

Lacey Savage

Like A  
Virgin

## LIKE A VIRGIN

“I’m going to be taking notes throughout this session,” Josie explained, gesturing toward her computer.

“I understand.”

“And if you have no objections, I’d like to record your answers as well.” She pulled open a drawer and withdrew a small tape recorder. When Eric nodded his consent, she placed it on the desk and pressed the “Record” button.

Though Eric still had to fill out all the basic information in the stack of paperwork he’d take home with him when he left, Josie made a note of his name, address, and the time of the initial interview. She also asked him a number of inane questions that she’d never thought to pose to anyone before, all in an effort to delay the inevitable.

Finally, when she’d run out of meaningless queries and had listened with rapt attention as Eric described in detail everything from his shoe size—ten and a half—to his favorite drink—banana daiquiri—she took a deep breath and asked, “What is your sexual orientation?”

“Heterosexual,” Eric said without missing a beat.

“Have you ever had a homosexual experience?”

“Yes.”

“Did you enjoy it?”

The corners of his lips turned upward in a gesture of self-conscious amusement. “It probably wouldn’t help anything if I lied, would it?”

She shook her head. “Not a thing.”

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# LIKE A VIRGIN

BY

LACEY SAVAGE

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LIKE A VIRGIN  
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*For Peter...my hero.*

# CHAPTER 1

She thought she was going to die.

Josie Wright struggled to breathe as rivulets of sweat ran over her forehead, dripped down her cheeks and soaked her tight exercise top. Excruciating pain cut off her respiration as it knifed through her.

“Hold it, you’re doing great. Just a little while longer. Hold it.” The yoga instructor’s rough, masculine voice made a warm shiver run down her spine. Or maybe that was another stab of pain.

The move didn’t look hard. Twenty other students stood like stone statues on one foot, the other foot hovering a few inches off the floor, their hands clasped to their chests.

They’d been standing like that for an eternity.

“You’re doing great,” the maddening voice repeated. “Just a little longer.”

Josie’s eyes watered. Her ankle quivered as she fought to maintain the pose, the shaking throwing her off balance. The room spun

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drunkenly for a brief moment, then the floor rushed up to meet her.

She collapsed in a heap on her foam mat. The landing didn't hurt nearly as much as standing there for the past ten minutes had.

"All right everyone, great job. Let's move on to the camel."

His feet seemed to glide on the hardwood floor to stop only a few inches away from her face. As Josie looked up, the instructor beamed a wide smile at her fallen form. She clenched her jaw and forced herself to hold his gaze, even though her cheeks burned.

No one else had fallen. None of the other students looked even slightly out of breath, but Josie felt like she'd just run a marathon, and lost. The instructor winked before turning his back to her and heading to the front of the class, although perhaps he'd only blinked sweat out of his eyes.

"I'm going to kill you," Josie mumbled between gritted teeth.

To her right, Felicia Locke chuckled. "I told you this would be fun."

"Yeah. And you lied." Rising unsteadily to her feet, Josie fought a wave of nausea. This was *not* fun.

Slender and curvaceous, Felicia looked much too calm. Though sweat coated her narrow face, her gaze remained glued to the instructor, her body molding to his every word.

"Get down on your knees with your heels pressed against your buttocks."

Josie did as directed, grateful for the relief flooding through her muscles.

The instructor looked straight at her as he spoke. "Reaching backward, grasp your left ankle with your left hand and your right ankle with your right hand."

Lifting her gaze to the ceiling, she fumbled to reach her feet, then moved her grip higher. Her stomach stretched, flattening against her spine.

"Inhale through your nose and lift your buttocks off your legs,



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arching your back and thrusting your abdomen forward. Tilt your head as far back as possible.”

If she thought the earlier move had been hell, this one was much worse. Pain fluttered through her limbs, thorough in its relentless drive. Sweat broke through her every pore, coating her tank top.

The temperature in the small room had continued to rise steadily since they’d arrived, and now it hovered somewhere around the boiling mark. Josie’s gaze remained fixed on the ceiling, on the green paint that had begun to peel.

Her chest, arms and legs protested as the instructor insisted they hold the pose just a little longer, then longer yet.

*Dear God, if you let me live through this, I’ll give up chocolate.*

“You’re halfway there. You’re doing great!”

She bit down hard on her lower lip in an effort to keep from screaming. The pain had become unbearable. She closed her eyes, furrowed her brow, clenched her teeth, all to no avail. A small, strangled moan fought its way out of her throat.

*Fuck that. I’ll give up men.*

“Okay, everyone, that’s enough for today. Let’s enter our cool-down routine.”

Twenty minutes later, Josie wrapped her hands tightly around her water bottle as she faced her best friend. “I can’t believe you didn’t tell me it would be like this!”

“Like what?” Felicia blinked her long eyelashes and smiled her most innocent smile.

“Knock it off. You know exactly what I mean.”

“Yeah, so maybe it’s a little intense.” She shrugged, took a step closer to the full-length wall mirror and brushed a stray bead of sweat from her flawless cheek.

“Intense?” Josie’s voice rose, attracting the attention of two women still huddled together on their mats. She turned her back on them and

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faced her friend. "Watching 24 is a little intense. Facing your cheating bastard of an ex-boyfriend is a little intense. This was cruel and unusual."

"You're exaggerating."

"Maybe if I'd been doing this three times a week for the past two years, I'd feel the same way you do. But you don't bring a novice to this kind of thing." She raised her right hand and waved it in front of Felicia's face. The receptionist had tied a red string around her wrist, marking her as a beginner. In retrospect, red probably hadn't been the best color choice. It now matched the tone of her flushed skin.

"I tried to tell you what you were getting into. You wanted to come."

"You said this was 'hot yoga!'" She hated the whiny tone that laced her voice, but she couldn't help it. When Felicia had first mentioned the class, Josie had pictured herself cross-legged on a mat, her palms spread before her in a gesture of supplication, eyes closed, soft, meditative music permeating the air.

"Then admit it," Felicia said. "I was right."

"About what?"

"He's hot."

Josie grasped her lower lip between her teeth and shot a furtive look toward their instructor. Tall, tan, and built like a Greek god, he leaned against the windowsill speaking to a petite blonde. He ran a hand through his dark brown hair, leaving it disheveled. His locks brushed the back of his neck, glistening with sweat.

"He needs a haircut," Josie noted.

Felicia laughed. "What he needs is a good fuck. I hear he hasn't had one in years."

Josie sucked in a slow breath through her teeth as she tried to banish the image of the sexy instructor's hard body beneath hers, his hands roaming over her skin, those flexible limbs tangled with hers in a

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sweaty heap.

He looked past the blonde's shoulder, and their gazes locked. He held hers with a magnetic force, his lips curving slightly in a sensual smile.

With a quick incline of his head toward the woman he'd been speaking with, the instructor headed in Josie's direction. They stood on opposite sides of the room, but his long strides carried him to her in no time.

A dimple flashed in one of his cheeks. "Glad you could make it today, Felicia."

Josie's stomach flip-flopped as his deep voice rumbled over her. Every nerve ending in her body came alive at the mere proximity to this man.

"And this must be Josie." He turned his dark blue eyes on her, appraising her from head to toe. Another one of those heartbreaking smiles passed across his face.

Heat flared anew and drifted through her body in languid waves. She took a step back, acutely aware of what she must smell like after a torturous hour of bending and contorting.

"She's the one," Felicia said.

"Good. I was hoping you'd be able to bring her today. Eric Stokes," he said, extending a broad hand toward Josie.

Instinctively, she reached out and gripped it before realizing her own palm was still slick with sweat. She tried to withdraw her hand, but it was too late. He held her firmly in his grasp, his thumb running maddening circles over her heated skin.

Her pulse quickened, and a rumble of noise seemed to thud through her mind as she struggled to form a coherent sentence. Caught in the depth of his gaze, she was speechless, like a teenager in the grip of her first crush.

"I need a wife," he said, saving her the trouble of coming up with a

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witty remark. Instead, she could only stare, stunned at his revelation and at the flood of heat that ran through her body to pool between her legs at his words. “The job’s yours, if you want it.”

\* \* \*

Eric’s gaze locked with Josie’s, and he watched her struggle to grasp the real meaning behind his words.

His lips twitched in amusement. The overheated blush that had tinged her pale cheeks had all but drained from her face. She looked entirely too sexy as she nibbled on her lower lip, her wide, almond-shaped green eyes glinting with disbelief and unmistakable desire.

“My agency,” she said at last as comprehension dawned across her face. “You want to hire my agency.”

“I want to hire you.” He loosened his grip on her hand, reluctant to release her, but knowing proper etiquette demanded it.

She cleared her throat and shot Felicia a look that could have melted steel. “I see. I’m afraid I don’t have a business card on me right now, Mr. Stokes—”

“Eric,” he interrupted, leaning back on his heels.

The color returned to her features, and she faced him squarely, tilting her small chin up at an angle. “Fine. Eric. I can leave our number with your secretary. If you’ll call tomorrow to make an appointment, I’ll—”

“No,” he said, interrupting her again. A flash of annoyance glinted in her eyes, but she hid it quickly. “I want you to do this, not one of our employees. And we need to get started tonight.”

“I better leave you two alone,” Felicia said with a bemused smile.

Josie nodded. “You and I will talk later.”

They stood in silence for a moment while Felicia stepped over the threshold into the cheery hallway outside the studio. Eric had opened the windows after the class ended, and a soft breeze allowed the sweet scent of freshly cut grass to drift into the small room. It caressed his

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bare arms, cooled his fevered skin.

"I can understand your frustration, Josie. Trust me, I wouldn't be asking if it wasn't important."

"All right, though I don't understand your rush. It'll take at least six months to work up a profile on you, then another month or two to find a suitable match. The reason Modern Matchmakers has been such a success is due to our commitment to every match, our thorough research and profiling methods. Starting tonight isn't going to change anything. The process will still take just as long."

"I don't have that kind of time," he said.

Josie chuckled, the gesture lighting up her face. It was the first time he'd seen her smile since she came into the studio earlier that day, and he found he didn't want her to stop. "No? Mr. Stokes—Eric," she corrected when he held up a hand, "You're probably used to getting your way, but let me assure you, Modern Matchmakers will not change our practices just because one man demands it."

He'd expected her to say as much. Modern Matchmakers had an incredible success rate by anyone's standards. Ninety-two percent of all couples they matched ended up at the altar, and eighty-five percent of those were still wed five years later. At a time when divorce rates across the country were greater than fifty percent, and it took years to find a suitable life partner, those statistics were hard to beat.

Which was exactly why he had to convince her to take the job.

He managed a smile. "Is that so? I can't say I'm not disappointed. I didn't expect the agency's founder to balk at the idea of doing things a little faster this time around."

She did an admirable job of keeping the anger out of her voice. "I'm not balking at anything. I'd be able to find you a suitable wife in two weeks, if I had to. But that's just not the way we work."

"Now that just sounds like empty boasting."

Eric knew he played a dangerous game. Taunting her could

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backfire, could cause her to leave without a backward glance. The thought made his heartbeat quicken. He didn't want her to walk away. Not yet.

*It's only the match that matters. My future wife.*

*Josie Wright has nothing to do with it.*

Even as the thought flashed through his mind, he knew it wasn't true. Ever since she'd walked through the door of the studio, he hadn't been able to take his eyes off her. He'd wanted to help her up when she'd stumbled, to teach her every possible way of bending, stretching and writhing – preferably under him.

The electricity between them sparkled like an intense, living pulse. He hadn't felt so attracted to anyone in years, not since Melanie...

Giving himself a quick mental shake, he turned his attention back to the real problem at hand. "Well?" he prompted. "Aren't you going to tell me to get lost, or to call your office in the morning?"

Her eyes narrowed and she watched him for a long moment, worrying her lip between her teeth. Loose tendrils of red hair had escaped her tidy ponytail to curl around her face.

"Are you toying with me, Eric? Because if you are—"

"I'll pay you," he said, perhaps a little too quickly.

She waved her hand in the air dismissively. "Of course you'll pay me. And that's a really bad habit, you know?"

"What? Paying for services rendered?"

"Interrupting people when they speak."

He swallowed hard, feeling a guilty flush rush to his cheeks. She was right, of course. It was a horrible habit, and one he'd been trying to break for far too long. Not knowing how to apologize for something that had become such an ingrained part of his personality, he simply chose to ignore her remark.

"And you're avoiding my question."

"I'll take the job," she said after only the briefest hesitation.

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“Though not to prove myself to you.”

“Of course not.” He couldn’t keep the satisfaction entirely from his voice.

Outside, a child screamed, and Josie continued as if Eric hadn’t spoken. “It wasn’t just empty boasting.”

He watched the emotions warring on her face and wondered if there was more to Josie’s decision than just being pushed into a corner.

The sharp stab of unexpected guilt took him by surprise. He’d taunted her, provoked her into accepting his business. She ran the most successful dating agency in Atlantic Beach; heck, probably the most successful agency in all of Florida. She didn’t have anything to prove to anyone, least of all to an aggressive yoga instructor.

“Look, I’m sorry,” he began, each word sticking in his throat. He wasn’t used to apologizing, but the look in her clear green eyes made him feel like no matter how much he did, empty words wouldn’t be enough.

“No need,” she said quickly. “I have to change. If we’re going to start the process tonight, you’ll need to come to my office.”

He nodded. “I’ll meet you outside in twenty minutes.”

“I drove here,” she reminded him. “We’ll meet at my office in an hour.”

A smile tugged at Eric’s mouth. He was used to demure, shy women, but Josie’s boldness and independence excited him in ways he hadn’t expected. In the past, he’d found outspoken, forthright women to be overbearing. But Josie was soft, tender, with a genuine smile that made heat rush to his groin.

“Whatever you say,” he murmured as his hand moved almost of its own accord to brush a tendril of fiery red hair away from her cheek. “You’re the boss.”

## CHAPTER 2

Josie walked through the deserted hallway into her spacious office and wondered, for the hundredth time since leaving the studio, what on Earth had possessed her to agree to Eric's ridiculous request. She didn't work this way. In ten years of running Modern Matchmakers, she'd never been tempted to comply with such a brash demand.

This one decision could cost her everything she'd struggled so hard to achieve. If she screwed up this match, and Eric decided to talk about it, he wouldn't be telling anyone how he forced her into agreeing to work the profile much quicker than she otherwise would have. He'd only declare she couldn't get the job done.

Except he hadn't forced her. Not exactly.

She'd willingly agreed, thrilled by the challenge in his voice, by the sensual turn of his mouth and the thought of seeing him again.

"Stupid, stupid, stupid," she muttered as she collapsed into the black leather chair behind her desk and cradled her head in her hands.



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A soft knock on the open door made her spine jerk, and she glanced up to find Eric Stokes leaning against the doorframe, looking lean and infinitely sexy. He'd changed into form-fitting dark blue jeans that encased his muscular thighs and a khaki T-shirt with the words "Get Some Love" scrawled across his chest.

Right then, there was nothing she wanted more.

Josie rose and braced her hands against the executive-style desk, suddenly grateful that its chunky bulk hid her quivering legs. "Have a seat," she said, indicating a plush leather chair mirroring her own.

Eric moved confidently, one hand still in his pocket, and did as Josie suggested. His spicy aftershave mingled with the sweet fragrance of incense that permeated the air at the Lotus Yoga Center. The sensual combination created a unique essence that sent her thoughts reeling in exquisitely naughty directions.

Taking an unsteady breath, Josie sat down and turned her attention to the computer screen. "I trust you had no problem finding your way here."

"None. The instructions you left with the receptionist were perfectly clear."

Josie cleared her throat. "Good. Since we're on such a short timeline, we need to get started. Before we do, though, I have to ask. Why the rush?"

Eric hesitated for only a moment. "I made a list of goals when I turned twenty. Finish school, get a degree, own a business. I met all of them, save one. I vowed to be married and well on my way to starting a family by the time I turned thirty. My birthday is five weeks away."

She raised her eyebrows. "It wouldn't be the first time a man hadn't met a goal he'd set out to achieve by a certain milestone."

"It would for me. As you pointed out earlier, I'm not used to taking no for an answer. Failure is never an option, Josie. Even when it's my own doing."

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Somehow, his answer didn't surprise her. She'd heard much worse reasons for wanting to wed, and most had to do with money. Eric's explanation seemed centered on nothing but male ego. She could deal with that.

"I understand this is a rigorous process you put your candidates through," he continued, his blue eyes fixed on hers.

"It is. I'm going to give you a package of standard forms to fill out tonight, and I'll need you to return those to me tomorrow. They're basic, for the most part: name, address, employment history, references, that sort of thing."

Eric leaned forward in his chair and nodded. "But there's more to it, isn't there?"

"Yes."

Josie's cheeks heated as a shiver of discomfort raced up her spine, and she mentally cursed herself for devising this screening and evaluation method. Not that it had ever been a problem before. The questions were intensely personal, and she'd decided long ago that the only way to discern if a candidate was telling the truth was to observe him as he answered each one in turn.

She'd taken a number of psychology classes and had become an expert on reading body language and other subtle signals that indicated a dishonest answer. Yet the idea of sitting across from Eric while he went into explicit detail about his sexual preferences made her squirm and press her legs together to calm the throbbing ache that settled between them.

"I'm going to be taking notes throughout this session," Josie explained, gesturing toward her computer.

"I understand."

"And if you have no objections, I'd like to record your answers as well." She pulled open a drawer and withdrew a small tape recorder. When Eric nodded his consent, she placed it on the desk and pressed

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the “Record” button.

Though Eric still had to fill out all the basic information in the stack of paperwork he’d take home with him when he left, Josie made a note of his name, address, and the time of the initial interview. She also asked him a number of inane questions that she’d never thought to pose to anyone before, all in an effort to delay the inevitable.

Finally, when she’d run out of meaningless queries and had listened with rapt attention as Eric described in detail everything from his shoe size—ten and a half—to his favorite drink—banana daiquiri—she took a deep breath and asked, “What is your sexual orientation?”

“Heterosexual,” Eric said without missing a beat.

“Have you ever had a homosexual experience?”

“Yes.”

“Did you enjoy it?”

The corners of his lips turned upward in a gesture of self-conscious amusement. “It probably wouldn’t help anything if I lied, would it?” She shook her head. “Not a thing.”

“Fine, then. Yes, I enjoyed it. Would I do it again? Only if my wife wanted to indulge in the occasional threesome. And let me stress that. *Very occasional.*”

“When was your last long-term relationship?”

“Five years ago.”

Josie couldn’t keep the surprise from her voice. “That long?”

“Yes.” He chuckled. “Why? Do I lose a point?”

His flippancy pricked the edges of her defenses and she straightened in her chair. “This isn’t a test. It’s simply the best way we’ve found to match you with a suitable life partner. I assume you want a wife with whom you’ll be able to spend the rest of your life?”

“Of course,” he said, still smirking.

Josie had the sudden urge to throw herself across the desk and wipe the grin off his face by sliding her tongue between his full, luscious

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lips. She wanted to see his defenses melt, his arrogance give way to fervor and lust.

She shook her head to clear the disturbing image. "One of the reasons we're so successful in our matches is due to this lengthy, involved process. Since you've put us on the fast track to finding you a wife, I have to speed through our usual preliminary steps and get right to the heart of the matter."

"Sex."

"Precisely. Sexual compatibility is vital to the longevity of a marriage."

"You'll get no argument from me."

Josie released a deep breath and allowed some of her frustration to dissipate. It wasn't Eric's fault that he caused every feminine nerve ending in her body to bristle into an aroused state of awareness, but she didn't know how much longer she could do this. They hadn't even gotten to some of the more intense questions yet, and her panties were already soaked through.

She shifted in her seat. "What do you look for in a woman's physical appearance?"

Their eyes met, and the air sizzled with electricity around her while Eric pondered the question. For a brief, heart stopping moment, Josie thought he'd describe her.

"I've always ended up with blondes," he began, and the sharp tug in her stomach suddenly came to a halt. "Short, petite, with a killer tan and a great body."

She typed quickly, pounding at the keys with more fervor than necessary. She continued pouring nonsensical words on the screen long after she'd recorded his words, unwilling to face him, not wanting to think about why his answer affected her at all.

Eric wanted a wife, and Josie was definitely not ready for a committed relationship. Though she loved her job and enjoyed seeing

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people walk off into the sunset together, she wasn't ready to give up her bachelorette days for anyone. So why did it matter that Eric wanted a blonde bombshell instead of a tall, much-too-skinny redhead?

It didn't.

Silence stretched on as Josie scanned the remainder of her questions and picked the one that seemed least likely to make her dampen the leather of her seat. "What's your favorite time of day to make love?"

"Mornings," Eric answered, a lazy smile on his delectable lips.

Another image flashed through Josie's mind. A four-poster bed, beams of bright sunshine pouring through the open window, a light breeze rustling the soft curtains. And Eric. Naked and spread out on top of clean white sheets, his tanned skin a perfect contrast to the pale linen.

She blinked hard, focusing her attention on the words on his T-shirt, which suddenly seemed like a proposal.

"I see...and how often would you prefer to make love in any given day?"

His dark hair gleamed as he tossed his head back and laughed, the strong, rough sound sending an uncontrollable shiver through her body. "As often as possible."

Josie caught her breath and stifled the moan that threatened to erupt from her throat. She forced herself to hold his gaze, to stare back at the unbridled lust that shone clearly in his blue eyes.

What would it be like to wake up beside Eric every morning? To be able to run her hands over the smooth, taut muscles of his stomach and grab his cock, to fill her eager sex with his thick rod? Josie's nipples budded at the thought, straining against her silk blouse.

This was madness. Delicious, heart pounding, madness.

"Could you be more specific?" she asked, trying to keep the fevered arousal from her voice.

"Breakfast, lunch and dinner. Once in the morning. Once in the

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middle of the day. And once again before bedtime.”

She couldn’t tell if he was teasing her, and she pressed her thighs together to quench the pulsing ache in her pussy while recording his answers in the file.

Fantasies flooded her mind with a fury she couldn’t control. She imagined him kissing her, stroking her body with expert hands, his mouth blazing trails of heat over her skin.

It had been too long since she’d had sex. That had to be all it was. Eric didn’t possess any magical qualities that set him apart from others. Any devastatingly handsome man would have been able to cause the same fevered lust rise up in her.

And there was nothing stopping her from taking advantage of the intense sexual energy sizzling around them. They lived in the twenty-first century. She could invite him back to her place, spend a phenomenal night in his arms, then let him get on with his search for a wife.

“Of course, all this decadent lovemaking would take place after the wedding,” he said, his deep voice intruding on her fiery thoughts.

Josie forced her attention back to the present. “And why’s that?” she asked, dismayed to realize her voice sounded husky with need.

Eric seemed surprised by her question. Leaning forward in his chair, he folded his hands in front of him and held her gaze. “Because my wife will be a virgin on our wedding night.”

\* \* \*

“He wants a *what*?” Felicia gaped at Josie, her coffee mug frozen half-way to her mouth, her eyes wide with disbelief.

“A virgin,” Josie replied calmly. She avoided Felicia’s gaze and removed the tape from the recorder.

Felicia eyed Josie over the rim of her bright pink mug, her pale brows knitted in confusion. “Why on Earth would he want one of those?” She spoke the words with a thick tone of disgust, as if the idea

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alone made her skin break out in hives.

Josie shrugged. "He didn't say. But he was adamant that either she was pure, innocent, and untouched by any other man, or he would take his business elsewhere."

"Of all the chauvinistic, macho, pigheaded—"

Josie raised a hand to stop Felicia's tirade. "We've had stranger requests. Remember the guy who insisted on marrying a woman who wore a size six and a half shoe? And what about the girl who refused to consider any man who didn't take his coffee black?"

Felicia gave a brief nod of acknowledgement and took a long sip of her drink. "I just wouldn't have expected it, that's all."

Neither had Josie.

Eric's words had had the same effect on her libido as if he'd doused her with a bucket of ice water. All those heated fantasies she'd entertained while he'd sat only inches away had dissipated as soon as he uttered his last request.

She'd rushed through the rest of the questions, making a half-hearted attempt at keeping up with the note taking, then she'd ushered him out of her office. Things had been different when she'd briefly considered giving in to her lustful daydreams. But as soon as he'd made her realize those thoughts were nothing more than mindless fantasies, she grew eager to have him out of her office. Better yet, out of the building, and as far away as possible.

He was far too tempting. Josie met a lot of eligible, single men in her line of work, and none had affected her as deeply as Eric Stokes.

Still, those lusty, heated fantasies just wouldn't go away. Even as she glanced at Felicia sitting across from her, Josie couldn't help remembering the way Eric's tight T-shirt hugged his muscular chest, his black hair curling around the nape of his neck, his arms corded with muscle. She licked her lips and stifled another untimely moan.

"Well, that's too bad," Felicia said, leaning forward. She reached

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for the tape in Josie's hand. "I'll turn that into a document we can add to his file."

Josie's fingers tightened around the hard plastic. "No, I'll do it."

Felicia frowned. "You have too much to do as it is. Hand it over, and I'll take some of the workload off your shoulders."

Josie hesitated. Felicia was right. She had enough work without worrying about transcribing the tape, yet Eric's voice and sexy confessions had set her nerve endings on fire. She didn't want to share him – any of him – with anyone else. Besides, she didn't know if her needy, lustful groans made their way onto the recording. The last thing she wanted was for Felicia to know how much Eric had affected her.

"I appreciate it, but I'll handle the Stokes file."

Felicia's lips curled into a knowing smile. "Whatever you say." She stood up, taking her Barbie mug with her. "I told you he was hot."

A blush crept up Josie's cheeks. "We've had a lot of good looking men walk through those doors."

"No one quite like him, though."

"Maybe," Josie grudgingly admitted. She didn't want to concede that Eric could make her pulse quicken with a brief glance from those blazing blue eyes. What good would it do, anyway?

"Too bad about the weird fetish, though."

"I don't think it's a fetish," Josie said, perhaps a little too quickly, judging by the way Felicia's gaze darkened. "I think he has a good reason."

Felicia snorted. "Like what?"

"I don't know."

"Right, he didn't say. If you ask me, it's downright bizarre."

"But not impossible. I can find him a virgin."

"Hon, you could find a blind man a supermodel."

Josie grinned. Her reputation was flawless, and she took pride in the fact that she could successfully match even the most unlikely



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candidates.

As soon as Felicia pulled the door shut behind her, Josie went back to work. She avoided reading Eric's interview questions or playing the tape, but she entered all his personal information into a separate file that would be used to match him with other hopeful candidates.

At five o'clock, Modern Matchmakers slowly emptied, until Josie was the last person left in the spacious eighth-floor office. This was normally her favorite time to work, knowing she wouldn't be interrupted. But no matter how hard she tried to concentrate on the mundane details of her job, Eric's handsome features kept entering her mind unbidden.

Her nipples swelled and hardened against her silk blouse and she leaned her head back against the leather chair, letting the lazy late afternoon sun flutter through the window to warm her skin. Closing her eyes, she let her hands drift over her breasts, picturing Eric's large, masculine palms and his expert fingers instead of her small, slender ones.

She hadn't been able to get him out of her mind since he'd come into her office the previous evening. What harm could come from indulging in a little fantasy of her own? At best, it might finally ease the pressure that had continued to build inside her, aching with a deep craving and fierce desire that threatened to spill over uncontained.

Spreading her legs as far apart as her tight, knee-length pencil-skirt would allow, she imagined Eric kneeling before her, his hot mouth eager to taste her pussy, his hands roaming over her thighs as he worked his way to her already damp panties. She tweaked a firm nipple between her fingers, letting a moan escape her throat.

It had been so long...much too long since she'd let a man taste her dripping cunt, and the need flooding her sex almost overwhelmed her. She trailed her fingertips over her flat stomach, undoing the small buttons of her blouse as she went.

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The skirt's waistband clung too tightly to her middle for Josie to slide her hand underneath, so she quickly unzipped it from the back, releasing the pressure around her stomach and giving her greater access to the ache at the apex of her thighs.

Wiggling her hand beneath her panties, Josie groaned as her fingers came into contact with her slippery slit. The damp cotton clung to her skin as she caressed the swelled nub of her clit.

Eric would be demanding, she knew. He'd be aggressive, rough and eager to please. Or at least, that's how she wanted to picture him as her fingers nudged her opening, her natural juices coating her entrance.

He'd demand that she remove all her clothes before he went any further. He'd watch her slowly strip out of her skirt and panties, the blouse and lace bra falling to the floor with the rest of her clothes. She'd sit back down on the big leather chair and he'd take his time giving her the most erotic, sensuous oral pleasure she'd ever experienced.

The fantasy took on a life of its own as Josie stroked her swollen folds with a light, circular touch that stiffened her nipples to budded peaks. She didn't want to come yet. She wanted to drag this out as long as she could, knowing it would be the only time she'd allow herself the indulgence of imagining Eric doing wondrous things to her body.

She held her outer lips open with one hand and slid the other beneath the edge of her panties, dragging her fingertips over the hot, slick area from her clit to the tight entrance of her anus, spreading the wetness over the entire length of her cunt. She took a deep breath as she nudged her index finger inside her pussy, held it, then let it out in a long sigh while her finger found its way inside her.

*His cock would be bigger, thicker.*

A second finger joined the first, stretching her opening as she shuddered with pleasure at being filled. It wasn't enough. She wanted more, but for now, this had to do. All her toys were at home, and Eric's

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delicious cock was nowhere near. The daydream would have to continue.

Her eyes still shut, Josie thrust her fingers in and out of her pussy, imagining they were Eric's cock. She let her fantasy take hold. He'd fuck her with that same intensity she'd seen in his gaze when he looked at her, pound into her cunt until he took her over the edge, until they both crashed into the explosive strength of their mutual orgasm.

Josie's nipples tingled with anticipation, her cunt clenching around her fingers, demanding the much-needed release it had craved since the previous evening. The muscles in her pussy contracted and her stomach clenched, eliciting a loud gasp from the base of her throat.

She pictured Eric's cock squirting inside her already drenched sex, joining in her release. He'd gush into her, fill her with his seed as she writhed and rode his shaft into delicious oblivion.

Unable to hold back any longer, Josie screamed, the sound echoing and bouncing off the walls of her office. She was vaguely aware that the cleaning crew was due to arrive any moment, but she didn't care. The orgasm felt much too good to worry about such minor details as being walked in on in the middle of a mind-blowing climax.

Her fingers finally slowed their intense thrusts inside her cunt and Josie released a deep breath as her body gave a last lingering shudder. She opened her eyes, realizing her panties, skirt and the leather chair were all soaked with her cream.

She let a slow smile spread over her lips and allowed another satisfied moan to escape her throat.

Straightening her skirt and buttoning her blouse, Josie convinced herself that nothing Eric could do would come close to the incredible state of arousal she'd been able to bring herself to on her own.

She didn't need a man. And she definitely didn't need one who wanted an innocent virgin. All she needed were her own fingers, and maybe a long, thick dildo every now and again.

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Eric Stokes had no idea what he was missing.

\* \* \*

Eric hesitated in the darkened hall outside Josie's office, his hand poised to knock, his knuckles barely making contact with the polished wood of her door. His palms were sweaty, he realized with dismay.

*Get a grip. This isn't a first date.*

Easy for that maddening voice in his head to say. It hadn't shut up since he'd left Josie's office, taunting him with the sweet sound of her remembered voice, husky with longing. She hid it well, but Eric had seen the way she parted her luscious soft lips, begging to be kissed. He'd noticed her green eyes widening, desire shimmering plainly in those seductive limpid pools.

And now he wanted nothing more than to march into her office, throw her on that big wooden desk and rip the silk blouse off her body. He wouldn't bother taking off her skirt—the one she'd worn last night was short enough that hiking it up would do nicely for what he had in mind.

His cock hardened and pressed against his jeans. Eric lowered his hand from the door and grabbed his shaft, squeezing it gently to ease some of the pressure. As much as he wanted Josie to leap into his arms when he walked through the door, he had a feeling that marching in there with a hard-on the size of baseball bat probably wouldn't have the desired effect.

One hand still on his cock, Eric gasped when the door abruptly swung inward.

“Wha—”

Josie's hand fluttered to her mouth to stifle a sharp intake of breath. At least she hadn't screamed at finding a man fondling himself in front of her office. Eric had to give her credit for that.

“I was...just about to knock,” he said lamely, shoving his hand deep in his pocket. The tip of his cock hovered just within reach, and he

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struggled to keep from touching it.

*Damn, but she's gorgeous.*

Josie's gaze traveled the length of his body to settle on the bulge between his thighs. Without conscious thought, he shifted and brought his hips slightly forward. He was hard as a rock, and there didn't seem to be a damn thing he could do about it. She might as well get a good, long look.

She didn't blush, or gasp, or do any of a hundred things he was used to women doing. She simply stared, took in all of him with a hungry gaze that left him deliriously horny.

"See anything you like?" He took a step forward, stopping within inches of Josie's tempting curves.

Her tongue darted out to wet her lips as she tore her gaze away from his groin and met his eyes. "You're going to make your wife a very happy woman."

Eric laughed, the sound bursting out of his throat before he had a chance to stop it. She was bold, alright. The women he'd been seeing weren't nearly as outspoken or as blatant about what they liked. Josie Wright was an enigma, a curious mixture of femininity and blatant sexuality that any red-blooded male would fawn over.

Anyone but him, Eric reminded himself. He knew all about women who toyed with men, wielding their sexual power like a weapon that could wound deeper than forged steel.

His grin faded as he moved past her into the dimly lit office. Josie wasn't just a distraction to dally with until she found him a proper wife.

She was dangerous.

"I brought you the information you asked for," he said, placing a large manila folder on her desk.

Behind him, Josie cleared her throat. "You didn't have to do that tonight."

"We're on a tight schedule," he reminded her, refusing to turn

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around. He didn't think he could resist the sight of her tempting breasts, her small, narrow waist. He closed his eyes briefly, but the image of her hardened nipples pressing against her silk blouse remained seared into his eyelids. He blinked to clear it.

He almost jumped when she touched his arm, her fingertips barely grazing his skin. Desire mingled with resentment and anger he'd thought long forgotten.

*It's not fair to her. She's not Melanie.*

Desire won. He turned to Josie, his chest grazing her nipples as she stepped closer to him. Her hand lingered on his arm, her touch growing warmer until it seemed to burn through his skin, igniting a fire he didn't think still smoldered.

"What are you doing to me?" He asked softly as he lowered his mouth within inches of hers.

Josie caught her lower lip between her teeth, a sign he now recognized as one of sheer nervousness. Her long lashes shrouded her brilliant green gaze, and he lifted her chin until she stared into his eyes.

Just thinking about kissing her made Eric's cock throb. The erection hadn't waned at all since he walked through the door, heedless of the unwelcome thoughts of Melanie.

Unable to hold back any longer, Eric brought his mouth down on hers. Heat shot to his groin as their lips met and he moaned against her mouth, the sound drowned out by her own husky groan.

Josie wrapped her arms around his neck and pressed her firm, lean body against his. Her perfume teased his nostrils with the sweet scent of roses and the spicy aroma of cinnamon. Everything about her tempted him with an utterly delicious wickedness, Eric realized as he deepened the kiss.

She even tasted delectable, like chocolate and mint, and the silken glide of her tongue taunted him with promises he couldn't wait to delve into. The more he kissed her, the more he craved being inside her in

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every way. His cock threatened to break through his jeans with the force of his erection. Either that, or come within the tight constraints.

His hands slid over Josie's body to settle on her hips. He gripped her tighter and pulled her against him, grinding his shaft against her skirt, relishing the moan that escaped her lips at the intimate contact.

Placing her hand over his, she led his fingers up her ribcage to settle on the swell of her breast. Small and delicate, the mound fit perfectly against his palm. Need ripped through him, tearing down all the defenses he'd built up so carefully over the last five years. He wanted her with every masculine force in his body; the inevitable pain and heartache be damned.

Eric flicked a button open and slid his hand beneath the silky material to feel the heat of her skin against his own. Her hard nipple budded and peaked, straining for his touch as he tweaked and twirled it between thumb and forefinger.

When the phone rang, Josie stumbled and tore herself from his embrace, fumbling for the receiver. Eric watched her perch unsteadily on the edge of her desk, her lips swollen from his kisses, her blouse still hanging open over a firm breast.

He hadn't expected her to be as shaken by the sudden intensity of their passionate kiss as he had been. She was obviously no stranger to sexual encounters, while he...well, it had been a long time.

*A very long time.*

Though he'd dated casually since Melanie left him, he'd stayed far away from anything sexual. Memories of what he'd shared with his ex-fiancée were too painful to endure, and the reality of that kind of passion and betrayal would be impossible to survive a second time.

Still, if there was one good thing that had come from that experience, it was knowing when to back off. He'd learned that staying far away from the moist, welcoming depths of a woman's cunt also meant staying away from the heartache that came with it.

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So why couldn't he keep his hands off Josie now?

She hung up and ran a hand through her thick, shimmering mane. Her eyes mirrored the same doubt and uncertainly racing through his mind.

"That was Felicia," Josie explained. She spoke so softly and smoothly, he almost missed the tremor in her voice. She didn't walk back to the heat of his embrace, but remained leaning against the desk.

*Only a few inches away, but worlds apart.*

Eric wondered where their passion would have led them if Felicia hadn't called. Would Josie have welcomed him inside her tight sheath? Would he have taken her if she'd offered herself to him?

"Thanks for dropping off the forms," she said, crossing her hands over her chest as if attempting to shield her body from his roaming gaze.

Eric nodded, hearing the dismissal in her words. "Let me know if you need anything else."

He ambled to the door, his throbbing erection keeping him from quickening his pace.

"Eric?"

He paused and turned around at the sound of uncertainty in her voice.

"Have dinner with me tomorrow."

He hesitated, words of consent burning on his tongue. He wanted to accept. More than anything, he wanted to see her again, to find out if this incredible chemistry had any hope of going somewhere before inevitably fizzling out.

"You've got other plans," Josie said, misinterpreting his silence. Her gaze darted away from him to linger on the café-colored walls of her office.

"No," he said. She looked damn cute when she stared at him like that, full of confusion and maybe even a little bit afraid.



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Cute, and completely irresistible.

“I’d love to have dinner with you. But I’ll pick the restaurant.”

Her grin mirrored his. “No Indian, no Chinese, and no sushi. Everything else is fair game.”

Nodding his agreement, Eric turned back and headed toward the elevators. He wondered how she’d feel if she knew the only thing he wanted on the menu was her delectable body, covered in her natural arousal and need for him.

## CHAPTER 3

Josie shoved the day's mail under her arm and hoisted her grocery bags up the three flights of stairs to her condo. Normally, she loved the place. Her own spacious, three-bedroom, private sanctuary had everything from pool access to a large fireplace in the living-room. Today, she would have given anything for the one luxury the builder hadn't considered: an elevator.

Nudging her door open with the pointy toe of a high-heeled shoe, Josie dropped the bags in the hallway and darted a quick glance at her answering machine. The red light beamed at her from across the room but didn't signal any messages.

"At least he hasn't canceled. Yet."

The clock on her VCR read 6:00 P.M. Eric had called her shortly after lunch to announce the restaurant he'd picked, and they'd agreed to meet at seven-thirty.

An hour and a half wasn't nearly enough time to figure out what

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to wear, Josie thought as she darted into her bedroom. When the doorbell rang thirty minutes later, she'd managed to scatter clothes all over the bed and the floor, but she was no closer to finding a suitable outfit.

"It's open," Josie yelled out, half-buried under a mound of sweaters.

"Wow," Felicia said as she stepped into Josie's bedroom. "I hope you're not planning on bringing him here after dinner. He'll think you've been robbed, and you know how men are, he'll have to prove his heroism by darting out the door after the would-be thief who rifled through your drawers."

"Very funny." Josie snatched a pair of red silk panties from Felicia's hand. "Are you going to crack jokes, or are you going to help me?"

"I think I'll crack jokes, if it's all the same to you," Felicia said, perching on the edge of the bed.

Josie held back an exasperated sigh. "Oh, for God's sake, stand up. You'll wrinkle those."

Felicia grinned and lifted her tight, yoga-toned behind just long enough for Josie to push aside the mound of clothes she'd sat on. "So, tell me again when exactly you managed to ask him out. Was it before or after he told you he wanted a virgin?"

Josie's cheeks heated. "After."

Felicia raised an inquisitive eyebrow. "Are you sure this is a good idea?"

Frowning, Josie crossed the distance to the window and pulled it open, suddenly needing to distance herself from Felicia's knowing gaze. The heavy, late-afternoon air smelled of exhaust fumes. "No," she admitted. "But it seemed like a good idea at the time."

"And since when do you give in to impulsive, half-cocked ideas?"

"Wait a minute," Josie said, turning around and crossing her arms below her breasts. "You're the one who's always encouraging me to go

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out more, to take a chance. And now you're telling me I shouldn't?"

Felicia held her hands up in mock surrender. "Alright, I'll back off. Just be careful, okay?"

"There's something about him. I can't put my finger on it, but he's different."

Felicia snorted. "He's got the same macho, overbearing, testosterone-ridden attitude as most of the men who strut into Modern Matchmakers. He just shows it differently."

Josie shook her head. "That's not it. Look, you're the one who brought me to meet Eric. You must have had a slightly higher opinion of him at some point."

"Yeah, but that was before he shared his bizarre request."

"Is it really that strange? I bet you wouldn't have blinked an eyelash if he'd confessed he liked being whipped while wearing women's underwear."

Felicia laughed, the sound echoing through the room and mixing with the rush of traffic outside the window. "Don't knock it. I had a boyfriend who liked doing that."

"So why are you being so tough on Eric?"

"I don't know. It's weird, okay?"

"It's not okay." Josie sat on the bed beside Felicia and placed a hand on her arm. "There's more to it than you're telling me."

"I just..." Felicia's gaze darted away, then finally settled back on Josie. A tumult of shadows passed across her face. "My mother never let me live down the fact that I lost my virginity at fifteen. She told me then that no one would want to marry me." Her eyes brimmed with tears. "She was right."

"Oh, honey," Josie wrapped her arms around Felicia's slender body and pulled her into a tight embrace. "She was *not* right. You're single because you haven't found the right guy yet, not because you're no longer a virgin."

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Felicia sniffled against Josie's shoulder. "Are you sure?"

"Of course I'm sure." She pulled back and wiped Felicia's tears with the back of her hand. "When you meet him, you'll know. And he'll be thrilled with your experience and your ability to please him. Besides," she added, "how many candidates have we matched up? And how many of them were virgins?"

"Not many," Felicia said.

Josie beamed at her friend. "Exactly. So you just let me know if you want to sign up for a matchmaking session of your own. I happen to have a perfect record, you know."

Felicia giggled. "Thanks, but no thanks. I prefer to find men on my own."

Josie shrugged and winked at Felicia. "Suit yourself. Are you still up to helping me pick something to wear?"

Felicia nodded, tears shimmering on her long eyelashes. "We'd better hurry, though, or you're gonna be late."

Skirts, blouses, T-shirts and dresses lay in a heap in every corner of the room, and Josie turned a critical eye on each batch in turn. She had less than thirty minutes to get dressed and walk to the restaurant.

Luckily for her, Eric had picked a place that was less than five blocks away from her condo. It would take Josie no time to walk there, and if things went well tonight, it would take even less time to make it back in her lust-induced state.

Felicia rose and strolled to the walk-in closet where she picked a blouse off the hanger. "How about this one?"

Josie wrinkled her nose in distaste. Red with big purple polka dots, it looked like it belonged on someone's grandmother. "You're supposed to be helping," she reminded Felicia. "Think sexy, hot, irresistible, breathtaking!"

"Yes, oh mighty sex Goddess," Felicia teased, her dark eyes crinkling at the corners as her mouth broke into a generous grin. The

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tears that had flowed freely just minutes ago had evaporated. The only hint of Felicia's earlier distress remained visible in her slightly pink nose, which she rubbed as she stared around her, looking as lost as Josie felt.

"You're supposed to be the expert here, you know?"

"I can't work miracles," Felicia said, indicating with a sweep of her hand Josie's wardrobe disaster.

She was right, Josie realized, cringing as she dismissed a pair of bellbottom jeans that should have stayed in the sixties. There wasn't a truly sexy piece to be found anywhere. Her collection consisted of enough pencil skirts and silk blouses to outfit Wall Street's top businesswomen, but there wasn't a low-cut shirt or a tight dress to be found anywhere.

"I could always go naked," she said as she rummaged through the pile.

"Not that he'd mind, but I'm willing to bet the other patrons might have a slight problem with the nude woman eating dinner beside them."

"Who cares about the other patrons?" Josie picked up a green wrap-around top with cap sleeves and held it against her. She stared at herself in the full-length mirror and gave her long hair a shake. Her tresses spilled over her shoulders and contrasted brightly against the cheery top.

"That works," Felicia said. "Try it with this."

The white skirt with a fine, red floral print she handed Josie wouldn't have been her first choice, but it worked with the top. The knee-length garment had been tailored out of a stretchy material that hugged her curves.

"At least you've got shoes to match," Felicia said with an approving nod.

Shoes, she had. Josie hurried to the hallway closet and chose a pair from among forty lined neatly along the floor. Though she didn't like

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shopping for clothes, shoes were an entirely different matter. She could smell a shoe store from the moment she walked into a mall, the scent of leather, plastic and even the fresh cardboard of the shoebox drawing her attention like a magnet.

The four-inch soft-leather strappy sandals completed the ensemble, and Josie took a moment to admire the overall effect. "Not bad," she murmured, grabbing a matching purse. "Not bad at all."

"True. But you're late."

"Oh, fuck." Josie groaned as she looked at the clock. 7:29. She couldn't run in these sandals and, at any rate, she couldn't have made it there in a minute even if she'd slipped into running shoes.

"Hurry. Something tells me Eric Stokes isn't the patient kind."

Josie took a deep, shuddering breath. "But it was all worth it, right? Tell me it was worth it."

Felicia's gaze swept over Josie's body. "Eric won't know what hit him," she said. "Now go. I'll clean up here and lock up before I go."

"You're an angel," Josie said, giving her friend a quick kiss on the cheek.

Felicia laughed, though her voice held a sharp, sarcastic edge. "No one said angels had to be virgins, right?"

\* \* \*

She was late.

Eric paced in front of the Grinning Cow Restaurant, trying to ignore the strange looks he received. Beaming couples entered through the western-style doors hand-in-hand, speaking to each other in low tones.

Josie hadn't stood him up, he was sure of it. She couldn't have. After all, the dinner invitation had been her idea. Still, he couldn't squelch the apprehension that had settled in his chest.

What if she decided she had better things to do?

Memories of his wedding day flitted through his mind, though he tried to shove them away. It was long ago, and thinking about Melanie

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wouldn't make Josie appear any faster. Either she'd come, or she wouldn't.

Yet his mind refused to listen to logical argument. He could still picture his ex-fiancée without even trying. He remembered the way she'd looked when she accepted his proposal, green eyes brimming with tears, her face flushed with excitement.

And he remembered waiting at the church for hours, trying to convince the priest and the entire congregation that she'd show up, that she must have had a wardrobe emergency or something of that sort.

But she didn't, and as night cast its long shadows through the chapel, Eric had been forced to admit that he hadn't only been stood up. He'd been dumped. The woman he thought he'd spend the rest of his life with had left him at the altar, and left him to spend the next five years wondering how he'd failed her. There was no agony left in his heart as he thought of Melanie now, but the anger remained as strong as ever.

"There you are." Josie's breathless whisper in his ear sent a shiver of desire up Eric's spine.

He turned, ready to assault her with a clever remark about the insensitivity of keeping a date waiting. But the witty retort fled his mind as he could only stare, mesmerized by the way her hair shimmered in the fading twilight. The last rays of sunlight made the red strands gleam brilliantly as they fell upon her lovely, unbound mane.

"You look stunning," Eric said when he recovered enough to trust his voice.

In fact, she looked better than stunning. She was breathtaking, clad in a green silken top that hugged her small breasts, and a trim, tight skirt that allowed him the slightest peek at her long legs. The heady scent of roses radiated off her glowing skin.

Josie rewarded his compliment with a broad grin. "It's just something I threw together."



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His gaze enveloped her from head to toe. "I seriously doubt that."

She laughed, tossing her head back. The rich, throaty sound rushed right to his groin, setting his cock ablaze in a rush of warm, lusty heat.

He took her hand in his and she responded instantly, curling her slender fingers and gripping him tightly. She pressed her body to his side, and glanced up at the sign above the doorway. Her brow furrowed. "What *is* this place?"

Eric followed her gaze. A grinning, oversized cow's skull stared down at them, neon lights dancing in its lifeless eyes. The sign below it read *The Grinning Cow*, and below that, *no animals were harmed in the making of your meal*.

"Only the best vegetarian restaurant in all of Florida," he said, his apprehension returning as her smile faded and she turned her wide-eyed gaze on him.

"Vegetarian?" Josie echoed. "As in, no meat? No fish?"

Eric looked at her quizzically. "You've never been to one before?"

"I'm a meat and potatoes kind of girl."

"Ah."

He couldn't think of anything else to say. It was just one more thing they didn't have in common. After Melanie left, Eric went to a great deal of effort to revamp his lifestyle. He'd changed his diet, lost thirty pounds, learned yoga and opened his own studio. And he'd started dating women who were nothing like his ex-fiancée.

Josie tugged on his hand. "Are we going in?"

"We can go somewhere else if you'd like," he said, visions of McDonalds burgers dancing before his eyes. It was all he could do not to grimace.

"Not a chance. You insisted on picking the place, and you did. Besides, I had the opportunity to tell you all the types of food I didn't like. It didn't even occur to me that you were...that you could be..."

"Vegetarian," he finished when she hesitated. "You can say it."

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She giggled nervously. “It’s just that you’re so different than the men I usually date.”

Eric sent her a sharp look. He didn’t like picturing her with other men. “And are there many of those?”

“Not as many as you’d think.”

He grunted, forcing himself not to press the issue. It was none of his business who she went out with. They weren’t even dating.

Not really.

The décor inside the restaurant was even more outlandish than the grinning skull outside indicated, and Josie gasped as she walked through the door. Whoever decorated the place had an eye for the morbid and the macabre, as animal bones had been carefully arranged to fill every spare inch of the walls.

A soft red light shone from the ceiling, its glow casting the skeletons in a crimson blaze vaguely reminiscent of dried blood.

“It’s supposed to make a statement,” he told Josie as a waitress dressed in a long, black dress led them to a corner booth.

“I can see that,” she said, her gaze darting around the spacious restaurant. A small water fountain sat on their table, and beside it, something that looked like it had once been a rodent.

Eric grimaced, suddenly wishing he’d picked a different place. The first time he’d come here, he found the décor interesting, in a modern, eclectic kind of way. “We can still go somewhere else.”

She offered him a genuine-looking smile. “I wouldn’t dream of it. I don’t expect there’s road kill on the menu, so I think I’ll be fine.”

The waitress returned, and Eric ordered for both of them.

“Spicy eggplant and tofu?” Josie asked once they were alone again. “Is that for me?”

“If you’d like. If you’d prefer something milder, you can have the tomato tofu.”

She wrinkled her nose, looking cute and sexy at once. “I’m sure I’ll

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like whatever you recommend.”

“You’re a very bad liar.”

“Yeah, but I try.” Her grin was infectious, and he found himself mirroring it.

The conversation flowed easily between them while they ate. She told him of her job, regaling him with colorful stories of eccentric candidates. In turn, he tried to tell her about the studio, but his thoughts fled every time she opened her mouth to take another bite of tomato tofu.

Her luscious, red lips wrapped delicately around the fork, her tongue darting out to catch a bead of dripping red sauce. His imagination burst into flames, imagining her mouth wrapped around his cock, her tongue working at his hard shaft, caressing and devouring it with the same passion she seemed to have found for the food.

“You like it?” he asked as she swallowed another bite.

“It’s surprisingly good.”

He couldn’t help the smile that spread across his face. He wanted her to enjoy her time with him, even if the restaurant’s interior design left a lot to be desired.

Eric reached out and wiped a drop of sauce from her lower lip. Fixing his gaze on her full mouth, he was once again mesmerized when she parted her lips and darted her tongue across the tip of his thumb.

The building lust that had threatened to erupt all night suddenly made itself known in the low growl that escaped his throat.

Josie looked him in the eye as she sucked his finger into the heat of her mouth, her tongue skimming over the sensitive skin, setting his cock aflame. He couldn’t pull away, caught between the wetness of her mouth and the tightening in his balls that promised he’d have to take matters into his own hands as soon as the date ended.

“Let’s get out of here,” she whispered, releasing his thumb.

Beguiled by the brazen longing in her wide, green eyes, Eric could

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only nod. He followed her out of the restaurant and into the brightly-lit parking lot, his attention captivated by her swaying hips, her inviting ass.

He didn't date women like her. Sexy, independent, confident women would only break his heart. Yet she pulled him along as if by an invisible thread, leaving him breathless with desire, hungry with the kind of need he'd vowed never to lose himself to again.

"Want to come up?" she asked when they stopped before a three-story building, her keys dangling from the tip of her finger.

He hesitated for only a moment, aware of the hint of uncertainty that darkened her gaze in the moonlight. Perhaps there was more to Josie Wright than he'd first assumed. She was confident, sure, but there was something else, an underlying tenderness and innocence that caught him off guard.

He cupped her chin and lowered his lips to hers, letting her soft breath warm his answer. Mouthing the word *yes*, Eric claimed her, losing himself in the irresistible sweetness of her mouth.

\* \* \*

"Wait here for a minute," Josie suggested, inserting the key into the lock. She turned it slowly, praying Felicia had cleaned up as she'd promised.

"Why? Do you have someone else in there?" The good-natured teasing rolled easily off Eric's tongue, but Josie thought she heard a harder edge beneath the words.

"Only my goldfish. Don't go anywhere."

She cast him a warning glance over her shoulder and stepped inside the hallway, flicking on light-switches as she made a cursory inspection of the place.

The living room was clean, but she'd expected as much since her earlier whirlwind wardrobe panic hadn't reached that far through the contemporary-style condo. The pale khaki sofa and matching chairs

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were perfectly lined up in front of the big-screen TV, Josie's favorite purchase since starting Modern Matchmakers and being able to afford the occasional luxury item.

She swept into the bedroom, holding her breath, and stumbled through the dark to one of lamps at her bedside. A soft, yellow glow shimmered over the off-white, satin bedspread and pillows. No blouses, sweaters, pants or underwear marred the bed or the Persian rug, and the door to the walk-in closet was closed.

"Thank you," she murmured, pressing her hand to her chest. She would have thrown every piece of stray clothing into the closet in under a minute if she'd had to, but this was perfect.

She rushed to the dresser and lit two, thick, column-style candles. Firelight danced on the wall, casting long shadows over a large watercolor painting.

"I somehow expected your room to be pink."

Josie spun on her heel, her pulse quickening as Eric crossed the threshold into her bedroom. He looked delicious in a pale blue crisp shirt and black pants, his hands in his pockets, strolling through her condo as if he had every right to be there.

And even worse, Josie thought as she took a step closer to him, he looked like he belonged there.

"I thought I told you to wait outside."

He shrugged, the gesture stretching his shirt over his broad shoulders, drawing her gaze to the powerful muscles hiding beneath his clothes. She wanted to run her hands over every inch of his body, feel him do the same in return.

"I got tired of waiting."

"I left you out there for two minutes," she said dryly. "I figured you'd find some way to entertain yourself."

His eyes glowed with hunger when he looked at her. "Entertaining is a lot more fun when done with a partner."

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Josie licked her lips, fully aware of the electricity passing between them. Touching him would probably cause a spark. Heck, if they weren't careful, they could set the entire place on fire. And she really liked her condo.

Her gaze traveled over the length of his body, taking in the lean lines of his chest, his powerful legs, and settling between his thighs, where the obvious bulge of a thick erection pressed against his pants.

She settled her hand over her stomach as a low throbbing began to thrum. It had been too long since she'd been this attracted to a man. And it was absolutely unfair that the man she wanted was off limits for anything more than a quick romp between the sheets.

Desire continued to build as they stared at one another for what seemed to Josie like an eternity. Eric didn't move, but remained standing in the middle of her bedroom, looking as intensely gorgeous and at home as he had in the yoga studio, in her office, and in the restaurant just an hour earlier. Comfortable and sure of himself, Eric Stokes exuded male sexuality without a hint of arrogance, as if knowing he was irresistible didn't change a thing.

At last, he stepped forward and pressed his body against hers, trapping her between the hard planes of his chest and the soft, inviting bed. Josie's breasts swelled, her nipples tightening with anticipation.

"I haven't done anything like this in a long time." Eric's husky voice rumbled through her, dampened her panties in an instant.

"Neither have I," Josie admitted. "Do you think we'll remember how?"

He chuckled softly, then placed a soft kiss on the side of her throat. "We might have to practice a time or two."

She flattened her palms against his chest, suddenly afraid that their intimate contact would shatter any defenses she still had left. Undeterred, Eric's tongue trailed a wet path down her sensitive skin. He moved slowly, his hands steady on her hips, his mouth working its

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way down her top until he took a budded nipple between his teeth through the constraints of the tight shirt.

A moan broke free from Josie's throat. "I've got all night," she whispered, glad she hadn't considered wearing a bra. The heat of his mouth made her aware of a myriad of sensations warring inside her.

She wanted him more than she'd wanted anyone in years, but this was absurd. She wasn't into one night stands, and with a man like Eric Stokes, that's all this night had to offer. He wanted a virgin, of all things. Josie was about to prove that she hadn't been one in a very long time.

As if reading her thoughts, Eric paused his suckling, his gaze searching her face. "Do you want me to go?"

Josie's instincts kicked in, her mind begging her to take the easy way out. She'd been down this path before, and at the end of it, there was only heartache. Yet, every feminine sensation she possessed screamed out to him, begged him to stay just a little while longer. "No. Not yet."

Returning his mouth to her breast, Eric cupped its fullness in his hand and kneaded it softly, eliciting another strangled moan from Josie's throat. She didn't know how much of this she could take. The warmth of his breath and the texture of the cloth against her tight nipples culminated in a deep pressure between her legs.

She tangled her fingers in his hair and held him against her as soft suckling noises filled the room. Her hands wandered over his shoulders and she reveled in the feel of him, the spicy scent of his aftershave mingling with the slight aroma of chocolate from the scented candles burning on the other side of the room.

He moved back up to her mouth at the same maddening, unhurried speed. By the time their lips met and he slid his tongue inside her mouth, Josie was panting, desire surging through her veins and threatening to overcome her. She held a tenuous grip on her emotions,

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and her physical reactions to his passionate caresses quickly spiraled out of control. The knowledge scared her, yet she continued to explore his mouth, the heat and exquisite male taste of him drawing her deeper, sending her over the edge.

Eager to wrap her hand around his stiff erection, Josie let her fingers skim over his trim hips and abdomen to settle on the bulge between his legs. Eric's indrawn breath signaled all the encouragement she needed. She slid the zipper down and grasped his shaft, marveling at the velvety texture of his skin, his solid length.

Her sex throbbed in response to the soft pulsing in his rod as it settled, hot and heavy in her hand. She trailed her fingers lower to cup his balls. Eric groaned and thrust his hips against her.

Growing wetter and bolder, Josie's need for him mounted until one desire surpassed all others. She had to taste him, suck his thick cock until he released all that pent-up sexual energy down her throat in a stream of delicious cum.

Unabashed, she lowered herself to her knees before him, her fingers tugging Eric's pants and boxers down around his knees. His rod sprang free among the mass of curls between his legs, spearing the air and demanding her touch.

She grasped it in her hand as Eric's fingers found their way into her hair, caressing her. A single drop of wetness beaded at the tip of his shaft, and Josie reached out to sweep it over her tongue. He shuddered beneath her hands.

"Josie."

She'd never heard her name more sensually spoken, and another rush of desire coursed through her.

Josie wrapped her mouth around the straining tip, and his length filled her as she guided it into the farthest reaches of her throat. She craved all of him with an unashamed need she wanted to explore until every drop of longing had been satisfied, every primal yearning



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fulfilled.

She sucked him slowly from base to tip, letting her tongue and hands trail one another as she brought him closer to the edge. Tension built in his cock. She could feel it with every lick, every uncontrolled moan that spilled from him.

Making love to his rod with her mouth made Josie's pussy clench, aware of the intense pleasure his shaft would bring once embedded in her depths. She sucked him deeper, one hand guiding and stroking him, the other massaging his balls.

Eric's hands tightened in her hair. He pressed forward, driving his shaft deeper into her mouth. Josie opened for him, took him in as far as he needed to be.

"Your mouth..." Eric's words came out between gasps and groans of pleasure. "God, it's so hot."

Josie sucked harder, her fingers clenching around his shaft and stroking in quick, circular motions. Eric's balls tightened beneath her hand and his body firmed, then shook with the force of his explosive orgasm. His seed spilled into her mouth and down her throat. Josie swallowed, milking his dripping cock of all its cum, drowning in the taste of him.

When his climax subsided, she released his rod and pulled herself free, her knees wobbling from the power of his release and her dizzying, overwhelming need.

"That was incredible," Eric said, a slow, lazy grin on his handsome features.

Josie nodded, unable to speak. She was abruptly aware of her lust for him, her desire to do anything to give him pleasure. The thought frightened her, sent a growing dread marching up her spine.

She couldn't do this. Giving in to him, making love to him tonight, would seal her fate. Her heart would be his forever. She could feel it with every fiber in her being.

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The concept of great sex wasn't foreign to Josie, but she'd always been able to keep her emotions separate from the act. Watching Eric, pleasuring him, caused her to lose her grip on her heart at breakneck speed.

"I think you should go," she said, the words tightening her throat.

Confusion flittered across his features and his brows settled into a frown. "Are you sure?"

Josie nodded, this time afraid to speak. If she opened her mouth to confess how she felt, she'd look like a fool. And she was determined not to let that happen. As determined as she was not to fall in love with him.

A vein twitched in Eric's jaw. He held up a hand in a gesture of denial and something else. Anger? Frustration? Josie couldn't tell.

He pulled up his boxers and buckled his pants, his gaze never leaving hers. But he didn't try to persuade her to let him stay, and when he turned and walked out of the room, Josie remained rooted to the spot until she heard her apartment door slam shut behind him.

Then she collapsed on the bed and let tears course down her cheeks, their salty taste mingling with the distant flavor of his cum on her tongue.

## CHAPTER 4

The condo seemed particularly empty to Josie as she made her way to the kitchen. She'd finally stumbled out of bed at six-thirty, after spending a sleepless night tossing and turning on top of sweat-drenched sheets, painfully aware that her bed was much too large for just one person.

She pulled the door to one of the cupboards open with more force than necessary, and it slammed against the wall with a loud bang. Snatching the coffee bin, she measured the right amount of ground beans and attempted to pour them into the machine, but her hand trembled and the fine grounds spilled out of the plastic container and onto the white marble counter.

"Screw it," she mumbled, tossing the measuring spoon into the sink. She gripped the edge of the counter until her knuckles turned white.

It wasn't fair. One man shouldn't have been able to affect her this way. She wasn't some lovesick teenager. She'd had more than her

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share of relationships. Over the years, she'd experienced it all: rejection, heartache, lust, love. And yet nothing came close to the intensity and heartrending passion she felt when Eric stood in the same room as her.

At seven, Josie locked the door behind her and stepped out into the low-lying fog covering the ground like a pale, white blanket. The air was crisp and cool, but the sun shone brightly, promising another warm day in Atlantic Beach.

Josie walked to work, stopping at Starbucks for a cup of Espresso Roast. The strong, slightly acidic taste blended with the sweet caramel and settled heavily in her stomach. By the time she reached the office, she'd drained most of the contents of the Grande cup.

She was the first one there, as usual. Most of the other employees didn't arrive until nine, although Felicia often came in earlier. Josie admired her friend's ambition and her ability to work as hard as their client load required. She never flinched when Josie asked her to put in overtime or take on even more accounts.

Josie had met Felicia in college. They'd both majored in ancient history, and when they realized their degrees were nothing more than fancy wall decorations, Felicia went back to school to get her MBA. Josie started Modern Matchmakers, and when Felicia graduated, she offered her a position with the company. That had been three years ago.

Josie set her coffee on her desk, then pulled up Eric's file. She had enough information on him to begin preliminary matches, although the process wouldn't be complete for at least another week. Finding a suitable partner was difficult and time consuming, especially since so many candidates were incredibly picky about prospective spouses. Some only wanted to date blondes or redheads, while others preferred their future life partners to be well established in a particular career. Lawyers, doctors, and professors were high on the list. No one had asked for a yoga instructor.

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Taking another sip of her now cold Espresso Roast, Josie eyed the list of possible prospects. She began with a cross-search on things Eric might have in common with another candidate. His obsession with healthy food, affinity for exercise and entrepreneurial abilities topped the list. Then she narrowed down the results using his answers to the sexual preference questions, and ended the search with his requirement for a virgin bride.

"You look like hell," Felicia said two hours later, as she poked her head through the gap in the door.

Josie looked up and eyed her friend with a cold glare. "Just what I needed to hear."

"Rough night?"

"You could say that." Josie leaned back in her chair and rubbed the bridge of her nose, an action that somehow only intensified the pounding in her head.

"Your date didn't go well?" Felicia closed the door behind her, then sat in the leather chair across from Josie. Sunlight danced across her dark blonde shoulder-length hair, which today she wore in a chic, straight style.

"Yes." Josie frowned. "No. I don't know."

"Wow. That bad, huh?"

"I don't want to talk about it."

"So I gathered." Felicia leaned forward and tilted her head in the direction of the computer screen. "Any prospects?"

"No."

Felicia raised her perfectly-plucked eyebrows. "None?"

"None of the candidates are right for him."

"Is that so?"

Josie lowered her gaze, suddenly unable to look her friend in the eye. A siren wailed in the distance. "Have you seen the women that have come to us lately? They have no ambition, no desires of their own,

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no independence. It's like we've suddenly hit a time-warp and managed to collect all the housewives from the nineteen fifties."

Felicia grinned. "It's not that bad, though your description is eerily accurate. On the bright side, it shouldn't be too hard to find him a virgin."

Josie scoffed, failing to find any amusement in the situation. "That's not the issue."

"Okay, then, let me help." Felicia moved her chair to the other side of the desk and sat beside Josie, staring at the monitor.

A picture of a slender young woman dressed in a casual blue top and jeans filled the screen, her dark eyes bright and sparkling with mischief.

"Sharon Signe," Felicia said, reading the tagline beneath the picture. "What's wrong with her?"

"She's nineteen!"

Felicia frowned. "And?"

"And nothing. Eric's almost thirty. They wouldn't be a good match."

"Since when are you so hung up on age?"

Josie crossed her arms beneath her breasts and fixed Felicia with a harsh glare. "I'm not hung up on age. I simply don't think Ms. Signe would be right for Eric."

"Because she's too young," Felicia filled in.

"Exactly. And she's into piercings and tattoos...there's nothing about that in Eric's file."

"But he also didn't say that he *doesn't* like piercings and tattoos, correct?"

"And that's exactly why you can't rush this kind of thing. We should know everything about his tastes, right down to the color of toenail polish he prefers on a woman."

"Pink."

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“What?” Josie stared at her friend in complete puzzlement. She might not have gotten any sleep the night before, but Felicia definitely wasn’t making any sense.

“I think Eric would be a pink toenail polish kinda guy, don’t you?”

“I don’t know,” Josie answered honestly. Eric was strong, sexy, and entirely male. He wanted a virgin, but she couldn’t picture him going for the frilly, ultra-feminine type. “Probably more of a deep burgundy.”

Felicia smiled and tucked a strand of hair behind her ear. “You want my opinion?”

“No.” Josie turned back to the computer screen. She didn’t need to hear what Felicia had to say. Her friend would only repeat the same conclusion Josie had come to herself, and at least if the words weren’t spoken aloud, she could cling to whatever pretense of hope still lingered in her mind.

“Alright then. Who else have we got?”

Josie clicked a button on the screen and the image changed to that of a mousy-looking woman with a genuine smile. She wore a loose-fitting peasant-style shirt and her hair was gathered in a severe bun behind her head.

“Martha Jordan,” Felicia read. “She grew up on a farm, has two brothers, runs her own bakery downtown. She’s successful, entrepreneurial, and a virgin at the ripe age of thirty-one. She has definite potential.”

“No way,” Josie said, her brows creasing into a frown as she stared at Martha’s picture. “She’s a farm-girl at heart. Eric grew up here, and he’s a lot more street-wise and sophisticated than this country bumpkin.”

Felicia took a deep breath and released it slowly. “You’re the boss. Anyone else?”

The picture changed again, this time showing a heavysset blonde clutching a poodle to her chest.

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“So, let’s hear it. What’s wrong with Vienne Ivanka?”

“Eric likes petite blondes,” Josie said, trying to keep the disappointment from her voice.

“She’s blonde,” Felicia pointed out. “And I really didn’t peg Eric as the type of guy to be that hung up on a woman’s dress size.”

“He’s probably not,” Josie admitted wearily. “But that still doesn’t make Vienne right for him.”

“I assume there’s more, then?”

“Of course there is,” Josie snapped. She waved her hand in the direction of the screen. “She’s...she’s...”

“Not you,” Felicia finished for her.

Felicia’s words knocked the air out of Josie’s lungs. “No, that’s not—”

But that was exactly what she’d been doing, Josie realized with a start. She’d been rejecting women for the slightest perceived flaw because she didn’t want anyone else to be with Eric. She closed her eyes and let out a deep sigh.

“Now do you want to hear what I think?” Felicia asked, her voice low and soothing, as if speaking to a child.

“No, but you’re going to tell me anyway.”

“You’re right. And you know why?”

“Because you’re a pain in the ass?” Josie blinked her eyes open and smiled, seeing no choice but to meet her friend’s knowing gaze.

“Maybe. But mostly because I care about you and don’t want to see you get hurt.”

“Alright, out with it.”

“You’ve got it bad.”

“That much I already knew. Any more pieces of wisdom?”

“Don’t get snappy,” Felicia said, pursing her lips. “Eric’s requirements in a wife might make me slightly uncomfortable, but he’s not a bad guy. I read his file, and from what I know of him from the



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studio, he'd be an incredibly loyal husband. He'll make some woman very happy one day."

"This isn't helping me, Fel."

Her features softened. "Let me finish. He'll get married, Josie, with or without our help. But unless you can meet that final requirement he gave, he won't be marrying *you*."

Josie let out a breath she didn't know she'd been holding. "Can you try not to sugarcoat it next time?"

Felicia chuckled. "Let's hope there won't be a next time. Because if you keep this up, you'll—"

The phone on Josie's desk rang, interrupting Felicia's advice-giving session. Josie reached for it gratefully.

"You'll get your heart broken. And there won't be a man in Florida who'll be able to put the pieces back together," Felicia finished before Josie could say a word.

\* \* \*

"Josie Wright."

Her silky, sensual voice sent a shiver of desire through Eric's body, and he clutched the receiver closer to his ear. "Hi, beautiful."

"Hello."

It wasn't exactly the warm, enthusiastic response Eric had been hoping for. He yearned to hear the whimper of need in her throat, her voice catching at the sound of his. He tried again. "I've been thinking about you all day."

He heard her take a deep breath, exhale it slowly. "Ah...I see."

"Don't tell me you haven't been thinking about me, too. Not after last night."

"Last night I sent you home. Nothing happened."

A vein twitched in Eric's jaw.

*Nothing happened?*

She'd given him the most amazing blow-job he'd ever experienced,

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and she called that *nothing*?

"I beg to differ," he said, his irritation growing. When she told him to leave, he'd assumed she was nervous, overwhelmed by the reality of what they'd just done. But she'd had all day to think about it, to crave a proper ending to what they'd only begun the night before.

"Is there something I can do for you?" Josie asked, her icy tone cooling his libido at an alarming rate.

He considered admitting that he'd called only to hear her voice, but doubted she'd be happy with that answer. "I thought I'd call and see if there was anything else you needed to proceed with the match."

"No, thanks. I think we have everything."

"Oh. So, that's it, then?"

"That's it," she said. An awkward silence descended on the line. "Look, I'll let you know as soon as I have a potential match, okay?"

It was damn well not okay, and she knew it. Eric gritted his teeth. "Fine."

Josie hesitated for only a brief second before saying, "I'll call you," and promptly hanging up as Eric struggled to formulate a coherent response.

He slammed down the receiver with enough force to chip a shard of plastic from the telephone's edge. It flew over his narrow metal desk to land with a loud clink in the garbage can.

Eric's hand shook as he raked it through his hair, annoyance and anger blending to form an altogether new and unpleasant sensation. He was used to turning women down when they approached him, careful to keep his heart, and his cock, well out of reach of anyone who'd inevitably leave him anyway.

But Josie was not like any other woman who'd pursued him since Melanie left. Quite the opposite. She seemed to want nothing to do with him. If not for her outward display of unbridled lust the previous night, he'd have thought she wasn't interested at all.

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He leaned his elbows on the windowsill and stared out at the sun-scorched lawn. The heady scent of roses drifted in from the garden behind the studio. It was almost five o'clock, but back here, Eric was sheltered from the bustle of rush-hour traffic.

What kind of woman worshipped his cock the way Josie had, then wanted nothing more to do with him? She didn't seem sex-starved and, truth be told, she was the kind of woman who'd never lack for male companionship. Tall and slender, with curves in all the right places and a mane of red hair he loved gripping while she sucked him off, Josie was every man's wet dream.

She wasn't rejecting him. There had to be something else going on. He squinted into the bright afternoon sun as a half-shaped idea began to take form. Whatever it was, he'd get to the bottom of it. If Josie Wright thought she could brush him off with a few icy words, she had more to learn about him than that silly sex survey of hers could possibly show.

A knock on the door interrupted his thoughts. He turned in time to see the studio receptionist, Karen Sly, storm into his office. Petite and stylish, Karen had just graduated from college. With her ready smile and a friendly demeanor, she was the main reason Lotus Yoga had enrolled so many male students in the last six months.

"Mr. Beeler's wife just called."

Eric grimaced. "How is he?"

"He's badly hurt."

"I told him not to overdo it." Eric swore, frustration knotting his muscles. "I told him!"

"Yeah, well, he didn't listen." Karen's pretty face found a frown of concern. "Do you think maybe we should change the policy about allowing beginners into some of the more advanced classes?"

"Yes," he said quickly, then hesitated. "No."

If Josie hadn't been allowed to come to the advanced yoga class with Felicia, then Eric wouldn't have met her. But was that enough of a

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reason to put other people's health in danger?

Karen lifted a blonde eyebrow. "Which is it?"

"Yes," Eric said. "Let's amend that policy. I hate feeling responsible for people who can't follow simple instructions. If only they'd put the same kind of energy into warm-up stretches as they do into trying to attract attention from the members of the opposite sex, we'd see a lot less injuries."

"Mr. Beeler's back spasm wasn't your fault."

"Maybe not. But I'd rather not have to cancel another class if I can help it."

Karen smiled, her face flushed as she stared at him. "What are you doing tonight, boss?"

Eric grinned, his thoughts turning back to Josie. "I'm going to see a friend."

"Oh," Karen said, disappointment etched on her features. "I thought perhaps, if you weren't busy, that we could—"

"Maybe some other time," Eric said quickly, cutting her off.

She nodded, the smile returning. "I'll hold you to that."

Once Karen had pulled the door shut behind her, Eric checked his schedule for the remainder of the evening. He had one class left, a three-part Introduction to Meditation course. Tonight was the last class of the series, and he looked forward to unwinding with his students.

He wondered what Josie was doing. She'd definitely still be at work. Would she grab dinner at her desk? Or go out with Felicia? He hated picturing her eating alone.

And what would she be wearing? Another tight, sexy top that hugged her breasts? Perhaps, but probably not. She'd most likely have on something more professional, like the pin-striped skirt and silk blouse combo from their first night together.

Eric left his office and headed for the workout studio, determination building inside him.

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He had to see Josie.

And this time, he'd make sure she couldn't brush him off.

## CHAPTER 5

Josie clicked another news headline link on the CNN website and stifled a yawn. Without bothering to read the entire article, she closed the open browser window and glanced at the small clock on the bottom of her monitor. It was almost 8:00 P.M., and her stomach rumbled, a gentle reminder that she hadn't eaten since noon.

She was beginning to regret her decision not to join Felicia for yoga class and a light dinner. At least she wouldn't have been alone, although seeing Eric was the last thing she needed.

But it was the only thing she wanted.

Ignoring the stiffness in her neck and shoulders, Josie glanced at the file still open on her desktop. Eric's picture made him look severe, his square jaw and full lips pursed in concentration. She remembered his laugh, the way his full lips curled when he was trying to hide a smile, and the small dimple in his right cheek that appeared only when he was genuinely amused.

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It wasn't fair. She hadn't been drawn to a man in years, and when one came along, he ended up being completely wrong for her. She and Eric were total opposites. Even discounting the virgin bride requirement, she had nothing in common with him. They didn't even like the same food. A relationship couldn't last if they had to constantly argue about which restaurant to choose on special occasions.

She frowned as she stared at Eric's image on her flat screen monitor. Though static and remote, his blue eyes managed to send a shiver of desire through her. She leaned in closer, trailed her fingertip over the faint shadow of stubble on his chin.

"No one said anything about a relationship," she murmured, an idea starting to take shape. "It would only be sex. Great sex. Nothing more."

But could she leave it at that? Her pulse quickened as she contemplated a hot, no-strings-attached night. The sex would be explosive, overwhelming, intense. And then it would be over, and she'd find him a bride with whom he could live happily ever after, while Josie...

Well, she'd do the same thing she'd been doing for years before walking in to Lotus Yoga. She'd work hard, play occasionally, and be blissfully unaware that men like Eric Stokes even existed.

Felicia was wrong. Josie was a big girl, and she could handle her heart. If she decided to get involved in a purely physical relationship, she was mature enough to keep it that way. Physical. She could leave her emotions out of it, and spend a blissful night having mad, passionate sex with the most appealing man she'd met in a very long time.

*Without falling in love.*

It might even be easy. And it would definitely be fun.

She grinned as she took her eyes off the picture and reached for the phone. Hopefully, he'd still be at the studio. She'd apologize for her earlier behavior and invite him to dinner, or better yet, straight to her

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place. If sex was the ultimate goal, there was no reason to prolong the agonizing wait.

Lifting her gaze, she felt a rumble of shock rush through her as her eyes met Eric's. He leaned against her doorframe, his lean, deeply tanned body silhouetted against the shadowed corridor.

"How long have you been standing there?" she asked, her tone edgy and a little defensive.

"Long enough to see an entire slew of emotions play over your face."

Josie frowned. "I'm not that easy to read."

"Not when you think someone's watching," he agreed. "But you didn't hear me come in."

"Well, you shouldn't be sneaking around like that. I might have mistaken you for a burglar and called the cops."

He lifted a skeptical eyebrow and walked into her office. Damn, but he looked incredible. The same sexy hint of stubble he sported in his candidate picture now gave him a rugged appearance. The sight made a knot form in Josie's stomach and her pussy moisten in anticipation.

She stood, and his gaze raked over her from head to toe before settling back on her face. "I tried to picture what you'd be wearing today. My imagination didn't do you justice."

A burst of heat rushed to Josie's cheeks. "Thanks," she whispered, suddenly at a loss for words. "What are you doing here?"

"I wanted to see you."

"I told you I'd call when I had more news about a suitable match." Now that he was stood just inches away, Josie didn't know how to behave. Planning to invite him over for a sexy night of seduction was one thing. She'd have had time to prepare, light some scented candles and bring out the whipped cream. But having him march right into her office, his teasing smile promising sensual delights, left her at a distinct disadvantage.



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*I can't go through with this.*

Eric shrugged, unconcerned. "Right now, the match is the last thing I care about."

"But your birthday's just a few weeks away." Josie eyed him with a dark frown as she tried to make sense of his words, but his expression was inscrutable. Had he changed his mind about needing a virgin bride before his thirtieth birthday? About wanting a wife at all?

"You're the best at what you do. I have no doubt you'll find me a suitable spouse before then."

Josie blinked hard, disappointment clogging her throat. Of course he wouldn't have changed his mind. He was too determined to go through with this. No one came to Modern Matchmakers only to back out. Her services were much too expensive for that.

"Since you weren't on your way out, I think I'll stay a while," Eric announced, taking another step toward her. Josie was grateful for the barrier of the desk between them, but she knew even that wouldn't hold him back for long.

She didn't want him to stay.

She needed him to go.

And while he was at it, maybe he could erase any lingering memory of his presence, like the spicy scent of aftershave and the way he looked so at ease, so *right* in her office, on her computer monitor, in her life.

*Stop it, Josie. He's off limits.*

Eric moved around the desk, stopping only a few inches away from her. Josie's breathing quickened, her nipples tightening in automatic response. Her body craved a repeat of the night before, yearned for his hands on the curves of her breasts, his mouth around her nipple, his cock springing free from the confines of his pants.

He reached out and placed his hands on her hips, his thumbs running maddening circles over the thin material of her summery

## *LIKE A VIRGIN*

pantsuit.

“I’m not going to hurt you,” he said, his voice thick with emotion.

Josie started at the honesty in his gaze, the intensity and determination in the set lines of his jaw.

“Not on purpose.”

“Let me show you.” He placed a soft, almost chaste kiss on her lips. It was over before it even began and left a pulsing trail of disappointment and emptiness flowing through her veins.

“Show me?” she echoed.

He nodded. “I want to show you pleasure. Last night, you had me on the brink of madness with your mouth wrapped around my cock.” He trailed more flickering kisses down her neck, and stopped to lick the hollow at the base of her throat.

Josie shuddered, her hands roaming over his shoulders, his hips. “And you want to return the favor?”

“Only if you’ll let me.”

There it was. All she had to do was agree. One simple word had the power to change everything.

She closed her eyes and pressed her body closer to his. Desire and caution warred within her, urging her to make a decision before it was too late. If she spent another minute in his arms, she’d be lost, unable to pull back.

He claimed her lips at last in a passionate, enduring kiss, his fingers sliding beneath the waistband of her pants. She sighed into his mouth as he released the small button clasp and pushed them down over her hips. Josie didn’t even think to protest as the garment slid around her ankles, leaving her naked from the waist down but for a pair of white cotton briefs.

She cringed inwardly, suddenly wishing she’d worn sexier underwear. Something lacey or silky, anything but the boring, white panties she always wore. But no one had seen her naked in a very long

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time, and when she'd left the house that morning, she assumed it would stay that way.

Eric pulled her up in his arms and placed her on the desk, parting her legs as he slid his body between her open thighs. She could smell the scent of her own arousal, musky and strong, penetrating through the damp panties.

Eric closed his hand over her pussy, the pressure of his palm against her clit driving her to the edge of distraction even through the cloth barrier. "Say it, sweetheart. I need to hear you tell me you want this as much as I do. If you don't, all you have to do is send me home again. I won't come back."

The thought of not having him in her arms was too much to bear. Josie's pulse quickened, and she exhaled a breath she didn't know she'd been holding. Their gazes locked for what felt like an eternity while he continued to press against her sex, the slow, rhythmic movements making her squirm.

"Yes," she whispered, driving her hips forward, wriggling her pussy against his hand. "More."

\* \* \*

Eric's cock throbbed, need and desire culminating into a pulsing rush of heat that settled low in his balls. He trailed his fingers along the inside of Josie's thigh, trying to rein in the incredible urge to tear off her panties and plunge straight into her moist, inviting sex.

The last thing he wanted was to give her a reason to send him away again. He still didn't understand what had caused her bizarre behavior the night before, but he didn't want to experience a repeat of that encounter.

He knelt before her, his fingers never breaking contact with her skin. She wriggled slightly and spread her legs wider, giving him plenty of room.

"That's it, sweetheart," he murmured against her thigh. "Open up

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for me.”

Josie tangled her fingers in his hair, tugging his head closer to her heated core. He gladly obeyed her insistent pressure. Resting his mouth against the cotton of her panties, he let his tongue snake out and brush her tender skin through the fabric.

She uttered a raw moan and lifted her hips. Her spicy scent was maddening, tightening his balls into a state of uncontrollable arousal. He wanted to be inside her, to fuck her until she screamed his name and he came deep inside her.

*It's too soon.*

He groaned as he pressed his lips to her warm sex, nibbling through the barrier of the fabric. He'd promised her pleasure, and he'd deliver.

His tongue trailed long, lazy circles over her swollen folds, wetting the panties with a mixture of his saliva and her cream. He made his way to the edges of her underwear, slipping his tongue beneath them to taste her skin for a brief moment. He could barely discern the flavor of her juices, but the tangy, intoxicating scent strengthened with each swipe of his tongue. Kneading his fingers into her thighs, he held her legs apart while he placed open mouthed kisses on her pussy.

She squirmed and wriggled under him, pressing her cunt closer to his lips, pulling his hair as her excitement built. “Oh, God, Eric, take them off. Please.”

He chuckled as he lifted his head from between her legs and pulled the panties down over her hips. She lifted her gorgeous, tight ass from the desk just long enough to let him slide the underwear off completely.

“You’ve got the sexiest little pussy,” he told her as he stared at the sight she’d revealed to him.

And he meant every word. Her shaved cunt glistened with beaded drops of her cream, the pink, pouty folds jutting out slightly between her swollen lips. He pressed his mouth to it, flicking his tongue over the moisture gathered within. She tasted incredible. Musky and

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feminine, her sweet juices flowed down his throat as he devoured her.

Eric's cock twitched and strained against his jeans. He slid his tongue through her slit and lapped at her dripping core as his hand worked the buckle of his belt. He had it undone in two quick moves, and the zipper followed, freeing his throbbing cock.

He nudged her clit with the tip of his tongue and Josie screamed her pleasure. She gripped his head with both hands and shoved his mouth into her snatch, all the while begging for more.

Her shyness had all but vanished, Eric realized as he licked her. She urged him on with her body and her words, pleading for release.

"That's it. Right there." She moaned and twisted beneath his tongue. "That feels so good."

A self-satisfied smirk touched his lips, but Josie gave him no respite. She clenched her thighs around his ears, trapping him in a world that was nothing but her sweet slit, her fevered demands. When she came, it was with the same intensity and passion she'd thrown into letting him know how much she enjoyed every swipe of his tongue.

Eric held her as trembles shook her slender body, her juices running freely down his tongue.

"That was incredible," she said, panting. "More."

He chuckled, rising to stand before her, his cock clutched tightly in his hand. "How about something a little different?"

Josie's eyes widened as she gazed at his rod. Her tongue darted out to wet her lips. "Yes."

That simple word of assent was all he needed. He thrust between her slick folds, intending to go slow, but unable to stop the overwhelming pleasure that rushed through his cock. Her pussy clenched and gripped him tighter.

Eric groaned. She was all around him, squeezing him, enveloping him in her warmth, her cream, her scent. "Josie," he whispered, his voice hoarse and foreign to his own ears.

## *LIKE A VIRGIN*

Her hands gripped his arms and he claimed her mouth, thrusting his tongue between her full lips. She kissed him back and their tongues melded in a furious dance, teasing, tasting, exploring.

Letting his hands roam over her luscious body, Eric found her breasts still encased in the blouse she wore. He pulled it open and buttons flew to land with a loud clink all around them. He wanted to apologize, but Josie never slowed her pace. He thrust into her with both cock and tongue, his hands kneading her breasts, pinching her nipples, rolling them between thumb and forefinger.

She moaned into his mouth, clamped her thighs around him and pulled him closer. The edge of the desk bit into his legs as he fucked her, but it didn't matter. Nothing mattered but her tight cunt wrapped around his cock.

Josie shuddered and came again, warming his shaft with an unexpected rush of heat. The feeling was too intense, and Eric couldn't hold back any longer. He gave in to the powerful orgasm, his hot semen spurting out of him and deep inside Josie while her legs held him tight to her.

He collapsed against her, listening to the rise and fall of her panting breath, and nibbled the sensitive skin on her throat. Though slowly softening, his cock remained buried to the hilt inside her pussy.

Eric stumbled back as reality hit him abruptly with an unwelcome force. "Damn." He pulled back, his shaft sliding out of her. Cold air grazed his wet cock and he forced back a shiver. "I'm so sorry."

Josie stared at him, her eyes wide and glazed with satisfied lust. Color stained her cheeks, and Eric didn't think he'd ever seen anyone look more exquisitely breathtaking than Josie Wright did at that exact moment. "For what?"

"I didn't think..." His words trailed off as he pointed at his bare cock.

"Oh." Understanding shimmered in her eyes. "We didn't use a

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condom.”

He shook his head slowly. “It’s my fault.”

“No more than mine,” she said, her lips curling into a sad smile. “I think we were both swept away by the moment.”

He could still smell her, the musky scent of her arousal stirring his spent cock. “It won’t happen again,” he assured her.

“Really?” She arched a perfect eyebrow. “That’s too bad. I rather enjoyed it.”

Eric couldn’t help the grin that came over his features, and the more he tried to hide it, the wider it became. “It was good for you, then?”

“Incredible. Why would you want a wife who didn’t do...what we just did?”

Emotion welled in his throat as he tried to come up with a reasonable answer. Because he was afraid of getting hurt suddenly sounded beyond lame. “I just...I thought...”

“Forget I asked,” Josie said, her smile disappearing into an unreadable mask. “It’s none of my business anyway.”

“I have a better idea. Tonight, we forget about everything.”

She eyed him skeptically. “And do what?”

“More of what we’ve been doing.”

For a moment, he thought she’d refuse. Emotions flickered over her face and she hesitated, her eyes hidden by the sweep of her long lashes.

Relief and excitement rushed through him as she hopped gracefully from the desk and wrapped her hand around his semi-hard cock. Her eyes sparkled with mischief.

“Show me exactly what you have in mind.”

## CHAPTER 6

Josie awoke to a languid, satiated feeling and half-shadows warmed by moonlight. For a moment, she couldn't figure out where she was, but she knew there were arms wrapped around her, holding her tight against a firm, masculine chest.

*Eric.*

Their night together came rushing back and she melted against him. They'd made love again and again, wandering the halls of the empty office building, searching for the most dangerous, exciting spots they could find. After having sex in the small staff kitchen, on the secretary's desk, and against the entrance to the office, they'd finally collapsed, exhausted, on the wide sofa in the reception area.

She grinned as she burrowed deeper into the soft leather, grateful the cleaning crew didn't work Friday nights and the office employed no security guards. The faint stubble on Eric's chin scratched her shoulder as he sighed in his sleep.



## *LIKE A VIRGIN*

*He's perfect.*

The thought formed abruptly and nudged its way into her mind. He *was* perfect. From those gorgeous blue eyes to the rock-hard abs and the long, thick cock, every inch of Eric was built for maximum pleasure.

But not her pleasure. At least, not for long.

Josie stifled the sob that settled in her throat. How could she fall so hard for a man who wanted nothing to do with her long-term? And what kind of man would fuck a woman senseless, but decide she wasn't the type he wanted to marry?

She slid out from underneath his arm, sitting up on the sofa. Felicia's mother had been right. There were men in the world who were perfectly happy to take whatever she offered, but once they had it, she was nothing more than spoiled goods. She certainly wasn't good enough for a meaningful relationship. He probably wouldn't even want to set eyes on her again once the sun came up.

She stood, intending to head for her office and her discarded clothes, but she couldn't help one last glance at him. Eric slept, unaware she'd moved. His lashes cast long shadows on his cheek as a streetlight spilled pale light into the office and over his handsome features.

Josie's gaze traveled over the length of him, taking in the muscular planes of his chest, his tight stomach, the patch of curls nestled between his thighs and the thick cock splayed atop them. She knew she should turn away, but she hesitated just a moment longer. If nothing else, she wanted to remember the sight of him long after it should have fragmented and faded into obscurity.

She'd never see him like this again.

*Ever.*

The enormity of the word hit her with a force she hadn't expected. Her knees buckled slightly as she struggled to maintain her composure.

## *LIKE A VIRGIN*

Biting her lip, she fought to keep the tears at bay. If she'd had any idea things were going to turn out this way, she'd never have let Felicia talk her into that yoga class.

A feeling Josie didn't recognize settled in the pit of her stomach. It felt like longing, and fear, and...

No.

Love didn't happen so fast. Not to her.

*Oh, God. This time it has.*

The realization stole her breath. She loved a man who could never be with her. She didn't meet all of his stupid requirements, he'd all but told her that himself when she tried to broach the subject in her office. Thinking that perhaps what they'd just shared would make him confide in her, or at least explain his reasons, she'd tried to joke about his desire for a virgin bride. Eric had refused to answer, and she ignored his obvious evasion, giving in to the lust that seemed to overshadow all her mental faculties when he was near.

There was only one thing she could do now. The same thing she should have done a long time ago.

Josie didn't glance at Eric again as she turned and rushed into her office. There, she tugged her shirt over her head and stepped into her pants as her eyes adjusted to the harsh, fluorescent light, not bothering to put on panties. They lay on the floor by the window, where they'd been hastily cast aside when Eric peeled them off her only hours before.

Her inner walls clenched at the memory. Traitorous lust built inside her, and moisture flooded her core, wetting the thin fabric of her pants.

Giving her head a resolute shake, Josie sat behind her desk and started the computer. Eric's image flashed on-screen.

"There you are."

Absorbed in her work, Josie didn't hear him come into her office an hour later. When she looked up, startled by the sound of his voice, he

## *LIKE A VIRGIN*

was fully dressed, his clothes having been discarded by the entrance.

"I'm working," Josie said, forcing her gaze back to the screen though his steel-blue eyes demanded her attention. Her heart pounded, and every nerve ending in her body flickered to life, fully aware of his presence.

"It's three o'clock in the morning," Eric pointed out reasonably. "Aren't there other things you'd rather be doing?"

Her cheeks heated as she remembered his hands on her breasts, his mouth on her heated pussy. And she wanted more.

Much more than he was willing to give.

"We need to talk," she said, still avoiding his eyes.

"In a minute. There's something I have to do first."

He strolled toward her, moved to her side of the desk, and wheeled her chair until she was forced to face him. Gripping her arms, he lowered his head and fastened his mouth on hers. His tongue sought hers and found it, and Josie opened up to him, kissing him back fiercely despite the knowledge that one embrace didn't—couldn't—change anything.

His passion for her was just that. Passion. Lust. It wouldn't last, because he didn't want it to.

But the taste of him drove every coherent, logical thought out of her head until Josie could concentrate only on the feel of him in her arms, his mouth clamped hard on hers. She clutched at his shirt, desperate to make him stay just a moment longer. He returned the hunger in her kiss, moaning against her mouth.

How long Eric kissed her, she didn't know. But she gave herself over to him completely in that time. Every soft flick of his tongue, every ragged breath threatened to send her over the edge.

When she finally broke the embrace, Josie's breathing was labored. Her thoughts spun in a hundred different directions, all leading back to the man standing in front of her.

## *LIKE A VIRGIN*

Eric leaned against the edge of her desk, his hands in his pockets, a slow, satisfied smile spreading over his face. “What was it you wanted to talk about?”

His question brought Josie’s racing mind back to reality, and a bitter smile touched her lips. She cleared her throat, searching for the right words and finally deciding on the blunt truth.

“I found you a wife.”

\* \* \*

“I see.” Eric rubbed the back of his neck and stared at Josie. “That’s why you left me in the middle of the night? To continue your search?”

She nodded, not meeting his gaze. “If I didn’t find her tonight, I would have found her tomorrow. The timing doesn’t change a thing.”

“You’re wrong.” Eric balled his fists at his sides, anger surging through him. She shouldn’t have done this tonight. Not tonight, not while he—

*What?*

Not while he was busy falling in love with her? The thought brought him up short. “What happened between us changed everything.”

Josie’s cheeks turned pink, the flush setting off her beautiful green eyes. She still wouldn’t look at him. “Heidi Thorton is perfect for you. Ambitious, smart, blonde...”

“And a virgin,” Eric finished for her.

Josie straightened, finally meeting his gaze. “Of course. She’s exactly what you asked for.”

Eric swore, low under his breath. The satisfaction in her eyes surprised him, although he supposed it shouldn’t have. He knew Josie well enough by now to understand that her pride was everything to her. She’d taken the job regardless of his absurd demands because it was something she didn’t normally do, and their relationship didn’t change her ability to see the challenge through to the end.

## LIKE A VIRGIN

Eric wanted nothing more than to take her in his arms, to melt away a little of that defiance. She didn't need to prove herself to him. He already knew she was talented, intelligent, and capable of doing anything she set her mind to. There had been no doubt in Eric's mind that she'd obtain a suitable match for him. Though now that she had, he found the prospect didn't hold much appeal.

"I think perhaps we should reconsider our business arrangement," Eric said. He reached forward and took her hand in his, but she pulled back and crossed her arms beneath her breasts.

"No."

The word echoed through the awkward silence that followed. Eric opened his mouth to protest, but words failed him. She'd rejected him, just like that. He thought he loved her, and she'd obviously wanted nothing more than a quick romp through the office.

Her rejection stung him much more than he'd expected. It clung to his soul, tearing through his heart and making it hard to breathe. He should have known better. After all, this was the reason he didn't get involved with gorgeous, independent women. They would inevitably leave him.

"Tell me about Heidi," Eric said, his voice raw with emotion. He glanced at the computer screen.

"She's twenty-nine, works as a marketing consultant, never married, no kids. Blonde, one hundred thirty pounds, five foot three."

"She sounds great," Eric said between clenched teeth. He didn't give a damn what Heidi Thorton looked like, or what she did for a living. The only thing that mattered was that Josie wanted nothing more to do with him.

Josie nodded. "She is. There's a small problem, though."

*Yes. She's not you.*

Wisely, Eric didn't share that thought. He didn't need to see the rejection in her gaze. Hearing it in her voice had been enough.

## *LIKE A VIRGIN*

“She’s backpacking through Europe and can’t be reached.”

“She’s not in the country?”

“No. She’ll return in a couple of weeks, though, and I’ll arrange your first meeting then. I’ll also make her aware of your rather unique requirement of marrying before your birthday, which is only four weeks away.”

“Great. So that gives her two weeks to figure out if she wants to spend the rest of her life with me.”

“She won’t need more than one,” Josie said, then clamped her lips tightly shut. She winced as if she’d said too much.

And she had. With those carelessly spoken words, she’d let him see what she hadn’t allowed him to notice before now. She cared about him. Maybe even as much as he cared for her.

“Josie, I—”

“You need to go.” She walked past him to hold the office door open.

Eric stood and turned toward her, but made no move to walk out. He watched her instead, letting his gaze linger over her curves. Her thick, red tresses shone brightly in contrast to the dark oak of the wood and settled on her shoulders in wild waves, still mussed from their lovemaking.

“Don’t you think we should talk about this?” he asked.

“There’s nothing to talk about. I’ve found you a wife.”

“And I’m sure she’s lovely. But you’re—”

“Not right for you.”

“You know, that’s a really bad trait.”

“What?” Her clear, green gaze met his.

“Interrupting.”

She smiled for only a moment, but it lightened the frown that had marred her features since he’d walked into her office. “I learned it from you.”

## *LIKE A VIRGIN*

“I’d rather you pick up on some of my better qualities.”

“Like your realistic expectations?”

He flinched at the venom in her voice. “I don’t have unrealistic expectations. I needed a virgin because she wouldn’t have enough experience to want to leave me once she’d had enough. How could I possibly disappoint my wife if she had nothing to compare me to?”

Eric held his breath as he waited for Josie’s reaction. He hadn’t expected to confess the reason for his strange request, but he’d had no choice. Making Josie see that he wasn’t some hypocritical, male chauvinist meant having to explain that his desire for an inexperienced wife was genuine. Or at least it had been. Until he met Josie.

Something flickered in her gaze. “Whoever she was, she must have really done a number on you.”

Eric took a deep breath, then released it slowly. He didn’t want to talk about Melanie or her bitter betrayal. He wanted to talk about Josie, and how she felt about him now that she knew.

“It was a long time ago,” he said.

Josie’s gaze grew shadowed. “Don’t settle, Eric. Ever. I’m not the right woman for you.”

He wanted to protest, but he knew it wouldn’t do any good. That he loved her was irrelevant; she’d already made up her mind to send him away. He could see it in the straight line of her shoulders, the slight tilt of her chin.

“I had a really good time,” he said, brushing past her, his steps slow and measured. He grazed her body with his own, and felt her nipples pucker tightly beneath her thin blouse. Desire rushed through him, and he clenched his jaw against the blaze of heat flowing through his veins.

“Me, too.”

Eric heard the office door close behind him, but didn’t turn back.

## CHAPTER 7

The Java Fusion coffeehouse was only a few blocks away from Eric's yoga studio, though it might as well have been an entire world away. While the studio grounds brimmed with greenery and palm trees that bent to brush their wide leaves against the windows, the coffeehouse had been built on prime oceanfront property, surrounded by nothing but clear white sand and turquoise water.

Eric leaned back in his chair and pressed his fingers to his forehead, trying to calm the throbbing ache that had settled there. He blamed it on the cloying heat, though while it was hot enough outside to melt the asphalt off the pavement, the air conditioner in the coffeehouse blew a comfortable stream of cool air across his skin.

He glanced at his watch, then looked around the crowded room. She said she'd be here at five o'clock, but it was ten after, and there was still no sign of her. Eric had arrived early and had settled into a comfortable, plush suede chair with a cup of Darjeeling tea. He'd



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expected her to be on time, if not a little early, and he grew irritated as he scanned the faces of the after-work crowd.

“Eric Stokes?” The tentative female voice had come from behind his chair, and he instinctively stood and turned to face the woman.

Heidi Thorton clasped her hands around a large backpack and gave him a tentative smile. Delicate blond hair curled away from a freckled face to hang down to her waist, and her eyes shone with genuine interest. She was short, barely coming up to Eric’s shoulders, and she looked slender, though her body was hidden underneath baggy jeans and an oversized cotton shirt.

“Thanks for meeting me,” Eric said, taking her hand in his. She had a firm, warm grip as they shook, and her smile broadened.

“I’m sorry I made you wait so long. I didn’t know Josie would find me a match so soon.”

At the sound of Josie’s name, Eric’s pulse quickened. He swallowed hard and sat back in his chair as Heidi took the seat across from him.

“I understand you were in Europe for a while,” he said, loud enough to be heard over the sharp conversational buzz in the room.

Heidi nodded, pointing to her backpack. “I’m an adventure nut,” she admitted with a small laugh. “In fact, I’m returning from a wall climbing session.”

Something akin to annoyance settled in Eric’s chest. It would have only taken her a few minutes to change into something more appropriate for a first date. He thought with longing of Josie and her flowered skirt, the wrap green top and those sexy sandals.

But he’d wanted a no-frills kind of girl, one who shared the same love for fitness and adventure sports that he did.

A waitress approached their table, pen and notepad poised to take Heidi’s order. “What would you like?”

“Green tea, please,” Heidi said.

## *LIKE A VIRGIN*

The waitress nodded and walked away. Eric took a sip of his own tea, watching Heidi over the rim of his cup. Josie would have ordered something sweet, decadent. There would have been chocolate, whipped cream, and a dash of cinnamon spice. Perhaps a chocolate and Irish cream cappuccino, or something even sweeter, like a truffle hazelnut chocolate latte. She'd devour it, and he'd be able to taste the savory flavor of the rich drink when he kissed her, licking the last remaining traces off her lips.

"...and then when I came back, there was a message waiting on my machine, saying she'd found you."

"Who'd found me?" Eric tried to give himself a mental shake to banish the vision of Josie's full, tempting mouth.

"Josie Wright. I assume you worked with her on your profile, too?"

Eric could only nod. More images flooded his thoughts. Josie lying on the hard, oak table, her soft body beneath his hands, his teeth grazing her nipples and the maddening scent of her arousal wrapping around him like physical traces of her desire.

"She's supposed to be the best."

Eric was certainly inclined to agree with Heidi's assessment. Josie was the best looking woman he'd ever seen. She gave the best blow job he'd ever had. And her tight, smoothly shaven pussy felt best when it was soaked with her need for him.

His cock hardened and strained against his pants. Gritting his teeth to hold back the groan that threatened to spill from his throat, Eric glanced around the room, letting his gaze rest on the brightly colored paintings and the animated faces of those around him. Red hair caught his attention, and he watched as a woman placed a soft, sensual kiss on her companion's mouth. She turned toward Eric, but her features were nothing like Josie's. Relief and disappointment mixed with longing inside his chest, and he forced his gaze away from the couple.

The waitress came back and placed a tall mug of green tea on the

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table between Eric and Heidi, then hurried to the next table.

Eric stared at Heidi while she blew into her hot drink, trying to picture their life together in the blink of an eye. She was exactly what he'd asked for. Blonde and petite, she was pretty in a girl-next-door way. She wasn't a stunning vixen, but she was natural and wholesome. She had as much interest in health food and fitness activities as he did. And he didn't have to ask to know that she was as pure as he'd wanted her to be. Josie would have ensured she found him the perfect woman.

Except that he'd already found the perfect woman on his own.

He stood up quickly and tossed enough money on the table to cover both drinks. Heidi's shocked gaze traveled the length of him and her eyebrows furrowed above her dark eyes. "I don't understand. You're leaving? But Josie said you were looking for a long-term commitment. You can't even make it through one date?"

"Josie created my profile three weeks ago. A lot's changed since then."

Heidi blinked. She stared at him with wide, uncomprehending eyes. "In three weeks?"

"My needs have changed."

"You no longer want a wife?"

"No, those needs have stayed the same." He gripped the back of the chair as he tried to explain the situation without insulting her. "My requirements for a wife aren't what they used to be."

A flash of annoyance crossed Heidi's features. "You should have told Josie before she arranged this stupid date."

A harsh laugh grated Eric's throat, and the sound seemed to startle Heidi even more than his confession.

"Trust me. I wish I had, too."

\* \* \*

"I'd like you to think about all the women you've had sex with. Was there a common trait between them?"

## *LIKE A VIRGIN*

The man across from Josie nodded, tugged at his tie. A sheen of sweat thoroughly coated his face, and they'd only reached the second question in the preliminary interview.

"Y—yes. They were...older."

Josie gave him an encouraging smile and molded her fingers to the keyboard, ready to record the slightest nugget of information that might be useful. "How much older?"

"At least thirty years."

Josie typed his answer into the document, trying not to let her surprise show on her features. Carl Robichaud was a 35 year old tax accountant with wide eyes that twitched when he was nervous, a pudgy face, and a bulbous nose. When he didn't fiddle with his tie, he ran his hand over his comb-over, ensuring that all the fluffy strands remained slicked down to his shiny pate.

A rumble of shouts filtered through the closed office door, and Carl glanced anxiously over his shoulder. Josie furrowed her brows and tried to concentrate on her client. Whatever was happening out there, Felicia could take care of it.

"Do you prefer vaginal or anal intercourse?"

Carl's face turned a bright shade of red, his eyes threatening to pop out of his head. "V—va—vaginal."

Josie sighed. It was going to be a long session.

"Is she in there?" The husky male voice echoed through Josie's door and her heart skipped a beat. It couldn't be...

"Yes, but you can't go in," Felicia said as Eric shoved the door open.

Carl jumped out of his chair. "I'll come back another time," he said, all but running for the hallway.

Eric marched into Josie's office, Felicia right at his heels. "I tried to stop him," she said, curiosity and annoyance mixing in her gaze. "He wouldn't listen."

## *LIKE A VIRGIN*

Josie's lips quivered as she tried to paste a smile on her face, although her heart threatened to pound out of her chest. Why was he here?

"That's alright, Felicia. I appreciate the effort."

Felicia mumbled something under her breath as she slammed the door shut behind her, leaving Eric and Josie alone for the first time in weeks.

"Why are you here? If your date didn't go well, you could have called my secretary. We'd have found you another match." Josie's chest tightened as she pictured him in another woman's arms, but she resolutely pushed aside the unwelcome thoughts. If he'd reconsidered his requirements, he could have come back weeks ago. But he hadn't.

The first few days after their explosive night together had been the hardest, but the constant longing became a little easier to bear with each passing day. She'd thrown herself into her work, knowing that dedicating herself to a task would keep her from focusing on a headache that would never otherwise mend.

"I missed you," he said.

The simplicity of his words startled Josie, and she looked into his eyes, searching for the slightest sign of dishonesty. She found nothing but genuine longing in his gaze.

"That's not enough," she murmured. "I can't be the person you need me to be."

Eric crossed his arms over his chest and rocked back on his heels. "And you think you know what I need?"

Josie released a fluttering sigh. He needed someone who wouldn't hurt him, wouldn't leave him. Someone innocent enough not to know what she was missing when she was in his arms.

Or someone who knew exactly what she had when Eric was in her bed, inside her, claiming every part of her as his own. Josie had a lot more experience with sexual encounters than Eric required in a bride,

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but she'd never felt this way with anyone else.

"I thought I did." She closed her eyes for a brief moment, trying to make sense of her jumbled thoughts. Eric wanted a wife before his thirtieth birthday, which was now only two weeks away. And he was here, in her office, telling her...what? That he'd reconsidered his needs?

When she blinked her eyes open, he stood only inches away from her. His slightly parted lips glistened invitingly, and she yearned to be able to throw herself in his arms and kiss him with wild abandon.

But she couldn't. Not until she knew exactly why he'd come.

"Unless you're here to propose, I don't think this should go any further," she said, her words barely above a whisper.

The challenge hung between them in the silence that followed. Josie's stomach churned with the knowledge that she'd just sealed their fate. For the third and final time, he'd walk out. And this time, he'd never return.

A tremor traveled up her arm as Eric's hand brushed, then closed around hers. Her throat grew tight, and afraid to speak, Josie waited.

"When I approached you a few weeks ago, I had it all planned out. I wanted to marry before I turned thirty. I wanted a woman with whom I could spend my life. And I thought I knew exactly what she'd be like." A faint smile touched his lips. "Then I met you, and you turned my world upside down."

Josie swallowed hard against a prickling of unease. "That's a good thing, right?"

Eric pressed his lips to her forehead in a slight kiss. The sensation traveled through her body, leaving her breathless. "A very good thing."

He wrapped his arms around her, pulling her to his chest. Spicy aftershave and pure male musk enveloped her as she breathed him in.

"I don't want you to marry me because I'm on a deadline," Eric said. "I want you to marry me because you can't live without me."

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She chuckled against him. "I didn't list arrogance as one of the fundamental traits in your profile."

"Arrogant? No. Just realistic. I knew that when I finally met the woman of my dreams, she'd feel the same way about me." He hesitated for a moment before continuing. "You do, don't you?"

Josie tilted her head and looked into his eyes. In them, she saw everything she'd ever wanted. "I love you," she whispered.

Happiness flashed in Eric's eyes before he brought his mouth down on hers in a thorough kiss. His tongue slid between her lips and she groaned at the delicious taste of him.

Eric's cock stiffened, his erection pressing hard against her belly. Josie whimpered against his mouth. She trailed her hand down his chest and lower still, over his hard abdomen, until she could rub his shaft through the thickness of his pants.

Her body throbbed with the heat of passion as Eric held her to him. She couldn't resist the promise in his kiss, his touch.

She broke the kiss, panting as Eric's gaze burned into hers. "Show me how much you missed me," she said

Eric's hands slid over her back, cupped her ass, and pressed her hips to him. "I'll be happy to show you for the rest of my life."

In that second, she knew he meant every word. Eric would spend night after night making love to her, claiming her body as he'd claimed her heart.

With expert fingers, she unbuckled his belt and lowered his zipper, then slid her hand beneath the waistband of his boxers to cradle his cock. She brushed the tip to caress the slit at the top of his shaft.

Eric's body shuddered at her touch. "On second thought," he whispered, his breath fanning her mouth. "Why wait?"

## LACEY SAVAGE

Lacey Savage began her love affair with romance at an early age. In high school, she checked out steamy romance novels from the public library and would often be found reading them in the middle of class.

Lacey still reads more than she cares to admit, and probably more than her husband would like, considering how many books she keeps bringing into the house. Her favorite genres have always been erotica, romance, fantasy, science fiction and mystery, so she tries to incorporate a little of each into her writing.

She initially majored in Marketing, then went back to school to major in English Literature. After earning her degrees, she decided to turn her efforts to her true passion: writing. A hopeless romantic, Lacey loves writing about the intimate, sensual side of relationships.

She currently resides in Ottawa, Canada, with her loving husband and their mischievous cat.

You can learn more about Lacey by visiting her website at [www.laceysavage.com](http://www.laceysavage.com) and can reach her at [laceysavage@rogers.com](mailto:laceysavage@rogers.com).

\* \* \*

***Don't miss Getting Lucky, by Lacey Savage,  
available soon from Amber Quill Press, LLC***

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