

Notice: This story is rated ADULT and contains material that is not suitable for younger readers.

In The Heat Of Winter

By Scribblesinink

Charlotte chugged laboriously along the treacherous road toward the ranch. Heather had cranked the window open, but the air flowing in didn't cool her down much. With her thick coat and wool suit, she was quite overdressed for the sudden spell of warm weather. That morning, when she had left home, it had still been the depths of winter, the ground hard-frozen and covered in a thin dusting of fresh snow. But then the winds had come down from the mountains far in the west, as they sometimes did, bringing warm air that raised the temperature until it felt like early summer and melted the snow into a thin layer of slippery mud, though the ground beneath was still hard with frost. It made for tricky driving conditions.

The unpleasant way her blouse clung to her back didn't help Heather's concentration, but she made the track safely and reached the yard without incident. Jake's mud-splattered Roadrunner stood parked at an angle to the house, and her heart pattered happily at the sight. She hadn't expected him home until evening; he must've got back early from his trip. He was never gone for longer than a few days at a time, but she still missed him when he was away.

Climbing down from the pickup, she blew sweaty strands of hair from her face while she quickly made her way up the porch and inside.

"Jake?" There was no answer, but she could hear a dull *thwack-thwack* drifting in from the back. Absently-mindedly, she hung her coat on the rack and let the sound lure her into the kitchen, where she could look out into the back yard.

Jake was busy chopping wood; he didn't hear her, and she watched him secretively for a minute. Because of the weather and hard work, he'd stripped to the waist; his back muscles shifted under his skin as he wielded the ax, his summer tan not yet completely faded. Unexpected heat pooled in her belly to match the unseasonably warm air blowing around her, but she was only half-aware of the dull ache of desire building deep inside. *He's beautiful*, she thought, a little surprised at her choice of words.

And suddenly, she wanted him, needed him to banish the ache within her....

She let out a soft laugh, glancing down at herself. She did want Jake. But not like this. She looked like a typical schoolma'am, dressed as she was for the school board meeting that afternoon, and she'd need to wear this outfit at similar occasions again. Best not have

memories of Jake making love to her attached to it. Besides, she felt sweaty and icky from the drive home.

Turning away from the window, thinking she needed to hurry before Jake finished, she dashed up the stairs to the bedroom, where she threw open the wardrobe. Most of her summer clothes had been packed away, waiting for the new season, but after some digging she located the item she wanted: a knee-length spaghetti-strap dress with a sunflower pattern, made of a soft material that would swirl around her. She took a quick shower to wash up, toweled off rapidly, and threw the dress over her head.

The dress molded itself to her body, and the mere thought of being naked underneath it—for Jake—made butterflies flutter in her stomach. It was something she'd read about in a novel once, and she'd thought it sexy, if a bit weird, at the time. She'd just never figured she'd ever had the opportunity, or the desire, to put something so risqué into practice.

Mimi had been right, Heather decided, while she checked herself in the mirror: a little diversity in place or time went a long way. And of course she and Jake still made love in the bed, and that was good, too; she loved to snuggle up to him afterward, to listen to his heartbeat slow down as she rested against him, or feel the rise and fall of his chest as he drifted off to sleep. But the occasional adventure elsewhere kept things exciting and fresh, and made her feel daring and desirable. She remembered the day Jake had surprised her in the kitchen, squashing her attempt to bake cinnamon cookies. Or that one time in the living room, in front of the fireplace....

Shaking off the memories, she drew herself back to the present. If she wanted this, she better get going. Judging by the pile of freshly chopped wood, Jake had been at it for a while, and he might be done any moment.

Barefoot, she flitted back down the stairs. The rhythmic *thwack* of ax hitting wood still could be heard outside, and she forced herself to slow down. In the kitchen, she poured a tall glass of lemonade, and then opened the screen door and stepped out onto the back porch.

"Hey," she called, as Jake put another log on the chopping block. "You're back."

He glanced up at the sound of her voice, doing a bit of a double take when he caught sight of her in the summer dress, and she giggled. It wasn't the first time he'd seen her wear a dress, of course, but the last couple months she'd been mostly covered neck to ankle in things like thick wool sweaters or flannel pajamas.

"Hey." He rested the ax on its blade, putting his palms on the handle. "Didn't hear you come home."

"You were probably too busy to notice." She indicated the pile of wood with a nod.

He gave her a lopsided grin. "Got home early. We were running low, so I thought I'd do something useful before the next storm blows in."

She nodded in understanding. It might be warm today, but true summer was still a ways off, and she knew she'd be grateful for the firewood before long. "I figured you might want something to drink?" She held out the lemonade.

He planted the ax in the chopping block and wove his way around the pile of wood to reach her. He took the glass and drank half of the lemonade in one draft. "Thanks." He wiped a hand across his mouth.

"How was your trip?"

"Long." He looked at her curiously and she shifted, suddenly self-conscious. From the way his eyes widened in response, she knew he'd noticed how the dress had shaped itself to her nakedness underneath. She felt her face heat up, although sharp desire slithered through her belly at the same time.

"Are you...?" His gaze raked her up and down hungrily, and she could feel her body respond to his scrutiny.

She leaned over the rail and smiled at him coyly. "Why don't you come up and find out?"

"Oh...." He scratched his neck. "Like that, huh?"

"Yeah." A soft, slightly nervous laugh escaped her. "If you—."

Before she could even finish, he'd had put down the glass on the rail and hopped up the porch steps. His brown eyes smoldered with desire as he took her chin and tilted her head up, seeking her gaze for a moment before dipping his head and kissing her deeply. Heather pressed herself up to him, the thin material of the summer dress doing nothing to keep her from feeling his body heat. Her nipples brushed his chest, and she slid a hand between them, finding him hard against her fingers. He groaned softly as she stroked him.

"I missed you," he murmured against her lips, even as he drew her flush against him with one arm, bunching up her skirt with the other hand until he could slip it underneath. His fingers dug into the soft flesh of her buttock, pulling her even closer, and she rubbed herself on his erection. He moaned into her mouth, and she could feel the vibration in his

chest. She slipped her arms around him, running her hands up and down his back, enjoying the feel of those strong muscles that she'd admired from a distance a short time ago.

Jake broke the kiss, pulling back from her a little, but only far enough that he could slip one of the spaghetti straps down her shoulder and expose her left breast to his lips. It was her turn to moan when his mouth closed around the nipple, his tongue flicking over it. She reached for his belt but he stopped her. "Not yet," he muttered against her skin, sounding hoarse.

Though she wanted to touch him as much as she wanted him to touch her, she obeyed, ready to let him set the pace. She'd get her chance later. As if he knew what she was thinking, his hand delved deeper between her thighs, and she mewled helplessly when his fingers slid between her folds. But the angle was awkward. Letting out a frustrated growl, he pulled away and pushed the other strap down from her shoulder; with a little tug, the dress puddled at her feet.

The look he gave her as she stood before him, naked and exposed, sent shivers down her spine that had nothing to do with the wind blowing over the porch.

"God...." He swallowed hard, running his hands lightly over her body, from her shoulders over her breasts, lingering briefly, before moving further, across her belly toward her hips.

His touch left a trail of fire, and she had to swallow herself. "Jake...." It was a plea more than anything because, god, she needed his touch *there, now*.

Much to her surprise, he didn't slip his hand between her legs, as she expected he would. He sank down on his knees before her instead, and buried his face in the dark patch of curls at the junction of her thighs.

"Oh!" She let out a startled cry of surprise and twined her fingers in his hair. Her knees trembled, and she feared her legs might no longer hold her up, but then he grabbed her hips and steadied her while he continued to nuzzled her gently, his tongue wet and hot.

It only took a few moments before her climax hit, a surge of such utter pleasure coursing through her that for a short while—or perhaps it was eternity—Heather knew nothing else but Jake's mouth on her, and the sensations he made race through her.

Finally, she drifted back to reality, and found him smirking up at her, apparently knowing full well what he'd done. She smiled back, telling him *thanks* without words, and was already plotting her revenge, when a distant voice cried out, chasing all the wanton plans

she was making from her mind.

"Jake?"

She recognized the voice: *Jimmy Taylor!*

"Heather? Anybody home?" Jimmy sounded closer with each word; any second now he'd surely step around the house and see them.

She discovered she couldn't move, crazily thinking that this was how deer must feel: frozen in terror while the car's headlamps bore down inexorably on them.

Jake recovered from his shock faster than she did. He snatched up her dress and shoved it into her limp hands.

"Go," he hissed, amusement and frustration mingling in his voice, even as he pushed her into the kitchen. "I'll handle Jimmy." As the screen door fell closed behind her, Heather discovered her ability to move again, and she rushed from the kitchen deeper into the house. Jake's last words followed her, whispered in a low voice: "You owe me, though."

She giggled to herself. With the imminent danger of discovery gone, she could see the funny side.

Making her way up the stairs, she relished the memories of what Jake had done to her, and how it had made her feel. Oh yes, she did owe him. Big time.

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