

Zig Zag is Copyright © Max Black Rabbit. Sabrina, Darke Katt and R.C. are Copyright © Eric W. Schwartz. James Sheppard, Marvin Badger, Rhonda Badger, Yohni, Alexi, Michael, Esteban, Mia, Wanda Vixen and Tamara Rabbit are Copyright © James Bruner. Alex O'Whitt is © Tigermark. The B-Team is © Silver Coyote. Jean LeBrun, Gabrielle Ryder, Timothy Bigglesworth-Farthington von Salzburg, Malcolm Grazer, Doctor Fox Jones, Peter Spermophilus, Miranda Spermophilus, Dina Spermophilus, Leo Leon, Miriam Redtail, Lizzy Doe, Emma Grey, Professor Moose Nicholson, Professor Erica Belge and Pethouse Magazine is © Joan Jacobsen, 2005. All other characters appearing in this story, except where otherwise specifically noted, are likewise © Joan Jacobsen.

Legal Notice: This story is Copyright © 2005 by Joan Jacobsen. This story may not be sold or used for commercial profit in any form or fashion. This story may not be modified in any way. This story may not be posted on a mirror site or any other Internet site without the written permission of the author. This story may not be distributed on print, magnetic, electrical or optical mediums.

Permission to use characters that are Copyright other individuals was obtained prior to the appearance of said characters.

The author, Joan Jacobsen, hereby asserts moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

This is an independent work of fiction with no connection whatsoever to Max Black Rabbit, Eric W. Schwartz, E.S. Productions or James Bruner and is in no way meant to imply any connection with Max Black Rabbit, Eric W. Schwartz, E.S. Productions, or James Bruner. This story contains characters created by Max Black Rabbit, Eric W. Schwartz, James Bruner, Tigermark and Silver Coyote. Events and characters occurring in this story should not be considered part of the storylines for either 'Zig Zag', 'Sabrina Online' or 'Sabrina Online - The Story'.

In fact, as far as 'Zig Zag', 'Sabrina Online', 'Sabrina Online - The Story' and 'Zig Zag the Story' are concerned, this story does not exist. The artists disavow any knowledge of and do not officially sanction the events in this story.

What mail can lead to...

It had been five days since Lieutenant Aureus got his reprimand. The first four nights afterwards, Leo had to get out of bed at a quarter to midnight, do a full inspection of the entire platoon and their gear, not to mention their living quarters, and then crawl back to bed sometime around one o'clock. By the fourth day, he was so tired he could barely see straight and the same went for his troops. The problem wasn't missing one hour of sleep. The problem was that midnight inspections broke the sleep rhythm in two for any fur subjected to it. After four days of that, in between long, hard days of work, most furs would be able to stand up and sleep.

Leo had very nearly witnessed that. The day before, he'd come across Corporal Twain talking to a private...and they were apparently both unaware that they were talking about two completely different things. The look of exhaustion on the faces of every soldier in the platoon was enough to confirm Leo's worries. If they were called on to actually do their job and lay down covering fire or a suppression barrage, they'd be just as likely to hit friendly targets as the enemy. Fortunately, Captain Cervus had that well in paw and most of Dog company's tasks had temporarily been assigned to Easy company instead. The Easy furs had grumbled until they had learned why. Then their grumbling and their discontent had been directed towards Lieutenant Aureus.

The jackal had been remarkably scarce for days now. Leo could understand why. He wasn't exactly the most popular fur on base.

Fortunately, last night had been the first no-inspection night after the punishment. The entire platoon had keeled over and slept like babies after dinner. They probably needed it very badly, Leo told himself. He had, at least.

He downed a cup of coffee and let his thoughts wander back home to Ohio. How did Lizzy get on back there? It had been almost a week since he got a letter from her, but he wasn't worried. The postal service was a bit irregular, to put it mildly. Life was...finding a rhythm out there, in distant Afghanistan.

Leo really did feel like he was a thousand miles from everywhere.

One of the few links to civilized society came in the form of American newspapers. They were always several days behind, of course, but it helped the troops keep up on affairs back home. They had been promised that eventually, computers with Internet connection would

be available but Leo was pretty sure 'eventually' meant 'somewhere around new year, 2005'. The newspapers had a new story to write about, anyway, and the buzz was going on around base as well. The 'Anthrax Scare' was on.

Christmas was approaching as well. Rapidly, in fact.

It made the lion think of home again, and of Lizzy, and he sighed. Ah well, if he couldn't celebrate Christmas with the femme he loved, he could think of worse furs than his troops to spend it with.

Refilling his coffee-mug, he thought about what to do for a Christmas-present. There weren't all that many trendy little shops in the area. In all likelihood, he'd have to find a much-belated Christmas present for Lizzy when he got home.

"MAIL! THE MAIL IS HERE!" a loud voice shouted from outside. Leo looked up and smiled. Perhaps there would be a letter from Lizzy today. Emptying his coffee mug in one long gulp and putting it down, he got to his feet and headed outside.

It was a bright day outside. Helmand decided to show itself from its best angle for once, he thought, and headed towards the post-office. Around him, many other furs were headed the same way.

Packages were delivered. A lot of them were wrapped in glittery wrapping paper. Clearly, many families back home had wanted to make sure their Christmas presents arrived in time. Leo couldn't help smiling at the happy expressions on the faces of many of these soldiers. They were just ordinary furs too, after all, and a Christmas present...well...he couldn't think of many ways to make a son or husband, far away from home, feel loved and thought of.

Suddenly, there was a lot of commotion up ahead. Leo couldn't quite see what was going on in the throng, but he tried to stretch his neck to get a glimpse. There was a lot of hooting and laughing going on.

Probably some unfortunate private who couldn't resist the temptation to open his Christmas present, only to find a really horrible knitted sweater in there, he thought and smiled. Right now, he wouldn't mind a really horrible knitted sweater. Somehow, the idea of someone doing all that work for him would be comforting.

"Third platoon really has it too good," someone laughed next to him. "HEY...YOU...YEAH YOU WITH THE PACKAGE...WE WANT TO SEE IT WHEN YOU'RE DONE WITH IT!"

Leo blinked and looked again. He could hear Corporal Twain's voice in response to the one who shouted. "NOT A CHANCE, YOU DIPSHIT! ALL OURS, COURTESY OF OUR SECOND LIEUTENANT!"

That got a good round of laughs. Suddenly, a private noticed Leo standing there and raised his voice. "HES DOWN HERE!"

Before Leo knew it, he was beset by furs wanting to know everything about how he knew the cast at ZZ Studios.

Laughing, Leo put two and two together and shook his head. "Aw for God's sake," he grinned. "It's not like I've starred in one of their movies. I just know one of the actresses through my girlfriend back home."

"I want a girlfriend like that!"

"Yeah right, Lieutenant...riiiiight."

"So, what are they all like? Really hot in private too?"

The questions rained down on the lion but he didn't mind. Pushing his way through the crowd, he came up to Corporals Mofeta and Twain, holding a very large, oblong box between them.

It was wrapped in black-and-white, tiger-striped wrapping paper.

###

For five days, Emma hadn't said a word. She had slept fitfully and her eyes looked as dull and lifeless as her fur. Her time was spent in her bed, sleeping or rocking back and forth. The doctors were getting increasingly concerned, and Fox, who had faithfully spent as much time with her as he possibly could, had only succeeded in getting the vaguest reactions out of her.

The day before, he had deemed it safe for Miriam, Jean and Lizzy to visit the mink but they too had to leave without getting any response out of their friend. Sometimes, Fox was sure he saw Emma's lips move. Like she was talking to someone...maybe to herself. She'd shuffle around the room, totally oblivious to the world when that happened, muttering without a sound.

If anyone addressed her, she'd stop and just stand still, looking at the floor

There was no real way of telling when or if the mink would get better, and Fox had taken it upon himself to arrange for her transfer to a psychiatric ward. It hurt him to the depth of his soul to do so, but he realized it was the best chance his friend had of improving.

Everyone was trying to help as best they could. Lizzy had taken a day off from work and had sought out Emma's boss at the Historical Society. She had explained everything that had happened, and the reason why Emma would be absent from work for an unknown length of time. To her surprise, the support for Emma had been complete. Instead of firing her, they would find a replacement until she was able to return to work. Even if that was half a year into the future, or more. The job was Emma's when she wanted it. There had been a lot of sympathy for the mink, too.

Emma's landlady offered to keep the rooms as they were, too. She would still need her rent, of course. She looked ashamed at mentioning it, but she explained it was her only way of making a living, herself. Lizzy assured her that wouldn't be a problem. Emma would need a home to come back to, after all, and Miriam, Lizzy and Jean quickly decided between them that they could find the money for the rent if they split it three ways, without even really noticing the extra expense.

Having thusly managed to set Emma's life on standby, Lizzy had returned to the hospital. Even if Emma didn't register what was said to her, the doe knew she had to tell her friend.

So she had done so.

Emma, predictably, hadn't said anything, and now Lizzy was sitting outside the mink's room, looking like her world had started to crack a little. It was late afternoon. Tomorrow, she had to go back to work, and somehow find the strength to do her job. Jean was at work today...the vixen had looked like someone had taken a mallet to her gut the day before, after seeing her friend in such a sorry state. Lizzy couldn't help wonder how Jean would get through her day at university after that.

Miriam was around, but she was temporarily somewhere else, getting something to drink. Fox was off trying to see to a room at the psychiatric ward for Emma. The mood had been extremely glum all day.

"Excuse me, Miss? Can you tell me if this is Emma Grey's room?" a quiet voice asked.

Lizzy looked up and nodded, surprised. In front of her stood a male mink, looking like he was in his late fifties. He was holding the paw of a clearly very distraught femme of the

same age. Lizzy could only assume they were married. It took a split second before she put two and two together.

The two minks in front of her were Emma's parents.

The male...presumably Emma's father stroked his impressively long whiskers nervously and tried to smile but the weariness and sadness in his eyes couldn't be hidden.

"That'd be here," Lizzy said, quietly. "I'm Lizzy...Emma's friend," she further explained as she got up to offer a paw to shake.

She took a moment to get a proper impression of the two furs. Their clothes were old, but in good repair. Both of them were clearly very concerned and worried, and especially Emma's mother didn't look comfortable about being in a hospital. Moreover, they both seemed hopeful in a subdued kind of way. It struck Lizzy that Emma probably grew up in a home of chronic low self esteem and that might explain her own self-image.

"You must be Emma's parents," she said in a warm voice, trying to be open and friendly. "Please...please have a seat. I'll find another chair for myself and see if I can't find a doctor who can come and talk to you. I thought you lived out west?"

The male nodded, gratefully. "We do," he said. "Seattle, you see, Miss. We've...never really had much money. It cost us our savings to come but we can't stay away when our little girl needs us like this. I...I should have come sooner. With the trial and all but she kept saying she'd deal with it..."

Lizzy nodded, slowly. That sounded exactly like an older, male version of Emma. Self recrimination and doubt. Sighing, she headed off to find a doctor.

###

"Pardon me for saying this so bluntly...but you look like *shit*, Miss LeBrun!" William said.

He was in Jean's office along with Hantaywee and Richard. Their paper was completed and they were ready to let the vixen have it. The three students looked concerned though. Their normally smiling and cheerful teacher looked like something the kaht had brought in...and then brought *up*.

"I'm sorry," Jean said and tried a weak smile. "I've had some really rough days. And no, this time there's nothing you three can do to help me. Anyway, let me have the paper," she said and held out a paw to receive it.

Getting it, she looked at the front page and nodded, thoughtfully, before placing it on the desk. "You've given the secretary two copies as well?" she asked.

Hantaywee nodded. "Sure. Just before coming here. So, when do we get graded on this?"

"Before Christmas," Jean said. "Although it's possible you'll get your grade via the university Email."

"No problem," Richard chimed in. "If it gets past Christmas, we'll all understand I'm sure. Seriously, Miss LeBrun...you do look worse for wear. What's wrong? Or am I too forward by asking that?"

Jean shook her head and smiled wearily again. "Not at all. It concerns a friend of mine who was hospitalized some days ago. It's an ugly affair but I can't really tell you more than that, as I'm sure you understand. Anyway...I'll get this looked over and graded. And since I'm unlikely to see you before 2002, I would like to wish you a merry Christmas."

The students nodded and wished Jean the same, then left the office. The vixen sat back, rubbing her face, looking at the whopper of a paper on the desk in front of her.

She was about to start having a look when there was a knock on her door. Thinking it was one of the three students who just left, she didn't even look up as the door opened ajar.

"Miss LeBrun?" a male voice asked "Or did we go to the wrong room?"

Jean didn't know the voice and she looked up from her work, turning to face the door. "No, you got the right room. I'm Jean LeBrun. And you are?"

"Well, our friends tend to call us 'the Wolf pack'," the male answered with a crooked grin "But since we're kinda here on official business, we're from the media institute. Mr. Luscus said to come see you about a possible topic for our final project?"

"We're all hoping it's not a historical documentary, though," another voice said from behind the male in the door. It was mirthful and good-natured.

Jean grinned and nodded. "Come in then, though I'd like to know your actual names!"

Three male wolves, all smiling and looking like they were quite pleased to be there, filed into her office, and Jean suddenly felt a serious need for more space.

"Well," the first speaker said "I'm Greg, that small red fellow is Terence...you know his father, I think. Father Rufus. The big dumb lug behind him is Dione. We keep him around to haul camera equipment."

"Oy! I protest!" Dione rumbled.

Jean was pretty certain she would see a flash of thunder outside. Dione's voice was bigger than his physical form and that was saying something.

"Well then, Greg, Terence and Dione...welcome. I'll do my best to answer any of your questions," the vixen said and turned around in her chair.

Dione nodded and scratched his neck. "Just gotta ask one thing before we get started..." he rumbled.

"Go ahead?" Jean said, crossing her legs and leaning an elbow on her desk.

The enormous wolf looked slightly ill at ease. Almost as if he wasn't sure if he should ask. "Well...there were those demonstrations recently and I was wondering...if it was true? I mean, no problem with me if it is. Just curious."

Jean chuckled and nodded. "It is. And thanks for the compliment."

"What compliment? Ow, Greg, why did you slap me?"

"Now you see why I say we keep him around for hauling cameras, Miss LeBrun?"

Jean giggled and shook her head. "Okay, okay...let's get working shall we. It's a pretty serious story so I suppose I had better start at the beginning?"

Greg took out a Dictaphone and nodded. "Feel free..."

###

Gabrielle looked at the building. It was certainly less impressive than the mansion, although it was still a comfortable home. A tight knot was forming in her stomach and every part of her screamed that she should leave. Just...turn around and walk away and never look back. She had argued the point to herself all the way to Denver, and she was still not convinced that she was doing the right thing.

Yohni was right there next to her. The mongoose had promised that she would be, and she had kept her word.

So why was she here? To meet an already dead fur? Certainly not to meet her father. She had never had one, and the male who had sired her in a purely biological sense, had officially disowned her years ago. So what was the reason for her even bothering to come here?

The letter, she reminded herself. The letter from her mother.

She had considered herself more or less an orphan. She'd actually been able to sympathize with Jean when the vixen spoke of how she had lost her mother, because she knew, herself, how it felt. The feeling of being betrayed by one of the two furs in the world you should be able to trust above all else. It was very hard to deal with, even in retrospect. She looked at her wrists for a moment. Then slowly, with the fingers on her right paw, she split the fur a little to look at the scars beneath. Where she had cut, that day, over a decade ago.

All because of the furs in the house in front of her.

So why was she here? She didn't owe them a single, solitary thing. Not her love. Not her respect. Nothing. Even if she sought the deepest recesses of her memory and her feelings, she wouldn't find anything but contempt for the furs who were, at least nominally, her parents.

Again the answer was the letter. She closed her eyes and took a couple of deep breaths. "I'll never be more ready for this than I am now."

"We can leave any time you want, Gabby, just remember that," Yohni said, softly.

"I know. You don't know how grateful I am for you being here though. I need you here, right now, Yohni...more than you can imagine," the filly said, nervously. "I have no idea what waits for me behind the doors over there."

Yohni smiled and gave her girlfriend's paw a squeeze. "Then why don't we go and find out? Together?"

Gabrielle nodded and walked up the gravel path to the door. She paused there...not quite certain what she should do next? Knock on the door? Just open it and enter? No, she reminded herself. Whomever lived behind those doors were strangers to her. Knocking was the right thing to do. So she did.

It seemed like forever before someone opened the door. When it *was* opened, Gabrielle could barely recognize her own mother. She had aged two decades in two years. Her mane was graying and her face was starting to show the early signs of age. Last Gabrielle had seen her had been on television when the Yakuza had attacked her father's mansion. Back then, while she was loathed to admit it, she could see some of herself in her mother's face.

Now, she could see her grandmother's face in her mother's lines...

Nonetheless, Roxanne looked stumped...then her eyes grew damp and she tried a very uncertain smile. "Gabrielle? I... I didn't think you'd come."

It had been barely more than a disbelieving whisper. Like Roxanne didn't really dare believe that Gabrielle was there.

Gabrielle, for her part, nodded curtly. "I'm here. Not to see...him. To see you," she said, struggling to keep her voice neutral. She didn't need to sneer at the femme in front of her...she was better than that.

"Please...come in, both of you," Roxanne said, quietly. She smiled at Yohni too, which Gabrielle did notice with some surprise.

The Roxanne she remembered would gladly extol on the vice and general 'wrongness' of homosexuality. She decided to test her mother's defenses a little.

"Sure. Yohni, meet my mother. Mother, meet Yohni...whom I'll be marrying in the new year," she said.

Yohni nodded to the older femme and smiled politely, but said nothing. She wasn't sure what would be appropriate. Somehow, staying quiet seemed the better option.

Roxanne nodded back and returned the polite smile...perhaps looking slightly more tired than she intended. "I didn't know Ohio allowed same sex marriages. But if you are happy together then all is good," she said, sounding like she meant it. "Gabrielle is an adult, and I trust that she would not give her heart to someone lightly. I'm glad to meet you, Yohni."

Gabrielle blinked. She hadn't expected that kind of response, at all. She wasn't even sure what to say next, but Yohni saved the situation by smiling a little wider and speaking up.

"Thank you. I can assure you, she didn't do it lightly," she said and stepped inside since Roxanne had moved aside to allow it.

This really was the world upside down, Gabrielle said to herself. How was she going to deal with this? She didn't know. One word at a time, probably. Waiting a few more moments and taking another deep breath, she closed her eyes for a moment. She was strong enough to do this. The letter had seemed very sincere in its tone, and if her mother was willing to admit to the wrongs she had done, then maybe a little progress could be made. Finally, she opened her eyes again and took out the letter from her shoulder bag.

"I want to talk to you about this, Mother. I'm not here to see a dying fur, to whom I owe nothing but contempt. I'm here to see you about *this*."

###

Third Platoon was getting quite noisy. Despite his standing order that no alcohol consumption was allowed while the unit was in Afghanistan, Leo had allowed himself to slack on that order just once. Just this once, he'd let the troops get out some cans of beer and enjoy themselves. They didn't know this yet, of course. He looked at the stack of six-packs under his desk and grinned. Outside, the rowdiness was still going on. Apparently, Corporal Twain had refused to unpack the tiger striped package from ZZ Studios yet. He kept saying it was addressed to Lieutenant Leon and that no good soldier opened his commanding officer's mail without permission.

Well, Leo hadn't given his permission, but the crowd out there certainly expected him to come out and open his package, from the sound of it. He grinned widely to himself and pondered the value of torturing the troops a little longer.

It would be cruel to do so, he told himself. They'd been giddy like schoolboys all day because of the package, and now that it was evening and they had their R&R time, they deserved their prize.

He left the beers under the desk and went out to his troops.

A roar welcomed him.

"FINALLY! Open it Lieutenant, please...open it already!"

"Come on, Sir...we really want to see what's in there."

"We've been veeery good boys, Sir, don't we deserve an early Christmas present?"

Leo grinned crookedly and headed up to the long package. He scratched his neck and smiled a bit. "Weeell...it's such nice wrapping paper. I'm not sure I can bring myself to just tearing it off," he tried.

The groans and whimpers from his troops were quickly replaced by laughter as Sergeant Pardinus held out a bowie-knife for the officer.

"Then cut it open carefully and save the wrapping paper, Sir," the lynx said, matter-of-factly.

"WAY TO GO SARGE!"

"Whoot...hot babes galore!"

"Yeah, cut it carefully, but let's see the contents!"

Taking the knife, Leo tried very hard not to laugh out loud. He carefully opened the package, making sure to be just slow enough for the troops to begin whimpering again. Finally, however, he unwrapped it and looked at the oblong box inside.

He opened it and looked at the content with some trepidation, although he managed to conceal it. He didn't mind the work they did at the studio. He knew Gabrielle and Yohni very well for instance, and they were definitely good furs. He just wasn't sure he wanted to look at either of them in any...sexual...situation. They were his friends after all. To his relief, the contents were not immediately recognizable.

"Okay...let's see...we have what looks like three video tapes and these long things must be posters," he said and held up a long roll. "We have six of them. That'll be two per squad then. Ooh, look...someone wrote something on the tapes. Oh and there's a letter here. Let me see..."

"Read it aloud, Sir...come on, be fair to us!"

"Yeah, we wanna hear...whoa, wrote on the tapes? Wow...autographed stuff. Cool!"

"Read it aloud, read it aloud!"

Leo laughed. He didn't try to conceal it anymore. "Let me skim it first. If it's...private...I'll keep it to myself," he chuckled.

Sergeant Pardinus took out a cigar and lit it, casually. "Let the Lieutenant have his love-letters to himself, furs, or I'll force you to read out every letter from your sweethearts to the rest of the platoon. Wasn't it you, corporal Mofeta, who got a letter from your girl back home, calling you 'Honeysnugglepookums'?"

Corporal Mofeta went beet red amidst the roaring laughter of his comrades. "What the...have you been reading my mail, Sarge?"

"No, you talk in your sleep, you dink!" the lynx chuckled. "And I have to check on you assholes twice a night...regulations, y'see."

"I'm going to stay awake tonight to see what Honeysnugglepookums has to say in his sleep then," Corporal Bock grinned and nudged the skunk with an elbow.

Corporal Mofeta groaned and slumped. "I'll never sleep properly again..."

Leo held up a paw to quiet everyone down. "I can read this out. It's a letter from Gabrielle. It's directed at me but it's kinda for everyone here."

He cleared his throat while the troops went quiet.

"Dear Leo..." the lion began. The grinning and snickering amongst the troops was quickly silenced by one sharp glance from by Sergeant Pardinus.

"Dear Leo," Leo tried again once he had everyone's quiet attention. "We've put this together in a real hurry so I hope it'll be good enough for your troops out there. I talked to the Boss and she said we should try to get it to you lot before Christmas. Seeing how the mail system always gets congealed with letters and packages here in the States, I dread to think how long it'd take to send stuff to our boys fighting over there, if we got closer to Christmas..."

He waited a moment while the grinning and comments about 'our boys' died out, before continuing.

"Wanda and Tamara wanted to be a little more raunchy with the posters than me...but I had a word with the boss, and we decided that since you're likely going to have to look at them, we'd send you some of the more artsy stuff. Knowing you, Leo, I'd say you should stay away when they play tapes two and three though. But the first tape...well, at least do yourself a favor and watch the first few minutes with them before leaving. I'm pretty sure one of them can explain why to you. Just take my word on this. Please tell your platoon that everyone here thinks they are doing the right thing, and that we wish them all the best. If you could get someone to donate a jacket or something, then have the lot of them sign it, we'll hang it on the wall in the common room as a memento of 'our platoon'."

Several furs scrambled to get a piece of uniform clothing to donate to the cause. In the meantime the letter was folded back up and Leo put it in his pocket.

"The rest is for my eyes only. Private stuff from one friend to another. Anyway...let's see. Private Riley, you're the biggest fur in the unit," he said and pointed to a large, brown bear. "One of your jackets should suffice. I'll make sure you get a new one. And someone get a pen that can write on cloth."

"We'll do that, Sir...but can we please see the posters at least?" Corporal Mofeta asked, having seemingly recovered from his Honeysnugglepookums-crisis.

Leo nodded and took the first roll. "Well then...let's have a look. My girlfriend would have my hide if she knew I was doing this, but alright."

He unrolled it and took a look. Then he blinked. He took another look and chuckled to himself. "Well I'll be..." he mumbled and looked at the group of furs in front of him. "Corporal Twain, I think I'll just let you have this one for second squad, before you beat someone up to get to it," he said.

The percheron beamed widely in that toothy way Leo had come to realize only equines could. It practically oozed attitude. "I think I can guess, Sir.." he said and stepped forward.

Leo let the corporal take the black-and-white poster of Gabrielle. It was signed...down in the corner. Even Leo had to admit it was a fantastic image. The bronco was slung on what seemed to be white satin sheets, but her pose was such that apart from her quite ample bosom, nothing actually showed. It taunted...hinted...promised a lot more if one could look juuust a little more from the left side...or if one juuust tilted one's head to the right like this. But of course, it was a two dimensional photo. It was very well done though and Leo had to admit, not nearly as raunchy as he had feared. Gabrielle was a beautiful femme...she could do images like that quite, quite well.

She looked asleep on the picture, with a content little smile on her face.

"MINE!" Corporal Twain grinned. "And if any of you shits want it, you can fight me for it, outside. I'll take on the whole platoon at once if I have to!"

"Hey, share it with the rest of us!" one of the privates in second squad moped.

Corporal Twain grinned and nodded. "I will. It'll hang right over my bunk!"

The rest of the posters were distributed. Three were in black and white. One for each squad. Three were in color. None of them were hardcore in any way. Leo sent a small, grateful thought to Gabrielle's sense of modesty...which in turn made him chuckle. It wasn't a trait he would normally associate with the bronco in any way.

Finally he took a look at the video tapes. They were numbered 1, 2 and 3, respectively.

Leo smiled and held up tape number one. "Sergeant Pardinus, if you go to my quarters I think you will find that underneath my desk I have a surprise for the squad. Two cans per fur, in fact. Take Corporal Brock along to carry so you don't drop anything."

"Wha'...*beer*, Sir??" the lynx asked. Then grinned. "YesSIR!"

"Males finest brew," Leo chuckled. "Budweiser for the whole squad."

Corporal Mofeta pretended to get all sniffly and misty-eyed. "Aww, jeez Sir...you really shouldn't have," he sobbed, then grinned widely and clapped his paws together sharply. "Beer and ZZ Studios movies. This is what livin' is all about!"

Leo went and put the tape in the machine, waiting a moment until Sergeant Pardinus and Corporal Brock were back with the beer. Amidst general cheerfulness, the cans were distributed to the troops and everyone found a seat.

Finally, when everyone was quietly paying attention to the television, Leo hit the 'play' button and stepped aside.

A rather catchy guitar-riff played...and ZZ Studios' logo faded into view. Then a gasp went through the crowd.

"Holy *shit*..."

"Isn't she retired...?"

"Whoa...Sir...you really do have all the contacts..."

Zig Zag's face appeared on the screen, and the camera zoomed out to show her comfortably seated amongst her cast.

"Hello boys. I'm sure I don't need to introduce myself..." the skunk began. Leo didn't really have to listen. The looks of awestruck fascination on the faces of his troops told him all he needed to know. He was watching something important. He knew from what Gabrielle had told him in the past, that Zig Zag was retired and that she hadn't appeared in front of a camera since she called her active career quits. She hadn't made a single cameo...not one 'walk-on' role in her own movies. Not even AVC, which Leo had to admit he had watched with Lizzy...although they had generally fast forwarded past the actual sex...

Well, they had the first few times.

Then they'd gotten inspired.

Feeling the tips of his ears start to burn, Leo pushed the thought aside. Zig Zag had made an introduction to this movie...because he had written to Gabrielle and asked if she couldn't send a poster or something similar.

He reminded himself to give the bronco a hug when he came home.

###

Emma looked around her new home. At least...it was her temporary home. The furs in the white coats had said so. They had been nice enough about it. She didn't really like it when they touched her though. Not until they found a nurse who had helped her into the room. That wasn't so bad.

It was a small but quite nice room. The color on the walls was a nice yellow. Nothing that burnt the eyes. The bed was a typical hospital bed, of course. There was a table and two chairs in there as well. A small bookcase, too. It was empty.

Bookcases shouldn't be empty, Emma said to herself. Maybe she could find something to put on it.

She shuffled around the room. Why was she here? She didn't really know but something told her it was better that she was there. There was a nice fox who came by several times a day to talk to her. She was pretty sure she knew him but she wasn't sure from where.

The empty bookcase stared at her, snapping her out of her thoughts about the nice fox.

He was okay...she didn't mind it when he hugged her, even if he was male. Males were dangerous, though. But the fox wasn't dangerous. Maybe not all males were dangerous. Or maybe it was just the fox who wasn't dangerous. It confused Emma and she shook her head, shuffling over to the window to look out. They'd be bringing her pills to eat. She knew that. They'd done so in the other room. That was okay. The pills made her not want to scream. They made the sound of shattering windows fade into the background even if it didn't make the sound go away altogether. The view was nice from the window. She could look down into a big garden.

There were no flowers, so it was probably winter.

But there was no snow either?

Emma was confused by this thought and the confusion brought tears to her eyes and she began to shake. Shuffling over to her bed, she crawled up on it and put her blanket over her head. It was silent and safe inside the darkness. The confusion was still there but the fear of it was dulled a little.

Rocking back and forth, she wondered who the other furs were who had come to see her. She had seen two minks...they looked so familiar. Maybe they were family? No no...that was silly, her parents lived on the west coast and were very poor. How could they afford to come and visit her? And what about the two vixens...the gray and red one? They had looked so worried. The gray one had a strange look to her. A little bit androgynous,

really...more feminine than masculine. That was okay. She had been really nice. The red one had worn a lot of beads and colorful clothing. Emma had wanted to laugh...it looked funny. But she couldn't laugh.

She couldn't remember how.

That had made her cry.

There was a doe too. That was unusual. She seemed to recall that there were a lot more of that kind of fur living up in Canada. She remembered the doe too. She thought of pancakes and breakfast. That made the fear go away and she stopped rocking.

She took the blanket off her head and crawled back out of the bed.

The empty bookcase laughed at her again.

It had a male laugh.

Then it sneered and said it wanted filling.

It had a *familiar* male voice.

"You can't even do *that* right, can you?!" it growled in Jeremy's voice.

Emma started screaming and hurried back on her bed, covering her head with the blanket again.

A moment later, the door burst open and someone hurried in. Emma didn't hear what they were trying to say. She could only hear Jeremy's voice growling at her for not filling up the bookcase.

Then she felt a little prick on her shoulder and the voice became a blur. A...blue and orange blur. How could a voice have colors? It did.

Emma smiled.

She was sitting in a roller-coaster and it was almost at the top of a tall rise. Then it dropped...her stomach tickled.

She slept.