



Biker Chic

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## Chapter One

*It's amazing how easily our lives can be dismantled, torn down and put away in boxes,* Melanie thought as she folded and packed away the last few pieces of clothing lying on the bed.

With a sigh, she smoothed out the wrinkles on one of Phil's shirts. She'd picked this one out. Was that why he'd left it behind? He no longer wanted the things she'd contributed to his life? So it seemed. She ran her hands over the fabric, enjoying the feel of the cotton under her palms. The shirt was one of her favorites, and it was easy to remember how her husband had looked wearing it. Absolutely fabulous. How well it had fit over his broad shoulders, its crisp style and bold color only serving to accentuate his sandy blond hair and deeply tanned skin. More than good-looking, Phillip Brooks was model handsome.

And for eighteen years he'd been hers.

But no longer.

Now they were separated. And it was breaking her heart. Her mouth twisted at the ease with which she recalled every detail of their recent arguments.

Trying not to think about the bitter scenes that had passed between them, her thoughts returned to the many boxes she'd been packing lately. Interesting to think how boxes represented and contained people's lives. Boxes carried pieces of yourself from place to place, to be rearranged to fit your life. She remembered the boxes she'd packed when she moved

out of her childhood home and into her first apartment with the man she'd eventually marry. Young and desperate to escape her parents and the hate they'd developed for each other, moving in with Phil seemed heaven sent. In retrospect, she would come to believe she'd jumped out of the frying pan and into the fire. It only took hindsight for her to figure it out.

Time had passed and more boxes had come into her life. Nine years ago, they'd moved into this house. Those boxes had been so full of happiness, hope and pride. Life was good for them, was getting better all the time. Phil had graduated, and his practice was really starting to take off. The struggle, it seemed, was all behind them. They were young, in love, and had a blooming future.

But her dreams were gone now, and in their place was cold, hard reality. Her lips pressed tighter together as resentment wound itself around her heart. *Now, the boxes are being packed again, but only one of us is leaving.*

That's what she was doing today. Boxing up the last few remnants of his life in their—now her—house. She supposed they'd have to sell it. The house had four big bedrooms, not to mention an exercise room with an attached sauna and Jacuzzi. It was too big for one person. Though they'd been trying to talk their way through a tentative reconciliation, they weren't really getting very far. For two people who'd been together for so long, they had little to say to each other. Married too young, they'd grown up and grown

apart.

Phil was the one who had chosen to walk out. How easily he seemed to be adjusting to the transition. For her? It was sheer hell. Finito? For him, yes. Sometimes it seemed like she'd been blown to bits by a bomb, only her brain wasn't registering any pain. Deep down the hurt was there, but she was numb, absolutely numb. Sooner or later the pain was going to hit. And when it did, she'd feel every bit of it. Right now she was only doing what she needed to do, functioning..

Boxes also reminded her of coffins. She wanted to crawl in one the day Phil had told her, quite calmly over dinner, that he was leaving her for another woman.

No, she thought. *It isn't me who belongs in a coffin. It's Phil. Him and his twenty-one-year-old slut, Tammi.*

Tammi with an 'l', not a 'Y'. Tammi with her pert, upturned nose and her perky tits, the nose and tits that Melanie's plastic-surgeon hubby had constructed.

"A forty-one-year-old man running after an ex-patient," she fumed, jealousy stabbing at her heart with its sharp, poisonous blade. "That little girl is barely old enough to drive, much less know what love is. It's obscene for a man that old to be running around with a girl barely out of her teens."

An angry tear trickled down her cheek. She swiped it away with an impatient hand. At thirty-seven, she felt older than dirt. Useless. Worthless. For the thousandth time, she wondered what she'd done wrong, why she hadn't been able to keep her man

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satisfied at home instead of having him wander off sniffing out younger pussy at work

It wasn't as if she was fat or frumpy. She'd never had kids and had kept herself slim, trim, and firm. She swam, played tennis at the country club—she worked to make herself attractive. Her shoulder-length blond hair was fashionably streaked and styled, her nails beautifully manicured. She wore her make-up in a subtle fashion, not painted onto her skin the way some women wore it. She believed that she'd been the picture-perfect wife in every way. Supportive and loving; a lady in the parlor and a whore in the bedroom. What more had he wanted? How exciting could a marriage be after eighteen years?

Of course, she knew the answer. Phil wanted something fresh, new and exciting—

Something out of the ordinary, a break from the same-old routine. He'd even gone so far as to suggest a partner swap with some of their friends. When she'd vetoed that idea, he'd tried to wheedle her into a threesome with the man or woman of her choice. Again, she'd held her ground and said no. She'd believed their sex life was fine. Trouble was, Phil didn't. He liked sex. Anytime, anywhere. And when he couldn't get what he wanted at home, he went looking elsewhere. More than once, he'd taken a lover. But he'd never before given any indication that he'd be willing to bust up their marriage. Until Tammi came into his life.

*And so he walked out on me.*

It wasn't the first time a marriage had grown



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stale, that partners had grown apart. Happened every day and the divorce courts across the nation were clogged with similar sad stories. People simply got bored with each other. The heat had gone—the fire burned to ashes. Their marriage hadn't ended with a bang or a whimper, just a sad sigh.

*If I had said yes, would he have stayed? Or would I have been delaying the inevitable?* With hindsight, she realized that there had been something wrong with their marriage for a long time; that he had been spending less and less time at home with her. She wanted to believe that it really was the pressures of his work. In the back of her mind, though, she knew the bombshell was coming, that Phil didn't really love her anymore, didn't want her anymore. No, there were other women in his life...and he'd finally met the one for whom he wanted his freedom.

Unable to stop herself, Melanie picked up his shirt and pressed it to her face. Though freshly laundered, she thought she could smell his masculine scent still trapped in its fibers, the lingering scent of his tangy aftershave. Without thinking about it, she lifted her tank top over her head, let it drop to the floor then slipped into his shirt. If she closed her eyes, she could almost imagine that Phil was pressing his body against hers.

Even though they were separated, she still dreamed about him, about making love to him. And when she awoke, her body's response to those images was so acute and so sharp that it was impossible to believe that it was all just a dream. It was almost as if

her subconscious was trying to will him to come back to her.

*He said he wanted to see another man make love to me. What would that have been like, having another man put his hands on my body? It was a fantasy of his. I remember how he'd whisper it in my ear as he touched me.*

Cupping her breasts through the material, she ran her thumbs over her nipples, enjoying the feel of the pebbled tips. Closing her eyes, she pushed the material aside and began to trace the pink aureoles with the soft pads of her fingers. As a doctor, a surgeon, Phil had great hands, and he handled her breasts as if they were something precious, squeezing them gently as his fingers worked their way to her hard nipples. It felt so good when he made love to them. When he touched her, the sensation ran all the way down her body, to between her legs.

Imagining that her hands were his, she rubbed her breasts and sighed softly. It was easy to remember their wild lovemaking, the way he'd assume control of her body. She loved it when he circled her nipples with his tongue. The sensation of a man suckling at the hard tips could make her climax.

Almost panting from the memories playing across her mind's screen, Melanie's hands traced over her flat belly, her hands sneaking between her legs until her fingers were stroking hard against the crotch of her shorts. She was so wet that the material slipped between her lips and rubbed against her clit.

Memories drifted in and out of her mind as she

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touched herself, whispering silken promises, and her body started to relax. Phil had often told her that she was unbelievably sensual and when he said it his eyes would light up with passion, revealing to her how much he enjoyed that side of her personality. It was an aspect she'd never suspected existed inside her until she'd met him, something she'd shared with him and him alone. It was as though her love for her husband gave her the freedom and confidence to show him all the gifts of womanhood.

Lost in her fantasies, she didn't hear the door downstairs open, the footsteps coming up the stairs, or the bedroom door swing open. A man's voice sounded behind her.

## Chapter Two

“Well, isn’t this a lovely sight? It does a man’s heart good to come home and find his wife getting herself ready for him.”

As busted as a kid caught with her hands in the cookie jar, Melanie came out of her dream and whirled around. Her body trembled, drenched in sweat. Heat blazed in her cheeks. She quickly tugged his shirt over her bare breasts, upset with herself for being caught in a moment of self-betrayal. His presence, coming so totally unexpected on the heels of her erotic interlude, was almost too much for her brain to cope with logically.

“Ph-Phil,” she stammered. “You weren’t supposed to be here till five.” She’d been nervous about seeing him today. She tried to tell herself that it was ridiculous that she should be put in such a tizzy over such a small thing as having him come by to pick up the rest of his belongings, but she was. Since he’d called this morning, the butterflies wouldn’t stop fluttering in her stomach. Seeing him now, though, butterflies of another kind took flight...and they weren’t in her belly.

Giving her a guilty smile, he shrugged, sliding a careless hand through his tousled hair. “It’s Friday. Took off early. Good thing I did. Looks like you could use a hand there.”

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Did he mean the packing...Or...?

"Ah, no, silly," she said, trying to gather her composure and failing. "I was just gathering up the last of your things."

Twirling his stylish sunglasses by an earpiece, he glanced quickly around the room. "You've been busy."

Breath catching in her throat, she nodded. "I changed a few things around," she answered tentatively, almost fearing his displeasure. In a burst of energy, she'd recently redecorated the entire bedroom, painting all the walls eggshell white and accenting it with a feminine shade of rose blush for the curtains, bedspread and throw rugs. She could see by his sour expression that he didn't like it.

"Things have changed since you started packing me up and moving me out," he commented, walking around the room as though inspecting her handiwork.

Melanie tensed and bit down hard on her bottom lip. Something in his voice made her feel two inches tall. How was it he still managed to make her believe she had to ask permission for everything she did? She supposed it was because he'd always been the boss, made the major decisions. Only in sexual matters had she dared to defy him, and even then she'd felt guilty for not giving him what he desired.

She tried to clear her mind, think calmly and logically. *He's cheated on me time and time again because I didn't give in*, she reminded herself. *Am I supposed to cave in to keep him?* A hard decision. Which was more important—her marriage, or her

dignity, and self-respect? She wasn't sure she could answer it.. All she felt right now was stupid and useless. She hated the weakness she'd shown when he left; continually driving around his office and new apartment like a psycho stalker, leaving one message after another with his secretary with yet another lame excuse that she needed to talk to him about the details of the separation. And just as she'd never had the nerve to stop and go into either place to talk to him face to face, he'd never returned her calls.

Her throat tightened in response, pain welling up inside her. "You're the one who decided to do that," she reminded through gritted teeth.

"Maybe I shouldn't have been so quick to go." He stopped and looked at her knowingly, his eyes tracking over her body, taking in her bead-hard nipples, her flat stomach, long legs. Desire sparked in his brown eyes. "Mmm. You look good enough to eat today, Mel."

His frank comments caught her off-guard, reminding her that he had walked in on her in a state of acute physical arousal. Even though she was somewhat dressed, she felt as though she were standing stark naked before him. Her heart leapt to her throat, nearly choking her. He had a way of wheedling people, twisting things around to get what he wanted. He never hesitated to use his looks, his talent, and his intelligence to his advantage. Most people did. That was human nature. And the way he was looking at her meant that one thing, and one thing alone was on his mind.

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"Don't start, Phil," she mumbled. The tension was almost a physical barrier between them. Her eyes burned from the strain of suppressing her tears. Every breath she took reinforced her emotional and physical awareness of him. She could actually feel her own yearning need for him deep within her pussy. Her breasts suddenly felt heavy and tender. She wanted to lean against him, wrap herself around him.

He ignored her. Tossing his sunglasses on the bed, he came to her in a few quick steps, hands capturing her shoulders. Before she could stop him, he kissed the curve of her jaw, near her ear, moving his lips softly along her cheek until their mouths met. Their kiss only lasted a moment before she pulled away, looking at him with a mixture of suspicion and longing.

Her frown deepened as panic engulfed her. Now that he had touched her, her body longed for contact with his. She was lost, helpless to control her responses to him.

"Stop it," she said as she crossed her arms over her chest, desperate to change the subject while she still had some control over it. "What you saw—"

He slid his fingers into her hair, and she flinched and trembled as his thumb brushed the flushed heat of her cheek, touched the corner of her mouth. "I saw a woman just dying for a little relief."

Phil's hands left her body, and she wondered briefly what he was intended to do. And then he slapped her.

Melanie screamed out in pain. What happened

next was a haze of pain, mingled with the pain of betrayal.

Her husband had raped her.

When Phil zipped his slacks and walked away, Melanie's mind stopped working. As she slid down the wall and fell face forward into the carpet in a limp heap, spatters of red, white and black exploded like fireworks behind her eyes. Feeling as though she was drowning in a murky pool, she realized the husband she'd so dearly loved, the husband who had cheated on her, was now no more than a ferocious stranger. The brutality of his actions made her sick.

Shaken, feeling as though she would vomit, tears pricked at her eyes. Her whole mind and soul ached with acute resentment, her heart filling with hate. Deep within her psyche, something sounded. Her initial shock was fading, but what was left in its place was even worse, a sick kind of anxiety, coupled with the pain and something more, something she dared not analyze.

Hatred. Distrust. Disgust.

Her fingers curled into angry claws. She'd been a fool, and now she was paying for it.



## Chapter Three

“So that’s it?” Angela asked between spoonfuls of cottage cheese and pineapple. “You’re divorced?”

Melanie speared a bite of her salad with her fork and nodded. “Yep. Eighteen years of marriage down the drain. We signed the final paperwork this morning. It’s over.”

“And Phil agreed to the settlement?”

Melanie swallowed and took a sip of her white wine. She didn’t usually drink alcohol this early in the day, but she was still tense from this morning’s meeting in the judge’s chambers with Phil and his attorney, and she needed to relax.

“I wouldn’t say he agreed,” she said lightly. “I’d just say he really had no choice.”

Angela took a sip of her own gin and tonic. Unlike Melanie, she was used to drinking in the afternoons. For her, the cocktail hour began when the country club opened at eleven.

“Would you have really pressed sexual assault charges against him?”

Appetite suddenly gone, Melanie put down her fork and wiped her mouth with her napkin. As she lowered it, she noticed her lipstick had left a crimson smear across the pristine white linen. The color reminded her of blood. It wasn’t her normal shade, but since the day Phil had attacked her, she’d taken

to wearing the scarlet hue, as a symbol of the raging hate she felt for him in her heart. That was how she felt inside, all smeared, stained. Soiled. She hated the way he had taken the love once existing between them and perverted it, made it something ugly and hurtful. Physically, she would recover. Mentally, she still had a lot of healing to do.

"You bet your ass I would have," she said. The words sounded harsh and bitter even to her own ears. She didn't like that. She didn't want to be an antagonistic shrew.

"Then you got it all?"

Melanie shrugged. "Got it all? I don't know if I have anything useful at all."

Angela's green eyes widened. She twisted a piece of her bleached blonde hair around a finger. "Oh, come on, honey. Tell me all about the settlement again." She giggled. "Hearing about it makes me shiver."

"I've told you ten times already." Melanie picked up her wine, emptied the glass then motioned to the waiter for a refill. "How many times do you need to hear?"

Angela laughed. "Ten more times, honey. I've love it when a man gets the shaft. Tell me again how he yelled at your attorney he was being more than fair."

Watching the sparkling liquid swirl into the glass as the waiter poured, she remembered the look on Phil's face as he'd signed the last of the papers. He'd been seething, barely able to maintain his civility in

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front of the judge. Not only had she gotten the house and her car, she'd walked away with more than half of the precious stock portfolio he'd been carefully building—worth almost two million dollars.

She hadn't known about it, as she never asked about the finances and his more than frugal handling of money. They'd lived well, but he made every decision regarding major purchases and controlled her allowance with an iron fist. She'd known he'd come into some insurance money when his parents died, but she didn't know any exact figures. Apparently, he'd taken it and invested it, with the intention of constructing himself a tidy little nest egg. And until he'd abused her, she'd been willing to settle for selling off the assets she knew about, taking her half and cutting her losses.

But he'd blown her good will out of the water when he fucked her up the ass and called her a bitch. Being raped—and in her mind, he had raped her—had made her a hard and cruel woman these last few months. If he hadn't known what a bitch was before these proceedings, he certainly did now. Forget about trying to be civil and decent and mature. She'd hired the best divorce attorney in Albuquerque and sent him after Phil's jugular. Simply, she wanted to see the bastard bleed. In a way, it was sad the way people drifted apart. And it was frightening how easily love could turn to hate. Now that it was said and done, she saw every flaw her ex-husband had. In retrospect, she could think of nothing positive.

There was something wet on her face. She

touched it with a hand and discovered she was on the verge of crying again. This simply would not do. She was supposed to be a mature woman, in control of the emotions that should have stopped hurting her months ago. It was time to abandon the past. She couldn't let herself keep dwelling on a man who'd abandoned and betrayed her.

"What can you call *fair* when a man screws you like Phil did me?" she snapped, daubing at her face with a napkin. "Sure, I got some damned possessions, but what does that really mean?"

Angela wisely ignored Melanie's angry outburst. "That you'll never have to work again?"

"It means I doubt I'll ever get my trust back. Right now I hate men. I think they're all bastards." Melanie drank down half her glass, liking the way the wine tasted as it trickled down her throat and warmed her belly. Though she was still far from relaxed, the alcohol was loosening her tongue—and it was also bringing out the worst of her mood.

Angela pushed her fruit salad aside and settled her gin and tonic in front of her—her third since their lunch began. With absurdly long, hot pink, faux-diamond-encrusted fingernails, she fished out a piece of ice.

"Come into the real world, Mel," she chided. "All men are bastards. You've just never learned because you've been married to—and with—one man for almost twenty years. You're out on your own now, and you're about to learn some hard lessons."

Melanie arched a cynical eyebrow. "Such as?"

Angela propped an elbow on the table and held up her index finger. “One—that all the good guys are married or gay.” She held up a second finger. “Two—men will fuck you, lie to you, and make you feel it’s your fault every time. I know, honey. I’ve been through four.”

Melanie regarded her friend of ten years over the rim of her glass. Angela Sloane was by no means a beautiful woman, but she had a good personality and was loads of fun..

However, her green eyes sparkled, and she’d an absolutely winning smile. Between the cleavage and her sexual abilities, she never failed to have a husband or boyfriend, sometimes both at the same time. Angela Sloane had made a career out of alimony, living and spending lavishly. She was currently sporting a huge pink diamond engagement ring so gaudy Elizabeth Taylor would blush with embarrassment. No doubt, she would probably exceed the number of husbands the actress had taken, given time and opportunity.

“So what can a girl do?” she inquired.

“Use them back, honey,” Angela advised. “Men and women are so different there’s no way on God’s green earth they can ever get along. The only real reason we come together is for breeding purposes. If it weren’t for sex, I think men and women would stay far away from each other.”

The waiter interrupted their talk briefly, taking away their mostly untouched plates and refilling their beverages. Melanie couldn’t fail to notice he was

good-looking, cute the way men around twenty-one or twenty-two always were. He was buff and looked like he could fuck all night and all day. She gave him a look-over but showed no interest. Angela practically drooled, dropping hints and innuendoes until the poor fellow walked away blushing.

"Looks like you'd like a piece," Melanie said, making a quick squeezing motion with both hands as Angela checked out the waiter's tight butt.

Angela sipped her gin. "Yeah, I surely would. But I'm trying to be faithful to Rich."

"At least until the pre-nup is signed," Melanie teased, glad to have steered the conversation away from her own angst and problems.

"No pre-nup," Angela announced happily. "I sucked him right out of that thought."

She blinked. "You what?"

"I sucked him right out of it," her friend repeated blithely.

Melanie's hand flew to her mouth. "You don't mean?"

Angela vigorously nodded her head. "Oh yeah. Put on my kneepads and went to work, honey. He'd better enjoy it now, too, 'cause after we're married that's the last time I suck his puny cock." She let out a deep, put-upon sigh. "After all this activity, I'll need a vacation." Her green eyes lit up at the idea. "Hey, not a half-bad idea. You could probably use one, too."

"A vacation?" Melanie echoed. "What's that?"

"Why not?" Angela prodded. "Don't you have some place you want to go?"

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Melanie had to laugh. “Well, I guess I’d like to go to Europe.”

“You guess? God, girl, boring! Isn’t there any place you’d like to go? I mean, just get into the car and drive? Where’s your sense of adventure?”

She drained her glass. “I guess my sense of adventure died years ago, you know?” Feeling the effects of the wine combined with the stresses of the last six months, an incredible sensation of exhaustion suddenly washed over her.

Leaning forward on her elbows, Melanie stared into her wine glass. *It’s as empty as I feel inside*, she thought. She gave it an idle thump with her thumb and forefinger, listening to its clear ringing tone. When had she started thinking in such a negative way? She didn’t remember any other time in her life when she’d been so depressed. She’d always believed she’d led a full and fulfilling life. While Phil was at work, she’d tried to keep herself occupied; keeping house, working out at the country club, planning dinners for their friends, participating in community services. She’d had her circle of friends.

Her brow wrinkled.

*Circle of friends?* Melanie questioned herself. Her eyes drifted around the table. The other chairs were empty. She’d invited four other women to join her for lunch. Only Angela had bothered to show up. The rest were ‘otherwise occupied’.

At least, she’d thought she had friends. Strangely, they weren’t around much anymore. All her girlfriends were married, now one-half of a couple. She was

single, half of...well, nothing. It suddenly occurred to her why no one called to chat any more, why the lunch dates had dwindled to nothing, why the invitations to events had ceased to come, why everyone's beauty appointments were now coincidentally different from her own.

*They're afraid I'm on the prowl.*

The realization hit her cold, but in her heart she knew it to be true. The ladies had circled the wagons around their men and left her standing alone on the outside. A single girl was the enemy, like a fox in the hen house.. She was a newly divorced woman, ink barely dry on her papers, financially independent. She couldn't have been more threatening in other women's eyes than if she'd stripped off her clothes and lay spread-eagled on the floor before their men.

*No wonder it's just me and Angela lunching today,* she thought. *I've been frozen out.* She wondered how long it would be before they asked her to resign her membership at the country club. That sounded like something those cliquish bitches would do.

Oddly, the idea did not bother her as much as she thought it would.

Considering getting smashingly drunk, Melanie ordered more wine from the passing waiter and tuned out Angela's voice. She suddenly didn't feel like gossiping or man bashing anymore.

All she felt was empty.



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## Chapter Four

It was after dark when Melanie returned home. Pulling into the driveway, she killed the lights and sat looking at the house, now hers alone. No illumination came from within, no sounds of a happy family bustling around. The house was empty, a shell. There was no one waiting for her. No one at all.

*How can I live here alone?* She thought, almost panicked. *It's too big for one person.*

Reluctantly opening the car door, she got out and walked up the sidewalk. The wine she'd consumed earlier had gone to her head, and she staggered a little, not exactly drunk but not entirely sober, either. Mostly she was tired. Exhausted, actually.

Her marriage to Phil had become an albatross around her neck, weighing on her soul like a heavy stone. It was a relief the divorce was over, a relief he was forever out of her life. Her emotions were raw, painful. She was still reeling from having the identity she'd had since the day she married stripped away from her. She was no longer Mrs. Phillip Brooks, wife of a successful doctor. She was now just plain old Melanie Brooks, wife of no man.

*I've been cast off like an old pair of pants,* she thought, fumbling with her keys to unlock the door. It swung inward on silent hinges, beckoning her into the dim foyer.

Flicking on the lights flooded the living room in brilliant illumination. She winced against the brightness. Pain stabbed through the front of her skull, the beginnings of a tension headache combined with too much wine.

The house was immaculate, elegantly furnished; every piece of *object d'art* ever so carefully arranged to be shown to its best effect. She's spent years decorating this house, making sure nothing offended Phillip and his picky eye. Living in New Mexico, the one thing they had not wanted to do was go for the traditional southwest Spanish-Indian style themes. It was too common and tacky, more prevalent around Santa Fe. Instead they had chosen sleek and modern—leather furniture, glass tables, cut crystal. Such expensive décor excluded children or pets.

With a jolt, Melanie realized how artificial everything looked. Instead of a home, the place looked like a display you would see in a magazine. It was a showroom, not a place people lived. It wasn't the kind of room you could lounge in; kick back, put your feet up on the coffee table, and watch television. It was the kind of room where classical music played softly in the background, where people sat around very prim and proper, sipping dry martinis and nibbling tiny tasteless canapés.

And she suddenly hated it. Hated everything about the life she'd spent eighteen years building.

Tossing her purse onto the couch, she dropped down beside it. Tears stung in her eyes. She blinked, not wanting to let them fall. She was so tired of

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crying, of spending her nights alone with a bottle of wine and a box of tissues. She felt sick inside, her nervous system so knotted and cramped she feared she would never be able to relax again. She was filled with self-loathing, unable to comprehend why she still felt so lost, so alone. All of a sudden, she felt too battered emotionally to even think about the divorce anymore. All she wanted to do was hide away from the world. If there were a way to hide herself from herself, she would have chosen the option.

“What are you crying over?” she asked aloud, not caring there was no one around to hear her words. “You walked away the winner, Mel. Took half of everything Phil had. This is all yours now.”

But she no longer wanted it, no longer felt vindicated she’d gone after her husband with the vengeance of a woman scorned. Of course she’d known Phil Brooks had a wandering eye, had cheated on her more than once. But she’d managed to hold her head high, keep her chin firm, knowing his little affairs would eventually end, that after he dallied around Phil would inevitably come home to her. He always had before.

And then came Tammi.

Like Pygmalion sculpting his Galatea, Phil had reconstructed Tammi, taking a plain, unattractive girl and giving her the beauty God had failed to finish. He’d straightened her crooked nose, put a cleft in her chin, installed a C-cup rack of tits, and lipoed a little baby fat out of her stomach and thighs. Medical science and Phil’s talent to manipulate human flesh

had made Tammi Hankins a beautiful woman. Her parents had happily footed the bill, blissfully unaware the doctor doing the work was also playing Svengali with his ex-patient.

Laying her head back on the cushions, Melanie's brow wrinkled in thought. Why, after all the women he'd cheated on her with, had Phil chosen this last dalliance of his to leave her for? She never stormed, threw jealous fits, or played the prefect shrew. Quite the opposite—she'd been a doormat.

During the many nights she'd spent alone, Melanie had often thought of taking a lover herself. Something always stopped her. She was the kind of woman who took her vows of marriage seriously. She'd promised to be faithful, for better or worse, richer or poorer.

*I let Phil stifle me, then smother me*, she thought, wiping away the tears escaping down her cheeks. He was good-looking, educated, urbane. She, on the other hand, was always the little brown wren. She knew other women looked at her, wondering how he could have possibly been attracted to such a dud. God knew she tried to keep herself together. But face it, Tammi was twenty-one. She was thirty-seven. Youth won every time.

Rising, she walked upstairs, heading to her bedroom. There, she stripped off her clothes and headed for the shower. The warm water would help soothe her shattered nerves. She looked at herself in the mirror and flinched at the image it flung back at her. She looked, she decided in despair, exactly like what she was. A sad, lost woman. She shook her head,

trying to chase away the misery coiling through her guts.

“Thank God I got away from Phil,” she remarked, adjusting the water until it was just the right temperature. She stepped under the showerhead, enjoying the stinging, massaging spray as it hit her back and shoulders. Wetting her hair, she poured a dollop of shampoo into her hand and set to giving her scalp a good scrub. Rinsing away the bubbles, she picked up a bar of her favorite scented soap and began to lather up her body. Finishing her wash, she stepped out of the shower and wrapped a thick fluffy towel around her naked body and another around her wet hair.

Drifting into the bedroom, she sat down on the edge of the bed and toweled her hair dry. Not for the first time, she began to wonder what it would be like to make love to another man. Listening to friends like Angela swap stories had made her ears burn and her cheeks redden. She couldn’t imagine being so casual about sex, treating it as if it were nothing more than another manicure. She was curious, though.

At this point, she couldn’t imagine the answer because she simply didn’t know.

Getting off the bed, she slipped out of the towel and into a comfy T-shirt and panties. She hated being constrained when she slept, and often slipped out of the shirt during the night. The feel of cool cotton sheets against her warm skin was a sensual one.

Climbing into the king-sized bed and pulling the comforter over her body, she was again struck by how

large the house was for one person. She really didn't need four bedrooms. Even though she'd gotten the house clear, it was still going to be expensive to maintain. If she were careful with her settlement and invested it wisely, she would never have to work. Selling the house, banking the money, and finding herself a smaller place might be the wisest thing to do. Did she really want to stay in a place where she'd known so much unhappiness? What would be the point?

"So," she said aloud. "I'm divorced, rich, and childless. What to do?"

The thought dismayed her.

She had nothing *to* do. In searching her brain, she found that there wasn't one single reason why she should get up in the morning. The years she'd spent decorating, hanging out at the spas, gossiping, and lunching at the country club were all gone, leaving nothing but an empty void in her soul. God, she'd believed she had a life. In reality she had nothing, using those superficial activities to fill the endless hours.

*Maybe it is time to get away, she mused, I should pack my bags, go somewhere new, see something different.*

Getting out of the city didn't seem like a bad idea at all.

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## Chapter Five

The next morning, Melanie woke up late, slightly hung over, but none the worse for wear. Groping her way to the bathroom, she managed to get herself showered, teeth brushed, and hair combed with relatively little pain, save for a nagging headache. Popping a couple of aspirin, she went downstairs and made herself a cup of coffee. Though not usually a breakfast eater, she thought she would feel better if she'd a little something in her stomach. Knowing she needed to watch her weight, she made two slices of whole-wheat toast with a tiny dollop of butter—just for taste. Then, wondering why she was watching her figure, she slathered on more butter and added a thick layer of cherry preserves. A long time since she'd indulged her sweet tooth.

Getting the morning paper, she sat down at the table to eat. Munching her toast, she glanced over the features, read the comics, and then turned to the lifestyle and travel section. The idea of taking a vacation was still very much in the forefront of her brain. Trouble was, she didn't know where she'd want to go. She and Phil had always vacationed together, and he'd always chosen the destinations, planning their itinerary down to the minute. They did what he wanted to do, saw what he wanted to see. When it came to travel, her passport was stamped many times

over. England, Germany, France, Belgium, Holland, Italy, Spain, Egypt, Ireland... They'd traveled all over the world.

Hardly in the mood to trot around the world on her own just yet, she immediately vetoed the idea of going out of the country. What about other parts of her own country? There were plenty of sights the good old US of A had to offer. And what about her home state?

A smile lit up her features as she licked the last of the preserves from her fingers.

Carlsbad Caverns. She'd always wanted to visit them, but Phil found the idea of underground caves and masses of bats boring. Carlsbad wasn't very far away, only a couple of hundred miles. She could make a weekend of it.

Excited by the idea, she took her cup of coffee into the den. Phil had taken the big desktop, but she still had her laptop, though she rarely used it. Fetching it from the closet, she set it up, plugged it in, and waited for the programs to load. Ten minutes later, she was browsing the Internet, doing a search for information. Jotting down notes on a yellow pad because Phil had also taken the printer, she looked over the information she'd gathered. The Caverns were open seven days a week, excluding Christmas.

The commuter airline out of Albuquerque offered the option to fly. Small planes scared the bejesus out of her. The bus was another option, but she wasn't fond of it, either. She just wasn't willing to let the busing system do the driving, having to endure stop



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after stop, strange stations, and too many people. Driving seemed the best option. She could make the drive in a day, rent a hotel room, see the sights, shop and explore, spend another night, and be back by Sunday evening.

“Sounds like a plan to me,” she said, copying down the directions off an Internet map site. They were fairly simple. Even an idiot like her couldn’t get lost if she followed the signs.

Finishing her coffee, she glanced up at the clock. It was ten after eleven in the morning. If she hurried to pack, she could leave by noon and be in Carlsbad by around seven in the evening. That would give her time to find a place to stay and relax for the rest of the evening.

Feeling very much the take-charge woman, Melanie hurried into the kitchen to clean up her breakfast mess. Next, she headed upstairs to pack. Dragging out an overnight bag, she made some quick choices she thought suitable for the late summer season. It was nearing the end of August, and the weather was broiling hot, in the high nineties, sometimes sending the mercury into the low hundreds. She picked out a few cute outfits, low-heeled sandals for walking, other toiletries she’d need for an overnight trip.

Bag packed, she dressed herself just as carefully, choosing a nice skirt and matching blouse. She put her hair up in a flirty style, curling a few loose strands of her blonde hair around her neck for a sexy effect. She’d just had her long mane cut and frosted with

### Biker Chic

lighter streaks, her manicure and pedicure freshened with new coats of nail polish. Unlike Angela's dragon-lady nails, she preferred an active length French style. With her tanned skin and perfect white teeth, she believed she looked every bit the California blonde. She applied her makeup with more care than normal, putting on her full face. If she was going out, she was going to be seen looking her best.

It was well past one in the afternoon when Melanie finally made it outside to the car. She'd double checked the doors and windows and set the burglar alarm. Cell phone tucked into her purse, bag in hand, she was finally ready to go.

*I'm going to have fun*, she told herself. *I'm going to get out and do something on my own.*

She was more than a little bit anxious. She'd never done anything wild or spontaneous in her life, much less gone off on her own. This would literally be her first trip alone as a grown woman.

She slid behind the wheel of her car, a 2006 convertible. The day was already burning hot, so she put up the roof and cranked up the air conditioner. There was no way she was going to broil in the sun. Sun damage was the fastest way to wrinkles. Her own tan was faux, done in a salon.

Starting the engine, she pulled out of the driveway. It was two hundred and seventy-seven miles to Carlsbad.. Following directions, she expertly wove her way through the insane traffic..

*Couldn't be simpler*, she thought, merging into a busy lane. Exhilarated by the wide-open spaces in

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front of her, she slid a CD into the player and cranked up the tunes. No staid classical music today. It was going to be rock and roll all the way!

## Chapter Six

Melanie reached Cline's Corners without any problems. Pulling into a gas station, she refilled the car's tank, hit the ladies' room, stocked up on snacks and drinks and prepared for the longest part of the drive, which would take her through Roswell and on to Carlsbad.

Through the long stretch of highway, towns were few and far in between, the dead desert lands of New Mexico going as far as the eye could see. In this part of the Land of Enchantment, there wasn't much to see except the flat brown plains and the long black stretches of asphalt crawling across the land the way the desert rattlers slithered across the arid, sun-baked earth. The desert stretched as far as the eye could see and beyond.

Because the rainfall had been non-existent for the year, there was little greenery to be found. Even the weeds had been singed to the color of straw. Whoever had dubbed the state the Land of Enchantment must have been high on peyote. It was more like the land of disenchantment. The best sight to be seen in New Mexico was waving goodbye as you left it.

Not for the first time did Melanie think about leaving the state entirely. Indeed, she'd been born in Texas.. But where would she go? Her parents were deceased. She did have miscellaneous aunts and

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uncles and cousins scattered around the state, but those were people she hardly knew, much less cared about. She wouldn't know any of them if they were to walk up and slap her.

*That's the way the cards fell for me. No family. No kids.*

And, it seemed, no close friends.

It occurred to her she'd been living her life as though under a bell jar, breathing the rarified air that came with being the extension of a successful man. Life with Phil had spoiled her. As his practice had taken off, she'd come to believe that his success was also hers, that his social standing was hers, too. How wrong she was. She'd only been privileged as long as he allowed her to be.

*I need to focus on what I can do, not what I can't. I can go to school or to work. Whatever I want. The future is wide open for me, if only I let it be.*

Uncomfortably she pushed away the thought. What was the matter with her? Didn't she have far more important things to do than dwell on the past? Her marriage had broken up, for heaven's sake. Hardly a catastrophe. Sure, there has been elation, grief, pain,. That was part of life. She could hardly expect to be spared. All in all, she seemed to have emerged reasonably intact.

Not wanting to think anymore, she cranked up her music and concentrated on the wide-open road. Drive. That's all she wanted to do, just drive and never have to come to the end of the journey.

The trouble began after passing through Ramon, a

little blink in the road. First, she accidentally took the wrong exit and ended up going down a long stretch of highway, obviously leading nowhere fast. The farther she drove, the more her instincts began to tell her she was lost. Just when she'd decided she should turn around and go back to a point she recognized, the gods of heat and car trouble struck.

First, the air conditioner was blowing hotter instead of cooler. By time she thought to kill the AC and sweat out the desert heat, her precious, brand-damned-new car began to overheat.

The first time the car lurched she thought for sure it was running out of gas. But a look at the fuel gauge said that wasn't so. The problem lay elsewhere, in the TEMP light lit up like a Christmas tree in December. A minute later the car pitched alarmingly. By the time she'd managed to maneuver the car to the side of the highway, the engine had spluttered one final time, then died.

She cursed, getting out the car and hurrying around to the front. Steam poured out from under the hood. "What the hell happened?" One minute she'd been driving down the road at a fair clip, the next she was standing on the side of an empty highway, looking helplessly at her car.

Hoping to find help, she turned and looked in every direction. Of course, there was none.. She was out in the middle of the desert where cars were few and far between. She was completely and utterly alone. What's more, she knew zip about cars and barely knew how to change a tire. As she stood and

looked at her car, she could feel the sun beating down on her unprotected head, sticky sweat beading on her skin and running down between her breasts. The heat had gone way past one hundred degrees, and if she didn't get out of it soon, she'd have a case of sunstroke to contend with. A little laugh broke from her lips.

"Well, naturally this is something that would happen to me."

She wasn't worried, though. She had her cell phone. She'd call Triple A and wait for them to send a tow truck.. Getting back in the car, she dug her membership information out of the glove compartment and her cell out of her purse. Flipping open the phone, she quickly dialed the 800 number and pressed it to her ear. Instead of the friendly sound of a ringing phone, all she heard was silence. Lowering the phone, she looked at the digital display.

*No Signal..*

"Shit, shit, shit," she cursed in quick succession. Thinking she would get a signal if she got out of the car, she wiggled her butt out of the seat and stood up, pressing the button.

Nothing.

The damned phone was as dead as her car.

"Well," she muttered. "Looks like I'm going to have to depend on the kindness of passing strangers."

It didn't look like she would have long to wait. A pickup came roaring up the road at a rapid rate of speed. Catching sight of it, Melanie put up her hand and waved.

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The driver waved back. But didn't stop.

Melanie lowered her hand. "Asshole." Why hadn't he stopped? Then it occurred to her. She didn't have any flashers on or her hood up. He probably thought she was giving a friendly wave.

To remedy the situation, she put up her hood. There, that should get her some help.

Two more cars roared by. Neither stopped.

"What the fuck? Do I look like a serial killer or something?" Her frustration was building. Was it just her imagination or were the drivers of New Mexico the unfriendliest people on earth? "Can't they see I am *stuck* here all by myself?"

She shook her head. Apparently, they couldn't.

All by herself on this hot stretch of barren highway, she was beginning to feel like the last person on earth. Moreover, she'd finished the last of her bottled water, and now, she needed to pee.

She looked around. Since she was alone, she didn't see the harm of taking a little outdoor piss. Grabbing a napkin to wipe her butt with, she hurried around to the far side of her car, lifted her skirt, lowered her panties, and hunkered down.

"If anyone comes by," she muttered, "they won't see my rear hanging.."

She was almost finished with her libations when she heard the roar of the engines and saw them pass, probably two-dozen bikers riding by on their motorcycles, smiling and waving at her—and all getting a great view of her bare ass. Both sets of cheeks burning, she scrambled to her feet, hurriedly



tugging her skirt down around her legs as a couple of the bikers pulled over.

Stiffening in fear, heart beginning to hammer in her chest, Melanie quickly sized up the two men. Immediately she could tell these weren't weekend road warriors, men who worked all week and took to the highways come Friday. These were hardcore bikers. The bikes they rode weren't machines usually garaged and kept beautifully polished. These were bikes well-ridden, dinged and dented, saddle bags packed with the supplies needed for living and literally sleeping on the road.

Both the men were rough and scary looking, dressed identically in heavy black boots, faded jeans, tee-shirts with the sleeves cut out. Both were heavily tattooed, long-haired, bearded. Their skin was deeply tanned, almost leather-like from all the hours they'd spent riding in the sun. They looked like the kind of men who would beat their grandmothers and rob convenience stores.

Though she was a fair-sized woman and had taken a few self-defense classes, Melanie knew she wouldn't have a chance if these guys decided to get tough with her. They would eat her up and spit her out. An image flashed through her mind, of herself lying dead under the desert sun, throat slashed, jewelry and credit cards riding off with these two tough thugs.

Where the hell is the highway patrol when you need it?

She watched warily as the men sauntered over to the car.

“Looks like you got a problem,” one said. Demonic-looking faces glared up from both his arms. He was a big bear of a man, sporting a pair of enormous shoulders, and an even larger beer belly. His greasy black hair was caught up in a ponytail halfway down his back. He looked like he hadn’t bathed in at least a year.

“I do,” she said, giving a timid smile. Might as well be friendly. There was literally nothing else she could do. Two more cars passed, neither stopped, the drivers probably figuring she had enough help.

The second man bent over the engine, lifting his dark sunglasses so he could examine it closer. His eyes were gunmetal gray, flinty and hard, but also intelligent. He had to be at least six feet tall. Under his scraggly beard he appeared to be handsome in a rugged kind of way. Unlike his buddy, he was lithe and lean; tight jeans hugging his ass like a second skin, his heavy metal T-shirt practically undulating over his flat abdomen and broad shoulders as he moved.

He was sharply sculptured, shockingly masculine in every way. He oozed with a potent, almost unnerving aura of male sexuality. Everything about him seemed overtly sexual, even his arms, which were heavily inked, one forearm hugged by a beautiful naked woman in a very suggestive pose. His sun-bleached blond hair was shoulder length, flowing free in the wind winnowing across the dusty desert plain. Crudely put, he was built like a brick shithouse and looked like he could fuck all night long.

Melanie found the tattoo obscene but also

strangely erotic. She was suddenly stunned. Something about the way he moved set the hair at the nape of her neck prickling, her stomach fluttering. It wasn't revulsion, or fright. It was...attraction. She just couldn't help it. She wouldn't mind being that woman on his arm, her body wrapped around his.

*Nice package*, she thought, eyeing his crotch. In a moment of unbidden fantasy, she imagined him pulling her close, his hands moving up and down her back and the other in her hair. Her breasts would press against his chest, and her body would rub against his as he slowly moved his hands down to her ass, kneading her cheeks. Leaning down, he'd press his lips lightly against hers, taste her, his fingers weaving through her hair. Her breathing became a little faster as she imagined how his cock would feel pressing against her, his lips pressed against her temple as his hands moved to her front to unbutton her blouse... She almost moaned aloud, wondering what it would feel like to have her pussy muscles clench his shaft.

Aware her daydream was going into forbidden territory, she blushed red clear to her roots. She felt a lump in her throat. Her stomach began to churn, and her legs felt weak. Her head spun from the heat, and her heart pounded so hard inside her chest she was sure he could hear it.

*What the hell am I thinking?* she thought wildly. *He's not my type..* He, too, looked like he didn't know the meaning of soap and water, yet here she was, wondering what it would be like to take him to

bed! She gulped, feeling both sick and shaky, like someone suffering from the aftermath of a nerve-shattering shock. She told herself she was being ridiculous. Still, she could not take her eyes off him. He was magnificent. Savage. A beast.

He had been poking around under the hood, and he finally came up with a length of frayed rubber. "Looks like she snapped a belt and overheated."

She shrugged. "That's bad, right?"

The guys laughed.

"Only bad if you don't have one to replace it," the blond said. He twisted off the radiator's cap, bent, and peered inside. "Damn, not a drop of water in this thing. Did you just take off across the desert without checking the fluids in your car first?"

She gave another helpless shrug. "I guess I just didn't think about it before I left." She nibbled her bottom lip. "It can be fixed, right?"

The fatter biker nodded. "Oh, yeah. Some water, a new belt, and you're back on the road. Probably just overheated."

She held out her cell. "Uh, my phone seems to be dead, too. Is there any way you guys could help me out?" She hated to ask, but right now she was at the mercy of the desert, a broken-down car and...these men.

The blond eyed her. "Sure, I'll give you a ride. That okay with you, Bill?"

Bill shrugged. "Whatever. I ain't going to stand out here in the sun all day. We got places to go, Jake. Hurry up."

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“Yeah.” To Melanie, “You coming?”

She quickly shook her head. “Ah, I don’t need a ride,” she said. “Maybe you could just call the police when you reach the next town. I can stay here with the car.”

“Be a long wait.”

She fanned a hand in front of her face, trying to cool herself off. God, but she was drenched in sweat. The sun was beginning to sink into the west, but the heat was hardly lessening. If anything it felt more intense, broiling. Her skin felt grimy, gritty.. Her makeup had practically melted off her face, and her clothes were clinging to her body like a second skin. All she wanted to do was strip everything off and take an ice-cold shower. “I don’t mind.”

Both guys shrugged. “Suit yourself.”

His good deed done, the one called Bill ambled back to his motorcycle, swung a leg over and kick-started the engine. The old machine roared to life. “Catch up down the road,” he shouted, sending dust and gravel scattering when he pulled out.

Jake shook his head then turned to her. “Sorry. He isn’t very friendly.”

A bit relieved her throat had thus far not been slit, Melanie gave a weak grin. “Too tell you the truth, he didn’t look very friendly.”

“He’s ok.” He looked from her to the car, back to her. “You sure you want to stay here? I can give you a ride to the next town.”

She wavered. “Well, I hate to leave the car here...”

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He laughed. "It ain't going nowhere, lady. I guarantee it will still be here when you get back." He shrugged. "And if it's not, you got insurance, right?"

She nodded. "I guess so." She eyed the huge motorcycle. "But I've never ridden on a motorcycle before."

"Then you're in for a treat. Let's go."

A little bit apprehensive about her decision to accompany this strange man, Melanie reluctantly grabbed her purse and locked the car. She'd obviously have to leave her luggage. There was no place to put it on the motorcycle. She thought about waiting for another ride to come along then vetoed the idea. Cars were few and far between out here. She might have to wait for hours for someone to stop. At least if he took her to a town, she could use the phone, get a room, and wait for the car to be towed in and repaired.

"That thing is *safe*?" she asked, small beads of sweat rolling over her skin.

Jake straddled the bike and sat rubbing his chin. "It is if you don't wreck it. Got a scar under my chin from rolling one down the highway."

"Oh, Jesus," she breathed.

He half turned in his seat and lifted the helmet perched across the rear passenger support bar. "Here. Wear this."

She eyed the helmet. "Aren't you supposed to be wearing it?"

He grunted. "No helmet law in New Mexico."

"Aren't you afraid you'll crack your skull?"

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He shrugged. "No loss if it happened."

She hefted the heavy helmet he handed over. "It'll ruin my hair."

"The wind isn't exactly going to fix it," he observed sardonically. "Besides, it'll help keep the bugs out of your teeth."

"Bugs in my teeth?" She gasped, stepping back. "Yuck."

He rolled his eyes. "Just put it on."

Hair limp from the heat and sweat anyway, Melanie grudgingly put on the helmet and tucked the strap under her chin. It was a little big, but it would suffice. She could only imagine what a person's head would look like contacting with the asphalt while going sixty miles an hour. The fact he'd admitted wrecking one didn't exactly bolster her confidence.

"Guess this makes me a biker chick now."

Jake eyed her from head to foot, taking in her prim blouse, skirt, and high-heeled sandals. She could feel him looking at her, and immediately she started to tense, suddenly self-conscious.

"Biker *chic*, maybe. Biker chick, hardly. You're so far from biker material it almost hurts my eyes to look at you. Definitely not the road-hog type. What the hell you doing out in the desert in an expensive convertible anyway? There's no cotillions out here."

She bit down on her bottom lip to try and keep herself from screaming. It didn't work. "I got lost! It's easy to do in this godforsaken nowhere land," she snapped, trying to pull the helmet off. "And forget going with you, you big stinking lout. I'll wait for

another ride.”

He put out a hand, catching her wrist. “Hey, settle down, lady. I was just kidding.”

“You’re making fun of me,” she sulked, too acutely aware of his skin contacting with hers. A shiver ran up her spine, though she was far from cold.

“Yeah? Well you called me a lout, so we’re even. You coming or not? I’m not going to wait all goddamn day for you to decide.”

“Yes, okay,” she conceded. “What do I do now?”

For an answer, he flicked out the kick-start with one booted foot then came down on it hard to bring the big motorcycle to life.

“Get on and hold on,” he shouted over the deafening din. “Keep your legs clear of the pipes. They’ll burn.”

“Oh, great,” she muttered. Wearing a skirt, there was no graceful way to climb onto a motorcycle. To get on, she’d to hike it up around her hips, showing quite a bit of leg. Hand on his shoulder, she clambered onto the back..

Settled onto the narrow leather seat, legs splayed open, her crotch almost directly connected with his ass. She was wedged against him far too close for comfort, but the wave of heat suffusing her body told its own betraying story, the sudden pulse of desire invading all the way to her clit. Immediately her tension started to grow, a strange sexual fierceness filling her as sure as the moist heat spreading between her legs. The massive machine between her legs vibrated with an intensity that almost caused her



to climax. It shocked her to feel this heady, almost wanton pleasure, just straddling an idling motorcycle. It was like playing with a thousand-cc vibrator.

Jake guided her arms around his waist. His casual touch redirected her attention. She was gut-wrenchingly conscious of the power of the muscles beneath his skin, more than aching aware of his body, his sheer maleness, in a way she'd never before been aware of a man's physical masculinity. She felt positively wicked, never having been this close to a strange man in her life. She was actually trembling from her physical reaction his very nearness.

"Hang on!" Gunning the engine, he simultaneously released the clutch and gave it gas as he shifted down into first gear. In one smooth motion, the motorcycle was on the road, skimming easily down the highway.

Body trembling, drenched with sweat, Melanie tensed at first, then let herself relax as she leaned into him. He smelled of heat, asphalt, and tangy sweat, the scents clinging to his clothes and skin and mingling with the musk of his unmistakable maleness. Receiving a new shocking charge of erotic awareness, she tightened her grip around his broad chest. A fine thrill pierced her heart. She could feel him grow tense at her touch; she could almost hear the blood hammering through his veins. His muscles were rock-solid under her hands. It was all she could do to restrain herself for letting her hand sneak lower toward his crotch.

She wanted to rip through those skintight jeans and go straight for his hard male flesh. Beneath her

Biker Chic

clothes her skin felt as though it were on fire. She could imagine his hands at her waist, his blond head bent over her body, lips pulling at a bare nipple. There was nothing more she wanted right now than the intimacy of his mouth against her own, his body pressed against hers, his erection pressing against her belly...

A soft sound of appreciation escaped her throat, thankfully muffled by the roar of the engine. *God, but I'd love to run my hands over his package and see what comes up.*

The very idea stunned her. But not half as much as thought of his rock-hard penis excited her. She knew all she'd have to do was reach down and touch him. Trouble was, she didn't know if she could handle what might happen next. A woman could get in trouble for playing the cock tease.

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## Chapter Seven

The dirty little town they pulled into didn't even have a sign posted to announce its name. Like a mirage in the distance, it suddenly appeared on the horizon of the flat, deserted land. Unlike a mirage, it had nothing beautiful to offer anyone passing through it—which was why people did exactly that—passed through it. It was a tiny town. Blink and you would miss it. So small there wasn't even a traffic light, the town boasted a little general store, a post office, a few gas stations, and other stores only locals would shop in. Most buildings had been shut down, broken windows boarded over. The only thing seemingly cultivated was weeds, wildflowers, and cactus, hardly a lovely sight. The long summer had been so dry even those were wilted and burned by the intense sunlight.

Jake pulled into a gas station. As he took care of fueling his hog, Melanie hopped off, ditched the helmet, and headed for the ladies room. Filling the sink with cool water, she splashed it on her face, washing off her makeup and the layers of road grime. She felt positively filthy. Her bare arms and legs were scorched red by the sun and wind. A few more hours out in the sun and she would have shriveled up like a raisin. There was no reason to try and re-fix her face. It was a lost cause. Her hair was almost as bad. After dunking her head in the water, she combed it back

and braided it into a neat simple style. It wasn't beautiful, but it would suffice.

That done, she gave the key back to the clerk and asked for a pay phone. A quick call to Triple-A would fix everything. Ten minutes later, tears of frustration pricked at her eyes, but she was too furious to cry.

"I can't believe Phil canceled my membership," she cursed, banging down the receiver. "Now what the hell do I do?" She pressed a shaking hand against her forehead. She wasn't used to dealing with these things. She didn't know how. Not for the first time, she realized just how dependent she'd been on her ex-husband. Phil had taken care of everything, part of his all-controlling nature to handle every detail of their lives. She never saw the bills, never worried about house, lawn or car maintenance. God, when had she become so helpless?

*Don't I know how to do anything?* And then it hit her. No, she really didn't. She'd been a daughter and then a wife all her life. First she'd had parents to do it for her then a husband. After all, a man was supposed to take care of those things...right?

*Wrong*, she thought. Instead of making her secure, it had made her weak, dependent and helpless. She didn't know how to do anything. *Well, then it's time to learn how to handle a mess. You got yourself into this, get yourself out.*

The sound of footsteps on gravel interrupted her thoughts. She turned around to see Jake walking up to her, two sodas in hand.

"Look like you could use something to drink." He

handed over the icy-cold soda.

Melanie gave him a wan but grateful smile. "Just what I need." She popped the tab and took a long drink.

"So, get some help with the car?"

She shook her head. "Not yet. I'm a little stymied since I am no longer a member of Triple-A."

"Oh." He took a drink of his own soda, quiet for a minute. "We passed a little garage a few blocks back. Odds are, these desert rats can tow your car in and do the work. You look like a lady who has a lot of cash. Should be no problem."

"Cash? As in hard money?" Again, Melanie had to shake her head. "I've only got credit cards, a few traveler's checks, and a few dollars in change. I've never really gotten into the habit of carrying more than ten dollars."

"You should learn to carry a fair amount of the green for emergencies. These little backwaters aren't really friendly to anything less than cold hard money."

"I've never had many emergencies," she admitted.

"Welcome to the real world, lady."

"Melanie."

"What?"

She cleared her throat and held out her hand, which seemed a little formal since she'd had her thighs wrapped around his hips for the better part of a hundred miles. "My name is Melanie Brooks."

"Jake Marrs." He took her hand, his grip firm, unyielding. His bear's paw practically swallowed hers.

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His hands were rough, callused, his fingernails corroded with dirt and grease. She couldn't help wondering how those hands of his would look cleaned up. For the first time since they met, he smiled, revealing a row of straight white teeth. "Well, Melanie," he continued. "Why don't we amble on over there to the garage and see if we can't find someone to fix your car?"

The walk was a short one, less than four blocks. The garage wasn't much, seeming to be nothing more than a tin shed, a little rickety and not nailed together too sturdily. All kinds of junked cars were parked around the garage, most of the parts rusted down and welded together by the intense desert heat and sand they were sinking into.

The owner of the garage was indeed an old desert rat who'd apparently spent his whole life as a shade tree mechanic. Dressed in coveralls without a shirt, his skin was deeply tanned, leathery, and creased. He might have been sixty or maybe a hundred. It was hard to tell. He was bald, toothless, and reeked of the tobacco chaw staining the scraggly beard around his mouth a nasty yellow shade. Seeing Melanie, the old fellow gave her a wink and a smile.

"Not every day a pretty woman comes in here," he said by way of a greeting.

"My car doesn't break down in the desert every day," Melanie countered, trying not to wrinkle her nose over the stench emanating from the old man.

"You folks broke down, huh?"

"About ninety or so miles down the highway," she

replied.

“What’s the matter?”

Not knowing exactly what the matter was, she looked helplessly toward Jake.

“Snapped the fan belt, no water in the radiator, overheated the car,” he said. “Easy fix. Just need someone to go and get it, do the work.”

The old man scratched his whiskers and nodded. “I reckon that’s easy enough. I could send my grandson out to tow it in.”

Hearing his words, relief flooded her. “Great,” she said. Digging in her purse, she pulled her credit card out of her wallet. “I’ll pay anything to get it fixed.”

The old man eyed the piece of plastic speculatively. “I don’t take credit cards.”

Hope plummeted to her feet. “You don’t?”

The old man shook his head.

“Uh, traveler’s checks?”

Another shake of the head. “Cash only.”

*The gods must hate me, Melanie thought. Murphy’s law is certainly in effect today. I can’t win for losing...* She sighed. “Where’s the nearest ATM?”

“ATM?”

“You know, cash machine?”

“I don’t know if we have one of those here,” the old fellow replied honestly. “Might be one at the bank, but it’s closed.”

Jake broke in. “How much to tow in the lady’s car and put a new belt on?”

The old timer did some silent figuring in his head.

“Oh, ‘bout fifty dollars.”

Jake nodded and reached in his hip pocket for his wallet. Unfolding it, he slid out a crisp fifty. “Better get on it then.” He handed the money over. “Silver-blue convertible. Can’t miss it if you go straight down the road.”

The old man nodded. “I’ll get Toby right on it.” Tucking his money safely away, he whistled, then hollered as he pounded on the side of garage with a gnarled hand. “Boy, get your lazy ass up.”

A tall skinny kid appeared around the corner. About seventeen, he was dressed in faded jeans and a T-shirt. A compact disc player was glued to his hip, a pair of headphones dangling around his neck.

“Get the truck and pull it around front. We got some work.”

The boy lit up. Something to break up the boredom of his day.

“Pick it up tomorrow,” the old man told them.

“Good enough.” Jake turned to Melanie. “Okay with you?”

She gave a grateful nod.

The old man spat a wad of chew onto the parched ground at his feet. “Suppose you’ll be getting a room for the night.”

“Yes, I suppose so,” Melanie said.

“I’ll have Toby come around and let you know when it’s fixed.”

“Okay. Should I give you a call to let you know where I am staying?”

The old man laughed. “There’s only one motel



here.” He made a vague gesture. “’Bout six blocks up.”

She gave a slight shake of her head. The town was that small. Of course there wasn’t going to be a huge selection of places to stay. Bidding the old fellow and his grandson a final goodbye, she followed the big biker as he began to walk toward the convenience store where they’d left his bike. The sky was slowly morphing from bright blue to dusky pinks and darker purples. The heat was slowly receding, slinking away with the shadows. The cooler night winds were beginning to winnow across the desert plains.

“Thanks so much for helping me out,” she said, doubling her steps to keep up with his stride. “I can pay you back, write you a check.”

Jake made a vague ‘forget it’ gesture. “It wasn’t a problem.”

“No, really,” she insisted. “I can pay you back.”

“No big deal.”

She threw up her hands, a bit confused by the blend of irritation and wryness in his voice. “Hey, suit yourself. I can’t make you take a check. But I appreciate the time you took to help me.”

Another shrug. “Didn’t have anything else to do, I guess.”

“Guess I’m still stuck here for the night.”

“Only a night. You’ll live.”

“I guess I have no choice, huh?” She gave him a long look. “You seem to know your way around here.”

“Been here a few times, going back and forth.”

Melanie’s stomach rumbled, reminding her she

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hadn't eaten anything solid in quite awhile. "So why don't you let me thank you by taking you to dinner?" she suggested, surprised by her own boldness. "We can get a room, clean up, grab a bite. That is, if you haven't got anyplace to be..." She let the sentence trail off, unfinished.

Jake scratched his chin, running his fingers along his jaw line. "I suppose I could clean up a little."

"And you have to eat, right?"

"Yeah."

She smiled. "Good. Then we'll do that, and I can pay you back."

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## Chapter Eight

The motel room was shabby but clean. The furniture was plain, well used, but obviously as well kept as possible. Two narrow little beds had been pushed together to make one larger bed. The décor was the usual faux-southwest patterns found all over the homes in town; Indian-inspired motifs of Kachina dolls and speckled corn. It was so ugly it could belong nowhere else but in New Mexico.

The bedspread was faded, patched in a couple of places. There was no telling how many years it had been in use.... Ditto the sheets. It had the usual accoutrements of a table, a chair, and an old color television bolted to a TV table in the corner opposite the beds. The puke-green carpet was well worn, thin in spots, and the poor old air conditioner leaked mightily as it labored against the heat. A few doors down, an ice machine hummed, dumping out a fresh load of chilled bliss.

To her relief, the place wasn't crawling with roaches and didn't smell too terribly bad, which was a high mark in Melanie's book. And the fact they could process credit card transactions was a definite plus. At least she wasn't wholly dependent on the strange man she'd let pick her up. She'd even managed to get the hotel clerk to advance her a hundred dollars on her card so she could pay him back and cover dinner.

### Biker Chic

She didn't want to feel beholden; was glad he'd helped her out, but now she wouldn't owe him anything further. She didn't have any other clothes to wear, but a shower would be heaven.

Before they'd reached the room, Melanie had stopped to fill the plastic bucket provided by the clerk. Right now the only thing she wanted to do was run ice all over her blistering hot skin. Getting naked and under a cool spray water would be an even better idea.

It definitely wasn't Shangri-La, but out in the middle of nowhere, it was a little slice of paradise. She'd offered to get Jake a room, but he'd declined. A quick shower was all he wanted then he'd be on his way.

Toting a good-sized knapsack, which was more than she had, Jake looked around the room. "This'll do." He tossed it on the bed, then flipped on the television, finding the local news channel. He flopped down on the bed. "You going to bathe first?"

Melanie set the ice down on the bed table. "Yes, I will. Thanks." Purse in hand, she disappeared into the bathroom and shut the door.

Flipping on the light, she found herself in the usual motel bathroom; sink, toilet, shower behind a semi-transparent curtain. There were a couple of thin towels, a washcloth, tiny bar of wrapped soap and even tinier bottle of shampoo. The tile on the floor was chipped and missing in places, the grout a little stained, sink and toilet showing the reddish rust of the hard mineral water corroding the pipes.

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Kicking off her sandals and stripping down to bra and panties, she looked over her limp blouse and skirt. There wasn't much she could do with them. Taking a washrag, she ran it under hot water and brushed them up and down. It didn't help much, but it made her feel like she was doing something to make them look a little neater, less wrinkled. Hanging them on the hooks affixed to the back of the door, she doffed panties and bra. Her lingerie looked no better. She wished she'd had the smarts to grab her bag, but trying to hold on to a bulky bag on the back of a motorcycle would've been ridiculous. As for a clothing store...there wasn't one. The hotel's clerk had informed her that most residents did their major shopping in the next town over.. Talk about living in the middle of nowhere.

Stepping to the shower, she turned on the taps, adjusting the water until it was warm, without being too hot. Unwrapping the little bar of scented soap, she stepped under the stream of water. The water sprayed down with the force of stinging needles. It was a welcome sting, though, the water driving away the grime of the whole terrible day. She soaped up, glad to rinse away the dirt and sweat.

As her hands skimmed over her breasts and ribs, she let her fingers come to rest on her belly. Because she'd never had children, no stretch marks marred her skin. Still, her belly was scarred, the tiny white puckers never entirely tanning the way unblemished skin did. At the age of nineteen, before she'd married Phil, she'd had a hysterectomy. Doctors had advised

her the polyps developing on her ovaries had the potential to turn cancerous, the way they had with her mother. Fearing the worst, she'd agreed to the surgery. Only later had it occurred to her she would never be able to conceive. Phil had assured her it didn't matter to him—he loved her whether or not she was able to have a baby. At the time she'd believed him. Now she wondered if he hadn't used her infertility as an excuse to cheat; because she wasn't a *whole* woman anymore.

*I still have feelings, she thought. I still enjoy sex, having a man make love to me.*

Her hand drifted down, gently touching the soft petals between her thighs. Very lightly, she ran her finger down between her lips, touching herself. She pushed her finger in deeper, slipping it up until the pad of her finger touched her clit, and she felt her body tremble. She tilted back her head and closed her eyes. Should she be embarrassed to be touching herself this way? She wasn't.

Her finger slid up and down slowly, ever so gently. A faint moan escaped her lips as she spread her lips apart. She hadn't thought about sex until she'd met Jake, but since wrapping her arms around his chest and feeling the powerful vibrations of the motorcycle between her legs, she'd thought of nothing but sex, more specifically, making love to Jake.

Would he be a gentle lover or would he bang a woman with a fierce rhythm? She could imagine her legs spread around his hips, his cock driving fiercely into her depth. The way he'd make love wouldn't be

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vicious, she thought, but intense, a wholly consuming thing. God, just thinking about having him certainly did not quell her body's desire to be sexually sated—it only inflamed it.

She moaned as her finger entered her creamy depth.. Unable to stop herself, she started pumping her fingers in and out.. She groaned and pumped faster and harder, moaning and whimpering under the spray of water.

“Oh, God...” She moaned as her vagina's muscles tightened around her fingers. She bit her lip as her body started to shake. She closed her eyes and gripped the railing with her free hand, feeling her body respond to the vibrations of climax. When she squeezed her thighs together, the feeling became more intense. Her chest was heaving slightly, her breasts rising and falling as her hips rocked back and forth.

Eyes closed and lips slightly parted, she tilted her head back farther and moaned a little louder. How she wished a man were here, slipping his hands down to her ass and pulling her to his hard hips, grinding his shaft against her. Orgasm came without warning, a wave of pleasure beyond all control. A little cry bubbled up out of her throat.

Sated, she leaned weakly against the wall of the shower. The water had gone cold, and she hadn't even noticed. Was it pathetic she was masturbating in the shower all by herself when a desirable man waited outside her door?

*I can't sleep with a strange man*, she blushed.

*God, no telling where he's been, who he's slept with.*

Shaking her head, she put having sex with Jake out of her head. It wouldn't be right. It wouldn't be reasonable. It wouldn't be Melanie.

"God," she whispered. "I'm so tired of me." Twisting the cap off the shampoo, she dumped its contents on her head and finished her washing.

Turning off the water, she pushed aside the shower curtain, snagged a towel and dried the water off her body. Her panties were still wet, but she put them on anyway. The heat of her body would dry the thin nylon in a few minutes. Besides, it wasn't uncomfortable to have a wet crotch against her. She needed a little cooling off down there. She slipped into her skirt then put on her blouse, foregoing her bra. Rather than tucking it in her skirt, she knotted it around her flat belly in a more casual summer style.

She surveyed her image in the mirror, combing her hair back, letting it part naturally and hang loose around her shoulders. Rather than wear a lot of make-up, she decided on a little eye shadow, mascara and lipstick. Her cheeks were already more than red from being under the scorching sun, so she certainly had no need of blush. She didn't look lovely, but she didn't look butt-ugly, either. She looked like a woman trying to make the best of a bad situation.

When she exited the bathroom, the look on Jake's face said she looked quite fine. His eyes skimmed her from head to foot, pausing a moment on her breasts, the bead hard tips of her nipples poking through the white material, her bare slice of belly, then her



slender hips. A tiny flicker of sensation coiled through her, a sweet ache mingling with the pride she could actually have such an arousing effect on him.

*He wants me...* She savored the tingle. *I can tell by the way his eyes caress my body, he's thinking about us together...* Instead of being embarrassed he found her attractive, she discovered there was a certain excitement to be savored in the knowledge she was a desirable and sexual woman in his eyes.

His eyes widened. A small smile touched his mouth. "You clean up nice," he said by way of a compliment..

She made a fluttery gesture with her hands. "I can be nicer," she said with a laugh. "But this is all I have to work with."

"It's enough." Stretching like a lazy cat, he lifted himself off the bed and stripped off his t-shirt in one smooth motion. His muscles rippled like a snake skimming over the desert sand, bringing a whole new set of warm feelings to her body. In the perimeters of the small room, he was standing far too close to her. She felt dizzy from the awareness of him, from her wretched over-responsiveness to his very maleness, and it galled her she seemed completely unable to control her body's physical compulsions. She wanted to edge closer to him, put her hands on him and explore his chest, his arms, his strong thighs...

She made a soft little sound of appreciation but quickly caught herself and stepped out of his path. It was hell to fight her attraction, to remind herself she would pay over and over again in guilt if she gave in

and had sex with a strange man.

“Your turn for the shower,” she quipped lightly, forcing her eyes off him and onto the television. She reached for the remote control and began to flip the channels, pretending all the while her attention was on the screen and not the hot man standing just a few feet away.

He dug in his knapsack and pulled out a small shaving kit. “I won’t be long.”

“Okay. But I’ll warn you now it’s cold.”

“You were in there long enough, so I wasn’t expecting any hot water.” When he went into the bathroom, he didn’t close the door behind him.

“There’s room in here for two,” he said, giving her a wicked grin. “You could always make things more interesting by joining me.”

“Join you?” She pretended to scoff. “I don’t even know you.”

She gave a tiny shiver. Not because she found the idea repulsive, but because she found it intriguing. Surely her body wouldn’t have reacted to him so strongly if there had been other men in her life. Every breath she took only reinforced her physical and emotional awareness of him. She could actually feel her own burning need for him deep inside her body. Her breasts suddenly felt heavy and tender. She wanted him to come into the bedroom, press her back onto the bed, spread her legs...

She knew immediately he’d seen what was in her eyes, because she saw the recognition of it flash within his own.

He walked into the bedroom, unbuttoning the top of his jeans. "It would be a good way to get to know me, don't you think?" Before she could stop him, he slid his fingers around to the nape of her neck, his thumb brushing the flushed heat of her cheek, before barely touching the quivering left corner of her mouth.

Melanie tried to pull away, turn her head. "No, Jake...no," she protested huskily. "I don't want this." But she knew it was a lie. There was nothing more she wanted than the intimacy of his strong arms around her, his body moving against hers, his erect cock rubbing against her moist slit.

She was still trying to helplessly protest when he started to kiss her, slowly at first, both his hands now cupping her face. The kiss was slow and lingering, as he tasted the texture of her lips, his tongue caressing their soft outline before pushing deeper into her mouth. For a moment, the gap between them threatened to completely close. Then, she was pushing him away, gasping.

"I'm sorry," she said hastily. "I can't." She drew a deep breath, rubbing at her mouth as though trying to erase the memory of this kiss.

Instead of being angry, he drew back with a laugh, unabashed and unoffended. "Suit yourself. The offer is always on the table." Giving her a quick wink, he sauntered back into the bathroom. There, he stripped down to his bare ass without a hint of embarrassment.

Though she was trying hard to keep her cool and not gasp aloud, Melanie couldn't help noticing he

wore no underwear. His ass was tight, hard and round. Those firm cheeks were like an apple she'd love to bite into. Flicking aside the shower curtain, he turned on the water.

She found the sight of his naked body unnerving, but not frightening, as if she feared he might attack her. She didn't feel he would force himself on her but learning he wanted her was increasing her own need, her own desires. The wave of heat suffusing her told its own story.

Blushing furiously red as her heart hammered in her chest, Melanie threw her hands up in front of her eyes, dipping her head so he couldn't see the betraying emotions in her eyes, the ones screaming she'd be happy to rip off her own clothes again and join him.

Jake stepped under the water and pulled the curtain closed. As it was clear plastic, she could still see his every tantalizing move. Watching him wash caused an odd weakening sensation in her stomach.

*If I suited myself, she thought, I would be right in there with him.*

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## Chapter Nine

The diner wasn't the nicest place she'd ever been in, but it looked clean. Whether by accident or design, it seemed to be echoing a late-fifties motif, complete with slide-in booths, a counter with stools, and a huge mural of James Dean and Elvis arm-wrestling over Marilyn Monroe. As she and Jake slid into a booth, a waitress dressed in jeans and a blue-and-white-checkered blouse came over and set down two glasses of ice water and a couple of plastic-coated menus with tattered edges.

Melanie immediately reached for the water. "God, that tastes wonderful."

"Anything else to drink?" The waitress tapped her pencil against her pad.

"Tea," Jake said.

"You?" The waitress asked Melanie.

"Same thing."

The waitress, whose nametag read 'Susie', nodded. "I'll get your drinks while you look at the menus." She sauntered off, stopping to pick up some dirty dishes at another table.

Melanie flipped open her menu. "Well, since I'm buying, pick whatever you want."

"Big spender, huh?"

"Oh, the biggest."

Jake opened his own menu. "Let's see what they

have here.”

Glancing down at her menu, Melanie couldn't help sneaking a look at Jake as he read his. After the shower, he'd shaved, getting rid of his facial hair and combing his own long hair back into a ponytail gathered at the nape of his neck. His face seemed so much more sharply sculpted now, so much harder, more strikingly masculine.

Though he'd dressed in the same jeans, he'd put on a clean black t-shirt and a faded denim jacket. He looked good. Damn good. The slight movements of his body kept attracting her attention, her eyes flickering helplessly toward him as though he were a magnet she could not resist. She was so tempted to rub her leg against his, slip off her sandal, and work her toes up toward his crotch.

And that kiss he'd given her. God, the all-consuming kiss ... the kind that practically made a woman come in her panties. She wanted to taste his lips again—and more. Just being with him even now ignited a hunger going past the physical, straight into the core of her being.

The waitress returned, breaking her stream of thought as she set down two large glasses of iced tea, complete with wedges of lemon.. She was suddenly burning hot. Reaching for her iced tea, she took a hasty sip. She missed her mouth, and a splash of liquid went down her chin to dribble on her blouse.

“Oh, damn!” she cursed, snatching up a napkin and scrubbing at her breasts.

“Having a little trouble finding your mouth?” Jake

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teased, taking a sip of his own beverage. He managed not to spill his.

She tossed the rumpled napkin on the table. "Apparently I am having all kinds of trouble today. Talk about everything that can go wrong going wrong. This hasn't been my day at all."

"Could be worse. You could still be sitting on the highway waiting for a ride."

She had to smile. "Yeah, guess so." She tired another drink and managed to hit her mouth.

"Ready to order?" the waitress broke in.

Jake glanced at his menu. "Steak and home fries, and make sure the cow is dead."

The waitress grinned and scribbled on her pad. "Well done."

"Very well done."

She looked to Melanie. "You?"

Too distracted by Jake to have looked closely at the menu, Melanie hastily skimmed the selections. As she suspected, they were loaded with waist-busting, calorie-laden selections typical to the southwestern area; steaks, hamburgers, Mexican food. Even the chicken dishes were swimming in oil, and the appetizers were all deep-fried. She looked in vain for salad selections and came up with only the 'garden salad' consisting of nothing more than lettuce, a few slices of tomato and cucumbers with carrot shavings and croutons. The dressings available were French, Ranch, or Bleu Cheese.

"Um, is this all you have for salads?"

Susie's head went up and down. "That's it."

Melanie sighed. She was so hungry and had entertained visions of a baked chicken breast with a side of steamed veggies. "I might have the salad. There's not really much to choose from..."

"Is that all?" Jake asked with a laugh. "What the matter? Watching your figure?"

"Of course I am."

He eyed her. "Trust me. You got nothing there in the way of fat. Why don't you have some real food? A good piece of meat might do you some good. Put some iron in your blood and color in your cheeks."

"I try to eat healthy food not junk."

He pulled a face reflecting disgust. "I guess if you ate it, your kind would go and barf it up anyway."

She bristled, a frown marring the smoothness of her forehead. "I don't have an eating disorder. What do you mean, my kind?"

"Oh, you know, you rich bitches with your fake tan, capped teeth, and bleached hair. I bet your tits are as false as your eyelashes."

"My breasts," she shot back frostily, "are real." She pointed to her breasts, accentuating the fact she was braless. "And they are all mine." She narrowed her eyes and looked him up and down. "And what about you, Mister Tattoo King?"

Instead of taking offense, he laughed and sipped his beer. "Point taken. What I was trying to say in my crude way was you don't have to worry about watching your waistline."

Feeling the tension of the day settling into her neck and shoulders, Melanie reached up to rub at the



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skin at her nape, which was tender from the sun's scorching. She hoped her skin wouldn't start to peel in a couple of days.

"Thanks. I'm sorry I snapped at you."

"No problem.." He offered a self-effacing grin. "I've been called worse things."

She laughed. "And I get called a spoiled country club bitch every day." She looked to the waitress, still waiting patiently. "You know what? Scratch the salad and bring me a double bacon cheeseburger, fries, and a chocolate milkshake. Mustard, mayonnaise, and ketchup."

Nodding, the waitress sauntered off to get the food.

"Much better," he approved. "I like to see a woman eat."

She giggled like a guilty child. "Phil would just die if he saw me eating a hamburger in a diner."

His left eyebrow went up a notch. "Phil?"

She reached out and pulled the wine cooler close, wrapping both her hands around the cool glass. "My husband...ah, my ex-husband."

"Not the hamburger-and-cheap-diner kind of guy?"

She grimaced. "Hardly. He's more the thousand-dollar-suit-and-Palm-Pilot kind of guy."

"So you two split up?"

"Our divorce was final this week as a matter of fact." She turned the spotlight back on him. "You married?"

"To my bike and the road." He fiddled with his

napkin. "Seriously, no wife, no kids, not even a dog. I like to be free to go where ever I want when I want."

"Must be nice."

"It is, most days." There was something wistful in his voice.

"Ever get lonely?"

"If I do, I find someone to fix it. What about you? Got kids?"

She shook her head. "No kids. Well, no kids unless you count his little girlfriend, Tammi. She's only twenty-one. How could I compete?" She paused, her eyes filling with tears when she remembered how she'd felt when Phil had announced he wanted the divorce. How badly she'd wanted to change his mind, until he'd come back to pick up the last of the things he'd left behind...

She started to tremble but quickly checked the bad memories at the door in her brain. In a heart-stopping, gut surging moment of awareness, she realized how stunted and stale her life had become. Getting stuck in the middle of the desert was the biggest adventure she'd had in years. And, far from hating every minute, she was surprised to realize she was, indeed, enjoying it.

From the moment Jake had pulled up, she'd been attracted to him. And sitting her ass on his motorcycle—wow! She loved the vibrations the huge machine gave off, the feeling of fear fluttering in her heart as she watched the black highway being eaten up. It was somewhat frightening but also exhilarating to know the only thing keeping her from smacking into

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the asphalt was the craftsmanship of the motorcycle and the skill of the driver. During their ride into town, she'd loved the feeling of danger almost as much as she'd relished the feel of her arms around his chest.

*I want to feel that again,* she thought. *I want to feel him again.*

"Why would you feel you had to compete?" he asked quietly.

His question jarred her erotic introspection, bringing her firmly back to earth. It was a question Melanie had never dared to ask herself. Initially, when Phillip had told her that there was another woman in his life, she'd refused to accept that divorce was exactly where their relationship had been heading for years. Now that she'd the time to consider it, she was beginning to realize she'd hung on to a bad marriage because deep down inside she was afraid of growing old and ill with no mate beside her.

"Because I didn't want to be alone," she admitted, swallowing hard. She couldn't go on. Her throat was thick with the ache to cry.

He gave her a long, penetrating look. "Trust me. You won't be alone long."

She forced herself to swallow the ache. Why was she letting this stranger get so close anyway? He'd probably ride off down the road in a few hours, and she'd never see him again. "I wish that were true."

"I think it will be."

The food arrived, giving her a chance to recover her composure as they dug into their meals. Her burger was practically the size of the plate. She

picked it up with both hands, taking a hearty bite. Though it might be a little diner in a dead-end town, the cook made the best burger she'd ever tasted in her life. There were two patties, heaped with bacon, melted cheese, tomatoes, and onions. The bun was lightly toasted, greasy as hell, but she had no problem swallowing it. She took a second bite and then a third.

"God, that's so good," she enthused, dumping ketchup on her fries and salting them. She hadn't eaten like this since she was a teenager, and it felt great to just let go and eat what she wanted, knowing there would be no subtle shake of the head and knitted brow across the table. She gobbled down a French fry. *You never realize you are a prisoner until you're free.*

"See? I told you some good food would make you feel better." Jake laughed and cut into his steak. It was almost burnt black and, to him, seemed perfect. He was putting away the food like a stevedore. It was clear he relished his meal. Watching him eat, Melanie had to wonder if he made love with the same intensity.

"Jake," she asked, "after dinner, do you think we could take a ride?" The words popped out of her mouth before she could stop them.

*Why in the world did I just ask that?* she started to silently rail against herself then stopped. Excitement and adventure had been missing from her life for a long time. It was time to be daring, have a little fun.

He chewed his food slowly then swallowed before

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answering. “We could. Any place you have in mind?”

She gave a shy grin and sucked at her milkshake through the long straw. “Well, I was on my way to see the caverns in Carlsbad... But since I had this little detour, maybe there’s something else to see. I hear the desert is beautiful by night.”

One corner of his mouth quirked as he watched her lick a bit of chocolate off her lips. “I think I can show you a few sights.”

## Chapter Ten

Like most people, Melanie thought of the desert as being a dry, arid, and harsh land. The dusky colors, dusty air, and blazing hot temperatures were the images most people often conjured when thinking of the wide-open spaces. At night, however, the desert changed. Temperatures cooled, light breezes blew, and the animals taking refuge from the heat came to life. The sandy flats and rocky hillsides were breathtaking under the moon's clear light, and the black velvet sky seemed to stretch on forever, an endless vista as vast as the land.

She wasn't sure how far they'd ridden when Jake pulled his motorcycle to a stop. Miles back he'd left the main highway, navigating onto a dirt road until there was nothing to be seen but miles of empty land. He killed the engine and lights, and they sat for a minute, listening to the sounds of the gentle wind. The silence was loudest of all. There was no sound of cars or any other city noise. The air was crisp, dry and clean, the wind scouring the ground until not a stray grain of sand remained.

Reluctant to unwrap her arms from around his chest, Melanie sleepily raised her head. "Where are we?"

"Nowhere," he answered, slipping out of her arms and swinging his leg over the bike. "This is the sights

out here. Miles and miles of nothing.”

Inner thighs still pulsing from the intense vibrations of the motorcycle, Melanie slid off the leather seat. Her legs were a little shaky, and she stumbled, almost falling down as an agonizing cramp shot through her calf. Only Jake’s strong hand on her arm saved her from a tumble.

“Careful,” he warned, his voice husky. “The ground’s a little rocky here.”

She gave a wan smile and bent down to massage her leg. “Leg’s a little cramped, that’s all.”

Standing, she came face to face with him, realizing too late her body was far too close to his. Suddenly, he was looking at her, searching her eyes so intently she had to look away, unable to sustain the scrutiny, especially when his gaze dropped to her mouth and lingered there.

Her tender lips burned, felt so terribly dry she had to lick them. “What are you looking at?”

“You. The moonlight shining in your eyes.”

His hand touched her face, cupping it gently, his fingers skimming her skin before sliding into her hair, supporting the weight of her head when his mouth captured hers. At first the warm suckle of his mouth was restrained, cautious, and reminiscent of the first time he’d kissed her. Then he seemed to lose control, kissing her harder, his tongue probing her mouth as his own self-control was swept aside.

Without intending to, she pressed her body against his. A sweet ache bloomed in her chest. The sensation of his lips against her was so acutely

heightened Melanie actually felt her response to it down inside her core—a familiar tensing of certain muscles, an awareness that a kiss, a little stroke would not be enough to sate her desire for this man.

“Melanie, I want you.” The sound he made as he said her name thrilled through her. It needed no translations nor explanation. Its message was as clear as the fierce hardening of his cock against the front of his jeans. She was lost in the sensations, her mind racing as her lips moved against his. His other hand moved around her waist, pulling her closer to him as his tongue traced her bottom lip. His hands were warm against her bare skin.

Just as suddenly as their kiss began, she regretfully ended it as her mind clicked back to reality. She pulled back from him, her breathing slightly ragged.

“Jake, no...I can’t.” Her hands trembled as they slid down his arms, to his broad chest, pushing him away.

He tensed abruptly at her rejection. “Why not?” Because I’m a scuzzy biker and you’re—”

“Biker chic?” she finished with a laugh. “No, no. It’s not that at all.”

A strange flicker of emotion crossed his face. “What then?”

Melanie struggled against the lump building in her throat, threatening to cut off her air. She twisted in his grasp, trying to pull away from him, escape the masculine heat of his body, but the motorcycle behind her prevented her complete escape.



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"I—I've only been with one man in my life," she admitted, feeling raw inside. "I've never had sex with anyone but my husband." A vein throbbed in her neck and he touched it with his fingertips, as though measuring the furious racing of her pulse. Would it turn him off?

He hesitated. His teeth were set, a muscle jerking in his jaw. "And you think that matters to me?"

Too embarrassed to answer, she lowered her head, giving a little nod.

Jake's hand slid under her shin, lifting her head, forcing her to face him. "I think that's awesome you've only been with one man," he said gently. "It's so rare to meet a woman who was faithful to her vows." He was looking at her as he spoke, and for some reason, his words made her ache and tremble with a longing she could feel clear to her toes.

"I don't want to think I'll only have one lover," she breathed, "but I don't want you to think I'd make love to the first man who came along."

"What if I told you I don't try to have sex with every woman I rescue off the highway?" he responded evenly. "What if I told you I only make love to women who attract me, and those are few and far between?"

"I'd say it's a good thing," she said, voice husky with need.

He moved against her, pressing her body against the seat of the Harley. "Me, too," he agreed, touching her as though his hands knew her body already; knew how to touch her, pleasure her.

His lips trailed down her long neck, kissing and

nibbling her soft flesh. As his lips brushed her skin, his expert fingers worked the buttons of her blouse. He peeled back the material to expose her bare breasts.

“All yours, huh?”

“Yeah.”

Melanie sucked in her breath as he began to fondle her nipples. They were hard and swollen, ready for the feel of his mouth. His hands cupped her breasts, squeezing them softly. She closed her eyes, relishing the feel of his callused hands against her soft skin. Dipping his head, he used the tip of his tongue to lightly trace the dusky pink circle of her erect nipple.

Her response was immediate and passionate, fingers sliding to the nape of his neck as she guided his mouth to the other breast. Her eyes were closed, lips half parted.

“That feels so good.”

“It’ll feel a whole lot better in a minute.” Jake nuzzled her other nipple, sucking it into his mouth. He began to roll her recently abandoned nipple between his thumb and forefinger. Her fingers tugged harder on his hair as he paid her left nipple the same attention. Somehow, she didn’t know how, one of his hands found the zipper on her skirt, tugging it open. The next thing she knew, it was pooling around her waist as he slid it from her hips. Her little white panties were all she had on.

Melanie felt his hands moving over her hips. Looking down, she watched his face as he knelt on the ground and slid the fabric over her ass and down her legs. His hot breath against her skin made her moan,

and sheer excitement built inside.. She wanted to grab the back of his head and pull his face against her pussy, but she controlled herself. Instead, she began to rub her breasts, teasing her nipples with the tips of her fingers.

Reaching up, Jake ran his hands between her legs, higher, toward the valley between her thighs. Unlike the desert around her, her cunt was moist with the juices of her growing desire. She drew in a sharp breath when he ran his finger up her swollen flesh. Her body shook as she pushed back, causing his finger to slip slightly inside. Her heart pounded with hard, driving beats within her chest when his finger moved deeper through the slick folds. Melanie cried out, her fingers clenching his shoulders.

Too far gone to stop what he was doing to her body, she gave herself wholly to the incredible sensations he was awakening in her body. She could hardly believe she was standing butt naked in the night desert, leaning against a motorcycle as a biker gave her oral sex. She felt wicked ... and sexy. What was happening now was magical and wonderful. She realized and accepted she wasn't a married woman any longer, ruled by the expectations and restraints of her husband. She was a single woman, free to make her own decisions. Giving in to her attraction to Jake now, showing how much she wanted and needed him would hurt no one. What was happening was between the two of them and need not concern anyone else.

"I want this to happen," she said before she could lose her newly found courage.

“I intend for it to,” came his brash reply.

With his forehead against her belly, Jake’s tongue snaked out and licked her pussy, his hand rising to part her flesh with his fingers, exposing her pulsing clit. Melanie gasped, but moved her feet farther apart as she started grinding against his face. She moved back and forth slowly, enjoying the feel of his tongue stabbing inside of her. When his tongue circled her swollen button, she cried out like one of the night animals in heat. With his hands on her ass cheeks, he let his tongue slide up until her clit was between his lips. He sucked it into his mouth, his tongue flicking hard against the throbbing nub.

Clenching her eyes shut as orgasm overtook her, Melanie pushed down, rubbing against his face, his nose rubbing against her slit. Her climax was fierce, a powerful explosion of sensations that left her weak and feeling dizzy, clinging to Jake as her body shook with the wonderful aftermath.

He stood, kissing her, and she tasted her own sweet juices on his lips. His hands moved to her waist, and with no effort at all, he was lifting her off her feet and setting her down on the seat of the bike so she was facing its rear. He straddled it himself, and they were face to face, her thighs sprawling open.

“Oh my God.” She laughed, wriggling her bare butt against the cool leather. “What are you doing?”

“Just hang on for the ride.”

Catching the waist of his T-shirt, he lifted it over his head, baring his chest. His skin glowed under the moon’s light, the tattoos etched into his flesh seeming

to echo the symbols long ago Indians had carved onto the bare desert ground. Strange sensations thrilled through her stomach at the sight of his bare torso. Unable to resist, she reached out to touch his chest. His entire torso was covered with the tattoo of a black-robed Grim Reaper. Scythe in one hand, Death held a naked woman draped over his arm. With the tips of her fingers, she traced the Reaper's blade inked above one dusky flat nipple. His arms and back were also covered with skulls, demons, and other grisly images.

His skin seemed to ripple under her fingers. Feeling his tension, she tentatively traced his nipple. He drew in a sharp breath. His hand touched her thigh, gently stroking. She laughed and leaned forward, touching her lips to his chest, tracing some of the lines of the naked woman with her tongue, tasting the salty tang of his skin. Against her palm his heart raced frantically.

"Damn." His hands slid into her tousled hair, and he held her slightly away from him, looking into her eyes. Desire burned in his gaze, his response to her touch immediate. She could see his cock straining hard against his jeans, waiting for its freedom.

"Feel good?" Her hands moved to his thighs, moving up his jeans to the vee of his crotch. She kneaded his skin under the tough material, digging her fingernails suggestively into his flesh. She heard him moan, the sound thrilling her. She heard him catch his breath next, felt the heat radiating from his body.

"Oh, yeah." He grinned and guided her hands to

the grips on the handlebars, than ran his hands over her hips and down her thighs, propping her feet on the footrests. Just like in a pair of stirrups in the gynecologist's office, she was spread open for his examination. "But you feel a whole hell of a lot better."

Leaning forward, his lips trailed down her neck, kissing here and nibbling there. Going lower, he nuzzled a nipple briefly before kissing the valley between her breasts, letting her flesh absorb the sensations of his touch. Hand easing between her legs, he slowly pressed the tips of his finger into her softness. He circled her most sensitive flesh, teasing her.

Melanie gasped and pushed back. A little whimper escaped her throat. Anything to ease the aching need inside..

Jake entered her with two fingers, slipping in and out as his thumb stroked her clit. His free hand went to the front of his pants, undoing the button at his waist and bringing his zipper down. His cock surged free, the head purple and swollen. He stroked himself even as he pleased her.

Melanie opened her eyes and glanced down. It was an incredibly sexual sight to see—one of his hand between her legs, even as he was stroking his penis. Her grip on the handlebars tightened.

"Oh, God, Jake," she gasped. "I'm about to come again."

"Not yet, baby." Hands moving to her hips, he pushed forward, impaling her.

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She heard him moan, felt the warmth of his hands on her thighs, felt the deliciously wanton friction of his skin against hers.

Jake held her hips, moving his in a slow back and forth motion... "You're so tight." He pumped harder. "Like taking a virgin."

Supporting her weight on the handlebars, Melanie braced her feet against the footrests. She ground her hips against his, her every downward motion meeting his powerful upward one, each becoming harder and more intense. A low moan slipped through her lips when she tossed her head back and closed her eyes. She felt so free, so wild, so naturally female. Her body tensed, feeling the waves of sheer gratification wash over her.

Her pussy started to ripple around his penis, and she knew his own release was close. She felt Jake's nails dig into her thighs as his whole body shook, a deep primal grunt rising up in his throat. Cock pulsing, his body tensed, trembling when he released his seed deep inside her.

Time seemed to cease. There was only the sky, the desert, and two people enjoying the primitive act of joining their bodies in a satisfying physical union

## Chapter Eleven

Back at the motel, Melanie reluctantly climbed off the huge motorcycle. Head spinning, body sated but hardly satisfied, she wasn't ready for their time together to end. But like Cinderella attending the ball, the midnight hour had struck, and the party had come to its end. Unlike Cinderella, her coach was a beat up motorcycle.

Jake accompanied her to her room. There was hardly any danger she would be attacked. The town rolled up the sidewalks at sundown. A coyote howled in the distance, a reminder the desert was still as wild and untamed as the man striding beside her.

Finding her room key, Melanie's hands shook as she tried to slide it into the lock. She couldn't believe she'd just had incredible sex with a complete stranger. This was the only one-night stand she'd ever had in her life.

Jake plucked the key from her hand. He opened the door with the air of a man who'd opened a thousand others just like it. "Returned safe and sound." He smiled, a lazy grin penetrating straight to the center of her core. Instead of being sated, it only served to kindle more sparks between them.

She suppressed a frown. How many hotel rooms had he stayed in before, and how many other women had welcomed him into their arms? Would there be



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another tomorrow, another lonely confused woman eager to sate her carnal appetites with the burly biker? It was inevitable Jake would go on down the road. That was his way, what he'd always done. She doubted he ever bothered looking back.

Still, Melanie wasn't ready to let him go. The night wasn't over.

She slipped under the threshold, unsure of what she wanted to say, or do, next. She wanted him again, but couldn't spit out the words.

He tossed her the key. "I guess this is where we say goodnight."

Melanie caught it. Feigning nonchalance, she licked dry lips. Jake's big body filled the doorway. He placed his hands on either side, bracketing the doorway. Framed by the halo of the light outside, he stood like a lion hovering over freshly killed prey. Anyone who didn't know him would think him a dangerous man.

The motorcycle, the tattoos, fierce weather beaten face, Jake Marrs was a man who belonged to the road. He wasn't the kind to be tamed by the idea of home and hearth. He craved the freedom of the open highway, no strings attached. In another moment he'd be gone, disappearing like a mirage swallowed by shifting desert sands, nothing more than an ache between her thighs.

"Stay." The word slipped past her lips before she even thought to say it. Her voice was low, husky with sated desire—and hinting she'd welcome more of the same.

He gave her a long, hard look. "That really what you want?"

She nodded. "Yes."

Jake lifted an eyebrow. "How long?"

Melanie wanted to say *forever*. She twirled the key around her finger. "It's mine till eleven tomorrow morning." She cocked her head toward the bed. "Let's give them a reason to change those sheets."

"You know I'm not the kind of man to hang around?"

She swallowed the lump in her throat. She felt a twinge go all the way from crotch to toes when she looked up at him and knew what her answer had to be. A twinge of pain ripped through her heart, but she refused to let it deter her. Of course, she understood. He had his way of life, and she'd hers. She did not, could not, say the words she wanted.

"No strings."

A slow lazy grin spilt his fine lips. "I think I could be persuaded to hang around."

She gulped, trembling. "How?"

"Like this."

Jake's big paw of a hand swept out, catching her under the chin. Tilting back her head, he bent, slow and certain in his control. His mouth covered hers, the beginning of a kiss long and deep. Melanie knew then this wasn't going to be just any one-night stand. The fierceness of his kiss said he was tired of those long lonely stretches of asphalt, of the dangerous outlaw life. He was willing to be persuaded.

And she was determined to be the woman who did

the job.

Their lips had barely parted before Jake slipped his hands down to her waist and pulled her against him. Like a cat, he started rubbing sinuously against her to increase the sensations, grinding his hips against hers.

His gaze ranged over her face. "I'm not used to hanging around," he confessed.

She offered her lips again. When his mouth settled on hers, she closed her eyes. Her whole body was longing to melt into his, but he was tormenting her, savoring the taste and feel of her as though his only purpose were to pleasure her.

"Maybe you could get used to it," she murmured when he pulled away.

"Maybe." He lifted his tight t-shirt over his head, revealing his tattoos in all their glory. Each was as unique and individual as the man who wore them, and she couldn't imagine him without them. It had taken a lot of time—and pain—to get them inked into his flesh. She wondered if he regretted them or wished he'd done things differently. She pushed the thought away.

Right now they were exactly who they were supposed to be, exactly where fate had placed them. She wasn't an insecure divorcee, and he wasn't a worthless road rat. They were two people who desired each other and decided to take advantage of the fact. Whether it was right or wrong, she didn't care. She was going to seize the moment and enjoy it.

Lifting her off her feet, Jake kicked the door shut behind them. Two steps and they tumbled to the bed.

His body covered hers. She felt the tough denim of his jeans chafe the tender flesh between her thighs. Her cry of delight was silenced by the crush of his lips, the sweep of his tongue conquering hers.

Melanie ran her palms over his hard back, relishing anew the sinewy muscle beneath her hands. Jake had the body of a man who fought and fucked with equal passion.

He groaned. He shifted his hips so she could feel his erection straining for freedom against his tight jeans. Liquid heat pooled inside her, trickling between her thighs. The crotch of her panties was wet with her juices, her neediness.

Melanie whimpered. Somehow she found the strength to separate their lips. He laughed, anticipating fulfilling her need and his own.

"Too late to change your mind, honey." His voice was gravel on silk.

"Not a chance." Breath rasping in shallow pants, her moistness increased. "I just want you out of those clothes."

"You do, eh?" Jake moved a hand between their bodies. He cupped her mound through her panties, rubbing her clit up and down with his middle finger.

Melanie released a slow agonized groan. The labia around her slit were literally pulsing in time with the soft rhythm of his strokes. She relished the primal throb even as she wanted the ache to ease. Most of all, she never wanted it to end.

"Slow down, babe. We'll get there.." Stretching out beside her, Jake propped himself up on an elbow.

Whereas she's wanted to doff the duds and do the deed, it was clear he wanted to take things slower, draw out the agony.

Gaze never leaving hers, he plucked apart the knot at her belly. When it was undone, he started to undo each button. The fine white fabric did little to conceal the duskiness of her pink nipples, swollen and hard, aching for the relief of his lips. With a knowing smile, he inched the material off her left breast, exposing a pink tip.

Her gut clenched in anticipation. He surprised her by tracing her lips with one finger, slipping it inside her mouth. "Suck it."

Melanie sucked, wrapping her tongue around his firm index finger. Later she hoped to be wrapping her lips around something larger.

Jake drew his finger away. He brushed the wet tip over the tight peak he'd exposed, tracing a moist path on the aureole. The sensation of wet against her dry skin was spellbinding. She felt the pull of lust straight down to her toes.

He dipped his head for a taste, sucking the hard bead into his mouth. He flicked and teased the tip until she slid her hands into his long hair. "Oh, God, I'm dying to come." She guided his lips to her right nipple. "Do the other one. Harder."

Jake complied, tracing the tip. When she moaned and closed her eyes, he nipped, bringing her eyes back open. She giggled as he soothed away the brief ache with more long hard licks.

"I never know what's next."

“You’ll find out.” He bit again then rolled the turgid tip between thumb and forefinger. Rolling over, he reached for the ice bucket she’d placed on the bed table... Most of the ice had melted hours ago, but a few cubes still floated in the chilly water. That was exactly what he wanted. Plucking a piece out, he rubbed it over her nipples, making them even harder, more sensitive to his touch. The ice vanished, trickling over her skin, down her belly and into the top of her skirt.

She felt familiar tension hardening her muscles, caught the familiar small sound she made in the back of her throat when she was aroused.

“Does that feel good, Melanie?” He dipped his head for another taste. His tongue teased the bead-hard tip, bringing a welcome warmth to chase away the chill..

“Oh, yes.”

“Right now I’m thinking about pushing that tight skirt up and bending you over this bed. When your bare ass is sticking out, I can’t help but think how much you’d like me to give it a couple of hard swats.”

She gave a nervous laugh. Domination wasn’t exactly her thing, but the idea was more than a little intriguing. “You wouldn’t.”

“Try me.”

Jake’s hands moved over her flat belly, giving her a little tummy rub before he expertly turned her over onto her stomach. Pulling her to her knees, he pushed her skirt up around her hips before sticking his thumbs in the waistband of her panties and tugging them

down.

Melanie closed her eyes, relishing the arrival of his mouth. To her surprise, the flat of his hand came down right across her exposed flesh.

The pain was sharp and absolutely shocking, increasing her excitement ten fold. She could imagine the print of his hand outlined on her bare butt and that turned her on even more. Absolutely vanilla in her sex life with her ex-husband, she was now eager to explore sexual kinks she'd formerly rebuffed. Somehow she hadn't trusted Phil. He was too eager to be cruel. She had the feeling Jake wouldn't hurt her.

It was a leap of faith to trust a stranger. She trusted him and leapt.

He smacked her rear again. "You like being a bad girl?"

Melanie bit her lip. "Yes," she threw out in a mock challenge. "Break me if you dare."

A slow smile turned up the corners of his mouth. "You're just dying for me to fuck you again." He gave her another smack across the ass.

She shivered. The addition of pain with her pleasure was a cloying mix. She wasn't sure if she liked such sexual play or not. Before she could decide, Jake's probing finger moved between her nether lips. He was touching her with hands that knew a woman's body, and she had no defense against that. Her desire was as much of a bond, as much so as if he had tied her spread-eagled to the bed. Her clit was swollen and moist. She had to control herself from coming right on the spot when he probed her depths.

Delicious shivers shimmied up her spine. She choked down a giggle. "Yes."

"Like this?"

Jake's hand disappeared. When it returned, she felt a sliver of ice pressing against her clit. The sensation of cold colliding with her own steam nearly sent her through the ceiling. She'd never imagined ice could be used in such an imaginative and erotic way. Mingling with her own juices, the ice melted, tricking down the inside of her thighs.

Melanie gasped, a long primal sound escaping from deep within her throat. "That feels so good!" Warm sensations worked their way outward from the center of her groin, shimmering through her body like waves lapping against a tropical beach. Moving her hips in a slow motion, she started to rock against Jake's wet hand. She felt her pussy contract when he spread her wide and slipped a second piece inside her depth.

Body shuddering, Melanie's fingers dug into the bedspread. All at once, Jake thrust two fingers inside her. She cried out, moaned as her cunt clenched his digits and held them. The hot and cold inside her was a serious turn on.

He paused and treated her to a sexy grin. "I love to hear you whimper."

"Damn you, Jake," she shot between clenched teeth. He'd ignited a fierce lust inside her, and she wasn't going to be satisfied until she felt his cock ramming into her. As his fingers probed her deeper faster, she started moving her hips, the beginning of a



slow finger-fuck session. Placing his thumb against her pulsing clit, he pressed into her one more time, causing her to cry out as orgasm crashed through her body. The wave crested and then eased.

Fighting for breath, she threw a glance over her shoulder. "I want to be taken—and not by fingers."

Ready to oblige, Jake positioned his body between her spread legs. His work calloused hands clasped her hips, holding her in a grip she could not have escaped if she wanted to. He lifted her higher, grabbing her thighs and raising her up so her knees barely touched the mattress. He massaged her ass cheeks with both thumbs, spreading her open to reveal her anus.

Memories of her rape at her husband's hands tumbled to the forefront of her mind. Surely he didn't intend to take her...anally... as Phil had.

Melanie recognized his intent. Suddenly she wasn't so brave anymore. Blind panic gripped her, lungs pulling in short, wild gasps of air. Body quivering, she hung in his grasp, waiting...praying he didn't mean to penetrate her up the rear. She didn't think she could take it. Not again.

"No." Her cry ended in a whimper. She wasn't into the game now. "Not that way."

He froze. Lowering her back to the bed, she felt the palm of his hand going up and down her back, rubbing a slow gentle path, as one would to gentle a skittish horse. He slid a hand around her waist, down her belly. His fingertip located her clit, applying a gentle but firmly placed pressure. She gasped fiercely, whimpering when he changed the direction

of probing massage, manipulating his index finger over the little organ. The constriction in her cheat eased. Each stroke took her closer to the edge of orgasm. She hovered, weightless and breathless, ready to peak.

“Easy, baby,” she heard him say. “Relax. I won’t do anything you don’t want.”

Though it was almost impossible, Melanie forced her body to go limp, pliant. She could stop this now by saying no. She doubted he would force her. But she didn’t want to stop. She wanted him to fill her again, wanted their bodies to come back together.

She clenched her eyes shut. The desire for completion was so deeply entrenched in her gut it was all of a sudden a part of her being, her very soul. A bond would be created when he finally entered her. Trust. She’d to give him that, wholly and without question. Without fear.

“Don’t stop.”

Jake rolled her over. He came down on top of her, arms bracketing her body, supporting his weight. Their bodies fit together perfectly. The swell of his erection pressed against her mound, separated only by his jeans.

“Look into my eyes.”

She met his gaze. His eyes showed every emotion he felt, and Melanie knew then he was a man on fire with true passion. She saw a need so raw and so deep she was swept away by it. Words failed her, but emotion did not. Beneath the rough edges was a gentle man concerned with the feelings of his partner. She was glad she’d opened her mind to letting Jake

spend a whole night.

“You know I won’t hurt you.” He planted a kiss on her upturned nose. He brushed his mouth over her lips, the beginning of a gentle kiss. The renewed desire to reclaim her life—and Jake—surged her. She sighed and swept her tongue out to meet his.

“I know.”

“I want you to enjoy this.”

She swallowed a moan. “I—I want to.”

Jake shifted his body, going lower. He ran his tongue in a circle around a taut nipple, flicking the hard tip. Her hips jerked upward in an involuntary response, teasing his straining erection and testing his sense of restraint. Her inhibitions fled as if they’d never existed. “I want you inside me.”

The next few moments were a blur. Somehow his clothes, along with the rest of hers, melted away, and he was on top again. This time it was good and right...nothing separated their bodies. She wasn’t surprised he was rigid, driven by the same aching need burning inside of her.

Moving his hips just so, Jake’s member parted her cream slicked labia. His swollen purple head pressed deliciously against her small hooded nubbin. The friction between them intensified. Her body began to shake.

Throat tight with tension and need, Melanie whimpered, trying to lift her hips against his, spreading her legs wider to guide him into her depth. She couldn’t because he was holding back, torturing her. She felt dizzy from her awareness of him, from

her over-responsiveness to him. Even now she was completely unable to control her body's physical compulsion for intimacy with him, unable to control the soft melting sensations within her soul.

"Melanie, baby, you're the one." As he whispered her name, the warmth of his breath feathered across her mouth.

Her own lips parted and softened. Beneath his mouth she made a soft little sound of need.

Immediately, Jake responded. He thrust, sliding his cock into her slick heat like a knife through butter. She cried out as his size stretched her.

He pulled back a little, chuckling in delight. "You're so damn tight." He pushed back in, all the way. He could go no further. Belly to belly, their bodies were completely joined.

Melanie felt his shaft pulsing inside her.. Her muscles tightened around his length, making it harder for him to pull out. A tiny frisson of sensation coiled through her, an ache she welcomed. Somehow she'd given him a power that was frightening. She could hardly quell the aching throbbing need he'd ignited in her body.

Jake's hands found hers, intertwining his fingers with hers and positing them above her head. The uniting motion ground their bodies together until they were not just locked together, they were a single unit, his cock filling her until she was filled and fulfilled.

His lips captured hers in a kiss as hot as their bodies. He ground his hips against hers, each push

taking him further than she ever thought possible. With every thrust, the rasping of his penis inside her depths became almost unbearable. He was creating an agony so exquisite, she wanted to cry out for a harder, deeper pummeling.

His eyes focused on hers, gazing deep.. Desire flared in their depths. "Come for me, babe."

She couldn't shut her eyes. She wanted to look at him as she climaxed, share the most intimate moment a woman could have with a man. No doubt that was his intention, and the crescendo of climax came without warning, a rush of sensations totally beyond her control.

She shuddered violently, lips pressed tightly as she struggled to make the sensations last just a moment longer. Her hands came up, clasping the back of his head, her body arching in fierce response. He slowed his rhythm, letting the tension between them build up all over again. He tried to hold back a few minutes longer, but control slipped away as the sensations claimed his senses. His cock surged, his body jerking as his seed gushed into her waiting womb.

It was a fierce coming together, a powerful explosion. Weak and dizzy, she clung to Jake while her body shook with the aftermath.

After a moment, he rolled onto his side, relieving her of his weight. By the look on his face, he was as sated as she was. "Damn," he muttered. "It's been a long time since I've sex twice in one night."

Melanie pushed stray strand of hair off her sweaty

face. "Oh, we're hardly finished." Her rapidly beating heart and sudden liquid rush of desire between her legs attested to that. "Round three is coming up."

He shook his head. "I'm not as young as I used to be, you know."

She grinned. "You aren't as old as you think." She reached down, caressing his spent member.

Jake's cock twitched, indicating it still had a will over its owner. He smiled and reached for her again. "You'll be the death of me, woman."

Melanie nuzzled the side of his neck, running her tongue between chin and shoulder... The smell of perspiration mingled with his salty taste. "I intend to do my best to keep you around a little longer." Her gut told her she wouldn't be satisfied with one night of pure unadulterated sex. Even if her body was sated, her soul would crave more of him.

But if she had her way, he wasn't going anywhere anytime soon.

Devyn Quinn

## Epilogue

Wrapped in a delicious warm lethargy, Melanie came slowly to wakefulness. The sun was well into the sky, the clock on the bed table reading two p.m. Yawning then stretching, she rubbed the remnants of sleep from her eyes and rolled over. It was muggy in the hotel room, the day's heat already at an oppressive temperature. Vague sounds from outside drifted in through the half-open window, its blinds closed against the light and prying eyes. Her body was covered with a fine sheen of perspiration. The lingering scent of sex was all around her. A strange sense of sadness filled her. The pillow beside hers was empty, though the sheets still proved that Jake's body had lain beside hers through the night.

Her body tensed in face of the rejection she knew subconsciously would be waiting for her when the day arrived. A frown marred the smoothness of her forehead.

*I knew he wouldn't be here when I woke up.*

With a wistful smile, she put out her hand and touched his side of the bed. She remembered how flagrant desire had filled her with a yearning begging to be sated, the touch of his hands only serving to inflame her on to a deeper, more urgent lust only he could tame.

And now he was gone.

That was the way it had to be. She could accept that.

Still, she couldn't help thinking back, wishing he were beside her now. The memories of Jake would always be there, like walking down a favorite path. In her mind she could relive the precious shared hours he'd given her.

She refused to dwell on his leaving or that he'd gone without as much as a goodbye. She'd known it was to be nothing more than a one-night stand. They would probably never meet again.

These last twenty-four hours had changed her in ways that she never could have dreamed. She was no longer Mrs. Phillip Brooks, wife of a prominent doctor. No, that identity was gone forever. Nor was she the weak, foolish ex-wife. She was something more now. She was Melanie Brooks, a woman able to make her own decisions—and deal with the consequences.

"I'm going to be fine. I'm going to be strong." Her car would be repaired today, and she'd be able to leave this town. She doubted she would ever return. There was no need to.

Sitting up, she pulled the sheet around her naked body, even though there was no one to see her. A sound caught her attention. She cocked her head. No, surely it couldn't be—

There it was, strong and clear, the familiar sound of an engine. And not just any engine, but the distinctive purr of Jake's motorcycle pulling up in front of her room...



Devyn Quinn

### About Devyn Quinn

Award-winning author Devyn Quinn lives amid the scenic Southwest Texas plains with her many cats, her four ferrets, and a Shih Tzu puppy. A huge fan of dark gothic literature, Devyn is a recent Romantic Times Nominee and CAPA Award winner. Writing with a style that has depth, fire, and fiendish imagination, Devyn makes her New York debut and is currently working on her next goth-erotic title. Readers may visit her on the web at [www.devynquinn.com](http://www.devynquinn.com).

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# One Naughty Night

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