

# Smoke

by Grant Bailie

She wanted handcuffs. She wanted candle wax and blisters, slapping, pinching, pulling. I was not much in for that stuff. I would never her dark master. I did not even own a leash. Pain, to me, was not pleasure. Pain, to me, actually kind of hurt a little.

It was a blessing when the phone rang and someone from work said that I needed to come in to the office. Someone hadn't shown up or something like that. I probably could have handled it over the phone but I knew an opportunity when one was within seizing distance.

"I've gotta run," I told her. "Work needs me."

"I need you," she said.

And I thought: you don't need me; you need an angry mob or a flight of stairs.

She was chewing on the ends of her hair. The bourbon was lifting from my brain now and I could see her bruises.

I told her she could stay as long as she wanted but that I would probably not be back until morning, and maybe later than that. Afternoon even. Or evening.

She said: "Bring me back some protein."

I wasn't sure what this meant. Was it sexual? Did it mean she would never leave?

"Really," I said. "I could get stuck there forever. My job is crazy that way."

She shrugged. Her shoulders were bare and freckled. She covered one breast with the bed sheet but left the other one exposed—as if she were only bashful about just that one. The one on the right.

"OK," I said. What else could I say? I left my apartment.

I hoped she would be gone by the time I got back; for all I knew she was a thief and a drug addict, but there was nothing to steal from my apartment, and aside from some cough medicine, not much to take either.

I think her name was Sylvia, but it might have been something else. When I returned the next day, she was gone and the only sign that she had ever been there at all was the vague scent of her in the air—something between cigarette smoke and lip-gloss.

