



K . F . C O L E

*Tender is the  
Moment*



Oh how Sandra Sharpe longed for that thrill again – her secret, her sin, her tender (or at least that’s what she called him). That night in the quiet parking lot near the mill. That first touch of warm skin and soft steam against her quivering lips. The subtle hint of herbs and spice – but she wasn’t asking questions. This was the first time in months, years, she’d felt a tenderness so sweet, so supple, so right.

He was from the South; gentle, polite and well-respecting – she, the suburbs, her life rolling slowly past her like the orange traffic cones presently outside her car window on the way to her daughter’s piano recital.

She pulled up to the hall and her daughter climbed out.

“Break a leg, honey!” Sandra called out, her motherly intention returned by a cold teenage stare.

‘*Oh to be young...*’ Sandra thought as she put the blinker on and pulled out, her own flowery youth flashing before her eyes, the years of study and fun, reckless abandon, and nightless passion.

That was before she’d married her man, a steelworker by the name of Brisk. Brisk indeed. He was a man whose hands had the thorough stench of grit and grime by the end of the day, and while that may have appealed to her in the similar milieu of a seedy studio flat, now they were both older, and her voracious appetite softer. Now, Brisk’s coarse fingertips chilled her like sandpaper over silk. His touch had no feeling. No softness. No soul. Sparks flew only at the steel mill nowadays – Sandra thought cheekily, ‘*Or with my tender...*’

At once she felt a zing – a rush – from her stomach up her spine to the back of her head. One flickering thought of her tender was all it took to make her hairs bristle, heart beat and palms sweat around their grip of the rubber steering wheel.

She bit her lip as her mind began to drift back. It was at lunch just a few weeks ago that her good friend, Emily, had unwittingly introduced Sandra to her tender.

It was a Wednesday afternoon, sunny, and the air vernal with the smell of suburban food court. Although Emily was only one year younger than Sandra, Sandra nonetheless saw her as a pluckier, wilder version of her current self, a yardstick to measure her own fettered whimsy against.

“He just treats me like I’m not there. I don’t know what to do.” Emily confided with nervous laughter.

Em had fallen in and out of love a thousand times in her little life, but never with the right sort of guy. This new boy, Jacob, was no different. It was a story Sandra had heard over and over again, and one she had perfected a stock issue response for.

“I know what you mean,” Sandra sympathised, “Brisk can be like that too.”

Emily continued. “What I need is someone who will give me attention, you know? I’m not needy, I’m not clingy. But I’m not invisible either. I’m not some succulent you buy from the garden centre and only water once a fortnight – I’m more than that, and Jacob oughta know!”

Sandra nodded along in silence. In fact, the more she nodded, the more she felt she could see herself in Emily’s shoes – albeit not in the stilettos of that twentysomething soul Emily so desperately tried to preserve, but more in the responsible, cork-soled sandals of a wife largely impartial to her husband’s tried affections.

“I’m just going to the bathroom for a second.” Emily got up.

“You do that.” Sandra said, somewhat comfortingly.

Alone, it was then that Sandra’s eyes first landed on her tender, just a few tables away. He looked instantly delicate, gentle – but also seasoned by a secret past. It was as though he were half-eaten by the woes of the world. She found herself daydreaming about walking up, some lame, gushy ballad playing behind her. He looked succulent – she wanted to bite right into him. Right then, right there.

Emily returned. “What are *you* looking at, missy?” she said playfully.

“Nothing.” Sandra looked down, flustered, heart racing.

It didn’t stop Emily from glancing around. She spied the table across from her.

“Ah, I see, I see!” Emily raised her volume.

“Stop it!” Sandra blushed. She hadn’t felt this way in ages. She felt shy, young – giddy like she’d been zapped back a decade.

She glanced at the table again.

“I saw that!” Emily screeched. “I’m going over there.”

“No no no no, you can’t do that. That’s weird. Em. Em!”

Em was not listening. She smiled perkily, got up and walked over.

Sandra shrunk in to her seat. *‘What am I doing!?’* she thought *‘What is happening? Am I insane? It’s not like Brisk wouldn’t do the same, would he? In the face of such forthright temptation? Surely he is tired too. But is this right? Morally?’*

*But it feels so right. It feels after years of sleep I'm awake, like a little soft and tender has come back into my life at long last...'*

Emily returned. "Go over. It's OK."

The butterflies. The trembling. The anticipation of this, her tender moment. Sandra stood.

"One more thing, Sandy! That fine fare's from Kentucky," Emily said with a wink.

Sandra approached the table. She couldn't help but smile from the very centre of her being. Sandra sat.

"Hi there."

Her tender looked at her, but not with human eyes. It was more primal than that – there was instant unspoken chemistry. Salivation, enzymes, a growling stomach. On a deep, biomolecular level, they bonded. She had been waiting for this. She was hungry for a soul just as he – a bluegrass sweetheart reared in a place where boys knew right from wrong, where rugged whims were tempered by smalltown manner and formality.

She realised then how close they were to each other. Less than a few centimetres apart. She could feel the warmth of his breast emanating as her heart throbbed inside her ears. Her lips moved closer, *closer*. She closed her eyes...

That was just a few short weeks ago. And still, thinking about it now on the way back home from dropping her daughter off, her fingertips tingled and her stomach clenched beneath her seatbelt in racy excitement.

*'Could I see my tender now?'* the thought made her heart pound.

*I'm alone. The turn off is just ahead,*' she fidgeted in her seat.

*'Chelsea's recital finishes at five, the same time that Brisk knocks off. I'll leave ten minutes to go back to the hall... That means I have twenty minutes, right now, to myself...'* she calculated, *'twenty tender minutes that no one knows where I am...'*, but already her hand was turning the wheel, off the main road, toward her puckish Kentucky tender.

Sandra hadn't always known about this spot she was driving to now. Actually, it was where her and her tender had last rendezvoused only four nights before, and scandalously, only a couple blocks down from the mill where Brisk spent his days thrashing hot rods of steel.

She thought back to that night.

It was raining, pummelling. Brisk was working late – something about a big order – and his car was in the shop, so Sandra had to pick him up. Waiting, she drove without aim in the industrial area around the mill. Lights atop long, vaulted smokestacks glinted dimly in the storm. Men raced to shelter with stiff umbrellas.

And it was in her malaise, through the rain, by pure chance, that Sandra spotted her tender again – his glistening, delicate skin, his sturdy Southern vim. She couldn't resist.

What happened next was such a flurry of lust and indulgence not even Sandra could piece it together afterwards, her flashbacks only disordered smearings, sensual pulses in a deluge of unbridled joy – the nibbling of her tender's soft flesh, her booming heart, steam on the windshield and the faint whiff of exotic spices, dripping, the thud of rain bucketing down on the roof of her car, the dark of the empty lot around her – brought to an end by the ringing of her phone.

It was Brisk.

“I’m coming now,” he said.

“OK...” Sandra said softly, gathering breath after her rapacious spree.

Two minutes later she was outside the mill. Brisk ran across in the pelting rain, a jacket his umbrella.

“Hoooo boy! It’s wet out there,” he gruffed as he clambered in. “Thanks honey.”

“That’s alright.” Sandra chimed – but her mind was elsewhere, for the thrill of that tender moment still lingered fresh on her lips, and now her secret elation swelled almost uncontainably by her realising of his sitting in the very same car she’d had her tender moment in just minutes before.

*‘He’d taste my lips if he kissed me,’ she thought, ‘Oh if only he knew what happened where he sits. Oh the thrill...’*

Sandra’s heart pounded as she relived that rainy night.

*The thrill... the thrill...’*

Slowly she drifted back to the current moment grinning ear to ear, giddy in the knowledge that the next twenty minutes would be hers and hers alone.

*The mill... the mill!’*

The steel mill passed by on her right. Instinctively she looked the other way.

*‘Did Brisk see me?’ she panicked, ‘Am I sprung? This close!?’ she thought again, ‘But who cares if he did! It’s time for me and my tender, baby!’*



She sped faster, faster to where she knew her loving tender would be, two short blocks away.

*I am crazy. This is madness – this rush.'*

One block. Her heart raced.

*'Is this an affair? I'm not that girl. I'm not, am I? But I am a girl – not a lady, not a mother. I am woman!'* Half a block.

Her phone buzzed. It was Brisk.

Louder, louder her heart pounded, *'Not now. Why now? Did he see me? He must've!'* Sandra panicked, but it was too late to turn back – she was ravenous, *'let it ring out, let it ring, let it ring!'*

She cranked up the rock music on the radio as the ringing stopped, though not enough to ignore a new text in the corner of her eye.

“Where are you?” it read. From Brisk.

“Tender!” Sandra shouted at her phone, “Tenderness, Brisk!”

One hundred metres.

She was so close now, so close she could feel the excitement pulse through every pore of her being and breathe in her tender's unctuous scent, see his crispy coat, feel his warm embrace, her fingertips tingling with expectation – her lips, salivating.

Ten metres.

One.

“Welcome to KFC, what can I get for you today?”  
the drive-thru speaker buzzed.

Sandra wiggled excitedly in her seat, perhaps because she knew that this was it – that greaseproof paper-thin moment before countryside etiquette would disintegrate into a forthright burst of passion; that courteous invitation fried so deep in Southern hospitality. Now was the time to answer...

“One Original Tenders Box. Please.”

“Sure thing. Anything else for you today?”

“An aioli sauce. Thanks.”

It was hard for Sandra to feign such nicety – the sort she’d typically reserve for a stranger – as the all-too-familiar aroma of her tender began to waft gently in to her car, and her soul.

“OK, so that’s one Original Tenders Box with aioli sauce for \$10.95 – drive through to window 2 when you’re ready, thank you.”

*No – thank you.*

Sandra wrapped and unwrapped her fingers around the steering wheel as she lurched forward, and tremblingly fingered the gritty seam of her purse for some coin. In doing so, she glanced at her phone lying face up on the floor by the passenger’s seat, and briskly, she thought of Brisk – his call, his text, his certain suspicion – and of she, as a simple country girl in the midst of civil war, torn in the crossfire between two sides.

On one side of the battlefield, Brisk, like the metal he tempered for a living – sturdy, stable and reliable, but oh so tough, calloused and unforgiving. And on the other side, her tender, who addressed in her a different need – a sensual need, a need

for simplicity and convenience, a spot, soft in her heart and a pang, unyielding in her stomach.

Speak of the devil.

The window slid open, as she spied the svelte, angular corners of her tender's box protrude against the taut white film of a paper bag in the operator's hand.

"OK, that'll be \$10.95 thanks."

Her sweaty palm obliged, raised and opened flat like a springtide bloom to reveal the exact coinage, hot from her passionate clasp. The operator took it from her and deposited it in to his till.

Unknowingly he dangled the bag at eye-level toward her as he finalised the transaction. It brushed her arm. It was too much.

"Have a good ni—"

In a rush of passion Sandra grasped the bag like a rattlesnake seizing its prey. She threw it against her lap.

"You too," but her heart beat loud and her eyes darted for a spot to park as her tender's heat emanated against her mumm-jeaned thighs.

Instantly she found one. She turned the engine off. The car fell silent, and suddenly Sandra was alone – for now it was her moment, her tender moment...

She glanced down at the box on her lap, and slowly, parted the crinkled paper to expose her Original Tenders. At once her pupils widened to take in their sculpted exterior, flecks of mystery in those rumoured herbs and spices – but a lady never asks – and beneath it all, tender, juicy breast fillet.

Sandra raised the box to her nose and breathed in her Original Tender's scent. *I want you*, she whispered, warm sauna-like steam gushing against her flushed cheeks and parted lips as her tenders stared back, reassuringly, consentingly. Yes, they said. Eat me, they sighed.

She couldn't take it – in heat Sandra unbuckled her seat belt, unwound the window and ripped open the aioli sauce.

Now, she was not thinking – just feeling, feeling the rush as she grabbed each Original Tender from the box and wrapped her fingers around it, plunged it deep into the creamy aioli sauce, pressed it against her lips, and bit in – in to a primordial cosmos of food and soul, crunchy and soft, salty and savoury, of pure, unbridled pleasure and enjoyment. She licked her fingers as she chewed, a sense of deep, intense satisfaction washing over her.

Her eyes rolled back and her head flopped against the headrest, exhausted. She closed her eyes as the thudding of her heart slowed.

*Tap. Tap.*

“Sandra?” a voice called from outside.

*Brisk?*

She opened one eye. It was.

“Honey?” he asked, splinters of concern lacing his usually rugged tone, “what're you doing? You've got sauce all over your mouth.”

Sandra sat up, bewildered in a cold, clammy sweat. She padded at her lips.

“I.... I...” she stuttered, but nothing came out.

“I tried calling you. Did you get my text?”

Still nothing, but inside her mind was racing, *I'm sprung. Done for. Caught by my husband and his iron grasp. What now? What happens now to Sandra Sharpe and her Southern fling? Is it all over? Does it stop? Where do I go?*

*How do I flee? That hedge is piddling, I'm sure I could jump it.”*

Brisk interrupted, “I was just seeing if you wanted some of these.”

‘*What?*’ Her mind stopped dead in its tracks.

“But it seems we had the same idea,” he continued, as he raised an unopened box of Original Tenders to the window.

“Oh Brisk, how did you know!?”

“The ads, I’ve seen your face when they come on. And the clippings you’ve kept in your drawers. I’ve seen it, I’ve seen it all Sandra – and I thought you might like to try some with me.”

Instantly Sandra felt her heart melt once more, for now in her vision of Brisk a softer, tenderer side had been rekindled, a side that had lied dormant through years of childrearing, manual labour and leaving wet towels on the bathroom floor. No – she was not invisible after all, and he, not blind. Now his roughened hands softened. His sea-green eyes and steely, thousand-yard stare broke again, through to the very centre of her being.

Now, right before her eyes, with this simple gesture and timely offer to a woman hungry for tender affection, the rains broke, the dam burst, the river flowed once more, and once again, Sandra and Brisk, weathered but not defeated, stood together on the canyon’s edge – a box of Original Tenders between them.

“Enough Brisk, enough! Come in ‘ere, you big softie!” she said, slapping the leather seat beside her.

“Why yes ma’am,” Brisk jumped in, wiping soft crumbs from her cheek as he did – and together, together at long, lovely last, in a KFC parking lot by the old mill, they shared their first of many tender moments to come.

“Good thing Original Tenders are here to stay.” Brisk chuckled.

“Oh Brisk!” Sandra toyed.



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tender moment on social.*



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***“Hunger, secrecy, herbs and spices...  
This original recipe will steal your heart.”***  
– BEVERLY FILLET

Sandra Sharpe was in want of something soft and tender. Ignored by her teenage daughter and hardened by her steelworker husband, Brisk, one day she finds herself staring at a mysterious and exciting new prospect in a local suburban food court.

Little did she know of the scintillating path and salacious hunger their tender encounter would elicit, nor of the impact it would have on her and her husband’s marriage...

***“No bones about it, dig in at once.”***  
– HERB SPICER

***“A timeless addition that will keep you  
absolutely satisfied.”***  
– CHRIS PETY

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