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# The Taste of Chicory at High Tide

By Lisa Mantchev

19 December 2005

I met her on a blind date, a double dare, a fateful setup by chaotic kismet. She strapped red boots on my feet and we danced until my blisters had blisters. She spoon-fed me spicy swamp creatures and fried bread that forever ruined me for ordinary food. We drank until I puked. She stole my wallet, got me shot at by her jealous ex-boyfriend, and gave me a raging case of the crabs. I wanted to take her out again anyway, but the bitch wouldn't return my phone calls.

Until now.

"I need you. Please come," she said. I couldn't fly there (no more airplanes for me, thanks), but I still answered her summons. It was a really long walk. The receding water ruined my dress shoes. The mud sucked at my feet with every step. But when a blues-singin' hoodoo-slingin' mistress calls, a man's got to reply.

I found her sitting in a deserted café, adding packet after packet of sugar to her thick black espresso. Discarded pink wrappers littered the soggy ground around her stilettos. The beads around her neck clattered against the metal table. The hem of her short, wet skirt rode up on her thighs. There were circles under her eyes and defeat oozed from the sodden pockets of her raincoat.

I slid into the chair across from her and looked around for a waiter, but the bar was deserted. The copper behemoth behind the counter stood unmanned and wheezing steam. Flour, dirt, and grease-flecked water swirled in a paste that dripped from the cracked marble countertop and onto the floor. The noisome mess oozed around my ankles and dribbled into my shoes to mingle with the mud.

It was too early in the morning for this kind of shit, and I hadn't had any coffee yet. I licked my lips and made a wish. My lovely companion slid the demitasse across the table without a word.

"You look like hell," I said and grimaced into the dregs, teeth gritty with sugar.

[Before Paphos](#)

by Loretta Casteen

8 January 2007

It starts again. The baby begins to cough and choke.

[Locked Doors](#)

by Stephanie Burgis

1 January 2007

*You can never let anyone suspect*, his mother told him. That was the first rule she taught him, and the last, before she left him here alone with It.

[Heroic Measures](#)

by Matthew Johnson

18 December 2006

Pale as he was, it was hard to believe he would never rise from this bed. Even in the darkest times, she had never really feared for him; he had always been strong, so strong.

[Love Among the Talus](#)

by Elizabeth Bear

11 December 2006

Nilufer raised her eyes to his. It was not what women did to men, but she was a princess, and he was only a bandit. "I want to be a Witch," she said. "A Witch and not a Queen. I wish to be not loved, but wise. Tell your bandit lord, if he can give me that, I might accept his gift."

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