

ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS

ELLORA'S CAVE
Quickies

*A Taste of
Honey*

MICHELE BARDSLEY

White *Hot*
Holidays

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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A Taste of Honey

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A TASTE OF HONEY

Michele Bardsley

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Chapter One

New Year's Eve

Jarod McClure stumbled out of the warm, cinnamon-scented house owned by Roger and Cindy Morrison. Behind him, Clay Aiken's "What Are You Doing New Year's Eve?" spilled into the cold night air. Thanks to ol' Clay, what had been a loud and raucous party morphed into a lovey-dovey-kissey-wissey affair. *Blech*. The partygoers had split into slow-dancing couples and made him all too aware that he wasn't part of a twosome or threesome or anysome. And he hadn't been for a long, long time.

Shit. He'd left open the front door but wasn't sure he had enough motor control to turn around and shut it. Before he could attempt what might be a life-threatening turn, he heard the door slam, immediately muting the sounds of the New Year's Eve party.

It sucked that he was leaving before midnight. Even without a steady girl to smooch on, chances were good he could've found *someone* to lock lips with at midnight. Oh well. It was a long walk to his house and he needed to get there before his Great Dane, Marvin, got impatient and started peeing on furniture.

He managed the three steps off the porch. He weaved right...weaved left...and fell face-first into the double-D chest of an X-rated snowwoman. *Oh yeah*. Roger had jokingly made the Snowie the Slut and Cindy retaliated by creating Snowjohn the Stud.

Laughing, Jarod sucked a lungful of snow, and the stupidity of doing *that* made him laugh harder. He extracted himself from the icy breasts—the purple lace bra clutched in a triumphant fist—and...fell ass-first into the snow-blanketed front yard.

"I give you points if you did that clasp one-handed," said a melodic female voice.

Blinking away the buzz gained by a mere two glasses of eggnog so potent people were getting drunk just *smelling* it, Jarod looked up and saw a beautiful blonde angel.

She smiled. "You had the eggnog too, eh?"

Jarod held up two fingers and she chuckled. "I had one," she admitted. "And I've been seeing double ever since."

She extended her hand and he grabbed it, attempting to pull himself up. Instead, she was thrown forward, on top of him. Delighted with this turn of events, he wrapped his arms around her. "Angel," he muttered.

From the house, a cheer went up. Then Jarod recognized the tune of "Auld Lang Syne".

"Midnight," he said. "Happy New Year!"

"Whoa, sugar. What are you —"

His lips took hers in a gentle caress. Her mouth was so cherry-hot he found himself unable to stop lip-locking her. She didn't protest...so he kissed her until the snow melted around them.

Finally, reluctantly, he let go of her lips to explore the shell of her ear. Such a delicate, pretty ear. Like a butterfly's wing. "We're sorta inebriated," she managed.

Nuzzling under her turtleneck, he said, "Uh-huh."

Oh God. She smelled like honeysuckle and tasted like soft bread. She was warm and wiggly and *holy shit* he really wanted to see what was under that parka that hid her body from him.

"It's probably unwise to think about continuing this...fun somewhere less cold," she said.

"Definitely unwise," he said. "But I'm sure we can find an unlocked car."

"You're such a romantic," she said with a laugh.

They rose on unsteady legs. She held onto his arm and he to her waist and just as they decided to move forward, they fell into a heap all over again.

"This isn't going to work," she said.

"Eggnog and the fates are against us," he said. "Give me your number. Your name. Your zip code. We'll have a New Year's Day brunch...in bed."

"Tell you what," she said. "You meet me here tomorrow night –" she handed him a white business card " – and we'll see what happens."

He peered at the card. "The Sex Club?"

"What's the matter, sugar? You afraid of a little challenge?" She leaned forward and kissed his throat. "I want to play with you. Eight p.m. Ask for H."

"H."

"Yeah." She patted his cheek and sauntered away, leaving him alone in knee-deep snow contemplating the strange card.

And the beautiful woman.

Chapter Two

"Mrs. Conroy, please reconsider. We can discount our services—what?" Jarod rolled his eyes. "No, I won't ask my employees to do that. Our men are skilled professionals, not strippers. I'm sorry too, Mrs. Conroy. If it doesn't work out, just give us a call."

Jarod dropped the phone receiver into its cradle. "That's the third customer this week." He picked up the pencil and tapped it against the papers littering the check-in counter. "Our services are unmatched and we get the job, any job done. There hasn't been a complaint yet. Sheesh. Where else can you call to get your car fixed, your pipes looked at, and your roof patched?"

"Honey Do," answered Ian drolly. "And you're preaching to the choir over here."

"Yeah, I know." The small office was located in a shopping center, crammed between the dry cleaners and the grocery store. ProCare's first office had been a garage, the only employees himself and his brother, Ian. They'd spent the last five years carefully building a solid, profitable business.

Truth be told, his thoughts weren't on business but on pleasure. He and his brother Ian always worked a full day on New Year's. Hell, they worked every holiday because they promised twenty-four-hour care no matter what. And, well, they had no lives. No girlfriends, no wives and no prospects of either one.

I want to play with you. 8 p.m. Ask for H. The card given to him by the blonde angel last night was in his front jeans pocket. It had become a talisman. Even without an eggnog-clogged mind, he remembered her scent. Her smile. The feel of her curves. Oh man. He really wanted to explore those curves again. Just a few hours more and his hands would be stroking her skin. He swallowed his groan.

"We haven't gotten a new customer since Honey Do opened two months ago and they're kicking our ass. I can't believe the shallowness of women. They want to ogle half-naked men." Jarod looked out the floor-to-ceiling windows and watched the cars dart in and out of the parking lot. "They could care less if the job gets done right."

Silence met his outrage. He glanced over his shoulder at the desk across the room. His brother, who looked like a grown-up Harry Potter, worked on the computer. He typed fast—the tap-tap of the keys sounded like a machine gun report.

"We're losing business," said Ian. "Our profits are down for the first time in two years."

"Are we in the red?"

"No. But it's a real possibility." Ian stopped typing and adjusted his glasses. "Honey Do poses a big threat. It's not like Clement Falls is a huge city. We have one of everything in this town. Remember when Harry Johnson's big-shot son came up from Tulsa and opened one of his chain dry cleaners here? Nan's dry cleaning service closed within six months. She'd been in business for thirty years." He shook his head. "We're in trouble."

Jarod dropped the pencil on the counter and turned to face his brother. "Do you know anything about Honey Sinclair?"

"She's the granddaughter of Odemina Wilson."

"Well, shit. Are you sure she's related to Odie?"

"Yeah."

A moment of terrified silence passed. Seventy-eight-year-old Odemina was sharp as a tack and mean as a hornet. Clement Falls elected a mayor every two years, but the truth was that Odie was the Queen of Everything. Her family had founded the small Oklahoma town one-hundred and twenty-seven years ago and she never let a soul forget it.

"Since Odie blessed the Earth with only one child...I take it that Honey is the daughter of He Who Must Not Be Named."

"According to the gossip at Sammy Jo's Dinerette, she is the result of Odie's disinherited son and the stripper he ran off with."

Jarod snorted in disgust. "Well, that explains her tendencies to encourage her employees to take off their clothes."

"Heard they were killed in a car accident a couple of years ago," said Ian. "Must've been hard on Miss Odie."

"Maybe that's why she invited Honey to live in Clement Falls. That girl's her only kin now." He frowned. "It's got to be illegal to require a man to disrobe as part of his job. Discrimination. Sexual harassment. Something." Jarod stroked his chin, an idea percolating. "I bet she wouldn't hire Ernie. He's a great worker, but I don't think his *wife* likes to see him with his shirt off."

Ian laughed and shook his head. "Poor Ernie."

"What if I could prove sexual harassment?"

"You're dreaming. There's no way you're going to be able to implicate Odie's kin in anything nefarious." Ian frowned. "I know that look. It's the same look you had when you talked me into sneaking onto old man Tyler's hen house. I nearly got pecked to death."

"It was a character-building experience."

"It was a painful experience. What are you planning?"

"I'm going to prove Honey Sinclair is doing something nefarious."

* * * * *

"Hubba, hubba," exclaimed the pink-haired female as Jarod entered the small, windowless office. Jarod blinked as the woman gave him a slow once-over that left him with the impression she was imagining him naked.

"Hi ya, sweet cakes," she said, waggling her eyebrows. She wore an amazing shade of gold eyeshadow and her fake lashes were glittery. She walked from behind the tall white Formica counter and Jarod stepped back. She was sheathed in a plastic pink dress that should have, by all rights, disabled her ability to breathe.

Behind the counter, a door opened. "Margo, where are the —"

A petite blonde dressed in white jeans and a yellow half-top stopped and looked at him. "Hubba, hubba."

"Are you referring to me?" he asked.

She lifted a thin eyebrow. "Wow, he's articulate. Where'd you find him, Margo?"

"He found us. Unless Santa Claus forgot to deliver one of my presents."

What the hell had he gotten himself into? No one had ever referred to him like a — like a thing before.

He leaned against the counter, directing his gaze to the blonde who seemed to be in charge. At least, he hoped so. He didn't know if he wanted to deal with the pink demon perusing the front of his jeans a little too avidly.

"Don't you worry about sexual harassment suits?" he asked.

"Nope," the woman answered. "If you can't take the heat, stay out of the kitchen."

"You advocate sexual harassment in the work place?"

"No. But I need to know our employees can deal with the...enthusiastic behavior of some of our clients." She smiled and revealed a dimple at the left corner of her mouth.

Jarod felt zapped in the pit of his stomach. Whoa. He hadn't counted on being attracted to her. *Get a grip, man.* His thoughts leapt to where he'd like to grip Honey — she had really nice...*no, no, don't go there..* He took a fortifying breath to calm his racing pulse. If he didn't figure out a way to put Honey Do out of business, then ProCare was toast — and that meant a lot of good men would be jobless. His workers didn't have the muscles or the youth to work for Honey Do.

The bell above the door jingled and he turned to see who'd arrived. A young man in a wheelchair rolled through, popped a wheelie and skidded to Honey. He grinned, a flop of brown hair covering his right eye. "Hiya, toots."

"Charlie, you big show-off. How'd the job for Mrs. Firman go?"

He withdrew a folded paper from his pocket. "The check's stapled to the Job Completion Order." He flashed a twenty-dollar bill. "And she tipped me."

"Twenty bucks? What did you do?"

"I stripped down to my shorty shorts with no shirt and flirted my ass off. It was a simple leak too. I think Mrs. Firman likes me."

"You're a slut."

"I know." He grinned again. "Got anything new, boss?"

Jarod slipped out of the office and walked to his car. His theories about Honey Do were way off. The owner wasn't a sleazy, money-mongering exploiter of men. She was vaguely familiar. Had he met her before? A fuzzy memory flitted...then faded. Oh well. What did it matter? The truth was that Honey Sinclair was nice and pretty and kind.

Damn it.

* * * * *

"He didn't recognize me," said Honey Sinclair as she and Margo shut down the office. "We shared a mind-numbing kiss at a party. It was magical. He might've followed me. And I waited for him. Then stupid Roger came out and dragged him off to a taxi. Sheesh. Despite all that, I still figured out he was Jarod McClure, rival and expert kisser."

"Give the guy a break, babe. It was dark and he was sloshed."

"*Magical*," stressed Honey. "And apparently one-sided."

"Doubtful. Maybe he didn't remember a drunken New Year's kiss, but I saw the way he was looking at you." Margo shut off the computer and straightened the files scattered on the desk.

"If you say so. Are you going with me to the New Year's party?"

"The one at the *sex* club? I don't think so. Besides, aren't you worried Jarod will recognize you?"

"If he didn't recognize me in a face-to-face, then he'll be less likely to recognize me with a mask." Honey locked the deadbolt and chained the front door. Then she turned around and looked at a bemused Margo. "Now, there's only one question."

Margo shouldered her purse and followed Honey out the back door. "Yeah, toots? What's that?"

"What ever shall I wear?"

* * * * *

"Does it say 'I'm a slutty snowflake'?" asked Honey.

"Short and stout," sang Margo, her pink head popping up next to Honey's shoulder. "Here is your handle...and whoa, look at that spout!"

"You're a pervert." Honey assessed her barely-there negligee in the floor-length mirror attached to her closet door. Hmmm. She could live with the way her breasts were showcased, held up by the flimsiest of lace bras. And the thong was okay too. Hell, she didn't even mind wearing the mask.

The thigh-high white boots were the real problem.

"Maybe I should switch to high heels."

"No way!" said Margo. "The boots scream 'Fuck me, big boy'."

Honey grinned. "I like what they're saying. I just don't think I'm tall enough to do 'em justice. Do you think dressing in all white suggests 'virgin bride'? Because marriage is so not what I'm looking for."

Margo cackled, nearly falling over on Honey's bed as her laughter pealed. "Anyone who knows you wouldn't use *virgin* or *bride* to describe you."

"Gee, thanks." Honey grabbed a fringed pillow and threw it at Margo who dodged it easily.

"Do you have a decent jacket?" asked Margo. "Otherwise you'll freeze to death on the way there. On the up side you'll be the sexiest dead body ever found."

Honey rolled her eyes. "Yes, mommy dearest, I have a coat. What I don't have is a friend going with me. I can't believe you're gonna stay home with your new boyfriend and drink champagne."

"Don't forget the part where we fuck like bunnies all night."

"TMI, Margo."

She grinned unrepentantly. "Stop worrying, doll."

"I'm not worried." *I'm freaking the fuck out.* Panic fluttered in Honey's stomach. *I'm going to a party so I can have hot sex with Jarod McClure.* Wait a minute. What was the bad part again?

Honey stared at the sexy image reflected in the mirror. Yeah. She'd dressed for the dark-haired man with the blue, blue eyes who called her an angel and kissed until she forgot her own name.

Jarod had made her knees quake and her body sing. With his lips and his words, he'd made her want, made her need...

And she couldn't wait to finish what they'd started.

* * * * *

Jarod McClure sat at the long black-and-chrome bar sipping a beer and looking over the crowd.

The Sex Club was Clement Falls' best kept secret—that everybody knew about. Sure, he'd heard about it and had friends who frequented it, but this was the first time

Jarod had stepped foot into the place—and only been able to do so because of H's little card. The invitation-only club partied in a converted barn located on a member-owned farm more than twenty-five miles out of town, away from the prying eyes and wagging tongues of local gossips.

Roger and Cindy, longtime members, had gleefully imparted Club guidelines when he'd dropped by their house and admitted he'd been invited to "play".. The rules were simple and based on anonymity and safety. Wear a mask and never take it off. Always use a condom. Bring your own toys. Use initials, not names. Establish a safe word or gesture and if used, stop immediately.

The bar was located in the Meet-and-Greet Room. According to Cindy, this area was the only sex-free zone in the building. Some participants liked to watch, others liked to go at it in front of anyone willing to watch, but quite a few liked the private rooms.

Jarod was an open-minded guy, but he wanted a private room. He just hoped H felt the same way. He wasn't sure he could drop his pants and do her against a convenient wall while other Club members watched. Hell, he'd passed two such couples on the way into the bar.

Kind of a turn-on. Huh.

A tall, lithe woman dressed in head-to-toe black leather approached him. Her mask was a black leather cat, complete with ears and whiskers. She held a whip in one hand and a champagne flute in the other. "My, my, my...aren't you yummy? Wanna play?"

Jarod's lips lifted into a regretful smile. "I'm not your guy, hon."

"Gay?"

"Not a sub...or a dom, for that matter."

"You didn't smell like vanilla. Too bad, so sad." She toasted him with her glass and moved on to other prospects.

"What are you into?"

Jarod turned and found a short, stacked blonde sitting next to him. Her brown eyes twinkled behind her simple white mask. Her white-lace teddy offered a view of mouthwatering cleavage and the hem showed the luscious curve of her ass. But it was the white thigh-high boots with three-inch heels that caught his attention. An image of this little morsel naked underneath him, those boots wrapped around his waist as he fucked her...his heart stuttered as desire roared through him. *Jesus, God.* Please, please, please let this woman be H.

"The strong, silent type, huh?"

He blinked. Then grinned. His mask was simple and black, his outfit merely a black T-shirt with well-worn jeans and his most comfortable black boots. "Sorry. You were saying?"

"What are you into?"

"I'd like to be in you."

Smiling, she leaned forward, a slim, pale hand toying with his wrist. "And why would a sweet, innocent girl like me go anywhere with a big, bad man like you?"

"I'm not bad," he said, his fingers stroking her silky blonde hair. "I'm just drawn that way."

She laughed. "Isn't that my line?"

"I'd rather be Jessica than Roger Rabbit."

Her brows rose.

"I'm not a cross-dresser, either. Though I will admit that at the tender age of six, I did run around in my mother's heels, but only because my brother dared me."

"Ah." Her smile drifted into a seductive curl. "So you're not into men, BDSM or women's clothing. You do sound a little vanilla there. What is your kink?"

He pretended to think about it. "I like to fuck."

"Okay. So anal, vaginal, oral?"

“All three, sweetheart.” He cupped her face in his hands and gazed into her melting-chocolate eyes. “I love everything about fucking. The feel of a woman wiggling against me, her soft flesh scraping mine. The smell of perfumed skin, the sweep of silky hair, the heat of mouths, the moans of pleasure.”

Her breath hitched. “And what would you do to me?”

“I’d like to strip you naked and play with those gorgeous breasts. I’d start by kissing those perfect mounds—kissing every inch of flesh. I’d save your nipples for last. God, I’d love to suck those nipples, make them hard and aching. You’d be squirming then, wouldn’t you?”

“Maybe.” Her voice was reedy, her eyes glazed with interest. “What else would you do?”

“Would you like to find out?”

Chapter Three

The gorgeous blonde slid off the chair and offered her hand. "I'm glad you showed up. You know I'm H. And you are?"

"J." He took her hand, placed the palm against his lips and watched her shudder. *Oh yeah, baby. You're mine, all right.*

He paid the bar tab and grasped her hand again. She led him up two flights of stairs to a private room. Woo-hoo! Relieved he wouldn't have to show off his manly moves in front of an audience just yet, he spent an excellent thirty seconds studying H's ass as she unlocked a door.

"I pay to have my own special play place," she said as they entered the room. "It has everything we need to have fun."

She locked the door and flicked the lights on low. The walls were purple. The king-sized bed was sheathed in purple silk. The bed and the two nightstands on either side of it were pink. The carpet was pink too.

"Interesting color scheme. Very Austin Powers," Jarod said as he drifted around the room. He studied a couple of purple beanbags tossed carelessly near the pink mini-fridge then looked at a pink door. "Dare I ask what's inside door number one?"

"You can ask," she said, "but that doesn't mean I'll tell." She crossed to the fridge and opened it. "By the way, door number two is the bathroom. So...beer, wine, coolers, spring water and juice pops."

Jarod's lips hitched into a grin. "Juice pops?"

"I love juice pops," she said. He watched as she took out a yellow one and unwrapped it. The mini-fridge door snicked shut as she rose and ambled toward him. "Hmmm. I love the lemon ones."

She licked the pop from tip to base. "So good," she murmured. She stroked the lemon ice with her tongue with such...expert enthusiasm, Jarod felt his cock get hard and needy. When she took the entire pop into her mouth, he thought he might pass out.

He closed the space between them and plucked the icy treat from her hand.

"I suppose now is a good time to establish a safe word," she said.

"Angel."

"Angel it is. Now what do you have planned for that lemon-sicle?" Her gaze was challenging...almost mocking. No, almost as if she *dared* him to pleasure her. His cock hardened as he thought about all the things he would do to this little ice princess. She wasn't skittish. He liked that.

"Take off your panties," he demanded.

"If you want them off," she said, spreading apart her legs and planting her booted heels firmly into the carpet, "then you do it."

Her insolence sucker-punched him and made hot lust flare in his belly. The only thing he loved better than a woman who gave him what he wanted...was a woman who made him work for it.

With his free hand, he slipped three fingers under the wispy lace of her thong. She looked down at his hooked fingers then up at his face. "You've got to be kidding. That will never —"

With one quick yank the material ripped and before she could finish her sentence, he dangled the shredded panties from his forefinger. Her stunned expression made him chuckle. "You were saying?"

"Been practicing that move, have you?"

"Maybe." He knelt at her feet, oddly feeling like her captor *and* her slave, and leaned forward to scent her shaved pussy. The feminine spice of her sex was like ambrosia to him. He loved the taste and smell of woman's pussy. He loved to put his lips and tongue on her tender flesh to suck and to kiss and to plunge until she came on

his face. Just thinking about H's cum dripping into his mouth made his hard cock tremble. *Whoa, boy. Slow down or you'll go off before you get inside her.*

Still holding the lemon pop, he leaned forward and kissed the spot just above the crease of her sweet cunt. He dragged his tongue down the slender line, sighing in ecstasy as he nibbled the plump flesh. His lazy exploration continued until her thighs quivered and her hands fisted into his hair. Though he intended to make her crazy, his actions only served to stoke his own lust to an agonizing peak.

Finally...slowly...he traced her cunt with the melting lemon pop. She gasped but didn't protest. As the yellow juice pearled on her skin, he licked off the drops. Using one hand, he pushed apart her vulva. With his other, he slid the pop inside her cunt.

"That's cold," she murmured. He looked up and noted with satisfaction that her eyes were closed and her face was flushed.

As he established a slow rhythm with the lemon ice, which was melting too fast, damn it, he suckled H's clit mercilessly. *Come for me, princess. Come on me.*

"You feel good," she said, moaning. "Your tongue...oh hell! What a glorious, talented tongue."

She tensed...then rammed his face into her pussy. He dropped the lemon pop and held onto her ass with both hands. He took the assault of her clawing fingers and pumping cunt. He drank the lemon-tinged cum until she broke free of his grasp and stumbled backwards.

Jarod was on his feet in two seconds flat. He withdrew a condom from his front pocket then unzipped his jeans and pushed them and the black-silk boxers off his hips. She watched him roll on the condom, her wide gaze not quite as confident as before, and yelped when he picked her up and slammed her against the wall. "I want to fuck you," he whispered into her ear. "God, baby, I want to fuck you hard and fast until I come in that beautiful pussy."

Her erratic breathing told him she was either scared or turned on. He sucked in a breath, trying to gain some control, but all he could feel was the sensual press of her

body against his. His heart pounded furiously and his blood raged. *God*. The tang of her sex was still in his mouth tormenting him as he waited for her decision. Would she say the safe word? Or give him permission?

Her arms wrapped around his shoulders and her legs tightened around his waist. Almost too softly to hear, she said, "Please...fuck me."

He was too far gone to play nice. He plunged his cock into her pussy and nearly died from the tight, warm feel of her flesh around his. Shit, shit, shit. Sucking in a steadying breath, he pinned her to the wall, his fingers digging into her thighs, and took her again and again. He wanted to make it last, but damn it, he was too turned on and she felt too good.

"I'm going to—" *Oh God!* Jarod moaned loudly as the orgasm shuddered through him. He held onto H tightly as his seed spurted, meeting the resistance of the condom. A minute later, he slumped forward, pinning his blonde prize to the wall. "I'm sorry. It's been a really long time."

"We have a lot of time to play, sugar," she murmured, her fingers dancing along his shoulders. "Don't you worry."

The hard points of her nipples pierced his chest, and he groaned in erotic anguish. He had plans for those beautiful breasts. Hell, he had plans for this beautiful woman. She smelled like honeysuckle and her skin was as soft as flower petals. A memory of last night skittered...soft laughter...hot mouth...cold snow.

He wanted to know his partner's name. Would she tell him? Should he tell her his identity? Maybe exchanging personal information was against the Club's rules.

"My turn," said H.

Jarod managed raise his head. "Your turn to what?"

"To come again." She grinned. "Me. You. Me again."

"I'll need some recovery time," he said.

"Hmmm."

Not sure what “hmmm” meant, Jarod released H who wandered toward the bed. He went into the bathroom to dispose of the condom, clean himself off and undress. He left the mask on, but he hoped by night’s end, he and H would reveal their identities to each other.

When he reentered the playroom, he stumbled to a stop.

H was spread-eagled on the bed, a long pink vibrator thrusting in and out of her pussy. She had shed everything but her mask and those incredibly sexy white boots. Her eyes were closed and her mouth was opened in a silent “O”.

His gaze lingered on her breasts. God, they were beautiful. The most gorgeous pair he’d ever seen. Big as grapefruits with nipples pink and juicy, he watched ‘em jiggle as H’s enthusiasm for the vibrator gained momentum.

Without waiting for an invitation, he crawled onto the bed and whispered, “Need some help with that?”

“My nipples,” H said. “Play with them!”

Jarod moved so that he kneeled at the top of her head. While she fucked herself with the big vibrator, he leaned down and lavished attention her breasts. The huge, fleshy mounds turned him on. God, did they ever. He was a breast man, through and through, and H’s tits were luscious. Eagerly, Jarod kissed the puckered flesh around her nipples, tracing the crinkles with his tongue.

“More,” she begged. “Suck them. God almighty, *suck* them!”

Jarod scraped his teeth along one nub then he lightly nipped the other peak. A low moan escaped H’s throat. That erotic sound sent lust zinging straight to his balls. *Oh yeah*. He gave up his playful torture in favor of an all-out sensual assault on H’s gorgeous breasts. As he suckled and pinched and squeezed, he got hotter and hornier. And he kept sucking and pinching and squeezing until H screamed, “I’m coming. *Ooohhh!*”

Her hips arched as she plunged the vibrator into her pussy. Her nipples went hard and tight, he tugged them as she gave herself over to the orgasm. As she went loose and limp, sweat rolled down her stomach, pearling in her belly button.

He smelled her cum, the musky scent of it, and felt his mouth go all sloppy. Crawling over her, he placed his knees on either side of her head, his hands on either side of her thighs, and flicked a tongue over her sex. He wanted to drink her cream. Again.

"I love your taste," he said hoarsely. He licked her slit clean then pushed his tongue into her vaginal opening.

He felt her move, adjust herself, but caught up in the taste and scent of her pussy, he merely adjusted with her.

Then he felt her mouth on his cock.

"Whoa. Wow. Uh..." Jarod's eyes rolled back into his head. He heaved a breath.

"What's wrong?" she asked. Her tongue flicked the tip of his dick. "Don't you like blowjobs?"

"*Yah-uh,*" he managed, "but I'm losing my focus on your beautiful, and may I add very tasty, pussy."

"We'll just have to make the best of it," she said, laughing. She kissed his cock, nibbling its ridges, and licked it repeatedly. *I've died and gone to heaven. And I have my own personal angel...*

Her hot mouth worshipped his penis until *he* was crying "Amen!" Her soft hands cupped his balls, squeezing gently. Frissons of heat skittered through him as she sucked his cock. And just when he thought he might explode, H took all of him. He felt the warm slide down her throat...and he dove into her pussy with renewed vigor.

She came before he did, and as he licked away the juice that dribbled from her pulsating cunt, the low moan that vibrated on his cock sent him shooting to the stars. She drank from him too, swallowing his seed with a gratifying purr.

A few moments later he flopped onto the bed and watched her wiggle off the white boots. When she was done, he said, "C'mere." And opened his arms.

"What's this? Snuggling?" She sounded amused and, if he wasn't mistaken, a little surprised.

"What's wrong with snuggling?"

"Hmmm. I just thought it broke some kind of man code."

"I'll demand dinner and a foot rub later. I'll also call you 'woman' to an annoying degree and growl a lot."

H laughed. Then she wrapped one leg around his, her arm sliding along his waist. Relaxed and happy, they both drifted into sleep.

* * * * *

When Honey awoke from the short nap, she looked at the digital clock on the nightstand. 12:30 a.m. Her gaze coasted down the still sleeping form next to her.

She had expected great sex. Their attraction was nigh-on combustible. And truthfully, she had expected that she would like Jarod McClure. He was funny and sexy and looked damned good naked.

But she hadn't expected the gooey, sweet emotion warming her like a just-baked batch of chocolate-chip cookies. She'd felt this way once or twice in her life but never this quickly. And with a man she had, well, lied to...not that he'd cared to ask who she was before he bedded her.

Usually, at least here in this place of sexual safety and satiety, not knowing a man's name didn't bother her. Honey loved sex. She loved the male body. She loved her play place here at the Sex Club.

Maybe she didn't exactly like going home alone every night. Or not having someone to snuggle with. Yeah. That's what did it, all right. Jarod, He-Man of ProCare, liked to snuggle after sex.

Damnation. She was a goner.

What would he do once he found out about her identity? That she was Honey Sinclair, owner and operator of Honey Do, his only competitor? And she was kicking his ass too. She knew it.

Guilt swirled. She hadn't expected to feel guilty for her duplicity. She just wanted to have some fun with Jarod. After all, he'd been the one to topple her into the snow and kiss her.

Maybe he'd never talk to her again once she told him the truth. And she'd live with his choice. But for now...

Honey rose onto her side. Leaning forward, she kissed his naked chest. His skin was taut, all muscled curves and ridges. She feasted on his pectorals, peppering kisses on every centimeter of flesh. She laved his tiny brown nipples into hardness then flicked her tongue across each nub until a soft, low groan issued. Glancing up at his face, she saw his eyes were open.

"Hello," he said in a whiskey voice.

"Hi." She licked the space between his pecs, tasting the faint musk of his skin. Moving upward to his neck, she traced patterns from collarbone to ear. "You taste good."

"Better than lemon juice pops?"

She grinned. As she explored his body with fingers and lips, his hands were restless on her back, her shoulders, her buttocks.

Her engine got revved all over again. And, apparently, so had Jarod's. Before she could take her next breath, Jarod looped his hands under her arms and pulled her forward so his mouth could ravage her breasts.

Zings traveled from nipples to pussy as he tugged one peak then the other between his teeth and flicked his tongue rapidly against the turgid points. The need built, an ache that bloomed between her thighs, a heat that engulfed her whole body.

When he let her go, she scooted down and rubbed her nipples over his chest. His hand snaked around her neck and brought her down so he could nibble on her throat. As he occupied himself with teasing the sensitive spot behind her ear, Honey's hand drifted down his thigh and snuck between their bodies.

She squeezed his hard-on then caressed it. She loved the stone-wrapped-in-silk feel of his cock. His moan zapped the pit of her stomach.

"I want to taste you," she murmured.

He released her and she crawled between his legs, her hands coasting up his rock-hard thighs. Honey wanted to feel that big, thick cock slide inside her again. Soon, very soon, she'd take him and ride him. But for now...she spent several glorious minutes fondling his balls and rubbing his cock.

Jarod's hands fisted in the bedcovers and his hips thrust, a silent begging for her mouth. She ignored that plea, stroking him rough then soft. Finally, he begged in a whisper, "*Please.*"

Only then did she put her lips against his flesh. She savored that gorgeous penis, kissing it from base to head before taking the tip into her mouth and sucking it. Torturing him with endless tongue swirls and long licks, she took all of him.

His hands dove into her hair and held her captive. Not content with her gentle worshipping, he fucked her mouth. She held on to his thighs and took his strokes, her tongue teasing the cock pumping between her lips.

With a persecuted groan, Jarod released her, gasping and panting. Honey saw pre-cum pearl the tip of his penis and she sucked it away.

Jarod looked at her, his eyes glazed. "I want to come inside you."

"That's very good news." She rose to her knees then planted herself on either side of his hips. She slid her hand between her legs and pinched her clit. Pre-orgasm shivers racked her. "That feels so good." Her gaze held his. She rubbed her slick inner folds then spread them apart and showed him her succulent cunt.

"That *looks* good."

Honey pressed down and slicked her cunt across his cock.

Jarod's eyes went blind and his hands fisted in the covers.

In a hurry, she leaned over and opened the nightstand drawer. Grabbing the box of condoms, she opened it and dumped a shower of condoms on the bed. Reaching down, Honey rolled on the protection then finally — *oh finally* — guided Jarod's cock inside her pussy.

Their breathing was harsh, shallow. Their gazes held, mirroring passion. Then Jarod's fingernails dug into her hips. He thrust upward and she followed his eager movements. His calculated strokes drove her mad. An ache stole across her, made her belly tight with need, made her core spiral with pleasure.

He released her hips and played with her breasts, pulling on her sensitive nipples, bringing her closer and closer to orgasm.

Then she felt his thumb stroking her clit and she squeezed her vaginal muscles as she fucked him, over and over, until he stiffened and shoved his cock deep inside. As he came, his stroking thumb never stopped.

The bliss sparked, trembled...then...oh *then*...

She shattered into a million sharp pieces that shredded her ability to think. For an endless moment she was only light and sound and feeling.

When she was able to breathe again, Honey collapsed against Jarod, her tongue flicking out to taste the sweat beading his skin. Her heart pounded a trillion miles a minute and she still felt that gooey warmth. Jarod wrapped his arms around her and spent the next few minutes doing some expert snuggling.

"H?"

"Hmmm?"

"How would you feel about exchanging names?"

"Names?" Panic fluttered, but she swallowed the knot of dread lodged in her throat and rose up a little to look into his eyes.

"No," he said, uncertainty ringing in his voice. "I don't want just your name. I want to unmask you."

Chapter Four

Honey hesitated too long. Even through his mask, she could see that Jarod's gaze reflected disappointment at her perceived rejection. Damn. If they took off their masks, the fun would be over. And selfish though it was, she wanted more time with him. Once he discovered that he'd been fucking his competition...well, it could go one of two ways. He'd laugh and snuggle with her. Or he'd yell at her and leave. Since men had as much pride as they had testosterone, she was guessing he'd go with Option B.

"Tell you what," she said, stroking his tense jaw. "If you can give me three more orgasms...we'll take off the masks."

His lips curved into naughty smile. "A very erotic version of truth or dare?"

"Yeah."

The smile went wider, naughtier. "Just three, huh?"

"Not a big enough challenge?"

"I guess we'll find out."

Jarod's fingers drifted across her arm, down her side, to her hip. "Your skin is so soft." He stroked her buttock, cupping it and kneading it. Then his hand moved leisurely to her thigh. "You smell good too. Like honeysuckle."

Ah. If only he knew...

"You're very distracting," she murmured, stretching against him.

He chuckled as he rolled her onto her back and covered her, his hardening cock nestled against her pussy. "I like making you come."

"Ooooh. And I like coming."

He kissed her shoulder and the soft press of his lips made her shudder. He tasted her collarbone, moved up her neck and peppered kisses along her jaw. His eyes were glazed with desire, his breath harsh against her lips.

Jarod stretched her arms above her head. Her back arched slightly, pushing her breasts into his chest. Her nipples pebbled against his warm flesh. "Do you have anything that might help me tie you up?"

"You mean like ropes or leather or...silk strands?"

"Where?"

Her hand felt to the edge of the bed and pulled out the attached tie that had been tucked between the mattresses. "There are four."

"I need only two."

He moved off her only long enough to attach the silk strands. When he finished binding her wrists, she tested the material. Her arms had some movement, and she had no doubt Jarod would release her if asked, but she still felt a little vulnerable.

Lowering himself onto her body until his mouth hovered above hers, he kissed her. It was a slow melding of the lips that made her breath hitch and heart pound. His tongue slipped into her mouth and danced with hers. He tasted like mints and like need. He released her mouth then licked the seam of her mouth. Her pulse leapt at the unexpected eroticism of such an act.

"You have the most beautiful breasts," he said.

"And here I thought you liked me for my keen intelligence and acerbic wit."

He grinned, obviously unrepentant about his love of boobs. Just to mess with him, she wiggled her chest.

Jarod took that as an invitation and cupped her breasts. The feel of his strong, warm fingers against her aching flesh made her squirm. He pinched the nipples into hardness and she felt the buds tighten almost painfully. He kept pulling and tugging and she kept moaning and squirming. It was like he'd plucked a string that connected her

nipples to her pussy. She shivered with liquid desire. "I like it when you suck on my nipples."

"Do you?"

"Yes. A lot."

"What a coincidence. I like it when I suck on your nipples too."

His mouth surrounded one tight bud and his tongue flicked the peak. Pleasure jolted through her, spearing her at the core. He laved her nipple, suckling one while his hand tormented the other. Then he switched mouth and hand and she went up in flames, wiggling some more against him. His penis bumped her clit and she cried out at the tortuous contact.

Crawling down her body, hot fingers dragged sensuously down her skin as his mouth trailed a wet line to her navel. His tongue encircled her stomach before sliding oh so slowly to her thigh. He pushed apart her legs and kissed the flesh on either side of her cunt. He parted the folds to taste her.

Honey tugged at the silk holding her hostage and bucked her hips, wanting Jarod's mouth on her, desperately. His tongue flicked her clit, teasing the hard nub before sliding down and tasting her again.

God almighty. His kisses drove her wild.

His tongue delved into her slit, licked the juice pearling there, then his mouth settled on her clit and sucked it, hard. The orgasm swelled, waves of pleasure threatening, then burst, sensation after joyous sensation rolling over her. She moaned and bucked, her cunt pulsating as she came.

"One," he murmured, and damned if he didn't sound smug. She didn't know if she should feel amused or annoyed.

From somewhere in the bedding, he produced a condom. She watched as he rolled it onto his erection.

Jarod pushed her legs up and forward until her heels rested on his shoulders. She panted, still shuddering from Orgasm One, when he lifted her hips and, without so much as a by-your-leave, plunged his cock inside her. He impaled her to the womb, stretching her and filling her in a way that made her shudder all over again.

His hands slid under her ass and adjusted the angle. She felt his dick slid along her G-spot and a rush of breath left her. She clawed at the silk, her back arching. "Oh my God. Do it again."

He not only did it again, he did it just right. His hands were sweaty on her thighs as he held onto her legs and pumped into her again and again. The rocking of their bodies singed her to the core. She heard the erotic slap of flesh as their bodies met. And she saw the glazed look of lust in his eyes that surely reflected her own.

Then there was that thick, delicious cock piercing her over and over and over.

She felt the rise of another orgasm. Her body strained toward bliss as her mind reeled with the implication that Jarod might very well do as he promised.

His thumb rubbed her clit and he fucked her harder, his cock pistoning into her pussy. She pulled on the silk bonds and closed her eyes, matching his movements, her heart pounding, sweat slickening her skin. His low moans brought her closer to another orgasm...

"I love how you feel," he said, "So warm and wet and tight."

She plunged over the edge into bliss. As stars exploded behind her eyes, she vaguely realized that Jarod was groaning, plunging deeply...coming inside her pussy. She convulsed around his cock, mini-waves of pleasure undulating from her core.

"Two," he said with a grin.

Honey was too satisfied to berate him for arrogance.

He slipped out of her then left the bed to dispose of the condom. When he returned, he knelt between her legs and massaged her quivering thighs, leaning down to kiss

her knees. He spent an inordinate amount of time on her legs, kissing and stroking. It wasn't so much a seduction as a way to relax her.

Slowly, her body gave way to his gentle touches and before long, she sank into the mattress, drowsy and sated.

Her eyes had drifted closed and she faded into a half-awake state. Jarod had fucked the energy right out of her. She felt deliciously mellow.

When she felt Jarod's mouth on her nipple, sucking it into hardness, she smiled and murmured encouragement. Lust stirred anew. She'd never had such an eager, willing, tender partner. Then she felt something looped around her left nipple. Her eyes slitted open. She looked at the tiny black leather nipple clamp. Jarod pushed the tightener up until her nipple tingled with pleasurable pain. Then he paid exquisite attention to her right nipple. With its tightener pushed until the bud pulsed and ached, Jarod turned his attention to a third item.

"You've rummaged my drawers," she said in a lazy voice.

He chuckled. "You have quite a stash of goodies. I liked this one in particular."

He held a clitoris clamp, which reminded her of an oversized silver bobby pin. She watched him trace the object with his forefinger. "I can't wait to put this on you."

"Then don't wait."

Her body had pulsed to life, no longer feeling languorous or tired. How he'd managed to rev her up so many times in so short a period still wowed her.

His fingers parted her pussy and he carefully pushed the clamp onto her clit. The nub reacted to the constriction with pleasurable tingling. "Going for number three, then?"

"Damn right."

The vibrator whirled on and Honey watched as Jarod placed the pink tip onto her tormented clitoris. As he rubbed her clit gently with the toy, nearly unbearable sensations rocketed through her.

She gasped then panted then lost breath.

He moved the vibrator across her swollen flesh and circled her entrance. "You're so wet," he said, his voice low and harsh. "You have a beautiful pussy. I love watching you. Love doing this to you."

"Do it to me some more."

He rewarded her for that sassy comment. The pulsating toy pressed inside and Jarod maneuvered it up just a little. With small, quick strokes, he fucked her with the vibrator.

Orgasm Three nearly melted her bones.

All the pleasure points triangulated into one big explosion.

Her hips surged off the bed. A sob caught in her throat. She screamed his name.

Then she was floating softly, softly back to Earth.

Jarod removed the nipple cuffs and clit clamp, loosed her numb wrists and gathered her into his arms. She snuggled into his embrace. Wow-oh-wow. She felt so incredibly wonderful. Safe. Happy. Well-loved.

Then Jarod leaned down and whispered, "How did you know my name?"

Heart pounding, Honey splayed her fingers on his chest. "I know who you are," she admitted. "I made some inquiries after that kiss at the Morrisons' party."

"Isn't that breaking the rules of the Sex Club?" he asked. He sounded playful, not angry.

"You could've done the same," she accused. She bit her lip. Stupid to sound that way. Like she had a right to be petulant about his behavior. "I guess that kiss wasn't as...memorable for you."

"I wouldn't have showed up if that kiss hadn't boiled me alive." His fingers edged along her mask. "I didn't think you wanted to be known. And that's the reason I asked to unmask you. I want to know your name. I want to see your face. I want to know your

favorite color and if you like baseball and if you prefer chocolate or flowers on a first date."

Honey felt her heart plummet to her toes. He sounded so romantic. So eager to take steps beyond being just bed partners. And oh, how she wanted it. Wanted it badly.

The mask shifted and, coward that she was, she closed her eyes as he lifted away the lace-edged plastic. For a long, terrible moment, she heard nothing.

Then he inhaled sharply and said, "*You.*"

The word was pure heat. Pure accusation. With nervousness clawing at her stomach, Honey opened her eyes and met his gaze. He looked shocked. And betrayed.

"What did you hope to gain from this...this charade?" he asked. Already he was rolling away from her and off the bed. He searched for his clothes, pulling on the jeans he found first. "You've already put the squeeze on ProCare. This your way of making sure we go under? You like your men naked, don't you, Honey?"

"Damn right I do," she said. She let him verbally flog her. Let him be pissed off. She deserved it for not revealing herself to him before they'd played together. "This wasn't about business. It was about pleasure."

"You got cameras in here? Am I going to see myself in the *Clement Falls Tribune* buck-naked? Good thing it wasn't me in those bonds."

That insult cut her like jagged glass scraped across her chest. But the image of him being tied up and at her mercy also sent a wave of lust through her. Lord, what fun it would be to take him...big, strong Jarod McClure...take him until he begged for her mercy.

She sat up and glared at him. "You don't know me. Or what kind of woman I am. But I would never hurt you like that. And I would never do something to betray the Club."

He tugged on his shirt and found his socks and boots. "Whatever you say, sweetheart."

"You're upset. You have a right to be. But I just wanted...you. I'm sorry I hurt you by not telling you who I was. But c'mon, Jarod. I saw the stars with you. You've got me twisted into knots. No other man's done that. Not like you. We have something that we can build on."

"Lies and mistrust?" His gaze burned into hers and she felt tears prick at her eyes. "I don't cotton to that, Miss Sinclair. You can't build anything on that kind of flimsy foundation."

"Would you have taken me?" she asked softly. "If I had introduced myself as Honey Sinclair, would you have met me and done the same beautiful, wicked things?"

He was dressed now. He ran agitated fingers through his hair. He smiled grimly at her. "Guess we'll never know, will we?"

Jarod turned and strode to the door, unlocked it and left.

She swallowed the knot in her throat then fell back onto the bed. Shoot. That had not gone well. She cried, feeling the pain of losing something she hadn't quite had in the first place. How could you miss what had never really been yours?

Best thing she could do was give herself a nice pity-party then suck it up and move on. She would find a way to apologize to Jarod. Maybe he'd accept it, maybe he'd tell her to go screw herself. But at least he'd know she was truly, deeply sorry about her lie of omission.

But she'd never be sorry that she'd spent New Year's night with him. Would never, ever regret the hours that she'd had him all to herself. Maybe, when he got over being mad, he'd realize the same thing she already knew.

"Magical," she whispered into the empty, lonely room. "It was magical."

Chapter Five

One week later...

Jarod drove his F150 up the imposing driveway that had already been cleared from last night's snowfall. The three-story Victorian was in near perfect condition, as gorgeous now as it had been in its heyday. It was also a shade of pink that made him shudder in masculine terror. It looked like a gingerbread house surrounded by mounds of white frosting.

He followed the circular drive halfway then parked. It took him a moment to gather the courage to get out of the truck and walk up the three wooden steps to the porch.

As he crossed to the etched glass door, it swung open. A slight girl with gray eyes and blonde hair beckoned him forward. "Come in, Mr. McClure. I'm Mettie Jamison, Miss Odie's assistant."

He had to admit, he was terrified to cross into the domain ruled absolutely by Odemina Wilson. He nodded to the girl then stepped inside. She took his coat and gloves then led him to the left and gestured for him to enter a big parlor. For just a second, he felt as if he'd gone back a hundred years in time.

"All original furnishings," said Mettie. "And as far as I can tell, still sitting in the same locations Miss Odie's great-great-grandmother arranged them." With a flourish of her hand, she indicated he should sit down on a red-velvet couch with fancy wood scrollwork along its top. Though he felt like a fool, he did so.

"Would you enjoy a cup of tea?" she asked.

"No, thank you. But if you had a shot of tequila, I might well say yes."

She grinned then slipped from the room, her job done.

Odemina made him wait fifteen minutes in the room filled with antiques and smelling like lemon wood polish. When she finally deigned to join him, she walked in

leaning heavily on a silver-tipped cane. Regally, slowly, she made her way to a wingback placed opposite of the love seat. Separating the seating arrangement was a large cherrywood table filled with ceramic bric-a-brac.

Miss Odie was a small, thin woman, as white as paper and just as sharp-edged. She was dressed in a simple black dress with a single strand of pearls dangling from her neck. Her gray hair was done up in a double-bun and pearls shone at ears. She wore black hose and black shoes. Miss Odie never wore any other color—not since the death of her husband, Jeremiah Wilson, ten years before.

“Mettie tells me you turned down tea in favor of spirits,” said Odemina. She said *spirits* in the same way a preacher might say *Satan*.

Her brown gaze sparkled with ire and intelligence, pinning him like a carnivore that had just discovered a tasty bit of meat.

Jarod’s mouth opened then closed. Good Lord, it was a blow to his manhood to realize how much awe and fear he held in reserve for Miss Odie. She was a formidable woman. Finally, he said, “Yes, I did, ma’am. In jest.”

“You have a peculiar sense of humor, Mr. McClure.”

“If you say so, ma’am.”

She narrowed her gaze at him, taking his measure. Or maybe she was supposed to wear glasses and pride kept her from correcting her vision in such an obvious way. His own grandmother refused to go to the eye doctor until she plowed through the garage door with her Honda. The remote control hadn’t worked and she was so vision-impaired she hadn’t realized the door never rolled up.

“You know my granddaughter, Honey Sinclair Wilson.”

Boy, did he ever. He wondered why Honey didn’t use Wilson. As if Odie were reading her thoughts, she said, “She doesn’t want to bank on the family name. She’s got gumption. Like me.”

He didn’t know how to respond so he merely nodded.

"I would like you to stay away from her, Mr. McClure. And I'm willing to pay you to do it." Her pink lips thinned.

Flummoxed by this firmly delivered edict, Jarod stared at her. Miss Odie was used to verbally walloping people in conversation. She met his gaze head-on without apology.

"I heard tell her little business is putting a hurt on yours."

"Competition is a healthy thing," he said, though he barely managed to maintain his respectful tone. A week away from Honey had cooled his ire. He hadn't been able to stop thinking about her, in particular the look on her face as he let his pride dictate his final words to her. He'd hurt her.

Now that his mind was less clogged with testosterone-fueled grievances, he could admit they'd enjoyed each other. He'd told himself plenty of times that the mind-blowing sex had been enough. He'd also told himself that she wanted nothing more than to blackmail him to cement her business in Clement Falls.

But he hadn't heard a word about Honey...or from her...and he'd been left in a swirl of guilt and anger ever since.

"Pride is a terrible thing," said Miss Odie. "Pride lost me a son, Mr. McClure. And it might very well have lost me a granddaughter if she hadn't had the heart to forgive an old woman. She's patient, that one. Sweet too."

As much as he didn't want to think about Honey having decent qualities, he knew Miss Odie's reputation well enough to be impressed. She wasn't one to heap compliments on anyone – not even relations.

Damn it. He hated thinking that he might very well have told Honey no if she'd revealed her identity after that snowy kiss. What a shameful thing to know about himself – that he would judge her motives instantly without getting to know her.

Miss Odie seemed to be waiting for him to respond. So he said, "I'm sure you're right about your granddaughter."

“What kind of man takes a woman’s body and rejects the rest of her?”

Jarod felt the blood drain out of his face. Did Odemina Wilson know about the Sex Club? About the night he and her granddaughter had shared? He wanted lightning to strike him or Mettie Jamison to smack him unconscious with a tequila bottle. He’d take any abuse or punishment to avoid hearing that the town matriarch knew he’d fucked her only heir.

Miss Odie wasn’t looking at him though. Her eyes looked distant, as if she were remembering something that pained her. After a moment, her face cleared and her eyes found his again. “That’s what my son said to me when he ran off with Honey’s mother. I couldn’t abide it, Mr. McClure. Couldn’t give up my pride to accept my son and the wife he’d chosen. And it’s too late to take back my words or my actions.”

“I’m sorry, Miss Odie,” Jarod said gently. He was sorry too. It had to hurt a mother deeply to not only outlive her child but know that the wounds between them would never be healed.

“Thank you for your kindness,” she said. After a pause, she added, “How much, Mr. McClure?”

“Pardon me?”

“Boy, you’re not deaf or dumb. How much money do you want to keep away from my granddaughter?”

“Seems to me, Miss Odie, you’re about to make the same mistake twice.”

She straightened in her chair and smacked the cane on the floor. Her gaze sparked with her infamous temper. “*Mind your tone.* Honey has been moping around town for a whole week. Won’t tell me why.” Miss Odie sniffed, her regal head tilted up. “Doesn’t want to upset me or get my dander up. But I make it my business to know what goes on in my town.”

Her gaze let him know what *business* she knew and Jarod felt embarrassment heat his neck. *Oh my God.* Odemina Wilson not only knew about the Sex Club but that he’d spent New Year’s night with her granddaughter in one of its private rooms.

"You've already made up your mind about my granddaughter," said Miss Odie. "I'm just helping you to keep it made up."

"I won't take your money," said Jarod. "And I won't stay away from Honey. I like her." The moment the words popped out of his mouth, he realized it was true. He did like her. Well, then. What the hell was he doing here jawing with her grandmother?

"I'm a powerful woman, Mr. McClure. Powerful and wealthy. Only a fool defies my will."

"Then I guess I'm a fool." That said, he rose to his feet, nodded goodbye and left the parlor. Mettie waited in the foyer with his coat and gloves. He put them on and went through the door she opened.

Once he got into his truck and turned it on to warm the engine, he put his shaking hands on the wheel and squeezed until his heart stopped trying to leap out of his chest. He'd just told Odemina Wilson to stuff it. There'd be consequences. He shuddered to think how she might retaliate.

Let the old biddy do her worst. He had something more important to worry about. He started the truck and headed toward town.

* * * * *

Inside the Wilson house, Odemina sat in her chair, staring into the distance, thinking about the past and the present. When Mettie entered, a smile playing on her lips, the old woman heaved herself out of the wingback. "Well? What's he doing?"

"Got in his truck and took off," she said, wrapping her arm around the fussy old woman to lead her out of the parlor. "You think he'll go to Honey?"

Odemina gave a rusty chuckle. "Oh now, Mettie. Only a fool defies my will."

* * * * *

"Mind if we talk?" asked a familiar male voice.

Honey dropped the paperwork in her hand, not caring that it missed the desk and scattered onto the floor. She whirled around and cried, "Jarod!"

He lounged against the doorway, his fists clenched by his side. He looked at her for a long time...so long it felt like a year passed. Then he said, "I'm sorry I hurt you."

His apology was unexpected. Her heart tripped over in her chest. "I've been trying to figure out how to apologize to you. I should've told you who I was, even if that meant you walked away."

"Ian told me, Honey. I called him on my cell to tell him I was coming to see you. He said you called ProCare today to tell us you were shutting down."

"It was the only way to —"

"To reward a foolish, prideful man?"

Oh wow. He was so tender-hearted. Stubborn, yes. But so was she. "It just makes me wild when you say things like that," she admitted.

"I don't want you to shut down your business just to say you're sorry. Please, don't do that."

"Okay," she said, relieved that he felt that way. She liked Honey Do. Liked running her own business and keeping townspeople employed. And she knew Jarod felt the same way about ProCare. They could come to some understanding, she was sure.

"What now?" she asked. It was a loaded question. Filled with risk and with possibility. She wasn't going to shrink away from her feelings or pretend they didn't exist. "I think I could fall for you, Jarod."

He crossed the space between them and gathered her into his arms. "I do believe you've already fallen for me."

The laugh caught in her throat. In his eyes glimmered what they might one day call love. And she sure felt the same way. But for now...

"You think we could go back to the Club tonight? Try out those silk ties on you?"

He shook his head. "I was thinking you might like to go to dinner. Maybe a movie. *Casablanca* is playing at the Wilson Theatre."

"Don't you think we're past the courting stage?" She was thrilled that he wanted to spend time with her in and out of the bedroom. Though maybe she'd give him a surprise in the theater.. She seemed to recall that it was very, very dark in there. "You thinkin' we should start over?"

"I'm thinkin' we can start wherever we want," said Jarod. As his lips lowered toward hers, he whispered, "So I'll start with a taste of Honey."

The End

About the Author

Michele welcomes mail from readers. You can write to her c/o Ellora's Cave Publishing at 1056 Home Avenue, Akron OH 44310-3502.

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