



Reluctant Press

Putty In Her Hands

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY MISTY MALVEAUX

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

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Reluctant Press TG Publishers

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Putty in Her Hands

By Sara James

Chapter One – An Unpleasant Surprise

Candi tried to stop smiling, but she couldn't. The simple act of driving her car through town to her boyfriend's apartment made her want to laugh and sing.

Her car had been in the shop for several months. After it had blown a head gasket, she had been forced to rely on buses and walking until she could save up enough money to pay for the repair and parts. The fact that her state inspection had to be renewed too hadn't helped the situation any. The inspector at the garage had told her that she had four bald tires, all of which had to be replaced. Then they had found out that the car's brakes were worn out too. It kept going like that. One important repair led to the next, each one having to be taken care of before she could put her car back on the road. By the time the garage had finished, Candi had owed them more than fifteen-hundred dollars, far more than she had in her savings account.

In order to come up with the extra money, Candi had been forced to work even longer hours at her job as a waitress. The tips she made were lousy, and the actual pay was even worse. Under normal circumstances it was all she could do to make ends meet while paying off the loans she had taken out to pay for her failed attempt at a college education. With the added burden of saving up to pay for the car repairs, Candi had been forced to work slavishly long hours to pay her rent, bills, her car loan, her student loans, save for the repairs on her car, and still find money for silly little extras like food, bus fare and laundry.

Her smile grew even wider. All that was over now. Her car was back on the road! With the paycheck she had picked up earlier that afternoon, the car repairs were paid for and her finances were back on track. The thought of not being free from all the overtime she had been putting herself through was a huge weight off her shoulders. She took a deep breath and let it out as a contented sigh.

The only thing that could have made the moment better was if the air conditioning in her car had worked. She leaned forward slightly and shook her head to toss her long, blonde hair behind her shoulders, grateful for the breeze created by her car's motion that was coming through the open windows. The acrid smell of hot asphalt was less pleasant, but there was no way she was closing the car's windows to shut it out. The day was just too hot for her to swelter in a closed car.

Candi pulled absently at the front of the spaghetti strap tank top she was wearing, peeling the thin cotton fabric away from the bare skin of her large, sweaty breasts. It was too hot for her to consider wearing a bra. Even in the shorts and tank top she was wearing, the heat was nearly unbearable.

As she thought about the cool, air conditioned environment of her boyfriend's apartment, her smile became sultrier. While the personal relationship she shared with her boyfriend Kane was rooted in sex, Candi was glad to have a boyfriend at all. Most men ended up leaving her after a week or two at most, their interest waning after they had slept with her.

She had dated Kane for a little over a year. He had been a mechanic at the garage where she took her car for oil changes. The men that worked with Kane had gotten a lot of laughs when they found out that her name was Candi. They all joked that she and Kane had to go out because of their names, "Candi" and "Kane."

Candi was used to jokes about her name. She had considered changing it in the past, but it was the name her natural mother had given her, right down to spelling it with an "I." After having been bounced from one foster home to another for most of her teenage years, her name and one faded photograph where all Candi had left to remember her mother by. So she kept the name and put up with the inevitable jokes that a thin, long legged, big busted woman named Candi put up with on an almost daily basis.

Kane hadn't laughed though. He had just stared at her with those intense green eyes, the smile on his lips so faint that Candi wasn't even sure it was really there at all. He was tall, with tan skin and thick black hair. His look more Irish than Italian or Hispanic, reminding her of a twenty year old Pierce Brosnan with a more athletic build. When he had asked her out, she hadn't hesitated to say "yes."

Their first date had ended up in her bedroom after only the scantiest of preliminaries. That had set the pattern for their relationship; there was lots of great sex, lots of great nights out on the town, but not much in the way of communication. Their talks were usually limited to plans to meet and expressions of mutual affection.

Still, Candi was glad to be with someone that wanted her for more than just a one night stand. The fact that they had been dating for over a year proved his af-

fection for her in her mind. Her friend Lisa disagreed, but Candi was convinced that Lisa was just jealous because she had never been in a relationship that lasted more than six months.

As Candi pulled into the parking lot of Kane's apartment building, she began to hum tunelessly in anticipation. Kane wasn't expecting her. She had told him that she was covering someone else's shift to earn more overtime. Since Kane had quit his job at the garage where her car was being repaired to take a better paying job at a different shop, he had no way of knowing that her car was back on the road and that she had actually asked for the day off.

Turning off the engine and bounding out of her car, she reveled in the pleasant, fluttering feeling of anticipation that was building inside of her. Whatever else her relationship with Kane was, it was a lot of fun. An afternoon of hot, urgent sex followed by a night out on the town would be the perfect way for her to celebrate the return of her car.

Kane's apartment was part of a complex. Candi always felt like she was being watched when she was outside there. It made her quicken her steps as she moved to the door of his apartment. One there, she paused to consider her options. She could knock, but he always asked who it was and used his peephole before he would let anyone in. Deciding to make her surprise as sudden as possible, she decided to let herself in.

Kane had never given her a key to his apartment, but she knew where he hid his spare. Bending down, she retrieved the key from its hiding place beneath a fake rock and used it to unlock the door. After returning the key to its proper place, she slid through the door, hoping to catch him with his back turned.

The situation was even better than she had hoped for; the living room and adjoining kitchen were both empty. Closing the door behind her, she took a long moment to revel in the cool air from the air conditioner while she considered what to do. Kane was definitely home. His beat up used car was in the parking lot. He obviously wasn't in the living room or the kitchen, and the TV was off.

She cocked her head, expecting to hear the shower. Instead, the sound that came from the short hallway that ended in both Kane's bathroom and bedroom sounded more like a moan of pleasure.

Candi slapped a hand over her mouth to keep from laughing out loud. If she had to guess, she had caught Kane masturbating again.

It had only happened once before on a night when she had been having trouble sleeping. She had woken up in the middle of the night to find Kane gone. The sounds that had been coming from the thin, lighted crack beneath his bathroom door had left no doubt in her mind what he had been doing. She had gone back to sleep, and she had never mentioned it to Kane.

This time, she decided to catch him in the act. To help prevent him from being angry or upset, she stripped out of her clothes before she made her appearance. Thinking of what to say, she decided to purr in her best sex kitten voice, "Is this a private party, or can I play too?"

Kane's voice came clearly from the direction of his bedroom. "Oh, God! That feels so good." Candi had to put her hand over her mouth again to stifle another giggling fit. When the urge to laugh had mostly passed, she tip-toed up the hallway to stand with her back against the wall next to the open bedroom door. She took a long, slow breath to calm herself, listening to the fleshy slapping sounds emanating from the nearby room.

Springing sideways and turning, she opened her mouth to give her prepared greeting, only to have the words freeze on her lips. Kane wasn't alone. He was having sex with another woman.

The pleasant butterflies in Candi's stomach shriveled and died in that instant. She wondered how she could have missed the thick smell of sex that was in the air, or the soft moans of pleasure that issued from between the unknown woman's slightly parted lips in time with each thrust of Kane's hips. Candi's mouth was still open, and a scream was building inside of her, but it was stuck somewhere deep within, refusing to come out.

Like a blow to the head, Candi remembered that she was naked. As if finding her boyfriend in bed with another woman wasn't bad enough, she had to consider what would happen if one of them noticed her. Backing slowly out the door, she retreated into the hallway.

She stood there for a long time listening to her boyfriend fuck another woman. Part of her wanted to confront them both right then, while another part of her didn't want to believe that Kane would cheat on her, even with the evidence of his unfaithfulness taking place less than a dozen feet away. That part of her – the part that was in denial – just wanted to get dressed and sneak out, pretending that nothing had happened. Kane loved her. There had to be some mistake.

For several long moments, the two separate impulses fought for control of her body.

It was a picture hanging on the wall that finally tipped the balance for her. It was a picture Candi's friend Lisa had taken of Candi and Kane at the beach the previous summer. Candi was dressed in a bikini, and Kane was standing behind her, his arms wrapped around her waist, his serious green eyes staring at the camera. *He has a picture of me on his wall, she thought. He has to love me. Why else would he have bothered to hang up a picture of us together?*

Her heart tender and sore, Candi returned to the living room, put on her clothes, and left the apartment as quietly as she had come.

Chapter Two – Impulse Buy

“I told you that he’s just using you for sex.” Lisa’s eyes flashed with repressed anger as she walked next to Candi at the mall. Her hair was long, but brown, and not nearly as long as Candi’s was. The relationship between their bodies was a similar match. Both were thin and of average height, with Lisa the less curvy of the two.

“Way to be supportive,” Candi muttered sourly.

Lisa sighed and made her tone gentler. “Well, he is. He’s too stupid to see how good he’s got it with you. If he knew how lucky he was, he wouldn’t be screwing around with some woman behind your back!” Lisa put her arm around Candi’s shoulder and drew her close as they walked. “You could do so much better than him. Maybe this is your sign to move on.”

“To what?” Candi asked. “I’m really not looking forward to sorting through a bunch of creeps that are only interested in trying to talk me into having sex with them. Besides I’m not ready to give up on Kane just yet.”

Lisa sighed dramatically and let her arm fall back to her side. “Why am I not surprised? So, Kane gets to cheat on you and aren’t going to do anything about it.” She looked directly at Candi and raised one of her eyebrows. “Or are you?”

The corners of Candi’s mouth turned up slightly at the corners. “I might have an idea or two.”

Lisa bit her lower lip and rubbed her hands together in anticipation. “Such as?”

The high pitched sound of Candi’s laughter was like the tinkling of tiny crystal bells. “That would be telling. You wouldn’t want me to spoil the surprise, would you?”

The puff of air that Lisa forced out made her displeasure clear. “Well duh, yes, I want you to spoil the surprise!” She shook her head. “At least tell me that you’re going to confront him about this. If you don’t, he’s just going to think that he can get away with it and he’ll start cheating on you more often.” Cocking her head to one side, she paused thoughtfully. “You know, come to think of it, how do you that this was the first time he cheated on you? What if it’s just the first time you caught him?”

Candi stared down at the clean white tiles of the floor. “I don’t know. I suppose it’s possible. Right after I left, I went out to my car and cried for the longest time.” Her pace slowed, and then stopped. Lisa stopped with her, watching her face with concern. “All I could think of,” she continued, “was the number of times I’ve been at work while he’s been at home. I always thought that he was alone, or maybe hanging out with his guy friends. It never occurred to me until I saw the two of them together that maybe he was spending his time with other women.” Candi looked at Lisa and smiled sadly. “Maybe this was the first time. Or maybe he’s cheated on

my every time I left him alone.” She shrugged and started walking again. “I don’t think I’ll ever really know for sure.”

They walked in silence for a while, with Lisa unwilling to press too hard. After another minute, she asked Candi, “So, what are you going to do?”

“Confront him,” Candi said simply. “He’ll either deny it or he won’t. If he lies about it after I saw the truth with my own eyes, I guess I’ll leave him. If he admits what he did to me . . .” Candi breathed deeply and let it out slowly. “If he tells the truth, I’ll stay with him. It will be awkward for a while, but I’ll stay. Who knows? He might even have a good explanation for what happened.”

Lisa snorted. “He slept with another woman. What could he possibly say that would qualify as a good explanation?”

Candi forced a smile and shrugged. “I don’t know. Hey, I thought we came here to shop,” she said brightly, changing the subject. She put her arm through Lisa’s, pulling her towards one of the malls many clothing stores. “Let’s see if we can find something that will make us look fabulous!”

Lisa laughed and let herself be dragged along. Shopping was how Candi dealt with almost any dilemma, which was one of the many reasons her financial situation was not the greatest. Even so, if it got her mind off of Kane and how he had wronged her, Lisa was willing to go along with it.

It was a Saturday, so they spent most of their day at the mall. Neither of them bought much, but they both found a few special items that they just had to have. It was several hours before Kane came up in the conversation again. They were in a Frederick’s

of Hollywood store, and they were laughing over a corset, complete with boning and back lacing. “Who would wear this?” laughed Lisa.

Candi shook her head. “Not me. My figure is just fine without cutting off my circulation.” She pursed her lips and looked thoughtful. “Maybe I should go on a sex strike until Kane agrees to model one of these for me.”

Lisa wasn’t sure how to react. “Maybe,” she said cautiously.

Candi began to smile and nod as she eyed the corset. “Yeah, in public. Like maybe at the garage in front of all his friends.”

The only thing that kept Lisa from laughing outright was how upset Candi had been on the phone the night before. When she had called Lisa to tell her what had happened, Lisa had wanted to come right over. Candi had refused, saying only that she wanted to be alone for the night, but that she wanted them to go shopping together in the morning.

Encouraged by the way Candi was joking about the situation, Lisa said, “That could work.”

Candi took the black satin corset from its place on the rack and held it up. “It needs something, though. Some extra ‘oomph’ to make it a little more daring.”

“It has garters sewn right in,” Lisa pointed out. “I think that would almost require him to wear stockings.”

“And a black lace thong,” Candi added. She hated thongs. She also hated lace, claiming that it both chafed and was too hard to take care of. “If this is going to be a proper punishment, he would *have* to wear a thong.”

“High heels,” threw in Lisa with a giggle. “Four inch heels, at least.”

Candi giggled too. “And he would have to wear makeup.”

“Lipstick,” said Lisa.

“Fire engine red,” the two women said in unison, causing them to laugh and high five at the synchronicity.

A saleswoman glided up to them with a practiced smile. “Can I help you ladies? If you don’t like these corsets, we do have some more in stock.”

“No, thank you,” Candi said, putting the corset back in its place on the rack.

“Is there something else I can help you find?” The saleswoman was shorter, and she had to look up at the two younger women.

“No, I think we’re ok,” Candi said. “We’re just looking for something for my boyfriend.”

Lisa bit her lip and choked on a belly laugh.

The older woman’s eyebrows shot up and her smile grew wider. “Oh, how nice! Do the two of you have an anniversary coming up? Looking for an outfit to make the night more memorable?” As if that wasn’t obvious enough, the woman actually winked.

Candi put on a mock serious face. “No, that’s not it. You see,” she said with a lowered voice and a quick look around the store, “my boyfriend just came out to me. He’s a crossdresser. There’s nothing he likes doing more in his spare time than dressing up in my bras and panties. I’m looking for an outfit for him as a coming out present so that he has his own things to wear.”

Lisa had to put a hand over her mouth to keep from laughing out loud. She was also a bright shade of red. At the same time, the saleswoman’s smile had become fixed and frozen. “Oh, how . . . nice of you. We get some men in her from time to time with similar tastes. He must be a very, um, lucky man to be dating a woman as, ahhh, understanding as you.”

“Why, thank you so much for saying so!” Candi fluttered her eyelashes.

“Why don’t you look around some more,” the woman said, nodding as she backed away slowly. “If you need anything, I’ll be over by the register.”

Candi lowered her chin slightly and smiled. “That would be fine, thanks.”

The woman wasted no time in fleeing. Arm in arm, Candi and Lisa left the store, waiting until they had left to burst out in laughter.

That set the tone for the rest of the afternoon. As they ate lunch at the food court and continued to browse through the stores, the two friends dreamed up

every possible revenge that Candi could take against Kane. The more outrageous and unworkable the plan was, the harder they laughed about it. Between their good looks and their loud laughter they drew quite a bit of attention from the other shoppers. No one bothered them, though. Even the boldest men stayed away, either mistaking them for a lesbian couple or picking up on the man-bashing vibe that ran through their conversation.

Late in the day as they were beginning to wind down and talk about leaving, they went into a store that was more like a flea market. The sporting goods store that had been there in the past had gone out of business, leaving one of the several vacant storefronts that dotted the mall. Instead of leaving the space vacant, the mall manager had obviously decided to rent the space out on a temporary basis to vendors that sold crafts and other goods that normally cluttered the mall's walkway. The result was a mishmash of goods displayed on folding tables, watched over by an eclectic variety of small business owners.

As they were looking at some bracelets and necklaces made from polished stones, the leathery old man that looked more like an old west prospector than a jewelry salesman spoke up, saying, "Boyfriend troubles, huh?"

Candi and Lisa shared a look. They could almost taste the lame come-on that was about to come out of the man's mouth. "No," Lisa said calmly, "we were just talking." She didn't bother with trying to convince the man that the plans she and Candi had been discussing to hog tie Kane and leave him naked and stranded in the middle of nowhere were just a joke.

The man chuckled. "If you say so. That's a shame though."

"Why's that?" asked Candi with a flat voice as dry as desert sand.

"If you were looking to get even with a man, I might know where you could get your hands on an authentic voodoo doll." He leaned back in his chair with a satisfied look on his face. He raised a hand to scratch at the gray hair on his chin that was halfway between a beard and overgrown stubble, not quite managing to hide his grin.

The two women relaxed, realizing that what had been coming was a sales pitch, not a come on.

"A voodoo doll," stated Lisa. "Like, you stick a needle in its head and the person the doll is supposed to be gets a headache?"

"Yep," the man drawled, nodding slowly. "That's it exactly."

Looking at each other, the two women cracked up laughing.

"Laugh all you want." Far from seeming offended, the man seemed to be enjoying their reaction. "The mother of the woman I bought most of this jewelry from swore the doll is real. She told me she bought it years ago from some high mucky muck Haitian priestess to get revenge on a woman that had stolen her man, but she never dared to use it on her."

"Why did she agree to sell it to you?" asked Lisa, still laughing.

He shrugged. "She said she didn't want it around anymore. Bad mojo or something, I guess. And by the way, I didn't offer to buy it; she practically forced it on me. The daughter even tried to talk me out of it." He scratched his chin hair again. "I still can't figure out if they were being honest or if they hustled me."

"How much?" Candi asked.

Lisa gasped and turned on her. "Candi!"

Candi nudged her friend in the ribs. "Come on, it will be fun. Think of it like a stress ball. It may not be much to look at, but I'll feel a lot better after I've used it."

Lisa rolled her eyes and sighed. "I suppose."

Bouncing slightly as she turned to the man with a grin, Candi asked again, "How much is it?"

The man leaned forward with a gleam in his eyes. "For a pretty lady like you, in obvious need of a little pin jabbing voodoo therapy? I think fifty dollars ought to cover it."

"Sold," Candi said, reaching into her purse.

"Candi!" Lisa wailed, her outrage undermined by her inability to stop laughing.

The man rocked his chair back on two legs and picked up a red plastic sandwich cooler that looked like it might contain his dinner. He opened the top and reached inside. "What the lady wants, the lady gets." With a flourish, he extracted a folded white towel that looked damp.

"What's that?" asked Lisa dubiously.

"That," said the man, "is the doll."

"It looks like a wet towel," she countered.

The man raised one of his eyebrows with a wry expression. "That's because it *is* a wet towel," he said, unfolding the object of their attention. When he was finished, a reddish lump of clay that had the vague outline of a person was revealed. "This," he said with an overdone flourish of his hand, "is the voodoo doll."

The doll was bent at a right angle, probably to make it fit in the small cooler. If it had been straightened out, it would have been about a foot long. If they hadn't been expecting to see a doll, it wouldn't even have resembled a person. The head was basically a lump in the clay, the legs were fused together, and the arms almost blended into the torso.

Candi paused on the verge of handing over her money. "You expect me to hand over fifty dollars for *that?!?*"

The man looked embarrassed. "Ok," he conceded, "twenty dollars." He raised his hand to cut off her next words. "That's as low as I'll go. It's what I paid the old woman, and your not going to talk me into taking a loss on this. Besides, the only reason I'm willing to go that low is I'm sick of taking care of the damn thing."

Candi handed over her money. The man pocketed it, then began to refold the damp towel over the clay. "Take care of it?" she asked.

"Yeah," the man said seriously. "You have to keep it moist. If it dries out, it's supposed to lose its magic."

Candi looked at Lisa, who just rolled her eyes and tapped her watch. "Is there anything else I should know about it?"

The man put the folded towel back in the cooler and closed the lid. "Yeah. For the doll to work, you have to get some body fluid from the person you want the doll to work on. Just put the fluid on the doll, and then you should be all set to go."

"Any body fluid?" she asked.

He shrugged. "I guess so." He pushed the cooler toward Candi. "Here, take the whole thing. I got the cooler and the towel from the woman too." He shook his head. "Keeping the damn thing wet but not too wet all the time has been more trouble than it's worth. I'm glad to be rid of the thing."

Candi took the cooler. "Anything else I should know?"

The man's chin dropped to his chin as he thought. He perked up. "Almost forgot. Once you've used the body fluid to make the doll work, it will only ever work with that one person. You can't undo it and change who it works on, so make sure you pick well the first time around." He smiled. "That should be it." A half beat later, his smile turned crafty. "Unless one of you wants to give me your phone number. I would love to take either one of you out to lunch sometime."

Lisa spoke for both of them. "Thanks, but no thanks." Taking Candi by the arm, she hurried them off. "Thanks for the doll!" she cried over her shoulder as they walked off laughing at the old guy's nerve.

Chapter Three – Trial Run

The argument that had followed Candi's revelation that she knew about Kane's infidelity had been brief and one sided. Kane admitted readily that he had had sex with another woman, but expressed no remorse for his action. Instead, he raved loudly about how Candi had violated his privacy, and how he never would have even considered having sex with another woman if she hadn't neglected their relationship by working so much overtime. His argument was punctuated with lots of red faced diatribes on the lonely nights and unfulfilled desires he had been forced to endure as a result of her lack of dedication to making their relationship work.

As in many other aspects of their relationship, Candi decided it was best to not press Kane on the issue and quietly agreed to the validity of his version of the truth. When his arguments and blustering turned into turned into teary eyed pleas for her to forgive him for giving in to the strength of his sexual needs, she went to him and wrapped him in her arms, offering him the comfort of her embrace.

Hours later, as she lay next to him in the darkness of his bedroom, Candi stared at the ceiling in the dim light of the room and silently cursed the way she had so readily given in to both Kane's arguments and his sexual advances. As she so often did, she had let him use her body in whatever way he wanted, her only desire to make him want her more by pleasing him in whatever way she could. On other nights, their lovemaking had gone on for hours, leaving them both drained and satisfied. But then, on other nights she had been more assertive, wanting to receive pleasure as much as she wanted to give it.

Their argument, no matter how brief, had made her feel bad. Even though she knew he was manipulating her emotions, she had still feel guilty for neglecting his needs for so long. Acquiescing to his sexual advances had felt like an apology.

With the incident out in the open and in the afterglow of their lovemaking, Candi thought she should have felt happier, or at least a little relieved. Instead, all she felt was sad and a little used. *What is this power he has over me?* she thought, lifting the sheet to cover herself more thoroughly. *It's like his erect penis is a magic wand that turns me into a bimbo, willing to do anything he wants, no matter how bad it might be for me.* She thought briefly about the sheet that she was using to cover herself, grateful that Kane had at least bothered to change the sheets that had been on the bed when he had had sex with that other woman.

She began to replay Kane's rant in her head, trying to find holes where she could have inserted her own thoughts, weighing the arguments she should have used to support her own views on the way he had acted. As always, she was able to see after the fact what she should have said and done to make her point effectively. *It's too late now,* she thought as she picked at the linen sheet where it covered her navel. *I've already told him that I forgive him. We even had makeup sex.*