

Ah'd love to kiss ya

by Doug Bond

One of his nails has blackened considerably and as he holds the tiny cup out to her I look slightly away as the tremor starts. He urges, "Drink...that's it...little more...Good girl!"

I try now. Show him how to hold the straw with one finger wrapped lightly to the cup, the others around the flimsy plastic, so the straw stays put when she pulls back.

"See Dad. Less dribbling this way."

She smiles, looking at us both, says, "Good girrr..." grunted, like words looking for a place to safely land.

The fifty yellow roses I had sent ahead for Dad sit now in clouded water on the stand out of reach. The cord from the chair attached to her collar lifts rigid when she pulls up to view them.

"Ok, settle down dear, I'll get them for you again," he says.

The smell of the small room gets into me, the near constant sighing of the much older woman on the other side of the sliding curtain brings pricks to my back and my feet begin to shuffle.

I fill in the silence with what comes to mind, a favorite old Bette Davis movie I'd recently seen with him on AMC on one of my visits. "What was the line in the movie Dad?...I want to kiss you now?..."

He interrupts me with a wink coming to his eye. He loves to perform. "*Ah'd love to kiss ya,*" and then a pause, his lilted voice rising for the punchline, "*but ah just washed mah hair.*"

We laugh, the sound of it spilling out into the corridor and the

adjoining small rooms. She reaches for more water, dribbles the small amount left in the cup down her front. A little clear stream beads over the patchwork heart on the cheap fleece sweater I'd given her last year for Valentine's Day.

"Bette didn't wash her own sweaters, Ma." I say as I pad the pool dry with her napkin. It makes no sense, but she nods like it does, smiles and kicks out from the chair towards the door.

I look at Dad and he rolls the lunch table away so we can maneuver the chair from between the wall and the bed. "I think they might still have some of that cake left from the party, Ma."

I kiss the top of her head, salty and soapy somehow at the same time. Dad unlocks the wheels and I push her from behind, slowly, down towards the double doors at the end of the hall.

