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Lilith Sorenson broke the surface and pulled back her hair, feeling the sunlight on her face. She'd let go of the towrope too soon and had to swim a few yards back to shore, pushing her ski to the sand ahead of her. Her sister Brooke had skied on the near side to the bank and alighted in less than four feet of water. She walked from the bay without getting her auburn mane wet.

Lilith waded from the water and joined her sister, while Dad idled the boat to shore and kid brother Greg gathered the ropes. Summer holidays here were an annual ritual. Lilith had skipped a few over the past decade thanks to college and work commitments, but this year Brooke had convinced her it was time to kick back, relax, and catch up with the family.

Brooke shaded her eyes and watched the launch ramp, where a massive pickup crusted with chrome and driving lights was reversing.

"Oh, great, a phallic symbol launching an even bigger phallic symbol." Lilith squeezed water from her dark hair.

"Yeah." Brooke smiled, watching the men who fussed around the trailer. They worshipped a slender fibreglass goddess that packed an enormous inboard engine amidships. "Nice outfit. Reckon she's supercharged. Those guys aren't amateurs."

Lilith sniffed. "Poseurs. You can't have a ski holiday without a bunch of macho meatheads turning up somewhere. They'll be launching their jet skis next, then we'll never hear the end of it."

"Still, gotta admit, it's all part of the scenery. I could use the eye candy. And so could you, stuck in that city office all day." Brooke never took her eyes from the bared chests and bronze-skinned shoulders, the rolled-down neoprene of open wetsuits,

the caps and curly hair and sunglasses.

"You might." Lilith curled her nose. "Gasoline and testosterone smell the same to me, and there's way too much of it wafting from over there. You might have an appetite for prime beefcake, but I've got more refined tastes. Those bozos are enough to turn me vegetarian."

"You're just grumpy 'cause Phil couldn't make it." Brooke glanced at Lilith just as Lilith felt her face flush. She giggled, and Lilith scowled.

"Phil can tell the difference between Moselle and Riesling without looking at the bottle. Those bums couldn't." She batted a hand at the newcomers.

"Yeah, but they'd know their Insane Clown Posse from their Slayer without looking at the CD case."

Lilith made a shooing gesture. "Well, off with you then, go and play with them if you think they're so fly. Honestly, I worry about your taste in men, Brooke. A real man should be self-possessed enough that he doesn't need to make a statement with big cars, big boats, big friends and big noise. What he really needs is a..."

"Big dick?"

Lilith laughed in spite of her lecturing. "Ohh, at least some good taste! Women need to be seduced, not hit over the head with a stone axe."

"Maybe some like it rough." Brooke shrugged and grinned slyly. "Phil must have a big dick, then."

Lilith felt her cheeks flame bright red. "No! I mean, I don't know, we're not that far along yet." She tried to shoo her sister again. "Get outta here, off you go and say hi."

It was Brooke's turn to back down. "No, I'll just look. They're probably only day trippers."

*And maybe it really is too soon after Bruce dumped you.*

"Well I hope so. They'll not impress me, anyway. I won't do them the favour of noticing them."

Lilith strolled up the sand, collected her towel, and dried off. Up on the grass beneath a shady tree, a reclining camp chair beckoned, her bookmarked novel waiting. Dad hadn't tethered the boat and was heading out again, this time to fish. Greg and Brooke were gathering the ski gear and helping Mum aboard.

The "Beefcake Boys" didn't look like they were going to be a problem. Their boat started with a bass gurgle, then turned and roared away after a brief display of attitude. Lilith peeled her way out of her flotation vest and wetsuit, then donned a light shirt and made herself comfortable.

"Marnie and I are gonna walk up to the village," came Greg's voice. "Anything we need to get from the shop?"

"Milk, I think."

Greg and his girlfriend wandered away from the camp hand-in-hand. Lilith watched them go, and was amazed by how much her little brother had matured since she last saw him. He was in his late teens now, his once skinny shoulders thick with muscle.

Brooke flopped on a towel in the sun, skin glistening with tanning oil. Lilith turned pages, soothed by birdcalls and the lapping of water on sand.

*Yes, it's a pity Phil couldn't be here. Relaxing together might have given our friendship a nudge along.* He could have stretched out in the second of the banana chairs and lost himself in a magazine or book, too, trading tailored suit pants and blazer for shorts and loafers. They could have walked to the shop, although it was unlikely they'd have held hands, or taken to one of the nature trails. Phil would have been snapping pictures left, right, and centre with his camera, or identifying birds from their songs.

She'd have gotten to show off her figure to him, emphasised by her stylish black maillot. Perhaps the sight of her body would have spurred him to consider new dimensions to their relationship. They'd engaged in light-hearted flirting, some playfully lewd suggestions, yet nothing had ignited from those frisky words. Yet. Of course he was sexual, every man was. In Phil's case, though, sex simply hadn't cropped up yet. He was tall, which was good. Blond, which was good. No athlete, but that wasn't necessary; brains were more important than muscles. He had dimples, a gentle voice and a lovely placid nature...

The low, insistent throb of a powerful engine interrupted her reverie.

The campsite provided buoys for the residents to tether their boats to several yards offshore, each buoy facing a trailer or campsite. King tides last season had torn the buoys to the left of the family mooring away. When Lilith glanced up, she saw three of the Beefcakes hustling down to the water to meet their incoming boat. The men, joking among themselves, walked between her ski gear and Brooke. When they yelled their overly loud 'oy's, it was from the sand in front of her own campsite. Brooke roused and looked up, a mixture of wonder and "how rude!" on her face.

They splashed into the water, and proceeded to tie up at Dad's buoy. Lilith hit her feet, dropped her book, and stalked to the water's edge.

"Excuse me...*excuse* me!" Since they ignored her, she started wading. "That buoy's taken!"

The boat driver stood in his seat, and when he looked at her, so did the rest of the men. Lilith drew a deep breath and raised her voice. "We've paid for this buoy and this campsite. Visitors' moorings are down the other end, there."

It didn't surprise her when their faces lit up with crooked

grins. They exchanged glances, and somebody made a catcall. The driver's mouth curved into a half-smile, but his black brows gathered behind his sunglasses.

"Well, excuse *me*, but we're paying customers and we're entitled to a buoy near our campsite."

*Our campsite* made Lilith shiver, and more determined than ever to shift them. "I don't think you understand." She gestured to the Sorenson tent, vehicles, and equipment. "*Our* campsite—*our* buoy. Our boat's out, so where are they going to tie up when they get back? If your buoy's gone, bad luck, you'll have to moor somewhere else. I'm sorry," she added, not very sincerely.

The smartass remarks started, chorused in a variety of male voices.

"Well *excuse* me!"

"I don't see no site numbers on these buoys!"

"Chill out, lady!"

"Finders keepers, babe."

"Whyn'cha move up one, then? There's nobody the other side of ya!"

Lilith refused to look away, although she wished Greg had been present as at least a token male on her side. One of the men grinned and winked, not at her but over her shoulder.

"Hey, Lil, c'mon, it's not that important." Brooke was clearly not going to be much help.

The driver's face had a craggier maturity than the others'. His dark, tousled hair showed a few silver strands, so she focused on him, hoping he was captain of the crew as well as the boat. "It's not like we'll be staying long, we're gonna ski all afternoon," he said, giving the slightest of shrugs. "We just want to set up camp first."

"But that means you'll be to and fro through our site lugging all your gear!" Lilith complained.

"Can it, you guys, and start setting up." The driver took off his glasses and squinted balefully at Lilith. "If we moor at the far end, then we have to tramp through *everybody's* campsites to move our gear. Deal with it, ma'am. I said we wouldn't be long. And you're getting your shirttails wet."

That was the moment when the lake betrayed her. The beach sand was a thin layer below the waterline, over greasy clay. When she tried to move she forgot to compensate. Her feet shot from beneath her, and down she went in a crash of spray, to gales of laughter from the spectators.

"C'mon, let's get the gear..."

*So much for dignity!* She sat on her backside, shoulder-deep in water, clay and sand oozing through her fingers where she propped herself up. The boat driver had jumped into the water and waded past, pausing to gaze down at her.

"I'd offer you a hand up, if I didn't think you'd bite it." It was surely sunlight reflected from the water that made his pale eyes so luminous. His voice was quiet, and deep.

"I'm going to complain to the park management!"

He gave a thin-lipped smile and touched two fingers to his brow, a sardonic salute, and strode after his buddies.

*Bastard!* All she was left with was a giggling sister.

She wrung out her shirt and hung it up to dry before covering up in shorts and a fresh top, and took her grievance to the site kiosk. The *Back at 3:30* sign didn't give her any satisfaction. There was no choice but to return to her book and try to relax in spite of the industrious noises from the new neighbours.

An improvised curtain of towels and wetsuits hung from tree branches offered little defence from rock music, cigarette smoke, laughter and cuss words. With all of them going back and forth to the beach and their boat, she soon counted six men



and two women. Brooke, with her easygoing chit-chat, was speedily becoming a third female party member.

Lilith didn't want to concede that the man she thought of as "Captain" was right when he'd said they wouldn't moor for long. Soon, their speedboat was rumbling away, towing skiers two and three at a time. Each departure and return was accompanied with macho posturing—voices whooped and fists pumped the air. They stepped with nonchalant grace onto slalom skis from standing beach starts, all suntans and white-toothed grins, wetsuits stretched tight over sculpted bodies.

*Show-offs!*

The girls didn't ski as well as the men, and did a lot of squealing in a manner Lilith supposed sounded fetching to their bulls. She swapped her novel, which she was having trouble concentrating on, for a crossword book and locked her attention to the clues. While ski parties went out, others in the group swam. The girls paired off with their men and spent a lot of time locked in aquatic clinches, necking and getting up to God-knew-what beneath the water's surface.

Although she'd drawn her knees up to support the crossword book and create a barrier across the shore view, Lilith glanced up again when the Captain strolled to the water's edge. His height, leanness, and loose-limbed grace made him look less Neanderthal than the younger men. He wore a black wetsuit inlaid with arcs of red and turquoise, and carried a racy-looking carbon fibre ski. At the water's edge he was as reserved as his companions were bumptious. He waded into the lake, bowed, and donned his ski, accepted the towrope he was handed, and turned his back on the boat to face the shore. Shoulders low, he lifted the tail of the ski from the water and sank the nose beneath. His pose was meditative, a prayer to the water.

Lilith sat up. This man thought he could take off

*backwards*. She'd never heard of that before. The boat growled, and before her startled gaze he mounted the wake in reverse, as though that was the easiest way to ski. His shoreside cheer squad yelled.

"Did you see that!" Brooke called.

*Now, that is just too much!* Lilith scowled and buried her nose in her book again.

Dad returned before the Beefcake Boys finished for the day, and Lilith's mood eased when he tied up at the home buoy. The others simply took the next mooring along, which meant they trooped right past the Sorenson picnic table and grilled fish dinner, but they were a passing inconvenience.

Brooke didn't join the family meal. "I'm going up to the bistro with my new friends," she declared airily, brushing out her hair. She nodded at one of the Beefcakes.

\* \* \*

Sundown brought a measure of peace to the lakeside. The scents of barbecue and salad and insect repellent were distinctively summery. Mum lit citronella candles to keep the pests at bay, while Dad read, and Greg and Marnie took a romantic stroll. With the neighbours away and the ski boats gone from the water, a hush spread across the camp that was as smooth as the evening bay. Only the creaking of frogs from their reed beds and the chug of distant fishing boats could be heard.

Lilith walked to the water's edge, relaxing properly for the first time all day. She smiled at the caress of warm water about her feet and the tickle of sand between her toes. Just above the western horizon, where the sky was rose-tinted lilac, the Evening Star gleamed.

*Venus*, Phil had told her. The planet of love.

She closed her eyes, wishing Phil were here. Surely in this haven, the romanticism wouldn't have been lost on him. He'd

shown her all the planets visible to the naked eye, Jupiter, Mars, and Saturn—all except Mercury, which was like Venus but much smaller and closer to the sun, and hard to see unless conditions were perfect and the time was right. And that was all he'd shown her.

She couldn't say why she opened her eyes. No sound had alerted her, but in her peripheral vision, she could see she wasn't alone. A man stood on the formerly empty beach, no more than ten yards away.

Lilith stole a glance. Like her, he was looking across the lake, taking in the dusk. He was tall and lean, silhouetted by the sky, with a strong chin and aquiline nose. Earlier, he had been covered by a wetsuit. Now he wore only racers, his strong and tapered body a sculpture of light and shade.

He was the Captain.

She breathed a curse and looked straight ahead, wishing he'd gone with his noisy buddies to town. Wished she didn't want to take a second look. Hazarded a second glance. A third. His shoulders were square, his torso toned, his legs long. That Lycra package in front—nice, everything in its right place, enough to tease the eye and not offend.

Poor Phil didn't look so good in bathers. His body was thick, his legs skinny, their profile not helped by his board shorts. If she loved him enough, desire would follow. Or so she hoped.

Her breath caught when the Captain turned his head. She awaited, blood thrilled by dread and excitement, anticipating the moment their eyes would meet. She didn't want to talk to him, and also wanted to.

The moment never came. Greg and Marnie trotted toward her from the tent, giggling about something that was on television. The Captain gazed past her without seeing, his eyes

light as the lake's mirrored surface.

\* \* \*

The peace was all too brief. Before long, the pickup truck thundered to a halt, stereo thumping, all lights blazing. The Boys had returned with plenty of beer, set to party the night away.

Lilith tossed about her camp bed. It was too hot to wad the pillow over her head. Surely their racket was loud enough to contravene the resort's curfew rules? She waited in vain for the caretaker to come and raise his voice, or maybe even the police. From right next door, they seemed loud enough. But nobody came, and she rolled over and over trying to sleep, regaled by drunken shouts and raucous singing, pierced by the high laughter of women. Names like "Gus!" and "Brookie!" studded her sullen drowse.

Her sister's bed was empty.

She wasn't sure how long she lay there. As soon as things quieted and she was ready to drop off, there would be sudden laughter, as though they could somehow see her and were waiting to startle her awake.

And then she realised she'd been gazing at the roof of the tent for some time, and the only thing she'd heard was frog song and birdcalls. The canvas overhead was just visible, lit by pre-dawn gloaming.

*Peace at last!* Although it was criminally early to be awake on a summer holiday, Lilith felt too alert to stay in bed. She poked her head from the tent flap and breathed dew, and smiled her delight.

The lake was gorgeous at this hour. It had been a crucible of molten gold at sundown, the sky a riot of colour. This morning it was gentle mauve, shrouded in a light veil of mist that blended land, water and sky at the horizon. The brightest stars were still glittering at the zenith, but the eastern skyline hinted at a clear

azure that would spread and welcome the sun.

She'd worn only a bikini to bed, so she threw a long T-shirt on as some protection against the dawn chill. When she stepped outside barefoot, crisp air made her shiver and her nipples sharpen. Behind her, the trailers and tents were silent and dark. The sandman had cast his spell, and fairies had painted every blade of grass, every leaf and cobweb with dewy diamonds. Lilith padded to the water's edge, breathing in magic.

Someone was snoring so noisily in the Beefcake camp she could hear him even here. *They even sleep loud!* It occurred to her that Brooke's bed was still empty. Was she snuggled in the crook of a brawny arm, her sweaty body brewing a hangover? *Serves her right!* With any luck, that was one camp that wouldn't stir until after lunch.

The girl who wandered through fairyland swiftly reverted to a stern, irritated woman. Lilith regarded the family boat, and gave a low, malicious giggle. *I am definitely going skiing this morning, as soon as Dad has breakfast. I'm not going to go far, just back and forth along the shore here, back and forth behind our noisy little ski boat with its noisy outboard, and I'll encourage Greg and Marnie to yell and squeal as much as they like...*

Along from Dad's boat, the Beefcakes' racing boat was a low, sleek arrow that looked like it was doing a hundred standing still. It was tied up in the wrong place. The rest of the boats along the shore were all tied up in odd places, thanks to the Beefcakes. They'd spoiled her holiday, and lured poor silly Brooke toward trouble with their antics. What would happen if there was a little accident? Maybe the tethering buoy had been weakened by the tides that had torn the missing ones loose. There would be no damage...oh no, nothing serious. Just a humiliating inconvenience. One good push, and their phallic

pride and joy would be gliding powerlessly away from shore. By the time they woke it'd be a speck in the middle of the bay.

The notion was so wicked it thrilled her. Her heart thumped. Untying their boat would be such a naughty thing to do, and the consequences of being found out didn't bear further thought. Her anger snickered, a little demon on her shoulder tempting her to wade into the water, one step at a time, eyes on where the speedboat was tethered. The lake was as warm as a bathtub, and as she passed knee-deep she trod carefully, toes sinking into the ooze of clay. She would have to hitch up her T-shirt...

"Don't slip."

Lilith gasped and windmilled her arms. Stealthy grace fled. She splashed around to face shore, and the man who had walked in ankle-deep behind her. A small smile was on his craggy face.

"Do you like going around creeping up on people? You scared the hell out of me!"

"Well, if it isn't the Lady of the Lake." In the cool, grey-blue world, the Captain's voice was low and warm, a laconic drawl.

"If I had a sword, I'd hit you with it," she muttered, and he chuckled.

"No doubt."

"What are you doing out here?"

He shrugged. "I was enjoying the morning, and when I saw you wading I wondered what you were doing." He narrowed his eyes and tilted his head, peering over her shoulder at his boat.

"I was..." *Checking that the boats were tied up properly? No, that's too obvious!* "Looking for Mercury," she snatched from thin air. *Choke on that, bozo!* She expected a smartass remark along the lines of "It's stamped on the side of your outboard engine, babe."

The Captain nodded thoughtfully, and his smile broadened.

"Into astronomy, are you?"

"I'm just curious about the stars, that's all. It's easy to spot Venus, but never Mercury."

The Captain squinted at the eastern horizon. "Still a bit too early. Another ten minutes or so, I reckon."

Lilith looked at him askance. "I wouldn't have thought any of you boys would be in any shape to be up this early, after last night's performance."

He shook his head. "I had a couple, but I didn't get that drunk. The younger ones, well, they take blending in with the natives too seriously. You know, it's in the textbook under *When in Rome*. Drink too much alcohol and make a riot, and nobody will take any notice."

"What?" She wondered at his sense of irony, searching his poker face for a sardonic smile. At least, now that they were talking, she could take a good look. Like the evening before, he was wearing only swim briefs. His fair skin was ghostly in the skyglow, shaded with dark curls on his chest and flat stomach. His jaw was dark with stubble, and thick brows gathered above those lunar-coloured eyes. His gaze had a piercing quality that was hard to escape—when he looked at her, it felt like he touched her, too. He was disturbing, and fascinating.

"You're not like the rest of them, are you?" She batted a hand at the camp.

"Who? The lads? Ahh, we've a lot in common. Classy boats, speed, machines, pretty women. You really should cut them some slack. We've been working hard, really hard, for months on end. We're overdue for a break, and we haven't hurt anyone. Only damage I saw was to your pride yesterday when it suffered a massive collision with the mud."

"Yes, well," she skimmed past the memory, "what is it you and your buddies do?"

"We're a survey team. Geophysics. We're testing the structural integrity of the Earth's crust, the better to understand how planets evolve and age. So there's lots of driving to the middle of nowhere and running tedious experiments."

"Is that like trying to predict earthquakes and volcanoes?"

He grinned a flash of white teeth that was astonishing for the way it lit his face. "Something like that. It's hot, thirsty, thankless and isolated work, but it gets you away from the crowds. Frankly, I hate coming back to civilisation and having to share a holiday park packed with vacationers, so that, I expect, evens our score. Having to rub shoulders with you people is as irritating to me as my boat is irritating to you." He shrugged. "Anyway, you must be Lilith, right? Brooke's big sister?"

"Whatever she's told you about me, it's not true," Lilith said hastily.

"Chalk and cheese, uh?"

"You still haven't told me what you're doing wandering the foreshore at this hour, Mister...I'm sorry, what's your name?"

"August Menzies. My friends call me Gus. As to what I was doing, I was going for a morning swim. I can't stay out of water too long or I get tetchy, and my skin starts itching and cracking." He held a sober face for a while, but then cracked a smile. "Don't worry about me. The lads'll tell you I'm crazy half the time, and nuts the rest."

"Uh, okay, Mr. Menzies..."

"You're not going to sue over the boat buoy, are you? Sounds like you're seeing me in court. Gus, yeah?"

His light tone made yesterday's incident sound deservedly trivial. His eyes held her captive. "Okay, Gus."

"That's better."

She raised her chin. "Is my sister all right?"

"Dunno, I never had her. No, no, that wasn't fair." He raised



his hands, a placatory gesture. "She and Jay got to fancying each other. He might talk big, but deep down I think he's worried, like, she's gonna be more than he can handle. Fact of the matter is, I was considering calling you in to help back her off a bit. Assuming I could ever get your ear."

Lilith sighed. "That sounds like Brooke. She has a few issues. She can't bear to be alone with herself, so she'll jump at any distraction. She's had a rocky ride in love matters over the years, but she never learns."

*Maybe that's why I'm so cautious with men.*

She looked up again. Her view of him cleared as the light of daybreak grew. His complexion warmed—his features a pleasing mixture of light and shade, eyes deep-set and moody, yet creased with laughter. "Well, you have my ear now, Gus, whatever I might think of your friends."

His eyes narrowed and he scowled—not at her, but past her, into the daylight. "Oh, look...there it is. Turn around."

"Huh?" She turned, although she wasn't sure what he was talking about.

"Look just above the brightest part of the sunrise, about a finger's breadth above that hill. Just let your eyes relax and sweep the sky there."

She squinted into the amber-tinged glow. "Over the willows?"

"No, further to the left."

The water made music around his legs when he waded up behind her. His hands on her shoulders were surprisingly warm. He twisted her fractionally in the right direction, then pointed over her shoulder, long brawny arm extended. They were standing so close that she could feel his radiant heat, and the tickle of his breath on the nape of her neck. He didn't smell of beer or hangover, but of water and insect repellent. Of warm

skin, and Gus.

She locked her eyes to the sky—and there, a tiny speck gleamed, barely discernible in the florid light. "Mercury," she breathed. Her heart pounded, but not because of the planet.

"Thanks," she mumbled. "Thanks a lot."

"You sound disappointed. I thought you'd be impressed."

The moment Gus had stolen was supposed to have been Phil's. She should have been standing knee-deep in water with Phil's body a fraction of an inch from hers. She should have been wanting Phil this badly.

"I'm sorry, I've...got issues, too." She turned to face him, but her head was bowed, eyes fixing on curls of chest hair that she wished she could rest her cheek against. If only Phil would hold her. He'd had plenty of chances, but never taken them.

Gus made a disparaging snort and propped his hands on his hips. "Not even the planets impress you? You're a hard case, Lilith. What's it take? The whole galaxy presented on a platter?"

"Your name." She still couldn't look him in the eye, and her blush rose as quickly as the sun. His nipples were erect nubs that held her gaze. They looked as taut as hers felt. "Not Gus, August. It's really nice. Different. August's my favourite month."

"Ahem, thanks." Now it was he who sounded taken aback. "I didn't realise it would be that easy."

She looked up, into eyes the colour of the sky, set in a sober face that was gentle in spite of dark stubble.

"Why are you so angry, Lilith? You've given my friends' names to your pain, but it's about more than a mooring buoy, isn't it?"

"I'm fed up waiting," she admitted, "for something to happen that's never going to happen." Something in her heart twisted and hurt when she said it, so she numbed the pain with irritation and turned away from Gus, swinging her hands at her

sides. She looked at his boat. "I mean, why, August, why do you have to have all this nonsense, the huge throbbing boat and the even bigger truck, and all the noise and beefcake and skiing backwards, for heaven's sake, just to impress women? Is that it? It's showing off, and showing off isn't impressive, it's just boasting."

"Skiing backwards?" He laughed. "I hadn't given it a thought. I do it because it's fun. That's what the boat, and the car, and all the gear's about—it's for having fun. And I think it's been a long, long time since you let yourself have fun."

"It's bragging!"

"No." His gaze speared her with its frankness. "You want to see bragging? This is bragging." With one fluid motion, he bent and pushed down his trunks. He stood, hands on hips, awaiting her judgement.

Lilith's world froze. She filled her lungs with air, but she forgot to breathe. He looked magnificent. All the lean lines of his hips and abdomen, and the dark line of body hair, converged at his groin. His penis hung in a relaxed curve, but was thick and enlarged enough that the head emerged from his foreskin.

What could she do? Scream like some helpless damsel in distress? Be the assertive modern woman and shove him, so that he fell on his back in the water? All she wanted to do was look at him, to enjoy him for the sexy man he was, to carve his image into her memory. Her pussy tingled, making her body's opinion known.

*Omigod, omigod, omigod!* "Is this how you...pick up?" she managed.

"I haven't picked up in ages. This is bragging, all right?"

"Keep bragging." She moistened her lips, wondering for how long she could stand and stare. When he lifted a hand, she stood very still. If he manhandled her, she could still scream.

Instead, he brought his fingertips very lightly to her cheek and ran them down her neck to her collarbone, leaving a trail of fire on her skin. She swallowed and squared her shoulders, lifting her breasts, the peaks of her nipples obvious through the thin fabric. He let his fingers slip around her breast and down her side, teasing. Her knees felt weak, her groin electric.

"If you want some fun," Gus purred, "get in the boat, and get your clothes off." He turned and walked quickly toward his camp, still naked, bathers in one hand. Lilith stood paralysed, pulse thundering in her ears, watching his dimpled rump. Phil would never, ever dare proposition her like that.

Never, ever.

What was she waiting for? She turned toward the speedboat and pulled up her T-shirt so it wouldn't get wet, and waded out the rest of the way. When the lake water kissed her pussy she expected a puff of steam. The cool water felt delicious, sending extra shivers through her belly. She pulled her shirt off over her head and dropped it in the passenger-side seat, the fabric caressing her shoulders as it went.

Naked? She hesitated.

Gus was returning, something in his hand. She climbed aboard the boat, then whipped off her bikini, breasts tingling at the sensation of swinging free and bare. She wrapped her arms shyly across them.

Gus smiled when he reached the boat. He put a key and a small box on the driver's seat, then went to the bow and untied. Ignition, and condoms. He vaulted over the side, a surge of muscle and water, then tucked the rubbers out of sight in the console, and put the key in the ignition. Behind her, the engine whined, then rumbled to life, a noise so deep it was felt as well as heard.

Lilith glanced at the sleeping camp. She let her arms relax

and slide down. "August?" He was gazing unashamedly at her breasts, pleasure in his eyes.

"Yeah?"

She nodded at the camp. "Can we do this...loud?"

His face split in a wolfish grin. He twisted the wheel and pressed the gas, the engine's roar overpowering his laughter.

\* \* \*

They thundered across the deserted inlet, following the trail of the rising sun, faster than a starship headed for Mercury. The slipstream whipped her hair about and ruffled Gus' thick locks. The lake's rippled surface rushed beneath them at breathtaking speed, but the great boat scarcely trembled, powerful motor lifting much of her length clear of the wave tops. Chrome and metallic paint sparkled, a blaze of rainbow colour, bold and arrogant and exciting all at once. Lilith laughed with joy.

"This is wonderful!" she shouted.

"Fun, isn't it?" Their voices were all but lost against the engine's exultant roar. Gus' face was a portrait of delight. "Go on!"

"Is it safe?" There were life jackets tucked beside the seats.

"Sure, the water's smooth as glass!"

She eased herself up so that she sat on the seatback, gasping at the rip of the slipstream. Now she was riding faster than a roller coaster, so she raised her arms above her head and squealed, bare breasts facing the sun, its first golden rays hot on her skin. This was freedom—no cares, no worries, no fussing over how to get Phil to take her where she wanted to go. Her hair streamed out in brunette ribbons, and her nipples tingled so much it hurt. The engine's vibration travelled through her perch and shook her most secret places, a delicious sensation.

Gus' hands were steady at the wheel. He grinned up at her, sharing her excitement. His erection was more obvious, a fleshy

dome rising from his lap. He reached up and slapped her knee. "Spread 'em!"

"Oh, my god!" She got her legs as far apart as she could manage, one hooked against the side of the cockpit, the other pressed against Gus's ribs. He let go the wheel again so that he could wrap his arm around her leg, and she could feel his laughter. The cold rush of air upon her wetness snatched her breath completely, and made her whole pussy clench. Her clit burned with icy fire. She thought she would come, clutching white-knuckled at the seatback.

The engine's tone changed as Gus throttled down, then switched off. The blast of air died away, the boat settling into the water's embrace. He rose up and twisted toward her, kneeling on the edge of his seat, arms braced on the seatback.

"So, was that fun, or what?" He eyed her expectantly.

Her reply was breathless. "Do you need to ask?" Her eyes were on the sturdy pole between his thighs.

He chuckled. "Bet you never thought you could be ravished by the wind." He sidled between her knees.

"Fuck me, August."

He sobered. "Only if you want it more than once. More than today."

She snagged her fingers in his hair, pulling him upward. His lips circled her nipple, his tongue hot against the wind-chilled skin. His hands roved her back, her thighs, and cupped her breasts, fingertips rolling and squeezing one nipple while he suckled at the other. She caressed the muscle-ridged smoothness of his back, feeling it ripple as he moved. Rays of pleasure speared from her breasts deep into her body; her cunt flooded with desire. She wanted him to rise up and take her onto his shaft.

Instead, his kisses took him lower. His hands worshipped

her breasts, but his lips followed her midline, his tongue coiling in her navel, then sliding lower, leaving a cool trail behind. When she realised his intent Lilith bit her lip and rocked her pelvis up to meet him. He grasped her buttocks and brought his tongue tip to her needful clit.

Three soft licks was all it took. Lilith's legs spasmed and her body bucked with the force of her orgasm. Gus showed no mercy. While she writhed he lapped between her leaves, the strokes longer and longer and wrestling a shrill cry from her. His tongue plunged and whirled, pushing deep into her gateway, tasting her brine. She wanted to pull him in and push him away at once, the pleasure so intense it was painful.

He held her close while she gathered her breath, taking her weight as he knelt before her, stroking her hair and rocking in time with the boat. Lilith was adrift in a glowing haze of pleasure, bathed in golden light. She kissed Gus' cheek so that she could feel his rough whiskers with her lips. His man-scent was sweetened by the rich perfume of her hunger.

His mouth found hers for the first time, and she lost herself in the power of his kisses. His tongue played her mouth with the same authority he had used below, their mingled flavours raising her pulse anew. It took him a long time to draw back. He held her face in his hands, and her soul with those hypnotic eyes.

Wordlessly, he turned aside, leaving her for a moment with the quiet slap of water on the hull. Had her cries been heard all the way back on shore? Plastic rustled, and Gus faced her again, eyes fiery with need.

"Wait. Let me?" she asked.

She felt the rubber pressed into her hand. When Gus stood, the boat swayed, but he was obviously accustomed to the motion and didn't stagger. Lilith admired his turgid cock and drew her fingers along the hot surface, feeling the ridges and veins. She

squeezed the streamlined bullet of his head, and tickled the grooved skin beneath. He closed his eyes, lips parted. When his penis twitched, her pussy twinged. His balls were snugged tight to his root, and when she placed her palm over them he let out a shuddering sigh. Pre-cum gleamed like morning dew. With a fingertip she drew the droplet into a spiral, slicking his cockhead with his juice. She kissed him atop his shaft, just once, tickling with the tip of her tongue.

He fingered her breasts while she rolled the condom over his flesh. Even veiled in latex he looked massive, a hot column that she needed inside her. He opened his eyes and locked gazes with her as, kneeling again, he brought his cock to her slippery entrance. Her labia parted around him, her body opening to his wondrous pressure and taking him in.

All of him. Gus groaned as he embedded himself deep in her body. She clenched hard on his shaft, legs wrapping around his thighs. Slowly, he began to pump. The boat nodded to their rhythm, a smooth rolling that magnified his every thrust. His muscular thighs were the living engine that powered him. The ride was so exciting that Lilith pulled him into her, urging him on, rising on the tide of another climax. Her high, clear cries could have been the calls of a gull on the wing.

They ended up tumbled together in the passenger seat, sweaty and gasping. There was no pretence of toughness on Gus' face any more as he leaned over, chest heaving, finding a seat at Lilith's side. She nestled in his arms and kissed him.

"Where to now, Captain?"

He chuckled, and wiggled the tip of her nose with a finger. "There's lots to see around the Bay. Windgrass Island, the Blackrock Falls, and lots of sheltered little beaches you can only reach by boat."

"So you don't just ski when you come here? How many



other women have you shown the sights to?" She poked his chest above his heart, and he caught her hand, eyes earnest.

"None so lovely as you. You were pretty when you were angry, and you're even more beautiful now." He kissed her forehead. "I have to check out all the beaches. There's only a certain kind you can ski backwards from."

Lilith gazed at him and stroked his jawline. Perhaps she wasn't the first conquest he'd taken in his boat. But right now, it didn't matter.

"I'm not impressed yet. You'd better keep impressing me."

Gus laughed, slid into the driver's seat and turned the key.

\* \* \*

They returned to the camp when Gus calculated his friends would be stirring. Some would want to ski in the afternoon, and while they were busy would be a good time to take a nap. Lilith put on her bikini, and Gus wore a beach towel.

Dad's boat was out. Lilith helped tie the speedboat to the Sorenson buoy. The irony was not lost on Gus, who grinned from ear to ear. She put her arms around his neck, and he gathered her close.

"Thank you for showing me Mercury."

"I'd like to see Venus this evening." He tilted her chin up and drew her into a long, lingering kiss. "She's shining bright at the moment," he added when they stopped for breath.

There was movement in her peripheral vision, people getting around cautiously, as though their skulls were made of brittle glass. An auburn-haired figure shaded her face with an upraised hand.

"Mmm." Lilith rocked against his chest, blissfully weary.

"Why don't we grab breakfast and take a nap? I'm starving," Gus suggested. They waded from the water hand-in-hand.

"Lilith?" Brooke called. "Is that...you?"

"Don't I know it!" She smiled and offered her sister a wave as she walked with Gus through the middle of the Beefcake camp. Of course, her arrival on Gus' arm loosed a chorus of whoops, cheers, and wolf-whistles. She cheerfully gave them the bird before ducking through the tent-flap Gus held open. Their applause surely echoed across to the far side of the bay.

\* \* \*

The next morning, tires crunched on wet cement and gravel as the speedboat was hauled from the water.

"Same time next year?" Lilith asked, drawing little stars with her fingertip on Gus' chest. They embraced beneath the shelter of a willow, in a pool of shade.

"Yes, but I hope to catch up with you again a whole lot sooner than that. The Mt. Mornington Astronomical Society's meeting in...August. Mercury's going to transit the Sun, so we wouldn't want to miss that."

"We've got each others' numbers. I'll give you a call before then." She kissed him, and they kept kissing, even when the Beefcakes yelled for him and their convoy of vehicles started up. Brooke was crying and laughing at the same time when the sisters watched them leave.

"God, what a holiday," Brooke sighed. Then she looked at Lilith askance, and nudged her ribs. "Go on, what are you thinking? Missing Gus already? You two are such a hot couple! I promise not to tell Phil about him."

"Phil who?" said Lilith with a smile. "No, I was just thinking. I'd better take up astronomy for real."

*~End~*