

JACKI KING



THE GLAMOROUS LIFE

The first time I took off my clothes for a guy, it was on a dare. I was ten, he was eleven, and we were behind one of the counselors' cabins at Camp Iroquois Springs.

I learned two important things that day. Guys always find a way to get their jollies first, and watching someone watching me peel off my clothes brought to life an itch I've been scratching ever since.

These days I took my clothes off all the time, only there were no dares involved, and the end result proved to be fistfuls of money instead of poison ivy.

For the last two months, I had been scratching my itch on The Quad circuit, a rotation of the four largest clubs for exotic dancers in the tri-city area. My favorite club on The Quad remained Floyd's Den of Iniquity. With three runway stages, lighted poles, and plush, private lap dance chairs, it was the nicest place I'd strutted my stuff...publicly, that is.

Mr. G, a delectable hunk of bouncer who never let anyone know his real name, would be the other reason the Den of Iniquity topped my list. He looked like most bouncers, muscles as far as the eye could see, and a body fat percentage that could be measured in negative numbers. His thick, jet black hair begged my fingers to dive in for a romp every time I walked by, and he had a way of smiling when he said my name that could make me melt every day of the week and twice on Sunday...

PRAISE FOR THE GLAMOROUS LIFE

“Jacki King captivates her readers from first sentence to last...Ms. King’s writing is fast-paced and spicy. A fabulous debut author to watch out for.”

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“Sexy, sassy, and laugh-out-loud funny...you’ll love debut author Jacki King!”

—Shannon Hollis
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THE GLAMOROUS LIFE

BY

JACKI KING

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THE GLAMOROUS LIFE
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And special thanks to Dave, whose birthday present initiated the concept...see, it's the gift that keeps on giving!

DEDICATION

*This is for exotic dancer Susan Walsh.
While this story primarily celebrates the positives of
this business, I am profoundly touched by her story
and loss due to her participation in it.*

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Of course, every other girl in the place felt the same way about G—at least the straight ones did. No one ever got more than that heavenly smile or a perfectly timed helping hand, though. Regulars on The Quad had a five hundred dollar pool for the first one to get his real name, but no one had claimed it yet.

I rolled into the Den's parking lot in my midnight blue Jeep Cherokee with a Toni Braxton medley booming through the speakers. After the one-two punch of "He Wasn't Man Enough for Me" and "Gimme Some," I oozed empowerment and sexuality. Just the way I wanted to be when I crossed G's path.

I climbed down from the car, adjusted my knee-length khaki sarong and white, sleeveless blouse—I always tried to wear skirts or dresses when I worked around G—grabbed my duffle of costumes, and headed into the club.

"Hello, gorgeous," G's spoonful-of-sugar voice trickled over me as I arrived at the ticket booth.

"I'm sure you say that to all the girls."

He checked his watch. "You're early tonight. Did you really need to see me that badly?" He whipped out that knee-buckling smile, and I swear the hallelujah chorus erupted in my head.

I raised my chin just a little higher. "Nah, I decided to grace you with my presence ahead of schedule." I put extra swing in my step as I headed toward the dressing room.

Another man's voice greeted me closer to the stage area. "Meow! I

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didn't know you were gonna be here tonight, Porsche."

I turned toward the DJ booth where Tornado Martinez was giving me the up and down like I was the last free pitcher of beer in a hot, crowded bar.

"Hey, Tornado," I said and gave him my most charming smile. "You gonna take good care of me tonight?"

"Baby, I'm gonna hook you up. I'll treat you so right, you ain't never gonna want another man." He whirled around, then snapped his fingers and bowed in my direction.

"I hope you're talking about music over there, pip-squeak," G said.

Tornado put up a hand and pretended to whisper behind it, although he didn't lower his voice at all. "Don't worry 'bout him. He gets cranky when his boyfriend's outta town."

G stepped out of the ticket booth and pointed at Tornado. "You want a demotion to toilet jockey?"

I grinned and walked into the changing area. Empty. Just the way I liked it. It was built like a locker room with two wooden benches on either side of the dressing area. Tall lockers stood against the walls next to the benches. Not necessarily an attractive arrangement, but everyone had plenty of room, even more so in the corners.

On the far side of the room, a mirrored vanity with theater lights offered plenty of well-lit preparation space for the entertainers. I walked in and took the left corner spot.

I straddled the bench, set my bag on it, then plopped down to double-check my costumes. Afterward, I went over the song list I wanted to use.

Aside from turning my natural assets into a killer package of phenomenal hair, enormous breasts, and costumes that could make a guy bust something at twenty paces, there were two tricks to my success in this biz: song list and Charms Blow Pops.

Most girls didn't bother to choose their song list and costumes

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together. Like most people, they bought into the stereotype that all you had to do was get naked and shake your tits to be a stripper. Technically, that might be true, but there was a difference between making some money and making a living, a very comfortable living. A little effort went a long way in this business, and my effort in particular meant I often took home double, if not triple, what other girls did.

Perhaps I'd watched *Flashdance* too many times, but I never failed to synchronize my makeup, music, and outfits. I always brought my own mix CDs and always tucked a twenty-dollar bill or two inside for the DJ. Hence the warm welcome from Tornado. DJs loved me.

The door to the dressing room opened. Two other Quad regulars walked in, a veteran named Dixie and a rookie named Gemini. Dixie was a sweet-talking but shrewd native of Atlanta who had followed a man north, then been dumped and stranded. She once confessed to me she was thirty-nine, but she didn't look a day over twenty-eight, and she'd been stripping almost her entire adult life. She had a waterfront condo and a stock portfolio on the verge of six-figures. I idolized her the moment we met, and three years ago, she had picked me as her rookie protégé.

"Ah, here's one you wanna keep your eye on," Dixie said, putting her bag in the right corner, then walking over to hug me.

"Good to see you, Dix," I whispered in her ear as I returned the hug. I looked at Gemini over Dixie's shoulder. "I had a good teacher, and I paid attention."

"Oh, she did more than pay attention. She's got good instincts. That lollipop thing you do is brilliant."

I shrugged. "It's about time to start planning a Vegas trip soon, isn't it?"

Dixie went back to her bag.

Gemini nodded. "We were just talking about that on the way over here," she said, pulling out a costume. "Can you really clear three grand

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in a weekend there?”

Dixie traveled every other month, hitting either Vegas or New York City. Thanks to the power of the Internet and online travel bidding, she had shown me the best way to snag cheap flights, cheaper hotel rooms, and arrange for a Vegas booking agent to secure some great gigs.

“Three grand’s a bit ambitious,” I said, digging out what I called my country slut outfit, super short-short denims, a red-checkered gingham bustier, and a red satin thong. “But you can clear two easily. It’s not your home turf, so you rarely cough up kickbacks.”

Gemini changed into a cute little white lace bra and thong that she covered up with the perfect naughty little schoolgirl outfit—blue and gray plaid skirt, white blouse. When she pulled out eyeglasses and a plastic ruler, I burst out laughing.

“Perfect,” I said.

“Do I know talent or what?” Dixie said, pulling her CD from her bag.

“You should open a school when you get out of here, Dix.” I learned a long time ago never to refer to her leaving as retirement.

She made a noncommittal “hmpfh.” I got rid of my street clothes and slipped into my costume. An hour later we had completed our transformations into goddesses, while other girls scrambled in, pulling on whatever g-strings they could find.

* * *

The first dance of the night always proved to be my favorite. Even though the audience was smaller at eight o’clock, the adrenaline surged highest for me right before the first dance. And with fewer guys in the club, I could give each one just a little more personal attention if I wanted to, pausing to give them that little smile, an extra shake, all those things that separated them from their money, even this early in the evening.

I always danced to “Man, I Feel like a Woman” when I had on my

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little Daisy Mae outfit. High-energy song, attention-grabbing outfit—when I strutted onto that stage and did a few twirls around the pole, the rest of the world disappeared.

I took my introductory walk up and down each of the runways in succession, scouting my first mark of the night. Money, and the potential to make tons of it, got me into this business in the first place. I never lost sight of that.

Along the outer edge of the right stage, two waitresses gathered chairs together and roped off the area. Probably a bachelor party on its way. Those were always good for big tips.

As I reached the end of the center runway, Mr. G walked by and winked at me. Did he harbor a secret Daisy Duke fantasy like the rest of the customers?

A voice to the left grabbed my attention during the transition to the song's chorus. "Hey, would you believe it's my little brother's birthday today?"

I looked down to the supposed birthday boy. He kept his brown hair neatly combed and cut short. Clean-shaven and dressed in navy Dockers and a tan polo shirt, he didn't look like the normal lush looking for a handout, neither did his brother. The older brother had hungry, eager brown eyes but otherwise looked like just a slightly older and heavier version of baby bro. The birthday ploy for a freebie was the oldest in the book, though, with "I'm shipping out tomorrow" running a close second. I spent the chorus in front of Birthday Boy and his brother, then I made my way to the left stage branch.

A quartet of blue-collar guys occupied the edge of this runway. They each had tanned faces, beards in various stages of growth, and huge hands with signs of cracking skin. Construction workers. They could be rowdy in groups, but most of them just wanted to have a little fun.

I strutted back to the main stage and started the slow, purposeful

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ritual of peeling off the short-shorts. My gaze swept the length of each runway. I definitely had everyone's attention.

I pushed them down over my right hip and right cheek then whirled around the pole some more. A lot of girls shied away from pole work and the bruises and falls that inevitably came with it. I loved the pole, especially ones like this that lit up whenever you touched them. Of course, I had loved the monkey bars as a kid, too, and used to climb and swing and flip and hurl myself into space, always dreaming of being the next Mary Lou Retton.

I slid my shorts all the way down, then shoved them behind me with my foot. I used to kick them forward on the stage until guys started stealing my costumes. And for what? Did they take it home to give my wife as a present?

"Look, hon, I brought you a little something from the strip club." Ugh!

I strutted and shimmied and swung through the song's last verse, then I paused at the center runway and slowly undid each hook of the bustier. By the time Shania made it past the "Oh-ah-oh" I had it off and dropped it on the stage.

I gave everything a few good shakes, then went for one of my trademark moves. I double-checked the floor space behind me then did a backbend that turned into a handstand against the pole. I wrapped my right leg around the pole and let it support my weight. Just as the song ended, I bent my back a little more and raised myself up so I could see the crowd.

The movement made my tits swing side-to-side. Every set of eyes I could see was honed in and following the movement the same as a hypnotist's charm. Maybe I should have told them they were all chickens just to see if they would have started clucking.

I carefully eased down the pole and did a forward walkover to stand upright again. I walked up and down each runway and slowly bent then

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straightened as I collected my money. There really was no dignified way to squat down and scoop something up when you were practically naked and trying to balance on five-inch heels.

When I reached the edge of the middle runway, I paused in front of the two brothers. The younger brother looked up at me with wide brown eyes, almost like he was afraid I might pounce him straight from the stage. I flashed him my most disarming smile. "I'll be back for you in a few minutes."

I looked out over the crowd until I spotted Mr. G. I tapped my left wrist, then pointed to the brothers. He nodded.

* * *

"We've got a birthday boy at the end of Row Two," I announced, marching into the dressing room. "G's confirming."

Gemini headed out for her turn on the stage.

Birthdays were a big deal to Floyd, so he made sure visitors got a treat at Den of Iniquity. Celebraters got two-for-one lap dances once G, or one of the other bouncers, checked the person's driver's license and gave them a special wristband.

I opened the combination lock on my locker, tucked away my costume and cash, then put on a red satin bra with hearts over the boobs. I snatched up a handful of Charms Blow Pops, then tucked them into the waistband of my g-string, saving a cherry one for myself. I unwrapped it, plopped it in my mouth and went to give someone a very happy birthday.

* * *

Lap dances were a necessary evil of the stripping world, and they were all the same. Bounce, grind, wiggle, and shake, either on the guy's—or gal's—lap or mere inches away.

The Charms made mine different. Of course, you had to have the right space to be able to use them, no chance of being bumped or

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caught up in a crowd. Den of Iniquity was perfect. The End Zone with its big screen TVs for the sports fan who liked a lap dance during his halftime show, didn't have enough room to do the trick.

I would work it around in my mouth in front of the customer, then lean over and ask him if he wanted a treat with his lap dance. They never said "no." He got a dance and a sucker. I got my thirty bucks—half to me and half to the house.

Some gals loved to do lap dances. They enjoyed being close, flirting. I, however, was not one of them. I didn't exactly hate them. They gave you a sense of power, getting to see what you could do to a guy, a total stranger. Really, though, my passion was the stage. I did lap dances until I lost any sense of thrill or got tired of getting pawed on the sly. If I hadn't reached the club's quota for the night, I simply paid it from my tips and went on my merry way.

Armed with my Charms pop, I sauntered up to the brothers. Birthday Boy did indeed have a purple band around his wrist. After a few cursory licks, I turned to the older brother. "So are you gonna be a good older brother and buy your little brother a lap dance for his birthday?"

His eyes focused immediately on the sucker I'd just put back in my mouth. "Oh yeah."

I gave him a big smile, then turned to the younger brother. I leaned down and spoke into his ear to counter the booming sounds of Gemini's music. "C'mon, birthday boy. I have a little treat for you."

I nodded over my shoulder toward the large, red leather chairs for lap dance customers. I glanced to his brother. "It's two for the price of one for the birthday boy. Wanna tag along?"

He stood up and nodded. "Oh yeah."

I held out my hand. He looked at it, paused for a second, then figured out what I wanted. He pulled twenty dollars out of his wallet and handed the money to me. I winked at him as I tucked the bill into

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the left cup of my bra.

Gemini settled into her routine while the brothers settled into their chairs. I unwrapped one of the suckers and placed it in the birthday boy's mouth. Giving customers something else to play with generally kept one of their hands busy. Another trick involved holding their hand while dancing. They felt like I gave them a personal touch, and I could keep better control of where that hand went.

Unless the guy smelled bad and just would not keep his hands still, I tried not to call the bouncers. If we called the bouncers on every guy who tried to cop a feel, the club would be empty within an hour.

While the birthday boy sampled his Blow Pop, I began to dance, swaying side-to-side before him. When I bent forward, grasped his shoulders, then pushed him farther into the seat—all while keeping the same dance, he froze mid-pucker.

I pushed each hip farther and farther as I swayed. Finally, I turned around and gave him a few little wiggles. When I turned back around, he'd gone bug-eyed and looked like he was about to bite his sucker in half.

Poor guy. He probably didn't get out much. I took the Blow Pop out of my mouth, leaned closer, and spoke directly into his ear. "You're not studying to go into the priesthood are you?"

He looked up at me like I'd suddenly sprouted a second nose. "Huh?"

"I wouldn't want to corrupt you or anything. You're so shy. Relax, Mr. Birthday Boy. Have some fun."

Finally, he smiled.

I put the sucker back in my mouth, turned around, and sat on the edge of his lap, alternately bouncing and rocking in time to the music. My gaze traveled over customer after customer as I formed the perfect pucker against the candy coating and twirled the Blow Pop against my lips. I locked my gaze on three different guys and made a mental note

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which one to go after in which order once I finished the brothers. Unless someone else beat me to them, I'd knock out over half my quota in a little over half an hour.

I turned around and gave Mr. Birthday my full attention. I straddled his lap in a half-stand, half-crouch position that I could never hold longer than one song per customer, no matter how many ballet squats a week I did on the leg press machine. I rocked my hips in time to the music.

After a few moments, I threw my head back, letting my long blonde mane swing back and forth against his legs. He probably couldn't feel it through his jeans, but visuals always seemed to help with guys.

I wiggled my shoulders back and forth, giving him all the jiggle he could handle for half the song's chorus. Once again, I straddled his lap and sat down. He was hard as a rock, a common occurrence this late in a dance. At least he hadn't shot a load yet. That happened more than I could count.

I pulled the sucker out of his mouth and held it just beyond the reach of his lips. He bent forward and took a tentative nip at it, and I pulled it away again just before he could close on his target.

I pushed my boobs together, then I tucked the stick of the sucker between my cleavage. "Bon appetite, Birthday Boy."

He leaned forward and took it. I stood up and clapped for him before moving on to his older brother.

Apparently Gemini had the extended mix put together for this song. It was taking forever to get to the end.

"What's your name, again?" Older Brother asked.

Great. A talker. "Porsche. It's my favorite sports car."

"Hey, mine, too. What do you know about that?"

I know you're full of crap, for starters. I should have said the Pinto just to see what he did.

"You wanna pick a flavor?" I asked, pushing my right hip toward

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him.

He took entirely too long picking a cherry one from my belt.

I started a series of new bounces and sways. I kept the sucker in my mouth in case Mr. Chatty tried to start up again, and I moved my hands in the air and over my head to keep them away from him, too.

I turned my back to him in the hopes that he was an ass man. There was no movement on the stage. I looked over at Gemini.

She had one hand on the pole but didn't move. Her attention was directly on the door to the club. I followed her gaze and noticed G was checking a woman's license. A tall blonde in a magenta spaghetti-strap slip dress stood in front of him. The man next to her had on black jeans and a matching denim shirt. He wrapped both hands around the woman's waist, pulling her closer to him. He looked around but immediately stopped when he noticed Gemini.

Gemini's horrified expression said it all. Only the cheated-on could create an expression like that. She whirled around and bolted backstage.

I took a step to go after her. I still had a customer, though, so I turned around again. Taking a deep breath and throwing on my isn't-this-fun smile, I danced in slow circles, rocking my hips, swaying, bending, the whole shebang.

I ventured a look back to the door. The guy with his arms around Miss Magenta threw his head back and shook his head at the ceiling in a very "Why me?" way. She, however, was oblivious because she was too busy drawing out the process of taking her license back from Mr. G. Her index finger followed the edge of the card, then stroked the back of his hand.

That bitch! I grabbed the sucker's stem and pulled it out of my mouth. I'd poke her eyes out with my Blow Pop if it was the last thing I did.

G gave her a very businesslike nod, mouthed something that

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resembled “Have a nice night,” and moved to the next person in line. *’Atta boy.*

The other man leaned closer to Magenta Slut and said something in her ear. She shrugged. They turned around and walked out the door.

Something bumped my hand. I looked down, and the older brother was now running his tongue around my sucker as though it were tethered to one of my breasts. *Ew!*

I don’t know how I held onto it. He lapped at it greedily, and I poured my energy into fighting off a convulsion of complete disgust. I tucked the sucker into his hand, next to the other one, then contorted my lips into something I hoped passed for a smile. “You boys have a good night,” I said, turning around.

I’d only taken a few steps when an unexpected wave of queasiness welled up inside me. I glanced around the room in anticipation of seeing Gemini. I found a man staring intently at me instead.

He reminded me of Locke from *Lost*, only younger. He was bald but more likely from shaving than from lost hair. The skin of his scalp was smooth and shiny. He wore light blue jeans, frayed at the left knee, over black motorcycle boots. Beneath an open, black leather vest was a crisp, white T-shirt. He had a patch over his right eye. All he needed was a parrot on his shoulder, and he could have been Long John Hell’s Angel.

I have no idea how many moments we remained with our gazes locked on one another. He didn’t have a “come hither” look, and I wasn’t looking for a sale. I needed to go check on Gemini, especially since it was Dixie’s turn on stage. I broke the stare and headed toward the dressing room.

* * *

The changing area teemed with the other dancers in various stages of undress. I didn’t see Gemini anywhere. At that moment, Tornado announced Dixie, and the rhythmic throbbing of techno music filled the

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entire club.

I stopped in front of a redhead named Amber. "Have you seen Gemini?"

She nodded. "She bummed a cigarette and went out the back."

I pulled an extra-long gray hoodie out of my locker and went out the back door.

Gemini paced back and forth, puffing on the cigarette.

She stopped when she saw me. "I'm not gonna cry. I didn't come out here to cry."

"That's fine."

She took three rapid-fire drags that burned down half the cigarette. "You know, I knew it. I knew he was up to something. I just didn't want to make a scene in the middle of the club."

"Why ruin your tips all night because of a dumbass like that?"

"Exactly." She groaned then stared out into the darkness. "My tips. Damn. I hope Dixie got my tips."

"I'm sure she's got you covered."

A few more puffs, and the cig was almost gone.

"Why would he bring a date here, though? Is that his kind of thing?"

She nodded. "He takes one of those pills that gives a guy erections all weekend long, and he has this thing about watching girls make out. He buys lap dances at closing time and tips you one hundred dollars if you'll make out with his date. Kissing only."

"Is that how you met?"

"Hell no." She dropped the cigarette and crushed it. "I met him at the gas station, actually. He drove this smokin' silver Mitsubishi Spyder that I just had to have a ride in."

She let out that "farewell" exhale, then looked at me. "Back to work."

"Spoken like a true Dixie prodigy." I held the door open and let her

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go inside first.

Poor kid. The thing about this business was that, nine times out of ten, it ruined your chance to have a healthy relationship. You either ended up dating clients, or if you tried to date normals, you ended up lying about what you did, which almost never worked for long.

I hadn't dated in over a year, and I honestly didn't miss as much about it as I thought I would have. I missed holding hands. I missed half-hour make-out sessions that left each of you breathless. But I didn't miss playing "that" game, pretending I was someone I wasn't just to keep a guy's interest long enough for him to figure out he couldn't live without me.

I tried not to be one of those girls who assumed our clients and their lust represented all men. I tried to remember there were normals out there.

Which, of course, brought me back to G. Neither client nor normal, he represented something else that I definitely wanted to try. Like most bouncers, though, he probably had a rule against dating "the girls."

I didn't want to think about that.

* * *

Half an hour later, Dixie walked toward my corner as I pulled on my neon pink wraparound unitard. It wasn't made out of a sheet of fabric per se, more like an inch-wide band that wrapped itself around your body over and over and over. Guys loved it, and it offered plenty of places to securely tuck money while letting each guy feel like he was getting away with a touch.

"Big spender at station six. Bought three lap dances, then he said if I had any blonde friends to send them his way." Dixie straightened one of my twisted bands.

"Thanks." I adjusted the criss-cross pattern of straps across my boobs. "Is he grabby or weird?"

"He has this...intensity, I'd call it. But he didn't act out of line. Not

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once.” She pushed my hair back off my shoulder. “He asked for you, though, and said to bring him a green apple Blow Pop.”

That was the worst flavor in the bag.

I pulled out a green apple Blow Pop, closed and locked my locker, then faced Dixie. “I’ll see you in four lap dances, then.”

“Gonna one-up the teacher, are you? That’s my girl.”

I made a loud smooch in her direction, then took off.

* * *

I emerged from the dressing room and strutted my way out to the main floor. My steps slowed as I approached station six because the man sitting there was none other than Mr. Eye Patch.

His good eye widened as he took in my costume. “Nice. Makes me want to find the end of the string and pull.”

“That’s the whole idea,” I said, flashing him my best spider’s-gonna-eat-the-fly smile.

He shot me his own version of one.

The queasiness returned. I didn’t like the ones who tried to play the game back. This was a lap dance, not a chess match. I’d rather have the yappy older brother across the room. Couldn’t this guy just shut up and enjoy it?

Time to put the moves on and distract him. The sooner I could lose myself in the music, the better. I took the green apple Blow Pop and unwrapped it.

I held it out to him. “I believe this is what you asked for.”

He looked at it but made no effort to take it. He blinked, then looked up at me.

“Is that it?” he asked. “You aren’t going to warm it up for me first?”

“What?” I looked down at the sucker. He wanted me to lick it for him? Great. He wasn’t just odd, he was a perv, too.

If he asks me to go to the bathroom with him while he does his business, I’m outta here.

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"I'll make it worth your while," he said, sliding a bulging black leather wallet across the table with a serpentine movement of his hand.

"The closest you can get is a good luck kiss," I replied. I puckered up and smooched the very top of the sucker.

When I presented it to him, he brushed his fingers over mine with a rough, possessive touch.

I wasn't one to shy away from trouble, but I didn't seek it out, either. In one swift motion I pulled back, then I wove both hands through the air in time to the music. Moving them over my head where they would be safely out of reach, I began to dance.

The last thing I needed was to convert some weirdo into a complete whacko. I hadn't had a stalker in over a year and hadn't missed the experience.

I rolled my hips in slow counter-clockwise circles and hoped he got into my show before I had to leave or call for G.

No matter what, though, he would only get one dance out of me. He could start tipping with hundred dollar bills, and I wouldn't care. Well, okay, I'd care. I just wouldn't stick around. I'd go back in the dressing room and give Dixie an earful because intense was not the same as creepy.

* * *

I walked up to G and waited until he'd finished checking another I.D. I took the sucker out of my mouth, so he could understand me. "You should keep your eye on station six," I said, then went back to work on the lollipop.

His eyes went straight to my mouth. "What's the problem?"

I removed the sucker again. "He's clingy and has high freak potential. He wanted me to lick his Blow Pop before I gave it to him."

"Did you?"

I shook my head and put the Blow Pop back in my mouth.

A mischievous gleam sparked in his eyes. "Would you do it for

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me?"

"Will you be serious? He feels like trouble."

"Yes ma'am." G saluted me, then glanced at station six. "There's nobody there."

I spun around. Mr. Eye Patch was gone. I looked around the floor, the bar, everywhere. No sign of him.

"Maybe Mother Nature called," G said.

I faced him. "Well, you won't have a hard time spotting him. He's the bald one wearing an eye patch.

"I haven't let anyone in wearing an eye patch."

"Are you sure? Maybe Sarge did?"

He shook his head. "I'm the only one on the door until ten. And I'd remember an eye patch."

I sighed. "Great. I'm going crazy, then."

"I'll tell Sarge. We'll watch for him." He finally noticed the pink wraparound I wore. "Is that new?"

"Like it?"

"Not as much as I like the Daisy Duke outfit."

"I'll remember that." I ran the sucker over my lips a second, then put it back in my mouth. He didn't miss a moment of the show.

"What club do you work next weekend?" he asked without moving his eyes from my mouth.

I removed the Blow Pop. "Satin Pussycat. Why?"

"I'm getting my first Saturday off in two months."

"And you want to come watch me dance? Don't you get enough here?"

"I had my mind more on after you finish dancing. I thought I might ask you to take a ride in my General Lee?"

"So are you asking me to take a ride?" I raised my eyebrows to play up the double *entendré*.

"If I were asking, would you say yes?"

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Boys. They could be six-feet-five and all muscle yet still be as shy as an elementary school boy when it came to asking girls out.

I pulled a cherry Blow Pop out of my hip strap. I locked my gaze on his as I gingerly unwrapped the sucker. He licked his lips in anticipation of a taste.

Before I could say anything more, a pair of customers walked through the door.

I held the sucker up to his mouth. He wrapped his lips around it and a flash fire sizzled beneath my skin.

"Keep your eyes open," I said, then winked and walked away, hoping to leave him and the two newcomers reaching for a bib.

* * *

I found Dixie in the locker room toweling off after her set.

"Did you make it to four lap dances?" she asked, dabbing herself up and down, then dropping the towel into the bottom of her locker. She pulled a neon peach bikini set from her bag and slipped into it.

"I could barely stand one. What's up sending me to Mr. Whack Job?"

"What?"

"That guy's not all there, Dix. He wanted me to pre-lick his Blow Pop, and he kept looking at me like he was gonna stick an apple in my mouth, slap me on a plate, and get a fork and knife."

"I don't know anything about that. He was sweet as pie to me. Showed me a picture of his dead wife and told me about how last week was their anniversary. His daughter's bringing the grandkids to visit next month. He paid for all three dances, tipped me an extra twenty, then told me to send 'that cute blonde with the candy' his way."

"He totally creeped me out."

"Sorry, sweetie, but if I'd known that, I wouldn't have sent you."

"Well. 'No harm done,' as you always say. But look out for him. And don't send anyone else to him."

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* * *

An hour later, and I'd made another rotation between the stage and the floor, making sure to avoid Mr. Eye Patch. Thanks to the bachelor party that couldn't get enough of my Blow Pop dances, I'd met the night's quota, and I kept catching G checking me out but looking away whenever I noticed.

I hadn't seen Gemini since before I'd gone on stage, so I took a much-needed break to look for her. After yet another lap around the club, my feet and back were really killing me, and when I felt another tug on my hand, I was ready to tell whoever was on the end of that tug to get lost.

Only it was G.

"Your guy left about twenty minutes ago."

He blew a bubble, and I reached up and popped it with my finger.

"Thanks."

He sucked the gum back into his mouth, and another heat wave whooshed from head to toe.

"Have you seen Gemini?" I asked.

He shook his head and blew another bubble. When I reached up to pop it, he grabbed my wrist. "You only get one, doll."

"Spoil sport."

He let go, and I made my way to the locker room. I slipped off my stilettos, grabbed some flip flops and my hoodie, and stepped outside.

Amber and a newbie brunette whose name I couldn't remember were halfway through their cigarettes.

"Have either of you seen Gemini?"

They both shook their heads, and I walked to the corner of the building. Looking down the row of employees' cars, I spotted her opening the door of a brand new, shiny red Dodge Charger.

"Where're you going, Gemini?" I called. My flip flops made a slapping sound against the blacktop as I hurried toward her.

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"I just can't do this anymore tonight. I started crying on stage. I told Dix to tell Floyd I threw up. I'm getting a quarter pounder with cheese, a bucket of french fries, and a gallon jug of chocolate shake to take home, then I'm calling my brother to meet me at the apartment to change my locks before Casanova gets there."

"Want me to stop by on my way home?"

"Nah. I'll get my brother to stay over, and we can watch DVDs of *Friends* all night."

"All right, then. I'll see you tomorrow night."

I took a few steps back and watched her get in the car. She started it up, revved that throaty engine a few times, then with two quick honks, she pulled out and disappeared down the road.

* * *

The sounds of a car door opening and shutting behind me had barely registered when someone grabbed me by the hair and pulled.

"Goldilocks shouldn't have tried to tattle on the big bad bear. Now the bear's angry." The voice sounded like Eye Patch, but I couldn't be sure, and I couldn't turn my head to see for myself.

He yanked so hard, I came right out of my flip flops. I backpeddled, trying to keep up with him, but bare feet and asphalt were not a good combination. The blacktop shredded the soles of my feet like a cheese grater. I shrieked like a banshee.

"Shut up!"

He shook me hard, and I staggered backward some more. I kept screaming. Every pebble I stepped on cut like a razor blade slicing from my foot straight up to my brain.

He grunted and slammed the back of my head against a car door. Pain exploded through my head in a spray of fireworks. I screamed again and waved wildly, looking for anything to grab. My left hand banged against a side mirror. I wrapped my fingers around it and pulled. We both lurched to the left a half a step.

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I swung my right arm across the front of my body and reached for the mirror, trying to strengthen my hold.

“Not so fast, Goldi,” he said, jerking me by the hair again. He grabbed my right wrist and pulled my arm away from the mirror. After four rough tugs, I lost my grip, and we stumbled to the right.

He let go of my hair, grabbed my left wrist, then heaved. Suddenly, I was airborne. Letting go of my left wrist, he pushed me away from his body, and I landed on my back inside a cargo van. The back of my right heel clipped the step up, and I yelped.

“I said shut up!”

His hand closed around my throat, and I coughed and sputtered. With both hands I clawed at his arm and wrist. Bits of skin gathered under my fingernails.

He growled but didn’t let go. Small red, blue, pink and yellow dots blinked around his face. I felt lightheaded. Passing out was imminent, but I would not go quietly.

He pushed down on me with all of his weight. I squirmed and wiggled but without success. In a last desperate move, I planted both feet on the floor and pushed. New explosions of pain erupted throughout my feet. I screamed and scratched.

He reached behind his back and pulled something from his belt. He shook something in that hand, then he held a small black cylinder above my face.

“This should slow you down,” he said.

I let go of him and threw both hands up, trying to bat the canister away. A cold stream of liquid splashed against my hands. I slapped and struggled. He dropped the cylinder and tried to grab my hands. My right hand connected with his cheek, and I rubbed my hand all over his face, moving straight up and going for the eyes.

He immediately let me go, then thrashed around and screamed, pawing at his face and gasping desperately.

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I rolled over, pushed myself onto my knees, and crawled to the van door. The blacktop was spread before me like an ebony minefield, nowhere safe to step. My flip flops were about ten feet away or so, offering mild refuge from the asphalt.

This is gonna hurt.

Behind me, Eye Patch launched into a blistering string of profanity involving the various forms of harm he'd like to direct entirely at my person. Yeah, walking might hurt, but I felt pretty sure staying behind would hurt even more.

I lowered myself out of the van and whimpered as my right foot reached the pavement. I pushed forward, transferring as much of my weight onto the ball of my foot as possible.

When my left foot touched down, I half-whimpered and half-cried at the new surge of pain.

Flip flops. Just get to the flip flops.

I gritted my teeth and forced myself forward another step.

"You in the van, stop what you're doing!" G's voice boomed from the front of the van.

"G, omigod. Help me!" I cried.

He ran around the front of the van, and I pointed toward the open door. "He's in there. The eye patch guy. He's got some sort of spray stuff, too."

G took a quick peek into the van, then he jumped in. Several punches later, he emerged from the van, dragging Eye Patch out the door. Blood trickled from the left corner of Eye Patch's mouth. The skin around his right eye was bright red, and his eyelids had swollen shut. He coughed and sputtered, then settled into a series of jagged breaths. His hands were behind his back.

G pushed him into a sitting position on the step-up. "You make one move, and I won't wait for the cops. You understand me?"

Eye Patch's wheezing seemed to be enough of an answer for him

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because he immediately turned to me.

“Amber just came in and told me a couple was out here having sex in a van in the parking lot. What the hell happened?” He didn’t wait for an answer. His eyes went straight to my feet and what I was sure was some serious bleeding that I didn’t want to see.

“He jumped me from behind,” I said. “He tried to drag me in there and mace me or something.”

G’s face hardened into a look I couldn’t possibly describe, but that I never wanted to be on the receiving end of. Jaw clenched, he balled up his right fist, spun around, then punched Eye Patch so hard in the stomach, it made *me* want to cough.

“I hope that broke a rib, mother fucker. I ought to kill you and claim self-defense.” He walked over and scooped me into his arms.

* * *

I’d love to look back on the rest of the evening and paint a portrait of a woman who braved her injuries with resolve and grace.

No such luck.

I gave a brief statement to the police, because apparently excruciating pain doesn’t excuse you from such duties unless you’ve had a life-threatening injury. Afterward, both G and Dixie went to the hospital with me.

I cried. I screamed. I had to be sedated. By the time all was said and done, even my stitches had stitches, and my final memories of the emergency room involved fleeting glimpses of Dixie, along with a strong desire to ask to be the middle of a Mr. G-cute doctor sandwich.

* * *

“Wanna play doctor?” G asked in a voice filled with mischief and innuendo.

I blinked a few times before the mountainous lump that was G came into focus. He had on a white doctor’s coat. Beneath it, he wore a

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black, button-down dress shirt and a maroon tie. He held up a stethoscope and wiggled the small silver listening bell in front of me.

“My first prescription is for some fresh air.”

He spun around, grabbed the edge of the privacy curtain surrounding my hospital bed, then pulled it back. Gone were the glaring fluorescent lights, muffled P.A. announcements, and antiseptic smells of the hospital. Sunshine, sweet-sounding bird chirps, and the delectable aroma of honeysuckle warming in the sun replaced them all.

The metal railings of my hospital bed had disappeared. The mattress beneath me was now large and round, big enough for two people to disappear into and not resurface for days. The most comfortable pillows I could have imagined were beneath me, raising me into a gentle, relaxed, half-sitting position. Both legs, wide apart but not uncomfortably so, rested on smaller stacks of similar pillows.

Gone was the scratchy hospital gown. In its place appeared a white silk chemise so light and airy it touched my skin like an angel’s kiss.

G climbed onto the bed on all fours and crawled toward me. He spread out, flat on his stomach but with stethoscope in hand.

“Let’s check out the patient,” he said and placed the cold, metal bell directly against my clit.

I squealed and squirmed.

G flashed a reproachful look at me. “I have very serious work to do here. You’re not helping.” He moved the bell around a few times, and I jumped each time the cool steel met my flesh.

He shook his head. “Guess this calls for an exploratory procedure since the patient is uncooperative.”

“I couldn’t help it,” I said in my defense, then gave him a sheepish grin. “Isn’t uncooperative better than unresponsive?”

I blinked. Suddenly the stethoscope disappeared, and G had on surgical scrubs, latex gloves, and a mask over his nose and mouth.

“Shhhh,” he said. He pulled at the wrist of one of the gloves,

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snapping it against his skin menacingly.

He moved back down between my legs. He pulled the mask down, and his breath danced over my skin. The fleshy nub, along with both nipples, immediately went rigid. When his tongue slipped between the fold of skin and the small, tight round of flesh, I took in such a big breath, my lungs almost exploded in my chest.

He slipped each of his hands underneath my legs and up around my hips. I reached down with my right hand and took his hand. His large hand swallowed my own. I could have stayed like this forever, but his tongue moved faster, and I lost more and more control of my body.

Muscles all over began to twitch in excitement. I wanted to kick and squirm, but I didn't dare move my feet after all they'd been through over the night.

The air left my body as fast as I gulped it in, but I kept calling out to G over and over until there wasn't any air left to spare. Explosions of pleasure rocked my body from head to toe. I closed my eyes tight, and fireworks cascaded in waves of bright color against the backdrop of my eyelids.

I opened my eyes and became aware of two things.

First, I was in my own bed, not in some hospital room, not in some Disneyesque meadow filled with fragrant flowers and sunshine.

Second, I wasn't in my bed alone.

Since I was flat on my back, I didn't have far to turn my head to check out who my new neighbor was. Broad chest that rose and fell in a steady rhythm, muscles that went on forever, and that lush dark hair I wanted to play with for hours. I looked into his face. *Holy crap—his eyes were open.*

"That must've been some dream you were having."

I gulped my greeting.

He didn't cut me any slack and kept going in a teasing voice. "I thought maybe your mind was back in the parking lot, except the way

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you said my name didn't exactly sound panicked." That lopsided grin said he knew exactly when and why I used that particular voice.

My cheeks grew warm, but I doubted he could see the blush in the dim lighting. I decided to distract myself by noticing what I could of him in the dark. I could see his white undershirt but didn't have the courage yet to check farther south, although I was dying to know if my dream-sounds had given him any kind of physical reaction, too. I still had on my hoodie from the night before. I did a quick butt-cheek squeeze. Yep. Thong was in place. So, Mr. G stood for "Gentleman," too. How many guys could have a half-naked, doped-up woman at their disposal and not take advantage of her?

My toes felt funny. I could feel air on the bottoms of my feet. I sat up and peeked to the end of the bed. The covers had been folded back over my feet. My toes were covered with what looked to be just the toe section of socks. Did he cut up my socks? What kind of kinky was that?

"I was worried your toes might get cold. The doc said the hardest part, aside from the pain, would be keeping your feet warm."

I looked up at him and just about fainted from the overwhelming combination of raw sex tingles and the relief that rocked through my body. "Thanks. That was sweet."

He flashed an adorably boyish and crooked smile before he continued. "I hope you don't mind. When you asked me to stay, I thought about sleeping on the couch, but I was afraid if you needed something, I might not hear you right away."

So, I had somehow had the presence of mind to ask him to stay, and he'd chivalrously obliged. He'd cut up a pair of my socks to make sure my toes stayed warm. If he told me he could cook and didn't mind folding laundry, I'd have no choice but to marry this guy before sunup so that he didn't turn back into a pumpkin.

"I think you just wanted to eavesdrop on my dreams."

"That was an added bonus."

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I smirked. “Don’t get all full of yourself. I’ve been sedated. I’m not responsible for what I dream.”

He shook his head. “Actually, the sedatives would reveal what is in your subconscious. They would let out exactly what you really want.”

I gingerly turned onto my side to face him. I thought about pushing myself up higher on the bed, but I had a pretty good suspicion that if I did any movement that required my feet coming into contact with *anything*, I would probably emit a howl that could shatter glass.

I gazed into sleepy brown eyes that matched the color of melted dark chocolate. Holy hell, he was gorgeous!

“So, you only stayed overnight in my apartment because I asked you, and you just happen to be here in my bed to make sure you can hear me, and this is all perfectly innocent?”

“Well, I don’t know if innocent is the right adjective...”

He knew grammar? Get the minister! “Let me guess. Like myself, you were an English Lit major who remained unemployable in a traditional profession when student loans came due?”

He shook his head, and the boyish grin returned. “More like my tenth-grade English teacher had a killer rack, so I always sat in the front row.”

At least he was honest about it.

He rolled onto his side to face me. We were almost chest to chest. “So I guess this rules out taking you dancing on the first date?”

I shrugged. “Unless you want me to make sounds that would make your eardrums look like the bottom of my feet.”

“I think I already heard some of those noises back in the emergency room.”

A heavy silence fell between us. I closed my eyes as two schools of thought duked it out in my head. I needed to thank him for everything he’d done. I could have been dead if he hadn’t come out to check the van. We both knew it.

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On the other hand, I didn't want to talk about it. I liked the flirting, the fun. I licked my lips, took a deep breath and opened my eyes just in time to see him close in.

He cupped the back of my head with one hand and held me in place while he moved his mouth over my own. He hovered for only an instant, then his lips teased mine, trapping my lower lip between them, pulling gently. Our mouths locked onto one another, soft, tender, polite...at first. When he parted his lips, mine followed along, and our tongues entwined in slow, introductory explorations.

A long time ago, I'd gotten used to the pawing and forced affection that came with stripping. To be honest, I barely noticed it anymore. Real affection like this, however, flooded my senses with wave after wave of sensory overload. One second I thought I would cry from the sheer power of it, and the next, I thought I might cream my panties and pass out.

He broke the kiss with a slow pull away and a soft moan. He took in a quick breath, and his mouth twitched as if he were about to say something. He let out a sigh.

"I don't want to keep calling you Porsche. Not like this."

All I could do was stare at him and blink for several moments. Did I get a concussion back in the parking lot? Did they finally find a way to combine painkillers and fantasies?

"Well, I don't exactly want to call you G, either."

He smiled, then leaned in and kissed me again. Close-mouthed, but so tender that it gave me a lump in my throat.

When we came up for air again, I spoke first. "We could try one of those quid pro quo things?"

"For sex?" he asked.

Doesn't take them long to reach that destination. "No, silly. About the names."

"Sorry. I didn't mean to go there."

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I flashed him a skeptical look.

"Well, I mean...I meant to go there, just not like that...aw, hell, I give up."

"I can cut you some slack. You do see me naked all the time, after all."

"Actually, I don't. Working in a titty bar does strange things. I don't really notice anyone is naked. It's like my brain doesn't register it." He gave me an apologetic shrug. "I notice your clothes, though."

"Especially that little country girl outfit?"

A light pink crept into his cheeks. "Daisy Duke was the first poster I had on my wall."

Perhaps I should consider adding a few more to my wardrobe.

He quickly changed the subject. "So about that quid pro quo thing?"

I took the plunge. "Victoria."

"I like that. Can I call you Tori?"

"I haven't heard that since grade school."

"Oh." He frowned.

"I mean that in a good way. It's endearing. You can use it, but you'd better get on with spilling your own name."

He grinned. "Gabriel."

I smiled. "Like the angel."

"I didn't think about that. But I guess so. And you have to split the five hundred dollar name-that-bouncer pool with me now that you know."

"Nuh-unh. What makes you think I would tell?"

I leaned in and kissed him, with plenty of insistence. While our tongues dueled, I brushed my hand across the front of his chest.

With the gentlest of pressure he rolled me onto my back, and his hand moved in a steady progression from my hair to the back of my neck, to my shoulder. Instead of going the safe route down my arm, he made a straight line along the front, grazing my breast in a movement

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that a less experienced gal might have mistaken for inadvertent.

Our kissing heated up. Without any cue, our breaths and tongues simultaneously became insistent and urgent. I moved my hand up and around his shoulder, pulling him in closer.

He slid his hand over my stomach in a slow, sweeping movement, as though my body were coded in Braille, and he knew how to read it. His fingers found the round of my hip, and he took it in his grasp. He drew me closer. The rock-hard lump of his erection ground against my leg. I reached down and raked my fingers along it...and raked, and raked. He made a soft moan, and I did it again. This was going to be hard *not* to take back to the girls and brag about.

We came up for air.

"You've got good moves. That's no lie," I said between small kisses.

"Is there a wager on my moves, too?"

"I'm not telling." I grinned against his lips. "Shut up and show me some more."

He let out a playfully exaggerated sigh. "If I *must*."

He moved in and kissed me hungrily. I wrapped both arms around his shoulders. Heat radiated from his body and wrapped me from head to toe.

Before I realized what I was doing, I planted my right foot on the mattress and tried to push myself snugly beneath him, only blinding pain made me writhe and gasp.

He took his weight off me instantly and did his best to comfort me by smoothing my hair.

I clenched my teeth together and waited for the throbbing to subside. Beads of sweat gathered at each temple, and I whimpered.

"Take it easy," he said, making another pass through my hair. "We've got all the time in the world."

He kissed my temple—right where the sweat was, but he didn't

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even flinch—then he sat up. “I’ll get your meds, and some water. We’ll take it easy for a while.”

That sounded like an excellent plan of action. With the psycho locked up, my newfound unemployment, and fresh batteries in the remote control, taking our time seemed completely do-able. Given the millions of hormones racing through my body like it was Grand Central Station at rush hour, an entire day of oral sex seemed completely do-able, too. And then there was that happily-ever-after thing...maybe there could be a little of that for good measure.

JACKI KING

Plain and simple, Jacki King is a saucy Southern woman who wants to sex you up. She spent half her childhood in fundamentalist private schools where teachers barely even admitted sex existed, much less made any effort to sort out fact from fiction.

Naturally, so much repression and denial created a tidal wave of curiosity and built up an impressive array of fantasies and daydreams about the subject (Note to said Fundamentalists: pretending sex doesn't exist does NOT make it go away!).

So now, Jacki loves to spend her time writing about sex, thinking about sex, and talking about sex—all in the name of research, of course! Stop by her website at JackiKing.com to put in your \$.02 on that and other topics.

Her previous Amber Heat release, *She Who Laughs Last*, is available now. You can reach her at: xJackiKing@aol.com

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