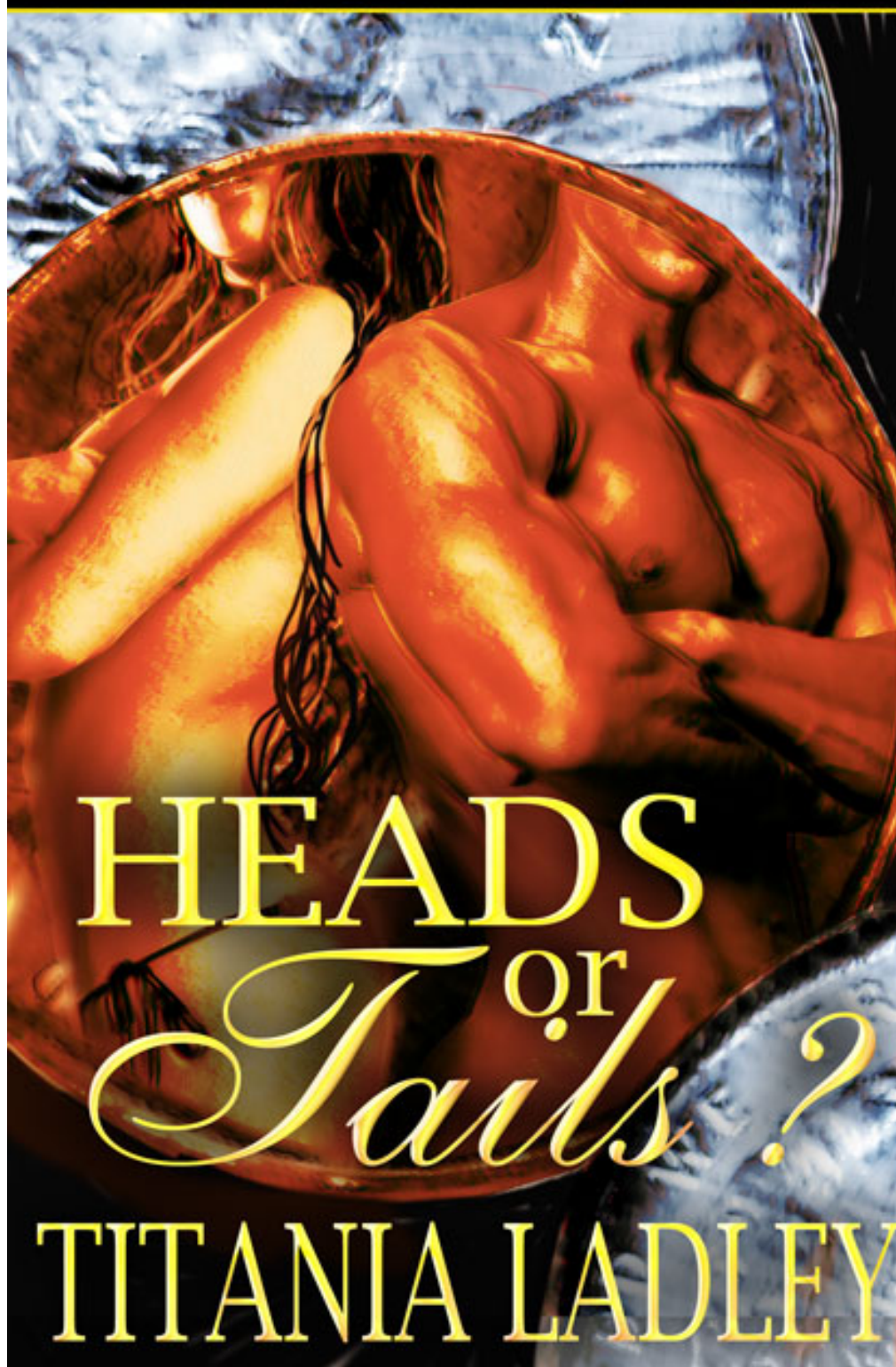


ELLORA'S CAVE PRESENTS



HEADS  
*or*  
*Tails?*

TITANIA LADLEY

An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Heads or Tails?

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# ***HEADS OR TAILS?***

**Titania Ladley**

### *Acknowledgment*

A huge thank you to my good friend Danny Brüggemann for her assistance in the German translations included in *Heads Or Tails?* Danny, your continued support is very much appreciated. Thanks for being there for me!

### *Author Note*

As you will see, *Heads Or Tails?* is two love stories in one. The first is Molly and Gwen's gentle awakening, and is strictly female-female in nature. The second is Cliff and Manny's fiery clashing, and contains nothing but male-male sex scenes. I am aware some readers may prefer one over the other (female-female or male-male). Therefore, I felt I should inform you it *is* possible to read just Part One for the lesbian story, or just Part Two for the gay love affair. However, if you should choose to do so, please follow with the Conclusion section to tie it all up and experience the climax of all four characters' rebirths. I do hope you'll opt to read the entire book, as this will bring you a fuller understanding of divorcees Molly and Cliff Garrett, and it will enrich your overall reading pleasure of the story as a whole. Either way, I hope you enjoy this unique gay-lesbian tale as much as I did writing it.

*Heads or Tails?*

## **Part One**

### **Tails**

### **Molly and Gwen**

## Chapter One

"Hello." The stranger smiled, her eyes crinkling at the corners. "I didn't hear you approach." Her warm gaze swept over Gwenyth Freemont and her snorting mule, lighting with a mixture of understanding and amusement. It was a look that really said, "Oh, I didn't hear because you rode in on *that*." Her lovely features settled into an expression of undisguised interest as she openly perused Gwen and her Amish garb.

Helpless to look away, Gwen studied the modern woman in return, from the plump rosy lips to the buxom chest in a snug sleeveless shirt. Her stare slid down and away from the erect dark nubs pressed against the ribbed white fabric, to the curvy hips. An empty laundry basket perched on one soft swell. Adorned shockingly in low-slung, faded denim pants, the woman's manner practically screamed "freedom", a concept Gwen had only dreamed of prior to this day.

Never before had Gwen been this close to an outsider without an escort. Fascination and a peculiar sort of envy bloomed in her breast as her gaze slid upward to take in the shocking bare abdomen. Its tanned, flat expanse boasted a twinkling white stone attached to the navel. Gwen's eyes widened at the naughty sight. She suppressed an urge to race up the inn stairs to examine and touch it, to figure out just how the gem remained attached to that silky, smooth skin.

"Hello." Snapping out of the brief, ridiculous enthrallment, the single word came out of Gwen's mouth with a hesitant quiver she couldn't quite disguise. Remembering her purpose here, her weary gaze shifted over her shoulder to the endless hills and valleys behind her.

For the thousandth time since escaping late last night, she scanned the horizon. To calm her nerves, she inhaled the scent of fresh-cut grass, focused on the distant bark of a dog and the hum of traffic along the blacktop road at the end of the inn's long gravel drive. A motorized red tractor bumped along in an adjacent field with a rhythmic rumble. It all seemed so surreal to be out in this fast world after twenty-five years of being virtually locked up in her slow-moving village. The differences were stark, almost blinding now that she explored it with her own free will, without Jakob's watchful, chastising eyes upon her.

Oh and how she thanked the Lord for that. So far, her cruel husband hadn't been able to find her...

So far — but he would eventually.

*Sinner!* At the echoed thought, Gwen swayed, her brow perspiring beneath the tight bonnet. Once again, her mind taunted her with Jakob's booming, preachy voice. She closed her eyes, flashing back to a moment in the recent past.

"To cast curious eyes upon a blasphemous outsider will condemn you to hell, Gwenyth," he'd warned, reaching for her jaw, painfully wrenching her eyes away from the scantily clad females bustling along the streets of Lancaster.

*Sinner!* She shook her head and dashed away the memories of his vile tone in her mind. Gwen suppressed a shudder and instead opened her eyes and swung her gaze to the right in an attempt to compose herself. She studied the distant, quaint town spread out across the wide valley just beyond the fenced acreage of the rural inn. Her tired eyes skimmed across the paved grid of streets lined by a general store, a post office, a station where autos were fueled, the tiny clapboard houses scattered between brand new big ones.

Her hungry stare flitted back to the dilapidated yet stately two-storied, weathered home. Set upon a small swell of ground with a sloping meadow and a copse of woods embracing its rear, the inn beckoned to her, almost taunting her. The modern woman stood on the wide covered porch looking down at her with an amusement that made Gwen's face warm with embarrassment.

*You're home, Gwenyth, you're home.*

The strange thought reverberated around her. Or was it the woman summoning her?

A single dark brow arched. "Uh, hello? Can I help you with something?"

"I..." Why couldn't she speak? Perhaps because her parched throat felt rough like the sandpaper Jakob used in his woodworking shop. Insects buzzed around her head. The sun beat down on her black clothing, relentless and cruel...like Jakob.

*No, no.* Gwen inhaled, flinging him from her mind for the millionth time. She'd come too far to finally lose her sanity. To steady her jumbled thoughts, she focused on the soft twang of music drifting out to her from inside the establishment. She assumed it came from one of those boxy electrical radio contraptions she'd once seen in Lancaster. Indulging in modern, toe-tapping, sinful song was forbidden among her people, as was the use of electricity and machines drawing on it to function.

But in spite of the reprimanding voice that screamed in her head, she remained transfixed by the pleasant female intonation singing the peculiar tune. She paused and allowed a delicious sense of mutiny to wash over her. There was no one here but an outsider, no one to punish or scold her for indulging in the curiosities of The Outside, a place that had always tempted her. Her heart thumped with the sudden excitement of freedom yet it cowered with the terror of being discovered.

"Yes, ma'am, perhaps you can. I—" Her glance sliced to Ada, snapping Gwen from the defiant respite of reverie she'd been indulging in. The mule started to root in a bed of flowers full of wilting, browned mums. With a profuse, hot flush to her face, Gwenyth scurried back to the beast's side.

"Ada, no, *nein!*" Lashes fanned her cheeks in mortification as she yanked the exhausted animal's head up and patted its perspiring shoulder. Ada tossed her nose up

and pranced, skittish as always due to the routine of enduring Jakob's temper in the fields.

"Got yourself a rowdy ride there, huh?" the woman called down from the porch, a smoky tinkle in her voice.

"Pardon, please. Ada usually doesn't cause much trouble—except when she's treated cruel—" She caught herself and altered her explanation. "When she's being stubborn, or hungry, or..."

"I see," the woman murmured, shifting the laundry basket and propping it on her other hip. She glided down the steps and extended her free hand. Gwenyth became engulfed in a cloud of sweet, alluring essence. "Well, it's nice to meet you and Ada. I'm Molly Garrett. I'm part-owner of this heap." She jerked her chin over her shoulder to indicate the bed and breakfast. "Welcome to the town of Miracle."

"Hello, m-misses...I-I..." Gwen blew out a breath, staring at the slim, honey-toned fingers. Why did her stomach dance with butterflies at the sight of that hand reaching for hers? And why couldn't she just shake it and be done with it?

At Gwenyth's hesitation, the woman's eyes widened in surprise.

"I'm sorry. I'm Gwenyth—or Gwen, if you'd like." She finally accepted the warm hand, astonished at the boldness of the grip. It emitted strength like a man's yet it held a decided female softness. The power of the shake caught her off guard and made her heart thud with an odd sort of excitement she didn't quite understand. "I-I need a room for the night...if you please, ma'am."

"Pretty name." Molly slowly released her hold, which by now trembled with...was it fear? Gwen wiped the perspiring palms on her dress and gasped when Molly winked at her. "So, does Gwenyth have a last name?"

She ignored the invasive question and instead let the town's name circle through her head. *Miracle*, Pennsylvania. She reached down and gripped the "miracle" lump in the pocket of her dark bibbed dress. Not only had she stolen Ada the mule from Jakob, she'd taken the wad of bills under the floorboards in front of their old kerosene-run icebox.

Gwenyth gritted her teeth. She despised that thing! It chugged and growled and ever grated on her nerves...so like Jakob. She drew in a deep breath, attempting to collect her scattered thoughts plagued by that despicable man. Now that she looked back on it, she marveled that she'd survived so many years under the same roof with him. It didn't matter to him that she'd worked her fingers to the bones to help him earn the money she'd taken from him last night. By his way of thinking, *everything* was his—including Gwenyth. She hadn't bothered counting the money, but his cabinetry business did very well indeed. It should be enough to get her far away from him, and that was all she desired.

Miracle, Pennsylvania. Yes, miracle was the proper term. It had been a wonder that she'd made it out alive.



Nervously, Gwen shot another fleeting glimpse over her shoulder. Drawing in a few shaky breaths, exhaustion detached her from reality and made her vision blur. She started. Was that his black carriage she saw marring the horizon?

Her fist rose to press against her breast. The ghostly *clip-clop, squeak* of Jakob's horse and buggy had been plaguing her the entire trip, following her every step. She knew her imagination ran away with her, knew she'd had a good head start and he most likely hadn't noticed her gone until dawn. But still, still she didn't trust him, didn't dare rely on her own rationalization of the situation or disbelieve anything she thought she saw.

*No, wait, Gwenyth, you're okay. You're safe for now. Many miles from Lancaster. He won't find you – not yet, at least. You'll only stay a night or two and then move on. Maybe you'll get lucky. Maybe the Lord will bless you and allow you to evade Jakob forever.*

Still, it wouldn't hurt to keep a watchful eye on her back...

Molly cleared her throat. Gwen looked back at her and blinked to empty her thoughts and cease the hallucinations. Very near the same height as Molly, Gwenyth met the intrusive stare levelly. Green. The woman's eyes, she suddenly noticed, were a striking green, like the glorious fields she'd just traversed to get here. This close, Molly's face seemed to glow tan and strong with a square jaw, and yet her features were put together in such an interesting way that the whole of it formed a feminine look that Gwen could only describe as beautiful.

She whispered, "*Ja*. Yes, ma'am, I do have a surname. But I prefer not to disclose it."

Molly's lips thinned. "Okay..." She said it with a trace of sarcasm, shoving a straight lock of sable hair from her temple. "Well, usually I require my guests to register with their full names." She shrugged and skimmed her eyes over Gwen's white linen cap, the black, dusty, shin-length Amish garb. "But in this case, we'll just say, what the hell?"

Gwen flinched at the curse word, an automatic reaction when one rarely heard such things. But she managed to ask, "Then you do have a vacant room?"

Molly paused, her eyebrows inverted in indecision. "Well..." An automobile horn sounded on the road below. Molly raised a hand and waved.

At the sudden blaring noise, nerves jumped in Gwen's belly and nearly erupted into full-blown panic. Except when escorted by her parents, or with Jakob after her forced marriage, she had never been beyond her own Amish settlement and its surrounding towns. In spite of the choking fear at entering that strange world alone, she'd begun her journey late last night after hours of listening to his snores, assuring herself he slumbered in a dead sleep.

Dead. *Tot*. Ah, she mused, her body swaying as she allowed herself to slip into the fantasy. What a beautiful word when paired with Jakob. God forgive her, but she'd often dreamed of lowering his lifeless body into a dark hole in the ground and tossing dirt on his sallow face. Too bad for her, it was just that. A dream. She'd known very well she would be ninety before she'd have the pleasure of watching him die. So she

had fled, taking paths less traveled, avoiding major highways, keeping to the nearby pastures for fear of being seen, being taken back to that devil.

The devil with the hard calloused hands that had marred and pounded her soft skin over and over.

A wave of nausea engulfed her.

*Don't think about it, Gwenyth, don't!*

Even as the woman stared agog at her, Gwen couldn't stop the cruel images from flashing in her mind. Meaty fists slamming into her, that huge, hairy body atop her, rutting into her, crushing her. True, she silently conceded as she swallowed down an audible gag, his thing had fit perfectly within her, but then, so had a cucumber—she knew that for a fact.

And she would prefer a cool, knotty cucumber inside her any day.

Gwen shivered convulsively.

"Gwenyth?" The woman's voice came to her as if in a distant dream. "Are you okay? Would you like to sit down and have something to drink?"

She forced back tears and eyed the woman with indecision. "N-no, yes. I'm fine, thank you. I-I'd like to know...do you have a room or not?"

Gwen's knees buckled, and Molly's figure warbled before her. It was a hot day, oh so hot, and yet she shivered as if she stood naked in a blizzard.

"Gwen?" The distant, sweet voice sounded so alarmed, so concerned. Gwen heard the thud of the basket as it hit the ground. Strong hands gripped her elbows. God help her, was it Jakob's vile fingers holding her hostage? No, no, she was gone from him. But still, the years of horror would not flee her mind.

"Gwen, are you all right?" Molly swore under her breath. "God, you're soaked in this heavy costume. You need to get out of these clothes and cooled off before you get heat stroke."

Her pulse skittered and she wondered if Jakob had succeeded in driving her crazy. The revolting thoughts of all that wiry hair scraping across her bare breasts made her gag again. Clear yet distant, the memories were so vivid, they snapped her head back. His foul breath invaded her nostrils as he panted and sweated atop her, his big body holding her captive, forcing her thighs apart. The mess between her legs after he'd roll over and pass out...Lord help her, she couldn't hurl it from her mind no matter how hard she tried!

"I...I think I'm going to be sick," Gwen croaked, and flung Ada's reins aside. She broke free and stumbled around to the side of the house. Falling to her knees, she let go of the few crumbs of food she'd swiped from Jakob's kitchen before escaping.

Molly's instant presence at her side gave Gwen a surprising sense of calm. She gulped for air. Tears rolled down her cheeks. "I'm so sorry."

"No, no, it's okay." The cool hand rubbed gentle circles over her back. She could breathe again. The queasiness subsided. The relief of it washed through her like a soft spring rain. What she wouldn't do to lay her head down, to sleep for days on end.

"Please, *please*...do you have a vacant room for the night?" Just a night to rest and refuel was all she asked. That, and maybe a map of Pennsylvania, was all she needed before moving on.

"Well, I-I...I'm sorry, but what rooms I have are all booked up. We're renovating, so the rest of the rooms aren't habitable."

Her heart sank. "The floor. I'll sleep on the floor in any of those uninhabitable rooms. Anywhere." Gwen's mind raced. She thought of the stable she'd seen at the rear of the inn when she'd approached moments ago. "The barn. Can I sleep in your barn? I'll be gone by morning, and I promise to be no trouble at all. You won't even know I'm there."

\* \* \* \* \*

Molly let the sweet burr of the voice laced by a faint German accent shimmy through her as she studied the hopeful eyes.

*Won't even know you're there? I, um, don't think that's possible now that I've touched you and seen into your soul.*

There was something haunting in the neon blue pools, like a jittery rabbit ready to bolt at the slightest movement. Molly couldn't discern the color of her hair under the ridiculous bonnet, but the face was heart-stopping, totally arresting. Not a drop of makeup and the young woman glowed as a raving beauty might on a pageant stage, even after puking. The eyes were fringed by sooty lashes that fanned in contrast over the pale, creamy cheeks. Her nose perched small and straight, almost pudgy in the delicate face. The lips, even now as she clamped the bottom one between her teeth, bloomed full and lush.

Botox injections? Uh, Molly didn't think so, since Gwen was obviously from one of those backward Amish or Mennonite cults. But the effect was similar, making Molly long to test their softness with a voracious, lip-locking kiss.

She continued her nonverbal interrogation, wondering what she should do. She wanted like hell to open her home to this woman, but what rooms she had were full. Molly noted the dingy, scuffed boots, the way Gwen had peered guardedly over her shoulder as if an unseen devil rode her skirts. It was apparent she was on the run. Which made Molly all the more intrigued by the weary, gorgeous traveler before her.

After her recent divorce, Molly had been starved for female companionship, and this one here appeared to be in need of...well, maybe not a friend or lover, but a hideout at the very least. If only the Paytons hadn't arrived needing two rooms instead of their originally booked single. Her mind raced for an answer. She didn't want to let Gwen go, not in the exhausted, emotionally unstable condition she appeared to be in.

Then there were her own emotional, female-obsessed thoughts to work through. Molly needed to assume this new avenue of her life—needed to, like yesterday—yet there was no way in hell an innocent Amish woman like this even knew such relationship possibilities existed. Hell, Molly herself had only indulged in fantasies and that one nightclub encounter right before the divorce. Other than that small dose of bliss, she had yet to embark on exploring her darker side.

The possible lesbian in her.

The reasons for the divorce had been somewhat of a shock to her and Clifford even with the odd changes that had started to take place. Sure, she'd had a perplexing fixation on Mandy Savage in college, and Cliff had seemed a bit too chummy with some of his frat brothers, but bells still hadn't started ringing.

So after a marriage where sex had become nonexistent, and they'd eventually begun to voluntarily swap their gender-targeted porn magazine subscriptions, they'd both accused the other of being gay.

The picture had become clearer during the big blowup following a night out in the St. Louis area. They'd traveled there for a dual purpose, to visit with Cliff's parents and to peruse a local renowned antiques shop for furnishings for the inn. His parents had run across a bargain of five nineteenth-century cherry, four-poster beds along with nearly all their matching chests and dressers. Even with travel and shipping expenses, the trip had proven cost effective in getting the bed and breakfast partially furnished.

To celebrate their fortunate find, they'd embarked on a night out on the town. Unknowingly, they'd happened upon a swingers' club on the east side of the Mississippi. At first glance, they'd snickered, realizing they'd found themselves in a stripper bar featuring both male and female dancers. Molly had always been more drawn to men's pornographic magazines than women's, but a sense of unease mixed with fascination had settled in her groin when she found her eyes continually devouring the female dancers instead of the male ones.

To further complicate the situation, she noticed Cliff couldn't seem to stop drooling over the buff male strippers onstage, and he appeared not to even notice there were naked women in the neon-lit room. As the night had worn on and seductive, hip-grinding music poured from the overhead speakers, couples began to fill the dance floor. Cliff had finally torn his gaze from the male dancers during a break and had asked Molly to dance.

Gradually, they'd started to become aware of strange things going on around them as they swayed to the music in the smoky bar. Female patrons removed their tops, exposing their breasts while they danced. Men unleashed their half-stiff cocks, gyrating and moving to the seductive harmony.

Molly had watched with a jumble of horror and horny fascination as a woman clearly unknown to a man had knelt before him and performed overt fellatio on him while he closed his eyes and danced. Couples who'd initially appeared together began to swap partners. A man bent a woman over a table and fucked her right there on the

edge of the dance floor, yet no one seemed to care or stare agog in the way Cliff and Molly had.

Then the turning point of their marriage had evolved, spinning like a top out of wild control.

An attractive married couple had sidled up next to them, their lean, striking bodies moving more sensually than the strippers' had only moments ago. At first, Molly and Cliff had clung to one another like frightened children in a haunted house. The handsome man had been built like a concrete wall...and he'd planted himself right behind Cliff, grinding his shaft into Cliff's ass while his hands slid around to explore Cliff's crotch. Molly would never forget the look on Cliff's face, one of disbelief, reluctant amusement and lust he couldn't seem to disguise.

Molly hadn't had time to examine the situation further for the man's wife got right to work. Her curvy, lush body had molded to Molly's backside, and she'd wrapped her arms around Molly's waist in a possessive manner that had taken Molly's breath away. Sweet, alluring perfume had filled Molly's nostrils while soft skin brushed hers and a gentle touch mesmerized her. The beautiful woman had swayed with Molly, rubbing her pussy into Molly's ass while snaking her hand up Molly's shirt to claim a mound already tingling and heavy with sexual need.

She hadn't even noticed she'd let go of Cliff and melted backward into her new partner until the following day when she'd had her big blowup with Cliff and he'd pointed it out to her.

The song had ended, sliding into a head-pounding rock song that didn't seem to fit the mood. The couple had merely smiled, reached for one another's hands and faded into the crowd. No words had been spoken. It had been as if they'd been on a mission to prove a point, and their operation had hit the target with deadly accuracy.

Molly and Cliff had left minutes later in a state of stunned silence and hadn't spoken to one another about their twilight-zone encounters until they'd arrived back in Pennsylvania the next evening. It wasn't until after that heated argument and some deep soul-searching that they'd both admitted they'd enjoyed their indulgences in the same-sex strippers and their encounters with the man and woman on the dance floor.

And so had come the bright light of day. Maybe they were both gay?

More honesty had followed in which their dull sex life—or lack of—became the focus. Since they were miserable with each other's company in bed, they concluded the only way to find out if they were gay was to divorce and pursue the possibilities. But as former real estate agents, the one thing they were mutually adamant about was not letting go of their new business venture, the recent purchase and ongoing renovation of this money-sucking inn.

She supposed their "duh, maybe we're *both* gay?" acknowledgment had been aggravated by the stress of buying and remodeling the bed and breakfast in the first place. Since they still owned it jointly as part of the settlement, they both continued to live here, neither one able to part with their dream of running and owning a small

business. She used the spacious quarters at the rear of the house on the main level while he occupied the finished full basement.

Things were touchy, that was for sure, especially when they worked together during the day, struggling to get each room in habitable order for guests or operating the front office. But there had been some sort of freeing relief for them both when they'd signed those divorce documents and divided the property, even though they still resided in the same home.

Molly snapped herself back to the present. Her gaze scanned Gwen, the natural beauty of that face, the small but full breasts pressing against the ugly dress, the tiny waist and hint of slim lower calves peeping from beneath the hem. A flood of unexpected desire washed through Molly. Except for that mind-blowing dance, she had yet to be with another woman, but she knew what drew her eye was definitely desire.

Okay, she thought wryly, maybe part of that intuition had come about due to all the lesbian DVDs she'd ordered and been devouring lately. It nearly made her swoon when scenes of those all-female porn flicks flashed through her mind...except the actresses were now replaced in her fantasies by Gwen and herself locked in a passionate, naked embrace.

Molly mentally fanned herself. Thank God Cliff had gotten restless and just left on vacation that morning! If she were going to pursue this curiosity right here under their roof, she'd prefer Cliff to be gone for the time being.

In agreement, they'd decided to flip a coin to see who would get to escape on vacation first. The one to call the coin correctly was the lucky ex-spouse to embark on their first getaway, leaving the other to man the inn and renovations alone for an entire week. When she thought back on it, it was ironic and almost laughable that Clifford had chosen "heads" without so much as a pregnant pause. Which made her immediately liken his choice appropriately to cock. On the other hand, she'd chosen "tails". Obviously, he'd won with "heads". But both choices were definitely good research material for Freud.

"The barn?" Molly finally replied. "No, there's no way I'd allow a guest to sleep in that nasty, cluttered barn."

"But I won't mind, not in the least."

Molly stood and looked down into the dejected face. "But *I* would mind. I can't allow you to bunk in there among all that filth. It's full of tools and grease and smelly straw."

"All right, ma'am, I understand." Gwen's red-rimmed, exhausted eyes filled with unshed tears. She got to her feet, sighed and scanned the perimeter. "*Vielen Dank*, thank you for your time. I...I'm sorry to bother you."

Molly watched, transfixed, as Gwen slowly turned, trudged over to Ada and took the reins. Her heart ached to gather this striking, demure stranger into her arms and soothe away whatever angst caused those eyes to edge with apprehension. She heard a soft, restrained sigh as Gwen examined Miracle where it lay far beyond the border of

the inn's estate. As Molly studied Gwen's rigid, retreating back, guilt warred with panic inside her head. Panic, she realized, at the thought of this woman walking out of her life for good.

Molly scrutinized the subtle flare of hips beneath the hideous garb, the hint of swaying round ass, the reek of femininity that almost taunted her. The cotton crotch in her panties filled with creamy wetness when she imagined her hands cupping and kneading those globes. She inhaled, struggling to keep her breathing under control, praying she wouldn't come off as a pervert to this innocent woman in need of help.

She continued to watch as Gwen led the mule across the yard toward the driveway, the fatigued animal tossing its head in protest.

Indecision battled with Molly's greedy little id. It screamed, *Hot, she's so hot! Don't let her go*, so loudly in her mind, she wondered if Gwen could hear it. Strangely entwined with the lust, pity squeezed her heart. With the threat of a sympathetic sob stinging her sinuses and clogging her throat, a solution finally came to her.

"Do you cook?" Molly called out.

Gwen stopped, turned cautiously around. The yellow rays of the afternoon summer sun bathed her, the rim of the bonnet casting the gorgeous face in a soft, flattering shadow. Tears were beaded on the rims of her aqua eyes, but through their glistening drops shone a bright twinkle of hope. "Yes. Very well, in fact."

Molly strolled across the yard. Crossing her arms over her midriff, she asked, "Oh really?"

"Yes. Really."

"Well, it just so happens I'm in need of a cook for the inn. And I just thought of something. I have an extra small bedroom in my quarters you could bunk in."

"Oh!" Gwen gasped and gripped Molly's forearm. The scent of lye soap mixed with a decidedly female aroma teased Molly's nostrils. "I'll pay twice the rate for the room, perhaps even three times if you like." Suddenly, Gwen snatched her hand back, as if burned by a boiling pot.

The innocent gesture, the soft touch on Molly's arm followed by the immediate withdrawal, proved to be all the persuasion she needed. Gwen might as well have stroked her clitoris for all the horny heat that ignited in her womb.

"If you cook for my guests, I'll let you stay for free." Molly couldn't believe the breathy tone beneath her own words and the edge of desperation, as if she silently begged Gwen to make love to her.

"For free?" She pressed her palms into one another, twining her hands together.

"Yes, you can work off your room and board. I serve daily breakfast and an early-afternoon dinner, so I'd greatly appreciate the help since my partner Cliff—he's kind of the chef here—is gone for the week. There are two rooms fully renovated upstairs, one with three beds, the other with two. It's enough room for occupancy all the way up to about ten guests or so. That is, until I can finish remodeling the three other gutted

rooms, then we'll have more. But can you handle that—cooking for about a dozen guests, I mean?"

The eyes shimmered with relief and deep gratitude. The heart-shaped mouth spread into a wide grin. "Oh yes, ma'am!" Giddiness bubbled in her soft-spoken voice. "Cooking for twelve or more...that is nothing compared to the many Amish gatherings I've helped cater over the years."

Well, Molly supposed that was about the closest thing to a résumé she'd be getting from an Amish woman.

"Great." Molly went to retrieve the basket. She marveled at the contrast in Gwen's moods within such a short span of time. One moment, Gwen had seemed to warrant calling 9-1-1, the next she appeared to be cured of all ailments and happy as hell.

Molly went on. "The old barn out back you spoke of? It's fenced in around the backside. You can house the donkey there. And the room I told you about..." She perched the basket on her hip and backed toward the clothesline. "Go through the front door there, straight back to another door past the dining area, then head down the hallway to your right. It's the room without linens on the bed. Not sure if there're clean sheets in the hall linen closet or not. But don't worry. We'll get you fixed up."

Gwen's face glowed with relief. She led the animal toward the opposite side of the inn. Molly was pleased to see the spring in her step, and anticipation tingled in her loins.

Gwen suddenly stopped, looked back over her shoulder. "Thank you, Mrs. Garrett. I'm very grateful." She swung her gaze to the right, inspected the sunny horizon. Her guarded stare searched the distant hills, but she exhaled in what sounded suspiciously like a much-needed release of nerves. "You won't regret it, I promise you."

"It's Molly. And you're very welcome. I'm sure I won't be disappointed in the least. Now you go and water the donkey and get back here so *you* can be watered...before you pass out on me."

"Mule. It's a mule," Gwen mumbled, even as she grinned.

"Whatever."

Molly watched as the slim figure disappeared from view, Gwen's promise echoing in Molly's head. No, she wouldn't be sorry at all. With a bounce to her own step, she crossed the yard and began unloading the sheets from the line.

Inhaling the fresh scent of outdoor-aired laundry, she took one indulging moment to rub her cheek against the fluffy fabric of a pillowcase. For the first time since the divorce, Molly experienced a sense of relief. She and Clifford had made the right decision, she was almost certain of it. Her soaked panties could certainly attest to it.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Here're some sheets."



Gwen turned to see Molly leaning against the doorjamb with a stack of crisply folded, pale yellow sheets.

"Thank you. I searched the linen closet but there were no sheets to fit this bed." She averted her gaze and stepped forward, gently plucking one from the stack that leaned against Molly's chest. The nearness to such a private area of another woman's body made Gwen's heart hammer against her breastbone.

"Yeah, sorry. We just bought the place last fall. And with Cliff moving downstairs, I'm short on several things here in my quarters for the time being. Trying to get the inn covered first, though. But we're getting there."

"It's...it's all right, really." What was it about Molly, Gwen wondered frantically, that made her feel as if her body had been disrobed and her soul condemned?

"My room's right across the hall if you need anything. And the bathroom here at the end of the hall we share. There's a door leading into it from each of our rooms."

"T-thank you." That convenience was certainly a far cry from an outhouse. Gwen flipped the fitted sheet over the bed and tucked it snug over the corners of the full-sized mattress. She reached for a top sheet, her eyes faltering as she bent to tidy the bed. "I'm sure I'll be fine."

Molly dropped the pile on a rocking chair set before the wide bay window seat. "Here, let me help you."

"Oh no, *nein*, please don't do—" Gwen straightened, her eyes widening with...was it fear she felt?

Molly's hand shot out to grip hers where Gwen had pulled the linen from the bed to hold it protectively against her bosom. The heat, the firm but female grip, it did something to her insides she couldn't explain. Surprisingly, there was no repulsion as there had been when her husband had touched her. Yet it wasn't the brief, friendly touch of a friend or neighbor either.

"It's okay. I won't bite," Molly said huskily.

The female voice wrapped in that hint of raspiness seemed to stroke Gwen's ears like the twangy music she'd heard upon her arrival. She looked down at their joined hands, back up at the glittering emerald orbs. The unexpected heat from Molly's palm interspersed with a strange tingle. It shot through Gwen's hand, racing hot and sinful up her arm.

Months before her wedding as a young girl of eighteen, she'd smuggled a woman's magazine home from a trip into Lancaster with her parents. Gwen had pored over an article, fascinated by its bold reference to women kissing and lying abed together. Was this what direction her thoughts were traveling? And was the gleam in Molly's gaze the same lust she'd seen in those women's eyes in the magazine, or was it simply the veteran look of an experienced foreigner? The possibility it could be the same sort of interest she'd seen in the magazine thrilled and frightened her all at once.

She snatched her hand away, angling the sheet—and her body—out of Molly's reach. "Please stop it."

The words had tumbled from the depths of Gwen's throat, mortifying her with her disrespectful tone. This woman had opened her home to Gwen and yet she'd snapped at her like Molly was some misbehaving child. In addition, she felt cowardly for her guarded reaction. Her voice held a note of pathetic, crazed peculiarity. Or was that one of those hums of desire she'd read about, the gaspy, moaning breaths escaping from lovers' mouths?

When Gwen slowly backed away, Molly's brows drew together in response. "Gwen, honey..." She casually closed the distance between them, stopped a mere breath's space away. "It's okay."

Gwen caught the heady floral scent of a bold outsider. She could never smell such tantalizing fragrances back home unless she picked wildflowers from the rear pasture to adorn the breakfast table. Suddenly, an erotic image burst in her mind, that of Gwen and this woman entwined and rolling naked through that field. It did strange things to her insides, made the muscles between her legs clench and throb at the same time. What was wrong with her? Where and why had she conjured up such bizarre thoughts?

The magazine. Her parents must have been right. Once they'd found it beneath her mattress, she'd been given a lashing the likes of which she hadn't seen since—except with Jakob's iron fists. Yes, just like her mother had insisted, the magazine must have been sent from the devil's own hands, luring her into sin even now.

"You can relax around me." Molly lifted a hand and very deliberately pushed Gwen's bonnet off until it dangled over her back, held only by the bow at her throat. "I promise I won't give you away to whoever or whatever you're running from. I just want to see your hair. I want to see all of you."

\* \* \* \* \*

Blonde. She had pale hair like rich strands of buttery silk. Molly flexed her fingers, itching to run them through the mass until the bun at the nape of that smooth neck released and tumbled free. Instead, she stuffed her hands in her jeans pockets when Gwenyth flinched yet again.

"I...I'm not running." Gwen spun away facing the bed again. She flipped the sheet over the mattress for the second time, tucking it in, putting order to it with experienced precision.

"Well, I've never before seen..." Molly stepped closer and leaned around reaching for Gwen's chin, marveling at the satiny texture of her skin. She lifted Gwen's jaw until she ceased her task, and azure blue eyes were forced to meet Molly's searching gaze. "An Amish woman alone on a donkey—"

"Mule."

"Mule," she corrected, "dozens of miles from her settlement. What's up with you, babe? Tell me. I promise I won't hurt you or reveal your secrets to anyone."

The expressive eyes narrowed with animosity. "Do you always interrogate your guests like this?" Gwen wrenched her jaw from Molly's hand, suddenly displaying an enchanting bit of indignant annoyance. Molly wondered if it was the first time she had ever snapped back at anyone in her entire life.

Molly plopped onto the bed and smiled warmly. "Technically, you're an employee, not a guest."

"No, I will pay you for the room. That makes me a guest." She receded toward the foot of the bed, the window at her back, her expression weary and rigidly guarded. Though the fabric of Gwen's god-awful dress was dark, Molly could discern the outline of her curvaceous body as the afternoon sun shone through the open window. She was very petite with round breasts, flared hips, a tiny waist and lean legs—oh yes, what legs!

*Ah, to be nestled between them, slurping up her creamy juices just like in the porno flicks...*

Molly's mouth watered. "Look, sweetie." She rose and crossed to where Gwen continued to stand erect near the foot of the bed. Unable to resist, she lifted a hand and rubbed a stray lock of Gwen's hair between her thumb and forefinger. The wispy strands caressed Molly's fingertips like the satiny swish of a sexy negligee's strap over bare skin. It was all she could do not to close her eyes and yank Gwen into her arms, to suck every sweet essence and cell of this woman into her soul.

"I'm going to be running this place all by myself for the next week," she finally continued. "It's only temporary, but I'd truly appreciate any help you can spare. I have lots of outdoor maintenance work to do, painting, lawn trimming, odds-and-ends repairs that keep piling up."

"You do the man's work?" Gwen blurted out with astonishment.

She grinned at the naïve question. "Uh, my ex-husband isn't much of a handyman."

"Ex-husband?" Gwen took a step back so that her lock of hair escaped Molly's grasp.

"Yes. Cliff and I divorced, though we both still live here and run the inn together." She chafed her fingers together, held them up and sniffed the fragrance that had come off on them. Molly resisted the urge to sigh. "He just left this morning for a weeklong vacation."

"He lives here? With you? And you're *divorced*?"

The amazement in her voice and wide eyes charmed Molly, making her long to cover that stunned mouth with her own.

"Yes, yes and yes. We've reached a sort of agreement and feel we make better business associates than spouses. He lives downstairs in the finished basement, and I have these quarters on the main level. So anyway, if you can cover the inside—even if just for a couple days—it would help immensely. Then I'd have free time to clean up the shabbiness of the outside a bit."

Gwen's gaze shifted to Molly's hand where she still held it below her nose. Her thorough perusal moved back up in indecision, as if she were on the verge of running. "B-but I had only planned to stay one night."

*Damn.* Molly let out a long breath. "Well, okay, then that's one night and day of help that I didn't have before you arrived. But...if you change your mind and decide to stay the entire week, I'd be inclined to give you free room and board during your entire stay in return for your kitchen and maid services. You see," she purred, unable to keep from brushing a lock of hair from Gwen's rosy cheek, "I scratch your back, you scratch mine."

Gwen's eyes widened. She drew back, taking possession of her hair once again. "I can scratch my own back, thank you."

Molly threw her head back and giggled. "It's an old cliché that means you help me, I'll help you."

Her face pinkened. "All right, I-I'll stay, but I'm not sure for how long. However, I'll leave well before your husband returns, that's for certain."

"Let's get it straight from the start. He's my *ex*-husband. And since we no longer share a bed, I sleep alone...unfortunately. In addition to that, he won't hurt you."

She blinked, cupping her hands over her mouth. Her eyes took on a glaze of denial as if she'd drawn the shades down to keep out the light of truth. "I-I never said..."

Molly reached up and closed her hand over Gwen's. Her skin felt cottony and smooth against Molly's palm. "You didn't have to. I can see it in your eyes."

"No..." Gwen snatched her hand free.

"It's okay. You're safe here. From whatever — or whoever — you're running from."

Her eyes glittered with hatred and fear. "There's nowhere safe enough."

Knowing the look of a scared rabbit about to leap from the brush, Molly backed toward the door. "I'm sorry. I don't mean to pry. I'll leave you now to the task of getting settled in. When you feel up to it, come on out. I'll get you started."

Gwen's shoulders sagged with relief. She gripped the bedpost and lowered herself to perch at the foot of the mattress. Nodding, she murmured, "Thank you. I won't be long."

That sexy capitulation gave Molly the urge to kiss the adorable, yummy mouth hanging wide open, as if Gwen couldn't believe her own quick surrender.

Elated that Gwen had agreed to stay, Molly spun on her heel and crossed the room, turning back only when she reached the door. "Good, I'll take what I can get. Now, I have a half a dozen guests mingling upstairs and several more out sightseeing at the local Civil War battle site. They're all expecting that early dinner. I do have some things started, but frankly, I can't cook worth a damn." She laughed at herself. "So it's an emergency. You should probably find your way to the kitchen first."

## **Chapter Two**

Molly was gone before Gwen could blurt out that she'd changed her mind and really should be going—now. This instant. God help her, she should have traveled an hour or two farther down the road. It wasn't like she dreaded cooking two meals a day. She didn't bemoan cleaning or checking people into the inn. None of that was very different from what she'd been doing all her life. In fact, domestic, hospitable skills were all she had to offer the outside world.

Aside from Jakob finding her, what she feared most was the innkeeper with the striking green cat eyes and the strange ability to set her heart pounding with a mere look, a touch. Was she a witch casting an evil spell on Gwen? Would Gwen be in danger of inviting the devil into her life if she stayed just one night in this place?

She dismissed the thought with a shiver and completed the making of the bed. No. If there was ever a Satan at all, his real name was Jakob Freemont, and she'd just escaped from his hell late last night.

Gwen forced herself not to think of him and instead studied the worn patchwork quilt tossed over the rocker chair. She'd stitched many blankets in her life, she mused as she flipped it across the bed and tidied it. Gwen had an eye and a talent for the needle, but at the moment, she simply longed to be wrapped in a cool quilt. Her muscles and bones ached to climb into the bed, but she resisted and made her decision.

She would go and make that meal and earn a night's keep. Then, instead of staying until tomorrow, she would take a brief evening nap and slip out into the middle of the night once again. It was important to keep moving, to get on to the next town, the next county.

Gwen sat on the bed and thought of this ex-husband, Clifford. She didn't know him, but she didn't want to either. It was safest to get out well before he returned next week. After all, she hadn't traveled dozens of miles to risk walking right into the same situation she'd just escaped, being controlled by another person and trapped in her own insanity.

She also detected something powerful, something strangely intense and odd about Molly that really put her on edge. True, she was no Jakob Freemont—no one else on Earth could possibly be that overbearing and cruel. But in spite of her curiosities about Molly, Gwenyth wasn't about to stay and find out just what lurked beyond that unwavering stare and soft touch.

Determined to tie up her obligations, she completed organizing her room and found her way to the kitchen. Two hours later, after finishing up what Molly had started of the main course, and gathering and piling all the ingredients into a large bowl for the cake dough, Gwen held up the electric mixer and studied the dial.

What could possibly be the difference between “blend” and “stir”? Didn’t they mean the same thing? And how on God’s earth do the metal sticks attach to the handle piece? She fumbled and twisted the parts, her tired eyes struggling to focus.

If it took her all day to figure out the contraption, she’d solve this mystery. She was going to incorporate modernity into her life, if not to conclude her obligations then to prepare herself to become an outsider. She’d already mastered other things in the kitchen, including the electric oven and stovetop knobs, and the various fancy flame warmers Molly had available for placing under the catering pans to keep large quantities of food hot.

With a huge chicken pot pie warmed and set on the buffet through the server window, and a pan of home-fried potatoes and corn sliced from the cob, she was nearly set. Through the window, she could see patrons already mingled, sniffing the delicious scents.

Her stomach growled in response to the hearty food aromas, and the steam curling up from the stainless steel buffet pans made her mouth water. Strangely accented voices carried through the window as guests lined up with plates in hand. They sipped lemonade, sweetened iced tea or the aromatic amaretto coffee that gave the inn its current homey scent. For dessert, she’d like to have prepared a shoo-fly pie, but Molly had lacked all the ingredients, so Gwen now embarked on making her first-ever boxed cake mix with canned frosting.

Gwen was relieved to have breakfast covered. She’d already laid the foundation for her late-night departure by preparing ready-to-bake blueberry muffins and cinnamon rolls she’d found in the freezer, as well as a breakfast fruit tray and juices she’d readied. All Molly would need to do once she realized Gwen was gone is remove the items from the cooler and start coffee. By then, Gwen would be miles down the road.

Her pulse suddenly leaped into her throat. The longer she stayed, the more real became the possibility of Jakob drawing nearer and finding her. Hands shaking, she struggled with the beaters. One finally clicked into its hole.

“Oh thank God.”

When the second one snapped into place, she grinned triumphantly. Now for the hard part, she thought as the smile faded and excitement jumped in her belly. She slid the dial over with her thumb—but nothing happened.

Her eyes skimmed the handle, the bulk of the device, the twisted metal spinner things.

“Why isn’t it working?” Teeth grinding together, she thought of the directions on the cake box. *Mix for two to three minutes with electric mixer.* Her gaze moved up the lengthy white cord. Gwen’s face warmed with embarrassment. “Oh.”

She grasped the pronged end and held it up to study it. Her gaze flitted to the wall above the counter where a rectangle plate with slots hung. It appeared to be just like the ones she’d seen outsiders use at various stores they’d visited while selling their breads and jams, or delivering Jakob’s cabinets to those who’d special-ordered them.

Electricity. It needed to be plugged in. She didn't know the first thing about electricity, but during those trips, she had on occasion observed that the prongs were inserted into holes in the wall such as these. So she lined them up and shoved them in.

Having left the dial in the "on" position, Gwen let out a shriek when the mixer suddenly whirled and vibrated in her hands. Instantly empowered by its allure, she lowered the spinning sticks toward the bowl of cake ingredients, her hand vibrating until the rotating gadget met its destination. She dipped it deep, lifted it out.

Globs of half-mixed batter splattered over her face, her apron, the walls and countertop.

"Uh...you're not supposed to pull it out of the batter when it's still on."

Gwen squealed and fumbled with the switch until she was able to miraculously shut it off. Her heart thumped in her chest and pounded in her ears. At the first sound of a voice intruding on her thoughts, approaching her from behind, she thought of Jakob. Of course it wasn't him. The voice was too soft, too warm and humor-filled. Nonetheless, her hands shook.

"Wow." Molly pushed the rest of the way through the swing door and scrutinized the disaster of her kitchen. "Um, next time, I'd suggest raising it just enough to clear the beaters of the batter, *then* turn it off before lifting it out all the way."

"I can see that now," she said stiffly, reaching for a dishcloth.

Molly retrieved a soft drink from the refrigerator and tiptoed through the splotches of goo on the floor until she made her way to Gwen. Lifting a finger, she deliberately swiped a patch of batter from Gwen's cheek. In her fingertip's wake, she left a burning trail that made Gwen's skin tingle.

Lips twitching, Molly sucked the cake dough from her finger and drawled, "My, but you're a delicious one."

"Please." Gwen swiped her face with the dishrag and tried to ignore the strange excitement that soared in her belly and seemed to trickle down between her legs. "Don't."

Amused, Molly replied, "Am I going to have to replace you with a more competent employee?"

She lowered the rag, her eyes flaring with fear. "No, *nein*, please, I'm sorry. I'll try to do better. I-I just..."

Molly rolled her eyes. "It's a joke, hon. Something I'm going to get you used to yet."

With Molly's nearness, Gwen could only stare into the twinkling orbs. It seemed time stood still. She caught the forbidden, wild scent of womanly sin. Visions swam in her head of kissing that soft, full mouth, just like she'd read about and seen in those naughty pictures in her secret magazine years ago. Along with that shocking thought, self-scorn warred with the heavy ache and wetness in her womb.

She was no expert by any means, but Gwen detected something there in the eyes, in the warm hand that rose to cup her jaw. There was no defining or labeling it. Her

experience proved too limited for that. But her instincts told her something very unconventional had evolved between the two of them in the short time they'd known one another.

"Has anybody ever told you you're hot?"

"Hot?"

"Mmm," Molly purred, brushing her thumb over Gwen's bottom lip. "Hot, as in beautiful. Extremely attractive and sexy."

"Sexy?" Gwen wasn't that naïve. She'd picked up on every "sex" word in that magazine. She'd obsessed over every attractive, modern woman on those colorful, ink-scented pages. But never had she considered herself in the same category. "Me?"

Molly's lips curved up at the corners drawing Gwen's gaze back to the rosy fullness of them. "Oh yes, most definitely *you*."

"Why are you telling me this?"

She shrugged. "Because it's true and because...I want you."

The words resonated in her head and made her vision warble. "Y-you want me? But what...what do you mean by—?"

"Look, it's not my plan to scare you or weird you out. It's just that Cliff and I recently went through a divorce." She removed her hand from Gwen's cheek and planted it on the tiled countertop. Cool, unpleasant air assaulted Gwen's face. "You probably haven't heard of the term before, being from such a proper Amish background and all, but...we both suspect we might be gay."

"Gay?" In the article about kissing women, she recalled that word being used interchangeably with "lesbian" in reference to women seeking women for sexual gratification and emotional support. Her heart skipped a beat and then proceeded to gallop in her chest. It forced every pulse point in her body to pound—including that damp spot between her legs. "You want to be with only women?"

Molly's eyes snapped with delighted surprise. She moved back a step and leaned against the counter, arms crossed over her abdomen. The impish gaze she slid Gwen's way made Gwen's breathing come in short pants. "So you know what a lesbian is?" Molly asked with a tone of satisfaction.

Gwen propped the mixer up and finally uncurled her fingers from its handle. "Yes...sort of. I...I've read about them before."

"Well, I don't know why I'm telling you this, especially being so innocent-seeming and all, but yes, I think I might be. Cliff and I divorced when we both suspected it about each other. Oh I've never *totally* been with another woman before...but I have an overwhelming desire and attraction to all that soft femininity that I can't seem to ignore anymore." Her gaze roamed the room, swung back to snare Gwen with eyes of flaming emerald. "And I definitely have an attraction to you."

"To me?" Gwen swallowed a lump of disbelief. "So you mean you want *me*?"



Her gaze warmed, searching Gwen's with urgent need. It was almost a painful, pleading look, one of tender longing and gentleness that made Gwen yearn to wrap her arms around Molly. But cowardice and uncertainty in her own true feelings kept her rooted to her spot.

"Yes. I want you, Gwen. I knew it as soon as I opened that door and laid eyes on you today. But I also knew, based on your style of dress and the donkey and all—"

"Mule. Ada's a mule."

She waved a hand. "Whatever."

"There is a difference."

Molly wrinkled her nose. "Sorry, but not to me. Anyway, I knew it probably wasn't going to happen on your part. But a woman can fantasize, can't she?"

Yes, firsthand, she knew a woman could fantasize. Gwen's words came out in a breathy whisper. "I...I don't know what to say."

"Say nothing if you don't want to. But I thought you should know in case you were getting...vibes from me. And in case," she added with a wink, "you wanted to take me up on it."

"I...oh dear." Gwen exhaled forcibly to help calm her quivering voice. "I—well, I just don't think so."

"No problem." She smiled, but the usual sunniness didn't quite reach her eyes. "I understand. But if the mood should ever strike you, just know I'm ready at any hour of the night or day." The grin faded. Her gaze searched Gwen's so thoroughly, she could swear she could feel its caress. "And I'll be gentle. I'll show you love and pleasure like I'm certain you've never seen before."

Gwen glanced at the chocolate batter then back at Molly in an attempt to still the wicked scenes that flashed through her mind once again. "I-I can't stay. I have to go very soon."

"I know. I can tell by the jittery movements, the way your eyes periodically dart over your shoulder. So you see, that's another thing, babe. You're welcome and safe here for as long as you want to stay. And that asshole who seems to have put the fear of hell in you? He won't be stepping even one foot onto my property."

At mention of Jakob, all of those forbidden, wanton thoughts she'd been entertaining went up in smoke and acrid ash. "You don't know him."

"No I don't, but I'm pretty sure he's a fucking jerk. I'm certain too that I could show you pleasures and happiness you've most likely never even glimpsed from that bastard. But no matter what he did or didn't do, he's as good as dead if he trespasses on my property."

She patted Gwen's cheek to seal her promise, her hand warm and gentle. It had been meant as a friendly gesture, Gwen was sure, but that all changed when their stares met and locked. Gwen's throat went dry and her pulse raced out of control. Molly's

eyes glazed over and she let out a faint moan. She leaned nearer, the fragrance of warm woman filling Gwen's lungs.

Her hand slid back to curl around Gwen's neck. Helpless to stop the momentum, Gwen stood there stunned as Molly pulled her close and pressed her lips to Gwen's gaping mouth. Her eyelids fluttered shut. She didn't know what to do with her arms, so she held them at her sides and fisted her dress in her hands. A rush of boiling blood flooded her center. The sweet flavor of lemonade burst in her mouth when Molly flicked her tongue in and out of Gwen's mouth for a brief, astonishing moment.

"There, see the difference?" Molly whispered.

Gwen could only stare, her legs trembling with the excitement of what she'd just experienced. *Um Gottes Willen, I've been kissed by another woman!* Just like in the magazine. And Lord help her, she had enjoyed it.

"I don't think this—" In spite of the tingly sensations bubbling inside her, Gwen attempted a respectable protest, but her words were cut off by a male voice behind her.

"Hey, Molly."

They both started. Molly stepped away from Gwen, leaving her cold and alone.

A heavyset man in the dining room bent and peered through the low buffet window. His full-moon, ruddy face filled the left side of the opening. Had he seen them kissing? The thought of that possibility made Gwen want to turn tail and run. Mortification made her face steam as she hung her head in shame.

"Hey, Louie." Other than her initial surprise, Molly appeared not to be the least bit concerned if they'd been spied. She spun on her heel, smearing the splatters of batter across the floor with her boot, and popped the top off her soft drink. "What the hell are you doing here?" She threw her head back and guzzled.

Louie planted bear-paw, beefy hands on the overhang. His beady eyes slid down Gwen's body, making her shiver with revulsion. He licked his thin lips and shifted his open scrutiny to Molly, ogling the length of her as she took another long swallow of the soft drink. Gwen's teeth ground together, though she wasn't sure if it was because of the man's general rudeness or...was it irritating her that he openly lusted after Molly?

The sudden thought had her gasping inwardly. No, that was absurd. It couldn't be the case...could it?

"Came by to let you know your kitchen cabinets should be done by now. Picking 'em up tomorrow, if that's okay."

"Sure."

"Cool. I'll drop 'em off and store 'em in your garage until I can get back next week to install 'em. Sound good?"

"Perfect, Louie. Thanks." Molly crossed to the swing door.

"Good, good." He flicked his gaze over Gwen then back to Molly. "Who's your pretty little new cook?"

"This is..." Molly's words trailed off. She shrugged. "Just a guest helping out."

"Some guest, huh?" Louie wiggled his eyebrows.

Molly crushed the soft drink can in her hand. "Was that all, Louie? The cabinets, I mean?"

He chuckled, leaning an elbow on the overhang. "Yeah, except one thing." His hungry stare swept the buffet. "Mind if I swipe a couple 'em buttery rolls?"

Gwen's spine straightened. She longed to reach through the window and slap his fat, dirty hand away from her buffet spread.

"No, help yourself," Molly said in a bored tone.

"Thanks." He chose four rolls and added, "I know you keep the garage open, so I'll just drop 'em cabinets off sometime tomorrow without pestering you."

"No problem. Cliff'll be back by the beginning of next week. Just let whoever's here know when you need to get into the kitchen for installation."

"Will do. Hope he's having himself a good Florida vacation, the lucky fucking dog." He popped an entire roll into his mouth, slurped his greasy fingers and waddled off.

Gwen's stomach churned as she watched him leave. Though Louie had a fat, squatty build compared to Jakob's tall and lean frame, the man still somehow reminded her of her husband and his uncouthness.

Gwen's mood swirled and twisted, morphing from revulsion to fear to irritation. Her words came out in a rush. "Molly, look, I really need to be going. I—"

She started to push through the door but paused. "No, please, not that again. Just another day or two. I do understand. Really, I do, but you'll be fine."

"I know you understand but..."

"I know one other thing for certain right now. There're almost a dozen hungry guests out there who'll be looking for a chocolate cake for dessert." She grinned, her gaze shifting to the splatters of batter. "Hopefully there's enough left to amount to a whole cake."

Gwen looked away. There was just no arguing with this woman. She would simply have to leave without further discussion, or Molly might do all she could to talk her into staying. And Gwen just might be tempted after that kiss.

"I'll get the cake in the oven right away." *Then leave in the middle of the night.*

"Great." She pushed the door halfway open, turned back. "Um, good job on the meal prep, by the way. But you better hurry it up, gorgeous. The wolves are hungry...including me." She added a wink and a toothy smile. With a mocking jiggle to her brows, she exited the room.

Gwen pressed a trembling hand to her chest. Her curiosity and the incessant, pounding ache between her legs in that woman's presence told her she longed to explore Molly's "hunger", but fear rode her hard.

Both she and Molly were as good as dead if Jakob were to ever find out about Gwen's sinful thoughts and transgressions where Molly was concerned. Not to mention

that shocking, wicked kiss they'd just indulged in. Had that interruption been Jakob instead of Louie, she'd already be a dead woman.

\* \* \* \* \*

Predawn light streaked across the sky in a breathtaking swirl of vivid pink, orange and lavender. Sated after indulging in coffee and the moist blueberry muffins Gwen had prepared yesterday afternoon, Molly lounged in the rocker at Gwen's bedside. She teetered forward and back as a cool morning breeze rustled the gauzy Priscilla curtains. Outside, she could hear the rustle of leaves in the wind, the tweeting melody of birds and the distant hum of a tractor. She could smell the scent of the lilac bushes at the rear of the inn as it wafted in through the open window.

The bed and breakfast itself remained peaceful and cozy. Guests hadn't yet stirred, but soon they'd be rising, experiencing the same serenity she did, following the warm aromas to the kitchen where Molly had set out Gwen's tasty offerings and started the coffee to perking.

Gwenyth lay curled on her side facing Molly. She'd obviously collapsed on top of the quilt last night, not even bothering to cover herself against the slight chill in the night air. The only sign of life seemed to be the gentle rise and fall of her shoulder as she softly breathed in, breathed out. The face glowed in a relaxed state of rest, the expression innocent in spite of the carnal fullness to the slightly parted lips. Her bonnet was still tied at the neck but had been pushed away from her face and now rested against her nape.

Molly rocked forward, reached for the bun at the back of Gwen's head and very gently pulled the pins from its mass. She combed her fingers through the long thickness of flaxen waves and spread them across the pillow behind Gwen. Smoothing the silkiness of strands, Molly then pinched the tie and tugged, slowly removing the cap and placing it on the bedside table.

But Gwen didn't stir. Exhaustion had taken its hold and left her almost comatose.

A fierce protectiveness welled up inside Molly. Gwenyth's earlier nocturnal screams had brought Molly into her room hours ago. Other than slipping out for a bite to eat, she'd stayed a good part of the night at Gwen's side, watching her fitful sleep. Molly had heard Gwen's eerie wails of "*Nein, nein, Jakob, please don't hurt me!*" and had watched her fight off the demons of her nightmares with flailing arms and gut-wrenching sobs. With each hour that had passed, each unconscious plea that had escaped those sweet lips, Molly fell just a little bit harder.

No, she wouldn't call it love—it was way too soon for that. But something akin to tender affection and an overwhelming need to choke the life from this abusive Jakob character rode her almost obsessively.

Dare she crawl into bed next to Gwen and gather her in an embrace? Oh how she longed to do just that! But it had nothing whatsoever to do with sex. The throbbing ache of desire between her legs while in the kitchen with Gwen yesterday had ebbed for

now. It had been replaced by something altogether new and perplexing. Molly didn't quite know how to define it—no, she didn't *want* to define it or dwell on it at the moment. But she knew it to be something fresh and unsullied, almost baffling.

It felt right, comfortable and normal, unlike the awkwardness and lack of spark she'd endured with Cliff. Yes, all in all, it was far from what she'd ever felt for Cliff.

Her gaze fell to the swell of breasts pressing against the dowdy dress. There was no skin revealed, no flaunting flashes of womanly sexuality often seen in the world today. But even in the high-necked, shin-length garment, Molly knew the flesh would be soft beneath the dark fabric. She knew the globes were small yet full and the hips flared as they cradled the sweet core of her.

How long had it been since she'd devoured one of her movies and thoroughly used up the batteries in her vibrator? A week? Three? A month?

She sighed. It really made no difference. Regardless of the timeframe, she ached for this woman in a way that had almost nothing to do with lust. It felt different, purer, sweeter. Just what it was, she didn't know for sure, but she *would* find out before Gwen departed.

Gwen moaned and twisted, once again entering that nightmare-ridden state of unconsciousness. She tossed her head from side to side and flung one arm out, the long sleeve of the dress riding up. That was when Molly got her first glimpse of the multi-colored bruises up and down the delicate pale skin of Gwen's inner forearm. There were several sets of circular fingerprint marks all in various stages of healing, from almost black to blue to pale yellow.

Molly's jaw clenched. There was no doubt in her mind this Jakob was responsible for the marred flesh as well as the cowering mannerisms and the fleeting flickers of fright in Gwen's unusual eyes. Anger and the instinct to lash back at him welled up in Molly's chest.

"That does it," she whispered.

The urgent need to hold Gwen swelled so violently she couldn't help herself. There would be no stopping her now. Molly rose, rounded the bed and crawled in behind Gwen. Very gently, she scooted forward until she could curl her body behind Gwen's spoon-fashion.

Gwen's movements stilled. She sighed and relaxed against Molly's body, as if she sensed the protectiveness that blanketed her.

Molly slowly slid her arm over the gentle arc of Gwen's pelvis. She caressed it, skimming her palm lower so that she could press her hand against the flat abdomen. Affection washed through her in a fierce sweep. Molly tightened her hold, drawing Gwen firm into the bend of her own body. She inhaled the warm essence of woman, etched the feel of curves and softness into her female-starved soul. Refusing to address the sudden spark of fire in her loins, Molly instead moved one step closer to the possibility she might be a lesbian.

And she finally slept.

## Chapter Three

Though Gwen's eyes were shut, she knew she wasn't dreaming. By the blissful warmth in the room and the golden rays alight beyond her eyelids, she knew it was morning. She must have slept through the night, missing her chance at a late-night departure. Exhaustion had drugged her to the point of near death. But now that she was well rested, she'd have to prepare to leave during daylight hours. Either that, or wait until tonight.

With the sensations that currently bombarded her, she knew that would most likely be her decision. How could she walk away from this, hours after the bliss of it?

A breeze blew in, carrying with it the scent of country dew and womanly heat. She didn't open her eyes. Instead, she chose to drink in the languid sensations that had welcomed her into wakefulness, the delicious, lazy throbbing in her cunt, the tingly tautness to her nipples.

She lay on her back as lips soft and gentle brushed hers. No poking whiskers, no foul breath, just sweet, velvety lips that tasted of blueberries and cream. A silky tongue flicked over her mouth, wet and soft. Teeth clamped onto her bottom lip, sucked, pulled, released. This wasn't merely a kiss, Gwen surmised in her sleepy state of waking dreams. This had to be sinful heaven, confirmed by the strange ache that traveled from her tongue and burned a trail through her bloodstream to that damp spot between her legs.

Gwen didn't need to open her eyes and verify it was Molly. The spicy, familiar, wild scent, the husky but feminine moans and sighs, the soft caress of body to body...no, this was far from a man.

The kiss proved to be nothing like kissing Jakob—or Lars Eberhart when she'd been fifteen and they'd met secretly behind her father's barn. He'd devoured her like a rabid wolf, leaving her mouth slobbery and her heart void of...something, but she'd never been able to put her finger on it.

And as a teen still living with her parents, she'd often awaken with explosive, delicious waves of something starting to crash through her loins. Her hand would be fumbling between her legs. She'd rubbed as frantically as she could, and every time she'd come fully awake to the disappointment of the just-out-of-reach climax.

Following her marriage to Jakob, the almost-blissful treats had tapered off. The more she prayed they would grace her dreams as an escape from what she endured with him, the more the dreams would elude her. But only in her vague imaginings or fumbling masturbation through the years had she been able to achieve even an inkling of the yearning, sweet ache that now burned deep within her. That ecstasy had been

reborn with Molly's kisses, and it had grown into something far bigger, something that made her so breathless, she writhed with it.

No longer did the cravings evade her. The joy of it burst inside her soul. Here, now, with this woman, promise of those secret pleasures had returned.

*I want you, Gwen.*

Molly's prior words resonated in her thoughts, one after another, tempting her like a decadent, sinful dessert.

*I'll be gentle. I'll show you love and pleasure like I'm certain you've never seen before.*

No, she'd never traversed this glorious mountain with someone else before. With the exception of those dreams and her lonely attempts at self-pleasure, the disappointing, sickening contacts with her husband and that one incident with Lars had been the extent of her experience. But now this...yes, this had been what she'd been missing, what she'd coveted without the luxury of being able to define it or explore her curiosity.

Her heartbeat accelerated, pulsating wildly behind her sternum. Unable to resist, she reached up and wrapped her arms around Molly's neck. Long, silky tresses blanketed her arms. A heavy, hot quickening stirred deep in her abdomen. It filled her with wonder, with those newly awakened desires she'd felt but fleeting glimpses of when reading her secret magazine or touching herself. With an instinct Gwen had never realized she possessed, she arched her hips in a desperate need to get closer, to enter and be entered.

*I've never been with another woman before...but I have an overwhelming desire and attraction to all that soft femininity that I can't seem to ignore anymore.*

Yes, Gwen was starting to understand Molly's bold declaration. Something very much like pride and affection bloomed in her chest at the thought of this being not only Gwen's first "lesbian" encounter but Molly's as well. Shame seemed to have taken a hiatus. She mentally swatted away Jakob's *sinner!* accusation as it pealed and clanged in that grating voice in the back of her head.

But it gradually faded and became replaced by soft sighs and soaring emotions she didn't know what to do with. She felt certain she wanted this woman all to herself, wanted to learn and experience the joy of this newly discovered treasure together with her.

Just this once.

Ah, if only she didn't have to worry about Jakob finding her... But she dashed that depressing thought away as quickly as it had come and focused on the glorious moment.

Taken by surprise at Gwen's brave move, Molly groaned and deepened the kiss. She threw one leg possessively – almost roughly – between Molly's. It sent a jolt of lust through her core, and made her buck up so that her pussy slammed into Molly's firm but soft thigh.

Before this moment, she would never have admitted to herself that the people in her fantasies had been female. Shame—and fear at being found out and banished from her community—had forced her to immediately shove that realization into the deep, perverted recesses of her mind following the pre-climactic pleasures she'd bestowed upon herself.

But not now. Her Amish world lay far behind her, and it would stay there forever if she went about her escape with cunningness. If she could help it, she never intended to return. Instead, she wanted *this*. She needed this desire and all the wicked, selfish fulfillments of The Outside in order to finally be happy. She wanted to use electric mixers and to wear tight man-trousers. Gwen yearned to own her very own motorized vehicle and to learn to drive it. She wanted to curse, to wear makeup and to decorate her abdomen with jewels.

She simply just wanted.

As the kiss grew deeper, so did her silent declarations. She craved this decadent, tantalizing lesbianism that she now realized had silently lurked in her soul for years, perhaps her entire life.

At Gwen's profound second of insight, Molly snaked her hand down and back up to search under Gwen's dress. Pushing aside the crotch of the cotton briefs, Molly found the prize that Gwen offered up.

Gwen's legs fell open. She cooed, sighed. "Ah, oh..."

Fire like she'd never known before engulfed her within its inferno. The heat of Molly's fingers branded her forever. In Molly's kiss, Gwen tasted passion and sweet desire. In her touch, she sensed desperation and need. Every one of Gwen's senses exploded, as if finally being born. With a gentle dance of her fingertips, Molly circled Gwen's clitoris, making the blood pool there, the lust simmer. Hot cream trickled out of her hole, coating her labia and soaking her panties.

"I'm sorry, Gwen, but I can't help myself." Molly whispered it against Gwen's mouth. "You're just too irresistible for your own good." She pushed through the curls, down along Gwen's slit until she located the heart of her wetness.

Gwen jolted, gasping out a cry of sweet torture.

"Please, tell me, give me permission. Do you want this or not?" Molly asked, her mouth dragging back and forth over Gwen's while her fingers did the same to her private, womanly lips.

Gwen panted, writhed against the sinful, irresistible sensations that bombarded her. "Y-yes. I...I do."

"Are you sure? I have to know for certain before I go any further. Please, Gwen, please..." Her touch did wondrous, glorious things to Gwen's newly unleashed libido. In a matter of minutes, she'd gone from a deep, dead sleep to unfathomable wantonness. Oh yes, there was no doubt about it anymore. She wanted this—no, she *had* to have it or die.

"Don't...please don't stop. Oh yes, yes, I'm—*ah!*"



The slim finger sank into her vagina. Gwen arched her back and bucked up so that she swallowed Molly's digit to the knuckle. She yanked Molly down, and like a depraved harlot, she pushed her tongue into Molly's open mouth. The finger pumped, fucked, tempted beyond anything Gwen had ever dreamed of. She moaned into the kiss, her tongue dueling frantically, hungrily even as she spoke. Her body reached for that unknown yet suspected pinnacle of ecstasy. "Yes, oh sweet Lord, *yes!*"

"Gwen..." Molly pulled back and stared down at her with an almost painful expression. Her eyes sparkled like rich gems while her lips were swollen and glistening by the languid glow of the sunrays that slanted over the bed. "I-I've never done this before—made love with another woman, that is. It feels even more right than I imagined it would. But please, please understand it could take me time—more than one try—to bring you the pleasure you deserve."

Her heart stilled its thumping. She could hear the distant chirping of birds and an occasional creak of boards upstairs as guests stirred. Emotion flooded her chest making her eyes sting with tears. "No one has ever sought to bring me pleasure before."

Molly blinked, but her gaze snapped with a mixture of awareness and vengeance. "Well, I promise you that's about to change."

Her gaze searched the beautiful planes and angles of Molly's face framed by that mane of dark, silky hair. Mesmerized by all the femininity, Gwen dashed away the small amount of shyness that held her back. Newfound bravery, freedom and liberation empowered her. She raked a hand through Molly's long tresses, trying to compare the texture to something, anything in her past experience. But it felt like nothing she'd ever touched before, not the cottony batting in the quilts she'd stitched or the linen of sheets she'd laundered.

It was not only the glorious softness of the strands caressing her fingertips that invigorated her, but the mere freedom to carry out her urges. Like a caged bird finally in flight, finally freed from lifelong confinement, she soared. She could actually satisfy all those curiosities that had secretly fascinated—no, haunted—her for a very long time. She stopped to flutter here, flutter there, to explore whenever and however she chose.

"No, you don't understand." Gwen adored the sensation of the soft, lightweight body against hers. She never wanted the heavy mass of a man on her again!

Tracing a trembling finger across Molly's nape and down to her collarbone, Gwen tightened her groin muscles around the digit still buried inside her cunt. It delighted her to watch the heavy-lidded reaction and hear the hitches of breath her enthusiasm wrought from Molly. "This...all of this. It's enough. It's more than I've ever had before. It *is* pleasure in and of itself. You don't need any more time because you've already shown me joy I've only dreamed of until now. It is joy like I've never, *ever* experienced before meeting you."

"Oh honey." Molly pressed her lips to Gwen's fanning the smoldering ache in her loins. "Then believe me, you're about to be blown away."

"Molly?"

"Mmm-hmm?" She flicked her tongue out, traced Gwen's lips and slowly slid a second finger to join the first inside her creamy canal.

Flickers of the bliss that had plagued her dreams long ago started to snap off in her loins. Her vagina dampened further and her nub throbbed as Molly pushed in, slid out, faster, harder, her thumb dancing over Gwen's turgid clit. "I-I want to see your body, your skin. I want to touch it. Is that okay?"

Molly groaned. She removed the pair of talented fingers, leaving Gwen with an empty, unsated numbness in her womb. Molly rose up on her hands, her eyes wide. The move pressed her leg firmer into Gwen's pussy, making her clench and gasp. "Is that *okay*? Holy crap, you think you have to ask?"

Gwen felt a warm flush wash over her face. "No but..."

Molly leaped from the bed. As she spoke, her eyes raked up and down Gwen's length, making her nipples tingle, her cunt dribble more cream onto her thighs. "Yes, you're going to see my naked body, touch it—hell, *taste* it if you want." She drew her short little green shirt over her head with no hesitation whatsoever. Gwen indulged in her first-ever look at real-life breasts pouring from a lacy white bra. It did something to her, very nearly grabbed her by the throat and left her breathless. The throbbing in her passage turned incessant, almost painful.

Gwen sat up and started to draw her dress over her head, but she paused at what met her gaze.

"Don't. Wait." Molly unzipped her jeans and slid them down, along with her thin satiny panties. They pooled at her ankles and she stepped out of them. The complexion of her skin glowed healthy and tan in the slanted beams of sunlight pouring onto the wood floor. The lean body and faintly corded legs spoke of health, strength and pride in her remarkable body. Long, loose hair flowed over caramel shoulders, adding just the right touch of femininity to the strong picture she presented.

Unable to resist, Gwen's gaze shifted downward. She couldn't help but notice the smooth, hairless lips of Molly's cleft. It sent a tremor through her. She'd heard whispers from other Amish ladies about the rumor of outside women removing the hair from their privates. It had always intrigued Gwen and made her loins pulse with a strange need. Now she knew why. The evidence of such a peculiar but intriguing practice perched before her. It allowed her to see every lip and every crease, along with the swollen, petal-like protrusion of Molly's clitoris perched at the top of her slit.

"I want to undress you myself," Molly added.

Gwen suppressed a wave of giddiness. The clandestine words combined with the delicious sight before her fed her desire. Her stare fell from the ample breasts spilling out of the push-up bra down over the taut abdomen adorned with the sparkly white jewel. She recalled her first sight of it yesterday, how she'd yearned to get her hands on it.

Her fingers flexed. "Can I touch it?"

Molly's eyelids went limpid. She skimmed her hand down her belly, across her unclothed hip and cupped herself. "This?"

*God alive, help you, Gwenyth. All this time you've been missing this?*

"Yes, that for sure." Discomfiture pinkened her cheeks, but Gwen didn't let that stop her. "But also the stone at your navel. It's...I don't know..."

"Sexy?"

She nodded, allowing her famished gaze to peruse the long lean legs, to study Molly's hand as she went to work on her own sex. "Yes, very."

Molly stepped up to the bed, unhooked her bra and tossed it aside. Full, round globes sprang free, jiggling at Gwen's eye level. Her mouth watered and she licked her lips, basking now in the intermittent flooding of hot juices between her thighs. Molly's areolas stood taut and sharp, blooming atop the mounds like wild tulips. Gwen caught the scent of a faint muskiness similar to her own, one that seemed to make her breathing go ragged and the fullness in her mons swell. She drew it in, already starved for every aspect of this woman to invade her entire body.

Molly reached down and gripped Gwen's hand, setting it upon her chest, encouraging her to touch, to explore her body with freedom. One soft and spongy sphere filled Gwen's palm, the dark brown nipple springing to life against the pad of her fingers as Molly guided her to cup, squeeze, massage. Slowly, maddeningly, Molly dragged Gwen's hand downward over her flat belly. She took Gwen's fingertip and gently traced the jewel that Gwen could now see pierced the skin above Molly's bellybutton.

But she didn't allow that for long. Instead, she turned Gwen's hand and pushed it down so that she experienced her very first touch of a woman's pussy.

Gwen gasped, simply awestruck by the utter softness that grazed her fingertips.

Molly's head fell back, her eyes rolled up in their sockets. "Yes, just like that. Mmm." The sound tore from her throat feline-like. Something about it made that spot between Gwen's legs throb more incessantly. It urged her to do more, to trace the folds and experimentally rub her fingertips over the hard nub beneath the swollen clitoris. It was positioned in the very same spot she'd found hers when she'd attempted to masturbate. Lower still, the lips were smooth and soft like the satiny texture of a flower, and they shimmered as if the morning dew had drizzled across their petals.

"Gwen, oh Gwen. I want you—now." Molly panted, wrapping her arms around Gwen's head. Molly clutched Gwen against her midriff so Gwen's cheek pressed right next to the twinkling navel jewel. She inhaled, closing her eyes and wrapping her arms around supple female curves. It pleased and relieved her that she no longer smelled a man's putrid body odor but a woman's soap-scented, flowery fragrance.

In a flurry, Molly bent and drew Gwen's dress and short chemise over her head. Her face flamed as cool air rushed over her bare breasts, stomach and legs. Molly tossed the garments on the floor and climbed onto the bed, pressing a hand against Gwen's shoulder so she lay on her back. Molly's gaze searched Gwen's flesh, hungry, eager and

urgent. It made her nipples peak with a heat Gwen couldn't describe, the ache of it settling heavy in her cunt.

"Ah, we've got to get you some panties a bit more attractive than these, hon," Molly purred, tugging Gwen's high-waisted undergarment down and off her legs.

The move left Gwen totally nude. Molly's perusal made Gwen's flesh hot and tingly, and every fine hair on her arms stood on end. She didn't know why, but even though embarrassment and self-consciousness heated her flesh, she felt comfortable with her nudity bathed in the filtered light of the morning sun. Never would she have experienced such bold empowerment or pleasure with Jakob. She shuddered at the thought of him and immediately shoved all traces of him from her life.

"Molly..." Gwen relaxed, her back pressed against the cool quilt. She let Molly explore, waited with eager anticipation for what would come next.

"Babe, it's okay," Molly whispered, brushing her lips over Gwen's. The sweet flavor of wanton desire burst in her mouth. Gwen opened her lips and accepted Molly in, at first hesitant, then their tongues rushed into a dueling dance that made Gwen's cunt pulsate and honey pour from her hole.

Molly eased the length of her unclothed body against Gwen's side and slowly dragged her left hand up Gwen's thigh, over her hip and abdomen, stopping to palm one breast. Sucking in a breath, Gwen arched her back and closed her eyes. She rode on the pleasure of the gentle touch, chill bumps shimmering over her skin once again. Molly's kiss became more urgent, wetter, hotter. She shifted until she lay atop Gwen, breast-to-breast, pussy-to-pussy, legs intertwined.

She'd never experienced the passionate animal-on-animal urges until now, so Gwen could only go on Molly's lead and her own body's reflexes. Her arms closed around Molly, gathering her close so their hard areolas abraded over one another, sending flashes of bliss straight to the raging bonfire between her legs. She raised her knees and spread them wide, Molly's hips wedged between them. Reaching for that pinnacle she'd never arrived at before, Gwen gyrated upward so her wetness ground into Molly's, two women becoming one. From afar it seemed, Gwen heard the moans, the soft panting and sighs, and she rejoiced that the song of it was a pleasant melody.

*Sexy.*

Oh she now understood what that word meant, and she never again wanted to be without it.

Molly's hands tangled in Gwen's hair. She thrust her groin into Gwen's, grinding her clitoris over her hard nub. Gwen looked into glazed eyes lost in lust. For once in her life, she welcomed and comprehended the emotions she saw there. She too drowned in the desperation and giddiness of pre-climax.

"Gwen, I-I'm going to come. I-I can't—oh!" Molly arched her head back, her smooth neck stretching. She howled wolf-like, her body twitching, her hands clutching wherever she could hold on. It seemed to go on forever, and all Gwen could do was look up at her with fascination, watching, enchanted, as Molly's beautiful face contorted

in pleasure. Finally, she stiffened one last time, collapsing on Gwen's chest. Her breath came in short gasps.

"I-I'm sorry, Gwen. Oh fuck me, but that was so wonderful." Catching her breath, she began to scoot down Gwen's body. "And now you're going to feel the same thing..."

"Molly, it's okay. God help me, but that was so amazing. I-I really liked it."

"Liked it?" Molly giggled, kissing her way down Gwen's fluttering abdomen. "If you liked that, just wait until you feel...this."

Gwen jerked, inhaling swiftly when Molly's tongue swiped her clit. "Oh...oh..." She thrashed her head from side to side, her hands first grasping the quilt then entangling in Molly's hair. Sharp, wicked shards of pleasure sliced through Gwen's core and combusted deep inside her womb. Molly's moist, hot tongue alternated delving into her hole and doing a delicious dance over her swollen button.

Gwen couldn't hold still, couldn't remain quiet. Her throaty moans carried out through the open window, out across the inn's yard. The cool morning breeze wafted in to caress her skin and fan across its wet sheen. She could smell Molly's juices mixed with her own, all coated by the heady fragrance of lilac in the air. Her throat went dry, and she arched up one more time when Molly sank three fingers into her dripping tunnel while her tongue continued to wreak havoc on Gwen's pearl.

Suddenly, she went rigid. Her breath clogged in her windpipe when immense, indescribable desire washed through her. Her pussy muscles convulsed, tightening around Molly's fingers. Instinctually, she drove her knot one last time against the velvety softness of Molly's tongue, reaching for her first-ever peak of pleasure. It came to her on a wave of wonder and understanding, her toes curling, her skin coming to life like never before.

Gwen lay there stunned as her soaring soul floated back into her body. She couldn't catch her breath. It seemed her spirit had finally come to life, embracing elation and wondrous magic she'd never been allowed to experience before now. Wicked. God, she felt completely wicked. There were no words to describe the realization that this was what she had been missing out on all those dull, cruel years of her life. How could such joy ever be classified as sin?

*No, this isn't sin. It is a sin to not be happy, to not savor the joys of God-given nature. To be cruel.*

No more, Gwen thought as Molly crawled up and snuggled against her side. Never again would she deny herself such a magnificent, beautiful thing as what Molly just gifted her with.

"Molly?"

"Mmm?" She sighed and pulled the quilt over their cooling bodies.

"Thank you. It...it was wonderful."

Molly kissed her shoulder, a gentle gesture that made a little glowing ache catch painfully in Gwen's chest. "No, baby, thank *you*. You possibly just helped me confirm my suspicions. Hot fucking damn, it's true. I think I *am* a lesbian."

Gwen thought about her reply for a long moment.

"All I am is free. Free and grateful," Gwen whispered. "Divorce is not an option where I come from, but as far as I'm concerned, I'm no longer his wife. I'm so grateful to be free from that demon. Never again, never..."

\* \* \* \* \*

Jakob Freemont sat behind his table saw and removed his goggles, watching with a disguised sneer as the man waddled into the cabinetmaking shop, his breathing labored from the short walk inside.

"Hello." The chubby man smiled thinly, planted his thick arms on the wooden countertop and looked down his pug nose at Jakob.

"Welcome." Jakob spoke to him as he did all outsiders – with very few words.

"I've come to pick up my order." He yanked his wallet from the tightness of his rear pants pocket, presenting his copy of the order form and paid receipt. "And it better be ready. I ain't making that fuckin' drive again."

Jakob slowly slid the safety shield over the blade of his saw and set down the drawer-facing board on the workbench. Swiveling in his seat, he switched the kerosene-operated generator to idle mode. "Your order has been finished since the last day of our Lord."

"Since Sunday?" He gawked, his eyes narrowing into two slits in a pudgy, grayish moon. "And you didn't call me? I could have come sooner."

"I do not have a phone," Jakob replied in a monotone.

"I do not have a phone," the man mimicked, slamming his fist on the top of a nearby cabinet, one on display for sale. "You idiot! You know I'm a good customer, so why do you always treat me so coldly?"

"Please, Louie." Jakob rose and unfolded his stature, stepping around his work area and coming to tower over the rotund man. Looking down with a gleam akin to the devil, he ground out, "Do not touch the merchandise."

Louie looked up into Jakob's smoldering stare. The rage drained from his face and became replaced by a pink sheen of awkwardness. Yes, Jakob sneered silently, all it ever took with this coward was a warning glower to put his fat ass in its place.

"Damn, sorry, Jakob." Louie fidgeted, his nervous gaze scanning the rustic shop. "I'm just on edge is all. It's that innkeeper bitch always flaunting her stuff. I mean, a guy can't go around *all* his life with blue balls, ya know? As if Molly isn't enough temptation, now she's got that new little cook."

Louie's jowls sagged and his perspiring brow wrinkled. "Hmm, come to think on it," he said under his breath, "she kind of dresses like your Amish women." He waved a

hand. "Anyway, shit, they've got me in a fucking tailspin, kissing and horny lesbo glances passing between them. Damn, I tell you what, I'm gonna—"

"Did you say Amish?" Jakob clamped his enormous hands around the blubbery arms.

"Ow!" Louie blinked, fear and surprise snapping in his ugly eyes. "Damn you, l-let go of me."

"Did you say Amish?" Jakob repeated, shaking the man until his round head bounced about like a ball on the cushy surface of his shoulders.

"Yes, for christssake, Amish...or Mennonite or something." Louie wrenched himself free and rubbed his thick arm. "Hot wench she is too. Recently arrived with a pair of smoking eyes and a tight little body that won't quit. Betcha ain't got anything like her around here, huh?" He added an attempt at wit by winking.

Jakob wasn't laughing. "Where?"

"Where what?"

*How idiotic could the man be?*

Jakob fisted his hands, ignoring his pounding pulse. "Where did you see the Amish girl?"

"In Miracle at the old inn. But I'm telling you what—"

"Your order is ready," Jakob cut in with a dismissive tone. He had all he could take from this man. But he'd gotten information that proved to be ten times more valuable than the great profit he would make from the cabinets. "Drive around to the rear door and you will find your cabinets ready to be loaded. Once you complete that task, I want you to leave my property and never return."

His jaw clamped, his lips thinning to a scant line in his puffy face. Louie planted paw-like hands on his rounded hips, a wave of bravery assailing him. "Well, you're sure a cocky son of a bitch, aren't you, mister?"

Jakob merely returned to his project and ignored the man.

Spinning on his heel, Louie marched from the little shop and went to load his cabinets.

Jakob glanced up as the little bell above the door tinkled with the man's retreat. He despised that fat slob, but at least for the moment, he was indebted to him for the wealth of information he'd unknowingly given Jakob.

Methodically and with great care, Jakob closed down the shop, shut down the generator and gathered up his full moneybox.

*Gwenyth, if that's you at the inn in Miracle, you better be looking over your shoulder, whore. Ah yes, you're going to rue the day you stole from me and fled like the cowardly little bitch you are.*

## Chapter Four

"I talked with Cliff this morning."

The evening of Gwen's second day at the inn, Molly strode into the laundry room where Gwen picked over the washing machine dials. A cordless telephone hung from Molly's hip so she could wander the property, perform her odds-and-ends jobs and work the front desk at the same time. Her leather tool belt squeaked as she moved. She'd settled it over worn denim shorts that frayed at the hem, and a tight pink sleeveless shirt emphasized her full breasts and showed off her toned arms.

Gwen's gaze slid down the length of lean legs, and a mental picture of those silky limbs entwined with her own bare legs only hours ago made her pussy pound with need.

Her face warmed. How had Gwen become so astutely aware of the human body in a little more than a twenty-four-hour period? Lord help her, but she ached to skim her palms up those legs and explore Molly's wet sex.

"Told him I'd like to open the saloon portion of the inn—it has some history, you know. Over a hundred and thirty years ago, this was the place to be south of Lancaster. So I want to restore it back to its original function instead of using it as that lame-looking parlor. Turn it into a pub to simulate its use in the latter half of the nineteenth century."

Molly grinned just as the golden rays of the setting sun bathed her body through the rear utility window. The excitement lit her tanned, gorgeous face and lent her a glow that took Gwen's breath away. "And hot damn, but dear old tight-assed Clifford agreed."

"A pub?" She feigned nonchalance at Molly's powerful presence and turned the level dial to "low".

Gwen really didn't like discussing this Clifford fellow. Something about it, about him and knowing she'd done all those wicked things with the man's wife—no, *ex*-wife—made her uneasy. She really must concentrate on getting prepared to leave before he returned. Gwen didn't relish looking him in the eye knowing she'd been touched in the most intimate of ways by the man's former wife.

Brushing a stray lock of hair from her brow with the back of her wrist, Gwen forced the thoughts of fleeing from her mind for the time being. Curiosity had her asking, "What's a pub?"

"It's a little cozy restaurant, some place for the townspeople and travelers to come for a sandwich, a beer, a little companionship." Eyes falling to where Gwen fidgeted



with the knobs, Molly replied, "Uh, babe, you gotta pull it out for the cycle to start running."

"Oh." Gwen flicked a look at her then back at the machine. She pulled the knob out until it clicked. "I think a pub would be wonderful." The water swished on, tumbling into the washer barrel and awing her with the cleverness of it. She wasn't sure which invention she deemed most nifty, electricity or indoor plumbing.

Molly sauntered across the small room and came to stop a mere foot from her. The scent of shampoo and leather filled Gwen's nostrils. Molly crossed her arms over her midriff, underscoring the feminine swells of her chest, a move that drew Gwen's eyes like the wicking of water through the sheets in the washing machine.

*God, how one simple gesture can give me such a thrill, I don't know.*

"Well, don't you get it? I can't do it without you, Gwenny."

Gwen's eyes riveted to those sharp green orbs. Heaven above, help her, but she could get lost in those pools forever. And to hear the pet name used in such a cavalier, affectionate manner made her hair stand on end and gave her a tempting sense of comfort—not a good thing when she was doing all she could not to let her guard down.

"I-I'm only staying temporarily. I already told you that. Maybe longer than originally planned, but..."

Molly's warm hand curled around Gwen's forearm. The gentle touch was reminiscent of their early morning, wanton coupling. Gwen's blood thickened, racing with relentless desire. She fought the urge to press her palm to the back of Molly's hand and explore the long length of silky flesh that rose to the feminine yet strong shoulder. Instead, she planted her hand on the vibrating washer in an effort to support her trembling knees. Swallowing, she tried to wet the dryness that had suddenly plagued her throat. But it seemed all the moistness had settled in the crotch of her underpants instead.

"I need you," Molly whispered, squeezing Gwen's arm. "I need you here to help me. Please stay. Please don't go so soon."

Gwen clamped her hands together and remained silent. *No one has ever needed me before.*

Molly had lent Gwen several articles of clothing, and now, standing there in the worn jeans and the blue cotton, button-down blouse with the sleeves rolled up, was akin to wicked nakedness. It had somehow made that spot between her thighs tingle non-stop as soon as she'd first donned the pants. The snug crotch had caused her soft cotton panties to rub against her sensitive labia. God alive, Gwen longed to rip both their clothes off and yank Molly into her arms, to devour those full lips again, just like that incredible first encounter. She could feel her cheeks blazing at the memory of it, and yet her body insistently demanded more.

No doubt about it Gwen had been bewitched by a woman. There was no other description for this irresistible pull between them.

"I can't. I should probably leave tomorrow." Her voice quivered, trembling with fear at not only the possibility of Jakob finding her but at Molly's ability to sway her. She studied Molly, the proud stance, the cloud of dark hair framing her sharp features, and imagined shamefully the sensation of their lips touching again, dewy silk brushing over dewy silk. "It's too dangerous."

"You can't run all your life," Molly threw out as she lifted a hand to tuck a lock of Gwen's hair behind her ear. It made Gwen shudder with pleasure, and the tender gesture held her glued in place. "When will you stop? When will you determine you've gone far enough from him?"

She hadn't thought of that, had only been focused on running. When *would* she stop? "I...I don't know."

"Honey, you don't want to have to keep hiding from that creep and never standing up to him, do you?" Her eyes were accusing and compassionate all at the same time. Molly cupped Gwen's jaw, stroking the underside of her ear with her fingertips. Gwen shivered at the woman's intoxicating power. She marveled at the fact that in a twenty-four-hour period, she had been touched with more care and concern than she had ever experienced in her entire life.

Gwen glanced down, avoiding that penetrating stare. "I just want...a new life. I want to forget it—him. I don't *want* to run. It's just that I have to. You see, I must get as far as possible so I don't *have* to keep running."

Molly tipped Gwen's face up with a slim finger and forced their gazes to meet. A subtle warmth suffused through Gwen's jaw and oozed into her bloodstream. She fought the fluttering of her breath, and concentrated on inhaling slow, exhaling slower yet.

"I think you've gone far enough. Besides, by running and never stopping, sweetie, you're letting him continue to control you."

"No." She shook her head frantically. "No."

Molly's hand snaked down and took Gwen's. She turned and led her to a small mirror that hung above the utility wash sink. "Look at yourself," she ordered, spinning her around until she faced the mirror. "Do you see someone he'll recognize? That anyone will recognize?"

Gwen examined her reflection intently. After they'd risen this morning, she'd done away with the Amish clothes and bonnet at Molly's insistence. Her low ponytail now fell haphazardly over her shoulder, several wavy strands spilling free of the constriction and framing her face. The azure eyes that stared back at her were lit with the beginnings of hope and freedom yet that fire of fear still blazed in their depths.

Her scrutiny moved lower over the pert nose and high cheekbones, settling on her full lips. She'd painted them with a soft pink stick from the tray of makeup that Molly kept on their bathroom sink. She hadn't asked if she could use it. Drawn to it like a waif to a shiny gold coin, she'd studied the tube, swirled it up and down, and had held the stick in front of her lips to see what it might look like on her. Her escape, it seemed, had

given her courage she'd never experienced before. Now transformed into that curious waif, she'd drawn color upon her lips and stared with lengthy fascination at the change that it had produced.

But still, she recognized that frightened woman...and so would Jakob. It was apparent she was still Gwen, and with that determination came the doubt. She met Molly's eyes in the mirror. "He would still know me."

Molly shook her head. "No, I don't think so. I noticed the lipstick as soon as I walked in the kitchen for breakfast. I swear, it really changes your looks, along with your hair like that and wearing regular clothes. But there's a lot more you can do to alter your appearance and style. And I can help you."

"You can?" That cruel seed of hope sprouted once again in her chest. Her heart pounded with possibilities she couldn't even fathom.

"Yes, but only if you agree to stay...at least for the rest of the week until Cliff returns." Molly trailed a finger down Gwen's arm. Gwen quivered, her gaze locking on Molly's in the mirror. Unaided by anyone, the washing machine continued to fill with water, its swishing noise oddly comforting in the small room.

She wanted to stay more than anything—and she wanted this closeness with this woman as well, at least temporarily. Admittedly, she loved this old inn, and she was beginning to feel a kinship to Molly, to admire her straightforwardness and gall in all that she did. But was it too close geographically to the life she'd escaped? Would he, sooner or later, be able to track her down if she didn't move on?

Gwen sighed inwardly. The only way to know was to try, and to maybe allow Molly to transform her so her chances of being recognized were even slimmer. The temptation to stay was a pull too strong to resist. Besides, it was true what Molly had pointed out, that she might never be able to determine when she'd gone far enough, or if "far enough" even existed where Jakob was concerned.

But was she brave enough to take the chance?

Again, she knew she need only attempt it to get her answers. Her inspection shifted to the window next to the door that exited onto a wide rear deck. Beyond it she could barely see the back edge of the side parking lot where an automobile sat gleaming in the pre-dusk, summer sun.

She thought of her long-term plans to buy an automobile and blurted out, "Room and board free, plus a small salary." Gwen surprised even herself. She'd said it almost saucily, and spun around to face Molly as soon as the words had tumbled from her mouth. Negotiation and freedom to speak her mind were all new to her yet she felt so very empowered by it.

Molly's dark brows went up in surprise, which quickly turned to approval. "It's a deal." She winked and thrust out a hand.

Gwen took the offered pact gesture and shook it eagerly. "So when do you show me how to become a new woman?"

Her boisterous laugh carried through the inn. "Baby, we've already started. But you just come with me."

Molly was almost through a door that led into another rear room Gwen had yet to explore, when she stopped dead in her tracks. She eyed the machine as it began to noisily agitate, knocking and bumping against the dryer. She crossed and lifted the lid.

"Um, Gwenny..." Molly turned and pressed her lips together, suppressing a grin. "When you wash a large load, it's probably better to turn the water level to 'high'." She flipped the dial, readjusting it. Molly wasn't done yet, and began tugging on several soggy sheets. "And it's probably a good idea not to overload it either."

"Oh...oh." Gwen peered into the square gizmo and studied the packed contents, the many linens nearly overflowing from its huge tub. "I-I'm sorry."

"It's okay," she assured her, dragging a few sheets from the load and setting the washer to rights. She swiped her wet hands on her shorts and reached for Gwen's hand, guiding her into the next room. "You've been working hard, and I think it's time for a break. Come with me. I'm going to show you a glimpse of heaven."

\* \* \* \* \*

The inn was now vacant except for the two women who gathered in the cluttered back room. Gwen learned it had once been a beauty salon, a proprietorship venture some thirty years ago for one of the many previous owners of the farmhouse. Yellowing domed hair dryers suspended over cracked vinyl seats lined a low room partition. Three chairs that reclined against round-edged sinks sat in line across one side of the room. Another wall displayed cracked mirrors set before a line of swiveling, high-backed seats.

Molly led Gwen to one of the sinks. "Be right back." She left the room and returned within a minute, her arms loaded with bottles of beauty supplies Gwen recognized from their own bathroom. Molly lined them on a shelf above the rinse station. "Sit down. We're going to start from square one."

Gwen had never seen such an odd sink before with a curved U cut into its front edge. "What are you going to do?" she asked suspiciously, refusing to sit.

Molly crossed to one of the swivel seats and plugged in two contraptions Gwen later learned to be a curling iron and blow dryer. She set a comb, brushes, sprays and makeup on the narrow counter below the mirror. As Gwen studied Molly's quick and sure movements, she was starting to capture a glimpse of what Molly had in mind, and it made her heart gallop with girlie anticipation.

"I'm going to show you the woman you can be. The woman he'll never recognize." Her hand reached for Gwen's and she tugged until Gwen sat in a chair set before one of the sinks. Engaging the recline latch, she pressed gently against Gwen's shoulder until she laid back, her neck resting in the curve of the sink's porcelain edge. With adept gentleness, she released Gwen's low ponytail and allowed her pale locks to spill into the sink.

Gwen's eyes wavered between curiosity and shame as she looked up at Molly, her hair tumbling over her shoulders as she bent to her task. "What are you doing?"

Molly turned on the spout and waited until the cool water warmed. "How many times are you going to ask that same question?" When the water began to steam, she soaked the hair that pooled in the basin. Molly moved the sprayer slowly upward until the pulsating heat pounded Gwen's scalp.

"Oh..." Gwen's eyes rolled back in her head. Her tight muscles relaxed, first her neck, then her shoulders. Relief and utter bliss swept down her entire body, permeating through every cell until she felt her toes go limp with bliss.

"Mmm, now I think you're getting it," Molly said huskily.

Molly took a quick peek down the vee of Gwen's shirt at the swell of breast that Gwen knew was displayed to her from her vantage point. Gwen's mouth watered, oozing with longing. Something about the novel empowerment of enticing someone with the intent of seduction made her wild with need. Their eyes met, held. Though new to this cat-and-mouse game of amorous courting, Gwen knew that look now, knew true, warmhearted desire when she saw it. There was no gleam of barbaric lust mixed with underlying anger as she had known with Jakob. It was just pure and respectful desire.

Smiling softly, Molly replied, "You just relax and enjoy. I'm going to wash away that dowdy shell and uncover the new, vibrant gem hiding inside."

Reluctantly, Gwen's eyes fluttered shut. She mentally slapped away the threats and fears that had kept her on edge since her wedding night years ago. Instead, she traversed the shimmy of delicious goose bumps as they spread from her scalp to her toes. Molly scrubbed and rubbed with firm yet gentle strokes, indulging Gwen in succulent sin. Her nails stimulated Gwen's crown, making her groggy and limp. From the shampoo, Gwen caught the aroma of green apples and could feel nature's cleansing of the soul that started to take place. Her body went completely flaccid, and she selfishly allowed this odd woman to perform for her the intimate, caring ritual of grooming.

The hands were gentle yet firm, moving over her head with expertise, massaging her upper neck, her temples, even the backs of her ears. Molly used her fingertips to scour and pamper, her palms to knead and squeeze the suds from the length of Gwen's hair. Gwen could have gone on like this forever and knew she'd do anything in the future to experience the luxury of this once again.

She heard the water spraying and sighed when the steamy wetness permeated the strands and soaked deep to her scalp. Hot water swished into her ears, misted over her face and eased the knot of fear and tension from deep within her every fiber. With the gradual easing of the anxiety came objective knowledge of her situation. She was either being tempted by the devil's own apostle, or she'd been blessed with one of heaven's angels. There was no other way to describe this woman and the ambiguity of this new relationship Gwen had stumbled upon.

Her eyes flickered open when the water shut off. She looked up and found Molly's bosom very near her jaw. The mounds Gwen had filled her hands with that morning jiggled beneath the tight shirt as Molly snapped open another bottle. Gwen's instant reaction was to recoil and cower at the sudden closeness of an outsider into her personal space.

*Relax, Gwen, relax. You're no longer inside that backwards bubble, that stifling prison. You're out in the real world where things are different...where, according to that magazine, sexual pleasures are not supposed to be sinful, but celebrations and expressions of freedom and life.*

Still, the moral, conservative propriety ingrained in her since birth warred with the much needed liberty dying to burst forth in her heart.

But Gwen settled back in, resigned to eternal damnation when she discovered her limbs were as heavy as rocks. Even if she chose to follow the instincts of her upbringing, she had no choice but to give in to her new life, to the paradise that was selflessly being offered to her.

"Don't get up yet. I'm just going to put some leave-in conditioner on your hair."

"Get up? How could I?" she whispered with a rasp. "I can barely move a muscle."

"Good. That's my girl." Molly quickly combed the cream through the strands. Her swift movements caused her left breast to accidentally brush Gwen's jaw. As if she'd been jarred from sleep, Molly suddenly stilled her movements, her startling eyes locking on Gwen's.

It seemed time faltered. Gwen's heart quickened, as did her sex. She longed to turn her face just so, just far enough to bury it in the full mound.

Molly's lips were pursed in a plump pink heart shape, as if she fought for every breath. The eyes probing Gwen's were limpid pools of swift need. The rims were outlined with a thin line of black, and her cheeks had been brushed with rouge.

Slowly, she bent and poised her mouth over Gwen's. "I'm sorry," she murmured hoarsely, her lips so close, Gwen could almost taste her essence. "But I can't help myself."

Her body flaccid and weak, Gwen was unable to move. It was what she'd wanted, she admitted at that moment. She'd fantasized all day about Molly kissing her again, if anything, to see if those lovely aching feelings seeped back deep into her stomach again.

And they did. They already had been since Molly had walked into the utility room moments ago.

She raised a trembling hand and pressed it weakly against Molly's shoulder. She saw the raw desire in the stark eyes, like the emergence of spring's foliage blooming, flaring. "I don't understand this," Gwen croaked.

Molly gripped the hand at her shoulder. She squeezed it and slid it up and around her own neck. "Don't worry what it is. Don't examine it. Just go with." She drew in a shaky breath, her hands stabbing into Gwen's damp hair. As if she mounted a horse,

she threw a leg over Gwen's lap and straddled her. "Goddamn it, I want you, Gwen. I want to make love to you again...and again and again."

Her eyes flared, not at the expletive but at their position, the time of the day, the location. "Here? Now?"

She brushed her lips lightly over Gwen's, flicking her moist, sweet tongue out across the plumpness. A nefarious laugh erupted from deep in Molly's throat. "Yes, here and now. Why not? I want to explore with you, to experience things together that neither of us have encountered before now. Mmm, wonderful, *delicious* things," she added as her hand slid down into Gwen's gaping shirt.

The hot flash struck Gwen from her nipple to that spot between her legs. A gush of cream spilled out and warmed her labia, the whole of her sex pounding with a wondrous ache. She drowned in the unholy sensation of it, of Molly and her talented hands and that mouth of magic. It seemed at that moment, when Molly tweaked her already taut areola and rolled it between her soft fingers, that Gwen's heart completely turned that corner from shame into the arms of freedom.

She heard herself moan throatily into Molly's mouth as she became the willing prey. Their tongues mated, two satin ribbons entwining in desperation. The flavor of the sweet soft drinks Molly always indulged in burst in Gwen's mouth, and she tightened her hold on Molly's neck, drawing her body flush against her own.

Gwen would never forget what happened next. That turning moment in her life, the next hour of wantonness...it would prove to be etched in her soul for eternity.

## Chapter Five

Molly was out of control. Holy hell, but Gwen's sweet breast was like a ripe, soft peach in her hand. She longed to devour both mounds, to suck the sweet nectar from their silkiness. As her tongue gently probed the warm cavern of Gwen's mouth, one hand remained in her damp hair while the other detoured to unbutton the shirt she'd loaned Gwen. Molly brushed the cotton fabric aside skimming her palms over narrow ribs. The move made Gwen moan, her breath panting in a sexy surrender of reckless release.

She inhaled, filling her lungs with Gwen's alluring fragrance. Gwen had showered after their earlier lovemaking and had used Molly's shampoo and scented soap. It smelled different warmed by the unique aroma of Gwen's flesh, utterly intoxicating, musky and spicy all at once.

When she had the worn, ragged bra exposed, Molly tugged it downward until one swollen globe was exposed and supported by the fabric. With a groan, Molly broke the seal on the kiss and dipped her head, ravenously taking an erect tip into her mouth. Mmm, *candy* was all Molly could think. Tasting Gwen's flesh and filling her mouth with the supple round mass was like sweet, pink cotton candy melting in her mouth.

Gwen gasped, her petite body arching upward. Her hands slapped the arms of the chair, clutching in desperation as she fought the bombardment of pleasure. Lying back in the seat, she was laid out like a shrine for Molly's taking. Molly clamped her legs tighter and slid them under the arms of the chair so her throbbing pussy abraded over Gwen's clothed cunt.

"I want more—*have* to have it," Molly murmured, kissing a trail from peak, to collarbone, to a spot just under Gwen's ear where her pulse pounded out of control. She buried her nose in Gwen's wet hair and inhaled the damp, fresh scent of the conditioner she'd just worked into the long locks.

"Don't...please." Gwen thrashed, reaching for Molly, her body speaking contradictorily to her words.

"No, I'll never stop," Molly professed on an indrawn breath as she caressed Gwen's chin, nose, forehead and temples with her mouth. "I want to fuck you again, to make crazy love to you right now."

"Here?"

"Mmm-hmm." She brushed her lips back and forth over that stunned mouth, and her hand slid down between their bodies to cup the damp crotch of Gwen's jeans. "Here."



"B-but I've never heard of this, of doing...*it* in broad daylight—and in a room without a bed."

Her hands came up and she cupped the pale face in them. In the depths of those confused orbs, Molly saw this woman's true desire for her. Yes, it came out ambivalently at times, but it was there, and it meant so very much to her. She looked deep into a troubled soul, one that had grabbed her heart and squeezed from the very first second she'd laid eyes on her. Molly wanted this woman, not as a fling, nor as an experiment to test her sexuality, she suddenly realized, but as her lifelong mate.

*Holy shit, I'm in love with her – I think.*

No, she didn't want to think about it. Was it true? Did she really love this woman? It couldn't be. It was crazy, and it was way too soon. Yes, whether Clifford turned out to be gay or not, Molly had come to the conclusion she most likely was. But gay, and already in love with the very first woman she'd had sex with? And to top off the shock of it, with an *Amish* woman?

She almost laughed at that. Until a grim thought wormed its way into her mind. There was no doubt Gwen would be flying the coop soon. Molly would never be able to hold onto a woman like this for very long, one haunted by that beast Molly had yet to meet. Thrown into the complicated mix that was Gwen loomed the fact she didn't know who she really was yet—or even *where* she was. Gwen was only just beginning her life, her new awakening, and something about intruding on that journey made Molly feel like an outsider who had no right to impose a commitment on Gwen.

Their relationship was, she knew without a doubt, a disastrous break-up waiting to happen.

A knot of sadness wedged behind her breastbone. It hurt like hell. The last thing she wanted at a moment like this was to think of Gwen walking out of her life for good. It was as if she could no longer picture herself at the inn without Gwen. A dim light of hope revived her libido. Hell, now wasn't really the time to ponder it, but maybe she could somehow entice her into staying? If not, then for the moment, she'd take what she could get, while she could get it.

How bizarre, she thought again, unable to let go of the truth of it. In such a short time, she'd fallen for an Amish woman, of all things.

"There's a lot in my world you've never heard of, but you will hear it, see it, feel it," she said, impassioned, her eyes boring into Gwen, "if you stay in my world."

"I'm never going back there. Your world will become mine too, if it's the last thing I do in my life. But I still can't stay. It's too close geographically to him. I want to—I *have* to—get as far from him as humanly possible."

*Damn that fucking monster.*

"Okay, okay," Molly soothed, combing her hands through Gwen's wet strands. "I understand. But for now, can you please just relax and enjoy our time together?"

The corners of her full mouth curved up. "I'd love that, truly, I would. This..." She closed her eyes briefly. The lids fluttered open again to reveal the stark blue limpid

pools that never failed to hold Molly spellbound. "This ritual of yours, I just—I adore it. No one has ever pampered me before. And God have mercy on my wayward soul, but your gentle, caring touch is too delicious to resist."

Molly got to her feet and snatched up one of Gwen's limp hands. "There's no way in hell God would want anyone to *not* feel loved. Now come with me. I've only just begun. It's time to complete the transformation so *no* one will recognize you."

\* \* \* \* \*

Feel *loved*? Gwen didn't know where that had come from, but she chose to tuck it away for later examination.

Molly led her to one of the swivel seats and combed through the lengthy tresses. Anticipation and the excitement of free will seemed to have an intense effect on the relentless pounding between Gwen's thighs. The primping was done in silence, and every stroke, every tender move, every adoring look Molly gave Gwen in the mirror brought her to a new level of arousal and further dampened her panties.

Molly spun Gwen so her back was to the mirror. Her hair was blown with the dryer contraption. The heat and brush stroking of the sodden mass made Gwen's body feel as if she were a sluggish tree finally cut down after decades of immobility. She pictured herself toppling onto the forest floor with a sigh, weightless yet heavy and unmoving, rejoicing at finally being free from her roots. Her skin rippled with titillating chill bumps she would have previously been made to think were the devil's work.

But no more. Gwen wanted this, wanted pleasures and a life of indulgence and fun. She wanted to remain not as that tree, but to become the tree's great hawk instead, now taking flight from its nest rooted within the gnarly limbs.

Oh she would have that life. Even as a sinking weight settled in her gut, Gwen knew to have her every desire, she would have to move on, away from Molly and her magic hands.

It would be the price of freedom she would have to pay.

But it would come later. For now, Gwen indulged.

Molly twined each strand around the steaming iron. The fruity scent of the shampoo she'd used on Gwen's hair wafted up to fill the room. Stepping back, Molly eyed Gwen, her lip clamped between her teeth as she misted a sweet-smelling spray over her final product.

"Gorgeous," Molly murmured, shaking her head. "Just gorgeous."

Gwen held her tongue. She would be the judge of that and would never believe plain old Gwenyth Freemont could be described as "gorgeous". Oh but how she wished it were so!

Molly moved on with her mission, applying and blending in a tan cream around Gwen's eyes. She powdered her entire face and followed that by lining her eyes with a stick that reminded her of charcoal. Gwen loved the feminine, otherworldly fragrances

of every bottle and tube Molly opened. She had never seen, much less smelled, such decadent things in her life. The seductive aromas of the soap and shampoo she'd used this morning, and now these additional products that obviously enhanced a woman's femininity, were completely wicked.

And for some strange reason, the act of allowing herself to use them made her clitoris engorge with rebellion.

Molly studied Gwen's face, tickling her eyelids and cheeks with a soft brush. She took a red pencil and outlined Gwen's lips, then filled it in with a shade that reminded Gwen of the bold reds she'd seen on the models in her magazine.

Stepping back, Molly took in the picture she'd just painted. "Jesus," she breathed. "Even in clothes, you're the epitome of a hot centerfold model."

"What?" A centerfold model? Gwen's heart raced at the glittering look in those eyes.

Rotating Gwen in the chair, Molly rested her chin on Gwen's shoulder and scrutinized her in the mirror. Their eyes met. The power of it, of the total picture she saw in the reflection, made Gwen dizzy with disbelieving excitement.

*Who is that beautiful, sexy woman staring back at me?*

"So do you think he'll recognize you now?"

Gwen's response was a sharp intake of breath coupled with an expression of utter shock. Her hand went up shakily to touch a curl, her lips, a softly painted eyelid.

"I'm telling you, you're a born hottie, Gwen."

"Excuse me?" Her eyes caught Molly's in the mirror, and the mixture of pride and attraction she saw there didn't escape Gwen.

"You're flawless, sweetheart, even without all this. The kind to break hearts."

"Me?" Her golden brows peaked. "I-I don't think so."

"Oh yes." Molly spun her back around until she could plant her hands on the arms of the chair. Leaning in, she snared Gwen with a smoldering look, her warm breath fanning Gwen's cheek as she spoke. "And I'm willing to take the chance at a broken heart." She swooped down and clamped her mouth to Gwen's shocked one.

The heat surged through her with a swiftness that defied nature as any Amish being knew it. One woman kissing another, becoming intimate as God meant a man and woman to do... This was madness, she thought frantically, despite the fact she'd participated in that very madness earlier that morning. And yet the insanity of it felt so right, so *good*.

Too good.

Only moments ago, she'd surrendered herself to the indulgence, but now fear assailed her again, fear of becoming too dependant on another human being. Gwen had to stop this recklessness before it got out of hand. Before Molly had Gwen's heart trapped so adeptly, she wouldn't be able to untangle her emotions long enough to run when the time was right.

She felt as if her head was spinning, as if she were running around in some confusing dream full of temptations and terror all at once. Panic at the fleeting thought of losing her freedom forced her to yank her mouth from the mind-blowing kiss. Cool, unpleasant air assaulted her wet lips, such a stark difference from Molly's hot mouth. It reminded her that with Molly, she could learn the extremes, would always know black from white, frigid from scorching, hate from...from love?

Gwen swallowed a lump of denial. The strange word seemed to reach behind her ribs and twist at her heart. No. This was all complete foolishness. Gwen had never even come close to experiencing that elusive emotion. Why was she bringing it into this confusing picture?

Because this woman seemed determined to make her "feel loved" and to capture her with it, just as Jakob had captured her with hate.

There was no other answer. She couldn't allow this tempting relationship to continue. She *had* to get out of here before she found herself ensnared once again in a situation where she had no control over her own life. Gwen wanted fun and freedom in her new world, but not in a place where she would have to look over her shoulder for the rest of her days or feel smothered by another's agenda.

Her chest heaved with reluctant passion as she spoke. She pressed her palm into Molly's strong shoulder, forcing her away. "I told you don't. Please."

Molly's lips curved slightly, as if she didn't take Gwen's demands seriously. She took two steps back and crossed her arms under her full breasts. Gwen forced her gaze away from the sharp points tenting Molly's shirt.

"Yes," Molly purred, "but your kiss, your eyes, they demand the opposite."

Gwen shot to her feet. "No. No, they don't." She tried to ignore the sensual sensation of her legs bound by man's pants and her free-flowing, newly curled locks swinging over her shoulders and brushing her areolas. The nubs beneath her shirt tightened against the stricture of the cotton fabric, and her breasts grew heavy and full. She groaned inwardly as a rush of cream moistened her labia.

"What's the matter, Gwen?" She sauntered forward, so close, so near that Gwen could smell her womanly arousal. Molly's pupils were still dilated with the remnants of their passionate kiss. "You enjoyed my lovemaking this morning, didn't you?"

"N-no." She looked away when Molly's dark brows arched mockingly. "Y-yes, of course I did. But I..."

Molly didn't waste any more time. She yanked Gwen into her arms. Soft yet firm flesh met her supple body. Nearly the same height, their thighs were flush, their pussies and abdomens touching intimately. Gwen moaned aloud when their erect nipples abraded over one another. A firestorm blazed in her groin quicker than the time her parents' barn had gone up in flames when Gwen was a child. She had no choice but to wrap her arms around Molly's neck, for she feared with her legs as wobbly as jelly, she might collapse any second now. She couldn't breathe, not with Molly's intoxicating scent filling her lungs and her delicious mouth nearly eating her alive.

Gwen had come to equate that relentless, swelling heat in her cunt with Molly, and now was no exception. It was as if her body took over, blocking out her mind, her common sense and the propriety that had been ingrained in her since birth.

To sum it up nicely, she turned into a wild animal in Molly's arms.

Molly kissed Gwen's neck, nipping with her teeth, licking and tasting every inch of her. It sent a bolus of lust coursing maddeningly through Gwen's bloodstream.

*All right. Just one more time before I leave tomorrow...*

Gwen had lost her own battle of common sense. Reckless abandon raced along her spine as she raked her hands through Molly's hair and held Molly's head in place, forcing her to continue feasting on Gwen's neck. "Oh...ah." She gulped, panted. "God help me, but I can't resist you."

"Mmm, that's just what I want to hear."

Gwen closed her eyes and let Molly roam her throat. Her words came out broken and raspy when Molly closed a hand over one breast. "I-I do want that again. That wondrous feeling deep in my belly."

"Ah, and I want to fuck you so damn bad." Molly's hands were everywhere, stroking, cupping, squeezing. It made Gwen's head spin with a blazing desire she didn't know how to cool. But no touch in the world could have sent a depraved jolt through her like hearing that one naughty word.

*Fuck.*

"F-fuck me?" It was the first time in her life she'd ever said that word out loud. She'd read it, and she'd understood fully what it meant. But to *say* it, to hear its unchaste sound coming from her own mouth, to feel its raw edges flow over her tongue...it gave her a delicious sense of rebellion that made her soaking wet with need. The urgent stab of arousal coupled with her curiosity prompted her to seek more information. "How? How can you—how is that physically possible to...to...?"

"It's hard to explain..." Molly evaded breathlessly, kissing Gwen's mouth, jaw, ear.

Gwen shivered, loving the soft-against-soft, woman-to-woman sensations so different from what she'd experienced with her husband.

"Please, I must know."

Molly finally drew back. Her eyes were glazed with passion. It seemed her voice came out smoky and wispy, as if it took all her mental energy to redirect her attention from her seduction to speaking.

"Well, there're my fingers and there's the way we did it before, just rubbing against each other, or the way I...kissed you down there. And then there's this toy I'd love to try that I just ordered a few weeks ago...for no apparent reason other than desperate hope at the time. But now I'm so freaking glad I did," she added under her breath.

"Toy? But I still don't see how—" Embarrassed, her jaw clamped shut. But she forced herself to gather her bravery to appease her burning interest. With courage that

had been born when she'd stolen Ada away and ran for her life in the dead of night, she barreled on. "How can a woman do that to another without a...you know?"

"A cock or penis?"

Gwen's hand pressed against her sternum. Her eyes rounded yet she felt an enormous measure of intrigue at the slang words. Oh she wasn't *that* naïve. She knew they referred to a man's appendage, but she'd never actually *talked* about these things with anyone, including Jakob. Unable to help herself, her mouth spread into a wide, rueful grin.

"Yes." She struggled to hold back the giggles. "A...c-cock or penis." Again, saying the naughty words aloud and hearing her own voice finally speak them excited her like nothing before. She wanted to shout them, to hear them being murmured to her. The mutinous sensation that filled her heart seemed to have an aphrodisiacal effect on her libido that she couldn't refuse.

"Uh, I can show you how. Would you like that?" Molly asked, trailing a fingernail down through Gwen's cleavage.

The implication of Molly's words proved more seductive than her exploration of Gwen's breasts. But it felt as if Gwen had been placed on overload, like the washing machine stuffed with too many sheets. She whirled around, needing desperately to catch her breath. "I-I couldn't," she said weakly. "I...Lord, help me, I've become so debauched in the last couple of days."

From behind, Molly encircled her arms around Gwen's waist. With a firm yank, she pulled her back flush against her body. Hotly, she whispered in her ear, "That is not true. You are simply a normal woman with natural needs and desires. And yes, you can let me show you, Gwenyth. You *will*. I know you want it, and I want nothing more than for you to be the one I experiment with."

One hand darted into Gwen's shirt and located an engorged mound. No matter how much Gwen gulped air in, the excitement was just too much to withstand. Dizzy with desire, she couldn't seem to get enough oxygen in her lungs.

On a witch's mission, Molly appeared to want to drive Gwen to complete insanity. Her free hand, like an arrow swiftly striking its target, darted down the front of her pants and hit the bull's-eye of Gwen's womanhood with deadly accuracy. After all that petting and kissing, and hearing and speaking the curse words, her button had emerged swollen and aching, begging for mercy. Within the tight confines of the denim, Molly's fingers played havoc on its bulk, a quick, sharp, short vibrating movement that caused Gwen's breathing to quicken and her legs to go weak and flaccid.

She shivered and gulped, melting into Molly's body, struggling to return her breathing to normal. Gwen desperately tried to put her heart back into her chest, to stand, for the love of God, without collapsing to the floor. The feel of Molly's body pressed to her backside had sent an erotic tingle surging through to her very marrow. The calculated, practiced moves had to be those of a she-devil casting a spell with some form of modern electricity via her hands.

But Gwen would later learn Molly had just given her a mere morsel of what bliss was to come. Foreshadowing that ecstasy, Molly rasped in her ear, "I know two girls who need to share a particular toy that will bring them both enormous amounts of pleasure. Want to know who those girls are?"

Gwen nodded, aware she played Molly's game willingly.

"Then come with me to my room. Now."

With all the arrogance of a man, Molly released Gwen and strode from the room.

Without hesitation, Gwen followed.

## Chapter Six

If she had a penis, it would be painfully erect at the moment. But since she didn't, Molly set the tool belt and cordless phone aside and dug through her dresser drawer for her faux cock.

Gwen stepped into the room. She leaned against the heavy oak door, clicking it shut behind her, and stared across the room. "Molly..."

"Hmm?" Molly searched for the package and pulled it from beneath a pile of silk panties. Her body zinged with the excitement of anticipation. "Ah, here it is."

"I can barely breathe or even stand up. I-I want that feeling so much, it makes me strangely dizzy. My body is doing—feeling—odd things. And yet...yet it's a heady sensation. I don't know what you've done to me, but please, would you do it again?"

Molly lowered the packaged strap-on vibrator. Her gaze locked on Gwen's over the top of the plastic molded rim of her toy's cage. It was at that moment her world finally tumbled to the other side of the fence—for sure. If there had been even a seed of doubt about her true sexuality, it just disintegrated into thin air. She had never looked at Cliff, or any man, and gotten this same rushing awareness deep in her gut. This was definitely new and uncharted territory.

Though Gwen wore jeans and a plain shirt, she exuded a magnetic femininity that made Molly giddy with horny desire. It wasn't so much the physical transformation Molly had just created in Gwen as it was her impassioned words and the ravenous gleam in her stunning, outlined eyes. Molly knew Gwen still intended to leave, and she knew Gwen harbored confusion and doubts regarding her own sexuality. But nothing, she just realized, could ever make Molly go back to being with a man. Not Gwen's eventual departure, and not someone else's wishy-washiness while in a relationship with Molly.

No matter what the world around her contained, the real Molly Garrett had just emerged after almost three decades of denial and identity confusion. She fervently hoped Cliff was, at that very moment, coming into his own self as well. Now that she saw the light, she couldn't imagine ever going back to the dark. And since she loved Clifford as a dear friend, she didn't want him to be groping his way in the dark like she just realized she'd been doing all her life.

But Cliff wasn't part of this new picture. She quickly dashed him from her mind.

"Come here, Gwen." Molly gestured toward the bed with a jerk of her head.

"M-Molly..." Gwen obeyed and crossed to the bed where it sat next to an antique nightstand and dresser. Her words came out in a breathy whisper. "Between my legs...it aches—no, it almost hurts! Please, I need relief."



Adrenaline raced through Molly's blood. It seemed a trail of lava burst into every vessel and every limb, finally erupting in her groin. Her pussy pounded like her pulse, and elixir oozed out of her slit and soaked her crotch. Molly's hands trembled as she tore the package open. She prayed batteries were included.

"Believe me, babe, I feel the same way."

"You do?"

"Yes, oh yes."

Gwen sighed. Her eyes clamped shut with relief, as if to not be alone in her torturous state was enough to make it more bearable.

Molly flipped aside the straps of the toy and located the battery compartment. Sexual anticipation seemed to deprive her fingers of blood for she fumbled with the compartment door, praying for batteries to be already in place. The scent of clean, naughty dildo rubber filled her nostrils.

To keep herself from collapsing in a nympho swoon at Gwen's feet, she tried to think of something dull like mowing. But it didn't work. Holy mother of Earth, she could come just *picturing* herself fucking Gwen with this thing. What would happen when she fastened the contraption around her hips, engaged the vibration mechanism and entered Gwen's sweet, wet passage? All it would take was one stroke and she'd explode.

"Wow, what is that...that thing?" Gwen's eyes rounded. Her mouth hung open in stunned disbelief.

Molly drew the toy out, tossed aside the package and held up the six-inch replica of a man's appendage strung on black straps. "It's my cock."

"Your cock?"

"Mine. The one I'm going to put on and fuck you with."

Gwen drew in a tattered, high-pitched gulp of air. Her cheeks brightened, and she reached out and steadied herself by clutching the bedpost. "Oh my."

"My sentiments exactly. Now your clothes. Take them off," Molly ordered, her words quivering as she stifled the panting that threatened to erupt from her own lungs. Shit, she'd never been in such a rush to get laid in all her life. The orgasm couldn't get here fast enough.

She finally disengaged the latch and peered into the recessed cavity.

*Ah, batteries included. Thank you, Jesus!* She clicked the cover back into place.

Gwen averted her gaze charmingly, but she didn't hesitate. Off came the shoes, jeans, panties and shirt. She fumbled with her bra but succeeded in ridding herself of it. Her full breasts sprang free, the dark pink areolas already erect with exhilaration. A trim rib cage tapered downward, and the gentle swell of hips below a narrow waist cradled that luscious, golden-haired sex.

Within Molly's reach stood a goddess, a siren now emerged from a false spinster's shell. Her long, pale locks tumbled around creamy shoulders. Wisps and seductive

waves framed an angel's face. The heart-shaped perfection of it didn't appear to be covered by makeup, but rather, its beauty had become enhanced by it.

The evening sun streamed in through the lace curtains, bathing Gwen in an ethereal, orange glow. The inn was vacant for the night, but Molly always had the cordless at the ready prepared to take reservations. She prayed everyone looking to check into her B&B would please just wait five more minutes – ten tops – before calling and interrupting her fantasy.

Urged by her raging libido, Molly set the strap-on on the nightstand and quickly disrobed. She snatched the toy back up and fastened the T-belt around her naked hips and between her legs. Tightening the straps, she settled it into place so the rod jutted out from her vee and the back strip settled snug between her ass cheeks. She closed her eyes and soaked in the wicked feel of the shaft's base weight pressing against her pussy.

There was no way to suppress the groan that escaped from deep within Molly's throat. The sinful sensation of wearing the faux cock overwhelmed her senses. She had never been so turned on in all her life. The backside of the flat foundation settled perfectly over her clit, abrading, teasing. What a wondrous, dominant emotion to have an appendage extending from one's groin meant to invade another's body.

And she hadn't even turned the damn thing on yet.

Her gaze scanned Gwen's slim, ripe body, so pale and soft, trembling with eagerness to be taken, to be ravished. Molly could glimpse the damp, glistening lips, Gwen's swollen pearl emerging from the top of the hood and parting the blonde curls. Son of a bitch, Molly couldn't wait to spread those lean legs and sink her new pole into that dripping cunt!

"Lie down, Gwen."

Gwen shuffled backward, never taking her eyes from Molly. Her bare ass sank to the quilt and she crab-walked, settling into the center of the four-poster, cherry queen bed. She propped herself up with her hands behind her, and her knees fell open with needy abandon. Molly watched as Gwen's flat stomach rose and fell with her panting respirations. Her sex bloomed like a dew-dappled flower, the lips pink and slick as they slowly spread open and cradled her hole.

"Jesus, you look good enough to eat."

Gwen's eyes clouded over with confusion at the strange reference to Jesus, but her expression gradually softened as Molly climbed onto the bed and crept toward her. The scent of her own shampoo, soap and makeup wafted up from the warm skin. She liked that. It pleased her that Gwen had allowed herself to be surrounded by those common extensions of Molly.

As Molly moved toward the center of the big bed, she planted butterfly kisses on a toe, a flexed calf, an inner thigh. Gwen's eyes rolled back in her head when Molly swiped her tongue up Gwen's slit. The flavor of cream exploded in her mouth, and the fragrance of female arousal filled Molly's lungs.

But as intoxicating as all that was, Molly feared she'd implode if she didn't get her phallus inside Gwen soon. On all fours, she edged higher, flicking her tongue in Gwen's navel, tracing the underside of both breasts.

Gwen whimpered. "Now, please, Molly. Please." She wound her arms around Molly's neck and bucked her hips upward. A sudden gasp tore from Gwen's throat when her wet mound bumped the toy. There was no question in Molly's mind the contact of Gwen's pussy to the penis was what had caused her shock, for the movement had jolted the cock enough to make Molly gasp too. The snap of electricity it sent through her loins nearly brought her to climax.

"Now do you understand there're lots of ways I can fuck you?"

Gwen nodded with vehement acquiescence. She panted so rapidly, Molly feared she'd hyperventilate.

Molly closed her palm around one globe and sucked the puckered nipple into her mouth. The solid pebble abraded over her tongue eliciting a sob from Gwen. Molly flicked back and forth, tasting soap and the unique, innocent flavor of Gwen's flesh. She nuzzled the hollow of her neck and buried her face in the clean fluff of Gwen's hair.

Gwen raked her nails down Molly's back, making her skin flush with goose bumps. Molly thrust her hips forward, poising the vibrator over Gwen's juncture. She unhurriedly lowered herself until she felt the resistance of Gwen's outer vagina push against the organ and back into Molly's core. Gwen cried out her pleasure, tangled her hand in Molly's hair and dragged Molly's mouth to hers.

"Mmm, Molly, mmm." Gwen's tongue darted into her mouth with an equal fever. "Now. Please, just fuck me now."

Molly's heart stilled its beating. The shy yet seductive sound of that curse word tumbling from Gwen's mouth in the throes of sex proved to be more than she could bear. Molly drank of her wet sweetness, dueling in the kiss, but she couldn't dally any longer. She had to have it, had to have more. Desperate need and the wanton word echoing in her head laced by that German accent drove her to a frenzied madness.

Reaching down, Molly swiped the pool of cum between Gwen's legs and coated the vibrator, jacking it off, slicking it for entry.

And in one stroke, she drove her bodily extension into Gwen's canal.

Gwen arched her back, pressing her breasts into Molly's. A throaty, feral growl tore from her windpipe. Her eyelids fluttered. She drew in a gasping breath just before her eyes widened. "Molly..."

"Yes, babe, I'm here. It's me, just me." Molly felt compelled to remind Gwen no one but the two of them participated in this glorious act of coupling. She nipped at Gwen's full bottom lip, amazed that entering that delicious vagina had nearly brought her to the pinnacle of ecstasy. The damn thing wasn't even part of her, but simulating the penetration motion, along with the back of the contraption playing havoc on her clit...she knew it would be more than enough to do the trick.

Molly shivered as Gwen dragged her nails up and down her back. Gwen lifted her knees and planted her feet on the bed next to Molly's thighs. Her hips began a rippling, up-and-down dance. It had to be inborn, for the undulations were even more potent than the strippers' dances Molly had drooled over that night she and Cliff had ended up in the swingers' club in East St. Louis. Each time Gwen thrust upward, it jolted the base of the cock over Molly's clitoris, sending her into a mini-orgasmic state of bliss.

Molly could go on like this forever, but she wanted to use the toy to its fullest potential. Continuing to meet Gwen's frantic thrusts, she asked on a husky whisper, "Are you ready for heaven?"

Molly's breath clogged in her chest when Gwen's eyelids rose. Looking into the blue pools, she thought of vast tropical oceans and paradise. Tears of what Molly hoped were joy and happiness glistened in the corners of her eyes. The sooty lashes fanned her cheeks in a coy yet seductive picture.

"Molly, oh God, Molly." She hooked her arms around Molly's neck and continued her dance. "I love to fuck with you. I—help me, but I'm so close. I'm about to feel it again."

The accented words couldn't have pleased Molly more. Close to the edge of insanity herself, she murmured, "Then I take that to mean you're ready." Reaching down, she found the switch hidden within the strap that crossed her right hip. Molly slid it over and braced herself for the unbearable zenith to rack her body.

The vibrator buzzed on. Gwen's eyes widened with shock. She let out a long, deep moan of pleasure that Molly would never forget. "Ah, *ah...*"

She clutched at Molly, holding tight, and Molly savored the painful pleasure of it. Their eyes locked, held. Molly knew the precise moment the climax washed over Gwen. Her body twitched, but she spoke not a word, her mouth open in an O of astonishment. The tears finally spilled over, trailing down her porcelain skin as she gasped for breath after breath.

Molly clung to her own wave of rapture. With her pelvis held forward so that the strap-on was buried to its base, she cried out, rejoicing when the vibrating bliss washed over her. She knew the gratification couldn't have been any more intense if she'd truly had a penis, if she were a real man fucking Gwen. A wondrous realization seemed to have released her locked soul. This was what had been missing in her sex life all along. She wanted to give pleasure in this way, though she also wanted to be in Gwen's position. But there was one difference, she thought as the pieces of her life's puzzle came together.

If she was to be the recipient of a cock again, the person on the other end of it *had* to be a woman from this day forward.

Because, no doubt about it, she truly was a lesbian.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gwen rolled onto her back and stared at the ceiling, her body languidly sated after several sessions of passion and play with Molly. Gwen hadn't been able to get enough. In the end, she'd worn Molly out, begging to be treated to more and more orgasms, pleading for yet another round of touching and kissing and vibrating bliss.

She listened to Molly's even breathing and soaked in the comforting heat of her exhausted body passed out just inches from Gwen's side. This was all so unlike sleeping with Jakob. His snores, the noxious odors he'd expel in sleep and the way his big body would take up the majority of the bed, leaving Gwen stiff and clinging to the edge...God above, how had she endured him for all those years? Amazingly, her self-inquiry didn't even encompass his sloppy, painful attempts at sex. She forced that sickening image from her mind and suppressed a gag.

Her skin crawled, but instead of allowing it, she forced her mind to ponder more enjoyable thoughts.

She'd liked the woman she'd seen in the mirror today with the saucy disarray of flaxen curls. The painted artistry that emphasized the soft planes of her face and outlined the bright blue of her eyes, and the deep red that fattened her lips, giving them a pouty look, had all been amazing sights to behold. Oh she could just hear her mother's scorn, referring to her as a blasphemous, sinning harlot. But her mother was no longer a part of her life. Gwen was her own mother, her own caretaker...and she wanted to always look like she had today.

She wanted to be a modern woman.

And she would.

Molly would be there to guide her in proper fashion and makeup technique...for the next few days of her stay, at least. Molly, no doubt, would offer to always be there for her in so many ways.

She was fascinated, she had to admit, by the innkeeper and her bold, daring, brazen personality. She'd never known a woman—or even a man for that matter—who could take on so many roles, be so overbearing and fascinating and yet sexual all at the same time.

She could see in the moon-bathed glow of the room that the paint was peeling above her. Although Molly's inn was run-down, she worked hard to rectify it. That included using all her wiles to convince Gwen to stay and help with the transformation. Transformation was a good word, she thought with a sigh. It was what Molly was doing with her as well. Turning her into an outsider, bringing her into the root of herself and encouraging her to spread her wings. No one, not even her own parents—and especially not Jakob—had ever taken such an interest in her potential.

Lesbian.

The word churned in her brain. She tried to picture herself living this way, two women committed to one another and cohabiting as a man and woman normally did. She thought of Molly and the warmth of her hands on Gwen's breasts, the soft lips exploring hers, the gentle probing tongue. Molly's smooth body filled her thoughts, its

feminine pelvis pressed into Gwen's rear. Ah, and Molly's mouth covering Gwen's pussy, her tongue fucking her with desperate precision.

The sharp recollection of it brought a swift twinge to her womb. She groaned and cast a glance at Molly. Should she wake her and hope for more?

But the flames died down at the sounds above her. Late-night travelers had phoned and arrived in between one of their lovemaking sessions, and Gwen now heard the toilet flush upstairs. The water in the sink swished down through the pipes, and after a few creaking steps, she heard a television go on. All were sounds that were so very new to her. And everything new, at least in the early stages of her escape from her community, seemed to have a connection to one person.

Molly.

Her brow furrowed and she flung an arm across her eyes. *Was there meaning in that?*

No. Gwen shifted her position and rolled onto her left side facing the window. She would have encountered this same modernity wherever she'd have ended up, she concluded as her gaze studied the starlit sky out the window. It stood to reason simply because the tiny world she'd fled was a minority compared to the vast world outside its boundaries. Modern plumbing, transportation, electricity and telephones were probably utilized by a huge majority of the mainstream country.

Her mind delved deeper, thinking of all the things she'd been denied. Mmm, yes, she thought, combing her fingers through the artful waves Molly had created. There was also makeup and stylish clothing that showed skin and limbs – oh it was so sinful!

*Sünder! Sinner!* Jakob's voice suddenly boomed in her head.

She tossed fitfully as vile images of him plagued her thoughts. Her flesh crawled at the memory of his hands on her, in her, smashing against her at her slightest resistance. How had she endured all those years with him? How had she kept her sanity?

She flung the covers aside and the painful memories vanished with the movement. Cool air fluttered through the open window. The songs of night filled her ears, soothing her, the croak of a frog, the rustle of a raccoon through the tall grass, the hoot of an owl. She inhaled, allowing the air to fan her, to cool the perspiration that had built upon her skin.

Rising, Gwen crossed naked to the window, her bare feet padding across cool, smooth wood. How exhilarating to be free of her prison, to feel the brush of night air across her bare flesh! The wind tossed her loose hair over her shoulders and caressed her sex, cooling its ardor.

But her pleasant thoughts were soon interrupted by squeaking. Her heart raced at the sound and her mind played tricks on her. Jakob? Had he found her? She pressed a trembling hand to her exposed breast, attempting to calm her pounding heart. She turned from the window and stared upward, searching for the source. Her brow creased as she trained an ear on the noises.

*Squeak, bump, groan, bump, creak, bump, moan.*

She blew out a relieved breath. Ah, the sounds of mating! She knew now more than anything how to recognize the songs of lovemaking. It was a catchy rhythm like the tunes that had come from Molly's music box. Soft feminine cries increased in volume and tempo. Unable to control her body's reaction, Gwen stood by the window fascinated, wide-eyed, as her clitoris slowly engorged with blood, aching to be stroked. Moisture spilled from her hole and dribbled onto her inner thigh. She planted her palms on her hot cheeks and attempted to still her shallow breathing.

The clamor of raw mating turned her on immensely, but when she imagined it in her mind, the man and woman guests became two women embracing, kissing, holding each other close in the bed above her. Somehow, that seemed more natural in her fantasies, and it certainly pleased her body more.

Gwen recalled how Molly had touched herself during their first encounter. Sliding her hand down her abdomen, she mimicked Molly's moves and cupped her sticky sex. But rather than relieve the burning in her groin, it stoked the flames higher. She parted the curls and found her essence, the pebble so moist and sensitive she almost came as soon as she rubbed her fingertip over its bulk.

The female cry above filled Gwen's ears. She stumbled back and leaned against the window frame. Cool air whirled in and caressed her scalding flesh, but the inferno had already risen higher. Gwen stroked herself, smearing the slick juices all over her labia. Her head fell back, clunking against the wooden window frame when she fucked herself with a finger for the very first time in her life.

*Lord, forgive me, but I cannot stop. It feels so heavenly good.*

She tried to suppress the animal scream that threatened to erupt from deep in her lungs, but instead, it came out like a bobcat's growl. She collapsed on the windowsill, her bare ass pressed against the raw wood. Her free hand curled around the ledge, holding on for dear life. Gwen spread her legs, and fucked, and fucked, and fucked herself.

*Mmm, fuck. Sakes alive, that word alone has the power to make me climax!*

Mirrored by a deep and final grunt above, Gwen's body twitched as she rode out her own release. Frissons of white-hot sparks rained down on her, spilling over her body and settling deep inside her cunt.

The shame at what she'd just done instantly washed over her. Panting, she opened her eyes and riveted her stare toward the bed. In the waning moonlight spilling into the room, she could see slight movements where Molly lay.

"Molly?" she whispered.

"Hmm?"

"Are you awake?"

"Damn right I am. Listening to that racket above while watching you get yourself off over there bathed by moonlight—Jesus, Gwen, I've created a femme fatale, out-of-control, nymphomaniacal vixen."

"Oh no, please, I'm—"

"Oh yes. And I *love* it!"

"You do?"

Molly's lithe, naked body bounded from the bed. "Mmm-hmm. Watching you masturbate while listening to our guests screw upstairs...I couldn't help myself. Motherfucker, do you realize how sexy that was, how easy it was for me to watch you do that and get myself off at the same time? Gwen." She sauntered closer. "It's like my sex drive just shoved its gearshift up to the D for the first time in my life."

The crunchy noise outside the window caught Gwen's attention. She jerked her stare over her shoulder, her pulse leaping and pounding in her ears. Slowly sidling away so her body became hidden, she pressed her back to the wall and peered out into the night. Was that a shadow falling across the grass just below the window?

Was that...was that Jakob?

"Gwen, what's wrong, honey?" Molly's hand rested on her shoulder, squeezing and massaging. Gwen sighed at its calming effect.

"N-nothing," she whispered. "I-I just thought I heard something." Her wide gaze scanned the scattered trees in the yard, to the field spread beyond it. She studied the far-off hump of the old underground cellar. With every click of a bug or swish of grass, she gasped, her stare darting around.

"Uh, I'm certain what you heard was our boisterous guests upstairs." Molly drew her back, pressing Gwen's round ass into her groin. She filled her palms with the heavy weight of Gwen's breasts, plucking and tweaking lazily. "Come to bed, babe. I need you."

"Y-yes, yes, okay," she murmured, her eyes still glued to the window. Molly dragged her backward until they reached the bed.

Had that odd noise been Jakob lurking about? No, no, that was crazy...wasn't it? She'd been glancing over her shoulder for the better part of three days now, certain Jakob had followed her. But her common sense told her if he had followed that closely on her heels, he'd have made himself very known by now. He wouldn't be lurking in bushes or peeping in windows. He'd be bursting through the front door exploding with anger.

Her mind was playing tricks on her again. It had to be. Yes, she needed to eventually move on in case their paths did cross one day. But she had hidden Ada in the barn, Molly had made her over into a totally unrecognizable woman and she couldn't think of any way Jakob would know to leave the beaten path and search this inn, of all places.

She needed to proceed with caution, true, but it had to have been a stray animal rooting around for food. And there were no shadows, for God's sake.

Inhaling a cleansing breath, she allowed Molly to pull her to the mattress and tuck Gwen into the curve of her body. Lying on her left side, Molly's arm thrown over her



waist, Gwen squeezed Molly's hand and stared out the window. She lay unmoving, her heart thudding behind her breastbone. Hours droned by. Eventually, Gwen listened to Molly's slowing, peaceful breaths. She finally succumbed to exhaustion. But true, solid rest eluded her. The nightmares were back with a vengeance.

## Chapter Seven

"Sleep well?" Molly asked as she plucked a strawberry from the tray and poured herself a cup of coffee. She saw the purple smudges below Gwen's haunted eyes and knew she most likely had her newest guests to blame. Molly herself had fallen into a dead sleep after that erotic incident of watching Gwen masturbate by the window.

Wow, what a sight that had been!

"No," Gwen grunted, pouring her own mug of black coffee. She shot Molly a grumpy glare.

"My oh my." Molly sent her a surprising look over the rim of her cup. "Testy, and after all that bliss last night?"

"You put them there on purpose, didn't you?" she accused, slamming her coffee down on the bar. When it sloshed over, she merely snatched a wet rag and swabbed it clean.

"Who?"

"Don't act so innocent."

In her tight blue spaghetti-strap shirt, Molly shrugged. "They were guests. I had to give them a room *somewhere*."

Glancing around to ensure no one was about, Gwen hissed, "The whole upstairs was vacant. Why did you have to give them the room above ours—yours?"

Molly was far more pleased with the results than she'd intended. She'd heard the couple too and had been grateful they were the only guests at the inn. Their boisterous, very verbal responses to lovemaking had been arousing, to say the least. She'd become so hungry, she'd almost risen and devoured Gwen's pussy right there on the windowsill.

But she'd discovered there had been something extremely carnal about watching her in all that alluring moonlight when she didn't know she was being watched. And then hearing her moans and gasps as she climaxed—holy dildos, what a sexy woman she'd uncovered!

She smiled wickedly and chose a scooped ball of watermelon. "It was the only one that was clean."

"If that's truly the case, then I'll be heading straight-ways upstairs after preparing the midday meal and getting them *all* cleaned."

"You know it's the case. If you recall, yesterday I got that particular room cleaned and set up for guests. But I spent most of the remainder of the day mending fences and replacing rotting boards in the entry hall rather than preparing the other suite. The rest, as you should know by now, aren't done being rehabbed."

"I could have cleaned the other one if you would have just said the word." Gwen's temper boiled this morning, and for some reason, Molly didn't think it had anything to do with the guests screwing in the room above theirs. Molly knew damn well firsthand Gwen had enjoyed it just as much as she had.

"You were already occupied—holed up in the kitchen preparing for the next meal."

Gwen deserted her coffee and set up a small buffet of juice, eggs, muffins and fruit for their only guests—the marathon fuckers who'd most likely rise at two in the afternoon. "Well, today I'll clean the other room to avoid a repeat of last night—and maybe I'll leave the one above your quarters dirty!"

Molly poured herself a glass of fresh-squeezed orange juice. In her holey jean shorts and the usual tool belt, she was set to begin the day doing a few repairs around this heap. Tossing the juice back in one swallow, she slammed the empty tumbler on the bar and swiped her mouth with the back of her hand.

"Look, I don't know what's up your ass this morning, but fine. You got no arguments from me. Clean all you want. I'll pay you just as we agreed." Spinning on the heel of her work boot, she ambled cockily out the front door.

"Women," Molly muttered, clomping across the porch. "Moody sons of bitches." Shrugging, she inhaled the fresh morning air, snatched up her toolbox and made her way to her baby, the old '57 pickup truck.

\* \* \* \* \*

Gwen sighed. After the embarrassment of last night, she was relieved to finally be alone. She let her mind shift to the fear, for how else could she conquer its irrational intrusion? Vile fantasies plagued her of Jakob suddenly appearing out of nowhere. It made her grumbly and on edge, and she knew she was being irrational and unfair to Molly. She didn't mean to take it out on her. It was just that she'd let herself slip into this false sense of hope, then suddenly—bam. Her mind started playing tricks on her again, keeping her from relaxing and enjoying herself.

Irritation at Jakob made her ooze with resentment. Would constant fear of that monster harass her emotions for the rest of her life and make her slip into insanity? God divine, how had she gotten herself into this bizarre situation?

Should she stay and accept that she was losing her mind, or should she go just to be on the safe side?

"Good morning."

Gwen started. Her hand flew to her mouth to suppress the frightful gasp that threatened to erupt.

It was only the auburn-haired woman from upstairs. She was petite, curvy and overtly sexy. She glided forward with her arm hooked through her mate's elbow. She smiled slyly, looking as if she'd already sated herself with yet another feast. And Gwen

was quite sure she had, for she could have sworn she'd heard it again before rising to begin preparing the morning meal.

"Good morning," she replied, making herself suddenly busy by starting a new pot of coffee. "I, um...trust that you slept well?" *I sure didn't.*

The tall and darkly handsome man said dreamily, "Never better." His hazel eyes were glued to the woman, as if he were ready to ravish her right then and there—again.

"Good, *gut.*" She became the accommodating hostess, arranging settings at the dining table for two. "Please," she urged, waving them toward the continental breakfast she'd prepared. "Come help yourselves to a bit of nourishment. If you require anything else at all, I'll be in the kitchen beginning early supper preparations."

Her smile was just on the edge of genuine before she turned and passed through the swing door and into the kitchen. She couldn't, she thought with mortification. She just couldn't stay in the same room as them without their moans and shrill cries of intimacy playing in her head. And without remembering her own shocking responses!

Gwen heard their whispers through the low window positioned between the kitchen and dining area.

"Do you suppose she heard us screwing last night...and this morning?" the female guest asked her lover with a trace of chagrin.

He grinned roguishly as he loaded his plate with fresh fruit and muffins. "I sure hope so. And with you being such a screamer, I imagine that little town down the hill heard you too."

*Oh I did hear you all right. And I even joined you.* Her cheeks warmed while her cunt started to throb and moisten yet again at the memory of it.

Holy mother, what was wrong with her?

*Harlot! Sinner! Hure!*

Gwen flung that despicable voice from her thoughts. She would *not* let him control or judge her anymore.

Later, as she checked the pots simmering on the stove, she heard the man say, "You ready, babe?" The smacking sounds of one licking their fingers carried through the window.

"Yep, this is a charming place, but I'm ready to hit the road."

Gwen heard their footsteps retreat toward the door. She breezed through the buffet area and into the vacant front room. Parting the curtains, she called out through the open window, "Thank you for staying at the Miracle Bed and Breakfast. Please come again!"

The couple waved, and Gwen watched as they climbed into a sleek cream-toned automobile and sped away.

Relieved to be alone, she marched upstairs and cleaned and tidied their suite...and tried not to blush when she stripped the well-used bed. Next, she went downstairs to remove the chicken and dumplings from the stove. Though they had no planned guests

for tonight, she would at least freeze the batch into portions for future use. The bread was baking in the oven, and the scent of yeast and buttermilk mingled with the fresh mums she'd pruned and set upon the table in the nook.

It was a cozy enough kitchen, she thought, though a bit too lofty and airy. All those copper pots and pans dangling over the island from the rustic beams overhead gave it a small measure of character. But it needed something, she mused. The whole inn needed...something. She studied the many appliances she'd already familiarized herself with, the worn cabinets and old tiled floor.

Ah, yes, it needed a woman's touch. It needed an ongoing theme throughout the whole inn. And thinking she just might have a grand idea, Gwen removed the bread from the oven, locked up the house and went in search of Molly.

She located her outdoors near the barn. Bent beneath the hood of a rusty automobile that looked to have seen better days, she'd pulled her hair back in a baseball cap, apparently to keep its long silky locks from dragging over the greasy engine. Something about that contradictory picture—glaring femininity despite the masculine picture she made—did things to Gwen's insides.

*Do I love this woman?*

No, as soon as the thought entered her mind, she shoved it aside. She couldn't allow her emotions to go down that surprising path, not when she planned to leave soon. Besides, Gwen had never been in love before, so how would she ever know what it truly was?

Still, she continued to caress Molly with her gaze. An overflowing toolbox sat on the motor next to her elbow. The tight blue shirt she wore rode up, revealing half of her slim, tanned back and tight abdomen. Her arm muscles flexed and the phone at her waist jiggled as she twisted and tightened engine parts. Since Gwen was still uncomfortable with answering the phones, Molly had transferred the lines and now wore her cell phone hooked to the waistband of her shorts.

Approaching, Gwen stopped and watched curiously as Molly banged and clanked, turned and secured nuts, reconnected wires and hoses. And swore like a man.

She may have had a filthy mouth, and sometimes wore clothes like a man, but everything else about her was all woman, even with her head buried beneath the hood of a vehicle. Gwen caught a warm whiff of the clean, floral scent of Molly just before her shadow fell over Molly's greasy body.

Gaze slicing up, a screw clamped between her teeth, Molly swept Gwen with a penetrating stare. Gwen's skin tingled, her nipples hardening. Molly might as well have fondled Gwen's bare skin. "When you gonna wear those shorts I gave you?" she asked around the bulk of the screw.

Gwen glanced down at her jeans concealed beneath the old worn apron. She slid a hesitant look back up at Molly. "I couldn't. They're too... revealing."

She drew the long screw from her mouth and wagged it at Gwen before dropping it into the toolbox. "It's too hot—you're too hot—to be wearing pants. You need to show

off that nice bod of yours.” She drew off the hat, shook her long locks free and swiped the back of an oily wrist across her forehead. It left an adorable smear across her brow. By the sudden tingling that started between Gwen’s legs, she could have sworn Molly had reached down and stroked her sex. “Besides, you do want to be that new, modernized outside woman, don’t you?”

She couldn’t argue that point. After all, she was no longer expected to wear the cumbersome black dress and suffocating bonnet. Summer was upon them, and it wouldn’t be getting any cooler. “I’ll think about it.”

“Fair enough.” She snatched up a wrench from the motor and tossed it in with the other tools. Leaning back on the grill, one boot heel hooked on the bumper behind her, she fiddled with the hat in her hand and asked nonchalantly, “So what’s up?”

Gwen folded her hands behind her back. “Well, I’ve decided to help you turn that barren front room into a pub, just like you suggested.”

“Really?” Beaming, her eyes aglow with delight, she plunked the hat back on her head and began gathering up her tools. As she tossed them in the box, they clanked and clunked.

“Yes, but I do have a few suggestions to make.”

She latched the container and set it on the ground, lowered the hood of the vehicle with a slam and resumed her stance against the truck. “This has the distinct sound of intrigue – and lots of expenses.”

“Well,” she began, turning to lean against the car next to Molly. “You do want to increase your occupancy, don’t you?”

“Yes, of course, but –”

“And you do,” she cut in, glancing sidelong at her, “want to have something to lure townsfolk and passersby in with, right?”

Molly planted her palms behind her and hitched herself up onto the worn pickup hood. She anchored her boots on the bumper, propped her elbows on her knees and groaned, “Get to the point, doll, before I kick you out on your ass.”

Gwen no longer took offense to her brassiness. It was just Molly being harmless, sarcastic Molly. With an excited grin, she held up a hand and replied, “Okay, here’s my brilliant idea. Let’s turn it back into a saloon, you know, western-style with bartenders in red-and-white striped shirts and barmaids wearing garters up under their short, frilly skirts?”

“Uh, being from that...sheltered group of yours, how did you know about western saloons?”

She turned, leaning an elbow on the hood, and faced Molly, ecstatic as the image of the new tavern formed in her mind. Pulling a saucy, sardonic face, she said, “It’s not as if Amish people are idiotic, uneducated dunces. We’re—they’re—all schooled. And I did read a lot—about anything in the world I could get my hands on.” She waved a dismissive hand. “Anyway, you could install kegs with spigots, build a wooden side

stage for performers, find an old player piano and knick-knack decorations at some antique shops nearby, redo the entrance with those double swinging half-doors, and –”

“Whoa! Whoa! Hold it there.” She thrust up a halting finger. “Do you know how much all that’ll cost to hire out? Cliff’s pretty thrifty – he’ll piss his pants.”

Determined to be heard, Gwen pushed away from the truck. She knew this idea would work. She felt it in her gut. Gripping Molly’s arms, she shook her gently and, with a sudden endearing tug of her heart, she scanned the smear of grease on Molly’s forehead.

“Don’t you see? *I* can do it! Jakob taught me all about woodworking and building things. Get me the wood, tools and supplies, and I’ll give you free labor in exchange for room and board.”

“He taught you to build player pianos?” Gwen loved the look of glittering drama in Molly’s grass-green eyes, eyes that only hours ago had been staring into her own in the throes of passion.

She studied Molly’s hands – the ones currently coated with black grease. Even like this, Gwen craved their touch and tender ministrations. The thought of them reaching out to her made her pussy engorge with hot desire.

“No.” She blew out a breath followed by a small chuckle. “That’ll have to be found and bought. But I can restore, build or rebuild anything. I know I can, I’ve done it many, many times. It would include the stage, the swing doors, the barrels and kegs, the cabinets and walls, the bar, varnishing the wood floors and all your ratty – sorry – furniture. And your kitchen cabinets? I can do those too.”

“Hmm...” She tapped a finger to her jaw. “You give me cause to pause, honey.”

“Do you have a miter saw and jigsaw?” she chattered. “A sander? Hammer, nails, a drill?” Her eyes were round with hope. God, she wanted to undertake this project so badly. Finally, something she could create with her own hands without the devil breathing down her neck.

Molly frowned theatrically. “Yes, out in the barn I use as a workshop, I’ve got every tool imaginable to man, and then some. But, uh, most of the above run on electricity. So after seeing how you used that electric mixer,” she winced mockingly, “I’m not so sure I’d trust you.”

Planting her fists on her hips, Gwen’s eyes flared. She had her hair down today, loose and streaming down her back. It fluttered behind her as she spoke, and God, how freeing it was! “I’ll have you know that cake turned out to be the best I’ve ever made, and I’ve used the mixer since then – without a hitch.”

She scrunched her nose. “But a saw? Shit, I could lose a hand or a leg or –”

“Molly,” she cut in with a warning tone. “Do you want me to continue helping with the laundry and cooking and cleaning?”

Molly nodded but looked away.

"Then I suggest you take me up on my idea. At the very least, let me show you my craftsmanship. I either leave and try to start a life somewhere else—I could be gone in five minutes—or I stay indefinitely and help you get your inn and pub up and running."

With a slow-growing smile, Molly replied, "That's my girl."

"All right, so I'm your girl." It felt so good to say that! "So what now?"

"Well, I'll make a pact with you. You show me how to build things with wood, I'll show you how to drive a car."

Excitement spiked in Gwen's belly. "Really?"

"Really, no shit. Come on." She pulled open the passenger's door, climbed onto the seat and slammed the door shut. Through the open window, she warned, "Gwenyth, my dear, you're about to take your very first Pennsylvania driving test. Just please, oh please, don't kill me."

\* \* \* \* \*

"Christ almighty! Trees are not targets," Molly screeched from her hiding place in the floorboard. Truly frightened, she'd lowered her hat over her eyes when Gwen meandered yet again off the worn field lane toward a ravine lined by enormous elms and oaks. "They're to be avoided at all costs. Seat belts," she grumbled, dragging herself back into the seat. "Remind me to install seat belts in this piece of crap before you get behind the wheel again."

"I *know* trees aren't where I'm *supposed* to aim," Gwen hissed through her teeth, wondering for the life of her how anyone could drive one of these motorized things so swiftly. "But this steering wheel...is it glued in place or something? It won't *turn*, for heaven's sake."

"Well, slow the fuck down and maybe we'll get somewhere in one piece."

She was only going...no, she wasn't going to look down again at the speedometer. The last time she'd done that, they'd ended up veering off the path and stuck in a pothole. Molly had gotten out and pushed—and had let out a string of curse words Gwen had never encountered in all her past reading material.

"The brake! Hit the damn brake!" Molly fidgeted, trying her hardest not to scream.

The tree was coming closer.

Gwen stomped on the pedal but nothing happened. The tree moved nearer.

"Mmm, that's the clutch, sweetie. Hit the other one too, the one on the right. One foot on each pedal." Her endearment did not match the growling tone of her voice. Gwen's legs were trembling so violently, she couldn't seem to locate the other pedal. And she wasn't about to take her eyes off the windshield...and that tree that seemed to be rushing toward them. Molly swore some more and finally scooted across the bench seat.

"Move out of my way! Now!"



Gwen scooted to her left.

Molly jammed her feet onto both the brake and the clutch, slamming the steering-column gearshift downward at the same time. The pair went hurtling forward, and Gwen's breath was knocked from her lungs by the steering wheel.

The engine spit and sputtered. It died and the motorized vehicle came to rest only inches from that menacing, towering oak.

Molly's breath ragged, her eyes wide with true fear and horror, she panted incredulously. "Holy beejesus, you're the worst driver I've ever known."

"Why, thank you," she said through clenched teeth, and fumbled for the door handle. She found it by luck with trembling hands and the shear sharp edge of her sudden anger. Climbing out and slamming the door behind her, she spat through the open window, "And you're the worst teacher I've ever known!"

Sprawled backward on the torn leather seat, Molly planted her face in her hands and mumbled something about, "Thank the Lord I'm still alive." She shoved open the driver's door and slid out onto the edge of the creek-fed ravine, her legs visibly shaking. "Look, I'm sorry. You did good, Amish, really – for someone who's never even touched a steering wheel before. But I'm so glad that tree and I didn't become one."

Her words struck a chord. Gwen snorted. She snorted yet again, and soon her giggles erupted into a full-fledged, knee-slapping roll of laughter. She wiped her eyes and shook her head. "I'm sorry, Molly, truly. I...I think it'll be awhile before I'll be getting that car."

Molly grinned, letting out a chuckle of agreement. But her smile faded, apparently Gwen's final words sinking in. "You plan on getting a car and leaving soon? But I thought we made a pact. I thought –"

"I'm saving my money for a vehicle. That doesn't mean I'm leaving *now*. But one day, I *am* going to buy a car and move on. That has always been my plan, and you knew that." She avoided Molly's shocked gaze by turning her back on her. Far across the opposite side of the brook, Gwen studied the long winding road that curled like a ribbon through the distant hills. It seemed at that poignant moment with the afternoon sun slanting across the breathtaking land, that the road gently pointed her toward the horizon and the completion of her goal.

Freedom and independence.

"I thought we just discussed and finalized this."

"We did." She whirled, ready for battle. "I'm staying, and I'm going to help you turn your place into a western pub, just like I suggested. But then eventually, I'll be on my way. I can't stay forever."

"You can do whatever you damn well please now, Gwenyth," she said in low, controlled tones.

Gwen had come to dislike Molly using her full first name. It usually indicated anger, sternness or disapproval. And the last thing she wanted was Molly's disapproval. But no matter Molly's mood, Gwen would stand her ground on this one.

"I know I can. And I will."

"Damn it, I want you to stay. Forever," Molly added with a husky whisper.

*Forever.* The word made her stomach churn with both excitement and dread. Forever here in Miracle meant possible discovery by Jakob, and she'd be a fool to wait like a sitting duck for him to come and hunt her down.

"Molly, in your words, I *am* going to do whatever I damn well please." Ah, so liberating to curse without blinking an eye! "I'm staying. But not forever."

Something snapped in Molly's eyes at that very moment. Gwen didn't think it was the curse word she had spoken, for Molly seemed to possess her own risqué vocabulary at times. It had to be the sudden realization that Gwen truly meant what she said. She *would* depart sometime in the near future.

But Gwen didn't have the heart to inquire what the look was all about. Nor did she wish to ever know. It would be easier on both of them if the strange emotion in Molly's eyes remained unspoken.

God, but she looked stunning standing there with passion swirling in her glittering eyes! Shaded by the tree, her voluptuous body exuded intense sex appeal. In her tight little shirt and frayed denim shorts, Molly was, by far, the most beautiful woman Gwen had ever seen. Even with the smears of grease on her face and arm—no, *because* of them!—she simply took Gwen's breath away and made her heart do flips in her chest.

Up above in the very tree Gwen had almost crashed into, a dove sang a melancholy song. Cicadas' high-pitched droning competed with the click of tree frogs. Down the incline of the ravine's bank, water gurgled in the small stream, its miniature waves tumbling over the rocky creek bed. A warm breeze stirred Gwen's hair, while leaves and limbs swayed above, their swishing, calming tune making Gwen long to curl up with Molly and make love all day long. Mingled with the sweet scent of hay, Gwen caught Molly's distinct, spicy aroma.

Mysteriously shaded by the brim of the hat, Molly's eyes remained locked on Gwen's as she glided closer. It was with amazed speechlessness that Gwen caught the glimmer of one lone tear in the corner of Molly's eye. Was it a remnant of their laughter, or was it the result of that nameless emotion that seemed to glow from her soul?

"Don't go, Amish. Please don't *ever* go." Still, she didn't free Gwen's gaze from hers, even as she reached out and took her hand. Curling her long fingers into Gwen's, it took one tug and they were in each other's arms.

"Molly..."

"Gwen..." Her arms crushed Gwen, molding every curve and plane to hers. Molly's mouth covered Gwen's, the hat tumbling off her head. Desire snaked straight down into Gwen's toes. There was no more of the hesitation and the awkwardness of

wondering what she should do with her arms and her body. Gwen let the lust rule her hands, her mouth, her tongue.

But reality hit her like one of Jakob's fists at the distant sound of a tractor starting up. She stiffened immediately, glancing across the half-mile or so that separated the inn from Miracle. Would someone see them embracing out here in broad daylight? But as their bodies melded together, as the stress and heat of the day began to seep from her weary body, Gwen gave in. Suddenly, she didn't care who saw them.

In fact, there was something completely wanton about the possibility of it. She sighed as one would when finally taking a drink of water following a long thirst. Her arms tightened around Molly's small waist. When Molly's hands began to move up and down her back to press them closer together, Gwen closed her eyes and savored the moment.

Softness, acceptance, patience. She could feel them breast-to-breast, hip-to-hip, and she experienced a sudden flare of fire, a combustion of fuel that began to slam through her bloodstream.

She sighed again, squeezed her arms about Molly and spoke through the kiss. "Molly?"

"Mmm?"

"Thank you for being my friend."

"Babe," Molly breathed, backing Gwen toward the open truck door until the smooth vinyl pressed against Gwen's ass. "I think we're much more than friends. Let me show you how much more... Get up in the truck and take your pants off."

"What? Here?" Oh God, just suspecting what Molly had in mind—not just kissing but making love out here in the light of day inside an old truck—gave Gwen a charge. Molly's daring nature alone had a way of keeping Gwen in a constant state of arousal.

"Look around you," Molly pointed out as she bent and quickly untied her boots. She kicked them off, and Gwen would never forget what she did next. She unfastened her shorts and slid them off. Molly stood there, proud and beautiful with her lower half now completely naked. In the sinful light of a summery afternoon, Gwen could see the bare lips of her cunt and the peeping of her pearl from between their shaved lips. It made her dizzy with reluctant desire, but her eyes darted around, hoping, praying no one saw her.

Apparently unfazed by her shocking, nefarious manners, Molly set a hand on the windowsill of the open truck door and continued to make her case. "Town is a good half-mile or so down and over the hill—no one there could possibly see us. And there's a line of trees here to hide us—mostly—from the main blacktop. The inn is vacant at the moment, we've got the truck to climb into and I'm so horny right now, I could come just looking at you."

"Oh gracious me," Gwen rasped, her hand pressed to her chest. She couldn't breathe, Lord help her. As if Molly had turned on a faucet in Gwen's pants, a flood of cream seeped onto her panties. Just imagining them being intimate right out here in the

middle of the outside world, it made her pussy pound incessantly with need. "Really? Here?"

"Really." Molly didn't wait any longer for Gwen to obey. She hurriedly rid Gwen of the apron, then undid her snap and zipper and yanked her jeans down. "Step out of them, and then get up in the truck and lie down on the seat. And hurry. I'm so hungry to taste your pussy, it hurts."

The naughty words and the image they brought to her mind had Gwen clutching the open door, for she feared she'd melt right at Molly's feet. Arid air rushed up to caress Gwen's sex, cooling the moisture yet increasing the temperature of her libido. Her entire body trembled with anticipation as she obediently kicked off her shoes and stepped out of the pants.

*How freeing and deliciously sinful to be standing here half-naked with the threat of someone seeing me!*

Molly raised her chin up, her expression challenging. "Get in. Now."

Without removing her eyes from Molly's glazed, rabid stare, Gwen scooted backward onto the seat. The cool, inflexible vinyl dragged over her ass and sticky mound, making her groan. She retreated far enough until she could lie with the top of her head against the far closed door.

Molly climbed in and shut the door behind her. Next, she gripped the steering wheel and spun around, repositioning herself until she perched backward on all-fours above Gwen.

"W-what are you – we – going to do?"

"It's called sixty-nine – we eat each other, and give and receive pleasure all at the same time. I've drooled over it watching tons of lesbian porno flicks, and I've been dying to do it with you since I first laid eyes on you."

"Ooh..." Somehow, she could easily picture it, and her heart, she feared, would simply burst from her chest if she didn't experience it soon. Fascinated, she got her first clear, unobstructed, bright view of a woman's anatomy, and realized with wanton glee that she would be kissing it soon, just as Molly had done to her many times since that first encounter. She reached up, her hand trembling with awe and excitement, and traced the plump lips, the swollen nub and the moist slit.

Molly had still been settling in and apparently hadn't expected the exploration so soon. She flipped her head up and howled. "Ah shit, you keep doing that, and I'm going to come undone before your tongue even touches my pussy."

Gwen loved hearing the naughty words erupt from Molly's mouth. It sent her into a rebellious state of sexual heat. She watched as the hole behind Molly's cunt puckered. Molly planted her knees on either side of Gwen's head, and Gwen studied the tanned and toned length of them with wonder. The vulva, ass and thighs were a beautiful portion of the female body, Gwen decided. She inhaled and caught the essence of female arousal. It sped up her own excitement, and she thought she'd die if the ache between her legs didn't get soothed soon.

It didn't take long. Molly dove in with a hunger like never before. Gwen cried out, arching her back. She tried to keep her eyes open, but the sensation between her legs was so intense, her eyelids clamped shut against her will. It seemed her core went from cold to blazing in two seconds flat. Molly's tongue snaked out and slurped up and down Gwen's slit. Her arms wrapped around Gwen's hips until Gwen felt herself being pulled apart. Warm air rushed in, but not for long. Molly slid a finger inside her, fucking her while her mouth did wondrous things to Gwen's clit.

When Gwen inhaled, drawing in the sweet fragrance of Molly's cum, she remembered what new exploration lay ahead of her—or more precisely, *above* her, just within reach. Her eyelids fluttered open. Molly held the bloom of her womanhood directly over Gwen's lips. Her mouth watered at the milky-white juice coating her mons. It made her think of the fresh cream she once gathered from cows' milk. Thirsty for her first taste of it, Gwen wrapped her arms around Molly's hips and tugged her down.

The bouquet of clean soap mixed with her womanly spice engulfed Gwen. Her tongue flicked upward to swipe a sample. The sweet, slightly bitter flavor burst on her tongue. It was like nothing she'd ever tasted before. She wanted to test a larger portion and flexed her tongue, delving deep into the tight hole.

Molly let out a muffled moan. Her ministrations quickened, a move that nearly brought Gwen off the seat and prompted her to increase her own explorations. She pulled tighter, sealing Molly's sex over her mouth. As Molly finger-fucked her, sending sparks of fire from her core out to every cell in her body, Gwen followed her lead. She inserted a finger into Molly's cunt and marveled at the hot slickness that surrounded her digit. In and out she pumped, faster and faster she licked.

"Mmm, ah—oh shit!"

"Oh mmm...yes, oh yes!"

It became so addictive that they clung and rocked against one another, letting out feral moans Gwen was certain could be heard all the way to Miracle.

Suddenly, a miracle did occur. Gwen experienced her first mind-boggling sixty-nine orgasm. While at the same time she received, she felt the spasms of Molly's climax squeeze around the length of her finger. Cream gushed out, soaking her mouth. She slurped and gulped it down, even as Molly reciprocated. Sparks and blazing flames shot off in all directions.

Gwen clamped her thighs around Molly's head, bucking, holding Molly's mouth in place. "Ooh!"

She burrowed deeper between Molly's legs, fucking her slick canal, drawing out the ecstasy for them both. Molly twitched. "Ah!"

Gradually, stillness prevailed. Gwen relaxed, her face buried in Molly's folds, and listened to the breeze carry through the trees. A lump formed in her throat. She would miss this place and the bold innkeeper she'd grown so fond of. She tried to picture her future living all alone in a bustling city, but the image just wouldn't form in her mind.

Gwen was a country girl at heart, but she still longed for modern conveniences and to be surrounded by normal, mainstream people. Her mind drifted. She pictured herself here in years to come. Squeezing her eyes shut, she was surprised at how quickly the image formed.

So what was she to do? Stay? The dove cooed in an old elm as if in favor. Go? Silence met her ears. Was that her answer? That heartrending moment, and what passion had just passed between the two women, etched itself in her mind as life's turning point.

But before she could further explore her thoughts and determine which way to turn, Molly collapsed atop Gwen. "Oh my God, Gwen." She rose up and spun around. Her eyes glittered with the remnants of lust and that one deep emotion Gwen couldn't quite name. Molly combed her hands through Gwen's damp hair. Her mouth and chin glistened with Gwen's elixir.

"Please, babe, please don't leave me. I'm begging you not to go. I promise, I'll keep you safe—I have a shotgun that'll blow that asshole's head right off if he so much as looks at you wrong. Gwen, baby," she said thickly, tears choking her up, "you can live here with me forever. You won't have to keep running. *Please* don't go."

Forever. There was that word again. Why did it frighten Gwen so very much? Her brain went back and scanned her whole life up to this point. And she knew the answer. It had nothing to do with this strange new commitment to a woman—or anyone else for that matter—or settling into a gay lifestyle. It was solely because of Jakob, just as she'd suspected all along.

For a while, she'd wondered if it wasn't because after being locked up in her Amish community for so long, she just longed to be free and alone the rest of her life. But that wasn't really the case, she finally admitted. Staying forever in any one place to Gwen had meant Jakob would eventually find her and force her back into a life she never wanted to live again.

But in reality, it wouldn't matter where she went or how far she fled from him. Just as Molly had asked, how far *would* be far enough? He would continue to influence her and keep her on the run even if she went to the end of the earth and he never actually came after her.

He'd brainwashed her—the whole damn Amish community had. As learned and programmed into her brain since childhood, she would keep a wall up between her and anyone, any outsiders, in her future no matter where she fled to. Letting her roots settle back in anywhere on this planet would mean his influence over her even in his absence would catch up to her, and she would have a difficult time escaping him again.

Yes, she had succeeded in escaping *physically*, she suddenly realized, but her mental breakout would be a long time coming if she continued to run.

So Molly had been right all along, despite her selfish motivations. Why *was* Gwen letting Jakob continue to rule her life? Why not stay, stand her ground and fight? She loved this place. So why not work on reprogramming her mind so that she could live

her life the way *she* wanted to? And God knew she truly, deep in her heart, wanted to stay!

*I want to stay because I love her.*

Saying it to herself while looking into those sparkling pools made Gwen breathless.

Her eyes stung with emotion, relief and happiness. She raked her hands through Molly's satiny, long tresses. "Molly, you're right. I am running, and I should stop."

Molly's eyes widened. She grinned. "You mean you're going to—" Her head popped up. Her smile faded. "Son of a bitch."

Gwen stiffened. "What?" At the look of shock on Molly's face, Gwen's mind screamed, *run, run!* But she fought against the lifelong, ingrained training of fear. She steadied her heart and forced it to calm.

Molly scrambled up, shoved open the driver's side door and bent to gather their clothes. She tossed Gwen's at her. "Get dressed. Now. *Hurry!*" She jammed on her shorts and shoved her feet in her boots.

Gwen didn't waste time looking for the source of Molly's angst. She slid her trembling legs into her pants and raised her hips to fasten them. As soon as the zipper closed, she turned to seek out what had caused such a stark change in Molly.

And her heart stopped. She couldn't breathe. Gwen's world spun around in a sickening whirl, and she feared she'd lose consciousness.

There, not three feet from the passenger door where Gwen had been devouring Molly's sex, stood the devil himself.

Jakob.

## **Part Two**

### **Heads**

#### **Cliff and Manny**



## Chapter Eight

Clifford Garrett stood on the ridge just behind the barn. He'd searched the whole inn, surprised to find it locked tight and Molly nowhere to be found. The succulent scent of bread had hit him as soon as he'd stuck the key in the door. It had wafted through the whole house and made his stomach growl. However, the door being locked, along with no guests and the strange fact that homemade food sat warm on the stove with no one about, had thrown up a bright red flag.

He always had been hell on red flags.

In this case, something was up because Molly couldn't cook worth a damn.

Definite red flag.

So he'd gone in search of her, knowing it would be likely she tinkered in her barn. But all he'd found, only adding to the curiousness of the situation, was her greasy toolbox on the ground and tire tracks leading down across the meadow and into the valley.

He planted his hands on his hips and scanned the dell where the rear stream meandered on their hundred-acre property. His gaze skimmed over and dismissed two splotches but quickly riveted back.

"What the fuck?" He squinted, wishing he'd brought his glasses with him. "Is that an Amish buggy? And Molly's old junky pickup?"

Curious, he took off at a strolling walk and continued his descent, noting with more bafflement the meandering tire tracks in the tall weeds. At times, they followed the worn trail left behind by the previous owners who had farmed this land. In other places, he saw where the tracks veered off the path without rhyme or reason. The grass had been pushed down, and in one spot in particular, he could see where tires had dug an obvious rut deeper yet, and a fresh pile of dirt mounded on the rim of the pothole.

He was already starting down the hill when he heard the raised voices. As he neared, his vision focused and he could see Molly and a beautiful blonde woman emerging from the truck. A tall, lanky Abe Lincoln look-alike stood a few feet from the dilapidated old vehicle, an expression of pure rage on his bearded, long face. He wore suspenders over a deep blue shirt, dark trousers and shoes and a broad-brimmed black hat. Obviously, the Amish buggy parked some thirty yards up the opposite hillside belonged to this man, though Cliff hadn't a clue why he'd chosen to trespass with it onto his property.

But he would be finding out very soon.

Suddenly, the fair-haired woman screamed, "Jakob, no! *Nein!*" Her voice was softly accented, which gave Cliff pause. His brows drew together. She appeared to be dressed

in one of Molly's shirts. But based on that distinct clipped inflection in her voice, could she be Amish too?

"Whores! *Hure!*" The man named Jakob growled, and before Clifford had realized what his intent was, he lunged forward and grabbed Molly by the upper arms. Cliff gasped and broke out in a run.

"Let go of me, you prick!" Molly hissed, attempting to knee the intruder.

"Jakob, *nein, nein*. You leave her out of this. Let go of her!" The woman had gripped the man's arm to pull him off Molly, but with one swipe, he knocked her to the ground.

"Hey, that is *enough*." Cliff's shout echoed across the valley. Molly's head pivoted toward Cliff's voice in surprise, which broke her concentration at a defensive escape. The man shook her violently and shoved her so brutally, Cliff was afraid he'd broken her neck. Then he drew back an opened palm and slapped her so viciously, it sounded like a baseball being cranked out of the park with an aluminum bat. She screeched, her head snapped back and she tumbled toward the fender of the pickup.

"No!" The single word tore from Cliff's throat in a painful croak. The sickening sound of her head hitting the truck made him so violently ill, he was afraid he might have to stop and vomit. He watched in horror, even as he sprinted toward the crazed beast, as Molly's blood splattered the vehicle's rusty hood.

"*Molly!*" The woman's bloodcurdling scream reverberated through the trees, sending a flock of doves scattering into flight. She raced to where Molly slumped near the front right tire. Gathering her up, she rocked Molly, sobbing, her eyes glittering with so much hatred, Cliff knew at that moment there was something between his ex-wife and this woman.

"What the *hell* is going on here, you son of a bitch?" Exactly the same height as the Amish man, Cliff fisted his left hand in the man's cotton, button-down shirt and stared deep into the eyes of the devil. Holy shit, such evilness gleaming back at him from the dark eyes. Cliff didn't wait for an answer to his question, but somehow, he knew he wouldn't be getting one anyway.

So he drew back and decked the fucker right in the jaw.

The man's head swiveled to the right and his hat flew off. His eyes rolled back in their sockets and he toppled to the ground with a grunt.

Cliff could hear Molly's groans and the woman's wailing tears behind him. Assured Molly breathed, he satisfied his rage and stood over the half-conscious jerk. He shook his smarting hand. As chef at the inn, he hoped to God he hadn't cracked a finger. Damn, it hurt like fucking hell. The last time he'd punched anyone, it had been the rugged face of Tim Schmidt in eleventh grade who'd taunted him with suspicions of Clifford being gay.

God, he'd hated high school.

He glanced over at Molly and saw that she was coming to. Anger boiled in his gut even more than it had for Tim all those years ago. He couldn't help himself. He drew

his foot back and took one swift, satisfying kick at "Abe". The man winced at initial contact then groaned, rolling over and clutching his side.

"Bastard. No one – and I mean *no* one – lays a hand on my wife."

The woman had been clutching Molly to her breast and inspecting the gash on her head but halted her ministrations at Cliff's words. Her startling blue eyes flew to Cliff. She gasped, her mouth gaping open as she stared at him.

"It's okay, honey," Molly rasped, reaching up and patting the woman's cheek. Blood soaked one shoulder of her blue tank shirt. "This is my ex-husband Clifford. We're divorced, remember? And he's not going to hurt you for touching me."

"Well, then," Jakob growled, directing his comment to Cliff. He spat blood and pulled himself to a sitting position. "Tell that to Gwentyth – *my* wife. I saw her – them. They were both – the sick whores – 'laying hands' on each other." He riveted his narrowed gaze on the woman called Gwentyth. "And I promise you, she will burn in hell for it."

*Laying hands* on each other, huh? Cliff was definitely intrigued by that statement. Had Molly already confirmed herself to be a lesbian in the few days since he'd taken off to Florida? He slid a furtive look at the two and watched as they stroked one another, murmuring, gazing deep into each other's eyes.

Cliff warded off a twinge of...something.

He pressed a fist to his stomach. Holy hell, was that jealousy that settled in his gut like sludge? And if so, was it jealousy at losing his wife to a woman? *Which would mean I'm probably not gay.* Or maybe he was gay, and it was jealousy that Molly had beat him to the punch, so to speak? Could it simply be envy that Molly had emerged from that murky stage of doubt into the light, while Cliff still couldn't see one foot in front of him? And here he'd gone all the way to Florida to try to "find" himself, only to give up and come home early – and fucking empty-handed at that.

He shoved aside the strange emotions swirling in his chest and said, "All right, pal, I've had just about enough of you." Cliff sliced a quick look at Molly, catching sight of the cell phone strapped to her hip just as he assumed it would be. Molly often transferred the phones and wandered the property, especially when Cliff was away doing the grocery shopping or out searching for decorations for the inn. "Molly, the cell phone please. It's time to get the sheriff out here."

"No need for that. I'm leaving." Jakob snatched up his hat and got to his feet. He rubbed his swollen, hairy jaw, his crazed stare locking on Gwentyth. "But I'll be back, I promise you that. And when I do come back, they're *both* as good as dead."

Cliff crossed and snatched the phone from Molly. While he dialed, he replied, "And I promise you this. You do, and I'll fucking kill you, you hear? Besides, the cops will be here faster than you can say giddy-up to your poor buggy horse there. They'll apprehend you before you're even a mile down the road. All kinds of charges coming your way too," he said nonchalantly as he held the phone to his ear and waited for the recorded prompter to play through. "Assault, trespassing, threat of murder, attempted

kidnapping—yeah, that one’s a stretch, but we’ll try every last charge known on the damn books.”

“We’ll see about that.” Jakob backed away. Jamming his hat on his head, he took off in a sprint toward his buggy. His hat toppled off, but he didn’t stop to pick it up.

Cliff watched him with a small measure of amusement and said into the phone, “Yeah it’s an emergency all right. Um, that’s why I dialed 911 in the first place. Clifford Garrett here at the inn in Miracle. Better get out here ASAP. Got some loony Amish guy who’s trespassing on my property and has just assaulted my wife, among other things. He’s trying to get away.” Cliff nodded. “Yes, looks like he and his black buggy are headed for the county road.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Days later, Clifford sat on a low ladder in the front parlor and gawked at the mess Molly and Gwen had left behind. “What the hell am I supposed to do with this disaster?”

Guided by Gwen’s apparent expertise at woodworking, Molly had been attempting to turn the parlor into a western saloon. He had to admit, he liked the idea, especially since Gwen offered free labor.

But Jesus, for the last four days, the scream of the miter saw, all that incessant hammering and the drone of the drill had reverberated throughout the inn and given Cliff the headache to rival Molly’s PMS. They’d formed such construction-zone chaos Cliff had finally been forced to put up the “No Vacancy” sign by the road. Shit, he couldn’t ask guests to pay to stay in a damn war zone. He’d found droves of sawdust upstairs when cleaning one of the readied suites, and for chrissake, he’d even tasted it in his food.

And Clifford Garrett’s gourmet and homemade food *never* tasted like sawdust.

Molly’s reservations for Florida had already been made weeks ago when Cliff had scheduled his. After he’d returned home earlier than intended, she’d called and added Gwen to the itinerary—fear of Jakob hovering about had them nearly sprinting out the door sooner than planned. Still, they’d spent the remainder of the week marking time and fulfilling their saloon vision that, by the looks of it, wouldn’t be completed anytime soon.

To soothe their skittish nerves—and his as well—over the possibility of Jakob returning, he’d slept in the spare room in Molly’s quarters. They’d all been on edge just waiting for Jakob to retaliate, but he’d never come back. Gwen and Molly had eventually relaxed and carried on with their female explorations. The thought of it made Cliff snort. What torture *that* had been lying there night after night listening to his lesbian ex-wife moan like he’d never heard her respond to lovemaking before.

And wondering if divorcing had been the right decision.

Now Molly and Gwen were skipping off into the Florida sunset, having left Cliff to watch out for Jakob and to clean up the muddle of the saloon they'd started but not finished.

Oh he didn't begrudge Molly her turn. He'd picked heads in the coin toss and gotten his chance to go on vacation first. It wasn't Molly's fault that his trip had turned out to be Calamity Cliff Goes To Hell and Back. It had been an utter disaster, all the way from his lost luggage, to being holed up in his hotel room due to torrential rainstorms, to making a total ass of himself by hitting on a very handsome man who'd turned out to be as straight as Cupid's arrow.

He sighed and swept, adding to the mound of sawdust.

So now, having chosen tails, it was rightfully Molly's turn. But he had to admit it was a relief knowing she was halfway across the country and out of that madman's reach.

Unfortunately, the sheriff had dragged his feet, and Jakob had been long gone by the time he'd shown up. The three of them had given their statements, but they currently awaited word on jurisdiction and how the two counties' departments would proceed.

If you asked Cliff, he'd say it was a bunch of crap. They're supposed to be law enforcers, for God's sake. And that county's inept sheriff's department wasn't even sure of their rights in arresting an Amish citizen? The man was just that, wasn't he? A citizen? Thus, he should be held accountable just the same as every other damn criminal in the county.

But what they claimed might be viewed as a "sovereign nation" to the courts justified—according to them—needing time to look into the specific laws of the matter before actually crossing over onto Amish property and arresting Jakob. Well, it looked all too apparent to Cliff. Hadn't he committed his crimes *off* Amish property?

Jesus Christ, that clan's been there for decades, perhaps well over a hundred years. And the damn sheriff didn't know the current law in dealing with them? True, it wasn't as if they were a crime-ridden cult in the slums. There probably wasn't a soul in that community who'd ever even *seen* a sheriff, let alone been arrested by one. But still...

He shoved his glasses up with a lusty exhale and swept some more. "Goddamn fucking debacle is what it is," he muttered, looking around at the enormous room and shaking his head. "And now that she's gone, what the hell am I going to do with all this mess?"

"How about finish the project yourself?"

Cliff spun around at the deep, resonate voice. He could have sworn his heart leaped from his chest. The giant leaning nonchalantly against the parlor doorjamb nearly sent him into cardiac arrest—and at thirty-two, he was way too young to die. He thought he'd locked the front door, but here the man stood in all that bulky flesh. It gave him the shivers to think anyone—even that madman Jakob Freemont—could have walked in on him without his knowledge.

He'd just gotten a new prescription, so he hoped it was his glasses rather than his nerves that made his vision suddenly warble. Refocusing and gathering his bravery, he raked the man from his coffee-brown, wavy, shoulder-length hair to the bulging arms folded over a black T-shirt and black leather vest.

*Was the man a vampire with all that black?*

His scrutiny moved lower to the narrow hips and corded thighs clad in faded blue jeans torn and frayed at the knees. Doing a loop-to-loop over the bulge in the crotch, he struggled to pull his stare back up to the handsome face.

"Excuse me?" he finally asked with all the appall he could muster after the shocking detour his eyes had just taken.

The stranger pushed off the doorway and sauntered forward. It was then Cliff's inspection settled on the eyes. Copper, just like the coin he'd tossed with Molly. But his dander went up at the expression on that rugged face. Lip-snarling arrogance so dense, he could have cut it with one of his prized chefs' knives.

"You asked what the hell you were going to do with this disaster. I say how about finishing it?" He had a thick Bronx accent with a hoarse underlay. Something about it gave Cliff a thrill despite the fight-or-flight rhythm currently racing through his system at the man's sudden, unexpected appearance in his house.

"And just who the hell are you?"

He thrust a hand out as immense as a bear's paw. Cliff got a mental vision of those calloused fingers exploring his body, wrapping around his cock. Disgusted with himself, he shook it off, recalling he didn't know a damn thing about this man.

And it would benefit him to not fall into the same embarrassing trap he had in Florida. He definitely felt a sexual pull when it came to masculine men, but that didn't mean he should assume this man—or even he himself for that matter—was gay or even bi. To learn from his mistakes, making an experimental play for someone without first determining their sexual preferences was idiotic and almost juvenile.

And totally crushing to the ego.

"The name's Manny." The omission of a last name didn't go unnoticed. Cliff's wary radar fired up and he sized up the intruder. He was no more than two inches taller than Cliff's six feet, but his muscle-packed body seemed twice as wide compared to Cliff's lean, athletic body. Strangely, he wondered what it would feel like to have those buff arms around him...

Cliff groaned at the continued direction of his thoughts. Talk about juvenile! He dug around for his adult self, swiped the dust from his palm and hesitantly offered his hand. He'd never felt a more solid, firm shake in his life. It sent a warm tingle up his forearm and into his chest. He tried to ignore the fact that his nipples hardened, tingling beneath his polo shirt.

"Clifford Garrett—most call me Cliff. I'm part-owner of this ruinous B&B...which we don't, by the way, have vacancies for. Didn't you see the sign I posted out by the road?" he asked, yanking his hand from that electric grip.

Manny's warm gaze went cold. He evaded Cliff's stare and instead let his perusal roam the room. With interest that almost appeared genuine, he looked from one sawhorse to another, several of them standing amid intricate tools or hugging that one eyesore wall—planned as the bar—which was currently gutted. "No. I...I came in from a different way."

*Big fucking red flag.*

Cliff's brows arched in disbelief. He tried not to notice the knot of fear growing in his gut. Something creepy shimmied up his spine. "A *different* way? Uh, there's only one way in, and that's to take the driveway from the county road below."

Manny flashed Cliff a grin, a white picket fence in the expanse of his tanned, rugged face. Cliff noticed he had a dimple in his chin, though it was partially shadowed by the day's growth of beard he sported. He wondered what it would feel like to explore the basin with his tongue...

"Eh, I didn't spot your place here when I first passed by. I headed into Miracle asking for accommodations. The gal clerking at the general store directed me here. Instead of backtracking all the way to the end of your drive," he said with a shrug, "I walked across the west field to get here."

"Ah, I see..." Cliff wasn't sure if he did in fact see. He knew of no "gal clerking" at this time of the evening at Miracle General Store. In fact, if he wasn't mistaken, they'd closed an hour ago. One thing that didn't go unnoticed was the lack of luggage and the fact Manny stated he'd "walked". "So you're a hitchhiker, then?"

He stuffed his hands in his front pockets and rocked back on the heels of his worn—vampire black again—hiking boots. "Yeah, I guess you could say that."

"Got any luggage?"

Manny hitched a thumb over his shoulder. "Got a pack out on the front porch."

"Mmm-hmm."

A decided awkwardness rent the air. Both of them shuffled their feet, looked away. Even with that vague panic burning in his gut, Cliff still couldn't shake the magnetic attraction he'd felt for this man the moment he'd laid eyes on him.

"So you got a room I can bunk in or not?"

*Hel-lo. Remember the red flag. Quit checking the dude out. Something's not right, even if he is a hunk.* "No."

"No?" Manny gawked for a moment but seemed to find his ire. He snapped his fingers. "Just like that?"

"Yes, no, just like that." Cliff mimicked the snapping of fingers.

He took in more details of the face. Was there anything besides the stunning brown eyes and faded jeans not dark about the man? Black slashes of eyebrows burrowed down to hover in clouds over the expressive orbs. The eyes were rimmed by thick midnight lashes so dark and long, Cliff briefly wondered if he wore mascara. He instantly dashed that notion, certain a man this rough-hewn and masculine wouldn't be

caught stiff and six feet under with makeup on. In fact, he probably hated that his lashes circled his eyes mysteriously and made women—and most likely men too—swoon.

Hell, they certainly caught Cliff's attention if the fact he couldn't drag a breath in were any indication.

"Fine. Suit yourself if you're going to be a prick about it."

Words and smoking eyes aside, his voice held an ominous note that had Cliff wondering if he'd made a deadly mistake in denying him lodging. Uneasiness emerging, his pulse sped up into a thready, erratic beat. Or was that due to this strange, dangerous attraction he seemed to be plagued by?

"Has nothing to do with being a prick. I already told you there's no vacancy at the moment."

"Oh yeah?" He helped himself to a seat on one of the sawhorses. Folding his arms, he settled back and crossed one thick ankle over the other. Cliff caught a glimpse of smooth kneecaps peeping from the ragged slits of his jeans. He imagined the knees digging into a mattress while thrusting his rod deep into someone's ass...Cliff's ass.

Cliff jolted at his shocking thoughts. *Where had that come from?* He drew himself back to the imminent danger before him.

Manny's ever-changing eyes glowered with sardonic humor. "Then why are there no cars in your parking lot?"

*Shit, busted!* And the last thing he wanted to do was reveal he was alone in the whole damn house. "The guests aren't here yet."

"Liar."

Anger overrode the niggling fear and erotic images. Cliff dropped the broom and it hit the floor with a snap. Dust wafted up, but he stifled the reflex to cough. "Look, I don't know who the hell you are, but you are standing in *my* house—uninvited at that. Your rudeness and false accusations are uncalled for." He plucked his cell phone off his hip and flipped it open—as if the damn sheriff would be any help at all. "I'm going to have to ask you to leave, or else I'm going to call the cops."

Ah, that did it. Manny's eyes blazed with something—was it fear?—and he jolted to a standing position so quickly, the sawhorse toppled over behind him. It sent one of Molly's many saws sailing across the floor. Son of a bitch! The damn thing had cost a fortune, the knowledge of which sent Cliff darting across the room to rescue it from its potentially deadly plight. He cursed under his breath, shoving aside the sawhorse and plucking up the saw.

"Goddamn it! Look what you've done." But not knowing diddly about the heavy electrical tool, he accidentally flipped the switch...wherever the hell that was. The saw came on with a scream and an ear-piercing squall. He gasped, nearly dropping the spinning blade onto his foot.



"Jesus H. Christ." Manny reached for the handle and yanked it from Cliff's grasp. He seemed to know exactly where the on-off switch was located, and promptly turned the monster off. He proceeded to slide the safety shield over the blade and set it on the floor a safe distance from Cliff's reach. "Don't you know how to handle one of these beasts?"

*Ah if only I could handle your beast...*

"No. That would be my wife's territory." He swiped a sheen of sweat from his brow.

"Your wife?"

"Ex-wife. She lives in different quarters in the house. We run the inn together, but we gave up on our marriage not long ago." Why the fuck did he feel compelled to explain that to a guy he'd threatened to call the law on only one minute ago?

"Mmm, I see."

Cliff shot him a scowl. "Really? Just what the hell do you think you see?"

"Your wife—*ex-wife*—wears the tools in the family. And since she's gone, all you know how to do is sweep around her mess."

"I never said she was gone."

"Yes you did." He bent, plucked up Cliff's cell phone and handed it to him. Apparently Cliff had dropped it in his heroic lunge to protect the golden saw. "You were bitching about her being gone and leaving you with the mess. I heard you right after I walked in."

Cliff snapped the phone shut. "I wasn't bitching. Women bitch, men get pissed."

Manny sighed and worked a thumb over his temple. "Okay, you were pissed. Look, it's not like I'm some Hitchcock character come to slit your throat while you shower. I'm a hitchhiker. So what? That doesn't make me a criminal. All I'm asking is a room for a night or two, and I don't give a damn about sleeping in a little dust. I can pay...or I can work it off by pitching in on your ex-wife's project here."

"Pitching in?" Cliff's interest was piqued. Yeah, he accepted the fact he'd been a bit too sensitive and jumpy with Manny. After that fiasco with Jakob Freemont and both counties' blunders, he didn't exactly feel like a safe citizen at the moment. Because of this mess and being forced to close the inn down indefinitely, he was alone in this creepy old house for the first time. Not that he was a pussy, but still, it would be nice to have some company.

"All these tools here?" Manny gestured around the room. "I know every one of them inside and out. Used to be a carpenter and dabbled in woodworking. And looking around, I can guess where she's going with it."

Cliff propped a foot up on the half-built stage and rested an elbow on his knee as he scanned the hell Molly and Gwen had created. "Yeah, a saloon. Molly and her girlfriend want to turn it into a western-style saloon and pub. I kind of like the idea," he said with a lift of his shoulder, "but I don't have the patience to help with the foundation and

dirty work. I'd prefer to be in the kitchen as the chef, or bartending and managing the pub once it's rehabbed. But at the same time, I know I can't get it up and running until this mess is at least halfway fixed. I've had to close down the inn because of this filthy war zone, and every day that goes by, we're losing money."

Manny reached up and squeezed Cliff's shoulder, buddy-like, he knew, but still it made him shiver. His senses took in the strong grip, the way Manny's grinding fingertips made Cliff's hair stand on end with succulent, selfish bliss. And holy crap, was that the beginnings of sweet desire snaking through his groin?

"No problem," Manny assured him, and Cliff caught the faint scent of perspiration and warm man. "I understand. But I'm here to help...if you give me a place to bunk for a night or two, that is."

\* \* \* \* \*

"This rear part of the main level is actually Molly's quarters. But since she'll be gone for the next week, I thought I'd stay upstairs here to be closer to the kitchen—we just had some awesome new cabinets and countertops installed. Anyhow, the kitchen downstairs in my apartment is nothing more than a kitchenette. Sucks a big one. It's far from gourmet." Cliff opened the spare bedroom door and stepped inside just past the doorjamb. "This is the room Gwen stayed in for a bit while I was in Florida last week."

"Gwen?" With the thready pulse of hunted prey, Manny made careful note that the room was positioned directly across the hall from another bedroom. He pivoted his head, glanced at its closed door and sized up the distance between the two. Filing it away as a possible escape route, he mentally calculated the number of steps it would take to get from one to the other. He'd already counted his strides from the front door to here.

"Yeah." Cliff shot him an amused look over his lean shoulder. "Molly's girlfriend."

"You mean..." He stood on the threshold and hitched his backpack up onto his shoulder, waiting for Cliff to step all the way inside. That girlfriend comment had certainly broken his concentration.

Cliff turned, and somehow good-natured about his wife choosing a woman over him, he jiggled his golden eyebrows. "Yes, I *mean*. Gwen's her lesbian lover."

Whoa! "No shit?"

"No shit. Like I said, we're divorced, and that, among other things, was a good reason for going through with it. Anyway, you can bed down in here. It's the spare where I've been staying for the last four days—but that's another story."

"I'm sure it is." Manny really wasn't in the mood to gab. He hadn't slept in over thirty-six hours, and he still had to stake out the place before he could relax. But in spite of his current priorities, he knew he would have questions later. Namely, why did it seem Cliff was taking his wife's gay lifestyle so nonchalantly?

"I'll switch on over and bunk in Molly and Gwen's room across the hall instead." He snorted. "I'm sure they wouldn't appreciate it if I let a stranger use their room. So if you need anything, that's where I'll be. We'll share this pass-through bathroom here at the end of the hall. We've each got a door leading from our rooms."

Cliff crossed and pulled open the private door, gesturing as if to show Manny the way. The hinges creaked. Manny jotted down a mental note of it. "So if you're the modest sort, you might want to lock the door leading to my room when you're using the facilities."

Manny wandered in and dumped his pack by the head of the double-sized four-poster bed. He took inventory of the space with its worn wood floor and antique furniture. An old rocker sat between the far bedside and the yellowing, flowery, papered wall. A mirrored dresser had been positioned opposite the foot of the bed. Drawn to one of his possible exits—or one of Vito Moretti's potential points of entry—he moved to the open window with its wide cushioned window seat. The scent of lilacs wafted through the screen, and the drone of cicadas sounded off somewhere in the nearby oak that shaded the backyard.

Quaint and cozy enough, he mused, but he wasn't here to let down his guard and get all snugly.

He parted the curtain just a crack and peered out into the pre-dusk of an early-summer evening where, by the waning light of day, he could still see the rear yard and meadows. There was a hump in the earth thirty yards or so out he assumed to be an old cellar. Beyond that, the yard sloped down and into an enormous, weeded field. A small ravine of some sort cradled a stream that meandered and tapered into a copse of woods.

His sharp stare scanned the horizon where the sun set in a glorious play of oranges and pinks off to his right. He could barely glimpse the back of the gothic-style barn with an old pickup truck parked at its side, but he memorized its position along with that of an aged shed to his left. Endless crisscrosses of fencing filled his vision, but his police training and eventual infiltration into an Italian mob in the Bronx long ago had taught him to memorize in minutes, even seconds. *Click-click*. His mind took mental pictures of each and every detail, sizing it up, planning and preparing for the worst. In the near future, he would need to know—and would obsessively check and recheck—if things were out of place or suspicious.

He shut the window and locked it. "What's beyond the field there?"

Cliff sat on the neatly made bed. His brow furrowed. "Uh, straight back and off to your left, more fields. We have a hundred acres, but there's other farms and land beyond that—and then a state forest that goes on for miles. Toward the right in the distance, you might be able to barely see the blacktop that also runs in front of the inn and goes through Miracle. Once it passes through town, it makes a sharp L so that from the back of the inn, we can see it winding up into the southern hills behind us. Why do you ask?"

Manny shrugged, grateful for that long explanation of the lay of the land but not ready to reveal his gratitude. "Mmm, just curious. Didn't mean to get a bedtime story out of you, but that's cool. Nice property you have here, pal."

"Thanks...pal." He didn't sound the least bit convinced by Manny's curiosity excuse. Manny felt the penetrating lime-green stare as he tested the window lock, slid it open, closed it, opened it, closed it. He did the same to the window, up and down, up and down, making sure everything was in working order for a possible escape. Turning, he stepped off the distance to the bathroom door, and then the space to the closet and the portal leading into the hallway.

Cliff got to his feet. He stood in the center of the room with his thumbs hooked in the belt loops of his khakis as he stared agog, watching Manny's every move. "Um, Mr. —"

"It's Manny." He tested the bathroom knob and locks, relieved to see it had two deadbolts, one for whatever side of the door you were on. Again, a good thing to have at his disposal. It was an added bonus that he'd have a door leading into the bathroom too. That left a third good route of escape.

Manny Valentino — or Joey Mangano, whatever role he played — always planned his routes of escape ahead of time. At this juncture in his life, he had to. The inn, he decided with a great deal of relief, was going to work out quite nicely as a temporary hideout.

"Okay then, Manny No-Last-Name. Can I ask why you're stepping off the room, wearing out the window and checking every last screw in the doors?"

He shrugged and strolled over to the bed. It looked soft and comfortable, a good place to finally rest his weary bones after weeks on the run. "I can get disoriented in the dark...at times. But this is nice. Really nice. I think it'll do," he murmured, running a hand over the patchwork quilt spread neat and tidy over the bed. Son of a bitch, could he ever use a good night's sleep.

"Disoriented in the dark... Okay, whatever. Well, towels are in the small closet in the bathroom, and as far as breakfast goes, I'm an early riser. I'll have it ready by seven, but don't feel obliged to join me — it appears you could use some rest. Once you're up and about, the saloon and all that pandemonium awaits. Better you than me, that's for damn sure." Cliff shoved his gold, wire-rimmed glasses up his slim nose and winked. Something about that jovial gesture gave Manny a strange charge.

Manny took stock of the accommodating man. His hair was a riot of loose golden-blond waves long enough to cover the tops of his ears. In the green polo that matched his eyes perfectly, he reminded Manny of a handsome, seasoned model posing on the front of a golfer's magazine...or maybe one of those international rugby-player-turned-model types with the lean bodies and pretty faces.

Either way, even with the specs on, he could easily see him on the front of a female-targeted magazine gazing into the camera with a sultry, I'm-Tarzan-you're-my-Jane look designed to make women swoon. Despite Cliff's lack of knowledge about tools,

apparent aversion to remodeling and the fact he dubbed himself a chef, he still had a masculine, friendly aura about him that Manny liked.

He scanned the face with the clear skin, dazzling eyes, sculpted cheeks, square jaw and full lips. *Full lips...* An age-old mental image flashed in his mind, one of male lips wrapped around his cock, a memory he'd buried and not thought of for a good fourteen years. He nearly stumbled backward onto the bed recalling it, that time during his junior year of college when he'd received a blowjob from another man.

Why the *hell* was he thinking of that now? *Stop, stop, stop!* Manny's mind screamed. He rubbed his temples, forcing himself to think of something — *anything* but *that*.

But it must be the fatigue. No matter how hard he tried to stop it, his mind kept wandering back to that night...

Having just had a horrendous fight with his girlfriend, he'd stormed out and ended up at a hole-in-the-wall bar in lower Manhattan. To his surprise, it had been a gay pub, but he hadn't realized it until he'd settled at the bar and started sipping his first cold one. Feeling uncomfortable but intrigued at the same time, he'd planned to finish his beer and leave.

Which he did after at least a dozen blatant propositions of everything from a handjob to a blowjob to the offer of a tight ass to bury his penis in.

He hadn't been ten feet outside the door and breathing a sigh of relief when a tall, muscle-packed, thirty-ish man had propositioned him, luring him just inside the entrance to the alley.

"Hey, hunk. Looking good." He'd nodded, the diamond stud in his left ear twinkling by the stray beams of the streetlight from the far corner post. "*Real* good." His dark gaze had raked Manny with such intensity, he'd gasped out loud at the involuntary sexual rush it had given him.

The man had been leaning against the outer wall of the bar, one booted heel propped up on the red brick behind him as if he'd been waiting for Manny to emerge. He'd worn jeans and a black leather vest with nothing beneath, and both his bulging deltoids had been decorated with beautiful tattoos. The head-banging music streaming into the alley from the punk band inside had sounded muffled and strangely erotic to Manny's ears. Traffic had buzzed by on the main street just around the corner, and humid summer night air had caressed Manny's bare arms and face.

"Thanks," Manny had mumbled.

The giant had suddenly strode forward to block Manny's path.

Manny had attempted to step around him but had succeeded only in getting snared by the beast. He could well recall his nostrils filling with the scent of the man. It had been a heady conglomeration of leather and manly soap as his burly arm had encircled Manny's lean waist and drawn him up against his full arousal. Their eyes had met, understood. He saw raw desire in the dark orbs and had been shocked to realize his own loins pounded with it too.

"Name's Will, by the way. I saw you in there." He'd jerked his head toward the bar, his long black hair flowing over his beefy shoulders. His voice had sounded whiskey-laced. His breath had been warm and soothing on Manny's cheek.

"H-hi. I'm Manny."

"Manny...mmm, I like that. Sounds real masculine." He paused. "I, uh, didn't peg you as one of them, ya know."

"Them?"

"Gays." Will had shrugged, and with the careless movement, Manny had whimpered when Will's erection had abraded over his own half-stony cock. "I'm not one either, but sometimes—every few months or so—I get an itch for a man. Probably the same for you, isn't it?"

Manny hadn't answered. He'd just stared up at the rugged, interesting face, ashamed at himself for loving the sensation of his dick being pressed against another.

The man had smiled at Manny's stunned silence, and his beautiful white teeth had glowed in the dimness filtering across his face from the streetlight. But his grin had quickly faded when Manny set his hand on the man's corded arm. He'd intended to unwrap the steely thing from around him and run. But once he'd gotten a feel of that brawn and strength, all he could do was let out a strangled wheeze of lust.

His feet had remained rooted on the still-warm pavement.

"Come on, I think you've got it bad too," Will had said with a note of sympathy in his voice. "My car's at the end of the alley. I've got a yen for some cock in my mouth tonight. How's that sound, to get yourself a nice blowjob while you jack me off?"

Being in his pre-academy days and only twenty-one at the time, Manny had froze, allowing the smooth talker to draw him to his car. He was going to let this man give him a blowjob? And reciprocate by palming him at the same time?

*Holy crap, what crazy fucking twilight zone did I just walk into? You need to stop this now!* he could recall his mind screaming. But as if in a dream state where he couldn't control his body's actions, he'd willingly climbed into the backseat with Will.

Manny had nearly passed out when Will unleashed his shaft. It was the biggest, thickest fucking cock he'd ever seen!

"See why I don't ask for some ass from you?" Will had winked. "I scare the shit out of 'em—so to speak—every time," he added with a deep chuckle.

Manny stood there in the spare bedroom of the inn and tried to shake himself back to the present. He vividly remembered how Will had knelt on the seat next to him and had pleased him beyond his wildest dreams. No female had given him such a thorough sucking, either before or since. By the time the carnal madness had engulfed him, he'd tossed aside his hang-ups. Curiosity had burned in his soul. He'd reached up and stroked that humongous rod, marveling at its size and the silky feel of it stretched tight over its steely bulk. The only penis he'd ever had in his hand was his own, so

being disjointed from touching one had turned out to be the most fascinating, sexy thing that had ever happened to him.

Ah, and then the balls...a thick pendulous sac that had tightened up like a basketball full of too much air in his hand.

But as the shameful vision flickered through Manny's mind, gradually the dark head in his lap sucking him off became a blond head with soft waves and a lean, strong body.

Cliff?

Holy Christ!

Manny's breathing became so rapid Cliff raced across the room and reached out a hand. He pulled Manny down by the arm and sat with him on the bed. "Are you all right?"

Uh, no, he was not all right. He couldn't afford for his rising hard-on to show. But Cliff's big hand continued to rub Manny's back. He might as well have been caressing Manny's pole. Shit, he didn't want Cliff to keep it up no matter how good it felt. Really, he didn't.

"Yes...yes." He took a deep breath and cursed inwardly when the spicy scent of Cliff's aftershave filled his lungs. A mental image blinked in his mind again...Will's head in his lap...morphing into Cliff's head. His fingers curled into tight fists. Stop it. Stop it right *now*, he thought, grinding the heels of his palms into his gritty eyes. "I'm fine, just fine. I guess I could use some fucking shut-eye."

Manny propped his elbows on his knees—partly to hide his erection, partly due to exhaustion—and held his head in his hands. Son of a bitch, where had that memory of Will come from? He'd buried it so long ago, he'd totally forgotten about it until now.

Well, he supposed joining the damn macho police force, and subsequently going undercover in the Moretti mobster gang, had played a big role in his convenient amnesia. He shuddered to think what Vito Moretti or his homophobic son Peter would have done if they'd had even one tiny inkling that he'd had a gay encounter on his résumé.

Manny thought of all those interrogations he'd witnessed—hell, even some he'd carried out himself in order to come off as a loyal "brother". Nausea plagued him. He could well recall every sickening noise, smell and sight in those three years of infiltration. Broken bones, busted balls and castrations, cracked skulls, severed fingers and toes, disfigured faces. And that didn't even count the full and final whacking jobs.

Oh and Manny had no doubt he'd have been whacked in a split second if they'd known he'd received a blowjob from a man and jacked him off in the backseat of a car.

No, Vito Moretti's men were not queers. And they would pay with their life if he even suspected it.

So Manny had had good reason to bury that encounter long ago...or else find himself bumped off and dumped in the nearest wet concrete leg of a new bridge. Or his

fifteen-piece body floating down the Hudson River. Or maybe turned into mulch by being fed live through Vito's infamous "Jaws" wood chipper.

Manny stifled a gag, ashamed that, even in the name of the law in order to put Vito's gang behind bars, he'd participated in such heinous acts. Well, it seemed recalling the reality of his shitty life as a mobster certainly could be a damn good cure for a riser.

Manny shifted, trying his best to ignore the chill bumps that spread over his skull and arms as Cliff continued to rub his back with concern.

"Mmm, I think some rest would be a good idea," Cliff replied, his voice soft and deep, almost soothing. "Manny...are you sure you're okay?"

Damn him. Did he have to sound so caring and gentle? Something about Cliff's manner made a lump form in Manny's throat. He nodded frantically, his face still in his hands. He was loath to speak—he wasn't sure what would come out of his mouth if he did. Being on the run for two weeks with little rest, coupled with years of stress, of walking that bloody line between life and death, it had just caught up with him. It seemed his whole messy existence just got sucked right down into the drain.

Once his big shoulders started to tremble, it didn't take much coaxing. At Cliff's "Aw, it's okay," Manny toppled into his arms.

He finally let go of his old identity as Joey Mangano, Vito Moretti's top dog, and let Manny Valentino emerge once again, hard-on and all.



## Chapter Nine

Whoa. Holy shits alive. Cliff couldn't believe what was happening. The guy was *crying*...well, not so much crying as he was groaning in his sleep. He'd just taken one shuddering, eerie sounding breath—as if he'd just died!—and collapsed right in Cliff's arms in total exhaustion. He wasn't sure if he should throw up one of his red flags or tuck the poor thing in and pamper him until dawn.

And for heaven's fucking sake, was that a bulge he'd glimpsed in Manny's crotch? *Gulp.*

He tried to look at everything in the room but the hot stud slumbering with his cheek pressed to Cliff's chest. But he couldn't keep his stare away. It zipped right back to the wondrous hunk in his arms. He'd thrown them around Manny's bulk simply out of reflex. Well, he'd had no choice actually. He didn't want the guy to tumble to the floor and crack his head open. Molly and Cliff couldn't afford a big lawsuit at such an early stage in their business venture.

Cliff cleared his mind of Molly and the inn, and inhaled the heady aroma of man while he could. Warm rippling muscles, hard even in sleep, blanketed Cliff's chest and abdomen. Cliff's cock twitched in response, but he ordered it to stop, attempting to curb a sexual appetite that had been denied for so long.

His last encounter had been a really long time ago, that night he and Molly had gone to that swingers' club in East St. Louis. He and Molly had had sex that night—God, he'd been so horny after watching all those male strippers strut on stage—but it had gone nowhere with no satisfaction for either one of them. All that fumbling and grunting with irritation at—what? At the time, they hadn't been sure what the problem was, but it wasn't the first time they'd had dissatisfactory sex, by far.

Cliff shoved aside the main reason for dissolving their marriage and wondered how a divorced man in possible denial of his true sexuality was supposed to proceed.

He looked down at the dark lashes fanning the strong cheekbones, the faintly crooked nose and the wide mouth parted in a dead sleep. Was *this* how he should proceed? Should he... The urge to kiss Manny—a *man!*—raged in Cliff more than he'd ever imagined in his wildest dreams. Yes, it looked like reality was proving to be far more vivid and intoxicating than his fantasies. His growing erection could attest to that. But even as his blood heated and a delicious quickening rushed through his groin, he couldn't help exploring his curiosity about this brazen, arrogant, puzzling man.

Where had he come from? And why did he prowl the place like a villain on the loose?

Cliff swallowed a lump of fascination. Was he an escaped felon maybe?

But he dashed that idea as soon as it popped into his brain. He shook his head. Nah, Cliff watched the local and national news channels religiously, starting with the early morning programs. He always let the TV drone in the background every day as he went about his work and kept it tuned to one of those twenty-four-hour-a-day satellite news stations. He'd have heard if there'd been a wanted criminal or a prison breakout.

There had been one recently, though, maybe three weeks ago? Some infamous crime lord from an Italian mob in the Bronx – Vito something-or-other, wasn't it? – had escaped from a New York maximum-security prison. But the mug picture they'd flashed on the screen did not, for sure, match this man. Cliff couldn't remember the details, but he did recall the man had been balding and in his mid-sixties.

No, not this man at all.

But something traumatic had occurred in Manny's life, there was no doubt about that. Manny could be an obsessive-compulsive nut, but Cliff gave him the benefit of the doubt. He'd assume for now Manny had a good, honest reason for stepping off distances, inquiring about the lay of the land and studying every lock and screw in the room. This was not just some vagrant hitchhiker worried about the law coming after him for stealing some food from a convenience store.

No, some sort of odd instinct told Cliff this was a man on the run from something much more dangerous and involved. The thought of deadly peril tracking Manny down caused a surprisingly protective urge to flare up in Cliff's chest. Sure, he'd been scared of Manny for a brief moment out in the saloon area, but Cliff decided to go with his gut intuition.

The only one who should be frightened of this man is the person in pursuit of him.

That decided, he let his gaze roam the face again. God, what a gorgeous man! Cliff couldn't help himself. He raised a hand and combed back the locks of dark hair falling over the forehead. Manny murmured something unintelligible. He sighed and settled closer, the weight of his massive body pushing against Cliff's. His muscles trembling, Cliff gritted his teeth and attempted to hold Manny's weight up as he sat on the bed with him. Cliff was a fit man but not nearly as buffed up as Manny was. It was no use. Slowly, he fell backward onto the quilt, and Manny's big upper body settled atop Cliff's chest.

Manny mumbled and shifted his position. He flung his left arm and left leg over Cliff, snuggling closer still. Cliff sucked in a shocked breath when Manny's half-hard spike pressed against his left thigh. Desire slammed into him, a meaty fist of relentless pleasure-pain that dead-on hit its target in his loins and burst out from there.

"Son of a bitch," Cliff rasped.

"Huh?" Manny lifted his head, his eyelids fluttering but not staying completely open. The whites of his eyes were bloodshot surrounding the stunning copper of his irises.

"Shhh." Cliff didn't know what else to do but soothe and stroke his corded back.

Manny sighed in his stupor, tucking his face into the crook of Cliff's neck with a sigh of bliss.

Cliff drew back and tilted his stare to look down into the beautiful slumbering face. He needed to know what the man had in mind before he went any further.

But what happened next told him everything about himself and Manny. It became the life-altering, pivotal point of his whole existence.

With his eyes now fully open, Manny lifted his jaw, mumbled something about, "Waited so long to have this again," and he rooted around on Cliff's face. Moist lips dragged over his chin and cheek as Cliff stared up at the ceiling in stunned disbelief. The warm, big body blanketed his side, and that stiff shaft, held hostage by those ragged, faded blue jeans, kept grinding relentlessly into his thigh. Manny's hand slid from Cliff's right shoulder down to his breast and squeezed.

"Ah, feels good," Manny rasped.

Cliff almost came off the bed, but instead he laid there as heaviness and tingling need transformed his soft nipple into a tight pebble. The abrasion over the knot was almost too much to bear. Hot, languid lust curled down and spiraled into his cock.

Well, what the hell was he supposed to do? Ignore the pleasure of it and push the man away? Ignore that enormous bulge? Ignore the obvious search for a passionate kiss?

No, no and no. Cliff would be damned if he'd let a valuable opportunity like this slip by to see if he truly was gay. So he did what any man would do who was curious about his sexuality and his relentless attraction to men. He let himself be seduced and closed his mouth over Manny's eager lips, putting himself to the test.

It was a frantic kiss from both sides. Manny's tongue pushed past Cliff's lips. He breathed rigorously as if he fought for air and couldn't get deep enough. The thick, wet ribbon of his need twirled around Cliff's tongue and traced his mouth.

It boggled his mind that this was the first kiss in Cliff's life that had the power to make fireworks snap off and explode in his body. Until now, he'd never been able to understand what all the hype was about kissing. And wow, did he ever comprehend it now. The tingling trail that blazed from the tip of his tongue and wound its way hot and heavy into his phallus definitely made itself understood.

Cliff had to have more. Mouths still melded together like glue, he rolled further to his left, instinct driving his pelvis toward Manny's hard tool. He needed to feel his front side flush with Manny's, with a man's. He slid his hand under the leather vest and around to Manny's shoulder blades. Arms clutched everywhere, wrapping so tight, Cliff didn't know where his ended and Manny's began. Their unison song of groans and moans filled Cliff's ears, turning him on like never before. Mmm, and he thrust his hips forward and gasped with delight when his cock bumped into Manny's.

*Jesus' holy angels on high. Is this what I've been missing all my life?*

Manny tensed and let out a growl so rapturous, it made Cliff wonder if cum now soaked his underwear. Cliff was normally an impulsive go-getter, do first and ponder

the consequences later—except in his sex life. But this sexual encounter was different from all those other cautious ones he'd had with females in his past. Urges he'd never felt before during heavy petting now drove him to find out for himself and worry about his actions later.

Christ alive, he had to get his palm wrapped around that hard-on, to see if a sticky wetness coated the head. Cliff raced his right hand across Manny's back, exploring the rippling muscles as he went. Their hips ground together in unison, and Cliff decided that if Manny hadn't come, he himself would very soon if this grinding kept up at this pace. He tried to focus on his destination...getting down into the front of Manny's jeans.

But Cliff's hand brushed something else solid, something tucked into the back of the waistband. And since Cliff didn't believe in aliens with "alternative" appendages, up went a red flag. It waved and flapped like fucking mad.

*A gun?*

He stifled a wheeze of surprise and closed his hand around the object. His pulse pounded in his ear as he slowly drew it from the confines of the pants. Ah, there's nothing like cold, hard steel to put out the fire, he mused, holding up the huge black pistol...black, dark and mysterious just like everything else about this man.

Manny's lids popped open. "What the fuck?" He searched around him with glazed eyes, eventually looking down in horror to find himself pressed against Cliff's body...and Cliff's erection. He shoved so forcefully against Cliff's chest, Cliff almost dropped the gun.

"What the *hell* are you doing to me?"

Cliff was genuinely surprised to hear the question. Manny didn't know what they were doing? And *he'd* initiated it? He understood Manny had been groggy, but he'd fully assumed he knew what he was doing.

*Shit, you just had your first mind-blowing, sexual experience with a man who obviously didn't realize he'd been doing it. Great. Just fucking great for the old ego.*

Manny shot to his feet and snatched the gun from Cliff's grip. Standing there in all his hard-on glory, Manny trembled with apparent rage and shock at what he'd just done in his exhausted stupor.

With a deep sense of disappointment, Cliff forced himself to push aside the embarrassment that started to warm his face. But curiosity drove him to slide a quick glance at Manny's jeans. He didn't see any damp evidence of cum soaking the crotch. And the vest had swung over his T-shirt, though Cliff knew with the black cotton fabric, it might have been difficult to discern a damp spot anyway. Disenchanted by the reality of a fantasy gone awry, he accepted the fact that maybe that shuddering cry of Manny's hadn't been a climax after all.

Maybe he *was* straight. Maybe, Cliff thought with a sinking heart, he'd thought he was fooling around with a woman.

Wonderful. Chalk another one up for the ol' male ego.

Cliff sighed and finally lifted his gaze. He stared up at the rumpled, arrogant epitome of Adonis himself. His heart clawed its way out of that sinkhole and did a flip in his chest, almost in spite of the regret and humiliation he felt.

"What was *I* doing to *you*?" he asked incredulously. "Uh, kissing you *back*—after you nearly attacked me in a sexual frenzy. Yep, amazingly hungry, you were." He just couldn't help adding that little dig. It made him feel a smidgen better. Somewhat recovered, Cliff got to his feet and readjusted his khakis. His brain now took note of the discomfort instead of the pleasure. Damn pants stretched across an arousal felt like a noose once the raging fires had been doused.

"Kissing me *back*?"

"Yes, that's right." Cliff started for the door. He'd be damned if he was going to stand here and defend himself to an asshole who'd come onto *him*. He spun back around. On second thought, a little more self-defense wouldn't hurt. "After falling asleep in my arms, you woke up—at least I *thought* you were halfway awake—and you kissed me."

Manny shut his eyes and covered his face with the back of the hand that still held the gun. It shook, and Cliff prayed he had the safety on. "No..."

"Oh yes you did. I knew you were drowsy, but I assumed you still knew what you were fucking doing. Obviously, I was wrong. But don't worry," he hissed, turning to yank open the door. "It won't happen again—accepting frantic kisses, hugs and cock-grinding from a man, that is."

*There, take that dose of reality, you prick.*

Manny groaned. "Jesus."

That one word said it all. Regret. "Yeah, whatever."

"I did *not* kiss you."

"Did so, goddamn it." Cliff gripped the outside knob and turned toward the six-panel oak door. He gritted his teeth, stifling the urge to pound his head into its thick surface. He'd made the same mistake in Florida. Geez, how the hell did you tell who was gay and who wasn't? But fisting his free hand, he recollected the stark, carnal truth of what had just happened. Something told him he wasn't nearly as far off the mark this time. "And you were real good at it, I might add." He couldn't help himself. It was the God's honest truth.

"Shut up, Cliff. I don't want to hear it. It was a mistake. I haven't had any sleep for over thirty-six hours. I didn't know what I was doing—or who I was doing it with."

*Or maybe long-buried desires had emerged and you just let them take over in your grogginess...*

Cliff had no choice. A more important matter stared him in the face. He shoved the whole erotic incident aside in favor of hearing the truth. He had to know. At first, he'd planned to let it go, but he'd changed his mind. It was his inn, his right to know and his responsibility to make sure the place was safe.

Mustering up a penetrating stare, he barked, "What the hell do you have that gun for?"

Manny shot a quick glimpse at it, turning the cold silver metal this way and that in his hand, as if he'd forgotten it was there. "Protection, why else?"

"From what?"

Manny muttered something under his breath and adjusted his snug pants. He stuffed the gun back into the rear waistband of his jeans. "It's none of your fucking business."

Anger spiked so high and zipped so rapidly along his nerve endings, it sent Cliff racing across the room. He shoved his face into Manny's...who didn't seem the least bit threatened.

"It is my 'fucking' business if you've got the damn gun under *my* roof. Now either you tell me what the hell is up with you and why you have that thing in your possession, or you hit the frigging road."

Something volatile snapped in Manny's eyes. He glowered at Cliff for so long, he started to assume Manny refused to utter another word. The whole while they stood there glaring at each other, Cliff could smell the scent of him again. It was a potent combination of leather, manly soap and the vague perspiration laced by the fear of one on the run. God, it was so addictive!

*Ignore it, Cliff, ignore it. It's a lost cause.*

Finally, Manny spoke, that murderous light dying in his gaze. "You can't do that. I need a place to stay."

"Then you spill your guts. I may not know where the damn off switch is on an electric saw, but I'm not an idiot. I could sense something odd about you from the first arrogant word out of your mouth."

"Arrogant? Why that's —"

"Out with it, or get the fuck out of my house." Cliff trembled with his rage. He meant every word of it. This man may have just helped him take one step closer to the truth about himself, but that didn't give him the right to march into his house unannounced and wield a gun like some *America's Most Wanted* bandit.

"The truth won't make a fucking bit of difference, believe me, I know." He clomped to his hiker's pack and heaved it up onto his back. With narrowed, glittering eyes, he added, "I told the truth once and it's gotten my head damn-near on a platter. Adios, pal."

With a heavy heart and his mind screaming *no*, Cliff watched Manny saunter right out the door.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Wait." Cliff's big hand curled around Manny's biceps. He stopped in the hallway and swiveled his head around. Manny sliced a look down at the smooth skin and long

fingers. It was definitely a man's hand, but it didn't show the signs of demanding labor—or death—like Manny's did. Overall, even though the expanse of the hand still had a masculine look to it, a sick sort of thrill quaked through Manny as he watched it curl around the pumped muscles of his arm.

Many a woman had explored his physique, but God help him, none of those soft, feminine hands looked as good as Cliff's large one did on his flexed biceps.

"For what?" Manny yanked his arm free.

Cliff slid his hands in his front pants pockets and jingled his keys. "Please...please, I'm sorry. Stay. With Molly and Gwen gone and the place shut down for renovation, I-I wouldn't mind the company. Plus, I could use your help with that mess in the saloon."

Manny glanced away and studied an antique framed painting that hung on the corridor wall above a small side table. A floral arrangement sat below the old artwork, and Manny wondered if that little touch of hominess was Cliff's doing. The possibility of it somehow gave him a warm glow inside he didn't want—or need—to feel at all.

Still, he wondered...how long had it been since he'd had a welcoming, comfy home to retreat to like this one? Since before college, in the farmhouse he'd grown up in in rural Missouri maybe? His mother and father—rest their souls—had provided him a safe and secure home with a typical, traditional upbringing. As an only child, his boyhood had been uneventful and happy, and it was filled with memories that made his insides radiate with warmth, just the way those flowers made him feel when he thought of Cliff arranging them and seeing to the inn's comforts.

*Goddamn, that's fucking ridiculous!*

He tried to dredge up the chronology of things instead, to take his mind off those flowers and the strong hand on his arm. There'd been college outside of Manhattan, then the police academy and working as a beat cop. He'd lived the bachelor lifestyle, thoroughly enjoying his apartment, his freedom and all the women who'd thrown themselves at him.

Then he'd moved to the heart of New York City to become an undercover agent, which had drastically altered his lifestyle and way of thinking. Having become invisible and aloof to his former circle of friends, they'd abruptly faded into a past he wasn't allowed to claim. He had to be much more careful, and he'd been forced to move deep into the Bronx and assume a new identity, that of Joey Mangano, carpenter turned feared street thug. He'd made his message very known. He was a Moretti-gang wannabe.

After some more extensive training and education on the intricate workings of the mafia, he'd eventually ingratiated himself into Vito Moretti's circle, proving himself time and time again with blood and brawn. Those three years he'd spent under Vito's rule, he'd lived in a tiny apartment north of the Bronx. But by that time, his parents had passed away and he did what he thought best. Rather than sell his childhood home or move back and give up all he'd worked toward, he turned it into rental property.

So even if he'd wanted it, he'd had no one or nothing to come home to at that point in his life other than tenants. Hell, there hadn't been time even if there had been a family to go home to. He'd spent most of those years on the streets busting heads for Vito, so it wasn't exactly the best environment to raise a family. Occasionally, Vito's wife Maria would throw lavish parties in their Long Island mansion. Manny would attend, taking full advantage of all that fine, expensive cuisine and free pussy. He was welcomed into their posh world and even expected to kick back and make himself at home.

So what had he needed a family of his own for, anyway?

But once Manny had gathered all the evidence he and the FBI had needed to arrest Vito and his "family", Manny had been found out while still undercover. By the time he'd narrowly escaped with his life, agents had shot down every one of Vito's known ruffians except Vito himself and his son Peter, who had escaped and remained at large.

Once Vito had realized he'd been betrayed by his top-dog gangster, he'd sent threats claiming to find a way to see Manny dead. As a precaution, Manny had been placed in the WPP. They'd set him up in a ho-hum construction job in a small port town in northern Maine—God, how he'd hated that place—immediately following the sting bust and Vito's apprehension. He'd carried on a dull life while the trial had dragged on for over a year, only returning to New York to testify while under protection.

Manny sighed and let his whole post-high-school life pass before him in a flash. In that poignant moment, he finally accepted the truth. Whether he'd realized it or not, he'd been running for years, seeking, searching...but for what? It seemed no matter where he'd gone since leaving home, there had always been something missing in all aspects of his life that he couldn't quite put his finger on.

What was it? Love, freedom, happiness? Maybe that good old Americanized form of commitment to another human being? He shuddered at the thought of that. He couldn't see himself settling down or staying in one place for too long with any woman. Manny had grown too used to the clandestine, no-roots lifestyle.

So he really didn't know what that piece of the puzzle could be, or why he suddenly seemed compelled to fit it into its place. But he was certain he felt that indefinable thing here in this old house. God knew he didn't want to leave whatever it was that seemed to pull at him. But apparently, his carelessness at forgetting about the gun in his waistband had been the turning point in whether he stayed or went. Well, that and his pretending-to-be-asleep-and-see-where-he-could-get farce.

Had he fucked it up and made a fool of himself by letting his curiosity go awry? He'd taken a chance even when he really didn't think Cliff was gay. It wasn't like Cliff was some effeminate, flaming gay-boy. Overall, he looked and came off as a purely masculine man—shit, was he stereotyping here?—despite his penchant for cooking and cleaning and his aversion to tools. His response to Manny's sleepy seduction of curiosity had been explosive to say the least.



But even so, Cliff couldn't be gay – or could he? He'd mentioned his wife being a lesbian, but the odds of Cliff also being homosexual were slim to nil. More than likely, he just had some horniness built up in him knowing his wife got it on with a woman right under the same roof. That always turned straight men on, and had kind of intrigued Manny on occasion, but not nearly, he suddenly realized, to the extent it had other men he'd known.

His mind rewound to only moments ago. Manny had known full well what he was doing, but he'd be damned if he'd admit it to Cliff. Against his ego's commands, all those jumbled, fatigued memories of Will had taken his bushed mind and body back to that night long ago. He'd been groggy all right, but his unrelenting hard-on had been wide awake and demanding. He'd halfway known what he was doing, and he'd been astounded to see that Will had been exchanged in his mind for Cliff.

He could recall silently telling himself, *Ah, now's your chance. Since he thinks you're asleep, see if your one encounter with a man was just that – the one and only, never to be repeated.*

But then, once he'd thrown his deadweight onto Cliff, forcing the two of them to lie back on the bed, he'd felt the firm chest beneath his cheek and the lean, long body stretched against his. Oh yes, the warm bod next to him had felt so comforting it had almost lured him into a baby's slumber.

He'd been fleeing from Maine on foot for a good two weeks or so now. Going on two days without sleep would do that to anyone, so he might have even passed out for a brief moment or two. But then his body and his senses had insisted he awaken and take note. He'd smelled the clean scent of aftershave and some sort of sweet kitchen spices. He could even remember squeezing Cliff's breast and grinding his column against Cliff's thigh. It had made his penis throb with a need like never before. So he'd decided at that point that a kiss would tell him all he needed to know.

But it had only fueled the reluctant flames. The next thing he knew, they were rod-bumping and Manny had himself a mess inside his boxers.

*Jesus, did I really do that?*

He heaved out a lusty exhale, his face flushing with embarrassment and self-disgust. What a jackass, what a pervert he'd been. To feign sleep had been totally unfair of him, and he felt like a real ass about it. The reality of his deceit combined with the ghastly acts of what he'd just done with another man sent him spiraling into humiliation and despair. Ah, kindly pass him the damn Jerk-of-the-Year-Award. He'd wanted to see if all that astounding eroticism he'd felt with Will had been a one-time thing or a reality he should address.

*So I used Cliff just to test myself.*

Prick.

Jerk.

Schmuck.

Asshole.

But what was done was done. Manny shifted his stance in an effort to decrease the discomfort over his now half-stiff, soggy-with-cum erection. What would Cliff do if he knew Manny had climaxed during their cock-grinding episode? Shame and disgust warred with the memory of the intense pleasure of it. God, even with their clothes between them, it had been far better than his encounter with Will!

*Son of a bitch, am I gay?*

No! No, no, it couldn't be. It was nothing more than the releasing of years of pent-up stress and the recent rigors of being on the run. In his confused state of total exhaustion, he'd succumbed to whatever was within reach. That didn't make him gay, goddamn it.

"Well?" The deep, soothing voice snapped Manny out of his musing. Cliff's eyes were wide behind the lenses of his glasses. They reminded Manny of two ripe, juicy limes.

"Well what?"

Cliff yanked his hand away and Manny ignored the disappointment of freedom. "Will you stay or not? I'm not going to beg you. Just make up your damn mind."

"Uh, it seems you have a problem with the gun. And since I'm not letting go of it, I guess that means I'm out of here."

"Look," Cliff said, shuffling his loafers and crossing his arms over his chest. "Just tell me why you have the gun. Tell me just an inkling of what's going on with you so I can understand it and relax. I mean, am I harboring a criminal? Aiding and abetting? Am I going to get my freaking ass thrown into jail if I open my home to you? What? For chrissake, just give me *something* to go on. I think I deserve that much."

He was right. It was unfair of Manny to practically barge in wielding a gun, not offer explanations and expect Cliff to turn his head the other way. From Cliff's point of view, it must look awfully scary and peculiar. And it was.

"I can't tell you everything."

Cliff shrugged. "Okay, then part of it. Just enough to convince me I'm not going to be breaking the law by letting you stay here."

Manny dropped his huge pack and propped it up at his feet. He gripped the nylon loop and thought it over. How much should he divulge? Manny was aware that the least Cliff knew, probably the better. Finally, he replied, "Ever heard of the WPP?"

"WPP?" Cliff's eyes rounded with fascination. "You mean the Witness Protection Program?"

"Yep, that's the one."

He grinned. "Sure I have. I've seen reports on the news about it and watched biographies and documentaries on every satellite network on the planet. Oh my God, you're not—" He thrust a hand through his hair, jostling all those golden waves. Something about it made Manny's fingers itch. "Are you one of *them*, a secret WPP witness?"

"I... Yes. But, Cliff, you have to assure me I have your total and complete confidence. It's a matter of life and death...most likely death in the end."

Cliff's jaw dropped. "Death?" He gulped. His eyes darted around and he lowered the volume of his voice to a near whisper. "Oh shit. I bet they learned your fake ID and whereabouts. Now you've got someone after you, don't you?"

"Mmm, to say the least. Which is another reason you'll never know my real last name. Now give me your promise, damn it, before I say anything else."

He crossed his heart and held up his hand, palm forward. "Swear. I swear not to tell a soul. You have my word I won't reveal a thing about you to anyone, not even your last name if I ever knew it. See? You're dead as far as I'm concerned."

"Thanks...I think." Manny hauled the pack up onto his back. "All right, all I'm going to give you is a very short summary."

Cliff nodded and stuffed his hands in his front pockets. "Okay, okay. I get it. Will you just tell me already?"

Manny paused, gathering his thoughts carefully. "I testified against a very dangerous criminal and was put in the WPP. Long story short, he recently broke out of prison. And you're right. Somehow about the same time as the prison bust, my cover was blown. He discovered my fake name, address, phone number, everything. Boom. Just like that, my quiet, boring little life blown to smithereens. So here I am just passing through on my way to nowhere."

"Oh crap. Well, why didn't you just say all that in the first damn place?" He waved a hand at Manny's withering stare. "Never mind. Okay, now, I've heard enough. Let's get you fed, showered, shaved and rested. Just turn that ass around and head right back into the spare room."

Cliff gripped Manny's shoulder and physically spun him around so he faced the end of the hall. With a gentle shove, he continued his scolding. "Go. Get settled in, take a nap—whatever you need. Then come and get something to eat. You must be totally exhausted and famished after all that running. And I have hordes of food for you to choose from, so go, hurry."

Relieved that his glossed-over explanation had gone well and that Cliff appeared to be far more receptive and accommodating than he even hoped, Manny obeyed. As he sauntered down the corridor, he threw over his shoulder, "If you don't mind, though, food overrides sleep for now. Get every damn morsel of it ready, because I'm warning you, I'm as hungry as a wolf."

\* \* \* \* \*

*Hungry as a wolf.*

Yeah, Manny had been that all right, Cliff decided, recalling their explosive bedroom incident. But it had had nothing to do with food.

Cliff strolled back into the bathroom to spit. He'd gone in and pasted up his toothbrush, then scrubbed his pearlies as he walked the house locking the doors. He readied himself for bed, planning to watch the nightly news on the television in Molly's bedroom after being stood up in the kitchen. Manny hadn't shown up after all, so Cliff had succumbed to his curiosity and peeped inside his room. Sure enough, he'd passed out cold on the bed before he'd even had a chance to come for a meal. Cliff had finished his recipe he'd been experimenting with, a dessert quiche loaded with fresh cream and every sinful sweet known to man. He'd put all the food away, cleaned and buffed the new granite countertops down and promptly prepared for bed.

It had been an unusual, stressful day. First Molly and Gwen had risen before the sun and he'd seen them off to the airport. Next, he'd done laundry, mowed the lawn and started some homemade vegetable beef soup he portioned and froze for future use. He'd eventually forced himself into the saloon and done his best to pick up the dusty pieces of their project, which had eventually led to a hot and handsome WPP drifter on his doorstep who turned out to be the best kisser alive. Yeah, it had been *some* day, but boy did it mark a turning point in his life.

Reliving that kiss and the wrestling match they'd had on the bed together, Cliff mentally added a few pounds to the gay side of the scale. Even now as he scrubbed and polished his teeth, his cock tingled and took notice at the vivid, blissful memory of it.

As he worked his way back to the bathroom, brushing his tongue and making one more cycle around his straight rows of teeth, he wondered if that scale would ever tip completely to gay. That possibility didn't cause him nearly as much discomfort today as it had days ago after returning from the vacation from Hades. In fact, his mouth watered just thinking about Manny and the prospect of taking their little unexpected rendezvous one step further.

In nothing but pajama bottoms, he slipped into the bathroom from the hall door and made it to the sink just in time before his mouth overflowed. He spit, gargled and rinsed...and choked on a mouthful of water when the shower curtain zipped open.

He gaped, speechless at the sight of Manny's burly body standing there all proud and naked in the tub.

Manny stared back, his hand still clutching the nylon curtain. "Uh, excuse me, but I was just about to take a shower."

"I can see that." As Cliff spoke, he definitely could see. Hell, he couldn't take his eyes off that hot body if Manny held his gun to Cliff's head. His hormones had just turned up about a gazillion notches. They currently buzzed through his system at record speed.

He set the cup down slowly, unconcerned when he missed the countertop and it tumbled to the tile floor instead. Every cell in his body had suddenly perked up. Nothing could have stopped him from performing a blatant inspection, not even Manny's foreboding gun in the next room.

Speaking of guns, he mused, letting his stare make a much-needed detour, it seemed Manny's other steel weapon was cocked and ready to explode. The only explanation Cliff could think of was that Manny must have just awakened from a dead sleep with a raging hard-on. The thing was enormous—no, gigantic. Its thick, veiny girth stretched all the way up past his navel. It jutted from a nest of dark curls, and a firm sac just below formed a strong foundation for the most beautiful male organ Cliff had ever seen.

Oh yes, he'd cast furtive peeps at tons of them in the locker room in high school and college, but he could chalk most of his cock experience up to blessed gay pornos and every smut magazine known to man. He'd stocked up since the divorce—researching, of course, to test himself. You name it, if it had penises and gorgeous men in it, it arrived monthly in their private post office box. Strangely, he'd always tended to ignore those magazines featuring sexy, naked women, so he and Molly had eventually started swapping their gender-specific porn subscriptions.

Cliff drew himself back to the stark present. The recessed light over the shower stall streamed down, bathing Manny in a soft silver glow. Each and every swell and undulation of muscle shone clear and well defined by the light.

Cliff felt his mouth go dry. He let himself take a quick inspection of the rippled abs, the wide, brawny shoulders and the powerfully corded legs made for thrusting. The chest was covered with just the right amount of dark curls. Rosy nipples, taut and erect, pushed their way through the array of hair. He tried to imagine what it might feel like to run his fingers through the soft fur. It made his hands clench into fists. Cliff's body went rigid and his vision blurred. He drew off his glasses, set them on the sink and rubbed his eyes.

"Sorry, you startled me. I didn't know you were in the shower, and I didn't hear the water running either." Why did he sound so defensive? It was *his* home. And after all, he'd done nothing wrong.

"Sorry back. I didn't know you were in the middle of brushing your teeth. I'd just stepped in the tub when I realized I forgot my washcloth. Um, can you put your eyeballs back in your head and hand me one?"

"Yes, I—sure." Glancing away, Cliff turned toward the small linen closet and located a washcloth. He curled his hand around the fluffy terrycloth. *Now just walk on over there real nonchalant like, hand it to him and walk away, you stupid idiot.*

He spun back around. Cliff heard the water blast from the faucet. A click sounded when Manny pulled the knob and the rush of water spraying from the shower filled the small room. He heard a guttural sigh, an animal sound of bliss that made Cliff's heart stutter and his groin quicken. The spatter of water against tile became a seductive, irresistible tune in the room that drew him closer.

One step. *Gulp*. Two steps. *Gulp*. It seemed the bathroom became one of those never-ending hallways seen in horror movies. Manny was that unattainable goal at the

very end looming just out of reach no matter how many strides Cliff took. He scolded himself for being so dramatic and continued his trek. Three, four, five.

An eternity passed before he got close enough to clearly view the intricate floral design in the curtain. There was the flip of the shampoo bottle, the squirting of it onto a palm. Through the light-colored vinyl, he could just barely make out the outline of Manny's body as he raised his thick arms and started to scrub his head. Cliff's pulse pounded in his ears. He groaned when that spot deep inside his loins started to throb. His legs trembled as he stood there on the opposite side of the curtain and clutched the washcloth.

Clearing his throat, he croaked, "H-here you go...buddy." *Buddy? Why the fuck did you call him buddy, for christssake?*

Manny slid the curtain over just far enough to peer out at Cliff. Steam wafted up, its foggy clouds curling in wisps between them. Cliff could already smell the scent of his own shampoo. Manny's hair was bubbly and slicked back from his face, and Cliff wondered how it was that he could look even more handsome waterlogged than he had the first time he'd laid eyes on this transient stranger in the saloon. It seemed he strangled on his own desire, and he thought he'd truly choke on the steam if something didn't happen soon...or if his damn legs didn't carry his stubborn body out of here before he did something really stupid.

He couldn't quit panting, couldn't stop staring as the water sluiced down and followed the tight curves of muscle and flat planes of fit abs. He forced himself to ignore that beautiful body for he feared if he indulged in one more glance, he'd do something rash and make a total fool of himself.

"Thanks." For the longest time, Manny just stood there staring down at Cliff. Strange emotions swirled in the unusual-colored eyes. Finally, he snatched the washcloth and shoved the curtain back into place.

"Y-you're welcome," he murmured. An odd jumble of relief and disappointment assailed Cliff. He closed his eyes, sighed and turned back toward the door. He was almost in the corridor when he heard Manny curse.

"Goddamn it, Cliff."

Cliff whirled around. He wasn't sure what he'd done to piss Manny off, but even after that sensual act of retrieving a washcloth, he was ready to defend himself to the temperamental god.

"What? What did I—"

Manny yanked back the curtain. Water pounded his right shoulder and trailed down to bathe that gorgeous specimen. Cliff should have thrown up a bright red flag and stormed from the room. But hell, how could he when he suddenly felt like a petrified tree entrenched into the cold tile floor?

Instead, he tore his gaze away, determined to fight this cruel, overt temptation head on. He shot a quick look at the rack. A towel indeed hung there. And he knew for a fact

there was soap in the shower, because he'd just added a new bar that morning. He couldn't think of anything more Manny would be barking about.

But Manny's next words didn't come out as a bark. Uh-uh. Far from it. They were the sexiest two words Cliff had ever heard in his life.

"Get in."

## Chapter Ten

Manny had stood behind the shower curtain in total agony. Even though his mind screamed, *Don't you dare do it*, his body shouted, *Son of a bitch, he'd looked good standing there with no shirt and nothing but boxer-style pajama bottoms on!*

"G-get in?"

"Yes, get in with me. I can see it in your eyes. You want to," he challenged.

"Y-you're asking me to take a shower with you?"

"No." He propped a hand on the tile wall. "I'm telling you to."

"But I...are you sure?"

"No again, but I'm not going to know for certain unless I give it a try, am I now?" He added a wink to that, loving the way it lit Cliff's eyes up. He liked him in glasses, but without them, his pretty-boy looks proved even more potent. It was like he was getting a glimpse of a hidden treasure meant only for special peeks. Without the spectacles, the stark irises were bigger, the lashes more defined. He imagined what they would look like in the throes of passion.

And why not give it a try? No one would ever know. He was out in the middle of Bumfuck. He didn't know a soul here, and they sure as hell wouldn't be getting to know him. He'd be gone in a matter of days and would never look back. Clifford Garrett would be a forgotten memory in no time. After warring with himself and trying to get up the nerve to invite Cliff to shower with him, he'd come to a very logical conclusion. It was the ideal situation to test his sexuality and prove something very important.

*That I'm not gay.*

Cool air wisped in to calm Manny's ardor, but his pole only seemed to be getting harder. When Cliff just stood there like a zombie with his thin pajamas starting to tent up, Manny remarked, "Hmm, I've been wondering...it doesn't seem to bother you that your ex-wife turned out to be a lesbian. Why is it, Cliff, that it's so easy for you to live under the same roof as Molly and her female lover?"

He shoved a hand through his hair again leaving the longish locks standing on end. He shifted from one bare foot to the other. "I...I don't know."

"Bullshit."

At that one-word accusation, Cliff blinked. "Are you going to start being a jerk again?"

Manny grinned. "Sorry. But how about you strip those pants off, get in and we'll discuss it under the hot showerhead?" He made a play of shivering. "I'm starting to catch a chill, and I don't want to let out all this nice steam."



Cliff took a full thirty seconds to ponder and bicker with himself. Manny could see the rainbow of emotions clouding his eyes. As the seconds ticked by, Manny decided he needed to use a bit more persuasion. Besides, if his cock didn't get some attention soon, he'd have a case of spontaneous combustion on his hands—literally. So without taking his gaze from Cliff's, he soaped up his hand and started stroking himself. He heard Cliff gulp and watched with glib satisfaction as those lime eyes traveled lower, locking on Manny's masturbation act.

"Suit yourself. But if you're not going to join me," he rasped, "I'll be damned if I'm going to let a good stiff one go to waste." He clenched his jaw. This was wildly exciting being watched by an obviously turned-on man while he jacked himself off. The slickness of his palm grazed up and down his rod, fueling his libido, making his balls tighten in preparation for the coming ejaculation. God, could he get any harder?

It did the trick. With a strangled moan, Cliff bent and swiped off his pants. In two seconds flat, he was standing in the tub with Manny, his chest inflating and deflating with his excitement.

"Okay, now what?" Cliff crossed his arms over his smooth, bare chest, the brown areolas already tight with anticipation.

Manny performed a blatant inspection as he continued to play with himself. Cliff's body was a natural golden tan. The shoulders were wide, the arms toned and definitely strong but not quite as buffed up as Manny's. He was lean and fit, his abdomen flat with faint ripples that no doubt had to see a healthy amount of physical activity to achieve that look. The hips were narrow and cradled a whorl of light brown hair trailing from his navel to his groin...to an impressive cock much larger than Manny had expected to find. In its fully erect state, its circumference appeared to be so thick Manny wondered if his grip would fit all the way around it.

And God above help him, but he couldn't wait to touch it.

Holy shit, was he ever hot and bothered. It far surpassed his excitement with Will, and at least for the moment, he couldn't think of any encounter with any woman in his past that could top this. He wasn't sure what to do next, but he'd figure it out.

"Touch me, Cliff. Touch me, and then answer my question while you're doing it." Manny's heart raced. He couldn't believe his own nerve. The seduction seemed to come naturally to him. But he needed to go through with the entire act to determine just what this sick obsession was.

Cliff's gaze snapped up to snare Manny's eyes. "What question?" He'd been ogling Manny's masturbation, so it seemed it took Cliff a few seconds to refocus. Which totally pleased Manny.

He released his aching manhood and reached for Cliff's hand. Manny drew it to his shaft, and with his hand wrapped around the back of Cliff's, he closed Cliff's palm around his penis.

"Oh..." Manny's groan echoed within the four close walls of the bathroom. He threw his head back and closed his eyes, remembering the pleasure of doing the same

thing for Will. But Will was in his past, just a quick detour he'd taken. Cliff was now on his path, and glee slammed into him at the realization of what was about to happen. He let go of Cliff's hand and let him take free reign, and it seemed he knew exactly how to please a man.

"Son of a bitch," Cliff swore, his hand moving faster, jack-hammering around Manny's tool. "This...this is awesome."

"Answer me, Cliff, now," Manny growled, locking his gaze on Cliff's. "Why is it so easy for you to live under the same roof as your lesbian ex-wife and her lover?"

Cliff panted, his respirations ragged. Their eyes remained locked as Cliff stroked and caressed, making a languid, heavy sensation fill Manny's loins. He especially loved it when Cliff would swipe his thumb around the corona. It nearly brought him to climax with each teasing flicker.

Finally, Cliff blurted out, "We divorced because we thought we both might be gay. We weren't sure at the time."

"Seriously?"

"Seriously. But Molly's already confirmed it in herself."

"Then you've been with another man before?"

"No, have you?"

He only hesitated for a second. Again, he'd be gone in a few days anyway, so why not just tell the truth? "Only once in college. Nothing more than a blowjob for me, a handjob for him." He switched the subject only because he burned for an answer. "So you're full-fledged gay then, not even bi?"

"I told you I've never been with another man before, so I...I'm still not sure."

"Bullshit."

"Okay, I'm really finding this a lot more pleasurable than being with a woman, so I guess I'm warming to the idea," he murmured, his voice thick with desire.

Manny planted his hands on the tile behind Cliff. He leaned in so close, it forced Cliff to release his grip. Except for the one side with the shower curtain, it was one of those squared off, tiled-in shower stalls, therefore it was easy to back Cliff flat against the rear wall. Their big chests and rigid, wet cocks touched front-to-front. The carnal sensation of it made Manny's voice come out strained and hoarse. "Wanna find out for sure?"

Cliff nodded frantically, his hands finally coming to rest on Manny's damp hips.

Hot water pounded Manny's back, releasing the tension in his muscles. He pushed through the steam and closed his mouth over Cliff's stunned one. He immediately tasted mint—Manny loved the flavor of mint. His tongue traced Cliff's full lips, explored the straight white teeth and dueled lazily with Cliff's long tongue. Cliff might as well have lit a match to the tip of Manny's tongue. In fact, it might as well have been the end of a gun-powdered wick for all the fire that blazed through him. It burned in an inferno from his mouth, down into his chest and exploded deep in his groin. His sex

twitched and he rocked himself against Cliff, intensifying the erotic sensation of hard male to hard male, strength to strength, wet to wet.

"I want you, Cliff," he growled, his mouth a breath's space away. "I want to fuck you—up the ass. Think you can take that?"

"Mmm, yeah, I can't think of anything I want more at the moment." Cliff slid his hands down and cupped Manny's buttocks. He massaged and pulled until he had Manny's cheeks spread apart. "This time, at least."

Manny tensed when Cliff swirled a finger around his snug opening. It made him lurch forward, the aching-hot pleasure of it surprising the hell out of him. "Jesus Christ!"

"Touch me there too," Cliff whimpered, his finger whirling faster.

Manny obeyed, sliding one hand down the slick wall. He clutched Cliff's tight rump, palming the cheek until he had his fill. Heart thrumming with excitement, his gaze scanned the various tubes and bottles in the shower caddy. "Got any lube?"

Apparently breathless, Cliff nodded. "The medicine cabinet. You can lean out and reach into it from here. Believe me, I know."

"I bet you do," Manny teased. He pushed aside the curtain and reached for the mirror. Pulling its door open, he spied the tube of lubrication on a shelf and snatched it up. He rinsed the soap off his cock and, with one of his fingers, he swiped some lube from the tube and spread it around his own shaft, anointing the tip. He set the tube on the small shelf, well within reach.

"Ready?"

"Very." Cliff kissed Manny's neck, making goose bumps shimmy up his spine.

With his finger greased, Manny reached around and sighed when he made contact with his very first anus. The puckered hole clenched involuntarily when he traced its outer ring. "Relax," he whispered, and Cliff responded by slumping against the wall.

"Yeah, just like that, babe," Manny rasped, and he slowly sank his slippery finger into Cliff's ass.

"Oh! Oh my God!" Cliff jerked against Manny, bucking so sudden, his cock rammed into Manny's belly. He took a nip out of Manny's neck, and something about that rough response while having his finger sunk in a guy's rectum fueled Manny's libido to levels he'd never seen before.

"You like that?"

"Understatement—ah yeah...mmm, fuck me now, Manny. Now. Please." Cliff raced his hands up Manny's back, kneading, clawing, massaging.

As Manny increased the rhythm and added a second finger, Cliff let out a bloodcurdling scream. Manny closed his mouth over Cliff's, muffling the noise. It gave him a dominant charge to be giving such pleasure and yet forcing Cliff to stifle his passion.

"Manny, now, please. I...I never told anyone before now, not even myself, but I've dreamed of having a big pole like yours buried in my ass while I get jacked off. I—God, I can't believe how much of a fucking turn-on this is."

It was making him dizzy just thinking about sliding his rod in between those firm glutes while he reached around and stroked off that huge cock. Yes, he had to agree, this was a fucking turn-on, and Manny had to have more. The urge to tear into Cliff had been simmering all along, but now it erupted. Manny ripped his fingers out of Cliff's passage and spun him around so roughly, he heard Cliff gasp and his hands slap the wet wall. Cliff cried out his approval, his wet hair fanning the back of his tanned neck. Water misted over his long back, down into the crevice of his ass.

At the beautiful, tempting sight, Manny snatched the lube back up. His legs trembled, threatening to make him buckle to his knees. It felt as if his cock would explode if he didn't get relief soon. Flipping open the cap, he squirted a trail of it all over Cliff's back. The clear gel slid down and into his rear slit.

He added a small dollop to his free hand, reserving it for the palm-rub he'd be performing soon. Manny let the bottle drop to the shower floor. He took his free hand and started a swirling motion over each shoulder, down the spine, around each tight ass cheek. Cliff groaned. He had one side of his face pressed to the wall so that Manny could see every emotion cross his face. Both hands were up flat against the tile, his eyes clamped tightly shut. Cliff's whole body shook with anticipation, and he pursed his lips murmuring, "Yes, ah, it feels so good, so good."

Manny located the taut hole again, the glistening gel lubing the whole crevice from tailbone to balls. He held on to rigid control. His teeth grinded together and he reached around with his other hand, drawing Cliff's lower body toward his swollen pole.

Leaning over him, he whispered in his ear, "Ready to test the waters?"

"Mmm-hmm." Cliff nodded. "Very ready."

Manny closed his gel-filled hand around Cliff's jutting penis. Cliff groaned, crying out with an unintelligible sob of pleasure. The shaft felt huge in Manny's hand, like a club meant to do harm. His long fingers barely reached all the way around its circumference, but he was able to clutch tight enough to slide his palm up and down the long length. As he started to stroke, he wedged his sex in between Cliff's buttocks, cradling himself in between like a hot dog in a warm bun. He closed his eyes, amazed to feel the outer edges of ecstasy rushing toward him.

"Cliff..." He nipped Cliff's earlobe between his teeth, staggered by the intimacy of this act between two men. Never would he have guessed it, always he had spurned it. All the while he kissed and licked Cliff's ear and neck, he rocked his hips, sliding his cock up and down Cliff's crevice while jerking him off with the sticky slickness of his palm.

"Yes?" he panted.

"You've got me so turned on, I'm afraid I'm going to come before I get inside you."

"Then hurry, do it now." Cliff pressed back, grinding his rear against the front surface of Manny's rod.

Manny released his hold around Cliff's waist and gripped his own cock. It felt smooth over the steely length, as if his manhood had been wrapped in satin. Hot steam filled the space between their hard bodies. Weird, but it seemed all of his senses were on overload, heightened like never before in any other sexual encounters. The clean scent of the lube wafted up, and Manny caught the spicy-clean aroma of moist ass entwined with it. He looked down to see the wrinkled eye, like a tiny rosette coated with oil. Aligning the head of his penis, he slowly pushed in about an inch, stopping to allow Cliff time to adjust.

Cliff sobbed. "Oh God, yes! Keep going, please keep going. Don't you *even* fucking stop!"

The resistance Manny met made his eyes go cross. Lust blinded him as he planted his feet apart and leaned over Cliff's back. He wound his arm back around Cliff's torso and started pumping his rod again. Manny pushed farther in, another inch, another, slow yet firm until he felt Cliff's muscles relax and welcome him all the way inside. Son of a bitch, he'd never experienced such tightness! The inner rippled walls contracted around him, milking him of his sanity. He swore he could feel—or hear?—a clicking in his scrotum, like a bomb ticking off until detonation.

Cliff grunted and let out the most erotic, sexy, strangled moan Manny had ever heard in his life. Buried to the balls, Manny had to get his bearings. He panted, attempting to hold off the waves of bliss that continued to taunt him into premature climax. The snug, slick heat, heat such as he'd never felt before, closed around his entire cock like a warmed gauntlet. He didn't care what anyone said, at this moment, no woman's cunt could ever come close to the ecstasy awaiting him inside this man's close-fitting tunnel.

*It was as if my body was made for man rather than woman. It's as if I'm...*

He pressed his forehead to Cliff's shoulder, forcing that disturbing thought aside. "Motherfucker, I can't believe how good this feels. It's only going to take me one stroke and I'm going to be filling your ass with my cum."

Cliff simply sobbed. "Then just do it. Fill me up!" He used the wall for leverage and pistoned his butt backward, forcing Manny to fuck him deeper, increasing the rhythm of Manny's hand on his slick, hot tool.

He could still taste the mint of Cliff's kiss in his mouth and he craved to sample it again, this time during that moment when he reached for that glorious summit and soared over its pinnacle. Frantic to have it before the white-hot sensation claimed him, Manny released his arm from around Cliff's waist. He gripped Cliff's chin and demanded, "Kiss me, goddamn it."

Cliff didn't seem to have a problem with the demand or the brassiness of it. He craned his head around and snaked out his tongue until Manny's mouth closed over

his. Mint burst in his mouth. He devoured it, swirling his tongue around Cliff's as the pleasure rose higher, hotter, tighter.

"Aw fuck, that does it," he mumbled against Cliff's open mouth. "I'm going to— Ooh!" Manny let out a growl as he held Cliff's rear snug against his hips. Both bodies twitched and spasmed in unison. Deep ass muscles caressed and convulsed around his shaft, extracting every drop of cum.

Cliff groaned, and Manny couldn't think of anything more sexy than the feel of Cliff's searing juices spurting out onto his hand, further lubricating his last strokes.

They stayed that way a full minute, gasping for air, neither one saying a word as the water pounded on Manny's back.

About the time he began to withdraw, Manny noticed the water had started to cool. Ugly regret moved in right along with the icy water that sluiced down his back. It seemed as soon as the pleasure had ebbed completely, remorse rose up to slap him in the face and ask, "What, are you a fucking gay bastard or something?" It was as if his libido had drugged him with amnesia, making him have a temporary relapse about his sexuality.

Nausea roiled through his gut at what he'd just done. He yanked his half-hard column from Cliff's core and quickly washed himself off. The move made Cliff's eyes snap open. He turned around, his shaft jutting up like a lethal sword, and asked with concern that only made Manny feel more like a hypocritical jerk, "Manny, what's wrong?"

"Nothing. Nothing at all." He turned off the water with a snap and stepped from the stall. He snatched the big fluffy terrycloth towel from the rack and briskly dried himself off.

Cliff let out a long, drawn-out, theatrical sigh. "Okay."

That only grated over Manny's nerves more, like Cliff had just dragged his well-manicured nails down a chalkboard. "Okay? Is that all you can say is, okay?"

"Look, I don't know what the fuck's suddenly happened here, but I don't want any part of it anymore. I *think* I get the picture." His voice was deep, manly, not at all effeminate. Cliff stepped out of the shower and trod to the closet. He yanked out a towel for himself and marched to his bedroom door. Manny tried to keep his eyes off that ass he'd just been buried in, but he couldn't. He just couldn't. And he'd be a goddamn fucking monkey's daddy if his cock didn't just take notice and start to ache again.

Speaking of getting the picture, that nice derriere and Manny's damn epic penis suddenly standing up and taking notice again sure did make things a lot clearer...even if he didn't want to face it.

Manny Valentino just *might* be—at the very most—bisexual. But he'd be damned if he'd be admitting it to anyone, leastwise the very man he'd just gone to heaven with.

*I will never allow myself to be full-fledged gay. No. That just wouldn't sit well with me—ever.*

“Look, I’m sorry. I’m starving, and I’m exhausted again. I apologize for suddenly being grumpy.” He wrapped the towel around his waist and tucked it in.

“Yeah, right. Well, go raid the kitchen all you want.” Cliff’s eyes narrowed. He tucked his towel around him in the very same manner Manny had. He leaned close, wagging a finger in Manny’s face. “But by noon tomorrow, you’re out of here, got it?”

He didn’t give Manny time to reply. Cliff turned on his bare heel, sauntered across the short bathroom and slammed his bedroom door right in Manny’s face.

## Chapter Eleven

By dawn the following morning, Cliff already stood at the new kitchen island slicing and dicing vegetables for omelets. Coffee perked in the pot, filling the kitchen with the scent of blessed Columbian caffeine. A storm brewed outside, but within the confines of the bed and breakfast, cozy warmth filled the space he now called home.

He drew in a long, contented breath, despite the tenderness in his anus. His body positively radiated with glee. Even recalling Manny's post-lovemaking regret, he felt as if he'd just been reborn. It was, he thought as he seesawed the chef's knife through tomatoes and green peppers, a lot like being trapped under a vast sea his whole life. He'd twisted and turned in the murky water of life, haphazardly searching left, right, behind, below, only to be dragged along with the current.

But he'd suddenly looked upward and, just beyond the rippled fuzziness of the water's surface, he'd gotten a glimpse of the sun emerging from the dark clouds. On instinct, he'd reached up, floating slowly toward that light of hope. It had been hesitant at first, but then as the glow became brighter, gradually warming his chilled skin, he'd shot aloft like a rocket. It seemed he'd burst through the surface, filling his burning lungs with sweet, cool air. He could swear even now with the rain pelting the windows outside the inn, and the remnants of Manny's shame hanging heavy in the atmosphere, he could feel that sun reviving his whole body.

Cliff glanced up and grinned.

*By golly, I'm gay. I'm really and truly gay, and it feels so good to know and accept it.*

He fixed his gaze out the window and caught sight of the flicker of lightning on the horizon.

"Go ahead. Rain on my parade. I'm now invincible." Drawing in a brisk breath, he welcomed the distant rumble of thunder. He whipped his head around. Or was that the electric saw screaming in the saloon?

He couldn't imagine after all their "activity" and claiming to have had no sleep for more than thirty-six hours, that Manny would be up and about already, even after that long nap he'd taken last night. Curious, Cliff set down the knife and followed the intermittent noises muffled by the thick walls of the inn.

He pushed through the kitchen door, sauntered through the buffet dining area and came to a door on the far wall leading into the front room. He hadn't used the door recently due to the room being closed off ever since Molly and Gwen had started gutting. Cliff's hands shook as he reached for the doorknob, the now unmistakable rumbling squeal of the saw filling his ears.



He opened the door and sure enough, there Manny stood in the front room with boards bridged across several sawhorses and his big hand gripping the tool's rounded handle. He had his shirt off and Molly's tool belt slung low around his hips. Even with the air-conditioning whirring in the background, a fine sheen of sweat glistened off his back and drew the eye to every smooth plane and flexed bulge on that buff body.

The sight of him half-naked and wet brought the shower scene racing through Cliff's mind again. It scorched a trail of memories across his libido and left smoldering ash in its wake. He swallowed back a groan, irritated at his body's swift and traitorous response.

Manny should be gone by now – well, by noon at the latest, just a few short hours away. Half of Cliff had hoped he'd be gone by sunup. He couldn't afford to get attached and start salivating like Pavlov's damn dog every time he simply got a glimpse of the hypocritical man. His other half – that double-crossing prick – had "risen" before dawn, aching for Manny's masculine touch. It wasn't fair. It just wasn't fucking fair. Even though he'd scarcely embraced his sexuality, and an eagerness to further explore it drove him to march into the room, he still didn't appreciate Manny's lethal hit-and-run denial approach.

"Morning." Manny did a quick scan of the room, dismissing Cliff nonchalantly. He had one of those flat carpenters' pencils perched behind an ear, and he wore clear goggles. Holding up the piece of trim he'd just cut, he studied the smooth angle with a pleased look at the product of his work. The arrogance of it, of him wreaking total emotional havoc on Cliff's nerves, only to make himself at home and speak to Cliff in that one-word, haughty sentence – goddamn it, it *pissed* him off!

Cliff planted his fists on his hips. He still wore the white chef's apron over jeans and a polo, but he didn't give a flying fuck what the man's view on his current state of dress would be. "I thought you were leaving this morning."

He slid another furtive look at Cliff, but he quickly shifted it back to his workspace. "You said noon." He walked around to the opposite side of the table he'd fashioned with a piece of plywood across sawhorses. The leather tool belt squeaked and the tools jingled as he moved that sleek panther's body around the room. "And I figured the least I could do was get some of this done to pay you back for the food and providing me a place to rest my head."

"And for the sex?" Cliff couldn't help the jab. He was suddenly feeling spiteful.

Manny's lips thinned. He leaned over the piece of trim, marking it with the pencil, but he didn't look up when he spoke. "Sex's got nothing to do with it."

"To use your own word, bullshit."

His muscles went taut. Thunder rumbled outside followed by the distant crack of lightning. He tossed the pencil onto the plywood. It tumbled end over end through sawdust and clunked onto the floor. "Look, I don't have time for this crap. You got something to say, then just fucking say it and get it off your chest."

God, he looked so good standing there with his eyes glittering like shiny new pennies behind the goggles.

"You don't have *time* for this crap?" Cliff snorted. "Well, you certainly had enough time last night."

"Oh yeah? Well, so did you."

Cliff raced over and planted his hands on the makeshift table, leaning across its expanse as he spoke through his teeth. The lights flickered as the storm picked up intensity outside. "Well, at least *I'm* man enough to admit the truth now that it's over!"

"Truth? What truth, Cliff?"

He didn't pause for very long. "That I'm gay, for chrissake."

Manny's eyes snapped with denial. "Whoa. Now wait one goddamn minute. I am *not* gay," he growled.

Cliff folded his arms over his apron. "Ah, and the Leaning Tower of Pisa doesn't lean. But as an aside, was I referring to you? No," he added smugly, answering his own inquiry before Manny could utter a reply. "I only meant myself. Which makes me wonder where *your* head really is..."

"Fuck you."

"No, fuck you. I thought what happened between us was really awesome and special. But *some* people obviously think differently. Me, I would never be so crude and mean as to denounce that mind-blowing act of lovemaking before the last drop of cum had even had a chance to shoot from my —"

"Jesus, Cliff, get a grip." Manny raked a hand through his thick head of hair. It was a potent move that had Cliff trembling in his shoes. He had to strain to keep from leaping across the table and attacking with a voracious lip-lock. "You're the one who's being crude."

"Mmm, whatever. Now get your hands off Molly's stuff and get the fuck out of my house." Cliff spun and sauntered back toward the dining room door. He heard Manny mutter something unintelligible under his breath. Cliff didn't comprehend that the pounding noise behind him was footsteps until he reached the knee-high stage that Cliff could only assume Manny had already partially completed.

A hot, hard hand gripped his elbow, and he felt himself being whirled around. The movement was so swift and strong, he couldn't have stopped it if he'd wanted to...but he didn't. With a small measure of self-disgust, he discovered he liked being manhandled like this, and the volatile energy that seemed to snap in the air when the two of them were in the same room together gave him a sick charge.

"Goddamn you," Manny roared as he flung off the goggles and wrenched Cliff into his arms. The sculpted wall of his naked, moist chest pressed firm against Cliff's breast. The cotton of the white apron soaked up Manny's sweat. The sudden turn of events made Cliff dizzy with raw desire. As a result, he hooked his thumbs into the tool belt, holding on for dear life. Funny, he'd never touched that thing before in his life. But now

under these circumstances, a fascinating interest was born. He ran his fingers along the suede strip that encircled Manny's hips, intrigued by its macho symbolism.

"I don't know what or who I am," Manny murmured huskily, "but I do know you've got me all fucking horny again."

His hand stabbed into the hair at the back of Cliff's head, holding him captive so that their lips hovered an inch apart. Manny pulled Cliff's face closer, slamming his mouth onto Cliff's. The toe-curling kiss he forced on Cliff made his knees go weak. He wound his arms around Manny's rib cage and cuddled close, surprised to feel the start of an erection pressed against his own.

Cliff was no dummy. They might fight like grouchy bears, but the sex between them more resembled rabbits. Fight or not, he would take what he could get when he could get it.

Manny tore at Cliff's clothes. "Goddamn it," he grumbled, his fingers fumbling with the apron strings. "Take this stupid thing off."

Panting—shit, was it ever getting hot and stuffy in here—Cliff hurried to do Manny's bidding. He untied the strings, his hands trembling, and winged the garment aside.

Manny tore off Cliff's shirt and went right to work on his nipples. Cliff groaned, throwing his head back when Manny ducked and drew a pebble into his mouth. He clamped his teeth on the small nub and pinched and rolled the other between his thumb and forefinger. Cliff's breasts went dreamy with liquid fire. Heaviness and a painful inferno rushed through his bloodstream and exploded in his loins. He held Manny's head to his chest, tangling his fingers in the longish, wavy strands. His hair caressed Cliff's palms and draped between his fingers like ropes of silk. He drew in the essence of soap and hot, aroused man. Their crotches grinded together, a foreplay dance they both knew so well now.

Manny dropped to his knees. The gleam of unrestrained passion in his eyes tore at Cliff's defenses. When Manny unbuckled Cliff's belt with adept speed and yanked open his pants, he knew a long-buried fantasy was about to be fulfilled. Fuck it. He'd swallow his damn pride and beg him to stay. And oh—oh God. Cliff let out a guttural mewl as Manny's hot, wet mouth closed over his throbbing manhood. He knew now he'd beg him to stay *forever*.

"Manny, aw shit, Manny..." He combed his hands through the bad-boy long hair again and screamed when that eager tongue swirled around the sensitive head. Sparks flew. He sucked in a breath and closed his eyes, knowing if Manny kept sucking like that, he'd climax in five seconds flat.

"Mmm..." It seemed Manny had an appetite that no omelet could appease. He bobbed his head and jacked Cliff off at the same time. His other hand fondled his sac doing incredible, wicked things that heated his seed and kept the fires simmering below the surface. The torture went on and on, and as soon as he brought Cliff to the rim of madness, Manny backed off.

"Damn you, what are you doing to me?" Cliff rasped.

Manny licked and kissed, sending a smoldering look up at Cliff. Those copper, sex-glazed eyes made Cliff gasp. He would never forget the rugged, handsome picture Manny made down on his knees sucking him off.

"Building up your fire, because mine's already about to combust."

"Oh God." Cliff gulped. Manny sucked some more.

"Lie down on the tarp there, the one I've spread over the stage," Manny ordered, withdrawing just enough to speak around Cliff's twitching, cement-hard rod.

"On the stage?"

"Mmm-hmm, on the stage. You're going to suck me off at the same time I'm finishing you up," Manny announced, rocking back on his heels, still holding Cliff's shaft in his big, hot hand. Cool air swirled around his phallus, drying the dampness Manny had left behind.

Cliff could see that Manny's fire was indeed about to combust. His delicious, gorgeous cock already peeped over the top of the tool belt. Lightning flickered through the window at that moment, illuminating his staff in a white glow. "Uh, do you mean sixty-nine?"

"Precisely."

At the confirmation that he'd soon be participating in a hot sex act he'd only seen done in gay pornos, Cliff feared he'd spill his seed spontaneously before the act even began. But Manny seemed to be just as impatient as Cliff. He unbuckled the belt and let it clunk to the hardwood floor. The clank of metal echoed throughout the big room. He ignored it and swiped off his jeans.

Cliff stood there staring at that naked body once again. The cock was stunning by the fluorescent shop lighting Molly had set up in the room. Its enormity defied nature.

Holy shit, how had that thing fit up his ass? Just thinking about it ramming past his anus, deep into his ass, made his balls ache painfully. But now it would be in his mouth. Cliff marveled at that, wondering how he would fit that monster down his throat without gagging. He wasn't sure, but he was damn well going to give it a try. Even now, as he divulged of the remainder of his clothes, his mouth watered at the prospect of sucking on that pole.

*Wow, I can't believe I've gone all the way up to the age of thirty-two without a man. What a waste of time!*

"Lie down," Manny ordered, dropping to his knees on the boxed stage.

"You got no arguments here," Cliff warned, crawling across the draped surface and lying on his back. The solid wood supported his body and the tarp's coolness assuaged the heat in his blood. He held out his hands, reaching for Manny. As Manny crawled toward him, it made Cliff think of the predator beasts on one of his favorite satellite nature shows. He swept the intense, stunning face, the packed muscles and the jutting

tool. His eyes glittered with rabid need, and that made Cliff feel all the more like that beast's prey. He shivered, anxious to see what this sixty-nine position would feel like.

"Uh-uh," Manny grunted. "I can't wait any longer." He spun around so that his body straddled Cliff's with his arousal sprouting within scrumptious reach of Cliff's lips. His mouth watered anew and Cliff wondered if there was such a thing as sexual oral secretions. He studied the organ poised above him, getting his first erotic view of an upside-down penis topped by pendulous, full balls. A smattering of hair curled around the base of the sac. He inhaled and drew in the faint scent of perspiration mixed with soap. He couldn't wait to get that huge tool in his mouth and see what it tasted like.

Manny lowered his pelvis and dragged his cock over Cliff's cheek and mouth. Cliff searched for the tip and thrust out his tongue. He found the slit and took an eager swipe. Bittersweet salt burst in his mouth. "Mmm."

"Oh yes, take it in your mouth," Manny urged, his voice hoarse and laced with lust.

Cliff reached up and gripped the base, tipping it closer to his mouth. And he opened wide and took it in.

"Aw fuck!" Manny had his arms wrapped around Cliff's drawn-up thighs. He clutched at them and hissed, his body going stiff as he struggled to hold still.

Cliff couldn't believe the sensations that fired off in his mouth—hot, hard, sweet, salty, silky, soft and a pearl of wetness that dribbled onto his tongue. He slurped it up and wrapped his lips tight around the girth. With his left hand planted on Manny's hip, he used his right one to form a C around the impressive column, holding it inside his open mouth. He took half of its length in and made up for what he couldn't yet take in by rubbing up and down its surface in rhythm with his fellatio moves.

Manny chose that moment to dive back into the blowjob. Thunder rumbled in the distance. Rain blasted under the porch overhang and pelted the windowpanes. Cliff arched his hips up, gulping around the bulk of Manny's member as Manny resumed his potent gift of oral pleasuring. They both hunched their bodies to reach each other, but soon it became so frenzied Manny tipped until they lay on their sides still curled together into the sixty-nine position.

They clutched and groaned. Fingers played with tight assholes and swollen sacs on the verge of erupting. Cliff felt his tool being devoured, and it sent waves of blissful, almost unbearable pleasure throughout his body. He returned the favor, mimicking Manny's actions. It seemed nothing gave him satisfaction and a warm glow inside like hearing Manny's wild, highly vocal groans, slurps and moans.

Rocking in a tempo of sexual cadence, they sucked and licked, devouring one another. As one took, the other gave, as one gave, the other took. It was a circular, never-ending cycle, just like the formation their bodies had made where one blended and entered into the other. In the back of his mind, Cliff heard the song of rushing water just outside the window. Right off the covered front porch, the torrential rains

tumbled from the roof and poured through the guttering in a cozy song. Thunder roared, the eye of the storm moving closer still.

Cliff recognized the signs of impending ejaculation, the *tap-tap* pre-convulsions somewhere at that spot deep inside his groin, and between his balls and ass. It was as if someone had injected him with a euphoric drug. He could tell Manny felt it too for his whole body went still. Then came the shuddering release, the muffled moans of sweet torture as the climaxes overtook them. Cliff shot off mere seconds before Manny. His shaft convulsed, lava erupting into Manny's warm, wet mouth.

Manny growled long and guttural. "Mmm..." he mumbled, gulping.

Lightning flickered and a loud crack shook the glass in the windows. Manny wrapped his arms around Cliff's hips and held him tight, apparently unfazed by the startling noise. He emptied his semen into Cliff's hungry throat. The cream shot in a hot, jet-spray manner, at first surprising Cliff so that he had to swallow quickly to avoid choking. But with his first taste of a man's cum, he was surprised to learn he loved the sweet-bitter flavor and the thick, slick texture. He gulped every drop down, laving the swollen head, swallowing and sucking for more.

Gradually, their bodies went lax and they withdrew their mouths. The storm calmed and left behind the soft patter of rain. Cliff lay there more content than he'd ever been in his life. He rubbed and scratched Manny's back with lazy resignation. A small smile formed on his face when Manny sighed with peaceful abandon. A gust of warm breath fanned his damp cock, making it draw up momentarily.

He decided at that moment he could live this way for the rest of his life. A fast-developing addiction seemed to be forming for Cliff. He dreaded the moment Manny would walk out that door. Strong emotions he didn't know how to name flared up in his chest and made his heart ache.

He thought about it for a few minutes longer, lying there basking in the glorious afterglow of what had just happened between them, and finally spoke his desire. "Manny?"

"Hmm?"

"Please don't go."

Manny went still and unmoving. Cliff could hear the distant trickle of water as it trailed through the gutters and the downspout. A damp, quiet summer breeze blew around the eaves.

"You told me to leave by noon."

"Well, I changed my mind." Cliff scrambled away and crawled across the platform. He reached for his polo shirt and drew it over his head. "The fact is, I'm gay and I need a man to warm my bed and let me explore. I want that man to be you for as long as you can afford to stay. I don't care if you have denial issues or a madman's on your tail. I just want a chance to indulge in the lifestyle I've denied myself all my life. Once you feel you need to move, move on. No strings attached, no looking back."

"Are you fucking serious?"

"Yes I'm fucking serious," he snapped, jamming his legs into his jeans. "I'm offering you the best of both worlds. Why do you always have to go balking at things and ruining all my fun?"

Manny chuckled, locating his own clothes and donning them. "Okay, okay, I'll stay for another day or so. But under one condition..."

"Oh shit."

"I'm starving. Will you feed me before I get back to work?"

Cliff grinned, reaching out a hand and drawing Manny into his embrace. "You'll really stay then?"

Manny nodded, that faraway look glinting for just a split second in his eyes. "For a couple days."

"Cool, then yeah, I'll feed you. In fact, it seems your hunger is far greater than you're ready to admit. So I think I've got just the thing to keep you here." He slid his hand down Manny's well-muscled arm and curled his fingers into that hand that could bring him such immense pleasures. Tugging, he headed toward the kitchen. "Ever hear that saying that the way to a man's heart is through his stomach?"

Manny snorted as he allowed Cliff to drag him along. "Hmm. The way you cook, I don't think I stand a damn chance."

\* \* \* \* \*

The following sunny afternoon, Manny sat on the plush sofa in the living room and propped his booted feet up on the pine coffee table. Taking a much-needed break from his contribution to the renovations, he scanned the finished space—one of few in the home—thinking how he could get real comfy here in this house.

Too comfy.

Bringing to mind the way that omelet had melted in his mouth yesterday, how the toast prepared from homemade sourdough bread had tasted with Gwen's strawberry preserves slathered on a thick slice...yeah, this place was just too damned tempting for a man looking over his shoulder expecting death any minute now if he didn't keep running.

He swirled his bottled beer and took a swig, letting the fizz of it slide down his throat with a sigh. The big flat-screen television mounted above the fireplace mantle droned on low volume. A satellite station featuring a marathon day of commercial-free rock videos flitted across the crystal-clear monitor. Manny studied it, testing himself. He watched as a hot, buxom babe pranced around a sleek red sports car, her large breasts spilling over the top of her skimpy, tight shirt. The camera zoomed in on her firm ass and panned down the mile-long length of legs when she bent over the hood and caressed it.

Manny waited...and waited...and waited. But nothing. No stirring in his loins, no longing to bury his face in between the melons or sink himself into the wetness between

those thighs. In fact, he could never recall mental, visual foreplay ever exciting him when it came to women. It had never alarmed him before now. He'd simply attributed it to a heavy work schedule, stress and the challenges of performing as an actor in a dangerous role—one that had the potential to result in getting his brains blasted out at any given moment if his cover was blown.

"Goddamn it." He shifted his position and guzzled down half the beer. "This can't be." Determined to prove to himself that he didn't have a thing for men exclusively over women, Manny jammed the buttons on the remote and searched for more pussy.

"Ah, there we go." He found an NC-17 movie. Sensual music played in the background while the camera focused on the fiery, wet interlude of two women getting it on in a swimming pool. "Oh yeah, this'll get the blood flowing and prove I'm not gay."

But his attention soon waned, shifting to the man. Though the film had at first appeared to be loaded with skin, hot chicks and tons of T and A, Manny's awareness perked up only when the program flipped to the man. The shot cut to a close-up. A crescent moon glowed in the background behind his short-cropped, flaxen hair, adding to the allure. Manny groaned when his cock tingled at the angular, lean muscle and smooth skin. The voyeuristic man's golden skin shimmered by the pool's light as the camera went lower, focusing on him cupping his own arousal. The actor reminded Manny of Cliff with his exact smooth complexion and athletic build.

He suddenly had a yen to go seek Cliff out. Manny longed to satisfy these new and strange urges yet again. It seemed this fever had reared its head from the moment he'd walked into this house and spied Cliff talking to himself while surrounded by power tools and sawdust. Even if he'd refused to admit it at the time, he now knew the flood of raw emotions wouldn't go back into hiding until he got the hell out of here.

Yes, he should probably leave very soon. Manny knew Vito and his son Peter were out there somewhere using their wealth and power to track him. He couldn't afford to wait any longer, and yet... Perhaps he could get Cliff out of his system once and for all by engaging in one more encounter? Once he'd had his fill, he could slip out in the middle of the night and never look back.

*Coward.*

Irritated with himself, he tossed back another gulp of beer, his gaze automatically searching for "Cliff" on the screen. It was only his second beer, but he already had a buzz on. Or was that because all the blood had drained from his brain into his cock? The thought of it caused him to force out a disgusted snort, and he tugged on the leg of his pants to lessen the discomfort in his crotch.

The frames continued to flip back and forth between the man and the women. *Goddamn it, why do they keep lingering so long on the females?*

Manny edged forward, planting his elbows on his knees. His gaze grew hungry, watching, waiting to get another glimpse of the Cliff look-alike.



Just when the scene flashed back to him, he heard the dishes clank in the kitchen. Averse to being caught watching a sexy movie, he snapped out of his television trance and switched the channel. Scrolling, he stopped briefly on a science network before settling on a twenty-four-hour news station. The weatherman currently warned travelers of an impending tropical storm in the Caribbean being upgraded to a category-two hurricane. The ominous swirl spun in multi-colors across the map as the meteorologist pointed and clicked his remote button.

Manny's gut felt a lot like that storm cloud. It whirled and churned with emotions he didn't want to absorb. Yet it seemed the looming eye of the storm raced toward him full of raw truth, awesome power and possible catastrophic destruction he could no longer deny. Covering his erection with a throw pillow, Manny collapsed back against the sofa and sighed.

No, it wasn't, it couldn't be.

Son of a bitch. Fuck.

He *was* queer, wasn't he?

Full-fledged. Flaming. All-out gay...but never, goddamn it, out of the closet if he could help it.

He was just trying his best to swallow that revelation when the weather concluded and Peter and Vito's ruddy faces appeared in the corner of the screen. Manny flinched, immediately turning up the volume.

An anchorwoman looked grimly into the camera. She wore a navy blue suit and sported a severe bob haircut. "Escaped mafia kingpin Vito Moretti has reportedly been spotted in several western Pennsylvania areas. Witness accounts place him in the eastern Pittsburgh metro area within the last forty-eight hours. Though Vito continues to elude law enforcement, his son Peter Moretti wasn't so lucky. He was apprehended yesterday following a 911 call from witnesses who reported seeing a man stealing a vehicle near a downtown area park."

The woman's eyebrows arched. "Subsequent to a lengthy trial, Vito Moretti was incarcerated in maximum-security Attica Correctional Facility on multiple counts of murder, money laundering and drug possession and distribution, while his son had escaped the bloody exchange with FBI and ATF agents. You many recall the high-profile reports of an unidentified undercover agent who proved to be instrumental in the capture and ultimate conviction of Moretti following several years of infiltration."

She leaned a fraction of an inch closer to the camera. "Be warned Vito Moretti is a felon believed to be armed and extremely dangerous. If you should see this man, you are cautioned not to take matters into your own hands. Immediately call 911, the FBI or your local police to report the sighting." The woman paused, her features softening. "We'll be back following messages from our sponsors. Stay tuned for the latest weather update on the hurricane gaining strength near the Bahamas."

"Oh shit," Cliff groaned from behind Manny. "I wonder if that hurricane is going to cut Molly and Gwen's Florida trip short."

Manny didn't turn. He simply stared at the commercials and held the pillow over his lap. "That would suck."

*And so would Moretti somehow finding his way to Miracle, Pennsylvania. Oh it was great news to hear he didn't need to worry about Peter anymore. But there was still Vito...*

He mentally estimated the distance between Pittsburgh and this small town well outside of Lancaster. It was a good four hours of drive time if Moretti were able to successfully steal some transportation. Or several days on foot depending on luck with hitching rides.

But even then, Manny had been very careful since fleeing Maine. Realistically speaking, he knew Vito would have a very difficult time tracking him and would most likely be caught before Manny even had to worry any further about it. Except for one newly issued to him in a name he'd never heard or used before, Manny hadn't utilized so much as a credit card or any of his old aliases...which made him wonder why he'd revealed his real first name to Cliff. But he *had* omitted his last name, so he shrugged it off, knowing in reality the chances of it coming into play were virtually nil.

Or was he stupidly trusting the guy during a life-or-death matter?

No, he really didn't think so. He'd simply called himself Manny, which he hardly thought would give him away since Cliff hadn't documented it electronically.

Besides, at this point, the bureau assured him Vito hadn't uncovered his real name, but he *had* discovered all of Manny's false aliases. It was what sent him tearing out of Maine in the first place once he'd been informed. Actually, once he thought on it, it was ridiculous how many names and identities he had to keep track of. Including his undercover agent ID, his nom de plume as Joey Mangano—Vito's right-hand thug—and his newer WPP identity that Vito had somehow discovered from behind bars, it was as if Manny were four people rolled up into one.

So the last thing Manny needed at this juncture in his life was adding more identity confusion to himself via Cliff and this strange connection they'd established.

What he needed to always remember was to be careful from now on and give nothing more away in case Vito did uncover his real name. As a trained professional, he'd always been prudent in all areas of his existence, therefore now wasn't the time to be lax. He'd succeeded thus far and used still yet more fake names at hotels or anywhere a name was required. He didn't know at this point in time what—or who—Vito knew or didn't know. True, it would be a miracle if Vito could somehow track Manny to the inn, but Manny would never carelessly assume anything where ruthless mobster Vito Moretti was concerned.

No, he wasn't taking any further chances. He would keep running and faking his identity until he was certain Vito was back behind bars with his son and no longer a threat.

"Mmm, yeah, it would suck like— Wow. You look tense." Cliff stood behind the sofa, his big hands settling on Manny's shoulders and massaging. It sent an immediate,

potent concoction of blissful relaxation mixed with lust racing through his veins. "Hey, it's late. How about you quit for the day?"

Cliff's fingers dug into Manny's tight shoulder muscles, loosening knots old enough to have calcified by now. Manny's eyes fluttered shut. It felt as if his body had just melted into liquid lava and drained onto the floor.

"Ooh... That feels fabulous." He let go of the pillow and allowed his hands to flop to his sides. His head fell back onto the couch and he looked up at an upside-down Cliff. Was that his heart screeching to a halt in his chest? Even from this angle, Manny had to admit Cliff was the most gorgeous man he'd ever seen. His dark-blond five-o'clock shadow lent him a masculine air while the smoldering eyes looked down into Manny's with sexual and emotional intent that he couldn't resist.

Cliff's magic hands slid down and into the neckline of Manny's T-shirt. He kneaded Manny's breasts, making him aware of nerve endings he didn't know existed. The nips sprang to attention and sent a licking flame to his groin. His cock twitched, the balls engorged and achy.

"Come to bed with me, Manny," Cliff said huskily, bending to clamp Manny's bottom lip between his teeth. "Please."

Manny groaned and went limp, letting himself be seduced. "It's four in the afternoon. Too early for this."

Cliff chuckled, leaning farther to slide his hand over Manny's quivering belly. "Then why do you have a full-blown hard-on beneath that lame cover-up pillow?"

"I—oh God..." Cliff's hand pushed past Manny's waistband and closed around his erection. It made him bite back his retort and let out a mewl of ecstasy instead. He was surprised to realize his asshole tingled when Cliff's fingers made a quick swipe to caress his balls. "For someone who divorced, unsure if he's really gay, you're sure taking the bull by the horns."

Cliff stroked Manny's rod as he dragged his lips back and forth over Manny's mouth. "I *am* gay, I know that for sure now. It's you who needs convincing...and I've got the perfect test for you."

"More food?" Manny asked on a pant as Cliff swiveled his thumb over the head of his penis. The move caused a pearl of juice to ooze from his slit, lubricating and warming the tip.

"Yeah, if you want to call a hot gay porno flick food."

Manny's eyes had been half-closed, but at that revelation, they popped open. "A gay porno movie?" The mere possibility of what Cliff hinted at made Manny go stone-hard. He figured his balls had just turned blue.

"Yep."

"Really?"

"Really." Cliff jerked his hand out of Manny's pants and shirt, adding, "My bedroom downstairs. I have a huge library and some really awesome toys. You can take your pick as long as you promise me one thing..."

Manny got shakily to his feet and readjusted his jeans over his throbbing column. He turned and stared at Cliff over the back of the sofa. He'd never once seen a male X movie. As far as toys went, he'd used them a number of times on women with little interest. Additionally, he'd seen his share of male-female pornos, but never had his pole gotten as rigid as it was now just *thinking* about sharing these wild possibilities with Cliff. "That demand of a promise sounds awfully ominous."

Cliff shrugged, his neatly ironed turquoise T-shirt settled snug against his lean physique. "Depends."

"On what?"

"On how you view my request. On how brave and daring you are."

"Meaning?"

"Meaning anal." Cliff started around the couch and sauntered toward Manny. He could see now that Cliff's cock had risen into a thick erection to rival his own. His mouth watered. The sight of it nearly brought Manny to his knees. He had an overwhelming urge to yank that beautiful shaft from Cliff's pants and swallow it whole.

"Anal?"

"Mmm-hmm, anal," Cliff mumbled on a nod as he cupped himself. "You see, it's *my* turn to fuck *you* up the ass. And I've got all the lube and toys and movies you could ever imagine to get you open and ready and begging for me. Manny, you're going to majorly get off on it, I'm certain, just like I did. I promise you, it's mind-blowing...among other things."

His cryptic words made Manny's penis go stiff and heavy with urgent need. "B-but the inn, the phones..."

"You already know the inn's closed for renovations. Besides, the website's updated with a temporarily-out-of-order notice, the answering machine's on indicating the same, the doors are all locked and I've got the 'No Vacancy' sign up by the road."

He held out a hand.

Manny stared at it.

"Come on, Manny. I've been in that kitchen for hours listening to you cursing and making those power tools scream. Now I want to hear *you* scream. So what do you say? Want to see just how daring a manly man such as yourself can be?"

## Chapter Twelve

Manny scanned the apartment. Even in his extreme state of arousal, he counted the newly carpeted stairs leading down from the foyer hallway. Following Cliff into a low-ceilinged, open room, he made note of the walkout exit door at the end near the small but freshly updated kitchen. A high breakfast bar overlooked the cozy arrangement of sofa and loveseat surrounding a pine armoire television and audio center.

"Got an office slash workout room across from the kitchen, and the bathroom's right here off the bedroom. But for now, you're going to get to know my bed." Cliff gripped Manny's hand and drew him into a dark and sensual room. The walls were painted midnight blue with a white chair rail and white crown molding. The afternoon sunshine had been blocked by tightly drawn, navy blue curtains. They hung across the only high basement window Manny had yet to see in the apartment. He was certain he could never fit through that opening if the need to escape ever arose. It gave him a brief sense of dread riddled with claustrophobia.

*You're just being paranoid. There'll never be a need to climb through that narrow window.*

Still...

Manny drew in a breath to calm his racing heart and mind, and instead focused on his still erect cock and what was about to happen. He watched as Cliff moved around the room lighting candles and incense. Smoke curled upward, snaking through the air and dissipating into nothingness. Its seductive, musky scent teased Manny's nostrils and filled his lungs. A burst of cool air from a high register brushed across his perspiring back at the very instant he heard the soft whir of the air conditioner kicking on.

The overpowering lure of this lair Manny had entered welcomed him hospitably as Cliff drew back the thick navy comforter from the king-sized, four-poster walnut bed. It revealed white satin sheets that glittered by the candlelight, further enticing Manny into its refuge.

"You've had this big-assed bed all this time, and here we've been doing it on the hard floor and standing up in the shower?"

Cliff chuckled and winked. "I like to save the best for last."

"Ah, so this is our last encounter then?" Manny ran his hand along the thick bedcovers and puffy pillows certain it would have the very same effect on him as a tranquilizer.

"Uh-uh. Not if I can help it." Cliff blew out the match and crossed to a panel. He turned a knob and faint classical music played from a hidden speaker. It seemed Cliff

had piped it in from the stereo system in the living room just outside the bedroom. Apparently he had more mechanical abilities than he let on.

A large television sat atop a tall chest of drawers opposite the foot of the bed. Cliff crossed the plush camel carpeting and plucked up a remote from the nightstand. He wasn't wearing his glasses, so he squinted at the screen as he adjusted the controls. Manny heard the glide and clink of a disc sliding into the DVD opening. Set now to his specifications, Cliff shot Manny a sidelong, rascally look and said, "Take a look. This one's my favorite."

At first, Manny wasn't sure what "favorite" he referred to, but it soon became apparent. With the push of a button, an all-male pornographic movie played out on the screen. Manny had never seen an X flick void of females before now. Awareness and intrigue fluttered in his gut and baited his loins. He gaped in lusty awe.

Deep moans and the suction of frantic kissing entwined with the upbeat, seductive background music. A well-built man with short strawberry-blond hair lay on his back with his knees bent and his legs drawn up. An even brawnier man had his hips wedged between the up-drawn, spread thighs, his long dark hair swaying across his meaty shoulders as he thrust. An up-close shot revealed in rich, moist detail the deep anal penetration the fair-haired actor took in. The brunette's huge penis glistened with lubrication, sliding in and out with ease as the tight rectum gloved him.

"Jesus..." There it was again, the tingling of his asshole. Did Manny's body desire some anal stimulation...like *that*?

"Take off your clothes, Manny. Now." Cliff was already out of his own garments. He stood naked on the opposite side of the bed, his pole jutting proud, the pale purple head near to bursting. The sight of it made Manny's asshole twitch, and a warm ache flushed through his anus as he imagined Cliff's shaft gently touching his tight ring. Sensing sexual desire in that anatomical area was new to Manny, but something about it drove him to strip off his clothes and dive beneath the covers.

"Come here. Now," he growled, repeating Cliff's command in order to prove his own prowess. "I crave the feel of your body next to mine."

Cliff groaned and his eyelids fluttered as he climbed under the sheet and wrapped his arms around Manny's waist. "How's that? Good?"

Manny let his head sink into the plush pillow. "Heaven." The slick satin pillowcase cradled his head with cool comfort. He thought he could sleep here for the rest of his life in this one position with Cliff's warm, long body stretched along the length of his.

"Manny..." Cliff whispered his name with an emotion Manny didn't care to name. He ran a hand up Manny's chest, sending a shimmer of chill bumps through his entire body. His nipples tightened and a fresh wave of need washed through him. Manny could smell the pungent candle smoke entangled with the faint scent of Cliff's masculine cologne and the homey aroma of line-dried sheets. Cool air whirled through the room and made the flames on the many wax pillars dance and toss shadows across the walls.

Moans and groans sounded from the television, and Manny slid a glance at the intertwined male bodies and fleeting shots of cock and ass. The blond continued to get ass-fucked. Their leisurely screw picked up its tempo so that Manny could hear the bed beneath the men squeaking. Their breathing turned to sweaty panting. The kissing grew frantic, the lovers starving for the taste of one another.

Manny experienced his own yearning. Never in his life would he ever have thought he'd be in need of a man, much less be hungering for his first anal action. As he turned into Cliff's embrace, he wondered what it was about this house and this man that had drawn out things in him he never knew were there. Shocking things. Things he couldn't afford to exploit. Things he *must* curb at some point...but God help him, not now.

"Okay," Manny rasped, hooking his hand behind Cliff's neck to pull his mouth closer. "You've got the movie as promised—which I love, by the way. But how about the lube and toys and that fuck you promised me?"

Cliff's eyes glittered like two jewels, the candlelight reflected in their depths. He slid a hand down Manny's side and closed it around his cock. "Oh yeah, I recall saying I wanted to make you scream."

His hand squeezed and stroked the length of Manny, making him suck in a breath at the torture of it. "I'm ready when you are."

Cliff grinned and rolled toward the nightstand. He rummaged through a drawer and presented a tube of lubrication jelly and a strange contraption Manny had never seen. "What the hell's that?" Manny studied the item, realizing it was a replica of an ass complete with tight male buns and the backside of a dangling scrotum. A pearl-drop of cum seeped from his slit when he noticed the puckered hole between the mounds.

"It's a vibrating asshole."

"Wow." Manny reached down and fondled himself to soothe the painful ache in his rod. Sexual anticipation zinged through his system. He couldn't recall ever being this turned on so many different times in such a few short days. Sex, he was starting to realize, was a lot more fun and exciting than he ever thought it could be.

Cliff squirted a dollop of gel on the faux asshole and smeared, inserting his fingers to grease the inside wall. "Roll over," he ordered, his voice deep and raspy. Manny could tell Cliff hung onto restraint by a thin thread. Every muscle in his lean body shown taut and defined, the firelight dancing over his smooth, tanned skin in shadows and glimmers. The covers were thrown back and Manny indulged in a lengthy inspection of Cliff's member, trying to imagine what the thick column was going to feel like sinking into his ass. He groaned at the thought, eager to test the waters.

Manny turned, propping himself up on one elbow. He drew up the top knee to give Cliff easy access. His heart thudded in time with the pounding of lust in his groin. "How's this?" he asked over his shoulder, his words coming out in a near-whisper.

"Mmm, perfect. Now how about this?" Cliff reached across Manny and perched the toy on the mattress near his cock. The tight anus teased and taunted every sense in his body. Manny could smell the sweet lube and see its sheen across the buttocks and hole.

He reached out and stroked one cheek. It felt soft yet firm in his hand, just like Cliff's ass. His mouth watered and he wondered just how much more temptation and pleasure he could take. He knew the plan. He'd be fucking the toy while Cliff fucked him, and he could think of nothing—no women, no decadent food or drink, no deep dark fantasy—that revved his libido more than this kinky act Cliff offered him.

"Oh man, you've got me so damned horny."

"Believe me," Cliff mumbled. "You're not the only one." He squirted a huge puddle of lube onto his right palm and tossed the tube aside.

Cliff reached between Manny's legs and closed his hand around Manny's penis from behind. He could have sworn he heard a sizzle when the cold jelly made contact with his hot flesh. The cool slickness ringing his shaft made Manny sigh and collapse onto the soft pillow. His head sank into the downy comfort of it, and he didn't know whether to drop off to sleep or let loose and come all over Cliff's hand.

Dragging his sticky hand backward, Cliff massaged and cupped Manny's tight balls, coating them with goo. It caused Manny's bollocks to draw up and flood with dull, warm spasms. Fielding the maddening pleasure, Manny knew Cliff would continue on his front-to-back path, and that carnal knowledge made Manny's asshole tighten with eager expectation.

"Feel good?" Cliff murmured in Manny's ear, his chest now pressing warm along Manny's back.

"Ah, does it ever." Manny clamped his eyelids tight and held his breath, waiting for the inevitable. Cliff caressed his sac, rolling the marbles between his slippery fingers. Gradually, he moved further along the path. Manny's muscles contracted, waiting for the unknown yet sensing euphoria to come.

Cliff swirled a fingertip around Manny's crinkled ass ring. Manny gasped. "Oh...oh God." The tingly, aching sensation seemed to soak deep into his ass even though Cliff simply circled the hole, lubing it for future entry. The spasms traveled in a surge through his pelvis and it seemed his phallus became racked by a need he couldn't squelch. Manny's gaze riveted to the toy. Without so much as a second's hesitation, he yanked it to him and aligned the head of his rod with the dimpled cleft.

"Goddamn it, I can't take this anymore, Cliff. I need—*ah!*" The finger entered him, slow and sensual, sending him into a delirium of lust. His rectum tightened around the invasion. Intoxicated with the unbearable pleasure of it, Manny forced out a gruff sound when sensitive nerves he didn't know he harbored started to fire off. His shaft contracted and pre-cum spurted into the puckered tush. But Cliff didn't give Manny time to acclimate himself to the intense desires bombarding his senses. Instead, he urged him to seek more and more.

"Fuck that tight hole while you listen to them make love in the movie, Manny," Cliff growled in his ear. "Go ahead, get your cock all hard and slick before I sink my pole into your ass. See what it feels like to fuck and be fucked all at once." Cliff's breathing was ragged as he picked up the rhythm, finger-screwing Manny's canal with



precision and care, as if he were an experienced lover who'd done this wild, naughty thing all his life.

The movie continued to play out. Deep groans and whispers carried to Manny's ears, further enticing him. The sloppy yet sexy noises of skin slapping skin during wet and wild penetration urged him to seek more, to mimic their animal acts.

Manny choked back a whimper of hysteria when Cliff added another finger.

*This is just too much fucking pleasure to bear.*

His hand shook as he aligned his glans with the slick, clefted toy. At the very moment Cliff buried yet another digit inside him, Manny pushed into the fake ass. Sparks ignited in his groin, backfiring into his anus where Cliff started to pump faster.

*Son of a bitch, I take that back. Now it's too much pleasure to bear. God, it feels so damn good!*

"Holy...holy shit." He could barely speak. The powerful euphoria that shattered inside him seemed to resurrect his soul. Bliss such as he'd never traversed before made his whole body shudder. Though he knew the toy to be rubber, it felt just like the depths of Cliff's ass. The rippled inside wall hugged the entire length of his manhood, its slick, hot, tight lair once again giving him that coming-home sensation in his heart.

But that wasn't to be the pinnacle of his revelation. Cliff tore his fingers from inside Manny. It left him feeling somewhat empty, and for the moment, his attention shifted from the toy to Cliff's sudden movements.

"Manny, oh God, I've got to get inside you. I want you to feel the awesome power of it, of being filled with cock. And I *have* to feel you too." Still in a side-lying position behind Manny, Cliff slipped his left forearm under Manny's pillow and wrapped his right arm around Manny's waist. He yanked until his rod nestled in the valley between Manny's ass cheeks, and his chest and tight abs pressed against Manny's back.

He recoiled, suddenly apprehensive about Cliff's huge shaft fucking him. The fingers had been more than enough, and he couldn't imagine his orifice accommodating any more than the circumference of three fingers. His rectum tightened involuntarily when Cliff probed its tight ring.

"Relax, babe, relax. Concentrate on your own cock buried in that asshole," Cliff coaxed in his ear. It made Manny shiver. The deep, manly voice and the gentle but firm way Cliff held him made the coming-home feeling return. A heavy emotional heat – son of a bitch, was that freaking *love*? – weighed on his heart.

*No, no, no...*

Cliff gripped his own penis and swirled the head around Manny's anus. The tingling deep inside Manny's passage returned, but this time it proved to be far more intense than he'd experienced with the fingers. His hips started to move, pumping slowly at first so that he could close his eyes and imagine he screwed Cliff's ass. The pressure built. Smoldering ashes rekindled into a full-blown inferno centered obscurely inside his loins. As Cliff inched inside Manny's rectum, the fire spread outward, moving along and singeing every nerve ending in his body.

*Relax, babe, relax.*

He rehearsed Cliff's words in his mind, focusing on opening up and taking him in while he simultaneously fucked the toy. Another inch and Manny choked on his words. "C-Cliff, it feels—" He slid his left hand under the pillow and found Cliff's fist. Cliff uncurled his fingers and twined them into Manny's. He would never forget the sensation of that, of connecting emotionally with another man. Bodies could invade and merge, but there was nothing, Manny thought with profound emotion, like the reassuring, loving touch of a hand entwining with his.

Fueled by a potent combination of sentimental lust, Manny stabilized the toy with his right hand and tore into it with a savagery that surprised even him. At that very same moment, Cliff ensconced himself, burrowing deep into Manny's ass. His first instinct was to recoil.

*Relax, babe, relax.*

Manny relaxed his rectum, drew in a long breath and pushed backward, taking all of Cliff in.

"Ah!" Cliff clutched Manny, cupping his jaw so that Manny was forced to turn his head. Cliff's mouth covered Manny's with a hunger like never before. He tasted the sweetness of lemonade on Cliff's tongue and moaned into his lover's mouth, starving for more.

Cliff's cock convulsed inside Manny, and the jolts stimulated sensory cells that Manny was certain were connected to his genitals. It was the most wondrous, blissful thing he'd ever experienced! Was this what he'd been searching for all his life? Was this what Will had begun but never finished? Holy crap, his past suddenly looked dull and lifeless compared to his newly born future. He recalled his own silent conviction of only days ago.

*I will never allow myself to be full-fledged gay. No. That just wouldn't sit well with me – ever.*

Well, screw that. It was not a matter of allowing himself. It was the reality of things, what he needed, wanted—what was the real him. And furthermore, if this was what gay was, then Manny Valentino flamed with it. Never did he want to be with a woman again. Oh no. *This* was what he wanted—had always wanted, he now knew—to be filled and to fill, to give and to take, to rejoice in the passionate, firm touch of a man.

"Cliff," Manny whispered against the full, wet lips. "Fuck me. Fuck me harder, faster."

"Oh God, are you sure?" Cliff asked, his voice strained as he clutched Manny, holding him spoon-fashion into the curve of his body.

"Yes. Yes! Now, goddamn it."

Cliff didn't need any more reassurance. He growled his satisfaction at Manny's enthusiasm. He withdrew and Manny knew a split second of emptiness and disappointment.

But the bliss returned. Cliff pumped in and out of Manny's ass, the lubrication slicking the way, lending him ease of penetration. Manny groaned, loud and forceful, his cry carrying through the room and drowning out the moans of the gay porno movie. He pumped the faux anus thrusting into its depths at the same moment Cliff impaled him from behind. The mixed aroma of sex and scented candles filled Manny's lungs. He inhaled and shoved backward, wanting everything to fill him at once, the erotic movie sounds laced by Cliff's heavy breathing, the sexy smells, the sweet taste of Cliff's kiss, Cliff's granite column.

He just wanted Cliff...forever.

But he quickly dashed that thought from his brain because with it had come the sadness of knowing he would have to move on without him. Instead, Manny focused on the amazing sensations of gay sex, of Cliff kissing his neck and tweaking his peaks while he drove into him time and time again.

"Manny..." Cliff gulped, catching his breath. "You ready?"

"Ah, like never before in my life."

"You asked for it," Cliff warned, panting.

"Asked for—" Manny's question was cut short by the sudden whirring of the toy. Cliff may not have known the location of the switch on the power saw, but evidently he knew exactly where to find it on this contraption. Intense vibrations racked Manny's cock and washed into his butt.

Cliff gripped Manny's hand under the pillow, his nails digging into flesh. He halted his thrusting and held himself buried deep inside Manny's anus. "Oh God, I can feel the pulsations all the way into your ass. Mmm, I'm going to—ah, *come!*"

It felt as if Manny's entire groin became filled by Cliff's hot semen. As Cliff's stiff rod jerked off inside him, Manny's own climax built. The euphoria of being packed by an ejaculating penis and buried in a faux ass at the same time nearly did him in. His heart pounded behind his breastbone and thundered in his ears. He could feel his rectal walls begin to shudder, and that spot somewhere up inside his balls drew up and started the rippling he always knew to be the precursor to a mind-blowing orgasm. The pleasure rose to heights he'd never traversed before now. Manny climbed higher and higher, his groans mingling in his ears with Cliff's moans. His muscles clamped and spasmed around Cliff, milking more, while his own cock spewed inside the vibrating toy.

"I'm coming, oh fuck, I'm coming all over you, all inside this thing," Manny growled.

"Mmm, you're awesome," Cliff whispered, nipping at Manny's earlobe before he'd even come completely down off his high.

"You...too," Manny panted. "Incredible. That was *the* most incredible sex I've *ever* had."

"Ever?" Cliff rose up on one elbow and gazed down at Manny. "Really?"

"Ever, really. I never knew..." There couldn't be anything more satisfying or harmonious than this, Manny thought, than the unique interplay of lovemaking between two men. Manny shook his head and turned his face into the cool pillow. Cliff remained inside him but Manny withdrew from the toy, found the switch and turned it off. "I just never knew," he said, his voice muffled.

"Well, me neither," Cliff replied with a deep tone of joy as he pulled slowly out of Manny's ass. It left Manny feeling empty and alone again. "But son of a fucking bitch, I know one thing's for certain."

"Yeah, what?"

"No more women for me, that's for damn sure." The mattress shifted as Cliff climbed from the bed. "Need to take a piss, wash up then I'll go and get us something to snack on. Made these great gooseberry tarts," he added with a grin as he snatched up a pair of black silk boxers and headed to the shower for a quick clean-up.

"Gooseberry?" Manny shivered. "No thanks. Sounds like shit."

"No, really, you'll love them. Be back in a few."

There was a brief run of the shower before Manny heard the unmistakable sound of Cliff bounding up the stairs. His footsteps faded somewhere on the path to his favorite room, the kitchen. Manny lay there for a few minutes, basking in the soft bed. He watched the movie for a bit, surprised he was getting turned on all over again. He couldn't wait for Cliff to return. The hell with food, he wanted to make love again.

"Man, how long can those guys go on fucking like that?" Manny muttered to himself with a chuckle. But when his cock tingled, he knew he just might be able to compete with their stamina.

He heard a loud bang and clank upstairs and shot up onto an elbow. Manny's heart raced. He swung his legs over the edge of the bed, warring with himself. *Should I go check on Cliff? Could it be...*

After a full minute of perking his ears, he forced himself to shrug, knowing he was most likely being paranoid. "Nah, relax, Valentino." He flopped back onto the pillow and yanked up the covers. "Cliff's always banging around in the kitchen. And mmm," he grinned, snuggling down, "maybe we'll 'bang' in the kitchen together sometime?"

Manny closed his eyes and listened to the soft sounds of male-male fucking on the television. God, he was so tired. It seemed for the first time since coming to the inn, relaxation swept his muscles and he went limp. Drowsiness overtook him in a sweet embrace. Maybe he *was* safe and undetectable here at this welcoming haven. Maybe he could stay here indefinitely until he got word of Vito's capture. Maybe, he thought as he drifted into slumber, he could stay here forever.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Well, ain't this nice and cozy?"

Manny didn't know how long he'd been dozing when he started at the familiar, ominous voice. *Vito Moretti!* His eyelids popped open. It seemed his heart had been electrocuted by fear and the sudden threat of impending death.

He sat bolt upright. Was he dreaming? Groggy, he automatically fumbled at the nightstand, realizing too late he'd forgotten to bring his gun with him. His wide gaze swung to the tall, balding figure standing in the open doorway. Vito had donned—or most likely stolen—dark slacks and a short-sleeved, button-down print dress shirt, as if he was just passing through on his way to go golfing or gambling. His huge, slightly rotund body filled the whole damn opening. Manny swallowed a lump in his throat sure it was his heart.

"Geez, Joey," Vito said conversationally as he lit a cigarette with one hand and aimed his forty-five automatic pistol at Manny with the other. "I never knew you was a fucking faggot." He shoved the lighter into his pants pocket and took a drag. Squinting through the rings of smoke, Vito gestured with the butt pinched between his thumb and forefinger as he spoke. "If I'da known, you can bet your nasty, ass-fucking cock I'da whacked you a long time ago and fed you to the goddamn sharks."

Manny slid from the bed and stood on trembling legs. Motherfucker, why did he forget his goddamn gun?

"Ah-ah-ah." Vito waved the gleaming silver weapon. "Did I tell you you could get outa bed, you asshole boob?"

"Just putting my jeans on, for christssake. Is that okay?"

Vito leaned a round shoulder against the doorjamb and crossed one ankle over the other. "Sure, go right ahead. I know you wasn't smart enough to bring a weapon with you since all you had on your mind was getting poked up your narsing, two-timing cop's ass. Besides, I ain't got any fucking desire to stare at your nasty shit-dipping dick." He grinned, his dark eyes glittering, but Manny knew that particular cold smile. It was one that always meant Vito was in the mood to "play" with his prey before blowing their brains out.

Manny jammed on his jeans, never taking his eyes off Vito. He didn't bother with his shirt. Though the extra protection might come in handy at some point, Manny knew the chances of that were slim to none. It was useless to take up his last minutes of life when the barrel of death stared him in the face.

"How did my WPP cover get blown?"

"You think I don't know what you're doing, delaying the big sleep?"

"Yeah, Moretti, I'm well aware you're wise to all the tactics. So humor me anyway," Manny grumbled nonchalantly, though every one of his senses were in heightened mode.

Of course Vito was right. Manny was stalling, but he knew damn well every millisecond could count in a dire situation such as this. He'd been on the other side of that gun many, many times before and had seen the look of panic in the eyes of those who knew they were about to get bumped off. Aware that one look could empower

Vito, Manny pushed forward. The bomb ticked, but he would do all he could to reset the alarm and delay death.

Meanwhile, images of a busted and bloodied Cliff kept haunting his mind. He had to get the upper hand here so he could get to Cliff in time.

"I was careful, very careful. The bureau was too. When I heard you'd broken out with knowledge of my location, my false WPP identity and all my aliases, I have to admit it stunned me. So how'd you do it?"

Vito shrugged. "Let me tell you something. You may not have been loyal, you piece of shit, but Peter, my wife and my mouthpiece associate are." He snorted, as if he had second thoughts. "At least I pay that fucking lawyer enough to stay clammed and dig up the goods – any goods I demand – that's for damn sure."

"So you've got your wife doing your dirty work too? Well, ain't that pathetic."

"Fuck you. Other than Peter, she was the best, most reliable spy I had...for a while. Found your ass, didn't she? While I'm doing time and Peter's hiding out, she tracked you every step of the way once the associate got a hold of the gold-mine WPP information."

"So she traced me to here, to this tiny-assed town – and to this inn? How?"

Vito made a face. "Nah, she did the prelims. Got me your Maine location and aliases. Once I got out and realized you'd left Maine ahead of me, it was only a matter of coming up with some money to bribe one of your fellow agents into learning your new ID they gave you when you flew the coop. Followed your WPP-issued credit card trail from there – what an idiot you were using it here in this small-assed town."

*Yes, a new credit card that was supposed to be totally secured and not connected to Manny Valentino, Joey Mangano or any of the other names he'd gone undercover as. So who was the money-hungry double agent in the bureau's program?*

"And your wife did that electronic tracing for you?"

He shook his head, grinning somewhat arrogantly. It seemed Vito enjoyed revealing his clever strategy to a man he was about to murder. "Ended up having to do that one on my own. Turns out lawyers are nothing but shyster thieves. Seems the broad had been skating around with the prick all the while I was doing time in the can. So first on my to-do list after I busted out of the big house and found out? I whacked 'em both."

"And you said they were *loyal*?"

"Fuck you. They got me the goods I needed to find you. That was all that mattered to old Vito here."

"But you lost my trail for a while there, or it wouldn't have taken you so long to find me."

"Money really does speak louder than words or guns, even here in this fucking town – the young gal down at the general store where you stupidly used your card is a few grand richer. Anyway, you was a careless bastard. So here I am."

His palms were drenched with sweat so Manny planted his hands on his hips to dry them. He kept up the stall tactic. "So your lawyer, who's supposed to be upholding the law, paid some snitch a fortune to get access to the records documenting my Maine residency. And he sent your *wife* out looking for me? Brilliant, just brilliant and manly of him."

"Ha, I wouldn't be stringing that shit along about snitches, you goddamn weasel. 'Cause look what it got me. Here in your fucking presence with the good old Roscoe aimed right at your big-assed, traitorous head."

"So when you busted out," Manny asked, trying desperately to recall the number of steps to the door and up the stairs, "your wife and your 'mouthpiece', two-timing lawyer helped you with that too?"

"Details, schmee-tails. The short of it is, I crushed out of the slammer, made a clean sneak and here I am. Now whatcha gonna do about it? Got your Chicago overcoat nice and comfy yet, huh, *Joey*?"

Manny refused to take the bait even though he knew the translation. "Chicago overcoat" equated to a coffin, a cold, dark, stifling and permanent coffin. He suppressed a shiver and switched tactics. "What have you done with him?"

"Him? You mean your pretty-boy faggot, daisy lover?"

"Where the fuck is he?"

"You'll see..." Vito pushed from the doorway and released the pistol's safety catch with his thumb. The soft click of it echoed in Manny's head, though he tried not to flinch. He knew his mortality was inescapable. It was the inevitable consequence of his betrayal. But he prayed Cliff had been spared. Even in death, Manny knew he would carry the guilt and pain of knowing he'd caused Cliff's demise by his own carelessness and selfish needs.

"If you've laid one hand on him, you prick, I swear I'll —"

Vito cackled but the humor didn't reach his evil snake eyes. He stopped abruptly in order to illustrate his hilarity was truly coldhearted and meaningless, that his laugh foreshadowed the lethal, bloody irony to come rather than good-natured fun.

"You think I'm some kinda idiot palooka? That wasn't just some three-spot jail term I got. You sent me up for *life*, you ratting weasel bastard son of a bitch, you. Oh yeah, we used to drink outa the same bottle, you and me. Hell, you was my fellow, my number one bo. Makes me sick to think of it."

He spat on Cliff's new, fluffy carpeting, and the disrespectful, nasty gesture made Manny's hands clench into fists.

Vito's big body shook and his high balding forehead glistened with sweat as he aimed the gun at Manny's heart. "But you can bet your gay gunsel ass you're dust to me now, pal. But first I'm gonna have a little fun tightening the screws before I pump some metal into you..."

Manny took one step forward, knowing it might be his last yet unable to help himself. "Where is he?"

Vito grinned, his crooked teeth glowing yellow over the top of the gun's notched sight. "Ah, yes, come with me and take a look for yourself. I'm dying to see just how much I can make a fairy pansy homo and his traitor, butt-fucking fag lover scream before they get whacked."

Manny had been with the Moretti gang long enough to know exactly what those slang words meant. Yes, it meant Cliff was still alive—but he wouldn't be for long. And Manny was going to be forced to watch him die in the most horrific, bloody way Vito could devise.



*Heads or Tails?*

## **Conclusion**

## **Heads and Tails**

## **Lovers and Friends Flirt with Fate**

## Chapter Thirteen

"What do you think of that, Joey, eh?" Vito had led Manny out into the barn. He glowered up at his clever work and cackled.

Manny had never been more terrified in his life. Apparently during Manny's leisurely nap, Vito had abducted and hogtied Cliff. That must have been the noise he'd heard and ignored like an idiot.

Good God, the pain Cliff must be in! His hands and ankles were strung up behind and above him. It took all of Manny's mental power not to run to him and yank him down.

*Calm, Manny. Remain calm. A stupid move like that would just get us both killed.*

Manny forced himself to remain fixed to his spot. He studied Cliff and the contraption Vito had lynched him in, hoping to find a glitch or to come up with some brilliant plan of rescue.

But, Jesus, it looked hopeless. One end of the rope had been secured to the conglomeration wrapped around Cliff's body. Manny's gaze followed the pulley's path looped up and around the structure's main support beam. The other end had been tied to a huge screw drilled into a pole bracing the center of the barn. Cliff dangled, his body swinging like a pendulum over Manny's temporary workstation...where an unprotected table saw churned and screeched on high power.

And he knew Cliff had to be scared shitless. Who wouldn't be with an electric saw blade spinning only inches below their naked gut?

Cliff wore only the black silk boxers. He had an enormous knot on the side of his head, and dried blood soaked his light hair, streaking down across his temple and cheek. The sight of it sent a murderous spike of rage through Manny. His heart raced out of control. Sweat dribbled down his hairline as he trembled in an effort to remain in one spot and keep from losing his cool.

*I'll kill you, Moretti. I'll fucking kill you.*

Cliff's mouth was secured shut with the very duct tape Manny had seen in the toolbox he'd found in the old outbuilding. Just that morning Cliff had informed Manny of the chop saw in the barn for cutting the brass foot rail below the bar. Manny had chosen to do the work here to avoid dusting the house with metal shavings. He'd explored the barn further, amazed to find hordes of tools and a good-quality table saw in addition to the miter saw he'd been using in the saloon. He'd set up the monster, drooling over the high-pitched scream of the manly, heavy-duty, cast-iron beauty.

Now, that same previously benign tool spun threateningly below Cliff's bowed body, the blade guard removed.

The late-afternoon sun slanted in through the partially ajar wooden door, glinting off the squealing metal blade and spotlighting Cliff. Airborne dust traveled down the beams of light, tossed by the hay-scented, soft summer breeze that wafted in. Amid the golden glow, Cliff's green eyes were alight with wild terror and unshed tears caused by staring a bloody, agonizing death right in the face. Still, a gleam of bravery lit their depths as he uselessly attempted to grip the rope from behind and pull himself up and away from the sharp, spinning blade. His gaze locked on Manny's, and even in the midst of the extreme danger he faced, Cliff's eyes bombarded Manny with a flurry of very valid, unspoken questions.

*Who the fuck is this madman?*

*Who the hell's Joey?*

*And what are you waiting for? Goddamn it, get me the hell down from here!*

"So what do you think of your queer bastard lover now, Joey? Heh?" Vito stood right by the saw, the gun aimed at Manny's chest.

"What do you want from me, Moretti? You know I'll do anything if you just let him down from there. Put me up there instead. Hell, blast my fucking brains out for all I care. But for christssake, don't involve him in this. He doesn't even know who I am."

Cliff let out a muffled protest, but Manny didn't dare take his eyes off Vito.

Slipping his free hand into his pants pocket, Vito snickered and rocked back onto his heels. "Bullshit he doesn't know you, you freaking boob. I saw you getting it up the ass by him. What, are you dizzy with this dame or something? Jesus fucking A. Christ, you're both disgusting nances. Eh, you make me freaking sick." To prove his sentiments, he snorted and spit out a thick, nasty hocker. It landed only centimeters from Manny's bare foot, making his stomach churn.

"Whatever. I don't really give a shit what you think anymore."

"You disappoint me big-time, Joey. You son of a bitch, it's your damn fault the FBI took out all The Family—*my* family." His big body trembled as he growled out every word. "Big Nick, Nino, Jimmy Babe, Ricco, Timmy Two-Tongues, Bobby 'The Bull', Big Clipper, Ice Pick, Sandman, Reaper, Gigolo Jim. All them was *my* boys, *my* family," he snarled, thumping his chest with the tip of his thumb. "But now they're gone because of your disgusting rat ass...and you and your butt-buddy's going to pay."

Manny knew what Vito planned...to release the rope and lower Cliff slowly to his death while forcing Manny to watch. Manny had witnessed scenes like this time and time again—hell, he'd participated in them. He knew all too well the inside of this barn would be painted red before the hour was up...way more red than its exterior paint.

Vito started to round the saw, the gun still gripped in his hand. Suddenly, his attention was diverted when a female voice came from the half-opened door. He pivoted his head around, the gun going with his body's momentum.

"Cliff, are you in here? I saw all those tarts scattered across the kitchen, then I looked out the window and thought I saw someone heading—Cliff? Oh my fucking God, *Cliff?*"

A beautiful brunette woman shoved open the door and stepped inside. The whole interruption was just the break Manny was looking for. Without pausing even a split second, he lurched forward and heaved the table saw onto its side. The blade continued to whirl but it didn't reach Vito as he'd hoped.

"Molly, what's going...on?" A gorgeous blonde followed on Molly's footsteps. She glanced around, her full lips agape at what met her eyes. "Cliff? What in heaven's name are you doing up there?" But it didn't take long for her to spy Vito. Her eyes rounded like two huge blue marbles. She let out an audible gasp and pressed one tanned hand to her breast. "What...who is this? Molly, what's this all about?"

Molly...Cliff's ex, Manny realized. She stiffened, halting her steps, and stretched out her arm to prevent the other woman from entering further. The glint of the setting sun off the steel of the pistol's barrel had caught her eye as soon as she'd pulled open the barn door. "Shh, Gwen, shh. Just stay right where you are, babe. It appears Cliff's in a hell of a fix, but I intend to find out just why these two son of a bitching men have him strung up like a side of beef."

Cliff mumbled and grunted in protest, his body thrashing wildly against his restraints now that the blade no longer threatened him with a terror-filled, gory death.

Vito swung around toward Manny, his eyes now wild with the glitter of confusion at the turn of events. Undecided, he spun back, haphazardly aiming the gun at the intruders. Vito pulled the trigger. The booming shot reverberated inside the wooden structure. Cliff squealed, and Manny could have sworn he heard Molly's name clear and panicked, even through the thick tape.

Alerted, Molly shrieked and swiped the woman—who Manny could only assume to be her lover Gwen—with one arm and brought them both tumbling to the dirt floor together. The bullet hit the barn door only inches from where Gwen had been standing.

With Vito's attention off his original plans, Manny knew it was his only chance to turn this nightmare around. Due to his haphazard hold and aim, the gun had whipsawed from recoil and jammed on Vito. Rather than continuing with another shot—one that more than likely would have found its mark—he'd been delayed by a few precious seconds and was in the process of readying to fire it again.

But he barely got his forefinger back into position when Manny leaped across the space and tackled him. Vito saw it coming out of the corner of his eye. The mobster pivoted around and sidestepped, though Manny still had made contact, wrapping his arms around Vito's lower legs. He threw all his weight and strength into the attack, bringing Vito to the ground. The women screamed. Cliff's muffled yell sounded from behind the tape as he made a frantic, useless struggle to escape his confinement.

That was when the blood and gore really hit the fan. Caught off guard, Vito tumbled sideways and his head snapped back, making contact with the sharp blade. The machine made a grinding growl as it sliced through skull. At first, Vito screamed from the depths of his evil soul. But it didn't take long for his painful cries and gurgles to die out. Manny flinched and buried his face in Vito's twitching legs as blood and

brain matter sprayed everywhere. Cliff was coated with it, and Manny heard his muffled groans and gags of disgust.

Gwen screamed and Molly held her lover's head down, soothing her, telling her not to look and that everything would be okay. Manny shot to his knees and dragged the body away from the saw. Bloody fluid gushed out of the hole in Vito's head, soaking the hay-spattered soil in a mess of reddish sludge.

Manny's pulse beat like a bongo drum in his ears. His nude upper body was drenched in sweat and blood. With his hand, he swiped the gooey moisture from his face and wiped it on his jeans. Nausea roiled in his gut as he stood up, his legs quaking. The rituals of death, all the blood and disgusting body matter, it had always gotten to him on an emotional level, though back then, he didn't dare show it. He was only glad this would be his last encounter with fatalities of any sort.

"Cliff..." He raced to the end of the pulley rope and unwrapped the cord loops from around the screw. With slow gentleness, he lowered Cliff to the floor only two feet from Vito's gory corpse. Cliff rolled onto his side and let out a moan of relief as the pressure was finally taken off his arms. Locating box cutters from Molly's toolbox, Manny quickly cut the ropes. Guilt beset him at the sight of raw rope burns crisscrossing Cliff's fit body.

*If you weren't already dead, Moretti, I'd fucking kill you with my bare hands for putting him through this.*

Cliff tore the tape from his mouth. He gasped, his eyes glazed with shock as he shouted, "Holy motherfucking shit!"

Cliff's body was spattered with Vito's brains and blood. But Manny didn't care. He clutched Cliff to his heaving chest. There was no stopping the tears. Manny sobbed, his trembling hands pressing Cliff tight against him. "I'm so sorry. Goddamn it, Cliff, I'm so sorry. Oh my God, oh my God, I almost lost you."

"Cliff!" Molly leaped up and stumbled across the barn. She kneeled next to Cliff and Manny. "Are y-you all right?"

"Yes, yes..." he panted. "And you? And Gwen? The bullet didn't..."

"No, no. Thank God your hero here stopped him just in time."

"Manny," Cliff informed her, closing his eyes and collapsing backward onto clean, hay-covered ground. "His name's Manny. I don't have any fucking idea what his last name is, but you'll be surprised to hear that...I'm in love with him." He held up a halting hand when Molly gasped. "I know, I know, red flags went up a long time ago. But it's too late to heed the damn warnings."

Silence crackled in the air. Manny startled, his entire body tensing. He couldn't believe what he'd just heard. Joy soared in his still-pounding heart, surprising him with the quick surge of it. Words wouldn't dislodge from his dry throat.

Love? Cliff *loved* him?

Molly simply gaped. Her eyes were a striking grass green—a shade or two darker than Cliff’s—and they rounded to the size of large coins. She had an old, yellowing bruise on her cheek that looked suspiciously like a handprint, but it didn’t mar her beauty in the least. Still kneeling, her mouth hanging open, she stared from Cliff to Manny. “Uh, you’re what? Care to repeat that?”

“You heard me.” Cliff peered out from behind the arm he’d thrown over his eyes. “I love him. I want to say it right now before something happens again where I can’t speak my mind. Do you know how horrifying and frustrating that is knowing you’re going to die and not being able to voice your love for someone because of a freaking piece of duct tape?”

“Wow.” Molly continued to gawk.

“Yeah, wow. Which means our suspicions were correct. I’m gay.” He shot a look up at Manny and waved a hand. “Yeah, yeah. There’s the door. Go ahead. Run. You were planning your getaway anyway. There’s no need to stay out of obligation just because a fool like me went and fell in love with a jerk like you.”

Molly let out a snort and got to her feet. She drew her cell phone from her back jeans pocket and slid a quick look at the gruesome mess Vito had become. Manny could see in her pale face and trembling hands that it was taking all the bravery she possessed not to lose her mind and hurl her lunch. “Um, I-I think this can be discussed after we get the police out here and get this sickening mess cleaned up.”

Manny reached for her wrist and clamped his hand around it before she could dial. “No. No police.”

“What?” Molly’s dark eyebrows shot up with disbelief. That one word held a note of antipathy that told Manny he better have a very good explanation, because she wouldn’t be taking shit off anyone.

“Manny, that’s ridiculous.” Cliff dragged himself up. “Look around you. It’s a fucking slaughterhouse in here. We *have* to call the police.”

He continued to hold Molly’s wrist. “Do what you want. But if you call them, I’ll have no choice but to leave.”

Cliff ground his teeth together. “Leave if you want, goddamn it. I’m not going to beg you to stay when you’ve had one foot out the door since you got here anyway. You have to understand my love for you isn’t a requirement to stay, or even a life sentence, for christssake. So leave. And let go of her, damn you.”

Manny slowly released Molly’s arm. He sighed. “Look, I’m sorry. I know you must have the wrong impression of me, and of all this.” He gestured around the chaotic barn. “It’s just that I’ve determined all the people who could cause me grief are finally incarcerated or dead—except one. A snitch within my own department—FBI, by the way. That’s right, I’m not a criminal as you might have thought. I am—or was—an undercover agent caught in the middle of a mob sting gone bad. *Real* bad. Now, if you call the police, this guy gets a heads-up. And I’m a dead man...which could also endanger all of you in the process.”

Cliff drew in a ragged breath. "No. No."

"Yes."

"Molly..." Cliff's panicked eyes lit on his ex-wife. "Wait, wait. Don't make the call. Not yet anyway. Let's..." He rubbed his perspiring, spattered brow and stared at the spinning saw blade. "Let's think this through."

"Oh *shit*. Goddamn it." Molly hung her head and shoved the phone back into her pocket. Her gaze swung to Vito but quickly snapped back. "Okay, so we've got a lunatic's fucking brains and gross blood everywhere, and we can't call the cops even though one's involved. So then, what do we do, just leave him—" Her words were cut short by a shrill but muffled scream. She gasped and whirled around. "*Gwen!*"

The doorway was empty. All the while they'd been exchanging words, it seemed something had happened to Gwen. The three of them sprinted to the door, coming to a halt at the sight that met their eyes.

"You bastard!" Molly hissed, racing outside.

"Motherfucker, he's back," Cliff groaned.

"Who's back? Who the fuck is that man?"

"Gwen's crazy, obsessed, Amish husband Jakob. Gwen left him, but he followed her. He swore he'd be back and that we'd all pay."

Manny's hackles went up. The bearded man in strange garb had Gwen pinned to the ground, both of them prone. He held a knife in his hand. Blood was everywhere, all over Gwen, all over the man. There was so much blood, it was difficult to tell where it originated from, Gwen, her husband or both.

"Gwen, Gwen, *no!*" Molly stumbled the few steps to where they lay. She lunged for the knife, but the man lay still. He didn't appear to try to move it out of her reach. Molly's hand clamped around his wrist. She uncurled his fingers and snatched the weapon from his bloody hand, tossing it aside. Shoving against his shoulder, she screeched, "Get *off* her, goddamn you!"

Manny sprinted over and fell to the ground next to Molly.

"What has he done to you?" Molly sobbed. "Oh God, *Gwen!*"

Manny knew by now the man was dead, but with Gwen's face down, he couldn't discern if she still lived. "Shh, shh, move aside, babe," he gently ordered Molly.

Cliff gathered Molly in his arms and held her, soothing her hysterics.

Manny pushed against the huge deadweight and rolled him off Gwen. It was just as he'd suspected. It appeared the man had taken Vito's reckless bullet meant for Molly or Gwen when they'd interrupted. He must have been outside about to spring his own attack on Gwen when the bullet penetrated the door and hit him right in the collarbone area. Evidently he'd tried to defy death and had lived long enough to grab Gwen from behind and drag her outside with him. But Vito must have nicked an artery. The man had lost enough blood to rival Vito's horrific death.

But he couldn't determine if the man had had time to slit Gwen's throat or not.

"Gwen," he murmured, reaching out for her red-soaked shoulder. He gently rolled her over. Molly peeked out from Cliff's chest and let out a bloodcurdling wail.

Lying on her back, Gwen's eyes fluttered open. She stared up at the bright blue sky and took a deep, gasping breath. "What...what happened?"

"Are you okay?" Manny asked, reaching a hesitant hand toward her.

Gwen recoiled, but the move caused her to catch sight of her clothing. She stared agog at her soaked T-shirt and gasped. Rolling her head to the side, she saw that her husband lay unmoving. Gwen sat up and scrambled backward, her beautiful eyes filled with tears of terror and what Manny assumed was relief. "H-he's dead?"

"Yes, he's definitely dead."

"A-are you sure?"

"Yes, I'm very sure."

She collapsed and buried her head between Molly and Cliff's thighs as they kneeled. Sobs of joy overtook Gwen. Over and over, she wept, "Thank the Lord, thank the Lord, thank the Lord."

Molly hunched over Gwen's back and cried with her.

Manny's eyes met Cliff's across the space. A breeze blew into the barnyard and ruffled his blond locks. It made Manny's heart catch. God, he was a hot man, even covered with brains and blood. Manny took in Cliff's loving embrace of his ex-wife and her lover, and he marveled at the twinge of jealousy that overtook him.

*He's mine, and I'm not going anywhere.*

He mouthed the words "I love you" to Cliff.

Cliff's handsome face lit with joy. But instead of releasing Molly and Gwen, he simply grinned and said, "Manny, this is my ex-wife and best friend Molly if you haven't figured that out yet."

Molly's head came up. A slow grin spread over her tanned, stunning face despite the tears that stained her cheeks. "Hi there."

Manny cleared his throat and wiped away tears of his own he didn't realize were there. "Pleased to meet you. Uh, and by the way, that would be Valentino. Manny Valentino."

"Glad to meet you, Valentino. I guess any man my Clifford chooses is all right by me."

"Manny Valentino?" Cliff released the women and dragged himself up. "Manny Valentino. Hmm, I like that. But...I *love* the man." He sauntered over and held out his arms. Manny sighed. He inhaled, ignoring the scent of death and drawing in Cliff's musky aroma as they clung to one another.

At that moment when Cliff went willingly and forgivingly into his embrace, Manny knew he'd finally found his place in the world.

Except for one thing...



He pulled away and looked back and forth between Molly and Cliff. "No cops, right?"

Molly slung an arm around a sniffling Gwen and pulled her close. "No. I don't want anything to happen to her. She didn't do anything wrong, but I don't want to risk putting her through all that legal crap if I can help it."

"Cliff?"

He glanced from the open barn door to Jakob's lifeless heap. Even though he let out a shudder, Cliff replied, "No. No cops. I don't have any idea how we're going to handle this, but no. No cops."

"You have no inn reservations, no people set to arrive tonight?"

"No. Right, Molly?"

She shrugged and continued to hold Gwen's face in the hollow of her throat to keep her from looking at Jakob. "How should I know? We came back early because of the hurricane evacuation, but we only just got here. I didn't take time to check the book."

"Well, I cancelled all reservations and didn't take anymore because of the mess you and Gwen left in the saloon."

"Yeah, on my way in, I saw you still had the 'No Vacancy' sign out by the road. Figured something was up," Molly added with a nod.

"So no one should be arriving?" Manny clarified.

"No, no one," Cliff assured him, rubbing Manny's back as he spoke.

Manny's gaze swung across the property and settled on the hump of the old cellar just beyond the mowed yard line. "All right then, I have a plan that just might work..."

\* \* \* \* \*

A week later, sitting on the rear deck overlooking the backyard, Molly balanced the penny on her bent thumb and curved forefinger, ready to flip it. Beyond the edge of the yard, the collapsed, demolished cellar had become nothing more than a flat spot of dirt...and a grave for two evil men. Where the barn had once sat, charred weeds and ash concealed any traces of brain matter and blood.

"Okay," Molly said with a chipper tone, "so heads, we leave it open to the general public, tails, we turn it into a gays-only resort. Right? Everyone agree? Gwen? Cliff? Valentino?"

"Yes," Manny said, suppressing a chuckle. He threw his arm around Cliff and pushed off with his foot to set the double swing into motion. "And if heads wins, I'm out of here."

Cliff gasped and sent a surprised look at his partner. "What?"

Manny winked at Cliff. "I already told you I have some property—over one hundred acres with a large farmhouse in southern Missouri. My parents left it to me, and I've been neglecting it for years. If I don't sell it, and if that coin ends up on heads

in favor of a boring, straight-laced inn, then you and I are moving to the farm and opening our own bed-and-breakfast resort—for gay men.”

“Really?” Cliff asked with a delighted grin, nudging his glasses up his nose.

“Really.” Manny leaned over, nuzzled Cliff’s neck and ran a hand up his bare leg. “Besides, I wouldn’t mind getting you all to myself again...”

Cliff shivered and wrapped his arms around Manny. They melted into a passionate kiss as the swing rocked them.

“Please, please, gentlemen,” Molly groaned. “For crying out loud, get a damn room.”

Gwen giggled and sidled up behind Molly. She leaned into the deck railing and wrapped her arms around Molly’s waist. Drawing Molly against her, she tightened her hold so that Molly’s ass nestled into the crotch of Gwen’s jean shorts. Gwen groaned her pleasure before pointing out, “Well, this *is* an inn, you know, so they can get a room here. And with the saloon almost done now, and another suite set to go upstairs, there’s plenty of rooms for them to choose from.”

“Wait a minute,” Cliff mumbled, tearing his mouth from Manny’s. “What about that snitch agent? Doesn’t he know your real name and where you came from? He might track you to the farmhouse in Missouri—if he’s ever of a mind to cover all his tracks and eliminate you in case you snitch back on him.”

“Hmm, good point,” Manny replied with a thoughtful, concerned look in his eyes.

Gwen shrugged. “Then Molly and I’ll go there and pretend like we bought it from you, and you two stay here and run this place. Besides, I wouldn’t mind getting as far from my roots as possible.”

“Great idea. Then we could own them both jointly and share in the profits,” Cliff piped in.

“Ah-ha, and how about this,” Molly added, her green irises lighting with possibilities. “This’ll be the male resort location, and the one in Missouri can be made into a lesbian one. Hedonistic ones. You know, where you come to satisfy any and all fantasies, from a simple romantic getaway to all-out kink?”

“Brilliant!” Cliff clapped his approval.

Manny nodded. “I like it. I like it a *lot*.”

“Me too,” Gwen chimed in.

“Then why the hell are we flipping a coin?” Molly asked.

Everyone shrugged.

Manny reached for Cliff’s hand and stood. He drew him up and draped an arm over Cliff’s shoulder. “Beats me. All I know is I don’t give a damn about the toss of a coin. But I *do* know I’m in the mood for ‘head’.”

Cliff gasped. “Manny!”

Molly rolled with laughter. "Then get the hell out of here, you flaming queers, and go give some 'head' to each other."

Gwen grinned, delighted with the openness and teasing nature that had formed between the four of them. Never would she have been able to talk this freely and shamelessly within the invisible walls of her old Amish world.

Manny threw his head back and let out a deep laugh, a man purely at ease with the gay-male barbing. He tugged Cliff to the back door. "Uh, Molly, you do realize your bedroom is right above ours? And believe me, I'm familiar with the muted sounds of muff-diving...your indulging in 'tails', I guess you could say."

"Mmm, now that you remind me, sounds like an excellent idea," Molly replied, turning in Gwen's arms. The kiss started out gentle and sweet. But it quickly morphed into a maddening flurry of lust.

"Molly," Gwen whispered.

"Hmm?" Even still holding the coin, Molly's hands were everywhere, in Gwen's hair, up her shirt, down her pants.

"I-I...I love you."

Molly's head came up from where she'd had it buried in Gwen's cleavage. "What?"

Gwen's heart pounded with fear of rejection. That aghast tone of Molly's hadn't sounded too promising. "I said I love you."

The tears that suddenly glittered in Molly's dazzling eyes took Gwen's breath away. "H-holy shit," she sniffled. "I thought you'd never say it."

"I shouldn't have?"

Molly chuckled, her naturally hoarse voice carrying out across the estate. "Oh no, you most definitely should have." Her smile faded. She combed her fingers through Gwen's loose, long strands. "Oh my God, I love you too, Gwen. I think I have since I very first saw you with that donkey – and in that ugly dress."

Gwen gasped, appalled. "It was not ugly. And for the last time, she's a mule."

"Whatever. And oh yes it was ugly. But not to worry. I'll be keeping you naked from here on out anyway."

Gwen giggled as Molly yanked her back into an embrace and nuzzled at her neck. With her teeth locked on Gwen's earlobe, Molly tossed the coin over her shoulder.

Manny and Cliff were already inside, pawing each other on their way to the basement stairs.

The coin pinged and bounced. It rolled across the deck and finally slipped between two slats.

Heads or tails?

The penny was lost forever, so who would ever know for sure which side it had landed on? But hell, none of them really cared anymore. By now, they each knew exactly which one they'd choose if the question ever came up again.

## About the Author

Titania Ladley knew it was necessary to hang up her stethoscope forever and write fulltime when her characters started coming to work with her on the graveyard shift. A pretty scary prospect when a nurse is unable to tell the difference between patients, spirits and her over-active imagination. So for the benefit of mankind, Titania clocked out one morning after working a grueling twelve-hour night shift and dragged her persistent characters home with her. She marched in the door, tossed her bag of medical paraphernalia into the spare bedroom and put her trembling, tired hands to the keyboard. You bet she was scared out of her booty! But there was just no other way for Titania to live—nor was there for her patients. ;)

Happily, Titania's never looked back. Residing in Minnesota with her very own hunky hero, one child remaining at home and twins in college, Titania devotes her spare time to family, reading erotic romances, walking, weightlifting, crocheting and baking fattening desserts. And arguing with her stubborn alpha males and kick-ass heroines.

Titania welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her author bio page at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

### *Tell Us What You Think*

We appreciate hearing reader opinions about our books. You can email us at [Comments@EllorasCave.com](mailto:Comments@EllorasCave.com).

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