

Somebody's Hero

By Kate Simon

“I miss friction burns!” Kathy announced with a touch of desperation.

“What?”, Jim couldn’t help but ask. He could tell from the look on her face this was going to be one of *those* conversations. Being that he was a good guy, he put the football game on mute. He was a good guy, not a saint.

“I miss friction burns,” she repeated.

“I heard you, I just didn’t understand you.”

“Remember that time when I met you at the convention and you were so happy to see me.”

“Yeah....”

“You were so glad to see me you couldn’t get naked fast enough.”

“Yeah and I had a blister for two months! Months, Kathy, in a place men shouldn’t have blisters.”

“It was so romantic. You were all over me. We were like teenagers.”

“Blisters!” Jim repeated as she seemed to be missing the cogent point of this conversation. He tried a different tactic. “Honey, we aren’t teenagers anymore.”

The look on her face told him he’d once again said exactly the wrong thing.

“Kathy, I...”

She popped up from her chair. “You ate all the chips,” she said as she grabbed the bowl and headed toward the kitchen.

“Kath...Ah...shit,” he muttered as he turned the volume up. There was no point in following her. This was not going to be a quick fix.

God, what a day. He felt like hell thanks to a wicked case of drive thru heartburn. This constant travel was a young man's game. The San Diego deal was in the crapper, the car's heater was broken, and the boss chewed his ass out about postage. Freakin' postage! He was struggling against a bad economy and ever-more demanding clients and his boss is concerned about his f'ing UPS bill.

"Cost cutting my ass," he muttered.

Now he was sitting in bumper to bumper traffic thanks to the idiot in the big rig who didn't realize that the eleven foot clearance sign wasn't just a suggestion. Jim turned up the volume on the sports radio show and put the car in neutral. He was trying to keep a dozen balls in the air and it felt like more than one had hit the ground.

The only thing now that had any hope of saving this day was his Giants kicking some Eagle ass. He'd stop on the way home for a six-pack of his favorite import. John was a good guy but his beer tasted like moose piss. He should call Kathy and ask her to pick up the beer.

Kathy.

Crap.

He didn't know what was going on with her lately. He always tried to 'be there' for her, whatever that meant. What the hell was she talking about, friction burns? Yeah he was happy when she surprised him at the convention. He hadn't seen her in ten days and then he answered the knock at his door and there she was, looking sexy and a little nervous, wearing those jeans he liked so much. He chuckled remembering how she barely had time to say hello before he grabbed her and threw her on the bed. They couldn't get their clothes off fast enough, or rather, they didn't. Kathy wound up with rug burns on her ass and the memory of the pain of the blister on his dick still made him flinch, even after five years.

He smiled. Blister or not, that was still a pretty stellar weekend.

Kathy looked in the mirror as she put on her moisturizer. Instead of her own face, she saw her mother. Lines on her neck, around the eyes, and when did her jaw start to sag? No wonder Jim was so disinterested lately.

She felt the same as she did when she met Jim, so why did she suddenly look like an old lady? Okay, she didn't feel exactly the same. Her joints ached in the morning. Mother Nature was still playing games with her. She hadn't had a period in eight months and then one appeared last week. Fifty three sucked.

Mother Nature favored men. Jim was still as handsome as the day they'd met, more so, in fact. His dark hair had gone steely grey. He was still trim from all those basketball games with his buddies. What few lines he had around his eyes added character.

Mother Nature was a complete bitch.

"Kathy, are you ready?" Jim called to her from the living room.

"Yeah," she shouted. She took one last look in the mirror. She'd set off her bright blue eyes with a little brown shadow. She quickly traced in a suggestion of eyebrows. No one ever tells you your eyebrows disappear along with your waistline as you get older.

"Close enough," she muttered as she flipped off the light.

"Kathy come on! We're gonna be late."

"For the preshow," she replied. "And you give me a hard time about wanting to see the movie previews."

"If movie previews gave me the point spread I'd be there on time."

John and Abby Martin had been their best 'couple' friends since they'd all moved into the same town five years ago. Jim and John played cards together once a month. Kathy and Abby managed a girls night once or twice a month which usually involved movies that couldn't drag their men to with bullwhips. It was the Martin's turn to host Monday night football and Jim had already cracked open a beer and was planted in front of the salsa and chips.

"Ahh," he said involuntarily.

"Long day?" asked John.

"You have no idea. Got stuck in that mess on 95."

"Crap. I heard about that."

"What should have been a twenty minute drive took an hour and a half."

"Kathy, you want a glass of wine?" asked Abby.

"Sure," Kathy replied as she followed Abby into the kitchen. John took it as a cue to turn up the sound on the big screen.

Kathy sat at the kitchen table as Abby poured them a glass of Merlot. She picked at the plate of cheese. "Mmmm. This is good."

"So what's up with you? You've been here twenty minutes and you haven't mentioned my new hair, or my 'to die for' jeans."

Kathy glanced up from the plate of brie. She suddenly realized that her friend had cut three inches off her hair and lost at least five pounds since last month's movie.

"Sorry, Abbs. You look great."

“Yes, I do, but that’s not the point. I haven’t heard from you in days, you’re completely preoccupied, so, I repeat, what..is..up?”

Kathy sighed and took a deep sip of wine. There was no getting around it. Abby always cut right to the chase. She loved that about her, usually.

“I don’t know, Abbs, I’m feeling...ancient, all of a sudden, too.” Kathy felt the dominos fall, and it started spilling out. “Yesterday I was twenty five and hot. Today, I’m my mother. When did this happen?”

Abby joined Kathy at the table and sipped her wine. “It happened when we weren’t looking. When we were working and taking care of the house and the men and life. That’s when it happened.”

“Well it’s not fair.”

“No, it’s not. I shouldn’t be the only one thrilled I can zip up my size ten jeans.”

Kathy smiled. “I’m thrilled.”

“Thanks, sweetie but you’re not my type.”

“John’s not thrilled?”

“He hasn’t noticed. Not the weight, not the hair, nothing.”

“He’s a guy.”

“That’s not an excuse.”

“I know, believe me.”

“Jim?” Abby asked.

Jim snagged the empty chip bowl and headed toward the kitchen.

"I'll get that," John said as he struggled to his feet.

"Stay put, I need a beer."

"Grab me one too," John replied as he looked back at the screen.

Jim moved toward the kitchen but conversation stopped him short. He thought he heard his name.

"Jim?" Abby asked.

"Yeah. He's not interested lately. I can't say I blame him."

"What are you talking about, you're adorable."

"Thanks honey, but a fifty-three year old woman is NOT adorable. On a good day I can manage, put together, even fashionable. But adorable? That boat sailed a couple of decades ago."

Jim stood at the edge of the dining room, listening and not believing.

"It's not fair men look so good as they get older," Kathy said.

Abby laughed. "Yeah, Jim is pretty hot."

Jim had to choke down his laugh. How much wine had these girls had?

Kathy nearly purred, "Yeah, he is."

"He has a great ass," said Abby. "Oh, Christ! Did I say that out loud? Sorry, Kath. It's the wine."

"It's ok. You're not the only one who thinks so. The girl at Coldstone is always flirting with him."

"Who, that skinny blonde?"

“Yeah, that’s her.”

“Bitch,” pronounced Abby with a note of solidarity.

Kathy laughed. “I can’t blame her for good taste.”

“Yeah, Jim is...yummy...oops. Out loud again.”

Abby thought he was yummy? This was getting creepy. He moved toward the kitchen. “Hey girls, you’re going to miss the game in here.”

Abby grabbed the half empty bottle and moved toward the door. “We’re coming,” she smiled a little too broadly. He looked at Kathy, who smiled, but not nearly enough.

Half time analysis started and John dragged himself out of his armchair. “Another beer?”

“No, I’m good,” Jim replied.

“Ladies, need a refill?”

“No,” said Kathy. “One more and I’ll be asleep.”

“Well, I’m not driving,” John said and retrieved another beer from the kitchen. “I’ve got tickets on Sunday for the Redskins game, you in?”

“Wish I could, but I’m busy. Work thing,” said Jim with no small amount of remorse.

“Working? On Sunday? Can’t you blow it off? This is Giants vs Redskins, thirty yard line, dude.”

Jim laughed. “You’re killing me, but no, I can’t.”

“Who works on Sunday?” John asked.

“Jim does,” said Kathy. She’d been so quiet during the last half of the game he’d almost forgotten about the conversation in the kitchen. Almost. He looked at her as she smiled at him across her empty wine glass. “He teaches the new volunteer firemen at the station.”

“Really?” The look on Abby’s face zoomed straight back to creepy.

“Dude, you’re a fireman? You never said anything.”

“I just teach some of the trainees.”

“He still volunteers at special events,” said Kathy. He looked over at her and saw the kind of smile he wished he saw all the time.

Jim was glad the ride home would only be a few minutes. The Giants winning didn't stop this from being one very long day. He glanced over at Kathy, was looking out the window.

"Why did you tell them?"

"What?"

"Why did you tell them about the firehouse?"

"You don't get it, do you?"

"Get what?"

Kathy leaned over and kissed his cheek. "You're my hero."

"Don't be ridiculous. I'm not perfect."

Kathy laughed. "I never said, you were perfect. You never remember our anniversary, or my birthday without me circling it on the calendar and then stapling it to your forehead. You and the hamper are complete strangers. You never tell me what you're feeling so I have to be a mind reader."

"Sounds like a hero to me."

"You think I don't know, but I do."

"What are you talking about?"

"You think I don't understand how hard you work, but I do. And I know things are tough now, but you're holding on the best you can. You've put up with my crap for years and love me anyway. And when you have a spare day, you save a piece of the world, or teach someone else how to save it. Face it, stud. You're a hero." She gave him that smile. The one he loved. The one that lit her face up like a school girl. The one that was only for him.

And then his world exploded.

The airbag deflated as quickly as it had exploded in his face. A moment after his vision cleared he realized what had happened. As they'd passed through the intersection they'd been t-boned, in the passenger side.

"Kathy!" Jim yelled. Her front and side airbags had deployed. She was stuck between what was left of her seat and the gear shift. Her eyes were closed, a gash over her right eye was bleeding. "Kathy! Baby, talk to me!" He felt for a pulse in her neck and relief washed over him. "Kathy, open your eyes!"

"Owww." She muttered. "What the hell?"

"I'm calling 911. You'll be out in a minute."

"Hey, buddy. You wanna move this thing? I gotta get home."

Jim looked out of the window to see a hulk blocking out the most of the light. He stood about six foot three, the same height as Jim, but had at least one hundred pounds on him. What he also had on him was glass, everywhere. This was the guy.

"Buddy, you wanna move this heap? My wife's gonna kill me if I don't get home soon." Jim got out of the car. He knew from his training the guy could have any number of injuries and still be walking around. What he knew from his sense of smell was this guy had a world class buzz on.

Jim got out of the car. "Buddy," he said through gritted teeth, "Why don't you sit on the curb for a minute?" He turned when he heard Kathy moan.

"Jim?" Kathy called.

"Ahh, screw this, I'm outta here."

Jim had never understood the expression 'seeing red' until now. Kathy was hurt and trapped in the car and this jerk was going to just drive away. He grabbed the hulk's shoulder and spun him around. Before either of them realized it, the hulk was a boneless mass on the pavement and Jim was massaging skinned knuckles.

“Jim, get me out of here,” Kathy cried from the car.

“Honey, you have to stay put until the EMT’s get here.”

“I don’t think that’s a good idea,” she said as she pointed to smoke coming from the mangled hood.

“Christ,” he swore as reached in and yanked Kathy in one move up over the gear shift and out the door. Setting gently on the pavement, Kathy turned her head and noticed the unconscious mass of flesh.

“You do that?”

“Ah...yeah.”

She smiled. “Nice.”

Jim’s attention was turned by the sound of a fire extinguisher and the cop using it. His partner walked over to them and also noticed Sleeping Beauty.

“That the other driver?”

“Yeah.”

The cop glanced Jim’s hand but said nothing. “The ambulance is on its way. You’ll have to give a statement but judging from the longnecks in this guys cup holders I doubt you’ll have an issue.”

It was nearly noon, but they were finally home. He was bruised but Kathy wasn't so lucky. Her arm was broken and the cut on her head required a few stitches.

"Come on, I want you in bed," Jim said.

Kathy smiled and held up her bright pink cast. "It might be a bit awkward, but ok."

"I'm serious." Jim pulled back the comforter and started helped pull the sweater off over her cast.

"So am I. The painkillers haven't worn off. You have a window of opportunity here."

He couldn't help but smile. This was his girl. Smart mouthed, a little irreverent and unflappable, even by a parade float sized Caddy plowing through her car door. This was the girl he loved. He grabbed a set of flannel pajamas from the drawer and started dressing her for bed. Off came the bra, lovely full breasts hanging free. Shaking his head a bit he slipped the pajama top on her and began to button. He pulled off her jeans and tugged the bottoms on.

Kathy laughed as she laid her head on the pillow. "You're missing a golden opportunity."

"I could have missed a whole lot more."

She stroke his stubbled cheek. "Honey, I'm going to be fine."

"I know. I just feel like I let you down."

"Jim, you pulled me from a burning car. How did you let me down?"

"I should have seen him coming."

"He ran a red light. No one would have expected that."

"I.."

“Stop that right now. You pulled me out of the car. You took care of me. And you flattened the bastard. You’re still my hero.”

He stood and rubbed his face. There was that word again. “When I saw you hurt... I was scared. I don’t know what I do without you.” He sat back down and took her hand in his. “You’re my girl.”

Kathy’s eyes teared but she let him speak.

“You know why I never noticed the Coldstone girl?”

“You were listening?” Kathy asked.

“A little,” he admitted. “I never noticed her because...well, why would I? You’re my girl. God, I’m making a mess of this.”

She stroked his hand. “You’re doing fine. Go on.”

“You work hard too. I know that. You put up with all my crap and you love me anyway.” He smiled “And you think I have a great ass.”

She blushed fluorescent. “Oh, Christ, you *were* listening.”

He place a kiss on her forehead. “I love you, honey. I love everything about you. I love your temper and your left-wing thickhead politics.”

She laughed and he kissed her lightly on the lips. “You know what else I love? Your eyes. They tell me everything. And you’re smile. God, I love your smile. It lights up the whole room. And...you have a great ass.”

A tear escaped and ran down her cheek.

“For a moment last night I thought I might have lost you. When I had to move you I thought I would hurt you more. I’ve never felt fear like I felt last night. So you see, I’m no hero.”

Kathy squeezed his hand. "You know what real courage is? It's being smart enough to see the danger and brave enough to face it anyway. That's what you do, every day. It's what I love most about you, that and your stellar ass."

He leaned in and kissed her, gently at first but then deepened the kiss. Hunger and desperation to know they were here, safe, alive.

He pulled himself away. "I should let you get some rest."

"Move and I'll brain you with my cast," she said as she wriggled out of her pajama bottoms.

"What are you doing?"

"What does it look like I'm doing? Help me with the top."

He obeyed, not believing what he was seeing.

"Now, get naked unless you want another friction burn."

"You've got to be kidding? You have a broken arm and bruised ribs."

"So we'll be careful," she said as she tugged at his belt.

He sat back for a moment and stared. No matter how old they got she would always be his girl. Smart and funny and hot. Very hot. He pulled off his polo and slipped off his khaki's. "I take no responsibility for further injury."

"I'll sign a release. Now get over here."

He climbed on to his side of the bed and slipped his arm under her neck. "I love you," he whispered.

"I love you too."

He trailed kisses down her neck, nipped it a little, just because she like that. Her moan said the painkillers hadn't completely dulled her senses. He traveled further paying reverence to her breasts before moving further down. He kissed, tasted and lost himself

in her scent. Part of him tried to hold back, tried to remember what they'd been through. But the rest of him didn't wait, couldn't wait.

He entered her carefully, lovingly as he caressed her. And when the climax came, it washed over both of them.

She cuddled in the crook of his arm, the painkillers and the night finally overtaking her. He kissed her lightly and pulled her close. He looked at his girl, smiling in his arms.

Maybe it was okay to be somebody's hero.