

# ~ A Slice Of Heaven ~

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*Dedicated to the Queen of the Double Standard*

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Lindsey Carter tipped the passenger seat back, stretched out her legs and closed her eyes as soon as she got in the van. "Coffee. I need coffee," she groaned, as they pulled away from the curb in front of her apartment. "And turn the heat on, will you? My foot is soaked." It was pouring down rain and she'd stepped into an ankle-deep puddle.

"Another late night bike ride?" her photographer, Chris Biltmore asked.

"Yeah. Couldn't sleep. I made it back just before this latest front moved in. Thank God," Lindsay raised a hand to stifle a yawn. "Man, it sure has been raining a lot this week."

"Where'd you end up this time?"

"Pinconning."

"Like the cheese?" he asked.

"Exactly. The Cheese Capitol of Michigan, according to the sign on the outskirts. It's just north of Bay City."

"And what was in Pinconning?" he asked.

"Not much at midnight."

"Midnight? What time did you get back?"

"Four a.m.," she said.

"Lindsey, you worry me sometimes," he said.

"You sound like my grandmother."

"We're here," he announced as he stopped the van. The rain beat down on the roof of the vehicle with a thunderous cadence.

Lindsey opened her eyes and sat up halfway to peer out the window. "A jumbo coffee and two chocolate covered cake donuts, please. And don't forget the half-and-half and Equal." She reached into her pocket and pulled out a ten-dollar bill.

"I don't know how I ever got started waiting on you like I do," he grumbled good-naturedly as he

took the money from her and pocketed it. He pulled the hood up on his parka. Like Lindsey's, it was red and had a big Action News logo on the back.

"Oh, you like it when people ask you what it's like to work in TV News," she said, laying back down as he darted out into the storm.

An hour later she was alert enough to finally inquire about their destination. The rain had not diminished.

They had to drive well below the speed limit because of reduced visibility and the amount of standing water in low-lying areas of the road. There was little traffic.

"Which county today?" she said, polishing off the second donut and the last sip of coffee.

"Charlevoix," he said. "Shouldn't be too much longer."

Lindsey's assignments never needed much preparation. That was especially true of this gig-the regular Saturday feature report on some interesting little person or place in one of the 14 northern Michigan counties in the Action News viewing area. She'd been assigned it every week since she'd joined the station two months earlier.

She longed for a challenging assignment, but the news director kept telling her she had an invaluable touch with human-interest stories. Lindsey suspected he kept her on the fluff stuff because he didn't think she could handle anything bigger. She rarely got a chance to do a live shot from the field.

*Just wait. One of these days someone will tip me to something. Or I'll be in the right place, at the right time...* Lindsey reached behind Chris' seat and pulled a Michigan County Atlas from the seatback pocket.

She flipped it open to Charlevoix County and scanned the two-page spread.

"We've got Charlevoix itself of course..." she said, picking out the major cities. "Boyne City. Boyne Falls. East Jordan. Ironton. Bay Shore."

"Anything jump out at you?" Chris had to nearly shout to be heard over the rain.

She shook her head. "Nah. It says there's a mushroom picking championship in Boyne City in May, and an apple festival in Charlevoix in the fall. Not much else."

"What do you want to do?"

"Since we're coming in on 31, let's just head up to Charlevoix. It's on Lake Michigan, should be some pretty scenery, anyway. If this rain ever lets up." She leaned down to look closer at the map. "There's a ferry there, to Beaver Island," she read. "Did you know Beaver Island was America's only kingdom?"

"Aw, c'mon Lindsey, you know I get seasick," Chris protested.

"We'll get you some Dramamine."

"That stuff puts me to sleep. Hey, look there!" Chris pointed to a colorful billboard ahead.

The sign advised travelers to take the next right or they would miss:

**Slice of Heaven Café**

**35 kinds of**

**HOMEMADE PIE!**

**Made fresh every day!**

"Take it! Take it!" Lindsey shouted as they neared the turnoff.

Chris was already slowing down. He knew the instant he'd seen the sign, he'd found a reprieve. The tall reporter sitting beside him was a sucker for pie, though her lean physique belied her weakness for sweets. And a pie café might fill the bill for their story, he thought. At least they could wait out the rain.

A couple of miles further, they entered the village of Meriwether, a two-block long cluster of establishments that included the café, a gas station, a handful of shops, a post office, fire station and library.

"Only one car in the café parking lot," Lindsey observed with a frown as they pulled up in front.

"Maybe they don't open until lunch?"

Lindsey pulled up her hood and darted the short distance to the entrance to read the hours of operation. She tried the door. It was locked.

"You're right. They don't open until 11," the reporter relayed when she returned to the van. "So we have a couple of hours to kill."

"Cool. Wake me." Chris shut off the engine and laid his seat back. He put his baseball cap over his eyes and crossed his arms over his chest.

"The coffee's caught up to me," Lindsey said. "I'm going out for a bit. I'll be back."

It was raining so hard she didn't see the enormous pothole beneath the van until she stepped down into it. Now both feet were soaked. She sprinted to the gas station to use the restroom, then took her time browsing the aisles of the neighboring variety store. Next door to that was the library, which was housed in a converted two-story home. She glanced at her watch and went inside, shaking the rain from her coat in the entrance vestibule.

Meriwether had an impressive library for such a small town. The entryway was decorated with colorful posters advertising a weekly story hour for kids, a book club for adults, free computer classes, and a special open house in two weeks to commemorate the institution's silver anniversary.

There were thousands of books in the stacks, and the library had four public computer terminals, two of which were in use. A handful of other patrons milled about the shelves, or bent over books at one of the tables. The front desk was unoccupied.

Lindsey headed to the Periodicals rack, picked up the latest copy of Traverse Magazine, and settled into one of two big easy chairs near the desk.

She was engrossed in a story about a family-run fudge business when a voice hailed her.

"Hi, Welcome to the Library. May I help you with anything?"

She looked up at an attractive woman, about her age, smiling at her from behind the desk.

The librarian was cute in a Meg Ryan kind of way; blonde and perky, with an engaging smile and full lips, and soft hazel eyes framed by long dark lashes. She was casually dressed in a long sleeve blouse and khakis.

Lindsey tried not to stare, but it wasn't easy. "Uh, no thanks," she said, feeling uncustomarily nervous. "I'm killing time, waiting for the café to open."

"Ah, I see. Well, you've come to the best place in town for that. What kind's your favorite?"

"Excuse me?" Lindsey could feel a flush rise to her cheeks.

"Pie. You came here for the pie, right? Personally, I like the Mocha Java Chocolate Cream best, but their Mile-High Lemon Meringue is pretty darn tasty, too."

Lindsey grinned. "Do they have rhubarb?" she asked.

The librarian nodded. "Ruby Red Rhubarb, Raspberry-Rhubarb and Rum Rhubarb with Raisins. You've not been here before?"

"Nope, we just saw the sign on the main road."

The librarian pulled a well-worn menu from a drawer of her desk and brought it over to Lindsey. "Here's the pie menu. They also have a special of the day."

"Thanks," Lindsey said, glancing at the menu. In addition to a mind-boggling list of pies, the menu contained a brief history of the café and the four elderly sisters who owned it. Three were widows who lived above the restaurant. It looked like a great choice for their feature piece. "Do you have any other material on the café? Or the owners?"

"Sure," the librarian said, moving to retrieve a hand-bound album from the reference section. "There have been stories about it in two newspapers and three magazines. Here they are." She carried the album over to Lindsey and handed it over. "The owners are a wonderful bunch of women. They do a lot for the community."

Lindsey leafed through the album, scanning the articles. "This is great. I'm going to do a story on them for Channel 6 News."

"Really? That's wonderful!" the librarian said. Her eyebrows shot up. "*That's* why you looked familiar! You're that new reporter! I'm sorry I didn't recognize you right away. I'm Emily Fairfield, by the way." She offered her hand.

"Lindsey Carter. Pleased to meet you, Emily," Lindsey said, taking the other woman's hand firmly.

"Same here. When will the story air?"

"It'll be the kicker for the 6 o'clock newscast. Probably about 6:25," Lindsey said.

Emily frowned. "Tonight?"

"Something wrong?"

"Well, I won't get the chance to see it, I'm afraid. I'm teaching a computer class tonight until 7."

"Would you like me to send you a tape?" Lindsey asked impulsively.

"I'd love that, if it's not too much trouble."

"Not at all. It'll give me a chance to say thanks for your help. Can I get copies of these?" She held up the album of articles.

"Certainly," Emily said. She copied off the articles on the library's Xerox machine and put them into a manila folder for the reporter. "Here you go."

"I really appreciate this. Saves me a lot of legwork."

"Well, that's what I do," Emily said with a smile.

One of the couples who'd been milling through the aisles approached the desk with an armful of books.

"Did you see the new Sue Henry mystery, Rebecca?" the librarian asked the gray-haired woman.

"No!" the woman said. "Where is it?"

"In the front window," Emily said. "I'll get it for you." She retrieved the book and brought it back to the desk, along with another mystery she had picked up. "You'll like this one, too."

"Getting any new westerns in, Emily?" the husband asked.

"I ordered a half-dozen more from Amazon, Cliff," she replied. "They should be in next week. I'll call you."

"Thanks. See you," the man said.

"Bye. Be careful driving. There's a lot of water on the road."

*She sure smiles a lot,* Lindsey thought as she watched the interaction. Lindsey couldn't put her finger on why she found the librarian so fascinating. She was attractive, sure. But it was more than that. She had a warmth about her whole personality that the reporter found very compelling.

It had been a long while since Lindsey had been out on a date. *It's a lot harder once you're recognized wherever you go,* she thought. *You never know if someone's flirting with you or just being nice to you because you're on TV.*

Lindsey glanced outside. It was raining so hard now she couldn't see two feet. She couldn't remember ever seeing it rain like this before and couldn't imagine driving in it. Just as well they were stuck here for a while. *There are worse places to have to hang out than a town with 35 kinds of pie and one very tasty looking librarian.*

She read the articles through and took notes on what she would ask the 'pie ladies', all the while sneaking more sideways glances at Emily. The woman seemed to know all her patrons by name, as well as their occupations, health concerns, even how their kids were doing in school.

"I put aside a book for you, Hannah," the librarian told a young girl of about six who came in with her mother. Emily handed a large picture book to the girl and the girl's eyes got big.

"Mommy, Mommy!" the girl showed it to her mother. "The doggies look just like Domino!"

"They sure do, honey. Thanks, Emily," the woman said.

"Any time, Elaine. Here are the other books you called about. How did your Dad's surgery go?"

"Oh, he's a tough old coot. He'll be back at Bingo next week," the woman answered, and both of them laughed.

"That's great. Give him my best, won't you?" Emily asked.

"You bet. See you."

The reporter and librarian were alone. Emily was occupied with putting books away. Lindsey liked watching her surreptitiously from the chair. She liked the way the woman moved--kind of easy and graceful, like she took yoga or something. Lindsey felt a little clumsy by comparison. She seemed to always be bumping into things.

Lindsey wished she could think of something clever to say. She was usually good at small talk, but not at the moment.

The rain drummed down. The street outside was deserted.

"You seem to know everyone in town," Lindsey said to break the silence.

"Pretty much. I grew up here," Emily said.

"Quite the opposite for me. My dad was in the military so we moved around a lot," Lindsey said.

"How did you end up in Michigan?"

"I read about the reporter's job in a trade magazine." Lindsey was about to elaborate when they were interrupted by the wail of a siren, very close by.

"That's the firehouse," Emily said. She picked up the phone and dialed a number from memory.

Two fire trucks screamed by, barely visible through the thick curtain of rain.

"They have a scanner at the gas station," Emily explained while she waited for someone to pick up on the other end. "Hi Sandy, It's Emily. What's happening?" She listened for a moment, and frowned. "Oh my. Was anybody hurt?"

Lindsey was on her feet now, moving toward the desk. She hovered over the librarian.

"O.K., Thanks Sandy." Emily hung up the phone. "Remember that little bridge you came over about a mile before you hit town?"

Lindsey nodded.

"The rain just took it out. Collapsed right into the river."

"Anybody hurt?" Lindsey asked as she pulled on her parka.

"No, they don't think so," Emily answered.

"Thanks again," Lindsey called over her shoulder as she hurried out into the storm.

The van was already running when she got to it. The sirens had awakened Chris and he was anxious to follow the fire trucks. "Where ya been?" he asked as she got in and he pulled away from the curb.

"Research," she answered. "That bridge we crossed just outside of town washed out."

"Anybody on it when it happened?"

"They don't think so, we'll see."

There was standing water everywhere they looked and there were virtual ponds in the low areas of the road, some so deep Chris wondered aloud whether the van would stall.

They saw the flashing lights ahead and slowed. It was impossible to see anything through the rain. They parked and Lindsey got out while Chris crawled into the back seat to get the camera. "Be careful!" he hollered.

Lindsey headed toward the fire trucks and once she got up to them, she could just make out the river ahead. It was well over its banks on both sides, and there was only a thin suggestion of the bridge remaining-- the left rail, bent out of shape along its entire length by the force of the floodwater. There was no sign of the rest of the bridge.

Lindsey was astounded by how high the river had risen in the two hours since they'd crossed it.

Firemen were all along the near bank, spaced several yards apart downstream of the road. They were looking into the river, searching to make sure no one had been on the bridge when it gave way.

Chris joined Lindsey. He had the camera perched on his shoulder, covered against the rain. He began to tape the scene, starting with where the bridge had been, and panning down to the firemen.

Lindsey approached the nearest fireman, who looked barely out of his teens. "I'm from Channel 6 News. Who's in charge?"

"The news? Man, you got here fast! The chief is Dave Christian. Over there." He pointed to an older man with a coil of rope thrown over one shoulder.

"Lindsey!" Chris shouted. "There's something in the water!" He was looking into his viewfinder, pointing toward a large oak downstream on the opposite riverbank that was sticking up out of the turbulent floodwaters.

For a moment, Lindsey could see nothing unusual, and neither could the two firemen near her who were alerted by Chris' shout. But as the water swirled and eddied they all caught a quick glimpse of metal—the top of a car, wedged against the tree by the force of the current.

"Over there!" the young fireman shouted to the rest. "There's a car!"

Lindsey's heartbeat sped up. There was no one on the opposite bank, where they'd seen the car. She didn't see how the men around her could possibly reach the vehicle through the fast water — not without a boat.

One of the firemen raced back to the truck she was standing beside and opened a side panel, revealing an assortment of rescue gear. He pulled out a wetsuit and began pulling it on.

Two of the other firemen were taking turns trying to throw a rope with a grappling hook at the end over to the opposite bank, without success. The distance was too far.

The Chief hurried over to the fireman in the wetsuit. Chris taped the interaction.

"The water looks awful fast, Jason. I don't think you should try to make it over until we can get a line across," Chief Christian said.

At that moment, a very wet and terrified teenaged girl popped up beside the submerged car.

"Help!" she screamed. "Help me!" The girl scrambled to put her arms around the tree, but it was too big for her to get more than a tenuous hold on it. The floodwaters beat against her mercilessly, and the nearest branches were too far above her to reach.

Lindsey knew the girl wouldn't last long where she was.

"Hang on!" The firefighters shouted encouragement to the teenager. "We'll get to you! Don't let go!"

"I can't!" the girl screeched. "Help me!"

"We can't wait, Dave," the man in the wetsuit told the Chief. "I'll just have to hope the railing holds. I'll be all right."

"I'm gonna' tie a line on you, then," the Chief said.

"Dave, look at that rail---there's too many jagged ends for the line to snag on. It'd more likely hang me up than help me," the man argued, as he slipped on a life jacket.

The Chief nodded. "All right, Jason. It's your call."

Jason took the coil of nylon rope from the chief and slipped it over one shoulder before rushing

down to where the bridge had been. He stepped out into the river, using the bent guardrail to help him get across. The water was a churning cauldron of fast current and floating debris.

Lindsey held her breath as the man began to way his make his way across, pulling himself along hand over hand. The rail was submerged about halfway across, and in order to keep hold of it, the fireman himself had to briefly disappear beneath the surface.

When he came back up, he was clearly struggling to hang on to the guardrail. He made no forward progress for a full minute or two; expending all his energy in trying to keep from being swept away by the vicious current.

"Jesus," Chris muttered under his breath from beside Lindsey, as he watched the scene through the viewfinder of his camera. He was on a wide shot so he could get both the firefighter and the girl in the same frame.

Finally the firefighter in the water began to pull himself forward again. He had only another 20 feet to go.

"I can't hang on!" the girl screamed.

"He's almost to you! Don't give up!" one of the fireman on the bank shouted.

"Lindsey-upstream, look!" Chris shouted from beside her, and she followed his line of sight and spotted a large log in the water headed right for the firefighter.

The Chief saw it at the same moment. "Jason! Watch out!"

The man in the water managed to evade the log, but when it hit the guardrail, it snapped the firefighter's tenuous lifeline and sent him barreling downstream in the current. He pulled hard against it, trying to reach the opposite bank.

The current took him past the girl, but he managed to reach solid ground another 100 yards downstream. Lindsey thought he certainly had to be exhausted, but he didn't show it.

He ran along the bank until he got as close as he could to the submerged car and quickly anchored one end of his rope to the nearest tree. He tied the other end around himself and waded out into the water just upstream of the girl. He let the current take him to her-and as soon as he was within reach, the girl grabbed at him and the two of them floated downstream several feet, locked together, until the rope grew taught.

Their heads disappeared beneath the surface for a moment when it did, but the man's lifejacket pulled them back up again, the girl coughing water. They hung on the end of the rope for a long time, the water rushing past them, like fish caught on the end of a fishing line. The fireman seemed unable to pull them both to shore against the current.

"Where the hell is that boat?" the Chief shouted into his radio. The response wasn't what he

wanted to hear. "That's not going to help! We need it now!"

"Chief, look!" One of the firemen on the bank shouted, as a pickup truck with a camper on top came into view on the road across the river. It pulled to a stop several feet before the edge of the water, and a plump middle-aged woman got out, popping open an umbrella.

"Shit," the chief cursed, just loud enough for Lindsey to overhear.

"They need help!" one of the fireman hollered to the woman, pointing toward the submerged car and the two on the rope.

The woman raced to the back of the camper, and a few seconds later, a burly man appeared, wearing only a pair of boxer shorts. He splashed through the shallow water toward where the rope was anchored, then braced himself and began pulling them in, inch by inch. It was torturously slow going. Several times he'd gain a foot or two and then lose it again when the wet rope slipped through his fingers. Halfway there, he had to holler for his wife to help. She dropped the umbrella and got on the rope behind him.

Finally, after several minutes, the couple got the firefighter and girl close enough for them to touch bottom. All four were clearly ready to drop and drenched to the bone.

The firefighter said something to the couple who had saved them, and the man nodded his head. They all headed back to the camper, and the couple and girl disappeared into the back.

The firefighter detoured to the edge of the water nearest the chief. "I'm going with them to the hospital in Charlevoix to make sure the girl is all right," he hollered. "It's Charlene Edwards-Bruce and Kitty's girl. Will you call them?"

"I will," the Chief hollered back. "Great job, Jason. Go get warm."

Lindsey spent a few minutes interviewing the chief on camera, and got the names of the girl's parents and where they lived. By the time she and Chris pulled up in front of their two-story colonial at the edge of town, the Edwards' had heard the news. After another short interview, Lindsey and Chris headed back to the library, where Lindsey hoped to find some background information on the bridge and when it was built. It was still raining.

Lindsey pulled out her cell phone. "I'm going to call the station and tell them what's happened." *This will get the news director's attention.*

But she couldn't get a signal because of the rain, so she stuck the phone back in her pocket as they pulled up in front of the library.

"Do I have time to grab a piece of pie while you research the bridge?" Chris asked.

Lindsey glanced at her watch. "Yeah. But we need to head back pretty quick if we're going to

have time to get this edited for the 6. Take 20 minutes-and bring me a piece of rhubarb to go, will you?"

"Rhubarb? You get 35 kinds to choose from and you pick rhubarb?"

"You don't know what you're missing," Lindsey responded as she got out of the van.

She headed back into the library to find Emily alone, on a ladder, busily pulling books from a bookshelf in the children's section-- a large room that had been added on to the original home. Atop the bookshelf sat three buckets, side by side.

"Sprung a leak?" Lindsey asked, heading toward the librarian.

"Oh! Hi there, didn't hear you come in," Emily said. "Yes, I'm afraid this happens sometimes when it really pours. I've had the roof repaired a couple of times-most recently just a month ago, but the roofers apparently can't pinpoint how it's coming in."

"Can I help?" Lindsey inquired.

"If you wouldn't mind, that would be great," Emily said. "I'm trying to get this section cleared so the books won't get wet. I lost a few before I noticed it was leaking."

Emily handed down books to Lindsey, who set them on a table a short distance away.

Working next to the librarian, Lindsey got an up close look at Emily's toned body, delicate hands, and engaging smile. The woman's subtle perfume was musky, enticing. It was all terribly distracting. For a few minutes, Lindsey forgot what she'd come in for.

It was Emily herself who brought the reporter back to reality. "So I understand it was quite a thrilling scene at the bridge," the librarian said when they were nearly finished. "But Charlene is going to be fine?"

"How did you hear all that?" Lindsey was dumbfounded.

"Small town. Word travels fast," Emily said with a grin.

"Well, your information was accurate," Lindsey confirmed. "Actually, I came in to see if I could get some history on the bridge for my story."

"Ah. Well, I don't think I've got anything on that here. That would probably be in the records at the township offices." Emily glanced at the clock on the wall. It was 3:15 p.m. "Which unfortunately are closed until tomorrow."

Lindsey frowned.

"I know the township secretary. Want me to give her a call?" Emily asked.

"Hmmm. Well, I'd like the information," Lindsey considered. "But we really should be taking off pretty quick if we're going to make it back to the station."

"That may be a problem," the librarian said.

"What do you mean?"

"There are only two ways out of town," Emily said. "West, over the bridge, or east, where the road is under water."

"I can't get out of here?" Lindsey asked.

"Afraid not," the librarian said. "Between the river and the low spots around us, Meriwether is more or less an island at the moment."

"Oh, great," Lindsey groaned.

"Does your station have a helicopter?"

"Nope. But maybe I can get them to send a car for us, if we can just get to the other side. Know anyone who has a boat?" Lindsey asked.

Emily thought a moment. "Not here in town. Let me make a call." She went to the phone and dialed a number. "Hi, Perry. It's Emily. The two news people who are here need to get out. Know anyone with a boat?" She listened for a moment, looked at Lindsey, who was watching her, and shook her head. She listened for another couple of minutes. "O.K., thanks anyway Perry."

Emily hung up the phone and turned to Lindsey. "No boats anywhere. Apparently we're not so bad off, considering what's happening elsewhere. Lots of homes and farms are flooded. Resources are stretched pretty thin."

"I better call the station," Lindsey said.

A buzzer sounded and Chris came through the door, shaking water off his parka.

"Hey Lindsey, did you hear? We're stuck here..." He began, but stopped when he saw her nodding her head.

"Yeah, I was about to try the station again." She got out her cell phone. "Oh sorry. Emily, this is my photographer, Chris Biltmore. Chris, say hi to Emily Fairfield, helpful librarian and pie recommender."

Emily smiled at the comment, and stepped forward to shake the photographer's hand. "Nice to meet you Chris."

"Same here."

"Still can't get a signal," Lindsey said. "Can I use your phone, Emily? I have a calling card."

"Sure," Emily said. "Help yourself."

Lindsey dialed the newsroom while Chris settled into one of the big easy chairs with the latest copy of Sports Illustrated.

"Hi Chet," Lindsey greeted the weekend producer. "I'm in Meriwether, near Charlevoix. We were going to do the feature story here, but the bridge washed out. We've got great video—a fireman risked his life to save a girl whose car was washed off the bridge. Problem is, we can't get out. All the roads are blocked."

She listened for a couple of minutes. "Yeah, everyone's fine," she said. A frown appeared and she reclined back against the desk. She cradled the phone against her shoulder to address Chris. "I'm on hold. The roof just collapsed on a convenience store in Charlevoix, and they're evacuating a flooded nursing home in Petoskey. Chet cut me off to answer another call."

After another moment, Lindsay put the phone back to her ear. "I'm still here." She listened for another minute. "Okay. Will do."

Lindsey hung up and turned to Chris. "They want us to stay here until we can drive out, and put together a story on how the locals are coping. Human interest. They'll do a big special on the storm next week and we'll have a five-minute piece in it." *Even with this great rescue video, I'm still going to be the last piece in the newscast.* She sighed.

Chris could read the disappointment in her voice. "Cheer up, Lindsey. Think of all the pie you can try."

That did indeed bring a smile to the reporter's face. She looked over at the librarian. "We need a place to stay. Is there a hotel or bed-and-breakfast close by?"

Emily's eyes widened slightly. "The nearest hotel is the Drummer's Inn. Across the bridge and up 31 a ways. There's nothing in the town itself."

"Oh great," Lindsey and Chris said, almost simultaneously.

"Wait a minute," Emily said. "I bet they have a couple of bunks at the firehouse." She picked up the phone and dialed. "It's all guys over there," she warned Lindsey while she was waiting. "But they're a good bunch." She put the phone to her ear. "Hi again Perry. Do you have a couple of empty beds over there our journalist friends can use?" She listened. "Great, I'll send him over. Thanks, Perry."

Emily set the phone in its cradle and turned to Lindsey. "They're putting up a couple of folks already, and only have one more bed," she explained. "Chris can take that one, and you can stay

with me."

*Say what?* "Uh, that's very nice of you, Emily," Lindsey stuttered, with a sudden nervousness that reminded her of going to the high school prom. *Get a grip.*

"Hey, not at all. I live just upstairs," Emily explained. "There's plenty of room. I'm just sorry it's a bit of a mess."

Lindsey couldn't suppress a grin at the revelation. "No worries there. I'm sure my apartment is worse." *This should be interesting.* She didn't know why, but Lindsey felt uncommonly nervous around the attractive librarian.

"How about something to eat, ladies?" Chris interrupted her thoughts. "You haven't had anything since those donuts," he reminded Lindsey.

"Sure," Lindsey said. She turned to Emily. "What do you say, can we buy you some dinner to say thanks? What time do you close up?"

"Well, there's no way I'm going to have that class tonight," Emily said. "And we haven't had anyone in here in the last hour. I might as well close up. I don't think we're going to get anyone else in here in this rain." She grabbed her raincoat and shut off the lights, and the three of them headed down the block to the café.

Though the street outside was deserted, there were nearly two dozen people in the café. Lindsey recognized a few of the firemen who'd been at the bridge, and the clerk behind the counter at the variety store she'd browsed in. There was a buzz of conversation in the room, with people at neighboring tables exchanging tales about the flooding.

They found an unoccupied booth, and Chris and Lindsey slipped into one side, Emily the other. Several people hailed the librarian, including the spry gray-haired woman who came to their table to wait on them. "Hi there, Emily. Do your friends need menus?"

"Yes, please Doris. The regular menu and the pie menu."

"Something to drink?" she asked Lindsey and Chris.

"Coffee, please," Lindsey answered.

"For me too," Chris said.

"The usual, honey?" the waitress asked Emily.

Emily nodded and the woman bustled away.

"What's the usual?" Lindsey asked, glancing around the café. Nearly everyone around them was eating a thick slice of pie. The young couple to her left had blueberry a la mode and coconut

cream. The man to her right--apple with a thick slab of cheddar cheese melted on top. In front of her, an elderly woman ate delicate spoonfuls of pumpkin with whipped cream, while her talkative grandson bolted cherry a la mode between truly awful knock- knock jokes.

"I have coffee in the morning, cappuccino in the afternoon." Emily said.

"Ah. I see. A fellow caffeine fiend. Wasn't your favorite pie Mocha Java something?" Lindsey asked.

"Good memory," Emily remarked. Her eyes met Lindsey's and held there for a brief moment.

They were given their drinks, and the two journalists got menus. The regular menu was only half the size of the pie menu, but it lived up to the motto of the café, written in bold lettering on the front: *All pies, All the time*. Every entrée had a crust. There was chicken pot pie and beef pot pie, as well as a seafood version and one for vegetarians. Shepherd's Pie promised homemade mashed potatoes on top, and there were quiches and pizza pies of every description.

They all ordered the special of the day--steak and potato pie, at Emily's recommendation. It had huge chunks of tender steak, potato and onion in a rich dark gravy, accented by just a hint of sherry. All enveloped in a flaky, buttery crust.

"I can't wait for dessert. This crust is incredible," Lindsey said as she polished off the last forkful of her main course.

"Yeah, that piece of chocolate pecan I had was awesome," Chris said. He picked up the pie menu and scanned the selections. "By the way, Lindsey, you still have that piece of rhubarb waiting for you in the van."

"Breakfast," Lindsey declared.

"I love some of these names..." Chris said, reading from the menu. "But how the heck do you know what you're getting when you order Sawdust pie?"

"That's coconut, pecans and graham crackers, mostly," Emily provided.

"Pennsylvania Dutch Shoofly pie?" Chris recited.

"Very sweet. Molasses, brown sugar and flour," Emily said. "How do you know all that?" he asked.

"Well, I've lived here all my life, so I've tried every kind at least once," Emily said. "And I like to cook, so I've asked for a few of the recipes."

"Aren't restaurants kind of protective of that kind of thing?" Lindsey asked.

"Usually, I guess. But I know the cooks. And they're all avid readers," Emily said with a grin.

"So when they want me to order a special book...or they run up their late fees... We dicker."

They all laughed.

Their waitress reappeared to clear away their dinner dishes. "What'll it be tonight, Emily?"

"Caramel Apple, please. A la mode. Thanks, Doris," Emily said.

"And you two?"

"I'll try the Maple Bourbon Sweet Potato Pie," Chris said.

"Rhubarb a la mode for me, please," Lindsey said.

"You're going to order rhubarb when you have a piece of that waiting for you?" Chris rolled his eyes. "You have three dozen choices, Lindsey. Brandied Peach Custard Pie! Mississippi Mud Pie! Live a little."

"Like I said, you don't know what you're missing," the reporter replied.

Emily was amused by the exchange. "Nothing wrong with a little loyalty to a favorite thing," she declared. "But one should always remain open-minded." She looked right at Lindsey as she said this, in a sweet way that made Lindsey wonder whether there might be something behind the statement.

The waitress served them their pie, and the only sounds that could be heard for the first couple of minutes after were contented moans and sighs of pleasure.

"It must be fascinating to do what you two do," Emily remarked as they lingered over coffee.

"Well, I must admit I like the way the jacket can get us in a lot of places," Chris said, pointing to the logo on their parkas. "We get to meet some pretty cool people and we don't have to wait in line much."

*Yup, everyone fawns over TV people, Lindsey thought. But I think Emily is just friendly to everyone. That's what this is. Nothing special. You're imagining things. She is not flirting with you. You just wish she would.*

"Lindsey?" Chris' voice jarred her back to reality.

The reporter was caught staring off into space. She glanced at Emily to find the librarian smiling a bemused smile at her, as if she could read what she'd been thinking. Lindsey cleared her throat and looked away, as a flush of embarrassment rose to her cheeks.

"You all right, Lindsey?" Chris leaned forward, staring at her.

"Yeah, yeah, I'm fine," she said, yawning to hide her discomfort. "Just a little tired. Sorry, what did you say?"

"It's only 6, how can you be tired?" Chris said.

She looked outside. It was only now getting dark out. "Busy day. Stop nagging."

"You two sound like brother and sister," Emily commented.

"Yeah, that's about right," Lindsey agreed. "My pesky baby brother."

Chris looked at Lindsey and put on his best little boy pouty face. "I'm only two years younger than you are. I still don't understand why you refuse to go out with me," he said.

"I just told you why, little brother," Lindsey said. She reached over and tousled his hair until it stuck up in all directions.

"Quit, Lindsey." Chris turned to Emily. "Guess there's not much to do in this town at night, is there?"

"Well, this and the gas station are the only things open," Emily provided. "You can follow us back to the library and take out a book or some magazines," she suggested.

"That's cool. I'll just come back here a while, have some coffee and read."

They paid their check and hiked back down the block to the library. The rain had finally begun to let up a bit, but it was still drizzling out.

Chris checked out the latest Joseph Heywood mystery and Emily locked the front door behind him.

"C'mon upstairs," the librarian invited, leading Lindsey past a sign that said **Private. No Admittance**, and up a rear staircase. "I'll show you around. Let me know what I can do to make your stay a comfortable one."

"This is very kind of you, Emily. I really appreciate it." Lindsey repeated.

Emily paused at the top of the stairway and turned to give Lindsey a big smile. "I wasn't kidding when I said excuse the mess. I rarely have company up here." She lingered there for a moment, looking down at Lindsey with an impish expression.

*Are you trying to tell me something?* Lindsey wondered. But it was over so fast the reporter convinced herself it was nothing.

Emily showed her into a modest living room where the only things out of place were a coat, thrown casually over a chair, a newspaper, open on the coffee table, and a variety of cat toys

spread liberally all over the floor. "Watch where you step," Emily said with an embarrassed shrug. "I kind of spoil my cats."

At the sound of her voice, a black kitten with white paws and whiskers raced in from another room, followed by an orange tabby, half again its size, at a much more leisurely pace.

"Meet Whiskers and Bob," Emily provided. "I hope you're not allergic."

"No, I love cats," Lindsey said. "Haven't had one in a while because I move around so much. But I always had cats growing up."

"You can sleep in my office," Emily said. "There's a daybed in there. This way." She led Lindsey down a short hallway, past a bathroom and bedroom-the brass bed unmade, Lindsey noticed-and through the doorway beyond.

Emily, just ahead of the reporter, gasped as she stepped over the threshold. "Oh NO!"

Lindsey hurried into the room. Water was running in a thin stream down the opposite wall. The carpeting beneath was soaked. Emily's desk, cluttered with papers and books, was only a couple of inches from the water. Some books she had set on the floor beside it were ruined.

"Will you help me move the desk?"

"Sure."

They got the desk moved out of the way and everything else within several feet of the leak.

"I'm going to grab a bucket and some towels," Emily said, excusing herself.

"Do you have a tarp?" Lindsey's voice caught her at the door.

"Yeah, I think so. I'll check."

There was a balcony outside the wall where the leak was. Lindsey stepped out onto it. *It would be pretty easy to get a tarp up over that. I can use that little table to boost myself up. Just need something to hold down the edges.*

Emily returned to the room just as Lindsey stepped back inside. She handed the reporter a large brown tarp, then set a bucket under the leak and spread the towels out on the carpeting.

"We can throw this over the roof and maybe at least slow that leak down," Lindsey said. "Do you have something to weigh it down. Bricks? Rocks?"

"I'm using bricks as bookends," Emily said. "Be right back."

She returned with a half-dozen bricks cradled in her arm. Thanks for this," she said. "You sure

you don't mind?"

"No problem," Lindsey said, holding out her hands for the bricks.

"Oh, I'll come help you," Emily said, motioning her ahead.

"We don't both need to get soaked. I can handle this myself while you clean up in here."

"I wouldn't think of it," Emily said. "If you're going to climb up on my roof, the least I can do is hand these up to you and make sure you don't slip off and hurt yourself." She winked at Lindsey when she said this, and the reporter wondered; *is she flirting with me?*

Lindsey climbed up on the roof and got the tarp in place with Emily's help.

That was the moment it happened.

Reaching down for the last brick, a flash of lightning, very close, illuminated Emily in a frozen moment: hair plastered against her head, her blouse soaked and clinging to her, outlining her breasts. Her face was flushed with excitement, her eyes shining as she looked directly into Lindsey's. Lindsey had an overpowering urge to kiss her. She started to lean down...toward Emily...but a deafening crack of thunder broke the spell and sent both women hurrying inside.

Lindsey was breathing heavily, but Emily seemed nonplussed. The librarian shut the door to the balcony and went to examine the leak. It looked like it had stopped.

*Stupid. Stupid. Stupid.* Lindsey berated herself. *That's all you need-- make a pass at a straight woman while you're covering a story. She calls the news director, and there goes your job.*

"I'm going to dry off and change," Emily said, heading for the door. She paused at the doorway. "I didn't think. You don't have any spare clothes with you, do you?"

Lindsey shook her head. Her pants, socks and shoes were soaked, and her shirt was damp despite her parka. "Do you have a robe or something I could borrow? I can hang these up to dry."

"A robe I can do," Emily said, smiling broadly. "And a dryer. I'd offer you some clothes, but I don't think I have any pants that wouldn't make you look ridiculous."

"A robe will be great, thanks," Lindsey said. *Yeah, just great. Sit around half-naked with Emily and try not to think about how hot she is. Jesus, what an incredible smile she has.* The more time she spent with the librarian, the harder it was getting. It was like Lindsey's hormones had been in hibernation, but were suddenly coming back to life with a vengeance.

Emily returned with a terry cloth robe and a big towel and tossed them to the reporter. "I'm going to take a quick shower," she said. "You can have it after me if you'd like, to warm up."

"Uh, no, that's all right," Lindsey replied. "This will be fine." *A cold shower is what I need.*

*Probably best to just get dry and dressed as quickly as possible.*

"Okay, suit yourself," Emily said. "Make yourself at home. I'll be out in a minute and then I'll fix us a cup of tea or something. How does that sound?"

"Very nice, thanks."

Lindsey dried off and slipped on the robe, and took her wet clothes with her out to the living room. Whiskers and Bob appeared from nowhere and followed her around as she took in Emily's furnishings.

From the framed photographs on the walls and in the bookcases, she ascertained that Emily was a photography buff who liked to travel to far-flung places. There were pictures of the librarian in front of the pyramids, beneath the Eiffel Tower, beside the Orient Express, and atop the Great Wall of China. Always alone. *Who took the pictures? Lindsey wondered. A traveling companion? Or an agreeable stranger?*

From the selection of books at hand, Lindsey learned that Emily had a fondness for mysteries, true-life adventures and biographies, particularly of historical figures. And she hadn't been lying when she said she liked to cook. There were two shelves of cookbooks, including several on ethnic specialties. Thai food and Vietnamese, Chinese and Japanese, Mexican, Italian and Greek.

Lindsey had no skills whatsoever in the kitchen. When forced to cook for herself, she usually had a tuna sandwich, or cereal, or some other nondescript meal that took no time and no talent. Or she ate take-out. The routine was getting tiresome. Emily was getting more and more attractive all the time.

"That robe certainly does more for you than me. I swim in it," Emily observed from the hallway with a grin, as she dried her hair with a towel. She was dressed in a pair of men's flannel pajamas, which were comfortably roomy on the rather petite librarian.

The robe was none too large for Lindsey. It came only to mid-thigh, and it gaped open at the neck, revealing more cleavage than she was usually comfortable with.

Emily seemed to sense her discomfort. She disappeared for a moment into her bedroom and returned with a large fleece throw. She handed it to the reporter and nodded toward the couch. "Why don't you make yourself comfortable and I'll make the tea." She took Lindsey's wet clothes with her to dry them.

By the time she returned, Lindsey was comfortably settled into one end of the couch, the fleece tucked around her, feet up on the hassock. Emily handed her a cup of tea and settled into the other end of the couch, facing Lindsey, her legs stretched out between them

Lindsey felt mildly uncomfortable with Emily looking right at her. She couldn't meet her eyes. She sipped at her tea and wished she could think of something clever to say. Her mind went blank.

"What made you want to be a reporter?" Emily inquired.

"Oh, I don't know. A lot of things, I guess," Lindsey answered. "I thought it sounded exciting. Different every day. Travel. Good pay. You get to meet interesting people. And once in a while, you can make a difference. You know, bring something important to the public's attention."

"Is it what you thought it would be?" Emily asked.

"Well, it's too early to say," Lindsey asked. "I've only been doing it a few months. I mostly like it, though."

Emily's eyebrows shot up. "This is your first reporter job?"

Lindsey nodded. "Yeah, I know. I'm a little old to be just starting out as a TV reporter. Well, it's a second career for me. I ran a little music store in Pennsylvania for many years." Lindsey forced herself to smile. *Until I found out my partner was not only cheating on me, she had also put us in hock up to our eyeballs.*

"That's quite a switch!" the librarian said.

"Well, my degree was in journalism. I just never used it. When circumstances...took an unexpected turn, and I had to think about what I wanted to do next...I thought: You're not getting any younger. What will you regret not trying? That brought me back to reporting. I told myself I'd give it a year."

"Well, you sure seem like a natural at it, to me," Emily said. She paused. "I like watching you."

People told Lindsey all the time that they liked watching her. It was a standard comment when you got recognized on the street. *But it sure sounds different when Emily says it. It has all sorts of sexual undertones. Real or imagined? Imagined,* Lindsey concluded. *Wishful thinking again is all.*

"Thanks," the reporter replied. She could feel a flush in her cheeks. She wished she didn't blush quite so easily. She couldn't look at Emily. *Change the subject.* "So how long have you been a librarian?"

"Hmm. Let's see. Officially? 17 years. Since I was 18. But unofficially, I've been working here off and on since I was 10," Emily supplied.

"10?"

The librarian nodded. "I grew up in this house," she explained. "When I was seven, my father inherited some money, and he and my mother both retired. They were teachers. But they got bored just sitting around, so they turned the bottom floor into a library. They loved books." Her voice sounded melancholy.

"They've passed away?" Lindsey gently inquired.

"Yeah. They were killed by a drunk driver two months after I turned eighteen."

"That must have been terrible for you, losing both at once. And so young," Lindsey said.

"It was," Emily agreed. "I'd not have survived it without the support of the whole village. So many people stopped by. Brought me food. Kept me company. Got me out and about."

"That's one of the best things about living in a small town, I expect," Lindsey said.

"Just one of," Emily replied.

"You sure seem to like what you do."

"Oh, I do," Emily brightened. "I love books. I *devour* them. Opening a box of new books from Amazon or Baker & Taylor is like Christmas to me."

"Who's your favorite author?"

Emily pursed her lips in thought. "Golly. That's hard."

*She looks adorable when she does that,* Lindsey thought.

"I'm reading Alexander McCall Smith at the moment, and he's great," Emily continued. "And I like a lot of Stephen King's stuff." She shrugged, a sheepish expression on her face. "I find new favorites all the time. How about you?"

"I like Patricia Cornwell," Lindsey said. "And Dana Stabenow. And just about any true mountain climbing or sea-going adventure."

"Ah, all good choices there," Emily agreed.

They discussed lots more books, then branched off to favorite movies, TV shows and music. The hours slipped by.

Lindsey didn't think about the time at all until Emily yawned. She glanced toward the VCR, where the digital numbers read 12:05. "Better turn in," she said reluctantly. "I have a lot of ground to cover tomorrow."

"What time would you like me to wake you?" Emily asked.

"When do you usually get up?"

"About 8, or 8:15. I open the library at 9. An advantage of living upstairs."

"That's fine for me, too," Lindsey agreed.

"I'll give you the bathroom first," Emily offered, as they got to their feet and headed to the hallway. "I laid out a fresh towel for you. And a spare toothbrush."

"Thanks. That's very nice of you," Lindsey said. She paused at the door to the bathroom. "So you grew up here, ay?" She took in the rooms from a slightly different perspective, imagining a toddler Emily running down the hall, or a teenaged Emily inviting friends for a sleepover.

"Yup. You're sleeping in my bed," Emily said, with a small smile on her face.

"Oh?" Lindsey's voice seemed unusually high-pitched in her ears. *You're killing me with these double entendres. God, give me strength.*

Lindsey tossed and turned for the next 8 hours. She dreamt all night of Emily.

She would dream she was touching Emily. Caressing her stomach. Kissing her neck. Her lips seeking Emily's. Just as she would find them, she would be startled awake. Frustrated to find it all an illusion. Falling back asleep with difficulty, the dream would start anew.

The setting might be different. They were in the library in one. In the café, surrounded by pie, in another. But the circumstances were always the same. She was touching Emily, and soon, Emily was touching her.

Each dream got hotter. More explicit. And each time Lindsey awoke, she awoke more and more ready to explode. Until finally she had to find relief.

Once she took things well in hand, she slept soundly the rest of the night.

Lindsey had a hard time looking Emily in the eye the next morning. She got right up, and showered and dressed quickly. And though Emily offered coffee and breakfast, Lindsey said she needed to get going and set off almost at once.

Where yesterday she was not at all disappointed with being stuck in Pie-ville with Emily, Lindsey was not looking forward to another night of those dreams.

At least not until she was back in her own bed.

She wished the café was open. The convenience store had lousy coffee and mediocre donuts. She hung out in the van, sketching out the places they needed to shoot, deciding whom they'd interview. She could have done it in the library, but the dreams were still a little too fresh.

On the one hand, Lindsey regretted not spending every second she could with Emily. The rain had stopped overnight and the streets were beginning to dry out. She wouldn't be stranded for long here. But she was afraid she couldn't conceal her growing attraction for the woman, and was

afraid of what she might do on impulse. She needed some time and distance.

After a while, she headed over to the firehouse, where Chris briefed her on notes he'd taken while talking to firefighters the night before. Lindsey also did an on-camera interview with the two other visitors who'd spent the night at the firehouse. They were an elderly couple who'd read the Slice of Heaven Café menu online and had come all the way from Sault Ste. Marie for a slice of Butterscotch Cream Pie for him and Montmorrency Cherry Pie for her. This café, they declared, had better pie than anywhere they'd ever been, and they were real pie devotees who were always searching for a new culinary treat.

They weren't too disturbed by having to spend the night in the firehouse and getting a second opportunity at that memorable pie menu.

By the time the news team wrapped up things at the firehouse, the café had opened. Lindsey asked to speak to the owners, and the waitress brought back four cheery women in their 60s and 70s. Clearly sisters—all four had the same square jaw line and freckled complexion. Two had let their hair go gray-white, and two had clung tenaciously to the auburn hair that must have been a family trait as well.

The sisters: Kate, Colleen, Maureen and Fiona, pulled up chairs and regaled them with hysterical stories of baking disasters, funny customers and well-intentioned experimental pies that went hideously wrong. Christ got it all on tape. It would make for a wonderful feature piece.

And best of all, they ate pie all day. The sisters brought out plate upon plate of samples. Tiny slices, just enough to get a really good taste, not so much that you couldn't also try at least a couple dozen more.

By three-thirty, Chris and Lindsey were both so stuffed they had to decline further samples, though they had at least a dozen more flavors still untried.

They returned to the firehouse and learned that the flooding had receded somewhat, and emergency officials hoped to be able to reopen the eastbound road out of Meriwether in the morning.

Lindsey felt both relieved and disappointed.

*Meriwether isn't far. You can ride out here on your bike on weekends for a nice pie lunch, she considered. Maybe check out a book. Or would I just be torturing myself?*

They stopped by the library about five. There were several people inside, sitting and reading or selecting books. A mother read a Scooby-Doo book to her two small children in a hushed but animated voice. "Rooby-roo!" she cried, and they giggled.

Emily appeared from the back, and her face lit up when she spotted Lindsey. "Well, you two have been busy, I hear," she said.

Lindsey and Chris laughed.

"I forgot you have ears everywhere," Lindsey said. "I was coming to tell you what we've been up to, and ask whether you can join us for dinner."

"I'd love that, if we can go at 6?" Emily asked.

"Sure," Chris said. "I wouldn't mind waiting until even a little later. I'm still pretty stuffed."

"How about we all meet up at 7?" Emily suggested.

"Sounds good to me," Chris said.

Lindsey nodded agreement. "I'm sure you also already know we have to stay here another night," the reporter said. "Can I use your daybed again?" Lindsey willed herself not to blush, with little success. If either Chris or Emily noticed, they didn't let on.

"Of course," Emily said. "You're welcome **any** time."

Lindsey felt a little overheated all of a sudden. "C'mon, Chris," she said. "Let's go back out to the bridge. I need to shoot my standup for the piece." *Anything to get a little fresh air.*

When they met up at the café, all three got the special again. Sunday night was enchilada pie night, a tasty blend of traditional ingredients encased in that now-familiar flaky exterior.

"Anything would taste good in this crust," Lindsey concluded as their dinner dishes were cleared away.

"So, what'll it be tonight, Lindsey?" Chris inquired. "After all those samples this afternoon, surely you're tempted to stray to something new for your last chance at pie?"

The waitress appeared.

Chris and Emily held their breaths.

"Raspberry Rhubarb, please," Lindsey said.

"Baby steps," Chris sighed. "But better than nothing. I'll have the Salmonberry pie, please."

"Lemon Meringue for me," Emily chimed in.

They lingered over coffee until 8, when Chris excused himself. "Some of the guys at the station are getting a poker game together, and they need a fourth." He leaned down to whisper to the women in a conspiratorial tone. "Little do they know that's how I financed my last year at Michigan State."

"Good luck," Lindsey said.

"Be nice to my friends," Emily admonished with a smile, as Chris gathered up his coat and headed out.

"So..." Lindsey said, suddenly at a loss for words now that they were alone.

"Shall we go?" Emily asked. "I can offer you a nightcap. I've got some killer raspberry cordial that I put up last summer."

"Sounds great."

They spoke little on the walk back. Lindsey lingered just a half step behind Emily, stealing sideways glances at the librarian. Remembering those damned dreams.

They settled into their familiar positions on the couch, sipping cordial from delicate little blown-glass stemware that Emily related had been purchased at an antique shop in Paris.

"So you've traveled a lot," Lindsey said, nodding toward the myriad of photos of Emily in exotic places.

"Yeah, I try to take a vacation every couple of years. I think it broadens your perspective."

Lindsey nodded. "I've lived in a lot of different places in the United States, but I've never been abroad. I hope to, one day."

"I bet you'll get a lot of opportunities as a reporter," Emily said.

"Not likely at this station," Lindsey said. "Too small. Doesn't have much of a budget for that. But probably will in a bigger market, or network, if I make it that far."

"You will, I'm certain," Emily encouraged. "If that's what you want."

"I'm not sure what I want, sometimes," Lindsey admitted. "The larger the market, the better the opportunities. But I've seen a lot of the advantages of living in a small town the last couple of days. It's definitely appealing as well."

That brought a big smile to Emily's face. "I'm glad to hear that. Any chance you'll make it back this way again?"

"Well, it is in my 'beat'," Lindsey said. "And it's only about an hour from my house. So it's a pretty safe bet I'll pop back here either for a story or another piece of that pie." *Or to torture myself some more. God, Emily, you're lovely.*

"I hope you do," Emily said. "Remember you always have a place to stay when you visit."

There was a moment of awkward silence after that, as if both women wanted to say more, but couldn't bring themselves to.

Lindsey yawned. It was still early, only 9:30, but the sleepless hours of the last two nights were catching up to her. "I think I'll turn in. It was a long day today, and Chris and I want to get an early start back." She didn't see the look of disappointment cross Emily's face.

"All right. What time do you want me to wake you?"

"8 again is fine." Lindsey got to her feet. "Good night. Sleep well. And thanks again for your hospitality."

"My pleasure. Pleasant dreams."

*Don't say that,* Lindsey thought as she made her way to Emily's office.

It took Lindsey no time at all to drift off. And her dreams *were* pleasant. *Too* pleasant. Replays of the night before. She awoke for the fifth time at 7 a.m., unbelievably aroused and unable to get back to sleep.

She dressed and made a pot of coffee, and waited for Emily so she could say goodbye.

*Perhaps with some distance, I'll get over this crush.*

But that optimistic assessment was shattered when Emily appeared, hair tousled from sleep, looking sexy as hell with the top button of her pajama top undone, exposing creamy white skin and a hint of cleavage.

*God get me out of here,* Lindsey thought, swallowing hard. "Coffee?" she squeaked.

"MMMmm, I'd love some," Emily purred, plopping down on the couch with a yawn.

Lindsey got up and went into the kitchen, poured a mug for Emily, and refilled her own. She lingered for a long moment, praying for the strength to leave Meriwether without making a fool of herself. *Irresistible. That's what she is. Damn, Damn, Damn!*

She turned, mugs in hand, to find Emily watching her from the doorway. Watching her with an openness that caught Lindsey off guard. Holding her eyes in a way that was just too *familiar* for a straight woman.

She froze where she was.

Neither spoke.

Neither looked away.

Emily at last came toward her—slowly, deliberately, and took the mugs from her and set them back on the counter. Lindsey still didn't move.

Emily put her arms around Lindsey's neck. Lindsey's heartbeat ratcheted up into high gear, pounding in her ears, making her feel suddenly light-headed.

"Am I wrong?" Emily inquired in a very soft voice, looking up at Lindsey.

Lindsey's paralysis evaporated and she wrapped her own arms around Emily's waist. "No," she answered, in a voice she hardly recognized. She drew Emily closer. "You're not wrong at all."

She leaned down as Emily reached up on tiptoes, their lips meeting in a soft and tentative first kiss.

Emily moaned, a sweet mewling sound of contentment that urged Lindsey to deepen the kiss.

The tip of Lindsey's tongue came out to caress Emily's lower lip, seeking entrance. Their tongues met, as their bodies pressed up against each other, the embers of the smoldering attraction between them fanned into a bonfire.

There was no mistaking that Emily wanted Lindsey just as much as Lindsey wanted her.

They pulled apart finally, just far enough to catch their breath. They were glued to each other. The coffee was getting cold, forgotten.

"I don't want you to go," Emily said.

"And I don't want to leave. But I'll be back." Lindsey pulled away to look down into Emily's eyes. "This weekend? Maybe we can take a drive, have dinner, see a movie?"

Emily nodded. "I'd like that. Very much." She looked away. Lindsey could see a trace of color in her cheeks. "This is... new to me, Lindsey. I've never been with a woman before. I'd like to take it slow..."

"We have plenty of time to get to know each other," Lindsey interrupted.

"Well, I was going to say I'd like to take it slow..." Emily continued, looking shyly up at the reporter again with a smile. "But my body doesn't want to take it TOO slow. Jeez, Lindsey, you sure have been heating up my dreams since you got here."

Lindsey laughed out loud. "We'll have to compare notes."

They grinned at each other with the shared acknowledgment until a buzzer sounded from downstairs.

They both glanced at the clock on the wall. "I bet that's Chris," Lindsey said. "I have to go."

"Yeah, I know. And I have to get a move on too," Emily sighed. "I'm supposed to open up in a half-hour and I'm not even dressed yet."

"Need some help with that?" Lindsey asked with a twinkle in her eye.

"Oh you're bad," Emily said, hugging the reporter tightly. "I have a feeling if you did, we'd never go anywhere."

They kissed again—a long, lingering deep kiss goodbye that took another long buzz from downstairs to break up.

"Gotta run," Lindsey said.

"I know. Wish you didn't. Oh! I've got something for you." Emily pulled a boxed pie from a sack on the counter. "I got you a rhubarb to go."

Lindsey licked her lips. "You are just too thoughtful. Thank you." She took the pie with one hand, embracing Emily with the other and kissing her on the forehead. "See you Saturday."

"Call me when you get home?"

Lindsey grinned and nodded. She started out but paused at the doorway for one last look back at the librarian. "You know, that sign on the highway was right. I sure found myself a slice of Heaven in Meriwether."

## **THE END**

\*\*Sadly, the Slice of Heaven Café exists only in my imagination.

Thanks for reading. Feedback welcome. Email me at [woodsbard@yahoo.com](mailto:woodsbard@yahoo.com) .

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