

A Good Idea

by Mindsparks and a friend

It sounded like a good idea at the time. But now she wasn't so sure. She met Nick online, on one of those dating sites, and they had met a few times and she was definitely attracted to him and the feeling appeared to be mutual.

As she was new to dating once again, having taken about a year off, she wanted to move slowly, not interested in just jumping in the sack. First, she wasn't on the pill and getting pregnant at 37 was the last thing she wanted to deal with. Second, by her calculations, August was the month that made her a virgin again! Well, okay, not really, she laughed to herself. But amongst friends the line was going a year without sex made one a "virgin" again in at least some sense of the word. And having that badge of honor, albeit, not really one she could *brag* about was something she wanted to hold onto for a bit.

And just b/c she was a virgin in being with another man, that didn't mean she had completely closed off her sexuality. The last year she had explored her body more and more, really finding out what she liked, what turned her on, what brought her to climax, what aroused her. As she worked with her hands, her vibrator and one or two other toys she had purchased but never used before, she found ways to bring her body to the brink and then....to pull back, driving herself crazy until her hand worked her clit into earth shattering orgasms that left her bucking on the bed and her legs shaking and weak.

She hoped one day to be in a relationship where she could explore all of her new found knowledge with a partner and maybe try new things, but until then, the time spent learning about herself was invaluable and built a new self confidence in herself and her body she had never had before.

But, back to Nick. They had met and gone out a few times. He was tall, muscular, with a deep voice that held a slight drawl, the tone and pitch of which hit her low in the stomach and aroused her in ways she hadn't been in awhile. They had kissed and boy, had they. His lips were soft, his tongue gentle, probing. Their few make out sessions had left her breathless and her body tuned sharply to the need that was growing inside of her. But she held off. She held off.

Because other than a strong physical attraction that sent her to bed wet and caused her to pleasure herself to new heights, she realized their lifestyles were too different and what he was looking for wasn't the same as she.

He was just back from a year in Iraq and had come home to find his live in girlfriend shacking up with a new guy, leaving him homeless and forcing him back home with his parents to figure out next steps. He had quit his job as a prison guard and had no desire to go back to that kind of work so was now working as a service manager at a local motorcycle shop as he sent in resumes to the local police departments and CHP who were desperate for new officers. He knew he'd get a job eventually but working thru the bureaucratic maze would take time.

While she liked him physically, she realized his place in life at the moment called more for focusing on his immediate needs with his career, dating women just to take his mind off his situation and frankly, just having fun for awhile after having been burned in a bad breakup.

So the night they sat at her kitchen table, having a beer and chatting seemed destined to have happened in some way. She knew it was just physical attraction, knew it wasn't going to go anywhere....They were chatting about his living situation and how bad it was and how he was trying to find someplace to live that didn't cost an arm and a leg.

"Yeah, my sister was going through the same thing. So for awhile she was going to move in here," she said.

"Where? This is only a 2 bedroom," he said.

"Oh, the garage. It's converted into a room."

"Shut the FRONT DOOR! Seriously? I gotta see this."

"Yeah, completely remodeled. Just using it for storage now," she replied.

So out they went to look at the room. Painted a nice color with hardwood floors. It was a free standing garage with windows and it's own private lock. As well it was just steps away from the back door and right inside the back door was the half bath.

Nick was amazed. "How much were you going to rent it out for?"

"About \$500 bucks," she had replied.

"I'll take it," he said only half jokingly.

She didn't know what to say as they headed back into the house to sit back down to their beers.

They chatted some more about this and that and as we did her mind was racing. What if he did move in here? Well, number one that would mean an end to their 'dating' as it were. That would have to be clear. And it would be nice to have someone around. She had been thinking about getting a roommate, just to take some of the loneliness away with her son gone to school. While she didn't need the money to live it would be nice to have some help with the rent. And it sounded like it would only be temporary, until he got a job with the police department and then he would move on.

They talked about it some more and she said, "Well, you know if we did this it would change the dynamic of our relationship. We'd downshift into being friends," she said.

"Yeah. I guess you're right," he replied as if figuring that out for the first time.

"Honestly, it would be nice to have somebody around, keep an eye out for each other and stuff," she said.

Maybe it was the beer talking or the fact that once she realized she had her out she relaxed and was really herself with him. She suddenly took the pressure off herself and didn't have to censor herself as to the right thing to say and what not to share, those rules we apply to each other when we're doing the dating dance.

By the end of the night the decision was set. As crazy as it sounded, he was moving into her place w/in a week. He was thrilled and excited to finally be out of his parents house. But when she woke up the next day she remembered what she had forgotten the night before.

She was very sexually attracted to him. She looked at him and imagined him doing things to her that she hadn't had in a long time. She knew he would be a good lover, stimulating her, driving her crazy. The fact that he was a police officer had its turn ons as well, as much as she hated to admit it.

She woke up the next morning wet from her erotic dreams of their sexual play. He the dominant, taking her, she the submissive, fighting him off but giving in to the pleasure. She dreamt of his mouth, his tongue, his cock as it fully entered her leaving her gasping and pulling him to her so she could feel every thrust as it slammed again and again into her wet pussy. The aftershocks of her dream state orgasm still stayed with her and as she rolled out of bed, she wondered if she

would be able to live in such close proximity to him without giving in to her desire.

When they had parted the night before they had been clear on their new relationship, at least she hoped so. Even so, he had left her with a kiss that had rocked her to her toes and she felt herself leaning into him, circling his neck as his hard body pressed against hers. His mouth left a trail over her lips, face, neck; his hand sliding up her side to cup the underside of her breasts. Oh, god. Yes, that would have to stop. That would have to stop.

What had she gotten herself into?

After 15 years in the United States Marine Corps, a year in Iraq, a purple heart, and several disciplinary actions, Corporal Nicholas Tattinger left the service gladly. He had served as a squad leader in the 'Sunni triangle' northwest of Baghdad and had seen plenty of action. He'd lost some buddies, killed the enemy, and been hit by a piece of shrapnel that left a thick, rope-like scar across his right pectoral and gave the military a reason to discharge him. He'd seen a lot of things that had fundamentally changed the way he saw the world, things that would often come calling on him in the dead hours of the night, leaving him disoriented and screaming in a cold sweat despite the safety of a bed far away from the sand and dust of Iraq.

The Marines left Nick with money for an education that he'd probably never use - books had their place, but he was more about action than contemplation. They left him with enough money to live on the cheap for a year without working. They left him longing for the company of women - not so much the idle chit-chat as the feel of skin and the taste of sex. Luckily, the Marines had left him in good shape to lure them in. With a nearly perfectly toned physique, at 5' 11", 190 pounds with only about 5% body fat and almost no body hair he could have been a swim suit model except for his scar and less-than-progressive attitude about male models. He kept his brown hair short though it always seemed to be a bit of a mess. He was fastidious about shaving despite the thick beard that began to reassert itself on his square jaw every evening.

Nick had always wanted to become a cop and he now figured that with his military experience and a few college courses that he'd be a shoe in for a job at a local sheriff's office or town police force. Despite his roots in Virginia, he relocated to the edge of the Bay Area in California. This had been largely motivated by the desire to make a completely fresh start when he'd come 'home' to Virginia to find his girl friend of 4 years shackled up with some prick of a lawyer. He'd submitted

several applications and was living in an extended stay hotel for the first several months of his stay in northern California.

For the first few months he'd gotten his fill of meaningless sex by trolling local bars and fucking any woman who fell into his bed. After nearly 15 months without sex, surrounded by young horny men who spoke of nothing but sex, he had turned into a machine with a seemingly unlimited urge for sex. The first woman he bedded, a twenty-ish, blonde with big breasts and a small ego had left his bed the following morning barely able to walk. She'd never been fucked (there was no 'making love' that night) five times in one night, each time faster, harder, and more aggressive than the last. She'd enjoyed the first couple times - his cock was deliciously thick and he used it, and every other bit of him, from tongue to toes, superbly. The third and fourth times were tougher for her as she was fatiguing and the drunk that she'd put on earlier in the night was turning to a hangover. When he started on the fifth time that night she began to worry - he was a very strong man and his dominance over her during their encounter wasn't unwelcome but she was physically exhausted, and the condoms, despite being lubricated had gone from chaffing to burning her. How many times would he want to do it? Thankfully he fell asleep after the fifth time and she took the opportunity to gather her clothes and leave.

He'd been surprised by that encounter as much as she had. Before the Marines he'd always considered himself as a completely normal guy so the mild dominant streak that expressed itself was something he hadn't known before. That he had taken the blonde five times that night was also completely unexpected but had relieved an itch that had been building for a long, long time. He didn't even think about the fact that she'd left him in the middle of the night - in fact at that time it came as something of a blessing.

His next several encounters were more 'normal' though he did find that he liked being in control. After a few months of purging the pure sexual energy that had been pent up in Nick for well over a year he ended his trolling. He began to focus on his job applications and found himself thinking that a relationship with a woman would be more preferable than the progressively more emptying sexual encounters he'd had. He put an ad online and met Sara.

Switching gears down into a 'relationship' of any sort was difficult for Nick. Sara turned out to be an incredible kisser, a 'soul stealer' he'd once heard such a kisser called. It was obvious that she was looking for more relationship than Nick could give her but he really enjoyed her company, and one night over beers she half offered him a room in her house and he half took her up on it, and before either of

them really understood it he was ready to move out of his hotel and into her place.

The move in day came quicker than she realized and Nick was there with his truck filled with his belongings. She gave him the key to the place and showed him around. She had cleaned her stuff out of the garage and swept the floors.

Nick was excited and it didn't take long to move his stuff into the 500 square foot space. Bed, sofa, nightstand, tv and computer along with some clothes and he was set.

"Guess that's it," he said.

"Yup. Looks like it," she replied. "Well, I'm' gonna let you settle in. You should be able to pick up the Internet from the wireless router I have set up in the house and the cable connection is hot so you're good to go."

"Great, thanks," he said. "And Sara, thanks for this. I can't tell you how great it is to get out on my own again. You've turned out to be a really cool friend."

"Your welcome," she replied.

As she walked into the house it was with mixed emotions. 'Cool friend'? Wow, how easy he was to downgrade their relationship, she thought to herself. But isn't that what she wanted? No complications? 'Just friends'? Those had been her words. That had been her stipulation. So why was she so upset?

She shook it off and went about her day.

As the first week passed they fell into a comfortable routine. Sara went back to perusing the online ads and exchanged emails with a couple of men. Nick came and went, sometimes staying out late at night, other times home at a semi decent hour. She tried not to take notice of his schedule but couldn't help wondering if he was out 'sowing his wild oats.'

Nights were the hardest. She'd lay in bed trying to work on her computer or read a book and could see the lights of his room outside her window. She wondered what he was up to, what he was doing, if he was thinking about her the way she was now thinking about him. As she replayed their earlier kisses, her mind filled again with thoughts of his mouth on her breasts and she moved her hand down under her shorts to find she was wet once again. She groaned to herself.

Oh, well, what's the harm in masturbating to thoughts of Nick? He would never know and if she didn't do something soon she was going to explode.

She continued moving her hand down to her pussy and started rubbing her clit, feeling her juices build up and slide out of her. Her other hand slid her tank top down, exposing her breasts. Soon her laptop was on the nightstand next to her, her lights were off and her covers thrown back. Quickly she got rid of her shorts and tank top and lay on top of her covers with both hands exploring her body, imagining they were his.

Her right hand pinched and played with her nipples until they were hardened like little nubs, growing tighter as the cool night air and her fingers pulled them taut. Her left hand was massaging the folds of her pussy, brushing subtly against her clit as she began to feel the pleasure build up in her stomach and shivers start sliding down her arms.

She moaned slightly as first one, then a second finger penetrated her and she imagined it was Nick's cock, slowly sliding in, just slightly, teasing her and then pulling out. She moved her hips around as her fingers continued to play and tease her while imagining him on top of her, his palms on both sides of her shoulders as his mouth started to slowly nibble at her lips, his tongue darting into her mouth, first slowly, then more insistent.

Her fingers continued to move in and out of her pussy and she felt her juices wet her entire mound and cupped it the way she imagined he would and lifted her hips to meet her hand, no, his hand.

She was building up. Her nipples taut, rigid, her breasts full, heavy, ripe. His mouth moving down to her breasts taking each one in turn into his mouth, nibbling and biting at her nipple, just a little too hard, leaving her to gasp out as the pain shot thru her slowly turning into a wanton pleasure.

Her fingers moved back down and now three fingers entered her and she imagined his cock sliding deeper as she lifted up to take him in. By now her movements were more insistent and she gave over to the feelings raging through her body, shutting down her mind and exploring the pleasures of her hands imagining it was him doing all of these things to her.

As she continued to slam her fingers into her, her other hand moved down and rubbed her clit back and forth and she felt herself building up, felt the heat and rush build up until finally, the release as wave after wave washed over her. She

tried not to moan out loud but whispered “oh god, oh god, oh god, yes” hoping the sound couldn’t travel outside into his tiny room in the backyard.

As she felt the shockwaves rock her body, shooting down her legs, up her waist and into her chest she gave into the feeling and slowed her movements, pulling every contraction out of her muscle until she was left, spent, on the bed, tangled in the sheets....and alone.

Nick, dressed casually in jeans, a dark tee, and snake-skin boots has been sitting at the bar of Vince’s Saturday Night Lounge for about an hour, putting on a slow drunk like a bride puts on her stockings. He’s been out of the Marine Corps since getting a medical discharge two months ago after getting hit while leading a patrol in the ‘Sun-triangle’ area of Iraq.

He occasionally makes some small talk with Vivian, the 50-something bartender that has been serving him his rye whiskey and sodas since he walked in. He watches a ball game on the old TV above the bar and occasionally scans the lounge for ‘her’, which seems odd as most of the clientele in Vince’s seem to fall into the the 40+, alcoholic, and male demographic. He doesn’t seem at all phased by this and continues to nurse the drink, pacing himself so that there is no chance that he’ll pass out before last call.

Between innings the network cuts to a promo for the local news which features a quick flash of soldiers firing their weapons in the bright sun light of what could only be Iraq and then cuts to an image of a Marine comforting a seriously injured buddy. A near imperceptible shadow crosses Nick’s face and the corner of his right eye twitches uncontrollably for awhile. Pacing be damned, Nick finishes the cheap rye in a swallow, looking away from the TV as a vein on the side of his head begins slowly deflates.

He watches a fat biker play pool with his buddies, the obese man’s ratty H-D shirt exposing a hairy, white band of biker blubber as he leans over the table to completely muff a shot at the 6 ball. His friends laugh at his clumsy shot and tease the fat biker about the skanky whore he’s been sleeping with.

“Hopefully you can stick it to her better than that ball” says skinny, meth-addicted biker who sits with his cue in hand, stroking it without realizing it looks like he’s jacking it off.

Fat biker smiles as looks at his buddies, “Fuck yes, her holes are twice the size of these pockets.” They all laugh as Nick groans inwardly as he’s heard these jokes throughout his career in the military.

Meth biker’s reply is quick, as if he’s made this joke a million times before, “Well sure, but your prick is only about half as wide as the tip of that cue so can you even feel it, or is it just her smell that lets you know yer fuckin’?”

“Fuck you.” and so on... They fade from his awareness as he looks away.

Nick turns back to the game and is seemingly unsurprised to see the platinum blonde that has taken the stool next to his. She is trashy sexuality embodied: big tits, big hair, big makeup, big ass, tall heels and tight clothes. The gum she’s mashing with her half open mouth smells like bananas, or as Nick perceives the smell, as cleaning fluid for his rifle.

The predator, present in all men to some degree, begins to shine in Nick’s eyes as he senses that this prey animal is weak and ready to be thinned from the heard. His eyes take on the erie yellow cast of a wolf’s. Her doe-eyes, surrounded by clumpy mascara and smudged eye liner flutter as she asks Vivian for a Bloody Mary in a too-deep voice tinged with an arabic accent that Nick completely fails to notice.

Nick is staring at her now, despite the fact that she is only a foot or two away and can almost certainly see him out of the corner of her eye. Her drink comes, the bloody tomato color rich and deep but impossibly thick and impossibly red for a vodka drink. Nick reaches to his drink which has been refilled without his asking and raises it to Blondie, “A toast?”

She turns to him, her cleavage a deep, dark spider hole between the grayish skin of her sagging breasts. “Sure cowboy, what are we drinking to?” Her gum smacks as if to put an exclamation point on everything she says. She takes a sip before he has a chance to answer, the red juice staining her lip.

As Nick says “We drink to fucking blondes with big tits and big hair.” he finds himself back in his hotel room, naked, his cock buried deep in Blondie’s snatch. He is on his knees behind Blondie’s pushed-into-air-ass as she receives his thrusts like a dog. It is oddly silent in the room and the only sound comes from the smacking of her gum which she never stops chewing. The room smells of smoke, but he doesn’t notice that the smoke smell isn’t from Blondie’s cigarette, still burning in an ashtray beside the bed, but seems more like the smell of recently burnt gun powder. Nick grasps her hips pulling her large, lumpy ass to-

wards him as he pushes his hips forward. He feels the head of his cock bottom out, ramming against her cervix, and despite knowing that this may be hurting her he simply thrusts harder.

“Oh yes cowboy, fuck me, fuck me with your big gun.” Blondie’s dirty talk sounds pained and labored. She moans a bit it and it sounds dull and weak.

Nick closes his eyes and focuses on the the feeling in his cock - the strong, hammering feeling of pure masculine energy that a man prides in. His member is the rock hard, physical manifestation of his sexual aggression and he drives his spike into the open gash of his grey-skinned prey repeatedly, grinding his teeth each time his hips mash into the toneless, cold, dry skin of Blondie’s pussy. The thrusting creates in Nick, as it would in any man, a euphoric high. His entire being is focused on only one thing now.

The blonde moans again, this time there is a bit of a gurgling sound and she coughs weakly.

Nick begins to feel his balls ride up his thighs and the beginning of his orgasm tingle in his ass and belly. Having nearly reached his goal his sweaty face loses some of its tension, his jaw loosens, and he opens his eyes looking out at the parking lot through the open window of his room.

“Fuck me.” Whispers Blondie in a hoarse, pained whisper her voice now most certainly male.

He begins to cum, semen bursting into Blondie’s often (mis)used cunt. He feels an immense gush of warm thick fluid rush back out of Blondie’s pussy, covering his balls and thighs. He glances down and his naked crotch is covered in blood which is smearing against the cold, gray skin of Blondie’s ass.

“What the fuck?”

He pulls his quickly softening cock from her and can’t understand why it looks like his M16. Nick is genuinely perplexed as he looks up from his crotch to Blondie.

Blondie falls from Nick’s grasp in a half roll to the bed as he looks on and he sees that Blondie’s left arm has largely disappeared in a bloody mess that exposes the bones of her shoulder. The skin on the left side of her ribs has been burned off revealing ribs and muscle. Blood is squirting from the wound near the shoulder. The deadish grey skin on the right side of her chest is as flat and hairy as a man’s.

Nick's mouth falls open. Guilt, pure and bright, bursts forth as if under pressure into Nick's chest. No battle wound could be as quick and disabling as this feels. The guilt drips from his shrunken gun-cock like cum and blood.

He looks up into Blondie's face which is no longer Blondie's. He sees Peterson's face, the left side shredded, the eye black, lifeless, and filled with blood. Nick forces himself to look at the good half of his buddy's face. With his good right eye, Peterson looks back at Nick, the expression in his face is exactly the same as it was 7 months ago when Peterson died in Nick's arms in bright Iraq sunlight. There is gurgling, labored breathing, wet with the blood that is drowning and will ultimately kill the 20-year-old PFC in one of the driest places on earth.

The light in Peterson's eye begins to fade as his breathing grows more and more shallow. It won't be long now. Nick leans in, not wanting to, but unable to stop himself. He must hear what Peterson will tell him, though he's told it to himself a million times in 7 months.

"Guess you really fucked me good this time, eh Nick ol buddy." the words, like knives into his soul, finally bring the scream.

The scream brings the sudden rush into consciousness away from the nightmare world where Nick so often finds himself. The sheets are soaked with sweat. His pillow soon to be soaked with tears.

Sara was shocked awake from her deep sleep later that night when she heard, or thought she heard, a loud noise from inside the house. She quickly turned on her bedside light, and waited for another sound as she began to collect herself. Slipping on a thin robe she padded out into the house, not bothering to turn on lights in the familiar setting. A noise seemed to be coming from Nick's room, and her immediate thought was that he'd brought home some woman and was being obnoxiously loud in *her* house! 'Completely unfair' she thought to herself as she sneaked closer to his door, a twinge of jealousy pushing her to find out what it was like to tangle with Nick.

She crept closer and her jealousy immediately turned to a mild form of guilt and a stronger version of compassion when she identified the sounds from Nick's room as the labored breathing of a man's sobs. Not the out of control cries of an injury, they sounded more like the anguished gasps of a deep wound. She raised her hand to knock, the caring and maternal seed in her pushing her to help. Sara wasn't sure why she didn't knock, letting her open hand gently touch the door as

if it were his face. She stood there for a moment, insuring that his breathing was becoming less distressed, then returned to her room.

Nick's first week went surprisingly well (at least the non-sleeping, public portion of it). After agreeing to the lease and the much more difficult 'just friends' clause Nick had found her space to be comfortable and inviting. The thoughts of her kiss as well as the beautiful curves of her full breasts and wonderfully rounded, heart-shaped ass didn't fade as quickly as he would have liked, but he distracted himself on a couple of nights with quick trips to his hunting grounds at the local bars.

He went to a promising interview at the local sheriff's department later in the week. They all but offered him the position after the interview, giving him a wink and a nod that they'd be calling next Monday about any hires they were making.

He stumbled into the kitchen on the Saturday morning after his nightmare in his desperate quest for caffeine and was happily surprised to see Sara there - in a fluffy, completely un-sexy, light blue terry cloth robe, her feet propped up on a chair in front of her, reading the paper. While the robe didn't spark any feelings in Nick, Sara's long legs that had been largely revealed by the the opening in the robe did spark a very deep-seated spark in him. He tried not to stare as he grumbled a good morning to her and pulled the coffee pot from its warmer and poured the last cup of her wonderfully dark brew into his 'Semper Fi' mug.

"You know they say that you your taste in coffee is the same as your taste in women?" he smiled looking at Sara who'd put down the paper, and unfortunately, her legs as well. He glanced at her and couldn't tell if she'd heard the joke before, so bravely marched on as he stirred in milk and sugar. "I like my coffee sweet, hot, and creamy white." He grinned, a slight gap between his teeth lightened the strong features of his face. "How do you take yours?"

She grinned at his boyish charms and light drawl despite herself, and responded without thinking about it too much, "cool, strong, and pale. Can I make you some more?"

"Thanks, I'd like that a lot. I tied one on last night, kinda celebratin' - I think I got the Sheriff's job!" His smile was intensified by the way his blue eyes lit up with his good news.

Sara bristled a bit at not being included in Nick's plans then realized that just friends meant that she had no rights to his celebrations. She sighed a bit, just to herself, as she thought about that and looked at Nick poking around in the cereal

cabinet. He was wearing a worn, nearly tattered pair of hospital scrub bottoms that he treated as pajama bottoms though they left little to her imagination. An even thinner, formerly dark blue, tee that had holes the size of quarters revealing tanned skin tried to cover his upper half. It contoured to his chest and upper arms, betraying the hard-packed muscular form that he had developed during his time in the Corps and even revealed the long scar across his chest. A small, well-drawn tattoo of the marine corp logo, an eagle soaring over the world, moved with the skin on his upper right arm. "Semper Fideleous" printed in strong, block letters underneath.

"What was Iraq like Nick?" She asked as she measured out coffee and water.

He paused as he was reaching for a box of cereal, then continued the motion considering his answer. "Well, it wasn't high on my list of vacation spots before I went, and it certainly didn't move up on that list after I was done with it." He tried to smile but she saw a flash of some pained emotion behind his eyes. "I don't really know how to answer that, its kinda like an inside joke, only the guys who were there understand it. I've tried to tell people about it, just never do it justice. I'm not good enough with my words to get it across to you. I just kinda think of it as being in hell but with good intentions."

His answer seemed almost programmed to Sara. That he was guarded about his experiences was obvious to her, and it didn't take a second thought for her to decide that pushing the issue wasn't a good idea. "I'd say that's a pretty good description of it. I didn't mean to bring up any ghosts for you Nick..." she was a bit worried that she'd probed too early after his nightmare or whatever it had been last night.

"Naw... its still all just a bit too... ummm... raw you know. I figure time 'll take the edge off, let the scabs fix emselves." He sat with a bowl of coco puffs in milk, the contrast of the man's body with the child's cereal; the man's pain with the goofy, gap-toothed grin painted a surreal picture of a very complex man.

"I got to meet and work with the best men in the world there. We did good work and I'm glad I went. That said, I'm pretty much ready to grow fat and happy as a sheriff in a palookaville and never think about going back. I see many doughnuts in my future." He smiled as a drop of milk trickled down his chin. More contrasts.

He looked at Sara, sitting across from him, her robe falling open at the neck, revealing a glimpse of some silky black material hidden under the safety of terry cloth. Her long, bed-headed hair framed her pale skin beautifully and he found

himself unable to look her in the eyes for any length of time before he began to feel dizzy, as if he were literally falling into her green eyes.

Cutting off these thoughts and feelings quickly, he refocused his attention on his coco puffs. “You got any chores for us today roomie? I’m pretty good with tools.”

Sara stood up, self consciously closing the gaps in her robe as she went to fill her coffee cup once again. “Actually, you got a great deal. No chores here,” she said. “Figure we can switch off with the bathroom just b/c I hate cleaning it so damn much. You keep the seat down and we both pick up after ourselves and all is well,” she finished, standing at the counter with her now full mug in her hand.

“Now that I’ve got some coffee in me I’m heading off to the gym and then meeting some friends for lunch. Got anything on tap today?” she said.

“Nope. Just nursing this hangover. A couple friends and I may take a ride out to the coast on our bikes. Other than that, lotsa water and coffee,” he laughed as he spooned in his last bite of cereal and then finished the rest of the milk in the bowl, leaning his head back as he tilted it up.

Sara couldn’t take her eyes away. Shit, he’s just eating, for pete’s sake, but the way he did it. He wasn’t slurping it up but very casually finishing his meal, putting bowl down, subtly licking his lips for the last drops of milk and sighing with contentment.

Shit, she thought. How corny to find something as basic as eating cereal a turn on. But he just looked so casual standing there completely unaware of the reaction going on in Sara’s body.

“Sounds good. Have a great ride,” she said.

“Yeah. I think at one point, when we were ‘more than friends’ we had planned to take a ride together. You still interested in that, Sara? As friends I mean,” Nick teased his blue eyes sparkling.

“Yeah, that would be fun. I’m still looking around to sign up for a motorcycle safety class to learn how to ride the damn things but that would be fun.”

“Good, maybe tomorrow then?”

“Yeah, sounds good,” she said. “Okay, if I don’t ride this caffeine high out I’m gonna forget about the gym and just skip to the lunch with girlfriends and wine. I’ll see you later,” she said.

She stepped away from the counter, self consciously pulling her robe closed again. Damn thing kept opening up and its short height, resting mid thigh might not have been the best choice for “lounging” clothes she could have picked.

“Okay, then,” Nick said.

Sara walked out of the kitchen leaving Nick at the kitchen table. He had refilled his coffee and sat down looking over the left over remnants of the Saturday paper, and typical male, went straight for the sports section.

She went into her room and grabbed some workout clothes and stepped into the bathroom to clean up a bit. Once the door was closed she stripped off her robe and stood in front of the mirror taking the time to look herself up and down and sighed.

It was hard to tell she was 37 years old, which was a good thing in so many ways. Sara peered at her face in the mirror, still sleepy and slightly swollen from sleep. There was a bit of mascara smudged under her eyes and her shoulder length dark brown hair was still tousled from sleep.

She ran her hands through her hair as she leaned closer into the mirror inspecting her face. No wrinkles, dark brown eyes fringed with even darker lashes. She smiled at herself, to see if any signs of age were showing and was pleased to see they weren’t. She still got carded, dammit. At 37. People were constantly amazed at her age. Her skin was clear with warm colorings with just a dash of freckles, very subtle across the bridge of her nose. You had to get up close to see them.

Her nose was, well, her nose. She had friends who had nose jobs but could never figure out if she could change it, how she would. Not that it was perfect, but it was there and it worked. She laughed to herself.

Her gaze moved down to her lips. They were full and red. She thought back to growing up and how ashamed she was of those lips. She thought they were too full for her face. Whether smiling or not she knew it was a feature that many were drawn to, but in early grade school days she remembered being taunted by the other girls who had slim lips.

How weird, she thought to herself, that was something I let myself be bothered by. Her lips, today, though, allowed her to get away without wearing the cavalcade of lipstick that many of her friends wore and were constantly trying to put on Sara. Clear lip gloss with maybe just a touch of color was all she could ever get away with. Because to put on anything brighter made her self conscious. Maybe she was channeling the taunts of her younger years, but she could never get used to having to always be on top of “touching up” her lips throughout the day with a new round of bright red or burnt auburn or demure pink lipstick that her friends seemed to do every hour or so, after every meal, constantly looking in mirrors to primp and make sure they were just perfect.

Nope. Her face didn’t look 37.

She took a step back and turned to the full length mirror behind the door and took in the sight of her whole body. At 5’10” she was tall for most women and again the taunts from childhood came back as she was always the tall one and it took FOREVER for the other boys to catch up as she towered over them through her grade school and junior high years. Now, she relished her height.

She took in her figure and settled on her breasts. Her areolas were a dark pink, almost ruby cover and were the size of quarters. As she kept gazing at herself she felt them start to harden and tighten into nubs, shrinking in size. Her nipples stood firm, taut and the piercing on her right breast stood out.

The piercing, she laughed. She had done it a couple years ago for god knows what reason. A recent breakup, she recalled. During that period of “will I ever be attractive to anyone again?” phase she had gone out and done it.

It was something she didn’t share with anyone. She didn’t even think her closest friends knew. It was just something that she did for herself. While some found piercing trashy, like getting a big fat tattoo on your chest, Sara enjoyed her little secret and the nights she had spent alone in bed exploring her body had played with the small hoop that pierced her nipple, circling it back and forth and letting the sensations it caused wash over her body.

It balanced well with her breasts. At 36 C she wasn’t huge but wasn’t small. Because of her height, she pulled off the size well, using particular bras to enunciate them when she wanted them noticed, but able to wear a sports bra and work out without feeling them impeding her workouts.

She moved down below her breasts to her waist and the curves that turned in as she moved down to her hips. She was blessed, she knew, that when she gained weight she always held her silhouette, small waist, wider hips, full breasts. Her stomach showed the crunches she was religious about at the gym with a slight definition of the sides of her abs showing through. While the area of her belly button wasn't rock solid it was definitely feminine with just enough curve to it.

Down to her hips and to the v between her legs. Dark hair grew there that she waxed on a regular basis. It made her feel clean and sexy and kept the shape the complemented the rest of her body.

Her legs were long and toned from cycling, swimming and running, the constant activity she would never give up. Her biggest fear was turning into one of those mid life women who let their body go. She had seen it happen with too many friends and acquaintances. It was depressing. She tied a lot of her self worth and how she was feeling into how she presented herself to the world and to end up wearing polyester pants and big baggy shirts to hide certain sins was something she would fight til the day she died.

She finished at her feet. A recent pedicure in a cherry red color complimented her still tan legs from a summer spent outside.

As she took in her body she critiqued it here and there. Could lose a pound or two there, tone that part there.

She suddenly realized she had been there for quite a few minutes without doing anything, just staring at her body. Nick was in the next room drinking his coffee and reading his sports page. God, she hoped he didn't notice the silence. How embarrassing.

She turned to the sink and turned on the water, heating it up to wash her face and brush her teeth. She pulled on her workout clothes, sports bra that covered her stomach and workout shorts. She sat down on the toilet and pulled on her socks and shoes then stood up, brushed out her hair, pulled it back in a pony tail and pulled on her sweatshirt.

She left the bathroom feeling self conscious and went into her room to grab a towel and her ipod and then stepped back into the kitchen to get a bottle of water and her car keys. Nick looked up from his paper.

"You ready to go?" he asked as his eyes quickly took her in. She suddenly felt exposed and felt his eyes travel up and down her body, or was she imagining that. Dammit, she had to get over this.

“Yup, I’m outta here. If I don’t see you when I get back, have a great ride,” she said. She left the kitchen and headed to the front door without turning back but could swear she felt his eyes following her as she opened the door, walked out and headed to her car.

Once in her car she took another deep sigh and realized her nipples were still hard and her heart was beating fast, a little adrenaline rush rushing through her from her close proximity of nakedness to Nick.

Shake it off, Sara, she said to herself. She started the car, looking up to see his bike sitting in the driveway in front of her. She imagined riding behind him as they headed out to the coast. Riding behind him, her legs straddling the machine and leaning into him, holding on for dear life as he took corner after corner, feeling the muscles working in his arms and back as he maneuvered the bike.

Enough, she told herself. She put the car in gear, pulled out of the driveway and headed off to the gym. Suddenly, she had a lot of energy she needed to work off, primarily sexula.

Sara finally got home, slightly buzzed after 10pm. Nick’s bike and truck were in the driveway but the lights in the house were off so she knew he was gone. Huh, she thought, either a friend picked him up or he just decided to pub crawl downtown and then stumble home under his own power.

It had been a great day. A great workout at the gym followed by a long leisurely lunch with some girlfriends on the patio of one of her favorite pubs in Larkspur, sitting on the patio, listening to the music, drinking good beer and gossiping with the girls.

They still couldn’t believe she had a roommate, and someone she had “dated” at one point at that.

“So isn’t it weird?” asked Rachel. “I mean, you guys were dating!”

“Yeah, like four or five times at the most, so it’s not like we were a couple or anything. I mean, he’s great and all, but dating wise, I knew he wasn’t someone I could pursue something with but really liked him. He needed a place, I had one....” Sara finished.

“yeah, but you are attracted to him, right?” chimed in Lori.

“Um, yeah, well, that’s all behind me. Like I said, he’s at a point in his life where he’s *completely* unavailable, even if he is dating,” said Sara. “Another time in my life he would be my mr. Right Now, but now...not that I have to find “the one” but I just want to know the guy is into just going with it, ya know?”

“Yeah, but still, it’s got to be weird,” said Lisa.

The three friends started chiming in with similar stories from others they had heard about how hard it was to separate any type of feelings with a man and how hard it was to be friends with them.

Sara sighed and listened to them rattle on. They just didn’t get it. All three of them were either married or in long term relationships and hadn’t been on the ‘singles scene’ in years. She considered herself their entrée into what single life was all about and wondered sometimes if they didn’t live vicariously through her, although her dating war stories were nothing to write home about.

The rest of their long lunch was fun, as soon as the topic shifted away from Sara and they ended up going to the movies and doing a little shopping after that.

Sara closed the front door to the house, flipped on a couple lights and headed into the kitchen. It was tidied up and the paper was stacked neatly on the corner of the table.

Wow, she thought to herself. I bet he’s the kind of guy who even puts down the toilet seat, she laughed as she looked around the room.

Sara realized how tired she was and was ready to relax and crawl into bed with a good book. But, since Nick wasn’t around and she figured he was out catting around and wouldn’t be back til late and then may not even enter the house, she decided to take a bath.

She locked the front door and put on one of her favorite CD’s. It was a recent rediscovery of hers that she hadn’t heard in almost 15 years. MoodFood by Mood Swings. Easy new age music that relaxed her as the sounds poured through the house.

She went into the bathroom with the giant clawfoot bathtub and turned on the water, adding her favorite bathsalts. The steam soon filled the bathroom and the aroma of the salts mixed with the steam gave the room an erotic, relaxing air. Sara began to strip off her clothes inhaling the scent swirling around her.

As the water reached its fill line, she turned it off and gingerly stepped in, taking her time to sink into the hot water feeling it engulf her body, turning her skin pink as the hot liquid covered her.

She sighed. Oh, my. It felt good. She sank further into the tub and pulled her long hair back into a rubber band and rested her head on the edge of the tub. The music from the other room filtered in through the steam and she leaned back and closed her eyes.

She would not think of Nick. She would not think of Nick. Her eyes closed, she did NOT think of Nick but worked on making her mind a blank slate as she felt her body sink further into the water and the heat relax her muscles.

She drowsed.

“Knock, Knock, Knock!”

Sara started. What the hell?

“KNOCK, KNOCK, KNOCK!”

She heard it again and was roused awake. The front door? She didn’t have a clock and didn’t know how long she had been drowsing but who in the hell would be knocking?

The knocks came again more insistent.

Damn, Nick. Probably one of his floozy girlfriends or one of his drunk buddies come over. Dammit.

She stood up in the tub and reached to the toilet and grabbed her short robe and pulled it over her still wet body, water dripping down her legs as she gingerly stepped out of the tub.

The knocking came again.

“All right. Hang on a sec,” she finally yelled. She padded to the front door leaving a trail of water behind her and as she got to it asked, “Who is it?”

“Sara? It’s Nick.”

“Nick?” she said as she unlocked the door and peeked around it, using the door to shield her robe covered body.

“Hey, do you have an extra key to my room?” he asked, trying to step into the entryway.

Sara could immediately tell he had been drinking. He wasn’t wasted but obviously looked like he had been out. She stepped back to let him in.

“Um, yeah, I have one. Where’s yours?” she asked, pulling the door open while using it as a shield to cover her robed state.

“Um, yeah, I don’t know. I guess I must have left it in my room when I left. A couple friends stopped by and we decided to walk downtown and grab a few beers,” he said coming into the house.

“jesus,” she replied. “You scared the shit out of me.” Nick stepped into the dining room as Sara shut the door. It was at that point that Nick got a glimpse of her outfit.

“Um, am I interrupting something?....or should I say, someone?” he said with a strange look in his eye.

“Huh?” Sara said. Then she realized what he meant. He thought there was someone there. “No. I was taking a bath,” she finished as she brushed by him to get to her purse in the dining room.

“Oh, yeah, well, of course,” Nick said.

Sara walked over to her purse, this time not caring what she looked like to Nick. She was annoyed. He had interrupted a perfectly good bath, was practically drunk and then thought she had a man in her room! She couldn’t pinpoint what about that bugged her so much, but it sure as hell did. Was it that he interrupted her? That he automatically assumed she was with another man? Hey. So what if she was? They weren’t even dating. Her life was her own. Why was she feeling so uneasy that he thought she had someone in her bed?

She shook it off as she reached into her purse to grab her keys. She found the ring and rather than pull the key he needed off of it she decided to give him the whole set. The sooner he was out of her way, the better. When she turned to give it to him he was right behind her and she practically fell into his arms as there was nowhere else to go. The next

thing she knew her whole body was pressed up against him with a slight “oof” that came from her lips.

She tried to pull back but she had the table right behind her and then suddenly felt his arm circle her waist and pull her closer. She tilted her head back and looked up and saw him looking down at her with a weird look in his eyes. Before she could say anything his other hand reached up behind her head, in her hair and pulled her face to his. She felt his mouth and lips cover her own as he started to kiss her. He wasn't gentle and the grip on her head tightened. She put his hands up against her chest, the keys in one of them and tried to push him away, but he was insistent. His mouth covered her own with a strong intensity and while she initially tried to resist, she found she couldn't.

Her mind was reeling as his tongue probed her lips and then pushed into her mouth, his lips bruising hers as he pulled her tighter against him.

What the hell? Was her first thought and while she tried to push him away she realized he was too strong, and started to panic. But as she did, she felt his hand in her hair, his arm around her waist, his mouth and tongue possessing her and against her better judgment stopped fighting him and kissed him back.

As soon as she did she felt his moan as he intensified his kiss and pulled at her even more. Suddenly the robe she was wearing grew too hot to wear and her breasts pushed up against it and she felt waves of something, of something wash over her.

God, she had missed his mouth on hers. God how she missed it. She returned his kiss and felt him respond once more. But as she did the tiny voice of reason still audible in the back of her mind grew loud. He's drunk! He's just using you like one of those dumb bim-bos he meets at the bars. Stop this NOW!

Dammit. With a final shove she pushed him away, breaking the kiss, leaving him and her standing there breathless.

His eyes were glazed, his mouth full and red, like he didn't know where he was. She pulled herself together, pulling her robe tight against her and just stared at him.

Slowly he came back to his senses and she could see the moment that he realized he had crossed the line.

No words were spoken. They stared at each other. Sara reached out and handed him the keys. Then, she turned around and walked back to the bathroom, her legs shaking, her

heart racing. She was upset. As she closed the door to the bathroom behind her she tried to calm her thoughts as they were racing through her mind. She was upset that he had done what he did. She was upset he thought of her as nothing more than a piece of ass he could tap whenever he got drunk. She was most upset, though, at how she had responded, how her body had responded. She was upset most of all b/c, if truth be told, she hadn't wanted the kiss to end.

Nick's momentary island of lucid thought in the river of his drunk lasted only moments, long enough to get him to his bedroom. There he passed out as the alcohol pulled him down into a grey haze, unhaunted by thoughts of war or the shame of his brutish attempt with Sara. There wouldn't be any nightmares tonight but the sleep would be thin and fitful, providing him with little rest and no solace.

With a significant amount of effort Nick was able to avoid interacting with Sara on Sunday. He knew well enough that he'd been an ass for attempting to press himself upon her while drunk and after she'd specifically de-escalated their relationship to 'friendship' status. He spent a large portion of his day watching football in his room as he nursed his hangover with a six pack, tylenol, water, and a pinch of guilt.

When his brain actually worked he thought about what he had to say to Sara, working out an apology that would hopefully save him from being evicted. It wasn't the possibility of being 'homeless' that motivated his apology. It was the potential loss of his friendship with Sara that forced him to contemplate a sincere and honest account of himself and his actions. Again his military training asserted itself - demanding of him an apology that made no excuses like "I was drunk" or, god forbid, "You were asking for it." He would take full responsibility for his actions.

Despite what he told himself he couldn't get the memories of his encounter with Sara out of his head. He replayed the vision of her walking away from him to her purse countless times. As if on film he saw how the short, thin, red robe had clung to her wet body. The way her ass shifted and swayed as she moved across the floor seemed to be a pump, pulling the blood into his cock. He could almost see the rivulets of water running down her taut thighs, across her knees, down the soft, gorgeous curves of her calves. He remembers the feel of her thick hair in his hands and the power he felt as he grasped it and pulled those lips of hers into his own. Ohhh the thought of those lips around his cock made him swell even

more quickly, the head mushrooming and reddening as it pressed its way out of his loose fitting boxers.

He thinks about the way her mouth had surrounded his tongue, taking it in then exploring back with her own. That she'd wanted that kiss as much as he had there could be no doubt. He remembers the way her breasts had felt as he'd pulled her body into his, how the damp heat that smelled of roses radiated up from the perfect 'V' shape of her cleavage. His cock grows harder, insisting upon more attention as he loses himself deeper in the memory. He isn't aware of his hand as it grasps the hard shaft and frees it from the confines of his boxers.

He thinks again about her lips. The way the red smoothness of them felt on his own... thinks about what they might look like when forming the obscene 'O' when parted around his pulsing cock. He imagines looking down into her eyes at that moment. The look in those bottomless brown pools betraying her, if only for a moment. Telling him that she wanted him, accepted the dominant passion that was driving him, and would submit herself to him.

But even without words she told him more than that on Saturday night. The bimbos he'd fucked since he'd left the Corps had submitted to Nick, but it wasn't a conscious decision when they did so. They'd spread their legs and lips for him not because they wanted to, but because they had no idea that they didn't have to. For them fucking was 'what you did'. Nick's less sophisticated buddies would have called them lemmings or cows, but his buddies were often simply the male versions of these women. Fucking women and acting the tough guy because they knew nothing else. Sara told him in any number of ways that when, and *if - for more than ever the if still loomed large between them*- she finally took him in, that it would be a very conscious decision. Her submission to him would be, paradoxically, only an expression of her dominant, self-assured nature. He is aware of this at some nearly conscious level and it captivates him. He wants her now more than ever.

He imagines the touch of her soft hand on his hip, pulling him forward and taking nearly all of the seven, thick inches of his cock into her throat. His overly active imagination imagines the soothing caress of her other hand as it traces down his balls. These thoughts begin to overwhelm him and in his mind's eye he looks down into Sara's eyes as she kneels before him. Her beautiful face framed by the top-down view of her body, breasts and feminine hips calling him. A million ideas, or maybe just one, is exchanged between their eyes as he feels the pulses of his orgasm begin. Only when the warm splash of cum hits his chest does his image of Sara fade and the blare of a Sunday football game return to his awareness.

Nick finally got the chance to deliver his apology to Sara on Monday after she arrived home from work. The exchange went as well as he could have hoped for - it was obvious that she was angry with him but she seemed willing to forgive him. After he'd said what he'd needed to say and she'd said what she'd needed to say Sara smiled a bit and handed him a small plain box. "Insurance for you next drunk."

He opened up the cardboard box and saw a lizard that appeared sculpted from stone and measured about 4 or 5 inches long. He looked at it, wondering why she had gotten it for him and why she'd have gotten him a trinket like this when he was clearly not a trinket kinda guy. He looked up at her, the confusion evident in his raised brow. "Uhhh, thanks its nice. I've always wanted a.... ummmm.... stone lizard."

Despite herself Sara let loose with a small giggle. "You dork. Shake it. I'm sure you'll be able to figure it out." The little barb hooked onto the end of her statement released the last bit of her anger with Nick.

Nick either didn't notice the barb or accepted it as payback for Saturday night. He took the lizard from the box and shook it. He was rewarded with a metallic tinkle from the lizard's belly. He turned it over and found a small metal plate, hinged in one corner, that covered the larger portion of the statue's belly. He slid the plate aside revealing a hollow that was large enough to hold a couple keys in addition to the one that already had been placed in there. He smiled, looking back up at Sara.

"Now I get to finish my baths and you get to crawl into bed even when you forget your keys. You can put him out in the yards somewhere where he won't draw too much attention to himself."

"Right... thanks Sara." He looked a bit embarrassed but would obviously recover. "So I was thinking that maybe I could, by way of making things up to you, take you for a ride this weekend? We could get some lunch and head out to the coast?"

"You know, that would be fun. Let me see how my week goes. Can I let you know in a couple of days? She answered, not ready to say yes, but not wanting to shut him down. She wanted to say yes, but was still battling her internal demons. She had realized in many ways she was also partly responsible for the other night as well in that she *had* participated in the kiss, but she was still gun shy and

needed a couple of days for them to hit their new rhythm and build back that trust again.

“Yeah, that’s fine. Just let me know,” Nick said. It was hard for Sara to read the expression on his face and couldn’t tell if he was pissed or just really didn’t care either way.

Tuesday night she had a date set with someone she had met online named Jay. They had gone out once before and had had a nice time. Nothing earth shattering and she had definitely not felt the physical reaction to him that she had to Nick, but, she figured, he was smart and intelligent. They had a nice conversation over what started as a drink at Dempsey’s and then moved out to the patio and had a nice dinner with the conversation continuing.

Jay was nice enough and the conversation was interesting but there was something missing. That, that, something, just wasn’t there. Rather than throw the proverbial baby out with the bathwater, though, she chalked it up to nerves and meeting someone new and knew that that chemistry didn’t always strike the first time.

Against her better judgment, she had agreed to have him meet her at her house and then they were going to walk downtown and grab some dinner. It was fall and still stayed light out late and seemed like a good idea at the time.

When Jay arrived to meet her Nick wasn’t home which was just as well. It would have just felt weird to have him there. Rather than have Jay come in and sit down for a drink, though, she rushed him outside and they headed downtown. She didn’t want to push her luck and for some reason didn’t want Jay in her house. At the time she couldn’t define why. She was a good judge of character and while her intuition was screaming at her to end it now she was consciously ignoring it.

She thought to herself, she could handle anything that came up. Later she would realize she had lost sight of the fact that there was another human being involved that may have his own feeling and emotions and ideas. She was good at that. She had a tendency to be so wrapped up in her own interpretation of events that she failed to see that others would perceive it in a different light.

They went down to a local Mexican place and had a couple margaritas and carnitas. Jay was well traveled with a master’s degree and owned his own consulting business that had clients around the world and was frequently flying out to meet CEO’s and COO’s on a moment’s notice.

On paper the guy was a gem. Tall, dark, fit, handsome, educated, financially secure. Granted, to Sara it didn't really matter that he was loaded and she was the furthest thing from a gold digger. She had always made out fine by herself and didn't understand women who felt the need to hook up with moneybags and expect the men to take care of them. Where was the self respect in that? She had learned long ago she would rather be with someone who really enjoyed what they did vs. someone who hated what they did yet made loads of money.

He had just relocated to the area and was currently building a house out on some property he had purchased in Sebastopol, and as they ate and drank she listened to him drone on about the plans for the house, the delays, the fights with the contractors, and the high priced interior designer he was flying out to decorate and furnish the house.

Normally Sara would be jumping into the conversation with the appropriate comments and questions but just couldn't find the energy. Her mind was elsewhere. What was sad is that Jay didn't appear to notice. She sighed as he droned on and on. She knew in her heart she wasn't into him.

All in all it was a nice meal and she had enjoyed his company for what it was worth but as they finished up and Jay paid the bill she realized that she wouldn't be seeing him again. She kept waiting for that spark to happen all night, some inkling, hell, even a 10 watt bulb blinking occasionally and had got nothing. It was nights like these dating was such a chore.

They meandered a bit through downtown and did some window shopping but Sara did her best to encourage their direction head back to her house and they were soon on their way. Later she would wonder if that had been the point that he had gotten the wrong idea but at the time all she wanted to do was get home.

Jay grabbed her hand and while she wasn't thrilled about it wasn't exactly a horrible feeling. There was just nothing there, so why was she doing it? She wasn't the type to send out mixed signals. She wasn't into the games, but wasn't that what she was doing with Jay? She scolded herself as they walked down the tree lined street. No, this guy was intelligent, he knew what was up. They both saw what was happening the same way, right?

They chit chatted about this and that and looked at the variety of homes on the surrounding blocks, commenting on the architecture. Sara would point out one or two that she liked and then Jay would launch into a reason *why* she liked the house, citing the year, architectural style and prattling on and on about the phi-

losophy of building he had just come to master through the process of building his own home.

When they got back to her house Sara was ready to say goodbye at his car, “thank you for dinner. I’m’ not sure if I said that before,” she laughed.

“It was my pleasure,” he replied, “I had a great time talking with you,” he replied.

“Thanks,” she said. In her mind she was dying to end the night but suddenly was having second thoughts. He was a nice enough guy. While she knew the date was over she wanted to end it as nicely as she could and fell back into the old standby. “I can’t believe it’s only Tuesday. Work is gonna be a bitch tomorrow. I’m sure you’re busy as well?” she asked and as she did she cringed. She was playing right into that role that she hated, the let’em’down easy and ‘I’ll call you don’t call me’ plan.

“Yeah, well, when you’re the boss you can do what you want,” he said laughing.

“True. Benefits of owning your own business,” she replied. “okay, well....” She started hoping to end the evening on a good note, but before she could, “Hey, I know it’s a school night and all that and I have a long drive home as well, do you mind if I come in and use your bathroom?” he asked.

“No, sure. Come on in,” she said, surreptitiously looking to see if Nick was home without realizing she had done it. In another state she may have been more aware and usually was, but her cloudy judgment and preoccupied mind missed what he was saying.

They walked up the steps to her house and she went to put the key in the lock felt Jay standing very close behind her and could have sworn she felt him blowing on her neck and ear. She ignored it, though, quickly trying to open the door and turn on the light.

Before she could, though, Jay had closed the door and pushed her up against the wall opposite and started to kiss her. Sara immediately flashed to the weekend before with Nick and groaned to herself, then felt the panic rise. What the hell? She put up her hands to push him away trying to break his mouth away, as he pushed his body harder into hers, his mouth still covering her own, tongue violently invading between her lips. Through her rising panic she could only think, “where did this guy learn to kiss?” and “what is it with guys?”

She pushed on him again, less gentle this time and turned her head side to side. “Jay, jay, Stop! Slow down. What are you doing?” she gasped. She tried to make light of it, having encountered amorous paramours before. This wasn’t anything she couldn’t handle but was surprised it had come from someone like him. This guy could have anyone he wanted so why was he bothering?

She was barely able to get him to pull his mouth from hers and he didn’t back up at all, but continued to pull at her, his arms around her, sliding up and down her back. Before she knew it he had slipped his hand under the back of her shirt and was massaging her back and moving slowly up to where her bra was.

“Hey, you invited me in. You’ve been staring at me all night and couldn’t wait to get out of there and I’ve been dying to do this to you all night,” he replied.

“Um, yeah, um, no,” she replied. “Can I have a little space?” She tried to squirm free but Jay interpreted that as his cue to push on her even harder up against the wall. She could feel his cock press through his jeans and up against her thigh. She was stunned. What the hell? Had she given out signals? Had she misinterpreted the evening, him? Thoughts flashed through her head as she recalled their conversations. She wasn’t a tease and hadn’t, she thought, given that vibe and intention out, so what was going on?

“Jay, seriously. Stop. I’m sorry if I gave you the wrong idea, but this is not what I want to be doing. Can you give me some space?” she repeated again.

Jay responded by sliding his free hand up her back and grasping her hair. The thought flashed through her mind that this was nowhere near the way Nick had done it, but before that thought had faded he pulled her mouth to his once more as his other hand slid to her bra and with a twist, unsnapped it.

That was when Sara felt her adrenaline kick in and started to fight back even more. “Dammit, I said STOP!” as she tried to push at him with her hands that were caught between their chests. She felt the anger rise up. Who did this guy think he was? Think she was? What signals had she given out that she was actually wanting this attention?

“Sshhhh, just a little bit .Just give me a little. You act like you’re all smart and can keep up with me but I know you’re type. You’ve been dying to have my cock in your mouth all night.” He replied.

Sara was stunned the night had gotten so out of control so quickly and started to fight back even more.

“Dammit, I have no idea what the hell you’re talking about but I swear to God, if you don’t take your hands off me right now I’m going to...” she started

Jay laughed. ‘You’re going to what?’ he said, grinding his cock up against her some more.

“She’s going to have her roommate come in and escort you from the house,” came a voice in the darkness from the back door. “Get your hands off her, NOW,” Nick said as he came into the hallway. Sara could see his expression from the light from the front door and felt herself grow cold. The man standing there was someone she had never seen before. His eyes were cold and black. His jaw was set and she was suddenly very, very afraid. This was a Nick she had never, ever seen before and one that she didn’t know she ever wanted to see again.

Jay stepped back from Sara, turning around to face Nick and seeing him for the first time. His cocky body language soon changed once he locked eyes with Nick. Sara could see Nick standing stock still, like a cat ready to pounce, more like a lion ready to kill, his arms at his sides, his hands tightened into fists. Whatever smart ass comment Jay was prepared to come up with died in his throat.

“What, you fucking him too? You really are a slut,” he turned and spat at her instead.

The next thing Sara knew Jay was jerked back from her with a violent motion and let out a cry of alarm as Nick threw him against the front door, grabbed his neck and cocked his free arm back to punch him. Sara was scared almost speechless.

“Nick? NO. Just get him out of here,” she was able to get out.

Jay was paralyzed in position by fear and Nick’s hold on him and Nick stood stock still, trying to take in Sara’s words. For a few moments nobody moved and Sara wasn’t sure what would happen next.

After a few moments Sara saw Nick’s fist relax slightly but then stepped back as he jerked Jay away from the door, opened it and literally kicked him out onto his ass. Jay stumbled down the steps, barely keeping his balance. As he recovered he looked back up at Nick and glared, now from a safe distance. His glance barely looked at Sara but when it did he smirked at her and blew her a kiss. Sara felt herself grow physically sick at his display.

Nick slammed the door shut and the sound of it drove Sara back against the wall. He turned on her before she realized what had happened and came and stood w/in inches of her, his eyes, even darker than before boring into her. All she could see on his face was rage and she still didn't recognize the person standing there.

By this point Sara had had enough of men clawing at her, kissing her, trying to dominate her and control her and felt the fear melt quickly into anger and felt the heat of it build in her until she was ready to explode.

"JESUS," she yelled at him, "What? What? You think I *asked* for this? What, this is my fault, right?"

Nick continued to stare at her and she could see a twitch start in his cheekbones as he struggled to get himself under control. "What, do you always invite guys you barely know into your home and then *not* expect something like this to eventually happen?" he spat at her.

Sara was enraged. "Fuck you, Nick. FUCK YOU. How dare you? You think I asked for this? You think I'm one of those bimbos you troll for at bars, you pick up at dives, one of these women who literally *do* ask for it wanting someone like you to come and take them?"

That remark hit Nick and she saw him wince and his eyes snap as the full weight of her words rained down on her. In spite of her anger, Sara found herself pressing herself further into the wall, unsure of what anger she may have unleashed.

The anger boiled up through Nick spurred on by the adrenaline that had dumped into his blood when he'd seen Jay assaulting Sara. He knows, at some level, that this much anger was irrational and completely unwarranted. While realizing this he still feels almost helpless to do the right thing; perhaps the sheer intensity of his emotions prevent a rational response.

"I didn't ask for any of this shit. I didn't ask for Iraq, I didn't ask for Peterson, and I sure as hell didn't ask for you." Nick scowles, brushing Sara with his shoulder as he walks into the kitchen.

Sara is frightened but also concerned - who was Peterson? Why was Nick bringing up Iraq? Where had this anger come from? She was also frustrated by the night's events. She followed him, at a safe distance, into the kitchen. Nick is rummaging through the liquor cabinet where he'd just found a two thirds full bottle of Jack Daniel's.

She watches as he opens the bottle, his back to her, and raises it to his lips. The emotions she felt only intensified as she watches him tilt his head back, lips on glass, and pour a near vertical stream of the brown fire in. He keeps pouring, beyond her comprehension, he just keeps pouring. He is unable to keep up with the flow and the whiskey begins to trickle out the sides of his mouth and down jaw his neck where the sinew and blood vessels stand out like cables under a breaking-point load.

‘He’s going to kill himself, or kill me’ Sara thinks. Without really considering her actions she walks straight at him, her eyes taking on a cold tone just a bit less intense than the tone that Nick’s eyes had held. She reaches up and with both hands rips the bottle from his hands. “I’m not going to watch you kill yourself, or kill me Nick. What the fuck is going on with you? You are freaking me out!” She was nearly screaming.

Nick coughed, wiped his face with a bare hand, the stubble making him look older, more haggard. His eyes are bloodshot. “God damn it. I’m sorry Sara. I really am.” he says looking her square in the eyes. He feels dizzy as the alcohol rushes into his blood and sits down on the floor, propped up by the kitchen cabinets against his back.

Sara sets the bottle, now only half full, on the counter, away from Nick, and kneels down so as to be at his level. She remains far enough away so that she can move away from him safely if she needs to. “Nick, talk to me. Please.” Her anger with him is slowly, very slowly, giving way to concern.

“It’s like I can’t even control myself sometimes. I ... fuck ... I” Tears well into his eyes and he quickly wipes them away but they only come back. “Nothings been the same since I came back. Nothing. I can’t sleep. I’m mad at the world. My life is empty. I have these nightmares about the really fucked up shit that happened in the sand. And then there’s you.”

Sara is confused by this. He seems to be in genuine pain and she is beginning to see that he is dealing with some ghosts of his service in the Corps but why is she a problem? She’s only been completely straight with him. “ohhh Nick. I don’t know anything about Iraq, but why me? What did I do to you? I honestly don’t know and I don’t want to be a bad guy in your life. I want to help.”

Nick laughs a sad little laugh that comes out almost as a snort. He looks up at her the tears now flowing freely down his cheeks. The little muscle in the corner of his eye is flickering again. “No Sara. You aren’t the bad guy. No...” He pulls his

hands away from his red eyes and looks into her eyes, the pain in his blue eyes almost tangible. “You are the good guy Sara. I think I’m in love with you - I’m not really sure, I’ve never been there before. I don’t know what to do about it. You see, I want something and can’t have it.”

“Nick...” she doesn’t know what to say. Is unsure if she should even say anything. She reaches out and lays a hand on his leg.

“I know that I’m in a completely different orbit than you, that I’m FUBAR’d in several major ways, and that I’ve made a fucking mess of our *arrangement*.” Arrangement comes out like he’s mocking it or himself for thinking he could ever follow through with the platonic bargain. “I’ve totally fucked you over and that just makes me want to set things right even more but I’m clueless as to how to do that Sara.” He buries his face in his hands again. “I’ve never learned how to deal with a woman anywhere but in bed.”

Nick looks up at Sara, still speechless with all this new information. Perhaps he mistakes her silence for reproach, perhaps he is too embarrassed about his confession to remain blubbing in front of her, perhaps he is just too restless to stay still with the emotions that course through him all but uncontrolled. So he stands, none too gracefully, and staggers a bit. He stumbles to the kitchen door and clumsily grabs for his keys and helmet as Sara watches him from her place in the middle of the kitchen trying to understand what has happened, what it means, and most importantly what to do about it.

“Nick, wait,” she says, before she’s realized she’s said it.

Nick stops at the back door, his back to her, his hand on the knob. He just stands there, still.

“Nick,” she starts. She doesn’t know what to say, what to do. “Nick, I, I, I’m sorry. About everything. I wish that I knew what to say, but I don’t.” Sara pauses. “I’ve come to care for you, Nick, and I care about what happens to you. And as lame as it sounds, I am here for you if you need me,” she finishes, not sure what she said, if she conveyed what she wanted to, if he even heard her.

Nick is still standing motionless, his back to her. For a few moments there is only silence in the kitchen. And then he takes a deep breath, lets it out, opens the door and closes it behind him.

The sound of the closing door is loud, metallic and cold in Sara's ears and she stands in the middle of the kitchen for a few minutes trying to process everything that has happened but her mind is racing too fast to make any sense of it.

That he has demons haunting him Sara now has no doubt and suddenly his cries from the other night make more sense. She has no idea what happened to him over there, but knows that Peterson is someone that he knew, someone that he cared about. She tries to put herself in his place, what it must be like coming home from a battlefield and incredible losses and be forced back into organized society and forced to put all of the anger and rage and impulses that were a required fact of life for survival over there under wraps. Because over here, she knew, that was frowned upon.

She shakes her head as a new understanding grows inside of her. We ask these men to go over and become barbarians, to live and die by a code that polite society has absolutely no inkling of. The only way can survive is by violence and cunning, using brute force to make it through experiences that no movie could ever accurately portray.

And then when they come home we expect them to push that all away and in the time it takes to exit the plane on US soil become civilian again so they can fit into the societal mold of expectations on how to "get along" with everyone else.

Sara takes a deep breath and lets it out.

As for his statement about her, she doesn't know what to think, how to process it. Maybe she is the first female that he's had a platonic relationship with. Having learned more about him the last couple of weeks she has seen his edgier side and is aware of his typical interactions with women. She understands that yes, she probably is different than the rest. But what he said she chalks up to the emotions racing through him.

Her feelings for him are confused, even more than before. She admits to herself now that her main attraction to him had been all that was dangerous about him. She was turned on by his danger and his bad boy attitude, playing into her own fantasies of being dominated and she got off on it.

Tonight Nick had shown her a new layer, a much deeper layer to himself as a person and it pounded home for her the fact that he was a living, breathing human with his own fears and insecurities and demons. Tonight he had become a true person to her. The initial wave of lust, to couple with him, fuck him, was gone and now she was aware that there was more to him than the physical body she craved. He suddenly became textured with even more mystery than before.

Her mind racing, these new feelings coming to the surface that she couldn't quite quantify buzzing around in her mind, she went to bed. As soon as she lay down she felt the wave of exhaustion wash over her and closed her eyes and fell into a deep sleep.

A sudden noise brought her wide awake. She opened her eyes and sat up in bed trying to see in the dark around her room. She leaned over to turn on her bedside table, "Sara." It was Nick. Her hand stopped before it reached the light.

"Nick? What's wrong? Are you okay?" she asked seeing his dark shape standing in her doorway.

"Sara, may I come in?" he asked

"Yes. Yes. Is anything wrong?" she asked still sitting up and pushing her tousled hair out of her face.

Nick stepped into her room and came over to the other side of the bed. She could sense his presence there and his body language in the dark room told her he was looking at her.

"Do you, do you want to sit down?" she said sitting up further and leaning against her headboard.

Without response Nick sat down on the edge of the bed and lay down next to her on top of the covers turning to face her.

"Do you mind if I stay here awhile?" he asked.

"Um, no. No," she said. "Here," she reached down and pulled a throw blanket over him. Then she settled back down under her covers and turned to face him. They were lying on the bed facing each other.

"Is there anything I can do?" she asked.

"Letting me lay here with you is enough," he said and she felt more than heard his sigh as his body relaxed.

Tentatively, Sara reached out to touch the side of his face with a slight caress and said nothing. Within moments she could hear his breathing get heavier as he fell into sleep.

Sara curled into her bed and watched his form move up and down with his breathing, her hand lightly touching his hair and face, so as not to disturb him. She was a mixture of emotions. But then, finally, she slept.