

# RACHEL CORD, PI

Still  
a  
Bitch

**A CONFIDENTIAL INVESTIGATIONS MYSTERY**

**R. E. CONARY**



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Rachel Cord, PI 'Still a Bitch'  
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*To all the women I've known and loved,  
my heartfelt thanks.*



# One

Once the convenience store clerk stopped staring at my breasts, he recognized the man in the picture.

“Yeah, that’s Mr. Carter. I see him with Mr. Stanley lots of weekends. They come in for gas and stuff. They usually order pizza on Saturday nights. A large double pepperoni, double cheese with hot peppers and onions. Not from here. I deliver for Pizza Quick at night. They’re good tippers.”

“Did you deliver a pizza last Saturday?”

He pulled his eyes back from staring at my breasts again. He was young, so I tried to ignore it. It happens all the time.

“No, they didn’t call in an order. Didn’t see them at all last weekend.”

He gave me directions to Stanley’s house and I thanked him. He strained over the counter to get a last look as I got into my car. I understood his interest. Every

adolescent male from nine to 90 stares at my breasts. A lot of women do too, but that's a different story. I hate it, it's my albatross and there's little I can do about it—yet.

My breasts are huge. Double-H huge that stick out like the bullet bumpers on a fifties Buick. They're a cause of distraction, but more than that they're a pain: a pain in the neck and back just trying to stay upright, and a pain to the ego. It's automatically assumed that the bigger the breast the smaller the brain. But one of these days I'm getting them cut back to a pleasanter, more comfortable size: a C-cup at least, or, maybe a B. A girl has her dreams.

The mailbox was just as the clerk described, large and black with three blue reflectors on the post beneath it. I pulled into the dirt lane and stopped.

It rained heavily the past weekend washing the lane smooth. It didn't look like anyone had been here since. There were no tire tracks. This was Wednesday. Morning light through the trees turned the lane green as it twisted and curved through the woods. I couldn't see the house. I got out of the car and checked the mailbox. There were some letters and a magazine. One day's delivery? Three? What time of day? I had no idea. Only one of the letters had a readable cancellation from last week. No help there. I left them. It's against the law to tamper with other people's mail. I try not to break the law—too often.

The rain-swept lane told me Jerome Carter probably wasn't even here, or Kenneth Stanley either. Maybe they went fishing and hadn't yet returned. Maybe they had an

accident. But they weren't in any hospital that I knew of, nor had any unclaimed bodies shown up. This could be a wasted trip. Still, I couldn't know for sure until I checked. Carter hadn't come home Sunday night and this is where his trail led.

Why was I here? Because I was hired to find the guy and hand him some papers? Because it's what I do for a living? Because I'm Rachel Cord, confidential investigator? Was that answer enough?

I didn't want to be here. Certainly wasn't welcome on this side of the river. I could have stayed in bed. Should have stayed in bed. Had plenty of reason to stay in bed and would be much happier there than here. I definitely didn't want to go down a tree-lined lane to a house hidden in the woods. Nasty things happen in such places. Nasty things that rip you apart, maybe never to be whole again. Nasty memories that didn't need to be dredged up.

Life isn't always hearts and flowers. Mostly it's pain and suffering. Muck and mire below the surface where the grubs and worms feed. It's an end and it's a beginning. It's dirty little secrets. Secrets that it's my job to discover, like it or not. My business cards even say so: *"Life's a bitch. So am I."*

Yeah, that's why I was here: to prove to myself I can still handle it; that I'm still tough enough, hard enough.

I started down the shimmering lane. Angled golden light pierced the green canopy sending up hazy mists that promised another hot, sticky, typical September start. The lane twisted around trees like a game trail instead of a

driveway built by humans. The quiet crunch of tires on sand sent birds fluttering and squirrels scurrying. The lane curved and as I crossed a short wooden bridge over a stream, I saw the log house at the crest of the hill across an open meadow. The meadow was wavy grasses and wildflower bursts of white and yellow, reds and blues. The colors extended up the hill toward the house, a modified A-frame with wings. A two-and-a-half story triangle of windows reflected blue sky.

The lane circled the meadow instead of cutting across straight to the house. There was a low place where the lane turned that still had water from the recent rains and looked pretty soft. No one had tried to drive through it or around it. I pulled to the left through the grasses to avoid getting stuck. Something scraped the undercarriage. The lane curved up the rise and I could see the side of the house, two towering trees shading the back yard, and a log garage. The weathered gray logs shone in the sunlight. Beyond was more meadow with an old red barn and then the tree line. I stopped near the back of the house. A dark blue car parked in front of the garage was a late model Cutlass and the license plate matched the information I had. I picked up the envelope of papers from the passenger seat and got out.

“Hello? Anyone home?”

A tawny tabby came out from beneath the deck to greet me. She meowed and rubbed herself against my leg. She leaned in hard as I rubbed her ears.

“You’re a friendly kitty. Where is everyone?” She looked at me with her deep amber eyes and meowed again.

I climbed the steps. An iron bell hung from a bracket beside the door. I rang it a couple of times. Its peal echoed across the meadow. The door was filled with glass panes. A cat door had replaced the bottom middle one. The room beyond was an enclosed porch with lots of windows. There were comfortable wicker chairs, a sofa and a table. An arrangement of wildflowers on the table needed to be replaced. I couldn’t see into the rest of the house. The door was locked. Across the room, by the inner door, was a pair of metal bowls on the floor. They looked empty. The cat rubbed against my leg.

“Hey, did they go off and forget to feed you?”

She looked at me and opened her mouth silently. I knocked on the glass.

“Anyone here?”

No answer. All I heard were birds in the trees and the lazy buzz of a fat carpenter bee as it looked for a hole in the porch roof beam.

I stepped off the deck and away from the house. I couldn’t see any open windows. The whir of a heat pump starting let me know that the electricity was still on and that it was probably a lot more comfortable in the house than out here. The air was already steamy from the hot sun sucking all the moisture out of the meadows. I wanted to get back into my air-conditioned car, get back to the city and my side of the river. This trip was

a bust. I turned toward Carter's car and the garage. The car looked freshly washed from the rains. There were no tracks, so it hadn't been moved. The garage was built of the same weathered logs as the house. The two roll-up doors on the garage were closed. There was an open screened window on the side of the garage and a window set in the side door. I walked over to the door and put my face to the glass.

No cars in the garage. As I thought, Carter and Stanley must have left before the rains. Another window on the opposite wall also looked open. In the dim light I saw a workbench along one wall. Tools hung neatly from a pegboard. There was a sink and an old refrigerator. In the middle of the nearer car stall was a large dark mat on the floor. On it appeared to be a large beige lump that made me curious. I tried the door handle and it turned.

Despite the open windows, the room was stifling and reeked of fermenting shit and piss and stale sweat. My stomach flip-flopped and my breakfast threatened a return appearance. I fumbled for the light switch. My hand hit a button and then the switch. One of the garage doors began rising and the fluorescent lights flickered on. The dark mat turned an electric blue and the beige lump became a naked body curled in a fetal position with a brown leather ball for a head. Then I saw the chains.

*(The chains bit into my arms and ankles stretching me, pulling my joints.)* I couldn't breathe. *(The electric blue silicone dildo*

*smacked my bare belly.) I stumbled backward out the door, gagging. (I was being ripped, torn apart.) Leaned against the rough gray logs. (A bead of sweat clung precipitously to the tip of a taut nipple.) Slid down the wall, folding into myself. (An oblivious dark eye disappeared in the muzzle blast of an exploding cannon.)*