

# WHEN DC LOVED IOWA



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## Acknowledgments

This novella is the result of a stubborn character who simply refused to die. Bitchy frenemy and TV finance journalist Cynthia Redwell was loathed by readers of *The Red Files*—and for good reason.

The icy side character was a little more likable in *Under Your Skin* as Catherine Ayers’s amused best friend at Catherine and Lauren’s Iowa wedding.

In a moment of madness, I decided it would be hilarious to write a short story about this cynical, sarcastic, image-conscious, closeted lesbian waking up in bed after that wedding with a new “friend.”

The friend would be Suze, a short, round flight mechanic from Iowa who used to be a softball player—the absolute antithesis of everything Cynthia is. Worse, Suze would give as good as she got and unbalance Cynthia’s view of her world. *When DC Met Iowa* was born.

There I thought Cynthia would stay forever—rueful and hungover, a sort of sad but still haughty figure caught up in her secrets and pain. Then, recently, I thought I could give her a proper ending. Two more short stories about Cynthia would do the trick, I decided.

As if Cynthia would settle for so little being written about her! Before I knew it, those extra short stories kept expanding and finally this novella was born.

It was also great fun to revisit the eternally playful Monique Carson from *Hotel Queens* and *Number Six*.

All credit for this book goes to Astrid Ohletz, my friend, occasional beta reader, and publisher at Ylva. She was one who insisted that there was still much more to my ice queen's tale.

Thanks also goes to my invaluable content editor Sarah Ridding, and beta readers Laura C., Mary M., and Carolyn Bylotas, who have a wonderful enthusiasm and a good eye for what's missing.

I hope you'll enjoy one of my iciest ice queens' journey to happiness.

# Chapter 1

## When DC Met Iowa

Cynthia Redwell awoke with a grimace and a mouth as dry as her last Economics in Journalism conference.

*Christ, that must have been some wedding reception.*

It was a bit hazy now. There had been imbibing. Party games. More imbibing. Cynthia offering her fabulously biting snark about the perils of the Midwest to...to? A blurry face swam in and out of view. Whoever. Someone.

*Oh well.* What's the worst she could have gotten up to? Besides, what happens in Iowa stays in Iowa, right? Wasn't that a thing? It should be.

Yawning, she glanced around as her brain slowly dithered into focus.

She frowned. Unless the Grand Millennium was now stocking up on Smurf-blue Target sheet sets and decorating walls with butch female sport stars, she'd gone home with a...new friend...last night.

Glancing uneasily to her side, Cynthia discovered a human-shaped lump in the bed. Oh. Well, it wouldn't be the first time, but she usually carefully vetted her one-night stands for discretion first. God only knew what this one's predilection for spreading gossip was. She bit her lip.

Of course, she could be overreacting. There might be an innocent explanation. A lateness issue? Some friendly local had explained they only lived around the corner, and would she like to...bunk in?

*For God's sake.* Even hungover and with a brain firing on half a cell, that sounded about as believable as her best friend, Catherine's, insistence she hadn't been into some brash Iowan. And look where Cynthia was now. Enduring the headache-thumping, wash-up from Catherine's wedding to said Iowan girl, Lauren.

Still, a good reporter checks her sources and examines the evidence.

Lifting the sheets cautiously, Cynthia ascertained her own body was indeed entirely naked. And, given some twinging muscles as her thighs shifted, it appeared she'd done more than cuddling up for warmth last night.

Cynthia huffed out a breath. Well. It'd be nice to remember her apparent night of chandelier swinging. Unless her bed partner had been unspectacular? Maybe that was it?

She prodded the buried lump through the thick comforter. "Hey."

"Mmph. G'backtasleep."

"Where am I?"

"With me. Sleep now."

"And you are?"

The lump flung back the sheets a foot and revealed itself to be a thirty-something brunette with a freckled face, wide, full-lipped mouth, and broad shoulders. Short, squat, and solid. Like a weightlifter, only rounder. Cynthia blinked.

This nuggety woman with a proud, strong jaw and flashing brown eyes was the antithesis of every perfectly manicured stick-insect she'd ever bedded. Since she usually only bedded colleagues, she supposed that figured. There was a bland conformity to TV women, right down to the blonde hair, lean limbs, and dazzling white teeth. Cynthia was right out of the same mold herself.

She wasn't sure whether to be surprised at her unexpected choice under the influence of local swill, or ponder her drunken ass's sense of humor.

“Well...you’re different,” she muttered.

“And by that you mean to say, ‘good morning’, and ‘you’re cute’.” The woman elbowed Cynthia. “Right?”

She actually *was* cute, in a tomboyish sort of way. Compared to Cynthia’s lean exclamation-mark of a body honed with Pilates, spin class, and green shakes, this woman screamed strength and solidness in a way Cynthia found appealing. Her edgy spunk was excellent, too. She’d be no pushover. Christ, how Cynthia disdained weak women. So maybe Cynthia’s drunken ass knew more about her tastes than her sober ass realized.

But there was no point encouraging the girl by offering random compliments. That might spark an expectation of round two of likely more forgettable bedroom calisthenics from this robust Iowan.

Cynthia had no time for that. All she wanted was to get caffeinated, dressed, get on a plane, and get the hell out of Iowa for good... Even if this woman’s wide, curling mouth was all sorts of alluring.

Enough of that. Time to commit to the exit strategy. “Right, well, um...” Cynthia peered at her bedmate, hoping a name would leap into her synapses. The silence dragged on for an uncomfortable beat.

“Suze,” she supplied with a knowing look. “Seriously, Cynthia? After last night, I’d have thought you’d at least remember my name.”

“I can’t even remember last night, let alone the finer points on names, occupations, or various pets.” Cynthia’s gaze roamed the room. *Where in hell are my clothes?*

Suze sat up, the sheet falling away, revealing an ample pair of bare breasts. It curtailed whatever grumpy inner-monologue Cynthia was working up to as she stared at the impressive sight.

*Oh my.* Why couldn’t she recall playing with those? Cynthia’s brain gave a pained whimper at the loss.

“You don’t remember your awesome beer-pong buddy?” Suze snorted. “Or the rest?”

Good God, she'd dearly love to remember the rest right now.

"Name's Suzette Beringer. Occupation: former softball legend. Currently: mechanic and bed buddy. Also: Lauren's best friend from college and highly sleep deprived. Pets: one pug named Buttcheeks. Do *not* start on his name. My ex named him, and I can't change it because it's all he damn well answers to."

*I hooked up with a beer-pong player who owns Buttcheeks the dog.*

"You think less of me now, don't you?" Suze asked, giving her a quizzical look.

"Yes, definitely," Cynthia confirmed. "But don't worry, the bar was set low. You being an Iowan and all." Her smirk was as wicked as her words.

"You know, the cracks about my home state were funnier when I was trying to get in your pants."

Cynthia blinked. Rather than sounding offended, as most people were by her deliberately acidic tongue, Suze looked faintly...amused. The woman shrugged and ran her fingers through cropped brown hair, doing little to erase the bed hair at the back.

*Okay, what is happening here?* She tried again.

"So, *Iowa*, you're a mechanic? You're a walking oil slick, like Lauren's knuckle-dragging brothers?" Cynthia was almost impressed at the dollops of disdain she'd managed to inject into just two sentences. Not that she had anything against mechanics; after all, she loved Dino back in DC for keeping her beloved Audi purring. But how on earth was some cute lay from Outer Hicksville immune to her finely honed slings and arrows?

"I'm a *flight* mechanic. I work at the airport. Why? Need some duty free?" she drawled, dragging her sheet back up to cover her chest.

Cynthia's brain all but pouted as the glorious sight disappeared from view. *Focus*. Her evil super power was failing. That had to be it. Maybe she needed refueling. "I need coffee." Where was the kitchen, anyway? She looked around again. "Is this your place?"

“For an economics expert you’re pretty slow, aren’t you?” Suze tutted, eyes gleaming with amusement. “Who else’s?” She waved at the walls.

Cynthia’s gaze took in the various knickknacks. A University of Iowa college degree; the writing too small to ascertain the subject. Smartass Comebacks 101 probably. Numerous softball trophies. A framed poster of the singer, Pink. Signed team poster of the US national softball squad. *Wait... Did that upstart just call me slow? Me?*

Her eyes narrowed. “I’ve written three books on the economy,” Cynthia blurted before she could stop herself. *Oh God.* That sounded almost...desperate for approval.

“I wrote a pamphlet once for work,” Suze retorted. “*Safety Tips for Employees Working in the MRO Hangar.* It was well received by critics. Five stars all round.”

*Oh my God. Not only have I lost my killer touch, I’m being mocked.*

Not that she didn’t deserve it. After all, Cynthia had been the one to start this bitchy dawn duel. She needed her A-game. “Coffee,” Cynthia ground out. “Oh, and that’s a requirement, not a request.”

“Make it yourself.” Suze’s lips twitched. “Kitchen’s downstairs. It’s too early for me to move. Besides, I’m not the best at hopping to orders from stuck-up DC chicks trying to rile me up for shits and giggles.”

Total. Super power. Fail. She’d been out-snarked by a damned Midwest grease monkey. It was end times. “Fine.” Cynthia threw back the bedcovers to get her coffee.

Cynthia paused midway to the door when Suze’s appreciative gaze roamed her, only then realizing she’d been too irked to notice that she was stark naked. She puffed out her chest a little, relieved she had at least some power left. “Like what you see?”

“You bet. But I’ve got simple tastes. Being an Iowan and all.”

Okay, that was a surprisingly excellent riposte. Cynthia tried hard not to laugh—one’s debating rivals should never know when they’ve won a point—and instead rolled her eyes.



Snatching a red silk robe off a hook on the back of the door, she put it on. It was far too short; only an inch away from breaching public decency laws.

*That's what you get for dallying with a garden gnome.* She snorted to herself, heading downstairs.

She padded to the kitchen. Before long, she found the necessities, and made a coffee. Then, feeling somewhat benevolent on account of having a good sparring partner, reached for a second cup.

She carried the coffees back upstairs and placed Suze's on the bedside table next to her.

Suze lifted her eyebrows at the offering and took a sip. "I'm probably going to regret asking this, DC, but how'd you know how I like my coffee?"

"Simple. Black, because it matches your soul, and three sugars because I can tell you have a sweet tooth."

"A fat crack? How original. I'll have you know there's muscle under this mass."

Cynthia frowned at Suze's interpretation of her words. No, it hadn't been a damned fat crack. At least she didn't look put out, even patting her rounded stomach over the sheet. But then, people usually hid their insecurities well. Lord knew, Cynthia had them by the U-Haul load. Trust issues, ten-foot high walls, and self-loathing lesbian pretty much covered them.

While she ordinarily wouldn't give the slightest flicker of concern about what people thought of her commentary on their lives, for some reason it bothered her that Suze might feel judged for her body. Which, as her brain had already made clear, Cynthia found decidedly appealing.

"It wasn't a comment about your weight," she murmured, sipping her own coffee. "I appreciate your body. It's unique. It's you."

Suze's eyes narrowed with suspicion as she turned that over. "Are you making fun of me?"

“No. I’ve decided I rather like you, in spite of your atrocious taste in birthplaces. You’re different. And trust me, in my world, that’s as scarce as an honest politician.”

“So, we’re doing honesty now?” Suze chuckled. “Okay. I can do that too. I’m flexible.”

“Are you?” Cynthia purred, wishing very hard she could remember what they’d gotten up to last night.

“You really don’t remember, do you? Any of it?”

A faint blush warmed Cynthia’s cheeks, much to her annoyance. “Not so much.” She sighed. “Which is to say, not at all.”

“Ah.”

“But if I was to take an educated guess,” Cynthia began, smiling, “I’d suggest we drank a lot, played beer pong, I thrashed you at that, and we made out in some discreet location. Then, overwhelmed by my sensational kisses, you invited me home. After...hmm...*three* glorious orgasms, you fell asleep in a tangle of sheets, knowing you’d never been had so well. Am I close?”

Suze laughed hard at that one. Actually...a little too hard.

“Well, you were right about the beer pong. But I *let* you thrash me.”

“Unlikely. I’m very competitive.”

“And I’m a former softballer remember? I can whip anyone at a throwing game. Well, anyone except Lauren. So, yes, there was beer pong. And you won. And you were so happy that you kissed me. And it was sort of a sloppy, messy kiss, if I’m being honest...”

Cynthia shot her a withering look.

“Hey, I doubt my kissing was much better.” Suze laughed at her outrage. “We were both barely standing by that point. Then we might have dirty danced around the fire pit at one a.m., giving all Lauren’s ancient older relatives a bit of a show; but her brothers certainly appreciated it. I’m deaf in one ear from all their hollering.”

“God.” Cynthia’s mouth fell open. She’d made a spectacle of herself? How embarrassing.

“Then Lauren’s dad suggested maybe it was time to call it a night, because some of the oldies had weak hearts. Which made you laugh and laugh and announce that I’d take you home to my place.”

“How magnanimous of me,” Cynthia observed. “I gather you were okay with me cavalierly inviting myself over?”

“Oh, yep. I may have said ‘Hot damn’ a little too loudly. So Lauren’s dad drove us back to my place on account of us being fifty sheets to the wind. The whole way home, you were singing songs with dirty lyrics about big-boobed women. Owen was blushing redder than a tomato.”

*Poor man.* Did they make cards that read, ‘*Sorry I Was a Horndog In Your Earshot?*’

So much for discretion.

“Right, so we get inside, and you kissed me against the door, then started flinging your clothes off downstairs. By the way, your bra’s on the TV...”

So *that’s* where her clothes were.

“We get upstairs to the bedroom. I apply my signature moves...” Suze waggled her eyebrows. “You swooned and had a mind-blowing orgasm courtesy of yours truly, but then passed out halfway through reciprocating. No follow-through.” She scowled. “Like, shit. It was seriously disappointing.”

“Reciprocat—” Cynthia frowned. She’d been a lousy lay?

“That means I missed my turn. Aren’t you DC economics types supposed to know the big words?” Suze nudged her.

“I know what it means. I’m just a little unsure what to make of it. I’ve never ever...”

“Well now you have,” Suze said. “Don’t worry. I’m sure it could happen to anyone... Not performing.”

Not performing? Cynthia prized herself on being as competitive as the next blackened soul that inhabited DC. There was no challenge she'd not crushed. This was completely unacceptable.

"Holy shit, you look so appalled! Like, this is some failing of personal honor."

"It is," Cynthia said darkly. She gave her an arch look. "Satisfaction guaranteed is my motto. Even if I don't like the woman that much, she always leaves with a smile on her face."

That brought Suze up short. "Wait, what?" She peered at her. "Why would you take home someone you don't even like?"

Cynthia's head snapped up. "What do you mean? Do you like everyone you sleep with?"

"Of course!" Suze gaped at her. "Why else would I want them in my home? In my bed?"

"For release?" Cynthia suggested with a shrug. "A way to pass the time?"

"Then use a vibrator!" Suze side-eyed her. "Is that what I am too? Someone you didn't like very much but wanted to pass a few hours with before your flight left?"

Cynthia would have loved to dismantle the woman's self-righteousness with a snarky 'Yes'. But that would be a complete lie, and she was allergic to them. "No," she sighed. "I already told you. I like you. God knows why right at this minute. You're more annoying than bikini-line regrowth. And I swear if you tell anyone about us..."

"You mean anyone *else*? Beyond Lauren's huge extended family who all saw you plant one on me and dirty-dance me around the fire pit? Not to mention Lauren's friend, that LA publicist? And her other friends from LA, Josh and Tad? And..."

"All right, Jesus, I get the picture. The horse has bolted." She waved her hand and added, in deference to their location, "Or cow. Whatever." She was screwed.

“Why do you care so much?” Suze gave her a curious look. “You’re not ‘out’ at work, I take it? Because you work in TV?”

“I’m not out at all. Anywhere. Or, rather, I wasn’t. Apparently Iowan weddings change a person’s settings from discreet to raging queer.”

“I’m fairly sure it’s in the brochure in your hotel room. Should have read the fine print.”

There was a pause as Cynthia digested that, and finally she laughed. “God! Oh God.” She sank her head into her hands.

“Look, seriously, stop freaking out. Lauren’s and Catherine’s LA friends won’t tell. They’re really nice. And who’re Lauren’s family going to talk to? No one even knows who you are around here, anyway. You’re fine, okay?”

Tension eased from Cynthia’s shoulders a little. That was true. “You know the irony of this is rich. For two years I’ve been getting some hilarious mileage out of Catherine getting together with an Iowan ex-softballer. *Now* look at me.”

“Slumming it, are we?”

“Hardly. I’ve just lost my mockery advantage. It’s...inconvenient. And I’m usually so much better at impulse control. Beer pong? Bedding the cute butch at my best friend’s wedding? Not so much.”

“You think I’m cute then?” Suze grinned.

“Regrettably for my once stellar, straight reputation, you are appallingly cute.”

“You’re not bad yourself. For a snooty DC bitch.”

“You think I’m a bitch?”

“Oh, you are. And you love it. Tell me I’m wrong.”

“You’re not.”

“Why do you do it?” Suze cocked her head, looking intrigued. “The mega-bitch routine?”

“It’s just easier.”

“Than?”

“Dealing with people. Entanglements. Interpersonal nonsense. Enduring assholes at work. They all steer clear of me, which is how I prefer it. Oh, there are *plenty* of assholes in my industry.”

“Yeah?”

“Definitely.” She set her coffee cup down before she gave into the urge to hurl it. “Christ. Do you know I used to be a ‘valuable resource’ and ‘top on-air talent’. That’s what my boss called me. Then I hit forty. I was moved into minor management with only occasional on-air slots. I suppose it was to avoid viewers having their retinas burned by the shocking sight of an older woman analyzing economic data.”

“That’d suck.” Sympathy edged Suze’s eyes. “Fortunately, Boeings don’t give a fuck how old or pretty the hands fixing them are.”

How weird would that be? To have a job based solely on ability? Cynthia couldn’t even imagine it. “Don’t you find it hard, working in such a male-dominated industry? Especially around here?”

Suze shrugged. “Any of the boys who gave me trouble in the early days got a wrench waved around for their trouble.”

“They were scared of a wrench?” Cynthia couldn’t picture it.

“I never said *where* I threatened to use it.” Suze cackled. “Honestly? Now I’m just one of the boys. It’s fine.” She drained the last of her coffee and set the cup aside. “Tell me, how’d you meet Catherine? She’s not on TV. Or into economics.”

“We go way back. Back to when we were both young and working at the same newspaper together. As the only two women on staff, we gravitated toward each other. And we each had something the other wanted.”

“Oh?” Suze leaned forward. “Wait, you two didn’t ever hook up?”

“Never.” *Not for lack of trying on my part.* Cynthia smirked. “I taught her how to handle the macho culture in newsrooms. How to stand up for herself better. She was so withdrawn and dedicated, used to saying nothing, just giving off these lethal glares if anyone gave her a hard time.

But a vicious look doesn't cut it. I was the one who told her it was okay to say what she was really thinking. She became the Caustic Queen because of me."

"You gave her courage?" Suze asked.

"Oh no. Cat's one of the bravest and strongest people I know. She's been to hell and back and survived. No, I simply gave her permission to let herself off the leash."

"And what did she do for you? You said you each had something the other wanted."

Cynthia debated whether to answer. Well, it's not like she'd ever see Suze again. With a wry smile, she admitted, "She taught me how to talk the way she does. I had TV ambitions but didn't sound the part. My first lesson in speaking properly came straight from Catherine's correctly enunciated Bostonian vowels."

"No shit."

"Mmm."

"How did you speak before that?"

"Let me put it this way: I learned that if you ever want to be taken seriously, don't sound like something the redneck dragged in." She wagged a finger at Suze. "It's a lesson for us all. Especially those in Middle America."

"This again?" Suze snorted.

Cynthia shrugged. "It's a reflex. I'd apologize but I don't say things I don't mean."

"Pissing all over the Midwest is like a party trick for you, though, you do it so often."

"It's just too easy." Cynthia grinned. "Like shooting fish in a barrel. Or eating buffalo chicken pizzas at Casey's, if you want the local equivalent."

Suze's eyes went wide. "Holy shit."

"What?"

"Now it all becomes clear."

“What does?” Cynthia was mystified.

“Only a local would cite Casey’s. Is that why you harp on Iowa so much? How long did you live here for anyway?”

Cynthia would so love to deny it. To wipe away the memories that had shaped her...and stained her.

Suze’s hand reached over and clasped hers. “Come on, share?”

Her tone was shaded into concern enough to make Cynthia hesitate about shutting the conversation down instantly.

*Is it safe enough to say the words out loud?*

The difficult words had such painful, sharp edges that they always stuck in her throat. Only Catherine knew her past.

“I moved around a lot as a child. Not just place to place, but family to family.”

“Family to...” Understanding lit in Suze’s eyes. “Foster kid?”

Cynthia nodded grimly.

“So you wound up here at some point?” Suze guessed.

“Unfortunately.”

“For how long?”

“I was actually born here,” Cynthia admitted through gritted teeth. “And I stayed only until I was old enough to bolt.” Fear and wariness filled her at the thought the woman might ask for more details. Her hand tensed under Suze’s.

“So, your voice,” Suze asked instead, “you used to sound like an Iowan? And Catherine taught you to sound like her?”

“Something like that.” Cynthia exhaled, relieved to be on safer ground.

“And now you just endlessly poke sticks at the Midwest? Like your subconscious is striking back?”

“It’s common to criticize what we hate about ourselves. To be honest, it’s not the place I hate as much as the asshole family I lived with. It’s hardly Iowa’s fault. But I think part of me blames it for even existing.



When I left here, I rid myself of all of it. From the dust on my shoes to the pedestrian brown of my hair.” Cynthia waved at her blonde bob.

“I get it.” Suze’s voice was sincere.

“You do?”

“Yeah. You didn’t want just an oil change when you got out of here. You wanted the whole engine overhaul. New place, voice, look, everything, right? So, you became someone else. Someone opposite. Although, y’know, you can completely rebuild a Dodge, but there’ll still be a bit of it left under the hood.”

“Perhaps. But every day I get closer to finally getting out of Dodge.”

“Ha!” Suze laughed. “Damn, that’s clever.”

“Thank you.” Cynthia smiled, and flicked at the tie on her borrowed red robe. “And you have an eye for quality.”

“Modest, too.” Suze shook her head. “Anyway, here’s what I think. Part of you has unresolved shit about where you grew up. You even took an Iowan to bed, someone you’d never ever consider back in DC, right?” She lifted her eyebrow. “I’m a little roll around your past, aren’t I?”

Cynthia stared at her. She had no idea *what* any of this was about. Even this conversation was surreal. Was Suze right? Possibly. “Who can say? All I truly remember of last night is meeting you.”

“I should be offended. But knowing you, you’d like that.” Suze snorted.

“Ordinarily true. But for some reason I actually think I want you to like me.”

“It’s not an urge you get often, I guess.”

“Not at all.” Cynthia sniffed. “Can you imagine where that would end? Small-talk. Book clubs. Socializing with people who want to *catch up soon*.”

“How awful.” Suze laughed. “So now what? You’ve had your Iowan hook-up and you’ll be on the plane to DC within the hour?”

Cynthia considered that, curious as to the faint stab of regret at the thought. “No. Well, not quite.” She pursed her lips. “I’m going to give you my e-mail address. And we will stay in touch.”

“We will?”

“Yes. For some reason, I wouldn’t object if I heard from you again.”

“Do I curtsy to Your Majesty at this news?”

“You should.”

“Ha!” Suze did a sort of twisted, half curtsy in bed that only succeeded in making the sheet fall down.

Cynthia appreciated the view all over again. *Well*. She licked her lips. She could always catch a later flight. Not like planes didn’t fly out of this regional armpit on a regular basis. She cleared her throat. “Just to tie up any loose ends, I apparently owe you some reciprocation. For certain pressing things left unfinished last night.”

“Oh, you don’t have to.” Suze gave a dismissive wave that looked far too indifferent to be believable. Her hungry gaze diving into Cynthia’s cleavage was telling.

“Oh, but I insist,” Cynthia said with a purr. “I’m a Type-A gal. I never like to leave things undone. Unless you’d like to...come undone?” She raised her eyebrows suggestively.

“I...” Suze’s cheeks heated up and her brown eyes darkened. “I think I would like that a lot.” She held out a hand, and her wide mouth curled into a teasing grin. “Slide right on over here, DC. I think it’s time you put your mouth to better use than just being a troublemaker.”

Cynthia snorted. “Well, I suppose.” As she gathered the impertinent woman in her arms, she decided she could think of far worse ways and places to wake up.

# Chapter 2

## When Iowa Met DC

Suzette Beringer was staring at the most ridiculous bra she'd just found behind her TV. For a start, it wasn't hers. That much was instantly clear by its B-cup proportions instead of being a DD. Did they even make DD bras at... She squinted at the tag. La Perla?

Of course, Cynthia Redwell would wear a fucking *La Perla* bra.

As she held it up to the light, she took in the stitching. Precise and perfect with embroidered little flowers all over it. The material. Silk? Probably. The color. Blue. Well, not just blue...a glossy blueish black that was so beautiful it seemed made only for luxurious intimates. This scrap of material probably cost more than she earned in a week. And Cynthia had left it behind.

After enthusiastically making up for her 'shortcomings' with Suze, Cynthia had been left with little time. In her rush to get to the airport, she'd obviously not found her bra before leaving.

Curious, Suze googled the La Perla item. Then...she almost dropped her phone.

A La Perla Maison blue silk bra with frastaglio, whatever the hell that was, cost \$440. DC wasn't short of a buck it seemed.

Suze snapped a pic then sent it to the e-mail address Cynthia had deigned to leave for her.

*Hey DC, you left something behind. Where do you want me to post it?*

No reply. Cynthia might be boarding or something. Suze wrapped the bra in a few tissues to keep it safe until she heard back from its owner.

Four hundred bucks for a bra. Crazy. But then again, everything about last night had been, hadn't it? Because no way did a beautiful, high-powered DC bitch like Cynthia Redwell ever take a second look at a 'walking oil slick' from Iowa any other time.

It was just a one-time thing, albeit a sizzling fling to remember.



A week was how long it took for Cynthia to reply. Suze had expected a relieved thanks and an address to post the bra to. Instead, she got attitude. And, perhaps more surprisingly, a personal phone number and a request for Suze's in return. Once Suze had supplied her cell number, while chowing down on a sandwich in her work's lunchroom, a text lit up that was pure Cynthia.

*I trust your grease-monkey fingers haven't coated it with marks? Silk stains easily.*

*Oh you're welcome.* Well, Suze wanted to send that but satisfied herself with glaring at her phone. She glared so hard that her colleague, Mitch, a young apprentice she was training, quailed opposite her.

"Not you, Mitch." She smiled. Poor kid was already uptight enough.

His shoulders relaxed. "Shit, I'd hate to be whoever you're mad at." Mitch's grin was boyish and sweet.

"Oh, I'm not mad." She chuckled. "I'm getting even."

Suze texted back: *Grease marks ALL OVER IT. Barely recognizable now. Especially since I've wiped down the inside of a wheel well with it. Boys sure loved watching that. The wolf whistles deafened me.*

A beat, and then a reply. *I suppose you think you're amusing?*

*Don't have to think it, Suze tapped back. I know it. btw \$440?!!! For one bra? Are you running out of things to spend your money on?*

*Quality comes at a price, Iowa. I wouldn't expect a wrench jockey to understand that of course. Some of us have a degree of...refinement.*

Suze had to appreciate the time Cynthia spent to add the three little dots to build up to her punchline. That took forethought. Attention to detail, even. She grinned, looking up, and remembered all the little ways Cynthia had deliberately enjoyed getting under her skin.

Mitch grinned back, eyes lighting with surprise.

*Uh oh.* She hadn't meant to give him the wrong idea; that her smile was for him. "My girlfriend," she lied—as if Cynthia would ever want that title, for a million reasons. She lifted her phone. "Thinks she's hilarious."

"Oh." His expression fell. "Girlfriend?" He scrunched up his nose as if he'd smelled a jet-fuel leak. He scowled. "Jesus," he muttered under his breath. "Bein' trained by a fuckin' *dyke*."

*And...shit.* Her own team might be cool with her now after years of her proving herself. They were like brothers. But not all the new recruits had received the memo to park any homophobic crap at the door.

"Hey, shit for brains," called Steve, a grizzled veteran on her team. He slammed his coffee mug on the table. "Beringer knows more'n you'll ever know about birds. *Both* kinds."

Laughs filled the lunchroom.

"It's wrong," Mitch muttered, glaring. "She's goin' to Hell."

"Preach on your own damn time or fuck off," said Steve. "Or just fuck off anyway. We don't care."

And that was the end of the conversation. Everyone finished up lunch and left, with Mitch shooting a disgusted glare over his shoulder. That earned a heavy thump in the back from another mechanic.

Steve hung back. “Hey, Beringer,” he said, scratching his chin as he loomed his tall, thin frame over her. “You been holdin’ out on us?”

“Huh?”

“You got a girlfriend now?” He rocked on his heels. “Good. About time. You’re too young to waste your pretty.” He paused. “Well, in your case, your ugly.” He guffawed at his own brilliance, and she good naturedly flipped him the bird as he wandered back to the workshop.

Her eyes fell to her phone. It’s funny how she’d reached for the word *girlfriend*. It had slipped out, bypassed her consciousness, and for that split second, she’d really liked how it had sounded. Which was absurd. She knew a one-night stand when she saw it.

Suze’s phone beeped.

*Cat got your tongue? Funny. I seem to recall your tongue being a lot more agile when I was around.*

*Are you bored, DC? Suze texted back. Or missing my tongue so much it’s worthy of texting about now?*

She chuckled as she strode back to the bird she’d been working on. A Boeing 737. Her eye fell to Mitch, still shooting daggers at her as if his disapproval would turn her straight. A small smile twitched her lips. She had a hydraulic system to flush. Disgusting job. Now seemed like a good time for an apprentice to step up, didn’t it? He was due to learn this sooner or later. Sooner suddenly felt right.



Three weeks later, Suze was in her bathrobe, singing off-key and heating spaghetti bolognese in the kitchen, when there was a knock at the door. Buttcheeks began to bark from his doggy bed in the spare room upstairs. She frowned. Seven at night and no one was expected.

She was half tempted to ignore it when she heard, “It’s me. DC.”

Suze dropped her wooden spoon in surprise. It splattered tomato all up her robe. “Fuck!”

At her sharp reaction, Buttcheeks started howling.

“Shuddup!” she called out, and mercifully the pug stopped. He was getting on in years now and didn’t like to be woken from his naps. Relatable.

Wrenching open the front door, she found Cynthia looking tired and regretful.

“I found myself in this godforsaken place for work,” Cynthia began without so much as a hello, “and thought I’d get my bra back.” A carry-on bag sat beside her heel. A taxi on the street behind her pulled away.

Pulled. Away.

What was this? If she was just picking up something, she wouldn’t have sent away the car. Right? Or...was Cynthia hopeful of having a round two? But if so, why the pretense?

She studied Cynthia’s immaculate outfit. Business suit. Sharp, professional. Executive. Lez bait. She licked her lips appreciatively.

“Well?” Cynthia’s eyebrow hit the heavens. “Unless you really did use it to clean out a wheel well.”

Suze blinked.

“Oh God, you did?” Cynthia’s eyes went wide. “Seriously?”

“Don’t be stupid, DC,” Suze said, stepping back. “Come in. I’ll dig it up for you.”

Cynthia followed her inside. “Nice outfit, by the way.”

“Sooo sorry I didn’t dress for you,” Suze threw over her shoulder. “But you didn’t actually bother to call ahead, did you?”

At Cynthia’s non-response, Suze smirked to herself the whole way to the kitchen.

“Don’t tell me you kept my bra with your smelly food and spices?”

“I’m not sure what’s with all the snark,” Suze said, turning off the stove, which had been her mission. “I’m doing *you* the favor, remember? Park the bitch routine, woman, or I’ll let Buttcheeks out of his room. He’s big on sniffing strangers’ crotches.”

“Ah, there’s the Iowa attitude I remember so well.” Cynthia’s eyes glinted. In...amusement?

*Oh. She’s been baiting me?*

“Follow me,” Suze said, leading her to the bedroom where she’d filed the overpriced silk bra three weeks ago. “Try not to be too obnoxious on the way.”

A snort sounded behind her. Definitely laughter.

Suze’s bed wasn’t made. So sue her. She’d been doing double shifts all week to meet a deadline. It had been made worse by being short-handed after Mitch had gotten his ass fired for incompetence due to a costly error—because he’d refused to ask her for help. When he’d told his bosses exactly why he wasn’t going to ask *her* for help, they’d told him not to let the door hit him on the ass.

Her team had cheered his exit but she’d just felt bad for the kid. Waste of a life being so young and full of hate. There was nothing good about that. Times like this also reminded her she wouldn’t mind living in a place far less likely to have Mitches in the hangar.

This was her first day off since her week of overtime and she’d spent it at home, lazing around, mostly in bed. Her evening was supposed to be comfort food and Netflix. Not dealing with a condescending bitch from DC who seemed to love riling her up for shits and giggles.

She was still trying to work out how she felt about this development—her libido was all in favor of course, but when wasn’t it?—when she slid open her dresser drawer and pulled out a little tissue-wrapped bundle.

For once, Cynthia made no sarcastic comment, just watched as Suze gently unwrapped the garment and showed the La Perla was indeed grease-free and had been lovingly cared for.



DC's intense gaze traced Suze's fingers as she unwrapped the item, and stayed on them, instead of the bra. Slowly she shifted her focus up Suze's arm and body until she met Suze's eyes.

Cynthia's eyes were blazing. And oh...it all became clear. She'd wanted more sex with Suze and didn't know how to ask. Had she left the bra behind on purpose? Probably.

"You could have just asked for it," Suze said, teasing that she might have meant either the bra or sex. "Either way, I'd have agreed."

Cynthia's eyes darkened at her words. Voice low and sultry, she said, "Your robe is filthy."

Her robe was perfectly clean; it just had a few spatter marks down the front. "You caused this," Suze noted dryly. "Your surprise arrival. I dropped my spoon in my spaghetti sauce."

"Well," Cynthia said, "all the more reason to deal with that robe. Perhaps you should...take it off?"

With a curling smile, Suze countered, "What if I'd rather just watch TV tonight? Pack you and your bra back in a taxi?"

For the first time, Cynthia hesitated, expression unsure. "Is that what you want, Iowa? For me to be gone?"

*As if!* "You're overdressed," Suze said. "It's the weekend, for God's sake. Take off that uptight suit."

"Bossy." But already Cynthia was rapidly undoing the buttons on her blouse. "And lose the robe. It's offensive."

Three splotches of sauce and it was offensive? Still, Suze lost the robe. She was in her favorite lucky boxer shorts—black and white striped—and a tank top, when Cynthia, now delightfully topless, looked up again.

She froze and swallowed. Hard. Cynthia's eyes were now blazing with hunger.

*Oh wow.* It was going to be an interesting night.



Next morning, Cynthia found herself trying to properly wake up while in Suze's shockingly bright yellow bathroom that included a wall of framed inspirational sayings. It was the price one paid for not staying at a hotel: one's bladder-emptying came with kitsch.

She squinted at the largest quote. *Be All You Can Dream.*

That seemed incredibly insipid, didn't it? Not very Suze at all. And what if you had lousy dreams? Or no imagination whatsoever? Honestly, did these creative types never think these things through?

The door to the bathroom cracked opened, and she snapped her head around at the intrusion. "I'm in here," she said sharply, before a mooshed-up nose appeared just above floor level. Then the rest of a small furry body confidently waddled in.

"Oh. You." She stared at what could only be Buttcheeks the dog. Small, biscuit-brown, with a black face and bright brown eyes. His tail was a perfect curl. The shiny coat said he was healthy but his legs moved slowly, showing his age.

He stared back and seemed to...smile?

*Did* dogs smile? Cynthia wasn't sure, never having owned one.

"It's rude to invite yourself into a bathroom when someone's using it," she noted acidly. "Were you raised in a barn?" Although around here, it was entirely possible.

He *wuffed*. Then trotted over. At least he seemed friendly, if clueless about respecting personal space.

Now he sat, parking his butt directly in front of her, and panted up at her.

"God," she muttered. "So rude."

Her temples gave a pained throb. Lack-of-sleep headache. Last night had been a lot. Suze had been enthusiastic as always, and they'd gone at it like rabbits for far too long. And now Cynthia was talking to a pug with no sense of propriety because that's what happens when you allow yourself to get sidetracked in Iowa.

“Have you ever considered *not* holding eye contact with someone urinating?” she asked Buttcheeks coolly. “Just an idea.”

More happy panting. His grin widened.

*Christ.*

She reached for the toilet roll and was dismayed to find the paper was some novelty item with tiny little soccer balls all over it. *Seriously?*

“Your human has appalling taste,” she grumbled. “Have you seen her Smurf-blue sheets, for instance?”

His tongue flicked out and he licked his flat nose.

Cynthia stared at him with suspicion he was mocking her as she rose from the commode, then flushed. She furled her borrowed robe around herself dramatically like an arch villain. That always amused her.

“Now what?” she asked the pug. “Do you plan to follow me for the rest of the day? Well, good luck. I’m on a plane home in a few hours.”

He dog-grinned happily at her as she washed her hands, never losing eye contact.

Finally, as she turned to leave, he pattered over to her left ankle, as if trained to be her security escort, butt wagging as he walked. He stopped the moment she did.

Cynthia stared at his guileless face. “Are we anticipating a security incident, requiring your intervention?” she inquired.

He made another *wuff* noise. Then his true intentions became clear as he flopped over onto his back, all four legs pointing in opposite directions. He gazed up at her hopefully.

*Good grief.* With a quick peek through the ajar door to make sure there were no witnesses of the Suzette kind, Cynthia lowered herself to one knee and gave him a hasty belly rub.

She wasn’t entirely sure why she’d capitulated but honestly, who could say no? “Okay?”

He sat up again, looking satisfied, and licked her hand.

“Don’t get soppy on me,” she informed him. “I’m only passing through. Your mom and I, we’re...” She tried to work out what to call it. “Casual. I’m probably not even going to see her again.”

The thought flooded her with such instant sadness, that she scowled. Buttcheeks’ ears flattened and his tail drooped.

“Not you, little guy.” She offered a reassuring pat as she poked over her feelings. That disappointment was entirely unexpected. She’d thought she’d gotten Suze out of her system last night. Apparently not.

Buttcheeks rubbed his head against her ankle. Was that his idea of doggy-comfort or was he itchy?

“I mean, it wouldn’t be too terrible to visit again,” Cynthia told him, absently stroking his soft fur. “If I had a reason to, of course.”

Her gaze fell on a cupboard near the edge of the bathtub. On it sat a small laundry basket, on top of which lay a familiar pair of striped boxers.

*Well, well.* Cynthia glanced at Buttcheeks who blinked up at her, grinning once more. “Ever feel like committing a heist, Mr. Buttcheeks?”

She wrinkled her nose. “Gross. And I’ll take dog farts as a yes.”



*You STOLE my boxers!* Suze wailed in an e-mail to Cynthia a few days later. She’d looked everywhere. This was a disaster.

*How is this my problem? And don’t you have others?* came the reply.

*Others! You don’t understand, those are my LUCKY ones. I have to be wearing them when I have to do my best work. I have to replace a rudder bias actuator today and that is fiddly as fuck. How can I be on the top of my game if my lucky boxers are missing?*

*Next you’ll be telling me lives are on the line.*

*THEY ARE!* Suze breathed deeply. *God you're infuriating. Why can't you be like a normal human and say "I want to see you again" instead of messing with a girl's lucky boxers so you'll have an excuse to return them? I know you didn't forget that bra. Are you so emotionally stunted that you can't ask for what you want?*

Silence fell for long moments, then: *I can courier them over to you today. Express. Will that be all?*

Ice was dripping off that e-mail and Suze felt a pang of remorse. Someone like Cynthia, who had a truckload of baggage, probably didn't need to be called emotionally stunted.

The more she thought about it, the more her anger started to fade. Cynthia had shared about her foster-child upbringing. Just enough for Suze to know that she didn't have a typical loving start to life, or normal relationships with anyone, it seemed. It's why she was such a bitch—to keep everyone at arm's length. And Suze had just rubbed her nose in her shit.

Real regret flooded her. She stared at her open drawers, boxers strewn all over the floor. God, it wasn't like Cynthia had known they were her lucky pair or that the fate of the 737s at Des Moines International Airport depended on Suze wearing them on certain days. She hadn't had a clue what they meant to Suze.

*I'm sorry,* Suze wrote back hastily. *That was a shit thing to say.*

*I've made the arrangements. Your misplaced apparel will be with you in a few hours.*

More frost. No apology. And she'd never get one, would she? Cynthia probably never apologized. It would be seen as a weakness. Some foster-parent asshole had probably taught her that, too. Made her understand why she had to never let down her guard.

And why would Cynthia apologize now, anyway? She'd probably stolen Suze's boxers in a moment of lightness, thinking it'd be fun. A cute excuse to extract another visit. And it had turned into this.

*You could always bring them back yourself?* Suze offered. *I wouldn't... object.*

*And what of all the planes that will fall from the sky in the meantime?* came the sarcastic retort. *We can't have that!*

*I'll put off the rudder bias actuator replacement for a few days. Or re-assign it to someone else in my team.* That should solve it.

There was no reply for ten minutes. Then: *I had no idea you were so superstitious.*

*I'm a former athlete. Of course I'm superstitious. Do not ask about players' lucky socks. Half of them never washed them if they were on a winning streak.*

*Sounds delightful.*

Suze could almost hear her distaste.

*I've canceled the rush courier pick-up. I am making...alternative arrangements.*

Suze smiled. Did that count as Cynthia melting a little? It meant she really wanted to see her, right? Hadn't that been the point of the boxer theft in the first place?

A new e-mail landed. *I can't have the wellbeing of Iowa's airliners in the hands of someone less experienced for too long. I can move around some meetings and be in Iowa in five hours. Is that acceptable?*

*Don't make a special trip just for me.*

*As if. I'm forced to be in your appalling little stomping ground again for work. I was supposed to be there next week, which is when I would have returned your wayward underwear, but I can bring it forward.*

*I'll meet your flight.*

*That's hardly necessary. I wouldn't want to put you out.*

*Cynthia. I work at the airport, remember? I'll meet your damned flight. Send me the deets.*



Suze did indeed meet the flight. Officially she was on her lunch break if anyone questioned it. They didn't.

Cynthia had barely gotten through security when Suze dragged her to an out-of-service restroom at the other end of the airport.

No one seemed to remember it was there since a minor airline had shifted to a different part of the airport after the big renovations in 1999. Even so, she locked the door, dropped the lid on the seat and reached for Cynthia. She slammed her into the back of the cubicle door and kissed her thoroughly.

Cynthia moaned as if she'd been given a tasty treat. "Oh fuck," she whispered. "Don't you look cute in your work uniform. Nice...overalls."

"Nice executive suit. Did you interview a billionaire in it?"

"As a matter of fact... I did not." Cynthia smiled. "Could you fuck me now? If that's not too much trouble? Since you seem to think *I don't ask for what I want.*" She drawled the last part.

"No." Suze slowly stepped back. "You owe me something first."

Cynthia rolled her eyes but retrieved a small bundle from her jacket pocket.

Suze snatched the boxers from her in relief and then unzipped her overalls, toeing off her boots. She slid down her current boxers, her third luckiest pair, as Cynthia watched appreciatively.

Then she put one foot into her favorite black and white pair.

“Wait! You’re not going to put those on now, are you?” Cynthia asked in dismay.

Suze froze and looked up. “Yes.”

“But I’ve just got you naked. Naked-ish...” She glanced at Suze’s sports bra. “I don’t think we should waste this.” She waved at Suze’s pussy which was not only on display but, embarrassingly, already slick.

“Nothing’s going to get wasted. But I’m cold.” Suze slid the boxers up her round thighs. She snapped the waist band and said with a satisfied sigh, “Much better.”

Pulling her overalls back on so they covered her chilly shoulders, she did up the zip a tiny way at her hips. She glanced at Cynthia and licked her lips. “Now, where were we?”

“You were ignoring me in favor of a ratty old pair of boxers.”

“The luckiest boxers on earth, you mean.” She grinned and slid her hands up Cynthia’s thighs, right under her prim skirt, and cupped her heat. “Speaking of lucky.”

Cynthia surged against her fingers. “About time,” she groused.

“So impatient.” She wrenched down Cynthia’s stockings and pushed aside a nude G-string, finding slick, aroused flesh. “A girl could get flattered by how badly you want me.”

“Oh, be quiet and fuck me,” Cynthia hissed. But there was no bite to her tone. In fact, she sounded needy enough that it made her own cheeks redden.

Suze slid a finger inside her. “Do you hate that you want me?” she asked, tone curious. “Want me enough to fly in a week early to see me?” She pushed in deeper, then rotated her wrist, flicking a thumb over her clit.



Cynthia trembled. “Oh.” She gasped. “Ohh.”

“Okay you don’t have to answer that,” Suze said, “But repeat after me: I will not steal Suze’s special underwear ever again.” As she spoke, she thrust in time with her words. “Got me?”

“*Nngh.*” Bucking against Suze’s thumb, Cynthia’s hands reached for her own nipples and she rubbed ferociously. Her eyes slammed shut and she moaned again. “*Oh.*”

Wetness now coated Suze’s fingers and her damp wrist told her the moisture was trickling down Cynthia’s thighs.

“You love this, don’t you?” Suze whispered, leaning in hard against her, crushing their bodies together. “Me being a bit of rough trade? You being so refined and better than me...no, wait, that’s not it. It’s that you’re better than *everyone.*”

“Ohhh...” Her moans came harder. Cynthia was close, Suze knew from experience, because her trembling was now going all the way down her long, slender thighs.

Suze pressed in even tighter and thrust. “Kiss me,” she demanded, her voice rough and excited.

Cynthia’s eyes sprang open. She didn’t even hesitate. She kissed the ever-living fuck out of Suze while Suze pressed into the side of her clit.

Warm wetness pooled between her own legs now. Suze’s lucky boxers were getting very lucky indeed.

Cynthia pulled back, shut her eyes again, and tilted her head back against the door. She orgasmed; trembling and wet and clenching Suze’s fingers.

Without thinking, Suze dropped to her knees, shoved Cynthia’s skirt up to her waist with one hand, wrenched her stockings and G-string all the way down with her other, and buried her face in Cynthia’s short black curls and swollen lips.

And God. It was...magnificent.

To her embarrassment, Suze came. Right there, on the floor of an airport bathroom cubicle, with her face buried in pussy. Her tongue lapped and froze, lapped and froze as the tremors overtook her. God, it felt incredible.

She was vaguely aware of Cynthia's fingers running through her hair, murmuring something dirty and sexy, urging her on. When Suze stopped trembling, the hand left her and she missed its warmth.

Shakily, she rose a little to sit on the lid of the toilet and gazed up at Cynthia. Still looking like an arrogant goddess, albeit one who'd been thoroughly fucked. Her hair clung to her brow and cheeks. She was still panting deeply and her nipples were hard knots against the silk of her blouse. Cynthia's unfocused gaze finally fell on Suze, who had her hand inside her lucky shorts now, between her legs, adjusting herself.

"Did you?" Cynthia began, straightening. She cleared her throat. "When you ate me out. Did you come just now?"

"Yeah." Redness flooded Suze's cheeks. "I guess you were a bit inspirational."

Cynthia smiled, her customary cockiness returning. "How... inspirational?"

"Huh?"

"Would you...care to show me?" She arched a shapely eyebrow. "The effect I allegedly have on you?"

Oh. She wanted to *look*. Horndog. Grinning, Suze climbed to her feet and shrugged off her overalls. "These things really do suck for a quickie."

"That they do," Cynthia murmured. Her voice was thick and husky. She sounded exactly like a woman who'd just gotten off and loved it.

Suze slid down her boxers and watched Cynthia's reaction with interest. She didn't look at herself. She knew it would be a matted mess of coarse black hair, folds swollen with arousal, and slickness.

Cynthia's nostrils flared, her pupils dilated, and the fingers on her right hand twitched and released.

Oh, she *loved* what she was looking at. Wanted to touch, badly.

“Oh my,” Cynthia purred. “*Someone* got very turned on.”

“You can talk,” Suze shot back. “You were virtually humping me the moment you saw me.”

“Nonsense,” Cynthia said haughtily. “It wasn’t *my* idea to drag me into some restroom at the ends of the airport.” Even as she spoke, her nostrils flared again as though she got off on the memory of what they’d just done. Like she loved the naughtiness of it.

Slowly, deliberately, Cynthia leaned forward over Suze and dragged her index finger down her curving stomach, through her untamed bush, and between her folds. She slipped inside her. “Wet. For me.” She sounded satisfied. As if she were merely taking a temperature. “Excellent.”

Suze gave a little shudder when Cynthia reversed course, and swirled over her already sensitive clit. *Oh shit that felt good.*

“For a cute garden gnome I found at my best friend’s wedding, you are certainly aroused.”

“A *garden gnome*,” Suze drawled back, “who fucked you so well you came in five minutes.”

Cynthia’s cheeks bloomed red, but she didn’t deny it.

“Just for that smart-ass crack, you can book a hotel room tonight,” Suze announced as she adjusted her clothing back. “No staying at my place.” She zipped her overalls loudly.

Genuine dismay crossed Cynthia’s face. “What?”

“You heard me.” Suze glared for effect, although she wasn’t serious. She couldn’t wait to get her hands on this woman again tonight. Lay her out on her bed, fuck her for hours...

“I see,” Cynthia said with a slow nod, catching on. “Whatever can I *do* to correct this misunderstanding?” She pondered. “I suppose you want me on my knees in benediction, debasing myself before you.” She suddenly shuddered as if the thought had aroused her.

Suze choked at the mental image herself. Cynthia on her knees for her was hot as hell. “No,” she said quickly, her voice coming out in a squeak.

She was appalled at the idea that those beautiful knees would end up on this cold, dirty, restroom floor. “I suppose, tonight, I’ll allow you to have the guest room,” she teased.

“Well, my dear, two things are wrong with that,” Cynthia drawled, enunciating her words perfectly. It reminded Suze that she’d been taught to speak this way and that once Cynthia had sounded just like Suze.

“Oh?”

“One, the guest room, as we both know, belongs to Buttcheeks.” Her lips quirked slightly at his name.

It was true. Buttcheeks barely left his room much these days, except for walks with Suze, given he was in his doggy dotage.

“And two...”

“Two?” Suze lifted her head in anticipation to meet her eyes.

“You were *never* my rough bit of trade.” Cynthia scowled at the idea. “And I’d enjoy sharing *your* bed tonight.” Sincerity filled her eyes now, and God, if that didn’t do everything to Suze. Her brain was fizzing.

Cynthia leaned forward and slipped her hand between Suze’s legs. She cupped her pussy, expertly rubbing and squeezing, shooting flares of arousal through her. “Tonight, I’ll make up for anything we left unfinished today. Now, you and your ‘lucky’ boxers should probably get back to work. Leave me your house key. I’ll wait for you there.”

And that was how Cynthia Redwell casually invited herself into Suze’s bed for a third time.

It was also how Suze managed to finish replacing a rudder bias actuator flawlessly...and in record time.



*Iowa? I didn't mean to call you a garden gnome. Sometimes things are funnier in my head.*

This was new. A day after mind-blowing sex and she was now getting a texted apology? Well, sort of. Cynthia style.

Every time Cynthia left her after a tumble in the Iowan hay, Suze always assumed that was it. The last she'd hear from her. You never knew exactly where or what she was up to most of the time. Although this time Suze did know her occasional lover was off to Vegas next week for an interview.

She wondered who was so important in a city of slot machines and floor shows that warranted Cynthia's in-person attendance.

Suze tapped out a reply. *Apology accepted, DC. I just assumed you were so overcome by my prowess that you forgot yourself.*

*I don't recall saying sorry,* Cynthia shot back. *Although there is no denying your prowess.*

*That almost sounded like a compliment. I may die of shock.* Suze grinned as she hit Send.

*Don't get used to it. A momentary lapse. I have to prep for my Vegas business trip now. I'll fill you in on it later. Or you'll see me on the news when I assault a bunch of fake Elvises. One or the other.*

*What have you got against Elvis?*

*Nothing. But the fake ones have such punchable faces. It's the sideburns, I think. Such hairy absurdities. Got to go. Later.*

*Safe flight for next week.*

Suze grinned. Well, didn't that sound all very civilized? She and Cynthia were at the 'safe flight' stage of being bed buddies. Although it didn't mean anything. Probably. She sagged a little at the thought. It'd be kind of nice if it meant *something*.

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# When DC Loved Iowa

BY LEE WINTER

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