

Tetch

Not a day goes by I don't think of her. I believe it would be hard for anyone to forget a woman like Tetch. Even in the dark I can still see her piercing blue eyes and full sensual lips, her smile, and her long wavy snow-white hair pulled back off her face. She's tall and leggy with a seductive curve to her spine and a sway to the way she walks, noticed mostly from behind. Her one shoulder is slightly higher than the other. Some would say it's from carrying the weight of the world all those years. More than likely it was from hauling one too many buckets of water. I don't think I'll ever forget the day she left either. She never even looked back. Trouble had a way of following her.

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When a valuable Thoroughbred racehorse is stolen from the breeding shed one stormy night, Tetch becomes the prime suspect in this infamous and mysterious theft. Though she is known far and wide as a renowned empath, even those who support Tetch begin to wonder. Why *won't* she defend herself? Why *would* she rather go to jail than tell the truth? And ultimately, where is Quanto?

"Horse lovers and animal activists unite to root for Tetch all the way!"

"Heartwarming and real."

"Wow! What a story!"

Chapter One

Cousin Desiree

Tetch was given her nickname by our Uncle Lou because as a child he insisted she was a little *tetched* in the head. Aunt Milly strongly disagreed. "She's precocious, that's all."

"I didn't say she wasn't *precious*, I'm just saying she's rightly tetched. She sees things we don't. And she hears things."

Over the years her being a little tetched in the head turned into her just being Tetch and that's what she's called to this day. Uncle Lou and Aunt Milly have since gone. She was at both their bedsides when they each passed. She hummed their favorite tune to them. Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound....

Tetch was as pretty as can be. She still is. She doesn't fuss much which is a shame 'cause she could probably pass for a movie star if she put on a little makeup. I wish I had

her hair. Course I'd dye it. Tetch is my cousin. We've been each other's cousins all of our lives, born on the same day; me in the morning, her at night.

My first recollection of her being tetch was when we were four. It was our birthday and she was eating cake and said it tasted like a summer breeze. A summer breeze? Can you imagine a four-year-old saying something like that? What did she mean? It was a chocolate cake for god's sake. I remember everyone just looking at her, some looking sad, some looking embarrassed. One was smiling, Aunt Milly of course. Aunt Milly practically raised her. Her daddy run off, a drunk, and her momma died so young. Aunt Milly never forgave her brother for leaving, drink and all. Good thing she hadn't seen him since. He came to her funeral. We all believe he thought he might inherit the farm. Probably wanted to sell it. Ain't no way. The farm was Tetch's. Aunt Milly made sure of that. It's a small farm and we all have our own land anyway. Uncle Lou and Aunt Milly's only son died in the war.

That was another sad funeral. Aunt Milly didn't like Tetch saying our cousin Hank died for nothing. She told Tetch to hush, but hugged her then and cried so hard her shoulders shook. There's never a good reason for a son to die, not even if they died a hero. I don't know why I'm even telling you all this.... Where was I? Oh, Aunt Milly's funeral. Tetch's old man says, "But I'm your daddy."

I'll never forget how Tetch just looked at him. If looks could kill, there'd be another dead man right there and then. "I buried the only daddy I've ever known two years ago. Where were you that day?"

"Lou wasn't my blood. Milly was. You're my blood."

Tetch shook her head and spit at his feet. Even as a child and we're talking a long time before this, Tetch was known to spit on the ground and put a curse on someone.

"You can't put a curse on me."

"I put a curse on you a long time ago when Momma died. That there was just to get the bad taste out of my mouth," she said, and spit again.

Her daddy pretended to laugh. I say pretended because all of sudden he looked like he was in pain and pressed his hand to his side, right here. My guess it had something to do with the curse. You never know....

~ & ~

If you invited Tetch to your farm you'd welcome her with open arms. But if you hadn't called for her, you'd likely get a sinking feeling in the pit of your stomach at the sight of her pickup truck making its way up your driveway. Sometimes it was the horses themselves who'd summoned her.

Goddard Jones sat down on the rickety old chair outside the front door of his barn. Tetch had been here before and he found her to be a likeable enough woman, none too hard on the eyes, but a meddler. He had no use for meddling. It was his farm and he ran it the way he wanted. He steeled his jaw. She wasn't smiling.

"Goddard," she said.

"Afternoon, Tetch."

She glanced around as she got out of her truck and walked toward him. "We sure could use some rain."

"I could use some beachfront property in Santa Cruz with a margarita machine on my front porch, but that ain't happening either."

"I never took you much for a margarita man."

Goddard chuckled a gravely laugh and then coughed. "What are you here for, Tetch? You come to harass me some more?"

"No. Not unless I don't like what I see."

"You got some kind of warrant?"

"Why? You got something to hide?"

"Nope. Not by my standards."

"What about mine?"

Goddard shrugged.

"How about I see for myself?"

Goddard looked away. "Sawdust has been pretty expensive."

Tetch prepared herself for a repetition of the barn's deplorable conditions when she'd visited him the first time - pathways in the aisle just large enough to get a wheelbarrow through, five or six-year-old bargain loose-bailed straw flanking each side, fire hazards everywhere, an old round bale of hay blocking the back door, four stalls with horses standing in manure and urine up past their knees, filthy water buckets, field corn cobs their only grain, one light bulb in the center aisle, and windows so dirty the stalls were like dungeons.

She was pleasantly surprised.

"I went to see a doctor," he said, following her inside.

Tetch looked at him.

"You told me I needed to see a doctor. And...well, I went."

Tetch studied the man for a brief moment and nodded. She had indeed told him he needed to go see a doctor, though in her fit of rage, hadn't said what kind of doctor and wondered.

"I was depressed. I'm on medication. I probably couldn't have a sex life anymore because of it, but..."

Tetch held up her hand. "Too much information."

Goddard laughed his gravely laugh and then coughed again. "The MD sent me to a shrink. A woman no less. She said I'll be fine as long as I take my meds and come see her once a month."

Tetch nodded and walked down the almost-tidy aisleway and looked in at the horses. "Sounds like a good plan." The horses appeared fine, certainly happier than before. The stalls weren't exactly clean, not by a long shot, but each horse was munching on fairly good quality hay and the water buckets were clean and filled to the brim. They were content. He'd even made an attempt to clean the windows.

"I'm proud of you, Goddard. I'm right proud of you."

"Thank you."

"They're happy. You're happy. I'm happy."

"I know. I don't mind telling you I slept out here the other night in the storm. I felt safe. You told me we had bad energy here. I fretted about that. I can't hold energy in my hand so I don't really understand it, but when I find myself smiling now out here for no reason that I can comprehend..." He glanced away, blushing. "I don't know. Maybe it's the meds."

“Maybe it’s just the new you.”

Goddard shrugged, blushing again.

“*And* the meds,” Tetch added, smiling. “The energy is most definitely different.” She held out her arms and gave the man a big hug. “I can’t say it enough. I’m so proud of you.”

“Thank you. It’s not perfect, but it’s a start.” He was embarrassed to have tears in his eyes and tried to wipe them dry. “I’m sorry.”

“Don’t be. Crying’s good for the soul. You haven’t lived if you have nothing to cry for.”

“Well, Lord knows I’ve done plenty of living.” He walked with her to her truck. “Does this mean you won’t be coming back?”

“Oh no. I’ll be back. You can count on it.”

“I hear your case is up for trial.”

Tetch hesitated as she sat behind the wheel. “In about a week.”

“Do you think they’ll lock you up?”

Tetch smiled. “I hope not. I don’t do well confined. Besides, they’d have to find me guilty of trespassing first.”

“Or find that horse.”