

THE ZOO IS PEACEFUL and beautiful under a layer of snow. It's Brigid's favorite time to visit the animals. As she walks along the paths, under the banners she designed, she enjoys the quiet.

Akia and Banji are much too big now to let out of their pens, their bodies long and strong, but they always seem to remember Brigid.

She knocks on the door of the lion enclosure, and Dave, the newest keeper, lets her in. She's here to see the growing cubs that first brought her to the zoo. Akia and Banji are much too big now to let out of their pens, their bodies long and strong, but they always seem to remember Brigid. And the pounds of ground beef she brings in plastic bags.

"You okay in here for a bit? I've got to go check on the wild dogs," says Dave.

"Oh, yeah. This is old hat."

Dave leaves Brigid with her companions.

"Hi, babies. Brigid's got foodies for you." She slips a handful of the raw meat into the feeding shoot, and Akia snarfs it down. "Don't worry Banji, I've some for you."

The enclosure is warm, and Brigid slips off her coat. Her jeans and sweater keep her comfortable.

"Is there going to be a full strip tease, or is that all I get?" asks a voice from behind her.

Brigid gathers herself and turns around. "Josie."

"Yep. Denver couldn't hold me, so I'm back in Indy. Miss me?"

Brigid lets her gaze drop for a second and doesn't answer.

"That's alright. I understand. How's the Bitch?" Josie steps closer.

Brigid looks Josie square in the eye. "Shelly's great. She really is."

"Are you happy?" Another step.

Brigid smiles. "Very."

Josie slips right up to Brigid. She runs her hand over Brigid's shoulder and down her arm, the entire time staring at her lips.

"Well, good then." Josie slips right up to Brigid. She runs her hand over Brigid's shoulder and down her arm, the entire time staring at her lips. "Very good. Tell me, what would you do if I kissed you?"

"You're not going to kiss me, Josie." Brigid sidesteps out of Josie's grasp. "I am happy to see you. You look good. But we can't do anything like that. Hell, I'm not even sure how I'll tell Shelly you're back."

"Tell her after sex. That always works."

Brigid smiles and shakes her head. "I should be going. I guess I'll be seeing you then."

"Guess so."

BRIGID SITS on the sofa by the window, nervously petting Ursa's head. "Josie's back, girl. What the heck do I tell Shelly?" Ursa rumbles with a low growl. "Gee, I guess I know what you think."

Brigid keeps peeking out through the curtains, waiting.

The big dog growls ferociously as Brigid finally sees the FedEx truck drive through the snow to the house.

“Down, Ursa! I mean it. Down!” The dog backs down and Brigid scratches her ears. “This is it, girl. Either the Indianapolis Museum of Art loved my presentation, or they hated it. The answer is in that packet.”

Brigid opens the door to the deliveryman who eyes Ursa suspiciously. “That thing as mean as it looks?”

“Only when we want her to be. So, let’s hope there’s good news in this envelope.”

Brigid signs and sends the anxious FedEx guy on his way.

“Here we go.” She tears open the packet and pulls out the bulk of information. Brigid reads the cover letter as she pads on bare feet to her office in the back of the cabin.

Dear Ms. Griffin: We are pleased to accept your proposals for the marketing of our new acquisitions...

“I got it! Ursa! I got the deal with the IMA.” The mastiff bounds into the room, seemingly excited by her mama’s tone. “We’ve got to call Shelly at the shop.”

Brigid fumbles with the land line, dropping the receiver on the floor twice. “Fuck! C’mon, dog. We’re heading down there.” Brigid throws on a coat and steps into her winter boots. Outside, the Indiana winter winds whip off the lake and around the trees.

The ‘Cuda roars to life with its mistress’s attention.

The ‘Cuda roars to life with its mistress’s attention. The monster, Ursa, sits in the passenger seat as they coast around the curves to the shop. A

patch of ice pulls the hot rod to the right, nearly skimming a tree. “Fuck!” screams Brigid, and she slows it down.

The 'Cuda rumbles into the lot of the shop. The garage is shut up tight against the winds. Brigid climbs out, followed by the beast, and makes her way to the access door. She barely opens it before Ursa pushes through to get to her Shelly. The crew is working hard. Four projects lined up. Culley, Darby, Jerry, and Shel. Brad, the office manager, sits back grabbing calls. They all want their rides ready for summer shows.

“Baby!” Brigid calls.

Shelly looks up fast from the rod she's working on, nearly bashing her head on the prop arm. “What's up, Babe?”

“I got the IMA gig. Promoting the new acquisitions. I got it!”

“That's my girl! Let me get cleaned up and we'll celebrate. We'll head over to the Blue River and do it right.”

Shelly's pop, Jerry, looks up too. “Hell, girls. We'll all go. Culley, Darby. Finish up. Brad, my boy, you can even drop those phones for a bit and let's go. Everybody clean up and we'll meet there at six-thirty.”

A BLUEGRASS BAND plays live music for the Patoka tourists and locals. A table of seven in the back seem to Brigid to enjoy themselves more than most.

“So, I get to work with IMA's new acquisitions manager to promote to benefactors, members, and the public,” she says.

“What the hell is ‘acquisitions’?” asks Brad.

“What *are* acquisitions, my dear, *are*. It's when the museum gets new and exciting art,” Brigid explains.

Shelly pipes up with a proud tone. “My Brigid is in charge of everything new at the zoo and at the museum.”

Brigid blushes at the thought of the previous day’s encounter. Shelly must take it as modesty, because she says, “Don’t be shy. You can do anything.”

Darby holds Lenore’s hand up high. “We’re there for you.”

“Girl, you know I’m always on your side,” spouts Culley.

Jerry lifts his glass and grabs the waitress around the waist. “We all love you.”

Everyone enjoys food, drink, and music. Only two need to be sober. Everyone else is riding in the two muscle cars. Darby and Lenore volunteer to take Brad home. Shelly loads up Brigid and Culley and hollers for her father. He stands behind the Blue River with the waitress and then finally joins the group.

“WOMAN, YOU LOOK good enough to eat.” Shelly says as Brigid spins around on her heels, her skirt flaring out and showing the tops of her stockings. She pulls her button-up blouse closed to cover her white lace bra.

“Oh, no you don’t. I at least get a nibble before you leave.”

Brigid opens her blouse. “Get over here you insatiable creature, you.”

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Shelly wipes the back of her hand across her mouth as she crosses the room. Brigid’s nipples contract with the look in her lover’s eyes. She runs a hand over her own breasts to feel the growing nubs, and she pulls the

cups of her bra down for Shelly's hungry mouth. The feel of Shelly's wet lips and tongue on her nipple causes a sharp intake of breath, followed by a deep sigh. She snakes her fingers into Shelly's long blonde hair and pulls her closer.

Shelly slips her hand under Brigid's skirt and runs it up her thigh to a pair of slight panties. Brigid parts her legs and allows Shelly's fingers to sneak under the edge of the lace. The mechanic's roughened fingers slide through the moist folds and press inside.

Brigid gasps and grinds her hips against Shelly's hand. She finds it swiftly removed.

"Ah, ah. You've got to get to the museum. We'll continue this later. Promise."

"Dammit, Shel. You drive me crazy, you know that." Brigid says in mock annoyance.

"But, you love me."

"Yes. Yes I do."

Brigid straightens her mussed up clothes and heads downstairs.

"Good luck, Baby," calls Shelly.

"Nothin' to it."

It's a grab of her coat and off in the 'Cuda for the IMA.

The space inside houses art ranging over a broad spectrum of styles and genres.

THE MUSEUM has recently finished a major renovation. Brigid parks and makes her way to the new entrance pavilion, exquisite in glass and

steel. The space inside houses art ranging over a broad spectrum of styles and genres. Making her way to the main offices, Brigid feels proud to be part of it all.

“Brigid Griffin here to see Ms. Hicks,” Brigid tells the administrative assistant.

“Have a seat and she’ll be right up to see you. Can I take your coat?”

Brigid hands over her wool trench and picks up a flyer for the latest show at the museum.

“We’re hoping you can improve on that type of thing.” The voice comes from just behind her. She turns to face a beautiful sprite of a woman who’s holding out her hand. “I’m Alice. I’m so pleased to meet you Ms. Griffin.”

“Brigid. Please call me Brigid.”

“Great. Let me show you some of the newest pieces. We have benefactors to woo. Come with me.”

Brigid follows Alice down the hall and can’t help but appreciate the woman’s beauty, although she can’t place her age. Short, blonde hair. Tiny, petite figure. And the most voluptuous ass. It sways with purpose under her long black skirt. Her knee-high black boots promise this woman is more than a basement-dwelling art-geek.

The women spend the rest of the day discussing the newest exhibits and what is expected to come to the museum over then next year. The main focus will be Roman Art from the Louvre coming in late summer.

The day comes to a close as the museum is shutting down.

“You should stay sometime after hours and walk a few of the halls before they get the alarms on. It’s spiritual,” says Alice. “Just you and the quiet and the art.”

“It sounds wonderful. But what sounds equally wonderful is dinner and a drink. Can I offer you dinner as a thank you for today?”

“I’d love to. My girlfriend won’t be home from classes until late tonight and I’m starved. There’s a place called Binkley’s—”

“On College? I’m there.”

TWO GLASSES of wine later.

“Your girlfriend is in school?” asks Brigid.

“She’s quite a bit younger than me. Almost half my age.”

“Yes. Keeran is studying photography at Heron Art School. She’s graduating in May.” Alice blushes. “She’s quite a bit younger than me. Almost half my age.”

“Good for you. How long have you been together?”

“Almost four years.”

“Shelly and I have been together for a little over three. Three very crazy years. We met when she was doing the rebuild on my car and the rest is history.”

Alice laughs. “Keeran and I met when I was on vacation in Myrtle Beach. She sold me a vibrator.”

Throughout dinner, the stories flow like the wine.

“Keeran was dating this statuesque blonde with a hot rod. I didn’t know if I could compete, but I had to try for her. She makes me feel so alive.”

“You know, my Shelly was in Myrtle for a while several years ago. She has a silver Chevelle and—”

The women stop. And then laugh.

“You have got to be kidding me!”

“Do you really think it’s the same Shelly?” Alice asks.

“Holy Lord. Knowing my recent history. I’d put money on it.” Brigid shakes her head. “We’ll have to get everyone together and see if sparks fly.”

“Speaking of our women, I’d better get going. Mine’ll wonder where I am.”

“Shelly, too. Thank you for coming along to dinner. I think we’ll work just fine together.” Brigid holds out her hand.

Alice’s laugh is warm and inviting when she says, “You might as well give me a hug. With our history, we’re practically family.”

BRIGID PULLS into the drive at quarter to ten.

“Baby? I’m home. It’s been a long day. A great day, but a long one.”

***Shelly comes to the bottom of the stairs.
“Where have you been?”***

Shelly comes to the bottom of the stairs. “Where have you been?”

“I had dinner with Alice after—”

“Who’s Alice?” Shelly shifts back and forth on her bare feet.

“The Director of Acquisitions at the museum, Hon.”

“You could’ve called. Unless you were too *busy* with Alice.”

“You think I’d —?”

“Oh. Well, I’m beat. I’m heading to bed. You coming?”

“I guess so.”

Brigid follows her lover upstairs, enjoying the view of Shelly’s swaying ass in her boy shorts. Brigid reaches out and lightly smacks Shelly’s right cheek. Instead of playing back, Shelly says, “What? Alice got you all worked up?”

“Nothing like that. It’s funny actually—”

“Oh, it’s funny is it?” Shelly snaps.

“Shel. Alice isn’t interested in me.”

“Is that what you would have told me about your zookeeper? Is this going to be the same thing?”

“Oh, baby. Is that what you think? That I would ruin everything? I love you and you’d better get that through your thick skull.”

Shelly sits on the side of the bed and looks at the floor. Brigid can tell she’s fighting between wanting to be mad and wanting to make peace. And Brigid knows she’s going to have to make it all better.

“Do you want to know what’s so funny?” Brigid sits next to her lover and puts a hand on her thigh. “Alice isn’t interested in me past the museum and maybe a nice friendship. She’s interested in you.”

“Me? What the fuck?”

"When you were in Myrtle, were you involved with a young girl named Keeran?"

"When you were in Myrtle, were you involved with a young girl named Keeran?"

"What the hell does that have to do with anything?"

"Alice is the woman that Keeran left with. Now they're here."

Shelly's face drops. "You're fucking kidding me."

"I wouldn't."

"I'm freaking haunted."

It's obvious to Brigid that Shelly is trying to keep a straight face, but the irony is too much, even for her.

"There's one other thing. I ... um, well, I invited them to come down for dinner sometime."

Shelly lets out a belly laugh. "You're kidding me. Actually, no you're not. Are you?"

"Nope."

Their laughter fills the room. Brigid nudges closer to Shelly and runs a hand down her bare arm. "Honey, there's something else too. Yesterday, at the zoo..."

Shelly pulls Brigid to straddle her lap. "Whatever it is, it can wait. I think we have some unfinished business from this morning."

Brigid's skirt is rucked up around her waist as she straddles her lover's hips. She hears Josie in her head. "Tell her after sex." Feeling bold, she

pushes Shelly back onto the bed and crawls up her body. She hovers above her on all fours.

When Brigid breathes deeply, her entire body sways and she feels like the lions. She brings her head down to Shelly's breasts and rubs through the cotton of her T-shirt. She takes a deep breath of her lover's scent and nips her on the collarbone.

"Hey!"

"Shush," Brigid says. "You can be on the bottom for once." She sucks deeply on Shelly's neck, licks her throat, and works her way up for a deep kiss. The women's mouths meet. Brigid draws her tongue along Shelly's chapped lower lip, relishing in the roughness of her lover.

Brigid sits up and pulls her blouse off and unhooks her bra. Her breasts rest heavily on her ribs that taper into her trim waist. She reaches behind her to unzip her skirt, shifts to remove it, and settles herself on Shelly's narrow hips.

Brigid looks down on her lover, and the two smile at each other.

"You love me," says Shelly.

"Let's get you naked."

"You know I do," says Brigid, and she starts tugging on Shelly's T-shirt. "Let's get you naked." Soon Shelly's T-shirt and boy shorts are in the same pile as Brigid's clothes.

The two women lie back on their pillows and curl together in their bed. Brigid runs her hand down Shelly's stomach to the slight patch of fur she keeps and trips her fingers along Shelly's lips. Everything is wet and swollen and Brigid licks her lips for the excitement in her lover. She slips her middle finger between Shelly's folds, over her already erect clit, and into the moisture of her opening. She rubs and presses at the same time. Brigid circles the opening and slips her finger inside, hooking it, and, ever so slightly, pumps.

Shelly arches and wriggles. “Let me—”

“No. Let me.”

Brigid brings her fingers to her mouth to taste her lover’s juices. Returning them to Shelly’s cunt, she presses hard on her lover’s clit, her own wetness growing between her legs.

Brigid rubs and circles and presses with a deep passion for the blonde woman lying next to her. Shelly begins breathing harder and harder.

“Baby.”

“Yes?”

“I ... I...”

“I know.” And Brigid rubs harder until Shelly comes, screaming into the bedroom they share.

“*What?*”

Brigid fidgets. “Well, um ... you see. Josie’s back at the zoo. With the lions.”

“Your goddamn zookeeper is back. Fucking great! Do I even want to know what happened?”

“I’d like to think you’d be proud of me.” Brigid tells Shelly every detail.

“Kiss you? She tried to kiss you? I’m going to fucking kill her!”

Shelly is pacing the room like one of Brigid's caged cats. "Kiss you? She tried to kiss you? I'm going to fucking kill her!" She stops with her back to Brigid.

"Babe. It's controllable. I'll only visit the lions on her days off, and the rest is just business." Brigid wraps her arm around Shelly's waist.

"*Just business?* I remember what business lead to last time, and now you have Alice too." Shelly whips around and yanks away from Brigid.

"Oh, honey, come on. You should know better than that by now. Between the two of us, we've made mistakes. This isn't one of them."

"I've got to get away. I'll be back." Shelly grabs a pair of jeans, a sweatshirt, her boots, and a coat. She's dressed and down the stairs in a heartbeat.

Brigid stands in the doorway and tries to stop her. "Stay here and we'll talk this out. It isn't that bad.

But Shelly is out the door and into the Chevelle in a flash. She kicks up rocks and icy snow on her way down the drive. Brigid stands in the door feeling entirely dumbfounded.

The roads have been bad with the recent storm. Brigid panics and runs for her coat.

She slides the 'Cuda down the drive and onto the county road. The back roads are covered thickly with snow, and they lead through curves that should be taken cautiously on a good day.

The wide tracks of the Chevelle are easy to follow, no matter how slowly Brigid goes through the back roads and onto the highway. That's when the slickness takes over.

Brigid turns east to the straightaway and takes the curves slowly. It's the ambulance screaming past to the west that changes her mind.

“Shelly!”

Brigid whips her car around and follows.

Flashing sheriff’s lights and blocked traffic panic Brigid. She can’t get any closer and pulls the hot rod to the side of the road. Traffic is backed up and emergency lights are flashing. Brigid leaves the car and runs to the accident

“Missed the curve.”

“Tree.”

“Trapped.”

The words follow Brigid through the crowd until she stops.

The silver car is mashed, the front end wrapped around a full, fat tree.

The silver car is mashed, the front end wrapped around a full, fat tree. The driver’s side is crushed. Emergency personnel are gathering their tools to begin their work.

“The ice grabbed it.”

Brigid ignores the emergency gear and walks up to the car.

Shelly’s head lies high on the headrest due to the neck brace. Her nose is bleeding, and her face is covered in cuts from flying glass.

“Ma’am. You’re gonna have to move. We gotta work here.”

Brigid steps back in shock. Looking at the car, Brigid can’t imagine where Shelly’s body fits in the jumble of metal.

“Everyone back!” The crew tackles the driver’s door with the jaws-of-life. The metal screeches and pops. The hinges give way. After what seems like hours, the door breaks loose and the EMT crew can get to Shelly.

When they finally pull her out onto the backboard, Brigid can hold still no longer. She runs to her broken lover’s side as she is carried to the ambulance. Shelly’s leg lies at an unnatural angle under the sheet. Brigid hears “Life Flight” and realizes they’re going to fly Shelly somewhere.

They load Shelly into the ambulance and continue working on her. Brigid starts to climb in.

“I’m sorry, miss. You can’t come with us. There’s too much we have to do for her.”

“Where are you taking her?”

“Methodist Hospital in Indy. You can see her there. We’ve got to go.” He shuts the ambulance doors, the siren blares, and they drive off.

Surrounded by the aftermath of the accident, Brigid stands in the road and stares as the ambulance takes her lover away.