

Pussy Katnip: A Hand of Gold

Editing Sample from Allyson Brooks

Allyson’s Edits to Original Manuscript

She counted the footsteps. [The individual footfalls and the unique gait of everyone who passed by her door or down the hallway.]

When a new one appeared, [L]it was always a revelation. She listened carefully, trying to create a unique identity [to for] the sound. Something to help her identify that particular individual. A [cadancecadence], a harmony that created the melody of their walk.

This walk carried a patience to it. There was no stress or hurry to the stride. No heaviness to the pattern. Whomever it was, they walked with confidence.

The lock on the door rattled. [A, indicating a] tell-tale sign of visitation, and a chance to put a face to this new walk. [The A] woman [who] walked through the door [and] began with a smile. The corners [of her mouth were] pushed a little too high, and [the her] cheeks pulled a little too tight.

“Miss Kitt?” Her voice lilted up at the end, adding a touch of artificial happiness.

“You have me at a disadvantage, Doctor...?”

“I’m Dr. Bailey.” She eased the door shut behind her and [pulled a clipboard around] to sit in the crook of her arm. The angle was just enough to let her glance down and [pull] whatever information she might have forgotten.

“Well, Dr. Bailey, please feel free to call me Foxy.” A smile, every bit as genuine as the doctor’s, played over Foxy’s lips.

“That’s very kind of you, Foxy. I was hoping you might have a few minutes to speak with me.” With the same patient stride, the doctor walked to Foxy’s bedside.

“I don’t seem to have any other plans right now, so...why not?” Foxy closed her eyes and then opened them slowly, taking in the woman beside her.

“Thank you. Do you mind if I sit?” She gestured towards one of the two chairs in the otherwise spartan room.

“Please,” Foxy answered.

A rumbling [squeeksqueak] accompanied the chair shifting over the hard tiled flooring. The doctor’s free hand pulled out her skirt as she sat on the chair.

“Now, what would you like to talk about?” Foxy asked.

“Well, I was coming by to introduce myself. I’m going to be helping you for the foreseeable future,” the doctor replied.

“Well, it’s a pleasure to meet you, but,” Foxy forced a concerned frown, “what happened to Dr. Palmer? He was such a kind man.”

The new doctor shifted in her chair, pulling herself more upright. “I’m afraid that he’s had to move on to a new assignment. I’ve been brought on board to take his place. [Does that upset you?]”

Foxy took a deep breath and let it out with careful deliberation. “Only in the sense that I worry about Dr. Palmer. We were just beginning to truly trust each other.”

“Well, hopefully you and I can get to that point [relatively quickly] as well.”

The doctor moved the clipboard and wrote something on the top page.

Foxy smiled. “So, I have to say that I’m not noticing an accent. Where are you from?”

“Bay City,” she answered.

“I meant originally,” Foxy clarified.

“I was born in Bay City,” the doctor said, “but if you mean where is my family from, that’s really not important.”

“Well, I could tell you’re Oriental, but I didn’t want to address you in any incorrect manner.”

“If you address me as Dr. Bailey, then you’ll always be correct.” Another note on the page.

“Oh, I apologize, Doctor. I didn’t mean any offense. The black and white patterning gave away your background immediately. I was just trying to make conversation,” Foxy said.

“It’s perfectly fine, Foxy. [I’d just rather talk about you],” the doctor stated.

“Me? What is there to talk about? I’ve been here for quite a while now. There isn’t much to talk about.” Foxy turned her head to look through the small window nearby. The bars obscured the vision of the moon rising over the horizon.

“Well, I’m new, so [I’d like to hear about you from yourself], instead of what others have written.” Foxy could hear the pen working over the paper on the clipboard again.

A quick turn of her head back towards the doctor caused her hair to shift, scattering it across her face. She turned it back and forth a couple of times, only moving it slightly.

“Would you like me to help you with that?” Dr. Bailey asked.

“If you don’t mind.” Foxy’s voice was soft and low. “I’d do it myself but...-”

“It’s not a problem.” The doctor rose up and brushed the hair away from Foxy’s face, leaving it completely uncovered.

“I prefer to have it over the right side of my face, if you don’t mind,” Foxy breathed.

Commented [a1]: Query: I’m not positive that this sentence works as a clause set by itself to describe the sentence before it. It can come across as a randomly incomplete sentence. Leave it if you are okay with it.

Commented [a2]: Query: I think the reader may get confused as to where the Doctor got the clipboard; did she carry it in, or was it in a box on the outside of the door?

Commented [a3]: Query: Would it be a little clearer if this word were “read”?

Commented [a4]: Note: Normally, a therapist would ask, “How do you feel about this change?” The word “upset” would be assumptive. But, if this doctor is new to the profession, then that question would just be a newbie mistake, or an indication of nervousness.

Commented [a5]: Note: a therapist would not want to establish rapport quickly. They want to gain trust and get to know the patient at a pace that the patient feels comfortable with.

Commented [a6]: Note: PERFECT. It’s always about the patient. ☺

Commented [a7]: Note: EVEN MORE PERFECT. A way to build trust in a patient.

Final

The new doctor shifted in her chair, pulling herself more upright. “I’m afraid that he’s had to move on to a new assignment. I’ve been brought on board to take his place. How does that make you feel?”

Foxy took a deep breath and let it out with careful deliberation. “A touch worried about Dr. Palmer. We were just beginning to truly trust each other.”

“Well, hopefully you and I can get to that point as well.” The doctor moved the clipboard and wrote something on the top page.

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"Of course." The doctor's fingers parted the hair again, letting it fall to the right side of Foxy's muzzle. Foxy inhaled deeply as she did.

"Now," Dr. Bailey returned to her seat, "do you mind if—"

Foxy didn't let her finish the question. "Your hand has a delightful smell to it, Doctor. Not the soap that I'm used to smelling from the other staff members here. What is it?"

Her face scrunched up, as though the smell for her wasn't quite as pleasant. "That doesn't really matter, Foxy. We're talking about you, remember?"

"Of course, of course. Again, I'm so sorry. It's just..." Foxy looked down at her body stretched out on the bed. "I don't get much to do on a daily basis. All I can do is lie here, after all."

"I understand, Foxy. Though the medical doctors working on your case tell me that you've made remarkable progress."

"Remarkable? Is that what they call it?" Foxy looked to her left hand. With what appeared to be great effort, her forefinger lifted from the bed. "It is very impressive, isn't it?"

"Foxy..." the doctor's voice fell away. "You can't treat yourself that way. It IS impressive. When you came here you were paralyzed completely from the neck down. The fact that you can move anything is amazing."

A wide smile crept over Foxy's face. "Thank you, Dr. Bailey. It's nice to hear someone say something so kind about me."

"You're welcome." She scribbled something on her notes again. "Do you feel that the doctor's here haven't been kind to you?"

"Oh no," Foxy gasped, "everyone has been wonderful. It's just..." she let out a sigh, "they don't often express kindness to me."

"SoSo, you feel that no one has been vocal about your progress?" the doctor asked.

"I wouldn't say that exactly. They've definitely encouraged me to try my best, but it feels more as though they're proud of their own medical achievements."

Another note. "From Dr. Palmer's notes—"

"I'm going to miss Dr. Palmer," Foxy interrupted.

Dr. Bailey waited a moment. "From Dr. Palmer's notes, it seems that you and he had several discussions about your progress. He says that you were insistantinsistent that he was the only one who—"

"Dr. Palmer was such a kind man," Foxy said.

The doctor pulled her pen up to her lip. "Do you always do that, Miss Kitt?"

"I thought we agreed to call me Foxy?" she asked in reponseresponse.

"It might be best to keep it as Miss Kitt for now." The pen went into the doctor's mouth for a quick nibble. "Every time I've tried to direct the conversation towards the matter of your treatment, you deflect it. Even to the point of interrupting me."

"I do?" Foxy's voice went up an octave.

A smile and a nod preceedededpreceded the doctor once more writing on her notes.

"What are you writing?" Foxy asked.

"Just some personal notes," she answered.

"Not something that you are going to share, then?"

"Our conversations are confidential, Miss Kitt. You don't have to worry about a thing," she replied.

Foxy smiled. "What about Dr. Palmer?"

Commented [a8]: Note: a therapist would be slightly gentler, saying a phrase more like, "would you like to—". The word "mind" has a feeling of annoyance. Unless, that's what you were going with.

Commented [a9]: Note: this sentence would be a new therapist mistake. One with experience would not say that because that therapist doesn't have the exact same experiences as the patient. She would be more likely to say, "I can hear the frustration in your voice," or "I can see why you'd feel that way."

Commented [a10]: Note: In therapy, this is considered a closed question, one that will elicit a one-word answer, like "yes" or "no." It can be a newbie mistake. The experienced therapist would say, "How do you feel about what the doctors have said to you so far?"

Commented [a11]: Note: This is another closed question. An experienced therapist may ask, "What do you think about what the doctors have said to you?"

Commented [a12]: Note: I am going to guess that, from here, the Doctor is getting really annoyed to the point of being snippy, and her professionalism begins to drop off. ☹️

Final

"Of course." The doctor's fingers parted the hair again, letting it fall to the right side of Foxy's muzzle. Foxy inhaled deeply as she did.

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Foxy didn't let her finish the question. "Your hand has a delightful smell to it, Doctor. Not the soap that I'm used to smelling from the other staff members here. What is it?"

Her face scrunched up, as though the smell for her wasn't quite as pleasant. "That doesn't really matter, Foxy. We're talking about you, remember?"

"Of course, of course. Again, I'm so sorry. It's just..." Foxy looked down at her body stretched out on the bed. "I don't get much to do on a daily basis. All I can do is lie here, after all."

"I hear some frustration in your voice, Foxy. Though the medical doctors working on your case tell me that you've made remarkable progress."

"Remarkable? Is that what they call it?" Foxy looked to her left hand. With what appeared to be great effort, her forefinger lifted from the bed. "It is very impressive, isn't it?"

"Foxy..." the doctor's voice fell away. "You can't treat yourself that way. It IS impressive. When you came here you were paralyzed completely from the neck down. The fact that you can move anything is amazing."

A wide smile crept over Foxy's face. "Thank you, Dr. Bailey. It's nice to hear someone say something so kind about me."

"You're welcome." She scribbled something on her notes again. "How do you feel about the way the doctors have been treating you?"

"Oh," Foxy gasped, "everyone has been wonderful. It's just..." she let out a sigh, "they don't often express kindness to me."

"How do you feel about what they doctors have said?" the doctor asked.

"I wouldn't say I feel anything exactly. They've definitely encouraged me to try my best, but it feels more as though they're proud of their own medical achievements."

Another note. "From Dr. Palmer's notes—"

"I'm going to miss Dr. Palmer," Foxy interrupted.

Dr. Bailey waited a moment. "From Dr. Palmer's notes, it seems that you and he had several discussions about your progress. He says that you were insistent that he was the only one who—"

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"I thought we agreed to call me Foxy?" she asked in response.

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Foxy smiled. "What about Dr. Palmer?"

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"Stop writing," Foxy spoke softly. "You know who she is. You don't need to write that down."

The pen pulled away from the paper before the doctor responded. "You don't care much for Miss Katnip, do you?"

"She put me here!" The words rushed out of Foxy's lips. "Pussy Katnip is a monster. The latest in a long line of monsters with that name. Katnip. They preyed on my family and took everything from me." Her eyes narrowed. "How many times do I have to tell the people here this?"

"And you are aware that Miss Katnip pays for your treatment...?"

"My treatment!" Foxy laughed. "Which part? The one where an orderly comes by three times a day to change my bedpan or the part where they try to cure my... mental issues."

"Both, actually," the doctor explained.

"I hope she's getting her money's worth, then. A full description from her lackeys so that they can all laugh over a nice drink." A new chuckle rose in the back of Foxy's throat. "And I know exactly what Pussy drinks, too. No one else really knows, but I do."

"That's an odd thing to say. What is it that Miss Katnip drinks?" the doctor asked.

"I'm not going to tell the likes of you!" Her jaws snapped tight at the end of her words. "That is a family matter. You haven't earned that answer."

"Because you don't know me well enough?"

Air filled Foxy's lungs and waited. When she finally gave her permissionpermission, it flowed out again.

"Yes. Yes, because I don't know you well enough," she lied.

"Well, I hope to some daysomeday earn that level of trust with you," Dr. Bailey stated.

"Time is a funny thing, Patricia." Foxy looked the doctor in the eyes.

They grew to twice their size right in front of her.

"How did you know that?"

"Your first name?" Foxy nodded towards her. "It's right there on your pen.

Inscribed 'To Dearest Patricia.' Assuming you haven't stolen someone else's pen, that would make you Dr. Patricia Bailey."

The doctor looked at the pen in her hand. With a slight tremortremor, she replaced the cap and returned it to her pocket. "Thank you for that, Miss Kitt. I'll be careful in the future."

"You don't need to worry, Patricia, I won't tell a soul." The smile once more graced Foxy's lips, but this time a fang poked through.

"Thank you," she answered, "but please refer to me as Dr. Bailey. I'd prefer to keep things on a professional basis."

"Of course." Foxy lowered her chin, looking up at the doctor. "I appreciate everything that you are doing, Doctor. It must be hard for you to step in and handle a case like mine."

"I'm happy to help." She turned her head. "What do you mean by a case like yours?"

"Oh, I know I have a reputation. A trouble maker. No one likes trouble thrown in their lap, and yet," she widened her eyes for a moment, "here I am."

"I don't see you as trouble, Miss Kitt. You're a patient in need, and that's—"

"Have you ever been in trouble yourself?" Foxy asked. "Not something small, but something big. A hubbub that puts you in a real pickle. In the clink. Or even a hospital."

"I've been very lucky so far. No, I haven't."

"I can still taste copper you know," Foxy said. "From this morning. They put that leather strap in my mouth, but that's not what I taste. After they run the juice through me all I can taste is copper. Richard told me that wasn't uncommon, but it just seems wrong to me. Doesn't it seem wrong that I should taste that still?"

Foxy felt the doctor do her best to keep their eyes locked, but the other woman glanced down at her paper after only a second. "Those treatments will help make you better, Miss Kitt."

"That's what they tell me, but even after all these months it doesn't seem to have done anything." Foxy let her mouth hang open. "You don't suppose they don't work on me, do you? I keep hearing screams at night from other patients. They seem to be doing much better, but I don't scream. Maybe there's something wrong with me."

Commented [a14]: Note: It would also work to have the therapist say, "How do you feel about Pussy Katnip?" It would be a definite trope here, as well as being a bit passive-aggressive on behalf of the therapist. ☺

Commented [a15]: This could also read, "...you people..."

Commented [a16]: I think this phrase may be confusing to the reader. Who is giving whom permission, and about what?

Commented [a17]: Maybe this word would read better as "level."

Commented [a18]: If the doctor really wants to sound condescending, she could refer to the shock treatments as "electro-convulsive therapy" and that it will improve Foxy's "cognitive-behavioral state." ☺

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"That's what they tell me—in less words, usually—but even after all these months it doesn't seem to have done anything." Foxy let her mouth hang open. "You don't suppose they don't work on me, do you? I keep hearing screams at night from other patients. They seem to be doing much better, but I don't scream. Maybe there's something wrong with me."