

## **In Cadence Love**

This book is a work of fiction.

All characters and events portrayed are fictitious.

All military scenes are fictitious and created for narrative effect.

Any resemblance to actual people,  
living or dead, is purely coincidental.

Copyright © 2020, By Suzanne Pederson

Cover Design by Susan Krupp

# Table of Contents

[Acknowledgments](#)

[Dedication](#)

[Chapter One](#)

[Chapter Two](#)

[Chapter Three](#)

[Chapter Four](#)

[Chapter Five](#)

[Chapter Six](#)

[Chapter Seven](#)

[Chapter Eight](#)

[Chapter Nine](#)

[Chapter Ten](#)

[Chapter Eleven](#)

[Chapter Twelve](#)

[Chapter Thirteen](#)

[Chapter Fourteen](#)

[Chapter Fifteen](#)

[Chapter Sixteen](#)

[Chapter Seventeen](#)

[Chapter Eighteen](#)

[Chapter Nineteen](#)

[Chapter Twenty](#)

[Chapter Twenty-One](#)

[Chapter Twenty-Two](#)

[About Suzanne Pederson](#)

[Other books by Suzanne Pederson](#)

[Connect with Suzanne Pederson](#)

## **Acknowledgements**

To my beta-readers, editors, marketing advisors, and family support.

Thank you!

## **Dedication**

To my husband. Some of my best memories are from when we served in the army together at Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri and Ft. Carson, Colorado. My enlistment was not what you expected or embraced, but always supportive of me, you learned to accept it.

Cheers to our shared time in the service and your ability to roll with the punches and accept new challenges.

# Chapter One

Nothing had ever stirred Katie's soul quite like the sight in front of her eyes. She could feel an unfamiliar electricity in the air as she looked around at the World War II army barracks where she was temporarily being lodged at the ACS reception station. The stark white buildings before her were meticulously manicured, but not very imaginatively maintained. There was definitely a military feel to her orderly surroundings.

Her first realization that she had arrived in the United States Army came when the bus she was riding drove through the main gate of the Missouri army post that was identified by a less than spectacular sign situated over a small gatehouse meant to control access to the military installation.

## UNITED STATES ARMY TRAINING CENTER FORT LEONARD WOOD

As she stood on the sidewalk waiting for the rest of the people who had arrived with her on the bus to join her outside, a convoy of camouflaged deuce and a half trucks trundled by and stopped in front of a barracks down the road. Two hundred or so, seasoned soldiers filed out in orderly fashion and silently fell into an immediate and precise formation. Their fatigues were dusty, their faces tired, the gear on their backs looked heavy, but they snapped to attention and responded in unison to the call of their leader who marched them away in a melodic cadence.

It was getting late. The Missouri sky was dark and so heavy with humidity that Katie imagined her shoulders sagging from its moist weight. She wiped a bead of perspiration from her forehead and listened to the noises of the bustling army post – the faraway calls of the marching soldiers, the grunting and choking of a five-ton tractor trailer rig being forced into action, and the distant rapid fire of weapons from a night training exercise on the other side of the post.

Though it was well past dinnertime Katie could clearly distinguish the sounds of three separate formations marching in the distance, each singing into the night the copycat callings of a commanding drill sergeant. Katie focused on the words that she could hear coming from the closest drill sergeant who was hollering to his troops with melodic timing...

*I wish that all the ladies...*

The soldiers repeated what he called out in a unified cadence and they all sang the song together...

*Were bricks in a pile, and I was a mason, I'd lay 'em all in style...*

*Hey, hey Baba Reba, hey, hey, Baba Reba...*

*I wish that all the ladies were nails in a wall... and I was a hammer, I'd bang 'em all myself...*

*Your left, your left, your left right...*

Their raunchy song continued more softly as the formation marched farther away...

*I wish that all the ladies were pies on a shelf, and I was a baker, I'd eat 'em all myself...*

Katie was hit with a kaleidoscope of conflicting emotions – excitement, expectation, and sheer panic. *What on earth was she doing here, and what had she gotten herself into?* She wasn't some kind of liberated woman who felt the need to prove something to men. She didn't care about making it in a man's world – she *liked* being a lady. She *wanted* to be idolized and pampered for her femininity and hopefully her beauty, and perhaps also for her fragility. She didn't need to be tough like a man or strong as an ox. She wanted only to be cared for and admired, and respected like a lady – *because* she was a lady.

But this was totally a man's world that she had dropped herself into as the raunchy cadence just proved to her, and Katie wasn't at all sure if women were even *wanted* here, except perhaps, as sex objects to be laid by the men.

She was about to begin basic training in one of the Army's earliest co-mingled basic training units where women and men would go through army training together...*side by side*... And clearly the army had done little in preparation for the arrival of women soldiers in their co-mingled training units.

Nonetheless, Katie was hit with an unexpected feeling of pride and jubilation for the patriotic role she was about to take on in this age-old ritual of *men* putting their lives on the line for everything that was dear to them, and everything that they believed in. And yet, the thought of what Katie had taken on was also terrifying.

She had never been particularly gutsy – she was by nature a timid person. She wasn't the kind of girl who wanted to claw her way to the top of some mega-corporation. In fact, she wasn't really into women's lib at all, though it was a popular movement; and she wasn't someone who liked to independently tackle life. She was happy being a woman who was fortunate enough to have a good man at home who wanted to take care of her. And in response to her husband's devotion, Katie *loved* taking care of her man. She enjoyed her role as a house keeper and doting wife. She didn't need anything else to be happy. She didn't *want* anything else.

But here she was on this army post far from home, where an entire formation of men had just marched by her proudly singing about women as oppressed sex objects – *no apologies necessary* – thank you very much.

*Wow!* This was a completely different world than what Katie left behind. Her training company was presumably made up of 106 chest thumping, sex obsessed men and 44 women of mixed mentality – some would be feminists on a mission to prove themselves in a man's world, some were just *Tom Boys* who would love the training, others would be here to play and have fun with the men, and still others like Katie, would simply want a good career; this was a way for Katie to make a living.

Except, Katie realized, as she stood on the sidewalk watching the army activity around her, she and one third of her fellow trainees had just been reduced into *pies on a shelf*... while the other two thirds of their company were presumably the hungry bakers intent on getting their fair share of whatever pie was being passed around.

*This was not your everyday career.*

Twenty-four hours ago, Katie's life was completely different to what it was right now. Twenty-four hours ago, she was living with Kris. Her heart succumbed to an unexpected pang of homesickness as her thoughts returned to him.

*Kris.* She ached for him now, not physically, though she knew that would come with time, but emotionally. Already Katie missed him more than she could ever have imagined when she was still standing by his side in their coastal bedroom. She shut her eyes for a moment alone with him and pushed her fingers into her ears to help block out the army sounds that continued around her.

Her husband was lean, with broad shoulders, gorgeous biceps, and well-defined chest muscles that tapered down to his minuscule waist. He had a towering torso, but he never *towered* above her. He was determined, but always giving; rugged, yet openly sensitive and vulnerable. He was adorably sweet, but oh, so manly. Admittedly, he was a bit of a chauvinist, but not in a bad way. He wanted everyone, *including women*, to chase their dreams and reach whatever potential they personally envisioned, and he supported equal rights. But in a contradictory way,

he liked being Katie's man and taking care of her needs. He *wanted* that responsibility. And part of what he so cherished about Katie was that her sole purpose in life – was him. She appreciated how he treated her like a lady – like she was his prized possession. Being his lady *was* her full dream.

His translucent blue eyes were captivating, his smile infectious. His wavy hair marked to his chagrin by premature wisps of gray gave him a look of quiet distinction, as did his well-trimmed beard and mustache that were marred with the same salt and pepper variations. What she missed most about him tonight, though, was his low masculine croon that always soothed her soul. He spoke in a poetic manner that turned words into musical notes and stories into colorful picture boards.

Last night's conversation had become a concerto of enraged emotion as he made his explosive feelings crystal clear to her.

"You did what?" His china blue eyes nearly popped out of his sockets as he listened to her confession. He came her direction with long, slow strides, hands clutched onto his hips, his shocked gaze locked on hers while his elegant stride closed the gap between them one exaggerated step at a time.

He stopped in front of her, bowed his six-foot three-inch frame her direction and stared in fury into her nervous expression. "Without consulting me?" His lower jaw moved sideways in protest and he held it there in visible consternation as his verbal disapproval hung between them.

Katie could only stare back in silent confirmation. *Why didn't she consult him first?* And why did she wait until the night before she had to leave, to tell him? Kris was right to be upset. Her enlistment without notice was a contrary act against their relationship and a stunning blow to the value system that Kris held dear.

In all the years Katie had known Kris, she had never made a decision without his wise guidance. Since the day they first met, she had let him take charge of the direction of their lives, gladly allowing him to plot her destiny with his because she trusted that any destiny that Kris plotted would benefit both of them. She wasn't a mindless pawn – she could make her own decisions and stand up for herself. But Kris was her savior and because of that she was happy to follow his lead. In fact, she saw her acquiescence to his decision making as a decision onto itself.

He had taken her from the disparity of a troubled childhood and given her life. *Being his wife was an honor.* He was a wonderful partner. Katie felt like Mary Magdalene sitting at the feet of Jesus. She was always so in awe of his infinite wisdom, his pure heart, and his beautiful soul. That was partly why she was so happy giving her life to him. He made her a better person. He lifted her up and made her feel whole.

But that was before she made this rash and contrary decision on her own – without consulting his heart and soul. Without considering his wisdom. Without accepting his guidance – or even recognizing his core beliefs.

"I'm sorry."

When Katie made her impulsive decision to enlist, she felt like it could save them as a couple. But after last night's fight Katie was no longer sure if her rash decision would save them... or destroy them.

"Please understand." She had expected him to be shocked, not outraged. "I did this for you."

"Then why didn't you ask me how I'd feel about it beforehand?" Kris didn't exonerate her guilty heart. He blew up at her like never before. "The army stands for everything I'm against! You *know* that!"

"I'm sorry. I thought the money... and benefits... I wanted to help us – to help *you*. We're so financially strapped right now."

His china blue eyes left hers, he straightened with a tense sigh, and fixated his attention across the room. He was looking, but not seeing. Speaking without talking. Thinking. *Always thinking*. He had such great insight. And there was more going on in his head as he stared blankly across the room than he was willing to share with Katie in the middle of a tense fight. She could see that in his face, she could read that in his agitated stance, and she could feel it in his confrontational silence.

"I'm sorry, Kris. I never intended..."

"Why Katie?" The tortured swallow that came out of his torn expression stopped Katie's explanation.

Kris used her silent retreat to ask his own troubled questions. "Have you completely lost faith in me? You don't think..." His surfacing emotions caught up with his unvoiced thoughts and brought his own words to a halt. He turned away from her and pulled the black fedora from his head that he had worn home from work, and tossed it in defeated silence across the room to where it landed on their bed. Then he leaned with both hands into the top of Katie's dresser and silently exhaled into his own reflected heartache that vacantly stared back at him from the mirror.

Katie watched his reflected image blot both of his eyes in an unwanted show of sorrow. Then he did it again as he sniffed back his emotions. She cautiously took a step closer to him from across the expanse of their plush master bedroom. Kris had given her everything she'd ever wanted. *And more*. She had seen her enlistment as a way of reciprocating his generosity. It was an opportunity for her to step beyond the simple gestures of her day to day existence by doing something for her husband that would really matter to him. This was her chance to put their marriage back on solid financial ground, and it would allow Kris an opportunity to focus on his own needs – *his music career* – instead of her needs.

"Kris?"

He turned his horrified expression from the mirror to stare at her face with a mixture of sadness and disgust. His eyes were still crying, but he didn't lose the tears. "Do you know what you've done, Katie?" His dread said that he very clearly did. And she guessed that he probably thought he was right in that regard. Kris had a vast knowledge base that showed in so many ways.

Years ago, Kris had been in the army. He'd fought in Vietnam. Then he returned to fight here at home. For peace. For humanity. For love of the human race. For his own personal dignity. For an end to all wars. He despised the senseless carnage he witnessed at war, he hated the justified killing, and he had no respect for military indoctrination that made young boys believe that killing an innocent life – *any life* – made sense. He would always support the warrior, but he could never support the war.

So now that Katie was going to be one of those warriors, didn't that mean that her husband would find a way to support her even if he could never support one of her wars? Her recruiter sure thought so and Katie believed that too.

Kris was six years Katie's senior, but his wisdom implied a larger age gap. He was an old soul inside a younger man's body. Many veterans were like that. They had lived through unimaginable chaos, they had seen unfathomable brutality, and they had suffered through way

too much heart ache – more than a soul could ever hope to forget. And because of that Kris and his fellow Vietnam vets came home from their war emotionally scarred, mentally changed, and woefully unwelcomed by a thankless nation. And when they tried to return to a *normal* life – as dictated by a postwar society – their own patriotic nation unpatriotically shunned their efforts.

Nobody seemed to care about the Vietnam vets and the problems they brought home with them. In fact, society barely seemed to notice them. And when they did see them, they quickly looked away to avoid having to acknowledge them. Who could blame the Vets for the chip that they carried on their shoulders when it came to their beloved Uncle Sam?

Katie understood all that about Kris. But for the first time in their three-year marriage, she wondered if maybe, *just perhaps* she didn't really get that about him, even though she had always believed that she did. And for the first time ever, the age difference between Katie and her husband seemed noticeable.

It was now 1979 and Kris had been home since 1969. He was only twenty when he returned from Vietnam –three years younger than Katie was today – but he had already witnessed so much by that time. In comparison, Katie had witnessed so little.

"You're still so naive, Katie." His pained expression said his heart was being ripped in two by her rash decision. "But how can I blame you for not realizing what I've already learned?" The wise counsel inside him calmly explained despite the conflict of his inner turmoil.

"The army isn't a nine to five job." He caught a runaway tear with the back of his hand. "It's your *life*, babe." She had never made him cry before – never until today. His tears streaked his face faster than he could erase them.

"And now it's *my* life again – in all it's cold blooded glory..." He wiped the streaking tears from his face. "Because it's not just the soldier who becomes part of the military... it's the soldier's entire family – *me*."

## Chapter Two

Katie was jerked out of the memory of her husband's sorrow by the yelling rant of a glaring drill sergeant. "YOU SLEEP WHEN I TELL YOU TO SLEEP, TRAINEE."

The humidity of Ft. Leonard Wood, Missouri made Katie feel lethargic despite the presence of the bellowing drill sergeant.

"NOT ONE SECOND BEFORE THEN. YOU GOT THAT, TRAINEE?"

Katie glanced to her sides at the silent and terrified trainees who had assembled beside her. She wasn't off to a good start. She returned her focus to the angry drill sergeant and gave him an apologetic shrug, accompanied by a compliant smile. "I'm sorry."

"WIPE THAT STUPID GRIN OFF YOUR FACE, TRAINEE." The drill sergeant scrunched his own face into a meaner glower. "DO I LOOK LIKE A FRIEND YOU WANNA GET ALL SMILEY WITH?"

"Oh." Katie quickly lost the smile. "I'm sorry, sir."

"SIR? DO I LOOK LIKE A SIR TO YOU? I HAVE BAGS UNDER MY EYES, TRAINEE, AND CALLOUSES ON MY HANDS! I WORK FOR A LIVING. I'M NOT SOME SOFT BELLIED MAN SITTING BEHIND A DESK WHO HAS NOTHING TO DO BUT PUSH PAPER AROUND! SO, YOU SAVE YOUR SIR'S FOR THE OFFICERS. "

"I.. " Katie didn't know how she was supposed to respond to that. She was just trying to be polite. "I'm not...." There was nothing else that she *could* say. "I'm sorry."

His scowl grew into a visual field of anger that matched the audible fury she detected in his rising voice. "THAT'S FOR DAMN SURE YOU'RE SORRY, TRAINEE... A SORRY EXCUSE FOR A SOLDIER! YOU ADDRESS ME AS DRILL SERGEANT. SHOW ME THAT RESPECT, TRAINEE. ALWAYS SHOW ME RESPECT. DO YOU UNDERSTAND THAT?"

Katie gave him a frantic nod. "Yes, sir. I mean drill sergeant. I understand." She swallowed hard against the threat of tears that would give away her gut reaction to her own disappointment in making a mistake. She wanted so badly to be good at this. Her recruiter had claimed that the army wanted her. They were rebuilding their forces into a new and improved modern military and they needed her as part of that new peace keeping force.

So, why was this drill sergeant making her feel so unwelcome? Why was he trying to make her feel like she was an idiot when she just barely got here and still had so much to learn? She *wanted* to learn what he wanted to teach her. It wasn't like she was resistant to his lessons. So why was he beating her up like she was an unwilling participant?

The answer to her unspoken question came to mind in her husband's soft croon.

*"They go for the heart, babe. They'll break you down. Find weaknesses you don't even know exist...all in the name of military readiness."*

When Kris said that to her last night, Katie had thought that his warning came out of an overblown show of concern for her – a *macho, chauvinistic* – but loving concern. He was just trying to protect his little lady. Katie had assured him that it was silly for him to think that the drill sergeants would have such an overpowering control over her emotional well-being– she was an adult woman and she had no real weaknesses, except maybe for Kris.

But now that she was standing here under the threat of unwanted tears, she had to wonder. Maybe her self-confidence had only been a naive assumption on her part? Maybe she *did* have some vulnerabilities unknown to her.

*Kris sure thought that.*

Her lids batted against the impending flood water that Katie could feel rising in her eyes. *She did not want to cry.* She did not want to act like a stereotypical *girl*... Basic training hadn't even officially started yet! They were still only processing into the army! How could she already feel so close to tears?

Once again, the whispering voice inside her head explained.

*"They'll redefine your morals, Katie. Change your mind about what really matters."*

The glowering man in front of Katie mercifully moved down the line of terrified trainees in search of another unsuspecting trainee to demean in front of everyone. Katie quickly blotted her eyes. She wasn't going to blow this. For the first time in her life she had a *real* job – a job she could feel proud of. She had a tangible purpose in life *other than being Kris' wife.* And she desperately wanted to do this job right. She was not going to let what Kris called, *the drill sergeants' voodoo magic*, get to her. And she was not going to fulfill the bad prophesy of Kris' warning – that the army would break her –Katie wasn't about to let that happen. She was excited about being a soldier.

*"Isolation, intimidation, and sleep deprivation, Katie."* His warning silently cautioned her. *"That's how they get to you,"* he had counseled her in a prophetic voice that was as defeated as it was knowing. *"And when they're through with you, there will be nothing left of you that is recognizable to anyone who ever thought they knew you."*

Had they already gotten to her as Kris prophesized? *"It's mind washing, army style. And it's legal. And it's effective. You don't know what you're getting into. They'll strip you of who you are. What you believe in. By the time you find out that I know what I'm talking about, it'll be too late for you to walk away. You won't even want to walk away."*

They had argued last night into the early hours of the morning. Katie had claimed that Kris was just jaded from his war time service. Vietnam was a horrible war and a terrible time in his life. He had lost friends. He had changed as a person. But the military was different now. *It was a peace keeping force.* That's what her recruiter had promised when he talked her into joining, and she had believed him with all her heart. And she had trusted that Kris would like today's army. But Kris seemed as unpersuaded as ever.

Katie turned off her emotions, determined to be stronger going forward, determined to avoid the brain washing her husband was so worried about, and determined not to lose confidence in herself, and her own self-respect in the process. She was twenty-three years old. She was at least three years older than the majority of stone-faced trainees standing around her who appeared so much younger than Katie. She had nothing to be scared of. *They* were the ones who were vulnerable to mind manipulation. *Not her.*

"Psst..."

Katie peeked to her side to meet the smile of a stranger.

"It's okay to cry. Just don't let 'em see you do it. They'll know they're getting to you if they do." The twinkling brown eyes on the stranger's face, sparkled even brighter. "I'm Larry." He winked in lieu of a handshake.

"Katie..." She whispered back with a smile on her face. His unexpected words of encouragement made Katie feel better. "And thanks..."

The drill sergeant returned. "WHO GAVE YOU PERMISSION TO TALK IN MY FORMATION, TRAINEE?"

Katie spun her head around to stare blankly at the drill sergeant. "I'm sorry, s..." She stopped herself from adding the show of respect.

"That was my fault, drill sergeant." Larry straightened beside her to meet the challenge of the drill sergeant's words. "Not hers."

The drill sergeant turned to give Larry his full attention. "GALLANT, BUT NOT SMART, TRAINEE. YOU AREN'T GOING TO MAKE IT HERE IF YOU LET YOURSELF GET DISTRACTED BY THESE WOMEN WHO ARE TRAINING WITH YOU." His eyes squinted into an intimidating stare that he leveled between the two of them. "DROP AND GIVE ME TWENTY PUSHUPS, TRAINEE." His eyes left Larry to return to Katie. "BOTH OF YOU."

"For saying hello?" Katie was shocked. She looked over at Larry and when he dropped and started counting pushups, she did the same. She managed to get eight out to his full twenty, but she felt stronger for having tried. If that's what they wanted from her, she'd do it. She wasn't going to be beaten by this yelling, rude man.

The drill sergeant allowed them both to recover.

It went on to become a whirl wind night of rushing to get somewhere, only to perpetually stand in waiting for whatever was supposed to happen, to finally happen. They were shuffled between rooms in harried lines to the constant barking of impatient drill sergeants who ordered them to fill out this form, complete that one – postcards home to let loved ones know they had arrived safely, life insurance forms, next of kin identification cards, health forms, income tax forms.

It was hard to believe that anyone could be expected to think this late in the evening after a long day of traveling, but the drill sergeants seemed unaware of the offensive hour or the trainees' fatigue. Their demands remained incessant, and their bark remained ferocious. Bed linen, pillows, olive drab wool blankets and white washcloths and towels were issued. They received two OD green laundry bags. Suitcases from home were inventoried, unpacked, sorted, and returned with missing contents. The drill sergeants confiscated all contraband which included everything from knives, perfume and cologne, to unprescribed medicines, Playboy magazines and framed and unframed pictures of loved ones. *Of Kris.*

Finally, they were led to an all-night mess hall where they were served cold hamburgers, greasy fries, waxy green beans, melting Jello and dry yellow cake. *Dinner a la army mess hall.* But it wasn't dinner time, and the food was barely edible as far as Katie was concerned. A glance at an industrial wall clock above the chow line told Katie it was after midnight. Her eyelids drooped at the mere realization.

The GI's on KP were laughing over raunchy jokes while they took a smoke break – they were killing the night shift in the hot muggy kitchen with such ambivalence to the hour that the crazy schedule didn't seem to be out of the ordinary for them. Except everything was out of the ordinary for Katie tonight.

Back home, Kris would soon be getting off work. He'd be walking in the front door and locking it behind him. He'd be eager to share his night with her but first he'd stop in the kitchen for something to eat. Then he'd move onto the bathroom, and then the bedroom. He'd peel his clothes off in the darkness of the room and silently crawl under the covers and slide over the mattress until his body met hers. Then he'd wrap an arm around her and wake her with a hello kiss.

Only tonight she wouldn't be there waiting for him to arrive home. The house would be quiet. The bed would be empty. His mood would be lonely, and his heart would be breaking in two.

*Last night...* Katie closed her eyes to remember.

Last night he'd drawn her into the safety of his arms as he stood in the room with her at the end of their fight. He held her close to his body and for a minute their world seemed right again. Katie wished she could remember the touch of his flesh. She had promised herself later, when she laid in his arms that she would remember the feel of him breathing beside her. She had *commanded* herself not to forget anything at all about him. She had savored each moment with him with the intent of drawing on it later when she felt so far away from him. *But she couldn't remember the feel of him now as she turned her thoughts to him. She couldn't hear him breathing beside her.*

Katie dived deeper inside her mind to try and recall each detail – the feel of his scratchy beard next to the soft flesh of her face, the smell of his freshly showered body snuggled up against hers, his arms wrapped around her torso holding her close, his fingers entwined with her fingers, his legs entangled with her legs, their toes softly moving against each other's toes, the taste of his sweet kisses, the joy in his light hearted chuckle and the seduction of his soft voice. She could hear it now whispering in her ear.

"*Come here, Katie...*" He had stepped out of the shower, towel wrapped around his waist, his cologne drawing her nearer, his smile relaxing her from their earlier tense discussion. Under the cleansing warmth of a midnight shower he had managed to shift his mood from fighting with her to loving her. But that was typical of Kris. He never stayed mad for long, especially if his anger was focused on Katie.

"*The guys in your unit will flirt with you, babe. They'll want in your pants. It's all part of the macho game they play in the military.*" His arms encircled Katie as he cautioned her about her future. "*It won't be about feelings, or caring, or love. It will only be about getting laid... and young boys trying to prove that they're men.*" He was concerned about her heart now, not her military indoctrination. "It's not that I don't trust you... *I do.* But I don't trust the environment of a military post and the mentality of young soldiers who are constantly being challenged to prove to themselves that they're half the men they think they are."

"Kris..." Their relationship was stronger than that.

"Hey." Kris wasn't detoured from his thoughts. "It won't be like at Charlie's where everyone knows us and respects that you belong to me."

Katie smiled at his chauvinistic caution. Charlie's Tavern was almost a home away from home for them – and Kris was Charlie's main attraction. He was a hometown hero – a local celebrity. And she loved that he saw her as being *his woman*. Lots of girls would love to take her place.

"You think I'll fall in love with the first guy who befriends me?" The idea seemed preposterous to Katie. "I'm not even going to notice the men, or draw them in as friends. I have no interest in that. Plus, I won't be the only woman there you know. So, I'll probably have lots of girlfriends instead and we'll hang out like a click of immature high school girls which I will find boring and adolescent, but tolerable." That was *exactly* Katie's intention. To get through basic training and then her advanced individual training for specific job skills as unceremoniously as possible, and then return to Kris as a newly employed, working soldier – in a peacekeeping force.

Kris tried taking comfort out of what she countered, but his worried expression hinted that his appreciation for what she was getting into contradicted anything she might offer in rebuttal. "You have no idea what you're stepping into."

"It doesn't matter." Katie didn't have a single doubt about it. She raised herself onto her toes as they stood by the bed, and kissed him with passion to convince his doubting lips. "I know what I have at home." Her thumb traced his wrinkled brow. "And nothing compares to this – to you."

He smiled, just slightly at her reassurance before adding more doubt to it. "And *I* know what you're taking on." His tone was laced in dreaded defeat. "So, I don't care if it's not allowed. I'm following you out there. As soon as I can tie up the loose ends back here."

"Oh God no, you can't Kris." Katie quickly tried to put a stop to his suggestion. "Not yet, you can't." It wasn't that Katie didn't want her husband to join her in Missouri. *She did*. But it wasn't allowed. "It's against army rules for us to have family members join us while we're still in training. You're supposed to wait until we're finished. And what about..."

"A rule is merely a suggestion, Katie." Kris stopped her protests with a persuasive kiss, then he backed her onto the bed and dropped down around her. "Jesus, Katie... you've upended the apple cart..."

It was the end of their discussion about what she had done and the beginning of their bittersweet goodbye. "I hate what you've done." He lost the towel that was wrapped around his waist. "You have no idea how strongly I feel about this. But I'll do my best to make it work for you."

The way he made love to her washed away his loathing for what she had done. He carefully undressed her as if for the first time, he marveled over her body as though it were priceless artwork, and he drove her to desire with unbelievable patience, finally fulfilling her burning need with sensitive experience. He was an incredible lover. A fantastic husband. And a wonderful friend.

"Oh, Kris..." Katie started crying when their passion was spent. She had made a terrible mistake enlisting in the army. Not for the reasons Kris expressed, but because she would miss him so. "What have I done to us? How can I leave you?"

"Hey..." His soothing purr said he was suddenly back in charge and his wealth of experience pushed her doubt behind them. "It's okay, babe." The tender moment brought a sweet poignancy to the glow of their farewell love making. "We'll get through this somehow. It's just for a few weeks. Then a three-year enlistment, and you're out of there. We come home and you go back to being my lady..."

He cradled her in his arms in a tighter embrace and gave her a soft kiss that soothed her anxiety. "My *ethereal* lady. Just don't let 'em change you while you're in. I'm not sure I could love a hardened soldier if that's what comes out of this venture."

Katie cried in his arms. "I swear it's just a job, Kris. A guaranteed pay check so you can chase your dreams while I hold onto what's dear to us back here." *Their house* which now seemed less important to Katie on the eve of their tender goodbye than it had seemed when she got talked into enlisting. And their overall financial security.

The tears she noticed earlier in her husband's eyes returned without warning though he quickly tried to hide them from her. "Just promise me..." His voice became tight with emotion. "...you won't ever forget *us*, babe – you and me – like this."

He turned out the light to provide more privacy for his tears but when he tucked her head into his heaving chest, his sorrow became more evident to her.

"It'll never feel the same for us, Katie." The slow rhythm of his palm petting the length of her blonde mane made the pitter patter of his wounded heart in her ear sound like a metronome beating out of time. They were suddenly precariously off balance, operating on a tilt that didn't seem salvageable – like an earthquake had cracked their foundation and it was now beyond repair. Kris had never sounded so lost or forlorn to Katie, and she had never felt more scared of her own actions.

"You and me Katie..." He squeezed her with sad emotion.

She would never forget him. Kris was her life – *her everything*. "I promise..." Nothing would change between them. *Ever*.

His desperate hug said maybe things already had. "Forever, babe." He didn't sound like he believed what he was saying but he said it again, if only to convince himself. "*Forever*."

Katie snapped out of the fog in her head to focus on finishing her first day in the army. She needed to get to sleep because tomorrow was only a few hours away and the drill sergeants had already warned them that the coming days would be full-throttle chaotic.

Tomorrow they would be marched to the post barber shop and hair salon where they would all get haircuts, except for the women who committed to putting their hair up in regimented buns every day. The army mandated that women had to keep their hair short enough that it only touched the top of the collar on their shirt; or they could put it up in a bun, not a ponytail, on the back of their head. Katie didn't want to cut her hair, but she didn't like the idea of having to mess with putting her hair up every day, especially knowing that they would be wearing hats and helmets all the time. She was going to have to sleep on the idea before making a decision.

They would also get pictures taken tomorrow for their military ID cards, information would be exchanged for dependent family members' ID cards, dog tags would be punched out and distributed, olive drab uniforms would be sized, embroidered with name tags, and provided to each of them, they would be fitted for combat boots, white tee shirts and green wool socks. Army issued undergarments would be provided. They'd get belts and belt buckles, hats, and jackets. They would all be issued dress greens for formal and ceremonial occasions; and the men would be issued an alternate semi-dress khaki uniform while the women would be issued an alternate uniform of mint green. Everyone would be given blood and urine tests, immunizations, and shot records. There would also be vision and hearing tests.

Katie located her assigned bed and locker when they were released for bed, and quickly emptied her remaining personal items into her locker. Then she made her bed and scooped up her pajamas and toiletries and went to the bathroom. She wasn't used to changing her clothes in front of other people, and she felt shy about doing so now, so she stepped into a bathroom stall and changed into her pajamas in there. Then she brushed her teeth and returned to her sleeping bay to try and fall asleep in her strange, new surroundings that made her feel far from home and lonely without Kris.