

~ The Camp Reunion ~

by Kim Baldwin

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This short story is dedicated to the Queen of the Double Standard. You know who you are!

Kerry nervously tapped her fingers on the steering wheel as she neared the familiar weather-beaten sign. "Welcome to Tawas, Michigan. Hub of Vacationland," it read, or almost read. On each side were pictures of rainbow trout, a popular lure in area streams. The sign hadn't been painted in many years, and some of the letters were illegible, but the petite blonde knew the greeting by heart. Every summer for 16 years, she had eagerly looked for the brown and blue village limit sign, for it lay just a scant 15 minutes from her final destination. Summer Camp.

She had always found it hard to sit still during those last few minutes of the three-hour drive to the all-girls camp, so eager as a child was she to see who she would bunk with this year, old friends or new? She made careful lists of items to pack, learned from experience. Flashlight and extra batteries, mosquito repellent. Enough clothes to fill a footlocker, for she always stayed for the entire summer, eight weeks. Not many other girls did, but her parents could afford it and she loved it so much up in the woods she never wanted to leave. There were canoe trips and backpack excursions, horseback overnights and nature hikes, cookouts and stargazing sessions. All with the camaraderie of dozens of other like-minded girls. All in a setting which encouraged learning, sharing, and appreciation for the out of doors.

She first went to camp at age 7. Then every year thereafter, first as a camper, later as a counselor. Everyone knew her. Her final summer was the one after she graduated college. Then she had to get a real job and well, that was that. She'd kept in contact with a handful of her old camp-mates--some of the few, like her, that had gone back year after year. They had been her most enduring friendships: ones that held together despite time and distance and real life interfering with the best intentions to keep in touch.

At first, she'd managed to attend a few of her old camp friends' weddings and baby showers, even though she'd moved out of state. And there was the infrequent lunch with one or another during one of her rare visits home. But in recent years, 'the gang' had mostly kept in touch by Christmas cards and infrequent e-mail. The upcoming reunion was the first time Kerry would see most of them in more than a decade.

But the occasion would be a bittersweet one. The camp had finally closed and been put up for sale, the only recourse after several summers of decreasing business. This would probably be her

last chance to revisit the paradise of her youth, but Kerry's nervous energy and edgy anticipation over the reunion had more to do with the potential guest list than the nostalgic location.

Will she come? Kerry wondered, biting her lip as she steered her big green pickup off the pavement and onto the dirt road that led to Camp. Although it was October, it was a mild Indian summer day, and the forest surrounding her was ablaze with color-- red and orange, yellow and burgundy and every shade of green.

There were many faces she couldn't wait to see again. Marsha, her favorite co-conspirator during midnight raids on the kitchen. Stella, the practical joker who had a quick wit and ready smile. And Heather, who had become much more than a boss. But ever since she'd gotten the invitation to the reunion, Kerry had fixated on one old friend in particular.

Anne McNamara-'Mac' to her friends-- had been the Riding Director during Kerry's last couple of years as a counselor. A teacher who had summers off, Mac had been a few years older, but the age difference hadn't mattered. The two young women had both been shy, horse-crazy girls who loved anything and everything about the out-of-doors, and they hit it off at once.

Kerry would never forget the image of Mac as she was then, a tall and handsome woman with long, dark brown hair, dressed nearly every day in the same striking riding attire: Denim shirt with mother-of-pearl buttons, straight-leg Levis neatly tucked into tall English riding boots, (despite the fact that all the horses at camp were ridden Western style). Deerskin riding gloves tucked into a back pocket. And ever-present was her cavalry hat, a felt slouch hat with a wide brim, gold crossed swords on the front and a gold braid with acorn tassels around the rim. It was so well-worn and soft it was getting hard to tell it had once been Navy blue, but Mac was rarely without it. She walked with a little swing in her step, and always smelled vaguely of leather, hay and horseflesh. Kerry thought she was the most wonderful thing she'd ever seen.

The first summer they met, they hung out together constantly, and took a canoe-camping trip together after camp ended and before Kerry had to return to college and Mac to school. The next year, they went backpacking after camp, and skiing later that winter. But then Kerry took a job in Georgia, and they had somehow lost touch not long after. There was no such thing really as e-mail back then, and both moved once too often.

Kerry had never forgotten Mac, for she'd never felt the same kindred connection to any friend, before or since. But back then, she hadn't really known what it all meant. She only knew she felt differently about Mac, and had an undeniable desire to be near her whenever possible. A 'late bloomer' sexually (a fact which she blamed on 12 years of Catholic schools), the petite blonde wouldn't really come to terms with her attraction for women until much later. Once she did, she realized immediately that she'd had the most enormous *crush* on her tall, dark best friend. Since she'd gotten the reunion invitation, she could think of little else.

Had Mac felt as she had, about the chemistry between them? And could it be re-kindled, perhaps fanned into something else? Something more? The prospect of seeing her friend again after all this time--*What is it? 15 years?* --made Kerry's heart pound in her chest as she parked in the small gravel parking lot near the main dining lodge and stepped out to survey her surroundings. *You're*

dreaming, you know. She's probably happily married, with four kids, two dogs and a mortgage. Still, Kerry couldn't subdue the sense of anticipatory joy that seemed to be running through her body.

"Miss Kerry!" A chorus of voices hailed her from the large screened-in porch. Three figures, all wearing different vintage Camp Owankee T-shirts, burst through the doors and skipped down the steps toward her, launching immediately into a harmonized version of the camp's 'Welcome Song' for new arrivals.

"Weeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee welcome you to Owankee,
We're mighty glad you're here,
We'll send the air reverberating with a mighty cheer,
We'll sing you in,
We'll sing you out,
To you we'll raise a mighty shout--
Hail! Hail! Miss Kerry's here!
We welcome you to Owankeeeeeeeeeee!"

By the time they'd reached the last line, the trio had embraced Kerry enthusiastically from three sides in a group hug.

"Wow! You look great!" Harriet Lipton said, as she pulled back to give the latest arrival the once-over. Harriet had spent nearly as many weeks at camp as Kerry had, all of them earned through selling candy and mixed nuts. She'd become the all-time champion candy seller at the tender age of 8, and maintained the title for the next four years going door-to-door. But Harriet was eventually unseated by a shrewd 7-year-old named Maria Peevy, whose father sold her candy by the case to the guys at the auto plant where he worked.

Harriet had harped about the injustice of it all for years, but apparently all had finally been forgiven, for it was Maria who now embraced Kerry from the other side. The third greeter was Kim Carson, better known as a child as 'toothpick arms', or, 'the camper you never wanted to get paired up with on canoe trips.' She was no less slightly built in adulthood, Kerry noted, though one area of her anatomy had very obviously been surgically enhanced.

"Well you all haven't changed much," Kerry said, biting back any commentary on Kim's hard-to-ignore implants. Though she had not been particularly close to any of the trio during her camp days, they all being some years younger than she was, Kerry was warmed by the enthusiastic reception.

"Heather said you're living in Atlanta now?" Maria inquired, referring to the camp's former director and organizer of the reunion.

"Yeah, for...let's see, 15 years or so," Kerry replied. "Where is Heather? Is she around?" *She'll have the list of who's coming, the blonde thought. Wondering whether Mac will be here is making me crazy.*

"She's in the lodge, working on supper," Maria said, pouting a bit at Kerry's haste to leave them. Maria had been famous at camp for her whining, superior attitude. But for all her self-involved quirks, Maria was as devoted to camp as the rest of them, and so was tolerated by the rest of the gang.

"I'll catch up with you later," Kerry promised. "I just want to check in with Heather a minute. Great to see all you guys," she said as she headed toward the lodge's side entrance, which led directly to the large commercial kitchen that had daily fed more than 200 campers and counselors.

She found Heather, still a tall and sturdy woman though well into her 60's, busily cutting carrots and celery stalks into uniform sticks about the size of her little finger.

"Lemme guess," Kerry drawled from behind her. "Walking salad?"

"Of course," Heather replied easily without turning around. "*Finally*, someone who'll lend a hand."

Kerry chuckled as she went to the large walk-in cooler and retrieved a couple of heads of iceberg lettuce. During her days as a camper, she'd gained a rather infamous reputation with the director for her midnight raids on the kitchen. But when she became a counselor, Heather had enacted her own form of justice by tapping Kerry to help her in the kitchen every week during the cook's night off. They had spent many hours together hunched over this large table, an experience both women remembered with great fondness.

Kerry took up her familiar place opposite Heather and began to work, separating the lettuce leaves so they could become receptacles for a mélange of carrots, celery, raisins and mayonnaise.

It was only then that Heather paused in her work to greet Kerry directly. "Been too long," she said, relinquishing a smile. "It's good to see you."

Heather was not an effusive individual given to hugs or sloppy sentiment, so this welcome was uncharacteristically warm and fuzzy for her.

"You too," Kerry remarked, smiling back. Heather had cut up a significant pile of celery and carrots: it looked as though a big gathering was expected.

"Peanut butter?" Kerry asked, as they worked.

"Yeah, Yeah, I got some of that too." Heather replied. "No surprise you still haven't seen the error of your ways."

It had been a running debate between them--Heather's insistence on serving Walking Salad during every cook's night off, while Kerry argued for that combo of celery, peanut butter and raisins more popularly known as ants-on-a-log.

"So how many are we cooking for?" Kerry queried, hoping Heather would divulge whether Mac was among those who had R.S.V.P.'d for the weekend gathering.

"I'm making enough for 35," Heather responded. "We're doing pizza burgers for dinner, and I've got the makings for S'mores and banana boats for the big campfire tonight."

"Well, Well! What a happy coincidence--those just happen to be all my favorites," Kerry commented.

"Oh, they were just the easiest," Heather harrumphed, refusing to admit to any favoritism among her former charges.

"So who all is coming?" Kerry asked, trying to draw some specifics from the older woman.

"The list is back in my cabin," Heather said. "I think we ended up with 29 for sure, and there were two 'probablys', three 'maybes' and one 'probably not, but I may drop in the last day.' "

Kerry raised an eyebrow. "And that last one would be...?" she asked

"Buff," Heather said.

The name conjured up an unforgettable image-a perennial flower child with an enormous frizzy blonde afro, who taught arts and crafts and preached constantly against materialism.

"Don't tell me, let me guess," Kerry said. "Yoga instructor? Owner of a health food store?"

"Not quite," Heather said, chuckling. "Our Miss Buff is Buff Riley these days."

"Riley?" Kerry gasped. "As in Riley Pharmaceuticals?"

"One and the same," Heather confirmed. "She married Jake Riley, eldest son and C.E.O."

"Wow, I never would have expected that," Kerry said.

"Oh, I think there will be a few surprises this weekend," Heather hinted.

"Spill, Heather," Kerry prodded, in a voice that displayed her growing frustration. "You know I hate it when you do that 'You'll just have to wait and see' routine."

"Too bad," Heather said, refusing to give up any details, no matter how much Kerry glared at her.

Just then the door to the outside banged open, and they were joined by a petite brunette with a striking tan and well-toned physique. Her face lit up when she spotted Kerry, and she went immediately to the blonde for a quick hug.

"Well hey there, Miss Linda," Kerry said as they embraced.

"Kerry! It is SO great to see you!" Linda replied, swiping a carrot from Heather's pile and munching on it. "Where are you staying?"

"Well, I don't know," Kerry answered. "I just got here. My stuff is still in the car."

"A bunch of us are up in the Fledgling cabins," Linda said, referring to the tidy log cabins that had housed the youngest campers. "Ellen, Colleen, Edie. Whaddya say? Electricity and real flush toilets!"

The Fledgling cabins were only a short hike from the lodge, and they were equipped with more modern conveniences than the tent-cabins that housed older campers. The tent-cabins were further away from main camp, clustered into small groups that went half-way around the private lake. They had wood roofs and floors and screened sides, and although they were equipped with cots and mattresses, their occupants had no electricity and had to use outhouses or hike long distances to the main shower house. Still, Kerry liked them best because staying in them always made her feel closest to nature.

"Well, I don't know yet...maybe," Kerry hedged, unwilling to make a commitment until she'd seen the rest of the guest list. "Boy, you don't look like a mother of four," she added, in an effort to change the subject.

The brunette grinned. "Well I did get three of them through marriage," she said. "And I still swim every day. Speaking of which..." the former Waterfront Director added as she turned toward Heather. "Where's the key to the boathouse, Oh Fearless Leader? I need to get out the rescue rings and whistles if you want everybody to be able to swim later. The water's warm enough."

"You used to say that every morning during the Polar Bear swim," Kerry reminded her. "Even on days when you could see your breath."

"Oh, you're just a wuss," Linda said. "A little brisk morning dip is good for your constitution."

"The key is in my cabin," Heather interjected. "Either on the counter, or on the peg behind the door."

"See you later," Linda said, swiping another carrot. "Think about staying with us!" she called out over her shoulder as she departed the way she came.

Kerry labored in the kitchen until dinner preparations were done, having no success in getting any more particulars out of Heather. Since there was still a half-hour until they would actually sit down to eat, she decided to spend the time looking around. She'd missed the place terribly and was anxious to see whom else she'd run into.

She started off on the path that would take her around the lake to the other side, where the barn

and corral were located, bypassing the waterfront. She didn't get far. She had paused at the dock, looking out over the placid water, when the sound of footfalls behind her interrupted her reverie. She spun around to find Francois, one of the handful of foreign counselors the camp had hosted while she was there.

"Francois! I can't believe it!" Kerry cried, hugging her.

"Bonjour Kerry!" the older woman replied. "Mon dieu how you've changed!"

Kerry grinned. "Well I should hope at least a little, since I was just a kid when you left!" she replied.

Francois had been Kerry's counselor for three years running, and had taught her all she knew about sailing and archery. But she had to return to Paris the year that Kerry turned 14, and no one she knew had heard from Francois since.

"Did you come back just for the reunion?" Kerry asked, as the two women settled into low wooden chairs that overlooked the waterfront.

"No," Francois replied, shaking her head. "I live in the States now-for many years, in fact. I teach at the same University I was attending when I was a counselor here during the summer."

"Well, Heather hinted there would be some surprises, but I never dreamed you'd come back!" Kerry said. The two women rehashed old memories and caught up on their current lives until the clanging of a bell called them to dinner.

They headed down the path to the lodge, and as they emerged back in the central part of camp Kerry could see other familiar faces converging on the dining hall, but not the one she wanted most to see.

Francois was intercepted on the porch by a former tent-mate of hers, so Kerry proceeded alone into the stone and log lodge. She scanned the tables, hoping for a glimpse of Mac, but found Marsha and Stella instead, motioning for her to join them at a table near the large fireplace.

She gave each a quick hug before taking a seat on the bench opposite. These were the two women she'd kept in closest touch with over the years. Although it had been a few years since she'd seen either of them, she kept in frequent contact with both by e-mail and knew they would be attending the reunion.

"Well, I was wondering when I'd find you guys," Kerry said, glancing around as the others were doing, to see who all was coming in and taking seats at the other tables. "When did you get in?"

"This afternoon," Marsha said. "We went down to my old unit to see if the mural I did on the shower house is still there. And it was, can you believe it?"

A petite woman with tortoise shell glasses snuck up behind Marsha and covered her eyes with

her hands. "Guess who?" she said in as deep a voice as she could manage.

"Oh, Jeez," Marsha replied. "Give me a hint at least."

"Surely you don't need a clue," Stella supplied.

"Please?" Marsha whined. "A little tiny one?"

"SURELY not!" Kerry chimed in.

Marsha finally got it. "Don't call me Shirley!!! Oh! Oh! It's Miss Sparky!" she crowed.

Shirley Spooner laughed along with the rest of them as she removed her hands and took a seat at the table. She had shed her long-hated birth name when she became a counselor at the camp the summer she turned 17, and 'Sparky' never looked back.

Francois also joined them at their table, just as Stella jumped up to wave at another familiar face—a tall thin brunette named Katy. "You owe me money!" Stella bellowed as she approached, and Katy laughed as she embraced her former tent-mate. It had been a running joke between the two—the result of too many late-night hands of poker played with matchsticks that Stella always won.

Dinner passed quickly as the group of women swapped stories and tried to remember the names of the other former camp-mates at the tables around them. There were a few Kerry couldn't place; women much older or younger than she was. She took a quick head count. There were 25 women present, which meant at least four were still expected, possibly more.

"I was really hoping Kat would come," Marsha said, referring to another old friend who had been editor of the camp newspaper. "I lost contact with her that year I moved so much."

"Yeah, and how about Dixie? Anyone know what ever happened to her?" Sparky asked. The others shook their heads.

It was the perfect opening. "And Mac, the Riding Director," Kerry added, hoping against hope she wasn't blushing. "Anyone hear from her recently?"

"Well, I kept in touch with her for a long while," Katy volunteered. "Christmas cards, mostly. I know she moved to a little town near Seattle-- ten years ago, maybe? But we lost touch right after that."

Kerry's heart sank. Seattle was on the other side of the country. It was unlikely, she thought, that Mac had even heard about the reunion. She'd been foolish to spend so much time during the past couple of weeks thinking about her old friend.

She was determined not to let the realization stop her from enjoying the weekend. She really was happy to see all her other old friends, and she looked forward to the campfire that evening, when

they would all gather on log benches before the council fire ring, with its breathtaking view of the lake. They'd toast marshmallows and sing old camp favorites-"Each Campfire Lights Anew" and "No Man is an Island".

"Gosh, I'm sure gonna miss this place," Stella said, wistfully. "Many of the best memories of my life were made here. Certainly most of my best friendships were, present company included."

"Isn't that the truth," Marsha said. "I just can't believe it's being sold. You just know some stupid developer will buy it and put little cottages all around the lake right on top of each other."

"I heard a rumor that camp will probably end up being logged by the new owner," Maria Peevy said, leaning toward the group from the table next to theirs. Maria had always had the uncanny ability to listen in on conversations going on all around her. "They'll come through here and take down most of the trees, you just wait and see." She nodded as though such an end was inevitable.

"It'll be a shame we probably can't ever come back," Katy said. "Never hike around the lake again, never swim on the waterfront."

"If this place gets logged, I won't want to come back," Kerry said. "I'll want to remember it as it was."

"Yeah, me too," Francois said.

They all fell silent after that for several moments.

"Before we leave on Sunday we should all walk around the lake, Kerry said. "You know, for a proper goodbye. Carry our lanterns, wear our Vagabond scarves, sing a few of the old songs. What do you say?"

"Count me in," Marsha said.

"And me," Sparky added.

"You bet," Stella answered.

"Me too," Francois nodded.

Katy chimed in, "I'm there."

"Can I come too?" Maria asked from the next table.

"And me?" Harriet and Kim said simultaneously, from either side of her.

"The more the merrier," Katy answered for all of them.

The group broke up into small conversations after that, as the women continued to reminisce

about the old days.

Kerry's mind wandered back to Mac, and the time they had spent together. They were her happiest memories of all the many she'd had during her summers at this place. Without camp, she realized, there may never be another reunion. No further chance of tracking down Mac.

"Earth to Kerry!" Stella said, in a voice that indicated she'd already tried in vain to get the blonde's attention. Everyone at the table was looking at her.

"Sorry," Kerry apologized. "What were you saying?"

"I said we were going back to the tent to get changed, and I asked where you were spending the night. Where's your gear?" Stella replied.

"Oh, I haven't put it anywhere yet. Where are you all staying?" Kerry inquired.

"We're up at the Eagle's Nest," Marsha said, referring to the cluster of tent-cabins that housed the oldest campers. It was farthest away from the main lodge, but it had the best view. It sat on a hill that overlooked the rest of the camp. "There's one more cot up there. C'mon, join us," she urged.

"All right, you're on," Kerry said. "I'll drive you up in the truck so I can get changed too. It's supposed to cool off a lot tonight."

There were a half-dozen tent-cabins in the unit, all designed to hold four campers, but attendance had been so poor during the last summer of operation that there were only cots in two of them, and many of them were in very rough shape. Kerry claimed the last usable mattress among the lot and dragged it into the cabin she would share with Marsha, Stella, and Katy. Two large coolers had been set up in the center, with decks of cards and a Coleman lantern atop them, and Kerry knew she'd be up all night.

They changed into heavier clothing. Kerry put on a favorite camp sweatshirt that she had not worn in years. It was so well-used and faded it was hardly presentable in public, but that wasn't the reason it had been put away. It had once been Mac's. It had been given to Kerry that first summer they met, after too many washings reduced it from a Large to a Medium. She hadn't wanted it to deteriorate completely, so she had tucked it away for safekeeping in her cedar chest.

The same thing that had told her to keep the sweatshirt had insisted she preserve another memento of their friendship -- a Saint Christopher medal that Mac had taken off and put around Kerry's neck just before she boarded the plane for Atlanta. She reached her hand up to finger it absently now as she lay on her cot and waited for the others to finish dressing.

Those years really had been a most precious time in her life, she knew, closing her eyes and listening to the birdcalls and cricket chorus around her that heralded the coming dusk. She breathed in the earthy scent of new-fallen leaves. She dearly missed being so close to nature. She vowed to herself that she'd pursue the dream she'd long carried of one day retiring to a cabin in the north woods.

. "Ready?" Stella's voice interrupted her thoughts.. Kerry roused herself to see Stella waiting by the door, Marsha and Katy already outside. The four friends trooped together down the path that led to the council fire ring., singing a chorus of "Oh Step Along," and then Kerry's favorite- "Swinging Along the Open Road" in two-part harmony.

The other former counselors were already gathered at the fire ring when they arrived, but Heather had waited for the ceremonial lighting until all were present. First she read the poem that all present knew by heart, for it was engraved on the mantle in the big stone lodge.

"Who hath smelt wood smoke at twilight?
Who hath heard the birch log burning?
Who is quick to read the noises of the night?
Let her follow with the others,
To the Camp of known desire and proved delight."

There were smiles all around when she finished and lit the large teepee fire with a torch she'd fashioned. It blazed to life, and soon was a bonfire, chasing away the shadows that were closing in around them with the setting of the sun. It was a glorious time of day, with a faint pink still on the horizon, and the first fireflies illuminating all around them. Someone started a song, and then another, their rich voices blending as though time had stopped. They made it through two verses of the third when those gathered at the fire ring realized that someone far off was singing along with them. They fell silent one by one, nudging each other as the realization hit, until they could clearly hear a melodic blend of three or four voices carrying across the lake to them.

The phenomenon of camp acoustics was something they all knew well. A rambunctious camper--or counselor--in a unit near the lake could often be clearly heard by anyone standing at the shore, even on the opposite side. The small body of water carried sound so effectively at night that the camp director usually knew right away if there was any mischief going on.

The voices across the lake ended the song, and then called out in unison the familiar faux Indian call that counselors used at camp to hail each other long distances. The counselors at the fire ring yodeled back, and then sat back to await the arrival of the latecomers. Heather still hadn't tipped her hand about who they might be.

Kerry had, she'd thought, given up hope that Mac might make it. But her heart increased its pace again as the minutes ticked by, her eyes never far from the trail that the newcomers would use.

Finally they arrived. A woman Kerry didn't know, followed by a grey-haired woman who used a cane.

"Oh My God!" Marsha said, poking Kerry in the side. "Is that who I think it is?"

"Yup, it's Miss Helen, all right, Kerry confirmed. "She has to be in her late 70s at least, doesn't she?" Helen Libby, the camp's first director, was being helped along by a tall, thin brunette with

glasses who looked familiar, but whom Kerry couldn't immediately place.

As they neared, Kerry heard someone behind her call out to the brunette--"Hey, Marty!" It was enough for Kerry to put her into context. Marty had worked alongside Mac in the barn, and had later replaced her as Riding Director. *They were friends, maybe they kept in touch?* she wondered.

She didn't have to wonder long.

Suddenly, there she was. Stepping lightly down the path toward them, alone, carrying one of the tin lanterns they'd all made for themselves during arts and crafts--its candle glow softly illuminating the curves of her long, lean body. The riding boots and hat were gone, but Mac had lost none of her ability to captivate Kerry. The years had done nothing to diminish the brunette's striking good looks.

The fire had died down to coals--the better to cook the banana boats that were next on the agenda--so it was difficult to clearly see the faces of those gathered around the large ring. Kerry watched as Mac's gaze drifted along the line of women, pausing now and then to acknowledge a greeting, but never lingering too long. It was as if, like Kerry, Mac had come to the reunion with the expectation of finding someone in particular. *Or is that just wishful thinking?* Kerry wondered. She held her breath.

Finally, Mac's eyes found hers, and held there, Mac smiling widely with the recognition, and Kerry's grin matching hers in excitement. Kerry rose from her seat as Mac closed the distance between them, and the two women embraced.

"I was hoping you'd..." Mac started as they hugged, while Kerry blurted out "I was hoping you'd come!" at the same moment. They broke apart, laughing, then hugged again, each remembering the history they'd had of often speaking the same thoughts simultaneously.

"Wow, you look great!" Kerry enthused, appraising Mac at arm's length.

"Same back acha," Mac said. "You haven't changed a bit. Well, except for the hair," she amended, chuckling. "That really was one god-awful perm you had the last time I saw you."

"At the airport," Kerry remembered. "No more poodle remarks, please," she chastened, laughing.

"And that sweatshirt looks vaguely familiar," Mac commented, raising an eyebrow. "I can't believe it's survived all these years!"

"Well, I...I save it for special occasions," Kerry responded, a faint flush coming to her cheeks.

They couldn't stop smiling and staring at each other. Finally they took a seat on one of the logs, a bit away from where the other former counselors were huddled in small groups.

"I can't believe you made it," Kerry said. "I heard you moved somewhere near Seattle?"

"I did," Mac confirmed, nodding. "I really became enamored with the Northwest during a couple of kayak trips. And then when a job opened up there that sounded interesting, I decided to move."

"Are you still teaching?" Kerry asked.

"Well I taught high school biology for a few years after camp," Mac said, "But before I got tenure, the big budget cuts came, and I was suddenly out of work. I decided that fate was telling me it was time for a change. A rather big change, as it turned out," she added. "I went to work for the Fisheries and Wildlife Department as an observer. Which meant I spent 10 or more months a year on foreign fishing vessels, making sure they were doing everything by the book."

"Well, that's a switch! Though it sounds fascinating," Kerry said. "What's it like, and how did you happen into it?"

"I read an article about it in a magazine somewhere, and it just sounded kind of intriguing to me," Mac answered. "It was really hard at times. Usually I was the only woman on a ship full of men, and often the only person who spoke English. That can be really lonely in itself. But when you're seen as sort of the 'bad guy' by most of the crew because of what you do...well, you can really feel isolated." She cocked her head and smiled. "But I don't regret a moment of it. I visited a lot of ports in Alaska, learned a bunch about other cultures, and I can say a few words in at least a dozen languages. If you ever need to say 'Where is the coffee?' in Russian, or 'Keep your damn hands to yourself!' in Italian, I'm your gal." They laughed.

"Well anyway, that job gave me a lot of time to think about what I really wanted to do next," Mac continued. "I missed Michigan a lot more than I expected I would, and I was planning to move back here anyway. But it was a phone call that really decided things for me. My Dad had a stroke, so I came home to take care of him."

"Oh, Mac," Kerry murmured sympathetically. She knew Mac's mother had died when she was only a young girl, and she'd grown up very close to her father.

"Yeah," Mac said. "It was pretty rough for a while. He passed away only a few months later."

"I'm so sorry," Kerry said, laying one hand gently on Mac's forearm.

"Thanks," Mac said. "Well, anyway, since then, I've not really had to work. Dad left me a nice nest egg. I traveled quite a bit, and bought a little place for myself not long ago."

"Here in Michigan?" Kerry asked.

"Mmm hmmm," Mac nodded. "I actually found a place not too far from here."

Kerry's mouth fell open. "You're kidding!"

"Nope," Mac said. "Just a hop and a skip. You know, I always felt more 'at home' up here in the woods than anywhere."

"Yeah, I know that feeling," Kerry replied. "Wow, I really envy you."

"What about you-- do you still live in Atlanta?" Mac inquired. "What have you been up to since we lost touch?"

"Well, I didn't end up working for that radio station very long," Kerry answered, referring to the reason she'd moved to Georgia. "I hadn't been there six months when I got a job with the Associated Press as a reporter-photographer-working mostly in the United States at first, but then I got sent overseas a lot."

"That's wonderful!" Mac exclaimed. "It sounds very exciting."

"Well it *was* great for a long while," Kerry said. "Good money, got to see a lot of the world. And I had a great boss."

"Why do I feel as though there is a 'but' in there somewhere?" Mac asked.

"There is," Kerry concurred. "I was working 60-70 hours a week, which gets kind of old after a decade or so. And like you, I was living out of a suitcase most of the time. Pretty lonely existence."

Mac nodded in sympathy. "So you're not doing that now?" she asked.

"Nope," Kerry said. "When my boss got promoted and transferred, they replaced him with a real... well, pinhead is too nice a term for the guy. Anyway, I decided it was time for me to move on as well. I had enough saved to give myself a year to see if I could write that novel I'd always wanted to do."

"And?" Mac asked expectantly.

"And I shut myself up in my apartment for three months and just wrote and wrote and wrote. The pizza delivery guy and I were on a first-name basis," Kerry chuckled. "But I finished! That was a month or so ago, I guess. Since then I've been shopping around for an agent and publisher."

"Well, congratulations, that's quite an accomplishment!" Mac said. "You're an author! What's the book about?"

"It's a murder mystery, set in the north woods," Kerry answered. She grinned. "Camp was a great inspiration."

"I can't wait to read it when it comes out," Mac enthused.

"Well that may be a while," Kerry said, "if what I've read about getting published is true. If

you're serious about wanting to read it, though, I'll get a copy to you." *It's one way to get your phone number and address*, Kerry thought.

They chatted on, catching up and recalling their days at camp, both only vaguely aware of the other counselors around them. They missed the banana boats entirely, so engrossed were they in each other, and neither noticed when some of the other reunion-goers began drifting away, back to their tents and cabins for the night.

Before they knew it, they were alone, and the fire was down to a few embers. The sky above was vivid with stars.

Kerry turned her watch toward the dim light from the coals and tried to read the dial. "It's past midnight!" she exclaimed, amazed at how much time had passed.

"Time flies," Mac smirked. "C'mon, let's get the fire out and head back."

They doused the embers with water from one of the fire buckets that stood sentinel on each side of the fire ring and set off back toward main camp.

"Where are you staying?" Mac asked.

"I promised Marsha and Stella I'd bunk in with them at the Eagle's Nest, at least for tonight," Kerry replied, her sudden lack of enthusiasm for that decision evident in her voice. "And I don't think there are any usable beds left in the unit," she added.

"Well, that's o.k.," Mac said. "I'll head home for the night...and catch up to you at breakfast?" she added.

"Great," Kerry replied, smiling. "I'll save you a spot at our table."

Mac insisted on walking Kerry up to her unit. She stuck her head into the tent for a moment to say a proper hello to Marsha, Stella and Katy, who were playing poker and drinking beer, before setting off back down the path.

The next day there was little time for the two women to chat privately, as Heather had planned a busy agenda for the reunion. After breakfast, there was a canoe outing on the lake, and an archery contest. And after lunch, a volleyball game followed by a group swim.

"I thought this reunion was going to be three days of sitting in the woods and relaxing," Marsha complained, yawning, "or I wouldn't have sat up all night playing cards with 'the shark'." She jerked her head in Stella's direction. Stella had, true to form, cleaned Marsha and Katy out of all the cash they'd brought with them.

"Well, you should have known better with Heather behind it," Katy groaned. "She never did believe in too much 'free time'". The four women in the Eagle's nest were changing out of their swim togs and into their jeans for dinner, still more than an hour away. Mac had joined the group

for the day's activities up until time for afternoon swim, when she'd begged off and said she had an errand to run. Kerry hadn't seen her since.

Marsha lay down on her bed. "I'm going to rest my eyes for a minute," she said, closing her eyes and tucking her pillow under her head. "Stella, will you wake me if I fall asleep and don't hear the bell?"

"No problem," Stella said, reaching for her deck of cards. "Kerry? Katy? How about a friendly game of euchre?"

"No thanks," Kerry said, "I thought I'd take a walk until the bell, look around the old place."

"Okay, we'll catch up to you at dinner. Katy?"

"Well, it'll have to be a friendly game, since you already have all my money," she replied, sitting cross-legged on Stella's cot, facing her. "Okay, deal, Minnesota Fats."

"That's billiards," Stella said.

"What-*ever*," Katy said, rolling her eyes in her best valley girl imitation.

They all grinned at that, except Marsha, who was already asleep.

"See you later," Kerry replied, carefully closing the screen door as she left so the banging wouldn't wake Marsha. The springs on the tent-cabin doors were set so tight that a careless slam could be heard clear across the lake.

Kerry had no real destination in mind; she just wanted to reminisce. She walked through the unit where she'd been a counselor and sat in her old tent for a while, listening to the sounds around her and looking out over the lake.

Then she set off on a little trail that went by the tall maple tree she had loved to climb as a camper. Kerry had been going to Owankee for more than a dozen years before Mac had arrived on the scene: plenty of time to thoroughly explore the 300 acres of virgin forest. She had taken Mac, and only Mac, to every single one of her favorite secret places. And in doing so, they had become not just hers anymore, but theirs, she realized. *Where did Mac run off to? she wondered. She never really talked about her home. Is someone waiting for her there?*

Kerry looked up into the branches of the old maple tree, which didn't seem quite as big as she remembered. She couldn't resist. She hoisted herself up, and climbed to where she could look out over the lake. She was so intent on the view that she failed to notice Mac's stealthy approach.

"I had a feeling I'd find you here," came a voice below her.

It startled Kerry for a moment, but she had settled onto a large sturdy limb so was in no danger of falling. "Hey there," she answered. "What have you been up to?"

"Well, you'll have to come down to find out," Mac said mysteriously.

Kerry was back on the ground in less than two minutes. "Okay," she said, brushing off her jeans. "What's going on?"

"Thought I might be able to convince you to skip dinner at the dining hall," Mac said, without elaboration.

"I see. You're not going to tell me what you have planned, are you?" Kerry said.

Mac shook her head. "Nah, better if it's a surprise."

"Won't we be missed?" Kerry said.

"No, I stopped by Heather's cabin on the way here," Mac said. "She knows we'll catch up to the group."

"Ah. Pretty sure I'd come, were you?" Kerry said, a huge grin on her face.

Mac blushed at that, which Kerry found extremely interesting. "C'mon," Mac finally managed, as she set off purposefully through the woods. Kerry realized in short order they were on a direct route to the barn.

"I don't even get a hint?" Kerry asked anyway.

"Nope," Mac said, smiling. "You know, you never could stand to wait for anything."

"That's not true," Kerry argued. "Well, maybe it's a little true. How about just a little clue?"

"Oh, you know where we're going as well as I do," Mac said. The barn was only over the next rise.

But Kerry hadn't expected to see a horse trailer parked at the barn, and two horses saddled up and waiting in the corral. Two familiar-looking horses, though that was impossible considering how long it had been since their camp years. One was a tall buckskin, and looked quite a lot like Moon Dog, Kerry's favorite during her years as a camper. The other was a pinto, and resembled Gypsy, the horse that Mac had ridden as Riding Director. The pinto was outfitted with a handsome pair of leather saddlebags that bulged with cargo.

"It's rather uncanny," Kerry said, as they approached the horses. "Where did these two come from?" She went immediately to the buckskin, and stroked his nose. He leaned into her touch and snorted a welcome.

"They're mine," Mac said. "I got them when I moved up here. Bet you can guess their names."

"No kidding?" Kerry asked. "Wow, that's great. Well, hey there, Moon Dog," she crooned to the horse, scratching between his ears as Mac tightened the horses' cinches. The gelding seemed to enjoy it as much as his predecessor had.

"Up you go," urged Mac, cupping her hands for Kerry to step into.

Kerry needed no further encouragement, but she did need the assistance, since she was only 5'4" and this horse was quite a bit taller than the one she remembered. She put one hand on Mac's shoulder, the other on the saddle, and was up and seated in a moment.

Mac mounted Gypsy, and set off down the trail that led to a secluded clearing on the edge of camp property. It was where they had always taken the horses for overnight camp-outs with the more experienced riders. And it was another of Kerry's favorite places.

They cantered a bit where the path was wide and straight, but otherwise were content to just let the horses walk. Around one bend they surprised a deer, which stared at them for a moment before bolting off into the forest, its broad white tail like a flag.

"I know I haven't been back here much," Kerry said as they neared their destination. "But it's going to be very weird not being able to ever come up again."

"Well, if you ever get a hankering for the woods, you'll just have to come visit me," Mac said.

Kerry's heart accelerated a bit at the invitation. "Don't be surprised if I take you up on that," she answered, trying not to sound too anxious.

"I hope you will," Mac said, as they emerged into the clearing and headed toward a little creek that ran alongside its northern edge. She dismounted there, and Kerry followed suit, letting their horses drink.

"Hungry?" Mac asked, pulling a small cooler and thin blanket from one of the saddlebags.

"I could eat," Kerry answered, as Mac spread the blanket out and motioned for Kerry to have a seat. She unsaddled the horses and then retrieved a picnic basket from the other saddlebag.

"Well, it's nothing too extravagant," Mac said, settling herself on the blanket. "But hopefully a bit better than our other alternative. They're having hot dogs, beans and lemonade in the lodge." She opened the basket and set out two plates and silverware, napkins and a pair of wine glasses. Next came a bottle of Merlot and a baguette, and from the cooler emerged a triangle of Brie, some thin slices of ham and a large bunch of grapes. For desert there was a Ziploc bag containing freshly baked oatmeal-chocolate chip cookies.

"This sure ain't camp fare," Kerry agreed, digging in. She looked at Mac as she munched happily away. "This was very sweet of you to do, Mac. Much more fun than Heather's agenda."

"I was rather hoping you'd like it," Mac answered. They stole glances at each other and smiled

frequently as they ate, enjoying their renewed closeness and the serenity of the setting.

"Well, this will be another wonderful memory of camp for me to cherish," Kerry said as they lingered over a second glass of wine. They were lying side by side on the blanket, a couple of feet apart, Kerry propped up on one elbow, Mac leaning against a small tree. "You know, all my best memories of this place were times I spent with you," she admitted softly, looking up at her friend.

"I feel the same," Mac answered, her voice unexpectedly husky. She met Kerry's eyes, and neither looked away, neither spoke, for several moments, until it was clear to both of them what would happen next.

They leaned toward each other and their lips met-- softly at first, tentative. A sweet, slow kiss, that sent a rush of heat through Kerry that was unlike anything she'd ever experienced. They broke apart, each smiling shyly at the other, their eyes shining and their faces flushed.

"I've wanted to do that for so long..." they said in one voice, and then both laughed.

"That's kind of freaky, when we do that," Mac said, shifting her weight until she was lying beside Kerry, their bodies a foot apart.

"Just shows how much in sync we are with each other," Kerry said, as Mac's hand reached out softly to caress her cheek, and then her neck. Kerry closed her eyes, delighting in the touch, as Mac's fingers found the chain and withdrew the St. Christopher medal from beneath Kerry's flannel shirt.

"You're still wearing it?" Mac asked in wonder, her eyes studying the well-worn surface of the small gold medallion.

"As I recall, you told me it would keep me safe until I saw you again," Kerry said, trailing her fingers lightly along Mac's arm and then down her side, coming to rest on the brunette's hip. "And so it has," she added softly, leaning in for another kiss.

A crashing sound abruptly snapped both women back to where they were. A deer had wandered into the clearing, grazing contentedly, until one of the horses had spooked it.

The sun was setting. It was nearly twilight, and both women knew they needed to head back if they were to reach the barn before it got too dark to negotiate the trail. "We should go," Mac sighed as she leaned into Kerry, burying her face in the blonde's neck. She made no move to leave.

"I know," Kerry answered, stroking Mac's hair. "But I don't want to. I've dreamt of this for such a long time."

Mac pulled away slightly to look at her. "How long?" she asked.

"I think I had a crush on you right from the beginning," Kerry admitted. "But of course I was really just a kid then, I had no clue."

Mac nodded. "Back then, I just knew I liked being with you more than anyone I'd ever known before. Maybe that last year, I suspected it was more than that. But I couldn't allow myself to really think about it too much. I was too convinced you were straight."

"I guess I didn't know myself WHAT I was," Kerry said. "I hadn't been with anyone. I was pretty naïve, really. When I figured out I liked women, I recognized what chemistry we'd had. I've thought about you often."

"I've thought about you a lot, too," Mac admitted, her hand softly stroking the length of Kerry's hip. "I'm so glad we're...back in touch, so to speak." This made both of them laugh. "But I guess we really should start back-- you know how pitch black it gets out under these trees after dark, and I'm afraid I didn't think to pack flashlights."

"Whatever happened to 'be prepared?'" Kerry asked. "Oh wait, that's the Boy Scouts," she chuckled, getting to her feet and extending a hand to help Mac up. She pulled her tall friend into a tight embrace. "I wish I wasn't staying in the Eagle's Nest," she whispered into Mac's neck, just before the tip of her tongue emerged to caress the soft flesh.

"You could always stay with me tonight," Mac offered.

"What are we waiting for?" Kerry answered, abruptly breaking their embrace and hastily packing up their things. Mac laughed as a slight flush infused her cheeks.

"I guess that's a yes," Mac said, moving to resaddle the horses.

They said little as they headed back in single file on the narrow trail, Mac's horse in the lead. Mac would turn occasionally in the saddle and smile back at Kerry, as if reassuring herself that the blonde was still behind her. Kerry in turn was content to watch Mac's back as she swayed slightly in the saddle, her long hair swinging from side to side.

They came to a fork in the trail. The left path would take them back the way they came, straight to the barn. The right would take them a longer way, around the lake, so Kerry was surprised to see Mac turn off in that direction.

"We're taking the long way?" Kerry asked, puzzled. "We won't make it back before dark if we go this way, will we?" She was beginning to feel a bit chilled in just her flannel shirt.

"Oh, there's time," Mac answered over her shoulder.

Kerry was about to disagree, when she spotted a structure of some kind amid the trees in front of them, just off the trail. A log building, where there had been only forest before. "What's that up ahead?" she asked.

"Looks like a house," Mac said, as they got nearer. It was a small log cabin, with a fieldstone chimney and a covered porch. A cord of cut firewood was neatly stacked beside it, but the windows facing them were dark and it looked as if no one was about.

"Who built a house here? And when? This must have been put up fairly recently," Kerry said, as they stopped the horses just off the porch. Mac dismounted and tied her horse to a nearby tree.

"C'mon," Mac urged, stepping up onto the porch. "I want to see if anybody's here. Aren't you curious?" Without waiting for an answer, she rapped loudly on the door. They waited. Mac knocked again. "Doesn't look like anybody's home," she said, peeking in the little window in the door. "Let's have a look around," she said, trying the knob. It was locked.

"I don't think we should," Kerry said, her years of parochial school kicking in.

"Oh, we won't hurt anything," Mac said as she went around to a side window and peeked in there as well. "There's someone living here, all right," she confirmed.

Kerry bit her lip, her curiosity at war with her conscience. Mac disappeared around the back of the house. "Mac?" she called out in a loud whisper, when her friend did not immediately reappear. "MAC!" She tried again, louder. Nothing. She dismounted and circled the cabin in the direction Mac had gone. There was no sign of her friend. She glanced quickly around; the light was failing fast and it would soon be too dark to negotiate the trail.

Suddenly lights came on inside the house. A window near where she was standing opened and Mac stuck her head out. "Back door was open. C'mon, you have to see this," she urged.

"Oh Mac, we shouldn't," Kerry admonished. She approached the window that Mac was leaning against. Her friend was looking at her expectantly, and it drew her in. She couldn't resist a peek inside. Mac was in the cabin's living room, warmly appointed with a brown leather couch and easy chairs, a large Oriental rug on the wooden floor. Colorful Hudson Bay Indian blankets hung from the log rafters, and wildlife prints and nature photographs adorned the walls.

Kerry's eyes took it all in, falling finally on the large stone fireplace.

Hanging above it, on a peg, was Mac's cavalry hat.

Tears formed in her eyes. She tilted her head to look at Mac, whose face was only inches away. Mac was smiling from ear to ear.

"Yours?" Kerry squeaked. "YOU...bought camp?"

"Mmm hmmm," Mac affirmed, kissing her lightly on the lips. "Come inside?"

Kerry nodded mutely, still in shock. She made her way around the cabin just as Mac emerged through the front door. They met on the porch.

"Go on in, make yourself at home," Mac said, bringing a hand up to caress Kerry's face. "I'll take care of the horses and be right in."

Kerry nodded again, still unable to speak. She stepped through the door and into the cool interior, pausing to study her surroundings. There were bits of Mac everywhere. New English riding boots, much like her old ones, stood beside the door. Here and there were framed photographs--one of Mac's father dominated an end table by the couch, and several Alaskan scenes had been artfully arranged on one wall.

Kerry moved about the room, soaking it all in, until her eyes fell on a photo of herself and Mac together--a candid shot of the two of them laughing that had been taken by Stella that last year they were all at camp. She ran her fingers lightly over the image. She had one just like it at home. Just then Mac reappeared.

"I can't believe it." Kerry said. "Why didn't you tell me?"

Mac shrugged, a twinkle in her eye. "Wanted it to be a surprise," she said mischievously. "Heather will announce it to the rest tomorrow." She moved to the fireplace and lit the fire that had been laid there. In short order it flared to life, the flickering light playing across the tall brunette's features.

"Wow. You actually own camp," Kerry repeated, shaking her head, as she moved slowly toward the hearth to join Mac. She put her arms around the brunette's waist.

Mac embraced her back and kissed her on the forehead. "Want to see the rest?" she asked shyly, pulling back to look down at Kerry.

Kerry could see in Mac's smoldering gaze that the invitation was for more than a sightseeing tour. She grinned and nodded her head, and Mac took her hand and led her to the bedroom. Mac paused at the threshold, leaning in to flick on the light, allowing Kerry to precede her.

The room contained a large brass bed, covered with an Amish quilt that had been done in the same autumnal colors that dominated the landscape outside. It had been pulled back to reveal plush flannel sheets in a dark hunter green. Wall sconces lit the room with a warm glow, and a thick rug cushioned the floor.

As Kerry took in the room, Mac turned on a stereo and the soft strains of a Bach cello concerto filled the room. Mac came up behind Kerry and embraced her. "What are you thinking?" she whispered, as she rested her chin on the blonde's shoulder, her lips only inches from Kerry's ear.

Kerry could feel her face grow crimson. "I..uh..." she stammered, too shy and excited to put her feelings into words.

Mac gently turned her around until they were facing each other. "Do you want this?" she asked softly, doubt etching her features.

"Oh, yes," Kerry replied, wrapping her arms firmly around Mac. "I want this very much," she whispered. "I guess I'm just a little nervous. This still feels like I'm dreaming."

"We're not dreaming," Mac reassured her, as she leaned down to kiss the blonde.

This kiss was not the gentle, tentative exchange they'd experienced at the clearing.

It started that way, but quickly escalated. Their tongues met, and began a delicious exploration, tasting and stroking. Insistent. Eager. The long withheld passion of their dreams of each other came together in that kiss, and still exceeded either's expectations. Kerry's body was on fire, and every one of her senses seemed incredibly heightened.

One of Mac's hands came up behind Kerry's neck and the other encircled her back, pulling their bodies together and urging deeper contact. Kerry tightened her hold around Mac's waist, one hand straying south to caress the brunette's firm ass.

They had to break apart finally to breathe, and both were breathing hard. Kerry could feel her blood course through her, drumming in her ears. Mac nibbled at her neck while insinuating one lean, muscular thigh between her legs. "Ungh," Kerry groaned, squeezing Mac's ass, pulling her even closer.

Their lips came together again as Kerry's hands tugged at the brunette's sweater, then shirt, her delicate fingers finding their way to the warm hollow at the small of Mac's back, caressing the soft skin in ever widening circles.

Mac groaned into their enjoined mouths at the exquisite touch and ground her thigh against Kerry.

Kerry felt light-headed. She thought she might faint. She had dreamed of being with Mac, but it was never like this.

They rocked against each other for several long moments, pulling apart only to breathe. Mac dipped her head until her lips were against Kerry's ear. She nibbled playfully at the lobe, stroking it with her tongue before she whispered huskily, "I don't think I can stand up much longer."

Kerry couldn't help smiling. "I know what you mean," she moaned lustily, as Mac's lips and tongue explored her neck. She closed her eyes and leaned her head back, encouraging the playful nips and wet caresses. She could feel her heartbeat pounding in her chest, as the warmth of her arousal spread through her. "Oh God, Mac, that feels sooo good."

"Come, love," Mac whispered, as she gently moved them toward the bed. She settled Kerry down on the quilt and stretched out beside her, still kissing her neck and face while one hand slowly began to unbutton Kerry's buttery-soft flannel shirt. Kerry's breathing quickened as her skin was exposed to the cool air, then caught in her throat when Mac's large warm hand began to caress her stomach, fingertips nearing the edge of her breast.

When Mac discovered Kerry was wearing no bra, she moaned, loud and long—a hungry, heated sound that shot through Kerry even as Mac's fingertip found her nipple, making it instantly erect. She played lightly over it until Kerry whimpered. Then she squeezed. A shudder skittered down Kerry's body and she whispered, "More, Mac. More."

Mac shifted her body, sliding down the blonde—her lips, tongue and teeth sending jolts of pleasure through Kerry as they nipped and danced over her flesh, teasing at first, avoiding direct contact with her breasts. Kerry's hand came up to cup the back of Mac's head, impatient fingers entwining themselves in her long hair, pulling the brunette close and encouraging greater contact. Mac was driving her wild.

Finally Mac's lips closed around the nipple and sucked hard, which elicited a cry of pleasure from Kerry. "Oh, God," she moaned, as Mac continued her oral onslaught, moving to the other breast to give it equal attention. "Please, Mac," she panted, pressing against the brunette. "I need to feel you."

Mac pulled away, her own arousal evident in her labored breathing and swollen lips. Wordlessly, she helped Kerry remove the rest of her clothes, stripping off her shirt, and then unzipping her jeans and sliding them off her body along with her socks and green silk underwear, all the while staring at her with provocative, half-lidded eyes.

She helped Kerry beneath the blankets and then quickly stripped off her own clothes and extinguished the light before rejoining the blonde. Kerry opened her arms as Mac spread her long frame atop her, resting her weight on her knees and elbows. The delicious skin-on-skin contact along the full length of their bodies amplified the urgency of Kerry's need. "Mmmmm," she moaned, as Mac suckled gently at her neck and slowly trailed a path of wet kisses along her collarbone.

As the brunette's mouth closed in again on Kerry's almost painfully stimulated nipple, Mac's hand gently urged Kerry's legs apart, her fingertips caressing the coarse hair with a maddeningly light touch.

"Touch me, Mac," Kerry begged, pressing her hips against the other's woman's hand.

Mac immediately complied, her long, strong fingers moving in to find the warmth that eagerly awaited her, stroking the soft, wet folds while her mouth continued its oral adoration of Kerry's left breast.

"Oh, Mac!" Kerry moaned as she pressed her lover closer, thrusting her hips against Mac's hand. She was incredibly wet, unbelievably excited. And so was Mac, she knew. The air was thick with the scent of their arousal.

Mac took her time, skillfully teasing Kerry's swollen nub, maintaining just enough contact to drive the blonde crazy, building her excitement in a steady crescendo of pleasure that lasted far longer than Kerry thought she was capable of. When she finally came, she cried out and clung to Mac, her whole body trembling with the aftershocks.

She was still breathing hard when she playfully reversed their positions, pushing Mac onto her back so that she could provide the same passionate adulation of the brunette's body.

Mac was certainly not going to protest. There was a hunger in her eyes that stripped away any shyness that may have remained between them. Kerry covered Mac's body with her own, caressing her everywhere with her mouth and hands, kissing a trail down Mac's long, athletic frame. Her hands cupped Mac's ample breasts and her lips closed around the right nipple, sucking firmly while the fingers of her right hand provided the same firm stimulation to its twin. Mac squirmed beneath her and growled an indecipherable purr of pleasure.

Kerry's hand slid between their bodies and found the silky wetness that was evidence of Mac's immense ardor. Her fingertips began stroking the soft folds and swollen bud, slowly at first, exploring every inch, prolonging the delicious suspense.

"Please," Mac pleaded in a ragged whisper, when she could stand it no longer. She opened her legs further in invitation, and Kerry's fingers penetrated her even as her thumb continued its stimulation of her most sensitive area. The combination sent Mac quickly over the edge, but Kerry would not cease her movements until the brunette had climaxed several times in quick succession.

After a short nap, they made love again with their mouths, coming together in a frenzied union and then collapsing in a blissful heap amid the tangled blankets.

"This is going to sound incredibly corny," Mac whispered, as they lay wrapped in each other's arms, Kerry's head nestled into the crook of Mac's shoulder. "But I really never knew it could be like this."

"Doesn't sound corny," Kerry murmured contentedly. "Well, maybe a little," she smiled. "But you're right. It's..." she half-rose so she could look at Mac, barely visible in the moonlight provided through the window nearest the bed. "It's altogether different...when it's someone you've known...and respected...and deeply, DEEPLY loved--- nearly all your life."

Mac's eyes filled with tears as she nodded in agreement. "I don't want us to be apart any more," she whispered.

"No chance of that, goofball," Kerry answered sleepily, poking Mac gently in the chest. "I'm afraid you're stuck with me now." She yawned and settled back against her lover and soon was fast asleep again.

But Mac stayed awake nearly until dawn, savoring their reunion and figuring out how she could turn the cabin's spare bedroom into an office for her favorite aspiring author.

THE END

Feedback welcome. Email woodsbar@yahoo.com
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