

THE BACK RUB

by

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Mid-November, 2000. As Jo's fingers poked and kneaded Sean's shoulders, she purred, "Precious, you want to ask me now so it doesn't keep botherin' you?"

Sean struggled to articulate the question that had been bouncing around his brain for the last week or so. He remembered what had piqued his curiosity as he tried to keep Jo's impromptu massage from letting him lose his concentration entirely.

They had been waiting in the densely packed, noisy terminal for their flight to take them from Hartsfield to McCarran, when Jo had looked over at him and said, "Get one for yourself, too!"

Sean had remembered being a bit shocked at Jo's comment, because right before Jo had spoken, he had wondered if he



should go over and get them both something cold to drink, since the flight was undoubtedly going to be late. Sean had said nothing at the time, but had filed the occurrence away in his mind for further consideration.

Their trip had taken them to Las Vegas for two days of sightseeing and trying their luck in the casinos. Sean had barely broken even playing video poker while Jo had done slightly better. But, both of them had done real well playing blackjack to the point that Sean felt that the pit boss was getting suspicious.

The next day they had taken a helicopter tour of the Grand Canyon, which fulfilled Sean's promise made to Jo on the night before the Coroner's Inquest cleared their good names. Jo had the time of her life and must have taken over a thousand shots of the place with her digital camera, while making Sean videotape the entire flight. Seeing Jo smiling and happy after the awful ordeal of the election and its aftermath made Sean feel twenty years younger.

The next day, they had checked into a nice, quiet resort in Palm Springs and had spent the next few days in pure bliss—sunning themselves out by the pool, swimming, hiking, exploring the cutesy shops and trying out trendy restaurants. Sean had been amazed that Jo hadn't been bothered by morning sickness once on the trip, despite their sometimes exotic fare. Their

five days in Palm Springs had been the first really relaxed time that they had been able to share with each other since their honeymoon months before in August. A lot had happened to them since then. So, they really appreciated this time alone.

The second morning that they had been in Palm Springs, Jo had surprised Sean by answering his question about the day's plans before he had asked it. Sean had chalked it up to his being predictable and hadn't given it another thought until the next day, when the same thing happened again.

These last two days in Palm Springs, Sean had felt like he was married to a mind reader, because a number of times Jo had acted as if she knew exactly what Sean was thinking. He was so madly in love, he really wouldn't have cared if she could read his mind, but he was curious how she was able to tell what was on his mind without any effort. He figured if she could really read his mind, she wouldn't have just asked him the question, so as her long fingers massaged the muscles near his spine at the small of his back, Sean said,

“How come you can read me so well? Am I that transparent?”

Jo asked boldly, “You ready to have the tables turned on you, Yankee Boy? You ready for a long answer from me?”

Since Jo had just started to gently rub and tease his skin with her long, sharp, red finger nails, Sean had no ability to resist left. So he said weakly, “Sure.”

Jo began her answer, which was entertaining if not entirely linear, “Precious, I fell in love with you despite you’re bein’ older and a stuffy ol’ judge and a Yankee for the same reason that I can anticipate what’s on your mind and your cats always have full water and food bowls. You followin’ me, so far?”

Of course Sean wasn’t followin’ Jo one bit, but was so enchanted by her touch, the smell of her perfume and the mellifluous sound of her voice that she could have been speaking a Martian dialect and he wouldn’t have objected. So Sean just whimpered his assent. Jo continued,

“Remember on Easter Sunday, when we went over to your place to swim and watch me on national TV?”

Sean said something unintelligible in reply. Jo continued, “I’ll bet you won’t remember this, but after we’d been in the house a short while, my two furry rivals for your affections appeared by us, looked at you for a second and you immediately got up and went to put more cat food in their bowls. This impressed me immensely.”

Sean, now more confused than usual by Jo inquired, “How did that impress you?”

Jo giggled and rolled Sean over on his back, where she placed her head on his chest. Then she said, “Cause you showed a lot of sensitivity in bein’ able to read their non-verbal cues. Any man that can read his cats that well surely would make a fine husband, since he’s got the ability to know what’s goin’ on ‘round him without havin’ to have it explained to him.”

Sean asked, “So you married me because my cats have me well trained?”

Jo replied, “Indirectly, it did, by convincin’ me that you were really what you seemed to be, a kind, sensitive, if somewhat overly intellectual man, who needed a woman badly and would forever appreciate whatever woman who figured that out.”

Sean asked, “You mean I was easy?”

Jo replied, “Let’s just say that you were a low hangin’ fruit just waitin’ to be picked off the tree. If I hadn’t plucked you, some other female would have. If she would have smiled at you and treated you half-right, you wouldn’t have cared about her age, education or looks much ‘cause you were so lonely.”

Sean would have argued, but he couldn't, because her words were true. He remembered one of the ladies from the probation office introducing him to a new probation officer named Linda a week before he had been forced by his friend, Kyra, on a blind date with Jo. Sean remembered Linda pretty well, since she and the other lady from the probation office had sat nearby where he and Laura were dining. Linda was about his age and rather plain, eschewing cosmetics in favor of the natural look. Still, Sean had found her smile captivating and had considered her plump figure to be Rubenesque, rather than fat. Sean remembered that Linda had kicked off her shoes under the table, which definitely caught Sean's eye. Sean had been tempted to invite Linda to coffee, but Laura's presence had inhibited him. If Laura hadn't been there with him, Sean might have fallen for Linda, because Sean had been so desperately lonely. He knew that Jo was right.

Sean stroked Jo's hair as he said,

“Thank you for picking me.”

Jo laughed a bit and said,

“Think nothin' of it. We both got what we needed. You got someone to love, nurture and take care of you and be the center of your life and I got you.”

Sean inquired softly, “What did you get?”

Jo replied, “I got what every woman wants and needs, but few get and even fewer appreciate if they get it. I found a man who loves me without reservation. I’m very lucky!”

That late afternoon in Palm Springs, Jo and Sean cried together because they knew they had both been exceedingly lucky in the Almighty’s matrimonial lottery.