



Authors note:

Dear Reader: I am obsessed, I have to admit. Obsessed with Eve, temptation, love and sin, love and death, love and madness, with the dark side of love. I've made it a point to explore my obsessions, so please forgive me if my characters are not your every day heroes and heroines, nor some of the endings the ones you would expect. No one said love was easy...

However, in Tequila Madness, the characters were so very in love with each other, that not even **I** could keep them apart! It was not supposed to end this way at the beginning, and yet there you have it. So cheers for your usual happily-ever-after ending...and cheers for love when it is indeed able to conquer it all! Wait for the next series of books all about these lovable 'friends' who each had to have a story of their own . . . I'm sure you'll have fun, sexy nights reading about them!

TEQUILA MADNESS

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TEQUILA MADNESS

EVE POWERS

It was a night of friends, tequila and games.

They had been drinking for several hours, and now the eight of them sat in a circle around Gary's living room, playing 'Spin the bottle'. A cloud of smoke billowed above them. Gary himself was already passed out asleep, but if the head of the bottle would point at him, they would have no qualms in waking him up. They drank shots and shots of tequila, and during the first rounds of 'Truth or Dare' they'd heard some interesting confessions. Before passing out, Gary confessed that if he had to go to bed with one of his straight friends, he would do so with Alex.

"Everyone wants to fuck Alex," Patty said, shaking her auburn curls. "That was too easy!"

And when asked how long ago she'd had sex and with who, Patty confessed, "Yesterday, with a Wendy's cashier boy." And they all laughed, and drank some more tequila.

Next Frank confessed the dirtiest sex he'd had was with two girls at the same time, one doing him from behind with a strap-on while he did the other one in the same position. "That is so gross," all of the guys, except Gary who'd passed out already, said.

Next Natalie confessed to having had the best sex of her life with an oversized electric dildo only last week.

"Good for you, Nats," Alex said, his blue eyes sparkling in approval. "Next time feel free to call me over if you need to have a real dick around."

Next Alex confessed his record was fucking five women all at the same time, which left the other men staring at their nails, not even wanting to compete with that.

Then Steven was asked about a wedding date and there was a momentary silence while everyone looked at him expectantly, then at Jane, who was sitting beside him, pink-cheeked. Finally, Steven confessed he already had a date set for next year. Everyone clapped and cheered, and Jane looked dazed, all of a sudden knowing she was to be married next year. They decided to toast, to Steven and Jane and their upcoming marriage, and they drank more tequila. Since William was the designated driver, he was the only one who didn't toast to that, and only watched them with a somber expression on his face.

The next victim was Jane, and they asked if Jane had to go to bed with one of Steven's friends, who would it be? Jane shook her head and said the question was totally unfair, but Steven insisted.

"Honey, come on, it's just a game between friends. We all know it's just for fun."

Jane stole a look at William under her eyes, the most solemn and shy of all of Steven's friends, with dark brown hair and even darker brown eyes. His eyes burned her. And although she didn't like to think of it, and had never openly admitted it, she'd dreamed about him more times than she could remember. Next she looked at Alex, the blonde Adonis, who was gorgeous and angelic but terribly full of himself and Jane wasn't in the least bit attracted to him. Then there was Frank, who was open and outgoing, but with that mean-boy attire and all those cigarettes she had to admit that he wasn't her type at all. But William...

William Dorset, with his clean dark looks and perfect body, was another story. There were nights when she would wake up sweaty and shivering after dreaming about him. And when they accidentally bumped into each other, or touched, her heart would race like a mad little thing.

“Come on, Jane, we’re waiting!” Patty shouted.

Frank closed his eyes and began to snore, making everybody laugh.

“Come on, Jane, Frank’s going to pass out like Gary if you don’t say now.”

“All right, all right, with William,” she said, meeting William’s unreadable face for only a second before she lowered her gaze to the floor. She was still sober enough to feel embarrassed, and she was acutely aware of the deathly silence that fell upon the group at her confession.

“Now that’s a surprise! Kick-ass Jane has the hots for you, Will!” someone shouted.

“Really?” Steven said beside her. “William? He’s the last I expected you’d say,” he whispered.

Her smile shook, and she couldn’t bring herself to meet her boyfriend’s gaze. “I’m sorry, but I was under a lot of pressure and had to pick someone!” she said as the group began to spin the bottle again.

He squeezed her hand in an attempt to comfort her. “I know.”

Suddenly everyone cried, “William! You’re up!”

“Truth or dare, Will?”

“Dare, dare, dare!” they all chanted in unison.

“If he asks for dare he can’t have any more drinks ‘cause he’s the designated driver, so I guess he’ll just have to kiss one of us!” Natalie said, and they all looked at Jane pointedly.

Jane could not bring herself to look at William, but she heard him say, in that low, delicious voice of his, “Truth.”

Patty nodded wickedly, a cigarette dangling from her lips. “So Jane is willing to sleep with you among all Steven’s friends. Now please tell us, would *you* like to fuck *Jane*?”

Jane wanted the floor to swallow her alive. After an eternal silence she looked up and noticed William wasn’t looking at her. He was looking straight at Steven, a muscle twitching in his jaw, when he said, “No.”

Jane felt the blood drain her body in an instant.

“How could you not want to sleep with Jane, you fucking faggot?” Alex shouldered him.

“You’re such a loser, William,” Frank shouted from the other side of the circle.

“Really, Will, who *would* you fuck? I swear I think you’ve taken a vow of celibacy or something. Frank says you haven’t gotten laid in years! Patty, pass the chips please.” Natalie stretched out her hand.

“I think he left a lady love back in London,” Patty said, handing over the bowl of chips. “Get over it, Will, life goes on. There are other girls who want you. Look at Jane, even if she does have Steven to scratch her itch, but she’s already confessed she’d have you in an instant, lucky boy!”

“I think William’s just scared Jane will kick his ass in a second!”

Ever since Jane had blended kick-boxing into her well-known aerobics workouts, her friends had teased her mercilessly, and yet subscriptions to her classes had soared, so she usually took their comments in good spirit – until now.

William just smiled and took it all in good sport, chuckling at their antics, but Jane felt as if she'd been slapped in the face by *him*. Steven looked relieved; he'd expelled his breath and even bent down to give her a peck on the lips when William said he did *not* want to sleep with her.

But Jane had never felt so humiliated in her life. True, she was with Steven, but to openly admit that she'd be willing to sleep with William and then having him say he wouldn't felt so horrible she couldn't even describe in words how she felt. She downed yet another shot of tequila, the liquid burning in her throat. She figured the more she drank, the less it would hurt, for now. In a few weeks, they would all hopefully forget the things that had been said tonight.

A half hour later Steven's Blackberry vibrated, and he frowned when he read the text message. "Honey, I've got to go."

"Aw, come on," Alex said. "Doctor's need to party, too!"

"Damn those emergencies anyway," said Frank.

"Sorry, guys, I've got to go." Steven turned to William. "Will, you're the driver tonight, will you take her home?"

William nodded but Jane furiously shook her head. She wanted nothing to do with William. "I'll crash with Gary, sweetheart," she said. "You can pick me up here tomorrow."

Steven rumbled her long blonde hair. “As long as you’re with Will I’ll know your safe, and I’d rather he take you home. Lord knows what Gary will do if he finds you here when he awakes.”

“Gary’s gay, Steven,” she muttered.

“Yeah but he’s weird, too. Don’t drink too much, sweetheart.” He kissed her softly on the lips before he left, and William looked away and stared absently at the empty bottle that lay forgotten for a moment at the center of the circle.

Jane never expected William would ever hurt her, not in this way, and not in any way. He was one of the most responsible, kind men she knew – or at least she’d thought so until now. Even when Steven was distracted ogling other girls and Jane was on the verge of falling on her back or tripping on something William would be there, hands on her elbows to steady her. And when they’d celebrated Christmas last year at her apartment he’d helped her set the plates and finish cooking the turkey while it should have been Steven who helped her, but he had of course been at the hospital in yet another emergency. And when Steven had been doing early check-ups and she’d sprained her ankle during her morning kick-boxing class, it was William who carried her to the car, William who drove her to the hospital.

This was not all William’s fault, she knew. This was actually her fault for drinking more than she should, and for telling the truth. If she’d said she’d sleep with Alex, it would have been obvious to everyone, and if they’d later teased her about it, she wouldn’t have been in the least bit intimidated, nor hurt by Alex’s opinion of her. But William...

He'd always tortured her with his chocolate eyes, and the way he looked at her with them. He had the darkest eyes, not green like Steven's, or blue like Alex's, but dark and endless. His face was so gorgeous, sleek nose and eyebrows set against a strong, square jaw, that it took all her effort not to drool over it. He was the quietest of them all, and usually kept to himself, but even without talking much, his mere presence commanded attention and respect, and everybody adored him. He knew how to take good care of everyone, even under the worst circumstances. He was tall, lean and strong, and yet unexpectedly gentle. Jane had never seen William make fun of anyone, and when the men teased him about not having a girlfriend yet, he was always such a good sport about it. He'd always been her favorite person. Until now.

When she noticed the tequila bottle they were sharing was bordering on empty, she saw Frank head towards the bar, and said, "Hey, Frank, bring a full tequila on your way back, please."

William scowled at her from the opposite end of the circle. "Should you be drinking more of that, Jane?" he asked. His tone was gentle but firm.

"And why shouldn't I?" she shot back, glowering at him. "I'm old enough, aren't I?" Besides she didn't feel the slightest bit inclined to please him. In fact, she didn't care to look at him anymore. She looked away when she heard his voice again.

"Maybe you'd better stop now, Jane."

"No, I'm not, I'm gonna drink some more!" she chimed happily as Frank handed her a brand new bottle of tequila. She cradled it in her arms, a smile on her face.

"Hey, Jane, truth or dare?" Patty said.

"It's not my turn," Jane said, looking puzzled.

“Yeah, but now we’re picking at random,” Natalie retorted. “You look fuzzy, is that a baby in your arms?” She bent forward to look. “What is that?”

“It’s a bottle,” Jane said.

“Oh,” they burst out laughing, having a riot, tears in their eyes.

William stood, his face serious. “What do you say we call it a night, huh, guys?”

“Oh, is it bedtime already?” Patty said with a pout, already rising to gather her purse.

“We were having fun, William, in case you know what that means,” Alex said, slapping his back.

“Let’s go,” William said, then turned to her, his eyes serious. “You, too, Jane. The bottle can stay here.”

“What about Gary?” someone asked.

They all stared at the sleeping Gary for a moment, lying over a pillow on the floor, mouth open, a drop of saliva clinging haphazardly to the edge of his lips.

“Maybe Jane wants to put him to bed?” one of the guys offered. And they all laughed. All laughed at her expense, because of William, she thought furiously as she followed them toward the elevator.

The six of them barely fit in William’s SUV. Alex rode in front, while Frank and the three women rode in the back. Frank was already snoring, for real this time, and since the four of them were squished tightly in the back seat, Patty and Natalie made a superior effort and thrust his limp, sleeping body onto the trunk. They were still giggling about that, and about the baby (bottle of tequila), when they suddenly said, “Did you see Jane’s face when William said he wouldn’t sleep with her *ever*, not for the whole world?” They

burst out laughing. “Sorry, Jane,” one of them apologized. “But you looked so funny, I wish we’d taped it.”

“I mean I don’t get it. You wanted to sleep with William, but he wouldn’t sleep with you? I mean, he actually said *no* to Jane Farley?” Patty asked in a slurred voice. “Aw, Will, you’re always such a grandpa! Jane, the only thing you didn’t say is *how* exactly you wanted to fuck William?”

Jane wouldn’t even dignify their comments with a reply. She felt William’s eyes looking at her through the rearview mirror but she’d die before she met his gaze, so she kept staring out the window as he guided his silver SUV through the dark Chicago streets. Natalie and Patty were roommates, so they were the first to get down, and next came Alex and Frank. William lived closest to her, in a building just two blocks away from Michigan Avenue, and because her building was only one block from his, she knew that she would unfortunately be the last he’d drop off.

She didn’t ride shot when he dropped Alex in his building, and William didn’t say a word when he noticed she would ride in the back, he merely drove on. She felt her chin tremble all of a sudden, and she knew she wanted to cry. How come William didn’t want to sleep with her? Did he think she was too thin? Didn’t he like tall, athletic blondes?

He pulled over in front of her building and she almost fell on the sidewalk in her rush to get away from him. She raced inside and faintly heard him call her name. He caught up with her in the elevator, just before the doors closed.

“Jane, don’t do this,” he said, his eyes pleading on her face.

She ignored him and stared blankly at the closed aluminum doors, arms crossed, her heel tapping restlessly on the floor as the elevator slowly made its way up to the sixth

floor. He seemed to be waiting for her to acknowledge his presence, but she wouldn't. Oh, no, she wouldn't.

When the elevator door opened, she stormed across the hallway and towards her apartment, fumbling with her keys. He followed her, the mere sound of his voice making her insides shake and tremble. "Jane, please, listen to me," he demanded.

She pushed her door open. "Goodnight, William," she said pointedly, pushing the door closed, but he shoved it before she could close it, and he followed her into the darkened living room, closing the door behind him.

"I'm sorry I hurt you. I swear it was the last thing I wanted to do, Jane."

She turned and glowered at him, feeling brutally betrayed and hurt by him. Moonlight streamed through the windows, making his sharp, chiseled features look shadowed and unbearably gorgeous. "Why would I be hurt, William?" She stared at him, her wild gaze daring him to answer. "I'm with Steven, remember? He wants us to get married next year. Didn't you hear? So why do you think I care if you think I'm hot or not?"

"Then why are you acting like this?"

"Like what? I'm not acting like *anything*, I just want to get some sleep," she lied. She turned to leave but his hand on her arm halted her.

"Did it ever occur to you that I might have been lying, Jane?" he asked in a low, raspy voice.

She gritted her teeth and jerked her arm free of his hold. "Then you're a coward. Because *I'm* the one who has a boyfriend and how come it was okay for *me* to say my very private, very secret thoughts about you, while you, on the other hand, made me the

ridicule, made me feel as if I were some silly perverted slut dreaming about you while I was supposedly in love with someone else and meanwhile you wouldn't even give me the time of day!"

He grabbed her shoulders and squeezed her hard, almost brutally so. "You *own* my day, Jane, but I couldn't let them know that!"

"And what the hell is that supposed to mean, William?" she shouted back.

His eyes gleamed as he looked at her, and every word he said next was like a slap on the face. "It means I want you so much I ache with it. It means every day I replay your face in my head, things you say to me, ways you look at me, smile at me. It means I would *die* to spend the night with you, hold you, kiss you. That's what it means!"

She was speechless at his words, and her heart drummed hard against her chest, so hard and fast that she felt dizzy, as if she were about to faint.

He placed his hands on her cheeks. They were big and warm and shaking hard as he pressed her face with urgency, as if to make her understand. "I nearly went crazy tonight when you said you wanted me," he whispered in a savage, desperate voice. His lips were just inches from her own, so close that if she bent even slightly forward, she could touch them with her own. "I was dying to tell you what I'd do just to be with you. But what good would it do to tell you? You and Steven love each other, you're going to get married, have kids together. It wouldn't matter if I told you – "

"William," she said his name in a breath before she pressed her lips against his.

She heard his quick intake of breath at the contact of her lips, and then his arms were all around her, pulling her closer to him, so close that her breasts pressed hard against his chest, so close that their hips touched, so close that their sexes ardently,

wantonly rubbed against each other, so close that she could explode from the mere nearness of his hot skin. She clung to him, her arms around his neck, and kissed him like she'd always wanted to. Desperately. Furiously. And he, he kissed her like he'd die if he didn't. His mouth was starved for her, his tongue delving deep inside her mouth and tasting, probing, taking.

He pulled away for a second, his eyes searching her face. "Jane, baby, do you want this?" His words were barely audible, his breathing ragged and uneven.

"I do," she breathed. She wanted this more than she would ever admit to anyone. He smelled so good, felt so strong, and so warm, and oh god, so right against her. She shouldn't want him so. She shouldn't. But she did. And the heat of the tequila coursed through her veins like poison, making her want to be reckless, making her want to finally give in to her fantasies and be William's, even if only for one night.

His hands shook as they slowly removed her clothes, first her sweater, then her jeans and underwear. She closed her eyes and let him do what he would with her. At this moment she wanted nothing more than to feel his hands and lips on her body, feel him inside her.

When they both stood naked, he knelt before her and bathed her entire body in hot, wet, fevered kisses. He kissed her breasts, her navel, her legs, until he parted her thighs and kissed her there in that aching spot that had craved his touch so much. Jane nearly fainted in pleasure when he slid his tongue inside her. It was merciless, stroking, tasting, probing. He was thirsty for her, and his tongue licked the folds of her sex and the tender nub of her clit in deep, long strokes that drank everything. And then his finger slipped inside her, so deep she could feel it all the way up to her chest, making it vibrate.

“William,” she breathed his name as if she couldn’t believe this was happening, this dream, becoming a reality, and the reality by far exceeding her imagination. He came up to meet her gaze and ran his warm, tender hands over her body, every crook and contour receiving his equal attention.

“Please make love to me,” she begged before she kissed the warm, taut skin on his neck.

“I couldn’t stop if I wanted to,” he murmured as he carefully lowered her onto the carpet, there in the darkened living room, with the lonely bed in her bedroom just a few feet away from them. But Jane couldn’t move, she wanted him here, she wanted him now, and she was afraid that if she moved a mere inch that this madness would disappear, and reason would be restored. And she wanted him so much . . .

She was so hot and feverish for his touch that she pulled him onto the carpet with her, not wanting to be parted from him, not even for a second. And he, he shook with need, his body hot and sweaty, his muscles hard and straining. With notable effort, he reigned in his desires, and caressed her in the gentlest ways she could have imagined, making him all the more endearing to her.

She had never been loved this way. Ever so slowly, as if this were the only chance they would ever have to touch each other, taste each other. There was no Blackberry on William to interrupt, no one calling him away from her. He was hers for the moment, all hers, and his huge, overwhelming erection was proof that he *did* want her, very much so.

His eyes blazed in the moonlight as he looked down at her. Locks of brown hair fell over his forehead as he bent down to kiss her breasts, her neck, and then her ears. It might have been the tequila, but the sensations he evoked were extremely powerful, as if

he were tearing her soul away from her only to nurture, to please it. She clutched him to her as he ran his tongue along her earlobe, her fingers sinking into his hair, pulling him closer.

“Tomorrow this never happened,” she whispered against his ear. “Please.”

He didn’t answer, but the way he kissed her said he understood. His kiss said he knew, knew she could be his only this once, and therefore, his loving was painfully gentle. His touch felt like magic, like nothing she’d ever felt before. Was she more sensitive right now, because she was drunk? Because it felt like heaven, being here, in his arms, being loved this way.

When he entered her, they looked at each other with dark, dazed eyes, and they both gasped in unison, their breaths mingling, at the wonderful feel of their bodies being joined so completely. He barely made a sound, it was as if he were afraid she’d disappear if he so much as breathed, it was as if he were doing a sacred ritual, one which he couldn’t soil with words. But he made her moan, made her arch her back and thrust her hips against his, encouraging him. He moved inside her, slowly at first, and then with more urgency. She sank her hands into his silky hair and clutched him closer as he slowly rocked his hips against hers, sliding inside her, then out, only to push back in again.

She breathed against his face, and his expression looked pained when she breathed his name. A hand came to cup her face only to hold it in place as he bent down to kiss her. His kiss was powerful, spellbinding, robbing her of her breath completely.

Her firm, lean legs, perfectly capable of sending a one-hundred-and-sixty pound sandbag soaring in the air with a single hit, were tightly wrapped around his hips and urged him to her, closer, deeper, faster.

They came together, as one, clutching each other's body closely. She could have sworn he said her name in such a way that it made her body melt, but she was not sure, because just a few minutes afterwards she drifted to sleep.

When she woke, it was past noon, and she was in her bed amongst rumpled linens, and she was naked, and alone. Her heart rammed against her chest because for a moment she feared William was gone, and yesterday could not be repeated ever again – could it?

She sat up on the bed, momentarily oblivious to the pounding in her head. “Will?” she called frantically. “William?”

Had it been a dream? But it couldn't have been, since she remembered it quite clearly, despite all that booze. She frowned, thinking maybe she should be grateful he'd spared her the awkwardness of 'the morning after'. But Jane wanted him here, with all her heart she did. She stared blankly at a note over the nightstand besides her bed. It read; *This never happened. W*

No 'I love you, please don't marry Steven' sort of thing, of course. What did she expect, after all? Standing, she kicked the side of the bed. Did he really expect her to act as if nothing happened after the way he'd kissed her, made love to her last night? Because he didn't just have sex with her. He'd made love to her, making her feel as though he cared about her. But he didn't, did he? And yet, why should she care if he didn't? She loved Steven and Steven loved her, end of story.

Jane decided she needed a cold bath. Her body smelled like him, and she could still taste his kisses on her lips. She spent hours in the tub and in fact dozed off until the phone rang and startled her awake. Towel around her chest, she answered, only to hear

Steven on the other end. He said he was picking her up in twenty minutes and taking her out for a late lunch.

While he drove he asked, “So, did you have fun last night?”

“Yes,” she said absently, staring blindly out the window at the busy shops along Michigan Avenue, also known as the Miracle Mile.

She wasn’t really in the mood for talking, particularly since she had dozens of unwelcome images tumbling through her mind, images of Will, and what they did last night, flashing through her brain like movie clips.

She usually loved to eat at the Chicago Chop House, particularly because she spent the day kicking and punching and jumping, and her body required more protein for her greedy little muscles than was usual. The lights were dim and the place was crowded as Steven guided her across the green carpet and to a table at the far end of the room, next to a small window.

Her heart all but fell to her feet when she saw him. William. She had no idea she would see him so soon, and would be so unprepared to see him. Just the sight of him, in loose blue jeans and a black mock-neck sweater, his hair pulled back from his handsome face, made her insides twist and turn as if they’d gone haywire. She felt like a robot, being dragged around by Steven and towards him.

William didn’t look flushed or affected by her presence. In fact, he didn’t even look at her, as if she didn’t exist, as if last night had been a fragment of her imagination. His eyes were fixed on Steven, which was just as well, because she couldn’t bare to look at him either, and instead stared at the high collar of his black sweater.

“Thanks for coming, Will,” Steven said as they shook hands and patted each other’s back.

“Honey, you didn’t tell me we were having lunch with William?” she said tersely.

“I told you it was a surprise,” Steven said as he took a seat.

William held the chair open for her. “Hello, Jane,” he said close to her ear, his breath hot against her skin. She flushed to her toes and briskly opened the menu. “Hi, Will. So what’s good to eat here?”

As they studied the selection, Jane stole a look at William through the top of her menu. He looked so handsome in that black mock-neck sweater; it made his eyes seem darker, his features even more prominent. Her gaze fell to his hands as they held the menu open, the same long hands that had touched her so intimately yesterday, the same lean fingers that had made her cry out in pleasure.

Nobody would have guessed as they both sat there that they’d been kissing and touching and moaning together only the night before. As if reading her thoughts, his eyes rose to meet hers, making her stomach constrict, and for a moment they stared at each other. He told her things with his eyes, silent things, deep things that she didn’t understand, that sent her senses reeling in confusion.

“Let’s order, shall we?” Steven said, his words jerking her attention back to the menu.

After they ordered their meal, Steven was all business.

“I don’t know exactly how to phrase this, but I’m going to do my best to make myself clear.” He took Jane’s hand over the table, and William tensed when he did.

“Honey, yesterday you said you would possibly like to sleep with William.”

Would everybody please stop saying that? She would never play ‘Truth or Dare’ again, ever. Her life was all havoc because of a game...and because of drinking, of course. She would have never admitted the truth if she hadn’t been a bit tipsy, she had to admit.

There was a silence, as if he expected a reply from her, and not bearing to look at William, she said, “Steven, that was just the tequila talking.”

William’s eyes were unreadable, but his jaw was set tightly.

“Tequila or no tequila, it was supposed to be a truth. And you, Will, my friend, you said you wouldn’t want to go to bed with Jane.”

He was silent, and for a moment Jane forgot to breathe.

“But would you go to bed with her if you knew I would be all right with it? I mean, she’s a very attractive woman,” Steven said, eyeing her appreciatively.

William’s face was unreadable, his eyes fixed on Steven, while Jane’s body was now in complete havoc, fearing what she expected was about to come.

“Where are you heading with this, Steven?” William sounded alarmed. Jane, too, didn’t like where this was heading.

Steven smiled, squeezed her hand gently. “I was thinking that if Jane has the slightest desire to be with you, and yet she’s in love with me and we are to be married next year, I could maybe give her a night of madness, a fun bachelorette party, so to speak, and we can have some wild sex, Jane, me, and you.”

Jane opened her mouth, her eyes wide as she stared at Steven in disbelief. “You want to share me with William?” she asked, freeing her hand from his hold.

Steven's green eyes glimmered. "The thought does excite me to no reason, Jane, I have to admit it. And I know Will's really not interested, so this would make me feel relaxed about the fact that you and him will be doing, you know..."

Jane felt outraged. Although she did have an affair yesterday, which was inexplicable and just plain wrong. But having a man who loved her propose to share her with his friend didn't sit too well with her either. He said he wanted to please her, but she was deriving no pleasure in the idea of Steven watching her in bed with William. If she was to be with William she wanted privacy and she wanted... This didn't make sense at all, did it? But last night with William had been so intimate, it would be wrong for someone to intrude. And yet she so desperately wished she could touch him again, feel him again . . .

"So what do you think, William?" Steven said, taking a slow sip from his wine glass.

Jane stared at her hands and for a moment she knew he would say no. William was not adventurous at all, at least she didn't imagine he was adventurous in that sort of way. He was old-fashioned in many ways, and she adored that about him. He opened car doors for women, opened chairs for them to sit, lit their cigarettes, and called his mother every week. His love of history made him collect old objects, objects people might think worthless, but to William they were cherished treasures.

Over fifteen years ago, before William left for London, he used to pause while walking on the streets at the slightest hint of a strange object. He'd lift it, study it, and if it was sufficiently old or strange or both, he'd hand it to her with sparks dancing in his eyes, as if he thought he was giving her a star from heaven. By the time she was fifteen she'd

had zillions of tiny, strange objects William had given her, until one day she came home from school and found her mother had donated them to a recycling campaign, and Jane had cried for days.

She felt his gaze on her, that deep chocolate gaze that had turned black with desire only last night as he made love to her. Those eyes were almost golden now, and she could see the fire underneath. She knew he was controlling a deep, fiery anger, and it hurt her to know this, hurt her like spears slicing right through her heart, because this was partly all her fault.

“Is this something you want, Jane?” he asked softly.

She could just faint by the way he looked at her. And his voice, so deep and gentle, when she knew perfectly well this was something he would never do, would never want to do with *anyone*. Oh, God. Ever since yesterday she’d become aware of a million feelings she had for him, not all of them surprising, since she’d always had an interest in him, but some of them did surprise her because they were so powerful. What could she even reply? *I want you again, but only you? Or, Is this my only chance to be with you again, because if it is, I’ll take it, even if it means having an audience and an extra player?*

“Yes, she wants it, believe me, I know her,” Steven said confidently beside her.

William turned to stare at Steven, his expression blank. “Yes, you know her very well, don’t you?” he said. “I have to say that this offer is, well, unexpected. But I really can’t do this.”

Jane felt the bile rise in her throat as she again felt rejected by him. Hadn’t he said he’d do anything to be with her one night? Hadn’t he looked like he wanted to meld his

body to hers forever? And yet a threesome was so unlike William, that he would surely have said no to anyone, not just to her.

“Aw, Will, my friend, you need to relax, you need to get out more. I swear one night in my woman’s arms and you’ll be a new man. It will do you good.”

Jane saw William’s hand flex at the side of his plate, and for a moment she could have sworn Steven’s words affected him deeply, but then he lowered it to his lap and all he said was, “Yes, but I think what I really need, Steven, is one night with *my* woman, not my friend’s.”

My woman. The words coming from his lips sounded so intimate, as if he’d meant them just for her. Their eyes met then, just for a second, and she wondered if he could see her anxiety, and the deep, raging desire she felt with his nearness.

“Are you sure you’re going to pass? Because I’m sure Alex or Frank or someone else would definitely appreciate this invitation?”

Jane felt frantic. She would *not* do this with Alex or Frank or anyone except William. She thrust her chin up, met William’s gaze straight on, and said, “Honey, if I’d wanted to have Alex or Frank I would have said so. I said I wanted William.”

“See Will? She wants you, man. I can’t say no to that, now, can I?”

William’s jaw seemed about as tight as it could get, and the gleam in his eye was deadly. He was angry, she could tell he was. She had never seen him this way. “I’m sorry, but I can’t,” he said tightly. “I can’t do this.” He stood up and walked away. Jane felt frantic as she watched him leave, but she couldn’t do anything about it, now could she?

“Honey, go after him,” Steven said, taking a sip of his wine. “If he doesn’t want to do this that’s fine, just ask him to have lunch with us, and don’t even worry, honey, I’ll think of something else.” He made a lascivious face to prove his point.

Jane forced herself to walk, but as soon as she was out of Steven’s eyesight, she ran, ran after him as if her life depended on it. She found him outside, standing in the sidewalk, his hands into fists at his sides, his chest heaving.

“William.” It was just a breath, but he heard it.

He turned to face her, and the way he looked at her made her feel less than a worm. His eyes were lethal, burning in fury. “I am *not* going to be your sex toy,” he hissed, pointing a shaky finger at her. “I am *not* going to spend a whole night watching you with the man you love, the man you’re going to marry. I won’t let you use me, Jane. *No.*”

Her chest hurt as she fought for air, and she felt her eyes well with tears. “I never meant to use you,” she cried. “I didn’t even know about this meeting in the first place. I had no idea Steven would propose something like this.”

William’s nostrils flared. He seemed hurt, like a wounded bull ready to charge. “Find another gigolo, I’m not for rent, Jane.”

“It was the only way I could think of to be with you again,” she finally confessed. “I got frantic and thought at least we could spend one night with each other without fear of Steven finding out.”

“And when you’re finished with me you can cuddle up with Steven on your big bed and reminisce on what a wonderful bachelorette party he gave you?”

She wanted to cry. “No, it wouldn’t be like that.”

“Then how do you think it would be, Jane?” he demanded. “How do you think it would be for *me*?”

A tear escaped from the corner of her eye, but she wiped it off with a vengeance. “Yesterday was so beautiful that I thought you may have wanted to be with me again. I thought you might have liked the idea, even if it does sound a little terrible, and even if it means sharing with Steven, but silly me because now I remember your note, so, yeah, Will, nothing happened. And you know what? Let’s just forget *everything*. I’m starting with the day I ever met *you*.”

She stormed into the restaurant and when she bumped into a waiter, she seized the moment and drew several deep, steady breaths to calm herself before she headed towards Steven again.

“Impossible,” she said as she sat down on her chair. “I don’t really think he likes me at all.”

“And here he comes now,” Steven suddenly said.

She didn’t turn, but she felt him as surely as she felt her heart beating, all six feet of him, only inches behind her. His presence overwhelmed her, his achingly familiar scent filled her nostrils, made her insides twist in pain. When he spoke his harsh, low words clenched at something in her heart.

“When, Steven?”

Steven smiled.

“I said *when*?”

“Saturday evening work for you, my friend? My place, around seven?”

“*Done*.”

“Hey, aren’t you staying for lunch?”

There was no answer.

William had left already, and Jane wanted to die. Oh, dear god what had she gotten into?

During the next week, she would have done anything to see William. Anything. And when Steven came to see her, she had to rummage through excuses to avoid having sex with him. Finally, she told him ‘waiting’ would make their experience Saturday all the more enjoyable, and he seemed to agree. She’d lied, only that she didn’t have the heart to be with Steven, not while she replayed William’s kisses every minute of every day inside her head. This had to be a phase of sorts, a chemical imbalance, maybe, because she had never, ever, felt like this.

One night, Steven began to kiss her, to whisper in her ear things he thought would turn her on. “Can you imagine what it will be like when you’ve got William inside you, and me inside you at the same time?” It did turn her on, but only the thought of being with William again. At the same time, the thought alone did terrible things to her soul, torture it somehow. Why? Jane wished she knew.

They’d been friends since childhood, all of them had, but when William’s parents were divorced, he left with his mother to London, and didn’t come back until years later. Steven and Jane had been together for years, and it had never occurred to her to ever be with anyone else. She never gave it much thought, and it came natural to lose her virginity to Steven at sixteen and then continue together. But when William returned from London a few years ago, she found herself harboring unexpected, overwhelming

feelings towards him, and whenever they were having a get-together, for some reason her first thought would always be *Is William coming?*

She'd lately realized that everything she did or thought revolved around him. When she'd moved apartments, hadn't she chosen hers because it was close to William, and if an emergency ever arose he'd reach her fast?

It was good that Natalie and Patty called during the week, because Jane was going crazy, the thoughts in her head becoming more and more confusing. They had coffee one sunny afternoon at Barnes and Noble, but although she tried, Jane wasn't even there with them. She physically sat there, but her mind far away, until of course *he* came up as the topic in conversation, and then her attention returned to Earth a hundred percent.

Patty said she'd asked him to take her to watch 'The Devil Wears Prada' movie. She said all he did was drive, pay for her tickets, and her popcorn. He didn't say a word all night.

"I swear that man grows weirder and weirder every day," she said worriedly. "When I talked about the movie it was as if he didn't even see it. It was just too weird."

Natalie nodded in agreement.

"We should set him up with someone," Patty declared, cradling her Frappuccino mocha in her hand. "What do you think of Melissa Waters?"

Natalie's eyes turned to saucers. "Patty you're a genius! Mel is just perfect for Will! She's quiet, amiable, she loves books and – "

"Melissa Waters is totally wrong for him!" Jane exploded, slamming a hand on the table in emphasis, toppling her own decaf coffee.

Her friends looked at her strangely, and Jane forced her mouth shut and told herself again and again that she should *not* mind that her friends were playing ‘cupid’ with William. She shouldn’t care about this. She shouldn’t.

“Wear the teddy I like tonight,” Steven told her on the phone Saturday morning. “You know how all that red lace turns me on.”

But the last thing she wanted was to excite Steven more than he already was. He’d been able to talk of nothing else all week. While she, on the other hand, felt nervous and scared. Even during her kick-boxing class this morning she hadn’t been her usual lively self, and some of her regulars had actually approached to inquire about her, clearly concerned.

That evening when she was finally dressing, she didn’t even glance at the red-laced teddy. She chose a simple black silk panty and bra set, and wore them under a plain button white shirt and her blue jeans. She dressed for William. She wanted him to see *her*, not her lingerie. Every thought and pore of her being quivered for him. Tonight perhaps she’d realize that the last time she’d been with him, and the magical madness she’d imagined, had been a fragment of her very drunk imagination. Perhaps after tonight she would get over her obsession of him.

As they waited for him, Jane looked around Steven’s contemporary décor, all that black, white, red, and purple, and she couldn’t help but feel cold and shaky and, much like the apartment, empty. The wait felt endless, the seconds ticking by much slower than usual. When William did arrive, she all but felt her insides melt. He managed to always look gorgeous to her. He wore a striking red sweater over a pair of jeans, and though there were circles under his eyes, the gleam in them was livid.

“Hey there, buddy,” Steven said. “You ready?”

William faintly nodded, not meeting her gaze.

“Want something to drink?”

“No, thanks, ” was all he said.

“Sit down, let’s get comfortable for a while,” Steven suggested. But there was no way either Jane or William would get comfortable. Neither of them said a word, and Steven found himself blabbering all to himself for a few eternal minutes. Finally Steven said, “Okay so why don’t you two start and I get to watch a little bit, just so you get comfortable with each other.”

Neither of them moved.

Steven glowered at William. “Will, do you want to take it from here or do you want me to give you exact instructions?”

William frowned at that and jerked on his cashmere sweater as he rose. She could all but drool at the sight of him as he stood in his blue jeans, his chest naked, muscled and tanned.

“Jane?” Steven prodded.

Jane rose and strode towards William, stopping only a few feet away from him, and slowly opened the buttons of her shirt. Her heart pounded up to her throat and she wouldn’t have been able to speak if she tried. She parted her top, and she could feel William’s eyes, his hot eyes, on her skin, as she let the shirt fall down to the floor. It was in slow motion that his hands came up to cup her shoulders. They nearly burned her skin when they touched her. He took a step closer and for a moment they just stood there, mesmerized as they stared, breathed each other’s air.

“She doesn’t bite, Will,” they heard Steven say. “You can kiss her, get her in the mood.” She closed her eyes, waiting for his kiss. But William couldn’t move, as if he were frozen by her nearness. When she opened her eyes he was looking at her, and what was it she saw in his gorgeous dark eyes? Hurt, longing, desire – it was all there somehow. She saw everything.

He bent down to kiss her so softly she could fly with the gentleness of his kiss. She heard him catch his breath at the contact, and her own breath left her completely as he slid his tongue in a single lazy motion into her mouth. His hands went around her waist, pulled her against him, closer, until their bodies were glued one against the other. She ran her hands over the muscles of his shoulders and spread them on his back, clutching him to her. He deepened the kiss, suddenly forgetting they were being watched, forgetting every single thing except her. He kissed her until she could no longer remember why they were here and all she knew was that she wanted more, wanted closer, wanted to be possessed completely, wanted him to claim her in a primitive possessive way that said, “She’s mine and I will kill anyone who comes near her.”

They kissed and caressed and touched until Steven said, “You guys can strip, it’s getting a bit stale.”

Stale? Jane was on fire, was flying in another world. She felt William’s hands slip into her jeans. They were shaking and he was breathing harshly, as if there were not enough air in the room to fill his lungs. She, too, was shaking and out of air, out of oxygen, as she helped him unzip his jeans. His gaze fell to her underwear, his eyes heavy-lidded with desire and with another deep, unreadable emotion, so deep it just swallowed her.

“Jane, you’re so beautiful,” he said in such a low, raspy voice she barely heard him over the background music. His hands ran over her skin, so gently, as if memorizing every curve and contour.

“Get rid of the underwear, Jane, you too Will,” Steven said from afar.

Every time they heard Steven’s voice, William tensed at the intrusion, and only after a few seconds did he relax again. Slowly, his hands went to open her bra, and he removed it with such tenderness that it almost hurt. All of a sudden she felt shy, vulnerable somehow, and she covered her exposed breasts with her palms as his warm, gentle hands slowly guided her flimsy black panties down her thighs, through knees, past her calves, until he discarded them on the floor and went to work on his own. The muscles of his arms and legs bulged as he removed his crisp white underwear.

In an instant, she felt his hardness, pulsing and throbbing against her stomach in rock-hard desire. His eyes were on her lips and he kissed her, hungrily, while his hands cupped her buttocks and pressed her against his erection. She could all but moan at the feel, at the desperate aching inside her, so desperate, so wanton, like she had never wanted anything before in her life. She kissed him back, starved for him, rubbing her body against his, her hands clinging to his nape. She traced a trail of kisses from his lips toward his ear, until she whispered, to him and him alone, “William, *now*.” Now before the third party spoiled the moment. Now before she woke up from this amazing dream.

He lifted her with his hands and arms and she wrapped her legs tightly around him as he slowly lowered her onto his tall, throbbing organ. It was glory, to feel him fill her so completely, to feel the warm skin of his chest against her own, his penis deep inside her, moving, possessing, claiming her as his. They faintly heard a voice say something, but

neither of them understood nor cared. Their every pore was concentrated on each other and the fire burning inside them as they kissed, and kissed some more.

Jane faintly felt an intrusion as an alien pair of hands cupped her breasts from behind, unwelcome lips nuzzled her nape, and the tip of another cock rubbed against her buttocks. It was William she clung to when it entered her from behind, shoving a cry out from her. It was William who drowned that cry with his kiss, William who pulled her closer to him, not liking the invasion, not wanting to share, wanting her all to himself.

His arms held her tight while her legs clung to him like a lifeline as the intruder pounded her from behind while he, he filled her, completed her, slowly, lovingly, tenderly. She buried her face in his neck and shuddered in his arms. When she did, he spilled himself inside her while the intruder continued his invasion of her. She fell limp against William's body, buried her face in the crook of his neck until Steven shuddered behind her and dropped motionless against her back. For a few more minutes William held her, naked, her arms and legs around him, his cock still inside her, while she kept her face buried in his neck and basked in his musky, male scent.

She didn't want to open her eyes, because when she did, she feared what would happen. Would this be the last time she would be with him, like this, entwined and sweaty and sated? She kept her eyes closed, even as she felt Steven stir behind her. William didn't move either, he was deathly still, his arms possessive around her, his breathing uneven.

"Honey, are you falling asleep?" Steven said from behind her, wrapping his arms around her waist and pulling her away. "You can let go of her, Will," he said.

Jane wanted to shout, felt like a baby being torn from its mother as Steven yanked her away from him. She felt William's arms go limp around her before Steven guided her towards the sofa.

"Here, baby, you're exhausted," he whispered as he pulled on a cozy, purple throw to cover her nakedness. Jane heard William shuffle, heard a zipper, and she realized he was getting dressed.

"See, Will, I told you she'd drive you crazy. She's something special, isn't she?"

Jane didn't want to hear William's answer, because if he said she wasn't special it would hurt her so much, and if he said she was it would hurt her even more, because she couldn't be with him, or could she?

Her heart clenched when he didn't answer and she kept her eyes closed just to make sure there were no tears spilling from her eyes.

"I'd better go," she heard him say, and she felt frantic. Her eyes popped open, and she turned to watch him thrust his head and arms into his red cashmere sweater.

"Thanks so much, man, I really appreciate it, you're a real pal," Steven said, patting his back. "One day very soon I'm sure you'll find your own woman to spend your life with."

"My very own Jane."

"Exactly," Steven said, chuckling.

Jane wanted to die right now. She couldn't let him go, she couldn't. "You don't have to leave now, Will, we can order some dinner and hang out for a while," she said, her voice unsteady.

He met her gaze and silently her eyes pleaded him not to leave. When would she see him again? At another group gathering in one month? Her heart screamed so loud and yet he seemed deaf to it.

“Honey let him go, we’ve already taken up much of his time, and this was really just a favor to us.” Steven patted his back again. “It was an awesome experience. Thanks, Will.”

William turned to leave but Jane couldn’t let him, she rose, clutched the throw to her chest, her knuckles white from the effort. “Will, really, aren’t you hungry? We can order anything you’d like and have a nice quiet dinner, all three of us.”

His eyes were black and stormy. “I really need to go.”

Need to go because he felt like her and couldn’t stand this, having him near, and not touching, not kissing, not looking? She fell back on the sofa, fisted her hands and brought them up to her eyes while she heard Steven dismiss him and the front door close. When Steven came back, he sat beside her and pulled her to his chest. “So, honey bunny, did you like it?”

She swallowed back her tears and closed her eyes, pretending to be asleep. She couldn’t even speak about this.

“I swear I didn’t know Will had a cock so damned huge! Alex would be green with envy. I, too, felt a little intimidated at first. Especially when he was using it on *my* girl,” he said conversationally.

Jane hadn’t noticed it in that way, because she felt he couldn’t fill her enough, couldn’t push hard enough, couldn’t be close enough, no matter how much she moved her hips and pressed closer against him and ached and tried.

For weeks she couldn't bring herself to have sex with Steven. Every night he came over, she would either be too tired, or with a horrible headache. But what she really had was a heartache. Natalie and Patty were worried. They'd been calling her almost daily and Jane sounded glum and disoriented. They had no idea what this was about, but it was nothing that couldn't be taken care off with an afternoon shopping bash, and dinner with friends. So they cajoled and pleaded until Jane finally agreed.

They were sitting at a large teppan table at the Benihana restaurant, watching the cook prepare their food over the grill, when Patty's cel phone rang.

"Hello...hey, Mel!...he did what? Oh, my God, you're kidding...and then what? This is just too much...but that's so unlike him, Mel, I can't even believe it..." Patty's eyes were round and huge as she listened. Natalie and Jane stared at Patty, eyes wide, mouths partly open, until Patty said, "Hold on a sec."

She cupped the phone and in a whisper said, "It's Melissa. Oh, my God, you won't believe this! William was *all* over her on their first date. He didn't even let her talk, he jumped her like an *animal*, he tore at her clothes and ..."

"Ravaged her?" Natalie supplied.

Patty went back to the phone, her expression dead serious. "Then what, Mel, we need to know *everything*."

But Jane didn't *need* to know everything. She didn't *want* to know everything. She *couldn't*. She felt nauseous. "I feel ill, Nats," she began. "I need to go, I'm sorry."

Before Natalie could even speak, Jane was already heading for the door. Once outside, she put her palms on her knees and gasped for air, the cold Chicago wind hitting

her face like cold, hard ice, her chest aching so hard as she forcefully wheezed air into her lungs. *William was all over her like an animal...ravaged her...*

William, *her* William, all over Melissa, and just the picture of him over her, touching and kissing like only weeks ago he'd touched and kissed her was too much. She needed Steven. She needed Steven to erase William from her mind and her body and her heart. Oh, no, she couldn't be in love with him, could she? But she was, she had never felt like this for anyone. Never ever. When she burst into Steven's apartment she was already taking her clothes off. "Steven? Steven?" she yelled. He came from the bedroom, wearing a pair of red boxers with white hearts she'd given him for Valentine's once.

"Jane? Baby, I thought you were with the girls."

"I was but I..." She couldn't finish. She jumped at him, kissed him hard, wanting to forget what William tasted like, and what his hands felt like. Steven kissed her back, not like William, but she needed to forget, she needed to stop comparing William to Steven. William was a *dog*, and Steven was here and available and in love with her.

"What's got into you?" Steven said, surprised, as he pulled away for a second.

"Steven please, just kiss me, make love to me," she pleaded, urgently so, her voice breaking as she reached for his boxers.

"Jane, baby, you're scaring me...is something wrong?"

She fell to her knees, pulled down his underwear and took his erection in her hands, but before she could put it in her mouth, she began to cry. Sobs racked her shoulders and tore from her chest in loud, pitiful whimpers. She bent her head towards the floor and clutched her stomach tightly, she was crying so hard. That night at their party she should have *never* said what she'd secretly thought about William. Because

now, it was all she wanted, all she yearned for. What she did to Steven was horrible – and William and Steven were friends. She deserved this, it was nobody’s fault but hers. She’d been the one to kiss William that night, she’d been the one to throw herself at his feet. She’d been the one that nearly forced him to do the threesome in the first place. And now she was paying for it a very high price – because she felt like dying. She’d hurt Steven, she’d hurt William, and she’d hurt herself so badly. Steven embraced her and ran his hands through her hair in an effort to soothe her.

“I’m a horrible person, Steven,” she whispered through her sobs.

“Shh,” he said. “You’re wonderful, Jane, please, don’t say this about yourself.”

“But I am!” she shouted, crying still. “I don’t deserve you and I can’t pretend anymore. I have to tell you. I had an affair with William.” There was an awful silence. “It was just one night...the night at the party. I had too much too drink and I.... “

“What are you saying Jane?” he sounded confused, a tinge of anger in his voice. His hand paused on her head, and suddenly dropped limp at his side, as if she’d burned it.

“I’m sorry, Steven, but after that it hasn’t been the same...*I* haven’t been the same. Oh, God, I should have never had so much to drink.”

“Jane, how could you?” he sounded outraged, and hurt. “How could William do this to me? How could *you* do this to me? And then when the three of us got together, he’d already fucked you!”

“That wasn’t even my idea, and don’t say that! He didn’t just fuck me, he was gentle and...oh, God!” she wailed.

“And stupid me sitting there thinking I was at no risk of losing my girl to him!”

She shook her head violently. “It was a mistake. It should have never happened! But now I can’t go on like this. I’m sorry but I can’t do this anymore...we need to break-up. I love you but not enough to marry you...not after what happened with...with...” she couldn’t even say his name.

“With William.”

“Yes,” she whispered brokenly, sniffing back more tears.

“You’re in love with him,” he said.

She closed her eyes painfully. “Yes.”

Steven rose and walked towards the door. “So you can understand me if I say I don’t want to talk to you now, and probably not ever again?”

She wiped her tears and stood with the little dignity that she could muster. “I’m sorry, Steven,” she said, looking him in the eye. His eyes were red as he fought back his tears. “I really am. I’m so sorry.”

“Bye, Jane,” he said. She knew would never forgive herself for hurting him this way. For hurting herself this way, and William.

“Bye, Steven.”

* * *

Jane was desolate. She’d turned her life from one wonderful happy life to a miserable one with nothing to look forward to and nothing to smile about. For days she didn’t answer her phone, nor attended her workout sessions. She just slept, and cried, and slept some more. Natalie and Patty had had enough of it.

“That’s it, we’ve had it with you, come on, you’re taking a bath and you’re getting dressed,” Patty ordered as they both stormed into her bedroom that morning, jerking the drapes open.

“No.” Jane pulled the white comforter over her head, but Natalie yanked it away from her.

“Get up, Jane,” she said angrily. “We’re not letting you stay here, you need to snap out of this.”

Jane covered her face with her pillow. “Go away, you’ve no idea what’s going on, so please just leave.”

“We know everything. Steven told us already.”

Jane stiffened at that, because she had no idea exactly what ‘everything’ meant. She sat up on the bed, glowering. “What did he say?”

“What else but that you broke up?” Natalie said, spreading her hands out.

“And that you’re in love with Will,” Patty added.

“Oh, and that you and Will had an affair,” Natalie supplied.

“Oh, yeah, and that you guys a threesome one night,” Patty confirmed, then smiled meanly. “You wicked girl, you.”

Jane pursed her lips tightly, inwardly cursing Steven for his indiscretions. She didn’t want to talk about Will or her ailing heart, but she did have to ask about Steven, she owed him that much after all. “And how’s Steven doing?”

Patty and Natalie exchanged glances, then shrugged. “Good. We’ve already set him up on a date or two. And tonight he’s going out with Mel and things look real promising.”

Jane arched a brow. “Really? So now he plans to steal William’s girl from him, get back at him for what happened?”

Patty frowned, scratched the curls on her head. “Melissa’s not William’s girl. Whoever told you that?”

Jane looked puzzled, blinked from one friend to the other. “But didn’t he *ravage* her? Didn’t he tear off her clothes like an *animal*?” Jane choked on the last words, having trouble even repeating it.

“He tore off her clothes like an *animal* and before anything important happened he stopped and said he was sorry, he was just trying to forget someone, but it was no use because he *couldn’t*. Mel thinks he might be gay, in fact!”

Jane felt it inside; her heart flutter, flutter, flutter up in hope as she clung to Patty’s words. “He said that? Will said that?”

“Come on and get dressed, we’re taking you to the Navy pier, like the good old days when we were kids. You need to have some fun, and we do, too, I swear everyone’s been in the worst of moods lately,” Natalie said, then disappeared into her closet only to return seconds later with a pair of blue jeans and a sweater draped over her forearm.

Jane stared at Patty, her gaze hopeful. “Patty, do you think William might have meant...”

“You?”

Jane nodded.

“Who knows, I swear that guy’s weird.”

Jane bathed quickly, suddenly looking forward to going out, and looking forward to the future. She slipped into her jeans and a soft Lily McNeal striped cashmere sweater. Inside, her mind was reeling with thoughts of him, William.

“Has anyone seen him?” she asked on their way to the Navy Pier.

“He’s worse than you are. Really. He doesn’t answer his phone and he has dead bolts on his door so it’s no use bursting in. We’ve tried already.”

“Does he know about Steven and...?”

“Until this morning. I heard they had a talk.”

“Oh.” Jane bit her lip, frowning. “Was there a fist fight?”

“You wish!” The girls laughed, slapped their thighs with their hands as they did so. “You’d like that, wouldn’t you?”

“That’s not true, I wouldn’t like that at all,” she said seriously. “I do love Steven, only more in a brotherly way. And William I’m....” She couldn’t even explain what she felt. She was at a loss of words.

As was usual during the weekends, the Navy Pier brimmed with excitement. Locals with their children and tourists with their video cameras walked about the large open corridor. The sun was bright and made the usual Chicago wind seem less chilly. Jane followed Natalie and Patty down the main “pier” corridor, which was wide and packed with people. To her right she could see dozens of boats, docked at the pier and looking almost regal as they floated calmly over the water. To her left the shops, restaurants, and attractions were noisy and crowded. People occasionally pushed and shoved them as they headed from one place, to another. But suddenly, Jane was oblivious

to everything, everything except the lone figure standing far across the long, open corridor, among the throngs of people, motionless, and staring right at her.

Her heart pounded in her ears as soon as she realized it was William.

For a few seconds they both stood there, frozen, while they stared at each other. He began to walk towards her, slowly, his eyes not leaving hers for an instant. She told herself she wouldn't run to him. She told herself she wouldn't wrap her legs around him and kiss him like her life depended on it. She told herself once again she would *not* run to him. But her feet started to trot, and when he began to run towards her, she was running, too, running as fast as she could, until they nearly fell against each other and clasped each other tight. She clung to his neck and he whirled her around, then lowered her feet to the ground and bent down to kiss her. He kissed her thoroughly, his taste glorious in her mouth. His long, lean arms around her felt like a safe haven. It was as if she'd arrived home, to where she belonged.

He pulled away and cupped her face. "I needed to see you," he said with force, his eyes dark with emotion. "I couldn't stand not seeing you. I couldn't stand remembering you, what you taste like, what you feel like."

"William," she breathed.

"I love you so much, Jane. I always have. *Always*."

"You should've said something. I've always had these feelings for you, but I tried to shush them, I never knew you might feel the same way."

"How could I say something, Jane? Should I have just told everyone that the woman I loved was in love with another man? Should I have just told my best friend how

I was lusting after his girlfriend, how I would have died for one night with her, and how because of her no damned woman I went out with added up?”

She studied his face, his gorgeous face, and thought that he was even more beautiful than she remembered. The hard angles of his cheekbones, the set of his jaw, and those eyes that still tortured her, like never before they did. “Well I think that night at Gary’s was your perfect opportunity to say all that,” she said, her eyes luminous, a smile curving her lips. “I would have fallen into your arms, I swear I would have.”

“I’d always hoped someday you would, Jane. That night when I made love to you,” he whispered, his thumbs slowly caressing her cheeks. “I could hardly believe I had you in my arms. I’d dreamed of you so many times...”

“And I’ve dreamed about *you* more times than I can even remember,” she confessed, her cheeks turning bright red.

His expression changed, tightened. “And that night at Steven’s,” he said darkly. “I felt like dying when I left.”

She cupped his face. “All I wanted was to be with you,” she breathed. “I didn’t want you to leave.”

“I couldn’t bear staying, seeing you, and knowing you weren’t mine...”

“I was all yours, William. You had me since that night...the one with the tequila madness. And even before that but I didn’t know it yet...”

“Jane, I love you,” he whispered as he bent down to kiss her, both of them oblivious to the crowd that had gathered around them, including their friends, including Steven, until they all began clapping and cheering.

THE END