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Under the
Cover Lovers



Tupelo Honey

Tina Gallagher

TUPELO HONEY

BY

TINA GALLAGHER

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TUPELO HONEY

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TUPELO HONEY

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Tina Gallagher

Dedication:

To my husband, who supports me in all that I do.

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Chapter One

“Naked?” Cassie shrieked.

“As a jaybird,” Jodi confirmed.

“What’d you do?”

“I interviewed him. That is my job.”

“Your job is to interview naked men?”

Jodi rolled her eyes. “My job is to interview athletes. Tim’s an athlete.”

“He’s more like a jockstrap,” Cassie snorted.

“Tim’s not a bad guy. He even put a towel on during the interview. I think he was slightly embarrassed that I caught him with his pants off.” It was Cassie’s turn to roll her eyes. “Hey, you dated him, not me.”

“Yeah, a million years ago.”

“It was high school,” Jodi pointed out. “And, from what I understand, you were crazy about him.”

“I was young and naive.”

“You had sex with him,” Jodi said. “In fact, he was your first, wasn’t he?”

“Don’t remind me,” Cassie groaned.

“Was he that awful?”

After a slight hesitation, Cassie answered, “No.”

“It’s funny we never talked about him,” Jodi said. “We’ve dissected every other relationship either of us ever had.”

“Well, I don’t want to talk about this one, much less dissect it.”

“Okay.” Jodi dragged the word out, telling Cassie it was anything but.

Cassie let out a sigh of relief when Jodi redirected her attention to her burger and fries. They ate in silence for a short while before Jodi spoke again.

“From what I saw today, you must’ve been one happy girl.” She picked up a french fry and nibbled on it.

“That nice?”

Jodi stopped mid-chew. “Are you asking me?”

"I never actually saw it," Cassie mumbled.

"What? Why not?"

"It was dark." Cassie snorted. "Jodi, I was seventeen-years-old. I wasn't exactly sexually liberated. I barely touched it."

Jodi clucked her tongue. "You missed out."

Cassie was trying to think of a clever retort when the topic of their conversation approached the table. She'd been so wrapped up in their discussion she didn't even notice him enter the restaurant.

"Long time, no see." Tim directed that comment to Jodi then turned to Cassie. "Cassie Evans, it definitely has been a long time."

When his cerulean eyes met hers, Cassie remembered how he'd managed to get her out of her pants fifteen years earlier. She got lost in his gaze and felt cold when he turned his attention to Jodi once again.

"Jodi, I forgot to ask you this morning. Are you going to the benefit Saturday?"

"Is that an offer?" Jodi flipped her hair and winked.

"Mark wanted me to ask," Tim said, referring to his teammate.

"Yes, I'll be there and Cassie will be accompanying me," Jodi replied.

Tim's eyebrows lifted and he redirected his attention to Cassie. "You're going?" he asked. She nodded. "Save a dance for me, okay?"

Without waiting for an answer, Tim excused himself and returned to his table.

Cassie watched his retreat. His broad shoulders, tapered waist, and tight butt were a sight to behold as he walked away.

"Yowza," Jodi said, drawing Cassie's attention her way. "There were so many sparks flying between you two, I'm lucky I didn't get burned."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"The hell you don't," Jodi chuckled. "If Tim looked at me like that, I'd melt."

Cassie shifted in her seat and felt the moisture that had collected between her thighs while Tim was in her presence.

"You okay over there?" Jodi asked in a too-knowing tone.

"I'm fine." Cassie chewed her sandwich and took a minute to collect her thoughts and her hormones. In order to change the subject she said, "Nothing's happened with Mark yet?"

"No." Jodi sighed. "Somehow I've managed to find a shy hockey player."

"Have you made a move on him?"

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“Yes and no.” Jodi sipped her iced tea. “I’ve let him know I’m interested, but I haven’t done anything about it.”

“Did you interview him?” Jodi’s smirk let Cassie know she understood what was being asked.

“The man blushes every time I walk into the locker room, and I think he showers with his underwear on.”

“So you haven’t seen the goods, huh?”

“No, but that’s okay.” Jodi blushed. “It’s kind of sweet, actually.”

“Sweet?”

“He’s so shy, it’s adorable. After dealing with arrogant, exhibitionist jocks, he’s like a breath of fresh air in a really smelly locker room.”

“I don’t know how you do what you do.”

Jodi shrugged. “At first I took the job to have a steady paycheck, but now I really like it. Some of the guys can be real jerks, but most are okay. But I’ve never met anyone like Mark before.”

Cassie looked at her friend’s glowing eyes and smiled.

“Maybe something will happen on Saturday.”

“Maybe for both of us.”

Cassie washed her hands and eyed herself critically in the mirror. Her make-up could use a touch up, but she’d have to take care of that later. If she reapplied under the harsh lighting in the restaurant bathroom, she’d end up looking like a clown. Her blond corkscrews had been the bane of her existence when she was younger, but she’d stopped trying to tame them a few years back.

She still longed for sleek, shiny hair, but it just wasn’t in the cards. Whenever she tried to straighten her hair, it ended up looking dry and frizzy. Besides, men seemed to really like her riotous curls.

She left the bathroom and took only two steps before crashing into the solid wall of Tim’s chest.

“Tim.”

She hated the breathless sound of her voice when she said his name. She also hated the way her body responded to his innocent touch. Cassie mentally snorted. As if Tim’s touch could ever feel innocent.

“Cas,” he said, using the nickname he’d always preferred. “I’m glad I caught you before you left.” He chuckled. “Literally.”

Cassie allowed herself to enjoy the deep rumble of his laugh and the feel of his hands on her arms before steeling herself again.

“Why?”

The tone of that one word cooled the air surrounding them. Tim released her arms and took a step back.

“I wanted to say hi.”

“Hi,” Cassie said. “And bye.”

She stepped around him and headed toward the front door of the restaurant. She needed air and she needed it now. Tim’s raven hair and blue eyes made him the epitome of tall, dark, and handsome, but did he have to smell so damn good too? Spicy citrus cologne combined with his own scent filled her nostrils even as she gulped in crisp, fall air.

“Cas, wait up.” Tim caught up with her and wrapped his hand around her elbow. “Why’d you run out like that?”

Cassie turned to face him just as a gust of wind carried his intoxicating scent to her. She breathed in and savored the aroma for a moment before meeting his gaze.

“What do you want, Tim?”

He shrugged and looked unsure.

“I just wanted to talk to you.” When she didn’t say anything, he added, “How’ve you been?”

Cassie tilted her head and studied him through narrowed eyes. He looked nervous and she wondered if maybe she had the advantage with him for the first time since her senior year in high school.

Not that she’d seen him in the fourteen years since they’d broken up, not in person anyway. Yet he’d always been in her thoughts.

Every time she dated a new man, kissed him, even fucked him, Tim had been on her mind. Probably because he’d been her first. No girl ever forgot her first.

“I’ve been fine,” she said. “And you?”

“Good.” His gaze drifted down to his shoes before meeting Cassie’s again. “I’ve been good.”

“So I’ve read.” Cassie wanted to kick herself for saying that.

“You follow hockey?”

“Not specifically, but I do read Jodi’s column.”

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“Oh.” He nodded his understanding. “How do you know Jodi?”

“We were roommates in college.”

“And now? Do you still live together?”

Cassie knew what he was really asking and figured she’d give him an answer.

“No, I live alone.”

“Hmmm.” That simple sound spoke volumes. He seemed very interested, and part of Cassie gloried in that fact. A woman would have to be dead to not enjoy Tim O’Brien’s interest.

“Would you like to go get a cup of coffee?” He gestured toward a shop across the street. “It seems kind of silly to be carrying on a conversation in the middle of the sidewalk.”

Cassie glanced at her watch.

“I really have to get going. I have an appointment, and I’m running late as it is. Disappointment clouded Tim’s eyes, but he smiled.

“Maybe I can get a rain check?”

Cassie nodded. “Maybe.”

That said, she turned and walked down the block toward her car. She halted and turned back when he called her name.

“I’ll see you Saturday.” His words were a promise, punctuated by twin dimples on either side of his magnificent smile.

“See you Saturday,” Cassie managed to say before retreating to the safety of her car. As if mere metal could block the potency of Tim’s sex appeal.

Chapter Two

Cassie tossed and turned, but try as she might, she couldn't get to sleep. At first she tried to fool herself into believing it was the extra cup of after dinner coffee keeping her awake, but eventually admitted the real reason behind her insomnia. Tim.

She hadn't stopped thinking about him since their run-in two days earlier, and he haunted her dreams. Like Freddie Kruger's victims, she was scared to sleep, afraid he'd visit her in the night. Only Tim never hurt her. In her dreams, he raised her body to heights of pleasure she'd never known.

Giving up on sleep, Cassie climbed out of bed. She went into the kitchen and put the kettle on the stove, then pulled a mug and a peppermint tea bag from the cupboard. While she waited for the water to boil, she thought about her past with Tim.

They were teenagers when they'd had sex. What had they known about it? Fumbling in the dark was all they'd done.

Cassie shook her head at that last thought. It wasn't true. They'd made love the best they knew how. Tim had been gentle and patient at a time when it couldn't have been easy for him to be either.

Their relationship happened so long ago, it seemed silly to be lamenting over it, but she couldn't stop herself. She'd loved him with all her heart and he'd taken that poor, trusting organ and stomped on it.

The kettle whistled and Cassie poured steaming water into her mug and carried it to the parlor. After turning the television on, she sat on the couch and curled her legs beneath her. She nearly burned herself when she jumped up as Tim's image filled the screen.

At first, Cassie thought she was hallucinating, and felt relieved when she realized she was seeing a re-broadcast of a local talk show. Tim's trade to his hometown team, the Chicago Ice Dogs, was big news. "Local Boy Returns Home" was plastered across all the papers, and apparently spilled over to another media.

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Cassie listened to Tim's words for a moment before pushing the mute button. She hadn't gotten a chance to study him while in his company. Not like she'd wanted to anyway.

The contrast between Tim's raven hair and eyebrows and his pale blue eyes was breathtaking. He'd always been handsome, but maturity had chiseled his features, defining his straight nose and high cheekbones, making him downright gorgeous.

His sensuous mouth and dimples on either side of it softened the image and made him that much more mouthwatering. Faint lines radiated from his eyes when he smiled now, but that too added to his appeal.

Cassie couldn't help but wonder what other changes time had brought to him. His chest used to be smooth and she'd loved to run her hands over it, enjoying his skin's softness and the steely strength underneath. Had the years added crisp hair to the texture?

Before she could expound on that, the phone rang. Glancing at the clock, she answered it.

"Hello."

"What's up?"

"Jodi, do you know what time it is? I hate getting phone calls in the middle of the night. It scares the hell out of me."

"Sorry," Jodi said, sounding anything but. In fact, she sounded downright smug. "Guess who I just saw." Without waiting for Cassie to answer, she said, "Tim."

"Jodi, was it necessary to call me at one o'clock in the morning to tell me that?"

"Not really. But it was necessary to call and tell you that he was asking about you."

"What did you tell him?"

"What's to tell?" Jodi said. "Maybe I could dig up something interesting from college, but now? Nada, nothing, zippo."

"Thanks a lot."

"You have to admit you've been having a dry spell." Cassie didn't justify that with an answer and Jodi continued. "But I'm sure that'll change if Mr. O'Brien has anything to say about it."

Her nipples hardened at that thought, but Cassie would be damned before she'd share that information with Jodi. Ignoring the tingling sensation that zipped through her body, Cassie concentrated on sounding stern.

"Did you call just to aggravate me?"

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“No, it’s just a side benefit. I really called about tomorrow night,” she said. “I have to work all day so I’ll be incommunicado. What time do you want to go?”

“Around seven?”

“I’ll pick you up then. Oh, and Cassie?” Jodi said on a chuckle. “Make sure you dress sexy for Tim.”

Before Cassie could react, the dial tone sounded in her ear.

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Chapter Three

Cassie soaked in a tub full of bubbles. The sweet scent of gardenia filled the air, and she willed herself to relax. Her muscles were drawn tight in both anticipation and dread of the night ahead.

Tim had made it clear that he planned to see her at the children's benefit. Cassie had promised to accompany Jodi long before Tim signed on with the Ice Dogs. She couldn't back out on her best friend. Jodi was hoping to hook up with Mark and that wouldn't be an option if she showed up on another man's arm.

Which brought one question to mind. Why didn't Tim have a date? Cassie knew he'd never bring someone and try to make a move on her, and he'd made it clear that he intended to do just that.

He'd just returned to town, but Cassie was sure he could have a woman just by snapping his fingers. Fourteen years earlier he'd had women fighting to get near him and Cassie couldn't imagine that had changed. In fact, it'd probably increased with his popularity.

She let herself sink further into the warm water. Looking back, she knew it'd been foolish to think she and Tim had a future. Then again, hindsight is always twenty-twenty.

At eighteen, she'd actually thought he'd be faithful, even on the road. What a dream that had been. One that turned into a nightmare when she'd decided to surprise him in a Detroit hotel.

Her last Friday class had been cancelled, and she'd taken the opportunity to drive to Detroit and surprise him. It'd taken her five hours to get there, and she'd missed the game, but that didn't matter. After three months apart, she and Tim were in the same city. The problem was, Tim wasn't expecting her, and she didn't know his room number and the hotel clerk wasn't talking.

She sat in the hotel lobby for an hour before Tim's roommate walked through the sliding doors. He told her the room number and gave her his key so she could surprise Tim.

Racing to the room, Cassie swiped the key card and swung the door open. It was dark in the room, but she couldn't miss Tim sitting naked on the edge of the bed or the redhead who was giving him a blowjob. If the look on Tim's face was anything to go by, the girl had been pretty good at it, too. Then again, at eighteen, he probably hadn't been too picky.

Cassie sat up and pulled the plug out of the drain. She dried off and wrapped herself in her favorite terry robe. Thinking about Tim and what happened in the past wasn't a good idea. He'd broken her heart, and even thinking about it now caused a dull ache in the center of her chest.

It had taken her years to truly get over. If things had ended differently, her reaction may have been different, but, as it was, she'd left the relationship feeling inadequate. Why shouldn't she? Tim had chosen casual sex over her undying love. Who wouldn't feel the slap?

He'd said there was no reason to end their relationship, but how could she stay by his side knowing what he'd be doing when she wasn't with him? That would have hurt more than what she felt when she walked away.

Shaking her head to clear it, Cassie headed to her closet to pick out a dress for the benefit.

Cassie watched Jodi and Mark on the dance floor. He'd finally made an official move and her friend looked radiantly happy.

Good for her. She deserves to be happy.

Squinting, Cassie tried to see past the strobe lights and gyrating sea of people. She told herself she wasn't scanning the room looking for Tim, nor did she wear her sexiest dress and come-fuck-me heels to impress him.

She felt him behind her before he made his presence known, and her traitorous body broke out in goosebumps. His scent enveloped her even through the smell of cigarettes.

"Why aren't you out there?"

Tim's voice urged Cassie to drag her eyes from the dance floor and look at him. Big mistake. In every day clothes he looked amazing, but in black tie, Tim O'Brien was mouthwatering. That's probably one of the reasons she turned into a cliché and lost her

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virginity to him on prom night. Not wanting to think about that, Cassie answered his question.

“My shoes pinch when I fast dance.”

“Then why wear them?”

“Because they make my legs look amazing.”

His gaze drifted to the objects in question and lingered.

“That they do.” He dragged his gaze back to hers. “Don’t forget you promised me a dance.”

“I don’t think I ever gave you an answer.”

“For old times’ sake?”

Cassie was about to tell him “for old times’ sake” wouldn’t sway her to do anything with him when *Tupelo Honey* by Van Morrison began to play. Only the first soft notes filled the room, but she knew the song immediately. It had been their song.

Her eyes met Tim’s and she was both surprised and pleased to see recognition there. Any hostility Cassie felt toward him started to drain out of her. Tim held out his hand and before she could think twice, Cassie grasped it.

Without words, Tim led her to the dance floor and pulled her into his arms. It felt so good, so familiar, and so right. Cassie snuggled in and rested her cheek against his chest.

The beat of his heart was strong and steady and mesmerizing. She tangled her fingers into the hair that brushed his collar and moved closer. Tim groaned and squeezed her tighter, encouraging her to shift closer still. By song’s end, Cassie’s body was plastered against the solid wall of his.

The song stirred memories and feelings Cassie couldn’t forget. It had been playing the first time they made love in the back seat of his Chevy Nova and every time thereafter. It also brought her libido to life, which she couldn’t ignore. It’d been a long time between men, and her vibrator just wasn’t getting the job done anymore.

She’d never found sex with strangers particularly appealing, but Tim wasn’t a stranger. Sure, they hadn’t seen each other in fourteen years, but they had a past and memories and a song together. What could be wrong with taking pleasure in each other’s bodies for a night?

The fact that she was already wet seemed like a sign they should do just that. The fact that he was rock hard made the sign glow neon. Cassie rubbed against him and snuggled closer as a new song began.

“Cassie?” Tim’s voice sounded thick.

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“Hmm?” she purred.
“Let’s get out of here.”

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Chapter Four

The ride to Tim's apartment was a veritable love fest. At the first red light, they made out like horny teenagers. At the next, he caressed her nipples into sensitive peaks. At the third one, Tim discovered she was wearing thigh highs instead of pantyhose and took full advantage of the fact. He reached his hand between her legs and slipped a finger inside her. When his thumb started to circle her clit, Cassie nearly came. A horn blast from the car behind them saved her from embarrassing herself.

Inside the door of Tim's apartment, Cassie boldly reached for the waistband of his pants and pulled him to her. Taking the lead, she sealed her mouth over his and thrust her tongue inside. The kiss was wet, wild and earthy. Cassie unbuttoned his pants and lowered the zipper, then yanked them down his legs. His tented boxers quickly followed.

Cassie broke from the kiss and looked down. Jodi hadn't exaggerated. Tim's cock was long and thick and perfectly pink. Cassie reached out and gripped it, then started slowly stroking.

Tim rested his forehead against hers and let out a low groan. She held onto his shaft and circled the plump head with her thumb. He grabbed her wrist, stopping her actions.

"Cas," he panted.

Tim closed his eyes and took a deep breath, letting it out slowly through his nose. When he opened them again, they were glowing. His sexy smile brought a fresh rush of desire between her thighs.

Tim backed Cassie against the wall and dragged the hem of her skirt to her waist. He lowered his mouth and took hers in a hungry kiss as he slipped her panties down her legs. Cassie stepped out of the scrap of lace as it reached the floor and Tim plunged his fingers inside her while her legs were spread. It was Cassie's turn to groan.

His tongue tormented her mouth as his fingers kept a steady in-and-out rhythm, pushing her closer to the edge. Cassie's hips rocked, trying to ease the ache that seemed soul deep. As if he read her mind, Tim dropped to his knees. He looked at her mound

then met her gaze. Cassie knew the hunger she saw exposed in his azure depths was mirrored in her own green eyes.

"You're so wet, you're glistening," he said before placing his mouth on her, easing the ache, even as he drove it higher. Tim slipped his fingers inside her as he sucked on her clit and an orgasm crashed through her. She would have crumbled to the floor if Tim hadn't lifted her into his strong arms.

He lowered her to his bed as she drifted back to reality. Cassie met his gaze and melted at his soft smile.

"I owed you that," Tim said. At her questioning look, he explained. "I don't think I ever made you do that way back when."

Cassie chuckled. "I didn't know that existed way back when."

"Well, it does." Tim's blue eyes twinkled. "Come here and let me show you again."

Show her he did, twice more before he spread her legs wide, slipping between and plunged his cock inside her swollen hole. He pushed deep, then Cassie wrapped her stocking-clad legs around his waist, allowing him to move deeper still.

They found their rhythm and climbed toward release. Tim ground into her, rubbing her slick clit with his pelvis. He grabbed her ass cheeks in either hand and tilted her hips, increasing the friction and the sensation. Cassie rocked against Tim as he thrust and her orgasm washed through her, taking her breath away. Her spasms drove Tim over the edge and with a growl, he came.

"Cas." Tim's voice was low and intimate against Cassie's ear. He dropped a soft kiss against the side of her neck before lifting his head and meeting her gaze. The emotion she saw in his eyes both confused and elated her. He looked like he was about to say something...something profound and meaningful. Cassie didn't want to hear his words.

"Tim," she said, rolling out from underneath him. "It's okay. I know tonight doesn't mean anything."

"Doesn't mean anything," Tim repeated.

Cassie clutched the sheet to her as she walked around the room gathering her clothes.

"Right and I understand that," she said.

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The look on his face was devilish and his blue eyes twinkled as if he had a secret. She retreated to the bathroom before Tim could say anything more.

As Cassie dressed, she reminded herself that she did not want to know his secrets, or anything else about him, for that matter. Squaring her shoulders, Cassie stepped back into the bedroom. She was relieved to find Tim fully dressed.

“I figured I’d take you home since you seem hell bent on getting out of here.”

While his words could’ve sounded angry, he seemed more amused than anything.

Chapter Five

The ride to Cassie's house was quiet. Not a strained silence, but one of companionship. Cassie thanked the stars that Tim was being a good sport about her abrupt withdrawal. Then again, why shouldn't he be? What do men love more than great sex with no strings attached?

That's exactly what Cassie wanted from Tim, too. Now that she'd scratched that itch, he'd be out of her system. She could let go of all the hurt and anger that had hidden inside her since she'd last seen him. Plus she'd gotten a few great orgasms out of the deal. Talk about a win-win situation.

"Thanks for a great night," Cassie said, perhaps a bit too cheerfully, when Tim pulled up in front of her house.

"It was my pleasure."

"It was good seeing you again. I'm sure I'll be reading about you in Jodi's column."

Tim's smile was sweet and open and so not what Cassie wanted to see at that moment. He looked too appealing and good enough to eat. Before she could stop it, her mind conjured up pictures of Tim sprawled naked on his bed.

Her mouth watered at the thought of licking every inch of him, then taking his stiff cock into her mouth and sucking on its plump head as though it were a lollipop.

Cassie shook her head, clearing her wayward thoughts. When she met his eyes, Tim looked as though he'd read her mind...and had enjoyed himself immensely.

"Thanks again for the ride," she said, just before she beat a hasty retreat into her house.

"So," Jodi said, dragging out the word. "Where'd you and Tim disappear to last night?"

"Nowhere special."

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“Back to his place, maybe?”

Cassie’s face felt so hot, she was afraid it would spontaneously combust.

“I knew it,” Jodi said, triumphantly. “I just knew it. You two were practically devouring each other when you left.”

“We were not.” Cassie’s tone was defensive. “And what about you and Mark? The way you two were slow dancing, it must’ve taken a crow bar to pry you apart.”

Instead of getting flustered or embarrassed, Jodi looked radiant and googly-eyed. “Yeah, we had a good time.”

“How good a time?” Cassie bobbed her eyebrows.

“Not as good a time as you and Tim, but that’s okay.”

“Really? The way you were dancing...”

“We did get a little carried away on the dance floor, but once we got off it, Mark was a perfect gentleman.”

“And you’re happy about that?”

“You know, I think I am.” Jodi looked down at her coffee mug and stared at its contents before speaking. “Mark is different. Not to sound corny, but he’s like a breath of fresh air. It’s pretty sad when we actually question why he didn’t jump my bones.”

Cassie felt herself blush again.

“Oh, Cassie, I’m not saying there’s anything wrong with that. What happened between you and Tim is fine, it’s just not right for Mark and me. Not yet anyway. You and Tim have a history. Mark and I haven’t even had an official first date yet. Although that’s going to change tomorrow night.”

“He finally asked you out?”

“Yep. We’re going to Amici for dinner and then to the movie of my choice.”

“That’s so sweet and traditional.”

“It is, isn’t it?” Jodi took a sip of coffee and met Cassie’s gaze. “I really like Mark and I don’t want to mess things up.”

“Just be yourself.”

“I guess.” Jodi stared at her hands as though contemplating those words. “So what about you and Tim?”

Cassie nearly groaned out loud. She thought she’d successfully steered Jodi from the subject. Obviously she’d been wrong.

“What about us?”

“When are you seeing each other again?”

“We’re not.”

“Why not?”

Cassie shrugged. “It’s not like that with us. Not anymore.”

“You could’ve fooled me,” Jodi said. “The way he was looking at you, I’d say it’s exactly like that.”

“What you saw was two old friends getting together for old times’ sake.”

“Uh huh.”

“Don’t ‘uh huh’ me. It was just sex, plain and simple. Nothing more, nothing less.”

“Are you trying to convince me or you?”

“Look, we did it, then he drove me home. End of story.”

“If you say so.”

“Jodi,” Cassie growled.

Jodi smiled. “Okay, I believe you. It’s just too bad, we could’ve double dated.”

“We still can.”

“I won’t hold my breath. How long has it been since you’ve had a date?”

“Obviously too long,” Cassie mumbled, thinking of the night before and how she’d fallen apart at Tim’s touch.

“I’m not trying to make you feel bad, but I thought you two had a connection.”

“We did. Just not the kind you’re talking about.”

“Are you sure about that?”

Jodi’s eyes probed Cassie’s in a way that made her uncomfortable. Wanting to avoid the issue and any uncomfortable questions once and for all, Cassie reached for the check.

“I’d better get going.”

She threw money down and headed toward the exit with Jodi’s too-knowing snickers following her out the door.

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Chapter Six

Cassie had managed to keep her mind off Tim all day Sunday, but when she fell asleep, visions of him filled her dreams. She woke several times throughout the night, her pussy throbbing, a fine sheen of sweat coating her overheated skin. The last time she emerged from her dream bucking her hips, as though Tim was on top of her and she was meeting him thrust for thrust. She'd finished herself off with a vibrator, but even that couldn't cool the fires that burned within.

Giving up on sleep, Cassie got out of bed and took a cold shower. Whoever said that was a cure for horniness was dead wrong. While her skin felt cold to the touch when she got out, her hole was hot and throbbing, and slick with a wetness that had nothing to do with the water she'd just emerged from.

With hours to kill before she had to go to work, Cassie booted up the computer and checked her email. That didn't take very long and when she was finished, she still had two and a half hours to go and a mind that insisted on letting thoughts of Tim seep into it. Wanting to exorcise him from her brain once and for all, she did the only thing she could think of. She Googled him.

A woman on a mission, Cassie scanned through various websites looking for something, anything, that would paint Tim in a bad light and remind her why she couldn't fuck him again. Not even to ease the persistent throbbing between her thighs.

Unfortunately statistics, accolades, and an occasional interview were all she found. Cassie was about to give up when something caught her eye. "Hotties of Hockey" was the title and when she double-clicked her mouse and opened the site, she knew she'd struck gold. Jodi had told her about the puck bunny websites, but she'd never actually seen one. Until now.

Listed on the site were various hockey players and their statistics, only not the kind of information you'd find in any sports magazine. No, on this website, you could find out the size of your favorite player's dick, his sexual likes and dislikes, and even what his cum tasted like.

Cassie wrinkled her nose at that last one. Swallowing was sometimes a necessity, but not something she'd beg to do. In her mind, if you put that stuff on ice cream, it wouldn't make it a sundae.

She scrolled down to the "O" names and clicked on Tim O'Brien. Just the fact that he was listed cooled her off. However, what she read heated her right up again.

According to twenty-five of the twenty-six puck bunnies, Tim O'Brien is "off limits" and not available for "fun". The one woman who actually had something to report described Tim's dick perfectly, but she couldn't give any other information. It seems she had one unfinished experience with Tim many years earlier in Detroit.

No details were given as to why the act hadn't been finished, but Cassie knew. She had interrupted.

What she didn't understand was why Tim had been off limits since then. When she'd broken off their relationship, it'd been because Tim said he wanted to experience all of what hockey had to offer. She'd assumed no strings attached blowjobs were included in that.

More confused than ever, Cassie shut down her computer and finished getting ready for work. She'd arrive early, but hopefully something would keep her mind off Tim and the unanswered questions floating around her brain.

The assumption that work would occupy her brain couldn't have been more wrong. Not that there wasn't enough to keep her busy. Her mind just wouldn't stay on the job.

As media relations specialist for a large corporation, Cassie always had phone calls to make and advertisements to write. Her mind was so scattered though, she couldn't focus long enough to do either, or any of the other things that sat in her "to do" bin.

She actually sighed with relief when a knock sounded on her door, giving her permission to get out from behind her desk. Her relief was short-lived, however, when her assistant, Jen, entered the office carrying a massive arrangement of fall flowers.

"These just arrived for you," Jen said, as she set the flowers down in the middle of Cassie's desk.

"Who are they from?"

Jen shrugged. "There's a card," she said, before leaving the office.

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Cassie retrieved the card and frowned when she felt its weight. Something was in the envelope besides a card. She picked up her gold letter opener, sliced through the envelope, and extracted its contents.

Five simple words were scribbled on the card.

Because you love fall colors.

There was no signature, but Cassie knew the flowers were from Tim. If the handwriting hadn't given her a clue, the enclosed item would have.

Cassie lifted the jewelry out of the envelope. She'd worn the chunky rope chain and hockey skate charm around her neck every day for nearly two years. Tim had worn the necklace before that, but he'd given it to her as a "going steady" gift.

After the humiliating night in Detroit, she'd mailed it back to him, not wanting to keep any reminders of him or their relationship. Unfortunately, her memories couldn't be given back as easily.

Her relationship with Tim had been sweet and uncomplicated, and probably one of the best she'd ever had. At sixteen, she thought she'd found her soul mate, the love of her life, but, two years later, he'd shown her how wrong she'd been.

Not that she could fault him. Athletes with more experience and commitments fell prey to the free sex professional sports afford. How could she blame an eighteen-year-old in his sexual peak for taking advantage? Only according to the website she'd seen, he hadn't taken advantage. Not after that night in Detroit, anyway. But why?

Cassie pondered that question while she cleared a space on the edge of her desk for the flowers. She still hadn't come up with an explanation an hour later as she stared at the bouquet and ran the necklace through her fingers.

Tim was the only person who could ease her mind, give her the answers she needed, and she had no plans to see him anytime soon. And even if she did, could she actually ask him?

A knock sounded on her office door, saving her from answering that question.

"Come in," she said, fully expecting Jen to come through the door again. When Tim walked into the office instead, Cassie froze behind her desk.

"Your assistant was going to announce me, but I told her I didn't need an introduction," he said, around an adorable smile that did strange things to Cassie's stomach. Apparently it rendered her mute too, because she couldn't seem to speak, only watch his lean athlete's body walk across the office to her desk.

"You got the flowers," he said. Cassie nodded, feeling satisfaction in the fact she'd offered a response, even if it wasn't verbal. "I hope you like them. When I saw the

arrangement, I immediately thought of you.” Again, Cassie nodded. “Good, because I was hoping it’d put you in a good mood, soften you up a little.”

“For what?” Cassie finally found her voice.

“I was wondering if you’d like to come over to my place tonight. I’ll cook dinner and we can catch up.”

“I don’t think that’s such a good idea.”

“Why not?” Before she could offer a reply, Tim said, “Is it because of Saturday night?”

“No. I mean, not really.”

“Because I didn’t plan for that to happen,” Tim said. “Don’t get me wrong, I’m glad it did, but when I asked you to save a dance for me, it wasn’t what I had in mind.” Cassie felt herself blush. “Damn, I’m really screwing this up.”

He dragged his fingers through his hair, leaving a stray lock clinging to his brow. Cassie squeezed her hands together to keep from reaching out and brushing it back. It was then she realized she was still holding the necklace. Opening her hand, she dropped it on the desk, where it landed with a dull thud.

“Why did you send this?” she asked, pointing to the puddle of gold.

Tim’s gaze dropped to the necklace before meeting Cassie’s again.

“You recognized it?”

“What kind of question is that? Of course I recognized it,” Cassie said. “What I don’t understand is why you sent it.”

Cassie dropped her gaze to avoid seeing Tim’s devilish smile. Only that made matters worse because it put his body right in her line of vision.

“Have dinner with me and I’ll tell you.”

“Isn’t that blackmail?”

Tim shrugged. “That depends on how badly you want an answer.”

Cassie nibbled on her lower lip. Did she chance getting that close to him? If she wanted answers, she knew she’d have to risk it.

“What time?” Cassie asked, expecting him to gloat, so his look of pure joy took her off guard.

“Seven?”

“I’ll see you then.”

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Chapter Seven

Cassie called herself every kind of idiot as she dressed for her date—correction, her evening—with Tim. She didn't want to make more out of the night than it was, and she'd dressed accordingly.

No little black dress, no sexy heels. Faded Levi's and a white t-shirt were the attire for this evening's get together. A pair of well-worn Birkenstocks rounded out the "we're-just-two-old-friends-getting-together" picture she wanted to portray.

Unfortunately, the ride to Tim's apartment had Cassie thinking in all together different terms. She and Tim had taken the same route a few nights before and Cassie couldn't help but recall what they'd done along the way.

At every light, she remembered the feel of his hands on her, in her. Cassie's nipples hardened and her heartbeat quickened. She squeezed her legs together, trying to ease the ache.

By the time she pulled up in front of Tim's apartment, her face was flushed and she was horny as hell. She stepped out of the car and decided to take a quick walk around the block in hopes the crisp night air would cool her off.

When she knocked on Tim's door ten minutes later, Cassie was confident she had her libido under control. One look at Tim and she wasn't so sure.

"Cassie," Tim said, his eyes skimming over her. "Come in."

She stepped over the threshold and was assaulted by the most amazing smells. Her stomach growled in appreciation.

Tim chuckled. "I'm glad you brought your appetite."

"It smells delicious," Cassie said as she took in the sight of Tim in his own Levi's.

Her eyes toured down his long legs to the frayed cuffs that rested on bare feet. She'd never considered herself a "foot fetish" kind of girl, but the sight of Tim's feet was making her feel all hot and bothered, so she raised her gaze.

Tina Gallagher

Only that didn't work because she had trouble looking away from the bulge of his cock that was cupped by well-worn denim. Cassie closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

"Why don't we get started on dinner?" Tim said, his voice sounding hoarse.

"This is wonderful," Cassie said. "How'd you learn to cook so well?"

"Desperation," Tim chuckled. "I got so sick of eating in restaurants, I taught myself a few simple dishes."

"I don't consider chicken marsala simple."

"It's not so difficult. Once I learned the basics, I started experimenting."

"Well, I'm impressed. I'm not much of a cook."

"That surprises me," he said. "You always liked to bake."

"I do like to bake. Cooking is a whole different ball game."

"I find cooking to be much easier. Baking is so exact. If you add an extra pinch of salt, your recipe is doomed," Tim said.

"But the results are so worth it."

"Still have a sweet tooth?"

Cassie nodded. "I could live on chocolate."

"Then you'll love dessert."

"Why?"

"You'll have to wait and see." Tim's eyes twinkled.

Cassie finished the last of her chicken.

"I may have to wait a while," she said. "I can't believe I ate all that."

"I'll take that as a compliment."

"Please do."

"I'm glad you enjoyed it," Tim said, as he finished his own meal. "It's nice to have someone else to feed. Cooking for one isn't all that fun."

Cassie didn't want to think about that statement too much, so instead she stood and started stacking dishes. Tim placed his hand on hers, stopping her actions.

"I'll do that," he said. "You go relax in the parlor."

"You cooked. The least I can do is help with the clean up."

"You're my guest."

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Cassie was about to protest again, but Tim placed his index finger across her lips. "Indulge me."

The two words Tim uttered did strange things to Cassie's body. He'd said the same thing when they had sex. Only then, she'd been naked and spread eagle on his bed. She'd given in then just as she did now.

As Cassie sat on the couch listening to Tim move around in the kitchen, she realized she hadn't asked him anything. She straightened her shoulders and resolved to remedy that as soon as he joined her.

Running the questions over in her mind, anticipation got the better of Cassie, and as soon as Tim stepped foot in the parlor she asked, "Why did you send me those flowers and the chain?"

Tim looked shocked at first then he chuckled.

"Don't hold back, Cas, tell me what you want to know."

He sat on the couch beside Cassie then turned his body so he was facing her.

"That was the purpose of this dinner, right?"

Tim's blue eyes studied Cassie before he answered. She grew hot under his scrutiny, yet her entire body broke out in goosebumps. Her nipples pebbled and when she shifted to ease the throbbing between her legs, Tim groaned.

"Cassie," he whispered, just before his mouth covered hers.

A part of Cassie knew she shouldn't allow him to kiss her, to touch her, that it was wrong. Only it didn't feel wrong, it felt oh so right. Tim rested his hands on either side of Cassie's face then dragged his fingers through her hair before resting them on either side of her head. He tilted her face to one side and pressed his lips more fully to hers. His mouth opened and closed, then opened again as his tongue swept into her mouth in a hot sexual assault.

He kissed her long and hard, creating a tight suction as their tongues tangled, exploring and enjoying each other's tastes and textures. Cassie swallowed Tim's low groan just before he pulled back, his breathing harsh.

She watched his neck muscles work as he swallowed. His essence lingered on her tongue and she craved more. He tasted better than chocolate and was much more addictive.

"How about some dessert?" Tim ran his thumb over Cassie's moist bottom lip and the look in his eyes told her he'd rather have her than any sweet treat. Or maybe that was just wishful thinking on her part, because she wanted to devour him. She nodded, not trusting herself to speak.

Cassie barely had time to compose herself when Tim returned carrying a tray laden with dessert and coffee. When he placed it on the table in front of her, Cassie's eyes widened.

"Brownie à la mode," Tim said. "If I remember correctly, you used to be quite fond of them."

Her mouth watered in anticipation.

"I still am," she admitted.

"Good." He held up a mug. "Cream or sugar?"

"Just cream, please."

Tim added a drop of cream to both mugs and set them to the side. Lifting one of the dessert plates loaded with a brownie topped with vanilla ice cream, hot fudge, and whipped cream, he handed it to Cassie. She took the spoon he offered, plunged it into the sweet concoction and placed it in her mouth. She moaned in ecstasy.

"This. Is. Delicious." Cassie immediately took another bite. "Mmmm." She was about to have another taste when she noticed Tim's gaze on her. He stared at her from beneath lowered lids, letting her see exactly what he wanted. "Sorry. I guess I got carried away," she said.

"I'm glad you're enjoying it," Tim said. "I was enjoying watching you." His voice was low and intimate and Cassie's libido stirred to life.

"Sorry." Tim cleared his throat. "I'll try to be good."

Tim scooted to the far end of the couch and started eating his own dessert.

"Now, to answer your questions," he said, before placing a heaping spoonful of brownie into his mouth. While he chewed and swallowed, Cassie tried to remind herself what she'd asked.

"I sent you the flowers because I thought you'd like them. I wasn't lying when I told you I stumbled on them and thought of you."

"And the necklace?"

He shrugged. "I wanted you to remember."

"Remember what?"

"What it was like between us. It was so good and I thought the necklace might make you think of that."

"Why?"

Tim hesitated a moment before answering, but when he did, Cassie read the truth in his eyes.

"Because I was hoping it could be again. That we could be again."

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Suddenly at a loss for appetite, Cassie placed her dessert on the table next to her untouched coffee. Tim mirrored her actions then took her hands in his own. He raised her hand to his mouth and kissed its knuckles.

“What--” Cassie sucked in a breath when the tip of his tongue touched the V of her fingers. “What about other women?”

“There are no other women.”

He turned Cassie’s hand over and placed a kiss in the center of her palm.

“I read that,” Cassie blurted out before she could stop herself.

Tim raised a brow then sucked on the very center of her hand. “Read it?” He blew his warm breath into her moist palm and she shivered.

“I, uh, I was on the internet...” her voice trailed off when Tim nibbled his way to her wrist.

“You weren’t checking out those nasty puck bunny sites, were you?”

Cassie blushed and attempted to extract her hand from Tim’s grasp. He wouldn’t let go. Sucking gently on the sensitive skin just above her hand, Tim kept his gaze on her, as though gauging her reaction to his sensual torture. She never thought of her hand as an erogenous zone, but Tim was proving her wrong.

“It’s okay if you were,” he said, nibbling his way to her elbow. “I know what they say about me.”

“I didn’t mean to...I just kind of stumbled into it.”

Tim nodded, then leaned forward and kissed her jaw.

“I just don’t understand.”

Tim lifted his head and met her gaze. She didn’t have to explain herself, because the look in his eyes told her he understood. His words proved that he actually did.

“It just didn’t seem right, especially after...” Tim dragged his fingers through his hair and looked away. When he met Cassie’s gaze again, his were glowing with memories. “The way you looked at me that night, Cas, it tore my heart out. I’m not going to make excuses, but I’d had a few drinks that night and I was so lonely. Most of the guys hooked up at one time or another.” He shrugged. “I knew it was wrong, but I guess I didn’t care. Until I saw you.”

“But you didn’t even try to apologize or explain.”

“Explain what?” he said around a self-derisive laugh. “You got an eyeful. I didn’t think you needed an explanation. And I did try to apologize, you just didn’t want to listen at the time.”

Cassie conceded the point. After watching some girl suck on her boyfriend's dick, she hadn't been in the mood to listen too much.

"And after we broke up?"

"It didn't matter. Part of me was disgusted by the whole groupie scene and I didn't want to be a part of it. Just because I fucked up and lost you in the process didn't mean I had to keep doing it and lose my principles, too."

Cassie was touched by his words and proud of the man he'd been.

"I haven't lived like a monk for the past fifteen years, Cas, but all my relationships with women have been real and honest." Tim moved closer to Cassie and his breath whispered across her lips. "But no one has ever compared to you." He took her mouth in a fierce, possessive kiss, sealing his words.

Their tongues tangled and dueled, consuming and sharing. Cassie ran her hands down Tim's chest, then curled her fingers into his t-shirt and pulled it up. She groaned as her hands roamed over his hot hard flesh and short silky hair. His muscles flexed and bunched beneath her touch.

Tim pulled back. "Come on."

He stood, then bent and swung her into his arms. Cassie didn't protest. Instead, she tucked her head into his neck and inhaled deeply. His cologne mingled with the scent of warm skin, creating a combination that drove her wild. She ran her tongue along the edge of his jaw and felt him shiver.

"Here we are," Tim said, just before he sat her down next to the bed. He sat on its edge and when her eyes adjusted to the dim light, Cassie saw his gaze devouring her.

"Would you undress for me?" he asked.

Cassie heated at the thought. She'd never done a striptease for a man, but the thought of performing for Tim turned her on. She stepped back and slipped off her shoes.

Her gaze locked to his as she placed her feet shoulder width apart and allowed her hips to sway from side to side. Ever so slowly, she ran her hands up, then down her torso, before resting them at her waist.

Running her fingers along the edge of her t-shirt, Cassie shimmied it from side to side before raising it, revealing her mid-drift. When she reached her chest, she opened her hands and squeezed her tits before lifting the shirt over her head and tossing it across the room.

Tim's eyes glowed with appreciation, urging her on.

She unclasped the front hook of her bra, but didn't remove it. The cups hugged her boobs while she swayed slowly and popped the top button of her jeans. She moved

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and the cups shifted, revealing more cleavage and, just before they released her flesh, the material got stuck on her tight nipples. The sensation was torture and, unable to bear it any longer, Cassie wriggled out of her bra and tossed the scrap of lace to the floor.

Tim's hands tightened into fists and she imagined he was fighting the urge to reach out and touch her. At least she hoped he was. She sure as hell wanted to be touched, and was having a hard time keeping her hands off him.

"Would you take your shirt off?" she asked. He raised an inquiring brow. "I like looking at your chest."

Her words seemed to please Tim and he complied. Cassie admired the play of his muscles as he settled back into place. Tim cocked his head, as though to move her along.

She slid her zipper down and separated the well-worn denim, revealing the white lace of her thong. Sliding her jeans over her hips and down to the floor, Cassie stepped out of them and kicked them aside.

Taking the few steps necessary to put herself directly in front of Tim, she hooked her fingers in the waistband of her panties and lowered them inch by slow inch. Tim seemed to hold his breath until they cleared her feet and rested on the carpet.

"You're beautiful," he said before pulling her onto the bed next to him.

He stroked her nipple with his tongue, then gazed up at her and sucked it into his mouth. Cassie dragged her fingers through his hair and arched her back, urging him on. Wanting more, she ran her hands down his sides to his waist, around to his butt, then squeezed, pulling him forward.

Tim bucked against her, and his cock pressed into her through worn denim. He stood on his knees and Cassie raised herself onto her elbows. She looked into his eyes and reached for the button of his jeans. After opening it, she eased the zipper over his erection. Raising herself up, she sat between his thighs, leaned forward and kissed his navel.

Cassie slid her hands around his sides and slipped them beneath his jeans and boxers. She grabbed his ass in either hand and squeezed before sliding his jeans and underwear down his thighs. She stared, fascinated by his cock as it jutted toward her, flagrant with arousal.

Wrapping her hand around his hard shaft, she stroked, absorbing his heat. Lowering her hand, she cupped his balls and gently squeezed. Spurred on by his quick intake of breath, Cassie leaned forward and opened her mouth over the plump head of his dick. Tim let out a ragged moan as she pulled him into her mouth. Her tongue licked and sucked him until he pushed her away.

His breathing rough, his eyes blue slits of desire, Tim tore at his jeans and tugged them off. Grasping Cassie's waist, he rolled her onto her back. His hand moved down her side and slid between her legs as his mouth fed off hers. His fingers touched and stroked, fanning the flames, drenching her in desire.

Tim slipped one finger inside her slick hole and pumped in and out. A second finger joined in, increasing the pressure and the sensation. When his thumb slid over her clit, she shattered.

Tim's fingers were still inside her when her orgasm ended and his eyes watched her closely. When Cassie's breathing steadied, he started a steady in and out rhythm again. She was so swollen and sensitized, she came almost immediately.

"Tim," she gasped. "I want you. Now."

He slipped between her legs and plunged his dick into her. Cassie raised her hips to meet his and gloried in the feel of every hard inch of him moving inside her.

Cassie traced her fingers down his back to the hard cheeks of his ass.

"Faster," she demanded.

She moved with him as he pumped his hips harder, deeper, faster. Her skin was tingling and her nerves tangled into knots. Wanting to feel more, Cassie wrapped her legs around Tim's waist and held him close.

"Cas." He came with a deep primal groan that seemed to last forever.

Cassie gasped as another orgasm ripped through her, stealing her breath.

Tim pushed deep into her one last time and stayed.

"Cassie, are you okay?" he asked once they both caught their breath.

"Mmmm, wonderful."

He looked deep into her eyes.

"I love you."

Cassie drew in a deep breath and Tim placed a soft kiss on her lips. His smile was slow, sweet, and sexy. "Before you freak out, let me finish."

Cassie nodded and tried not to think about the fact that they were having this conversation with him still buried deep inside her.

"Fifteen years ago, everything got screwed up. Our relationship was great, but things went too far, too fast. We weren't mature enough to handle it." He smiled. "I don't know where this is gonna go, but at least we're old enough to deal with wherever that might be. Will you take that journey with me, Cas?"

Cassie felt his heart beating in time with hers. It seemed like a sign. She knew she loved Tim, probably had never stopped. He wasn't asking for a lifelong commitment

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at this point, only a chance. Though his eyes told her that much more was hers for the taking, and she knew that eventually she would want to take. She let her answer shine through her eyes. Tim's smile told her he understood, though his words asked for clarification.

“Will you, Cas?”

Her heart pounded, but somehow Cassie managed a saucy smile.

“I will if you promise more rides like the one we just had.”

Tim's answering grin was wicked.

“You can count on it.”