

Gentlemen Prefer Witches

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Gentlemen Prefer Witches

by Nick Pollotta

(Originally released as, "Belle, Book, and Candle")

Sample file

MORE SF&F BY NICK POLLOTTA

Illegal Aliens (w/Phil Foglio)

Bureau 13: Judgment Night

Bureau 13: Doomsday Exam

Bureau 13: Full Moonster

Shadowrun: Shadowboxer

Invasion from Uranus

Satellite Night Live (as Jack Hopkins)

Satellite Night Special (as Jack Hopkins)

Satellite Night Fever (as Jack Hopkins)

Bureau 13: Damned Nation

That Darn Squid God! (w/James Clay)

Sample file

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Sample file

CHAPTER ONE

As the Chicago city bus lurched into motion, every passenger swayed in unison, except for the very tall man sitting all the way in the back. Rissa noticed that right away.

With both hands folded neatly in his lap, the stranger seemed to defy the laws of physics by not moving in the slightest as the lumbering bus sharply banked around a tight corner.

Must be a yoga master, Clarissa Harmond guessed, settling back into the worn plastic seat. Highlights of silver in his dark hair proclaimed that the rather handsome fellow was rapidly approaching middle age, yet he seemed to radiate an aura of physical strength the same way a blast furnace did heat. She could literally feel his presence from yards away.

Unbidden, there flashed in her mind what such a man might be like in bed. The strength of youth combined with the experience of maturity was a tantalizing possibility. Lost in dreamy reflection, Rissa could almost see him standing unadorned in her bedroom, every firm muscle gleaming in the golden candlelight ...

Just then, the bus jounced through a pothole.

With a gasp, Rissa grabbed her throat, flushed with embarrassment. *Get a hold of yourself, Harmond!* Clearly, she was starting to lose her mind from not having anybody else in her bed except that coppertop bunny. He had wonderful stamina, but she sure missed cuddling.

Turning away from the dapper giant, Rissa banished the burgeoning erotic fantasy. Out of sight, out of mind! Hopefully, anyway. *When did this damn bus become so warm?*

Looking out the dirty window at the passing streams of honking cars, Rissa pulled a battered iPod from her purse, tucked in the earbuds, and thumbed the dial for a much-needed distraction. Crooning the world-famous intro to a classic MGM musical,

the amazing Gene Kelly began singing about seriously inclement weather, and Rissa felt herself gradually relax. *Sing, you magnificent bastard, sing!*

Ever since the invasion of those damn red boxes forced the closing of her video rental store, Rissa had been doggedly searching for a new job that was in some way connected to movies, her chosen field of expertise. Today, her diligence had been rewarded with an offer from the local cable company to be in charge of their film library. *Yippee! Back in show business!*

The money wasn't great, but the chance to run amok through their huge catalogue was nearly irresistible. Rissa adored movies, and collected them the way yuppies did fine wines. The classics, the turkeys, the weird, and the wonderful, Rissa watched everything, but only a select few films ever went into the big bookcase standing alongside her old television. A situation sadly similar to her personal life: lots of first dates, but very few overnight guests. Or at least, none that she'd like to introduce to friends in the light of day. As the old saying went, sometimes even cowgirls get the blues.

Unfortunately, while the new job sounded exciting, the two-hour commute every day would be brutal, and moving from the suburbs to downtown meant a change in her lifestyle that required some serious thinking.

Crossing her arms, Rissa snorted. *Okay, that was an outright lie.* She had already decided to accept the job, and simply wanted to stall for a while and prolong the illusion that she was not about to leave her comfort zone to create a whole new life in a distant world. A stranger in a strange land? Hell, it was more like Alice in Wonderland. *Scary stuff.*

As the joyful music dramatically swelled into full orchestration, somebody nearby loudly coughed. Then did it twice more. "Excuse me, miss?"

Rissa opened an eye. It was the yoga master. She removed an earbud. "Yes?"

Chagrined, the man displayed a bare wrist. "Do you have the correct time, please?"

"Sure, no problem," Rissa relented, thumbing to a different screen. "It is ... nine fifteen."

"Thank you," he sighed in relief, then blinked and pointed. "Good lord, wherever did you get that delightful relic?"

Glancing downward, Rissa was startled to see her grandmother's amber pendant dangling on the outside of her white blouse once more. How weird. She could have sworn it had been tucked into her bra as usual before leaving the cable network skyscraper. That was Survival 101 for any big city dweller: Hide Your Valuables! Crackheads were like magpies; they'd steal anything shiny, whether it was valuable or not.