

PHAZE FLARE

FREE FICTION



SHORE LEAVE

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By Stephanie Vaughan

The occasional cars moving in the opposite direction cast light on Colby's face as he drove them across town, from Thai and Thai—Restaurant & Food toward her apartment. Raven watched the play of light and shadow over his beautiful features as he kept his eyes on the road and drove. She'd always been a sucker for high cheekbones. His nose was long and straight—the word *elegant* came to mind--and she was somewhat surprised that it looked to be in original condition. She would have thought that in his line of work it would have been broken at least a couple of times. And his mouth, with its slightly fuller lower lip, looked made for sin.

As he drove, his left hand held the wheel, left elbow draped negligently on the open window, while his right hand rested on her thigh. Granted, it didn't require much at this point, but he was taking her right to the edge by drawing light little circles on the denim covering her upper leg. First up and back, then around in a circle, then up and back again. The stroking seemed absentminded -- unconscious even -- as though he was by nature a toucher. She was dying to be doing the same to him, but quite frankly, she didn't trust herself. She'd been dreaming about him for so long that she was afraid once she started touching, she wouldn't be able to stop. He was everything she loved in a man in one amazing package, and she was taking him home.

He glanced over at her. “You're awfully quiet. What are you thinking about?”

You. How much I want you. How incredibly hot you are and how good you make me feel. How I can't wait to get you home and get you out of those clothes.

“I was just thinking you got here on a good weekend. I've been buried in work the past couple of months, but I actually have a chance to catch my breath for a week or so before it gets crazy again. Except for a couple of

part-time techs, you're looking at pretty much the entire Pendleton, Oregon, Chamber of Commerce Information Technology department."

She knew she was babbling again, but the closer they got to her apartment, the more reality came crashing down on her. What if Colby suddenly came to his senses and realized that Raven McKnight, small-town girl and geek extraordinaire, wasn't what he wanted after all? What if he realized she simply was who she was and that there was nothing magical or special enough to interest him?

She also knew that, one way or another, her heart was in for a beating. There was just no way this could have a happy ending. He would come home with her and make fabulous head-banging, headboard-rattling love to her. And then she'd probably do something stupendously, predictably stupid like fall in love with him--just in time to see him leave again.

She had an instant picture of him trying to claw his way out her door as she clung, sobbing, to his jacket lapels. But before she could complete her minute-masterpiece of depression, they arrived at her apartment and Colby was holding her door open, smiling that smile at her that would melt Mother Teresa herself. Raven had a sudden flash of empathy for the Chinook salmon that still swam in the Umatilla River a couple of miles away. Knowing she was doomed, still, she couldn't stop herself.

"Hey, you." He drew her out of his truck and into his arms in one effortless move. His kiss went from sweet to down-and-dirty in a heartbeat-and-a-half, and she went right along with it. "So about my fantasy..."

She fought her way back from the edge of insanity, where he was doing wicked things to her throat with his kisses. "No way, buddy. It was agreed. *I* get to go first." She struggled a little to get the words out between gasps. Oh, that felt *too* good.

His hands were moving up her ribcage now, where they had no trouble staying anchored as his thumbs brushed gently over the tips of her breasts. Her nipples peaked as his thumbs returned again and again, lightly caressing her through the thin material.

“But my fantasy is easy: you and me, we’re both naked, I’m inside you. You’re hot and wet.” He was grinding his crotch into hers now. “Ideally we’re indoors, but it’s not critical. Depends on you--I’m flexible. Sweet Jesus, I’m flexible.”

And with that he picked her up and asked, “Which one?”

She clung stubbornly to her principle. “Mine first.”

“No, which apartment’s yours?” He was looking determined and more than a little urgent now.

“Twenty-two. On the end.”

“Excellent.” Colby grinned. “A noisy one, are you?”

“I’m gonna slug you.” A thought occurred. “Hey, what about your ankle? It’s sprained, right? That can’t feel good.”

“Where’re your keys? Give them to me. As a SEAL I’m trained to take care of the most immediate need first. And my need is *immediate*.”

He got her apartment door open and the two of them inside. “It’s all about priorities.” He quickly scanned her apartment and, apparently not finding what he was looking for, set her down on the small table next to the door and began fishing in his pocket.

Intuiting what he was searching for, Raven rummaged in her own pocket and came up with gold, but too late, as Colby first unzipped and then covered himself with the condom he’d pulled from his own pocket.

Raven stifled a groan. “Oh, baby, *I* wanted to do that.”

“Next time.” He grunted, making short work of the snap on her navy shorts and pulling them off her. She lifted her bottom to help him and prayed that her little Duncan Phyfe table would hold.

Holding her hips in place, he kissed her again hard and thrust himself home.

* * *

“Raven, honey, you’ve gotta go easier on me next time.”

They were lying on her couch—a seven-footer, thankfully—still wearing most of their clothes. He was completely clothed, albeit with pants loosened if not actually off, while Raven lay sprawled across his chest wearing only a shirt and some Nike cross-trainers. He couldn’t get past the downy softness of her perfect ass. He ran his hands over it in a rhythmic back-and-forth motion. There was something incredibly soothing about it.

“Oh, yeah? I thought SEALs were America’s most elite fighting force. Don’t they keep you boys in any better shape than that?”

The words were sassy, but he noticed she didn’t bother to open her eyes and she mumbled because her head was tucked under his chin. He couldn’t wait to see her eyes again, so obsidian-dark they almost appeared black. Just as soon as his heart rate got back to normal. Jesus, it was like he was back attempting his first HALO—adrenaline pumping, his pulse going a mile a minute.

“The fact that I’m in such great shape’s the only thing that saved me. You’re hell on wheels, sweetheart.” To hell with worrying about whether or not she minded being called “sweetheart.” She’d just have to learn to deal with it.

“You think so? The Ranger down the hall never complains.”

“Yeah? Well, tell him to get his pansy Ranger ass down here and let him prove it.”

That got her eyes open and her head up. “Oh, no, you don’t. No more of your fantasies until we’ve done at least one of mine.”

“I guess you’re right. Fair is fair. What did you have in mind?” Oh, man, it just kept getting better and better.

She sat up on his midsection, adjusted her shirt, and gave him a thoughtful look.

“Okay, seeing as how I was so rough on you last time, we’ll make this an easy one. I want you to take off your shirt, slowly.

“That’s it?”

“That’s it. Just take off your shirt.”

“My shirt?” Huh? Where was the fun in that?

“Yes. I’ll just be sitting over there.” Raven pointed at the little table they’d put to such good use a few minutes ago.

She climbed off his lap and tugged her shirt down, blocking his view of her world-class *derrière*. As she walked the few steps it took to get back to the table, she tossed a glance over her shoulder to make sure he was watching. As if he could take his eyes off of her.

She turned around and used her hands to boost herself up onto the table and gave a little gasp when the warm backside he so coveted connected with the cool marble top. She did a bad fake job of simulating discomfort before she said, “Could you give me just a second before you get started? I want to get comfortable here.”

And with that she pulled her shirt up to her shoulders, pulling her arms out of the sleeves, but leaving the shirt in place around her neck. She ignored him completely while she paid excruciating attention to fumbling with the front clasp of her bra.

“Just let me know if you need some help. I’m pretty good with my hands.”

He was glad *she* was getting comfortable. He was getting more uncomfortable by the moment. If his pants hadn’t already been unzipped, he would have been tempted to loosen them more. For a man who had been completely sexually replete not five minutes ago, he was

extremely interested in what was going on on the tabletop across the room.

“No. That’s okay. It’s being fussy. Oh, look—I’ve got it.” And just like that he had a breathtaking view of full-frontal nudity that was definitely calendar quality. But, too quickly, she pulled the shirt back down. She let out a big fake sigh. “Whew. Much better. Okay, you go ahead now. Shirt off, please. Slowly. Oh, and stand first, please?”

Colby hadn’t made it through BUD/S and all the subsequent training it took to be a SEAL by avoiding challenges. It was all in your approach and your mental attitude. He was going to have some fun with this.

He stood, bringing his hands in from where they’d been resting loose at his sides and placed them at the tops of his thighs. He made sure he had her attention before dragging them slowly up his legs until he could hook his thumbs momentarily in the pockets of his jeans. He let his hands briefly frame his crotch, letting her see that she definitely had his attention.

He crossed his hands over his front, grasped the bottom edges of his shirt, and slowly began to pull the shirt upward. He wasn’t vain about his looks, but he knew that he had a better-than-average package. As he dragged the shirt up over his belly, he maintained eye contact with Raven, watching the heat climb in her expression as she watched him strip.

Colby dragged it out as long as he could, but how long could it possibly take to remove one shirt? He pulled the shirt over his head and let his hands fall back to his sides, the shirt left dangling from the tips of the fingers of his right hand. He slowly relaxed his fingers and allowed the shirt fall to the floor.

“Next request?” Where was the fun in taking off his shirt? In watching her watch, he’d discovered. And the expression in her eyes as she watched turned *him* on. Hugely.

That was definitely a throat clearing he heard. “Next, I’d like you to turn around.”

He had no idea what she was up to, but he couldn't wait to find out what it was.

First, the quiet thud of feet on hardwood broke the silence; then even that was gone as she crossed the small rug in front of the couch. The quiet swish of her waist-length hair reached his ears just before her hands settled lightly on his waist.

Without saying a word, she peeled back his jeans. He knew the instant she found his tattoo, but she still took his breath away when she went to her knees and her lips met the bare skin of his ass in a kiss.

* * *

Afterward, Raven was never able to identify the exact moment her life spun out of control. Was it at dinner, when she'd invited Colby home with her? Or when she'd kissed him practically on sight, rather than going with any of a dozen really viable options that had crossed her mind? Or could it have been as early as six months ago, when she'd taken her lunch to the park on a whim and met the most beautiful man she'd ever seen?

Yes, sir, she'd been a happy little camper just minutes ago. She'd successfully gotten him out of his shirt and was making good progress on his pants. She had discovered his tattoo and was expressing her utter appreciation of it – completely lost in the beauty of his body. She was just sliding her hands into his jeans to help them the rest of the way off, when the knock came at the door. More of a pounding, really, thinking about it.

Colby turned in the direction of the sound, reacting to the male voice just outside hollering for “that hot party-woman Raven,” while she fell backward, landing flat on her butt. Just a half-second's consideration for either her or her wounded pride would have been nice. She chose to believe it was concern for her partially clothed state and not pure caveman territoriality that had him heading for the door before she'd had a chance to do more than pull down the tails of her shirt to cover herself.

He opened the door to the willowy, twenty-something young man still wearing two pieces of what looked to be a very nice Armani suit, took a good look, and called over his shoulder, “Honey, looks like your Ranger’s here.”

The two men continued to check each other out, while Raven did her best to look as though there was nothing unusual going on here at all.

“Hey, John. Colby, this is my neighbor John. John, this is Colby. So what’s up, John?” she asked, trying for as close to normal as she could manage while sitting in the middle of her living room rug wearing not a stitch from the waist down.

The raised eyebrow told her John was going to take pity on her and not take a swing at the high, slow one she’d just lobbed over the plate. Apparently Colby hadn’t felt the need to zip up on his way to the door.

“Chuck and I were heading down to the Rainbow Room. They’ve got Black 47 playing there tonight. We thought you might want to come with.” He looked innocently from Colby to Raven and back to Colby again. “But I’m going to go out on a limb here and guess that you’re busy tonight. Bordering on tied up, even.”

It must be something about being a trial attorney that gave him the ability to deliver lines like that with a straight face.

“Oh, I don’t think so. Unless, Colby—you don’t want to go down, do you?”

“Mmm. Tough call.” He offered a sigh and scratched his still-bare chest. The scratch drew both sets of watching eyes—and for remarkably similar reasons. It was a beautiful chest, all toned pecs, ripped abs, and just enough hair to let her know he was a man, not a boy. That was something she and John shared-- an appreciation of hunky blond men. “If you’d rather do that than stay home and listen to Callas sing ‘Carmen’ like we’d planned, that’s fine. You know me—I’m easy.”

John must have just won a big court case, because he gave them both a cheery smile, saying, “Well, maybe next time, then.” Either that or he remembered how long it had been since her last date. “Don’t you kids do anything I wouldn’t do.” Definitely a trial attorney. Impeccable

timing and an overwhelming need to get in the last word.

She waited until the sound of John's steps died away to say, "Well, I think that went pretty well, don't you?"

He shoved himself away from the door and began moving slowly toward her. There was a glint in his eye that made her get her feet under herself and try to get away. Yes, there was a definite stalking quality to that walk.

"Did anyone ever tell you, Ms. McKnight, that you are a tease?"

"What? *Now* you object?" Not only was she was finding it difficult to pull off an ice-princess tone while wearing no panties, movement only seemed to have kicked his predatory instincts into a higher gear.

"What's up, John?" "Would you like to go down, Colby?" At least he didn't use the annoying falsetto that so many men seemed prone to when quoting a woman. Hot body or no, she would have been forced to end his life.

"Perfectly innocent comments, all, taken out of context." She was behind the sofa now, trying to keep a few body lengths between them. It was a bad time to remember that the man hunting her was a warrior by training. She didn't stand a chance.

Two quick strides, one grab, and he had her. One more flip and she found herself nose-deep in carpet, surrounded by two hundred pounds of male animal. Very excited male animal, by the feel of him.

"I think we're going to find out *exactly* what's up, Johnny."

* * *

The muffled sounds coming from the carpet beneath him made Colby stop and wonder when exactly he'd become a card-carrying member of the Knuckle-Draggers of America. He hadn't been raised to treat women that way. He liked women and treated them with respect—not like the spoils of war. But there was definitely something appealing about

pinning Raven down and feeling that luscious backside squirming against his groin.

And just when had he become such an ass man? He'd always been much more about breasts and long, long legs. But damn if he didn't feel like eating breakfast off of this one. Screw drool-worthy. Raven's behind was "get out the plaster-of-Paris and make me a mold" quality. No, make that Latex.

God, he really was a sick fuck. But he couldn't help it. Whenever he got within reach of her, his brain short-circuited and his body went on high alert. And now that he'd tasted her and -- thank you, Jesus -- been inside her, the feeling was stronger than ever.

"I'm sorry, honey—you're going to have to repeat that. I couldn't understand a word you said."

He figured that would get her blood pumping. So he backed off a little on the full-body press—enough so that she could turn her head to speak.

"I *said*, I know it's been a whole half an hour since you got laid and all, but aren't you worried about wearing it out? You don't have to make up for the entire five months or whatever in one night, you know."

He didn't even have to think about that one. "Actually, I kind of think I do. In fact, I'm pretty sure my 'whatever' is just getting warmed up."

This whole no-pants thing was really working for him. What a great idea. Talk about your time-savers. He slipped one arm around her waist to raise her up a little and felt her rock back with him, maintaining contact all the way. Hoo-yah—definitely on the same page here. His hand naturally gravitated forward to cup her crotch, while his fingers stroked her gently.

"Baby, we've really got to introduce you to the concept of a bed. Wonderful invention. Ohmygod don't you even think about stopping that." She was rocking rhythmically into his hand, and suddenly he was racing to keep up. He had to be inside her when she went over the edge, and she felt close.

“Raven—hold that thought,” he knew he’d stuck a second condom in his pocket tonight. Where the hell was it?

Her “What?” came out somewhere between a groan and a shriek. “You can’t do that.” She sounded truly bereft.

“Sounds like somebody needs to work on her delayed gratification.” Thank Christ, there it was. The sight of her looking over her shoulder at him through her hair, all mussed and wild-looking, her breath coming short and fast, had him fitting the condom on in record time. “I got ya, baby. I’ve got you.”

He entered her in one slow, luxurious move, and all conversation stopped. She squeezed him tightly with her inner muscles, and everything but the sheer mind-blowing intensity of the sensation went out of his mind. He went from zero to sixty in about five seconds, thrusting deeply until he heard her groan and felt the shudder that came with it. And then he was beyond doing anything but driving himself faster until he came so hard he saw colors explode and his arms shook with the power of his release.

* * *

Colby decided he was going to buy a lottery ticket, considering how off-the-charts great his luck was running. Did Oregon even have a lottery? He realized he had no idea. Man, he’d been living away from home too long. He had two full weeks leave before he needed to report back to Coronado. Two weeks to catch up on all the things he’d missed in five months that had felt more like fifteen: sleep being one; visiting with the family was another; and making love as many times a day as humanly possible with Raven. They had a lot of lost time to make up for.

They were finally in her bed and it was big enough to fit them both comfortably with room left over. Although, he wouldn’t have minded sleeping on bare ground if it meant sleeping with her. He probably ought to consider why that was, but he was too relaxed to work up a decent case of give-a-shit. He’d let himself examine it ad nauseam when he got back to California.

Raven made a noise in her sleep that he knew better than to characterize as a snore. If he knew her at all, and he was beginning to think he did, he knew she wouldn't react well to being told she snored. He must be going mental, because he even thought it was kind of cute. He also knew she could use a few more hours of sleep, but it was time to bite the bullet and break the news to her.

"Raven. Wake up."

"Huh? You better not be talking to me, buddy." She peered at him through one barely opened eye.

"Not a morning person, eh? That's okay. I'll make coffee. Your mom called a little while ago. She said she'd have brunch ready in about an hour and asked if you could stop and pick up some bacon on the way over."

* * *

"Please, God, tell me you're joking."

"No, she definitely said bacon."

"It is way too early for this shit. I can't be at my mother's in an hour. I need sleep, coffee, and ESPN—in that order. And I think it is small and very mean of you to torture me like this."

"Hey, don't shoot the messenger. I promised your mom I'd give you the message. And a SEAL always keeps his word. Come on—get up. She's expecting us in an hour."

"That's the Boy Scouts, not the SEALs, and you did *not* just say 'us.'"

"Call her if you don't believe me. She made it pretty clear I was expected, too."

She continued to stare at him, willing him to say something like "Ha-ha, really had you going, didn't I?" But he didn't. He just sat there, looking

like the first picture in a Playgirl pictorial: nicely tousled hair, a little blond morning shadow on his chin, and a playful half-smile on his lips.

Those lips were really something. Raven focused on them, letting her mind run through a quick recap of what those lips had done last night. Yes indeed, for once in her life appearances had not deceived. She would carry a mental picture of him bending to her breast and taking it into his mouth through those wicked lips with her to her grave. Which might be sooner rather than later if she truly had to endure Sunday brunch at her mother's with Colby.

Between caller I.D., the internet, and interrogation techniques the Mossad could take pointers from, her mother would have every detail of her life and budding romance out of them before the toast got cold. Dammit, she wasn't ready to share him yet. It was all too new. And she wanted some more time with him and her fantasies before harsh reality set in. Well, there was no law that said she had to cooperate with her own execution. She would just pull a pillow over her head and refuse to move.

"Come on, McKnight—don't be such a skirt. Suck it up and let's get this over with."

The swat on the butt stung, but he followed it so prettily with a kiss in the same location that she decided she just might forgive him after all. She was pulling the pillow off her head when she felt the mattress give as he leaned over to whisper in her ear, "And if you're a good girl and finish all your oatmeal, we just might find time for a pony ride later."

* * *

"Don't forget the bacon."

Perfect.

The story of her life was beginning to sound like a children's book. Her sister Rachel had called to ask her to bring the Joss Stone CD she wanted to borrow, as well as whatever tools she needed to fix Mom's email. She tried to explain that there was nothing she could do to help AOL, but it

was hopeless. Maybe she should just shut up and go with the flow before it turned into Raven and the Terrible, Horrible, No Good, Very Bad Day.

But it didn't necessarily have to be so bad. Did it? Maybe they could just get in and get out before anybody got hurt. Before Mom could turn the morning into a hometown version of *What's My Line?* meets *60 Minutes*. But just thinking of the phrase "getting in and out" had her mentally right back in the shower she and Colby had taken together this morning. He'd done things with her she was pretty sure Waterpik had never intended for their little invention. Or maybe they had, God love them.

Rose Mary McKnight met them at the door, obviously having been alerted to their presence by the rumble of the engine of Colby's diesel truck in her driveway. Raven tried to see her through Colby's eyes. She was tall, like Raven—obviously Native American, like Raven. Her mother greeted her with a kiss and quick hug, her eyes full of questions but saying only, "Hello, sweetie. Well, this is certainly a surprise."

"Mom, I'd like you to meet Colby Denbow. Colby, this is my mother, Mary. Mom, be nice. There will be no grilling the suspect. I'm sorry, but I totally forgot I said I'd come by. Colby just got back in town yesterday and we've been catching up." She made the mistake of meeting his eyes. "We already made plans for today, so we can't stay long. But I wanted to come by for at least a little bit."

She rushed through it, telling herself it was only a little exaggeration. They really did have plans. It was just that virtually none of them could be carried out in the presence of a parental unit—but there was no way could she tell her mom that.

"Well, can you at least come in for a cup of coffee and sit down for a few minutes? I'd like to do more than say 'Hi, how are you' to Colby."

"That sounds great, Mary. I know I don't have to tell you what an amazing person your daughter is, but sometimes I don't know where she gets all that energy."

He gave Raven a little wink/smirk combo that let her know he was counting on her not wanting to make a scene in front of her mother. As soon as her mother's back was turned she made a face at Colby to let him know he'd better not push it. Great. Next she'd be sticking out her tongue.

"So what big plans have the two of you made today?" her mom asked, gesturing toward the dining room table. "Did you say that you had been out of town? What line of work did you say you were in, Colby?"

About as subtle as Jerry Springer's closing monologue. Next she'd be asking him for a DNA sample and a copy of his TRW.

"Mom, he's on vacation--no grilling." Amazingly, Colby seemed more amused than annoyed. Pleased almost. She wondered what *that* was all about.

"I'm home on leave from the Navy. My family lives here in Pendleton. My folks are retired, but my sister Margaret is a pediatrician in town and my other sister, Robin, is on the school board."

"We're going down to Raley Park, Mom. It's the Salmon Walk today and the Chamber has a booth set up. I promised my boss I'd swing by and make sure the computers are all behaving."

Another minor exaggeration. They were beginning to pile up like the cord-wood stacked outside in her mother's backyard. While it wasn't totally inconceivable that they might actually end up at the park for the festivities, the only way her boss would see her today was if she didn't see him first.

"Will that be any fun for you, Colby? Or are you in one of the races?"

"No, no races for me this year." He smiled sweetly at her mother as the hand that had been resting on Raven's thigh under the table reached over and stroked her crotch. "I'll probably just hang around for a while and see if I can give Raven a hand."

#

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Read more about Stephanie's existing and upcoming releases at <http://www.stephanievaughan.com> .



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