

# The Meeting Place

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Published on Lush Stories on 21 Jun 2012

*A chance encounter in a darkened bar.*

<https://www.lushstories.com/stories/straight-sex/the-meeting-place.aspx>

Cool air struck my face as I slipped into the dark, subdued interior of The Meeting Place, a stark contrast from the thick haze of midsummer in Louisiana. The Meeting Place was much the same as I remembered it; stained wood panels, mirrored vintage signs, and stained glass windows lined the walls, while the tables bore chess boards or solitaire puzzles. The place was spacious, despite having so much on the inside. Unlike many other bars, The Meeting Place felt more like home; it had warm ambient lighting, and a couple couches and comfy chairs. This was a place to enjoy company, not just drink to your heart's content. I hadn't frequented the pub in nearly six years, since my college days, but it was all still recognizable, except the booths and tables, filled to the brim on a typical weekend, seemed slightly skeletal. Evidently, I never came here during the week. However, the dozen patrons, myself included, had free reign of the jukebox, pool table, dart board, and restrooms. I checked my watch. Six-thirty. I still had an hour before my date arrived. I loosened my tie and took a seat at the bar. The bartender emerged a minute later from the kitchen with a rack of freshly washed, still-steaming glasses under one arm. He was a thin man, but you could tell by his toned forearms that he had a runner's physique. He had long, straight, brown hair, tied into a ponytail, and his nose jutted out from his brow, a mark of Italian heritage. "Evening," he greeted, setting the rack on a counter. His voice was far deeper than you'd expect for a man his size. "What can I get for you?" I examined the tap levers that rose from the bar. The Meeting Place was well-known for their unique brews. Among the labels of commercial beers, there were two taps bearing plain white labels. "I'll try the Apple Cinnamon," I answered slowly, debating my choice as the words escaped my lips. It was new to me, and I decided I wasn't in quite the mood for Honey Nut. The bartender nodded and pulled a dry glass from the overhead rack and set it under the tap. He pulled the lever and a dark yellow liquid ran from the mouth, a thick layer of white froth forming as the glass filled. As he filled my glass, I pulled out my wallet and produced a MasterCard, and laid it on the smooth bar. Once the tall glass vessel was filled to the lip with a mixture of beer and foam, the bartender set a cork coaster on the counter and rested the glass on it. In one movement, he scooped up the card and asked if I wanted to start a tab. I nodded in the affirmative and he stepped over to a computerized register, swiping the card, and returned the card with a slight flourish. I received it and picked up the glass and coaster and took a seat on the plush couch a dozen feet away. The hour passed lazily. The beer was very well

made, and had a good flavor and surprising aftertaste. Some patrons left and some more came in. I occupied myself by watching some sports footage on the large screen, perused the selection at the jukebox, and joined a friendly game of darts. I was thankful there was no money on the line. I'm not very skilled at darts, and my score proved it. I was aiming carefully when the light of the evening filled my peripheral field of view. I counted myself lucky that I wasn't hit and blinded by direct sunlight as I turned my head, because silhouetted against the city street was the form of a slender woman. She stood quietly in the doorway, surveying the interior a moment, before stepping in and allowing the door to shut behind her. My daze was broken, however, by the laughter and applause of my new friends, and I became aware that the dart was no longer in my hand, but as I discovered upon turning my gaze away, had gone careening off target, struck the wall, and landed in someone's drink. Fortunately, there was only a sip left, and the cheery temperament of my companions assured me that no ill feelings were meant. I was distracted the rest of the game. When I wasn't sending darts in every direction than the dart board, I was attempting to take a better look at the woman who'd entered and turned my losing streak from embarrassing to humiliating. With every glance, however, I found that a bit of lattice obstructed my attempts. I continued my downward spiral for the next fifteen minutes and let the game end with me triumphantly behind by more than a hundred points than my worst opponent. We shared a few laughs, and I declined a rematch, claiming my ego was bruised and any further injury would require mouth-to-mouth. It afforded me a few more chuckles and my leave, which meant a chance to take in the woman at the bar. She was turned mostly away from me, and I could just see her cheek move as she spoke. She was perched upon a bar stool, and her ankles hooked together between the metal legs. Her feet were adorned with black stilettos, and her legs disappeared just before the knee under a black skirt that sat loosely around her thighs. Above her skirt rested the hem of her scarlet blouse of shimmering satin that hung from her shoulders and fell below the seat of the stool, concealing her bottom. Her blond hair was twirled in a tight bun. Her slender arms slid from the short sleeves of her blouse and rested politely on the bar. Her skin, I could tell even in the subtle light of the pub, was the tan color of a weak tea, not too dark, smooth and uniform. On the bar sat her purse, a black and white bag that had a chrome logo emblazoned on it, but whose make I couldn't recognize. I'm interested in women, after all. Do you think I'd recognize a designer at a dozen paces? I continued to walk as I tried to see more of this beauty, but her face was turned away from me. She was in an animated conversation with another patron, who had obviously also found her attractive. I felt a twinge of contempt, but I instead looked at my watch, looked around the pub, and headed casually for the bathroom. Like the rest of The Meeting Place, the restroom was personable. Warmly lit, it lacked the stark façade so many other establishments adopted for their restrooms. I stood at the sink and straightened my tie, splashed my face with a little cold water and combed my blonde hair back. Once I released it, it fell in gracious waves from my scalp down onto my ears. I scratched at the whiskers of my trimmed goatee absently, realizing that my mind was still on the woman outside. I shook my head firmly to try to get her out, but I was a man possessed. Maybe another beer will help, I reasoned, and yanked a paper towel from the automatic dispenser, and I exited the restroom back into the pub. As I emerged, I saw the mystery man hobble to the exit

and curse mildly under his breath, his hand fiddling with his keys. After a moment, I realized he was more sheepish than under the influence, and I let the impulse to stop him from driving drunk lift. I turned, and that was when I saw my beauty's face, albeit in profile. Her face shared the same tint of brown as the rest of her exposed skin. As you followed her neck from her collar bone up, it arched to her chin which ever so gently wound back and up to her lips, colored a deep red that complemented her blouse. Her nose sloped from her brow in a straight line, and ended in a rounded point. As for her eyes, they were sparkling orbs of blue, white, and black, with thin, arching brows above them. Her ears were very shapely, and from the lobe a small, dangly crystal hung. A dainty glass sat on a coaster in front of her. She must have been drinking some sort of wine, mostly dispensed, it too mimicking the hue of her attire. Her eyes were stuck in a paperback novel, the cover of which was lilac, but otherwise indistinguishable. I swallowed, glanced at my watch again and, once I got my butterflies in order, approached her, pulling the stool next to her out and positioning myself to hop. "I'm not interested," she said, smoothly, her eyes still fixed on her book. "Keep on walking." "I think you misjudge my intentions," I claimed as I rested on the stool. "I'm just here for a drink." "There are other stools, you know," she answered, lifting her head, but her eyes kept to their target. "I know. I was just curious, was it that last guy's stupidity that sent him packing, or are you merely that venomous." She contemplated the request for information carefully. In doing so, she picked up her glass and placed the rim to her lips, letting them part and lifting the stem to let the remainder of the wine slip into her mouth. I watched as her throat shift beneath her skin as she swallowed, and my eyes instinctively dipped lower. Draped around her neck was a gold chain, holding a small cross in place on her chest. Upon seeing the cross, I drifted even lower and discovered her blouse was open enough to reveal what could be considered the perfect amount of cleavage; just enough to hint at the size of her breasts, but not enough to be obscene. She placed the glass down and she spoke quite simply. "He couldn't keep his eyes off my chest." I clenched my eyes closed the instant she finished the sentence and turned forward. I didn't want to open my eyes, but I did, and affixed my eyes on the stack of coasters at the edge of the bar. "However," she continued, but this time, her cold voice was warmed by a slight smile, "he was otherwise quite charming." She patted my arm gently. "Don't worry, you at least looked away." "Yes, well," I started, trying to recover. "Men are not organisms, but rather colonies of organs, the eyes having a mind of their own." She gave a chuckle, her tone a little more relaxed. "Face it. Every male body part has minds of its own." "Yes, but our leader is a real dick," I commented, turning my head. Maybe I was exaggerating my gesture so there was no way for my eyes to return to their doom. However, my eyes fell on hers, and they were thinned by her cheeks, swollen with a smile. "Sorry to say, the jokes don't get much better." "It's fine, I know someone who tells worse jokes than that, but you're damn close." "Fair enough." "I don't normally make conversation with strangers in a bar," she confessed, looking around the room, her mouth shifted to one side, "but it appears my date isn't going to show." Again, I glanced at my watch. "Yeah, mine either. Maybe this is God's way of telling me to quit the dating scene." "I wouldn't give up hope. There's bound to be someone who is willing to show you pity." I winced at her remark. She was beautiful and witty, albeit as a predator taunts its prey. I lifted my hand to signal the bartender, who

finished racking glasses and approached. He poured another mug of Apple Cinnamon brew and I turned to the beauty. "Have you tried this brew yet?" "I try to stay away from microbrews, thank you," she replied, her look in mild distaste, her eyes returning to her book. "Trust me, this is no typical brew. Try a sip, and if you don't like it, you'll have the satisfaction of being right. If you do like it, I'll buy you a glass. Either way, you can't lose." She looked at me, then at the glass. After a moment of trepidation, she pulled the glass and coaster toward her, picked up the vessel, and took a short swig. The foam formed a thin moustache that she licked away once the golden liquid had passed into her stomach. It took a moment, but she finally spoke. "Fine, I don't know everything." The expression on her face was of defeat, and she crossed her arms. "But I don't want a beer tonight. I'll stick with my wine. Your treat." "Very well," I said, a little gloated. With another wave of my hand, the bartender refilled her glass. She lifted the glass to her lips and her other hand rested at the wrist on the bar, allowing the book to relax towards its natural closed state around her thumb, and giving me a peek at the cover. It was a romance, with a realistically depicted painting of a gorgeous woman, who looked surprising like its reader, being seduced by Adonis, or some other paragon of manliness. I gulped, as I had nothing to offer to the conversation as far as the subject matter was concerned. Give me an action or adventure and I can talk your ear off, but the closest I had come to romance starred comedians who found themselves in relationship perils of their own doing. I did, however, note the author. "Gale Richardson, writing as Penelope Hitch." "I wonder why people write under a different name," I commented, more to myself than to the woman next to me. She obviously heard me, because she twisted her wrist to examine the cover of the book. "To gain exposure to new audiences without the prejudice of their own established fame," she answered. "Gale Richardson is actually a self-help author. Tell me, would you read a romance novel by someone who writes instructional manuals for people with personality disorders?" "Well, I don't read romance novels on general principle, but I can see what you mean." "Names can be powerful," she expounded. "Ever get called by your full name by your mom or dad? Do you remember how potent that was? Those words carried emotion, but they bore power unto themselves. The Egyptians believed that your true name was something to be guarded, lest you be the subject of dark magic." My eyebrows were raised slightly in interest. "So, it would be futile to ask you for your name." "You catch on quick," she quipped. "That's me, Speedy Gonzales," I said and quickly added as she opened her mouth to retort, "No comments, thank you." I took another draw from my beer. The head had mostly fizzled, so I didn't have to fight it to get the rich liquid beneath. "So what do I call you?" I inquired. She gave a shrug. "Well, I could call you Venus, but I'm already toeing the cliché. How about Dulcinea?" "Who do you think you are, Don Quixote?" she disparaged. "This is not a winner, try again." "Fine, Guinevere then. A strong female figure in literature." "And that would make you Arthur, I presume?" "I prefer Lancelot, but you can call me Lance." "What is with men and phallic references?" I stopped short when I realized what corner I backed myself into, again. That, and the bartender snickered as he eavesdropped. He realized he gave himself away and went back to wiping the counter. I added after a moment to regain my pride, "I'm just glad I didn't pick Richard. So is Gwen alright with you?" She rolled her eyes, but with a subtle grin on her lips, and said, "Fine, Speedy." "That's Lance, thank you." "So, Lance, what do you do for

a living?" "I rescue damsels in distress," I quipped, but Gwen turned her eyes to me as if to say 'That's lame,' and I switched in mid-stream to, "I'm a writer." "Really?" she asked, phasing from sarcasm to sincere interest. "Have I read any of your stuff?" I considered this for a moment. "Most likely not." "And why not?" she inquired, turning her body towards me a little more. She probably meant it as a maneuver to coax me into the truth. Honestly, she didn't need to, but I got rewarded with a further peek into her cleavage, although I left that to my peripheral vision. "Do you read Playboy?" I shot back. The answer wasn't exactly what she was expecting. She looked a little taken aback, but she didn't lose composure. "Not really," she answered. "I don't swing that way, and I didn't realize you were that type." She shut her book and was stuffing it in her purse. She didn't seem angry, merely suddenly disinterested. "For your information," I stated, trying to sound firm and proud, not desperate to keep the conversation going, "I'm a freelance writer, and most of my stuff has been for the tech section. And what type is that?" She blinked and looked a little guilty. "Nothing, never mind." We shared a silent moment as we drank from our glasses. Your Song, by Elton John was playing on the jukebox. "So what do you do?" I asked, turning to her like she earlier did to me. "I dance," she answered. This time, I was left with my mouth open and primed for comment when she quickly interjected, "Ballet, tap, that kind of stuff." "Really?" I asked, extending the word a little for emphasis. "Is it profitable?" "Profitable? No," she replied, "but it is rewarding. I'm actually teaching a couple classes this year. One is a bunch of football players, looking to improve their foot work. Ever see a three-hundred pound man try a pirouette?" We both began to laugh at the image, and her laughter marked her speech. "I really ought to film it and sell it to one of those funniest video shows. Thank god they don't have to perform on stage." She composed herself after a moment of giggles. "I also have a class of second- and third-graders. They may not be as coordinated as the older classes, but they put in a hundred-and-ten percent every time." She gave a little smile to herself and said quietly, "I'm so proud of them." She finished the statement by sipping more wine. "Very nice," I said, smiling with her. "I've done a bit of acting in college. A bit of singing. Never dance, though. I have to order all my shoes in lefts." "That's alright," she assured me. "I wasn't expecting you to be Fred Astaire." She took the final swallow of her wine. She licked her lips, savoring the sweet flavor of her beverage. The motion was somewhat arousing and flirtatious. A television above the bar caught her attention. I looked up to see an announcer appeared, his mouth moving silently, and the Major League Baseball logo hovering over his left shoulder. The image clicked over to a rowdy group, obviously recorded during the game, as many of them were cheering and making triumphant gestures. I looked back to Gwen, who had an excited smile on her face. The bartender must have refilled her glass while I was distracted, because she was downing another glass of wine, rather hurriedly. Soon, her glass was empty, and I was still sipping at my second mug of ale. She sat the glass down, maybe a little harder than normal for a wine glass, but not enough to break it. "Baseball fan?" I inquired, as if I couldn't already tell by her reaction. "Duh!" she answered, still smiling like a schoolgirl. "How can you not be? Granted, I was brought up in a house full of baseball fans, but that's beside the point." "Well, I'm not," I said, matter-of-factly. It was as if I spoke bullets and shot them at her. "Granted," I added, "I don't really follow sports, so I guess I don't really have a bias." "We'll just have to work on that," Gwen

commented, more to herself than anything. She gestured to the bartender again to refill her glass and he gave a hesitant look as if to say, 'Are you sure?' She gestured again and he didn't need to be told another time. Once she was satisfied by her filled glass, she turned twisted her body behind her, and I followed her look, which fell on the jukebox. It was emitting a song that had clique-y percussion and half-sung lyrics that would make Madonna blush. "Ugh!" I winced, becoming suddenly aware of the music through my pleasantly distracting conversation. "Someone needs to kill the cat." "Easy enough to fix," she replied. She reached into a pocket on the side of her purse and pulled out a couple slightly wrinkled one-dollar bills. She stood up from the stool, taking her purse in one hand, and began to walk away, towards the musical apparatus. Her hips swayed under her skirt as she glided gracefully to the jukebox. She was inserting the bills into their receptacle, so I grabbed our glasses from the counter and followed. She hovered over the machine, pressing a button and letting the plates displaying the song listing for each CD slide from right to left. For a moment, my mind flitted back to the days of boxes atop tables in the tiny diners of my youth. Her voice broke my flashback. "Wow, Sinatra, Ra, No Doubt. I've never seen a collection as eclectic as this. Except y..." she began, catching herself on a word she wasn't supposed to say. "Y'know, people's playlists online." "I see," I replied with a nod. "Anything good?" Gwen merely grinned and punched in a selection from either Meredith Brooks or Megadeth, I couldn't tell which. The album covers sat side by side for a moment, but soon Megadeth slid to the right and overlapped Meredith Brooks to reveal Meat Loaf. Lisa Loeb, Lifehouse, Lenny Kravitz. The list went on and on. Soon Guns 'N' Roses was facing forward and Gwen punched in another selection. She looked up at me and said, "One more. You pick." She took the glasses from my hands and stepped to one side to give me free reign. It only took me a couple presses of the "Browse" button to find an appropriate song. I looked up at her and she was peering over my shoulder. I cleared my throat politely and she rolled her eyes and turned away. I punched in my selection, hit the browse buttons randomly and turned back to her. A similarly clique-y song was playing during our selections, and I prayed there were no more in queue. She faced me, her eyes inquisitive. "So, what song did you pick?" she asked. "I'm not telling you," I retorted. "You need to wait and find out." She gave a little pout. "I hate surprises." "That's life," I commented, pulling another sip of ale. She took a large swallow from her own glass. It was her third drink in less than an hour. "Are you going to be all right driving home?" I asked sincerely. She shot me a look and a chuckle. "The concerned bar-goer? I've gotten a lot of lines before, but this one's new!" I wasn't sure if she was mocking me in jest or trying to humiliate me. "I can get a cab, if you're really that concerned." "Or I can drive you to your apartment and drop you off," I said, trying as I might to not sound like I was shallowly hitting on her. Granted, the image of her body against mine was playing evil games in the back of my mind, but I really enjoyed Gwen's company and didn't want to rush anything. "Nothing more than that," I added, to build my case of sincerity. "How very noble of you," she stated, but with a good-natured smirk. "Tell you what, if you can beat me in a game of pool, I'll let you bring me home. My home, and just to drop me off. If you lose, I call a cab and you walk away. I'll even let you break. Deal?" I hesitated. I knew I was not very good at pool, and I could really blow it right now. In the couple seconds while I considered my options, a new song replaced the former. It opened with a rock

drum beat, joined by a guitar. I knew the song. Bitch . No, the song's title is Bitch , not Gwen. Right now, however, she was definitely playing the part. And I decided I was up to the challenge. "Deal." We shook hands, and I realized this was the first time we touched since I sat next to her. Her skin was soft to the touch, smooth. My mind imagined that the same smoothness was uniform, not just her hands. I straightened out my thoughts and hesitantly released her hand. I could have been mistaken, but I for the sensation that she didn't want to let go either. We pulled two cues from the wall and I rested mine over my extended forearm, turning it and ensuring it was straight. She wasn't satisfied with the one she picked, having rolled it wobbly on the table, so she replaced hers and drew a new one. I had to circumvent the pool table to insert my money into the sliding tray, and took the opportunity to draw my eyes up and down her body again. She stood about 5'6" in her heels; the top of her head came to about my brow. She was stunning to observe, and she was confident. I pulled the rack from its hook and started placing balls into it. She must have been happy with her new cue, because she had come over to my side and was rearranging the order of the balls even as I was bringing more up. "Picky, picky!" I commented, and she merely glowered. Well, mockingly so. I pulled the cue ball and positioned it as she placed the rack of balls and lifted the frame, leaving a neat triangle of spheres. I chalked the tip of my cue and leaned over. The cue slid twice over my fingers as I aimed carefully. On the third stroke, I thrust the cue forward and struck the white ball, causing it to careen into the neat formation, and with a series of random cracks, they scattered. They thumped against the felt shoulders of the table, and finally one, bounced off one edge of the corner pocket and dropped into the hole. It was a solid yellow ball. The two ball, maybe? I couldn't remember. Goes to show how often I play this game. "Not bad," Gwen commented. "Lady Luck smiles." I surveyed the table again. My further prospects weren't so hopeful. I was able to sink another ball, but left myself either needing to get through striped balls or shooting into clusters. I tried what I thought was moderately difficult, but in striking my intended target, it bounced in an unexpected angle and missed the pocket. "Aww, the poor thing," Gwen teased, drawing her own cue and striking her white sphere firmly. I watched her sink what I thought would be a rather difficult shot, and I gulped. Bitch ended, and November Rain replaced it, with its piano, electric guitar, and full symphony. Gwen took another shot, this one a bit easier, and she sank it without error. On her third aim, she saw me intently watching her and she positioned herself so she was across the way from me, leaning over the table, flashing me a bit of cleavage. Her blouse hung low enough that I could see that her breasts were restrained by black, with a lacy trim, but anything farther was obscured by the fabric of her blouse or the shadow within. She must have been concentrating more on her tease than her aim, because the cue ball sped passed her ball and directly into the pocket just beyond. "Damn it," she muttered, thrusting the rubbery end of her cue against the floor next to her. I picked up my glass to take another draw of my ale before taking my turn. I struck gold with my next three strokes, sinking all three in rapid succession. Granted, they were easy shots, but required a bit of restraint to avoid sinking the cue ball as well. On my fourth, however, I again misjudged my aim, driving my intended victim into an opposing ball and dropping it into the pocket instead. For good measure, the cue ball dropped into another pocket. Ouch! Insult? Injury? There was no difference that this point. I looked up sheepishly

to Gwen, and she merely smiled and regained control of the table. She withdrew the pale sphere from its receptacle, and rolled it around in her palm. Her fingers oscillated as the ball moved clockwise in her hand. I felt an involuntary twinge in my groin at the sight. I cursed my mind for bringing in sexual visuals and I looked away from her hand into her eyes. She was smiling, knowing how her actions were affecting me. There was a game within a game, and while I was currently ahead in pool, she was dominating the other, more social game. She resumed her turn. She was confident and agile, striking the balls firmly. I kept stealing glances down her shirt and at her bottom as she bent to either select an aim or to strike a ball. Soon, there were four balls remaining on the green felt: two of mine, one of hers, and the coveted eight ball. I looked around and noted that there were even fewer patrons in the pub by now, the remainder of the crowd was at the bar. I was brought back to the game by a most pleasant sensation. I looked down and found Gwen bent over the table, taking aim, with cheeks of her shapely bottom pressed firmly against the front of my pants. I gasped in a breath at the sudden change, and could feel my pelvis suddenly lurch forward in response. She lingered there, longer than she would need to for her shot. Every time she brought her cue back, she would bring her body back as well, and it roused my member into a slow ascent. She had to know of the physical effect she was having now. She finally dropped her last striped target into the pocket, straightened her body against me, and looked over her shoulder, meekly saying, " 'scuse me," before stepping away. I had to quickly adjust myself to accommodate my now visible bulge. She laughed suddenly, and I inquisitively looked at her. In addition to the eight ball, there were two solidly colored balls, one purple and one blue. "Look who's left with blue balls," she giggled. "No thanks to you," I retorted. Quick wit is just another of my many services. I turned my attention back to the game. She had a relatively easy shot. She needed to hit the eight ball on a slight angle to drive it into the corner pocket. She leaned down and pulled her cue back once. Something wasn't quite right. She pulled back again. I compared the relationship between the eight ball, the cue ball, and the straight line of the cue. I watched as the blue chalked tip of the cue struck the white ball and raced towards the black one. But instead of striking it and sinking it into the pocket, the white cue ball ignored it, and it struck the backside of the pocket and dropped out of sight. I gaped incredulously. It was a simple shot, and she totally blew it. She looked up at me and only squeaked out, "Oops," without an expression on her face to match the embarrassment, and she turned toward the cue rack. "Why did..." I stammered. I found myself approaching her. "You threw the game!" "Are you sure about that?" she said, holding back a smile. "Maybe we should check the instant replay." "You could have won, and you threw it away! Why?" My voice was hushed, but firm. I found myself behind her, her hair still neatly tied in a bun, her slender neck stretching down to her shoulders. She gave a slight shudder and I realized that last phrase landed on the back of her exposed neck. She leaned back. There had only been mere inches between us when I finished my sentence, and now there was none. I felt her firm shoulder blades, her muscular back, and her taut ass pressing against me. Leaning my head down, I repeated, "Why?" into her neck. Goosebumps formed on her skin, and a subtle moan reverberated in her throat. I could see into her cleavage again, although it was again obscured by her blouse. "I think it's time for you to take me home now, Lance," she said. I stepped back to give her room to move again. She rolled her



shoulders to shake her sensations, and she turned back to me. "Clean up here, and I'll be right back." With that, she snatched her purse and strode to the ladies room. I scooped the last of the balls into a random pocket, returned our glasses to the bar and the bartender allowed me to pay both of our tabs. The last thirty seconds of November Rain was playing when Gwen emerged, walked up to me, and hooked her hand in the bend of my arm. I wanted to hesitate, to let her hear the song I'd selected as I had promised, but she was already drawing forward, and I followed her lead. The night was complete by this time; street lights shone amber on the pavement and concrete. The air was cooler than earlier, but by no means cold. It was excellent weather by which to go for a night time swim. Gwen looked around for a moment and suddenly pulled me forward, but stopped, and asked, "Which one is yours?" I took a step in the same direction she had pulled me, and we sauntered towards my sedan. I pulled out my keychain from my pocket and I clicked the alarm. The red Corvette chirped, its lights flashed once, and a click signaled that the doors were unlocked. We reached the passenger door and I graciously opened it. Gwen slipped in, straightening her skirt as she did, covering the flash of her legs. I cursed internally and shut the door gently, pacing around the car and opening the door for myself, taking a seat, and buckling up. Gwen had done the same, and was silently regarding the knapsack and blanket on the back seat. I slid the key into the ignition and with a twist of my wrist the engine came to life, giving a triumphant roar. The lights of the dash flared on, and the crooning of some vintage singer filled the air. I pulled the shifter into gear and looked to Gwen. "Out by the Hook Lake," she said without me prompting her. "Do you know where I mean?" I nodded and slipped from the sidewalk into the scant street. I tested the speed limit and toed the line between acceptably fast and "license-and-registration" fast. Soon, we were on the highway. Light filled the cabin, illuminating Gwen's face, her heaving chest, until we passed beneath the lamp and the juncture of windshield and roof, creating a sharp shadow that dropped down her body. This repeated under every lamp as we raced down the highway. About thirty seconds of straight, level highway ran beneath us before she reached out her hand and grasped mine. Without a word, she took her free hand and lifted the hem of her skirt, and slipped my hand inside. Her legs were smooth, and hairless. She was still holding my wrist and beckoning my hand higher up her thigh. I kept my eyes on the road, but split my concentration between the steering wheel and my wandering hand. I reached higher and my fingertips found a damp thatch of hair. The car lurched momentarily towards the shoulder as I realized her trip to the restroom offered her an opportunity to remove whatever panties she was wearing. Or was she not wearing any from the beginning? The thoughts swam like a narcotic in my mind. The more I thought of it, the more aroused I became; the more aroused I grew, the faster and more erotic the images came. My fingers instinctively traced her soft petals, to her hooded nub, and back down. I discovered her waiting folds and slipped my finger tentatively inside. Her legs spread in response. She was already slick and her inner walls clung to my fingers expectantly. I pushed in further, exploring, testing her. I looked over to her. She held the skirt in both hands, granting me uninhibited access. Her head was tilted back as far as the seat would let her. Her breathing was deep, but not yet rapid. I brought my eyes back to the road and realized I was approaching the exit to the lake, but was in the wrong lane. Without causing a jolt of panic, I pulled the wheel with my free hand and crossed

three lanes in time to safely exit. Gwen had been none the wiser. By now, my finger was sliding in and out slowly from her tender insides, but I knew she wanted more. I pulled my finger out, damp with her dew and, keeping constant contact, lifted my fingertips to her clit. I could feel its tip peeking from under her hood. She gave a shudder when I found it, accompanied by a moan. I traced my finger in little circles around it as I followed the winding road. I could see where the lamps ceased ahead, and beyond that was wooded darkness, accented by only the moonlight slipping through the leaves. My fingers flicked on both hands; one hand turned on the high beams, while the other made Gwen writhe in her seat. She was panting and moaning softly, urging me to continue my ministrations. At one point she shuttered and twitched, but I wouldn't stop this momentum. It was difficult, now trying to be vigilant against wild animals that may wander into the road while paying my companion homage. A couple times, I saw a small scurrying creature begin an advance onto the road, but in my headlights, they retreated back home. I passed a sign that read "Now Entering Hook Lake" and I halted my nudging fingers and called to Gwen's attention. "Now where?" I asked softly. My finger gave a twitch and she jumped a little. "Take your first right, then pull into the second driveway." I nodded, and resumed my attentions, although not to their previous passions. I wanted to make sure I didn't miss my turn, because backtracking isn't very romantic. I found the first right and pulled down it. It slumped downhill and eventually revealed Hook Lake, bordering on the right. I counted the driveways. At the second, I turned the wheel and the lights shone on a sign that read, "Camp Misty Lake." The campgrounds were completely dark, and I was impeded by a wooden gate. Gwen was aware of my question before I asked it, because she motioned to a small cove to the right. "Over here, down the path." I pulled the car to the right, and just at the far end of the small clearing was a dirt path, wide enough for one car. It extended down several hundred feet. She had me stop the car when the main road could no longer be seen. I reluctantly pulled my fingers from between her thighs and turned the key in the ignition. The car hushed, and the sounds of insects and frogs permeated the glass of the car. Suddenly, a hand grasped the back of my neck, pulled me to my right, and forcefully planted my lips on Gwen's. I bugged my eyes out in shock, but they slipped closed, and I opened my mouth as she opened hers. We repeated this action for a few moments, and then I discovered my tongue pressing against hers. They surrounded each other, wrestling for control over one another. I reached my hand behind her head and pulled her hair out of its bun. I felt it fall over the back of my hand as I placed my hand on her neck and increased the passion of our kiss. My other hand unbuckled my seatbelt, and I was able to lift my body forward and undo her belt. We tried to press against each other, but we were impeded by the console between us. Instead, I was forced to reach out and grasp her back and caress it firmly. She must have enjoyed that because I felt her moan in my mouth. My hand moved from back to side, from side to front, and was squeezing her breasts through her blouse. They were still concealed beneath the bra, but I could feel every contour of the lacy cup. I found her nipple and pinched it gently. Our tongues danced their wicked tango as our hands wandered. Her hand was running up and down my back in a pleasurable mini-massage. "Need more room," I gasped between kisses, and Gwen nodded her affirmation. I reached over and pressed a button, the trunk lunged upward, but not completely open. I could barely see this, as the windows were becoming

steamed. "Get out of the car." We opened the doors and were suddenly aware of the temperature difference between the inside of the car and the outside. While not cold, it was enough to make us momentarily shiver. I reached in back and grabbed the folded blanket, laying it on the roof as I exited. I walked to the trunk and lifted it. Within, there were miscellaneous automotive supplies, a box of books, an almost empty picnic basket, a hibachi, and a large citronella candle. I retrieved the latter, as well as a square, flat wrapped package and a box of matches from the basket, and closed the trunk. The small package I stuffed in my pocket. I crept up next to Gwen and kissed her again. I then placed the candle on the roof, lit it, and picked up the blanket and spread it across the hood of the car. Gwen suddenly had a look of understanding, though her visage was faint in the mixture of candle and moon light. I kissed her again, and she put up no protest. She parted her lips and darted her tongue between my lips, and I welcomed it with my own. I was lost in the passion of our embrace. I was only half-aware of my hands as they groped the front of her blouse, squeezing her swelling breasts through the fabric of her garments. My hands had grasped the shirt's fabric and pulled outward as I pulled from the kiss. A tiny button struck my neck, and I could feel another bounce off my chest. In their wake, I was gifted with the image of Gwen's lace-clad breasts, supple and heaving with her every breath. I pulled her close again and brought my lips to her neck. She was fragrant with the scent of lavender, and her skin was slightly salty with the taste of sweat. I pawed at her back, caressing the muscles that moved and shifted under my hands. Her hands had gained a handhold on my tie and with one yank, the shorter end slipped through the knot and its form dissolved. I kissed, licked, and nibbled at the taut flesh of her neck and shoulder, my fingers fumbling with the clasp of her bra. A small part of me, uninterested in the sexual energies emanating from our heaving bodies, noted the irony that I could operate a moving vehicle while manually bringing Gwen to ecstasy, but I couldn't successfully undo a bra. The clasp suddenly released in my fingers, and that part of me involved in our passion play (needless to say, almost all of my remaining faculties) shouted, "Ha!" "What?" Gwen asked between moans and bites. She had my shirt half unbuttoned. "Uh, nothing," I said, and bit into her shoulder again, causing her to sink as her knees weakened. I felt slightly tangled in the loose blouse, and now the freed bra. I bent my elbows and took hold of her blouse, pulling it down her arms. She relinquished her efforts for a moment to allow me to relieve her of her abandoned vestment. After her sleeves were clear of her wrists, she shrugged her shoulders forward, and the bra rode her arms toward the ground and she caught it in an upturned hand. Both of us threw the discarded garments on the windshield. I wrapped a single arm around her waist, pulling her close to me again, and kissed the hollow created by her collar bone. She finished off the buttons of my shirt, exposing my chest, baring the slight coat of fur upon it. She slipped her hands over my shoulders while I continued to ravish her neck and shoulders. My shirt was soon off and bunched on the windshield with hers. She tossed her head back as I reached a sensitive spot and her hands found my hair and she ran her fingers through the thick locks, ushering my head downwards. I had ventured lower to the hills and valley of her breasts, and I took my time in my explorations; my mouth was joined by my hands as they caressed, kissed, squeezed, and licked in a physical harmony. The result was pure bliss for Gwen, who was writhing again, moaning her approval, and for myself, as

Gwen's encouragement pulled me deeper into arousal. I leaned back to give myself a moment to observe. Her breasts sloped from her chest into a full and graceful curve and tucked neatly below in a crease, created by the hard underwire of her forgotten lingerie. They were not large, but relative to her height and weight; large breasts might have looked unnatural on her. Her nipples extended about half an inch, and were encircled by a dark silver dollar sized areola. The tone of her skin was broken here, as a set of pale triangles cupped her breasts where a bikini top had obscured her to within decency. Even in the dark of the woods, you could make out the contrasting line between the secret and the public. The line was merely a tangent of her areola, and you could imagine just how close they were to being seen from beneath the bathing suit top. Even though only a couple seconds had passed, I could no longer restrain myself. I leaned down and took one of those nipples into my mouth and applied pressure, drawing the air to the back of my mouth and creating a vacuum. Gwen gasped in surprise and pleasure and wrapped her wrists behind my neck to draw me tight against her. The tip of her extension was well past my lips and I flicked my tongue over it, around it, trying everything to coax more out of her. My hands had resumed their own course again, and one had seized her right breast and was dexterously manipulating her nipple in pinches and tugs, while the other slipped as low as her knee before ascending behind the curtain of her skirt. By now, her nexus was not merely damp, but slick with her own natural dew. A finger slipped within her, and it was as if there was limited room within her, because at the same time, she released a delightful squeal. I drew my finger out, stroking the nearest wall as I did. As I did, I felt the ridge of her g-spot and pressed lightly against it as I continued to withdraw. Gwen shuttered again. My finger was now completely free of her depths, and coated with her wetness. My fingertip followed the folds of her labia and found their destination. Her nub was swollen, and even the act of finding it by touch sent shivers into her. I knew it wouldn't take long to bring her to climax, and I tried to fight my eagerness, to prolong it. I pet the sensitive spot with the length of my finger. I flicked at it rapidly with the tip. I encircled it with the flat of the last digit. Each variation elicited a new response, but in every motion, I couldn't stall the inevitable. She was beckoning in hands and words, in lips and pelvic thrusts. "Harder," Gwen said, half as an order, half as a plea. I wasn't one to disappoint, and I mashed my fingers firmly against her clit as I wagged them back and forth. She cried out, her orgasm filling her, and I watched her face contort in a wincing smile. My animalistic arousal was mixed with satisfaction with this climatic outcome. (No pun intended.) She clung tightly to me, her chest heaving irregularly as she fought to regain her normal breathing. I could feel that if she didn't, she would topple sideways along side the car. She recovered after a moment, and I was still stooped with half of my face pressed into her cleavage. I withdrew my hands, and she took the opportunity to lift me up and look into my eyes. She pressed her lips into mine again, and before I could elaborate on it, she pulled her face away. Beyond the trees, we heard a solitary car pass, and the thick branches almost completely obscured its headlights. She looked straight into my eyes and clearly and slowly spoke with conviction. "I need you. Right now. Inside me." Her words were broken by deep breaths. The next action may have been pure comedy to a casual observer, but to us, it was an act of desperation. We both grasped at my belt at the same time, fumbling at the buckle, and got in each other's way. This only kept up for a couple seconds, because I

resolved to end the battle and dove for her neck, clasp my lips upon it and ravishing her neck once more. I attained the result I was looking for: Gwen stopped and froze as if entranced. I imagined her eyes may have even unfocused. This left me able to undo and remove my own clothes. I reached into my pocket and palmed the square wrapper. With my belt undone and my fly open, my slacks dropped to my ankles. Even in her mesmerized state, Gwen must have been aware of what was going on, because her hands found the waist of my boxers. In my concentration on Gwen, I had become oblivious to my own aroused manifestation. Now, with the fabric sliding down the length of my erection as Gwen disrobed me, I was aware of every thread that caressed it. The tip peeked out of the elastic top, and with the underwear clear of my hips, Gwen let gravity take care of the rest and turned her attention elsewhere, namely my firm member. Her hands wrapped around it, and she held it loosely. I could feel her fingers slide from head to hilt, slowly, as if she needed to feel it blindly to know what it looked like. She repeated the action and it sent lightning through my nerves. Her grip tightened with each stroke, and I knew that if I was going to act, I needed to do so now, or she'd stroke me to orgasm. I disengaged from her neck, and scooped her up at the waist, sitting her on the blanketed hood of my car. This caused her to release my member, and with her hands free, she scooted up further, leaning back on her elbows. She raised her feet up so they were flat on the blanket and her knees were in the air. As a result, her skirt had ridden up to her waist, and I could see that the same pale contrast on her breasts was repeated across her pelvis. I wanted to merely jump on the car and take her, letting the beast within control me, but I still had an ounce of rationality in me. I tore open the package and produced a translucent condom, placed it on the tip, and unrolled it down the shaft. The wrapper fell from my hand and I stepped out of my pants and crawled on top of the hood, through the open gate created by Gwen's legs, and I hovered there, on my hands and knees. I could feel the heat irradiating from the metal hood beneath the blanket, diffused and made comfortable by its fabric. I advanced my hips forward until I could feel my phallus resting against Gwen's furry nexus. I could already feel the wetness of her through the thin latex, her hand reaching between us to grasp me in preparation, her fingers trembling slightly in anticipation. I leaned down and laid a kiss on her lips. Her hand had found me, and I felt my tip being guided along her labia and to the mouth of her vagina. I looked into her eyes and saw the pleading expression, pouring out of her very being. I neither could nor would deny her any longer. The first stroke brought me deep within her. It wasn't a thrust, but a steady, dedicated, purposeful plunge, meant for us to become acclimated to our sudden unison. I was in her fully and she was as aware of the sensation as I was. She was looking up to me with a look of wonder. She had pulled her hand from between us and placed both of her hands on my shoulders. I pulled back, and I could tell that her body didn't want that, as her vagina contracted around me. I obliged her and pushed into her again. With the thrust, she gasped. I thrust, she gasped. It seemed to be an unspoken understanding, and I began to contribute more, thrusting harder. Her gasps were accompanied by moans and her hips instinctively rose to meet mine. Her legs had encircled my hips, and we moved repetitiously. We were an organic machine, my erect staff pushing into the folds of her most private essence, and she received my every effort, and I was rightly rewarded with groans and caresses. I slid my torso lower so my lips could meet hers again, and I

grasped the back of her head and shoulder in order to gain more leverage, more ability to please her. She pulled my head aside suddenly, and in her sweet revenge, ravished my neck with kisses and bites as I had done to her. It was ecstasy, flawless and immortal, raw, absolute. We were no longer Gwen and Lance. We had never been, nor would we ever be. Names were mere labels in comparison to this, our form of worship. All that existed were the thrusts and the moans, and nail marks running down my back. "Yes, yes, oh God, yes," Gwen chanted as her climax splashed over her. Her already tight interior clenched harder on me. Tears were streaming over her cheeks, and I knew that it wouldn't take much to offer her more. I was similarly wasted by my own enveloping pleasure, but the animal within me knew I needed to give more, that if I had anything left, I would be a thief in the highest disgrace. I redoubled my efforts. She whimpered in appreciation. I knew that she was lost to the carnal sensations of her loins, and I felt the pangs of pride within for giving them to her. Faster, harder we moved, and our bodies struck each other in audible slaps. I could sense my nearing climax, and didn't want to be alone. I took a handful of hair and yanked her head to one side, trying to make sure not to cause her any discomfort, brought my mouth to her shoulder, and sank my teeth down upon it. The reaction was instant, and exactly what we wanted, what we needed. Her pelvis shot up into mine as waves of pleasure rippled under her skin. Her motions furthered my own excitement, and my eventual orgasm arrived. I thrust as deep as I could, my hilt pressed firmly against her, and I felt my explosion inside the prophylactic. I gasped for air as Gwen and I slowed to a halt. I pulled out from her and she released me from the grip of her legs. I climbed over her leg and lay next to her. She had her hands on the top of her stomach, and she was breathing desperately. She breathed out a few laughs and looked at me. I discarded the spent rubber and cuddled up to her. I leaned down and kissed her, for the first time softly. It wasn't a kiss of passion, but rather one of genuine affection, love. She glanced down and began laughing. I looked down curiously and saw, beyond our nude bodies, were two pairs of yet-clad feet. Her shoes were still affixed by a strap over the top, and I still wore socks and hiking boots. "Maybe we should get dressed," she whispered. I nodded in agreement, and slid off the hood, carefully placing my feet in the holes left by my crumpled underwear and slacks. I pulled them up my legs and secured them. Gwen had her bra on and was examining her blouse. "I just bought this!" she complained, noting the lack of buttons. "I loved this blouse! You owe me a new one!" She emphasized this with a pointed finger, but her face had an expression of amusement on it. "I couldn't help it," I chuckled in defense. I approached the back door and opened it. I unzipped the knapsack and withdrew a t-shirt and, digging deeper, a pair of lacy panties. I shut the door and handed the clothing to the woman on my hood. "Just be glad I came prepared this time." She merely rolled her eyes, and pulled the t-shirt over her head. It was black and clung to her torso, hinting at the gorgeous body underneath. I slipped my own shirt over my head, and watched sadly as she tugged the panties up her legs and into position under the skirt. Once dressed, she pulled me close to her again. We kissed for several minutes, tender, loving. I helped her hop off the hood and collected the blanket, wadding it in a ball and holding it under one arm as I opened her door. She slid into the seat and pulled her legs in. I pushed the door closed with a clack and drew around the car again. I paused a moment to toss the blanket in the backseat, and then entered my

side. The key was still in the ignition, and, with a turn, the car returned to life. "So, 'Lancelot,' " she teased, "do you always treat total strangers this way?" I leaned over and said softly, "Only the ones I marry. I love you, my wife." That brought a warm smile to her face and I lifted her hand to my lips and kissed it just above her wedding ring. "I love you too, Husband mine. By the way, what song did you pick?" She leaned over and kissed my lips. "Escape." I pulled the shifter into reverse and the car crept backwards. "The Pina Colada song?" she asked. I nodded in confirmation as I turned the wheel and the car headed for the road. "Did you remember to clean up this time?" the woman next to me asked. I rolled my smiling eyes, but I knew I'd forgotten again, and I'd have nearly a dozen torn wrappers to clean up now. I shrugged, admitting aloud, "Maybe I'll remember next week."