

~ In The Light Of Day ~

by Cheyne

whenpiggsfly55@aim.com

Disclaimer: None needed. Other than a strong resemblance to you-know-who, the characters are mine and so is the story.

Fandom: XWP Uber/Original

Rating: 15

Summary: When Riley Vaughn wakes up in a strange bed, it leads to awakenings of a different kind.

Other Information: This was one of those ideas that wouldn't leave me alone until I wrote it down. My muse is a nag. Thankfully.

My thanks to Brenda for the constant nudge in the right direction, Ren for the velvet whip she cracks and Canna for the best line in the story.

When Riley Vaughn awoke, she instantly knew she was not in her own bed. The mattress was too soft.

She blinked and tried to maintain consciousness. She tried to keep the one eye open that was not buried into the pillow and struggled to get a bearing on just exactly whose bed she might be in. And tried to remember just exactly how she might have gotten there.

Nothing immediately came to mind regarding the night before - other than blurry recollections of her cousin's, bachelorette party. Danielle was getting married the following week and she had promised quite a raucous bash for the attendees. Danielle had kept her word.

Riley moved slightly to readjust her position which brought forth new revelations; her muscles ached, she was not alone and she was naked.

Her aching muscles were the least of her concern as that could have been explained by the yielding consistency of the mattress. Usually, if she didn't sleep on something akin to a slab of concrete, her back killed her. She had to admit, though, as her body sunk into the mattress, it was more comfortable than most soft mattresses and the body parts that ached were not the usual areas related to a bad night's sleep.

Her lack of clothes could have resulted from any number of things, including the disconcerting thought of them being covered with vomit. Although she didn't have the aftertaste of throwing up, she knew she must have consumed quite a bit of alcohol to have not made it home and not to remember *why* she couldn't make it home. And, if she had puked or spilled something on her clothes and they had been hung somewhere to dry, she reasoned she would still be in her camisole and panties.

Added to that was the mystery of whose back was pressed up against hers. The warmth of skin on skin contact felt nice. It had been so long since Riley had been intimate with anyone and she wondered if the night before had been worth ending her self-imposed celibacy. She closed her eyes and softly chuckled. *Nearly twenty months of sexually starving myself, wanting it to actually mean something the next time I had sex and not only can I not remember the act itself, I don't even know who it was with...*

She didn't remember meeting anyone outside the confines of the attending party members but the problem was that she didn't remember *anything* after a certain point in the evening. She was positive that Gina, the only non-drinker in the group and the designated driver, would not have let her leave with anyone she didn't know. Although she could not really think of anyone in her current circle of exes or interests who could seduce her out of her resolve. Even drunk. *I'm just so tired of the way men -*

"Good morning. How do you feel?"

Riley's eyes popped open and she stopped breathing. It wasn't so much that the body touching hers now had a voice or that it belonged to a person she would now have to awkwardly deal with, it was that the rich, dulcet tone belonged to a woman.

What the f... Okay, okay, don't panic, Rye. Just because you are lying in bed, naked as the day you were born, with a possibly naked woman beside you doesn't mean that you...you...actually did anything. Breathe. That's it. In. Out. Good. Think, damn it! We probably both just got hopelessly drunk and crashed. Maybe if I can see her face it will trigger something. Riley lifted the covers just enough to allow herself to turn, which caused the overpowering scent of sex to breeze upward. Her head fell back on the pillow and she closed her eyes tightly. *Oh, God. What the fuck happened last night? I know I didn't sleep with a woman. What would cause me to sleep with a woman? I've never been attrac-*

"You okay?"

The voice was closer now. In fact, Riley could feel breath on her face. *What have I done? OhGodohGodohGod.* "Fine," she squeaked, politely, "thanks for asking."

"Why are your eyes still closed? Are they crusted shut or something?"

"No, I...um..."

"If I drank as much as you did last night, you'd probably need a seam ripper to get my eyes open. Although I must say, you handled it better than most."

"Handled what?" She held her breath again. *Don't say it, I know we had sex, I can smell it and feel it. Damn...what exactly did we do? My, um, parts are sore. OhGodohGod, just don't think about it.*

"Your alcohol consumption."

"Oh." *I'm going to have to look at her sometime. She's got a very nice voice, very smooth. With my luck, she's got a face made for radio, probably looks like Gollum. Oh, God. What was I thinking? Well, that's just it, I wasn't thinking.* Riley slowly opened one eye, then the other. She found herself staring into a vivid pair of mesmerizing, electric blue eyes. "Uh...hi."

"Hi." The woman smiled at her, a gesture that revealed perfect, even, white teeth. She had long, jet-black hair, which framed her chiseled features and complemented her tanned complexion. "Thought you might stay in there all day."

"Stay in where?" Riley asked. *Oh, my. She's...she's beautiful. But that still doesn't explain why we are in bed together. She doesn't look familiar. That's not good.*

The woman tapped Riley's temple. "In there."

"Oh."

She studied Riley and smirked. "You look bemused."

"You look *amused*." Riley gripped the sheet up to her neck with such a tight fist, her knuckles were white.

"You have no idea who I am, do you?" The woman leaned back and rested against the headboard.

"Uh...I really...no, I don't," Riley admitted, hoping she didn't look as humiliated as she felt. Her eyeballs rotated over to accept the disappointment in her hostess' stunning and expressive eyes and her gaze automatically fell upon two bare breasts. Riley immediately covered her face with the sheet. "Oh, I'm sorry..." *Can this get any more embarrassing? Okay, don't ask.*

"Why? You didn't seem sorry last night." Her tone was a cross between befuddled and teasing, which made Riley try to burrow deeper into the bed. "You don't remember last night, either, do you?"

"No," came Riley's muffled reply.

"Pity. It was most definitely worth remembering."

"Um...thank you?" Riley's voice was still smothered by the sheet and both her hands. The woman chuckled and it was a sound Riley found oddly delightful.

"Come on out of there and we'll talk," she coaxed as she tugged at the sheet. "I promise I'll cover up. It's obviously making you uncomfortable."

"Thank you." Riley felt the woman's weight ease off the bed.

"Okay, you can look. I'm decent."

Slowly, Riley pulled the sheet from her eyes and focused on her hostess, who belted a royal blue satin robe closed. The color of the garment only enhanced the woman's loveliness. The woman approached the bed and extended her hand.

"I'm Kya Liberis."

"Riley Vaughn." She accepted the handshake and released it quickly.

"Yes, I remember who *you* are." Kya sat in a rocking chair opposite the bed.

"Right. Yeah. Can I ask -?" *Where should I start? Does it really matter?* "What did I drink?"

"Tequila."

Riley squinted at her in confusion. "I don't drink tequila."

"You did last night."

"No, it's not possible. Tequila makes me really sick and gives me the hangover from Hell."

"Is there such a thing as the hangover from Heaven? You don't remember Julie giving you shots of dill pickle juice before each shot of tequila? Swore it wouldn't give you a hangover?"

"No. I shot Tequila?" Riley still wasn't convinced.

"I saw it with my own eyes."

"Who's Julie?"

"Danielle's matron of honor."

"Oh."

"Don't remember her either?"

"She's kind of fuzzy."

"She's Mediterranean." Kya said.

Riley didn't get it at first, then she cocked her head. "Cute."

Kya shrugged and smiled. A simple act that made Riley audibly catch her breath. Confused by her own reaction to Kya, Riley covered the action with a cough.

Why don't I remember her? She's fucking gorgeous. Wait, what? Focus, Rye, focus! She shook her head as though that would knock the cobwebs loose. "I shot dill pickle juice?"

"Surprisingly, yes."

"That actually works?"

"Are you sick?"

"No."

"Do you have a hangover?"

"No."

"Then I guess it works."

"Listen, Kya, I...I don't know what...I don't, um, sleep with women..."

"You did last night."

"No, seriously -"

"You don't drink tequila, either." Kya arched an eyebrow at her guest.

"Kya, this is very awkward for me - for many reasons - and I need to know what happened last night. I need to know how I ended up in your bed...with you."

The blue eyes pinned her in scrutiny. "You really don't remember a thing?"

"No, not much after..." Riley closed her eyes, apparently trying to recall. "...the male stripper."

Kya nodded. "What's the last thing you remember about him?"

Riley glanced above Kya's head, toward the ceiling as though that would help her remember. "He...uh...gave Danielle a lap dance. Then...he...hmmm...he gave lessons?" She looked at Kya for confirmation. When Kya nodded again, Riley said, "And after that, I...wow, it really starts going blank after that."

"Maybe it's selective amnesia," Kya suggested.

"Why would I have that?"

"Because you gave me a lap dance."

Riley turned progressive shades of red. "I did?"

"I have proof." Kya reached around to her dresser and picked up her cell phone. She pressed a few buttons and handed the phone to Riley. "Just click the circle on the side to go to the next picture."

Riley took the phone from Kya and made sure the sheet didn't fall away from her neck. She looked at the first picture and her eyes widened. Numbly, Riley studied the selection of seven images of her as she, indisputably, ground into Kya's lap. "Those are pretty clear."

"There's video of it, too," Kya said.

"I'm sure there is." As she handed the phone back to Kya, Riley's chin touched her chest. "I don't remember that."

"You weren't the only one who did a lap dance. There were at least twenty other women who, after their lesson, tried their new skill on someone from the group."

"And I chose you? I don't - didn't - know you."

"Actually, I was volunteered. I had just walked in the door when a guy in a navy blue thong with an embroidered badge was pumping his pelvis wildly to '*Say It Right*' and a group of drunken women were mimicking him. Julie handed me a huge glass of sangria. I had taken maybe two sips when Gina grabbed my wrist, pulled me over to where the lessons had just concluded, told me to sit and then dragged you over and said you needed someone to practice on."

"Okay, well, if twenty of the others did it too, it sounds innocent enough."

"You gave a very seductive lap dance to the only lesbian in the room."

"I didn't know you were a lesbian."

"Actually...you did. Gina announced it when she introduced us. She loves to do that. She said, 'Riley, meet Kya. She's a lesbian. You can practice on her. She'll love it'."

"Oh, God. And then what happened?" *I am going to kill Gina.*

"She was right. I loved it. And, apparently, so did you. When you were done, you asked for everyone's attention and told them that you just gave a lap dance to a woman who could really appreciate it."

I'm going to kill myself. "I did that? That is so not me. It had to be the tequila. You must have wanted to slap me silly. Did we say anything to each other?"

"First, you were already silly and second, the sexiest woman there dry humped me to one of my favorite songs. Trust me, I could barely speak."

"Thank you," Riley smiled, shyly.

"For?"

"Saying I was sexy."

"Don't you own a mirror?" Kya grinned widely at the reaction she got from the adorable, smaller blonde woman. Riley may have been inhibited at the moment but the recollection of that luscious mouth on her, of how that hot little body rocked in ecstasy above her, or how she repeatedly screamed release mere hours before, contradicted that. The memory of Riley fucking her with abandon, of Riley causing her to writhe in pleasure, even though she protested she had no clue as to what she was doing, challenged that sober reserve.

The sensual intensity of Kya's expression left Riley with no doubt what the other woman was thinking. Hopefully there wasn't a tape or cell phone photos of *that*. "So - after the, um, successful lap dance, then what?"

"You drank more and got more even friendlier."

"With you?"

"With everybody but I seemed to be your favorite. I have to admit, I'm a sucker for a natural flirt."

"I get that way after a few drinks."

"Obviously."

"Okay, after a little harmless flirting -"

"There was nothing harmless about your flirting. You blatantly came on to me."

Riley looked dubious. "I wouldn't do that."

That denial was greeted by a raised eyebrow and an undisguised once-over of the bed.

"But I don't sleep with women. I've never...well, the attraction and desire has never been there."

"It was there last night."

"I was drunk."

Kya smirked. "Liquid courage? It's been my experience that people do and say things when they are drunk that they don't have the guts to do and say when they are sober."

"You think I harbor a secret desire for women?" Riley sounded unintentionally defensive.

"I don't think anything of the kind, Riley, I just stated what I know to be true."

"But - still - I'm not...I'm not a lesbian."

"One experience does not a lesbian make." Kya ran a hand through her hair. "Look, I can see you are very uncomfortable. There's really no need to be. We met, we had a good time, that's all it has to be. It was what it was."

"Do you think anyone knows that I, uh, came home with you?"

Kya sighed. "Just Gina. Are you ashamed?"

Thankfully, Gina doesn't have a big mouth. If Danielle knew, it would be currently scrolling on CNN every fifteen minutes. Riley recognized that she had stepped into eggshell territory. "Only of my own behavior, not of you. I would have been ashamed if I had ended up in the bed of a man I didn't know, either, especially in this day and age."

"Unfortunately, I can't make you feel any better by telling you we were cautious because we weren't."

"But...I don't even know what to do with a woman..."

"So you said last night. I can assure you that you have a creative imagination and you take instruction very well." Kya grinned at Riley's nonplussed expression. "Bet you wish you could remember it now, huh?"

Riley blushed furiously again. *How does she do that? My God, though - if I had to pick a woman to enjoy a night of debauchery with, I could have done a hell of a lot worse. She is striking.* "So does that mean I did okay?" *Oh, fuck! I can't believe I just asked that!*

Kya could not stop herself and burst out laughing, which caused Riley to smile back at her. "You were great," she winked at her. Kya stood up. "How about some coffee?"

"Do you mind if I shower first?" *Do I really want to stay and have coffee with this woman? Yeah. I think I do.*

Kya gestured toward the bathroom. "Be my guest. Towels are in the cupboard next to the tub. Good luck finding all your clothes."

Her focus had either been on Kya or her own lap, so Riley had not had a chance to look around the room. She was sure her clothes were on the floor by the bed. Riley surveyed the bedroom and saw her blouse on the bedpost, her jeans draped over the television, her camisole was dangling from the ceiling fan and her panties were M.I.A. "Oh. Oh, my."

"Yeah. It got a little wild in here last night. I don't even know where my clothes are. You were a little impatient."

Riley shook her head. "I still can't believe I was the aggressor. And with a woman."

Kya chuckled again and as she left the room, she said, "The lady doth protest too much, methinks."

Ow. Owowowowowow. Jesus, what did we do last night? It shouldn't sting this much to pee. Riley gingerly wiped herself, flushed and started the shower. She found a temperature she liked, adjusted the showerhead, stepped under the spray of hot water and let it pulsate on her upper body.

Okay. Okay. Come on, Rye, it's really not as bad as you first thought. Aside from being stunning and hot, she seems like a nice person - wait, did I just call her hot? Oh, get over yourself, Rye, she is very hot. It's almost too bad I'm not into women. Wait, what am I saying? Focus, Rye! She lathered up her hair. Everything will be fine. Kya seems up front and discreet. She makes sense; it doesn't have to be anymore than what it is. Or what it was. Now that I have the experience under my belt, though, I wish I could remember it.

That is definitely the last time I do tequila.

"How do you take your coffee?" Kya handed Riley an empty mug. She had the coffee carafe in the other hand, ready to pour. "Regular, like your men? Or dark and strong, like your women?"

Riley nearly choked on her own saliva. She squinted at Kya. "You're just getting the biggest kick out of this, aren't you?"

"Actually? Yes." She gestured with the coffee container again.

"I usually like it without anything but that depends on how potent you make it."

"Well, you don't have to cut it with a knife and fork but you can't read a book through it, either."

"Then I'll take it black. It smells really good. I love the smell of freshly brewed coffee."

"Me, too." Kya placed the carafe on the table, gestured for Riley to sit and then pulled out her chair for her. After they were both seated at the kitchen table, Kya said, "Are you feeling better?"

"I feel, um, fresher. Although I still can't find my panties," she blushed again. "Going commando is an experience all in itself."

"Ah. The secret of the missing panties - not something we should call Nancy Drew for, eh?" Kya sipped her coffee and watched Riley over the rim of her cup.

"No, although somehow I really don't think George would mind too much." Riley chuckled.

"So the little straight girl does have some gaydar," Kya mused.

Is she making fun of me? Am I being too defensive? How do I know? It's not like I have anything to compare this to. Move on, Rye, she's probably just teasing. "So how do you know Danielle?"

"We went to college together, actually roomed together one semester. We try to get together and catch up once every six months, more if we can."

"Really? Did you and Danielle...ever...?"

"Sleep together? No. I had a girlfriend. Danielle knew all about it. She was fine with everything. Besides, Danielle is as straight as anyone I have ever met. And, even if she had been gay or bi, I was not attracted to her."

"You don't think Danielle is attractive?"

"No, I think Danielle is extremely attractive. I've just never been attracted to her. Big difference there."

Huh. That's a concept I hadn't thought of. Interesting. Riley nodded.

"In most cases, just like straight women, lesbians have to be attracted to the person. We're not willing to sleep with every female on the planet just because they are female, you know? Well, a majority of us, anyway. There are a few who defy that...unfortunately. They give the rest of us a bad name."

"How do you do that?" Riley wondered out loud.

"Do what?"

"Read my mind like that? That's the second or third time you've done that."

Kya smirked. "Don't ever play poker for money, Riley. Everything you think shows on that beautiful face of yours."

Riley smiled, demurely. "You certainly are a charmer, aren't you?"

"Depends on who you ask, I guess." Kya added more coffee to her cup and offered more to Riley, who declined. "How do you know Danielle?"

"She's my cousin. Her mom and my mom are sisters."

"Oh. That's right, Danielle does have a lot of cousins. Weren't there quite a few at the party last night?"

"Other than me, there were only six and that was six too many. They were some of the older women who arrived early and left soon after the stripper showed up." Riley rolled her eyes. "I'm sure I will hear about the fact that I stayed to see the stripper when I go see my mom tomorrow. In fact, I won't be surprised if there isn't already a message on my phone."

"Really? She'll have a problem with that?"

"Only because her oldest sister, the Wicked Witch of the Westons - my mom's maiden name - will preach fire and brimstone about the continuous, sinful downfall of my generation of 'Westons'. I keep hoping someone will drop a house on her but it hasn't happened yet. My mom gets it the worst because I am the youngest of all the first cousins."

"Oh, so you're the salvation of the family reputation?"

"Something like that."

Kya's laughter bubbled up again. "I guess last night kind of blew that, didn't it?"

Riley couldn't help but join her in the laughter. "Yeah, well, thankfully what Aunt Virginia doesn't know won't kill my mother. And I blew the 'great family hope' thing long before last night." Riley began to loosen up a little. She was still detached from the events of the night before and, surprisingly, started to feel regret that she had blacked out having sex with the enchanting woman seated opposite her. Riley became more intrigued by the minute. "I think I'd like more coffee if that's okay." Riley reached for the carafe but Kya got to it first and refilled Riley's cup. *First my chair, now my coffee. Well, well, well...chivalry is not dead after all.* "Thank you."

"I remember Danielle used to joke about her mother's side of the family. I never thought too much about it. I mean, we all have interesting family dynamics."

"We're one of those families who have yearly reunions, even though most of us live here in town and can see each other any time we want. And everybody who can shows up - me included - because we're an irritatingly competitive lot. We have to brag to each other about our lives and accomplishments. It really is an unhealthy cycle of one-upmanship."

"And you participate in that?"

"Not so much anymore. But I used to think it was a requirement to remain in the family."

"Yet you still go." Kya rested her chin on her palm.

"I know. It's destructive and obnoxious behavior." Riley smiled. "Most of us can't stand each

other but we're family, you know?"

"Really? You can't stand each other yet you all clamor to get together once a year?"

"Odd, I know, but the precedent was set early on by Aunt Virginia and Uncle Ted."

"No gay or lesbian relatives?" Kya asked.

"None who would dare to come out." Riley grinned.

"Ah, but you suspect there may be?" Kya flashed a grin back at her.

"There were always rumors about my cousin, Warren. He's in his fifties, never married, always brings the same two people to the reunions; his best friend, Sean, who's so flaming I'm sure you could light the Fourth of July fireworks off him, and Anna. She's supposed to be Warren's girlfriend but nobody buys it. They've allegedly dated for the last twenty years. Supposedly he's madly in love with Anna and it's Anna who doesn't want to get married. Who knows? It may be true; it may not. I honestly don't care. He seems like a cool enough guy but because of our age difference and the fact that he successfully escaped to another state, I don't really know him well."

"At his age, you would think he wouldn't be so afraid to come out. Seriously, what real impact could nasty old Aunt Virginia have on his life?"

"Well, since she's his mother and there's a large inheritance to consider..."

"Ah. That makes it clearer." Kya warmed her coffee again.

"Can I ask you a personal question?" *This is kind of silly. Last night we shared the most personal act that two people can share - several times, from what she has indicated - I hardly think I should have to ask permission to ask a personal question.*

"Sure but isn't that a little redundant?" Kya smirked.

"How come you don't have a girlfriend?"

"What makes you think I don't?"

"Because you...we...um..." Riley gestured toward the bedroom. "I just assumed..." She let her voice trail off. *Of course, why wouldn't she have a girlfriend?*

Kya snickered and put up her hand. "I apologize. That was wrong of me. No, I don't have a girlfriend. I'm not ready for a relationship right now. What about you? Boyfriend? Husband?"

"No. No boyfriend and I'm not married. I wouldn't cheat on my husband. Especially not with a wo..." *Oh, fuck, Riley! Why the hell do you suddenly sound like such a homophobe?*

"With a woman?" Kya finished for her. "One never knows what one will do in times of desperation."

"I don't consider myself desperate. It's my choice that I haven't slept with anyone in a while." *I wish she would stop making me feel so defensive.*

"Yes, I know. You told me," Kya soothed. "I didn't mean you, personally."

"Oh. Okay. Good because I hardly think anyone would have to be desperate to sleep with you. I would think you could have your pick of just about anyone."

Kya looked into Riley's eyes, no mistaking her intent. "I do."

It was difficult for Riley to find her voice immediately. Finally she was able to break eye contact and she cleared her throat. "Oh." *Wow. That was intense.* "Um...so why not anyone permanent?" *So I guess she finds you attractive and is attracted to you? How does that make you feel, Rye? Flattered? Yeah, flattered works. I wonder how I would feel if she wasn't so damned beautiful.*

"Are you offering?" Kya's grin was playful and indulgent.

Riley smiled in response to Kya's teasing. She blushed and bowed her head. "Uh...no. I think last night was a one-time thing." She looked up, back at Kya. "I don't think there is anything wrong with being gay, even experimenting - obviously - but I like men too much." *Even if the experimentation was subconscious.*

"Why?" Kya's question sounded genuine.

"Why?" *Is 'because I do' too trite an answer?*

"Yes. Why? What is it about men that you like so much?"

Riley shrugged. She had never really thought much about it. "Good question. I like that male energy. I like a certain amount of machismo as long as it doesn't cross the line to abusive. I'm independent but I like to be taken care of at times. I like a man's strength. I like penises."

"Really? I find them fascinating but very unattractive," Kya admitted.

"Well, they aren't very pretty but I like what they can do." Riley cocked her head. "You find them fascinating?"

"Oh, absolutely. I am fascinated by how a man can center his entire existence around that dangly thing between his legs. I am fascinated by how those little guys seem to have a mind all their own. In fact, if I am going to watch porn, I'd much rather watch hetero or guy on guy porn than lesbians."

Riley was totally absorbed in this conversation. "Really? Why? I would think -"

"That because I'm a lesbian, I would only want to watch girl on girl porn? Have you ever seen a lesbian porn video?"

"No. I've never had the opportunity or the desire, really."

"Oh, they're not even good enough to be classified as horrible," Kya said, and made a dismissive motion with her hand. "At least the videos I've seen. They're all Barbie dolls with perfect bodies, fake boobs and no acting talent. If I'm going to watch women have sex, I really want to believe they are exciting each other. So far I've yet to see one lesbian porn movie where they have convinced me that's happening. But when guys are in a porn movie, there's no doubt they are excited. The focus is on the penis and, in porn at least, penises don't disappoint."

This is truly an enjoyably bizarre conversation. "Yeah, it can be a little different in real life. Huh, interesting. Have you ever, you know, been with a guy?"

"I experimented a couple times. Just to see what it was like. It was okay. If I could have had the penis without the man attached, it would have been much better. Fortunately, I have substitutes which work as well, if not better," Kya winked. "So, tell me, if you like men so much, how come you're not with one?"

Another good question. "I have great experiences with casual dating but I don't do so well with relationships. I must attract the wrong kind of guy. I dated who I thought was a wonderful man for seven months. He was handsome and educated and well-mannered...my family just adored him. I thought I'd hit the jackpot. When he proposed, I accepted. The minute he put that ring on my finger, everything changed. He instantly treated me like property, told me what I could wear, what I could do, who I could see..."

"Why did you stay with him?"

"I didn't. But it was hard because by the time I realized that he was being abusive, I was already deeply in love with him. I now understand how women get into abusive relationships. By the time they realize it's abusive, they are so far in it, it's hard to comprehend and acknowledge that they are actually there."

"Did he ever hit you?" The question was asked through clenched teeth.

"No. But I could tell it was headed in that direction."

"How did you end up leaving him?"

"It was Thanksgiving, two years ago. I wanted to spend it with my family but he insisted we spend it with his. Dinner went fine but he drank all through the meal. After, when everyone was relaxed and played games, like croquet and bocce, he openly accused me of coming on to his sister's boyfriend. For some reason, that was the last straw. I left his parents' house and never

spoke to him again. I Fed-Exed the ring back and decided I really needed to look at who I was getting involved with. It didn't make me hate men, it just made me more cautious."

"That's certainly understandable."

"What about you?"

"I don't hate men. I just don't want to be with one."

"No, why do you like women so much?"

"Because I do," Kya smirked again.

Oh, no. If I can't give that answer, she can't give that answer. "No, seriously, what is it a woman can do for you that a man can't?"

"Best case scenario? Know her body and use that knowledge on me. Not let her ego or misogynist upbringing control her every move. Not treat me like a trophy."

"And how many women have you actually met who can fulfill that?"

"I've been lucky."

"Yet no steady girlfriend," Riley stated.

"As clichéd as it sounds, it's not them, it's me. Let's just say it's complicated and leave it at that."

Riley finished her coffee and glanced at her watch. "I should get going. Where am I, by the way?"

"Scotland Court. Where do you live?"

"Mountain Street, off Eastern Avenue, over by the mall."

"Okay, I know where that is. Give me a second, I'll throw something on and take you home."

"Are you sure? I can call a cab."

"It's fine, I don't mind at all. Unless you'd rather we not be seen together."

"I think it's a little late for that," Riley said, amiably. "Yes, I would like a ride home, thank you. And if you find my underwear -"

"I'll bring them to you at the wedding," Kya kidded.

"Unless you want to be the cause of several heart attacks, including my own, I'd really appreciate

it if you didn't." Riley visualized that scene. That would be the undoing of her parents, especially in front of her Aunt Virginia.

Kya finished her coffee and stood up. "I'll just slip into some sweats and run you home."

The ride to Riley's was quiet but pleasant. When they pulled up to Riley's apartment, Riley hesitated before getting out. "It was nice to meet you, Kya," Riley said and extended her hand.

"It was my pleasure," Kya responded and accepted the handshake. "So I guess I'll see you next weekend at the wedding."

"I will be there."

"Do you have a date?"

"Nope. Do you?"

"No. Do you want a date?"

"Uh..."

"I'm just teasing you, Riley. I mean, could you be any more adorable when you blush?"

Riley blushed furiously and let go of Kya's hand. "You're a stinker, you know that?"

"I've been called worse," Kya said. "Listen, Riley, I like you. You are difficult *not* to like. I got the feeling that last night meant more than just a one-night stand for you. That you were reaching out, I don't know...trying to let the real you out."

"This is the real me. And I'm not gay."

"So you keep saying. Which one of us are you trying to convince?" Kya's all-knowing smirk bordered on condescending.

Well, now. That was below the belt. But...does she have a point? Riley bowed her head. "Like you said, it was just sex."

"No, I don't entirely mean that part. From things you said, when we actually had conversation, you sounded like you wanted to change your life, wanted to be more...fearless. I hope you can achieve that fearlessness. I think last night was certainly a step in the right direction. Not because you had sex with a woman but because you were brave enough to step outside your comfort zone and do something so out of the realm of what you thought probable. You told me you were tired of living by everyone else's standards. So don't." Kya nudged Riley with her elbow. "Gutsy is very attractive."

Riley looked out the window, unsure of how to respond.

"Relax. I'm not coming on to you. I've never forced anything on anyone and I'm not going to start now. However, if you ever want to get together again, meet for coffee, whatever, give me a call. I'm in the book. There's only one K. Liberis."

Indeed. "I'll keep that in mind." Riley opened the door and exited the car. "Thank you, Kya."

"Again, my pleasure. See you at the wedding."

Riley checked her voice mail when she got inside her apartment. She listened to several messages that included two from her mother and two from Gina. Gina's first message consisted of lewd jokes about Riley's lap dance with Kya and that she hoped Kya had been a 'gentleman' and for her to call Gina when she got home. The second message had Gina not quite as jovial, wondering if Riley had made it home okay and she was going to call Kya if Riley didn't return her call before noon. Riley looked at her watch. It was almost eleven-forty five.

Her mother's messages were actually quite calm. Her mother had heard through the family grapevine that Riley stayed until the end of the party. Then her mother said, "Your Aunt Virginia will have a lot to say about that, I'm sure. I hope you had a great time and didn't drink too much." Then the next one said, "Your cousin, Meredith, spread around that you drank like a fish last night. You know better than that. If you're really sick for the next couple of days, I won't have any sympathy for you." *Thanks, Meredith, I owe you one.*

Riley called Gina first. There was no answer so she left a message and told Gina she was home and everything was fine. She added that she was going to take a nap so if she called back and got her voicemail again that would be why.

The next call was to her mother. "Did you just get up or just get home?" Gloria Vaughn asked her daughter.

"Yes."

"Is that one of those 'it's none of your business, mom' answers?"

"Yes." Riley laughed.

"Aunt Virginia is on the warpath, you know."

"And that's news, how?"

"Just don't become her target. Your father and I can take her venom when it's directed at us but

when it's at you -"

"Oh, Jesus. What's got her all wound up now?"

"Danielle's behavior at the party last night. I hear it got pretty wild with the drinking and the stripper and that lap dance thing he did."

"Does Aunt Virginia even know what a lap dance is?"

"I don't think it matters. She knows it's dirty. She's appalled because Danielle is getting married next week and she doesn't feel that this is how a bride-to-be is supposed to behave."

"Well, in her day, that's understandable. By today's standards, Danielle was a nun."

"Did you get one of those lap dances?"

"Did I *get* one? No. I wasn't the guest of honor, Mom, it wasn't about me." *Thank God Meredith and the others left when they did.*

"But you did drink a lot. Meredith made that very clear."

"Do I sound hung-over or sick to you?" *And thank God for pickle juice. I'll have to remember that. For the next time I DON'T drink tequila.*

"Honestly, no. You sound tired and that's all."

"I *am* tired. It was a long night. At forty years old, you would think Meredith would outgrow her tattletale phase at some point."

"It's hereditary. Your Aunt Mildred was a tattletale, too."

Riley yawned. "I'm sure Danielle will threaten to uninvite Meredith if she keeps it up."

"That might work until next week. Why don't you go back to bed, sweetie. I'm glad you had a good time last night and don't forget about tomorrow. Brunch is at eleven."

"I'll be there. Love you, Mom."

"Love you, too, Rye."

Riley closed her cell phone and smiled. She loved her mother dearly and Gloria was a good woman but Riley hated the way her mother kowtowed to the whims of her eldest aunt, Virginia. *The whole family's afraid of that old bitch. God forbid, anybody do anything to earn Aunt Virginia's wrath. One of these days, someone's going to take the wind out of the elitist old biddy's sails.*

She yawned again and headed for her bedroom. Riley stripped out of her clothes, put on a tank top and boxer shorts and crawled into her bed. She thought about the woman she had spent the night with and felt a pleasant tingle in the pit of her stomach. It had been a long time since she had experienced that kind of excitement. *Where did that come from?* How could she feel that way about an incident that never should have occurred and the details of which she couldn't even remember? Then Kya's face appeared in the haze that happened between cognizance and slumber.

Riley fell asleep almost instantly with a smile on her face.

Kya stripped off her clothes and stepped into the shower. As her body got used to the temperature of the water, she thought about what a lovely surprise little Miss Riley Vaughn had been. She knew Riley identified as straight, it had been mentioned a few times during the night but Riley certainly didn't seem opposed to climbing into her bed when the opportunity presented itself.

She knew 'morning afters' could be tricky in situations like this and it had been a while since she had indulged in picking up someone and bringing her home. Since Jillian, her life-partner, had died, Kya had only allowed herself to fill the emptiness by an occasional tryst with curious straight women. So far, there had only been three and the affairs had been short, sweet, safe and uncomplicated. The women were neglected housewives married to rich but inattentive businessmen and Kya felt no guilt as she accommodated their curiosity. She was not interested in getting involved with anyone again and these women neither wanted to jeopardize their standing in their communities nor sacrifice the upper crust lifestyle they were used to by risking a scandal.

It had been a mutually beneficial situation, everyone walked away satisfied and no one got hurt. Although Riley did not fit the criteria, she was bait too inviting to ignore. Gina, their mutual friend, who had provided the introductions and encouraged the coupling, assured Kya that Riley was open to experimentation. Last night, Riley seemed more than willing to back that up.

The recollection of being led to a chair and instructed to sit before she even had a chance to sip her sangria was pleasantly eclipsed by a beautiful, short-haired blonde who suddenly appeared before her with an eager smile on her face.

Gina, who was too sober for her own good, stood behind this sexy woman and sported a shit-eating grin.

After the introductions were made, Gina said, "Riley needs to practice what she just learned. Can she borrow your lap?"

Before Kya could answer, perfect hips swiveled seductively in her face to the sound of Nelly Furtado's voice. If Gina had not taken the wine glass out of her hand, it would have surely dropped to the tile floor and smashed. When the music stopped, Riley simply sat on Kya's lap, faced her and made the announcement to the room, thanked her and left. Speechless and glued to

the chair, Kya watched the tipsy little seductress move about the room. Kya's body experienced mini-detonations that she had not felt in years.

Because Riley glanced back at her often, with either a wink or a coy smile, Kya had to know more. She cornered Gina the first chance she got.

"What was that all about?" Kya asked.

"What?" Gina was the picture of innocence.

"You know damned well what, you wench," Kya smirked.

Gina laughed. "You likey?"

"Of course, I likey. I'd have to be in a coma not to likey. Is she family?"

"No. But I'm quite sure she would be willing to be temporarily adopted."

"Really? What makes you think so?"

"Just a hunch. First, she can't keep her eyes off you and second, she's due."

"Due?"

"She's nearly two years dry, Kya. She needs to be fucked six ways from Sunday and I can't think of a more capable person to do a more thorough job. Since she's not normally into women and you're not looking, you two are perfect for each other. I bet if you give her any encouragement at all, you'll have yourself a really good time later."

"Define 'not normally' for me."

"Okay, to my knowledge, never. But, damn, Kya, look at her! She keeps looking back at you with those flirty little glances. She knows you're gay, you heard me tell her that right up front. It didn't seem to bother her, did it?"

"No but she's a little intoxicated, Gina," Kya pointed out, as she watched Riley drink another shot of tequila and chase it down with a shot of something else.

"Maybe...but she is far from out of control," Gina said as they caught Riley staring at Kya again. "She is so checking you out every chance she gets."

"I can't be the first lesbian she has ever met."

"Oh, hell no."

"So her curiosity can't be about that."

Gina grinned. "Oh, hell no."

Kya watched Riley a while longer, her interest piqued. "Hmm. Well, let's see what happens here. I'm due, myself. And she has already got me all hot and bothered. I'll let her make all the moves. If she doesn't? No harm, no foul but if she does?"

"You're ready to play ball?" Gina asked, unnecessarily.

"You bet your ass." Kya studied Riley from head to toe slowly. "Or, more precisely, her ass."

It had been forty minutes since the lap dance and all Riley had done was look from a distance. Kya began to feel a building disappointment about how the evening would probably end. She made the decision to use the restroom, make her rounds to say her goodbyes and head home.

As she exited the bathroom, Kya stopped herself mere centimeters from slamming into Riley who had clearly waited for her by the door.

"Gina says you think I'm hot." Riley's grin was downright predatory.

Kya regarded this gorgeous and inebriated woman as they stood alone in the hallway. Riley placed a hand on Kya's arm and lightly ran her fingers up and down her bicep. "Gina seems bound and determined to play matchmaker tonight."

"Are you interested?" Riley was coquettish.

"Are *you* interested?" Kya was dubious. "Gina told me you've never been with a woman before."

"Well, yeah, that's because I'm not gay."

"Then why would you be interested in being with me tonight?"

Riley leaned in. "I need to be more fearless, you know? I want to learn to step outside myself more, to try new things..."

"Oh, I see. And I would be one of those new things you'd like to try?"

Brazenly, Riley openly appraised Kya. "Oh, yeah."

"How much have you had to drink?" Kya leaned against the doorway and folded her arms.

"Too much and not enough."

"Tell you what, I am going to head out of here in about fifteen minutes. You really think it over."

If you still think you want to go home with me, meet me out by my car."

They studied each other briefly and when Kya nodded and walked away, Riley said, "What does your car look like?"

Kya turned around and walked backwards a few steps. "If you're that interested, ask Gina."

The smile that graced Riley's face impetuously propelled Kya into her arms. She pushed the smaller woman back into the bathroom to kiss her right there behind the locked door. Instinct told her that taking Riley home was not a wise move; that Riley was too intoxicated to make this decision prudently but her libido overrode her common sense.

The kiss was eagerly accepted; it instantly became powerfully electrifying, and stirred up emotion in Kya she forgot she possessed. She held Riley impossibly close to her as she trapped Riley between herself and the wall. Lips enclosed around her questing tongue, sucking gently and provoked a flood of wetness that rushed south. She was kissing Riley with a sexually charged abandon that belied her usual indifference. Who was this woman and how could she stir up this kind of emotion in her? A part of her she thought was permanently dormant suddenly awoke and was vigorously rearing its glorious head. The kiss ended when Kya knew if she didn't break away, she would take Riley right there in Danielle's bathroom and that was not the memory she wanted with this woman. Someone else, maybe, but for some reason she could not explain, not Riley. Kya pulled away slowly and gazed into smoldering, half-closed green eyes. She touched her lips to Riley's forehead.

"My car is the black convertible MGB," Kya said, hoarsely.

"I'll be in it when you leave," Riley panted.

The next morning, Riley awoke well rested but still felt tender in her nether regions. She'd had several provocative dreams of living in another time, being made love to by an unrecognizable dark figure. The person was strong, noble and passionate. The gender of this lover was not clear but she could not shake the feeling that it was Kya.

She rehashed what she could recall from the fragmented dreams during her shower. She couldn't stop the grin every time she visualized Kya's striking face on the body of her romantic dream lover. If what happened in her dream was anything like what happened in Kya's bed, she had missed out on something pretty damned special.

Riley suddenly remembered a kiss. A kiss so intense, so fiery, so...*arousing*, she lost her breath. She rested her hand on her chest and her face flushed as her lower body reacted to the steamy recollection with a moisture that had nothing to do with the shower. Her mind replayed full lips moving against hers with impassioned enthusiasm and she responded with a blinding need she never knew existed within her. An insistent, talented tongue found its way into her mouth and effortlessly mastered the art of fencing with her own. If she had ever been this affected by a kiss

before, she was not aware of it. Every nerve ending in her body felt inflamed with a pleasure that was almost painful. When the kiss ended she was looking into captivating blue eyes that seemed to reflect the secrets of Riley's soul. Riley found herself gasping for breath.

Jesus Christ. What was that? She knew this memory had not come from her dream, it had come from late Friday night. She turned the water to cold and let it run all over her. *Riley, you're an idiot.* She laughed at her own unexpected reaction. *Good God, it was just a kiss.* But it wasn't. It had become so much more. She stopped smiling and swallowed hard, feeling as though she were on a precipice of...something. Something big. And frightening. The butterflies in her stomach felt like bald eagles at full wingspan.

As she dressed and put on her make-up, the sequence of dreams and the reality of that kiss haunted her in a distracted but pleasant way. As did Kya. *It's as if she's got me under a spell. I can't get her out of my head. What did you do to me, Kya?*

Oh my God...you're acting like you've got a crush on her. Jesus, Rye. Grow the fuck up. Kya Liberis is a woman. You aren't into women.

'You were two nights ago,' the voice of Kya echoed around her brain. Riley shook her head and splashed cold water on her face. She finished getting ready to go to her mother's.

"Where's dad?" Riley wondered, as she poured coffee into the favorite mug she had at her parents' house. She leaned against the counter while her mother diced potatoes for home fries.

Gloria Vaughn rinsed her knife under water and placed it in the sink. Gloria was a taller, brown-eyed version of her green-eyed daughter. "He went to pick up Aunt Virginia and Aunt Penelope."

"Ugh. Aunt Virginia's going to be here? I wish you'd told me."

"If I told you, you wouldn't have come."

"Exactly." Riley sliced English muffins and set them on a plate next to the toaster. "I thought this was supposed to be a treat for Aunt Penny, something to get her away from the wedding crap for a few hours."

"It was. But then Uncle Luc said that if she could get away then so could he so he called up your Uncle Ted to go play golf."

"Which left that old windbag with no one to bitch to," Riley commented and sipped her coffee.

"Riley, behave. Don't disrespect Aunt Virginia like that."

"Oh, mom, it's true. And she disrespects everyone else, including you and dad. Shouldn't she have to earn respect and not just demand it?"

"Get the orange juice out of the refrigerator, would you please?" Gloria requested.

Riley did as instructed. "Any champagne we can put in it?"

"Sure, but not today. Not with Virginia here."

"Well, that's not fair. Aunt Penny loves mimosas and with everything going on, I'm sure she could use quite a few, probably more with Aunt Virginia here."

"Riley, I'm not thrilled she invited herself, either, but it's easier just to go along with her. The hell you pay if you don't is just not worth it."

"I'm just not in the mood for her today. In fact, I'm not in the mood for her *any* day." Riley filled five glasses with orange juice.

"Could you get that bowl of eggs out of the fridge when you put the juice back, please?" Gloria watched as Riley sighed, then returned to the refrigerator. "Honey, I know your aunt is a pain in the ass and that she can say rude and hurtful things. I know she is a snob with an extremely false sense of self-importance but she is no different today than she was when I was your age -"

"So I'm supposed to give her credit for consistency?" Riley set the bowl on the counter. They both heard the garage door open.

"Now, it is stressful enough for your Aunt Penny without you being in a bad mood and sending Virginia on a tear," Gloria admonished. "You were brought up to respect your elders until they give you a damned good reason not to. And I mean a *damned* good reason. To be tempestuous just because you're in a bad mood and want to take it out on everyone is not the daughter I raised. If you don't respect your Aunt Virginia, then respect your father and me by not making trouble for us."

"I'll make you a deal. I'll be respectful if she is."

Gloria faced her daughter squarely, hands on her hips. "What has gotten into you today?"

The kitchen door that led to the garage opened and Riley's two aunts and her father entered. "Hi, Daddy." Riley greeted her father with a kiss on the cheek.

"Hi, brat," Tim Vaughn grinned.

Riley turned and hugged her Aunt Penny, Danielle's mother. "Going crazy yet?" she kidded.

"Yet? I passed crazy two weeks ago."

"Hi, Aunt Virginia," Riley said, in a tone as friendly as she could muster.

"Riley," Virginia sniffed in acknowledgement. She placed her purse on the counter. "I'm surprised to see you here."

Riley shrugged. "I don't see why. I'm here every Sunday."

"After what Meredith told me, you should be in the hospital with alcohol poisoning."

"Goes to show you, Aunt Virginia, your sources aren't always reliable." Riley smiled through gritted teeth. She glared at her mother, who gestured Virginia to the table. Riley then walked to Penny. "How about some champagne for your orange juice?" Riley whispered in her ear.

"Oh, bless you, dear," Penny said, closing her eyes in relief.

After Riley smuggled their glasses into the garage, she opened a cheap bottle of champagne and mixed it with their orange juice. She then returned to the kitchen where breakfast was being served. She handed Penny her glass and took a sip from her own before sitting down.

"What's in that?" Virginia inquired, with a raised eyebrow. "Booze? Is that why you had to sneak it to her?"

Riley was going to lie and tell her it was club soda to give it fizz, especially after the daggers she was receiving from her mother, but she decided to be straightforward. "It's a mimosa, Aunt Virginia. That's champagne and orange juice. It is a perfectly acceptable brunch beverage, served at the most exclusive restaurants in town. If it's good enough for them, it's good enough for our table. Besides, Aunt Penny happens to like them very much and, after all, this brunch is for her." *Ooooo, you really have a death wish, don't you, Rye?*

Everyone at the table was speechless, at first. Riley and Virginia stared each other down. Finally, Virginia spoke. "Why you impudent, little -"

Riley's father loudly cleared his throat. "Let's all eat, shall we?"

Gloria placed the last food item on the table, sat down and passed dishes around. "So how goes the wedding prep, Penelope?"

"I can't wait until next Sunday. When it's over. All this last minute stuff is about to send me over the edge," Penny admitted.

"I would think Danielle's vulgar behavior would have sent you over the edge long before now," Virginia commented. "Don't be surprised if her fiancé finds out, he'll want to call the whole thing off."

"Just what is it that Danielle has supposedly done, Aunt Virginia?" Riley tried to keep her tone neutral.

"Of course I wouldn't expect you to see anything wrong with it but let's start with that...that party Friday night. A male stripper? She allows a man who is not her fiancé to take off all his clothes and...and...act like he's having explicit sex with her? In front of a roomful of people? I would say that's rather depraved."

"Really, Virginia, it was a bachelorette party! It's a common practice nowadays for the bride to have a stripper," Penny said. "And I am sure if there was simulated sex, it was just the boy's act."

"Not according to Meredith."

"Meredith left before the man really even started dancing. I don't know how she could give you details of that event when she wasn't even there," Riley said.

"You were there, Riley, why don't you tell us all what happened?" Virginia asked, smugly.

Don't think I wouldn't love to. "Sure. A guy showed up dressed in a police uniform and told us to quiet down, that he got a complaint. When Danielle came to the door and told him it was her party and she would tone it down, he slapped handcuffs on her, told her he would have to take her into custody. He then reached behind him, grabbed a CD player, turned it on and started to dance and strip."

"Naked?" The question came from Riley's father.

"No, dad, he wore a g-string. And he never took it off."

"He might as well have been naked," Virginia stated. "What about the simulated sex?"

Four sets of eyes were on Riley. "Please," she said, sighing in disbelief. "He gyrated his hips a few times in her face to the beat of a song." *If that's your idea of sex, Aunt Virginia, it's no wonder you're a nasty, high-strung, anal old prude.* "He was a really good dancer. He danced for us again, collected his tips and left. If Meredith and the others had stayed, they would have known what really went on and not had to make things up."

"Let me assure you, Virginia, that Danielle loves her fiancé to excess. They've been together for three years and they have both worked very hard to make sure nothing goes wrong between them. She would never do something as salacious as to screw another man or even pretend to screw another man at her bachelorette party," Penny said, in a balance between defensive and appeasing. She drained her mimosa and looked pleadingly at Riley.

"Absolutely," Gloria agreed with Penny. "Danielle is a good girl. Why, she would die before she would be unfaithful to Todd."

"Are you sure, Gloria? After all, Danielle is half French and you know what notorious philanderers they are," Virginia sneered then glanced at Penny out of the corner of her eye.

Riley bit her tongue and rose from the table. That was her Aunt Penny's battle to fight, although it was a low blow. Her Uncle Luc had been unfaithful and Danielle's parents had separated for several months before they decided to work things out. Riley adored her Aunt Penny, thought she was the prettiest of all the Weston women and the sweetest woman on the planet. She couldn't understand why her Uncle Luc would want to look elsewhere. As Riley went to retrieve the champagne bottle from the garage refrigerator, she heard her mother's voice get crisp. *'Bout time, mom.*

"Virginia, that was just mean and uncalled for."

"And an outdated generalization," Tim added.

"You mean like Irishmen who drink too much?" Virginia commented as Riley came back into the kitchen with the bottle of champagne in her grasp. She filled Penny's and her glass and chose not to add orange juice.

"Aunt Virginia, let me ask you something. If we are all so beneath you, why do you insist on lowering yourself to be around us? Is it to make yourself feel better by trying to make us all feel bad?"

"Riley..." There was a warning in Gloria's tone.

"No, Gloria, it's fine," Virginia told her younger sister. She looked at Riley. "I don't *make* you or anyone else feel any particular way, my dear. If you feel bad about yourself, don't blame me."

Tim finished his coffee. "Rye, why don't you come outside with me, I want to show you the trellis in the garden. Your mom painted it purple."

I know the only reason he doesn't say anything to her is that he's afraid once he starts, he'll stroke out before he stops. And it probably wouldn't even faze her. "No, thanks, Dad. You go. I'll be out in a bit."

Tim excused himself and left the kitchen.

"Guess he can't stand the heat, eh?" Virginia sneered.

Riley shook her head. "You're something, Aunt Virginia." *Is it really worth getting upset with this ignorant, old battle-axe? If I allow her to get me to the point of losing my temper, who has really won?*

Virginia ignored Riley and focused on Penny. "So who are Danielle's bridesmaids going to be?"

Penny rattled off the names of four women and when she got to the last name, Riley almost spit out her champagne.

"Who is Kya Liberis? What is that? Greek?" Virginia asked.

"Yes. I believe Kya is of Greek heritage. She's a beautiful girl. She and Danielle roomed together in college. She's very sweet," Penny said. "Did you meet her at the party, Riley?"

"Yes, yes, I did. She's, uh, very nice. And yes, she is very beautiful," Riley agreed.

"It's a shame what happened to her a few years ago," Penny shook her head.

"What happened?" Riley and Virginia chorused.

"Her partner of ten years was killed in a car accident. It was tragic. She became somewhat of a recluse. I'm surprised she agreed to participate in the wedding."

"Oh God," Riley breathed. Her heart felt as though it slammed to the pit of her stomach. "She never told me." *Maybe that's what she meant by 'it's complicated.' Why do I feel like I want to run to her and comfort her? I don't even know her. Well, not really.* Riley suddenly had a pounding desire to know her better. *Or is it really so sudden? Admit it, Rye, you've wanted to know her better from the second you woke up in her bed.*

"She's very private so I'm not surprised," Penny said. "I think she's still grieving, honestly."

"What do you mean - her partner? I don't understand. A business partner?" Virginia asked, suspiciously.

"No, Virginia, her girlfriend, her - her lover, the woman with whom she shared her life," Gloria spoke up. "Her partner was a loan officer from my bank. It was all very sad."

"Sad, my ass!" Virginia snapped. "Anyone who chooses to live that lifestyle deserves whatever happens to them! I can't believe you would allow Danielle to have someone like that in her wedding!" Virginia was at her most indignant.

"What?" Penny was stunned. "Are you saying Kya deserved to have that happen to her because she's gay?"

"You're not telling me you approve of that lifestyle, do you?"

"I don't disapprove of it," Penny said, defensively.

"Of course not. You said they roomed together in college. Maybe they had a little something going on. Is that what's going on, Penelope? Danielle is secretly a lesbian? That's why it's taken her until this age to find a man to marry her? Someone who will help her cover up her shame?"

"Virginia, you're being ridiculous," Gloria insisted.

"I will not allow one of *them* in this family, Penelope, do you hear me?" Virginia bellowed as Penny burst into tears.

"OKAY! That's it!" *So much for not losing your temper.* Riley stood up, circled the table and stood next to Virginia's chair. "I have had it with you! What is your problem - I mean, other than being an insufferable bitch?"

"How dare you!" Virginia began but Riley cut her off.

"How dare *I*? I dare because somebody needs to say these things to you."

"Gloria, get control of your child! I will not stay here and -"

"Hey! I'm talking now!" Riley yelled. "You walk around this family like you own us all. Like you are such an intellectual and we are all dirt under your feet. Like, God forbid, we need *you* to save our souls. You make everybody's life so Goddamned miserable when they cross you that they'd rather let you get away with your deplorable behavior than to tell you to back off and mind your own damned business! You are a reprehensible woman, Aunt Virginia, and you are not the know-all, do-all, be-all of this city! Nobody honestly gives a shit what you think! About anything! You sit in this huge glass house and expect everyone to do as you say but not as you do! It's pathetic."

"Nobody talks to me this way!" Virginia said, offended.

"That's exactly the problem, Aunt Virginia. Nobody does and they should because you think nothing about talking to all of us that way. You think nothing of saying the most hurtful, damaging things to us and about us but that's okay because it's you who is saying it. It's *not* okay, Aunt Virginia. How would you like it if I went around this town saying that Warren is a homosexual?"

There was an audible gasp from all three sisters. "You take that back! There is nothing wrong with my Warren," Virginia said.

"I agree. There's nothing wrong with Warren. He is who he is - a fifty-two year old man who has never been married, has had the same girlfriend for twenty years and is stuck like glue to another man who couldn't be more obviously gay if he were Boy George in the 80s. If you use the same theory on Warren that you did on Danielle, then I guess Warren's hiding something too, huh?"

Virginia was on her feet. "Gloria, would you please ask your husband to bring me home?"

Before Gloria could answer, Riley said, "No, she won't. She will, however, ask him to contact Uncle Ted at the golf course and ask him to come get you. Why should my father have to cart you home and listen to you run up one side of him and down the other about how disgraceful you think his daughter is? The only disgraceful thing about me, Aunt Virginia, is that I haven't tried to take you down a peg or two before now."

"Why you ungrateful, uncivil little tart! You? Take *me* down a peg or two?" Virginia roared.

Tart? Is she kidding? I'm the least promiscuous of any of my cousins - including Meredith. Riley was about to respond when her mother spoke up.

"Jesus, Virginia, it's about time someone did," Gloria said. "I am ashamed that I haven't done it, that I have let you terrorize me and my family by your venomous nature." Everyone was again stunned speechless, including Riley. *Go, Mom!*

"You're a bitter, vengeful crone who thinks she can use her huge bank account to get away with the most despicable behavior. Having money doesn't make you better than everyone else, Virginia. It just makes you richer. But I've got news for you. Money cannot buy you a conscience and it cannot buy you class and I don't care how far you are up the chain of command in your church, it sure as hell won't buy your way into Heaven."

"That's for sure," Riley said. "In fact, I hope you have plenty of fire insurance. You're going to need it where you're going."

"I certainly don't have to stay here and take this. You're all crazy and you will all regret this when I die. None of you will get a cent of my money!"

"None of us want your money," Riley said. "I have a great idea, Aunt Virginia. Why don't you wait outside for Uncle Ted to come pick you up?"

"You can't throw me out of your mother's house!"

"She can when it's deserved," Tim stepped back into the kitchen from the garage. "Ted's on his way, Virginia. I really do think we'd all be more comfortable if you waited outside."

Tim and Virginia stared each other down. "You have no idea what you're doing, Timothy."

"I do. And, like my daughter said, it is long overdue." He took a non-threatening step toward his eldest sister-in-law. "Would you like to be escorted out?"

"I can manage on my own." She turned to Gloria and with a sneer, she said, "And don't worry, I shall never darken your door again." She turned to Penny. "Anything you want to add to this ridiculous tirade?"

Draining the rest of her glass of champagne, Penny looked up at her. "Yeah. What they said." She pointed to Riley, Tim and Gloria.

"Penelope! Well, why should I think you should stand on your own two feet? You've always been a weak, dependent, drunk and that's obviously what you will always be."

"And you've always been an emasculating, egotistical, self-righteous phony. And by the way...your perfect, uptight English husband isn't playing golf with my philandering French husband."

"What are you talking about?"

"When Luc told Ted that I was going to be at Gloria's for a couple hours, Ted asked him to cover for him and your precious husband is off screwing his very buxom and eager secretary."

"That is a lie!"

"No that's the truth. What Ted told you is a lie. And he's probably very upset that you interrupted him."

The anger contorted Virginia's face to an unrecognizable expression. Turning on her heel, she left the house slamming the door behind her.

Three sets of eyes engaged Penny. "Ted is having an affair?" Gloria finally asked.

"Of course not. That henpecked coward would be too afraid to ever cheat on Virginia. She'd have his testicles mounted over city hall and he knows it." She let out a deep breath. "Woo! That felt good. You're right, Gloria, it was a good idea that I come here this morning." Penny looked at Riley. "Any more of that champagne left?"

As Tim and Gloria exchanged stunned looks, Riley returned to the kitchen with another bottle of champagne. "Poor Uncle Ted doesn't know what he's in for when she gets in the car," Riley commented, popping the cork.

"Poor Uncle Ted, my butt," Tim said. He's just as bad as she is. Maybe it'll do them both good to have a taste of their own medicine."

After pouring Penny's champagne, Riley turned to her mother. "Sorry, Mom. I know I did exactly what you asked me not to do. I just couldn't stand it anymore. I know I caused trouble for you and dad -"

"Riley," Gloria interrupted, "I'm not going to say there won't be repercussions because your aunt is a powerful woman in this town. But, sweetie, you don't owe me an apology; your father and I owe you one. We never should have allowed her to be so abusive to us and especially not to you. You were right. Just because she got away with her horrible behavior when I was your age doesn't mean you should have to put up with it now. We've all fallen into a routine with your aunt and she is the only one who benefits from it. I am sorry it took pushing you to the edge to get me to smarten up."

"Mom..."

"No, let me finish. I saw a hint of fear in Virginia's eyes when you were hurling all those truths at her. I have never seen Virginia display any hint of vulnerability. Until today. And, until today, I thought she was invincible. My own daughter's pure sense of right and wrong put a kink in Virginia's armor. Who knew it could be so simple?" She put her hand affectionately on Riley's shoulder. "You are a good and brave woman, Rye. Much braver than I am. You risked defying

my wishes and earning your aunt's wrath to defend people who were not here to defend themselves against what you knew to be outright lies. You weren't concerned with the consequences for yourself."

"I guess I had a damned good reason to be disrespectful, then?"

"You did, indeed. And *that's* the daughter I raised," her mother smiled, proudly.

Riley found herself driving by Kya's house on her way home from her parent's which, in reality, was way out of the way. She recognized Danielle's car in the driveway and felt an unreasonable surge of jealousy filter through her. *What is that about? She and Danielle are just friends, probably talking about the wedding. And why do I even care? I'm not a lesbian.*

'So you keep saying. Which one of us are you trying to convince?' Kya's question echoed around her brain.

Indeed.

She drove home with the intent of spending the afternoon researching 'ambivalence' online.

Gina tapped Riley on the shoulder as she sat down on the barstool next to her. "I get one message from you on Saturday and then nothing else until this afternoon. Happy hour on a Wednesday? Must be important."

Riley turned to look at her. "It is."

Gina studied her. "Wow. You look horrible, like you haven't slept in a couple days."

"I think that's because I haven't slept in days." Riley scanned the bar and spotted an empty table as the bartender approached them.

"What are your happy hour specials?" Gina asked.

"Midori margarita, appletini, house zin and domestic drafts," the bartender said.

"I'll have a glass of the house zin. And put it on her tab." Gina pointed to Riley, who nodded at the bartender. When he delivered her wine, the two women moved to the empty table. "What are you drinking?" Gina asked, eyeballing Riley's glass of clear, fizzy liquid.

"Club soda. I want my head to be clear."

"Ah. I thought maybe you'd gone on the wagon after this weekend."

Riley took in a deep breath and let it out slowly. "Yeah, about that..."

"Yes, do tell." Gina's expression was irritatingly self-satisfied.

"I think I might be gay."

Gina's smug look disappeared. "You mean - as in 'festive'?"

Riley glared at her. "Do I look festive to you right now?"

"Well, no, not at this moment but...you don't mean gay as in lesbian. Do you?"

"Yes."

Gina sat back in her chair. "Wow. Kya's good. She deserves a top of the line toaster oven for this."

"Ha ha." Riley brushed her fingers through her hair. "I'm serious."

"You've never been with a woman before Kya, have you?"

"You know I haven't."

"So you think spending one night with a woman, a night you don't even remember, makes you gay?"

"Of course not, I - wait a minute," Riley studied Gina suspiciously. "How do you know I didn't remember it?"

"Danielle and I were over at Kya's on Sunday and I was teasing her. It came out then that you were too drunk to remember anything."

"Danielle knows?" Riley closed her eyes. *Mom, keep your eyes glued to CNN. Aunt Virginia should be calling you any second now.* But instead of embarrassment, she felt relief.

"After a little unmerciful kidding, Danielle seemed fine with it. She was a little surprised it was you but she certainly didn't seem upset or horrified or anything. I mean, who doesn't experiment?"

"Have you?" Riley's eyebrow was arched in curiosity.

"I suppose I can't plead the fifth here, huh?"

"Not if you want to leave this bar alive."

"I made out once with a girl in college." Gina's admission seemed defiant but uncomfortable. "You know, just to see what all the fuss was about."

"Gina, if all you did was make out with her then you still have no idea what all the fuss is about."

"I thought you didn't remember."

A smile that seemed to hold many secrets pursed Riley's lips. "Let's just say most of it has come back to me over the past few days."

Focusing on Riley's unabashedly libidinous expression, Gina grinned. "Ooo. Must've been pretty damned spectacular."

Spectacular doesn't even come close to describing it and if you think you're getting details, you can go scratch litter, my friend. "We're getting off track here, Gina. Don't you think it was a little tactless on your part to out my night with Kya to my cousin, the town-crier-in-training?"

Gina became defensive. "Danielle is one of Kya's very best friends. I'm pretty sure she would have told her eventually. Although, maybe not. Kya seemed a little annoyed with me that I brought it up at all. But, come on, you didn't expect me to let a juicy little tidbit like that go unchecked, did you?"

"True. I guess it would have been so out of character for you to be discreet."

"Are you mad at me, Rye? I mean, I admit I put you in a situation that was odd for you but you ultimately made the choice to go home with her."

"I'm not mad at you, Gina, and I'm not blaming you for my choices. Even though I was in a vulnerable state, it was still ultimately my decision to behave in the manner in which I did."

Gina took a sip of her wine. "Before we get to the 'why you think you're gay' thing, why did you go home with her? I'm all for experimentation and I think Kya is great. I know I was instrumental in pushing you two together but I was really surprised to find out you actually left with her."

"Why were you so set on getting us together?"

Gina shrugged. "Honestly, I don't know. There was something in the air. Your eyes were all over her from the minute she walked in the door. That shocked me because that is so out of the ordinary for you. I thought I'd have a little fun with it and then it took on a life of its own. Kya's a wonderful person, Rye, and if she were a guy, you all would have been fighting over her that night."

"I have no doubt of that." She took a sip of her club soda. "How do you know Kya? I mean, how come we've never met before?"

"Michael, my ex, used to work with Jillian at the bank. Do you know about Jillian?"

"Was she Kya's partner? The one who died?"

"Yes." Gina looked at Riley, curiously. "Did Kya tell you about her?"

"No, my mom and Aunt Penny did. Why?"

"Because Kya doesn't talk about her. To anyone. Ever."

I'm sure that wound is too deep to ever heal and probably still too tender to touch. As Gina explained how she came to be friends with Kya, Riley got the bartender's attention and signaled for another club soda.

"Now...why do you think you're gay? I mean, it was one night. Maybe it's just a girl crush." When the bartender brought Riley's club soda to the table, Gina ordered another drink.

"I've spent the last couple of days and nights mulling over the same question. It's not about the sex, although, that was quite an eye-opener." *And then some.* She paused and took another sip. "She has awakened something in me, something indescribable. I have never felt like this. There's a connection I can't explain, like I belong with her. When I have slept, I've dreamed of her in some form. She is the first thing on my mind when I open my eyes and the last thing on my mind when I close them. It's like I have to be with her...but not in an unhealthy, stalker-type way," Riley added with a sheepish grin.

"Still could be a crush," Gina said, as the bartender handed her a glass of wine.

Watching the bartender leave, Riley looked back at Gina. "But it's not. I know the difference. I have feelings for Kya that I've never had for anyone. Not even Ryan and I was going to marry him." She took a deep breath. "For the first time in my life, I feel whole. The best I can tell you is it just feels right." The resolve in Riley's voice was undeniable.

"If it feels so right then why do you look like shit? Shouldn't you be all bouncy and happy?"

"If I had more sleep, I'm sure I would be. This was a big revelation to me, Gina. I'm not ashamed of it but, trust me, it took its toll. This was the last thing I ever expected." She smiled. "It's a good thing. I feel like I finally know who I am."

"And all this happened just since Saturday morning?"

"Yeah. Unbelievable, huh?"

"Do you think you're really a lesbian? Or is it just Kya?"

That stopped her for a second. *Wow. Good question.* "At this point, I don't know. I just know I wouldn't be opposed to seeing her again and finding out."

Gina leaned forward. "Then go for it, Rye. I mean it. If she's willing, you couldn't do any better than Kya. And, really, you are the first person she has shown any kind of an interest in since Jillian. Just be honest with her and you can't go wrong." The intensity in Gina's voice was startling. She took another sip of wine and relaxed. "And she could do a hell of a lot worse than you."

"Why, thank you," Riley said and smiled. She contemplated her beverage and looked toward the bar. "This is...scary."

"Why? Other than you definitely have better taste in women than you do in men?"

Riley rolled her eyes. "No. What if she was just flirting, just trying to make me feel okay about jumping into bed with her? What if she's really not interested in me, the way I'm interested in her?" She blanched. "What if she tells me thanks but no thanks? I'm really bad with rejection."

"I don't want to sound like a cliché but you'll never know until you try." Gina reached over and tapped the tip of Riley's nose. "And you will hate yourself if you don't try."

"When does life stop being so complicated?" Riley asked, rhetorically.

"Never," Gina said, unnecessarily. "So grab the chances when they are presented. You don't want to grow old being an 'I wish I had done this' type of person. Opportunities like this one are fleeting, so don't wait too long. If word gets out that she might be back in the relationship market again, you'll have to beat the women away with a stick."

"Kya! There's someone here to see you," the voice belonging to the woman at the front desk called out.

Kya passed a partition, walked to her office door and stopped. She removed her glasses and recognized Riley. Her smile for her visitor was surprised but dazzling, nonetheless. "Hi."

"Hi." Riley was caught off guard at her own reaction to seeing Kya again. It felt as though her insides were ready to explode from excitement.

"How did you find out where I worked?" Those hypnotic blue eyes were caressing every inch of Riley.

"I asked Gina. It's okay that I'm here, isn't it?" *Oh, Jesus. My voice is shaking. How high-schoolish is this?*

"Oh, absolutely. Why don't you come into my office?"

"Actually, I thought we might go out for coffee, if you're not too busy. Gina said your schedule was mostly your own."

"It is," Kya confirmed, an enthusiastic grin still plastered on her face. "And I would love to go for coffee."

"Great." *You better be sure about this, Rye. The last thing either of you need is to get hurt again.*

Kya placed her glasses in her denim shirt pocket, reached around to grab the handle and closed her office door. "I'll be on my cell if you need me," she said to the woman who had announced Riley.

"Yep. Got it. Have fun," she winked at Kya.

"It's coffee," Kya shot back.

"Sure it is," the woman cracked.

They exited the building, and Kya pointed the way to the closest coffee shop. Once seated, after retrieving their individual orders, Kya concentrated on Riley. "It's not that I'm not happy to see you because I am -"

"But why am I here?" Riley finished for her.

"Yeah."

Riley nodded, cleared her throat and drew in a deep breath. She then let it out slowly. "I could tell you any number of things, I guess, but the truth is I wanted to see you."

"You'll see me in two days at the wedding. Why sooner?" Anticipation flashed in Kya's eyes.

This is harder than you thought, isn't it, Rye, spilling your soul like this? "I, uh, can't stop thinking about you, Kya. You're haunting my waking and un-waking hours. I know we don't really know each other and I know this is abrupt and crazy but I was wondering if maybe we could, you know, start spending some time together."

"As friends?"

"Well...at first...and then see if maybe anything happens from there."

Kya chuckled and shook her head. "I thought you weren't a lesbian."

"I don't know what I am, Kya. I don't think of it in those terms. I just know that whatever happened between us Friday night, it...God, how can I put this? It melted something inside me I didn't even know was frozen. It changed me. I feel alive again. And the oddest thing is *you* are what's given me this renewed energy."

"Me? I don't understand."

"I don't either. I really don't. I don't want to question it, though. Like you so wisely said Saturday morning. It is what it is. I know I am stepping into the unknown here but I am compelled to do it. It...it feels right." Riley looked into Kya's astonished eyes. "Insane, huh?"

"Yes. But that's okay," Kya said, quietly. "I'm used to insane."

"So, what do you think?" *Boy, she's not giving me anything. It's really hard to read her. I hope this wasn't a mistake. She seemed interested on Saturday morning.*

Kya cocked her head. "What do I think? I think I'm interested in going out on a real live date with you. And I would like to make a better decision after that. But you need to know that I'm not used to dating available women or even women interested in anything personal from me."

"Is that because of Jillian?" *I hope mentioning her isn't stepping over the line.*

Her voice got quiet. "Did Danielle tell you about Jillian?"

"No, my mom did. Jillian was her favorite bank person. She remembered when the accident happened."

Kya nodded.

"I'm sorry for your loss."

"Thank you." Kya stared out the window, then back at Riley. "There is something different about you, Riley. I want to get to know you better; that much I know. If things go the way I hope they do, I would love to pursue something more. I have not had this kind of feeling about someone since Jillian. However, if we go for this and it turns into something, you need to know that I don't want to hide you and I don't want to be hidden. I'm not going to live in your closet. If we are going to date then we are going to openly date. Otherwise this won't work. Do you think you can do that?"

"I've been doing a lot of thinking since this weekend. Kya, I don't want to be a person who looks back on her life with regret and I think I would really regret it if I didn't see where you and I could go."

"I don't want to be your experiment, either, Riley. If you don't intend to follow through, if whatever happens with us gets serious, I want to know before my heart is invested."

"Fair enough." *Gee, sounds like she has thought about this as much as I have.*

"I can't believe I'm talking like this when we've only known each other for five days," Kya smiled.

"Seems like a lot longer," Riley said.

"It does, doesn't it?" Kya took a long sip of her cooling coffee and studied Riley's flawless face.
"When do you want to schedule this momentous first date?"

"I don't know...do you have a date for the wedding?"

The End

[Cheyne's Scrolls](#)
[Index Page](#)