

Inspector Sue Sharp : A Case for Robert “Tit for Tat”

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Inspector Sue Sharp - Sue's Fourth Case

Tit for Tat

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Compulsory pettification (ComPet)

Compulsory pettification (ComPet) was initially a controversial government program that went on to become both wildly successful and popular with the majority of the citizenry. The program calls for a small percentage of the country's twenty-year-old female population to be drafted into what is known as the "pet service." As state-owned a "ComPet," "pet girl," or "service animal," these draftees lose their human status for a period of two years. After a term of obedience training at a government kennel, these service animals are leased to owners for the remainder of their service.

The program is regulated by the **Federal Bureau of Pettification (FBP)**. The FBP keeps track of the service contracts and provides the initial training of all pet girls, performs welfare checks on their living conditions, provides veterinarian care, and ensures that all policies are followed by pet owners.

The rise of pettification has unfortunately led to a variety of pet girl-related crimes, such as ComPet terrorism, illegal pettification, and black-market human-pet trafficking. With the rise in these incidents, the FBP has piloted a new joint program that pairs police officers with FBP inspectors.

This is one of their stories.

The Story so Far

If it has been awhile since you've read the previous stories, or you for whatever reason just want to jump in here, this is a little section to jog your memory or catch you up to where we are now.

At age twenty, the petite and pouty **Sue Sharp** received her ComPet draft notice. Fortunately, her family was able to arrange for her to serve as an FBP junior pet welfare inspector by calling in many favors and offering an enormous bribe to officials. After a monotonous year of performing welfare checks for service animals, Sue was given the opportunity to become a full-fledged inspector when she was assigned by her chief, **Mr. Cross**, to investigate the disappearance of a puppy girl named **Boji**, who was owned by wealthy and prominent citizen, **Mark Richter**. As it would happen, the missing puppy girl, whose real name was Sarah, had actually escaped with the help of a housemaid named **Megan**. Sue incidentally led the authorities to them, and her first case ended with a promotion for her, punishment for Megan, and Sarah being returned unhappily to her owner. In the closing lines, Sue learned that Megan did not act alone and was a part of a larger anti-ComPet organization calling itself "F.E.R.A.L" (Freedom, Equality, Revolution, and Liberty).

Sue's next case had her teaming up with the tall, gum-chewing Detective **Robert Jericho** from the Central City police department. They were charged with protecting a VIP's beloved, voluptuous puppy girl, **Cheesecake**, from a possible abduction attempt by F.E.R.A.L. With the help of a perky and patronizing groomer named **Donna**, Sue posed as a puppy girl named "Ditzzy" and went undercover at the **Happy Paws Boarding Kennel**, Cheesecake's home while her owner was away on business. During her time undercover, Sue learns that there is a part of her that enjoys the humiliation and degradation of being a lowly puppy girl. She also acknowledges to herself that she is very much attracted to her new partner, Detective Jericho. In the end, Sue and Robert are able to foil the kidnapping after they have an encounter with one of the terrorist leaders named **Sapphire**.

In the third case, Sue and Robert go undercover again, this time posing as a tutor and student to trap a man they would eventually call the **Mutt Maker**. The Mutt Maker abducted girls from the passenger trains, and through the use of a special chemical delivered via an anal plug, he transformed them into drooling, cock-crazed animals. Before their sting operation began, Sue develops strong suspicions that Robert and the groomer, Donna, were sleeping together. She begins to realize that she may have feelings for her partner that extend beyond mere physical attraction. Eventually, while serving as the bait, Sue is captured by the Mutt Maker. Only receiving half the dose of the chemical, Sue is able to fool her captor into thinking she's docile and is able to overpower him and call for help. While the so-called Mutt Maker was arrested, the person behind the chemical remained at large.

This roughly brings us to where we are now.

Story Background

The fourth case is a continuation of the events that took place in Nimbletail's comic The Healers. If you're interested you can learn more about that here: <https://www.hentai-foundry.com/pictures/user/NimbleTail/871611/ComPet-Healers-is-available>

Part 1: Ed's Dead

Detective Robert Jericho stood beneath a leaking awning of a closed shop and stared out into the gloomy night at the cold, pouring rain. The wet pavement reflected the garish neon of flashing and static signs alike, creating a kind of dark, flickering rainbow that stretched down the street and out of his sight. The twist of murky colors was not a sign of a storm ending, but of one that was just beginning.

Even if it meant an end to his career or even an end to his life, Robert had made up his mind.

Dr. Ezzat Andre, a Senior Veterinarian for the Federal Bureau of Pettification (FBP), and a dear, old friend, was dead. He'd been gunned down in his own clinic by a group of terrorists calling themselves F.E.R.A.L—Freedom, Equality, Revolution, and Liberty—gunned down in the name of “service animal liberation.” Robert shook his head. If only those poor, misguided fools knew that they'd killed probably the only decent man in the whole program...what would they have to say about that? The irony was palpable.

Robert closed his eyes and listened to the rhythm of the rain, wishing that it could wash away his memory of Ed on the floor, bled out with his pretty assistant on his left and a dark-haired puppy girl on his right, both clutching him and crying over him.

Thunder rumbled in the distance and the rain began to fall harder. The words of Mr. Cross, the chief, skipped through his mind for the hundredth time.

“You're too close to this, Jericho. I can't let you go after them. The Catchers will track them down just fine without you.”

Robert played by the rules. What kind of police officer would he be if he didn't? It was literally his job to enforce rules. So, instead of screaming off

into the night and tracking his friend's murderers, like he knew he could, Robert had dutifully gone on guard duty at Ed's clinic in case there was a "second attack." Robert did it knowing that it was just a bullshit assignment to keep him and his partner busy while the terrorists most-likely slipped through the nets of the Catchers. It had been two days and there had been "no developments." For all he knew, Ed's killers had already hopped the border. Cross was absolutely right. Robert was too close to the victim, but he didn't care.

Lightning flashed, illuminating the black, river that the street had become. Robert spied a petite figure in a little, black skirt suit emerging from the vet clinic across the street. He narrowed his eyes when she recklessly stepped out from the safety of the doorway and jogged across the street in the driving rain. He spit his chewing gum into a nearby trashcan and popped a fresh, minty stick into his mouth and chewed away his annoyance. Panting and soaked, with specks of water on her glasses, his little partner, Sue Sharp, joined him in the relative dry under the overhang. Seeing her, Robert forgot his anger and his sadness over his friend, if only for a moment. She should have gone back inside for an umbrella. She never thought about things like that. She didn't seem to have the slightest bit of self-preservation. It was really annoying.

Seeing her shiver, he started to take off his coat with the intention of wrapping her up, but then he reminded himself that she was a grownup, and didn't need him. He compromised with himself and offered her a clean handkerchief to wipe off her glasses. There was just something in him that really wanted to take care of her and to protect her. It probably started on their first case together, when they posed as owner and pet. Even before she'd been put in the pet gear, Sue struck him as kind of cute, but by her own admission she was a bit of a bitch, which oddly enough made her a little more attractive by his measure. Robert liked a little spunk in his gals. There was a part of him that he didn't like though, which found it incredibly gratifying to see the stuck up runt helpless on all fours, nearly naked, plugged and blushing furiously, but another part of him felt awful for her knowing what she would have to go through during their undercover assignment. How could he really blame her for being bitchy when, in a way, it was part of her job description?

At the start of the case, when he'd walked her to the car he found himself sneaking glances at her as she crawled clumsily by his side. She was struggling so much to adjust to her new form of walking that she couldn't possibly have noticed his intense gaze, which gave him ample opportunity to stare at her slender figure, specifically her swaying pert, peach-shaped ass, and her tiny, hanging breasts.

At least he wasn't reaching for low-hanging fruit.

If that had been the end of it, Robert probably wouldn't have been so affected. After all, he'd seen plenty of girls in that degrading position in his time. However, the puppy girl kennel where Sue was playing bodyguard to a VIP's pet felt the need to keep sending him pictures of her throughout the day. It was a typical practice of puppy girl kennels to show owners that their pets were happy and safe, and since he was playing the owner it only made sense that they keep texting him reports.

He was sitting in the car across the street, so he'd be nearby if anything happened, when the first picture arrived accompanied by the text: "Ditzy had a little accident! I think she misses you! She's getting a little shower before breakfast!" Suddenly Robert's pants felt a little too tight. Sue looked deliciously vulnerable, and at the same time heartbreakingly pathetic. She was hunched over in a shameful crouch; her face was mostly obscured by her fuzzy paws. Her ridiculous, stubby pigtailed and pink hair ribbons were disheveled, wet and drooping. It was clear what her "little accident" was and what one of the handlers did to correct her. She'd peed in her crate and gotten her nose rubbed in her puddle.

Robert found it difficult to look away. He was caught between wanting to fuck the miserable little wretch and wanting to beat the hell out of the handler for what he'd done to her. Not that he really had any right to call out the handler.

He tossed his phone aside in disgust. How many pathetic, frightened trainees at the ComPet Obedience School had he done the same, or worse? Over the course of his handler-training he'd lost count. He drummed his fingers on the dashboard and tried to think of something else, but he couldn't. He snatched up the phone and looked at the picture again. He

poured over it, wishing that he could see more of her, even if it was just her wide, striking eyes.

Sue blinked her big brown eyes twice from behind her dried lenses. “Thanks!” She said and handed back the handkerchief. “You wanna tell me what you’re doing out here in the rain?”

Robert half smiled at her. “I guess I should ask you the same question.”

Sue gave him a look and took off her blazer to shake some water out of it. Her white blouse clung to her sylphlike shape. He could see the outline of her bra, and like a horny schoolboy he wondered what color it was. The dim light made it impossible to tell. He wondered if she knew what she was doing to him while she wrung out her jacket. Each movement made her willowy body strain against her clothes. It was just like when they’d put her in that damn juvenile-looking school uniform when they went after the Mutt Maker. He saw her panties so many times on that case he swore that if he didn’t know better she was flashing them on purpose just to tease him.

“I was just getting some air.”

Sue popped out her vape pen and took a drag. The smell of fake cherry filled the air. Robert felt his lip curl. He hated that stupid little pen of hers—Tin Man she called it. It wasn’t just the smell that reminded him vaguely of urinal cakes; he hated to think what it was doing to her lungs.

“Well, I was getting some air.” He waved his hand around.

She smiled impishly, wrapped her pink lips around the thin, metal cylinder, took a long drag and slowly opened her mouth to release a cloud towards him. When he didn’t react, her face became a bit more serious.

“You’ve been weird since we got this assignment. What’s up?”

Robert hesitated. He didn’t want to involve her, but he didn’t feel like lying to her either. In truth, he just wanted someone to talk to.

“Come on. Tell me.”

“Dr. Ezzat Andre—I called him Ed—he was a friend.” He began, figuring that there’d be no harm in telling her that. Sue had made it clear that most of the time she wanted things professional, and he’d tried to respect that. To his surprise instead of staying quiet or trying to change the subject, she seemed uncharacteristically sympathetic. She even went so far as to extend a hand as if she were about to touch his arm before awkwardly bringing it back to her side.

“Oh, Robert, I’m so sorry. I didn’t know...”

“It’s alright. There’s no reason you should have. He and I go pretty far back, but we haven’t really spoken in a long time.”

“Dr. Andre was a good man...” Sue started. “When I was still doing welfare checks for ComPets he was the only vet who actually took any of my reports seriously, and he never hit on me either. How did you know him?”

The downpour had slowed. Robert felt his jaw clench. He would have much rather thought more about “tutoring” Sue in her school girl uniform than talk about Ed.

“Remember how I said I went through the program to become a ComPet trainer? That’s where I met Ed—he was my roommate in the dorms. He was studying to be a veterinarian at the time. He was the only other guy at the training center that didn’t seem like a total bastard...” Robert felt himself smile on reflex as memories of carefree afternoons bubbled to the surface of his mind. “He was a lousy pool player, he couldn’t hold his liquor, and he’d keep me up all night watching the worst b-movies...”

“...What happened?”

“He could make his peace with this...with all this!” Robert pointed at the clinic across the street and then at Sue’s small, paw-shaped FBP badge on the lapel of her jacket. “I just couldn’t. The whole thing seemed so...Well, anyway, Ed did what he could to make their lives—the pet girl’s lives—better, but I just ran away from it.”

“Well...you’re here now aren’t you?”

“Yeah, but he’s already dead.” Robert turned away the moment he feared his voice might get shaky. He would have liked to have just been able to say goodbye to Ed if nothing else.

“So, what are we going to do about it?”

Robert raised his eyebrows and turned back around. “What do you mean we?”

“You know exactly what I mean, Detective Jericho!” Sue stared him down with her hands on her hips. She was so damn cute when she tried to look assertive. “If you want to go after those F.E.R.A.L agents, then let’s go after them.”

Robert was a bit surprised. Here he had felt guilty about even telling her what he was planning on doing and there she was inviting herself along. Maybe she wasn’t trying to look assertive.

“Sue, I can’t let you come along. They could have my badge for this, but you...”

“I know the risks, believe me, I know.”

He’d never seen her so steely-eyed about anything, but he had to try to talk her out of coming with him.

“I don’t care. You’re not going. It’s out of the question.”

“What are you, my daddy?” She made a pouty face that nearly leveled him.

Still, Robert managed to maintain his resolve. “You’re not going.”

“Fine, leave me here. When you don’t show up for work tomorrow night the chief will ask if I know anything...” Sue casually polished her nails on the damp lapel of her jacket. “And I might just not be able to lie and...”

Robert clenched his fist. What the little brat needed was a good old fashioned spanking! The idea of Sue squirming and wiggling over his knee, her skirt yanked up above her waist, her panties down around her ankles,

his hand caressing her soft, upturned ass before delivering each firm, attitude-adjusting swat whilst she pleaded for mercy forced Robert to adjust his stance. She didn't seem to notice.

He sighed. "Looks like I have no choice."

"Looks like you don't!"

"Alright, the Catchers have a two day head start on us, but I have an idea for a lead that they didn't pursue..."

When they re-entered the clinic, Sue, following Robert's plan, intercepted the pretty assistant veterinarian, Natalie, and took her aside for a "little chat."

Natalie. It was her face—her grief—that pushed Robert over the edge. Ed's kind, almost guru-like demeanor seemed to win a lot of girls over. Natalie seemed to be no exception. Robert hated to see a girl cry, at least due to grief anyway. Maybe he wasn't going after Ed's killers purely for selfish-reasons after all. If he lied to himself enough he could make the whole thing something more-noble than it really was.

The Catchers, the FBP's special armed team, had already been through the clinic to gather evidence. They'd surely reviewed the surveillance footage and questioned the staff, but Robert was sure that there was one angle they didn't get. Other than a puppy girl named Cookie, the dark haired one he'd found crying over Ed, there was one puppy girl who didn't get taken—who didn't escape—during the raid. Apparently, the F.E.R.A.L people had missed her in all the shuffle. She was in the perfect spot to have overheard something. That is, if there was something for her to have overheard. Robert knew that the Catchers, like most FBP stooges, had to believe that ComPets were just animals; otherwise there was no way they could do the things they did to them. That mindset would have made it impossible for them to interview her as if she were a person, even if she did have something useful to say.

Robert paused in front of the crate and took a deep breath. He looked at the nameplate above the door before he opened it. Pirouette he read. It was a

classier name than most service animals got.

He tried to keep his voice light. “Here, Pirouette, here!”

After a moment a head popped out of the crate. Her light brown hair was styled into a pair of large ballerina buns with hair bands trimmed with ruffled, light pink lace, giving them the appearance of miniature tutus, at the base of each bun. She had the thin, graceful build of a dancer and wore identical light pink paw mittens and leggings and paw slippers trimmed with the same gauzy lace. She looked ridiculous, and her sour, frowning face told him that she was aware of just how ridiculous.

Robert clipped a leash to her ruffled collar and looked into her sullen eyes. Without really knowing anything about her, Robert constructed a whole background for her, imagining that she was a gifted ballerina before she got her draft notice and that the tutu hair bands and her pet name were just cruel reminders of what she used to be. Then again, her owner could have just had a thing for ballerinas.

“I’m going to make this quick, girl,” he said gently. “I’m going to turn off the shock collar on the pet sitter and I’m going to ask you some questions. If I like your answers...” he pulled a dog treat out of his pocket. “You’ll get a treat. Understand?”

Pirouette glowered at him. The fading red stripes across her rump suggested that she was what they called a “problem pet.” To Robert’s relief it seemed that hunger overpowered defiance.

“Woof.” She barked one hard syllable.

Robert took the remote that controlled Pirouette’s shock collar from the top of the crate. With a few button pushes the device audibly clicked off and she visibly relaxed as if she’d just slid into a nice warm bath.

“Alright, you were here two nights ago. I want to know if you heard anything from those people in black...”

“You mean F.E.R.A.L?” She interrupted hoarsely and hesitantly as if she were about to get shocked for the sin of making human speech.

Robert kicked himself for thinking like the FBP. Of course she could hear everyone talking about them around her. He didn’t like her snippy tone though.

“Yes. Did you hear them say anything?”

She cocked her head to the side. “You mean like a bunch of shouting and shooting?”

“Yeah, like that.”

She smirked. “No, I didn’t hear anything.”

Robert’s expression hardened. “I don’t have time for games, pup.”

She rolled her eyes in response. Robert looked over his shoulder at the door to the room. He wanted to make sure that neither Sue nor Natalie saw what he was about to do—especially not Sue. He yanked Pirouette’s leash—not hard enough to really hurt her, but enough to shake her and get her attention. He kept the leash tight, bent down and hissed wickedly in her ear, “Listen to me little pup, you tell me what I want to know or I’ll see to it that your service time is doubled!”

He let her go. Pirouette looked up at him. Despite the tears in her eyes she still had a defiant look in them, but it was waning.

“You—you can’t do that!” She squeaked, not sounding quite a hundred percent sure of herself.

Robert crossed his arms. He didn’t have the power to do anything of the sort, but she clearly didn’t know that. “Try me. Now hurry up. If you don’t tell me what I want to hear right now, I’ll get you on obstruction and you could be declared a pet for life!”

“Wait! Wait!” She put her paws up in front of her in a begging pose. “When those idiots were about to open my cage, I heard some gun shots and then

somebody screamed—a woman...” She furrowed her brow. “Then they ran away and left me here...I’m the only one who didn’t get to escape...” She pouted. “...Just as they were leaving I heard someone say something about meeting at the ‘Super Station’ or something like that...”

Robert smiled. “Good girl!” he praised and patted Pirouette on the head.

She glared at him and was about to say something when a quick press of a few buttons on the remote reactivated her shock collar.

“Sorry, girl...” Robert did feel a bit sorry for her. Being so close to freedom and having it snatched away must have been quite a blow to her. He held the small treat in front of her in the palm of his hand. “Go on. It’s yours.”

Pirouette snatched the treat with her teeth and munched on it hungrily.

Robert patted her head again and repeated, “Good girl!” Then he removed the leash. “Alright, back in your box.”

It was 6:00 AM and still dark. Five minutes after their relief arrived, Sue and Robert sat down in their car across the street from the clinic. Robert took the driver’s side. It gave him just a little bit of satisfaction that Sue no longer had the cute idea that she’d be the one in the driver’s seat. He slipped the key into the ignition, but didn’t turn it.

He looked over at Sue. The multicolored city light streamed through the wet windshield and bathed her in an array of colors. She really was beautiful in her own way. He wanted to tell her so, but he had to attend to business. His father, the venerable Henry Jericho, would have told him, “We work before we play.” Of course, his father said a lot of things. “Robert, you’re going to be doing a great service as a ComPet trainer. Women—girls really, because they never truly mature—they can’t take care of themselves. They’re frail, weak-minded little things that need big strong men to call the shots. The program is the best thing to happen to society. One day, we can only hope that that draft will be expanded.” Robert didn’t agree with him, but there were times when Henry Jericho’s ideas played out in his head as if they were his own.

He hated that.

“Are you really sure you want to do this?” He asked.

Sue stared out the window. The headlights of a passing car strafed her face making her glasses shine. It gave her an otherworldly look. “Who knows, we may be able to catch up to them before our shift starts tomorrow.”

“Since when did you become so optimistic?”

“Just now I guess.”

“Why are you doing this?”

“I already said.”

“Yeah, yeah, we’re partners.”

Sue turned to him. “You saved me from getting my head kicked in by that crazy Sapphire bitch, and you came for me after the Mutt Maker...”

“You don’t owe me anything.”

“Yeah, you would say that.” She leaned back in her chair and crossed her arms. “I’m going because I want to. Okay?”

Robert nodded and turned the key. Smooth jazz, the kind that public radio stations foolishly played late at night when many drivers were trying to stay awake, floated out of the car speakers. Sue made a face and turned off the radio.

“What did you find out from the puppy girl?” She asked.

“Mostly that she got the raw end of the deal.”

Sue looked at him quizzically.

“Never mind...she said that she overheard them say something about a ‘super station.’”

“Super station?” Sue asked.

“Yeah, does that mean anything to you?”

Sue did a quick search on her phone.

“It’s a petrol station.”

“What?”

“It’s a brand of petrol station. You know, what we used before every vehicle went electric?”

“Oh, yeah...okay, so they must be meeting at an old station then. That makes sense.”

Sue read from her phone. “According to city records there are still four of them standing. Two have been repurposed. Two are still vacant. One is on the east side across the river and the other is south of town on the old highway.”

Robert thought about it for a moment. Either could be options, but the one to the south seemed more-likely. The nearest border was to the south.

“South it is.” He said confidently, but it was really to mask his doubt. While it was unlikely that Pirouette had lied, she may have misheard. His assumptions could have been wrong. Even if he was right, it had been two days. They were probably long gone.

Part 2: The Not-So Super Station

The sun was just beginning to crest the tall pine trees that blanketed the area when Robert parked the car on the crumbling side-road. The tall, dying grass that had sprung up around the rusting metal “Super Station” sign swayed in the early morning wind. The gun concealed under his gray suit coat weighed heavily.

Sue reached for the door handle.

“Wait,” Robert said.

She paused.

“We don’t want to let them see us approach—if they’re even there.” He sighed. “Chances are we’re not going to find anything.”

“Well, we got to try, right?” Sue smiled a little.

“I’ll take the front. You go around to the back. Keep low and don’t start anything, got it?”

Sue nodded. “I got it.” She took a quick pull off her vape pen and brandished her HPPS issued pepper spray.

“Not in the car, Sue.”

She made a face and put the pen away. “It was my car first!” She mumbled.

“Right, and now it’s ours. Let’s go.”

Robert watched Sue disappear through the undergrowth. For once he was thankful that she was so undersized. It made it easier for her to squeeze into tight spaces and reduced her chances of being seen. He pulled the .357 revolver from its holster and regarded it for a moment. Robert was a decent shot at the range, and he could still be accurate under pressure, but he

usually preferred never to have to shoot at all. At that moment he realized he was aching for the opportunity—for the excuse—to use it. He didn't like the feeling that was overcoming him, but he didn't have the time or the desire to think about it. Using the dry undergrowth, trees, chunks of broken concrete and piles of random junk for cover, he made his way towards the station.

There were tire tracks, fresh ones, in the patches of mud in the broken blacktop in front of the rusted, overgrown, but still intact, building standing lonely in the middle of the clearing. The shriveled vines that coated much of the building's exterior were broken around the front door. Someone was definitely there. Robert steadied himself and licked his lips pensively. It could have been those F.E.R.A.L people, or it could have been a rare hermit, or even some teenagers looking for a place to party and screw.

There was only one way to find out.

Robert stalked up to the front door, finding more cover where he could. It wasn't a long way, but it sure felt like it. He kept his focus on the door, but his eyes darted routinely to the roof and the whole face of the building looking for movement of any kind. His body was loose, but also tense. He was ready to drop to the ground at a moment's notice.

His eyes snapped to movement in the trees. The sound of the shot, the burning feeling of the bullet grazing his arm, and the sudden impact on his knees and elbows when he threw himself behind a large, weed-choked engine all seemed to happen at once. Robert swore under his breath. His arm hurt like hell, but it still moved and he didn't see that much blood. He'd be okay, at least, for a while. He popped up and returned fire back into the forest where he'd seen the motion and the muzzle flash.

Back behind cover, with his ears ringing, he tried to listen for a reaction from the shooter. Gritting his teeth he called out, "This is the Central City P.D. You are surrounded! Drop your weapon and come out with your hands up!"

A shot ricocheted off the corroded metal of the engine.

“You’re full of shit!” He heard a girl’s voice call. “You’re alone.”

Robert shrugged to himself. Apparently one theater class an actor did not make. “Okay...you got me. I’m alone! Do you feel like talking, Ms. Critic?”

“Fuck you!”

Another shot rang out.

Robert took out his handkerchief and tied it around his arm. He stifled a groan as he tied it around his bleeding bicep with one hand and his teeth.

A shot struck the ground just beyond the cover by his side. Wet earth and gravel peppered him. He hoped that Sue had the good sense to stay back.

He popped up and shot again, but the wound was making him unsteady.

Two more shots whizzed overhead.

“You keep this up you’re going to run out of bullets, lady!”

“I can do this all day, asshole!” The girl’s shrill voice broke through the ringing in his ears. “I can—” Her voice stopped and so did the shooting.

Robert hesitated and listened. The stinging in his ears from the gunfire slowly started to fade.

“Robert!” Sue called out. “Robert, I got her!”

Robert furrowed his brow and carefully peered over the engine. Sue was standing behind a tall girl dressed in black “tactical gear,” the kind that a weekend warrior would get at an army surplus store. The girl was red-faced and panting with her hands in her air, one of which was bandaged, while Sue had one hand against the woman’s back and the other raised and playfully waving at him.

Robert stood with a groan and pulled a pair of handcuffs from the holster on his belt. He wondered how in the hell had little Sue managed to take the girl

in black prisoner. He grabbed wrist and slapped on a cuff. Robert glanced down and noticed that Sue was holding her pepper spray canister horizontally against the woman's lower back like a gun barrel. What a clever little thing she was!

Once the girl in black was securely cuffed, Robert sat her on the wet grass. She looked up at Sue's hands and her face said she realized that she'd been duped.

"You little bitch!" She spat half in hate and half in surprise.

Sue shrugged. "I've been called worse."

"You're a fucking traitor to all women!"

Sue visibly colored a bit. From the bits and pieces Robert was able to get out of her in past conversations and from what he knew about her background from other sources, he knew that being called a "traitor" probably stung her quite a bit.

Robert stepped between Sue and their prisoner. He looked down at her "No. You talk to me, honey."

The girl screwed up her face. "You're a sexist pig! You can't tell me what to do!" She spat.

Robert did everything in his power to maintain a cool, calm exterior. De-escalation was a part of his police training, but in such situations he routinely fell back on some of the tenets of his ComPet handler training. He knew that if he lost control in front of the prisoner, she would have won. Besides that, having reviewed the security footage himself, Robert could tell by her bandaged hand that she wasn't the one that did the shooting. That made staying calm just a little bit easier.

"You know what, you're right. I can't tell you what to do..." Robert's voice was low passionless. "All I can do is ask you some questions, and maybe you can be a good girl and give me some answers."

She pressed her lips together and scowled up at him.

“All right, you can choose not to cooperate, and then we can hand you over to the FBI.”

“...So? You think that scares me?”

“I think it does.” Robert stood up to his full height. “I think you saw the news reports like everyone else. You know happens to captured terrorists like you...” Robert referred to the “re-purposing” of F.E.R.A.L agents into helpless, desperately hungry, and blind piggy girls that served in a “recycling” role among “other duties.”

She looked ill, clearly knowing exactly what he meant. Normally, what they did to captured F.E.R.A.L agents made him sick too, but after she and her friends did to Ed the punishment didn't seem harsh enough.

Robert continued. “But it doesn't have to be that way. If you answer a few questions...” He glanced back at Sue. “...then we'll cut you loose. How does that sound?”

The girl looked pensive for several long seconds.

“The clock is ticking, darling.”

“I don't know anything!”

“Wrong answer.” Robert pulled out his phone.

“Fuck you!” she spit up at his face, but the spittle fell woefully short.

“You're acting like an animal already. I bet you'll fit right in with the other pigs in the pen!” A look of fear flashed across her face. He relished it; just like she probably relished the look on Ed's face while he bled to death right in front of her.

“Robert...” Sue said from behind him, bringing him back to his senses.

Robert sighed. Trying to talk to a fanatic was like trying to argue with the wind. He unzipped the girl's black jacket and plunged his hands inside. The girl snorted.

“Get your hands off of me!”

“Relax, girl, I'm searching you, not groping you. I like my girls pretty and not crazy...” Robert's hands felt around until his fingertips touched the stiff, laminated paper of a passport. He flipped through the pages rapidly, comparing the picture inside to the handcuffed girl at his feet. “Going on a trip, Miss Chloe Vance?” He asked. The booklet fell open to a page marked with a folded piece of paper. There was an address written on it in Sudan, the southernmost town of the country, located conveniently right by the border. Beneath the address someone else had hastily scrawled, “Destroy after reading.” Robert looked up from the note. “Well, I guess I don't need to make a deal with you after all.”

“Wait! I...” Chloe struggled in her handcuffs.

“Unless you have something to add?”

“If I tell you...you'll let me go, right?”

Robert nodded.

“They're going to make the crossing tomorrow night.”

“Which crossing? What time?”

“I don't know!”

Robert paused. He couldn't be sure, but he felt she was telling the truth, and feelings were all he really had to go on at that time. He pocketed the passport and the note.

All eyes turned to the sound of tires crunching on broken pavement. A black, boxy van wound its way down the road towards the station. The red symbol of the “Catchers” was emblazoned on its reinforced sides. Robert cursed. There was a part of him that said: “Stay. Explain your way out of

the situation.” Then there was another part that said: “If they catch the two of you here, then you can forget about getting Ed’s killer.”

Robert started for the woods. For Sue’s sake he knew he should stay. She didn’t deserve to be punished, because he couldn’t let things go. To his surprise though, she was right next to him, following him unflinchingly.

“Hey, what about me?” Chloe called after them as she scrambled to her feet.

Without stopping, Robert called over his shoulder, “Better start running!”

Robert and Sue reached the tree line, hunkered down, and watched as Chloe ran for the opposite tree line. Moments after she disappeared into the woods, the van pulled up and the reinforced doors on the back flew open. Several men in urban camouflage and light body armor spilled out and onto the overgrown circle drive. They were armed with tranquilizer, net, and lasso guns—weapons made to capture and pacify rather than to do permanent damage. In their hands these non-lethal weapons somehow seemed more sinister.

Their most novel pieces of “equipment,” however, came in the form of a pair of so-called “bloodhounds.” Robert had only seen a bloodhound once before when the FBP R&D people did a presentation about the future of suspect tracking. In an effort to avoid dangerous situations for old-fashioned canine units; the proposal called for bloodhound ranks to be made up of girls who had been sentenced to community service for non-violent crimes. They called the bloodhounds “a perfect marriage of woman and machine.”

Robert doubted that the girls doing service would agree.

Unlike the ComPets with their soft, yet restraining, paw mittens and slippers, bloodhounds had their arms and legs encased in sleek, dark blue metal up to the elbows and knees. Each bloodhound sported a heavy metal shock collar around their throats, with round numbered ID tags hanging from them making it easy for handlers to identify them, which was necessary as their faces were entirely obscured by the rest of the gear. Their

heads were obscured by a metallic mask made to resemble the head of a German shepherd, making them very “uniform” in appearance.

The metal ears and the snout weren’t merely an aesthetic choice to rob them of their humanity and their dignity—though they definitely did that. They were a main component of that “marriage of woman and machine.” The ears enhanced hearing, while the snout improved the power of scent. Sounds and smells would travel through the mask components and into the bloodhound’s brain, which would signal the mechanical limbs, which were also connected to the brain, where to go. When put into “hunt mode” they had absolutely no control over wherever the gear took them. Their bodies and minds were merely the crossroads that connected all the components of the heavy-duty gear.

During the FBP presentation, after Robert had gotten over the shock, he couldn’t help but notice that the “unit” was extremely swollen and dripping between her hind legs. One of the other police officers had joked, “Ah, all women are animals anyway! This one? Well, she’s just not afraid to admit it!”

The joke wasn’t out of line with how he’d been raised, but Robert couldn’t help but wonder what was going on under those dog-shaped hoods.

The thud of the heavy metal paws on the worn pavement and the mechanical baying that issued from the metal muzzles filled the air. The bloodhounds sniffed about on the ground while one squad of the Catchers forced their way into the old building.

“Let’s make for the car.” Robert whispered.

Sue nodded. They slipped back into the undergrowth and made their way back as quickly as they could. To their dismay they found a second van blocking their car into the drive.

The baying of the bloodhounds grew louder.

“They must have gotten our scent.”

“What do we do?”

“No choice. We gotta hoof it!” Robert grabbed Sue’s hand and pulled her deeper into the woods with him. They ran and ran, brambles tore at their clothes and exposed skin, but eventually the baying faded into the background. Slowing their pace to something more sustainable, they walked for hours. The sun was starting to set when they reached a stream swelled by the recent rains. Robert looked back at Sue who was chewing on the end of her vape pen. She only did that when she was nervous.

“What’s the problem?”

“Nothing, it’s just...that looks awfully deep and the water is running really fast.”

Robert picked up a long stick and tested the depth towards the center.

“It looks about waist-deep.”

Sue stepped up next to him. “Ahem. That’s relative.” She motioned with her hand showing the water would be creeping up to her collarbone.

Robert furrowed his brow. “Well, we could try to find a bridge or at least a shallower spot...”

They both gave a start at the distant baying of the bloodhounds.

Robert took off his shoes and socks and handed them to Sue.

“Hey, what are you...?”

Robert took her hand. “I’m going to carry you, come on!”

In the fading light, Robert thought he saw her blush and her retort seemed stuck in her throat. Not waiting for her to find her voice, Robert grabbed his shoes and hefted her effortlessly over his shoulder.

She kicked in the air a bit and quickly found her voice. “What? No! Put me down! I—”

“Just enjoy the ride, doll!”

“For the last time you are not a 1930s gumshoe. Don’t call me ‘doll!’”

“Do you want to stay dry or not?”

He winced as the icy water ran over the tops of his feet and the sharp stones dug into the soles. He gritted his teeth. “It’ll be over before you know it!” He wasn’t sure if he was reassuring her or his feet.

Thankfully, Sue stopped struggling and became still.

“There’s a good girl!” He laughed and carefully took another step forward.

“Oh, shut up!” She mumbled.

The baying grew louder and louder as Robert inched his way carefully forward, feeling his way across the rocky streambed with his toes in the dim light. Suddenly the baying stopped. Robert glanced over his shoulder at the bank and saw the metal head of the bloodhound staring at him with its sightless eyes. The body encased inside the metal pet gear was scratched from the brambles and undergrowth. It dripped with sweat and heaved with exertion. Yet the gear remained rigid and uncompromising.

A low mechanical growl issued from the metallic muzzle and Robert felt a pang of fear in his chest.

“What—what’s happening?” Sue squirmed over his shoulder until she was able to raise her head and presumably got a good look at what Robert was seeing. “Oh, crap...”

The mechanical limbs whirred as the bloodhound crouched back as it prepared to pounce. The maw of the muzzle opened revealing a row of razor sharp teeth. Robert felt the weight of the gun in his holster again, but he couldn’t bring himself to draw. He couldn’t shoot someone who was helpless—even if she was about to tear him apart. The bloodhound launched into the air with unnatural force and Robert’s only recourse was to try to dodge it. The tender sole of his foot came down on something sharp.

He couldn't tell if he was bleeding, but it sure felt like he would have attracted a dozen sharks if he'd been in the ocean.

The metallic teeth latched onto the sleeve of Robert's suit coat and thankfully not his arm. Robert stumbled as he was pulled forward. He couldn't do anything to free himself while also holding Sue.

"I'll make this up to you!" Robert yelled over the rush of the water before tossing Sue towards the opposite bank. She didn't even have time to scream before hitting the water.

Free to move, Robert pulled back against the bloodhound's vice-like maw until he felt his sleeve tear. The bloodhound fell backwards into the water with a splash, the torn sleeve still in the metal mouth. Robert could see it struggling in the water, the weight of its heavy metal appendages weighing it down. Robert spun around. He didn't see Sue on the opposite bank. His eyes darted frantically over the surface of the water. He saw her waving her arms frantically further downstream as she was swept away.

Robert tore off what was left of his jacket and dove into the water to swim after her. He barely felt the pull or the iciness of the current. The stream widened and grew deeper with every stroke, but he didn't care. His whole mind was on getting to Sue. His heart leapt when he saw that she'd managed to stop. She was clinging desperately to a half-sunk tree in the middle of the raging stream. He let the current carry him to her and he latched onto the tree right next to her.

"Fancy seeing you here!" He grinned. "Do you need help getting to the shore?"

Sue's forehead was pressed against the tree trunk. Her eyes were shut tight. "Yes! I—I can't swim"

Robert kicked himself for not realizing why she'd seemed so concerned about the height and speed of the water. He tilted her chin up and her eyes tentatively opened.

"Don't worry! Just hold on to me," he said, offering his back to her.

After a moment's hesitation, she reached out and grabbed a hold of him. Robert took off for the other shore only to be yanked back.

“Wait!” Sue cried out. “I’m stuck!”

Robert pulled himself back to the tree and took stock. Sue’s blazer and skirt were both caught in the twist of branches. Knowing that it was only a matter of time before the bloodhound or the Catchers would find them, Robert acted fast. He tore the blazer from Sue’s back and then plunged his hands down into the water to go after the skirt. He groped blindly over her pert behind as he searched for a zipper.

Seeing Sue’s embarrassment, Robert quipped, “I don’t usually go this far on the first date!” To his surprise, his stupid joke seemed to calm her down a bit.

Freed from the branches, Robert beckoned her onto his back again. Her small, wet frame pressed against him as he let the current take them further downstream before he started making a diagonal path towards the opposite shore.

Part 3: A Cozy Cabin

Sue felt like she had every right to complain about the current situation. There she was, wet, cold, and half-naked in the middle of the dark woods; and all of it because Robert had to go on some kind of revenge quest. Of course, her more-reasonable side reminded her that she had invited herself along, and therefore she really couldn't say much. Her less-reasonable side, as it were, fell in line with this view, because despite the fact that she was shivering and hungry, she got to be with him. Besides all that, he was taking responsibility for the situation. Both of them had lost their shoes in the water and Robert insisted on carrying her piggyback through the woods. There he was being the white knight again. If he was going to go to the trouble of being mister noble, then she figured that the least she could do was play the helpless damsel. Feigning complete exhaustion, Sue laid her head on his shoulder and lost herself in his warmth, his smell, and the steady rhythm of his heartbeat.

Robert, for his part, was just as cold and hungry as Sue. Worse, his feet hurt like hell, and though she was a small gal, Sue was starting to get heavy. Even though she'd insisted on going with him, he still felt somehow responsible. His father would have told him not to give into her "childish demands" and to have made her stay behind. Though he didn't agree, like most things his father had told him about women, he couldn't help but think it once or twice as he trudged onward through the darkness. For better or for worse, his upbringing also demanded that he carry her no matter how tired or footsore he got. Besides that, he liked the feeling of the smooth backs of her thighs each time he adjusted his hands, the way her small breasts pressed against his back, and the warm tickle of her breath on his neck. It all kept him sufficiently distracted from every stone and twig he stepped on and the concerns that he might be going in circles.

Both of them were in a daze when suddenly Robert spied something odd in the hill they were skirting. In the dim starlight he could see that there was a stone wall with a door and a window built into the side. It must have

someone's cabin. He pointed it out, and with a slight groan, he put Sue down.

Sue walked right up to the door and knocked without hesitation. Then she looked down at herself, clad only in her torn white blouse, and her shredded pantyhose, she scurried behind Robert and waited for an answer.

There was no answer. Robert looked down at her. "What if someone actually came to the door? What were you going to tell them?"

Without missing a beat Sue replied with the first thing that came to her. "That we are newly-weds who got lost in the woods and needed help." Her cheeks felt hot as the words hung in the chilly air. She hoped that Robert would take it as a joke and not sense that her words reflected her desire.

Robert cleared his throat awkwardly. Sue probably would have made a pretty, little bride all dressed in white. Of course, she looked just fine to him in stocking feet and tattered blouse. Either way she was wearing white. "You think you could have run that by me first?"

Sue didn't respond. She was eager to gloss over the moment of letting her mask slip. Instead she picked up a rock and looked at the window and then broke out one of the panes.

"What are you doing?" Robert exclaimed and grabbed her wrist.

She liked the feel of her slender wrist inside his strong hand. She liked the way it felt when he controlled her. "I guess you call it 'breaking and about to be entering,'" Sue replied wryly, unconsciously hoping that her sarcasm might push him to do something, but she didn't know what exactly.

For the second time that day, Robert wanted to put her over his knee and teach her some respect for private property. He wanted to hold her still, yank her panties down and turn her milky white backside bright red. He wanted to hear her beg for mercy and see her tears. Robert fought down the urge and let go of her hand. "We're supposed to be the law, Sue!"

“Oh, I’m pretty sure that went out the window when we didn’t obey our orders,” she said, swallowing her disappointment that he hadn’t gone further in some undefined way. “Besides, I don’t know about you, but I don’t plan to spend the whole night out here if I have any choice...and anyway, do you really think that either of us will be in any shape to get those F.E.R.A.L people if we don’t get some rest?”

Robert ground his teeth. He wished he had a stick of gum, but it was at the bottom of the stream turned river like their phones, wallets, and even his gun. When she was right she was right. He made a mental note to find the owner of the cabin after everything was over, so that he could pay him or her back for the damages.

He gently nudged Sue aside, reached through the broken window pane and unlocked the window. It was his fault they were out there. If someone was going to sin it should be him.

Robert and Sue had groped around in the darkness until they found a convenient oil lamp and matches in the middle of a table. With the thick curtains drawn over the window the interior of the cabin was quite cozy. Though the ceiling was a bit low for Robert’s taste, it suited Sue just fine. The walls were lined with soft, horizontal, cedar boards. Though decorations were sparse, they maintained a warm feeling with the flame of the lamp flickering across them.

“We should get out of these wet clothes...” Robert said absent mindedly. Sue’s cheeks colored. He added, “I mean...let’s find something to change into.”

Sue replied, perhaps a bit too emphatically, “Yes, let’s.”

There was a dresser next to the bed in the corner. Inside the top drawer Robert found a patched, red-button up shirt that had seen so many washes it was almost a dark pink, and a pair of equally weathered, blue jeans with a worn leather belt still in the loops. Hanging on a peg over the dresser, there was an orange ball cap with the word “Breeder” embroidered along the front in black, block letters. On the floor beside the dresser there was a pair of old, brown work boots, still crusted with mud. Everything looked like

it'd fit Robert height wise, but the real owner was clearly much heavier than he was.

Robert died inside a bit as he thought of swapping his custom-tailored, cashmere suit for the rags he was holding. Sue passed him up a pair of socks from the middle drawer and then pulled out the bottom drawer.

“Well, that’s about what I’d expect from someone who owns a cap with ‘Breeder’ written on it...” She grumbled as she spied the drawer’s contents. It was pet gear. Though it was clearly unauthorized, homemade pet gear, it was by no means low quality. The gear was light brown and consisted of hand wraps and leg wraps, a tail plug, a pair of floppy ears on an Alice band, and a red leather collar with a brass, rectangular tag. The name “Muffy” was inscribed on one side. Sue flipped it over and read another inscription, “To the sweetest, most loyal companion a man could have.”

“What’s it say?” Robert asked.

“Nothing...” Sue mumbled and tossed the collar back into the drawer. The tag and buckle clattered noisily.

Robert held up the patched shirt. “I’ll flip you for it.”

“Ha-ha.” Sue pulled the patchwork quilt off the bed. “You can have it. This will do for me I guess.”

The two stood awkwardly for several moments.

Robert pointed to opposite corners. “Uh, which one...”

“Oh, I’ll take that one!” With her shoulders hunched, Sue hurried past him to the corner between a cupboard and a shelf. She glanced over her shoulder to make sure that Robert’s eyes were in his corner. They were, and his shirt was already off. He was slim, but his tanned shoulders had just the right amount of bulk to them. She bit her lower lip and quickly fixed her eyes on her own corner, chiding herself for looking at him the way she thought—wished—he might be looking at her, as if he would have been remotely interested in looking at a scrawny thing like her. Her fingers were still a bit

stiff from the chill outside and it made the act of unbuttoning her shirt more difficult than it should have been.

Robert unbuttoned and unzipped his pants and lamented again about what the water and mud and brambles had done to them. He pulled his pants and boxers to his ankles and bent over to get them the rest of the way off. As he did, his eyes darted past his legs, seemingly of their own accord, to Sue. His mouth went dry as he watched her drop her bra on top of her tattered, stained shirt and slip her shredded pantyhose down her hips and legs. He knew he should look away when she hooked her thumbs into the waistband of her white, satin panties, but he didn't. He was hypnotized as she wiggled her hips back and forth, working her underwear down inch by inch until they were around her ankles. Robert quickly reached for the jeans.

Sue tossed her panties onto the small pile of clothes and wrapped up in the blanket. It was surprisingly soft against her skin. As she did, she chanced another glance. Robert was just pulling his pants up and felt her heart leap at the sight of the top of his butt. Though it wasn't the first time she'd seen some more-intimate parts of a man, it was the first time she'd ever wanted to stare, and that made her feel downright naughty.

She turned back to the corner. "Um...are you done?"

"Yeah," Robert replied as he turned around while buttoning up his shirt. He adjusted his stance a bit. Much to his annoyance, Sue somehow looked more-alluring and more-vulnerable wrapped up in that great big quilt with just a touch of her collarbone showing.

Finally "dressed" the two searched the cabin for something to eat. The owner, Mr. Breeder, as Sue had come to call him, apparently relied on hunting for food, because the cupboard was nearly bare. All they managed to find was a one metal cup, one metal plate, a few pieces of silverware on the top shelf, and a pair of beat-up dog dishes on the bottom. Fortunately, at least as far as Sue was concerned, there was an unopened bottle of bourbon on the middle shelf.

"Well..." she shook the bottle towards Robert. "At least we won't feel cold!"

Outside, there was a low rumble of thunder and a steady rain started again. Sue couldn't help but imagine how romantic it must have been for Mr. Breeder and Muffy on cold nights whenever they were there at the cabin. Then she scoffed at how twisted her own notion of "romance" had become over the previous several months.

Robert took the bottle from her hand and put it back on the shelf. "Or much at all... We'd be better off tomorrow without it."

Sue snatched the bottle back from the shelf and cracked the cap. She was so used to having a drink, usually several, sometimes more, to unwind after even a normal day, and that day had been anything but normal.

"Ah, but that's tomorrow!" She winked and went to the table with the bottle and the single cup in hand. She poured a bit into the cup. The smell made her nose wrinkle. It wasn't sangria, but she wasn't feeling particularly choosy.

Robert glowered at her as she raised the cup to her lips.

Sue paused and set the cup down. "How about we call it a drink to Ed?" She offered him the cup with an earnest half-smile.

Robert nodded and took the cup and raised it. "To Ed, the best hu-vet there ever was or probably ever will be." He took a sip and curled his lip. Other than a brief fascination with it when he'd come of age, Robert had never been much of a drinker. The cheap quality didn't make it any better. He returned the cup to Sue.

"To Ed," she said. "The best hu-vet there ever was or probably ever will be." She repeated and took a much bigger drink than Robert. The liquid burned like fire down her throat. She coughed and tears welled up in her eyes.

Robert laughed. "This isn't your fruity wine, Sue."

Sue wiped away the tears and made a face at him. "Why do guys think they're so manly for drinking stuff that tastes like crap?"

“It doesn’t taste like crap to us.” He lied and he wasn’t sure why. He never really felt the need to try and impress girls, especially with something so meaningless, but with her it was different somehow.

“Oh, I see.” She took another big gulp and gasped and Robert laughed again. “Fine, show me how it’s done!”

There was no clock. They marked time by trading the cup back and forth until over half the bottle was gone. Robert sat in the only chair by the table while feeling incredibly mellow, while Sue lounged on the bed feeling the same.

Robert looked at Sue and scratched his chin. He needed to think about something else other than her. Only that stupid blanket and one big step separated them. Every time she shifted, she revealed another part of herself. Sometimes a foot poked out of the quilt’s folds, sometimes a shoulder, sometimes a bare ankle or a stretched calf. He ached to join her on the bed, to touch her, to hold her, and to do much more to her. He thought of how she’d acted at the end of their first case together, the way she jumped on him and licked him. He thought of how she’d been after the Mutt Maker abducted her and he was glad that the cabin owner’s pants were so roomy. He remembered the feeling of her face rubbing against his crotch, desperate and pathetic, and unbelievably hot. His eyes moved to the dresser. His thoughts turned to the pet gear inside. He thought about putting her in it and giving her the training and attention an unruly little thing like her sorely needed. Then again, he knew that she only did those things because she’d been stuck in character and then because she’d been under the influence of a drug, but he couldn’t block out the memories. He hated himself for his base desires. There she was, innocently sitting there, while he was thinking of every awful act he could.

He had to think of something else. He had to talk about something, anything. “So...are you into cars or something? You knew about the Super Station and petrol in cars and all that pretty quickly.”

Sue reached over and took the cup from the table and took another sip. She had stopped making a face three drinks before, Robert observed.

“Oh, that...I’m not really, but my dad was. I guess he probably still is.” Sue took another sip. She didn’t want to talk about her dad or her family in general. What she wanted was for Robert to button his shirt more. In all the time she’d known him, he was impeccably dressed. She had wondered if he’d still look good without his perfectly tailored suits. It turned out he did. The worn, red flannel was parted and showed his strong, hairy chest and she was dying to climb up on his lap, to run her fingers through his chest hair, to play with it, to rest her cheek against it. She desperately wanted him to take the whole thing off and join her on the bed, pull away the blanket and do whatever he wanted with her. She kept trying to think of something to say to get him there while also not revealing her intentions, but even as drunk as she was she knew damn well that there was no reward without risk. Besides all that, she knew she’d only be making a fool of herself if she tried. A man like him would never be interested in someone like her. She knew that after seeing some of his dates. If he could get a tall, voluptuous, sexpot like Donna the pet-groomer, what could she possibly do to compete? Then again, she did overhear him describe her as “cute as a button” one time. If only she could have known if he was being serious or not.

“Oh, so your dad was into classic cars?” Robert didn’t want to let the conversation die. If the conversation died then he’d have nothing to keep him from sliding back into the dirty, dirty, dirty gutter.

Sue’s eyes drifted to the dresser and her heart beat just a little faster. She could only imagine being brave enough to pull the pet gear out, present it to Robert and ask him to put her in it. She didn’t want to answer the question. She wanted to think about Robert restraining her and then sternly giving her obedience lessons.

“Yeah, he had this silver, antique roadster. I don’t know much about the specs, but it was super fast. He’d take my sister and I out on drives on the weekends sometimes...just for ice cream or whatever.”

Robert nodded. “Had? Did something happen to it?”

Sue frowned and took another drink. Robert wanted to warn her for the fifth time that she needed to be careful—that hard liquor was different than what she was used to—but he didn’t.

“He...he had to sell it when I got my draft notice. My parents didn’t want me in the ComPet program, so they needed money to ‘negotiate’ a deal with the officials.” It made Sue feel terrible when she thought about all the sacrifices her parents made so that she wouldn’t end up as a helpless, panting plaything for some pervert. It made the fact that she regularly fantasized about being a plaything that much worse.

Robert looked down. “I’m sorry...” He felt like he was saying it to all the girls he’d help train. Sue’s whole family had given up so much to keep her out of pet gear and there he had been thinking about putting her in it just for his selfish fun. Always trying to find the bright side he added, “at least it worked.”

“Sort of, I mean, I still end up on all fours every now and again...” She laughed nervously and took another drink. Her head was swimming.

Robert felt a pang in his chest thinking about what Sue’s fate might be once they returned to headquarters.

“Why did you have to come with me?” He asked.

Sue’s smile faded. She was just starting to feel relaxed with him, and not because of the bourbon. They were living inside on her little fantasies, miles from civilization, in a nice cabin. Most importantly, she wasn’t alone, but then he had to go and say something so cold. “What, do you wish you were here with Donna instead?”

“What?”

“I...” Sue couldn’t believe she’d let that slip. “I...nothing. Never mind.”

Robert was silent. The rain continued to fall outside. He wondered why she would care if he and Donna had gone out a few times, especially because it hadn’t worked out between them. Sure the sex was mind-blowing. Donna may have been an ex-ComPet, but she still fucked like a top-tier one. There wasn’t a trace of shame or inhibition when she climbed on top and rode him, all the while yelping and barking as her long, blonde pigtails bounced in-sync with her awe-inspiring tits. Robert could barely keep up with her,

but after it was all over, when they lay in the dark, their breathing slow, and still sweating, they had nothing to say to each other. More than that, Robert felt nothing but the temporary absence of raw desire.

“Why are you bringing up Donna? Why would I bring her instead of my partner?”

Sue didn't know what to say. It was the same problem she always had. It was why she hated conversation. She always had a way of unintentionally touching nerves and digging her own grave, and then having neither the ability nor the courage to climb back out.

Robert's judgment would have told him to stay where he was, had his judgment not been drunkenly singing show tunes in the sordid backroom of his mind. So, he went it alone and sat down next to Sue on the bed. He reached out and gently tilted Sue's chin up so her eyes met his. She looked away and he whispered, “No, look at me, Sue.”

She did. His quiet voice was still commanding. Sue wondered if she could have resisted even if she wanted to.

“Why did you bring up Donna?”

Sue trembled.

“It was just...I know she's your girlfriend and you'd probably want to be here with her instead of me...” Her voice sounded more pathetic than she meant it to.

Robert shook his head. “Donna's not my girlfriend. We just went out a couple times, that's all.”

“Oh...I...”

“But why would you...”

“Because, Robert, I think I might...” Sue was drunk, but that wasn't what finally loosened her lips. She thought about Ed's assistant, Natalie, and how devastated she was to have lost him. Near as Sue could tell they hadn't been

in any kind of relationship, but she got the impression Natalie would have wanted to be in one. It was so damned cliché, but life was short. It was too short for her not to say something. “I might be falling in love with you.”

Her words hung in the air. Robert looked at her for a long time. He was concerned that she was just drunk or maybe playing a game with him, but everything in her eyes told him that she was being sincere.

Sue pulled away. “Oh, God...I can’t believe—please, just forget what I said...I—”

Robert followed her, took her by the shoulders and pressed his warm lips to hers. Sue tensed at the unfamiliar sensation. She had to remind herself that she was in her twenties and that her puritanical mother wasn’t around to say she was acting “slutty.” It was okay to finally be kissed. Robert’s arms encircled her the way she always hoped they would as his lips and hers worked back and forth and their warm breath intermingled. She thought she might swoon as his tongue slowly slid into her hot mouth.

Robert’s hands drifted up to the top of the blanket and pulled it away from her shoulders. Sue clutched it to her and broke away from the kiss.

“W-wait!”

“What’s wrong?” Robert panted.

“I...um...”

He laughed breathlessly. “You’re not a virgin are you?” Sue’s eyes went wide. It took Robert half a second to realize why. “You mean you’re actually...”

Still breathless herself she nodded. “Yeah...that was actually my first kiss.”

“How is that even possible?”

“It’s complicated. And...this is complicated. I’m sorry, I...”

Robert shook his head. “No, Sue. Don’t. Why don’t we just figure this out later?”

Sue nodded slowly and they pulled away from one another.

Part 4: Alternatives to Verbal Communication

The instant coffee tasted like wet cigars, but Robert needed it to kill the hangover and to give him the energy to get through his next conversation with Sue. It had been torture sleeping next to her, but he'd been too much of a gentleman to tell her to sleep on the floor and his aching back wouldn't let him sleep there either. He'd tried to put some distance between them in the bed, but sometime in the night she'd rolled over and clutched onto him as if he were a lanky teddy bear. The feel of her warm little body pressed up against him was maddening, but somehow he made it through the night and even managed to get a little rest.

The sun was just beginning to rise when he took the last gulp of coffee and returned inside of the cabin with a hand crank radio he'd found in hand. According to the local news, the authorities were seeking "Detective Robert Jericho" and "Inspector Sue Sharp" for questioning. It was going to be hard making their way to the border as themselves.

Robert watched Sue still sleeping in the bed, looking like a pale, delicate china doll, the swell of her breast just peeking out from the covers. There she was teasing him again without even knowing it.

She was a virgin. The fact was titillating as it was concerning. He'd never been with a virgin, but the idea of showing off his experience and introducing her to one of his favorite pastimes was more than a little appealing. Yet, she was already so damn unapproachable, and they worked together too, which made getting involved with her already a pretty bad idea. Her being a virgin made it the worst idea, but it was an idea he couldn't quite shake.

Wishing he had a real breakfast on the table, Robert dumped another packet of instant coffee into the mug and topped it off with some hot water. He

stirred the liquid slowly as he contemplated what he might say to his sleeping partner. Finally he settled on, “Good morning, Sue, coffee?”

Her little face scrunched up and her bloodshot eyes slowly creaked open. Her doll-like appearance melted away, but there was still something irresistible and cute about her even as she was glaring at him.

“Coffee?” Her voice cracked.

Robert nodded.

“Thank God!” She took the cup and sipped it. “Yuck, instant...” She wrinkled up her nose, but immediately took another sip.

“Yeah, it’s not exactly Taster’s Choice is it? But what can you expect from a guy who owns a cap with ‘Breeder’ written on it? Anyway, hurry up, the rain is gone and we’ve got some ground to cover today.”

Sue pointed at his worn boots. “It’s great that you have shoes now, but what am I going to do? Hey, how’s your back?”

Robert scratched his head. “Yeah, about that...” He patted the crank radio on the table. “The police are looking for us, Sue. They want us for ‘questioning.’ It’s all over the news. They said both our names along with physical descriptions; we’re going to have a big problem if someone recognizes us.”

“Well, you don’t look like yourself at all in that getup.” Sue gestured at him.

“That’s exactly what I was thinking, but what about you?” He was praying that she would get his meaning and that he wouldn’t have to suggest it.

Sue looked at the bottom drawer of the dresser again, then back at him. When she was sure that she understood his meaning she curled her lip very purposefully. “What? You want to dress me up like your little hunting dog? Is that it?” She tried not to sound excited by the idea and laid on the disgust in her voice as thickly as she could manage.

Given the situation and what little they had to work with, the ridiculous suggestion was the most-practical idea Robert could think of, but he couldn't deny that he wanted to see her that way again. He tried to play it cool. "Can you think of a better idea? If we keep heading south we ought to reach the highway again and we can hitchhike all the way to Sudan. To anyone who picks us up we'll just be a stranded hunter and his loyal hound."

"No." Of course, she wanted nothing more than to say, "Yes! God, yes, Master! Woof!"

"Look at it this way, if you're shy fewer people will notice you as a puppy girl than if you're walking around in just your blouse, don't you think?"

Sue pursed her lips and acted as if she were suddenly thinking about it, when she'd already made up her mind.

"I'll still carry you until we get to the road so we can make better time, how about that?"

"...I can't believe I'm even considering this." She paused again, really wanting to sell her reluctance. Finally, she answered, "...Okay, just let me finish my coffee."

A short time later, Robert stood with his back to Sue. His heart was pounding in anticipation as he practiced maintaining a professional, cool exterior. He could hear Sue behind him sigh deeply.

"Okay...I think I'm ready."

Robert took a deep breath and turned around. Sue stood with the blanket still tightly clutched around her as she had the night before. Her hair was brushed down and she wore a pair of floppy, brown dog ears attached to an Alice band.

"Are you...?"

"Yes, I got them on, but..."

“Yeah, uh, I get it. Don’t worry, Sue, I’ll make this as easy on you as I can.”

“Th—thanks.”

Robert reached for the blanket and stopped. “Do you want to...?”

Sue tittered awkwardly. “Oh, no...Actually, it’d be easier for me if you took the blanket off me.”

Robert gently pulled the quilt away, first revealing Sue’s breasts. Her nipples were topped by the small, dark brown, heart-shaped covers that they’d found at the bottom of the dresser. A rush of light pink flush washed over her skin from the top of her milky white chest to her raven hairline. His first impulse was to reach out and cup her, pert, little breasts, to squeeze them and knead them, but he pulled away the rest of her covering instead. Both her hands went to her crotch as the blanket drifted past her smooth belly, over her slender waist, and down her thin legs.

Robert dragged his gaze back up to her face. “Here, let’s get you up on the table. It’ll be easier.”

“Easier for you you mean!” Sue joked in a shaky voice.

“Yeah, exactly, who else would I mean?” He quipped back.

He took one of her hands, savoring the feeling of her soft palm against his fingers, and carefully guided her up. Once she was situated, she put one of her hands back between her legs to cover herself.

“I’ll look as little as I can, Sue. Okay?”

She wanted to tell him that he could look as much as he liked. “It’s not like I have anything you haven’t seen right?” She laughed nervously. “You’ve probably done this plenty of times!”

Robert picked up one of the dark brown, mud-stained leg restraints, bent her right leg as far as it would go and started binding. “I wasn’t a pet groomer, but I did have to trade out a lot of the training gear in the program.”

Sue winced when he secured the restraint. Being in his gentle, but strong hands as he manipulated her was making her tingle in her belly.

“Too tight?” He asked a little anxiously.

“No, it’s fine. Keep going...” Sue tried to keep the huskiness out of her voice.

Robert took her other leg and began to wrap it. “And every girl has something I haven’t seen. They’re all different.” She teetered a bit uncertainly as he set her second bound leg down making her hand slip away from her crotch for a moment. Robert sneaked a peak at her smooth, hairless slit before he could stop himself. It was just slightly parted and looked inviting. He wanted to tell her “Good girl” for being so well-groomed already.

Robert moved to her front and took one of her hands in his. He carefully arranged it into a fist with her thumb on the outside and started wrapping it. Sue flexed and unflexed her hand a bit as she felt the tingling from before start to spread over her whole body.

“Be still.” Robert murmured out of the corner of his mouth as he held her hand a little tighter. Then he paused and looked at Sue. “Sorry, force of habit. Are you alright?”

Sue closed her mouth and breathed through her nose quickly in an effort to not sound like a panting dog. She told him that she was fine. She would have been more fine if he’d not even asked. When he’d finished with her first “paw” she held it up and flexed against the tight bindings encircling her hand.

“Sue?”

“Huh?”

“Your other hand?”

“Oh, right!” She set her hand in Robert’s. She inhaled sharply and squirmed as he began to bind her left hand. The fear and the excitement of being helpless rose with each passing moment.

Robert stood back and admired his own handiwork for a moment. The homemade restraints weren’t as attractive as officially licensed pet gear, but they were well-made and certainly did the trick. Sue was quite a sight on all fours with her little breasts hanging down. She was still flushed. The poor thing was probably dying of embarrassment and it was only going to get worse.

Until then, he’d kept the plug tail and lubrication out of Sue’s sight knowing how “skittish” puppy girl trainees were about them. He didn’t want to cause her any undue stress, and yet at the same time he did.

“Sue, about last night, about you...”

Sue looked at the brown tail with the thick black plug warily. It wasn’t the first time she would have something shoved up her butt for something work-related, but she certainly wasn’t accustomed to it and she doubted that she ever would be. She opened her mouth to ask Robert if it was really necessary to plug her. She chided herself for even thinking of trying to talk her way out of it. Whether it was her actions, his actions, luck or a combination of all of them she was getting exactly what she really wanted. Wasn’t she? What’s more, would she ever find herself in such a position again? She tried to push away the fear, the shame, the words of her prudish mother, and even what Robert might think of her. Last night she couldn’t even make out like a normal person, even while drunk, but sober she’d submit herself to whatever indignity and love it as long as Robert was the one doing it to her.

Their eyes met. Robert wondered why she didn’t protest. “I’ll be as gentle as I can, alright?”

Sue nodded slowly.

Standing behind her, Robert lubed up the plug more than he thought necessary. When he was satisfied he patted Sue’s paw that she’d returned to

cover her crotch.

“Move your paw, just for a bit, Sue.”

Her hand slowly slid away revealing herself to him again. Robert put his hand on Sue’s left hip to steady her and pressed the greased silicone against Sue’s tight, pink rosebud. Sue whined loudly and shuddered.

“Are you alright?”

Still trembling, she nodded slowly again.

Robert rubbed his thumb gently back and forth along her soft skin and mumbled, “Just relax, Sue. It’s going to be alright.”

Her trembling lessened. Even though the facts were contrary to his words, she believed him.

He pushed the plug forward and Sue’s bud stretched around the black silicone. Even as she whimpered louder, it took the invader inside of her. When she reared up and tried to push the thing back out, Robert held her firmly and pushed it deeper and deeper into her as if to say, “Take your medicine, sweetheart!” The pain was intense, but Sue found herself growing wet as Robert did his work seemingly so stoically. Robert had managed to stave off an erection since the process had begun, but at that moment he strained against his pants as he gripped her tightly and pushed the plug the rest of the way inside of her.

Glowing with sweat, Sue sobbed quietly with her face to the table. Robert breathed heavily behind her. He felt like a monster, but his desire remained and he greedily took in the sight of her on all fours, nearly naked, with her perky ass turned up to the air. Beneath the brown tail protruding from her stretched backdoor, he could see Sue’s pussy. It was glistening with her juices, swollen, quivering, and grasping at the emptiness in front of it. Could she have been enjoying it all or was it just the byproduct of stimulation?

He touched the back of Sue's head and petted her softly, shushing her as he did. "See, that wasn't so bad now, was it?"

Sue half-sobbed, half-laughed, "I-it w-w-was pretty bad!" She took a deep breath and exhaled. "Maybe you're out of practice." Robert stopped petting her and she regretted trying to be funny.

"Let's get you finished. Sit up for me."

Sue sat up and demurely squeezed her legs together. Robert held the collar in his hand. She couldn't help but stare at it. She'd been waiting for the collar since he'd made the suggestion of them posing as hunter and hound. It had been so upsetting for her when Donna had collared her. The idea that she hadn't escaped degrading pet service after all was almost too much to bear at the time. Yet, when Robert tilted her chin gently up, she shivered with excitement instead of fear—mostly. Countless times she'd imagined the moment and rubbed herself raw on the floor of her apartment at the thought of him taking possession of her. The pressure of the plug inside of her and the growing anticipation made her desire mount and mount. She sat up a little higher to give easier access to her neck, her legs spreading a bit as she did.

Robert couldn't ignore Sue's flushed face, her heavy breathing, or the wetness peeking out from between her slightly parted thighs. It wasn't just an involuntary reaction to the plugging. She was genuinely aroused. Was this the reason she'd given in and accepted his absurd idea? Was this the way she meant she was falling in love with him? Suddenly he began to see her previous behaviors in a different light. He felt himself growing harder and without the guilt as he remembered her crawling by his side and wondered if she'd enjoyed it even back then.

Sue just wanted the collar around her neck. Her anticipation had turned into frantic impatience. As she shifted, her eyes dropped down to Robert's lower half. Even with Robert's borrowed jeans being so baggy she could see his bulge pressing against the faded, worn denim. He hadn't said he had feelings for her the night before, even after she'd clumsily admitted her own. Yet, at the time she had just been glad that the awkwardness of talking

had been over. Seeing that she had gotten such a reaction from him was better than words.

Their eyes slowly drifted away from each other's nether regions and met. Neither said a thing and neither needed to. Both knew what the other was thinking as Robert slid the cracked, brown leather around Sue's supple neck. Sue panted and Robert struggled to keep his hands steady as he fumbled with the buckle. It was more-intimate than the plugging somehow, and both found it hard to leave the cabin behind after all was said and done.

Part 5: Hitch-hiking Hijinks

Having not eaten since the day before, Robert's step lacked pep as he trudged through the woods with Sue on his back as he'd promised. It wasn't just anger over Ed that was keeping him going at that point, it was also knowing that the road couldn't be too far away. He smiled when he came up a hill and looked down at an old two lane road cutting its way through the pine trees and fields.

"Look, girl!" He nodded towards the beautiful pavement. "We found the road."

Sue scoffed, "Trying to get into character a little early aren't you?"

"Why not, we both should, right, Muffy?" Robert referenced the name engraved on the tag attached to her collar. After her display at the cabin, he figured that she wouldn't complain.

"Muffy...God, that's the worst, but at least I'm not wearing that cap!" She batted at the visor with her paw.

Robert frowned.

Sue smiled back and playfully knocked the visor down over his eyes. "Sorry. Oh, I mean, woof!"

Robert laughed. "That's better." He put her down on the ground by his feet. "You walk from here, pup!"

Sue made a pouty face up at him and they made their way down the hill. On all fours, Sue was quite a bit slower than him, but she was far less clumsy than she was the first time they'd worked together. Apparently the stint of undercover work at the kennel had done her some good in that area. Robert stopped so she could catch up, but she stopped a few steps behind him.

Robert started to command her to “heel,” but he thought that might be pushing his luck. “What are you doing?” He asked.

“Crawling?”

“No, I mean why are you staying so far back?”

Sue sat back on her knees with her thighs together and her paws resting daintily over the top. “There’s no c-string attached to the tail to cover my... I’m...I’m embarrassed, okay?”

He wanted to pet her and tell her that she had nothing to be embarrassed about, but he knew what she meant. “Don’t worry about it, Sue. Your tail helps cover you. Just try to keep your butt low and no one will notice!” Robert lied.

“You really think so?” She asked hopefully.

“Trust me.”

“Well, alright...” Sue hesitantly crawled to his heel.

“Now that that’s settled, let’s go.”

Side by side, they continued down the hill until they reached the side of the deserted road. The road didn’t stay empty for long. Robert spied a car in the distance going the way they were.

He pointed to the ground by his foot. “Stay, Muffy.” Then he walked to the side of the road. “I’ll show you how this is done.”

Sue plunked down on the ground. “Are you some kind of hitchhiking expert?”

“Sue—Muffy!” Robert chided. “Stay in character.” The car was getting closer, but he explained. “I’m not an expert, no, but I did it a few times. Come to think of it, there was one time Ed and I hitchhiked to a concert out of town...”

As the car was about to pass, Robert waved his thumb casually at it. The car sped past him without even slowing down. In fact, it may have sped up. Robert stared at the car rapidly disappearing into the horizon.

“Woof?” If it was possible to bark sarcastically, Sue had done it.

Robert looked back at her and she had a mischievous smile on her face. It was true that he had hitchhiked a bit when he was younger, but not because he had to. He could have asked his father for a new car anytime, but Robert preferred to get along on his own as much as possible. Besides that, Robert really didn’t want Ed or anyone else to think that he was some kind of spoiled rich kid.

Undaunted, by his first failure, and eager to wipe that arrogant little smirk off Sue’s face, Robert got ready as another car approached. He waved his thumb more vigorously, only for it to zip past him also. Knowing she was still watching, Robert felt his cheeks heat up a bit. He took off his hat and waved it for the third passing car. It was fortunate that there’d been so much rain; otherwise he would have had lungs full of road dust from three, then four, then five cars speeding past him.

After the sixth car passed without stopping, Robert threw the stupid cap on the ground and stamped on it.

“Damn it!” He yelled. It had been so much more fun back then. He was with his friend, he had a few beers on board, he wasn’t hungry, he wasn’t dressed in the clothes of an overweight hillbilly, and most importantly he wasn’t spectacularly failing in front of a girl he liked.

Sue crawled up next to him and patted him on the knee to get his attention. She looked up at him with her big brown eyes and asked innocently, “You mind if I try?”

“You?” Robert chuckled, picked up his hat, dusted it off and put it back on his head.

“Well, we are short on time. It couldn’t hurt, right? I mean, woof, woof, woof?”

Robert shrugged. What did they have to lose? “Yeah, sure, go ahead.” He took a few steps back and stood with his arms crossed as another car, an old pickup truck, clanked down the road towards them.

Sue waited until the truck was close. She tensed and with a visible shudder that ran through her whole body, she popped up onto her “hind legs” and started begging. She was quite a sight with her pink tongue lolling from her open mouth, squatting and bouncing. Robert took note that she only had one “paw” raised, while the other rested on the ground, conveniently covering her bare crotch. Even while she was making such a display, it amazed him how she could be so bashful. It amazed him that she could perform like that at all. He wondered if she was enjoying it. He wondered if behind her covering paw she was as wet and swollen as she was when he was “dressing” her earlier that morning.

The truck whipped past her only to screech to a halt and slowly start to roll back towards her. Sue immediately dropped back down to all fours. Then she looked over her shoulder at Robert. Even though her face was beat red, she still winked at him.

Robert returned to her side. He was genuinely impressed and even a little humbled. “I guess I should say ‘good dog,’ huh?”

“I just made an idiot out of myself,” she grumbled. “It’s the least you could do.”

“Good dog, Muffy.” Robert chuckled and patted her head.

A heavysset man in overalls and an old denim jacket stepped out of the rusty, mud splattered pickup truck. Scratching his stubbly double-chin and smiling at Sue he asked, “You two need a ride?”

“We sure do!” Robert replied in the best backwoods accent his one theater class could provide.

The man opened the tailgate to the makeshift canopy-covered truck bed. “Just load your pup up and we’ll get moving.”

Robert looked down at Sue and she looked back up at him with a worried look. “Ah, I’d rather she ride up in front with me.”

“Sorry, mister, animals ride in back.” No sooner did he say that when a large German shepherd stepped out of the back of the truck bed to the open tailgate, its nails clicking on the metal. The man patted the dog’s head. “She’ll be fine. Roxy is comfortable enough back here, aren’t you, girl?”

Robert knelt down and hoisted Sue up in his arms. “It’s a girl dog, you’ll be fine,” he murmured in her ear. Sue whined a bit, but to his relief, she didn’t break character and he set her down next to Roxy.

The dog sniffed at Sue’s face and she pulled back a bit.

“Uh, she’s new to this!” Robert explained. “She’s still a little skittish.”

“I’d say so. Don’t worry, Roxy is very friendly. Your pup can share her water and kibble dishes if she likes. She won’t mind!” The man slammed the tailgate shut and trudged back to the cab.

“Robert,” Sue hissed. “I’m not staying back here with a real dog I’m—” She was cut off by Roxy licking her across the face. “Ick!” She exclaimed and wiped the slobber from her cheek.

“It won’t be for long. Just be friendly and we’ll be there before you know it!” Robert whispered back before dashing to the passenger side of the cabin, leaving her alone with the very affectionate farm dog.

Several twists and turns down the road, Robert melted into the worn out seat of the truck’s cab while he chewed on the old farmer’s, the driver’s, homemade jerky. It had just the right amount of spice and saltiness, and even if it wasn’t basically perfect, Robert was too hungry to care what it tasted like. He watched the countryside speeding past the window, while the farmer rambled on about something. With a moment to rest and his belly not grumbling, Robert was finally able to think and take stock of the situation. No gun, no phone, no badge—not that said badge had any real authority to back it up anymore—and dressed like a hick, he wasn’t sure

how he'd proceed. He had been able to save the small black book with the address, so at least he still had the trail.

“So, why'd you call her Muffy if you don't mind my asking?” The old farmer asked.

“Huh?” Robert straightened up in his seat and pointed back into the covered truck bed. “Oh, you mean the pup?” Ha, she's a real big fan of earmuffs!”

Both men laughed and then fell silent for a few minutes.

“So where did you 'adopt' her?” The old farmer asked.

Robert hesitated to answer.

“Just looking at her I can tell she's not one of them government animals. She ain't been tagged or branded. She's homemade I guess you could say. So, where'd you get her?” When Robert still didn't answer, the man continued. “Oh, don't worry about the law, I'm just asking because maybe I'd like to get one like that myself one of these days!” He laughed.

Robert forced a laugh when he finally understood the farmer's meaning.

“You know, so I can have someone around the farm as quiet and loyal as Roxy, but also something I can dip my wick in every night and maybe get a few litters out of too!”

“Yeah, I know what you mean...” Robert clenched his jaw. Pet girl bootleggers were a real problem in rural areas. If the situation had been different, he would have jumped at the chance to interrogate the farmer on everything he knew about it.

“So, where'd you get her?”

“Oh, yeah, I...I caught her hiking near my cabin a few months ago.”

“Ah, if only I could be so lucky to have a cute little piece-of-ass drop on my doorstep like that!”

Robert nodded. “Yup, it was pretty lucky I guess.”

“You thinking about breeding her? That’s the worst thing about them government pets, they stick them on that birth control so they can’t do what a woman was made to do!”

“Uh...I hadn’t really thought that far ahead.”

“Ha! Well, I don’t blame you, being a young man and all. Remember though, they say it’s the best way to domesticate them. Put a litter in her and she’ll be yours forever!”

Over the clanking of the engine and the rattle of the poor suspension on the old road, Sue could still overhear the conversation between the two men in the cab through the cracked window separating the front of the truck from the back. She’d only been able to sit still long enough to eavesdrop for a short while, however. Roxy had chased Sue around the enclosed space with her very inquisitive snout. Already very achy between her legs from crawling by Robert’s side and humiliating herself to get them a ride, the last thing Sue wanted was for the large dog to come nosing around her. Roxy’s hot breath tickled Sue’s delicate, swollen pink folds making her shudder and then scurry away. Fun was fun, but she wasn’t ready for the emotional burden and confusion that would come with responding to Roxy’s curiosity.

Fortunately, Roxy seemed to have satisfied that curiosity and plunked down on the left side of a smelly, threadbare rug in the middle of the truck bed. Sue hesitantly crawled up next to her and lay down on the opposite side of the rug. As she did, she eyed Roxy warily, afraid that she may have misinterpreted the extra space on the rug as an offer to lie down. Sue was tired and despite the greasiness and stench of the fabric, she was happy to rest.

When she saw Robert eating the jerky in the cab, her mouth watered. Out of the corner of her eye, Sue noticed Roxy’s head had perked up and she was visibly drooling. Sue was shocked to suddenly feel a little camaraderie with her rug-mate. When it got down to it, they were just two hungry little bitches hoping to get scraps of something yummy from a man. Sue

squirmed at the thought of it, but willed herself not to think about it any further.

Sue had almost calmed herself down when she heard the farmer ask Robert if he'd considered "breeding her." She perked up and listened anxiously for his response. She furrowed her brow when he responded unenthusiastically that he hadn't thought about it. He was only playing a character, so his answer didn't mean much anyway, but she was still disappointed. The farmer encouraged him, however.

Sue wiggled at the words, "put a litter in her and she'll be yours forever!" To which Robert responded, "Really? Well, I suppose I ought to be able to get one or two or ten out of her!"

The heat which she'd tried so desperately to cool rushed through her again, and her pawed hand shot down to her smoldering "puppy parts." A part of her said, "No, not here. You're not really an animal. What if Robert sees you acting this way?" but she could not stop herself. On her stomach, she began to grind against one paw while she bit into the other to keep herself quiet. The wrappings binding her hands were not as soft and fuzzy as ComPet paws, but that didn't stop her as she was soon sopping wet and humping in a steady rhythm.

Roxy watched Sue from the other side of the rug. If Sue didn't know better, she'd say that Roxy was giving her a disapproving look, like a good church woman might give a cheap whore. Sue humped harder and faster knowing that there wasn't camaraderie between her and Roxy. Roxy had more sense, more self-control, and more dignity than her. In some sort of imaginary hierarchy that Sue's spinning mind created, Roxy was higher than her by far. Roxy could probably herd sheep or do something else that was clever and useful, but not Sue. All she was good for was carrying Robert's litters. She'd never thought about being pregnant as sexy, but she couldn't stop seeing herself, with swollen "teats" and belly at Robert's feet. She was utterly owned, utterly helpless and completely dependent on him.

Sue bit down hard on her paw as an orgasm surged through her tiny frame. There were tears in her eyes from the pain she'd caused herself and the wonderful release. Wiping the tears away she noticed Roxy was still

looking down on her. Without the soft pink haze of passion, Sue suddenly found Roxy's stare too much. For the rest of the trip, Sue couldn't make eye contact with her.

"Thanks, Mister!" Robert waved as the old farmer took off down the street of Suden.

Robert looked down at Sue and held out some of the farmer's beef jerky. "Here, I saved some from you."

Obviously too hungry to care about the indignity of eating out of his hand, Sue picked up the dried meat with her teeth and chewed on it gratefully.

"I wouldn't normally recommend giving a dog people food, but I guess we can let it slide this time..."

"Damn right!" Sue mumbled.

"We're in town now, Muffy. That means no talking unless you absolutely need to, and if you gotta, then keep it low!" He pulled the leash from his pocket.

Sue swallowed the mouthful of jerky. "Do I have to be leashed?"

"It's the law."

Sue presented her neck. "Yeah, we wouldn't want to break any laws now would we?"

Robert clipped on the leash.

"Just don't choke me, alright?"

"Just keep up and you won't have to worry about it." Robert mumbled and re-read the address. It wasn't far. Walking along the sidewalk almost felt normal for a moment. He could forget about why he was there and just imagine that it was him and Sue, Muffy, not that he would have ever given her such a dumb name, out for a little lunchtime walk before he'd have to go back to work. He watched Muffy's tail wag back and forth enticingly as

they went, and held on to the pleasant little fantasy until they eventually reached the address.

Robert looked at the address again and then one more time just to be sure that he'd found the right place. Across the street and in the fading light of evening, he could still clearly make out the brightly painted sign of a steaming coffee mug with an apple cheeked puppy girl's face licking her lips next to it. Beneath the two images the words "Perk and Pup." The F.E.R.A.L people were more-clever than he'd originally thought. No one would think to look for them in a puppy girl-friendly coffee shop.

Making sure that no one was nearby he knelt down next to Sue and whispered to her, "Alright, let's not make this complicated. We'll just go in there and sit and see what we see."

"Wow, Hannibal, aren't we a master strategist?" She quipped.

Robert ignored her. "Whatever happens, if shooting starts or even if things just get physical I want you to get out of there. Do you understand me?"

"I didn't come all this way to run if you need—"

Sue was cut short as a young couple came out of a nearby door holding hands and dressed for a date. Robert took a knee next to Sue and ruffled her hair so violently that it shook her into silence. "Yeah, Muffy's a good doggy, ain't she?" He said in his terrible country accent. "She's just as cute as a button! Yeah, you know you are!"

The couple stopped and watched Robert as he continued to praise and vigorously pet Sue. Robert was running out of things to say and wondered how much longer they would stare.

"Uh..." The young man started. "Hey, man, cute puppy girl."

Robert looked up and smiled. "Thank you kindly!"

The young man glanced back at his date. "Do you mind if we pet her?"

Robert knew that Sue wouldn't like strangers touching her, but he nodded, mostly just so that they'd hopefully go away after, but also because he wanted to see how far he could push her before she broke. "No, go ahead." Sue's cheeks were crimson as the young man petted her head.

His date reached out hesitantly and brushed Sue's bangs. "Poor thing, she smells really bad. Just like a real dog!"

The young man laughed, but then chided her and pointed at Robert.

Robert laughed too. "Oh, don't worry; I know she stinks to high heaven. We've been out in the woods for weeks. I'll give her a good scrub later."

The young man looked at his date. "A good scrub, eh? Are you sure you don't want to volunteer for service?" Obviously, it was a joke between the two of them.

The young woman shook her head and stood up. "Uh, I think I have a little more dignity than that. You'd never catch me crawling around on all fours and being led around on a leash!"

The young man stood up also and nodded at Robert before they both continued down the sidewalk.

"Eh, besides, did you see how she was all drippy? Only a total slut would be enjoying being treated like that!"

After they'd turned the corner, Robert grumbled, "Don't listen to her. I've seen her type plenty of times. After a week in the kennels she'd have her flat ass up in the air offering it to anyone who passed within three steps of her."

"Really?" Sue mumbled back.

"Trust me, Sue. She's definitely that kind."

Part 6: The Cafe

With the rich smell of coffee in the air, soft, golden lighting warming the old, red brick walls, and smooth hardwood floors, the café would have been nice if it weren't for its clientele. They reminded Robert of why he avoided pet girl-related establishments. He was filled with contempt for men who had to buy a woman and annoyance that the losers didn't even know how to handle them. Watching from the table he'd picked mostly for the vantage point, he watched all kinds of mishandling. One puppy girl with dark brown hair and olive skin looked very dehydrated as she lay on her side, her eyes a little glassy and her tongue hanging out, while she panted weakly next to an empty water dish. Her owner ignored her while he idly stared at his phone. It was a clear case of neglect. Another owner carelessly allowed his black skinned, curly haired pup to sit at his feet without attaching her leash to one of the convenient hooks included on the sides of all the tables. With the leash end just sitting in his lap, she could have easily pulled away and tripped staff walking through the aisle between tables. It was all around annoying and there was nothing he could do about it without drawing attention to himself.

“Have you decided, sir?” A pretty waitress approached him for the third time. Not having a cent on him, Robert could sense his stalling wouldn't last much longer.

“Well, darling, how about a glass of water with lemon for me and a bowl full of cold water for my little mutt here?”

The waitress didn't look amused, but replied, “Yes, sir, coming right up.”

“Oh, and I changed my mind, go ahead and bring me a food menu.” He pointed at Sue. “Y'all got kibble for her, right?”

“Yes, sir, we have wet and dry in six different flavors. I can bring you a doggy menu too if you like.”

“That’d be great!” Robert grinned.

Moments after the waitress walked away, Sue laid her chin on his knee, startling him. She motioned with her paw that he should lean closer.

When he did she whispered, “I am not eating dog food!”

“Hush.”

Someone cleared their throat behind him. Robert looked up at a giant of a man who seemed to have stepped up on him from out of nowhere.

“Nice, pup, what’s her name?” There was a bulge around the left pocket of his three quarter length coat. If the bulge wasn’t a gun, it sure was gun-shaped.

Robert sat back. “Muffy,” he replied.

“Ha, cute name! Listen...” the large man gestured with his pocket. “I’ve got some friends in the back of the store that would love to meet both of you. How does that sound?”

Robert looked at Sue to reassure her, but he wasn’t so sure of the situation himself. At least, he reasoned, they were in the right place.

He tried to play unconcerned. “Sure, sounds fun.”

With the man following close behind, Robert and Sue made their way into the back of the establishment through several heavy, metal doors and into a large, half-empty storage room. Next to stacks of boxes, there was a row of cots and a makeshift kitchen against the wall. Two young women sat on one of the cots talking quietly and a third one was microwaving something in the kitchenette.

“Well, if it isn’t the big bad detective and his itty bitty little helper!”

Robert recognized the coldness and odd cadence of the voice that greeted them. Sue stopped dead in her tracks and looked up at him, her face full of worry. A tall woman dressed in black with auburn hair tied back in a tight

ponytail stepped out of the adjoining room with a wicked grin on her face. It was Sapphire, the woman who'd tried to stomp Sue to death months before.

"I can't say I'm happy to see either of you, but...here you are." She bent down and gave Sue a mocking look. "You end up on all fours so often, if I didn't know any better I'd say you like dressing up as a puppy!" Sue looked away, but Sapphire grabbed her face and made the smaller woman look her in the eye. "You should know that it was your fake gear that tipped us off, right sweetie?" She yanked on Sue's ear. "No tag." Then she slapped Sue across the ass making her yelp. "No brand!"

Robert stiffened and Sapphire looked back at him. "Counterfeit puppy gear is a felony is it not, detective?"

"It is. Why don't you call a cop?" Robert quipped, only to get pistol whipped by the large man behind him. Robert grunted and dropped to his knees clutching the back of his head.

"You show the lady some respect, asshole!" The man thundered.

Robert slowly stood back up as he pulled his hand away from the back of his head. He narrowed his eyes at the red smear across his fingers.

"That's enough!" Sapphire held up a hand. "As much as I'd like to see you both get the long, drawn-out torture you deserve for supporting the system, we're on a tight schedule." She called to the three other women, "Ladies, we've got to move out soon, but come over here first."

Sapphire reached out to her partner and said, "Give me the gun." The gun passed hands quickly as the three other women came over to join them. "Since I already got to have my fun with that hu-vet, I think it's only fair that I should let one of you have the chance to feel the same thing by killing these two."

Robert felt his fists tighten. He didn't have an individual—a face—to hate for killing Ed until that moment. All of his anger from earlier returned, but he still had the good sense to realize that it wasn't yet his moment.

The three women all looked shocked at Sapphire's offer. The first one to speak was a particularly striking redhead. Having looked at the files of each puppy girl that had been "stolen" from Ed's clinic, he recognized her as Juliet Walsh, or "Lilly" as she'd been renamed in the service. Before she opened her mouth, Robert took note of her and Sue staring intensely back and forth at each other as if they recognized each other. He wondered if they had a history of some sort.

"Hey, I just wanted to go free, I—I think I speak for all of us when I say, we're not murderers."

Sapphire's eyes flashed with anger. "These are the people that help support the system that enslaved you, humiliated you, and violated you! Break out of the cage that they put around your body and your mind! You don't have to submit to them anymore!"

Juliette shook her head. "Can't we just go?"

Sapphire flipped the gun around and pushed the handle at Juliette. "Take it!"

Juliette shook her head. "No," she said firmly.

As they pushed the gun back and forth, Robert saw his opportunity, but so did Sue. Even before he could act, she leapt up and bit Sapphire's hand making her scream. The gun clattered to the floor. His moment had finally come. Robert wheeled around, grabbed the large man's lapels and flipped him in one smooth, powerful motion. The man slammed against the concrete and moaned in a deep daze.

Sapphire clutched her hand and ran back into the adjoining room. Robert scooped up the gun before anyone else could. He aimed in Sapphire's direction and was ready to pull the trigger, but she was already out of his line of sight. He heard the crash of a metal outer door opening and slamming shut. Wasting no time, he grabbed a knife from the kitchenette counter and cut Sue's restraints. He shoved the gun into her freed hands, "Here, keep this on them. Don't let them leave!" He ordered before taking off after Sapphire.

Sapphire was fast and had a head start, but he was faster and he had a purpose. He didn't feel the fatigue in his muscles or the burning in his lungs as he pursued his prey across the dying tall grass of an open field and up into the hills south of town.

When Sapphire reached the top of the hill, she stopped in front of a deep, rocky ravine. There was a rushing river at the bottom. It made for a natural and difficult-to-cross border. Breathing heavily, Sapphire turned around and glared fiercely at Robert. He returned her gaze with a stony expression that denied all the anger he felt inside.

“There's nowhere left to run, girly. You're going to pay for what you did.”

“I don't need to run. She reached down and picked up a stick and swung it experimentally.”

“I'm not going to fight a girl.” Robert dismissed her, but she swung at him anyway.

Robert leapt back and avoided the swing. The branch whistled menacingly through the air.

“How about now?” She grinned and swung again, narrowly missing his head.

Still keeping his distance and circling with his hands protectively out in front of him he shook his head.

Clearly angry at his disregard, she lunged forward with another wild, overhead attack. Robert waited until she hit the ground and then stomped on the branch so hard that it was ripped from her white-knuckled grip. With her disarmed, Robert tackled her and then pinned her on the ground.

“Let go of me, you bastard!” She snarled.

Robert looked at her as she struggled violently, spitting and cursing the whole time. He thought that if there was justice in the world then Ed and she would have switched places. If there was justice then Sapphire wouldn't

have gone through everything to make her so crazy. He didn't want to kill her anymore. He felt sorry for her, but that didn't mean he would let her go. He'd do what a police officer was supposed to do and let the law handle it.

“Calm down...Calm down, girl!” He used his trainer's voice. The tone seemed to speak to something deep inside Sapphire's mind as she stopped struggling for a moment.

“We're going to stand up...” Holding her wrist, he stood up and dragged her to her feet. He twisted her arm behind her and grabbed the back of her auburn hair making her grunt. “That's a good girl...” He praised. “I'm not going to hurt you. Now let's get back to your friends...”

At the mention of “get back” Sapphire suddenly stiffened. She put her foot between Robert's feet and kicked up into his crotch making him grunt and let go of her.

Sapphire's anger and intensity had been replaced by a look of pure fear and panic. “No, I won't go back! I won't go back!” She screamed and ran for the ravine.

Robert tried to stop her, but she ripped past him and jumped. Time seemed to slow down as he watched Sapphire spin in the air and fall down and down through the giant crack in the earth. The moment passed and she hit the water. Robert stared down at the raging river peppered with sharp rocks jutting out at odd and dangerous angles. One way or another, Sapphire was gone, maybe forever, or maybe just for a little while. Only time would tell.

Realizing that Sue would be waiting, Robert hurried back to the pet café. When he jogged through the door, he found Sue standing over the large man. He looked to be securely bound by her wraps. Everything was where it should be, except the gun and the three missing pups were conspicuously absent.

Before Robert could ask the only relevant question, Sue said flatly, “I let them go.”

“What?” Robert exclaimed. “Why?”

“I couldn’t send them back. I just...”

“Christ, Sue, do you know...” He stopped. Of course she knew. “You shouldn’t have done that. They were legally the property of the program!”

“I don’t care! How can you even talk about what’s legal after what we did? How can you call them property? You called it ‘cruel’ but you want to send them back?”

“That’s not what I meant...”

“What did you mean, detective?”

Epilogue

A few days after the incident at the Perk and Pup, Robert and Sue stood at attention in front of their chief, Mr. Cross. He’d talked for a while, but the short of it was that they were both in a lot of trouble. There was no sign of Sapphire, alive or dead. Though it was assumed she was the latter, the large man they took into custody in the back of the coffee shop insisted that a mere fall wouldn’t have gotten her.

“So, there it is, you went against the orders of the Central City PD and the FBI, and my orders. You interfered with an important investigation, damaged a very expensive experiment blood hound by exposing it to deep water, and you didn’t even catch the terrorist leader or return the three stolen pups!”

Robert took a deep breath. “Sir, it was all my fault...”

“Yes it is all your fault, but the department doesn’t agree, and they’ve handed down disciplinary measures for both of you. Jericho, you’re suspended without pay for two months, handover your badge and your gun.”

Even though he’d just gotten replacements for both the gun and the badge the day before, having to formally return the bits of metal that made him a police officer made him feel a bit numb.

“Sue, during his suspension you’ll be reassigned to work at headquarters—as a postal pet.”

Sue looked like she might faint, but she quickly regained her composure.

“Sir, that’s not fair!” Robert stepped protectively in front of her.

“I know it’s not.” Mr. Cross replied. “But we all have our orders and I don’t have the luxury of being able to ignore them.”

“Talk to the department again. I’ll—” He didn’t have anything to offer, but he had to try.

The chief just shook his head and dismissed them. Sue left first and had started down the long hallway. Robert walked faster to catch up with her.

Sue stopped. “Robert.” She spoke quietly and wouldn’t look at him. “Don’t.”

“But you...”

“I accepted the consequences for doing what’s right.”

“Sue, I won’t let you do this!” He cursed himself. He should have been as firm with her when she insisted on coming along. He should have talked sense into her so that she wouldn’t have done something so foolish.

“I made my choice and you made yours. What else is there to say?”

Robert watched her walk away. As low as he felt, something told him that there was a lot left to say.

The End