

## The Search

A figure hopped down from the truck onto the hot desert sand. It burned through the soles of her boots. A stubby, gnarled cheroot was clamped tightly between her teeth. She scanned the landscape, her eyes shaded by a fedora pulled low on her forehead. Then she spat the twig of tobacco onto the burning sand and turned to offer her hand to the statuesque beauty who stepped down to join her.

The tall woman's high heels twisted crazily in the shifting surface. "I told you you should change your shoes."

The woman tried to balance, hand on her companion's shoulder. "Well, Ah'm sorry," she drawled in her soft southern accent, "But Ah was raised to be a lady and you're not going to get me to wear shoes like...those," she said disdainfully, pointing at the younger woman's feet. The quirky little upturn at the corner of the shorter woman's mouth displayed her amusement. "For someone who was a warrior princess in a past life you are--such a...girl."

"Thank you. Ah take that as a compliment."

"Hey, I wouldn't have it any other way."

"Stop leering."

"I'm not."

"I know it when I see it."

"Yeah, I guess you would."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"You're effing gorgeous. And you know it." Jan watched, smiling broadly now as Mel's face burned bright with the sudden flush of hot blood. "Cat got your tongue?"

"I sway-ah you take a perverse kinda pleasure in making me feel uncomfortable."

"Not too uncomfortable I hope." She snaked a sinewy arm round Mel's waist.

The tall woman drew herself even more erect with rectitude as she said, "You're all bluff. And you know it."

Grinning, Jan removed her support. "Have it your way."

Mel struggled to keep her balance. She teetered one way, then another, grasped at the air and then, very unceremoniously, gave into gravity and sat heavily on the sand. Jan stifled a hearty laugh while extending a hand to help her up. The tall woman kicked off her shoes, but hopped painfully until Jan bent over and said, "Climb on."

They made quite a gangly sight, if indeed any stray camel or son of the desert had been there to witness, as Jan piggybacked Mel across the hot sands. "Just around this dune...ah, here we are," Jan straightened and dumped her friend at the edge of a beautiful little oasis. The young woman undid her belt, stepped out of her trousers, drew off her shirt and boots and lastly removed the battered felt hat. A feminizing length of golden hair brushed her shoulders. Her clothes were strewn in a more or less straight beeline. She'd never stopped moving toward the water, back to Mel, and now she dove into a sizable spring.

Mel, still pouting, sat her ground. "Come on in. You'll love it. Here, I'll be a gentleman. I'll turn my back." In a few minutes she heard a slight splash behind her and turned to see the dark-haired beauty shyly demure in her natural state. Jan was almost surprised by the fleeting emotional response. She didn't have a vulnerable bone in her body.

Or so she'd thought.

Usually, sex was just something to get out of the way in a hurry so she could go on and concentrate on the truly important things. Usually, it was something she took care of on her own. At night in her tent, before falling asleep. She always slept like a log. But since she'd met this woman... More than a few nights recently she'd lain awake and listened to the measured