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by Kim Conklin

He'd kept the parking space open. She used it most often, whenever she and her husband, an old drinking buddy, came to visit.

When he saw her that day, he knew. Her hipbones were fins on a '58 Caddy, her eyes death black. He was shocked, but not surprised.

Her husband had always mistreated women. A soldier's daughter, she had carried on.

Had he known, he might have killed.

He'd been captured somehow the first time he met her. That first night, he'd watched her undress, her image unknowingly reflected in a window.

Over the years, they had become good friends. She trusted him. That day, all she wanted was to park her car and run to a distant city.

Suddenly a lieutenant again, he did the right thing. He stopped her.

Don't run, he told her. Stay and fight. Stay with me.

At first, she still wanted to run from everything, from protection, even love. He stood guard, held her hand as she stood, taking baby steps towards living again.

One evening, he kissed her. She kissed back tenderly, piercing his armoured heart.

He swallowed his fear. For months, every time she left, he worried she wouldn't return.

He'd lived through the Tet unarmed; he would survive this. The years past had been the quiet before the battle, a long, restless wait, for what he had not known.

Now, she laughs again. He loves the sound. Just to touch her gives him joy. He walks home more quickly at night.

She comes to him.

