

*The best way to get the better of
temptation is just to yield to it.*
~Clementia Stirling Graham

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Fort Lee, Virginia, 2000

They were released from Friday night formation before dark. Captain Brown gave her obligatory speech to the gathered troops concerning a soldier's responsibility to represent the Army—and Whiskey Company in particular—in an honorable fashion. As she spoke, each soldier silently prayed that he or she would not be assigned to C.Q. duty and be forced to give up the weekend for the good of Uncle Sam.

Tru leaned forward from the line to look for Brittany, who was ten or so soldiers away. Brittany met her eyes for a quick second, and then she faced forward again. Finally, the unfortunate chosen soldiers were announced. Chosen, usually, according to their behavior during the previous week. Those selected broke rank with no less than reluctant chagrin and stood to the side of the Captain, and then she dismissed all the others. Each platoon raced for their respective barracks in a stampede to finish last minute preparations for the weekend.

Private Morgan detoured around the billets to call a cab from the pay phone at the corner and then hurried to her quarters for her overnight bag, anxious

to begin the weekend of freedom that all soldiers cherished.

Private Jabot waited at the picnic table in the smoking area when Tru came out. They indulged in chit-chat with the other departing soldiers, relating common experiences and plans for the weekend, and Tru noticed that Brittany was more carefully aloof than usual. "You still want to share a cab with me, Brit?"

Brittany put the tiny Capri cigarette to her full lips and took a pull, the glow of it forming a hazy nimbus around her piercing blue eyes. She considered Tru. "I guess. Which hotel are you staying at this weekend?"

"Well, it seems like everyone in Whiskey Company is going to the Comfort Inn in Hopewell. Supposed to be a big party. So I'm going to the Ramada in Petersburg."

"Me, too," She said simply. "Sure. Let's share the cab."

Tru saw Captain Brown emerge from the billets and promptly dropped her cigarette, calling the other soldiers in the smoking area to attention. The Captain returned Private Morgan's salute, responding, "As you were." In synchronization, the soldiers bent to pick up the cigarettes they had dropped when Tru called them to attention. "I hate when that happens," she told the others, smiling.

When the taxi arrived, the two of them collected their things and got in. The cabby, his face obscured by the darkness which had gathered quickly around them, was not the talkative sort, for which Tru was silently thankful.

Halfway into the trip, the glow of city lights on passing motels and buildings ushered in a sort of sluggish peace which seemed to descend on both of

them. Brittany interrupted the peace with a yawn, and leaned over to lay her head in Tru's lap. Endeared and excited by this, Tru toyed with her hair and stroked her back and neck tenderly, hoping for some reaction to tell her if Brittany's thoughts were her own. Had that passionate, wee-hour rendezvous at the barracks given Brittany ideas? If the C.Q. had not interrupted the liaison, would it have gone further?

Tru peered down at the supine young woman lying trustingly within arm's reach. *At least she can't run away in the back of a cab...and putting her head in my lap was an obvious invitation to move a boundary...* Tru let her hands convey those feelings which craved expression, and her touch met no protest. Brittany lay still and warm, yet silent, her cheek atop Tru's thigh.

When they arrived, Tru paid the cabby the full fare and tipped him a couple of dollars before they went inside to register. She turned to look at Brittany. "Want a room alone, or do you want to share the expense for that, too?"

Brittany pursed her lips and looked around in the wallet she held. "It can get expensive alone. I'll share, if you don't mind."

"I don't mind," Tru answered, almost too nonchalantly. *My heart doesn't seem to mind either. It's jumping up and down in my chest right now,* she thought.

The two women pooled their money on the desk and accepted the two keys. Brittany went to punch the elevator button and Tru joined her, telling Brittany she was going to leave her stuff at the desk while she ran over to the liquor store on the corner to get some wine, and then join her in the room. Brittany turned as she stepped in the elevator and said, "Chardonnay." Tru smiled as the doors closed between them.

When she returned, Brittany was puttering about, unpacking, and switching channels on the TV.

Finally alone together, they began to settle in, sipping the wine. To Tru, Brittany seemed no less elegant holding the plastic cup with the Ramada Inn logo on the side than if she had been holding a Waterford goblet.

She watched Brittany while leafing through a magazine that might as well have been upside down. Brittany—soft and inviting wearing that big pink shirt, her wavy, luscious blond hair falling free over her shoulders—knew that Tru watched her and was pleased without knowing why.

Brittany disappeared into the bathroom for long moments, and emerged with a plastic dish. “Want to help me frost my hair?”

Tru looked at her directly, happy for the opportunity to be near her for a justified reason. “Sure.” She tried not to seem overly enthused; birds tend to take wing when startled. And Brittany was like a bird. Freedom-loving, her flights controlled, but easily startled and fragile if handled roughly.

Brittany carried the mixture of gold highlights over to the bed and sat down, handing the dish to Tru. “Just use this brush and sort of paint in the highlights. Pretend you’re Picasso.”

“Picasso painted some pretty goofy-looking things in his day.”

“I’ll take my chances,” Brittany decided with a meaningful smile.

Tru refused to allow her hands to tremble as she held the dish with the mixture. Dabbing the brush, she held it aloft, studying Brittany’s hair for a starting place.

“Get the front first, then do it all over.”

Tru thought wistfully that this was how she wanted to make love to her, too. “I may not do this right—”

“It’s easy. Trust your instincts.”

Tru again found double meaning in those words—ironic, coming from Brittany. *Yeah, take your own advice, fraidy-cat.* She leaned down in front of Brit, aware of the soft scent of her perfume. *What was it?* If Tru were to give it a name, she would have called it, *Drive Me Crazy.* She tried not to inhale too often, but holding her breath was making her light-headed, so she had to rethink that action. Brushing the highlight mixture on gently, slowly, she purposefully prolonged the task. While Tru alternately studied her hair and stroked with the brush, Brittany watched her face, unmoving, but the awareness of Brit’s attention on her caused Tru’s heart to pump faster as those blue eyes flickered over her features. She took her time, leaning very close every so often in order to dab the areas she thought needed a highlight.

Tru tried several times to stop, fearing the continual closeness would make her do something rash, like toss the bowl across the room, grab this temptress, and fall on top of her in a lip-lock. There was some wisdom in the evolutionary design of humans; it was a matter of utility that they could not normally see the thoughts of others. Certainly, the images in Tru’s mind would have sent Brittany screaming down to the front desk to get another room.

The swift realization emerged that this opportunity to be near the object of her desire, was becoming personal torture on many levels. But Brittany coaxed Tru on, insisting that she needed more

highlights, though Tru was sure if it went on, the task could have been handled more quickly with a full color job, rather than strokes from a brush. It was rather like mowing the lawn with scissors. But Brittany was still not bolting for the door, nor showing any signs of discomfort. The shoe was on the other foot now. Brittany was perfectly content to drive a person crazy. Tru knew that foreplay came dressed in many disguises, but wondered if Brit fully understood that was what she was doing.

The process continued for over an hour, with Brit insisting on Tru's meticulousness, and Tru getting closer and closer to hyperventilation. Each time Tru leaned close to paint a strand, an ache settled at the apex of her thighs; a maddening itch that lived internally and thus, could not be scratched, except in the same way. Tru had never felt such an intense, vehement desire. She leaned down to face Brittany, checking the frontal appearance of the frost, their faces inches apart. Brit whispered, "Talk to me, Tru..."

The words sliced through her like a hot velvet knife, a knife Tru wished would cut her again and again, while she lay spent in grateful pools of blood. "About what?"

"Whatever it is you're thinking."

Tru cleared her throat quickly and continued to paint. "You don't want to know what I'm thinking."

"Maybe I do."

Tru met her eyes, seeking verification. "Okay. I was thinking that you're the most beautiful woman I've ever seen."

"Thank you."

"Welcome."

"What else?" Brittany urged.

Tru feared she would not survive this conversation, much less the rest of the evening. "What do you want me to say?"

"Just talk to me, Tru. I like your voice."

Tru's mind looped into chaos. She considered telling a joke, but doubted she could remember one. It was so much easier to sing a song on stage to a room of strangers, than to speak intelligible words to this woman who vexed her so. She considered a story about her childhood but couldn't decide which one. She considered the truth about what she had really been thinking, along the lines of *'why don't you just lie down and let me do wonderful things to you?'* but worried that her admission would result in the sudden flight of the Brittany-bird. Mysteriously, she wanted the torture to continue; she was the prisoner in love with her chains. At least by frosting her hair, she could be near this tantalizing creature who made her ache in places she had forgotten. "I have no idea what to say," she admitted honestly.

"Do I make you nervous, Tru?"

Each time Tru heard her own name from that throat, she felt blood rise to the surface of her skin in sundry locations. Brittany might as well have taken a section of Tru's soul and kissed it. "Why do you ask?"

"Your hands are trembling."

"Too much coffee today, I guess."

"Your face is red," she pressed.

Tru blurted the first excuse that came to mind. "It's hot in here."

"No—" Brit tapped a finger on Tru's chest. "It's hot in here."

The tiny circle where her finger had been began to burn as if a lit cigarette had been held to her skin, and

Tru believed she'd have to stifle an oncoming scream. Instead, she huffed and relaxed her arms to raise up, put the color on the chest of drawers, and lit a cigarette.

"I think that's enough," Brit said, smiling at her hair in the mirror, and disappearing into the bathroom.

Tru slammed a hand against her chest and took a deep breath and blew it out shakily. "I think that's too much," she corrected softly.

With Brit in the bathroom, Tru used the time to regain an alarming degree of lost composure. *Brittany is straight, and is teasing me...But oh, how exciting is the game.* Tru stretched out on the bed to finish her cigarette, angry at the blood pounding between her thighs. Had there been anyone who had affected her this way? Her first lover had evolved into her best friend, and most of her other relationships had been short-lived. She always seemed to hook up with the "new meat"—the women who had never been with another woman. This scenario always ended in the same fashion: another woman would intrigue the newcomer, and Tru would see only the flying gravel from her pursuing heels.

Each of them had intrigued or fascinated her in some way. But an unfamiliar energy thrived between herself and Brittany, defined partially by Tru's view of Brittany as the first woman she found stunning and classically beautiful. A lot could be said for physical attraction. Personality and inner beauty aside, the hormones respond best to visual stimulation, and they don't give a flying rat's ass whether or not the stimulation is spiritually profound or one dimensional. This is at the crux of all sexual impropriety. It feels

good to be horny and it feels good to be close to beauty.

Tru heard bath water running and knew Brittany would be closed up in there for a while longer. She imagined Brittany getting undressed and stepping into the steamy water, easing herself down slowly into the warm bubbles...the expression of pleasure that would be on her face...Tru shook the image away and put out her cigarette, which had burned down to the filter. Instead, she recalled that silky Texas voice: *Talk to me, Tru...* and shivered violently. Tru wanted her fiercely—even knowing that Brit toyed with her and that her needs were more likely than not to remain unquenched.

“Tru—” came that voice beyond the door. “Would you bring me some wine?”

Tru sat up, aware that she’d have to walk in and pretend that Brittany was a friend—naked in the tub. She poured the wine, spilling some and cursing. She carried it to the door, and knocked. “Are you decent?” She tried to sound flippant.

“That’s debatable,” came the reply.

Tru took a steadying breath and opened the door.

The bubbles sheathed Brittany up to her underarms. Had there been no bubbles, Tru would have certainly lost her aplomb. *Thank God for bubbles...damn the bubbles...* She set the wine on the edge of the tub and turned to the mirror, trying to get away from the image of her. But there it was. Their eyes met in the glass.

“Thanks, Hon’,” she said, leaning forward to have a sip, the skin of her shoulders like polished ivory, inviting Tru to look further, to the way her breasts were now visible amid the bubbles.

Tru picked up the brush and ran it through her regulation short, black hair, knowing that if she left too abruptly, she'd give herself away.

"Something wrong?" Brit asked sweetly.

Tru sighed. "Not a thing. Enjoy your bath." She escaped out of the room, seethingly angry that she had blown her cover.

Much later Brittany came out in a skimpy hotel towel...*(was it a hand towel, for chrissakes?)* and crossed in front of the bed where Tru lounged. Brittany turned her back on Tru and dropped the towel. Tru closed her eyes quickly, flatly denying herself the pleasure of watching her get dressed for bed.

Brittany sat at the foot of the bed and stared at the TV, apparently engrossed with an old episode of Dallas and rubbing her neck.

"Homesick?" Tru asked, pointing to the program.

"Aren't we all." She continued to massage her neck.

"What's wrong with your neck? Is it stiff?"

"And my feet are cold..." she muttered.

"What?" Tru had heard her, and immediately checked to see if Brit was wearing socks. She was. Then she wondered if she had only wished for another meaning in her words; wished for Brittany to return her feelings.

"Nothing. Would you rub it for me, Tru?"

Put my hands on that beautiful neck in a platonic fashion?! Glad for a quick moment that Brit had not turned to look at her; Tru was certain that the exclamation which had darted through her mind was manifested on her face. "Sure." She endured the shame of being easily lured into the abyss of subservience. First the frosting, then the wine in the bath, then this.

Somewhere in Dante's circles of hell, there had to be a level where vixens reside, and torture the hormones of their victims. Wasn't that the Lust Circle?

"Tru—?" Brittany turned, then, questioning Tru's hesitancy. "Are you going to do it?"

Tru's mind groaned, *Dear God, I hope so!* and she made a valiant effort to ignore it. Brittany gathered her hair together in the back and lifted the length of it up and around in front of her. Tru perched on her knees behind her and began to knead the muscles at her shoulders, rudely aware that they were very relaxed, as were the muscles in her neck. She knew for sure, then, that she was being baited—Brittany, the juicy, inviting worm, and Tru, the hungry, stupid fish. "Better?"

"Mmmm..." she moaned. "That feels great."

You have no idea, Tru wanted to say, but kept it to herself.

Eventually, Brittany decided she wanted an entire back rub, and positioned herself on the bed, without any statement of acquiescence from Tru, assuming correctly that Tru would oblige.

Astonished by the intense pleasure she received from touching Brittany's back, Tru knew she would have performed the massage for as long as Brittany wanted. Until her fingers fell off and rolled onto the floor...But moments later, Brittany thanked her, got up, and offered to respond in kind. Tru felt like a child who'd been offered sprinkles for her favorite ice cream. Was she testing herself to see what her reaction would be upon touching a woman with romance in mind? Whatever the reason, the sensation of Brittany's hands on her body only made the flame burn a little higher, and tonight she would simply have to take the

Big Chance. But only when the time felt right, or if Brittany gave her some sort of signal. Until then, Tru could only manufacture a mental fire hose to douse the flames.

Much later, after enjoying the delivered pizza, spending some time reading and talking about home and any other subject they could cover safely, Tru sat on the edge of Brittany's bed to refill her wine. Awkwardly, Brittany studied Tru and seemed to want to say something, but finally gave up and turned out the lamp. They both sat there in the neon-pierced shadows, drinking wine, the only sounds an occasional vehicle outside, and their breathing.

Brittany set her cup aside, and snuggled down into the blankets. Tru poured herself more wine, hoping it would help calm her wildly bouncing pulse, her mind a jumble of scenarios, each one more steamy than the last, while Brittany watched her in the cover of darkness. She heard Brit sigh.

"Can't you sleep?" she asked softly.

"No...I think I need..."

Tru twisted to face her. "What do you need, Brit?"

Brittany remained quiet so long that Tru thought she might never answer; that perhaps she had even fallen asleep. But then, "I need you to hold me." — and she turned her back to Tru.

Tru swallowed the heartbeat that vaulted into her throat, and peeled back the covers. Sliding in behind Brit, she put her arms around her and waited. Tru could almost hear their heartbeats in the silence of the room, and could not, would not ignore her ache this time. She touched Brittany's hair, unable to resist the scintillating locks, captured in the shard of neon dancing through the slightly parted curtains; she

brushed the pale, saffron strands away from her cheek as Brit lay facing the wall away from Tru. Tru moved closer, to kiss her temple softly. Brittany made a slight, indecipherable sound, but did not pull away. Tru pressed closer, feeling the silent energy passing between their bodies, aware that Brit's pounding heart marched in cadence with her own.

Tru swept her hand slowly along Brit's thigh, coming to rest at her hip. Brit moaned softly and moved against her, as Tru kissed her hair, temple, cheek, and moved to her neck as Brittany offered it to her. Tru pushed Brit's shoulder down so that they faced each other. In her eyes, Tru saw fear and longing. "I care for you so much," Tru whispered. A quick breath escaped Brittany's lips, and she said nothing. Tru kept her eyes open as she bent slowly to touch her lips to that soft cheek. She bent back and watched as Brittany took a breath and moistened her lips, closing her eyes.

Tru dropped kisses from Brit's cheek to the corner of her mouth, pausing a moment before she pressed her lips against Brittany's. Tru withdrew, waiting for a signal. Brittany sighed and whispered Tru's name almost inaudibly, and Tru kissed her again, deeper, gradually exploring her mouth as Brittany met the kiss and her arms came around Tru's shoulders. Tru teased Brit's mouth with her tongue, pulling back slightly when Brit tried to deepen the kiss. Tru felt fingernails press into her back, and cringed in pleasure. Releasing a bit more of her ascending passion, Tru explored the young woman's body; first with her hands, then with her mouth.

Freeing the buttons of Brit's nightshirt, Tru caressed the swell of Brittany's breasts and let her lips

do the same. To Tru it felt like a ceremony—a ritualistic lovemaking as homage to a goddess. Brittany breathed faster, and Tru allowed her kisses to travel down to the pink areola, drawing the nipple into her mouth and suckling gently. A line from Shakespeare appeared in her mind: *Where the bee sucks, there suck I...* Brittany moaned suddenly, digging her nails deeper into Tru's shoulders. Tru continued, moving to the other breast for more of the same, and then eased her way down to Brit's stomach, leaving small wet circles with her tongue. *How far will she let me go?* Tru wondered, her own breathing inconsistent, her heart frantic, bruising, against her chest. She decided to find out.

Sitting up, she grasped the sides of Brit's bikini-briefs and waited. Brittany lay there, eyes closed, her breasts undulating with her breathing, the fabric of the pink nightshirt haloing the round fullness of her breasts, where it lay scrunched above them, the nipples erect and serving as a barrier the shirt could not pass to cover her skin; they were fresh cherries, ripe and inviting. Brittany lifted her hips, allowing Tru to remove the fabric between Tru's passion, and Brit's need.

Tru absorbed the sight of her, trembling and vulnerable, eyes still shut tight, and traced her fingers, feather-like, from Brittany's neck, over her breasts, sides, hips, and down both legs. She placed her knees between the young woman's thighs, and stroked the sensitive inside of them with the backs of her hands. A shiver tickled Brit's body and Tru wanted badly for her to open her eyes, or speak. But she did neither.

She parted Brittany's thighs without an objection, and settled between them. Opening her gently, Tru

tasted the sweetness of her, gleaning a new and different moan from her throat. Gently, lovingly, she explored her most intimate place, taking her time with the ceremony. She slaked Brittany's thirst steadily; eager, yet restrained, but certainly with no thought of ceasing. Tru was overjoyed long, excruciating minutes later, when Brittany caught her breath and called out her name, her body arching off the bed, rigid in the fist of searing sweetness. She dug her nails into Tru's skin, and shuddered...

Tru lay her cheek on Brit's thigh, swallowing on a sigh, and then gazed up at her. "Look at me, Brit."

Brittany pressed her lips together and shook her head, whispering, "I can't."

Tru captured her hand and squeezed it. "Look at me."

Brittany opened her arms in an inviting gesture, her eyes still closed, exposed by a passion she could not understand. "Come here."

Tru crawled up to her, wiping away the wetness from her chin with the corner of the sheet. She held her, kissed her. "Are you sorry?"

"No."

"Why can't you look at me?"

"I can't." She pulled Tru closer. "Just hold me."

Tru held Brittany, settling in close, knowing she was hooked, and wondering if that was good or bad.