

The Party
(A Janice & Mel Adventure)
By
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I

Janice Covington looked in surprise at the phone she held in her hand. Bringing the receiver back to her ear she spoke. "You'll have to repeat that Mel. It sounded like you wanted to know where my gun was."

"That's right," Mel's disembodied voice crackled through the phone. "It's going to take you at least three hours to drive back from the publishers, and Dean Palmer is fit to be tied when his dinner guests are late. I'll go on ahead. Doctor Cyrene can pick you up on her way to the party. You shouldn't be more than an hour late. I might even be able to talk the dean out of firing you." The Southerner's voice was teasing but Janice hardly heard her. She was still hung up on the 'gun thing'.

"That's fine Mel, but that still doesn't explain why you want my gun?"

"Janice," Mel said, the patience in her voice fraying around the edges. "I need it for my costume. Don't worry, I'm not going to load it."

"But what kind of--" Janice stopped herself. She and Mel had been through this discussion several times. Having only worked at the University for three months she was still acclimating to her position there, as well as adjusting to life with the magnificent Melinda Pappas. Having learned only weeks before about the annual Halloween party held at the Dean's house she understood with surprising alacrity that elaborate costumes were a plus, and absolute secrecy about the costumes essential. As long as it represented something historical anything went, the more creative the better. She'd never been much of a party goer, and didn't want to start now. With Mel's encouragement, however, she agreed. It was, after all, an excellent opportunity to play politics.

Starting again she kept her voice calm and answered her lover's question. She'd find out soon enough why Mel needed the gun. "The gun is locked in the top drawer of my desk. I haven't had a chance to clean it since target shooting, though. The holster is in the closet with my whip. Please double and triple check to make sure the thing isn't loaded. I'd hate for you to hurt yourself. If you end up shooting Professor Higgins though, I'll understand."

"Oh, Janice. I'm not going to shoot anyone. Now you hurry home. Pandora insists on staying to help you get ready. I've set things up with Doctor Cyrene and I expect she'll be here shortly after you get back. I'll head over to the deans in a couple of hours. Give Argo a kiss for me and I'll see you soon."

Janice handed the receiver back to the secretary who placed it back in its cradle. "Thanks Betty," she said. Standing a bit awkwardly she didn't remember when she'd sat on the edge of the petite blond's desk. Probably when Mel mentioned her gun. "Who on earth is she gonna be?" she whispered to herself.

"Dean Palmer's annual costume party?" Betty asked cheerfully, intruding into Janice's thoughts. Janice smiled shyly. Betty was a type B. Since moving to North Carolina, Janice Covington realized most of the women she encountered fell into three distinct categories. Type A were the women completely oblivious or disdainful of her attraction to women and simply thought her a freak. Type B were curious or intrigued about it and type C were downright interested.

"Ah yeah," Janice replied, quickly gathering her papers and stuffing them in her leather case.

“What are you going as?” Betty asked with a warm smile. “I’ve heard it has to be something of historical significance.”

“It does. I’m killing two birds with one stone. I’ve constructed a ceremonial costume based on descriptions from a scroll I’m working on at the moment.”

“Really,” Betty breathed hanging on Janice’s every word. Janice wondered a bit uncomfortably if she should reassess the young woman into the ‘C’ category. “I’d have pictured you dressed as some sort of adventurer.”

“Oh, you mean my weekend clothes?” Janice replied with a laugh. “That would be cheating now wouldn’t it? I’m not much of a cheater.”

Betty smiled back, the second meaning of the archeologist’s words apparently lost on her. With a smile Janice left her in the type ‘B’ category. Making a last minute note on the article she left for the publisher, she finished up her business with the secretary, whistled for Argo then left the building.

Janice chatted amiably with her dog on the three hour drive back home. While the passenger of an occasional passing car might look at her funny, Argo enjoyed the attention and Janice figured it was better than trying to sing along with the radio. “What do you think she’s going to be?” she continued to the dog who divided her time between rapt attention to her mistress, and sticking her head out the passenger window. “Maybe she’s wearing my clothes, going as me?” Janice wondered then decided it wouldn’t be historical enough.

As soon as Janice pulled up to the big house on Franklin street, she was met by Mel’s housekeeper Pandora Booth who ushered her inside. “When did Mel leave?” Janice asked as she was shooed up the stairs. “What was she wearing?”

“Not more than a half hour ago. And you knows I can’t tell you. If you hurry you can sneak in while they’re still having drinks,” Pandora said as she began to efficiently strip the clothes from Janice’s body.

“If you don’t mind ‘Dora, I can undress myself.”

“Just don’t dawdle,” Pandora warned as she left to get Janice’s costume.

Quickly Janice stripped out of her skirt, blouse and hose. The uncomfortable shoes never stayed on her feet past the entry way so she was already barefoot. She stood up too fast and was momentarily hit by a wave of dizziness. Taking a moment to get her bearings she relaxed, breathing in the scent of the familiar bedroom. Sparkling green eyes flashed open as her keen nose detected the scent of leather and the faintest traces of gun powder. Her pulse quickened as she tried to picture the fair Melinda.

“Here we go,” Pandora bustled, interrupting Janice’s fantasy before she was able to imagine a leather ensemble for her lover. “Lets get you dressed.”

Janice stood as patiently as possible while Pandora helped her dress. “This is quite’n outfit,” Pandora commented as she slid an leather arm bracer up Janice’s left arm. “Considering, of course dat dere isn’t much of it. Has it helped with the research as you’d hoped?”

“Some,” Janice agreed, acutely aware of just how much of her remained uncovered now that she was fully dressed. “The Amazons must have lived in a very warm climate.”

“You got dat right,” the housekeeper agreed with a rumbly chuckle. “And I gets the feelin’ birds was a might plentiful.” Making her point she handed Janice an ornate feathered mask. “There’s gonna be a mess of men sittin’ mighty uncomfortably at dat dinner table, Miz Wolf. I wouldn’t sit by Miz Melinda if I was you. Poor girl won’t be able to keep her hands off of you.”

Janice glanced down disapprovingly at her body. Lean and muscled, sure, but she was also covered by a variety of scars, mementos of her past adventures. She felt awkward and not terribly attractive. No, when she thought beautiful she thought about the sculpted, flawless perfection of Melinda. In comparison she felt like a farm horse next to a throughbred. Still, while she might not

be the package of perfection on the outside she was well aware that she had other...attributes that endeared her to Mel without reservation.

Pandora had just finished with Janice's hair when the chime at the front door sounded. Threading a feathered ear ring through her left lobe, hesitated a moment before following Pandora. Making up her mind, she grabbed Mel's warm dressing gown and put it on over her ceremonial clothes. Tying it securely at the waist she headed downstairs.

"Who the hell are you?" she asked seeing Fiona Cyrene in the entry way dressed in padded black long johns.

"I could say t'same about you Janice," Fiona said in greeting. Her thick Irish brogue softening her words. "Me costume's in the boot of me car. Lovely period dressing gown you have there."

"My costume is a bit...drafty," Janice explained. "You'll see it when we get there." With that she turned and gave one more affectionate rub down to her dog. "You keep an eye on the house Argo, mommie'll be home soon. Pandora, thanks for your help. I don't want to see you around this house until noon tomorrow."

"It's my pleasure child, but there's no need to spoil me like dat. I'll come at my regular time." Janice shook her head and looked at the elderly black woman pointedly. Pandora was quick, and in a moment caught the meaning of the archeologist's raised eyebrows. "But seein' as how you two will be out late tonight. I think the laundry could wait 'til tomorrow afternoon."

Fiona Cyrene chuckled as Janice settled herself in the front seat of her Packard. "That costume must really be something if you're so sure t' fair Melinda will be keeping you up all night."

Janice ignored the jibe and asked instead, "do you have any idea what Mel dressed as? I know it involves a gun and leather, and the suspense is killing me."

"You'll find out soon enough m'dear. She asked me for a couple of pointers, and I suspect you'll find the results more than worth waiting for."

Frowning, Janice didn't press the issue. She'd have to wait. Fortunately it wouldn't take long to get to the dean's home.

"Looks like everyone is indeed here," Fiona commented as she pulled her car up along side several others parked in front of the stately home.

"Might as well get this over with," Janice grumbled as she stepped towards the car to wait for her colleague. Fiona opened the trunk revealing an assortment of shiny armored plates. Janice's eyes grew wide. "You're going as Joan of Arc?" she asked incredulously.

"Most observant Janice. I take it you know a thing or two about heraldry?"

Janice continued to shake her head in disbelief as she helped the Irish woman dress in the plate armor. It didn't take long before the other woman's movements became labored under the considerable weight of the costume. When they'd finished Janice took one last look at her handiwork and buffed off a few finger prints from Fiona's armor. She retrieved her Amazon mask from the back seat and nonchalantly undid the dressing gown. After tossing the robe into the trunk of the car she settled the mask squarely on her head.

"Janice!" Fiona gasped when the archeologist turned around.

"What?" Janice demanded. "I'm up here by the way," she added when Fiona failed to make eye contact after long moments of looking at her costume.

"It's just that...I didn't realize... I never knew you were so...so... fit, Janice." Fiona finally explained. "I swear this is going to be the talk of the archeology department for years to come."

"Don't be ridiculous," Janice said with a shrug, helping her friend up the steps to the house. "This happened to coincide with some research I'm doing. Made more sense to make this than go off on some other tangent and neglect my work." She paused outside the front door and pulled the ceremonial mask over her face. Fiona lowered the visor to her helmet and knocked at the door with

a gauntleted fist.

As soon as the door opened the raucous sounds of a party in full swing could be heard from inside. Due to the limited field of view from inside the Amazon mask, Janice needed to turn her head to look around. "Dean Palmer," she said cheerfully in greeting. "Or should I say Your Majesty. Nice Henry VIII costume."

The dean, dressed as a rather slender Henry VIII looked at Janice in bafflement. She removed the mask from her face and his jaw dropped open. "Doctor Covington?" he stammered. His wife Mary joined him at the door, matching his stunned expression. "Nice to see you again Mrs. Palmer, or, should I say Anne Boleyn." The dotted line around the woman's neck was a dead giveaway as the monarch's second wife.

Shaking off her surprise the dean's wife recovered and motioned Fiona and Janice into the foyer. "Please come in, can't have you standing in a draft now can we," she said pleasantly, sharply jabbing her husband with her elbow.

"No, of course not," he agreed. "Doctor Cyrene, I can see that you're Joan of Arc, sings on your armor not withstanding, but Doctor Covington, forgive me, but who are you?"

"This is a ceremonial Amazon outfit from the period I'm working on in the scrolls," Janice explained. "I'm not sure if the title is Queen or Regent, a few fragments of the scroll were missing."

"Of course," the dean agreed leading the two newest arrivals into the living room.

Blue eyes watched the archeologist's movements from a shadowed alcove. Melinda Pappas took it all in. From Janice's honest bafflement at why the entire room got quiet the second she entered it, to the graceful way her body moved as she made small talk. She could see Janice's eyes scanning the room, looking for her. She eased her body back deeper into shadow. She wasn't ready for her love to see her, not yet. Feeling a little guilty she allowed herself the indulgence of simply drinking in the sight of her lover, so she watched.

There was no denying that Janice had out done herself on her costume, Mel admitted. From the supple leather boots to the hand tooling on the belt that wrapped around her short brown skirt to the hand stitching in gold on the revealing brown top, Janice had captured every detail. Feathers dangled freely from a loose collar she wore around her neck, which only served to draw attention to the delicious cleavage sculpted by the tight fitting top. The arm bands she wore drew attention to well defined shoulders and biceps and the belt at her waist provided the perfect contrast to the expanse of flat muscled abdomen. Moistening her lips, Mel smiled. The flesh on display across the room was nothing new. In the three months she'd lived with the archeologist she'd seen her love nude more times than she could count. But now it was different. Blue eyes sparkled with equal parts pride, love and lust. She felt proud that a room full men and women alike now knew what Mel had known all along. That Janice Covington was strikingly beautiful. She felt an almost overwhelming love seeing Janice interact with her colleagues, honestly indifferent to how spectacular she looked. There was no doubt in her movements that she was simply working her way from one end of the room to the other where she'd then continue her search for Mel elsewhere in the house. Melinda Pappas liked that. That even in a room where a number of people clamored for her attention her only interest was Mel.

A young man, eager to shake Janice's hand in greeting inadvertently tipped his drink, splattering Janice's abdomen with brandy. Mel licked her lips again as a bolt of lust shot through her veins. As Janice moved, wiping at the liquid with a napkin, the muscles of her abdomen clenching then relaxed, moving with sensuous strength. Mel well knew what wonders lay concealed beyond the minimal clothing. Watching Janice move was making Melinda Pappas very hungry and thirsty all at once. Deciding she needed some air if there was any hope in maintaining her composure to dinner, she turned and walked from the alcove heading for the porch outside.

II

Janice cocked her head at the sound of familiar footfalls. Visually searching the far end of the room, her ears detected a slight ringing of metal that faded with the sound of footsteps. Accepting the offered drink from Professor Byron she headed across the room to a small alcove formed by book cases that ran from floor to ceiling. Stepping into the shadowed darkness she picked up the faintest scent of leather with traces of Mel's perfume. Looking back into the living room with an unobstructed view Janice realized that her lover could have been there watching her for some time. With a wicked glint in her eye Janice decided to join in the game of cat and mouse, not really caring whether she ended up the cat or not.

Making her way through the party, Janice was only vaguely aware of the wide eyes and stumbled words in the small talk her colleagues exchanged with her. The house was warm, but not overly so. She'd have been comfortable fully clothed, as it was her exposed skin tingled ever so slightly from a chill. She was surprised at the range of costumes represented in the throng. The Pharo Tutankhamen was talking quietly with Queen Hatshupshut near the punch bowl. George Washington joined them with his wife Martha in tow. She stopped only long enough to get a glass of punch for her office mate, Joan of Arc, and continued her search for her elusive lover.

"Doctor Covington, there you are," Professor Simpson said as he stopped her on her way to the porch. Looking dapper in a Charlie Chaplin costume, Janice couldn't help but smile. She noted that he was one of the few men unembarrassed enough by her appearance to let his gaze wander appreciatively. "You're looking lovely this evening. I trust your costume is authentic?"

Catching a glimpse of movement from the porch behind him, Janice struggled to keep her focus on the elderly professor. As one of her staunchest allies in the department, Janice didn't want to be rude, but at the moment was positively uninterested in anything the gentleman might have to say. "It's as authentic as I could get it," Janice explained. "I didn't have any visual guides, but Gabrielle was kind enough to go into some detail in it's construction in a couple of her scrolls." *Details of the garments coming off that is*, she thought to herself. For now she was happy to keep some of the bard's more passionate works unpublished until the rest of the scrolls were accepted into the annals of academia. Unable to stop herself, her green eyes darted past Professor Simpson to the porch beyond.

Simpson smiled. He found Janice Covington's rough edges disarming and felt he was too old to question youthful passion when it so transformed the faces of Melinda Pappas and her companion into visions of beauty. "If you could do me a favor Doctor Covington," he said with a warm smile. "I fixed this drink for Miss Pappas, but Higgins is bellowing for me from the smoking room..."

"I'll take it to her," Janice offered accepting the drink. "I take it she's on the porch?"

"Oh yes," he replied his smile brightening, "you won't be able to miss her."

Moving past Simpson, Janice paused at the door to the back porch. Taking a quick sip of Mel's drink to ease the sudden dryness in her mouth, she was shocked to discover that the liquid was whiskey. Making her way onto the long porch, she paused in the shadows cast by several faculty members. The porch was lit by lanterns, the unsteady light casting dancing shadows everywhere. It was cold outside, but she barely felt it. The instant her eyes adjusted to the change in lighting, her vision locked on a lone figure standing at the far end of the porch.

Janice took another sip of whiskey at the sight. Leaning against the porch rail stood Mel, looking every inch the bored gunslinger. Wild black hair stood out in sharp contrast to the light brown hat and buckskin duster. The silver spurs on Mel's dark brown boots glinted faintly in the lamp light. Janice watched transfixed as one booted foot moved, coming to rest on the porch rail behind the Southerner. The long duster shifted and Janice got a glimpse of what lay beneath. Dressed in tight fitting dark brown chaps over blue jeans Mel's legs seemed to go on forever. Noting

her gunbelt slung low, it was belted over a dark brown hand tooled leather jacket. From this distance it was hard, to tell but Janice could also see a white shirt and several scarves wrapped around the outlaw's neck. One of which reached almost to the bottom of the duster. In a graceful movement Mel brought a short cigar to her lips and lit a match effortlessly on the bottom of her boot. After a couple of contented puffs, she was still once more. Waiting.

Moving like the tide drawn to the moon, Janice crossed the porch. "*And I thought she looked amazing in a tux!*" she thought to herself, stunned at the transformation of her lover. Forcing herself to remember that this was Melinda Pappas after all, a woman who had fought Ares, yet still jumped on furniture at the sight of a mouse, Janice Covington regained her composure. She smiled as she got closer. The cigar Mel held between her lips was her favorite brand. "Your drink," she said softly, handing Mel the glass, and easing the cigar from soft lips.

"Thank you," Mel replied, barely audible as she gazed deeply into Janice's eyes. "You look magnificent, you know."

Janice puffed on the cigar and blew a couple of smoke rings. "I'm glad you think so. You're rather stunning yourself. I didn't think you could out do a tux, but this...this is really something." Standing closer, Janice could see the intricate hand tooling on the leather jacket and the white linen shirt and vest nestled beneath. One scarf wrapped around Mel's neck was tucked inside the shirt, the other scarf, the long one with southwestern stitching hung low, reaching down to the tops of her breasts. Completely covered in layers of clothing, the Amazon couldn't remember when she'd ever been so turned on by the sight of so little skin.

"It feels different from a tux," Mel admitted, taking a sip of her whiskey. Janice noted with amusement that her companion didn't even flinch as she downed the potent liquid. "I feel different in it. More..." she struggled to find the right word. "Surly," she finally decided. "And you," she continued, eyes roaming brazenly over Janice's body. "Look positively wild."

"Could be interesting," Janice murmured.

Mel grinned, taking her cigar back from the Amazon's lips. "I'm counting on it."

Janice shivered, from more than the chill October air. Mel's eyes sparkled with mischief and the tone of her voice was down right raunchy.

Setting her drink down on the porch railing, Mel shrugged out of her duster. Janice was sorry to see the garment removed, but she did get a better look at her lover this way. With profound gentleness, Mel draped the coat around Janice's shoulder, carefully pulling long red gold tresses from beneath the collar. The Amazon smiled. The duster was warm and carried the comforting scent of her lover and leather. Two of Janice Covington's favorite things. Janice let her eyes roam once again over her companion, now that her view was unobstructed. The jeans and chaps were quite tight, showing off every muscled curve of Mel's legs. The jacket was simply a work of art, and the ivory handled gun stood out in sharp relief against the dark leather. She knew Mel was watching her, and didn't bother to conceal the hunger in her gaze. She reached out a hand to touch the intricately patterned jacket, but Mel flinched, moving just out of her reach.

"You sure you want to do that?" Mel husked in warning. "We're not alone you know."

Janice nodded, bringing her hand back to her side. There was no way she'd be able to touch Mel and have it not look downright erotic. Glancing casually away, she noticed several colleagues watching her curiously. With a clenched jaw Janice realized she could look but not touch. This was going to be a long evening.

III

Both women stood quietly, simply taking in the sight of the other when they were interrupted by William Byron's approach. "Doctor Covington, there you are," he said, intruding into Janice's thoughts like fire works on a tranquil sunset. "You left your drink by Doctor Cyrene."

‘Evening Miss Pappas,’ he added with a nod at Mel.

Janice accepted the drink with all the grace she could muster while Mel looked on with a decidedly amused smirk on her face. “*Well two can play at that game,*” she thought. Tossing her head back she downed the drink in one gulp. The smirk vanished from Mel’s face as she and Byron stood transfixed, watching the flow of muscle as Janice swallowed. “Thank you Professor Byron,” Janice said handing him the empty glass. “I seem to have gotten a bit thirsty out here.” Mel’s eyes narrowed at the comment and Janice smiled, rather satisfied with herself. Taking a closer look at Byron, something about his costume bothered her. He was dressed in silk robes, with an outrageous moustache glued on his face. If she hadn’t been so distracted by her lover, she would have laughed at him on sight. “Who exactly are you, Professor Byron?” she asked.

He puffed up with pride, which made Mel turn away, her amused grin hidden behind wild ebony locks. “I am Ming T’zu, the Chinese daimyo.”

“Really?” Janice replied.

“Oh yes,” Byron enthused. “I just reviewed an article about him. He was one of the lesser known daimyo. His life was sadly cut short by a crazed courtesan who claimed to have won his heart at dice. He left behind a son Ming T’ien who ruled with great strength until he was tragically killed in the aftermath of an earthquake-- hit in the head by falling debris.”

Janice glanced over at Mel to gauge her reaction. The demure Southerner had been decidedly unpredictable dressed as she was; the last thing Janice needed was an argument between the heiress and the misguided academic. As she feared, Mel looked pissed.

Straightening to her full height, Mel narrowly gazed down at Byron and muttered, “don’t believe everything you read.”

Byron opened his mouth to speak, only to be interrupted by voices from indoors announcing dinner. Before he could regain his momentum, Mel and Janice stepped past him and headed inside.

“Behave yourself,” Janice muttered to Mel as they headed for the dining room.

“Me?” Mel’s face was the picture of innocence that clashed completely with the tall woman’s attire.

“You’re not fooling me for a moment Mel,” Janice continued in a hushed whisper. “Those clothes have done something to you.”

The two women had reached the dining room and like the other guests were circling the table looking for the place cards to identify their seat. “You don’t know the half of it,” Mel said conversationally. Finding Janice’s seat, she helped the Amazon out of the duster, whispering near her ear, “I can hardly wait to get out of here Janice. I’ve developed quite an itch and only you can scratch it for me.”

Janice sat down with a thud as Mel nonchalantly moved on to her seat. With cheeks flaming crimson she watched her lover circle the table, stopping at the seat directly across from her. Only when a robed figure carrying a papier mache tablet approached at her right did Janice’s attention momentarily waver. Glancing at the place card she realized with an inward groan that her departmental nemesis, Professor Higgins, had been seated on her right. Looking at the place card to her left, Janice waited for the arrival of Eunice Montgomery. The elderly woman bustled in carrying a pallet with oil paints and a handful of brushes.

“Mary Casatte, won’t you join Moses and myself,” Janice said in greeting as matronly woman sat down.

“You’re quite sharp, Janice,” Eunice beamed at the recognition. “I’ve been erroneously called Mona Lisa all evening.”

“Well you’re asking for it carrying around the paints and all,” Higgins said dismissively. “Besides Mona Lisa is a historical figure, Mary Casatte was just some woman who liked to paint.”

Janice caught the narrow gaze of building anger from her lover across the table. The archeologist didn't blame her, Higgins was an ass. "That's ignorant even for you Professor Higgins," the Amazon said calmly. With a quick glance she noticed Mel relax a little. With a sense of resignation she realized that she'd need to stay on her toes to keep her surly gunslinger from saying what she was really thinking. The assembled academics were in no way ready for this side of Melinda Pappas.

"What do you expect from a guy who was lost in the desert for forty years and didn't ask for directions," Professor Simpson teased from his seat on Mel's right.

"Why Thomas, that's blasphemy," Eunice said with insincere offense, smiling all the while.

"We're archaeologists." Janice grinned to the matronly woman. "Blasphemy and the desecration of religious monuments is part of our job."

Several of the assembled archaeologists laughed at the remark and toasted Janice with their wine glasses. Joan of Arc was the last guest to be seated, needing the extra time to maneuver in heavy armor. Byron helped her then took his seat on Mel's left. Once the Tudor King and Queen were seated, servants brought out the first course.

The turtle soup had a complex hearty flavor that Janice enjoyed tremendously. The best part was the opportunity to feast her eyes on Mel with every bite. The conversation was pleasant, everyone at the table enquiring about the costumes of their colleagues. Unfortunately it was Higgins who finally broached the question to Mel. "Miss Pappas," he began in his gruff wind bag like way. "Why on earth are you dressed as a man?"

Mel paused only for a moment as her spoon made it's ascent to her lips. She took her time, enjoying the earthy flavor of the soup. When she finished, she dabbed at the corners of her mouth with a linen napkin and looked at the man dressed like Moses. "I'm dressed as Ellen Chamberlain, a gunfighter and bank robber who, I assure you, was every inch a woman. She was my great-great grandmother."

Janice nearly choked on her soup. "You've got a gunfighter in the family?" she repeated, stunned.

Taking a sip of wine, Mel drank in the stunned expressions as well. "I believe it was Ming T'zu who once said every rich man has a thief in their family somewhere. The Von Melosa fortune was built on investments, but the original capital came from Ellen's exploits. That's how we're able to afford things like original paintings by Mary Casatte."

"Impossible," Higgins murmured.

An eyebrow slowly arched it's way up Mel's forehead. "You calling me a liar, Professor Higgins?" she asked quietly. "This jacket belonged to her, as did the scarf. I assure you, this isn't as much a costume as it was her work clothes."

The next course miraculously appeared from the kitchen and Janice would have thanked god had she believed for a moment that such a creature existed. "What about you Doctor Covington?" Professor Simpson asked, smoothly defusing the tension between Higgins and Mel. "Tell us about your costume."

With all eyes at the table focused once again on the scantily clad archeologist, things got rather quiet. "I suppose that's your great-great grandmother's outfit too?" Higgins taunted.

"Well it goes a bit farther back than that I'm afraid," Janice replied with a laugh. "The details for this came from a scroll Mel and I are translating at the moment."

"That's right," Higgins snorted dismissively. "You've been prattling on about historical Amazons for some time--" his words were cut off and his eyes bugged out in pain. With a frightened stare he turned to glare at Janice. "That was my foot," he growled.

Janice stared back baffled, then looked over at Mel. The smirk on her lover's face explained everything. Higgin's foot had just met one of Mel's spurs only he thought she did it. "Sorry," Janice

apologized returning her gaze to her lover once more.

Calming herself she took a deep breath watching blue eyes zone in on her chest as she moved. The main course was served and Janice let out a sigh of relief. Maybe, just maybe she'd survive this after all. "Would you like a piece of tri-tit-- *tip?*" Byron asked passing her a serving plate. Then again, maybe she wouldn't.

When everyone settled down to the business of eating, Janice relaxed. Content to stay quiet and observe she listened absently to the conversations buzzing around the table. Mel was also quiet and the two women engaged in their own unspoken conversation, unnoticed by the dinner guests around them.

You're making me hungry, Mel's eyes seemed to say as bright white teeth eased a bite of meat off her fork.

I hope so, Janice smiled reaching for her wine glass and taking a thoughtful sip. *The wine's good, but not as sweet as your kiss*, she conveyed with a wink

I'd hardly call this dessert, Mel's smile beamed when the serving of peach cobbler was set down in front of her.

Hardly, Janice's stare echoed pointedly. Just then she felt the faintest nudge from the pointed toe of a boot. The calfskin of her Amazon boots was soft and she could feel the gentle nudge clearly. That simple contact heightened her pulse and had her draining her water glass. She needed to get out of here, now.

When dinner finished the houseful of guests retired to the den for brandy and conversation. Janice slipped on Mel's duster and headed outside for a breath of fresh air first. She needed a moment to ground herself before enduring another public sitting with Mel. The night air was crisp and cold. Her breath came in foggy puffs in the lamplit darkness. After a few minutes of silence she heard the distant scrape-jingle of boots and spurs. Janice didn't turn around, rather, she simply waited for the tingle of warmth that would caress her skin when her lover stepped close.

IV

Mel took her time, walking over to Janice with measured steps. "Your brandy," she said, her voice a throaty rumble as the archeologist turned to accept the offered snifter.

"You're gonna be the death of me," Janice growled.

"I can't think of a better way to die," Mel beamed in return. "So are you ready to leave or what?"

"Surly is definitely the word for you, Mel. Are you forgetting the 'lets play politics' portion of this little soiree?"

"Oh no," Mel admitted her smile broadening. "I've just agreed to supply Dean Palmer with some additional funding to complete some work the museum is doing and to upgrade the security for your upcoming Scroll exhibit. He's happy as a kitten at the moment, and I'd say that means you're free to go."

Janice's eyes narrowed. "Are you saying you *bought* my way out of this party?"

Mel gazed down at Janice, her eyes making it quite clear just how much she wanted to retire for the evening. "Damn straight, I did. You can come with me quietly, or be thrown over my shoulder and carried out of here."

"Save it 'till we get home," Janice dismissed with a light laugh.

Returning to the throng of people, Janice spoke with each guest for a few moments, saying her goodbyes and wishing everyone a pleasant evening. Turning to Fiona Cyrene last, she bid goodnight to the woman propped up near the door.

"Staying up late and leaving early," the Irishwoman whispered. "I'm envious."

The ride home was quiet. Janice drove, keeping her eyes focused on the road. Mel gazed at her with ravenous desire tempting the archeologist to simply pull over and have at it in the car. But that wasn't who she wanted to be with Mel. Unwieldy passions aside, a luxurious Auburn was still no substitute for the comfort of home.

Argo barked in greeting as the two women entered the door way. Then the dog cocked her head quizzically as Mel picked up Janice and hoisted the Amazon over her shoulder like a sack of flour. "Hey!" Janice yelped in surprise.

Looking confused, Argo stepped inbetween the couple and the stairway a soft growl emanating from her throat. Although distressed, the large dog wasn't about to let her mistress go anywhere against her will-- even if it was in the company of her mistress' mate. "That's my girl," Janice beamed.

Hearing the pride in her mistress' voice the Golden Retriever rushed behind Mel to gaze up at Janice's face and pant happily. Her rescuer deciding she was no longer in peril, Janice endured the march up the stairs, grinning all the while.

Mel was about to head for the bedroom when the sounds of a crackling fire drew her attention. She headed for the study, easily opening the door with one hand and stepping inside. A fire was lit in the fire place, burning steadily. Two comfortable leather chairs were positioned in front of the hearth, and a low table midway between them. The table was bare save for an iced bottle of champagne and two crystal flutes.

Gently, Mel put Janice down, holding the smaller woman's arm for a moment to steady her. "Pandora must have just left," she said as Janice stepped away to pull the bottle from it's cocoon of ice. With practiced ease she popped the cork and filled two glasses.

"She seems to think of everything," Janice agreed, handing Mel a long fluted glass.

"Not quite everything," Mel replied setting her glass down on the table. She turned to face her Amazon, towering over the shorter woman. Tall to begin with, the heels of her boots added a couple of inches. Next to Janice who stood in flat calfskin boots, she stood nearly a foot taller. The gunfighter gazed into sea green eyes as warm hands came to rest on the Amazon's shoulders. Janice didn't move, curious to see what her lover would do. It wasn't completely out of character for Mel to take the lead where physical intimacies were concerned, but it wasn't a common occurrence either. Mel brought her hand up to gently caress Janice's cheek with the back of her knuckles. The other hand eased behind her neck threading through reddish blond hair. Slowly and deliberately Mel lowered her head, softly claiming Janice's lips with her own. With a touch that was tender, confident and supremely loving Mel made it clear, with her lips alone that Janice was the center of her world.

When their lips parted Janice gazed up in awe. The Amazon was no stranger to the softness of a woman's kiss. In fact she'd been with a number of women before meeting the Southerner. Yet there was something about Mel that affected her like no other. A brief moment of eye contact, the slightest smile, a word or two-- these simple things touched Janice deeply. Given that, every time she made love with the statuesque woman, the passionate exchange rocked her to her very core. Regardless of how playful their exchanges were, for Janice Covington there was nothing casual about her relationship with Melinda Pappas, ever.

"Not that I'm complaining," she said, gazing up into a sea of blue. "But you don't kiss much like a gunslinger."

"Oh no?" Mel replied, slowly dropping to her knees. "Just how many gun fighters have you kissed?" Janice laughed, taking the hat from Mel's head and flung it over to the stuffed leather chair on the far side of the table. Champagne glass in one hand, she took a sip, threading her fingers into ebony softness with the other. Mel didn't wear her hair down much, and every time she did Janice couldn't help but touch the silken strands, making love to Mel's hair with her hands. In fact, her soft caresses were one reason she didn't see the Southerner's hair down more often. On the few

occasions Mel had tried to work on the scrolls with her hair down, neither woman had gotten much translating done. Leaning in close, Mel sighed into the firmness of Janice's abdomen, enjoying her Amazon's tender touch. Smelling the slightest hint of brandy, Mel opened her mouth and with her tongue traced wet patterns over the muscled flesh. She smiled picking up the faintest taste of the liquor that Byron had dumped on Janice earlier. The archeologist groaned, her whole body shuddering at the contact.

"Good point," Janice agreed tightly, abdominal muscles flexing at the erotic onslaught. With legs swiftly turning to water, Janice swayed unsteadily on her feet. Strong arms wrapped around her thighs, steadying her and urging her back at the same time. Janice took a tentative step back, bumping into one arm of the overstuffed leather chair. Reaching behind her with one hand Janice grabbed the chair arm, using it to guide her falling body as she toppled back into the leather chair. With a purposeful shove, Mel moved the small table towards the other chair and from her knees continued her assault, kissing a path up the Amazon's abdomen. Without removing her lips, Mel trailed her hands down each side of her lover's right leg and began to untie the laces to the calfskin boots. Tugging roughly, she pulled the boot from Janice's foot and carelessly tossed it behind her.

Janice may have been more concerned about the hours spent making her costume and the harsh treatment it was receiving, had she not been confident in its sturdy construction and so turned on by Mel's impatience. Moments more and the second boot joined the first.

"Don't you think you're a little overdressed for this?" Janice asked as Mel's hands slid behind her back and undid the ties to her brown leather top. Slowly Mel rose, standing to her full height and looked at her lover. Janice gazed up, face slightly flushed and feeling suddenly exposed. Mel held the top by one strap and studied it appreciatively before bringing it to her face with both hands and softly kissing the leather.

Janice's breathing was shallow and rapid as she watched the dangerous looking gun fighter. In time Mel's eyes drifted from the garment to her now exposed breasts, nipples stiffening even more under the intense blue gaze. Arctic eyes met sea foam green as the Southerner smirked. Turning her back she walked across the room to one of the two sturdy work desks and gently sat the Amazon top on its hard wood surface. Slowly, she shrugged the buckskin duster from her shoulders and drew it from her body, tossing it over the edge of the desk near the top.

"This better?" she asked throatily when she turned back to face Janice again.

A vision in dark brown, white and blue Janice's attention was riveted. Mel was radiating danger, lust and devotion in a combination that was irresistible. Wetting her lips unconsciously, Janice could only think to nod. Sauntering back to the Amazon once more, Mel stopped only when she was standing directly in front of her lover at the wing-backed chair. Janice had to tilt her head back to meet the blue eyes that studied her.

"Come here," Mel said, her voice barely above a whisper.

As close as she was, the only way Janice could get any closer to her lover was to stand. Putting one hand on each chair arm, she gracefully pushed off rising to meet Mel and keeping her balance with the chair. Forearms and biceps flexed, honed from hours in the field, easily supporting the archeologist's weight. Without invitation Mel's lips claimed hers once more in a searing display of desire and power. Tongues dueling passionately, Mel kissed Janice with the purposeful insistence of a woman starved being unleashed upon a feast. One arm wrapped around the Amazon's back, assisting in supporting the smaller woman's form as the other hand went to the leather belt keeping the brown skirt in place. Mel stopped in surprise after flinging the skirt towards the calfskin boots.

"That isn't very authentic," she commented with a wry grin, hooking an elegant finger in the waistband of Janice's black satin underwear.

"Well, you and I both know that Gabrielle rarely wore anything under the skirt. Hardly seemed appropriate for a dinner party."

Mel grinned, even white teeth gleaming in the firelight. “Oh, I can think of some dinner parties where it’d be most appropriate.” With a firm tug she pulled, the garment easily sliding down muscular thighs and falling onto the floor.

Janice stared, finding it hard to believe such a statement brazenly fell from the lips of Melinda Pappas. “You weren’t kidding about surly were you, Mel?” she asked, a smile quickly vanishing from her lips as Mel slowly sank to her knees once again, trailing her fingers down Janice’s body as she moved.

There was a raw urgency in Mel’s demeanor that excited Janice. While not exactly rough, she didn’t think Mel had it in her to be truculent, the no frills determination exhibited by her partner made the Amazon’s pulse race. The leather of the tooled jacket brushed against Janice’s inner thigh as Mel nudged with her shoulder. Urging her partner’s legs apart, the heiress wasted no time making her desires known.

Janice gasped as ardent lips sought her out where she was all heat and wetness. “Oh, yes!” she gasped succumbing to Mel’s unspoken request to move her legs further still.

Supporting her weight with strong arms, Janice braced the chair, letting Mel guide her hips to where the outlaw wanted them. More than ready, her lover wasted no time in consuming the passion that had been building all evening. Driven by a lust fueled by her attire, Mel let go of years of careful grooming and did simply as she desired. Right now she wanted her lover. She wanted to feel the tremble of familiar muscles as she drove the other woman higher, wanted to hear the sweet sounds of ecstasy as Janice lost control of her own body. Control that Janice lovingly gave her. More than that even, Mel wanted to satisfy her own craving for the lusciousness that was her lover’s body. They shared a love, intimacy, and connection that Mel had never experienced with anyone in her entire life, but that wasn’t what drove her at the moment. This time it was purely physical. Mel craved Janice, pure and simple. The way she tasted, the way she smelled, the way the slick folds moved against her face and tongue. This was about taking what she wanted, knowing Janice was enjoying it as much as she.

With a satisfied murmur and a not so gentle shove, Mel picked up one of her partner’s calves and hoisted it over her shoulder. Janice groaned in delight, the move shifting the angle of her body and giving Mel better access in the process. With the other foot resting on Mel’s thigh the Amazon slowly moved her hips up and down, by flexing her arms slightly.

“Yes, Mel... like that,” Janice encouraged as the gun fighter’s tongue traveled the distance of her cleft moved over the slippery knot of nerves at the top then began at the base again, pausing occasionally to lap at the slick opening to the Amazon’s heat. Not missing a beat, Mel drew a hand up the length of Janice’s leg, teasing the opening with two fingers.

The crown of red-gold hair fell back as the Amazon felt dizzy with need. “Please,” she panted. “Come on baby...take me.”

Smoothly Mel’s fingers entered her as the outlaw’s tongue continued to lap at her surface. Movements in synch, Janice felt near bliss. The thrust of her hips met the movements of her lover’s fingers resulting in delicious fullness and friction. Each movement was also met in counterpoint by the warm stroke of a tongue, punctuated by a pointed caress at the top. The only part of the experience not entirely blissful was a slight warmth building in Janice’s shoulders. With a body singing in near rapture, it was easy at first to ignore the warm exertion of shoulder muscles. However the steady pressure was beginning to go from warm and tingly to hot. A different kind of heat from that of her throbbing core. A painful kind of heat.

Janice began to move her hips, at first forcefully then frantically against the other woman’s face. The draw towards her climax began to quicken even as her muscles began to scream in protest. The combination of delight and pain intensified, amplifying her awareness of each pleasurable sensation. Sheer will alone locked her arms in place as every muscle in her body began to quake. Mel

picked up the tempo as her lips held tightly, tongue darting and swirling almost teasingly across sensitive surfaces. Then with a firm suck of the Southerner's lips Janice's body exploded into a million different shades of bliss.

The Amazon's arms finally gave out, but Mel was right there, supporting the smaller woman at the waist and drawing her into the circle of her arms. Janice was quiet for several long moments. Unable to speak she moaned incoherently trying to get some control over the torrent of emotion flooding through her. Limply her arms draped over Mel's shoulders and her legs straddled one of Mel's leather clad thighs. The pounding of her pulse didn't slow the lust thrumming through her veins didn't wane. The intensity of her climax should have taken some edge off her passion, but it didn't. Not at all. Her head was filled with the aroused scent of Mel. The perfume she wore, the leather and a faint hint of gunpowder. The singing of the blood pounding through her veins became a chant. Janice Covington pulled back a little to look her lover in the eye. With green eyes blazing with desire, Melinda Pappas looked very much like tinder.

V

With crushing force Janice kissed Mel, lips slipping and sliding over a face already slick from their passionate exchange. The force of the Amazon's attack rocked Mel back a little. With a quick glance Janice made sure that they weren't in danger of bumping into the table. There wasn't much room inbetween the two leather chairs, table and fireplace but it would be enough. Janice was in no condition to even consider moving their lovemaking to a more suitable location.

Regaining control of her spent arms, she put her fingers to good use unbuckling the belt that held the gun holster in place. When the belt slid free of it's buckle, Mel collected the gun holster from around her waist and with a long stretch, tossed the weapon onto the leather chair behind her. Janice's hands were moving at such a frantic pace, Mel doubted her lover would consider that throwing a firearm, unloaded as it was, across the room was not such a good idea. With a soft thud, the gun and holster joined her hat in the chair. Janice hardly noticed, her attention was riveted on the ornately tooled leather jacket and the sensuous body moving underneath it. Her mind, adrift on the hedonistic haze from her climax, and slightly buzzed from an evening of alcohol consumption was a wash with feeling, thinking was out of the question. Happily, Janice let go of herself and went where her passions led. It was, after all, one of the nice things about being in love.

"This is so good...so good" the Amazon murmured, tracing her fingers over the intricate Mexican patterns. "Nothing compares to loving you, Mel. Nothing," she said, her green eyes dark with desire roaming over her lover.

Mel smiled as she leaned back, enjoying the sensation of skilled lips attaching themselves to her throat. It was hard for the Southern heiress to believe that she'd only been at this for three months. It had taken a little getting used to, as Mel suspected it would with any lover; but the occasional clumsy feeling had been replaced by a sense that she must have been doing this her whole life. Mel's smile broadened as she felt Janice open the jacket and pounce on the buttons of her vest with single minded intention.

"I love the way you smell, love the way you move," Janice murmured burrowing her face into the folds of material covering Mel's chest. "No one has ever loved me the way you do. And you're so gorgeous-- God, I must be dreaming." Janice was babbling, but Mel didn't mind. In truth she adored the sound of her lover's voice and always felt reassured when Janice was aroused to the point where she couldn't distinguish between what she was feeling and what she was saying. While dressing as a gun fighter had been enormous fun, deep down Mel was still Mel, subtle insecurities and all.

It wouldn't have taken much for the heiress to feel shy or awkward where sex was concerned. That was, after all how she was raised. But since that first time, and the dozens of times

thereafter the archeologist had made it abundantly clear, in word and deed that to her, Melinda Pappas was perfection personified. It's hard to doubt your abilities as a lover when your partner can't stop babbling about you.

A frustrated growl drew Mel from her thoughts. Janice had opened the jacket, unbuttoned the vest and was attempting to pull the shirt tails from her pants with one hand while the other massaged her breast through the fabric. Having spent a good hour getting dressed, Mel knew there was no way Janice would be able to untuck the long linen shirt without ripping it. It was equally clear that in her condition, Janice was in no position to care.

"Kiss me again, Janice," Mel demanded, distracting the Amazon from her battle with the shirt. Green eyes darted up, the Amazon didn't have to be asked twice. Janice kissed her deeply filling her senses with the passion she was feeling. She wasn't worried about scaring the Southerner. If anything, the last three months had proven to the archeologist that Mel loved her utterly and trusted her completely. An exceptionally quick study in the bedroom, Melinda Pappas had a way of channeling the raging fire that was Janice into something truly magnificent. Janice Covington had never felt truly magnificent before, but she did with Mel.

"God Mel," she murmured between soulful kisses. "Tasting myself on you is such a turn on." To make her point, Janice drew her tongue slowly along Mel's bottom lip.

Murmuring agreement the gunfighter captured the Amazon's lips once more at the same time moving Janice's hands to the buckles of her dark leather chaps. "I need you, Janice," Mel panted. "Need to feel your hands on me-- your fingers inside of me. Get these damn clothes off!"

Pulling back a little, Janice chuckled in spite of herself. She could well imagine the wound up state her lover was in. She took a deep breath and drew Mel's hands to the buckles. Looking deep into Mel's eyes she whispered seductively, "you do these, I'll get the boots." Then, with a wink she moved off of the Southerner's thigh and headed for her feet.

By the time the footwear was removed and tossed towards the growing pile of clothes, Mel had undone the buckles of the chaps and was frantically working at the buttons to her jeans. Feeling warm, she removed the heavy tooled jacket and shrugged out of the vest. Janice watched Mel undress trailing her hands over leather clad legs, enjoying the smoothness of the chaps as well as the show. "Next time you wear these, love-- don't bother with the jeans."

Mel laughed, thinking that her lover was kidding. Janice only smiled, envisioning her body nestled between strong leather clad legs. With a firm tug, the chaps were removed, the jeans following moments later. To her delight, Janice discovered that her partner was not wearing underwear. "Did you forget something?" Janice teased. "Or is this you working towards authenticity?"

In no mood to be teased, Mel pounced, shoving Janice to her back and squarely straddling her hips. Placing a hand at each side of the Amazon's face she gazed down, a dangerous glint in her eye. "I thought it would help me be surly," she purred. "You got a problem with that, Amazon?"

"Oh, no," Janice grinned, reaching her arms around Mel's back. "I like my gun fighters surly."

Janice had her knees bent since there wasn't enough room for either woman to stretch out between the wing backed chairs. She didn't want to move though. The firelight coming from the side illuminated the linen shirt the Southerner still wore. While not transparent, the darker slopes and curves of the supple body beneath the linen was enough to paint a very erotic picture. Slipping her hands under the garment, Janice sought out the flesh that swayed so enticingly in the firelight. She didn't need to see to be able to tell just how ready Mel was. Nipples contracted instantly against her palm as she caressed a soft breast. Pulling forcefully with the arm snaked around Mel's back, she drew the larger woman in for another searing kiss.

As Mel moved, her hips rose off of Janice's body and the Amazon had the access she

needed. Her right hand slowly moved from a full breast to slick center. At the first touch, Mel's hips moved forward in an enticing invitation. Brazenly wanton in her need, the gunfighter was literally dripping with seduction. Knowing she was taking a chance, with Mel as ready as she was, Janice nudged Mel's leg, wordlessly asking to be let up. The Southerner complied, moving from her hands and knees to rest upright against her heels and frowning disapprovingly

"Where in Sam Hill do you think you're going?" Mel nearly growled as Janice moved to her knees facing the taller woman.

"You said you wanted wild, gunfighter," Janice said, her voice rough with desire and eyes slightly taunting. "I'm going to give you what you want."

Mel's eyes narrowed, one eyebrow arching dangerously. Blue eyes burning with want, Mel took in the sight of the woman kneeling in front of her. While the Southerner's body was covered by a long sleeved linen shirt that reached well past mid thigh, Janice was dressed only in Amazon arm bands, choker and earring. Her soft skin glowed bronze in the fire light, the fine hairs of her arms reflecting gold like a halo. The scars that marked the archeologist's body only served to draw Mel's attention, first to the graceful slope of a breast, then to the gentle ripples of a strong abdomen, finally to the slight indent of a hip near the red gold curls where she'd already feasted. The Amazon's skin was slightly shiny from the exertions of that recent encounter and Mel noted that the hairline at her temples was damp with sweat. Another surge of lust swept through her at the sight and she licked her lips unconsciously. Tasting traces of her lover yet again, only served to worsen her aching need.

Resting her palms on her thighs, Mel leaned forward until her lips brushed against her lover's ear. "What I want," she said in a hoarse whisper. "Is for you to fuck me. Right here, right now. Do you think you can do that Amazon? Or do I need to get my whip and--"

Her words were cut off by a searing kiss. Both women near the breaking point, it was nearly a battle as tongues fought for space in each other's mouth. For long minutes both women dueled, determined to consume every fiber of the other. When it finally ended, both were left gasping, greedily taking in lungfuls of air.

Shoving gently, Janice gasped "hands and knees, lover," as she pushed Mel forward. The heiress complied, too concerned with breathing to wonder about what was going to happen. Her attention quickly refocused however, when Janice's left hand moved under the shirt to caress a breast that was hanging freely, the right hand gently stroking her backside.

Gentle fingers traced up and down the backs of her thighs, teasing the inside curves, urging her legs apart. Mel complied, head dropped down, eyes shut concentrating every ounce of her awareness on her need and the anticipation of that need's fulfillment. She threw her head back with a loud groan as two fingers pressed against her wetness.

"Oh yes, please," she panted, not caring for a minute that it wasn't a very surly thing to say.

Janice stroked back and forth, enjoying the wetness and the fullness of arousal that pressed against her fingers. Smiling, she allowed herself an indulgent look. There wasn't anything about Melinda Pappas that she didn't find breathtakingly beautiful. The exposed body of the woman on her hands and knees was certainly no exception.

"Please, Janice," Mel groaned again as the Amazon continued to tease, her other hand playfully pinching at erect nipples.

"Anything for you Mel," Janice purred as she carefully drove two fingers deep within.

"Yes!" Mel hissed as her upper body dropped to her elbows, giving Janice greater access. Her hips thrust back in a wanton display of need and she groaned encouragement with every thrust.

Janice drew her left hand from Mel's breasts knowing that the feathers of her Amazon arm bands must tickle as she trailed them over her lover's abdomen.

"More...please...yes!"

Janice beamed as she carefully added another digit. At this moment life was perfect. She was in love with the woman of her dreams who was every bit as crazy about her. Kneeling to Mel's side, the fingers of her left hand danced through hot wetness from below as her right hand pumped out a steady rhythm of passion inside. Mel was groaning in ecstasy, mostly incoherent save for the frequent utterances of 'Janice' and 'please.' She finally belonged *to* someone. She lived in a home, and with Argo and Mel, had a family. In addition, the Xena Scrolls were sitting on her desk not five feet away. Janice Covington decided that life couldn't get much better than that.

Well it could get a *little* better, and did. Like a building tremor, Janice could feel the vibration surge through Mel's body as the slick satin of her inner walls changed to velvet, clamping down on her powerfully. Knowing her partner's body well, she allowed several more powerful thrusts prolonging the shuddering waves. When she knew Mel had had enough, she stilled her hands, still holding her lover protectively and let the other woman rest. After a couple of seconds, Mel turned, blindly groping around for the body of the woman who held her heart.

Janice gathered the larger woman in to her arms, as she leaned her back against one of the leather chairs.

"You are the most amazing woman on earth," Mel breathed.

Janice smiled. Mel could make her feel that way. Probably because it was a mutual adoration. With a quick whistle Janice signaled Argo, who had been sleeping contentedly under the desk, occasionally glancing at her mistresses curiously.

"Don't tell me that mongrel watched," the Southerner mumbled, too content to care.

"Be thankful she didn't try to participate," Janice soothed jokingly. "Argo, go get a blanket," she said after turning her attention to the dog. Moments after padding quietly from the study, the soft thud could be heard as the large animal jumped on their bed. Shortly thereafter Argo returned, dragging a soft quilt by her teeth. Janice swallowed nervously as her dog handed over the quilt Mel's grandmother had made. After a quick examination she was relieved to find no punctures in the heirloom. Pulling a cushion from the chair, she propped it behind her back and wrapped the quilt around them. Her dog nearby, her lover in her arms and a fire dancing in the hearth, Janice decided that life indeed didn't get much better than that.

"So costume parties aren't quite so bad after all, are they?" Mel asked, her voice sleepy and warm as she shifted getting more comfortable.

Janice Covington chuckled as she hugged her lover closer. "With you, Mel, I think costume parties are going to be one of my favorite things."

The end...

Disclaimer: This just goes to show you what can happen when you don't take the Madonna CDs out of the car. Driving to work and trying to figure out a sex scene while listening to *Forbidden Love* and *Rain* over and over and over does something to a person...