



The Changelings

Phoenix Rising

Changeling Press

Phoenix Rising
Lena Austin, Belinda McBride
Anne Kane, Tuesday Richards

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Editor: Margaret Riley

Cover Artist: Marteeeka Karland

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Like the legendary bird, the heroines of Phoenix Rising rise up from defeat, rebuilding their lives, and their loves, one night at a time.

Fallen Angel -- Lena Austin

Angie's an exotic dancer with a secret that could ruin her entire family. There's a fanatic with a gun about to erase all her options but one -- the mysterious biker known as Tree"

Draggin' in Phoenix -- Belinda McBride

Alan's no stranger to the cross dressing scene, but when he spots the new face on the stage for the Coming Out Pageant, it's like a kick to his gut. Then again, Alan's heard imitation is the most sincere form of flattery. Things really heat up when "Jesse" and "Lana" go Draggin' in Phoenix!

Fertility Rites -- Anne Kane

Beltane begins at sundown, and tradition dictates Rhys choose his life mate from the single females who will dance for him. Tamara's determined to win his heart -- but she's not alone.

What Doesn't Kill -- Tuesday Richards

Rebecca's determined to start a new life with Rick. But her past still haunts her -- despite the restraining orders. This time her ex may have pushed her just a little too far"

The *Phoenix Rising* anthology's royalties go entirely to *Save the Quiet Kitty*, a fund organized to help our fellow writers with unexpected medical expenses and disaster relief.

Phoenix Rising: Fallen Angel

Lena Austin

Angie's an exotic dancer with a secret that could ruin her entire family. She's determined to keep a low profile, but there's a fanatic with a gun about to erase all her options but one -- turn to the mysterious biker named Tree, who isn't all he appears to be!

Fallen Angel

Would he come tonight?

Angela Fisher glanced toward the big double doors of the bar again and lugged her tray full of beer mugs back to the bar once more. Her butt ached from all the illegal pinches and pats from the patrons, and her temper burned high.

Sue, the bartender, grinned at Angie. She was the oldest in the place at forty-three, and tougher than the old steel-toe boots she wore. She'd apparently noticed Angie's repeated glances at the door. "Pay attention, Red. You're safe here." She tapped her crossbow under the bar, for which she had all the licenses. "Now go deliver these shots to table eleven."

Table eleven was full of Sue's biker friends, and normally a nice bunch, but some new guys out to prove themselves were there and drinking shots. They grew rowdier by the hour, and the bar's bouncer had already wandered over to have a talk with the partiers about keeping their hands to themselves when it came to the servers.

Angie hefted the tray and staggered under the weight. She still wasn't used to the heavy loads lifted by the servers, but she'd managed to totter around on the high heels every girl in the place wore to make their legs look longer. If the heels weren't bad enough, the abbreviated costumes were worse. Her father would have called them "invitations to rape with big red bows."

The doors opened and shut on another customer, his face hidden in the shadows of the entranceway, but there was no doubt in Angie's mind who the newcomer was -- Tree was back.

Tree stood six feet four inches tall and had the black hair and hazel eyes of his European ancestors. He shrugged out of his leather jacket and sauntered over to join the party at table eleven.

Now Angie was happy to heft her tray over to the overflowing table and put the shots and beers in the middle of the table for the group to sort. She didn't dare do more than ask professionally who needed a round. Her scribbling the orders on a pad didn't prevent her from giving Tree a special smile she reserved just for him.

Tree gave her a slow, quiet smile and mouthed, "The usual for me." The music made hearing him impossible anyway, not to mention the good-natured banter of his friends.

Angie reached across the table to gather up all the empty mugs and flipped the ashtrays into the one on her tray. She had the last empty mug in her hand when a hot, sweaty hand ran from the back of her left knee all the way up before cupping her ass. Her face flushed red with annoyance. Enough was enough!

The biker whose hand was currently doing its best to worm under her costume's tight panties grinned up at her. "What's your price, Red? I'm itching to see if you're a natural redhead." If his leer hadn't been obnoxious enough, his insinuation was worse.

Angie's reaction was automatic and swift. Her right hand, loaded with a heavy glass beer mug, swung back and connected with his jaw with a loud crack. Some gleeful demon inside cackled with satisfaction while the sensible prim librarian on her other shoulder groaned and wondered if she'd be charged with assault and battery.

The man's eyes rolled to the back of his head and he toppled over to kiss the floor with his face. The whole place stopped. Even the jukebox ran out of tunes at precisely the same instant.

Still riding high on temper and satisfaction, Angie calmly put down the mug, raised her hand over her head, and snapped her fingers in the silence.

The bouncer obeyed the summons and lumbered over. He looked down at the snoozing customer. "Idjit. Didn't I warn you three times to keep your paws off our

girls? Nope, you had to go for the redhead." He turned to the club members. "This probie is too stupid to be anything other than a sidewalk commando."

Those who weren't sniggering nodded their heads, even Tree. They didn't protest when the bouncer hefted the unconscious patron and lugged him outside to finish his nap in the parking lot, draped over his bike. Anyone who wore a grape purple helmet to match their grape bike deserved to be mugged, in Angie's opinion.

Someone laughed and fed the jukebox more money. Seconds later, the house rocked again. The small incident had been dismissed. For them, at least. Her good girl side calculated how long they'd have before the police came to drag her off in handcuffs.

Angie flipped her red ponytail over her shoulder with her chin in the air and took the tray back to Sue. "Three drafts, one whiskey neat, a Guinness, and a Michelob Light."

Tree followed, much to her surprise. He sat next to Angie, where she waited for Sue to fill the drink order. His blue-green gaze locked with her still stormy brown eyes, and his tongue licked his lips. "He deserved worse, Angel Face. Don't worry. I doubt he'll even remember in the morning. He was pretty shit faced."

"Angel Face? Who are you talking to, Tree? I know what my mirror says. I don't think frizzy red hair, freckles, and brown eyes qualify for the heavenly hosts." Her heart ached for a moment, but years of scars from handsome men who used her to get close to her more beautiful friends had taught her well. Even if she hadn't had those lessons, the past few months had taught her a great deal more -- trust no man. She was tired of being a victim.

"Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, Angel Face." He took the Michelob Light he'd ordered off Angie's tray when Sue delivered the bottle. "I'll wait here for you."

Angie glanced at the clock over the bar. "Then you'll be waiting two more hours. It's only just now midnight."

His heated gaze started at her face, raked her whole body with heat, and came back to her lips. She'd have sworn he kissed her with his eyes alone. "I'll wait all night, if I have to."

Her breath caught in her throat. Could it be he wasn't just flirting with her, like all the rest? Warmth spread from her core, filling her until her face could have fried bacon. The curse of being a redhead was to blush at the drop of a hat.

The shrill dingle of a bell went off, and the lights flashed, signifying time for her performance with Sheila, her dancing partner. They'd worked on the routine for a solid week, and now the debut of this number was upon them.

Sheila appeared, her white costume glowing in the lights of the bar. Her painted face matched, looking virginal and innocent, and a far cry from Sheila's hard-boiled true personality. She grabbed Angie's hand and dragged her up on the tiny stage.

The lights went out completely, for a count of five seconds. Every man in the place froze, because rumor had spread that tonight Angie and Sheila had a new routine.

Angie grabbed the red bowler hat, which matched her sparkling red vest and panties. Her fake forked tail banged up against her knee, and she cocked her leg in a provocative pose with her other hand placed dramatically on the brim of her hat.

The spotlight came on, focused squarely on Angie, and the music came up simultaneously, playing the first few words of Billy Joel's "Only the Good Die Young." Angie played the part of a demoness sent to tempt the virginal and sweet "Virginia," played with big sweet eyes by Sheila. The irony was, Sheila wouldn't know innocence if cherubs bit her in the ass.

Angie's hands and feet moved automatically to the music and the routine they'd practiced in the early afternoons before the bar opened. She opened her vest on cue, her tits spilling out until only the thin snaps at the bottom kept her nipples covered. Angie smiled impishly at the audience, knowing most of them were about to faint from blood loss.

Even Tree followed her every move as she dance-strutted over to where Sheila “cowered” from her. She licked her lips and shifted her weight, ready for the move to come.

While the music clashed, Angie reached out and yanked Sheila to her, and Sheila’s hair cascaded down around them both. Sheila giggled into Angie’s shoulder. “Honey, let’s make ‘em drop one wing and howl in a circle.”

This was the climax of their dance. While Billy Joel warbled about how only the good die young, Angie’s and Sheila’s lips met, and they did their best to give each other a simulated tongue tonsillectomy.

The masculine crowd went nuts, cat calling, whooping, and -- just as they’d hoped -- the cash fell like rain on the stage.

There was only one way to gracefully exit, and Angie prayed the other girls, Bambi and Nancy, had done as promised. Angie and Sheila fell through the center cut in the curtain, onto a mattress provided to catch their fall. In seconds, they were out of sight.

The curtain closed behind them. Sheila and Angie ended their lip lock, grinned at their success, and did a high-five. Then impishly, Sheila rolled on her back and stuck her feet out where the customers could see, with the ankles locked together. In the same instant the music ended, she spread her feet violently, as if the demoness had won.

More hooting and shouting accompanied a shower of money hitting the stage like rain.

Sheila yanked her feet back in and folded herself in a tailor’s seat. “This calls for a celebration, ladies! We got five minutes before we’ll be back to hefting trays.”

Bambi slid an ashtray in between them, and all three lit up a celebratory smoke. Nancy came in, push broom in one hand, bag of cash in the other. In the semi-darkness, her chocolate skin shone like it had been oiled, and her grin gleamed white. “This has to be the best take of the year! Hey, Bambi! You wanna team up and give ‘em the old lesbo routine?”

"Yeah, sure." Bambi took a drag of her smoke. The mixed race "mutt" as she called herself, was beautiful and petite enough to be a crowd favorite. She made tall Angie feel like an elephant next to a pygmy. "We're gonna have trouble topping their routine, though."

Nancy snorted. "Bet we can, 'cause we are lesbians, not like this pair of fake dykes." She cuddled up to her longtime partner.

"Hey now! We're bi," Angie protested. The old exchange was all in fun, so everyone giggled.

Sheila sniggered and took another drag before snuffing out her cancer stick. "Oh, honey! Let's face facts. We like dick too much to compete with these two."

Angie and the others followed suit, stubbing out their smokes, taking one last swallow of drink, and trooping out en masse to serve the customers before Nancy and Bambi each took their turn on stage before closing.

Tree still waited for Angie by the bar, where she collected her tray and gave him a blown kiss before running around to her assigned tables.

The wait had never been so long until closing. Nancy's athletic pole dance and Bambi's inspired routine with giant rubber bands got the usual applause, but time crawled until all but Tree staggered out the door.

He'd been drinking virgin sodas for the past two hours, so Angie knew he was safe to drive his prized '72 Harley Sportster safely home. Tree crooked his finger at Angie when the closing bell sounded.

Curious, Angie picked up her leaden feet and acted like she could care less if she made the walk back to the bathroom to change into decent warm clothes for the long walk home. She cast one quick glance at the door with relief, knowing her ex-boyfriend would not be there to harass her if he hadn't arrived by now.

Tree spotted her nervous eyeing of the door and smiled. "Chill, Red. Your ex won't be there. Some of the guys -- and I won't name names -- found out what Bob had been doing to the most ladylike of the dancers in their cherished bar." He cleared his

throat and winked. "They had a little chat with ol' Bobby Boy. He's a little occupied keeping breathing, I understand."

"Oh." Angie bit her lip to keep from grinning back at Tree. She felt a little sorry for Bob and hoped his bruises would ache as long as hers had until she'd left him. "Thank you."

Tree drank the remains of his cola in one gulp. "Enlightened self-interest, Angel Face. We don't want to lose our ladies to turds like him." He put his glass on the counter so Sue could wash up. "Need a ride home? I've seen you walking down San Juan."

Angie nodded slowly. Did she trust him so much? She surprised herself by answering with a *yes*. Would he expect a sexual favor in return? What if he did? Would she? Oh, hell yes, she would. She wasn't a virgin by a long shot. Decision made, then. "I'd love a ride home, especially on your Harley. Got a spare helmet?"

Tree swallowed, and he looked away for a moment. "Yeah. I came here for the express purpose of... seeing to your safety, Angel Face."

She licked her lips with the tip of her tongue. Maybe he did like her and sex wouldn't be a mercy fuck, after all. She was used to being the ugly stepsister and best pal to the more lovely of her friends. Maybe for once she'd found a man who could see beyond her curves. "I appreciate the ride. Did you like my dance, then?"

His jaw tightened and his hand clamped down on her wrist. He guided her hand until she caressed a thick hardness in his jeans. "Yeah."

Angie's hand remained on his crotch when he released her. To prove she didn't mind, she stroked the straining denim herself. "Good. I hoped you might."

"Oh, for God's sake! Take the foreplay outside, you two, so I can clean up!" Sue tossed a bar towel at them and put Angie's gym bag on the bar. "Out!"

Angie kicked off her heels, slid her jeans right over her red panties, pulled on her sneakers, stuffed the heels in the bag, and threw on a T-shirt over the vest in record time. She was going to get laid, and by one damn fine man. She hoped he didn't notice her red panties were damp.

Tree threw her bag over one shoulder, grabbed Angie by the shoulders, and got her out of there. Another towel thunked wetly against the door as he pulled it shut behind them.

The early spring air was chilly, but not bad at two AM. Normally, Angie enjoyed her walk home even with sore feet, but a ride on a motorcycle without a jacket would be downright cold. Thank goodness her tiny apartment was only a couple of blocks away.

"My place is at the Wickshire Apartments on Lane. You know where they are?" She waited for him to get on first, and then swung her leg over. "I'm in Building Two."

"Yep. Had a friend in Three a couple years ago." He handed her the spare helmet and clipped on his own. Sportsters were notoriously difficult to start, but he kicked the bike over on the third try.

The ride took less than two minutes on a fast Harley. Tree swung into an empty parking spot.

Angie clambered off the bike, unclipped her helmet, and fished her key out of her gym bag. Here it came -- the awkward moment when there was a last chance to chicken out. Not that Angie ever took anything this far unless she meant to actually do her best to do a reverse Rape of the Sabines on the guy. Considering she'd had her front plastered up against his back the entire ride, Angie sincerely hoped he'd not lost his nerve. Angie jingled her key at him and pointed to her door. "Last chance to say no, Tree. However, I will demand a price."

Smooth moves this guy had in abundance. His arm whipped around her and yanked her right up against hard chest, hard abs, and -- oh, my, yes! -- hard cock. Talk about hard bodies! "Babe, you couldn't get rid of me with dynamite. What's your price? Better not be in cash."

There was an instant of outrage, and then Angie realized she'd brought that comment on herself. She blushed beet red and slid her hand under his T-shirt to caress those rock solid abs. "No, silly! I just want to know your real name. Tree is very obviously just a nickname, and one I completely understand."

Angie stood five feet seven in her bare feet, and in her heels, she still had to look up. His height impressed her much more than any other physical feature except his eyes. Eyes were always important for two reasons -- one, if they looked at her and not her tits, Angie was automatically impressed. Second, if eyes were the mirror of the soul, sometimes you saw the darkness even in a pair of blue eyes. Tree's were a stormy hazel normally, but right now they shone almost like blue moons. Nice trick of the light.

He laughed and tried to take her key from her. "That's a weird entrance fee, Angel Face."

They wrestled for the key, but she shoved the cold metal down her jeans and into her red panties. In between giggles, Angie managed to taunt him. "You can hunt for the key after you tell." Yeah, like she could have stopped him encased in his left arm. Being held in a vise was probably roomier.

He buried his face in her neck. His nips there drove her nuts. "Cheater. Okay, you win. My real name is Oakton." He let go of her. "Open the damn door or you might get a spanking instead for teasing."

Her heart iced over with fear, but she would be damned if she'd let anyone know her weaknesses again. Ever. Bravado had gotten her this far, and served her again. "I'm sooo scared. Cool name." Angie winked and unzipped her jeans so he could fish out her key to open the door. She chanted to herself that he couldn't know her secret, and must never know why she was an exotic dancer living in a sleazy low rent complex. No one would. She'd crawl out of the hole she'd dug all on her own and damn the world.

His hand caressed her back while Angie worked the lock. She'd replaced the deadbolt herself when she'd moved in, not trusting the original. "Hey, I didn't mean to make you angry or anything. Don't go white-faced on me."

Observant bastard. Damn the streetlight for revealing her face. Angie thought fast. "Hey, don't sweat the small stuff, hot stuff. I'm a little hungry, that's all. You know, pale redhead skin." There. The door opened, and she damn near fell on her face as usual. So much for being a graceful dancer.

Tree's strong arms caught her before Angie face-planted into the cheap, scarred linoleum. "Whoa there!" Then he caught sight of her other passion -- her bookshelves. He stepped around her one chair, salvaged from the Dumpsters -- and read the titles. His eyes widened and he fumbled for the light switch on the lamp atop the plastic milk crate next to her chair. "I repeat. Whoa. Heinlein? The Complete Works of Shakespeare? Hamilton's Mythology?" His eyes grew respectful. "Okay, where's the Nora Roberts? Hidden in the closet or are you that much of a secret nerd?"

"Snark! Snark!" Angie made the words sound like pig snorts. "They're in my bedroom. Which was where you were headed until you made such a mean comment." She stuck her nose in the air and wished he hadn't made fun of her brains. If he wanted just a body, then she'd tell him not to let the door hit him in the ass on the way out.

In two seconds flat, Angie was back in his arms. He kissed her nose. "Prickly, aren't you?" He gave her a light brush of a kiss on her lips. "Hamilton's work is not well respected and badly researched, but still entertaining." He grinned at her open-mouthed shock. "I'm a big fan of Lazarus Long, too."

Oh, really? She could test him. "When is it time to leave a civilized society?"

"When they start demanding everyone has identification." He stuck his tongue out at her. "What should I always leave handy where I can find them in the dark?"

"Too easy. Your clothes and your weapons." Okay, Angie was seriously in danger of losing her heart. The thought terrified and excited her all at once. He must not know more than this about her! Damn shame. She could have fallen for this guy. Too bad. "Test over. You may now pass Go and collect two hundred dollars."

His mouth came down on hers so fast she'd have sworn electromagnets were involved. Yeah, she was a secret geek. Had Angie not already had her mouth open in a smile, he'd have forced his way in and she'd have let him. He tasted of Sue's specialty sodas, a hard candy dropped into a lemon lime beverage. Green apples.

She missed the taste of green apples. Angie hadn't eaten one in a year or more, not since her fall from grace. She was so hungry for such a small luxury she could have

kissed him all night, just for the taste alone. To emphasize her eagerness, Angie put up her left hand to his head and locked her fingers in his hair.

In response, he pulled her tighter to him and his right hand moved to cup her ass by worming its way past her still unzipped jeans. His fingers caressed the red silk of her panties.

Tree wasn't going to get a beer mug upside his handsome jaw. Angie moaned and did her best to merge skin to skin with him, annoyed with the clothes hampering their eventual horizontal tango.

Her right hand was busy fumbling with his belt buckle, snap, and zipper. Angie intended to not stop kissing him until she found skin.

Just when Angie found hot and cylindrical flesh, Tree lifted her up bodily and she lost her hold. She wrapped her legs around his waist and let him carry her into the only door off the living room, which of course was her bedroom. How he found his way while still kissing her brainless was a mystery.

Tiny and spare though the decor was, Angie was proud of what she'd achieved. Sure, the mattress was on a small platform of salvaged two-by-fours hammered together from tools she'd borrowed from the maintenance man, but her bed was off the floor. Sort of. Her curtains were re-dyed and hand sewn, but they matched the blanket on the bed. The bureau in one corner was a refinished Dumpster dive rescue she'd hand painted. Even the lamp was one she'd rewired herself. Not bad for a fallen angel, in her opinion. Okay, so Vern Yip would have said her efforts would make a cat laugh. Still, everything in the room was all hers.

The chances of a man noticing anything but the goal of the mattress and the willing female in his arms were slim and none. She'd known men who slept for weeks in their sheets without washing them. Ewww.

Tree had to let her go long enough for them to finish undressing themselves. There, he had the clear advantage. She'd done all the hard work, so he was naked before Angie untied her sneakers, much less anything else. Of course, the fact she was

bent over to unlace the shoes gave Tree ample opportunity to step behind, yank her jeans down, and tease her with his cock.

With so much man-meat caressing her neglected and very hungry pussy, Angie didn't even try to stop the moan that fell from her lips. She even backed up and ground her panty clad hips into his groin. "Wouldn't you know I fumbled the shoelaces into a knot?"

"If you don't hurry up, I'll fuck you right here and ruin your costume." His hand slipped inside her panties to tease and fondle her clit.

Angie broke the shoestrings and decided she could eat Ramen noodles five nights a week instead of four. Anything would be worth the fucking she wanted. Her pussy and clit took turns throbbing with raw need. "My, what talented hands you've got!"

"The better to play with you, my dear." Oh, God. He could do the Big Bad Wolf growl better than any actor.

Finally! Angie kicked her shoes and then her jeans away toward her closet and bathroom door. Shimmying out of her tee and vest took a bit of effort and blinded her, but she caught a glimpse of Tree looking around at the room. The guy was full of surprises. A raging hard-on and he still checked out the decor. Though why he frowned at the window she had no clue. The curtains weren't so very bad.

Naked at last, Angie practically launched herself at him, and they fell together onto her mattress. She let him shove his face in between her breasts, since she had displayed them half the night every time she danced. You don't tease without delivering what you promise, and she'd made promises she intended to deliver.

Tree was an expert on nipple nibbles, and made her fly high on the sensations. He was an equal opportunity tit man, spending time going back and forth so neither of the twins were neglected.

Angie wriggled and moaned and made all the appropriate noises to let him know his efforts on her behalf were much appreciated while she tried desperately to reach his cock and guide him in for a perfect one-point landing.

He grabbed her wrist, giving her a momentary fright. She wondered if she'd ever get over the abused woman syndrome and trust again. Tree read her body stiffening up and let go of her wrist. He reached into the heap of his clothes and fished out a condom. The silvery foil packet gleamed in the light of a streetlamp filtering through a gap in her curtains.

Hah! Like she'd lie there passively. "Nuh-uh, buddy-roo!" Angie rolled over and pounced, sending him on his back with the condom half rolled down. He lay on his back and gave her wide blue eyes for a moment. Clearly, females didn't surprise him often enough. He tapped his upper lip. "Moustache ride, lady?"

"You haven't got a moustache, silly." Still, an invitation was an invitation. She clambered up and tossed her pillow at the foot of the bed so they could indulge in a classic sixty-nine. Once she was in place, she couldn't resist a tease. "Do I put the quarter in your ass?"

He nipped her inner thigh before attacking her clit. The first hot lick was like heaven, and Angie darn near came from the one sensation. Which was before he latched on and began to eat pussy in earnest.

No way was Angie going to last enough to enjoy the face she got unless she distracted herself by noshing on cock. Being that Angie very much enjoyed sucking cock made the prospect enticing enough to do a good job.

Angie took her time and started by burying her nose right between his balls and alternating kisses and licks. There was a lot to be learned about a man by sniffing his one special spot. She sucked one ball in her mouth and took her time inhaling the scent of clean man and a certain Irish soap, which in combination were the ultimate in aphrodisiacs to her.

Maybe her imagination ran overtime, but it seemed as if they competed to see who could do the better job on one another. Angie was in danger of losing every time he gave her clit another rough lick. She might have had a chance but he upped the ante by tickling her very drenched pussy with his fingers.

By the time even one digit made the journey inside, Angie was howling like a wolf. If his cock hadn't been down her throat, the neighbors would have called the cops. She used his cock as a gag and did her best to see if she could suck a golf ball through a garden hose. Even the slight latex flavor of the condom didn't bother her. Thank goodness for flavored condoms. Bless all scientists everywhere.

Meanwhile, her pussy did its level best to turn her inside out or make her explode for certain. Like being caught in a riptide, she was along for the ride. For once, Angie didn't mind giving Tree the control, even though she had the joystick in her mouth. The analogy might have made her laugh at any other time. Now, she accepted the comparison for simple truth.

Seconds before Angie hit the threshold between pleasure and torture, Tree released her. His head thunked on the mattress hard enough for her knees to feel the shock. "Oh damn! Angie, stop before you ruin our fun too early."

She released the suction on his delicious cock and lifted her head so he came out from between her lips an inch at a time. Such slow torture was about the only retribution Angie could think of at the moment. "Okay, but just because I want your hot meat fucking me blind with a straight quickness."

"Then roll over." He patted her ass very gently, like you'd pat a kitten's head. "Prepare to be ravished by the black knight, fair maiden."

Angie giggled at his silliness and fell over on what was left of the full-sized mattress. Another Dumpster dive find, the size was a treasure to her. Entering into the spirit of the play, she batted her eyes and panted in mock terror. "Oh, Sir Knight! Thou wouldst have me like this in my hour of need?"

"Trust a woman to be better at those thees and thous." He laughed and fell on her, slipping in with only a little difficulty. Tree showed his appreciation for the moment by grunting once, his eyes half shut with concentration.

Angie relaxed even more despite her pussy practically crying with need to be filled completely. Yep, her pussy was a slut and for once, she was inclined to let her

have all she wanted of the man of the moment. “Gimmegimmegimme!” Not the most intelligent of statements from her, but the thought counted.

Fortunately, Tree was more than obliging. He shoved in and made like a jackhammer. Okay, back to howling. By some miracle, the fingers of her right hand found her pillow, and Angie stuffed a corner in her mouth. Mrs. Henley next door was a nice old lady who really needed her beauty sleep. Her whole bed moved across the room, fortunately away from the wall, with the strength of Tree’s thrusts. Just the way she liked to be fucked! Angie was a happy and orgasmic little camper with the corner of a pillow in her mouth.

All good things must eventually come to an end, however. Tree’s face contorted. Most men look like cartoon characters when they come, but some like Tree become very intense versions of their own faces, almost like demons. Angie much preferred demons since she was a fallen angel. His breathing was like a locomotive at full steam, and the sound was much better than yelling like a little girl who’d seen a spider. Combined with thrusts so deep Angie was sure he planted his seed in her navel, Tree gave the perfect masculine orgasm.

They both stayed stock still, the only sound their attempts to keep breathing, like marathon runners who couldn’t fill their lungs with enough oxygen at the end of a race. Her hand slowly slid to the cool tiles of the floor.

Tree lifted the abused pillow away from her face and dropped it over the side. Where he summoned the strength to roll off and gather her into his arms, she had no idea.

The next thing Angie knew, the late morning sun was in her eyes. She could hear someone she hoped was Tree in her kitchen. Whoever they were, they’d managed to coax her coffeemaker to work, because Angie heard the chugging and dribble. Her bladder also awakened, and she made a mad dash for the bathroom.

By the time Angie got a quick shower and freshened her breath, Tree was lounging on her bed, which he’d shoved back against the wall. He waved a steaming coffee mug like a lure. “Good morning, little girl. Want some coffee?”

Snuggling and sipping coffee was pure luxury. She'd never had the pleasure, and wasn't sure of the protocols. Bob had slapped her ass and demanded breakfast at seven AM every morning, whether he went to work or not. Angie wondered when she'd stop comparing every man to him. He'd lose, so why did she make comparisons? She had no idea.

Tree seemed content just to hold her and sip coffee without speaking. Silence was a real blessing. Peace and feeling cherished, no matter how short the time, was a gift. Time didn't have much meaning, since the only clock she owned was on the stove.

Angie knew some horrible portion of reality would eventually intrude. The strains of "Ave Maria" from the cell phone in Tree's pants shattered the peace. Tree echoed her sigh, but wriggled until he could fish the silver and black phone from his pocket to answer. "Yeah?" He got up and paced, speaking in cryptic phrases. He glanced once at her and quickly looked away. "No, I haven't. Can you give me an hour, Jenkins? Thanks. What's the latest word?"

Angie rolled out of bed and dug in her bureau for her clothes. She recognized the awkward moment was upon them when he had to go, and he felt he had to make promises about calling, etcetera-yada-yada. He had no idea she could have cared less about promises. Promises weren't something Angie expected, and never would again. Too many people had broken them.

Tree listened to whatever Jenkins told him, nodding like everyone did even though the person on the other end couldn't see them do so. By the time she slid on her jeans and buttoned up her shirt, his conversation was done. She'd had plenty of alone time in the past month to work through her emotions, and Angie wasn't bitter.

She had never really liked being the daughter of a local politician and a vain socialite who had more in common with her plastic surgeon than her husband. Society wenches like Angie who became fallen angels never really appeared on the scene again, and she was happy with her anonymity. She'd make her own way in the world without Dad's money or Mom's influential friends offering her some desk warmer job. Angie darn sure didn't need the complications of a man in her life, or for anyone to say she'd

gotten where she wanted to be on her back. Angie wanted Tree to see the truth in her eyes so she stepped in front of the window and pulled aside her curtains.

Tree yelled an incoherent yelp and threw himself at her, knocking them both to the ground.

Just before Angie hit the floor, she heard an explosion and her window shattered. On the opposite wall, the small picture of a seagull she'd bought at a yard sale became a pile of trash.

Tree kept her covered until all the glass finished tinkling to the floor. *Chink! Ka-chink!* Then he rolled and came up with a small gun. Where the hell had he hidden the weapon? In his tight little ass?

Angie tried to sit up, spitting mad, only to have Tree's foot plant her back on the floor face first. Outside through the broken window she heard shouts, scuffling, and eventually a siren. No, a lot of sirens. Her heart sank to the depths of hell. She knew in her heart what was wrong, but Angie didn't have to like the possibility one damn bit.

The crash Angie assumed was her front door caving in heralded the arrival of two guys wearing dark suits and ties -- Feds by the look of them -- guns drawn. One, a balding guy showing the first signs of a paunch, took in Tree's foot in her back and the rage in her eyes. He lowered his weapon and spoke into a walkie-talkie thing on his shoulder. "All clear." He grinned at Tree. "We got him, Agent LaCroix. You can let her up now."

"Lucy, you got some 'splaining to do!" Angie was so hot with rage at Tree's deception she could have spit nickels and given change. She came up with fists ready to see if she could plant one right on his jaw.

Tree -- Agent LaCroix -- managed to not only catch her fist before Angie connected with his handsome jaw, but he somehow locked her in a grip with his elbow in her throat. Figures a G-man would know some fancy judo moves. "I'll explain, if you promise not to kill me."

"No guarantees, asshole!" Angie struggled and damn near strangled herself.

The bald guy laughed and the other G-man tried really hard not to grin. The balding one appeared to be in charge. He put away his gun. "Good thing you called for backup, LaCroix. Looks like Firebrand Fisher has offspring who didn't fall far from the tree." Wisely, he and his friend turned to go.

"Thanks one helluva lot, Jenkins!"

Tree -- Agent LaCroix -- waited until he heard them outside, and then dragged her away from the window. At least he cared about not getting glass in her feet. "Dammit, I'd begun to like you too, Agent Asshole LaCroix." On principle, Angie kept struggling. "I assume some nut decided to make a hit on Dad and his family?"

Agent LaCroix tightened his grip. "Got it in one, Angel Face. Only the assassin wasn't just one nut, but an entire religious nut case church that decided the whole city council and local senators were a bunch of atheistic infidels. They figured on pulling something similar to the Tenth Plague of Egypt by killing the firstborn of every politician in the city." His breath was warm in her ear.

Given a choice between principle and breathing, she'd take air every time. Angie stopped squirming. "Well, darn. At least they modernized and didn't insist the sacrifice be firstborn sons. My little brother... well, I guess you know." Her brother was in an institution on a respirator, proving cerebral palsy could strike down even the rich.

"Yeah, I know. Look, can I release you without having to worry about flying body parts coming at me?"

At her nod, he released her. Angie moved across the room and pretended to examine the remains of her seagull picture while simultaneously hunting for her sneakers. "Okay, so you've done your job. I've been saved from the fanatics. You can go now. I'll be okay." She would, too. She didn't need anyone. Not even a handsome cop. Angie pointed out the door with the one sneaker she could find.

"No, Miss Fisher." He folded his arms and lounged casually in her bedroom doorway. "Apparently, you don't read the papers."

Angie dug under her bed for her other sneaker. "Can't afford them. Why?"

"*Senator Fisher --*" he let the implications sink in -- "*left for Washington yesterday. My job was to find you, keep you alive, and hopefully convince you to --*"

She curled her lip. "*Become a respectable citizen so he won't be embarrassed?*"

Tree grinned. "*In a nutshell, yeah, but he phrased the request much more diplomatically.*" He hesitated. "*I was supposed to keep you alive. I wasn't supposed to fall in love with you.*"

She was so shocked she forgot to breathe for a moment. Nothing intelligible would come out of her mouth.

"*Would wife be respectable enough?*"

Wife. Was that what she wanted? She'd been lusting after him for months, but respected him too much to make the first move. She needed a bad boy, and he was all that, but he was also intelligent, and he had an inner strength that said he could be a partner, not just another mistake she'd regret later.

Still, she'd learned something from past mistakes. Angie cocked her head to one side, in what Dad called her negotiation pose. "*Fiancée will do for now. I'll let you know in six months if you can put a band on my finger and a ring in my nose.*" She grinned wickedly. "*In the meantime, Dad can fork out for college. I learned enough lessons in the school of hard knocks.*" Angie stuck out her hand for a handshake. "*Deal?*"

Lena Austin

Lena Austin is a “fallen” Southern Belle with a checkered past. She has been a licensed minister, hairdresser, and Realtor, radio DJ, exotic dancer, telephone service tech, live steel medievalist swordswoman, BDSM Mistress, and investment property manager. Not necessarily in that order. She never finished that degree in archaeology, but did learn to scuba. After a life like that, writing about it is pretty restful. Of herself, Lena writes, “I’m tall, and I look like an unholy mating between an Amazon and a librarian. Everything else is subject to change on a whim.” She presently has over thirty books written, and has no plans to stop “until they pry my cold dead fingers from the keyboard.”

Email: voiceomt2002@yahoo.com

Web site: <http://www.LenaAustin.com>

Blog: <http://depravedduchess.blogspot.com>

Facebook: Lena Austin’s there, but darned if she knows the address

Twitter: http://www.twitter.com/Lena_Austin

Yahoo! group: (news only) <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/LenaAustin> or
(social) <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/Catitude>

Changeling Author Link:

<http://www.changelingpress.com/author.php?uid=11>

Draggin' In Phoenix

Belinda McBride

Misunderstood doesn't begin to cover it.

After years of hiding her true nature, Jessica's finally had enough. On drag night at the local bar, she takes to the stage as "Jesse" for the Coming Out Pageant. For the first time in her life, Jessica feels at home in her skin.

Alan's no stranger to the cross dressing scene, but when he spots the new face on the stage, it's like a kick to the gut. Alan's heard imitation is the most sincere form of flattery, and suddenly he's feeling very flattered indeed! Things really heat up when "Jesse" and "Lana" go Draggin' in Phoenix!

Draggin' In Phoenix

Jessica, this is your mother. Please call. We're so worried about you, honey.

Jessica Flanagan leaned toward the mirror of her vanity, evaluating the crowning touch of her makeup for the evening. Glancing at the photo next to the mirror, she frowned, not completely satisfied with the effect. She studiously ignored the messages playing back on the answering machine.

Jessica, this is your mother again. I called yesterday, but you never called back. Please, sweetie, give us a call. Your daddy is so upset... I just... I don't... Honey, you're still on our insurance. We can get a counselor. Father Neilson is willing to counsel you if you don't want to see a psychologist.

Jesse rolled her eyes in disgust, and then focused on her image once more. She carefully inserted the contact lenses that changed her blue eyes to brown. She couldn't change the shape, but she had enough Native American in her bloodlines to give her that hooded eye with just a little shadow. She didn't have an epicanthic eye fold like her model, but the effect was similar.

Jessica, please. I've tried calling you at work... please, honey, if you get help, your daddy will let you move back home. I promise.

She'd carefully prepared a small amount of crepe wool, using flesh-colored liquid latex to give herself a sparse beard and mustache. A skull cap covered her long red hair. Her last task was to slip on the jet black wig. It was long and simple, falling in a straight line to her shoulders.

In the photo, he wore it pulled back in a ponytail, but she liked it loose around her shoulders. That's how she liked it best on Alan, loose and straight.

Hey, Jesse, it's Maureen. I keep getting these frantic calls from Mom and Daddy. They're really worried about you.

There was a long pause in the recording.

Baby sister, I know... I know this has been hard for you. I want you to know I love and respect you.

Jessica turned away from the mirror, slipping a button down shirt over her tightly banded breasts. She left it unbuttoned at the top, revealing a black ribbed tank.

I know you've been unhappy all these years, and I know you're doing what you need to do to survive.

Jessica stepped into a pair of men's briefs, pulling them up over the jock style harness and soft dildo that she wore. She adjusted her package until she was satisfied with the effect. Next came a pair of skintight Levi's; she buttoned them up the front, pleased with the subtle bulge to the right. She'd considered packing hard, but wasn't planning on getting lucky tonight, so this was just right. She tossed the other dildo into a satchel with condoms and lube, just in case.

And just for the record, babe, I think you'll make a heart-stopping man. All the girls are gonna want to fuck you. Some of the guys too! Good luck tonight, wish I could come down and cheer you on!

Jessica laughed aloud at her sister's comment. Maureen would never be caught dead in a bar, much less a place like the Top Rail. She might be more understanding than their parents, but the years of Christian guilt ran deep in Maureen's heart and soul. But unlike their parents, Maureen had embraced the good of her religion, and loved her sister regardless of what Jessica was about to do.

She stepped into a pair of cowboy boots and then looked at the young man looking back at her from the mirror. She then compared him to the photo that sat on the vanity.

Not bad. Not bad at all. She straightened up and pulled on a cowboy hat that she'd had for years. It was not quite like his, but it was comfortable. And it fit.

Time to go Draggin' in Phoenix.

* * *

Jessica hopped out of her pickup truck and strode confidently across the parking lot of the Top Rail Bar. She'd never practiced her guy walk before, but it came as easy as breathing. The cock in her briefs felt natural and as real as though she'd been born with it. Jessica waited in line, checking out the crowd. It was the monthly Draggin' in Phoenix night at the Rail, and she was surrounded by tall blonde bombshells in evening gowns, and short studs in T-shirts and jeans.

At five foot ten, she was a comfortable height for a man. Jessica hadn't gone for a movie star or some other stereotypical drag king look. She'd modeled herself off someone real, someone she'd really like to look like. Someone who made her heart speed up every time she saw him. He'd probably never understand what she was doing at the bar right now. Like her parents, he'd probably be disgusted by the compulsions she had that were bringing her out tonight. Yet if she continued to deny this side of herself, she knew that she'd wither and die slowly.

And it was time to stop thinking of herself as a girl. Jesse took a deep breath and let Jessica go for the night. Tonight was boys' night out.

The line moved quickly; Jesse paid his cover charge, plus the extra fifteen dollars to participate in the pageant. He pulled out his driver's license, proving not only that he was over twenty-one, but that he was also truly in drag. He handed over the completed entry form for the Coming Out Pageant. The bouncer handed him a number which he attached to the sleeve of his shirt.

Inside, the music was loud and compelling, drawing his eyes to the dance floor. Jesse ordered a beer at the long western style bar. He then shouldered his way through the crowd, finding a table where he could sit and watch the party.

Leather-clad toughs rubbed shoulders with sequin-spangled divas, and he grinned, watching a diminutive Marlon Brando squeezing the ass of his statuesque girlfriend. The sexual heat was up, but mostly the crowd was immersed in having a good time. Up on the karaoke stage a trio danced, and Jesse recognized them as a hot boy band act. Well, an imitation of that trio of brothers.

He took a long drink of his cold beer and kicked back, one leg crossed over the other, grinning at the display right in front of him. Someone tugged his shirt, pulling him into the writhing mass on the dance floor. Jesse danced, swiveling his hips, arms in the air. When he caught sight of himself in one of the mirrors that lined the dance floor, Jesse came to a stop, staring at the young man he'd transformed into.

I can pass, he thought.

Maybe he wasn't the identical twin of Alan Pan, but it was close. The young man in the mirror was tall and slender, with narrow hips and nice shoulders. Long legs were wrapped snugly in denim. Tanned skin, dark eyes and long black hair was nearly a uniform in this part of Arizona. He looked good. He could pass.

Someone bumped him and Jesse started dancing again, surprised at how aroused he was by this revelation.

* * *

"Who's that?"

Lana sat with her back to the bar, long legs crossed, elbows propped on the wooden surface. The pose was casual, but showed off her slender waist and rounded breasts. She reached down and smoothed the turquoise cotton of her sundress over her thighs.

Marjorie leaned forward to look, her heavy breasts dangerously exposed under the uniform of tank top and black jeans that the Rail employees wore. "Who?"

"The cowboy. The one that looks like..."

"That new one looks damn real, doesn't he?" Marjorie gave a throaty chuckle. "He's got a damn nice ass on him too. Moves like a real boy, nice and easy."

She hummed under her breath a bit. "He's hot. If I didn't know better, I'd be tempted to take him out back. Might do it anyway. Teach him how to fuck a woman." She turned back to the bar, pulling a beer for another customer.

Lana swallowed hard, grateful she'd managed to bite back the sentence. She idly lifted the shot of whisky to her lips, careful of her lipstick. The cowboy looked like Alan Pan. The similarity was a little too strong for coincidence. The shoulder-length hair, the

shirt over the tank top... right down to the brand of jeans and the shining black cowboy boots. It could be coincidence, but still...

Lana shifted a bit on the stool, fighting down a gut level arousal as she watched the young man. He was standing now, talking and laughing with a small group of ladies. One reached out and casually grasped his groin. The kid jumped back, looking embarrassed as the women laughed a little too loud. He took it with grace though, and as the Coming Out Pageant was called, he headed up to the stage, ready to take his turn on the catwalk.

They alternated. First a woman would sashay across, down and back, often shimmying to the music, giving the crowd a show, then a guy would strut his stuff, striking a pose to the shouts and whistles of the crowd.

Alan Pan's double moved without the over-exaggerated strut of the drag kings, looking like a real man had wandered up onto the stage. He grinned bashfully at the swell of applause that came from the appreciative crowd. After his turn, he accepted his blue participant ribbon and wandered back to the table where he'd been sitting. He was alone, but wouldn't be for long, if Lana had any say in the matter.

Even as she made the decision he started for the bar, empty mug in hand. That was the first clue to his birth gender; most men wouldn't bus their own table.

He strode to the bar and Lana tried to see the face under the cowboy hat. Full lips, heavy, smoky brown eyes. Mysterious indeed. Not a Chinese face, but a beautiful face just the same.

He glanced at Lana, his eyes sliding over her dress. "I have one..." He stopped abruptly, his gaze rising to Lana's face. "I have one just like that. But I wear a white jacket over it."

Lana's heart stopped in her chest.

* * *

The redhead at the bar was a knockout. In fact, she was wearing Jessica's dress better than Jesse ever could. Even the robin's egg blue pumps were the same. And the hairstyle... long red hair falling from a side part.

Jesse felt his cheeks grow hot with embarrassment as he looked past that fall of red hair to see her face. Her eyes were the same brilliant blue as Jessica's, but the cheekbones were higher, the eyes were almond shaped and angled up. The nose had a distinctive arch where Jessica's was small and straight.

"Alan?"

"Tonight I'm Lana. Jessica?"

"Jesse."

They stood staring at one another, partly aghast, partly in delight.

"You're beautiful. Absolutely beautiful!" Jesse's grin was brilliant.

"I was just about to ask you to dance." Lana smiled, and Jesse's loins tightened.

"You... uh... you look an awful lot like a woman I know. Her name's Jessica."

He moved a bit closer, stepping between the full skirts over Lana's long legs.

She smiled up at Jesse. "Imitation..."

"...is the most sincere form of flattery. I used a photo of you from the Christmas party."

Lana smiled, reached out and fingered the sparse beard on Jesse's chin. "I guess I've just looked at you enough to know exactly what you look like."

Jesse blinked, the implication of their conversation becoming clear. Alan Pan had modeled himself off of Jessica! Their gazes met and held. He could see the pulse racing in Lana's throat.

"You've done this before. Every time you show up at work with your beard shaved..."

"Yeah, I come here three or four times a year. Mostly when I can't stand being vanilla anymore."

"This is my first time."

"I know. I watched you in the Coming Out Pageant. You look good."

Jesse moved closer, invading her space, close enough that he could feel the puff of Lana's breath on his cheek. Tentatively, he rested his hands on Lana's thighs, running them up to her hips. She hooked one high heel around his calf, holding him in place.

The music was louder now, and their voices were low. Lana's full lips were expertly rouged with a shimmering coat of red lip gloss. Her eyes were shadowed and lined; the makeup was flawless. For the first time, Jesse realized that his pale skin tanned to the same golden color that Lana was naturally.

Carefully, he set a light kiss next to Lana's mouth and then whispered in her ear, "Let's go out to my truck. I think we need to talk."

"I think that would be a very good idea."

Lana rose. In her heels, she was a bit taller than Jesse stood in his boots. Their hands brushed together, fingers caught, and they clasped hands. Jesse could feel the pulse beating in Lana's hand. Or maybe that was his own.

They didn't talk as they walked across the well lit parking lot. Jesse's phantom cock was hard as stone. It was difficult to walk naturally. When they arrived at the truck, he backed Lana against the door of the vehicle, pressing their hips together, bringing her to him for a kiss. She parted her legs and he thrust up, rocking into her mons as the kiss moved from searching to searing. His hands roamed her body, feeling the narrow waist, her soft breasts.

Finally gathering his courage, Jesse trailed a hand down to hike up her skirt, his hand running up Lana's smooth, muscular thigh. His fingers caught on the silk of her panties, and he slipped his fingers between her legs. She'd tucked her cock back; it was trapped in the soft fabric of her underwear. "That's got to be the world's hardest clit."

"Not the biggest?" Lana asked softly, and Jesse laughed.

He reached back further, stroking the hard flesh. Lana moaned a bit, thrusting gently into his hand. He jumped when Lana squeezed his crotch through the tight fabric of his jeans.

"This isn't hard enough yet."

"I left my erection inside the truck."

Lana wrapped one leg around his, stroking up and down till she reached his ass. "I'd like to take you and your erection back to my house."

Jesse grinned and reached around, grasping her ass. "I didn't really count on scoring tonight. I've had a crush on someone at work."

"Well, cowboy, it looks like you're gonna get lucky tonight." She glanced around the parking lot, nodding toward a blue sedan. "There's my car. You can follow me."

"Okay." Jesse leaned in, licked at her lips just a bit, smiling at the taste of cherry in her lip gloss. After he let Lana move away from the truck, he unlocked it and climbed in, smiling as he reached for the satchel on the seat.

Time for a change of equipment.

* * *

Lana didn't have time to turn on the lights. Jesse had pulled her into his arms, pressing her backwards into the living room where they collapsed onto the wide leather sofa. Eager hands fumbled, pulling at random pieces of clothing. His boots came off, and then socks. Lana kept her pumps and thigh highs. He liked that.

She reached up and unfastened the top button of Jesse's Levi's, and smiled to find the head of his cock peeking out. Lana pushed at the jeans, pleased when Jesse stripped and stroked the length of the cock that was harnessed to his hips.

"Is this for me?" She stroked it, and then leaned forward, trailing just the tip of her tongue down its length. Jesse watched, eyes narrowed in arousal. He then shifted back, pushing up the skirts of the blue dress. Lana lay back and watched as he carefully lowered the blue silk panties. She closed her eyes and gasped as her throbbing cock came loose.

"It must be sore from being trapped like that." Jesse's hand stroked and massaged and Lana caught her lip, exhaling hard in pleasure. He straddled her, drawing their cocks side by side, pressing them together in his hand.

"Make mine disappear again, Jesse."

For a moment, Lana saw doubt in his face, but then Jesse got off Lana, and pulled her to sit with her back against the couch. He found his wallet and drew out a condom. Kneeling between her thighs, he trailed the foil edge of the packet up her cock. Lana

hissed at the sensation, and smiled at how carefully Jesse rolled the condom down her penis. He then rose up and straddled Lana's hips, bending down for a kiss.

Lana reached down and stroked Jesse's naked cock, traveling down its length to the root. She probed a bit, feeling that Jesse's cunt was slick and wet with juices. She pushed back a bit further, pressing lightly on his ass. Jesse shivered under her touch.

"I'm ready," she whispered.

Jesse gulped and nodded, rising high above her. His long black hair swept his shoulders, and the black tank showcased his golden skin. Lana reached up and ran her hand over his chest, and then down his taut belly. She braced her cock as Jesse came down over her cockhead. She inched into the tight channel, and reached up to spread Jesse's lips a bit wider.

"The dildo is pressing your labia together. That's why it's so tight. Are you okay with it?"

"It feels so... fucking good," Jesse gasped. He rose a bit higher and tried again, shivering as she stretched and filled him.

Lana couldn't agree more. She had the prettiest boy she'd ever seen on her lap, and her cock was buried in the tightest cunt she'd ever felt. Jesse's cock was trailing over her belly. She clasped it, pumping. As she pumped, it stimulated Jesse's clit.

Jesse stared intently down at her as he rode her cock, his eyes dropping half closed in arousal. He looked as blissed out as Lana felt.

"Jesse, I want you on top."

They carefully changed position, with Lana on her back, her head cushioned on the arm of the sofa. Jesse still straddled her hips, but quickly caught on to what she wanted. He pressed down, filled his body with her once again, and then lay full length atop Lana, thigh to thigh and face to face. Lana grasped his ass, guiding him into the tempo that worked for her.

Jesse showered her with kisses, tasting her mouth, worshipping her eyes. He buried his face in her neck, breathing deeply. His cock was caught between their bodies,

a hard, arousing presence. Lana thrust up into him faster, and Jesse parted his legs slightly.

"No, keep them together..." He followed her instructions. "Now just forget who you are, forget who I am, and just let it carry you away."

They rocked together, their bodies mirroring each other exactly. They were the same height, and very nearly the same weight. Jesse gave up supporting his weight and came down fully atop Lana, and she brought one arm up to his shoulders to hold him there.

"Ohhh..." His moan was quiet, but telling. Jesse's breath came fast, and Lana could feel sweat blooming on his skin. If the room was light, she'd see the telltale flush at the neckline of his tank top.

"Almost there?" She was, and was praying that Jesse would go first. He nodded, gasping.

"Oh... oh God... Lana!"

He was plunging atop her body, muscles going tense all at once. His cunt gripped

Lana's cock hard, the dildo thrust wildly between their bodies. She let go of her control, thrusting and driving hard into Jesse's body, feeling her balls contract flush to her body. Her ass went tight, squeezing the climax from the base of her spine to the top of her head. To her delight, they rose and finished together in nearly perfect synchronicity.

Lana panted, cherishing the feel of Jesse in her arms. Her legs slipped open, her cock slid from his body, and they lay quietly, cooling down in the darkness.

* * *

Jesse was back in his jeans, but had left off the shirt, wearing only the black tank top. Lana had lost the pumps and hose, but still wore the blue dress. They'd moved to her bedroom and lounged among the pillows on the bed.

"This is weird."

"Why?" Lana sipped at the tea she'd made just a few minutes ago. Jesse held the small cup in his hands, as though his fingers were cold.

"I've known you for years. Worked with you nearly every day. I never suspected that you were Two Spirits."

"Two Spirits?" Lana looked at her curiously. "I just think of myself as a cross dresser. Maybe gender queer. I need to pass as a girl sometimes or I get a little crazy in my head."

"Two Spirits is a Native American term. I always felt like I had both girl and boy in me. I like being a girl, I really do. But all my life, Jesse's been there too."

"Same here. I like guy stuff, but Lana's always there, waiting for her turn. So how does that make us weird?"

Jesse gave a roguish grin and sipped at the tea. "Maybe we aren't weird. I dunno. I like what we did. A lot."

"Good. Because I hope we're going to do it again. A lot." She stretched out a hand and ran it up Jesse's thigh, up to where the rigid dildo was trapped inside his jeans. Jesse smiled at the pink polish that Lana wore on her fingers and toes.

"Do you always wear toenail polish?"

"Sometimes. Wonder what the other guys would think if they saw it?"

"I'm wondering what they'd think if they saw you in that dress and hair. They'd probably knock each other down to get to you!"

They laughed again and Jesse leaned back, resting his head against the headboard. Lana got up and went to a shelf, taking down a book. She opened it to a beautifully illustrated page. It was a stylized Yin Yang, with a dragon on the white section, a phoenix on the black section.

"This is extremely oversimplified, but the black Yin portion represents that which is passive, soft and hidden. This is traditionally the female side of the symbol. And the phoenix is the symbol for woman."

"And the white side is the opposite. The dragon is male energy."

Lana nodded.

“And I’ve noticed that the Yin Yang symbol generally has a spot of white in the black, and a spot of black in the white. So the male side carries an element of female, and vice versa.”

“That is correct. But there is more.” He turned the page to reveal a simple black and white Yin Yang symbol. “If you take the symbol, and spin it rapidly, will you see black or white?”

“Neither. It would turn gray.” Jesse’s eyes grew wide. “So it’s not one or the other. It’s both.”

“At the end, just before you climaxed, did you feel male or female?”

“I didn’t feel either way. I just... was.” Jesse sat up, staring hard at Lana. “Did we just unlock the meaning of life or something?”

Lana laughed out loud. “No, I doubt either of us is that profound, but maybe it helps us to understand ourselves a little better.”

“Does your family know about this? I mean do they know about Lana?”

“My grandmother is the one who showed me that trick with the Yin Yang. She probably noticed how fascinated I was with my sister’s clothes when I was a kid.” Lana reached up and pulled the red wig away. She then pulled her long black hair loose of the pins that held it to his head. And now Lana was Alan again. “They know, but as long as I’m happy, they pretty much ignore my Lana moments.” He reached out and peeled the beard and mustache carefully from Jesse’s face, while she took off the wig and freed her long red hair. “This is really good work; did you have it made?”

She took the facial hair and wrapped it in a handkerchief. “No, I took a theatre arts class a few years ago. It’s crepe wool and liquid latex. If I’m careful, I’ll be able to use it a couple more times.” She rubbed her fingers through her hair, enjoying the rush of blood to her scalp. “I can remember exactly when I knew I was Two Spirits. We were learning how to do facial hair. I stayed after class building beards and mustaches. I’d always felt something missing from myself. When I looked at myself in the mirror with a mustache and beard, I saw Jesse.”

Alan looked over at the slowly emerging Jessica. She still wore the band over her breasts and the black tank top. He still wore the blue dress. Picking up her foot, he massaged it. "Your foot is the same size as mine. We can trade shoes."

She grinned, and he saw a dimple next to her mouth. He wanted to kiss it. "Alan, what size dress do you wear?"

"About a seven."

"That's smaller than me. Bummer."

"I can go up a bra size." He bent down and kissed her toe. "That'll fix it." He sat up and unbuttoned her pants, pulling them down her hips. The harness and dildo came off as well. He set it on the bedside table. "I have the overwhelming need to be naked with you, Jess." He pulled the tank over her head, and watched as she unfastened the breast band that kept her flat. She sighed as it came off. Alan stood and dropped the dress down over his hips, and deftly removed the bra. The silicone inserts he wore remained in the cups.

He sprawled next to her on the bed, and they seriously studied one another. She had a good build; her hips were slender, and her breasts were small, high and round. Alan trailed his fingers over her peach-colored nipples, smiling as they crinkled under his touch. Her skin was pale and golden; bathing suit lines showed that she was even whiter without the kiss of the Arizona sun.

Her hand came up, her fingers trailed over his slender body. In spite of his job and time at the gym, Alan never bulked up; his muscles were smooth and flat. In spite of the obvious gender and race differences, their builds were similar.

She reached out and lifted the silver pendant that he wore around his neck. "It's a phoenix."

"I wear it when I feel more like Lana than Alan. That way, even if I have to dress in pants, I've got an outlet." He reached over to a shallow dish next to the bed and retrieved another necklace. This one had a dragon dangling from the chain. "I wear this when I feel masculine."

Jess took the pendant from his hand and held it next to the phoenix. "They fit together."

"Two halves of one being. I'll get one for you."

"I'd like that."

He slipped the dragon necklace over her head and they lay back against the pillows together, black hair mingling with red. "Have you told your family yet, Jess?"

She sighed, and Alan pulled her closer. He'd noticed she'd looked downcast lately. "I tried to explain. I've always dressed boyish, but since I also like being girly sometimes, they never really noticed. Awhile back Mom decided to do me a favor and get my laundry started. She found men's underwear and assumed I was sneaking guys in. Dad just about blew a gasket."

"How old are you? You aren't exactly a kid anymore."

"I'm twenty-four. But that's not the point. It's their house, and their rules. We... they're very religious. So when I told them that the underwear was mine, they assumed I was a lesbian. I tried to explain, but they didn't get it. Dad kicked me out."

"Fuck."

"Well, I was just staying there to save money for awhile. My college loans are paid down, so it's not that bad. I found a place pretty quick."

He rolled to his side, trailing his fingertips along her cheek. "Still, they're your family." He didn't miss the tears in her eyes.

"They'll come around. Mom's trying to get me into counseling, but my sister will be there to go to bat for me. She understands better than they do. And if I hadn't moved out, I'd never have screwed up the courage to go to the Rail tonight. I'd have missed you."

Alan laced his fingers into hers and lifted their joined hands into the air, looking at the contrast in color. He brought her hand to his mouth and kissed the pale tips of her fingers. "Do you still feel like Jesse tonight? Or are you back to being Jessica?"

"Why? Are you ready to go again?" She brought her leg up his thigh, lightly rubbing his cock. He sucked one of her fingers into his mouth, swirling his tongue around the tip and then pulling it in deeply. He let it go with a pop.

"Have you ever fucked someone with your cock?"

She licked her lips nervously. "No."

"Wanna fuck your girlfriend?"

Her eyes were huge. She nodded.

* * *

He helped her back into the harness, making certain the straps were snug. He then lay on the bed, looking up at her. "You don't need the clothes or the breast band. Jesse's in your head."

Alan's cock was hard, and he pumped it, watching Jesse roll a condom onto the dildo. She set the lube to the side of the bed, as well as an extra condom. She then covered Alan's slender body, pressing kisses to his flat chest, his rosy, erect nipples. Their mouths caught, lips clung, and tongues twined together, tasting of heat and sex and green tea. Alan's hands wandered Jessica's body, reaching back between her legs to dip fingers into her cunt, his fingers slipping and sliding in the wet heat of her body.

Jessica reached for the lube, spreading it liberally over her cock. Alan spread his legs, cradling Jessica as their cocks rested side by side. Jesse pumped her hips slightly, and their shafts slipped together in a silky embrace. At Alan's gentle coaxing, Jessica moved back and guided his knees apart, pushing them up to his chest.

"Use your fingers first, just a little at a time. Lots of lube."

Jesse followed his instructions, pressing gently, pumping and spreading the tight band of muscle, and Alan relaxed. Jessica might be a virgin at this act, but had a true knack for it.

Her slick cockhead pressed for entrance, slipping past his anus, and then withdrawing in a teasing motion.

"You're very good at this." Alan's voice was breathless. Jessica pressed in a bit more at the next thrust, easy and smooth. Two more strokes and she'd penetrated to Alan's prostate gland.

"Oh shit... so good..." He stretched his arms out to the side, clutching at the bedding. Heat prickled his skin and his heart pounded against his chest. He forced his eyes open, watching Jessica's slender body as she undulated against his ass.

Jessica grinned, clearly proud of herself. She lowered her body, covering Alan... dominating him. His cock was trapped between them, hard and weeping with arousal. He brought up his legs, locking his ankles around her hips.

"I'm fucking you, Alan!" She looked completely delighted. He struggled for words, couldn't find any, simply pulling her forward for a kiss. When her eyes dropped closed and her breath began to quicken, he knew she was going to climax. She shuddered, digging hard into his ass. She slowed, but didn't quite stop, keeping a steady stroke into his body. She groaned and trembled, but never lost her tempo.

"I've never come with just the harness on." She'd gone limp, her silky hair trailing over his skin. Her nipples were so hard he could feel them against his chest.

"You probably didn't have it fitted properly. If your clit's sensitive enough, the pressure of the dildo should make you come."

Besides, she'd probably never fucked another person, not the way her brain and body wanted her to.

She pushed up, looking at him. "That was amazing. Just... thank you!" She leaned down, kissing him deeply. She'd gone still, and his ass clenched around the dildo.

"Can you come with it inside?"

He nodded. "Yeah, it's not too big. Perfect size for me."

Jessica rose to her knees. She stroked his belly, and then pumped his cock, which had gone a bit soft. She spread a bit of pre-come around the tip, and then licked it off her finger. "Can you keep the cock there and come inside me?"

He immediately grew harder. Jessica reached down and fondled his testicles gently. She loosened the straps of the harness, leaving the dildo buried in Alan's ass. He clenched his teeth and pulled her down to his body, one hand buried in her hair, the other kneading the soft flesh of her ass.

Quickly, he rolled her to her back. "I'm suddenly feeling like Alan again!"

He felt her fumbling at the straps of the harness. She held them, keeping the dildo in place. It pressed hard on his gland, and another bead of pre-come trickled from his slit. With trembling hands, he rolled the condom on. He tried to move backwards, wanting to taste and lick, but she held him in place with the leather straps. In frustration he turned around, his knees straddling her chest, and he went down on her that way.

She was wet, her juices flowing freely following her earlier climax. He caught the faint powdery aroma of the dildo, the scent of leather, and the unique scent of Jessica. He parted her pussy lips and dragged the tip of his tongue through her folds. He jerked when her tongue trailed over the stretched tissues of his perineum.

"Too much?"

He grunted in reply. She caught his cock in her fist, and he shuddered as her tongue stroked its length. He found her hardened little clit and sucked, smiling in satisfaction as she cried out. When his cock slipped into her mouth, Alan cursed, barely holding back his climax. He panted as she squeezed the base of his cock, giving the dildo a slow, deep pump.

Jessica had never felt so empowered in her entire life.

She'd used her body, her cock to fuck Lana... Alan. It didn't matter, he was right. Jesse was in her head, not an item of clothing or a wig. She'd fucked him, feeling the strength of her thighs. Her labia had grown swollen and puffy, rubbing against the base of the cock like real testicles. She'd held him in place, controlling his pleasure.

Jess knew she wasn't a lesbian. She'd never wanted a girl, not a real girl, anyway. Lana was different. She loved knowing that under the feminine package that he had a

dick and balls. The feeling of fucking his ass had been the ultimate head rush. She loved feeling like a man.

She loved the feel of her soft package through the fabric of her tight jeans. It made her wet. It made her want to be filled to the brink. It made her want to fuck Lana/Alan into a puddle of giddy satisfaction.

He went down on her, eating her, until it was all she could do to not fuck his face till she came screaming and digging her nails into his tender flanks. Instead, she played with the dildo and sucked him hard, distracting him from his task. She squeezed him firmly at the base of his cock, forcing his climax back when he came too close.

He was so close. So was she.

She let him slip loose of her mouth as he shifted awkwardly, returning to cradle his hips between her parted thighs. When he kissed her, she tasted herself on his mouth. Slowly, she licked those full, pouting lips. Even with the makeup washed away, with his black hair hanging in sweaty strands around his face, he was so beautiful. "Next time we fuck, you're wearing the strap-on." She gave the straps a slight tug, reminding him that she was still fucking his ass.

"Oh, God Jess..." His eyes looked feverish, even with the blue lenses. He leaned down and nipped the tender skin of her ear. "I can't wait. I can't wait to see you all stretched... both holes full of me..." He thrust his cock against her mons, putting pressure on her clit. Jess arched her back, trying to align herself with his shaft, but he moved back, teasing.

She tugged on the straps, bringing him back to her body. "I think I'm still in charge. I've got the leash."

He jerked, a slight moan escaping his lips. "I'm not gonna last once I'm inside of you."

"That's okay. I'm about there." She lifted her legs, locking them around his ass, and he pressed into her opening, just a little at a time. Finally, she tugged on the straps, pulling him closer. He wouldn't move to fuck her, so...

She grinned and nipped his chin. He tried to pull back, to thrust into her, but she held him tightly. He groaned, holding perfectly still as she fucked his shaft. He braced himself on straight arms, watching her face. "Problem solved."

He laughed. "Are you going to make me beg?"

"No. No, I'm not." She let up on the pressure, allowing him space to move, and Alan thrust in hard. They both gasped at the sensation, and she lost herself to the frantic, overwhelming need to feel him pumping into her body. He fell atop her, fucking her furiously, and Jess felt her climax building. Her muscles went tense, her skin bloomed with sweat, and she held it... held it until she was swept away by wave after wave of bliss.

She heard Alan groan repeatedly, and he thrust frantically between her legs, then went still, his body limp and heavy atop hers.

"Oh God." His voice was small and weak. He rolled off her, and she gingerly removed the dildo, tossing it and the harness to the floor. "Oh God, I think I've just died and gone to heaven."

She lay limp and sated, but managed a weak laugh. "I didn't think you were Christian."

"I'm Buddhist. But I think I just converted." He rolled over and threw an arm over her body, pulling her close. They lay panting, their chests heaving nearly in unison.

"So when I go meet your parents, should I go as your girlfriend, or your boyfriend?"

She snorted with laughter and sat up, heading for the bathroom on trembling legs. "Alan, it won't even matter. You're Buddhist, that'll give them something new to freak out about!"

She peed, flushed and opened the door. They traded places while he used the facility. "Won't they care that you're with a person who loves you?" She heard the water in the shower start, but stood still, stricken by his words.

"You love me?"

Alan stepped out of the bathroom and took her by the hand, leading her into the stall. Water streamed around their faces, and Alan leaned forward, kissing her gently. "I've loved you for a long time. I just never realized before how perfect we are for each other. Almost like it's meant to be."

He was right. Absolutely right. Jess picked up the bar of soap and began soaping his sleek golden muscles, working on his chest and shoulders as he washed between her legs, gently soaping her tender tissues. She returned the favor, washing all the lube and sweat from his body.

"I came out tonight, but still, I wondered if anyone would ever love me for who I am." She stroked the hair back from his face, stunned once again at the exotic beauty there. "Next time you wear that dress, skip the wig. I'll do your hair. In fact, let's go shopping this weekend. I'd love to get one of those exotic Chinese dresses... for us."

"A cheongsam?"

"Yes, one of those. What color do you think..."

"Blue. Dark blue will look good on both of us. Blue satin with a golden phoenix design. We can get a silk Chinese jacket too. Black with dragons on it. You'll be so beautiful."

She looked at Alan in stunned amazement. "I love you, Alan." She slipped her arms around his neck, amazed at how perfectly they fit. "Two halves of a whole," she whispered.

He kissed her lightly. "A dragon and a phoenix."

Belinda McBride

Belinda was born in Inglewood, California, but grew up far to the north in the shadow of Mt. Shasta. While her upbringing seemed pretty normal to her, she was surrounded by a fascinating array of friends and family, including a polyamorous grandmother, a grandfather who is a Native American icon, and various cowboys, hippies, scoundrels, and saints.

She has a degree in history and cultural anthropology, but in 2006 made the life changing decision to quit her job as a public health paraprofessional and stay at home fulltime to care for her severely disabled, autistic niece. This difficult decision gave Belinda the gift of time, which allowed her to return to writing fiction, which she'd abandoned years before.

As an author, Belinda loves crossing dressing -- err -- crossing genres, kicking taboos to the curb, and pulling from world mythology and folklore for inspiration. She is committed to taking her readers on an emotional journey and never forgets that at the end of the day, she's writing about love.

Find out more about Belinda by visiting her on the Web:

Web site: <http://www.belindamcbride.com>

Blog: <http://www.belindam.blogspot.com>

Yahoo!: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/BelindaMcBride/>

Email: Belinda@belindamcbride.com

Changeling Author Link:

<http://www.changelingpress.com/author.php?uid=115>

Fertility Rites

Anne Kane

The Feast of Beltane...

The Beltane rites begin at sundown. Tradition dictates that Rhys, an acolyte of the Earth Goddess, shall choose his life mate from amongst the single females who will dance for him this night.

Despite being mocked and labeled a half breed for the fairy ancestry that dilutes her Elf blood, Tamara intends to capture Rhys' heart. She's spent months practicing the intricate footwork required for the fertility dance, and when Rhys sees how strong and beautiful her fairy blood makes her, she knows he'll claim her for his own.

There's just one problem. Nadine's never learned to take "No" for an answer.

Chapter One

Tamara peeked through the cascading branches of the weeping willow tree. If she slanted her head at just the right angle, she could see Rhys performing his morning rituals on the sunny western slope of the sacred mountain. A slick sheen of sweat covered his impressive abs, and as she watched, he pivoted to perform an intricate set of movements that showed off his taut buttocks. She felt a fiery coil of lust settle into her belly. She'd secretly been watching Rhys greet the Mother Sun each morning for the last two years, ever since his coming of age ceremony when the Earth Goddess had chosen him to serve her. The sight of his naked body moving with such grace and strength never failed to set her pulse racing. And tonight, she'd finally get a chance to touch it.

"Take a good look, because that's all you're ever going to get, you little fairy bitch."

Startled out of her daydreams, Tamara jumped and whirled around. "What's that supposed to mean?"

Nadine smirked, looking down her nose at Tamara as she had ever since they'd been Elflings. It was getting tiresome. "When Rhys comes to the Beltane celebrations this eve, he'll be so dazzled by my perfect Elven body, he won't even see you. You didn't honestly think that a half blood like yourself stood a chance did you?"

Tamara gritted her teeth, biting back the retort that sprang to her lips. She wouldn't give the other Elf the satisfaction of seeing her barb hit home. The fact that her great-grandmother had been a fairy did not make Tamara any less of an Elf. If anything, it gave her an advantage during the Beltane rites. Fairies had greater stamina during the long ritual dances that greeted the changing seasons.

And the fertility celebrations that followed.

The Beltane celebration began this eve, and tradition dictated that Rhys choose his life mate from among the single females who courted his attention during the ceremonies. Tamara knew that Nadine coveted the handsome young Elf for her own and planned to throw herself at him during Beltane. She didn't intend to let that happen.

She'd been practicing the intricate footwork required for the dance for many moon turns, and she was determined to show Rhys and the rest of the Elven community how beautiful and strong her fairy blood made her. He'd have to fight off his fellow acolytes before she let him claim her as his own.

Holding her head high and ignoring Nadine's scowling face, Tamara left her hiding spot and hurried to the maidens' hall. Even at Beltane, the chores needed to be done.

* * *

Standing with the group of unmated females, Tamara watched Rhys step out into the moonlit clearing with his fellow acolytes. Naked, except for the gold bands of office circling their biceps and calves, they strode to the center of the clearing and formed a loose circle around the sacred oak tree. The elder, seated on the outskirts of the clearing, nodded his approval and started to tap out a rhythm on the ancient deer hide drum.

Rhys threw his head back, letting his body sway to the hypnotic beat for a few moments before his feet began to pick out the intricate steps of the ritual dance. Tamara admired the way the slick coating of oil, applied by a high priest at the moment the sun rose over the eastern horizon, caught the bright beams of moonlight, each hard rope of muscle outlined in mouthwatering detail.

The elder picked up the pace, his hands flashing over the deer hide, and the men began to jump and whirl, strong young bodies silhouetted against the dark wood of the oak. Rhys moved with a sinewy grace that sent heat sliding down Tamara's spine. His shaggy black hair framed a classically handsome face, and his pointed ears peeked out from between the long strands, a testimony to his full blooded status. His shaft, fully

engorged, arced proudly upward as he followed the ancient steps of the dance, welcoming the coming season. The fertility of their tribe and the success of the upcoming planting season rested with the favor of the Earth Goddess. If the young men's performance this eve pleased her, she would bless them with bountiful crops and many strong babies.

Tamara ran the tip of her tongue around her lips. She intended to make sure that Rhys performed all his tasks with enthusiasm.

From their perches in the trees above the clearing, the mated Elves began to play on their wind instruments, calling the single females to the dance. Tamara straightened her shoulders, feeling the call of the music flowing through her as she stepped into the clearing. Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Nadine move into the line of dancers. Her rival flipped her hand dismissively before she turned to shimmy her body into the line of females facing the young acolytes.

Ignoring the full blood, Tamara lifted her lashes, and looked for Rhys, timing her entrance so that she glided to a spot directly in front of him, her movements deliberately slow and seductive. He looked up into her eyes, and a slow sexy smile curved the corner of his mouth, sending damp heat rolling through her. Lust kindled in his slate grey eyes as his gaze flitted over the outfit she'd spent the last moon cycle creating, each artfully placed piece of the translucent material revealing more than it hid. He reached for her hands, but Tamara evaded his grasp. An enticing shimmy of her hips put her just out of reach, and she treated him to a mocking smile.

Rhys acknowledged her maneuver with a slight tip of his head. "You look beautiful tonight."

"Thank you. I hope the Goddess is pleased." She twirled, following the beat of the drums. The flowing panels of her skirt parted briefly as she kicked her leg skyward, an impossible feat for a full blooded Elf. The tips of her toes sparkled, the light coating of fairy dust she'd applied earlier in the day catching the moonbeams and reflecting their silver rays. The look on Rhys' face as her bare thigh flashed past him was worth the time she'd spent practicing that move.

"You're welcome." Rhys' feet flashed across the ground in an intricate pattern of petition to the Earth Goddess.

Tamara admired the muscular length of his leg, his thighs as wide as fledgling oak. His flat, hard stomach muscles undulated with each move, and when he turned to face the ancient oak, his taut buttocks drew her attention. She could just imagine the strength they'd impart as he thrust his way into her hot core. He pivoted to face her and held out one hand, silently waiting for her to accept it.

Tamara let her smile show her approval as she placed her hand on his palm. He was a quick learner; he'd never demand her obedience even during ritual dance. She might not be a full blood, but she had no intention of following orders like some of the lesser females in the village. There wasn't a submissive bone in her body, and Rhys knew it. She intended to be his mate and his partner; she'd settle for no less.

Rhys closed his hand around hers, a sexy smile lingering on his lips. They continued to dance their way around the tree, the center of the Earth Goddess's sacred circle, along with the other acolytes and females. Tamara knew it was merely a formality. Rhys belonged with her, and she defied Nadine or any of the other hopeful females to try to take him away. His choice had been made long ago.

Rhys ran his hand down her arm, his fingers brushing over her flesh with the softest of touches. Shivers of heat snaked their way across the surface of her skin, following that touch. A wickedly sinful smile played across his handsome face, and he drew her in closer to sear a kiss across her lips.

Tamara gasped, startled despite herself at the wild leap of need that surged through her at the touch of his lips. Her focus narrowed to the handsome Elf holding her hands. The tree, the other Elves, the sound of the drums beating out their rhythm faded away. She could see the naked lust in Rhys' eyes, feel his hard shaft pressing against her stomach through the wispy material of her dress.

Liquid heat danced down her arm, following the trailing path of his fingers. Forcing her breathing under control, Tamara took a step backward, twirling around to face the trees.

Firm hands clamped down on her hips from behind. "I've always loved the way your tight ass moves when you danced." Rhys' warm breath fanned across the back of her neck. "I can't wait to see how it feels beneath me when we consummate the fertility rites tonight."

Tamara twirled around, forcing him to remove his hands. "I haven't agreed to be your partner," she pointed out, her voice much huskier than she'd hoped.

"But you will."

"Perhaps."

He tweaked the gold thread holding her top together, and her breasts spilled out into his hands, pale skin glowing in the bright moonlight. "We both know you were born for me."

"Really?" She arched her brows.

He grinned and slid a lazy finger across one firm mound. "Really."

"Why would I agree to tie myself to a full blood?"

"I think the real question here is why a full blood would be willing to lower himself to mate with a half breed." Nadine sprang into view behind Rhys. "Especially when he could have me."

Rhys opened his mouth to reply, his face a mixture of shock and fury at Nadine's callous statement, but Tamara covered his lips with her hand. "It is my honor she insults. I will deal with her." She gently pushed Rhys aside. "I will be back shortly to claim you."

Stepping up to Nadine, she drew her hand back and slapped the full blooded Elf across the cheek, not bothering to stay the strength in her arm. "You come between me and my beloved during Beltane rites, and I demand satisfaction, as is my right."

Nadine's hand went up to cover the red handprint on her cheek, her mouth open in shock. "You have no rights, half breed."

"On the contrary." The elder appeared at their side, fixing his stare on the two females. "Rhys has already held out his hand and she accepted it. You intervened after

that point, and young Tamara has the right to demand an apology, or failing that she has the right to meet you in unarmed combat at the base of the Goddess' sacred tree."

Nadine spat on the ground. "I am not apologizing to a half breed!"

Tamara smiled coldly. She'd known for years that this moment would come. "Then we fight."

Nadine looked at the elder. "What if I refuse?"

He shrugged. "You will be expelled from the village, with three days' worth of supplies to journey with."

Nadine glared at him, but the old man merely waited patiently. Tamara glanced back at Rhys, and his smile told her that he had confidence in her abilities. She turned her attention back to Nadine. "Well? I have better things to do this eve than wait for your decision. Apologize now, or prepare to be beaten." She knew the other Elf would never be able to bring herself to apologize, and would be forced to fight.

Nadine had made her life hell for years. That stopped now.

"She isn't even a full blooded Elf!" Contempt dripped from every word. "You can't make me fight an honor duel with a fairy."

The elder drew himself up to his full height, his voice icy cold. "Tamara Nightwing was born in this village to Elven parents in an Elven crèche and accepted as one of our own. She was chosen this night by a servant of the Earth Goddess to be his mate. If you, Nadine Deforest, refuse to acknowledge her right to demand an apology, then you will be taken to the outskirts of the village and banished for all time. Choose. Now."

The blood drained from Nadine's face as the elder recited the charge in a formal voice. Tamara could have almost felt sorry for her, if she'd shown a single ounce of remorse.

"So be it. I will fight the fairy." Nadine glared at Tamara. "And may the Earth Goddess refuse to drink your tainted blood when I spill it on her ground."

A collective gasp went up from the assembled Elves. To curse your opponent before a duel of honor was tantamount to blasphemy.

Tamara smothered the smile that rose to her lips, inclining her head toward the elder to acknowledge her acceptance of the duel. With her haughty airs and bullying tactics, Nadine had few real friends amongst the villagers. It was time someone stood up to her.

"So be it." The elder took his oak staff and paced in front of the oak tree, using the heavy stick to trace a circle on the ground. "The circle has been drawn. The first to leave its bounds or cry out for mercy will be judged the loser. May the Goddess lend you her strength and wisdom."

Tamara removed her clothing. Folding it carefully, she handed it to Rhys in a deliberately intimate gesture calculated to provoke Nadine's temper. One quick glance told her she'd scored. Elves fought their duels naked, a practical rule since the delicate materials used in their clothing would be quickly torn and destroyed in hand to hand combat.

Tamara and Nadine entered the circle from opposite sides. The elder held the oak staff high in the air and waited for the crowd to quiet. "Let the duel begin, and the Goddess show her favor." Lowering his arm, he strode out of the circle, leaving the two women to fight.

Although they were of roughly the same height, Tamara had the advantage of weight. The fairy blood that Nadine was so fond of ridiculing showed in the lean muscles of her legs and arms. While Nadine had the slender, ethereal look of a full blooded Elf, Tamara looked like she could kick some serious butt. Tamara let a hungry smile show on her face. "Come on, you full blooded wimp. Let's see what color you bleed."

Nadine's face twisted in a baleful snarl. "You first, fairy." She danced into the center of the circle to deliver a perfect three-part attack, punch, kick, punch. A classic maneuver taught to all fledgling Elves.

Tamara evaded it easily and pivoted at the last second to land a roundhouse kick on Nadine's shoulder before the other Elf had a chance to regain her balance.

Nadine staggered backwards, just barely managing to avoid landing on the ground in an undignified heap. A look of shock on her face, she brought her fists up into a sloppy guard position.

About time, Tamara thought. She might have fairy blood but she intended to teach Nadine a very important lesson in etiquette, and it would help if the other Elf at least attempted to defend herself. Balancing on the balls of her feet, she kept her knees slightly bent while she circled her opponent, waiting for another opening.

Nadine watched her warily. She circled in the opposite direction, keeping a good distance between them. "Rhys might be intrigued by your fairy looks, but he needs a real Elf to warm his hut." She tossed her head. "He'll get tired of you soon enough and come looking for a real Elf."

"Like you?" Tamara kept her voice low and even.

Nadine nodded. "Exactly. Save yourself the hurt. Leave him now."

"I can see one teensy flaw in your logic." Tamara angled a little closer.

Nadine frowned, her guard weakening. "What's that?"

"My great-grandfather was a full blood Elf."

"So?"

"He never stopped loving my great-grandmother, and she was full fairy." She stepped across the circle and slipped a left jab under Nadine's guard, catching her in the ribs.

Nadine gasped, and dropped her hands to clutch at her side.

"And my grandmother, half fairy that she was, held the devotion of the tribal healer for their entire lifespan." Tamara snapped a quick front kick into the other girl's soft stomach.

Nadine let out a shriek of pain and doubled over, arms wrapped around her wounded belly.

"And my mother, with a full twenty-five percent fairy blood, is adored by my father, and has been since the day he set eyes on her." She lunged forward, using her

momentum to place a flurry of punches, driving the lighter Elf to her knees at the circle's edge.

"I have the blood of all three of those magnificent women running in my veins and Rhys, or any other Elf that I choose, will be lucky to win my affection."

With a light shove she knocked Nadine out of the circle. She turned her back on Nadine and walked to the elder. Bowing low in a gesture of respect, she addressed him in the formal Elven tongue. "My honor had been appeased. My opponent lies in dust and will not sully my name again lest she be banished."

The elder returned her bow. "It is as you say. May the light of the Goddess bless you during these Beltane celebrations." He gave her a knowing smile that told her he wasn't too old to enjoy a few of the Beltane rituals himself.

"I bid thee thanks." Tamara turned and walked over to Rhys.

Chapter Two

She couldn't stop the big grin that lit her face. Reaching up, she smoothed a lock of dark hair behind the point of one of his ears. "Where were we before she interrupted?"

"I think you were telling me how much you'd like to be my partner in the fertility rites."

Tamara arched her brows at him, loving the way his full lips crooked upward when he smiled. "Really? I don't seem to remember that."

"Uh huh." His eyes sparkled with mischief. "I recall you mentioning how you couldn't wait to feel me penetrate your hot, tight little pussy in honor of the Earth Goddess."

She laughed. His cheeks went such a cute color of pink when he lied. "The way I remember it, you were trying to convince me that a full blooded Elf would be able to satisfy me."

"Oh, baby." He reached out and grasped her wrist, pulling her in close. "You're going to be begging me for more. You have no idea how sexy you looked, fighting for your honor. I'm not sure I'd let you go now if you asked me to." A darkly wicked smile crossed his lips. "Lucky for me, I know you want me as much as I want you."

The sound of the drums penetrated Tamara's consciousness, their beat gaining urgency as the moon climbed higher in the night sky. She glanced around and realized that the rest of the Elves had drifted away to return to the dance. Naked bodies swirled around the giant oak in a dazzling display of devout worship.

"We should rejoin the group." She didn't move.

"Yes, we should." He slid an arm behind her and used one hand to tilt her head back.

Tamara watched, mesmerized, as his lips descended, coming closer and closer until they closed over hers in a feather light kiss that sent shivers down her spine.

She sighed, her body melting against his as his tongue swept along the seam of her lips, tempting her to open her mouth. She hesitated for a fraction of a second, just to tease him, and then parted her lips to let him slip his tongue inside.

This was what she'd been fighting for, this hard male body that set her senses aflame. He belonged to her, with her. Since birth, she'd known that Rhys would one day be her mate, and no full blooded bitch would stop her from claiming him.

She wound her arms around his neck and closed her lips, sucking on his tongue, the feeling incredibly erotic. Darts of lust worked their way to her core. The Earth Goddess would not be disappointed with her this night.

"Damn, you're sexy." Rhys worked his tongue deep into the warmth of her mouth, exploring every surface while he tightened his grip on her waist, dragging her hard up against him so that she could feel the thick bulge of his shaft pressing along her belly.

Good thing they were already naked or their delicate elfin garments would be going up in flame. She choked back a giggle. "You're pretty hot stuff yourself." She squirmed against him, loving the feel of that hard shaft.

Rhys nibbled his way from her lips to her ear, his warm breath sending shivers through her. He nipped the delicate lobe, then quickly kissed the sharp pain away. He licked and nibbled a path of liquid heat from her ear down to the hollow at the base of her throat, stopping to let his tongue linger over the vein that betrayed her rapidly beating pulse.

Tamara couldn't remember a time without him. He'd been there when she learned to crawl, to talk, to sing praises to the Earth Goddess. He'd been at her side when she'd first gone to the little school in the center of the village. A low moan of

pleasure escaped her lips when he cupped her breasts in his hands, flicking her tender nipples with his thumbs so that they rose in eager peaks, straining toward him.

"You have no idea how long I've waited to taste these." He dipped his head to suck one rosy tip into his mouth.

"Oh, sweet Goddess of Light!" Tamara arched her back as heat sizzled through every fiber of her being.

Rhys raised his head and his eyes smoldered with passion. "Methinks we need to find a soft patch of Earth to consummate the fertility ritual." He swept her up in his arms as if she weighed no more than a newborn lamb. "If the Goddess favors us, I know just the place." He strode out of the clearing, barely pausing to nod a greeting when they passed the elder.

Tamara relaxed in his strong arms, enjoying the feel of his hard muscles bunched against her. Now that they were finally going to make love, the sense of urgency fled, replaced by a desire to make this the most memorable night of their lives. The Goddess would indeed be pleased with their worship.

Rhys pushed aside the trailing branches of a colossal weeping willow, using his massive shoulders to shove his way through the thick tangle of greenery. The moonlight filtered through the leaves, making the open space next to the trunk feel magical.

He laid her down gently on a thick bed of moss he'd prepared earlier in the day. Bracing himself up on one arm, he stretched out beside her. "I've waited so long for this moment." He ran his hand down her naked body, barely restrained lust in his every touch. His eyes devoured her, hot naked desire deep in their depths. Hedy. Intoxicating. "It's hard to believe it's finally here."

Tamara's heart raced, anticipation speeding through her. "Me too."

Rhys leaned over and traced the line of her cheekbones with his finger before he slowly lowered his head to feather a line of kisses from her forehead down to her lips.

She shivered as hot flames of desire raced through her, burning away all her doubts and inhibitions. He took her lips with infinite care, kissing the corners, trailing

his tongue across the seam, asking her to open up, to grant him entrance. His mouth was wickedly sinful. Enticing. Promising pleasure beyond her wildest imaginings.

His broad shoulders dwarfed her, his body muscular and hard from years spent serving the Earth Goddess. The calloused tips of his fingers trailed across her shoulders and down to her breasts, sending waves of liquid heat rolling across the surface of her skin.

His lips followed the path of his fingers and he laved his tongue across one nipple. Tamara let out a strangled gasp at the heady sensation, reaching up to wind her fingers in his hair as lust rippled through her. He took his time, worshipping her with his mouth, driving her pleasure higher with his tongue and lips and then letting her down again while she whimpered and squirmed beneath his talented lips.

He moved lower, his silky hair tracing paths of heat across her body where it touched while he explored her ribs, her belly, and the delicate hollow of her hips.

He cupped her sex in the palm of his hand, one finger brushing across the tiny nub of her clit, and she screamed out at the pleasure that rolled through her.

“Easy, babe.” He crooned soothing words while his finger thrust deep within her, sending darts of pure lust deep into her core. He pulled it out only to replace it with two fingers, pumping them in and out of her aching pussy until a wild orgasm exploded over her, pleasure so intense it bordered on pain.

She cried out to the Goddess, her core clenching tightly around his fingers. She could hear Rhys murmuring above her, his words lost in the heat of her orgasm. He held her, his touch tender and loving while her breathing slowly returned to normal.

She opened her eyes and gazed up at Rhys. Not many Elves would have taken the time to see to her pleasure before their own. He looked back at her, a sinfully wicked smile promising more delights to come. His shaft strained upward from its dark nest of curls, fully engorged.

She reached out to trace a finger around the swollen tip, fascinated by the single drop of liquid glistening on the tip. She touched it with her finger, then lifted it to her lips. Darting her tongue out, she tasted his essence. Slightly salty, with a hint of musk, it

sent a tingling of renewed desire through her. She lifted her head, and was trapped in the smoldering depths of passion radiating from his eyes.

She opened her mouth. With deliberate slowness, she stuck her tongue out and ran it around her lips, leaving them wet and glistening.

"Taste me." He circled his thick shaft with his hand, stroking the long length of it in an easy rhythm.

Obediently, Tamara lowered her head, swiped her tongue down the length of him before she opened her mouth and engulfed the mushroom-shaped head in her mouth.

Rhys gasped aloud, threading his hands through her hair. "Ah, Goddess, that feels incredible."

Encouraged, Tamara took him deep into her throat, sucking so hard her cheeks hollowed with the effort. She swirled her tongue around the swollen tip, enjoying the feel of his smooth skin in her mouth. She traced the large vein that ran the length of his cock, using her tongue to explore every inch of his glorious shaft. The soft hair covering his balls tickled her nose, and she smothered a sneeze as she licked and nibbled at them, amazed at the way his shaft bucked and jumped with each stroke of her tongue.

"Enough!" Rhys pulled his cock out. "The Goddess decrees that on this night, we consummate the fertility rite with me buried deep within your sex." A ghost of a smile flitted across his strong face. "A few more strokes of your tongue and I'll be spilling my seed down your throat."

Tamara licked her lips and lay back on the soft moss, watching his cock bobbing above her. "Perhaps another time. I loved the feel of your cock sliding down my throat."

"Oh, there will be many other times." He towered over her, straddling her hips in one fluid movement. "The feel of your lips closing around my shaft is almost enough to make me come on the spot."

He nudged her knees apart, and settled himself between her thighs, propping himself with muscular forearms to either side of her chest. The head of his cock pushed

eagerly through the damp folds of her labia, and Tamara wrapped her legs around his waist, eager to feel that massive shaft stretching the walls of her sex.

Rhys took his cock in one hand, aiming it at the damp entrance of her sex as he recited the ritual words to the Earth Goddess. "We offer our passion and our pleasure this night to the Goddess of the Earth. May she find our offering worthy of her and bless our union, granting us happiness and fertility both now and in the future. May we always strive to please each other, and in this way please the Goddess."

"Goddess, yes!" Tamara bucked her hips upward, trying to impale herself.

Rhys chuckled. "I'm sure the Goddess will be truly pleased with your enthusiasm." Tamara felt a deep sense of fulfillment as she looked up into those grey eyes, blazing with heat. Love vied with the lust in them. Love for her. Rhys' eyes darkened and he grasped her hips, seating himself to the balls with one powerful thrust. "I have waited for this moment since the Goddess first chose me to serve her." He pulled out partway, then thrust back in as she whimpered and bucked beneath him.

Tamara felt hunger well up from her very core, welcoming his thick shaft into her depths. Heat blazed through her as her inner muscles stretched around his massive cock. She tilted her hips to allow him better access. His balls slapped her ass with every hard thrust of his hips, and a whimper of lust escaped her lips. Rhys increased the pace, shafting her with his massive cock. In and out. Pistoning. Harder. Faster. Friction built up in her depths as he surged into her repeatedly. Her muscles clamped down hard on his shaft as a second orgasm rippled to life, roaring over both of them like a tidal wave. She felt a flood of wet heat as he emptied himself deep inside her.

Rhys collapsed onto his side, wrapping his strong arms around her, and they lay tangled together for long moments, their breathing ragged while tiny aftershocks rippled through their bodies.

"I have never loved anyone but you." He brushed his lips across her forehead. "I never gave Nadine any reason to believe otherwise."

Tamara smiled up into his eyes. "I know that. But it felt so good to finally stand up to her in front of everyone, and claim you as my own. I am proud of my fairy blood, and I refuse to apologize for it." She wrinkled her brow. "You're not mad, are you?"

"No. How could I be mad at you for standing up for yourself? The hint of fairy blood gives you an exotic look." A darkly wicked grin lit up his face. "And did I mention how hot it made me to watch you fighting over me?"

"You did." She snuggled closer. "The Goddess has truly blessed us this night." He sighed happily.

"Yes, she has."

Anne Kane

Anne Kane lives in the beautiful Okanagan Valley with a bouncy Jack Russell terrier, a cantankerous Himalayan cat, and too many fish to count. She has two handsome sons and three adorable grandchildren. By day, she's a respectable bean counter, but after hours her imagination soars and she writes romances that span the galaxy and encompass beings of all sizes, shapes and origins. She first started telling stories as a child and she just can't seem to stop.

Her hobbies include kayaking, hiking, motorcycles, swimming, skating, karate, playing guitar, singing and, of course, reading. You can find Anne at:

Website: www.AnneKane.com

Blog: <http://annekane.wordpress.com>

Twitter: www.twitter.com/annekane

Facebook: www.facebook.com/anne.kane.author

Changeling Author Link:

<http://www.changelingpress.com/author.php?uid=116>

What Doesn't Kill Tuesday Richards

Rebecca's determined to start a new life with Rick. But her past still haunts her -- despite the restraining orders. This time her ex may have pushed her just a little too far...

What Doesn't Kill

Rick circled Rebecca's clit with his thumb while his tongue ran smoothly between her pussy lips. She lifted her hips and did everything she was supposed to do when a gorgeous man had his head between her legs. Despite the talented tongue, hard hands and strong defined muscles, Rebecca just couldn't get her head in the game.

Rick lifted his head. "Babe, what's wrong?" Worried brown eyes glittered in the lamp light. "I thought you enjoyed me licking your pussy."

"Oh, honey, I do. God, you're great." She sighed. "I just can't concentrate. What if he ignores the restraining order?"

Rick wiped Rebecca's juices from his mouth and moved to the top of the bed next to her. Propped up on an elbow, he gazed down at her. "Bec, your ex hasn't been anywhere near you in two months. Neither have I, for that matter." He rested his hand on top of hers.

Her heart dropped. *Have I really been that distant?* "I'm sorry, babe. I hadn't realized I'd been that rigid. I've just got a lot on my mind."

Rick's lips pulled together in a half smile. "Is one of the things you're thinking so hard about a wedding date?"

Rebecca was shocked that of all the questions he could have asked, he chose that one. "No, to be perfectly honest, I wasn't. Why bring it up now?" She sat up, pulling the sheet around herself. "I asked you if I could have some time and you said you'd give it to me."

Rick got out of bed and stood there staring at her in all his naked glory. "On the night I asked you to marry me, you said yes as long as you could have six months to choose a date. Well, it's been six months -- seven, if you wanna be technical." He turned

and walked briskly to the bathroom door. "I'm sorry, Bec, but you need to figure out if you want to marry me. I can't just sit in limbo the rest of my life."

"It's easier to get out of an engagement than it is a marriage," Rebecca whispered, looking everywhere but at him. "You don't know what it's like to live every day in fear of the one you love."

He put a hand up, shaking his head. "I know the story, Rebecca. I can't pretend to know what it was like for you being with Jason, but I'm not Jason. I've never given you a reason to think it would ever be like that between us, and I would appreciate a chance to prove that you don't have to run anymore." His shoulders slumped and he sighed. "I love you, Bec, but I can't keep paying for what he did to you." Rick closed the bathroom door, shutting out any rebuttal she might have had.

Giving up, Rebecca got out of bed, pulled on her robe and went downstairs. She made a pot of coffee, started breakfast for Rick, packed his lunch and cleaned up the kitchen.

Rick came downstairs and sat at the dining table, eyeing the spread. "Thank you, but you really don't have to do this every morning."

"I don't mind. Enjoy." While he ate, Rebecca went back upstairs to take a shower and get ready for work.

By the time she was done, Rick's car was gone. He hadn't said goodbye. He was really upset with her. She vowed she would stop allowing the past to rule her, and fully commit to Rick.

Locking the door behind her, she stood on the porch looking at the storm clouds sitting off to the south. If they headed north and opened up, Rick, who worked in construction, could be home early and he would cook, not helping her night of seduction. Hoping the sky held its water till later in the evening, Rebecca stepped off the porch, rounding the house.

She stopped dead in her tracks, scuffing up her black knee high boots. There sat her car, in her parking space, and also in the yard, on the sidewalk and in the rose bushes. The tires were flat, head and taillights busted, all the windows shattered. Her

heart stopped and her breath came in short gasps at the graffiti on the hood. Beccy was written in blood red spray paint across the front of her black Blazer.

Two pieces of paper hung with silver duct tape from the driver's door window, at least where the window should be. She tentatively walked over to the Blazer and immediately saw the restraining order against Jason hanging from the hollowed window frame. With it was a handwritten letter. Rebecca gently pulled it from the window frame as if it would bite her if she woke up the sleeping predator. Jason's chicken scratch handwriting lined the blank paper.

Red letters read *Did you honestly think a stupid piece of paper would keep me away from you, Beccy? That was a mistake. You're mine and that is final. So why don't you turn around and reclaim your man.*

The scream that rose in her throat never left her mouth as a gloved hand grabbed her from behind, covering her mouth. His other arm went around her waist, dragging her backwards. The strap on Rebecca's purse broke in the struggle, the contents spilling everywhere.

Jason dragged Rebecca through the sliding back door and into the living room. *I did lock that door, didn't I?* She kicked his shin with the heel of her boot, only getting muffled grunts for the trouble. Throwing her head back into his nose, she heard a sickening crack of bone as he dropped her.

Without hesitation Rebecca took off for the door. Her feet went out from under her before she made it three steps down the hall. Breaking her fall with her hands, she silently begged for traction as her boots slid on the hardwood floors. She didn't get the answer she longed for -- Jason grabbed her ankles and pulled her back into the living room.

"Rebecca!" The voice of heaven came from the front of the house.

"Rick! Help me!"

Jason rolled Rebecca over and slapped her viciously across the face. Her eyes watered and she could hear Rick pounding against the front door, trying to get it to open.

Jason was on top of her, his weight holding her down. "This is for leaving me!" He balled up his fist and punched her in the ribs. She tried to move but he was too heavy. "How dare you shoot me!" Another punch. Rebecca tried to scream but she couldn't catch her breath. His hands wrapped around her throat and squeezed.

The bang of the door being thrown open gave her hope. The grip on her throat made her wish she had married Rick months ago. She realized dying could help a person see clearer, even though her vision was blurring and when she tried to catch a full breath, she was lucky to get a gasp.

"Get your hands off my girl!" Rick took a flying leap into Jason's chest and knocked him backwards into the coffee table.

Rebecca curled up into the fetal position, coughing, throat sore, trying to suck in as much air as she could. She straightened out, crawling toward Rick, who was in a fistfight with Jason.

"Bec, call the cops." Rick took a punch to the face, his head snapping to the side so hard Rebecca feared for his life.

She lunged for the phone, but Jason caught her ankle again and she hit the floor, knocking over the table. Rebecca kicked with her free leg, and the pressure on her ankle disappeared. She scrambled across the floor. Having the phone in her hand made her giddy, as if she had accomplished flying to Pluto. She dialed 911, watching fearfully as the two men rolled around on the floor.

A few seconds went by before it finally sunk into her fear-fogged brain that the phone wasn't ringing. She hit the talk button repeatedly. No dial tone. *Shit, where's my cell?* Rebecca looked around frantically. *In my purse, outside.* She jumped to her feet and raced across the room toward the door. Jason was so involved with Rick that he didn't see her.

She nearly hit herself in the face with the solid oak door on her way out, then fell down the two concrete steps, landing hard on her knees. She cried out in pain but kept moving, her purse in sight.

She searched the grass, recovering her wallet, car keys. *Where in hell is that damn...* "Ah hah!" She caught a glimpse of it by the water meter. She could hear things breaking inside. Rick and Jason were beating the hell out of each other. At any other time that might have been flattering, if one of them hadn't been trying to kill her. She grabbed for the phone.

"911 Emergency Operator. Please state the nature of your emergency."

"My ex-boyfriend broke into my house and he's trying to kill me and my fiancé. I need cops quick!"

The operator asked her a few pointed questions and she rattled off the answers while she returned to the front door to see if she could help Rick. Jason had Rick in a headlock, his face red from lack of oxygen. Rebecca dropped the phone. She ran across the room and put a knee to Jason's head, sending him backwards again. Her own momentum sent her sprawling, landing on top of him. Disoriented, she didn't expect the backhand that rocked her world.

* * *

The resonating crack of Jason's hand connecting with the side of Rebecca's face had Rick's heart in his stomach. Her still body lying on the floor next to him stopped his heart altogether.

Jason grabbed a piece of broken glass and held it to her neck before Rick's brain could register that he had moved. "Don't fucking move or I swear I'll slice her throat."

Rick put his hands out in front of him, hoping by some magical force the glass would move from Jason's hand to his, or that a gun would appear. "Jason, calm down. If you love her, you won't hurt her."

"You are so fucking stupid, you know that? I don't love her. I never have." A cocky smile moved his lips. "She was easy to manipulate. A very useful bitch. You realize how relaxing life can be when you have a pathetic slut to do all the work for you?" He pulled her up by her hair and kissed her cheek. "How wonderful it is to have someone you can use as a punching bag and know she's too feeble-minded to actually leave?"

"But she did leave you, didn't she? Bec shot you and left you lying on the floor bleeding." Rick stood slowly. "Then she met me. I've treated her with respect, loved her for who she is. I've even made her scream without ever laying a violent hand on her." He took a steady step forward and stopped as Jason put the point of the glass into her skin. A tiny drop of blood ran down her smooth neck into the crook of her shoulder, disappearing beneath her blouse. "She's witnessed and lived a life without violence. We're getting married. Rebecca is done with you, Jason. Get over it and leave her alone."

Jason chuckled. "You see... Rick, is it? You see, Rick, I'm not done with her. Beccy here is one of a kind. It took years of training to mold her to be the perfect girl for me, and I just don't have that kind of time to train another."

Rebecca came to, her beautiful hazel eyes instantly filling with fear. Jason maneuvered Rebecca to where they were both standing, belly to back, with the glass still to her throat. She moved as far from the sharp object as she could, but in the confining restraint of Jason's arms she couldn't get far enough.

"I can see it in your eyes, Rick. You would die for her."

"Instantly." Rick wanted to move, but his body froze in concern for Rebecca's throat. "So please, let her go and I'll stay here. You want somebody to hurt, take me."

Jason turned his nose into Rebecca's hair, inhaling deeply. "He's such a sap, Beccy. How can you stand it? You need a real man, someone who can keep you in line." Turning back to Rick, Jason licked her ear. Rebecca whimpered, and a tear slid silently down her cheek.

Rick turned when the front door slammed against the wall. Two police officers charged down the hall, guns drawn. "Freeze!" The lead cop spoke sternly, holding his weapon at the ready in front of him. "Put the weapon down, sir, and let the woman go."

Jason laughed deeply, throwing his head back. "Are you fucking kidding me? When were you able to call the cops?" He adjusted his grip on Rebecca and moved behind the couch. "You took advantage of me being distracted with pussy boy over

there, grew a backbone and called the police. Well, I guess I underestimated your courage, Beccy.” He kissed her cheek and grinned at Rick. “Won’t happen again.”

“You don’t have to do this, son. Just let the girl go.” The lead cop spoke calmly. “I’ll put my weapon down if you do the same.”

Jason’s eyes went cold. “Don’t patronize me. The second I let Beccy go you’ll either shoot me in the leg, or the head.”

“No, no, I won’t. You’ll walk out of here quietly in handcuffs and you won’t be charged with anything but breaking and entering and assault. You’ll do maybe three years if convicted.” The cop lowered his weapon just an inch or so, but the other police officer kept his weapon trained on him.

Rick looked out the sliding glass door and noticed two more cops creeping through the backyard, seeking to gain the element of surprise. He stayed stone still, not wanting to alert Jason. Regaining eye contact with Rebecca, he tried to convey that everything would be okay, and that she would be safe again, even if he had to die to accomplish it.

What happened next went down so fast Rick could barely keep up. The cops outside came rushing through the back door. Jason never saw them coming. He went to the floor, landing on his side with two police officers on top of him. Rebecca scrambled away as fast as her fear-ridden body could carry her, and the other cops ran over, guns trained on Jason.

Rebecca flew into Rick’s arms sobbing uncontrollably, body shaking like a California earthquake. He wrapped her in protective arms, kissing as many tears as he could away. “It’s over, baby, it’s over,” Rick cooed in her ear.

* * *

Rebecca kept her face buried in Rick’s chest until the cops had taken Jason out of the house in handcuffs and the lead police officer came back in, followed by an EMT. Rick sat Rebecca in a chair in the kitchen and got her a glass of water.

"Rebecca, my name is Officer Santiago. Can you please tell me what happened here?" He took a small spiral notepad and a pen out of his breast pocket and turned to a blank page.

"Rick left to go to work, then I got ready for work myself and walked out the door. I saw my car had been trashed and the restraining order I placed against Jason was taped to the car. I didn't have time to think when he grabbed me and dragged me into the house." Rick rubbed her back gently, letting her know that he was there for her. "Everything after that happened so fast that it's hard to pinpoint anything but hitting, kicking and screaming. Rick came home and jumped in."

Rick gave his statement, explaining that he'd been parked out front, and hadn't seen her car when he left. He'd turned around halfway to work to come home and apologize for their fight that morning. Santiago asked a few more questions then left them alone. Rick didn't really know what to say. He made sure the front door was locked and the deadbolt thrown. He forced a length of wood into the track of the sliding back door, so nothing short of a sledgehammer could force it open. Rebecca walked slowly up the stairs to the bedroom and sat on the bed, knees drawn up to her chest.

She appeared so fragile, sitting there shaking. The bruises were starting to surface from the fight. She had a small scratch on her neck from the glass. Despite her disheveled clothing, tousled hair, and a face whose makeup was smudged and tear streaked, she was still beautiful.

Her eyes lifted and met his. Bloodshot and tearful, they still sparkled with a life that wouldn't die. Not if he had anything to say about it. Rick sat down on the bed next to her, never taking his eyes off of her beautiful face. He couldn't get over it. He'd been looking at her for almost a year now, but he feared he hadn't been seeing her. How fragile and scared she was to relive the life she had, how innocent and naïve of what a good man could bring her. She needed someone to protect her and understand her and he had failed on both accounts, too wrapped up in his own feelings and needs to realize what she'd gone through for two years while with Jason. "Bec, I'm sorry." Her eyes clouded with confusion. "For what? You saved me."

Rick sighed and his shoulders slumped. "Yeah, I did and I'd do it again in a heartbeat, but that's not what I'm apologizing for."

She reached for his hand and laced their fingers together. "What is it, Rick?"

He held her tight, afraid that her hand and every other part of her would disintegrate if he let go. "I never really understood what you went through with him. To be honest I guess I always thought you were dramatizing a little." Rick shifted to gaze at her more directly. "I'm sorry I thought you were using the abuse as a reason not to want to marry me. Please forgive me. You can take all the time you need to set a wedding date." He kissed the back of her hand and held it to his chest above his heart. "I'm here for the long haul. I'll never leave you, never hurt you, and never ever treat you like you are a piece of garbage. That is my solemn vow to you."

She turned slightly, with a knee bent up on the bed. Her hand rested gently on a sore spot on his shoulder and she smiled. "I know all that, Rick. You don't have to apologize. I was stuck in the past, afraid to move forward because I believed that eventually all guys are like Jason and I would get hurt again." Her hand moved and rested against his cheek. Rick turned his head into it. "If anyone needs to apologize here, it's me, for ever thinking you would be anything like that creep."

Rick wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her close. He kissed the bruise forming on her cheek, the one on her chin, and the cut on her neck, finally settling on her soft, luscious lips. They tasted of salt but that just added to the flavor of her body. Their mouths fit perfectly together and if he had anything to say about it, they would always fit that way. Rick slid his tongue across hers, removing the salt from every silky inch. When her mouth opened slightly, he moved his tongue between her parted lips.

Her warm tongue slid over his, putting all his nerve endings on high alert. Her hand moved slowly up his shoulder and neck, making his body tingle and dick harden. Her fingertips moved through the short part of his blond hair, pulling him closer.

He couldn't wait to feel her skin on his. Ripping the blouse from her body, he rested his hands against her cool, soft flesh. The heat generated by the kiss of all kisses

was mind numbing. Rebecca had never kissed Rick like that and he didn't know if his dick could get any harder without exploding. His fingers worked the clasp of her bra. That darned contraption eluded him, but he finally got it and slid the lacy garment down her arms, dropping it to the floor. Rick cupped her breasts, circling one rosy nipple and bringing it to a point.

Rebecca moaned softly against his lips, weaving her fingers through his hair. The hand on his chest moved down, cupping his erection through baggy jeans.

He broke the kiss and took a rosy nub into his mouth. Arching her back, he brought her closer. He teased the pink areola with his tongue, then nibbled on the sensitive tip before he moved into her, laying her back on the bed.

She tried to reclaim his cock. Pushing her hand away and gently lacing their fingers together, he gazed down at her. "Baby, as good as that feels, tonight is all about you and making you feel like a queen." Rick reached around behind his head and rested her hand on the back of his neck. He kissed her deeply, passionately. Feeling her body arching into his, he ached to be inside her, exploring her soft feminine folds. She whimpered his name as he trailed kisses down her body, her flesh burning his lips as it heated up. Nuzzling his nose into her soft curls, he inhaled her scent and fell in love all over again.

Rick circled his nose around her clit, never touching the swollen little nub. He slid his tongue across it lightly. Rebecca shivered, moaning softly. He smiled to himself and flicked the sensitive spot with his tongue a few times before he wrapped his lips around it and sucked gently. Her back arched, her fingers gripping his shoulders painfully, but it was all pleasure.

"Rick, that feels so good, don't... don't stop." Her words were only a whisper, but they were so full of love and lust it made his heart sputter and his dick grow painfully hard against the bedspread.

He lifted her legs, bending her knees and pushing them out to open her up and give himself better access. She was so beautiful, trimmed perfectly, but not bare. Rebecca smelled wonderful, a little musky from the fight, but the scent of her floral

body wash stood out more, tickling his nose. Slick with juices she glistened in the soft lamp light, beckoning him to the treasure. He slowly slid a finger into her waiting hole, feeling around the tender folds of her womanhood and finding the one spot he knew would drive her completely insane, the holy grail of womanly treasures, her G-spot.

Rebecca's sharp intake of breath and the ever-increasing arch of her back rewarded him with the knowledge that he had found the treasure he sought. Carefully holding her clit between his teeth, Rick pumped his finger in and out of her pulsing hole. It took all he had not to mount and pound her into submission, but he had to be patient and make sure that Rebecca enjoyed herself and knew she could trust him with her life.

"Oh my God, Rick, I'm going to come! Oh... oh..."

Her hips lifted, and he grabbed them and held them down. Applying more pressure to her clit with tongue and teeth, he inserted another finger and pumped them faster, hitting the G-spot every time.

Her head whipped from side to side, and her grip moved from his shoulders to the bed sheets. "Rick! For the love of God, fuck me!"

It was all the invitation he needed. He positioned himself between her legs, gripped her hips and pulled her off the pillow to him. The head of his cock pressed against her opening. Cupping both breasts, he slowly slid in to the hilt. He squeezed her tits, leaning over and flicking both peaks with the tip of his tongue.

Rebecca began to move, rubbing her clit into Rick's curls. Her pulsing pussy massaged his cock to painful attention. He pulled out slowly, then thrust quickly back to the hilt, bumping her G-spot hard. He couldn't hold back anymore. Gripping her hips, he pumped hard, their skin slapping together.

Rick could feel his balls rise. He wasn't ready, and she wasn't completely there. Rebecca had to come before him; it was only right. She would always come first in his life, forever. He stopped moving and just sat with her warm cunt wrapped around his shaft. "Rebecca, I love you so much." He pulled out slowly, her eyes rolling to the ceiling. "I don't care how long it takes, but I will have you as my wife." He slowly

inched back in. "I will never leave you." Out. "I will never hurt you." In. "I will always respect you."

Rebecca glistened with sweat. Her grip on the sheets had turned white-knuckled. "Tomorrow!" She tried to impale herself on his dick, so close to the edge she was attempting to push herself over.

Rick held her hips, wanting to make sure he had heard her screech of an answer clearly. "I'm sorry, honey, I missed that."

"For fuck sake, Rick, you're killing me!" She slid off his cock and sat up, hands on the side of his face. "I want to go to the Justice of the Peace tomorrow, and marry you." She pushed him off his knees onto his back, mounting him with a leg on either side of his body. "Then, I want to plan a big family wedding, where we invite everybody." She dropped her dripping pussy onto his raging shaft, and it was his turn to gasp. "But I want to be Mrs. Stevens tomorrow."

Rebecca rode Rick's cock hard, hands on his chest. He reached up and cupped her small breasts, wanting to feel them bounce in his hands. She undulated her hips while moving up and down on his cock, rocking his world. He'd never felt like that before, never made love like that before. His balls rose and tightened. Her vaginal muscles clenched around his shaft.

Rebecca threw her head back, screaming his name to the ceiling. He feared his grip on her hips was painful as he pounded into her, coming inside her. Her pulsing pussy felt so good, he didn't think his climax would ever end and he'd be drained of all bodily fluid. "God... Bec... You... are... fucking amazing!"

"Oh, that was fantastic!" Rebecca collapsed onto his chest, nuzzling into his neck.

Rick craned his neck to look at her the best he could. "So did you mean it?"

"What?" Lifting her head, she gazed at him.

"Are we really going to get married tomorrow?"

Rebecca slid down until his semi-erect shaft rested against her chin. "You bet your sweet cock we are!"

Rick's heart stopped when she swallowed his dick, sucking the cum from hilt to tip. "Holy shit!" he gasped. His hands fisted in her hair, controlling her movement. "Not too fast, or this is going to be over quick."

She slowly moved to the side of the bed, keeping his dick in her mouth. It was the weirdest feeling, being led around by his cock.

He moved with her, until she was on her knees on the floor and he sat on the edge of the bed. Her head bobbed on his cock. He was so turned on he wasn't sure he would be able to control his climax.

Her tongue slid up and down his shaft, licking every single drop of their cum from it. Rick reached down, pinching the nipple of her closest breast. Her suction increased with her intake of breath. His balls tightened and rose. He fisted her hair, to get her to stop.

Standing up, Rick moved behind her. Rebecca automatically bent over with her hands on the bed, but he turned her to the side and lifted one of her legs, resting an ankle on his shoulder. He moved in close and thrust into her slick cunt.

Rebecca had a grip on her thigh, with one hand on the bed for support. "Fuck, Rick! Oh my God!" she screamed to the heavens. "I'm coming! Faster! Harder! Rick! Oh my God!"

"Bec!" he howled to the sky, releasing another load into her pussy.

Collapsing on the bed next to each other, they fell asleep.

* * *

Three happily married months had gone by since they'd last seen or heard from Jason. He'd been sitting in jail, awaiting trial. Rebecca had received a phone call from the prosecutor's office two weeks ago making sure she would be available to testify.

After many meetings to prepare her for trial, she was now late.

Rick sat in the front row right behind the prosecutor, who turned around, asking him where she was. "I don't know. I left the job site and came here. The only reason I could think is traffic."

“Mr. Delanie, where is your witness?” The judge seemed irritated that his court proceedings had come to a halt.

“I am sorry, your honor, I’m trying to contact her.” Mr. Delanie reached for his phone and Rick took his off the clip.

Jason sat at the defense table smirking. Rick could only imagine the thoughts that went through his head at the no-show of the one person who could put him behind bars for a long time.

“Beccy doesn’t have the guts to walk into this courtroom and testify against me. She’s always been weak!” Jason spoke with conviction, and that conviction scared Rick.

The door to the courtroom opened, and Rebecca walked in, head held high, her business suit pressed and perfect. Her hair hung loosely around her shoulders. She stepped with pride through the room to the prosecution’s table. Her voice rang through the courtroom, firm and clear. “Your honor, at one time I wouldn’t have had the guts to stand up to this man.” Her eyes went to Rick. “But now, sir, I know what it is to have a man who truly loves me, and he’s helped me find the strength and courage to believe in myself.”

Tuesday Richards

Tuesday Richards is in the home stretch of college classes, working toward a business management degree. In her free time she works as a marketing coordinator and spends time with her kids. As for her name? No, her parents weren't high or drunk -- she was named after "Tuesday's Gone" by Lynyrd Skynyrd.

Visit her at www.tuesdayrichards.literalseduction.net.

Changeling Author Link:

<http://www.changelingpress.com/author.php?uid=106>

The Changelings
on behalf of the
Save the Quiet Kitty Fund
<http://savethequietkitty.com>

Natural disasters like floods, fires, and disability often hit without warning, leaving chaos in their wake. When a crisis hits our friends, we all want to help. The online writing community is made up of so many people who come together to share in a neighborhood that exists only in cyberspace. We come to know people like they're members of our family, even if we've never met them in person. Beyond cyberspace, however, reality sometimes intrudes.

Most authors are self-employed, and only have health insurance if they maintain their day job, or if their spouse's employer provides family coverage. Even when medical insurance is affordable, sometimes a preexisting condition may keep an author from being eligible. And then there are the things no one plans for -- hurricanes, fires, floods, and family emergencies.

Originally formed to provide oxygen equipment and assistance with medical bills for our friend Camille Anthony, we've met and exceeded our original goals, and now reach out a hand to other authors in crisis.