

Down the Rabbit Hole

A Red McKenna Novel

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Read this first chapter in the next installment of the Red McKenna Series.

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“Doc! You inconsiderate, unfeeling, self-centered son of a bitch, get your ass in here right now,” Pat Dacy yelled into the telephone, “and explain to this poor girl what’s going on! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. What were you thinking – keeping her in the dark like that?”

Pat was Chief Operations Officer for Scottsdale Systems Technology. Red (aka Judith McKenna) didn’t know what a Chief Operations Officer was supposed to look like, but Dr. Patricia Dacy was not what she would have expected. Rather, she looked like someone’s grandmother.

Pleasant and kindly, with wise eyes, Pat had long, straight, grey hair, which she wore pulled back from her thin face, which must have been beautiful forty years ago, before ravages of time had turned it to soft, seamed leather. She looked like she’d be at home sitting in a rocking chair with an old, lazy gray cat sleeping on a braided rug at her feet, while she knitted and waited for the tea to cool. Instead, she was scolding her boss.

* * *

Sunlight streaming through the glass wall in Doc’s bedroom had awakened Red Saturday morning, cuddled with Doc like spoons in his oversize bed.

While the glass-walled office building Doc had bought and condo-converted a few years earlier – keeping the top two floors for his own use – certainly wasn’t the highest in the area, it was far enough from other high rises and high enough on its own that sheer distance from prying eyes was enough to create privacy. Doc habitually left the curtains open to enjoy the view.

“It’s beautiful,” she had exclaimed when she first saw that view across what Phoenicians like to call “The Valley of the Sun,” which is an immense basin containing Phoenix and its many suburbs.

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That had been Friday night, and she and Doc had been standing in the middle of the room stark naked, getting ready for bed. He had just shut the lights off so she could see the view.

Western citiscapes at night generally resemble the classic view of Los Angeles from the Hollywood Hills, which nearly everyone in the industrialized world is familiar with from motion pictures. They all look like semi-regular arrangements of lights carpeting a more-or-less flat expanse reaching to the horizon. They nearly all look like that from any elevation high enough to provide a view.

While movies have prepared people to recognize this cityscape, even the big screen cannot convey the yawning cavernousness of the space overlying that flat expanse of flickering and moving lights. With no reflections of the darkened room, nothing appeared between Red and that immensity.

When they'd first arrived at the desert in West Texas traveling from Florida, Doc had told her: "Easterners meeting the desert for the first time either love it, or hate it. If they love it, they never want to be anywhere else. But, for some people the immensity is too much. It makes them feel small and unimportant, and they go scurrying back to someplace where they feel less exposed."

Red had hired Doc to transport her on his motorcycle to Nevada when her car broke down in Florida. She'd run away from home – the yacht her mother lived on with her step father when they weren't at one of his other residences – to search for Red's long-lost natural father, a geologist who'd disappeared on a field trip to Nevada ten years before.

Doc had stopped to help her get her car settled in a repair shop that he, at least, trusted. She'd quickly come to trust him enough to hire him to provide alternate transport on his motorcycle for the rest of her trip West.

In West Texas, she'd found that she was one of the people who loved the western deserts. Now, it suddenly became clear to her why. The thrill she got from looking out at this cityscape was similar to the thrill she always got standing next to the big, athletic

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men, like Doc, she was so physically attracted to.

Being six feet, three inches tall, and a crack athlete herself, Red found that there weren't too many men around whom she would describe as "big." Unfortunately, the ones she'd known previously had all come up short in some other way.

Either they weren't smart enough to keep her brain entertained (she was earning top grades in what Doc described as "one of the most intellectually demanding universities in the most smarty-pants part of the country with a degree in a subject that gives most people phobias"), or they were too egocentric to give her the space she needed to be herself, or what ego they had was too fragile to take competition from a girlfriend who was bigger, tougher, and smarter than they were.

While spending nearly all her waking hours – and most of her sleeping hours – with Doc for nearly a week, she hadn't yet found anything not to like about the guy. That fact had made her decide that, come Hell or high water, she wasn't going to let *this* one get away. Her decision had been reinforced by the fact that, when she'd finally decided to make love to him, he'd introduced her to the best sex she'd ever experienced.

Not that she was all *that* experienced – most of her beaus had failed to measure up before she'd gotten to the "is he any good in bed?" test. Doc was definitely the most experienced of the two or three who'd made it that far in the "husband for Judith" try-out program.

The ones who'd spent their high-school years banging cheerleaders had washed out very, very early. In fact, none of them had made it past the "polite conversation" test. Red (Red was the "biker" nickname Doc had coined for her due to her flowing flame-colored hair and densely freckled complexion) felt very sorry for the poor cheerleaders!

* * *

"Doesn't it bother you how many people can look directly into your bedroom windows?" she had asked, staring at the immensity

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past the glass wall.

Living alone in a big apartment for years, she'd kept up the nudity-at-home habit she'd picked up from her freshman roommate – the last person she'd shared accommodations with before getting her own apartment across the river from the Harvard campus.

Like most nudists, she was acutely aware that people in general are embarrassed by seeing strangers unclothed. Not only is public nudity illegal in most places, it is impolite everywhere.

She didn't want to make a mistake by running around nude – and doing other things she intended to do – in a bedroom with glass walls.

“The only people who could possibly see us are people in high rises all the way over there,” Doc pointed out, “and they couldn't make anything out without a pretty serious telescope. If they want to spend thousands of dollars on optical equipment to spy on their neighbors, I figure they deserve a show. If the lights are bright enough to make it hard for you to sleep, we can draw the draperies.”

“No, it's spectacular – worth being kept awake, actually.”

“I thought you'd like it.”

* * *

Despite the fact that the glass wall in the bedroom faced West, away from the rising sun, morning in the clear desert air was bright enough to waken them.

As Doc had predicted days ago, they no longer felt the compulsion to make love every time they found themselves alone.

When, as they passed through Austin the previous Wednesday, Red had first maneuvered him into sharing a bed at the Driskill Hotel by telling the check-in clerk they'd recently been married, they found themselves keeping up the fantasy by enthusiastically copulating every time they got the chance.

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Noting that they'd made love half a dozen times in the first thirty hours, and that she was looking forward to more, Red had speculated that they'd crossed into nymphomaniac territory. Doc, who'd had experience with *real* nymphomaniacs, said that, no, it was what he called the "Honeymoon Effect." They'd both just taken on new lovers (each other), and had little else to do right then. So, they were naturally making best use of their time and energy by exploring each other. He predicted that their libidos would calm down over the next few days.

That's exactly what happened. With other things to think about while riding cross country on Doc's big touring motorcycle, their sneaking-off-for-a-quickie rate had plummeted. They still did a lot of groping between the sheets when they stopped for the night, but when they were done, they were done, not just taking a break to recharge their batteries for the next tryst.

That Saturday morning, they were content to just sit up in bed holding each other and enjoying the view while their sleepiness wore off.

Desertscape with the sunrise at your back – whether you're looking out over vast stretches of open desert, vast mountain ranges glowing in the Sun, or the facades of countless buildings burning red-gold in reflected light against the azure sky – always seem alive, and inviting.

"Look at me," they seem to say. "I'm full of the promise of adventure. There'll be all sorts of things going on out here all day. Get out of bed, sleepyhead, and come out to play."

One can't resist the siren song for long. Just a few minutes is all it takes for sleepy desert rats to begin to stir.

* * *

The first order of business is always to pee. Doc got there first, so Red wrapped herself up in the enormous bedspread folded at the foot of the bed, and curled up in one of the luxurious red-leather club chairs Doc had arranged around a black marble coffee table next to the glass wall. Still not 100% awake (accounting for her

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losing the race to the bathroom), she smilingly resisted the desert's pull a little longer.

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After taking her turn in the bathroom, Red found Doc already dressed in jeans, a pair of black cowboy boots, and a light blue western-style shirt, topped off by a tan cowboy hat. He had stretched out his muscular six-foot, six-inch frame in the same chair she'd just vacated, with his feet, as usual, propped up on the coffee table.

Red walked over, and plopped onto his lap, still nude, for a kiss and a cuddle before getting dressed, herself. She would have been too big a load for an average man to hold in his lap, but was just right for Doc to cuddle up with.

One of the many traits that had caused her to decide she wanted him for exclusive property was that he was the first man who could make her forget the huge empty space in her life that had yawned like a chasm at the edge of her consciousness since her natural father disappeared.

In less than a week since he'd found her crying her eyes out in frustration when her pink 1965 Mustang convertible had given up its mechanical ghost by the side of the highway in Florida, he'd become the central figure in her life. Doc had immediately chased away all the failure and panic, making her feel like an adventurer who could conquer any obstacle.

Thinking he was just some random motorcycle bum, she'd offered to pay him \$100 a day to carry her on his big touring bike to Nevada, where the trail to her father's whereabouts had gone cold all those years ago.

It wasn't until she'd fallen madly in love with him that she discovered:

1. He was a certified genius in two fields of physics – both of which were fascinating to her as well;
2. He had combined this scientific ability along with business acumen to make himself filthy rich;

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3. The company he'd built had just the right technical capabilities she needed to complete her quest.

The last item meant that she'd be joined to him at the hip at least until her quest was over. The first item meant that they were destined to be best friends (there just weren't that many math and physics fans around to play with).

The second item was something she'd never thought of as terribly important, but it sure felt nice!

All her life, what she'd wanted most was a home and a family with a husband she loved and respected. She'd always imagined that husband to be just like her father. Now, she imagined him to be just like Doc.

She felt things had started working out spectacularly well for her the minute he'd walked into her life. She never wanted him to walk out again.

That would be awful!

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