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**Connections**

**by Selena Kitt**

***2006 Rauxa Prize First Runner-Up***

**eXcessica gratis \* free fiction**

In the bygone days before cell phones, lonely Cathy, college dropout, works in a grocery store and makes completely random phone calls to strangers just to make a human connection. When a strange coincidence forces her to actually speak to the person on the other end of the phone, she's suddenly thrust back into the world, with all its vulnerability. Will Seth be able to draw Cathy back into the land of the living?

*Warning: This title contains graphic language and sex.*

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## Connections

The phone company used to give phone books away free. I have one for every city in the state of Michigan. People think I'm kidding when I tell them that one day they delivered thirty big boxes full of phone books to my apartment door. All four hundred or so of them are stacked in milk crates against my living room wall. I stole the milk crates from work.

I sit on the floor, flip through the white pages, and call. At first it didn't matter who it was. I would just point out a name in the shadowy light of the aquarium and push buttons on the phone.

There is always a moment of anxiety while it's ringing. I sit there with the phone crooked, twisting the cord around my finger, watching my fish swim back and forth in their tank, my breath shallow and turning to glass in my throat when I hear a voice: "Hello?"

I think I have heard every possible way a human being can say that word.

It was just a game at first. Any name connected with a voice: male, female, old, young. Just a voice. I don't need to talk. People will say, "hello" a few times and then hang up. Sometimes they say hello and then wait a while, as if expecting a response. But I never talk. And I never, ever hang up first.

Some of them take it on as a contest of wills, I think, but I just like the idea of being connected with someone out there in the world. Eventually, they all grow tired of waiting and hang up, but I cling to that silence until they do.

As my calls grew more frequent, I became more selective. Once I figured out how to make my name show up as "Private" on Caller-ID, I'd call the same numbers sometimes. Men are the most interesting. I like the deep, secret sound of their voices.

Most of my calls are local, but sometimes I'll take out phone books from small places in the state I've never heard of. Once in a while, for variety, I'll discard the phone books and just dial. Once I called California and tried to imagine the warmth.

I don't tell people about it. People don't understand me. I know I would just get those strange and steady looks, like the one the UPS guy gave me when he delivered my phone books. I think he thought I was insane. That's okay. Sometimes I think so too.

\* \* \* \*

I used to go to college, but that feels like a long time ago now. And I don't talk to my mother anymore. It sounds like a non-sequitur, but those two things are related. My mother couldn't live with my decision to leave the University of Michigan—her alma mater, that prestigious institution. My father would have understood my reasons for leaving, I think. But he died when I was fourteen and left me with my mother.

My mother... she used to shop at Kroger's until she discovered I work there as a cashier. She shops down the street at Farmer Jack's now. I see Clyde's car there on Sundays. You can't miss it, a huge turquoise Cadillac with red interior.

Clyde is mother's second husband. She remarried three years ago. I stood up in the wedding in a pale pink dress that was also my formal for senior prom. Clyde wore plaid pants and smoked cigars through the whole reception. I hate him. I almost retched when I had to watch him take the garter off my mother's leg. I swear, he was leering and drooling, and my mother, feigning innocence, was blushing like some sixteen-year-old.

My mother—I think she's the one person in the state I haven't called in the past two-and-a-half years.

I live in a one-bedroom apartment with fish I named after the seven dwarves and four more I named after the Monkees. I was going to name them after the Beatles, but I didn't want to name one after John or George because they're dead. I named my first fish Martin, after Martin Luther King Jr., and he died. I held a mini-funeral for him, and cried when I had to swish him down the toilet into the unknown world of the sewers.

I like funerals. They make me feel, and anything that can do that is something to hold fast to, even if it is a bit morbid. I remember my father's funeral. I didn't cry, but my mother did. In fact, she carried the theatrics so far she collapsed in the funeral home during the service. I know it sounds unfair, but she always found some way to steal my father's spotlight, even when he was dead.

Every time I think of the funeral, I see her blushing as she lifted her wedding dress higher on her slim leg, pretending to be so pure. Everything with her is pretending. She's like an aging, dark-haired Barbie doll. I don't like her much, now, and I know she doesn't like me, either, so that's okay. She'll never accept that the world doesn't revolve around her, and she knows I see through her charade. She thinks I loved my father more than I did her. She's right.

\* \* \* \*

I like to listen to Bob Dylan in the dark. He makes me think. He teaches me in his rough, monotone voice. He's a true poet.

I hated college because I didn't learn anything. I wanted to major in political science, but my first two years were spent taking courses like freshman English and "Introduction to the Library." The whole thing reminded me too much of high school. I opted to save my time and their money and got out. Now I lie alone in my bed and listen to Bob Dylan in the dark and wonder.

I like the back of his Highway 61 Revisited CD.

*"The WIPE-OUT GANG buys, owns and runs the Insanity Factory—if you don't know where the Insanity Factory is located you should hereby take two steps to the right, paint your teeth, and go to sleep."*

He has such amazing insights, Mr. Dylan. I wonder if he's ever peeked inside the Insanity Factory, or felt that the WIPE-OUT GANG was coming after him at the speed of light, like I have.

\* \* \* \*

Finding Seth one night is a complete and total accident. I do what I've done a thousand times before—pick up the phone and dial, waiting for someone to answer.

“City Morgue,” the voice says. “You kill 'em, we chill 'em.”

“What?” The word startles out of me before I can even think. I put a hand over my mouth, staring at Sneezy through the aquarium glass.

“I'm kidding,” the voice says. “This is Seth. Who do you need?” There is laughter in his voice.

“Hello?” he asks. “You still there?”

Of course, I am, but I'm not about to answer. It's the first time in two years that I've said anything over the phone to another human being.

“Look, I'm sorry about that,” he says. “It was a joke. This isn't a morgue, it's Bennett Hall. Who is this?”

I'm silent, twisting the phone cord around my finger, trying not to breathe.

“Cathy? Is this you?”

I jump when he says my name and a small sound escapes my throat. It takes me a moment to realize he isn't talking to me. That's impossible. My name is common. He just knows another Cathy, that's all. Strange coincidence.

“Which one of us do you want?” Seth asks. “Hello? Come on, it was just a joke! Who is this?”

I wait for this to end. I know it will, I just have to wait for it.

“Cathy, if this is you, I'm going to be mighty pissed. You know I'm studying for McBain's exam.”

I close my eyes, wanting to hang up, but still waiting for him to hang up first.

“Cathy, I mean it! I'm sick of your games! Is it you or not? Hello?”

He's getting angry. I hold my breath. He will hang up soon. They hang up when they get angry. I wait. I never hang up first and I'm not going to start now.

Of course, up until now, I've never talked, either.

“Who is this?” he asks again. “Look, Tom isn’t here, and I have no idea where he is. Steve is out with Jen at the Brown jug and Will’s at the Union. Okay? So if it isn’t me you want to talk to, you’re out of luck, anyway.”

The Brown Jug.

Student Union.

Bennett Hall.

Too many coincidences—here I am, connected with Seth (whoever he is) and through some weird synchronicity, connected with my past and U of M, five hundred miles and half a state away.

Now I’m desperate to hang up and break the connection, but the habit is too ingrained. He has to hang up first—and soon.

“Hey, do you need someone to talk to?” His voice turns gentle. “Is this a... a cry for help?”

I pull the phone away to stare at it, but I can still hear him.

“Hey, I’m here. You might as well say something while you have me on the phone.”

“Fuck you!” I yell. “Who do you think you are? Freud?” I’m too indignant to think about not talking anymore.

“No. Seth,” he says, laughter in his voice. “I was beginning to think you didn’t have any vocal cords or something. Who is this?”

“...God,” I tell him after a pause, and hang up.

\* \* \* \*

I don’t make any more phone calls that week. Rolling around, warm, searching for cool places on the sheet at night, I am unsure and afraid, until I get up the nerve to call him again. He doesn’t answer the first time, so I hang up. I try again, Sunday night, and he picks up the phone.

“Hello?” he says. I can’t find my voice. “Hello? Who is this?”

“Me,” I tell him, clearing my throat. “Me. God.”

“Oh, it’s you,” he laughs. “Whatcha want?”

“Are you busy?” I don’t know why I ask. I don’t even know why I called.

“Um... I dunno. That depends. Are you going to talk to me?” he asks. “I was about to open up a bag of Doritos and settle down to a night of reading Hemingway. Can you be more interesting than that?”

“I can try,” I reply.

“I have to admit, I’m curious,” Seth says. “Who are you? I mean really. Do I know you?”

“You can if you want to,” I tell him, lowering my voice.

There’s a brief silence and I can hear Bob Dylan in the background singing “Lay Lady Lay.” Maybe it’s a sign.

Then he says, “Oh, hell, Hemingway’s a bore. Hold on.”

Faintly: “Hey, Will, can you get out of there, man? I’ve got a private phone call.”

The reply is even more faint: “Some hot chick?”

Seth again: “Maybe. I’m gonna find out.”

Waiting, I almost hang up, but I don’t. Maybe that proves something. I don’t know. I’m not Freud.

“Thanks, man. If anyone needs to use it, let me know,” Seth says. I hear a door shut, and Dylan is drowned out. “Okay,” he says when he gets back on the phone.

“Who’s Cathy?” I ask him.

“An old girlfriend of mine,” he replies.

“How old?”

“Well, she’s twenty. But I haven’t dated her for a year now. Who are you?”

“My name’s Cathy, too,” I tell him. “But I’m twenty-one.”

“Me, too,” he says. “Do you go to U of M?”

“I used to,” I say, knocking on the aquarium glass at Doc, who, with a swish of his tail, sails down to the other end of the tank. “A few million years ago.”

“Yeah? You’re that old, huh?”

“How old do you think God is?” I ask.

He laughs. “Are you a friend of a friend or something? Did I meet you at a party?”

“No.”

“How did you get my number?” he asks.

I tell him the truth. “I just pushed a few buttons and there you were.”

He hesitates. “No kidding?” He sounds stunned.

“No kidding,” I reply.

“What, like a crank call?”

“Something like that,” I admit.

“Huh. Weird.” He’s quiet for a moment. I contemplate hanging up again. “Well, congratulations! I think you might be weirder than I am!”

“Oh... thank you?”

“Believe me, I welcome the competition,” he says. “There should be more of us weirdoes, you know. We make life interesting.”

I laugh. I don’t think we’ve stopped talking since.

\* \* \* \*

We talk about everything.

\* \* \* \*

Leaning against a windowpane, watching the rain fall in a pale circle of orange florescent light, I stand with the phone against my ear and we talk:

“Cathy, do you believe in God?”

“Sometimes I do.”

“I think God was made up so no one would be afraid of dying.”

Surprised, I ask, “You don’t believe in God?”

“I don’t think so,” he replies.

“Are you afraid to die?”

“... yes. Kind of,” he admits.

“Then maybe you’re right.”

\* \* \* \*

Lying on my bed in the warmth of a sunbeam, listening to the long, low whistle of a train in the distance, and to Seth, I share myself with him, carefully.

“Did you ever wonder what stars were made of?” I ask.

“When I was little, I thought the stars were holes that God had cut into the sky so that the sun could shine through at night.”

“You had a pretty amazing imagination when you were little, Seth.”

“I know. Don’t you hate being grown up?”

After a brief silence, I say, “I hate pretending that I am.”

\* \* \* \*

Curled up next to the refrigerator, I feel protected in the small space as painful subjects and old fears loom and stretch icy fingers in my direction.

“What did you get on your SATs, Cath?”

“You tell me first.”

“980, combined. You?”

“1540.”

“Holy shit! That’s sixty points shy of a perfect score! No wonder you got a full-paid scholarship here! I bet you were valedictorian, too.”

I swallow hard. “Yes.”

“I don’t get it, Cath. You’re nuts! You’re just wasting your life without a college education.”

I snort and tell him, “You’ve been programmed to think that. School isn’t living. School is for people who want to be told what to do. It’s for people who want rules to live by.”

His voice is soft. “You know what I think? I think you’re afraid, Cath. You’re afraid if you tried to live by someone else’s rules, you wouldn’t fit in.”

Tears sting my eyes. “I tried once already. I don’t want to change. They tried to make me into someone they wanted me to be.”

“You just don’t want to adapt to the world,” he told me. “You’re afraid of getting hurt. If you stay in your own world, you’ll be protected, right? That isn’t living, and it’s awfully lonely.”

I stiffen, gripping the receiver. “Alone and lonely are two totally different things.”

“I know, babe, but you’re both.”

\* \* \* \*

I don’t make hang-up calls anymore. I haven’t since Seth, anyway, and that’s eight months. We talk every day. It’s expensive, but I have a job in an office now and I’m making more money. Seth’s an English major and he’s going to be a teacher and I know everything there is to know about him. He likes mint chocolate chip ice cream, snow boarding, classic rock, Franco American Spaghetti-O’s & Meatballs, and making love in the rain.

I don’t know the last from experience, but we’ve talked about sex. I know he hasn’t had a serious steady girlfriend since Cathy. He knows I’ve had three boyfriends. Only one of them could be considered serious, and because Ron was a fundamental Baptist, we never had sex. Well, officially. I don’t know what God thought about all those heavy petting sessions and the time he asked me to put it in my mouth and I did. I heard Ron was getting married to a girl from his church. I wonder if she will put it in her mouth?

Seth knows me better than I know myself. We’ve exchanged pictures. He’s tall, almost willowy, with longish blonde hair, green eyes. In the picture he’s standing by a Jeep wearing jean cut-offs, and I can see his ribs, his skin so pale. I sent him the only recent picture I have of myself. It’s an instant Polaroid shot Ron took of me sitting in front of the aquarium on the phone. I don’t remember who I was talking to in the picture, if I was talking at all. I guess it’s not important.

\* \* \* \*

“Easter Break,” Seth says the first thing when he calls. “Can I come see you?”

He sounds so nonchalant, but my heart leaps to touch my tonsils. How do I say no? I’m standing in the middle of the kitchen, my hair wrapped in a towel.

“Where will you stay?” I ask.

“Well... I was hoping I could stay with you.”

“Oh.”

I glance around the kitchen, at the dishes I haven’t done, the peanut butter sitting out on the counter. Ron hated it when I left the kitchen a mess. What do I say?

“It’s next week,” he says. “I told my parents I wouldn’t be coming home for Easter since I went down for Christmas.”

Seth comes from North Carolina. I never noticed his slight drawl until he told me. My eyes close, and I take a deep breath.

“Cath? You still with me?”

“Umm,” I reply. He and I have never met face to face. In eight months of phone calls, we have never met. “I’m here.”

“Well?” he asks.

I open my eyes, seeing the peanut butter jar through prisms. “Sure. I’ll give you directions.”

\* \* \* \*

After cleaning the apartment top to bottom, it takes me three long hours to lug the milk crates full of phone books down to the dumpster and toss them in. I ache all over when I’m through and there is a huge, empty white space on the wall where they have been stacked. There are two phone books left under my end table: one for my area and one for Seth’s.

Then I put on Bob Dylan singing *Angelina* and sit on front of the aquarium, waiting. I watch Davey and Dopey and company swim around their little world until I hear the garbage truck outside. Then I go to the door wall and watch as the dumpster is lifted, and then set back down again, empty. I watch and wonder why I’m crying.

\* \* \* \*

I call my mother a day before Seth is suppose to arrive. I don’t know why, but I call her. It’s like unfinished business. Clyde answers the phone and then goes into a coughing fit. Too much cigar smoking is my guess. I almost put the phone back on its cradle, but I don’t. That would be too much like reverting to old habits.

“Hello. May I speak with my mother, please, Clyde?” I ask. If there’s one thing I am with Clyde, it’s polite.

“Catherine?” He clears his throat.

“Yes.”

“Just a moment.” I wait as he goes to get her.

“Cathy?” It’s my mother’s voice, soft and concerned. I can close my eyes and see her, her dark hair, thick like mine, pulled back into a girlish ponytail she likes to wear around the house. I find myself wondering if there was a time when I felt genuine love for my mother. Once, I think, after I’d scraped all of the skin from both knees when I took a dive with my roller skates and she wiped away my tears and called me “Lovey,” I felt something... It’s the only time I can recall.

“Hello, Mother. It’s me.”

“Is something wrong? Are you okay?”

“Fine,” I tell her, a little hoarse. Her tone brings the memory into focus, and I can close my eyes and see her, her hand on my cheek, her brow wrinkled, the lines around her eyes only faint then, her voice concerned as she asked, “Are you okay?”

“I just wanted to see how you were doing,” I say.

“Fine.” Her voice is tighter now. “We’re both fine.” And of course, she has to bring Clyde into it.

“I’m glad.” I grip the phone. I remember her at the wedding, wearing white like she had a right to, and me standing by pretty-in-pink, a reminder.

There is a brief silence, an awkward one.

I try to sound cheerful, “Well, that’s what I called for. I’ll be seeing you.”

“Cathy, wait,” she says. I wait. “I heard about your job. Your new one.”

“Yeah?”

She clears her throat. “I just wanted to tell you, I think it’s terrific.”

“Why?” I ask. “Because I’m typing in an office instead of working in a supermarket? A job is a job, Mother. I still don’t have a college education. Are you going to tell me that it doesn’t piss you off?”

“I wish you wouldn’t say things like that. It sounds like you haven’t changed a bit.”

Weary, I say, “Ditto.”

“Why did you really call?” she asks. “You haven’t been interested in my life for years, why start now?”

I stare at the phone. “Interested in your life?”

A long silence stretches. I shake my head and sigh. “I called to see if I still had any feelings left for you,” I tell her, realizing it as the truth.

“Oh... well?”

“Pity, Mother,” I tell her. “That’s about it.”

I replace the receiver, make my way to the bathroom, shed my clothes, and get into the shower. I’m kneeling in the tub, letting water mix with my tears, when I hear the phone ring. I don’t answer it. It stops after six rings and, for some reason, I cry harder.

\* \* \* \*

My hair is pulled back into a ponytail, and I sit barefoot and cross-legged on the couch, wearing a black velvet dress and watching the door. He is fifteen minutes late, and when he knocks, I'm afraid to answer.

"Cathy?"

It's his voice, all right, only it's close, much closer than it's ever been.

"Hi." I peek through the crack I've made in the door. He's holding a bag that says *Adidas* on the side, carrying a guitar case over his shoulder and wearing jeans, a red shirt, and a blue-jean jacket.

"Cathy." It's not a question, just my name, soft and sweet, like he knows me.

"Can I come in?" he asks after a moment.

I step back and swing the door open wider. He comes inside, setting his stuff down. I shut the door and lean against it. He looks around, his eyes settling back on me.

"It's nice," he says, nodding. I smile a little.

"Thank you. So are you," I say, and then bite my lip.

"Come here." He stretches an arm out. I drift toward him and he takes my hand. The response is instant and total, and I look down at our hands together in wonder, and then up at his face. He is serious, his eyes on mine. He takes my other hand and stands looking down at me, his breath warm on my face.

"Hi," he whispers. "I'm Seth."

"I'm God," I whisper back. "Nice to meet you."

He laughs and hugs me. I put my arms around him and close my eyes, marveling at the human contact, letting the warmth envelop us.

"I've waited so long to do this," he says into my hair.

"Too long."

His arms tighten around me.

\* \* \* \*

I don't have a real bed, just a box spring and mattress shoved against the wall on the floor. It's a firm mattress, hard, really, and I'm still apologizing for it as I show him my room and he kisses me into silence. I've kissed lots of times, but this is different. This is Seth. His mouth is soft and firm, his lips wet, like the inside of a ripe plum. He tastes like cashews from the Chinese we ordered earlier.

His hands are already lifting my dress in back as he presses me against the dresser. My heart is racing, but so is my head. I break the kiss and slither out of his arms, moving toward the door. He is watching me, his eyes smiling.

“Where you goin’, Cath?”

“Uhhh...” Where am I going? I make a quick decision. “Bathroom.”

He nods and I go wash my face and flush the toilet, trying to keep my hands from shaking so much. I sit and stare at the wall for as long as I think I can, and then I go back to the bedroom.

The lights are off and he’s lit a few of the small candles on my dresser. He’s in my bed, bare-chested under my dark green comforter and he’s smiling again.

“Come to bed.” He holds his hand out to me. “I won’t bite.”

I lean against the door, my arms crossed over my chest. “Promise?”

“Only in all the right places.” He wiggles his eyebrows and I smile, but my stomach hurts.

I move towards the bed and sit on the edge, facing the door.

His hand moves over the small of my back, rubbing, comforting. “Want me to unzip you?”

I nod, not trusting my voice, and he tugs my zipper down, opening my dress to my waist. I’m wearing nothing underneath it. The air is cold and I shiver. He is kissing my spine, vertebrae by vertebrae, from bottom to top.

“Seth.” It’s a whisper. I can’t find my voice. It’s caught somewhere under this lump in my throat.

His lips reach the back of my neck. The heat of his body is so foreign to me that it makes me flush. He moves my hair over my shoulder and I stiffen when his tongue slides along my hairline, his hands pushing my dress down over my shoulders.

“You’re beautiful,” he murmurs over my shoulder blade.

I shake my head, pulling one sleeve back up over my exposed skin. “Guys just say that.”

“Is that what I am?” He sits back.

I can feel him, his eyes on me, but I don’t turn. “What do you mean?”

“Am I just some guy?” He leans back against the wall.

I look at him over my shoulder, trying to keep my voice steady. “Yeah, that’s right. Just some guy.”

He shakes his head, frowning, and then his face relaxes into a sad smile. “Cathy, what are you so afraid of?”

“Nothing.” I shrug, looking back at the door.

His laugh is soft, disbelieving. “Girls just say that.”

It makes me smile. “Is that what I am?”

“Yeah,” he says, stretching his legs out on either side of mine, wrapping his arms around my waist. “That’s right, just some girl.”

“You are so mean to me,” I whisper, leaning back against him.

His silent laughter shakes through us both, his bare chest against my exposed back. “I know. I’m so awful. Just like all those other guys, out for just one thing...”

“You are!” I muffle a laugh with my hand.

He pulls me over his lap, and I squeal, the motion a surprise. I am trapped between his scissored legs, lying back across the bed.

Seth grins. “So how about you give me what I want, then, huh?”

I stick out my tongue at him.

“Yep, that’s what I want,” he says, leaning in to kiss me, following my tongue’s retreat deep into my mouth. It’s as if some electrical current is passing from his body into mine. I break the kiss, putting my arms around his neck. His mouth moves over my throat, the light heat of his breath punctuated by soft kisses.

I open my eyes and watch the three flickering circles made by the candles on the ceiling as he kisses my dress off each shoulder. I shiver, the air over my breasts a shock, but have no time to think about it before he’s nuzzling each of them in turn, as if trying to decide which one he likes best. That thought makes me want to giggle and I stifle it, watching his bent head move toward my nipple.

I feel outside of myself, as I almost always do, watching him take my dark nipple between his lips. I feel the sensation, I feel his tongue swirling around the nipple, I feel his fingers rolling the other nipple between his thumb and forefinger, and yet I feel numb. I look back up at those three shadowy circles, wanting a beacon to call me home. I want to know what home looks like, feels like.

He stops, and I look down at his eyes searching mine. What is he thinking?

“Cathy, you’re not even breathing,” he whispers, kissing the underside of my breast, his lips soft and warm.

“I’m not?”

He takes one of my hands that I’m gripping the sheet with, a clenched fist, and he urges me to open it, pressing it against his, palm to palm. My hands are small and soft, his large and calloused. Sitting up, he slides my dress down over my hips, my thighs, tossing it over my desk chair in the corner.

“Nice shot,” I remark. He smiles, but my body is his focus and his eyes move over me in the candlelight. I’ve never felt so exposed.

He takes my hand and rests it below my navel. “Here. Breathe here.” I try, and he waits, watching me. “Move my hand, up and down, with your breath.” He places his hand over mine. I can feel the weight against my womb, an easy pressure, sinking my spine down deeper into the bed.

“I’m trying,” I say. I bite my lip, closing my eyes, focusing all of my attention on my breath. It’s a shaky rhythm.

“Yes! There it is,” he murmurs, and I smile at his praise. I can feel my belly lifting our hands. “Right there. Don’t stop that.”

I want to giggle again but I don’t. I look up at him, his eyes reflecting the candlelight, and for the first time, I see him. The awkward hello, the hesitation, it all melts with the heat of my belly’s breath moving our hands, the flickering flames in his eyes. I see Seth, and he sees me, and just for that one moment, there’s no more fear.

Not moving his hand, he leans over and kisses me. In just moments, I can feel myself floating away again, and he presses his hand against mine under my navel, a gentle reminder. He nods against my lips, not breaking our kiss, when he feels me breathing more deeply into my belly.

“Keep breathing,” he murmurs, sliding down my body to settle between my legs. And still, he doesn’t move his hand. His cheek rests against my thigh, his mouth close enough to my pussy to move my pubic hair, and his hand covering mine just above my mound.

“Seth,” I whisper. “Please.”

He nods, looking up at me. “It’s okay. Keep breathing.” His hand presses and I breathe, closing my eyes as his tongue finds my center. At first there’s nothing except that sense of watching myself. Then a slow, rising tickle starts as his tongue moves through my slit, easing back and forth over my clit with an easy persistence.

“Seth,” I say, my hand reaching for him, gathering his fine, soft blonde hair and grasping. His tongue moves back and forth over the sensitive bud of my clit, and the shadows deepen around me. I am floating again, this time inward instead of outward.

My breath comes faster and harder now, reminding me to stay here, stay right here, with his mouth and his tongue and his hand on my belly. I move my hips, pulling him closer into me, wiggling toward the right spot, the best place.

“Ahhh god, yes,” I moan, and he moans too, sending a shockwave up my spine with the vibration of his tongue. His fingers slip through my wetness, making a soft, squelching sound as he slides first one, then two fingers inside of me. I gasp and buck against him.

“Don’t stop,” I beg, opening my legs for more, the tickle moving toward tremor. He shakes his head, no, he isn’t stopping and the sensation overtakes me. I rise up to meet him like a wave and he presses his hand into my belly as I come. I breathe into it again and again and again.

He is holding me, rolling me over with him and kissing my cheek and my ear and my throat. I slip my hand down under the sheet that he’s pulled up over us, smiling to find him still wearing his briefs. Maybe I’m not the only one who’s shy.

“Your turn,” I whisper against his mouth, kissing my way over his chest, his belly. He is hard, and I press my cheek against his cock through his underwear, breathing in the scent of him. He watches me, his eyes half closed, as I nuzzle against him, using my tongue to explore the soft give of his balls, the straining, bent angle of his cock through the material.

“Are you breathing?” I tease, smiling up at him and sliding his briefs down to let his cock spring free. He smiles, and then moans when I begin tracing the tip with my tongue.

I know how to do this. First, I take him as deep as I can, the softness of the head near the back of my throat. I love the sound and feel of him, the soft groans, his hands moving my hair so he can watch me suck him.

I match my rhythm to his breath, slow at first, then faster, my tongue stopping to swirl around the tip. I taste his pre-cum mixing with my saliva, making my path smoother up and down his shaft. He grips my head, pushing hard into my mouth, moaning. I take him, all of him, pressing him against the roof of my mouth with the flat of my tongue, squeezing.

“Oh, god,” he moans, easing me off his cock. My tongue reaches for it, and there is a string of saliva attaching us, from mouth to tip. He looks at it, at me, his eyes dark and full of lust.

He is on me before I know what’s happening. We are rolling again on the bed, his cock like steel heat between us. I can feel it pressing my thigh, my hip, my pussy, as we thrash and kiss and push and pull at each other.

“I want to be inside of you,” he says against my breasts, his mouth eager, demanding, moving between my nipples.

“Yes,” I breathe. I want what he wants. Beyond want, my body is opening, my arms, my legs, my pussy, like one wide open ache. He moves onto me, reaching between our legs to slide his cock over my wet mound, seeking and finding the give. I’ve never had anything but fingers inside of me before.

“Oh! Wait!” I stiffen, clutching his arms and crying out. He stops, his cock angled right there, seeking entrance. He rocks his hips back and forth, looking down into my eyes, moving just the tip of him in and out.

“You feel so incredible,” he whispers, his eyes closing for a moment and then opening back up to me. “Please.”

I nod, moving my hips, lifting my legs to help him. He moves forward, pushing into and past my burning edges. I gasp and close myself around him, gripping him tightly.

He waits, his breath ragged against my ear, until I whisper, “Okay.” Then he starts to move, and I am moved by him, his arms trembling as he holds himself above me, his teeth biting the soft flesh of his lip, his cock throbbing between my legs in a sea of wetness, his belly and balls pressing into me with every thrust, again and again.

I look down, watching him slide into me, reaching down in wonder to feel him, to feel the place where we are joined, the sensation of him moving in and out of me like a wet secret. Faster now, sinking down onto me, the weight of him is a shock as his hips thrust deeper, harder. I take him, the weight and heat and pulse of him.

He growls and moans into my ear, a sound that moves through me like water, and then he shoves into me hard, one last time, his full weight behind it, taking my breath. His whole body shudders as he collapses onto me. I kiss his shoulder, the salty taste of sweat burning my lips, feeling a trickling heat easing down my thighs.

We are quiet for a long time, and I can feel everything: the throbbing sting between my legs, the way my breasts are flattened under the weight of him, the ever slowing beat of his heart in his chest, and in mine. I can feel the tears burning behind my eyes and I can see the fading reflected glow of the candles on the ceiling, only two glowing circles now. One has burned out. I breathe deeply into my belly, my eyes closing as we start to fade into darkness together, hoping that I remember to feel this way forever.

\* \* \* \*

Seth shows me his guitar. He’s been practicing a Bob Dylan song just for me, he says, and I sit on the edge of my bed wrapped in a sheet, watching him tune his instrument. It’s beautiful, with a full, round mahogany belly and long, thin black neck. Seth is beautiful, his hair falling over his eyes, but he doesn’t notice. He has them closed, and he’s listening to the strings, one by one, as they come into some mysterious harmony.

And then he plays for me. I swallow around a hard lump in my throat as I listen. No one has ever played a song just for me before. No one has ever done anything just for me.

*Buckets of moonbeams in my hand  
I got all the love, honey baby  
You can stand.*

He's got a rough voice, surprising from him. It has an edge you wouldn't expect from a man who looks so easy. I am startled but not surprised at all. This is Seth, too. His fingers are slender and long, and as I watch him strumming, I remember his fingers inside of me, his hands in my hair and gripping my hips. The music fills the room, and seeps into me through all of the places where I have felt cracked open and bleeding.

*I been meek, and hard like an oak  
I seen pretty people disappear like smoke.  
Friends will arrive, friends will disappear,  
If you want me, honey baby,  
I'll be here.*

He smiles at me and opens his eyes for the first time since he started singing. Maybe he just got the courage, and that thought makes me smile back. He's looking at me like a question, and I blow him a kiss. Maybe he's remembering, like I am, the way our lips move together. I watch his mouth and remember.

*I like the way you love me strong and slow  
I'm takin' you with me, honey baby  
When I go.*

I love Bob Dylan. There is no other man in the world who has ever looked inside of me the way that he does. Until now. The words are coming from Seth, and he is singing them just for me. He means them. It's in his eyes, the way his hands move over the strings, the way his bare foot taps out a beat.

*You do what you must do and ya do it well  
I'll do it for you, honey baby  
Can't you tell?\**

The song ends with a beautiful hum, the guitar strings still vibrating in his hands. My whole body feels as if it's humming, too. It floats there between us for a while and we look at each other, riding it like a gentle wave. When he asks me what I think, I unstrap his guitar from him, set it aside, and kiss him down to the bed.

\* \* \* \*

I sit in front of my quiet aquarium wearing a bra and panties, looking into the secret world of fish. My hair feels silky across my arms as I hug my knees to my chest.

"Cath?" I look up and see him wearing a pair of green plaid sleep shorts. I see his ribs when he stretches before he sits beside me and it reminds me of the picture I have of him stuck into the corner of my mirror. Amazing, that they are both one in the same. "Are you okay?"

I don't answer him but I marvel, as he puts his arms around my shoulder and leans his head against mine, that he is here at all, in my world.

"I called my mother yesterday," I tell him. "She hates me."

"No," he says, stroking my hair. "No one could hate you."

I shrug, watching Doc poke around some plastic seaweed.

"I guess." I put my head on his shoulder, an already familiar gesture.

"Are you sorry you let me stay?" he asks after a moment.

"No." I kiss his collarbone. "I'm sorry I didn't ask you to come sooner. I was just afraid."

"Of what?"

"That you wouldn't like me, I guess."

"Oh, Cath."

We sit in the dimness, listening to the gurgle of the aquarium.

"Seth?"

"Hmm?"

"Do you ever get depressed?"

He squeezes my hand. "Sometimes. Not too often."

"How come?" I tilt my head at him.

He lifts his eyes to look into mine. "Because I like myself."

He smiles—I have fallen in love with his smile—and he kisses me, tender and lingering.

I am too small to contain what I feel.

*\*Buckets of Rain by Bob Dylan*

### ***ABOUT SELENA KITT***

Selena Kitt is a bestselling and award-winning author of erotic fiction. She is one of the highest selling erotic writers in the business. With half a million ebooks sold in 2011 alone, she is the cream-at-the-top of erotica!

Her writing embodies everything from the spicy to the scandalous, but watch out—this kitty also has sharp claws and her stories often include intriguing edges and twists that take readers to new, thought-provoking depths.

When she's not pawing away at her keyboard, Selena runs an innovative publishing company ([www.excessica.com](http://www.excessica.com)) and in her spare time, she devotes herself to her family—a husband and four children—and her growing organic garden. She also loves bellydancing and photography.

Her books *EcoErotica* (2009), *The Real Mother Goose* (2010) and *Heidi and the Kaiser* (2011) were all Epic Award Finalists. Her only gay male romance, *Second Chance*, won the Epic Award in Erotica in 2011. Her story, *Connections*, was one of the runners-up for the 2006 Rauxa Prize, given annually to an erotic short story of “exceptional literary quality,” out of over 1,000 nominees, where awards are judged by a select jury and all entries are read “blind” (without author's name available.)

She can be reached on her website at [www.selenakitt.com](http://www.selenakitt.com)

If you enjoyed CONNECTIONS,  
you might also enjoy:



## **ESCAPING FATE**

By Selena Kitt

Sam has an unusual interest in humans—well, considering she’s a fairy of fate whose profession it is to determine their futures, it’s no wonder! But it isn’t just Karma she’s curious about... Sam has what her fairy-pal Alex thinks is an inordinate and rather wanton interest in certain biological aspects of human behavior—most notably, s-e-x.

When Sam’s job leads her into the path of a handsome man who rocks her world, Sam’s interest becomes obsession. Alex reminds her that fairies get one Christmas wish – will Sam consider using hers to become human to experience one night of bliss?

When things become even more complicated—Sam discovers that Drew, the sexy stranger she’s been fantasizing about, can actually see her—Sam finds herself immersed in a complex and tangled web of human experience. She has to make a choice that will teach her a twisted lesson in fate, ultimately change the course of human existence and even reveal the origin of Santa Claus!

Warnings: This title contains erotic situations, graphic language and sex with fairies - the kind that fly.

EXCERPT from “Escaping Fate”:

Cats are the worst. It's the wings. They love to play with the damned wings. I can't count how many times, out of nowhere, I've become some feline's personal play toy. You'd think I'd been rolling in catnip, the way they come after me!

One minute, I'm just sitting here minding my own business--okay, so I'm minding someone else's business--perched on the footboard and watching the show, and the next minute--wham! Now I'm rolling around on the bed with Anna and her new Beau, except they're having a good old time, and I'm trying to save myself from Fluffy's claws!

"Beau, put him out," Anna begs.

Brilliant idea! The damned cat's got my wing pinned and he's about to pounce on my head! I'm flopping like a landed fish and the cat's tail is swishing like mad when Beau grabs him by the scruff of the neck. Just in time! I stick my tongue out at the cat and shake off my wings while he hisses and spits and sails out the door.

"Where were we?" Beau climbs back into bed and dives under the covers, making Anna giggle wildly at first, until she begins to moan.

Damned comforter! I give her a little "push," and she kicks off the covers, revealing the spread of her hips under his hands and the swell of her breasts with their hard, dark nipples. His face is buried between her legs, and he's making those noises, like he's eating something sinfully delicious.

Anna is rolling her hips, her eyes closed, her fingers gripping his head, guiding his tongue. The cat's mewing on the other side of the door, but they're both oblivious, of course. I've got that funny feeling in my belly again, and I'm thinking about what Alex said the other day. I haven't gotten up the nerve to go back ... to the man who could see me. Okay, so I flew by his window and peeked in, but it was dark, and I couldn't see anything.

"Beau, yes, oh God!" She gasps and squirms, spreading her thighs wider and pressing up against his mouth in fast, rhythmic thrusts. Her head goes back and forth, side to side, and she's making this noise in her throat, not unlike the cat outside of the door. When her body stiffens and threatens to buck right out of his hands, he grips her ass, his mouth fastened tight between her legs, his eyes dark and full of lust as she shudders and quakes.

"Oh God, oh God, oh God," she breathes as he kisses his way up her belly. She clutches him tight, reaching between them to find his cock. I can't see well enough, now, and I float down toward the mattress, moving off to the side so I can watch them join together. She strokes him, squeezing, and I watch his face--that look of bliss as she slides him between her pussy lips, guiding him inside.

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