

~ Comic Book Life ~

by Zee

Disclaimer: Please read responsibly. If the idea of women loving women doesn't appeal to you, just move on. This story has lesbians, bad language and I think violence but nothing too icky.

Big thanks to my beta readers - I worship the ground you walk on.

Thanks and enjoy.

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"Remy. Baby. Have I found the perfect woman for the show."

Sighing, I rolled over and picked up my watch. I blinked a few times until the numbers slowly came into focus.

"Remy? You there? Hello? I can hear you breathing."

"Alison, what are you talking about?" My fingers automatically picked up the pencil on the nightstand and started doodling on the marked-up paper I kept there.

"BloodRaven - The television show. I found the perfect woman to play BloodRaven."

"I seriously doubt that." There was only one woman who could be or play BloodRaven, and I somehow doubted that Alison had just found her by chance. I had to laugh at Alison's tenacity, though. My onetime girlfriend was now some Director of Programming for the cable giant Showtime and would not give up on the idea of making my comic book anti-hero into a real-life television show.

"Remy, I don't know why you're being such a pain in the ass about this. Comic books are big right now. Look at the movies! They're big business! Just look at all the ones out there: *X-Men*, *Spiderman*, *The Hulk*..."

"*The Hulk* sucked." Graphite created the gray outline of a woman crouched on top of a building.

"Yeah, yeah. Well, it may have sucked, but it still brought in the money."

"This is a piece of me, Alison. I won't allow it to be butchered and thrown up on the screen to fit some Hollywood formula." Changing tactics, I penciled in a gargoyle for the outlined figure to hide behind.

"Hey, I know that. Why do you think I've let you have so much input in the creation process?"

I had to snort at that. "Alison, I have so much input because I own all the rights to BloodRaven - lock, stock, and barrel. You couldn't change a light bulb on the set without asking me first."

"And, Rem, that was brilliant of you, 'cause we all know what would have happened if Disney had been allowed to make their version of your little killing machine."

I gave a shudder; she didn't have to continue. The original comic book company I had created BloodRaven through had sold Disney the rights without even asking me. What the idiot hadn't done was check the contract I had originally signed with his father. The only person who could authorize merchandise, film, and book rights was me. After reading the script that some Disney hack writer had written, I had quickly called my lawyer and sued.

BloodRaven was not for children. She was a half-human, half-demon killing machine fighting the good fight on the side of humanity. BloodRaven also had lots of sex, with men and women. Oh yeah, it had Disney family flick written all over it. I'd left that comic book company and re-signed with one that would respect my creative vision while making them a profit at the same time.

"I'm glad you agree. So why should I make it any easier for you?"

"Remy, baby. The fact you make it so hard lets me know this thing will be a hit. But you should relax. This is Showtime. They don't care about your chickie's sexual appetites or the bloody way she wields a sword. As long as the story and production values are good, they'll back us."

"I know, but I still have a hard time believing that they want my vision. I keep expecting them to try and warp it somehow." Moving to an unused piece of the paper, I drew the same woman surrounded by little Mickeys and Minnies.

Alison laughed at me over the phone. "Remy, you need to relax. You and your lawyer have made it impossible for you to lose creative control." She paused. "You're not paying attention. You're doodling in that stupid notebook."

"What? I'm paying attention." With a sigh, I put the pencil down. "Well, for once I can thank Logan for that. He sent me to his lawyer as soon as I started trying to sell my scribblings to a company."

"How is the boy wonder?"

"Good, but his knees are bothering him. He thinks this might be his last year playing basketball."

"Sometimes I can't believe you're related to Logan St. James, the basketball star. I mean, come on, I've seen you try to play sports and it's not pretty."

"Hey, I took first in fencing at the University. Besides, he plays in the European league; it's not like it's a big deal."

"Remy, fencing isn't a real sport. It's only a real sport if they show it on ESPN."

"Well, it's not like they show the European league on ESPN." I was being petulant. "Alison, it's two in the morning here. I'm hanging up on you."

"Fine, you have a flight out at 11 A.M. tomorrow on Delta. Oh, and they do show European basketball on ESPN."

"What?"

"Check your email; the details are all there. You're going to love this girl."

I just stared blankly at the phone until the dial tone snapped me out of my daze. *I guess I'm going to L.A.* God, had I known my doodles would result in this kind of madness, I would have become an accountant. Plus, who knew Logan actually got TV time?

Giving up on sleep, I threw back the covers and got up. Padding silently through my one-bedroom apartment, I grabbed a glass of water, then turned on my computer. A pleasant female voice told me, "You have mail." That I did; most of it crap. Let's see: fans, my manager, one from my sister, and then Alison. Most of the fans thanked me for my work and asked when they could expect the next graphic novel. Sighing, I tapped my fingers on the desktop. I didn't know when I would finish the next novel. I'd begun to seriously consider ending the comic. BloodRaven was created when I was in junior high with braces and a bad perm.

Junior high was the worst experience in my life. I'd never felt so alone as I did during those three hellish years. I was far from popular, I didn't play sports, and boys didn't find me the least bit attractive - which was fine, since I didn't find them attractive either. The one saving grace of those years was my art teacher, Ms. Winstrom. I think she saw my uncertainty and my lost soul; I think she also saw my talent. She encouraged me to draw; no matter what I was feeling, she pushed me to express it on paper. I went into her classroom during my lunch breaks to just sit and draw. The first crude sketches of BloodRaven and a host of friends and villains appeared in that room.

Now... now I was a long way from junior high and Ms. Winstrom's kind presence leaning over my shoulder. I was beginning to wonder if BloodRaven had reached her end or if I could, as my manager urged, sell my child and let some team of creative geniuses take her over. I couldn't stomach that thought either.

My mood was becoming pensive. I clicked open Alison's email. *L.A., here I come.*

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Airplanes make me cranky. They're cramped, they smell bad, and the stench of the vile concoction they try to pass off as coffee makes me want to hurl. Thankfully nobody recognized me, although being a comic book creator hardly made one famous on a large scale. Comic book fame was little cluster groups that came up to you at the mall and remembered you from some comic con you did two years ago.

The repeated bludgeoning of my back forced me into wakefulness. Thump, thump, thump - right into the small of my back. Turning, I peered through the crack between the seats into the childish face of the anti-Christ. He giggled and swung his legs some more into the back of my seat while his mother just patted his leg and thanked him for being so well behaved. If I were BloodRaven I would sneer and scowl at the boy until he pissed himself. As it was, I'm small and blonde with the face of a cherub; I'm far from scary.

"Um, excuse me, young man."

He ignored me, slamming his feet harder into my seat.

"Uh, young man."

"I've taught him not to talk to strangers," the mother replied, not looking up from her magazine.

"Yes, that's great, but your little angel is bruising my internal organs."

She looked up from her magazine at her son who had stopped his kicking and smiled innocently up at her.

"Were you kicking the lady's seat?"

"No, Mommy."

Oh god, he had little lost orphan eyes. Kill me now.

"Obviously you were mistaken. I'm sure it's just turbulence." The Anti-Christ's Mother said. She also gave me a once over and with a roll of her eyes dismissed my importance in the circle of life.

"Right." The boy shot me an evil grin and I stuck my tongue out in response. His mother just cleared her throat; embarrassed, I sat back. Thump, thump, thump. I stewed as the boy kicked my seat. Thump, thump, thump. There's so going to be a devil anti-Christ child in my next comic. Thump, thump, thump. I reached up and hit the attendant call button. The over-caffeinated perkiness in the form of a flight attendant appeared in her navy blue-skirted glory.

"Yes? Can I help you?"

"Could you ask the Captain to do something about this turbulence? It's bruising my insides."

"Turbulence?"

"Yes. Originally I thought it was the little beast behind me; his mother assured me that he's an angel and it must be turbulence. Silly me." I said, using my most deadpan look.

"Excuse me, young man, could you please stop kicking the seat in front of you.?"

In a sickeningly sweet voice, he said, "Okay."

I had just about drifted back to sleep: thump, thump, thump.

Grabbing an armrest in both hands, I began to shake my body and my seat.

"What are you doing?" the mother asked me, clearly horrified.

"Nothing. It's just a little turbulence. I'm sure we'll pass through it in a moment."

The man next to me snickered but continued to pretend he was asleep.

Getting off the flight in L.A., the mother and child sprinted ahead to avoid me. I grinned evilly and slowly made my way to the baggage claim.

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I saw a tan and blonde Alison leaning against a pillar waiting for me. For a moment I wondered what the hell was wrong with me to have broken up with a woman that gorgeous. Then I remembered Alison's allergic reaction to monogamy and commitment.

"Remy, darling, welcome to the land of the insane." She swept me up into a bone-crunching hug. Sometimes I hate being short.

"How are you, Ali?"

"Good. I'll be better once you get off your high horse and let this thing get off the ground."

"Bite me, Ali."

"Okay, but do you really want me to do that here in public?"

I swatted her playfully on the arm. "Always the flirt."

"I'm charming. That's totally different."

I laughed and gave her a hug. "My mistake. Charming it is."

The wind blew through my short hair, making it stand to attention as we drove down the freeway.

"So how's Ohio?"

"Fine. You know, it's Ohio. It's a little odd being so close to my folks, but they don't come over much."

"I can't believe you left New York to move home."

I sighed. "You weren't there, so don't question me." She patted my leg, letting me know she was sorry. New York was great, but something changed inside me after 9/11. I wasn't even directly affected - I was nowhere near the towers, didn't know anybody who worked near the area - but still it changed me. I think humans don't like change as a whole, and catastrophic change like that... well, the damage to our souls and psyches is never pretty.

After that day I tried to go on about my life, but thoughts of my family kept bubbling up in my head. Before too long, I found myself packing up and moving back to my hometown. With modern technology it wasn't such a big deal to my publisher and my work.

"You're so going to love this girl..."

"You're not sleeping with her, are you?" I gave her my narrow squinty-eyed look.

"No. God, I wish, but no."

I raised my eyebrows at this.

"This woman is BloodRaven. It's almost if she were your model. It's freaky, and sex appeal just oozes from her. And best of all, she doesn't mind sex scenes with men or women. That was another hard sell. Not many were willing to do the nasty with another woman onscreen."

I giggled. "She's a unknown talent, isn't she?"

"Um, maybe."

I gave her the look again.

"Stop it with the look already. Yes. Are you happy? She's an unknown talent. I caught her in a performance of *Taming of the Shrew* in the park."

"What park?"

"Some park my date dragged me to a couple of weeks ago. Tina, Tracy, something like that."

"You know it's really bad when you can't remember their names."

"Piffle."

"What's that mean?"

"Piffle, uh, it means 'whatever' I suppose."

"Don't you piffle me, young lady."

"I'll piffle you if I want."

Still laughing about 'piffle' for some reason, we walked into the studio offices. The secretary just looked us up and down for a moment.

"Ms. Montgomery, Ms. Sinclair is here."

For a moment my steps faltered. Did she say... just a coincidence.

"Thank you. Please hold my calls. Oh, Rachel, this is Remy St. James, the creator of BloodRaven."

I held out my hand but she didn't take it.

"Nice to meet you." It was said with a certain amount of disdain.

"You've read the comic, haven't you?"

She gave a nod. Somehow that nod conveyed exactly what she thought of my art and creative vision.

I gave her one of my charming lopsided smiles. "Everyone's a critic." "Are you ready?" Alison was milking the dramatic moment for all she could.

"Just open the door. I can poo poo your 'BloodRaven' and then I can take a 'red eye' flight back home."

"I beg to differ, my friend." She opened the door and we entered her office. Her office is nice; she even has her own bathroom.

"James." I frown; I hate it when she calls me James. "I'd like for you to meet Megan Sinclair. Megan, this is R.S. James, the creative genius behind the graphic novel BloodRaven."

I stood like an idiot; I knew I was and I couldn't seem to correct my behavior. My mouth hung open and I couldn't seem to move.

Alison came to my rescue. "I knew you'd be stunned. A few red streaks in her hair and she'll be the perfect BloodRaven."

My jaw snapped shut and I barely avoided biting my tongue. I'm not sure how Alison managed it, but she'd found my muse, the inspiration behind BloodRaven - Megan Sinclair. The secret love of my life. For as long as I could remember I'd been in love with her.

I was seven when I fell in love. However, she didn't love me, and for the longest time she didn't even know I existed, but on a bright October day she rocked my world. It was recess and we were playing.

"Red Rover, Red Rover, send... Megan right over," the girls chanted in singsong voices. Even at seven she was slightly taller than anybody else, and had short curly dark hair. She looked at the line that I was standing in, my arms linked with the girls on either side of me. Her eyes landed on mine and my heart started to beat in a funny rhythm and my stomach got queasy. I honestly thought I was going to be sick. Then she tore out of her line, straight at me. I never had a chance. She sent me flying and broke through the line. Giggling, she looked down at me; her eyes blue like a winter's morning. Deciding I was okay, she picked her best friend Lindsey and took off back to her line. I lay dazed on the cool ground and decided right then and there that I was going to marry Megan when I grew up.

I remembered racing home after school. Slamming the door shut, I hung up my coat and went into the kitchen. I pulled a chair over so I could climb up and reach the container that held the Oreos.

"Hey, Remy, how was school?"

I looked at my dad as he came into the kitchen. He smiled, his brown eyes twinkling with good humor. "It was good." I wiggled hyperly around on the counter.

"Ah, ah, ah. What have I told you about the Oreos?"

"Um... no Oreos without milk, 'cause it goes against nature." I copied his phrase perfectly.

"That's my girl." He ruffled my hair and went to the fridge to pour two glasses of milk. He placed them on the table and motioned for me to come over. "Ah, ah, ah. You pulled the chair over there; you can pull it back."

I sighed but did as he told me. We sat at the table and dipped Oreos.

"So anything happen at school today?"

"Yep. I met the girl I'm going to marry. Her name is Megan."

Dad paused in his dipping. "Megan, huh?"

"Yep, she's tall and strong, with blue eyes... and... and she knocked me down today when we played Red Rover at recess."

"Remy, um, honey..."

I just stared at him.

"Remy, women don't normally marry other women."

"Why not?"

"Well, most people think it's wrong."

"So what I did was bad?" I felt tears come into my eyes but I didn't really understand why.

"No, honey, but you probably don't want to blurt it out to people. I think we should just keep it between you and me... well, maybe your mom until you're at least in high school and, well, there's plenty of time. You can always change your mind about marrying a girl."

I scrunched up my forehead in puzzlement as I sorted through what Dad had told me. "Nope. No changing my mind. I'm going to marry Megan Sinclair when I grow up."

"Well, if you want to marry a girl I'm okay with it, but I'm not so sure I want you marrying a girl who knocks you down."

"Okay," was all I said.

My dad showed me a new magic trick; he made an Oreo come out of my ear. I giggled and laughed, then took my schoolwork into his office and read while he went to his drafting table to work on a project.

My home life hardly mirrored what you would see on *Leave it to Beaver*. My mom worked odd hours at the university as a professor of chemistry. My dad stayed at home, took care of the kids, did housework, and worked part-time from home as a graphic designer for an ad agency.

I think Dad told Mom about my crush. I found her in my room once just looking around at my posters - Wolverine facing off with Sabertooth; Cat Woman in the full moon with her whip; and all my little doodles that would someday evolve into my own comic.

"Honey, don't you want some dolls?"

I stood quietly, digesting her words. "Like more army guys?" My sandbox was a battle zone of carefully built castles and trenches. Little green and gray army men were poised and read for

battle.

She sighed. "Um, no, honey. Like Barbie."

"Icky, no." I didn't even have to think about it. Barbie was lame; none of the boys in the neighborhood played with Barbie.

"You sure?"

"Yep."

"Okay, come here and give me a hug."

I ran over and squeezed her leg tight, giggling. Mom was really tall and I was rather short for my age.

She bent down and picked me up, placing a sloppy kiss on my nose. "Remy, no matter what, I'll love you."

"Kay. Love you too."

She laughed and quietly let me slip back into my childhood world.

Nothing ever happened in elementary school. My crush continued, although I didn't know it was a crush. Although we were in the same grade, we had different teachers. I would see her at recess playing with her friends; and I wished I had the nerve to go talk to her, but anytime I would try, my stomach would get queasy and I thought I would get sick. In the fifth grade I found out she would be trying out for the school basketball team, so I tried out as well. It was a disaster. She made the A team while I made the D team, and even then I sat on the bench a lot of the time. I went home and begged my brother to make me a better player. He made me pay him a dollar and then I spent the rest of the week retrieving balls as he shot them at the hoop. It wasn't the first or last time Logan would be a jerk.

I never became a basketball star and Megan Sinclair remained outside my sphere of influence.

A smooth warm voice broke me out of my memories. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Ms. James." I smiled wanly and shook Megan's hand. God, she was still tall with piercing eyes; they had a worried look in them. Probably because I wasn't having the reaction she expected. I also hadn't failed to notice that she didn't recognize me at all. If I had an ego at all it would be dead right now.

"I, uh, need a drink of water... I'll be right back." I fled, trying to look like I wasn't fleeing but I was fleeing alright.

Standing in the hallway, I leaned my head against the wall and practiced my breathing. An old girlfriend who had panic attacks once showed me how to breathe. I used to joke and tell her that

breathing came naturally for me; we didn't last long. Now I found that lesson in breathing to be quite helpful.

"What in the world is wrong with you?" Alison growled at me, as she gently closed the door behind her.

"She's BloodRaven."

Alison blinked at me in confusion. "Really? You'll let me cast her?"

Well, she hadn't really understood the true meaning of my sentence but I let her run with the context that she got.

"Yeah, on one condition."

Alison gave me a sigh. "There's always a condition. Nothing can ever be simple with you."

"You can't fuck her, Ali."

"What? Come on. We're grown women..."

"I mean it. I catch wind of you two going at it like sexually frustrated wombats, and you'll be doing a season finale halfway through the first season." I couldn't stand the thought of my best friend and the woman whom I had been irrationally in love with since the first grade doing the nasty on Alison's casting couch. It wasn't fair, but there's no such thing as 'fair' in love and war, or in this case television production.

"Fine, but only because I want this to go." She shrugged. "Plus I think she has a girlfriend or boyfriend already."

That pain in my chest was from the lunch they tried to serve me on the plane, not because of what Alison had just said.

"Oh." I gave a little frown then tried to make it disappear before she could notice. "Well, good."

"Shall we go back in and give Ms. Sinclair the good news?"

"Yeah, sure."

Alison paused at the door. "How long can you stay?"

"I don't know... probably a while. I don't have anything pressing at the moment."

"Good. I'd like to bring in some others to do film tests with Megan, and try to cast the other roles."

"Okay, any chance..."

She cut me off before I could even start, but she knew what I was going to say. "Remy, there is no way we can get your evil vampire slayer girl to come work for us; she's doing a show with Fox. Trust me, I tried. I figured if I could get her on board there would be no way you could say 'no' to me."

I pouted. Damn, she knows me too well.

Alison opened the door and burst through. "Great news, Ms. Sinclair. James here agrees with me; you have the job. I'll have my secretary draw up all the necessary paperwork, and if you're not busy later James and I would love to take you out to celebrate at this great sushi place I know."

"Really? Oh, my God. I didn't want to get my hopes up but thank you. Thank you both so much."

In all the years I'd spent growing up and watching Megan, that I'd never seen her cry or be close to tears. I felt like I had just saved some lady from a burning building and all I had done was give her a job.

"Don't sweat it, kid. You were made for this part. If you'll excuse me, I'll go talk to my secretary."

Oh, if Alison only knew how close she was to the truth.

Sitting alone in the room with Megan was setting all my senses on high alert and I started to fidget. Searching for anything to say, I grasped the first thing that came to mind. "Um, Megan, you're not just going to sign what Ali gives you, are you?"

She cleared her throat. "What? No, I mean I'm not that naïve; I'll find a lawyer."

"Oh, okay. Good. Um, here." I fumbled with my wallet and pulled out my lawyer's business card. "This is my lawyer's card. If you want, give him a call."

"I'm not sure I could afford..."

"I'll call him. He's good, he's honest, and, best of all, he's not overpriced." Actually Timothy owed me a favor.

"Thanks."

"No problem."

"Here you go, Megan. If you'll just sign..."

"Thank you, but I'd like to look them over with my lawyer."

"Oh, yes, of course."

I could see the slight crinkle to Alison's lips. I knew she'd been hoping to pull a fast one with Megan. Alison wasn't a bad person, but business was one thing and friendship was another. And Megan was business.

Megan didn't join us for sushi; she said she needed to get home. Probably to her boyfriend or girlfriend - probably a boyfriend. As far as I knew, Megan was straight. Ever since she'd experienced that sexual awakening in junior high, she'd had a boy draped on her arm. Some may argue that the girl is supposed to do the draping, but not in Megan's case. Everybody was her puppy dog, and they all wanted to belong to her and make her happy. Then the sexual revolution had come and exploded in her body. This probably had a lot to do with her parents. Her parents were the constant source of gossip in our little area of the liberally hip East End. Sure, people on the surface acted all open-arms and spouted on about the equality of the human race, but underneath the young progressive cover, they gossiped and had a cookie cutter standard of who should and who shouldn't be living with them.

I think my father had liked it when the Sinclairs pushed the envelope of the middle class, since I think up to that point our family's goings-on had fueled the gossip track. All my family had done was reverse the stereotype of the nuclear household; the Sinclair family outdid my Dad's stay-at-home-father routine by a long shot. Megan's father was a Harley mechanic and her mother owned an exotic dancing club called the Kitty Club. I get the joke now, but for the longest time I thought it was a place where cat lovers got together. I don't think I became an awakened sexual being until I was 22, so I was a little slow.

Since the moment she was legally able to serve alcohol, Megan worked at her mother's place. Being around such blatant displays of human sexuality helped Megan work sex appeal until she gave it a whole new meaning. I would have been her humble follower but, as I said, she never noticed me. Well, I take that back. She did notice me once. In high school I was totally focused on art; I slept, ate, and breathed art. It got me noticed; people heaped praise on me, and no longer was I known as 'Oh that's Logan's sister, the one that can't play sports' or 'Oh that's Gray's sister, no, no she failed chemistry twice'. I was Remy, the artist.

Megan was heavily into drama. Yes, I went to all the plays she was in. Pathetic, I know. So anyway, I was hanging out at lunch sketching a figure who would later become Captain Craighorn, BloodRaven's somewhat sidekick and inside source within the Witch Haven police, when this shadow blocked out all the good light. Not looking up, I grunted, "Move to the left or I'll flick a booger on you."

A soft laugh behind me freaked me out. I knew that laugh. I'd never had it directed at me, but oh

how I'd wished. It was the woman I would some day marry - Megan Sinclair.

"I understand you're the person to know if you need some art done."

Sounding somewhat like a squeaky pubescent boy, I replied, "What? Art? Oh, um, art, sure."

She laughed again and sat down next to me. I thought I might swoon.

"We're doing Romeo and Juliet as the drama season finale, and we in the Drama Department were wondering if you would design a poster for us."

I wanted to say no, but what came out was, "No problem."

"There's a rehearsal tonight. Why don't you come and check us out?"

"I'd love to."

So I went and checked it out. Somehow I'd assumed that she would be playing Juliet, but instead I found her playing Juliet's nurse. Juliet was some waif-thin blonde thing with huge tits, especially large for a senior in high school. I watched them rehearse then, and watched them bring out the sets one horror after another. I wanted to cringe. When they got to the balcony scene I couldn't take it anymore. The flat painted canvas was made up to look more like an evil dungeon of torture than the soft noble castle wall of a minor Italian lord.

"Jesus Christ!" I blurted out before I could stop myself.

The student director, Christa Chambers, glared at me. "Is there a problem?"

"Hell yes! Whoever designed and painted your sets should be shot."

"I suppose you could do better." The way she said it, it came out with the implied an unsaid 'you nobody, unpopular, loser, geek' at the end. Christa was popular and a cheerleader; I don't think I need to go any further.

"Yes, I could do a lot better."

By this point the action had stopped on the stage and the actors were staring out into the house.

"Fine. You have until Monday to redo my sets."

Oops! I'd insulted Christa. "Monday... that's... today's Friday."

"Think you're better than me, you little nobody? Why don't you just back down, Remy?"

"Fine. You'll have your sets on Monday, and I bet that's the only positive thing that shows up in your review." I left 'bitch' unsaid.

I showed up Saturday and Mr. Hensley, the drama teacher, was there to let me in, which was nice. He gave me a spare key and a note so the janitors wouldn't kick me out. I stared at everything in horror. What had I gotten myself into? Around 1:00 somebody scared the holy living heck out of me by clearing their throat behind me. Screaming, I launched my brush across the backstage area. I turned around to find myself face to sternum with Megan.

"Hi. I brought you some lunch."

"Um, thanks." Not that I minded, but why was she here? "Not to be rude, but, why are you here?"

"Well, it was really cool the way you stood up to Christa and these sets are hideous. And in all honesty, I wasn't going to come here today but then I felt bad. I've seen your art and you're doing us a huge favor, but there's no way you could get it all done by yourself by Monday, and I'd like Christa to eat her words."

"Really? Wow, thanks." Megan was so cute when she babbled.

"So point me in a direction and tell me what to do."

Sunday evening, splattered with paint and slightly high from the fumes, we looked over our handiwork. It was much better. Megan looked from me to the flats and then back to me.

"What?"

"It's... oh my God. They're perfect. Remy, you're going to go far." And with that she swept me up into a fierce hug. Sensation overload caused my good sense to explode. After she set me down, we stared at each other and I thought... I stupidly thought that I should kiss her for some reason. As first kisses went, it wasn't bad. I managed to hit her lips and no blood was drawn. For a moment I thought she responded back but then she pushed me away.

"Remy..."

That's the first time my heart broke. I heard it quite clearly. It made a soft sound, like the dropping of a glass.

"Please, don't..." Say, do, tell - there were a lot of things I didn't want to happen at that moment.

"Remy. I'm sorry but I don't... you're sweet, not my type."

"Megan, I..." I did the only thing that made sense; I gave in to my instinct to run.

I did the poster, handing it over to Christa, but I never stepped foot into the theater again. Christa sneered at me but in the end I was right, one of the only positive things about the play were my set designs. Well ... and Megan's portrayal as the nurse. I never really interacted with Megan

again. Sure, I saw her across the hall or cafeteria, but I made sure to stay away. I did wonder why she didn't out me for what I had done; for a week afterwards I expected to arrive at school and have people stare at me and point. 'There's the dyke.' It never happened, and three months later, graduation swept me away to a whole new world of college women.

Alison was staring at me. "What?" She didn't say anything, just kept staring. Crossing my arms over my chest, I gave her a petulant look. For days we'd been casting the other characters: Captain Craighorn, Mayor Feldman, Josh Stevens, Ripper, etc. The last one was proving to be the most difficult; it was a minor villain called the Jester. The Jester wasn't a homicidal maniac like Ripper; she was a thief, a practical joker, and a constant pain in BloodRaven's ass. She was cultured, educated and, when not wearing a mask, the bored socialite daughter of Captain Craighorn - Charlotte Craighorn. The problem was that the Jester's true identity was a big secret of the comic. It was one of the things I had never revealed. So whoever played the Jester had to play Charlotte, and it had to be kept a secret. Just because I was doing a TV show didn't mean I was going to reveal the big secret that had been driving my readers nuts for years. It wasn't like I was deliberately misleading people. The two looked alike; when I drew the Jester, I drew Charlotte wearing a mask. We needed somebody who could be that good of an actress, to pull off playing what was essentially two different characters. Alison wanted me to just pick somebody. I was positive that the woman she wanted me to pick was a barely functioning alcoholic; however, she and Megan had tested well together.

Grabbing Alison's hand, I dragged her out of the room. "Alison, there has to be somebody else."

"What's wrong with Liz?"

I eyed Alison. "You're sleeping with her, aren't you?"

"So what if I am? You told me Megan was off limits. A girl needs some fun."

"But, Ali, she's drunk as we speak. I'm not sure how she's standing."

"She's not drunk. She just needed a pint for courage today."

"A pint! Jesus H. Christ."

"You know, I've always wondered what the H stood for. I'm thinking Henry. Jesus Henry Christ..."

"Shut up, Ali. You're not charming your way this time."

Alison sighed and looked at me, then I sighed and looked at her. Finally Alison broke the silence. "She really is the best. She took some fencing in college; not like you, but we should be able to get some close-up shots before switching to a stunt double."

"She's drunk," I reminded her.

"Fine, I'll add a clause. If she's ever unable to fulfill her duties to the studio, she's fired."

I bit my lip in thought.

"You know, Remy, if you wanted to play Charlotte and the Jester that would solve a lot of problems."

"What?"

"Come on. I figured out that you based the Jester on yourself a long time ago. Now all I need to figure out is who your BloodRaven is; you know, that girl who never noticed you but you tried so hard to get anyway."

I blushed. You're closer than you think, Alison. "I-I-I don't know what you're talking about."

"Come on. Charlotte is so in love with BloodRaven, but the big dumb anti-hero doesn't have a clue. In order to get noticed, Charlotte becomes the Jester. Now for the last couple of years those two had some serious tension going on, but it never breaks. I'm guessing whoever this girl is that has you wound so tight still hasn't noticed you. Please give me a hint."

"Ali, sometimes I swear you're on crack."

"So we're agreed. Liz is Charlotte/the Jester."

"Yeah, okay, but make sure everybody understands the silence clause. They speak a word to anybody about who the Jester is and... well, bad things will happen"

"You're the best. Don't worry. I'll make sure the cast and crew have a good idea."

She gave me another one of those crushing hugs that I hate.

"Ali, oxygen depletion here."

"Sorry. So, dinner, then the airport?"

"Yep."

"Sure you don't want to stay?"

"Yeah, I'll leave you TV types here to make TV and I'll go home and make comics. Just send me

photos and stuff for me to approve over the net."

"Kay, but I would like it better if you were here. Who else can I take clubbing?"

"I'm not your personal DD."

"Aww, be nice. You know I love you."

I reached up and pinched her pouting lip. "It's not going to work. I have a life in Ohio that I need to get back to."

"Who has a life in Ohio?"

I stared at the computer screen. My father, in his indeterminate humor, sent me a game called 'Whack an Elf.' It's funny, but in a sick and very wrong way. I've avoided Alison's email. The last one she'd sent me was to tell me she'd met Megan's girlfriend. Girlfriend! Oh, the world was a cold and cruel place. I'm not sure I want to see what her email today says. Finally giving up, I opened Alison's email. Okay, this I can handle. She'd sent photo attachments for the first couple of shoots. I could feel the little vein of anger that pulses in my temple whenever I get upset start to go off. Didn't the fucking set designer read any of my notes? I knew it was going to be slightly different than the comic, but some things just have to be in there. In the midst of getting ready for a full-blown temper tantrum, I fumbled for the phone. Picking it up, I paused when I didn't hear a dial tone.

"Hello?"

Confused, I mimicked, "Hello?"

"Remy?"

"Dad?"

"It's the darnedest thing. I swear the phone didn't even get a chance to ring."

"I just picked it up to give Ali a call."

"Ah. How is the one-night-stand wonder?"

"Dad. She hates it when you call her that."

"Then don't tell 'er I said it... again."

"Fine. And she's fine."

"Good. Oh, I ran into Hank, the other day - you know, Megan's dad. He wanted me to tell you thanks for giving his little girl a chance. He was so proud; I thought he was going to pop." My dad and Megan's dad had become close over the last few years.

"Well, I didn't do anything. She really was made for the part. Plus..." I trailed off, not really wanting to spill my guts to my father.

"That didn't sound like a happy, plus. What's up?"

"Nothing."

"Remy, I'm not Jean Gray; I can't read your thoughts. Now spill."

"Plus she doesn't even remember me." I pouted.

"I'm sure that's not true. Who could forget you?"

"Megan Sinclair."

"Honey, nobody could forget my little thief of hearts. Plus you've been stalking her since grade school."

"I have not."

"Honey, stop pouting. Why don't you just concentrate on the fact that you have a chance to get to know each other again? If I remember correctly this is the woman who's going to give me grandbabies."

"Dad!" I couldn't believe he was giving me such a hard time. "Haven't Logan and Gray given you enough small snot factories?"

"Nope. Your mother and I need little Remys running around." I groaned. I almost told him that I'd been trying since I was 22 but I just couldn't. That's too much information to share with my father. "Nobody needs little Remys running around."

"Well, if you're here and Megan's in LA it's sure not going to be happening."

"Dad, it doesn't matter. She has a girlfriend already."

"So?"

"So? So? So I'm not the kind of person who chases after someone who is taken."

"How do you know she's taken? If you're not there, then Megan doesn't know what she could be having in you."

"Dad, I am not having this conversation with you."

"Fine. So the reason I called - X-Men 2 is playing at the dollar theater. Want to take your old man?"

My dad was obsessed with comics, the Uncanny X-men in particular. It explained how us children got our names. We're not sure how he got Mom to agree but Dad got to name us: Logan for Wolverine, Gray for Jean Gray, and little old me for Gambit. Our pets all got normal names like Alice, Timmy, and Andy. "I would love to but I have to fly out to LA."

"Good for you."

"Not for the reasons you're assuming. I've got to kick the set designer's ass."

"Whatever you say. Call me when you get back into town and we'll have dinner."

"Dad, it's..." He hung up on me.

Looking at my computer screen, I gave a scream of frustration and then started dialing Alison's phone number.

"Okay, I know you have this artist vision and angels talk to you and all that but..." I said, looking at this Michelangelo wannabe. I could tell he'd already written me off. "...certain things cannot just be dropped because they ruin the feng shui of the set. They are important to the comic and they are going to be important to the show." He tried to hide it but I clearly saw the flickering downturn of his mouth at the mention of 'comic'. I was so going to kick his ass... oh, and now he's not even paying attention to me. I looked at Alison and she tried not to laugh. She gave me a shrug, telling me in that simple gesture that I'd wanted dictatorial control of this so now I could deal with it. The other people in the room were clearly trying not to laugh at the situation either. I drummed my fingers on the table.

"You're not listening to me, are you?"

"No, I'm listening. But you are a doodler of comics." He clearly sneered 'comic'. "You are not an artist. I am an artist. This production is lucky to have my shop working for it."

Goddamn egotistical bastard. You would have thought I would have ditched them all when I left college. 'You're going into what?' They thought it abhorrent that my talent was going to be wasted drawing comic book art.

"Bob..."

"Roberto, my name is Roberto."

I growled and stomped off toward Alison. She grinned. "Isn't he a peach?"

"Yes, very. Could you have someone bring me Bob's contract?"

"Sure."

I stomped back.

"So if we are finished, Ms. Comic Book Doodler, some of us have real work to do."

That's it. I swear I'm a very nice person, but this guy hit all of my buttons. "Sit!"

He sniffed at my order and started to get up anyway. As I passed by a props table on my way back, I spied an old friend. With a quick kick I brought my foot up and then down on the pommel. The sword flipped up and arched into the air. I guess it would have been very pretty if I hadn't been so pissed off, wanting to carve my initials in Bob's back. I caught the sword easily and in three quick strides I slid into a classic fencing lunge, the tip resting against his breastbone.

"I'd sit down if I were you, Roberto. She was picked for the Olympic fencing team." Alison called out helpfully.

Okay, that's not true. It's more like I tried out and they said "thank you for your time," but Bob didn't need to know that. "Bob, here's the deal. I'm not just some simple 'doodler' as you like to throw out. How should I put this? I'm fucking Stalin. What you and the voices in your head want don't matter."

"Ooooo, Roberto, she used the f-word. She's really pissed," Alison's said cheerfully. She was really enjoying this.

"I have the final say on everything, and I'm saying your sets aren't cutting it. Do you understand me?"

"If you get rid of me I'll blacklist you. Nobody will work for this farce."

"Oh, I'm not getting rid of you." Alison's gopher chose that moment to run up with Bob's contract. I backed off and relaxed the foil in my hand while I looked over the contract. "Okay, Bob..."

"Roberto."

"Whatever. I'm giving you the day off. Be back here tomorrow morning. If you fail to appear, you'll be in breach of contract; I'll sue you, then Showtime will sue you. Do you understand?"

He nodded silently.

Thank God. I think I may have broken through to him. "Bye now."

As I looked over the contract, I failed to notice Alison approaching.

"That was a bit heavy on the overlord despot role, don't you think?"

I looked up, puzzled. "But he called me a doodler. I'm an artist too, damn it." I was pouting again.

"Oops. My bad. I forgot how sensitive you artistic types are."

"Well, I for one am happy she laid down the law."

I turned to gape at Megan. She saw me... with the... and the... oh my God.

"He failed to put BloodRaven's family crest in the den of her mansion."

"You... the crest... you noticed." Oh my God! She's a fan of the comic.

"Of course I did. My dad's a huge fan of the comic. We used to collect them together."

I could feel myself blushing.

"And what's even better is I can say I grew up down the street from the creator."

"But... but..." I thought she didn't remember me.

"Are you two having a moment? I can clear the room," Alison blurted out.

"No, Ali, it's fine." I turned to Megan. She looked great. Her hair was streaked with blood red and tiny fangs indented her bottom lip when she spoke. They weren't big so they got in the way of her speaking; they just added another dimension of otherworldliness. "I thought you didn't remember me."

She laughed that beautiful laugh. "How could I forget the girl who saved Romeo and Juliet? I was... well, I didn't want any favors getting this job. I wanted it because I was the best, not because we went to school together."

"Wait! You two know each other? Remy, why didn't you say anything?"

I glared at Alison, trying to convey the sense that she should back off.

Megan smiled sheepishly at us. "Pretty silly, huh?"

I smiled back. *Nope, nothing you could do would be silly.* "Nah. You were the best person for the role."

"Oh yeah. The role was made for you." Alison snickered.

I glared again. She ignored me, of course.

"If you'll excuse us, Megan, we have a set designer to mold into our bitch."

I'll give Alison credit; she waited until we were in her office to start her interrogation.

"You two went to high school together, huh?"

"Yeah, I was some art geek and she was queen of everything she touched."

"Uh huh. She's the real deal, isn't she? She's the model for BloodRaven."

"Ali, you've been dipping into the white powder again."

"Right. I'll let it go for now. But when you least expect it I'll get you drunk and take advantage of you."

"Ali, I haven't let you do that to me since the day we graduated from college."

"Oh, right. Mmmmm, that was hot. Why did we break up again?"

"Your fatal reaction to commitment - and the fact that I caught you with that track star, and then with the girl from across the hall, and...."

She winced. "Right, enough, please stop. Anyways, Roberto..."

It was around five in the morning and I was hanging the Raven family crest in the mansion set. It took me most of the night but I finally got it right.

"W-w-what are you doing to my set?"

Ah, the mighty Bob had returned.

"Roberto, I think we established yesterday that this is my set." Wiping my hands, I turned to face the artistic genius.

His face was turning purple and his mouth kept opening and closing. He finally managed to get something out. "I-I-I-I can't work like this. I quit."

"You might want to rethink that, Roberto. If you quit, I'll sue you." Walking over to a bench, I picked up his contract and threw it at him. "You might want to check your contract." I took a breath; because of my stunt yesterday I had damage control to do. "Roberto, your sets are fantastic. Don't ever think that I was unhappy with them. They're some of the best work I've seen." I saw the little man's chest puff up. "But you failed to read my notes, or if you did, you totally discounted them. Your sets are fine for people who have no idea about the comic book world I created. However, people who are die-hard fans are expecting certain things: BloodRaven's hair streaks, the Jester's bag-o-tricks, and this crest. If we can't give those fans certain things, they will sink this show."

"What do I care about a few freaks?"

I sighed. "Roberto, BloodRaven is one of the top 20 comic books collected in the world. I put out maybe six books this last year. Most comics are monthly. And other than a few shirts, I don't allow any image reproduction or merchandise.

Roberto's eyes had glazed over at the math.

"So, you see, it's more than a few freaks." He nodded. People were quick to put down what they didn't see intrinsic value in. "For the first time ever I'm allowing my baby, my creation, outside of my control and, Roberto, I want it done right. Are you going to help me do it right? Because if any man can, it's you."

"Yes, I see now. I'm sorry. I can understand artistic control and wanting your creative vision protected."

God, I'm slicker than snot on a January sidewalk. "Thank you."

He smiled. "Okay, tell me about this crest."

I smiled back. One crisis avoided.

Spearing my salad violently, I pretended to pay attention to the conversation going on at the table. Over the past couple of months, Megan, Alison, and I had become close; we normally had lunch together. Megan had added an unhappy element to the lunch routine today. We finally got to meet Megan's girlfriend. Was it wrong to want to reach across the table and stab her with my fork? She was an actress who had done commercials, and with those tits I'm guessing some adult movie work as well. Okay, I swear to God I recognized her from some porno my last girlfriend rented. We hadn't lasted long; I'd been feeling the competition from the triple-X section of the video store. I figured, if one was getting jealous over a video the relationship wasn't going to work. Of course that had me wondering if Megan had done some of those movies. Ahhhh! Bad thoughts, bad thoughts.

"So, Remy?"

"Huh?" I blinked at the large-breasted blonde across from me.

She giggled and fluttered her eyelashes at me. *Is she flirting with me?* Rolling my eyes, I looked at Alison who was grinning in amusement, then to Megan who was studying her sandwich.

"I asked if maybe you had a position for me."

I continued to stare at her blankly.

"On the set."

"Um..." Pushy thing. "Well, uh, ask Ali; she might have a position for you." Thankfully those big blue eyes moved over to Ali, who kicked me under the table.

Alison smiled. "Sure. Just make an appointment with my secretary, and I'll bring you in for a test drive."

I choked on my soda.

"Oh, thank you," the blonde gushed. "Okay, sweetie, I have to go. See you tonight."

They kissed and I thought I was going to lose my lunch.

Megan looked a little embarrassed. "Alison, that was nice of you. I'm really sorry about her being so pushy."

Alison waved her off. "In the season finale we need a couple of hookers. She'll be perfect."

I choked on some green leaf and kicked her under the table.

"Ow! What did I say?"

Megan just started laughing.

"You called her girlfriend a hooker, you knucklehead."

"What? I did not! I just said she'd be... perfect... oh crap. Megan, I'm sorry."

Megan was still laughing. "No, it's okay. When it comes to this job, she can kind of whore herself around to get work."

"Hey, Megan, you're the star. If you don't want me to hire her, give me the word and I won't."

"Thanks, Alison, but giving her some work might help me out a lot."

Alison wiggled her eyebrows. "Troubles in paradise?"

"Ali!" Jeez, she could be a nosy shit.

"No, Remy, it's okay. Alison, it's never been paradise with Natalie, but it's been over a year and I feel like just because we're having a rough patch doesn't mean we should just chuck it out the window."

"That's very noble of you." Damn, that sounded bitchy. "Sorry. I need to get back and make sure Roberto is doing justice to the Clocktower."

Grumbling on my way back to the set, I kept telling myself I just had another month and then this season would be over. I could go home for three months. I really needed to look into getting an apartment down here. Alison said if I was going to insist on playing the despot and lording over everything, I would have to stay in L.A. Although if Showtime signed us for another year, we were probably going to move to British Columbia to film. There we could get the gritty rainy mood that was so hard to duplicate in L.A.

I sat in front of my drawing table at a complete loss. My publisher was screaming at me for a new comic and I was drawing a blank. It had been a month and I found myself missing the craziness of television production. Tapping a pencil on my forehead didn't seem to be helping me. Thankfully, the ringing phone offered a nice distraction.

"Hello."

"Who loves us?"

"Ali?"

"Yep, and I repeat - who loves us?"

"I don't know."

"The fans and Showtime. Two months - you, me and BC, baby."

"No shit?"

"I would not shit about this."

"I'm oddly happy and excited about this."

"The master of understatement as usual, Remy. I need you to fly up to BC and meet me next week. We need to check out the new digs and find apartments."

I sighed. "Fine."

"You know you love me. Plus, think of it this way - in BC, Megan will be far from Natalie. Perhaps you can break her down for a date or at least a quickie."

"I can't believe you said that. I'm not that kind of person."

"Yeah, I know, which is too bad. You know, nice guys, er, women finish last."

"Good-bye, Ali."

I wish I could say the thought hadn't crossed my mind, but I was a nice person, not a saint.

Season Two was well on its way and I'd managed to squeeze out another BloodRaven comic. However, neither my publisher, the fans, nor myself were really happy with the result. I was beginning to think it was time to end the series or pull a trick out of my hat. I was pondering actually killing off the Jester when Alison broke me from my thoughts.

"Remy?"

"What?" Looking over I spied a puzzled Alison, an upset Megan, and a midget walking toward me, where I sat in a director's chair going over script changes. As they got closer I realized the midget was actually a child. Puzzled, I tried to figure out where it came from.

"Remy, we have a problem," Alison started nervously.

"Look, I'm really sorry," Megan broke in. "I'm not used to the Canadian holidays. I had no idea there was no school today, and it's too late to get a sitter."

"Okay." I wasn't really sure how this affected me.

"Since you don't really do anything but lord over everybody, I was thinking you could watch Kit for the day."

"Kit? The car from *Knight Rider*?"

"No. As in Kit, my daughter."

"You have a daughter! When? How? Does the porno queen know?"

Megan glared at me; she was very much not happy with me right now. "Yes, I have a daughter. When, six years ago. As for the how, I'm sure you took biology; and yes, Natalie knows about Kit."

Properly chastised, I stared at the floor. "Sorry."

"So, Remy, will you watch the kid?"

A pair of blue eyes were staring back at me from behind the leg of Megan's leather BloodRaven ass-kicking pants. The kid looked like a little carbon copy of her mom: blue eyes, dark brown hair. Her skin was paler; it didn't have that always tan that Megan's did. Kit didn't look like she liked this idea any better than I did.

"Are you sure I'm the only one available?"

"Yes."

"Never mind. I can tell this is a big inconvenience for Remy," Megan huffed.

"No, I can do this. I watch Gray's kids all the time." That was such a lie. Well, okay, I watch them from the other room. I try not to be in the same room with them; they creep me out.

"Are you sure?"

I think Megan sensed I was full of shit.

"Yeah, no problem."

"Okay." Megan crouched down to be eye level with Kit. Dear Lord, look at that ass. "Kit,

Mommy has to go to work and play pretend. My friend Remy is going to watch you. Okay?"

"Can I stay and watch you?"

Jeez, the kid was a heartbreaker. I looked at Alison and she shook her head no. I frowned. Why couldn't me and the kid stay and... oh, sex scene today.

"Hey, Kit. You wanna go to the kid's museum with me?"

She shyly ducked behind her mom.

I continued on bravely. "You see I've always wanted to go but they won't let me in 'cause I'm not a kid. If you come with me they're sure to let me in. What do you say?"

She shook her head no.

"Come on." I pouted. "I hear they have lots of cool stuff you can touch and an IMAX. We can watch a movie on the ocean." She was looking at me with interest now. Apparently Kit liked the ocean.

"With dolphins?" She hesitantly asked.

"Yep, with dolphins." There had better be dolphins or somebody was so going to die.

"Can I, Mom?"

"Sure, honey. Be sure to obey Remy, okay?"

"Okay."

Kit shyly came over and grabbed my hand. I tried to hide my distaste; I expected the kid's grip to be sticky, but happily it wasn't.

"Remy, are you sure you're okay with this?"

"No problem." I took a deep breath and guided the midget out of the studio.

You know, for a snot factory Kit wasn't that bad. We were watching a 3-D show on how Jim's body works. This was G-rated. We had the brain, heart, lungs, eyes, and stomach. Earlier we'd stood in front of a blue screen and watched a TV that displayed white blood cells which moved

when we did. I poured on some disco moves while Kit giggled; watching that little single-celled guy get down on the screen was pretty funny.

When the show was over we deposited our glasses in the bin and I hoisted Kit up on my back. "You're potty trained, right?"

She giggled. "You're silly."

"But that's a good silly, right?"

"Yep." She patted my head.

"Hey, easy on the hair."

She just giggled some more.

"I shouldn't have let you have that soda in the food court. So what now? Want to learn more about the human body or should we move on to the dinosaurs?"

"Dinosaurs." She clapped and bounced up and down.

"Ufff. Gently there, bucko."

Worn out, I paid the cab fare and let the bouncing child lead me back into the studio. "Hey, Frank, will you call and let Ali and Megan know Kit and I are back?"

"Sure."

Kit led me down the hall. "Third door," I told her and she stopped in front of my door. Fumbling with my keys, I opened the door to my office and walked in, heading right for the couch. Sitting down I leaned back, letting out a yawn.

"Well, kiddo, I think you broke me."

She sat down next to me. Looking out of the corner of my eye, I caught her yawning. "I don't suppose you'd be up for a nap?" She scowled at me. "Okay." I looked over at the TV and VCR. "I think I have some Scooby-Doo. You up for that?" She yawned again and nodded.

As I got up to turn on the TV and load the tape, she laid down on the couch. I started the tape and sat down on the floor, not really sure it would be appropriate for me to take a nap on the couch

with the little beast. Leaning my head back on the couch, I failed to keep my eyes open.

Next thing I heard was Shaggy exclaim, "Zoinks!" Blinking, I looked up at leather-clad legs right in front of me. Yummy. And a crotch, and a... oh, blue eyes. 'Zoinks' was right. "Megan?"

"Yep." She sat down with a smile, her leather pants creaking slightly.

"How did shooting go?"

"Fine. Doug's a creep, but we got the shoot done."

I yawned. "You want me to fire him?"

"No, he's perfect for FBI Agent Jim Daly."

"Kay."

"So was Kit good for you?"

"You know, she was. Gray's kids never mind me, and Kit was surprisingly free of snot and sticky hands."

Megan laughed. "You're not just saying that, are you?"

"Actually, no. I had a good time with her. If you want me to watch her again just let me know. Unless she's having a big snot-producing day, then count me out."

"Thanks. You don't know how hard it is to find people to watch a hyper six-year-old."

"Nope, I don't, but I'm happy to help you out."

"Thanks. I wish others were as nice as you."

"By others, you mean Natalie, don't you?"

Megan bit her lip. "Yeah, but it's not your problem."

"Megan, don't be like that. I'd like to think we're friends."

She gave me this strange look and a sad smile. "Yeah, friends."

"Well, gosh, don't be so happy about it."

She laughed and kissed my cheek. "Don't ever change, Remy."

I wanted to say, 'I want to change to be whatever you'll need so you'll give me just one chance.'

But I stayed silent.

"Mommy?"

Megan smiled at the midget on the couch. "Hey, sweetie. Did you have fun?"

"Uh-huh. I saw whales, and learned about sound, and Remy made the white thing do disco 'cause she said it had soul."

Megan looked at me; I just shrugged. "It did have lots of soul."

"Come on, Pumpkin, time to go home."

"Kay."

"Thanks again, Remy."

"No problem." I watched them leave my office and I felt very alone.

"No, no, no, nooooooo!"

Peeking out of my office door to see what all the 'no' was about, I was taken out by a midget. "Ahhhhh!" I screamed and landed on my back. Looking up, I saw tear-filled blue eyes. "Hey mid... er, Kit. What's wrong?"

"Can I hang out with you today?"

"Sure. Kit, did someone hurt you?" I felt my little dog protective streak coming on.

"No."

I could see a snot bubble - eww. "Um, why don't you let me up and we can go find your mom?"

"No."

"Okay. How about you let me up anyways?"

She slowly got up and I tried to avoid clothing contact with her nose. I took her into my office and made her blow her nose. That simple act caused my anxiety to go down. I looked down at her and she looked up. Stumped, I wasn't sure what to do. "So you want to tell me what's

wrong?"

"I don't like Natlee."

"Me neither." Crap. I'd said that out loud in front of Megan's kid. That's going to be coming up at dinner.

"Really?"

"Yeah, really. So I'm guessing this has something to do with Ms. Wondertits?" I so don't spend any time around children. I just wanted to smack myself in the head. Who the hell says 'Wondertits' in front of a six-year-old? She just stared at me with a cute little puzzled expression on her face. "Please don't repeat that around your mother."

"Kay."

"We need to find your mother so she doesn't worry about you."

"No."

"What is it with you and that word?"

She shrugged and tugged on my pant leg.

"What?"

"Up. Horsy ride."

Sighing, I came to terms with my life as a beast of burden. "Give me your arms." I swung her up. "Okay, you get a horsy ride while we find your mom."

"No."

"Yes."

"No."

"Yes."

"NOOOOO!"

"Ow! You little anti-Chri..."

"Kit? Kit, where are you?"

Megan's voice distracted me from another embarrassing faux pas. I stepped into the hall.

"Megan, are you looking for this?"

"Kit! You, you, you scared me. You shouldn't have run off like that. Natalie and I were both scared for you."

I fought really hard not to roll my eyes. I didn't see Ms. Wondertits looking for Kit.

"I wanna spend the day with Remy not waunderits."

"Who?" Megan blinked, confused.

Oh please, please don't let her put that together.

"Wondertits!" Kit shouted for the whole hall to hear.

"Remy, did my child just say what I thought she did?"

"No. Whatever you heard, it was not that."

"Kit, come on. Natalie is waiting."

"No!"

"Megan, really, it's okay. She can hang with me if she wants. I'm going to be in my office all day working. I have some Powerpuff cartoons on tape and if she gets bored with that she can draw or paint."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes. Really, it's not a problem."

"Megan? Darling. We're going to be late for our lunch reservations."

Speaking of them. I mean, her.

"Yes, Natalie, I did find Kit. She was hiding with Remy." Megan seemed a little pissed that Natalie hadn't asked about Kit.

"Oh, Ms. St. James, it's lovely to meet you again. I have my portfolio in my car if..."

"Natalie, not now."

"Megan, I'm sure it's not any problem. She is a childhood friend of yours."

Feeling bad for Megan, I quickly jumped in. "Um, I'm kind of being manhandled at the moment, but if you'd give it to Alison's secretary I'll look at it when I get a moment."

"See, honey, it wasn't a problem at all."

But I think it was. Megan had that look she gets in her eyes when she's deep into her BloodRaven character. "I can't believe you. Kit runs off and your first concern is lunch and then networking."

"She's fine. Remy has her. What's the big deal? It's fine for you to get all the breaks but not me."

"Not now, Natalie."

"Well, you started it."

"Wondertits!" Kit yelled again.

Oh, just kill me now.

"Why, you little brat."

"Natalie."

"You heard what your child called me."

"She's six."

"Um, hello!" Both pissed off women looked at me. "Megan, are you done for the day?"

"Yes!"

Yikes. "I'll watch the big-mouth wonder. Why don't you two go grab lunch and talk?" I couldn't believe that I was helping them work out their problems.

"Thanks." Megan smiled.

Turning around, Kit and I fled for my office.

Disengaging the tree monkey from my back, I set her down. "You just had to open your mouth. Your mom's going to get me."

Unconcerned, Kit giggled.

We were both sitting at my desk drawing. Looking over, I noticed she'd drawn what I thought might be a knight fighting a monster. I'd go with the stereotypical answer and say dragon but it didn't look much like a dragon.

"Is that a knight?"

"Nope. It's Mommy fighting the bad guys."

"Really?"

"Uh huh." She nodded.

"Do you like sword fighting?"

"Uh huh."

"If I can find somebody, you want to watch me sword fight?"

"Really?" Her eyes were huge.

"Yep, come on."

It took a few minutes, but I found Leslie, Megan's stunt and fighting double. Luckily, she was in need of a warm up and agreed to a fencing match.

"Okay, Kit, I need you to sit here and not move. Swords are dangerous and if you come onto the floor you could accidentally get hurt. You understand?" She nodded.

"Okay. This here is safety gear. Feel this. It's padded so if she hits me on the chest it won't actually hurt me." She poked the padding. "This is a face mask; it protects my face."

"Bug eye."

"Well, yes, I guess it does look like a bug eye."

"Mommy doesn't wear that."

"Actually she does until we're ready for the final shoot." Looking over I saw that Leslie was ready. "Wish me luck."

"Good luck."

We slid back and forth, metal singing against metal. Fencing is all about the point; scoring can only happen if the point of the foil strikes a target area. You could score with the edge if you were fighting with a saber. Right foot quickstep forward, left foot slides up behind. Leslie is good but she obviously learned to fight with the saber; she keeps forgetting you can't slash. I was going to have a couple of good bruises. Quickly I tapped my sword against hers as she pressed back; then dropped my sword in a quick V under hers, then back up to lunge and strike at her opening.

"Mommy!"

Distracted, I didn't see her counter which slid right into my throat. The padding helped a little but I was still choking.

"Oh God, are you okay?" Leslie asked, concerned.

I gave her a thumbs-up sign as I tried to catch my breath.

"Mommy, kiss it better."

Thanks, kid. That would really help me get my wind back. Quickly I released the facemask and loosened the vest. I rubbed the area around my throat. God, Alison's just going to have a field day with this.

"You sure you're okay?"

I smiled at Leslie. "Yeah, I'll be fine. The padding helped a bit."

"Okay. I'm going to flee before the little one attacks me for beating you up."

Glancing over, I caught Kit glaring at Leslie.

"Hey there. I'm okay."

Kit ran up and tackled me again. "That was so cool. Can you teach me?"

"Um, when you're older."

"How old?"

"When you're taller than the sword."

"Fine."

"I can't leave you two alone for a minute."

I smiled up at Megan. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Are you really going to be okay?"

"Yep. I believe I will be."

"Okay. That was really great. You two with the swords, it looked like..." She paused, searching for a word. "It looked like poetry." She reached a hand down to help me up.

I blushed. "Thank you."

"No, thank you for watching Kit. Natalie and I were really overdue for a talk."

"I'm glad I could help you out." God, just stick hot needles in my eyes; it would be less painful. Megan got that weird look on her face.

She leaned in close and I got that weird feeling like I should be kissing her, but I already did that once and it didn't turn out so well.

"You know, sometimes I wish I'd been ready for somebody sweet in high school. Instead I had to be all about the bad boys."

What was she telling me here? "I understand most girls have that problem."

"Did you?"

"No. But I did have a thing for bad girls. I did create BloodRaven, after all."

"Is BloodRaven your dream girl?"

I laughed. "No. I think I want someone a little more real, down to earth."

She smiled. "Good to know. Kit, we should be getting home."

I was putting away the protective gear when Megan called out, "Remy, just so you know, Natalie and I are breaking up."

I dropped the facemask. I juggled it for a moment, and then I tripped over a chair. "What?" But she was gone.

I wasn't sure what that meant. I mean, I knew what I wanted it to mean, but I wasn't sure why she'd disclosed that to me. And what was the appropriate waiting period before asking someone out after they go through a split. My head swirling with thoughts, I opened the door to my office. Caught unprepared, I just stopped, stunned at the spectacle in my office.

"Oh Jesus."

"So you think my tits are wonderful?"

"I-I-I, far as I can see they're very nice. Very much, not giving into gravity, but still very nice. Um, why are you naked on my couch?" I was going to have to dip the thing in disinfectant. Right after I dipped my eyeballs.

"Well, I was hoping we could have a casting session."

"Right. Um, Alison really does that kind of thing. And don't you have a girlfriend?"

"Remy? I was wondering..."

In a panic I turned to the hallway. "Megan?"

She looked past me into the room then at me. Oh crap, she's got that BloodRaven ass-kicking look on her face. "Never mind. I can see that you're busy. I hope you're able to find a position for Ms. Martin."

"Megan, it's..." But she was already gone.

"Oh, Ms. St. James?"

I turned back to Natalie.

"No, I don't have a girlfriend anymore, and neither do you." With the efficiency of a hooker, Natalie was dressed and walking past me down the hall.

"How the hell did you know I'd come back to my office? How did you know she'd come looking for me?" The evil bitch just laughed and kept walking away. That was the kind of timing that only happened in comic books and television; I think I've cursed myself. I quietly shut my office door behind me. Avoiding the couch, I headed for my desk; I sat down and held my head in my hands. This was a moment for drink, but I didn't feel like drinking. Pain. Moments of pain were made for art. Picking up a pencil, I opened my sketchbook and began.

In twenty-four hours, not one person had knocked on my door or come looking for me. I suspected the office grapevine had me branded a dog. In my hand was the first rough sketch of the last BloodRaven comic. My muse had died, but she'd given me a beautiful going-away present. I made two photocopies. One I put in an envelope addressed to myself. The other I carried with me. I slipped the envelope into the mail, then I walked down to Alison's office. I knocked on the door, hoping she wasn't there.

"Come in."

"Hey, Ali."

"Remy. You look like shit."

"I feel like it too."

We sat in an awkward silence, at least it felt awkward to me. "I'm leaving."

"Remy, you can't leave. What will the crew do without its little despotic mascot?"

"Breathe a sigh of relief, I imagine."

"Remy, give her time. She'll realize there was no way you and Natalie were screwing around with each other."

"It doesn't matter."

"It does too matter. You've been in love with her since elementary school. It fucking matters."

"You and my father have talked, I see."

"He may have called wondering how you were."

I laughed. "It's okay. But I'm still going home."

"Fine. I'll call you when Roberto gets full of himself again."

"Please don't." I got up to leave. "Oh, here." I threw her the photocopy.

"What's this?"

"The last BloodRaven comic. Thought you'd like a sneak peek."

I was halfway down the hall when she yelled at me. "You killed her. Goddamn, you killed her."

It's all very dramatic. *The Jester took the Huntsman's cursed arrow meant for BloodRaven. Falling to the floor, she asked BloodRaven to take off her mask, revealing Charlotte.*

'Why?' asked BloodRaven.

'Because I was in love with you and, as Charlotte, you never gave me the time of day. But I watched you and you always had a thing for the bad boys and girls. So I made myself bad so you would notice me,' Jester moaned, coughing up blood.

'I'm sorry I couldn't love you, Charlotte. I wish things had been different.'

'So do I.' The Jester's eyes slowly closed. With a scream of pain the Raven took the bloody mask and her sword and marched onward to battle the forces of evil.

Okay, it looked better with the cool graphics I drew. I was afraid that if I didn't leave now I'd end up like the Jester. Dead. Dead, without the chance to have experienced love. The Jester was in love with a woman who never noticed her and, in the end, what did that get her? Nada. So I thought I'd take a lesson from my alter ego.

Well, I didn't really think I'd end up dying, but it's a metaphor. It'd been almost two years since I'd had a date. Since I'd been working on the show and around Megan I had put parts of my life on hold. That wasn't fair; it was time to move on.

Sitting on the plane I wondered if I'd made the biggest mistake of my life, but there was no getting off the plane.

"Aunt Remy, there's no such thing as magic."

I stared at Gray's oldest; her wire-rim glasses made her look older and wiser than her nine years. "Gray, would you quit ruining the joy of childhood in your kids? Just 'cause you're a chemistry geek doesn't mean you have to push it on your kids."

"My kids are just fine," she shouted at me from the dining room.

"Okay, smarty-pants, if there's no such thing as magic, how can I get this out of your ear?" I proceeded to pull a quarter out of her ear.

She rolled her eyes at me. "'Cause it was in your hand."

"Really?" I held up my hands for her, showing that the palms were empty, then proceeded to pull another quarter out of her ear.

Her eyes got wide and she took off into the other room. "Mommy, Mommy! Aunt Rem can do magic."

"Sure she can. Remy! Stop messing with my children's brains."

Logan came in and handed me a beer. He was wearing the God-awful sweater Mom had knitted him for Christmas last year. It had a big fluffy snowman on it. Sadly, I looked down at mine; it had a Christmas tree on it.

"So how does it feel to be unemployed?" he asked.

"Pretty good. The show is doing well and the last comic sold great."

"Still can't believe you ended it like that. But what a bang."

"Yep." I took a swallow of beer. "Are Dad and Hank done grilling the bird?"

"Nope. But I think you can see the fire from Mars."

"Jesus. Think we should go get another fire extinguisher?"

"Might not be a bad idea. The Mart is still open."

"Probably should get some burn cream."

"That's a good idea." He nodded.

It was so odd to see my brother so mellow. Normally he was all focused basketball guy, but now he talked about his kids and his wife. His knees had finally given out, so he had moved home and taken a job coaching the local high-school team. But he was far less tense.

I took another sip. "Gray?"

"Yes?"

"Logan and I are headed down to the Mart for burn cream and another fire extinguisher."

"Good idea," she called back.

"You need anything?"

"Nope."

"Dad, we need cookies for Santa!" One of Logan's brats yelled out.

"There's no such thing as..."

Before Gray's kid could finish Logan bellowed out, "Gray, your kids better keep their yaps shut and not ruin this holiday for my kids."

"Fine, Logan. Melissa, what have I told you..." Gray's voice trailed off.

I giggled.

"Just you wait. Someday you'll have your own to wrangle."

"Thank you, no."

"Uh huh. I think you have a secret mom inside of you just waiting to get out."

"Shut up, jerkface."

"Hey, I'll tell Mom."

"Where is Mom?"

"She went to pick Maria up at the airport. She's flying back from seeing Megan."

"Oh."

"Hey, Remy, did you know every time someone brings up Megan's name you curl your lip?"

"I do not."

"Megan. Ha, see, you did it again."

I threw his coat at him. "Come on. Let's go make the world safe from idiots with fire." Opening the front door I came face to face with Maria; Mom was cheerfully standing behind her.

"Merry Christmas, Remy."

"Merry Christmas, Ms. Sinclair."

"Ah, how many times do I have to tell you call me Maria?"

"Sorry. Merry Christmas, Maria."

"That's better."

I stood back to them into the house. Behind Mom there was a midget.

"Remy!"

A midget who tried to take me out at the knees. "Kit?"

"Up."

Not really thinking about it, I swung her up into my arms and she wrapped her arms around my neck.

"You went away," she scolded me.

"I'm sorry. I missed you everyday."

"Really?"

"Yep. Gray and Logan's kids won't draw with me."

"I will."

"Good, I'm counting on it."

Somebody cleared her throat to get my attention. Looking up, I was stunned by the sight of

Megan standing in the doorway. I guess I should have realized she'd be here if her kid was.

"Do I get a hello as well?"

"Megan. Hi. I'm, ... I, ... well, I thought you were in BC."

"Mom convinced me to fly home with her for the break."

"Great." I hope that sounded convincing. "Oh here, come in." I stepped out of the way so she could come in. Setting Kit down I moved to the door, slipping past Megan.

"I'll be back. I'm going to get another fire extinguisher," I called out. Not waiting to see if Logan was following I hastily made an exit.

"Are those idiots still in the backyard with the turkey?" Mom muttered as I shut the door.

Closing my eyes, I tried to center myself. Megan showing up was not something I'd been ready for. I crunched down the sidewalk, my booted feet sinking into the fresh snow. The Mart was only two blocks away.

"Remy, wait." I heard Megan call out but I didn't stop moving.

"It's fine. I'll be right back. Go inside and get warm."

"I said wait, goddamn it."

I still didn't stop moving. Whap! A snowball hit me square in the back. Turning, I spied Megan glaring at me. "You little shit." Scooping up some snow, I straightened up and got slammed right in the face with another one. Scrambling on the icy cement, I lost my footing and went down.

"Remy?"

I didn't move. I wasn't hurt, but she didn't know that. Sneak attack me, will she?

"Remy, it's not funny."

Oh, but it will be.

Peeking through my snowy eyelashes, I saw her walk up to me.

"Remy?"

That's it, a little closer. As she bent over I attacked; surging up I pushed her easily back into the snowy yard of some neighbor. Straddling her waist I proceeded to pour snow over the top of her.

"Remy! That's cold, you jerk." Laughing I continued.

"Paybacks are a bitch."

"Stop! Uncle. Stop! Please!"

Breathing hard, I sat back. "Why are you here?"

"It's Christmas. I'm here to visit family and friends."

"Okay."

"We're still friends, aren't we?"

I bit my lip but didn't answer for a moment. "No. You believed I would cheat on you with Ms. Wondertits. A friend would know me better."

Leaning back I got off her and continued on down to the store before it closed. Thankfully she didn't follow me.

Knocking the snow off my shoes, I reentered the house. "I have burn cream and a fire extinguisher!" I yelled.

"Good!" My mother yelled back. "Go take it to your father. He set himself on fire when he decided that the grill needed more coals."

I laughed. My dad didn't use to be this way. Mom blamed Hank; she said he was a bad influence on Dad.

Shrugging out of my coat, I hung it up. Turning back around I gave a little yelp of surprise. "Megan, don't sneak up on me."

"Sorry, I didn't realize I was being so quiet."

"Well, you were." Her eyes got big. "Sorry, that sounded cranky."

"It's okay. I'm sure I... this... Kit and I being here was a surprise..." She trailed off, seeming to deflate.

Was I being an ass? I did a second of introspection. I guess maybe I was, a little. "Hey no, I missed the midget..."

"Midget?"

Ouch, right, internal monologue was not allowed outside the body. "Um, it's just a little name I have for... um, burn cream. I should really get that out to my dad." I grabbed my coat right back off the hook I'd just placed it on and fled to the winter wonderland of the backyard. *Stupid,*

Remy. Way to put your foot in your mouth. Although I didn't know why I was mentally yelling at myself. I was so over Megan Sinclair.

Dad and Hank were standing next to the grill.

"Dad, don't you think you and Mr. Sinclair should be at least five feet away from the grill?"

"Now, Remy, what's the point in that? We wouldn't be able to see how the bird is cooking from that far away." He turned and looked at me, puzzled. I couldn't help it; I busted up laughing.

"Here." I tossed him the burn cream. "Rub that where your eyebrows used to be."

Dad caught the tube and smacked Hank. "You told me I was fine."

Megan's dad, Hank, who was six feet of hairy muscle, just shrugged. "You're fine. Nothing's broken or bleeding, and the hair will grow back."

Dad grumbled and started putting the burn cream on.

I came as close to the signal flare to the mothership as I dared. "So, how much longer?"

Hank scratched his beard in thought. "Well, something like this can't be rushed, and we put the turkey onto the grill... what would you say Gavin? A half hour ago?"

Dad pondered. "Sounds about right."

"What have you two been doing out here all this time?"

They looked sheepish. "You know, guy things."

"Guy things, huh?"

"Yep." They both grinned, looking like little boys.

"You ruined the first one and snuck out for another."

They looked at me in shock. "Never!"

"That's not what the cashier said at the Mart." I chuckled as they sputtered, then they too started to laugh.

"Here, have a beer and join us in manly stuff, like grilling."

"I'm hardly manly." I laughed, taking the beer.

"Not from what I hear." Hank chuckled.

"What?"

"Let's see. You bitch slapped your set designer, are deathly afraid of any liquid coming out of a child's nose, and..."

"Hey stop, that's plenty." I blushed.

Hank slapped me good-naturedly on the back. "Megan tells me you and Kit hit it off."

"Kit's a good kid. Bit of a blabbermouth but good."

He began to laugh. "Oh, I heard all about the Wondertits comment. That was priceless."

I glowered but Hank kept on laughing.

"Honey, it really was funny," Dad chimed in, trying to help.

"Okay, maybe I'll find it funny in like 20 years or something."

"That's the spirit."

Hank wiped the tears out of his eyes from laughing. "Hey, Gavin, your turn to flip the bird."

The grin Dad got was almost scary. He began to what I only can assume is their version of suiting up. He picked up a wielding shield and slipped it over his face, then put thick oven mitts on both hands, and lastly picked up two huge tongs.

As Dad approached the grill, Hank did some grilling of his own.

"So why are you here and not in BC with my little girl?"

"I needed a break from the show and everything."

"Some break. You killed off the Jester. I'm very pissed with you."

"You and a few hundred other people."

"You can't just end the comic there."

"Hank, please don't..."

"You're a coward."

"Excuse me!" That was a non sequitur if there ever was one.

"You're a coward. At least the Jester told BloodRaven how she felt."

"She was dying."

"Yeah, but you're not. Have you ever once told my little girl how you really felt about her?"

"What? Mr. Sinclair, I think that's really none of your business."

"No, you haven't. Have you ever let everything out? Laid your cards out for everybody to see?"

"Well, she shot me down pretty good in high school."

"This isn't high school. And you're not the socially shy teenager that used to ride her bike in front of my house hoping to get a glimpse of my daughter 50 times a day."

My face and neck started to turn red from embarrassment. "I-I-I... how did you know?"

"Remy, I'm not blind. And I did the same thing with Maria. Only I had a Harley."

You know, if I'd had a Harley that would have solved a lot of my problems. Who was I kidding? I'd have looked like a five-year-old on one of those things.

"Mr. Sinclair..."

"I know you're upset with me, Remy, but call me Hank."

"Fine. Hank. I just ... it would never work."

"Why?"

"She has a kid..."

"Whom you adore."

"It's me, okay. I built her up from grade school to be this mythic thing and..."

"And when she turned out to be flesh and blood with doubts, and rash judgments, you got scared."

I laughed but it sounded almost like a sob. "No, but she thought I would cheat on her with Ms. Wondertits."

He glared at me. "Never mind, Remy. I don't want my daughter with somebody who's not a fighter, somebody who gives up without even trying, somebody who's too afraid to try and taste happiness. So you just stay away."

I glared back. "Don't you tell me what to do. I know where your house is. I have duct tape and I'm not afraid to use it."

"Big talk from someone who's a coward."

"Um," my dad broke in. "Not to interrupt but, Hank, I think you're hardly being fair to my daughter. Besides, what makes your daughter such a winner?"

"What?" Hank turned on Dad.

"Well, she did kind of get around. Had a child out of wedlock. What exactly she did in L.A. to make ends meet is kind of sketchy..."

"Gavin," Hank warned.

"Hey you two, stop it." They ignored me. "Dad! Hank!" I threw my hands up. Great! I'd ruined Christmas. Years from now Logan's kids would be all grown up but they would refuse to celebrate the holidays because of this one-year where Grandpa and Mr. Sinclair killed each other and burned down a whole city block. It would be all my fault.

Making a retreat into the house, I yelled out, "Logan, go make Dad and Hank stop fighting."

"No way! Make Mom and Maria do it. Ow! Fine." He came out of the den rubbing his stomach. He went to the fridge and pulled out a six-pack. He glanced at me. "What? Beer solves every ailment known to man."

"Uh huh."

"I know you share a lot of guy traits since you're a lesbian but you're still not a guy. You wouldn't get it."

I sighed and pretended to understand as Logan made his way outside.

"What's up?" Megan asks asked, scaring me again.

"Jesus!" I hadn't heard her come up behind me.

"Megan, you need a friggin' bell."

"Language," my mom yelled from the den.

"Sorry," I yelled back.

We stood in what I felt to be an awkward silence.

"So?" we both said at the same time.

"Go ahead," I offered.

"Are you ever coming back to the set? I miss... I mean the crew misses their little despotic mascot. Roberto looks at your chair at least three times a day."

"I'm sure I'll be back," I hedged.

"Remy, I just want you to know how sorry I am."

"About what? Megan, there's really nothing to be sorry for. You didn't do anything." I waved her off.

"Alison so ripped me a new one for jumping to conclusions."

"Megan, what's in the past is past. There's no need..."

"Remy, shut up. I'm trying to apologize," she interrupted with a glare.

"Okay," I muttered sheepishly.

"I'm sorry I basically accused you of having an affair with Natalie."

"Apology accepted?" I wasn't really sure how I should respond.

She laughed. "Are you sure?"

"Yes." God, women were confusing.

Maria burst into the room, towed along by the midget. "See? I told you she hadn't run away again."

Ouch, that hurt. I know it was me they were referring to. "Hey Mid... Kit." Megan smirked at me as she caught my slip. I knelt down and scooped up Kit. She giggled and climbed her way round to my back, the little tree monkey. Smacking me on the head, she said, "I thought you left again."

"Nah. I had to go get some safety stuff for my dad and your grandpa. They were playing with fire."

"Playing with fire is bad."

"Yep," I agreed. "Besides, why would I leave you when we haven't even had time to hang out?"

"Can we draw?" she asked excitedly, bouncing on my back.

"Sure."

"Goody."

I winced as her excited bounce intensified.

"You're very good with my little one," Maria commented, patting my cheek. Maria looked like a housewife. She had graying black hair in loose curls, plump cheeks, a round body and she wasn't much taller than me. I could imagine her running PTAs and Girl Scout meetings but no, she runs the Kitty Club, filled to the brim with exotic dancers.

"Thanks. The little tree monkey seems to have just sort of grown on me."

"And your mother tells me you hate small children. She was telling me the other day how you would run and hide whenever Logan or Gray would come over with their kids, but I see you two and know your mother was pulling my leg."

"Eh, you know," I waffled, knowing that the two Sinclair women were laughing at me somehow.

Logan came in wiping snow out of his hair. His eyes lit up at the scene. "Ha. See? I knew you had a maternal bone in your body."

I thought it was time for a retreat. "Come on, Kit; let's go color."

She just cheered and clapped her hands.

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Kit happily drew away. I wasn't so happily drawing away. At first, I kept drawing the Jester over and over again. In some her expression was one of disappointment while in others I thought she looked like she was mocking me. Then I started drawing a little comic of me kicking Hank's ass. Call me a coward. I'm no coward.

"Are you and Mommy fighting?"

"What?" Kit's question was totally out of the blue.

"Are you angry at my mommy?"

"No." Puzzled, I reflected on why she would think that. Giving up, I asked, "Why do you think that?"

"Cause. You two seem sad and you seem upset and more sad when you're around each other."

"It's..." How did you explain things to six year old? "It's complicated."

"Mommy misses you. Her and the boss lady had a fight and the boss lady was mean and wouldn't tell us where you went. I made you pictures but I couldn't send them. I don't like the boss lady." Kit was pouted.

"Aww, sweetheart. Ali wasn't being mean; she just doesn't know how much you and your mommy mean to me. She thought she was protecting me, I bet."

"Do you love me?"

Ack, she used those sad little orphan eyes. "Of course I do."

"Good." She patted my hand. "I like you much better than Natalie."

"That's not hard," I muttered.

"Do you love Mommy?"

"Um... it's complicated."

She looked up at me, blue eyes boring into mine. "It's okay." She patted my hand again. "You're just scared."

"Am not."

"Are too."

"Am not."

"Are too."

I started tickling her. What was it with people and calling me chicken? She squirmed out of my grasp and, with a squeal, started running through the house. "Come back here!"

Going around the corner into the kitchen, I plowed right into another body. It was a tall body so, thankfully, it wasn't the midget.

"Remy, I thought I told you I wanted you nowhere near my daughter," Hank growled. Blinking, I looked up into his scowling face then down at the body I was sprawled on top of. I gave a wince, realizing it was Megan.

Megan laughed. "Dad, chill out."

With a squeak I tried to get up. The midget had crept back and was starting to giggle. Blushing, I helped Megan up.

"What's going on in here?" Maria made her way into the kitchen. With a laugh, she stated to my dismay, "How perfect! You're both standing under some mistletoe."

I stared up in horror. How come I had the feeling that everyone was out to get me and Megan together? Especially now that I'd resigned myself to the task of moving on.

"Right. Remy's too chicken," Hank muttered then he had the nerve to flap his arms like wings.

"Dad, for crying out loud. Knock it off." Megan looked embarrassed.

Screw him. I wasn't a chicken. I reached up and cupped her face in my hands, and with a little pressure brought it down to my level. Then as gently as I could I barely touched my lips to hers.

Then the peanut gallery chimed in.

"Eww, they're kissing," Kit blabbered.

"That's not a kiss. See, Remy, you're even a wussy kisser," Hank growled.

"Hank," Maria warned.

I'd show Mister Pushy. Sometime during the second kiss everybody cleared the room - which was good, since Megan's tongue sneak-attacked me and it got much more heated than the chaste kiss I'd been going for. Breaking apart, I inhaled air quickly into my lungs.

"Wow."

She smiled and brushed the hair out of my face. "Not that I'm complaining, but you didn't kiss me just because my dad called you a chicken, did you?"

"Um, well, your dad had a good point." Several good points, now that my head was out of my ass.

"That you're a chicken?"

"Well, yeah."

"Does this mean, well..."

She looked shy all of a sudden; it was cute.

"Megan, could we maybe... look, what I'm trying to say is since you knocked me down in the first grade playing Red Rover I've been in love with you - okay, more like a serious crush. Now

that I've got to really know you I'm so..." Okay, that was a bit much on the disclaimer. "So can we go out on a date and maybe find out if there's something more here between us?"

She just kissed me again. I took that as a yes.

We broke apart and she held my face in her hands like she was afraid I was going to run away. "Um, don't look now but there's a small child with glasses staring at us."

Glancing to the left then the right I spied Gray's middle child staring at us. With his bowl cut and glasses he looked kind of like a redheaded Harry Potter - which would be great, except he thought the books were rubbish. Gray's kids were seriously warped.

"Xavier, is there something you wanted?"

"No, I was just observing the mating habits of the female homosexual."

I blinked. The kid was seven; what seven-year-old talks like that? Her kids were seriously messed in the head

Megan started laughing. "Is there anybody in your family that's normal?"

"Gray, your kid's taking notes while I'm trying to make out with Megan!"

"Which one?" Gray asked.

I heard Logan mutter, "Messed in the head."

Somebody started clapping. "I knew you weren't a coward!"

That bastard, he played me. Megan's dad so played me.

"Gray, come get Xavier. He's giving me the creeps."

"Xavier, it's time to feed your spiders."

That kid was seriously creepy. Who kept spiders as pets?

"So are we good?" I mumbled into Megan's shoulder.

"Do you forgive me for jumping to rash decisions about you and Natalie?"

I shrugged. "I guess. In the future when we're a couple and happily married, promise me you'll try to talk things through when you think you may have jumped to a rash conclusion."

"Married, huh?"

I blushed. "Hey! I'm a very good catch, I'll have you know."

"And have I caught you?"

"Jeez, we haven't even had a date," I mock grumbled.

She laughed.

But she'd caught me in elementary school. It just took her a while to get with the program.

She kissed me again.

"Wow. That particular brand of mistletoe must be really potent." Logan chuckled.

"Grandma, they're still kissing," Kit added.

"Come on, you two. The bird's ready; time to eat," Dad broke in.

"As you can see, Aunt Remy's ears have turned red, which I theorize indicates arousal..."

"Gray! Put a muzzle on your kid," Logan grouched. "I shouldn't be hearing the word 'arousal' out of a seven-year-old's mouth. You know he's going to grow up to be a pervert."

"You know what?" I whispered in Megan's ear as I took her hand and led her to the dining room.

"What?"

"I think this is one Christmas I won't soon forget."

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Season three found the show still a hit. I was living in sin with Megan in BC; I still haven't convinced her to marry me yet. Someday I'll wear her down. Being in a lesbian relationship hasn't really hurt Megan's career, but she takes it slow. She's had some acclaim from roles in a few independent films, but she's unwilling to go 'all Hollywood' as she calls it. I even got a bit role in the series, set to air later in the season. I got to play a villain. Alison pushed me pretty hard to do it. I think she was tired of me mooning around the set, but it was fun. I played a familiar half-human half-cat demon. Just getting into makeup every day was a hoot; it was a pain, but I looked so different afterwards. Megan loved it because she got to kick my ass around the stage. It was the best couples therapy ever.

The comic remains in limbo, but after several restless nights I've started a new one called

Afterlife. I tried to find a way to bring the Jester back from the dead. I wasn't going to go all cheesy and just miraculously have her come back in the next episode of BloodRaven. This comic follows the Jester's adventures in the death realm and her quest to get back to her one heart's desire, BloodRaven. Unlike me, the Jester wasn't a quitter.

The alarm on my computer went off, reminding me it was time to take the midget to karate practice. Kit kept bugging me about learning how to fence; I told her that while she was still too young to learn fencing, there was something she could do that would help her be ready when she was old enough. Karate will help her learn flexibility and some discipline.

"Hey, you suited up for class?"

She came running into the room, the fabric of her slightly-too-big Gi rubbing against itself.

"Hiiii Yaaa!" She yelled, tackling me to the couch.

We laughed and roughhoused. "Come on; let's go." Yep, I was pretty much what I considered to be a stay-at-home mom. Oddly, I loved it.

"Are we picking Mom up?"

"Yep. As soon as you get out of class we're off to the airport to get her."

Kit clapped her hands excitedly and twirled around the room. I couldn't help but smile a goofy grin. Even though Megan had only been gone a day for some promotional work, I found it was one day too many.

We piled into the car. "Can you come and talk to my class next week?"

"Sure. What about?"

"Well, Mr. Yung Lee was very excited when I told him one of my Moms is an artist."

You know, I still got choked up when she called me 'Mom'. "Sure. Did you explain that I create comic books?"

"Yeah. Then he said that was even better 'cause most of the kids would relate."

"Okay. I'll email him."

"Goody."

Standing I looked through the window into the dojo, watching a bunch of kids mimic the instructor. I slipped a hand into my jacket pocket to clasp the jewelry box in my palm. Yep, someday soon I'll make Megan make me an honest woman.

End...

Send feedback to zeeamy@gmail.com
