

Fraternization

A PHAZE FORCE HEATSHEET BY

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eBook ISBN 1-59426-996-3 Fraternization © 2007 by Cara North

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Phaze is an imprint of Mundania Press, LLC.



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"Do you mind if I sit here?" Scarlet King dumped her bag next to her feet and took the seat anyway.

"I guess not." He looked over the edge of his newspaper at her. Long, sandy blond hair and piercing blue eyes framed his rugged whiskered face. He popped the paper edge back into place and left her gawking.

Scarlet had spent the last thirteen years in the United States Marine Corps. She held the rank of Gunnery Sergeant and managed to remain single with her reputation as a ball buster still intact. So why, after all the years of fighting and yelling with some of the toughest men and women this country has to offer, was she suddenly a bit nervous? "So, uh, you're waiting on a flight?"

Without moving the newspaper, he replied deadpan, "It is an airport."

"Right." She nodded to herself, rolled her eyes, then took a deep breath. The breath was supposed to calm her, but instead she caught a whiff of his cologne. Nothing too harsh—he smelled woodsy and masculine, warm and spicy. *What is wrong with you? Get a grip, for crying out loud! How long has it been? Hmmm. Okay, so how long has it been without batteries?*

"Can I get another coffee?" He spoke to the server passing by. The woman stopped and smiled big as the sky when he folded the newspaper and looked directly at her. Scarlet was smiling, too, though for the life of her she did not know why. Then Mr. Blue Eyes smiled at her. "Would you like something to drink?"

"Coffee is wonderful, thank you." Now she had turned into her Aunt Thelma, the Miss Manners of the Midwest. He arched a brow and her insides turned to liquid heat. The server walked away. "I mean, I could really use some caffeine. I've been traveling all day and this fu...flipping airport just delayed me again."

"Why don't you just get a room and fly to your destination tomorrow then?" He leaned forward and propped his chin on his fist, elbow casually on the table as if she was about to read him a story or some shit.

"Because, I need to get back to work." A guy like him could never understand the responsibilities of a woman like her. "Where are you

headed? You seem very relaxed to be in a packed airport with flights delayed and cancelled. I hate the snow. I cannot wait to get back to North Carolina."

"Where in North Carolina?" he asked as he studied her. She could not mistake the man's blatant ogling.

"Am I entertaining you?" Her inner confidence reappeared. She was no longer Scarlet, sex-deprived woman on the verge of making a move on a stranger. Instead, she was Gunnery Sergeant King, who would kick this guy's ass if he thought he could be so openly disrespectful to her.

"Yes." He nodded. "You're beautiful, a little bossy I think, but your eyes are mesmerizing."

"Are you trying to con me?" Her blood pressure was rising. She bit her teeth together so as not to let it get the best of her, yet.

"No." He shook his head. "I've been away a while. But, I know a gorgeous woman when I see one. I am heading to North Carolina myself. I was thinking if your destination wasn't far from my destination, I might ask you out for dinner."

"What?" Not the response she had expected, so she kept up the bravado. "I don't even know you."

"Oh, right." He sat up straight then offered his hand over the table. "I'm Ezekiel Major, everyone calls me Zeke."

She took his hand and immediately noted the warm dry skin and every rough, callused patch. "Scarlet, Scarlet King."

"Nice name. It suits you." He let go of her hand. He looked left, then right, then leaned in over the table. He whispered, "So, Scarlet King. I don't think either of us will be getting to North Carolina tonight. What say we grab that dinner now instead?"

It had been entirely too long since she had been with a man. To keep her reputation intact she threw herself into her work, into the corps. Her star was on the rise, she could be a First Sergeant in the next year, her promotion package was tight, everything she needed to do had been done. If she were counseling a younger Marine she would say, "You don't hook up with strange men in an airport," but she was smarter, safer, and more experienced. "Okay."

"Okay." He stood, and her mouth about unhinged as he grew to stand well over six foot tall. She was no dainty woman—at five foot seven inches, she considered herself tall. His broad shoulders and narrow waist accentuated his height; he looked like he could fall off the cover of

a historical romance novel. All he needed was some leather and a puffy shirt.

* * * *

Zeke, ol' boy, you have really outdone yourself this time. The woman sitting across from him had the most gorgeous hazel eyes he had ever seen. Her dark auburn locks sparkled bright with bright red streaks when the light hit the strands just right. "So, you work in an office?"

"I do now." She took another sip of wine. He watched those perfect bow-shaped lips hug the glass in a sweet kiss before letting it go. "I'm done with all the field work for a while."

"I could tell you worked in an office. You have this sort of corporate dominatrix vibe. When you walked up to the table at the airport, you planned to sit with me whether I wanted you to or not." Her shrug at his comment heightened his confidence. She was indeed a powerful woman, he bet she was a firecracker in a boardroom, but would she be a firecracker in the bedroom?

"I was tired of walking." Even her light laugh turned him on. He would not be able to walk out of the hotel restaurant without knowing she would be returning to his room with him.

"I know I may be coming on a little strong but I assure you, I don't normally do this." *No stupid, you might scare her! Clarify.* "I mean, I don't normally invite strangers to dinner at a hotel and secretly hope they decide to check into my room instead of their own."

"I don't normally accept invitations from strangers hoping they not so secretly want me to check into their room." She licked her lips and looked him up and down. His dick could hammer nails, it was so hard for this woman. "So, do you think they'll send dessert up?"

"You still want dessert?" Amazing, she was positively amazing.

"I will in an hour." She stood up from the table. "I'll be right back."

He fought the urge to make her promise him. "I'll be right here."

He watched her hourglass figure move with confidence and grace towards the ladies' room. He didn't know what turned him on more. Watching her walk, or knowing she would be naked within the hour. "Definitely the latter. Waitress," he pointed at their table. He knew it was rude, but now he was in a hurry.

* * * *

Scarlet practically itched to touch him. They had not even kissed, yet she knew when they did it was going to be explosive. At least she hoped it would be. The elevator didn't have mirrors all around, it was an

old style elevator with wood paneling and a picture in it. She glimpsed her reflection the best she could in the glass on the hanging art.

"You look fine." He looked at her out of the corner of his eye.

She pursed her lips as she put a hand on her hip. "I wasn't looking for that. I just wanted to make sure I didn't have anything in my teeth."

"Ah, I see." He nodded. "I must apologize for my appearance. I'm not normally so..."

"Rugged?" She stepped closer. The damn elevator just couldn't move fast enough. "I love the way you look. You have hair. I can run my fingers through it."

She reached up and did just that, pushing her fingers through his sandy blonde locks. "It's much softer than I expected."

"It'll be the only thing soft this evening, I promise you that." He turned into her hand letting her fingers fall over his cheek thick with beard stubble. "I'm trying to behave here. You're making it impossible."

She trailed her finger over his silky smooth lips. "I have no intentions of holding back. I haven't had sex in too long to remember. I need this."

He growled. She was sure of it. Right before her back pressed into the elevator wall and her legs miraculously wrapped around his hips. His nose stopped just short of touching hers. "What floor am I on?"

"You have three more to go," she squeaked out as his lips pushed into hers. His tongue swept her mouth, exploring the entry, battling with her tongue for control of the kiss. Each stroke longer, harder, and deeper. Her thighs clenched uncontrollably pulling him closer, pressing them together through clothes.

The elevator door dinged before sliding open. He didn't put her down as she expected. He gripped her ass with two large hands and carried her down the hallway to the room. Once inside he set her down.

"I need to catch my breath." He paced three steps away from her. "Whew. I almost lost it and took your clothes off in the elevator."

"Why aren't you taking them off now?" Scarlet didn't want distance and reason to come between them. She wanted unbridled, semianonymous sex with a stranger. She could take this night and hold it for months in her memory. Maybe longer.

"Don't want to disappoint on the first round." He paced back to her, looked down into her eyes. "You work hard. I can tell that. Let me take the first one nice and slow, make it worth your while, cause I'm going to pop like a two-dollar pistol and need a few to recover afterwards."

"Hmmm, so you're saying there will be hot," she stepped closer to him, "unbridled," he licked his lips, "wild animal sex in my future if I just let you torture me the first time?"

"Absolutely." His wicked grin made his plea irresistible.

"So let the pain begin." Scarlet held out her arms in welcome.

"It won't be painful, darlin'." He leaned over a bit then picked her up and carried her to the bed. "At least, not for you."

* * * *

She giggled, but he was telling the truth. Zeke couldn't remember the last time his balls ached like this. He was past ready. Of course it was well over eight months since he had been this close to a woman and longer than that since he was laying one out to touch and taste at will. He was grateful now for the lumberjack look he sported. Scarlet seemed turned on by it. Too bad by tomorrow night the lumberjack would be gone. She wriggled out of her jeans and stole his breath with creamy thighs and pink panties decorated with black skulls and cross bones. "Nice panties."

"My eighteen-year-old sister gave them to me for Christmas, she says they're all the rage." She pulled her turtleneck over her head and the matching bra had sparkly pink gemstones for eyes. "Good grief, I forgot about the bra."

"It's interesting." Zeke unfastened the button-down shirt three buttons, then pulled it and the T-shirt underneath over his head. She looked at his chest and abs. He fingered the silky straps then slid them over her shoulders. "Scoot back so I can sit down here."

She moved farther onto the bed. "You aren't taking your clothes off?"

"Not yet." He kissed her shoulder, lifted her hair and kissed the nape of her neck making sure to lick as he did so. "You taste good."

"How do you taste?" she asked in a quiet voice. "You can tell me later." He closed his teeth gently on her other shoulder, then positioned himself behind her. His legs spread around her and hung off the bed. He had kicked off his shoes before climbing in, and he wiggled his toes and adjusted his groin. "Now, I'm comfortable. How about you?"

"I sorta thought you'd be facing me." She leaned back into him as his hands cupped her breasts, weighing them gently.

"I will, when you're ready." He stroked his thumbs over her tight nipples and teased them through the silky fabric.

"I feel pretty ready right now." Scarlet rolled her head on his shoulder. Her neck was exposed to him, displaying her pulse thrumming against the skin. He leaned down and kissed the tell tale vein. She was getting there, but she was not ready yet.

"Do you like the way this feels?" He whispered in her ear and rolled the nipples between his thumbs and forefingers. "When you touch yourself do you do it like this?"

"I...I don't know." Her head straightened.

"Don't get shy on me now. I'm just trying to make sure I do it right." He nuzzled her with his chin, the beard stubble scrapping along the tender flesh of her cheek and neck, leaving a pink trail behind it.

"You're doing just fine." She turned into his nuzzle and kissed him. He rewarded her action by pulling the bra down, freeing her nipples. She rewarded him by reaching back and unlatching the damn thing altogether. His fingers touched her naked flesh. "Oh, yes."

"I plan to suck on these later. They are perfect." Her legs crossed. Her thighs clenched. He trailed his hands slowly over her shoulders and down her arms. He liked the look of her from this angle. She was all warm and womanly. Sitting between his legs, vulnerable and trusting. Her hands started to creep up his thighs so he knew he needed to get her focused on herself again. "So, how do you like to be touched here?"

When his hand smoothed down her stomach and under the band of her pink pirate panties she gripped his thighs and moved no farther. "Yes."

"I don't think that's giving me much direction." He slid his middle finger down farther, just enough to touch the tip of her distended clitoris then pushed past it and dipped right into a very wet, very tight hole. "Damn, you weren't kidding about it being a while, were you?"

"No." Her hips bucked against his hand. She held his thighs for advantage and began her own rhythm. He looked at her, eyes closed, bottom lip tucked beneath her top teeth. Beautiful. He pulled his hand up and she turned on him like a snake ready to strike. "What are you doing?"

"I was going to move to the front now." He bit his lips trying not to smile. She looked wild with lust and that look was for him. "Lie down, let me get these clothes off and I'll get right..."

"You'll get back to me now." She grabbed his head and pressed her lips to his. What he was trying to make slow and sensual for her was rapidly turning back into the burning flame from the elevator.

"Let me taste you." He rasped and she let go.

"Leave your clothes on; you can undress in a minute." She was comical in her lust. He was certain she didn't find it funny one bit but for a woman to be so demanding with him was unfamiliar and refreshing.

"Yes, ma'am." He saluted her and she gave him a weird look in return. He ignored it and went right for the panties pulling them off in one swift move. "So tell me, how do you like it?"

"Now." She fisted the sheets and her toes curled. He spread her lips apart with his thumbs and looked at her slick pussy. She whimpered and he decided not to torture her any longer. He licked one long lick from end to end, and her knees moved to lock against his shoulders. He braced his arms against the pressure and moved one hand to slide two fingers into her heat, while he kissed and sucked her clit. "Mmmm, oh my, uhhuh, yes. Right there, oh God, Zeke, right there!"

He fought the beast within him wanting to feel her come on his dick rather than his fingers but knew that time would come later. He pumped her pussy fast and hard while sucking and twirling his tongue around the bud. He could feel her walls tightening, tighter and tighter before she finally pulsed. Scarlet raised her hips against him, fisted his hair and screamed his name. He shucked his jeans and positioned himself at her opening, pre-come seeping already from the tip of his prick. "You're sure you're okay with this?"

"Yes." She nodded and he pushed inside.

"God, that's tight." He collapsed on her, his right knee giving out for more than the obvious reasons. He pushed through the pain, the pure pleasure making the knee dull out. Her encouraging coos of "fuck me, Zeke, harder, faster," undid him in seconds. He growled out a release that seemed to be endless.

"That wasn't so bad." She tickled his ear with a lock of his own hair. He snorted and rolled to the side. "If I knew you had that vortex tongue I wouldn't have been so bossy."

"That right?" He winced and his jaw clenched. "Sorry."

His eyes closed. She followed his arms down to the knee his hands were holding. It looked freshly scarred. She gasped. "You're not supposed to be doing this, are you?"

"Doing what?" His laugh seemed pained. "Ah, shit. It hurts."

"You poor baby." *With abs of fucking steel and a cock big enough to wrestle with, bad Scarlet, bad!* "Do you need some ice?"

"No, and don't poor baby me. I'm fine." He snapped, then rolled away from her, giving her a nice view of his firm ass.

"Nice tush." She pulled up her own knees and wrapped her arms around them. Here they were, two strangers, just had sex, and already they were facing problems.

He snorted. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to snap at you. I'm not dealing with the whole knee thing too well. My entire future just changed. I could keep working, but I can't keep doing what I normally do so now I am being stuck in some office to rot for the next three months."

"You apologized." She looked at his nice tush again. "I'm not used to an honest apology."

"I'm not used to giving them, so you can rub it in a little more if you like." He stretched his leg out then pulled it back up again.

"Would it help if I rubbed it in your thigh and not your face?" She let go of her knees and moved to touch his leg. "Relax, okay."

"Don't touch the scar or press hard." He stretched his leg again. "I should have done my stretches earlier but, well, I got caught up."

"With me." She gripped the thigh gently at first but it was like trying to massage a boulder. She put a little more pressure in. He closed his eyes and made a deep ah sound. "You walk perfectly, I would never have known if I didn't see you naked."

"Yeah, that walk was what did me in." He made all sorts of faces as she worked the muscle above his wound.

"How did you do this?"

"Fell out of a tree." He snorted. He did that a lot.

"You're really a lumberjack?" She cocked her head to the side as she looked at him.

"Let's not talk work, okay?" He curved his lips into a sleek smile. "In fact, I think we should talk dessert."

"Look, you were great and all..."

"I'm as good as airport coffee?" He sat up and turned those intense blue eyes on her.

"Okay, you were better than great, maybe too good in fact." *Way too good. Addictive even.* "I can call it a night if you need to rest. I mean, we both have to fly out in the morning."

"It grosses you out, doesn't it?" He scrubbed his big hands over his face. Stopped, put his finger under his nose and inhaled. She knew her mouth fell agape. No one had ever done something like that in front of her before. "You smell so good, Scarlet, but damn, you taste even better."

He turned those eyes to her again and she couldn't resist him or his bum knee. "So, what do you want for dessert?"

"Besides you?" He wiggled his eyebrows. She looked at his knee and wondered if it really hurt. He seemed playful again. She gave him a stern, don't bullshit me look. He sighed and admitted, "I need some milk to take the meds with."

"You're on pain meds?" *Great, he will be knocked out ten minutes after we have dessert.* She frowned at the thought. *Don't be such a stingy bitch Scarlet, the man is in pain.* However, her pussy was aching again, too.

"No, no. I don't like narcotics, make me loopy. I take an antiinflammatory." He put a hand over her hand on his thigh. "Thanks, babe."

"Babe?" She pulled her hand back.

"Uh, Mistress?" He reached for her hand.

"No, not mistress either, just, well—no one's ever called me *babe* before." She pulled completely out of his reach. Pulling her panties back on, then her jeans, it was if she were pulling layers of defense against him back on as well. "Do I look like a babe to you?"

"Is that a trick question?" He winked. Even though he remained gloriously nude and she had pulled her clothes back on, he seemed more confident of the two. His ego irked her.

"I'm thirty-two." She winced as the words rolled out of her mouth.

"Really?" he sat up and eyed her with a new appreciation. "You look younger."

* * * *

After barking at him about his dessert order, she made an excuse to leave his room and go to hers. Truth was she needed distance from the man. She didn't really know him from Adam yet being with him was so...easy.

"Hey, Big Dog, this is Gunny King, anything happen while I was out?" She called work. When all else failed she could call work for some perspective. The Corporal in the office was new but learning fast. It was tough for a grunt to be sent over to a base unit. This one was adjusting well and with a new wife and baby, he appreciated the non-deploying aspect of his new duties. The Corporal gave her the scoop on what had been happening in the office while she was out. Nothing major, thankfully. "I'll see you in two days, you have my cell if you need me."

She flipped the phone closed and sat on the edge of her made-up bed. Her body tingled in places it never tingled before. Why didn't he just fuck her? Why did she let him do all of those naughty little side tricks? What the hell was she going to do now?

There was a rap on her door. "Guess that answers my last question."

She peaked through the peephole and saw Zeke leaning on the door frame, his shirt open, jeans unsnapped at the top, holding a piece of chocolate cake in his other hand. "Ah, dessert."

She opened the door. He walked inside, his limp more obvious now. "Should you be walking?"

"I didn't know if you were coming back." He set the plate on the table and looked at her bed. Of course she would have to have everything laid out like it was ready for inspection. "OCD much?"

"I'm not obsessive or compulsive," She packed the carry on with the garments she would not need in the morning. "I like to be prepared and I wasn't sure how long you planned to keep me over the orgasmic edge, so I wanted to be ready in case I had to rush through a shower and get dressed in the morning."

"So, you were planning to stay the night with me?" He fingered her underwear. "I like the others better."

"I don't care what you like, and no," she snatched her panties from him, "I wasn't sure if I would be there or not. I hadn't planned it either way."

"So, plan to stay the night with me." He reached for her hand and grabbed it. "Come on, Scarlet, you know you want to. Besides, no other woman will want a lumberjack like me where I'm going."

"You are so full of it." She let him tug her closer to where he sat on her bed.

"I'd like to make you full of it." He smiled wickedly, his blue eyes sparkling with mischief.

"Ahgh." She groaned in frustration. "Fine. I'll stay with you. But don't think that busted knee means you're off the hook buster. I came here expecting a one night stand and I damn well plan to collect."

"I love it when you talk dirty." He stood and grabbed the plate. "You wanna move this stuff to my room?"

"No. I'll need a little privacy in the morning. So will you." Her heart sank thinking about leaving him. She brushed the thoughts off and smiled. "So let's go."

* * * *

"Mmmm." She moaned.

"Oh, baby, this is the good stuff right here." He closed his lips around a bite and made delightful noises of his own.

"I don't think I have ever tasted something this delectable before." Scarlet finished the last bite of the chocolate cake.

"Hey." He mock frowned and fingered the last bit of crumbs from the plate. "I know this is good, but I gotta tell you, you were better."

She knew she was blushing and she never blushed. "You...stop being fresh for five minutes."

"Aw, come on," he licked his lips, "my knee feels much better now."

"I bet." She swatted his hand as it advanced on her. "I need a shower."

"I like where this is going." He stood and offered a courteous hand. She accepted. Then he pulled her up hard and fast into his chest for a hug. Her arms naturally grabbed him to keep balance. He took advantage of the moment and began kissing her.

Damn, he was such a good kisser. He tasted like chocolate cake and icing. His tongue swept over her teeth then down the center of the roof of her mouth leaving a strange tickle in its wake. She surrendered to the sensations, the comfort, and the freedom. "Let's get in the shower."

"I thought you'd come around." He placed a gentle kiss on her nose. The intimacy didn't feel false, it felt genuine.

"We'll see how I come once we get in there." Feeling naughty and trying to keep this thing purely physical and less intimate, Scarlet led him to the hotel bathroom. Inside the bath was a small tub and shower. Her fantasy of a Jacuzzi and plenty of room to get it on in deflated instantly. "Well, we can both fit. That's a good thing, right?"

"Definitely." He undressed in rapid order. She watched him lean over to turn on the water as she undressed herself. For someone trying to keep it physical she missed his hands undressing her slowly, torturing her so sweetly as he did before. "Come on in, water's fine."

She stepped into the warm spray and let the gentle pelting soothe her as it washed over her body. Eyes closed, head back, she jerked a little as his fingers touched her skin. "Sorry."

"It's okay. I was in la-la land a moment there." Scarlet looked up at him. His wet hair hung to his shoulders, his unshaven stubble gathered sparkles of water. His eyes looked so much more intense. "You look good wet."

"How do I taste?" He asked wickedly.

"Let me see." She bent to her knees and grasped his already hard cock. He hissed as she teased him with a downward stroke. "You're thick."

"Not too thick to slip into that pretty mouth of yours." His eyes grew heavy with desire. She loved having him at her mercy though she was kneeling before him.

"Hmm, I don't know." She licked the underside of the head as water trailed in streams around her fingers. His big body blocked the spray. She looked up to see him pull his lower lip under his front teeth. She licked again as he watched. His hands threaded through her hair and he held it up and away from her face.

"Do that again." He said.

She licked him from root to tip. His muscles bunched and his cock jerked. He didn't have to ask this time, she immediately began exploring his rod with her tongue. She couldn't remember the last time she gave a guy head but she was sure she didn't enjoy it this much. The more sounds he made, the tighter the grip he held on her hair, the more she teased him.

"Please." He rasped.

The word sent a heat-wave coursing through her body. She opened her lips and tasted him, salty, sweet. He continued to sing her praises as she continued to suck on him. At some point he pulled her off of his cock but she was enjoying the feel of his thighs flexing beneath her fingers, the draw of his nut-sac close to the base of his penis. She knew she had him twisted up like a pretzel inside and she wasn't about to let him loose.

"Scarlet, babe, I'm gonna...come." He shuddered as he spent. She swallowed down every drop he offered and still suckled for more. He pushed her face away from his dick gently. The pop when she released was loud and surprised her. "I need to lie down."

"What?" She slowly came back to the moment. He was trembling. *Damn—his knee, stupid!* "Shit. Are you all right?"

"Fine." He laughed and turned the water off. "Just a little unsteady. Come on, we'll get in the bed, then I can see if your legs are stronger than mine at the moment."

"Huh?" She followed him feeling a little pleased and half-guilty she had taken his leg out again.

He laid out the towel he grabbed off the bar and then lay on top of it. "Saddle up."

"Excuse me?" She continued to pat herself with the towel she grabbed off the bar.

"You heard me. Get on up here and let me taste you." He patted his chest. "Unless you're afraid you can't hang. I mean those chicken legs of yours are bound to wear out."

"Chicken legs?" She opened the towel to look at her legs.

"There we are." He laughed shamelessly. "Now come on up here and ride me, beautiful."

* * * *

Scarlet proved to him repeatedly how strong her legs were. Until they finally gave out.

"So, are you a nymph or something?" she asked.

He laughed. "Are you?"

"No." She propped up on her elbow and looked down at him. She would have to leave in a few moments to get showered and dressed in her own room. He hated to see her go. An admission he wasn't prepared to make to her or himself at the moment. "So I guess you won't need my number in North Carolina after all, huh?"

"I was hoping this guaranteed I would get it." He yawned. His body ached in places he forgot he could feel. It was a good ache, though; even the constant pain from his knee was dulled by the new sensations, a very welcome thing. "Though I must say, I won't be pulling another all nighter while I'm there."

"It might be too far, it's a pretty big state, you know?"

"So where do you live?" he asked around a yawn.

"Emerald Isle," she answered in kind. "I have a house, not on the waterfront, but on the island and very close to the beach. I've lived there off and on for fourteen years."

"Cool." He closed his eyes. The sparkle of light bursting behind his eyelids was from exhaustion.

"Hey." She nudged him. "Wake up, we got planes to catch there pal."

Startled, he jerked. "All right, okay."

"All right." She laughed. The smooth coat of her laughter wrapped around him and warmed him to his soul. He prayed that Camp Lejeune was close to Emerald Isle. He wanted to see her again and soon.

* * * *

"This is bullshit." Gunnery Sergeant Scarlet King was pissed.

"I know, but you're gonna have to suck it up." First Sergeant Parv shrugged in that manner he had. "Look, it could be worse; he could be taking your entire office."

"Doesn't he want to be in here, with you?" she asked.

He let out a full belly chuckle. "No way, don't even think about it. You know it is a luxury for you to have an office of your own anyways, so if this guy has to be there for three months to ride a desk and do some paperwork until he gets his papers then you are gonna have to compromise, Gunny. That's final."

She growled.

"Glad you see it my way." His classic 'subject closed' line. It wasn't like she cared about the office as much as she cared about the distraction. She got a lot more work done when she could close the door and be selective about who entered it. Now, with some Captain in the corner, who knew how many people might come traipsing in there? "The C.O. is settling him in now."

"Now?" She choked on her swig of coffee. "Shit!"

"See ya later." He called to her back as she left his office and headed to her own at the end of a long empty hallway. It used to be a supply closet but when remodels on another building went through, they moved all the gear and she got the space.

"Gunny," The commanding officer, Captain Maddox was in good spirits as usual, "This is Captain Major."

She stopped in her tracks as the man turned away from the window and looked at her. His head tilted to the left, her jaw hit the floor. "What the hell?"

"Gunny!" Captain Maddox snapped. She knew he was shocked, she was never disrespectful. He lowered his voice and addressed her. "I thought the First Sergeant told you. It's three months, no need to get ugly about it."

The office, right. He thought she was upset about the office. She snapped herself together and addressed the C.O. "My apologies, sir. I don't know what came over me." Except a lying, no good...Oooh, he was in trouble...Oh shit, no. They were both in trouble. If anyone found out that they had been together it would destroy her career. Fraternization! Fraternization! No one would believe it. God, did it show?

"Well, I'll leave you two to negotiate the room." He gave her a stern look and low enough only she could hear said, "Unless you might try to kill him."

"What?" She knew her heart pounded faster than a jackrabbit running for its life. "Oh, no, sir. I'm fine. I knew he would be here, I just didn't expect so much to be moved around already."

"If he gives you any shit, let me know. You're my Company Gunny, he's a guest." The C.O. smiled at the treacherous man standing at the window. "You'll be in good hands with the Guns here, don't worry."

She could die on the spot.

"No worries." Captain Major, Ezekiel Major, Zeke, waved as the captain left them, closing the door behind him.

"What the hell is going on here?" She tried to whisper but it was more like a hiss.

"I'm just as surprised as you are, though apparently more pleasantly so." He looked her over. "You look good in uniform, can't wait till Friday. Do you wear the skirt or trousers with your Charlie's?"

Her mouth opened, shut, opened again. "I'm serious! You were totally not a Marine forty-eight hours ago."

"Yes, I was." He stepped closer and she stepped back. "Scarlet, don't worry. I can explain."

"Don't call me Scarlet, Major." She stomped.

"Captain." Again he smiled. She was ready to die of overheating from anger and he was smiling.

"What?"

"My rank is Captain, my name is Major." He settled onto the corner of her desk letting his leg swing. "I was part of a special operations team for the first three years of my career. I got shot in the knee, did some rehabilitation therapy, but I can't go back to what I was doing so I'm calling it a night. I have three months left, so see, it isn't a big deal. You didn't know, I didn't know. And in three months it won't matter."

She was worried her jaw would lock in place if she clenched it any harder. Didn't matter, no big deal, of course not to him, he was getting out. But for her, this would be a scandal—hell, it might make the news! "I'm glad you can be so calm about all this. Especially since in three months it won't matter to you, but it matters a lot to me. This is my life, my career and I have worked damn hard to be the best Marine I can be. I won't let you take that form me."

"You're gonna have to stop talking to me like that." He made an indiscernible face. It pissed her off even more.

"Because you out rank me?" Is spontaneous combustion actually possible?

"No. It's turning me on." He nodded and perused her camouflaged utility wearing body as if she were nude. "You must make the men in these office nuts."

"I am also the Equal Opportunity Advisor for this unit and you," She pointed at him, "are way in the red zone, Captain Major."

"So I guess this means I can't ask you to dinner tonight?" He folded his arms over his chest, clearly displeased with her.

She didn't bother with a response.

"All right. You wanna make this all about business, forget what happened between us, fine." He stood. "I want this desk cleared out by lunch time—you can take that dinky piece of shit they wheeled in here for me to, use. I need my own file cabinet, a locking one...are you getting this down Gunny?"

On the verge of tears but unable to let any man see he had broken her down that far, she stormed out of the office and made a bee line for her big gun—the First Sergeant.

* * * *

Two weeks of pure silence in the cramped office space was wearing on both of them. The First Sergeant made sure she kept her desk and file cabinet. They hauled him in a larger desk and file cabinet of his own. They put the desks front to front to make room for them to move around in the tight space. North Carolina was a far cry from Colorado. The weather was warm, it was the first week of January. The building wasn't prepared for the sudden heat wave and the heater was still pumping against all attempts to cut the damn thing off. He didn't really answer to anyone there; he was on an internal affairs assignment and needed to be close enough to investigate his subject without suspicion.

The C.O. was so concerned about heat casualties in January he allowed the Marines to wear P.T. gear half the day until the heating system could be repaired. Temperatures today reached almost ninety. The window to the office, raised as high as it would go, afforded little comfort but an occasional breeze filtered through.

Scarlet sat across from him in her green on green gear. The cotton T-shirt and silky running shorts brought out her eyes. "I'm going to run to the vending machine to grab a drink, would you like something?"

It was the first words spoken between them since the desk incident. She looked up at him, her lashes closed over her eyes twice before she nodded. "Diet."

"You want water, then?" He worked harder to keep from talking to her than he worked to get to talk to his subject. Once he did, it was an open and shut case, but if he shut the case now, he would be on his way back to Washington. Not here across from the stone cold fox who haunted his dreams, replacing all the nightmares of when he got shot.

"No. I want a diet soda." She looked away from him but he noticed the tug on the corner of her lips. She was smiling again. His stomach did a little flip flop, taking him by surprise. He left immediately to get the drink and away from her.

"I like you." He said as he handed her the drink. "Don't go back in your shell, Scarlet, listen to me."

She held the drink in her hand, unmoving.

"I'm done. The job I was sent here to do is done. If I tell them, I'll have to leave. What I'm asking you is...do you want me to file my report?" His stomach did full flips waiting for her reply.

"Why would you leave, you just got here? They sent you here to ride a desk until your time is up." She set the drink on the desk in front of her.

"That is what they told the command, yes. But I can ride out the rest of my time in Washington just as easy. The FBI already has plans to transition me. I'm asking you if you want me to leave." He knew it was risky, but worth it. He stepped closer and reached to touch her face. The instant his fingertips stroked the smooth skin of her cheek he was gone. His heart pumped double time and he knew he wasn't just in lust, he was falling for her. He cupped her cheek in his hand and tilted her head to look at him.

"You're asking me to break the rules." Her voice shook slightly.

"Have dinner with me tonight." He let her cheek go, the last thing he wanted was for her to break down on him in the office. It would ruin what he had learned was an impeccable reputation she had, and no doubt get a salty old First Sergeant up in arms again.

"All right." She nodded. The world lifted from his shoulders. He was not aware of how much her response meant to him until she responded.

* * * *

"This is a nice place." He looked around the kitchen, opened drawers, cabinets. It was weird but she knew now he was meticulous and very organized, much like her, except he was a little obsessive with it. "I can take you out to eat."

"No." She shook her head. She didn't want to be seen in public with him. But moreover, in her house, she was on her turf, playing by her rules. She could make him leave at any minute. Looking at him out of the corner of her eye she couldn't imagine putting the words together to ask him to go anywhere other than to the bedroom. His hair neatly tailored into a traditional high and tight haircut made her think of his long locks. The beard stubble replaced now with barely a five o'clock shadow made her wonder if he would grow it out when he left active duty. "I want to talk and I prefer to do it in private."

"I prefer to *do it* in private, too." He moved behind her and wrapped his arms around her. "You smell good."

"This is exactly what we need to talk about." She leaned against him. "I don't want you to leave but I can't afford for you to stay. I've never been in a situation like this. Lines were always clearly drawn for me. I follow the rules, I watch my six, I don't date Marines and here I am. With you, and you are not just a Marine."

"Why thank you." He whispered in her ear and nibbled on her lobe.

"You know what I mean." She was being serious and he was being himself, playing, flirting, being bad!

"Do you want me to leave?" He asked again, for the third time she was ripped in half with no clear answer.

"You want me to break the rules. I don't know if I can." It was a tough thing to say. He wouldn't understand how hard it was for her to keep thinking of all she worked for when her body screamed "who gives a rats ass—go for it" whenever he was near her.

"I don't want you to break my heart." He turned her to face him. "Tell me to go. If you don't want to break the rules ask me to leave."

She stood there looking at him. The words playing out in her mind but her lips refused to move. "I can't."

"That's what I needed to hear." He hugged her tight. "I'll file the report and go back to Washington. When I get my papers, I'll come back here."

"Here?" She pushed away from him. "But what the hell are you going to do here?"

"Besides you?" He teased her, his smile infectious. She giggled despite herself. "I'll go fishing, maybe get a job. I'll get benefits from this and I do have a degree to go with those bars they gave me. I'll find something. Maybe work at a surf shop."

"You will not work at a surf shop." She rubbed her temples and appreciated the way he held onto her even when she let go of him. "What if I get orders?"

"Then you'll marry me and drag me around like Marines have been doing for ages to their spouses." He shrugged.

"Is that your idea of a proposal?" She quirked a brow.

"No." He laughed. "I'm not stupid. You'll ask me when the time is right. Right now it's time to get you naked."

"I'm not calling you sir."

"Yes, ma'am." He saluted her. The memory hit them both at the same time. They both broke out in laughter. "Come on, babe, let's see if my knee has healed any more."

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Cara North is an honorably discharged United States Marine. She lives in North Carolina with her husband, Chris, their two dogs Brittany and Jonah, and two cats, Han-Solo and Shiva.

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