

TOAST WITH JELLY

THE TRAGEDY OF A LESBIAN CONFUSED

A novel by

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Earth Wise Books

ELECTRONIC EDITION

SECOND EDITION

First edition published by Raular Publishing 2009

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“There comes a time in some people’s lives when they feel like actors playing a role for which someone has changed the story line.”

# One

Tiny raindrops that started as a misty haze progressively transformed into pelting rain as Pam pushed her way through the crowded city streets. She was late for work again.

Stopping, briefly to catch her breath, she wiped the drenched stray strands of her thick auburn hair that escaped the tight knot on the back of her head from her equally wet brow as she studied the flashing sign over the doorway of the run down diner on the opposite side of the street.

The “e” in Pete was dark, turning ‘Pete’s Diner’ into ‘Pet’s Diner’. Pam grimaced as she watched Chuck forge his way through the threatening torrent and shove his way past the clouded glass door. A regular customer, Chuck was a perfect example why ‘Pete’s Place’ should actually be called ‘Pet’s Place’. He was a pig if ever she’d met one.

Lowering her umbrella, she hunched her shoulders against the elements while merging with the crowd that hovered as one while crossing the street. Maybe if she showed up soaked from the rain, Pete’s antagonistic growling about her tardiness would be less severe.

It was worth a try.

It was ten years ago to the day that Pam walked into Pete’s Diner; a shy introvert looking for a job to help pay her way through college. The fact that her mother, Ida, was against the idea was what gave her the incentive to venture into such a seedy looking place to begin with. She and Ida hadn’t agreed on life for some time now.

Ida, who’d received an enormous insurance settlement after the death of Pam’s father and a not-too shabby divorce settlement from a second marriage after that, saw no reason for Pam to pay her own way through school. The pain of her father’s death, compounded by Ida’s seemingly brief mourning

period the led to an even briefer marriage to that beast of a stepfather she'd brought home with no warning he'd existed; let alone verifying he was husband and step father material tore away any love Pam may have harbored deep within the recesses of her heart for her mother. She wanted nothing to do with Ida or her money; especially the money that came from the beast. He was the primary reason for her hatred and mistrust in men.

Pam left home as soon as she could, even though Ida was divorced by then and the beast was gone. She was resentful that it took her mother so long to open her eyes and believe her when she complained about her new husband, Chester's, disgusting pedophile ways. She wondered if Ida had not walked in on them on one of the many nights Chester decided to rape her, if she would have ever believed that her beloved husband was capable of being so diabolical.

Ida's gut wrenching remorse and violent actions to-ward Chester came too late for Pam. Her mother's blind-ness where her vile stepfather was concerned and refusal to listen to Pam's pleas for help drove a thick, un-wavering wedge between them. Ida questioned if it could ever be removed.

Pam's college diploma rested on a shelf in the back of her closet and her work routine remained the same. For one full decade, still shy and introverted, she showed up faithfully to serve breakfast in Pete's run down greasy diner with the faulty sign and undesirable clientele.

Damp wind raced past her in as she slipped, relatively unnoticed, through behind the thick glass door and into the diner's small foyer. Pete was barking orders at Sylvia, while she pushed her buxom body through a small crowd of people waiting at the register to pay their bill. Sylvia spotted Pam and took just a brief moment to assess her appearance. She shook her head and clucked her tongue as she sped past to a crowded booth in the corner of the room where she dispensed the dishes from her overly laden tray.

Pam searched the room, that was bursting with the noise and commotion of blue collar workers gearing up for the day, and realized the other server, Caroline, was missing. This meant they were short not just her help, but Caroline's as well. Poor Sylvia was working all alone and the dining area was packed.

Guilt for her laziness and oversleeping swept through Pam as she rushed to the back room to hang her coat and tuck away her handbag and umbrella.

"Good morning Sleeping Beauty. I hope we didn't disturb you this morning," Pete growled.

His sarcasm and harsh tone rubbed Pam raw to the bone. She often questioned why she kept coming to this flea bag of a diner to work and suffer the verbal attacks Pete flung at his on a daily basis; not to mention the crap she took from the customers.

Although, she had to admit that she deserved Pete's chastising today. She had no excuse for being late, except for the fact that she stayed out late with Fiana and overslept.

Pam nodded briskly as she silently swept past Pete to grab her apron and an order pad. He scowled, shook his head, and turned his attention back to the home fries that were piled high as they sizzled in a pool of lard on the grill.

"It's a madhouse in here today. It's bad enough with one of you out, but two... damn," Sylvia complained as she slammed several cups on the counter and immediately started filling them with coffee. "Chuck just sat down in your station and we can split Caroline's. Starting at table seven... I go up, you go down."

"Shit. Why do I always get stuck with Chuck?" Pam groaned.

"He loves ya, baby," Sylvia chuckled as she loaded her tray with the filled coffee cups and sped on past Pam. "Chop! Chop! Time's wasting!"

Pam took her time making her way to the booth where Chuck sat chewing on a toothpick. She could feel his beady green eyes leering at her every move. She stopped to check on an obese dark haired woman who was so deeply engrossed in eating her breakfast that she didn't notice Pam's approach and merely grunted a "no" when Pam asked her if she needed anything.

Chuck stretched back into the booth and sipped on the water the busboy delivered.

"What can I get you today, Chuck?" she asked reluctantly.

Chuck replaced the toothpick with an e-cigarette. He smoked it languidly while he looked Pam up and down.

"Just coffee today, sweet thing," he said in a sultry, almost lazy manner before adding, "and you, if you're up for it."

A wave of repulsion swept over her from head to toe as his words assaulted her ears. He had no idea she was a lesbian. No one at the diner did. Even if she was straight, there was no way she could ever be attracted to this middle aged leech. Hideous strands of perilously thin gold chains hung gaudily against his puffy, hair laden chest in the 'V' that was created by his shirt which was buttoned only half way up his oversized belly. Some buttons were missing at the top near his collar, but she doubted that made a difference. Buttons or no buttons, she was sure he would still expose himself in his ridiculous attempt to look sexy.

The gold on Chuck's wrists was equally thin and tawdry and his thick burly fingers touted even more cheap gold. He'd struggled to cover his balding head with long stringy hair that he pulled back in a short pony tail. Pam sighed. Chuck was the epitome of ridiculous.

"Booths are for food orders, which you well know," she grumbled without looking up from her order pad. "If you only want coffee, you'll have to sit at the counter."

“Then give me some toast with jelly, along with the coffee. Okay doll?” he said with a revolting, syrupy, sweetness and a smile displaying crooked teeth that were severely abused by years of coffee and poor dental care.

No matter how many times Chuck entered the diner and forced Pam to wait on him, she couldn't get used to his creepy demeanor. It was a never ending struggle to subdue the shudder that came naturally whenever she looked at him.

“Whole wheat,” Chuck continued. “Make the toast whole wheat with butter. Lots of butter.”

His words trailed after her as she hurried toward the kitchen and as far away from him as she could get.

Chuck looked over at the obese woman as she noisily ate her bacon without a care. Put off by his intrusive stare, she hesitated and gave a brief, threatening glower before returning her attention to her morning feast.

Pam returned with a half full pot of coffee, a small pitcher with half and half, and a heavy duty porcelain cup.

“Careful,” she mumbled without looking directly at him, “the coffee is really hot.”

The thought of pouring it in his lap, instead of in the mug, brought an inner smile that quickly faded when she set the steaming cup of liquid on the table in front of him and he grabbed her wrist.

“The coffee's not the only hot thing in this place, is it?” he asked in a voice that was just above a whisper.

Pam yanked her arm free and, ignoring the insinuation behind Chuck's remark, grabbed a menu, and flipped it open.

“Well, there's a Mexican section on the menu that's pretty damned spicy. Knock yourself out,” she spat.



Slamming the menu on the table in front of him, she locked eyes with his. It was her sincerest hope that her expression relayed the disgust and repulsion she felt.

Their brief silence was broken by his deep throated chuckle when he said, "Thanks, the toast will do just fine today."

"Suit yourself," she tossed over her shoulder as she wasted no time in making herself busy at a task that would take her into the kitchen and away from this repulsive excuse for a human.

She flinched when she saw Pete's angry eyes glowering at her while he waived the phone's receiver in her direction. He hated it when she received calls on his time. Today it must have been doubly annoying for him.

"How many times have I said no phone calls during work, huh?" he demanded. "Every day it's the same thing. Every damned day! I should fire your ass. One day I will. I'll fire your damned ass. Keep it up... you'll see! Son-of-a-bitch! No one listens to me. No one gives a damn what I say around here."

She'd barely grasped the phone from his outstretched hand before he released it and returned to the grill. Placing the receiver reluctantly to her ear, she shoved a finger in her free ear to help drown out Pete's loud vocalizing of his dissatisfaction with her this morning that, combined with the normal clanging noised of dishes, pots and pans before softly saying, "Hello?"

"When are you coming home?" came the low tone of Fiana's sultry Russian voice as it purred through the receiver; sending sensual chills up Pam's spine.

"I just got here," Pam cooed as her body visibly relaxed.

"I miss you. Come home. Come home and make love to me," Fiana demanded with pouty seduction.

Pam shuddered with sheer delight as her lover's words caressed her. She had never known anyone who could touch her in the way that Fiana could.

She recalled the shiver that ran down her spine when she met Fiana three years ago. It was at a gallery that was showing Fiana's photography. Appalled at the concept of lesbianism, Pam resisted her body's natural reactions to Fiana's alluring presence, but, with time and patience, Fiana was able to help Pam step past her boundaries and into a new world of sexual awareness and self-satisfaction. Within a matter of months, they were nesting together in an apartment in Greenwich Village and were blissfully oblivious to the world around them.

"Are you drinking already?" Pam asked with concern.

She worried about Fiana's addictive behavior and inability to be alone for extended periods of time. Lately, it was getting progressively worse and more extreme.

"I miss you," Fiana whined. "Do I have to be drinking to miss you? I'm lonely. When are you coming home?"

"What am I going to do with you? You know I have to work," Pam asked in a tone that was far from scolding, but firm enough to set Fiana off.

Fiana's words slurred forcefully through the telephone receiver as she grumbled, "The hell you do. You don't need to work. You never need to work. You just want to be away from me, I think. That's it, isn't it?"

Pam's attention was pulled back to her surroundings by Pete's bellowing voice.

"Toast, God damn it, toast," he roared before adding emphatically, "I'm gonna fire your ass!"

"Toast sounds delicious. Bring me some toast," Fiana cooed, "with jelly, lots and lots of jelly... Grape... or strawberry. Either will do."

"She's pushing me!" Pete bellowed when Pam didn't immediately respond. "Toast! ... God damn it, now!" His words echoed through the kitchen.

Pam had worked with Pete long enough to recognize when he'd reached his limit.

"I have to go," she said in a low, urgent tone.

Sylvia walked past her with her arms precariously supporting a tray that was loaded with plates of food. Pam often marveled at her co-worker's ability to carry such a heavy load on a consistent basis.

"Give it a rest Cookie. You're not firing anyone," Sylvia barked at Pete before leaning closely to Pam and speaking softly in her ear. "You'd better get your buns moving or Cookie might surprise us all and follow through with some of that hot air he's always spewing out of that big gut of his."

"I hate that place. Why do you stay?" Fiana complained, bitterly.

"I'll be home soon. Order in something. I have to go," Pam said firmly before placing the receiver back in its cradle without waiting for Fiana to respond. She hated it when Fiana got in these moods, which were becoming more and more frequent.

She made her way to the serving line to pick up Chuck's order of toast. Her hand was just touching the plate when Pete grabbed it and picked up the toast; waiving it ferociously in the air while growling. Satisfied that his message was conveyed, Pete dropped the cold and soggy toast back onto the worn and scratched up plate and went about his business, leaving her to figure out how she was going to explain to Chuck that the cook was mad and wouldn't replace his order of cold toast with a hot one.

## Two

Pam walked briskly toward the bus stop. Her day had been borderline unbearable. In an effort to appease Pete and get back into his good graces, she'd agreed to work a double shift. Her feet and legs were numb from the exertion of waiting on customers; the majority of which she was convinced were the dregs of humanity. She longed for a hot bath, soft sheets, and her head cradled in the crook of Fiana's arm.

The sun was just settling behind the skyline when she reached her destination. A small crowd formed as the time for the bus to arrive grew near. Pam made her way toward the bench. It was laden with people, but she could at least lean against it to take some of the load off her feet and ease a bit of the discomfort she felt while waiting. An elderly lady eyed her suspiciously while solidifying her grip on her bags and an old man sitting beside her raised his eyebrows seductively. She looked away with disgust. Men were all the same, no matter how young or old.

The squealing of brakes and the smell of fuel and heated automotive grease permeated the air as the bus pulled to a stop. Pam positioned herself in line to get on. The musky scent of the young Asian man standing next to her managed to filtrate the toxic bus smell and capture her senses. Not since her brief attraction to a high school classmate, Thomas, had she reacted in such a powerful way to the scent of a man. Her body tingled from head to toe. She found it pleurably sensual, yet unsettling.

Pam coughed in an effort to camouflage the reaction that she felt was obvious to all as she stole a closer look at the man. He stood a few inches taller than her. Tall enough that she could wear heels, but still a comfortable height to allow them to look into each other's eyes. Even under his light weight jacket and loose fitting shirt she could tell that his body was tight and hard. His muscles

looked well formed, but not bulky like a body builder or a wrestler. They looked more like those belonging to a runner or a swimmer. The strong Adam's apple in his throat moved with every breath he took and his brilliant white teeth flashed alluringly as he smiled at her.

Realizing that she was openly staring, or better yet, ogling, the stranger, Pam quickly climbed onto the bus and rushed to the empty seat in the back. Her face burned scarlet with humiliation at her own actions. What was she thinking? She didn't even like men! It had to be the musk cologne he was wearing. Yes, that was it. It was the cologne.

Embarrassment consumed her as she watched him make his way toward the back of the bus. She shrunk her body as far down into the seat as she could and stared out of the window, praying that he would pass her by. Her prayers were answered when he positioned himself in an empty seat a few rows in front of her. She couldn't see him, which was good, but his closeness still allowed her to revel in his sensual scent for the duration of her trip.

His stop was a few blocks before her own. She watched his feet plant firmly on the pavement as he nimbly hopped off the last step of the bus and it drove off. She looked away quickly when he turned toward her window and briefly caught her staring at him, but she looked back as the bus drove off, since she was certain he wouldn't be able to tell from a distance. His confident swagger lingered in her mind's eye long after the bus turned the corner.

## Three

Pam almost dropped her tray as she ploughed her way through the diner's crowded dining room toward her customer's table. She'd slept poorly the night before; partly from the aches and pains in her body and partly because she couldn't shed the image and scent of the Asian man on the bus. Her body was almost numb as she delivered the food and then turned to the booth next to them where Chuck sat, doing his best to look sexy while he smoked his e-cigarette.

"What will it be today, Chuck," she asked while waving smoke from her face. "That's a bad habit, you know.

They'll be outlawing it in public soon."

"It's vapor," he said smugly. "Haven't you ever seen an e-cigarette?"

"Whatever, they're offensive," she said as she kept her eyes on her order pad while she waited for him to answer.

"How about you, baby. Are you a bad habit?" he said coyly. "Tell me you're on the menu today, eh?"

"Place your order Chuck. I'm tired and I'm busy," she practically spat. "What'll you have?"

Pam was in no mood for this letch and she didn't care if it showed.

"Well, give me toast with jelly, coffee, and a large orange juice," he murmured.

Chuck's hurt tone sounded real, but she just didn't care. Maybe now he would sit in someone else's section.

"You got it," Pam said in a tone that was crisper than she'd intended.

She felt a small pang of regret as she watched Chuck's sad body wince from the sting of her mannerism. Oh, why her, damn it! Why did he pick her anyway?

“Don’t let it get to ya, Pamie,” Sylvia assured her in a low tone as she passed by. “He’s a harmless old coot. He’s been coming here as long as I can remember. He’ll give up on you as soon as some fresh meat starts working here. Hang in there.”

Sylvia had a knack for being in just the right place at the right time to hear and help out when need be.

“Meat? I’m meat? Christ, I hate this place,” Pam grumbled. She wondered if maybe it was time to listen to Fiana and quit working at Pete’s sleazy diner.

Sylvia led Pam by the elbow to the edge of the room and said in a tone that was just above a whisper, “You need a break from this place. I have another job and it pays a lot better than this one. I could get you in. Are you interested?”

Sylvia held down another job? Pam couldn’t believe her ears. Heck, she could barely keep up with the woman at this one, and then she goes off and works at another.

She found this truly amazing. “How much better?”

A loud slamming sound came from the kitchen followed by Pete’s bellowing, “Sylvia!”

Sylvia stood in nervous defiance of Pete’s demanding howling.

“Today’s my last day here,” she said excitedly. “I’m leaving this dump. If you’re interested, tell me now.”

Pam couldn’t believe it. Sylvia always seemed like she loved her job. Yet, here she was telling Pam she was leaving and calling the place a dump. Pam wondered if acting was Sylvia’s second job, because she was certainly good at it.

“Now!” Pete’s bark grew more urgent.

Pam listened to Pete's slamming and roars and then looked over at Chuck, who was twirling his e-cigarette between his fingers. She knew that it was time for her to make a change.

"What time and where?" she asked with determination.

Sylvia smiled smugly. She'd promised Marty a second girl that night and hadn't much luck recruiting any of her friends. Pam was a gift from heaven. She'd be in Marty's good graces for certain now.

"Ten o'clock tonight... right here," she said happily before rushing off to the kitchen.

Pam grabbed a cup and the full pot of freshly brewed coffee as she moved toward Chuck's booth. She was so engrossed in her own thoughts that she didn't notice Chuck as he reached over to stroke her arm. Startled, she jerked and coffee spilled in his lap.

Chuck leapt out of the booth while howling and jumping up and down. Silence filled the diner and all eyes were on Pam as she tried her best to subdue his angry wails while offering him a towel. The commotion drew Pete out of the kitchen, but he only stood and watched with his hands on his thick hips until he was satisfied that the situation was in hand. Pam looked over at him briefly as he shook his head and returned to the kitchen. He could be heard mumbling obscenities to himself as he disappeared behind the swinging door.

Something in her snapped. It was as if she'd reached her break point. She just couldn't stand being in that hell hole one more minute. Slamming the coffee pot down on Chuck's table, she was mindless of the hot brew that splashed onto its surface as she marched behind the counter and grabbed her purse from underneath. Tearing her apron from her waist, she tossed it on a nearby stool, grabbed her coat from its hook near the kitchen, and walked out without saying a word.



Although she made her way down the street with brisk determination, it without much sense of direction. She needed to get as much space between herself and the diner as she could.

Her agitation eventually subsided and she chuckled to herself at the fact that she'd finally fulfilled her fantasy of dumping steaming hot coffee in creepy Chuck's lap. She slowed her pace and allowed herself the luxury of inspecting the contents of the store windows she always rushed past in order to catch the bus. She always loved window shopping. She found it incredibly relaxing.

When she stopped to admire a handbag in the window of a small boutique, she gasped when she spotted the reflection of the sexy Asian man from the night before. He was staring right at her! She boldly locked eyes with his through the glass reflection as she stood frozen in place. Her heart raced with excited anticipation while struggling to subdue the responses her body gave to his nearness. There was something about this man that she couldn't explain, not even to herself.

A bus pulled up behind her and he moved to get on it. Pam hesitated only briefly before springing into action and leaping onto the bus just before it closed its doors. There were no seats left so she grabbed a strap and positioned herself for the ride. She looked toward the front of the bus to see its destination. Her eyes flew open wide when she realized she was on a bus that was headed for the Lincoln Tunnel. What was she thinking by being so rash? What came over her?

The Asian man was studying her from his seat. Noticing her discomfort, he stood up and tapped her on her shoulder. She looked at him for a moment while she struggled with the physical sensations that his touch induced. His brilliant smile was accentuated by a pair of dark, kindly eyes as he silently clutched her elbow and led her to his seat. Her body trembled as she smiled

gratefully and dropped her body onto the torn vinyl with its filthy stuffing protruding out.

The man returned to hold the strap Pam had only recently held and looked away as the bus jolted down the street; seemingly disinterested in her presence.

The bus stopped and started a few times, but Pam never moved. Since she was sitting behind him, it gave her the opportunity to admire his profile openly. She finally came to her senses at the last stop before the Lincoln Tunnel. If she didn't get off now she'd be finding herself in New Jersey; a place that she had no knowledge of or desire to visit. She got up quickly to make her exit. Their bodies brushed as he stepped aside to allow her to pass. She prayed he didn't notice how affected she was by their encounter. His poker face gave no indication if he was experiencing the same as she focused on her escape from his nearness and her foolishness.