

A photograph of a man's bare torso, showing his abdominal muscles. A woman's hand is resting on his waist. The lighting is warm and intimate. The text is overlaid on the image in a glowing, metallic font.

Johnny
Loves
Krissy

KyAnn Waters

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Chapter One

Johnny's Got It Bad

"Where's Krissy?" Johnny Huston said, draping his dark blue, suit coat over the back of the chair before sitting down. A bit overdressed for drinks, but he'd worked late at the law office where he interned. He greeted the four others sitting around the table. The usual suspects except for the one woman he really wanted to see. Shelby and Ryan, Casey and Brett, along with he and Krissy made up the perfect six-pack.

"I talked to her this afternoon," Casey said, popping a salted pretzel into her smiling mouth, and then brushing her dark bangs out of her eyes. "She had an appointment after work." Casey was the responsible one of the group. Wearing her hair in a conservative bob, subtle make-up, she wanted to land a Fortune 500 man when she finally decided to settle down. Until then, she dated selectively. She didn't sleep around. It wasn't a prerequisite in a girlfriend for Johnny, but he respected Casey for it. Not that he'd ever date Casey. Only one woman made Johnny think past a moment of pleasure. And she was late.

Johnny glanced around. It was a slow night at Stuart's Karaoke Bar and Grill. Karaoke in the front, local bands and dancing in the back, Stuart's was the place where Johnny unwound with his friends every Friday night. Sunday morning they'd all meet again for brunch. Stuart, Stu as he was known to the regulars, made the best chowder.

Johnny signaled to the waitress. He ordered for himself and Krissy.

"Shouldn't her boyfriend pony up the dough for drinks?" Ryan said, leaning in and kissing Shelby on the neck.

"Krissy doesn't have a boyfriend." Shelby ducked his kiss and batted his hand off her thigh. "Be good."

"I always am."

Shelby rolled her eyes.

"Why should he?" Casey asked. "Everyone knows you two are doing it."

"Appearances aren't always as they seem." Johnny rested his forearms against the edge of the table and rotated the bottle of beer between his hands. "Everyone assumes Krissy and I are doing it, but we're not." A point he often regretted. Not that he could do anything to change it. He and Krissy had only ever been friends. Best friends. And if he thought about that for too long, he'd get depressed.

"And why haven't you?" Brett asked while he fished a bill out of his jeans to pay the waitress for his beer. "You know you want to bang the wood girl." Brett loved calling Krissy the wood girl. It had more to do with her luscious tits, than the fact that she sold custom kitchen and bathroom cabinetry.

Johnny tipped the long neck bottle of beer to his lips. No way in hell was he going near that one. He'd been in love with his best friend since third grade. Getting into bed with Kristina Taylor would be amazing, incredible, mind-blowing... Enough along that train of thought before the building pressure behind the fly of his slacks became apparent. Even if he could change his relationship with Krissy, he wouldn't. Better to keep their friendship uncomplicated. Krissy distracted him from his studies often enough. If he ever had the

chance to sleep with her, he might not want to leave his bed again.

Beyond his desires, he wasn't willing to risk their friendship. Best friends made poor bedfellows. Johnny stared into the light carbonation in the bottle of MGD. Making love with Krissy would be the best mistake he could ever make. Too bad he was smart enough not to make it.

"Johnny's not Krissy's type," Casey said with a smile on her face.

"Why, because Johnny has his shit together?" Brett smirked and then pointed at Johnny with the neck of his beer bottle. "She'd break your heart anyway, dude. Girl backs out quick once a guy gets googly-eyes."

And what man wouldn't get googly-eyed. Just over five-two with big, beautiful breasts just enough to spill over a man's hands. She had a heart-shaped ass, and blue eyes with depth to drown in. The old cliché about blondes having more fun couldn't be truer than with Krissy. Only she was so much more. A you-get-what-you-see girl who would give you the shirt off her back. Well okay, she'd give the shirt off her back just to show off the fabulous job her surgeon did.

"Hey guys."

Speak of the devil. Glancing up, he noticed her blonde hair falling in waves over her shoulder. A touch of blush highlighted her cheeks, and she was breathless in her obvious haste to meet them all on time.

Krissy sat next to him, letting her hand brush his shoulder. A jolt of adrenaline pumped into his heart, speeding up the tempo. "Thank you," she said, smiling at him. He found her mouth incredibly sexy, almost pouty. Pink and tempting, her tongue licked her upper lip just before she sampled her drink.

Sweat dampened his palms. Time slowed as her head tipped back, the motion stretching her neck. The muscles beneath her skin moved sensuously with each swallow. Blood pounded in his head, echoing hollow in his ears. He licked his own suddenly dry lips.

"You okay?" he asked when she downed half her drink.

Krissy wore her emotions on her face. If life treated her well, her smile would light the room. Tonight, the sparkle didn't reach her eyes.

She gave an almost imperceptible nod. "Later," she said under her breath.

Oh hell. The last thing he wanted tonight was to get drunk with her. Who else, other than the best friend's shoulder would she cry on when another relationship went south? He supposed that was better than when she bent his ear with details of the most incredible sex she had on the back of Pete's motorcycle. Pete was an ass. Better to be the shoulder. Listening to her sexcapades made him ache for what he couldn't have.

He put his hand on her knee and gave a squeeze. It was hard—wrong word—it was difficult being in love with your best friend.

Shelby's cackle of a laugh pulled him from his thoughts. A couple of beers and she practically sat on Ryan's lap. They made a cute couple, like a fierce, bottle redhead Barbie meets Ken. Barbie liked tanning beds and Ken could make the gym his second residence. Johnny didn't know how much verbal communication went on between them, but he felt the heat five feet away. Their sexual chemistry made it difficult to sit next to Krissy and not become distracted with his body's responses. His cock twitched in his pants. He would've thought the years would numb her allure. It wasn't enough to love her bubbly personality,

good heart, and honesty. He had to be physically attracted to her, too.

Johnny wished he were more like Brett.

Brett was single with an *I don't give a damn* attitude. After dropping out of college, his parents yanked his monthly stipend. University out, the new assistant manager of used car sales in. Evidently, business was good. Brett had a new car, new condo, and lots of ladies. He was systematically working his way through the bar regulars. Thankfully, he drew the line at sleeping with his friends. That courtesy didn't extend to sisters of friends, so when Casey said, "My sister is knocked up." Brett choked on his drink.

"Relax," Casey said, pounding on his back. "She knows who the father is and it isn't you. Still, she's freaking out. It was a hit and run, on her part. The guy already has a couple of kids he doesn't take care of and she knows she's on her own. Seemed wiser to cut the ties early rather than wait for the sperm donor to bail sometime down the road."

"Is she scared?" Krissy asked.

"Shitless. But you know how she is. Her philosophy is life's a roller coaster..." Casey raised an eyebrow. "...so hang on."

Krissy finished her drink in one, long swallow confirming Johnny's growing suspicions. Something had upset her.

"Do you want to get out of here?" Johnny asked.

When she turned to him, her eyes were red and glassy. "Yes, but you don't need to leave." She grabbed her purse and stood, ready to bolt. "I'll see you all on Sunday."

"You okay?" Shelby asked, concern discernable in her voice.

"I'll go with you." Johnny didn't give Krissy a chance to protest. Standing, he put his hand on her lower back and gently pushed. "See you on the flip side," he said to everyone.

"Later," Brett said. "C'ya wood girl."

Krissy waved over her shoulder. Johnny followed Krissy out of the bar.

The instant they exited, she turned into his arms and buried her face in his chest. "I'm totally screwed," she whispered through her tears. "I just want to go home, get in bed, and sleep for a week."

He ran his fingers through the silky strands of her hair. Scents uniquely Krissy's surrounded him as he pulled her close. "I'll take you home." With his heart lodged in his throat, he pressed his lips to her forehead. "Mine or yours?" He hated to see her unhappy. Worse, he hated to see her cry.

* * * * *

She shook inside. Today was the first day of the rest of her life and it would never be the same again. At twenty-five, she wasn't ready to grow up. Yet, she had to make a decision because of a few words from her doctor. He'd basically told her now or never.

"Your truck, my house."

She climbed in the driver's side scooting in before Johnny to sit hip to hip beside him. Leaning her head on his broad shoulder, she let him take some of the burden from hers.

"Do you remember when I went to the doctor last week?"

The hum and vibration of the engine seemed loud in the truck as she took a deep breath. "I had a scope and a scrape."

"And that is..."

"A diagnostic scope. Laparoscopic surgery, not a big deal. He goes in, finds the endometriosis and the uses a laser to remove as much of the scar tissue as he can. Dr. Hart calls it laser vaporization."

"Sounds painful."

"I'm sore for a day or two." She sighed deeply. "This time the news wasn't what I wanted to hear."

Johnny jerked the wheel and then quickly righted it. "What do you mean?"

"Exactly that. Bad news. I had to go back in." She blinked trying to keep tears from her eyes. She looked into Johnny's face.

His jaw thrust forward. The muscle ticked beneath the shadow of a beard covering his cheeks. He had a strong, square jaw and full mouth. His lower lip was slightly fuller than the top. Dark furrowed brows, over equally intense, coffee-colored eyes narrow, blinked, and refocused on the road.

He adjusted his shoulders and sniffed his straight nose in an outward attempt to regain some composure. "Okay, so how serious is it?"

This is where her world altered on its axis. "One way or another, it's going to end my life as I know it."

"You're scaring me." He adjusted in the seat so he could wrap his arm around her shoulder. "Out with it. Just tell me what the doctor said."

"He said my endometriosis had gotten bad again. It's progressing more quickly than it had in the past."

"Can't you get scraped again?" He looked at her with questioning eyes. "I'm not sure I understand the procedure, but if it helps—"

"Just think of the surgery as having my tubes roto-rootered."

Johnny laughed. She tried not to laugh with him, but failed.

"It isn't funny." Her eyebrows drew together pinching the skin of her forehead. "It's serious. This is the third time I've had it done and the doctor says my body can't take a fourth. I have to make some heavy-duty decisions about what I want from life." As it had in the doctor's office, her stomach flipped and rolled.

Krissy pulled away from Johnny. Her left underarm pit worked overtime. She worried that soon her nervous odor would overpower Johnny's woodsy, clean scent. Flannel shirt or a three-piece suit, he was solid. Just the sort of strength she needed tonight, a warm body to hold her without him wanting to get her out of her pants and into bed. Hands that comforted rather than wandered. She could always count on Johnny. Seduction never entered her mind, at least not when she could do anything about it. That didn't mean when she was alone at night with her thoughts, she didn't wonder how Johnny would hold her as a lover.

"I'm sorry."

Her head snapped around.

"I know it isn't funny."

She let out a breath relieved she hadn't spoken aloud. Expressing her feelings would only contaminate the friendship with awkwardness. Over the years at one time or another, she'd been attracted to him or he to her, but the timing was always wrong. One or the other always seemed to be involved with someone else. Now with both of them available to explore

more, the friendship was too important to risk. Maybe what was missed opportunity then now seemed clearly for the best. He was her best friend.

"There isn't a cure," she said. "Endometriosis doesn't simply go away."

Johnny pulled into her assigned parking slot at the apartment complex she called home. A one bedroom with hookups, she didn't have to make trips to the laundry. Well, Johnny didn't make trips to the laundry mat either, not unless you call her apartment the wash and go. Her home could also be called the dine and dash, and occasionally the pee and leave. He had a key. A time or two, maybe more, she'd wake up to find him asleep on her couch. For some reason, he preferred sleeping off a heavy night at her house. She didn't mind. It was nice having company in the morning for coffee.

He followed her up the walkway. She could feel his eyes boring into her back. "You can't tell from looking at me," she said, putting the key in the lock and then opening the door. "And no, you wouldn't see it if you looked. There's nothing unusual to see down *there*."

"I wasn't going to ask."

"No, but you were thinking about it. Admit it."

He shut the door behind him as she went to the couch and plopped herself down.

"So how did you know? You haven't said anything." He draped his suit coat over the tattered lazy-boy and then knelt on the floor in front of her. He must have gone straight to Stu's from the office. His dress shirt was wrinkled on the sides and down the back. Taking one foot, he slipped off her shoe and then did the same for the other foot.

"I don't complain about periods." At his raised eyebrows, she laughed. "I blame my irritability on the painful PMS." The muscles in his forearms bunched when he rubbed, drawing small circles with his thumb into her instep. She noted the way the dark, curly, arm hair swirled against the tanned skin.

His lips twitched. "Then you've had painful PMS since puberty, because as long as I've known you, you've idled at irritable."

"Hey, it hurts like hell. I've always been irregular, but the last six months my periods have been crazy. I'm not going into the gory details."

"Thank you. I'd rather take your word on it."

"Well, you know how I told you it hurt to have sex?"

He gentled his ministrations to her feet. Then he slid his fingers between her toes, stretching them apart.

"Ohh, that feels amazing." She leaned her head back, closed her eyes, and wiggled her toes. Johnny dragged his fingertip down the center of the underside of her foot. Krissy smiled and said, "Don't tickle me." She sighed in bliss. "So what was I saying? You've muddled my brain."

"That it hurts to have sex. I thought you were bragging about Pete's size."

She brought her head up. "Ewe, don't be disgusting," she said, scrunching up her face. "Bragging about performance is fine, not equipment." Well, maybe with the girls it was okay to measure one guy against another, but not with Johnny. She could tell him *almost* anything.

"So what are the options? Date a guy with a little dick?"

"Don't make me laugh. I'm not done spilling the beans. I haven't told you the worst part, or maybe I should start saying the best part so I'll start believing it."

His hands stilled on her feet. Concern reflected in his eyes. "How bad is it?"

She pulled her foot out of his hand. Johnny moved to sit next to her on the couch.

This time she couldn't stop tears from dropping onto her cheeks. More followed and then she was in his arms crying.

"Dr. Hart gave me some options." She sniffed and lifted her face from his dress shirt leaving a large wet spot. She tucked her feet under her legs and settled more comfortably with her back against his chest. "He thinks the best solution is a hysterectomy. The upside to that choice is that I won't have my period anymore. My mom had a full hysterectomy in her twenties. She said not having her period was the best part." She paused, reflecting on her mother. Krissy always wished for brothers and sisters. As an only child, her parents had doted on her. If it wasn't already too late, she would probably only have one child, as well. Her greatest problem was time. It had run out for her mother. "I know she wanted more children."

"Hey, count yourself lucky. Try growing up in a house with eight."

"I don't want eight." She shifted so she could see his face. "Just one."

The walls closed in on her as she spoke the words. Still foreign to her own ears, she was going to have a baby. All she needed now was health insurance, a bigger apartment, and better hours at her job so she could be home with the baby. Oh, and let's not forget, a father.

"You're going to have a baby." He sounded outraged. "Are you pregnant?"

She scowled and sat up. "No!" What reason did he have to get upset? She was the one with the medical problem. It was her choice to get pregnant. Granted, she was going to need his help, but it wasn't as if she asked a hardship from him.

She tried not to notice the horrified look on his face as it drained of color. The muscle under his eye developed a tick.

Running her fingers over her head, she dug her nails into her scalp, pushing her hair away from her face. "At least not yet." She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "I want a baby. So instead of getting a hysterectomy, I'm starting hormone therapy." She stood quickly. Wringing her hands, she paced in front of the couch. "Dr. Hart said it's now or never."

Johnny leaned back and crossed his right ankle over his left knee. Then he folded his arms across his chest. "So who's going to be the father?"

She stopped pacing, looked at Johnny, and smiled. "Well, you see that's where you come in."

Chapter Two

Krissy Makes A Plan

Johnny nearly swallowed his tongue. Her words mimicked his earlier thoughts about being in bed together. However, in his mind they had hot, dirty sex. After he got the best tittie fuck of his life, she begged him to take her in the ass. Nowhere in his fantasies did they create a baby. He hadn't considered fathering her children...yet. Sure, he loved her... but kids? Now?

She grabbed her purse and sat down beside him. What in the hell was she getting from her purse? It was all he could do not to bolt. Now or never didn't mean, *now*. How was he supposed to shift gears from friend to father in the span of twenty seconds?

"I figured you'd have a more unbiased outlook. Who do you think would make a good father?" She dug through her purse and pulled out her Palm Pilot. "I wish I still had the phone number to the guy I met skiing last winter." Her hands dropped limply to her lap clutching the electronic address book, her version of the little black book. Krissy kept a list of names of the men in her life or at least the nickname she gave them. "You liked him, didn't you?"

Johnny cocked an eyebrow. "Not really." He'd never liked any of her boyfriends. It inevitably caused problems when Krissy chose hanging with Johnny and the gang over a date. Similarly, women that had passed through his life tended to get jealous over his connection to Krissy. It didn't matter because he'd rather be with Krissy than anyone else. "He was a pretty boy."

A pensive smile crossed her lips. "Even you have to admit he had the best hair." She refocused on the small computer, skimming down the names. "Too bad it was all he could think about. Do you know he got up after sex to primp?" She giggled. "He was worse than a woman." Her head tilted to the side and she sighed. "Oh remember, Enrique? Not that he would have made a good father, but he had a great personality. I guess I should delete him." She took the stylus and touched it to the screen. "He had to go back to Mexico. I didn't ask why. Johnny, are you listening? You have to help me figure out who would be a good father. I don't have much time."

Pressure built behind his eyes. His head was in a vise. She wasn't propositioning him. She was asking him to choose a daddy for her baby. Where was the relief? When she'd first made the outlandish declaration he'd nearly choked. He was in no position to take on the responsibility. He busted his ass trying to maintain GPA requirements for his partial scholarship, which didn't cover much. Hell, he didn't even date because he didn't want to spend the funds. He hung out with Krissy and the gang. That was it.

If he had to be honest, he liked that Krissy played the field and dumped her boyfriends before the relationships became serious. He didn't like her fucking other men, but there wasn't much he could do about that. There weren't many and it wasn't as if he hadn't tapped a few women. He simply liked believing when he was finished with law school and ready for a wife and kids, she'd be ready too. In the back of his mind, he'd actually convinced himself that she was waiting for him. He only had a year left.

"You can't just pick a guy, sleep with him, and then go on your merry way. Men have some say in when they start a family."

"Hey, having sex means taking a chance. I'm not asking for their permission." Her shoulders stiffened as she moved away from him. "I'm also not asking *whoever* daddy may be to have anything to do with me or the baby. I wish I could say I've thought long and hard about this, but I haven't." She looked at the Mickey Mouse clock hanging above the front door. "I've had about three hours to make my decision. First guy that fits my list is getting lucky."

"Until the baby comes. Then there's child support, visitation, and a guy that although he looks good, might turn out to be a possessive, homicidal maniac. But hey, he was the first guy to fit the list. Don't you see how crazy this is?"

Her fingers tunneled through her hair again. Chewing her bottom lip, she was clearly trying to find another angle in order to convince him. Good luck. No way was he signing another guy on to take her to bed.

"I've got seventeen men listed in here." She held up her PDA. "One of them is bound to be suitable father material."

"Have you considered you're not suitable mother material? Grow up, Krissy. This isn't how you pick a father for your kid."

"I don't have time to fall in love, get married, and have a baby. I've got time for a hook-up, and a knock-up. Don't judge me, Johnny. Just help me."

He growled, tightening his hands into fists. No way out of this one. Krissy's acumen with men didn't bode well for her kid. Left to her own devices, she'd pick the biggest loser thinking she'd found Mr. Right. She was too trusting. Men spoon-fed her crap, and she'd believe it until proven wrong. However, once crossed, the girl carried a grudge like a NFL running back.

"Give me your palm." He snatched the PDA from her hand. "Here's the deal, I'll look through your bonehead boyfriends, but I won't be held accountable when this blows up in your face. And please don't fill me in on the details."

One moment the idea of being a father made his head spin, his stomach churn, and his chest tighten. Then with the next breath, the rug was pulled out from under him. He wanted to be the only man volunteering for the position. His mind immediately surmised the positions Krissy might like. Christ, once again Krissy was making his life a circus.

"I'll get us something to eat." She had a bounce in her step as she headed for the kitchen.

Johnny stifled a low groan partnered with a defeated sigh. Krissy's plan screamed disaster. When she hit the brick wall, he'd be right there beside her.

"Want a beer?" she called.

"Yes." He needed something to wash the bitter taste from his mouth. He was actually scanning down a list of names. Brad, Darin, James, Mike, Trent -- he couldn't remember half of these guys. Krissy wasn't a slut. Most men didn't have a chance in hell getting her into bed. Krissy just enjoyed a night out on the town. Who was he kidding? He might be her best friend, but there wasn't much difference between him and the guys in the palm. Well, except that he wasn't in the palm. She'd memorized his number.

Krissy returned with Cool Ranch Doritos and bologna sandwiches. She handed him a

bottle of beer. "So who's the lucky guy?" She sat down next to him and crossed her legs Indian style.

Johnny glanced in her direction. Under her shirt, she had her hand twisted behind her back unhooking her bra. Slipping one strap down her arm, and then the other, she moaned as she unbound her generous breasts.

Cold beer didn't douse the flames of desire licking his libido. His cock jumped at the gentle sway beneath her T-shirt. Drawing his attention, her nipples puckered against the fabric like two tight cherries. He couldn't help licking his lips.

"Krissy, you date a bunch of party boys. This is the wrong place to look for the man to father your baby." He held up her palm. "He isn't in here." He needed to focus. Just because she didn't have *John Huston* listed in the PDA didn't mean the father he referred to would be him. He had school to finish, a career to build. The plan didn't include children for several years.

Not that Krissy even considered him a remote possibility. Best friends, he reminded himself. Wasn't that the way he wanted it? "What you need is a clean slate. Delete these guys, because after you get pregnant, they're not going to be the type of men you'll want in your life."

She nodded her head while taking another bite of bologna sandwich.

"You'll have to give up drinking, too."

She smiled around the rim of the beer bottle. "See how easy it's going to be. I'll have you to take care of me." She leaned her head on his shoulder. Her tit brushed against his arm sending energy straight into his crotch. Not a good time for a hard-on. His pants were not going to help hide his response.

"And I'll eat healthy, which you'll benefit from. You can have home cooked meals with me."

"Greeaat. You'll probably develop an eccentric palate and make me eat your creative cooking. No, it'll be Subway and Taco Bell for me."

She grabbed his arm, pressing it against her chest. Maybe if she were carrying someone else's baby he could finally get over her. Because right now, it was all he could do not to ask her to let him be the one.

"I still can't believe I'm going to have a baby." She took the throw pillow and stuffed it under her shirt. "It's so wrong." She crinkled her brow. "I'm going to be fat."

"Pregnant isn't fat."

"So you'll still love me?"

Sometimes her teasing hit too close to the truth.

"Hey, it could be worse. My mom is in menopause." He pulled her close and kissed her temple. "At least you're not having hot flashes." Unlike him, every time she came near.

"Yeah, well it's one more thing I get to look forward to. Along with mood swings, swollen ankles, back aches, any other symptoms you can think of. My mother had terrible acne."

"Morning sickness and cravings. I suppose you want me to hold your head while you're yakking up breakfast. Nothing I haven't done before."

"Hardy-har-har." She slugged him in the thigh. A little higher and she would've made contact with something a lot harder. "I haven't been that drunk in a long time. And anyway, I

have to get pregnant first. I'm trusting in your decision because I do date a bunch of losers." She laughed. "Any smart—but not smart enough to demand a condom—good looking guys in one of your classes?"

"Good point. How do you know you won't get a disease from the guy? You haven't thought through this crazy scheme."

"Oh God, Johnny," she whined. "Forget the whole thing." She picked up her palm. "I'll do eeny, meeny, miney, moe."

"Fine," he said, snatching it away from her. "But not these guys. We'll start the search tomorrow night."

She launched herself into his lap and wrapped her arms around his neck.

"Hey," he said jumping up. Time to go. His body was swinging in and out of heat like a furnace on the fritz. He never knew when it was going to betray his head. With Krissy on the prowl for a permanent attachment, he'd better figure out a way to check his libido at the door. He wasn't going to hang at her place with a semi in his pants while she fattened up with another man's kid. "I'll pick you up tomorrow."

Chapter Three

The Plan Has A Few Flaws

Johnny greeted a few acquaintances on his way to the back of the bar. He and Krissy were the last to arrive. The rest of the six-pack hollered as they approached.

"Bout time," Shelby said. "Krissy, remember Hot Guy from Country Jam? I just saw him. He asked about you."

"Really?" She took a seat on a black vinyl barstool.

"We deleted him," Johnny said, taking the seat beside her.

"No, not Hot Guy. Why?" Shelby's shoulders slumped.

"Yep. My PDA is empty." She scanned the room. "Next guy has to be more than hot."

He braced for the reaction. Here's where she told them about her plan. Johnny fortified himself with a drink. If she thought he handled it badly, just wait. Rule number one between Krissy and her girlfriends -- no kids until thirty.

"I'm going to get pregnant," Krissy blurted. "And Johnny's going to help me."

The beer in Johnny's throat slid down the wrong pipe. Coughing and pounding his chest, he whispered, "Rephrase and explain."

Krissy laughed, eyes dancing. "He's helping me find my baby's daddy."

"What in the hell are you talking about?" Shelby asked. "Why in the world would you want a *baby*?"

"Christ, Krissy," Brett said, clutching the front of his shirt in his fist. "You about gave me a heart attack. If you want a kid, fine by me, just don't fuck up the six-pack by fucking Johnny."

"Not that I think Krissy and Johnny should sleep together, but I don't see how it would be much different than Ryan and Shelby." Casey pointed her finger at Brett. "In fact, they'd probably be good for each other."

"Yeah, until Johnny falls in love. The *wood* girl doesn't do love."

Johnny did his best to ignore the conversation watching the people on the dance floor instead. Fall in love with the Krissy? Too late. He hit that mark in ninth grade. By the time he was a junior in high school, she was the star of every one of his wet dreams.

"It doesn't matter," Krissy said. "Johnny and I are best friends, not lovers. Don't worry ever about the gang breaking up. We're all practically family."

"You haven't explained why you want a baby," Casey said. "It's sort of out of the blue."

"Let's just say I decided it's time. I want to be a mother."

"Remember the nursery rhyme," Ryan said. "Krissy and a guy sitting in a tree. K-I-S-S-I-N-G. First comes love, then comes marriage, and then comes the baby in the baby carriage. Shopping for a dad for your kid isn't supposed to be like a trip to the mall for a new pair of shoes. Krissy, you can't return a kid because it doesn't fit right."

"I know that, Ryan. Do you think this is a decision I want to make or that it was easy? It's now or never. I saw the doctor. My endometriosis is getting worse. There won't be another laparoscopy for me. Next time, I'm having a hysterectomy. Six months from now, I'm

not going to have a choice. So just look around and see if anyone looks like good daddy material."

"Are you sure?" Casey asked. "Couldn't you go on the pill? I heard that helps."

"The disease is too advanced. I'm not taking the chance. I talked to my mom. She got emotional about the fact that I'm her only child and her only hope of grandchildren. I know what you're going to say, and I agree. I'm not doing it for her. I want it too."

"I can't believe it," Casey said.

"It's true," Johnny said with a note of sarcasm to his voice. "It isn't a joke." No, there was absolutely nothing funny about Krissy searching for a man to take her to bed. This wasn't sex for sport. Procreation, permanence, a family and damn it, she wasn't going to wait for him to finish college. She hadn't even considered him. So he would step back, let misery eat at his heart because the woman he loved looked for another man. He'd wallow in pity. He only hoped the lucky guy didn't mind a best friend in the picture. Krissy didn't care whether the father wanted to be involved with the baby, but the father might.

"Exactly what is *good daddy material*?" Brett asked. "Most men who come to bars are looking to get laid, not audition for *let me be your baby's daddy*."

"Getting laid is all they need to think about. Leave the rest to me. He looks good," she said, indicating a man on the other side of the dance floor. "Johnny?"

He looked in the direction Krissy gave a slight nod. Blond hair, decent build, dressed okay, yeah so he could be as good as the next guy. How in the hell was he supposed to decide?

"What do you want me to say, Krissy? I'm sure he'll stud himself out to you. Looks like he's having a good time. Does he have a job? Does he have mental illness in his family? Hell, he could be sterile. Go find out. Bring him over, see if he meets your minimum basic requirements."

Her eyebrow rose at the challenge and her mouth did that incredibly sexy thing when it turned up on the left side. "Fine." She took a hefty swallow of beer, adjusted her shirt to reveal an enticing amount of cleavage, and fluffed her hair.

Johnny nearly groaned aloud as her heart-shaped ass sauntered across the dance floor. She smiled at the guy, pulled out the chair next to him, and sat. The guy returned the smile. Then he looked at his watch. Krissy nodded and then she was coming back across the dance floor. The smile she had been wearing looked remarkably like a scowl. Oh crap, the mood swings couldn't be starting. She wasn't pregnant yet. Sympathy symptoms. A sense of dread fell upon him. Pregnancy was ten times worse than PMS. Good hell, he hated to imagine Krissy pregnant.

"So?" Shelby asked.

"Jacked up teeth." She sat back down on the barstool. "Kids are expensive. With teeth like that, my kid's baby teeth will need braces."

"The bar might be the best place for an easy pick up, but I don't think it's fertile hunting ground for a good guy," Casey said and held up her beer bottle. "A toast and a wish to Krissy, to being brave enough to make this decision—"

"Or stupid enough."

"Shut up, Brett," Casey said not breaking her cadence. "Here's hoping you find more than you expect, a great guy who'll end up being supportive, but not controlling."

"A guy who'll want to help and have the money to do it," Shelby said.

Ryan picked up his drink. "Here's hoping he never finds out you tricked him."

"And if he does, he isn't pissed off. Because I know I sure as hell would be." Brett didn't wait for the toast to finish. He tipped his beer and drank.

"To finding a guy who could be your best friend." Casey finished and everyone clinked their long necks together.

Sickness rolled in Johnny's stomach. Krissy had a best friend. He wasn't going to toast some other guy coming in and replacing him. No, she needed to find a guy who had no interest in sticking around. "Why don't you go to a sperm bank?" he blurted.

The table grew quiet. Everyone looked at him, stunned.

"What?" he asked. "It would be a hell of a lot safer than picking up Joe Blow at the bar. At least they test the men for disease. You'll get a complete dossier. And you wouldn't have to sleep with him." And no one would interfere with their relationship.

"It also costs more money than I have."

"You think kids are cheap?" Johnny asked.

"No, I don't." She gave him a scathing glance. "You still don't really know what you're buying. I'll agree that I'm not going to find him here. Tomorrow I'll get my game on and make a plan. Where else is a good place to go shopping?"

"The mall," Ryan said.

"Very funny. I'm serious. Want to go to the gym with me this week?" Krissy asked Shelby.

"I know you can find a good guy there." Shelby leaned into Ryan and playfully punched his over-inflated, bicep. "Yeah, I'll go."

"I've got to study tonight." Johnny stood. "I'll catch you all on the flip side."

He wanted to think about anything besides Krissy and her search. It was unlikely he'd be able to concentrate on his studies. He needed to deal with the turmoil in his mind.

* * * * *

The following morning was brunch at Stu's. That made three days in a row. He didn't want to go, didn't want to see Krissy. Granted, Stu's Sunday brunch was the best meal of the week for Johnny. If Krissy's hunt continued to be the topic of conversation, he'd rather spend the morning going over his textbooks and eating dry toast. Bread was about all he had in the pantry. However, if he didn't go, the gang would think something was wrong. Right now, he needed to act as if Krissy's happy hunting season didn't bother him.

Rubbing his eyes, he accepted the daunting task of facing the gang and made his way to the bathroom. A long shower later, he dressed in cargo shorts and tank top. Clean-shaven, a splash of cologne, and he was off.

Johnny wasn't surprised he was the last to arrive. "Did you order for me?" he asked Krissy. He sat in the only empty seat next to her. She looked like summer incarnate. Pink T-shirt stretched across her generous breasts, and a pair of white Capri pants to hug the contours of her thighs. Even her toenails were hot pink, poking out of cork wedge sandals. His gaze rested on the curve of her calf. Smooth and hairless, he wondered if she was sensitive on the back of her knee. The thought of the discovery sent an exciting ripple through his fingers.

Every seductive curve of her figure would be fun to explore.

His gaze roamed back up her body. When his eyes met hers, she smiled big. His heart took a jolt. Busted staring, he dragged his finger under his lip, pretending to wipe away the drool.

“Yeah. I ordered you a Philly Steak and fries.” She leaned her elbow on the table and faced Johnny. Her smile widened. “There’s a demolition derby at the fairgrounds tonight. Want to go?”

He must have been fifteen the last time he went to the derby. Junk cars, mud splattered T-shirts, good family fun at the fairgrounds. Not the setting for Krissy to continue with her plan to find a dad for her baby, the men there had their kids in tow. Perfect. A night just like old times, old as in last week, before her plan for conception.

Maybe he could plant a seed of doubt. He worried about her. What she planned was a one-night stand to last a few weeks until she conceived. Men liked Krissy. It wasn’t her fault. Her bubbly personality and great sense of humor were impossible to resist. In truth, she had just as many female friends. Unlike girlfriends, Krissy didn’t keep male friends close. They inevitably wanted more. He groaned and leaned back in the chair. Only he was smart enough to keep what he wanted hidden. Their friendship surpassed any relationship she might have with another guy. He wasn’t going anywhere. No, actually he was going to the derby with his girl.

Great. He had his appetite back.

* * * * *

Krissy sat next to Johnny in the cab of his truck. The glare from the setting sun in the west reflected off the other automobiles on the old highway. Almost as intense was the glare glinting in Johnny’s eyes. He was quiet and she wondered if she’d done something to upset him. His unhappiness about her decision to have a baby was obvious. Didn’t he realize how hard this was for her? Her plans hadn’t included becoming a single mother, but life doesn’t always turn out as planned.

She needed him. But then, she’d always needed him. That wouldn’t change. Who did he think was going to teach her son to play ball? And Johnny would be great with a little girl. Look how well he handled her over the years. Krissy tended to jump in with both feet and then remember she didn’t know how to swim. Johnny – the life preserver – always saved her. If she had to, she could stand up for herself, make decisions and accept the consequences if things didn’t go as she hoped. Except why would she want to? Life was better with Johnny around.

“Am I getting the silent treatment?” she asked.

His shoulders visibly slumped. “No.” He turned to her and smiled. “Sorry, I want to enjoy tonight, just the two of us.” He reached over and took her hand. “Can you make me a promise?”

She nodded.

“Just for tonight, will you put aside your search?”

She could, but what if the perfect guy sat down next to her? It was hard for her to explain to Johnny what she didn’t understand herself. Something had snapped inside her

when Dr. Hart said she wouldn't be able to have children. In a few years, mentally she'd be ready. However, by then she'd have had a hysterectomy.

Krissy listened to the experts. Two parent families were supposedly best. However, she wasn't asking for advice. Now or never rang through her ears again. If Mr. Right sat down next to her, she didn't have time to placate whatever bothered Johnny. She planned to answer when opportunity knocked.

"Let's just see what happens," she said. "I'm not stupid. I'm not going to take a string of men to bed. When I finally get pregnant, I will know who the father is. One guy, hopefully I can stretch out the relationship for a few weeks. And then to use Casey's words, I'll do a hit and run."

Johnny parked his truck in the grassy lot adjacent to the fairgrounds. He walked around the front of the truck and opened her door. He blocked her exit, bracing his hands on the hood of the car. "No matter how much *you* plan, you can't predict how the guy is going to react."

"Johnny, I can't worry about what I can't control." She pushed past him. Winding their way between cars, they approached the entrance gate. Mostly the derby attracted couples on dates, some families. Finally, she spotted several large groups of single guys. Hey, she could walk over to the beer tent, strike up a conversation, and see where it went. Or she could think about Johnny and just have a good time at the derby. She linked her arm through his. "I want pink cotton candy."

Yeah, she made the right decision. If Mr. Right sat next to her, she'd take it as divine intervention. The smile on Johnny's face was worth putting her search aside for the night. Friendship was a two-way street. It was time for her to think of something and someone besides herself.

The first round of cars made their way into the dirt-covered arena. Pieces of junk that barely ran with names such as Destroyer, and Terror Truck spray-painted on their sides lined up on the field. The announcer introduced the drivers and encouraged the crowd to scream and holler for their favorite. Krissy cheered when a purple station wagon backfired, flames shot out from under the hood, and black smoke billowed from the tailpipe.

"The Purple People Eater is mine," she said latching onto Johnny's arm. Standing on the bleachers, she pointed to the field. "Pick your car Johnny, and let's make a bet."

"I don't know." Because the stands were full of screaming fans, he stood to get an unobstructed view. "It seems to me the crappier the car looks, the better it does. I'll take the piece of shit on the end. What's the prize?"

Krissy's touched her tongue to her upper lip. "If I win I want a piggy back ride to the car after the derby. What do you want?"

"Chicken enchiladas tomorrow night at your place. Only this time, could you make more than two." He shook his head while he sat.

Okay, her kitchen record wasn't perfect. Casey's mom had told her about this great recipe with sour cream, cream cheese, shredded chicken, and cream of chicken soup. How was she supposed to know how much to use? That wasn't included with the recipe. After hours of planning and preparation, she'd gathered the six-pack. Too bad her meal only served four. Barely.

"You got it." She hollered with the crowd and then turned back to Johnny. "You really

like my cooking?"

"You've had your moments." He put his hand on her waist while she stepped from the bleachers and then Krissy plopped down next to him. "There was the Spaghetti O thing."

"Anyone could make that mistake." Taking a piece of cotton candy out of the bag, she stuffed it into his mouth. "I thought it was like Campbell's Soup. I didn't realize I wasn't supposed to add a can of water." Johnny ate the candy. She licked the sugar from her fingertips. "Yummy." She pulled another piece from the bag.

"You're reading my thoughts."

Chapter Four

Every Tom, Dick, And Harry

The gym was a bust. Sweating men stood before a wall of mirrors, curling arms resembling the Michelin Man. What had she been thinking? Krissy liked the gym and there were good guys keeping their bodies primed. Just none that interested her.

"Shelby, this isn't working." Krissy's legs pumped on the stair stepper. Next to her, Shelby mastered the elliptical.

"What? Look at all this eye candy. Good looks, motivation, enough money to afford the membership, you claim not to need much more information than that."

Shelby only repeated what Krissy said. Then why did she feel dirty? Imagining picking up a guy from the gym and taking him home lost its appeal. Not only would her reputation take a hit, but also she'd be uncomfortable working out with her one-night-stand pumping iron twenty feet away. "Nope. Can't do it." Krissy grabbed her towel and water bottle. "I can't finish." She turned off the machine and stepped off. "You staying?"

"I'm here now, might as well make it worth my time."

"In the words of Johnny Huston, catch you on the flip side."

Speaking of Johnny, she wondered where he was. They planned to hook up around six for enchiladas. She should have picked Destroyer at the derby. Purple People Eater ate dirt and Johnny's pick caught fire shortly after. Technically neither of their junkers won, but Johnny claimed to be the victor since hers was the first one out.

She stopped at the grocery store for supplies before driving home. A good thing Johnny was the only one coming over. Her apartment wasn't in any condition for company. Johnny didn't count. Her apartment had a common floor plan. Open dining room and living room, but the kitchen was small and could use more cupboards. Textured linoleum flooring in the bathroom matched the kitchen. The large picture windows sold her on the place, that and the covered parking spot and that it was a one level building. She didn't mind neighbors on the right and left, but she hated having upstairs tenants.

Too bad, she didn't have any hot neighbors. She sighed. Going to the gym wasn't a waste of time, but she should've been cleaning. She should've been at work. She had orders to get in and a couple of jobs were ready for install. Not to mention the laundry spilling out of the bedroom, down the hall, and a pile waited in the bathroom. None of it matter. Krissy had a mission. Her biological deadline approached faster than her deadlines for work or her messy house. Once she found her baby's daddy, she could get back to her routine.

Krissy thought of other places where she could find a decent guy. If she attended the university with Johnny, the possibilities were endless. College had never been in her future. However, that didn't mean she couldn't meet Johnny on campus for coffee. Digging through the dirty clothes, she found a pair of jeans she'd only worn once. Tossing her grubby T-shirt in the mountain of laundry, she then went to her room. After pulling a tank top over her head, she slipped on her cork wedge sandals. Dinner preparation could wait. She was missing an opportunity. Half the college population was male. There had to be *one* who could father her baby. She grabbed her keys and headed out the door.

If she remembered correctly, he had class until one. She got into her car and headed over to the campus. Too bad, she didn't know which building. She flipped open her phone. Holding the steering wheel with one hand and one knee, she text messaged him. "Where R U?"

He replied in text, "In class. Y?"

She smiled. He didn't get it. "I know U R in class. Building? Coffee?"

He messaged that he'd meet her by the clock tower in the center of the campus. She pulled into visitor parking and lucked out finding a spot.

A few minutes later, she saw him. "Johnny," she called, waving her hand. He turned at the sound of her voice, swung his satchel over his broad shoulder, and walked toward her. She narrowed her eyes. He didn't walk. He moved with a masculine strut. Cocksured. It was a good thing they were only friends. The sun glinted off his hair. The gentle wind lifted a lock from his forehead. She imagined combing through the silken strands with her fingers. But his smile, her stomach flipped and her heart rate took a bounce. She wasn't supposed to tingle to her core with *Johnny*. She lusted after her best friend! It had to be heat stroke. She put her hand to her forehead.

"What's up? You feeling okay? Are we still on for tonight?"

"Yep. I figured I needed to step up my game." And she needed to quit looking at Johnny like he was prime, grade A beef. "Thought I'd buy you a coffee in the commons and scope for prospects." She laughed while he groaned. "Consider the gym barren ground." This time he laughed while she groaned.

"Let's go."

They walked to the Union Center. In addition to the coffee and juice shop, the college boasted a bowling alley and pool tables. Always crowded, it was luck when Johnny spotted an empty table. He tossed his book bag on the table and then joined Krissy at the counter to order.

"What's up with Shelby and Ryan?" Krissy asked as she spooned sugar into her coffee.

"You'd know more than I do," Johnny said, pointing to the table in the middle of the room. "Women talk more than men. Ryan's been closed mouthed about it."

"Oh come on. Men give each other high fives after they score. Shelby has a rockin' body. Don't tell me he didn't give graphic details."

"Shelby's hot, but she doesn't have a thing on you."

"You think I'm hot?" She did a little shimmy and watched Johnny's eyes glass over. She rolled hers. "So fess up. Is it serious between them?"

He held the chair for her and then sat. "Don't know." He blew on his coffee and took a sip. "But I think it's cool if they are. We've all been friends for a long time. It was bound to happen."

"Yeah, but getting involved with a friend is risky. When the relationship ends, so does the friendship."

"Or maybe they'll get married and have a bunch of kids." Johnny leaned back and surveyed the room. "I'm not seeing any hot prospects."

Krissy glanced over her shoulder. "He wouldn't have to be hot as long as he isn't ugly. Smart more than makes up for looks."

His mouth posed to take a sip.

"Why are you staring?" she asked.

"This from the woman who had 'hot guy' and a phone number in her palm."

"I'm growing up. This whole pregnancy/hysterectomy issue has been a real eye-opener for me." She became quiet. "I want my kid to have a good life."

He pulled his chair closer to hers and covered her hand with his. "You're taking a big chance sleeping with a stranger. What if the guy has always wanted a kid? You get pregnant. And if he has a good job and the courts can't find a reason to deny it, he could walk away with joint custody. Your baby could spend two weeks out of the month away from you. Or it could be worse than that." He paused.

Krissy worried. She didn't want to face the horrible what ifs. She'd face risks no matter what the scenario. She didn't want Johnny playing the doomsayer.

"What if the father wants full custody? *You* could be the visiting parent."

"What other choice do I have?"

He leaned back and shrugged. "You don't want to go to a sperm bank."

No, but she didn't have to find someone in her neighborhood either. She still wanted a connection. The moment of her baby's conception shouldn't be on a doctor's table with her legs in stirrups. It didn't have to be great sex, but it had to be personal. "Too bad I don't have enough money to take a cruise, or go to the Caribbean and pick me up a cabana boy."

Krissy flipped her hair over her shoulder and shook off the depression darkening her afternoon. A beautiful sunny day is for fun, not having a pity party. Fighting a ticking clock, Dr. Hart gave her a few months before the scar tissue built to the point where it would impede pregnancy. It would be too late then. The point of no return.

On the up side, at twenty-five she had a great job, absolutely wonderful best friends, and she still had an opportunity to have a baby. Had she not gone to Dr. Hart, she might've been too late. Her gaze roved around the room. She wished she had more time. It would be nice to find someone as wonderful as her best friend. He'd be perfect if he were a stranger.

Johnny smiled at someone over her shoulder. She turned to see a tall, blonde classmate waving, wearing a brilliant, white smile for Johnny. Krissy's brows arched. "Who's that?"

"Just a girl from class." He focused on Krissy again. "A cabana boy, huh?"

"Why the smile? Do you like her?"

"I don't know her. She smiled first."

Krissy snorted. "She's cute, but you could do better."

"Where's that coming from? I'm not interested in a girlfriend. And at the moment, my focus seems to be on your sex life. Mine will have to wait."

She didn't want to think about Johnny having sex. Sure, she knew he did it. He probably did it well. Johnny was too considerate to be a selfish lover. She shook her head. Wrong direction for her thoughts to take. *Focus on your own sex life*. Still, the image of Johnny, with his face buried between a woman's thighs wouldn't leave her mind. If she allowed herself to focus on his lover's face, it was hers.

Krissy grabbed her coffee and took a drink allowing the scalding brew to distract her.

* * * * *

Johnny stopped by Brett's after he left Krissy. His head wasn't in his studies and Brett's

pad usually offered a nice reprieve from a grinding day.

Brett, unconcerned about the future, spent his money as fast as he made it. Plasma television, imported beer, mood lighting. Yep, Brett lived in a perfect bachelor pad. Johnny reaped the benefits.

Johnny knocked.

"Come in Jess, the door's open," Brett hollered.

"Jess or Jessica, because I don't want to intrude." Johnny stepped through the door.

"Hey dude," Brett said, coming into the front room.

"I won't stick around."

"You should. I bought a hot tub today. The sales girl is coming over for dinner. She's bringing a friend."

Nice shirt, gel in the hair, it didn't take an Einstein to realize Brett intended to get laid. "So you bought a hot tub?" Johnny walked into the kitchen and looked out the patio doors.

"It'll be delivered tomorrow." Brett took two beers from the fridge.

Johnny shook his head. "I'm going to Krissy's for dinner."

"Then I take it you won't be staying." He leaned back against the counter. "I know we all give you and Krissy shit, but why don't you make a move?"

Johnny chuckled and decided to take Brett up on his offer of the beer. "Well, for one she's trying to get knocked up."

"You've been hot for her since high school. You should make a move before she finds someone else."

Johnny tipped the beer to his lips, drank, and then wiped his mouth with the back of his hand. "Listen to what you just said. Krissy's amazing and she knows how I feel about her. If she was interested in me, she would've made a move a long time ago."

"Maybe she's waiting for you."

Johnny rolled his eyes. "Since when does Krissy wait?"

Brett shrugged. They both knew Krissy. She didn't have a deceptive bone in her body. Definitely a tell it as she saw it girl. Had she desired Johnny, she would've made it known.

Krissy made him happy. He smiled just thinking about being around her. Outgoing with a contagious laugh, it wasn't worth risking with one stupid mistake. They were friends and he was okay with that. He didn't have to have more. If he made a move and she wasn't receptive, she might not be comfortable around him anymore.

"What about you?" Johnny asked. "Do you ever think about getting serious?"

"Most girls don't want their boyfriends to date." Brett shrugged with a big smile on his face. "I think about it and know I'm not ready. I figure I have until thirty-five. I don't want to be an old man having kids."

Johnny nodded and set his half-full beer on the counter. "I want kids, but I've got to finish school. I don't want to struggle. Get a good job, have a few years of fun in the fast lane, and then settle down with a family." He picked at the label on the beer bottle.

"Sounds good to me. Wish I had the motivation. I want instant gratification. School's important, but I want to play now. No doubt, dude. I'll regret dropping out, but I'm getting prime pussy and making bank." He tipped his beer to Johnny. "I'm an asshole. I'll grow up later."

"Yeah, well your prime pussy is on her way over, so I will see you on the flip side."

"Later dude, give Krissy a kiss."

Brett followed him to the door. As Johnny walked to his truck, Brett hollered, "A wet, deep, tongue-dipping kiss that will keep you hot and hard for a week. Put one hand on her luscious breast and the other on that sweet ass."

Johnny laughed, flipped him the middle finger, and felt a response in his pants from the thought of doing exactly as Brett described. Great, now while he ate dinner with Krissy, he could imagine her hot and spicy mouth along with her hot and spicy enchiladas. At least he'd get a taste of one of them.

* * * * *

Krissy spent the next couple of days eating lunch at different sports bars and visiting the library. She even stopped by the local artist's museum after work one day hoping to strike up a conversation with a sculptor. She could do worse than finding a creative man with great hands. But she came up with nothing. Zilch!

Why hadn't she recognized the guys clamoring around her at the bar were losers? Tonight, she could look forward to more of the same while hanging out at Stu's with the gang. Maybe Johnny would pretend to be her date for the night. His good looks always made a great deterrent.

After changing into jeans and a white, gauzy, pirate-style blouse, she cruised over to the bar. In her mood, it was bound to be an early night.

Shelby held a table big enough for the six-pack. Krissy smiled as she made her way over. About the time she sat down, she recognized the voice belting out from the karaoke stage. Ryan held the microphone like a Las Vegas crooner. Shelby and Krissy laughed as he hit a high note along with *Celine Dion*.

"How long have you two been here? And how many beers has that boy had?" Tonight, she hadn't wanted to come out. However, it was shaping up to be just the distraction she needed.

"Too long, and too many." Shelby shook her head as Ryan sang that his heart would go on. "Oh God, someone stop him." Shelby leaned forward, dropping her forehead to the table with a thump.

"Here comes Brett. Don't look now. He's joining Ryan on stage." Brett, still wearing his dark sunglasses, wrapped an arm around Ryan's shoulder. The result, discordant harmony.

"I didn't think it possible," Krissy said, laughing. "The duo is worse."

"Where's Johnny?" Casey asked, coming up behind her.

"Don't know," Krissy answered. "Where were you?"

"Playing pool." Casey covered her mouth and pointed to the small stage rimmed with rope lights and with a mini disco ball hanging in the corner. "Oh Shelby, you love him."

Shelby's shoulders shook because she laughed into her folded arms on the table.

"Hey Krissy, I haven't seen you in a while." She turned at the familiar voice behind her.

"Trent." *Where in the hell is Johnny.* A frisson of unease caused gooseflesh on her arms. Determined, unknowingly deleted, Trent needed a deterrent. They'd dated a couple of times.

She never called him. Yet, he called her all the time. Before he got the hint, she'd had to download a ring-tone just for his number. "How've you been?" she asked, looking anywhere but at Trent.

Not that she really wanted to know. Johnny had deleted Trent along with everyone else she'd dated in the past year, although she'd quit thinking of Trent as anything more than a pest a long time ago. Glancing at him now, she realized Trent should've never made it into her address book. She continued to peruse the room, focusing on the door, and willed Johnny to appear.

"Krissy?"

She turned to Trent. He leaned in and she caught a whiff of his aftershave. She never did like it. She'd have to bury her nose in Johnny's collar to cleanse away the odor.

Focusing her attention on Trent, she forced a smile.

"Can I buy you a drink?"

"I'm sorry." She put her hand on his forearm. She was about to make a lame excuse when Johnny came through the door. A smile twitched her lips when a chorus of "Johnnies" erupted from the room just like the old television show *Cheers* did for Norm.

Johnny waved and said hello to a few friends on his way to their table. She stood when he approached.

"Hey, Trent." Johnny gave a nod in greeting.

Krissy wrapped her arms around Johnny's neck, slid her body against his, and kissed him full on the mouth. She tasted Johnny's hesitation, but then his mouth softened and the kiss deepened. She hadn't expected tongue, but the delicious, minty flavor of his mouth mingled with hers.

Both hands stroked down her back, pulling her against the hardening bulge in his jeans. Her head spun as desire licked her pussy. Wetness damped her panties as she rode his hard, thick length.

A low hum vibrated her throat. Breath rushed from her lungs, replaced with the intoxicating scent of his cologne. Johnny shifted, bent his knees, and aligned their bodies more perfectly. His cock felt huge, rubbing through the layers against her clit. She wanted him naked. The fingers of one hand trailed up her arm in a lover's caress.

Her tummy fluttered when that hand tunneled into her hair, holding her head. His velvet tongue stoked hers, sending a pulse straight into her core. The walls of her sex clenched, anticipating fulfillment.

She wanted more than kissing when they pulled away slowly. "I've been waiting for you," she said on a breathy pant, passing her thumb over his moist, lower lip.

Her heart beat faster. Blatant sexual energy vibrated into her flesh from the gentle pressure of his warm fingers as his hand rested on her hip.

"Had I known this would be my reception, I would've hurried." They stared at one another. Johnny's hand moved to the curve of her butt, pulling her more intimately against him. Darkened eyes moved over her face and down her body with interest.

"I'll see you around," Trent said and then stepped away.

The tension in her shoulders eased, but not the heat flowing hot through her body. She sighed, but it was far from relief. Since when did *Johnny* turn her on? At least heating her to the point of wanting to tear off his clothes, topple him to the floor, and ride him like a wild

stead. "Um, thanks. I don't have the patience to deal with Trent. The slightest provocation and he becomes a pest." And Johnny becomes doable. Oh crap, she needed a drink.

* * * * *

Johnny's stomach dropped to his feet before rocketing into his chest. Some welcome! One he'd never forget. He'd always suspected Krissy's kiss would be memorable. His loins blazed. Hell, more than that, he needed release. His cock throbbed with unfulfilled promise. He wanted it to be with the woman standing in front of him. He wanted to touch and he didn't want the barrier of clothing between them.

"No problem. Use me anytime." He slapped her rear, and then caressed his hand over the curve.

Ryan and Brett finished their set and came up to the table. "Where's mine?" Brett asked Krissy.

"Right here." She smacked her butt and headed for the bar to order a drink.

"Dude, it was a joke," Brett whispered to Johnny. "Didn't think you'd take me literally."

"I didn't. That was all Krissy." And all a joke. His stomach lurched. His heart dropped. She really had no idea how he felt about her. It was past time to move on. Only he doubted he could. He loved her.

"Whatever it was, it looked hot as hell," Ryan said.

"It was and now I'm going to need a beer to douse the flames."

Brett slapped him on the back. "That my brother, is doable." His mouth twitched into a grin. "Just like the wood girl."

"Only in your dreams."

"Only in your *wet* dreams," Shelby said from behind them. Then she sauntered over to join Krissy and Casey at the bar.

Chapter Five

Meet Mr. Perfect

Krissy lay on her bed and closed her eyes. Sometimes, life sucked. One week was already gone. She neared one week closer to the finish line. The worst part, she wouldn't know when she crossed it until the race was over.

Dr. Hart couldn't give her an exact date she had to conceive by. Each day that passed, endometrial tissue built in her body, making it harder to reach her goal.

She raked her fingers through her hair. Johnny and Friday night's kiss lingered in her thoughts, driving her to distraction. She didn't need complications and falling for her best friend would be a monster-sized problem.

She needed divine intervention. She sat upright. Perfect. Jumping from the bed, she raced to the closet and flipped through hangers. *God*, it was so simple. Literally.

Choosing a cream colored, calf-length skirt and light pink top, she worked fast to get herself ready. The morning had slipped away while she pitied herself. Inspiration struck and she needed to hurry.

Krissy wore her hair loose with a slightly windblown look. She radiated innocence with her subtle make-up and low-heeled shoes. Today was about dressing for success. Looking the part. God damnit, oops, gosh dangit, but she could almost imagine the tingling in her stomach was her baby. Some days she felt brilliant.

Speaking of brilliant, the sun shone brightly as she unlocked her car door. Sunday morning, the birds sang in a canopy of green. Children laughed from the apartment complex playground in the center of the numerous buildings. She couldn't remember the last time she'd been to church. All that changed this morning. Maybe she hadn't found Mr. Perfect, but heaven help her, she had one place left to look.

* * * * *

Johnny held his head and looked at the alarm clock. Brett and Ryan had encouraged complete abandon last night at the bar. And now he was paying the price with a world-class hangover. Drinking himself stupid hadn't numbed the effects of Krissy's lip lock. Leave it to Brett to predict he'd wear a hard-on for a week.

After hanging out at Brett's yesterday afternoon, testing out the new hot tub, he'd found himself at Stu's last night. He vaguely recalled the cab ride home. Krissy lived closer to the club, which meant a cheaper fare, but he couldn't crash at her pad and not think about the way her body fit his. He groaned. His cock twitched to life again. God, he was obsessed. That he managed to keep his attraction to her from interfering with the friendship was a testament to his acting abilities. Maybe he'd been searching for his pot of gold in the wrong field. Instead of pursuing his love of the law, he should've hopped a Greyhound bus to Hollywood. He gave Oscar caliber performances.

He rolled to his stomach. He liked his life. Only one problem needed addressed this morning. He still had to find a ride to get his truck from the club.

The reason for waking still rang in his ear. He flipped open his cell phone and fell back onto the pillow.

"I thought of the perfect solution. You'll never guess where I am."

"Krissy, you sound too chipper for my mood this morning. You must whisper," he said softly. "Or I'll hang up." He swallowed hard and rolled to his back.

"I'm going to Saint Luke's for service."

He groaned again and draped his arm, elbow bent, over his eyes. "Good. Pray I don't throw up, then."

"Don't try for clever. You're not up for it." Shows what she knows. Just hearing her voice, a certain part of his anatomy stood, demanding attention.

"I'm not up for anything." He attempted to lie to himself. His erection had nothing to do with the woman on the phone. It spontaneously happened to every man. Yeah, whatever. His body's betrayal made a tent out of his boxers. "Call me after the service." He flipped the phone closed and thought about the conversation. What exactly did Krissy hope to find at church? Inspiration, divination, or did she actually think she'd find the man to father her baby kneeling next to her for communion? He cracked open his eyelids, and then squeezed them shut, fighting against the glaring sun streaming through the dreary curtains of his small, studio apartment.

Morning wood, coupled with the memory of Krissy's kiss kept him from going back to sleep. He slowly sat up. A crew of jackhammers pummeled inside his head. Church. He'd shake his head, but it would hurt.

Johnny lived in a two hundred and fifty square foot studio room. Technically, it was an apartment only because it had a bathroom, a closet, and a kitchenette with two barstools at the counter. His bed took up most of the room. Books stacked in piles filled up the rest of the space. There was a reason he hung out at Krissy's, outside of the fact that he loved her, she had a real apartment.

He walked into the kitchenette, held his head, and bent over, opening his mini fridge. Not much of a choice, Diet Pepsi or Bud Light. He straightened, closed his eyes, and leaned against the wall. Coffee. Strong and black. That required him to get dressed, go down two flights of stairs, and walk three blocks to 7-Eleven. Even if he did have a car, he wouldn't drive. His body still had a bit more alcohol to metabolize.

Any other day, he'd call Krissy. How long did church last anyway?

Johnny turned on the cold-water tap and stuck his head under the faucet for a few seconds. Once thoroughly soaked, he turned his face and took a drink. After he shut off the water, he ran his hands through his hair, massaging his aches. He growled loud and long. Dripping water down his bare back, chest, and onto the floor, he went to the bathroom. He toweled off before drying his hair. At least he was awake enough to go for coffee.

His phone rang again. Krissy's number displayed on the caller ID.

"What happened?"

"I went in, sat down, and the pastor started the service."

"I'm with you." Johnny took the Diet Pepsi out of the fridge. The coffee would have to wait.

"I looked around, you know, checking out the congregation, mostly the typical families. Then I had a revelation."

He noted the humor in her voice.

"There were a few guys sitting alone. I could've stuck around until after the service and stayed for the social hour. But Johnny, this is church. No one in there is going to do me on the first date."

He laughed and paid a price. A sharp pain stabbed him above the eye.

"I don't have time for courting. What was I thinking?" She laughed. "Obviously about as well as you are this morning. Want me to bring over coffee?"

"I'll kiss your feet." *And any other part of your body.*

"No need to kiss, but since your offering service, you can paint my toenails."

"I'll drink water."

"Brat," she said.

"You're the spoiled one. I'm the ass."

"I'll stop at the store because I know your fridge is empty, swing by Starbucks, and be over."

"I love you."

"I know."

"I was prepared to walk to the convenience store."

"And now you won't have to. I'll see you in a minute."

He hung up feeling better. And since he didn't have to walk anywhere, he fell back into bed.

* * * * *

Krissy wondered if she'd ever find a man to father her baby. He didn't need to be perfect. At this point, passable would be enough. Who would've thought she'd find it so damned difficult getting knocked up. High school girls managed it all the time.

She pulled into the parking lot at Albertson's with a little too much zip. The tires screeched to a stop. Small miracle, she found a spot close to the door. Good thing the person parked in the stall next to her didn't see her pull in. If Krissy drove a Chrysler 300 M, she'd park it away from a cart return and as far from the front doors as possible. Why risk a scratch from someone like her? Krissy chuckled. Like she'd ever be able to afford a luxury car. Like she'd *want* to with a child.

Krissy looked at her beat up Saturn thinking she had a hard enough time keeping it clean and it was just her. Working in the kitchen design business meant that she kept samples of cabinet doors, moldings, and countertops on her backseat. An inch of sawdust covered the floor mats, and Diet Pepsi, once spilled, made the center console sticky. Even if she did have the money, why trash a thirty thousand dollar car. Her twelve thousand dollar, beat to crap, Saturn suited her.

Entering the store, she pulled a plastic cart from the chain. The front wheel squeaked as she made her way down the bread aisle. Italian men were notorious lovers, she thought as she looked at a roman gladiator on the package of *Romanmeal* bread. Or was she in the mood for a Greek. She picked up pita pockets. French toast, French men? Speaking of men, the guy at the end of the aisle had a nice ass. Krissy watched him put peanut butter in his cart. He turned the corner and she flipped around. Her heart rate jumped. This was crazy. All she'd

seen was the rear end. The grill might be smashed. Nonchalantly, she pushed her squeaky cart. Oh no, the grill was perfect.

Wide smile, straight white teeth, probably veneers due in part to a great cosmetic dentist. Tilting her head, she returned the smile. There had to be something in *this* aisle she could put in her cart. She attempted to focus on the shelves rather than the way his thick, ebony hair flowed in a wave around his head. Clipped tight above the ears, a dark lock partially covered his high forehead. Roman nose, square jaw, and the most incredible, copper-colored eyes stared straight into hers.

"Morning," he said, passing her cart.

An accent. There was a God and evidently, he'd seen her at church. Healthy food in the cart, tailored slacks, and a nicely proportioned chest stretching the fabric of his shirt, Mr. Perfect -- at least he met the minimum basic requirements. She felt like jumping up and down and squealing. However, she maintained her outward calm. She took a slow deep breath and relaxed. No big deal, just perhaps her future as a mother.

Okay, so he'd passed her by and was now shopping another aisle. How desperate should she appear? If she followed him, he might consider her a psychotic stalker. Every other aisle might be okay. In fact, it might strike him as funny if she flirted a little. How was she supposed to do that if she had to get Johnny's breakfast?

She made a few quick choices and moved on to the next row. Her heart jumped. He wasn't there. Next aisle, her stomach flipped. She turned down the third aisle figuring he had to be there, but he wasn't. Good hell, she was practically running.

He vanished. Somehow, he'd left the building. Damn! She stomped her foot. Damn! Damn. *Damn!* Just when she thought she'd found her baby's daddy, fate steps in and says, "You are not the father." Send her to the *Maury Show*.

With her breakfast items in the cart, she went to the checkout. The rags always made her smile. How to lose twenty pounds in twenty days, who is getting married, and it's splitsville for another Hollywood couple. Apparently, an alien kidnapped a woman in West Virginia, made her have marathon sex, and now she's having an interplanetary, interspecies baby. Well, Krissy thought, "Why can't that happen to me?" She smiled and put the magazine back on the rack.

Krissy didn't pay attention to the cashier as her groceries slid across the scanner. She couldn't stop thinking about Mr. Perfect. It'd be just her luck, he would be perfect except for the little wife and five kids.

The cashier spoke and Krissy lifted her head. Her stomach jumped into her throat. The beat of her heart tripped, and then rocked into a steady rhythm. Mr. Perfect stood in line at the next checker. He had his back to her, but the rear end was unforgettable. He was almost done with his transaction. Krissy dug in her purse for a twenty. Hurry. Hurry! If she timed it just right, yes! She snatched her change and plowed her cart forward.

Flipping her hair, she made sure to smile before walking toward the exit. Mr. Perfect could watch her rear end now as she swung it with just the right amount of oomph to entice. Shoulders straight, poor posture wasn't attractive.

Reflected in the automatic glass door, Krissy saw Mr. Perfect behind her. And yes, he smiled as he watched her walk. Outside she paused to put on her sunglasses giving Mr. Perfect time to approach. If her hip swing had the desired effect, maybe he'd say hello.

Coupled with an inviting smile, it might lead to an introduction. After introductions, a dinner invitation, if all went well, they'd spend the night together.

She pushed her cart again. Distracted by her thoughts, she didn't pay attention. As if in slow motion, the cart hit a ridge in the pavement. Krissy lost her hold on the cart handle. The wheel slid into a pothole. The basket tipped knocking Krissy to her knees. Gravel bit into her palms. Groceries scattered. Eggs broke and oozed. A car skidded to a halt before flattening the loaf of bread, killing the roman gladiator on the package.

"Are you okay?"

Mr. Perfect with the fabulous accent went to one knee, and put his hands on her shoulders. She might have fallen down in the middle of the street, and her baby's daddy might think her a klutz, however, her body fired up on instinct. Energy raced from where his fingertips branded her skin, turning up the heat in her core. His honey smooth accent, like an aphrodisiac, was almost enough to forgo the introductions and ask him to her apartment for a little afternoon delight.

"I'm fine." The touch of his strong grip as he helped her stand caused her skin to tingle. He brushed loose gravel away with long fingers and tenderness. "I didn't see the pothole."

His mouth tilted into a charming smile. He righted her cart and grabbed the spilled bags. "Your eggs are broken."

Focusing on his angular jaw and beautiful mouth, it took her a moment to realize he spoke of the empty carton in his hands and not her reproductive problem. "Thank you."

Mr. Perfect put his hands on the cart handle and said, "Which car is yours?"

Krissy pointed and followed. Charming, considerate, and handsome, the points kept accumulating in the score column. She popped the trunk. Dressed in designer duds, Mr. Perfect loaded her groceries. "Be careful." He winked and walked away with the cart. Mouth agape, she stared as he pushed it to the return, and then strode in a confident swagger to the 300 M parked next to hers. Unlocking his car, he set his grocery bag in the backseat, gave her a little wave, and sat in the driver's seat.

He started the car.

He backed out of the slot.

She still stood at the trunk. Mr. Perfect was getting away.

Her eyes widened.

He was getting away! Her purse dropped from her shoulder to the crook at her elbow. The Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away. And sometimes he even makes a miracle.

Break lights.

Reverse lights.

Mr. Perfect used the controls on his door to roll down the passenger side window.

He looked like he was about to say something, when he slid the gearshift into park and stepped out of the car. Her heart raced. Nervous and excited, she licked her lips. She looked into his eyes and realized he towered several inches over her.

"Would you have dinner with me?"

"Yes." *Would you have a baby with me?* She returned his smile.

Mr. Perfect leaned into his vehicles, and pulled out a business card. "I won't ask for your number because we've only just met. If you're uncomfortable allowing me to escort you

in my vehicle, I could meet you. However, if you'd allow me to pick you up, I'll make dinner reservations for us."

Krissy fingered the stiff paper. Nigel Markos exuded gentlemanly charm. Setting her purse on the trunk, she took out a pen. "Do you have another card?"

Nigel reached into his car again. Krissy scribbled her name, and phone number on the second card. "I'll meet you here and we'll go in your car."

Nigel glanced at the card and then extended his hand. "It's nice to meet you, Kris. Until tonight?"

She nodded and slid her smaller hand into his. She didn't want a man named Nigel knowing her as Krissy. Not that it mattered at this point, but Nigel's success was obvious.

* * * * *

Krissy's legs trembled as she sat behind the wheel. Her hands shook. She flipped open her phone to call Johnny, but the message from her brain to her hands jumbled. Flipping the phone closed, she started her car and headed to Johnny's place. Her news would have to wait. At least the drive gave her an opportunity to calm down.

Krissy hiked up the two flights of stairs, and knocked. In her excitement, she forgot Johnny's hangover until she heard the groan from the other side of the door.

"Sorry," she called, testing the knob and then letting herself in. "Don't get out of bed if you don't have to." She came into the room.

Johnny lay on his belly spread eagle on the bed. Since her mind had recently catalogued a very nice foreign rear end, looking at Johnny's butt, she decided American made wasn't half-bad. In fact, it looked good in black, silk boxers.

Setting the groceries on the breakfast bar, she climbed onto the bed. "Scoot over."

Johnny growled as he rolled from his stomach to his back. "Where's the coffee?"

"Oh shit, I'm sorry, I forgot."

"How?" He winced as he turned toward her. "It's all that mattered."

She turned onto her side and faced him. If Johnny wasn't her best friend and completely off limits, she'd admit his chest was worthy of noting. However, she wasn't going to imagine touching his defined pectorals, tasting his flat nipples, or running her fingers through the sprinkling of hair disappearing into his boxers, which she already new hid an impressive package. Meeting Mr. Perfect really had turned her on if looking at Johnny made her hot. Okay, so maybe Johnny had heated her blood on a few other occasions, several...She closed her eyes for a moment and then focused. No! Not on the bulge in his boxers. Shit!

"I met my baby's daddy at the grocery store," she blurted.

Johnny's eyes widened.

* * * * *

Blinking a few times, Johnny willed the hangover away. Nothing sobered him faster than Krissy and her search. "How do you know?" He thought his job was to insure the guy was cut from father material. Krissy's judgment couldn't always be trusted.

"His name is Nigel. He has the most delicious accent. He made me wet with his voice.

No hardship in the looks department, drives a really nice car, and handed me a business card." She took it from her purse and handed it to Johnny.

It read, *Nigel Markos, Production and Distribution*, along with his phone number. What did *Production and Distribution* imply? Krissy didn't appear to care. The hangover fog burned off and his mind went wild with possibilities. He sat up and stared at the card. "We should find out more about him."

Krissy snatched it from his fingers. "Too late. I'm having dinner with him tonight. If all goes well I should be in the cat bird's seat by midnight."

"You just sounded like your dad. Now I will. You have to get to know him first." Until she actually found a man to fill the position of daddy, it hadn't seemed real. The bad taste on his tongue had nothing to do with the cottonmouth from last night. "I think I should meet him."

"You will eventually. If all goes as I've planned, I'll be involved with him for at least a week. I'll bring him to Stu's Friday night. You can meet him then."

"Yeah Krissy, a week too late. You'll already be involved."

She wiggled her eyebrows at him. "I hope so. Come on, let's eat."

Now, Johnny couldn't eat. He was sick to his stomach.

Chapter Six

What Happened To Mr. Perfect

Elegant and elite, the restaurant overlooked the city. Thousands of lights twinkled. Traffic inched along city streets. Krissy put her hand over her stomach in an attempt to calm the swarm of butterflies fluttering about. Romance had never entered into the equation, but the way Nigel's fingers trailed from her shoulder to the center of her back brought erotic images to mind. He traced the spaghetti strap of her silky, shimmering blue dress.

She'd practically had to sit on her hands in the passenger seat of his luxury car to keep him unaware of her anxiety. This was huge. Barring any complications, she was having dinner with the man who would father her child.

"Ready?"

Krissy nodded. Nigel kept his hand on the open back of her slip dress as they followed the hostess to a table in the corner. "A wine list, please," Nigel said, holding the chair for Krissy to sit.

Once they were alone, Krissy took a moment to study the man sitting across from her. Handsome, charming, clearly financially secure, but could she see him as a part of her life for... well, forever? When a child turns eighteen, a parent's responsibilities don't disappear. A child linked them.

Krissy recognized that her personality came off abrasive to certain people. Sure, she was putting on a show tonight, the method to this madness of getting pregnant. What if Nigel hated the woman behind the façade? On the other hand, what if there was more to this tickle in her stomach and flutter in her heart? Maybe Nigel offered more than a temporary solution to her current condition. Or did the tickle come from insecurity?

Johnny wiggled his way into her thoughts. Nigel would never fit with the six-pack. And it would take a near miracle for Johnny to accept a man in her life, especially a boyfriend who would interfere.

"Are you with me, love?"

"Sorry, just musing." Damn, but that accent had a way of pushing every other thought out of her mind. His copper eyes glowed in the dim light of the restaurant. Disarming with a hint of mischief, a knowing smile played on his full lips. Almost as if he were gauging her, just as she was him. If she had a daughter, she'd be cursing her with years of waxing. Nigel had thick brows and long lashes giving him a strong, masculine face. His gaze, as he looked at her now, would mesmerize in the glow of the moon. Mysterious, he conjured wicked thoughts and risky behavior. Who needed dinner? She was ready to take him home.

After they decided on dinner, Nigel ordered a bottle of 1990 La Mission Haut Brion. Krissy might not be a wine connoisseur. However, she noted the price at one hundred and twenty-five dollars a bottle. She didn't have the heart to tell him she preferred Bud Light.

The dark, red Bordeaux coated the glass as Nigel swirled, sniffed, and savored the wine.

"Tell me, Kris, what it is you do for a living?"

This seemed like the perfect opportunity to reveal some of the real Krissy. "I work with

wood.”

His fingers stroked the stem of the wine glass mimicking the carnal thoughts in Krissy’s head. He cocked an eyebrow.

“Hard wood,” she said huskily. “Soft wood. Knotty wood.” She saw the movement in Nigel’s throat as he swallowed. She tipped her glass, took a sip, and then touched her upper lip with her tongue, slowly drawing it across. “I design custom cabinetry,” she said and then smiled. “New construction, remodels, bathrooms, I do it all. Have you heard of Creststone Cabinets?”

He nodded. “Your company does beautiful work. Perhaps I should have you look at my condo?”

“I’d love to.”

“Tonight?”

Her knees knocked together. She lifted her wine glass at the same time she raised an eyebrow. “Sounds promising.”

“I couldn’t agree more. If you’ll excuse me for a moment,” Nigel said.

Krissy tracked his movements as he weaved his way through the restaurant. As soon as he was out of view, she reached into her purse. Flipping open her phone, she called Johnny.

“Is the date over?”

“It isn’t going to be over for a very loooong time,” she whispered. “Hell, I don’t even need the dinner. I’m already wet. By the time he gets me into bed, I’ll be a puddle.”

“Great.”

“You don’t sound happy for me.”

“If you’re not being honest with this guy, at least be honest with yourself. It’s dangerous, sneaky, conniving, and morally wrong.”

“So then you’d have me give up on having a child?” Elation transitioned to depression. She blinked tears from her eyes. “I’ve made poor choices in my life. Will I regret missing the opportunity of having a baby? Or will it be the manner in which I got myself pregnant that I’ll regret? Either way, I’m screwed.”

“No, but you’re about to be. So, please be careful. You don’t know this guy.”

After she flipped the phone closed, she stared at it. Johnny made valid points. The way she looked at it, she had the next hour to learn as much as she could about Nigel Markos. Instead of looking for the basic requirements, she’d look for a reason not to sleep with him. If she didn’t find one by the end of dinner, damn it, she was taking her chances.

“Tell me about your family,” she said when he rejoined her.

“I have one sister. She’s here. You’ll meet her, another day of course. She lives in the condo next to mine. Our parents live in southern Florida. I visit every six months.”

Well Johnny, she thought. A strong family connection is a definite plus. Next door to his sister is a bit too close for comfort, but not a deal breaker.

“My parents relocated to Pennsylvania a couple of years ago,” Krissy said. “Dad plays golf. Mom just plays. They worked hard their whole lives and now they’re enjoying the rewards. They didn’t want to leave me when they relocated. I don’t think they thought I’d be able to take care of myself. Until I earned my own money, I wasn’t financially responsible.”

“My family seems to have a gift for making money,” he said.

She shrugged. Money made life easier, not better. Look at Johnny’s apartment.

Someday he'd have money, but not having much now didn't bother him. "I told my parents to spend it all. I don't want any of theirs. I want to earn my own."

"Bravo." He refilled their glasses with wine. "To a beautiful woman who knows what she wants."

Krissy lifted her glass and touched it to his. "And for going after it."

The server arrived with their dinner.

"Ah, lovely," Nigel said, setting his glass to the side. "I hope you're hungry."

"Ravenous, actually." She draped her linen napkin across her lap.

The presentation was absolutely beautiful, a visual masterpiece. "It smells heavenly, yet it's almost a shame to eat it."

Nigel reached across the small table and touched her fingers. "You are like a breath of fresh air compared to the women I usually date."

Why did the statement make her smile? Her stomach tightened. Even if she had an amazing encounter with Nigel, did she really want anything more than her baby? Probably not. Sure, he seemed like a great catch. Initially, they all do. The only man she hadn't tired of in her history with men was Johnny. And he didn't count. She never slept with him. She sighed. Good thing or one of them would've moved on by now.

More than likely, Nigel's fascination would wear off. Krissy was a beer and burger girl, not five star cuisine and Bordeaux. Hopefully, she and Nigel would be able to keep their association civil. She couldn't see a reason why not. Nigel exuded civility.

"You're not eating," he said.

Startled from her reverie, she raised her eyes to his and smiled. The fresh salmon flaked on her fork. Dusted with herbs, the mouth-watering aroma adding to the experience, she closed her mouth over the first delicate, bite. Heaven. The flavor melted on her tongue.

Nigel stared.

"How's yours?" she asked.

Nigel picked up his steak knife. However, it wasn't necessary. The piece of prime rib cut like butter. He rolled the meat in the juice on his plate, put it into his mouth, and chewed.

Krissy's second bite never made it to her mouth. Frozen in midair, her fork poised to put another piece of salmon into her mouth.

Sixth grade lunch at Buchanan Elementary didn't disgust the way Nigel did as he chomped his prime rib. That was saying a lot considering Travis Angle sucked his Jello through a straw...through his nose. Nigel's mouth wasn't open exactly, but it sure as hell wasn't closed. She saw his tongue and teeth demolish the food. Her fork clanged as it dropped to the plate. Oh boy, no way was she going to allow him to use that mouth on her. Good thing she hadn't kissed him yet. Salmon and wine in her stomach roiled.

"Are you okay, love? You look a bit pale."

"I don't feel so well."

"We can leave as soon as I finish my meal."

She cringed. Strike two. His concern didn't extend to his missing the meal. Granted, an expensive meal, but had he offered to leave, she would've declined. That he didn't, bothered her.

"Do you think you are ill? Perhaps it'll pass."

Oh yes, that is exactly how she felt. "I don't know. It seems to have come on

suddenly.”

A cheeky smile spread across his lips. “I don’t suppose you’d still like to inspect my wood?”

Had the statement come after he’d expressed concern, she would’ve at least laughed. Instead, like the umpire at a baseball games, the words, “Strike three, you’re out!” echoed through her head.

“Another night,” she said.

“Perhaps the salmon is spoiled.”

Evidently, not the only thing. Krissy picked at her food. Johnny’s words worked into her subconscious, took root, and now grew into a forest of reservations. It wasn’t Nigel’s poor table manners, and had nothing to do with his wanting to finish a beautiful meal before taking her back to her vehicle. With the chaos in her mind, she didn’t want to act rash. Better to let tonight end with a good night kiss rather than a romp. Damn, and so attractive.

* * * * *

Johnny poured over his textbooks with fiendish intensity. Hunting season closed and he needed to refocus and regroup. His schoolwork took a backseat to Krissy. No more. Yeah, right. She’d satisfied her minimum basic requirements. He didn’t care what she did. Then why did he feel as if an elephant stood on his chest?

Scraping his fingernails along his scalp, he read the same paragraph in his textbook. The words blurred and he pictured Krissy in the arms of another man. He glanced at his watch. Two in the morning, she should be home. He made a fist with his left hand and smacked his right. Stupid!

Nigel Markos could be anyone. He’d *Googled* him. Whatever his business, it didn’t have a presence on the Internet. No way was he going to sleep until he spoke with Krissy and he knew she’d safely made it home.

After dialing her number, he went to the kitchen to scrounge for food while he waited for her to answer. Spending time in his kitchenette was an exercise in futility. He either ate at Krissy’s or grabbed fast food. Good thing *Wendy’s* stayed open late. And since he had to go out, he might as well swing by Krissy’s first.

Johnny yawned as he drove down the deserted streets in the hours of darkness. Leave it to Krissy to cause him another sleepless night. He had a plan. If she weren’t home, he’d get a value meal, come back, let himself into her apartment, and eat.

There her Saturn sat, parked in her space. The girl had some explaining to do. She needed to answer her damn phone. He parked in a visitor slot.

As he walked to the apartment door, he wondered if Mr. Perfect planned to sleep over. Well, plans change. He intended to give her an ass chewing, get a bite to eat, and crash on the couch. In that order.

He knocked once, tested the doorknob, and knocked again. If she opened the door with a sheet wrapped around her body because he roused her from bed, he’d laugh. Not that he’d find it funny, but because it served him right for worrying.

Johnny didn’t expect Krissy’s swollen, red-rimmed eyes when she cracked the door.

“Why are you here?” She pulled the door open.

“Because you didn’t answer the phone. What happened? God, did he hurt you?” Johnny walked into the apartment. Krissy closed the door behind him.

“No, I couldn’t do it. I had him drop me at my car and I came home.”

“Why didn’t you answer your phone? I’ve been calling. You went out with some guy none of us know, intending to take him to bed, and then you wonder why I’m here. Don’t you get it? I care about you and I don’t want you to get hurt!”

“When a person doesn’t answer the phone, it means they don’t want to talk. I still don’t want to talk to you.”

Great, now he felt like crap for caring. Tears streamed down her cheeks. He didn’t intend to make her cry. He just wanted her to understand that her actions affected him too.

“Come here.” He pulled her into a hug. “I’m sorry. I worry about you.”

Her arms held him tightly around his waist. Tunneling his fingers into her snarled hair, he cradled her head in his palm. “So you call Mr. Perfect tomorrow. Make a date, spend a few days getting to know him, and see what happens.”

She shook her head and pulled away. “No more searching. It won’t work. No one will be good enough and it’s all your fault.”

Chapter Seven

Krissy Has An Epiphany

She could see her comment confused him. His eyes narrowed as the wheels of his mind turned. Didn't he understand that his reservations became hers? He made her see this monumental step in her life was too important to chance on a perfect stranger.

"Why can't I find someone like you? You have a great family, you love kids, and someday you're going to have a great job. I've heard the rumors about your prowess in bed. I don't doubt they're true. We've probably shared too much about what we've done and whom we've done it with. I've seen you naked—"

"Skinny dipping at youth camp doesn't count. Cold water alters perception of certain body parts."

Krissy rolled her eyes. "Johnny, I peek all the time." She laughed when he opened his mouth to speak. "You peek, too." There were times when he crashed on her couch that she knew he wasn't asleep. She'd purposefully pranced back and forth from the bathroom to her bedroom giving him a peep show.

"I never peeked."

"Liar, but it doesn't matter. I try not to remember what it felt like when we kissed. But I can't stop thinking about that either. The kiss turned you on too. The package you pressed between my legs is going to make some lucky lady very happy."

Johnny crossed the living room floor moving away from her. No way could he have forgotten the way his cock hardened when they kissed. Clothing was the only thing that kept them from making real the movements their bodies simulated.

Krissy wondered why she hadn't thought of it before now. Who better than her best friend? Of course, the risks were high. Getting intimate with a man always brought about emotions with the potential to destroy a friendship. For that reason alone, Johnny should remain off limits.

All through high school when he invaded her dreams, she'd convinced herself she couldn't act on her feelings. She cared for him too much to risk what they shared. Any innuendos they'd made had been in jest. Hers had covered her secret desires. Over the years, she'd been able to put those feelings aside. She would rather have Johnny as her friend, than not have him at all. Except now the stakes had changed. The risks were greater.

But how was she going to ask him? For the past week, Johnny had been helping look for a sperm donor. Never once had he volunteered for the position. Trembling started in her chest and traveled down her arms until she clasped her hands together to keep Johnny from noticing the shake. After convincing him to help find the perfect, temporary man, how was she going to make him see that he'd be the perfect long-term solution?

"Are you listening?" he asked.

"I'm sorry. I was thinking. Johnny, I could search forever and never find the right man to father my baby. Maybe we're looking in the wrong place."

He sat in the ratty recliner. "I don't see how you can say that. We've looked everywhere."

"I know. Don't you see? No one is ever going to be good enough. Just because a man is nice to look at, fun, and can show me a good time, I want to take him home. The problem is that the package is beautifully wrapped and never what I bargained for on the inside." She fidgeted with the ring on her finger unable to look Johnny in the eye. If he said no, she'd be devastated. Now that she realized Johnny was perfect, she didn't want to look anywhere else. And if he said yes, would sex change them forever? Could they become lovers and then return to just friends as if nothing happened? Probably not. But maybe they could be better.

"This is your deal. You made the rules and you determine the outcome. You're the one who said you didn't have time to get to know the guy."

"I already know him."

He sighed and adjusted his position in the lazy boy. "We've deleted everyone in your palm." He pushed back the recliner bringing the footrest up.

"He was never in the palm. I want you."

Johnny didn't move. He didn't speak. God, was he even blinking? He just stared at her across the living room. What was he thinking? The stupid muscle in his jaw worked overtime. Not a good sign. Why wasn't he saying anything? She'd just asked him to have a baby. He had to have an opinion. With the way he had acted in the beginning, surely he'd thought about it. She wasn't completely oblivious to his mood swings. And he thought she was irritable. "Well?"

"Well *what?*" The footrest slammed back under the seat. Johnny bolted out of the chair and stalked into the kitchen.

"Don't walk away." She followed him. "It's the perfect solution. All the rules still apply. You don't have to do anything, but enjoy the ride. It wouldn't have to change anything between us. It's the perfect solution." She repeated, wanting to grab him by the shoulder and swing him around to face her. Instead, she pleaded her case to his back.

"I'm not ready for kids."

"You don't have to be. I'm not asking for more than sex." He did turn around at this. Okay, so it was easier talking to his back. The glare in his eyes more than intimidated. However, cowering wasn't her style.

"Don't tell me it'll be a hardship. We both know we've been curious about how it would be between us. At least I can admit it."

"Wondered, yes. Without intending to ever find out."

She took a hesitant step closer. "I trust you." One more step. "Our kid would have a mom and a dad that get along. We've never been in a relationship, so we won't have the burden of an ugly breakup." She touched his arm. "Best friends. Our child would have loving parents. I know I can't expect from you what I did from the men I considered at the beginning of my search. You're in my life and I know you'd be around for the baby. You could spend as much time with our child as you wanted. I'd want your parents to be grandma and grandpa. You'll be around regardless of the biological father. Johnny, you are the only constant in my life."

Johnny growled and stepped away from her touch. So much for an easy undertaking. She needed better arguments than the ones spilling from her lips. "My parents live on the other side of the country. I love your mom and dad. Think about how great it'll be for your parents. They love me." She gave him a coy smile. "You'll put your mama's mind at ease."

She's worried about the kind of girl you'll bring home."

"My dad will have a heart attack. And I won't be bringing you home. I'll be knocking you up. Do you still think they'll be thrilled?"

Why did he have to think things through all the time? For every point she made, he offered a counter. When he finished school, he'd make a great lawyer. Time to face the truth; this wasn't going to work. Johnny took responsibility for his future.

"So then you won't do it?"

Johnny growled again and ran his fingers through his hair. He hopped onto the counter and wrapped his hands around the edge of it as his legs dangled. Funny, she'd always known he was attractive. Yet, never before had her mind detailed his thick thighs encased in denim or the way the muscles of his forearms bunched as his hands white-knuckle gripped the edge. She imagined them on her body and felt an instant response deep inside.

"I think it would be a mistake." He glanced down at the floor and then met her eyes again. "I don't want us to end up hating each other."

"It'll never happen."

"Hear me out. What happens when at some point in the future one of us gets involved in a relationship?"

She popped up onto the counter next to him. He hadn't outright refused. It was important to take the technicality of the actual act of intercourse out of the equation and appeal to him as her best friend. "We start as we intend to finish. If we talk it through and address each of our concerns, no one will get hurt."

He shook his head. She'd better start talking fast because she was losing him. "I know you love me and I love you," she said. "Keeping out the usual problems that go along with relationships will be easy. We don't have a relationship."

He jumped from the counter. "I don't do casual sex."

"Oh give me a break," she said, exasperated. "You don't do commitment any better than I do. This is probably the best argument I have. I don't want you to have any obligation to me outside of the baby. At least no more than you would feel if someone else fathered my baby."

* * * * *

Johnny nearly sagged under the weight of her statement. Hadn't *this* been his problem from the beginning? Krissy's determination to have a baby directly impacted how they'd relate to each other for the rest of their lives. Could he realistically watch her create a lifelong bond to someone else? No. But, there were so many complications to consider. Namely, how did he insure they remained friends?

People loved, married, had children, and still ended up hating each other and making their children pay the price. Nothing could make him hate her. Only he had no control over her emotions. Thinking of not having her in his life depressed him. There was one sure way to stay connected.

"Oh shit," he said, scrubbing his cheeks with his palms. "If I say yes, we're going to have some ground rules."

"Absolutely."

Krissy slid off the counter. Her smile brightened the room while her eyes sparkled like diamonds. Pure pleasure at his response manifested itself in every beautiful line of her face. A face he just insured he'd see for the rest of his life. Unable to stop his own smile, he grasped the magnitude of his decision.

"We can't let our sleeping together change us. We *won't* let it," she said.

He stood in front of her and put his hands on her shoulders. "The first thing we need to do is be honest. It is going to change us." Her hair felt like silk against his hands. He wondered how it would feel against his chest or spread out across his pillows. Imagining her sitting astride, riding him with her hair falling around her shoulders...Oh no! He was getting stiff. "We need to talk about everything. What I expect from you, what you expect from me, and don't tell me you don't want anything."

"Okay, you go first." She took a notebook out of the drawer next to the kitchen sink and a pen from the cup on the windowsill. "I'll write down the rules. This is our contract."

This was stupid. He wasn't detached enough to lay his emotions out on the bargaining table. "I don't want you sleeping with other men while you're pregnant with my baby."

"Fine. But if I'm going without, so are you."

Not a problem. Sleeping with Krissy would undoubtedly ruin him for anyone else.

"What are we going to tell our parents?" she asked.

He went to the refrigerator. "You hungry?" he asked, helping himself to her groceries.

"I can eat. So what do you want to tell them? We're getting pregnant on purpose, but maybe we should we let them think it was an accident?"

Johnny paused in the task of getting a frying pan. "I don't want our baby ever thinking he or she was a mistake."

"Our baby," she whispered with awe and wonder discernable in her voice. "Is this really happening?"

Her eyes filled with tears. Johnny set the frying pan on the stove and pulled her out of the kitchen chair and into his arms. "Scary when it finally becomes real, isn't it?" He stroked her back. He felt her head nod against his chest. Then she stiffened and pushed against him. "What?"

"We have bigger problems." She took two retreating steps. "The when, where, and how."

"Pardon me?"

"I don't want some magical date etched into my mind reminding me of the day we conceived our baby. Where are we going to do *it*? Not my bed. I'm not going to remember *us* every time I get into bed. Not yours either. I don't want you thinking about me when you go to bed."

Good thing she wasn't in his head. He'd already taken her to his bed hundreds of times. In his dreams. "It won't matter. You and I both know we'll never forget."

"As for the when, I'm ready when you are. Actually, I should rephrase that. I'll be ready after you make breakfast and we eat. If we can decide where, then we can do it tonight. We just need to think of it as the first step in a series of steps to reach the desired conclusion of having a baby."

As if he could just forget *he'd* be making love, while Krissy only thought of there being together as a means to an end. "At least we don't need to discuss the how."

"Actually, I think we do."

Johnny nearly crushed the egg he was holding in his hand instead of cracking it into the frying pan. He looked over his shoulder and cocked an eyebrow. Krissy sat at the table again with a serious look on her face, not a trace of humor in the straight line of her mouth. "I'm capable."

She rolled her eyes. "We both know what happens in relationships when one falls hard and not the other. That can't happen to us. So we need rules about the how." She held up one finger. "No kissing. No caressing. No touching outside of what is absolutely necessary."

Johnny laughed from deep in his chest. Tears came to his eyes. Unbelievable. His dreams had come true and then morphed into his worst nightmare. He could make love to Krissy, but by God he wasn't allowed to enjoy it.

"If you make me come, I'll clobber you the minute you get off of me. I don't want you to be good."

Did she read minds now? "I can't control whether it's good or not."

"Yes, you can! Just get on, do the deed, and get off. Hopefully, we'll only have to do it once."

"Do I get to enjoy it at all or is that against the rules as well?"

Johnny flipped the eggs in the pan and took the bread off the top of the refrigerator. He needed to calm down. However, Krissy's unrealistic ideal situation was a long way from his.

"Of course." She stood and poured them coffee. "You have to enjoy it in order to reach orgasm. How else am I going to get pregnant? Coming is ejaculation. I don't suppose you're a premature ejaculator. The faster the better."

Johnny slammed the spatula onto the counter, pulled open the utensil drawer, and held out the turkey baster to her. "Why don't I go beat off in the bathroom and we'll artificially inseminate you right here on the kitchen table?" He turned off the stove and stalked out of the room. She was nuts. He wasn't going to climb on and perform without her willing and enthusiastic participation.

"Johnny, don't get mad." She came up behind him as he stared out the front room window.

"I'm supposed to make love to you and you... what? Watch TV? Read? You lay there and take it while I fertilize." He stiffened when she put her hands on his back. "This is touching. And that felt like a caress," he said when she wrapped her arms around to his waist and pressed her cheek against his shoulder.

"I love you, Johnny. I don't want to be *in* love with you. Neither one of us is ready for commitment. It's going to be hard enough getting used to being a mom and dad."

He turned and pulled her against his chest.

"Are we going to ruin us?"

Johnny kissed the top of her head. "No." He just needed to convince her, the *us* would be Johnny, Krissy, and baby as a family. Her plan might not include life after baby. His did.

"No more joking," he said, putting his hands on her shoulders and easing her away. "It doesn't matter where we do it. Neither one of us is likely to forget." He put his fingers to her lips after she took a breath to speak. "No *unnecessary* touching." This left the topic wide open for debate. "I kiss you now." He pressed his lips to hers in a chaste kiss to prove his point. "But I agree, no open-mouthed passionate exchanges."

“And what about the rest?”

“Are you willing to have sex once, and then wait a month to see if you conceived? It seems to me that we should spend the next few weeks screwing our brains out and then hope for the best.” He turned on the charm and gave her a big open smile.

She rolled her eyes. “You’re incorrigible.” He followed her back into the kitchen. “But you’re right. So Johnny, when are you going to knock me up? We don’t have much time so you’ll need to be efficient.”

He put eggs and toast on plates then set them on the table. “I’ll do my best.”

She unsnapped her pants.

“Wait a minute.” He stilled her hands. “I can’t believe I’m saying this.” He ran his fingers through his hair. “Not right now.” He needed a day of mental preparation. He’d last about a minute if they had sex right now. That is if he could keep it up. Krissy epitomized his fantasy. If he was going to fulfill that fantasy for the next few weeks, every encounter would be memorable. “You’ve been on a date with another guy. We’re both tired. We’ll go with the plan. I’ll come over—” He looked at the clock on the stove. “—technically tonight.” The sun would be up in a few hours.

“We’re not going for romance, Johnny.”

“Fine no romance. I have classes during the week, but I break at ten. We can hook up for quickies?”

She lifted her coffee cup to make a toast. “Thank you, Johnny.” Her eyes glassed over.

“Save your tears,” he said touching their cups together. “We may have just started down the road to hell.”

“I’m glad we’ll be traveling together.” They touched their cups again. “Should we tell the gang?”

Johnny shook his head. “I don’t want anyone trying to talk us out of this. After you’re pregnant, the world can know. Right now, our plan is just between you and me.”

Chapter Eight

The Big Oh O!

“Hi.” His heart pounded. Damp palms, dry mouth, oh yeah, all the markers telling him just how terrified he was to make love to Krissy. He’d never actually been with someone he loved. If he listened to the spin, it made a difference. That was why he was afraid.

Krissy held the door for him. She must have spent the afternoon cleaning. Her house appeared almost sterile. Clutter cleared from the coffee table, the usual shoes at the door gone, and the hint of pine cleaner hanging in the air, this was not his Krissy. The girl didn’t clean,— he swallowed the lump in his throat,— unless she was nervous.

Johnny sat on the couch. His knee bounced out a fast cadence. “Can I get a beer?” he asked. He didn’t wait for a reply. Once in the kitchen, he leaned his forehead on the fridge. Closing his eyes, he took a deep breath and tried to prepare himself for the night to come. Somehow, he had to make it right for both of them. Krissy didn’t want a memory to cherish. He couldn’t be indifferent.

“Johnny, what’s the problem?” He hadn’t heard her approach.

“I can’t do this.” He took a beer out of the fridge, closed the door, and then leaned his back against it. Twisting the lid off the beer bottle, he gulped half.

“Tell me what you need.”

Since when did she become diplomatic? His Krissy would tell him to drop his pants and get on with it. The Krissy before him worried her lip between her teeth and shifted her weight from one foot to the other. She tucked her hair behind her ears. Tilting her head to the side, a slow smile spread across her face.

“What?” he asked, knowing she had something to say.

“Remember Joe?”

Johnny groaned, but couldn’t help smiling. “Junior year, Mr. Bradshaw’s third period calculus class, I hated him.”

“You hated anyone who came between us.”

He still did.

“After Joe, I realized what was special about you and me.”

“It took you that long? Joe Harcourt. High school sucked.”

Whenever Johnny and Krissy were lucky enough to get a class together, by the end of the first day the teacher had them sitting on opposite sides of the classroom. The entire semester he watched Krissy and Joe become close. Always the dutiful best friend, Johnny was there as infatuation turned into a crush. Then disaster struck, he held Krissy close when Joe broke her heart.

“I’ll always regret giving him my virginity.”

Yeah, Johnny regretted it as well. The following week, he took out Lori Drummond. Krissy and Lori hated each other. There was no explanation for it. It just was. They’d grown up in the same cul-de-sac. Maybe they vied for the same babysitting jobs. Who knew? All he knew was that he screwed Lori on the football field. Krissy found out and went ballistic. Krissy wasn’t upset that he had sex. It was Lori. If he and Lori had become involved, it

would've made it difficult for Krissy. The pathetic part was that Johnny knew how Krissy would react. He'd wanted her to have a taste of what he'd felt watching her with Joe. He'd suffered all semester long, to have her give away what he would've cherished. He showed her all right. And nearly lost the most important person in his life.

"The purpose for the stroll down memory lane?" he asked her.

"I won't regret tonight like I did with Joe. I know you'd never hurt me. We aren't using each other because we understand exactly what we're doing. You've always been there for me. What we have is special."

He wanted to pull her into his arms, run his hands over her body, and taste her tongue with his own. His cock was rock hard. Obviously, his body knew better than he did what it wanted. Krissy's perfect, round breasts swayed beneath her wife-beater tank top. Dark areolas puckered through the thin ribbed material.

Johnny wiped perspiration from his upper lip. No touching. No kissing. No caressing. Make love without touching the planes of her flat stomach. The sterling silver loop piercing her bellybutton was off limits to his tongue. Krissy would consider anything associated with his mouth, kissing. He wanted to press his lips to the tramp-stamp of a gecko tattooed two inches above the crack of her sweet and tempting ass. Following her rules, he couldn't even smack that ass. She'd consider it a caress. No way in hell she'd ever let him tap it.

"I don't know how to start." Normally he'd kiss a woman. Get her hot by pinching her nipples, maybe enjoy a little oral sex, and slip on a condom and complete the act.

"We take off our pants and nothing else." Helpless to stop her, she pulled him into the living room. "Maybe if we talk about your school or my job, we won't be focused on what we're doing."

Not a chance. Every nerve pulsed like a live electrical wire. He closed his eyes, inhaled deeply through his nose, and exhaled out his mouth.

"Meditation is good. Take yourself out of the moment," she said.

He opened his eyes. "Shut up, Krissy." If she wanted him to get her pregnant, he'd better figure out how to stay in the mood. He needed a hard cock, which at the moment wasn't a problem. However, if she kept speaking, he'd humiliate himself with a soft, deflated one.

Johnny glanced around the room. "Exactly where are we doing this?"

"Couch?"

He shook his head. With the no touching rule, they'd be uncomfortable on the cramped couch. Johnny grabbed a couple of throw pillows and tossed them to the floor. His hands trembled. Christ, he was scared as hell. His heart pounded like a sledgehammer attempting to break through his ribcage. At this rate, he'd be lucky to maintain an erection. This wasn't sex. This was procreation.

Mouth dry, he stumbled over the words. "Are you sure, Krissy?"

She answered by unsnapping her jeans and shimmying them past her hips. Next went her pink satin thong panties. His tongue swelled in his mouth. Narrow waist, hips that flared in a tantalizing curve to delectable thighs, beckoned him. A blonde, neatly trimmed, thatch of hair called to his primal side. Light headed, and no longer able to think rational thoughts, he held his hand out to her.

Krissy pulled on the snap of his jeans.

"I don't think I can do this your way," he said, swallowing the lump lodged in his throat. The rasp of his zipper echoed loud in his ear. He couldn't help himself. He grazed the side of her breast with his fingertips. His hand numbed. The sensation traveled up his arms. His body heated.

"Try," she whispered. Her touch was tentative at first. Then she reached into his pants. Head arched back, he hissed in pleasure as she circled his shaft, stroking the length of his erection.

"This is touching," he said, pushing his jeans over his hips and kicking them off.

"We agreed no unnecessary touching," she said.

Johnny leaned into her neck. Her scent filled his senses. Rocking his hips, he brought his center closer to hers. His heart pounded, cock aching for the hot sheath of her sex swelling around him. "I think this is necessary too." He tunneled his fingers into her silky hair. His mouth brushed the flesh of her neck. He wanted to taste, but he kept his mouth closed. Running his hands down her back, he pressed her full breasts into his chest. When his hands made contact with the bare skin of the heart-shaped ass he'd drooled over since puberty, he couldn't help cupping the cheeks and lifting her against his cock.

"I think we've experienced enough foreplay," she whispered. She grabbed the afghan off the Lazy Boy recliner and spread it out on the carpet. She sat down and leaned back on her elbows. With a smirk on her lips, and her knees bent, she spread her thighs. Her wet pussy glistened. He did that to her.

Johnny pulled his shirt over his head.

She sat up straight. "I thought we were only removing what clothing was necessary."

"I think our definitions differ. I *need* you naked, but I know you wouldn't consider that necessary so I'm not going to get it. I want to kiss and touch you. Damn Krissy, I want to run my hands over every part of you. The rational side of my brain understands your rules. The rest of me wants to taste." His eyes traveled down her body to the juncture between her thighs. "And I do mean everywhere." Her sweet peach of a pussy made his mouth water. "So enough complaining."

She lay back against the pillows when he dropped down beside her. He knelt between her thighs. Leaning over her, he closed his eyes and slipped a finger into her hot wetness. He followed with a second. Flicking back and forth, her body jerked against his hand.

"Please Johnny, don't make me come." Her choppy words brought him back into the moment.

Oh, but he wanted to put his fingers into his mouth. The musky scent of her arousal hit his senses with the impact of a freight train. Instead, he wrapped his hand around his throbbing cock and fit it to the tight, hot, opening of her pussy. He squeezed his shaft hard as the head slipped in. Taking a deep breath, staring into her eyes, he buried himself full hilt. Dear God, he was home.

* * * * *

What had she done? She'd peel back her fingernails digging into the carpet before she'd clutch Johnny's back and buck as her body desperately desired. Each long, powerful thrust of his cock brought her closer to a euphoric pinnacle. Damn it. This was not how she

imagined tonight.

"Baby," he whispered, pulling out and sliding in again.

"No whispering sweet nothings. It's against the rules." She couldn't stop herself from wrapping one leg around his hip and arching off the floor. Johnny wasn't supposed to make every cell in her body sing his name. When he had slipped his fingers into her, the room brightened as if the sun had come up. Nothing compared to this. Heaven was having Johnny inside of her. Oh God, he felt so good. She bit her tongue to keep from crying out.

The lines of his face softened. She'd never seen him from this angle. Well of course, she hadn't. This was the first time they'd made love. No, damn it! This is just sex. A means to an end. Yet, she could see how bright his eyes sparkled. And even while stretching and filling her, there was tenderness in his touch.

He changed his tempo. Faster, harder, leaning over her with his weight braced against his arms, he lifted higher. Johnny's lips hinted at a smile. "You okay?"

"No!" Krissy wiggled to free herself. "You can't look into my eyes. That's a bond, Johnny. We can't afford to be bonding." She squirmed out from under him.

"What are you doing?"

"What does it look like? I'm changing positions!" On her hands and knees, she repositioned so that she could bite the couch cushion if she needed to scream.

"You have the best ass."

"You're breaking the rules." She knew she whined, but he wasn't playing fair.

Probing her pussy with his finger, he then replaced it with his cock. Her walls stretched, and then tightened around him. His groan echoed off the wall. Each thrust created a spark of electricity that shot from the top of her core straight into her brain. "This is sexy." His finger traced the gecko on her lower back.

"Shut up! I'm not sexy!" She moved against him. "Oh hell, this isn't supposed to feel incredible."

She wanted to look over her shoulder, but she wouldn't. She didn't have the strength to see Johnny, have him filling her, and remain uninvolved.

"That's a caress!" She batted his hand off her ass.

"I need to hold on," he said, gripping her hips and driving hard and fast.

"Fuck you, Johnny!" Her back arched. Thrashing from side to side, she couldn't hold still to bite the cushion. A powerful orgasm stole her breath. White light blinded behind closed eyes. Spasms rocked her core, clenching Johnny's cock in a silken glove.

Johnny smacked her ass.

"Hey, that's deliberate," she said, glaring at him over her shoulder. "You've proved your point, now prove your virility."

On the verge of orgasm, his cock hardened and felt even bigger. If he didn't come quick, she was going to join him. A multiple was completely out of the question. She reached between her legs, grabbed his balls, and gave a gentle tug. With a shout, Johnny shot off like a rocket.

Krissy rolled onto her side, and Johnny sat back on his haunches.

"I wasn't supposed to come, you ass." She knocked him off balance.

He laughed at her. "Hand me my boxers."

Krissy reached for his jeans and then grabbed her own.

“Don’t get dressed,” he said standing. “I heard it increases your chance of conception if you lay down for twenty minutes.” He pulled on his boxer shorts. “That’s about how long it’ll take me to recover,” he said as he walked to the kitchen.

“How do you know so much about conception?” she called to him, slipping a pillow under her butt to help the sperm seek out their target. She pulled the afghan over her legs and crossed her fingers. Probably just like Johnny, the little swimmers wouldn’t know how to follow directions. “Recover for what?”

He came back into the living room with a Diet Pepsi and leaned against the wall. “For round two.”

Chapter Nine

Can They Keep A Secret?

“Do you want me to stay?”

Krissy shook her head. Johnny didn't want to leave, but he realized Krissy's confusion. Making love changed them. Neither was ready to admit it, but the uncomfortable silence hung in the air like a suffocating shroud. What had transpired on the floor twice and on the couch once already strained their friendship. They weren't just friends anymore. Whether she admitted it or not, without sharing a single kiss during sex, they were lovers.

“I'll see you tomorrow at ten.” She pulled open the door.

He gently touched her cheek. She took two steps back and his hand dropped to his side. “Don't pull away.” They'd followed her rules. It hadn't mattered. “It'll be okay. Think about the baby.”

Her hand went to her stomach. “I could be pregnant.”

Or not. He needed this week to convince her that friendship is the best foundation for a relationship. Tomorrow he'd work on breaking a few more of her rules. Tonight he'd leave her to sort through the confusion. Hell, he needed the time too. Being together had been magic. Krissy claimed she wasn't ready for commitment any more than he was ready for fatherhood. He'd plunged into, well her. And if it took every breath from his body, he'd convince her of the rest.

* * * * *

Krissy closed the door behind Johnny, her worst fears realized. No touching, at least no unnecessary touching. No kisses, no caresses, and Johnny still gave her the best orgasm of her life with the perfect length, girth, and acumen to spiral her into oblivion. She was in trouble. He made her pulse race, and her skin tingle. Even now, when she should be sore and completely sated, she wanted him back.

She went to the window to watch him leave. He took purposeful steps to his truck. The span of his shoulders, tapering to his waist reminded her of how he looked braced above her. The engine roared and the truck pulled out of the parking lot. Taking a deep sigh, she turned to the living room. The couch now reminded her of the way she'd straddled his lap, careful to keep her hands on the couch backrest. However, that brushed her nipples against his incredible bare chest. Had she not worn the tank top, Johnny would have had his mouth on her breasts. Moreover, she would've initiated it.

Any other day he'd crash on her sofa. Tonight sleep would be impossible with him in the next room. She'd known Johnny practically her whole life and never considered it could be so intense between them. Men never took the upper hand. After one night, her indifference to Johnny, sex and keeping it simple melted away. Somehow, he got inside and now she found herself invested. Damn.

Her heart pounded. Her stomach flipped just with the memory of the tenderness in his eyes. Not googly-eyes. She saw straight into his heart. How were they ever going to keep it

impersonal if she fell in love? Steeling her resolve, Krissy decided it would be simple enough, she just wouldn't.

* * * * *

Krissy squinted against the morning sun streaming through her bedroom blinds not having rested at all. Johnny never crossed into her sanctuary last night, yet he invaded her bed, weaved himself into her dreams. Sitting up, she combed her hair with her fingers and focused on the alarm clock numbers. 9:37! Twenty-three minutes to grab a shower, brush her teeth, and get ready for Johnny to come have non-committal sex with her. It *would not* be making love.

Krissy scrambled down the hall and into the bathroom. After turning on the shower, she stuffed her toothbrush into her mouth and brushed her teeth while the water warmed. Oh hell! Staring at her reflection, she groaned. Mascara smudges had given her raccoon eyes. A pink pimple shined on her chin, such a lovely image for Johnny to focus on. Better than her eyes. Ugh. What was she doing thinking about whether Johnny found her attractive. For that matter, maybe she should stink. Anything to speed him up on the follow through because she couldn't take another two-hour romp and still obey the rules.

Standing in the shower, inspiration struck. She had the perfect solution.

* * * * *

Paying attention to the lecture was impossible. All Johnny's thoughts centered on Krissy and last night. Krissy with her jaw locked, gritting her teeth, trying hard not to come, but breaking apart anyway. He'd never before felt a surge of adrenaline as he did when her body convulsed around him. That he brought her pleasure increased his own.

His cell phone vibrated in his pocket. Flipping open the phone, he read the text message. Brett stood next to the hot tub at his condo, and a couple of hot and wet girls wearing bikinis smiled at the camera phone photo. Might sound appealing before last night, but now he had ten minutes left in class and a five minute drive until he had a hot, wet, and willing woman of his own. He text messaged him back, "*Another time.*"

If he bailed out of class a couple of minutes early, he'd have time to stop for coffees and bagels. He joggled his knee. Glancing around the room, looking for the most convenient path to make his escape, he grabbed his satchel and made a beeline for the south door exit.

Ten minutes later, he was at her apartment door, but she wasn't answering his knock. Putting his key in the lock, he let himself in. "Krissy, it's just me." He shut the door and locked it behind him. Making his way through the living room, he couldn't help smiling as he remembered last night.

"Kris?" He set the coffee and bagels in the kitchen. That's when he heard the shower.

He had two choices. He could let himself into the bathroom and join her. Erasing her rules in one act— guaranteeing himself a slippery hellcat. Instead, he took his coffee into the living room, sat on the couch, and kicked off his shoes. Picking up the remote, he turned on Court TV.

"You're early." Krissy stood at the threshold of the room with one towel wrapped

turban style and the other wrapped around her body. Legs bare nearly to her ass, cleavage cresting out the top of the towel as her arms held it closed, his body's response was instant. He moved on instinct. Crossing the room, he almost smiled as she countered his steps until her back was against the wall.

"Johnny, wait." She put her hand on his chest.

He grabbed the towel on her head and pulled it off. Her damp hair cascaded past her shoulders, clinging to her skin. "I want to see you naked." He tucked his finger between her breasts and hooked the towel. "All of you."

"Renegotiate the contract? I had a similar thought when I was in the shower."

His smile spread. She could've hit him with a truck. He thought he'd have to get her hot and whimpering before he asked for at least one of the rules to be broken. Before he had a chance to ask if he could kiss, touch, caress, or heaven help him, taste her, she continued.

"I'll compromise. I won't get dressed, but I need a distraction. Last night was way too intimate. Don't give me that look." She pushed him back. "You know it was good."

"Great, actually."

"For your information, that's the problem. So this morning while I showered, I remembered this one really disturbing event in my life. It seemed to me that it just might be the perfect solution."

Johnny followed her to the couch. She tucked the corner of the towel tightly between her breasts and picked up Johnny's coffee.

"I'll get the other one. I think I need to be sitting down for this." He hurried to the kitchen and came back with the second coffee and the bagels. "Can't wait to hear what you've come up with, so lay it on me." He sat in the recliner and rested his forearms on his knees.

"It's a long story, but basically I once had this dream. I remember it well because Shelby, Casey, and I laughed for weeks. Granted, it was funny. But I was permanently scarred. Disturbing doesn't come close. I couldn't use my vibrator for weeks. At one time, I loved having sex in my dreams. After this... event, I went to bed terrified I'd have a recurring nightmare because I couldn't stop thinking about it."

"Sounds serious. So what happened?"

She took a bagel from the bag. "I was having a perfectly great erotic dream. All the players were there."

"Who was it?"

"Doesn't matter, never reached the peak. The dream went scary wrong. We were headed for the shower. Slight problem in the bathroom. Someone was already in my shower."

It didn't sound scary to Johnny. Sounded interesting.

"I pulled open the shower curtain." She demonstrated the action for Johnny. "Regis Philbin asked for the soap."

Johnny laughed.

"He was naked in my shower and I swear to God, I cataloged every part of his body. Every wrinkle and let's just say I had the image of those wrinkled parts burned into my corneas. I saw Regis Philbin's dick! I woke up in a sweat. Not the good sweat, the kind that leads you to believe you have the flu." She took a bite of bagel, a drink of coffee, and swallowed. "So I was thinking that I might be able to control my body's response to you if we

watch Regis and Kelly while we're having sex."

He didn't know what to say, so he just stared.

"I will compromise on the bed. I've got a TV in my room and—" She looked at the clock above the door. "We're in luck. It's after ten and the show is on." She took one last drink of her coffee, stood, and held her hand out to Johnny. "Do you need motivation?" She loosened the towel, but didn't let it drop.

"Some less secure men might take offence to your micro-managing. Since I'm secure in our arrangement, I think you should know I'm looking at these new developments as a personal challenge."

"You're going to make me come?"

"As many times as I can." He followed her into the bedroom. "Since we're renegotiating, do I get to touch your tits?"

* * * * *

Johnny left after lunch. He loved the smirk on Krissy's face when he said goodbye. That is, right before she slammed the door. She issued the challenge and he rose to the occasion. Several times.

Now back to the grind. Krissy worked and he needed to get down to some serious studying. For the next semester, his education still needed to be a priority. The grants and scholarships required a minimum grade point average. However, he had another concern. When Krissy had the baby, he needed to be in a financial position to care for his new family. Figuring he had at least nine months to get to a point where cutting his school hours and securing a job, wouldn't mean giving up his dream of being an attorney. Krissy's timetable took precedence. She didn't have time to wait for him to finish his education.

Driving home, he went through a fast food drive thru for dinner. Once he sat down to study, he did not intend to leave his apartment until tomorrow afternoon when he would meet Krissy after work.

So when Brett text messaged and told him the gang planned on meeting for an impromptu gathering to christen the hot tub, he returned the message and asked if *everyone* meant a full six-pack.

His phone rang while he waited for Brett to answer.

"Are you coming?" Krissy asked.

He chuckled. "Not at the moment. I could be. Do you want to come over?"

"Add phone sex to the banned activities list."

"You take all the fun out of making love."

"Just sex. So are you going to Brett's?"

"I'm thinking about it. If you're going over to Brett's, I will." He listened to dead air between them. "Well?"

"What if everyone can tell we're sleeping together? I don't want them to know you're Mr. Perfect."

"Perfect, huh?"

"Don't get cocky."

"I thought that's all you wanted me for." Johnny could almost hear her roll her eyes. "I

can be good. Can you?"

"You should know. Was I good? You know you are."

He chuckled. He did know. She couldn't hide her response, but then he wasn't hiding his either. "See, you are willing to talk dirty."

"Yes. No. Be serious for a minute."

"You don't have to explain."

"At first, I didn't think I'd care. I do."

He felt the same way. They couldn't stay away from their friends and keep up pretenses. Yet his stomach clenched when he thought of Krissy and not telling the world that they were taking this monumental step. Soon, he would convince her that her best friend made the perfect husband.

"So we put on our game faces. We can do it." He could hear her smile. A deep sigh and then a note of excitement in her voice when she said, "I might not have many more months left to wear my bikini."

Oh hell, he hadn't thought of that. Krissy in a bikini. Brett and Ryan might not be inclined to touch, but every warm-blooded male looked. Including Johnny. And man did he ever want to touch. Between her gecko tramp stamp and her belly piercing, her body screamed sexuality.

After agreeing to meet there, Johnny put on his swim trunks, grabbed a change of clothes, and headed for his truck. So much for studying.

Normally, Brett kept plenty of beer on hand. If Krissy abstained, he would too. Stopping by a convenience store, he grabbed a couple sodas. Climbing back into the truck, he marveled at his new outlook.

Thoughts of Krissy flitted through his mind several times a day, however not with the same intensity as the last two days. Since Lori Drummond many women had come and gone from his life. Nothing compared to the feeling of being buried balls deep in the body of the woman he loved. Already his palms were starting to sweat. Maybe tonight he could get her to break another rule. As long as she was in a bikini, he might be able to find some way to get his hands on her. Before yesterday, touching Krissy was no big deal. An arm around the shoulder, cuddling on the couch to watch a movie, or sitting hip to hip in his truck, now brought deeper sentiments to mind.

* * * * *

Arriving before Johnny, Krissy sat in the car for a minute. Ridiculous, she was nervous about seeing him. Hell, she'd seen all of him this morning. It had been difficult to obey the rules yesterday, nearly impossible today. Her smile dropped from her lips. Regis did absolutely nothing to stop her body's betrayal. Not only did it respond to Johnny, but now seemed to crave him like a drug.

Music drifted around the side of the house. Obviously, Casey had control of the stereo. Infatuated with Rob Thomas, she gave two choices, his solo album, or anything from Matchbox 20. Brett tolerated Casey and her obsession for a limited time before he suffered her wrath and changed the tunes.

Johnny's truck roared up behind her. Convincing herself she wasn't waiting, she

stepped out of her car. Hiding his eyes with dark sunglasses, dark hair framing his face— her heart skipped a beat as his smile twitched his lips.

He slid out of the truck. His easy swagger reminded how he didn't rush as he buried himself deep inside, how he paused a moment before slowly pulling out, savoring the sensation as he would the first sip of fine wine. The blood in her veins flowed hot when he lifted the sunglasses and their eyes met and held. Liquid warmth pooled in her core making her wet.

"We're not going to pull this off if you stare at me like that in front of the others." He wrapped his arm around her shoulders just as he would do if they were walking into Stu's. Only tonight, she stiffened. The masculine scent of his aftershave hit her senses like a Mac truck and careened right into her libido. She was in trouble. She wanted him. Now.

The pulsing heat between her legs snaked up her spine and settled in her cheeks. Johnny's chuckle told her he knew exactly what she was thinking.

Ryan and Shelby were arguing in the kitchen. Johnny handed Krissy a soda, kept one for himself, putting the rest in the fridge.

"Soda?" Brett came in from the patio dripping water on the floor. He took a beer from the fridge and handed it to Johnny.

"Thanks, but I'm sticking with soda tonight."

He stood next to Krissy. And *he* was worried about *her* blowing it. Normally Johnny would have a beer and ask about the women in Brett's life. Basically, Johnny was a laid-back guy. "Have a beer." She slugged him in the gut and stepped away. "I'm getting my suit on." She walked out of the kitchen hoping he would get the hint. The Johnny they all knew drank beer, teased, and didn't hover in her space.

* * * * *

Johnny took off his shirt. He'd worn his trunks and brought a pair of jeans to change into before he went home. Taking the beer, he decided he needed his senses dulled just a bit.

He went out onto the patio. Ryan stood at the small gas barbecue flipping burgers. "Hungry?"

"I already ate, but thanks." Johnny tipped his beer to his lips and made his way to the hot tub.

"How's Krissy's search going?" Casey asked. "Did she hook up with Mr. Perfect from the grocery store?"

Johnny set his beer on the edge of the hot tub and stepped over the side. The water foamed and swirled. Steam opened his pours. "Nice," he said, finding a spot with a jet pulsing into his back. "Mr. Perfect had a flaw." He finally answered Casey when she stared at him impatiently waiting for a response. At least Mr. Perfect from the grocery store had flaws. The Mr. Perfect intent on knocking her up— didn't.

"Johnny, you've got to talk her out of this."

"I'm not getting involved." First bold-faced lie he'd ever told to the gang. No doubt the first of many over the coming months.

"Hey girl." Krissy came out of the house and Shelby wrapped her in a hug. "Hungry? Ryan is making burgers."

Johnny tracked Krissy's movements as she flitted about the patio. Draping her towel over a lawn chair, setting her soda on the table, until finally she glanced at the hot tub. Their eyes locked and held. Her skin blushed as if he'd actually touched her. Thankfully, his lower half remained hidden under the churning water because her creamy smooth skin, pebble-hard nipples, and tapered thighs sent all the blood from his head into his groin.

"How's the water?"

"Get in," he said.

She took in a sharp breath of air. She could no more hide her response to him than he could to her. Holding out his hand, she trembled at the first touch. Then she tightened her hold, stepping over the side and into the water.

Johnny put his hand on her hip to steady her. Once she found her footing, she moved two feet away from him, claiming a jet for her own.

"Johnny said the grocery guy didn't work out."

"Casey, it was the strangest thing. Looked good, smelled good, dressed nice, had all the telltale signs of a successful man. He was charming. Mr. Perfect. He took me to a nice place. Dining at the most expensive restaurant in the city, I find out he eats like a cow. How does a parent raise a child into a successful man and not teach him basic table manners? Not a family I want to be involved with or subject my child to."

"So then where does that leave you? Are you giving up on getting pregnant?"

Johnny refused to look up. He kept his gaze on the bubbles stirring and frothing into interesting shapes, anything but glance at the woman occupying every one of his thoughts. Her laughter echoed in his mind. Sometimes he'd walk to class and swear her fresh scent carried on the breeze. He found the slight gap between her teeth charming. The way she worried her lips between her teeth turned him on, and that she had a smile for everyone warmed his heart. He loved everything about her. And if he met Krissy's eyes, Casey would see right through him and their secret would be out.

"I've found someone," she said, and his eyes snapped up.

"Oh my God!" Shelby had been listening while watching Ryan man the grill. "So what is he like? Are you sleeping with him already?"

Krissy traced the letters on her soda with her fingertip. "He's stubborn, yet compromising. Handsome, not arrogant or conceded. At this point, we're not talking about the future, although I doubt he'd ever walk away."

"He sounds great. Where did you meet him?" Casey asked.

"Actually, I've known him for a long time."

"Did we go to school with him?" Ryan asked. He had his left hand on Shelby's hip and his right wrapped around his beer. "Maybe I know him."

Johnny coughed. "You okay," Krissy asked sliding closer to him. He nodded. She turned her head and glanced back at Shelby and Ryan. "You might, but I'm not giving names."

Under the water, her hand brushed his thigh. Whatever she was thinking, he was in no condition to play along. It was hard enough, hard being the optimum word, to sit next to her in a bikini and keep his hands to himself.

"When can we meet him," Ryan asked. "I want to see who you suckered."

"I didn't sucker anyone. I actually gave full disclosure." Her hand touched the front of

his swim shorts.

"Are you satisfied?" His eyes locked with hers. She wrapped her hand around his cock through his trunks. Air rushed from his lungs. He leaned his head back, gritted his teeth, and closed his eyes.

"Yeah, was he good?" Shelby asked.

"Are you okay, Johnny?" Casey asked.

Krissy snatched her hand away.

"I'll be fine. The hot tub feels great." He rolled his shoulders.

"Stimulating," Krissy said, nodding.

Johnny willed his erection to heel. As long as Krissy sat next to him, teasing with her innuendos and wandering fingers, his determined cock wasn't going soft.

"I'll find a way to get you back for this," he whispered so only Krissy would hear.

"This is payback. I'm not going to be able to watch Regis anymore."

She pushed her stream-dampened hair away from her face. The motion caused her breasts to rise above the water.

"That's it." Water splashed when he stood. "I'll be back in a minute." He stepped out of the water and quickly covered himself with his towel.

"Where are you going?" Krissy asked.

"Bathroom." Out of temptations range.

In the house, Brett leaned against the fridge in the kitchen speaking on his cell phone. He pointed to the front door, mouthed the words, "Hot chicks." He held up two fingers, smiled a lecherous grin, and walked outside.

Breathing in a deep sigh, Johnny wandered down the hallway. Brett had moved into the condo six months ago. He'd made some changes. Sterile white walls now had muted abstract prints, though nothing ranked as masterpiece. But the pieces broke up the monotony from one room to the next. Two bedrooms, one served as an office with a desk and computer, the other was Brett's bedroom. Across the hall was the bathroom. Johnny stepped into the laundry room because the window faced the hot tub. Just as he noted Krissy's absence, her voice sounded behind him.

"Are you lost?" She crossed the small room to look out the window. Shelby and Ryan were arguing over something. Shelby's hands spoke a language of their own. Krissy laughed and Johnny lost what was left of his self-control.

Chapter Ten

What Rules?

The tension shifted in the room. Johnny's breathing changed. Before Krissy's heart had a chance to skip a beat, Johnny pinned her body against the wall. Hot and demanding, his lips found and parted hers. His tongue snaked into her mouth. Tasting. Savoring. Stroking the texture, he sucked on her tongue while pulling a moan from her chest.

"Kissing is against the rules," she said, arching her body closer to his. Angling her hips, she nestled his incredibly hard cock in the apex of her legs. "Oh yes," she said when his palm found her breast, and his thumb stroked across the peak. Her nipple tightened to the point of pain. She needed more.

Johnny understood her silent plea and pulled the tie behind her neck. The top fell forward. Johnny tasted his way down her neck until he latched onto her nipple. Opening wide, he ate as much of her breast as he could fit in his mouth. Working the flesh with his jaw, his tongue flicked the nipple. Electric shocks reverberated, traveling from the tight tip straight into her pussy.

"Watch out the window." Johnny stepped away from her and shut the laundry room door. "It doesn't lock," he said, coming back to her.

A dark gleam in his eyes stole her breath. Then he kissed her again. She moaned when his lips moved over the sensitive skin of her neck. Gentle nips of his teeth made her shiver. His hand on her breast not only stroked her nipple, but stimulated her creamy cunt, soaking her bikini panties.

"I could've pulled you onto my lap in the hot tub you got me so hot." He eased her bikini bottoms off. Lifting her up, he set her on the washing machine. "Watch."

He eased her thighs apart, pulled her to the edge of the machine, squatted before her, and softly blew against the thin strip of golden curls covering her pussy. She dropped her head back. His tongue was cool as it slipped between the hot, swollen lips of her sex. She put her feet on his shoulders and held onto the edge of the washer. "This is definitely open-mouthed," she said. He looked up and she smiled.

"I meant for you to watch out the window, not me," he whispered against her quivering flesh.

She couldn't turn away when he spread her lips with his thumbs and licked her clit. Soft and yet firm, his tongue flicked and pressed until her thighs trembled and her core tightened. The beat of her heart thumped in her ears and curled her toes. Sharp breathy pants, she was close. His hungry mouth moved back and forth across her clit, then ventured lower as he fucked her with his tongue. The hot caress set her aflame. Her imagination hadn't done Johnny justice. His skilled assault liquefied her center. He pressed his lips flush against her wet folds and sucked, hard.

A blazing wave of passion crashed over her. "I'm coming." Her bottom came off the washer. "Oooh," she moaned. Her arms shook as her whole body contracted. Sparks flashed behind her eyes. Euphoria enveloped.

More amazing, it was Johnny standing before her. He freed his cock, and thrust into

her body before the final spasm ebbed. "No more rules." His hands touched. Hers clung. Wrapping her legs around his waist, she arched. Johnny growled, put his hands under her ass, and lifted her off the washer. Turning, he slammed her back against the wall and pounded into her body. It took only a moment. She couldn't hold back. Her cries echoed off the wall as Johnny exploded inside her.

Her legs dangled and then dropped to the floor. "Oh my God. I can't stand." Her legs trembled. "Do you think they're growing suspicious?"

Johnny chuckled and looked out the window. "Our friends seem to be oblivious to our absence. They're all in the hot tub."

"Oblivious, huh? Not likely." She put on her bikini wondering how she was going to walk back out to the patio when her legs weren't strong enough to keep her upright. And heaven help her, what was she going to do about her feelings for Johnny? She'd always known they cared for one another. Having sex logically took them to the next level. But Johnny was right, how would she handle it when he moved on? Her track record sucked. The last thing she wanted was to hurt him. She just didn't know how to make it past the hurdle into a full-blown, committed relationship. *She couldn't be convinced she and Johnny would have the same relationship had they never experimented with emotions beyond friendship.*

"It doesn't matter," he said, smoothing her hair. "Lie, deny, and counter-accuse."

She giggled and leaned her head against his chest as he pulled her into his arms. "You really are a shit," she said. "It won't be the same now that we've broken the rules."

"You started this when you made me watch Regis."

He had a point. If someone bore the guilt of drawing first blood, she did. Who would've guessed not even Regis could kill the mood?

* * * * *

Johnny snapped. There wasn't another explanation. The thin ribbon of control he had over his baser needs, just *snapped*. He'd been rough. Unable to get enough of what she'd denied him for the past two days, he took it all at once. He felt like an ass, but that wasn't what had him puzzled. Krissy seemed to be taking it in stride. She smiled and laughed. And she had responded in kind. He'd been insatiable and she'd met him stroke for stroke, adding to the fire blazing between their bodies rather than trying to put out the flames.

Johnny shifted his shoulders. No way could he get back into the hot tub. He needed to grab his T-shirt and cover the red, welting, claw marks stinging his back.

"Will you get my shirt from outside? I'll hang in the kitchen." He turned around.

Krissy covered her mouth with her palm. "I'm sorry."

"I'm not. But I don't want to have to explain."

He watched her butt as she sashayed out the sliding glass door and grabbed his shirt. Shelby and Casey grilled her about where she'd been. He heard her tell them. Good girl, stick to the truth and avoid forgetting what lies you've told. They had been *talking*... and moaning, and kissing.

"Hey dude, so what's up?" Brett came into the kitchen and grabbed another beer out of the fridge. "So listen, I was talking to this girl on the phone. She's got a dirty mouth. And I say that with the utmost respect for her." He twisted the top off the beer. "I was heading to

my room to finish the conversation and I heard the strangest noises coming from my laundry room."

Johnny didn't move. He didn't breath. Shit! "You got a rodent problem?" Well, that could possibly be the dumbest thing he'd ever said. Wasn't he just praising Krissy on keeping it simple?

"I've never thought of you as a rat." Brett set the beer on the counter. "Look, I'm not getting into your business. You and Krissy have something special. We all know it. We've ribbed you over the years, but we all wondered why you two never hooked up. I'm not saying I know what was going on, even though we both know I do. I'm not going to say anything to the gang. It's your business."

Johnny raked his fingers through his hair. "If I could say anything it would be that I've loved her... forever. I can't watch her make a life with another man without at least trying to see if there could be something more between us."

"Then you're the guy she spoke of?"

Johnny didn't acknowledge it, nor did he deny it. Brett was like a brother. Omission was his only choice.

Brett seemed to understand. "Well, good luck. Trying to tame the wood girl, you're going to need it."

"I wouldn't want her to change. If she let herself, she'd see we'd be good for each other."

"Trouble is, Krissy doesn't trust in relationships," Brett said.

"But she trusts *me*." Johnny straightened when she approached the glass doors.

Krissy had Johnny's shirt in her hand. "Thanks," he said, slipping it on. "I'm going to bail."

"Want to come over to my place?" She grabbed a diet soda out of the fridge.

Oh, the devious twinkle in her eye should've warned him off, but Johnny wanted to take her home and break every rule ever conceived.

"Hey y'all," she hollered out to the gang. "Johnny and I are going to bail."

"What? Why?" Shelby leaned against the edge of the hot tub with her arms bent and her chin resting on the backs of her hands. "I want to hear about the guy?"

"She won't talk," Casey said.

"Krissy always shares. And we want details." Shelby worked her eyebrows up and down.

"Not this time." Krissy gathered her belongings.

"Hey Johnny," Brett said. "See you later." And he smiled.

Johnny breathed a sigh of relief. "Yeah. See you on the flip side." He might not have Brett's full support, but at least he wasn't giving him grief about the whole thing. If it turned out to be a mistake, it was his and Krissy's to make.

"Hey Johnny, why don't you and the wood girl meet up with us at Stu's later?" Brett glanced over at Shelby and Ryan. "Are we still going?"

They nodded.

He didn't want to go to Stu's. He wanted to get Krissy naked. Spend the rest of the day discovering her secrets. "Maybe, I'll let you know."

Brett approached so only Johnny could hear. "A word of advice?"

Johnny nodded.

"You want the wood girl you're going to have to play her game."

Krissy loved the chase. Once a guy turned serious, Krissy turned and ran. This time it would be different. Johnny wanted forever. Brett was right. He needed to play her game. Have fun, be carefree, and enjoy the ride.

"See you later then," Johnny said, and then walked into the kitchen, through the living room, and out the door.

Krissy waited by her car.

"They want to go to Stu's tonight. Are you up for it?"

"I'd rather stay home."

He gritted his teeth. Damn, but he didn't want to go either. However, he could see the bigger picture. Krissy thrived on anticipation. "I told Brett we'd go."

"Okay, it sounds like fun. It should be a quiet night, but if it's not can we leave early?"

Looking back at the house, assuring they were alone and unobserved, he then turned and pulled Krissy into his arms. "The only reason I don't want to go is because I'm not going to be able to touch you. I'd rather stay home, in bed, but you don't want our friends becoming suspicious."

"It'll be a test of endurance. We can do it."

"I'll follow you home and then we'll go to the club together."

She climbed into her car and Johnny went to his.

* * * * *

Stu's wasn't the average sports bar with heavy smoke hanging in the air. It boasted pool tables, darts, karaoke, and a grill comparable to any steakhouse. Stu's was home away from home.

Johnny reached under the table and wrapped his hand over Krissy's bare thigh. The hem of her skirt brushed against his knuckles. He pressed his fingers into her soft skin, and then inched slightly higher. She sucked in a quick breath, recovering nicely by adjusting in her chair. Krissy smiled, and then shifted her legs. With a reluctant squeeze, he removed his hand.

"I'm going to mingle." She set her drink to the side and slid off the bar stool. "Maybe I'll go dance."

Right, and he'd sit at the table and drink himself into oblivion if he had to watch her flirt with the bar crowd. Krissy didn't mingle, she pollinated. She flitted from table to table, sometimes talking, always smiling, and laughing. Yet, someone always managed a touch. Her ass belonged to him now.

"I'll come with you." He stood.

"No. You stay here." She leaned in close. The essence of her perfume drifted around him. Her fingers rested on his forearm, burning her brand into his skin through his clothing. "Johnny," she whispered. "My panties are wet. You can't touch me here."

"No one is looking under the table." Mentioning her panties made his cock instantly hard. He experienced the same hunger he had in Brett's laundry room, yet he didn't want to fuck her in the bar bathroom. Too degrading and dirty. He'd rather take her home, make love

by worshipping her body from her delicate toes, up her toned calves, smooth thighs... damn, but he needed to stop now. Swallowing the excess saliva in his mouth, he said, "How long should we stay?"

"A little while longer." Laughter hinted in her smile. "It's an endurance test, remember." She spun on her heels and sauntered her sweet ass in the direction of the pool tables.

The erection in his pants faced the endurance challenge. Tracking her movements around the bar only brought to mind the way she moved under him. She glanced over her shoulder. The hussy, she knew what she did to him and took perverse pleasure in it. He smiled. Who cares if she was right? He did enjoy her blatant sexual energy. He didn't want anyone else feeling the effects.

"Johnny, you want to sing tonight?" Ryan smoothed his hair back with his fingers.

Johnny hadn't drunk near enough to sing karaoke with Ryan. "No duets tonight." *At least not the singing kind.* He glanced around the room having lost sight of Krissy. He wasn't keeping track. He simply enjoyed the view.

He needed to focus on something. The night would end soon enough and then he'd have Krissy to himself again. He upended his beer. "Buy me another and I'll sing."

* * * * *

Krissy closed her eyes. A particularly bad rendition of Matchbox 20's *Push* bellowed from the speakers. Johnny and Ryan serenaded a red-faced Casey from the karaoke stage. Shelby laughed and cheered from the table. In fact, the whole bar was singing along.

Stu's collected regulars making everyone friends. It was a rare treat for Johnny to sing. She could tell by his tone – and the fact he could carry one – that he wasn't drunk.

Stepping around a couple, she worked her way to the edge of the room trying to find an unobstructed view. Ryan played the Las Vegas crooner and Johnny held the microphone like a washed up rocker without the big hair. Casey's head bobbed to the beat.

Johnny looked good. He didn't workout, but his physically active life sculpted lean muscles into his genetically lucky physique. They used to play racquetball until Johnny's school schedule interfered. He had homework. Hell, she didn't spend enough time getting her work done. She'd wasted time looking for a sperm donor when she should have been getting her ass into the office. A few of her projects were behind schedule, but she'd catch up.

A bigger concern was her growing attraction to Johnny.

He never used to make her hot just looking at him. Those lips, smiling at her from across the room, created a fluttering in her stomach. Would she have slept with Johnny had she known how it would change the way she saw him? Probably, no, maybe, she grinned, hell yes. The unreasonable expectation of thinking they could sleep together and not touch, kiss or caress was grossly overestimated. When the connection became too intense, she'd just gently remind him that although they'd broken the rules, they still needed to keep perspective.

He bent his knees, held the microphone, and strained his neck reaching for chords out of his range. She wanted to wrap her arms around him and ask him to pump into her core with the same powerful beat as the music. Her panties dampened. She wanted him and she didn't want to wait until tonight. She never used to be indecisive either. Once she decided to

sleep with a man, she did. When it was over, she didn't look back. With Johnny she was afraid to look in the future. Right now, she couldn't get enough of the present, and terror struck her heart over the thought of losing what she'd had with him in the past.

Even though he sang the song to Casey, she felt the words in her heart. Anticipation released butterflies into her stomach. For now, she could have as much of him as she wanted. Like a decadent dessert, she couldn't get enough. Soon it would be gone and she didn't want to regret not taking... Johnny.

She glanced around noting the people around her. She didn't want to attract unwanted attention. She only wanted Johnny's eyes on her. She planned to put the endurance level to a test. Her eyes locked on his. She slipped her middle finger into her mouth and sucked, making her cheeks concave. His dark eyes narrowed, focused. Her pussy hummed with the possibilities. She licked her lips, her teeth, and then sucked her finger into her mouth again.

Johnny stopped singing in the middle of the chorus. The crowd laughed assuming he'd lost his place on the large television displaying the lyrics. She smiled while slowly pulling her finger from her mouth.

Johnny handed the microphone to Casey. She couldn't hear what he said, but watched his lips move. Turning, she headed toward the exit.

"I need some fresh air," she said to the bouncer. He stamped her hand for reentry.

Krissy felt Johnny like the prey feels the hunter. Her heart beat in her chest, echoing into her ears. Her blood flowed hot, fired by the thought of Johnny and his incredible touch against her skin. She craved his mouth. Her nipples strained against the lace of her bra. Hadn't she wanted him, expected him, to find a way to get his hands on her? She'd dressed to play. Her loose and flowing skirt wouldn't hamper wandering hands. Nipple points puckered beneath her thin shirt. The bra clasped in the front and would allow easy access. The thong panty covering her sex was so small, it slid against her clit, wet and sticky with her cream.

"Krissy."

She turned at the sound of his voice behind her. Her heart rate took another jolt. He took purposeful strides toward her, eating up the pavement to reach her.

The summer wind at her back blew her hair into her face. Tunneling her fingers into her bangs, she held it away so she could see the lust sparkling in his eyes. There was also a seriousness in his expression she didn't recognize. Maybe she'd pushed too far with her little act of seduction.

She started to explain when finally he stood before her. He didn't give her a chance. He grabbed two fistfuls of hair, pulled her head back, and smothered her words with his mouth. She moaned and leaned into him. The hard length of his cock pressed against her tummy.

"Let's get out of here," he said, nipping his way to her ear.

She angled her head, giving him her neck. "We can't leave."

"Then why the tease? I'm hard as hell." To prove it, he bent his knees and ground his erection against her pussy.

She reached into his pants and pulled it upright. "I'm sorry. I'm horny." She licked his full, lower lip, and then meshed her mouth against his. The sealing of their mouths, the taste of his tongue, all contributed to her reckless thinking. She pressed her body against his,

flattening her breasts against his chest. "Johnny, I need you, now."

He took her hand and headed for the truck.

"No, we can't leave."

"What? Krissy, you're killing me. We aren't going to climb into the cab of my truck to do it. The parking lot is too busy. I don't want my ass on display."

Krissy took his hand. "Come on." She laughed, leading him around the corner of the building. The parking lot lights didn't reach the secluded corner. Freeway traffic off in the distance and muted music from inside the club cocooned them in a pocket of daring intimacy.

She leaned against the building. Shoulder-high shrubs on either side of their position hid their bodies, but not their heads. She pulled him close. Smiling, she kissed his lips, maintaining eye contact. "It's fun." She rubbed her hand over the fly of his jeans. "Don't sing anymore. It turns me on."

He looked in both directions, and then sliced his thigh between hers. "Someone might see."

"I don't care." His breath, warm on her face, increased the heat between her legs. She plucked her own nipples. Out of her mind with desire, she wanted his hands on her breasts and his cock deep.

He paused. Then he lifted her skirt, pushed her soaked panty string to the side, and slipped two fingers into her body.

"Ahh." She spread her legs. "It isn't enough. I need your cock." She was desperate. Her body bucked against his hand. She needed to come. "Please. I'm almost there." She pushed his hand away.

"Damn it, Krissy," he said. "Someone is going to see." He glanced at the parking lot and then toward the freeway. "Your timing sort of sucks."

"My timing isn't the only thing."

She dropped to her knees. His zipper lowering sounded loud.

"I want this." She opened his fly. His cock sprang free, weighing heavy in her hand. She wrapped her fingers around the base. Her stroke met a low groan. She opened her mouth over the head. "Mmm." She curled her tongue around the shaft, then over and around the tip, stroking at the same time with her hand. "Like a hot popsicle." She tasted from base to tip, flicking her tongue, licking the slit. Then she took him deep. His cock slid partially down her throat.

Johnny moaned aloud with erotic pleasure. His hands tunneled into her hair, holding her in place. Her lips slid over the heated skin as she pulled back. The muskiness of his arousal floated across her tongue. She gripped his thighs and let him pump his hips, driving his cock in and out of her mouth. His balls bounced. When they tightened into his body, she pulled away and greedily lapped up the beads of precum.

"Do you like fucking my mouth?" Their eyes connected.

He growled, pulling her to standing. "I like fucking you."

"Then do it."

Pressing her back against the wall, with her skirt bunched around her waist, he clasped her thigh, and lifted her leg. "God, you're wet." Holding her panties out of the way, his cock nudged her opening, and then filled her tight channel.

"Yes." One stroke and her body careened over the edge into oblivion. It didn't matter

that at any moment someone could come around the corner and hear her cries of release. She clung to his shoulders, taking the impact of his frantic thrusts. "Faster." Wetness trickled down her inner thigh.

"Do you want me to pull out?" He smiled through his labored breathing. "Decide quickly, I'm going to come."

"Don't you dare." She licked his chin. "I mean don't pull out. You better come before someone discovers us."

Johnny closed his eyes and thrust twice more. His fingers dug into her flesh. His lips stretched over his teeth. Every muscle tensed under her roving hands. Wrapping her arms around his neck, she held tightly until the storm receded. His head rested in the crook of her shoulder. He released her leg, allowing her to stand on her own.

"You okay?" he asked. She kissed his jaw when he righted her skirt, tugging it back into place.

"I'm fantastic. But I need to go to the restroom and adjust my panties before we hook up with the group." She wiggled, trying to get them back into place.

"I've always known you were crazy. I can't believe I just took you against the side of a building, and the whole thing lasted less than two minutes."

"I like that you're efficient." She took his hand. "We won't stay long. I want to continue this at home."

"I like the way you think." She smiled and fluttered her eyelashes.

"You're asking for a spanking."

"You just gave me what I asked for." She kissed him. "And it was incredible."

Chapter Eleven

The Positive Side

Days like today made Krissy want to quit her job. Remodels always had more complications than new construction. She had to deal with a homeowner who was cooking meals in a microwave in their living room. She'd spent the entire day at the jobsite. First, production ran a week behind. Not a good scenario, but one easily corrected if she had an efficient installer assigned to the project. However, when the installer screwed the wrong cabinet to the wall, the homeowner got upset. Krissy's frustration mounted, and now her head pounded.

At least she reached a bright spot in her day. Dr. Hart told her she could stop in anytime for a pregnancy test. Well, Johnny had rocked her world for three days. Excitement buzzed around her as she thought about a positive result.

She waved her fingers at Natalie, Dr. Hart's nurse. "Can I head on back?" Natalie nodded and pointed to the heavy, wood door separating the waiting room from the internal office.

"Just get me a sample," Natalie said.

Krissy knew the routine. Not that she'd ever come in specifically for a pregnancy test, but it was standard procedure when she had her yearly appointment.

She locked the door and hung her purse on the hook. Clear, plastic cups were stacked on the back of the toilet. A basket held individual wet wipes and a black Sharpie marker. She wrote her name on a cup. Usually just being in the bathroom and she'd have the urge to pee. Why this time, when she needed to collect a sample, her body tightened up? She turned on the tap and hummed the alphabet song.

Her smile strained the muscles in her face when she returned the sample to the nurse. Confidence emanated from her.

Natalie returned the smile. "Have a seat." She instructed Krissy. Krissy sat in the chair next to the office scale and blood pressure cuff. "We'll get your weight after I take your blood pressure." Natalie wrapped the cuff around Krissy's upper arm and placed her stethoscope just above the elbow joint.

It wouldn't surprise Krissy if her blood pressure *was* high. Her heart pounded in her chest, fast. And it had been like that for three days. Heaven forbid she think about Johnny, Natalie would put her on a medication to lower it.

"Normal." Natalie made a notation on Krissy's chart. "Step on the scale."

Krissy did. Weight had never been an issue. Krissy kept in shape. Working out had always been a priority in her life. Pregnancy would alter her routine, but she intended to take walks. She wouldn't take chances with the pregnancy. She couldn't afford any complications. There wasn't time.

She was going to need the physical activity. Once she confirmed pregnancy, she wouldn't be screwing Johnny. And one of the rules, not that they were keeping them anymore, was that she didn't sleep with anyone while pregnant. Not that she'd want to sleep with anyone else. Hell, how was she going to manage not having sex with Johnny every day?

Oh yeah, she was in trouble.

Natalie made another note in the chart. "So how late are you? Do you remember the date of your last period?"

"Technically, I'm not late."

"Are you having symptoms?"

"No, but I'm *trying* to get pregnant. I've had sex *a lot* in the last three days, so I think my chances are good." She nodded her head, willing Natalie to agree.

Natalie set the chart on the nurse's station counter. Then she sat next to Krissy. "I know. The thing is, you need to be at least ten days pregnant for the test to give an accurate result."

Krissy's shoulders slumped. "I didn't know that." She blinked several times refusing to allow her eyes to fill with tears. Another week of sleeping with Johnny had definite benefits, but could she do it and not take the serious chance of destroying their friendship. Her constant thoughts now had an impact. Emotions she didn't want for Johnny wormed their way into her heart and that could be dangerous. She didn't want to care so much. She didn't want to be in love with him. It was uncomfortable walking around jobsites, talking to construction works and foremen, knowing her panties were soaked because she constantly wanted Johnny's dick in her. "Since I'm here, couldn't we do the test anyway?"

Natalie's brows rose and then she laughed. "I know you. If it's negative, you'll be back tomorrow, and the day after that. You'd be better off just waiting. The test costs fifteen dollars every time you have one."

"Crap. I'd be better off buying them in bulk." Her heart was on the line. Falling in love with Johnny had the potential to destroy the relationship they both cherished. Better to find out if she was pregnant quickly and cease having sex with him as soon as possible. The danger lie in the way he made her feel, not just the act of having great sex. When they made love, Johnny stared into her eyes, seeing straight into her soul. It scared her. Johnny genuinely liked her, not just the way she looked. She couldn't screw that up by screwing him.

"So come in after you've missed a period, or after a home kit tests positive."

"If you're sure." Krissy swung her purse over her shoulder. "Okay then."

"Don't look sad." Natalie winked. "You're still in the fun part. After the baby comes, you and daddy will wish for the days before three a.m. feedings. Enjoy it," she whispered. "A time will come when making love all night will be a distant memory, along with a clean house, hour-long showers, and quiet evenings. I better shut up before I talk you out of having a baby."

There in lay another problem, she already fantasized about Johnny making love to her all night. He'd never complain about getting up with the baby. In fact, they hadn't broached the post baby concerns.

Every other weekend visitation wasn't an option. Johnny wanted to be in their child's life every day. Krissy wanted that, too. She'd spent Christmas with his family last year because she couldn't afford to go to her parents. And her dad's health had kept them from flying to come see her.

She supposed from the outside looking in she and Johnny were a family. Even if they didn't see each other, they talked every day. In truth, she didn't see how they could get much closer.

She headed home. As if she'd gone too high on a swing, her stomach lightened. Was she excited or terrified? Her feelings for Johnny changed every time he touched her. Tonight after dinner, she knew exactly how the evening would end. After the disappointing day, she'd like her dessert first.

However, priorities came first. She'd stop at the store for the biggest box of pregnancy tests available. Along with her hormone therapy pill, every morning she'd look for the elusive plus sign signaling pregnancy.

Krissy breathed a sigh of relief when she discovered she beat Johnny to her apartment. She wanted a moment to freshen up before starting their dinner. Okay, so her usual easygoing attitude with Johnny shifted into hypersensitive. Never before had it mattered if she brushed her hair, or wafted the subtle scent of something feminine and alluring. Hell, she hadn't cared if she smelled like a truck driver after a week on the road. More than once, Johnny brought his own brand of funk into her apartment. After an afternoon playing basketball with Brett and Ryan, his smell burned her nasal membranes.

Funny how thoughts of Johnny kept running through her mind. She didn't have many memories that didn't include him. At least not memories that brought a smile to her face, pulled a tear from her eye, or ripped her heart from her chest like the time when his baby brother died. After Mathew's death, Johnny's mother never tried to have another baby.

Krissy put her hand to her stomach. It just clicked. This represented her only chance. Once she conceived, she needed to get her life in perspective. Taking care of her and the baby took precedence. It had devastated Johnny's entire family when they lost Mathew to AIDS. God, it had already been eleven years. She'd never forget that horrible week before her fourteenth birthday.

Krissy sprinkled dill on salmon and wrapped it in tinfoil with an orange segment. She stuck the fish in the oven, washed her hands, and dried them on a dishtowel.

This was her opportunity to have the perfect pregnancy. Indulge her cravings, revel in her body's changes, and marvel at the fact that she created a new life. However, this wouldn't be Johnny's one chance at fatherhood. At some point, he'd meet the right woman and fall in love. Hard to acknowledge, but she knew she wasn't that woman. For right now, he was hers. They'd have to go back to being friends before she sabotaged any feelings of love Johnny might be developing for her. She'd enjoy him while it lasted. And no time like the present to find out how close she was to her objective. The test directions stated that first morning urine was the best to use. She shrugged. Tomorrow she'd try it in the morning. If pregnant, regardless of the time of day, she'd see a plus.

Nervously taking one of the four tests, she went into the bathroom.

Chapter Twelve

The Royal Feast

Johnny sat in his parent's house. His attention drifted between the golf game on television and the clock on the fireplace mantle. How his pop could jump from his chair and cheer for the ball on the putting green, was beyond him. Who cheered at *golf*?

"You in a hurry?"

"What makes you ask?"

"You're watching the clock like it's a ticking time bomb. Mom has a potpie in the oven. She's counting on you for dinner."

"Can't. Krissy's expecting me." He heard his mother humming in the kitchen. He didn't want to hurt her feelings, but Krissy offered more tempting fare.

"Invite her over. I miss my little pipsqueak. We haven't seen her in a while. Make your mom happy, son." Dale nodded to the phone on the wall. "Call Krissy."

"I'll call, but if she's already making dinner, I'm taking a rain check on the potpie."

Johnny dialed as his dad ambled into the kitchen. Nothing about Dale Huston rushed. Whatever the combination, his mom and dad had found one that worked. Married for thirty years, his dad still catered and adoration twinkled in his mother's eyes when she looked at her husband. They hailed from a simpler time. As far as he knew, they'd never spoken of divorce, not even during the hard years. Having grown up in a rural community, they'd gone to school together, got married, and had their family. He stopped his thoughts because Krissy answered.

"Hi, where are you?"

"My parents. Mom made a potpie."

Krissy groaned.

"If you've already got dinner in the oven, I'll give Mom a kiss on the cheek and tell her another time. But Pop wants you to come over." He shook his head. "I mean, I do too. He suggested we eat here instead." Johnny lowered his voice. "I don't care where we eat. I just need to see you."

"Me too."

The sultry richness of her voice was enough for him to tell his dad to bag it. Literally, he'd take the food to go and get to Krissy. Halfway hard at the sound of her voice, he'd be all the way there the moment he saw her. The last thing he needed was his mother's ESP focusing in on the shift of his and Krissy's connection. And see it, she would. Then she'd start with twenty questions until she'd whittled down to the root. Before the night was out, she'd have the wedding planned with Krissy calling her mom. Johnny needed more time convincing Krissy they had forever – not just until conception.

"I've already put the salmon in the oven. So it's up to you. I can wait a few minutes until the salmon comes out. Then drive over. Or you could be here in ten minutes."

"I could be there in ten, eat in three, and then get you into bed. Or we can spend the next several hours with my parents. Hmmm."

"Hard choice."

"That isn't what's hard. I'll be there in ten."

Krissy laughed. "See you in a few."

Johnny went into the kitchen. "I can't stay. Krissy has dinner on the table. Can we make it next week? Sorry Mom." He leaned in and kissed her soft, warm cheek. Wrinkles creased her eyes, full of understanding.

"Dinner on Sunday? And bring my pipsqueak."

"We'll be here."

"When are the two of you going to quit playing and get serious?" Shift in roles, tonight it was his dad's turn to push.

"I'm working on it, just don't tell Krissy."

His dad slapped him on the shoulder. "See you Sunday."

Johnny twirled his keys on his finger as he hurried to the truck. He ought to swing by his place and grab his textbooks, but the promise of what waited if he hurried, had him ignoring his responsibility to school.

In significantly less than ten minutes, Johnny pulled into a parking spot. Krissy had opened the front room window blinds. He sat there a moment watching her flutter about picking up clothes. His mouth twitched into a grin. Since when did Krissy care about the condition of her apartment when he came over? He knew when, since they started sleeping together. Her words might tell him their actions simply represented a means to conceive. However, her body and actions whispered so much more.

Locking his truck, he then walked to the house. Any other day, he might let himself in, tonight he used his knuckle to knock.

Krissy opened the door, and Johnny's heart hammered against his ribs. Beautiful smile, blonde hair soft and shimmering, he tightened his hand into a fist to keep from reaching out to run his fingers through it. Then he relaxed his hand. How he handled tonight determined how they'd share... well, hopefully the rest of their lives.

His fingers brushed her cheek, barely a touch at all. Yet, she flushed with color. Slipping his hand under her hair, and around the nape of her neck, he gently pulled. He didn't force her to move, just guided her closer. Not demanding, but needing to reconnect.

"I missed you," he whispered just before his lips applied the slightest pressure to hers. Not impulsive or desperate, just a simple kiss to reacquaint.

Her soft mouth parted under his. Johnny slanted his head and dipped his tongue in for a taste. Sweet and potent, he sipped from her lips. Barely pulling away, shifting his angle, he sealed their mouths again. Her heartbeat raced against his palm where it lay on her neck. Their tongues twisted together. Krissy moaned. Johnny reluctantly pulled away from her sweet, moist mouth. For now, he'd just taste even though his blood pumped hotter than hell. He intended to savor the anticipation of what was to come.

He took her hand and stepped into the apartment.

"How are your parents?" she asked, backing away.

"You and I are having dinner with them on Sunday."

"Sounds good. Just um, have a seat and I'll have our dinner ready in a minute." She turned and fled the room. Johnny smiled. About time he set her world off kilter. She could run, not hide. He sat in the ratty recliner, popped up the footrest, and marveled at the twist of fate that had him sharing dinner, not with just his best friend, but with the woman he loved.

* * * * *

Krissy leaned her head against the wall and closed her eyes. Covering her heart with her hand, she willed the rapid pace to slow. What in the world was going on? Johnny, her best friend, chum, partner in crime -- he was not the man who caused her core to clench with a kiss. Yet, he did. Repeatedly. Already wet, she considered what her condition would be after staring across the table at him through dinner.

Damn, the kiss started it. Johnny had no business making her fall in love. He should've stuck to the rules. Then they could've come through all this unscathed. She ought to forget dinner, jump his bones, and send him out the door. Then she could wallow in misery until the next time she saw him.

Her stomach growled reminding her she was hungry and that she'd need her strength for the night to come. And come she would. Her body staged a revolution against her will. After she conceived, she'd lick her wounds alone unwilling to lose their friendship. If she tried to foster a relationship built on more than just sex, she might destroy the best thing in her life. She needed Johnny and so would her baby.

Salmon scents filled the kitchen. Krissy put the food on plates. Nigel crossed her mind, only because she attempted to duplicate the presentation from the restaurant. What was she doing? She didn't need any more special memories. Making a meal and presenting it as if Johnny were the king of, well she didn't know what he was the king of, actually yes she did.

He reigned as the supreme ruler of her body.

Pulling open the cupboard, she then took out disposable plates and transferred the salmon. Then she grabbed two cans of soda out of the fridge. The home pregnancy test was negative. So it didn't matter if she had a beer. After the kiss in the open doorway, she needed ice-cold Rocky Mountain refreshment to douse the flames of her libido. But, she wanted a baby. What if she conceived tonight? She glanced at the soda hoping it was cold enough to cool the flames of her desire.

"Need some help?"

Krissy jumped at his voice behind her. "No, I'm fine. Here." She thrust the Styrofoam plate filled with salmon, peas with almond slivers, and a flakey, buttery croissant. "I got you a soda, but you can have a beer." Her hand shook.

"Thank you." He reached out and their fingers brushed. Electricity raced up her arm. Her nipples responded.

"Let's eat," she said, then stepped around him with her own plate. She wanted to be warm and inviting tonight. All she felt was nervous and apprehensive. Her stomach swooped. The dinner smelled wonderful. Hopefully, she'd be able to eat.

The plan had been to sit at the kitchen table, light a candle, and create a mood to carry into the bedroom, but her imagination needed a timeout. What she needed was a bright neon sign flashing in the corner reminding her of the agenda. *Just sex. Just sex. Just sex.*

Chapter Thirteen

All Hail King Johnny

Johnny smiled at the slight tremble in Krissy's hand as she held her fork. Mostly picking at her food, she wouldn't look at him. Her unease fueled his determination. Her plan unraveled at the seams while his appeared to be sewing up nicely. Less than a week into the arrangement and he watched her walls crumble a little each day.

Krissy needed confidence. It wasn't that she couldn't commit to a relationship. She might not be willing to admit it and she needed more time to recognize that her problem had never been about the men. He figured it had everything to do with the two of them.

"Thank you," he said, and then wiped his mouth on a napkin. "It was great." He pushed his plate away.

He didn't give Krissy a choice. He'd spoken directly to her. She lifted her eyes and made contact with his. Blood pounded in his ears. He recognized the glint of smoldering passion. She hadn't been eating because it wasn't food she craved.

"Good thinking," he said, standing. He went to her, reached down, and pulled her up by her hand.

"What did I do?"

He enjoyed the firm grip of her fingers. "Disposable dishes."

"Huh?"

"No clean up. I've been patient." He pressed his lips to hers, sucking her upper lip into his mouth. "Let me make love to you." He brushed the shell of her ear with his lips as he whispered. Gliding down, he gently nipped on the curve of her slender neck. The clean scent of shampoo mixed with the intoxicating essence of the perfume she dabbed behind her ears.

Krissy rested her arms on the top of his shoulders, wrists dangling, as her head fell back and to the side. "We can't make love," she said, pressing against him. Shoulders, chest, hips, and thighs, connected.

Taking his lips from her throat, he swooped down on her mouth and plunged his tongue in an act of complete possession. Sliding against the velvet softness, his tongue twisted around hers. He ate at her mouth until she moaned her submission. Her arms tightened and her hips pressed against his throbbing erection that sought release.

She slid her hand down his chest, plucking his nipple through his shirt. His smile broke the kiss. Her fingers trailed lower. His breath hitched.

Krissy's palm touched the plane of his stomach, and then she slipped into his pants.

Clenching his jaw, wind whistled through his teeth on a sharp inhale. Lower. "Ahh." Delicate, yet firm, her grip encased his straining cock. Freeing the button and sliding down the zipper allowed her to pull him fully upright.

She bit his earlobe. "Just sex."

He stopped her from dropping to her knees. As much as he wanted to see his cock in her mouth, he wanted Krissy to understand what their involvement meant. He laid his hand on her cheek. "It isn't just sex." He reached down and zipped up his fly. "Sit with me."

Johnny led her to the couch. He sat against the armrest and spread his thighs. Pulling

Krissy between his legs, she sat with her butt snuggled against his groin, her back to his chest. Johnny wrapped his arms around her waist and held her close.

"Haven't you ever wondered about us?"

Krissy's shoulders stiffened. He smiled. Of course, she had.

"Look at our history." He rubbed his thumb over her knuckles. Small hands, petite woman, but he'd never mistake her for weak.

"A history of friendship. It doesn't mean it'll transition into a relationship. I suck at commitment."

"You just haven't been with the right man. I can prove it to you. Relationships are ninety percent friendship. The only unknown between us was sexual compatibility and I think we've answered that question. You came during Regis. Which isn't half as disturbing as the fact that I came during Regis."

Krissy laughed, threading her fingers with his. "So what you're telling me is sex makes up ten percent of a relationship."

Johnny shrugged. "Yeah, I suppose you could say it that way."

She blew out a deep sigh and let her full weight rest against him. "I guess that's why I suck at relationships. I've managed the ten percent fairly well. It's the other ninety that I can't seem to get."

Johnny kissed the back of her head. It was sinking in. They had one hundred percent of what made a great relationship.

"But I also think it's that ten percent making it or breaking it." She didn't have to finish. That was what she feared.

"Okay, a little personal trivial pursuit. I guarantee there is nothing I don't know about you." Johnny slid his legs out along the couch and adjusted, making himself more comfortable.

"First kiss?" she asked.

"With me or *the* first kiss?" She slugged his leg. "Okay." He chuckled. "Let's see. Fourth grade, after school, Eddie—" Johnny snapped his fingers trying to remember the last name. "It'll come to me. He trapped you in the recessed entrance near the jungle gym after school. The only way he'd let you go is if you kissed him." He kissed the side of Krissy's head. "I bet you thought I'd say that jerk from the roller rink. He was *your* first kiss. But I remember Eddie scared you."

"I remember your Dad grounded you when you got a three day suspension the next day for fighting in the school yard."

"Eddie never tried to kiss you after that."

She weaved her fingers with Johnny's again. "No one would kiss me after that. Why do you think I had to kiss the jerk at the roller rink? He was the only one stupid enough to risk getting beat up."

"Ask me another one. I promise I'll know the answer. I remember who took you to school dances." He paused. "Because I didn't. Once we were old enough to date, you only thought of me as a friend."

She shifted and rolled onto her stomach. "Best friends. I don't want to lose you. What if you're wrong?"

"I'm not." He cupped her cheeks in his palms. "Let me make love to you and prove it."

No rules. No Regis." He smiled and she returned it. "You and me, with nothing between us." He kissed her lips. Not with passion, but full of promise. "Trust me." He kissed her deeper, opening his mouth and taking the briefest taste of her sweetness. "Trust in us."

Krissy hesitated. Making the decision for her, Johnny put one arm under her knees, the other around her back, and lifted. Kissing her mouth, delving into the hot, moist recesses, he carried her to the bedroom.

* * * * *

Krissy trembled inside. Oh, she was going to pay for this. For the past week, she'd beat herself with the truth stick. She'd been making love to Johnny since the first day. Not only did he satisfy her sexually, but he also touched her soul.

She left her arms hanging loosely at her sides as Johnny slipped the strap of shirt off her shoulder. His knuckles grazed the abundant swell of her breast. She inhaled sharply. Her nipple puckered into a hard point. Chills raced along her arms. He bent down. She held to the side of his head as he lapped at her nipple.

"Mmm..."

Johnny sucked her nipple deep into his mouth. She bit hard on her bottom lip. "More." She arched against him. Damn her body for obeying his decree. He wanted her withering, breathless, and eager to make love. His wish was her command.

Slowly, he lifted her shirt revealing skin one inch at a time. The cool air from the air-conditioner blew from the vents. Gooseflesh broke where his mouth left her wet, tingling.

Spreading his fingers wide, he cupped a breast in each hand. Then he lifted the full, heavy weight, bringing them together, stroking the hard nipples simultaneously sending hot, electric shocks straight into her core.

Gliding his fingers down, her stomach quivered at the gentle pressure. He pulled the snap of her shorts. Sliding the zipper down, he shimmied them over her hips. "You wear the craziest panties." He fingered the velvet, zebra print thong.

"Johnny, make love or have sex, but I need your cock in me."

"Making love takes time." With one finger, he hooked the top of her panties and pulled them down her thighs. "Spread your legs." Kneeling before her, he slipped his tongue between the dewy lips of her sex. Hot cream trickled onto her inner thigh.

"Johnny." She pushed against his mouth, wanting him to tongue her engorged clit. She wanted to come. Her thighs vibrated, clenching as he brought her closer. She giggled.

"What?"

"Don't stop." With a hand to the back of his head, she guided him between her legs. "I was thinking. The way you're eating me is like a cat at a bowl of cream. And then I thought how right the analogy was, since you're licking my pussy."

His chuckle vibrated into her sex. "I love sweet cream." He licked slow and long, dragging his tongue the length of her, greedily feasting.

"More," she said.

He stood from his knees and thrust two fingers into her swelled flesh. "I thought you'd like a taste." Kissing her open mouth, he tangled his tongue with hers, sharing the flavor of her arousal. He flicked his fingers within the swollen flesh of her pussy.

Her body tightened. Euphoric flashes pulsed. She cried her release into his mouth. Gripping his shoulders, she held herself up when her legs liquefied.

Johnny shucked his pants. She felt like dropping to her knees and swearing allegiance to the... what? *Flag*? His cock did sort of wave as it pulsed. It was glorious with a large, rounded head, deep color, and a thick vein running the underside of his shaft beneath the tightly stretched skin. She circled the base. It jerked in response. His heavy balls contracted close to his body and then released. She rolled them in her palm.

Her nails combed the springy hair, following the trail up his torso. "Can you please make love to me now? Call it whatever you want, just make me feel. I need you inside of me."

Johnny sat on the edge of the bed and Krissy sat beside him. Scooting backwards, he stretched out and pulled her close.

He caressed her back with his large hands, feeling each vertebrae of her spine before cupping her rear and pulling her flush against his erection. Her breast crushed against him. She strained for each breath. Her chest contracted and expanded, her breasts pressed against the smooth, finely chiseled muscles of his chest. She pulled back to place a kiss to his flattened nipple, enjoying the texture, tantalizing on her lips. She flicked her tongue over the tip.

Krissy rolled to her back. The crisp hair of his legs tickled her inner thighs as he rolled with her and used his knees to open her legs. She didn't need encouragement. Spreading wide, she welcomed the weight of his hips.

His stomach tightened, revealing the ribbed muscles. Then he was finally inside her. Hot juices flowed, sucking him deep. Angling her hips, meeting his stroke, he thrust in, and filled until his balls nestled against her ass. Pumping slow and sure, bracing his weight with his arms, he stared into her eyes. Every nerve sizzled. Building to a crescendo, the friction intense, the heated flesh of her channel infused with need.

Harder.

Deeper.

His balls slapped her ass. He wasn't just fucking her. He commanded and her body obeyed. She was his loyal subject. Her breath hissed at the pleasure. He was wonderfully huge.

"Oh God. *Oh God*. Oh God!" Each oh God raised an octave. Then she screamed, "All Hail King Johnny!"

Oh, crap. She'd really screamed aloud. But how was she supposed to hold her emotions in when her body withered, gripped by the fiercest orgasm yet. Damn! How much better could it get?

Johnny rolled off, held his sides, and laughed.

This could be a good sign.

She rolled on to her stomach and propped her chin in her palm. "So I guess we're still just having sex. People don't laugh while making love."

He kissed the tip of her nose. "We do."

"Fine," she said, a note of annoyance to her tone. "I'll concede sex is good with you."

"The king takes offence." Johnny rolled to the side of the bed. "The sex is fantastic."

She'd made statements in the past that had come back to bite her. *This one took the prize*. He knew what he did to her. That's why he wore the smug smile.

He stood and strutted naked across the floor. His erection still looked impressive. No reason he needed to leave yet.

"Where are you going?" She sat, crossed her legs, and pulled her pillow into her lap, holding it against her chest.

About to step through the doorway, he pointed across the hall. "To the bathroom for a towel. Now lie down and put that pillow under your ass before I spank it. Like sex, making love makes babies too."

The neon sign flashed in the corner. *Just sex*. The sign flickered and burned out. It was useless. She couldn't convince Johnny if she didn't believe it herself. She fingered the edge of the pillow. All the what-ifs. What if she could have a long-term relationship? What if she could guarantee Johnny wouldn't grow tired of her? What if she got pregnant, planned forever, and Johnny walked away? Not from his child, but from her...their friendship, and all the years together. Would she survive?

"Hey," he said, breaking into her maudlin thoughts. He took two wide steps and jumped onto the bed, nearly landing on top of her. She giggled as he toppled her backwards, covering her body. His growing erection poked her when he pressed her into the bedding. "I suppose if you won't do as you're told, I'll have to make sure I've done my job thoroughly." He stood on the bed, bending so as not to hit his head on the ceiling, and pulled her feet around. She scooted toward the wall, giggling as he stood on the floor and positioned himself between her thighs. Her head was now in the center of the bed and her butt nearly falling off the edge. "Brace your feet on the wall, babe, because I'm going to make you swear your loyalty."

Chapter Fourteen

Is This Heaven?

Krissy slid from the bed. Padding naked and barefoot to the bathroom, she stared at the pregnancy test waiting for her first morning pee. Turning toward the bedroom, she could see Johnny's legs from the knees down. Sprawled out, lightly snoring, and spending the night in her bed. This signified an entirely new level of intimacy. She'd never let a man, boyfriend, whatever, spend the night. Johnny crashed on the couch. That wasn't the same. At the time, they weren't involved sexually. She put on her bathrobe and went into the living room.

It still boggled the mind. Johnny's presence in her bed sent her emotions into a riot. Nervous tension roiled in her stomach. What was she going to do? She curled into the ratty recliner with her legs pulled up. Her thoughts were the only noise in the quiet apartment. She closed her eyes, but all she saw were images of Johnny.

It was crazy to consider getting involved. Yet she was.

"You okay?"

She jumped at the sound of his voice from the darkened hall. A small amount of light from the streetlamps revealed he'd put on his boxers. Messy hair, whisker stubble shadows under his cheekbones, just tumbled sexy, and she wanted him.

"I missed you." He came closer to her. His voice, deep and gravely from just waking, stroked the flames of desire she thought he'd quenched.

"I needed to think. I don't do that well when you're near me." Yes, like a moment ago when she listed the pros and cons of getting more than physically involved. The list of reasons, or rather excuses didn't seem so important. Didn't she have to try?

"Come back to bed and think." He took her fingers.

"We need to talk." And she started to cry. Not a good time for tears. She wanted to appear strong and sure, not show him she was scared as hell to trust him, to trust herself.

He dropped to his knees. "What is it?"

She touched his face. "Did you know I've never let a man spend the night?"

"I stay over all the time."

"Not to sleep with me. Crashing on the couch because you don't want to go home and to save on cab fare isn't the same." She leaned in and kissed his lips, tenderly, without expectation. "I want you to stay, sleep in my bed..." She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. She folded her hands in her lap. Leap of faith time. "...and make love to me." She looked at her hands and stopped the fidgeting she didn't realize she was doing. "I want to try to make a relationship. I want more than friendship. I want you in the same way you want me. I guess I'm just afraid I'll screw up what we already have."

Johnny dropped his head into her lap. She couldn't resist running her fingers through the silken mess of hair. Smooth and broad, his muscular shoulders tapered to his waist. Using her nails, she gently scratched circles into his back.

"That feels good."

"Sit forward. Massage or back scratching?"

"Doesn't matter." He turned around and sat Indian style. "I just like your hands on

me.”

In the darkened living room, she sat on the floor with Johnny positioned between her thighs. Cool air swept under the robe, titillating to the wetness of her sex. Running fingers over his shoulders, she dragged her fingernails down his back like a farmer furrows his fields. “Harder?”

“No, softer.” His head dropped forward.

Next, she swirled her fingers in a figure eight. She drew close to the edge of his back near his armpit. Each time her nail crossed one particular rib, he twitched. Ticklish or stimulating, she wondered. Tempting with her tongue, she licked the spot. His body had a momentary spasm and she laughed. “Sorry, I had to see if it tickled.”

“It does, and it’s also making me incredibly hard. Why don’t you part your robe, sit on my lap, and let me find your ticklish spot?”

“Be good,” she said, switching from a scratch to a massage. “Hold on, I need something from my room.” She hurried into her room for a bottle of almond massage oil.

Returning, she said, “Lay on your stomach.”

It didn’t take a psychic to read what she had in mind. Naked under her robe, with a bottle of massage oil, she wanted sensual, but fun. He’d be brainless to refuse her. Seeing the front of his boxers pitched like the big top tent at the circus made Krissy wonder if perhaps his chest needed massaged. The seat looked mighty appealing.

Johnny groaned and did as she instructed. Reaching into his boxers, he adjusted himself before rolling onto his stomach, folding his arms, and pillowing his head on the top of his hands.

She straddled his hips and sat on his firm butt. She poured a generous amount of oil into her palm and then rubbed them together to heat. Starting in the center of his back, she circled, pressing deep into the muscle. With her thighs spread, she ground against him, stimulating her clit against the silk of his boxers. Hot and slick, her fingers moved over his shoulders.

Groaning low and steady, Johnny encouraged her.

“Would you like to take these off?” She ran her thumbs inside the waistband, along the curve of his ass, to press into the dimples at the base of his spine. Rising up, she allowed Johnny to lift his hips. With a quick tug, she bared his butt. Then she pulled them from his legs.

“Don’t turn over. We’re not done.”

“Krissy, I’m going to get a rug burn on my cock.”

“You have to try and hold still.” She settled on his butt again, this time enjoying the smooth flesh between her thighs. She arched her back rubbing the thin strip of hair covering her pussy into his flexed ass.

“What are you doing?”

“You have to guess what I’m spelling.” Using the pad of her index finger, she spelled one letter at a time.

“U.”

“Very good.” Leaning forward she pressed her hardened nipples into his back and kissed the nape of his neck. “Next letter.”

“Mmm... I need it again.” She pinched his butt. “Ow!”

“Answer correctly and you get a reward. Miss and it’s punishment.” She rubbed her hand over the smooth skin where she’d pinched. “Now,” she said in an authoritarian voice. “Do you still need it repeated?”

“R.”

“Very good. See, sometimes it’s good for the king to relinquish control. This time you have to concentrate. I’m going to spell the whole word.”

“F,” he said. “U. C. K. I like where this is going.”

“Would you like a spanking?”

“A. Yes, I think I would. B.” He flipped over toppling her off. Krissy laughed and spread her thighs. She reveled in his weight as he lay on top of her.

She sucked in a breath as his cock probed her moist opening.

“So I’m fuckable,” he said.

That beautiful, bulbous head slid between the folds. “Mmm hmm.”

“Exactly when did you come to that conclusion?”

Wet beyond belief, slick and pulsing, he slammed into her, shocking, tantalizing, and gloriously stretching her. She raised her hips and met his urgent stroke.

“The first time I saw you naked.” He slid in slow, making her whimper. “Tenth grade,” she said and grabbed his ass forcing him deep.

“Really?” He chuckled.

“You’re right. Making love is much different from just having sex.” He pumped harder. Friction on the carpet burned along her spine. “Laughing and having a conversation, will wonders ever cease?”

“Krissy, you’re talking too much. And I think it’s time you took some control of your own.” He rolled to his back never severing their connected bodies. “How do you like that?” He flexed his hips, driving deep until his shaft completely filled her.

“Oh yes.” She panted, arched, and dug her nails into his flesh.

He gripped her hips and helped her rise and lower, impaling herself. “That’s better.”

* * * * *

He hadn’t planned to stay the night. Classes started at nine and he wanted nothing more than to stay in bed. Sleepovers could become complicated if he didn’t keep his obligations in perspective.

Leaving Krissy, naked, sleeping, he went to the bathroom. A quick shower followed by the hunt for something to wear. Tucking a towel around his hips, he searched through her closet. One of the problems in doing his laundry at Krissy’s was that he always managed to leave something behind. Today he was grateful. He found a gray T-shirt with a Harley Davidson logo on the back hanging in the closet. On the shelf above, he found a pair of pants he hadn’t seen in a while. Who knew how long they’d been up there. Casual Dockers didn’t exactly go with faded Harley Davidson, but he didn’t have time to go home to change. He needed to hurry because he was late already. Unwilling to dig through her drawers for a pair of boxers, he went free Willy.

He crawled onto the bed, and nuzzled her neck. “I’ve got to go.”

“Mmmm,” she moaned and stretched. “When will you be home?”

Her words punched his gut. He'd never thought of her house as home. Nevertheless, this morning, it was exactly how he felt. "After classes."

She blinked a few times and looked at the alarm clock. "I should be at the office." She leaned up on her elbows. "I have orders to get in and this afternoon, I'm making rounds to the jobsites." She pushed her tangled hair off her face.

"I don't know what you want? After last night, I don't want to push. We can plan to see each other tomorrow." The thought tightened his stomach. Pressing too hard or too fast jeopardized the future he wanted for them. He wanted to spend every night in her bed. Therefore, for now, he'd play it cool.

"I'll call you," she said, tossing off the sheet. "It might be late."

He shrugged. "Whenever. Well, I'm late so I had better bail. I made coffee." He stood. "If you can meet for lunch, call me. Otherwise, I'll catch you on the flip side." He bent, kissed her, and then strode from the room.

Johnny's feet felt like iron anvils. Each step away from Krissy and her soft warmth was harder to take. He planned to treat this relationship like a fine wine. Let it breathe, give it time to mature, and hope that in the end he'd have something priceless. Damn, but with her taste on his lips, he wanted to get drunk.

He'd get through class, get through the day, and somehow find a way to get through the night without Krissy.

* * * * *

Krissy didn't call for lunch and she wasn't answering her cell phone. Not entirely an atypical occurrence. Jobsites were often in undeveloped neighborhoods outside of town with sporadic cell coverage.

He swung by Brett's place to see if the gang had plans for the night. The oppressive thought of going to his ant trap of an apartment was only slightly more appealing than hanging out at Krissy's. He wasn't about to appear clingy and co-dependant. The woman of his dreams had an independent streak. As her best friend, he knew what she hated in a boyfriend. Forewarned is forearmed.

Brett waved from the driveway. Two girls sat in the front seat of a Jeep. Wet hair, wearing bikini tops, they were cute.

Johnny raised an eyebrow at Brett's cocky grin. "What's up?"

"Not much anymore."

"Hey," Johnny said to the girls.

"We'll see you in a couple of hours."

"Yep." He smacked the side of the jeep with an open palm and then stepped back.

They waved and reversed the jeep out of the drive.

"So which one are you dating?" Johnny asked following Brett into the house.

"Both."

"Bullshit."

"It's a fact, my friend."

They walked through the living room into the kitchen. "How do you do it, dude?"

Brett handed him a beer. "I don't ask why, I just take what's offered. We're headed

over to the bar tonight. You up for it?"

Johnny shook his head. "Krissy's working late."

Brett paused with the beer at his lips, and then slowly lowered it. "And you don't go without her."

"No." Johnny pulled out the bar stool and sat down. "That's what I want to talk to you about." Johnny took a breath.

His friend had an inclination, and a few facts about what was going on between Johnny and Krissy. He was also the only one Johnny trusted. Whether for a secret or advice, Brett knew how to keep his mouth shut, which was one of the things Johnny liked best about him.

"You're coming clean to me? Why?" Brett hopped onto the counter. "Wait, you think I'll condone your sleeping with the wood girl, because I don't have any scruples."

"You don't, but that's beside the point. I don't care who you're sleeping with. The fact I'm sleeping with Krissy has me energized. Until yesterday, she remained under the impression it was just sex. Not for me. Last night we labeled it."

"Shit." Brett guzzled. "You sure it's worth the risk? Krissy bails when relationships get serious."

"I'm not worried. Here's the bitch. She still doesn't want anyone to know. She's afraid it'll jinx us. For the first time, she isn't running scared."

"So what's the problem?"

"There isn't one." He couldn't stop the big smile. "I feel like a woman. I had to tell someone." Johnny held out his beer to toast. "She's making me do it backwards. First, I have to knock her up, and then convince her to marry me. At least she's accepting the fact that I love her."

"Don't let Ryan hear you talking. Remember how he reacted when Krissy said she planned to have a baby."

"Yeah, you weren't too happy as I recall. Don't fuck up the six-pack by fucking Johnny."

"Hey, that was just me talking out my ass. Christ John, naming you the father is going to send Ryan into orbit."

"Well, he won't know for a while. I'm just hoping I can keep my hands off Krissy in front of everyone."

"Get your mind on something else. Come to the bar and grill."

Yeah, maybe it was just what he needed to get his mind off Krissy. He'd have his cell phone. Play it safe and just a bit distant, prove to her that they could maintain autonomy, and still be a couple.

Johnny went home agreeing to meet Brett and his girlfriends at the bar in a couple hours. Still wearing the Harley T and going free Willy, he needed to change.

He caught up on some homework and ate a peanut butter sandwich before grabbing another shower and getting ready to go out.

Putting on his favorite jeans, and a tight, white T-shirt, he checked his reflection. If Krissy called, he might just be able to persuade her to join them.

He drove to the bar with the radio on. It felt good to be going out. Time split into two activities, school and sex. Heaven and hell. Tonight gave a reprieve from both. Well, unless Krissy called. Then he'd ditch his friends at the bar as he'd done to his parents for dinner.

Johnny saw Brett's girlfriends' jeep in the parking lot. He took the space next to it. The sun dipped low on the horizon in a wash of orange and pink. Another hot summer night, thinking of hot, he hoped Krissy called. It felt like high school. He might not be a teenager anymore, but Krissy had been his first crush. She was certainly his first love. Wasn't he entitled to feel a little giddy?

He went into the bar. Brett wasn't there, but the girls were. They waved from a cross the room. Johnny went to the bar for a long neck before joining them. He intended to hang with Brett, not find himself in a foursome. Unless Krissy showed up, he'd only buy drinks for himself. As of last night, he had a girlfriend. He just couldn't tell anyone.

"How's it going?" he asked the guy behind the bar. A little small talk to drag out the inevitable.

"I'm busy." The guy moved down to the other end of the bar. Great, now the bartender thought he was looking to score. At least with Brett's beauties, he wouldn't look gay.

He took his time crossing the room hoping Brett would arrive.

No such luck. The girls wore smiles on their pretty, pink lips when he approached and sat. Dressed similar, same almond-shaped, green eyes, even the way they held their frozen red concoctions was the same. "Sisters?"

They laughed. "Cousins, but we get asked all the time." And why wouldn't they. Johnny was probably the only man who didn't fantasize about sisters. Most men wanted twins. He'd only ever wanted Krissy and her enhanced twins implanted by a skilled surgeon.

Johnny's gaze shifted from the door to the girls. When Brett finally arrived, he let out a deep sigh of relief. The long lapses in conversation were becoming increasingly uncomfortable.

"Sorry, I'm late. I called Shelby and Ryan. Casey might be late, but she's coming too."

Johnny tipped his long neck, but didn't ask. It was a stare down between him and Brett. Johnny suspected his grin was every bit as wide as Brett's. "I'm not asking," Johnny said.

"She's not coming."

"She will." Just not at the bar, well, maybe at the bar. It happened once. If she wanted to again, he would take her behind the building. It had been daring, and two of the best minutes of his life.

Brett laughed.

* * * * *

Exhaustion weighed like a heavy blanket. Krissy's trunk was full of scratched cabinet doors. She hoped the shop would be able to buff them out or she'd be eating up any profit she'd worked into the remodel bid. This was a day to put behind her. A warm bath, a tuna sandwich and off to bed. If Johnny wanted to come over she could use a little of his specialty as well.

She stepped into the house and groaned. "Damn, damn, damn!" She forgot to turn the air conditioner on before she'd left this morning. The heat of the day had turned her apartment into a muggy, airless, sauna. She dropped her purse and padded into the kitchen

where the thermostat for the AC was located.

She took a diet drink from the fridge and returned to the living room. A bang and a hiss from the vent, and then arctic air blew offering relief. She dropped her pants, pulled her shirt over her head, and lay on the floor in her bra and panties. Cool air blew across her sweat-dampened skin. "Ahh." She took a deep breath and closed her eyes.

The tension tightening her muscles ebbed. She could fall asleep. Before she lost all consciousness, she'd better call Johnny.

She rolled to her stomach and stood. It took effort to cross the room to where she'd dropped her purse. As soon as she got her cell, she wouldn't have to move for the rest of the night. She sat in the ratty recliner.

She'd missed a couple of phone calls. Dialing into voice mail, she got Brett's message to come to the bar and grill. She was surprised Johnny hadn't called. Did she want to go? Not really.

"Ugh." Tuna didn't sound as good as Stu's chowder. She'd go, but she wasn't dressing up.

* * * * *

Johnny couldn't take his eyes from Shelby. She wouldn't sit next to Ryan who was flirting heavily with one of the cousins. Brett appeared to be taking it in stride, but the tick in his jaw gave him away.

Where was Mother Casey, the voice of reason? Casey was the only one in the six-pack who got away with telling Ryan to knock off his shit. Well, others had said it, Ryan listened to Casey. Hell, if she told Johnny to do something he would. Whatever the reason, and it certainly wasn't her size, the woman knew how to intimidate.

Shelby slid her chair closer to Johnny. The hairs on the back of his neck tingled.

"Johnny, give me an update." She leaned in and spoke low. "Is Krissy pregnant?"

"Not yet." He glanced over at Ryan who had definitely taken notice of the fact Shelby was practically sitting in Johnny's lap. "I don't think you're going to make Ryan jealous with me, sweetheart." He took a drink of beer. "What are you two fighting about?"

"He's a jerk. So which one is Brett's?"

"They both are."

Shelby's full laugh made Johnny smile. He couldn't help joining in.

"I don't know why I worried," she said. "Ryan doesn't have a chance."

"If he doesn't figure it out quick, I think Brett's going to pop. Why don't you take him into the back and dance? Grind on him a bit and remind him what he'll be missing."

Shelby's eyes narrowed when she looked at Ryan. "He's making an ass out of himself. Why do I love him?" She finished her drink and slammed it to the table.

"Watch it!" Ryan said.

"No. I need to talk to you." Shelby took his hand and pulled him away from the table. "I want to dance. We'll be back." She winked at Johnny.

"I want to dance." Cousin Two leaned into Brett and batted her long, smoky eyelashes.

"I'll stay with John." Cousin One scooted to the stool Shelby had vacated.

Great, now he was back to one on one. Cousin One wanted to chitchat. Johnny wished

Casey would show up, so he could make an excuse and bail. Krissy had to be home by now.

* * * * *

Krissy honked her horn as she pulled into the parking lot of Stu's behind Casey. They parked side-by-side.

"Hi," Casey said, stepping up to the driver's side door. "Looks like the six-pack is here."

"Yeah, I see Johnny's truck. I wasn't sure he would be." Krissy locked the door then shut it.

"Any news?"

Krissy stumbled on a pebble. "Like what?"

"The baby, the guy?" Casey cocked an eyebrow. "You're not telling me something. I know you."

Krissy shrugged. "It's nothing."

"Why don't I believe you?"

Krissy stepped into the dimly lit portion of the bar and froze. A hard lump rose into her throat. Johnny was sitting at a table. A dark head leaned in close and then laughed at something he said.

"Hey, Johnny found a hot piece of action. Good thing Brett isn't around. Johnny's better looking, so why do you think Brett gets the girls?"

"He's got a big one."

"I wouldn't do him. Well, I might if I didn't know he was such a slut. Come on, I want to check Johnny's date out."

Krissy couldn't move. Her mouth was too dry to form words. There had to be a rational explanation, but right now, she didn't want to hear it. She had to leave before he saw her. Damn fate! What was wrong with her? Knowing Johnny didn't cheat didn't matter. It still hurt to see him huddled with another woman. Almost an affirmation of her suspicions that just when she'd dropped her guard and started to trust, the guy would stray. Or he just walked away. Her mind kept screaming that Johnny wouldn't.

There had to be another explanation why he got out his wallet and bought the woman a drink.

She took a step backward. "I don't feel so well. I think I better pass on tonight." Even if he did have an explanation, hearing it now would let everyone know she and Johnny had gone beyond friendship and she wasn't ready for that.

"Aren't you even going to say hi?"

"Can't. I think I'm going to be sick." She turned and bolted. Her bad day just got a whole lot worse. This is why she didn't get serious. Misunderstandings hurt as much as actual betrayals. She knew she should've kept her involvement with Johnny purely physical. Sleeping with her friend for the purpose of making a baby had been the plan. Admitting she loved him risked too much. In the inevitable end of their relationship, they were going to lose each other.

* * * * *

Johnny breathed a sigh of relief when Casey tossed her purse on the table.

"Is Krissy knocked up?"

To bad the relief didn't last longer than the first words out of her mouth. Johnny stared at Casey, barely managing to speak around the constriction in his throat. "Why?"

"She just left saying she was sick. I thought it might be pregnancy sickness. It doesn't always hit in the morning"

"She's here?" Johnny spun on the stool, looking around the room.

"No, she bailed. We walked in. Then she turned around and walked out."

Shit! Johnny rushed to the door. He burst from the darkened bar. The streetlights illuminated the parking lot. He scanned for her car, but she was already gone. He slapped his hand against his thigh. Damn her overactive imagination if she thought for even a moment that Cousin One held any interest for him. She should have stepped up to the table and pulled a classic Krissy. Jealousy wasn't her style. But what other explanation was there? He supposed somewhere in there was a truth that should be making him smile. If her reaction stemmed from jealousy, she revealed a lot about her feelings. She couldn't be indifferent and neither could he. Had he seen her in the same position, he would've reacted the same way. Hell, he'd be kicking some guy's ass in the parking lot. He shouldn't have bought Cousin One a drink. For that, he owed Krissy an apology.

Johnny went back into the bar only long enough to make an excuse to the others. Sitting in his truck, he flipped open the phone and dialed Krissy. When she didn't answer, she confirmed his suspicions. How does a girl who is a riot to be with, gorgeous, and funny end up with insecurities? He slammed the truck into gear and drove out of the parking lot.

Only a few minutes had passed since she's left the bar. Yet, there were no lights on in her apartment. Either she'd gone straight to bed, or she anticipated he'd follow her and this was an attempt to discourage a conversation tonight. It wouldn't work.

He walked to the door, knocked once, and tried the knob. When she didn't answer, he took out his key and let himself in. Unable to see in the darkened room, he listened for some sound. All he heard was his irregular heartbeat echoing in his ears. His chest tightened with rapid breaths. Anticipation hummed in the air because he knew she was in the apartment. Krissy was being Krissy and this was a game. The games they played now had no rules.

Johnny pushed the door closed. No way was she sleeping.

Rustling near the couch had him uselessly straining to see, listening intently. And then gentle fingers caressed his calf. He'd know her nails anywhere after last night. She dragged them over the back of his knees, chilling his body through thin denim, and nearly buckled him to the floor. He leaned back against the door. He couldn't see, but he knew she knelt in front of him as her hands pressed into his thighs.

"Krissy?"

"Shh."

He couldn't shush. His cock throbbed behind the fly of his jeans. He wanted to grab her perfectly positioned head by the ears and slide into her hot, wet mouth. She cupped his incredibly, hard bulge. He groaned, his pleasure bordering on pain as he swelled behind the constraint of his jeans. A tug on his zipper and then she lowered it, metal teeth unlinking.

"Is this what you had in mind when you followed me home?" She tugged and his jeans

dropped around his ankles.

"I'd hoped we'd eventually get here. Oh God." Her tongue circled the head of his cock and then she slid her wonderful, wicked mouth over him, drawing her tongue along the shaft. His ass cheeks flexed tightening his balls. Blood drained from his head, the one on his shoulders, and pumped into his groin. Her mouth was hot and wet, the smooth softness within encased him. She sucked him deep until the sensitive tip banged against the back of her throat. Humming, she shifted her head, and his cock went unbelievably deeper.

Eyes open or closed, it didn't matter. Erotic beyond any fantasy, he savored the moist warmth of her mouth. Threading his fingers in her hair, he couldn't help pumping his hips.

"Krissy." His voice sounded loud and unsteady in the still and quiet room. "Don't make me come."

She sucked harder, moved her mouth back and forth faster, frenzied. Her tongue licked the tip, the length, and then she sucked his left ball into her mouth.

He spoke her name as if it were a profanity. He jerked her head away from his body and dropped to his knees. She giggled.

"You won't be laughing in a minute," he said. He touched her naked, trembling body. *Interesting.* She must have anticipated his coming over as much as he did. He hadn't expected nudity. He thought of enticing her to strip for him. He'd fulfill that fantasy another night.

Flipping her onto all fours, he then knelt behind her. The musky scent of her arousal tickled his senses. He wanted a taste of her, but his painfully aroused cock demanded release. He held tightly to the base of his shaft and entered her slowly. Stretching her inch by inch, he made her whimper. He had to squeeze harder to keep from shooting off like a rocket.

"Please, Johnny." Scooting back, she tried to impale herself, but he kept one hand on the sexy curve of her ass. Her thighs quivered. "Please," she begged.

"Please what." His mind numbed with possibilities. He pulled out.

"Nooo." Her fist pounded the carpet. "Fuck me!"

He grinned. "Here." Using the head of his cock, he spread her juices. Rubbing along the crack of her ass, he lubricated her tight little sphincter. "No." She pulled away.

"No? Isn't the king supposed to make the rules?"

"Yes, my lord. Now do your royal duty." She hiked her ass in the air for him. "Get me pregnant and I'll let you fuck me up the ass."

Johnny ran his hand into the severe arch of her back. "Promise?"

"Yesss!" She cried out when he filled her with one powerful stroke.

The impact of hitting the top of her cervix shocked through his body. Primed and ready, she immediately milked his cock. She came before the second full thrust. Holding her hips, he pistoned hard and fast. He'd take his time later. Riding the wave of her orgasm, he took his own. His balls drew up, the sack tight against his body. The rush of spurting cum from his cock drained his mind of all thought.

His legs trembled as he rolled to his back. "You okay?"

Her silky hair tickled when she leaned over him. "Yes." Breathly pants fanned against his skin. "But I'm tired." She kissed his belly.

"Then let's go to bed." Her fingers stilled on his chest. She took a deep breath. Something still wasn't right. "What's up, Krissy?" He brushed her hair from her face. She moved his hand away and sat up.

“I think you should go home tonight.”

* * * * *

Johnny sat in his truck staring at the darkened windows of Krissy's apartment. He didn't think this had anything to do with what happened at the bar. Krissy was scared and he overplayed his hand. Damn, he didn't know how to backtrack either.

He started the truck, paused to consider what Krissy would do if he forced his way back in. He wanted back in her house, and into her bed. Basically, he wanted it all. He slammed his fist against the steering wheel, squealed the tires, and sped out of the parking lot. He left because she asked him to and Johnny would do anything for Krissy. This sucked.

Chapter Fifteen

Krissy's Got It Bad

Krissy leaned against the door. Fat, heavy tears trailed down her cheeks and dripped from her chin. Sending Johnny home was the hardest thing she'd ever done. And now she questioned whether she made the right decision.

He'd been devastated. The hurt she caused him would only intensify if they kept up with the crazy plan of building a relationship. Yes, she wanted him, but not at the cost of their friendship. Breaking his heart now would save them overwhelming pain in the future. Twenty-four hours wasn't long enough to cause lasting pain. Yet, misery squeezed her heart, ripping apart her chest.

"Ouch." She stubbed her toe on the recliner moving through the dark room. Because she didn't see the lights of Johnny's truck leave, she assumed he sat outside wondering what had just happened.

Krissy would give him a couple of days to put the changes happening between them into perspective. She needed the time, too. There was no use denying she'd fallen in love and that those feelings would change them. Avoiding the emotion had been the purpose for the initial plan. Now she had to draft a new agenda.

Going into her bedroom, she looked at her bed. This was why she didn't want to have sex in her room. Now not only would watching television while lying in bed bring forth memories, but so would the wall, the floor, the dresser, and the mirror. Not even her favorite ratty recliner would offer solace as it once did. Now it was the *love seat*. It should've found its way to the dump years ago. Now it was King Johnny's throne of passion.

Climbing into bed, she didn't bother putting on pajamas. She just cried herself to sleep.

* * * * *

Two days passed. Johnny hadn't heard from Krissy and he refused to call her. The way he left, without working out whatever the problem was, reflected the instability of their relationship. She needed time and he wanted to give it to her. He also wanted to give her a baby.

It was Friday night at Stu's, and he wondered if she'd show. Of course, she would. She intended to keep up pretenses. Well, he'd had just about enough of pretending. Maybe tonight he should tell her and everyone else his exact intentions. Before the night was over, he intended to be back in her bed. This time, he'd let her label it anything she wanted.

He pulled into the parking lot later than usual, hoping if Krissy did decide to come, she'd have a soda and be comfortable before he arrived. Fly in under the radar, use stealth to sneak in and steal the heart she kept hidden. He sealed his fate going into this crazy plan. He had her. He just had to figure out how to hold on before she bailed completely. No amount of talking seemed to have an impact.

He walked into the loud, crowded bar. Like laser guided, heat-seeking missiles, his eyes locked on Krissy. Bare legs, moving up, he greedily eyed the schoolgirl style mini skirt.

Too mini, every man in the bar noticed the sweet curve of her bottom. He knew what the ass felt like and he wanted his hands under the pleated flounce.

She turned. The profile of her figure caused an immediate surge of blood. Either she'd had a few beers already, or she was in a genuinely great mood. Her eyes twinkled with mischief when she smiled in his direction. He glanced around. Good goddamn thing the smile was for him.

Weaving his way through the bar, he greeted a few friends. When he approached, his hand settled on her hip when she thrust it out in a cocky stand. "You look amazing. Have you been drinking?"

"Just soda." She playfully bumped against him. "Not to close, you'll spoil my game."

"I am your game." He slid his hand around to her butt. "What are the stakes?"

"How much you willing to lose?" She stepped between his wide spread thighs. "Oh?" Her face lit with surprise. "Is that my prize?"

He leaned in close. "If your hand touches the prize again, I'm going to drag you to my truck and fuck you in the parking lot. I don't care who spies my ass in the air. It's been two days. I about blew in my jeans when I saw you in this skirt."

She put her hands on top of the bar and purposely leaned her thigh into his groin. He hissed.

"How do the lyrics to *Johnny Be Good* go?" she said. "*His mama told him someday he would be a man.*" She licked her lips. "I'd say you've proven you're a man."

"But I'm not a leader of a band."

"Oh, but Johnny you've been playing me all along. So well in fact, that I would drive miles to have you play me after the sun goes down." She flipped her hair, lowered her lashes, and then gave him her sleepy, sexy, smile. "But we need to remember it's a game."

Johnny had to kiss her. He leaned in, but she pulled back. "Just sex and not in front of the gang." She put her hand on his chest. "So are we okay?"

He shook his head. He covered her hand with his, angled his body to face the bar, and slid her fingers over the steel rod throbbing behind the fly of his jeans.

She glanced around. No one could see. He closed his eyes as her fingers closed around him. "Later," she said, flattening her palm.

"Now."

* * * * *

Oh, but how she would love to blow his mind by doing just that, turn the tables on him. He'd done it for her. She could do it for him. Only it was too soon. When he'd walked in wearing tight black jeans and lavender silk shirt, she'd wanted to jump tables and run into his arms. Damn, but he wore purple well.

Instead, she'd stayed by the bar and flirted while her stomach rolled. Even with the playful banter, she saw the guarded veil hiding his usual openness. She couldn't blame him. He probably hurt as much as she did. Give it a few months, he'd thank her for diverting fatal damage.

"Not tonight." She patted his chest. "But I'll buy you a beer." She smiled. He didn't. "Don't do this," she whispered. "Not here. I don't want everyone to know what almost

happened.”

“Almost? What exactly almost happened? Because we didn’t almost have sex, I didn’t almost fall in love, and we didn’t almost commit to each other. The only almost is whether you’re pregnant.”

“Shhh. People are looking.” She took his hand. Weaving through the tables, she made her way to the exit. If he wanted to yell, they were better off outside.

They walked around the side of the building where they wouldn’t be on display for anyone coming or going from the bar. She leaned against the bricks and closed her eyes. She couldn’t be here and not think about the way he had touched her. Looking at his face, he must have been thinking the same thing.

“What do you want me to say? I’m sorry doesn’t seem to be enough.” She lifted her tired eyes. “I think we made a mistake. I’m trying to fix it.”

Johnny paced like a tiger caged at the zoo. Now and again, his eyes made contact. Mostly she wondered when he’d pounce. And when he did, would it be in anger or passion. She doubted she could handle either one. At least with anger she had a chance at keeping her heart. Succumbing to his heated touch, and deliciously wicked kiss, would be her undoing.

Johnny growled and ran his fingers through his hair. “We aren’t a mistake. The baby won’t be a mistake. Giving up on us would be.”

“In my head, I have a list of all the wonderful reasons I need you in my life. Something happened after we made love.” Her uneasy stomach twisted. “I think about you and me, about the future and I just know somehow I’m going to screw it up.”

He took two steps closer to her. “You’re screwing it up now.” He pounded a fist against his chest. “I love you,” he hissed through his teeth. “I don’t want to go back to being just friends.” He looked away. “I don’t think I can.”

“We can if we try.”

“I don’t want to try,” he hollered. He leaned against the wall beside her.

“So where does this leave us?” Somehow, she had to get him to understand her position. Middle ground is what they needed. He’d risk it all and she didn’t want to take any chances.

She looked down at her hand when he took it in his. Strong and warm, she immediately thought about how those fingers felt on her flesh. She looked up to stare in his face. Glistening with moisture, the mask lifted and she saw the pain reflected in his darkened eyes. The knots in her stomach tightened.

“Maybe it was a mistake from the beginning. When you first told me you wanted a baby, I thought you were propositioning me. When the light finally dawned that you only wanted my help to find a suitable candidate, I wondered why I didn’t feel relieved. It hurt.”

He let go of her hand, turned his body, and propped a shoulder against the wall. Muted music from the club vibrated through the darkened windows and brick walls. Diffused light permeated the shadows where they stood. She wanted to smooth the furrow from his brow, kiss the grimace from his mouth.

“I never wanted anyone else.” She grew quiet, pensive about where that left them. “I just needed to discover what my heart already knew.”

He chuckled. “Don’t you think it’s entirely possible you’ll figure out we’re good together?” He touched her cheek.

Close to tears, she closed her eyes and shook her head. "I never said we weren't. Don't you worry about the future? I know me. I don't do love. Not like the rest of the planet."

His fists clenched at his sides.

"Stepping back now will be much easier," she said. "Our lives will be a tangled mess in a few months and there won't be anyway to get back what we had."

His chest lifted and fell on the deep sigh. "You finally got it. It's already too late." He stepped away from the wall. "I can't do this anymore." He took her finger and gave a little shake.

He walked away.

"Johnny, wait." She ran after him. Catching up to him, she grabbed him by the elbow. "What exactly are you telling me? You'll toss our friendship because I won't be your girlfriend?"

"Listen to what you're saying. Date who you want, do what you want. I'm done. I can't play these games with you anymore."

Almost afraid to ask, she whispered, "What about the baby?"

"I'm sorry. Being with you is more than just sex to me. It has to mean something to you too."

"It does! I don't want anyone else." Her face burned with indignation. "Having a baby is the most important decision I've ever made. That hasn't changed."

"I know." He touched her cheek. "This time I've got to think of myself. I thought I could convince you. I want a family, a wife, and a kid. Weekend visitation won't be enough. I have my resume out with several law firms. I'm hoping the summer clerkship will get me in the door. One more year of law school and then we'll be financially set. I planned to take care of you and our baby." His eyes squinted against the emotions he attempted to keep from her. His jaw clenched and his lips pulled tight. "I don't want one without the other."

"I can't promise forever. Yet, I can't lose you. So am I supposed to stay in a relationship when that isn't what I want?"

"I guess that's the crux of it all. I thought you did."

He turned from her, walked across the parking lot, and climbed behind the wheel of his truck.

The music thumped around her. People chattered as they came and went from the bar. Krissy's world just drove away without looking back.

She couldn't go back in and pretend nothing happened. But if she didn't, she'd draw more attention. Krissy did what she did best. She sucked it up. The center of attention, the life of the party, pretended she didn't care. She walked back into the bar, scoped the crowd for the hottest guy, and proceeded to flirt.

Ten minutes later, she'd had enough.

"I'll see you all later. I've got to work tomorrow."

"I'll walk you out, wood girl. Let's go." Brett put his hand on the small of Krissy's back and escorted her out of the bar.

"So what's up with you and Johnny? And don't give me any of your bullshit. I know you fucked him on my dryer so I think that gives me leeway to ask questions."

Krissy snorted. "It was the washer. So lay it on me. I know I'll hear it from Ryan. Tell me how I've ruined the six-pack. Wasn't that your comment? Don't fuck up the six-pack by

fucking Johnny.”

“God, do you people keep a record of what I say?”

“I know what I’ve done and now I’m trying to fix it. Johnny has other ideas.”

“Johnny’s been in love with you since high school. What did you think would happen when you started sleeping with him? Hell Krissy, guys fall in love with you after three dates. Why do you think I call you the wood girl? It isn’t because you sell cabinets. You can’t help it. Men like the way you look. Johnny loves you, not the body.”

“Then you think I should ignore the little voice in my head telling me to back out quick. That little voice has saved my ass more times than I can remember.”

“This time the little voice told you to run from the best thing that could’ve ever happened to you. We all love you. Johnny wouldn’t care what the package looked like.” He let his eyes travel down her body. “He isn’t complaining. But it wouldn’t make a difference.”

She rolled her eyes. “And I should take the advice of the consummate bachelor?”

He shrugged. “Nope. I’d run too. And I’ll probably never have what you and Johnny do.”

Krissy unlocked her car door. “I’m trying to protect what I have with Johnny.” Nothing, not even the child she wanted, was worth giving up her friendship. If she already had the baby, who knows how she’d feel. But what you’ve never had, you can’t miss. She didn’t want to miss Johnny. “I’ll fix it.”

“You didn’t make a mistake sleeping with him.” He kissed her forehead. “You’re more than a pretty face and a rockin’ body. Who knows you better than Johnny? I’m not telling you what to do.” He smirked. “Yeah, okay so maybe I am telling you what to do. I had it wrong. Don’t fuck up the six-pack, fuck Johnny.” She slugged him in the gut. He pulled her against his tall frame and held tight.

“What if I can’t get Johnny to talk to me? I don’t want you, Ryan, Shelby, or Casey to have to choose between us. What if I already screwed up the group?”

“He’ll come around.”

Yeah, but she knew Johnny too. This time he’d walked away. Something he’d never done before.

Chapter Sixteen

Slumber Party Hell

Johnny didn't want to go home to his little apartment and Krissy's place wasn't an option. He wanted to go to the bar and toss back beers with the Ryan and Brett. He needed male bonding after having had enough of women for the night.

Circling the block, he drove through the parking lot looking for Krissy's car. He couldn't face her, not yet. The bitter taste of losing her filled his mouth. He planned to wash it away. But obviously not yet. Her car still sat beneath the streetlight. Leaving the lot, he pulled into the parking lot of the grocery store across the street.

After finding a parking spot in a shadowed corner, he walked into the store and bought a forty ounce. Taking it back to the truck, he sipped the beer and watched the door of the bar. If she came out with a guy, he'd go ballistic. Walking out tonight told him he was nowhere ready to give her up. Rolling down the window, the distant sounds of the bar drifted into the truck cab.

Watching the clock on the dash, he chugged most of the beer. His head spun. He might be tipsy, but he stayed sober enough to know driving across the street was out of the question. The choice of going into the bar, or going home no longer held relevance. He needed to use a restroom and he needed a ride home.

The alcohol rushed to his brain when he climbed from the truck. Oh yeah, he'd had enough to drink. Locking the doors, he walked across the street. Time to maintain. If the door bouncer suspected he'd already reached his limit, he wouldn't be let in. Regulars got away with a little more, but not much.

He waved to Stan sitting in his chair wearing a yellow security T-shirt. Johnny made his way into the bar, noticing the crowd had thinned. Scanning the room, he didn't see Krissy. In fact, he didn't see any of the gang. He supposed it was just as easy to drink alone because tonight he had a mission. He wanted, no he needed to be drunk. He used the restroom and then went to the bar and ordered a shot of Jack Daniels with a beer chaser. Closing his eyes, he let the alcohol slide down his throat. The burn didn't help dull the pain in his chest caused by the image of Krissy heartbroken in the parking lot. He'd walked away from her, destroying her dream of having a baby. He forced the memory into his head of her coming apart in his arms, whispering his name, but it faded, replaced once again by the sadness in her eyes just before he had turned and left.

"Hey dude." Brett slapped him on the shoulder. "I thought you bailed."

"I don't want to go home. I don't want to see Krissy. Can't go to her place." He glanced around. "I see her car. Where is she?"

"She left."

Johnny's breath sucked from his chest.

"Not with a guy. Ryan and Shelby took her home. She wasn't drunk. She didn't have a drink all night."

Johnny took another drink of beer. "How're we getting home?"

"Leave it to me." Brett winked.

Brett weaved on unsteady legs across the room. Sharing a few words with the woman shooting darts, he then waved Johnny over.

Johnny had seen the woman in the bar on occasion, but admittedly most of the time he hung with Krissy. Outside of the gang, he had acquaintances. Brett on the other hand, buzzed about, the busy bee of the group, pollinating the pretty flowers. Crap, he was drunk if he was starting to refer to Brett's conquests as pretty flowers. In an odd way, Brett was the male version of Krissy. They both mingled like social butterflies. The similarity ended at the bedroom door. Krissy kept hers closed, whereas Brett had a revolving door. Once he tired of a girl, a new one was always on the way in. Sometimes they bumped into each other. Watching him juggle girlfriends was entertainment for the gang.

Johnny found a table. He set his beer aside having had enough. Dealing with Krissy as a lover turned his mind to mush and made him a lush.

"Brett, I need to go. Don't say no. Someone stop me. I'm rhyming. Aagh." He laughed, swiveled in the barstool, and tried to control the fuzziness in his mind.

Brett took the seat next to him, leaned back against the wall, and watched What's Her Name throw another dart. "I talked to Krissy after you left."

"And?"

"She's pulling a classic Krissy. She regrets getting involved."

"She regrets committing. Take my word for it, she doesn't regret the sex."

"Maybe you should give her what she wants. Be fuck buddies." Brett wagged his brows. "Forever."

That certainly held appeal. Did he take what she offered? Was it enough? No, not by a long way. Maybe he ought to show her what she's missing. She wanted their relationship to return to friendship. He doubted Krissy would handle it any better than he did.

Reaching behind him, he took his beer. "I think Krissy should get exactly what she asked for." He tipped his bottle to Brett's.

"And what exactly does Krissy ask for? I bet she's kinky."

Johnny held a drink of beer in his mouth. Then he swallowed.

"Hey, I've always been curious."

"You'll stay that way."

Brett chuckled. "You forget I heard you in my laundry room. Every time I throw in a load, I get a hard on. Never used to like doing the wash, thanks dude."

"So can you get your girlfriend to give me a ride?"

"Hell, no. If I'm lucky, and we both know I am, Sexy Lexy will be riding me." He smiled.

"Funny. I think I'll take your advice." The alcohol made him either brave or stupid. "Drop me off at Krissy's. Do you know how she planned to get her car in the morning?"

"I'll be coming back in the morning. I'll pick you both up." He stood and went to his date. Leaning in, he whispered in her ear while his hand smoothed over her hip.

Brett waited while Lexy bid her friends farewell. "Okay guys, ready. If either of you puke in my jeep, I kick your butts. Don't think I can't. I've got a black belt and I intend to use it."

"Mmm." Brett put his arm around her shoulder. "Lucky me." He winked at Johnny. "Can I use my black belt on you?" Brett kissed her neck.

“Only if I’m naughty.”

She grabbed her purse and they headed out.

The open-air jeep zipped through the deserted streets. Warm, summer air swirled around Johnny. Riding in the back contributed to the effects of the alcohol. Unable to focus on the blur of town, he watched Lexy stroke Brett’s thigh, inching ever closer to his groin. Brett groaned.

Johnny punched the back of the passenger seat. “Wait until you drop me off.”

Johnny’s cock pulsed in his pants by the time Lexy pulled into Krissy’s apartment complex. “Thanks.” He stood on the seat and jumped to the ground. He doubted Lexy heard. She and Brett were lip locked in the front seat.

Unsteady on his feet, he walked to Krissy’s door. How many times had he fumbled with the key? He shushed himself. If Krissy had already fallen asleep, he’d slip in and crash on the couch. He hoped she was up, because he certainly was. He adjusted so the first thing she saw wasn’t the bulge in the front of his pants.

Entering the house, he closed the door quietly and locked it. *Looks like just friends tonight.* She slept.

He didn’t need to turn on a light to find the bathroom. After taking care of business, he left his jeans and shirt lying on the floor.

He glanced at Krissy’s bedroom door. Bar smell clung to his skin. Debating whether to risk waking her, he decided he probably needed a cold shower. *Back to friends, not likely.* Let’s see how Krissy liked knowing he showered naked only a few feet from her bedroom. His cock liked knowing she lay in the bed on the other side of the hall.

After turning on the water, he stripped off his boxers. About to close the bathroom door, he changed his mind leaving it open. If Krissy doubted who took liberties with her shower, the transparent curtain would clear it up. Warm water sprayed over his fingers. He stepped beneath the gentle needles.

Keeping his hand on the tile wall to steady himself, he tucked his chin to his chest and let the water cascade over his head. He didn’t move, just listened to the sound of the water hitting the curtain and trickling down the drain.

Keeping his eyes closed, he ran his hand down his torso. Taking his cock in his hand, he imagined Krissy’s fingers circling his shaft. Slowly at first, he stroked the length with a light grip. Picking up speed, his grip tightened and then relaxed. This wasn’t for a quick release. He imagined Krissy and prolonged the sweet torture.

“Johnny?” She stood in the doorway. Bare legs, he imagined her naked under the shirt she wore, his shirt. “What are you doing?”

He kept his fist locked around his cock and demonstrated.

“I meant, why are you here?” She rolled her eyes when he grinned, sliding the skin up and down the hard length. “You didn’t come over to beat off in my shower.”

“Where’s the soap?”

She laughed.

“I hope to hell I’m an improvement over Regis.”

“You’re drunk.”

“Yep. Had Brett drop me off.” He pulled open the curtain. “I think you should get me off.”

"I thought we were over."

"I thought you wanted to go back to being friends."

"We didn't have sex when we were just friends."

"No, but I always wanted to. Come here, Krissy. Join me." He continued to masturbate. Cupping his balls, he rolled them in his hand. "I'd rather your hand was doing this."

"I don't think we should. We need to talk first."

"Is that your final answer?"

She hesitated a moment, and then one by one she worked the buttons free. The shirt gaped. His eyes locked on the thin strip of silk panties covering the lips of her sex.

"You're getting the floor wet," she said. With the curtain open, water had begun to puddle.

"Are you wet?"

"What do you think?" She fingered the silk and then tugged it into her sex to stimulate her clit. Reaching up, she plucked her nipples between her thumb and finger.

"Can you lick your nipples?"

Bending her head, she pulled her tit to her mouth. Her breasts were huge in her small hands. Kneading the milky smooth flesh between her wide spread fingers, they maintained eye contact. Krissy opened her mouth and licked her lips before she stroked the darkened, pebbled tip with her pink tongue.

Water sloshed when his hand moved faster, increasing the friction. He groaned because the muscles in his forearm tightened and burned.

"Are we in a hurry? Do you want to come, Johnny?"

He slowed his stroke. No, he didn't want to hurry.

Krissy slid her panties down around her upper thighs. Pressing the pad of her finger to her clit, she spread her legs and bent her knees. Her finger slid between the swollen flesh of her pussy and sank deep. Moaning, she pulled her lip between her teeth.

"I want to watch you come." The deep, husky timber of his voice revealed the level of his desire.

She licked two fingers. "Then pay attention." Making a V with her wet fingers, she exposed her clit. Touching gently with her other hand, she flicked and circled the bundle of nerves. Breath hissed from her mouth.

Johnny's cock throbbed. Muscles in his forearm bunched. She touched herself for him. He didn't think he'd ever been this turned on. His erection bordered on painful. The sleepiness left her eyes, replaced with building tension, climbing closer to the point of release. His body vibrated with indecision. Let her finish— or help her get there?

His nostrils flared sucking in the heady scent of arousal hanging heavy in the steamy room. Krissy's breath came in sharp pants making her breasts tremble and nipples pucker. She closed her eyes. Her thighs shook. Muscles clenched and released. Her cry echoed off the walls. He turned to the spray, every nerve electrified. He growled and followed her orgasm with one of his own.

Johnny turned off the water and stepped out of the tub. He wrapped a towel around his waist. "You hungry?"

* * * * *

Hungry for what? Water droplets trailed down his chest and dripped from his hair. Krissy mouth dried at the sight of his biceps. She'd never see his arm again and not think about the way he flexed while jacking off. Oh yes, she was hungry.

Confusion overwhelmed her. Why had he come to her house? He'd made his position clear at the bar. She didn't want commitment. He'd gotten the message because he sure didn't act the same. He'd left the possessiveness in the empty beer bottle. Yet, the look in his eyes remained the same.

It took a lot of trust to do what they'd just done. She'd never watched a man pleasure himself, and she sure as hell never thought she'd touch herself without a man there pleasuring her at the same time. More revealing, she hadn't hesitated. When she'd seen him in the shower she wanted to join him. Yet, fear kept her immobile. His moans had her remembering how he thrust into her body. Thinking about it now did the same. She wasn't satisfied. Would he want to sleep with her tonight? How would she handle another slumber party?

Johnny hollered from the kitchen. She followed the voice. "What?"

"You're out of milk." He shoveled a spoonful of Cookie Crisp into his mouth. "Wanna bite?"

Why did Nigel's mouth full of food turn her stomach? Yet, she wanted the cool sensation of Johnny's milk mouth on her breast.

She stepped close. The clean scent of the soap she used wafted to her nose. She stared at his eyes, but didn't touch him. "Yes." She bit his chest just above the flat disc of his nipple.

He chuckled.

"You're laughing at me?"

"Yes." He took another bite of cereal. "I saw the light with Brett. You're right. We should just stay friends. You can relax because you don't need the whole seduction act."

She scrunched her forehead. "How drunk are you?"

"Pretty drunk. But I can still get it up." To prove it, he dropped the towel. "You want to ride my scooter?"

Krissy snorted. "Maybe you should come up with a more masculine name. Scooters aren't very impressive."

"Impressive?" He cocked an eyebrow. "Now, your ass is impressive." He set the bowl in the sink.

"I need to understand what we're doing. What does it mean if we sleep together?"

He tunneled his fingers into her hair. The thrill traveled to her toes.

"Tonight it doesn't mean anything." His lips crashed onto hers stealing her breath. Fierce longing clouded her thinking. That wasn't exactly what she wanted. But his tongue, cold from the milk, lapping her lips, thrusting into her mouth convinced her they could talk in the morning.

"Ohh." Two talented fingers plunged into her hot, melting center. Grabbing his wrist, she pressed her mound into his hand urging him deeper. "I need you."

Johnny pulled his fingers from her body and put them in his mouth.

Krissy took his hand and led him into her bedroom. She loved when he got a little buzzed. In this mood, she didn't know what to think. Definitely drunk, but how far gone, she

couldn't guess. He walked a straight line. Words weren't slurred.

"Have your way with me." He fell onto her bed, climbed to the pillows, and rolled to his back. Arms stretched out, he flexed his cock, moving it back and forth. "Ride the scooter," he said and laughed.

"Couldn't it be a bullet bike, or maybe an F-16?"

"Too fast. Scooters might not have big engines, but they run forever."

Why was she debating the name of his dick? She straddled his lap. "Who's driving?"

"Baby, I'm too drunk to drive. We'd get arrested."

She slid down his cock.

"Ah fuck." He grabbed her hips, arched, and pushed deep.

* * * * *

Johnny listened to Krissy's gentle snoring next to him. She was beautiful, her mouth soft, body warm. She sighed and snuggled closer. Wrapping his arm around her, he kissed her temple.

He glanced at her one more time. More than anything, he didn't want to leave. He took a deep breath. However, his plan had backfired. So now, he'd try hers. Just friends, but like Brett pointed out, friends who enjoyed each other's body.

He slipped from the bed with a smile on his face. He'd play it close to the bone. Just like Krissy wanted. He crept to the bathroom for his clothing and took his cell from his pocket. Calling Brett wasn't an option. He needed a ride, but at four in the morning, he'd have to come up with another choice. Not wanting to wake sleeping beauty, he dressed quickly and left.

Johnny stood on the street and phoned a cab company.

* * * * *

Krissy stretched, reaching for Johnny. Cracking her eyes, she saw the empty space beside her. "Are you making coffee?" When she didn't get a reply from the quiet apartment, she crawled out of bed and shuffled to the bathroom.

Queasiness rolled through her stomach. Johnny's clothes were gone. Wide awake, she hurried to the living room. When had he left and why? Last night was wonderful. Masturbating in front of Johnny had been a liberating experience. She'd never felt such a powerful connection.

She started the coffee pot and let her mind replay the night's events. He'd been everything she'd ever wanted. A thought chilled her skin. Had last night been a way to teach her a lesson? He'd preformed to her ideal fantasy man. He was adventurous, yet tender. He seemed to know exactly where to touch her and his responses to her had empowered her to lose all reservations. They'd both been completely uninhibited. He even made her laugh incorporating her twisted dream of Regis in the shower.

The aroma of coffee hit her nose. Her stomach revolted. Rushing to the bathroom, she retched. Damn him for playing with her emotions. She didn't like this side of him.

She went back to the kitchen and picked up the cell phone and text messaged, "*Where R*

U?"

She dropped her phone to the counter. The agitated beat of her heart pounded in her ears, fear weighing heavy on her chest. She poured a cup of coffee and took it with her into the bathroom to get ready for the day.

Standing in the shower, she put her hand on the tile and bowed her head remembering the way Johnny looked. The fear drained away leaving hollowness. Then she spun, the heat adding to the nausea. Her head lightened. She turned the water cooler, fighting the need to retch again.

After her shower, she dressed and fixed her hair. By the time she got around to sipping her coffee, it tasted bitter.

She tossed her phone into her purse and headed out the door. It was a good thing Johnny wasn't standing in front of her because if she got hold of him, she'd clobber him.

She got to the parking lot and swore. She'd forgotten she left her car at Stu's. She sighed and called Brett. He'd agreed to take her back. Undoubtedly tangled in some woman's arms, well he could just unwind his limbs and come get her. She shook the image of Brett in bed from her mind. No. The only image she wanted was Brett pulling up in his car in front of her apartment.

She dialed. "I need my car." He answered with a groan. "Brett!"

"Call someone else. I can't move. Get your boyfriend to call someone."

"My boyfriend bailed during the night."

Brett laughed.

"It isn't funny. Was it a joke? Why did you bring Johnny here?"

"Too tired for this conversation. All I know is Johnny decided he'd give you what you want."

What did she want? After last night, she couldn't deny the special connection she had to Johnny. Yet, she couldn't shake the uneasiness.

* * * * *

Johnny didn't like hurting Krissy. The girl knew how to carry a grudge. He wasn't usually on the receiving end of her anger, but he read between the lines of her text message.

He stared at the phone, scared to call her back. Intimidated by a wisp of a woman, he shook his head. They were supposed to go to his parents tomorrow. Not nearly enough time to wear off her pissed mood. Avoiding her seemed like the chicken's way out. "*Bak, bak.*"

Therefore, he had a Saturday with nothing to do. And at this point no vehicle in which to do it. He called Brett.

"Why would I come for you when I wouldn't get your girlfriend?"

Johnny's mouth dried. "She's pissed. I caught a cab home this morning because I was still drunk, too drunk to drive anyway."

Brett laughed. "Yeah, she isn't too happy you left her last night. She thinks it's some great scam on your part to get her back for the fight at the bar."

"So basically your advice sucked. I'll hang at your place for a while, get some coffee in me, and shake this hangover."

"Can't do it. And don't blame me. I told you to be fuck buddies. I'm still in bed with

mine. So call me later." Brett hung up. Johnny snorted. Krissy's horrible track record rubbed off on him. Nothing worked the way he imagined. Getting together with Krissy should have been easy.

* * * * *

Shelby gave Krissy a ride to get her car shifting her eyes from the road to Krissy and back again. "What?"

"I just wonder what's going on with you," Shelby said.

"Nothing. I feel like shit this morning."

"Because of the fight with Johnny?"

Yes and no. She was upset about the bar, but it's what happened last night making her sick this morning. Yet, she wasn't ready to admit her feelings for Johnny. If he'd played a game with her, it was the cruelest thing he'd ever done.

"I don't want to talk about Johnny." It hurt too much. Damn the emotional tugs. Heat built behind her eyes. Her stomach rolled with fear. "I don't want to go home. So what are you doing today?" She didn't want Johnny to think she sat home waiting for him even though that is exactly what she wanted. Strengthening her resolve, she took a fortifying breath. He wasn't going to prance in and out of her bed, at least not without some explanation of what it meant. They made love last night. It wasn't just sex for her. Making love with Johnny included laughter and talking. Last night was nothing more than an orgasm for Johnny. *Just sex*. For her, the emotions had overwhelmed.

"We can go to Brett's and barbecue."

A smile tugged on Krissy's lips. It would serve him right. A rousing from bed is just what he deserved for his duplicity last night.

"I'm game. Let's gather the group."

Shelby took a quick left. Krissy fought down a wave of nausea. "I'll throw up in your car if you take sharp turns."

"You sick?"

No, she was just pissed. "I woke up a little queasy." Thank Johnny for his disappearing act. Consider last night the slumber party from hell.

Chapter Seventeen

The Holdout

"Hey, maybe you're pregnant."

"Stop the car!" Krissy covered her mouth. Shelby crossed a lane of traffic and pulled to the curb. Krissy barely had the door open. She pulled her hair back and threw up in the gutter.

She hadn't taken a pregnancy test. She'd decided to do one a week rather than one every day. The suckers were expensive.

Could she be sick from pregnancy? Nausea would be her only symptom. Without letting Shelby see, she pressed against her breast. They weren't tender. She wasn't overly tired. Technically, she could be considered moody, but she had a perfectly good explanation for that. Her boyfriend, oh God, did she really just say that? She didn't have boyfriends. She had *boy friends*. Johnny had treated her like crap, slipping out in the middle of the night. Nothing more than simple irritation made her nauseous.

"I don't think so," she said, pulling herself back into the car. "Shelby, don't say anything. Please." Until she knew where Johnny's head was at, she didn't want added confusion. If they worked it out, and that was a big if, she didn't want their agreement to come out of guilt or a false sense of responsibility to the baby. Johnny would be there regardless.

Was she really reconsidering what she took back? Her mind circled. Maybe she was pregnant. She didn't want a commitment, and then she did. Now Johnny seemed content to give her the kind of relationship she'd asked for and she wanted more.

Shelby smiled. "I can keep a secret."

Krissy didn't doubt it. She just wasn't ready to tell. If pregnant, Johnny should be the first to know.

Krissy and Shelby laughed when they pulled up to Brett's house. A jeep sat in the driveway with an open driver's side door. Discarded clothing led the way into the house. The front door stood open.

"Do we really want to go in there?" Shelby latched onto Krissy's elbow.

"Oh yeah." Krissy plowed forward. "What I would give for a camera."

"Use my phone." Krissy met Shelby's devious smile.

"Got to love technology." Krissy flipped open the phone and turned it to the camera function.

They giggled as they approached the house. "Shhh." Shelby put her fingers to her lips. "If I see Brett's dick, I'm kicking your ass."

Krissy put a restraining arm on Shelby. "I hadn't thought of that. I don't want to see it either. I felt it once. That was more than enough."

"Gross, you felt it." Shelby's face scrunched. "How?"

"It's huge. I'm talking—" She held her hands to show the length.

"No way!"

"Shhh." She laughed. "Don't wake him up."

"My God, Krissy, that's a birth defect. He should've gone into porn."

Krissy held up the phone. "He just might."

They didn't need to worry about knocking with the door standing open. They peeked inside. Clothing was scattered on the living room floor. They tiptoed into the kitchen. Outside the patio doors, a pair of panties floated on top of the hot tub.

"Now we know he has sex in the hot tub. I'd rather be ignorant." Shelby's shoulders slumped. "We should stop now."

"No way." Krissy took a picture of the hot tub. "It'll make a nice scrapbook page."

When they passed the laundry room, Krissy paused to look at the washer. Butterflies filled her stomach, quickly turning to a wave of sickness. Emotion rushed over her, filling her eyes with unshed tears.

"Hey, you okay?"

Krissy blinked a few times. If she got weepy, Shelby would know. They wouldn't be taking pictures with the camera phone, but Shelby would be on the phone to Dr. Hart. Didn't pregnant women cry all the time? Crap, or yippee, maybe she was pregnant.

"Come on," Shelby said, pulling on her arm. "Get the camera ready. Do you think the girl is going to care? Do you think they're doing it?"

Krissy rolled her eyes, spreading her hands reminding her of Brett's length.

"You're right, we'd hear them."

"We'd hear *her*. Okay we're surmising way too much information."

They walked down the hall and peered into the master bedroom. Krissy slapped a hand over her mouth to keep from laughing. With the other hand, she snapped a few pictures of Brett.

She pushed Shelby out of the room. Once they were in the living room, they both laughed. "Okay, so how do we send this to Ryan, Casey, and Johnny?" Just saying his name caused a riot of sensations.

Shelby took her phone and forwarded the photo. "I'll give it twenty minutes before the gang is here."

It took less than that. Johnny pulled up with Casey right behind. Krissy wondered if Casey had taken him to get his truck, or if they'd been together. Pressure built behind her eyes. She pressed fingers to her temples and gently massaged small circles. Her imagination shifted into overdrive. Since when did she get jealous?

Johnny came into the house, laughing. Were they laughing at her? Her stomach cramped. She bit the inside of her cheek before unleashing her temper. Maybe they were still laughing at the picture of Brett wearing a pink and black striped tie around his head like a bandana. Hair stuck out in every direction. The girl had on Brett's knee and elbow pads. Krissy didn't want to know what was up with that.

His laugh drifted away as his eyes locked on her. The carefree smile fell from his face. Her heart hammered out a rhythm drowning out the noise and chatter in the room. Heat raced into her face. Damn it. He wasn't going to see her cry. Turning, she walked out to the patio.

Standing next to the hot tub, she watched the panties float on the water. Glancing over her shoulder, she looked to the door. Johnny hadn't followed her. In fact, she could hear his laughter again. Someone must have woken Brett. This was her idea, and yet she hid outside

afraid her feelings for Johnny showed on her face.

Once again, she'd sabotaged a relationship. Only this time it hurt to her very essence. Her friendship with Johnny helped to define her as a person. She knew that sounded crazy, but he brought out the best in her personality. How cliché, yet true.

Letting him into her heart, loving him, being in love with him, left her open to pain, betrayal, and disappointment. Since asking him to help her find her baby's daddy, she'd inflicted the same.

"Hey wood girl, I'll get you back."

Krissy glanced over at Brett. She hooked the bikini panties on her finger. "Had fun, did ya?"

"The way Johnny talked at the bar, I'd bet you had a good time too." He took the panties and tossed them on the chair. "Sooo." He dipped his hand in the water, and then flicked drops at Krissy. "Are you two going to give each other the silent treatment or are you going to admit you screwed up?"

Krissy turned away. "What's wrong with me, Brett?"

He came up behind her. His arms circled her shoulders. "You're just like me, wood girl. We like to play. Who wants to grow up and have a relationship?"

"I think I do." She sighed and leaned into his supportive strength. She lifted her face to look at him. "And I don't think we're too much alike. In fact, I guarantee it. What in the world were you doing last night? The jeep door was open. The house is in shambles. Her panties are in the hot tub. Shelby had a fit. She didn't want the visual of what you do in the love tub."

"Action/adventure."

"Stop. I don't really want to know. I need to know how to fix my friendship with Johnny."

Brett let her go. He walked across the patio and turned on the jets. "Look Krissy, I told Johnny to give you what you want. How was I to know you'd change your mind?" He stepped over the side and sank into the water with his shorts on. He squirmed a bit and then tossed the shorts out of the water. "If you didn't get a snapshot this morning, I'm not giving you the opportunity now." He stretched out his arms, closed his eyes, and sighed.

Shelby stepped out of the house. "I want in."

"He's naked. Might want to sit on the opposite side."

Shelby looked at Brett than leaned into Krissy. "Do you think it can reach?"

"It's impressive, Shelby." Brett wore a smile. "I knew it. Women talk about size, just like men talk about women."

"Equipment, Brett. Not performance."

"Umm, Shelby. No, we talk about performance, not equipment."

Brett laughed. "I score high in both categories."

"Ewe," they said simultaneously.

Krissy rolled her eyes. "You just score."

"Hey," Johnny stood at the door. "Can we talk?"

Krissy tried to assess his unreadable features. Despite his closed expression, she sensed his vulnerability. With her stomach tight, warmth in her breast, she nodded.

"No way." Brett stood from the hot tub.

Shelby screamed. "I didn't want to see it."

Brett laughed and grabbed Krissy around the waist and pulled her into the hot tub.

"Brett, you're naked. Let me go." Krissy splashed. Her head went under water a couple of times before she found her balance. "Oh crap, I touched it! Shelby help." Krissy leaned over the side. Shelby helped her step over. The heat of the water, coupled with the exertion, caused a resurgence of nausea. Her soaked clothing clung to her body. She looked at Johnny just as her stomach revolted. She turned to the bushes and threw up.

"Are you hung over? Sorry," Brett said. He was about to stand when Krissy put her hand up.

"Please don't." She wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. "We've seen enough. Get your girlfriend to play with you."

"She went home because she was humiliated by the little photo session."

Shelby rolled her eyes. "She was covered. And please, I've had enough revelation for one day. Do not tell me what the knee and elbow pads were for."

"I want to know." Ryan, the grill meister had prepared shish kabobs for the grill. He fired it up. "Nice," he said to Krissy, drawing everyone's attention.

Krissy's nipples strained against the fabric of her shirt. She wouldn't be surprised if the dark centers were visible through the light blue fabric. Johnny's hungry gaze swept over her, settling on her chest. It was too easy to lose herself in his gaze. Although she couldn't deny the thrill cruising through her, she deliberately shut out the awareness, the aching pulse of her body.

"We need to talk," he said.

She pushed her wet hair out of her face. "Brett, I'm going to see if there's something in your closet I can change into."

* * * * *

Johnny stepped out of the way to let her pass. Then he turned to follow her.

"Johnny."

He glanced over his shoulder at Brett. "My bedroom only looks like the laundry because there are clothes on the floor."

Johnny rolled his eyes. He did not intend to try to seduce Krissy on Brett's bed. Not that he wouldn't like peeling her out of those wet clothes. Her breasts looked unbelievable. She could win a wet T-shirt contest, only he didn't like others staring. Knowing his two best friends wouldn't make a move on her, it still fired his blood to see Brett touch her. When he'd pulled her into the water, Johnny had clenched his hands to keep from interfering. He didn't know if Brett attempted to provoke him into a declaration. He considered Krissy and kept his mouth shut. She didn't want their friends to know they'd slept together.

Krissy stood at Brett's closet flipping through shirts. She pulled one from the hanger. "Close the door."

He did.

"Will you turn around?"

He didn't want to, but he turned and walked to the window facing the parking lot.

"Are we friends?" He held his breath while he waited for her answer.

"Is that what you want?"

His shoulders slumped. "Yes." The word tasted bitter in his mouth. No, he wanted more.

"We shouldn't sleep together," she whispered.

Johnny spun to face her. "Why?"

"You said you didn't want to sleep with me unless we had a commitment."

"I'm bending here, Krissy." He took a few steps toward her. "You claim not to want a relationship. I'm agreeing with you. Just sex." He touched her shoulder and dragged his finger along her collarbone, savoring the texture of her soft skin.

Her eyes drifted closed. "We've proved we can't stay friends and have sex. I don't want to lose our friendship. I keep repeating the same thing, and we still end up naked."

"Because the sex is better than either one of us has ever had." To prove it, he brushed his lips against her warm, smooth mouth. She whimpered, her lips parting. Tilting his head, he coaxed her tongue with his, drawing it into his mouth.

He placed gentle kisses along her jaw, to taste the sensitive area beneath her ear. "I love you."

She pushed against his chest. Tears sprang to her eyes. "That's the crap I don't want you doing." She pushed on his chest.

"Maybe we do need a break from each other." He ran his fingers through his hair. Maybe with a little distance he could gain some perspective.

"Maybe."

They had never spent time apart. Maybe that was the problem. They took each other for granted. The old saying about absence making the heart grow fonder was a bunch of shit. Absence made it easier to move on, but it looked like that was the chance he had to take.

Chapter Eighteen

An Act Of Sedition

Krissy hadn't realized how much of her time she spent with Johnny. Her voice mails went unanswered. The bum knew her schedule. He returned her call to the house knowing damn good and well she spent her mornings at job sites. Before she made the biggest mistake of her life by sleeping with Johnny, they'd met for lunch a couple of times a week. She'd think he could speak to her. Distance didn't need to equate to no contact.

She'd called him, several times during the day. She wondered what excuse he gave his parents when she didn't join them for dinner on Sunday.

The oppressive thought of being alone again tonight hit her hard as she drove home from work. Her laptop sat on the passenger seat. With her evenings free, she hoped to get kitchen drawings done and into the system. Then what would she do with the rest of the hours until she could sleep? She lived like a depression commercial. Do you feel tired all the time? Have you lost your appetite? Do you shun activities you once enjoyed? Yes. Yes. Yes! Maybe Dr. Hart could prescribe something for her.

She took a deep sigh. Not likely. Not after she took the pregnancy test. She covered her breasts with her hands, fairly certain the tenderness stemmed from pregnancy. The test waited, only she wasn't ready to take it. What if it came up positive?

She needed to face the truth. She'd had morning sickness for three days in a row. Her breasts hurt in the shower or when she put on a bra. Air hurt. She wanted to be pregnant with Johnny's baby. Didn't she? So then why was she scared to take the test? She knew. Because she wanted Johnny to be happy about it. Under the circumstances, she wasn't sure he would be. They'd left too much unsaid. Or maybe too much had already been spoken.

As she drove home from work, she detoured past his apartment to see if his truck was there. Her heart beat quickened as she rounded the corner onto his street. She didn't realize she'd been holding her breath until she saw he was home and released it. She didn't stop, simply took comfort that he would spend his evening the same way she did.

Cool air blasted her when she opened the front door of her apartment. She tossed her purse onto Johnny's throne and slipped off her shoes. She had leftover Mexican in the fridge. A beer would taste great, but putting her hand on her belly, she opted for a glass of water instead.

A few minutes later, she had her laptop on the coffee table, the smell of reheated enchiladas tickling her growling stomach, and cold water quenching her thirst. Now if she had a vibrator that could wrap its arms around her, kiss her mouth, and smack her ass, she might be able to shake her self-pitying mood. Picking up the remote, she turned on the television.

A knock at the door made her look at the clock above the door. She rose on stiff legs, crossed the room, and looked out the peephole.

She pulled open the door. "Hey girl, what's up?" Casey came into the house. She moved the purse to the floor, and plopped into the lazy boy.

"What have you done to Johnny?"

"What have I done?" And how much did Casey know? Johnny promised he'd neatly swept their topic under the rug. It would remain there until she could no longer hide the visible evidence. Hopefully, she still had a few months before that would be obvious. She'd take the test in the morning.

"He kept Brett up until three in the morning."

Krissy narrowed her eyes. "How do you know? Were you there?"

"God no. With Brett? Ewe, wash your mouth out with soap." Casey pulled the handle on the chair, propping up her feet. "He called me to come and get the drunken mess."

"Oh, Casey, I'm sorry." She ran her hands through her hair. She lay down on the couch and closed her eyes. "I suppose I need to talk to someone. I've been sleeping with Johnny."

"What?" The footrest slammed back under the chair. Casey covered her mouth and started to laugh.

"It's not funny. It's depressing. Who would've thought Johnny would be the best sex of my life."

"Really? Hmmm. Probably should've known that. They say you can tell a lot about performance by the way a guy dances."

"It's true then, because Johnny's great at both. And I mean amazing great. If he sucked it would've worked out perfectly." She rolled to her side and pillowed her hands under her head. "I wasn't supposed to love him."

"What is that crap? You've always loved Johnny."

"Like a friend."

Casey snorted.

"Your friendship is better than most marriages." Casey walked to the couch and sat on the edge of the cushion beside her. "What's the real problem, Krissy?"

She rolled her eyes, but tears filled them anyway. She wiped her cheeks with the back of her hand.

"It all happened so fast. I thought we'd bone a couple of times, share a laugh, and go back to the way things were." She sat making room for Casey. "Have you ever laughed during sex?"

"During foreplay or in the heat of the action?"

"You just answered my question. Johnny makes me laugh. He gives me this incredible feeling, right here." She put her hand on her chest. "And then I start wondering how it's going to feel when he finally leaves. Either I'll push him away, or he'll get tired of me. Isn't it better to keep the friendship?"

Casey's brows furrowed and her lips pursed. "Hell no."

"So what should I do? He won't return my phone calls. He leaves messages when I'm not home."

"You'll see him tomorrow. He won't miss Stu's on a Friday night."

Casey was right. How could she forget? Krissy smiled. She didn't rationalize or explain the tingle of anticipation rushing through her veins.

* * * * *

Johnny sniffed the armpit of a shirt. Looked clean, wasn't badly wrinkled, and passed the odor test. What the hell? It was only class and who did he have to impress. The one woman in the world he wanted, didn't care. Cripes, he hated whiners. Throw him some cheese. He smiled thinking of his dad's comeback from childhood. "You want some cheese to go with that whine?"

He climbed into his truck and headed across town. They lived in a college town with plenty of pizza joints and coffee shops, but more than that, it offered a great place to raise a family. Fourth of July in the park, Christmas parades with Santa, rodeos, demolition derbies, he planned to plant roots here. Someday he planned to buy a house. It would take working for a firm for a few years before he could open a practice of his own. His passion lied with corporate law, tax law, not personal injury or divorce. Johnny understood numbers. He didn't want to involve himself with airing someone's dirty laundry or debilitating injury.

He slung his backpack over his shoulder and hiked across the campus to his first class. Only a few weeks left in summer semester and then he had to think about what he wanted to do.

He wondered if he should just carry on as if Krissy hadn't altered the course. Could he continue to pretend to be friends after all they'd shared? He'd been pretending for years, but he didn't have the memory of her breathy pants as she neared orgasm. He knew when to hold off gratification, driving her crazy, because of his intense awareness of her.

He found a chair in the back of the classroom. Not that he'd be slipping out early today as he had in the last few weeks. Finishing the semester was his only priority. He wouldn't be hurrying to Krissy's house today for a quickie. Regret churned in his gut.

He replayed all that had happened in the last few weeks. He missed her. Krissy never strayed too far from his thoughts, which was exactly the problem. He couldn't concentrate on his studies. He imagined she must think he'd deserted her.

He hadn't.

He just wasn't ready to see her.

When class was over, Johnny slipped out the side entrance ahead of the crowd.

"Hi John."

Johnny turned toward the soft voice beside him. He couldn't remember the girl's name but he'd seen her around campus. She might even be in one of his classes.

"Alisa," she said, shifting her knapsack to her other shoulder.

They did have a class together, the one he'd just left in fact. He nodded his head indicating she should join him on the walk.

"Do you have another class?" Standing a few inches taller than Krissy, she looked him in the eyes.

He smiled. "Nope. Do you want to grab a coffee?"

"I'd love to."

They walked across campus. He glanced at Alisa from the corner of his eye. He didn't want to be caught staring because he was unfairly comparing. Guilt burned at his conscience like acid. He swallowed the lump in his throat and ordered.

After they purchased coffees, they sat on a bench near the clock tower in the center of the campus. Ducks cut through rippling dark waters of the pond stretching to the south

parking lot.

It wasn't cheating. Why did it feel that way? Alisa smiled, batted lashes made long and thick with mascara, and bumped his shoulder when she laughed.

She represented the perfect antitheses to Krissy. The thought of spending Friday night at Stu's gave him chills. Krissy would be there. With their relationship irrevocably altered, the adjustment would take some time. What he needed was a distraction.

He turned to Alisa. "Would you like to go out tonight?"

* * * * *

Johnny really was an ass. Alisa, sitting bitch in the cab of the truck, had dressed to impress. Brett would call her hot. She had full kissable lips, and a decent figure, but she wasn't Krissy. And that was the exact reason why her hip rested against his. Krissy was the only one he wanted sitting next to him. Alisa's perfume drifted to his nose without stirring a niggle of interest. His cock didn't even twitch with her trim thigh aligned with his.

"We're meeting my friends. I hope that's all right with you."

It didn't serve his purpose if Krissy didn't see him moving on. There it was again, the guilt. Not a problem, as long as he didn't lead Alisa on. He'd keep it casual.

"Great."

Johnny parked and then stepped out of the truck. Alisa followed him out the driver's side door. Her skirt hiked up high on her thigh. She shimmied, smoothing it down. Flipping her hair, she then tucked her hand into the crook of his elbow. "Okay, ready."

Her smile slammed into his gut. Awe hell, he had to stop this before it went too far. He could stop it after Krissy saw him with a date. She'd better show up.

* * * * *

Krissy kept one eye on the door and the other on the friends sitting around the table.

"Another round," Brett said to the waitress and held up three fingers.

"Are you trying to get drunk?" Krissy narrowed her eyes, but kept the smile on her lips. Tonight she wished she could. All eyes narrowed on her as she sipped the cola drink in front of her. She hadn't told them it was Diet Coke. Let them make assumptions. She'd drink if she could, but she'd taken the test. Her stomach somersaulted. Then a smile spread across her mouth. She licked her lips and focused on the door again.

She couldn't wait to see Johnny. She took a deep breath hoping for the fortitude to face him. One part of her wanted to run into his arms and profess to love him forever. But the saner, or maybe just the more stubborn side of her personality wouldn't shut up. The little devil on her shoulder wanted to come out and play.

Casey's words had the desired affect. Krissy did want Johnny, forever. The idea of becoming a sappy lovesick couple made her shudder. She wanted fun, teasing, best friend Johnny for a boyfriend.

And her boyfriend just walked in the damn door with a growth attached to his arm. She was just the person to remove it. Who in the hell was she? How dare Johnny pick up a babe to bring to the bar? Theirs was a closed club. A six-pack. Only Brett brought along dates

because he had temporary involvements. Some rules couldn't be broken. Johnny bringing a date was one of them!

"Hey, where you going?" Brett grabbed her arm and pulled her back. Three shots of tequila sat in a row on the table. Casey and Shelby were ready with the salt and the lime.

Krissy glared at Johnny as he escorted the tramp across the room. When they approached the table, she pasted a spurious smile on her face.

"We're doing body shots." They weren't, but he didn't need to know that. She scrunched her brows. "I lost my partner. I think he went to play darts." She stood on her tiptoes and looked around the room. "Oh, there he is." She was purposely vague. Like Eddie in forth grade, she didn't need Johnny rushing over and popping someone in the face.

The table grew quiet.

"You haven't been doing shots," Brett said.

"Oh shut up." Okay, so she just outted herself. Big deal. She planned to eventually.

"She's not, but I am." Casey licked her hand and sprinkled salt. "I don't know about the rest of you but, tonight I plan to get a little drunk." Krissy met Casey's eyes with a silent thank you and then glanced at Johnny.

Casey wrapped her arm around Krissy's waist. "If the boys want to see their girls get a little wasted, let's not disappoint." She picked up a shot glass and slammed the drink. She chewed the lime ignoring the laughs going around the table.

She handed a shot glass to Krissy. "Your turn."

"I can't." Krissy nearly choked. "I'm a Bud Light girl." She glanced down at her soda and cringed. "Except tonight."

Johnny laughed and she glared at him. He had his hand on the wrong hip. It should be hers.

"Hey Brett, want to dance with me?"

Brett turned to Johnny. Like it mattered if it bothered Johnny, Krissy might have limited options at the moment, but she could make Johnny jealous.

Evidently it worked.

His jaw clenched. He looked at the table, and then lifted his head. Their eyes locked. Krissy cocked one brow. "Hi," she said to his date.

"Alisa. Krissy." He introduced her around the table.

Pleasure snaked up Krissy's spine. Brett had a twinkle of interest glinting in his eye. She'd exploit the twinkle when needed. No one ever claimed Krissy didn't go after what she wanted. It had only been a week. You'd think Johnny would pine for a moment. This was war. *Love and war.*

"It's nice to meet you," the growth said.

Alisa clung to Johnny. Hmmm, she couldn't tell if Johnny liked it. Who was she kidding, the girl was drop-dead gorgeous. Krissy scrutinized the blonde. Something about the girl looked familiar. Dropping dead would come in handy about now. Only whom did she want to drop? Johnny didn't look all that comfortable. A bead of perspiration trickled down his temple. He focused on everyone except Krissy.

Alisa slid onto the stool next to Ryan. Johnny stood behind her. "Can I get you a drink? Beer?"

She nodded. Krissy's chest ached. For the first time ever, Johnny didn't offer to get her

something from the bar. She blinked tears.

"So how do you know Johnny," Casey asked.

"From school."

That's why she looked familiar. Krissy remembered seeing her when she'd met Johnny for coffee. The tramp wanted him then.

"We have class together."

"You're going to be a lawyer?"

Shut up, Ryan. No need to highlight the finer points of the woman. They needed to look for faults. Krissy tried to appear casual when she leaned to the side and checked Alisa out from the crown of her perfectly coiffed hair to her expensive-looking, strappy sandals that probably came from Victoria Secret like the bra supporting her perky breasts. She didn't even have fat ankles.

"He's told me all about you." Alisa smiled glancing over her shoulder. Johnny had two beers in his hand.

Ryan and Shelby looked at each other. Casey just nodded. Were they all afraid to ask what they really wanted to know? She didn't need to ask. If he wasn't sleeping with her yet, give it a beer or two and he would be. The girl buzzed with sexual energy. Get Johnny in the same condition and she *knew* what would happen.

Krissy made a smacking noise with her lips and nodded her head. She met Johnny's stare. "He told you all about us? Huh?" She glanced at Alisa. "Did he tell you I'm having his baby?" She let the statement land like a dead horse on the table. Turning away, she stomped off to the back of the bar.

* * * * *

The blood drained from Johnny's head and continued down his body. His throat dried, tongue swelled. He labored for breath and his ribs cracked under the pressure of guilt. His knees locked to keep him standing. Beer sloshed onto his shaking fingers.

Brett took the tall, plastic cups from his hands. He set one in front of Alisa and guzzled some of the other.

"I need to go after her." He looked at the back of Alisa's head. "Shit."

"Why don't you let me take care of this one? You aren't very good a juggling, my friend."

Johnny slapped him on the shoulder. "Thanks," he whispered. "Alisa, I've got to—"

"It's fine, Johnny." She smiled at Brett. "Are you going to keep me company?"

"So Alisa, do you like hot tubs?"

Johnny didn't know how Brett did it. And right now, he didn't care. Bringing Alisa to the bar hadn't been his most brilliant moment. The last few weeks encompassed a series of bad decisions. He'd always considered himself a smart guy. Who knew he could make such monumental mistakes?

He wound his way around the perimeter of the bar. When he didn't see her on the dance floor in the rear room of the bar, he made his way back to the table. "I can't find her."

Casey pointed across the room. Krissy laughed and flirted with a guy playing darts. "Don't get pissed. She came here tonight to work it out and you showed up with a date."

Speaking of dates – “Where’d Alisa and Brett disappear to?”

Shelby giggled.

Ryan snorted. “Dude, you left her with Brett.”

“Hot tub.” Shelby wrinkled her nose. “Remind me to ask him if he’s had it fumigated before we go over,” she said to Ryan.

“Gross,” Casey said. Then she turned to Johnny. “Don’t go over there. She doesn’t want to talk to you right now.”

“I can’t believe I never guessed you were Mr. Perfect.” Shelby shook her head. “We should’ve guessed,” she said to the table.

“I can’t believe you knocked her up! I suppose that if you have to saddle yourself with a woman and kid for the rest of your life, it works best if it’s someone you like.”

Johnny looked away from Krissy and glanced at Ryan. “I love her. I couldn’t let her go have a kid with a stranger.” He turned to Casey. “But I want more than to be her baby’s daddy.”

“She isn’t going to want to hear declarations of love tonight. You brought a date.”

“I’m a dumbass. I have to go over. It only gets worse for Krissy and I if we don’t talk.”

Johnny stared across the room. The beat of his heart pounded in his head. Pregnant, with his baby, he hadn’t known how he’d feel when it finally happened. He still didn’t know how it felt. He was numb. He stepped away from the table. She might not want to talk, but he had to.

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Krissy’s hand shook as she held the dart. Johnny’s eyes burned her skin, made her heart trip, missing a beat. Did he believe her? It wasn’t the way she wanted to tell him. She imagined a slow dance, hip to hip, and whispers in his ear. She’s say something like, “Hold me close while you can, about four more months.” He’d robbed her of the experience by bringing a date.

“Can we talk?” He stood to the side with his hands in his front pockets.

“After my game.” Krissy narrowed her eyes, pitched her arm back, and sent the dart in an arc to the board.

“Is it true?”

She gave the guy with the darts a smile, and took a couple steps toward Johnny. Her palms and pits were damp. She combed her hair off her forehead with her fingers and tilted her head to scrutinize the man she loved. Her tongue swelled in her mouth as she considered the words and the order in which to give them. Baby first or profess her love? Risk her heart or once again lock it away?

“Not here.” She didn’t want to make the most important decision of her life in the bar. Wasn’t it enough they might’ve conceived here? Now pregnant, she didn’t want to expose her baby to the second hand smoke. This would be her last Friday night at Stu’s indefinitely.

A wave of nostalgia flowed over her. She took a good look around. It wasn’t the last time she’d ever come to the club, but never again as a part of the six-pack. She and Johnny were making it seven.

Maybe they could stay the same. Or maybe it could be better. She’d never know if she

didn't try to move past this fear of losing Johnny. She needed to think about how much more she could have in a real relationship with him. Shelby and Ryan's relationship headed in the same direction as she and Johnny. Brett needed a miracle to settle down, and Casey kept her life too organized to make the mammoth mistakes Krissy did.

Only, her baby wasn't an accident. Johnny told her in the beginning that he wanted a baby, their baby.

She lifted her eyes to him. "We need to talk." She swallowed the lump in her throat. Like a boulder, it wouldn't budge. On shaking knees, she crossed the bar to the table where Shelby, Casey, and Ryan watched in wide-eyed fascination. Like her, they probably wondered if Johnny would find himself removed from the bar for disorderly conduct. "We're going."

"You okay?" Shelby came around the table. "Is it true?" she whispered.

Krissy grabbed her cell phone and keys from the table. "I can't talk about it now. I'll call you later."

Casey leaned in. "Don't worry about calling us. Fix this thing you have with Johnny, or you're going to regret it. Listen to Mother." She smiled. Krissy chuckled. Casey was drunk. It didn't happen often.

"I hope you're taking her home."

Ryan nodded.

Shelby wrapped her arm around Krissy's shoulder. "We take care of each other."

"I know."

Krissy snuck a quick glance at Johnny. He'd always taken care of her. Her stomach churned. And tonight she was about to let him do so again.

Chapter Nineteen

The Baby Bond

Johnny maintained an outward show of composure. Yet, inside his heart raced, his stomach tightened, and his nerves stretched to near snapping. He carefully traced the contours of her figure. If indeed pregnant, she wasn't showing. But then, she couldn't be that far along. If she was pregnant. This could all be part of *getting her game on*.

"You ready?"

He refocused on her face. Ready for what, fatherhood?

"I'll drive. I haven't had anything to drink."

Johnny reached out and clasped his fingers around her elbow bringing her to a stop. "Are you pregnant?" The texture of her soft skin under the pads of his fingers stirred emotions. Instant tenderness replaced uncertain motivations. He stared into eyes harboring the same fears roiling in his gut.

Her teeth gnawed on her lower lip. They'd done a grand job of screwing with each other's feelings. She didn't trust him anymore. He let go of her elbow. The fact that he questioned her statement of pregnancy reflected that he didn't trust her either.

Reaching into his pocket for the keys, he swallowed the excess saliva in his mouth. Their fingers touched when she took the keys from his hand and a slight tremor traveled up his arm. Sleeping together hadn't brought them closer together, but made them unfamiliarly uncomfortable with each other.

He marveled at the realization that Krissy might be the future mother of his child. She'd balk at relinquishing her independence. But if he'd learned anything in the past several weeks, it was that it wasn't so much the message as the delivery. He couldn't pamper her. She'd call it controlling. Bringing about changes in their relationship needed done gradually. Life was about to change again. He smiled thinking about how Krissy liked it when he filled her with his cock. Taking it slow wouldn't be a problem. He liked taking it slow.

Over the past weeks, both he and Krissy, mostly Krissy, had focused too much on the baby. He thought about the sex more than making a baby. All that would change if she was pregnant. More than their relationship would change.

He kept thinking of things like her car. It got great gas mileage, took her to job sites over rutted gravel roads, and held plenty of cabinet doors in the trunk and back seat. He groaned. If she was pregnant, they were switching vehicles. He couldn't have her jostled in the driver's seat of her Saturn. His baby needed air conditioning and a comfortable ride. This meant he gave up his truck and learned to like sawdust, or he'd better figure out a way to get another car.

Krissy unlocked the truck doors. "Do you want to drive around or go to my place?"

He put his hand on the door keeping her from opening it. "First, I want the truth." He sandwiched her body between his and the truck. "Are you pregnant?"

"I think so. The test was positive. I've been sick for days, and if you touch my breasts, even an accidental brush, I'll scream."

Johnny nodded. Then a slow smile spread across his lips. The tightness in his stomach

eased. Warmth started in his chest and radiated out to the rest of his body. His fingers burned to touch her.

"You look pleased."

A wisp of hair, lifted by a gentle breeze, drew his attention. He lifted his hand capturing the golden strands between his fingers. "Unless you tell me it isn't mine, then yes, I'm very pleased." His finger trailed to her jaw. "Ecstatic."

Quick, shallow breaths blew against his cheek as he leaned in close to her face. "I know you," he whispered. "You don't sleep around. The baby is mine." His lips grazed her jaw line. A gentle kiss followed. The familiar scent of her shampoo tickled his nose. His tongue flicked her ear lobe. He tasted the sweetness of her skin, blending with the essence of her perfume. She rewarded him with a pleased sigh. "And so are you." He pressed his lips to hers at the same time his pelvis rocked against hers. Her fingers clutched the front of his shirt.

"Johnny, we need rules."

He laughed. "We screwed up a good thing with rules." He rested his wrists on her shoulders, hands dangling, and stared hard into her eyes. "We both have points we want to make. Can we agree that this thing, whatever it is between us, doesn't have a name, a label, or expectations?"

"But—"

He stopped her protests with another kiss. She moaned when he slipped his tongue into her mouth. "Talk at home."

He reached behind her and opened the truck door.

Krissy slid behind the wheel. He closed the door and walked around the front. He smiled. She stared at him through the passenger window. "Unlock the door."

She pressed the power lock button. Johnny opened the door and slid in. He cocked a brow. "Ready?"

"Okay." She started the truck.

He couldn't take his eyes off her. Truth struck him hard. Realization that what he thought was the biggest mistake of his life, actually felt like a dream come true. He never would have bore the news that she carried a child that wasn't his. His baby. His future. From this moment forward, they worked for at least one common goal.

* * * * *

Krissy drove the truck on autopilot. Her thoughts drifted from Johnny to the baby. How did she insure they stayed friends and build a relationship. Yikes, just thinking the word made her look to the sky for a lightning bolt.

She entered the apartment complex lot, drove around to her building, and pulled into her slot careful not to wrap Johnny's truck around the cement pole supporting the carport.

From past conversations, she had a good idea how he'd want to progress from here. Her bottom lip found its way between her teeth. If he asked her for a commitment tonight, she'd give him one. That thought struck fear into her heart. She took a deep breath. Time to remind herself she would trust in their foundation of friendship even though the past few weeks had been shaky. She took responsibility for that. She regretted pushing him away when he wanted to get closer. Tonight, he could get as close as he wanted. She hoped it was

very close.

Krissy unlocked the door and stepped into the apartment. Her heart raced in her chest. Blood pumped through her veins. She hoped Johnny didn't try to hold her damp hand. He'd know how nervous she was.

"Can I get you something to drink?" She tossed her keys and phone on his throne. Then she went to the kitchen.

Johnny tracked her movements through the house. He stared, his eyes searching. He probably expected to see the telltale belly bulge. Well, she'd have a pooch soon enough. Hurrying from the room, she needed to be out of his line of sight to regroup. She took two glasses from the cupboard with shaking hands. Milk might be good for the baby, but the baby hadn't started craving it yet. Until he or she did, Tums with calcium would have to do the trick. Just seeing the half-gallon carton in the fridge made her stomach roll. Nothing to do with nausea or the baby, she'd never liked milk unless it was mixed in a bowl with Cookie Crisp or some other sugary cereal. She wouldn't oppose a Starbucks caramel latte, either. Oh no, those were probably out now too. She didn't want to give the little guy a caffeine headache after birth. She barely lasted a day without an energy drink, or an espresso triple shot.

"Krissy."

She hadn't noticed him. With a shoulder propped against the wall, he leaned on the doorjamb. He straightened and slipped his hands into his front pockets. "It's just me. All we need to decide tonight is when we tell our friends and family."

"I believe I already took care of the friend part. I think we need to talk about us."

"No. No talk about relationships. Where we go from here will take care of itself."

But she wanted him to ask her for forever. Her breath came in heavy pants. If she didn't gain some control over her raging emotions, she was going to hyperventilate in the kitchen.

"I'm going to take another test in the morning." She didn't need to. With the symptoms, she didn't doubt the first one's accuracy. "Would you like to stay tonight? I think you should be here for the confirmation." There, she'd done it. She'd put out her desire to have him stay over. He should be able to make the connection. If he didn't, he'd surely get it when she jumped his bones.

He came fully into the kitchen. "I'll stay." He put his hand on her stomach. "How sick have you been? I want to know everything." His hand wrapped around her waist and slid up her ribs. Her nipples tightened with awareness, but he didn't touch her breast. He trailed his fingers over her shoulder and across her collarbone. Then he touched the throbbing pulse point in her neck. Finally, he cupped her face. She closed her eyes when his thumb stroked her cheek. "Most likely, this will be our only baby." Her eyes flew open. "I don't want to miss a day."

"I'm sorry." She stepped into his arms. "I'm not scared anymore." She chuckled. "Okay that's a lie. I'm scared as hell. No labels and no limits. I want us to be like we've always been." She pulled back and looked in his eyes. "No sappy love sick crap like Shelby and Ryan, or pessimism from Brett to interfere."

"Brett plays both sides. He knows. He heard us when we made love on the washing machine."

"Had sex," she interrupted, and then smiled.

Johnny rolled his eyes. "Either way, he thanked me for making laundry a pleasant and *uplifting* experience."

"Oh Johnny, don't tell me details. I know enough about Brett, his equipment, who he uses it on and how."

He narrowed his eyes. "I hope there isn't a confession coming on."

"Yikes! Brett? Give me a break." The tightness in her chest eased. However, now her nipples responded to Johnny's nearness. He grazed the pebbled peaks with his chest. Getting turned on hurt too much. She desperately wanted him to stay. She needed him to hold her and assure her that the new development although thrilling, wasn't the reason he stayed.

"I'm tired, Krissy." His voice lowered. "Where do you want me to sleep?"

His voice sent heat spiraling to her core. Her heavy breasts ached, yet her nipples hardened for his touch. She craved his mouth on the crested peak.

"You won't hurt my feelings if you ask me to sleep on the couch, and nothing has to happen if we share your bed." He touched her arm, trailing his finger along the sensitive underside.

She smirked. "You can't get me pregnant."

He chuckled. "God, I missed you."

Krissy stepped into his embrace and wrapped her arms around his waist. "I want you to sleep in my bed." She pulled back and looked in his eyes. "And when I get up in the morning, I want you to be there. Don't leave in the middle of the night again."

He brushed a kiss against her cheek with tenderness. "I almost couldn't do it. I watched you sleep for a while. Thought about kissing you awake. In the end, you only want friendship, and I'm trying very hard to stay uncommitted. So I promise not to mention love and devotion, and focus on fun and friendship." Her tummy swooned when he put his hand on it. "And family."

She'd changed her mind. She wanted to make love. The just sex sign flashing in the corner changed into a glaring, red warning light. "Then all we are is friends having a kid?" Her heart hammered, the pounding of her pulse loud in her ears. She hadn't opened up, just for him to close the door.

"We're much more than that."

She let out the breath she held.

"Can I take you to bed now?" The gentle pressure of his lips pushed her backwards a step. And then another.

He tugged on the hem of her shirt, breaking the kiss long enough to lift it over her head, dropping it to the hallway floor.

His knuckles grazed the swell of her breast. She sucked in sharply.

"I love your tits." He bent his head taking one of her nipples into his mouth, pulling a moan of both pleasure and pain from her lips. "I'm hurting you." His warm breath on her flesh soothed.

"Yes, but don't stop."

Johnny backed her into the bedroom. Facing each other, Johnny unsnapped his pants, letting them fall from his hips, to the floor. He stepped out of them and then pulled down his boxers. She missed the sight of his glorious cock jutting out from the thatch of dark, springy

hair. Moisture coated her mouth thinking about the swollen head crowning his thick, silken shaft. She could almost taste the musky essence.

His hand wrapped around the base and stroked it once. Her mind clouded with images of him in the shower, steam creating an ethereal mist between them as they self-satisfied. The room spun. She reached out to grab the dresser, but it was out of reach. She stumbled. Before she could fall, Johnny had her in those strong arms.

"Are you okay?"

"Just dizzy." She held his forearms as he maneuvered her to the bed. "No theatrics tonight," he whispered. "You need to rest."

"But I want to be with you." She pulled on his arm.

He leaned down and kissed her temple. "It's late." Walking to the wall switch, he turned off the light plunging the room into blackness. "Damn, but your apartment is dark. Ouch!"

"What?"

"Stubbed my toe on the dresser. I can't see. I'm not used to it."

The mattress dipped. She smiled when he tugged on the sheet. "If you didn't keep the air on, you wouldn't need this many blankets."

Johnny pulled the comforter over their naked bodies. She snuggled close to his side. "Heavy blankets have always made me feel safe." Her fingers traced over the smooth divide of his chest. "I won't be afraid with you here." With his arm wrapped around her shoulders, her head pillowed perfectly against him.

"Then go to sleep. I'm not going anywhere."

Krissy sighed and tried to lie perfectly still. Johnny's heavy breathing took on a relaxed tempo. She didn't know if he slept. How could he? They were naked. He sighed, relaxing even more. A live wire didn't carry as many volts of current as was shooting through her system. Every nerve frayed.

Blinking didn't help. Her eyes were wide open. Her body waited for the slightest signal that he couldn't sleep. The hum of the alarm clock competed with the hum of the refrigerator. Soon the air conditioner would drown out both. And she'd still be wide awake.

Wetness spread from between her legs onto her thighs. Wanting a connection to Johnny, a throbbing awareness in her body kept her from controlling the clenching spasms of her core. He wasn't holding her as close, yet his fingers still curled around her shoulder. He couldn't be sleeping. To check, she shifted. Her breasts might be sore, but she still sought his touch. If awake, he had to feel her nipples brush his skin.

She slid her leg between his, enjoying the texture of his leg hair against her smooth skin. His breathing changed, no longer deep and steady, but quick and shallow. Her breast pressed against his side. The achingly hard nipples tightened further. Sexual tension radiated between them. She knew he wanted her. The strength of that desire caused the sheet to shift. She trailed fingers down his chest. His pulse leapt to life beneath her ear. She turned her head and kissed his skin. Desperate for a taste, her tongue slipped out from between her parted lips, and flattened against his pectoral. Her fingers wrapped around his upper arm. Leaning up, she gave his nipple a soft nip.

"Johnny," she whispered into the darkness. Her hand wrapped around his cock. "You're up, too."

The crack of his grinding teeth filled the room. "You should rest."

"I will." She slid her body over his. Spreading her thighs to accommodate his hips, she rubbed the fleshy part of her pussy along the length of his cock. He groaned and gripped her hips, thrusting hard. He didn't penetrate, allowing only the pressure to stimulate.

He leaned up and turned her onto her back. "Will I hurt you?" He braced his weight with outstretched arms. In position to fuck, he waited.

She wrapped her arms around his neck, combing the hair at his nape with her fingernails. "I'm learning, Johnny. You'd never hurt me." She angled her hips allowing full penetration. She sighed in contentment at finally joining.

Krissy discovered they could make love without laughter. His slow deliberate strokes, built a steady, intense fire.

"Mmmm." She pressed her fingertips into his back. His body rolled like a wave, crashing into her core. Braced above her, but unable to see his face, he kept his full weight from resting on her tender breasts.

"You feel amazing." His tempo increased. "Can I make you come, Krissy?" Holding himself with one arm, he used the other hand to take her thigh and lift her leg higher. Shifting his angle, he stimulated another area deep inside.

"Oh yes. More." Her toes curled. Lightness numbed her thoughts. Her core contracted. Her orgasm washed over her with the same rhythm of Johnny's thrusts.

"That's it." His muscles tensed, but he didn't follow her with a release of his own.

He stilled and pulled from her body. "What's wrong?"

"Nothing. Everything is perfect. You're beautiful."

"You didn't come."

"Not to worry, I will. We're not done."

This Johnny, she adored. He made her smile, made her heart happy. Funny, yet sensitive, he brought forth uncomfortable emotions. Only with Johnny did she feel safe to express her most intimate needs. Desires having nothing to do with sex, physical expression wasn't a problem. He exposed her heart.

Tears threatened. Grateful for the depth of the darkness, she blinked them away. "Where do you want me?" she asked.

"On your knees."

She knew. "You're such an ass man."

"With you I'm a tit man, too. You're beasts are tender and I don't want to hurt you. I want to fuck you. Hard. Until you're ready for a frontal assault, this is the best way." His hands caressed wherever they touched.

He pushed the covers off the end of the bed. She took position on her hands and knees close enough to the top of the bed to brace her hand against the wall.

"Will I hurt you?" His hand rubbed a small circle on her ass cheek.

"No, but if you don't hit it quick, I might hurt you."

He chuckled. Then she couldn't speak. Johnny slammed his cock, full hilt into her. Arching her back, she cried out.

"You have the best ass." He held her still.

She savored the sensation of his cock stretching, filling, and pressing to the top of her channel. "You can talk dirty to me now. It's not breaking the rules anymore."

“We’ll talk about rules tomorrow,” he said, and then fucked her as promised.

Chapter Twenty

Unfamiliar Familiarity

The crisp sheets tangled around her legs, Johnny's arms circled her waist, just under her breasts. She stretched, lifting her arms above her head and then rolling to face him. She nuzzled her nose into the warm, firmness of his chest. The inhaled scent of his skin reminding her of the passion they'd shared. Even breathing caused his sternum to lift against her cheek. How stupid she'd been to almost toss this away. He'd slept in her bed and held her throughout the night. She kept waiting for the familiar constriction of fear to squeeze her heart. Instead, contentment abounded.

"Morning." His fingers slid into her snarled hair.

She pressed her lips to his flat stomach. "Good morning."

"Great morning. Coffee?"

She pulled away and sat up. "Can't. It tastes like battery acid. My first symptom. Actually, when I started throwing up, I should have suspected. Shelby did. I thought stress made me sick. The night you left me when I wanted you to stay, I thought... I thought you played a head game on me."

He stretched with a growl. "We both played. I wanted to show you we couldn't go back. Too much has changed between us."

He gave her rear a gentle swat.

"Hey now." She smiled knowing Johnny tracked her movements as she went to the dresser for a clean pair of panties and a T-shirt. "Go make yourself coffee. I should be able to handle the smell. At least, better than you'd handle going without."

She headed toward the bathroom. First thing in the morning and it was time to take the second pregnancy test. She closed the door and took an EPT from under the sink. If she got the positive result again, this would be the last pregnancy test she'd ever take. The advanced endometriosis wouldn't give her a chance to conceive again. She put her hand on her stomach. Even though she didn't feel any different inside, a baby could be growing.

Johnny tapped on the door. "Are you taking the test?" She noted the panic in his quickly spoken words. "If you are, will it take long? And if you're not, don't rush. Whenever you're ready."

"I'm taking the test and I don't need any help." She'd become skilled at the task.

"How long does it take?"

She looked at the test tube in her hand and then at the closed bathroom door. She didn't have these nervous butterflies when it was just her waiting for the little plus or minus.

"Krissy?"

"Go make your coffee and quit bugging me. I can't pee with you listening at the door anyway. I'll be out in a minute and we can wait for the results."

"You're sure?"

"Go!"

She turned on the fan hoping to drown out the *distraction* making coffee. Another thought crossed her mind. What did she really want in regards to living arrangements? Was

she ready for real permanence? She wasn't sure she wanted one sleep over to become two, and then three. Crap, what if Johnny never went home?

Krissy shook off her wayward thoughts. Johnny respected her need for time alone. "What am I worried about?" Johnny wouldn't crowd her and he wouldn't give up his apartment. She didn't need to think about anything beyond the test in her hand. After taking care of business, she left the test on the edge of the sink and walked out of the bathroom. She didn't want to see the results without Johnny.

She went to the kitchen to wait the five minutes for the results to show. Johnny stood at the counter with a cup of coffee in his hand. He'd put on his jeans, leaving the top button undone. Her eyes traveled the trail of hair up the hard plane of his stomach to the bare, clean lines of his chest. When her eyes came to rest on his face, he looked at her over the rim of his cup as he took a sip. One eyebrow cocked asking the question for him.

"Five minutes."

He nodded and took another sip of coffee. All at once, the fresh brewed scent hit her empty stomach causing it to roll and churn. She hurried to the couch and lay down before she threw up. "I can't be sick." She didn't want to go into the bathroom for five minutes. Every plan she formulated ended in disaster. Damn it, she wanted to follow through on this one. With eyes closed, she took shallow breaths. She wanted to ask Johnny to time the test, but she was afraid to open her mouth.

"Can I do anything?"

She shook her head.

"Do you want a bucket?"

"No," she whispered. "In..." She cracked one eye, glancing at the clock above the door. "three minutes and forty seconds, I'll throw up. We're going to look at the test together. I can make it."

He stood there, staring.

"Go drink that coffee in the other room." Without opening her eyes, she pointed to the kitchen. "Watch the clock for me."

* * * * *

Johnny moved out of the living room, but didn't lose sight of Krissy. She really was pregnant. This wasn't faking. God, his parents were going to shit. The six-pack would shit. He wiped his clammy palms on the front of his pants. He'd spent the night with Krissy, woke with her in his arms, and planned to make love to her before he took her to his parents to tell them the news. Krissy had blurted the news to enough people last night that he couldn't put off telling his mom. If she found out from anyone else, he'd pay for it until she had the baby in her arms.

He wasn't worried about their reaction to Krissy's pregnancy. His mom was ready for Grandmadox. It was the need to tell her there wouldn't be a wedding that struck fear in his chest. Sure, his parents loved Krissy. However, they also knew Johnny had carried a torch for her since puberty. They would blame her for his unmarried status and he wouldn't allow that. He'd play the bastard if necessary.

Glancing at the clock, he realized the five minutes had passed. He took a deep breath

wanting to wait one more minute. After they looked, life immediately changed. He took a hesitant step into the living room. Krissy rested with her arm bent over her eyes, her chest rising and falling with each shallow breath.

He bent and tenderly kissed her lips. "Ready?"

She sat with slow deliberate movements. Then she jumped from the couch and rushed down the hall. When Johnny followed her into the bathroom, she leaned over the toilet emptying her stomach. Johnny glanced at the counter. The white, plastic test waited. Should he look first or wait?

He went to Krissy and gathered her hair. She pushed him away. "I'm fine."

"You're throwing up."

"Look at the test Johnny, I don't need to. I'm fine once I throw up."

He picked up the test while his heart raced. His gut clenched. Skin tingled. His vision blurred. However, not before he'd read the results. Krissy was going to have a baby. His baby.

Krissy rinsed her mouth, took a drink, splashed water on her face, and dried it on a towel. "You're crying," she said, glancing up. "Johnny?" She took the test from his hand, looked at the plus, and then tossed it into the garbage. "We're having a baby."

Her fingers were on his cheek wiping away his tears as she cried, too.

He took her hand, smiled, and pulled her from the bathroom. "Am I an ass because I want to make love to you? Are you still feeling sick?"

"Not at all. Please, I always feel great after you fuck me." She smiled coyly and wagged her brows.

"After I *make love* to you, we're going to spend the day together. First stop, my parents. And then I think we should get the gang together at Brett's." He fell onto the bed, pulling her with him. "I want to tell everyone." He laughed running his hands over her back, finally cupping her bare ass. He couldn't help smiling. Thong underwear was made for an ass like Krissy's. He ran his finger under the thin string and traced the crease between her cheeks.

She arched her back inviting a deeper exploration. "Did you ever expect it to be this good between us?" She moaned her pleasure when he found her heat.

He rolled her onto her back, snapping the thin string of her panties.

"Hey—" She stopped speaking when he thrust his middle finger deep into the hot, wet core of her pussy. He flicked a few times, slowly withdrew, and then slid in two fingers. The walls of her sex tightened, grew wetter, coating his hand in a wash of her cream.

He stood from the bed, dropping his jeans. "Scoot down."

Krissy slid to the edge of the bed until her legs dangled and her ass nearly fell off. She laughed as Johnny took her ankles and brought them to his shoulders. Lubricating the head of his cock with her juices, he then eased into her body. In this position, he watched her pussy eat his cock. Sliding in and out, glistening, wet. Hot. Smooth. He held on to her thighs, slightly lifting her body to give him deeper penetration. He banged against the top of her cervix with each thrust. The mind numbing smell of their hot bodies, coming together, their essence mingling, made his cock harder, his need greater.

His balls slapped against her ass when he increased the tempo. "As for your question," he said between bursts of energy. "I never considered any of this a possibility." He drove into her hard. "I want you to come for me." He slowed his tempo, let go of one of her thighs, and

touched her swollen clit.

"Oh God, Johnny." She arched off the bed, her body instantly contracting. Her unexpected orgasm brought a smile to his face.

"I've elevated my position from king to God."

"If you fuck me like this every morning, I'll gladly go from pledging allegiance to your cock, to worshipping it. Oh God!" Her knuckles whitened as she gripped the bedding.

Johnny spread her legs wider, letting them fall from his shoulders to bend at the knee in the crook of his elbows. "You feel so good." He didn't want to tell her how much better it felt knowing she wanted him every morning. Hearing her speak of the future made him happy. He loved the smooth muscled walls of her sex encasing his cock in a blissful pleasure. He'd fuck her for breakfast, lunch, and dinner. Then at night, before they went to sleep, he'd make gentle love to her.

He threw his head back, clenched his ass, and filled her with cum.

* * * * *

Krissy needed to sit on her hands, but that would just alert Johnny to her nervousness. She sat hip to hip with him in his truck as they crossed town to his parent's house. Johnny spoke as if they were the prize patrol for the *Publisher's Clearing House*. She suspected more likely, they'd meet with the warm reception due an IRS auditor.

The truck came to a lurching stop. "You ready?" He gave her thigh a pat. "No use putting it off." His hand moved to her stomach.

"I'm scared shitless. We didn't think this through. Your mom is going to freak and your dad is going to wonder why you didn't wear a rubber after all the boxes he bought you throughout high school."

"Mom was too young to be a grandma then. We've grown up and they've grown older."

"You said it might give your dad a heart attack. Are you sure we should risk it?"

His face became solemn as he glanced at her. He took her hand in his. "You're right. Maybe we shouldn't tell them. Dad's health, Mom's moral Christian upbringing, we'd be screwed all the way around. And maybe we've done enough screwing." His eyebrow cocked as if in thought. "I admit, I'll miss the screwing. No more morning wood for the wood girl."

She rolled her eyes. "Shut up. Let's go."

He opened the driver door, and she scooted out after him. "I can't wait until you tell my parents you've knocked up their only daughter."

"And I'll have to tell them it wasn't my fault. You seduced me."

She let out an exasperated sigh. "They'd believe you, too."

Johnny wrapped his arm around her shoulders as they walked to the door. She let the warmth of his skin seep into her. It proved to be a beautiful Saturday morning, but she still felt a little clammy and gooseflesh broke across her skin.

"Would it help if I told you I love you?"

"Fuck you."

He laughed. "You did and that's why we're here."

He knocked once and opened the door.

“Hey everyone,” Johnny’s dad hollered. “Johnny and my pipsqueak are here.”
Krissy groaned. “Great, the whole family is here.”

Chapter Twenty-One

Krissy? Jealous?

Johnny nearly bit his tongue off. Laugh, scream, or ignore what happened? Krissy sat on the passenger seat. Not hip to hip, but pressed against the passenger door, nose to the window, staring at the blur of trees passing her by. So his mom got a little exuberant, his dad a bit presumptuous. Johnny didn't have the balls to tell Krissy his parents were right. She was in a mood and clearly not ready to hear anything about the benefits of marriage.

"So do you want to go home? I still want to go to Brett's."

She faced forward. "At least there I won't have to get grilled about my obligation to you and the baby. Ryan does the only grilling and that's on the barbecue. The last thing our friends are going to encourage is marriage."

He didn't let the statement take root in his mind. At the beginning of this craziness, she didn't think of Johnny as the man to father her baby. They'd come a long way. Sharing a bed, baby, their friendship, it wasn't a far jump into permanent commitment. Maybe if he had a judge do the service and not mention until death do us part or any other reference to long term, she might go for it.

"It isn't that I don't want to get married." She glanced at him. "Why are you smiling?" Her eyes narrowed, with an accusatory glint.

"What's not to smile about? Our friends are going to be happy for us. If Shelby and Ryan were having a baby, what would you say?"

"Congratulations." Her tentative smile widened. "You're right. Who knows what's going to happen in the future. I certainly don't want to wonder for the rest of my life if you married me because of the baby. If we decide... later... not now." She put her hand on his arm. "Please don't say anything now." She giggled. "You'll totally ruin anything wonderful you would have said, if you say it now. If you ever want to say anything, say it when I'm not expecting it. Am I babbling?"

Johnny pulled along the curb in front of Brett's condo. "Yes." He touched her cheek and then trailed his finger down her body until his hand rested on her stomach. "Today we talk about the baby. My parents spoke without thinking. They're happy for us. Do you want to tell them the true nature of our relationship? I don't. They also know that I...well, that we've always been friends."

Krissy scratched her fingernail into the upholstery of the cab seat. "We aren't where we started anymore." She spoke quietly.

"No, we're more than friends, but we're taking it slow."

"I don't want your parents to think I'm a slut."

"You aren't and they love you. I'd never let anyone get away with saying anything derogatory about you." He took her hand and pulled her close. "Can I still call you my bitch?"

"Only if you smack my ass at the same time."

He swept her mouth with his tongue. Like every time he touched her, his body responded. Before, he had to hide. Not any longer. He hummed his pleasure, deepening the

kiss. Her hand touched his chest. Covering it with his own, he slid her fingers to his crotch.

He willed his pounding pulse to slow and took even breaths. "Just so I don't screw up —"

"You can screw any way you want." She kissed him again.

"Can I touch you whenever I want?" His hand went to her breast when she leaned in. "Can I kiss you in front of our friends?" He cupped the back of her head with his palm and sealed their mouths. Her silky hair tangled in his fingers. Her velvet tongue slipped between his lips. He enjoyed the taste of her. Hot and cool. Gentle suction of her mouth pulled a line straight from his cock, hardening his shaft. If she were wearing a skirt, he'd lift her and settle her back down on his lap. Her perfume tickled his nose.

"Once my belly gets big, the whole world will know we've been fucking."

"Making love."

She snorted. "So if I tell you to make love to me right now, or Johnny fuck me, which one makes you hotter?" She lowered the zipper on his fly. His erection strained against the thin cotton fabric of his boxers.

His eyes glanced from Brett's front door to Krissy. Her fingers slipped into his boxers through the slit in the front and wrapped around the swollen girth. "Ahh, fuck."

She kissed his lips. "That's right. Fuck, not make love." She pulled her hand out of his pants, slid across the seat, and opened the passenger door. "Come on. They're probably wondering what happened to us."

"You're going to leave me like this?" His cock stood proudly out of his pants. She licked her lips. "You are a bitch." He lunged for her, but she slammed the door.

"Your bitch," she said through the open window.

Johnny laughed while he adjusted his cock so he could zip his fly. He caught up with her at the front door. His stomach tightened. Even though she'd told the entire bar about her pregnancy, they were confirming it... and the truth about Mr. Perfect.

Krissy walked in ahead of him.

"Hey, wood girl." Brett came out of the hallway. "So what's the verdict? Did Johnny knock you up?"

"Yep." Johnny put his arm around her waist.

"Remind me never to bang a girl on the washer. Bad omen for a guy like me."

"I don't particularly want to know what you do on the washer." Krissy rolled her eyes. "I'm hungry."

"Are you going to get fat?"

Johnny slugged him in the shoulder. "You never tell a woman she's fat. She's probably having a craving."

"Or maybe I'm hungry after a night of *making love*." She batted her lashes. "You haven't fed me anything, but your cock."

Brett turned to Johnny. "You lucky shit."

Johnny could only smile.

* * * * *

Krissy went to the patio. The hot tub steamed and foamed, but no one was in it. Hot

summer days spent by the pool, and cool summer nights in the Jacuzzi. Too bad Brett didn't have a pool. Not to mention she didn't think pregnant women were supposed to raise their body temperature. Didn't mean she couldn't soak her toes.

"So, it's official," she said to Casey and Shelby. "Where's Ryan?"

"He's on his way."

"What's official exactly?" Casey asked. "Because for your two best girlfriends—" She turned to Shelby and then back to Krissy. "We don't know much about what is going on in your life."

"You used to tell us everything." Shelby crossed her arms over her chest. "And then we find out you're pregnant at the bar. Now, I distinctly remember asking you if you were pregnant when you were puking on the side of the road."

"And I knew you were sleeping with Johnny."

"You knew?" Shelby asked Casey. "And you didn't tell me."

"I promised."

"Stop." Krissy feigned a laugh. "You two should know why I didn't say anything." She dropped her chin to her chest. Heat filled her face and tears threatened. She blinked a few times. "You know how I feel about Johnny. He's my best friend. I didn't know what would happen once I asked him to be the father of my baby." And she didn't know what might happen in the future, but she knew they'd be together.

"Well, the rest of us could've told you what he'd want. It's what we've all known he wants. You."

"I know. His parents asked when we're getting married. His mom sat with me on the couch and talked about how quickly we could put together a small ceremony. I was uncomfortable. I don't want Johnny to feel like he has to marry me. I've already pushed him into making a baby." Krissy plopped into a lawn chair.

"I'm sure it was a real hardship for Johnny to fulfill his fantasy of sleeping with you." Casey combed through the grass with her toes.

"Oh, he wants payment."

"I'm almost afraid to ask. Johnny's a tit and ass man," Shelby said, sitting in the grass next to Casey.

Krissy stood from the chair and joined them to form a small circle. Her forehead scrunched as she glanced between the two best friends in the whole world. "Oh, Johnny's an ass man. I can't drink and anal is never a good idea until after the sixth shot of tequila."

"And then in the morning, you wonder what in the hell you were thinking." Shelby laughed.

"Are you going to pay up sober?"

"Casey, I have to." Krissy dropped her head to her bent knees. "Damn, but I want to."

"Why is it a man wants to do it in the ass when there is a perfectly good pussy two inches away?"

Krissy joined Shelby and Casey in their laughter.

"Oh my God, he must be incredible."

Krissy looked up and smiled. "He is."

"Our girl is in love." Casey leaned into Shelby. "And in a relationship."

Shelby screamed. "She has googly-eyes!" Shelby covered her mouth with her hand.

"Shhh." Krissy laughed. "Don't let him know."

"So tell us, how bad was it with his parents?" Casey leaned back and pillowed her head on her palms.

"I wanted to curl into a ball when his dad just stared. I think he's disappointed in us."

"Imagine if they found out their son wants to fuck his woman in the ass," Shelby said and then giggled.

Krissy thought about the baby growing in her tummy. Then she thought of her mother and father and what it would mean to them. "I can't imagine what my mom is going to say, but I doubt she'll start planning a wedding."

"No, she's going to try and figure out a way to get you and Johnny to move back east."

Krissy put her hands on her stomach. "I want my baby to grow up with cousins. Johnny has a big family. I grew up an only child. If it weren't for Johnny, I'd have been alone a lot."

Emotion welled within and robbed her of breath. Johnny's presence in her life outweighed that of her parents. What did that mean? She loved him. Life wouldn't be fun without him. Tears blurred her vision. He would love her and the baby... forever.

"No crying." Casey wrapped her arms around her shoulder. "Loving Johnny shouldn't be scary. He's a good guy, Krissy. You two are perfect for each other and you're having a baby. *His baby*. Don't cry."

She cried because she knew with certainty that she and Johnny were making more than a baby. She never wanted to be away from him when they were friends. As lovers, they were inseparable.

Ryan came out of the house and went to the grill. "So you did the deed with Johnny." He shook his head. "I figured you guys were always doing it on the down low."

"We weren't."

"Yeah, whatever." He lifted the lid of the barbecue and threw on the steaks. "Brett said we're celebrating and I'm in agreement." His eyes locked on Shelby.

"I'll be back." Shelby hurried into the house.

"What's up with her?" Krissy asked.

Casey shrugged.

Krissy glanced at the doors when she heard Johnny's voice. With a beer in hand, he followed Brett. Male bonding at it's best.

"Hi, Casey." He spoke without moving his eyes off Krissy. "Can I get you a drink?"

"I'll get my own." Casey joined Shelby in the house.

Krissy shook her head. Her heart pounded out an unfamiliar rhythm. Nervous and excited, she licked her lips. With Johnny standing beside her, she was eye level with his crotch. Damn it, she couldn't help looking. His cock twitched beneath the denim. He knew she looked. Her eyes rose to meet his. Yep, his thoughts mirrored hers. They shouldn't have played in the car. Now, she was horny. Being this close to his bulge, her imagination reproduced the muskiness of his skin. She could almost feel the smooth, hot texture in her mouth. Her breathing became shallow.

"Christ, you two. You're making me hard." Brett grabbed his crotch and adjusted.

"I'm going to go see what's wrong with Shelby." Krissy stood and fled from Johnny's temptation.

"I think it should be marriage."

Krissy froze with her heart in her throat. Were her friends gossiping behind her back?

"I don't see what the big deal is?" Shelby said. "Vegas is an eight hour drive."

"Elope?" Casey wrinkled her nose. "Tacky." Tacky was talking about your best friend when she sat ten feet away.

"So what are you thinking, a big wedding in a church? Real cute. White dress and all."

"A bride doesn't have to be a virgin to wear white. Give me a break."

Shelby chuckled. "Wouldn't that be funny?"

"I won't be giving you the chance to laugh." Krissy came into the room and slid the sliding, glass door closed. "I don't want him to ask me to marry just because I'm pregnant. God, do you know how scary it is to admit I love him? I'm not saying I'll never marry. But no one is going to push him or me into it." She ran her fingers through her hair. It hurt that her friends didn't understand. She thought they knew her better than that.

Casey and Shelby didn't speak, simply stared.

"I can't believe you're in here talking about it." Krissy went to the fridge for a diet soda. "I need your support. I'm having a baby. I don't need the stress of a wedding. I certainly don't want the stress of not having one."

"How's Johnny ever going to live with her?" Shelby asked.

Casey shook her head. "He's the only one who'll put up with her shit."

"Well, he isn't going to have to worry about that either. We aren't moving in together. So I'd appreciate it if you stay out of my business."

"Oooh." Casey grinned at Shelby. "She is so going to feel horrible."

"I already do. My best friends are in here dogging on me."

Casey winked at Shelby. "She's going to beg for forgiveness."

"Why?" Krissy popped the tab on the soda.

"Because Shelby and Ryan are getting married. How does the foot taste?"

Krissy slapped her hand over her mouth. "Oh My God." She set her drink on the counter and pulled Shelby into a hug. "I am a shit. I'm so sorry."

Shelby laughed and hugged her back. "I didn't want to say anything. You have your good news. When you came in upset about Johnny's parents wanting you to get married, I didn't want to say anything."

Krissy pulled back. "Shelby, I can be happy for you. I agree with Casey. You can't elope. Big or small wedding, we all want to be there." She glanced out the patio doors. "How did he ask? Was it romantic?"

Shelby laughed. "Real romantic. Hey, babe." She altered her voice adding in the machismo. "We should get married. It's just like dating, but you get to fuck every night."

Casey laughed. "You fuck him every night anyway."

"Yeah, but I won't move into his place without getting married. And I live at home. My mother hovers."

"You don't get married to get laid," Krissy said.

Both Shelby's and Casey's mouth dropped open.

"Okay, so I'm not the best person to offer advice on marriage protocol. However, don't deny that the two of you don't love each other."

Shelby got a dreamy faraway look in her eyes. "I won't."

They all giggled.

"Has Ryan told the guys?"

"Yep. That's how the idea of Vegas came about. Ryan wants his bachelor party on the strip."

"And you're okay with that?" For reasons Krissy wasn't ready to explore, she didn't like the idea of Johnny patronizing Las Vegas strip clubs. Okay, she was jealous. That Johnny loved her figure was an incredible turn-on. No way could she compete with the rockin' bodies of those strippers.

"He's marrying me. I have to trust him. And he'll be with Brett and Johnny. They won't let him get into trouble."

"Sounds like you've made up your mind," Casey said.

Shelby shook her head, and then followed Krissy back outside to join the guys. "All I've said is yes." She walked straight into Ryan's arms. Leaning against him, Ryan ran his hand over her back and shoulders. He kissed her temple and then her mouth. Krissy watched and wondered if knowing a commitment existed changed the way you felt.

"Hey." Johnny came up behind her and gave her hair a gentle tug. "Are you surprised?" They both watched Shelby and Ryan.

"Yes and no. Probably no more surprised than they were when we said we were pregnant. Ryan thinks we've been doing it all along."

"Only in my fantasies." Standing behind her, he put his hand on her hip. "Is this okay?"

She nodded.

"And this?" He brushed his lips against her neck.

She nestled her ass against his hardening erection.

"You said something about a prize after I knocked you up." He whispered in her ear while fitting his cock to the crease between her cheeks. "Are you still game?"

"Funny you should mention it. I talked with Shelby and Casey about it."

"You told them I want to fuck you up the ass."

"Don't you mean make love to my ass?" She thought about his incredibly large cock plunging into her. Man, she'd be sore. However, he'd given her what she wanted, a baby. In a few months, she wouldn't be able to give him his. "Normally, I need to be drunk."

"I'll be careful."

She tipped her head when he nuzzled her neck.

"Casey, you want to get in the hot tub with me? Since Shelby and Ryan are doing it and—" Brett nodded in Johnny and Krissy's direction. "They've got proof they're doing it."

"Never, Brett. We are *never* going to have sex."

"I think you should know what you're turning down."

Casey screamed and ran into the house. Brett gave chase.

Johnny laughed, wrapping his arms around Krissy. "I've never seen Brett drag a woman kicking and screaming to the bedroom."

"We'll find him a hottie in Vegas." Ryan smiled.

Krissy's tummy swooped. Doubtful she'd ever be comfortable with Johnny going to the strip joints, not without her anyway. "When are you all thinking of going?" If Johnny planned to do Vegas, she planned to make him a lasting memory to take with him.

"You'll go too," Johnny said near her ear.

She shook her head. "I doubt I can get the time off work. Any vacation time I do have, I need to save for when the baby comes." She didn't mention the money it would cost. If Johnny decided to go, she didn't want him feeling guilty.

Shelby stepped away from Ryan. "We haven't decided anything yet."

Krissy hoped they decided to stay in town. Damn, this jealousy thing. She didn't want Johnny being hit on and she sure as hell didn't want him looking at hot pieces of ass. There she'd said it, well, thought it. That was good enough under the circumstances. Revealing insecurities in a new relationship insured certain suicide. At least, it had been for all the men she'd dated.

Casey rejoined the group. "Another official announcement. Brett and I will never date. He's lucky he can still walk." She picked up a soda from the table. "Who's is this?"

"Mine," Krissy said.

Casey guzzled. "He kissed me."

"Slipped her the tongue, too." Brett smacked her on the ass.

Casey choked, sputtering soda from her mouth.

"She's right. No compatibility."

"I don't have big enough tits for Brett," Casey said once she recovered. "And I'm too smart."

Johnny wanted out of this conversation. His dick hurt it was so hard. Krissy left him with the distinct impression that he was going to get the opportunity to tap her luscious ass. He could barely follow the conversation between Casey and Brett. All he wanted was to take Krissy by the hair like a caveman, pull her into the house, and dominate.

"Is the food almost done?" Krissy went to the grill. "Because I'm eating for two and we're hungry."

"Look out, Ryan. You should've heard her earlier in the kitchen. Feed her quick."

"Johnny's been feeding her." Brett sat in a lawn chair and stretched out his legs. "You still hungry, wood girl? I'm sure we could —"

"I'd starve first."

Casey went into the house and returned with a bag of *Doritos*. They ate and talked about the wedding and the baby. Johnny watched Krissy when Shelby grew animated discussing the details of what she would consider a perfect wedding. He smiled. Making the plan, breaking the rules, and creating their own kingdom, had certainly been an epiphany for Krissy. He'd give Krissy whatever she wanted. He'd take her to Maui and marry her on the beach if that was the wedding she wanted.

"We want all of you with us," Ryan said. "That's it."

"When we mentioned Vegas, we didn't know about the baby. I won't get married unless all of us are there. We're a six pack."

Brett pointed to Krissy's belly. "And a shot."

Krissy's smile turned to a yawn.

"You ready to go," Johnny asked.

She nodded. "I've been tired. Another symptom." Krissy hugged Shelby.

Shelby kissed Krissy's cheek. "Congratulations."

"You too," Krissy said, and then followed Johnny out of the condo.

"I have wanted to touch you like this for so long." His hand caressed her shoulder as they walked.

"Why were you hesitant to sleep with me if you'd been imagining us together?"

A hand on her elbow kept her from climbing into the cab. "I never just wanted to sleep with you and you weren't ready for more. I suspected you cared, but I was too chickenshit to risk rejection. You don't know how many times I wanted to pull you close and kiss you breathless. That's how you leave me, you know. Breathless. You're so beautiful and so much fun to be around. I couldn't see myself with anyone else." He touched her cheek. "Admit you worried, too." He furrowed his brows staring into her eyes. "And now I can't imagine not being with you."

She threaded her arms around his waist and pressed herself against him. "I'm not scared anymore." Her breath was warm on his face.

The muscles in his forearms tightened. He braced his palms on the truck top. "You started this when we arrived. Are we going to continue on Brett's front lawn?" Not that it would surprise the neighbors. The six-foot fence surrounding Brett's small back yard and patio afforded some privacy, but it wasn't a sound barrier.

"Let's go home. It's late on the east coast and I want to call my parents while I'm feeling brave."

That was a quick way to kill the mood.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Krissy Loves Johnny

Johnny's hand glided over the smooth plane of Krissy's stomach. The skin quivered under his touch. It was difficult to imagine her small waist, which he could span with his hands, swollen with his baby. He pressed his lips to her navel, tunneling his tongue into the dip, taking the small belly ring between his teeth. He kissed his way to her ribs. Her breaths echoed in his ears. The cotton sheets swished when Krissy brought her knees up and spread her thighs.

He moved between them and slid down the cool sheets, kicking the quilt to the floor. His body heated, hungry to mate. His cock jumped at the sight of the pink folds of her pussy glistening with wetness. Cupping her ass in his palms, he lowered his mouth and tasted. He flared his nostrils, sucking in the muskiness of her arousal. The sweet familiarity of her perfume wafted up from the sheets as she dug in her heels and lifted her hips.

"Johnny," she whispered.

With rapid thrusts, he darted his tongue in and out of her core. Then he pulled her nubbin into his mouth. He breathed in her essence, sucked on the inner folds, savoring the flavor. He closed his eyes and brought his ministrations back to her clit. He wanted her to come. Her hips rocked against his mouth. Her fingers threaded into his hair, then fisted, holding him close. He wasn't going anywhere.

She leaned back on the bed pillows. Johnny refocused on her face. Sliding two fingers deep, her thighs snapped to the side of his head. Her body arched off the bed and her internal muscles contracted around his hand.

"Oh yes!" she cried.

Cream slicked his fingers. He lapped, coating his tongue, drinking her. A feral growl erupted from deep in his chest as she rode her climax.

Krissy's eyes glazed over in ecstasy. Trailing her hands over her stomach, she held her generous breasts in her hands, rolling the pouting nipples between her fingers. He'd been hesitant to kiss and suck her tits. "Aren't you sore anymore?"

She gulped air, settling back into the pillows. "A little tender tonight." She squeezed her breast and offered it to him. Johnny crawled over her body and latched his mouth to her erect nipple. He kissed, stroking his tongue over the hard peak. Then he pinched it like a ripe berry between his lips.

He raised his eyes to hers. "I'll come if you keep that up." Her hand caressed the length of his shaft.

"We don't need to worry about wasting your ejaculations anymore. You can come wherever you want." Her thumb pressed against the slit in the head, drawing out a bead of moisture. "What do you want, Johnny? Tonight it's all about you." She placed her hands on his cheeks and drew his mouth to hers.

Their tongues swirled together. She nibbled his lower lips before pulling it into her mouth. Johnny's heart danced in his chest. "You know what I want. But we don't have to if you don't want to."

She laughed and bit his jaw. "What is it with men? They all want women to take it in the ass."

Johnny brushed her hair off her forehead. "Have you ever done it before?"

He suspected she'd have told him if she had. She told him everything else. At least they'd never have the uncomfortable conversation regarding sexual history. She knew his secrets, too.

"I've never had sex, just fingers."

He had. Krissy had made jokes in the past. A girl wasn't a keeper if she didn't like to get a little kinky. Hopefully, Krissy now realized the women in his past weren't keepers because they weren't the woman he loved. "Only if you want it. I don't ever want *us* to be all about me, or all about you. What makes us special is the connection."

Her smile tilted into a mischievous smirk "We need a lubricant."

"You're sure. I don't want to hurt you." He smiled, kissed her lips, and then smiled at her again. "You say stop, and we're done."

"Top drawer. You'll get a kick out of the name."

He left her side and went to the dresser, where he found a bottle of Astro-glide tucked in next to her eclectic assortment of panties. He went back to the bed leaving the lubricant within reach. His blood zinged through his veins. His cock had never been so eager. Glancing down, he didn't think it had ever looked bigger. Krissy was a small woman. If he weren't careful, he could tear her up. But if he did it right, he'd make her fly apart.

"Do you want me on all fours?" She smiled while sitting up, and then got on her hands and knees. Glancing over her shoulder at him, she wiggled her rear. The gecko tramp stamp appeared to crawl into the arch of her back.

Damn, but she was cute. Her hair, tangled and messy from her last orgasm, fell over her shoulders. Her cheeks still flushed, and her lips reddened from his kisses. It was all he could do to maintain. He wanted to possess her in every way, but he needed to give her another orgasm first.

He knelt behind her running his hand over her smooth thigh. She stiffened. "Baby, you have to relax." He palmed the curve of her firm butt cheek. He lowered his head, burying his face in the split between her cheeks. He lapped at her pussy, dragging his tongue to the tight, wrinkled, center of her ass. She moaned, pressing into his mouth. His fingers dug into her hips, anchoring her.

"Are you ready?" Johnny leaned over her back. The head of his cock poked at her hot opening. Sliding in, her body adjusted to his girth, a tight sheath gripping the length of his penis.

"Change your mind?" she asked, arching deeper. "Ohhh."

He penetrated slow and steady. Sinking in and pulling out, he fanned the flames of her arousal. "Not to worry, I can last." He closed his eyes, enjoying the sensation of her wet walls sucking him deep. Smooth and hot, she pulsed around him.

Rocking his hips in an increasing rhythm, he reached down for the lubricant. Opening the lid, he squirted the thin, watery gel into his hand. She stiffened. "No, babe." He rubbed her pale cheek with his other hand. "Don't tense up. Relax." He let the gel drip from his fingers, watched it slide from the divot at the base of her tailbone, down her crack. He spread her cheeks and dragged his finger along the seam. She glanced over her shoulder when he

circled the puckered hole with his fingertip. His finger went lower until he touched his shaft, and then cupped his balls, rolling them in his hand. Blood rushed into his cock making it harder. He could feel it growing as he pistoned into her.

He moved his hand back to her crack. Placing his palm on the curve of her cheek, he pressed his thumb to the wrinkled hole and massaged away the tension.

"Are you scared?"

"I trust you."

With his next thrust, he pushed his thumb an inch into her clenched sphincter.

"Eye! Holy, jeezus, make me come, Johnny!"

He laughed replacing his thumb with his middle finger. He finger fucked her with the same tempo as his cock plunged into her pussy.

Two fingers.

She cried out working her hips to get harder, deeper penetration on his shaft. Krissy trembled. He scissored his fingers. When her body began to spasm and clench, he gritted his teeth and growled. Damn it, he'd hold on. Her orgasm ebbed. He took his fingers from her hole and replaced them with the smooth, red head of his cock. The already taut muscles objected to the intrusion.

Her breath came in heavy pants, echoing in the quiet room. His heart pounded in his ears. The smell of their sex fed his appetite. Wanting to slam her ass, but knowing he'd hurt her, he pressed forth inch by agonizing inch allowing her muscles to accept him.

He continued until his entire cock disappeared into her sweetness. He rounded his chest over her back and held her close. "You okay?"

She was breathing hard, excepting his entry. Her large, luscious breasts swayed and jiggled. He reached under her, cupping them with the nipple between his fingers. He barely backed his hips away and then pressed further.

She screamed, arched, and threw her head back. "Now!"

Johnny straightened. He gripped her hips, used his thumbs to spread her cheeks, and pumped his hips. The erotic visual of his cock, her ass, tangles of blond hair, and the sexy tramp stamp caused emotions to swell in his chest. It seemed as if he'd loved her forever. Now they had forever. His grip tightened. His vision blurred. His climax built in a turbulent abandon. Krissy's limbs trembled as he pulled out and slid in.

"Oh hell, Johnny." She thrashed when she had another orgasm. "It's happening again." Her thighs vibrated. "Johnny!"

He pumped faster. Flames of desire burned, heating his thighs and groin. Reaching between their bodies, he shoved three fingers into her pussy just when another spasm clenched her core. Krissy rode a wave of orgasms. Johnny became light headed. His balls tucked close, drawing up just before his shattering release. Cum rushed from his rigid cock, spurting into her ass. He growled, slammed deep, and then stilled.

"Johnny?"

"Mmm." He slowly slipped his dick from her body, reveling in the sensation of her sphincter taut around his erect shaft.

He lay on his side and brought her into the circumference of his arms. Spooning, he kissed her head, and stroked her soft, warm arm. The sheets were damp. The musky, intoxicating scent of his semen permeated the room. Her cheeks were slick with it. The beat of

his heart slowed until his breathing pattern matched hers. He ran his hand softly along her arm until their fingers touched. She gripped his fingers, laced them with hers. "Are you okay? Did I hurt you?"

She shook her head.

With a gentle coaxing, she turned to face him. "Something's wrong." He wiped tears from her cheek with the pad of his thumb.

* * * * *

Hypnotized by his eyes, she never knew he could look at her expressing such love and devotion. She tingled from the warmth of his body. She touched his lips, tracing the shape with her finger. She'd surrendered completely to his passion, drawn to a height of release she'd never experienced before. She sighed in sated exhaustion.

"I love you. The sweet, sappy, love that makes others around cringe with embarrassment. I can't stand near you and not touch. I want you to kiss me, wrap me in a haven of protection because when I'm with you, the rest of the world simply fades away." She wanted him in ways that both thrilled and frightened her. Unfamiliar yearnings blended with faith and trust in who they were as a couple. She swallowed the lump in her throat. They'd been in love, together, long before her epiphany.

His eyes darkened with unshed tears. Warm lips slowly descended to meet hers, brushing once, twice, then covered her mouth. Blood heated in her veins, flowing hot into her sex making her hungry for more. She drank his kiss, shivering with arousal when his tongue slipped past the barrier of her lips. Her emotions swirled, thoughts spun. She sucked his lower lip, while he kissed her upper.

"I love you, too."

"So where do we go from here? We need a plan."

"No plans." His chuckle vibrated into her breasts. "We do better living on the fly."

She combed her fingers through his hair. "Different plans. Not for us, but we need to make decisions regarding the baby. He or she is going to need a home. This is a one bedroom and you live in a box."

He pulled back and narrowed his eyes. "Are you saying you're willing to move in with me?"

She nearly burst with emotion. He had her heart, her love, and now she was ready to share her life. "Johnny, I'm willing to do a lot more than that."