



BEST LESBIAN
2013
ROMANCE

EDITED BY RADCLYFFE

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LESBIAN
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2013

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CLEiS
PRESS

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INTRODUCTION

“Love” and “romance” are often used interchangeably to describe the state of deep emotional and physical connection between two individuals. While the concept is similar, the nuances are distinct—love is an emotion, whereas romance might be the process that leads to love or the greater framework by which that love is expressed (hence, the idea of a “lifelong romance”). Love exists in many permutations: between friends, family members, and even members of other species (“love me, love my dog, cat, horse, etc.”), but romance is reserved for lovers (and not necessarily just for the young or young at heart). Love and romance sometime grow out of our darkest moments, strengthening and comforting us with possibility, as in Anna Meadows’s “The Loneliest Road,” when two very different women meet by chance and find they share similar pain. Their meeting and the soul-deep understanding that results offer the promise of a new beginning.

*The woman only kissed her back, her mouth as
chapped and dry as the cracked ground of the Nevada
desert.*

Lila pulled away just enough to speak, their foreheads still touching. "Thank you," she said, though for what she didn't know. For being willing to die for her and everybody else, even those who'd sent her away with nothing but those combat boots. For keeping a hand on the small of Lila's back, a palm's width of warmth for when winter settled over the Great Basin.

Everyone who has ever loved remembers the first time—the freshness, the wonder, the transformation that throws wide the door to the future and floods us with joy. The young narrator in Joey Bass's "The Color of Autumn" reminds us of the bravery and innocence of first love:

The other students in the hallway faded to mere shadows. I no longer cared who they were or what they were thinking. I was who I was and Angela Hart wanted me to follow her. A feeling of great happiness and well-being filled me. It was right.... A part of me knew I would follow those swaying hips and that waterfall hair anywhere, and I would be doing it for years.

Love changes, just as it transforms us, altering its color and fabric and design as life weaves its imprint. Inevitably, love changes the course of our lives in the most unexpected ways. Sometimes, we risk everything for the promise of that lifelong romance. In Andrea Dale's "The Last Rays of the Summer Sun," the essence of long-term love is celebrated.

I fell besotted and breathless once again with the curve of her collarbone, the dusky hardness of her nipples, the rounded pooch of her belly, the softness of her inner arm as I stroked it with my fingertips.

I felt dizzy with desire in a way I'd forgotten, and hadn't realized I'd forgotten until now.

Love and romance may defy simple definition, but every story in this collection speaks to the universal thread that binds lovers everywhere—possibility. As you travel through these love stories, I hope you remember the first wondrous steps of the journey and dream of the next to come.

Radclyffe
2013

HOME TO HER COUNTRY

Cheyenne Blue

Her face was as hard, brown and unyielding as the dirt on which she stood.

I came to a stop in front of Ana and waited for her to crack a smile, for her face to fold into welcoming lines. “Say something,” I begged.

She leaned the hayfork against the tree. “You must have been to the house. How did you understand my mother? She doesn’t speak a word of English.”

I swallowed. I hadn’t expected her to fall into my arms cooing with delight, but I’d hoped for more than this.

“I learned some Spanish. I had time after you left.”

Time enough to cry, to clean the house, to arrange the clothes and books Ana had left behind in among my own, so that if she came back she’d feel like she belonged with me. Time to take both a basic and an intermediate Spanish course.

She answered me with a stream of Spanish that was cruel and telling in its speed. I picked up single words and simple

phrases in the torrent: “Back to America” and “I live here.” But I’d come so far to see her, thought about this for so long, that I wasn’t going to be easily put off.

“You left without telling me why,” I said. “If I can’t have you back, I’d like an explanation.”

Her façade cracked for the briefest instant, and I saw a flash of softness in her brown eyes.

“Sometimes it’s easier not to say anything.”

“Easier for you maybe. Not for me. You hurt me, Ana. I came home and you were just gone. No note, no message. Just a hole in my life where you used to be. I spent the first week convinced you’d be back. The second trying to find where you were. You didn’t tell anyone.”

“How did you find me?”

“The airline rang asking if you’d complete a survey about your flight to Madrid. You gave our—my—number for contact. I realized you must have gone to visit your home village.”

“I’m not visiting—I live here now.” Her face cracked a mirthless smile. “But of course you must know that as you speak Spanish so well.”

The heat of the midday sun beat down on my head, and my face was burning from more than the scorn of her words. “Your mother gave me your lunch. Seems you left without it this morning.”

“Every morning. Mother...forgets things sometimes.”

I’d seen the vagueness in her mother’s milky eyes when she’d wordlessly pressed a package into my hands.

There was a blanket spread in the sparse shade of an olive tree. Without waiting for Ana’s invitation, I sat and rested my back against the tree’s sharp bark. The lunch pack contained a crusty loaf, some sort of hard white cheese, olives, tomatoes and a rich dark fig, which had cracked, spreading sticky sweetness

over the bread. It was a lunch for one, not two, but I broke the bread in half anyway, pairing it with thick slices of the cheese.

Ana sat too, her back to the tree. Our shoulders touched, but it wasn't companionable. I stole a glance at her as she bit into the food. She'd lost weight since she left the States; any soft edges had been honed into muscle. Not the calculated stature of a gym rat, but the blunt lines of a manual worker. Her dark hair was pulled from her face by a yellow bandana, and she wore a pair of cropped cotton pants and a khaki tank top. Her skin gleamed through a fine layer of dust. She'd been working when I found her, following the vague gesture from her mother, an hour from the village, turning hay. A couple of pale stalks clung to her tank top.

I divided the fig into two. Juice coated my fingers, and as I handed Ana her half, our fingers touched: hers dry, rough and hot, mine sticky and pale. We didn't talk. When she'd finished her meager lunch—made smaller by my presence—she rose to her feet and stomped back to the hay. I remained in the shade of the tree, watching as she turned her back to me and started down the row of hay, methodically forking as she went. Sweat gleamed on her shoulders and the dust from her efforts rose in the air and settled on her skin.

This was her life now, it seemed. A small village, where cars were too wide for the tight stone streets. Where doors were open in the afternoon sun and women came out to beat rugs and sweep steps. Where every open door showed the same tiled floor and heavy wooden furniture. This wasn't Madrid, or Barcelona, or Seville, or any Spanish town where the tourists swarmed. This was a simple way of life, one that was passing swiftly from Europe.

I knew Ana mourned its passing. Often, when we'd lain in bed together in our Seattle apartment, she'd told me of her life growing up: cooking with her mother, long lazy days in the hills

with the sheep and goats, a ten-year-old child with only the fierce dogs for company—dogs that would protect her as well as the sheep. Days spent picking olives, tending the vegetable garden and cooking, always cooking. But it was one thing to look back on a childhood with fondness and wistfulness; it was another to give up her current life to retreat to nostalgia.

Ana propped her pitchfork against the tree, picked up the water skin, and took a long draft. Wordlessly, I rose and took up her fork and continued down the row of drying grass, mimicking her actions. I wasn't as proficient as she was, and the stalks fell in haphazard lines.

She watched me for a moment before coming over. "Here," she said in a gruff voice. "Hold the fork lower, near the prongs. You'll have more control over the movement." Her warm hand covered mine as she slid it down the handle.

She was right, and my row became neater, although it was still a disaster compared to hers. I forked grimly for twenty minutes or so. My back ached from the unaccustomed bending and I oozed sweat in the heat. But I'd come thousands of miles to talk to her, and if some manual labor would smooth the path, then so be it.

I reached the end of the row and looked back. For a moment I couldn't see her, then I spied the yellow bandana. She was stretched on the blanket on her stomach, her head resting on folded arms. I walked over. The sunlight dappled her skin through the scanty shade of gray-green leaves. She was asleep. I squatted down, able to study her in a way I daren't when she was awake. Her dark hair curled out of the back of the bandana, wisps of it stuck to her neck. Her skin was darker than it had been in the States. Now she was burnished to a rich copper. Ana exhaled deeply and shifted onto her side, but didn't waken. I studied her high-boned face, the way her thick eyelashes made

dark crescents on her face. My hand moved, hovered. I wanted to touch her, to remember how she'd felt underneath my hands in our other life, but I was afraid of waking her.

For a moment, I thought about lying down with her, curling my body to hers, but her earlier prickliness dissuaded me. Instead, I went back out into sunshine so bright it washed the color from the landscape, and picked up the fork again.

It was probably an hour later when Ana came up behind me, startling me as she touched my shoulder.

"You've done enough," she said. "You'll be very stiff tomorrow."

In truth, I was one big burning ache now. I had a blister on one hand, and my face flamed with the heat.

She touched one finger to my nose. "You're burning. You should have rested the siesta, as I did."

I didn't answer, just followed her back to where our packs rested together in a closeness their owners didn't share. Ana picked hers up, swinging it onto her shoulders.

"I'm going to bring in the flock," she said. "You better come too."

I swung my own pack onto my shoulders, wincing as it banged my aching back, gritted my teeth and marched doggedly in Ana's wake.

We found the flock spread over a mountain pasture, a mix of sinewy, scraggy sheep and goats. A rangy dog was with them. He had a shaggy coat and gimlet eyes, and barely spared me a glance before focusing all his attention on Ana. She issued a series of sharp commands, and the dog took off at a flat-out run. Ana rested on her staff, looking every inch the rustic shepherd, and waited, occasionally issuing a piercing sequence of whistles. In no time, the animals plunged past with nervous eyes, the dog at their heels.

We set off down the mountain, striding down the path we'd plodded up earlier. Ana took her flock into the village, where she and the dog penned them into the area underneath the house. It was pungent with the musty smell of hay and their droppings.

Only then did she turn to me again. "You better come home with me."

I hadn't given much thought to where to stay, but it was obvious the village had no *pensione*, certainly no comfortable hotel.

Ana strode off again, not into the house, but around the twisting stone streets of the village. She bought bread in one shop, meat at an unmarked doorway, milk at another. Only then did she lead me home.

Her mother greeted us with a vague smile, never asking what I was doing with her daughter, and Ana offered no explanation. She hugged her mother and launched into a stream of Spanish, too fast for me to follow, although I caught words about dinner and the weather.

Ana took her mother by the arm and led her into another room. After a moment of indecision, I followed.

Once past the doorway, the smell of urine was strong. Ana's mother's face twisted in anguish, and she started to cry in a silent, helpless sort of way.

"*Lo siento*," she said, over and over. *I'm sorry*.

Ana pinched the bridge of her nose briefly, and smiled at her mother. "*De nada*." *It's nothing*. She ushered her mother to a recliner, the only piece of modern furniture in the room, helping her to sit, adjusting the footrest with a precision that told me she'd done it many times before. She flicked on the TV and handed her mother the remote. Only when her mother was smiling at a game show did she leave.

Back in the kitchen she brushed past me as I stood awkwardly

in the middle of the room. Antiseptic splashed into a bucket, water and a cloth.

“Let me,” I said.

Her eyes flashed. “*Es mi madre.*” That I understood: she is *my* mother.

As I watched her, the long flight and the emotion of the day caught up with me. My head spun with tiredness and all I wanted to do was sleep. One hand on the doorjamb, I closed my eyes for a moment. When I opened them, Ana was watching me.

“Come,” she said.

The room she took me to was obviously hers. The single bed was rumpled, and clothes were scattered on the floor. The only other furniture was a heavy wooden chair and a chest of drawers.

“Sleep. We’ll talk in the morning.”

“It’s your bed,” I started to say, but she pushed me on the shoulder so that I sat heavily on the side. “*No hay otra cama.*” *There is no other bed.*

Too tired to undress properly, I fell asleep to the sound of clattering pots from the kitchen.

My body clock was still on American time, so I woke to the sound of soft snoring. The room was dark. Ana was spooned behind me in the narrow bed, her face pressed into the curve of my neck and shoulder. Her arm was heavy across my waist and I could see her hand lying palm up and fingers loosely curled.

Memories engulfed me, so abruptly, so intensely, that for a moment I couldn’t find my breath. Although we were both semi-clothed, Ana’s breasts pushed into my back and her knees nudged the backs of my thighs. I took a deep, slow breath, and even though I needed to pee and my stomach rumbled with hunger, I didn’t want to disturb this moment. The months alone

in America eased away, and in the dark night, I could pretend that Ana and I were still together, that any moment I could turn to her, kiss her awake and explore her body with fingers and tongue. I'd missed this—missed her—so very much.

Although I was trying hard not to move, she probably sensed the change from sleep to awake. She snuffled in her sleep, and her hand curled around my breast, cupping it. She'd often slept that way, mimicking the curve of my body with her own. I lay without moving for a long, long time, savoring the touch of her body against mine.

I must have fallen asleep again, because I woke to the absence of her. I sat up and she was sitting on the end of the bed, pulling on her sandals. For a moment, we stared at each other. It was probably my imagination, but I thought that some of the softness of the night lingered in her eyes. With a nod she was gone, down the hall, and I heard her speaking to her mother. There was so much love in her voice it made my throat ache.

I found the bathroom on my third try and had a quick wash standing up at the basin. There was no shower, just a heavy iron bath in the corner, but the bright blue tiles and terra-cotta floor were sparkling clean.

I found Ana and her mother in the kitchen. They were sitting at the table eating breakfast—or rather Ana was. Her mother was moving a sweet pastry around her plate, destroying it with her fingers until there was nothing but crumbs.

There was a third plate with a pastry and a small cup of strong black coffee. No milk. In the States, I would have demanded another coffee, a larger one with cream, but here I drank it. Ana watched me, and I thought I caught a flicker of approval on her face at my lack of complaint.

“¿*Quién es?*” asked her mother, and her eyes snapped to my face with an abruptness and clarity I'd assumed she'd lost.

“*Mi amiga, Vika,*” replied Ana.

Her mother’s eyes ran over my face and plain gray T-shirt. “*Se viste como un niño.*” *She dresses like a boy.* She wadded the crumbs on her plate into a ball and stuffed them into her mouth, chewing ferociously.

“*I dress like a boy,*” said Ana, in Spanish.

“But you are...you are like a boy.” As suddenly as the clarity was there, it was gone, her brown eyes clouding like the milky coffee I longed for.

We ate in silence, but my thoughts ran in heated, chaotic circles. Why Ana had returned was obvious, and I dared to assume that she’d run out on me rather than explain. But what would happen now?

The pastry was flaky and sweet, and melted on my tongue. I finished and rose, collecting my plate and those of Ana and her mother. I washed them in the sink, leaving them to drain on the side, and then, without a word, found food for lunch: bread, some of the hard white cheese and thin slices of smoked ham. I packed them into two containers and added a couple of oranges from a bowl on the dresser.

I returned to the dining room and put our lunches into the daypack I’d seen Ana use the day before. Ana watched silently, then turned on the TV and assisted her mother to the chair. After kissing her mother on her crêpey cheek, she left, with me trailing in her wake like a comet’s tail.

The pack banged my shoulders, which were stiff from yesterday’s exertion, but I forced myself to keep up with Ana as she whistled for the dog and let the small flock out from underneath the house.

The day was a repeat of yesterday. We walked steadily to the upper pastures where Ana whistled a series of commands to the dog, which dropped to the ground, eyes never leaving the

animals. Ana and I spent the morning turning the hay so that the damp underside was exposed to the sun. This time I took siesta with Ana, stretching out with her on the blanket. She was asleep in moments, but it took me longer, unaccustomed as I was to napping in the middle of the day. I lay on my side, watching her brown shoulders rise and fall slightly with her breathing. I could hear the buzz of a fly and far away the bleating of the goats, which faded as I slipped into sleep.

In the afternoon, we forked the hay into conical stacks. Ana was neat and efficient, but my attempts often left the hay floating haphazardly to the ground. Despite her promise of the night before, there was little conversation between us. I'd decided I'd wait for her to make the first move, so apart from necessary instructions and requests, we were silent.

We arrived back to the house to find her mother still in front of the blaring TV. After dinner, which Ana cooked, I cleaned up while Ana sat with her mother, holding her hands, talking to her in soft tones. I watched them while trying to appear engrossed in the dishes. Ana's love was deep-rooted, that was obvious, and once, when I glanced up, I saw her mother smiling softly back at her.

My hands stilled in the sink. What was I doing here? I should go home, back to America. It was obvious Ana would never leave her mother, and I wasn't sure there was a place for me in her life, even if she wanted me to stay. I held a tourist visa that expired in five weeks. I had a flight back to Seattle and my college courses waiting for me.

I stared openly at the scene in the living room. Ana looked away from her mother for a moment and our eyes locked. I don't know what she saw in my expression, in that moment of despair, but she smiled, a warm, genuine Ana smile, different from the tight-lipped snarls she'd offered me before. In that

moment, seeing her so beautiful, so strong, so caring, my heart plunged off the precipice again, diving deeper into love, deeper into this woman. At that moment, I made a decision: I would stay until my return flight. I would savor and enjoy this time with Ana while I could, storing memories for the times that would follow without her. And then I would return to the States, without complaint, without tears, without making it difficult for her. I owed her that much.

Later, when her mother had been assisted to bed, Ana asked if I would like to go down to the village for a glass of wine. It was after ten, but I already knew how late the Spanish kept their evenings. Indeed, our early dinner was only in deference to Ana's mother, who liked to retire early to bed.

We left the house, walking through the narrow streets, twisting and turning through the houses until we came to the single café, ablaze with light. It was crowded, people sitting at tables with carafes of wine and small plates of *tapas* in front of them. I sat at a table out on the footpath and Ana disappeared, reappearing in a short time with a carafe of wine and a plate of tiny tastes of food—octopus, some thick yellow tortilla, and some sort of meat in a red sauce.

The wine was heavy and dark, a rich red, and the initial roughness gave way to a throat-warming smoothness. Ana fiddled with her napkin and picked at the tortilla. I waited, figuring that finally, now was the time to talk. With my decision made as to my course of action, all I was hoping for was some acknowledgment of what I had meant to her. Closure, and then maybe, for the rest of my time in Spain, we could recapture some of the closeness we'd shared previously.

"I'm sorry," Ana said eventually. "I should never have run out on you. But I didn't think you'd understand. I thought you would argue, try to change my mind. This is something I have

to do.” She took my hand across the table. “I loved you, Vika, I did. I could have stayed with you and been happy. Finished my college course. Made a life over there.”

I stared at our hands, as intertwined as our lives were now separate. “I loved you too,” I said. “I still do. That’s why I’m here, but it’s not enough, is it?”

Her silence was answer enough. She raised my hand to her lips and kissed the back of it, one of her endearing old-fashioned gestures I remembered so well. Tears prickled at the back of my eyes.

“I can’t ask you to wait for me,” she said eventually. “It could be...years.”

I nodded in understanding.

“What will you do now?” she asked, and her fingers caressed the back of my hand.

“I have five weeks before term starts,” I said. “I’d like to stay—if that’s okay?”

“I’d like that,” she said in low tones. “I’ve missed you.” And then we were hugging, clasping each other tightly, my face in her shoulder, hers in my hair, and we were crying and kissing and crying some more because it was all so right, and so perfect, and we were in love, and it was all so sad and doomed and in five weeks it would be over.

That night we made love in her single bed, coming together silently in the moonlight that streamed through the window. We made love with lips and tongues and voice, and our sweat and tears and juices mingled in a salty sea of passion.

The days took on a rhythm. We would awaken, spooned together in the narrow bed, and Ana would assist her mother while I showered, and then I’d put together breakfast and keep a steady flow of conversation and an eye on her mother while Ana showered. Gradually, her mother came to recognize me,

at least some of the time, even once calling me by name. Then, when her mother was settled for the day with her TV and magazines, and a neighbor arranged to check on her and feed her lunch, Ana and I would get on with the simple manual tasks of farming: tending the animals, forking hay, harvesting the olive crop. There were market days in the village, and then we bought food that was not normally available in the small village shop. Once every week, a local teenager would tend to the animals and Ana and I would load the rattling truck with produce and go and sell olives and vegetables direct to the factory in the nearest town. Ana taught me to milk the goats, and then how to turn that milk into a rustic cheese, which we sometimes ate with our dinner.

I discovered the village had a good Internet connection, thanks to a Spanish government initiative, and I was able to keep in touch with friends and family in the States. I made a tentative inquiry about distance learning with my college, but although they told me it was possible, there was still the matter of a Spanish visa.

In the evenings, the two of us would sit with her mother, and I would cook while Ana assisted with her personal care. Sometimes after dinner, we'd go out for a glass of wine, where we were treated with a sort of kind, baffled warmth, that said although we were an oddity being a lesbian couple, it was not something to disapprove of.

And at night, in the narrow bed, we made sweet love, fiercely passionate love and energetic lustful love.

“Are you happy here?” Ana asked one day.

I was squatting on the wooden milking stool, my head pressed into the goat's flank. My nose was full of the goat's pungent odor, and straw tickled my feet. Ana's words distracted me from the fiddly task of milking.

My immediate reaction was to say *of course*. But when I glanced up and saw her serious expression, I paused and gave more consideration to my answer.

“I love being with you,” I said, “but I think I could be happy in most places if you were with me. But here?” I sorted through my thoughts. “Yes. I’m happy. It’s not what I expected—it’s quieter, less frantic, but I like the rhythm of life.”

Two weeks until I had to leave. Ana and I had fallen into a happy routine. My Spanish had improved—enough that Ana would send me alone to the shop and know that I would return with more or less the correct items. We’d spent a couple of evenings with a friend of Ana’s and her husband, and for the most part, I was able to follow the conversation. They were kind enough to speak slowly, and tentatively, I would join in.

One week left, and my departure loomed. I started cataloging the little things to remember when I was back in the States: the loud shout of laughter Ana gave when I mangled the language, the quiet moments together on the balcony overlooking the village with a glass of the rich, rough red wine. The bustle of market day, the sense of achievement when I found a goat that had strayed, the feeling of protectiveness and care when Ana’s mother called me by my name and held my hand to her cheek. And of course our lovemaking: sweet, hot, intense. How Ana would forget to breathe as her orgasm approached. The taste of her on my tongue and fingers. Her dark head at my breast. Our limbs entwined, sated and relaxed after lovemaking.

Three days before my departure, Ana came in holding a thick, official-looking envelope. I was sitting with her mother, encouraging her to eat, but Ana’s posture alerted me. She put the envelope carefully down on the table and sat down next to me.

“Vika,” she began, “you know I love you, right?”

I nodded and disentangled my hands from her mother’s, and

Ana immediately claimed one. “Would you stay here with me, Vika? With us, me and mom?”

My world narrowed to her intense, serious expression. How long did she mean? An extra week? A month? A year? *Forever?*

She must have seen my hesitation, as she opened the envelope. The familiar crest of my American college was on the letterhead. “You can finish your degree via distance learning. Or you can transfer to the university in Burgos, one hour away. You can even get a minor in Spanish.”

My gaze was riveted on the tremble in her fingers.

“I’ve thought of that. Even made similar enquiries. But I don’t have a visa for that long, and I don’t think a student visa would—”

“Marry me, Vika.” Her words cut through my fumbling explanation. Tiny words. Short and sharp, but they shafted deep to pierce my unarticulated dreams and desires. *If only*, I thought. *If only*.

Ana must have seen my anguished expression, because she smiled slightly. “We may still have goats under the house, but Spain allows us to marry, as openly, officially and joyously as any straight couple.”

I’d forgotten that, if indeed I’d ever known.

It was as if the sun had lodged itself in my chest and was now expanding with the morning. Would I marry my love? I opened my mouth to say, yes, yes, yes, a million times yes, when Ana’s mother shuffled in her seat. Slowly she pushed herself to her feet. Her eyes were as clear and sharp as I’d ever seen them.

“Vika,” she said. “Vika, marry my daughter. Please.”

It was settled.

WHERE THE GIRLS ARE

Ariel Graham

Sandra went to the city because there was nowhere else to go. It wasn't supposed to be a huge change. The city was only Reno, Nevada, a population even with outlying communities that was still well under half a million. Still, it was a City with capital letters compared to the desert community of Fernley, forty miles to the east and simmering in the desert sun.

She went to the city because her marriage was over and she thought there had to be more out there than a farming community and two grocery stores, a place where Starbucks didn't arrive until the new century was more than half a dozen years under way, and where if you knew anybody—and she knew everybody at this point, even the California imports—they knew you.

Or they thought they knew you. She was pretty sure even she didn't know Sandra, not after so long living with Dave and the day-to-day idiocy of his life. She'd tried. She had loved him, once, many long football games and beer-soaked poker games

ago, before the small yappy dogs he began collecting. Before he started ignoring her.

Before she'd learned something about Sandra by accident. The morning she'd joined the new gym in Fernley and discovered a locker room full of women who didn't bother with towels or modesty—and most of them should have, she thought. She'd always watched her weight, always worked out and eaten conservatively, and she wasn't one of the ones prancing around without a towel.

But she liked watching, especially the women with hard bodies, lean and long from physical work on farms, tanned by the sun, and equally the few who were gym-toned and tanning-bed tanned. And she told Dave, much later, with great hesitancy, and suggested maybe since two women was every man's fantasy, so-called... Only turned out Dave didn't have a lot of fantasies. It wasn't Sandra who left him cold, it was pretty much the whole messy business of sex.

She took to reading personal ads. She dreamed of women. She daydreamed of women. She worked out harder and longer, and spent more time in the locker room than she needed to, but nobody looked at her twice, except people who knew her, and those she wasn't about to engage. If she did anything in Fernley, all of Fernley would know. So when Dave finally called it quits—politely, kindly, but still without passion—and offered her the house, the dogs (his dogs), the whole nine yards, she said thank you, but she was going to move to the city.

“Sacramento?” Dave asked. “Or San Francisco?”

She looked at him sharply, trying to judge if he was teasing her, or angry, or sarcastic, or even if he'd figured out what she hadn't told him and certainly hadn't told herself.

“I thought I'd start with Reno before I moved to Paris,” she said lightly and he blinked before smiling.

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