

THE .380

(from THE MANUSCRIPT)

by Michael Stephen Fuchs

It was a Bersa Model 86 "Undercover," it was, that was tucked into that pantsuit, that was always tucked in somewhere. Boy, did Celeste love that gun. Much to love about it: Thirteen rounds in the magazine, plus one in the chamber. It ate anything she fed it; she'd put maybe 1000 rounds through it on the range – mixed loads, rapid firing – and no jams, no stovepipes, no nothing. Molded rubber grips. Three-dot high visibility combat sights. Push-button magazine release. Broke down and reassembled quick and painless. Small, light, and breathtakingly sleek. It really fit her hand. With the Model 86, Bersa had made a truly sexy gun.

A really sexy gun.

Neither Miles nor Celeste had been blowing smoke on rec.guns that night.

No, Celeste hadn't ever tagged anybody with it. But she did have to squeeze off a few rounds once in a tight situation. It had been at a range of over a hundred yards, and she almost certainly hadn't hit anything but tarmac and maybe some sheet metal.

And she'd had to pull it out – just a little flash of cold steel – on a few occasions, perhaps a half a dozen times. That's when the Bersa really went to work. Celeste Browning: twenty-eight, beautiful, brilliant, big responsibilities. Odd line of work. Celeste wasn't always taken seriously. But the Bersa always was.

The .380 always, always was.

In a tough biosphere, one needs good tools to win. In a tough biosphere, still leaning toward patriarchy, a twenty-eight year old woman – in a tough job, with big responsibilities – had to be able to count on some tools. The Bersa was a really good tool.

And so sexy. So very sexy, she always admitted to herself. She tried to always to be honest with herself about that.

“B E R S A” the molded rubber flashed up to her, as she laid it on the speckled porcelain of the countertop alongside the vodka tonic in the scuffed rocks glass, and assisted gravity in lowering her pale jeans and white underpants to the cold floor. On another quiet Friday night, she sat, sipped the drink, examined the gun.

“B E R S A” the molded rubber flashed up at Miles as he laid it on the bleached porcelain of the countertop alongside the bottle of beer in the beer condom. He was getting a bit of a head start on the party at Yahoo's, while beginning to get ready for it.

He kicked off his purple paisely boxer shorts and plopped his skinny acne-scarred buttocks on the cold porcelain and examined his knees, upon which rested the bent spine of a ratty copy of Amy Hempel's “Reasons To Live”. He was only anticipating having a few minutes there to read, but read something he must.

He heard his better half moving around in the bedroom. He glanced again at the coal-black firearm. They had left the porch door open again to let in some of the evening, and the alcohol seeping into Miles' veins appeared to be half-hoping that someone else would come in from the night, someone bad, someone Miles could maybe shoot and make the world better, and himself a little bit powerful. It was a miserable thought which he hated having, but he wasn't able to banish it. He didn't know what to do with it, so he

just disliked it. There it sat on his lap, as he sat on the can. He looked suspiciously again at the Bersa.

It was, come to make note of it, really funny that Miles owned the same gun. He owned one gun, and it was the very same gun.

Noel, the Cleaner, with his dozens of guns, did not own a Bersa. He didn't really have any use for anything smaller than a 9mm.

Different job, different tools. Nothing to be read into that.

Celeste rose from the can with empty rocks glass and colon. She strolled to the kitchen to refresh the former.

Miles nursed his beer and his colon just a bit. Finally he rose and flushed and took his Hempel and his Bersa and his insulated bottle into the crooks of his arms, trying to transport all three simultaneously without spillage or accidental discharge; Farmer Brown has to transport his rabbit and his snake and his hound dog across the river on his fishing boat. He can make no more than three trips, and the boat can only hold him and two animals at a time. The snake will eat the rabbit, and the dog will...

She was laying out his outfit for him, prim and serious about the preparations.

Noel was scribbling into his little notebook, stretched out on his stomach on the threadbare carpeting. His gun was lying by his head.