

# Meet the New Girl

By Jill Irving

**A**nother town, another set of changes. We hadn't been at Leonard Wood long when I had to start school. As usual, it was mid-year, everyone else had time to make friends and find their way around. Leonard Wood is pretty small, not a lot of kids on base. Not big enough to have their own school, so all us military brats were forced to attend school with the locals. Usually that's worse than attending base-schools. The townies usually have it in for the base kids.

Now normally that means base kids stick together, but as such things work, there's always got to be a top dog, alpha male. No big, right? Only I'm not much for thinking that someone is the top dog just because he's male. Not surprisingly, my attitude is not the most popular one on base. Leonard Wood was just another in a long line of attempts to prove myself.

Okay, I admit Dad's never openly approved of my fighting on base, says he wanted me to be taught for self-defense and in case I decided to follow in his footsteps. He's just never really disapproved either. Secretly I think he's proud of me...but he says all the right words about how it's bad and I need to stop...yada, yada, yada. Still, I know the day I win, he'll be the proudest man on base, whatever base that happens on. It wasn't Leonard Wood though.

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**T**he Alpha-male's name was Gregory Barton, everyone called him Bart. I kind of thought of him of Bart Simpson, myself. That really didn't help matters much! I hadn't been on base a week when I started school. It was worse than I thought, not better. Go figure! Townies hated the base kids, mostly because they didn't stick around long. Assignments come and go, so do the kids. Base kids stick together because they understand each other...but there's a pecking order. Kind of like the military. And like the military, it's got to be earned. And the earning means fighting. Oh, I could settle for being a SF Captain's daughter and would have a place, but that's not the kind of place I'm looking for.

Second day at school, I met Bart. He knew who I was. His father was a gunnery sergeant...you might say I outrank him, but I'm a girl. He let me know right off how things were going to be. I submit to him or else. I guess I chose else. I told him a mere Gunny isn't going to order a Captain around and after seven years of summer boot camp he's not going to order me around. Bart got this little smirk on his face and said "we'll see". He and his cronies went off, leaving me to wonder when the other shoe was going to drop.

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**I** didn't have to wait for long. Two days later I was hanging out on this hill on base. It was a ways away from everything, you could see down over the town and the base. When I arrived no one was there. I was doing some reading for school, something about

the Civil War as I recall. Kind of apropos, actually! I heard Bart and his buds coming up the hill; they weren't making any attempt at being quiet. There were five of them. I've always been tall and kind of built for a girl, but these guys are bigger and older. No surprise, usually the alpha male is one of the older boys. So I sat there listening to them clamber up the hill considering my options.

Now I'm not stupid. The chances of me succeeding against five larger boys are slim to none. As I saw it my best chance was a one-on-one honour combat, as it were, with Bart. But not knowing these boys, I didn't know exactly how that would play out. But then, since my option was to run away like a chicken, well that just wasn't gonna happen in this lifetime.

I met them calmly pretending to read, only watching them with my peripheral vision. I could hear where they were anyway. Two of them were huffing like they'd run a race. Sounded like they needed to get back to basic training! I could use that to my advantage, I don't run six miles a day for the fun of it...well actually, it is kind of fun. Sometimes I run more than that, because I love the feel of knowing my body is as fit as I can make it and I'm in complete control of it. I hate things that take away that control, like sickness and drugs!

"This is our hill! Get off!" Bart announced only slightly winded from his climb up.

"I didn't see the sign" I commented putting aside my book. I looked around quickly and asked "Where is it?"

"It's right here", he held up his fist.

Dad always told me my mouth would get me in trouble. Darned if he's not usually right! "Awfully small" I responded.

"Look, girlie, I don't usually beat up girls, but for that mouth of yours, I might have to make an exception." He grinned evilly.

"I'm sure there have been a few "exceptions" along the way." I challenged. "But if you are so worried about it, why don't we make it a fair fight, you versus me? Your friends stand down."

"Like a girl is gonna beat me!" Bart sneered (he really does sound like Bart Simpson if you ask me).

"So if its not gonna happen, then you shouldn't have to worry about telling your buds to stay out."

"See the problem here, girlie, is that you gotta work your way up the ranks to fight me...earn the right, so to speak." He laughed as he was funny, patting the nearest Neanderthal on the tummy. I just don't get these guys! "What do you think guys?...who's up to fighting the chick!"

Oh so funny! No one spoke up. They just looked around at each other, looking really amused with themselves. "Apparently none of you are up to the challenge. Wouldn't think you'd be afraid of me...but then again, I'm probably faster and fitter than the lot of you, huffing and puffing up that wee little hill." The hill is actually pretty long and at a 45 degree angle, not the easiest climb. Okay...so maybe I am stupid!

One of the Neanderthals raised his hand as if to slap me; I deflected that one easily and assumed a defensive posture; by this time I was standing. Never give your opponents the upper-hand, no matter how stupid they appear; if you do, you are more stupid.

“Well now, you sure got a mouth on you!” Bart commented a slight red cast had come over his face. I guess it could have been embarrassment, but most likely it was anger. Apparently Bart had a hair-trigger temper...that’s never a good thing. He turned to his friends...”maybe we should put that mouth to a better use!” He suggested to his friends, voice dripping with innuendo.

Twenty-first century and men still think with the wrong head! I can’t stand it! It always ends up going that way. No matter what’s going on, it always comes down to “you’re a girl, I’m a guy, physical equals sexual”. And here’s the rub, about refuse like that, I have a hair-trigger on my temper...this was so not going to a good place!

Bart continued on, “Maybe we make this interesting...I win, I get....a kiss...yeah...” Again turning to his buddies winking, “she’s kind of cute, in that dyke way.” He grinned insinuatingly at me. “Maybe I’ll show her what a real man does with little girls like her.”

“I’d rather kiss a Wookiee!” I put on my best haughty princess Leia impression. Not sure if they got the reference, but I’m sure he got the meaning. Did I mention I was stupid? If not, this is where I will...if so, let me reiterate. Five guys, one me, and the topic of sex had already been brought up. NOT GOOD!

Bart’s buddy said...”maybe we oughtta teach her some manners, Bart. Show her what girls are good for.”

Bart glared at me, “...or at least better uses for her mouth” he suggested, his hand hovering near his crotch.

Running was starting to sound like a good idea, except for the fact that the Neanderthals had moved around behind me while this pretty little discussion was going on. So I was going to have to be very tricky or VERY fast. Now, I’m fast, but uneven footing and long arm-spans notwithstanding, I’m not sure I’m that fast.

I took a deep breath and played my last card. “So Bart, is it gonna take all of you to teach me that lesson? Or are you man enough to handle it alone?” I hoped his hair trigger would head him into the fight rather than the “grab her boys” mode.

For the first time that afternoon, I was right! Woo hoo, yeah me!

He led with a left jab straight towards my chin. It’s a fast take down, but it’s a sucker move. Saw it coming a mile away, slipped under and kicked him in the belly. Now, you might think a kick in the groin would have been the way...but I figured that was a sure way to bring his friends in.

Ever noticed that if you are watching a movie in a theatre, and there’s a scene where a guy gets kicked in the balls, or gets them chopped off, every guy in the theatre flinches and crosses his legs, or shifts uncomfortably? So I’ve got this theory, it’s like they are all connected somehow through the balls. And if you are fighting one guy with four of his best buds watching, kicking him in the balls is like kicking them all in the balls. And the first one to recover is going to work that much harder to take you down and hurt you bad.

Given the topic of conversation, I figured it would be a good chance they'd try to show me what I'm supposed to do with those balls....can I just say now, ICK!

He shook off the kick and tried a leg sweep (Dad's favorite move). I jumped over it in a sweet spin kick that hit him in the face, sending his head snapping to the left. Round two, me!

Bart stopped a second to glare at me, and clearly reevaluated his plan of attack. In a quick move, he shot out to grapple me to the ground. I almost dodged it, but he got hold of my right leg as I shifted away and he pulled me down on top of him. Here's the trick, I'm faster, but if he pins me, it's all over! I leaned in the fall, landing my weight and my elbow on his chest, trying to dig in as hard as possible. A solid sternum hit could incapacitate him...

Bart countered me by rolling in the same direction as my motion, grabbing my arm which flipped me down on the dirt and rocks next to him. I was able to roll with the motion and not take the full brunt of the impact, but it still stunned me for a half second as my back and left elbow struck solid rock.

Bart pulled up his knees and rammed one into my exposed side, pushing me further into the silt and rock. I rolled back and pumped my legs forward to stand, but Bart scissored his legs kicking out just as I was getting my balance and sent me sprawling away from him. I think my head hit rock, but I'm not sure. Bart was on me quickly digging his knees into my back, he started to pull my head back by the hair, saying something stupid about surrendering.

Finally all those acrobatics and flexibility training exercises came into play. I twisted my body towards him forcing him off-balance and off me. As soon as his knee shifted, I rolled directly into him. He lost his precarious balance and landed half-on-me, but without any strong hold.

I shot my knee up into his torso again, just as he slammed his full weight down on me, crushing me between him and the freaking rock. I think I heard a rib crack...I know I felt it. While I was down he straddled me and smashed me in the face, hard, right across the cheekbone and eye! My head smacked the rock again and I started to feel a bit "disconnected".

However, since he didn't go for the complete pin I had expected I had my hands free. Feinting with the left, I slammed him in the sternum again, open-handed. Must have gotten it right that time, because he fell back a bit, trying to breathe! I started a back roll away to get back to my feet, but I forgot about the rib until I'd crunched myself into a little ball. Then I remembered as I fell out of it sideways, towards the hurt side, no less.

I must have run into one of the Neanderthals, because I stopped really short. He reached down and grabbed my left arm, pulling it out of the socket as he pulled me up. Then he pushed me back towards Bart. Not being fully in control of my body then, I could do little more than go where he sent me. Bart came in low, grabbing me around the waist, slamming me down on his shoulder as he came back to a stand. Since he'd used his right shoulder, my absolutely broken rib was crunched against his shoulder, and the pain was screaming through my system.

I started kicking and punching at him frantically from this undignified position. The more I kicked the more they all laughed, but I knew I would pass out soon if he didn't put me down. Passing out around these boys didn't strike me as a good plan. Unfortunately, I didn't have any purchase to work with since I was more or less a sack of potatoes thrown over his way-too-bony-for-all-that-meat shoulder. Finally my foot connected with his groin. I knew the minute it happened, because he started to double over. I figured I would end up ceremoniously on my backside.

Might have happened too...if Bart hadn't caught his foot on the edge of the rock we'd been fighting on. Instead, Bart started toppling backwards. And me still kicking on his shoulder, I ended up flying down the hill, head first...

Ever had the sudden, free sensation of flying? It's really interesting, in a clinical sort of way, watching the packed dirt and rock fly by as your body gets ever closer to the moment of impact. See the physics of the matter is that a body in motion tries to stay in motion. And every action has an equal and opposite action. So the body in motion was mine; projected off of Bart's shoulder and down the very big hill that we'd been fighting way too close to the edge of.

I must have flown at least twenty feet down the hill before the first impact, smashing my head into a rock about the size of a football. The curious thing was that wasn't enough to stop my motion...it wasn't equal and opposite. No, I kept on rolling down the hill, hitting just about every rock on the way down the rest of the hundred foot incline.

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I woke in the base hospital. Mom was crying! I think she thought I'd finally managed to get myself killed. Come to think of it, death would have hurt less, but I'm used to pain. When Dad noticed I was awake, he walked to my side and stood there shaking his head for a minute or two.

I tried to speak to him, but my mouth was as dry as cotton, and it felt like my throat was on fire. He held out a plastic cup with a straw so I could take a sip or two of water.

"Don't speak." He commanded, still shaking his head a little. "Three broken ribs, a dislocated shoulder, a concussion, broken tibia, a black eye, and bumps and bruises covering you from head to foot." He turned away in frustration. "Are you trying to get yourself killed?"

Actually, I think I've managed to do each of those things to myself at one time or another. Just usually not all at once! Got a feeling this will be one of my longer hospital stays.

"I didn't have a choice." I whispered. "There were five of them."

"And you just had to shoot off your mouth." He turned back and shook his head again. "I know what this is all about and I know its tough, but you can't fight the battles you can't win. Sometimes you need to walk away."

"Sometimes they don't let you!" I responded.

"Would you know the difference?" He whispered before turning back to mom. "Why don't you go grab us some coffee?"

After she left with a characteristic sigh, Dad turned back, gently stroking my hair. “It’s a lucky thing that one of those bullies had a cell phone with him. You were bleeding pretty badly when they got you here...”

“What happened to Bart and his crowd?” I asked to turn the subject away from me.

“Bart was admitted to look into some damage around his sternum. The others scattered after the paramedics arrived.”

“At least I got in a few good blows.”

He sighed. “Do you have any idea how much I worried?” He leaned down closer to me, “What would I do without you?” Then he kissed me gently on the forehead.

It was true. I was much more his daughter than my mother’s. Actually I was more his son than daughter, though I was born the wrong sex. More than that, I was his closest friend, while mom was someone he had to protect. I had to show him that I was a protector, not someone who needed protecting. And so I would fight again, until I won.

“We’ll always be together, dad.” I promised solemnly.