

KAREN LEE BOREN

## HONOR

SHE GOT A LITTLE PUNCHY, turned philosophical, went to orgies, and made it with panhandlers – well, hotel cooks – anyway, one hotel cook.

This is what your sister marrying your ex-husband can do to you, she thought as she pushed the flabby-assed sous chef through her hotel room doorway.

Her sister and her ex-husband. The three of them, they were a Greek play. A Southern tragedy. An afternoon talk show, she thought as she threw the bolt behind the chef hopping down the hallway.

Jesus Christ, if they didn't ask her to be matron of honor. *Matron*. The word stuck in her craw and she kicked the pile of taffeta at the foot of the bed, the gritty sound of the material grating her nerves. They even had the gall to print it in the wedding program as if she were thrilled to be a part of it all. *Our Matron-of-Honor, Deb's Older Sister, Lauren*. She saw his hand in it. Getting in one last dig. ("You're killing me," he said. "But I'll kill us both before it's over.") As if it wasn't his fault she was a washed-up old matron at twenty-three. She'd told her sister what a spiteful man he could be, but the girl couldn't see past his warm, brown eyes. (*Those eyes had once looked at her with something besides hate.*) She noticed they didn't print her last name. They didn't print anyone's last name, but she was pretty sure it was because they didn't want anyone asking why the groom and the matron of honor were both Zoblanski's. As if that could be a coincidence.

No, they left it at *older* and *matron*.

OF COURSE THE WORD wasn't just in the program either. It beamed from the place card at the head table in curling swirls of tar-black calligraphy. Seeing it glaring at her is what set her to drinking the crappy punch champagne like it was some sort of sports drink and she was on mile sixteen of a marathon. She hadn't even made it through the soup course before she said, fuck this, and went to look for a convention. (*When she married him there had been no soup course, no flowers or gowns, no tuxes or tiaras, and no ice swan, melting like the tears dripping from her eyes; for them it was courthouse steps and witnesses.*) She couldn't find a convention, only prom after prom of drunk teenagers. She made do, and after thrusting her tongue into the mouths of three stunned kings, headed for the kitchen. Nobody seemed to mind her watching the hands of the sous chef fiercely drilling the knife through a tomato, then, it seemed to her, lovingly spreading the vegetable like the petals of a flower. His powerful care made her long for his touch. It would surely be nothing like the wham-bam her sister was in for tonight. So she slid her extra room key card into the chef's back pocket and whispered her room number into his ear. He barely looked up, but hours later, after the happy couple had shoved five layers of butter cream into each other's faces—the one part of the ceremony she would have been happy to join in on—the chef found her in the coat room, her broomstick legs and powder-blue slingbacks protruding as if a faux-fur house had dropped on her. (*Didn't her sister know she hated all shades of blue, but powder blue most? Didn't her sister know her at all?*)

---

The morning sun  
glared saffron as he  
said, "I guess it's your  
sister's turn now, eh?"  
His words startled her.  
(*Did everybody  
know?*)

---

The chef's strong hands grasped her ankles and pulled. Without a word they rode the elevator to her room, and once inside he stirred her like cake batter until she was whipped into such a froth, she screamed, "Fuck, I never even loved him." The sous chef didn't reply, only gutted out his own *uh!* of a climax. Later, in the dark, with the chef's sleeping weight against her, his dishwater blond hair curling through her fingers, she whispered it again, "I never even loved him." Then, "I wonder if he loves her." She pondered this thought until a bright stripe of morning peeked through the ill-fitting curtains. She was still thinking about it when the chef rolled off her, threw back one drape, and

smiled. The morning sun glared saffron as he said, "I guess it's your sister's turn now, eh?" His words startled her. (*Did everybody know?*) They brought into relief the painfully bad seascape paintings, the scratchy bedspread and the heap of blue taffeta on the no-longer-plush carpeting. It was all so dingy and sordid and the chef was fatter than she thought.

It was too much, she decided, too much humiliation at once. She jumped out of bed and shoved the chef towards the door, barely allowing him time to pick up his clothes. One leg in his white chef's pants, he chuckled as he hopped toward the door, and she had to keep herself from kicking his fleshy behind as he skittered through it.

**T**HIS IS WHAT YOUR SISTER marrying your ex-husband can do to you, she thought as she pushed him through the doorway and bolted the lock behind him. She kicked the taffeta dress and heard it rip satisfyingly. She stared open-eyed into the sun, streaming through the patio door's glass, the chef's words blinding her. By the time she turned away, the room was splotted with black and she had to admit that after all the chef wasn't wrong. It was her sister's turn now. Her sister would wake up with him every morning, day after day, for two lifetimes. And where would she be? She turned to the mirror, her face obliterated by her own vision. She turned again, to the bed, to the bathroom, to the door, behind which lay the whole, knowing world. Naked, alone in a room not her own, she continued to turn, to the sunlight, to the paintings, eventually rising onto her toes, her long hair lifting from her damp neck, sweeping the room until in a dizzy heap she crumpled to the floor as her mind swirled on.