



Encounter at Sushi's Bar

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Respectfully submitted for consideration for a writer's loop
 "Really Rotten Romance Writing" contest. A collaborative effort by my brother, my sister-in-law,
 and me. What a way to spend an evening!
 And we won first place. How's that for an...er...uh...honor?

Of all the nights in the year, and of all the bays in the world, and of all the sounds in the bay, and of all the ferries on the Sound, and of all the bars on the ferry, it figured he would be there that night. At Sushi's bar.

Sushi had warned her about him. Told her he was dangerous. Now she could see for herself that Sushi was right on.

"The name's Hal," he said in a low, seductive tone. "Hal E. Butt, private eye."

Salmon Patty knew there was something fishy about the man the moment she cast a glance his way. It wasn't so much the way he perched on his chair, watching her, staring with an intensity that made her feel like she was floundering. Or the way his mussels rippled under his tight shirt.

No, it was the company he was keeping.

To his right sat Cal Amarri, that too-suave European of undetermined heritage . . . it was rumored he was a crime boss, but there was no real proof . . .

To his left, one leg resting with a caviar grace on the bar, was Hermit Crabbe, a well-known pickpocket who had clawed his way to top of the bottomfeeders of society.

It was Cal who noticed her first. "Hey, babe," he leered. "What say we make tuna a night to remember?"

She stared him down. "What say you just clam up?" she replied like the cold fish she was. "That's a crappie idea if ever I heard one."

Normally, Cal Amarri would have just turned away: who wanted to waste time on a cold fish? But, hey, on a scale of one to ten, she was the most beautiful gill he'd ever seen. He got ready to use his best line on her—one he was sure she'd really go for, hook, line, and sinker—but he never got the chance to let it fly. His flunky, Ray Manta burst into the room.

"Kelp!" he cried, a desperate look in his beady eyes. "Somebody kelp me!"

"Holy mackerel, Manta! You gone over the deep end?" Cal yelled.

As Salmon turned to watch the drama unfold, Manta raced past her, pushing her aside. She stumbled, staggered, slipped a little, and tripped on a crack in the flooring--when a pair of strong hands came to steady her.

She turned. It was him. Hal. His lure was even stronger when he was close by. The words stuck in her throat--like those little tiny bones in that really expensive fish that you buy and then wonder why the heck you spent the dough when you spend more time picking out bones than eating anything—and before she could spit them out, Maurie Eal, Manta's worst enemy and one of the slimiest characters in the region, pushed past them both, sending them flying into the sushi bar.

"Oh, no!" she whaled.

"Don't worry," Hal assured her from the middle of the Ama Ebi. "If you knew Sushi, like I know Sushi, you'd know she won't mind."

Comforted, Salmon nodded. But before she could say another word, Eal threw a threat at Manta. "Yer gonna swim wid da fishes!" he grinned wickedly.

"Ah, baloney!" Manta replied, his lip curling derisively, but even from beneath the piles of Makuro and Kappa Maki on her head, Salmon could see the fear in the shrimp's eyes. This was not going to be pretty, and she didn't want to watch it.

She struggled to get her footing, but before she had a chance, two strong arms slid around her and lifted her. She looked up, and her gaze was met and captured by Hal's masterful, manly orbs.

"Come on, baby," he muttered with baited breath. "Let's cast off."

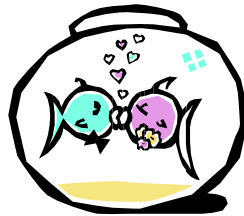
It was the best idea she'd heard all night. But she knew she couldn't do it. It just wouldn't work. She was uptown, he was a regular guy. She was wine and roses, he was guns and roses.

He knew it, too. Saw the look in her eyes, and a sad smile crossed his virile features. "It's OK, doll," he said, setting her down slowly. He turned to leave. But he cast one last glance back her way when he picked up a glass of wine from the bar and toasted her.

She'd never forget those last, wonderful words he uttered: "Here's looking at you, squid."

And then he was gone. Sailing off into the dark, lonely night, leaving her staring after him, knowing her life would never be the same. For the rest of her days, she'd feel like a fish outta water, a gill with no goal, a left-out trout, a sal with no mon...

But such was the price of truly true love.



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Thanks.