

Charmed Acres

by Tami Canaday

MORGAN is a woman.

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So, I'm the head cook at Charm Acres Nursing Home. Not the chef, but the head cook; there's a difference. See, when the chef tells me what the menu is gonna be, I cook the food. Been working here since I was fourteen; I started out delivering food to the room-bound and washing pots and pans. Being young, I'd plunge the pans into boiling water until my hands bled a little. I was told the water needn't be so hot, but I had gotten used to it. I believed, the hotter, the cleaner. Still do. So back then, Charm Acres had a locked ward for those - I'm gonna say it - drooling, partially clad screamers and gibbers. But after a couple of years, the state changed the laws, and they closed the ward off. Just kept the door to the ward locked and that was that for a long time. Yet lately? I take my key that I still got, one they forgot to take away, and sneak in during my breaks. I don't know why. *(slight pause)* It's hallway is cool and dark, mostly. Maybe, I go in for the dark. 'Cause otherwise it smells like wet fur and if I look close enough, with a lit match, I can see scratches and scuffs and what looks to be - deep slashes in the walls. Still *(slight pause)* sneaking in and standing like a sentry and smoking a cigarette isn't enough. See, there's another locked door - or more like one that's chained shut - in the hallway. And, if I lean my ear *(continued)*