

# Stick Out Your Tongue

Raud Kennedy

Also by Raud Kennedy

Mad Rabbits  
Streaking Venus  
Sex on the Beach  
Top of the World  
Twice Dead  
Black Oak  
Glimpses

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# 1

It all began on a Saturday last fall. The day had started out no differently than any other Saturday. I'd slept over at Scott's. He was my boyfriend at the time, not a bad guy, but too high maintenance for me. He had big white-collar career dreams and planned on rising up through the ranks at this insurance company he worked at. He must've liked a challenge because he was starting in the basement mailroom. Me, I couldn't handle being cramped in a concrete cell without any windows all week long. Nope, I'd go postal and burn the place down. Just give me my bicycle and a packet to deliver, and everything is cool.

I worked for a courier service riding around downtown Boston picking up deliveries and dropping them where people told me to. Pickups and drops. The name of the company was Bean Pod Delivery. Sounds cute, eh? But try being asked a zillion times a day if you're from Bean Pod. No, I'm from Piss Pot. The person who came up with the name should be capped.

Like I said, the day had started out normal. I woke up earlier than Scott because I had to work a half-day. It was the first night that week I'd slept over, so I was feeling pretty ornery. It was time for my man to get his mojo workin'. I gave him a little 'assistance', and he woke up just the way I wanted him. To tell you the truth, I kind of used

Scott. I wasn't in love with him, but he knew what to do in bed and didn't have a lot of hang-ups about sex, which was one of the few areas he didn't.

After we made our toes curl, he collapsed on top of me and started to space on his big-O endorphin high. I'm kind of a small girl, so when a guy spreads his elbows and uses me as a body pillow, I can only go without breathing for so long. If I didn't smoke, maybe I could've let him nap a while, but to hell with that. "Get off me, you dope," I gasped.

"Sorry," he mumbled and rolled off. His eyes were closed, and I knew he'd soon be asleep again. He slept a lot on weekends. Like he had to rest his brain from all that strenuous work in the mailroom. But I didn't mind, it kept his important parts rested.

I pushed the blind aside so I could look outside and see what the weather was like. The leaves were dropping, their color had turned brown and gold. The window was open a crack, and the air breezing in smelled different that morning. The beginning of the end rode on that musky smell of molting leaves, like Scott's breath next to me. "I've gotta go to work," I said and threw the covers back. I went into the bathroom to use his shower. For a guy, he kept his bathroom really clean, Odd Couple Felix clean. He'd have a conniption fit if he knew how many times I'd used his razor to shave my legs. I'm not the girliest of girls, but hairy legs are way too granola crunchy, like go save the planet for me, okay? When I was clean and dressed in my baggies and tank top, I went back into the bedroom and messed Scott's hair. "See you later," I said and smooched his cheek. Considering he'd just done a two-mile breaststroke, I figured he was asleep again, but he rolled over and opened his eyes.

"Are we doing bands at the Rat tonight?" he asked.

I swung my courier bag over my head, strapped on my crash helmet and hefted my bike to my shoulder. "Yeah, we're meeting Dave, and whoever is his flavor of the week,

at Foley's around eight," I said and opened the apartment door. "And wear boots, I think it's a surf punk band."

He nodded his head as he rolled onto his side and closed his eyes. "Got it, wear boots," he mumbled.

I stepped into the hallway and closed the door. "Got it, wear boots," I echoed back quietly. Actually, that's my nickname, Echo. Ever since I was little, whenever I heard something that sounded funny, like it was a strange combination of words, or was said in a funny way, I echoed it. If you don't know me, it comes across as wise ass, which I am a lot of the time, but mainly it's just habit. I'd tell you the name my mother gave me, but I don't like it. It's a name that suits some stiff ass blue blood on Beacon Hill, not a street rat like me.

Scott's was in Cambridge across the Charles River from Boston, a really crunchy granola, hairy legged sort of town, but his apartment was rent controlled. So for two hundred a month, even I'd live there. I rode across the Massachusetts Avenue Bridge on my bike, a real babe, though you wouldn't know it from looking at her. I've disguised her with rags and stickers, kind of like me. Then I headed through Back Bay. With all its tree lined streets, I wouldn't mind living there, but my friend, Zoë, said I'd have to marry an old codger sugar daddy to afford it, and spreading for a guy who's into screwing a girl the age of his granddaughter would get old fast. When I hit the financial district, I locked my bike to a meter maid's best friend where I could see it from inside the Blue Diner and went inside.

This place was a real greasy spoon in an old style aluminum diner, but the service was fast and the people weren't dicks. There's nothing worse than getting a bitchy waitress first thing in the morning who slams your plate down and leaves you high and dry with an empty coffee cup, or worse yet, a full cup but with no cream. Ask anyone who drinks their coffee with cream, coffee with no cream just doesn't satisfy, like Scott when he's drunk. God I bitch a lot, you'd think I was Sinéad O'Conner.

So the Blue Diner was greasy, but it's hard to screw up eggs and toast. I climbed on a red capped stool and turned my coffee cup upright. The morning guy, Chad, immediately filled it and scooted the cream down the counter to me. I loved that place. Chad was a regular guy, the sort you find all over Boston, barrel chested and balding, with a thick chowder head accent. He ran the front, and his girlfriend, Gladys, ran the sweatshop that was the kitchen.

"You working today?" Chad asked.

"Yep," I said, and waved hello at Gladys in the kitchen as I slurped my coffee.

Chad smiled. "Then you're in luck. Our omelet of the day is a protein special, sausage, bacon, green and red peppers, all smothered in swiss cheese."

"I'll take it," I said and slurped more coffee. "Got any newspapers around?"

He slid a Herald down the counter. "Have mine."

"Thanks, I'll try not to spill on it."

The first thing I do when I get a paper is check my horoscope. That day's said, "When encountering obnoxious persons, don't let them agitate you. Remain calm." Me get agitated? Never. The headlines were full of the same boring crap as always. The President had announced another new assault on hate crimes. I hate crimes too, but all this guy did was talk, gas and more gas. Then there were the daily announcements of more world strife, hunger and nonsense. If I didn't always have to be doing something, I'd probably never look at the newspapers. One story did catch my eye, though. In Toledo, Ohio a group of striking school teachers took control of a high school building and demanded higher pay, but before the police showed up for a face off, yardsticks against guns, a group of militia separatists, calling themselves, The New Americans, stormed the building and took the teachers hostage. Now it was guns against guns. Their demands were a statewide vote on seceding from the Union. If the South couldn't do it, what made them think little Ohio could. I'd like to secede from

the Union too. Hell, I'd like to secede from the planet, but the only way to get off it is way too painful, especially if you're a guy in cult that's chasing a comet.

After the omelet, which was more of a gut bomb than a protein pick me up, I rolled into work. Piss Pot was in a former chop shop. The Boston Mafia used to break up stolen cars there and sell the parts as new. The grease in that place was never going to go away. I can still smell the Liquid Wrench now. There was a mechanic, Ned, who worked on the yellow courier cars and some of the bikes, and he filled in for the dispatcher when he went on his lunch hour. I always tried to take my lunch break then because Ned would dispatch us street rats on car runs that went to hell and back, and then laugh, saying he'd made a mistake. He was also the owner's pitbull. He did the hiring and firing, so a certain amount of ass kissing was in order. When I rode into the garage, Ned was in his train engineer overalls sweeping the floor with a push broom. He was tall and skinny as a rake handle and bald as a bowling pin. "You're late," he said as I hopped off my bike.

I looked at my watch. "Bullshit." I was three minutes early, no slow service at the Blue Diner.

Ned leaned on his broom handle. "I'm joking."

"You're such a social retard."

"Then teach me how to socialize," he said, polishing his broom handle with a jack off motion.

I rested my bike against the wall and started for the office. "I'm gonna sue you for sexual harassment."

"I'll have to pay in trade," he said and leered at my bike.

"If you touch it, I'll Bobbit you," I said and stepped into the office. Ned and I played this game almost every morning. He wanted my ass but there was no way he was going to get it, so all he was, was gas. But I meant it when I said he was a social retard. I felt sorry for him. He'd say things that would make you shiver with the heebie jeebies. He probably didn't even know what a social retard was, but hell if I was going to give him a sympathy lay.

The office wasn't much bigger than a cash hut at a gas station. There were a couple of car couriers inside. I couldn't remember their names, I never could, so I smiled and said, "Hi." I grabbed my radio from the lock up where they charged them over night and strapped it to my bag's shoulder strap running across my chest. That way while riding in traffic, I could get to it without having to stop. Sitting in front of a wall map of Boston and its burbs, looking like Jabba the Hut with a scraggly beard, was Randy, the dispatcher. I liked Randy. Just because he looked like Jabba and scowled a lot didn't mean he was into eating live frogs and tossing people into pits for monster food. He was more like Charlie Brown gone to seed. Beer belly, chronic smoker, hungover a lot of the time, but still easy going and warm hearted.

"Hey, Echo," he drawled. He was from somewhere out West. "How ya doing?"

"I had a Blue Diner gut bomb for breakfast."

"Living on the edge, huh?"

"Out there with the Pillsbury Doughboy," I said and stuck out my bloated stomach like I was pregnant.

He pushed his morning box of Duncan Donuts across his desk toward me. "Have a donut."

"Push it any closer and I'll ralph in it."

Randy pinched the bridge of his nose. "I know how you feel."

"Did you go to the Spit last night?" The Spit was a tavern in Somerville near where several of the guys lived. It was actually called the Barbecue Pit, but I called it the Spit because the only thing I'd do with their food was spit it out.

"Hell if I was going to stay home on a Friday night and watch TV," he said as he shuffled through a few pickup sheets.

"No long hauls, okay?" I pleaded, holding my gut. A long run out to Brookline would not be good for the digestion.

"Don't worry kid. It's slow, even I'm getting bored." He

handed me a sheet of pickups to copy down on my clipboard. “It’s the same old Saturday pickup. You can stretch this one out for hours. There are thirteen packets, and all of the drops are in Back Bay and on Beacon Hill. You know how those folks are, they don’t wake up until it’s time for brunch.” He took a swig of Diet Coke and swallowed a few tabs of aspirin.

I handed back the sheet and stuffed my clipboard in my bag. “Thanks Randy, I’ll check in when I’ve made all the drops,” I said as I moved to the door.”

“Take your time. Dave’s on the streets too.”

“What’s he doing working my Saturdays?” I usually worked Saturdays alone. It was slow, and they only needed one bike.

“There’s a girl at Mills & Nash who only works Saturdays. He wants to hit on her.”

“That slut,” I said with a grin, meaning Dave, and walked back into the garage. Ned was waiting for me next to my bike, a wrench dangling from his hand. He looked like Mr. Goodwrench on crack.

“Don’t even think about it,” I said. “There’s nothing on it that needs fixing.”

He raised his hands, palms out, and wiggled them at me. “You sure your hubs don’t need to be lubed.”

“You’re such a pig.” I pushed him out of the way, jumped on my bike and rode out of there.

“Have a nice day,” Ned cooed after me. I thought of the smiley face T-shirt I’ve got where the face has a bullet hole in its forehead. Ned was getting worse, and it was really starting to annoy me, almost as much as a bitchy waitress in the morning.

The pickup was in a four-story walk up in the lower South End on Shawmut Ave, a nice building, but the neighborhood was what a realtor selling it would claim was ‘transitional’ to make it sound better. It was one of those areas yuppie couples get conned into moving into, but get scared out of within a year. Too much small time crime.

Most of the rest of South End was cool, but especially cool if you have a hankering for your same flavor, as in gay.

When I arrived at the building, I carried my bicycle up the stoop and pushed the intercom button. “Bean Pod,” I called into the speaker, the first of a zillion times. The door lock buzzed open. I wheeled my bike into the entry area, leaned it against the wall, and climbed the four flights to the top floor where I knew from routine I’d find the packets stacked in the hall outside the apartment door. And there they were, as always. I’d never seen the pickup’s face, but I figured it was a guy because Randy said a guy always called in the pickups. Maybe he was shy, who knew. Maybe he didn’t want to trouble with putting clothes on. We’ve all been there, can’t be proper all the time. I picked up the packets and as I traipsed down the stairs, I shuffled through the envelopes, sorting them by address into the order I’d deliver them. They were all nearby. This Saturday was going to be easy. I’d do more stair climbing than riding.

The first drop was on Commonwealth Avenue near the Public Garden. I rang the buzzer and waited. There was no answer, so I rang it again. Still there was no answer. I didn’t want to make all the other drops and then have to ride back there after those lazy asses woke up, so I pushed the buzzer and held it down. After a zillion hours, this eurotrash daddy’s girl opened the door. She looked like she’d left her soul at the Club Joy disco last night, I mean, I’ve seen movie zombies that looked more alive than she did. I took my time letting go of the buzzer, then said, “Bean Pod Delivery.”

She flipped her long brown hair to one side and stared at me. “What do you want?”

I glanced at the address written on the envelope. “I’ve a delivery for a Sofia in apartment two. Do you live in apartment two?” I asked dryly.

Her eyes went wide, the red in them showed me how truly hungover she was. “Did Nicky send you?”

“I don’t know any Nickies, but I know a few Frankies,”

I said, being smart.

“Just give me the envelope,” she snapped.

“Do you live in apartment two?”

“Yes, I’m Sofia, the second floor is mine,” she said, exasperated.

I held out my clipboard for her and offered a pen. “Please sign at the top of the page next to your address.”

She scrawled some lines that meant nothing, and I handed her the packet. As I did, she tried to hand me an envelope back. “What’s this?” I asked.

“You know what it is. Give it to Nicky,” she said, thrusting the envelope into my hand and disappearing behind the closed door. I put the packet in my bag, thinking nothing of it, just a return trip I’d have to let Randy know of so he could bill them for it. I don’t ride for free.

The next few drops were mail slot deliveries at private residences, then a couple of preppy guys who answered the door in their boxers. Remember when the President was asked if he wore boxers or jockeys? I can’t believe he actually answered. The rest were more eurotrash who acted pretty much the same way as Miss Sofia. Get a life. I was finished around noon and radioed into base. Randy said to call it a day and come on in.

“What about Dave? Is he still on the street?” I asked.

“If you could call it that,” Randy radioed back. “He’s been polishing his handlebars outside Mills & Nash for the last hour praying for them to call in a pickup.”

“Okay, I’m on my way,” I said.

“Hey, I heard that,” Dave said over the radio.

Mills & Nash wasn’t far away, so I rode in that direction. I saw him up ahead, stretched out on a park bench with his head resting on his crash helmet. I pulled up next to him. “Hey slut, what’s happening?”

He opened his eyes. “Hi Echo. Nothing. I’ve had three runs.”

“Who’s this chick at Mills & Nash?”

“She’s a babe, totally my type,” he said as he sat up.

“Maybe you know her? Maybe you could set me up?”

“If she’s your type, I doubt I know her. I assume her bra size is bigger than her IQ?”

“I can’t help it, Echo. I’m a slave to big boobs.”

“Just go up there and pretend you have a pickup to make. Then while she’s searching around the desk, do your puppy dog thing or whatever you scam these chicks with.”

“Shit, that’s brilliant. Why didn’t I think of that?”

“Because, you slut, you’re thinking with the wrong head,” I said, and rode my bike into the street. “See you tonight at Foley’s.”

I started back toward the Piss Pot chop shop, but then I remembered Miss Sofia’s return drop, the envelope with Nicky scrawled on it. As I hung a U-turn, a fat lady in a mini-van honked at me. I gave her the evil eye, then smiled. I was rolling down Boylston at a good clip when a car door opened in front of me. I swerved to miss it and smacked into the car I was sideswiping. It knocked me off balance, and the ground rose up to meet me. My feet broke free of my pedals, and my crash helmet hit the pavement, then I went for a skid and rolled up against the nearest parked car. I prayed to Sid Vicious my bike didn’t get run over.

I was lucky. I had road rash up one leg, but my bike was in one piece. I picked it up and waved off the drivers asking me if I was okay, then walked back to the car door I almost impaled my brains on. Standing behind it was a happy homemaker from the burbs. I guessed she was in town for her urban fix while the kiddies were at BB&N, a rich private school, listening to a lecture about Big Brother in 1984. She looked a little stunned, probably worrying about a lawsuit. I was pissed, but I also knew if I hadn’t been sideswiping her I wouldn’t have dumped it.

“God, are you all right? I’m so sorry,” she said.

“Don’t worry about me, hon, just check your mirror next time. If I’d been a drunk cabby, you’d be shredded from here to the Commons,” I said, got back on my bike and pedaled into traffic. My adrenaline was rushing hard, and I

didn't want to deal with her, but I'd give ten to one odds she'd check her mirror from now on. What a public service we street rats provided, the city should give us a bonus for every crash.

I turned onto Dartmouth and rolled into the South End. At the building where I made my morning pickup, I carried my bike up the stoop and pressed the intercom. A man's voice answered, "Yeah, who is it?"

"Bean Pod," I sing songed.

"You already picked up."

"I know, I picked them up. You've got a return packet."

The door lock buzzed open, and I wheeled my bike inside. As I took the stairs two at a time, I pulled the envelope out of my bag. It had a big tear in it. Inside, I could see a load of 20's. Sending cash was against the rules. Checks, yeah, but no green. With what Piss Pot paid us, they didn't think we could handle the temptation. When I'd climbed to the fourth floor, I closed the tear as much as I could and slipped it under the door, then turned and started loping down the stairs two at a time. But I wasn't going to get away that easy. A gruff voice called after me. "Yo! Bean Pod chick! Hold up there."

I was six steps from the ground floor. I stopped and waited. No way was I going back up there. This pickup was too creepy. Maybe there was a darker reason for why he never opened his door. I wanted to be as near the building's exit as possible. Heavy footfalls came down the stairs, and then a guy rounded the corner of the banister. He had black hair slicked back from his forehead the way the euros wore it, and he had a tan, like he worked outside or didn't work at all. He was good-looking in an Armani sort of way, except for his eyes. They had a mean glint, like rusted bullet dents in a road sign.

He held out the torn envelope. "What's with this?"

I played dumb. "Sofia in apartment two on Comm. Ave. told me to drop it here. I assume you're Nicky."

"You open it?" he asked hotly.

“I crashed my bike,” I said, staring back at his mean eyes. “It must’ve torn in the fall.”

He looked me up and down. His gaze rested on my bloodied leg for a moment, then he smiled and pulled one of the 20’s from the envelope. When he smiled, his face warmed, and the cold glint in his eyes changed to a sparkle. He held out the bill to me. “This is for Band-Aids.” The bill was crisp, fresh out of an ATM. I could smell the Denver mint. “Go on, take it. I’m not going to bite.”

I took two steps up the stairs and snatched it from his hand. “Nobody ever tips.”

His smile faded, and he winked one of his mean eyes at me. “Let’s keep this between you and me, okay?” I put the money in my pocket and nodded. He turned and started back up the stairs. “See you soon,” he said with a glance over his shoulder.

I carried my bike down the stoop and started riding. This was a total ‘I should’ve’ situation. I should’ve taken the torn envelope to base once I saw money in it. I should’ve passed on the 20-dollar tip. I should’ve stayed in bed with Scott. The drop’s eyes said it was more than a tip. “Fuck!” I swore aloud. It was almost Saturday night, and I wanted to have some fun, not worry about some dickhead named Nicky. I cranked it through traffic as hard as I could, using the danger of speed to push it from my mind.

J.J. Foley’s was an Irish pub on the edge of the financial district. From outside all you saw was a scraped up door and a sign. You wouldn’t go in there unless you knew to. It was a street rat hangout. You could always find a group of us lounging about after work. Once through the doors, there was a flight of stairs, then the bar and a back room full of booths. And when you crossed that threshold, time lost its teeth. Without windows, day and night didn’t exist. It was always the same hour, the cocktail hour.

When Scott and I got there that evening, Dave was already there, and he looked like he’d been there awhile. He was in the back room sitting in a booth across from a chick