

New Fiction from Kate Sullivan: “All Sales Final”



GoodSouthernBoy™ is born to a RegularAmericanFamily! in Tennessee. You won't learn where exactly, and if you do, you won't remember. It's not important. GoodSouthernBoy™ stands over six feet tall, has blond hair, and you shudder to think that at one point in time, GoodSouthernBoy™ was ConventionallySexuallyAttractive. GoodSouthernBoy™ has the trappings of a nice smile, white teeth and with enough cheek dimple for RegularAmericanMoms! across the country to swoon and say things like You Found A Keeper! and What A Heartbreaker! and there's never enough time for you to say it isn't your heart that GoodSouthernBoy™ will break. GoodSouthernBoy™ is a Marine Officer in his spare time, could be a poster boy, you can almost see him on the highway billboards proclaiming *the few, the proud*, can almost see his dress blues cover tipped forward to reveal the quatrefoil and some hefty under eye shadow. The manufacturers really go for that. Mystery! Intrigue! GoodSouthernBoy™ has it all. The RegularAmericanMoms! are so proud.

GoodSouthernBoy™ comes with accessories like SoftGreyTShirt and AlcoholicDrinks and Excuses!

GoodSouthernBoy™ has a pull string that says lines like *let me walk you home* and *I insist* and *reach for the sky*. Well, maybe not that last one but it sort of fits? See, GoodSouthernBoy™ has this effect where you remember the acute things, the contours, but some of the specific details are sold separately. The manufacturers and makers of Marine billboards call it CHARM™, and although you were also a Marine Officer in your spare time, you don't get a billboard. You know it's not fucking CHARM™ but this story is about GoodSouthernBoy™ so you

know what, you don't get a say.

GoodSouthernBoy™ is everywhere and nowhere, he lurks around every corner, attends every planning meeting because you've been assigned to the same 80-piece playcastle that's really a thousand piece jigsaw puzzle of an old World War II facility. Even though you know the likelihood of him being at the same meeting as you, or crossing the crosswalk at the same time is slim, thanks to Reassurances™ from your JobManager, the malleability of GoodSouthernBoy™ makes it so your JobManager's words ring hollow. You stop walking to that coffee shop at the far end of the work complex, the one where you know

GoodSouthernBoy™ is most likely to have clients and comrades, but just when you think you have a Routine!, GoodSouthernBoy™ will emerge from some adjacent stairwell and when your JobManager asks why you've slowed down your normally very Purposeful and Powerful walk, you'll say you left your notebook in the conference room, and when your fucking JobManager points out you're carrying a notebook you snarl *no, the other one*. JobManager became a JobManager when They realized that he'd be LeastLikely to cause a problem. In his performance report They wrote "HighlyCompetent" and "Client-Focused." GoodSouthernBoy™ isn't rated "HighlyCompetent" or "Client-Focused" but when you have CHARM™ They don't seem to care.

Extension packs for GoodSouthernBoy™ feature drunken texts months later with prompts like *hey are you out?* and *hey did you just start working here?* and *i don't know if I'll ever forgive myself*, and though you'll start to wonder, you trust the manufacturers that it's not a defect. Even if it was, there is no return policy, no extended warranty. *All sales final* is in GoodSouthernBoy™'s fine print.

GoodSouthernBoy™ isn't a T R A N S F O R M E R™, he doesn't shapeshift into a car or a truck or a shark. You're not a T R A N S F O R M E R™ either (what you'd give to be one of those

lucky bastards), but you don't really know what you are because your manufacturers can't seem to make up Their mind on what to call you. They've done reissues like: SoccerGirl™, LIMITED EDITION MARINE OFFICER!

NEW WITH PARACHUTING CAPABILITIES™!, Backcountry Skier™, and queer™. Your collectors' items have included soccer balls and combat boots and plastic skis with felt climbing skins, ice axes, and rainbow flags. You've *had* collectors. So you still can't understand why They prefer GoodSouthernBoy™ and his stupid blond hair even though you've done better in sales, outperformed and outlasted and in every reissue, your accessories have never broken.

The announcement of your latest model is particularly infuriating because there was never any preparation or marketing campaign for it. You just woke up one day and like GoodSouthernBoy™'s Excuses!, your new release just circled around your brain like a halo, because that's the technology They've settled on for mass announcements. When They announced the release of V ! C T ! M, you tried to tell them it's not how you feel for a reissue but They insisted. V ! C T ! M, defender of virtue and honor, comes complete with YouShouldSmileMore! and a 50-yard stare and a POWERsuit. *It's all about power*, They say. You don't like the way people look at you as V ! C T ! M, you don't feel they can see what you're defending.

The manufacturers create a special, limited edition dual set, "V ! C T ! M vs. GoodSouthernBoy™." Even then it doesn't make sense, because you're the one defending honor and virtue but *that's not what marketing is reporting back to us as what the people are responding to!* They say.

They tell you the reissue includes a tete-a-tete with GoodSouthernBoy™, who's evidently been preparing for months. They tell you *don't worry*, GoodSouthernBoy™ is scared, he's sweat through all five of his SoftGreyTShirts, has downed the last of his AlcoholicDrinks and will be forced to rely on his

Excuses! You already know you're stronger, you're just not sure you can look him in the face.

You tell JobManager you're taking a vacation (it's not), and he says to make sure your OutofOffice™ is on (it is). He never thinks to ask you how you're doing. In his performance report They wrote "EmotionallyIntelligent."

You're supposed to have a Law!yer but there isn't one available. *Your fate and the city's* rest in Their hands. GoodSouthernBoy™ has a Law!yer issued to him named Eric. You shift uncomfortably in your seat because V ! C T ! M's cape and collar are made of itchy, scratchy wool and it's ninety-seven degrees in this cardboard courtroom.

You cough but They programmed your catchphrase to *Let's get 'em!* What you hear is a voice not your own, a register belonging only to V ! C T ! M.

The city's burning, They say. Whatever will we do? I meant no harm, says GoodSouthernBoy™.

I told him I didn't need to be walked home, says V ! C T ! M.

He was just being Nice™! says Eric.

In the fight for justice, V ! C T ! M vs GoodSouthernBoy™! We wish there was someone to save us, They say.

I said no, says V ! C T ! M.

She invited him inside, says Eric.

I was confused, says GoodSouthernBoy™.

That seems really confusing! They say. We're so confused!

He wouldn't leave, says V ! C T ! M. He's over six feet tall and weights over 200 lbs.

But weren't you a

LIMITEDEDITIONMARINEOFFICER!NEW,WITHPARACHUTINGCAPABILITIES™?

They say.

Yes, but, says V ! C T ! M.

Ah, the lady™ protests too much, says Eric.

I never was a lady™, says V ! C T ! M.

There's silence as sweat drips down yours—V ! C T ! M's—collar. They say *YouShouldSmileMore!* and you feel the corners of your mouths involuntarily turn upward in smirk. Eric paces on the floor in front of you.

We're gathered here today in V ! C T ! M vs. GoodSouthernBoy™ to witness a most remarkable occasion. As we watch our city burn, we pay our respects to all those who perish beneath the flames. But we find renewed solace in the judicial proceedings that have taken place today.

Eric pauses.

I remember when I was a GoodSouthernBoy™, life was, indeed, so scary! Surely, you will show my client mercy.

Your legs stick to the plastic chair, you feel V ! C T ! M's weaponsbelt™ conform to your hips. This is who you are now. They look at you with daggers in their eyes.

Thank you Eric! They say. We've considered all the evidence laid before us today and we thank you both for yourradicalcandor™. In the case of V ! C T ! M vs GoodSouthernBoy™, we are pleased to announce,

You wish you They assigned you a rocket ship to blast off into the cosmos. You and V ! C T ! M hope that your RegularAmericanMom! will understand.

GoodSouthernBoy™, we are pleased to name you Jeff.