



Because Love Grows

Where My Rosemary Goes

 ✧ Hard Reset ✧ 

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It was possible the world was ending. On fire. It was definitely very warm and he thought he saw embers. Or maybe glitter. Red sequins.

You want me to do what charm? The one where you won't get pregnant? You want me to do that?

What... Why did you want me to do that, again? Did you want it on a piece of paper so you could take it with you? Did you say that? I guess I could watch Lucy... What did you say? What are you saying? Is that words?

“Milo? Can you?”

Milo Rose, with steamed-up glasses, chalk white complexion, and a damp braid hanging down the back of his shirt that felt like an electric wire, nodded.

“You wanna?”

Milo Rose, with shaking hands folded up in each other, nodded.

Yeah, but... I really think... maybe we should put some water... on the planet... because I think I am going to die...

Calliope Marshmallow Otis (O-T-I-S not O-T-T-I-S), with an oversized button-down men's shirt and a pair of black trousers that almost matched his, and ballerina flats... and freckles, and such pretty eyes... smiled. She smiled at him. Such a great smile.

Oh, gods, I can't, he thought. I'll hurt her. I've hurt her. I'm stupid. I'm broken. I'm wrong. I can't even talk to her. I can't even talk. She'll hate me. She'll hate me because I can't...

“Cool,” she said. “Here. C'mere a second.”

She led him by the hand. She had a table, for drawing. It had a tilted top, and a chair. It folded when she didn't want it. He helped her put magic on the hinges because Hyacinth was always taking everything metal and maybe there wouldn't be hinges for very long. Like the easel. There was magic on the easel too.

There was a pad of paper on the table and a cup with some pencils and things. A paintbrush. A pen. She sat him in the chair and put a pencil in his hand. It was a red pencil.

“Draw me a flower, okay? Let me do this.” She leaned into his vision and she smiled. She had brown eyes and black hair and such a pretty smile. “I really like when you draw flowers.”

Yeah. She did. He stole her chalk pastels and he drew flowers all over the wall of his room like he was a crazy person and... and she liked that. She liked the flowers and she didn't mind that he stole the chalk pastels and she took him to buy more.

Flowers... He held the pencil in numb fingers and stared at the page. *I...*

She put her hands on his shoulders and touched her lips to the top of his head. Not really a kiss, just resting there for a minute, like he was a pillow. Her hands slid down and she began to undo his hair, humming softly.

...love grows where my Rosemary goes...

He drew a rose.

He felt her. Her arms went around his neck and shoulders and she held him that way for a little while. She unfastened his suspenders and pulled them down, because anything else would interfere with the drawing. She pulled up his shirt, and when her hands went into his lap and touched there, he responded instantly.

He drew, staring at his work. Deep blood-red in the creases between the petals, fading to almost-pink in the highlights. He blended with the tip of his smallest finger, leaving a faint stain there. The design seemed to draw him towards the centre, like a mirror or a shiny thing, except instead of reflection or light there was only softness and colour. The paper was smooth and thick, with a light texture that accepted the pencil like melted butter on toast.

She was warm and soft. She was around him, against him. Her hair brushed his cheek, and his neck. He could hear her breathing and she smelled like... not like flowers. Plain white soap, the kind that barely smelled like anything. And talcum powder. And her.

It's so pretty...

He drew, and she held him and stroked him through two layers of fabric. He liked that. Fabric. Softness. And touching. He did that sometimes, sometimes just the fabric, but sometimes through the fabric. Dresses, usually, but sometimes pants. The pants were wool, which was practical, and dark grey, because he only wore black and white and grey, but he always picked nice fabric that felt good, even if it was a little bit more expensive. The rough wool was thick and loose (but feeling quite a bit tighter), and beneath it the white cotton panties were smooth and close, almost like satin...

Milo gave a gasp, and the fingers he couldn't feel stuttered a jagged line he couldn't erase and that he had to turn into more shading.

I'm wearing ladies' underwear and she's going to see.

She knew about the dresses, being Ann and dresses, but not that. She didn't know he was in ladies' things when he was being *him* too. Panties, the briefest and simplest kind he could find, because bloomers and slips and petticoats couldn't be worn with trousers. And sheer black silk stockings. It just felt good.

It felt so good, and she was warm and soft and touching, and he thought he should push her away so she wouldn't know and he didn't want to. He wanted more touching. Needed. Needed and it was so good, but she might stop anyway when she felt what he was wearing... White cotton. And ruffled lace. She might hate him. She might yell at him.

And still he drew, because if he didn't draw he might think, and he might be afraid. More afraid. He needed the touching. Wanted. Needed. And the rose. Sometimes, for the space of a breath, he didn't remember about the panties, only the touching. And that was so good. So bad. Oh, but what if she hated him...

He was drawing rapid breaths through his open mouth and blushing furiously. His heart was hammering in his chest and every part of him throbbed, even to the fingertips. He could hear the blood in his ears. Touching. So wonderful. But she might...

Her hands had undone the top button on his trousers and slipped past it. She touched the smooth white cotton. And him.

Calliope snickered. "Hey, Milo, are these *girls'* undies?" She'd felt a small satin bow in the front and her fingers went around it, investigating.

Milo nodded, bright red, not daring to look up.

She hugged him tighter, and she pressed her cheek to his own. She was much cooler. She felt like snow. He could feel her smiling.

"Aw." And she kissed him. And her hands went around his head and stroked his hair. "That's super cute. Can I see?"

Milo's eyes widened, and he began a dazed smile, like a man with a very high fever who'd had maybe too much cold medicine. The kind where it had the percent alcohol by volume on the bottle.

You... like that?

He stood and turned and stared at her, smiling. His pants were open and his suspenders were dangling behind him like coattails and his shirt was hanging out.

Oh, wow, wait'll you see my silk stockings!

He took down his trousers. He didn't even bother about taking off his shoes. He didn't remember he *had* shoes. Or what "shoes" were, or what kind of function they might serve.

"Aw," Calliope said. "Those're nice." She leaned down and touched two fingers to the edge of one stocking, just below the knee, then she followed the seam down the back.

Milo thought:

RUN PROGRAM: "total bliss"

Running subroutine: "silk stockings are amazing"...

Running subroutine: "physical pleasure"...

Running subroutine: "desire"...

ERROR: Incompatible subroutine: "constant terror"

DELETE: "constant terror"

WARNING: "constant terror" IS PRIMARY OPERATING SYSTEM. REALLY DELETE (Y/N)?

Y

RUN PROGRAM: "i love calliope"

FILE CORRUPTED

ERROR: Missing subroutine: "trust"

ERROR: Missing subroutine: "understanding"

RUN PROGRAM ANYWAY, DAMN IT

SYSTEM FAILURE. HARD RESET (Y/N)?

Y

And then nothing. Blank. Awaiting input. Which there was, in the form of Calliope's bare leg rubbing up against his own in the stocking, while he stood there with his pants around his ankles and an erection poking out the smooth front of his white cotton panties and smiled like a loon.

Hello, World. Milo thought. *I don't have any idea who I am or what's happening. I am a completely new person who likes having his silk stockings stroked. Can I have that? I can?*

She pressed up against him and she brushed aside his shirt tails, and she put down a hand and stroked down the front of his underwear. She investigated one of the laced-edged leg holes, which had been somewhat stretched due to the circumstances, and she slipped inside and touched him.

SYSTEM FAILURE. RESTART (Y/N)?

OKAY. SURE.

UM, INVALID COMMAND...

She rested her chin on his chest and she smiled up at him while she held him and touched him. Her eyes were lidded with contentment. She liked the cotton panties and the silk stockings and the glazed, clueless expression with the steamed up glasses and the smile. Especially that. "Babe, I guess we better do that charm, huh?"

SEARCH QUERY: (what charm?)

NOT FOUND

SEARCH TERMS: brain:/users/milo/backupfiles or whatever QUERY: (what charm?)

CONTRACEPTIVE CHARM

YOU KNOW. FOR SEX.

Oh, yeah, right. There we go.

Still smiling, Milo nodded and waved a vague gesture. He felt a concentrated heat, which he guessed was the sensation of a million potential little lives being told to go get stuffed for right now.

It was just on the edge of painful. He might've overdone it a bit. He hoped he didn't break anything down there. He might want a kid *eventually*.

Whatever a "kid" was. Possibly something to do with making Calliope happy.

She took a step back and considered him with a frown. "Isn't there supposed to be glitter or something?"

Milo shook his head. He mimed tearing the packet open. That was just the ones they sold in stores. It was a second charm, on the wrapper, so you knew nobody tore it or poked a hole in it and used up the other charm you wanted already.

"Huh." She smiled and she drew him near again. "Okay. I trust you. I mean, obviously." She snickered,

and she stood on tiptoe so she could kiss the corner of his mouth. “Glorie scolded me about not using charms before, and I guess Lucy’s pretty happy being an only child and stuff.”

SEARCH QUERY: (lucy?)

Oh, yeah. A ‘kid.’ He thought Calliope already had one of those. Over there in the laundry hamper or something. Nice kid. Real quiet.

RUN PRAYER: “don’t cry, lucy, okay”

RUN PRAYER: “at least give me, like, ten minutes”

SEARCH QUERY: (does sex take +/- 10 minutes? I mean, if you’re not hiding from the police and have a real bed?)

NOT FOUND

Smiling, Calliope attempted to lead him to the bed. But he had forgotten about the existence of pants and shoes and also that he had some, and he fell on her. She laughed and apologized and helped him sort himself out. She left on the silk stockings, though.

She took off her own pants and shoes and abandoned them on the floor with his.

She had on boxer shorts with thin red and white stripes. That was kind of funny, that he had girl’s underwear and Calliope didn’t. But before he could do anything about the funny — *Laugh? Can I do that?* — she pressed him down on the bed and she rubbed her bare foot along his silk stocking and crashed his system again.

Hello, World, thought Milo.

Hello, Pretty Girl in the White Shirt, thought Milo. *I need how you’re touching me. Do you think you’d like to do that some more? You would?*

She crawled up him, touching, warm, and she carefully gathered his hair and laid it over the back of the pillow. “I really hate when guys lay on my hair,” she said. “I’ll try to be careful, okay?”

What? Okay? Yes. Everything was very okay, thank you. He nodded at her.

She stroked her fingers through it, petting him. “It’s really pretty.” She snickered. “It’s kinda nicer than mine. There’s way more of it.”

RUN PROGRAM: “milo is pretty”

Oh. Lovely. Yes.

He liked that one. He had that the first time he wore a dress. Being pretty. It was a very good feeling, very strong, but it tended to overload the...

He gasped and arched back against the mattress and the pillow. He shut his eyes, and all he could do was feel everything. Everything good. And pretty. So pretty.

Why couldn’t he stop thinking of roses? The dress had flowers, maybe...

No. Just one rose. A red rose drawn on paper. Because she asked him to. Not a dress making him

feel this way. A person.

Are you still there? He opened his eyes and checked. *Oh. Yay.*

“Oh, you like that, huh?” she said, grinning. She knew he liked it when she brushed his hair. She did not know how much he liked being pretty, not yet, so she attributed the reaction to the hair. She kissed him lightly, his forehead, his cheek, and she stroked his hair.

Ah... thought Milo. It wasn't that he couldn't speak, that he hated it and was afraid of it. He had forgotten all about that. But with it had gone the mechanical function of speech. It was too complicated. He was running programming on a much lower level, this input had stripped all his gears. If he could've purred, he would've done that. It would have been self-sustaining, automatic, like the smile and the erection.

He closed his eyes and liked everything. He'd never had touching like this. He'd shied away from it, human contact of all kinds, because he didn't know how to do it right and people reacted badly when he got close to them. He was too stiff. He didn't look them in the eye, or smile. He was too afraid of hurting. He held them limply or not at all, like he was a dead person. He never knew what to do with his hands. He was wrong.

He didn't know that now. He was a completely new person who needed all the touching in the world. But, that was why he needed the touching. And, that was why it lit him up like a Yule tree and he was incapable of sublimating it. He didn't have any pathways for it, or anywhere to put it. His brain was drowning in chemicals, happily. *Oh, gods, THIS is what we've been missing all this time! Keep it coming!*

She kissed his mouth, and she undid a couple of his shirt buttons and laid her hand on his chest. “Hey, Milo, don't go to sleep.”

He blinked open his eyes like that comatose lady in the fairy tale and smiled at her. *Milo? Okay. I'll be Milo if you want me to be.*

He wasn't totally sure what sort of a thing that was. He had an idea it made watches. And toasters.

He seemed to be missing some large and fundamental pieces of memory and identity here. He was vaguely aware of it, and *totally* okay with it. The touching and feeling good (and pretty) were eating up a whole lot of processing power, which he was happy to give them. He didn't really *need* “basic addition” or “street address.” Not at the moment. Or possibly ever, that would be okay too.

“Is it okay if I'm on top...?” she asked him.

He nodded, smiling, though he had no context for the question or what the answer might mean.

“...It's just been a while. I guess I'm kinda worried it'll hurt.”

The smile vanished. He shook his head.

I might hurt you?

REBOOT “constant terror” FROM BACKUP?

Wait... I don't know... Wait...

He didn't have the capacity to think about this. It was like drugs.

"Aw." She kissed him. She was still smiling. (That was good. The smiling. Also the kiss.) "It's okay, babe. I'll be really careful. Just let me be in charge of things, okay?"

Milo nodded gravely. *Pretty Girl in the White Shirt, you can be in charge of everything forever. That would be just perfect.*

She undid her buttons from the top down and became the Pretty Girl in the White Camisole with the Very Heavy and Obvious and Attractive Breasts. (Also, there were still boxer shorts going on under there somewhere, but they were not nearly as nice to look at, so Milo discounted them.)

Ah. Oh my gods. Why do you hide those?

He had glimpsed them occasionally, not even in a camisole, while she was feeding Lucy. He was aware of them. It was impolite to stare, but no one was particularly bothered about them because it was a practical application. It would be like being bothered by a bowl of cereal.

This, with the thin white camisole and the little darts of fabric poking out because of... well, because of *her*... and the touching and the wrinkled pile of shirt beside her on the bed, and the matching piles of pants and shoes on the floor... This was an entirely new context for Calliope's breasts, and about as far removed from a bowl of cereal as a raw coffee bean was from an iced latte with sprinkles.

I think... I think it might actually be okay for me to touch those. He closed his mouth and caught his upper lip between his teeth. He licked it. It tasted like sweat. *Maybe... Maybe... Sometime. If she says it's okay. You know. After a while. I think it might be nice.*

She snickered. She picked up his hand and put it against her.

SYSTEM FAILURE.

Hello... Hello, you.

"It's okay," she said. "You can play with them if you want to. They don't get sore anymore like they used to. Just be careful, 'cos I leak sometimes."

Pretty Girl, you can leak or do anything else you want to. You can turn into a bird if you like. I don't mind at all.

"They're pretty great, huh?" She turned sideways and pulled the camisole tight against her.

Milo nodded as if he desired to loosen his head from his shoulders.

"Yeah." She grinned. "I dunno if they're gonna stay like that. They're kind of a bother, sometimes Lucy doesn't want to even me out and I'm all lopsided, but I like how big they are." She took off the camisole, which dislodged Milo's hand (which had frozen where she put it). "What do you think?"

I think I have found my life's purpose. Milo does not make watches or toasters. Milo looks at this pretty girl in bed with him with the freckles and the beautiful smile and no shirt. That will be all I need, thank

you.

In his mind he was sketching her, blending the folds and shadows of her flesh against the paper, because he didn't dare pick up his hand and touch. Graphite and thick paper instead of skin against skin, things he was familiar with and understood, like drawing the rose. He couldn't... He couldn't parse this as another human being that he could hold, just line and perspective and shadow.

It would be really hard to draw those boxer shorts. All those lines. He wished she'd take them off. Then he could just... shade right there. It would be darker right there.

She moved his hands for him and she put them where he wanted them to be and he felt... Oh. Not smudged pencil and paper at all. Warmth and smooth skin and softness.

SYSTEM... SYSTEM...

I don't need a system. I'm not running a program. I'm here and this is happening.

Oh...

He lifted his hand. He smoothed back her hair and tucked it behind her ear. He brushed her cheek. *That is such a great smile. I wish I had a drawing of that smile. But I'm glad it's not a drawing.*

She kissed his fingers and she held his hand and nuzzled against it. "Super cute," she said.

He nodded.

She took off his glasses for him — *I wear glasses, apparently* — and his shirt — *and shirts. Glasses and shirts. That is what I wear. And nice silk stockings.*

"Oh," she said. She touched his arm, tracing a small circle.

Okay. Yes. That is really good too. Do that.

He had quite forgotten the scars. The remnants of old bite marks. They were from forever ago. Well, most of them. His arms were covered with them, little pink ovals and circles and half-circles, overlapping. From the wrists to just below the shoulders, where he couldn't reach. When Ann wore sleeveless dresses, she wore opera gloves that went at least that high.

He used to hurt himself a lot. They used to put him in the straitjacket to make him stop. He never rolled up his sleeves, or let people see him with his shirt off.

But he didn't remember about any of that now. He wasn't even looking. Why would he look at himself? There were so many nicer things to look at. He only felt her touching him, and that was good. He smiled.

"Babe? Does that hurt?" she asked him.

He shook his head. *No. You don't hurt me. I don't even know what being hurt is. I'm a brand-new person and all I know is you.*

"Okay," she said. She lay beside him, and worked an arm beneath him. (He shifted when he figured

that was what she wanted to do.) She held him and she stroked his arm. She kissed him. "You're really pretty," she said.

Oh. Yes. He closed his eyes and shivered.

She snickered. He felt her breath in his ear. "You like that? Pretty?"

He nodded.

She sat up, and then she slid on top of him. They were both still wearing underwear, which he thought he minded a little, but the fabric was thin and soft and she was warm on the other side of it and that part was great. It was like a sheer curtain over a stage. She planted her hands on his shoulders and leaned down. "Everything about you is pretty, Milo."

He felt hot, and light, like maybe he was a mage light that someone had overloaded with magic and he was just about to blow.

Or maybe he was a silk stocking. Or a corset!

Something pretty. Something really pretty. Pretty...

He nodded firmly, then he touched her on the nose, and he brushed her cheek with his hand. *You're pretty too.*

She laughed and she clasped his hand in both of her own. "Oh, I know *I* am."

Lucy spoke up from the bassinet, not a cry, just a warning shot, "Weh."

Calliope covered her grin with a hand. "I should be quiet."

Milo nodded. He touched a finger over his lips.

"Yeah, you too," Calliope said conspiratorially. She snickered and pulled down his hand so she could kiss him. Oh, that was good.

She got to be in charge of everything and he let her put him however she wanted him. She got rid of their underwear, but she said she was sorry about the panties and she held them up and said how she liked them and he liked that so much he kind of lost track of what she was doing for a little while. She left on the silk stockings and she touched them sometimes and he was starting to feel like maybe he might not make it to the sex part if she kept doing that. He thought she might not like that, even if he wasn't running "constant terror" anymore, but he wasn't totally sure. She kept smiling and touching, even though she could probably tell.

She had something in a tin, like makeup, only not makeup. It smelled faintly vanilla, which assailed his sharpened senses like being held face-down in a bucket of potpourri. That wasn't *bad*, though. A little bit dizzy. He wasn't sure what...

Okay. Yeah. That was what. He totally understood that now. He blushed somehow hotter. It was cold and sticky but only for a second. Then it was... oh... oh... okay... Hey. If she wanted him to come right now, she could just say so!

He probably would, if she just said so. She wouldn't even have to keep touching.

She wiped her hand on her crumpled white shirt, which was still on the bed. "I guess I hafta do laundry anyway," she said, smiling.

Laundry? Why, whatever sort of a thing might that be, Pretty Girl? Nevermind that he'd spent about seven years of his childhood doing laundry in a workhouse. He had no context for "laundry" whatsoever. Ask him about silk stockings and orgasms, though! He could do a whole thesis!

She sat on top of him again, and she picked up his hand and put it on her breast and he lost hold of silk stockings and orgasms too. She showed him how to touch there, moving him. He stopped and left his hand where she'd put it when she let go.

She snickered at him. "You're kinda like a paintbrush." He was supple and responsive, but she had to put him exactly where she wanted him and swish him around. She was pretty good with a paintbrush, but she'd never had to use one on *her*.

Well, except for that one party, but that was a while back.

He smiled and nodded to her. He didn't know what she was saying, but he liked that she was saying it. A "paintbrush," that was something to do with drawing roses. And "you," that was something about drawing roses too. And touching. All that touching. Sensation.

"Me..." I'm the thing that feels things. Yes.

"Is it still okay?" she asked him.

He nodded. *Everything is okay forever, thank you. Especially the part where there's sex.*

She put a hand down and she moved him. He was stiff and it was awkward, like she couldn't see what she was doing. Maybe a little like a paintbrush, whatever that was. She put him somewhere warm and snug and he knew that was exactly where he wanted to be, and she knew it too. She settled, accepting him, and she sighed. "How's that?" she asked him.

He shivered. It... It wasn't like silk. He had silk, and he'd used it like that. It started cold and it got wet and sticky and it was not very nice. Not *there*. This was better than silk.

I can't be a silk stocking. I must be a corset. A corset made of this. All over.

It was soft, and so, so warm. And slick.

That stuff that smells like vanilla is wonderful. I need some of that.

I need this.

He tipped his head back and pressed closer, lifting his hips. He couldn't escape the mattress and bedclothes, but he slid inside of her and... and it was so much better than anything. To be there. Close there. Moving there. He couldn't cry out, he didn't know how his voice worked, but he drew in a little gasp and every fine hair on his body stood on end.

She laughed softly, he felt her. "Okay?"

He picked up his hands and he signed OK! at her with *both*.

"Cute," she declared him.

Oh, I think she likes me... Ah!

She moved against him. Closer — *oh, yes* — then away.

No. No, don't go... He brushed her hip with a hand, but he didn't dare pull her back.

She didn't go. She only pulled back a little so she could come closer again. It was like stroking him. Stroking her too. This feeling. Like silk but better than silk. Fabric he'd never felt before. Closeness. Contact. Togetherness. *Oh, touch me, touch you, touch me...*

He gasped again, louder this time, a cry drawn inwards instead of let out. He arched, shuddered and then dropped his head back on the pillow.

She stopped and sat back comfortably on his legs, what would've been his lap if he had the capacity to sit up. "Aw, Milo. Did you come?" She was still smiling, her hair was just a little mussed.

He smiled back dazedly. This was a smile beyond a fever and too much cold medicine, this was the expression of a man with a glowing coal of pleasure where his brain used to be. Apparently, the surgery was a success.

He managed a nod, lolling against the pillow. *Oh, yes, thank you. It was wonderful. I feel wonderful. I think I don't have bones anymore.*

That seemed to rule out being a corset, but it lent the silk stocking theory some credence!

"Super cute," she said. She stroked his hair, and she didn't pull back from him. "You mind touching me a little so I can too?"

His mouth dropped open. He sat up and wedged himself that way with his elbows. He seemed to have found his bones again, and he felt a growing heat that made him wonder if he was going to come again too. *You mean I can still touch you? I don't have to be done?*

When he was upstairs in his closet with the dresses and shoes, when he was done he could hold them, and curl up with them, and sleep. Sometimes he did, even if they might stain. It felt safe. But he was alone and there wasn't anything more to do. Now there was this other person, this pretty girl, and she was asking him to touch her and make her feel good. She was offering *more*.

He nodded frantically. *Oh, please, let's do that. Please say I can.* He reached up a shaking hand and he touched her hair. Just a few strands. It felt like electricity. She touched his hand and she nuzzled against it, then she examined it.

"Yeah, your nails are pretty short," she said. She kissed his palm.

She slid off of him and that felt cold, like loss. But she drew her knees up and curled up beside him and she was warm there and she didn't go and she said he didn't have to be done. "Here. I'll show you."

There was no earthly reason his fingers ought to be more sensitive than anything else he had going on down there. Maybe they were just smarter, or more used to touching things. Whatever the reason, with her hand guiding him, he felt more detail this way. There was soft crinkly hair and that was all he could see, but when he felt her, she was deep and folded and complicated like... Well, like a rose. Or a dress with a lot of ruffles, but a warm, soft one.

She tried to show him where to touch, and how, but it was pretty complicated...

Pretty... Complicated...

...and he was in no way experienced or confident. It seemed he was a little bit less than a paintbrush, in this context, but when he got something right she would say, "Mm-hm. There," or if he got it even *more* right she would sigh and point her toes. That made him feel all fuzzy inside. He was full of warm water and glitter, like some kind of weird novelty snowglobe. Greetings From The Bedroom.

(They'd have to sell him in a plain brown wrapper because he looked like a naked person.)

Finally, blushing, she said, "Babe, I think I'd better. I don't know how long Lucy's going to give us."

Whoever "Lucy" is, I hope she falls off a bridge, Milo thought, but only briefly.

"...You can just touch me everywhere else, okay? I'd like that." She smiled.

His eyes widened. *I... I can do what now?*

He looked at her. All of her. She was small. Not skinny. Proportionate. Round at the bottom and at the top. She was darker than him, but he was almost the same colour as a soda cracker. He was like one of those fancy pet fish where you could see all the organs under translucent scales. She was sort of golden. She had red marks on her belly, and some on her breasts — like scars, like lightning — but they didn't seem to hurt her. She was lying on her side, propped up on one elbow. She was warm, she felt warm to him, but she had goosebumps too. Her hair was dark, on her head, and the fuzzy triangle between her legs. Her eyes were dark. Her nipples too. It was a nice contrast. It'd be fun to draw (especially her breasts, that was almost like a *cartoon*), but it wasn't a drawing. He could touch her. Anywhere. She *asked* him to.

Yes, little boy, you can have the pony AND the princess dress for Yule. And how would you like some ice cream?

He nodded to her. For a brief moment he wasn't even smiling. He sort of didn't believe it. Then he did believe it, but he couldn't process it. When he finally managed to get his brain (or whatever he had going on in there) around it, the smile came back and it was *great*.

She put her hand down but she didn't do anything. She looked distracted. "Wait, I better be quiet..." She cast about for anything handy. There was the shirt but that was kind of thin...

Milo fully supported the Pretty Naked Girl's decision to be quiet or whatever else she wanted. He

would have helped her if he had any idea what she was trying to do. He did not expect her to pick up the corner of the pillow and put it between her teeth, but he also found that he approved of this decision, especially when she guided his hand to her breast and began to touch herself.

Um, he thought, unashamedly staring. He wasn't totally sure he had eyes. He might've been absorbing this like a sponge, just soaking in it.

I really, really, really need to remember this, because I need to dream about it later. And I'm going to masturbate about it.

Is it possible I can have sex about it? he wondered. If he said he wanted to, would she let him again? Not just this part, but all of it? Was it possible she might... might even like it? Was this a thing that could just keep happening?

She made a soft snicker against the pillow. She was leaning on her left elbow, and she shifted so she could move that hand, and put it on his hand, and move his hand *for* him. "Mm?"

Oh, my gods, wait. I'm still having sex about it NOW!

She said she wanted him to touch her. She said he didn't have to be done.

Can I really?

Cautiously, he stroked her shoulder. He wanted to pet her hair, but he still had some vanilla stuff on his hand and he thought she wouldn't like that in her hair. She smiled at him around the pillow. He could see it between her lips and he knew she still had her teeth in it. He sort of wished she would put her teeth in *him*, but he wasn't sure how to ask. It was good just seeing her, though, and touching...

He leaned forward, carefully, and kissed her mouth. He could only get the corner of it, because of the pillow, and he couldn't do anything wet or loud or involved, but he was pretty sure that was still kissing, like a whisper is still talking.

"Mm," she said, and she closed her eyes.

He sat up so he could have both hands, and he leaned against her, and he touched what he was looking at. *This is pretty, here. And this.* (He still didn't touch her hair, though.) Some places got more of a reaction than others and he revisited them. Her neck and shoulders. Her breasts. Her hip and the small of her back. He didn't get a chance to narrow it down too much (it was apparent she liked having her nipples stroked) because soon she shuddered and groaned against the pillow and... and something happened.

"Oh, shoot," Calliope said. She sat up urgently and crossed her arms over her chest, putting pressure there. "Did I get any on the bed?" She'd have to wash the sheets if she did. That stuff wasn't like sex. It didn't air out. It just started to smell funny.

Darn. There goes my afterglow.

"I'm sorry, babe," she said. "It's not your fault. I... Milo?"

He had some on his hands. Because he'd been touching her there. Because she liked being touched

there. She said, "Mm," and she wriggled and she pointed her toes. That meant liking. So he touched there.

He was breathing hard through his open mouth, one ragged breath after another, and staring glassily at nothing with dark, dilated eyes. He'd looked like that after she accidentally fed him those hash brownies. She was so sorry about those brownies, she should've left a better note.

"Milo, did I scare you?" she said. "It's okay, I promise..."

He wasn't scared. She couldn't know it, but he'd looked like this when he drew the flowers all over the wall in his room upstairs, too. Something he wanted to do, but he had a vague idea he shouldn't, but he did it anyway.

He hooked all four fingers of his left hand into his mouth and sucked and tasted. He closed his eyes.

He smiled.

Well, *that* was okay, then. She smiled too. "Hey, so how is it? I thought about trying it on cereal but it seemed like too much trouble. And I don't have, like, a lot. I still have to do formula for Lucy and stuff."

Milo swayed subtly back and forth, like he was keeping time to some pretty music. He only did it for a little, just to get it across. It wasn't music. It wasn't even really a taste (there hadn't been much on his hand, a ghost of sweetness, and it was all gone now). It was just... this feeling.

It was something to have. It was something she'd given him and now he had it inside. It was like the chalk pastels — he thought that later, when he could think. It was more than touching. It was... *taking*. She gave it and he took it. Maybe he stole it, but it was okay. He needed this like he needed colour, maybe *more* than he needed colour. They took colour away from him, but he'd had it for a little. This... This feeling inside — *Love? Safety? Care? Just someone who cares?* — he'd *never* had this.

But now, now there was this feeling, a glowing wire pulled right through the centre of him. He had been hungry for a long time, so long he didn't even know what that emptiness was anymore, and now here was something to fill him up.

(There were people that loved him and wanted to keep him safe and take care of him, there had been for a long time, but he didn't really know that. He didn't understand it, the part where something good about him that people didn't just like and tolerate. The part where they wouldn't turn on him and abandon him the first time he screwed up, and that would be his fault. This feeling didn't need understanding like that. He just felt it. It felt good.)

"Hey, do you think you'd *like* some formula?" she said. "I could do you a bottle." She snickered. "I think that'd be kinda cute."

That might possibly be nice, or it might not fill the same emptiness inside, but he was in no shape to consider it. He wasn't parsing human language very well and he had only a vague idea of a voice like music. It made him think of roses. He was full of milk and roses.

He sat there with eyes closed and a smile, and a rock hard erection, still sucking his fingers. He made no attempt at a reply, but no further reply was necessary. She scooted closer and dipped her hand into his lap. She stroked him. He shifted and sighed.

“Milo?” she asked him. “You want some more?”

Yes. I want more. I want more of this. I want more of you. I want more touching, and feeling. I want more of this feeling. I want more fullness. I want more warmth. I want more and I want it again and I want it forever.

Thank you for being more. Thank you for being so much more... and letting me have some.

He nodded.

“I probably have a little,” she said. “I guess Lucy won’t mind sharing. I hafta do bottles for her anyway, she won’t mind another one.”

Milo wasn’t really hearing words, just rhythm and sound. It was good, though. Pretty. It seemed to be some kind of addendum to the part where she said he could have more.

She curled up with him, cradling him and resting her lower back against the headboard. She gave him her breast and he took it. It took him a little bit of shifting and investigation before he could get what he wanted out of it. (He was already getting what he wanted out of this, more than he ever wanted, but he still wanted more.)

“Is that good?” she asked him.

He didn’t have words, and trying to make signs would mean taking a hand away from her. He didn’t want that. Maybe it wasn’t so important to say. He snuggled closer. He just did that.

“It feels nice,” she noted. Not that Lucy didn’t feel nice (occasionally she bit down and did not) but this was different nice. It was nice to be something besides a bottle-warmer and a diaper-changer and a meal. It was nice to be sexy again.

I am not a hotel and a restaurant, she thought, snickering. I am an amusement park. ...With free buffet.

Milo was really nice about it, too. He didn’t mind about the stretch marks or the contraceptive charm or being careful. He didn’t mind about her breasts being all weird and leaking (obviously). He didn’t mind about *anything*.

You are nice, she thought, combing her fingers through his hair. I don’t know why you said that about getting married and not being Ann anymore and no more dresses so we could be normal, but you’re nice. She liked knowing that. She liked knowing things about him. That he liked having his hair stroked, and being called pretty. That it didn’t hurt him when she touched where he had scars. That nursing turned him on like nobody’s business.

I guess we better do this again, so I can know more things about you. She smiled. She played with him. She wasn’t totally sure if she could get him to come again, but she wanted to see if she could. *I mean, it’s not like you can talk to me.*

“You’re pretty, Milo,” she said.

He shivered.

When she didn't have any left and he was sticky with liking it, she wrapped her arms around him and he wrapped his arms around her and he still didn't have to be done.

Maybe I don't ever have to be done, he thought. He held tighter and rested his cheek on her shoulder.
Maybe I can just have this. If she lets me...

He closed his eyes.

The story continues at soldier-on.com!