

~ Caught In The Storm ~

by Kim Baldwin

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Dedicated as always to the Queen of the Double Standard

Marcy flinched as another KABOOM of thunder echoed across the river valley, an instant after a lightning bolt reached down and struck a large pine tree at the water's edge 300 yards upriver. It blasted a shower of bark into the air and split the tree in half.

She loved to sit on the screened-in porch during thunderstorms, high above the water. It had a splendid view of a wide horseshoe bend of the river, and best of all, it faced northwest, and that was the way that most of the big storms came in, roaring down from Canada. She faced her high-backed wicker chair head-on to the wind, far enough back on the deep porch that the thick mist blowing in through the screen didn't hit her too badly.

It had come up all at once, not an uncommon thing in this remote Michigan north country. What had started out as a mild autumn day turned south in an instant. Massive dark clouds and a deluge of rain rolled in and temperatures plunged twenty degrees.

Marcy stretched out her long legs in front of her and leaned back against the thick cushion. The wind whipped the trees into a frenzy around the cabin. They creaked and groaned as if in torment, stretched to their limits. Every now and then she heard the sharp crack of a branch breaking, and the occasional crash when a particularly large one hit the ground.

She stared at the spot upriver where the lightning had struck, hoping for another flash. Instead, there was a kayak suddenly there, in the very spot. She stood and went to the screen, absently reaching for the binoculars around her neck.

It was a kayak. Just one. *How foolish to be on the river during a storm like this.* But then again it had been all blue sky not a half-hour ago. And there were few places to pull out just upriver from her cabin. Sheer cliffs or rocks lined the banks on both sides.

She peered through the binoculars as the kayak drew closer. A woman!

As a rule, Marcy rarely hailed anyone going down the river. Her cabin, painted dark brown and nestled amid a thick screen of trees, usually went unnoticed by the tourists and fishermen who floated by. It was perched high above them, surrounded by National Forest and far from any other sign of civilization. She liked being invisible.

But she had no choice here. It was dangerous to be on the water and there was nowhere else the stranger could take refuge.

"Hello!" she hollered, fighting the roar of the wind and the rain. But the kayaker made no sign she'd heard. She was nearly below the cabin now. Marcy put two fingers between her lips and whistled. This time the head snapped up, the woman below searching for the source.

"Stay close to the left bank, there's a takeout spot just ahead," Marcy yelled, her hands cupped around the sides of her mouth.

The head below nodded, and the kayaker paddled to the left bank. Marcy grabbed her rain jacket off a peg on the wall, pulled up the hood, and headed out to meet her.

The narrow trail down to the water was slippery and steep, and she picked her way carefully along until she came to the stretch of sand where the kayak had beached.

The woman was already out of the boat, peeling off her neoprene spray skirt.

She was at least a half-foot shorter than Marcy, probably only five foot two or so, but well proportioned. Her wetsuit clung to her, defining the curve of her hip, the flat plane of her stomach, the round breasts. It was hard for Marcy not to stare.

The kayaker looked up and smiled as Marcy approached. It was a warm, inviting smile that seemed unexpectedly familiar. But the woman's face was partially hidden by the long brim of her baseball cap. "You're a lifesaver," the stranger said. "I was desperate for a place to pull out." She reached into the cockpit of her kayak and retrieved a small backpack.

"There's not many places you can, around here," Marcy said. There was another crack of thunder, too close. "Let's get to the house. Careful going up, it's really slippery."

Marcy led the way and they were soon back on the porch. She shed her jacket and turned to look at the newcomer as the woman shed her cap and ran her hand through blunt cut blonde hair that fell just shy of her shoulders.

It was then that Marcy could tell with some surprise that her unexpected guest was older than she first thought. The tiny creases around her eyes and mouth suggested the woman was probably about Marcy's age, somewhere in her mid to late 40s. "Marcy," she introduced herself, holding out a hand to the stranger.

"Kris," the woman offered back, taking the proffered palm for a brief but firm handshake.

"Doesn't look like it's going to clear anytime soon," Marcy said, glancing out over the river. The sky was so dark it looked like twilight, still three hours away. "You're welcome to wait it out here."

"Wow, what a fabulous view," Kris breathed, gazing out over the river. "I never saw this place. I wouldn't have known it was here if you hadn't whistled."

Marcy nodded. "Yeah, I love it here." She turned to face her visitor. The wetsuit was very distracting. The woman's hair was soaked and she was shivering.

"You must be freezing. Is that a change of clothes?" Marcy asked. She gestured toward the woman's pack, slung over one shoulder.

"Yes," Kris answered. "Do you mind if I change?"

"Sure thing. Follow me." Marcy opened the sliding glass door that led into her living room, which was dominated by enormous picture windows on two sides and a fieldstone fireplace in one corner. It was a homey, warm room, with antique furniture and plush rugs. In a little hammock bed in the front window, a black kitten lay curled asleep.

"That's Snitch," Marcy said as they passed by on the way to her bathroom. "There are fresh towels in the cabinet under the sink, if you need one," She offered, reaching into the room to turn on the light.

"This is very nice of you," Kris said, "I'll just be a minute."

The kitchen was separated from the living room by a long counter lined with tall bar stools. Marcy put a teakettle on the stove and set a pair of teabags in a cobalt blue teapot her mother had given her.

She couldn't shake the feeling that she'd met the kayaker before. But she was fairly certain she'd remember if she had. The blonde was a knockout, and Marcy felt incredibly attracted to her.

That was the biggest surprise of all. Marcy hadn't had a date in so many years she couldn't remember the last one. She'd resigned herself to a solitary existence, once she'd made the decision to move to such an isolated place.

But she felt an unmistakable rush of heat when she turned to find her guest. Kris had changed into jeans and a thin, body hugging turtleneck sweater, and she looked every bit as irresistible as she did in the wetsuit.

Marcy swallowed hard. The teakettle began to whistle. "Tea?" she stammered.

"That would be lovely, thank you," Kris said, drying her hair with one of Marcy's thick towels. "You have a wonderful place," she said, admiring the view of the woods out of the picture windows.

Birdfeeders of all types were placed strategically about the yard. The long tube feeders that hung protected under the wide eaves of the cabin were clustered with birds trying to escape the downpour.

"Thanks," Marcy said, handing her guest a china teacup and saucer.

There was another loud crack of thunder just overhead and the lights blinked out.

"Oh bother," Marcy said.

They blinked back on.

Off again. On.

"This happen often?" Kris asked.

"All too, I'm afraid. The wind blows tree branches into the line."

The lights blinked out.

They held their breaths.

On.

"That would drive me crazy," Kris said.

"It does a bit. Shall we go back on the porch?" Marcy suggested.

"Sure, I love to watch storms. From a safe vantage point," Kris added. She smiled.

"Me too." Marcy was struck again how familiar that smile seemed.

They adjourned to twin wicker chairs, their teacups sharing a matching glass-topped wicker table between them.

Thunder sounded in the distance, and the rain kept up a steady muted drumming on the roof.

"Were you on a day trip?" Marcy asked.

Kris sipped her tea and nodded. "I put in at the MacPherson Lodge and had them spot my car at Raintree Bridge. I'm staying at the lodge."

"Best place around," Marcy said.

"But your view has theirs beat. Do you live here year round?"

"Yes. I work from home."

"Oh wow. Here all the time? How marvelous." Kris inhaled deeply. "The air smells so different during a storm."

Marcy nodded and sucked in a lungful herself. "It does. Seems more earthy, somehow. All the wet leaves."

"Mind if I ask what you do?" Kris asked.

"I'm a Copy Editor. Which is not as glamorous as it sounds. I edit very dry technical manuals mostly. But it lets me live out here. You?"

"Nurse," Kris answered. "I live in Petoskey."

"I grew up there," Marcy said. "But I went to summer camp up here and really fell in love with the idea of living in the woods."

"Wow, that's a coincidence," Kris said. "I went to camp not far from here. That's why I come up here a lot on vacation."

"What camp?" Marcy said. Maybe they'd hit upon the reason why Kris looked so familiar.

"Tall pines," Kris answered.

"I went there!"

"No kidding!"

Kris broke into song. Marcy joined in before she got halfway through the first line.

*"Remember the times you've had here,
Remember, when you're away,
Remember the friends you've made here,
And don't forget to come back some daaaaaay."*

They ended in full-voiced harmony, both laughing.

"You know, I wonder if we were there at the same time," Marcy said. "You look kind of familiar to me."

Kris' eyes lit up. "I thought the same thing! When were you there?"

"Let's see," Marcy said. "I went for a couple of years-when I was 10 and 11, so that would be '67 and '68."

Kris' forehead furrowed. "Well I wasn't there until a few years after that." She chewed her lip, thinking, as she studied Marcy's face. Her eyes got wide. "It wasn't at camp," she whispered. "It was at school."

Tall pines was a church camp, run by the Catholic archdiocese in Petoskey. A lot of kids who attended parochial school went there in the summer.

Marcy's jaw dropped. It all fell into place. "Saint Mary's. Oh my God. You're Kris Blanford."

Kris nodded. "And you were Marcia then, not Marcy. Marcia Winchester."

Marcy laughed and nodded "I became Marcy right after that, during the Brady Bunch years. Too much *Marcia, Marcia, Marcia.*"

They sat there gaping at each other for a long moment, silly grins on both their faces.

"Wow. Talk about a small world," Marcy finally managed.

"No lie. What's it been? 25 years?"

"More than that," Marcy said after a brief mental calculation. "We moved to Flint in 1970, so that would make it 34 years ago."

"34? Man, I feel ancient when you say that!" Kris laughed.

Marcy nodded her head. "I know what you mean. Oh! Oh ! I just remembered something, I'll be right back." She set her tea down and hurried in to the house.

She came back after only a minute or two, and held out her hand. Across her palm was a short length of braided rawhide strips, decorated with colorful beads. "Recognize this?" she asked with a smile.

"Our friendship bracelets!" Kris squealed, taking it and tracing a finger over the uneven surface of the leather. "I remember making this! I can't believe you still have it!"

Marcy shrugged. "It's moved from jewelry box to jewelry box over the years. I guess I just couldn't bear to throw it away."

"I never took mine off," Kris said. "I lost it swimming in a lake the summer I turned 18. I remember it was a traumatic experience."

"Best friends forever!" Marcy said, smiling fondly at her guest.

"I remember," Kris replied, smiling back.

They had been inseparable for nearly a year. From the time of their introduction as lab partners in Sister Adele's 6th grade science class, until Marcy's family moved away when she was 13. Kindred spirits on the threshold of adolescence, who shared every secret. But Marcy's father was an ambitious man, and they moved around a lot. The girls lost touch around the time both turned 15.

"Well this storm was certainly serendipitous for us," Marcy said.

"Fate, I think," Kris agreed.

Is it fate? Marcy wondered. Her mind flashed back to that cool autumn evening so many years ago. She had never forgotten it. Had Kris? *Who forgets their first kiss?*

It was a Friday night. They were in Kris' bedroom, one on each of her twin beds. The Beatles were playing on the record player. The walls were decorated with pictures cut from *Tiger Beat* magazine. They talked about the party they were to attend the next night; noteworthy for two reasons. Not only would it be the first boy-girl party either would attend, but the evening's entertainment was likely to include a game of spin-the-bottle. Both girls were nervous and excited about the prospect of kissing a boy for the first time.

"With my luck, I'll have to kiss Gary Voger," Marcy frowned.

"I want it to be Jason Russell," Kris said. "He's dreamy."

"Do you think they'll want to French?" Marcy asked.

"Gosh," Kris said. "I hadn't thought about that. Do you?"

"Heck, I don't know. I haven't done this either, you know."

"What if the boys think we're not good kissers?" Kris worried.

Marcy shrugged. "I suppose they might not invite us to the next party."

Kris' eyes got wide. "Or they might tell the other boys at school."

"Great. Now you've got me so nervous I probably *will* be terrible. What if I bite his lip or something?"

Kris seemed to consider that. "We should practice," she decided.

"Practice?" Marcy repeated.

"Yeah. Practice on each other. You won't laugh at me if I'm bad, will you?" Kris said.

"Well no, but..." Marcy's voice trailed off when Kris stood up and moved over to the twin bed she was on. The girls sat cross-legged, facing each other, a couple of feet apart.

"C'mon, let's try it," Kris encouraged.

Marcy shrugged. "Okay."

They leaned into each other and pressed their lips together. It didn't last very long. They pulled apart.

"You're a good kisser," Kris said, smiling.

"You are too," Marcy said, grinning back at her.

"Should we try it again?"

"Probably should," Marcy agreed.

This time both girls relaxed into the kiss, and it went from chaste to exciting in a heartbeat. The tip of Kris' tongue caressed Marcy's bottom lip, exploring, seeking entry. Marcy's lips parted and her own tongue came out, and they tasted each other.

Kris' hand came up behind Marcy's neck, her fingers threading through Marcy's long dark hair. She pulled Marcy to her and deepened the kiss.

Marcy's heart was pounding in her chest. She felt an unfamiliar stirring in her lower belly; a delicious ache between her legs.

After several long moments, they parted. Both girls were breathing hard. Marcy felt so light-headed she thought she might faint.

"Wow," Kris said. Her cheeks were flushed. She put her hand to her lips.

"Yeah, wow." Marcy repeated. "Guess we know why everyone makes kissing out to be such a big deal."

She'd wanted to lean in and kiss Kris again, Marcy remembered vividly. But Kris' Mom had interrupted to inform them that Marcy's Dad was waiting outside in the car to take her home.

They never talked about it after that.

The next night they went to their party, and both of them kissed boys. Marcy wondered why it didn't feel anywhere near as exciting as it had felt with Kris, but she didn't really figure it out until long after she moved away.

Marcy had to know if destiny had indeed brought this stunning childhood chum back into her life. "So tell me about yourself. Are you married?"

"I was, for ten years." Kris said. "Jim passed away in '90. Cancer."

"I'm sorry," Marcy said. Her heart sank. *Straight. Now that's a shame.*

"He was a good man," Kris said.

"Kids?"

Kris shook her head. "Nope. How about you?"

Marcy shrugged. "Never married. Never really close."

They turned to small talk, reminiscing about their school days and the pranks they'd played on the elderly nuns who'd been their teachers. Marcy's dead-on impersonation of some of them had Kris laughing so hard tears streamed down her face.

Before they knew it, it was dusk and it was getting harder and harder to see each other on the porch. It had stopped raining some time earlier, but they'd been so engrossed in their conversation they hadn't noticed.

"Well, it's been absolutely wonderful seeing you again," Kris said. "But I hate to impose. Can I bother you for a ride to my car? I could come pick up the kayak tomorrow."

"What are your plans?" Marcy asked.

"Well, I'm up here through the weekend. Thought I'd do some more day trips on stretches further downstream. Maybe take in a couple of the antique shops in the village."

"Why don't you stay here?" Marcy suggested. "Give us some more time to swap stories. I'd love the company."

A smile spread across Kris' face. "I'd love that."

Marcy got to her feet and reached for her coat. "O.K.! How about we swing into town and get your stuff, maybe stop for a pizza. We can detour to get your car on the way back."

"Sounds like a plan," Kris said, falling in behind Marcy as they trooped through the house toward the garage. "What do you like on your pizza?"

"Pepperoni, Black Olives, and Extra Cheese?"

Kris nodded. "We're going to get along just fine," she grinned.

They checked Kris out of the lodge and got the pizza to go. Marcy warmed it up in the oven while she laid a fire in the fireplace and got it blazing.

"First fire of the year," she said, stretching her hands out toward the flames to warm them. "Can't believe how cold it gets at night already."

"Winter will be here before you know it," Kris agreed, joining her in front of the hearth and putting her backside to the warmth. "Mmmm," she groaned. "This is heavenly."

Marcy stole a sideways glance at her friend.

In the flicker of the firelight, Kris' blonde hair shone like wheat in the summer sun. Her cheeks were still ruddy from the cold. She looked incredible.

Marcy looked away, afraid to be caught staring. She took a deep breath to compose herself, and inhaled a whiff of Kris' perfume. It was subtle. Earthy. Intoxicating. *What have I done, inviting her here?*

The next five days were the happiest Marcy could remember. She and Kris kayaked every morning, hit the antique stores or hiking trails in the afternoon, and shared cooking chores in her kitchen as if they'd been doing it for years. In the evenings, they sat in front of the fire, sipping wine and swapping stories of their lives, filling in the missing 34 years.

They talked about their jobs, their parents and siblings, all the places they'd lived. Kris reminisced about the man she'd been married to, as well as a couple of others who'd asked. The women rekindled their friendship as though little time had passed.

But neither brought up the kiss they'd shared.

And Marcy deftly changed the subject whenever the conversation strayed toward her own sexual past. She wanted to get her attraction to Kris under control before she admitted she was gay. She didn't want it to get in the way of their friendship. But that was proving impossible.

With each passing day, Marcy felt a stronger and stronger pull toward her fair-haired friend. She often caught herself staring at Kris' lips, remembering their kiss. Then her glance would stray to other parts of Kris' delicious anatomy and a flush of warmth would spread through her body.

The night before Kris had to leave to go back home, the two women fell into their after dinner routine; Kris washed dishes while Marcy dried and put them away.

Marcy had never so relished the chore. She loved being able to stare openly at Kris' firm ass while the blonde faced away from her, bent over the sink. She licked her lips. *Just get through one more night, she told herself. Once you get some time alone, you can get your hormones under control.* She sighed. Maybe she'd take the easy way out and tell Kris she was gay over the phone. *At least that way she can't see me blush.*

"I should take some Advil," Kris said as she let the water out of the sink. "I think I pulled a muscle today." She reached up and squeezed her shoulder.

Marcy tore her eyes from Kris' ass and reached into a cupboard. "Here," she said, opening a bottle of Ibuprofen and extending it toward Kris. She tried to keep her hand from shaking.

"Thanks," Kris said, extending her palm for two tablets. As she took them with some water Marcy stepped into the living room.

"Come sit over here." She patted her low-backed easy chair.

"O.K., whatever you say," Kris said, plopping down into the soft cushions.

Marcy stepped behind the chair and her hands reached out even as her mind rebelled against the wisdom of what she was about to do.

She put her hands on Kris' shoulders and began to knead the sore muscles. She'd dated a massage therapist for a while, She knew what to do.

Kris relaxed into Marcy's touch. She leaned her head slightly forward to allow Marcy greater access and groaned-a long, throaty growl that sounded immensely erotic.

"MMMMmmmmmm. That's just unbelievably wonderful," Kris sighed. "Where did you learn to do that?"

"Uh..." Marcy stammered. "A friend taught me." She could feel the heat rise to her face when she remembered how some of those massage sessions ended.

Kris started to turn to her to look at her. Marcy panicked. *Good grief! Don't let her see you like this.* "Here, lay down and let me really work on that shoulder," she said, taking a quilt off the back of the couch and laying it out in front of the fire. She tossed a throw pillow on top.

"Well I'm sure not gonna turn down an offer like that," Kris said, kneeling on the quilt. She stripped off her pullover and lay down on her stomach. She was wearing only a tank top underneath, and suddenly exposing all too much flesh.

Marcy hesitated. She tried to swallow. Her mouth was dry.

"Something wrong?"

"Nope. Here I am," Marcy managed, getting to her knees, straddling her friend's body. She kept her weight off Kris, but the scrumptious proximity of their bodies sent Marcy's pulse racing. She rubbed her hands together briefly to warm them before she leaned forward and set her hands on Kris' shoulders.

The soft flesh was hot to her touch, and she bit her tongue to keep from moaning aloud. The firelight cast shadows across Kris' back that accentuated every alluring curve.

Kris went limp beneath her. She moaned again, and Marcy closed her eyes and allowed herself the fantasy that she was touching Kris everywhere, and that these throaty sighs of pleasure were a prelude to something more.

Kris' voice brought her out of her reverie. "Marce?"

The moment Marcy snapped out of it, she realized with horror her hands had strayed. Her fingers were, at that very moment, lightly caressing the soft outside curve of Kris' breasts, on a trail from shoulder to side and down to hip. She kept her hands moving. Back to kneading Kris' shoulders.

How obvious was that? She didn't trust her voice. "Mmmhmm?" She murmured.

"I'm so glad we ran into each other again," Kris said.

"Me too." Marcy let out a long breath, relieved that Kris was apparently going to let her roaming hands pass without comment.

"Going to be hard to leave tomorrow."

"Well, Petoskey is only two hours away. You can come up any weekend you like," Marcy offered.

Kris raised up on one elbow to look back over her shoulder at her friend. "You mean that?"

"Of course. I hope you'll come up a lot."

Kris smiled and lay back down. "You may be sorry you said that. I love it up here."

Marcy managed to get through the rest of the massage without further incident, but she tossed and turned for hours that night, remembering the feel of Kris' skin and the sultry moans of her contentment.

She awoke the next morning to the smell of coffee. She stumbled out to a barstool in her flannel PJs, and a mug of coffee was set before her.

"Is next weekend too soon to come back?" Kris asked, leaning over the counter to face Marcy with a bright smile.

Marcy tried not to look beyond the smile to the amazing cleavage that was being displayed by Kris' current position. She was wearing a robe--an extra one of Marcy's that was much too large--and it was only loosely tied.

Marcy cleared her throat. "Next weekend's great," she squeaked. She got up and retreated with her coffee to the bathroom. "Quick shower, be right back," she called over her shoulder.

It was a cold shower. A very cold shower. By the time she was through, Marcy had regained her composure and made a decision. She would tell Kris she was gay. Today. She had to make sure Kris was okay with it and that it wouldn't interfere with their friendship. She just hoped she could keep from blushing too badly.

"Everything all right?" Kris asked as Marcy emerged from the bathroom in jeans and a sweatshirt.

"Sure," Marcy answered, sitting down to a plate of potato pancakes and bacon. "This looks great, and smells delicious."

"Hope you like it," Kris said, sitting down beside her with a plate of her own.

Marcy waited until they were done eating and had adjourned with their coffee to the porch. The yard and river were always busy this time of morning with critters coming out to feed. This morning there were all sorts of birds, squirrels and chipmunks.

"There were two deer drinking at the river when I got up this morning," Kris said, settling into one of the wicker chairs. "And that flock of turkeys was back-they were roosting in that big pine over there." She pointed. A lot of the leaves had already come down along the river bottom, but there were still splashes of autumn color here and there, and the sky was deep, bright blue and cloudless.

"Kris, I have something to tell you," Marcy said, looking out upriver. She held her cup with both hands to keep them steady.

"All right," Kris encouraged, looking at her. But Marcy could not meet her eyes. "Is everything O.K.?"

"Yeah, everything's great," Marcy said. Her mouth felt like cotton. She took a quick sip of coffee. "Well, this is just kind of hard to talk about. You never know how someone's going to react." She cleared her throat.

"Marcy, what is it?" Kris asked, concern in her voice. She reached over with one hand and laid it atop Marcy's forearm.

Marcy's skin burned where she was touched. "Well, it's really not a big deal," she shrugged. She could feel the heat begin to rise to her cheeks. "But since you're going to be coming up to visit..." Her voice trailed off. "Well, I just thought you should know...that I'm gay." She held her breath. Her face felt hot.

Kris did not withdraw her hand, but neither did she say anything right away. "Thank you for confiding in me," she said after a long moment. She squeezed Marcy's forearm briefly and then her hand returned to her coffee cup.

Marcy exhaled slowly and waited for Kris to say something else. She still couldn't look at the blonde.

"You said you never know how someone is going to react," Kris said. "Have you had someone react badly?"

Marcy nodded her head. "A couple of times." She didn't elaborate.

"Well, I'm sorry that happened to you," Kris said gently. "I remember how shy you are, Marce. I know it can't be easy to come out to someone."

Marcy began to relax.

"I'm glad you trusted me enough to tell me," Kris went on. "Honestly, I never suspected. So it did take me kind of by surprise. But if you were worried about my reaction, please don't be. It doesn't make any difference to me."

"I was a little worried it would," Marcy admitted. She glanced over at Kris, finally.

"Well that explains why you've been rather vague about your past *amours*," Kris said. "So, do I get all the juicy details now?"

Marcy almost choked on the big sip of coffee she was about to swallow. The blush returned with a vengeance. She could definitely *not* talk about sex with Kris, not while her hormones were so out of control. "I thought you had to leave," she mumbled.

Kris laughed. She glanced at her watch. "Okay, you're off the hook for now," she said, getting to her feet. "I actually should get on the road. But I want the full story next weekend." She patted Marcy on the shoulder as she turned to go inside. "I'm going to pack," she said.

Marcy stayed on the porch regaining her balance while Kris threw her things together. By the time she was ready to go, the tall brunette had composed herself.

"Well, I'll see you soon," Kris said as Marcy walked her to her car. "I can't thank you enough for such a great week."

"I've really enjoyed getting to know you again," Marcy answered.

Kris threw her bag into her SUV and then reached out to hug Marcy goodbye.

"Thanks for opening up to me," she whispered as they embraced.

"You're easy to talk to," Marcy said, acutely aware of every place their bodies were touching. She imprinted it on her mind to replay later. Reluctantly, she let Kris go. "Drive safe. Will you call me when you get home?"

"I will," Kris promised. She got into her car, and with a final wave, rumbled off down the rutted two-track driveway.

They called each other nearly every night the next week, recounting their days and swapping more stories. Kris asked gentle questions about Marcy's past, and the tall brunette found it easier to open up over the phone. She told Kris about her previous relationships with women: most of them brief, none of them memorable.

After the phone calls, Marcy would lay awake trying to convince herself she was not attracted to Kris. But she couldn't stop thinking about her friend's sublimely tight ass, pert breasts, delicate hands. Her soft moans while she'd been massaged. Their kiss.

The night before Kris was to return, Marcy got so turned on thinking about the blonde she had to touch herself. It had led to a shattering climax, and afterward, some of the wildest erotic dreams she'd ever experienced.

The next day, Marcy couldn't concentrate on work. She did mindless tasks about the house to make the time go faster while she waited for Kris.

The dreams haunted her. She knew she was going to have a devil of a time keeping her hands off Kris, and her mind out of the gutter. *Don't stare*, she told herself. *And no drooling, either.*

Just as the sun was setting, Snitch ran to his hammock perch at the window. A moment later she heard the sound of Kris' car pulling up. She went to the window and petted the cat while she watched Kris park and get out.

Her breath caught in her throat and her heart began to beat double time.

Kris was wearing a soft knit sweater that molded itself to her breasts. Her faded jeans displayed her exceptional posterior equally to perfection.

Marcy groaned. *Oh Shit. She sure doesn't make it easy.*

Kris threw her arms around Marcy when she opened the door, and Marcy caught another whiff of her friend's earthy and enticing scent as they embraced.

"Good to be back," Kris sighed.

"Come on in," Marcy said, to break the spell, disengaging from Kris before her hands strayed without her permission.

The weather had taken a sudden turn toward winter. They could hear the wind howling outside and there was even a chance for snow in the forecast.

"I thought the weather might keep you from coming," Marcy said.

"No way," Kris answered. "I've been looking forward to this all week!"

Marcy already had a fire going in the fireplace, and two glasses sat by an open bottle of Merlot on the coffee table.

"Ready for more probing questions?" Kris asked as they settled onto the couch. It was the name Marcy had given to Kris' nightly queries about her past.

"I guess, if you must," Marcy said, rolling her eyes. Despite her outwardly cavalier attitude, Marcy was less relaxed at the moment than when they played this game on the phone. She knew Kris was only curious, but answering questions about sex when they were sitting this close together was going to be a challenge.

"When did you realize you were gay?" Kris asked.

"Well, I suspected in high school, I guess," Marcy answered. "Although I dated boys, I always

kind of felt something was missing with them. I was more drawn to a couple of my girlfriends, though I never did anything about it. I didn't have my first relationship until I was in college."

Kris nodded and sipped at her Merlot. She started to open her mouth to say something else when the lights blinked out.

This time it was the real thing. They didn't come back on.

"Oh great," Marcy grumped. "Excuse me, I'll call the power company." She phoned in her outage and was told that trees were down all over the county, so it might be morning before a crew got out to her.

She relayed the news to her guest with a shrug. "This pulls out to a sleeper," she patted the couch they were sitting on. "You'll be more comfortable here than in the guest room-it's supposed to get cold tonight."

"What about you?" Kris asked.

"Oh, I'll be fine," Marcy said, "I'll throw an extra blanket on my bed."

"Nonsense," Kris said. "Stay here with me. It's plenty big enough, and this way we can chat until we fall asleep."

You mean we can continue to talk about sex until you get me all hot and bothered, and then we'll lie down next to each other, Marcy's brain translated. Her palms began to sweat. Her mind fixated on those dreams again, and was unable to come up with any kind of good reason why she shouldn't share the sofa. *Why does my brain turn to mush when she's this close to me?*

But Kris was already on to other things, having immediately rejected any notion there might be a problem. She was relaying some story about a Lesbian she knew at work.

Marcy only half heard her. She was still thinking about them sharing a bed. *How can she be so unaware of the fact that I'm ready to explode from wanting to touch her?*

"So even though she'd been married to the same man for twenty years...she suddenly found herself in love with her best friend, at age 50," Kris concluded her story.

Marcy's ears perked up. *What was that?* She didn't want to admit she hadn't been fully concentrating on what Kris was saying, but the woman had definitely gotten her attention with that last part. "That happens sometimes," Marcy commented vaguely.

"That's what Sharon said. That she's met a lot of other women it's happened to. They think they're straight all their life, and then they meet someone who opens up other possibilities."

Is this simple curiosity? Marcy wondered. *Or is there more behind the turns this conversation is taking?* Her pulse quickened at the prospect.

When she didn't immediately respond, Kris chatted on about how she'd gotten to know this friend of hers. She launched into a story about the hospital where she worked.

Marcy's mind began wandering again. Back to those damn dreams. The warm golden light cast by the fire made the setting just too romantic, she concluded. She couldn't tear her eyes from Kris' breasts. It was getting cooler in the room with the furnace out, despite the fire, and she swore she could see Kris' nipples through the thin sweater.

Sweet torture. She tore her eyes away and stood on shaky legs to feed more wood to the fire.

Kris yawned. "Had to get up early this morning for a meeting," she explained. "Sorry, don't mean to be a party-pooper."

"Not at all," Marcy replied. Even though they would be sharing a bed, she welcomed the chance to turn in. She'd get some time to try to rein in her runaway libido. She hoped Kris would fall asleep quickly.

"Why don't you get ready for bed and I'll get the sheets and blankets out?" Marcy offered.

"Sounds good," Kris replied.

Ten minutes later, they lay side by side on the sleeper, Snitch stretched out between them.

"Ready for another probing question?" Kris said once they'd settled into the blankets.

"I thought you were tired," Marcy reminded her. *Oh Jeez, no more sex questions right now,* she groaned inwardly. *You've already got me so worked up I'll never get to sleep.*

"I got my second wind brushing my teeth," Kris said.

"All right," Marcy grudgingly consented. "Fire away."

Kris was lying only a foot away. Marcy could swear she could feel the heat coming off the blonde's body. She couldn't look at Kris, too afraid her friend would be able to see in her eyes how much Marcy wanted her. She'd never be able to lie here all night. *Oh Shit. What if I have another one of those dreams? I might reach out for her in my sleep...*

She was nearly in full panic mode. She hadn't noticed that it took Kris quite a long time to voice her next probing question.

"What was it like, the first time you kissed a...a woman?"

It took a moment for Marcy to really register the question. *Is this a trick?* she wondered. *Or doesn't she remember?*

"Well, the first time I kissed a girl..." Marcy paused. She glanced at Kris as she amended the

question. Kris was staring at the fire. "Well, I'd have to say the kiss was... memorable. Unbelievably exciting." She had to be honest. She didn't know why Kris had asked the question, but she wouldn't lie. She stepped out on a limb. "What was it like for you?"

Kris rolled onto her back and stared at the ceiling. It took her a long moment to answer. When she did, it was almost in a whisper. "The same."

Marcy turned her head to look at Kris.

The blonde was breathing hard, almost hyperventilating; her chest rising and falling. Her cheeks were pink. "I've been thinking about that kiss all week," she confessed.

"You have?" Marcy turned on her side to face the blonde, propping herself up on one elbow.

Kris nodded. Her eyes were still pinned to the ceiling. "I wondered if you remembered."

"I remember," Marcy stepped further out on the limb. "I could never forget you," she added in a low voice.

Kris turned her head to look at Marcy.

Their eyes met, and for the first time, Marcy saw the desire written there, and recognized just how much Kris wanted her, too. *When did that happen?*

"I ache to kiss you again, Kris."

The blonde nodded, her eyes moist with emotion. "Oh please do," she whispered.

Marcy's tongue peeked out to moisten her lips and her hand reached out to lightly stroke Kris' cheek, just before she closed the distance between them.

Marcy's instinct urged gentleness. She didn't want to scare Kris. She fought the raging inferno that ignited the instant their lips met.

But Kris' mouth met hers with a hunger that matched her own, and they came together in a burst of lust and passion that sent Marcy's head spinning. Her tongue stroked Kris'. She nipped at the blonde's lower lip.

Kris moaned and wrapped her arms around Marcy, pulling the startled brunette on top of her with a surprising strength.

Marcy happily surrendered, shuddering at the rush of arousal when their bodies met along their full length.

The kiss deepened. Their bodies ground together, until they had to break apart to breathe. Marcy had stopped thinking. All her fantasies were coming true and she was afraid to question why or

how. Her lips trailed along Kris' cheek, kissing her softly, her tongue tasting the soft warm flesh at the base of her throat, where the pulse throbbed wildly just beneath the surface. Marcy was in a blissful daze, a part of her still not believing this was really happening.

She snapped back to reality when Kris stiffened beneath her touch.

"What's wrong?" Marcy asked in a husky voice she didn't recognize as her own. She looked at Kris.

The blonde's lips were swollen and tender. Her eyes were heavy-lidded, the pupils dilated in her arousal. "God, Marcy, I've never felt like this before," she crooned. "It's so much...so intense."

"Do you want to stop?"

"NO! No." Kris clung tighter to her. "I'm just...afraid," she whispered. "I'm afraid I won't know what to do. I...I want you, Marcy. In a way that I never expected, never prepared for. *So much...*" she added wonderingly. "But I don't want to disappoint you. I don't know what to do. I don't know what's...expected."

"Relax, Kris. I have no expectations," Marcy said, holding her close.

"I don't want you to think this is some...curious experiment," Kris said. "It's not. I want more... need more from you, than just some quick sexual fling."

"Okay," Marcy whispered. "What *do* you want?"

"First of all, I want these clothes off," Kris said, tugging at the edge of Marcy's sweatshirt. "And then I want you to tell me how I can please you."

EPILOGUE

Kris needn't have worried. Marcy was so turned on by their kissing that Kris barely had to touch her, the first time.

During round two, Kris took her time, her hands exploring every silky fold, finding the places that made Marcy writhe beneath her touch, memorizing the kinds of strokes and caresses that made her lover cry out in pleasure. She drove the brunette wild.

In round three, Marcy demonstrated the versatility of the human tongue in ways Kris had never dreamed of. She was a quick study.

They finally fell asleep sometime in the hours before dawn.

Kris slept until nearly noon, and when she awoke, the space beside her was empty. Her heart

sank. "Marcy?" she called out.

She smiled and snuggled back under the covers when she heard the sound of the shower running, and the faint strains of a female voice singing "Oh what a beautiful morning," from *Oklahoma*.

That's when she felt it.

She brought her left arm out from under the covers. There on her wrist, a perfect replica of the friendship bracelet Marcy had put there, more than three decades earlier. *Best Friends forever*, indeed, she sighed.

THE END

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Feedback welcome. E-mail me at woodsbard@yahoo.com

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