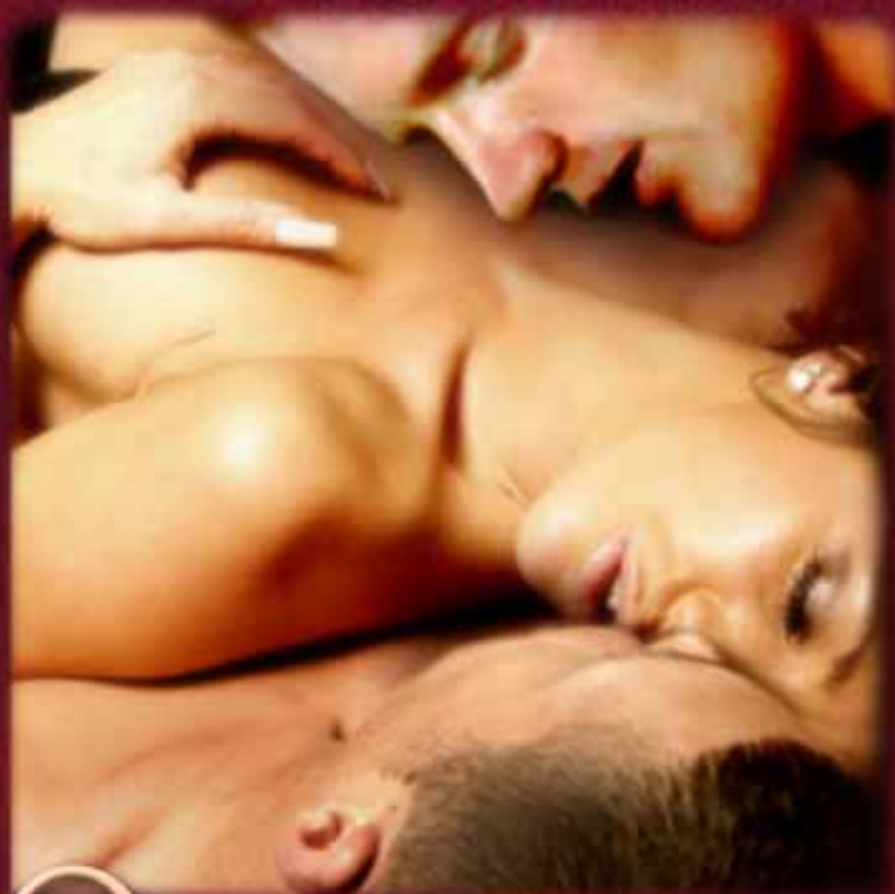


CAUGHT BY CUPID



OVERHEARD

MAYA BANKS



SANDHAIN publishing, LLC

Gracie Evans wants a Valentines she won't forget. Luke Forsythe plans to give her exactly what she wants.

Overheard

Maya Banks

Gracie Evans is a woman tired of the men in her life not satisfying her in bed. She's had a string of boyfriends, but none of them have come close to satisfying the vivid fantasies she has. Two weeks before Valentine's Day, she breaks up with her latest boyfriend after a night of lackluster sex.

When her good friend, Luke Forsythe, overhears her talking to their friend Shelly about what she really wants, he's stunned. And very turned on. Gracie thinks there isn't a man alive who can satisfy her in bed. Luke aims to prove her wrong.

Warning, this title contains explicit sex, graphic language, ménage a trios.

eBooks are *not* transferable. They cannot be sold, shared or given away as it is an infringement on the copyright of this work.

This book is a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the writer's imagination or have been used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, actual events, locale or organizations is entirely coincidental.



Samhain Publishing, Ltd.
2932 Ross Clark Circle, #384
Dothan, AL 36301

Overheard
Caught by Cupid Anthology
Copyright © 2007 by Maya Banks
Cover by Anne Cain
ISBN: 1-59998-315-X
www.samhainpublishing.com

All Rights Are Reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

First **Samhain Publishing, Ltd.** electronic publication: January 2007

Overheard

Maya Banks

Dedication

To Jess for heading up such a fun project.

To Bianca and Gwen. Ganging up on Jess is awfully fun. We should do it again sometime.

Chapter One

The sun shone high overhead. The sky blazed brilliant blue, and not a single cloud marred the canvas. Sixty-five degrees on the first of February. It was what Gracie Evans loved most about living in south Texas. By the middle of the week, another cold front was poised to move through, dropping temps into the forties. Oh the horror.

Gracie stretched in her lawn chair and watched lazily as Jeremy Miller tended the barbeque while his wife, Gracie's best friend Michelle, hovered nearby.

"Come on, Gracie, get up and play," Wes Hoffman hollered from the yard.

She looked over to see him and Luke Forsythe tossing a football back and forth. Boneheads. She was more than comfortable right where she was. After a long week at work and not sleeping worth a damn last night, sitting up to eat was about as energetic as she planned to get.

Luke flopped onto the chair next to her. "What's up, Gracie? You're not usually such a stick-in-the-mud."

She shot him a dirty look. "Busy week at work. I'm just tired."

Of course, the worst part of the week had been last night. Her date with her current boyfriend had ended with the usual boring, obligatory sex, and quite frankly, she was tired of being disappointed in that area. She'd stayed up most of the night mustering the courage to call him this morning and break things off.

He hadn't taken it well.

"Earth to Gracie."

She blinked and looked back at Luke. "Sorry," she mumbled. "Lot on my mind."

Luke gave her a curious stare but seemed to sense she wasn't in the mood to talk. He got up and ambled over to talk to Jeremy. Wes joined them on the patio, a beer in hand.

Gracie let her gaze flit appreciatively over the men. Not bad considering they were her best friends and all. She wouldn't mind finding someone like Luke or Wes. Problem was she usually ended up with the frogs. Ugh.

Michelle eased into the chair next to Gracie, and Gracie looked over with a smile. "How you feeling, girlfriend?"

Michelle returned her smile. "Good. Tired but good."

Gracie eyed Michelle's cute little pregnancy pooch with a little jealousy. Jeremy was over the moon in love with his wife, and Gracie wondered what it felt like to have that sort of devotion. From what Michelle said, Jeremy was also dynamite in bed. Really, what more could you ask for in a man? Undying love and the know-how in the sack.

Gracie shook her head. She was really going to have to up her standards when it came to boyfriends. Boyfriend. Maybe that was her problem. She didn't need a boy. She wanted a man. Someone who could take her fantasies and make them reality.

"You sure are quiet today, Gracie."

Gracie grimaced. "Sorry. I broke up with Keith this morning."

Michelle jerked around in the lawn chair and all but pounced on Gracie. "Gracie, you didn't!"

"Shhh," Gracie hissed, looking up to see if the guys had heard. They already gave her a hard time about the men she chose to go out with. They'd be gleeful that her current relationship hadn't worked out. The "I told you so's" were already ringing in her ears.

"What happened?" Michelle whispered.

"I'll talk to you about it later," Gracie said, looking pointedly at the guys.

Michelle huffed but she didn't protest further.

The two women lounged in the chairs while the men puttered around the grill. Gracie loved these times with the people she considered her best friends.

They got together pretty much every weekend. During hunting season, they spent weekends at the camp and hunted the mornings and evenings. When the weather was warm, they spent all their time at the beach, fishing and soaking up the sun. Gracie loved their group. She felt free to be herself.

Jeremy and Michelle had been married a year and they hosted most of the get-togethers. Jeremy and Wes were both local cops, while Luke was a building contractor.

Wes was handsome in a carefree “I don’t give a shit” kind of way. He had blondish brown hair, and in the summer, it was liberally streaked with lighter shades. His sense of humor was what Gracie loved the most about him, that and he didn’t tend to get his underwear in a bunch at the least provocation. A more laid-back guy you wouldn’t find.

Luke, yeah, he was good looking. Blue eyes, light brown hair, and abs you could bounce a nickel off. But he was also a pain in the ass. A mouth-wateringly gorgeous pain in the ass, but an irritant nonetheless. His and Gracie’s relationship was a study in competition. Neither could stand to lose, and neither would ever back down from a dare.

Every year the outhunt and outfish contest usually boiled down to Luke and Gracie. Last year, Gracie had crowed when she’d bagged the biggest buck any of the group had ever killed. Luke had sworn to one-up her the following season.

But still, she wouldn’t trade him for anything. The group worked well together. They were extremely loyal, and more importantly, they were always there for one another. Which was why she didn’t want the guys to know she’d broken up with Keith. They’d make a huge deal out of it, and she simply wanted to forget the whole thing.

A shadow fell over her chair, and she looked up to see Wes standing over her with a beer in hand. He pressed the cold bottle to her arm, and she yelped and flinched.

He laughed. “Thought you might want a beer, Gracie.”

“Gee, thanks.”

He handed the beer to her then winked and ambled off again.

“Lug nut,” she grumbled.

Michelle laughed. "You know you love him. He's cute when he's not being a pain in the ass."

Gracie nodded. "Yep, the two days of the year he's not a royal pain, he is downright cute."

"I heard that!" Wes called from the grill.

"You were supposed to," Gracie returned sweetly.

"I'm about ready to dish it up," Jeremy said. "Michelle, if you want to set the table, I'll have it up in about fifteen minutes."

"I'll help," Gracie said as she heaved herself out of her chair.

Luke turned his head and watched Gracie follow Michelle into the house. Her auburn curls jiggled down her back as she walked. He'd always loved her hair. It fit her carefree personality perfectly. Only she didn't seem so carefree today. He wondered what was bothering her. It wasn't like her to be quiet and withdrawn. And he didn't buy that line about a busy week at work. Gracie could do her job in her sleep.

"Do me a favor and take this in to Michelle," Jeremy said, ramming a tray into his gut.

Luke looked down to see a platter of sausage.

"Tell her the rest will be ten minutes."

Luke grunted. "Sure."

Luke walked toward the sliding door of the patio and eased inside. He strode through the living room and toward the kitchen. When he reached the doorway, Gracie's voice stopped him.

"I called him this morning and broke up with him."

Luke backed away and stood to the side. She'd broken up with Keith? Somehow that didn't surprise him. The guy was a complete pussy. No way he could keep pace with someone of Gracie's caliber.

He strained to hear the rest of the conversation.

"You called him the morning after you had sex and dumped him?" Michelle asked in disbelief.

"Yeah," Gracie replied.

Whoa. Harsh. Luke couldn't wait to hear why.

"Good God, girl. That must have been crushing to his ego," Michelle continued.

Luke nodded his agreement.

He heard Gracie sigh. "I don't care, Michelle. I'm tired of hooking up with guys who suck in bed. And I don't mean my tits either."

Michelle dissolved into laughter and Luke's eyebrows shot up.

"Was he that bad?" Michelle asked.

"He wasn't good," Gracie muttered. She sighed again. "Damn it, Chelle. I want something..."

Luke nearly hurt himself trying to press his ear closer to the doorway. What did Gracie want? This had to be good.

"I want someone who lights my fires. Who makes me think of nothing but taking every stitch of clothing off him and licking him from head to toe."

Luke shifted, an uncomfortable surge of heat racing to his crotch. Damn if the woman wasn't direct. He liked that in a girl. Didn't like stupid games and fluttering eyelashes.

"That's the problem with you, Gracie. You always settle for men who can't stand up to you," Michelle interjected.

Luke nodded in agreement. Michelle was right on there.

Another sigh from Gracie. "I want someone who can make my fantasies come alive, Chelle. Is that too much to ask? A guy who can be adventurous in bed and not come across like a freaking fruit loop?"

Fantasies? Luke shifted again and rubbed his palm across his shirt. Gracie had fantasies? Who knew?

"What kind of adventures are we talking about here, Gracie?" Michelle asked in a cautious voice.

Yeah, what kind of fantasies? Damn it, he only had a few minutes before Jeremy was going to come busting in with the rest of the food. Then he'd never find out what made Gracie tick.

There was a long, silent pause.

"Nothing illegal," Gracie cracked. "At least I don't think they are."

"Quit joking and spill it," Michelle said. "The guys will be in soon."

"Oh, I fantasize about bondage, a little spanking, maybe a whip or two. The idea of being tied up gets me hotter than I'd like to admit," Gracie said ruefully. "But..."

But what? Luke wanted to yell.

“More than anything I’d love to experience a ménage.”

“Gracie!” Michelle exclaimed. “Really?”

“Yeah,” Gracie said in a low voice. “Two sexy men, all their attention on me, pleasuring me? Yeah, I think about it a lot. I just don’t know how to make it happen.”

“Holy shit,” Michelle whispered loudly. “Have you thought about taking out an adult ad or something?”

“Yeah, I have,” Gracie replied. “I’ve thought about it a lot. But the thought scares me. Who knows what kind of freaks are out there.”

Adult ad? Luke wanted to march in and throttle her. He would have but he was still thrown for a loop by what she’d admitted. Gracie, *his* Gracie, had triple X fantasies.

“Face it, Chelle. I’m not sure there’s a man out there who can satisfy my needs in bed. Maybe I’m expecting too much. I just know I’m not settling for less ever again. I’m done with the Keiths of this world. If I can’t find a man, I’ll stick to my toys and self-gratification.”

Not sure there’s a man out there who could satisfy her huh. Luke’s mind whirled with all he’d overheard. So she wanted a threesome. It was obvious Luke had spent far too much time looking at Gracie as a best buddy and a hunting/fishing partner. It certainly wasn’t every day he found a woman who wanted all the things that had gotten him tossed out of so many women’s beds.

Ménage. She wanted a ménage. He couldn’t wait to talk to Wes. He had a feeling his buddy would be very interested in what their good pal Gracie wanted out of her sex life.

Man enough? She didn’t realize it yet, but she’d thrown down the challenge. And damn if he wasn’t going to be the man to answer it.

Chapter Two

Gracie dug into her food, sighing with pleasure as the tender meat hit her tongue.

“Good?” Jeremy asked.

“Run away with me,” Gracie declared. “What does Chelle have that I don’t? We can live on your barbeque and be beach bums.”

Jeremy grinned and started to reply.

Gracie held up a hand. “No, don’t answer that. I’m not up for a list of the ways I don’t measure up.”

Wes and Jeremy looked curiously at her while Luke made it a point to stare down at his plate. Gracie cringed. Instead of coming out jokingly as she’d intended, it sounded sad and resigned.

She glanced over at Michelle and made an “oops” face the others couldn’t see. Then she focused back on her food, cutting another bite of the brisket.

Her breakup with Keith bothered her more than she liked. Not only had the sex been a disaster, but his reaction to the surprise she’d planned still made her cringe in embarrassment. He’d made her feel like a freak. Not what a woman wanted to feel like when she was trying to be wild and sexy.

Weren’t men supposed to like that sort of thing? Didn’t they all complain because women weren’t adventurous enough in bed? Ha! She’d yet to find a man who liked sex with the frequency and imagination she did.

Maybe she *was* a freak.

She cleared her throat and looked over at Luke. "How's Ellie doing? I haven't seen her much since the wedding. Jake seems awfully protective of her."

"He has a reason to be," Luke said with a grimace. "But she's doing good. They seem happy."

"Isn't she going to counseling?" Michelle interjected.

Luke nodded. "Yeah, that whole thing with Ray really fucked her up."

"Stupid son of a bitch," Wes muttered. "I don't trust that little breakdown he had on public television. Seems too calculating to me."

Jeremy raised his brow. "You think he'll try something?"

"Not unless he has a death wish," Luke said. "Jake will kill him if he comes near Ellie again."

"And I won't exactly be knocking myself out to stop him," Wes said.

Gracie shook her head. "Ellie's a sweet girl. I hate that she's been through so much. But Jake's good for her."

"He'd be good for me, too," Michelle broke in, a devilish glint to her eye.

"Hey," Jeremy protested as he reached over to tweak Michelle's arm.

Gracie laughed. God, she loved these guys. She could never stay down in the dumps for long around them. "If Chelle doesn't want you, Jeremy, you're welcome at my house."

"Are you propositioning my husband?" Michelle demanded.

Jeremy rubbed a hand over his chin. "I kind of like being fought over."

"Cat fights are sexy," Wes said with a snicker.

Gracie rolled her eyes. "Like any girl has a chance with Jeremy. He's so gaga over Michelle, it's nauseating."

"Just like I like him," Michelle said with a smug grin.

Michelle stood and began clearing the table. Gracie got up to help and started collecting the plates. As Michelle began running water in the sink, she looked out the kitchen window and tensed.

"Uh oh, Gracie."

Gracie didn't like the sound of that uh oh.

Jeremy evidently didn't either. He went to stand behind his wife so he could look out.

Michelle turned around to Gracie. "Keith just pulled up."

"Oh great," Gracie muttered as she plunked down the plates she was holding.

"Trouble, Gracie?" Wes asked in a concerned voice.

She flashed him a reassuring smile. "Nothing I can't handle." She walked toward the door, determined to meet Keith outside rather than take the inevitable confrontation inside. "Y'all excuse me for a second. This shouldn't take long."

Luke followed her with his gaze until she left the house with a bang. Wes looked over at him questioningly, but Luke played dumb. He didn't want to let on that he'd overheard Gracie's conversation with Michelle.

"What's going on with those two?" Jeremy asked Michelle as they continued to stare out the window.

"She broke up with him this morning," Michelle murmured.

Wes got up from the table, carrying the plates Gracie had left. He walked to the sink and set them down before peering out the window himself. Luke was dying to do the same, but he made himself sit and appear only mildly interested.

"Can't say it surprises me," Wes said with a shrug as he returned to sit at the table. "She needs a man she can't run over so easily."

Luke looked at his friend in surprise. On that point they agreed, though they'd never discussed Gracie's love life before. Hadn't exactly been high on their priority lists.

"He looks angry," Michelle said anxiously.

Both Wes and Luke shot to their feet and walked to the window to look out. They were all understandably wary after all that Ellie had endured at her ex-husband's hands. No way would they stand by and let Gracie take the brunt of some punk's anger. Keith did look pretty pissed and Gracie took a step backwards as they all watched.

"I'm going out there," Luke muttered. "I want to make sure the dickhead doesn't get carried away."

“Jeremy and Wes are the cops, maybe they should go,” Michelle said, her frown deepening as she watched her friend.

“More reason for me to go,” Luke said. “I can get away with decking the asshole better than they can.”

He didn’t wait for a response. He strode for the door and quietly let himself out.

Neither Gracie nor Keith must have heard him because they never turned around. Luke eased down the steps into the yard. Their heated conversation filled his ears, and he stopped so he could listen from the distance.

“Damn it, Gracie, what was I supposed to do? You acted like some kind of a whore. I wasn’t expecting it.”

Gracie clenched her fists at her side.

“Just because I suggested we do something other than the usual suck your dick and missionary that makes me a whore?” she all but yelled.

“Be quiet for God’s sake!”

“No, Keith, I won’t be quiet. It’s over. I don’t know why you’re here, but it sure as hell won’t change my mind. I said all I had to say this morning.”

“You’re dumping me?” he asked incredulously. “Shit, Gracie, you’re being unreasonable. You should have warned me or something. You had *nipple* rings of all things. Like some kind of cheap tramp. What on earth possessed you? Is that what you made me wait a month without sex for? So you could spring this weird ass surprise on me? And then you go on about how you want me to take control and for you not to have to decide how we do it all the time. Give a guy a break.”

Nipple rings? Oh Jesus. Gracie had nipple rings. This most certainly was a new development. Luke had seen her in a bikini on many occasions, and he damn sure would have noticed nipple rings.

So Gracie was trying to branch out and the pussy boyfriend had thrown a fit. Well, good for her for dumping him. He obviously didn’t deserve her.

"That's exactly what I'm doing," Gracie said coldly. "Giving you a break. We're done. Finito."

Anger flashed on Keith's face, and Luke started forward. He knew that look and it could only mean trouble.

"You teasing bitch," Keith snarled.

He made a grab for her arm, but Gracie sidestepped him and rammed her knee into his groin.

"Cock-sucking bastard!" she hissed as he fell to the ground.

Luke stepped between them and hauled Keith up by his shirt. The man was still pale with pain and clutching his privates for all he was worth.

Luke slammed him against Keith's truck and got in his face. "If I ever see you within ten feet of Gracie again, I'll make what she just did look like a blow job. You got me?"

Keith grunted and struggled to get loose. "Yeah, I get it. Get your fucking hands off me. You're welcome to the psycho bitch."

Luke decked him. Keith fell to the ground, blood spurting from his nose. Keith grabbed his face with both hands, howling in pain.

He scrambled to his feet and fumbled to open his truck door. "You son of a bitch! If you broke my nose, I'm pressing charges."

Luke chuckled and jerked his thumb in the direction of the kitchen window. "You do that, pussy boy. But you ought to know two cops are watching from that window over there, and I imagine they'll swear they didn't see any such thing."

Keith threw himself into the truck, swearing and swiping at the blood running down his face. In a few seconds, he spun out of the driveway, spewing a trail of rocks and dirt several feet high.

Luke turned back to Gracie who wore a look of astonishment on her face.

"You okay?" he asked gently.

"Yeah, I'm good." She looked up at him, her eyebrows arched in question. "What the hell was that all about?"

Luke knew why she was confused. He'd never intruded on her business like that. Gracie was more than able to take care of herself. It was something he admired about her.

He shrugged and put a hand on her shoulder. "Just looked like you could use the help, that's all."

"Yeah, well, thanks," she mumbled as they started back toward the house.

As they stopped at the steps, she looked up at him, her bottom lip stuck between her teeth, a sure sign of agitation.

"You didn't...you didn't hear our conversation did you?" she asked nervously.

Luke almost smiled. Yeah, he supposed Gracie would about die if she knew he'd overheard that and more. From what he'd gleaned from her conversation with Michelle and then her fight with Keith, it looked like she was spreading her wings a bit and venturing into new territory. Territory he was intimately familiar with.

"Nah, I'd just come out when he made a move toward you," he lied. "Looked like he was trying to hurt you."

"Well, thanks," she said again, her shoulders slumping in relief.

"No problem. What are friends for?"

He threw his arm around her neck, letting his hand dangle over her shoulder, something he'd done a million times before. Only now, he was very aware of the proximity of his hand to her breasts. And those nipple rings he was dying to see.

Chapter Three

“So you going to tell me what the hell went on out there earlier?” Wes asked as he popped open another beer.

Luke flopped onto his couch and took a long swig of his own beer. He and Wes had left Jeremy’s earlier and had ended up at Luke’s place. Luke knew Wes was curious over his interference, not that Wes would have done things any differently if he’d been outside when Keith made his move at Gracie.

He took another fortifying gulp before he eased the bottle from his lips. “Let’s just say it’s been an interesting and informative day.

Wes leaned back in the arm chair and propped his feet up on Luke’s coffee table. “How so?”

Luke shook his head. Where to start? With the easy part he guessed. “Keith was being an asshole. He was ripping on Gracie, and she told him to take a hike. He went after her and Gracie kneed him in the balls.”

“Good for her,” Wes said, performing a mock salute with his beer bottle.

“I broke his nose for good measure.”

Wes looked at him and shook his head. “Shit, tell me I’m not going to have to arrest your ass when he presses charges.”

Luke laughed. “He’s a pussy. Besides, I told him you and Jeremy were watching and would swear you didn’t see anything.”

“Gee, thanks,” Wes said dryly. “Just what I need, to be arrested with you.”

Luke fiddled with his beer, tapping his finger in restless staccato against the cool glass. He hesitated to tell Wes what he’d overheard. Why, he couldn’t say. They’d never exactly been discreet with each other, and

he knew Wes would find it as surprising as he had. But something held him back.

“What’s eating you?” Wes spoke up, intruding on Luke’s thoughts. “You’ve been acting weird all afternoon. You said the day had been informative. So what’s the news?”

Luke sighed and leaned forward to set his beer on the coffee table. “It’s about Gracie.”

Wes cocked an eyebrow. “What about her? You weren’t really surprised she dumped her pussy boyfriend, were you?”

Luke shook his head. “I’m not talking about the wimp, and no, I’m not all together surprised she dumped him. Even less so after what I heard her talking to Michelle about.”

“Ah hell, man, what were you doing eavesdropping on the girls? Gracie will kick your ass if she finds out.”

Luke grinned. Yeah, she wouldn’t hesitate to lay him out. He got the oddest tingle just thinking about her getting in his face. He shook his head. It was the nipple rings, it had to be. He couldn’t get his mind off what her nipples must look like. Hell.

He cleared his throat. “She, uh, well, she said some interesting things.”

Wes leaned forward, dropping his feet to the floor with a thud. “Now you’ve got me curious. What the hell did she say?”

“Apparently she dumped the pussy because he sucked in bed.”

“Yeah, well, again, that’s no surprise. She probably ate him alive,” Wes said.

Luke cocked his head sideways and stared at his friend. “Tell me something, Wes. Have you ever thought about having sex with Gracie?”

Wes choked on his beer and coughed several times in succession. “Sex? With Gracie? Shit man, no, not really. I mean she’s hot, don’t get me wrong. Seriously hot. But...”

“Seriously hot, huh. So you have thought about it, you lying sack of shit,” Luke said on a laugh.

“You have eyes, man. The girl is a walking goddess. What guy wouldn’t get a hard-on looking at her?”

“Well, get this,” Luke said, leaning toward Wes. “I overheard her telling Michelle that she was tired of men not satisfying her in bed. That she has fantasies she wants to live out.”

Wes sat up straighter, his attention focused on Luke. “What kind of fantasies?”

Luke shrugged casually, but his blood was racing just thinking about all she’d said. “Bondage, a little spanking...and she wants to take on two guys at the same time.”

“Whoa,” Wes said as he flopped back in his chair. “She said all that?”

“There’s more,” Luke continued on. “Apparently she wanted pussy boy to do a little experimenting in bed and he freaked. He called her a whore.”

“That little son of a bitch,” Wes growled. “I knew I should have gone outside with you.”

“She has nipple rings. Must be recent. Keith evidently didn’t receive the news so well judging by his comments.”

“Holy fucking shit. Nipple rings?”

“Yeah. Now tell me you aren’t picturing Gracie in the buff with nipple rings dangling from those perfect breasts.”

“Jesus.”

“My thoughts exactly,” Luke mumbled.

“She wants two guys? She said that?”

“Oh, hell yeah. She said that and a lot more. She wants a guy who isn’t afraid to call the shots. Someone who will tie her up, spank her ass and fuck her brains out.”

“Goddamn.”

Luke laughed. “Is that all you can say?”

“I’m speechless,” Wes said, his mouth still open in shock.

“Glad I’m not the only one all fucked up over it.”

“Does she know you heard all that?”

“Hell no. She wouldn’t speak to me for a year,” Luke said.

Wes fell silent, his eyes thoughtful. Luke knew Wes’s brain was spinning a mile a minute. He also knew Wes was rapidly coming to the same conclusion he had.

"Hell, if that's what she wants..."

"Yeah," Luke said. "Tell me you aren't thinking the same thing I am."

Wes grunted. "I'd have to be fucking gay not to react to something like that. I mean she's hot. I've always thought so."

Luke looked over at his friend. "Valentine's is just two weeks away. Should be enough time for you to make arrangements to be off work."

Wes's eyes narrowed. "What are you thinking about?"

Luke took in a deep breath then grinned. "Well, we've already established the fact that Gracie is hot. We're both attracted to her. Neither of us has any problem with nipple rings or bondage, and we have considerable experience in the threesome arena. So it seems to me that maybe we should give Gracie a Valentine's Day to remember."

"What if she won't go for it?" Wes asked. "I don't want to piss her off and I sure don't want to mess up my friendship with her. We have too much fun for that shit."

"She'll go for it," Luke said confidently.

He'd seen the longing in her eyes, the need for something she probably couldn't even explain. He knew it because he'd felt the same thing. He also knew that he was the man who could give it to her.

Wes scrubbed a hand over his closely shaved goatee in a thoughtful motion. "I don't know, man. It's not like we're going to fuck some chick we won't ever see again. This is Gracie we're talking about. What happens when it's over with? I don't want there to be any awkward shit."

"You're over thinking this," Luke said impatiently. "We give Gracie an experience she won't ever forget. We show her things she's been craving. If anything it makes us even closer. I mean there's no way in hell I'd fuck her and just go on like nothing ever happened. We both like her a hell of a lot. More than any other woman apart from Michelle, that's for sure. I don't see the problem here."

"Just how much do you like her?" Wes asked, a peculiar expression on his face.

Luke shifted uncomfortably. What the hell kind of question was that? "I—I care about her," he said lamely.

Wes continued to stare at him. "Do you have a thing for her?"

“Shut the fuck up,” Luke growled. “Jesus, this is sex. Gracie’s our friend. Our very gorgeous, hot friend. You can’t tell me you wouldn’t like to get next to her.”

Wes took a sip of his beer. “No, I can’t tell you that. But wanting something or knowing I’d enjoy it is different than actually doing it. Look, I just don’t want to fuck things up between us all.”

“What if she wanted it?” Luke challenged. “I mean what if she wanted what we could give her? Would you be so reluctant then?”

Wes thought for a minute then shook his head. “Hell no. I just don’t want to hurt her. That’s all I’m saying.”

“Well, shit, Wes. Do you think I’d do anything to hurt her? She’s one of my best friends. I want to make it good for her.”

“You’re serious about this.”

“Fuck. No, I’ve just spent the last ten minutes going on about my plan to seduce Gracie for nothing.”

“No need to be sarcastic,” Wes said with a chuckle. “Okay, you’ve convinced me. This is your idea, so you plan it. Tell me when and where to show up. I’ll be there. But if she shows any sign of not wanting this, I’m out.”

Luke scowled at him. “No shit, dumbass. It’s not my plan to rape her for God’s sake. But I’m telling you, she wants something. Something she doesn’t quite understand but knows she wants. You didn’t hear the things she said or the *way* she said them. And I think I can give her what she wants.”

Wes looked quietly at him, studying him with that cop look he was so famous for. “Yeah, maybe you can.”

Chapter Four

Gracie twisted restlessly in her chair and flipped another contract in the to be signed pile. Mondays were always busy. Tickets to process, contracts to look over. It was dull, tedious work, but it paid the bills, and she could do it with half a brain. Important when the other half was consumed with her nonexistent sex life.

Yesterday's encounter with Keith had only reinforced that she'd made the right decision. She still felt the uncomfortable burn of embarrassment that Luke had stepped in when Keith had gone over the line. She didn't like Luke seeing yet another of her failures.

Her office door swung open, and she looked up to see Luke standing there. She blinked, wondering if she'd conjured him. She smiled welcomingly.

"Hey, what are you doing here?"

He ambled further into her office, his thumbs thrust into his jeans pockets. Jeans that were tightly molded to his muscular legs. His leather jacket hung loosely to his waist, and underneath she could see he wore a simple T-shirt. Obviously a day he wasn't meeting prospective clients.

"Hey, Gracie," he said, returning her smile. "I was in the neighborhood and wondered if you wanted to grab lunch with me."

Her smile widened. "Barbeque?"

He chuckled. "As if I'd suggest anything else."

She made a grab for her jacket on the floor at her feet before standing. "As long as you're buying."

As she rounded the desk, his arm came out, and he pressed his hand to the small of her back to usher her out the door. It was an intimate gesture, one that puzzled her. He was usually all about punching her in

the arm or pointing out a nonexistent spot on her shirt so she'd look down and he could chuck her nose.

They walked outside, and Gracie shivered slightly. Damn cold front had moved in overnight. The sky was overcast and gray, and a cold drizzle escaped in fine droplets.

She slid into Luke's truck and sank into the heated leather seats with a contented sigh. She'd given him hell when he'd bought the truck. Top of the line, tricked out, no expense spared. He spent money like it was nothing. But then he did have a lot of it to burn.

"Cold?" Luke asked as he started the engine and turned the heat on full blast.

She grumbled under her breath and stuck her hands out to the vents. He knew damn well she was freezing her ass off. Anything below fifty degrees and she was breaking out the winter parka.

They drove a few miles to the Barbeque Shack and pulled into the crowded parking lot. Aside from a Mexican restaurant and a hole-in-the-wall burger joint, this was the only other place to eat without driving into the neighboring town. Which was fine with Gracie, because if it wasn't grilled and slathered with barbeque sauce, it wasn't worth eating.

Luke walked ahead of her treating her to a look at those very tight jeans stretched across a very nice ass. His hair was all messed up as usual, but that was Luke. The wind blew at it, ruffling it up and sending it scattering across his head. She nearly reached up to smooth it, but caught herself before she did.

He held the door open for her, and she walked by him, sniffing appreciatively as the mixture of leather and the smell that was Luke sifted through her nostrils.

Minutes later, they were sitting at a table by the window sipping their drinks and waiting for their order to come. Luke leaned back in his chair and gazed lazily at her.

"Tell me something, Gracie. How come you and I haven't ever gone out?"

She nearly choked on her drink. She set it down with a plunk and wheezed as she tried to make the last swallow go down.

“What?” she gasped.

His eyes narrowed. “You heard me.”

“Well hell, Luke, I don’t know what to say.”

Her mind reeled as she stared at him. What on earth had possessed him?

“We like each other, right?”

“Well, of course,” she said crossly. She wasn’t sure she liked where this conversation was heading. Now was not the time for Luke to get some strange bug up his ass.

She was feeling oddly vulnerable after her latest dead-end relationship. Like she was some freak of nature, destined to never find a guy who understood her, much less one who could satisfy her.

“We get along great. We understand each other,” Luke continued.

Yeah, right. If he only knew. He understood she was a nice girl who kept picking the wrong guy. He had no idea that underneath all the sweetness was a woman itching to break out. She was tired of being good. The girl next door. She wanted to be bad. And she was damn sure tired of being viewed as little sister, good pal, hunting and fishing partner.

“Is there a point to all this?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he said slowly. “There is. I’m trying to figure out why we’ve never gone out on a date.”

She stared at him for a long second, debating whether to even go there. But she wasn’t a liar, and she wasn’t big on playing games. So she just told the truth.

“Because you never asked,” she said softly.

They were interrupted by the waitress bringing their plates and dumping them in front of them. Gracie was grateful for the break because Luke was looking at her like he could crawl right under her skin and see everything she was hiding.

The waitress took her sweet time in leaving, and as she started away, she slid a napkin across the table toward Luke. Gracie didn’t give it a single thought until Luke picked it up and looked over his shoulder, a look of surprise on his face.

"What's wrong?" Gracie asked, finally breaking the silence between them.

Luke turned back around, shaking his head. "She gave me her phone number. Wrote it on the napkin."

A surge of irritation rippled through her chest. "That's probably one reason we've never gone out," she muttered.

"But you were sitting right there," he said, ignoring her comment. "How the hell did she know we weren't here together, that you aren't my girlfriend or something?"

Gracie burst out laughing. "Luke, are you feeling well today? I swear you aren't yourself. Half the town is used to seeing us together. No one's ever assumed you were interested in me."

"Well, what do they know?" he growled.

He stared across the table at her, his blue eyes sparking with something she wasn't used to seeing. At least not when he was looking at her.

"I'm asking now, Gracie."

She looked dumbly at him. "You want us to go out? As in a real date? I mean because we usually hook up on the weekends anyway."

He dropped the napkin and leaned forward impatiently. "I mean you and me on a date. No Jeremy, Michelle or Wes. Friday night."

She blinked in surprise. A peculiar sensation ran circles in her belly. She felt *nervous*. For God's sake. This was Luke.

A real date. She sank back in her chair, still staring at him like he'd lost his mind.

"Well?"

"Uh...okay. I mean if you really want to. Friday night is okay."

He smiled then, relaxing back into his seat. His blue eyes held a warm glow, a *triumphant* warm glow.

"All right then. I'll pick you up around five. We'll go into Beaumont to eat."

She nodded, suddenly unable to taste the food she'd stuffed into her mouth. A date. With Luke Forsythe. Her best friend Luke Forsythe. Holy hell. Michelle was going to shit a brick when she heard this.

A mental groan echoed in her head. They'd never hear the end of it from Wes and Jeremy.



"He did what?"

Gracie winced as Michelle nearly shrieked her ear off.

"Holy cow, Gracie, you and Luke?"

"Yeah, I know," Gracie mumbled as she put the phone back to her ear. Hopefully Michelle's scream fest was over. "Do me a favor. Don't tell Jeremy about this. Or Wes."

"Well, of course I'm going to tell Jeremy. I tell him everything."

I tell him everything, Gracie silently mimicked. Hell.

"And then Jeremy will tell Wes, because he tells Wes everything. And then Wes will tell everyone because that's what he does," Gracie gritted out.

"Gracie, hon, I hate to tell you this, but within five minutes of you and Luke being seen out on a Friday night when everyone and their mama knows you both always come over here, everyone's going to know anyway."

"Fuck me," Gracie muttered. "I don't know why the hell I agreed to this. He's got to be out of his damn mind."

"Why, because he asked you out? I'd say that's the first smart thing he's done in a long time," Michelle said loyally.

"I just hope it doesn't screw things up for everyone," Gracie hedged. "We've got a good thing. No need for Luke and me to fuck it up."

"Oh, please. We're big kids, Gracie. We can handle a little tension without freaking out and going our separate ways. Stop looking for reasons not to go out with him and just do it. You've got to admit he is one sexy beast."

"You are so not helping here," Gracie grumbled.

Michelle laughed. "Go. Enjoy yourself. You said yourself, you were tired of being with men who can't satisfy you. I can't imagine Luke disappointing a woman in bed. Not with his considerable equipment."

“Michelle!” Grace’s admonishment nearly strangled her. “What the hell do you know about his equipment?”

“Oh, you are one lying bitch if you tell me you weren’t looking every bit as hard as I was when the men went skinny dipping two summers ago. That was before Jeremy and I got married, and I was staring every chance I got.”

There was a long silence then Michelle burst into laughter. “You were watching. Admit it, Gracie.”

“All right, all right, so I was watching. Hard not to when they were flopping around in the buff.”

“Uh huh. Now tell me you didn’t get an eyeful of his equipment.”

Gracie felt heat rush to her cheeks. She hadn’t thought about that time in a long while. But yeah, she remembered. She’d stared in pure feminine appreciation at the hard bodies and the gorgeous cocks. Watched while they got out and as the water ran down their bodies. Oh yeah, she’d looked. And looked. And lamented that she’d never had one that nice.

A ripple of awareness skittered over her body. Her nipples hardened, and the rings twitched in response.

“Yeah, I got an eyeful.”

There was a long pause before Michelle said, “This is a good thing, Gracie. Maybe...maybe Luke is exactly what you need.”

Gracie licked her lips and felt nervous jitters tickle her stomach. Maybe Michelle was right. After all, no man in her past could ever stack up next to Luke. Luke, well, he was in a class all by himself. So why wasn’t she looking forward to their date?

“Yeah, maybe,” Gracie mumbled. “Look, Chelle, I gotta run. It’s getting late, and I’ve got a ton of shit to do at the office tomorrow.”

They rang off, and Gracie sat there for a long time, thinking about her lunch with Luke. She felt edgy, unsatisfied. Horny as hell. Had Luke done that to her? Had the idea of going out with him in the capacity of something other than a buddy got her all hot and bothered?

She felt a date with BOB coming on. And later, as she relaxed after a BOB-induced orgasm, she was irritated to note that she’d fantasized

about Luke the entire time she'd gotten herself off. And his damn equipment.

Chapter Five

Gracie waited nervously for Luke to arrive at her house. She'd dressed meticulously, changing her mind a thousand times, and it pissed her off to no end. She, who never spent more than five minutes on dress, hair and makeup, had spent well over an hour angsty over every aspect.

If that didn't make her pathetic, she didn't know what else would.

She looked down one more time at the black sweater she'd chosen. She looked good in black. It went well with her auburn hair. And if she'd squeezed herself into a pair of jeans she hadn't been able to wear in several months, it certainly wasn't because she wanted to look hot for Luke. She just didn't want to look like a fat ass.

She blew a curl out of her face for the hundredth time and wished she'd used more hairspray. But then if they went anywhere with candles or little kerosene lamps on the tables, she'd go up in flames with as much shit as she had in her hair.

Finally, she heard Luke's truck and headed for the door. She met him halfway across the lawn, and he looked at her in surprise.

"I would have come and gotten you, Gracie."

She shrugged. "I'm here."

He took a minute to look her over. "You look nice."

She smiled at him and willed herself not to shake. "Thanks."

He guided her back toward the truck and opened her door for her. He got in on his side and turned up the heat before backing out of her driveway.

She studied him as he maneuvered. He must have gone home and shaved because he usually wore a shadow by now. He wore a short-

sleeved polo shirt that stretched tightly across his biceps. He worked out regularly with Wes, Jeremy and Jake, something they'd started a year and half back, and the results were downright yummy. She couldn't wait for the summer when they'd run around shirtless. She hadn't seen Luke's six pack since last summer, and it had looked pretty damn good then.

"How does seafood sound?" he asked as he looked over at her.

"Sounds great to me."

They lapsed into silence, and Gracie wondered if she were the only one who felt the awkwardness between them. If they were going over to Michelle's, they'd be chatting it up, talking about the work week and the weekend ahead. But they were on a date. And that changed everything.

She let out a small sigh and slouched down in her seat. To her surprise, Luke reached over and slid his hand over hers. He tucked his fingers against her palm and ran his thumb over the back of her hand.

"Relax, Gracie. We can do this."

"But *why* are we doing this?" she blurted out.

It just seemed so stupid to ruin the easy-going rapport between them. She snuck another glance at him to see him smiling. What the hell was so funny?

He left his hand over hers as they drove into town. When they reached the restaurant, he hopped out of the truck and hurried around to open her door. He reached up to help her down, and she landed close to him. Close enough to smell his cologne and to feel his body heat.

He tucked a curl behind her ear, his fingers glancing over her cheek. "You look beautiful."

Her face grew warm. Before she could respond, he wrapped an arm around her shoulders and guided her toward the entrance. A couple. They were acting just like a couple, and it was weirding her out.

Once inside, Luke ordered fish and she ordered shrimp. They both ordered a beer and sat back to wait on the food.

"So how are we doing so far?" Luke asked as he watched her across the table.

"I don't know, Luke. I feel like this is a test or something, only I don't know the rules or what we're supposed to be doing."

He leaned forward and stared intently at her, his blue eyes glowing in the dim light. "You're a gorgeous woman, Gracie. Why do you find it so hard to believe that I'd want to go out with you?"

Her eyebrows furrowed. "Maybe because we've been friends for years and you've never even hinted at it before now?"

He shrugged. "I wasn't ready."

"And you are now?"

"Maybe."

He took a long swallow of his beer and arched one brow at her. "If you're so unconvinced then why did you agree to go out with me? What is it you want from this?"

Busted. He'd turned the tables on her completely. She licked her lips and thought about what to say.

"I don't know," she finally said. "Something about it intrigued me. Maybe a part of me lit up at the idea. I'm confused."

"That's what I love so much about you, Gracie," Luke said.

She laughed. "What, that I'm a confused numb nut?"

"No, that you're honest. You're direct. There's no pretense about you. It's sexy as hell."

She blinked in surprise. She hadn't exactly expected him to say that.

The waitress delivered their food and Gracie dug in, glad to have a distraction from the current conversation. Luke was attracted to her, and she was damn well attracted to him, but it wasn't as easy as going home and having sex. This was Luke. One of her best friends on earth. His respect meant a lot to her. So did his friendship. She didn't want to do anything to fuck up either one.

If they had sex and things didn't work out, how would it affect them? Could they really pick up and go on like it hadn't happened? Continue to spend as much time together as they did? Go hunting and fishing and hang out at Jeremy and Michelle's?

"You're putting way too much thought into this," Luke said mildly.

She looked up guiltily to see him watching her. "I'm sorry. I'm doing my best to ruin the evening before it even starts."

"Just relax. We always have a good time together."

She smiled. "Yeah, we do."

"Eat up. We'll take a drive. Go out by the lake and watch the stars."

"That sounds great," she said.



The moon was rising when they pulled up and parked at the overlook.

"Want to get out?" Luke asked as he cut the engine.

"And freeze to death?" Gracie asked in mock horror.

"I'll keep you warm."

She stared at him, shivering slightly at his promise. Well, she was no wimp, and she was willing to see where this took them. She opened the door and stepped into the crisp night air.

She breathed in deep and stared out over the water. It was a crystal clear night and the stars shone brightly in the sky.

Luke walked around the front of the truck and leaned against the hood. She moved to stand beside him. Damn it, she was already cold. No way she was going to stand out here for long.

He reached for her, wrapping an arm around her and pulling her to stand in front of him. Then he wrapped both arms around her body until her back was firmly melded to his chest. He tucked her head underneath his chin.

"Better?" he asked.

She was warm from head to toe. There wasn't an inch of her skin that didn't feel like someone had taken a blowtorch to it. She nodded her head.

"So tell me something about you I don't already know," he said against her hair.

She laughed. "But you already know everything about me."

“Not true. I think there’s quite a bit I don’t know about you,” he said softly. “I want to know what makes you tick, Gracie. What your dreams are. Your fantasies.”

“My fantasies?” she squeaked.

She closed her eyes. No way was she going there. She’d tried that with Keith and it had led to their immediate breakup.

“Hmmm, I can feel you blushing. You must have some juicy fantasies.”

She stiffened in his arms. She didn’t want to waste her time or his. No, she didn’t really want to go into it, but if he were going to scare off, she’d rather it be now than later. If he couldn’t handle hearing about the real Gracie, then he certainly wasn’t worth her time.

Luke felt the rioting emotions in her. Knew she was waging a battle with herself over whether to share that part of herself with him. He held his breath, hoping she’d trust him.

She turned in his arms, the light of battle in her eyes. She looked at him almost defiantly. “I’ll tell you mine but you have to tell me yours.”

She was testing him. He could tell. She thought he’d tuck tail and run just like her last pussy boyfriend. She was afraid to share that intimate part for fear of rejection, and who could blame her with the way dipshit had responded.

“Oh, I’ll tell you mine,” he said calmly.

“I like sex,” she blurted. “Good sex. Or I should say I’d love good sex.”

Luke raised an eyebrow. “Boyfriends not satisfying you in that department?”

She ducked her head. “No,” she mumbled.

“Go on,” he urged.

She stepped back a bit and took a deep breath. “I want a man who doesn’t feel like he has to stop and ask permission every step of the way. I want someone who can take control and make it good for both of us. I want someone who is creative and doesn’t have to be coached.”

“You don’t want someone who has to be told how to satisfy you,” Luke spoke up.

“Exactly! And...and...I want to experiment, do something different, and I’d love to have a partner who could make that happen without making me feel like a freak.”

They were getting somewhere now.

“What would you like to do, Gracie?” he prompted.

She wrinkled her nose and grinned. “I have a kinky streak in me a mile wide. I’d love to be tied up, spanked and my brains fucked out. And...I’d really love to have a threesome.”

“Another woman?” Luke asked, pretending ignorance.

She shook her head adamantly. “No, me and two men.”

“Ahh.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she asked defensively.

He put his hands out to her shoulders. “Gracie, it doesn’t mean anything. You’re not a freak. Lots of women have these fantasies. They’re healthy, normal fantasies.”

She relaxed a little. “You don’t think I’m weird?”

He chuckled. “Yeah, I think you’re weird, but not because you have kinky sex fantasies.”

She surprised him by throwing her arms around him and hugging tight. He eased his arms around her and held her, running a hand through her curls. He probably shouldn’t push things yet, but he’d been dying to taste her all night.

He tugged gently at her hair until her head fell back. He cupped a hand to her cheek and gently ran his thumb down her jaw. Her lips fell open in silent invitation and it was all he needed.

His lips found hers, hot, flushed and needy. She tasted sweet, and she felt incredibly soft against his hard body. He loved that, loved the way she fit so perfectly against him.

Her mouth opened wider against his kiss and the tip of her tongue feathered over his. He caught it and sucked it further into his mouth. Their tongues rolled and tangled as the sounds of their breathing echoed into the night.

If they were anywhere but at the lake on a cold night, Luke would lay her down and strip her naked. He’d get between her thighs and slide so

deep into her pussy that she wouldn't know where he began and she ended.

With more willpower than he thought he possessed, he pulled away from her.

"Wow," she whispered.

"Yeah, wow," he agreed. "I had a feeling we'd be like an inferno if we ever got together."

She stuck her hands in her pockets and looked away for a minute. Then she glanced back at him, her eyes still echoing her need. He reached out a thumb to glide over her swollen lips. Lips he wanted to devour again.

"Want to go out again tomorrow night?" she asked. "I pick the place this time."

Luke looked at her in surprise. Was this another test?

"Okay. Sounds good to me. What time should I pick you up and what should I wear?"

"Eight o'clock and jeans and a T-shirt are fine. Don't overdress. You'll be getting hot."

His body surged to attention at her words. Innocent or not, they were full of innuendo. But she didn't elaborate, so clearly she was going to let him ponder just what it was they were doing.

Chapter Six

Gracie waited inside the door for Luke to come to the steps. He'd seemed bent on coming to get her last night, so she'd waited tonight.

He mounted the steps and knocked lightly. She opened the door and bit back a smile of satisfaction at his double take.

"You look...fantastic," he murmured.

She reached for her jacket and noted his disappointed grimace when she slid it on. "Ready?" she asked.

She grinned smugly all the way to the truck. The top she'd chosen was more suited for warmer weather. The thin straps looped over her shoulders and the built-in shelf made wearing a bra unnecessary. The material molded and cupped her breasts like a lover. Every curve was outlined in vivid detail. She liked to call it her bitch in heat shirt. And where they were going, she planned to work up a sweat.

"So where we going?" Luke asked when they got into the truck.

"Downtown," she said vaguely.

He looked curiously at her but started the engine and drove out of her driveway. Fifteen minutes later, they got off the freeway and headed toward the downtown section.

"Take the next left," she directed.

They turned onto a smaller street and she pointed toward a stop sign.

"Take a right."

She leaned forward in anticipation as she spotted the club. "Here, turn into the parking lot," she directed.

Luke pulled in and parked then cut the engine. He looked over at her. "Rave? We're going to Rave?"

"You don't dance?" she asked innocently.

"I've been known to dance," he said slowly.

"Then let's go."

She slid out of the truck and met Luke around the front. She'd shed her jacket and hopped a bit to keep warm in the cold air.

"Let's get inside before you freeze," Luke muttered.

As soon as they stepped inside, the fast beat of the music swelled and pounded. It vibrated the floor beneath their feet and exploded off the walls. Her pulse quickened as the beat invaded her veins.

"Let's dance," Luke shouted beside her.

He tugged her out toward the crowded dance floor. Couples moved and gyrated in time with the music, their bodies meshed in sensual poses.

Gracie hesitated, unsure of herself for the first time.

Luke leaned in toward her ear. "Pretend for a minute that I'm one of your boyfriends. You've brought me here to dance. Come on, Gracie, what would you do?"

He was taunting her, daring her. And damn it, she never backed down from a dare.

She looped her arms around his neck and swung her pelvis into his groin. She moved and swayed, getting into the heady beat. She closed her eyes and threw her head back as she rubbed her breasts across his chest.

After a few moments, she rotated in his arms, grinding her ass into his hard cock. Oh yeah, she could feel the bulge against her behind. She leaned into him and reached up, twining her arms behind her around his neck.

She writhed against him, bumping and thumping as he moved in sync with her. His hands crept around her, moving slowly, seductively over her belly.

She shivered as a flash of need, centered in her abdomen, shot out in ten directions. Her pussy tightened, her nipples beaded and the hunger within her grew.

His hands moved up inching closer to her breasts. Would he touch her in public? She knew the club goers here were about as uninhibited

as they came, but she wasn't sure if Luke would feel comfortable indulging in that sort of activity.

Then he cupped both breasts through the thin material of her shirt and she gasped at the erotic sensation that bolted through her body. He massaged and plumped them both, lightly caressing the sensitive flesh.

One of his hands dropped, sliding down her body as the other kept kneading her breast. Lower still until his thumb brushed over her belt loop and caught there. His fingers dipped to the juncture of her thighs until he touched her pussy through her jeans.

Her body jerked in reaction and she moaned softly. He continued to rub up and down, dipping farther between her legs. She ground her ass against his cock, her movements becoming more restless by the minute.

"Undo your jeans for me," he said close to her ear.

"Here?" she asked.

"This is your place, Gracie. You wouldn't have brought me here if you hadn't wanted this to happen."

She gulped nervously and reached down with shaky fingers to undo the snap of her jeans. Around them, the dancing continued and no one seemed to notice or care what she and Luke were doing.

"Arms back up now," he ordered.

She slid her arms back up over her head and wrapped them around his neck until she was once more locked in his embrace.

The hand he had on her breast lowered to the hem of her shirt. He dipped underneath until his hand came into contact with her bare skin. Then he slid his hand back up toward her breasts until he flicked over her nipple.

The nipple ring dangled and he plucked gently at it.

"Very nice," he said in her ear.

She'd forgotten all about the nipple rings and how he might react to them, but based on his response, he was far from turned off.

He continued to play with the nipple ring as his other hand delved into her pants. She sucked in her breath as his fingers found her clit and began rubbing in a slow, torturous circle.

"I want you to come for me, Gracie. Right here, right now."

Oh God, if he only knew just how close she already was.

He pulled harder at her nipple ring and bent his head to nibble at her neck. His fingers moved faster over her pussy, separating the folds and flicking at the button between them.

Her breathing sped up. Then just as he sank his teeth into her neck, he pulled sharply at the nipple ring and he pinched her clit.

She exploded against him in a rush of heat. She sagged heavily in his arms, and he caught her against him, holding her tightly. Wave after wave of exquisite pleasure poured over her as the music swelled in the background. Her legs shook, and she felt weak all over.

Finally he eased his hand from her pussy. He let his other hand fall from her breast and carefully withdrew it from her shirt. He reached around her with both hands and redid her snap before arranging her shirt for her.

"Maybe we should get a drink now," he suggested.

She nodded numbly and followed him off the dance floor. They took a table far enough from the dancing and music that they might actually be able to hear each other without shouting.

"What the hell was that?" Gracie asked after they placed their drink order.

Luke fixed her with one hell of a sexy stare. "I should be asking you that. Didn't you set me up for that?"

She opened her mouth but couldn't think of a single thing to say. "No, I mean yes, but no, I wasn't setting you up. I just wanted to see..."

"If I'd run scared if you took me to a place like this?" he finished.

"Yeah," she finished lamely. "Something like that."

"I'm not like your other boyfriends, Gracie."

"No, you're not," she said truthfully. "That was, honest to God, the hottest thing that's ever happened to me in my life."

Luke grinned. "Honest. Yep, that's what I love about you."

"You didn't...you didn't mind the nipple rings?"

He stared strangely at her. "Mind? I was turned on as hell. I can't wait to see them. I bet you look incredibly sexy with them dangling from your nipples."

She grabbed for the drink being delivered and drank greedily. God, she had to do something to cool off or she was going to go up in flames.

Finally she put it down and stared intently at Luke. "Is that where we're headed, Luke? Are we going to have sex?"

"I could lie and say no, but I won't. That's precisely where we're headed, Gracie."

Delicious tickles licked up her spine. Her insides quivered and her nipples tightened. For the first time in a long time, she looked at sex and had no idea what to expect.

"Not right away," he continued. "I want to see you a few more times. I'm having fun seeing you as more than a buddy. You're a beautiful woman, Gracie, and I'm enjoying you very much."

He leaned in toward her until his mouth was inches from hers. "Would you trust me enough to go somewhere with me for the weekend? For Valentine's Day?"

"Valentine's Day?" she echoed.

"Call it our fantasy weekend," he said. "Make plans to get next Friday off work. I'll pick you up Friday morning, and we'll spend the weekend together. I promise you won't regret it."

She sat back in her chair and stared at him open mouthed. Spend an entire weekend with him. Having sex. A fantasy weekend. Her entire body tingled at the thought.

"Do you trust me?" he asked.

She nodded. "You know I do."

"Then let me plan this. Say you'll go."

She must be out of her mind. No one did this sort of thing after two dates. But this was Luke. Not some schmuck she'd just met. She knew he wouldn't hurt her and would probably give her the best sex of her life.

"Okay," she said. "I'll do it."

"Good. That's just next weekend. Not long at all to wait."

"No," she agreed. "So what do we do in the meantime?"

"We get to know each other better," Luke said. "And we dance some more."

He gestured toward the dance floor. "You ready for round two?"

Chapter Seven

“So what is Jeremy doing for you for Valentine’s Day?” Gracie asked as she leaned against Michelle’s kitchen counter. She, Ellie Turner and Michelle were all gathered in the kitchen while the men sat in the living room ready to watch the fight.

Michelle stopped stirring the tea and set the pitcher aside. She smiled ruefully. “Nothing romantic I imagine. He’ll probably finish painting the baby’s room and we’ll probably go pick out the crib.”

“Sounds exciting,” Gracie said dryly. “What about you, Ellie? If I know Jake, he’s planned something terrific.”

A blush worked its way over the pretty brunette’s face. “I don’t know exactly,” Ellie said. “He told me not to make plans.”

Michelle grinned. “Jake does plan the most wonderful surprises.”

Gracie nodded. “Lucky bitch. What I wouldn’t give for a man to look at me the way Jake looks at you, Ellie.” Even as she said it, the memory of the way Luke had stared at her on their date sent a slow burn straight up her spine.

Ellie laughed and blushed again. “I’m not complaining. I’m so lucky to have him.”

Michelle reached over and patted her arm. “No, honey, he’s lucky to have you.”

“No doubt,” Gracie agreed. “Who else would put up with all that testosterone?”

“Oh, I don’t know, Gracie. You have to admit all that bottled he-man stuff is awfully sexy,” Michelle said cheekily.

“I swear those pregnancy hormones are raging. You must keep Jeremy awfully busy,” Gracie said dryly.

Michelle blushed. She actually blushed. Gracie crowed in delight. "Busted!"

The three women dissolved into laughter.

"What about you, Gracie? Got any plans with Luke?" Michelle asked pointedly.

Gracie felt her cheeks heat, but damn it, she was not going to betray herself like the other two women. "Yeah, we're spending the weekend together."

Michelle raised one eyebrow. "The weekend as in you'll have a couple of dates or the weekend as in spending every minute together?"

"The latter," Gracie replied.

"Wow, you guys move fast. Going anywhere special?"

"I don't know exactly. He's planning it. I just know it involves sex."

Michelle pinned her with a questioning stare. "You nervous?"

"Of course I am. This isn't just any guy. I don't want to screw things up."

"You'll do fine," Michelle soothed.

"Luke's a great guy," Ellie interjected.

"What are you girls doing in here?" Luke asked as he walked into the kitchen.

"Gossiping, of course," Michelle said lightly.

Luke dropped a kiss on Michelle's cheek. "How are you feeling, sweetheart?"

Michelle smiled at him. "I'm doing good. Baby's growing like a weed."

He turned to Ellie and gave her a quick hug. "What about you? Jake treating you good?"

Ellie's smile lit up her entire face.

"I'll take that as a yes," Luke said.

Then he turned his attention to Gracie.

Gracie felt an odd shiver as Luke reached to pull her into his arms. He kissed her lightly on the lips before pulling away.

"The fight's starting. I wondered if y'all needed help with the snacks," he said.

The girls put it into high gear. Gracie shoved a tray at Luke while Michelle collected the tea pitcher and the bags of chips. Ellie grabbed the glasses of ice and followed everyone else into the living room.

It was a familiar scene. One that brought Gracie comfort. All of them gathered at Jeremy and Michelle's to watch a UFC fight.

"Hey, Gracie, come sit," Wes called. He patted the spot beside him on the couch.

Luke sat down on the floor in front of her and leaned back between her legs so his back rested against the couch. Ellie sat nestled in Jake's arms, and Gracie felt a pang of longing at the couple's obvious devotion.

They spent the evening laughing and having a good time. Luke didn't go out of his way to latch onto her in front of the others, a fact she was grateful for.

She didn't want to flaunt her budding relationship with Luke. She still felt awkward about it and didn't want to extend that discomfort to the rest of the group. And to everyone else's credit, they'd acted completely normal.

The fight had been over a few minutes when the doorbell rang. Jeremy got up and disappeared from the living room to answer it. A few seconds later, he reappeared.

"Gracie, Keith is at the door for you."

Gracie stiffened. Why now of all times? Did he never think to call or at least go by *her* house if he had something he wanted to say? Why he was fond of making a scene in front of her friends, she'd never know.

"Has he been drinking?" Gracie asked as she got up.

Jake's eyebrows shot up, and his face darkened.

Jeremy shook his head. "I don't think so, and he'd be a damn fool to show up here if he had." He winked at her. "I gave him my best cop stare and told him he better not start any shit."

Gracie grinned. "Thanks, Jeremy."

Luke put a hand on her shoulder as she got up from the couch. "I'm going out with you."

She hesitated for a moment then nodded. As they left the living room, Luke slid an arm around her waist and squeezed reassuringly.

When she opened the front door, Keith, who was standing on the porch with his back to her, turned around. His lips curled in distaste and his eyes glinted with a little fear as he spotted Luke.

"What do you want?" Gracie asked.

"I'd hoped we could talk alone," Keith said, looking pointedly at Luke.

Luke pulled her closer up against him, his hand resting possessively on her hip. "Whatever you have to say to Gracie can be said in front of me. Isn't that right, sweetheart?"

"So you're with him now?" Keith demanded.

"It would appear I am," Gracie said calmly.

"Damn it, Gracie. You don't even give a guy a chance," Keith complained. "You can't expect to spring shit on me like you did. I know I reacted badly, but what did you expect?"

Gracie raised her eyebrows. "Expect? I don't guess I expected anything from you at all, Keith. I've said all I intend to say on the matter. We're finished, and I'd really appreciate it if you'd quit coming over to my friends' house."

"So would I," Luke drawled.

Keith ran his hand through his hair and swore again. "All right, Gracie. If that's what you want. Your loss."

He turned and stomped off the front porch toward his truck. He peeled out of the driveway and left in a cloud of dust.

"Dumbass," Gracie muttered.

"What did you ever see in him?" Luke asked as they walked back into the house.

"Don't rub it in."

Luke laughed. "Okay, I'll shut up now."

"Good idea."

"Everything okay, Gracie?" Jeremy asked as she and Luke entered the living room.

"Yeah, he's gone," she said.

"Maybe you and I should pay Keith a little visit in the official capacity," Wes said to Jeremy. "We could tell him to leave Gracie the hell alone."

“Is he bothering her?” Jake asked with a scowl. “Do I need to go beat his scrawny ass?”

“I can take care of myself just fine, Jake,” Gracie said. “But thanks. You guys are the best.”

“Who wants a beer?” Michelle interrupted.

Gracie looked gratefully at her, and Michelle winked back.

“Who wants to watch the fight again?” Jeremy asked as he picked up the remote.

Chapter Eight

Gracie leaned back in Luke's truck seat and tried to settle her nervous stomach. They were headed out of town to a cabin on the lake Luke and Wes shared ownership in.

She'd been out before. They'd gotten together for fishing trips and stayed weekends at the cabin, but she'd never gone with the idea of having sex with Luke.

The week leading up to the weekend had been terrific. She and Luke had spent every day together. The sexual tension between them had grown into an enormous entity, but more than that, their relationship had developed beyond their casual friendship.

And now they were adding sex to the equation. It seemed so important to him that she trust him. She did. She'd always trusted him, and it felt right for them to be together. Somehow she *knew* Luke would satisfy all her needs and desires.

"You're quiet," Luke said beside her. "Having second thoughts?"

"No, not at all."

She slid her eyes sideways to look at him. The heat in his gaze peeled a few layers of her skin off. No, she had many thoughts, but she wasn't regretting her decision to see where the weekend would take them.

He reached over and curled his hand over hers. "I'm glad. I'm really looking forward to this. To us."

She smiled. "Me too."

Thirty minutes later, they pulled up to the cabin overlooking Sam Rayburn Lake, and Luke cut the engine. He turned sideways in his seat and looked intently at her.

“I’ve planned a lot for us this weekend. If you ever feel uncomfortable with the direction we’re going or I’m doing something that you don’t want, just say so. I’ll stop. Otherwise, I expect you to do exactly as I tell you.”

A full body shiver worked its way over Gracie’s skin. She nodded, her mouth too dry for her to speak.

He leaned in and kissed her, his lips working hot over hers. When he pulled away, his eyes were half-lidded, and desire burned brightly, making his eyes a darker blue.

“I want you to go inside to the bedroom. Remove your clothes and lie down on the bed. Wait for me. I’ll be in with our bags.”

She swallowed and nodded again.

He handed her the keys, singling out the one to the cabin.

“Just leave them on the coffee table in the living room and head to the bedroom. Our weekend starts now.”

She got out of the truck and headed for the door. She inserted the key into the lock and went inside. Luke had evidently been here in preparation for their weekend. The cabin was warm, and she could hear the hum of the heater. A fire had been laid in the fireplace, just waiting to be lit.

She set the keys down on the coffee table and headed for the bedroom. Once there, she ran her hands up and down the sides of her jeans, trying to work up the courage to do as he’d told her.

Her body tingled from head to toe. Her pussy hummed, warm vibrations swirling between her legs. The anticipation was nearly sending her over the edge.

Knowing she was only stalling, she undid her jeans and peeled them down her legs. She pulled her sweater over her head and tossed it aside. She hesitated for a slight moment before removing her underwear and bra.

Feeling vulnerable standing in the middle of the room—naked—she moved to the bed and crawled onto the warm comforter. She turned over onto her back and waited for Luke.

She heard him moments later and looked over to see him standing in the door.

“You look magnificent.”

She smiled and watched as he moved closer to the bed. He sat down on the edge and reached his hand out to smooth over the skin of her belly.

His fingers worked their way up until he fiddled with her nipple rings. Fine little goose bumps broke out over her flesh as he tweaked and plucked at her nipples.

“Are you ready for this, Gracie?”

“Yes,” she whispered.

“Get up,” he directed.

She climbed off the bed and stood beside him. He circled an arm around her waist and pulled her down to his lap. At first she didn’t understand how he was positioning her, but he turned her so she lay across his lap, belly down. Oh God. She knew what this was about.

His hand glided over her back and to the curve of her ass. Then without warning, his palm smacked down, sending a current of fire through her body.

He petted her and soothed the area before slapping the other cheek with his open hand.

She twisted restlessly against him, needing something, not quite sure what. The blows stung, but directly on the heels of the impact came such delicious pleasure. She was at a loss as to how to describe it, how to react to the erotic spanking. He was giving her exactly what she’d said she fantasized about.

Three, four more times his hand met with the plump flesh of her behind. She moaned softly and squirmed even more.

Then as suddenly as he’d pulled her down, he stood up, picking her up with him.

“Stand right here and don’t move,” he said as he positioned her by the bed.

In a few seconds he returned with a piece of rope. She trembled as he pulled her hands behind her back and began coiling the rope around her wrists. When he finished, he pushed her gently toward the bed.

“Lay face down on the bed, feet on the floor.”

She bent over the bed, placing her cheek against the mattress, and planted her feet on the floor. Her ass was vulnerable and exposed in this position, and it made her even wetter.

She heard him walk away then return. Smooth wood made contact with her ass with a crack that made her jump. She closed her eyes and tensed, waiting for the next blow.

Another followed close behind and then another. Her ass was on fire, the tingling nearly painful in its intensity. She needed release, needed to come, but she was helpless to his demands.

“I want to fuck you so bad, right here, right now,” Luke said behind her. “Your ass is so red, so sensitive.”

She moaned again as the paddle came down across her butt. “Please,” she whispered.

She heard the sound of a zipper and knew he had undone his jeans. Then she heard the crinkle of a wrapper and before she could process anything further, his hands gripped her thighs, spreading her, and in one motion he plunged into her pussy.

She cried out at the almost unbearable fullness. He hadn’t taken off his jeans, merely unzipped them enough to get his cock free. She could feel the scratch of denim against the tender skin of her ass. She wasn’t going to last long.

He began pumping in and out of her, and she was trapped beneath him, unable to move, only able to accommodate his thrusts. She strained against her bonds, needing to be free but delighting in the sensation of being bound, subject to his mercy.

Her orgasm built and spread, preparing to explode. With each thrust, the pressure in her belly grew until she bucked against him, desperate for release.

He wrapped his big hands around her waist and pulled her back to meet each thrust. He leaned into her, pressing her further into the bed, his weight pushing his cock even deeper.

“Luke!” she cried out.

Just as she felt him pick up his pace, her orgasm burst upon her with the speed of an explosion. She tried to scream but no sound came out. She had a mouthful of the bedspread, her teeth dug in with the agony of her release.

Every muscle in her body tensed painfully as Luke rocked her body against the bed. He strained against her, holding himself deep as his hips spasmed.

“God, Gracie,” he gasped out as he shuddered again.

She went limp underneath him, and he collapsed against her back, his ragged breathing close to her ear. He felt good, his big body covering hers, his cock still wedged deep into her pussy. When he finally moved, she made a sound of protest.

He stepped away for a moment then returned and began untying her hands. When she was free, he climbed onto the bed and pulled her up into his arms.

She cuddled into his chest and rubbed her cheek against his shirt.

“No fair, you’re still dressed.”

He laughed. “I won’t be for long. That was incredible, Gracie. Thank God I brought so many condoms. I think we’re going to need every last one of them.”

He wrapped his arms tighter around her and held her close as they rested.

“It was perfect,” she whispered. And it had been. It was as if he’d reached into her mind and plucked out every exacting detail of what she wanted from a man.

He bent to kiss her. “I’m glad. But we’re only getting started.”

Chapter Nine

Gracie lay cuddled in Luke's arms for a long moment. Finally, he pulled away from her and stood beside the bed. He began shedding his clothing, and Gracie stared with unabashed admiration.

His body was beautiful. There was no other way to describe it. Tight, well muscled, the dips and contours were meant for exploring. She couldn't wait.

As he pulled his jeans off, his semi-erect cock flashed in her view. She ached to reach out and touch it. She wanted to fondle it and stroke it, watch it spring to life under her attention.

He was built for a woman's pleasure. There wasn't a woman alive who wouldn't want a cock this size and wouldn't die of pleasure in the process.

"Do you like what you see?" Luke asked as he stood before her.

She licked her lips. "I want to taste you," she said.

Luke groaned. "Damn, Gracie, you make me crazy."

He got back onto the bed and settled over her body. He lowered his mouth to hers, nipping and sucking at her bottom lip. His lips traveled down the line of her jaw to her neck and then around to her chest.

"I've been dying to taste your nipples," he said hoarsely as he closed his mouth around one.

She arched into him, moaning at the sweet pleasure that streaked from her breasts to her abdomen.

He caught the ring between his teeth and tugged gently. He swirled his tongue around the stiff peak before capturing it between his teeth and nibbling delicately at it.

She worked her hands into his hair and held tightly to him as he sucked at her nipples. He feasted on the sensitive buds, licking, sucking, and biting.

Finally he kissed his way to her belly. He ran his tongue around her navel, leaving a wet trail as he moved lower.

He tugged her legs apart as he moved his body down the bed. Her pussy throbbed in anticipation. He gently parted the slick folds with his fingers then bent his head to lick her clitoris.

Her body jerked in reaction, and she sighed in absolute pleasure. His fingers worked lower, sliding into her opening as he nibbled and licked at the quivering bud.

She closed her eyes and surrendered herself completely to what he gave her. Already she could feel her nerve endings tightening, the familiar rise to something wonderful.

He spread her legs wider and moved off the bed long enough to slip on another condom. Then he slid up her body, settling between her legs.

He played with her nipple rings as his cock nudged at her pussy entrance. He bent and nipped sharply at the quivering peak just as he thrust into her.

As his hips bucked forward, he gathered her in his arms, holding her tightly as he slid into her. His lips moved hotly over her neck and to her mouth, capturing her in a breathless kiss.

He moved powerfully between her legs, stroking to her deepest regions. He felt so big. He stretched her, the friction caused by each thrust making her mindless. She grabbed at his shoulders, sinking her nails deep.

His hands slid down her body until he grasped her buttocks. He squeezed and kneaded as he cupped her against his body. He spread her wider, diving impossibly deep into her. Then he trailed one hand between them, finding her clit and pinching it between his fingers.

She bolted upward, straining against him as he stroked the quivering flesh. He thrust again and again until she panted beneath him.

Her orgasm built to impossible heights and still she hung there, creeping ever closer but not tumbling over the edge. She clamped her

teeth together and squeezed her eyes shut as the pressure became nearly unbearable.

He began rocking into her, faster, his thrusts harder. He set an impossible pace and demanded her body keep up.

“Oh God, oh God,” she chanted as she felt her body began to splinter apart.

She let out a long wail as he slammed into her again. Around her the room blurred and she felt a thousand strings break in her pussy.

He moved frantically against her, his orgasm racing over him as she found her own. Sweat dripped from his forehead as he arched into her one last time.

She went limp a second before he collapsed over her. It took all her energy but she wrapped her arms around him and held him close as he fought to catch his breath.

“Are you all right?” he rasped in her ear.

“Mmmm hmmm.” It was all she could manage.

He rolled to the side and discarded the condom before rolling back over to pull her against him.

“Rest, sweetheart. I’ll get up and fix us something to eat in a little while.”

She curled into him, feeling ridiculously content. He stroked her hair as her eyes fluttered and closed.



Gracie awoke to find Luke standing over the bed. He bent and smoothed her hair away with his hands then kissed her.

“Time to eat,” he murmured.

She stretched and slid out of bed. Luke caught her against him and stroked his hands over her naked skin.

“You better get dressed or I’ll never eat,” he said.

She grinned and reached for her shirt.

As she followed him into the kitchen, she sniffed appreciatively. Then she saw what he’d cooked.

“Oh my God, you made barbeque chicken!”

He smiled and gestured for her to sit down.

She took her seat, and Luke took the chair across the table from her. She dug in with her fork, uttering a contented sigh when the chicken hit her tongue.

“Are you okay with things so far?” he asked.

She paused, setting her fork down on her plate. “Yeah, and you?”

“I just had the best sex of my life. I’d say that qualifies as okay,” he said dryly.

Familiar heat flooded her cheeks.

“If you don’t stop looking at me like that, you’re not going to be able to finish eating,” he warned.

She ducked her head but smiled at the desire in his voice.

When they finished eating, Gracie started toward the sink to put her plate up, but Luke intercepted her.

“You go wait for me in the bedroom. I want you on your knees on the rug. Naked. Hands behind your back.”

She swallowed nervously even as a thrill shot down her spine. She nodded and handed the plate to Luke. Her legs shook as she walked toward the bedroom.

She only paused a moment before shedding her shirt. Then she walked over to the plush rug that covered the floor in front of the bed and sank to her knees.

Rising up slightly, she put her hands behind her so they were clasped in the small of her back. Streaks of need pulsated and radiated from her pussy into her abdomen as she imagined what Luke would do when he came in.

She didn’t have to wait long. He strode into the room, naked. He stopped when he saw her, his eyes darkening with approval and lust. His cock sprang to attention, and Gracie enjoyed a moment of triumph that she affected him so.

“Do you have any idea how sexy you are?” he asked.

He stopped in front of her and reached out to thrust his hand into her hair. He palmed the back of her head, cradling it as he directed his cock at her mouth.

“Take me deep,” he commanded.

She opened her mouth, and he thrust to the back of her throat. He rocked his hips back and forth as she swallowed and sucked at him. He gripped her head, holding her tightly against him.

He pumped into her mouth for several seconds before finally easing from her lips. He reached down and pulled her up to stand in front of him.

He fiddled with her nipple rings, pulling them until her nipples stretched in front of her. “I love these,” he said. “They’re sexy. Like you.”

She twisted, jittery and needy as he plucked at her nipples. She was hot and restless, ready to see what he had in store for her next.

His fingers trailed down her body, over her belly and lower to her pussy. He dipped a finger between her legs, sliding into her wetness. Her knees shook and threatened to buckle.

“Get on the bed,” he ordered. “Belly down, legs apart.”

She did as he directed, crawling onto the mattress and lying down until her cheek met with the comforter. She spread her legs and stretched her arms above her head.

He crawled between her legs, pressing his chest against her back. He nudged her thighs farther apart with his knee then positioned his cock at her pussy opening.

He surged forward, pressing her further into the bed. His body covered her and his hips dug into her ass as he plunged deeper.

He reached above her, holding her wrists with his hands. She was unable to move as he thrust between her legs. Finally he let her arms go and dropped his hands down to her ass. He squeezed and massaged, pushing upward to gain better access to her pussy.

Then he began thrusting in earnest, increasing his pace until the force pushed her up the bed. He bent down and nipped sharply at her neck until goose bumps dotted her back.

The throbbing between her legs bloomed and spread outward, radiating to every sensitive region of her body. She loved this dominant side of him, loved that he never once stopped to ask her what she wanted or if what he was doing was okay.

She panted as he rocked against her. She was so close and yet she couldn't get there. Her orgasm built and built until it was painful in its intensity.

He grasped her hips with both hands, pushed up so her body angled to give him better entry, and he plunged home. She let out a wail as her orgasm cracked and burst around her. It hurt, it pulsed, it was the most exquisite form of torture she'd ever endured.

And it went on and on.

He collapsed forward, coming to rest at the deepest point in her pussy. His chest pressed into her back, and his body melded to hers. A perfect fit.

She arched her ass into his pelvis, not wanting him to leave her just yet. They both heaved as they tried to catch their breath. Finally, he rolled off her, and she immediately felt cold without him covering her.

She mewled softly in protest, and he gathered her in his arms, once again wrapping his body around hers. He kissed her softly.

"Go to sleep, Gracie. I'll be here. I'm not letting you go."

Chapter Ten

Gracie woke to the sun shining in the bedroom window. The space beside her was empty, and she smelled bacon cooking. She smiled. Luke must be in the kitchen cooking breakfast.

She stretched and climbed lazily out of bed. Luke's flannel shirt lay in a heap on the floor, and she reached for it. She slipped it on, leaving it unbuttoned down the front. His scent surrounded her, and she wrapped the shirt tighter around her.

She padded barefoot out of the bedroom toward the kitchen, a wicked smile on her face. She'd tease him with a few glimpses of those nipple rings he loved so much. By the time breakfast was done, he'd be a walking hard-on.

She rounded the corner, letting her shirt gape a bit wider and let out a squeak of surprise. She yanked her shirt closed and stared at Wes who was standing in the kitchen leaning against the countertop.

She started to back up but Wes closed the distance between them.

"I-I didn't know you were here," she sputtered.

She gripped her shirt even tighter, sure her face was as red as a stoplight. To her surprise, Luke stood by the stove, his expression one of interest as he watched her.

Wes stopped in front of her and reached down for her hand. He tugged her forward into the kitchen.

"Come on now, Gracie," he drawled. "You've seen me naked. Time for me to return the favor."

She shivered slightly under his intense stare. "Is this a practical joke or something?"

Wes ran his hand up the lapel of her shirt, nudging it slightly aside until her breasts peeked around the edge.

“No joke. We’ve been friends a long time, Gracie. I don’t want to make you uncomfortable, but I don’t think you are. I think you’re as turned on as I am right now.”

She cocked her head in confusion and shot Luke a panicked look.

“Quit fucking with her,” Luke said.

“You want a threesome,” Wes said. “Luke and I want to give you one.”

Her mouth rounded to an O and her eyes widened. Wes’ fingers brushed across her nipples, flicking lightly at the rings.

She looked back over at Luke again to see him staring intently at her.

“If you don’t want this, just say so,” Luke said quietly. “We don’t want to do anything to make you uncomfortable.”

“Wow,” she whispered. “I mean, I don’t know what else to say. You’re okay with this?” she asked Luke.

He smiled. “Who do you think invited Wes?”

“Holy shit.” She shook her head, unsure of whether or not she was dreaming. A threesome. Not with strangers. With two men she trusted implicitly. Two men who cared for her and would make it good. Not much to think about there.

“What do you say, Gracie?” Wes murmured.

She nodded. “Okay.”

Wes nudged her chin up with his knuckle, and she looked into his warm brown eyes.

“I don’t want things to be awkward for us. We’ve been friends too long for that.”

He leaned in and brushed his lips across hers. His goatee rubbed softly on her chin. Bubbles of excitement took flight in her chest. She relaxed against him, and he deepened the kiss.

Her shirt parted as his hands slid underneath the material and cupped her breasts. His thumbs worked over her nipples, and his hands moved down her skin.

Shedding her inhibitions, she wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him back, letting her tongue roam playfully over his.

It was a different experience kissing Wes. He was more gentle than Luke but every bit as sensual. If she gave herself time to analyze the situation, she'd likely retreat in mortification, but it felt right.

Wes wrapped his hands around her waist and hoisted her upward until she sat on the countertop.

"Much better," he murmured.

Her breasts were now level with his mouth, and he took advantage. His tongue rubbed lightly over one nipple. It puckered and her muscles tightened in response.

He cupped her breasts with both hands and held them up for his mouth to devour.

"I never knew you had such a wild side, Gracie. I like it. The rings are hot."

She moaned as he sucked her nipple into his mouth, his tongue toying with the ring.

"She needs to eat," Luke interjected.

Wes slowly pulled away, and it was all Gracie could do not to insist she wasn't hungry so they'd take her to bed. Her stomach contradicted her by rumbling.

Wes lifted her down as Luke set a plate on the table for her. She walked unsteadily to her chair and sank down into it. She pulled her shirt tight around her, suddenly giving up the idea of making Luke crazy. He'd completely turned the tables on her.

The two men sat down on either side of her and proceeded to polish off their plates of food. She managed to nibble down a small amount, but her stomach was in full somersault mode, and she knew she wouldn't do much justice to her food.

"If you're done picking at that, I know something we could be doing that's a whole lot more fun," Wes spoke up.

She flushed and pushed her plate away. Wes held out a hand to her and pulled her from her chair. Luke walked toward the bedroom, and Wes swung her into his arms and followed.

Wes deposited her on the bed, her shirt falling open. She quickly pulled her shirt off and tossed it off the bed. Wes and Luke stepped back

and began stripping out of their clothing. She watched, not missing a single detail.

Her heart beat a little faster as Wes moved toward the bed. His cock was impressive. A size that would make a woman stand up and pay attention. It brought to mind all sorts of yummy questions. Would it fit? How delicious would it feel to accommodate all of him?

Wes grabbed her ankles and pulled her toward the edge of the bed. Her legs fell open, baring her pussy to him. He made a sound of appreciation as he bent his head.

Just the anticipation of him touching her with his mouth had her ready to burst. When his tongue finally rubbed over her delicate folds, she nearly came on the spot.

“You taste as good as you look, Gracie,” he said. “Sweet.”

She arched her back and moaned as his tongue delved deeper. The bed dipped and swayed as Luke climbed up beside her. He bent his head to her breasts, and she cried out as both men tormented her with their mouths.

Wes slid a finger into her pussy. “God, you’re so tight, Gracie. I don’t want to hurt you.”

He left her for a brief moment then his finger slid back into her, gliding easily inside. He smoothed lubricant into her, easing his fingers around the walls of her pussy.

She heard the crackle of a condom wrapper and the sound of more lubricant being squeezed out. Then the head of his cock butted gently against her entrance.

Luke moved from her breasts to her lips, kissing and sucking at her mouth. His hands feathered over her nipples, tweaking and pinching at the taut peaks.

Wes slid easily into her, and she gasped at the fullness. He came to rest deeply within her, and she struggled to process the bombardment of sensations.

“Am I hurting you?” Wes rasped.

“God no,” she managed to get out.

Never before had she felt this way. Wes was seated deep within her pussy while Luke kissed her, toyed with her breasts. It was the most exquisite pleasure, every one of her most sensitive spots being teased and touched.

Wes began to move, gently at first and then with more force as she arched her hips to meet his thrusts. Her tongue tangled with Luke's, and she wrapped her arms around his neck, holding him close to her.

Wes pulled away from her and ran his hands over her legs. "Turn over on your hands and knees," he said.

She scrambled over, allowing Wes to position her to his liking. Luke sprawled out in front of her, his cock in perfect position for her to bend down and take it in her mouth.

Gentle hands spread her thighs then Wes mounted her, sliding into her from behind. She closed her eyes and moaned. Luke smoothed her hair from her face as she rocked back against Wes. God, it felt good.

She opened her eyes then slowly lowered her mouth, letting her tongue slide over Luke's hard cock. His hand tangled in her hair, and he groaned as her mouth closed around the head.

So far the reality of a threesome far surpassed her lame fantasies. Being between two men, their focus solely on her, their hands and bodies touching and pleasing her, it was a ride on the most exhilarating roller coaster.

"Gracie, honey, you drive me crazy," Wes said in an agonized voice. "You're so tight, so beautiful."

"Very beautiful," Luke murmured below her.

Luke stroked her hair, running his fingers through the strands as she sucked his cock.

"We want to take you at the same time, Gracie. Are you up for that?" Luke asked.

She shuddered, her orgasm lurking so close. Just the image of them both buried in her body had her teetering on the edge.

Wes withdrew, and Luke gently pulled her away from his rigid cock. Then Wes moved to the side of her and lay down on the bed, his legs hanging over the edge and his feet planted on the floor.

He reached for Gracie, his big hands positioning her over his cock. "Ride me, Gracie."

She let out a moan as she slowly lowered her body onto his erection. He slid in, the friction nearly unbearable. God, he was so big, she didn't know how Luke would accomplish the feat of taking her too.

"Just relax, sweetheart," Luke said as he ran his hands over her ass.

She felt the cool shock of the lubricant over the seam of her ass and flinched as Luke slid one finger inside. Wes played with her nipple rings as she held herself still on his cock.

"We're going to take this slow and easy," Luke said. "I won't hurt you, Gracie, I swear it."

"I trust you," she whispered.

He eased more lubricant inside her, stretching her slightly with his fingers. After several minutes of stroking and preparing her, he positioned his dick at her tight opening.

"Breathe deep," Wes said. "Breathe in and relax. That's it, baby."

Wes' fingers found her nipples again, pinching and plucking at them, distracting her from the burning and stretching of her ass.

She gasped as the muscle gave way and Luke penetrated her anus. He stopped and gave her time to adjust before slowly moving forward again. He inched his way into her until finally, she felt his hips press into the flesh of her buttocks.

Both men were fully sheathed within her body. She began to shake uncontrollably.

"Easy, sweetheart," Luke soothed. "Make it last. Make it good."

She leaned forward in Wes' arms, letting him support her weight as Luke began to move inside her. Soon they found a rhythm, moving in unison. They both pressed forward, filling her, stretching her, bringing her unbelievable pleasure.

How she managed to accommodate them both, she'd never know, but she'd never enjoyed herself more than at this moment.

"Are you all right?" Wes whispered close to her ear.

"Very all right," she replied. She nipped his ear, and he groaned in response.

Wes' hands slid down her waist, gripping her hips. Luke's hands grasped her shoulders, and they held her against them, captive to their embrace.

"I can't last any longer," she gasped. She fought against the rising tidal wave, but knew she only had seconds.

"That's good because I can't either," Wes said. "Let yourself go, we've got you."

Luke surged forward, burying himself in her deepest regions. Wes bucked upward until she gasped at the pleasure/pain of his penetration.

"Oh God!" she cried.

Her body began to spin out of control. Her vision blurred and she writhed between them, unable to bear the pressure building within her. She erupted with such force that Wes slid out of her.

He grasped her waist with one hand while he used his other hand to position himself between her legs once more.

The two men rocked against her, each straining with their own release.

She screamed. She couldn't help it. She'd never ever had such a powerful orgasm, and it scared and thrilled her all at the same time.

She fell forward onto Wes' chest, and he wrapped his arms around her, holding her and soothing her as she fought to catch her breath.

Luke surged against her ass, pressing her harder onto Wes. He slumped against her for a few seconds before easing out of her and rolling to the side.

She lay panting on Wes. She couldn't move, couldn't speak even if she wanted to. His hands slid gently up and down her back, and he kissed the curve of her neck.

"You are one incredible woman, Gracie."

"That she is," Luke agreed. "I may never walk again after this weekend."

Wes rolled Gracie to the side, still cradled in his arms. He pulled out of her and started to sit up.

"Let me get cleaned up, and I'll be right back."

As Wes got up to discard the condom, Luke pulled her into his arms and tucked her head under his chin.

“Was that good?” he asked.

She stretched and yawned like a contented cat. “I’m not sure I could deal with it if it got any better. Thank you, Luke. I don’t even know what to say. That was fantastic. I can’t believe you went to so much trouble to make my fantasies real.”

“Trouble? More like my pleasure,” he said. “You’re an incredible woman, Gracie.”

Wes climbed on the other side of her and scooted in close. He pressed a kiss to her shoulder and slid his hand down the curve of her waist.

“Rest up, Gracie girl, and we’ll do it all over again.”

Chapter Eleven

Gracie lay in bed between Luke and Wes and stared up at the ceiling. The euphoria around her had yet to dissipate. Her body still felt tingly and alive on the heels of the most fantastic sex of her life.

She glanced over at Luke, unable to control the softening in her chest. The past week with him had been unbelievable. He'd taken their conversations and pieced together her fantasies. He'd made them come alive, and he'd done it because he cared for her.

She wasn't sure exactly when she'd fallen in love with him. In retrospect, she couldn't remember a time when she hadn't felt deeply for him. But the past week had brought it together and shoved it to the forefront. She wanted to be with him.

As if feeling her gaze, he turned his head toward her, his blue eyes glowing with contentment. He reached out a hand to cup her cheek.

"I thought I'd light a fire in the fireplace," he said.

She nuzzled her cheek into his palm. "Hmmm, I'd like that."

"Give me five minutes and I'll be back for you."

She watched as he got up and pulled his underwear on. Then he disappeared out of the bedroom.

A warm hand slid over the curve of her hip, over her belly and up to cup one of her breasts. She closed her eyes, enjoying Wes' caresses.

He nibbled lightly at the curve of her neck as he fingered her nipples.

"Did I hurt you earlier?" he asked. "I worried I was too big for you."

She smiled and turned over in his arms. "You won't find me complaining about your dick size," she teased. "I thought I'd died and gone to heaven."

He kissed her lightly, and she felt the penis in question stir to life against her stomach.

"I can't wait to taste it," she said in a sultry voice.

"Shit," Wes muttered. "I can't wait either."

"We have about three minutes before Luke is coming back to get me," she said wickedly. She slid her body farther down the bed until her mouth was even with his erection.

This was the first time she'd gotten this close, and her eyes widened in appreciation. The man was stacked. She licked her lips in anticipation, and Wes flinched beside her.

"God, woman, quit teasing me."

She laughed huskily and lapped her tongue over the head. He flinched again and dug his hands into her hair. She slid her mouth over him, sucking him deep.

"Oh yeah, baby, suck it. Just like that. Damn."

She took him as deep as she could, and his breath left him in one long hiss. She pushed him over onto his back and knelt over his hips, shoving her hair out of the way.

She wrapped her fist around the base of his cock and moved her hand up and down with the motion of her mouth.

"Stop," he moaned. "Baby, stop before I come."

He pulled gently at her hair until he was free of her mouth. His chest heaved with exertion, and his eyes glittered brightly as he stared at her.

"Fire's built," Luke said from the doorway.

She turned to see him leaning against the doorframe, watching her and Wes. She uncurled her legs and stood up beside the bed. Wes got up as well, and they walked out of the bedroom into the living room.

She curled onto the couch directly in front of the fireplace and sighed in pleasure. To her surprise, Luke sat down beside her and pushed her chest down to the cushions. He pulled her arms behind her back and tied them with the same rope he'd used the previous night.

"Totally and completely at our mercy," he murmured.

She closed her eyes and clenched her teeth against the tide of desire rolling over her body.

Luke stood up and pulled her up to stand beside him. He guided her around to the side of the couch then bent her, belly down, over the arm of the sofa. Her feet left the floor, and her cheek rested against the soft material of the couch. Her ass was in the air, vulnerable.

She heard the jingle—of a belt? Seconds later, she felt the sting of leather across her buttocks. She gasped and squirmed. She had no idea who was administering the spanking.

Again the slap of the belt, the sound of it striking flesh, the delicious burn across her ass. After the fourth stroke, she panted for breath. After the fifth and six, she was begging. After the seventh, she felt hands smooth over her burning ass. Fingers curled roughly around her thighs and spread them.

A cock nudged then rammed into her. Wes. Oh God. He wasn't as gentle as he'd been earlier. Maybe he knew now she could accommodate his size. He thrust hard, sending her spiraling into a world of unbelievable pleasure and the thrill of erotic pain.

He paused for a moment, so tightly wedged into her that she couldn't move if she wanted. Then he forced himself deeper and she cried out.

He slipped from her body, and Luke slid into her, immediately replacing Wes. He squeezed and kneaded her ass cheeks as he thrust into her again and again. Then he slapped her butt with his hand, and she yelped. The skin, so sensitive from the belt, tingled and singed under his hand. He rode her harder, spurred on by her cries. His hand rained down again and again until she sobbed her release. And still he continued.

Unbelievably, her body reacted to his demands. She felt herself climb toward another orgasm even as tears streaked down her cheeks from the first.

Then Luke stopped. He smacked her ass one more time before pulling out.

"No!" she cried out. They couldn't stop now. Not when she was so close again.

She heard a chuckle and wasn't sure who it came from. Then she felt her ass being spread, the cool lubricant soothing over her anus. She

trembled from head to toe. Wes stepped between her legs. She recognized his touch. Oh God, surely he wasn't going to take her ass.

"We're going to take this nice and slow, Gracie girl," Wes said soothingly. "You're going to take all of me."

She closed her eyes as he positioned his cock and pushed forward. Slowly, the pressure agonizing. Pleasure ripped through her abdomen even as the pinch of pain unsettled her. It was a heady combination.

The couch dipped and Luke picked up her head and slid underneath her. He fisted his cock in his hand and curled his other hand into her hair. He slipped his cock between her lips just as Wes plunged into her ass.

The momentum carried her forward, forcing Luke's dick deep into her mouth. The tightness in her ass was nearly unbearable. Then Wes smacked her cheek with his hand and she bucked against him.

"I'm going to ride you now, Gracie," Wes said as he began moving within her. "I'm going to ride your ass while Luke fucks your pretty mouth."

Gracie closed her eyes, her body tightening and spasming uncontrollably at Wes' erotic language. She was wild with need. She wanted more. She was helpless between them, unable to move. Her body was theirs to do with what they wanted, and she loved it.

They fucked her mouth and her ass, foregoing their earlier gentle style. This was raw sex, hard, sweaty, the kind she'd dreamed about. They were unrelenting as they made demands of her body. They owned her, they used her, and she never wanted it to stop.

She cried out, but Luke thrust deeply into her mouth, halting all attempt at making sound. She closed her eyes, squeezed them tightly shut as her body splintered and broke apart under their relentless assault.

The wet, sucking sounds of their fucking filled the room. Luke's hand wound tightly in her hair, pulling her head closer to his groin. Then Wes grunted behind her and let out a shout as he came.

"Swallow it, Gracie," Luke murmured. "I want you to swallow it all."

He moaned and jerked against the back of her throat then flooded her mouth with his cum. She sucked greedily, wanting to please him in a way she'd never wanted to please a man.

Wes carefully withdrew from her quivering body as Luke finished in her mouth. Wes reached over to untie her hands, and Luke pulled her into his arms.

She lay on his chest, eyes closed, too worn out to form a coherent thought. Luke hugged her closer as he stood, lifting her with him. He carried her into the bathroom and started the shower.

He washed her gently, taking care with the tender parts of her body. When he was finished, he wrapped her in a towel and carried her to bed.

She burrowed into his chest and was vaguely aware of Wes spooning against her back. Gentle hands soothed over her skin, petting and caressing her. She yawned and allowed herself to drift away.

Chapter Twelve

Gracie opened her eyes, a smile on her face. She sighed and snuggled a little deeper into the covers. It was dark outside, so she'd been sleeping for several hours at least. The guys were gone. Probably in the kitchen since they seemed so determined to take care of her this weekend.

She kicked off the covers and flexed her toes. Lord, but she was sore. Deliciously so. Her body felt heavy and languid, the kind of feeling you could only get from deep-seated contentment.

She pulled on her jeans and her sweater, not bothering with a bra. Chances were she wouldn't have her clothes on long enough to worry about anyway.

She walked out of the bedroom and headed for the kitchen. She could hear the guys talking in low voices and smiled. As she got closer, she stopped in her tracks. She kept out of sight and listened to the conversation unfold in the kitchen.

"I have to admit, when you came up with this idea, I was skeptical," Wes said. "I wondered if you'd really heard Gracie right."

Gracie wrinkled her brow. What on earth was he talking about?

"You don't think that now, though," Luke said with a laugh.

Wes chuckled. "Hell no. It's obvious she really wanted this. It's too bad you didn't overhear her a lot sooner."

"I doubt she and Michelle discuss it that much," Luke said. "Gracie's a private person. If she hadn't just broken up with dipshit, I doubt she would have said anything at all."

"You're probably right. Still, it worked out great. You were able to set up this entire weekend, and I think she really enjoyed it."

Luke laughed again. "See, there are advantages to eavesdropping. Gracie would kill me if she knew I'd listened to her conversation, but it worked out great in the end."

Gracie's mouth fell open and a wave of humiliation rolled over her with the speed of a Mack truck. She could barely process what the conversation meant. She was too busy trying to control the burning in her cheeks.

The whole thing had been an elaborate set-up because Luke had overheard her talking to Michelle about her fantasies?

She didn't even realize she'd stumbled into the kitchen until Wes and Luke looked up at her. Guilt flashed in Luke's eyes, and hurt washed over her again.

"Gracie..." Luke began.

She held a hand up, trying to control the shaking. She'd already made a big enough ass of herself. Oh God, when she remembered all they'd done, she just wanted to bury herself in the ground.

"Is that all this was?" she said in a trembling voice. "Were you two just cashing in on my fantasies? You see a way to have a good time at my expense? You are supposed to be my best *friends*."

"God, Gracie, no, you can't think that," Wes protested.

They both started toward her and she shrank back. Her bottom lip trembled and she bit down, ignoring the pain.

"I thought...I thought this week happened because you cared about me," she said painfully, her gaze focused on Luke. "I feel like such an idiot. Why the games? Why the elaborate charade? Why let me fall in love with you if none of this was real?"

"Gracie, you have to listen to me," Luke said desperately.

She spun away, grabbing the keys from the coffee table.

"Gracie, wait!"

She ignored him and ran from the house as fast as she could. She hurled herself into his truck and locked the doors even as she jammed the key in the ignition.

Luke ran out of the house toward the truck, shouting her name. He tried to open the door as she began to back up.

“Damn it, Gracie, don’t go!”

She rammed her bare foot on the accelerator and gunned the engine. When she’d backed far enough out of the drive, she threw it into drive and whipped around.

She raced down the highway, her embarrassment so acute she wanted to curl up and die. If you looked up ass in the dictionary, there had to be a picture of her.

A tear slid down her cheek and she wiped angrily at it. Could she have misread the situation any more? She’d just made the biggest fool of herself ever. With guys she considered her best friends on earth. Guys she couldn’t even look in the face anymore.

The forty-five minute drive back home seemed interminable. She’d been stupid to take Luke’s truck. She’d be lucky if he didn’t have her arrested. But then she’d done a lot of stupid things in the past week.

She drove up to her house and parked Luke’s truck next to her car. She left the keys in it, knowing he’d come by looking for it. She went inside long enough to get a pair of shoes and her jacket then she got into her car and took off.

She was being hysterical and unreasonable. She knew that much. She’d carried on like a complete nitwit, but she’d been so humiliated to learn the real reason why Luke had gotten close to her.

She drove with no real sense of direction until she found a quiet, secluded place to park. She needed to calm down, start acting rationally again. Again. Ha. She hadn’t acted rationally in months.

Her first mistake was going out with Keith. She’d only compounded that mistake by allowing herself to fall in love with her best friend. Her third mistake had been thinking he had feelings for her beyond those of friendship.

She wasn’t going to cry. Even though she felt the sting of tears, she was determined not to give in. She’d already made a big enough ninny of herself.

She sat there, staring at the sky, numb. For several hours. Luke would have his truck back by now. He and Wes would be home, probably wondering what the fuck her problem was.

Emitting a weary sigh, she started the engine and drove slowly toward the main road. She instinctively headed for Michelle's. It was late. Or early depending on your point of view, and she hated to disturb her friend's sleep, but she needed a shoulder to cry on in the worst way. This whole stiff upper lip was getting old fast.

It was nearly four in the morning when she pulled into Michelle's driveway. She turned off the engine and slowly got out. Before she closed the door, she saw Jeremy hurry down the steps and stride across the lawn toward her.

She trudged toward him, and he held his arms open to her. He caught her in a hug and kissed the top of her head.

"We've been worried sick about you, Gracie. Come on in. I'll make you some hot chocolate."

She smiled gratefully at him. "I'm sorry, Jeremy. I didn't mean to worry y'all. Especially not Michelle."

"Luke and Wes are worried too," Jeremy said quietly. "I need to call and let them know you're okay."

Gracie stiffened.

"Gracie, Luke is frantic. He's worried something happened to you. I'm just going to call and tell him you're all right."

She nodded, guilt creeping over her.

Once inside, Michelle hurried over and hugged her tightly. Then she dragged her over to the couch and made her sit down.

"What on earth happened?" Michelle demanded.

Gracie sighed and closed her eyes for a moment. "I made an ass of myself. That's what happened."

Jeremy returned and pressed a hot cup of chocolate into her hands.

"Thanks," she said.

Jeremy sat down on the other side of Gracie and put a comforting hand on her leg. "Tell us what happened, Gracie."

She flushed and set her cup down on the coffee table. "Apparently Luke overheard our conversation," she said to Michelle. "The one about my fantasies."

"Ohhh," Michelle said, her eyes wide.

“And apparently he wanted to fulfill those fantasies for me. He asked me out and we spent the week together. I thought he was interested in *me*. I confided those fantasies in him and he arranged this weekend. Wes was a surprise.”

She broke off and ducked her head in embarrassment when Michelle’s eyes widened further in shock.

“You mean, you and Luke *and* Wes?”

“Yeah,” Gracie muttered.

“You’re angry with them for not telling you they knew?” Jeremy asked in a confused voice.

Gracie sighed. “I’m not angry with them,” she said quietly. “I’m angry with me. And I’m so humiliated I want to just find a hole to crawl in.”

“Oh honey,” Michelle said. She reached over and squeezed Gracie’s hand. “Why on earth should you be embarrassed?”

“I just wish Luke had been up front. Told me from the beginning that this was about sex. Instead he made me believe...he made me believe he cared about me. He made me fall in love with him,” she said miserably. “And all along it was just a game. His heart was in the right place. I know he’s never approved of the men I’ve slept with. He wanted to give me a weekend I’d remember. I understand that.”

Michelle wrapped her arms around her and hugged tight.

“I let my mouth get ahead of my brain again, and I basically blurted out that I loved him. Just before I ran like a scalded cat. Now I’ve got them both mad at me because of a huge misunderstanding. One I perpetuated. I guess in a way, I wanted it to be the truth. I wanted Luke to love me.”

“Are you so sure he doesn’t?” Jeremy spoke up.

She nodded, tears burning holes in her eyelids. “I heard him and Wes talking. And Luke’s never said anything to make me believe he cares for me beyond a friend. I just got wrapped up in the whole going out thing and confused sex with love. You’d think I was twelve years old or something.”

She bowed her head as hot tears splashed onto her arm. “I screwed up.”

Jeremy gently nudged her chin up with his knuckle until she looked him in the eye. "Don't blame yourself, honey. There are two grown men who are as big a part in this as you are. I don't know what the hell happened, but I don't think we have the full story here."

Gracie leaned forward and hugged Jeremy. "I'm sorry to put you in this position. They're your friends too. I just needed to come by and talk to Michelle."

He hugged her back and stroked her hair soothingly. "You're always welcome here, Gracie. Michelle and I love you. Nothing will change that."

"Of course not," Michelle said firmly.

"I should get home," Gracie said as she pulled away from Jeremy.

"You're not going home in your condition," Jeremy said. "You look exhausted. It's four o'clock in the morning. You can crash on the couch and go home after you've rested."

"I'm too tired to argue," Gracie said.

Michelle stood up. "I'll get you some pillows and a blanket. We'll talk more in the morning when you're feeling better."

"Thanks, Chelle. I don't know what I'd do without you guys."

Michelle hugged her again then hurried toward the closet down the hall. She returned a few minutes later with the linens.

Gracie took them gratefully and made a comfortable spot on the couch. Jeremy and Michelle said their goodnights and disappeared into their bedroom.

Gracie sank wearily onto the couch and pulled the covers up to her chin. *Dummy, dummy, dummy*. She closed her eyes. She was even too tired to further castigate herself.

Chapter Thirteen

Luke pulled up to Jeremy and Michelle's house and parked beside Gracie's car. The sun was just starting to peek over the horizon when he mounted the steps to the front porch.

Before he could knock, Jeremy opened the door and motioned for him to be quiet. He followed Jeremy inside and saw Gracie sound asleep on the couch.

"She's wiped out," Jeremy whispered. "She was pretty upset when she got here."

Luke raked a hand through his hair and swore under his breath. What a mess. His gaze drifted back to Gracie, drinking in her appearance. He'd been so goddamn worried when she'd tore off in his truck. He and Wes had driven the entire way home afraid they'd find her wrecked on the side of the road.

"I'm going back to bed with my wife," Jeremy said. "I don't know what all is going on between you and Gracie, but I know she's hurting."

"Thanks for calling me," Luke said softly.

"No problem. I know how worried you were about her."

Luke watched as Jeremy left the room and then he went to kneel beside the couch where Gracie lay. His chest tightened when he saw the evidence of her tears. Tenderly, he stroked her hair away from her cheek then he leaned forward and kissed her lips.

God, he didn't like to see her hurting. He never had. She had a way of twisting him up on the inside that no other woman had ever managed to do.

He hated to wake her up. God knew she could use the sleep. So could he. But they had to talk. He had to make her understand.

“Gracie,” he whispered. “Gracie, sweetheart, wake up.”

She stirred, twisting her head slightly, a frown marring her face. Then she opened her gorgeous eyes and looked at him in confusion. Hurt filled her gaze, and he felt like someone sucker-punched him.

“What are you doing here?” she whispered.

He stroked his hand over her face, wanting to touch her, reassure himself that she was really okay.

“We need to talk, Gracie.”

She nibbled at her bottom lip then slowly nodded. “I know,” she said quietly.

“Will you come with me?” he asked. “I don’t want to hash everything out here with Jeremy and Michelle in the next room, and I don’t imagine you want to either.”

She pushed herself up on her elbow and struggled to sit up. He curled his hands around her waist and helped her upright.

“Okay,” she agreed.

He breathed a sigh of relief. He’d overcome the first obstacle. Getting her to listen. Now he just hoped he’d be successful in all he had to convince her of.

She stood up, a little shaky on her feet, and he reached out to steady her, but she stepped away. He collected her jacket and held it open for her.

She walked ahead of him out the door, and he carefully closed it behind them. He hurried for his truck, knowing she’d be cold.

He started the engine and turned the heat on high before backing out of the driveway. They didn’t speak as he drove toward his house. He didn’t know whether to be grateful she wasn’t yelling at him or worried that she was so quiet.

A few minutes later, he parked in his garage and looked over at her. “Come in so we can talk?”

Gracie stared at Luke for a long moment. He did look worried about her, and she hated that she’d acted so stupidly. She was still embarrassed as hell, but she’d just made things worse by running.

She finally nodded and opened the truck door to climb out. Luke waited for her in front of the truck and ushered her inside.

He had a gorgeous house. He'd moved into a spec house he'd built when he started developing the neighborhood. She'd always thought it too big for him, but it would be perfect for a family.

She sighed and directed her thoughts away from a family Luke may or may not have in the future.

Luke guided her into the living room and gestured for her to sit down on the couch. She perched on the edge, just wishing they could get the awkwardness over. She needed to beg forgiveness for being such a dipshit, and maybe, just maybe, they could one day go back to being friends again.

He stood a few feet away, looking uncomfortable. Poor guy probably didn't know what the hell to say in the face of her assumptions. He was probably trying to figure out a way to let her down easy.

She sighed again. "Look, Luke, I'm sorry."

He looked startled by her apology. He started to speak but she held a hand up. "Let me finish please."

She looked down at her hands and sucked in a few steadying breaths. Then she looked back up at him.

"I overreacted. I know that. And I made some assumptions I had no business making. It's just that I wish you'd been level with me from the get-go. Just told me what you'd planned. You didn't have to go through the whole charade of getting close to me. I thought..." She took another deep breath, willing herself not to crack. "I thought you were coming to care for me as more than a friend and that this weekend was a natural progression of that relationship. Silly, I know, but not knowing that you'd overheard my conversation and made plans to surprise me, well, it's the only conclusion I could draw."

He stared at her, mouth open. Then his eyes sparked. He was angry. Hell.

He strode over to where she sat on the couch and knelt down in front of her.

"Luke, I—"

“Gracie, shut up,” he said fiercely.

She blinked in surprise.

He blew out his breath in an angry puff then he yanked her to him, kissing her roughly, passionately. She had no time to react, and she was too shocked to do so.

He pulled away from her and collected her hands in his. “Gracie, I love you.”

Her mouth fell open. “But—”

“Not a word,” he said, his eyes still flashing angrily. “I swear I don’t know where you get some of those fool-headed notions of yours. I’m so tempted to turn you over my knee and spank your ass.”

Her cheeks warmed as she remembered him doing precisely that.

“This week has been the best week of my life, Gracie. And you’re the reason for that. Yeah, I overheard your conversation with Michelle. And yeah, it made me see you in a new light. It made me realize how much we had in common and how stupid I was for never seeing it, for never asking you out.

“Yes, I wanted to give you a weekend you’d never forget, but I also want to give you a lifetime of those weekends. You and me, tearing up the sheets, eating each other alive. Gracie, when I’m with you, I swear I don’t even think straight. The chemistry between us is off the charts. But more than that, you’re my best friend. I love you. I think I’ve always loved you, and I want to spend my life with you. There’s no one I have a better time with. No one who understands me like you do.

“I fucked up. I should have told you I heard you and Michelle talking, but honest to God, it never even occurred to me that things could go so terribly wrong. I planned to spend the weekend making all your fantasies come true and then I was going to get down on my knees and beg you to make *mine* come true by marrying me.”

Gracie stared at him in shock. Her mouth fell open and tears spilled over onto her cheeks.

“You love me?” she whispered.

“After a speech like that, can you doubt it?” he asked.

She laughed and put her hand up to cup his cheek. "Oh, Luke, I was such an idiot. I was so afraid. I'd fallen so hard for you, and in that moment, I was so afraid you didn't feel the same."

He gathered her in his arms and held on tight. "I'm sorry I hurt you, Gracie. I'd never do anything to hurt you on purpose."

She hugged him back, trying to blink away the tears that streaked down her cheeks. Relief and euphoria like she'd never known rolled through her system.

He pulled slightly away and kissed her. He cupped her face in his hands and kissed her so tenderly, so full of love that it was hard to hold the tears at bay.

"Will you marry me, Gracie?"

"Yes. Yes!"

She threw her arms around him again and peppered his cheek and neck with kisses.

The door leading from the garage to the kitchen slammed and Luke whirled around. Gracie saw Wes standing in the doorway to the living room, concern etched on his face.

"Gracie, are you all right?" he asked anxiously.

She looked at Luke and, at his nod, stood up and walked over to Wes.

"I'm fine, Wes. I'm sorry for blowing up like I did."

"Ah hell, Gracie, no need to apologize."

He walked forward and wrapped his arms around her. He squeezed her tight and stroked a hand through her hair.

"I'm sorry if we hurt you, girl. I'd cut off my right arm before doing anything to hurt you."

He drew away and kissed her warmly on the lips. He let his tongue mingle with hers as his hands stroked up and down her back.

"I hope you don't regret the weekend," he said huskily. "You're one special woman. Luke is a lucky man."

She hugged him again. "He's asked me to marry him."

Wes pulled away from her and grinned. "And you said?"

"Yes, of course."

"Well, hot damn. Congratulations. To both of you."

He put his hand out to Luke then pulled him into a bear hug. "I'm gonna get on out of here and leave you two to sort things out."

He ruffled Gracie's hair. "Love you, girl."

She smiled. "Love you, too, Wes. And I don't regret this weekend."

Fire blazed in his eyes. "I'm glad."

He turned and walked back out to the garage, leaving Luke and Gracie standing there.

Luke pulled her into his arms and rested his cheek on top of her head. "Did you mean it? You'll marry me?"

She smiled into his chest. "Just as soon as I can drag you to the altar."

He loosened his hold on her and stuck his hand into his pocket. "I didn't get you flowers for Valentine's Day, but I hope this will make up for it."

He pulled a small ring box from his pants and held it out to her.

She couldn't breathe.

She opened it with shaky hands and saw a diamond ring nestled against black velvet.

"Oh, Luke, it's beautiful!"

He tugged the ring from its perch and slid it onto her finger. "I love you, Gracie."

She admired her ring for a moment then she looked into his eyes. Brilliant blue eyes that burned with love. Love for her.

"I love you, too," she whispered.

About the Author

To learn more about Maya Banks please visit www.mayabanks.com
or send an email to Maya at maya@mayabanks.com.

Look for these titles

Now Available:

Seducing Simon
Colters' Woman

In a heated Valentine weekend, Caleb and Jacqueline explore just how far their friendship can go.

Be Mine

Copyright © 2006 Gwendolyn Cease

Caleb and Jacqueline have been friends for nearly two years since he was engaged to her best friend. But now the engagement is over and Jack wonders where they stand. Jacqueline wants to maintain their friendship, but would prefer so much more.

Caleb invites her to spend Valentine weekend with him at a bed & breakfast since he had made the reservations long before he and Claire broke up. Though the breakup with Claire was only a month ago, the relationship between them had been over long before that. Caleb wants Jacqueline and is prepared to do anything to get her.

And he doesn't just want her for the weekend, he wants her forever. Caleb uses every strategy in his erotic arsenal to convince her she is more than just his friend—she is the woman he loves.

Warning, this title contains explicit sex and graphic language.

A Valentine's date gone wrong marks the beginning of a love that will last for all time.

Forever Valentine

Bianca D'Arc

Jena knows about vampires, particularly about the one who watches her every step, lest she somehow reveal her knowledge to the mortal world. Ian Sinclair would be her executioner should she even try to share her knowledge, but she doesn't fear him. No, Ian bothers her on an even more elemental level. He's just too sexy for his own good—and hers.

Ian finds himself attracted to the all-too-mortal lady doctor, though he knows better. He's been assigned to watch her, not seduce her, but seduction seems to be all he can think of when he looks at the gorgeous woman who works entirely too hard and has such sad eyes. He feels things he hasn't felt in centuries when she's around, including an unreasonable jealousy when he follows her on a Valentine's date with one of her colleagues.

After the disastrous date, will they both be able to resist temptation when Jena invites the vampire in?

Warning, this title contains explicit sex and graphic language.

SAMHAIN PUBLISHING, LTD.

It's all about the story...

Action/Adventure

Fantasy

Historical

Horror

Mainstream

Mystery/Suspense

Non-Fiction

Paranormal

Red Hots!

Romance

Science Fiction

Western

Young Adult

www.samhainpublishing.com