

## Roommates

Slap! Slap! Slap!

“Damn that cat! What time is it? I don’t care if he is yours I’m going to kill him! Get up and feed him!”

The speech comes as loud, high pitched machine gun fire bursts.

The sun streams mutely from a single window into our musty, wall-papered apartment—old fashioned. I doze on, comfortable in the warmth of my sleep. The machine gun returns, “Get up, damn it, George! It’s only eight o’clock.”

In my birthday suit only, I swing my dancer’s legs over the edge of the bed and streak into the kitchen, purring to my yellow-striped tabby, pouring some dry cat food into his bowl. He briefly but appreciatively strokes my calves before crouching to eat. “George, get back over here. My butt is cold!”

I trot back to the bed, dive under the covers, and burrow in like some Mercer Mayer critter. The bedroom exists in name only. The entire apartment is a good sized rectangular room on the second floor of an older house. At one end is a kitchen with the only sunny window and a bath with none. The living room is set up at the other end lit only by a single lamp. A pair of folding screens creates the bedroom, and the double bed faces the only door.

I don’t doze long. Reluctantly, I swing my feet once more onto the bare linoleum floor. I have a 10:00 AM class. The machine gun bursts again, staccato across the cold air, “Turn the heat on, will ya? I’m not sticking my little fanny out into that cold!”

Running over to the single gas heater, I light it, dashing to the bathroom, shivering and covered only in goose bumps. Clearing out the old corn cobs—the cat’s favorite toys—from the tub perched on its four carved feet delicately above the gray floor, I run some hot water. Steam rises, fills my lungs, and fogs the medicine cabinet mirror. I stretch my body out full-length in the hot water to get warmed all over.

“George, hurry up! I need to pee!”

“Oh, come on in,” I shout back. A blast of cold air invades the warmth and dampness.

“What are you going to wear today? Wear that tight sweater with some jeans. It looks real good on you.” Oh, yeah, sure, I think, sinking back under the water. I really hadn’t thought much about what I was going to wear until now. Oh, yeah, what the hell—the tight sweater with jeans.

“See ya for dinner tonight,” fading machine gun bursts out the door.

“No, I have to work,” floating in my cocoon.

“Oh, yeah, maybe I’ll come down to see ya.”

George’s Majestic Lounge, historic, lies the university side of the railroad tracks. One-of-a-kind, it is the

oldest drinking establishment in town. I work there Tuesday, Friday, and Saturday nights. The interior, dark as any bootlegger's den, smells like the inside of a left-over-from-yesterday ashtray full of old cigarette butts and soured beer. All the interesting people, and some who are not, hang out here. Even when we're not working, we're down there most nights drinking and hanging out.

Tonight, the ex-marine—heavy-jawed and large handed—spends several hours trying to convince me to go home with him. He owns a Basset—or rather his girlfriend does—that wanders off a lot, so we discuss the characteristics of different breeds and why Bassets are so damned valuable. My roommate slides in next to him. 11:00 PM

Well, hell, if you aren't going home with me, I might as well take off," he says leisurely, still sipping his beer. "Besides, I bet you look lousy in the morning."

"She does not. George looks great in the morning," my roommate gives me a sly wink, Momentarily, the ex-marine looks started, then nods his head knowingly. Now he understands, or so he thinks. He slides off the stool and leaves. "C'mon. George," my roommate says, "I'll stick around and walk you home."

The chilly winter air does little to sober my roommate up. "Have you ever slept with Alex? What's he like?" she queries.

"I don't know. He's all right," I murmur, puzzled by the query.

"All right," she says disgustedly. "I can do better than that. I can give you a better orgasm than any man," she giggles.

"That's all right, " I mumble again, trying to figure out if this is a rhetorical comment or a come on.

12:30 AM—my roommates snores softly, her bare butt snuggled up against mine.

April comes with a hint of thaw in the air. My roommate decides we can save some money by moving elsewhere. Besides, our shriveled up, prune of a landlady, complains about the frequent nocturnal visitors— "Nice girls don't do that." We move into a one-room efficiency with two cots for beds. The sunlight never streams in anywhere here.

"Let's spend the night together...Nah, nah, nah, now..."

After another night at George's drinking, my roommate's boyfriends drops her off about 2:00 AM. There's a loud commotion at the door. She's giggling and falling down. I get up fully clothed to let them in. "Help me get her to bed. She's pretty drunk," the boyfriend says.

“I’m not drunk. Whadya mean. Hiya, George.” She’s been seeing a therapist, and she drinks like a sailor almost every night now.

“I gotta go. Can you handle her?” Prince Charming asks. Oh, yeah, sure. Why not? She’s small, and I’ve put her to bed many times before.

“C’mon. Let’s get you to bed.”

“George, know what?”

“What?”

“I love you.”

“I love you too. Now go to sleep.” I tuck her in. The unheated apartment—to save money as we are in the constant starving student syndrome-- is quite chilly now. I crawl back into my sleeping bag, the one Buck gave me—an old one with little green men marching across its tan interior—burrowing down. Sleep and fatigue carry me away.

“George--”

“What?”

“Come sleep with me. I need you.”

“Go to sleep. You’re just drunk. You’ll be all right.”

“George, I’m cold. Hold me.”

A thousand dilemmas foggily cross my mind. Burrowing further down in my sleeping bag, I drift away into a dreamless sleep.

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