

A woman with long brown hair and large silver earrings is shown from the chest up. She is holding two playing cards, the Ace of Hearts and the King of Hearts, in her right hand. In front of her are several stacks of poker chips in white, red, and green. To the left of the chips is a slice of lime. In the foreground, there is a large glass filled with a red, frosty margarita. The background is dark and out of focus.

*Nicole Austin
TK Winters*

Margarita Day

SANDHAIN publishing, LLC

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Nicole Austin and TK Winters

Dedication

Nicole's Dedication:

To TK, we sure make a good team, sis.

To J.A., may you be bold, daring, and seize your HEA with both hands.

TK's Dedication:

To Nic, my sister of the soul and a constant inspiration. To my family, who believes in me no matter what I do. To the Research Alpha, you make romance novels pale in the light of reality. And finally, to the Welcoming Wench—this one's for you!

Dedication from both Nicole & TK:

To the Hussies, who tirelessly read, re-read, and then read again.

To Angie, who gives so much and makes dreams possible.

Prologue

Jodi curled up on the uncomfortable seat, face pressed against the cold plastic airplane window. A single tear rolled down her cheek as she stared at the mountains below without truly seeing them. Her mind lingered in the past.

The flight was crowded, people pushing in all around her. The older woman next to her overflowed the seat. Heat radiated from her grandmotherly body, the scent of lavender permeating the cabin space. Behind her, tiny feet kicked at the seat back in boredom. “Are we there yet, Mom?”

“Not yet, honey. Another thirty minutes. What color do you want this balloon to be...”

She had never felt more alone. Tuning out the conversations around her, Jodi let her mind drift.

In the center of the table sat a fresh deck of cards, still sealed. After they made small talk for a while, Wiz picked up the cards. Looking at her, he stated, “Lady’s choice. What’s your pleasure, Jodi?”

Her heart began pounding frantically against her ribs and she felt a heated blush spread across her face and neck. This was the moment of reckoning and she wasn’t sure she would be able to go through with her plans.

In the next moment, John gently clasped her fidgeting fingers within his grasp, giving them a light, reassuring squeeze. Okay, she could do this. She could be bold and go after what she wanted.

“How about Five Card Stud, deuces wild.” Her voice sounded a little weak, but she felt proud to be stating her desires.

“And the stakes?” Trevor asked, one eyebrow arched high as they all waited for her answer.

It was now or never! Jodi struggled to make her voice calm, yet it came out sounding deep and breathless, a bit sexy. "Loser forfeits a piece of clothing. Jewelry, accessories and ties do not count. Last one left still wearing any clothing wins."

The flight attendant leaned past her seat companion and patted Jodi's arm. Jolted from her memories, she forced a smile onto her lips and looked up at the woman.

"Are you okay? Can I get you anything, ma'am?" The gesture didn't provide the intended comfort. Instead, it made her uncomfortable; as if the woman saw something was wrong and should offer empty reassurances.

Jodi rolled her petite frame into an even tighter ball, letting her chestnut brown hair hide her eyes. They had to be red and swollen because it felt like someone had rubbed sandpaper over them. She didn't want to talk or be seen right now. "No, thank you. I'm fine."

Well, maybe not fine. Okay, what a lie. She wasn't even close to being fine. Jackie, Katie and Reba were all living the fantasy, basking in the welcoming glow of happily-ever-after. She was thrilled for them, but it made Jodi reflect on what she was missing in her own life. Reflections she thought she had put behind her years ago as not being worth her time or trouble.

Why couldn't she have left well enough alone? She'd had her Internet friends. They had tons of laughs and fun playing cards together, but she'd messed up and blown those friendships big time, hadn't she?

Opening a fresh deck of cards, Conner took control of the game. As play continued, Trevor and John were both down to their shorts, Wiz wore only his socks, and Jodi was in her corset. Conner remained fully dressed, the bastard. She was dying to get a good look at his chest, not to mention the large bulge pressed against his tight pants.

"Look," Trevor said. "The four of us are down to one item of clothes each. I suggest a new wager." His gaze drifted around the table, stopping on each set of eyes to make brief contact before moving on.

"Okay, I'm game. What do you have in mind?" John asked.

"It's clear we all want Jodi. I suggest the winner of each hand gets the chance to pleasure her."

Her decision had led to the most erotic night of her life. A scorching ménage with four gorgeous men. A *ménage à cinq*. Chills raced down her spine from the mere thought of that once-in-a-lifetime night.

“Come here, honey. Take what you need.”

Turning onto her hands and knees, Jodi crawled over John’s glorious body, pausing to brush a chaste kiss on the dripping head of his cock. When she bracketed his hips with her thighs, John guided the broad head to her slick opening. She stared at him for a moment then sank down onto his length.

John’s breath hissed from between tightly clenched teeth, creating a sexy sound she loved hearing. She had him fully enveloped in her tight sheath, the head pressed against her womb. The sensation of being so completely filled had her yelling, “Fuck, yeah!”

She started slightly at the first touch of Conner’s thick fingers along her spine. Looking back over her shoulder, she watched as he pumped his huge shaft in his other hand. Lord only knew where he’d gotten the tube of lubricant, which now rested on the bed next to John’s leg.

“Don’t make me wait, Conner. I want your gorgeous cock tunneling up my ass.”

The head of Conner’s cock was almost purple and a copious flow of juices ran from the small slit. “Damn, honey, I can’t wait any longer.” One calloused palm rubbed against the quivering flesh of her ass, while the other guided his shaft to her entrance. The slick head easily pushed past the tight ring of muscles.

Conner clasped her hips tightly, thumbs soothing over the nerves along the base of her spine. “Breathe in, push out, and I’ll be all the way in.” His breath hissed out as he fought for control.

Jodi relaxed and as she pushed back he thrust, sliding deep inside her ass, filling her beyond her wildest dreams. Searing pleasure-pain raced along her back, causing her muscles to shudder and spasm.

Both men began a slow and steady coordinated thrusting, filling her completely. She thrashed between them, reveling in the amazing sensations engulfing her. It was too good, too much, yet she wanted more. She wanted them all to share in this.

Her words came out in stops and starts as she panted, fighting to draw much-needed oxygen into her severely deprived lungs. “Trevor...Wiz...I need...” Jodi was quickly

frustrated with her inability to communicate what she wanted, choosing instead to issue a bold command. “Come...here, now.”

They were both quick to comply, moving to either side, totally surrounding her with gorgeous male flesh and beautiful cocks. Kneeling on the bed, they slowly pumped their cocks.

Tugging gently, she pulled them closer together. As her lips met the warm, silk-over-steel flesh of Wiz’s cock, Jodi moaned. This went way beyond her wildest fantasies. Every sexual orifice was blessedly filled with cock. Even her sensitive fingers were filled with hard throbbing flesh. Holding the two men close, she took turns licking, sucking, and gently nibbling on them.

Although she wanted it to never end, it was all too much. No matter how she struggled to hold back her orgasm, her body could no longer delay the inevitable. The pleasure was too intense to keep from responding. She began to spasm, and clamped down on John and Conner, her fingers tightening on Trevor and Wiz.

“Please...yes, come with me,” she cried. Pure bliss surged through every inch of her body. White lights burst behind her tightly clamped eyelids as she soared higher than she’d gone before. Her release triggered the men, and one by one they filled and covered her with hot jets of come.

Jodi gasped, startled back into reality. She could now add hot and horny to the list of things bothering her. Her vivid memories were two sides of the same coin—both blessing and curse.

Trevor had drifted away after their ménage, unable to handle the sharing, but she still had the others. At least for the moment.

Conner. Wiz. John. Three wonderful men wanting a commitment from her, each holding a special place in her heart. She wanted to do the right thing, make the right decision for all of them, but didn’t know what to do at this point.

Jodi remained mired in a thick miasma of conflicted, jumbled feelings of self-doubt and hopeless apprehension. She didn’t want to lose the friendships she’d managed to build with the three men, but if she picked one over the others, feelings would be hurt, egos bruised, and following Trevor’s lead, they’d silently slip away.

Conner was every fantasy come true. She swore the man had stepped off the cover of a steamy romance novel. Tall, muscular, onyx eyes, hair so black and soft she couldn’t

seem to keep from stroking her fingers through it. Yeah, baby. To top it all off, Conner was also a man who cared deeply about his people and took his job policing the Navajo reservation seriously. He was a proud, confident man, a man she respected.

And Wiz. Though he was older, his dark auburn hair starting to show a few streaks of grey, his body was lean and athletic, and he moved with a grace and confidence that made Jodi's womb clench in excitement.

And then there was John. Sweet, wonderful John. He made her laugh, shared her quirky humor, and kept her juices flowing twenty-four/seven. He was a hard-working man with the muscles to show for the effort. Tall and dreamy, she enjoyed losing herself in his whiskey brown eyes. His thick, wavy brown hair was usually disheveled, and when paired with his typical enthusiastic expression, he often looked playful and boyish, but she knew he was all man.

He had a huge heart and big dreams. Dreams Jodi was sure included a white picket fence, family and forever after. The kind of life her mother had always dreamed of but never found.

The kind of life she didn't think existed outside of dreams.

The deep, monotone voice of the captain issuing instructions over the loud speaker drew Jodi from her mental wanderings. Within minutes they would land at McCarran International Airport where it was an oppressive one hundred five degrees at midnight.

She sighed in relief.

Welcome to Las Vegas.

Bright lights.

Sin City.

Home.

Chapter One

Six Months Later

“The hand goes to player two. Congratulations, sir.”

Jodi paid out the winner, collected the cards and prepared for the next game.

Quick reflexes, a sharp mind, and rigid control—all qualities essential for success as a Vegas dealer. She had them all. She was a master in the gaming universe. Unlike other parts of her life, behind a poker table she was the epitome of confident command.

John was always saying the proverb about still waters running deep must have been written about her. The man had poked and prodded during private online conversations and e-mails until he’d uncovered the passionate and complex underpinnings she didn’t often reveal. He wasn’t fooled by her quiet appearance at all.

She gave herself a mental shake. Not even the lights, bells and cacophonous chink of coins into metal trays of nearby slot machine alley were able to fracture her total absorption and iron-clad discipline, but thoughts of John could.

Her eyes stayed in constant motion, scanning her domain, taking in minute details as she read the players and worked the cards.

“Have you seen the musical since they changed it, Jodi?” one of the customers asked.

“Nah. The show girls just don’t do it for me. I did go take a peek at the boy band concert last night, though. I forgot the group’s name, but the guys were hot.”

“Come see the musical with me, honey. I’ll make it fun for you.” Her regular customers loved to tease.

She laughed as one of the bosses leaned over, saving Jodi from having to turn the man down.

“Employees are not permitted to socialize with the customers, sir. If you’re interested, I can arrange for an escort.”

Jodi smiled her thanks.

“No. Wouldn’t be the same,” the man said with a deep sigh.

The other man chimed in. “Yeah, no way would any escort be as sharp as Jodi.”

Everything about the well-choreographed dance of the gaming floor sharpened her focus. Having her customers notice was icing on the cake. She loved the competition and strategy. The firm flick of crisp cards through her fingers, the smell of the cleaners used on the felt tabletops, intent banter between dealer and better, the taste of excitement flavoring every breath, and the sight of her hands moving faster than the eye could discern.

She was proficient in Five Card Draw, Blackjack, Seven Card Stud, and Texas Hold ‘Em. The mechanics of working the cards using a six-deck dealer shoe kept her on her toes. She dominated it all, from shuffle to pitch, ante to dropping the rake—Jodi manipulated the pace and energy of the game.

What a heady rush!

“All right, gentlemen. You ready to turn this game serious?”

They all assented and she kicked things up a notch.

It was shaping up to be a great day. She was hot, on fire, and the poker gods smiled down on her. Tips were good. Her attention never wavered whether she was watching for the players’ tells, ferreting out cheaters, or keeping up a friendly dialogue. She was in the zone, working the table with an air of cool competence.

Her obsessive-compulsive tendencies made observing the fine details a given. This, coupled with an affinity for numbers, calculating odds and probability, meant Jodi was one of the top dealers in the busy casino. She never missed a beat.

“Whoa, look at her go.” The comment came from one of her regulars. “Hang on to your wallets.” This earned a knowing laugh from the others.

Three players were seated at her blackjack table. One was a favorite of Jodi’s—a king george who always tipped generously whether he was winning or losing. The other two were georges, players who always treated the staff well. The house gave them special treatment in return. Jodi thanked the casino gods she didn’t have any fleas or stiffs at her table tonight. They rarely tipped since they were only in it for themselves.

“Once again, the spoils go to you, sir.” She counted out the winnings and stacked the chips in front of the winning player. He lifted two ten dollar chips and tossed them to her with a nod.

The cards were running in favor of her king george, who was making larger and larger wagers, and Jodi noticed the table had captured the attention of the shift manager. Good, she thought with satisfaction. Her player would likely be offered a comp package of some sort, which would include free meals and part or all of his room expenses paid. Treat the customer right and they returned. It was good for him, good for business, and very good for her.

As she worked the current hand, a mid-deck entry—a new player joining the table while the deck had already been dealt and was in progress—took an empty seat to her right. He wore a black and silver ball cap sporting the Raiders logo, and had it pulled down low over his eyes. Maybe he was a California boy or merely a team fan. Jodi studied him surreptitiously while finishing out the hand. Something about his mannerisms struck a chord in her mind. She was unable to pick up many details about the new player because the game came first. Mentally she shrugged her shoulders. New players meant the possibility of more tips.

She got a whiff of his sexy cologne and her mind flashed back to a favorite memory.

She lay sprawled across John, too spent to even think, let alone move.

“Out,” he whispered. She had a vague sense of bodies moving off the bed, head and hand movements as he waved the others away, making the hard flesh beneath her shift, then the quiet snick of a door shutting. Since the other guys were leaving, the party must be over. Good! She longed for some quiet time.

Well, except for John. He wasn’t leaving her alone during the post-coital fog. Far from it. Not only did he stay to share it with her, his hands still tenderly caressed her sated body as if he hadn’t had enough of her.

She felt sublime. For once she didn’t have a care in the world. Her mind and body were at peace. Having John hold her was the icing on the cake. She luxuriated in his caring touch, basked in the afterglow. Warm, unfamiliar emotions surged through her. She wasn’t used to a man hanging around once the sex was over, but then John was different than other men. More connected to her. They’d become good friends over the past year.

John wrapped his arms around her and rolled off the bed, standing and shifting her into his arms in one smooth motion. She’d never felt safer or more content.

“Come on, honey. Let’s clean you up.”

“’kay,” she mumbled against his shoulder. The ménage had left her sated but also sweaty and sticky.

She heard water start and then she was sliding down his body. Her feet met the tile floor, knees buckling under her weight, but John’s firm arm around her held her upright. Every bone in her body must have dissolved under the force of her orgasm. She had a vision of a melted pool of wax with a partial leg bone sticking out and giggled.

“You okay, Jodi?” John turned her so the warm water ran against her tired body.

“Yeah.” She smiled against his chest. “I’m more than okay, I’m-I’m...I don’t know what I’m, but I love it.” She snorted against his chest. “Shit, I sound like I lost every brain cell I ever had.” She started to laugh full out. It was one of those contagious laughs and she felt John’s belly begin to shake with hers.

“Come on, share the joke. What’s so damn funny?”

“Now I’ll have to dye my hair blonde!” Peals of laughter rang through the enclosure. She felt John stumble and catch himself against the wall, pulling her even closer. “Damn, lady, we’re gonna end up in a heap on the floor if you don’t stop it.”

She wrapped her arms around him, pressing her ear against his chest. Their laughter mellowed and she felt comfort hearing the steady thud of his heart. She didn’t ever want to let go.

John’s hands glided across her body, washing away the sweat and sticky semen with sure strokes. Her legs finally found strength and she returned the favor, savoring the contrast of slick skin and coarse hair. Once they were both clean, he carried her out of the enclosure and sat her on the counter to dry each inch of her skin with a soft towel. Jodi had never felt so utterly complete. She relished each moment because she knew it wouldn’t last.

Her name being spoken snapped her attention back to the table. Damn it! She’d zoned out in the middle of a game. Her cheeks felt flushed, her whole body was alive and zinging with sexual energy. All because some guy wore the same cologne as John’s. Shit! The man made her nuts, and right now she had to focus.

She glanced at her cards. “Sixteen.” According to table rules she was required to draw. She pulled a seven. “Busted.”

Her king george won the hand with a total of twenty. She paid out winnings and accepted a tip. While a waitress refreshed drinks and took the new guy's order, she refocused herself with a series of relaxing breaths.

"Ante up, gentlemen." She scanned the chips tossed onto the table to ensure each player met the required bet before the hand was dealt. Jodi had done this so often, she didn't even have to think about it anymore. She gazed across the smooth felt, mind automatically counting, ready to begin the deal, when she screeched to a halt. The new player had set down a black velvet jewelry box instead of the mandatory chips.

"Only chips, sir."

What the hell? Did the moron think he could bet jewelry? This wasn't a beer buddy's poker night at someone's house or a backroom game somewhere. He was in a Vegas casino, where the rules and regulations of the Nevada Gaming Commission required strict compliance.

She stared at the box and glanced up at the man, most of his face was still shielded by the cap. A frown of displeasure caused her brow to crease with tension and she readied herself to get his butt kicked right out of the casino. Agile fingers flipped up the hinged lid, forcing her attention back to the box. Nestled inside was a stunning engagement ring. The center princess-cut diamond, mounted in a platinum tension setting, burst with color and reflected light. To each side six smaller versions of the center stone were set into the grooved band. Her stunned gaze shot back up to the player.

She gasped. No. It couldn't be.

John.

He looked up, revealing his face, and his sexy lips curled up at the ends, making Jodi wonder if she'd said his name out loud. For once, he didn't have his poker face on, and she read a depth of emotion in his expression she hadn't seen there before. He wore his heart on his sleeve.

"Will you marry me, Jodi?"

Oh God. Panic seized her heart and made her throat feel tight. Dammit! What the hell was she supposed to do now? Her commitment phobic nature made her want to run.

His warm voice, husky with emotion, touched something deep inside her.

Jodi stared at the gorgeous ring again. It was apparent John had put a lot of thought into her career when he'd chosen the ring. The prong-free design was perfect for a dealer.

There was nothing to snag on the table felt or mark the cards. The clean edges and low profile band wouldn't get in the way of her work. It was stunning.

Years of experience and extensive training had not taught her how to handle such a dramatic and personal situation.

A tap on her shoulder brought Jodi's focus back to her surroundings.

Everything around her seemed too quiet and still. It was almost as if all those within the casino were holding their breath, waiting for her response to the bold action.

"I-uh..." She struggled to find an appropriate response.

Good Lord. She'd been standing motionless behind the blackjack table in the middle of the busy casino for who knows how long with everyone staring at her. She'd broken one of the cardinal rules—never let the game pace lag. Not only had it lagged, the play at her table had come to a complete standstill. Hell, most of the casino activity had stopped.

Jodi turned to face the shift manager, head held high. She would face the consequences of her actions head on, and take full responsibility for the situation.

The happy expression on the normally stern manager's face confused her since it was the last thing she'd expected to see.

"I've freed you from the rotation for the rest of the shift, Jodi. Take your young man somewhere private and give him an answer."

Chapter Two

Jodi's stomach was tied into knots. She glanced longingly into one of the more private bars off the main casino. "Why don't we have a drink?"

"No, I want you to myself." John insisted on returning to his room. Looking into his eyes and seeing the love and sincerity in them, Jodi couldn't say no to him. Damn it. She'd have to find the strength to decline his proposal from somewhere.

"I'm hungry. Let's get a table at one of the restaurants."

"Uh-unh."

He ushered her down the long hallway with a gentle hand at the small of her back. The carpeting was thick and she swore the only sound was the thudding of her heart. All it ever took was the touch of his hand to have her hormones in an uproar.

In the six months since her fantasy meeting with the guys, she'd spent time with Wiz and Conner, but she had avoided John's company for the most part. He was the most dangerous to her control.

She didn't have a name for what happened each time she found an email waiting for her or heard John's voice on the phone. It created a warm feeling deep inside her heart. A comforting sensation, which made her feel safe and secure, made her laugh and smile, and her spirit seemed lighter somehow. It was very different from what she felt for Wiz and Conner. Unique. Special.

"Here we are." He swiped the keycard and ushered her inside. The wall of windows looked out onto the multi-colored lights of the Strip. She stared, lost in thought.

Arms enfolded her from behind. John brushed his lips against the shell of her ear, soft as a whispered promise, breaking into her thoughts. A sigh shuddered through her body.

John had rented the best room in the hotel. Private bar stocked with every libation imaginable, Jacuzzi steaming in one corner, and a bed big enough to sleep at least six people and piled with pillows for twenty, she was sure.

The first thing Jodi did was kick off her shoes, strip the hated knee-high stockings from her feet, and head straight to the bar for a shot of tequila. If she didn't get something to steady her nerves, she'd never make it through this without crying or screaming or...or who knew what else?

"Do you want a drink?"

"No." His breath warmed her neck and made her head spin.

Dammit! Why couldn't he take no for an answer and leave her alone? She couldn't keep him at arm's length as she did with Conner. Sooner or later she would give in and no way was she going to travel down the imaginary marital bliss road only to crash and burn.

Jodi reached for the full shot glass, but his hands covered hers before she could grab it and bring it to her lips. John turned her in his arms until she was sandwiched between his hard body and the padded edge of the bar. With her breasts pressed into his chest, her nipples swelled and hardened until they ached. John's beautiful eyes held hers, a slight smile on his handsome face. She felt the solid length of his erection nestled into her soft belly. Jodi closed her eyes and said a prayer for the ability to resist.

She'd spent an entire week with Conner and the sexual tension had been high. No doubt about it. She'd slept beside him in a tent, in a cabin, even crammed into a traditional Hogan in the middle of nowhere, and saying no to his advances had never been a problem. But with John...all he had to do was be in the room and she said yes whether he touched her or not.

Her lips parted, in protest she assured herself, but it was all the invitation John needed. His head swooped down, soft lips meeting her parted ones to brush across them. His tongue teased across her upper lip, tracing the delicate skin before teeth nipped playfully.

"John, we need to talk about this." Jodi breathed the words against his mouth.

"Uh-huh," he mumbled, lips coming down harder, tongue delving into her mouth, stroking across the top of her own, circling once to tease the softer underside, then plunging deeper. Her arms wrapped around his shoulders and before her brain managed to issue an order to stop, her body was melting against his.

Her desire spiked, and she stopped resisting.

“To hell with talking,” she said, pulling away slightly. “Just make love to me for tonight, John.” Jodi rose up on her toes, rubbing her aching breasts along his hard chest, her hands drawing his head back down, her lips meeting his once more. She felt his brief hesitation, as if he couldn’t believe she’d given in with such ease, then he gathered her close to his body. One hand cupped her ass while he ground his hard cock against her quivering abdomen.

“My pleasure, ma’am,” he drawled against her lips before taking control of the kiss. His tongue tangled with hers in an intricate lover’s dance. Jodi felt as if they’d always danced this way—pure and right. Sinking into his warmth was coming home, even though she’d never had a real home and her head insisted she didn’t know how it felt or what it meant. Her heart knew though, and for tonight it was good enough.

She found herself picked up in strong arms, then she was sitting on the edge of the bed.

“No bar tops tonight, Jodi. Not even padded ones.” The reference to the erotic night with their friends heated her blood. “Only the finest bed and the softest pillows for you.” His fingers reached out and began slipping buttons from their holes, slowly exposing ivory flesh covered by a light sprinkling of freckles.

Jodi trembled, remembering the night he spoke of all too well. John had spread her out on the bar while the other men watched, tongue and fingers tormenting her until she could only beg and plead for more. Her pussy clenched at the memory, hot cream seeped from her core in reaction. Not to the thought of others watching. It had been a fantasy come true, but she’d found out some fantasies were best left where they belong—in her head. No, her pussy had tightened and dampened because his tongue circling her clit had been as close to heaven as she’d ever gotten and now, with his warm fingers brushing across her exposed skin, she knew ecstasy was within reach once more.

At least for tonight, she amended. Only tonight. That’s all she had to give.

The white silk blouse slipped down her shoulders, gently trapping her arms against her body. A pink blush began to color her skin. Instead of the sexy, sheer bra and panty set she’d normally wear for a hot night of sex, John was going to see the real deal. Lace and silk were nice, but they wouldn’t support her double-D breasts day-in and day-out. It took something sturdy to keep these babies up where they belonged so they didn’t get in her way or cause her back to ache from the weight.

She began to pull away, insecurity tempering her excitement. John gripped her arms in a gentle yet firm hold. His head lowered until his tongue could travel a warm path across her upper breasts before delving into the deep crease of her cleavage.

“Damn, Jodi. You are so fucking hot.” Pulling the blouse from the waistband of her black slacks, he pushed her back onto the bed. “I want you naked so I can lick every inch of your hot skin and hear you scream my name.”

He tossed the blouse behind him, expertly unfastening the button on her pants. Nimble fingers slid the zipper down, and pulled the garment from her legs, leaving her in nothing but cotton granny panties and sturdy brasserie.

Jodi felt her body go rigid, but a low moan caused her to look at the man standing above her. His eyes were dark with lust. The enticing bulge pushing against his pants had Jodi licking her lips and forgetting all about her boring underwear. He made her feel beautiful and confident, pushing past her defensive shyness.

Jodi came up on her knees and reached for John’s shirt. Grabbing it in both hands, she ripped the snaps open in one fluid motion, using it to pull him closer at the same time. An enticing pelt of dark hair trailed between hard pecs, widening across six-pack abs. The sight sent her senses racing with anticipation. She leaned forward and traced kisses across his chest, tongue swirling around hard nipples before moving lower to lick at the shallow indentation in his belly. His body shuddered beneath her touch and a gratifying moan vibrated through his chest.

She slipped the large silver buckle from its leather hole within his belt with ease, opening his pants to expose his hard length encased inside silk boxers. Jodi ran her tongue under the elastic waistband until she reached the pulsing head of his cock.

“No, Jodi.”

He clasped firm hands on each side of her head, forcing her away from her ultimate goal. John leaned down and captured her mouth in a hard kiss, making her world seem to spin. Before Jodi could retaliate in kind, he picked her up and playfully tossed her onto the mound of fluffy pillows. He growled and she couldn’t help giggling.

“If you keep that up, baby, I’m gonna come before I even get you naked.” He crawled up the bed, a cougar stalking its prey, only stopping when her legs were trapped between his, and knelt over her. He traced the dark shadow of her pubic hair beneath the panties, slipping one finger between her legs and dragging it along the damp crease. His eyes closed and his body shuddered again.

John slid his hands across his chest and abdomen, stopping only when reaching his erection. “Look what you do to me, Jodi.” His strong fingers grasped both jeans and underwear. Rising higher on his knees, he shimmied his hips and peeled the clothing away, his parted thighs stopping the descent. His cock jutted straight and proud from a nest of dark curls. Clear liquid on the crown gleamed in the soft light from the bedside lamp.

Jodi watched in fascination as pre-come seeped from the slit and trailed across the thick head of his cock. Her back arched, hips tilting upward. She needed to have his shaft buried so deep inside her pussy she wouldn’t know where she ended and he began. She needed to be held in his strong arms, feel his body moving above her, and have him slam into her wet channel until all the fear and confusion disappeared in a blazing glory of sensation.

She sat up and unclasped her bra, letting her breasts fall free. She cupped a heavy globe in each small hand, lifting them in offering.

“Oh, yeah. Hold them just like that, baby.” John wet one finger with his pre-come, and traced a glittering path around one dark areola. Jodi watched the circle pebble, and the nipple grow long and hard under his light touch. He lowered his head, blocking her view of his tongue rasping across the peak, licking up his own salty essence before drawing her nipple into the warmth of his mouth.

She writhed beneath him, breasts thrust upward in response to the tugging of his lips. John’s hands replaced hers to squeeze and knead. Teeth nipped at her sensitive bud, followed by his tongue laving away the slight sting. He sucked as much of her soft flesh into his mouth as he could, his moans of enjoyment vibrating through her flesh and paving a hot path through her belly straight to her clit.

Jodi wanted to give as much pleasure as she was receiving. She moved her freed hands between them and grasped his hard shaft, pumping once, twice, squeezing her fist around the throbbing length. Damn, his hard cock felt incredible in her palm. The heat pouring off the thick column penetrated her skin and ignited every nerve. She idly rubbed her thumb over an engorged vein, the steady beat of his blood starting a matching pulsation in her clitoris.

John’s head came up, back straightening, hips thrusting his cock in reaction to the confining clasp of her hands. “Now, Jodi. I need you now.” Rolling off the bed, he toed off his boots and finished stripping in one quick motion. He reached out, grabbed her ankle and tugged her toward the edge of the mattress.

“John,” she complained, wanting him to stop dragging her all over the bed and get busy already.

“Keep your sweet ass right here, baby, and spread those pretty legs wide for me.”

Before Jodi had time to respond or even comply, her panties were off, legs pushed open and his fingers had parted her swollen labia. Cool air followed by hot breath sent shivers rocketing through her body. She thrust her hips upward, seeking the source of the teasing warmth. A totally masculine, satisfied chuckle sounded through the dim room.

Her leg muscles bunched and she once more thrust upward, wet pussy making contact with smiling lips. This time she heard a whispered curse before he sucked her clit into his hot mouth and his tongue teased her hard bud.

“Yes,” she cried out. “Yes! Like that...oh God, just like that, John!” Her hips bucked and ground against his mouth while he sucked and licked her clit. His tongue flicked along the sensitive tissues, delving into her dripping channel. Jodi felt her leg muscles tighten, toes flexing on the edge of the bed as her ass pushed high above the mattress.

John’s hands shifted to clasp her soft cheeks firmly, keeping his mouth sealed against her clit as spasm after spasm rushed through her body. A high-pitched keen pierced the air in rhythm with her blistering orgasm.

“I can’t wait anymore, honey.” Pushing her farther onto the bed, his hard body came over the top of hers, knees spreading her legs, and in one long thrust his hard cock slammed into her pussy until it was seated deep inside.

“Christ, Jodi...I wanted this to be special,” he gasped. “To take my time.” He pulled his hard shaft back, increment by slow increment. “I wanted to romance you.” His steel rod drove deep into her core. White-hot shards of sensation raced through her body.

John’s breath rasped in her ear, every muscle in his back knotted beneath her grasping hands as he pulled his cock back with painstaking precision. The slow pace was maddening. “Slip the clothes from your body piece...” he panted, “...by piece.” His neck corded with strain. “Carry you to the Jacuzzi...” His head fell back between his shoulders, and he labored to get each word out. “Hold you in the hot...water...whisper of days...to...”

His hips flexed, and his cock drove forward, a hammer pounding a steel spike home in one long percussive impact. Jodi’s back arched, tight as a drawn bow, and her vagina contracted around his shaft. Damn, one more hard stroke, one more thrust against her cervix and her world would go up in flames of glory. “Unh...John, please!” He slowly pulled back to begin again.

“Share sips of champagne.” Each word was emphasized by the hammering of his cock. “Share dreams...give you time to know the real me.” Tremors raced through his taut muscles. Bracing his upper body on his elbows, John rose and all motion ceased. He looked directly into her eyes, smoothing back the damp locks of hair from her face.

“Marry me, Jodi. Please. Come share my life with me. I promise you moonlit walks. Nights spent in the warm ocean water, our bodies moving as one. Roses, chocolates, champagne. Enough excitement to last a lifetime.”

The heartfelt words made her throat tighten around a thick lump of emotion. He finally gave in to desire and began to move in a steady rhythm. Jodi wrapped her legs around his hips, her fingers grasping his head to draw his mouth closer. Their lips met and she mumbled against them.

John pulled back, hope shining in his eyes.

“What, baby?”

“Margaritas. I hate champagne. Now shut up and fuck me, you fool.”

Chapter Three

“What’s going on?” Jackie’s familiar drawl coming through the phone was comforting and almost made her cry in relief.

Good question. Jodi fought to keep her hand from shaking as she lifted the shot glass of tequila to her trembling lips. How did she answer her friend? Explain how neurotic she was feeling and acting when she didn’t get it herself?

She’d awakened wrapped up safe and warm in John’s arms, and lay in the darkness struggling with her feelings. Her head against his chest, she’d listened to the steady beat of his heart. Each breath had brought a gentle snore to his lips. He’d sounded like a cat purring in contentment and she had wanted to give in and purr right along with him.

Slipping out of the warmth of his arms had been one of the most difficult things she’d ever done, but she had to get away, put some distance between them. She couldn’t just stew over a decision she’d already made.

She had crept through the dark room, gathered up her clothing and pulled them on. Her senses were hyperaware to each breath John took, every shift of his body in the bed. With shoes and stockings in hand, Jodi had turned the doorknob, holding her breath as she pulled the door open enough to slip through. It thunked shut behind her with a sense of finality.

She’d made her way through the casino where the slots still *ka-chinged*, bells and sirens a numbing dissonance in the dead of the night, and ducked into a small, blessedly quiet bar off the beaten path of the more raucous partiers. She knew it was simply a matter of time before John woke and came looking for her. The dark setting she’d chosen would grant them a bit of privacy when he did.

“I’m sitting in a bar, drinking tequila.”

“Why? What happened, Jodi? Talk to me,” Jackie encouraged. Thankfully, Jackie was always there for her, willing to help talk things out and help Jodi see the situation more clearly.

“John proposed and I got scared. Then we had the most amazing sex.”

“Proposed? Holy cow. Was it romantic? How’d he propose? What did you say?” Jackie paused to take a breath. “You can tell me ‘bout the sex later.”

Jodi smiled. She didn’t doubt Jackie would remember and demand details.

“I—um. I didn’t give him an answer yet. He put the ring down on my table as an ante. Everyone on the entire casino floor was watching. I couldn’t even speak.” Her statement met with silence.

“I’m a mess, Jackie. Conner, Wiz and John all want something from me and I’m not sure I can be with any of them.”

Jackie sighed heavily. “Okay. Let’s take it one step at a time and talk this out. Didn’t you go spend time with Conner last month? I thought you already crossed him off your list of possibilities.”

“Yeah, I did.” She took a deep breath and sniffed back tears that had begun to fall. “I’ll never forget watching the sun set while he held me close.”

She paused with a soft sigh of reminiscence. “I was so comfortable with my head cradled against his shoulder. I listened while he talked about his dreams for the future. His future, the future of his people, and his hopes I’d share the vision with him.”

They were dreams she didn’t share, and while his lifestyle was perfect for Conner, it didn’t work for her. He’d always hold a place in her heart, but they would never be more than close friends.

“I can’t see myself living in such a rustic setting without the excitement of Vegas. He said he understood.”

“Well, then why in the hell are you putting him back on the list?”

“Well, I...” Jodi sat back on the stool. “‘Cause I have this compulsive need to complicate my life? I don’t know!” The more she tried to explain, the more exasperated she became.

“Don’t you see, Jackie? I never wanted any of this. I just wanted to have some great sex, fulfill some hot fantasies, and then go back to my life the way it was. I don’t want to get serious!”

“Well now, if that’s so, how come you don’t just up and tell them boys to pack their bags and get outta Dodge?”

“Don’t you get it?” Jodi could hear the pleading in her own voice. “I don’t want to lose the friendships I have with any of them. If I was to choose one of the guys, then the

others would get pissed and I'd never hear from them again. I've already lost Trevor over this whole damn thing. And even worse, if I do marry one of them, then I'm going to lose that one too!"

"Ah, okay...you wanna drive that one back by me, honey? You lost me."

"Get real, Jackie! Marriage is just a word for servitude! That ring John presented me is just an expensive chain to reel me in with—one forged with diamonds and promises rather than iron links."

Jackie sighed heavily. "Jodi, you've gotta stop thinkin' every man is gonna be an abusive bastard like your father."

"I guess..." She found it hard not to compare other men to the example set by her father.

"Can I ask you a question without you getting upset?"

"Um...I guess so." She wasn't sure.

"I'm not going to beat around the bush here. What happened to make you so gun shy?"

Aw, shit. She didn't want to go into it, but this was her friend. Jackie would understand.

"Don't you remember what happened with Sam? I was so in love. And when he asked me to marry him, I was truly happy."

"Oh, honey. I know it hurt when you caught him cheating, but that was a long time ago, and not all men cheat."

"I know, but it was really hard. And it still hurt. I won't set myself up for that pain again." Jodi sniffed back a tear.

Jackie quickly shifted gears. "I know you told me John was coming out to help you at the shelter a few weeks ago. What happened with that?"

"Nothing happened. We hung out and painted."

The time they'd spent together wasn't simple, and it wasn't easy to explain. Even doing mundane work of repainting the rooms in the shelter turned into something extraordinary when he was there.

"It was actually kinda fun." Jodi laughed, remembering how they'd gotten more paint on themselves than the walls. The two of them had played hard, and laughed even harder.

“Okay, you’ve spent some private time with John, but what about Wiz? Have you gone to see him since y’all had the ménage?”

“I’ve gone to a few business parties with Wiz, but we haven’t had any private time.”

“Well, there ya go. Spend some time with him to see if y’all mesh anywhere near as good as you and John do. Then you’ll have your answer.”

Jackie was probably right. She needed to see what Wiz was offering, spend time with him, exploring her feelings.

“I’ll betcha a hundred bucks what’ll happen.”

“Jackie...”

“Don’t go gettin’ you’re panties in a twist. If you take a long look inside your heart, you’re going to realize how much John means to you. Hell, he’s perfect for you. That’s why you keep pushing him away. You’ve been afraid ever since Sam cheated and broke your heart. It’s in the past, Jodi. Let it go and get on with your life.”

The blunt Texan hussy knew her so well. Hell, better than Jodi knew herself sometimes. It was time she left her ex-fiancé, her father, and all her previous relationships in the past where they belonged.

“Jackie, I’ve gotta go.”

“All right, Jodi, but you’d better call me. I wanna know what happens.”

“I will. And, Jackie...thanks!”

“You’re welcome, sugah. Now get out there and get your man.”

In the hush of the dark room, John regulated his breathing and kept his body relaxed. He missed the warmth of Jodi’s lush body snuggled against his side, and where her head had recently lay against his chest there was now emptiness. A hollow feeling in his heart where moments before it had been overflowing with warmth and love. He listened to her almost noiseless movements as she collected her clothing. She reminded him of a furtive little bunny sitting motionless, extending its senses into the darkness, checking for predators before she relaxed and continued dressing.

He’d learned a lot about Jodi over the months they’d played online poker. The circumstances surrounding their first face-to-face meeting had made him nervous, and he’d been cautious. Rightly so. When all was said and done, the entire evening had been nothing but a setup for a huge fuckfest. He hadn’t wanted an orgy. John was ready to settle down with one woman. The woman he loved. Jodi.

Part of him had been skeptical about hooking up with a woman he'd met online, let alone a woman who would consider partaking in such sexual excesses. Even so, he'd found himself inexplicably drawn to Jodi through the personal emails they'd exchanged. The more he'd learned from hints she'd dropped, hints Jodi probably had no idea she'd given, the more he had wanted to meet her.

Underneath the shy exterior was an adventurous, sexual woman. It was obvious she'd been hurt in the past and remained aloof to protect herself. There was much more to her, though. In little ways, she had revealed bits and pieces of her caring heart to him.

John had to protect himself too, so he'd had her checked out. He doubted even her closest friends knew the true Jodi. The woman who volunteered at a battered women's shelter, sponsored a soccer team, and mentored high school kids.

During their frequent poker games with Trevor and Wiz, Jodi's manner had been brash and outspoken when it came to sexual innuendo, but in private emails, John had met a different person. He'd begun to suspect the brazen hussy in the poker game was protective coloration, allowing her to blend into her surroundings. A front to hide her true nature.

When they had finally met in person, he found she was everything he'd ever dreamed of during those long lonely nights growing up in the middle of nowhere with nothing but cows for company. Actually sharing her had been one of the most difficult things he'd ever done. But he'd gritted his teeth and gave her the fantasy.

He was impressed by how she treated people with dignity and caring, no matter who they were. From the lowest man on the food chain to the high tippers, everyone received her respect.

She might not know it yet, but John knew they'd make perfect life partners. And not because the sexual attraction between them was hot enough to make his brain head south each time he saw her. True life partners. It had nothing to do with sex, coming instead from the heart. They enjoyed each other's company, laughed and joked comfortably together, and they both lived for the excitement and thrill of the casino.

No one in their group of friends was aware of what he did for a living. He'd let them assume he was merely a regular guy with a fairly decent income, and not much social life, looking to have some laughs. People acted different when they found out about him. Keeping his real life a secret was the only way he'd found to develop true friendships.

Where he lived and how he made his living made it difficult to find a woman to settle down with. At least a woman who wanted him for who he was instead of what he

could give her. Jodi's façade as a brazen hussy couldn't even begin to compete with some of the women he'd met over the years. Gold diggers were an unfortunate fact of life. Let some women find out about money and any chance of a real love connection went right out the window. He'd had more than his fill of empty relationships over the years.

John had had every intention of sharing his real life with Jodi tonight. He wanted to move to the next step and begin planning for their future, but the darn woman had distracted him. Simply watching her work the tables, her breasts pushing against the tight silk of her blouse, casino lights glinting in the gold and red of her chestnut brown hair, had his dick straining against his zipper, same as it was tenting the sheets right now.

He'd done everything he could think of to get Jodi to open up and share more of her true personality since the night of their fantasy poker game. Each time he had reached out, made the effort so they could get to know each other better, she'd slammed the doors shut. She'd already made up her mind about him, what he wanted from life, and what he expected from her. He had figured the next step was to open himself up to her and then perhaps she would take the leap with him.

After a great deal of rumination, John suspected Jodi hadn't had the most idyllic childhood. Perhaps her experiences had made her shut down, closing her heart to the possibility of any relationship hinting of intimacy. Not sexual intimacy, simply intimacy. In fact, he figured having sex would be easier for Jodi than the closeness born of hearts coming together and meeting openly. From what little he knew, the strongest, most affectionate relationship she had was with her three college girlfriends, and judging from what he'd seen since she returned from their recent reunion, changes in Jodi had started to happen as a result of their visit.

He gave a sardonic chuckle. He'd really blown it tonight. It had started out as planned—a place available for a new player at her table, slipping past her sharp dealer eyes, the ring instead of a bet—even the pit boss had helped put Jodi right where he wanted her. But he hadn't been able to keep his hands off her.

The hallway door opened and shut with a brush of quiet movement against the carpet. John sat up, turned on the light, and headed for the shower. One thing he'd learned as a child in Montana was patience. While growing up on the ranch, he'd coaxed many injured wild animals into eating from his hand. Once he had their trust, he healed their wounds and set them free again. He didn't figure Jodi was much different. He'd have to wait her out.

Drops of liquor spilled from the shot glass and onto her tense fingers. Jodi threw her head back and closed her eyes, savoring the burn of liquid gold sliding down her throat. Warmth spread from her knotted stomach and through her tight muscles. She breathed a sigh of relief as the tension eased.

What in the hell was she going to tell John? She'd put him off all these months because she needed time to figure things out, but talking with Jackie had made her realize she was avoiding making any decisions at all because of the past.

She wasn't sure how she felt about Wiz at all. They'd seen each other several times since the ménage, but it had always been social affairs that involved wheeling and dealing in the world of finance. Wiz had always treated her with the utmost care and respect, but she'd felt out of place. As if she didn't really exist as a person in his world. He put her on display, a work of art at his side, there to elicit envy amongst his peers. And he could be bossy and overbearing. There were times he forgot she was even there. As if she was only at his side to increase his value, although she couldn't figure out how she did that.

The last time he'd flown into Vegas, though, they'd had a romantic dinner and she'd danced the night away in his arms. He'd truly listened to her, and made her the center of his attention. The night was magical. Being the center of his world was intoxicating. She'd finally relaxed enough to talk to Wiz about how he made her feel at the gatherings, and he'd been horrified. The next day Jodi had received five dozen long-stemmed red roses and a note promising to never make her feel bad again.

His friendship meant a great deal to her. Hell, her friendships with John and Conner did too. Other than the Smut Squad, her poker buddies were the only people she allowed herself to care about. They were safe. She didn't want anything with the guys to change. Most important, she didn't want to hurt any of them by turning down what they'd offered. But no matter what she did, someone would wind up hurt because she couldn't say yes to all of them.

What a mess. She needed to figure out how to tell John she wasn't going to marry him and at the same time, salvage their friendship.

Jodi heard muted footsteps and sensed his solid presence behind her. The small box appeared on the bar, diamond gleaming against the stark black of the velvet.

"Say yes, Jodi."

“I can’t.” She felt the heavy weight of his thoughtful stare.

“Tell me, what does your heart say?”

John placed his hand over her heart, which was beating way too fast within her chest. While she was tempted to lie, she wouldn’t be dishonest with him. Lying would only make it all worse.

“My heart says to grab hold and never let go.”

“And your head?” His hand moved to tenderly cup her cheek.

“My head says to be cautious and sure.”

He seemed to consider her words. “Do you love me?”

“Love?” Jodi turned her head to look at him. Even though she didn’t want to witness the hurt in his eyes, she forced herself to meet his tender gaze. There was a slight smile on his face and sincerity radiated from him. “I don’t know, John. I-I don’t think love is something for me. I’m not sure what love is, or if I’m capable of either giving or accepting it.”

John eased himself down, sitting sideways on the stool next to her, knees touching her legs. He propped one elbow on the bar, head tilted to rest against his hand. She missed the comfort that hand had given as he cupped her cheek.

His forehead creased with concern and there was confusion in his eyes. “I don’t get it. Love is...well, it’s love, Jodi, and not reserved for only certain people. Does this have something to do with the work you do at the shelter?”

Jodi rubbed her hands across her face. “In part.”

God, she was tired. No way did she want to have this conversation. Not tonight. Not ever. She heaved a sigh, eyes focused on the bar. “When I got out of college I came straight to Vegas. Besides meeting the Smut Squad, it was the best thing that ever happened to me. I didn’t come here to be a dealer, but I have a knack for it and I need the challenge. I felt like I’d finally found myself. My father had a fit when he found out.” The tears started to build in her eyes. No way was she crying in front of John.

His warm hand covered hers. “Go on, Jodi. Please?”

“John...ah shit.” She gave in. “Okay. To say he threw a fit is an understatement. My dad is not now, and has never been, a nice person. He beats my mom and she puts up with it. When he found out I was working in Sin City, he went off the deep end. He backhanded my mother across the face and then started throwing things against the walls.”

Jodi shuddered at the memory. As hard as she tried, she couldn't keep the tears from slipping out of her eyes and down her cheeks. "I grabbed the phone, dialed 911, and then stood between him and my mom while she cowered in a corner." She shook her head in anger, feeling her teeth clench in helpless frustration.

"I didn't know what else to do, John. It was...shit, it was every nightmare I'd ever had coming true." She let her head fall into her hands, pushing hard against her eyes. She hadn't told anyone of that night. She didn't want remember the fear, the rage, and her inability to somehow stop what was happening. The underlying guilt she had for causing the whole nightmare to come alive.

John's arm came around her trembling shoulders, one hand smoothing back her hair. She was grateful for the silent comfort he offered.

She sat back up and turned toward him. "When the cops got there, they wrestled my father down to the ground and handcuffed him. They took my mom to get medical help and then got her into a women's shelter. I packed my bags and threw them into my car, and swore to never look back."

Once she gotten back to Vegas, she'd called her mom at the shelter, only to discover she'd gone back to take care of the house and wait for her husband to get out of jail. Jodi had armored her heart, and never called back.

John took her face between his hands and kissed the tears rolling down her cheeks. When her eyes finally met his, she expected to see many things—pity, disbelief, anger. The one thing she did not expect was the look someone gets when a light bulb goes on and everything falls into place.

"Ah. I think I see now," he said, rubbing the remaining tears from her cheeks while he collected his thoughts. "Okay, let me ask you another question. Do you trust me?"

Her response was firm and confident. "With my life." She didn't know much about John, yet he had always been honest with her and she couldn't give him anything less than her own honesty. In a flash of clarity, she realized she couldn't have gone to the card game and partaken in all those fantasies if John hadn't been there.

"You're sure?"

Her eyes narrowed on him as she began to see the point he was making. "Of course I'm sure."

"Then why not at least give us a chance?"

Good question. As she struggled for a way to explain her fears, Jodi's hands began to tremble. She understood what he was saying and her sudden realization underlined his point. Hell, if she had been talking to anyone else about their own life, she'd agree wholeheartedly, but she was different than other people.

Her thoughts turned to her parents. Sam. No way. Maybe she trusted John with her life, but she'd never entrust her heart to anyone. She learned from her mistakes. Hell, from real life! Love and marriage were not an option for her.

She turned away from him and picked up her shot glass, staring at it, surprised it was empty. "I can't be what you want me to be, John." Setting the glass on the polished bar, she signaled for a refill.

John leaned closer, too close for her comfort. "And what would that be, Jodi?"

The bartender set a full shot of tequila in front of her. He moved off into the darkest parts of the bar, but not before she caught the look of concern and sympathy in his eyes. There wasn't a person in this casino Jodi didn't know.

"A wife," she finally spit out. "I can't be your wife, John."

She looked everywhere except at him, letting her attention wander along the dark paneled walls and shadowed tables only to freeze when landing on the wide doorway.

Backlit by the bright lights of the hallway, Wiz stood watching them. She wasn't able to see his expression, but it was easy to read the stiffness in his body as he watched through the doorway. Could this night get any worse? A confrontation between the two men was imminent. They'd been working toward a big blow-out ever since they'd met in person. Hell, even online it was impossible to ignore the subtle and growing agitation both men emitted.

"You say that like it's a four-letter word, Jodi."

Jodi wanted to say something, anything to ease the husky emotion she'd heard in John's voice, but the thick, oppressive tension surrounding them pressed in on her chest, stealing her breath and making it impossible to voice a serious response.

She had to laugh. "Wife *is* a four-letter word, John."

"Well, isn't this cozy." Wiz's voice dripped with sarcasm, and Jodi wondered if there was any chance of the men remaining friends after tonight.

Chapter Four

“Looks as if we have something to celebrate here. Bartender, your finest champagne.” Wiz moved into the room with a fluid grace that took Jodi’s breath away. Tonight, instead of his usual tailored business suit, he wore tight black pants with a close-fitting white silk shirt tucked into them. The cloth clung to each lean muscle. He should be in the spotlight dancing the flamenco. Her pussy tightened and gushed. Oh man, how she’d love to be his partner for that dance!

Jodi brought her attention back to the situation at hand. “That’s really not necessary.”

“Nonsense, Jodi! If I’m not mistaken, a celebration is in order.” Wiz nodded at the engagement ring still sitting on the bar. “Make that Cristal, bartender.”

Oh, great. Put her on the spot. Wonderful! Thanks a lot, Wiz. She was not having this particular conversation in public.

“Wiz, you’re...” Jodi began to explain, but John didn’t give her a chance.

“A pretentious asshole,” John grumbled.

Jodi glared at John and gave him a discreet kick on the shin.

“Pretentious, am I? At least I know how to treat a lady right, which is more than I can say for you, cowboy,” Wiz sniped back before he turned his attention to the bartender, dismissing the conversation. “Well, hurry it up, man! I don’t have all night.”

John glared at Wiz over the top of Jodi’s head. “At least I’ve bothered to find out what this lady prefers, and it isn’t champagne.”

Wiz sniffed disdainfully. “Nonsense. There isn’t a woman alive who doesn’t like expensive champagne and beautiful diamonds,” he replied with another nod toward the ring.

“Both of you stop it. No way am I putting up with this tonight.” Jodi let her irritation show in her voice even though her knees were quaking. What if they just got pissed off and both left in a huff? On the other hand, Jackie was right—either they were worth

being friends with or they weren't. "Wiz, you're jumping to conclusions. And John, you didn't know jack about my preferences before tonight, so don't be an ass."

The bartender set a sterling bucket filled with ice on the bar. Pulling the bottle from the crystalline shavings, he held it up for Wiz's approval. "I have a 1999 Cristal, sir. Will this meet with your approval?"

While Wiz was perusing the label, the bartender caught Jodi's attention, raised one eyebrow and rolled his eyes, trying to contain a smirk. Jodi sighed silently. Bruce obviously shared John's sentiment.

Wiz nodded his approval and tossed a gold card down on the bar. His total disregard for people and money was an aspect Jodi didn't care for. He treated Bruce as a second-rate citizen because he was a bartender, had to work for a living, and lived on a budget—like Jodi did. Briefly, she wondered if he thought of her in this same way.

Wiz looked down at her, a bitter smile on his face. "That's an engagement ring, and engagement means a celebration. You did accept John's proposal, didn't you Jodi?"

Bruce quietly popped the cork on the sleek, frosty bottle.

"Well, I...um..." Her attention was distracted by the misty vapor rising from the bottle, and Bruce pouring the pale yellow liquid into crystal flutes. Her brain stalled while she searched for a way to explain but all she could manage to do was stare at the bubbles as they rose to the surface of the glass, fizzing and popping in the muted light. Now was not the time to lose her confidence, dammit.

John saved her by reaching out and snagging a delicate flute, inhaling the subtle scent before taking a sip. "I've put the offer out there. Not that it's any of your business."

Jodi gathered her newfound courage around her while the two men studied each other.

"I'm not accepting any proposals from anyone."

John opened his mouth to object, but Jodi plowed ahead while she was on a roll. "The subject is closed, John." She reached out, picked up the velvet box and placed it in John's hand with what she hoped with a determined look on her face.

Wiz raked a hand through his dark auburn hair in a gesture which spoke of relief. "Ah!" The tension in his body relaxed somewhat. "Then I, at least, have something to celebrate." With a smile of satisfaction on his face, he picked up a flute and took a deep swallow.

Jodi rolled her eyes at his smile. “Well, don’t get your hopes all worked up.” She slid off the stool and grabbed the remaining flute. “Let’s take this over to a booth so we can be more comfortable. If,” she gave them her sternest look, “you both can behave yourselves.”

Once they were settled in the cozy half-moon of the booth, a man to each side, Jodi took a small sip of the champagne. “Hey, this isn’t half bad.” She guessed you got what you paid for. “So, Wiz. What brings you here tonight? I thought you were busy with a big business deal.”

“I am, but I stopped by to see if you were available to attend a party with me tomorrow night at a friend’s house. I’d like for you to meet them, and the pit boss told me you have the evening off.”

The pit boss? He’d checked her schedule with her boss?

She watched John shoot an angry look at Wiz. Jodi finished her champagne in one long draw, and gave Wiz a glare of her own. “What were you doing talking to my boss?”

“I blew it again, didn’t I.”

At least he made it a statement and not a question, Jodi thought. “Yeah, you did. My schedule is my business and to spend time with me, you ask me. You don’t go talking to my boss behind my back. What was the point anyway?”

Wiz looked sheepish and a bit embarrassed. “Having you there is important to me. I didn’t want to take the chance you would have to work. I didn’t think. I’m sorry, Jodi. Truly I am.”

Bruce came over and set the bucket on their table, pulling the champagne out to refill the empty glasses. Jodi covered hers with one hand. “No more for me, Bruce.” She flashed him an impish grin. “*You* know I hate champagne.”

Bruce laughed with her and her tension began to ease. “Jodi’s a tequila girl all the way, gentlemen, and has been for all the years I’ve worked here. Can I get you something else?”

Jodi drew herself up in the seat, stuck her nose in the air, and with what she hoped sounded like a snooty sniff, she shooed him away. She thought it was a pretty good imitation of Wiz’s earlier attitude. “Tequila, my good man. The best bottle in the house, and don’t dawdle.”

She felt John’s shoulders begin to shake with repressed laughter and his body slid lower in the booth.

Bruce put on a serious mien and bit his lower lip to keep from grinning. “Right away, madam. I believe I have just the thing for you.” He made a huge production of rolling his r’s and putting in the right emphasis for a Spanish accent. *What a ham.* “A *Tres Generaciones Añejo* I put away for a special occasion.” He rushed off, putting a swish in his hips that would make any showgirl proud. And with sudden insight, she realized—a friend.

“Did I really act that stuck-up when I came in?” Wiz asked.

John, unable to contain himself any longer, put his face in his hands and gave up. The laughter came deep from his belly and his body shook harder against Jodi. She tried to answer Wiz seriously, but with the look of chagrin on Wiz’s face and John’s infectious laughter, all she could do was giggle and nod yes.

Wiz’s mouth quirked as he held back a smile. “I guess I can be a bit pretentious.”

Jodi wiped tears from her eyes. “Yes, at times you are and for the life of me I don’t know why, but I’ll go to the party with you.” She wanted to spend more time with Wiz, and the party was the perfect opportunity.

Bruce returned with a bottle and three shot glasses. “Shots all around?”

“Darn right, all around! I put up with champagne, so they can be gentlemen and go along with my choice.”

He poured the shots and set the bottle in the middle of the table. Before going back to the bar, Bruce said, “Enjoy! This is the Cadillac of tequilas.”

“Here’s to letting things go and taking the rest of the night one step at a time,” Wiz said. They tapped their glasses together and tossed the liquor back, savoring the smooth taste.

The three of them spent time catching up with each other, the men sipping the dry champagne, while Jodi slowly savored another shot as if it were wine instead of tequila. She listened as Wiz and John discussed some business dealings Wiz was involved in, and breathed a sigh of relief. The attention was off her, and finally she was able to relax and enjoy herself with her friends.

Wiz slipped out of the booth, and with a bow and teasing grin on his face, he held out his hand. “May I have this dance, Jodi?”

John stiffened next to her and she glanced at him first, hoping he’d be okay with this. “Dance? Well hell, why not?” She took Wiz’s hand, letting him pull her from the seat and lead her to the small parquet floor.

Wiz pulled her close. His tight pants did nothing to hide the burgeoning erection nestled between them. Right or wrong, a heated flush prickled across her skin in reaction. She looked up at him and her mouth went dry. Older or not, he was one magnificent-looking man. She wanted to trace the meticulously groomed moustache outlining his full upper lip with her finger. Tonight he looked magical and should be dancing around a fire, taunting gypsies in flaring skirts with his prowess or standing in a ring, the crowd roaring as he enticed a bull to charge.

The evening began to take on a surreal quality as Wiz guided her across the small floor, hips moving against hers in sensual rhythm. Another warm body moved in close behind her, the scent of John's cologne sending her already overloaded senses reeling. Placing his hands on her hips, he moved in closer. His thick cock pushed between the cheeks of her ass.

Oh yeah, she thought as the three of them began to move together. Jodi let her head fall back against John's shoulder, her breasts pressed against Wiz's chest, and she was encased by hard flesh. She let the music and the heady scent of arousal wash through her and take her away.

John's warm thighs pressed against hers, a large hand keeping a possessive hold on her, his thumbs resting along the sensitive crease on each side of her mound, fingers grasping her hips. Her body heated, blood pumped faster and her panties dampened with desire. Damn, his hands felt good.

Wiz's fingertips glided across her jaw and down her neck. She moaned as he traced random patterns along her breasts before cupping them in his hands and brushing his thumbs across her tight nipples.

The combination of their caresses made her head swim, but they avoided the places she wanted them to touch. The three of them swayed to the music. Jodi relished the sensation of moving between two hot male bodies. It was a fantasy brought to life.

John's fingers wandered over her swollen flesh, creeping closer to where she needed his touch. She wiggled in an attempt to get his questing fingers in the right spot, and bit back a needy whimper. Damn him. If he'd cooperate, slide a bit lower, increase the pressure...

Jodi gasped, unable to hide her reaction when Wiz plucked at her nipples. Fiery jolts raced from her breasts to her pussy.

They had her on edge, ready to soar, both men working together toward a common goal—her pleasure.

“Jodi? Are you okay, honey?” Wiz asked in a low, concerned voice.

Her eyes popped open, and her body tensed. Shit! They hadn’t been...relief flooded through her in a strong wave. No, they hadn’t been having sex on the dance floor. Thank God! She must have fallen asleep and dreamed the whole thing. Until Wiz said her name in a husky voice, she hadn’t realized her eyes were closed, head cradled in her arms, resting against the table.

“I’m fine. Fine.” Her head was still clouded with drink and fatigue, but thankfully Wiz’s voice had the sobering effect of a bucket of cold water and shocked any erotic feelings right out of her. “I, um...” She stuttered and struggled for coherent thought. “I have to get out of here. It’s been a long night, and I’m tired.”

She was headed for the door before either man could form a protest. Embarrassment colored her skin bright pink. She needed to escape to her small apartment. Cuddle up on the couch in her flannel pajamas with a cup of cocoa and her cat, Charlie.

Almost at the door, Jodi realized she didn’t know what time to meet Wiz tomorrow or where. Coming to an abrupt halt, she turned on her heel, nearly running straight into the two men.

“Holy shit,” she gasped. She’d thought they’d still be across the room, not stalking behind her.

“What time? Where?”

Both men stood before her wearing identical puzzled expressions. Hmm...she’d have to be more specific.

“What time and where should I meet you tomorrow, Wiz? And where is the party?”

“Ah, no worries. My car will pick you up in the morning. Will ten o’clock work for you?”

She merely nodded, waiting for more details.

“We’ll take my jet back to Seattle. The party is not far from my home. You can decide later whether you want to spend a few days in Seattle or fly back to Vegas the next day.”

“Oh, um...okay.”

Jodi turned away and marched through the opulent lobby. She didn’t notice anyone or anything. She was too busy concentrating on simply getting to the employee’s parking lot so she could get home and forget about tonight. And maybe take the edge off her arousal. Now that she was up and walking, she could feel how swollen her clit was and

each step made her pants rub across the throbbing nub. She didn't think even a real dousing in cold water would help.

Jodi could hear John and Wiz talking as they dashed to keep up with her.

"We can't let her drive home, you know," John said. Jodi felt both of them watching as she carefully made her way through the lobby, staggering only a bit on her way to the door.

"Well, if you hadn't been putting so much pressure on her to marry you, she wouldn't have drunk all that tequila."

She turned to comment, watching as John stopped mid-stride, turning back to Wiz. "Pressure? What do you call..." He threw his arms up in the air in frustration. "We don't have time for this. We need to take care of Jodi before we air our differences."

She couldn't deal with anymore tonight. She had to get home. She had to get away from them now—before they realized how hot and horny she was. She might be able to say no to Wiz, but John was a whole other matter. She turned and headed for the employee parking lot.

Jodi was once again stopped short when a masculine arm snaked out and held the large glass doors closed. Another arm grasped her around the waist, keeping her from running into the door. She recognized John's touch as her feet left the floor.

"Jesus, John, Wiz! What do you two think you are doing?"

John set her down and turned her to face him.

"Jodi, you can't drive home by yourself. You are too tired, had too much to drink, and can barely walk a straight line."

Damn, looking into those gorgeous eyes, Jodi wanted more than anything to kiss John goodnight. To feel his lips sealed tight against hers, their tongues exploring each other's mouths.

Wiz's released the door to cup the back of her head. "John's right, sweetheart. You're in no condition to drive."

The concern in his voice caused her to turn and look at him. She let her gaze trace the lines of his full lips and travel across his handsome face. Kissing the small lines from between his brows could be the beginning of sensual delights. Longing coursed through her veins. It was too similar to her dream. Wiz in front, John behind, both so close she could smell their unique and arousing scents.

Wiz leaned in closer, his lips brushing across her ear. “Why don’t you let my driver take you home tonight, honey?”

“Like hell,” John grumbled. He grabbed the small purse she clutched tightly in one hand. “Give me your keys, Jodi. I’ll drive you home.”

Wrestling for her purse, Jodi was doused once more in reality. “I’m not going anywhere with either one of you morons! I’m perfectly capable of driving myself home.”

John held her purse high over his head to keep her from retrieving it.

“I have never met two more juvenile men in my life,” she said, jumping up to swat at John’s arm. “You guys aren’t concerned about my safety and well-being, you only want to see who will win some stupid pissing contest you have going between you!”

Realizing she could never jump high enough to grab the small black clutch, she stopped. Hands fisted on hips, teeth clenched in indignation, she yelled, “Give me my goddamned purse!” Jodi stomped her foot against the ceramic tiles, accentuating her demand.

The sound of her shoe coming down with force rang through the entryway. She had a sudden vision of how she must look, first jumping up and down, before stomping her foot like a two-year-old who wasn’t getting her way. Talk about juvenile...the picture only served to make her anger build. She wanted to blast the two of them with spiteful words, let all her frustration and insecurity out in an explosion of derisive expletives but instead, tears threatened to flow.

She hated that part of her. The weak part which wouldn’t let her vent all her hurt and anger. When she got angry, she ended up crying instead of raging. Jodi gritted her teeth and clamped her eyes shut. She would not cry.

Arms circled around her, tenderly shifting her until she found her head cradled against a strong shoulder, one large palm cupped the back of her head. She remained rigid, determined not to give in. Not only would she not cry, she was not going to let her heart melt under the illusion of warmth and caring she felt with these two idiots, regardless of how sexy they were.

“Jodi, honey, it’s okay,” Wiz murmured against her neck, his breath ruffling loose wisps of hair against her skin. “All we truly want is for you to get home safely.”

The clean scent of soap and expensive cologne, mixed with the warmth and strength of Wiz’s arms around her began to work their inevitable magic. Her body began to relax.

His obvious concern and caring wormed into her heart, and the anger and humiliation began to ease. Her heart melted.

“Shit...I know. You are both right. I shouldn’t be driving.”

She rested even more into Wiz’s strength as John moved in close behind her. She was surrounded by two warm, hard bodies, strong arms, and the unique musky scent of men...oh yeah. She totally gave in to the feelings of safety, concern. Silent tears fell, soaking into the expensive silk of Wiz’s shirt.

Why couldn’t the two of them get along all the time? Why did they have to make life miserable by tearing her first one way, then another? A rag doll being fought over by two dogs, each determined to go their own way, neither willing to give an inch, and she was the one getting her arms torn out of the sockets!

“Don’t cry, Jodi. Ah hell.” John wrapped his arms around them both, temporarily forgetting his ire with Wiz. “I can’t stand it when you cry, sweetheart.” Long moments passed as the three of them rocked back and forth, lost in a warm cocoon.

“Then why can’t you two go back to being friends?” Jodi sniffed, slipping out of their arms. Wiz and John were left facing each other.

John slowly stiffened. His arms fell to his side and he took a step away. “We’ll at least try to keep our differences to ourselves, Jodi,” he assured her. “I wish I could promise you more. Now, will you please let one of us drive you home? If there is one thing both Wiz and I can agree on, it is your safety.”

Jodi stared into John’s eyes for a moment. What she saw drained away her irritation. He was being honest with her and was afraid she wouldn’t accept his assurance. A moment of clarity and comprehension made her aware that outside of her friendships with her college mates, John’s was the most genuine relationship she had ever had. He never told her what she wanted to hear simply to make it easier for himself.

She needed to give this revelation some serious thought. But not tonight. Tonight she needed the shelter of the familiar—her home and her belongings.

“I’ll take a cab, okay?” she conceded.

John tenderly brushed an errant strand of hair behind her ear, one finger caressing the line of her cheek and jaw. “More than okay.”

Chapter Five

John kept his peace until the taillights of Jodi's taxi disappeared around the corner. He'd promised Jodi they'd keep their differences to themselves and he was bound and determined to keep his word—at least when she was around. He knew all too well what kind of parties Wiz attended. He'd wanted to somehow get Wiz to tell Jodi exactly what kind of party he was taking her to, but the opportunity had never presented itself.

He had a bad feeling about all this. He didn't think Wiz would intentionally put Jodi in harm's way, but he'd had enough *good ole boy* conversations with him to know he liked to play the kind of sex games which could be dangerous to someone who was unprepared—like Jodi. She might think of herself as a brazen hussy who had now done everything, but he knew she wasn't. One of the things he loved about her was her wide-eyed willingness to try anything once when it came to sex. God, what nights they could have together if she'd just let him into her heart and trust him to love her. He didn't even want to think about Jodi going off with Wiz to some BDSM party. He could see her thinking it would be a lark and satisfy any burning curiosity she might have.

Hell, he didn't want to think about her going off with Wiz for any reason. He wanted to charge off and lock Jodi in her apartment and keep her there all to himself. She was his, dammit! He felt his nails digging into the palms of his hands. He wanted to hit something. John took a calming breath. If he honestly loved her, and he did, he had to back off and give her time to work things out in the rest of her life. She had to find out the truth about Wiz for herself.

He turned and glared at Wiz, finally able to let his anger and jealousy out in the open. "Okay, now that Jodi is gone, just what are you up to, old man?"

"Old man, you say? In that case, I'm not up to anything you need to be concerned with, you snot-nosed kid," Wiz replied. Haughty indifference radiated around him, from his speech to his stance.

All it took was the sound of his voice to make John's indignation rise. "If it concerns Jodi, then it is my business, Wiz."

Wiz shoved his hands into his pockets. "You don't own her, John. In fact, I intend to make sure you never get the chance to be with her again. After tomorrow night, she will belong to no one except me." Wiz turned away and strolled toward a Bentley with a chauffeur waiting beside the open door.

"What do you mean she's going to belong to you?"

He lunged before Wiz could take more than a few steps, grabbed him by the shoulder and spun him around. "I knew this party was really one of your BDSM club gatherings! And you can't even be upfront enough about your lifestyle to be honest with her. You're so insecure, you have to lure her to your home. Jodi doesn't belong to anyone. Not me and certainly not you, you bastard!" Pent up frustration took over. Before John knew what he'd planned, his fist came back behind his ear and landed a right hook to Wiz's jaw, knocking him clear off his feet to land sprawled on the sidewalk.

John heard the rapid staccato of footsteps as the chauffeur came running down the walkway. Damn, he'd done it now. From the looks of the man, he was probably more bodyguard than driver. John readied himself for anything. He'd spent years wrestling with cows at branding time and been in more bar brawls than he could keep track of. Hands loose at his sides, knees flexed, he kept one eye on Wiz and the other on his employee.

Wiz sat with a stunned look at his face. Instead of coming for John, the chauffeur made sure Wiz was okay and helped him to his feet. Wiz pulled a silk handkerchief from his pocket and dabbed at the blood beginning to dribble from his nose. He spoke quietly to the man at his side and gave him a reassuring slap on the shoulder before sending him back to the car.

Wiz gave John a pained smile. "Relax. I'm not going to strike you and get into a common brawl right here in the street. I know how difficult it must be to see the woman of your dreams walk out of your arms and into mine. I'll forgive the offense this one time." Wiz's eyes narrowed into slits, his face taking on a hard and implacable look. "But make no mistake, the next time I will not be as quick to forgive the insult."

John felt shock as he watched Wiz walk off and climb into the waiting Bentley. He could not believe Wiz had not retaliated. Shit, he would have in Wiz's place!

Right now he had more problems than trying to figure Wiz out. He needed to call Jodi and see if she was okay. Maybe he'd be able to talk to her about Wiz and his lifestyle. At least give her a heads-up.

"HMMMM, 'lo?" Jodi's sleepy voice caressed John's body, soft as a tender brush of fingers across his skin.

"Hey. Did I wake you?"

There was a moment of silence and he could almost see her face as it changed expressions, comprehension dawning slowly in her sleep-clouded brain. "John?"

"Yeah, it's me. I'm sorry to wake you," he said, even though he wasn't. Hearing her voice was a balm to his soul right now. "I wanted to make sure you got home and were okay."

"Mmm, I was dreaming about you." Her voice was a low, sensual purr and made his balls tighten. "It was the first time we met—only the other guys weren't there. You were wearing those chaps...have I ever told you how seeing you in those chaps made me so freaking horny I could barely stand to be in my own skin?"

John heard a little hitch in her voice. He knew the sound and what it meant. He closed his eyes and saw her face as it softened with passion. She would lick her full lips and as her excitement grew, her small white teeth would bite into her lower lip.

He moaned. "Jodi..." She didn't seem to hear him, though. Sleep still fogged her voice and she was caught up in reliving her dream.

"You didn't have anything else on. Just the chaps. Your back was to me, the black leather cupped your ass... I came up behind you, ran my hands across all that smooth, hot skin..."

John clenched his jaw, his cock a steel rod threatening to break the metal teeth of the zipper keeping it confined. He used his free hand to press hard against the ache, hoping to stave off his lust. His brain warred with his cock. He needed to talk to Jodi about this damned party of Wiz's, but son-of-a-bitch, she was killing him!

"Jodi, damn it, girl!"

"I don't want to talk. I want to spread you on my bed in those chaps and lick and suck your cock until it's all wet and shiny, then I wanna..."

"Jodi, you're killing me here! I want that. God do I want that! But I need to talk to you." John paused while he made short work of releasing his cock from its painful

confines and gave it a few slow strokes. He was going to kick himself later for stopping her.

His urgency must have gotten through Jodi's lustful haze. She gave a long-suffering sigh and her voice took on a more suspicious quality. "What do you want to talk about, John?"

"This party Wiz is taking you to..."

"I'm going, John. I said I'd go and I'm going whether you're happy with it or not," Jodi said with finality in her voice.

"I know. I'm not trying to stop you from going. I just want you to be careful. You don't know the kinds of things Wiz is into. You have to admit, you don't know much about him."

She gave a sharp laugh. "Hell, John, I don't know much about you either!"

John's erection began to lose some of the aching urgency under the lash of her voice. "I know. Jodi, I wanted to change that tonight and..." His voice trailed off.

Jodi was silent for such a long time he began to wonder if she was still on the other end of the line or if she'd gotten angry and hung up. A century must have passed before he heard the slow inhale of her breath. He could visualize her face, eyes closed, mouth tight, tense concentration causing a frown between enticingly arched eyebrows, while she counted to ten before answering. "I'm going to the party tomorrow night with Wiz. Now good night, John." The buzzing of a disconnected line was the only thing left to listen to.

"Shit!" John flung the receiver down on the base and jumped off the bed. He began stripping his clothes, leaving a trail on his way to the bathroom.

His mind whirled faster than a tornado, emotions and thoughts whipping around until he wanted to scream in frustration. Reaching into the large, glass-enclosed shower, he turned the handle and let the water run until it blasted hot and steamy before stepping in.

He let the water pound against his skin and tried to calm his mind. He'd blown it tonight. Was nothing simple with this woman? What he had hoped would turn into a romantic evening had turned into a nightmare. Jesus, what a rotten night. One of the worst he could remember. To top it all off, his cock had gone from ramrod straight, ball-breaking agony to wilted and despondent in moments.

Jodi had him by the short hairs and all it took was her voice to thrust him this way or that according to her whim.

The steaming water began to work its magic, calming his reeling emotions, slowing his thoughts, easing taut muscles. Jodi's image formed in his mind. Long chestnut hair to caress across his skin and wind through his fingers while he watched her mouth move up and down on his cock. Her coral nipples puckering as she dragged them up his belly, mouth questing on its way over his pecs.

He began moving his hands across his chest, imagination taking over. He brushed his thick fingers across his hardened nipples while in his mind Jodi tongued first one, then the other. She kissed across the hard planes of his chest, tongue making swirls and circles as she made her way back to the hard bud. She nibbled before drawing him into her mouth, laving and sucking until each nerve in his body ignited. A path of fire shot through him and a simmering blaze began low in his belly, as he pinched and pulled his nipples.

The skin between his legs began to tighten, testicles drawing closer to the heated center of his body. He roved his hands downward now, drawing his semi-erect cock into one fist to squeeze and roll, thumb circling the rapidly swelling head, awakening each nerve in his hardening length.

John stumbled to sit on the bench running the length of two opalescent walls. Sprawled in the corner, he propped one foot on the seat, shoulders leaning back against each wall, his head lolled on his neck. Water streamed across his chest, teasing at sensitive flesh before it ran through the dips and valleys of his abs, cascaded around his rigid cock and washed across his hard balls. With a firm grip, he moved his fist from root to stem, mind still spitting out images of the woman who'd captured his soul.

Jodi as she sprawled on the bar, legs spread, pink pussy slick with her juices, clit engorged and throbbing. Jodi as she worked her tight slit down his cock until he felt her clit drag above the root of his dick. Jodi as her mouth nibbled along his neck to suck at the hollow beneath his throat, her hard nipples dragging and catching in his chest hair.

Back arching with the sliding, squeezing sensation of his fist, hips thrusting, he increased the tempo of his desire. His buttocks tightened and released with each thrust, his tight back entrance throbbing. John gave a long, low moan and slid a thick finger down the expanse between balls and anus, and began teasing the fluttering entrance, each thrust upward releasing the pressure against the little hole, the downward momentum teasingly pushing his fingertip into the puckered ring of muscle.

Watching her that fateful night while her expert fingers pushed into Trevor's asshole, mouth working his cock, had about killed him. He didn't want to see her with another

man, but damn was the sight hot. He pictured Jodi in the shower with him, kneeling between his parted thighs, slim finger slipping into his tight backdoor while she sucked and licked the head of his cock...

Ah fuck! His balls drew up tight against his body, cock contracting almost painfully before hot streams of come jetted across his belly and chest. The motion of his hand and hips slowed, tension draining from his body as his penis softened beneath the now gentle stroking. His cheek resting against one wall, eyes closed, water beating a steady tempo across his body, he let out a long exhalation.

Temporarily sated, now he simply needed to figure out what to do about Jodi before she drove him insane.

Jodi had been having the most incredible dream of her life when the phone rang. She was so deeply asleep that reaching out and picking up the phone took a huge effort. When she heard John's voice, it seemed to be part of the fantasy. Oh yeah, the deep sexy rumbling of his voice made the feeling of tracing the tight muscles in his ass more real.

Then awareness flooded in and reality slammed her awake. He didn't call to play with her and ease her aching flesh. He'd called to hammer at her about Wiz again. But Jodi was in control for once, and in no small part because of John's insistent prodding, along with Jackie's reality talk.

It was her life and she was going to live it. She was going to find out what she wanted and to the devil with anyone else! Right now what she wanted was John's hot flesh beneath her questing mouth and hands. Mm, mm, mmmmm—hot damn!

She let her imagination take her winging back to the dream.

"Just lay there on the bed, cowboy. I wanted to see that tight ass up close. Grip the headboard and hold on tight 'cause Jodi wants to play."

She gazed at each ridge of muscle in John's back as he lay face down on the bed. Damn, what a fine bedspread he made. The black leather of the chaps made a startling contrast to his bronzed skin. She let desire move her and traced one finger along the curve of his ass before moving lower to tease his balls.

"Spread your legs, John." Her voice hitched in rising excitement, sounding husky and sexy.

John's moan filled her with feminine power as Jodi crawled between his parted legs and sat back on her heels.

Where to begin?

Her hands glided up the backs of his legs, each hair sending a tingle through the palms of her hands. In a heady rush, the sensation spread up her arms, racing to her breasts and pussy. It was similar to a jolt of electric current, and each nerve along the path was ignited. Jodi squeezed her legs together and rolled her hips, gasping as her clit was compressed between her slick folds.

Grasping the insides of his thighs, she pushed to widen the space between, and moved backward 'til she was on her belly. She brushed across the tender inner flesh with her hair, like a cat rubbing against his skin. She heard him suck in air and felt his body clench. The top of her head came up to brush against his balls. Jodi gave them a lick, and purred against him.

“Son-of-bitch, Jodi!”

She raised her head and watched as he thrust his hips against the sheets, his head raised, neck muscles bulging. A grimace of aroused agony creased his face. He gripped the headboard so tightly his knuckles were white with strain.

What a captivating sight. She felt powerful, in control. She was all woman, and John was her man. Jodi could imagine his hard cock pressed into the sheets, the head almost purple with blood, pre-cum seeping out to soak into the material beneath them. Closing her eyes she inhaled the subtle scents of sex. She smiled in satisfaction—aromatherapy at its best. Oh yeah...

She drew her attention back to the feast before her. She licked each hard testicle, swirling through the short hair before slipping between the cheeks of his ass. She parted the firm globes so her tongue could twirl and tease at the quivering back entrance until he was moaning.

Giving in to temptation, she nipped at his firm cheeks then laved each bite with her tongue to soothe the sting. She worked her way up past the belt of his chaps, dragging her breasts against his warm body. Her breath came faster and faster, her own needs becoming unbearable. Jodi reached between her legs and teased the engorged pearl. Her fingers were wet and slick with her own juices. She moved her hips, letting her fingers circle around her clit.

She grazed her teeth across John's back, biting and sucking—she was totally lost to sensation. John beneath her, her breasts pressing into his back, both hands now rubbing and teasing between her legs. Her flesh was slick and swollen, throbbing with imminent

release. Little mewling noises began to mix with her fast breathing. She thrust harder with her hips.

Close. She was so damn close, she...

Oh. My. God. Yes!

The world seemed to explode around her. Jodi was caught in a lightening storm, each cell sizzling with heat and light and sensation.

She collapsed facedown on her pillow with her hands still trapped beneath her. Just before drifting back to sleep, she felt a fleeting sense of emptiness. Her immediate needs were satisfied, but she wanted more.

How wonderful it would be if dreams could come true.

Chapter Six

Wow, talk about your hedonistic decadence. After sleeping the rest of the night in sated unconsciousness, Jodi had been picked up the next morning in a luxurious chauffeur-driven Bentley and whisked away to a private airstrip. For the first time she was looking forward to exploring her relationships. Even though she hadn't let John tell her about Wiz's past last night, she'd listened and was uncertain about her commitment to see this through. But she had promised herself to find out what she wanted. She was going to be "Dolls", the adventurous hussy who looked forward to each new adventure, not Jodi, the scared little rabbit.

Everyone was nice and went out of their way to be accommodating. There was nothing better than being treated as a princess to make a girl forget her doubts. The pilot came out and introduced himself, took Jodi on a tour of the plane and proudly showed her all the extravagant amenities.

"No expense was spared when Mr. Carlyle purchased this craft. There's a bar stocked with the finest wines, spirits, liqueurs, and imported beers, a sophisticated entertainment system with a drop down movie screen, and leather reclining seats, each with its own set of headphones." The pilot pointed out each feature. "Toward the back of the plane are two executive washrooms." Each one was bigger than the bathroom in her apartment. There was even a bedroom with a large four-poster bed. What in the heck did he do? Live on his plane?

Add in all the staff and this was one high-priced ride. Pilot, co-pilot, navigator, two stewardesses, and a woman who didn't seem to have a designation Jodi could think of.

"Elise is available for pedicures, manicures, massages, hairstyling and make-up," the pilot informed her. Who the hell other than a famous cover model needed a stylist on staff?

After her impromptu tour, the pilot made sure Jodi was comfortable in her seat. “Mr. Carlyle will be joining us shortly. We are scheduled to take off in fifteen minutes. Travel time to Seattle is estimated at two hours and eighteen minutes.”

Good, she thought to herself. With more than two hours flight time she’d have plenty of time to get details on this party. Attending a get-together with Wiz’s hoity-toity friends was always a daunting prospect.

Before Jodi could explore the high-tech seat she found herself in, one of the stewardesses came through to make sure she was comfortable and had everything she needed.

“Would you like a cocktail before take-off, Ms. Matthews?” she asked with a dazzling smile.

“No, thank you.” Jodi smiled back. “I’m fine for now.”

“If you need anything at all, please push the top left button on either armrest, and I’ll be here in a flash.”

This was sure different from the last plane trip she took. She was a new person now and that curled up ball of misery was just a distant dream.

While she waited for Wiz to arrive, Jodi played with the various buttons on the armrest, discovering what each one did. Before long she was slightly reclined with her feet up, the chair performing a heated massage along her spine. Wowza, how delightful. She had no idea how much the fancy chair cost. Heck, a single trip on the pricey jet was liable to cost more than she made in a month.

A tentative voice interrupted her thoughts. “Excuse me, Ms. Matthews. Would you like to have a manicure and pedicure while you wait for Mr. Carlyle?”

Jodi opened one eye and smiled lazily at the attractive young woman. “No, I don’t think so, um...what did you say your name was?”

“Elise, ma’am. I’m here to make sure all your personal needs are taken care of before the party tonight.”

Personal needs? The words made her want to sniff her armpits to see if she stunk or something. She’d showered and packed several different outfits for tonight, having no idea what kind of party Wiz was taking her to. What other personal needs could she have?

“My name is Jodi and I’m not ma’am to anyone. It’s a pleasure to meet you, Elise,” she said. Elise reminded her of the old Jodi she’d tossed out the door. “I’m fine. I don’t

think I need anything special like a pedicure,” she finished with a self-conscious giggle. “At least I think I took care of my personal needs before I came.”

Elise didn’t meet her eyes, but gave her a tiny smile. “Please call me if you change your mind, Ms. Matthews.” She disappeared into the back of the plane.

Wiz arrived in a flurry of activity. An assistant followed close behind, scribbling notes in a leather-bound binder as Wiz negotiated with someone over a Bluetooth wireless device hooked over his ear. He took a seat across from her, acknowledging her presence with a wink, and continued his conversation. From the sound of it, he was bartering the details of major business purchase.

She tuned out his voice as he ended the call and had a discussion with the assistant. By the time the impeccably dressed woman disembarked, the crew was preparing for take-off.

“Candice, why doesn’t my guest have a drink?” His booming voice reprimanded the stewardess, and Jodi worried the employee was in trouble.

“It’s alright, Wiz. I was offered a drink, several times in fact, but I didn’t want anything.”

He ignored her comment, turning to Elise, who had immediately appeared from the back as soon as he boarded the plane. “Why are you standing around? Were my instructions not clear?”

“They were very clear, sir. Your guest declined my services.”

Wiz turned and looked at Jodi momentarily before focusing his attention on the other woman. “Jodi will allow you to perform your job. I want her ready for this evening when we land.” He proceeded to rattle on about what he expected from the employee, making it apparent Jodi was being given no choice in the matter.

Domineering bastard!

“Whoa there, Wiz! Don’t I get any say in this regimen you’ve set up for me?” Jodi didn’t want Elise or the stewardess to be in trouble—they had been nothing except kind and polite to her. She also didn’t want to be treated as some empty-headed doll there for his pleasure.

She watched as his shoulders became rigid for an instant before relaxing. He turned toward her, a warm, almost apologetic smile on his face.

“Jodi, I am so sorry. Of course you have a say, sweetheart. I didn’t mean to be overbearing.”

The captain's voice floated through the cabin. "Sir, we've been cleared for takeoff." The plane began moving down the runway.

Wiz sat down beside Jodi. Reaching over, he buckled her seatbelt securely before fastening his own. "I truly apologize. It's sometimes difficult to shift gears from work to pleasure." He gifted her with an endearing grin. Wiz had one of the best smiles she'd ever seen. She always found herself smiling back and forgiving him anything.

He kissed the back of her hand before explaining. "I know how nervous you get in social situations and I wanted to do everything I could to make you feel more comfortable. I didn't want you to have any doubts about fitting in with my friends. That's all I was trying to do. Forgive me?"

Jodi felt the knots in her stomach uncoil. She'd known there had to be a reasonable explanation for Wiz's behavior. The treatment of his staff had taken her by surprise, but he did have her best interests at heart, and she'd probably find it difficult to switch gears herself. Her life was simple compared to Wiz's. She dealt cards and she was good at it. When she went home, the job was over.

Jodi returned his smile wholeheartedly. "Thank you, Wiz. I was worried about the party," Jodi confessed. "I don't even know if I have anything stylish enough to wear to a party with your friends. You didn't tell me anything about it. I brought several different dresses so I would be prepared for anything."

"Don't you worry about a thing, Jodi. I've taken care of all the details. Elise is here to spoil you. Think of it as one of those spa days you ladies are supposed to treat yourselves to, but rarely do. She'll primp and pamper you, get you all relaxed and feeling like a million bucks!"

Put that way, Jodi relented. Spa day! Who wouldn't want to be pampered?

She eased back in her comfy leather chair. Once the plane had leveled off, Elise brought out a small stool and a basket of items, which she set in the aisle. Pulling a lever, she swiveled the seat and began removing Jodi's sneakers and socks.

Jodi looked over at Wiz, hoping to talk while she was primped and pampered, but he'd already returned to conducting business. She tried to ask him a question, but it seemed things were settled in his mind, and he'd gone back into business mode.

Elise's hands were soothing as they rubbed oils into her foot, massaging each toe until Jodi felt the tension seep out. Elise worked her way across the foot, paying special attention to the arch. By the time she pulled out the pedicure implements, Jodi was sprawled in her chair with a silly smile on her face, totally chilled. She'd forgotten all

about Wiz and his behavior, and barely moved when Elise finished with her feet and began her ministrations to each hand and lower arm. No wonder women paid exorbitant prices to have spa days. She could get used to this kind of treatment real fast.

Once Elise completed the pedicure and manicure, she encouraged Jodi to follow her into the bedroom. A plastic pad had been laid down to protect the bedding, and Elise efficiently spread a sheet over it, setting a folded, matching one on top. She pulled a bottle of white wine from an ice bucket sitting on the bedside table, and began explaining the next steps while she poured the wine into a crystal glass.

“This is a nice crisp wine and wonderful for quenching your thirst. Most people’s mouths get a bit dry and I’ve found this really helps.” Jodi did feel a little parched. She sat on the edge of the bed and took a sip while Elise continued.

“I’ll step out of the room for a moment while you undress. Just lie down on the bed, face up, and pull the sheet over you. It will keep you from becoming chilled and also preserve your modesty.”

“What are you going to do that you need me naked for?” Jodi was relaxed from Elise’s previous ministrations, and more inclined to trust her, but she was also curious.

Elise smiled comfortingly and laughed a bit. “I was able to massage your lower arms and legs during the manicure and pedicure, and now I’d like to finish up with treating the rest of your body to a massage. First, though, we will begin with waxing your legs.”

Waxing her legs? “Isn’t that painful?” Jodi swallowed hard. “I’d really rather not.”

“There will be a brief flash of pain when the wax is removed, but you’ll love the results. Your skin will feel smooth. And the best part is you won’t have to shave for a while.”

That sounded pretty damn good. She hated shaving her legs. Then there was the massage afterwards. “Okay,” she agreed, albeit reluctantly.

When Elise returned, she folded the sheet back to expose one leg and, with a gentleness that seemed innate to her personality, smoothed the warm wax over Jodi’s skin. The wax felt surprisingly good as it covered a small part of her leg. This was very nice. Jodi allowed herself to sink into the mattress and enjoy being pampered.

She almost jumped right off the bed as the first strip of wax and hair was ripped away, but managed to contain a yelp of surprise. Elise giggled while she smoothed her hand across the offended flesh. “Sorry, Ms. Matthews. I forget how the first time is always a shock.” She continued to rub the offended skin, and the sting disappeared. At

first Jodi wondered if the woman was laughing at her expense. She rose up on her elbows to take a look at Elise. Their eyes met and all she saw was gentle humor and sincere concern. Maybe this wouldn't be as bad as she'd feared. It was tolerable torture considering the rewards of a massage afterwards and no shaving.

After a while it became monotonous. Warm wax spread on. Strips applied to the area. A firm tug and flash of pain, then it was on to the next bit of flesh. Elise had turned on soft music, and combined with the repetitive procedure, Jodi began to doze.

Jodi was relieved as the torture part came to an end. She felt lazy, listening while Elise rubbed lotion over her legs and chatted casually. "You just relax more while I work this into your skin. The lotion has emollients to calm the sting, and keep the areas from becoming red and swollen. By tonight, your legs will feel like silk and look stunning."

Jodi hoped Wiz paid the woman big bucks. Just the sound of her voice was enough to ease any anxiety she might have left. And her hands were a miracle as they worked each knotted muscle until she felt limp as a noodle, and very content.

Elise nudged her legs apart, bending the left one at the knee and resting Jodi's foot against the other calf. Her magic fingers worked up and across Jodi's inner thigh. Jodi began to feel a bit embarrassed as her spread labia moved with each stroke. The gentle friction made her hot, and, her clit engorged, cream slicking her folds. The sensations were incredible, but to be creaming because of a woman's touch. That freaked her out a bit.

She tried to relax again and ignore the sensations. She let herself drift with the feeling, losing herself in the music until an unbelievable feeling of heat spread across the plump lips of her pussy, shocking Jodi out of her trance. The woman had spread wax over her pubic hair. This time Jodi did jump off the bed.

"What the fuck?"

"I'm sorry if I startled you again. I thought you were sleeping. I'm finishing up with a Brazilian wax. Mr. Carlyle specifically requested this service."

Jodi's voice was shrill with disbelief. "He wants you to do what? I don't think so, lady!" She stood, arms crossed over her chest, eyes narrowed in anger, stiff and unbending.

Elise began backing toward the door, hands held out in front as if to ward off the indignation rolling from Jodi in almost visible waves.

“M-*Ms.* Matthews...you don’t understand,” Elise stammered, reaching behind her to grasp the knob and open the door.

“Don’t understand?” Jodi’s voice cracked with her fury. “I understand perfectly. Mr. Carlyle can damned well let you rip off his pubic hair if he wants to, but you’re not touching mine.”

Without another word, Elise turned and fled the room. With the door standing wide open, Jodi became aware the only piece of cloth she had on was the linen strip stuck to her pussy. Great, how was she supposed to get the wax off now without ripping the hair from her most tender flesh?

She reached out and grabbed the sheet, wrapping it securely around her. Propping a foot on the bed, Jodi moved the sheet aside and looked at the offending wax. She gripped one end of the cloth between thumb and forefinger, and treating it as a bandage, she pulled sharply.

Her eyes widened in pain as several hairs ripped out of her sensitive labia. “*Youch!*”

It was stuck. If she hadn’t been furious before, rage began to boil up and threaten to take the top of her head off with the force of its explosion. The only way it was coming off was going to get Wiz exactly what he wanted—waxed pussy.

As realization dawned, Wiz strode through the door looking upset, Elise peeking fearfully out from behind him.

“What the hell is wrong with you, Jodi? Just let Elise do her job.” He raked a hand through his hair in a show of exasperation. “I want you to look your best for the party tonight.”

She brought her foot down on the floor and turned to face him, one hand grasping the sheet tight at her chest, the other coming down to cover her mound. Squaring her shoulders and straightening her spine, she looked at him. “A nice dress and new hair-do and I’d be fine for any party.”

“*Dammit*, Jodi.”

A bead of sweat rolled down his red face, his broad shoulders rigid, and his hands had fisted at his sides. Flashes of her father’s face began repeating in her brain. Her shoulders began to slump, and she bent slightly in the middle, head lowering in fear and shame. Somehow she managed not to cover her head in a defensive posture. She didn’t think Wiz would strike her, but he was madder than hell.

“Wiz, she...she wants to w-wax my...my private places.” Her voice hitched in humiliation. Fuck, she was so upset she started to cry.

Dashing the tears from her face, she turned her back on Wiz. The half-full glass of wine caught her attention. Jodi grabbed it and downed the cool liquid in one gulp.

This, his reaction and attitude, is why she didn’t get involved with men. They were high-handed bullies who never stopped to think anyone else might have an opinion. *John would never have done this without discussing it first*, a calm voice in her head insisted but she shoved it away.

From the corner of her eye she watched Wiz. He closed his eyes for a moment, took a deep breath then shook and flexed his hands until they unclenched before moving up behind her. Jodi’s body began to shake in reaction, reliving all those days of her childhood when she was helpless to defend herself against someone bigger and stronger.

“Don’t, Wiz. Do not touch me right now.” She took a deep breath and stiffened her spine. She was a grown woman and would face his anger. “Just leave Elise to finish what she started and get out before I say something I’ll regret.”

Without a word, he turned and walked out. When the door had closed with a soft click, Jodi lay back down and allowed Elise to do as she’d been instructed. She liked Elise and didn’t want the woman to get in trouble, but to allow a stranger to touch her so intimately...wild, random thoughts buzzed through her head and she struggled to remain still.

The whole thing was...surreal. Confusion and embarrassment combined with the pain and shock. The invasions of her personal space made her feel exposed and vulnerable, but at the same time it was a wicked, erotic experience. Her body spread open for another woman, gentle hands caressing and spreading lotion over her tender folds. Was Elise a lesbian? Did the sinful sensations mean she might be one, too?

What other comfort zones would be pushed tonight? What would Wiz expect of her? The unknown made her leery, but also excited. The questions swirled around in her dazed mind long after Elise finished the waxing and began styling her hair, finishing by applying make-up. Jodi was caught up in her thoughts, and the rest of her beauty session passed by in a bit of a blur.

By the time Elise was done, Jodi barely recognized herself. She was dressed in a thick white robe and slippers, and her long dark hair had been tortured into an elegant up-do with springy curls framing her face. Dramatic make-up changed her entire look, making her eyes seem large and sultry.

The pilot executed a smooth-as-silk landing. Jodi headed for the closet to change back into her own clothes, but Wiz came through the door before she had a chance. “We are disembarking now, Jodi, and the car is waiting.”

“Okay. It will only take me a minute to get dressed.”

He shook his head. “I don’t want you to change. I’ve got an outfit waiting for you at the house. The driver will collect your things and bring them later.”

Oh, great. Here we go again.

Warmth spread a path from her chest all the way up to her cheeks as she blushed. Damn her fair complexion.

Did he actually expect her to walk off the plane wearing only a robe? Nuh-uh. She couldn’t possibly.

Before she could even get up the energy to blast him back through the door, he stepped closer. One warm hand on her shoulder, he cupped the side of her face with the other, thumb brushing across her cheek. Concern laced his handsome features and somehow he managed to look both remorseful and sad as a lost puppy.

“I’m sorry, Jodi, for being such an insensitive lout earlier. I should have discussed all these arrangements with you ahead of time, and I know I’ve probably earned your anger, but...please forgive me? I’ll try to do better from now on. Truly. It would please me if you would submit to my desires. I like knowing you have nothing on but my robe.”

Hundreds of warring responses battered inside her head. Maybe he was into the D/s lifestyle. It would fit with his domineering personality. Jodi knew she was tender-hearted and gave in too easily to the few people she valued, but...

The idea was daring. She found herself craving the adrenaline rush of an adventurous act. It was Dolls all the way this time.

“On one condition, Wiz,” she finally replied.

“Anything, honey. What’s your condition?”

“We sit down and talk.”

A broad smile eased the tension in his face. “Of course, we can talk! We’ll talk before the party tonight. I promise. And if you really don’t feel comfortable walking from the plane to the car in your robe, I’ll have the driver wait while you dress.”

Jodi didn’t want to be outside in a robe, but it did cover her and she suspected she wouldn’t have far to walk. She couldn’t deal with one more conflict between them right now. Besides, she wanted to be bold and take a risk.

Decision made, she hooked her arm through his in silent acceptance, and let him lead her down the steps to the tarmac where they were greeted by his driver, George.

“Miss Matthews, it’s a pleasure to meet you,” the man said with a slight bow in her direction. He seemed to take her attire in stride as if women stepping off the plane wearing only robes were an everyday occurrence. What the lack of reaction said about her friend was something she chose not to contemplate.

George opened the car door, assisting her into the rich interior. As he closed the door, ensconcing them in privacy, Jodi sighed with relief. Maybe in the quiet of the car they’d be undisturbed and she would learn some details.

She’d parted her lips to speak, and Wiz’s cell phone rang, once again stealing away their chance to talk. He spent the entire drive to the house issuing orders to a subordinate on how he wanted a certain business deal handled.

Things were no better when they got to the house, or mansion might be a better description. Why a single man needed such a huge place was beyond her imagination. It wasn’t as if he had a wife and ten kids running around to use all those rooms. In reality, it was more showplace than home, but Wiz seemed comfortable there among all the expensive art and designer furnishings. She’d learned from their online conversations that he enjoyed the finer things in life. The huge palace left her feeling small and insignificant.

Wiz excused himself to finish the business call in his office. The housekeeper, Abigail, showed Jodi to her room. It was a surprise to find her suitcase in the closet, her clothes hanging from the rack. She shrugged, deciding Wiz’s staff was able to perform magic.

She ignored the boxes laid out on the bed and changed into a comfortable pair of jeans and blouse. Dressed and feeling at loose ends, she wandered around the enormous dwelling until she found the game room Wiz had pointed out when they’d first arrived. She’d seen the computer in there, and knew it was her chance to get online.

Chapter Seven

After several hands of video poker, Jodi logged into the online game room where she'd met her friends. It didn't take long for the instant message box to appear with a greeting from John.

Johngamer: Hey, Dolls! How was your flight?

Dolls: Um...interesting.

Johngamer: How so?

SheriffDan: Come on, Dolls. Fess up. We need a little excitement in here. It's been a boring day. What trip?

Dolls: Okay, okay...sheesh! I'm in Seattle with Wiz, who has yet to have the time to notice I'm here. He had this stylist chick on the plane that fluffed, pampered, and massaged me to within an inch of my life...LOL!

Johngamer: What's going on? Why isn't he paying any attention to you?

SheriffDan: Yeah, what's up with that?

Dolls: He's too busy making \$\$\$. Didn't even realize how embarrassed I was when he asked me get off the plane wearing the robe and slippers.

SheriffDan: In a robe and slippers? Details, woman!

Johngamer: WTF? I knew this trip wasn't a good idea. There's a lot you don't know about Wiz.

Dolls: That's why I'm here, to learn more about him. And Wiz is my friend, even if he is distracted most of the time. I'm really anxious to hear about this party.

Johngamer: Just be careful, Dolls. And don't let him talk you into anything you don't want to do. Damn, I knew you shouldn't have gone with him.

Jodi stared at the screen for a moment. Why did John keep trying to warn her away from Wiz? Was it just jealousy or something more? Granted, Wiz was turning out to be a control freak, but if he was into D/s, she figured that fit. Besides, she was anxious to see what the draw of BDSM was.

Dolls: I'll be careful, John.

Johngamer: Jodi, please...dammit.

Dolls: This is Wiz we're talking about. And it's not like nobody knows where I am. If it will make you feel better, I'll call you later.

"Well hell and damnation!" John swore out loud while he slammed the top down on his laptop. "That's it. I'm done. The woman can just take her chances. See if I care anymore."

He grabbed his cell phone and flipped it open, autodialing a special number for the airport. "This is John Graham. Get my plane ready and alert the pilot. I'm going back home." He shut the phone without bothering to say good-bye. He was in no mood to be polite.

John opened and shut drawers, grabbing clothes and throwing them into his suitcase. He was sure the entire hotel could hear the slamming and cursing as he stomped from one place to another packing his things. Home was sounding better and better.

He let autopilot take over while he made arrangements to check out and get a limo to the private airport terminal where his plane awaited him.

His home was a far cry from the hot, dusty Montana buttes he'd grown up on. There wasn't one cow to disturb his midnight slumber and he never had to sleep in the bitter winter darkness to keep an eye on the critters so they didn't get scared by a coyote and run off. He did have horses, though. He enjoyed riding in the evenings with the tropical breezes blowing through his hair. He'd hoped to share some of that with Jodi, but...nope. He was done. He wasn't going back to that.

Home was now a tropical paradise. Hard work and a natural ability for business had made John a fortune in the stock market. He had invested it in his dream of a casino paradise. Damn, he loved the excitement of casino life. The noise, the men and women in their finest clothes, all pumped up on the rush of gambling.

In the down times, he relaxed on the white sands of his island just watching the endless expanse of sparkling blue ocean stretch out before him while he sipped on a cold margarita. He was proud of his business and his life.

“Good to see you, boss.” His pilot opened the door to the limo and waited attentively while John got out and reached for his briefcase, before being escorted up the steps to the airplane.

“Nothing good about it,” he snarled. He knew it wasn’t anyone’s fault he was hurting so bad, but damn it he just didn’t want to be sociable.

The pilot was tall, good-natured man whom John had known for years. Instead of a crisp uniform, Seymour had on baggy shorts and a loud Hawaiian print shirt. John may have left the ranch behind, but he’d brought the easy-going, laidback attitude of the life with him. He hated ties and tight collars and he wasn’t going to make anyone on his staff wear them if it wasn’t absolutely necessary.

John threw his briefcase in an empty seat while Seymour pulled the door up and locked it. “Bad trip, boss?”

John rubbed his hands over aching eyes and a head that felt ready to explode. “You might say that, Seymour. In fact, you might say this trip could not get worse.” He flopped down in a seat. “I just want to go home and forget about the world if I can.”

Seymour gave a small salute. “You got it, boss. We’re on our way.”

The confrontation with John made Jodi feel bad, but hell. She was capable of taking care of herself and making her own decisions. Getting to know Wiz meant meeting his friends and seeing how he lived, learning what he enjoyed.

John had disappeared from the game room without posting another message, and the conversation moved on to the game they were playing. Jodi began to feel a bit better, more confident, after chatting with her friends. She stayed in the game room until the housekeeper came to let her know dinner was ready and Wiz was waiting for her.

She followed Abigail through the halls and into a formal dining room, thankful she had a guide. Wiz was sitting at the end of a mile-long table, which had to seat twenty. She took in the delicate china surrounded by too many utensils to keep track of, knowing she’d spend her time fumbling over which to use for what dish and worrying about making a fool of herself.

“Ah, there you are, my pet.”

His pet? Yeah, right. She was nobody's pet. The endearment, if that's what it was, left a bitter taste in Jodi's mouth. Whenever her father used those words, it had meant her mother would receive a verbal berating at best, a physical beating at worst.

She took her time walking to the long table, collecting her thoughts and wondering how to reply. Wiz looked content and at home sitting in his fancy dinner jacket, complete with satin lapels and precisely folded handkerchief in the breast pocket.

"Gosh, Wiz, if I'd known this was a formal affair, I would have changed into something more appropriate." He was playing some strange game with her and hadn't bothered to give her the rules. Jodi felt her temper spike. "And what's with the pet thing?"

"Just an endearment, my dear." He rose and held her chair for her, expertly seating her to his right. "Where have you been, pet?"

"Don't call me pet, and don't play with me. I don't like playing games unless I know the rules, Wiz. You knew exactly where I'd be since you're the one who pointed your game room out to me. You know I can't resist spending time on the computer."

He chuckled, nodding his head in acknowledgement, dismissing her curt reply. "I'm glad you're enjoying my home, Jodi. My offer still stands. I'd love to have you come live here with me and be a part of my life."

It was a generous offer. One which, if she accepted, would mean never worrying about money again. Wiz would give her anything she wanted. Considering the things she'd already experienced at Elise's hand, though, the idea was scary. She wondered exactly what he would expect in return.

Her irritation vanished as the staff served one culinary delight after another. Wiz talked about the people she would meet.

"The party will introduce you to my world and some of my friends, giving you a taste of what we could share."

Jodi found his choice of words interesting.

She tried to think of questions, which would give her more specific information, but he was a master at talking yet saying nothing, and she felt uncomfortable pushing for information in front of his staff. Someone was always hovering to refill water and wine glasses or pick up dropped napkins and forks. As each course was brought out and served, the uneaten portions of the previous dish were whisked away. There never seemed to be an appropriate time.

“Shall we get ready for the party?” Wiz questioned when they finished the meal. She nodded and he took her hand, escorting Jodi up the grand, winding staircase to her room. She became jittery and nervous as he opened each box, moving tissue paper out of the way to reveal the outfit he’d decided she would wear to the mysterious party.

“You are going to look fabulous in this outfit, Jodi.”

Wiz held up a scrap of black leather with swirled silver accents. It was similar to a bustier, only with about half the material missing. She presumed it was some sort of top because of the shoulder straps, but Jodi wasn’t certain.

The back of the garment was laced with black ribbon. When he turned it around, Jodi gasped. There were two small silver-ringed holes which would leave her nipples exposed, and the neckline dipped low. At least half of her generous breasts would be hanging out.

“What the hell is that?” And did he really expect her to wear it...in public? Holy shit!

“Bondage wear,” he casually responded and lifted another small scrap of leather from the box.

The second item appeared respectable at first. In fact, it appeared to be a pair of boy-cut pants with the same silver accents as the top. At least, until she got a look at the crotch, or more appropriately, the lack of crotch. A big gaping hole was positioned where her privates would fit into the obscene garment. Fine silver chains ran from front to back. Her imagination filled in how those would look covering her newly denuded pussy.

“Um, Wiz...” Jodi began, but he produced the next item and she started laughing. The black vinyl platform boots he held up could have come from a porn star's wardrobe. “You’ve got to be kidding, Wiz! If I try to walk in those, I’m gonna face plant within the first few steps.” His other hand held black fishnet thigh-high stockings, which rounded out the bizarre ensemble. “I like the stockings, though. Cute!”

Jodi flopped onto the bed, too stunned to be graceful. The wicked grin kicking up the corners of Wiz’s mouth had her grinning back. “Want to give me a few details about this um...party?”

Wiz sighed in resignation. “As I’ve already told you, the party is at a friend’s house. It is a private gathering for a group of us who share similar tastes in swinging, bondage, dominance and submission, along with a bit of sadomasochism.”

Jodi was sure her jaw had to be hanging open all the way to the floor. “Oh. My. God. You mean like in the books?” Even though she’d begun to suspect Wiz’s darker side—

how could she not with all of John's hints—she still felt shocked. Or maybe she was titillated by the idea?

“We get together in a safe environment to indulge our desires. Trusted staff members monitor the proceedings to ensure everything is safe, sane and consensual. Each member of the group is regularly tested for sexual diseases, and all practice safe sex.”

Wow! It was a lot to take in. Wiz and his friends were into bondage and all that stuff? She'd read books about D/s and even had fantasies of being spanked, but had never been brave enough to do more than fantasize about how it would feel. And now Wiz wanted to take her to this party as...

“What is my role in all of this? You want to parade me around half naked in front of your friends, tie me up and perform your wicked sex games with me?” She almost burst out laughing.

Wiz lifted a large velvet box and held it out before Jodi. Her stomach clenched, but she realized it was too big to contain another ring. Taking the box, she peeked inside.

“Um, Wiz...” Jesus, she was beginning to sound like a broken record, but how was she supposed to respond to all this? A wide black leather choker lay inside. The necklace was accented with swirly silver bits to match the rest of the outfit, and interspersed with oval shaped pieces of smoky topaz. At least they weren't diamonds and the topaz would look good with her eyes. She slipped her finger through a large silver ring in the center of the necklace. “What's this for?”

He held up a matching leash. “You'll go as my pet and be introduced to my lifestyle. I don't expect you to participate in the activities. For tonight, you'll observe and learn.”

He wanted to take her to an exclusive BDSM sex party on a leash like a dog. She stared up at this man she called friend and studied his face. She hadn't really looked at him closely since he boarded the plane. So much had been happening at once. Jodi noticed there was a slight abrasion on his cheek and his nose was a bit swollen and red. Humph. Things began to click into place.

“Did John know what kind of party it is?” she asked.

Wiz pursed his lips and his forehead creased. “You might say that.”

Jodi ignored the little flip-flop her heart did at the thought of John. She sucked her lower lip between her teeth and tried to hold back a smile. “Looks like you conversed with a fist, Wiz.”

He hung his head. “You might say that, too. John was very adamant that I tell you upfront about this particular party.” He looked back up. “He was right, and I was wrong.”

She watched him silently as he turned away and strode to the window. “I want you to come and see my lifestyle, Jodi. I know there isn’t any reason for you to, but...I still want you to come.”

She stood up and walked over to him, patting him on the shoulder. “I’m not really angry, Wiz, just shocked. I’m not going to say yes or no right now. I need to think about it.” Jodi ushered him out of the room. “I promise I’ll make decision and let you know in time for the party.”

Time to call on the Smut Squad for some friendly support and advice.

Chapter Eight

“So what am I supposed to do?” Jodi asked.

She’d kicked Wiz out of the room, grabbed her cell phone, and initiated a three-way with her long-time friends. Reba and Katie were both on the line while Jackie was keeping up through instant messaging with Reba.

“That all depends.” Katie’s brilliant legal mind analyzed the situation and broke down the key factors. “How do you feel about what Wiz is proposing? Are you interested in checking out the party? Do you want to explore his darker side? Check out your own dark side? Will you be able to handle such an extreme social situation?”

Reba’s boisterous laughter was loud and clear over the distance. “Jackie said to ask if you put the outfit on yet. She wants you to snap a picture and email it to all of us.”

“Like hell,” Jodi cried. Even if she decided to attend the party there would be no photographic evidence. And she’d certainly be making some alterations to the outfit Wiz had given her. In reality, she’d already decided to go, but it was always good to talk things out with her friends first.

Katie joined in the laughter for a moment before turning serious again. “Jodi, you have to follow your instincts. If you’re curious about the party, go and see for yourself. If you are uncomfortable with the idea, then decline the party. It doesn’t matter whether you are considering his proposal to move in or not. He’s giving you a choice. He also sounds like the kind of guy who would appreciate an honest answer and will respect your wishes, even if he isn’t always forthcoming himself.”

“Of course, we’ll need a full report afterward,” Reba chimed in. Not long ago she’d lived out her fantasies at an erotic club with the two sexy owners and her husband. They all knew she’d kept certain aspects of the evening to herself, but for the most part had been very open about the experience. “I’ve read about parties like that, but don’t know anyone who’s been to one. Well, at least not anyone who admits it.”

Jodi considered everything they said. The outfit made her very uncomfortable and she was unsure of how she'd deal with such an intense social gathering, but she was also ready to explode from the curiosity firing her imagination.

"Jackie wants to know if you think you'd feel safe going to the party with Wiz. Will he stay true to his word and not expect you to participate? Will he make sure no one takes advantage of you?" Reba relayed. "It comes down to how much you trust him."

"I do trust Wiz, even though I'm not seriously considering the idea of moving in. And I have to admit, I'm dying to go and see this for myself. I like him when he isn't being the large-and-in-charge business mogul and actually has time for me, but I don't see myself leaving Vegas to live in this mausoleum. The lights and action are in my blood."

"So go to the party, but I want you to promise me something." Katie's voice held a commanding tone. "Before you go, make sure Wiz understands and accepts your limits. Spell out for him what you are, and are not, willing to do. Then tell him we expect him to ensure you are protected. If he fails to keep you safe, he's going to have to face the Smut Squad, and it won't be a pleasurable encounter."

Jodi chuckled, her anxiety lightened thanks to her friends. She'd known they'd help ease her tension by offering support and love. "Thanks, you guys. I'll fill you in on all the details tomorrow."

Moving to the closet, Jodi took stock of the clothes she'd packed. The bondage outfit would be all right with a few modifications. Wearing a black cotton bra and panties set would take care of the worst exposure of flesh. Thankfully she'd brought along a see-through crochet black sweater dress she usually paired with a white tank dress. The sweater would provide a tantalizing view of the bondage wear while still giving her a bit of coverage.

Jodi put on the stockings Wiz had provided and her own velvet granny boots with pretty ribbon laces. Since the boot heels were less than three inches high, she'd actually be able to walk without fear of falling on her face.

Wiz was waiting for her at the bottom of the staircase. Her breath caught in her throat as she looked him over. He was such a handsome man. For the party, he'd put on a black poet shirt with billowy sleeves and left the ties loose to reveal an alluring glimpse of tanned flesh. His black leather pants fit to perfection, lovingly cupping the impressive length of his cock and weighty balls. With his deep auburn hair slicked back and his

mustache neatly trimmed, he looked elegant. The dark, sensual gleam in his brown eyes made her skin tingle with awareness.

“You look beautiful, pet. I’m so glad you decided to go!” He glanced pointedly at the collar she had yet to put on before taking her hand.

George was waiting outside with the car. When she moved through the front door, he whistled long and low in appreciation.

Wiz’s warm breath caressed her neck as he assisted her into the car. “You’re gonna have everyone drooling all over themselves,” he whispered. The compliment boosted her confidence.

Once they were underway, Wiz launched into a lecture on how she was to behave and what he expected of her. Jodi tried to pay attention, but the nervous anticipation coursing through her body made it difficult to sit still, much less take in a bunch of instructions.

“Jodi.” The deep and commanding tone of his voice pulled her from her mental wandering.

Wiz fastened the collar around her neck. “The jewelry is a symbol of my ownership, and is for your protection. It will tell the other group members you’re taken. They will only include you in an activity you request to become a part of.”

“I’ll observe and see what it’s all about. I’m not going to submit to anyone, so I won’t be asking to participate.” She wanted him to understand upfront so there would be no misunderstandings. “There will be no flogging, spanking, touching...”

He nodded in acknowledgement of her wishes. “No one will come near you.”

By the time they arrived at the secluded estate, she was wired, a stick of dynamite ready to explode at the slightest show of a spark.

At first everything seemed normal enough. They entered the stately residence, and were greeted by a butler who ushered them into a reception area. A bar was set up at one end of the room, but no alcohol would be available during the party. Wiz had explained on the drive over how drinking and BDSM did not go together well since being altered in any way reduced a Dom’s ability to read his slave or pet’s responses. The submissive could be pushed too far or injured, which was unacceptable to the club members.

She was happy to discover how protective the Doms were, and knowing there were safety precautions in place was comforting.

It was easy to determine each person's role. The Doms were all dressed in elegant attire and the subs wore next to nothing. Black was the prevalent color, although she did notice a few splashes of color to lighten things up here and there.

Many of the subs were either kneeling or standing behind a Dom, with their eyes lowered to the floor. Wiz had said something about not making direct eye contact, but there was no way she'd stare at the floor. Jodi wanted to drink in every detail.

Wiz kept her at his side as they moved around the room, greeting his friends. Almost everyone he introduced her to had questions about their status. "Jodi is exploring the scene, determining if she wants to be my pet." The pride she detected in those words tugged at her heart, but she had serious reservations. She had a difficult time picturing herself kneeling at Wiz's side or walking around with the leash he held coiled in one hand attached to the collar she wore.

They were headed toward the other rooms when a servant told Wiz his presence was required by the host for a private meeting and she was left to her own devices. Good. It gave Jodi the chance to check things out without Wiz's intense scrutiny of her every expression. She'd scope things out and get a sense of how this exclusive club worked.

Chapter Nine

Holy crap! Jodi was going to have a great time describing everything she witnessed to the Smut Squad. Where did these people come from? They looked normal for the most part, if you ignored the risqué clothing, but their sexual proclivity toward the dark and bizarre was beyond shocking.

In the first room she entered, a man was bound to a large x-shaped apparatus. He wore nothing save a series of silver-studded leather straps. One of those straps had been clasped tight against the base of his very red, engorged cock. Another was fastened above his balls, the shaven sacs stretched away from his body with metal weights pulling on the sensitive flesh. Yikes! Didn't that hurt?

A woman dressed in a red catsuit stood behind the man doing something that made him cry out in pain, yet the look on his face was one of tortuous pleasure. Jodi circled the room, moving to get a look at what was being done to bring about such an expression.

Discarded on the floor lay a blue flogger. The red marks peppering his muscular back and ass attested to the fact the toy had recently been in use, but it was the current activity which made Jodi's eyes feel like they were going to pop out of her head. The woman wore a huge dildo strapped to her pelvis and was fucking the man's ass with powerful thrusts. Maybe strip poker and wild sex with four guys was actually kind of tame. It sure was compared to what was happening here.

Jodi was pretty sure she was in danger of her unhinged jaw dragging the floor becoming permanent condition as she moved into the next room. The large space appeared to be a living room under normal circumstances; however, it was set up tonight to accommodate several different scenarios.

People were gathered in various groupings around the room. Two men sat on a couch and seemed to share a casual conversation, totally ignoring the half-naked women between their legs sucking them off. Jodi's attention was caught up by the unbelievable

scene, and she almost tripped over a woman crawling behind her master, wearing nothing but a collar and leash, a horsetail butt plug merrily swinging from her ass.

The sight was so far out there she didn't know what to think about it.

On a small platform set up in another area, a woman stood, arms suspended from chains hooked to the ceiling. A metal bar had been attached to her ankles, keeping her legs spread wide. A table covered with various floggers, whips and canes was positioned next to the platform. A hooded man spoke of each toy's finer qualities before demonstrating its effectiveness on the woman. The look of lust mixed with pride on the woman's face as she was beaten was beyond Jodi's comprehension.

She observed a few people watching the woman closely and talking in quiet tones. For a moment, Jodi wondered if they were discussing the quality of the floggers. What did people discuss at these gatherings? Stocks and bonds?

The scene taking place in the final room she entered captivated Jodi. A sex swing hung from the ceiling near the center of the small space. A stunning redhead was suspended from the device, her back straight, legs extended at a nearly impossible angle from her torso and spread wide. One man stood between her legs, another behind the woman. Each man wore only leather chaps, leaving their asses and cocks exposed.

Wow! It was every woman's fantasy come to life—dual penetration by tall, dark and handsome twins.

Fuck yeah! This party was starting to speak her language.

Both men held the swing, using the device to fuck the woman on their cocks as they stood still. Jodi circled the room, watching their tight, muscular asses clench as all three participants moaned in pure delight.

She took up a position to the side, allowing her to watch both cocks thrust in and out of the woman. She imagined herself in the swing being fucked by twins who looked like John, one cock entering her body as the other withdrew, constantly filled and stimulated.

Her hard nipples pressed against the material of her top. The musky scent of sex entered her lungs with every raspy breath. Her pussy swelled, the chains digging into her scantily covered mound. Jodi didn't even realize at first that she was keeping pace with the trio, enjoying the friction of the chains pleasuring her needy flesh.

"Would you like to be fucked by two men?"

Jodi gasped as the sexy words were breathed against her ear in a husky voice and a large set of hands closed over her hips. Fear laced with excitement made her vagina

clench and flutter. She didn't know whether to lean back against him or pull away. Caution and habit had her trying to pull away and look back at the stranger all at the same time.

"No, don't turn or look. The anticipation and unknown are part of the thrill." One hand caressed her body, sliding up her stomach, across her swollen breasts and the diamond points of her nipples, to finally cover her throat. She felt a brief sting against the side of her neck, which was startling, but she figured the slight pain had to be from a wisp of hair caught in the tug of her collar.

Her attention was captured once more by the threesome in the swing. The man standing behind the moaning woman grasped her swaying breasts, letting his brother set the pace between them while he tweaked and pulled her nipples.

The stranger holding Jodi sidled up closer and rubbed the hard length of his cock between her ass cheeks, soft leather teasing the backs of her legs as he matched her rocking motions. Oh yeah, time to be bold Dolls and not shy Jodi. Wiz had assured her this place was safe and all she had to do was say stop if things went farther than she wanted.

She relaxed back into the man, ass rubbing the considerable bulge she felt pushing against her. He took control of her movements and continued his seductive whispering.

"Imagine the ecstasy of having every orifice used. One cock fucking your mouth, a second in your pussy, and a third in your ass."

Jodi's mind flashed back to the night she first met her online gaming friends, an incredible evening when she'd had sex with four men at once. John had lain on the bed with her above him riding his cock while Conner filled her virgin ass. Wiz and Trevor had knelt at her sides and she alternated between stroking and sucking their cocks. She'd been totally surrounded by glorious male flesh.

She admitted to herself the reason their ménage had been so good was because of John's involvement. The whole thing would have been less fulfilling without him there to hold her.

Feeling a bit woozy all of sudden, Jodi leaned harder into the stranger's strong embrace. Why the hell did the ménage participants seem blurry? She had a sensation of movement. Walking, she thought, or were they still gliding with the rhythm of the swing? Unexpectedly, she was unable to wrap her mind around what was happening—things became detached and unreal.

“I see you’ve found us an exquisite toy to play with, Lucas.”

The words snapped Jodi back into reality. She gasped in confusion, looking around at a darkened, private room and wondered how she’d gotten there.

“Where the hell am I?” How had they moved her to a different location without her awareness? Had she been drugged or somehow mesmerized? It didn’t make any sense.

A third voice had her fighting the firm hands holding her in place. “An ownerless pet...how very fortunate for us.”

The men surrounded her, their big hands wandering as they took liberties she hadn’t offered. They stroked her everywhere, someone plumping her breasts, another cupping her mound. Thick fingers sunk into the muscles of her ass, holding her painfully tight. Their caresses felt impersonal and rough.

It was completely dark and she couldn’t see them. Jodi tried to escape the three pairs of questing hands, but the men used their greater strength to keep her captive. She lacked energy, wondering again about drugs as she realized both her body and mind were lethargic, sluggish and refusing to function.

“I-I’m not a pet,” she cried. Her voice sounded weak. “I have a collar on. He said it would protect me.”

One of the men chuckled against her ear. “Your owner is a fool to have left such a succulent delight unattended. You’re ours to play with now, kitten.”

“I don’t want this.” The men ignored her verbal outburst. She struggled against their hands as best she could, but her muscles felt rubbery and each movement caused her head to spin. Her clothes were being stripped from her body. Jodi was terrified, wondering if they would rape her.

“Please...”

“Oh, don’t worry, pet. We’ll please you. In fact, I predict you’ll beg us for more.”

She shook her head, the rapid motion sending the pins flying from her hair. Warm, rough hands pinched her bared nipples. Pain shot down her spine.

“Relax and enjoy, kitten.”

One of them meowed and they all laughed. The sound of their amusement had the effect of sobering Jodi. There was nothing she hated more than being made fun of. It renewed her struggles.

“Let. Me. Go!”

A hand began to slide beneath the waistband of her shorts and into her panties. Her body was all for it, but her mind rebelled. This was not happening. She had to make them stop.

The door burst open, light flooding the room and Jodi screamed. Wiz’s angry voice growled from the doorway.

“Get the fuck away from her.”

As the hands released her, Jodi sunk down to the floor and curled into the fetal position, her lax muscles unable to support her weight. The men may not have gotten the opportunity to screw her, but they had sure give her one hell of a mind fuck.

Another man entered the room, his angry voice booming in the small space. “Rodney, Michael, get these scumbags out of here.”

Jodi was lifted into a warm embrace and wrapped in soft cloth. She heard the assertive voice address the three men. “Needless to say, your trial membership is being revoked and you are banned from this group’s activities. Show your faces again and you won’t walk away.”

Nothing made much sense to her. She had no idea what was happening.

Wiz carried her from the house and into the car. She decided to sort out her emotions later. For the moment, being held soothed her frazzled nerves and allowed her to relax. Knowing she was safe, Jodi let the exhaustion take over and drifted off to sleep.

Chapter Ten

Jodi came to awareness slowly. She had the oddest sensation of being held far beneath a murky, oppressive depth of water. She tried to swim to the surface, but her arms and legs weren't working right and failed to respond to commands from her brain, which felt soft and mushy.

"Help. I need some help here." She tried to scream the words, but only a weak gasp gurgled up from her throat.

Oh, this was bad. What the hell was wrong with her?

A cool damp cloth slid over her forehead. She sighed in blissful relief over the wonderful caress and ceased her weak struggles.

"Shh, it's all right now, sweetheart."

Was that Wiz's voice? Hmmm, sweetheart instead of pet. What had changed? If only she could get her mind to work...

After several attempts, she was finally able to open her eyes, but ended up slamming them shut again as piercing, bright light sent sharp shards of pain coursing through her head. Her stomach rolled, and she came close to tossing her cookies.

Good Lord. She hadn't been this trashed in...well, never.

A warm hand quelled some of her anxiety as it rubbed circles over her belly. Mmm...very nice. Maybe she'd lie here and go back to sleep for a while.

"Come on, Jodi. You need to wake up for me now."

She detected concern in the words and tone Wiz used, and the lassitude she'd experienced only moments ago began evaporating like fog under harsh rays from the sun. It was hard to resist the lure of snuggling into the warm body next to her, but Jodi fought her way out of sleep.

With returning awareness, Jodi started to notice other immediate needs. Her tongue was stuck to the roof of her dry mouth. It was a desert in there, arid and stale. Her bladder chimed in, letting her know staying in bed much longer wasn't an option.

"Water," she croaked.

An arm slid beneath her back and lifted her, but her head lolled on her boneless neck. Someone stabilized the heavy weight and a straw pressed against her lips. It took several tries to get her mouth opened and functioning, but the cool liquid sluiced down her parched throat, making the effort well worthwhile.

When she'd drunk her fill, she was lowered back against a pile of soft pillows and the haze began to lift from her fuzzy thought processes. A tendril of dread wrapped around her heart and squeezed, constricting the flow of blood through her body.

Memories flooded her brain. The lewd outfit, risqué party and the strange man. Oh, shit! She panicked, eyes snapping wide open, and took in her surroundings.

Whew! She recognized her room at Wiz's house and calmed once again, secure in the knowledge she was no longer at the freaky BDSM shindig.

"It's alright, Jodi. You're safe now."

For some reason the reassurance only served to piss her off. Why hadn't she listened to John's warnings? Instead, she'd been a pig-headed fool, gone off with blinders on and ended up in a massive heap of shit.

The mere thought of John made her long for his touch and home. The realization of how stubborn she'd been hit her hard, a bolt of lightning from out of the blue. Not only did she owe him an apology, it was time to stop running and accept what her heart knew. She loved him. Needed him. Ached for the kind of life they could have together, even if it meant leaving Vegas. All startling, scary ideas.

Okay, first she had to deal with Wiz without hurting his feelings, then she'd be free to go after John. She pushed herself up higher in the bed and put a little distance between Wiz and herself while collecting her thoughts.

The first thing she wanted to know was what had happened the night before.

"I didn't drink last night. Mind explaining why I feel like I've got a massive hangover?"

Wiz wore his emotions on his sleeve. She detected a wary reluctance and determination in his dark eyes as he cleared his throat and began talking.

“I had to leave you to attend to some pressing business with the owner of the house where the party was held. Several of the group members said they saw you wandering through the different rooms, observing the different scenes underway. Does any of this sound familiar?”

She nodded and immediately regretted the action as pain sliced through her skull. “Yes, I remember everything up until watching a ménage where the woman was in a swing with two men fucking her. After that things get...fuzzy.”

“From the accounts of those in the room, a trial member approached you from behind and drew you into a private playroom. His acquaintances, also trial members, joined you there. You were only in the room with them alone for a few minutes before I found you.”

Jodi remembered bits and pieces of what he said. After taking a deep, cleansing breath she was ready to hear the rest and set the wild fears flying through her mind to rest, praying there hadn't been enough time for the men to get very far in their seduction attempt.

Wiz seemed hesitant, but grudgingly continued even though it became obvious he left some parts out of the tale.

“My personal physician met us here at the house. He found a puncture site on your neck and believes you were injected with a medication to make you compliant. Nothing as heavy as Rohypnol or Progestex, the date rape drugs that erase your memories. Dr. Martin assured me there would be no lasting effects or damage.”

“Jesus Christ, Wiz. This sounds like something out of a warped soap opera. No lasting effects or damage...shit!” She bit her tongue to hold back the rest of her rant.

Each word had caused him to flinch and his shoulders to cave in. He hung his head and wouldn't look at her. “Jodi...dammit. It was all my fault. Everything has gone wrong from the beginning. I am such a selfish ass! I put business before your safety, welfare and happiness.”

He got up and began to pace in front of the bed. Jodi thought a war was raging inside him judging by the expressions on his face. His mouth worked, but he couldn't seem to get any words out. He finally stopped and looked at her. “Sorry doesn't even begin to make up for putting you through the last day and night.”

Jodi tried to sit up and swing her legs off the side of the bed, but her head still felt mushy, broken, as if someone had taken a sledgehammer to it. She settled for patting the edge of the bed. “Wiz, please come sit back down so we can talk. You moving around is

making my head hurt.” He settled on the edge once more, and Jodi carefully turned to face him.

“What happened wasn’t completely your fault, Wiz. On the other hand, I wouldn’t have been in the situation if you had been upfront and honest with me about your lifestyle.”

He took in a breath to speak, but she placed her finger over his lips. “No, let me finish before you say anything.

“I’m going to be honest and tell you I don’t really understand the appeal of your lifestyle. Well,” she amended with a wicked grin on her face, “maybe the sex swing and those hot twins.”

Wiz chuckled, the momentary smile easing the tension from his handsome face, which was exactly what Jodi had been hoping for. “In all seriousness, the eroticism of what I saw turned me on, but I could never participate. It’s too over the top for me.”

Sorrow crossed Wiz’s features again. “Jesus, sweetheart, every time I think about what could have happened... I could have lost you. Jodi, I-I...”

She jumped in before he could continue. “You made me a generous offer, and wanted to create a place for me in your life, but last night showed me it isn’t a world I belong in.” She saw disappointment and hurt shadow his eyes briefly and rushed to reassure him.

“Don’t get me wrong. It’s the right lifestyle for you, but not for me.” She paused for a moment to keep from crying. She wasn’t good at sharing her feelings, didn’t have much practice in doing so. “You are a wonderful man, a good friend. I don’t want to lose what we have and hope you can understand. I’ve fought it for long enough. My heart belongs to John. He understands me and has from the beginning. We love each other, and I’m going to accept his proposal.”

Wow! Where’d that last bit come from? She hadn’t made a conscious decision to marry John, but found a sense of rightness and joy in having made the choice now. Her heart knew what she wanted. A flood of desire washed through her. Jodi ached to get back home and share her emotions with John, to accept his proposal and start their life together.

She tried to crawl across the bed. With the way her head felt, she wasn’t up to taking off, even though her heart soared. She needed to get back home, though. Jodi was startled, and more relieved than she could say, to discover someone had removed the slutty outfit and put on her nightshirt. She looked around for her suitcase.

“Wiz, I need to go. I have to get back to home.”

He nodded and his poker face slipped into place, hiding his emotions from her.

“Your things are in the closet. I’ll have the jet readied within the hour. Why don’t you take a shower and we’ll have some breakfast before you go chasing after your man.”

On impulse, Jodi hugged him tight. She was happy to find her refusal of his offer hadn’t caused irreparable harm to their relationship and hoped they’d continue on as friends.

“Thanks, Wiz. You’re the best.”

Chapter Eleven

The endless ringing of the extension in John's room was driving Jodi crazy. She'd already tried his cell and got dumped over to voice mail every time. Leaving a message was not an option. She wanted to hear his voice, needed to devour his response when she told him she was coming home.

After hanging up, she called the front desk and talked to Misty, shocked to find John had checked out yesterday afternoon.

Jodi fought back a panic attack. This was not good. She didn't know his address, where he worked or how to find him other than online. The number of things she didn't know about John hit her like a two-by-four and left her with a splitting headache.

She had been so completely self-absorbed? The idea made his proposal even more amazing. He'd seen past the façade and seen the real Jodi she tried so hard to keep hidden because of her irrational fear.

Elise saw Jodi rubbing her temples and brought over some aspirin and a Coke.

"Here, doll. You look like you need this. If you need someone to talk to, I'm a good listener."

Doll? How did Wiz's employee know her nickname? Jodi shrugged it off as a coincidence, accepted the pain reliever and turned down the offer to talk. The only person she wanted to talk with was John.

Wiz had a car waiting to drive her home when they landed. Jodi decided it was a cool thing to have friends in high places who enjoyed spending money, although she was getting tired of flying all over the place. There was no way she was getting on another plane for quite a while.

During the drive to her apartment, she still wasn't able to reach John and finally ended up leaving a brief voice message.

“Hi, John. It’s Jodi. I’ve been trying to find you. Just got back in town from Seattle but the casino said you’ve checked out. I’m dying to talk to you, to hear your voice. Please call me back.”

Damn, had she sounded desperate? She hoped the anguish tightening her chest wasn’t obvious in the message. Oh, well. There was nothing to do now but wait. In the meantime, she called to find her work schedule only to discover the pit boss had put her on vacation for the next week.

What was she supposed to do with herself for a whole week?

Once inside her apartment, she headed straight for the computer and booted it up. Maybe she’d have better luck finding John online.

“Damn it all to hell and back,” she cussed. Nobody in the game room had seen him all day and her only emails were from the Smut Squad.

“Figures he’d go into hiding when I’m ready to say yes.” She huffed in frustration and began watching the clock tick off the hours. Hopefully she hadn’t waited too long to open her eyes and heart.

For several hours she existed in a depressed fog. Nothing fit anymore. Not Vegas, her apartment, or even the life she’d created for herself. Without John it all seemed...superfluous.

It was late in the evening when her instant messenger program opened up a pop-up window from Reba.

Soldierswife: Hey, Dolls. How’d the partay go?

Jodi laughed out loud at the way her friend spelled party. She should’ve called the girls right away. They were always good for lifting her spirits.

Dolls: It was...interesting <g>

Soldierswife: Ooooh, how so. Do tell!

Dolls: Better send an invite to the rest of the Smut Squad first so I don’t have to tell this twice.

Soldierswife: Already done, now spill!

Pornluvr: Hey chickies.

She smirked when Jackie's ID popped up.

Giddyup: Hey everybody. Wuz up?

Jodi cracked up. Katie's user name was just as bad.

Soldierswife: Dolls is getting ready to dish on the wicked BDSM partay. <rubbing hands together> Can't wait to hear what happened.

Giddyup: Yeehaw! This oughta be good.

Pornluvr: Is this gonna be X-rated? Vin's not home and I'm outta batteries.

Soldierswife: TMI, hussy! Big time TMI!

Jodi laughed again. She'd sure been blessed in the friends department. She was beginning to feel lighter as some of the stress lifted off her shoulders. While she talked about the party, Jodi kept things easy and humorous. She did a little shuck and jive, skirting around the incident with the three men, not wanting to upset the girls. They spent too much time worrying about her as it was.

They asked a lot of questions about the different scenes she'd watched play out, the clothing people wore, and Wiz's huge house. When she told them about her last conversation with him, they all agreed she'd made the right decision, which gave her a boost of confidence.

Pornluvr: Told ya it's them quiet ones ya gotta watch out for. LMAO!

Soldierswife: She just needed to take her time and be sure.

Giddyup: What 'bout John's proposal?

Leave it to the lawyer in the group to not be distracted as she'd hoped.

Soldierswife: Yeah, have you talked to him yet?

Pornluvr: What are ya gonna do, Dolls?

A lump formed in her throat and Jodi struggled to hold back the tears. She'd screwed up royally with John and wasn't sure if he'd ever talk to her again, much less still want to marry her. Thank goodness they were talking online and the girls weren't able witnessing her agony.

Hot tears streamed down her face, making it hard to see the screen. Her hands shook as she began to type. Might as well tell them the whole story. They'd pull it out of her sooner or later anyway.

Dolls: I've been walking around with blinders on—trying to protect my heart—only to find John's the one man who deserves my love and trust. I haven't been able to get in touch with him, and I'm afraid I'm too late.

Several minutes went by before she heard the chime announce one of the girls had written something.

Pornluvr: Dolls? You okay?

Jackie had been her roommate in collage. Out of her three friends, Jackie knew her the best. She'd understand, but Jodi wasn't ready to admit to being an emotional basket case.

Dolls: I'm fine. My eye's bothering me again. Having trouble seeing the screen.

Giddyup: Don't make me come over there and smack your ass, Jodi. I'm not buying it for a second. Wipe your eyes, blow your nose, then tell us what happened.

Damn, they'd gang up on her now but it was a wonderful feeling. She loved them for being such great friends. She gave in and told them about John's cryptic warnings, how he'd acted the last time she'd seen him and during their chat session the day before. The heart-wrenching part was writing about how he'd disappeared and wasn't taking her calls.

Dolls: I f'ed it all up. Nothing new there. Everything I touch turns to shit.

Soldierswife: Stop right there, missy. You've gotten a lot right in your life.

Pornluvr: Yeah! You got that fancy math degree and kick ass at the tables in Sin City.

Giddyup: So no more putting yourself down, Dolls. Won't fly with us. We know you too well.

Pornluvr: I think this calls for a meetin' of the Smut Squad.

Soldierswife: Sure does. I've always wanted to see Vegas.

Giddyup: Woohoo! The Smut Squad does Vegas. Hell, Jackie, sounds like a great title for one of Vin's movies. ROFLMAO!

Soldierswife: bwahahahaha!

A weak smile crossed Jodi's lips. The Smut Squad in Vegas. She'd have to warn the town before they all converged and turned it upside down.

Pornluvr: How many times do I got to tell ya, he don't do that no more, you hussies. And I'm not sharin' him with the world. It would be a great title though. LOL!

Plans were put into motion and the girls scheduled flights for the next day. After Katie put the screws to her, Jodi gave up what information she had on John. It was hard to stick to concrete facts about his life and not go into intangibles like the way his eyes lit up when he smiled. The way his right pinky twitched when he had a winning hand of cards. Or how he didn't make eye contact when bluffing...

If anyone could track him and figure out where he lived, it would be the tenacious lawyer. Jodi crossed her fingers, hoping her friend would be successful.

By the time she signed off the computer and headed to bed, Jodi felt better. Knowing the girls were on the way and would offer unconditional support made her feel loved.

She'd have to hit the liquor store first thing in the morning. They'd all argued and debated, finally settling on a margarita day to fix what ailed her.

Chapter Twelve

She paced the lobby while waiting for the girls. Jodi had offered to pick them up at the airport, but Katie insisted on renting a car.

I like the freedom of having my own wheels had appeared in the instant messenger window, and Jodi gave up the fight. Once Katie got something into her head there was no talking her out of it.

“Well, don’t this just beat all.” Jackie’s twangy drawl rose above the sounds of the busy casino as her friends walked into the lobby, arms linked together. “Talk about fancy smancy. Jeez!”

“It’s perfect,” Katie chimed in. “Exactly as I’d pictured.”

Reba’s response was less vocal than the others. “Everything’s so...big.”

A wicked smile turned up the corners of Jodi’s mouth as she watched her friends. No matter how her heart ached, it was going to be fun having the Smut Squad all together in her stomping grounds.

When Jackie spotted her, she let out a squeal and came charging across the lobby, pulling a picture from the most enormous purse Jodi had ever seen.

They were such a diverse group, all vastly different, but the same where it counted. Her college friends were caring women with hearts of gold. Any one of them would do anything to help the other, dropping everything and racing to the rescue after a call for help went out. She was lucky to have them all in her corner. After a day with the Smut Squad things were bound to be better.

“There’s our quiet one. Lookie what I got ya, chickie. It’s a wet one.”

Oh, no she didn’t. Not in the middle of the casino lobby. Jody shuddered.

Jackie loved to collect pictures of hunky, naked men. Knowing Jodi loved the sight of a glistening, wet male body, the hussy made a point of finding “wet ones” for her.

She accepted their hugs and the picture, which Jackie pushed into her hand. A fiery hot blush spread over her cheeks as she looked at the beautiful, wet, naked male flesh displayed in the image. How mortifying. It wouldn't take long before her friends' antics were the talk of the whole casino.

Nick, one of the porters, rushed over to help with their luggage and Jodi nearly died of embarrassment. "Here," she shoved the picture at Jackie. "Put that away."

The uncouth, brazen slut had the nerve to stand there and hoot. Damn, Jodi was never going to live this down. She cast a surreptitious glance to see if anyone was watching them. They got a few quick looks, but everyone in the huge lobby seemed to be otherwise occupied. She wiped her brow and sighed in relief.

"Now don't get all embarrassed, Jodi. Nobody's paying attention to us. I thought Vegas is all about cutting loose anyway," Reba said.

"Yeah," Katie grinned. "All the commercials say, 'what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas'. Nobody's going to care what the four of us are doing." A devilish gleam lit up her eyes.

Nick carted their luggage, following behind the chatty group as they made their way to the suite of rooms Jodi had arranged. Having an employee discount meant she was able to provide the best accommodations for her friends. They all deserved it for dropping their own lives and rushing to her side when she needed them most.

"I've died and gone to heaven," Katie exclaimed when they entered the suite.

Jackie whistled through her teeth. "Damn, Jodi. Isn't this just the shit."

"Wow," Reba said, looking stunned. "Looks expensive."

Jodi changed the subject. "I'll mix up some of my special margaritas while you all get settled."

While the girls went to claim their beds, she moved to the bar. She poured generous portions of tequila, brandy, and orange liqueur into a large pitcher. Forget measuring it all out, she finished off by filling the rest of the container with margarita mix and gave it a stir. After salting the rims of four glasses she dropped in ice cubes, creating a tinkling musical sound.

The girls joined her, and Jodi directed them to an intimate grouping of furniture. The gorgeous brocade sofa and overstuffed chairs were too wonderful not to enjoy. Drink in one hand, she kicked off her shoes and got comfy. Deep moans of appreciation filled the air as they indulged in the delicious concoction.

“This is the life.” Reba held out her glass for a toast. “To the Smut Squad.”

“To the Smut Squad,” they all agreed and touched glasses.

“Thanks for coming, you guys. I don’t know what I’d do without you.”

Jackie winked at her. “Aw, Jodi. ‘Course we’re here, sweetie. It’ll always be the four of us against the world.”

“Hear, hear,” Reba agreed and they all clinked glasses again.

“Alright,” Katie said, turning all business-like. “Here’s what I was able to find out.” She reached into her pocket and pulled out a piece of paper covered with her bold, elegant script. “Granted, it’s not much.”

The comment surprised Jodi. Katie was a wonder at finding people. Her not being able to dig up information on John was worrisome.

“John Graham has done a very good job of keeping his life quiet and private. He’s a mystery. From what I found, he lives and works on a tropical island. The name of the business wasn’t listed, so what he does there is anyone’s guess. He’s somehow managed to keep his credit history, financial and any real estate holdings secret.”

She glanced up and made eye contact, holding Jodi’s gaze. “His ability to hide this information either means he’s got serious power or rolls with some major players.”

“I don’t understand. John’s your typical working-class guy. This doesn’t make any sense.”

Katie’s eyes turned sympathetic. “How well do you know him, hon?”

Good question.

Reba scooted closer on the couch, wrapping her in a protective hug, encouraging Jodi to continue.

“Well,” Jodi began slowly, “I know he’s a sweet, thoughtful, sexy man who I trust. We’ve spent a lot of time chatting, discussing everything under the sun. He gets me, doesn’t expect me to be something I’m not, and I like that.”

Jackie cleared her throat. “Yeah, but what about personal things. Has he told you much about his life?”

Jodi had to think about it for a minute before answering. “Sure! I know he has a brother with a sick child. John’s done so much to help them. He likes to play games online and enjoys the casino scene as much as I do. Um...”

She scratched her head. “He’s mostly interested in talking about me or common subjects. He’s made general references to work being a headache at times, but is happy with his life for the most part. Stuff like that.”

Katie nodded. “That’s about what I figured. He appears to be a cautious, private man. This is not necessarily a bad thing.” She pinned Jodi with an intense gaze. “You seem to have strong feelings for him, even though you aren’t saying much.”

After a long pull on her drink, Katie finally said, “Considering how strongly you feel about him, I suggest you take him by surprise. Show up on this island and discover the real man. See how he lives, where he works, then you can make a decision about his proposal.”

Nervous from being under such scrutiny, Jodi busied herself with taking a drink, keeping her eyes on everything except the three expectant faces of her friends.

Jackie, ever short on patience, reprimanded her. “Don’t hide from us, Jodi. We’re your friends.”

“Tell us.” Katie’s voice was stern, but Jodi felt the understanding and compassion behind the curt words. Still, she found herself unable to meet their gazes, and when the words finally made their way past her tight throat, she could barely hear herself.

“I’ve already decided.”

Katie and Jackie glanced at each other, both leaning forward in their seats. “What did you say?” Jackie asked.

Reba, arms still around Jodi’s shoulders, gave a reassuring squeeze. “One more time around the block but with confidence and enthusiasm, girlfriend.”

With a reluctant sigh, Jodi looked up. She opened her mouth, but no words came out. Taking a deep breath for courage, she cleared her throat and began again. “I’ve already decided.” She glanced around, seeing nothing except encouragement and smiles to boost her self-assurance.

“Hell, I’ve known for a long time I love him. I was just afraid to admit that to myself because...well, because I don’t want to be hurt.” Once she got rolling, Jodi found it easier to share her feelings with her friends.

She let her breath out in a whoosh. Ignoring the clamoring fear in her head, she told them what her heart knew. “He makes me feel cherished and loved. Treats me with respect and keeps me hotter than a three alarm fire.” Her cheeks heated and Jodi knew

her face was redder than a fire truck. “My heart knows everything it needs to about John.”

Still the devil’s advocate, Katie asked, “What about your job and the geographical differences? What if he won’t leave his tropical island?”

“Simple. I’ll give up Vegas.”

They all stared at her for a long moment, knowing the significance of her statement, the huge sacrifice it would be for her to give up the city and profession she loved.

“I’ve finally realized that even though I love this job and city, I love John even more and my heart belongs to him. Being with John is what will make me happy and makes life worth living.”

Her friends squealed and smothered her in a happy group hug.

“About time you reeled him in,” Jackie said with a boisterous laugh. “Didn’t I warn y’all...”

“Gotta watch out for them quiet ones,” they all sing-songed and burst out laughing.

Jackie snorted. “Well, it’s true.”

They went through another pitcher of the tart and sour drinks while devising a plan of action. Jodi’s buoyancy rose with the support and encouragement of her friends. They laughed and joked, same as old times when they’d lived together in the dorms. Every time they got together it refreshed all their spirits.

One call to Wiz and his plane was at her disposal. By the time she boarded the jet again, she felt ready to take on the world single-handed and certain she’d win. A little help from Elise in the hair and make-up department helped the cause.

She worried over how much trouble the Smut Squad would get into in her absence. They were all pretty tipsy and rowdy by the time she’d left, and it was Sin City. At least Katie had the connections to get them out of any jam. They’d be all right...hopefully.

Jodi focused on her goal. She was ready to knock John’s socks off.

Chapter Thirteen

The casino staff had finally gotten the hint and started giving him a wide berth. John knew he was acting like a bear, but wasn't able to do anything about his sour mood. He'd tried to forget about Jodi, but he was ready to go insane not knowing what happened in Seattle and thinking the worst.

Fuck, if only he'd been able to get Jodi to listen, make her heed his warnings about Wiz. Lord only knows what twisted shit the wily old bastard had dragged her into.

He shook his head in an attempt to dislodge the horrible pictures running rampant through his mind. Images of Jodi's small, sweet body tied up, tortured and whipped. He needed to get a grip on his imagination. Wiz was selfish but he'd never let anything happen to Jodi. It was stress and fear working him into a frenzy and he knew it.

He should have stayed in Vegas and waited for her to return. Guilt tore at him for taking off, but dammit! He'd tried to talk to her, and not only about Wiz and his proclivities. Each time she shut him down and turned away. Maybe she didn't have the same aching need to be by his side, as he did to be by hers?

"Hey, boss."

"What," John growled.

"Whoa!" Tim, head of casino security and his best friend, did a double take. "I guess everyone was right. Must've been one hell of a big stick someone shoved up your ass."

"Tim," he warned, "I don't have time for this shit. What do you want?"

Not many people were brave enough to take on the big body builder, but John was in the perfect frame of mind for a knock-down-drag-out-ball-busting-fight. It might even relieve some of his tension. There was nothing better than physical aggression to get a man's mind off a lady.

Tim held out his hands in surrender. "Just wanted to make you aware of a developing situation. We have a private jet asking for permission to land on the island."

“And you’re bothering me with this why?”

“We don’t have any scheduled arrivals today.”

John rolled it over in his mind. “Did you question the pilot?”

“Now, come on. You hired me for a reason. ‘Course I did. Says it’s some hot shot high roller wanting to throw some money at the tables.”

“Fine. Let them land, but keep an eye on things to make sure it’s legit.”

“No problem, boss.”

Tim wasted no time in making himself scarce. Smart man.

John rubbed his bleary eyes. Not sleeping the night before hadn’t helped his attitude any. He’d tried calling Wiz to check on Jodi, but had gotten the run around from the man’s overprotective servants.

Sitting in his office wasn’t doing him any good. John needed action. Time to make the rounds. He headed out to the casino floor where the noise and vitality settled his nerves marginally. It may appear to be chaotic to others, but he recognized the well-oiled mechanics of the inner workings, appreciated the subtle ebb and flow of his pride and joy.

Through hard work and dedication, Luck of the Draw turned a hefty profit. They catered to an exclusive clientele of rich high rollers with money to burn. Treating the customers like royalty and providing only the finest accommodations ensured they kept coming back.

He paused to observe a hand of blackjack. Big mistake. Almost immediately a woman—wearing not much more than a few gold sequins covering her fake boobs—rubbed up against him.

This is what he hated about his life. Once women discovered he owned the successful casino, he might as well kiss any chance of a true friendship goodbye. Dollar signs appeared in their eyes and clouded their brains. He was sick and tired of countless women coming onto him because of the status and power he held. They didn’t want him, the man. There was only one woman he’d had a shot at a real relationship with and she was off being seduced by the world of D/s.

“Hi, sexy,” the vacuous blonde said in a sultry voice. She pressed her huge breasts against his chest and gave him a come-fuck-me smile. “Would you like to join me for a drink...in private?” She all but shoved her room key into his hand.

“Darlin’...”

“Well, isn’t this cozy,” an angry female voice cut in. He cringed, knowing without any doubt who was speaking. Jodi! His heart did summersaults and began hammering at his chest. He turned, wanting nothing more than to pick her up and squeeze her in his arms.

John wanted to kick his own ass when he saw the hurt look in Jodi’s eyes. Fuck! He hated knowing he caused her pain. What timing. Tim was standing behind her and tried to grab her as she turned and rushed through the crowd.

“She’s what the jet contained, boss. Bad news?”

John shoved gold digger into Tim’s arms.

“No, just bad timing. Get this woman away from me now!” It took great effort on both their parts to free him from her sharp claws. By the time he’d parted her company, Jodi was gone, lost in the crowd.

Shocked was too mild of a word to cover what she felt when the security dude told her who John was. She’d lost her ability to speak and began sputtering.

Jodi had wanted to get mad, but instead chose to hear him out first. There had to be a good reason he’d never told her something as major as owning a casino on a private island. She knew even less about him than she’d thought. Hell, the man had proposed marriage and she’d been ready to accept not even knowing something as basic as where he lived or how he supported himself.

It was perfect, though. There would be no true sacrifice. She’d trade a casino in the desert for one on a tropical island and continue in the job she loved, minus the lower level players. Her stomach fluttered with excitement. Maybe they could be partners. With so much in common, perhaps being married and being friends wasn’t such a farfetched fantasy after all.

Of course, it was all contingent on if he still wanted her.

Her eyes devoured every detail of the magnificent resort and casino. John had built an incredible establishment to rival the best available out there on the Vegas Strip. She was a bit creeped out by the muscle-bound glorified bouncer following her, but dismissed it as a precaution necessary for the exclusive casino.

Pushing through the crowd around the blackjack table, Jodi's mouth dropped open and her heart turned to a solid brick of ice. A golden, shimmering bimbo was wrapped around John's body closer than a second skin. Jodi's lip quivered and her coordination disappeared. Only Tim's quick reflexes saved her from tripping over her own feet.

She was hurt, and the feeling totally pissed her off. The big guy tried to stop her, but she wiggled out of his arms and beat it out of there. She refused to start crying in the middle of a high-class casino. Without conscious thought she made her way out the door and stumbled down the beach. Jodi plopped down onto the sand and stared off into space, lost in thought.

Sand worked its way into tiny crevices, but the irritant didn't faze her. Seagulls performed aerial acrobatics above the pounding surf. Palm fronds swayed on a gentle tropical breeze. A light spray of salty water misted over her skin. She remained a million miles away.

This was no time for delusions or games. She had to face facts—John Graham was one hell of a sexy man. Combine his good looks with an unassuming, laidback attitude and being the owner of a magnificent resort casino in paradise, the result was devastating. No woman could resist making a bid for his attention.

Slam! With the force of a sledgehammer smacking into her head, Jodi's confusion cleared and things fell into a new perspective. She reminded herself that the shy, insecure Jodi Matthews who existed before her fantasy night was old news.

The old Jodi would have never understood. She would've turned away from John and never looked back. What a fool. She'd given up on a lot of people over the years because of her learned fears. This new bolder, assured woman who'd matured over the last several months was another case.

She sensed John's presence before he reached out to touch her shoulder.

"Jodi...sweetheart. Let me explain."

"John, it's..." He didn't allow her to get a word in.

"That woman is a tramp who only notices me because of my money."

He sat down, moving in close to her side. Jodi was overwhelmed by the cloying scent of the bimbo's perfume and seeing the strong man wearing his heart on his sleeve.

"John..."

“Let me finish. Women like her are the reason I didn’t tell you much about my life. Money makes people treat you different. It’s almost impossible to have an honest relationship if someone knows about my money first.”

“You stink...” He still wasn’t listening. The silly man thought he knew how she’d react and seemed determined to have his say first. She guessed he had good cause. Jodi merely shook her head and let him go.

“I’d planned to bring you here once you accepted my proposal. I want to share my life with you, Jodi. You’re not like other women. You don’t play games or hide from the truth once you see it. You’re everything I’ve ever searched for, longed for, and I love you.” He paused to take a breath.

“Are you done now, John?”

“Huh?” He turned toward her and seemed surprised by her smile. He’d expected the typical reaction of old Jodi—hurt and crying.

“Are you finished?”

“Um...I guess so.” His response was tentative, leery.

“Good. I love you too, but you stink worse than a five dollar French whore. Would you please go take a shower and change your clothes. Then you can come back down here and make love to me on the beach while the sun sets.” She shot him a wicked grin. “Oh, and bring the ring with you.”

It was charming the way his mouth hung open. She reached out and pressed against his chin until it closed. He wore a hopeful, boyish expression. “You’re not upset?”

“I wouldn’t go so far as to say I’m not upset. Maybe annoyed would be a better word.”

The cute look on his face dropped faster than a deflated balloon.

“John. Look at me.” She waited for him to meet her gaze before continuing. “I’m annoyed with myself. I almost let you slip through my fingers by being blind to the truth. I love you. I want to marry you and grow old together.” She let a big smile grow on her face. “But I’m not touching you until you get rid of her stink.”

His gaze darted around for a moment as if searching for a quick solution. Without a word, John grabbed her hand and sprang to his feet, dragging her toward the glimmering water. Jodi followed along, stumbling in the deep sand until she kicked off her heels. She laughed over his antics. “What on earth are you doing?” She felt good, almost weightless. The new Jodi was definitely a refreshing change. Life was good. John was her perfect

match. He loved her for who she was without expecting her to change to fit a certain mold. And she loved him for the man, not the casino, glitzy trappings or money.

She took a deep, carefree breath for the first time in...forever. Jodi glanced around and let the quiet serenity of the beautiful island fill her soul. It was how home felt.

John stripped his shirt over his head. She could see his hands shaking with anticipation. "Are you sure, Jodi?"

She did a double take and licked her lips. God, he had a gorgeous body. "More than sure, John."

"Then strip," he said, hands going to his belt. "I'm not leaving your side again and this is the fastest way I can think of to get rid of the perfume smell."

She slowly stripped for him while he got his pants and shoes off. The warm air felt deliciously wicked on her naked skin. John took her hand once more and pulled her into the warm ocean until her feet left the sandy floor. She wrapped her legs around his waist and the feel of his hard cock pressing against her sent her head reeling.

He unexpectedly dunked them both under the water. Jodi was spitting, gasping and laughing over the exuberant joy radiating off John. They let the heat rise between them, sharing long kisses, hands roving over each other's bodies, nipping at lips, necks, nipples, until they couldn't wait any longer.

John carried her out of the water and laid her on the wet sand. He moved over her stretched out form, fitting his solid muscles against her smooth curves in the most delightful ways. The heady, clean scent of salt and aroused male spread through her on every breath. It was pure and good and right. As wonderful as their love.

Cradling her face in his warm palms, John stared into her eyes for several seconds before drawing her into an incredible kiss. Their lips sealed together, tongues teasing and tasting. Jodi gave herself over with complete trust in her lover.

They surfaced some time later, breathless, hot and aching. John pulled the diamond ring from his pinky, took her hand, and slid it halfway onto her finger.

"I love you, Jodi Matthews. You are my entire universe. Everything I've ever dreamed of, longed for, and so much more. I'm half a person without you by my side. Make me whole. Say you'll be mine."

Tears welled up in her eyes, but they were happy tears for once. "Yes, John. I love you so much, but shut the hell up and fuck me now. I need you. Okay?" She giggled as a smirk spread across his lips.

“You are really going to keep me on my toes, woman, aren’t you.”

It was more of a statement than question so she merely grinned.

John pushed up onto his knees and spread her legs. Jodi gasped. The hunger and love in his heavy-lidded eyes took her breath away.

“You are so beautiful!” The praise went straight to her head, making her feel dizzy.

He proceeded to kiss, lick, suck and nibble each curve, dip and valley until she was trembling beneath him. John settled between her thighs, slid his hands beneath her ass, and feasted on her pussy. He teased her engorged clit, never giving it the amount of attention she craved. Her hips bucked, fucking his face in desperation. After what seemed to be ages, he finally latched onto the small bud, suckling and slurping with obvious pleasure.

One orgasm wasn’t enough for him. No sooner had the first begun to wane than he built her up again. Jodi lost track of how many times she flew up and down, sending her twisting and freefalling. Each gush of cream was devoured with hummed appreciation until she was beyond boneless.

“John...please,” she begged.

“What do you need, sweetheart?”

The answer was simple and automatic. “You. Only you. Forever you.”

He slid his cockhead through her damp folds. “I love how hot and wet you always are for me.”

How Jodi managed to lift her legs she had no clue, but her ankles hooked above his ass. She thrust at the same time he did, and came close to crying at the exquisite sense of being filled completely. Her pussy walls stretched to accommodate his hard-as-stone shaft and she tilted her hips, taking him a bit farther inside.

They moved together, following baser instincts and primal desires. What started warm and easy soon heated to a frantic, blazing need. They surged together again and again, meshing in the most amazing union. Body to body, heart to heart, and soul to soul.

As they made love, Jodi watched the sky change colors numerous times in a stunning display. It began with mild golds and oranges, moved to deep reds and purples and finished with dark blues before fading to black.

John called her name as his climax hit, hot jets of his seed shooting into her womb, triggering another orgasm. *La petite mort* didn’t come close to an adequate description for the way each nerve ending soared in ecstasy. Sated and replete, she lay beneath his

comforting weight and fell in love with John all over again as her whole life took on new meaning.

Jodi Matthews, new and old, blended together to create a new woman. One whose dreams came true. She'd beat the odds, broke the bank and was taking home a jackpot far surpassing her wildest dreams.

About the Authors

Nicole Austin

To learn more about Nicole Austin, please visit www.nicoleaustin.net. Send an email to Nicole at nicoleaustinsizzles@yahoo.com or sign up for her Yahoo! group to join in the fun with other readers as well as Nicole! http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TandA_FantasyPlayground/

TK Winters

To learn more about TK Winters, please visit www.tkwinters.com. Send an email to TK at tkwinters@cox.net or sign up for her Yahoo! group to join in the fun with other readers as well as TK! http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TandA_FantasyPlayground/

Look for these titles

Now Available:

Mimosa Nights by Nicole Austin and TK Winters

Tamara's Spirit by Nicole Austin

Coming Soon:

Jesse's Challenge by Nicole Austin

One island...One woman...Two studs

Stranded

© 2007 Eve Vaughn

India Powers is at the end of her rope. After dumping her cheating fiancé and having a falling out with her parents, she decides to take a much needed vacation. In route she meets two hunky fellow vacationers in the form of Rafe Santiago and Grant Thompson. Though she's not looking for love, India sees no harm in a little island flirtation.

Rafe and Grant have been friends since they were kids; both from broken homes, all they had were each other. Their closeness leads them to the discovery they enjoy sharing the same women. After surviving a stormy marriage that nearly destroys their friendship, Rafe vows to never let another woman come between them. To celebrate Rafe's divorce, he and Grant take a vacation in hopes of finding Miss Right along the way.

Tragedy strikes when their plane goes down. In a twist of fate, the only survivors are India, Grant and Rafe. Stranded for weeks, their daily fight for survival turns into something much deeper when India falls for both men and they for her. However, when they're rescued and returned to civilization, they fall under public scrutiny. Can their newfound love survive when outside forces step in to tear them apart?

Enjoy the following excerpt for Stranded:

Grant was anxious as they drew closer to the cave. He could tell India was nervous from the way she shook. He squeezed her hand in reassurance, giving her a smile of encouragement. She was so beautiful and he couldn't believe they would finally have this ebony goddess just as Rafe said they would. In a way, he was glad Rafe had pushed the issue, otherwise they may have still been skirting around it, but he wondered if she was simply giving in to them because she felt she had no choice. As much as he wanted nothing more than to take her on the ground and fuck her senseless, he needed to make sure one last time that she was ready to accept both of them as her lovers.

He stopped just before they entered their shelter. Grant turned to her. "Is this what you want?"

India hesitated for only a second. “Yes. I do want this. I don’t know why I was fighting the inevitable so hard. You and Rafe were right, this was meant to be.”

Relief flooded his chest. Grant didn’t know what he would have done if she’d changed her mind. His cock was straining painfully against his pants, and right now all he could think about was driving into her tight sheath.

“Then what the hell are we waiting for,” Rafe growled, propelling her forward. Once inside, Rafe grabbed India to him and placed an urgent kiss against the curve of her elegant throat.

Grant refused to be a spectator on the sidelines. Moving behind her, he cupped her shoulders, reveling in the silky smoothness of her mocha skin. He pushed her straps down before raining kisses over the exposed flesh.

India groaned against Rafe’s mouth and then hooked an arm around Grant’s waist. She wiggled her bottom against his cock, making Grant’s throbbing more painful than before. He needed her.

“So beautiful,” he murmured against her skin, raising her dress to run his fingers between her thighs. Already she was wet and ready.

“Oh,” she sighed, resting the back of her head against the crook of his shoulder.

Grant slipped his fingers inside her panties, encountering a soft patch of curly hair between the juncture of her thighs. “You’re so warm,” he murmured, pleased at her arousal.

He noticed Rafe reaching into her bodice and freeing her full breasts.

“Perfect. I haven’t been able to get these lovelies out of my mind since I last had the pleasure of tasting them the first time. By the way you’re squirming for it, you want my mouth on you. Don’t you, India?”

“Yes,” she groaned.

A smile curled the corners of Grant’s lips. There was something arousing about seeing Rafe and India interact. If she was turned on now, Grant planned on turning up the heat several more notches.

Grant dropped to his knees behind her, taking his hands from inside of her panties. “Part your thighs for me, darling,” he commanded softly, prying her legs apart a little further.

India complied, wiggling her delectable backside in the process. Grant wanted no barriers between them. Grabbing the edge of her panties, he pulled them down her

shapely thighs and legs, admiring how supple and soft she was. He couldn't help running his hands along her rear and down the backs of her thighs. Even the contrast of his pale hand against her dark skin was an arousing sight.

Helping her step out of her panties, one foot at a time, Grant tossed them aside, careful not to throw them too close to the flame.

The soft mewling sounds she made in the back of her throat were driving him crazy. Grant stole a brief glance up at India to see her dig her fingers into Rafe's dark hair as he suckled one taut nipple, before returning to his task.

"Good God, you're wet," Grant whispered in wonder upon seeing the trail of moisture drip from her pussy. Placing his head between her thighs, Grant licked at the stream of moisture, savoring the tangy flavor on his tongue. "Delicious," he murmured, before planting kisses on her ass and inside of her legs.

"Grant," she groaned, practically shoving her rear in his face. Parting her damp labia, he found her throbbing clit slick with her juices. He rolled the hot bud between his thumb and forefinger, applying pressure and then releasing.

"Do you like that, India?"

Grant already knew the answer to that question from the way she moved against him, silently begging for it, but he wanted to hear her vocalize the affirmative.

"Yes! Oh, yes!" Her shout of ecstasy served to increase his arousal. He shoved a middle finger into her slick channel. Shit, she was tight. Grant could only begin to imagine how it would feel to have his cock buried in her cunt, gripping him like a vise.

Squirming her bottom, she moved with him as he fingered her.

"That's it, darling. Don't hold back. Give me everything you've got."

"Rafe...Grant. This feels so good. Ah!" she cried out.

Grant slipped another finger into her pussy, stretching her for his cock. He wasn't a small man and neither was Rafe. With a pussy this tight, he'd have to prepare her first. He squeezed her luscious ass with his free hand before giving it a playful smack.

"Oh!" Her momentary gasp of surprise became a satisfied purr. He couldn't take it anymore. Grant had to be inside of her now. Slowly, he eased his fingers from her damp channel and brought them to his mouth, slurping every bit of her essence from his skin. Grant couldn't remember the last time he'd been this aroused and he could barely contain himself.

He was so eager for her, his hands were trembling almost like his first time with Susie Jordano in her parents' bedroom. Only this time there was no rush or fear of her father coming home to bust them. And this moment was definitely more special because he and his best friend were pleasuring a very desirable woman who turned him on in ways no words could describe.

He pulled back just enough to tug his polo shirt over his head and then he undid his pants and removed his boxers in a hurry. Grant's dick throbbed, bright red with his desire.

"I need to be inside of you now, darling. I don't think I can hold on much longer."

Rafe lifted his head, letting go of her nipple with a wet slurp. Grant looked at the other man and his friend nodded in their silent communication.

"Look at me, sweetheart," Grant commanded.

India did as she was told, her breath coming out in hurried gasps, her body trembling in her passion. "What do you want me to do?"

Grant reached up to tug her dress all the way off. "I want you on your knees so I can fuck you."

Dodging explosions, crashing cars, jumping off rooftops...and falling in love.

Driven to Distraction

© 2007 Ashleigh Raine

Up-and-coming stuntwoman Blaina Triton stops to help a sexy stranded stranger on the side of the road. Passion ignites hotter than the asphalt beneath their feet and they go back to his place for an anonymous carnal romp. Days later, she arrives on the set of her next feature film only to discover that the man she played out wanton erotic fantasies with is also her boss, Jay Williams. She thinks this job just got a whole lot better, until Jay makes it clear he never mixes business with pleasure.

Jay knows firsthand how distraction can be fatal, but around Blaina, his full, lust-ridden attention strays to her rather than staying on the job. In an effort to regain control, he offers an ultimatum—off set, their relationship is no-naughty-holds-barred, but on set, when they touch, it has to be strictly professional.

Soon their clandestine rendezvous ignite as hot as the movie's onscreen explosions. As an unstoppable stunt team, they are flawless, until the strain of their secret relationship begins to tear them apart. Jay has to make a decision. Walk away from the woman he loves, or allow himself to be driven to distraction...

Warning, this title contains the following: Jay and Blaina are imaginative in their proclivities. There's lots of sex in, on and around cars. Sex in public places, sex in a hotel room, masturbation, exhibitionism, oral sex, anal sex, spanking, minor bondage of the tie-me-up-and-have-your-wicked-way-with-me kind and sex with a foreign object.

Enjoy the following excerpt for *Driven to Distraction*:

Without warning, Jay threw his car around a corner onto one of the small canyon roads. Like he could shake her that easily.

Whipping after him, she caught up as he pulled off in a turnout. Brake lights flashed as he came to a halt. She parked behind him, not even caring that the race had ended with him in the lead.

He stepped out of his car and she did the same, grinning from ear to ear. “Calling it a night already? You know I could’ve taken you—”

She froze in mid-sentence as he stormed toward her, eyes dark, body tight. All those hard sculpted muscles wrapped up in such a beautiful package, determinedly striding her way, like a predator ready to strike. Her natural fight or flight instinct kicked in, fiercely pumping adrenaline through her bloodstream, making her already hot body burn. But even as his chosen prey, there was no way in hell she was running away from him.

Jay drew to a halt a foot away from her, his chest rising and falling in rapid succession, his arms at his sides, hands curled into fists. Not angry. At least she didn’t think so. Just tense. Powerful. His normal stance when he didn’t have a clipboard, a tool or her breast in his hand.

Nipples growing tight, she crossed her arms over the announcement of her arousal and stared at his chest, remembering the way he looked standing naked in front of her. Sun-stained bronze liberally sprinkled with crisp golden curls, muscles tight beneath her exploring fingers. The Celtic flame tattoo that burned along his breastbone, adding an air of danger and intrigue that drew her in like a moth to a flame. Her fingers itched to rip off his blue T-shirt, to force him to show some emotion other than the steely gaze currently pinning her in place.

Blaina tilted her head back and met him stare for stare. “Are we just gonna stand here all night staring at each other?”

“Maybe.”

His simple reply, or perhaps it was how he said it, a deep sizzling vibration of sound, had an annoying effect on her libido, making her stomach clench and toes curl. How sick was she that an indecisive word could make her pant like a dog in heat? If he said a full sentence would she hump his leg? Good lord, she was pathetic.

She blew out a furious breath, angry with both herself and Jay. Even knowing the consequences, she was ready to throw her brain and clothing out the window for one more chance to fuck him.

To avoid pulling him down to her level for a game of tonsil hockey, she tucked her hands in her back pockets. But her forced air of nonchalance had another side effect, thrusting her breasts, erect nipples and all, out in a “please fondle me” manner.

Jay inhaled sharply.

So the man could emote on occasion given the right stimulus. She tested her theory, leaning back against her car, keeping her breasts aimed outward and upward. His gaze followed her tits like they were bouncing black balls on karaoke night. It made her want to break out into song. Maybe “Damn, I Wish I Was Your Lover” would do the trick.

But making Jay deaf with her wailings wasn’t exactly what she wanted to accomplish tonight.

He moved in close until the only way she could escape would be to climb over her car. As if she’d chance denting it like that. His gaze remained locked on hers. Blue had never been such a warm color before.

“You know, Jay, today was long and hot and tiring and as stimulating as this game of ‘let’s see who blinks first’ is, I’m gonna have to—”

Before she could finish, his body met hers, sandwiching her between hard metal and even harder Jay. His calloused palms scratched over her bare arms, making her gasp, making her flesh ache for more, for deeper penetration, for her body to be consumed by his hands and mouth. She was ready to beg for him to end the torment, when his grip moved to her neck, tipping her head back.

“You blinked,” was all he said before his lips ground down against hers, sucking away all rational thought. He devoured, tongue driving into her mouth with volatile force. In return, she dished out everything she had. Pouring into him, marking him, trying to ensure that come morning, he couldn’t wipe her from his mind. She breathed his taste deep into her lungs, the raw male power that seeped from every pore.

But it wasn’t enough. Clawing the wash-worn cotton of his shirt, her fingers dug into his pectorals and scraped down over a chiseled abdomen. Lower still, she grasped his bulging erection, feeling soft, faded denim and hard, relentless male.

His cock throbbed against her touch and she tightened her grip, circling his length through the forgiving fabric, fucking him with her hand. She purred and he growled, ripping his mouth from hers. “No. I won. It’s my turn to take.”

In fast, jerky movements, he undid her jeans, yanking them and her underwear down to her knees. He spun her around, pinning her against where her fender met her door, leaning toward the cowl, one hand against her spine holding her in place. With his other hand he traced down the crack of her ass and into the moisture seeping between her legs.

He paused there, swirling two fingers over her wet flesh, not quite entering. She wondered what he was waiting for. Her light was green and if he didn’t race through her intersection at top speed, she’d implode.

She tried to spread her legs wider, anything to give him a clue that she wanted to be taken, but the hand pinned to her back and the jeans and underwear bunched at her knees kept movement to a minimum.

Those damn swirling fingers finally thrust their way inside and she just about hit peak velocity. He fucked her with his fingers like he would with his cock, slamming into her harder and faster, his leg pushing against hers, his hand flattened against and kneading her spine. She reached behind her, trying to grab him, to bring his body even closer. But his questing fingers slightly curled, adding an abrasive torment to the pleasure, and she completely surrendered, letting him control her like only he could, building her higher, making her not give a damn about being half naked against a car less than a block from the highway.

Stars burst in her vision when his thumb pressed against her anus. Oh God, she was going to die. She pushed back against his fingers on a strangled moan, wanting to scream but not wanting anyone to call the cops. It would be just her luck to get arrested for indecent exposure before she climaxed.

He removed his hand from her aching pussy. Denim rustled, a zipper lowered and plastic ripped. "So you like a man sliding in from behind, do you?" He traced his shaft up and down her aching slit, soaking his head in her juices, spreading the moisture between both cheeks. "Pinned to your rear, watching your ass move..."

She bit her lip, swallowed a moan and pretended to be one hundred percent in control. "That's where he belongs."

Recipe for a Mimosa Night: Take a few libations to loosen inhibitions, mix them with meddling college friends, add in an innocent game of dice, and the result is a steamy cocktail of erotic desires.

Mimosa Night

© 2006 Nicole Austin and TK Winters

Since her husband's military deployment, Reba has been plagued by dark, secret fantasies. Never before has she had such scandalously carnal needs—needs she can barely share with her husband, let alone anyone else. But her tenacious friends enlist the help of mysterious otherworld partners until she spills every spicy detail.

During an intimate reunion of college friends, three women share details of their own scorching real-life sexual experiences and the subsequent changes in their lives to help one friend find fulfillment. Things really start to sizzle, though, with an unexpected invitation, a mysterious delivery, and a once-in-a-lifetime offer Reba can't refuse.

From cowboys and porn stars to floggers and psi vamps, these ladies sure know how to unleash their fantasies.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Mimosa Night:

She heard the murmur of conversation before her eyes picked out the men standing in the cool shadows of the barn. Jase, arms crossed over his broad chest, leaned against the rough wood of a stall. Zeb's back rested on the hinged gate, one leg drawn up to brace the sole of his boot against the planks, muscular forearms draped across the top of the door. Katie felt as if all her senses went on high alert.

The musky, clean scent of cowboys mingled with the sweet hay lining the stalls was like an aphrodisiac racing through her bloodstream. Her womb clenched in response. There was an almost visceral feeling of testosterone rolling in heated waves from the two fine-looking cowboys to submerge her in desire.

As if aware of Katie on a deep, physical level, Jase turned toward her. He did nothing to hide his assessing gaze. Each place his gaze touched and lingered, her skin

heated. When Zeb turned, letting his eyes roam over her sleek curves in silent perusal, the added intensity nearly melted her on the spot. All that masculine attention focused on her was somewhat disconcerting but oh-so-hot, causing her breath to catch, her heart to lodge in her throat.

Her nipples pebbled and she prayed her soft, button-down shirt was loose enough the men wouldn't notice her reaction. There was no way to hide the musky scent of her arousal, though, she thought with a shiver of excitement. She was certain they smelled her heated desire from where they stood.

Damn, she'd never gotten this sopping wet before, and in such record time. Her pussy lips swelled, thick cream coated her folds, soaking into her silky panties. Oh yeah, she was ready for some action.

As if reading her mind, Jase asked, "You finally ready, sugar?"

Katie whimpered as her womb clenched in response to his deep velvet voice stroking over her skin. The serious looks on their faces made it difficult to tell if they were teasing, or if their words meant what she prayed they did. Her body was ripe and prepared for them.

She'd imagined having an encounter with more than one man at a time, but it had always been just a fantasy—this had the potential of becoming real. Very real.

The idea held definite appeal when faced with these two gorgeous cowboys. They were such a study in contrasts, and she imagined their lovemaking styles would contrast as well. One demanding all she could give, but the other? She wasn't sure about Zeb. He seemed quiet and shy, but...but she absolutely had to find out, and this was it. If she wanted to live out her fantasy with these two men, now was the time to grab onto the opportunity with both hands and hold on for what was bound to be one wild ride.

Before she could untie her tongue, Zeb commented, "She sure looks ready, boss."

"Yes. I'm ready." Her voice was barely a whisper, but both men reacted to the husky, sensual sound by moving closer, crowding into her personal space. They both leaned in, their body language giving off a message rich with sexual desires Katie prayed she was reading correctly. Everything about them positively oozed sex.

She wanted them. Both of them. Right here. Right now. Vivid images of the two men pleasuring her at once had her breath coming in quick pants, her heart beating in a wild, discordant rhythm.

Zeb's hand rose, fingers brushing over her cheek. "You look a little flushed, baby." His soft blue eyes held both concern and desire.

Jase brushed his fingers over the row of buttons running from the waistband of her jeans to right above the swell of her breasts. "It's kinda warm in here, isn't it?" He teased the bare skin accessible through the opening, fingers gliding upward to linger over her rapidly beating pulse. "Maybe you should take some of these clothes off."

All the soft shyness left Zeb as he pressed in close against her right side. The hard, heated ridge of his erection caressed her hip and Katie felt sure she'd go up in flames. When the steely length of Jase's desire settled into the curve of her opposite hip, she began to tremble with anticipation.

These cowboys were big and hard all over. Yeehaw!

The two men continued moving forward, backing her up until she was held captive between the stall door and a wall of warm muscle. Each man gently grasped a slender arm, then large hands drew her arms to the side and forced her shoulders tight against the rough wood. With practiced ease, two cowboy boots—one scarred black, the other scuffed brown—pushed between her feet, easing her legs apart. The move forced her back to arch and her breasts to press forward.

Jase's warm hands slid down her body, stopping to cup and weigh one heavy breast, thumb rasping over her pebbled nipple.

At the same time, Zeb swooped in, his lips capturing hers. His hot, demanding mouth swallowed the sound of her gasp. His moist tongue teased at the seam of her lips until she opened for him and accepted a deeper mating of their mouths. Tongues twining and teasing, she took in his spicy, masculine flavor, imbibing the heady sensations. His free hand came up, fingers interlaced in her hair, tilting her head to the angle he desired. Once assured she would hold the position, he moved his hand to cup her other breast.

Both full globes felt needy and heavy as the men stroked and tugged her nipples through the soft and light material. Breaking the kiss, Zeb traced a path of fire over her jaw and down her neck. Katie let her head fall back and hang over the top of the stall door. The multiple sensations were powerful and overwhelming. All she could do was give herself over to their expert ministrations.

The front clasp of her bra was unhooked before Katie even realized her shirt had been unbuttoned. She moaned, reveling in the pressure of their warm hands teasing her flesh. She arched her back even more, filling their hands with the generous globes, seeking a firmer touch. A touch her cowboys were more than willing to provide.

Zeb's tongue plunged back within the hot, moist depths of her mouth, erasing any lingering questions in Katie's mind about how he would take her. His tongue moved in a seductive motion, a beautiful dance of give and take.

Jase's lips went to one aching breast. The first warm swipe of his tongue over the taut peak had her womb clenching and she moaned deeply. The vibrations raced through Zeb's mouth and his tongue began to thrust with even more intensity. Leaving her mouth once again, he teased the other nipple with lips, teeth and tongue.

Oh God, having both nipples suckled and teased at the same time was more erotic than anything she'd ever imagined.

Katie's legs shook from the extraordinary sensations her lovers created. She wouldn't be able to stand for much longer. Her knees weakened and threatened to buckle. She pictured herself sliding down the rough wood, a pool of boiling desire soaking into the hay, but Jase released her breast to slip one muscular thigh between her spread legs, forcing her onto her toes. Releasing his hold on her arm, Zeb palmed both aching breasts, teeth nipping, tongue swirling, fingers tweaking and pulling at the ultra-sensitive nubs.

Jase swirled his tongue across the delicate shell of her ear. He grasped the tender lobe between his teeth, the firm bite sending shivers racing down her spine. In a voice raspy with need, he commanded, "Ride my leg, sugar." He ground the hard length of his cock against her hip while moving his massive thigh, forcing Katie's jeans to rub against her trapped and aching clit. She couldn't think, couldn't breathe—the experience was too powerful and all-consuming.

"Jase...Zeb..."

"Ride me, Katie. Show me what a hot little filly you are," Jase demanded.

Zeb tugged hard on one elongated nipple while sucking the other swollen bud deep into his warm mouth. Hot jolts rocketed straight down to Katie's throbbing pussy, causing her hips to roll and grind harder against Jase's leg. She couldn't believe this was actually happening—her fantasy was coming to life.

Zeb released her breast with a wet pop and stood back to watch.

"Mmmmm...baby, you look so damn hot." One hand continued to grasp her breast and tease her nipple, while the other released the snap on her jeans and eased the zipper down. Slowly, Zeb worked his hand inside her jeans until his calloused palm rested above her mound, fingers cupping her swollen lips. Shifting his body slightly behind hers, he ground his hard shaft against her ass, thick fingers spreading her slick folds, and forcing her swollen clit to slide across the hard muscles of Jase's thigh.

“Oh. My. God.” Katie’s head rested against Zeb’s broad shoulder as his arm snaked around her side, his other hand once again fondling her breast. Her back arched, bared breasts thrust forward, one nipple poking between Zeb’s spread fingers, the other quivering and exposed.

Jase’s heated breath flowed across her quivering flesh. “Damn, sugar. You are one beautiful sight.” His mouth came down and pulled the exposed nipple deep inside his hot mouth, hands bracketing her hips to set the pace of her fevered motion.

Katie’s hips bucked against Jase’s leg as Zeb thrust against her from behind. Heat built and prickling sensations rushed across her skin. Little gasps and pants poured from between her kiss-swollen lips.

“Oh yeah,” Zeb moaned. “Come for us now, Katie-girl.”

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