

~ Opportunity Knocks ~

by Catherine Burke

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This is a short work that popped into my head a few weeks ago. Not sure where it's going to lead. If you want to offer some feedback you can reach me at burkcatherine@aol.com.

When opportunity knocks, it's best to answer the door. At least I thought so at the time. At twenty-four years of age, my life was typical for someone trying to make ends meet. I worked too much, played too little and was always worried about having enough money for the rent. I hadn't planned on the course of events that changed my life. People rarely do.

My name is Faith Russell. I grew up in the typical dysfunctional home with a father who drank a lot and a mother who liked to bitch. My dad left when I was four. My mom dumped me with a great aunt when I eleven. By the age of eighteen, I was on my own with a small suitcase of well worn clothes. I landed in Gunnison, Colorado at the Summit Mountain Resort. The area had everything I wanted, mountains, valleys, rivers, sprawling woods filled with aspens and pines, meadows overflowing with wild flowers, and a quiet town environment. I started working at the lodge as a housekeeper. Moving my way up by proving what a hard worker I was. I worked in every area of the resort until I landed in the events department.

For the most part, I work as the assistant events coordinator. You know the person who does most of the grunt work for the weddings, conventions, and specialty requests. When the season is in high gear, I swing additional shifts on the mountain working as a children's ski instructor. My life is pretty simple. I rented small apartment over the maintenance supervisor, Bud Powell's garage just outside of town. I didn't mind the close quarters, the place was close enough to the grocery store that I could walk there or even to work if needed. Plus, Bud would drive me to work in his monster 4x4 with a plow when a storm rolled in. My '96 Chevy pickup ran, but with the oil leaking pan, I was putting a quart in it every other day. I resorted to running to work or letting one of the guys pick me up.

By the guys, I mean I work with an assortment of individuals who worked at the resort. They were my family, the scruffy group of men and women who ran the resort from maintenance and housekeeping to the front desk staff and the kitchen crew. I didn't have much of a family and these individuals substitute for the blood who walked away from me.

My landlord Bud and his motley crew of maintenance workers took care of the lodge, spa, and the slopes. For the most part, the crew left me alone, knowing Bud wouldn't tolerate any of them

hitting on or harassing me. I didn't hide my preference for women. Most of the crew treated me like one of the boys until Bud got a new employee, Joe. I had to let the tall dark haired olive skinned man know I was a hundred percent lesbian. It took a few months for the fact to sink in with Joe, who had become a good friend and drinking buddy off the clock. He was a really cute guy, too bad I wasn't into males. We actually resembled a real life Barbie and Ken. Minus the 44" bust line, I was more around the 34" range and not at all interested in Joe. I stood close to 5'9" and had a nice figure that I kept by running every morning no matter what.

This was one of those mornings, I wondered why I even got out of bed. The temperature hung in the upper twenties, but snow was swirling around the mountain top. The weather report predicted a blizzard closing in on the resort. My feet pounded the wet pavement of Butte Drive. My route rarely varied depending upon the time of year and traffic. The white cord of my head phones bounced with each rhythmic step as Dani California by the Red Hot Chili Peppers played on: *Lookin' down the barrel of a hot metal .45 Just another way to survive*. My blue eyes hidden by a pair of wrap around Ray bans focused on the horizon and the mountain. I didn't notice the jeep slowing down behind me trying to get my attention until the horn honked loudly as it pulled up next to me.

"Faith!" Screaming my name at the top of her lungs was the Summit's Assistant Operations Manager, Beth French. "Faith!" Her face was completely flushed and she looked as if she were about to burst a blood vessel.

"Jesus Beth." I stopped running and placed my hand on my chest over my racing heart. "What's wrong? Did someone get hurt? Bud?"

"No, but there is an emergency." She pulled the resort's jeep to the curb and climbed out to talk with me. "There is a situation."

"A situation? Where you have to track me down at 6:45?" I stretched my hands over my head and felt my sweatshirt rise and my back pop. "Come on Beth what's up?"

"The staff in Aspen has food poisoning. They have a major event and need us to send people there."

"By people, I will assume you mean me." I kicked at a snow clump sending it in a hundred pieces across the road. I watched her expression change; she didn't think I'd confront her. "I'll go Beth. Just it always seems to be filling in for other people and resorts issues."

"Faith, I know and I really appreciate it. There is some big writer's convention in Aspen this weekend and the heavy weights are scared about screwing it up. Hell, the attendees will probably write about it in their columns and bury any business we have." Beth huffed out and fell back against the company jeep. I could tell she was uncomfortable about asking me. "Plus Tiffany asked if I could send you."

Tiffany Johnson was the Assistant Operations Manager in Aspen. She trained in Gunnison last summer and we became friends. "My truck won't make it over the mountain." I voiced knowing the staff knew what a piece of crap I drove.

"I thought it was a four wheel drive." Beth ran her hand through her hair. She would have to figure this one out but that was why she made the big money.

"It is but between the oil and bald tires, I'm lucky to make it down Main Street." As pitiful as it sounded, it was the truth. I didn't need to be reminded of my financial status.

"I think I can issue the Jeep out to you, after all its company business." Beth looked at the Jeep and back to me. "Plan on the weekend, but it could be a week. We aren't really sure what the situation is over there."

"A week!" I pushed the knit cap back out of my eyes. "That's ..." *Bullshit*....I refrained from stating my opinion. I knew I was the only employee who didn't have a family and would be the one who didn't make waves. "When are you giving me the Jeep?"

"Now. Drop me back at the resort, and go pack your things. Faith, this is a great opportunity for you. Summit's upper management is all over this thing."

I nodded and walked to the passenger side. I wondered if management cared how the employees got the food poisoning in the first place. I was definitely going to find somewhere else to eat. Stretching my shoulders I wondered how long it was going to take me to drive to Aspen.

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Five hours, that was the answer to that question. The long ride was spent stuck behind a semi truck on the winding switch backs. My hands were sore from the white knuckle grip on the steering wheel. I parked in the back of the sister resort and headed into the office area. Just as I opened the door, a tall raven haired woman was exiting. Between my pulling and her pushing the door opened. The change in momentum caused her to tumble towards the ground. Quick reflex's had my arms wrapping around the woman's torso before she could land head first in a near by snow bank. Instead of gratitude, I was on the receiving end of stone cold brown eyes.

"Are you okay?" I guided her to her feet, my hands still secure on her waist.

"What the hell!" She screamed at me. "There isn't supposed to be anyone back here." She stared at me for a moment as if she contemplated why I was there. She gave me the once over then shooed my hands from my waist. "No one is supposed to be here."

"Sorry?" I wondered what the hell she was talking about. "I work here." It was a bit of an exaggeration, but I was reporting to work. "I just got here and this is where I was told to go. Of course, I'm about two hours late, but I really wasn't about to take on a semi."

"A semi?"

"You know eighteen wheels, usually with a container size load. Believe me ice, snow, and winding roads are not the ideal conditions when trying to pass one of them."

"Are you here for the convention?"

"Convention, no." I shook my head. It seemed my description of the truck lightened her mood. Her eyes grazed over my body and softened when she reached my face. "Are you okay? I didn't realize I pulled the door open so quickly. I'm late." I repeated my tongue becoming tangled from her appraisal.

"I'm fine. A little off kilter, today's just been a bad day."

"Tell about it. Who knew I'd be driving five hours to help out up here." Faith glanced at her watch. "Listen Miss..."

"Amy...Call me Amy." The woman seemed stunned at the sound of her own name.

"Amy, I'm Faith. I work for Summit Resorts, the parent company of the Aspen Pines. I was recruited this morning off the road to come to here and help out for this writer's thing. I just got here, but if there is anything I can do to make your stay more satisfactory, please let me know." I smiled at her and received one in return. My gaydar was pinging off the map, as this beautiful woman checked me out. Maybe trekking to Aspen wasn't going to be as bad as I thought. I let my eyes wander down her rangy frame. She was definitely in shape, with a bit of feminine curves here and there.

"Off the road?" She raised an eyebrow.

"I was jogging." As I heard her question I thought it may sound as if I had a different occupation. "Not the ideal way to be notified I'd be working out of town."

"You're in Aspen for the weekend?" I nodded. She didn't elaborate, but I could see the wheels in her brain turning. "Good, maybe we'll run into each other again."

"Maybe." I felt my insides tingled. It had been a long time since a woman stirred any type of feelings in me. "I've got to go. Enjoy you're...."

"I'm here for the writer's thing." Amy winked then turned and got into the limousine idling along the curb. I felt the wind go out of my sails. I had just blatantly flirted with a guest. Not just a guest, a VIP from the looks of the limo. I needed to report and I would worry about the VIP later.

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The writer thing as it turned out, was the largest mystery writer convention in the world. From the staff, I learned that there were famous writers from all over world in Aspen for the convention. "They say Taylor James is here." Diane, one of the wait staff said as she set down the large serving tray. I looked at her like she had grown a third head. "You know the writer."

"I've heard of him." She laughed at my comment. I wasn't much of a reader. If I had time or the interest in a story, I'd get an audio book from the library and listen to it while I ran. Taylor A. James mystery, *Closed Accounts* was actually one I really enjoyed. Even Bud raved about it. In fact, the story was so intriguing Hollywood made a feature film based on it.

"Not big into reading are you, Faith?" I shook my head. "Well, do yourself a favor and don't try to make conversation with anyone from the convention. They'll boot you back to Gunnison." She grabbed the full tray waiting for her in the window and rushed back to the floor.

I thought about Amy. She was here for the convention and got into a limo. I had been in the industry long enough to know guest who went in and out of the back doors into limousines usually had money, lots of money. There was no way she'd give me a second thought. I was probably just another member of the staff she'd dismiss. That didn't mean I couldn't fantasize about her. Amy and her long raven hair, I wonder what it would be like to touch the silky tresses, thread my fingers in the black mass and kiss her lips? I barely had a conversation with the woman after almost knocked her on her ass. I'm sure she completely forgot about me and was rubbing elbows with the likes of Taylor James.

Even if I did run into her, I was here to work and not get laid. Remembering the look in Amy's eyes, I contemplated having her body against mine. I felt my center twinge, she was definitely easy on the eyes and it had been a long time since anyone had that effect on me.

I snapped out of it knowing I needed to work. Friday, Saturday and Sunday was all about the convention, the needs of the client always came first. It didn't matter that I had been on my feet for twenty straight hours, the customer was always right. At least, my time in Aspen was flying by. To my relief the food poisoning had come from the local pub the staff liked to frequent after hours. I caught up with Aspen Pines General Manager, David Granger just after the dinner rush.

"Mr. Granger, I'm Faith from..."

"Gunnison." He finished my sentence. I nodded. "Thank you for your quick response. We need all the help we can this weekend. Tiffany requested you to help but I didn't realize what an impression you would make on our guests. I got a wonderful compliment about you from Taylor James's staff."

"Taylor James?"

"Yes." He nodded. "They sent their compliments on your attentiveness. Keep up the good work. Also, arrangements for you to stay on site have been made."

"On site?" It was rare that any of the staff would actually stay at the resorts.

"Again, the James party complimented you. Believe me when I say, the management team here greatly appreciates everything you've done." He turned when his name was called. "Check with the front desk, they will get you a keycard. Thank you for your assistance." He started to walk away. "Oh, Faith." He called to me. "What does Taylor James look like?"

"I have no idea sir." And I didn't. I had assisted a number of guest's through out the day; the couple, whose children had locked the key cards inside the room with an eighteen month old, an elderly woman who struggled with the elevator and the long walk from her room to convention and a white haired gentleman whose skin color matched his hair with scary translucent eyes. I wondered if he was wearing contacts for effect.

"That's what I thought. The rumor is she is very secretive about her identity." He shrugged.

"She?" No wonder the waitress laughed at me earlier. He confirmed Taylor James's gender with a nod. I didn't want to think which woman was the famous Taylor James. I wanted to find a bed with my name on it, pass out and start the whole ordeal over again tomorrow.

Dragging my tired butt to the front desk, I waited until all guest were taken care of. I stepped up as one of the clerks's recognized my uniformed maroon blazer with the Summit insignia over my heart. He smiled. Anyone working in the hospitality industry was trained to smile no matter what our moods. "Hello. I recognize your outfit but not your face." I was probably one of a dozen Summit employees sent to Aspen.

"Hi. I'm Faith, E6734." Summit had a strict policy of revealing hourly employees last names. A few years ago, an over zealous guest became obsessed with an employee at one of the Florida resort. The case made national news, a public relations nightmare according to my boss.

"Let me check. Mr. Granger said we had a few special requests this weekend." He typed into the system. His eyes widened a bit and he stole a glance at me. "Here we go. This is your room number and here is the easiest route to the room." Again, training took over. The front clerks were not allowed to state what room any guest would be in nor the length of a stay. "If you have any questions, someone is on duty 24-7." He handed me the key card. "There is a message for you." He went to the small cubby behind the desk and slid a small envelope across the counter to me. "I believe your bags have already been placed in your room. Enjoy your stay at Aspen Pines." Nodding my thanks, I headed towards the elevators.

I looked at the room number. Something bothered me. I had worked the desk and knew where the VIP suites were. All of the resorts maintained the same set up. The luxury suites had picturesque views of the mountains, while the cheaper rooms had views of the parking lot. Something was wrong. I had worked for Summit long enough to know the room I was assigned was a luxury suite. Not the small off the beaten path room's staff was dumped in. I turned around to the clerk.

"That's the correct room. Have a nice night Faith." He confirmed the confused look on my face.

I pushed the button for the elevator and wished I didn't have my uniform on as I adjusted the a-line skirt. At this time of night, usually a drunk or disgruntle guest would confront me about how horrible the service was or how over priced the alcohol was. The small heavy matted envelope in my hand was not the usual resort issued stationary. The fine quality paper in my hand held my curiosity. I didn't want to open it in front of strangers. I'd wait to open it in the room. Lucky for me, I made it to the fourteenth floor without a guest in sight. Even the 14th floor was deserted.

I recognized the sweet rich smell of flowers as I opened the door. On the table in the sitting area, a large bouquet of white roses and lilies sat in a crystal vase. The card with my name was engraved with pictures of the same flowers. The weariness of the day seemed to disappear. Maybe management had recognized my hard work with the special flowers. I slid my finger under the flap and opened the envelope. Unfolding the small card, I first noticed the bold strokes of penmanship.

Faith,

I wanted to apologize for my rudeness. It isn't often that I am knocked off my feet by a beautiful woman. You however, did succeed in doing just that. I hope the flowers make the long day worth it. Can I interest you in dinner?

Amy

Below Amy's name, she listed her room number. Glancing at the clock, I wondered if I should call. I put myself in her shoes for a moment, if I sent a woman flowers, I'd want her to call me. I realized the room number sequentially would be located next to the one I was in. There was an interior door that joined the suite to the next one. The guests could go between rooms without going into the main hallway if they wanted.

Looking at the encased doorway, I slowly walked towards it. Pressing an ear to the inch thick interior door, I listened and heard nothing. I stepped back and questioned whether or not to knock. If I knocked, Amy would answer and God only knew what that would lead to. Did I want to see Amy or did I want to ignore the attraction the woman stirred in me? Tired as I was, being with Amy would be worth the lack of sleep. Watching my hand form a fist and knock on the interior door, I knew there was no turning back. This morning I met a woman, I'd been thinking about all day. I wanted to knock knowing the possible consequences if I did.

Two seconds was all it took for the door to open and for Amy to pull me into her arms. Strong limbs secured me tightly against her curves. She lowered her mouth to mine and made me forget any doubts I had. I wanted her and she wanted me. I threaded my fingers in her soft hair like I fantasized about doing earlier in the day, pulling Amy closer. Our tongues dueled and hands explored unfamiliar landscape. I wanted her. As tired as I was, I wanted this woman. "Thank you for the flowers." I said as I pulled back.

"Faith." She said my name with such relevance, I felt like the Pope. "I want you." Her hands were under my jacket and lifting it off my shoulders to the floor. I knew if I didn't hang the blazer up, I'd spend thirty minutes ironing in the morning.

"Wait..." I said as I backed up and pick up my blazer. I started to remove my white oxford when she reached her long slender fingers towards the buttons.

"Let me." She began unbuttoning my blouse and I complied. I watched as her fingers undid each button slowly sliding the shirt from my body. "I've thought about you all day." Amy confessed as her lips found my ear. She pressed her hips into mine. I groaned and could feel my wetness

pooling between my legs. "I should have been working but you were all I could think of." She placed a kiss on my neck and began to suck. My head automatically fell back giving her more access. Nipping and sucking, she had me under her spell.

"What do you do?" I asked my voice a pitch higher than normal. She continued to kiss her way towards my mouth. When she was inches from my lips she said.

"Do you really care?"

"No." My answer was muted by her mouth covering mine. She closed the door between the rooms and pressed me against the grain. My skirt was lifted to my hips and my hose and underwear pulled down to my ankles. I knew what was happening and loved every moment of it. It was like a trashy movie of the week with the climax happening against the hotel door. I didn't care. I wanted more as her hands explored my breasts, stomach and hips. Amy lowered her lips to my breasts. I held her head tight when she latched on to a taunt nipple and began to suck hard. If she continued, I would come in a heartbeat. With her mouth at one breast and her hand covering the other, I sagged against the door. I wanted this. I wanted her. She pressed her thigh between my legs as my skirt rode high on my hips.

"Amy..." I waited to until she raised her passion filled eyes to mine. "Take me to bed." I wrapped around legs around her hips as she lifted from the door and carried me to the bed.

The night morphed into skin against skin as she took me again and again. I lost track of the number of times I climaxed with her. When I touched her, I remember hovering over her and slowly grinding my lower body into hers. My fingers stroked her, feeling her passion. She let her head fall back against the bed. I watched in fascination as the veins in her neck throbbed. I could actually see her body reacting to mine.

"Faith!" She screamed out my name and bit my shoulder. "Oh fuck!" I felt her internal muscled constrict against my fingers. I remember pulling her close and holding her until sleep took over.

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I woke the press of lips against the back of my neck and the feel of hard nipples on my back. Amy... I didn't care that I was woke from a peaceful rest. I knew the sable hair woman wanted me again and I didn't care. I lifted my hips and pressed against her. Still half asleep, I wanted her to touch me again.

"Faith, baby..." Her cooing words in my ears. "Lift your hips for me." Amy whispered in my ear. Her hands were on my hips lifting them off the bed. I was on my knees, my palms rested on the mattress holding my torso off the bed. Oh! I felt what she wanted to do. The long shaft ran against my sex causing it to twitch. She ran the phallus back and forth against my wetness. Unconsciously, I fell into the rhythm she set.

Our body's moved together. Me on my hands and knees, Amy on her knees behind me ready to enter me with the strap on. "Do you want me like this?" Her voice filled my ear as her teeth nip on the lobe. "Tell me..."

"Yes..." I hissed out as I felt her push up against my ass. I knew I was turned on and wetter than I ever had been. Not one to use toys or bend gender issues, this would be the first time. She pushed her hips forward into me. The phallus skimmed against my sensitive tissue. I tensed when I thought she going entered me.

"Relax..." She said as she kissed my ear and nibbled her way to my shoulder. "You can say no."

"I want..." Amy covered my mouth with hers knowing I wanted her in me, deep and hard. She rubbed against my sex letting me get use to the feeling of the toy. I groaned as she slid passed the place I wanted her again.

"Patience...." She said as she pulled my hips towards her and spread my thighs further apart. I knew she was lubricating the phallus with my juices. She spread my center open and pushed the tip of the dildo into me.

"God..." I groaned aloud. It felt so good as she leaned her weight against me pressing her nipples into the center of my back. "Amy please..." My voice strained. I wanted her to fuck me in ways I never thought I would. She entered me swiftly and it took a moment for me to get comfortable with the size. She waited patiently, whispering soft words in my ear and kissing my skin. My body naturally adjusted and I began to rock my hips against her. I felt Amy's teeth nip at my neck. Her hands held my hips in place as she slowly withdrew then entered me again. She set a rhythm that I matched. The length filling me then with drawing, the sensation was over powering as my eyes closed in ecstasy. *Amy...*

"You feel so good." Amy cooed in my ear. She increased the speed of her hips the phallus exiting and filling me as deep as she could. "Faith!" I heard my name as the powerful hips pushed into me. I was close so close. I had never come like this. My face pushed into the pillow as the scream of rapture was muted by the down filling. I felt Amy's body collapse on to mine, and then the world went blank.

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"Exactly who are you?" A cold voice woke me from my sleep. Blinking feverously, I tried to wake up and figure I were I was. Standing at the foot of the bed was rail thin woman with short black spiky hair with a streak of white at the temple. She reached her hand out and poked my side. "Up!"

I slapped the hand away. "What the hell?" I sat up in the bed, staring at the woman. The sheet that pooled at my waist, I pulled to cover my breasts.

"Come on, up and out. Did she take care of you?" The woman turned to the windows and pulled the curtains wide open. She turned back to the bed and smoothed down the business suit she wore.

"Lady you need to get out of my room now!" I demanded with as much gumption as I could naked. "Where's Amy?"

My question seemed to rattle her for a moment. She looked me up and down. "You're not the first, you're not the last." She held up a thick envelope. "Here this should settle the matter. Take a shower and be out by nine." The woman looked at her watch. "When I say out, I mean off premises."

"Do you work for Aspen Pines?" She laughed. Dumbfounded, was I being fired. I knew about the no fraternizing with the guest policy, but it was more like a guideline. Most of the management staff's spouses had been guests.

"Your services are no longer needed. I don't care where you go or who you do as long as you are out of this suite." She huffed out the interior door and into the other half of suite.

"What the fuck!" I went to place my feet on the plush floor when I realized how sore I was. Where was Amy? Who was that woman? Gingerly, I walked to the bathroom and looked in the mirror. Dear God! What did Amy do to me? I touched the bite mark on my shoulder and winced at the tenderness. On my neck was a giant hickey. I turned to turn the shower on when I saw the scratches down my back. I scrubbed my body clean of any remnants of Amy. I thought about of the things we had done to each other last night. Although I woke up to a stranger barking orders at me and Amy nowhere in site, I wanted her again. Call me crazy, but I did. I scrubbed my body harder. I didn't want to deal with Cruella Da Vill again

Grabbing the robe from the back of the door, I walked into the room, picked up the phone and dialed the administrative office. Asking for the manager on duty, I waited for the phone to be answered.

"Tiffany Johnson, how can I help you?" The voice of the manager came across the line and I was immediately relieved.

"Tiffany, Hi! This is Faith Russell from Gunnison."

"Faith, when did you get here? Did Beth send you up here in the blizzard?"

"Yes, she asked me to come up and help for the weekend."

"Thank you. What's up?"

"Am I fired?" I could hear the nervousness in my voice.

"You're kidding right?" When I didn't answer, she continued. "Not to my knowledge. Oh wait, you're the Faith Mr. Granger was going on and on about."

"That was yesterday. Today could be a different story." I mumbled.

"No, if you were, I'd know." Tiffany was second in command at Aspen Pines. "Besides what on earth could you have done to warrant a termination?"

"Just checking, I just had a weird run in with woman, who isn't too fond of me."

"Can describe her?"

"Did you see 101 Dalmatians?" I heard a soft acknowledgment. "Picture Cruella de Vill but shorter."

"That's one of the guests. That woman has been tormenting staff and guests for the past two days. Don't worry Faith, your still with us."

"Thanks Tiff. One more thing if you have any pull with the schedule, can you hide me in the back today? I'm not feeling well and I don't want the guests to catch anything." Besides the fact the hicky on my neck would stick out like a sore thumb. If I could hide in or near the kitchen, at least I knew I wouldn't run into Amy or Cruella.

"Sure...sure. No problem Faith. Hey, I've arranged places for all the visiting staff to stay, you weren't on the list."

"You're a savior Tiff. Please tell me you have a room for me." I opened the closet door and saw all of my clothes had been unpacked and hanging up.

"Hang on. We are filled to the gills with the convention. Faith if you're up for it, you can crash at my place."

"I can meet you in the office in twenty minutes." I looked around and found my bag and started stuffing my things into it. Glancing at the envelope the Cruella left, I shoved in my bag, to angry to think about what happen this morning. I'd work today and tomorrow, I'd be on the road back to Summit and my life there.

~

For the hundredth time, I reminded myself I asked to be placed in the back. I pressed my hands on my lower back and stretched. A night of sex aerobics caught up with me. The kitchen staff screamed at each other. When one of the line cooks called me a pinche puta. I ripped into him in Spanish. I learned quickly how knowing the language saved me multiple headaches.

"Hey Faith." Diane said as she came to the window. "Have you been here all night?"

"Yes, hiding in the kitchen with Jose and the crew." I gave the man who called me a fuckin' whore another look.

"You know Taylor James is at the head table and is supposed to speak after dinner. You should sneak in and listen."

"Is she?" I let the waitress in on the gender discovery I learned. She laughed at me. "Maybe if I'm finished back here." She gave a wink then grabbed her tray and headed back out to the floor.

Forty minutes later when the clattering of dishes breached silence, I wiped my hands on a towel and made my way to the lavatory. I checked my hair and made certain the hickey on my neck was hidden. The last thing I wanted was a guest or member of the staff to question how I got the mark. Digging through the small purse I carried, I found a brush. Making some kind of semblance to the blonde mop that sat on top of my head, I touched up my makeup and applied a light coat of lip stick. Looking at my reflection, I wondered what I would do if Amy did approach me after this morning's disaster. I didn't expect much, but I didn't expect to be roused from bed by some stranger either. Gathering my wits, I headed to grand ballroom. My interest in the famous author Taylor James peaked by Diane and Mr. Granger. At least I could see what the woman looked like.

The house lights were low as the staff cleared the tables of the dessert dishes and after dinner coffee flowed. I leaned against the back wall blending with the shadows. A spot light of soft blue glowed on the podium on the main stage. The host of the event spoke softly into the microphone.

"Ladies and gentleman, it is with great pleasure that I introduce tonight's keynote speaker. The winner of multiple Dagger and Edgar Awards, and the author of *Closed Accounts* for which she won a National Book Award, please give a warm welcome to Taylor James." The man backed into the darkness. The applause was deafening. From the shadows, like the phoenix rising from the ashes, Taylor James appeared on stage. Her dark hair, glowed bluish under the spotlights, she wore a burgundy colored jacket and skirt, where tiny black buttons along the side. The black silk blouse she had on clung to her curves, shimmering as she moved to the podium and the amount of leg she showed as her skirt opened to just about mid thigh.

"Jesus!" I said as my hand landed in the center of my chest. My heart pounded and the recognition brought tears to my eyes. *Amy...*

"Beautiful isn't she." Diane said as she came to stand next me. The audience quieted after she raised her head and smiled. When she had the convention's attention, she began to speak. I stood riveted to the floor. I heard her voice amplified by the sound system, but I remembered the soft whisper in my ear, her voice calling out my name as she came. I closed my eyes and could feel her body moving against mine.

"Yes..." I repeated the word I had said last night when Amy fucked me with the strap on. I wanted her last night and as she stood in front of all these people, I wanted her again. I realized she had played me. I was a pawn, a foot soldier. Someone she easily could sacrifice. I had been used by Taylor James, world renowned author. I shouldn't have knocked on the door. I should have gone to bed. Now, I was kicking myself for being stupid. I let her use me. I didn't want a ring or anything, a cup of coffee would have been nice or even a good morning.

"Wow..." I heard Diane say.

"What?" Too busy with my internal voices to hear what Taylor was saying.

"Did you hear her?" I shook my head. "She's had writer's block for two years." Diane explained. I turned to the stage and focused my attention on the woman I knew as Amy.

"This morning, I had breakthrough as if the wall in my way crumbled at my feet. I believe with faith, any thing is possible." She stopped speaking and raised a hand to her brow trying to block out the lights. My mouth hung open slightly. Did she say my name or was this another dig against me? The irony of Amy using my name in a speech about conquering her writers block, just added another reason I needed to get out of Aspen. She stepped away from the podium as a loud thunder of applause and accolades were given up by the audience. I was about leave when Cruella stepped forth and began to speak.

"Ladies and gentleman, Miss James will be signing autographed copies of *Closed Accounts* tomorrow morning in the Crystal Room." Cruella smiled then caught Taylor by the elbow and ushered her backstage.

"Did you see that?"

"What?"

"The way that woman grabbed her arm. Rumor is, the woman with the skunk streak is her girlfriend." Diane grabbed the tray she had set down.

"Are you going to get an autograph?" I asked Diane wondering if she was such a big fan. I didn't want to speculate about skunk head. If she was Amy's girlfriend, it would explain this mornings awakening.

"Probably not. By the time I get out of here tonight, I don't even want to think about getting out of bed."

"Then take care it was nice meeting and working with you."

"You're leaving tomorrow." I nodded. I had to work the front desk in the morning to get the guests out, but after that, I was heading home. Away from Aspen Pines and Amy-Taylor James. "It was nice meeting you Faith. Thanks for helping us out. Careful heading back to Summit." With that the waitress left me standing in the dark looking out over the dispersing crowd. I closed my eyes and wished I never came to Aspen.

"Faith!" I opened my eyes and found Tiffany approaching me. The assistant manager saw my frazzled state this morning but did not question my appearance or my demeanor. "I'm glad I caught you. The James party has asked for you." I felt the tears form. I was hanging on by a thread. Just the mention of the name James was enough to send me into a tailspin. "Jesus, Faith what's wrong?"

"I can't Tiff. I just can't." I wiped at my eyes and I was making a scene on the floor. I straightened my blazer and headed to into the kitchen area. The staff looked at me when I went out the back door and into the winter night. I didn't care. I needed to get away.

"What's going on?" Tiffany followed me to the area frequented by the smokers. She wrapped her arms around her upper body trying to stay warm. "Does this have something to do with your appearance this morning?"

"It's just been a really bad weekend." I wiped at my eyes again and cursed myself for being so emotional.

"Listen, just go to my place, finish your shift in the morning and head home. Don't worry about anything. I'll take care of Taylor James."

"Promise me that you won't give her any information about me. You have to promise me." With the internal pain and humiliation still fresh from this morning, I didn't want to deal with Amy or Cruella again. I knew I was in full blown tears. The last time I cried like this was when my mother left me. I felt Tiff wrap me up in a warm hug.

"I promise." She held me for awhile trying to soothe away the hurt. "Go to my place. Bryan knows your staying with us."

"Thanks." I pulled away and gathered my wits. It wasn't often I had a complete breakdown at work.

"When you're ready you can tell me the entire story." She steered me back into the resort. "Get your stuff and get out of here. If you're not up to it, call in sick tomorrow."

"Thanks Tiff."

~

I didn't go to Aspen Pines for my shift. I spent the night at Tiffany's house and slept until two in the afternoon. Thankful for the Assistant Manager for covering for me, I didn't have to subject myself to possibly running into Taylor James. Thankfully Tiffany didn't ask any questions. She never mentioned what happened with the writer's request. She did as I asked and I left Aspen a changed woman, not so naïve.

In the years to come, Taylor James made changes also. She'd go on to write the best selling novel, *Leap of Faith*. The title character seemed eerily familiar. I took a promotion when Tiffany was named the General Manager of the Crystal Mountain Resort and Spa, at the base of Mt. Rainer in Washington.

I think back on that weekend in Aspen and wonder what would have happen if I never knocked on the door. I can't change anything, nor would I. Opportunity knocked and I opened the door.

The End

This is neither my typical story nor the typical voice I of writing I use. I started with an idea of a short story and I wanted to write it. Do I think the story of these women can continue? You tell me.

CB
