

# Bloodless

by Misti Rainwater-Lites

The steaks sizzled in the skillet with the onions and bell peppers. The walnut brownies baked in the oven. Things seemed cozy and safe. Beth sat down at the table and sipped ice water from the goblet feeling like she was home, finally, after many wars. But there was a bratty voice in Beth's head that never shut up. "Things are not cozy and safe, bitch. This is not your home. There will be more wars," the voice said. Vince sat down at the table. There were plates and forks and knives. There was butter and chives and sour cream and jalapenos and shredded cheese for the baked potatoes. There was macaroni and cheese. Vince sipped ice water from his goblet and smiled at Beth.

"Are you happy, babe?" Vince asked.

"I've never been happier," Beth said.

"I'm glad. Are the brownies done yet?"

"They'll be ready when I smell them."

Their story wasn't terribly original. They met in a bar. They got drunk. They spent the night together in a cheap motel room. Two weeks later Beth moved into Vince's trailer. The sex was good but not phenomenal. Vince tried to bring Beth to orgasm to no success. Beth excelled at giving Vince blow jobs and baby oil massages and he liked her brownies. He didn't love her, though, not in an intense way. He didn't miss her whenever they were apart, didn't call her to tell her that he was craving her. He flirted with waitresses and barmaids in front of Beth, called them "babe" and "sweetheart" and "darlin'." He told Beth she needed to lose thirty pounds. He told her he would never marry her but he enjoyed her company. She made him feel young again, sometimes. Vince was fifteen years older than Beth. Beth had always preferred older men.

"What do you think?" Vince asked Beth, watching her eat her first bite of steak.

"It's so fucking good. Melts in my mouth," Beth said.

"This is better than eating out in a restaurant," Vince said.

"Fuck yeah it is. We know we've washed our hands," Beth said.

In bed Vince fell asleep right away. Beth wished Vince would reach for her in his sleep. That had happened a couple of times before. "He doesn't love you. What the fuck are you doing here? You're nothing. You're wallpaper. You're carpet," the voice said. Beth closed her eyes, tried not to think about the condom she'd found in Vince's gym bag, tried not to think about the night before in the bar when she had caught Vince hitting on a woman on his way to the bathroom. Tequila. He blamed most things on tequila. Tequila turned Vince into a horny sixteen-year-old. Beth wanted to get in her car and drive but her car needed a new front windshield and radiator. Vince had taught her how to open the hood and pour in antifreeze. Beth didn't have a destination in mind. She liked the idea of Utah. She'd always wanted to visit Arches. Beth finally fell asleep and dreamed that she was in a canoe on a moonlit lake with Vince. They sat facing each other. There were no oars but it didn't seem to matter.

"When I leave you it will be bloodless, I promise. No tears, no accusations, no drama. I'll just walk out the door, get on my horse and ride west," Beth said.

"Will you kiss me first?" Vince asked.

"If I feel the kiss I'll give it to you before I go. But I probably won't go until I've stopped feeling the kisses. Once the kisses are gone there's nothing left, not even coffee with cream and sugar."

Vince put a fuckload of cream and sugar in his instant coffee. Beth didn't like instant coffee but she had been drinking it since moving in with Vince. He didn't have a coffee maker. Beth drank her instant coffee black. She woke up from the dream and glanced at Vince. He was the most beautiful man she had ever shared a bed with. She would miss him. "Don't turn this into a country and western song, idiot. Just put on your boots and walk out the door," the voice said. Beth wished she was a smoker or a drug addict or an alcoholic. The voice would continue to talk at Beth until she walked away, sober as hell and feeling every goddamn step.

