of his gleaming eyes shot a jolt of excitement through her. She smiled and walked toward him; he met her halfway.

"Good crowd tonight," she said.

"Get 'em liquored up a.s.a.p. Lubricates the laughs."

"So they say."

She noticed a good-looking blond fellow had stuck his head out after Bobby.

"Packing 'em in out there?" he called over.

Bobby nodded. "Seems that way."

"Good! That's what I like!"

"Penny, did you meet my brother, Tommy, the other night?"

"No, I didn't have a chance. How do you do?"

"Nice to meet you," Tommy said.

"Loved your act," Penny said. "Very funny stuff."

"Thanks. Appreciate that."

"You didn't say that about my act," Bobby whined, with a huge, mock pout.

"I did too! I told you I thought you were funny."

"Didn't Mom tell you not to fish for compliments, Bobby? Some things never change," Tommy teased.

"Yeah, like me bailing your ass out of fights when your wise-guy

MY COMIC VALENTINE

remarks would get you into trouble. Your whole life!”

Tommy laughed. “Whodda thunk...and now I’m making a living at it!”

“Son of a—” Bobby said. The two brothers feigned a semi-wrestling match. As a couple of fans noticed from nearby tables and started whispering, more heads turned.

“You’ll have to excuse me, you two,” Penny announced. “My section’s been seated and I’ve got to start plying my customers with liquor.”

“That’s right, sweetheart,” Tommy called. “Grease ’em up good for easy laughs. Especially for my baby brother, who needs all the help he can get!”

“You little—” Bobby started to say. But he stopped short and, instead of taking his brother’s bait, trotted up behind Penny.

A couple of fans snagged Tommy on his way back to the dressing room, and he dashed off autographs.

“I gotta run, you guys,” he said as more fans caught the scent. “Catch me after the show, all right?”

To Penny, Bobby said, “I’ll see you after the last show, right, Penny?”

She laughed and made a sassy little toss with her head.

“That’s right, *mon cher*.” She turned back and added, “You lucky boy!”

“I know,” he cheerfully agreed.

* * *

In the aftermath of a steamy shower, Penny toweled herself off with the thick, white towel boasting the Sheridan Hotel emblem. She reached across the faux marble-topped sink for the travel-size, vanilla-scented body lotion also provided by the hotel. Inhaling its luscious scent, she smeared it into the skin of her arms, legs, neck and chest. She removed the soft, white hotel robe from the back of the door, closed it

MY COMIC VALENTINE

around her body and cinched the belt around her waist.

Off came the Sheridan's plastic shower cap to release her thick locks. Penny rubbed her head to loosen her hair, arranging the blond, curling ends around her shoulders. As a final act of ablution, she swept her glass off the counter top and swigged the last drops of champagne from it.

Wearing his own Sheridan-issued robe, Bobby reclined on a sofa in front of the TV. He turned his head away from the History channel as soon as the bathroom door opened.

"She steps out in a cloud of steam," he joked. "Leave any hot water for me?"

"Hey, this is New York City. We don't run out of hot water."

"Not yet anyway." He rose and planted a quick kiss on Penny's forehead, then chugged the last of his own champagne. "All right. Let me get in the shower so I can get back out to you."

He placed his glass on the table and surprised her by turning to kiss her again. Feeling clean and cozy, she was melting against him when he broke away. He caressed her cheek with the back of his knuckles.

"Such soft skin...and you smell so yummy. Let me get in and out of there. You're all clean and I'm still sweaty. Be right back."

"How can you be sweaty? It's like a meat locker in here."

"Turn it up if you're too cold. Anyway, I'll be out in a few to warm you up." He pecked her mouth with a final kiss and headed for the bathroom.

She sauntered over to the air conditioning unit and raised it a couple of degrees. On her way back to the sofa, she stopped by the champagne bucket on the desk and reached for the bottle. Bobby had called her earlier in the day to find out what she wanted to drink that evening, and she'd told him *Moet et Chandon*. When they got back to the room after their late-night dinner, he'd pulled a chilled bottle of it from the fridge. Fulfilling that desire had delighted her. Now her heart pounded as she

MY COMIC VALENTINE

awaited the fulfillment of other desires she'd been harboring.

Aside from that night with her ex, Penny hadn't been with a man in a long, long time. That encounter had served only to stave off a feeling of desperation. Now, she wanted to be consumed by this man's passion and feel the satisfaction of his body weight pressing down against her own. She wanted him deep inside her, too.

She'd desired Bobby from the first time she'd seen him, six months ago. He was handsome and funny, and the combination had set her passions ablaze. She wondered if he'd crack jokes during sex.

Bobby emerged from a steamy bathroom to find Penny propped up on the pillows of the queen-size bed. She was sipping her champagne, half watching a sixties English vampire movie.

"Any champagne left for me?" he asked.

"Yes," Penny answered in a sultry voice. "But hurry and come over here so I can bite your neck and suck your blood."

"Suck my blood, eh? I have a better idea."

"Oh, really?"

He slid down beside her. "May I?"

Penny lifted herself away from the massive pillow pile-up to let him slide out two for himself. He propped himself up against them and leaned on his elbow to face her. Without moving her body, she turned her head and sent him an inviting smile. Bobby said nothing as he returned her gaze and sipped quietly from his glass.

Penny felt her nipples harden as she looked into his gold-flecked eyes. When he took his time shifting his glass into the other hand, her heart fluttered. He reached his free hand down and rubbed the front of her robe covering her breasts. Penny's eyelids lowered as she gave herself over to the delicious sensation.

Bobby eased himself closer to her, while brushing his hand over the full mounds of her breasts. He rubbed a bit harder to feel her erect nipples through the robe's thick fabric.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

"The perfect size," he said quietly. "And they're real."

"Of course they're real," Penny answered. "What—you can tell, just like that?"

"Mm-hmm...they feel so good...not like hard packs of silicone."

Penny's skin heated up as he ran his hand further down the terry cloth encasing her body. From her breasts, he slid his hand over her belted waist, and on down to caress her abdomen and thigh...

She basked like a great cat beneath the stroking of her master's hand, enticed, yet not moving a muscle. She heard Bobby's breathing deepen as he stroked the curves of her body, and she looked at the arousal beneath his own robe.

"If I was a cat, I'd be purring right now," she said huskily.

"I thought you *were* purring."

She chuckled. "Wait—I think you're right."

He slid his right hand up inside the robe's lapels and caressed her neck. She arched her chin up in a feline gesture that begged for more.

"I want to take my time. Do you mind?"

"No," she mumbled, "why would I mind? This feels great. I don't want to rush anything."

"After thinking about you all these months, imagining what it's like to be with you...I don't want to rush the real thing."

He slipped his hand further inside her robe. She grew hotter as his hand closed to encompass the roundness of her breast. He clasped her hard nipple between his thumb and forefinger, swirling them around its tip, squeezing and releasing repeatedly. She reached her arms up to embrace and kiss him.

He pulled back, unlatching her arms. "No, wait," he murmured, "not yet. Let me."

"But I want to feel you—"

"You will."

She obeyed, dropping back to the pillows as he reached for her belt.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

He loosened it, opening the robe just enough to reveal part of her chest and belly. He ran the back of his hand along her golden skin before pushing her lapels apart for full exposure of her breasts.

“Mmm,” he said in a pleased voice. “They’re more beautiful than I’d imagined.”

“You imagined them?”

“Oh, yeah. I’m not kidding—I thought of you a lot while I was gone. I often fantasized about you.”

She said nothing, only arched her back up as an invitation for him to take her flesh. He complied by grasping the lapels of her robe and yanking the robe away, pulling it down her back and arms. The rush of cool air against her hot skin made her nipples pucker. Bobby smiled, massaged her breasts, and lowered his mouth to taste her.

With gentle lips, he suckled her nipples and the flesh around them. He brushed his mouth down over toward her stomach, where he kissed her navel. Goose flesh sprouted across her skin each time his lips teased her with their light caress. She finally begged him to stop flicking his tongue in and out of her navel, so he ran it back up and over her breasts.

As he pressed his tongue flat across her nipples, Penny undulated in frenetic rushes of excitement, sensation after sensation pulsing from her throat down to her pussy. When she opened her legs beneath the robe that still covered them, Bobby moved on top of her. She felt his erection pressing into her through the robe he still wore.

As he mounted her, he pulled her arms from her sleeves and nuzzled his nose into her clean, dry armpit. She shuddered, pleased that he’d found one of her favorite erogenous zones. He nestled his mouth into that tender part before kissing and suckling his way back up to her shoulder, burying it in her neck. She giggled from the myriad of lush sensations.

“Oh, baby, in the flesh is so much better,” he said between love

MY COMIC VALENTINE

bites.

When he put his mouth directly onto hers, their kisses exploded in a glorious interplay of tongues touching and lips sliding over each other. As their frenzy increased, Bobby struggled to wriggle from his robe. Penny felt for his belt and was able to pull it open.

She reached up and ran the back of her hand along the exposed flesh of his smooth, hard stomach, and up over his chest. He lifted himself to give her better access to his pecs, which she massaged, squeezing his nipples between her fingers. With their mouths still joined, she pressed her hand down along his stomach, toward his pelvis, brushing against his pubic hairs before reaching for his manhood. When she grasped his shaft in the palm of her hand, he gasped in ecstasy.

“Oh, baby...” was all she heard.

She caressed his hard—on as she had the umbrella shaft, that night at Chloe’s. The thrill in easing his hot skin back and forth became the fuel feeding her wildest desire. She swallowed when Bobby raised himself onto his hands above her. He appeared mesmerized by the awesome sensation her stroking produced.

“Oh—my—God. Penny, that is so good.”

“Mmm...”

“But, wait, there’s time for me, later.”

“There’s time for you, now.”

He opened his eyes and looked down into hers, while she continued rubbing his shaft. Stroking the skin of his throbbing cock was bringing her immeasurable pleasure. Smiling, he watched her.

He chuckled. “You’re still wearing that big ol’ robe.”

“So are you, at least, halfway.”

He took hold of her wrist. “Hold on a minute, beauty.”

She released his penis. He pushed himself up and over her, onto his knees, where he shook off the rest of his robe. Penny’s eyes drifted

MY COMIC VALENTINE

toward his long thighs covered in soft, golden hairs and the erect penis jutting out between.

“Ooh, you look good,” she said.

Bobby laughed. “Thanks, darlin’. That’s one thing about being on the road: you work out to keep from dying of boredom. Got me in shape, if nothing else.”

She looked at his lean abs and defined pectorals. “I’ll say.”

“Now, what about you?”

“I try—”

Before she could finish her statement, Bobby was kneeling over her, ripping away what remained of her robe. She tried not to blush as he ran his eyes up and down her body. He stopped and stared at her muff. “So you *are* a natural blond.”

“Well, more or less.”

“You don’t dye this.” His fingers played in her curls.

“No, I don’t dye that.”

Bobby put his face right down into it and inhaled. When he took his head away, he said, “Here, let’s get rid of this. It’s only in the way.”

He helped her sit up and pulled her robe out from under her. In the blink of an eye, he had tossed it away and flipped her over to her belly. Her next sensation was that of his nose nuzzling her buttocks.

“You have the softest, smoothest ass,” he murmured.

He ran his lips across her ass cheeks, pulling the skin between his teeth, releasing it just before she’d feel discomfort. He flicked his tongue in and out of the tender skin along the inside of her crack, working his way down to the soft, golden hairs reaching up from behind her pussy. He lowered his head and rubbed his face against the smooth mounds of her ass, inhaling the musky but clean scent of her freshly showered privates.

“Mmm,” he mumbled, “you smell so good.”

He moved back up to open her legs and look at the fur of her

MY COMIC VALENTINE

brown-gold muff. She spread her legs to let his fingers open her fuzzy mounds, exposing the pink skin of her labia.

Penny basked in the mindless pleasure Bobby was bringing to her body. From behind, she felt his tongue tip against her inner pussy lips. She lifted up her tush and pushed back onto her knees, giving him full access to her cunt.

Starting with the soft skin below her anus, he swirled his tongue down and around until he reached the opening to her vagina. Flicking his tongue's tip just inside those moist, tender lips, he coaxed forth her juices. He pressed his tongue inside her more and more forcefully, moving it faster and faster, in and out of her hole. Penny groaned in delight as he circled it around and around.

"Oh, God, Bobby, that feels fantastic!"

He continued to pleasure her pussy, licking and swirling and flicking his tongue. He stopped and surprised her again by flipping her onto her back.

"I didn't see that coming," she said breathlessly.

"I want to see *you* coming," he growled, his voice thick with desire.

Penny felt a rush of blood flow from her pussy clear up to her brain. Her cheeks burned from the incoherent desire created by her head rush, and she thought she might faint. She watched Bobby crouch between her legs and flatten out on his stomach, his head at her crotch. He pushed his hands against her inner thighs to open her legs out, pinning his elbows against her calves.

Once he'd positioned her legs, he slid further up between them, bringing himself closer to her muff. He moved his hands up and spread her fuzzy lips open to see her tender, hidden parts. Penny was grateful the room was dim, the sole light emanating through the crack of the bathroom door.

When she felt him press both thumbs into her hole, she gasped. Her heart pounded with ecstatic excitement as he massaged the moist skin

MY COMIC VALENTINE

between her inner and outer lips, drawing out fresh juices.

“I want you to come in my mouth,” Bobby whispered.

Penny managed to squeak out, “Okay.”

He continued rotating his thumbs in her vagina. Her ass gyrated in sync with their circular movements. Then she felt him replace his thumbs with one of his middle fingers. His long finger slid in and out of her juicy cunt, deeper and deeper inside. Titillating rushes sparked in her vagina, emanating up toward her clitoris. The more her butt spiraled around, the more intensely Bobby fingered her. Her breathing grew heavy as the tensions built up in her pussy.

“Oh!” she called out. “Oh, I’m so hot, baby.”

“What do you want me to do now, Penny?”

“You know what to do!”

“What—fuck you or lick you? Come on. Tell me what you want.” He continued to finger her, waiting for an answer.

Penny wasn’t used to saying what she wanted. She hesitated before deciding she wanted an immediate release. “Lick me,” she said breathlessly. “Lick me.”

Bobby teased her further by asking, “What, sweetheart? What did you say?”

Penny was breathless, on the verge of coming. “Lick me, baby.”

“Lick you where?”

Penny could take no more. Her voice burst out, “My pussy! My clit—lick my clit now!”

Bobby complied without further hesitation. He eased his finger out and replaced it with his mouth. He kissed her pussy lips, then brushed his tongue against her hole, slipping it in and out. He ran it up from her hole to the tip of her clit. She felt him drive his finger into her again, while flicking the tip of his tongue against her super-sensitive nub. She cried out as the delightful friction produced the explosion of her first orgasm. She felt the wave of bliss begin at the lowest point of her cunt,

MY COMIC VALENTINE

where Bobby's finger was pressing, and wash up over her clit. One wave broke into the next as she moved her hips faster and faster to keep it going. Vibrations of blissful energy pulsed through her pussy, radiated through her ass, and exploded in her belly.

"Oh, Bobby, Bobby, Bobby," she uttered in the throes of multiple orgasms. She whispered his name breathlessly until the waves slowed down and melted away.

Bobby sat back on his heels and wiped his mouth on a nearby robe.

"Thank you." Penny's voice was almost inaudible.

"You're welcome, baby," he said in a low, husky voice.

She rolled over onto her belly and looked at his protruding cock. He gasped when she leaned in without warning and took the head into her warm, wet mouth. After she'd sucked him a moment, he placed his hands against her hair and held her head away.

"That feels great," he said. "But I need to be inside you."

Without another word, he rolled her back and pressed his body down onto her. He slipped the hot head of his cock between her swollen vaginal lips.

"Let me fuck you. Let me fuck that sweet pussy...oh, you're so wet," he murmured.

She gasped when she felt his throbbing cock stoking the furnace between her legs. She opened herself as he pushed his way in and entered her, filling her up. Bobby maneuvered his penis inside her the same way he'd just moved his finger, except now he grew wild with the abandon of his own sensation. He moved his rod faster and faster inside, thrusting it in and out. Penny gyrated her hips to accommodate his movements, holding onto his shoulders and upper back until he stopped, pulled out, and rocked back onto his knees.

"Here, let's try this," he said.

He took hold of her legs, one in each hand, and pulled first one, then the other, onto each of his shoulders. He eased himself back down

MY COMIC VALENTINE

and pushed his cock into her again. With the shift in their position, her legs bent far back and her buttocks lifted, she felt his chest rest against the backs of her thighs as her vagina stretched open to accommodate him. In this position, he felt huge, and she gasped at how far his penis moved inside her.

“You all right, baby?” he asked. “Am I hurting you?”

“No, no. It’s just—intense. I never felt it so deep before.”

“It’s good, isn’t it?” he asked. As she relaxed, he also relaxed, moving deeper into her canal. “Mmm—that’s deep. I’m so deep inside you.”

A moment later, his words became incoherent rambling. He eased himself down on top of her, angling her spine up and back. Her limberness enabled him to fuck her steadily in that position, and he took care in working his cock. As his turn-on increased, he thrust harder and faster. She could feel his rod expanding with the build up of his orgasm.

“I’m gonna come, baby,” he gasped. “Is that okay?”

“Yes...just go easy on me, like this.”

“Here, let me shift...”

He backed away and slid her legs off his shoulders. They fell naturally out to the side and he snuggled his body between them again. She held onto his shoulders and wrapped her legs around his waist while he screwed her with abandon. She felt him sweat as their fluids mingled together, and their body heat soared with the flow of their passion. She imagined his member sparking from the friction of such heated penetration, growing in intensity as he reached his boiling point and exploded.

He howled in ecstasy and filled her with his cum as Penny clung to him. Time fell away while she shared the deliciousness of his release, holding him even as he seemed transported to another dimension.

When Bobby was spent, he collapsed on top of her until she nudged

MY COMIC VALENTINE

him off. When he rolled onto his side, she hoisted a robe over them.

"That was great," he mumbled.

"Uh-huh," Penny said. "Ain't nothin' like the real thing."

"You know it."

After a moment of sweet silence, Bobby said, "I'd like to do that together, some time."

"Didn't we just do it together?"

"Come. I mean, I'd like us to come together. Can you do that?"

She didn't know why she was blushing from his question. "Not usually," she answered. "I usually come just from oral sex. I mean, I've tried—the other way. But, you know...it takes longer. So..."

"So other guys haven't bothered to take the time to get you there."

"Something like that."

He leaned up on his elbow, head in hand.

"Well, you want to work on it? Make it a project kind of thing?"

Penny laughed. "I'm not sure about it as a 'project,' but—hey, why not? I'd love to work on it. I mean, everybody knows practice makes perfect. Right?"

"That's right, pretty girl." He kissed the end of her nose, then her lips, and flopped over to his back.

Penny smiled at his offer. It was, amazingly, the first time any guy she'd slept with had been interested enough to want to go there, together. As she dozed off in his arms, she wondered if their connection might turn into a relationship.

* * *

Penny knew her apartment was empty the moment she walked through the door. She'd expected to find Frankie at her usual Sunday morning routine, drinking coffee and studying. She always did that, unless she'd had a late Saturday night, which was a rarity. Frankie wasn't much of a drinker and rarely lingered for cocktails after work. Since she was an early riser, jogging in the park most mornings at six-

MY COMIC VALENTINE

thirty, Frankie often cut short the socializing. Penny assumed Frankie had left Chloe's shortly after she'd gone to dinner with Bobby. Now it was almost noon, and her roomie was nowhere to be seen. She crept toward Frankie's room and looked through its open doorway to see her perfectly made bed, with no signs of life.

Huh, she thought. Maybe she ran to the store.

Shuffling down the hallway to her own room, she glanced in the mirror on the wall.

After-glow or not, you look tired, girl. Well, what do you want, after fucking all night with two hours of sleep?

She grinned at herself in self-congratulations and decided the great sex was worth the subsequent burnout. Even if she had to take a nap before she could get her studies done, her sexual escapades with Bobby had been worth every exhausted moment she'd spend in recovery today. She smiled and headed for the shower.

* * *

She woke up shortly after three p.m. to the smell of freshly brewed coffee.

"Frankie?" she called out from her bed.

Frankie walked to the doorway and smiled. "Yeah, girlfriend?"

"Oh, that is you."

"Who the hell else would make Sleeping Beauty a cup of java, when she awakens from her sleep?"

Penny laughed. "Well, you never know...maybe I thought the man I spent the night with was being nice. Although I doubt Bobby would be coming to the upper East Side to make me coffee, since he's boarding a plane for Dallas."

"Is that the deal? He's on his way to Dallas?"

"Mmm-hmm."

"For how long?"

"Six weeks. He even mentioned flying me out there to see him."

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Very nice. You spent the night with him, what, at his hotel?”

“Mmm-hmm.”

“And?”

“Very nice.”

Frankie gave her a provocative smile. “Well, isn’t that just peachy for you.”

“Peachy! It was beyond peachy.”

“Uh-huh.” She raised an eyebrow at Penny. “Well, roomie, I’ll have you know I didn’t spend the night alone at home either.”

This information sparked Penny’s interest. She pulled herself up off her pillow and sat up straight. “Okay, Francine Smithers, you tell what gives. Don’t be holding back on me, girl. I told you about mine.”

“Don’t be calling me Francine, Penelope Ann. You know I hate that name.”

“Okay, okay, sorry. I just got carried away, that’s all.”

Frankie turned back toward the kitchen. “You want cream in your coffee, right?”

Penny hopped off the bed. She made haste in shoving her arms into her robe sleeves, following her roommate. “How can you be so casual? Don’t torture me with this mystery, detective. Come on: who’d you spend the night with?”

“I won’t make a very good detective if I give up the facts so soon, will I?”

“You won’t be a very good friend if you don’t spill the beans, *now!*”

Frankie laughed. “Okay, girlfriend, let me get the coffee together. I’ll give you the low down.”

A few minutes later the two roommates were seated in the living room with toast and coffee. Penny gulped down two extra-strength Tylenols with her juice.

Frankie teased her. “Head all swolled-up there, doll?”

MY COMIC VALENTINE

Penny grinned. "I guess I could've done without that last glass of champagne."

"Mm-hmm. It's always the last one that does ya in."

"Enough about me. Let's hear about you."

"Now you know I don't kiss and tell."

"I know you don't do 'it' very often either. So spare me the details and just tell me: who?"

Frankie grinned at Penny's look of exaggerated impatience.

"Okay," Frankie said. "Remember I told you how Paul Worrell always makes cracks about my legs? That I have the fiercest legs he's ever seen on a woman? Well, he started it up on Saturday night, again, complaining about me wearing black pants instead of my usual shorts."

Penny had to bite her tongue to keep from blurting, "Paul Worrell?" She managed to sustain self-control, uttering a little, "Mm-hmm," while waiting for Frankie to divulge the details.

Frankie continued, "I don't know what possessed me, but I felt like toying with him. So I said, 'Well, Paul, honey child, my bare legs are still under these slacks. And they might possibly be made available for a private viewing, sometime. If you're interested.'"

Penny giggled and sipped her coffee.

Frankie gained momentum. "So, he looks me up and down with those puppy-dog eyes of his, under their long, black lashes, and smiles real sexy. And he says, 'Miss Frankie, don't tease me like that. Don't be cruel and make offers you have no intention of following through on.'"

Penny grinned and tapped her fingertips together in excitement.

Frankie raised her eyebrows and continued. "So I say, 'Paul, how am I being cruel to you? How do you know what know my intention is?' and he says, 'Oh, you have the power to hurt me, bad, Frankie, because I have dreamed of seeing those legs in private. I've been wondering how far up they go up for a very long time.' And I don't

MY COMIC VALENTINE

know how I got the balls to say, ‘Well, how come you never said so before?’ but I did. I said it.”

Penny nodded her head excitedly. “Yeah, so? So what’d he say?”

Frankie stopped a moment. “I don’t know that he said anything. I’m not sure what he said, to be honest with you. I guess I got flooded by lust, or something, those endorphins fogging up my brain. But, before I knew it, there we were, outside the triple C’s, walking over to his place.”

Penny waited, impatience eating her up. She urged Frankie on. “And, so?”

Frankie teased her by feigning indifference. “Mmm...what?”

“Oh, you know what! Like—that was it? You went back to his place? And—what? Did the deed?”

Frankie shrugged. “Yeah, basically.”

“And?”

Frankie became embarrassed. “What?”

“Well, how was it?”

Frankie took a deep breath and held it. When she exhaled, she blew out a long current of air.

“Let’s put it this way,” she said in a seductive tone. “You know how brilliant his stand-up is? Well, that brilliance transfers over into other realms. Let’s just say, he’s a very talented man, all around. Just—amazing. I mean, I have never...” Her voice trailed off and she assumed a dreamy expression.

Watching her, Penny raised an eyebrow. “That good, huh?”

Frankie nodded. “Yup. That good—and then some.”

Penny perked up. “Looks like we both got lucky. Yay for us.”

Frankie raised her coffee cup with a sly smile on her face. “I’ll drink to that.”

CHAPTER 5

On the edge of a gigantic pot in which a hickory tree resided, Penny sat, absorbed in thought. She was thinking about Paris, just prior to the French Revolution. She was in the process of developing her perspective for a paper she had due in a few weeks. She'd sit and mull over ideas from her current research whenever she got the chance. She was so lost in thought, she didn't see the man in blue jeans and black blazer approaching her. He remained unrecognized until he was practically on top of her.

"Oh," she said with a start. "Christopher—I didn't even see you."

"Lost in space, eh?" he joked.

"I was off in another era."

"Ah, time traveling. I love doing that."

"Me, too."

"Where were you?"

"Paris. Pre-Revolution."

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Mmm...the French Revolution. That was a particularly unsavory blot on human behavior. We’ll have to discuss it sometime.”

“Love to. Hey! I almost didn’t recognize you without your kilt!”

He chuckled. “Yes, well, I’m not bound by heritage all the time, you know. Actually, my habit of wearing kilts grew from the need to keep students’ attention on me, in case my fascinating lectures don’t do it. One day a kilt, the next blue jeans...I try to keep it interesting.”

“I see. Teaching class, are you?”

“I have no classes today. I’ve been up in the library, researching my book.”

“What book is that?”

“The one I’m writing about Gallic history. Incorporating my doctoral thesis into it, along with some research I did on Celtic migration and integration with the Franks.”

“Cool...right up my alley.”

He looked at her and she detected a glint of interest in his eye.

“Yes?” she asked.

“What?”

“Why are you looking at me that way?”

He shook his head. “Just entranced by you, I guess. Not only beautiful, but so bright, too.”

Penny blushed. “Oh! Thank you. That’s, uh, very sweet of you to say.”

She cleared her throat and tried to stave off the self-consciousness rising within her. When the professor said nothing, she smiled. She thought he appeared amused, as though he took pleasure in cracking the surface of her serious-student demeanor. She couldn’t help but notice how attractive he was, with fine, silver streaks throughout his black, wavy hair.

While she’d always aimed to keep her interaction with him on a professional level, she noticed other students did not. Girls gushed and

MY COMIC VALENTINE

fawned over him constantly, with abandon. Penny couldn't deny that she'd stared at him for his looks, on more than one occasion. But she'd always held herself in check. Now, however, unless she was mistaken, she was getting a very non-pedagogical vibe from him.

"May I be bold here, for a minute?" he asked.

Penny gave a shrug. "Sure."

"Would you care to discuss our mutual interests over dinner?"

Penny tried to keep her eyes from widening. *Holy shit! The professor's asking me out!* "Oh," she said with forced nonchalance, "that might be nice."

"That doesn't sound too enthusiastic."

Penny wondered if she'd been missing signs of interest, along the line, perhaps failing to notice a prior attraction on his behalf. Or was this one of those things that happens in the afterglow of intercourse, where the non-tangible but undeniable vibe of sexual satisfaction becomes an aphrodisiac, arousing others? This possibility sent a fleeting pang of guilt through her, since she'd been with Bobby only two days before and was now receiving a new kind of interest from her teacher.

Should I actually consider going out with my professor?

She and Bobby were new, and hadn't discussed relationship possibilities. And he was also out on the road, while the handsome, brilliant Christopher MacAlister was here in town. On campus, no less. Currently staring at her.

She snapped back to the moment.

"I'm sorry," she stammered. "I, I guess I was just, uh, I mean...I don't know what I mean! Sure. I'd love to have dinner sometime."

The professor chuckled. "How about Saturday?"

"Actually, I'd need a week's notice to get off work on a Saturday night."

"So pick another night. When's your next night off?"

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Sunday.”

“Then let’s do Sunday.”

“Okay.”

They exchanged phone numbers.

A few minutes later, Penny took leave of her teacher and headed for the subway to get to work on time. She walked along in a daze, amazed she’d just agreed to have dinner with a professor at the college she attended.

While she did have to stave off a recurring pang of guilt on account of her new love interest, she decided she had the right to date whomever she wanted, at this stage of the game. Even though she and Bobby were incredibly well—suited in the sack together, he was, after all, out on the road.

She sighed. *I’m sure it’ll all work out, in the end.*

* * *

Monday night at Chloe’s Comedy Club was “New Talent Night,” even though most of the performers were hardly new to entertainment or the club. Anyone who signed up in advance could perform, but only the emcee got paid. Some of those stand-ups had been playing mediocre acts at clubs around town for years, relegated to marginal gigs, playing outside the prime bookings. The more successful stand-ups who attended only showed up to try out new material, or to polish their acts.

Monday night also included those who only played Chloe’s to add the famous name to their resumé’s. This cluster consisted of over-the-hill entertainers who used the experience to book decent-paying jobs at less renowned clubs and resorts around the country, or aboard cruise ships. After six months of hearing these acts, Penny concluded the bulk of them ranged from mediocre to plain awful.

Mondays were more laid back than weekends, since the entertainers performed gratis and no cover was charged. Customers came in with

MY COMIC VALENTINE

lowered expectations. They were ready to chuckle, maybe even guffaw, rather than get a real belly laugh from a clever comic with a tried-and-true act. As a result, they tended to be less demanding on both comics and their servers. With so much amateur talent, Penny and other staff members tended to stand around a lot more watching the clock—waiting to end the pain.

On this particular Monday, Penny had served the tables in her section their first round of cocktails. She then sauntered over and parked herself by a waitress station, waiting for the show to roll. After examining her nails, she concluded she was in dire need of a manicure. She happened to glance up in time to see Frankie and Paul come out of the kitchen. Her perky smile faded, however, when she noticed how upset Frankie was. She watched her buddy say something to Paul, who grimaced, shrugged his shoulders and walked away from her. Penny watched him stride across the room, skip up the stairs, and take center stage.

Paul was fighting to soften his features into something resembling a smile, working to lose his grimace as the audience applauded him. Apparently, he'd been upset, too. With the mike in one hand, he drummed the fingers of his other against his thigh, absorbing the energy of his welcome. While the crowd cheered, he seemed to come into himself and, Penny noted, resume his showmanship.

Once the excitement died down, Paul spoke as emcee. "Good evening, folks, and welcome to new talent night here at Chloe's Comedy Club, where tapping your courage is the greatest factor in getting up on stage. Just ask the newbies you're about to see. I'm Paul Worrell, ladies and gentlemen, Paul Worrell—thank you, thank you."

He waited for the welcoming hoots, hollers and applause to die down.

"That's right, Worrell. Rhymes with bell, lives in hell. My world—and welcome to it. All right, I admit it's a self-imposed hell, of sorts.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

But, that's what happens when you spend your free time punishing yourself for all the stupid things you've ever done in your life! It's true—I tend to dwell on my mistakes.

“Take the negative and build a religion on it, that's my motto. Kind of like living in an altered state. On the one hand, I live a constant, inter-dimensional existence filled with self-loathing and abuse, while on the other hand, I'm going through the motions of having a life. I live in the past, while existing here and now. Gives me double the torture, double the fun. I'm two, two—two psychos in one!”

The audience laughed. They always loved Paul's self-abasement. Penny looked over to see Frankie's reaction. When she saw her roommate shake her head and storm back into the kitchen, she followed her.

By the time she caught up with her, Frankie was loading cocktails from the service bar onto her tray.

“Wassup, girlfriend?” Penny whispered. “Everything okay with the big guy?”

Frankie shot her buddy a wary look when Bert, the cranky bartender, got quiet. His nickname wasn't “eagle ears” for nothing. His proclivity for eavesdropping and gossip was unmatched by any other staff member. Penny understood and nodded. She walked over and held the door for her buddy. After Frankie delivered her drink order, she followed Penny to the back of the club and sat down next to her.

“So?” Penny asked. “What's going on?”

Frankie hesitated, searching for the right words. “I, uh...well,” she said in a low voice, “let's just say Paul didn't exactly appreciate the, uh, gesture I made earlier today.”

“You saw Paul earlier today?”

“No, I didn't see him 'til I got to the club tonight. I, well, extended sort of an act of kindness toward him. Which he apparently didn't see as, I don't know, appropriate, or something.”

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Uh-huh,” Penny mumbled. “Frankie?”

“Yeah?”

“What the hell are you talking about?”

Frankie sighed and shook her head. “All right, girl, I trust you. Just promise me, nobody here will find out anything we’re talking about.”

“I think you know me better than that, Frankie. I don’t gossip with the natives.”

“I know. Just making sure. Okay.” She sighed again. “Well, remember I told you how amazing Paul was, the other night? How amazing the sex was?”

“I remember.”

“Okay, well you got the gist of it, right? I mean, how often do I even do something like that, right?”

“Right.”

“Well, I wanted him to know just how special that night was for me, and how grateful I was. So, I...well, today...”

Penny waited, feigning patience. The words seem to catch in Frankie’s throat. Penny began drumming her fingers against the table. “Yeah,” she blurted. “So today you—?”

Frankie shot out a quick response. “I sent him a dozen roses.”

Penny sat very still. This was nothing she would have anticipated. She hadn’t known what to expect, but this answer came out of left field. She shook her head.

“Wait a minute,” she said. “*You sent him* a dozen roses?”

Frankie got quiet and shook her head feebly. “Why—was that bad?”

“Well, I don’t know if I’d say it was bad, exactly. Just...not the norm, you know? Usually, the guy sends flowers. Not that Bobby sent me any, by the way.”

“But why should just the guy do it? I thought it was so beautiful, what happened between us. I just wanted him to know how I felt, being with him. It meant a lot to me.”

MY COMIC VALENTINE

Penny nodded and scratched her head. “Yeah, okay. But, maybe he felt un-empowered, or something, getting flowers from the girl. Maybe he thought he should’ve done it for you, but if he did it now, it would make him look bad. Like, he’d be reciprocating after—the—fact. Or, maybe it made him feel, I dunno...cheap, or something.”

“Cheap?”

“Well, I don’t know. I’m just throwing things out, here. So, what did he say?”

“He didn’t say anything. When he came through the kitchen tonight, he kind of looked at me from the corner of his eye and gave me a little nod with a, “Hey.” I stood there like a big dope, while he just kept walking by. I almost freaked. So later I snagged him alone, in the dressing room. I was, like, ‘Paul, baby, did you get the roses I sent you?’ and he was, like, ‘Yeah, I did.’ So I stood there looking at him a minute and then I said, ‘Well?’ And he just shrugged.”

“He didn’t say *anything*?” Penny interjected.

“Well, actually he did. He said, ‘I’m not sure how to react to something like that.’ So I said, ‘Why don’t you just say how it made you feel,’ so he says, ‘Well, honestly, it made me feel a little weird.’ Then we started to get into it, heatedly, I’ve got to admit, and he was, like, ‘I can’t talk about this now, Frankie. I gotta get myself together for tonight.’ So I just dropped it and left the dressing room, and he hasn’t looked at me since.”

Penny sat quietly and mulled the story over in her head. Of course, she’d have to tell Frankie that Paul was a cad. But she also had to admit, her roommate sending flowers to him after a lustful night seemed a bit odd.

“Frankie, honey? Maybe you just need to back off. Let him absorb the whole thing. Don’t crowd him. You know what I mean?”

“I’m not crowding him. He can have his space. I’m not saying another word to him.”

MY COMIC VALENTINE

Penny looked at her buddy with sympathy. Frankie rarely went on dates and almost never went after a guy. She came off as one tough chick. But, in truth, she was pretty inexperienced when it came to men. She could see Frankie's feelings were hurt, and her first inclination was to rescue her.

"Hey," she chirped, "Paul's an odd bird. You know that. Brilliant, but a bit, well, unusual. Just give it a little time, and see what happens."

"I don't have much choice," Frankie answered, looking glum. "I've got to check my tables."

"Yeah, me, too."

The two roommates rose and headed for their sections.

While Penny was clearing a table of extraneous napkins and utensils, Eddie Moreno blazed to the stage. She looked up in time to see him leap up and set his portable CD player down. Clad in tight, white jeans and a red, button-down shirt, he played up his Mexican heritage for all the laughs he could.

As the audience applauded, he shouted into the microphone, "Yeah, all right! Thank you!" He gestured for more applause. "Bring it on, man, bring it on!"

When the audience quieted down, he introduced himself by saying, "I'm Eddie Moreno, from Mexico. But I prefer to say I'm a Latin stand-up—as opposed to a Mexican stand—off!"

There were smirks and chuckles from the audience.

"Is true, man, is true. Look, truth is, I'm Latino, man, an *hombre* without a revolution—who needs one to survive! I got to get the changes going, man, and give meaning to my life. And I tell you what: the current administration is adding plenty of fuel to my flame, setting Eddie Morano into motion. Hey, otherwise, what the hell else I'm going to do with all this energy, huh?"

Penny listened to the audience call out dumb suggestions. She knew Eddie's act by heart, but always got a kick out of him.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Yeah,” Eddie shouted back out at the audience. “I know, I know, even my shrink says I’m nuts! Go ahead, try and insult me—you can’t do it, man, I don’t let choo!”

He stood and stared at the audience, hands on hips, enduring their heckling and idiotic attempts to insult him. “That’s right, keep trying—bring it on, man, bring it on!” He cupped his hand to an ear to better hear one voice.

“What, man? You say you don’t like my fire engine red shirt? Like I give a fuck, man! So-the-fuck-what?! Look at choo, man, in your fucking yuppy get-up—all khaki and beige. You know what that says to me? *Boring*, man, b-o-r-i-n-g!”

Laughing and shouting, the audience now turned to stare at the man in beige seated by the stage. He squirmed and hurled a feeble epithet or two.

“Ah, forget it, guy. We could exchange insults all day long.” Eddie laughed. “Let’s change the subject and juss have some fun.” He pressed the tip of his boot down to turn his CD player on. “Holy guacamole! Let’s start with rock ’n’ rollie!”

With a saucy turn and his backside to the audience, he made audacious wiggles with his derrière. The audience went crazy with cat calls, whistles, hoots and hollers, while Mick Jagger’s rendition of “Brown Sugar” blasted from the boom box. Eddie gyrated his hips some more and turned back to the audience, unbuttoning his shirt. The audience howled with delight as he danced a striptease down to his shorts.

Penny giggled and shook her head when she saw Eddie’s white boxers with huge, red hearts all over them. When Lydia walked by and rolled her eyes in exaggerated boredom, Penny followed her back to the kitchen.

Penny reached Lydia at the same time Joe Latose passed them on his way to the stage.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Good evening,” he said in greeting, “you luscious women-folk, you.”

The girls smiled politely until he was out of sight, then looked at each other with disgust.

“Morose Joe Latose,” Penny said with sarcasm.

“Yeah—king of the no-jokes. It’s gonna be one long night, out there,” Lydia answered.

Penny was in the midst of serving, with care, a specialty glass filled with a frozen daiquiri, when she heard Joe Latose introduce himself to the audience.

“It’s no-joke time, folks,” he told the audience. “That’s right. I’m the anti-funny guy—kind of like the anti-Christ of comics. I’m here to set you free from comedy bondage.”

Groans emanated from the audience.

“You get to take part in these, so quit your complaining,” he shot back. “Okay, answer me this one, if you know it,” he dared the audience. “How did Helen Keller burn her hand?”

An audience member hollered, “She tried to read the iron!”

“No,” another shouted, “she tried to read the *waffle* iron!”

“No,” Joe answered tartly, “you’re both wrong. She spilled hot coffee on it.”

Penny beat feet out of there amid the boos and hisses aimed at Joe.

It happens almost the same way every week, she marveled, and yet he never alters his act. *Yeesh*.

By the time the last of the new talent ascended the stage, the checks had all been dropped with the staff standing nearby, waiting to collect. After clearing their tabs, they gathered to wait for the mass exodus. Penny stood along a wall with Frankie and kept an eye on departing audience members, making sure no one pilfered glassware or salt—shakers on their way out.

“Any change with you-know-who?” she whispered.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

Frankie shook her head, then nudged her chin toward the kitchen door. Penny looked to see Malcolm and Marie standing in the shadows of the hallway. He was leaning back against the wall and she was plastered up against him, gyrating her groin against his upper thigh. He was pulling her head back by her ponytail, his free hand engulfing her throat. After a moment, he released his hand and ran it down her throat, stopping just before he reached her breasts. She, in turn, groped him up and down, massaging his stomach before her hand slid down along his outer thighs.

Frankie shook her head as she watched. “How do some people do it?”

“What—have no shame in public?” Penny answered.

“I was thinking more, like, have no fear of intimacy.”

“How about, having no self-respect,” Penny said. “But you call it what you like.”

They both chuckled and strolled over to clear their emptied tables.

* * *

After poring over classical French moralists, Penny yawned and closed the book she’d been immersed in. Her brain felt swollen with information for her upcoming exam. She couldn’t read anymore about La Rochefoucauld, Bossuet, La Fontaine, Madame de Sévigné, or La Bruyère.

Got to let this stuff absorb into my brain, and that takes time.

She sat back and rubbed her eyes. When she re-focused, she happened to catch sight of two particular bindings on shelves across the room. They were used ones she’d purchased at a college book fair a couple of months ago. When she’d brought them home, she’d popped them right onto the shelf. So far, she hadn’t a moment to read for pleasure. She rose to take a look at them.

One was entitled *Celtic Wisdom*, the other *Scottish Chiefs*. She flipped through, skimming chapters about Wallace and Marion,

MY COMIC VALENTINE

something about a pledge and a sword.

Got to read that sometime, she instructed herself

She scanned a few more pages. *Hmm... William Wallace...bravery...Gallic Seas...King Edward...*

The movie *Braveheart* flashed into her mind and she suddenly recalled a scene from it. She pictured the wild but courageous band of Scottish warriors all lifting their kilts up, taunting their enemy by flashing their manhood and mooning them.

That certainly takes some balls.

She chuckled.

Hey—and I think I just figured out what they wear under their kilts. Or don't wear! That really does take some balls.

She vowed to read more about the Celts this summer, after graduation. While sliding the book back onto the shelf, Professor Christopher MacAlister's image flashed into her mind. She pondered how dapper he appeared in both kilt and blue jeans. As his handsome image dominated her thoughts, she found herself walking toward her bed. She kicked off her clogs and collapsed back against the mattress. Resting her over-worked brain in sleep seemed the only thing to do. But thinking about Christopher had quickened her pulse. The throb of a drumbeat now surged through her private parts. Sliding a hand down beneath her baggy velour pants, she placed two fingers against the crux of that pulsation.

She had on no panties beneath her velour sweats, so she combed her index and middle fingers between her silken hairs until she felt the skin at the top of her clitoris. She recalled the image of Christopher wearing a black, woolen kilt, and circled her fingers around the soft, smooth flesh of her pussy lips.

She'd seen the professor dressed in that kilt, with a black dress shirt, one autumn day. She'd been intrigued by the shirt's silky material and had looked closely at the paisley-like swirls stitched through it,

MY COMIC VALENTINE

catching sight of his taut muscles outlined beneath. He'd also been wearing a black overcoat, and she remembered his boyish grin when she'd complimented him on his great outfit. The overcoat had hugged his tall, slim physique to perfection, its full length reaching down to his booted ankles. Black leather boots had laced up to his knees, and, as she'd eyed him from his ankles up, she'd noticed a solid silver clasp pinned a few inches above his hemline.

From her reclined position on her bed, she now pretended the professor and she had walked to Central Park that day.

Her eyes grew heavy as she opened her legs and massaged her pussy lips. She imagined herself sitting with the professor, beneath a tree in Central Park. She imagined them in a remote section, away from joggers and bicyclists, couched in privacy among a quiet grove of trees. In her mind's eye, he was leaned against a tree, on his black coat he'd laid out over the grass, with her seated beside him. While she pictured this delightful scene, she ran her middle finger through her moist inner lips growing wetter with her yearning.

She fantasized that she'd asked Christopher to show her what he wore beneath his kilt and he'd gestured toward his crotch.

"Look—I can't hide my feelings for you," he said with a laugh.

Penny imagined looking down to see his erection poking up beneath the black, wool cloth. She saw herself raise an eyebrow as she reached her hand over. "Looks like something needs attention."

Her fantasy continued with his navy eyes searing into her gaze. "You'll get to see what a Scotsman wears beneath his kilt, after all."

Lying on her bed, Penny slid her sweat pants off. Naked from the waist down, she eased her middle finger inside herself, pumping it between her slick folds. As she worked in and out of her own wetness, she imagined she was sliding her hand down Christopher's long legs, reaching up beneath his kilt. She imagined feeling the heat from his loins as her knuckles nuzzled up against his scrotum. She imagined

MY COMIC VALENTINE

caressing his balls. She could almost feel the fuzz on his sac as she pictured herself rubbing its tender flesh between her fingers.

She imagined reaching up to grasp Christopher's hot, pulsing shaft, long and large in the palm of her hand. She reveled in discovering his non-circumcised penis, pulling the skin up and down as his cock grew harder and throbbed with increasing intensity.

In her fantasy, she watched him lean back against the tree and open his legs to reveal the entirety of his manhood. Her hot hand slowed its stroking as the other hand folded back his kilt. She brought her head down over the exposed head of his cock, reveling in his ecstatic groans as she encompassed it with her mouth. She had pulled his foreskin down with her hand and was wrapping her lips around the ridge between the head and shaft, pumping up and down. She stopped only to flick her tongue across the tip of his penis. He leaned his weight against the tree, succumbing to the erotic pleasure Penny produced in his body.

"Your mouth feels...exquisite," she heard him say through the sound of her sucking.

Meanwhile, back on her bed, she was fingering her own pussy. While she sucked off the Scotsman in her daydream, she was bringing herself to her own climax. She worked her finger with forceful thrusts, in and out as she imagined Christopher thrusting his cock deeper and harder into her wet mouth, working his pleasure faster and faster, almost down her throat. As she finger-fucked herself, she imagined pulling her mouth off his member and grasping it in her hand, holding it while his hot cum shot out in an orgasmic explosion.

She groaned and let her own orgasm go. Waves of bliss rippled through her cunt as she imagined Christopher's ecstatic howl echoing through the hidden grove of trees in Central Park.

Her mental movie came to a close and she swept her hand away from herself. She imagined smoothing Christopher's kilt down and resting her head in his lap.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

She pulled her comforter over her and rolled into a cocoon for a well-earned snooze.

* * *

A half-hour later, she was awakened by the sound of Frankie's voice. It seemed to be calling from far away. "Penny! Penny!"

Penny wished she'd shut up and let her return to Nirvana, or wherever it was she was visiting.

"Penny, girl," Frankie called louder. "Don't you hear me out here?" She knocked hard against the bedroom door.

"Huh?" Penny forced herself from her grogginess. "Hold on, I'm coming."

She felt around for her abandoned sweats and, pulling them on, stumbled to the door.

"Sorry to disturb you, Sleeping Beauty," Frankie said. "I didn't realize you were in la-la land." She cupped her hand around the phone she held. "It's Bobby. I figured you'd want to talk to him."

Penny squinted to focus her dazed mind into reality. "Yeah, uh—'course."

Frankie laughed. "I thought you were studying when I was calling you, girl."

"I was studying...I must've crashed. Here, give it to me. Thanks." She plopped back onto the bed, phone to her ear. "Hello?"

"Hey, baby girl. How's it going?"

Penny was trying to wake up. "Hey, hi," she stalled. "How are you?"

"I'm just great. Did I interrupt you studying?"

The fantasy she'd just engaged in gave her a fleeting pang of guilt, as though he'd caught her with another man. "No, no."

"What—you just figure out it was me?"

"No. I knew it was you. I'm just all fuddled-up from my nap. My brain was fried after studying and I fell asleep."

MY COMIC VALENTINE

"I'm sorry—did I wake you up?"

"No, Frankie did." She suddenly snapped awake. "Hey, it's all right. It's great. So how are you? What's going on?"

The two lovers engaged in general chit-chat, for awhile. Bobby described his flight to Dallas, and Penny complained about amateur night at the comedy club. She told him how upset Frankie was when Paul Worell gave her the brush-off after sleeping with her.

"Why'd he do that?" Bobby asked.

Penny lowered her voice. "Well, maybe because of the, uh, gesture she made towards him, the next day."

"What do you mean?"

"Well..." She paused for drama. "She sent him a dozen roses."

"*She sent him* a dozen roses? Talk about bucking tradition."

"I know. It freaked him out."

"That'd freak me out, too. Especially since sending flowers is just a bunch of baloney anyway."

Penny stopped. "What do you mean?"

"I don't know. Sending flowers...what's the point? Fifty bucks, and they're just gonna just die in a couple of days."

"But they're beautiful, for a while. And it's the thought that counts."

"We used to grow flowers in our garden, in Miami. Dozens of different kinds. It seems silly to have them delivered for a small fortune, when we just used to go out back and pick them, ourselves. I remember my mom was always arranging flowers around the house."

"That's a lovely memory. But you don't have all those flowers around now, do you, in the city?"

"No." He paused. "Hey, what do I know? It just seems a waste, that's all."

Penny tried to push away the encroaching disappointment brought on by this conversation, since one of her favorite fantasies was getting

MY COMIC VALENTINE

flowers from a man. She stretched out across her bed and smoothed the silk pillows by her side. “But, it’s romantic. Don’t you think?”

“Candlelight dinner is romantic.”

“Well, yeah, dinner is great, but fleeting, too. If something makes someone happy, though, you’d do it, right?”

“I don’t know,” Bobby said.

A moment of uncomfortable silence threatened to dampen the initial excitement of their conversation.

“Maybe. I guess. I guess if it came down to going to the opera or sending flowers, I’d send flowers.”

“You don’t like the opera?”

“I think it’s safe to say that.”

“You don’t like Verdi? You don’t like Mozart—*The Magic Flute*?”

Bobby chuckled. “I don’t know them. But I was never really interested. Hey— why don’t we change the subject to something more pleasant for us both?”

“But the opera is pleasant. At least, to me it is.”

“Well, how would a trip to Dallas be, for you?”

Penny perked up. “A trip to Dallas? To see you?”

“That’s the idea, baby girl. I’d like to fly you out here for a visit. I miss you already.”

“I’d love that! When?”

“As soon as you can get some time off. Just let me know and I’ll book the flight.”

Bobby’s reticence to send flowers was temporarily overshadowed by his generous offer to bring her out to Dallas.

Penny’s mood brightened. “The weekend after this? Is that too soon?”

“That’s not too soon. Let me call my travel agent, see what she can do. I can’t wait to see you, baby.” He lowered his voice, and his words slid out in a sensual growl. “I want my mouth on your pussy. And I

MY COMIC VALENTINE

want to be inside you.”

Penny flushed at his open expression of desire. “I can’t wait for that either, sweetie. I want that, too.”

After she hung up the phone, she sat back against her pillows and considered calling Frankie in for advice. She wanted to talk about how to deal with the dilemma created by her new plans to visit Bobby, and her upcoming date with the professor. But, considering the recent rejection she’d suffered from Paul, Penny decided against it.

I’ll just have to wait and see what happens and have a little patience. These things have a way of working themselves out, in the end.

CHAPTER 6

On Broadway, heads turned to regard the kilted gentleman with the hot chick on his arm. Penny wasn't quite comfortable with the incessant stares and comments directed towards them as she and the professor strolled up the avenue. She was aware of her own appeal in the tight, black dress sheathing her body, but the bulk of the eye-popping was coming from passers-by staring at the man whose arm she held.

She'd met Christopher for a cocktail at the Oak Room in the Plaza. He'd wanted to see the place one last time before renovations kicked in. Penny had sipped her glass of bubbly, while he'd described the upcoming plans for condominiums to be built there. A pang of sorrow had gnawed at her, however, with the thought of changing the beautiful old behemoth of a hotel into private dwellings only the wealthiest could afford.

"I always think of this as one of the best places to slide into city

MY COMIC VALENTINE

history,” she’d said.

Christopher had agreed. “Exactly. But I’ll try not to hold the developers in too much contempt until we know what changes they’re planning. I only hope they have some regard for history and retain the original structure.”

Penny had snickered. “Right. I hope we don’t come in for the grand opening and see some theme-park rendition of the former location. Wall plaques saying, “‘Sit here, where Dorothy Parker sipped martinis,’ or ‘Hemingway got hammered at this end of the bar.’”

Christopher had laughed. “In neon. With big red arrows. And post cards for sale out front, or copies of their books, all signed by the authors!”

Penny had joined him, giggling at this image. “Hey, at least there’s some literary value to that.”

“Not to posthumous author signings.”

“No. I meant selling great books in a tourist trap.”

“I’d have to agree with you on that. Let’s hope whatever they’re planning, they’re kind in their preservation of days gone by.”

The eye-catching couple had left the grand old Plaza to walk across Central Park South, toward Columbus Circle. Christopher had drawn Penny’s arm through the crook of his elbow, where he grasped it with his other hand. They turned and ambled north on Broadway. He was squeezing her hand so tightly, however, that her palm began to sweat.

“So,” Penny asked, flexing her digits in an effort to ease his grip without being rude, “where are we heading, professor?”

“See that red awning up ahead, on the right side of the street? Well, I thought after a bit of Old World charm, we’d come over here for some New World cuisine. Julietta’s Place. Very hot right now. Do you know it?”

Penny shook her head. “‘Fraid not. I’ve seen it a few times, but never ventured in. The ‘fusion cuisine’ thing threw me.”

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Don’t let it. It’s great stuff. I think you’re really going to enjoy it.”

As they chatted about the blend of Dutch and Indonesian food offered at Julietta’s, Penny tried to ignore the looks from other pedestrians. She had to admit, he made a stand out figure in his MacAlister tartan: a red background with blue, green and white lines running through it. While he cut an unusual but appealing figure, Penny felt increasingly self-conscious at the focus he was pulling.

My date’s dress is getting more attention than mine!

Plus, she had the irritating notion that Christopher MacAlister was trying her on for size. He kept checking out how others responded to her on his arm, observing how many looks she was getting and how she reacted to attentions aimed toward him.

I swear he’s going down some sort of check-list, to see how I measure up in different environments and situations.

As the couple approached Danté’s Park, Penny was seized by the memory of Bobby and her walking the same route, the night they ended up ravaging each other at the Museum of Natural History. The way Christopher was clutching her hand clashed with the easy, seamless quality when she and Bobby had meandered along together. With that thought, a surge of sexual heat flared up her middle, searing her insides. She hoped it didn’t break the surface of her skin in a flush.

Just as she was wondering if a rosy glow had crept over her cheeks, Christopher asked, “You know, I meant to ask you if you’re seeing someone.”

Penny drew in a long breath before answering. “I was, kind of. I’m not sure what’s going with that, right now.”

“Oh?”

She wasn’t sure why she hesitated explaining. With the fleeting reflection she gave the subject, she realized she didn’t want Christopher to know anything about Bobby. Was she protecting that relationship from the professor’s scrutiny, she wondered, or was it simply none of

MY COMIC VALENTINE

his business?

“What about you?” she asked. “You have a girlfriend?”

“Nope.”

With a playful gesture, she reached her free hand over to take hold of his left ring finger. Checking it for a wedding band also helped her ease the other hand from his grip.

“No,” he assured her. “No ring. Not married.”

“Have you ever been?”

“Not even close.”

The prideful, resolute timbre of his pronouncement disturbed her. She wondered if he was one of those men who thought of bachelorhood as the avid avoidance of the marital noose. The set of his jaw after that comment certainly pointed to the likelihood of him clinging to freedom as long as he could, until the day he’d be led down the aisle by some determined gal, kicking and fighting the whole time. She chose not to address this notion, however, and nodded without further comment.

* * *

The sauvignon blanc was a delicious accompaniment to the garlicky Asian concoctions of fish, seaweed and noodles the couple shared. The dry sherry her date suggested Penny imbibe with her flourless chocolate cake was perfect. Everything Christopher MacAlister chose for dinner was exquisite. Even the anecdotes he shared about his descendants, the Clan MacDonald, and their connections to the powerful old House of Stewarts, were enticing. He was a man who took charge and lived life in a large and unabashed manner. All externals pointed to him being Mister Perfect.

Penny wondered why her heart wasn’t fluttering.

Not even close.

If anything, she felt agitated and on guard.

After they departed Julietta’s Place, Penny slipped her arm into a loose hold in the crook of her date’s elbow, before he could pull it

MY COMIC VALENTINE

through and hold it in his vice grip. He offered to accompany her home.

"Oh, you don't have to do that, Christopher. I live way up at Ninetieth and Third. How far is that from your place?"

"Not too far. I'm further down than you. But it's no trouble."

And, without further discussion, he hailed a cab.

Inside the vehicle, she felt the professor's arm slide along the seat behind her head. Penny didn't really think about it, though, until she felt his other hand pulling her chin around to face him. Before she was able to look him in the eye, she felt his mouth press down onto hers. She was taken by surprise at the sudden sensation of his wet lips engulfing hers. She felt violated when his tongue rammed in and pushed against the back of her throat.

She managed to wrest her head away from Christopher's mushy mouth. "Whoa," she mumbled. "Whoa, there."

All she wanted to do now was keep him at bay until they reached her apartment building, where she planned a hasty departure. Of course, she'd need to find a way to deal with him, until then.

"That took me by surprise," she said, hiding her disdain.

"Is that a bad thing?" he asked. He moved to pull her up to him again.

She let out a nervous little whinny. "Not really." But, in an instinctual gesture of protection, she brought her hands up over her chest and left them there, fiddling with her collar as the reason.

"Here we are," she said in hushed tones, "with the driver right there. He might be watching in the mirror."

"Who cares?" Christopher growled. And before she knew it, his mouth was covering hers, again.

She struggled to keep her lips together and his tongue out, trying to ward off his aggressive behavior. Any desire she'd previously entertained for him was fast ebbing away.

She laughed off her discomfort, however, with the hope that she

MY COMIC VALENTINE

could ease him back to where he might reflect on the fact her enthusiasm for French kissing didn't quite match his. But he took little notice of her subtle attempts to shift him away. In addition to assaulting her mouth with his, she felt herself surrounded by his hands. Like huge bear paws coming up behind her shoulders, they lowered to entrap her waist. His mauling only served to increase her annoyance, especially when she felt him jerk her up closer to him. Disgust consumed her when he resumed shoving his big, fat tongue toward the back of her throat.

She felt suffocated in his clutches. Lashing her head from side to side, she managed to shake her mouth free and jerk herself away from her predatory professor.

"Christopher, Christopher," she managed to croak.

"What's the matter?"

"Well, I'm a little freaked out," Penny answered. She sought a sane response for explaining the revulsion his glomming had produced in her.

He sat back and waited. The shocked expression on his face made her feel like a lab rat that had grown an extra head. "Freaked out?" he repeated.

"Maybe that's not the right word," she said. "I just, uh, I like to ease into these things, that's all. Take more time in, you know...getting to know each other."

Christopher sat back and scrutinized her. "Really?"

She wondered why his regard made her feel so meek all of a sudden.

She scratched her head. He continued staring at her. A slow smile curved along his lips. She returned a guarded smile. He grinned and shrugged. "I think you're really hot, Penelope Foster. Is there anything wrong with that?"

"No. I mean, thank you for saying so. I just, well, I don't know. I

MY COMIC VALENTINE

just feel weird, with the cab driver up there and everything.”

“He doesn’t give a damn. Probably sees this kind of thing all the time.”

“Maybe. But he doesn’t see me doing it.”

“Is it me?”

Her honesty failed her. “No, of course not. It’s the situation, that’s all...the back of a cab.”

The taxi swerved into the driveway at the quadrangle of apartment buildings where Penny and Frankie lived.

“This it, sir?” the cabbie asked from under his pork pie cap.

“This is fine, thank you,” Christopher answered.

Penny turned to him. “I had a really great time.”

“Me, too,” Christopher said. He handed the driver a twenty and waited for the change.

Penny slid toward the door handle. “Okay,” she said, “well, I guess I’ll—”

Christopher cut her off. “Hold on. I’ll be right there.”

“Where?”

“I’m walking you up to the door.” He reached over her, grabbed the handle, and released the door.

“Oh?”

“Come on. Out, my lady.” He tipped the driver and thanked him.

“But,” she said as her high-heels hit the curb, “you’re going to lose the cab.” She wobbled a little as she pulled herself out.

Christopher reached up from inside the cab to steady her elbow, then followed her out. He closed the car door behind him. She watched the cab speed away.

Halfway up the sidewalk leading to the lobby, Penny stopped and turned. “Listen, Christopher, I’ve had a great time, but I have a roommate, and I really can’t have you up. I mean, I’m sorry, but—”

“Do you two share a bedroom?”

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“No, but, still. I told you: I like to take things slowly.”

He held her by her shoulders and looked down at her. She fought the encroaching intimidation of his impressive frame towering above her.

“We can take things slowly,” he said in a low voice. “My timing is great.”

Penny hoped she concealed how unimpressed she found his boast. *Christ. If you have to say that, it can't be so.*

“Listen,” she said, an exasperated sigh escaping. “I just can't have you up, tonight. Please—try and understand.”

He shot her a sidelong glance before clasping her hand in his. Then he led her toward the lobby door, asking, “So, what? You don't like me?”

“Of course I like you. It's not that.” She hadn't quite figured out what it was, but she knew without question he wasn't getting into her bed. Couldn't he take a hint?

Just as they reached the door, Christopher laughed and yanked Penny away.

“Hey,” she blurted, “what're you doing?”

“Just go with it,” he countered, pulling her down the sidewalk with him.

She felt herself moving away from the lobby door and windows, down to an area enclosed by foliage. A thick patch of trees and shrubs were growing around the building's edge there. Christopher slipped in beside the tallest tree and whirled Penny around to face him, pressing her back against the outside brick.

Before she could protest, Christopher's mouth was swallowing hers again. She also felt him yanking her hand down between his legs.

She struggled to hiss, “Christopher!” between his sloppy kisses. “Christopher! Stop—somebody might see!”

He ignored her entreaties. “Here,” he growled between slurps, “feel

MY COMIC VALENTINE

here. You wanted to know what a Scotsman wears beneath his kilt? Now you can find out.”

Penny felt him rubbing her hand over his kilt, pulling it down toward his groin. Beneath the light wool, she discerned his erection with ease. The eerie recollection of the fantasy she’d played out on her bed pervaded her thoughts. But, in real life, she didn’t like being railroaded into sex, and his lack of respect was starting to piss her off.

“Look,” she said when he came up for air. “Christopher, what are we doing? We’re out here in the bushes. Somebody could walk by and see.”

“Who cares?” he murmured. “This is New York. Nobody cares.”

“But you’re a professor at a prestigious college. Plus, in case you haven’t noticed, you’re kind of conspicuous in that kilt. Aren’t you afraid somebody from school might recognize you?”

His only response was to pull her hand back against his genitals again, and shove his tongue down her throat. Her inner outrage soared.

I’m more concerned over his reputation than he seems to be!

He made avid attempts to force Penny’s hand around his hard-on. Even through the cloth, she noted its substantial girth. But his lack of concern about how she was responding, whether she was reciprocating or not, and failing to notice the level of her discomfort, drained her of all interest. She was in no mood to share sensual pleasure with this man.

When he tried to move her hand up under his kilt, she’d finally had enough. She struggled and succeeded in wresting herself free.

“Christopher! I mean it—cut it out!”

The intensity of her hiss must have caught his attention, because he stopped and looked at her. “What’s wrong with you?”

“What’s wrong with me? What in hell is wrong with you? We are out in the frigging bushes of my apartment building, and you’re pulling my hand up under your kilt! Trying to force me to give you a hand job,

MY COMIC VALENTINE

out here!”

Her cheeks burned with indignation. Christopher watched her. She swallowed to contain her anger.

“Hey, I’m not forcing you,” he said in a rational tone. “I’d never force you to do anything you don’t want to do.”

Considering his behavior, she found that hard to believe, but decided not to push the point. “Okay, fine. Whatever.” She tossed her head and pushed her hair off her sweaty neck.

“Hey, I’m sorry,” he said. “I’m just so intrigued by you. I thought the feeling was mutual. I wanted to feel you bring me to orgasm. Is that such a bad thing? To be turned on by such a beautiful girl?”

Penny shook her head. “No. It’s not such a bad thing. I just...I don’t know...”

That vague guilt she’d felt before started gnawing at her again. Had she been giving signals she wasn’t aware of? Or did he assume dinner and drinks equaled sexual payback?

“I’m sorry,” she said. “I didn’t mean to lead you on or anything. It’s not that I don’t find you attractive. You’re really good-looking. Very handsome. I just, well...I don’t know.”

He took a step toward her and, with a gentle motion, took her hand in his. “Let’s go inside.”

“No. I can’t. Not tonight.”

“Listen. I’m hard as a rock, right now. I’ve got to get rid of this. Even if you don’t want to do it, help me out, here, will you?”

“Help you out? What d’you mean?”

“Just pull on my nipples while I explode. That’ll be enough to get me off.”

Penny blinked. *This is all about him. My feelings have little to do with it.*

She felt pressured by him and wanted to end the evening—but if she continued disagreeing with him, she might be there all night. She

MY COMIC VALENTINE

decided giving in to his demand was the easiest way. Still, she wondered how he couldn't read the disgust she was certain must be showing on her face. For an intellectual, he sure was dumb. She shook her head and made one last move to pass by him. He held his arm around her waist, however, thwarting her attempt. With the other hand, he placed a gentle touch onto her shoulder.

"Penny, please, you don't even have to touch it. I'll do it myself. Just squeeze my nipple. This one. Hard."

"You're going to make yourself come in the bushes?"

"Well, if you're not going to take me inside..."

"No, Christopher."

He stepped in closer and lifted her right hand over his right pectoral. "Now. Nobody's around."

He pressed her thumb and forefinger around his nipple, squeezing them over his shirt to indicate what he wanted her to do. With one hand, he held her wrist in place. With the other hand, he reached beneath his mockers. Penny was amazed by his lack of inhibition in performing sexual antics amid her apartment building shrubs. She also noted that this American member of the Scottish clan wore nothing beneath his kilt.

While standing there, watching him in the throes of his selfish desire, a swell of anger and revulsion washed over Penny. She admitted to herself that, as his student, she did fear angering him. After all, she did revere his pedagogical side. His pushy male side had come as something of a shock to her, however. Tonight, he'd fallen from the pedestal she'd placed him on. Now, she just wanted to give him what he wanted and conclude this little foray as soon as possible. So, she focused her anger into Christopher MacAlister's left nipple, squeezing it as hard as she could between her fingernails. And, while she twisted his tittie, he pumped on his dick, intent on bringing it to its full release.

While he mumbled, "Yes, yes, yes," she rolled her eyes in disgust.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

She kept squeezing his nipple until she sensed he was about to explode. She wondered if his cum would drip down his leg, or shoot onto the bushes below.

Oh, God, let this be over soon. I want to take a shower, crawl into my bed, and forget this ever happened.

She took a step back to avoid getting splashed as the professor rose toward his zenith. She figured he was coming when he uttered a long gasp, closed his eyes, and dropped his head back. At that point, she ceased squeezing his nipple, gave him a little pat on the chest, and took her hand away.

“Okay, there, professor?” she asked with sarcasm. She now had the upper hand, in a manner of speaking, since her esteemed professor had just jacked himself off in front of her. She stood back and cocked her head to one side. “Need a tissue?”

He sighed while patting down his kilt. “Nah. I’m fine. I shot my wad right onto the ground.” He examined the tops of his boots. “All clear! Excellent aim, I must admit.” He chuckled with self-satisfaction. “Hey, with my fertilization, these paltry shrubs ought to be perennials, in no time!”

Penny smirked. “I’ll be sure to keep tabs on them.”

He shot her a brazen look. “Do let me know.”

She looked away and slipped around him. This time, he didn’t stop her. Her feet crunched over dried sticks and she pushed back branches on her way to the sidewalk. She smoothed her dress, straightened the strap to her evening bag against her shoulder, and headed for the lobby. She bristled when Christopher strode up behind, but relaxed when he reached around to grab the door for her. She glanced inside, where the doorman sat reading a pamphlet. When he noticed her presence, he rose to greet her, but she waved him off. Assuming a mask of propriety, she turned to face her date.

“Well, Christopher. Thank you so much. It’s been—interesting.”

MY COMIC VALENTINE

"You're very welcome, Penny. I'm glad you enjoyed yourself. I certainly enjoyed your company." He made a half-bow and kissed her hand. "You're all right, I gather, from here on in?"

"Fine. As you can see, the doorman's right there."

"Fair enough. Good night, then. And thank you."

"Thank you."

"See you in class."

"Of course."

She flashed a quick smile before turning to cross the sparse lobby's tiled floor. When she approached the front desk, the doorman sat up straighter and stopped flipping through the pamphlet for his upcoming vacation.

Relieved to see his familiar face, Penny grinned. "How's it going, Gino?"

"Fine, Miss Penny. You?"

"It's all good," she answered. "Kind of warm out, tonight."

"Tell me 'bout it." Gino nudged his chin in the direction of the departing professor. "Like men in skirts, do ya?"

"I did, until tonight."

"Uh-oh."

"No big deal. You just learn something new everyday, that's all."

The burly doorman nodded. "True. So true."

As Penny headed towards the elevator, Gino called out, "I always wondered what they wear under those things."

The elevator doors opened. Penny stepped inside and turned. "Some things are better left a mystery, I think."

She wished him good night and pressed the button marked "4." She sighed in relief as she rose, ever closer, toward the comfort of her bed.

* * *

Frankie strode toward Penny, a big grin on her face. Penny looked up from the roll-ups she was wrapping for that night's show.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

"There's the lucky girl," Frankie said in a teasing voice.

"How am I lucky?"

"Lucky enough to get a dozen roses sent to her."

Penny stopped rolling the trio of utensils into a paper napkin. "Somebody sent me a dozen roses? When?"

"Late this morning. You'd already left for school. I tried calling you five or six times on your cell phone and finally gave up. Figured I'd see you at work."

"I turned it off at the library. Studied all frigging day long. I guess I never even checked in for messages."

"I figured it was something like that."

"Well? Who're they from?"

"Girl, I don't know! I didn't open the card. It has your name on it, not mine."

"Shit. I want to know who sent them."

Frankie shrugged. "Must be Bobby, right?"

Penny grimaced. "I wouldn't be too sure about that one, detective. He thinks flowers are a dumb waste of money."

"How romantic."

A movement to the right caught Penny's eye. She looked over to see Marie and Malcolm leaving the dressing room together. When they reached the end of the hallway, they stopped by the kitchen entrance, all giggles.

She nudged her chin toward Frankie. "Ever notice how those two just love that spot, right there?"

Frankie looked over to see Marie leaning back against the wall, Malcolm leaning into her. She was looking up at her man, wearing a dreamy smile. He was cupping her face between his hands, looking down into her eyes.

"It looks like more and more like puppy love, every day," Frankie said dryly.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

Penny shook her head. "I must admit, I'm a little amazed."

"Amazed at what?" Lydia chimed as she slid into the booth seat beside Penny.

Penny gave a little shrug. "Lust seems more like love, over there."

Lydia glanced at Marie and Malcolm. "I know," she agreed. "I read the poem he wrote for her."

Penny raised her eyebrows. "Malcolm wrote a love poem for Marie?"

"Yup," Lydia said, incredulous. "Really decent stuff, too. Very romantic."

"Well, whoda thunk it?" Frankie marveled.

"That kind of points up this article I read, the other day," Penny added. "I was giving myself a break from all the French stuff, for a minute. Anyway, this doctor was saying how endorphins that go off in the brain during sex can actually lead to falling in love."

Lydia shot her a quizzical look. "Oh, yeah?"

"Yeah," Penny continued. "She was saying how that feeling of euphoria stimulates other parts of the brain, including the limbic system—the part that rules emotions. In the article, she even warns: 'Be careful who you bed down with. You could end up falling in love!'"

The three women looked over at Marie caressing Malcolm, running her hands up and down his arms in a gentle, loving manner.

Frankie shook her head. "Is it possible that the wild woman of Chloe's Comedy Club has finally taken a fall? That's hard to believe."

"Not if you watch those two. They're all gooeey, lovey-dovey, these days," Lydia marveled.

Penny recalled the day she'd walked in on them in the dressing room, and how they'd played out their sexuality with unabashed abandon.

Can that turn into love? Is sex the key that opens the door to true love?

MY COMIC VALENTINE

She thought about Bobby. A warm, sensuous rush ran up her middle, from her privates to her heart.

I didn't feel that with Christopher. Nothing around my heart, no tingle in my belly. Didn't even want him touching me. I wonder...could this other thing lead to love?

She shook her head, sighed, and decided to let it go, for the time being. As she rose to help the girls set up, she remembered the start of her conversation with Frankie.

And, I wonder, who sent me flowers?

* * *

Frankie watched Penny pull the small envelope from the plastic holder inserted among the dozen roses. Struggling to extract the card, Penny rolled her eyes in frustration.

"This envelope's tight enough."

"Just rip the blasted thing open," Frankie urged.

"I've got it, I've got it." Her eyes scanned the card. "Oh, no. They're from MacAlister." She tossed the card onto the table beside the vase of roses.

"The professor?"

Penny screwed her face into a grimace and said nothing.

"What? That's bad?" Frankie asked.

"Kind of."

"Can I read it?" When Penny nodded, Frankie grabbed the card and read it out loud. "You are one special lady. The Scotsman."

Frankie looked at her roommate, waiting for an explanation. Penny remained silent as she reached inside their refrigerator.

"So," Frankie asked with intentional poignancy, "how was your date with him?"

Penny turned and wrinkled up her nose as though she smelled something bad. "Ugh. Want some wine?"

"No, thanks. What does 'Ugh' mean?"

MY COMIC VALENTINE

Penny poured a glass of chardonnay for herself. "It means, he's too pushy, is what it means. He's a control freak. All over me, hitting on me without mercy, is what it means."

"Hot for you in a big way, huh?"

"Yeah. Only I don't appreciate being mauled on my first date."

Frankie sat down and put her feet up on the coffee table, while turning on the tube. She waited until Penny sat in the nearby chair.

"I guess that means you don't return the feeling."

"Apparently. I mean, the guy's handsome and brilliant, but he was so pushy, just being a selfish pig. And here he is, my teacher. Christ."

The two roommates watched television for a minute before Frankie said, "Guess you're looking forward to seeing your comic this weekend, huh?"

Penny sighed. "Like I never dreamed. Crazy, huh?"

Frankie laughed. "Life's like that sometimes, ain't it? Crazy!"

Penny chuckled. "Yup. Hopefully, crazy in a good way."

* * *

After class, Penny waited for Chi Wong Liu to conclude discussing her thesis with Professor MacAlister.

"Ah, Miss Foster," he said with a flirtatious raise of his eyebrows.

"Hi, Christopher. Great lecture, today."

"Thank you. I appreciate that."

"You're welcome." She lowered her voice. "And, those flowers. I have to admit, they took me by surprise."

"Isn't that the nice thing about it—the surprise?"

"I guess. Yes."

"I just wanted you to know how much I enjoyed our time together. And also, well, everything. You know?"

Penny nodded, not wanting to discuss how weird it had been, for her. "Well, I, uh, yes. You probably have to get going. I just wanted to say, 'thank you.'"

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Where are you off to?”

“I’ve got some major studying to do before I go to work.”

“Can you squeeze me into your busy schedule, sometime? This weekend, maybe?”

“Actually, I’m going out of town, this weekend. To Dallas.”

“Dallas? What’s in Dallas?”

Penny’s cheeks burned as she sought an explanation. Again, that inclination to beg off the truth about Bobby... “An old friend of mine, from way-back-when,” she lied. “We decided to get together after she got transferred there for work. I’ve always wanted to visit Dallas, and this is the perfect excuse.”

I can’t believe I just told a bold-faced lie! What in the world is wrong with me?

“Sounds like fun,” the professor said, gathering his papers together. He snapped his briefcase shut. “How long will you be gone?”

“I fly back Monday.”

“At least you won’t miss Tuesday’s lecture.”

Penny laughed. “I’d never want to do that!”

Christopher walked her to the library steps. “Have a safe trip, Penny. See you when you get back.” He reached his fingers down and gave a quick, almost imperceptible caress to her cheek.

Penny smiled, then strutted toward the library. Halfway up the stairs, she stopped and turned.

The professor was taking his time, watching her as he walked away. He nodded, and she waved before turning to go in.

She pushed against the metal bar of the glass entry and wondered at her own behavior.

I don’t usually tell lies. Am I protecting this thing with Bobby, or keeping it secret to lead my teacher on? She sighed. *Just got to analyze everything, don’t ya, Foster?*

She concluded everything would turn out for the best if she stayed

MY COMIC VALENTINE

in touch with her true feelings. And, right now, her true feelings were pushing her to finish her studies so she'd be free to spend every minute of the upcoming weekend enjoying Bobby's company.

CHAPTER 7

Penny gulped in air, then blew it out into the cool, clear water with each rhythmic stroke of her arm. She glided steadily through the calm water, exhilarated yet soothed, navigating the length of the pool and back. After seven or eight laps—she'd lost count—she felt sated by the exercise. Her right arm reached up to grab the lowest rung of the hanging ladder. She held onto it, letting herself float back and look up at the evening sky. Buoyed by the water, she gazed for a moment at the twinkling stars amassed in the vast, Texas dome above her.

She pushed herself away from the ladder and glided toward the shallow end. When she felt her feet touch bottom, she stood. Reaching up, she pulled away the covered band holding her thick curls in a bun on top of her head. She held her nose between her thumb and forefinger and plunged down into the water. A few seconds later, she burst up through the surface like a playful dolphin, throwing her chest forward and her head back. She smoothed her hands down over saturated hair

MY COMIC VALENTINE

that curved like a collar around her shoulders.

* * *

Amid the abundant foliage surrounding the pool, Bobby watched Penny swimming laps. He sat slouched in a deck chair, resting an ankle over a knee, taking periodic swigs from his red plastic cup of light beer. When Penny pulled herself up out of the pool, she shuddered and walked in his direction.

“Brrr—I’m actually chilled now,” she said. She reached for the fluffy white towel he handed to her.

“Give it three or four minutes,” he said. “You’ll be hot enough to dive right back in.”

She towed herself off and sat on the empty lounge chair beside him. “Isn’t this kind of freaky hot?”

“Yeah, it’s a heat wave, all right. Ninety degrees in October? That’s hot, even for Dallas.”

“It’s nice, though. So pretty down here. All these big, green plants. And the flowers! They’re gorgeous.”

“What do you expect? It’s a fabricated hotel garden,” Bobby said with a chuckle.

“But these are so pretty! Just look at this one, the color. Isn’t it hibiscus?”

“Let me see...yup. That’s hibiscus.”

“And what about these—some kind of jasmine? They smell so good. They’re beautiful, aren’t they?”

“Night jasmine. My mom used to grow them. They’re beautiful. Like you.”

“Thank you.” She smiled and reached the towel up to dry her head and neck.

Bobby watched her run the towel around her back, over her belly, and down each leg. “Hey, did you like that bit I did tonight, about the fashion camouflage?”

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Fashion camouflage?” She thought back to his stand-up act and tried to remember what part he was talking about.

“Yeah,” Bobby pressed. “That thing I did about what good things come out of military aggression, like the cell phone and wartime fashions...”

“Oh, yeah,” she said slowly. “Yeah, I thought it was clever.”

“Clever? But, like, funny clever?”

“Yeah. Funny. Hey, I laughed.”

“That’s what counts, I guess.”

* * *

Her response seemed to disappoint him, and Penny wondered if she should have been more effusive with her praise. She remembered the showman’s ego and its subsequent needs, but figured if she added further comment at this point, she’d come off as insincere. She opted to drop it and say something nice about his material, later. She placed her lips over her straw and slurped up the last drops of rum and coke.

“Sounds like you could use a refill,” Bobby suggested. “Ready to go back?”

Penny nodded and stood. She wrapped the towel around herself and fastened it under an armpit.

Bobby eyed her from his chair. “Better keep that on or you might get arrested for indecent exposure.”

“Is it that teeny?”

“Mm-hmm. A teeny-weeny bikini...I’m not complaining, mind you. Actually, I’m looking forward to ripping it off.”

Anticipation made Penny tingle with excitement. She couldn’t wait to get back to the hotel room. She leaned down and kissed Bobby on his lips.

“Sorry, baby,” she said, pulling away. “I dripped all over you. Got you all wet.”

He shot her a crooked smile that was innuendo enough before rising

MY COMIC VALENTINE

from his chair. He took her by the hand and led her back up the path, amid the foliage she so admired.

* * *

Bobby locked the hotel room door. Penny headed for the bathroom.

“What’re you doing?” Bobby asked.

Penny threw him a bemused look. “I was going to shower.”

“How about waiting just one minute.”

Penny heard the urgency in his voice. “Sure, baby.”

He flipped on the hotel television to a station offering jazz music. With the towel still fastened around her, she sat down on the bed. When Bobby’s eyes locked onto hers, he brought the image of a beautiful, stalking panther to her mind. She bent back and looked straight up when he moved in to stand above her.

He spoke with a seductive growl. “Why don’t you slip out of that towel and let me dry you off?”

She stood and let the towel fall away from her body. “It’s kind of damp.”

“Hold on. I’ll get you a new one.”

He was back in seconds with a fresh towel, which he tossed onto the bed. Before she realized what he was doing, he’d slipped his hands behind her and unlatched her bikini top. She felt the cool air conditioning against her nipples as he slipped it off and tossed it away. When she felt his mouth clasp an erect nipple, she tossed her head back to savor the sensation. He ran his mouth over the soft flesh of her breast, while his hands caressed her back. He moved his mouth over to taste the other nipple, flattening his tongue over the goose flesh around it.

He ran his mouth down to her stomach and poked his tongue in and out of her navel. She laughed when he pushed her down on the bed and, in one fleeting move, slid off her bikini bottom. She felt him tug the damp fabric over her thighs, but before she could offer to help, he’d

MY COMIC VALENTINE

eased it down and whisked it away from her ankles.

As she lay against the bed, she felt him spread her legs and press his hands against her inner thighs. When she turned her head to the right, the unanticipated reflection of her prone, naked body made her twitch with excitement. When closed, the large, double doors of the closet created a vast, mirrored wall. She hadn't realized before that the entire scene of their sex play would be visible at any given moment.

"Wow," she remarked. "That's a big mirror."

Bobby glanced to his left and let out a devious chuckle. "The better to see you with, my dear." He scanned Penny's naked body in the reflection. He took his time running his eyes over her round breasts and flat belly, then down her thighs to her ankles.

"Looks yummy." He turned back from the mirror to look straight down at the golden-brown down between her legs. "And this looks yummy."

In the mirror, Penny watched Bobby's head disappear between her thighs. Then she felt his mouth against her muff. Before she lost herself to the ecstatic sensation, she murmured, "Bobby, sweetie, why don't you come up here and let me taste you at the same time?"

"That's alright, baby. I love tasting you."

"I love it, too, but I want to feel you in my mouth at the same time."

Bobby caught his breath. "I didn't think I could get harder 'til you said that."

He stood up, ripped off his pants and lay down beside her, his head by her crotch. She felt him grasp her hips and start to pull her over him.

"But I wanted you to lay over me," she said.

"Uh-uh. This way I get better access."

As he hoisted her up and over, she straddled his head. She felt vulnerable with her butt up in the air and her private parts exposed.

Geeze, she thought, my ass is in his face.

But when she placed her mouth over his cock and felt him caress

MY COMIC VALENTINE

her buttocks, she relaxed and forgot her inhibitions. Her mind melted with his touch. Pleasuring her partner, while receiving it at the same time, further titillated her senses.

She wrapped her wet mouth over the head of his penis, her lips covering her teeth to avoid pinching him. She teased him by sliding her lips over the ridge, just between the tip and shaft, before opening her throat to take him in. She felt the pulse of his cock while she pumped her mouth up and down. Her wet lips slid faster and faster along his shaft, increasing his excitement. The more aroused he grew, the wider she opened and the harder she sucked, drawing his cock toward the back of her throat.

Bobby ceased moving. His mouth stopped an inch from her pussy. While Penny tasted him, savoring his groans of delight, she slid a hand down to pet his balls. When he opened his legs, she eased her mouth off his shaft, kissing her way down to his soft sac.

Lost in nuzzling his most vulnerable parts, she heard him murmur, “Okay, okay, okay...” as though he was somewhere far away.

She felt his hand press against her hair and hold her head to keep her from moving. Confused, she disengaged her mouth from his genitals.

“Hold on, Penny, hold on. Come up here, a minute.”

“Huh?” She felt like she’d been rudely awakened in the middle of a great dream.

Without warning, Bobby flipped her off him. When she turned her head toward the mirror, she saw herself on her back again. In the reflection, she watched him kneel over her head as she had just done to him, reversing their sixty-nine position. She turned away from the reflection and looked up to see his jewels dangling in her face. She grasped his firm cock in her hand.

Bobby groaned with delight. “Hey, leave me alone for a minute or I’m going to come. First I want to taste you—gimme that fruit.”

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Okay. Dip into my fruit bowl.” Penny giggled.

“Lemme have it. Let me taste your kumquat...no, your plum...open up, 'cause here I come.”

“My kumquat?” Penny was still giggling as she spread her legs apart and surrendered her pussy. She turned her head back to the mirror to watch him settle on top of her. She also watched herself grasp his cock in her hand and massage. The last image she had before closing her eyes was that of his head disappearing between her thighs, again. She moaned in delight when she felt his mouth press the flesh of her clit. “Ooh, that’s so intense, right there.”

“Too much? I’ll go easy.”

She released his cock when he sat up and moved to all fours, bringing his knees down around her ribs, still facing her feet. Sliding his left hand under her butt, he maneuvered the other to stroke her velvety folds from above. He nuzzled the middle finger of his left hand onto her anus and swirled it around, while moving the fingers of his other hand between her juicy lips.

“Mm...there’s the fruit bowl,” Bobby whispered.

“You found it.”

“I want to taste it.”

He lowered his head and pressed his tongue against the nub of her clit while fingering her.

“But I want to feel you inside me, Bobby. Right away, now! I want you inside me—”

Before she’d finished speaking, he was up on his feet. She felt him flip her over to her tummy and yank her back on all fours. He surprised her by maneuvering her around to face the mirror and standing back, then he spanked her bottom. He continued with light spansks against her pussy from behind. She felt a slight sting that made her want to cry out, yet beg him to enter her.

When she glanced up toward the mirror, she saw the bed was the

MY COMIC VALENTINE

perfect height for him to remain standing and mount her from behind. She felt him pressing the head of his cock against her wet pussy for rear entry. Her juices flowed with so much desire that he slid in with ease. He grasped her hips with both hands and held on, pressing deep inside her. He fucked her doggy style with forceful thrusts in and out of her slippery slit.

Penny became both participant and observer as she watched in the mirror. She saw herself up on all fours, her breasts swaying back and forth, as Bobby plunged himself into her from behind. She felt him sweating against her, while aiming to sate himself. He seemed unable to get deep enough inside her, but was taking great pleasure in trying. They both abandoned themselves to their animal nature as she tilted up her ass to offer him greater access.

“Yeah, bring that little ass up. Cock it back for me!”

His movements grew more rapid, more frenzied, as he surged in and out of her pliant, succulent hole. She reveled in feeling his shaft heat up and expand inside her, the friction increasing the more he fucked her.

“You all right, baby?” He was breathing hard when he added, “Am I hurting you?”

“No, you’re not hurting me.”

She welcomed the swell of his manhood as he drove himself deeper into her. The hot lust consuming her was equaled by no other sensation she could imagine.

“I want to make you come, this way. I want us to come together.”

Penny protested. “I don’t know if I can.”

“Just concentrate on your pussy and feel my cock sliding in and out of you.”

He pressed his body down against her back, balancing his arm underneath her stomach for support. He was moving her forward to bring himself onto the bed without slipping out of her. He slid his arm out from under her and placed a firm but gentle hand against her back,

MY COMIC VALENTINE

pressing her chest into the mattress. He pushed against her and lowered himself between her legs to thrust his cock deep into her. From this position, he rammed his hips repeatedly against her backside, burying his shaft deeper each time.

“That’s right, keep your ass lifted up like that,” he ordered.

As she lifted her tush back up to him, he eased himself all the way down to lay his belly against her backside. His right hand slid down beneath her in front, seeking her muff. She felt his fingertips touch the soft folds of skin between her mounds of hair. He continued driving his cock in and out from behind, while fingering her clit.

“How does that feel, baby?” he whispered. “Does that feel good?”

“Yes! That feels awesome.”

“I’m gonna make you come this way. Come with me, baby. Let’s do it together.”

Penny put all her attention on the hot sensation of her body swelling around his shaft expanding inside her. She was amazed to feel Bobby coaxing the first waves of an orgasm from her clit.

“Bobby—I’m coming!”

He plucked at her nub with his middle finger while fucking her with enthusiasm.

The bliss of an unstoppable climax began flowing up from her pussy. She felt it expand into every fiber of her cunt, reaching up her spine, until it exploded in her brain.

“Yes,” she called out, “yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes, yes!” She shuddered and groaned as the waves rolled out.

He let her excitement diminish before he pulled his hand away and brought his torso up. Pressing that hand into her back, he held her leg out to the side with the other, enabling him to pound the full force of his cock into her from behind.

He yelled, “I’m coming, baby, I’m coming!”

She glanced at the mirror to watch him lean back and ride her with

MY COMIC VALENTINE

the final ferocity preceding his climax.

He howled as his orgasm erupted. Jarring his hips in wild abandon, he shot his fiery liquid into her until he'd emptied himself. Penny groaned at the sensation of his full blast of jism jetting deep inside her. She felt him ease the movements of his hips and his breathing slowed. He wavered, but remained inside her until the slow reduction of his hardness dissipated to wet heat, causing him to slip out and separate their bodies.

He tapped her butt with an affectionate pat before collapsing onto the bed beside her.

"We did it, baby," he said. "We came together."

"We did. That's a first for me. Ever! Amazing."

She pulled herself up and snuggled against Bobby. Between the swimming and the sex, she'd be sleeping like a rock tonight. And from the looks of Bobby—one arm around her waist, the other thrown back behind his head with his mouth gaping open—the same was true of him.

CHAPTER 8

Frankie busied herself inside Chloe's show room, stacking tents advertising drink specials onto rows of tables. Penny breezed in, wheeling her weekend bag behind her.

"Well," Frankie joked, "she made it back from Dallas all in one piece, I see."

"Whew—bad traffic coming in from LaGuardia. I was freaking out on the Brooklyn Bridge. Thought I'd never make it to work on time."

"Don't worry. We'd cover for you. So? How was it? You have a good time?"

"Great time. The whole time I was there I ate, drank, swam and—uh, you know..."

"Uh-huh. Spare me the details. I'll only get jealous."

"Let me go change so I can help you finish setting up. Where are Marie and Malcolm, by the way? I'm almost afraid to go into the dressing room alone."

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Oh, Miss Thing’ll be a little late today. She had a doctor’s appointment, doncha know.”

“Oh? What’s wrong with her?”

“We’ve been wondering that for years! But she ain’t sick, if that’s what you mean.”

“No?”

“Mm-mm.” Frankie lowered her voice. “Rumor has it Malcolm went with her to the O-B-G-Y-N. For a blood test.”

Penny’s voice dripped sarcasm. “That can’t mean what I think it means.”

“Why else would two fools like that go to a lady’s doctor? Or did you forget where babies come from?” She giggled. “Whatsa matter—too many margaritas down in Dallas?”

Penny frowned and wrinkled up her forehead. “Are you thinking she’s really pregnant?”

Frankie shrugged. “I’m not thinking anything. But they might be.”

Penny shook her head. “I hope you’re wrong, Mizz Detective. Geeze, I hope you’re wrong.”

Frankie gave a wicked chortle. “Hey, me, too. I’d hate to see the offspring of that union. Or what they’d do to it.”

Penny shook her head. “What a thought. On that note, I’ll go and change.”

* * *

The club wasn’t crowded for this new talent night. Loveable Kurt Wise, a popular stand-up who often played Vegas, acted as emcee since Paul Worrell was out of town. Penny caught part of his opening act while delivering chicken tenders to a table by the stage.

“Oh, yeah, I sure have hang-ups,” he was telling the audience. “In a big way. It all started back in kindergarten, when I got caught committing my first sin. By Sister Mary Happy, just after cookies and milk. Instead of nappy, I was slapping my little zappy. It felt perfectly

MY COMIC VALENTINE

natural to me, but, boy, was she mad. Smacked my knuckles with a ruler! Told me I'd go to hell if I didn't wash my hands and say a hundred rosaries."

Dejected, he looked down at the ground.

Female audience members emitted an audible, "Awe," or "Poor thing."

"Yup, yup, it was terrible. She humiliated me in front of all the other kids. Told me to hop to it and start praying. Scared the bejesus out of me! Oh, I prayed, all right. Got right down on my itty-bitty knees and started praying, right there and then."

More sympathy from the audience.

"I've been praying ever since," Kurt added. "The fear is so ingrained in me, I pray to this day, every time my little zappy gets attention." He stopped and looked straight out at the audience. "My wife's threatened to leave me if I keep it up."

Penny chuckled. *So that's where the need to be on stage starts. Public humiliation, followed by a lifetime of approval-seeking.*

She went back to the kitchen just in time to see Marie and Malcolm enter holding hands. She watched them lean against the service bar and start yakking with cranky Bert. Penny had to admit Marie did have a special glow about her. She loaded cocktail napkins from the bar onto her tray and listened in on their conversation.

"Mm-hmm," Marie was saying. "So, what do you think of my Malcolm, here, becoming a daddy, Bert?"

Bert answered, "Well, I'll tell ya. It couldn't happen to a more handsome couple. That kid's gonna be one cute little devil. I can just see Mal out there tossing a softball to him—or her, could be a her. I can see ol' Mal coaching the little league team, his kid the star player. Or else you'll have a beauty pageant winner."

Marie laughed with the total self-assuredness Penny had come to despise. "Right? With this guy's physical beauty?" she drawled. "And,

MY COMIC VALENTINE

well, I'm not a bad looking girl, myself, in case anybody's noticed." She rubbed her as-yet-flat belly. "This kid is gonna rock." Then she looked up at Malcolm. "Right, baby?"

Malcolm nuzzled his nose down into her neck. "That's right. With such a gorgeous mommy." He followed his affectionate nuzzle with a mushy kiss.

Penny rolled her eyes and headed out of the kitchen.

Scanning the showroom in search of Frankie, she noticed Lollie had taken center stage. She groaned when the singing stand-up sat at her electric piano and extolled, in a theatrical voice, "It's time to sing for you, now, boys and girls!"

Lollie growled out the "R" sound as she started her act. "Are you r-r-ready for some zest? I'm gonna put some spice in your lives now, children! Fasten your seat-belts and hold on for the ride, 'cause it could be a bumpy one!"

The only zest you could ever bring onstage, Penny thought, would be via the soap that goes by the same name.

She winced at the start of Lollie's first off-key tune. Desperate to escape the warbling sound of Lollie's original tunes, she looked around the club for Frankie. She was relieved to spot her leaning against the wall of the furthest tier in the back of the house. She hurried up to her.

"Guess what?" she whispered.

Frankie raised her eyebrows and waited for the answer.

"I just saw M an' M, in the kitchen."

"And?"

"Our worst fears have been confirmed," Penny concluded. "Marie is pregnant with Malcolm's baby!"

Frankie shook her head. "You know, I can't even joke about it. It scares me that much."

Penny nodded in agreement and shot a beleaguered look toward the stage, where Lollie was singing loudly and off key.

MY COMIC VALENTINE

Penny had to give her credit, though. Even off key, she sang without apology: “When I look into your eyes, I see more than paradise. Of course—that might be the reflection of the moon!”

* * *

Just inside the lobby door, Penny closed the metal mailbox and turned the lock. She rifled through the wad of envelopes she’d pulled out, handing over those addressed to Frankie. The two roommates then meandered across the lobby, Penny laboring between glancing at return addresses and wheeling her weekend bag behind her. As they approached the lobby desk, the doorman looked up.

“Need any help there, ladies?”

“Nah, that’s okay, Gino. I’ve got it,” Penny said.

“What’s shakin’, Gino?” Frankie chimed.

“Not too much,” he answered. “Doing all right, tonight?”

“Fine, thanks,” they each mumbled, returning to their mail as they resumed walking.

“Hold on a minute,” he called. “Apartment Four-D, right?”

The girls stopped.

“Miss Penelope Ann Foster,” he announced with intentional flamboyance. “Here, right here. These came for you, today.” He turned and reached behind him. When he came back around, his meaty hands clutched a rectangular vase of thick glass, overflowing with pink roses and Peruvian lilies. He placed them onto the granite countertop with a flourish.

Penny’s eyes lit up and her mouth dropped open. “Are you kidding me? Those are for me?”

“You’re Penelope Ann Foster, right? In apartment Four-D? Well, they’re for you, then,” said the big, affable guy.

“Here, Penny,” Frankie said, “give me your bag. I’ll wheel it up so you can carry those. Or—you want me to get them?”

“No, no, I’ll get them.” She lifted the vase off the counter and held

MY COMIC VALENTINE

it away from her so as not to disturb the arrangement.

“You getting married or something, Miss Penny?”

“Why would you think that?” Penny asked.

“I dunno,” Gino answered. “Twice in one week, I guess.”

“Wait,” Frankie said, “aren’t you even going to look and see who they’re from?”

“I can look when I get up to the apartment.”

“No, you can’t wait that long,” Frankie urged. “Gino probably wants to know who they’re from, too. So better read the card right here and now. You want to know, Gino, right?”

The big man feigned intrigue. “Just dying to!”

“See?” Frankie teased.

Penny laughed. She reached into the mass of pink roses and plucked the card from the pronged stick holding it in place.

“Penny,” she read out loud, “the scent of these flowers is almost as intoxicating as yours. Enjoy them—as I enjoy you.”

“Mmm, poetic,” Frankie teased. “Who’re they from?”

“Has to be Bobby, this time.”

“Is that what the card says?”

“Well, no. There’s no name on it.”

“Let me see that!” Frankie snatched the card and read it for herself. “So, it doesn’t necessarily mean they’re from Bobby. As a matter of fact, why can’t they be from, uh, you know who?”

“Yeah, right, detective. I think it’s pretty obvious who sent them, since I just got back from Dallas. He must’ve changed his mind about the flowers-thing. Okay, let’s go. You got my bag? Good night, Gino. Thanks for keeping these.”

“Not a problem,” Gino said. “Good night, ladies. Enjoy your flowers.” He smiled. “Ah, to be young again.”

* * *

Penny displayed the glorious mass of pink flowers on the side table

MY COMIC VALENTINE

in the living room.

"They're really something, aren't they?" she asked Frankie.

"They really are. Gorgeous arrangement. I love how those pink lilies are all mixed in with the deep pink roses—mm, mm, mm!"

"This must've cost him! You think, what—sixty, seventy bucks?"

"At least. I know what I spent, with Manhattan delivery prices. And that's a premium arrangement, girlfriend. You must have been *good* over the weekend."

Penny blushed and laughed. "I told you it was fierce. But *that* good? To get these from a guy who said he didn't believe in sending flowers? I've got to call him right now."

She dialed Bobby's hotel and waited for the receptionist to connect them. With the time difference between Texas and New York, she figured Bobby wouldn't be home from his gig, yet. She prepared to leave a message.

His voice, live and in person, gave her a little jolt. "Hey, you," she blurted. "What a surprise!"

"Hey, darlin'. How's it going? You get home all right?"

"Yup, yup. Everything went fine. I got to work on time. A-a-nd...I was thrilled to get home to my surprise."

"Oh, yeah?"

"The flowers," she said coyly. "They are oh-my-God drop-dead gorgeous! Here you are saying how you never send flowers, then you go and out-do yourself with the most incredible bunch—"

"Penny—"

"Of roses and lilies I have ever—"

"Penny!"

"What?"

"If you're saying you got roses—"

"Hello—yes! And the vase is beautiful, too, just filled with plump, gorgeous flowers! Like, I don't even know how many!"

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Penny.” Bobby suddenly sounded very serious. “Penny! That’s great, about the flowers. But what I’m trying to say, is...I didn’t send them. It wasn’t me.”

“Huh?” His words bludgeoned her giddiness to stillness. “You didn’t send me flowers?”

A beat of silence passed before he answered, “No. Wasn’t me.”

“Oh, geeze,” she blurted. “Then who the heck was it?”

He chuckled without mirth. “I’m sure I don’t know. What—the guy didn’t sign his name?”

“No. No name. Just, uh, a little note. I guess I just assumed it was you playing around.”

“Well, I’m sorry to disappoint you, but it wasn’t me. Guess you’ve got a secret admirer. I, obviously, don’t keep it a secret that I dig you.”

“Huh...”

“Course, kinda makes you wonder, why the guy didn’t sign his name.”

“Hoo, boy. Sorry about that. Wow. I feel like a big dope, now, for calling.”

“You’re a beautiful woman, in a big city. Doesn’t surprise me you’ve got a secret admirer out there. I’m cool with it.”

Penny let out a nervous little laugh. “Yeah, okay. Listen, on a different note, I had a great time this weekend. Thank you for everything.”

“I had a great time, too. Let’s plan on getting together again, soon. I’ll fly you out again. Sound good to you?”

“For sure. I miss you already.”

“Me, too. I’ll call you in a day or two, baby.”

Dazed, Penny hung up the phone. All at once, a myriad of thoughts crashed through.

What was I thinking? I should’ve known he didn’t send those flowers! Why would I think he’d changed his mind, all of a sudden?

MY COMIC VALENTINE

Then she hesitated.

Wait a minute. If Bobby didn't send those flowers, who the heck did?

Oh, no. Not him, again.

CHAPTER 9

Penny passed in front of Professor MacAlister while he held the door for her. In the hallway, she turned to face him and noticed his eyes shot up from her rump.

“Nice slacks, Penny,” he said. “Very flattering on you.”

“Thanks.”

They walked along, the silence growing fat enough to burst. “So, did you receive my gift?” he asked.

“The flowers?”

“Mm-hmm.”

“It *was* you! Oh, Christopher, that’s too much. I mean, they’re beautiful, don’t get me wrong. Gorgeous flowers. And the vase is beautiful, too. I just mean—well, it’s not necessary—”

“A simple ‘thank you’ will suffice.”

Penny sighed. “I’m sorry. Thank you.”

She was overtaken, however, by a sudden urge to end this

MY COMIC VALENTINE

relationship. As they left the dark corridors and met with sunshine, she stopped.

“Christopher,” she began, “I have to tell you something.”

“Why does that send a message of foreboding?”

Penny smiled and shook her head. They resumed walking.

“Okay. Listen, sir. Remember when you asked me if I was seeing someone? Well, I wasn’t exactly up front with you. I mean, I wasn’t exactly sure what was going on with that, and, well, now I am. But I didn’t know what to say until I was certain, you know? So I took the path of least resistance when I told you I wasn’t involved with anybody.”

“So what you’re saying is: you weren’t completely honest with me. You *are* involved with someone.”

“Yes.”

Neither spoke as they walked along. Then Christopher said, “And that’s who you went to see in Dallas, over the weekend?”

Penny’s tone oozed guilt. “Yes.”

“Mmm-hmm. And now it’s a beautiful thing, and you’re all in love and the two of you, what? Got engaged?”

“No, not yet. Only, it’s gone to the next level. And I need to be up-front about it with you. Because we agreed not to see anybody else, from now on.” Penny had made this part up on the spot, but hoped it was true.

“Well, that’s why I asked, Miss Foster. So we could avoid wasting our energies with this type of conversation.”

“Look, I’m sorry.”

“Listen, you’re a gorgeous girl. I didn’t think you were single.”

She swallowed and blushed with discomfort, but refrained from speaking.

“You want me to leave you alone, do you?” he asked. “No more flowers, no more dates?”

MY COMIC VALENTINE

Penny hoped it was his gentlemanly side coming through, in spite of how ungentlemanly he'd behaved on their date. And, was she mistaken, or did she detect a wounded look in his eyes?

"Oh, Christopher, I'm sorry. You're an awesome teacher. I hope I can still learn from you. And that you still want to teach me things. Please, I—I hope you don't hold this against me."

Christopher stopped. He made a point of turning to look down at her. "Don't insult me, please. I'm a man, but I'm also a professional. And I love teaching. I'll always be there for you. Our personal relationship has no bearing on my teaching, believe me. Or on your grade point average, for that matter."

Penny grinned. "Well, I didn't think so."

"So you'd better study your buns off, because I'm not handing out anything for free!"

Penny raised her eyebrows, about to make a rebuttal. Before she could say anything, Christopher spoke.

"Oh, stop. I'm teasing. You're a great student, Penny. What happened between us will have no impact on your studies. I love talking history and French culture with you. That'll never change."

As he walked her to the library, they discussed the rise of abbeys throughout medieval France.

In the back of her mind, Penny thought, How amazing. I didn't have to figure out what to do. It just came to me.

She took a deep breath and felt relief wash over her.

I guess things do have a way of working themselves out.

* * *

Just as Frankie managed to push in the keys and undo the second latch, Penny rushed through their apartment door. She lunged for the ringing telephone.

"Hey, you just get in?"

Bobby! "Hey, baby," she answered, a bit out of breath. "How's it

MY COMIC VALENTINE

going?”

Frankie waved and headed for her bedroom. Penny lay down across the sofa.

“Couldn’t wait to get you,” Bobby said, excited. “I wanted to give you the news.”

“What news?” Penny said brightly.

“The news about the TV show. Tommy’s agent’s been hammering out a deal with NBC, the past few weeks, for the sitcom idea we pitched a while back. They finally agreed on the basics, and now my agent’s in on it. With me, as co-creator.”

“Wow, Bobby. Awesome. That’s just awesome!”

“It sure is. This is big time, baby. Tommy’ll be starring in his own show, just like Ray Romano. And I’ve got a part in it, too. But I’m more excited about overseeing the writing staff.”

“You’ll be writing?”

“Yup. Tommy’ll be punching it up with his stuff. I’ll be on the overall concept and main storyline.”

“Geeze, I’m so happy for you. Did I ever doubt it, though?” She put on her Russian accent. “You never know what za future holds.”

“That’s what’s funny. I keep thinking about that night, with your whole Madame Zaza thing. It freaked me out when you told me about my being more in the background, and moving to L.A. Because nobody knew about the deal. We kept it under wraps until it was all worked out.”

“Huh. Interesting...maybe I really am psychic. Maybe I picked up on what was meant to be.”

“That’s what I’m thinking.” Bobby’s voice became quieter, more serious. “Hey, listen. I know we never talked about where you and I might go, with us. And I know you’re not finished with school until May. But, would you ever consider moving out there? To the west coast?”

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“What? L.A.?”

“Yeah. I’ve got to move out there, be close to the studio, for this.”

Penny didn’t want to point out her attitude toward the other coast was that of any educated, elitist New Yorker. The culture in which she currently thrived created the assumption she was sitting on the world’s cultural pinnacle. Why would she ever leave the most incredible city on the planet to go out to Hollywood? Plus, New York had the European connection, with France just across the Atlantic. No, she doubted she could ever be happy out in La-la land.

“We—ell,” She cleared her throat. “Hmm. I never really—”

“Before you decide you’d never go out there, you ought to come out for a visit. I know how New Yorkers are about L.A. But there’s a great, big world out there, honey. Lots of opportunities in other places, even though you might not think so.”

“I know.”

“I’m finishing this gig early and moving out there in two weeks. Looking to get a house in Westwood. I’ve got a realtor on it,” he said.

“Well, why don’t I come out there for a visit, Bobby, and see what it’s like?”

“There you go. That’s a start.”

“And I think it’s great, so great, what’s happening for you. You deserve it.”

“Thanks, baby. God, I can’t wait to see you. I’ve got to get you out there, in the next few weeks.”

“I was there, once, years ago. I guess I liked it well enough. I never really thought about living there, though. But I want to see you, Bobby. I guess I should try and be flexible about things. I mean, if we decide we want to be, uh, close.”

“I do want to be close, Penny. And I’m talking long-term. I haven’t met anybody I feel more connected to in a long, long time. You’re just —you’re so beautiful! And smart. And fun. And hot. And I love your

MY COMIC VALENTINE

pussy, baby. I just love it.”

He couldn't see Penny blush. “I'm glad you love that, my—pussy, honey. I mean, hey, it's a start.”

He laughed. “All of you, girl. I love all of you. You're great. Even though it's only been a month, I just, have this feeling about us. I want us to be close.”

“Me, too. So let's just see what happens. Okay?”

“Absolutely.”

After Penny hung up, she sat very still.

You don't come across this feeling very often. But—me, out in L.A.? Hollywood, no less? French history nut, out there with the glitz and glitter? I don't know about that...but, then again, it's Bobby. He makes all the difference.

She sighed.

Keep the faith, I guess, and things will work out for the best.

CHAPTER 10

Penny and Frankie strolled up the sidewalk, chatting about that night's crowd at Chloe's Comedy Club, until they reached the entrance to their apartment building.

"That whole table was so obnoxious," Penny said. "I just wanted to dump my tray of drinks over the guy's head, after he said that."

"Rude mother-fucker," Frankie added.

"Yeah. At least Manny was on my side."

"He's good like that. Knows an asshole when he sees one. Or two. Or five."

"Hey, so did you talk to Paul? I saw him come in and stand at the back of the house, when Kurt was on."

"Yeah. Said, 'Hi, how you doin'?' Asked him about life on the road. He was nice enough. Kept his distance. Didn't look me in the eye too long."

"Oh. Well, who knows." She reached for the door. "Give him a

MY COMIC VALENTINE

minute, maybe he'll come around."

"I don't believe in fairy tales, honey. He's intimidated and that ain't ever gonna change. I've accepted that. I'll live."

Penny yanked the lobby door open. Frankie followed her in.

Penny called out a playful greeting to Gino. "Gino, baby! How's it shakin' there, buddy?"

"There's my girls. The most beautiful girls in the building."

"You are too kind," Penny answered.

"Yeah, really," Frankie added dryly.

"And popular, too," Gino said.

"Ya think?" Penny asked with a chuckle.

She approached the lobby desk while Frankie checked the mail.

"I'd say so, kiddo," Gino teased. "I have never seen more flowers delivered to one apartment! You must be doing something right."

Penny's mouth dropped as she stared at the huge floral display Gino was placing on the counter. "Oh, no, not again."

Gino laughed.

"Uh-oh," Frankie said. "The secret admirer?"

Penny shook her head. "Look at this thing. This outdoes either of the others. And what's this?" She took a closer look at the container holding the massive array of flowers. "Oh, wow. It's a colander! A pink enamel colander. How cute."

Frankie came over for look. "Yup, that's what it is, all right. What does this tag say?" She read the glossy tag tied through one of the enameled holes. "'You have received an original floral arrangement exclusively designed for FTD by Todd Oldham.' How do you like that, honey? High-class, designer flowers."

"God, they are something," Penny agreed. She shook her head and marveled at the spider mums, blue asters, pink orchids and roses, and bright orange birds of paradise. "These are exotics. I mean, this is phenomenal."

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“Outdid himself this time,” Frankie added. “You’ve got to read the card.”

Penny snatched the pink envelope poking out the side of the arrangement. “But, why would he do this? He was perfectly reasonable when we talked about things. He never said anything more about it, after our conversation. Acted normal, after class today.”

Her eyes widened as she read the card.

Frankie raised her eyebrows. “Yeah? So?”

Penny bit her lower lip as tears came to her eyes. “I—these are from Bobby,” she said quietly. She read the card out loud. “Your favorites, like the hotel garden in Dallas. I figured you could use the colander later. Love you, Bobby.”

Frankie chuckled. “Wow, from the anti-flower man.”

“This a different guy?” Gino asked.

Penny nodded her head meekly. She could barely contain the joyful tears threatening to erupt. “I—this guy said he’d never send flowers ’cause it’s just a waste of money. But he, he...”

“Guess he changed his mind,” Gino said.

“He must really want me to move out there with him.”

“Okay, lover girl,” Frankie said. “Let’s get this load upstairs. Gimme your bags.”

Gino hurried ahead to press the elevator for the two roommates laden down with shoulder bags, book bags, a pile of mail and the huge floral arrangement. He held the door as they maneuvered inside.

“Good night, ladies.”

“Good night, Gino,” they both called.

“Thanks for everything,” Penny added.

As they rode up, Penny shook her head. “Wow. He’s serious about wanting me to come out there. But, I don’t know, Frankie. You have to drive around everywhere, don’t you?”

“Yeah. But that wouldn’t bother me. And I don’t want to work in

MY COMIC VALENTINE

this town, that's for sure. So, if you're thinking of going out to the west coast, maybe I'll put in for a position, out there. Not L.A. proper. Maybe Orange County. I'll have to research it."

Penny exited the elevator and tried to see her roommate through the mass of flowers in her arms. "Wait a minute. You'd really relocate out there, after graduation?"

Frankie looked at Penny and laughed. "Girl, I can barely see you behind that arrangement!"

Penny giggled. "I know. I can hardly see over it. Or around it."

She walked with care to their apartment.

"Listen," Frankie continued, searching her purse for her key. "I'm open to possibilities, that's all. If you're going, I just might be going, too."

Penny nodded. "I need to start taking Bobby and me more seriously. Not that I didn't before. I mean, I didn't really think about it. But, a comic...well, that's just not the kind of guy I was thinking I'd end up with, is all."

"Who can say, with matters of the heart," Frankie reasoned as they entered. She dumped the bags she'd been carrying onto the sofa.

Penny carefully placed the floral arrangement on the dining room table. She stood back and admired their beauty.

Wow. If he did this, after saying he'd never send flowers, he must really be ready to open his heart. But—am I? *She leaned down and inhaled the perfume.* I'd be crazy not to give it a shot! It's not every day a man like him comes along—even if I never dreamed I'd end up with a stand-up.

Frankie came over to stand by Penny's shoulder and admire the flowers. "And it's not even Valentine's Day."

Penny smiled. "I know. Can you imagine? Wonder what he'll do, then."

"Well, I know one thing."

MY COMIC VALENTINE

“What’s that?”

“If I were you, I’d stick around to find out.”

Penny smiled. “Sounds like good advice.” After gazing at the flowers another moment, she announced she was going to her room. “I need to make a phone call.”

Frankie chuckled. “At least you’re sure it’s him, this time.”

Penny walked down the hall, her heart pounding.

It’s almost scary, how much these flowers mean. Okay, I’ll take the plunge. I’ll commit to giving this relationship all I’ve got. After all, my comic’s being flexible. I can be flexible, too.

Grinning ear to ear, she closed the door and dialed Bobby’s number.

SHARA BLOODSTONE

After earning a Bachelor's Degree in French and Spanish literature, Shara Bloodstone took to the road. She toured the world as a musical theatre performer for several years before making New York City her home base. While she has always been involved in the arts, economic realities introduced her to employment in the restaurant, bar and retail industries. Her extensive travels and professional experience encompass the ridiculous to the sublime, providing her with a glorious reserve of material for use in her writing.

* * *

***Don't miss Urban Ambrosia by Shara Bloodstone,
available from Amber Quill Press, LLC***

The heat soars in the restaurant kitchen when a chef and a bartender ignite their passion—until past mistakes threaten to douse their sizzling romance...

Bartender Marla Casey loves living among New York City's diverse cultural offerings. But when sexy and passionate Executive Chef Anthony Somacelli invites her to join him in a new life and career opportunity, she must weigh urban attractions against following the man of her dreams to less exciting turf.

AMBER QUILL PRESS, LLC

HOME OF AMBER HEAT!

QUALITY EROTIC FICTION
IN BOTH PRINT AND ELECTRONIC FORMATS

ACTION/ADVENTURE

SUSPENSE/THRILLER

SCIENCE FICTION

PARANORMAL

ALTERNATIVE

MYSTERY

ROMANCE

HORROR

DARK FANTASY

FANTASY

CONTEMPORARY

HISTORICAL

AND MORE...

BUY DIRECT AND SAVE
<http://www.amberheat.com>