

Excerpt from *The Dreamer Gambit* by Kathryn Flatt

In her dream, obnoxious cousin Gordon crept into her room to scare her.

"What are you doing here?" She heard her voice as a garbled mumble.

Out in the hall, her mother argued with someone in harsh whispers. Tabitha wanted to call to her to make Gordon stop bothering her, but no words came out.

"Tabitha." A deep voice teased softly from nearby. "Taaaa-bith-aaa."

Gordon's attempt to sound spooky, the stupid little slug. Eyelids too heavy to open. *Must be a dream. You can never open your eyes when you want to in a dream.*

"Tabitha? Do you know who I am?"

With supreme effort, she opened them the slightest bit but could hardly see the figure beside her. Yet the broad shoulders, the blond hair seemed familiar.

"Scot?"

"I came back to see you, Tabs."

How did he know where---? The thought slipped away, and deep relaxation overwhelmed her. "I always loved you, Scot."

The dream morphed into the hallway at her old high school. She had to get to the exam but could not find her locker.

"Do you remember the day you kissed me by the pool?"

His warm breath in her ear made all concern over the locker evaporate. "I remember. You were so angry."

"You surprised me, and you were such a child then, but now you've grown into a beautiful woman."

Her heart swelled with joy. She wanted to see his face but could only make out his shadow. In a flash, she stood before her locker, mystified by the odd figures which swam around the combination lock dial.

"I thought about that kiss a lot," Scot whispered. He hovered over her, resting on his elbows and cradling her head in his hands, his face so close she could see nothing else. "And I'd like to do it again without the surprise. What do you say?"

"Oh, yes!" What a lovely dream; so real when his lips met hers in a tender kiss.

"Did you like that?" He massaged her temples with his thumbs.

She licked her lips, floating, floating. The stupid locker would not open, and dread seeped in at the thought of missing the exam.

"Would you like some more?"

Scot's voice whipped her out of the hallway, and she lay in a hammock on a long ago summer afternoon. *Long ago? Wait, what?*

"Would you like me to kiss you again, Tabs?"

She squirmed with anticipation. "Yes. Please."

He did, passionately, at once exciting and vaguely troubling. She wished he would do it again.

"Do you have a boyfriend?"

"No, I---" Her locker sprang open but instead of books, an avalanche of unpaid bills poured out.

"What a shame. Such a pretty girl without someone to love her." He lifted her nightgown, and his warm hand slid over her skin. "So beautiful."

His hand explored, and for a moment, she thought of Jack Watson. The memory troubled her, a sense of wrongness.

"Do you like this?" Scot asked.

He caressed her thigh and her heart began to race. *Should I feel my heart race in a dream?* "What are you . . . oh!"

"Shhhh." His mouth covered hers roughly.

She shuddered, aroused but with an undercurrent of fear over being caught in the hallway without a pass. She groaned as his fingers stroked her, tender and reverent, and desire rose to a fever pitch. Then suddenly they were gone.

"Oh, no! Please don't stop. I want you. I *need* you."

She tried to reach for him but could not move a muscle and it scared her. The principal came toward her down the hall, her books were scattered everywhere, but her feet stayed glued to the floor when she tried to run. The principal's hand gripped her shoulder so hard it hurt.