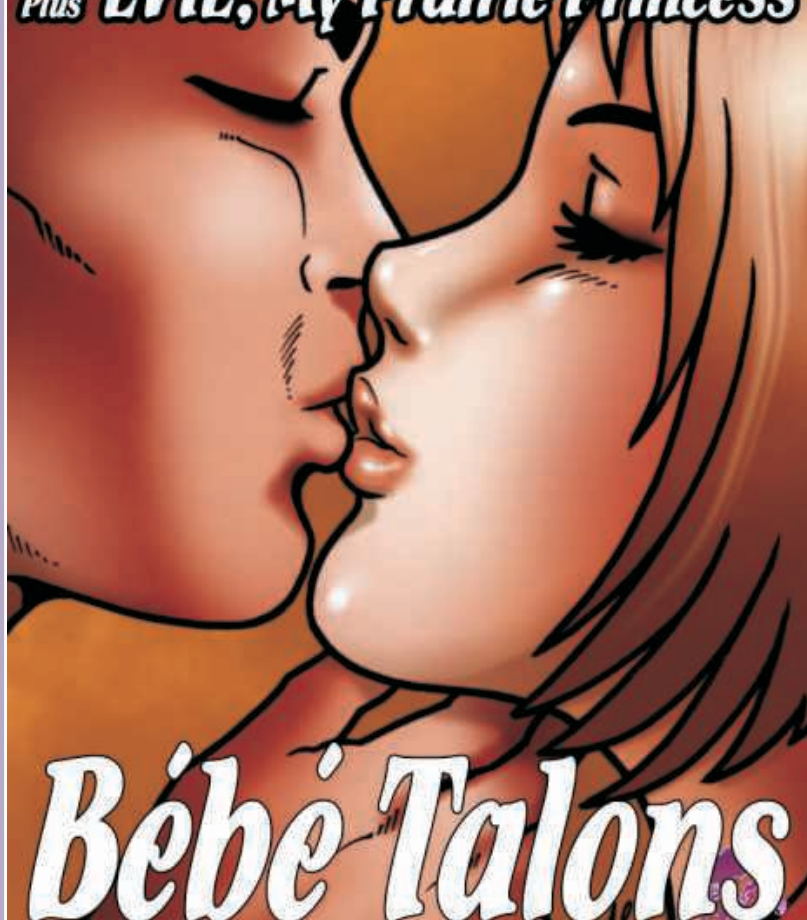


MY ALICE FROM WONDERLAND

Plus EVIE, My Prairie Princess



Bébé Talons

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MY ALICE FROM WONDERLAND

by Béb  Talons

Chapter One

My name is Harmon McQueen. I was thirty-nine years old when this narrative began some years ago. I was (am) a member of the Bar of my State, but I do not practice law per se. I am exactly five foot nine inches tall and weigh one hundred fifty two pounds. I served in the Second Desert Storm effort as a Marine Major where I earned a purple heart when “something” tore a huge hole in my chest. As a result of that hole and the loss of part of my lung, I was medically retired on full disability and I came home to my mountain aerie to recuperate and hibernate. I was going to say *live* but that is not exactly

the right word to describe my reclusive life after I was released and returned home.

I have to tell you that I had been diagnosed with PTSS - Post Traumatic Stress Syndrome - (that's something like P.M.S. only it's combat related, not hormonal!) by the Navy medics and like my Father and three Uncles before me, I became a virtual hermit or recluse when I returned to the States. Like my Dad and Uncles before me, I kept waiting for "The Bullet with my name on it" that would end it all and put me out of my self-imposed misery!

I admit that I went straight to seed. Do not pass "Go," but go straight to "Jail" (seed), (Excuse my little attempt at humor, OK?). I began to go weeks at a time without showering, but being so close to the source, I only occasionally got a good whiff of myself. I also did not change clothes very often which only added to my distinctively odoriferous, repulsive, aroma. Most people avoided any and all contact with me, which suited me just fine as I just wanted to be left alone anyway.

Too, I forgot that I owned such a thing as a razor and my beard grew to a length that was both bothersome and pleasing to me. Bothersome in that the hairs on my upper lip kept getting into my food when I ate (when or if I ate at all) and the long hair had a disturbing tendency to catch and hold just about everything that came in close contact with it! But, at the same time it was pleasing because it made me look like an old time "Man of the Mountain," and I liked that. The hair on top of my head grew until it hung well below my shoulders and I seldom combed it. As a result, it was full of tangles and matts which further accentuated my wild, obnoxious appearance.

I got away with all this because I lived alone, as I explained earlier.

I did not have a housekeeper.

Nor did I have anyone to “do” for me.

And even if I had wanted someone, who would ever have put up with my slovenly ways?

Yeah, you guessed it, I was unmarried.

I had never been married.

Nor did I think at the time that I ever wanted to be married.

I did not (still don’t) think that I was (am) a homosexual because I had never wanted to form any sort of romantic relationship with a male either. Friendship, yes, but romance? Never!

At that time, I had two passions in life, one is reading. I love to read and my library is crammed with many hundreds of books that I have read and more of those that I have not read but that I fully intend to read someday. If I live long enough!

And the second is my blooded horses. I am passionate about horses, and I get that from my late Uncle Fred who (like me) fell in love with them when he was a mere child, as did I.

My third passion is the main object of this whole narrative, my now wife, Miss Alichandra Maria Cortes McQueen, the Queen of my Heart!

I had six men who worked for me tending my ranch and I saw them occasionally around the place when I was riding. But, Jesus (Hey - soose) Cortes, my ranch foreman, is extremely competent and any problems that might arise are generally handled without them ever having to bother me about them.

Which is the way I liked it!

You see, I trusted (trust!) Jesus implicitly.

My story started on a rather warmish Halloween night a few years ago when I was surprised by an insistent ringing of my doorbell shortly after 6:00 p.m. Surprised by this intrusion because I lived high up on the mountain side with no one living anywhere near-by, and no one likely to build anywhere close as I own all of the mountain plus some six or eight thousand acres of wooded lands and meadows lush with green grass that are populated by fat, sassy steers and a hundred or so blooded horses, stretching far back into the rugged foothills of the mountains beyond.

OK, so it was mostly all left to me by the deaths of my three bachelor Uncles and my Father when I was fresh out of law school. All right, so I inherited the whole shebang when they died. So? Sue me! Jeezums! They had had the unfortunate duty of being National Guard soldiers during the first Desert Storm action in the near East where each had died as a result of I.U.D.'s and/or mortar attacks or the like. Not all at once, but within a few days of one other.

Unfortunate for them, fortuitous for me. And since none of my Uncles had ever married, there were no nieces or nephews to share with. Too, my Mother had been an only child, so as far as I knew, I had no "near" relatives at all. If I did, I never knew them.

You see, my great-great grandfather had settled this land right after the Civil War when it was still a Territory and more or less "controlled" by Apaches, Mojaves, Cheyennes and some other tribes with

whom he had formed treaties whereby he would run cattle and sheep on the land, and in return, the tribes could have a certain number of animals as "rent." When he died in the early 1900's, my great-grandfather inherited the land and by then he had a deed from the Federal Government that is in force yet today. My grandfather inherited the ranch in the 1930's and it passed to my father and uncles in the late 1970's. That's how it came to me in the late 1990's.

But, that is only incidental to my story.

As I said, the doorbell rang insistently and when I went to open it, I found a young, about sixteen or seventeen year old, beautiful, Alice in Wonderland standing there. Her traditional, youthful blue dress was covered by an equally traditional white bibbed apron that was rounded gently by the flesh beneath its bodice. She wore white silk stockings and black patent mary-jane shoes with two inch high baby heels. Around her creamy neck she wore a small gold cross on a dainty golden chain and in her pierced ears she wore small diamond studs that twinkled brightly. Her cheeks were colored with rouge and her lips were painted a bright red to match her equally bright red fingernails. Not surprisingly, a whiff of her dainty perfume wafted across my wrinkled nose and I inhaled deeply in spite of myself. Her blonde hair was curled and hung in pretty ringlets beside her smooth cheeks. Her dark eyes shone with an odd light.

"Yes?" I queried somewhat curtly. "Can I help you out?" I resisted the urge to add, 'Just show me the way you came in!' Yeah, I know, sarcastic and nasty to the bone! What can I say? Remember the old saying, beauty is only skin deep but ugly is to the

bone? Well, that's me, ugly to the bone! And what's more, I was proud of it! Little did I know that that was all about to change dramatically!

But, back to the story as she goes. . .

"Trick or treat!" this blonde beauty with the dark eyes trilled, her lips curved in a brilliant smile showing twin rows of white, white, even teeth as she held up her goody basket while curtsying prettily.

I stared at her in amazement. No one had ever come here on Halloween before. Mostly the kids who lived in the town in the valley below avoided the place. First, my Uncles and Father (after the death of my Mother) had become as reclusive as I became and they too had discouraged any and all contact with outsiders, no matter the circumstances nor who nor what nor why nor when nor wherever, if it was not concerned with the ranch and its doings, they wanted no part of it.

This had led to some rather odd local misconceptions about the place being haunted or that it was some gangsters' (translation - "Mafia") hangout (with a name like McQueen? Give me a break!), or some kind of drug related enterprise, or some other equally nefarious, though erroneous, notion about the place. Juicy rumors seem to live forever and some people will talk just to watch their lips move!

Besides, we were too far away for most kids to bother us. . .

Then, something about this girl caught my eye and I looked at her closely. For some strange reason, she looked danged familiar to me, like someone I had met or known before. . . somewhere. . .

The question was, "Where?"

"Do I know you, girl?" I asked gruffly.

"I . . . I . . . don't think so. . ." she replied hesitantly as a soft blush came to her already rosy cheeks.

"Come inside," I ordered, holding the door wide.

"I . . . I . . . think I had better just go," she whispered with embarrassment as she curtsayed low and turned to walk away. I saw her cute little nose wrinkle with distaste, but she said nothing.

"No! Wait!" I begged. Suddenly, I didn't want her to go at all! I wanted her to stay! Why? I have no idea, but all at once, that she not leave was of vital concern to me!

"I mean you no harm, Alicel!" I wheedled. "That is who you are, isn't it?"

She turned and nodded. "Yes, Sir." And she curtsayed politely again.

"And a beautiful young Alice with such charming manners!" I grinned.

"Yes, Sir," and she curtsayed again.

"Please come in, Alice," I invited again. "I'll look and see if I can find a suitable treat for you so that you don't have to trick me! I get so few visitors up here and I certainly didn't expect anyone tonight." Then, as an afterthought, I asked, "Tell me, dear Alice, why *did* you come up here?"

Pausing only to wipe her dainty feet on the doormat, Alice stepped inside. She looked up at me shyly. "It was a dare!" she whispered, her cheeks blazing with embarrassment.

I was surprised anew. "A dare?" I asked, startled.

She nodded. "Yes, Sir. Some of the other kids dared me, especially when they saw me in my Alice in Wonderland costume."

"Now why would your costume have anything to do with a dare?" I asked gently.

Blushing, Alice hung her head in shame and curtseyed. "I'm sure I don't know."

I led the way into my library and walked behind my desk. "I was just going to have a brownie with my coffee. Would you like to join me in a cuppa?" I asked.

Alice's eyes lit up with mischief. "Oh, do you think we'd both fit?" she teased.

"Fit? Oh, join me," I murmured. 'An Alice with a sense of humor!' I laughingly told myself. Aloud, "I think I meant share a brownie with me," I explained needlessly.

Again she smiled brightly. "Oh, yes, Sir! I dearly love brownies! But may I have a glass of milk or one of cider instead of coffee?" she asked politely as she curtseyed again then perched herself on the edge of the huge leather chair in front of my desk.

"Of course you may! And I'll have some cider too. My doctor is always telling me to cut down on my coffee intake anyway!"

"My Father drinks coffee all the time," Alice offered shyly. "Only he likes his black and strong enough to float a horseshoe!" she giggled.

"Sounds just like one of my hired hands!" I chuckled as I poured two glasses of cider.

"Yes, Sir, he works for you, you know."

"Who does?"

“My Father.”

“Your Father works for *me*?” I asked in surprise.

She nodded and took a sip of cider. “Yes, Sir, Jesus Cortes.”

“But Jesus only has one child, a boy, as I recollect. . .” I mused thoughtfully.

Alice nodded, her face flaming fiercely. “Yes, Sir.”

“Then, you’re. . . Alichandra?”

She hung her head in shame. “Yes, Sir, I am Alichandra Maria Cortes” she whispered as she rose, curtsayed and blushed with shame. “I. . . I’d better go. . .” she turned.

“Well, I’ll be damned!” I whispered reverently. “I will be eternally damned! I would never have guessed! Not in a million years!” I added inanely.

Now that I knew the truth and was looking closely, I could almost see the boy beneath the girlish make-up and feminine accouterments! And it was also obvious to me that he was fully at ease wearing a dress, heels, hose, make-up and all!

“Please don’t go, Alice,” I wheedled. “I did not mean to embarrass you, Sweet Alice,” I whispered softly. “I meant it as a compliment.”

He looked at me shyly. “I know. I got over being embarrassed about wearing dresses long ago!”

“I like your costume, Alice,” I told him calmly. “Will you model it for me?”

Obediently, he curtsayed gracefully, and twirled slowly, giving me the full effect of his nylon encased legs before curtseying. He watched me surreptitiously.

“Very nice, Alice. I am quite impressed! Tell me, have you been dressing as a girl very long?”

He nodded, his face flaming brightly. “Yes, Sir,” he whispered. “Since I was a baby. . .”

“I see,” I mused aloud.

“But it wasn’t my idea,” he protested weakly. “At least, not at first. . .” Warily, he sat back down.

“But you are a very beautiful little girl,” I praised. “In fact, I would like it very much if you would visit me again while you were dressed as Alice. We could have a nice tea party and chat and all.”

He looked up at me through stricken eyes. “You. . . you. . . you’re not angry?” he whispered.

“Angry? What is there to be angry about? I see a very pretty girl sitting in my chair and I have just invited her to visit me again. Is that so strange?”

He shook his head back and forth, his ringlets swirling teasingly about his cheeks. “No, Sir.”

“Good! Do you have anywhere else to go? I mean, are you expected somewhere else? Now, I mean?”
Damn, this was a Helluva time to get all tongue-tied!

He shook his head. “No, Sir.”

“Well, why don’t we have a tea party right now?” I asked brightly. “I really do want to get better acquainted with my new found friend, Alice,” I praised, walking around the desk and taking his hand in mine, squeezing it gently.

“I’d like that, Sir,” he replied, eyes shining hopefully.

“Good.” I pulled him by the hands and drew him to his feet. “Let’s go into the kitchen and see what we can come up with, shall we?”

He curtsied. "Yes, Sir, I'd like that," he repeated, looking around. "Are all these books yours?"

I nodded. "Yes, Ma'am, every last one of them!" I exclaimed proudly.

"Have you read them all?" he asked in disbelief.

"Not yet, but I am working on it. I imagine that I will have read most of them by the time I'm ninety years old, provided I don't buy any more in the meantime!"

"Wow!" he whispered reverently. "I wish I had a library like this."

"You are welcome to come over and use it any time you wish," I offered.

"Oh, that would be great!" he enthused.

"Well. . . there *is* one small string attached. . ."

"Oh?" A sudden tenseness appeared in his eyes.

"You may only use my library if you come as a girl. . . as Alice," I amended, holding my breath in anticipation of his response.

"Only as Alice?" he asked wistfully.

I nodded. "Only as Alice," I affirmed.

"In this dress?" he asked.

"Anything, as long as what you wear is made expressly for a girl," I amended gently.

He smiled brightly, the tenseness fading immediately. "Oh, that's easy! Sure, I'd like that."

I took his hand and led him down the hallway to the kitchen where I brushed away the residue of my bachelor attempts at cooking and found the makings for our party. Soon, a pot of tea was brewing and he surprised me by taking some things from my

fridge and before I knew it, he had made some fussy little tea sandwiches to enjoy with our tea.

But, rather than returning to the library, I had him carry the tea things on a serving tray into the parlor. It was the most presentable room in the house, you see. As I said, I am not the world's best housekeeper! We sat in comfortably upholstered chairs across from one another and sipped our tea and nibbled on our little sandwiches.

"Ah, this is the life!" I sighed.

"It is rather nice," Alice agreed shyly.

For many long minutes, we sat quietly, sipping and eating. I noticed that he ate daintily, taking small nibbles of his food like females are wont to do, and I realized that he had had extensive training in female mannerisms and social inter-reactions of a procedural nature. It came so naturally to him that I realized it had become part of his everyday persona!

"So, tell me, Alice," I began softly, "how did you come to be Alice in the first place?"

He sighed wistfully. "My Mother. You see, she had always wanted a daughter and her first three pregnancies all resulted in miscarriages. All the unborn fetuses had been female. Her doctors warned her after the third time that she should not try to have any more because it might cause her death. But, she wanted a daughter so much that she tried again anyway. This time, she carried the baby to term, but instead of a baby girl, they got me!

"Well, Dad was just glad to have any baby, but Mother was heartbroken because she had wanted a girl so much. When she decided to raise me as the daughter she desired, my Dad decided to let her have her way and I was there after a girl for all prac-

tical purposes. Until I was six or so, I didn't know that I was a boy, but when it came time for me to attend Parochial School, I had to become a boy whether I wanted to or not.

"But all those years as a girl had had their effect on me. I looked like a girl and I acted like a girl and I spoke like a girl and I did things like a girl and most people even treated me like a girl! And so I got through the first eight grades until I was sent to the Catholic Junior High School for the ninth grade. That was four Septembers ago and the brothers are nowhere near as accepting of me as a girl as the nuns of my old school had been.

"I was held up as an object for ridicule by the brothers teaching my classes and as a result, the bullies were given open season on me. The second afternoon I returned home with my clothes torn, my books and papers torn and muddled, and my nose bleeding, my Dad went to the school and without ceremony, barged right into the Head Abbot's office with me in tow.

"When he got done yelling and threatening retribution if I ever came home like that again, they were quite glad to assure him that it would never happen again! Dad told the Abbot that if I ever did come home again in a similar condition, the Abbot would suffer the same treatment, only more so! And he told the Abbot that it was not a threat, it was a promise!

"Then, he turned, and dragging me behind him, we left the building. The next day in class the teacher warned the bullies not to touch me under pain of correction by the Abbot, and not one of them wanted to be subjected to a public whipping by anyone, much less the Head Abbot! So, except for some

yelled threats and veiled innuendoes, that was the end of it.

“Until tonight when some of the kids from school saw me and dared me to come up here. And, I came and here I am.”

“Amazing!” I whispered. “To think that such things still happen in this day and age!”

“When I get to University next year, it will all change,” he commented, sighing.

“Yes, I remember how things were when I was in under-grad school. There were all sorts from A to Z and hundreds of stages between, and no one ever commented adversely on anything!”

“I wish high school could be like that,” he commented shortly.

“It’s the administration’s fault just as much as it’s anyone’s fault,” I replied. “If they would just grow a little backbone and put a stop to it in the first place, the bullies would soon die out because they would have no one to bully without repercussions all around!”

“But, it isn’t and it won’t be, so, what’s the answer?”

“If I told you, I’d have to kill you!” I teased.

“Seriously?” he giggled.

“People taking it upon themselves to stop the practice by their presence! That’s how. If you need someone to escort you to and or from school, I hereby volunteer my humble services.”

He giggled anew. “You’re nice. Not at all like some of the others say you are.”

“Don’t let it get around,” I gasped in mock horror. “I would not like that!”

He giggled again. “I like you, Mr. McQueen.”

“Oy vey,” I lamented, rolling my eyes in mock horror, “where ever did I go wrong?”

“You’re funny too, Mr. McQueen!” he laughed, eyes shining with pleasure.

“And you’re absolutely beautiful. Wanna fight about it?”

Again he giggled happily. “Oh, Heavens no. Whatever would I do with you if I won?” he laughed.

“Oh? You think you can take me, little girl?” I glared at him menacingly.

Well, I tried to be menacing. . .

“I don’t know. Where would I take you?” he asked, frowning in mock thought, his forefinger under his chin.

“Watch it girl, else I’ll tickle you!”

“Oh, please, Mr. McQueen. Don’t tickle me! I’m very ticklish!” he admitted soberly.

“All right,” I agreed. “But be forewarned, the tickling fickle finger of fate is always ready to go!”

He giggled again. “I’ll try to remember that,” he whispered, and before I knew it, he had leaned across our bodies and had kissed me on the cheek. And you know? I liked it!

No, I loved it!

And I wanted him to kiss me again. . .

And again. . .

And again. . .

And never stop!

So if being kissed by this beautiful boy in a pretty dress who was wearing high heels and nylons and make-up and all the rest of that feminine get-up makes me *gay*, well then, I guess I am gay because I never wanted him to stop!

Not in a million years!

* * *

CHAPTER TWO

As you may have already guessed, my personal habits and appearance were radically changed by my new friendship with Alichandra. That same night after he had left shortly before midnight, I took a shower and put on clean clothes for the first time in months. The next morning, I drove into town and got a shave and a haircut. Actually, I only had my beard trimmed back to an acceptable size and had my hair put back in a Marine cut for the first time since I had been retired. When I looked into the barber's mirror, I felt more like myself than I had in almost four years, since my brush with death.

At my next doctor's check-up, he remarked that I seemed to be in much better spirits and I told him about Alichandra's first visit. I did not mention that Alichandra was a boy in a dress!

While in town, I stopped off at a temp place to ask about temporary maid service. I figured that as long as I had cleaned up my act that I should do the same for the house! They promised to send three ladies out the next day to get started, and sure

enough, three Mexican-American ladies showed up shortly before 8:00 a.m. the next morning and by noon, I did not recognize the place! It made no difference to them that it was the first of November and getting chilly, they opened every window in the place to air me out, and I have to admit, the house smelled a lot better afterwards!

At any rate, I began to look forward to Alichandra's visits, and true to his word, he always wore a dress and high heels and nylons when he came over. I grew very fond of him very quickly!

Then one day two weeks later, Jesus came to the house and I invited him in. I didn't have to wait long before he broached the subject of his visit. "Mr. McQueen, I know Alichandra has been coming up to the main house pretty regularly of late."

I nodded. "Yep, so he has," I agreed.

"If he's being a problem, tell me and I'll stop it," he offered, blushing heavily.

"When I don't want Alichandra coming around any more, Jesus, I am perfectly able to tell him so myself. Until that time, he is welcome to come by any time, whether I am here or not!" I emphasized.

Jesus stood and held out his hand. "Thank you, Mr. McQueen. You're one man out of the herd!"

"Well, it's nice of you to say that, but I do like the boy and believe me, it's no bother to me having him come around! If it hadn't been for him, I'd still be a bum! I owe him more than I could ever repay in twenty life-times!"

"Thank you again, Mr. McQueen," Jesus repeated, turned and walked away. I noticed that his back was straight and proud and that he walked

with a sort of jaunty air that had been missing when he first came to the house.



That afternoon when Alichandra came by, I told him about his Father's visit. "What brought that on?" I asked.

Alichandra hung his head. "It was just something. . ." and he would say no more.

"Look, Alichandra, you are welcome in my home whether I am here or not. That goes for today, yesterday, tomorrow and all the rest of the days of the year from now until Hell freezes over, or until I tell you to bug off. Is that clear?"

"Yes, Sir." He smiled weakly.

"Now, to Hell with books today. Do you like horses and horse-back riding?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. McQueen, I love horses and I absolutely love riding!" he enthused. "But I don't get the chance very often because I do not have a horse of my own," he explained.

'Like all girls!' I thought wryly. 'Why should my little Alice be any different?'

"Well, how would you like to go riding with me this afternoon?"

"I'd love it!" he exclaimed, eyes shining with pleasure.

"Good, I have a sweet little mare that would suit you to a tee."

"Can I run home and change my clothes first?" he asked excitedly.

"As long as you come back in a riding habit suitable for a young senorita!"

"I've got just the thing!" he enthused, laughing brightly. "It'll knock your socks off!"

In the few weeks of our acquaintance, I had only seen Alichandra in a pants outfit once, and that had been when I took him to the Big City near us for a cattle auction, and even then, his clothing had been feminine all the way! God, but he had a cute butt in those tight jeans he had worn! And I told him so too! And he blushed right down to his toenails, which I thought quite feminine of him! Cute, too!

I was surprised at the extent and variety of female clothing Alichandra owned and I began to look forward to seeing what he would come up with next! I have to admit, this boy had gotten under my skin as no one else ever had!

By the time he returned, I had his mare saddled and ready to go, and was just finishing up my stallion when he returned. I gaped in surprise!

He was dressed for riding, all right! But what a dress! He was dressed all in leather, from his hat to his boots to the leather gauntlets on his hands, he was all in brown! Well, except for the white blouse and the lace flounces that showed from under his bolero jacket. His skirt was at least ankle length and “split” so that he could ride, and I knew he’d look great atop the hurricane deck of the mare I had chosen for him, especially since the saddle I had chosen for him was a “side” saddle!

And why not, since he looked every inch a Mexican Senorita of the late 1890’s period?

“Hey, right on time, after all the work’s done!” I teased in greeting.

“All the better to preserve my nails!” he quipped brightly. Then he noticed the side saddle. “Oh, my!” he whispered in awe. “How did you know, Mr. McQueen?”

“Know what?” I asked, mystified.

“That I have always wanted to ride using a real side saddle,” he murmured in awe.

“I didn’t,” I admitted. “It just seemed to me that a sophisticated lady in the day usually rode side saddle, and since you are My Sophisticated Lady, I just naturally put that kind on for you,” I explained sheepishly.

Alichandra stood up close to me and raised to his tippy toes. Before I realized what he intended doing, he was kissing me on the lips and it was not a fleeting kiss either! He meant it!

So, I put my arms around him and held him close. And by all that’s Holy, I kissed him back!

I mean, I kissed him back!

No, I was *not* kissing a boy in girl’s clothes.

Well, maybe I was. . . maybe. . .

OK, all right already!

Yes, I was kissing a boy, a boy dressed in girls’ clothes!

But that thought never entered my mind even once!

To me, I was kissing a very beautiful, desirable, senorita and it just seemed *right* in my mind!

“Oooh,” he whispered when we finally broke, “I am so. . .”

“If you try to tell me that you’re sorry you kissed me, I’ll skin your skirt and petticoats back and those bloomers down and blister that fat ass of yours to a fond fare-thee-well!” I threatened.

Alichandra giggled. “No, Mr. McQueen, I was *not* going to say I was sorry I kissed you, at least not in the way you think. I was going to say that I was sorry I hadn’t kissed you like this a long time ago!”

I looked at him in amazement. “Really?” I gasped. “You mean all this time that I’ve wanted to kiss you, I could have kissed you and you would not have objected or tried to stop me?”

He shook his head back and forth. “No, Mr. McQueen, I would never try to stop you. You see, I have fallen in love with you,” he admitted, hiding his face against my sheep skin coat.

“Alichandra! Don’t joke with me!” I warned.

“I am not joking, Mr. McQueen. . . er, Harmon,” he replied.

“Just call me *Queen*, like other people do,” I told him.

“Queen, eh? You know, I like it, My Queen!” he joked. “I think I shall call you ‘My Red Queen’ after the one in the story. . .” he teased.

“And you’re my little Fairy Alice Blue Gown!”

“On the other hand, maybe I should just call you *Red*,” he mused.

“Suits me,” I replied, “just as long as you don’t call me late for dinner!”

“Where are we going to ride?” he asked, startled.

“Out back and look at some of those steers I bought last week.”

“Sounds like a plan, My Queen!” he enthused and stood next to his saddled mare. “How’s about a hand up, cowboy?” he smirked.

I held my cupped hands and when he put his booted foot into it, I lifted him quickly and easily to the back of his mount, watching as he expertly hooked his leg over the up-thrust horn and wriggled his bottom into place on the heretofore unfamiliar side saddle.

“Oooh, you’re so strong!” he laughed as he took the reins into his gloved hands.

“You sure you never rode one of these things before?” I asked skeptically.

“Not on a horse!” he laughed exuberantly. “And I do not have a fat ass!” Then, “Heyah!” he shouted and they were off like a bat out of Hell!

And I had to go like another bat out of Hell to catch them too!

All in all, it was a most pleasant ride and I enjoyed his company as we rode. He chattered about everything under the sun, everything except what was uppermost in my mind, US!

The cattle were doing just fine and looked at us quizzically as we circled around them. We rode out further until we came to some of my blooded stock galloping and gamboling in the coolish air. My Alice loved watching them almost as much as I did (do!)!

It was late when we returned to the ranch to be met by Jesus. “I was just about to ride out looking for you two,” he greeted ominously.

“I was with the safest man I know, Daddy!” Alichandra greeted gaily. “We had a glorious time!”

“I was worried about you when you didn’t come home when you were supposed to. . .” he added.

“It’s all my fault, Jesus,” I placated the man, “I kept us out longer than I should have.”

“Alichandra should have told his Mother where he was going,” Jesus insisted.

“I did tell Mom that I was going riding,” Alichandra protested.

“You told her a short ride,” Jesus grumbled. “We got worried.”

“I apologize, Jesus,” I offered. “From now on we’ll take a walkie-talkie with us, OK?”

“Well, all right. . .” but I could tell he was still a little peeved that we had made his wife worry.

“Those steers in the far northeast forty are just about fat enough to drive,” I pointed out as a way to change the subject.

“Me’n the boys was figuring on doing just that tomorrow or next day,” Jesus replied.

“Fine.” To Alichandra, “Let me take your mare and I’ll put her away.”

“No, Sir! No way! Not on your life!” he protested. “I rode her. She’s my responsibility. I’ll take care of her needs!”

“Have at it, then!” I waved my hand in the air.

If Jesus noticed that Alichandra was riding side saddle, he never mentioned it to me. He just turned and stomped out the barn door in a pretended huff. Anyway, Alichandra unsaddled the mare, rubbed and curried her carefully and turned her into her stall. Then he made sure she had grain and hay and fresh water before he started for the door.

“Alice?” I asked gently.

He turned to me. “Yes, My Queen? You rang?” His eyes sparkled with mischief.

“Do you like Suzie Q.?” I asked.

“Who?” He was puzzled.

“Your mare, Suzie Q.” I replied, nodding at the mare.

“Oh, yes,” he whispered reverently. “She’s the most beautiful horse I have ever ridden!”

“She’s yours.”

“What?” he asked in surprise.

“She’s yours, if you want her,” I repeated.

“Want her?” he squealed in excitement. “Do you really mean it, Red?” he asked skeptically.

“Four hooves, swishy tail, horse teeth, side saddle, bridle and all!” I laughed in delight.

“Oh, Red! I have never wanted anything more in my whole life!”

“She’s yours, provided you always ride her side saddle and wear a proper feminine riding habit suitable for a young senorita when you’re aboard her hurricane deck,” I equivocated.

“I can do that!” he exclaimed, his eyes suspiciously wet and shining with joy.

“I’ll have the papers drawn up for you tomorrow,” I promised.

“Oh, My Queen!” he exclaimed, coming into my arms and kissing me hungrily. “Oh, my dear, dear man, I do love you, so very much!”

“I love you too, my Sweet Little Fairy Alice Blue Gown!” And I realized as I spoke the words that I did love my little Alice, with all my heart!

He leaned back and glared up at me. “And I don’t care if you do call me a *Fairy*! Just as long as I can

call you My Red Queen!" he exclaimed. "And I do not have a fat ass either!"

"Hunh? What are you talking about?" I asked. Now I was puzzled.

Earlier, when you kissed me for the first time," he explained.

I laughed and caressed his rounded behind possessively. "Plump ass, then," I teased.

"Just so long as it's not fat!" he declared boldly.

"You bet'chum, Red Ryder!" I laughed and gave him a loud slap on the subject under discussion.

He glared at me. "You're just a big bully, Red!" he snapped peevishly. Then his lips curved in a wide grin, "But I love you in spite of your many faults!"

"Faults? Me? What faults do I have?" I yelped in simulated outrage.

"Give me time," he laughed skipping out the door, "just give me time and I'll think of something!"

"Why you impudent little baggage. . ." I lunged towards him.

But the barn door closed in my face and I stopped just short of slamming into it with my nose.

I could hear his happy laughter as he ran away.

"Well, I be damned!" I muttered. "I *will* be eternally damned!"

Then I laughed, finished my chores and went up to the house.

It had been a most eventful day.

And I felt happier and more contented with my lot than I had in months.

Miss Alichandro Maria Cortes was good for my soul!

No!

More than that.

Much more!

Miss Alichandra Maria Cortes was good for me. .

Period!

* * *

CHAPTER THREE

Things went along swimmingly for several days and the more time I spent with my Alice, the more enchanted I became with her girlish manner and her feminine ways. After the third day I spent with her, the fact of her original male birth was forgotten entirely and as far as I was concerned, she was a fully sexed and sexy female and I was falling deeper and deeper in love with her as time passed. I think it must have been mutual for her because she was forever coming into my arms, kissing me sweetly and telling me that she loved me!

Our rides continued with me showing her all those places on the ranch that had delighted me and fascinated me since I was a young boy, and she would exclaim with delight every time I showed her something new. Which only added to my enjoyment and pleasure.

I kept a close eye on the time when we were out riding and made sure she was home by her expected

time. I did not want to cause any sort of rift between me and her Father. He trusted me as fully as I trusted him, and I would do nothing to disrupt that trust!

November was almost gone when Alichandra came into the library one afternoon and asked, “My Queen? What are you doing tomorrow?”

“Oh, I don’t know,” I replied absently. “It looks like our first blizzard is going to hit sometime this afternoon, tonight or tomorrow and I thought I’d give the horses a rest and just lay around the house and think about a certain someone. Why?”

“Tomorrow’s Thanksgiving, Red,” he reminded me softly.

I had forgotten all about that! “Well, have a good time with your family and make sure you have a slice of ham and turkey and a big gobba sweet patooties for me,” I teased. “And top it off with a huge piece of pumpkin pie with gobs and gobs of whipped cream.” I added with a smirk, knowing how much he loved whipped cream!

“Mother and Father told me to ask you to come down and have dinner with us,” he continued.

“Oh, no! I don’t want to impose on your family get-together,” I demurred. “You just go ahead and have fun and eat lots of turkey. OK?”

“Not OK, Red!” he corrected me soberly. “They want you to join us along with the other cowboys and their families. Mother converted the big feeding shed into a cafeteria with a dance floor and it would be a crying shame to let it go to waste,” he insisted.

“But won’t your relatives be there?” I asked.

“Oh, sure!” he confirmed. “Aunts and Uncles and Grand Parents and cousins and boy friends and girl friends and husbands and wives and lots of children and all!” he laughed. “Besides, I want you to come and eat dinner with me,” he confessed shyly.

“Isn’t that advertising?” I asked gently. “I mean, I’m proud of you and all, but letting all of them know that you have a different approach to your sexuality, isn’t that just asking for trouble?”

He laughed gaily. “Mr. McQueen, my sweet man, they all know about me! I have never tried to hide who nor what I am from them and apart from some die hard fanatics, they don’t care! You, however, might get a stare or two, but if you ignore them, they will just go away. Besides, you’re the Bigga Boss Man, if anyone gets too far out of line, Daddy has really big fists and he’s not afraid to use them!”

I gazed at her fondly. “If it means that much to you, Sweet Alice, I’ll be glad to come.”

His eyes lit up with happiness. “Oh, thank you, My Red Queen!”

And then he was in my arms and it was like kissing a wildcat! I mean, he was all over me! Like white on rice! He must have grown eight arms because it was like being held by an octopus!

And the next day was enjoyable too. . . though not as much. . .

The shed had been transformed and a full fledged fiesta was in full swing when I arrived shortly after noon to be greeted by my beautiful senorita who promptly led me to the dance floor. Under her gay, laughing direction, I learned how to dance, Mexican style!

Yes, I called Alichandra *her*! And from now on, she will be she and that's all I have to say about that! (Ooh! Shades of Forrest Gump!)

It was a wild afternoon, filled with delicious food, songs, dancing, conversations and meeting all the people I had avoided for so long.

Like I said, Alichandra was good for me.

The blizzard held off until long after all their guests had departed and then it hit with a vengeance! There would be no long rides with my sweet Alice for some time, and you know what? I resented that! I had begun to be spoiled by her constant presence and anything that kept her from me was resented!

I looked up from my book the second day of the blizzard to see Alichandra, covered with snow and shivering with cold, standing in the doorway to the library. "Alichandra!" I exclaimed, going to her and holding her in my arms. "Why are you out in this storm? Why, anything could have happened!"

"I missed my Red Queen," she whispered, kissing my lips softly. "I tried to call but the lines are down and I got worried about you," she admitted shyly.

"Does your Mother know where you are?" I asked.

She nodded. "Yes, I told her where I was going and I waited until there was a lull before I started out. She watched me all the way until I waved from the back door and she waved back, so she knows I got here safely."

"And how are you going to get back?" I demanded.

She looked up into my eyes and I saw the devilment there. "I'm not," she whispered. "I am going to stay with you until it's all over!"

"Oh no you are not!" I yelped.

"Too late, Man of Mine," she giggled. "The lull is all over and visibility is back to zero, so you are stuck with me for the duration!"

"Why, you little schemer!" I blustered. "I ought to skin those bloomers right off you and blister that fat little ass of yours to a fond fare-thee-well!" I threatened.

"Mr. McQueen!" she gasped in outrage, "I told you before, I do not have a *fat* little ass!"

"It still needs a good whopping!" I insisted.

"You always were just a great big bully, always taking advantage of poor innocent little girls!" she teased innocently.

"Don't push it, Little Alice Blue Gown!" I warned. "It's not too late to amend the situation!"

"Oh, you're all talk, Red!" she giggled. "All meat and no potatoes!"

So, I grabbed her, flipped her over my upraised knee, skinned her bloomers down to her knees and slapped her plump bottom resoundingly three times.

"Oh! Ouch! Ouch! Ouch! You big bully!" and she started to cry.

So I took her into my arms and held her, caressing her hair and crooning apologies in her small ear. Then I became aware of something.

She was not crying!

She was laughing!

Once more I had been had!

Well, she did stay over.

And during the night, I awoke to find her standing next to my bed and she was shivering and crying. When I asked her what was wrong, she told me that she had been awakened by a loud crash against the side of the house and it had scared her, and when she was scared, she always went in to her Mother to be comforted.

“So what do you want me to do about it? Take you home right now?”

She shook her head. “No, My Queen, I just want you to hold me until I go back to sleep.”

“In bed? With me? Now?” I asked, surprised in spite of myself.

“I promise to behave, Red,” she blubbered. “Please?”

I was stuck. Thank the Lord I was wearing a long tee shirt.

She crawled right in with me, snuggling close to me, which is where I found her when I awoke the next morning! At first, I didn’t realize who she was and when it dawned on me that she was wearing only her smooth taffeta bloomers and one of my over-sized tee shirts, I scrambled from the bed hurriedly and got into my bath robe toot suite!

She grinned up at me. “Coward!” She beckoned with her crooked finger. “C’m’ere ‘n’ gimme a good morning kiss!” she ordered.

Gingerly, I leaned down and kissed her.

“You weren’t so shy with me last night,” she teased with a sly grin.

“What happened?” I demanded.

“Nothing, darn it!” she giggled. “You were a perfect gentleman!”

I breathed a sigh of relief. “Thank God!”

“But that doesn’t mean that I didn’t try!” she teased.

“Why, you impudent little baggage, I ought to strip those bloomers down and smack that plump thing to a fond fare-thee-well!” I threatened half-heartedly.

“Like I keep telling you, you’re just a great big bully!” she retorted. “But I love you anyway, in spite of your many faults!”

“I keep telling you,” I protested weakly, “I do not have any faults!”

She bounced from the bed and ran out, her merry laugh trailing lingeringly behind her swiveling, wriggling bottom.

I sighed wistfully.

“What am I going to do about her?” I wondered.

You know something?

I’m still wondering the same thing!

* * *

Chapter Four

We amused ourselves by playing card games until shortly after noon when I noticed that the blizzard was in another lull, and I took her home, much

to her loud protests. Her parents were glad to see her safe at home in one piece almost as glad as I was that she was home!

Not that I wouldn't have liked her to stay, it was more that I did not, could not, trust myself with her, especially if she should take it into her head to sleep with me again! Oh sure, nothing had happened that I could remember. But what if something had happened? Where would I have been then? I would have been up that well known tributary without means of locomotion, that's where!

Had Alichandra been of age, it would not have mattered as much, but, she wasn't, and that was that, like it or not. NOT!

Two days later, the blizzard blew itself out and I made a fast trip to town, stopping off at the local fabric store for information about flannel pajamas.

"Mr. McQueen," the owner told me, "I don't do any actual sewing here, but I may have someone who can help you out," she mused, her finger under her chin in thought.

"Anything you can do to help would be greatly appreciated," I replied fervently.

She giggled. "Let me make one call, OK?"

I nodded. "Sure." What did I have to lose?

She stepped to her desk, dialed a number, waited, then, "Hi, Dorothy?" And she spoke for a good ten minutes or more before hanging up. "Do you know, Dorothy Sullivan?" she asked.

"I don't think so, why?"

"She lost her husband in Desert Storm and she's been having a hard time of it because the Feds, the Government, have been so slow in giving her his

death benefits, and her teaching salary just barely covers her daily expenses, what with her two children, John Jr., six, and little Dot, four,” she explained. “She’s an excellent seamstress and she has agreed to make what you need.”

“Great!”

And ten minutes later, I stopped in front of a small white house on Third Street, got out and rang the bell. A moment later, it opened and I about fell through the porch floor. “Dorothy Morgan!” I gasped. “I didn’t know you were the Dorothy Sullivan that Megan told me about!”

“Come in, Harmon,” she invited, holding the door wide. “How have you been?”

“Recuperating,” I replied.

“Oh?”

“I was wounded in Desert Storm,” I explained.

Her eyes watered. “John L. didn’t make it home.”

“I heard, and I am so sorry.”

“Well, life goes on,” she wiped a tear from her eye. “Now, tell me about this sewing project I have agreed to do for you.”

So I explained about wanting some flannel pajamas made for Alichandra because I was quite concerned about the harsh winters and thought it would be a great Christmas present for him.

She thought it was very neighborly of me, to which I countered, “His Father is my ranch foreman!”

“Ah, yes, I seem to remember now,” she thought. “I think he was in my fourth grade class at the paro-

chial school some years back when I first started teaching.”

“Probably,” I agreed.

“Now, the design. What did you have in mind?”

“Well, I thought some footed pajamas with non-skid soles would be apropos since his Mother is always on him about running around in his sock feet on the cold floors.”

“Good thinking!” she praised. “Zips, snaps or buttons?”

“Well, a zip for closure, only can you put it in back?”

She looked at me startled. “In back?”

I nodded. “His Mother, Rosita, says he has a bad habit of shedding his tops while he’s sleeping and that worries her no end,” I explained, making it up on the fly, so to speak.

“Makes sense,” she agreed. “Anything else?”

“Well, Rosita suggested a zipper going from one ankle up the inside of the leg, then across the crotch and down the inside of the other leg to the other ankle to make it easy for him to go to the bathroom when he needs to in the middle of the night,” I improvised quickly.

She nodded. “I see you have thought this through quite thoroughly.”

“Well, Rosita and I tried to think of everything,” I agreed sheepishly and blushing shyly.

“And you want them made of flannel?”

“Yeah, the soft kind, like this,” and I showed her a sample that I had filched from the fabric store.

“My goodness, you have expensive tastes!” she teased. “This is one of the most expensive fabrics in the store!”

“I can afford it,” I blustered, embarrassed.

“Yes, I’m sure you can. . .” Her implication was obvious! Unlike her, I had no money worries!

“I didn’t mean it like that,” I protested.

“Oh, I know you didn’t, Harmon,” she admitted. “It’s just that the Government has been so darn slow about things. . .”

“I’m sorry,” I murmured in sympathy.

“Not your problem!” she spoke brightly. “Now, is there anything else?”

“Like what?” I asked, puzzled.

“How about snap-on mittens? Or an elasticized hood?”

“We didn’t think of those,” I admitted slowly.

“I can make them so they snap on and off, or I can attach them permanently.”

“I think the snap-ons would be more efficient,” I colored slightly.

“Easy enough. Now, colors?”

“Oh, I hadn’t given that much thought,” I admitted, lying through my teeth! “How about a light blue and a white and a shocking pink and a red?” I offered weakly.

“As I recall, Alichandra would be quite pleased with your selection!”

“Great! How soon could you have them?”

“Christmas present, you said?”

I nodded.

“OK, how about a week from today?”

“For all four of them?” I asked in amazement.

She nodded. “For all four.”

“You’re on!” I took out my billfold and handed her a hundred dollar bill. “Don’t spare the horses!” I chuckled. “If you need more, just get it from the store and charge it to me.”

“I will get right at it.” she promised and I left, one more “worry” resolved.

Or was it?

Time would tell.

* * *

Chapter Five

The pajamas were all I had hoped for and more! Not only did the footies have non-slip soles, but they were also well padded with an insulating material to prevent cold from seeping in through the thin sole material! Too, there were added elastics just above the ankle bone to keep the legs straight as well as elastics around the waist and the wrists of the sleeves. The zips were just as I had envisioned and I felt they were apropos to “chastity” when in bed. You see, not only did I not trust myself with Alice, I did not trust Alice when with me! By being securely zipped in, she was “safe. . .” well, relatively safe!

Anyway, the hoods had elastics around the face opening and when I first snapped one into place, I

put it on backwards and it fit perfectly! The snaps all lined up to be fastened either way. Now, I don't know if that was deliberate on Dorothy's part or not, but it proved to be very "handy" later on in our burgeoning relationship! But, more about that if it happens later on in this narrative! If I remember. . .

I had noticed that Dorothy used an older model sewing machine and when I asked her about it, she admitted that it had its moments but that she just could not afford to replace it for the time being.

So, not telling her anything, I stopped at the fabric shop and bought a brand new electronic machine for her, one that Megan told me that Dorothy had had an eye on for ages. To explain to Dorothy, I said that the machine was a loaner because it was the last year's model, but I had the strange feeling that she saw right through me and my attempt to be subtle. And as far as I know, she still has (and uses) the loaner!

Anyway, I was so pleased with the four she had made that I ordered six more, one each of a pretty purple, a sunshine yellow, a navy blue, an almost jet black, a soft lilac and a nice shade of forest green, all made the same way as the first four with the same features, and all with a "professional" look.

I stored the pajamas away for the time being, not telling Alice about them since I wanted them to be a surprise when next she pulled an over-night stunt on me. That she would do this, I had no doubt, and as it turned out, my intuition was right on point!

The first blizzard had covered the trails so that we could not go riding, and Alice spent much of her spare time curled up in one of the chairs in my library with an open book in her lap. Occasionally,

she would interrupt me to ask the meaning of certain words, which I didn't really mind, but knowing that I would not always be available to answer her questions, I showed her my unabridged Merriam-Webster dictionary for her to use when I wasn't readily available.

That didn't mean she stopped asking me. On the contrary!

I didn't care how often she would ask me something as I loved talking to her for any reason, even one so mundane as defining words for her.

We spent a lot of time in the stables where she curried and brushed her pony. She was never quite satisfied with how it turned out. Something was always out of place, and it bugged her no end. Finally, I took pity on her and told her that nothing was ever done to one's complete satisfaction, the trick was to get close. And as far as I could see, Alice had gotten closer than anyone else ever had.

To which she came into my arms and I kissed her trembling lips. "Oh, Red," she cried brokenly.

"What's wrong, Sweetheart?" I asked, puzzled.

"Oh, you always know just the right thing to say to make me feel better about myself!"

"That's my job, my sweet little Fairy!" I murmured affectionately.

To which she just cried all the harder.

Not knowing how to combat a woman's tears, I just stood there and held her close until she was all cried out. I smoothed the hair out of her eyes.

"Feel better?" I asked gently.

She nodded. "Yes," she whispered.

“Good! Now, let’s go in the house and I’ll make us some dinner!” I enthused.

“Sounds like a plan!” she agreed and hand in hand, we raced to the house, laughing like idiots.

I loved the time we spent together!

Then it was Christmas Eve and I was sitting in the Cortes’ living room enjoying my after-dinner coffee while My Alice and her Mother cleared away the supper things. I had offered to help but was summarily chased from the kitchen under threat of disembowelment if I didn’t git! I had got!

Jesus and I were laughing about something or other to do with cattle when My Alice returned and plunked her sweet bottom down in my lap and kissed me sweetly. I was a bit uncomfortable with that, but Jesus and Rosita paid it no mind!

“Hey, Red,” Alice asked, “where’s my present?” she demanded querulously.

“What present?” I pretended surprise.

“My Christmas present!” she persisted.

“Why, I thought you had outgrown Santa Claus,” I teased.

“Santa Claus, maybe, but not presents!” she insisted with a frown.

“What’s that big one beside the tree? The one with silver wrapping and a red bow?” I pointed.

“Red!” Alice scolded fondly, kissing me again. “You are such a brat!”

“Me?” I yelped in pretended outrage! “You’re the one always wanting this and wanting that until I am going broke with keeping up with you!”

“Mr. Harmon McQueen!” she gasped in outrage. “You know that’s not true! I have never asked you for one single thing in my whole life! You take that back, and right now!” she demanded angrily and I could see the red creeping across her face.

I laughed. “Touchy! Touchy!” I teased.

“Well, I didn’t and I haven’t and I don’t! So there!” She stood and stared down at me sulkily, then turned to the package I had mentioned.

“Hey, not so fast!” I squeaked in alarm. “That’s for tomorrow!”

“Oh, pish and posh on you, Mr. Red McQueen! We always open one present the night before!”

“But then there will be nothing for tomorrow!” I protested.

“Your point being?” she arched her brow questioningly.

“Oh, go ahead! You will anyway! You always do! God, you are so spoiled!” I groused.

“I love you too, Mr. McQueen. Here’s yours,” and she handed me a small gift. “Here’s yours too, Daddy. . . Mommy. . .” and she handed them similar packages.

“Thanks, Honey,” Jesus whispered as he unwrapped his.

“You’re a good girl,” Rosita whispered proudly as she opened hers.

Seeing that I was out-voted, I tore the wrapping from my gift. All were the same, beautiful silver identification bracelets with our individual names engraved on them.

Except that mine read, "The Personal Property of Alichandra Maria Cortes."

I was almost overcome with emotion. Only my Alice would dare. . .

But, she was too busy opening her present to pay much attention to my blushes. She squealed with happiness when she saw the footed pajamas. "Oh, Red! I have needed some new pajamas for the longest time! Thank you so much! I'm going to run up and put on a pair right now! Which color should I wear? Oh, they're all so beautiful!"

"Which ever you wish, Alice, my sweet," I replied.

"Oh, goody!" She raced off, her feet thumping excitedly on the steps as she raced up to her bedroom. Her door slammed shut and all was quiet.

Several minutes later, I heard a quiet, "Ahem," from the stairs, and looking up, saw my Alice in red flannel pajamas! My good God! She was so beautiful!

"Who's the new broad?" Jesus asked Rosita.

"Very nice, dear!" Rosita praised, ignoring Jesus' attempt at humor.

"And they fit me to a tee!" Alice enthused, coming down and turning in place to model them for us. "Now I don't have to worry about my feet catching cold!" She slipped into my lap. "Thank you, Red. I'll be up to make it up to you later!" she whispered in my ear. I blushed rosily. I knew what she meant!

We sat there and talked quietly for some time before I finally pushed Alice from my lap and stood. "It's been nice, Folks," I announced. "But it's time I go up to my own place and leave you kind people to your own devices."

“Nonsense, Mr. McQueen!” Rosita protested. “You are welcome here any time! You *are* coming over for Christmas dinner, aren’t you?” she demanded.

What else could I do! I nodded. “Yes, Rosita, I’ll be here for dinner.”

“Good! I serve at three P.M.!” she announced imperiously.

“Yes, Ma’am,” I agreed and left.

They accepted the romantic relationship that existed between Alice and me without qualms.

Then why did I feel so edgy?

What was bothering me?

* * *

Chapter Six

What *was* bothering me?

I was in love.

The girl I loved also loved me.

Her parents approved of our relationship.

I was content.

Alice was content.

I think. . .

One never knew about her!

Then what was bothering me?

I was confused, I guess. . .

Or maybe it was an attack of conscience. . .

I had finally come to grips with my basic sexuality and I was comfortable with the knowledge that I

was in love with another male. I didn't particularly care what outsiders might think, one way or the other. If they approved of our relationship, fine. If they disapproved, that was their problem, not mine!

So, what was my problem?

It finally dawned on me on New Year's Eve. Jesus and Rosita were away for the evening visiting a relative who was giving a New Years Eve party.

Alice declined their invitation and I knew she fully intended to celebrate with me! I also knew that I would have no say in her decision! I was, as many of those in my former outfit might have put it, "Pussy whipped!" Whatever it was, I had it, and I had it bad!

Sure enough, I was pleasantly feeling no pain when about 9:30p.m., I happened to look up and saw Alice standing in the doorway to my den. "Hunh?" I gasped. "Where'd you come from?"

She giggled. "If you have to ask, there's no hope for you!" she teased.

"Don't be a smart-ass!" I growled. "What'd'ya want?"

She glided into the room and I saw her costume, or rather, her lack of costume! She wore one of her skimpy bikini bathing suits - you know the kind, two quarters and a dollar bill and her sky-hi opera pumps. Everything else was bare skin! Oceans and oceans of bare skin! My prick immediately got hard as a rock!

She slid into my lap and her hot lips kissed me with a searing caress that burned me right down to my soul! Her hand slipped between our bodies and she grasped my erection through my jeans.

“Ooh, what a delightful surprise!” she cooed. “Is that all for me? Is that your flash-light or are you just glad to see me?” she crooned throatily.

“Alice!” I exclaimed. “Don’t do that!” I protested, rising and dumping her to the carpeted floor.

Her dark eyes filled with tears. “You don’t love me anymore!” she accused.

I squatted beside her. “That’s not true, Alice,” I soothed her ruffled feathers by caressing her hair. “You know I love you with all my heart!”

“Then why don’t you show me?” she demanded. “Every time I try to be affectionate with you, you reject me out of hand! Why?”

“I don’t know,” I admitted sheepishly.

And then, I did know!

My reluctance. . .

My reticence. . .

All became crystal clear to me!

I knew why I was uncomfortable!

It was our age difference!

I had just passed my fortieth birthday and Alice was only seventeen!

She wouldn’t be eighteen until mid May coming!

The gulf between us was much too wide for us to successfully bridge over time!

Suddenly, I was totally ashamed of myself for taking such blatant advantage of Alice’s youth and vulnerability! I should find someone my own age to love!

The trouble was, I wanted her like I had never wanted anyone else in my whole life! She slid into my lap and slipped her arms around my neck, kissing me affectionately.



“Wha. . . what are you doing?” I asked weakly.

“I am trying to start a little flame in your heart,” she teased. “But I see you’re lost in an Irish whiskey bottle again.”

It was a continuation of an argument we had been having for some time. “Am not!” I protested.

“Then let me sit beside you while we watch the New Year come in around the globe!” she invited, patting the sofa seat beside her where she was now seated.

So, I obeyed her command.

I began to get drowsy and before I realized it, I was sound asleep, stretched out on the sofa with my head cradled in her lap, her soft hands caressing my face tenderly as she crooned a lullaby to me.

“Go to sleep, little baby,” she crooned, “dream of me while you sleep. . .”

I awoke some time later, my head still resting on her naked thighs, my face turned down with my nose pressed against the miniscule triangle of her bikini bottoms. Her hand was behind my head, holding me securely in place! Without thinking, I pressed my lips against her triangle and kissed her loudly.

“Ooh, you wonderful man!” she squealed, her thighs flying apart. “I’ll give you just an hour to stop that!” She giggled with happiness. “Well, since you are so insistent, I’ll give you two hours, but that’s my final offer!”

“What are you mumbling about?” I demanded, sitting upright.

“Spoil sport!” she teased. “And here I thought you wanted to have your way with me!”

“Be serious, girl!” I snapped.

“I am serious,” she replied and I saw that she was deadly serious!

I sighed and glanced at the television. They were showing Times Square in NYC and the M.C. was chortling, “Ten, nine, eight. . .”

“Only two more hours until it’s our turn!” Alice whispered. “Then it’s just you and me!”

“Alice,” I began, “I have come to a decision about us. . .”

“Oh, goody! I can hardly wait!” she enthused.

“It won’t be to your liking. . .” I continued.

“You don’t love me anymore!” she wailed, bursting into tears.

“That’s the trouble,” I explained. “It’s because I do love you. . .”

“Then what’s your major malfunction, My Queen?” she demanded.

“I’m much too old for you!” I stated flatly.

“Hunh?” she gasped in surprise. “Is that all? I thought you had found another girl to love!” she admitted, sighing with relief.

“Alice! Listen to me!” I begged. “Think about it, I’m almost three times your age! Why, when I’m sixty, you’ll still be in your thirties, much too young to be tied to a decrepit old man!”

“Why don’t you let me worry about that?” she asked.

“I have to do the worrying for both of us!” I declared.

“And I don’t get any say in this decision of yours at all?”

I shook my head. “It’s for your own good!” I insisted.

“Now who’s being a smart-ass?” she demanded. “I do not like people telling me what’s good or not good for me! I want to make my own decisions regarding my life and how I live it! And that includes listening to this b.s. you’re spreading around! Your age and mine have never once crossed my mind. You could be a hundred and ten and I would still love you! No one else ever gave me my own horse and side saddle and took me riding to all the special places we have been! No one else has ever given me such wonderful pajamas and no one else has ever told me that I’m beautiful. . . well, except for my Mother and Father, but they’re obligated because I am their family! You told me that I was beautiful without ever expecting anything from me, and I loved that about you!

“So, Mr. smart-ass Harmon McQueen, like it or not, I am in your life to stay and I fully intend to marry you and get into bed with you and let you have your nefarious ways with me, so there! Said and done!” she concluded, her arms folded across her tiny breasts while she glared daggers at me.

“And now I don’t get to have my say, do I?”

She shook her head. “You’ve had it.”

I bowed my head. “I still think I’m too old for you. . .”

“And I think you’re just right! So, shut up all ready!” I shut up as her lips claimed mine.

“Happy New Year, My Red Queen!” she whispered.

“Happy New Year, Alice,” I repeated.

“Oh, shut up and take me to bed!” she ordered.

I stood, stooped, gathered her into my arms and carried her up-stairs to my bedroom where I put her on my bed while I made a mad dash for the shower.

The room was lit by one single lamp when I returned, to find a naked Alice lying in the middle with her arms out-stretched for me.

“C’m’ere, handsome!” she ordered breathlessly.

What else could I do?

I “c’m’ered,” that’s what I did!

And if I thought she was a wildcat or an octopus before, it was because I had never been in bed with her. . .

With both of us as bare as the day we were born.
. .

Heavens to Murgatroyd!

I had died and gone to Paradise!

* * *

Chapter Seven

It was a fantastic night!

I mean, we kissed one another. . .

Shamelessly. . .

And caressed one another. . .

Equally as shamelessly. . .

All over!

I don't believe there was one thing you can name that we didn't try!

As New Year's Day dawned, Alice lost her virginity and she had her blood streaked thighs, my bloody prick and soaked sheets, to prove it!

She cried once as I burst through her defenses the first time. . .

And that was the end of her cries of pain!

The rest of her heartfelt cries were all of joy and pleasure as we became husband and wife!

Well, you know what I mean.

And if you don't, why are you reading this?

To continue, we spent the whole day discovering one another in so many different ways. We discovered that we liked the missionary position best for making love because we were face to face. Besides, nothing got in my way and I was able to penetrate her fully, which she liked best. (Me too!)

Alice did not really climax the first few times we went at it, but she soon did and after that, she was just as enthusiastic about going to bed as I was. Probably more so, but I didn't ask. You know, don't ask, don't tell?

About dawn, we fell asleep, pretty much worn out. Let's face it, we were exhausted! But I had never felt better in my life!

Contented?

Well, that was one way to put it. . .

But it doesn't express the great joy and peace I felt with her in my arms. I had never had anything affect me like making love with my Alice did!

And from the satisfied smirk of a smile on her face (Like the cat that had swallowed the canary!), I gathered she felt the same.

If she told me she loved me once, she told me at least ten thousand times that first day! I mean, she couldn't say it enough to get it out of her system. And she couldn't tell me enough to satisfy my need to be told!

We awoke around noon and after a bout of kissing and caressing, we got up, padded (still naked as jay-birds!) down to the kitchen to have something besides love in our tummies! Now I'm a pretty good cook, if I do say so myself, and I do, say so myself, I mean, and because of my renewed outlook on life, the fridge and pantry were fully stocked.

Soon, I had whipped up two cheese, mushroom and diced ham omelets to go with our cold milk, and we laughed and giggled while we ate. My playful Alice even stuck her loaded fork into my mouth when she thought I wasn't getting enough nourishment by myself. She missed a couple of times, and I think she did it deliberately because she licked it off each time with her moist, inquisitive tongue, sending delicious shivers of passionate arousal up and down my spine.

Then, the phone rang.

It was Jesus asking if Alice were there.

Wordlessly, I handed her the phone.

"Hi, Daddy!" she greeted brightly.

After a moment, "Yes, I'm fine."

Then, "Well, after you and Mom left, I got lonesome so I came over here to welcome in the New Year with Mr. McQueen."

A pause, then, “Oh, we had a great time watching people welcome in the New Year around the globe! It was ever so much fun when we both saw things we would never see otherwise!”

Another pause before, “Oh, I imagine it was after four or so because we waited to see what would happen in Hawaii.”

She giggled happily. “Yes, Daddy, I behaved myself.”

She handed the phone back to me. “Here, Daddy wants to talk to you.”

I took it reluctantly. How was I going to tell the man I had raped his under-age son, even if we did all treat him as her? He or she, it was still statutory rape.

“Yeah, Jesus, how they hanging?”

“Thank you for being so nice to our girl,” he answered.

“Da nada! I was glad she showed up. Otherwise, I would be nursing a huge hangover today! She caught me in time and instead of drinking myself into a stupor, I found myself watching the New Year being greeted by the rest of the world!”

“Nevertheless, Rosita and I thank you for watching over our Alichandra while we were away.”

“Happy to do it anytime,” I reassured the man.

“OK, send her home when you’re tired of her,” he told me.

To myself, I thought, ‘Then she’ll never go home!’ Aloud, “Sure, Jesus, ‘bye now,” and I hung up.

I stared at Alice in wonder. “He was awful calm about you staying the night with me,” I murmured.

“Daddy and Mom know how I feel about you, My Queen, and they approve heartily.”

My jaw fell to the floor. “They do?”

Alice nodded, her face smeared with a wide grin. “Oh, McQueen, don’t look so glum! Like I told you before, I have never made a secret of how I feel about you, and they are, after all, pretty intelligent people, for ignorant Mexican wet-backs,” she teased.

“Whoa up there, girl!” I objected. “I have never once said anything disparaging or derogatory about Mexicans! In fact, some of my best friends are of the Mexican persuasion!” I declared vehemently.

“Oh, My Queen, you are so funny when you’re angry!” she giggled.

“It ain’t funny, dammit!” I roared.

“OK! OK! You made your point! Jeezeums!” she pretended to p[ou]t.

“What else did you tell them?” I demanded.

“Oh, pretty much everything. . .” she grinned.

I gulped audibly, almost choking on my coffee. “Everything?”

“Well, maybe not everything, but pretty close!” she giggled.

“My good God!” I muttered. “I’m dead!”

“Only if you fail to follow through on your promise,” she countered softly.

“Promise? What promise?” I roared.

“Why, Hunny Bunny, don’t you remember? You proposed marriage to me early this morning.”

“I did *what*?” I bellowed. “Are you jiving me, girl?”

“No, Sir, you asked me to marry you, and in the heat of the moment, I agreed to your proposal. All we have to do is set a date, fly to Massachusetts, like you said, and get married.”

“Holy s**t!” I gasped, thunder-struck.

“Don’t you want to marry me?” she asked, her face suddenly down-fallen.

“Hell, yes!” I replied. “It’s just that you took me by surprise!”

“Imagine how I felt when you asked me!” she retorted. “I could not believe my ears until you asked me the second time.”

“Holy s**t!”

“You already said that,” she laughed. “Then you are having second thoughts?” she asked quietly.

“Yes! Er, no, not about marrying you!” I retorted. “It’s just that this is so sudden. . .”

“Yes, my darling man, it was rather sudden, coming up as it did!”

“Now cut that out!” I roared.

She grinned impishly. “Yes, Mr. Benny!”

“Who?”

“You know, Jack Benny. He always said that when Dennis Day would. . .”

“Yeah, yeah, I remember.”

“So, put up or shut up! You say you want to marry me. When?”

“After you graduate high school.”

That would give me some sort of breather.

“Said and done!” she squealed, jumping into my arms and kissing me thoroughly. Then, as I sat there in amazement, she swiftly knelt between my spread legs and before I realized what she was going to do, she had done it and my swiftly rising prick was deep in her sucking mouth! In total reflex, I grabbed her by the ears and drew her close, driving myself deep into her gagging throat!

For the next several minutes, her head bobbed in my lap until the inevitable happened, I exploded straight down her gulping throat!

Oh, it was glorious!

Heaven!

Total ecstasy!

Long after I was all calmed down, she knelt before me, her soft mouth sucking gently while her sharp teeth chewed not so gently!

Stop her?

Like Hell!

I never wanted her to stop!

I still don’t!

And when she’s on her knees in front of me like that. . .

I won’t!

* * *

Chapter Eight

No, Alice did not move in with me. She did, however, continue to visit me every day after school, and Valentine’s Day passed with an exchange of sappy,

sentimental, Valentine's cards, a gigantic box of chocolates for my adoring Alice and another for Rosita.

At my insistence, Alice did not stay over-night after New Year's. "We must respect the public morality and refrain from a blatant display," I explained piously.

"Spoil sport!" Alice teased with a soft giggle.

"Nevertheless," I equivocated.

"Oh, all right!" she pouted. "I don't like it, but I'll do it!"

"That's my good little fairy!" I teased.

"I'll fairy you, you big demanding bully!" she flared angrily. Then she laughed. "Oh, you. . ."

Then Easter came around and believe it or not, I attended mass for the first time in years! And you know? It wasn't all that bad. Kind of made me sorry that I had missed Alice's first communion. But, she was my intended wife now, and I guess you can't have everything, no matter how much you might wish to go back in time and amend your mistakes and oversights!

Spring came and the snow began to recede on the upper slopes so we could go riding again. As she had before, Alice wore her senorita riding habit and rode her pony, Suzy Q., on her side saddle, and it was a pure joy to hear her laugh and enjoy herself.

As it got warmer, she even began to pack along a picnic lunch for us when we ranged far back in the mountain pastures. Like myself, she loved the wide, open spaces and many times, she would burst into song, "I love the wide, open spaces! Where six guns beat four aces, I love the wide open spaces!"

Another favorite of hers was an old Dinah Shore melody, "Oh, east is east and west is west, and the wrong one I have chose. . ." Then something or other and something or other, before finishing up with, "And I'm all yours in buttons and bows!"

I could have listened to her for the rest of my life and never gotten tired of that lovely voice!

I mean, if that is not love, it will do until the real thing comes along!

I could not believe the variety of things she packed for our picnics. There was fried chicken, hot dogs, hamburgers, potato salad, tacos, tortillas - oh, not all at once, but over time. And when I tried to thank Rosita for the food, she told me, "Me, Senor? Not me! Alichandra did it all!"

I was amazed. All those brains and culinary skill too!

And the best times were when we started a small fire to roast our hot dogs or hamburgers and lie back under a shade tree and just enjoy the absolute silence of the high meadows. With Alice snuggled contentedly in my arms, my lips grazing her hair gently, her soft sighs. . . ah! It was Heaven on Earth!

And in all the years since Alice entered my life, I have never really forgotten my reclusive days when I would ride the high country just soaking up the quiet and solitude. Fortunately for me, Alice loves the same thing, silence and solitude. Many's the time we just lay on a blanket, listening to Mother Nature. And because we never threatened them, the smaller animals would come sidling up to us for hand-outs, which delighted Alice no end.

And what delighted Alice, delighted me.

If it made Alice happy, I was all for it!

And, true to my promise to Jesus, I made sure we carried a long range walkie talkie with us when we went deep into the mountains. And I also made sure we kept in close touch with home base. It was the least I could do to allay their cares when their only chick was so far away!

Alice would laugh and call me an old Mother hen, but I did it anyway.

And I was glad I did! One day in late March when we were miles from the ranch house, a sudden snow storm came over the horizon, catching us in a small cul-de-sac. Fortunately, I had my axe with me and several blankets in my saddle roll, and we made shelter in a small cave with a make-shift back-fire to throw the heat inside and we just settled down to wait it out, our horses chewing their oats in the back of the cave. We called home and explained what had happened. Jesus was all for getting a search party together and coming to rescue us, but I told him we were safe and it would be just a waste of time for them to buck the snow drifts unnecessarily.

Finally, he agreed and we rang off.

"I thought they would never leave!" Alice whispered in my ear. "Now we can get down to our real business!"

And I knew exactly what she was talking about!

In moments, we were stripped to our skin and cuddled together under the blankets.

Had I not known better, I might have thought that Alice had set the whole thing up!

Come to think of it, when we finally did get back to the house, I found a notice on my weather desk that warned of a possible snow squall. . . right where we were!

Coincidence?

Maybe. . .

Or was it fortuity?

Whatever.

That's my story and I'm sticking to it.

Besides, who am I to argue with my Alichandra?

* * *

Chapter Nine

One day, shortly after our blizzard adventure, Alice and I made a trip to town to see Dorothy to see if she would make a graduation gown for Alice. To say that she was delighted would be understating the actuality by several degrees. She was so enthusiastic that when they started discussing styles and materials and accessories, I felt like a fifth wheel, totally unneeded and unwanted!

A fifth wheel is great when needed, otherwise it just stands there, usually in the way and even more usually, absolutely useless except for taking up needed room! So, I retired to the nearest bar and proceeded to have a few. . .

Then I got a brilliant idea! I would try to help Dorothy get her benefits from the Government!

So, I made a phone call to The Pentagon and finally got to talk with an old friend of mine from my

own Marine days, Major General (then Lt. Colonel) Jefferson “Jeff” Davis and I explained the problem.

“I don’t recall the case, McQueen,” he replied, “but I’ll look into it and let you know. OK?”

And we left it at that, after I invited him to drop by sometime. . . knowing he never would!

The next day, my phone rang at the house and when I answered it, it was Jeff with news. “Hey, you old hoss thief, what’re you tryin’ to pull?” he began, “I found the case file and according to records, that claim was paid over three years ago. Is this one of your lame-brained jokes?” he snapped angrily.

“General, I never joke about money!” I snarled right back at him. “The lady has been waiting patiently for this bureaucratic mess to be cleared up and all she gets is the run around. If I say she has not been paid, I mean she has not been paid. Now, get your lazy assed people on this, find out what the problem is and get it taken care of toot suite. OK?”

“All right! All right! Damn, you always were a pushy hard-ass!” he lamented, and hung up.

Five days later when I went back to Dorothy’s to give her a check for the graduation dress, an olive drab car stopped in front of her house and General Jeff Davis, in full dress uniform, stepped out!

I answered the door and we greeted each other like long lost brothers. I mean, I was so glad to see him, I got all choked up!

“By God, I should have known you’d be Johnny-on-the-spot!” he grinned. “Is she your intended?”

“Who me?” I yelped. “No way, she’s just a damn good friend.”

“Yeah, I know all about your friends!” he grinned knowingly.

“Who is it, McQueen?” Dorothy asked, coming into the foyer.

“Just some dumb assed Marine General who got lost. . . again!” I laughed.

Jeff colored brightly. “That was an accident, McQueen,” he snarled, “and you know it!”

“Dorothy Sullivan, meet Major General Jefferson “Jeff” Davis, United States Marine Corps. General Jeff Davis, meet Mrs. Dorothy Sullivan.”

“I am very sorry for your loss, Mrs. Sullivan. I knew your husband. . .”

“Did you now?” she asked brightly. “Well, come on in and tell me everything you can remember about John L.!” She stepped aside, waving graciously.

After we were seated in the living room and Dorothy had served coffee all around, Jeff spoke up. “I came here under false colors, Mrs. Sullivan,” he admitted sheepishly. “I sort of remembered Sullivan showing this picture of a beautiful woman to anyone who would stop long enough to look, and it got my curiosity up and I decided to put a face to the photo. I hope you don’t mind. . .”

“Of course I don’t mind, General. . .” she smiled.

“Oh, please, call me Jeff!” he insisted.

“Jeff. I like that. But only if you call me Dorothy,” she insisted.

“Dorothy. It suits you!” he smiled at her like a love-sick calf.

“So, Jeff,” I started, “what brings you way out west?”

“That’s General Davis to you, Major McQueen!” he snapped.

“Like Hell! I’m a civilian now, so take your rank and shove it!” I roared right back at him.

“Hasn’t changed a bit and after all I did for him!” he lamented with a smirk.

“All you did *for* me?” I bellowed, “don’t you mean all you did *to* me?”

“Whatever,” and he laughed heartily. “Allus could get your goat, McQueen!”

“Wha’d’ya wan’, Jeff?” I asked, still smarting from his sarcasm.

“Oh!” He reached into an inner pocket and withdrew a government envelope, handing it to Dorothy. “I think this is yours, Mrs. Sullivan, er, I mean, Dorothy.”

“What is it?” Dorothy asked, tearing it open and withdrawing the check. She glanced at it and gasped with shock. “Why, why, it’s John L.’s death benefits!” Shaken, she sank into her chair, her eyes filled with happy tears. “Oh, General Davis! Thank you! Thank you so much! You will never know how much this means to the children and me!” she murmured through her tears. Rising, she put her arms around his neck and kissed him full on the lips! I noticed he held her quite close and for much longer than necessary! Why, the lecherous old Billy Goat!

I was all choked up myself. “Well, you finally got something right, General!” I admitted, touched in spite of myself.

"I found where the claim had been pushed aside so many times that everyone in that office had assumed it had been settled long since. Once I had the check in hand, I decided to hand-deliver it myself to make sure it got to the right person."

"Thank you so much, Jeff," Dorothy repeated, kissing him again. Then, she looked deep into his eyes. "When was the last time you had a home-cooked meal?" she asked.

"Not since my wife died four years ago," he admitted. "The Officer's Mess is not home cooking!"

I had to agree to that!

"Then you'll stay for supper?" And it was not a question!

"Well, I do have some other things to see to. . ."

"Fine! I'll expect you back here promptly at seven. Will that give you enough time?"

He nodded. "Yes, Ma'am, and I'll bring a bottle of wine."

"Great! See you at seven."

And we were out the door.

"OK, General," I reminded him harshly. "Go easy on her! She's very vulnerable."

"So am I, McQueen," he admitted. Then, "You're absolutely sure you have no romantic intentions towards her?"

"Nope, nary a one. She just does sewing for me."

"All right, I wouldn't touch that with a ten foot pole!"

"Follow me up to the ranch and I'll show you around. You've got lots of time."

“I thought you’d never ask!”

* * *

Chapter Ten

Hi, this is Alicandra speaking.

It’s my turn to tell the story. I’ll start the first time I met McQueen’s friend, the general.

Faintly, I heard, “Hello? Anybody home?”

“Out here, by the pool!” I called, recognizing the voice of my lover, McQueen. “C’m on out, the water’s great!”

“Loves swimming,” I heard him comment as he walked out onto the rear deck.

But, what a sight to greet him!

There I was, stretched out on my stomach, my legs slightly parted with my feet pointed straight back at them and my head resting on my folded forearms. And I appeared to be totally naked!

“Oh, my God!” I heard a strange voice whisper in awe.

“Maybe you better cover up, Alice,” McQueen suggested hoarsely. “We have company!”

“Eeekk!” I shrieked as I twisted around to sit up, my legs drawn up protectively and my spread hands shielding my breasts. “You should give me some kind of warning, McQueen,” I scolded with a fond smile. Actually, I wasn’t all that embarrassed to be seen almost completely nude. I had become a devout exhibitionist since being around McQueen and it

was so much fun flashing him when he least expected it. I love it when he is looking at me!

Frankly, it wasn't all that bad showing off my almost nudity to another man either.

You see, I really wasn't naked! I was wearing the same miniscule bikini suit I wore for McQueen on New Year's Eve when I finally got into his pants. You know the one I mean, two quarters and a dollar bill? Yeah, the very same!

I held out my hand to McQueen. "Give us a hand up, darling?" I cooed sweetly.

Automatically, his hand reached for mine and hauled me up-right in a flash. Now that I was standing, it was obvious that I was wearing something, small as it was.

"Alice Cortes, meet Major General Jeff Davis. Jeff, meet Miss Alice Cortes, my fiancée."

"Fiancée, you say? I would never have believed it of you!" he whispered in awe. "McQueen, she's beautiful! You have out-done yourself!"

He took my hand, bent and kissed the backs of my knuckles in the continental style. "I am so pleased to meet you, Madame," he whispered, his moustache tickling my hand pleasantly.

I dimpled prettily. "Thank you, kind Sir, you are much too gallant! Won't you have a seat and I'll fix us all some lemonade?"

"Don't mind if I do," he admitted with a sheepish grin.

To McQueen, "Give me a hand, darling?" I asked sweetly.



“Hunh? Oh, sure, back in a jiffy, Jeff,” he told his friend and followed my swaying ass into the house. In the kitchen where we couldn’t be seen, I turned on him accusingly. “Why didn’t you warn me you

were bringing a friend home with you? What if I had been completely naked? Wouldn't that have been a pretty sight for him to take back wherever he came from?"

"Relax, sweetie, he's just here to deliver Mrs. Sullivan's benefit money and he'll be flying back to D.C. in the morning. Besides, he was quite impressed with you."

"So what's he doing here at the ranch?" I demanded.

"He's just taking a look around."

"Oh. Well, he sure got a good look!" I was somewhat placated, but not entirely. "OK, let's get that lemonade and get back out there before he thinks we're doing something naughty!"

"That had entered my mind," he admitted softly, reaching for me.

I ducked away. "Not now, you over-sexed maniac! Keep that horse cock ready and I'll take care of it after he's gone," I promised with a lewd leer.

"You're on, girl!" he laughed, following my swinging bottom again.

I don't know why he likes to watch my wriggling ass when I'm walking. Something about the sight gets him all hot and bothered. Too bad about him!

Besides, I like him just as hard and swollen as he can get when I get him in bed! I mean, what good is a man who isn't hard and swollen? A girl has to look out for her own pleasures. . .

And I do!

I mean, a good man is hard to find, or is it the other way around?

He grouses a lot, but a twitch of my naked ass and he jumps to obey. So much for the superiority of the male sex. Any woman worth her salt can entice any man, any time, if she puts her mind to it.

So, we sat on the terrace and made small talk for some time. Eventually I got tired of their war stories and went back to sun-bathing beside the pool. And except for a liberal application of sun-block, I wore nothing but my two quarters and a dollar bill suit! To make sure I tanned evenly, I kept moving around to expose my skin to the sun's rays, and I knew that my movements were avidly watched by my audience, so I made sure to give them a good show each and every time!

It was evident that I had succeeded because when the General announced that he really had to leave, I could see two hard lumps in both of their crotches and I smiled to myself in satisfaction. Oh, how I love to get McQueen all hot and bothered. Makes the man more easily handled, if you catch my drift.

Anyway, our guest left and it took about two seconds for McQueen to shed his clothes and join me pool side. I pretended annoyance when he began to caress my back and sort of half-snarled, "What are you doing, McQueen? I'm trying to get a tan!"

"Screw the tan, you little baggage!" he answered throatily. "I've got a problem that only you can handle!" He took my hand and guided it into his crotch.

"I smiled at him lazily. "My, my, that is a problem! Don't know as I can handle all that!" I teased him deliberately.

His hand moved between my legs and I felt my dollar bill deserting its post as he rose over me, slid

between my spread legs and entered me with a rush.

“Ooof!” I grunted. “And the great stallion scores again!”

He said nothing, just lunged at me vigorously.

“I give up!” I whispered. “Don’t keep me waiting!”

He didn’t!

* * *

Chapter Eleven

It was early May, just days before Alice’s high school graduation when she came running into the house, all excited and bubbling over with her exuberance. I caught her and held her tight. “OK, what’s all the fuss about?” I demanded softly.

“Oh, McQueen,” she giggled happily, “how would you like a real pussy on your wedding night and not some stretched out asshole?” she asked, her voice breathless with happiness.

“What are you talking about?” I asked her, puzzled.

“Look at this!” And she waved a brochure in my face.

“Whoa up there!” I stepped back. “Stop hitting me with the damned thing and let me see!”

She handed it to me and I looked at it.

“See? It’s a place where they do sex reassignment surgery! That means I can be operated on and be a real woman for you! And don’t try to tell me that you wouldn’t like a real pussy instead of what you have

now!" she giggled. "I am getting quite loose with that damn horse cock filling me nightly!"

"You've never complained before!" I griped.

"That was before I found out about this surgery!" she explained excitedly. "Oh, McQueen! Think about it! A real pussy! I would be a virgin again and the wearing of white would be apropos! And you do know what I mean, so don't pretend you don't!"

"I don't know, Alice," I demurred. "I mean, I love you just the way you are, and all surgery is invasive and dangerous, even the simplest ones. And this is not simple by any means!"

It wasn't that I was against her becoming a woman. It was more of a surprise that she would ever consider such a thing! I mean, never once in all the weeks we had been together had she said anything about wanting to become a woman!

But, if that was what she wanted, I would go along with it.

After all, whether she had the vestiges of maleness between her legs or a feminine pussy, inside she was still the same Alice I loved.

"OK, my little Fairy," I grinned. "If that's what you want, we'll look into it!"

"Oh, McQueen!" she cried, "I just knew you would understand! Oh, I love you more than ever!"

So, we pulled strings and got permission to go ahead, and the day after her graduation, we flew off to the clinic where Alice soon became Alice for real!

Alice wore her new white gown to her graduation - she was valedictorian - naturally! Her short commencement speech was something about tolerance and acceptance, but don't ask me for particulars! I

was so proud of my soon-to-be-wife that I just tuned everything else out.

I do remember some sort of reception at Jesus and Rosita's home, but I have no idea who was there or who wasn't there.

It's all a blur in my mind.

There was just too much going on!

* * *

Chapter Twelve

Hi, it's Alice again.

McQueen wasn't all that thrilled that I wanted to have a sex change done, but he's so easy to manipulate and I had no qualms about manipulating him! After all, from the first time I saw him, I loved him and I wanted him to have something most other men have in their wives, a usable pussy!

The Clinic was a sterile place, all shiny metal everywhere and the smell of medical disinfectant permeated the air. And the room I was in was just as sterile. But, since I went to sleep an hour after being checked in, it didn't make one whit of difference to me.

But before I went under, I had a little talk with my doctor. She thought I was nervous and she started to calm me down, but I stopped her in mid sentence.

I laughed heartily. "No, I have no qualms about the surgery. I know that will come out A-OK! What I wanted to ask if you were able to find a usable

uterus and ovaries for me. I want to give McQueen a son and a daughter,” I explained.

She nodded. “Yes, we were able to find suitably matched organs for you and I believe you can easily become pregnant. Just don’t hurry it by being too impatient. Hurrying has ruined more good intentions and all that. Now, are you nervous about the actual operation?”

“Yes, a little, Doctor,” I continued. “I want you to make me just as tight as you possibly can! I want my future husband to have to work at it to take my cherry. It wouldn’t be my style to make it too easy for him!” I grinned.

“I noticed that you have been having anal sex with someone. I assume it’s your future husband?”

I nodded. “Yep, I seduced him last New Year’s and he’s been at me ever since!”

“Well, if you’d like, we could take a slight tuck in your anus and except for the knowledge in your head, you would be virgin there all over again too!”

I just stared at her. “Can you do that?” I asked incredulously.

She nodded and smiled. “Oh, yes, we have done the same thing for many of our patients and we have never heard one complaint from either partner after healing!”

“Then, do it!” I enthused. “And the tighter, the better!”

She giggled. “I know just what you want, my dear, trust me!”

“You know how they say, ‘f**k you’ in Sillywood?” I asked mischievously.

She shook her head. "Sillywood? Oh, I get it! You mean Hollywood. No. . ."

"They say, 'Trust me!'" I laughed.

She giggled. "I'll have to remember that!" She held up a syringe. "Now it's time to go nighty-night!" and I felt a slight pin prick in my arm.

Then, nothing!

When I awoke, I was hurting. . . slightly. . .

OK!

A lot!

My legs were bent at the knee and held in some sort of framework that kept them spread and raised. My crotch itched like crazy with all sorts of little creepy-crawly thingies on my skin. I wanted to scratch myself, but discovered that both my wrists were restrained.

"What the. . ." I gasped, and a woman looked down on me. "Oh, good, you're awake at last. How do we feel?"

"We feel nothing, but I feel like s**t!"

She giggled. "That's what they all say when they wake up."

"How long have I been asleep?"

"Two days, Ma'am," she replied. "We have found that the time is necessary for the body to get used to the rather drastic shift of anatomical attitude!"

"What's that mean?"

It means, my dear girl, that your body had undergone a dramatic change and it tried to fight back. That's why you were kept sedated and restrained."

"Oh."

“But, your discomfort will quickly pass and you’ll be good as new in no time. Better, in fact! Now, would you like something to eat?”

“Oh, that sounds good. What have you on tap?”

She giggled again. “For you, a very strict diet until your body adjusts. So, how’s Jewish penicillin and a peanut butter and jelly sandwich sound to you? You know, chicken soup.”

“Lady, you undo my bonds and I’ll eat the east end of a horse headed west, I’m so hungry!”

“You’d. . . oh, I get it! Very funny!” she giggled as she undid the straps holding me down. “Now, don’t go away and I’ll be back in two shakes of a lamb’s tail!”

“I won’t move from this bed!” I promised.

She giggled again. “No, you won’t, will you?”

After I had devoured my soup and sandwich, my doctor came by to check on me.

“Ah, Miss Cortes, I see you are awake,” she trilled.

“Yep, I finally woke from the dead!” I grinned at her. “How did everything go?”

“Very well! In fact, better than well! You were a dream patient. Everything came out right and when we put the pieces back together, everything just fell into place! It was as though a magic spell had been cast over you!”

“And I’m all ready for my wedding night? I mean, I’m tight?”

“My dear girl, if you were any tighter, you wouldn’t be able to urinate or defecate!”

I giggled. “Then I’d be full of s**t, wouldn’t I?”

She groaned. "I never heard that one before. . . not!"

"Gee, and I thought I was the original wit!" I exclaimed. "Well, I guess I was half right!"

"Half. . . Oh, you mean half-wit! Very good! I'm glad to find you in such good spirits!"

"And I haven't had a drink of anything alcoholic in days!" I quipped.

She finished her cursory examination and tucked her stethoscope in her jacket pocket. "In a week or two, you will start your menses, you know, your monthly period. Be careful not to get pregnant right away. Give it at least six months to a year. It will take at least that long for your body to adjust to all the changes it will experience." She paused briefly. Then, "Now, I want you to rest. Tomorrow, we're going for a walk!"

"Oh, I can't wait."

But, I waited anyhow. . .

* * *

Chapter Thirteen

True to her word, the next morning, bright and early, well for me it was early! Seven a.m.! I never get up that early. Well, not usually. . .

After a scanty breakfast, the nurse came in and helped me into my mules and I stood up-right for the first time since my surgery. I thought I was going to take a header, I was so weak and dizzy. Mostly dizzy, but a lot weak. But just in my upper legs, you know, where the thighs connect to the

hips. There. Nothing wanted to work right and I wondered momentarily if the doctor had screwed the pooch. With the encouragement from the nurse, I walked hesitantly, but the more I used my legs, the better I felt and the more in control of my body I felt.

I only walked for a few minutes, but my nurse told me I had done so well that she would be back that same afternoon and I could try it again, for a longer period this time. And that afternoon, I felt like a million bucks after about ten or fifteen minutes just walking aimlessly up and down the corridor outside my room. And, later on, I tried walking by myself, and you know? It was a little shaky at first, but the shaky part soon faded and after that, there was no holding me back!

My strength soon returned as I continued to exercise and it wasn't long before I was as good as new, better because now I was all woman!

I had never known such a joy before!

A woman!

Me!

Born Alichandro Marie Cortes. . .

A boy!

Was now Alichandra Maria Cortes, soon to be Mrs. Alichandra Maria McQueen!

Oh, the utter joy of that phrase!

Mrs. Alichandra Maria McQueen!

God, how much I wanted My Queen here, with me, so I could f**k his brains out the way a proper woman should!

When I expressed my desire to my doctor, she laughed and told me, "Oh, not yet, Hunny! You'll

have to wait until you are all healed before you can resume relations!”

But. . .” I started to protest.

“But, nothing!” she retorted. “I do not want you tearing out all the good work I have invested in

You, so take my advice! No screwing until you are ready to be screwed!”

“I’m ready now!”

“But your new uterus isn’t! Believe me, it will keep!”

So, I had to be content with that.

It wasn’t easy!

* * *

Chapter Fourteen

On the day Alice came home, I was summarily rebuffed when I tried to kiss and fondle her as we had been wont to do of recent weeks, and it angered me somewhat, until Alice told me that she wasn’t completely healed after her surgery and that I would have to be patient and wait for our wedding night to make love to her again.

I did not like that one single bit, but I could see the logic behind it, so agreed to forego taking her to bed until our wedding day.

I shouldn’t have worried too much because her ever hungry mouth was at my prick more often than ever! Alice had developed into a superb cock-sucker and I had long since learned to let her have her way, or suffer the consequences – no b.j.’s at all!

I took her into town for a preliminary fitting of her wedding gown and discovered my old friend, General Jeff Davis taking his ease in Dorothy's living room! Seems that he and she were getting pretty close, *acquainted*, as it were, and were on the verge of announcing their engagement! It couldn't have happened to a better pair! And now that Dorothy's financial problems had been eliminated, the beautiful young woman that I remembered from my high school days reemerged and it was obvious that Jeff was smitten!

Dorothy's children had accepted him as a substitute Daddy, and the sadness had disappeared completely from her eyes. I was not a bit surprised when Jeff asked me to be his best man at their wedding. So, what could I do? I had to reciprocate and ask him to be best man at mine!

Which was all right with Alice, "As long," she cautioned coyly, "as you're the real best man!"

I blushed, but whether I was embarrassed or complimented, I have yet to figure out!

Probably a little bit of both!

So that's how it almost became a double wedding, only Dorothy and Alice decided between them that they did not want to intrude one's happiness on the other's, so agreed (between themselves!) to have nuptials two weeks apart, with Alice going first.

Jeff and I thought that was a complete waste of money, time and effort, but we had no say in any decisions our future wives might make for us. As it turned out, they were right and we were wrong, but it took us months to figure it out!

As Alice laughingly told me, “You men are so blind! The obvious is right under your noses and still you don’t see!”

I didn’t then, and I still don’t!

Nor does Jeff!

Women!

Nothing like them to mess up a man’s life. . .

And make him like it!

* * *

Chapter Fourteen

That was a few years ago, if you’re keeping count. Alice and I have settled into a solid routine of husband and wife, and except for a minor squabble or two, marriage to her has been pure bliss. When I started this story, I never thought it would turn out this way.

The general and Dorothy have a new baby and the older children are thrilled to the bone! If any kid ever is more spoiled than that one, I have yet to see it!

Alice just dropped a bomb on me. I am going to be a Father sometime in May next!

OMG!

Who would have ever thought it?

My head is still in the clouds from the news. Do all expectant Fathers feel like this? If so, I should have done it a long time ago!

My Dad would have been so proud.

I know I am!

The one fly in the ointment is that Alice and I have had to put our rides on the back-burner until the baby comes. Rosita and Jesus are beside themselves with joy! This will be their first grandchild and they are anxiously awaiting the big event!

If the baby is a girl, we will name her Alichandra “Alice” Maria McQueen, and if a boy, his name will be Jesus Alichandro McQueen which causes Jesus to almost pop his buttons with pride.

Me? I don’t care just as long as he or she is healthy!

And that’s about it.

Jeff and I are partners in a huge herd of Black Angus steers. Seems there is a big demand back East for Angus meat and we are just the ones to scratch that itch!

##

E V I E :

MY P R A I R I E P R I N C E S S

By Béb  Talonsl

“Heellpp mmee!”

There it was again, the faint cry for help. Jacques LeClerq stopped short, stood tall in his saddle and looked around carefully, cautiously. He saw nothing except the erect, pointed ears of his mount, but seeing nothing was not unusual when gazing through the tall grass of the vast reaches of the Wyoming prairie. Although he could see nothing moving in the tall grass, the smell of something burning filled the air and that in itself was reason enough for caution!

Suppose it was a prairie fire? Or a trap? Suppose some hostiles were hidden out there, just waiting for him to make a stupid move. Just because the vi-

cious Indian uprisings had been put down permanently some years before, did not mean that the Indians had forgotten nor forgiven in this year of our Lord, 1879. There were still several wandering bands of renegade Apaches and Comanches and Cheyennes, among others, dead set on killing every white man who dared to venture onto their land!

“Heeelllpp mee!” came the voice again, weaker now.

But suppose it was a non-Indian calling for help? Could he ignore that? In his heart, Jacques knew that he could not. He had been raised better than that! He had to help that voice!

Dropping to his knees after ground-hitching his horse and pack animals, he crawled toward the sound slowly. He kept his eyes moving, alert for any movement that was not of his making, anything that might prove to portend great danger ahead. His Spencer repeating rifle was cocked and ready for instant use. Carefully, he checked that the twin Colt revolvers were loose in their holsters and ready also. After about a hundred yards, he could see that the grass was thinning out on the edge of a huge buffalo wallow and the smell of Buffalo chips and burning wood was even greater. That was where the call was coming from!

Carefully, he parted the grass and saw the charred remains of four Conestoga/Studebaker covered wagons and several heaps of clothing scattered about that could only be dead bodies. Lazy flies buzzed about and the oppressive smell of death and ravaged flesh was all around him.

As he might have surmised, the live stock had been driven off, and the wagons had been looted before being burned.



“Heellpp meee!” came the cry, becoming ever weaker and Jacques could see one of the smaller bundles of clothing move slightly.

‘Can’t be many Indians around or they would have scalped this one too,’ he thought, then rose to his feet and took several minutes just to look around carefully, closely, before he determined that he was indeed alone with the survivor.

Stooping, he turned the body over and saw that it was a girl who appeared to be about thirteen or fourteen years old. She had long blonde hair, deep blue eyes and seemed to be about five foot two or three inches tall. She was fair and small boned with a mass of freckles across the top of her retroussée nose. A quick check showed that she seemed to be somewhat dazed from a blow on her head, but except for some minor scrapes and abrasions, she was otherwise unhurt. He touched her shoulder. “Miss? What happened?”

“We were attacked by Indians,” came the faint reply.

“Lie still for a minute while I check. OK?”

She nodded mutely, her eyes big and staring with fright.

Jacques couldn’t blame her for being frightened! After all, he hadn’t combed his hair nor shaved in almost a year and his buckskin clothing was travel worn and filthy. On top of that, except for a thorough dunking in a stream the day before when his mount had stepped on a loose rock while crossing, he hadn’t had a proper bath in about the same time as when he had last slept in a for real bed!

Taking his canteen, he gave the girl several small sips of water, holding her upright until she could

manage on her own. Slowly, her breathing became stronger and she seemed to be recovering her poise.

“Thank you, Sir,” she whispered softly. “I was very thirsty!”

Jacques grinned. “Yeah, getting hit by a club will do that to a person!”

Jacques rose and went to each of the bodies in turn, noting that four were older males, three older women and six others who seemed to be teenage boys and girls. All were shot through with Cherokee arrows, but not one of the bodies had been scalped which made it the work of a band of renegade white men and not renegade Indians! That meant that Pony-Boy (given name Epiphany) Hart was somewhere about. He was the only one with enough men to scare the renegade Indians away and still attack an unarmed wagon train to loot at his leisure.

He looked swiftly through the wreckage around him and found traces of looting that the gang had tried to cover with fire. Jacques determined that these were drought-displaced farmers from Minnesota or Michigan who were going to the prairies of eastern Montana to start over. He saw the prints of a dozen horses and twelve or fourteen rawboned mules and several teams of oxen that had belonged to the farmers as well as the marks of ten or twelve mounted men who had raided them. Only one of the raiders had ridden an unshod horse.

He went back to the girl and shook her gently. “Ma’am? Can you move?” he asked quietly.

“Who. . . who are you?” she asked softly, still dazed from the blow to her head.

“I’m Jacques LeClerq, Ma’am, and when I heard your calls for help, I came to investigate.”

"Thank you again," she whispered. Then, "Are the rest. . ."

"I'm sorry, Ma'am," Jacques nodded. "They never had a chance!"

"My father and uncles did not believe in guns," the girl started.

"Not a good idea out here," Jacques observed sagely.

"The soldiers tried to warn them, but they thought that being unarmed would show that they came in peace and therefore they would be left alone."

"To an Indian or a renegade outlaw, going unarmed is a sign of weakness and anyone who does so is fair game for attack and killing and looting and everything else they can think of."

"How unchristian of them!" she exclaimed, shuddering with revulsion.

"They aren't Christian, Ma'am. Renegades have a whole different way of looking at things."

"My name is Evie. . . er, Evelyn Bascomb and we came from Wisconsin, near Lake Michigan," she offered.

"Pleased to meet you, Ma'am," Jacques grinned, then stood and offered her his hand. "Now, if you're able to stand and walk, I'll loan you one of my remounts and take you back to the fort," Jacques explained.

"No!" the girl was adamant.

"Ma'am?"

"I want to go on west and file on the land my father was going to file on. I'll raise beef and breed pedigreed horses in his name!" she declared stoutly.

"Ma'am! That's impossible! You'd be killed before the week is out!"

"Nevertheless, I must try!" Taking his outstretched hand, she managed to get to her feet, and Jacques saw that unlike some women of the time, she preferred to dress in men's wear instead of the long skirts of the era. Still, it did nothing to hide her burgeoning femininity!

"As you wish, Ma'am," Jacques agreed reluctantly.

"Is there anything of value left?" she asked quietly.

"Not much," he admitted. "But then I didn't make a close search."

"Do we have a few minutes?" she asked. "I'd like to look."

"Sure, but don't wait around too long. They might come back. They often do, especially this bunch," he commented dryly.

"Then you know who did this?" she asked. "I thought they were Indians. They were dressed as Indians and used bows and arrows."

"Nope, wasn't Indians," Jacques shook his head emphatically. "Indians would have lifted hair from everyone. You too," he added. "Besides, all the bodies were shot in the back of the head, and no Indian ever does that! That's a white man's trick."

She shuddered. "Oh, how horrible! They actually cut one's hair from one's scalp?"

“Yep, sure do, but don’t blame the Indians! Back more’n two hundred years ago, the French in Quebec would only pay for those rebels the Indians could account for and that meant scalping. Before that, an Indian just counted coup against his enemies and let it go at that,” he explained. “The French did not trust the Indians count so they had to scalp their victims to get the bounty the French Government was paying them.”

“I didn’t know that,” she admitted slowly.

“Not many people remember, but it’s a fact of history. I did not make it up!” he exclaimed.

“Oh, I believe you,” she replied hastily. “I just didn’t know!”

“Were the raiders riding bareback or were the horses saddled?”

She thought a moment, then, “They were saddled.”

“It was renegades then ‘cause Indians only ride bareback. ‘Sides, those ponies were shod.”

“Oh,” she murmured.

“Well, if you’re gonna look around, better get on with it. It don’t pay to stay in one place too long!”

He watched as she poked around in the ruins, then pulled a small metal box from the charred ruins. “Thank God!” he heard her murmur. As she turned, she smiled, then spoke, “They missed this!”

“Whatever this is,” he replied laughing.

“There’s over ten thousand dollars in gold in this box. My father and my uncles had it nailed to the underside of our wagon. It’s what we were going to buy our land and stock with,” she explained.

“Best not say that out loud anywhere, Ma’am. Gold has a way of changing people’s attitudes.”

“Oh, but I trust you,” she declared.

“Shouldn’t, Ma’am. How do you know I can be trusted?”

“You came to my rescue. No dishonest man would have done that!” she exclaimed.

“Don’t you be so trusting, Ma’am!” he warned. “Look how far it got your folks!” he insisted.

“Oh, but I’m going to learn how to shoot and hit what I aim at. I’m not so hesitant to use a shotgun or pistol as my father and uncles. And I don’t trust everyone either. You think I’m a woman, don’t you?”

“Well, yeah,” he admitted. “With all those soft curves and all. . .” he blushed.

“Well, you’re mistaken ‘cause I’m not!” She was close to tears.

“Could have fooled me!” LeClerq laughed, thinking she meant that she was still a girl.

“And if you were not to be trusted, you would have raped me!” she continued. “I wonder why those robbers didn’t kill me too?” she mused.

“Must have been scared off.”

“Anyway, you did not try to invade my privacy! You respected me enough to leave me alone!”

“Course I did! My Mother taught me to respect female critters!” he insisted strongly, blushing.

“Like I just said, not everyone would have done so,” she repeated, smiling.

Jacques blushed. "If'n you say so, Ma'am. Now, if'n you're all done poking around, we best get on with the burying and get on outta here!"

Two hours later, they had salvaged everything of value, buried the bodies and were riding away from the scene, leaving the smell of the massacre far behind.

They stopped to make camp some twenty miles from the wallow, but Jacques took pains to keep well out of sight. He led the horses and pack animals up the creek they entered for over a mile before he saw what he was looking for, a deadfall of trees that formed a natural shelter from wind and rain and any possibility of discovery. He kept their fire small and used dry wood so there was very little smoke given off and what little spiraled upwards was greatly dissipated when it rose through the up-rooted tree roots!

"Are you always this careful?" Evie asked with some amusement.

"I've still got all my hair, all my horses, all my pack mules and all my gear!" he pointed out softly.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean anything by my remark," she apologized.

"One can't be too careful out here. Not only do you have to watch for raiding Indians and bands of renegade white men, you still have to be watchful for prairie dust storms and wind storms and tornados and blizzards and the occasional buffalo stampede and grass fires and the like."

"Isn't it rather late for a blizzard?" she asked, puzzled.

“Well, yeah, but I was speaking of things in general.”

“Oh.”

“Better get some sleep,” he advised. “I wanna start out before first light.”

“Why so early?”

“To get a head start, and besides, it’ll be a hot one tomorrow and I want to get our traveling done before we have to hide from the heat.”

“My father would have liked you, Jacques LeClerq!” she spoke suddenly.

Jacques blushed. “If’n you say so, Ma’am.”

He spread his bedroll out on the ground and turned to the girl. “You sleep here and I’ll make do with some pine boughs.”

“Oh, I couldn’t do that!” she objected. “It looks big enough for both of us. . .”

“Ma’am?” Jacques was surprised at her boldness.

“Mr. LeClerq, if you had had any ideas of taking advantage of me, you would have done so long since! Besides, we’ll both be fully clothed, so what’s the problem?”

“But, Ma’am,” Jacques protested. “We ain’t married nor nothing like that!”

“Details!” she pooh poohed. “Besides, as I said before, Mr. LeClerq, I trust you with my life.” She sat on the edge of the bedroll and removed her shoes, then glanced up at him. “Or is it that you don’t trust me?” she grinned.

“I ain’t afeerd of no female critter!” he retorted angrily as he sat and removed his boots, to lie beside her and pull the blanket up.

“Good night, Mr. LeClerq,” she murmured, snuggling into his arms.

Jacques lay awake for a long time listening to the night sounds, but mostly to the slow, rhythmic breathing of the girl who lay beside him. ‘What in the pluperfect Hell have I got myself into?’ he wondered just before he too slept.

The stars were still bright overhead when Jacques awoke and it took him a moment to gather his wits about him. Suddenly, he became aware of the girl who had turned and curled herself against him in the night. She was all warm and soft and sweet smelling and for a moment, Jacques felt temptation fill his loins. “Like Hell!” he muttered. “She trusts me!”

“Hunh?” Evie asked, slowly rousing from her sleep. “Oh, hello, Mr. LeClerq. Did you sleep well?”

“Passable,” Jacques muttered as he shook his boots and pulled them on. “If’n you got to attend to anything, better do it now before we get started.”

“Why did you shake your boots before you put them on?” she asked.

“To knock out any stray scorpions or snakes that might have crawled in during the night,” he explained. “They often do, seeking the warmth.”

“Oh, I didn’t know,” she admitted.

“You’ll learn soon enough,” he laughed.

He began to build a small fire as he sliced off some bacon into the battered fry pan he carried and started his coffee boiling. By the time the girl returned, the smells of breakfast were filling the air.

“Oh, my,” she murmured gently. “That surely smells good!”

After they had eaten, Jacques carefully put out the fire, saddled their horses, stowed their camp gear in the packs, and just as the last stars faded away in the false dawn, they were mounted and making their way across the silent, desolate prairie.

Jacques kept up a steady pace and by the time the heat of the day was starting to be oppressive, they had covered a good twenty or more miles and had come upon the banks of a wide river that Jacques explained was the Snake, so called because of the many twists and turns it made as it wandered across the countryside. Again, he found a deadfall of trees to “noon” in and after scouting around the area, just to “make sure,” he returned to their camp where Evie had started a small fire and had coffee ready for him to eat with the flour and water biscuits she had made. Some cured beef was sizzling in the big fry pan and all at once, Jacques was hungry!

“Mr. LeClerq?” Evie asked as she cleaned up after their meal.

“Ma’am?” Jacques spoke lazily. ‘Ah,’ he thought, ‘this is the life!’

“Do you think it would be all right if I took a bath?”

“I’d rather you didn’t,” he replied.

“Why? Aren’t we alone?”

“I don’t know that for sure and it’s best we don’t take any unnecessary chances. Maybe later on, like when we make camp tonight if we’re close to water?”

“All right,” she replied dejectedly. “If you think it’s wisest!”

“Sorry, Ma’am,” he replied and with a shock, he realized that he really was sorry!

Later, when it had cooled somewhat, they continued on their way west, covering some twenty or more miles before they stopped at another secluded deadfall some distance from the river. After a hasty meal, Jacques scouted the area and found no new tracks, shod or unshod, to indicate others in the area. He did, however, discover some tracks made several days before, but he said nothing to Evie about them. Only then did he ride back to their camp and inform Evie that she could take her bath while he rustled up some grub.

“Just be careful and if’n you hear something that doesn’t belong, get on back here.”

“Yes, Mr. LeClerq, I’ll be careful.” And before Jacques realized what she was doing, she had leaned down and kissed him fleetingly on his unshaved cheek. “Thank you!” she whispered, and with a soft swish of denim, she was gone.

Jacques was so surprised that he almost burned his hand when he grabbed the fry pan instead of the handle! “Hot damn!” he muttered, then grinned in spite of himself. “Well, I will be damned!”

A few minutes later, he heard a small scream and he grabbed his pistol as he raced through the brush, to see a small, naked female body standing in the river while a wild hog snorted and threatened her. “Go away!” she cried.

LeClerq shot the hog and dragged the carcass back to camp, leaving Evie alone to finish up. He was shaken as he recalled the smooth, pink flesh of the girl’s body, the hunched back, the tiny waist, the full, round bottom and her wildly waving hands as she tried to shoo the hog away.

“Damn female!” he muttered, then blushed as he realized that he was fully aroused!

It was almost an hour later when Evie returned, bright and refreshed and happy. “OK, Mr. LeClerq, your turn!” she announced firmly. “By the time you return, I’ll have supper all ready for us. Go on, now, scoot!” she ordered. As Jacques started for the river, she called, “Shave too!”

“Yes, Ma’am,” he replied, blushing to his roots.

When Jacques returned, Evie had cut some choice steaks from the boar and had them frying next to the fire. In a kettle, she had boiled some prairie onions and some other roots while some flour and water biscuits baked nearby.

“You’re just in time, Mr. LeClerq!” she exclaimed brightly, handing him a cup of fresh coffee and turning to fill a plate for him.

Jacques sipped the coffee, hot and strong, just the way he liked it!

“You know,” he sighed happily after they had eaten, “There’s a lot to be said for a woman in a man’s camp! Sure beats my cooking all to blazes!”

Evie blushed. “It’s nothing. Anyone can learn to cook if they want to!”

“Well, as long as I have you, I don’t want to!” he grinned.

“I want to thank you for chasing that darn pig away,” Evie whispered. “I was frightened right out of my wits! He was so big!”

“Aw, he was just defending his territory. ‘Sides, he sure tastes good, don’t he?”

She giggled. "And now we have fresh meat to carry with us."

"Yep, that too," LeClerq agreed.

Long after the stars came out, they lay side by side in the bedroll without speaking, just enjoying the silence and one another's company. At long last, Evie broke the silence. "Mr. LeClerq? Are you awake?" she murmured. "I'd like you to teach me how to use a six shooter."

Jacques was startled. "Why?" he asked in surprise.

"One day, I will meet up with those men who shot and killed my family and I want to be ready to avenge their souls."

"Now, Evie, that's men's work," he started.

"What men?" she retorted. "In case you haven't noticed, Mr. LeClerq, I'm not exactly surrounded by men folk relations any more, am I?"

"Well, no, Ma'am, but. . ."

"But, what, Mr. LeClerq? No, it's my responsibility and mine only. But, before I can avenge them, I must learn how to shoot, fast, straight and accurate, every time. Every bullet must count!"

"Well, Ma'am," Jacques agreed. "I can teach you but I still think it's a job for a man."

"Obviously you have never heard of Calamity Jane or Sioux City Sue or Mrs. Butterworth," she retorted angrily.

"Well, yes, but they was different. . ."

"They were women and I look like a woman. What's different about it?"

"You're just a girl!" he protested.

“Hunh! Lots of so called *girls* are married women with children by the time they’re my age! Just how old do you think I am anyway?” she demanded querulously.

“Oh, I don’t know, twelve, thirteen or so, I’d guess.”

“I’m just a month shy of fifteen,” she declared. “I’m almost full grown!”

Jacques thought a moment. Then, “All right, I’ll teach you, but we do it my way. OK?”

“Whatever you say, Mr. LeClerq!” Evie agreed, rising and kissing his cheek quickly before nestling down beside him. “Good night, Mr. LeClerq!”

“G’night, Evie,” but she was already asleep.

Again, it seemed to take forever for Jacques to fall asleep.

* * *

II

The next morning, Jacques dug through his packs and found an old belt and holster that he kept as a spare and an old Russian .44 caliber revolver, handing both to Evie. Wordlessly, she buckled it about her slim waist. “Now, the first thing you do is practice drawing that pistol until you can do it without thinking about it. Until you get used to drawing it, there will be no bullets in it because I don’t want you to go shooting yourself in the foot. Too dang many people have done just that when practicing a fast draw. They get excited and pull the trigger on the way out of the holster!”

Evie's eyes were shining with anticipation and she was so excited that she dropped the gun as soon as she had it out of the holster.

"See what I mean?" Jacques laughed gently.

"I'm not very good, am I?" Evie asked dejectedly.

"It takes practice, lots and lots of practice! Don't worry if you're clumsy at first. Don't try for any speed, just get it out and point it at what you want to shoot. It's just like pointing your finger and once you have developed a smooth rhythm, speed will come naturally."

From then on, Evie practiced drawing the weapon and getting it aimed correctly, and true to Jacques' prediction, with practice came speed.

"Remember, having a fast draw is nothing if you can't put your bullet where you want it. Half the fast draw artists shoot into the dirt with their first bullet. Like you said, the thing to do is make your first bullet the one that counts. Don't be alarmed if your target doesn't fall down right away. It's surprising how much lead the human body can carry and still get around!"

For weeks, Evie practiced drawing the gun, practicing until she felt her arm would fall off! But, quit was not in her. She persevered and Jacques was surprised with her rapid advancement. As she gained expertise, he loaded the gun so that she would get used to the added weight, and she soon found that the gun came to her hand with ever increasing speed and accuracy as time passed.

One day, some months after Jacques had rescued her, they came upon a lone rider camped in an old buffalo wallow, and as they rode into the camp,

Evie noticed that the horse was one of her father's stud stallions.

"Howdy, Jacques, my friend," the man squatting by the fire called. "Sit and have some coffee."

"Howdy, Steam," Jacques was careful to keep his gun hand out of the other's sight.

Evie dismounted and stood a little off to one side. "Mr. Steam, or whatever your name is, stand up and prepare to defend yourself!"

"Wha?" the man gasped, recognizing his danger too late.

"That horse you're riding was stolen from my father."

"Hunh? You callin' me a horse thief 'n a liar?" he snarled. "No little girl calls me no liar!" he bragged, standing and glaring at her belligerently.

"You're a liar and a horse thief. You stole that horse when you and your renegade friends killed my family over to west Iowa back in late March."

"Why, I never!" the man blustered. "I bought him from an Indian and I gots a bill-o-sale fer him!"

"Draw, you no-'count murdering horse thief!" Evie snapped.

"Now just a minute here," the man made a motion and went for his gun. He had no more than cleared leather when two small holes appeared in the pocket of his shirt where he kept his bag of Bull Durham. "Dammit!" he yelped. "Now look what you done! You done shot me!" He took two steps, trying to bring his pistol to bear, but fell dead at her feet.

"He won't steal any more horses," Evie whispered and sat down suddenly.

“Hey! You OK?” Jacques yelled as he knelt by her side. “I don’t see any holes or anything?”

“No, I’m all right. It’s just that he’s the first man I ever killed!”

“Well, you got back at least one of your Pa’s horses and a coupla mules to boot! Plus we might just as well take whatever else he had for our own use.” Evie just sat there.

“You did good, Evie,” Jacques praised. “He was going to shoot you, but you got him first. You did what you had to do and you done it just fine!”

“I just did what you told me and made my shots count.”

“That you did, Evie, that you did!”

The next morning they rode on, Evie mounted on her father’s horse and she put the killing behind her.

A week later, they came upon two more men riding her father’s horses and two more men were called out. Two more men died.

They rode out with four more horses and three more mules, plus two more Winchesters and four holstered Colt 45’s, plus ammunition for all, two more saddles and the rest of what the men had.

Then one day, they came upon four men who were branding cattle and Evie recognized all four of them as men who had helped murder her family. Since they were obviously rustling the cattle, Evie kept them covered while Jacques tied them up.

When they rode on an hour later, four bodies swung from the lone cottonwood tree and they had gained another eight horses, four mules and more rifles and pistols and cowboy gear and food.

By now their gather had grown to fifteen horses, twelve mules and several cows with calves and it was getting to be too much for just two riders.

One day, they topped a rise in eastern Wyoming and saw a small band of Pima Indians coming towards them. The Indians were in bad shape and only had two horses among them. Warily, Jacques hailed them and found that besides the Chief, there were four braves, seven younger boys not fully grown, four squaws, six teen girls, six young girls and three papooses. They had been raided by some renegade Cheyennes and they were all that was left of their tribe.

Jacques invited them to smoke and palaver, and the Chief with his four remaining warriors sat cross legged before their camp fire and smoked their pipes.

Evie, for her part, went to the squaws to see if she could help and she saw immediately that they were starving. Without a word, she took provisions from the back of one of her horses and prepared a decent meal for them.

The squaws were a little reluctant to eat, but Evie told them that it was a gift from the Great Spirit, and because the Gods had been so good to them, it was only right that they share with their new-found Indian friends.

The younger children were fed first and from the way they swallowed every crumb, it was obvious that they had not eaten in many days!

When the children and women had been fed, Evie coaxed the teenage boys into eating and finally indicated to the Chief that there was food ready for him and the grown men too.

“You good woman,” the Chief told Evie. “We thank you.”

“They were hungry,” Evie replied evenly. “I just did what had to be done.”

The hief nodded sagely.

“Chief,” Jacques began, “what will you do now?”

“I do not know. We only wish to live in peace with the white man, but I fear that our enemies will not let us. So, we will die as warriors, counting coup steadily until the last of us loses his hair!”

“How would you like to ride along with us?” Jacques asked finally. “We too wish to live in peace with the Indian and have a chance to raise fine horses and fine beeves and to be left alone. And, we also have spare rifles and pistols that you do not have to help us gain that peace that we seek.

“We have horses that your warriors can ride and even mules for your squaws and young ones. We have ample food to feed you. And we have some clothing that you may find useful.

“But, it is not charity we offer you. What we give you will earn by helping us herd our stock and protect it from those who would try to steal it away from us.”

The men sat in a circle around a blazing campfire and puffed on their pipes for a long time, their heads nodding from time to time as they discussed LeClerq’s proposition.

Finally, the Chief spoke, “We will ride with you, friend LeClerq. Our braves will ride with the herd and our young warriors will ride the ridges and keep a sharp lookout for those who would do us harm. Our women will care for the horses and mules. You

say we can use the extra saddles and riatas you have?"

Jacques nodded. "If we have it, you are free to use it."

"Is good."

"Can your boys shoot?" Jacques asked.

The Chief's eyes widened. "You would trust us with your rifles too?" he asked in surprise.

"Yes, of course, we are all one tribe now. What is ours, is yours. What is yours, is ours. We are your brothers and sisters and you are our brothers and sisters, and you are Chief amongst all warriors! I give you my word."

The old man thought a moment, then, "It is a good thing you do, my friend."

"You help us and we help you and we both gain much! I have spoken!"

"Is your squaw a warrior woman?" the Chief asked suddenly.

"Evie is not my squaw," Jacques replied, blushing rosily. "She is my sister."

The Chief nodded sagely, guessing the truth. "It is better that way. She shoots?"

It took a good hour to tell Evie's story and the Chief's only comment was, "Is good!"

* * *

III

Some three weeks later, they arrived at a small outpost in eastern Wyoming where they decided to

lay over for the winter. They had been able to kill several buffalo which they offered to share with the troops at the outpost in return for remaining close for the coming winter months.

This was agreeable with the Post Commander and soon they had all settled down. The young Indians kept the live-stock from straying and Jacques and the older warriors cut hay and stacked it against the coming snow. They found many different foods and herbs growing wild and they harvested all they could, with some grumbling from some of the troopers at doing menial work. However, a sharp word from Lieutenant Johnson, the Post Commander, soon quelled this resistance!

One day in early December, four bedraggled and filthy men rode up to the fort and it was obvious that they were in a bad way. It wasn't until later that same afternoon when Evie and Jacques returned from a successful hunting trip that they learned of the arrival of the four men. Evie was further shocked when she saw that the men were led by the same man who had killed her family so many months previously!

"That's the man who killed my parents and little brother! That's the one you called Pony-Boy Hart!" Evie told Jacques angrily. "And I fully intend to call him out and shoot him!"

"No, you're not!" Jacques cautioned. "At least not yet! That *is* Pony-Boy Hart! Give it a few days and we'll take care of business then. OK?"

"No! I want to have it out with him right now!" Evie stormed angrily.

“Evie! Stop! Think! Never go into a gun battle when you are angry! That’s when you will make a fatal mistake and get yourself killed!”

“I won’t make any mistakes!” Evie replied evenly, coldly.

“You don’t know that! Believe me, if you go for him now, he will shoot you down like he did those on the wagon train. The thing to do is lull him. Don’t let on you know who he is. Let him get used to you being around, but don’t let him know you can shoot that hogleg of yours as good as you can. Get into a shooting match with him and lose. That way, when it comes to a showdown, you will have an edge.”

“I don’t want to wait!”

“Please, Evie? Trust me to know what I’m doing?” Jacques was almost begging.

“OK,” Evie agreed reluctantly, “but not too long!”

“It won’t be,” Jacques assured her.

The next morning, Hart and his men were plinking some empty bottles when Evie “happened” by. “Oh, that looks like fun!” she enthused girlishly through clenched teeth. “D’ya mind if’n I give it a try?”

“Sure, girlie,” one of the men sneered. “Jes’ don’t let that heavy old hogleg throw you!”

The men all laughed heartily.

Evie took her stance and fired six shots at the bottles, missing every one! “Oh, darn it all!” she moaned in disappointment. “I missed!”

“S’all right, girlie,” the same man sneered. “Girls can’t handle guns any how!”

“I guess you’re right!” she agreed and walked off.

“Hey, I know that gal from somewhere,” Hart mused.

“W’al, she’s been riding with LeClerq and he claims she’s his sister,” the other man explained.

“Like Hell!” Hart snapped. “I knew LeClerq back East in Quebec City and he din’ have no sister. In fact, he had no family that anyone knew about a’tall!”

“All I know is what them sojers say,” the other man insisted.

“I know, but I still say I have seen her afore and not too long ago neither!” Hart insisted.

The other man laughed. “W’al, Boss, w’en ya figger it out, lemme know. OK?”

Hart just glared at the man and said nothing more.

Two days later, the men were plinking bottles when Evie “happened” by again. “Hey, fellers!” she greeted. “I been practicing with this here pistola and I bet I can fetch those darn bottles now!”

“A gold eagle says you can’t hit even one!” the man guffawed loudly, remembering her pitiful performance of several days previously.

“I’ll hold the money,” a second man volunteered, taking the two gold coins and slipping them into his pocket.

Evie raised her pistol and shot, missing the bottle completely whereupon the men all laughed.

Again, she shot, and again she missed. She shot a third time and still missed. But, the fourth shot broke the bottle into smitherines! And the fifth shot broke the neck of the last bottle cleanly.

Evie turned to the other man and smiled. "I told you I've been practicing!" she chuckled. "And I thank you for your donation!" She took the gold eagles and walked off.

"Dag nab it!" Hart snapped shortly. "I know I've seen her someplace before and she sure as Hell ain't no sister of LeClerq's neither!" he fumed angrily.

The next day, Hart cornered Evie at the Suttler's and demanded to know what her real name was. When she just glared at him, he got belligerent.

"Dammit!" he exploded, "I've seen you somewhere before and I damn well want to know where!"

"Mr. Hart, when you figure it out, look me up," and Evie turned her back on him to walk out of the store, head held high.

He turned to the suttler. "What do you know about that woman?" he asked harshly.

"All I know is that she rode in here with LeClerq and that buncha Pima Indians a few weeks ago and set up for the winter," the man explained. "LeClerq said she was his sister."

"W'al, she ain't no sister to LeClerq neither!" And he stormed out of the suttler's. Half way across the parade ground, he stopped in mid-stride. "W'al I be damned!" he chuckled. "Now I know!"

Almost running, he made for their area and accosted one of the men who had witnessed the shooting exhibition. "I know who she is!" he chuckled snidely.

"Yeah, Boss, who?" the man asked.

"Member that wagon train that the banker said had ten thousand dollars worth of gold eagles?"

“Yeah, but we killed alla them, din’ we? An’ they din’ have no gold eagles neither!”

“Obviously we din’!” Hart stormed. “And you can bet LeClerq knows everything!”

“So? We just kill ‘em both. What’s the prollum?”

“Have you ever seen LeClerq shoot?”

“Yeah, so? He can’ handle alla us’n’s by hisself!”

“He doesn’t have to. He’s got that girl!”

“So? She can’t hardly lift that gun much less hit anything with it!” the man sneered.

“I wouldn’t be too sure about that,” Hart cautioned.

“Why?”

“If you noticed, she shot with her left hand until the last two times she shot. . .”

“So?”

“So, dummy, she snookered us!”

They still can’ outshoot the four uh us!” the man insisted.

“Not if we hedge our bets,” Hart smiled evilly. “Me and Jase’ll brace them while you and Jerold stand off to the side, sorta, and take them from there.”

“Damn, Boss! You sure are smart!” the man praised.

“That’s why I get the big bucks!” Hart grinned.

Shortly before the retreat ceremony, Hart and Jase Hermosa waited by the main gate as Evie and LeClerq rode in with more buffalo meat.

“This is it, Evie,” he told the alert girl out of the corner of his mouth. “When you dismount, make

sure your horse is between you and them. Don't waste any time talking and make sure you keep your Spenser in your right hand. Hart always likes to run his mouth before he shoots, thinking that his telling what a big man he is will throw his intended victim off stride. So, as soon as Hart opens his big mouth, lay your Spenser across your saddle and shoot him right above his belt buckle. Then you twist and take out Old Yeller. Keep shooting into them until they don't move any more. I'll take care of Jase and Jerold. You concentrate on your targets and I'll take care of mine. Got it?"

"I've been ready ever since I found out who they were!" Evie snarled between clenched teeth.

"Good. Here we go then!"

LeClerq rode up to the hitching rail, seeming to ignore Hart and his men altogether while his eyes saw everything. Halting their ponies, Evie and LeClerq turned, keeping the animals between them and the Hart gang.

Hart, thinking they were off guard and unsuspecting, shouted, "I know who you are now, girlie!" he boasted loudly. "You're that girl from the wagon train back in Ioway, aint'cha?" he demanded. "Well, I'm a gonna finish the job I started then and take the rest of them horses and gear you taken from my boys when you bush-whacked them!"

Evie did as LeClerq told her, lay her Spenser across her saddle and shot Hart just above his belt buckle, slightly up and to the left. Hart dropped as if he had been hit by a locomotive, his drawn revolver firing into the dirt in front of him! With no wasted motion, Evie swung her rifle and shot Old Yeller right between the eyes, and that man never knew

what hit him, being dead long before he started to slump to the ground, his pistol firing harmlessly into the dirt in front of him!

Evie could hear shooting in the back-ground, but she did as LeClerq had told her, kept her eyes on her targets and ignored him altogether. Neither Hart nor Old Yeller moved and after a moment, Evie broke her weapon to reload and looked around to see what had happened. All she saw was LeClerq reloading his own rifle casually while watching two slumped figures across the parade ground.

Slowly, Evie walked over to stand above the fallen Hart.

“You shot me!” he accused.

“Just like you shot my father and my mother and my uncles and my aunts and my cousins and my baby brother, only they did not have a gun in their hand. You and your men killed them all in cold blood.”

“They started shooting at us!” he protested.

“You lie! They never owned a gun in their lives! Not one of them had ever shot a gun in their lives. You killed them because you thought they had gold hidden in one of the wagons and you burned everything when you couldn’t find it, letting people think it was the Indians who raided and killed them. Only I survived the massacre. Mr. LeClerq taught me how to shoot and today I am avenged for their deaths by yours. May you burn in Hell!”

“The Good Book teaches that a man shall be forgiven his sins in Heaven,” the man protested weakly.

“Oh, in your case, Mr. Hart, I am sure He will make an exception and send you straight to Hell!”

And Hart’s eyes glazed over. He was dead.

Lieutenant Johnson came bustling across the parade field demanding to know what was going on. In a few words, LeClerq explained what had happened out on the prairie and being braced by Pony-Boy Hart and his men, resulting in Evie and himself having to defend themselves.

“Was that the lot of them?” Lt. Johnson asked at the end of LeClerq’s explanation.

LeClerq turned to Evie. “Well, Evie, my darlin’, you was there. Have we missed any?”

Evie grinned and shook her head. “No, Mr. LeClerq, that was the hull of them!”

“Then no more head hunting?” he asked gently.

“Not unless someone else wants to have a go at me,” she grinned.

“Lord forbid!” he replied reverently.

* * *

IV

Spring finally melted the deepest snow so that the live-stock could once more get at the grass and LeClerq breathed a sigh of relief. Supplies of grain and hay were getting low. One day in late March of 1880, a full year after he had rescued Evie, he, Evie and the Pima Indians gathered up their belongings and started driving the rest of their livestock west. It took several more weeks, but finally they looked across the bare Montana flatlands to the foothills of

the Rocky Mountains just beyond and realized that they had finally come home.

The Chief and his followers set up a more or less permanent camp near a sparkling mountain stream while Evie and LeClerq scouted around for a place to build their house and start their ranch.

Working together, the braves and LeClerq soon had trees cut and trimmed and had started on a log house for Evie. It was a small place, consisting of an eating room/kitchen combination with an attached wood shed and a divided loft that would be their sleeping area, Evie on one side and LeClerq on the other.

The main house completed temporarily, LeClerq and the braves started building houses for the married men and their squaws and papooses. Before the winter winds and snow arrived that fall, they had cut and stacked many stacks of fire-wood and cut and stacked tons of grass to feed their animals during the forthcoming winter. LeClerq and the Chief had determined that the next year they would raise grain to help feed the stock plus give them enough extra to grind into flour. Buffalo had grown scarce on the prairies, but they were able to find and kill several animals before the wolves got them. Evie wheedled LeClerq into bringing home six buffalo calves and that was the start of an endless supply of buffalo meat over the years ahead!

With the gold from Evie's Father, they went south with their braves and some of the younger boys where they purchased several thousand head of short horn young stock that they then drove to the home ranch. In two more years, much of that young stock were of marketable heft and LeClerq found no

dearth of buyers when he let it be known that “he might sell off a few head. . .”

But, before that. . .

One night late in October after they had moved into the house (it had started to get rather cold at night), LeClerq was half way surprised to waken and find Evie shivering and snuggled up close to him under his blankets.

He shook her shoulder angrily. “Hey! What in blazes are you doing? Get back to your own side of the curtain and into your own bed roll right now!” he blustered.

“It’s cold over there,” she murmured sleepily.

“No colder’n this side!” he retorted. “Sides, your side’s got the chimney!”

“It’d be a lot warmer if you’d just lay back and let me snuggle up to you,” she answered in a soft, reasonable voice.

“Evie, we can’t!” LeClerq moaned. “We’re not married!”

“Details!” she snapped. “We’ll take care of that little detail next time we go East.”

“You’re just a baby!” he protested. “Hardly out of diapers!”

“Look, LeClerq, I’m almost sixteen years old. I am so old enough! I want you! So, shut your cake hole and hold me close. I won’t bite.” Then she giggled. “Well, not very hard!”

It took LeClerq hours to fall back asleep while Evie slept the sleep of the innocent!

It didn’t surprise him when a few nights later, he found an almost naked Evie waiting for him, but it

did surprise him when all she did was cuddle up next to him, pull his arm around her so that his hand was cupping her tiny, almost non-existent breast and went to sleep.

Again, it took him much of that night to fall asleep too. . .

LeClerq wasn't himself the next day when he rode out and he got caught miles from the house without his slicker. He was drenched to the skin when he arrived back at the ranch house, and before Evie could get him warmed up, he was shivering and shaking out of control. She knew instinctively that the man had caught pneumonia, and that if he weren't watched closely, he would die on her!

She made a gallon of chicken soup and fed the semi-conscious man as much as he could get down, then wrapped him in all the blankets she could find, letting him lie on a pallet in front of the fire-place in which she kept a roaring fire going for six days and nights. When LeClerq couldn't stop shivering and shaking, Evie stripped down to her skin and crawled into the bed-roll with him, keeping him warm with the warmth of her own body through the many long nights thereafter.

On the sixth day, LeClerq's fever broke and he slipped into a peaceful sleep with Evie still holding him close. In time, LeClerq roused enough to realize what had happened to him, and he tried to thank Evie for nursing him back to health.

Evie, for her part, was so happy that her LeClerq was on the mend, that all she could do was cry, something that puzzled LeClerq no end!

“What in thunderation is wrong with you, woman?” he roared.

“I’m just happy!” she bawled and cried harder.

“Women!” LeClerq muttered and went back to sleep.

And true to her established custom, Evie slipped into bed with LeClerq that night and cuddled up to him, dropping off to sleep almost immediately.

Soon, LeClerq just gave up and had accepted the inevitable since he made no more objections to Evie’s choice of sleeping arrangements. Even when he awoke morning after morning with her small hand holding and stroking his erection, he accepted her advances, realizing that it would make no difference to Evie what he said, Evie would do as Evie wished in spite of what he might or might not wish!

Then one night in mid-December, LeClerq got the surprise of his life! When he went to place his cupping hand over her sex mound, he discovered something that he had never dreamed existed, at least not on his Evie! Evie had a tiny penis and an undeveloped sac between her legs. Evie was a male!

And in all the time since he had known her, he realized that never once had she confirmed nor denied outright that she was female! It had always been hinted at but never stated for a fact! LeClerq was so surprised that he sat right up in his bedroll and glared at Evie!

“You’re not a woman!” he accused belligerently.
“You’re a boy!”

“I’m sorry, LeClerq,” Evie whispered, “I wanted to tell you way back in the beginning. . .”

“Well, why didn’t you?” he demanded angrily, reaching for his boots.

“Where you going?” Evie demanded.

“Out! I can’t stay here!”

“Why? What difference does it make what I am or am not? LeClerq, whether you realize it or not, I love you. I have loved you since that day you found me!” she asserted.

“But, it’s not right!” he exploded.

“Why?” she asked calmly.

“Because it just ain’t!” he stormed. “I’m a man and so are you and men don’t sleep together and all that there kinda stuff!” he whimpered.

“I don’t care if you don’t,” Evie purred seductively. She patted the blankets beside her. “Come on, lay down with me and hold me like you always do,” she invited.

Gingerly, against his better judgment, LeClerq lay down stiffly while Evie cuddled close to him. “See?” she whispered. “It’s still me. I haven’t changed a bit.”

“Only you’re a boy now,” LeClerq persisted.

“Yes, I am, and always have been,” she giggled, “and if you don’t pay any attention to that, you’ll forget all about it!”

She leaned up and kissed him sweetly. Then lay looking down at him. “See? My kisses are still my kisses and my hands are still my hands,” she whispered as her hand reached for his erection which was now harder than he could ever remember it getting!

‘Good God!’ he thought. ‘I must be going out of my mind!’ In spite of his reservations, LeClerq slipped his arms around Evie and held her tight.

Eventually, he fell fast asleep.

That next night, he watched as Evie stripped right down to her skin and looked around at LeClerq. “Well, are you going to sleep in your clothes or are you going to get comfortable?” she teased.

Blushing, LeClerq stripped down to his red flannels and slipped in beside Evie.

“Good boy!” she praised. “I’ll never hurt you, LeClerq!” she promised.

LeClerq groaned under his breath, closed his eyes and held Evie close, kissing her and caressing her like the lover he was becoming!

Before the end of December, LeClerq was as naked as Evie when they went to bed and when he awoke a few days later to realize that her head was cuddled on his stomach and she was sucking his erection busily, he couldn’t have stopped her even if he had wanted to. . . and he surely did not!

And, on New Year’s Eve, 1881, Evie lost her virginity to LeClerq’s raging erection and for the rest of her life, never once did she regret letting him make her his woman!

When they went south in late March to purchase more cattle, they got married in Fort Worth. No one questioned that she was a girl. After all, wasn’t her name Evelyn Bascomb? And everybody knew Evelyn was a girl’s name! Besides, in her smart forest green dress and her high heeled button boots, she looked every inch the lady she was.

And, people being people, saw what they expected and wanted to see.

To quote an old saying, "If it looks like a duck, quacks like a duck, and waddles like a duck, chances are pretty good that it *is* a duck!"

It surprised LeClerq to learn that the Pimas had known about Evie's "real" sex almost from the very beginning, but they felt that it was not their place to say one way or the other. The Indians had known men like Evie for years, men who preferred to dress and live as women, even going so far as marrying a man! To the Indians, these men were known as "Berdaches," and often had great power in the tribal councils. They were thought to be wise in the ways of the world and were thought to have great medicinal powers of healing. From the very first, Evie had seen to the welfare of her Indian brothers and sisters and they loved her and accepted her as their own.

LeClerq realized that once again he had been had by Evie, only by now he was long past feeling any resentment. Evie would do as Evie wished and he, LeClerq, would do as Evie wished too.

LeClerq had long since learned the futility of arguing with her.

They worked long and hard hours that summer and in the fall they had enough grain and hay to last two full winters.

Evie was twenty two years old, married to a loving, adoring husband, was part owner of a sprawling ranch, and had more friends than she had ever known!

She was more than content with her world.

The massacre had long since receded in her memory, but each year LeClerq reminded her so that she could pay her respect to her ancestors, the Indians joining in with her with a keening dance and much beating of chests as they mourned with her.

But, not all observances were for the dead.

Twice a year, LeClerq and Evie threw a big barbeque steer and pig roast for their Indian brothers and sisters at which there was much dancing and orating and courting and boasting and playing of games that all enjoyed to the hilt.

To the Pimas, Evie and LeClerq were blood relations, and what affected one, affected all.

There could not have been any better friends, neighbors nor relatives than the Pimas.

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