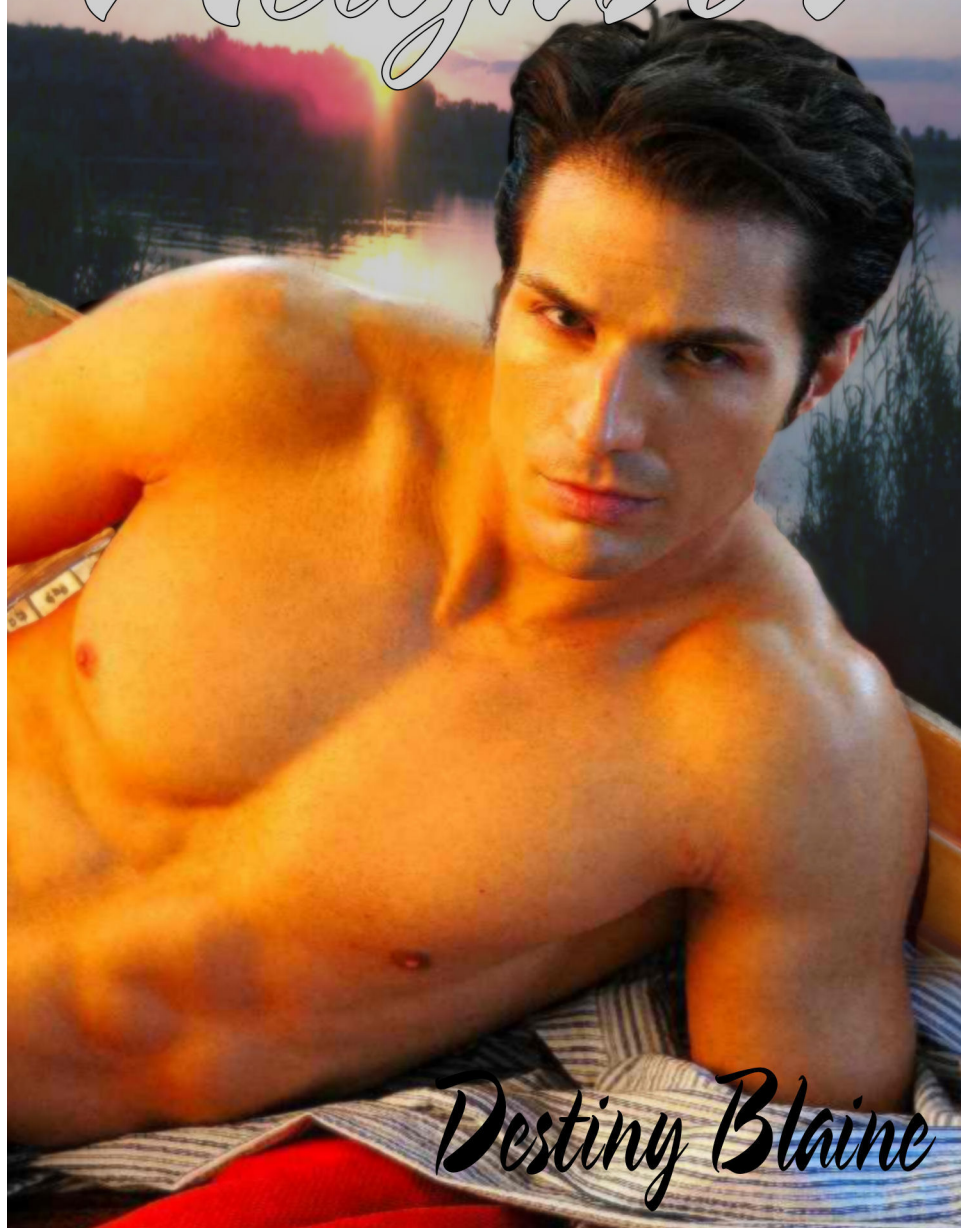


Mardi Gras Publishing Presents...

My Summer Neighbor



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My Summer Neighbor

Chapter One

The air was crisp yet stuffy at the same time. She tried to take a deep breath in to inhale the morning air, but as she grasped the cool mountain smell, she found herself unable to exhale and unable to breathe deeper. Carol Langley was having another panic attack, and no one was around to help her. *Why is this happening now?* It was her last thought as the trees began to blur. Her head was spinning, and soon she was cold...

"Carol, can you hear me?" Carol's neighbors Maude and Clyde walked down the hill to say hello when they saw their neighbor's SUV pull into the driveway. Carol could hear them, but she tried to slip further into her apparent sleepy state. After all, she wasn't ready to take on her summer neighbors when she felt so peaceful.

"I think she may be dead," Clyde said as he chewed on his cigar and leaned against the hood of Carol's candy apple red Ford Expedition.

Maude gently shook Carol. "Hon, can you hear me?"

"Of course she can't hear ya, woman, and if I had my druthers, I wouldn't be able to hear ya either." Clyde had such a way with words. "Besides, she looks white, kind of has that dead look going on if ya look at her close enough."

Maude continued to push her right forefinger into Carol's shoulder. "Carol, you can't be dead. You just got into town." Her voice wasn't overly excited because Maude had a tendency to speak in monotone most of the time.

Clyde continued to gnaw at the stub that was left of his cigar as he walked over and nudged the young woman with his foot. "Yep, sorry Maude." He paused and

took off his glasses while tugging an old handkerchief out of his pocket. "Here you may need this. *She is dead, really dead* this time."

Maude stood up and looked him straight in the eye. "I'm so ashamed of you Clyde Morris. You just get on out of here. This girl is not dead!" Though her voice rose a little louder, she didn't panic. She kept calm.

Maude squatted back down over Carol and poked her cheeks with the same forefinger. "She couldn't have been out long; I just saw her car or truck...whatever that thing is...drive by no more than twenty minutes ago."

Clyde stood over his wife's shoulder peering down at his occasional neighbor. "Yep, but ya know, it sure don't take too long for people to die these days, that's like that fella at work. He just decided one day he'd had enough of his wife's nagging, and his tired body just fell over without any warning. He just fell over I tell ya. *Caput* and he was outta here."

Maude was trying really hard to ignore her husband's ignorance when Carol regained consciousness.

When Carol saw the faces of the neighbors she often tried to avoid during her cabin stays, she went out for another minute. Maybe it was on purpose.

Maude instructed her 'no-good husband' to go on inside the house, find a wet cloth, and return quickly. She propped Carol's head up on her lap and tried to talk her back into reality again.

The young woman wanted no part of it but finally grew tired of hearing Maude yell for Clyde and decided that it was possible they would stick around until she came to rather than allow her to lie on solid ground in peace and quiet. Besides, Clyde was too lazy to walk home to get a cloth, and her cabin remained securely locked.

Carol placed the back of her hand over her forehead and started to move, moaning as she did. "What happened?" Even though she had been able to hear the elderly couple make a fuss over her for a while, she wasn't exactly sure how she ended up on the ground.

Maude and Clyde both decided to tell her at the same time. They both agreed they had watched her drive in and had walked down to say hello but instead found her lying cold on the ground. It was quickly established and reestablished that Clyde thought Carol was probably dead.

Maude asked her if she had one of those *nervous breakdowns* again. Carol explained, as she always did, it wasn't a nervous breakdown but a panic attack while Clyde carried on about someone buying the cabin right next door.

Carol was confident Maude and Clyde had probably waited all winter to share the news with her, so never mind the fact she had just fainted or the fact she had just arrived for the summer.

"He's nice." Maude gleamed. "We met him the first day he came out here from the city to check everything out before some sort of closing on the deal."

Poor Maude would never understand business. The closing on the deal would've been the *real estate closing* on the cabin, but why bother explaining the whole concept to a woman who went from her father's home straight into Clyde's bed. *Oh, what a scary and morbid thought.* Carol suddenly felt sick when she captured a mental image of the two. It was almost unbearable. Poor Maude.

"He ain't married Carol." Leave it to Clyde to stick to the subject when it concerned Carol and her sexuality or the possibility to find a male companion.

Carol groaned as she tried to stand up from her seated position. Every summer she treaded three hours for his badgering, and every summer it was the same thing from start to finish.

Five...Four...Three...Two...

"You ain't gay are you?" Clyde said it as soon as she thought about it.

She rubbed her head and groaned again; this time with exaggeration as she headed for her porch to sit down for another minute. He couldn't wait ten minutes before starting into his routine, not even thirty seconds.

These two people were exactly why her mother always avoided the beautiful little place. It was so serene there, but Carol's mom only had one concern when she used to

visit the cabin. She worried constantly someone would buy the Thompson place, and the privacy once cherished at the cabin by Carol's grandparents would be ruined. Now, it appeared her worst fears were realized.

All of her family had the money to buy the property at any given time, yet they decided to postpone the purchase and just leave the sale of the place in fate's hands. After all, maybe no one would buy it. Her own procrastination came at a price. Privacy.

After so many years of putting up with Maude and Clyde, dear old friends of her Grandmother Jane, it appeared she had another nearby resident equally as irritating as her elderly guardians up the hill. Her thoughts were abruptly interrupted, which happened a lot when she spent her summer days near Clyde and Maude.

"Clyde is going to always have this sneaking suspicion that you are gay until you marry."

Geez, the gay-lesbian thing again, she couldn't seem to catch a break with these two. They were a comedy act in the making. A very poor one, but comic relief nonetheless.

Maude winked and then looked at Clyde. "You have to understand it is the only thought about sex he ever has." She grinned as if she approved of Clyde's mind being preoccupied with Carol and her sexuality.

Great, this man, who knew my grandfather, is having one thought per year about sex, and it involves me. Carol felt herself blushing, and she inhaled the fresh air.

The couple took about thirty minutes visiting with Carol. Rather than telling her of the local gossip surrounding the Cherokee Lake area, they surprised her by asking about her life in the *city*.

The city was Nashville, and even though it was only a three hour drive, Carol's lake cottage near the old town of Rogersville, Tennessee was a world away. She chatted with them about the city, and they seemed satisfied with the answers she provided to their questions.

The area was simply beautiful. Set deep within the mountains of Eastern Tennessee, the town area was a historical little community with less than five

thousand people. Cherokee Lake, located nearby, was the only reason Carol visited and the only reason she would ever be there. It was the setting of her late grandparents' cabin that brought her back to the *almost* peaceful place, minus her neighbors, each summer. It was typical *small-town USA*.

The downtown area prided itself on the Fourth of July festivities and fireworks complete with bake sales, parades, and children running everywhere. Overall, the people of Rogersville enjoyed a life of simplicity. It was an uncomplicated town with easy pleasures where neighbors, with the exception of Clyde, genuinely cared about their neighbor.

The place provided a safety net for Carol, far from the crime-ridden streets of a bigger metropolitan area. In fact, the area wasn't a place for high crime or even low crime for a great number of years. Since the year 2000, few violations or felonies had been reported in the region, unless you counted the scattered burglaries, which usually involved theft of prescription drugs.

Yes, Carol felt comfortable in her surroundings when she visited the lake cabin. She enjoyed the country setting and the welcoming water in her backyard. She liked lazy days when the only sounds she heard were the sounds of nature.

As Clyde began to speak again, she longed for the silence.

"Are you going to sit there all day, or are you going to get unpacked?" Clyde stood by the tailgate of her 2006 automobile. If someone had driven by the cabin and saw him standing there, they would have sworn he was ready to jump right in with a helping hand.

Carol smiled. "I suppose I'll sit here all day and let my kind neighbor unpack for me." She did know better, but she knew the slightest mention of work would send Clyde right back up the hill, and it did.

Clyde huffed. "Well, then you have a sit, I'm going home." He turned with a grumble and began up the incline. *One down one to go.*

"So much for lending a neighborly hand," she called after him.

Maude patted Carol on the back and just shook her head as they both began to unload signs of an extended stay. Carol always dreaded the unpacking of a loaded down vehicle. She also needed to spring clean the cabin, which had been locked up all winter. Maude offered to help as she always did. Carol declined, just as Maude probably expected.

"Before I go," Maude began. "I do want to tell you about our new neighbor."

Carol waved her hand slightly. "Maude, I don't want to know, if I meet him, I meet him."

Maude looked at her puzzled. "Well, of course, you'll meet him. He's your neighbor, and he'll be here anytime!"

The older woman would have left it at that but decided to add, "Carol, if you would try being slightly sociable with this man, he would make a nice friend for you when you are here in the summertime. He is one of a kind."

"Like Clyde, I suppose?" She couldn't hide the smirk creeping across her face.

She shook her head sternly. "No, no, not like Clyde, this young man is polished, and as you writers would say, *refined*. Well, you'll just need to meet him yourself."

Carol was already scooting her luggage around to one neat little pile in the center of the floor scanning the cabin for the broom. The place was dusty and indicative of a home in need of a good swipe with the feather duster.

Maude, clearly agitated because Carol was paying her no mind, headed for the door. "Carol, can I ask you something?"

She sighed and replied, "Sure, you can ask me anything, and if you want, I'll even answer."

Maude threw her hands on her seventy-something year old hips. "ARE you a Lesbian?"

Chapter Two

Alone at last, Carol went to work. She uncovered the furniture and stripped the bed. She swept out every nook and cranny. She washed down everything from her woodwork to the appliances to the front and back doors. When she finished, she unpacked her belongings, which included pretty much everything from clothing to her home office.

As she started unpacking the canned goods she had brought from home, she looked out over Cherokee Lake. The natural beauty of it all was why she came there each summer. It was mesmerizing. The calm waters of the lake seemed to be endless, and the mountains were spectacular. The image was Carol's slice of heaven. She could sit on her porch for hours and just breathe.

Carol's cabin was small but more than enough for her. It only had five rooms, if you counted the living room and kitchen as separate rooms. In addition to the kitchen and living area, there was a bathroom, a bedroom, and a sunroom, which she made into her office. The laundry room was a tiny closet off the sunroom, so she didn't count that for anything more than storage.

Her favorite place in the cabin was her office in the expansive sunroom, which fronted the lake. When the lake activity wasn't heavy, she could open up the old wooden door off the back of the house and expose the screen where fresh air could drift inside. It was when she found the most inspiration. Carol sat down to take it all in for a moment.

Her grandparents built the small place in the sixties. They planned to live out much of their retirement years there, but that plan would never come to fruition because Carol's grandfather was killed in a car accident the week before he retired from a successful lifelong career as an attorney. Her grandmother's death followed soon after. She died of a broken heart, or at least that's what the hopeless romantics around Rogersville thought.

Carol's mother, Sally, soon took over the cabin in all of her glory. She never appreciated it like Carol believed her grandparents would have, but then again, Sally never appreciated anything. Carol thought of her mother, on occasion, but always upon arrival to the cabin. Sometimes when she first arrived, she thought she could feel her mother's presence there almost like an untamed soul searching and waiting for her daughter's arrival. It spooked her actually but generally only lasted a moment. Still, the feeling existed.

Carol's mother, Sally Corvaire, had been a very difficult and hardened woman. She had been through more husbands than her daughter would ever care to admit. Seemingly, she never bothered to notice the beauty that surrounded her. One such beauty was indeed her daughter, but Sally never noticed trivial things such as beauty because she was the center of her own universe.

Her third husband, Carl Corvaire, was the only father Carol ever knew. When he died, her world became a whirlwind of chaos. Her mother brought in one boyfriend after the next and remarried twice while Carol still lived at home. The fifth husband died of a heart attack after she moved to Nashville.

After that, Sally dated countless men over the course of five years until she finally settled on a husband who was twice her junior, at least in appearance. That marriage only lasted twenty-nine days and seven hours, but who was counting.

When Sally's marriage dissolved, she was heartbroken. She wept continually for four days, and to Carol's knowledge, it was the only time that her mother spent at the cabin alone. When she emerged from the house after her four-day retreat, she called her daughter and told her she would stop by to see her on her way to Little Rock.

Carol heard the desperation in her voice, so she changed all of her plans to meet her mother for lunch.

Knowing her mother had spent some time at the lake, Carol began to imagine how Sally would roll into Nashville. She would weep over the years they lost as mother and daughter, apologize for her lack of compassion as a mother, and offer a better relationship in the future.

She fantasized about what would happen once her mother saw her again. Sally would speak of how the cabin brought back fond memories of her parents and of her only daughter. She would admit they had spent too little time together. Carol knew her mother was aging, and maybe she would be ready for a relationship with her only child. So what if it would be too little too late, Carol would welcome her mother into her life.

Carol had met her mother at a café off a Nashville exit on that particular day. Not surprisingly, Sally was dressed in black. She wore a skimpy dark dress with black sandals and a black scarf wrapped around her head like someone still in mourning. Carol knew her fantasies for a mother ready to focus on her daughter would not be the reality of her visit.

She remembered quickly snapping a kiss on Sally's cheek and how she had swiftly wiped it away with the back of her palm. "I really wish you wouldn't do that when you have on lipstick."

"Good to see you too, Mother."

Sally stood back a minute and observed the woman in front of her "You look like me."

Nodding in agreement, she returned with something like, "I suppose you are stunned with the change that three years brings." Yes, it had been three years since the two of them had seen one another. They had only spoken five or six times by phone over the last thirty-six months. One of those times, of course, was over her mother's marriage and another time, over her divorce, which was when she announced she would be going to Cherokee Lake.

"Well, you seem to be fine." Sally's voice seemed agitated.

"I'm doing okay, Mother, and you are trying to recuperate I take it."

Sally's eyes filled with tears. She immediately put on her black sunglasses probably to hide the overflow of emotion. "He was the love of my life," Sally began. "I wish you could have known him."

Carol had walked toward the café while thinking, *the love of her life until the next one*. As they entered, Carol knew it would be a long luncheon with a woman who had been nothing more than a stranger to her. She had been her birth mother but never a *real* mother.

As the two ladies walked into the café, heads turned and many took double takes because the two women truly looked more like twins than mother and daughter. The older woman had the better shape even though she was twenty-four years Carol's senior. Years of working out five days a week with a personal trainer helped her keep a youthful presence.

Still, Carol, the younger of the two, possessed a more unique and genuine beauty. She held a strong resemblance, but she had features her mother did not possess. Her mother's eyes were brown. Carol's were darker, almost black. They both had high cheekbones only Carol's were clearly defined.

They both had the latest shade of beach blonde hair, thanks to their individual stylists. Each held a five foot six frame, or very close to it, and neither one of them had an inch of fat showing anywhere. However, to be so alike, they were very different.

Carol was thirty-two and had never tasted the bliss of marriage as her mother commonly referred to matrimony. Of course, her mother had collected marriages and men like they were trophies. The cabin showed evidence of it because that was where she kept all of her wedding photos and mementos of past relationships.

She remembered making small talk with her mother. They both had ordered a glass of white wine before Sally began to ramble. "I came to tell you that I won't be seeing you anymore after today."

Carol looked at her in astonishment.

"Did you hear what I just said?" Sally was perturbed at her reaction. Carol *wasn't* reacting.

She continued, "I will not be able to see you anymore because I'm not comfortable traveling by myself. After all, we have to consider my age now, so we will not be seeing one another again."

Carol remembered laughing out loud, but she couldn't remember why exactly.

"Gee, Mom, I'll miss you!" She'd said the words without thinking but was quite relieved when they'd slipped out.

Sally straightened her napkin on her lap, extremely taken aback by her daughter's words and tone. She looked around to be sure no one was looking at her daughter's outburst. They were. "Control yourself, people are looking over here."

Carol slapped down her hand on the table. "Then, let them look, Mother."

Sally was very uncomfortable. "You are taking drugs, it's obvious. I'll send you to rehab, it is my parental duty after all. You are on drugs. *My daughter* would never have a public outburst like this."

Carol took a gulp of the white wine and raised her glass tilted to the server for another. "*You* don't have a daughter, and I'm not going to listen to how you are aging and can't come to see me anymore when I haven't laid eyes on you in more than three years. This is an attempt at pity or something. I don't know, and I don't care." Her own anger with her estranged mother shocked her as much as it did the distraught woman seated next to her.

Her mother had been embarrassed by Carol's behavior and obvious lack of concern for her well-being. "Darling, this may come as a shock to you, but I'm not going to listen to you berate me for not being there for you. I did the best I could with you. I tried to be a good mother. You were just always such a difficult child."

She remembered thinking her mother's words came from out of nowhere, but then again, that was typical of Sally Corvaire. "No, Mother, you did not try with me, but thankfully, your husbands did, and from what I've seen in other adults, your

husbands did a fine job raising me. In fact, Carl even molded me into who I am today.”

Carol glared at her mom and decided to calm down long enough to ask what she was just dying to know. She remembered feeling like she just had to know what was on her mother’s mind, so she could hear it and leave. “Why *did* you *really* want to see me?”

Sally shook her head. “To tell you I blame you that I could never find happiness. There, I’ve said it.” She took a dramatic sigh.

The young woman was stung by her mother’s cruel tone and precise speech. It was obvious that Sally had thought long and hard about telling her daughter of her resentment, and it came shining through in the conversation as well as her meticulously chosen words.

Carol couldn’t believe it. She had been hurt by her taunting, but nonetheless, she heard the words. She couldn’t find a way to retaliate. She wasn’t sure at the time she even wanted to try.

Sally looked her directly in the eyes careful to remove her sunglasses. “No emotion, and no surprise?”

Carol was numb. What more did her mother want? She was paralyzed by the pain of the years without a caring mother, deadened by the self-consumption of a socialite woman, who left her only child to be raised by a husband or boyfriend. She sat frozen in time, but no, she wasn’t surprised.

She had it coming to her all along. Since the day she had been born, she had been despised by her own flesh and blood. Now, her mother summed up their relationship in a very short sentence, and she did it without any reservations. It was apparently a day of reckoning for Sally. She truly hated her daughter, or at least wanted her to think as much.

Carol imagined her mother laughing at her a lot. It was almost a wicked laugh and one she felt she could reach out and turn off at any time. It was so real and perhaps even a little haunting.

Suddenly, she heard a light tapping at the door, which jolted Carol from the little café back into reality. The pecking on the wood made her realize she had gone from thinking about her mom into a deep sleep. *Great, Clyde and Maude*, just what she needed.

Chapter Three

Carol opened the door, and there he stood—her new neighbor. All six foot four of rock-hard masculinity with dark eyes and curly black hair, he was just plain cute.

“Hey there, you,” he began. “I thought I might have come at a bad time. I’m your new neighbor Tom O’Brien.”

He extended his hand, and they swapped introductions. Carol was immediately aware that her hair was a mess. She also had on a bathing suit cover-up with large gaps at the arms. She had thrown it on in the midst of her cleaning spree. She immediately crossed her arms to hide the obvious.

“I won’t ask to come in,” he began. “Since we only met seconds ago.” He paused as if waiting for an invitation anyway, but of course, he didn’t receive one.

Carol blushed. “I would invite you in or something, but as you can see, I’m hardly dressed for visitors, and after a long day of getting the cabin back into a livable state....” She paused before continuing, “Well, I hope you understand.”

Tom grinned from ear to ear and showed a beautiful set of pearly white teeth. He obviously didn’t smoke, and Carol smoked, quite a bit.

Tom ignored her. “No problem, I’ll wait here on your porch until you grab a bra or whatever you need to put on.” His dimples were adorable as he stated the obvious.

The audacity! She couldn’t believe he just said that to her. A gentleman would have ignored the fact that she didn’t have on a bra. A gentleman would’ve been gracious and left. A gentleman would’ve...*wouldn’t have looked like Tom O’Brien.* Carol smiled

sweetly then shut the door, but she was mad as hell. He was just like she had first thought, another pushy damn neighbor and yet, he wasn't. He wasn't like anyone she'd ever seen. He was so sexy that she almost creamed on the spot thinking about him.

She went into her bedroom and slammed the door. Carol had no intentions of spending her summer being inconvenienced by a neighbor. She didn't have time for drop-in guests. She walked back into the kitchen area and put her hand on the front door then thought of those manly but gentle eyes.

She walked back into the bedroom and slammed the door again. Who did he think he was to invade first her private retreat and now her personal space? More importantly, why was she going to let him do it? Carol returned to the front door, opened it, and stuck her head out. "I'd like to get to know you, but now isn't a good time."

Tom stood up and slowly brushed off the seat of his Levi jeans then turned around and faced her. "I'm not asking for sex. I don't want to fix your breakfast or have you fix mine. I just want to get to know you since we live side by side."

Carol nodded, blushed, and closed the door then opened it again to say something.

Before she could open her mouth, he quickly added, "You aren't gay, are you?" His devious smile told her everything she needed to know. He had spent a lot of time talking to either Maude or Clyde and probably both.

She blushed again and said she would be a few minutes before closing the door. She decided she should be gay just so Maude and Clyde would quit talking about it.

She took her time changing clothes and really didn't expect him to wait. He was a patient man, and she had to admire at least that quality.

"Wow, you're a gorgeous girl." Tom obviously wasn't shy. "Definitely worth the half-hour wait."

Carol cleared her throat and began to stutter, "I'm not used to having company when I'm here at the lake except for um, well, you know Maude and Clyde, and that is only on rare occasion after five because they are usually in bed by seven."

Tom grinned. "I noticed your dock needs some furniture, but I have some lounge chairs out on the bank. Let's go down by the water, so we can talk." He had already started walking down her steps gesturing toward the waterfront.

Carol agreed all the while thinking about how assumptive he was and how it could eventually get on her nerves.

Tom led her through a short path to his lakefront cabin and told her to grab a seat while he grabbed a cooler full of beer.

Carol carefully soaked in the exact views Tom had of her place. She waited for him to return giving him a shy smile when she spotted him.

He was lugging a cooler and a basket with blankets, in case the air became cool. "I have beer and wine coolers because I wasn't sure which you would like."

Carol took a beer, and naturally, he made a comment about how she was a girl after his own heart. She thought the comment was teetering on intrusive. *I'm not a girl after anything and perhaps I need to let you in on that fact.*

He leaned back on his lounge, and Carol scooted up in the seat of hers and crossed her legs in a yoga-type position. They talked about where they were from and what they each did for a living. He was an attorney, like her grandfather. She told him she was working on her fourth novel.

He talked about his childhood and how he had been an Army brat growing up with a father and mother both in the military. She listened intently while taking in the fact that he was so relaxed in conversation. Her grandfather was like that. Maybe it was the fact that they were both criminal attorneys.

She decided she liked Tom. He was a likeable guy, and he certainly was more than enough eye candy for any one woman to savor. He made her feel relaxed, and she had fun talking to him. She decided he passed the neighbor test.

After a couple of beers and a few hours of easy conversation, the night air chilled her. He grabbed a blanket and walked over to drape it around her shoulders. He noticed her tiny, delicate neck and how her straight blonde hair just flowed over her shoulder blades.

As he started to touch her shoulders with strong manly hands, he quickly reminded himself of Maude and Clyde's description of this shy, beautiful woman, and backed away before he did something to possibly scare her off. He could think what he wanted and even fantasize about her later, but physically, he knew she was off limits. He would have to take his time with her, and it would definitely have to be a slow go.

"So, how long will you be here this summer?" Tom asked the question almost like he was uninterested in her reply.

Carol grinned. "Why? Do you want to ask me out on a date before I go back home?"

Tom chuckled. "I thought that was what we were having now." He paused before he continued and took a drink of his beer. "I forgot to tell you, I'm a cheap date."

She laughed out loud, but it softened as he leaned in closer. She could have sworn he was going to kiss her right then and there.

Noticing she drew in her breath, Tom smirked as he told her softly and with a great deal of confidence, "Ms. Langley, I *will* not only take you out on *a* date, but I will *date* you."

Carol pulled back in surprise. "I don't have time to date and I...I..." She was at a loss for words. "I don't have time to date." Suddenly, the level of comfort she had experienced only moments before had vanished. She looked at the dark water and wanted to go home.

Tom smirked. "You said that, and I understood it the first time." He sat quietly, looking at her from head to toe. He knew he would wine her and dine her alright. He would not only *date* her, but he would *possess* her thoughts, and if she so much as resisted, then he would simply become her obsession.

He licked his bottom lip and resisted the urge to take her in his arms. He fought back a moan that kept forming in the back of his throat just because her presence was playing havoc on his senses.

Yes, he was going to *own* Ms. Langley's every waking thought even if it meant playing it her way. He could do that *for now*. After all, he had waited far too long. He'd anticipated her arrival and talked to everyone about her. Now, there she sat in front of him. He didn't have any immediate plans of scaring her away, but he had every intention of getting to know her.

He sat quietly taking in womanly curves almost hoping she would become a bit uncomfortable by his longing stares.

Carol became self-conscious, and the alcohol was getting to her, which she made the mistake of voicing. "I was never one to hold my alcohol. It always goes straight to my head." The last man she slept with was a relationship that began after a long night of drinking, and he was a potential one-night stand, so she had no interest in making the same mistake. Even though her last relationship began with sex as the main focus, it was a disaster from beginning to end and left her with a new rule. No sleeping around on the first date. She almost told him as much but decided against it.

"I have a full day tomorrow. I've had a really nice time getting to know you, but I need to turn in tonight." She stood up leaving nothing to chance indicating she was calling it a night.

He flirted with danger. "Alone?"

She tossed the blanket onto his lap. "Yes, I'm afraid so." She managed a half-smile and began to look around to see if she was leaving anything behind.

Tom jumped to his feet. "Allow me to walk you back home."

Even though Carol thought she could make it back to her cabin, which was only the distance of a football field, she agreed and permitted him to escort her to the front of her once private porch.

The cabin was dark, so he waited for her to flip on some lights, and then he leaned over and looked her square in the eyes. "I'd love to kiss you goodnight," he whispered in a raspy voice that sent chills up her spine as butterflies in her stomach took flight. Instead, he grabbed her in a bear hug and laughed loudly. "However, I guess a big hug will have to do."

As he wrapped his arms around her tightly, which she found extremely uncomfortable, she was overcome with wanting him, which added to her discomfort. It had been awhile since Carol had slept with anyone, and even though by first appearances many men considered her frigid, she loved to feel the warmth of a man filling up her inner circle. *Who am I kidding? I just like to fuck. Have I really written so many romances that I can't just call it what it is?* Mentally, she argued her point.

He felt her tense up under him and moved his arms to rest easily on her shoulders as he looked her in the eyes. "You're beautiful." Tom caught his breath in dramatics. "The whole town talks about this lovely, but odd, girl who strolls into town each summer, and I want to know that girl...the woman they don't know. I hope you will allow me the opportunity."

Carol pulled away from his clutches. She had to do so or she would live to regret it. Her body was telling her to invite him in, and her mind was telling her not a damn chance. "Good night, Tom. It's been a wonderful evening." Her face was hot; she could feel it. She was going to need an ice-cold shower to cool her down.

Tom started down the steps.

She finally let her guard down and could begin to breathe easily again as she took a step and started to close the door.

Tom turned around before she could slip inside to add a tempting proposal. "Oh, yeah, one more thing, what are you doing for the rest of the summer?"

Carol stiffened for a minute stopping dead in her tracks. Why in the hell couldn't people take a hint? She did not like to make plans. "I don't plan ahead Tom because I travel so much on short notice, and I have deadlines to consider and..."

He seemed to enjoy the fact she was trying to get out of making a future date with him. "Well, lady, you're in luck because I'm the same way. I hate to make plans. Despise being on a schedule. So, we'll take it one day at a time. Be ready at nine for breakfast."

Before she could protest or think of an excuse, he'd disappeared under the cover of darkness.

Chapter Four

Carol tossed and turned all night. She couldn't get her charming, not to mention sexy and very persistent, neighbor out of her mind. She had almost decided she liked him, and then he pushed again for another date.

She would have to set him straight at breakfast. When he picked her up to take her into town, she would tell him that she was an award-winning author who met her deadlines and followed a strict writing schedule during the summer. The past two summers had proven to be very productive for her, and he wasn't going to mess things up.

If Tom O'Brien thought he could sway her to put aside work and interest her in a tempting romp all summer long, well, he needed to consider a thing or two. First, she didn't have time to bang the neighbor, and second, she had no interest in fucking her summer away. *YEAH RIGHT!*

She finally gave up on sleep and went into the kitchen to make some coffee. She stepped out onto the deck and took a deep breath. As she started to exhale, she heard him. "Hey nearby friend! You're up early!"

Carol froze. *What the hell?* Rather than turn to look at him, she darted back inside. She couldn't let him see her first thing in the morning. She hadn't brushed her hair, or her teeth for that matter, and didn't want to see him or anyone else right then. It was six-thirty in the morning, and he was outside on his dock? *Come on!*

At seven o'clock, he was knocking on her door.

She had just printed off a portion of her manuscript and was about to go through a short editing process when he began pounding out a rhythmic knock. She slung open the door. "ARE you OUT of YOUR mind?"

If he was an assumptive man, he should've been able to tell she was not glad to see him that early. Her voice inflection delivered just the kind of response he deserved from a woman who had yet to drink her first cup of coffee. Especially one he didn't know very well.

"Since I saw that you were up, I thought I'd come over to tell you I've already started breakfast. It'll be ready in thirty minutes. Dress is casual." He chuckled at his own wit and turned to leave her standing in the doorway with a bewildered look on her face.

She couldn't handle the drama. She was a private person. Tom O'Brien was going way over the line to squirm his way into her life. It had to stop, and it had to stop before it started. She wouldn't be going to breakfast. There was no way this was going any further....It wasn't what she wanted and besides...suddenly, she couldn't breathe, and the hole consumed her....

When she came to, she was staring up at Maude, Clyde, and Tom. "Honey, are you alright?" Maude was very concerned.

Clyde looked down on her. "Sure she is; she just got one of them old spells again."

Sometimes Carol wondered how Maude could listen to his illiterate ass day in and day out. She should get a medal for being the most patient woman in the world. She should also have the first-place ribbon for marrying one of the dumbest men on the planet, as if it warranted a prize.

"Carol, now this here ain't right. You may need to go on into town and see yourself a doctor." How sweet. Clyde was concerned, bless his heart.

She felt a twinge of guilt.

Clyde continued, "After all, I can't be running on down here every time you hit the ground. I just ain't able."

So much for the concern; leave it to Clyde to ruin a good thing.

Tom knelt down beside her. "So, this is what they mean by cold feet?"

Carol stared at Clyde for a long time before saying the first thing that came to mind. "Maybe it's contagious."

They all looked at her in shock.

"No, no, these there spells, they ain't catching." Clyde rubbed his chin. "At least I don't think they are."

They ain't catching? Please Clyde. Go Home! She wanted to scream. Carol had enough. She sat up rubbing the back of her head. "I'm talking about you. Maybe you...whatever it is *you* have...maybe *it's catching*."

Tom laughed and knew exactly what she meant. She threw a punch at him in the stomach with the back of her hand. He accepted it doubling over but whatever worked to get her moving. Their breakfast would be cold before they had a chance to eat it.

Clyde looked at Tom before he offered, "Whelp, me and the little woman would stay and eat with ya, but I think you two should be alone. It was awfully nice of you, Tom, to cook her breakfast. What do ya think, Carol? Anybody else ever cook your breakfast?"

If looks could kill. Carol shot one in his direction but noticed he was still there when she blinked her eyes. *He lived through it – damn.*

Maude and Clyde were gone before he could gear up for more conversation. Maude pushed him off the porch. She was probably happy with what she perceived as a match-up of Carol and Tom. She seemed to be in a hurry to give them some privacy.

Tom helped Carol to a chair at the kitchen table. "You gave me quite a scare."

She watched and waited for him to continue because she knew he would. She sat motionless and decided this 'spell' as Clyde called it was worse than the last couple she had experienced. She must've hit her head really hard.

"Since you didn't show for breakfast, I decided to provide take-out service and found you out cold in the doorway. Thank goodness Maude heard me yell. They came down here right away. I didn't know you had a lot of these attacks."

The look she saw on his face, she decided, was one of concern.

He fidgeted for a minute more and then remembered he had a casserole to warm up. "I'm going to use your stove to heat this up. It's really good. It's an O'Brien breakfast treat complete with potatoes, eggs, sausage, cheese, and a few other ingredients that give the person eating it an aphrodisiac effect." He laughed out loud. He really amused himself.

"I imagine you don't have to go out in search of entertainment in this small town." Carol's eyes never left his. With a roaring headache, she was somewhat perturbed.

"Why do you say so?" His look was inquisitive, and Carol knew it was forced.

Carol squinted her eyes. "You seem pretty capable of entertaining yourself so why bother?"

Tom grinned. "You think so do you? Well, let me just say, that while I can entertain myself okay, I find the entertainment I can bring to the opposite sex is..."

A buzzer went off in the kitchen. Thank heavens because whatever was about to roll off the man's tongue was likely something she didn't want or need to hear yet.

Tom went through her cabinets like they were his own before he realized he had forgotten something at his place. He rushed out and was back before she could tell him to get lost again.

By the time the casserole was hot and ready to eat, Tom had placed a plate full of homemade biscuits in front of her. "I'm not that great of a cook outside of breakfast, so don't get too used to it," he teased.

Carol watched him as he served her a healthy helping and then helped himself. She had to admit, he had his charms. The breakfast he prepared for her when she could use a nutritious meal was a great way to her heart.

Tom paused for a minute. "Are you sure you are going to be alright?"

She nodded, and they ate without a lot of conversation between them. Mainly because Carol's headache was overwhelming, and her vision was blurred, which made her dizzy. In fact, at one point, she could've sworn she saw three Toms. That

was enough to almost send her into orbit. After all, she clearly couldn't handle one of him! Three would make her delirious indeed!

For the first time since she'd arrived at the cabin, she noticed she was beginning to calm down. Maybe she had him to thank for that, but nonetheless, she was glad to be seated in her cabin directly across from Tom O'Brien, a man who must've made up his mind long before she came into town that he was going to spend time with her.

"Thank you for this." She looked at him with sincerity in her eyes.

Her gratitude almost made him feel uncomfortable. "It was my pleasure." He reached out to pat her hand and thought better of it. He stood up and began to clear off the table. "Why don't you go lie down, and I'll clean up the mess I made?"

Carol looked at him longingly behind his back. She knew she did it and was thankful he didn't turn around and catch her. She couldn't help it. He was so damn nice, and she'd been a real jerk to him.

He must've thought she was a true nut case. Perhaps he thought medical personnel had allowed her a leave from the psych ward. She had watched him as he withdrew his hand from her while sitting at the table. He had wanted to touch her, but she had scared him off.

To make matters worse, she didn't feel well and didn't want to be alone. She hoped her request wouldn't send further mixed signals, but her head felt weird, and she didn't want him to go. Still, she needed to lie down.

"This is going to sound really strange," she began. "But I don't feel so well." *Good one. Who would feel well after passing out cold?* "I think I took a hard hit when I fell. Would you mind staying with me for a few hours while I lie down?" *What a shameless plug. Using his obvious kindness for my own security.* She mentally scolded herself knowing he wouldn't deny her just by the way he looked at her.

His face showed he was surprised by her request.

"Sure, I would love to stay. I'll just...um...I'll um..." He was at a loss, so she helped him out.

"Would you mind {to lie} lying down with me?" She felt too light-headed for jokes, so she hoped he wouldn't offer any.

Under normal circumstances, Tom would've taken that sort of request as an invitation for a sexual encounter. A mid-morning romp. However, Carol was pale and looked frightened. He knew it was an invitation for safety precautions more than anything else. She was afraid she'd have another attack. He nodded his head and took her hand.

She led him to the bedroom, and as she did, she couldn't help but wonder what it would be like to lead him there for another purpose. Perhaps one day she'd let her guard down and find out. Maybe after she felt better. As a weak smile spread across her lips, she couldn't help but feel warm in all the right spots just thinking about it.

Tom laid down next to her and decided to face her. He was actually nervous. He didn't want to cross any boundaries, and he felt responsible for her earlier attack. He had pushed too hard, too fast.

Carol looked at him and smiled. "Not how you imagined lying in bed with me I take it?" Her words formed slowly as she suddenly felt dizzy all over again, and she cursed whatever it was making her pass out all the time. Maybe if she could just learn to breathe like everyone else she wouldn't lose consciousness every time she was nervous.

He didn't say anything but returned the smile and slid his arm under her neck where she immediately curled up happy to be lying next to him.

With his free hand, he brushed the hair out of her eyes and kissed her on the forehead. "Get some rest," he instructed. "I'll be right here when you wake up."

She had no doubts that he would be. In fact, it was one of the reasons she fell easily into a restful sleep.

Chapter Five

Tom kept his word. When she woke up, he was right there with her. She sat up in the bed and looked at him wildly. "What time is it?"

He looked at his watch. "It's only about four o'clock."

She was instantly apologetic. "Oh my gosh, I'm so sorry! You've wasted your entire day in my bed." She didn't realize she set herself up for the remark he was sure to give her.

"I can't think of a better way to *spend*, not waste, the day." He gave her a wicked grin and reassured her instantly, "Now before you go thinking something happened, let me just say you were terrific. The best I've ever had, and I'm looking forward to a lot more of the same."

She picked up a decorative pillow at the end of the bed and tossed it at him. "Be serious, why don't you?"

He looked at her hard for about a minute, and she almost turned to look away when he reached out and took her by the hand. "Okay, I'll be serious." He pulled her to him. "I've been lying here all day with the most beautiful woman I believe exists on this planet. Now, if you want to run out that door, that's fine, you go ahead. If you feel like you are going to have one of your so-called spells, that's fine too. I'll be right here when you do, and I will take care of you if you need me to." He paused for what appeared to be effect more than to gather his thoughts. "But lady, I am going to kiss you. I'm going to kiss you right this minute, and you're going to kiss me back."

She was speechless. It was a good thing too because just as Tom O'Brien kept his word on staying with her for the day, he made good on the promise of introducing his lips to hers. He planted one right on her before she had time to think a whole lot about it.

Carol immediately began spinning out of control but not like she was going to hit the deck without any recollection later. Instead, it was much different. She was about to lose her ability to be a lady. She wanted to get lost in him as he kissed her as passionately as she could remember anyone ever kissing her.

Just when she started to pull back, he did it again and with more exploration. He wanted her.

She knew it, but she wasn't ready.

He made no apologies for his advances. "I just met you, Carol. I'm not going to try to have sex with you until you tell me you want me as much as I already want you, but I will have you, and I promise..." A grin spread across his face as his eyes swept over her body with pure lust. "You're gonna love it."

Somehow, she didn't question it. Not for a minute.

* * * *

Later that afternoon as Carol sat in front of her computer; there were three things she couldn't dismiss from her mind. The first one was Tom kissing her. The second was waking up in his arms, and the third one, the third one seemed to have her undivided attention. He had promised she would love sex with him. She had no doubts he would deliver. *No doubts whatsoever.*

She couldn't seem to focus on her manuscript, so she decided it was a good day to be out on the water. She filled an ice chest full of ice and went down to the wine cellar. Mr. Cantwell, the caretaker of the property, always kept the cellar stocked with beer as well as the latest wine selections.

She had told him to quit stocking wine and double up on beer and just keep it down there, too. It was close enough to the water, so she never had to hike too far to

replenish the cooler when friends were in town. On this day, she would be taking the boat out alone, so a six-pack would be all she'd need to get her creative juices flowing.

She only had time for a quick tour around the lake before nightfall would be upon her, but she wanted to breathe fresh air and feel it blowing in her face. Then, she'd find some inspiration and get to work. With any luck, she'd see her handsome neighbor the following day. He had surely spent enough time with her for one afternoon.

As Carol backed out of the boat slip, she looked up and saw Maude and Clyde standing on their bank waving at her. "Have a good night!" Clyde called after her.

"Be careful." She thought she heard Maude cry. Clyde didn't go out on the water, but occasionally, if Maude was feeling frisky, she would ask for a boat ride, and Carol actually enjoyed their times together. It was usually a good time for them to catch up. Besides, she enjoyed hearing the stories Maude told about her grandparents and even her mother.

Carol glided around on the water and looked at the various new homes being built. There weren't that many of them, but like any lake area, there were still some new constructions worthy of her attention. She reveled in calm waters and enjoyed her time alone in the middle of the lake until she heard **an** unfamiliar chugging sound.

Carol considered herself a responsible but amateur boat owner. Mr. Cantwell always had the boat "winterized," whatever that meant, and kept it in tiptop shape. However, Mr. Cantwell overlooked one small detail, and Carol was so preoccupied by thoughts of Tom that she didn't think to look. She was sure the chug-chug sound came from the fact she had no gasoline. Fortunately, for her, she wasn't too far from shore.

If she had a flare, she could send it off. Clyde would surely see it as a sign his favorite neighbor was in trouble.

Who am I kidding? Clyde doesn't have the good common sense to get out of the rain. A flare would be like fireworks to him. She didn't have one anyway. She took out the paddle and started the grueling work of paddling toward shore. She had done it once before and

knew it would be a long undertaking, but she wasn't stressed out. She still had three beers and a pack of cigarettes. Life was good. Great in fact. *No need to panic.*

Carol paddled for a while then drifted for a while. She'd drink a few gulps of ice cold beer then smoke another cigarette. She was calm, cool, and collected. In fact, she was enjoying being out on the water even though she knew it would be pitch dark before she made it to shore. She was okay. She knew the lake, and she could see her cabin. Nothing to fear at all. *Don't panic.* She talked herself into believing everything was just fine and it would've been...that is until the lightning began.

The storm had crept up on her so fast; she didn't even see it coming. The sky fell dark quicker than normal even for the time of day. Thunder began to engulf her. The waters were a bit rougher, and she thought it might help pull her into shore quicker, but instead it was making it impossible for her to row toward the bank. Lightning skidded across the water, and soon she stared fear in the face as the sky around her lit up. Then, she saw him ahead.

"HEY! WHAT ARE YOU DOING OUT HERE?" Tom called out to her.

"I'M OUT OF GAS!" She called back to him and added, "I'M GLAD TO SEE YOU!"

They were screaming back and forth because the weather set in around them, and they were fighting a good East Tennessee storm. Thunder, lightning, buckets of rain, and high winds rocked both boats.

He tossed her a towrope and a yellow rain jacket. "OKAY! HANG ON!"

It took them another ten minutes to get back to her dock. Both boats were rocking back and forth, up and down, and he was afraid if he went too fast, he would either lose her or the boat or maybe even both. It was excruciating for both of them not to mention frightening as the flashes of lightning darted down in zigzags that seemed to touch the water. They finally made it back to her boat slip and had little trouble getting it docked. He told her to go inside and raced his boat back to his own home dock.

She ran up the hill and stood looking around the corner of her front porch until she saw him make it onto shore. Convinced, for whatever reason, he was safely inside his own home; she walked inside and started to lose her clothes at the door, so she wouldn't track in the water. She lost the poncho and her shirt and was about to undo her khaki shorts when he walked in.

"I'm...uh...oops...uh...oh." He stopped his failed attempts at apologizing and stood there looking at her.

He was captivated by her beauty, and his words seemed caught in his throat.

Her hair was damp and tangled over her shoulders. She was still out of breath from the excitement, and her breasts were heaving as if they were peaks waiting to be explored.

"Oh hell, I..." He stopped again and took every inch of her in as a groan escaped his mouth.

She looked at him like a frightened girl waiting to see what was next, and that was the only reason he opted to go into the bathroom and return with towels to drape over her. He couldn't use this moment to his advantage. For whatever reason, she was too fragile, and he saw it in her eyes or at least he thought he did.

When he reappeared, she let him wrap her up in a big beach towel he found, and she slipped off her jeans from underneath. "I didn't want to track in the house," she explained. She liked the way he just made himself at home.

Carol gathered up her clothes and took them into the laundry closet. When she returned, she had a pair of jeans and a flannel shirt. "These may have belonged to my mother's last husband, I don't know. Anyway, go ahead and get out of those wet clothes. You don't need to go back outside in this storm. There are far too many trees, and you might get struck by lightning."

He didn't say anything. He let her do the inviting because he wanted her to be sure she wanted him to stay after he barged in on her like he did.

He went into the bedroom to change. She called out to him that she would make them dinner if he would like to stay, and he seemed all too eager to accept. She went

over to the kitchen and began to search for what she had to put a meal together. At a glance, she became aware of the fact, she could see him in the full-length mirror in her bedroom.

She admired his toned body as he peeled off his wet T-shirt. The top two buttons were unbuttoned on his jeans and she noticed. Oh, but did she notice. Everything about him turned her on as she watched him undress. She felt guilty spying on him, but when he looked up and caught her watching him, she didn't look away.

He continued to strip down to his boxers. He had caught her looking, but he didn't stop undressing. He hesitated only for a moment before he turned to the side and took the wet shorts off, too. He put on the pants she brought him without any underwear.

She became aware of the fact that he knew she watched with curiosity and wanting.

He held the pants in front of him, and she couldn't see how hard he was until the last minute when it looked like a spring had ejected from his pants. She started to giggle and turned back away from the mirror.

He had already made up his mind before he joined her in the kitchen; he wasn't going to embarrass her. He'd caught her looking at him longingly with desire filling her eyes. He saw it and took his time dressing.

She knew he saw her watching him, and for some reason, she decided not to turn away.

He didn't mind. He was glad she saw. He was proud of the goods he possessed, and he couldn't wait to share the entire package with her.

"So, what's it going to be for supper, dear?" He made a joke as he came into the kitchen.

She teased him right back. "Supper? You did not just say *supper*. That's a southern thing if I've ever heard of one. You have been around Clyde and Maude for far too long."

He winked. "You have to try to blend in with the locals around here."

They both laughed.

"Say, I don't guess you'd have a beer left around here, would you?"

She playfully winked at him. It seemed to be her turn to flirt. "A cellar full of it, but you'll have to go back into the rain to get it. How about a whiskey sour?"

He was surprised. "You're a girl who rushes into summer prepared, aren't you? A whiskey sour will be great. I'll fix it. Want one?"

She nodded and pointed in the direction of the liquor cabinet in the living area.

"You never answered me, what's for dinner?"

She looked up. "I guess it'll have to be cubed steak and some veggies. Is that okay?"

He walked over to her and stood beside her looking down at the frozen corn, peas, and green beans. "Jolly Green Giant. Where would we be without him?" He paused for a minute and then decided he had to get something off his chest. "What the hell were you doing out there by yourself anyway?"

She looked surprised by his tone with her. "Oh, don't tell me, *you never* go out on a boat alone."

He passed a sarcastic glance back at her. "No, I didn't say that, but I'm obviously..." He smirked. "A man." He continued, "And you are *obviously*, a woman. There's a difference in survival skills here."

"I tell you what," Carol began. "I'm going to let that male chauvinistic comment slide today but only since you were so nice to stay with me earlier, and just so you know, I always go out on the boat alone. Get used to it."

He chuckled. "Okay, I will. I love saving beautiful damsels in distress." He grinned from ear to ear, pulled up a bar stool, and sat across from her as if in awe over her every graceful move.

"Are you going to sit there and watch me while I cook?"

He eyed her up and down. "I didn't notice. You're cooking?" She tossed a baby carrot at him as she chopped up a salad.

"Why don't I finish the salad, and you can get the microwave going with those Jolly Green selections." Right as the words left his lips, the electricity went out.

"Shit, I knew that would happen. Well, at least I have an abundance of candles."

He helped her light the candles and couldn't help but notice the way she looked in the candlelight. She had a sensual look and one he wanted to capture again and again. He lit as many candles as she would allow him, so he could catch that one particular expression she gave him right after they lit another candle. When they lit the last one, he put it in the bathroom and came back to the kitchen to let her know food wasn't really on his mind.

"I'd be content to make a fire in the fireplace and just cuddle up with our drinks if you want to put the food away for later."

She agreed, and he went out to the front porch to uncover enough firewood to start a flame.

He's working this for all it's worth, she told herself. She instantly felt guilty at the thought. He'd been so thoughtful and warm. She felt as if she'd known him all of her life, yet she was second guessing everything he did as if everything he did had a motive behind it. It wasn't her typical character to judge others like she'd been judging Tom O'Brien.

She normally was a pretty nice person, but lately, she had become so indifferent to everyone. She was going to have to chill out and start enjoying life a little more. The night ahead looked like an excellent place to start.

The lightning was getting worse, and just when the fire began to ignite, a big crackling sound accompanied by a "boom" sent her flying to the sofa behind him. He laughed and scooted over to make room for her next to the fire.

"Don't tell me I went to all of this trouble to build a fire, and you're going to sit way over there."

She grabbed some large oriental pillows from a corner as she made her way to the floor. Carol didn't realize it until she found herself in front of the roaring fire, but she had just set the scene for a very romantic ambiance. "Before I settle down, would you like another drink? I think I'm going to have another one."

He nodded. "Sounds good."

She deliberately made his drink as strong as she made her own. In her mind, a stiff drink would keep him in check and keep her nervous energy from boiling over.

She handed his glass down to him, and he took her glass as well as he offered his hand. "My rebel without a cause," he teased. "Why don't you just sit your pretty little tail on down here."

She smiled and put her hand in his. He helped her down to the cushions like she was a fragile little China doll.

Tom watched her with adoring eyes. She couldn't really understand where he was coming from with all of his adoration, and he did seem to have a strong interest in her. As strange as it seemed, she saw the admiration in his eyes time and time again.

"Rebel without a cause? Well, I suppose I worked something to my advantage because it isn't often that women have a handsome hunk jump out in the middle of a storm to save them only to come back and build a romantic fire in the middle of the summer!"

Tom's laughter warmed her up even more. "You know, it's not quite summer yet and a fire is a great aphrodisiac."

Carol laughed nervously. "Okay, that's the second time you've mentioned that word. Something you're not telling me?"

He looked like there was a lot he'd like to tell her. In fact, she could've sworn lust was written all over his face which meant he'd probably rather show her a few things.

"Tell me about your mother." Tom set his drink down as he began to tread in territory he had a feeling Carol viewed as off-limits. "Maude and Clyde told me she spent some time here, and they knew her."

"Did Clyde bother to tell you he wasn't too crazy about my mother either?" Carol reached for her glass and took a sip never taking her eyes off him.

"You misread him. Clyde likes *you* a lot."

Carol began to giggle and soon was rolling with laughter. "Yes, I guess you're right. He likes me a lot. Too much I'm afraid. In fact, I believe I'm included in the only

sexual thought the man ever has." She had no idea where that came from, but the words tumbled from her mouth easily enough.

Tom looked at her with a touch of suspicion. "I know I could certainly understand why Clyde has sexual thoughts about you. I know I do." Way too forward. He knew she would bolt on that one, and she did.

"I'm ready to spice up my drink a bit. How about it, are you ready for another one?"

He chuckled. "Sure, I can't wait to get you drunk. Then, I can take advantage of you."

She smiled, and he saw that she was actually tearing down her own boundaries. Of course, after spying on him in her bedroom mirror, she'd already taken a plunge into the water. He knew she'd have to take a swim before her curiosity got the best of her.

When she came back with the glasses a second time, they sat in silence for what seemed like hours, and he started pressing about her mother again. It didn't get him very far. Carol made it clear to him that the occasional mention of her mother's name was okay, but overall, she felt like it was a subject best left alone if they wanted to enjoy their evening.

Tom moved on to the subject of her writing. "I want to know more about your novels. What do you write?" He moved in closer. "More importantly, what are you going to write about this summer?"

"I'm sure I'll have lots of creative ideas hit me." She playfully answered him.

Tom studied her. He loved how she danced around things she didn't want to answer. A woman to keep him on his toes. Carol only told what she wanted others to know. He was interested in how she became a published author and what her claim to fame had been in the past. She wasn't your small town journalist by any means, and of course, he knew as much. He'd done his homework on the lovely Carol Langley.

"So, you aren't going to let me in on your secrets?"

"Not a chance!" She winked. "Then I'd have to worry you'd give away my next best-selling plot."

Tom took the opportunity to dash in playfully, "Best seller? Wow, a woman richer than I am. I'm not sure I can deal with seeing someone who has a higher net worth than I do."

She teased him right back, "Oh, I don't know, unless you're worth at least a couple of billion, you're probably way out of your league, but I might make an exception." She enjoyed poking fun at him. "How many zeros are after your digits?"

"I don't know; it depends on how many it will take to get your attention. I can tell you anything you want to hear."

Carol winked. "I'm sure you can, Mr. O'Brien."

They sat silent with nothing but the popping and crackling sounds of the fire. Carol began to feel the alcohol. He had one leg out and the other one bent inward, and she moved it outward, so she could scoot her back up against his chest.

He nuzzled her head for a minute and could smell the rain. It didn't matter. He had her right where he wanted her. Well, not exactly, but almost. She was at least, between *his legs*.

The rain continued to fall down in sheets, and they sat for a long time looking out over the water. The way the lightning darted down on the lake would have been beautiful if it weren't so scary. It was like it electrified the air around them, and the crashing booms were reminders of how dangerous not the thunder itself, but the lightning could be. Tom told her if you listened to the sounds of the thunder, you could tell how close the lightning was, and if that held any truth to it, then the lightning was pretty darn close.

She snuggled into his lap tighter, and he wrapped his arms around her waist. She had let her guard down, and he was pretty sure she wouldn't be too eager to turn him down if he wanted to make his move. He'd been her knight on the white horse, and considering she was an author of romance, he was certain he'd ranked pretty high when he saved her. Okay, so his boat wasn't exactly a four-legged animal.

"This storm isn't going to let up," she announced the obvious.

"No, it isn't, and it's getting late. Do you want me to go home?" He was pretty sure she would want him to stay.

She loved how he moved the ball into her court. She turned around to face him. "That's really smooth, Mr. O'Brien. The power is in my hands now. If I tell you to go home, you're smart enough to know, I will worry myself sick about lightning striking you as soon as you step foot under the power lines. If I tell you to stay, I'm...well, it could...well...just skip it." She was frustrated she couldn't find the right words. They would've come to her without any problems if he hadn't been giving her the *I-know-you-want-to-do-me* look.

He bent over her shoulder and kissed her lightly on the lips. "I think you'll miss me if I leave, so I'll sleep on your couch if you don't mind."

She did mind actually. If he was going to stay the night, he could do better than her couch! Of course, he wanted an invitation and maybe even a roadmap to her bed. That wasn't going to happen either. Even though she'd had a few drinks, it didn't make her stupid! They might end up there, but he would at least have to work for it!

"We're in quite a predicament here," she finally announced outright without realizing it.

He studied her for an agonizing few seconds trying to figure out his best approach. "I'm sorry. I can go then. I just thought you'd feel better with me here, and that's why I offered." *Where was his Virgin Man act coming from all of a sudden?* He wasn't playing the role she'd expected.

"Oh just finish your drink, and I'll think about it," she said abruptly. "There's no hurry. We've got all night to decide."

He smiled to himself. *Yes, they had all night to think things over.* The end result would be the same.

Chapter Six

She poured them another round of drinks and announced it would be their last round because she had to get some sleep, and they were also out of whiskey. They had spent the last hour talking about their past relationships. Tom was glad to learn there was no one who held Carol's heart in the palm of his hand, and she seemed glad to know his forward act of adoration wasn't because he was on the rebound from a lost love.

His last story was about one of the local farmers who had been trying for the past six months to marry his daughter off and chosen him to handle the task. The way he told the story about the farmer dropping his daughter off in front of his office and leaving her stranded in town so Tom had to give her a ride home had sent Carol into hysterics.

The story was hysterical because Tom told how he saw the farmer pointing and showing his daughter where to stand. From his office window, he could hear him coaching her on what to say. Then, Tom started home from work and found her waiting near his car. He gave her a ride home and had to wait with her because she'd also been locked out of the house, and of course, no one was home to let her inside. He couldn't just leave her standing alone on the front porch.

Carol just rolled in laughter. "Sounds like her father had big ideas for you."

"It's not funny. It really gave me issues." He smirked watching her shake with even more laughter.

When she finally stopped snickering, she noticed Tom's look toward her had changed. "You know I'm going to kiss you again."

She could only hope. It had taken him long enough to reach the decision! By the time he offered, she thought it was long overdue and she blindsided him when she said, "No, you're not....I think you're going to do a lot more than that. You promised me, remember?"

He looked at her sheepishly before responding. "Yes, I remember, but right now, all I'm asking for is a kiss."

She turned around to face him and threw one leg high over his head, which admittedly shocked him when he saw her do it. She ended up sitting across his lap with one leg on either side of him. "Well then, what about that smooch?"

All he could do was laugh. *Yes, laugh!* She thought he had some nerve until he explained. "Where on earth did you learn to throw a leg like that?"

She gave him her best sweet and innocent smile. "If you think that was neat, wait till I show you my bed gymnastics." She felt him underneath her and added, "That's what I wanted to do. There's nothing better than a man who knows how to respond to seduction."

Tom sighed and hoped she wanted to do something more than just get an obvious show of appreciation. He did so love the attention, but the action was what he craved.

She pushed her crotch into him. "I wanted to get a rise out of you."

He began kissing her neck and whispered slowly, "You've done that without any problem."

Carol marveled in what his kisses were doing to other parts of her body. Her nipples were throbbing for his touch. She was aching for him to explore her, but she needed him to take the lead. She wanted to be sure he wanted her after all of the games she'd played with him over the last few days.

Tom moved his mouth along her throat to the nape of her neck and up to her ear where he whispered a somewhat throaty request, "I want you to touch me where I'm certain you've seen me."

She slid her hand down into his jeans and stroked him softly. "Ahh, and what makes you think I've been spying on you, kind sir?"

He ignored her question as she took a stronger grip. He drew back to look at her. "You like what you feel, don't you?" He bit his lower lip and seemed to bite and release it with each stroke she gave him.

It was all a bit too provocative for her since they'd never been intimate before. She wanted to go with it, but she felt like if she talked the talk with him, then she'd never be able to keep up. She might write the naughty stuff onto the pages of her manuscripts, but acting on it was entirely different.

He might have gone too fast with the verbal stimulation. He was beginning to think he could read her thoughts just by her facial expressions alone.

"Talk to me baby. Tell me what you like." He drew her in for a kiss as she continued to pump his thick cock through the palm of her pleading hand.

She was nervous but had no thoughts of backing down. She was just getting started. She slid her hand back up his chest and wrapped her arms around his neck. She licked his lower lip with the tip of her tongue and slid it in to explore the depths of his passionate kiss. She lingered as long as she could without moving her hand back down to touch him again. It was much harder than she had left him previously. In fact, she couldn't imagine how she could handle all of him. He felt larger than any man she'd ever known.

As she stroked his dick, she sat back to look at him and started to pucker again after she became uncomfortable with the way he was looking at her. She quickened her strokes, and he took his hand and cupped the nape of her neck tighter, drawing her in for a longer, harder kiss. Then, he leaned her back and pressed against her.

She helped him strip off his shirt and reveled in his muscular upper body in the firelight. *What abs!* She almost said it out loud. She was so turned on by him. She wrapped her legs around his hips and pushed her inner thighs into him. Carol gave him a glimpse of the strength she had in her legs as she locked them around his back and held him closer to her.

At one time he pulled back to look at her and giggled. "You promised great things with those babies, now I don't want you to let me down." He slapped her playfully on the thigh, and the pop sound only made Carol more aware of the potential straight ahead. Those slapping sounds of one body against another were calling to her.

"I have no intentions of letting you down in any way." The anatomy she thought she controlled was already working under his touch.

He shifted as if he were trying to move out of her tight grip on his hips, so she teased by thrusting herself up allowing her to lock him around the middle with a remarkable latch of thighs. She wanted him to know she'd be worth the trouble. He let her have her fun as he thrust up against her. After he rubbed on her for just a moment longer than he thought he could stand, he moved her hand down again.

Once her fingers were there again, she unzipped his pants. He rolled her over on top, and she slid down his stomach as if she'd done it many times before. She kissed his skin as she trailed toward his cock.

Taking his own hand, he held it at the base as she tried to take him in her mouth. When she finally had all of him, he released his hand and began stroking her back. She flicked her tongue as she massaged him with soft, eager lips. She slid her mouth up and down, to the tip and to the root and back to the tip again. He didn't know how much of her oral affection he could take.

She encircled the tip of his dick with her tongue and started to move back down on him for a throaty taste, and he brought her back up to him. He kissed her hard. She straddled him, and he watched her as she took off her shirt. He reached behind her back and unhooked the only thing keeping her tits from touching him. "Oh, Carol, you are..." She had a good understanding of what the mere sight of her did to men, and this one wasn't any different.

He couldn't finish. He had to have her. He encircled her nipples with a light tongue before taking in her whole breast as a mouthful to devour. He couldn't get enough.

She wasn't surprised.

As she was enjoying the massaging sensation on her upper body, her lower body was telling her it was time to move closer. She rolled off to the side and slid out of her pants. She was down to lace panties, and he moved swiftly to please her in a way she had pleased him earlier. He tongued her through the lace to let her know what she was in for.

He massaged her through the material then slid his middle finger under the crotch of her pretty panties just to tease her with the thoughts more.

Tearing himself away from her, he probed her center softly with his fingers.

She tossed her head back making sure the come-and-get me look was undeniable.

He couldn't help but notice her sexy, if not divine neck and couldn't resist moving up her chest to place pecks everywhere his lips led him. His hand massaged her with more intensity.

As his lips moved in to kiss more of her skin, his hand quickly helped her out of the garment he deemed worthless. Once the material disappeared, he traveled back to explore, lingering only for a minute at her breasts to taste once more before he pleased her in a way she wouldn't soon forget.

Long, perfect legs tensed as he kissed her inner thighs. He slowly licked her from opening to clit then covered his mouth over her warm center, and his tongue danced. It was deep, and it was completely unexpected. She moaned as he thrust his tongue into her like no one had ever done before. Just when she thought she was going to reach her climax, he withdrew and moved up a little bit to take her clit into his mouth again with light flickering sensations.

She massaged his scalp with one hand and begged for him to enter her. *"Now, I need you now,"* she whispered.

Taunting her with a rapid finger fucking her, he asked her bluntly, "Do you need me now or want me now?" He smirked as he pulled his fingers in and out then went back in for another taste of her sweetness.

This time her hips moved forward more, and she began to rock slightly toward him. When he knew she was ready, he spread her legs open wider and prepared to dive in.

Hovering over her, he acted as if he was ready to enter her. There was a look she couldn't describe that came over his face. Pure satisfaction maybe or simple pleasures perhaps.

He moved into her slowly. "I don't want to hurt you," he said.

She instructed him to give her all of him. She wanted all of it.

He gave himself to her in small increments filling out her insides. Just when she thought she couldn't handle it all, he thrust into her, and she let out a deep moan.

It was the only cue he needed, and he was ready to fuck. Turned on beyond words, he couldn't stop. He {grinded} ground ? into her, and she pushed up against him with equal force. He leaned back and pulled her with him, so she could be on top.

"Take as much of me as you can handle," he whispered. "I never want to hurt you."

She took it all, turned on by his choice of words. She slid up and down on him gently at first and then with ferocious passion. He gripped the sides of her legs and held her tightly as his lips wandered across her breasts, and she screamed in ecstasy as he rocked her back and forth.

Just fuck me. Don't talk. Just give it to me long and hard. Her mind transformed her into a pleading whore ready to do anything just for the ride with him. *Never again. I can never do this man again. I'll fall for him...I'll come...I'll be damned if he isn't the best piece of* ...She couldn't think. She couldn't do anything except lose all of her inhibitions and just let it go.

When he knew she had finished reaching new heights, he moved her gently for a minute more and slowly massaged her core with his cock. His pace quickened, and she wrapped her legs tighter as he brought her to climax again meeting his own for the first time.

Chapter Seven

The electricity came back on around eight o'clock the next morning, and she woke up startled. He quickly jumped up to grab the lights and turned everything off. She watched him sleepy-eyed as he moved throughout the cabin blowing out the candles and turning off the lights. At some point, they had pulled a quilt down from the sofa, so he moved back to snuggle up against her after he made sure the door was locked, too. He didn't want Maude or Clyde to come on in if they walked over for a visit.

He kissed her lightly on her forehead and asked her what he was dying to know. "Any regrets?" She looked out over the water and thought about the delicious experience he had given her during the night. Sure, she wouldn't have done it had she been sober, but now that she had tasted sex with him, there were no regrets. In fact, she couldn't wait for another experience.

"No, not at all." She looked up at him and grinned a wicked grin. "The only thing is..." She moved her hand down to stroke his manhood. "I don't remember too much about last night since I drank so much. You may have to show me again."

He grinned. "We can fix that, I promise." He had just started to kiss her when the knock on her door came.

Carol laughed then cut her laugh off with a gasp. "Oh no, I promised Maude I would go with her to the flea market today."

He grinned. "Well then, I guess you'd better answer that." He watched her as she scurried to put her clothes on.

She went to the door and cracked it open. Clyde was there. "You up?"

He pushed past her and found Tom zipping up his pants. "Well, I guess so....morning, Tom." He didn't seem surprised to find him there.

Carol shifted her weight back and forth. "Um...I...um...tell Maude I'll be up there in a few minutes. I'm just now getting in the shower, and I will...um..."

Tom cut her off. "Come on, Clyde. Let's go see what kind of damage that storm did last night. I imagine there are branches down everywhere."

Clyde turned to walk out and paused for a moment. He turned back for a minute and took a glance at Carol. "Well, I guess you ain't gay after all."

Tom turned back to her with a wink. "Clyde, I can tell you from experience, she's definitely not."

Carol returned the wink as he walked out the door, and he reached back inside long enough to kiss her on the cheek. "Have fun collecting fleas today."

* * * *

Carol was just giddy as she looked around the empty cabin thinking about the passion that heated up the entire room only hours before. She thought about his hands cupping her breasts while his mouth explored her nipples. She imagined his tongue exploring her intimately. She thought about his rock hard cock pumping into her and became wet just thinking about it. "I have to stop this." She said the words out loud and laughed when she did. Funny how a man could stroll into a woman's life and just change things with a quick roll on the floor. She giggled again.

After tidying up the living room floor, she went over to the kitchen to put everything up from the night before. She glanced out the window and saw Tom and Clyde on the property line talking.

She went out onto the deck and yelled below, "Clyde tell Maude I'll be by there in about an hour. I have to call my agent; then I'll get ready and be on my way."

He waved her off and nodded. He was enjoying his conversation with Tom.

She checked the front door to be sure it was unlocked in case Tom forgot something and came back in to get it. Maybe if she was lucky, he'd come on back to pick up where they'd left off. She could hope.

Carol grabbed some towels from the laundry room and headed to the shower. A few minutes later when she heard him sneak in, she wasn't really all that surprised. After all, a woman knows when she's given a man a good lay, and she'd done precisely that and a whole lot more!

"I'm glad you didn't lock me out," he said as he joined her in the shower. "I know we don't have a lot of time," he started. "Maude will be waiting on you." His voice was raspy as he taunted her with the ideas of more pleasure just by a simple look.

Carol's eyes darkened. "Then let her wait." She pressed her body up against him, and he moved his hands down her hips taking time to feel the curves.

She whispered his name telling him what she wanted from him, and he wasted no time in entering her from behind. The palms of her hands went up against the wall as he thrust into her. It was sexy and provocative as the water ran down between them. White French-manicured nails scraped the tile as he drove her over the edge.

He pressed his hands into her ass and plunged a heavy-weighted cock into her as she cried out for more. If they were going to grab a quickie, then he wanted to make it worth her while, and by the sound of her voice, he was hitting just the right spot. He quickened his pace and moved his hands around to cup her breasts. As the water heated up, he rolled his forefinger and thumbs around her excited nipples.

When she quickened her motions, too, he withdrew for a minute and rubbed his dick up and down her leg. "Tell me, Carol, let me hear you tell me."

She was horny, and she didn't care. "I want you."

He whispered to her, "What do you want me to do to you? Tell me."

She knew what he needed to hear. "I want you to fuck me."

As soon as she said it, he moved his hips into her and grinded her with more force than before. "Oh baby." He put one of his hands on her shoulder and reached around

with the other one to hold her right hand to the wall, and when they came, they both shook with such fury they had trouble keeping their balance.

"Oh Tom." Carol was breathless. "Oh lover..." She cursed herself for the dramatics she must've pulled from a book somewhere but didn't recognize the words as her own. She turned around and looked at him bewildered for a minute, and he threw his head back under the showerhead.

"You're fabulous yourself," he said with a smile. She moved in and kissed him lightly. He dumped shampoo on his head then hers. He massaged her hair then soaped them both up and took pleasure in a full body massage. When he finished, he let her linger for a moment in the shower without him and retreated to the living room.

She emerged from the bathroom with a flushed face and was dripping wet in a wrapped towel. "Well, I guess I'd better get ready now."

He had a mischievous look. "Yes, you should. Can I watch? I'd love to watch, and you know I'm always good at keeping my word. If you'll let me watch, I'll get you hot and bothered without ever laying another hand on you."

Her imagination began to take her to a place she couldn't possibly let it go and still walk out the door to meet Maude. "No way!" She laughed out loud. "You can leave."

He held his heart and acted crushed. "What? Did I just get romped and then kicked out on my ass?"

She walked over to him and dropped her towel to show him her genuine appreciation. "This isn't going anywhere except to a flea market. There's more of the same whenever you think you're ready for it."

He made a throaty moan as he wrapped her naked body into a tight bear hug. "I'm going to hold you to it."

She turned to go into her bedroom to get ready, and he enjoyed the view as she strutted her ass across the floor. "I'll see you later," she called out over her shoulder, and he left with more than a smile.

Yeah, I'll see you later. He had no doubts he'd think of her until he did.

Chapter Eight

If anyone loved shopping for junk, Carol decided it had to be Maude. Not only did she make sure she saw every single booth at the flea market, she stopped at most of them. Carol was completely zapped by the time she returned home. Maude had worn her out. If she wasn't prying about Tom, she was rambling about Clyde. If she wasn't thinking about buying an old flag, she was buying a clay pot. She went from one topic to the next as quickly as she went from one table to another booth at the flea market.

When they finally pulled back into their shared private road, Carol was ready to run for cover. Maude grabbed her hand and patted it firmly. "I've had such a great time today. We'll do this again soon."

Carol smiled politely and told her she, too, had enjoyed their time shopping. She then made a mad dash for her cabin. She needed time to unwind, and she really had to call her agent this time. Otherwise, she might not have an agent to call in the near future!

She dialed the number and lit a cigarette. "Tansie Talley, please." She waited patiently as she took a long drag off her cigarette.

"Hello, this is Tansie." Carol could hear the stress in her voice.

"It's me, Tansie. How are you?"

The other end was silent, and then Tansie hit her high-strung chord. "Where the hell have you been? I've been trying to call you for days. I thought you were dead.

This isn't like you, Carol. What's up with you? Can't you even call the gal who finds you the best deals in the publishing industry? I thought you were dead. I swear I did."

Carol took in another drag and exhaled. "Yes, you said that already. You thought I died. Kicked the bucket. Yes, I'm sure you did. You thought my number was up. Finito." *What was it with everyone these days? Seems everyone I know is giving me up for dead.* She let the thought pass.

Tansie laughed at Carol's wit. "So, spill it, who is he?" She knew her so well.

"You'll just have to come down here and meet him, but I can tell you one thing for sure, you'll be surprised."

Tansie pumped her for more information. "Why? What's to surprise me? Did you get married?"

Carol giggled and took another puff from her cig. "No, I did not get married. He's just not who you would picture me with, and he's definitely different from the men I've known."

Carol smiled to herself as she thought about how well endowed her neighbor was and almost licked her lips at the thought. *This is crazy.*

Tansie wanted more than Carol offered. "Okay, girlfriend, tell-all. I don't have time for your cat and mouse game. What's he look like? How serious is it? Who is he? Where's he from? What's he do? I already know he's great in bed because you can't talk about him without it coming through in your voice! Tell me all about it. Details woman! Details!"

Carol decided she would save the goods for another day, but she just covered the bases. His looks, what he did for a living, and how sweet he was. She skimmed over the bedroom details. She didn't want to give too much away. "So, Ms. Agent, I called to chat about the contract you sent me in Nashville before I left...."

Tansie shifted into business mode at once. "Well, your silent treatment did some good. They became a bit antsy because you wouldn't sign with them, and they've decided to offer an advance. We need to try this approach more often."

Carol spotted Tom going down to the lake. "Hmm...so it's really that good? Tell me more." She watched as he took off his shirt and tried to stay focused on her conversation with Tansie.

"I think it's good, Carol." She paused for the dramatic effect. "How's a \$100,000 advance grab you?"

Carol walked away from the window and sat down. "You've got to be kidding me. A hundred grand before they even see the finished manuscript? Get out of here!"

Tansie assured her she was worth it. "Look, Carol, your last book was a bestseller. They actually should've offered more, but it's a strong advance, and I think you should take it and sign."

The two women agreed she would take it, and they said they'd talk in a couple of days. Carol went back to the window in time to catch Tom pulling out away from his dock. There was a blonde woman in the boat with him, and from where Carol stood, she could see she had on a bikini top and shorts.

What the hell? She watched them pull out and followed the boat with her eyes until it was out of sight. She stood at the window for a minute longer. *Who did he think he was?* Carol felt a twinge of hurt, and then she was angry. He was a player. He'd fucked her brains out all night long and again the same morning, and then he proudly rubbed her nose in it with another chic? He had the audacity! She'd give him that much. He didn't even try to hide it. The nerve of him!

* * * *

Carol paced back and forth then walked down to the cellar returning with a twelve-pack. She tossed it in the refrigerator and headed back down for two bottles of wine. She'd start with the wine then hit the beer. *WHO did he think he was?* She was steaming.

She'd spent the entire day with Maude at the flea market, so she needed to work. A manuscript needed to be written, but she was way too hot under the collar to face her computer. "DAMN IT!" she said out loud. WHY did she have to sleep with him?

She poured herself a glass of wine and went to her deck with the glass in hand. She decided she would sit there and wait for him. If he was going to screw around with two women in one day, the least she could do is let the second woman know he was with her earlier the same day! *I'll ask her if she likes leftovers and see how that grabs her!*

She gulped down the first glass of wine and poured herself another one. Before she knew it, she had slurped down the second sprinting toward the third and fourth glasses, which disappeared just as quickly, so she opened another bottle. If he didn't hurry up and come back to the dock, she'd be smashed by the time he did and then what? *Then, I'll really make you look like the ass you are Tom O'Brien.*

She was furious and unable to focus on anything sensible. *This is crazy.* She really didn't have any reason to be mad. She had decided to sleep with him out of nowhere. It was so unlike her. *When you act like a slut, you're treated like one.* She decided she had no control over what he did. *Carol. Calm down. You don't own him just because he gave you a good roll in the hay. So what if someone else is getting their romp, too?* She wasn't sure if she was talking to herself or thinking out loud or if her mother's voice was the one she heard inside her head.

She went back and forth with how she would handle this new development and became tired from it all. She was getting a splitting headache from the wine, so she decided to lay down and wait. She'd leave the door open to the deck, so she would hear him when he pulled back in *with the blonde bombshell.*

Carol stretched out on the sofa as night began to fall and fell fast asleep. Her dreams took her to her mother's grave. She was standing in the cemetery, and her mother was standing behind her. She could feel her presence, but she couldn't turn around. *Turn around Carol,* she told herself in her dream, but she couldn't move. She had to face the grave while her mother talked to her.

Carol, don't get involved. You always did make very bad choices. You're like me in your men choices. More than you know. Her mother started to laugh a ghostly laugh. She could hear her mother's delight. It was so real it brought her out of her dreams, and she sat straight up.

The laughter filled the room, but she realized, what she heard wasn't her mother's giggles but instead was coming from outside. Carol got up and went to the deck to see Tom and the blonde strolling up the hill in the moonlight. It looked like their arms were entwined. She moved toward the railing, so she could get a better look. Her motion light turned on, and immediately, she knew Tom could see her watching them. "HEY NEIGHBOR!" he shouted. She glared into the night and said nothing.

As she went back inside, a loneliness swept over her. She felt used and definitely alone. She couldn't believe he thought so little of her that he could be parading another woman around her front yard. She was angry at him for ever sleeping with her. She was disgusted with herself. Carol picked up the phone and dialed Zebra Airlines.

"Yes, hello, I'd like to book a flight from Knoxville or Tri-Cities, Tennessee to New York City, and I need the quickest flight you can find me. One way will be fine. My travel plans are uncertain. Yes, tomorrow morning at 6:50 will be fine. Yes, let me give you my information...."

Chapter Nine

Carol didn't sleep at all. The blonde must've been driving the Toyota that sat in Tom's driveway all night because it never left, and since Tom didn't come over to check on her, well, she knew why. The blonde never left either.

Throughout the night, Carol had nightmares about Tom's lips on someone else other than her. It was agonizing to watch through her dreams. She thought about his hands massaging another woman the way he'd touched her. Her sleep brought endless images. She thought about his tongue doing things to please the blonde like he had done so completely to please her. She was sick, and she couldn't leave fast enough. Whether she slept or not, he was on her mind.

The next morning, to add insult to injury, Carol saw the woman jogging up the driveway headed for the main road. She didn't look her way and instead stopped long enough to drop a note into Clyde and Maude's mailbox explaining she had to go away for a few days. They'd understand because Carol had done so plenty of times. She made it clear that she would be unavailable.

She headed for the highway, and the blonde threw a wave in her direction. Carol thought about running her over but decided against it. She had a plane to catch. She imagined it would be at least a day before Tom noticed she was gone. He probably wouldn't care. He'd have another chic in his bed by the end of the day and probably another one the following day. *What a player.* Carol was just so mad at herself for being foolish.

When she finally made it to the airport, she was mad all over again. She cursed herself under her breath. She wished she had stopped earlier in the morning long enough to introduce herself to the woman. *Right before killing her.* She would have loved to have seen the expression on her cute little face when she told her Tom had screwed them both in the same day. She should have taken the time. It could've been entertaining.

Still fuming, she boarded the plane. When she flopped down in her window seat, she never bothered to notice the man who sat down beside her a few minutes later. She never noticed his good looks and didn't really care to look either. She threw her head back and reclined her seat settling in for a nap before takeoff. The booze was still rampant in her system from the all-night binge drinking.

"Ma'am, excuse me, ma'am?" The stewardess was leaning in over her with a huge smile. "I need you to return your seat to its upright position please. We're about to take off."

Carol looked at her with fury. "You're just too damn happy." She returned her seat upright. "I guess you had no way of knowing I was exhausted and needed to sleep. The plane certainly couldn't take off without all passengers sitting *erect*, could it?" Carol practically barked her words out at the stewardess who simply smiled and moved on.

The gentleman in the aisle seat put down his paper and she immediately noticed his deep blue eyes and beautiful complexion. "Bad day?"

Ah, hell. Not another one, she thought.

"Yes actually, it's been a bad morning following a bad night, after a bad, not to mention short lived I might add...affair."

His eyes darted up and down her slender legs. She had on a red business suit and very little make-up, but he found her quite beautiful. "That was a little more information than I needed, but okay." He raised his *Wall Street Journal* back directly in front of him, so he couldn't see her. "I'm William by the way."

She heard his introduction from behind the paper and peered around it. "I'm Carol, and I'm not sleeping with you." Her mouth turned up in a take-that fashion.

She threw her head back and closed her eyes. *I've lost it, she thought. I've really lost it.*

He leaned over and whispered in her ear, and she caught his British accent. "Carol, it is Carol, right?" She held her breath in and waited for what she was sure would be a good come on line. "I didn't ask you to sleep with me, and if I had asked you for sex, I would have asked you if you would like to accompany me to the lavatory for a fuck seeing as there isn't a bed on this plane."

Her eyes bugged. She couldn't believe he had just said that to her. She looked at him hard for a moment then started to laugh. He joined in with her.

"I deserved that, didn't I?" Her head was moving in agreement with her chosen words.

He nodded. "You did."

Her smile widened. "I take it you've had practice putting women in their place?"

He nodded. "I'm keen on it, I must admit." He winked.

Carol realized they were airborne, and she turned to look out her window at the ground below.

When she turned back, she noticed him checking her out. "So, have you ever fucked in the bathroom, William?"

He laughed. "Not in midair I'm afraid."

"Me either." She moistened her bottom lip with her tongue and looked him up and down provocatively as she tossed her head back and closed her eyes. Hell, what did it matter? She had almost given herself to a man completely. Tom O'Brien had tugged at her heart's strings. Now, here was a great looking man beside of her in first class.

She leaned forward and batted her eyes at him and circled her lips once more. *Let him think about what I can do with this tongue. Men are pigs. ALL men are pigs. I hate men. I hate ALL men. I'm going to use them and then abuse them. No. I'll swear off all men. I'll just*

become a lesbian and at least please one man in my life. Clyde can go around telling everyone he was right. His neighbor was gay. I can hear him now.

She either passed out or fell asleep while she was thinking about her distaste for the opposite sex. She was sure her flight would go much smoother if she slept. However, her mother appeared in her dreams. This time she saw her walking along the shore with a man. From a distance she could see the man was younger than her mother. He looked to be at least thirty or so, and his body was in shape. She focused on his ass. Her mother's hair appeared white. She followed them in her dreams. She chased them along the lake and called out for her mom, but she couldn't hear her, so she kept running.

"Excuse me; Miss, would you like a drink?" Carol's eyes opened wide. William looked at her waiting for her sarcastic remark. He knew she had it in her.

"What? You woke me up for a drink? You WOKE me up for a DRINK?"

The perky stewardess pretended not to notice her mood. "Yes ma'am. I did. What would you like to drink?" She smiled so sincerely and for a moment, Carol really thought the man next to her had paid a hefty sum to entice the woman to wake up his traveling buddy. *No one is really that dumb and happy about it.*

Carol shifted in her seat and pulled down the tray in front of her as she reached for her purse. "I want a Bloody Mary. No, I want three Bloody Marys. William, would you like a Bloody Mary?"

The stewardess watched her move quickly to retrieve cash from her purse. "How about I serve you one and check back on you in a few moments?" She was already nodding her head hoping for a positive affirmation in return.

William quickly said he'd take a Bloody Mary, too. He was just hoping to keep down a confrontation. As soon as the stewardess was gone, he handed off the drink to Carol.

"He must've been a very foolish man," William said as he stared at her legs again.

Carol looked out the window. "Maybe I was the foolish one," she said.

He looked at her delicate features and stared hard at her breasts. A chill ran over her, and she shuddered for a minute.

"Would you like a blanket?"

She nodded, and he motioned for the stewardess and asked her to retrieve a blanket. She gulped down the first Bloody Mary and started on the second one.

"So, William, are you married?"

He wasted no time in telling her the truth. "Yes, I am."

"Well," she began. "At least you're honest."

He nodded. "It doesn't mean I wouldn't fool around with the right woman." He watched her face for an expression.

She licked her lips again giving him a provocative look along with it. *Don't get mad, get fucked*, she thought. "So, are you going to be flying all day?"

He grinned. "I have the same layover as you do I'm sure."

Her smile widened. "How do you know?"

He nodded his head in the direction of her ticket. "I saw your ticket, and I'm headed to New York, too. We stop in Boston for a plane change and an unprecedented four-hour layover."

She smiled. "So we do."

William and Carol flirted back and forth throughout their flight. At one point he slid his hand underneath the blanket and moved his hand up her legs when she caught his wrist and pushed him away.

He whispered in her ear, "I want to fuck you in Boston. What do you think about that, Carol?"

She watched him in her peripheral vision long enough to decide she was playing with fire but decided she would go with it. She leaned forward giving him her best forefinger motion of come-over-here.

He leaned into her.

She acted like she was going to plant a kiss right on him but instead looked at him square in the eye while she slid her hand down to his hard cock. She stroked it a

couple of times and then whispered in his ear, "I want to get off now. Get me off right here." Her eyes darkened.

"You're very bold for a woman with a broken heart. " He slid his hand under the blanket and moved his palm up her inner thigh. "Still, I can't tell you how glad I am that you asked. " The excitement was all over his face as his eyes grew hazy. He felt her lace panties and slid his hand under them.

She tossed her head back against the seat and enjoyed his fingers massaging her clit. He put his middle finger inside of her and brought it back out a couple of times before he leaned down to kiss her. She turned her cheek, and he nuzzled her hair. She closed her eyes and felt him finger her again, this time with quickened intensity. She was about ready to come when she heard the pilot. "Ladies and Gentleman, this is your captain. On behalf of your flight crew, I'd like to be the first to welcome you to Boston."

She moved his hand away. "Well, William, it appears we're out of time." She grinned and returned her seat to its perpendicular position.

He looked at her with a smile and then gave her a quick wink. "I have a feeling the clock has just started ticking."

She watched as he turned the attendant light on, and she folded the blanket neatly in her lap. *What is he up to?* She didn't dare ask.

The stewardess came over in a flash. "Did you need something, sir?"

He looked back at Carol and decided he did in fact, *need something*. "Please call ahead to the Zebra VIP Room when we land and let them know William Balfour would like to use one of the smaller conference rooms during his layover." He turned back to Carol again with pure lust written all over his handsome face. "I think we have some unfinished business here."

Chapter Ten

Carol followed him through the airport to the Zebra VIP Room. She knew about the private facilities because she was actually a member and knew the girls who worked at the front desk in Boston very well since she flew through there frequently.

"Ms. Langley." A brunette woman greeted her as she walked in, "How are you?"

Carol loved being recognized. "I'm great. How about you? It's been awhile since I've seen you." The ladies made small talk, and William continued, once again, undressing her with his eyes as she spoke. Carol had her briefcase in one hand and reached out to pat William on the arm. "Charlotte, do you know William Balfour?"

The girl smiled. "Everyone here knows Mr. Balfour. His mother is always so kind to us when she travels through here with him. It's so good to see you, Mr. Balfour. I have your meeting room available." They followed the young woman to the cozy conference room, and she asked if they would need anything more then disappeared.

William barely waited for the door to close when he slid one hand under Carol's skirt. He moved into her, so he could fondle her breast with his other free hand. He gave her a smirk as he fingered her gently appreciating the warm moisture calling to his manly senses. He pressed her firmly against the wall, and his lips immediately swarmed in on her throat. "I'm all for a quickie," he said as he withdrew his hand. "But I have to do something first. I'll be right back." Before she could protest, he slid out the door.

She looked around the room and decided she should use the private rooms more often than she did. They were much more inviting when compared to the public areas. The room had a wet bar complete with a mini-refrigerator and sink. There was a conference table with several chairs, a sofa, loveseat, several end tables, and a wide-screen television. There appeared to be surround sound throughout the room. Later, of course, she would discover the surround sound was in fact video cameras placed for security purposes.

She turned the television on and found CMT playing a Brooks and Dunn song she recognized and settled on her selection. She kicked off her shoes and took off her jacket. *What am I doing? This is crazy. I don't just pick up a complete stranger on an airplane and fuck him in the airport during a layover. This isn't like me. This is really insane.*

She battled back and forth with her morals and decided she was a very sexual oriented person. For crying out loud her novels were very explicit. She wasn't a mousy type lover in the sack. She was bold when she screwed around, and uninhibited sex was what she found most appealing, so why not experience it? So what if she just wanted to fuck to get even. It was her right to do so.

William appeared in the doorway. "I see you over there thinking about running for the door. You can you know. If you've had time to think this over and don't want to do this, you can leave. I'm sure a woman in your position has probably never done this sort of thing before."

She gave him an inquisitive look. "What do you mean a woman in my position?" He sat down on the end of the conference table and pulled out a book from his jacket pocket. "You're her, I presume." He pointed to her name on the front of the book cover. "You're Carol Langley. Carol Langley...the author?"

Carol looked down. "I have no idea what you're talking about."

He grinned widely at her. "Well, maybe not, but your friend at the front desk, Charlotte I believe is her name, was on her way back in here to get you to sign this book for her sister. I told her there was probably a mistake...." his voice trailed off.

He paused and then continued, "You see, there had to be a mistake. After all, Carol Langley, THE Carol Langley that I've heard of was on the lake somewhere for the summer. She wouldn't have been on her way to New York right now."

Carol's look was bewildered. "WHO are you?"

He stuck his hand out directly. "You've met me already, but let me reintroduce myself properly. I'm William Balfour of Balfour Publishing."

OH SHIT. No way.

He watched her in amazement. She seemed surprised, and he reveled in the way she tried to pull herself together before she said anything to him, so he began. "I understand we're going to miss out on your next book. I was very disappointed to hear about that. You see, I was prepared to offer you a very lucrative advance." He watched for another reaction, but she was still trying to absorb the fact she'd just been fingered by one of the most powerful forces in the publishing world. His cell phone rang and gave her time to collect her thoughts. *OH SHIT! What have I done? I've just committed professional suicide is what I've done.*

There was a knock on the door, and William motioned for Carol to answer it. It was Charlotte. "Ms. Langley, I'm sorry to be so forward, but I assumed you wouldn't mind if Mr. Balfour brought you my book to sign {copy} for my sister." William passed her the book and a pen without so much as a glance up.

"Not at all, Charlotte. What's your sister's name?" Charlotte told her, and Carol tried not to tremble as she signed a personal note in the front of her latest release.

"Thank you so much, Ms. Langley." She shyly added, "If there's anything you need, I'll be happy to personally take care of it."

Carol looked at her awkwardly and then decided she'd better warn her. "Charlotte, when Mr. Balfour gets off of the phone, we'll be involved in contract signings and some extensive paperwork. Please make sure we aren't disturbed." She smiled sweetly, but Charlotte thought maybe she had pushed too far. Of course, she had no way of knowing that Carol and Mr. Balfour had some very unfinished business.

While he was finishing his call, Carol took the opportunity to run to the bar. When she reappeared with two whiskey sours, she wasn't sure if she would be drinking them both or sharing one. William hung up the phone and turned to face her. "Ms. Langley." He chuckled. "I'm sure you're as uncomfortable with what has transpired today as I am," he began. "But I'm one for adventure, and you are definitely one adventurous woman. However, I wanted you to know exactly who I am even though it may be my loss that you now know. Of course, you could always think of it as putting the screws to me yet again."

She knew what he meant. She had almost published one book with Balfour Publishing a couple of years ago, and her latest book was supposed to go to Balfour, but Tansie changed her mind at the last minute and went back to Cater, Carol's original publishing house. Carol was staring down at the floor. She was afraid to look up. She had gone from the frying pan into the pits of hell.

William walked over to her. "Look, I see this thing playing out two ways now that we know who the other one is. You know my status in the publishing world, and I know you are the up and coming author who will never have to publish more than one book every couple of years in order to make a very cushy living. There's no denying we fucked up, and when we did, we did it in grand style." They both looked at each other and burst out laughing. "Carol, I won't lie to you, I still want to fuck you, but if I do, it may be a mistake both of us will regret later."

She knew he was right. As much as she hated to admit it, he was right. It still didn't dry up the puddle he'd caused between her legs.

They decided they would use the time, and the room, to catch up on some work. She sat down at one end of the table. He sat down at the other, and they both pulled their computers out of their briefcases. He looked over the top of his computer and addressed her in a more professional manner, "You know I was prepared to offer you a hundred thousand in advances." He watched her intently.

"Why didn't you?"

"I didn't make it to where I am today without being able to read people. You were offered a hundred grand I take it? Good for you." He watched her until his phone rang again, and this time he stepped out to take the call.

Carol drank the bottom out of both drinks and stretched out on the sofa. Why was her life such a mess? She had gone from bad to worse in a little less than twenty-four hours. Getting even or getting fucked, whatever she thought her new motto should be wasn't what it was all cracked up to be. She had a roaring headache, and she couldn't feel too sorry for herself since she brought it on herself.

She fell fast asleep and was taken back to dreams of her mother. She could picture Tom and her mother sitting on the porch of the cabin. Her mother was very upset with him over something, and he was trying to console her. She could see him try to comfort her, and she'd pull away. It was really weird. She went to see what was going on and placed her hand on her mother's shoulder. When she turned to look up at her, she saw the woman wasn't her mother but instead was Carol herself! She jolted awake quickly with her eyes wide open.

"I didn't mean to startle you." William was standing over her.

"Oh my gosh. Have we missed the connecting flight?" She started to get up.

"Not yet, we still have a few hours."

He sat down on the end of the couch, and Carol curled her feet up under her. "You were mumbling something about your mother. I came over to be sure you were okay. I didn't mean to wake you. I know you get all PMS on those of us who wake the dead." They both laughed.

"So, you had a pretty rough time in Tennessee? Anything you'd like to talk about?"

Carol looked at him for a long time before she responded. She thought about Tom and how he used her. She thought about her mother and how she was haunting her, and then she thought about William; this gorgeous and powerful man who was right in front of her at the moment. She decided she would become more like one of the seductive women she wrote about all of the time in her books. She wanted William.

She wanted him on the plane, and she woke up wanting him. She reminded herself that she was single and available and, frankly, unconcerned with the fact he had a wife. That would be considered his problem. Not hers. She wasn't the one who said *I do*.

They chatted for a moment about Carol's cabin and her new neighbor. She implied she had known Tom for a while. It was good for effect. William seemed to hang on her every word. Then again, every man she'd ever known hung on her every word. When she had told as much as she planned to tell about the Carol and Tom story, she leaned further into the sofa and rotated her neck on the pillows. William watched her breasts move up and down as she sat there in deep thought.

"If you change your mind," he began. "I'll be over here working."

She knew what he meant. She knew he was still longing for her. Perhaps she needed him, too. It couldn't hurt anything. She had reasoned with herself all she wanted and all she intended, what she wanted was to be laid by this publishing powerhouse. It didn't matter anymore if he knew of her or her reputation as an author. Her desires were coming first, and she wanted to act on them.

As he got up and started to walk by her, she took his hand and surprised him. She tilted her head upward without saying a word. He pulled her up to meet him, and they fell into a deep passionate kiss. Their lips explored each other hungrily as he devoured her scent along her neck and traced it up to behind her earlobe.

She unzipped his pants and then paused long enough to instruct him to lock the door.

As he walked across the room to the door, Carol admired him from where she stood. He was quite a man. He had made several sexiest-men-of-the-year mentions in some of the magazines, and she understood why. Looking at him walking toward her, she was sure he was one of the sexiest men alive. *Tom was definitely sexier, but who was comparing apples to apples? Tom didn't have this man's power, and he was unknown to the voting public who decided on the winner of these ego-building honors.*

He walked over, sat down on the sofa, and motioned for her. He started to say something, but she put her forefinger to his lips. "Don't say anything. Just fuck me like you mean it."

He looked at her a little surprised. She was definitely like her heroine in her recent book. Outright brassy. She took her blouse off and unhooked her brassiere, and he almost gasped when he saw the most perfect tits he'd ever laid his eyes on. She had a flawless body; one he couldn't wait to explore further now that his opportunity was in full force.

She reached inside his pants and fondled him for a moment as she leaned down to kiss him hard. He squeezed her breasts and fondled her nipples as she took a tight hold on his cock with more control and guided him to enter {him} her. She stroked him three times more with his tip right outside of her slit and then pushed him into her greedily. There wasn't a lot of time for foreplay because she had time to conduct enough of it in her mind and on the plane.

"Holy shit," he said out loud without thinking. "You're as tight as any virgin I..."

She didn't let him finish his sentence because she covered his mouth playfully with hers and grinned wickedly as she bit on his lower lip and encircled his tongue with hers.

He was large enough for a comfortable ride, she thought. Not huge like Tom. She guided herself over him and then began rising and falling in slow motion, so she could feel his cock going in and out of her. She sat erect and threw her head back with a wave of hair following behind her. "Fuck me, baby." She was forceful in her request and demonstrated exactly what she wanted as she moved quicker to screw him like there was no time to be wasted.

He grabbed her ass and drove into her with speed. He was weak in the knees but managed to stand and move them to the table where he sat her ass down next to his computer.

The movement excited her, and she almost met her climax, but just as she thought she would come, he withdrew from her and told her to roll over. She didn't resist. She

turned over onto the cold table and threw her ass high in the air as he entered her from behind. He placed his palms on her ass and drove his cock into her rapidly. "That's it baby, come to me. That's right. Fuck me. Buck me, ride me harder. Fuck me hard." He was quite the talker, but he did it in such a throaty way she came without much penetration, and when she did, she found he was already spent himself.

He lingered on her back for a moment and then rose up to retrieve his pants. She didn't want to look at him. She just wanted to fuck him again. *What is wrong with me?* She walked over and kissed his neck and told him not to get his pants. "Sit back down." He followed her to the couch allowing her the pleasure of riding him again.

I have heard of multiple orgasms, but this is one horny bitch, he thought to himself.

When they first sat down on the couch, she had immediately mounted him and began jerking within seconds. Just his cock inside of her had made her come within seconds of hitting the cushions underneath. After she had come the first time on the sofa, she had turned to face outward while bending her knees underneath her. He grinded into her and watched her as she seemingly bucked him in pleasure. "Ummm William, shove your cock into me harder William...That's right, hon... You got it... Now fuck...me." He couldn't give it to her enough.

After about an hour of hard-core fucking, the call finally came from the desk. They needed to report to the gate. They both hurriedly found their clothes, and she went to the powder room to freshen up. Luckily, he had left a note he'd see her at the gate, and she stayed behind a moment longer thinking about what she had just done. *No regrets,* she told herself as she closed the door behind her.

Chapter Eleven

Carol didn't go to the gate but instead went to the main terminal. She headed to the ticket counter. "I need to change a scheduled flight please. You're boarding Flight 58 to La Guardia, and I just got an urgent call. I need to go back to East Tennessee." Carol handed over her ticket and boarding pass.

The ticket agent looked at her computer monitor for only a second and quickly typed in her information. "If you hurry, you'll catch a flight back right now, but you'll have to sprint. It's boarding at Gate Twelve. I'll call ahead and let someone know you're on your way."

She sprinted to the gate and dialed Tansie. "Hey, I need a favor. I'm not on the plane, but I need you to pick up my luggage and send it to me."

Tansie was furious with her. She had changed her schedule and everything to entertain her friend and client for the next few days. "WHAT is going on with you?"

Carol suddenly felt a little sad. "I have no idea."

Tansie instructed her to get on the plane to New York. "We need to talk. Now you get on that plane to La Guardia, and I want to see you in a couple of hours."

Carol glanced at her watch. She would be back at the cabin in five hours or so. "I can't. I'm headed back home."

Tansie was clearly concerned. "Carol, the message I got from you late yesterday sounded like you probably needed to get away from there for a week or so. Come to New York. Let your hair down. Forget Tom. Get even, find another Tom."

Carol laughed. "I did that already, and I *definitely* got even." Before Tansie could ask what was going on, Carol lost service and was in flight shortly thereafter.

She thought about the last week of her life as she was flying home. She thought about Tom and William. She tried to analyze her weird dreams. She thought about Tom's busty blonde. She thought about Clyde and his concerns over her sexual orientation. She pictured Maude and wondered how a woman like Maude could ever be trapped in a marriage with an illiterate man like Clyde Morris and be so seemingly accepting of him.

She lingered on the subject of Maude and Clyde for a moment longer and decided maybe ignorance was bliss. Maude seemed content with what she had in Clyde. From Carol's point of view though, Maude could've done much better. There were some distinguished families in Rogersville. She could have had any one of their men in her younger days. Carol had seen the photographs. Maude was a knock-out back in the day, but she chose Clyde.

Carol spent the trip back thinking about everyone in her life and everyone who had seemingly passed through it. She closed her eyes tightly and tried to sleep, but sleep wouldn't come. She didn't know why she decided to go back to the cabin. There was nothing there for her, but she knew she didn't have a lot waiting on her in New York either, so she just kept her eyes tightly shut and tried to think about anything and anybody but Tom.

When she landed {in} at the airport, she went straight to her car because, of course, her luggage was on its way to New York. She dialed her voice messages and found she had two. One was from Tansie stating she had picked up her luggage. The other was from Maude. "Hi honey, it's me, Maude. Why'd you leave so soon? We thought something might be going good for ya for a change. Tom even had his sister down from Ohio. I think she came in yesterday while we were at the flea market. She's cute as a pumpkin pie. You'd just love her. They were by the house awhile ago looking for you. She wanted to meet you. Well, call us when you can and love from us."

She gasped as she heard the message. She played it again. The message said 'sister.' *THIS HAD TO BE a bad joke.*

Carol sat in her SUV for a long time before starting the ignition. She had jumped to conclusions. It wasn't another woman. It was his sister. What in the world was going on with her? None of her behavior made any sense. She had never acted so irrationally, and now she was going off the deep end. She must be losing her mind. It was the only logical explanation.

TOM'S SISTER? Yeah, right. They just told Maude that because they wanted her to think he didn't have an overnight guest after spending time with Carol. That had to be it. It must be it. She knew her first inclination about the blonde was correct. He just wanted his cake and wanted to eat it, too. She was exhausted. She'd spent all day in the airport. "That woman better not be his sister," she said it out loud. She was definitely losing her mind. She was talking to herself and sleeping with strangers. She picked up the phone and dialed.

"Hey Tansie, it's me. I landed safely."

Tansie was rambling about Carol's luggage and how it was an act beyond words to try to claim her luggage without a claim ticket when she had made it to the baggage claim later than anticipated. "You owe me big time. The whole ordeal couldn't have been more ridiculous."

Carol apologized profusely and then told her what had been going on. She even told her about 'a strange man' in the airport and how they had screwed in a conference room.

Tansie couldn't help scolding her friend, "Carol, that's reckless and you know it. You're acting like your mother would act."

There was a long silence, and Tansie finally broke it by changing the subject. "I was going to wait and tell you later, but since you sound like you need some good news, I'll go ahead and tell you now. You'll never guess who I ran into at the airport."

Carol was still spinning about Tansie's comparison of her. What did she know about her mother? Nothing. Just what Carol had told her. It was a low blow to her. It

was tacky, and she couldn't believe a friend would stoop to such levels. She couldn't believe she'd even said it.

Hurt by her inconsiderate remark, she missed everything she had been saying until she heard his name. "...so anyway, sure enough, he was who he said he was and, Carol, are you ready for this? William Balfour is offering you a \$225,000 advance if you'll sign with Balfour! Can you believe it?"

Carol snapped her cell phone shut. *The plot had thickened.*

Tansie rang right back. "What happened? Did you lose a signal or something? Tansie pressed on, "Did you hear what I said?"

Carol had her go through the entire conversation again claiming she lost her after her inconsiderate comparison of her and her mother.

Tansie apologized and went straight into telling her about Balfour. "I was at baggage claim, and this man was lurking over to the side—this very hot man I might add—anyway, I was trying to collect your luggage explaining you had an emergency and had to catch a flight back home while you were in Boston."

"So anyway, I'm standing there and rambling on trying to retrieve your luggage, and this man walks up and introduces himself as William Balfour. Well, I was so taken aback by his good looks that I never put two and two together. Anyway, it turns out he was indeed THE WILLIAM BALFOUR of Balfour Publishing. He gave me his card and took one of mine. We went over to one of the bars there in the airport for a drink, after I picked up your luggage of course, and he made his proposal.

"He offered you a \$225,000 advance on your manuscript! I told him you were actually on your way to sign on another deal but were called back to Tennessee. By the way, why did you go back exactly? You never really said."

There was a long silence, and finally Carol said she would just have to talk with her tomorrow. "All of this is too much to process. I will have to call you back."

Tansie was very irritated with her, but she agreed to talk to her late the following day, and they said their good-byes. Carol needed to find quiet. Peace and quiet would be nice, but Carol's uneasiness told her neither would come to her anytime soon.

Chapter Twelve

On her way home from the airport, Carol stopped in at a little beer joint called The Big Orange and grabbed a beer. She was still dressed in her red suit and turned heads from the moment she walked in. She even caught a few winks and whistles. She had really screwed up a good thing, and she dreaded going home until she could sneak in. She sat down at a corner table and was approached by first one cowboy and then another. She would've found all of this very appealing if she didn't have the weight of the world on her shoulders. After the fifth guy approached her, she decided she'd had enough. If she couldn't drink in peace, she'd just leave.

She drove slowly home but seemed to arrive in record time. She turned her lights off as she started down the shared private road, so she didn't disturb Maude and Clyde coming in. Truth be told, she just didn't want Tom to see her pull back in the driveway.

She practically crept inside the cabin, trying to slip inside in the middle of the night like she would find him waiting for her or something.

She turned the bathroom light on and started her bath water. She just wanted to take a long hot soak, drown her worries away, and then cuddle up in bed with a good steamy book. *No, no, no. I want anything but a steamy story*, she thought. She wanted to curl up with a good mystery. She'd experienced all of the heat she could stand in one forty-eight hour period.

The hot water felt good to her aching bones. Her legs had been in positions she didn't know they could form. In fact, maybe she wasn't supposed to be so intense during sex because right now her legs throbbed, and she knew why. When she was intimate with a man, she had the tendency to get really close, and the more a man was with her the more he liked being with her for that very reason. She definitely knew how to work her legs! Pretzels had nothing over on her, and she wanted the men she fucked to know it!

She soaked for a long time and then got out and wrapped up tightly in a silk robe. She made some chamomile tea, even though she was tempted to drink something alcoholic, and curled up with her cup on the sofa.

The knock on the door was almost instant. She looked at it for a minute and didn't move. The tap, tap, tap came again and again. *He's not going to go away.* "Carol, it's Tom. Are you okay in there? My sister wants to meet you before she heads back tomorrow. Can you get to the door?" He called out to the wooden door hoping she'd answer.

Carol opened the door and peered outside as they were starting back down the steps. She placed her hand on her head. "I'm sure I look a mess," she began. "I'm sorry. I just got out of the bath."

Tom lit up the porch with his smile. "You look absolutely gorgeous." He leaned in to kiss her cheek and took her hand in his. "Carol, I want you to meet the other woman in my life. This is my baby sister, Kim." Carol could see the strong resemblance. There was no denying the fact that the blonde was definitely related to Tom. She cursed her stomach for knotting. Then she mentally cursed herself for jumping to conclusions.

Carol reached her hand out, and Kim warmly shook it. "I'm so glad you made it back in time for me to meet you. I'm leaving in the morning, and Tom has burned my ears with stories about you. He thinks you're really something."

Oh yes, something. I am really something. What I am is the real question on the table though and I'm afraid neither of you would be very impressed. Carol smiled sweetly at her

while trying to keep up a good front. "I wish I'd known you were going to be here. I would've postponed flying up to Boston for a meeting." Wow, she was pretty good with that one. She'd better be convincing because, obviously, the lies were only just beginning.

Kim grinned. "Well, from what I understand from Tom, you are a woman in demand, and I can't wait to read one of your books. Admittedly, I'm not much of a reader, but now that I know an author, I'll have something to look forward to in the bookstore." They chatted for a moment longer, and Kim told Tom she'd be back down at his cabin, to just take his time. They said their nice-to-meet-you and good-byes, and Tom stepped inside and closed the door.

He looked at her for less than a couple of seconds and swooped down on her with ferocious and passionate kisses. He cupped her face in his hands and drew back to look at her. "Oh Carol, honey, I thought you'd be gone for a while after I talked to Maude and Clyde. Why didn't you come by the cabin to let me know what was going on?"

She looked at him for a moment, and her eyes began to spill tears.

"What's wrong, baby?" His face showed concern, and she quickly wiped them away.

She fought back the tsunami ready to wash right over both of them and told him she was just really tired. He didn't buy it. Finally, she spilled the beans. "I have a lot to tell you but not right now. Tomorrow, I'll tell you tomorrow. Just know, I made a mistake and acted irrationally, okay?"

He looked at her with a blank stare, so she told him enough to pacify him. "I thought Kim was maybe somebody you were seeing, and I just had to get away and take care of something. I'm sorry. I jumped to conclusions. I saw her on the water with you, and I just thought..."

His mouth stopped her from saying another word. He kissed her lightly and then wrapped his arms tightly around her waist. "We will talk about this tomorrow, but I want you to know tonight I'm thinking of only you and the fact I have to go back

down the hill and eat my sister's fried ravioli and act like it's the best meal I've ever tasted." They both laughed.

He stroked her hair again and kissed her lightly on the lips. "I'll see you tomorrow. I have to go into town early in the morning to take some depositions. I'll be back after one or two. Get some rest." He stole another lengthy kiss and was out the door.

Carol decided reading was out of the question. She had a lot of plot ideas for her upcoming novel and headed to the computer to make some headway. She worked half the night and e-mailed a good number of pages to Tansie for her feedback. When she thought she couldn't type another word, she fell into bed and began to think about Tom.

She knew she had no reason to feel guilty. In fact, she really had no reason to tell him anything that had happened in Boston. She really didn't owe it to him because they had only just started something between them. It wasn't like a commitment. Still, she knew there was something powerful between them, and she thought what she did could possibly hurt him. She didn't want to hurt him. He seemed so interested in her. It was like he had known her all of his life, and she liked the fact that he was so comfortable for her to be around. Her thoughts of Tom turned into more dreams of her mother.

You've always gotten yourself into more childish messes. You aren't like me, Carol. You are like your dads. Every single one you ever had. She heard mimicking in her mother's voice, and then she saw her mom's husbands in the dream. They faded in and faded out, but one man came into clear focus. It was undoubtedly Tom. He was smiling at her and whispering something in her ear. Her mother was looking down at a jig-saw puzzle. They both looked at her and laughed. Then, her mother was gone. Tom was left there to pick up the pieces of the jig-saw puzzle. Carol went in closer to take a look as he picked up the pieces. He reached for her and then he disappeared.

Carol woke up and looked around the room. Why was her mother haunting her? Was it the cabin? Was it because her mother wouldn't want her to find a man who

could potentially make her happier than she had ever been in her life? What was going on with these damn dreams? Carol snuggled deep into her sheets and fell back into the land of the dreamer. This time, it was all wonderful and very, very, wet.

Chapter Thirteen

Carol woke up around eight o'clock to a phone ringing. She had trouble finding her cell phone but eventually found it next to a stack of towels in the bathroom. It had stopped ringing by the time she found it. She stepped into the shower since she was there anyway and was reminded of her sexual romp with Tom earlier in the week. He was such a fantastic lover. She reveled in the fact he had been glad to see her return early from her unplanned trip and thought about how lovely his sister had been to her. She could kick herself for being a jealous freak and almost screwing everything up.

She massaged her scalp, and the scent of berries filled the shower. The thought of Tom bathing her in soap and shampoo turned her on, and she immediately knew she'd be well entertained once he joined her later in the day. She threw on an oversized Tennessee Titans T-shirt and some black lace panties and went to work at her computer.

Her e-mail seemed to be bulging at the seams. She had fan mail to sift through before she could even locate Tansie's e-mail. She spotted it and opened it immediately. *I TRIED TO CALL YOU THIS MORNING. IT IS URGENT. I NEED TO SPEAK WITH YOU.*

Carol didn't get overly excited. Urgent? Everything was urgent for Tansie. By her own self-evaluation, she'd once told Carol that she knew she had a problem with everything in her life happening right now. They had teased one another at the time,

and Carol told Tansie she could only imagine her in bed with someone. He would be really into her, and she would get a sudden sensation and tell him abruptly she needed an *urgent fuck*. They had found it particularly funny at the time.

"What's so urgent, Tansie?" Carol was straight to the point once she had her agent on the line.

Tansie was quiet for a moment. "Why didn't you tell me you fucked William Balfour?"

Carol was speechless. "I didn't...I did...I didn't know...what the fuck is up, Tansie?"

She immediately regretted having her best friend as her agent, too. She knew Tansie knew details, or at least thought she did, otherwise she wouldn't have mentioned it. After all, Carol told her only of a man in the airport. She never mentioned Balfour.

Tansie knew everything; otherwise, she would've never placed Balfour and the terms she chose so explicitly to describe Carol's brief encounter with him all in the same sentence. It would mean trouble because Tansie would reprimand her as her agent and scold her as her friend.

I cannot win. Carol told herself to come clean with the truth.

"You fucked him at the airport."

Easier said than done.

Carol was silent.

"It's the very reason you went back to Tennessee, isn't it? You fucked him at the airport and didn't care who saw you. What have you done to yourself this time?"

Carol went to her window and looked out over the water. "I don't know. I don't know." She paused long enough to light a cigarette before she continued. "Tansie, it isn't like anyone saw us, so you can calm down."

Tansie almost had a self-righteous demeanor. "Oh, yes, Carol, someone saw you. It's all over the publishing world, and for that matter, quickly leaking over into the media everywhere. Yes, you were definitely seen."

Carol remained calm for a moment. "There's no way it is all over the publishing world because no one saw us."

Tansie fired back. "OH REALLY? Well, try this one on for size. You and William Balfour on a conference room table. You and Mr. Balfour on the sofa for hours. I think there was reference to you being on top. You and Balfour screwing like animals for several hours in a Zebra Airlines' Conference Room. HOW AM I DOING SO FAR, CAROL?"

Carol couldn't breathe. She was going to have another attack. She felt it coming on, and the last thing she remembered was total blackness.

You've managed to screw up a good thing, dear. It was her mother's voice. You've come out of your hermit cage and become a raging lunatic! No! NO! I haven't, Mother. I haven't. I'm confused. WHY are you doing this to me? Why are you haunting me and torturing me? What did I ever do to you? Carol's blackness became a complete nightmare. Because you took him away from me. Before he ever met you, he was in awe of you. Before he ever knew you existed. HE BELONGED TO ME FIRST. REMEMBER, I had HIM first!

Carol jumped up as if she had been awakened from a deep sleep. She sat up on the floor and rubbed her neck. She thought about her mother and her dream. Still hearing the anger in the voice of a woman scorned, she thought back to the day she last saw her mother in Nashville, Tennessee. *I blame you because I never could find happiness. Thinking about her mother's words burned her heart. No emotion, no surprise? Her words were filling up the cabin. I blame you because I never could find happiness.* Carol didn't understand why her mother's words still filled her head. She would have to think about it later. Right now, she needed to call Tansie back.

She called her cell phone, and Tansie immediately answered. "Carol, I'm sorry, I should've handled this sensitive subject with you in a better way. I was just so damn angry. You had another attack didn't you?"

Carol and Tansie talked a minute about the panic attack, and Tansie advised her to talk to someone in Tennessee. "There are a lot of good doctors in the area. I've been

online and found a couple for you. I'll send you a list now by e-mail. Carol, you need to do this. Things are going to get rocky."

She figured as much if Tansie had been online trying to locate a shrink for her.

Carol went outside to smoke a cigarette. She inhaled deeply. "How bad is it?"

Tansie asked her if she wanted to call someone to sit with her before she broke the news to her, and she told her no. There really was no one she could think of at all. Maude wouldn't understand, and Tom wouldn't begin to comprehend what she'd done.

"Carol, why don't I just come down there. I can be there tomorrow."

Carol thought about taking her up on the offer. "No, I guess tomorrow will be too late. I need to know now."

Tansie danced around it one last time. "Would you like for me to send the release to you in an e-mail?"

Carol panicked. "A RELEASE? WHAT RELEASE?" She tried to maintain a breathing pattern. *Just keep breathing in and out and in and out. Think of it as sex. No! No! Scratch that. Just breathe.*

Tansie immediately told her to calm down. "Keep things in perspective, okay? This is a smut weekly magazine, and everyone knows it's a trashy smutty weekly magazine. Remember that, okay? Don't think of the twenty-seven million people who read it only that they pick it up for the cover story and then throw it down." She forgot to tell her she *was* the cover story. Hell, she forgot it too until after she'd let the words fall from her big, fat mouth!

Carol was sick to her stomach, and then she heard someone at her door. "Hang on a second. Someone's at my door."

She opened the door and was attacked by a bundle of roses. "Hey beautiful, my depositions were cancelled." He was grinning from ear to ear.

She wanted to cry but instead smiled and motioned him in. "Tansie, can I call you back?"

Tansie was very agitated. "NO! YOU CANNOT AVOID THIS! YOU CANNOT CALL ME BACK!"

She screamed so loud Tom even said, "Wow, I heard her from here." He moved past Carol into the kitchen to find a vase for the roses. "I'll just be outside," he said as he moved out to Carol's deck following close behind his extended finger.

"Tansie," Carol lowered her voice. "You don't understand the whole story, and Tom's here, so I can't get into it now. PLEASE, let me call you back and explain all of this later."

Tansie was hearing nothing of it. "Carol, do you understand there's only one name in publishing any bigger than the man you fucked?" Carol was silent, and Tansie continued, "Hell, in the whole writing world, there's only one name any bigger than William Balfour, and that name has a coveted writer's prize attached to it. Do you understand what I'm saying to you?"

Carol looked out onto the deck watching Tom with genuine concern. Without meaning to, she voiced her fears. "He's going to find out about this, isn't he?"

Tansie was quiet, and when she finally answered, she simply told her the truth as gently as she knew how. "This will not ruin you. As your friend, I want you to know I think you made a big mistake, but we all make mistakes. As your agent, I want you to know you are in for a tough ride and to answer your question, yes, he's going to know about it because there are many pictures already circulating on the internet. The reason word has traveled so fast is because the room at the airport was wired for security. Your verbal and physical actions were captured."

Carol told Tansie to send everything she had in an e-mail. She sat down for a minute and pulled up GOOGLE for a quick search and typed in William Balfour. The first search request turned up the following headline: WILLIAM BALFOUR CAUGHT IN A ROMP WITH AUTHOR IN BOSTON TERMINAL. The second one was worse: ROMANCE/EROTICA NOVELIST CAUGHT WITH HER PANTS DOWN AND LEGS SPREAD WIDE. The third, even worse: PAYING FOR SEX AND A GOOD BOOK. \$225,000 ADVANCE BUYS A LOT THESE DAYS.

Tom walked in and shut the door behind him. "Hey, whatever is eating at you and the wailing girl on the other end of the phone, it really can't be all that bad."

Carol's gaze probably told more than her words could ever say. She shook her head. "Yes, Tom, I'm afraid it can be."

Chapter Fourteen

Tom had gone out of his way to avoid discussing whatever was eating at Carol. After he found her staring at the computer screen, he suggested they go out for a day on the lake. His depositions were cancelled, and whatever she was doing at the time, he was certain it could wait.

Carol was discovering that Tom was a hopeless romantic. As if the two dozen roses weren't enough, he had picked a handful of wild flowers to give to her as they walked down to the boat. He fixed a picnic basket of chicken salad his sister had made along with the best brownies Carol had ever tasted. Of course, he took credit for the brownies but couldn't remember how to make them when she asked for the recipe. Rather than bringing along a nice bottle of wine from Carol's cellar, they agreed to opt for beer, and both of them seemed to be in a race to drink as much of it as they could.

Carol stripped down to a cute striped bikini, and Tom seemed overly pleased with the way she looked in it. She spread out a beach towel and went to the front of the boat. He drove leisurely around the lake admiring her every movement. "Carol, I missed you yesterday. I knew I saw you on the deck the night Kim came into town. I called up to you, but you didn't say anything. Kim was afraid you might think something, and I should've listened to her. I'm sorry if you thought she was...well, someone else."

Carol was guilt-ridden. He had nothing to be sorry about. She was the one that should be apologetic.

"I'm going to take you somewhere and show you something. You just sit tight up there. Things are going to get a little tricky." He gave the boat some gas, and the tip of the nose came roaring out of the water, and they sped toward a cove. As they approached the lagoon-like area, he slowed down considerably and floated in. "One of my partners owns this house, and he told me to use it anytime I want, but I never really had the need to use someone else's home since I have my own place. The guys at work say it's incredible." Carol saw it from the water and could tell it was definitely magnificent.

They docked the boat and started a flight of about eighty steps up to the house. Tom pulled out his cell phone. "This is Tom. Hey listen, I'm standing in front of the house with Carol. Are you sure you don't mind if I show her around? Okay. Thanks. Sounds great. I appreciate it. We will. Bye."

Tom grinned. "He said for us to stay as long as we want. He's headed out of town. The code on the alarm is 1234. Creative, huh?" Tom went to where his partner had told him he'd find the key and unlocked the front door. They went inside and started exploring.

Tom began explaining certain rooms to her. He was really cute about it, and he started out fairly informative. "This is supposedly the best stocked bar in the state of Tennessee," he began. "And Steve said to help ourselves." They walked around behind the bar and checked it out. It was definitely stocked.

They moved into a huge country kitchen where they found about three times the amount of cabinet space typical of the average home. "The cabinets are custom obviously, but the brick work is one of the things I wanted you to see. I've heard so much about this splendid kitchen." The brick was really pretty, but Carol wasn't that impressed.

They went through about ten rooms on the first floor and then headed upstairs to find one large open space. They both guessed it was about 2,200 square feet. There, they found two wide-screen television sets, a large Tiki-bar with about twelve bar stools, a pool table, air hockey table, video games, a make-shift putting green, and a

foosball table. One of the wide-screen televisions was off by itself completely encircled with theatre-style seating. "Wow, this is pretty cool." Carol laughed. "Leave it to you to find the best house on Cherokee Lake."

He took her hand to lead her around. "This is where I'm going to start with you." He pointed to the bar stool. "I think I'll get you warmed up there, and then I'll walk you around to the movie chairs here." He pointed to the first row of seats and lingered for a moment as he undressed her with his eyes. "I think I'll start massaging your clit here and..."

She suddenly had a shiver down her spine. "Stop it, you're going to talk me into an orgasm," she teased.

Tom took her hand and put it on his dick. "Baby, I'm ready when you are."

She winked at him and pulled her hand away. "I want to see the house first. I have a feeling there are better places to get laid." She bit on her bottom lip giving him a provocative come-hither-but-later look.

They walked up another flight of steps and into the master bedroom. "Yes, ma'am, you are exactly right. This might be that place." They looked at each other with the all knowing look that it would definitely be one of them. He took her hand and led her into the bathroom, and there they found a steam shower and a whirlpool tub big enough for at least five people. Off of the bathroom, a deck led down to the pool area.

Close to the pool, they found a hot tub and another huge bar. There were fountains around the landscaping, and the view from the pool was limited but pretty. Carol mentioned it to him. "Why would someone want to live on the water with a limited viewing area of the lake?"

Tom eased toward her. "Did you notice any houses around here?"

She shook her head no. "But that doesn't mean there won't be tons of them in the future."

He grinned at her and pulled her in close to him. "Hey, I'm not worried about the houses or how built up the area will be in the future. Right now, all I know is you don't have your computer. I don't have mine, and neither one of us are going to be

interrupted by Maude or Clyde. Oh, and if I want to fuck you outside, no one will see us."

Tom winked at her again and pulled back. "Go look around. I'm going to make sure the boat is secure and grab our beer. After all, the liquor is fine, but I'm not going to drink another man's beer." They both laughed at his corny attempt to make a joke.

"You're planning to stay the night?" She looked at him puzzled.

"The night, the week, the month. As long as you want to stay." He turned and walked back down to the dock, and even though he wasn't gone very long, she missed him while he wasn't by her side.

* * * *

By the time Tom came back up from the dock, Carol was sitting topless dipping her toes in the pool. He couldn't set the cooler down quick enough. She rose to meet him as he made his way around the pool. She wanted to feel him on her skin. He wrapped her slender body into a hug and savored the feeling of her full breasts pressed up against his chest. He kissed her neck and throat. He bent down to lick her breasts and lingered longer than necessary as he cupped one in his hand and stroked it passively while he aggressively sucked the other one, teasing her nipple with his flickering tongue.

He picked her up, and she wrapped her legs around him tightly. She moved her crotch into him and held him snugly. He set her down on top of the bar and placed both hands on the sides of her face. "You are too gorgeous to be true." He kissed her with such intensity it left her breathless. There was never a moment that passed when she wasn't thinking about him inside of her. Even though he was larger than the average man, he was more gifted with his cock than most sexually-aggressive men, and she was completely damp from thinking about his forceful strokes inside of her.

She tugged at the string on his shorts, and he slipped out of them. As he licked her tits, she began stroking his hardened cock. She wrapped her whole hand around his dick and pumped it up and down. As it grew harder with each stroke, she wanted him more and more inside of her. "I can't wait for you, Tom. You have to give it to me

now." She watched his dick move in and out of her clasped hand. It only made her lust more intense.

"That's so damn sexy." He watched each tug. He helped her out of the string bikini bottom, positioned her again on the bar, and wrapped her legs around his hips. Before he entered her, he wanted to taste her. He massaged her clit with his fingers before spreading her wet lips, excited by her warmth and turned on by her movement toward him.

She tossed her head downward and watched him finger her and knew she couldn't hold back much longer. She looked up at him and urged him to move in closer. "Faster baby." Raising her ass up off the bar, she helped him gain access for deeper insertion.

He began moving his fingers rhythmically inside of her while squeezing her breast. She moved backward trying to escape before she came, but he assured her this was how he wanted her to come.

Turned on by his dick rubbing up against her leg while he smothered her breasts with suckling, she moved closer and took his hand in hers. He thought she was going to withdraw it, so he moved one hand swiftly up under her ass and kept fingering her with the other. She only moved closer. "OH, TOM!" He felt her inner muscles tighten around his fingers, and he moved fast to lower his mouth to suck her clit and taste her climax. He smothered her private lips with wetness of his own probing tongue searching to go deeper into her warmth.

After she had reached as far as she could go, he quickly thrust his dick inside of her pleasure-inducing walls. She was still vibrating from the first climax as he reached his. She locked him tightly against her and rocked him with continued pleasure.

When they both had reached the top of their release, she started to pull back, but he instead pulled her forward. She couldn't believe his cock was still so solid. "I thought you did." She seemed to be questioning whether or not he'd had an orgasm.

"You couldn't tell? "

"I thought you did but I wanted to be sure." Her eyes darkened. "I always want to please you."

He nodded, licked his lower lip, took her nipple in his mouth, and mumbled into her skin, "You do and you're going to again." She played with his thick curls and bent down trying to pull him into a lip-lock, but he wouldn't leave her tits. He was enjoying the fullness of her firm breasts in his mouth. She started to encourage a position change when he stood straight up and began pounding her pussy wildly like a caged animal trying to get out of its restraint. She was shocked at his forcefulness but grew wetter by the second, and knew she would ride it completely out with him.

He wrapped his hands underneath her hard ass and leaned into her, pounding away until she let out a screeching, "UM yeah, Tom, *please* fuck me harder." If she wanted it harder, he could give it to her harder. He didn't have his entire cock inside of her, but he would. "If you want to fuck baby...we'll fuck."

"Ohhh shessh, oh, Tom," she whispered as a vibrating sensation told him she had come again, and he looked at her laying out on the bar almost lifeless but still wrapped up in the pleasure he was bringing her.

"CAROL, hold me tighter with your legs, I'm going to come... I'm coming inside of your... OH HOLY HELL..." She knew by his tremors, he had finally filled her full of his sweet cum, and she felt it dripping from her as he withdrew then revisited a place he wanted to claim as his own.

He knew there had never been another woman who had turned him on as much as Carol. She met his sexual desires with a fire of her own. He rested on her chest for a moment after they both climaxed all they could possibly manage.

"I know your back hurts on that hard bar," he finally said as he pulled her up. She started to retrieve the bikini half of her bathing suit, but he stopped her. "No. I want you to lay down with me just like you are." They walked hand in hand over to the soft cushions of the loungers and laid out for the sun to bake their naked flesh.

She was completely in awe of him, and he was mesmerized by her, but of course, he had been for quite awhile. He would soon tell her he had known of her long before

she had even heard his name. "Carol, I love being with you." He could tell her so much more but for the time they were in, it was enough.

She rolled over and patted his stomach. "I love being with you, too, Mr. O'Brien." She laughed and knew she was telling the truth but wondered when it would all end. With the media field day surrounding them, it would come to an end. All good things did. It was one life lesson her mother had taught her.

The next few hours passed in a blink of an eye. She slept peacefully in the sun as he retreated to the water quietly. He swam a few laps and watched her as she slept in nothing but her flawless skin. He swam up to the side of the pool and asked her to join him, but she didn't hear him. She was in a deep, deep sleep.

After he let her snooze for a couple of hours, he sat down on the edge of the recliner next to her and began stroking her back. He laid down next to her and fit his cock firmly against her ass. Moving his arm under hers, he began to fondle her nipples and trace the crack of her ass.

"I was about to have a wonderful dream."

He whispered into the nape of her neck. "I bet I can squirm my way into them and make them deliciously wet." He continued to touch her everywhere. The hot spots, the cold ones, and the ones that just fired a woman's sexual desire right up. "Nothing in this world could be more wonderful than this." He meant it.

She rolled over and looked at his eyes. "We need to talk, I'm afraid."

He saw the look of concern on her face, but they still had too many wonderful moments to share there, and he wasn't ready to talk. "Not yet" was all he could say.

He moved his hand down to her inner thighs and whispered into her hair, "We can talk later... Let's play for now."

Uninhibited sex had a way of persuading her, so she decided he was right. Why not enjoy the here and now with the beautiful home and perfect-for-fucking corners in it? She moved in to kiss him but decided it was worth a wait. She slapped him playfully on the ass. "Come and get me." She jumped into the pool.

By the time she surfaced, his splash was already beside her. He swam straight to her under water and kissed her nipples. When he came up from under the water, he took her head in his hands and kissed her deeply. "Carol, we have to talk sometime but not now. Have today with me. Give me today and tonight."

She had no idea what would lie ahead, but she knew he was right. He knew something was wrong. Maybe he didn't know what, but he knew something would tear them apart. It was time to {shelf} shelve the conversation and just revel in a true sexual marathon. It promised to be one they would both win.

Chapter Fifteen

After a day in the heat, they were both ready for some rest and relaxation. Tom found some perfect clothing for both of them in a guest closet. She dressed in an oversized T-shirt, and he was in a pair of dry shorts. They found a comforter they liked on one of the beds and took it with them into the media area of the second floor.

"Wow, Carol, check out this movie library." Hundreds of movies were lined up on a multitude of shelves in a closet they discovered. From hard-core porn to Barney, there was a movie for everyone.

"I'm not much for porn," Carol admitted. Tom grinned, and his smile widened as she grew more and more uncomfortable.

"You don't have to dig porn. You're my little sex machine, and porn couldn't teach you a damn thing. Besides you're the expert. You write the stuff."

"I write romance, baby. I just spice them up a little. It's not porn."

"Well, you use the same stuff in the bedroom as you write in your books."

She was giddy all at once. "And how do you know that?"

He was caught with his hand in the cookie jar. "Okay...You got me. I've read the two books you gave Maude."

"You did, did ya?" She was already horny just thinking about him reading what she'd written in *The Keeper*. The sex was everything from bondage to anal play. It was a hot little novel that caught a huge warning label across the back of it. The book contained material some wouldn't appreciate on the pages of their romance book.

"I did."

"What did you think?" She was curious.

"Everything except two things you write in that book...you've shown you can do."

"And how do you know I won't do it all?" She teased, tempted.

He licked his bottom lip. "Baby...I know you better than you think, and I'm willing to bet you will but if not, we will at some point explore the possibilities!"

They both laughed for a minute, and she thought about the smut releases about her and William. Tomorrow, Tom would end it with her. There would be no more romps with him. *It would be over.* The media would play out her affair with William in a large way. She'd seen it done before. They'd take one day at the airport and turn it into a multi-year affair.

"Carol, snap out of your day dream and tell me which movie you want to watch or are you already making plans to explore your deepest, darkest fantasies?"

She shrugged. "Anything is fine with me. Anything you want to watch will be just fine."

He chose *Basic Instincts 2*. She laughed at his choice. "I saw the first one. If it's anything like that one, then you'll have a rise in your shorts before the end of the first scene."

He winked. "You're the only one who can get a rise out of me, sexy."

Somewhere between the first scene and popping back into reality with Sharon Stone in leather getting her lights fucked out by a guy with a neck choker, she fell asleep in Tom's arms. Her dreams weren't as kind as they'd been by the pool earlier. This time her mother appeared.

Stop your whining, Carol. What on earth did you expect? You had one of the most gorgeous men in the world oozing all over you, and then you go and sleep with someone as high profile as William Balfour. You had this one coming, and now everything was for nothing. Carol began weeping in her sleep. "NO! I haven't ruined everything! NO! YOU RUINED EVERYTHING! WHY COULDN'T YOU JUST LOVE ME?" Carol was talking in her sleep.

Tom was a little startled but not surprised. Carol had told him she had been having dreams about her mother, and since he had personally known Sally Corvaire, he understood more than Carol would be able to understand. He tried to console her, but she was in a fit of dreams she couldn't escape.

He held her and rocked her until she came out of her daze. When she did, her cheeks were drenched. "I'm so...sorry...."she began. "I don't know why she is haunting my dreams. This never happened to me before." She tried to find the words, so he would understand, but she couldn't find them.

Tom already knew why. It was time. It was time to tell her.

"There's something I think I should show you." He stood up and offered her his hand.

Carol looked at him and resisted. "Not now, there's something I need to tell you first. Sit down and listen to me. You have to listen to me."

He decided to lighten the mood. "And if I listen first, what will I get as a reward for being a good boy?"

She felt a pain growing in her stomach. "Tom." She was serious in her expression as her mouth formed a straight line. "I'm afraid after I tell you what I have to tell you, you may not want a reward from me. You certainly won't want to sleep with me."

He sat back down and looked at her with trustworthiness extended. "Carol; there's nothing you can't tell me. There's not anything that will scare me away. There's zilch that will hurt me so deeply that it will keep me permanently away. My only hope is that you can leave the past in the past and look forward to our future. We have a future together. I've known it since the first day I laid eyes on you." He wanted to tell her that day had actually been since the first day Sally had showed him her daughter's pictures, but he didn't dare.

"Do you really believe what you are saying?" She asked him for her own selfish reasons, and she knew it. Like him, they each shared a secret the other one would have to eventually know. Both their secrets would surface in time. They each had to tell what the other person would eventually find out through someone else if they didn't.

He stroked her head. "Oh baby, yes, I do." He really wasn't so sure. He was speaking for one side—his.

She cuddled into him under his arm and laid her hand on his lower stomach.

"I can't be sure," she whispered.

"Yes, you can be," he reassured her.

She kissed his bare abs and encircled his belly with make-believe circles in his hair. She had to taste his sex one last time. She knew what she had done was unforgivable. The truth had to be told, but for now, she was overcome with wanting him. The desire to have him once more flew through her veins like a vixen in heat.

Tom pulled her back up to him and kissed her. He played with her tongue sucking it lightly into his mouth and then biting down softly on her lower lip. He kissed her collarbone and breathed into her neck how much he wanted her. "I've wanted you longer than you can even imagine," she heard him say. "You baby, I need you. I need you in my life. I need you in my bed. My body aches for you."

Carol positioned herself over him and drew his cock out of his shorts, which was something she was getting very used to doing and finding each time he was as ready as the last. His hard dick in her hand felt like it was something she alone could mold. As she stroked him up and down, she was weaving the skin, so he could feel the intensity of the power she held over him, if only for a few seconds at a time. He was enjoying it more than any hand job he'd ever had.

There was nothing the woman couldn't do sexually. Orally she was his deep-throat queen. Manually, she was better than his own trained hand for more than one or two obvious reasons. Between her thighs? Carol was a gifted and untamed ride always ready to be mounted.

"Go ahead, baby, I want to come in your palm. Do it to me." His body had already started to jerk slightly.

She moved her hand faster up and down with more intense movements. She whispered in his ear, "Come to me. Let me feel your heat. Then, I want your cock in my pussy grinding me until you think you can't hold back any longer. Come on, baby,

I want to feel that big dick pulse. I want you to spill your sex all over me. Let me feel it." She didn't know why she had become so verbal. She had always been a very sexual person, but Tom brought out something else in her.

He took her hand in his and started moving it up and down faster driving his own need. When he finally came, his juice wet both of their hands completely, and she enjoyed every sticky drop of it. He entwined his fingers through hers as their strokes settled down.

She was about to come herself without him ever touching her. She mounted him, and he buried his face into her chest. He massaged her tits with his tongue. She fingered his balls, and he cried out for more as she stroked him tenderly.

His throaty whisper told her where he wanted her. "I want to fuck you on the pool table." She grinned because she had thought the same thing when she first saw it. He picked her up cradle style and carried her to the felt.

She sprawled out beautifully across the table with her legs spread wide and her ass slightly arched. He rubbed his dick over the backs of her legs and reached around her to play with her bare breasts again.

He massaged and then cupped each as he teased her a little longer. He could wait. She was the one who couldn't. He brought his hands back around from her front to the sides of her and traced the outline of her ribcage and her waist with his fingertips. Up and down, he marveled at her shape. "You are more beautiful than any other woman Carol...far more beautiful than..." He stopped himself. He'd almost told her far more than she could hear in the heat of passion. He'd have to be more careful.

When she least expected it, he slid his hand in from behind to reach her center and probed her to be sure she was ready for his full cock. "You're so wet. Tell me what you want me to do about it. Talk to me, Carol. Tell me what I can do to cure your wet pussy."

He whispered into her ear, and she begged for him to screw her, but she couldn't get it completely out. She whispered more to herself than to him.

He teased her with his fingertips again while rubbing her center back and forth with the full palm of his hand. "Carol, speak to me, tell me what I need to hear, or you won't be getting any more of my hard dick tonight. Don't you want my cock inside of you, pounding you? Don't you want me to fill out the inside walls of your pussy? Come on, baby, tell me, I need to hear you tell me. I love it when you talk to me."

She lost her concerns. Inhibitions were over-rated. "PLEASE, Tom, I'm begging you for it. I want your dick fucking me. I want you to grind me hard. Fuck me harder than you've ever screwed anyone. I want to feel your sex and have you inside of me. Please, baby, fuck me all night with that hard dick."

He drove into her like he had earlier that same day only as he felt her become wetter and smirked at the puddle he helped create. He pulled back completely. He rolled her over to watch and then carefully scooted her to the edge of the table so her legs would dangle off the side.

He laid on top of her for a moment almost in a hug and then slid down to explore her breasts for a lavish tour over them again. He knew whatever it was she wanted to tell him, it couldn't be as bad as what he had to tell her. This could possibly be the last time he fucked her, and he wanted it to last. He sucked her full breasts and noticed in delight how perky they were when he left them to satisfy her requests.

"Tom, please, I want you." He looked at her wildly for a moment, and suddenly she was filled with fear.

They both were facing off very different truths. Both carrying around lies that needed to be buried.

He saw something in Carol's eyes.

She saw everything she didn't want to find in Tom's.

They both had the face of fear staring right at them and the act of fucking right past it might be great for a few seconds while they {road} rode out a climax, but it wouldn't last. *The truth will stand.* Carol thought of her grandfather's words. It was one of the few things he really wanted his granddaughter to know. *The truth will stand.*

Tom put his hands on her waist and looked at her once more before he became focused on pounding her wet center. Suddenly, he stopped short as his dick remained inside of her at an erect stillness.

"I think I love you. I know I love fucking you more than anyone I've ever fucked but this..." He slid out of her and inserted his fingers into her wetness and pulled them out again to take a taste. As he licked his fingers, his mouth moved the words as provocatively as the act itself. "*This is mine. You're mine. From tonight forward, as long as you sleep with me. It's only me. From today forward. Do you understand?*"

She knew he was giving her an out. She knew he had known all day what she needed to say. "Tom, I....I'm sorry...."

He smiled at her with genuine forgiveness. "Baby, trust me, you don't have anything to be sorry about. Still, I want you to know that you belong to me. From the time we first had sex, I haven't wanted you to be with anyone but me. You can never leave me out of your experiences. Do you understand? You're mine. I just love you that much. I don't want anyone else to ever have you. "

She tried to sit up and kiss him, but he gently pushed her back and held her softly with his palm between her breasts, and he thrust his throbbing cock back into her wet sex while calling her name wildly. "Harder, Carol. Fuck it harder. Move it, baby. Twist it inside of you. You know what to do. I KNOW you know what to do. Grind me with those hips."

Beads of sweat formed on his brow as he pumped. He shook and groaned. Moaned out in agony as he tried and yet, it was different. Something more than her sexuality was driving him. It was something deep from within and she wanted to know more. What was it driving him crazy with need?

She moved everywhere he told her to move, and when she came, she felt like she came from all different directions. After she met her orgasm, he just went full speed ahead with such quick strides she knew the ripples of his dick would be only another stroke away.

The last romp left them both spent and tired. They barely had the energy to find their way to bed much less talk. They'd had a great day of sexual encounters, and she felt like she knew his body explicitly.

They fell into bed without another word about things they should tell the other one. He told her he loved her and waited for a response but didn't get one. Things were going to change quickly for them, so there wasn't any reason for her to get lost in words. She knew better. After all, she had a personal relationship with the English language. Her body language had been articulate enough or it should have been. Words weren't necessary. After all, it would be over before it could ever really start.

Chapter Sixteen

"No one from William Balfour's office would comment on the status of Mr. Balfour and Carol Langley's relationship. A best-selling and award-winning author, Ms. Langley was unavailable for comment, but CMTN News spoke to Ms. Langley's agent this morning, and we'll have her coming up next on CMTN."

Carol could hear the news playing on the surround-sound, but she was afraid to open her eyes. She knew he was beside her, and her heart was breaking for him, but he would hear it now, or he could hear it later, and she'd rather he hear what was going to be said while she was with him. Maybe she could explain some of it to him if he had any questions for her.

The show was going to go on, so she might as well lie still and let it. "Good morning, everyone. I'm Cindy May, and this morning, sexual exploits hit the publishing world in a big way. Three days ago, Carol Langley, an award-winning author, and William Balfour, the self-made billionaire of Balfour Publishing, were spotted on a Zebra Airlines flight bound for New York City. The couple sat together in first-class and quickly gathered the attention of the flight attendants and several passengers as they gave sexual favors to one another in plain view." *That wasn't true*, she thought to herself.

May continued, "Balfour's wife, Donna Balfour, filed for divorce this morning citing irreconcilable differences and is seeking custody of the couple's four children.

We'll have her on the show later this hour, but right now, let's go to New York City to the offices of Tansie Talley to talk with Carol Langley's literary agent."

Well, the curiosity always did kill the cat. Carol slowly slid up from under the blankets to watch Tansie speak to the press on her behalf. She was afraid to look at Tom, so she didn't. She knew he was there, and he hadn't started to run yet, so that could be a good thing.

May looked like a wet oriental rug wearing a shimmering blouse of too many colors. "Good morning, Tansie, thank you for coming on our show."

Tansie sported dark eyes as if she hadn't slept in two days. With her short haircut, she looked like a wet stressed-out seal. *What is up with me? I'm judging everyone!* Carol decided to look for more positive attributes from those in the media as well as those who were obviously trying to help clean up her damn mess. *Yeah right.*

"Good morning, Cindy, thank you for having me." Well, so far so good. Go Tansie.

"Tansie, how does an award-winning author, like Carol Langley, go from a highly respected and critically acclaimed writer one day to a top publisher's mistress virtually overnight?"

"Cindy, I'm glad you asked that question. From what we can tell, my friend and client, Carol Langley is still very much an award-winning author who is highly respected in her field. Also, it's important to note that Mr. Balfour is not and hasn't been in the past, her publisher. Also, it's important to note that Ms. Langley is not his mistress."

"Yes, we understand. However, isn't it true that the day after the pictures of Balfour and your client appeared in your office that a very hefty book advance of \$225,000 also came in from Balfour Publishing?"

"We have no comment on that at this time."

"How do you think the public views your client now? How do you or how will she expect to overcome these very public photographs with live video clips as well?"

"Cindy, we know how this looks. We know it looks bad...."

"Bad? She had sex in an airport conference room while security cameras taped the whole show. Langley, *a romance writer*, was swapping something other than just good book ideas with her publisher. You're darn right it looks bad."

Cindy did what she did best. Backed Tansie in a corner. Most of May's guests typically crumbled, but Carol could see the fire brewing in her agent. "Cindy, come on, let's be honest here. I know your reputation. I know my reputation. We are all sexual creatures when it gets right down to it and..."

"My sexual orientation doesn't send me into exhibition in a public place, Ms. Talley. Most of us know when to pull our pants up and most of us keep them on when the cameras are rolling."

"MS. MAY, if you want me to be on your show and answer questions, I suggest you let me finish my sentences before responding." *GO TANSIE*. Once again, Carol cheered, but she had to do it silently because Tom still hadn't said anything.

"My apologies, Ms. Talley, but let's try to keep our interview focused on William Balfour and your client."

"I want the general public to know that Carol Langley, as portrayed in those pictures, is not the Carol Langley we all know. Sure, she is a romance writer, and her books include some very explicit material, but she's never been known to act irrationally in the past, and since I've known her, she's only had one serious relationship."

"Tansie, how long *have you known* your client?"

"Over ten years."

"Is it possible she and William Balfour have had an ongoing sexual relationship, and that is why she hasn't had any public relationships?"

"No, it isn't possible. I know the details behind all of this, and I can assure you that isn't the case."

"So, your client did pick up Balfour in the airport, and well, the pictures tell the rest of the story obviously."

"No comment."

"I want to thank Tansie Talley for being with us today. Ms. Langley, of course, was unavailable for comment. I'm Cindy May for CMTN News. Up next, Donna Balfour talks about William, their relationship, their children, and Ms. Langley. Keep it here."

Carol slowly sat up with her back against the headboard. Her palms were clammy, and she didn't know where to begin. She could feel her own disappointment as well as his beginning to overpower them.

Tom was dumbfounded. She was speechless.

She finally turned to look at him, and he was looking dead ahead. "Tom, I'm sorry. I'm so so sorry. I thought...I thought that Kim...I'm sorry." She just couldn't find all the words she needed. *So much for being a weaver of words.*

He looked at her with hurt in his eyes but kindness in his voice. "Do you want me to turn this off, or do you need to hear Balfour's wife tell the world how you were the reason she and her husband split?"

"Please turn it off."

Carol sat up with the sheet held tightly to her chest and turned to sit facing him.

He went into attorney mode. "Tansie did a good job with the May woman."

She nodded and started to say something when he cut her off.

"This Balfour thing is huge, and the media will play it out for all its worth because of Balfour's stupid-ass mistake of offering you \$225,000 on an advance." She didn't try to find the right words as he continued. "Tell me the truth, Carol. How involved with him are you?"

"One lousy day."

Her response didn't really matter; he'd seen the edited pictures. It was like the pictures of Pam Anderson and Tommy Lee. People don't forget the visuals too quickly. He knew he had screwed her brains out. How many times didn't matter really. "He had you after me and then you came running back into my arms that were waiting for you...wanting you...missing you..." The real pain set in, and his eyes fixated on the floor while his whispers summed up the story as he saw it.

"Tom, please let me explain. I made a very big mistake. It's not who I am. I'm not even what you would call sexually active in most cases."

He looked at her and shook his head with a snicker following his voice. "Carol, you're talking to me. Yes, you are a very sexual woman, and you are *very active*. The way you fuck someone is like no one I've ever known. That doesn't come from inexperience. I'm no fool. The first time I was ever with you, *I knew*. I knew you were experienced in the sack, and to be honest with you, it's part of what I like about you." *That hurt. Well sort of.*

He continued. "Don't try to lie to me about this and do not make excuses for who you are. I know you are a desirous woman who can have any man she wants. I also know if a man even had a clue what you could do to him in the bedroom, you'd have them lined up waiting to romance you in every city. So just don't..." Regret stopped him in his speech. He should've told her he wanted her for keeps from the beginning, and then they'd be in a different place. They wouldn't have to face the dreaded road before them.

Carol tried to explain. "You won't believe me but here goes. I've slept with five men in my life, not that the number of men I've slept with would be yours or anyone else's business. William Balfour was a big mistake. You had been so forward with me, and I let my guard down with you, and then I thought you were...we've already been over this. I'm not going to beg you to understand. I know I hurt you, and I'm sorry." She started to get up, but he pulled her back down to him.

Her elbows were on his chest, and she was staring up at him. *She's beautiful, she's sexy, and she's smart*, he thought. *But she's entitled to a mistake.* "Listen to me. I know why you did it. It doesn't mean I'm happy with it, but I know why you did it. I think it was reckless and foolish, but I had just started seeing you, and I hadn't made my intentions clear. I want you Carol; only you, but that hadn't been decided by either of us when you went to Boston. I guess what I'm trying to say is Boston doesn't matter."

She looked at him and saw gentleness in his face and love in his eyes. Things with them had moved so fast, but that was okay. She needed him. She needed a strong man

in her life. She had forgotten how much. She leaned up to kiss him, and he kissed her lightly on the lips.

"Our relationship will be very public for a while. They will tear you apart. They will tear me apart."

She agreed with him.

"Carol, the level of notoriety you've received for your books is commendable, but you are in a position where you can't behave recklessly anymore. You have to think clearly. When you act before you think, you're acting just like your mother, and you're not your mother." *Shit! That slipped.* It wasn't a good time to talk about Sally. She couldn't handle it right now.

Too late; Carol had already caught his comment. She sat back and looked at him strangely. "You knew my mother, didn't you? I think I've known it for some time because of the dreams. You did know her, and I'm willing to bet you knew her well."

She waited for a response, but nothing came out. He looked at her hard and could see the resemblance of Sally in Carol, but Carol was so much more beautiful than her mother had been. Carol had natural beauty, and Sally had to work for her beauty or at least he thought so. Carol was naturally pretty and so very sexy. Her mother was an ice princess with a mean spirit.

"Answer me, please, you knew my mother?"

Tom took a deep breathe in and began. "I want you to understand something first. I love you, and I have loved you since the moment I saw your pictures. Your mother had so many pictures of this wonderful young woman, and yet she missed out on so much by not being a part of your life. Down deep she knew she missed out on getting to know you."

Carol moved back away from him and was beginning to feel sick at her stomach. *I want you to know I blame you because I could never find happiness...You were always such a difficult child, Carol.* Her mother's words stung her again. "You...You were..."

"I was husband number six." Tom looked across the bed at her.

Carol shook her head and put her hands over her ears as the waves brought a current of tears with a fierce undertow. An end to them wasn't in sight. "NO! NO! This isn't happening. I can't handle anything more. NO! You weren't! Tell me you were not married to her. Please tell me this is a bad dream."

She buried her face in her hands and wept. He tried to comfort her, but she wouldn't allow it. "Get away from me!"

"You have to listen to me, Carol. I fell in love *with the idea of you* after I married your mother. We weren't even married a month. I know it sounds twisted, but the day I laid eyes on your photographs, I loved you. I wanted to take care of you. Once I dug deeper into your life through the media, the internet, and even Sally's recollection of you, the more I needed to get to know you."

Carol looked at him through tears. "Twenty-nine days and seven hours. You said you weren't even married to her for a month. She said you were married for twenty-nine days and seven hours. I just thought I would let you know." She spoke in a monotone and slower than usual.

He looked at her puzzled and wasn't sure why the time frame would matter at all.

"She told me twenty-nine days and seven hours," she said it again. "You flew her out of the country for a quick divorce. She was heartbroken."

Tom laughed at her last statement. "I obviously knew her better than you did. Sally wasn't heartbroken, Carol. Sally knew I was mesmerized by you. It hurt her ego, but she wasn't heartbroken. She never even loved me to begin with. She just wanted to be with a younger man, and I was young and available and thought it would be a good time. It was *worth my time* because I found you, but it was pure hell being married to that woman."

Carol looked at him hard. "I don't know how to respond to any of this. I'm hurt, Tom. None of this makes sense to me. WHY wouldn't you tell me who you are, and more importantly, why didn't you tell me you were married to my mother?"

"Carol, try to be fair. I was hurt, too. I know you can't compare what I've done with the whole William Balfour sex sprint, but come on, give a man a break."

She ignored him. "Did Clyde and Maude know you were married to my mother?"

He hesitated for a moment.

Stung by the truth, she answered her own question. "Of course, they knew and they played right along. I've been such a foolish woman."

"Yes, Carol, they knew but no, you are anything but foolish."

She started to cry again. When he reached out to touch her, she snapped at him, "DON'T YOU TOUCH ME. YOU, YOU...You've PLAYED ME for a fool!"

The hurt on his face told her she didn't know the entire story, but she didn't want to know his version. She wanted to go home. She wanted to get out of there. She was tired; she was spent. She couldn't think. She...she...she...couldn't breathe.

Chapter Seventeen

Loud laughter filled the black hole she found herself in. Everyone was laughing at her. She couldn't see where it was coming from, but she could hear it. She recognized Clyde's snicker, she heard Maude's giggling, she heard Tom, and most of all she was absorbed in her mother's loud and somewhat wicked cackling. They were all making fun of her, and she couldn't escape.

How does it feel, Carol? You're sleeping with a man who knows me as well as any man can know a woman. Do you like sleeping with someone who slept with your mother? Does it give you power, Carol? She was taking great pleasure in haunting her daughter.

She saw them all moving toward her in her dream. They encircled her. Cindy May, Tansie, Tom, her mother, Clyde, Maude, and William. They were coming in closer and closer. She gasped for air and couldn't find it. They were too close. She couldn't breathe. She couldn't breathe!

"Carol, come back to me, baby. Sit up, Carol. Come on. Come on back to me." She felt a cold cloth on her forehead and looked up to see Tom.

"That's it. Come on." He was so good to her, yet he had committed the ultimate betrayal. She blinked her eyes but couldn't focus. She felt her head spinning out of control. "Carol, I want you to listen to me now. You straighten yourself up right this minute. You are going to listen to me. Carol? Carol? Come on, baby, come back to me."

He disappeared for a moment and came back with colder cloths to wet down her forehead. She finally kept her eyes open long enough to lock hers with his.

"I love you. Don't throw that away. I made a mistake. Are you really willing to throw away what we have because I made the mistake of not telling you everything from the beginning? If I'd told you, how far with you would I have gotten? Hmm? Answer me. Not very. I'll answer for you."

"You do that!" She spat the words at him. Carol slowly sat up and glared at him. She was unsure of how she would handle it. She didn't want to talk to him. She wanted time alone. She didn't want to look at him. She wanted to go home. "I need some privacy to get dressed please. Then, I want you to take me back to the cabin."

Tom looked at her with concern. "I can't take you back there."

"Why not? You mean *you won't take me back there.*"

Tom picked up the remote for the television and flickered through a few local stations and finally settled on an entertainment-type news show. "No, I mean *I can't take you back there.*"

"I'm Sandy Jacobs, and we're standing next to the front porch of where we are told Carol Langley, the bestselling romance author, is said to be spending her summer. I have with me one of her neighbors, Mr. Clyde Morris, who claims he hasn't seen Carol since she left for Boston." Sandy moved the microphone in front of Clyde.

OH SHIT. Here are his ten minutes of fame. "No, I haven't seen her, but I want you all to know that girl you see in those porno photographs couldn't be our neighbor Carol Langley." *Thank you, Clyde. You tell her!*

"Mr. Morris, why don't you think the photographs of William Balfour and Carol Langley are authentic?"

He looked directly into the camera. "Well, I reckon she's gay."

Carol fell back on the bed. "OH HOLY SHIT! HE DIDN'T JUST SAY THAT!"

"Gay? You are telling us you thought Carol Langley, the author, is a lesbian?"

Maude appeared in front of the camera and tugged on Clyde's sleeve. "Come on honey, it's time for your medication."

She looked into the camera. "Carol, wherever you are honey, love from us."

"Ma'am." The reporter was persistent. "What can you tell us about Carol Langley? Was she involved with anyone? Did you see her with anyone here at the cabin? Was she romantically involved with a man, or perhaps, a woman?" The reporter trailed after her.

Maude looked at Clyde and then directly into the camera. "My husband is mistaken. Carol isn't a lesbian. She's a good woman who keeps to herself. She's a beautiful young lady and a great neighbor. Beyond that, I can tell you this, who she sleeps with is none of your business or anybody else's." The cameras showed Maude and Clyde trailing off back up the hill.

Carol reached for the phone. "What's Maude's number?"

Tom shook his head. "I don't know but call from your cell phone."

She didn't know where she left it but assumed it was on the boat. "It's on the boat."

Tom volunteered, as she knew he would, to go get it. She flipped through the television channels and leaned back on her pillow acting intent on watching the news unfold. Once Tom was out of sight, she quickly dressed and began to rummage through papers in a marble-top desk. She wanted to find some sort of envelope that would give her an address, so she could call for Maude to come and get her.

He reappeared in the doorway as she frantically searched. "I'll tell you the address here if you want to leave, but you are asking for big trouble if you do. You can't leave yet. The press is blowing this out of..."

Something caught Carol's attention on the television. She brushed past Tom and grabbed the remote to turn up the volume. It was Cindy May again. "I'm saddened to inform the public that William Balfour was found dead in his office a little over four hours ago. The police arrested Donna Balfour in connection with his murder after our interview with her earlier this morning."

Carol sat lifeless. Tom sat down beside her. "Oh Carol, I'm so sorry." Carol stared straight ahead as the news continued. She held the remote in her hands in a death grip.

May was talking with one of Balfour's editors. "Jim, what can you tell us about William Balfour's relationship with Carol Langley?"

Jim Davis, a highly respected editor with Balfour Publishing, tried to appear unshaken. "We know Mr. Balfour was impressed with Carol Langley's work. Beyond that, I'm afraid none of us knew of any relationship, sexual or otherwise, he may have had with Carol Langley."

Cindy pressed on, "Can you tell us anything about his relationship with his wife?"

"Cindy, I really can't," Jim began. "We never saw much of Mrs. Balfour in the office. We saw her maybe once a year at the Christmas party, but outside of that, no one knew much about her."

"Jim, do you think she killed her husband?"

"Cindy, the photographs and video clips that came out of Boston were consistent. They showed a woman and a man engaging in an act so personal that I'm sure it must've been difficult for Donna Balfour to accept. Did she KILL William because of his public sexual relationship with Carol Langley? I don't know. The police seem to think so, or they wouldn't have arrested her, but all I can say is William Balfour was one of the best men I knew personally. He made a costly mistake. Carol Langley is a highly respected author. She made a careless mistake. William's mistake cost him his life. We are all hopeful that Ms. Langley is alive and well and hasn't paid with her life as our dear friend William Balfour has been forced to do."

Carol didn't move. She sat still numbed by it all. She had cost a man his life. Not just any man. A married man with four children. A thriving businessman with a purposeful and meaningful life. How could she live with herself?

"Jim, you bring up a very important point. No one has seen or heard from Carol Langley since this saga began to unfold. Do you think its possible Donna Balfour, or whoever killed William Balfour, could have killed Carol Langley?"

"Cindy, let me just say this. No one knows for sure Donna Balfour killed William Balfour. However, if she confesses to killing her husband, we are hopeful she will tell us anything she knows about Carol Langley's whereabouts, if there is anything to know. We are still hopeful that Carol is alive and that she just left town for a few days after the release of the photographs. We don't think really, at this point, that Ms. Langley is dead, but we really don't know."

Tom took the remote from Carol's hands and turned the news off. "Carol, I'm calling Tansie. Is her number programmed in your phone?" Carol nodded. "Okay, I'm calling her to let her know you are alright. Okay?" Carol nodded.

Tom looked through Carol's phonebook on her cell and found Tansie's cell phone then pressed send.

"Oh, Carol, I'm so glad you called. I've been worried sick," Tansie began. "Where are you?"

Tom cleared his throat. "Tansie, hi. This is Tom O'Brien. I'm..."

She cut him off, "I know who you are. Where's Carol? Is she alright?"

Tom cleared his throat again. "She's with me, but she isn't alright as you might imagine. You and I will be taking care of things for her for the moment. Please listen to me."

Tansie didn't take direction very well from people she didn't know. Carol couldn't move, but she listened to Tom as he spoke. She knew his approach wasn't going to go very far with her young fiery agent.

"No, you listen to me you arrogant ass. Carol Langley is my friend, and the least you could have done was call me before now. She's fragile, Mr. O'Brien, and I hope you aren't taking advantage of that. I need to know she's okay. I have been worried sick. PUT HER ON THE PHONE."

Tom shot Carol a look she must've been expecting. "I really don't think she can talk to you right now. She just found out William Balfour was killed. She hasn't moved one inch since."

Tansie directed him, "Hold the phone to her ear."

Tom did what she told him to do and held the phone to her ear. "Carol, listen to me, honey. We need you to pull it together. I'm going to ask Tom to handle the legal end of all of this for you. I hope that's alright. Is that alright, Carol? Carol, can you hear me. IS that alright?"

She looked at Tom and nodded as she got up off the bed and went over to the window.

"She nodded it was okay. I'll start to work on it."

Tansie was persistent. "Okay, I need to know where you are."

He thought about telling her and then changed his mind. "Tansie, you and I are going to have to trust one another here. She's safe, and that's all I can tell you. Now, I want you to send over to Carol's e-mail everything you have on William Balfour and his wife. Forward any inquiries to me as well. I'll make a statement tomorrow at some point. We'll talk throughout the day today and decide on that later. We have some time. Right now, you concentrate on getting the word out that Carol is alive and, of course, had no interest in harming William Balfour, if asked. You will be asked because I'd be surprised if Balfour's wife confesses to murder. She'll probably crook the finger over toward Carol."

When he hung up, he walked over to her as she stood by the window. "Come on; let me fix you something to eat."

She followed him downstairs and watched as he fixed her some canned soup. What had she done? She'd made a dreadful mistake sleeping with a married man. She'd cost him his life. *What have I done?* She continued to carry the blame.

As she sat on the kitchen barstool, she buried her face in her hands again and started to cry. Tom came over and stood behind her. "Tansie's right, you're going to have to pull it together. You're going to have to be strong for yourself. If you don't pull it together, you'll look guilty."

His words brought her out of the trance she had created for herself. "What do you mean I'll look guilty? Donna Balfour was arrested for his murder."

He saw a scared young woman before him and tried to look at her as a client for a moment rather than the woman he loved. "Look, if she *confesses* to the murder, it will make it easier on all of us, but chances are, she won't confess. She will probably point to you unless there is hard evidence suggesting she pulled the trigger. My hope is there is at least substantial evidence pointing to Donna Balfour even if she doesn't admit to killing her husband."

Carol nodded. "We'll just have to hope then."

Chapter Eighteen

Tom and Tansie worked throughout the day by phone and e-mail. Carol finally talked to Tansie, and they had a long chat about how the pictures surfaced. Carol and William had both separately used conference rooms at several of the airports before. For some reason, they were under the impression the conference rooms they used were for private meetings, and they weren't aware of the security measures some of the airlines incorporated into their meeting rooms.

They thought the rooms were completely private. They were mistaken. Their sexual encounter had been chronicled, and a guy in the security department looking to make a quick buck quickly sold it to anyone who had an interest in buying. As one could imagine, he found plenty of takers.

Tansie sent over all of the clips and photographs. Carol gave her permission. "Tom and I are strictly professional now," he had heard her say. "He's going to get me through this, and then we're going our separate ways. He's being a good friend, and I do appreciate his efforts."

She wanted him to know she was grateful, but she also wanted him to understand there was nothing left for them to discuss about future plans as a couple. After all, he had betrayed her so completely. He'd chosen to keep a very important secret, one that would've changed the path they both had chosen to take.

She thought about his betrayal further. If he hadn't lied to her and she hadn't slept with him to begin with, she would've never gone to Boston. Balfour would still be

alive, and she wouldn't be feeling so completely helpless. All of this started with Tom and his lies. His damned-ass lies.

The day turned into night, and Tom said he was going to go back to the cabins to retrieve some of their belongings. She told him where to find a key, and he assured her he wouldn't be long. "Carol, I'll be making a statement tonight if I'm forced to do it. I want you to know in case you turn on the television. Call me if you need me." She followed him to the door and locked it behind him. She was all alone.

Making her way to the bar, she poured herself a brandy then trailed back upstairs to cuddle up on the bed. She turned on the television again. Fear crept over her. It was a huge house to be in alone without him, and her mind took her back to the week in review. She thought about every personal act they'd performed.

Carol thought about her mother and her dreams; she thought about how her mother had deliberately intruded into them. She ached as she condemned Tom and her mother for ever being together. Her heart seemed to be forever wounded. Then, Tom's face was the only image she saw. He was taking care of everything she needed. It was what he wanted to do because he loved her.

"Good evening, ladies and gentleman, I'm Cindy May. If you're just now tuning in, let me bring you up to speed. The affair of Publishing Tycoon William Balfour and Award-winning Author Carol Langley turned deadly this morning. Balfour was found dead in his office from multiple gunshot wounds. Soon after, we told you of the arrest of Donna Balfour, but we didn't have any details about the events leading to the death of Mr. Balfour. We now have an updated timeline to share. We're going live right now to Steve Cross who is standing by at Balfour Publishing. Go ahead, Steve."

"Good evening, Cindy. We are in front of Balfour Publishing here in New York and have news tonight of a very sad story. This story started off as a high profile love triangle with explicit photographs and video that would rock the publishing world. Two of its very own and *very big* players would enter into a public affair exploited by photographs and footage that won't soon depart the minds and memories of those of

us who witnessed it. Balfour and Langley, both highly respected in the writing world, made a mistake that ultimately cost Balfour his life.”

With a quick flicker of light, the screen divided, and two reporters, Steve and Cindy, exchanged information back and forth. It seemed so ordinary to her at first until suddenly Carol realized the news flashed was telling *her* story. This had become her public catastrophe. She was in the limelight as never before.

“We are told by sources close to Langley that she is with friends tonight. We assume she has watched, like us now, as all of this unfolded. After Langley’s agent gave a few interviews on her behalf this morning, we all came to the conclusion Tansie Talley, Langley’s long-time friend and literary agent, had no idea of her client’s whereabouts. We didn’t get much information from her or out of Balfour’s Publishing House.”

“Donna Balfour appeared on television earlier as well in an exclusive interview. Soon after, we’re told Donna Balfour, sole heir to her husband’s fortune, was arrested for the murder of William Balfour. Now, we have the details of what happened that ultimately led the police to Balfour’s wife and mother of their four children.”

Since Carol hadn’t heard the entire story unravel, she settled deeper into the soft feel of the down comforter and watched intently as the news unfolded. She couldn’t help but feel so unconnected to the situation, especially since Balfour had meant nothing to her. He had provided a service, and he’d been a mistake. The news media at least had that part right. It was a mistake, and yes, it had unfortunately brought his life to a quick end.

The story continued. “At eight o’clock this morning, William Balfour went to work, and we have footage of him dodging the reporters who wanted to know more about his affair with Ms. Langley. He walked into his office, and we’re told he called Ms. Langley’s agent. She confirmed the call with the police, but we aren’t sure what they discussed.”

“At eight fifteen a.m., several reporters tried to get a statement from Donna Balfour as she entered the front of the building, which is where I am standing.” The

reporter turned to motion to the sidewalk and apparent path the scorned Mrs. Balfour walked. "At eight thirty, she calmly walked out of the building and drove away in her Mercedes. Around nine this morning, the body of William Balfour was discovered. Later, Donna Balfour was arrested for his murder. We have no word yet if she has admitted to the crime or not. Back to you, Cindy."

"Okay, thank you, Steve. We're going now to Tennessee where Casey Davidson is standing by live at the cabin where Carol Langley spent her summers. Go ahead, Casey." *Spent* her summers? Carol knew the media must have already assumed she could be among the dead.

"Thank you, Cindy. Things were quiet here up until about fifteen minutes ago when a man was spotted entering Carol Langley's home to retrieve some of her belongings. He was accompanied by a local sheriff, but it's unclear exactly who he is or what his relationship is to Ms. Langley. We're told someone will be making a statement on her behalf later this evening. We'll have to wait and see. Back to you."

Carol picked up her phone and called him. He answered quickly. "Hey, I can only talk quickly because there are several people standing here." She started to cry, and his heart melted. Regardless of the conversation he overheard between Carol and Tansie, he loved her. He couldn't help it. He had loved her before he even knew her. He loved her now. Damn it all, it appeared she would have a forever hold on him, and if they could ever get past all of this, he knew she could love him, too.

"Honey, I know what you're going through, but you're going to have to hang on, okay?" He caught the eye of a reporter and tried to regain the professional composure he had held prior to his call. He noted the reporter scribbling down details and acting like he wasn't listening.

"Hang on a second." He placed the phone down, and she heard him. "Okay everyone; I need to take this call. It isn't related to what we are discussing. I need five minutes alone please."

She heard shuffling, and he was back on the phone. "Okay, sweetie, talk to me. What have you heard on the news?" She never noted his pet names for her only his kind tone and his willingness to help.

She relaxed when she heard his voice and told him everything she had watched over the last hour. He jotted down some notes and then told her he had to go. "Carol, I'm only coming back to the lake house tonight if I can get in there without being followed. Okay?"

She started to {snub} sob and choke back tears. "But I need you here please, as my friend, okay? Please come back for me." She hung up the phone. After she realized her heart was aching for him to be there with her, she knew she needed him there with her as more than simply her friend. She just needed him beside her. Regardless of the past, he already possessed her heart, and they would have to work through everything else. It was then and there that she realized she loved him. She *really* loved him, and that fact scared her to death.

Carol sat completely still when the truth hit her like a ton of bricks. Her mother's sixth husband. She was in love with one of the men her mother had married, and even though it was a brief marriage, she was now in love with a man her mother had claimed at one time as her own. *Physically laid claims to him.* The thought sickened her.

Thinking back to the café in Nashville, Tom had been why her mother had met her. She felt certain if her mother knew Tom had feelings for her daughter, it was why she had arranged for the meeting that day. Her mother probably intended to tell her everything but then changed her mind. Perhaps she knew the two of them would hit it off and couldn't stand by and watch, so she just met her to tell her she resented her and blamed her. She blamed her for Tom because Tom wanted to pursue Carol.

What a sting that must have been to mother's ego. She started to feel a bit sorry for her and then came to peace with it almost immediately. Years of being pushed aside came into focus for her as she thought about her mom. Life had allowed Carol to get even, and she didn't even have to try to do it on her own.

Miles across the lake, Tom put his cell phone back in his pocket and walked onto his front porch. He took a deep breath and went to the microphone, which had been set up for him. He was about to have more than his ten minutes of fame, and by the looks of things, his notoriety was about to start right in that very moment.

Tom was standing on his front porch.

Carol turned up the volume just as one of the news anchors interrupted someone from Balfour Publishing. "Mr. Tate, we are going to have to cut you off for a moment. We've been told a statement coming out of Rogersville, Tennessee is expected momentarily from Carol Langley's attorney. We're going there now."

The reporter was set up and ready to go. A camera flashed across a small crowd standing around. "Yes, we are live here at Carol Langley's cabin in East Tennessee. Apparently, her attorney, Tom O'Brien, who is also her neighbor, tried to sneak back to the cabins to pick up some of their belongings tonight. We're told the statement he was going to make tomorrow has been pushed ahead, and he will be speaking to us here in just a few more minutes. We hope to learn more then."

Carol went downstairs and fixed herself another brandy then returned just in time to see the cameras turning on Tom again. He was about to make his speech on her behalf. She heard the clicking of the cameras and saw the flashes of light. She couldn't help but notice the lines of worry across his brow, and her heart just went to mush as she longed to be there with him. Not because she wanted to be there in front of the crowd but because she thought maybe now *he needed her* support.

"Good evening. I'm Tom O'Brien, as most of you already know, I'm Carol Langley's attorney. At this time, we want to make several statements in no particular order, and then I will open up the floor to take a couple of questions of which I'll answer to the best of my ability.

"On September the 15th, 2005, Carol Langley left Tennessee headed to New York City. She was supposed to meet her agent there to sign a contract for her next book with Cater Publishing. They had offered her an advance. Ms. Langley and Ms. Talley

were prepared to accept the advance and sign off on the contract.” He looked into the cameras as he spoke.

“Carol Langley flew from Tennessee to Boston seated next to William Balfour. No one, not even Ms. Langley knows why he was in Tennessee. She had not met him previously. While in flight, they had light conversation, and Ms. Langley had a number of mixed drinks.”

“When they arrived in Boston, Mr. Balfour invited Ms. Langley to accompany him to Zebra’s VIP Lounge and private conference room. The rest, as you all know, has been an open book. The photographs and the video clips tell the story.”

Carol watched him intently as he commented on the clips. She could see what she hoped others would not. She could feel his pain as visibly as it showed on his face.

“After her brief encounter with William Balfour, we are told he boarded his scheduled flight for New York, and Ms. Langley changed her flight plans and decided to return home. My sister and I saw her later that same evening.” He admitted something he should’ve left off.

“Ms. Langley learned of William Balfour’s death this morning just as many of you did. She heard it on the news and was deeply saddened by the realization that her actions may have caused someone to take William Balfour’s life. Her heart goes out to the Balfour family and specifically to William Balfour’s children.”

She had to admit. He had made a very good statement on her behalf. Tom and Tansie both were taking care of everything for her. She couldn’t have made it through any of this without them.

“Mr. O’Brien, Mr. O’Brien, where is Carol Langley now?”

“No comment.”

“Can you tell us if William Balfour was in Tennessee visiting Carol Langley at her cabin?”

“I can tell you with absolute certainty that Mr. Balfour was not visiting Ms. Langley at her cabin.”

“Mr. O’Brien, isn’t it true that you were married to Carol Langley’s mother?”

"No comment."

"Mr. O'Brien, how long have you known Carol Langley?"

"No comment."

"Mr. O'Brien, I have a question for you. Many people assume William Balfour's widow killed him, but she hasn't admitted to the crime as of yet. How do you know Carol Langley wasn't involved at all?"

"I'm certain she had no involvement."

"Does she have an alibi during the time when he was killed?"

"Yes, she does."

"Mr. O'Brien, isn't it true you are her alibi? Isn't it true you are romantically involved with Carol Langley?"

"No comment."

"Mr. O'Brien, why were you going into her cabin this evening?"

"Obviously, the press has made it impossible for Ms. Langley to return here. I wanted to pick up some of her things."

"Are you staying with Ms. Langley? Will you be seeing her later this evening?"

"No comment."

"I'd love to answer more questions for you, but as you all know, it has been a trying day for all of us. Again, Carol Langley sends her condolences to the family of William Balfour."

Carol watched him slide back inside his front door, and she turned off the television set. Her phone rang almost immediately.

"Did you watch?"

She told him she did.

"What did you think?"

"You were perfect Tom." She paused and then continued, "Thank you."

"Carol, I don't know if I can get back over there without being followed."

She started to cry. "Tom, I need you here. Please. Please. Please. Don't leave me here alone. I don't even know where I am. I...I...I can't breathe."

Tom started trying to calm her down. "Carol, stay with me, baby. Carol? Are you there? Honey, baby, stay with me. You have to stay with me. Please, honey." His voice soothed her and brought her peace, at least for a moment.

"Okay, I can do this. You're right. I can do this," she talked to herself and him at the same time.

If things weren't so bad, he would've probably smiled. He knew she needed him, and he knew he could, in time, give her the life she so desperately needed. He could give her love and share his family with her. They could start their own family. He could make her the happiest woman in the world. He had to hope for another chance with her, and they had to work to get this other stuff all behind them.

"Tom, are you there?" She thought she had lost the connection.

"I'm still here. I'm looking out over the lake trying to figure out the best way to get back to you."

She let out a sigh of relief. He *would* be coming back to her. "Tom, did you love my mother?"

He looked out over the water again and thought about it before he answered. He wanted to be honest with her. "I did not love your mother. She was full of life. Everyone wanted to know her when they first laid eyes on her. You know that from being her daughter. She had great charisma, but she was also lethal, Carol, and there are things about your mother that I will tell you someday. Things you will need to hear, but not now. Now, I need to come home. I need to be with you. I love you, and if you'll let me, I'll love you for the rest of my life. We can put all of this behind us quickly and move on, but you have to make up your mind to let me. I'll see you soon."

Carol hung up the phone and immediately dialed Maude. She knew she wasn't sleeping with all of the commotion right outside her door. She talked to her about Tom and her mother, and Maude put a very interesting spin on everything when she told her of a very rocky relationship that Tom had told them about some time ago. She also told of how Tom had prepared for the day he would one day meet her.

“Carol, I know this all sounds impossible, but Tom fell in love with you while he was married to your mother. He told us he felt like he just wanted and needed to take care of you for the rest of your life.”

Carol felt better talking to Maude. During the conversation, Clyde picked up the phone and told her they had been under a lot of stress with the reporters and everything going on. They would be leaving the next day to go and stay with his brother until her problems blew over, and the reporters went home. Carol didn’t blame them for leaving, and she was ridden with guilt over what she had done.

Her neighbors were made to feel uncomfortable in their own home. She’d proven to be a lousy summer neighbor for Clyde and Maude. *Funny how things can turn around*, she thought. At one time, they disturbed her peace and quiet at the lake. Now, it appeared to be the other way around.

Long after she had said good-bye to the older couple, her thoughts turned back to Tom’s expression of love for her. She wasn’t sure about the whole love thing. After all, the “love” her mother had always described as “bliss” seemed to include happily ever after with one marriage after another. Carol just never bought into the idea of true love, but then again, she’d never gambled on meeting someone like Tom O’Brien either.

Chapter Nineteen

Carol stood at the window watching for him. She still had the television on listening to the news. She saw the boat lights and felt at peace knowing he had been able to make his way back to the house. She moved away from the window slowly backing onto the bed as she watched the story unwinding on the news update.

The news just seemed never ending. The events fell in line one after another. "Donna Balfour has admitted to murdering her husband this evening. Her statement comes after hours of interrogation. Originally, she had tried to point the finger in the direction of Carol Langley. However, too many witnesses saw her enter his office at Balfour Publishing, and with security cameras rolling throughout the building, there was no evidence of anyone going into Balfour's office, before or after, his body was discovered except for Donna Balfour."

Carol looked up and saw Tom standing in the doorway. He smiled weakly. "Thank goodness. It doesn't solve all of our problems, but it sure makes for a better night's sleep" He walked over to the bed and sat down beside her. He started to say something, but she stopped him.

She threw her arms around his neck and started to cry. "Thank you for coming back for me. Thank you so much."

He pulled her back and held her by the shoulders gently. "Carol, I will always come back for you. I will never leave you. If you'll just..."

She covered his mouth with a lingering kiss and then pulled herself to her knees cupping his face in both hands. "I need you to make love to me."

Tom was surprised and taken aback by her chosen words. He'd known Carol as a tremendous lover. She had proven to be a wildcat in bed...completely uncontrollable, but she never mentioned their romps as making love. Of course, it was still too soon for her to call it that. She'd regarded it as something else entirely.

She took his hand and led him into the dressing area of the bathroom. "I want to watch you love me." They stood in front of a large dressing mirror. He stood behind her and slowly undressed her and then himself. Lovingly, he moved her hair, so he could kiss the nape of her neck. He kissed her back and moved around her ribcage with soft kisses before his mouth reached her breast. She watched in the mirror, as his dick grew hard beside her. She could feel its heat touching her hip as he licked her nipple.

He moved in front of her, and she pushed him back on the marble vanity. She kissed his chest and moved slowly down his stomach to find the tip of his dick within a lick of her lips. She licked over the tip and sucked it lightly until she could taste him. She took him deeper into her mouth and sucked. He watched her as she kneaded his skin underneath his dick and slowly moved his cock in and out of her luscious lips. His hips started to move with her, and he grew more and more excited by her. "I may come," he told her. She picked up her rhythm trying to give him as much oral pleasure as she could offer.

He pulled her to him. "Not yet." He kissed her hard and told her to stand. She stood over him and faced the mirror. His head was parallel to the center of her wetness. He tongued her clit and fingered her pussy before covering her opening with his wanting mouth. He continued to lap her juices while spooning the wetness into his mouth with fingers still hard at work trying to work her into an orgasm like she had never known. When he felt her legs tighten, he had no doubt he was succeeding.

He stopped his greedy consumption of her sweet taste and moved back to feast on her breasts. He devoured each as he playfully patted her ass. She leaned into him

touching her crotch to meet his full dick. He slowly rose to meet her request of watching him love her. He moved behind her and put his palms on her back. "Watch me, Carol. I want you to see me love you. I want you to see me fuck you. I want you to watch my cock move in and out of your pussy." There was a large hand mirror placed to the side of the vanity. He had spotted it when they first entered the room. He moved it under them on the bench in front of where they stood. She smiled as he placed it there growing excited by what she knew she would see.

He kissed her again on her neck, and she turned her head, so their tongues met in a provocative dance over her shoulder. "I can't wait any longer. I have to have you now, look down baby. Watch me."

She felt as if her heart was in her throat as she watched his thickness spread her wet intimate lips apart. His package was bulging. As he pounded her, she could see the intensity of his fire. She looked straight ahead into the mirror in front of them and could see his wicked smile truly turned on by her intense stares of his cock moving in and out of her body. He licked his lips, and she bit down hard on her lower lip as if to signal him to pound into her harder. He obliged and took her hips as he thrust deeper inside her pulsating heat. They both screamed out with pleasure, and she took one final look into the mirror below now covered in the aftermath of what had just occurred between them.

Carol let Tom rest on her back for a few seconds as she reveled in his male body encircling her tiny frame. She crossed her arms in front of her and propped her chin up. She smiled at him as he lay there with his eyes closed content with being inside her. "Don't move," she told him.

He looked up at her. "You won't get an argument there. I'd like to stay like this for a while." He shut his eyes again. Several times she felt his sex soften, and she would pulsate her walls to entice his thickness. He would smile and then relax again. She watched each time for his facial response loving the pleasure she was bringing him and herself. She'd never felt this close to anyone in her life.

"Tom?"

His eyes widened, and he looked at her through the glass. The seriousness evident in her voice scared him before she said what he already knew.

"I love you." She didn't know why she loved him, but she did. She didn't know why she had to have him for her own, but she knew she must. She wanted him like no other, and she would quit fighting it.

He smiled. "I love you, too."

Her eyes watered. "I don't know what to do about it, but I want you to know I really love you. Everything just happened so fast."

He stroked her hair and kissed her back softly. "Come on, babe, let's go to bed."

She walked in front of him, and he was filled with wanting her all over again as he saw her ass move in an inviting way. She turned around playfully, and he saw the mischief in her face.

"There's the girl I know and love." He wasn't lying. She was the one he adored.

She teased him as she paraded around him in a circle. "So, you like this playful side of me most? Not the serious side, right?" She laughed and patted his ass. "What else do you like most about me, Mr. O'Brien? What is it that gets you going most? I know what it is. Do you want me to show you?"

He winked inviting her to use and abuse him while licking his swollen lips lightly. "I'm all yours for the taking."

She pushed him down on the bed and before he had a chance for foreplay, she mounted him immediately. "I need you to fuck me now and fuck me hard. Fuck my pussy, baby." She was quick with her movements, and he knew their foreplay had in fact been in front of the mirror with her pulsating against his spent cock.

Her hair draped over her shoulders, and he noticed her tits were perky and full. There wasn't a sign of age anywhere on her body. He had claimed her in her youth. His baby would later be the only thing that would undue her body's perfection, but when the time came, he would be ready for slight imperfections.

In the meantime, her flat stomach was perfect and led to the best set of tits a woman had a right to possess. He devoured them as she came and was satisfied

knowing this was the beginning of a night full of passion ahead. This was the Carol he knew. The sexual creature before him was the Carol he loved. He wasn't ashamed that he loved her for her body because it was what she did with that body that brought him to love her completely. Yes, he knew sex led to love and love to sex. It was part of human nature. With them, it was going to be more. They were completely obsessed with one another.

After she came quickly on the bed, he massaged her clit and slowed his pace. He watched as his length entered her and felt her creamy passion begin to thicken again. He knew she was already there again. As she began to sit forward and move back, she quickened her steady pace. Her legs clenched tightly around him, and she threw her head back calling out his name as he watched. She moved her hands to his chest and pumped up and down as she met her climax screaming uncontrollably.

"Ummm...that's it, Tom....Shove your cock into me harder....Oh yeah...come on—do it....Harder baby...harder."

Something during her last climax brought back a clip Tom had seen of her with William. He'd seen the whole event, of course, because the whole thing was in fact posted on the internet unedited. She had mounted him quickly on a sofa in the conference room and immediately started bucking him wildly instructing him to 'shove his cock into her harder.'

The whole scene glazed Tom's eyes over, and just as she had instructed William to do, she had told him to do the same.

"Like this?" He rolled her over and spread her legs farther apart. "Get ready, baby, cause I'm giving you the whole package." He plowed into her with rapid force her face told him she enjoyed completely. He did it a couple of times and then looked at her. "Tell me again what it is you want."

"I want you to shove your large, swollen, cock into my pussy and don't stop."

He placed his palms down on the bed next to her hips and thrust into her several times. His body was tired, but he knew how to satisfy her. The images of her and William made him more determined to show her what his cock could do for her.

"You feel that, baby?" He plunged a couple more hard strokes into her.

"Mmmm...yeah that's it...come to me...I'm going to..." Her body began to shake, and his pace quickened. His length stroked her completely, and they called out to the other one in wild screams. He pounded her until he was sure he had released all he could give her and then rolled over on his side.

"You are undoubtedly the best fuck any man could ever want."

She looked at him and laughed. "Wow, that's romantic."

He sat up on one elbow. "Okay, you're right it wasn't romantic but this...this wasn't exactly making love." He paused as he pointed to the dressing area. "In there, yes."

He pulled her to him and kissed her forehead. "Out here, no way. *We fucked out here.*"

They both laughed. Her feelings weren't hurt because she knew he was only telling the truth. She liked to fuck and loved his dick any way she could get it. She wrapped herself up in his arms and fell into a deep, peaceful sleep.

The dreams didn't come to haunt her. Instead, they came to haunt him. He dreamed Sally was standing over him laughing as he watched Carol and William grinding it out on the conference room table. He saw Carol take William's hand, and he watched as he pulled her up to him and his hardened dick. He saw her straddle him, take his cock and shove it up inside of her. He screamed for them to stop as he lowered his mouth to take in her breasts and fondle her clit.

He woke up once in a cold sweat and returned to the nightmare all over again. William was nuzzling her breasts, and he was trying to get him to stop. He was telling him to move away from her, but he wouldn't. Instead, he took her nipple playfully in between his teeth and bit her slightly, so she would call out his name in front of him. "Watch me, Tommy Boy, I'm fucking your girl," he heard him say. He watched and waited to see what happened next and saw William enter her.

The dream was like the clip on the internet, focused on her pussy and his dick entering into her. He screamed out for her to stop, and she wouldn't listen. He told

William to stop, but he pressed deeper into her, and then he heard the gunshot and was instantly awake.

Chapter Twenty

He looked over at her, and she was sleeping, so he went downstairs to the office. He turned on the computer and answered an e-mail from Tansie congratulating him on a good public statement; one she felt would help Carol restore some of her failing reputation. He didn't see how. He then clicked on the file marked WILLIAM BALFOUR AND CAROL LANGLEY. He turned the volume up and sat back to watch.

He saw her look at him as if she were leading him in, and it looked as if she were consenting to an earlier invitation for sex. He watched as he kissed her. She was the one to initiate the sex because she unzipped him. She instructed him to "Fuck her like he meant it." Tom had heard that before.

She took a strong hold on his cock and shoved his dick into her pussy. He made a sick comment about her being tight like a virgin. *And she was tight. They agreed on that.*

Tom turned the volume up as he watched her rise and fall with a man who was marked for death as soon as he became caught in the clutches of her tight womanly web. He watched her ass in the clutches of another man's palms as he squeezed the flesh of her skin. He watched the close footage of the publishing giant carrying her to the conference table. His dick never left her as he set her down on the table. He saw him twist her over and slap her ass.

He saw the look in the man's eyes. He paused it while he looked to be sure. Yes, it was there. He knew the look himself. It was why William Balfour died. His wife saw

it, too. After he had her once, he would have fucked her again. He was in her clutches. Tom knew. He knew better than anyone else what that felt like.

He squirmed as he heard him yell. "Yeah, baby, come to me. That's right. Come to me. Fuck me. Ride me harder. Fuck me hard. You like fucking me, don't you? Does my dick get you off? It's a perfect fit for your pussy, baby. It's a fit. You know it, don't you?"

Tom's anger grew again like it did when he saw it the first time. It was a good thing his wife had killed him because Tom would've stood in line to take his shot, too. He watched them move to the sofa and turned up the volume yet again to hear her say, "Umm William, shove your cock into me harder, William..."

The footage was the tape from the security office that made it to the internet. It was uncut, unedited and made sure to capture every angle. Tom O'Brien had a way of dealing with this. He always faced his adversities, and he could turn them around to his advantage. He knew the way to do it, and if Carol would agree, he knew he could get it out of his mind once and for all.

"What are you doing? What the HELL do you think you are doing?" His thoughts were interrupted as she entered the room. She walked over and looked at the computer and then back at him shaken by what she saw. She yanked the chord from the wall unplugging the computer.

"TOM... WHAT THE HELL?" She was in his face practically. "ANSWER ME!" She walked into the other room and headed straight for the bar.

He took a minute to think about how he would respond. When he walked into the other room, she was taking shots of whiskey and chasing it with a glass of water.

"Just tell me why you wanted to see it again. I just don't understand this. I don't understand you."

He sat down on one of the stools careful to observe her before he said anything. "I know how this looks to you. I'm sorry if that hurt you." He watched her intently.

Her eyes were wild. "HURT ME? YOU were disrespecting me like all of those other people out there in the world who will be clicking on BALFOUR FUCKS THE AUTHOR."

He knew she was right. "I'm sorry, I...I couldn't help myself."

"YOU COULDN'T HELP YOURSELF? YOU COULDN'T HELP YOURSELF? I fuck your lights out upstairs, and you come down here to watch me fuck another man. WHAT IS WRONG WITH YOU?" Exasperated, she sat down behind the bar and poured herself another whiskey. She sat there for a while before he moved around to pick her up off the floor. By the time he did, the once-full bottle of whiskey was near empty.

"What are you doing to yourself, Carol? This isn't going to help. Let's talk about this."

She staggered into his arms. "So, fine, you talk, and I'll listen."

He fumbled around for his words. "*I had the dreams this time,*" he began. "William was fucking you and telling me to watch so ..." He couldn't finish what he wanted to say because her anger stumped him.

Carol was furious. "That's real good, Tom. A dead man comes to you in your dreams and tells you to watch your girlfriend fuck him, so you say to yourself, gee, what a great idea, I think I'll go do just that." She laughed at her own sarcastic and twisted wit.

He was sorry. She could see it.

"It was *actually* just like that. I decided I had to watch. I *wanted* to watch. I even, I guess, *enjoyed* watching."

"Well, then tell me something, Tom, was it as good for you as it was for him? Did you jack-off watching us go at it? Did you watch as he poured himself into me? Did you see how bad he wanted it? Did you?"

"Yes, I saw how much he wanted you, and I'm sure his wife saw it, too. What I saw, Carol, could be her motive for murder, and you better be glad she didn't come after you, too, before she was caught."

Carol softened for only a minute. "What are you talking about?"

"I can show you if you want. There are a couple of places on the tape that tell a very important story. He was in love with you."

Carol stood up enraged. "HE DIDN'T KNOW ME."

Tom spoke firmly. "I didn't know you either, but I was mesmerized by you before I met you. He knew *of you*. He knew you were going to be on that flight. I'd bet money on it."

Carol wheeled around. "I didn't even know I was going to be on that flight until the night before I took it. How could he have possibly known I'd be on it?"

She realized it at the same time he said it. "Tansie."

The whiskey ran rampant through her veins as she reached for the phone and dialed Tansie's number. "I know I woke you. Tansie, the police have evidence of why Balfour was on my flight. Do you know what it might be?" she lied.

Tansie was silent.

"Tansie, they're saying you are the reason he was on my flight from Tennessee to Boston. You told him I would be on that flight. You even told him about Tom. Is any of this true?"

Tom had to hand it to her; she had played it just right with Tansie. Carol waited for her answer.

"He's been obsessed with you from the beginning," she started slowly. "In the very beginning, Carol, he offered us some really good contracts. They were too good to be true and sent up red flags. Then, he used to stop by the office looking for you when he had heard you were in town. Sure, he could've gotten to you on his own, but if he had attempted it, well, the fallout would've been more than he could've stood. As you can see, it was a very bad idea from the beginning." Carol had Tansie on speaker phone, and she listened then nodded for Tom to respond.

"Tansie, thank you for being honest with Carol. Given the circumstances surrounding the case, I think it would be best if you could let me handle all media contacts and inquiries on the Balfour case from here forward."

Tansie agreed, "You are absolutely right, Tom. Carol, please forgive me. I would never hurt you or your reputation intentionally."

Carol fought back tears. "It was unforgivable Tansie. He was a married man. My heart was breaking. You knew how fragile I was, and you did this?" The tears began to pour.

Tom touched her hand and continued. "Oh, and one more thing, Tansie."

There was silence on the other end as if she knew what would be next.

"I don't know exactly how your business world works precisely, but Carol can fill me in on the details—you're fired. Either appoint someone else in your office to work with Carol, or we'll find someone in another office." He hung up the phone.

Carol went to the bar again and poured herself another drink. What was she doing allowing him to take over her life and her business? She had worked too hard and too long to let him just manhandle her. She turned around and demanded answers.

"What gave you the right to talk to Tansie on my behalf?" Her face wrinkled and eyes squinted.

He looked at her and saw her fiery spirit resurfacing and wished instantly he could claim her. He licked his bottom lip and went in for a try, but she resisted his kiss.

"Believe it or not, Carol, right now, I'm your attorney first. All of this will blow over soon since they have a confession, but we still needed some answers. Now you have one. Didn't you wonder what a hotshot publisher was doing on an early flight from East Tennessee? To me and everyone else, it just didn't add up. Now, it does."

"Leave it to Matlock to solve the case by watching his step-daughter fuck the publisher." She tilted her glass in his direction.

He moved in toward her. "You are not my step-daughter. You had it right earlier when you referred to yourself as my girlfriend and lady you are one hot girlfriend." His eyes undressed her.

She looked up at him with anger still in her eyes. "You still had no right to watch that clip again. Once was enough."

He walked over to the barstool and pulled her legs apart. He fit himself into her crotch and pressed into her with his length hardened by what he saw earlier *and* by what she had done to him upstairs. "You're right, if I watch again, I'll watch with you."

She looked at him bewildered. "You were turned on by that. I can't believe it. Me fucking another man turned you on? You are a sick, twisted bastard." She drew her hand back to slap him, and he caught her in midair.

"Carol, let's just come clean. You once told me you weren't that into porn. So, okay, you aren't into porn, but, honey, you basically write some very porn-worthy scenes into your books. You've seen porn, or you couldn't write those scenes that you claim you've never acted on. You've watched porn, or you wouldn't know you didn't like to watch it, and now, honey, you're in one of the hottest flicks on the internet, and you look good doing what you're doing. I only wish I was the one starring in the flick with you."

He pulled her up by her upper arms and kissed her hard on the mouth. She first resisted and then found her tongue tapping out a tempo with his as they devoured the other one completely.

"I'm still mad." She pulled back, and he could tell by the look on her face she'd soon be over it.

He pulled her leg up and rubbed his jeans into her wet pussy. "Get over it," he whispered. "Because we're going to do this. I'm horny." He knew she didn't have on panties, and he took full advantage of it as he held one leg high and used his other hand to finger her center.

He whispered into her ear, "Yes, forgive me, I was turned on by you fucking someone else but don't misunderstand." He moved his finger from her pussy and held her head back to look at him. "I know the circumstances behind why you were with him in the first place. It was a revenge fuck. I saw it in your eyes. You've told me that it was, and I believe you, but the circumstances that drove you to him are very much a part of what turns me on."

"You like to watch? Then watch, but watch me with you. Watch me masturbate. Watch pornos, but promise me, you'll never watch those clips again. I can't stand to think you might be hurting because of something I did, and I know some of the verbal commands you heard hurt you. You say you care about me, and if you do, then watching and listening to all of that must have hurt you."

He cupped her face in his hands and kissed her deeply. She had hurt him with some of the things she said, but unfortunately, as twisted as it sounded, the truth was he grew incredibly hard watching her with Balfour. Yes, a lot of the reason he was so turned on was how she ended up with the poor bastard in the first place.

As he kissed her, she ran her fingers down to his crotch and unzipped him. She moved his dick to tip over the waistband of his shorts as if it tried peeking over them waiting to come out and play. She kissed it savoring the taste of him then slowly kissed her way back up to his chest and neck.

He lost his pants in record time, and she played with him fingering all of him lightly until his balls were firm and hard like his cock. She marveled in his length and stroked him from the base to the tip measuring his fullness with excitability.

"You want to fuck me while watching me fuck William, don't you?" She whispered into his ear, and his manhood continued to harden "Then, let's do it." She almost pulled him into the office-library and watched as he plugged the cord back into the wall. The alcohol had her head swimming, but she decided if it turned him on, then she wanted to do it. They were, after all, uninhibited as a sexual couple. There was apparently nothing they couldn't do together or say to one another when they did.

"Are you sure about this?" She nodded but down deep she thought about how morbid the whole idea was.

She moved papers from the desk and sat down beside the computer monitor. She waited for him to find the clip he wanted, which happened to be the start of the entire video. He looked at her lovingly and thanked her for letting him watch and do her at the same time. "This is the sexiest thing I've ever done in my life," he confessed. She

watched, too, and quickly saw the appeal in the movie just as he had witnessed for himself earlier. She decided she might like watching as much as he did.

She stood up placing her hands on the desk in front of her. Carol watched the screen as Tom entered her from behind. She hadn't even started fucking William yet, and Tom was already coming. She moved in rhythm with his body as he grinded her into the desk. He was rotating his cock within her, and William was just beginning to kiss her. Tom reached around her and clicked the mouse to stop the video. "Wait," he whispered. "Wait until I'm ready again." He was breathless and had no trouble regaining an erection. He'd never been so completely turned on in his entire life.

Her looks seduced him, and she told him to sit down in the executive chair. She sat on the ottoman, and he sat in the recliner with his legs naturally spread apart. She clicked the mouse and told him to watch her and the monitor very closely. *Might as well give him the fantasy of a lifetime*, she thought.

The monitor showed William fondling her breasts, and Tom told her to move closer, and he touched her tits as he watched William's hands cup her breasts. She moved her hands underneath his firm ass and pushed his dick into her wet lips while her tongue tasted the remaining cum from an earlier display of satisfaction. She sucked him as tightly as she could as William marveled about fucking her tight pussy. Tom moaned and stroked her head gently. "That's it baby, that's it. Go down on me, baby. You got it. Go down. Suck it, baby." His voice was raspy, needy.

William had moved her to the boardroom table, and Tom was about to come again, so he asked her to stand up. She took a final chokehold on his cock and sucked it deep into her throat and released him with a final kiss on the tip of his dick. By the time she stood up and leaned over the desk, William had entered her again from behind. Tom wasted no time in doing the same only he didn't put his hands on her ass like William had done; instead he reached around her to pull at both breasts gently. "You're horny, aren't you? This turns you on, too, doesn't it?"

She hated to admit it, but it had turned her on more than anything she could ever think of, but it was because of Tom and the way he was acting out on what he saw.

Her excitement came from him and the way he appreciated the opportunity to share everything with her completely. She found it deliciously wicked like something she might read in a risqué novel.

He fondled her for a moment longer but knew the scene he liked most was up next, and he bit his lower lip in anticipation. He saw her throw her hips harder in the air as she gave William the last ride of his life. She bucked against his cock and threw him into a position where he had to hold her steady with his palms firmly on her ass. She watched, too, admiring the sexual expertise she clearly had.

Tom rammed his cock into her all at once. "Talk to me, baby. Fuck me like you fucked him. Tell me how you want to fuck me. Tell me." She wanted to be sure she did it right in case a little jealousy comparison was going on there.

Tom let his cock settle down into the depths of her pussy. He wiggled his ass to grind in as far as he could and told her not to move. He continued to take in the security movie but kept a firm grip on the real thing at the same time. He wished silently he could've been closer for show. He didn't know what had gotten into him, but this woman had a certain spell over him like no one he'd ever known. He never wanted to be left out of a scene like the one in front of them.

He stood solid with her ass in the air and his cock packaged tightly in her warmth. She and William began to rock in motion, and it was obvious to him they were both in the throes of their climax.

"That's it," she began. She knew it was the part he was waiting on. "There it is baby, See, there it is. That's me fucking him. He's making me come like I want you to make me come. I liked it, too. I liked feeling his hard dick pounding my pussy, but I love feeling your dick inside of me. I love feeling the pulsating in your veins."

Now, it was her turn to wonder where the thoughts and perverse feelings were coming from. She didn't know, and she didn't care. She liked the power it gave her. More importantly, she loved that it empowered her over Tom.

Tom didn't move. He watched and just tried to press farther inside of her. He was turned on by what she said and enjoyed watching her buck at him trying to encourage him to quicken his pace. He didn't move.

She began to buck Tom wildly like she had William only she screamed her requests, "FASTER BABY, COME ON FASTER, TOM." He began to ram her pussy with forced penetration. "COME ON, TOM, YOU CAN DO ME ALL NIGHT LONG. JUST FUCK ME HARD." She was screaming and moaning all the while her ass was driving against him, and his dick was plowing into her.

He drove in a couple of more strides before he finally reached his climax. As he came, he heard her favorite line. "Shove your cock into me harder." He didn't want to let her down. His cock, after all, was larger than William's, and he knew she didn't just like his cock, but she *loved his dick*. Any woman would because he definitely possessed the goods, and he knew how to use what he had.

"Come to me, baby, shove your thick, long dick into my pussy. Get me off, baby. Ride me." He gyrated in a circular motion and thrust into her harder and harder, and when he came, he exploded into her heat making sure she was left exhausted from it all but with a wicked smile that told him everything he needed to know. *She had enjoyed watching it, too.*

Tom and Carol spent the night all over the house after the movie had ignited a passion within them that couldn't burn out. When they woke up the next morning, Carol sat on the edge of the bed and looked out over the lake. Her mother had been a lot of things. She'd been nasty to Carol her entire life. She'd taken more than she could ever give. Yet, somewhere in the midst of it all, she managed to leave behind one of the best gifts she could've ever given Carol. She gave her Tom, and after the night of intimate ecstasy they'd shared, she was sure it was a delicious gift that would keep on giving!

The End