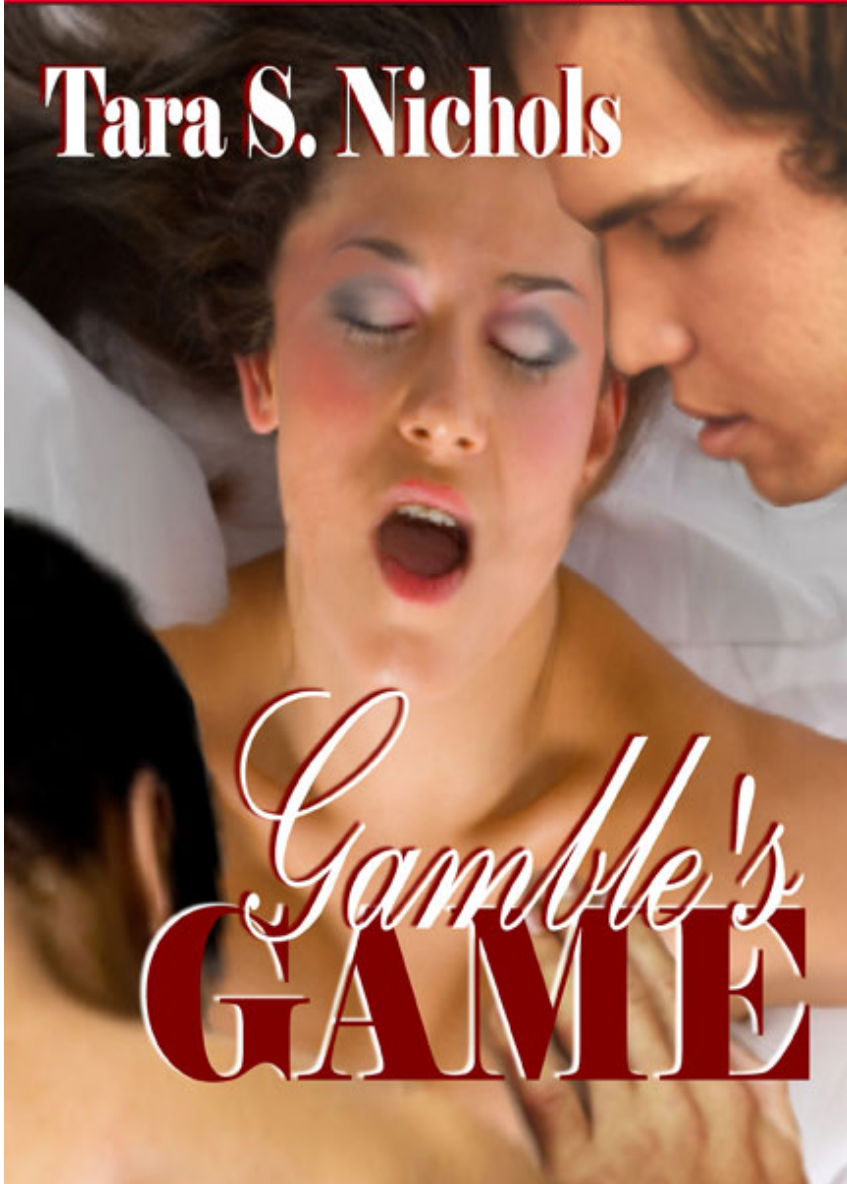


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Gamble's
GAMIE



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MENAGE AMOUR



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TARA S. NICHOLS

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Chapter 1

Throwing herself down in to the chair across from her two friends, Gamble and Tully, she scowled to tell them she was in no mood for surprises. They looked at her as if she had sprouted antennae. She may as well have. After Tina, her supervisor, had finished scolding her, she could have used a new set of ears. As it was, her current set might never stop ringing. She felt as though she had been put through a meat grinder, one of those old-fashioned ones that chewed a body up slowly. That was Tina though. She wasn't known for her delicate touch. Tina didn't like it when people tested the boundaries as she claimed Desiree had been doing.

Late shmate, she thought. If she had told Tina why she had been late for every shift this past week, well, it'd curl the old girl's toes. She just couldn't do that to a fellow cashier, even if she was her cantankerous boss.

Terguson's Foods wasn't the worst job she'd ever had, but if ambience is everything, then the raw stench of the staffroom, with the sour tang of long-forgotten lunches, the nasty odour from a collection of footwear piled in a heap in the corner, and the harsh sting of cleaning chemicals mingling spoke volumes about the way Desiree Jones felt about the small grocery store. This morning, in particular,

she was not in the mood to breathe the foul air of a workplace that thought it could dictate how she lived her life.

Gamble looked at his watch, grossly over exaggerating the action. According to Desiree, whoever invented the alarm clock sucked. That annoying little ticking time bomb was nothing but a cruel joke foisted upon society that should have been nipped in the bud a long time ago.

"You're later than usual." He arched his eyebrows with a superior air, "You know, later than your usual lateness. Did your playboy put up a fight and not want to call it quits by two?"

She had expected this. The boys liked to rib her every chance they got. She had braced herself for their verbal torment, ready to rebut every little point they tried to make, but then Tina had taken her by surprise, and that crispy little conversation had taken all her reserve nerve. Perhaps it had been a mistake letting the likes of those two into her private life. She knew the rule. Never kiss and tell, but when the telling was so juicy, well, she just had to dish it out. Leaving her closest friends in the dark about her love-'em- and-leave-'em lifestyle was next to impossible. Besides, that would leave them with nothing to talk about. Gamble's frequent escapades rivalled her own, and Tully simply couldn't stop thinking about it. No, the floodgates were wide open, and her business was their business.

Tully continued their merciless pursuit. "By the looks of it, it must have been something extraordinary. I hope you are planning to spill on all the gory details." He leaned forward hungry for gossip. "My VCR broke in the middle of *Pent UP Playmates* last night, and I'm hungry for a fireworks finale." Unfortunately, Joshua Tully didn't get many dates, hence the dependency on sex films. He was the Jughead of modern-day men, a harmless, sex-starved puppy. Women, including herself, flirted shamelessly with him, but all parties involved knew it wasn't going to go anywhere, well, at least she didn't think it was. Who knew what she was capable of after too many Mojitos. Other than the dorky fraying straw cowboy hat he was always sporting, he was pretty easy on the eyes. Tully's problem was

that he was awkward. Deep down, she harboured the urge to make him a man, to open his eyes and show him what it really meant to want it. He was so fresh that the urge to spoil him for all others was always prevalent on her mind. Yeah, she liked power that much.

Fighting back the urge to gag, she levelled Tully with a ‘don’t test me’ stare. Straightening, he heeded the warning of impending violence with admirable clarity and speed. He was harmless though, a nice guy with a bottomless appetite, no verbal social filter, and the most beautiful set of baby blue eyes she had ever seen. They were perfectly round, endless, and eerily soothing. It was unfortunate that he couldn’t stop shovelling junk food into his gullet so someone could actually have a look at them. Had he actually given it any thought, sponging off someone else’s sexual escapades was rather parasitic behaviour, and she was not an enabler.

“Get your own fantasies, Tully.” Dismayed at her choice of companions, she groaned and rubbed her temples.

That settled, she resumed her morose attitude and slumped back in her chair. She hated to scold Tully. It felt equivalent to kicking a puppy, but it seemed that was all she ever did these days. He had that apple-cheeked boy next door quality to him, average features, casual haircut, light brown hair, and enough fashion sense to get through life unscathed, or unnoticed. Which was worse, she didn’t know.

Then there was Gamble, aka Andrew Gamble. He, on the other hand, was a sex god. He had chiselled features; dark, neatly trimmed hair; a regal nose; and a pair of slate-coloured eyes perfectly framed with the longest lashes she’d ever seen. She couldn’t decide if his irises were dark grey, dark green, or a mixture of both. Whatever they were, they were fine. Gamble was fine. Unfortunately, his fineness came across in everything he did, in the way he dressed, pressed black slacks, crisp white shirt, and perfectly fastened tie. It was in the way he spoke, a smooth baritone that melted your knee caps off. One exception to the rule was the way he dated, like an upper-class caveman out to populate the southern basin. He serviced more women

than a revolving door, herself included. Why couldn't he be a celibate monk instead of the hottest thing to walk the grocery aisles? He was just like her, and it was the one thing she hated about him. After their one night of debauchery and bliss, he had somehow made a lasting impression on her, and no matter what she did, she couldn't seem to shake it. She craved him, and that just couldn't happen. It was dangerous and ridiculous and just not going to happen. She liked her life the way it was. She had her faults, and she embraced them. No man was going to mess up a good thing. Her parents had made that mistake, and they were still suffering for it.

She wasn't being fair of course. When Gamble had suggested they give it another go, she had promptly declined. It had been a gut reaction, instinctual after so many years of protecting her individuality. She hadn't allowed herself time to really consider the ramifications of such a refusal, and she knew Gamble had been hurt by her rejection. No doubt she had surprised him, which possibly increased his attraction to her. After that, he'd thrown his wooing into high gear, bringing her flowers, chocolates, cards, and even a few toys from one of the kinky shops on Fourth Street. The clutter eventually became too much and she'd been forced to explain her actions. Going into detail about how she had grown up with two parents who acted like they couldn't stand each other, she had given him more information on herself than she'd ever given any person before, exposing her underbelly to him in hopes that he would see reason and back off. Unfortunately, it failed. When he couldn't respect her reasons, she had resorted to threatening to upload the video they made on You Tube, and he had retreated. They never spoke of it again.

Thankfully, their friendship had survived, more than survived really. Despite the fact that they mutually vowed to never sleep with one another again, they flirted openly. She just couldn't seem to keep her hands off him, and since he never complained, she didn't see why she should have to. Besides, it was reciprocal. Eventually, they even managed to draw Tully into their raunchy little world of bum

pinching, dirty talk, and a little thing Tully invented called the Nark Frisk. Nark Frisking was when an unsuspecting victim would be pressed against the lockers and physically interrogated then left gasping for breath, not unlike to a beached fish. It was all in good fun though and none of them took it seriously, or so she hoped. It had its side effects of course. Each one of them went home rangier than a rabbit, and anyone that had to endure their playful banter was misled into believing them to be a very strange trio. Some of the gossip floating around made for some very interesting conversations between the three of them usually ending up with one of them confessing to having started it themselves.

The feelings she had developed for Gamble never really left her, and all of their flirting, on top of the dates he went out on, was starting to take its toll. She cared about him, and it was starting to cramp her style. An uneasy feeling settled into the pit of her stomach whenever she was with other men, which made her feel guilty and more lonely than when she was actually physically alone. Gamble didn't seem to be having any issues though. Word in the lunchroom was that he was still the best lay around. So she kept up a brave face and pushed all of those nagging feelings down to where they couldn't interfere with her getting some too.

They were not a good match, and perhaps Gamble had come to the same conclusion. She was a bit of a slob after all. Who had the time to pick up their soiled undies after a wild night's romp through the sheets? Who cared if the toothpaste sat all night without the cap on? Seriously, she never understood the urge to carry a little sticky roll of tape in her pocket to remove all the dander, cat hair, and man stubble from her clothes the minute she left her apartment? Gamble did.

She studied his well-groomed exterior, noting his stubble-free jaw and mousse-styled hair. Working with him was a daily reminder of their many differences, but damn polished had never looked so good.

“So?” Gamble prompted her, while his eyes narrowed on her as though he expected her of some great mischief.

“What?” she snapped, seeing their smug smiles.

“Oh, I think you *know* what.” Tully scratched his neck and tried his best to look indifferent, but deep down, she knew he was itching for details.

“Tina,” she finally admitted. “Tina is the reason I am late.”

Her curveball had worked. They were both surprised, thrown completely off guard because they expected her to say she had been late, again, because she had been Adam and Eve-ing it under the apple tree. Well, truth be told, she had been, but Tina had been waiting for her by the staff entrance at eight twenty and had nabbed her before she could make it to the staff room this time. According to Tina, she had been on to her for some time now.

“Tina?” Tully gasped and glanced around as though speaking her name might invoke her. “Is this *it* for you then?” Tully blurted before she could answer.

Gamble was more casual, simply frowning with concern. “What did she say?”

She laughed to lighten the mood. “No. I’m not fired, if that is what you are asking, at least not yet.” She shrugged as though it had been nothing when she was actually quaking in her boots. “I got a warning.”

The guys let out a sigh of relief and leaned back into their chairs.

The distress in their eyes was touching, and she felt herself softening toward them. “You were really worried there for a sec, weren’t you?” she teased them, unable to resist.

Immediately, Gamble’s cockiness returned. She could hear his lecture before he opened his mouth. “So are you going to heed that warning or go on boffing everything that moves?”

“Boffing?” She scoffed. “Yes, I’ll continue boffing everything that moves, as long as it suits me, but I don’t need the attitude,

Gamble. I already got the verbal spanking from Tina, thank you very much.”

“She spanked you!” Tully leaned forward again, his eyes huge and round.

Desiree slapped her forehead. “Good grief, man, no. I’m not *that* easy and I said verbal spanking—oh never mind.”

Gamble arched his eyebrows.

“What?” She targeted him. “You better not be insinuating what I think you are insinuating.”

“Oh, I think we all know just how easy you really are.” Before she could protest, he held up a fine, slender finger and silenced her. He took a deep breath and said with an air of authority, “If Tina Goodman offered you advancement out of cashier hell, you’d bend over her knee and take what she offered, with a smile.”

Desiree’s mouth dropped open. She didn’t know whether she was shocked or impressed such a vulgar sentiment had been uttered by Gamble.

“I never knew you thought so low of me,” she retaliated after recovering from her shock.

He shrugged for effect. “After some of the stuff you’ve told us...” He fanned himself to indicate just how steamy it had been.

She gave an indignant little huff and crossed her arms over her chest. “Remind me not to share anymore,” she added dryly.

“But you so like to share,” Gamble teased her. “At least, you like to share your bed.” He winked at Tully. He was goading her, she knew it, yet she took the bait anyway.

“Yes, I do like to share my bed, and you’re sure one to talk. You’re no better than me.”

“Well, we haven’t really fairly compared that now, have we?” He gave her a wicked little wink as though that was supposed to mean something to her.

Gamble was sharp today. She wasn’t rested enough to take him on. “You have a problem with the way I live my life, Mr. Tantric?”

They'd been over this many times before. At least ever since Gamble had found that tantric sex book in the library.

"Don't knock the tantric." He dropped his chin and wagged a finger at her looking very much like an elderly great aunt of hers, only male and much sexier. "You could do wonders with a little discipline."

"Oh believe me I get my discipline whenever I'm in the mood for it." She leered at him defiantly.

His eyes crinkled at the corners, the only visible sign that he had very much enjoyed the image she had conjured up. Otherwise, he kept his tone dour and disapproving.

It was all an act, one that she enjoyed as much as he. She longed to bring Gamble to the breaking point, where he got so worked up he lost his polished exterior. She'd had numerous fantasies where he was the stern disciplinarian setting her tender buttocks afire from repetitive strikes of his hand, and she was the unruly, naughty girl who wouldn't listen to reason. Just thinking about it had already distracted her to the point where she had tuned out everything he had been saying.

"Desiree, it's not the same thing and you know it. What I'm talking about is denying the gratification for a bit to give it more meaning, more substance." He finished with a pink tint coloring each cheek. She loved it when he got worked up. It reminded her of the sex god she had once shared a bed with.

She snorted and jerked her thumb at Gamble's noble expression. "Will you listen to him?" She spoke solely to Tully now. "He thinks denying myself pleasure will give me greater pleasure. How half cocked is that?"

"She's got a point, Gamble." Tully addressed the other man.

"No she doesn't," Gamble insisted. "I'm not saying go without. I certainly don't and heaven knows she couldn't actually do that."

Her eyes widened. "Oh no? You don't think so?"

His mouth curved into a crooked smile, and she realized she'd been baited. "No, I really don't think you could completely abstain." He shook his head. "Impossible, you'd explode."

"Are you calling me a nympho then?"

He looked warily to Tully, but Tully shrugged.

"We don't know why you do it, Dezzie," Tully said kindly, "or what makes you tick. We just know you do it, a lot." He smiled sheepishly, and then ducked to avoid the small plastic shaker of pepper she had picked off the table and lobbed at him.

She re-crossed her arms over her chest and pouted. "I'm offended."

"Well, if the shoe fits." Gamble tugged at the tie constricting his neck. He had gotten so worked up that he was slightly dishevelled. It was distracting in a way that made her wary. When they were through tossing each other around on her bed that night they spent together, he had looked so rakishly handsome, so lecherous and wild that she'd pushed him down for one more round. Now that look was back, and there wasn't anything she'd rather do than have another go at him. Thankfully, she restrained herself, gripping the chair tightly as though at any moment she might fly off her seat and ravage him.

"Wanna make a bet?" he said in challenge.

Desiree and Tully looked nervously at one another. He was calling her bluff, she figured. He was always doing that. Until now, she'd always backed down. Before she could think it through, she pierced him with one scrupulous eye. "What are you suggesting?"

Narrowing his focus on her, Gamble matched her gaze. "Abstinence."

"Abstinence." She assumed an air of nonchalance, as though abstaining from sex were as easy as pie and she did it every second weekend. In fact, the very idea of going without scared the living day lights out of her. "Why not," she finished after a dramatic pause.

He laughed heartily. "Seriously? You? That'll be the day."

"How about today?" She leaned across the table, acting bolder than she felt, in hope of calling his bluff.

He studied her for a moment before answering, "All right, but I feel confident you won't make it past tonight. This should be some of the easiest money I've ever made." He laughed surprising her.

"Oh, I'm not in on this alone." She realised their mistake. "No way, if I have to abstain then so do the both of you. I'm betting I can go *longer* than *you* can."

"What?" Tully sat up straight in his chair, suddenly very alert. "Why me? I haven't done anything to deserve this."

Gamble speared him with an impatient glare. "What difference is it going to make to you? It's not like they are lining up out there."

"Ouch." Desiree lowered her face so Tully couldn't see her struggling not to laugh.

Tully pouted at Gamble but won no sympathy from his friend.

"Look at it this way," Gamble reasoned. "*You* will stand the best chance of winning."

Immediately, Tully brightened. "Hey, yeah." He chuckled. "Finally my dating record is going to go in my favour." Much like an impressionable child, Tully made a remarkable recovery. His mood was now strangely bright and competitive.

Gamble leaned in so he was mere inches from Desiree's face. "So, what's on the table?"

Desiree shrugged. "One week's wages."

"One week?" Tully sputtered.

They ignored Tully's outburst and continued to stare each other down.

Gamble chewed his lip a moment and focused his eyes on her, the challenge he issued. "Make it two."

She swallowed hard. Two weeks, good grief. That would really set her back if she lost. So she had better do everything in her power to not lose, she told herself firmly. How long would it take for either

one of them to buckle anyway? Gamble was as much of a horn dog as she was. A day, maybe two tops?

She glanced over at Tully, who was struggling to open a bag of chips, and rolled her eyes. It never failed. Every time she looked at him he was chewing an oversized, unidentified substance. Despite the fact, he was as skinny as a rail. It wasn't fair. His metabolism must have been through the roof. She wondered if that was also an indicator of a high sex drive as well? Perhaps she could use her knowledge to her advantage. He was the weak link truth be told. One night without a VCR and he would be climbing the walls. He might even resort to spending some money on a new machine. Hell, it'd be cheaper.

Gamble was the real challenge. What with his competitive nature and his self-discipline through his tantric exercises, he was the one to beat. She returned her gaze to Gamble and took a moment to admire his handsome profile. He was resolute, stubborn, dapper, and ravishing. Not a hair was out of place. She longed to unravel that polished exterior and make him beat his chest like Tarzan. She knew he had it in him. She'd seen it, up close and personal. A fiery passion lurked just below the surface, a passion he couldn't contain forever. Tantric or no tantric exercises, everyone had their breaking point. Perhaps, if he wasn't getting any he might try to seduce her again, and this time, she smiled slyly, she might bend the rules and rock his world.

"So it's a bet then?" She held out her hand to make it official.

Gamble reached out and shook it confidently. The feel of his firm grip wrapped around her hand was comforting, and she discovered she was in no hurry to let go. His eyes held a hint of merriment, and it seemed, since he lingered as well, that he echoed her sentiments.

They looked expectantly at Tully. He stopped chewing, his eyes widening at their sudden change of course, and swallowed the wad with some difficulty.

"Well?" she prompted when he delayed.

He rolled his eyes in disgust. "I'm an idiot for doing this, but, all right, I'm in."

She nodded and let go of Gamble before it got too awkward.

Gamble reserved a wink for her before he brought his fingertips together in front of his face. He tried on his best greedy bureaucrat impression, and flashed each of them with a menacing smile. Then, putting on his best serious face, he addressed his opponents as though speaking from a podium. After clearing his throat, he said, "Rules are, no masturbation and the first one to succumb to temptation loses. The other two split the pot."

Desiree shrugged casually. "Sounds good. I sure will enjoy spending your money." She lifted her chin, confident again.

"Don't look so smug. I'm a very determined man."

"We'll see, won't we?" She gave her hair a flirtatious toss and flattened down the front of her blouse. The guys followed her every move.

Gamble stood to go, but before he left them, he bent down and whispered in her ear, "It's open season on you, baby, and I'm determined it will be me who makes you lose."

His words sent a jolt through her that left certain parts of her anatomy humming. Did he mean he intended to be the one whom she slept with or simply the one who won?

There was a glint in his eye that he meant to be writhing between her legs, and strangely enough, she hoped it were true.

When he pulled away, she instantly longed to reach out for him and hold him back. Instead, she watched his departing back with longing. One consolation resulting from this bet was that she didn't have to wonder if he was sleeping with another woman that night. That in itself was worth at least one week's wages.

Chapter 2

Finally, after three long, mundane hours of punching keys at the till, a good-looking customer came along, an Arabian prince come to whisk her away from asparagus and toiletries. With smooth, cinnamon-coloured skin, a long, angular face and glossy chestnut hair that shone under the fluorescent lights, she could see that he took good care of himself and that he had very refined tastes. Even after he underwent her usual tests, he still measured up. There was no sign of a ring on his finger, no kids clinging to his pant legs or shuffling behind him, he didn't have bags under his eyes, and he wasn't twitching, sputtering, or staring uncontrollably. Hell, with those attributes, he could be her one true love, her Prince Charming, her destiny, if she actually believed in all that hooey. She could tell by his heavy gold wrist watch, his designer tie, and his high-end water crackers that he was an upper-class businessman just nipping in for a bite of lunch. No doubt he was en route to a very important meeting. At least that was the fantasy she applied to him as he inched his way down the line toward her. She basically hurled the two customers ahead of him through just to speed up their introduction. As she fed his tidy little pile of healthy snacks along the conveyor belt, she flashed him one of her best disarming smiles, reserved for occasions such as this.

Naturally, it worked. Why wouldn't it? She was a catch. She'd been told countless times that she was beautiful. She wasn't a model but what she lacked in height and a double d cup, she made up for with impeccable taste, bottomless social skills, and a killer smile. With a porcelain complexion, Cupid's bow lips and a heart shaped

face she could pull off coy under any circumstances. Even though her eyes were spaniel brown, a colour she thought of as common, their deep-set, almond shape, bestowed her with an exotic and ethereal appearance. Her dark unruly curls might be mistaken as a sign of her laziness, but they could just as easily be considered charming and carefree. The light sprinkling of freckles across the bridge of her nose and tops of her cheeks had bailed her out of trouble more times than she dared to count and if she really wanted to work the room all she had to do was flash one of her shapely legs, an asset she never covered up. She used her looks now to win over her Prince's favour.

His serious features drew into a radiant smile, and she soon had him chatting amiably about kiwi and guavas, two of the items on his grocery list.

If they had been at the bar, she felt confident that he would have asked for her number, but they weren't, much to the chagrin of the growing line of customers behind him. When the first sounds of a checkout mutiny sounded, Prince Charming slipped her a business card, which she peeked at discreetly the minute he left her till. Instantly, her mood deflated. She had been right about one thing. According to the card, he was a businessman, just not the prestigious kind she had been hoping for. He sold lottery tickets and cigars out of a newspaper stand farther along in the mall. He was not a prince. He just dressed nice. Still, he might be fun for one night, maybe even two. She could've called him tonight if it weren't for her big mouth and the useless bet she had made with Gamble and Tully.

Smiling tightly for the woman who was next in line, she tried to distract herself from her nagging conscience. Why was it that she ran from deeper relationships? Maybe that cigar salesman *was* Prince Charming. Maybe he would be the one, the one she called for a second date, the one she let slobber all over her pillow, the one she didn't smother in the night for snoring.

No, she knew why. She didn't like sharing. She was used to living independently, used to getting her way, and if she did let someone in,

he'd try to change her. He'd find fault with her and tear her apart piece by piece until he had turned her into something he liked rather than what she liked. After living with her parents for eighteen years, of listening to them bickering and finding fault with one another, she had vowed to never let anyone in that far. It only led to misery.

Chapter 3

The boys came to collect her in the produce section at the end of the day. Gamble usually had last-minute things to finish up so she had grown accustomed to doing her grocery shopping while they waited for him.

Greeting them with little more than a grunt, she let them know deep down she was fuming and she would like nothing more than to see their perky little faces stuck between a vice. She'd had all day to blame them for her missed opportunity, and she intended to make them suffer because of it. First, she would start with that smirk plastered across Gamble's face.

He was not intimidated. "You look like someone pissed in your—"

"Don't start."

Gamble's eyes widened, and he glanced nervously at Tully.

Tully just shrugged.

"Okay then." Gamble rolled his eyes and peered into the plastic basket she had slung over one arm. It was half full of various items, mostly vegetables.

"My, my, what a healthy menu you seem to have adopted." He picked up one long English cucumber, then a rather large ear of corn. "Just the one ear will do you?"

She caught her upper lip in her teeth and snatched the corn out of his hands.

He reached in again and pulled out a zucchini. It fit nicely in his hand, and the end had a unique flange. He held it up under her nose.

“What is this?” he demanded with a tone that suggested deviance of some sort on her part.

“A zucchini, you idiot.” She gave him a strange expression and scoffed.

He examined it thoughtfully. “You know, I’ve heard these things are considered erotic in some parts of the world.” He drew the smooth flesh of the zucchini along her cheek. Its cool, smooth surface sent a shiver through her. “Dating vegetables counts against you I’ll have you know.”

“What? I wasn’t going to—” She glanced around to see if anyone had overheard. Only one shopper had been standing close enough, but he showed no signs of having heard. He just kept on picking his way through the apples.

At that moment, a cool breeze touched the backs of her legs. She turned to see the draft had been caused by Tully, who had lifted her short skirt with a parsnip he had selected from the contents of her basket. As the parsnip touched her inner thigh, she screeched loud enough to bring up all the heads of shoppers all around. Shrinking down, she blushed and waved apologetically to a half a dozen strangers.

“Honestly!” She hissed as she scooted away from Tully and his imposing parsnip. “We’re going to get arrested for indecency because of the two of you.”

“You’re the one buying all the phalluses.” Gamble nudged her in the rib with the zucchini. She looked around, snatched the slender green produce from him, and then pursed her lips tight to warn him he had crossed the line. Undaunted, he reached into her basket again, this time he withdrew a large gourd. He held up the small, pale yellow oblong squash. “I don’t even want to know what you intend to do with this.” She smacked it down and he laughed, grinning wide.

“I’ll have you know I was going to make a vegetable stew tonight and invite the two of you over, but now you can just forget it.”

He turned to Tully with a grin. "She seems hostile, don't you think? Maybe I touched a nerve."

Tully nodded as though the situation warranted a serious tone. "It's been awhile for her, you know." He glanced at his wristwatch. "Tsk-tsk, a whole eight hours I'd say."

"Ugh." She looked to the heavens as though she would receive answers from there. "Both of you are completely and utterly incorrigible." She brought her head back down.

"And you love it," Gamble accused her.

Shaking her head, she moved away from them and over to another mountain of vegetables, where she selected two of the reddest tomatoes she could find. Much to her dismay, the guys followed her. They seemed to have adopted a keen interest in everything she did all of a sudden.

They hovered with anticipation until she turned on them. "Are you going to accuse me of shoving tomatoes where the sun don't shine if I buy a couple of those too?"

"I don't know you're the nymphomaniac." Tully grinned.

It was obvious fending them off with those tactics wasn't working. It was time to give them a taste of their own medicine. Holding one out in each hand, she squeezed them gently, tested their weight, then brought them to her face where she rubbed one against her cheek. "Oh, that is nice." She lowered them until they were level with her breasts. "They feel so ripe, so full, yet they have a pleasant—"

Gamble caved first. "All right!" His voice squeaked as though he were under some sort of strain. "Stop it. Enough. You've made your point. Let's go."

"Oh, I'm not finished yet." She pierced them each with a scrutinizing stare. "You started this honey, yet you don't have any idea what you're in for do you?"

Their blank expressions confirmed as much.

“Giving up sex is like giving up cigarettes cold turkey, and trust me, I know. For the past four hours, all I could think about was how I wasn’t going to play rodeo bull with an Arabian prince tonight.”

“Rodeo bull?” Tully looked confused.

“Arabian prince?” Gamble smirked again and she glared him into submission.

Tully was about to offer up a suggestion, but she cut him off just as quickly. “I’ll need chocolate, good stuff, not that cheap Easter crap, and some caffeinated soda, good red wine, chips, dip, and a chick flick.”

Gamble’s worried expression broke and he laughed. “And you expect us to fill this tall order do you?”

She gave him her best ‘don’t test me look’ and he closed his mouth, and the smile fell from his lips.

“Right then.” He stepped wide, giving her ample berth on his way to fetch the items on her list.

“Good thing we work in a grocery store.” She could hear Tully say as he raced to catch up to Gamble.

“I have a feeling this is going to cost us,” was Gamble’s reply.

You better believe it, she thought to herself with a smile and noted just how nice Gamble’s ass looked as he walked away.

Chapter 4

Without needing to discuss it, they took their little party of three back to her place and laid their snacks, beverages, and movie out on the long coffee table located in front of the television. After two years, they had a routine, and Tuesday night was movie night.

They lined up in a row, with her sitting in the middle, as she usually did, but this time she was acutely aware of her two male companions' presence. More accurately, she was aware of their warmth through their clothes against her own, of their masculine smells of cologne, of some unidentified soap product, and of the tantalizing rule they had cast about them earlier that afternoon that acted like a charm spell, making her want to tamper with it and figure out a way to unravel it. Why it was affecting her so much she didn't know, but she figured it had something to do with the knowledge that they were off limits. She hated rules. She broke them every chance she got, only this time, it would cost her.

When all three of them were settled in and the previews had started to roll, she announced, out of the blue, and with some degree of vehement fury, "I'll have you know, I could've been fucking a nameless stud on this couch right about now."

There was a moment of silence where she was tempted to turn her head either direction to see how they were taking her news, but she wouldn't give them the satisfaction. That would be showing weakness, would allow them to see that her mind had gravitated to her nether regions, and she was having some difficulty staying within their close proximity. She had to play it cool.

Then, out of the corner of her eye, she saw Gamble nod. “You still can, baby. You’ve got two willing studs right here, but it will cost you.”

“Don’t flatter yourself,” she replied through gritted teeth.

Gamble chuckled and shifted innocently, but in doing so, he shoved his hip onto her hand, pinning it to the couch. A new ensemble of highly intensified sexual stirrings flared within her. With his right buttock literally in the palm of her hand, she froze, unsure what to do. Did she act casual and her hand, just in case Gamble hadn’t noticed, or did she look put out as though she weren’t enjoying herself at all. The fact that she liked the feel of his muscular gluteus kept her from doing either. Daring a glance in his direction, she saw that he was looking at her.

“Comfy?” He sniggered.

“No,” she said sullenly and jerked her hand away.

A crooked grin tugged at the corner of his mouth, and he leered. “Hey, if you’re that desperate, I’ve got something else you can wrap your hands around.”

Appalled, she looked at him, then made it obvious she intended to watch the movie, despite the fact that her concentration was now completely shot.

Brooding, she focused all her attention on the television. As the credits rolled and the title appeared, she realised that they had pulled a fast one over on her. Clearly, by all the heavy breathing and the scantily clad damsels flitting across the screen, she knew Tully had picked the movie. They never let Tully choose the entertainment. He always got what he wanted, which was almost always brainless porn.

Unfortunately, she was caught. If she reacted, they would get the satisfaction from having riled her up. Her only option was to bear it. She gritted her teeth tighter and tighter as the gratuitous nudity, the excessive explosions and the absent plot wore her down. Seething she felt her anger building. Finally, she turned to look to Tully. He, in turn, glanced her way. He tipped his cowboy hat, which he refused to

take off inside her home, and then turned his attention back to the screen, no doubt anxious not to miss a potential tit sighting. No, Tully certainly wasn't the mastermind behind this. He was just acting according to his true nature. He didn't have a malicious bone in his body. Gamble on the other hand...

It had to be all *his* fault. He let, or perhaps even encouraged, Tully pick something called Moody Moon Whores.

Fixing him with a scowl, she turned her head to glare at her other companion only to find him already looking at her, a broad expectant grin spread across his face. He had been waiting for her to react, the bastard. He wriggled his eyebrows, his face mischievous and alight.

Not about to let him win, she growled, crossed her arms and threw herself back against the cushions. The next thing she knew he was pressing against her shoulder again, his warm breath in her ear.

"It's kind of raunchy, isn't it?" he asked, his voice soft, creating butterflies in the pit of her stomach.

She shifted aggressively, and their legs bumped. Overcompensating again, she jerked away, willing her body not to respond to the intimate contact.

Merciless, he continued to press against her. "Do you find me so irresistible that you can't stop touching me?"

"You wish," she snapped, refusing to look at him.

"I don't have to. I haven't had this much action since—"

Tully shushed them, and they fell silent.

When she couldn't stand it another second, she muttered through gritted teeth, "You suck, Gamble."

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw his dark eyes widen in mock surprise. "Why, Dezzie, whatever is the matter?"

She swung her face around to glare at him. "I should have known you'd try something." She turned back to face the television, not trusting her raging hormones to fall for Gamble's fine, chiselled features. "It just goes to show you don't believe you can do it without

resorting to petty manipulations.” She dared risk a glance at him. He had a charming smile that might just lift the money out of her pockets.

“What?” He feigned injury and laid his palm flat against his chest.

“You set me up. You’re after my hard earned money and you don’t even need it.”

Tully gently elbowed her and shushed them a second time.

She made a show of rolling her eyes, signalling her patience was quickly running out.

“Everyone needs money,” Gamble continued with an impish shrug.

“Yeah, but you’re willing to test my limits to get it.”

She saw the brilliant white of his teeth flash in a wolfish grin. She was nothing more than prey to him, she thought, her face hot. He lowered his lips even closer to her neck, his warm breath grazing her tender skin with a feathery touch. “I’ve hardly even begun to test you.” He said before he pulled away. Something about the way he said that made her think he wasn’t referring to his attempts at trying to piss her off. It had been laced with erotic promises that lifted the hair on the back of her neck. She swung her head back around until she was staring at him, their noses nearly touching. His dark eyes glittered like gems beneath his long lashes. He could have told her that his biggest turn-on was women who cluck like a chicken during foreplay and she would have obliged.

An angelic smile replaced the wicked one he had been sporting mere moments ago. “What? I’ve got this stereo I’ve had my eye on for some time now and—”

He had ruined the mood. Snapping out of her delusional fog she stood, thrust one arm out, and pointed to the door. “Out!” she commanded.

“Oh, come on now. Don’t be so sour. It’s just a friendly little wager and—”

"No. I don't host hormone terrorists. The two of you can take a hike, and you can take that smug grin with you. I won't subject myself to any more of your provocations."

He looked as though he were about to argue some more but then he closed his mouth in defeat. He slapped his palms against his knees and stood. "All right." He shrugged. "Have it your way, but you'll miss the ending." He indicated to the movie with his head.

"What?" Tully finally tuned in. "I don't really have to go, too, do I?"

"Well, the movie is coming with me, so I doubt you're going to want to have tea with Brittle Britches here." He retrieved the tape from the machine and tossed it to his jacket by the door.

"Brittle Britches!" She exclaimed, indignant. Her perfectly executed pout was wasted on the likes of them. Being too far absorbed in their own plans for the evening, they were completely ignoring her.

"Can we at least watch it on your machine?" Tully dogged Gamble's heels all the way to the door.

Gamble rolled his eyes and nodded, his hand resting on the doorknob. "Yes, my horny little sidekick, but no sleepover." He turned to address Desiree again, imploring her. "Come on, Jones, lighten up. It's funny."

He'd used her last name in a vain attempt at camaraderie. Well, it wasn't going to work. "I'm not laughing and don't think for a minute you're going to get away with this either. I'll outplay you. You can bet on that, too."

He gave a little snort. "No way. I'm the master of discipline, remember?"

"Oh, you have your weaknesses." She added with menace in her voice, "And you told me what they are too."

He paled, looking slightly concerned, but in typical Gamble style, he pushed it aside and smiled confidently. "Bring it on, sweetheart."

With that, he pulled the door shut.

Chapter 5

“Man! This blows,” Tully exclaimed once they were on the other side of Desiree’s door.

Gamble shushed him and ushered him farther along the corridor. When he stopped, he took one last cursory glance at her apartment door. Seeing her door brought a smile to his lips. He wanted so much to return to her apartment and exchange more flirtatious banter with her, but that would have to wait for another day. Her feisty image floated back to his mind, distracting him from the point he was about to make. She had looked ravishing this evening, with her hair pulled up in a high ponytail and some dark, curly tendrils cascading down her neck. Her eyes had been bright with fury, and he had longed to do so much more than rile her up. Oh, he wanted to bring her back down again, in the one way he knew that would leave a smile on both of their lips. He turned his attention back to Tully.

Speaking with a hoarse whisper, he informed his friend, “You’re gonna get to watch your damn porno. I’ll lend you my machine. What we did tonight”—he leaned in conspiratorially—“was sow the seeds.”

“Sow the seeds?” Tully squinted in his confusion. “What on earth are you talking about?”

“Desiree’s stubborn. She’ll hold off just to show us it’s not about the money for her.”

“So why don’t you just sleep with someone and hand me the cash. That way none of us suffer.”

He rested his hand on the middle of his back and guided him toward the elevator. “Think about it my friend.” They stepped inside

and watched the doors draw shut. "She's going to be one ticking time bomb when she does go off."

"What does that have to do with us?" Tully shrugged. "I just want to get laid."

Gamble could see it was useless trying to get Tully to see the big picture. The day would come when all their teasing and flirting would evolve into more and then, hopefully, he'd understand. "You will my friend, and it's going to blow your socks off," Gamble said with a knowing smile.

* * * *

After they left, Desiree paced. Gamble had made a real mess of her tonight with his sly tricks and merciless flirting. He had never gone after her as hard as he had tonight. What was it going to be like when he followed through on his threat? She had to think of a way to get to him before she jumped his bones in a ravenous frenzy. She had to do something with her nervous energy. It had been a sexy day and that didn't bode well for her at all. First, the hot guy, then the movie, by now she should be on to her third orgasm. "Damn that Gamble," she cursed through her teeth. What was his motive behind all of this anyway? He wasn't hurting for cash. He was the wealthy one in their little trio. Tully was as broke as she was after he blew his paycheque on his car and porn. What she didn't hand over to the loan services she blew on rent and batteries for her many dildos. She'd taken a job at her favourite hangout just to cover her bar tab. Her bartending job gave her an excuse to spend all night schmoozing and flirting without having to drink her face off. It was her main method of securing company for the night.

She wasn't looking forward to Thursday night when she was scheduled behind the counter at the bar until midnight. She would have to turn down every offer or pay a hell of a price for some

meaningless gratification. If she weren't so hard up for cash, she'd tell Gamble to go screw himself and his cash.

Chapter 6

Desiree saw Tina's jaw drop open at the sight of her already at her till, her counter cleaned and her station ready to go before the store even opened. For some reason, she had a terrible sleep, and Desiree knew it was written all over her. She blinked her bleary red eyes under the harsh fluorescent lights and yawned openly. She was uninspired to put in an effort to impress anyone. Even her clothes were the same ones she had worn the day before.

She glanced up to see Tina hadn't moved. The old girl was in shock.

"Don't think it is because of anything you said," Desiree growled. "Threats and pep talks just don't have that kind of effect on me. If you're looking for an explanation, you can go ask Gamble."

"Honey," Tina said, snapping out of her daze. "I don't care what your reasons are for getting here on time, whether it was me, a fire in your building, or the pull of the moon on your brain. All I care about is that I don't have to can your skinny ass."

Desiree smiled. She liked Tina. She was a good-hearted woman who was going against her grain every time she had to act like a heavy handed manager. With her flaming orange hair tied back in one long braid; her dour, I-mean-business expression; and the flat grey bib of her apron stretched tight across her stout torso, she resembled a heroic Viking come to do battle with irate customers. Yet, after hours, Desiree knew the woman, who talked rough, rode a nineteen fifty three Indian motorbike, and listened to ZZ Top, was truly a softy at heart. Tina was the sap who cried at nature preserve commercials, the fool who handed out homemade caramel popcorn balls to her

coworkers on Halloween, and the dame who had a secret fondness for pastel pink. She'd seen the contents of Tina's purse, and it looked as though Mary Kay had packed it herself.

"Not today you don't." Desiree winked, and Tina shook her head as she walked away, no doubt dismayed at the youth of today.

When Desiree turned around, Tully was standing in her stall looking at her with eager anticipation. He was still wearing his cowboy hat and headphones and was snapping his fingers to a beat only he could hear.

She gasped and clutched her hand to her chest. "Tully, what on Earth—"

"Wait for it," he said. He made a show of listening a moment more before he nodded and clutched his hand to his chest in a passionate gesture. "Oh, Desiree! It's our song."

"What?" she screwed up her face, but he grabbed up her hands and swung her around, bouncing her and spinning them in the tight little space the cubicle offered.

There was a lot of gratuitous bumping and grinding a little obscene gyrating and a whole hell of a lot of frisking. He had let her left hand go and was now steering her with one hand firmly on her ass. His actions threatened to bring the back of her short black skirt up with it, but he showed no signs of stopping.

After some effort, she pried him off her. She scolded him with a gentle laugh. "If you were looking for something to rub up against, there is always the fresh dough in the bakery."

He pretended to be momentarily interested.

She slapped his ass to get him moving back in the direction of the staff room, then looked around to discover Janet, the other regular cashier, had seen the whole thing. Desiree flashed Janet a tight little smile and made a silent vow to get even with Tully later.

* * * *

An hour later, Gamble floated passed. "You look rested." He sniggered.

Desiree gave him a withering look. "Surely you must know your presence here is less than refreshing."

He seemed to revel in her misery. "Already feeling the effects, baby?" His mouth split into a wide smile. "Did that movie prove to be too much for you?"

"Since when do you call me baby and live?" She speared him with a scrutinizing glare. Just then, she noticed what he was wearing. "And since when do you wear tight faded jeans as well?"

He shrugged, admiring his long slim legs flattered by the fitted cut. "The occasion seemed to call for it."

"What occasion? The one where you get all my money?"

"Yeah, that'd be the one."

"Fat chance, lover boy. I'll be the one buying MoJos on your wages."

"MoJos! Those things cost two cents. I'm insulted!"

"As you should be."

"Oh now, now," he tsked matronly. "I just came by to see how close I am to getting that stereo."

Her hands clenched into fists, and she growled like a rabid dog. "Don't you have radishes to count or something?"

She saw the insult strike home, but much like last night, he seemed unaffected by her hostility. "Interesting." He rubbed his chin thoughtfully, trying on his best serious face. "I'd say you have a persistent case of Hypertensive Nasties, usually brought upon by unexpected dry spells in regards to—"

She cut him off before he could implicate her within Tina's earshot. "Oh, stuff a sock in it."

"Yep, she's testy, no doubt feverish and has been asking strangers too cool her down."

"I have not. This is harassment, I'll have you know!"

“Naw, this is just me pushing the envelope.” He winked and sauntered off. His job was done.

Fuming, she shot imaginary darts into his departing back.

A moment later, Janet appeared at her side. Janet was a nice girl. She was beautiful, well put together both in genetics as well as in style. Her background screamed private catholic school – long, knitted socks; short tartan skirt; white, starched shirt; and drooling teenage boys. Despite having shared the same workplace for over three years, they hadn’t talked much. Now Janet was pressing her shoulder against her own, as though they were comrades, and was watching Gamble’s mouth-watering swagger with her.

“He sure is something, isn’t he?”

She looked to Janet and wondered at the dreamy tone of her voice. “Was that sarcasm?”

Suddenly Janet looked alarmed, as though she had said more than she had intended to. “What, er, well, no.”

“Janet, have you got the hots for Gamble?” she asked through an amused smile.

Janet’s eyes widened. “No.” she said hastily. “I mean, not anymore. Obviously I wouldn’t want to intrude, but you’ve got to know most women find him very appealing.”

Still smiling, Desiree had to agree there. “Oh yes, who doesn’t like a well dressed man?”

Janet seemed reassured and relaxed again. “Besides, he turned me down.” She gave a gloomy sigh.

Her comment nearly floored Desiree. “*He* turned *you* down?” She blinked in disbelief. What on earth would have possessed him to do that? It went against his nature, his reputation, and all the bragging he’d been doing since she told him they weren’t ever going to jump into the same bed again.

“He must think I’m too, you know, goody-goody.”

Desiree could do nothing but gawk. She wanted to say, “You are a goody-goody,” but that just seemed unnecessary and callus. It also

didn't explain why Gamble would turn her down. He wasn't that discriminating.

Janet squirmed, uncomfortable under Desiree's scrutinizing stare. "So what was that all about?" She motioned toward Gamble had gone. "Was it a lover's quarrel?"

That snapped her out of her dazed state. "He wishes." She rolled her eyes.

Janet's expression went from concern to sympathetic. "Is there anything I can help with?"

Desiree fixed her with another puzzled look. It seemed odd that Janet had come over to chat in the first place, but now she was adding to the strangeness by acting all chummy. "No, thanks, I'm just frustrated."

"Frustrated with what?"

She looked into the taller girl's innocent expression. She couldn't really explain now, could she? She didn't know Janet from a hole in the ground, and she wasn't even sure she trusted her. "It's nothing." She waved her hand in the air dismissing the whole thing. "Don't worry yourself over it." But Janet wasn't sidetracked easily.

"You know what I do when I'm all tied up in knots?"

Here it comes, she thought and wished whatever had possessed Janet to befriend her would just go away. "No, what?" Desiree sighed, scanning the store with lazy interest.

Janet continued unperturbed by Desiree. "I knit," she smiled seeming pleased with herself. "It's kind of ironic if you think about it. I'm tying knots to relieve the tension."

Desiree's scepticism faded. That might be just the thing she needed to take her mind off sex, men, and one man in particular, Gamble. Knitting sounded as unisexual as it could get. "Does it work?"

"Oh yes," she exclaimed, her eyes wide.

"Huh. Well, I'll let you know if I reach that point."

“Sure, I can even teach you how if you’d like. We could get together sometime after work and compare notes on Gamble.”

“You have notes?”

“No.” Janet laughed. It was a beautiful sound Desiree decided. “But if I could figure out how to get his attention, I’d leave lingerie all over his bedroom floor.”

“What a great idea,” Desiree suddenly said.

Janet looked baffled.

“If I were to tell you that I knew of a way to make Gamble’s eyes fall out of their sockets, would you cover for me?”

A sly smile slid across Janet’s sweet features. “Sure. What do you want me to tell Tina?”

“I don’t care. Tell her last night’s spinach dip didn’t agree with me.” Desiree said as she backed her way out of her stall. “Tell her an alien popped out of my cash drawer and scared the crap out of me. I don’t care. You’ll think of something.” She left Janet standing there alone, reeling and confused.

One lucky thing about working in a mall was that practically everything was at her fingertips. So when she barrelled into the women’s intimate section in the closest department store, she thanked the powers that be for giving her the opportunity to shove it in Gamble’s face so expediently.

Spying the perfect bait, the bargain bin, Desiree dived in. It was heaped with racy, bright, outrageous panties of all styles, colours, and sizes. She selected the most risqué of them and brought them to the front counter. Ignoring the cashier’s raised eyebrows, she paid and rushed back to her own till, where she pulled their tags off and disposed of the evidence. Then, with a nod to Janet, who was three aisles over watching her, she spurred herself into action.

First, she hit the staffroom, and upon locating Gamble’s jacket, she slipped a hot pink lacy pair into his right hand pocket. Next, she found his change of clothes and strategically placed a large black thong into his jeans. Then, she hit the offices.

Finding Gamble in his seat, hard at work, she approached his desk with a pleasant smile. He looked surprised to see her and slightly wary.

"Don't worry," she reassured him. "I just came up here to apologize and tell you I felt bad for being so harsh earlier. I took it too seriously. Now I see it for what it is, and that is a game." She shrugged and placed a thin piece of chocolate down in front of him. "I got you a peace offering."

He eyed it suspiciously and she laughed. "No, don't worry. It isn't laced with a laxative or anything like that."

As she patted him on the back, she let the pair of fire engine-red crotchless panties that she had hooked on her finger fall to the floor behind him.

He smiled and seemed genuinely relieved, so relieved that, for a moment, she felt bad for what she was about to do, and then, it passed and she regained her spiteful self. With her lips armed with dark pink lipstick, she kissed him once firmly on the cheek, and then turned to go, satisfied by the perfect lip outline that had transferred.

When she returned to her station, Tina was on her till, and she had a line that extended into the main aisle. Remembering her instructions to the equally busy Janet, Desiree clutched at her stomach and winced as though she were in some great discomfort. It worked. Tina glanced at her and gave her a sympathetic smile.

Once the customers had declined in numbers once again, and Tina had returned to her small office behind the customer service desk, Desiree scampered over to Janet's till.

"Does she suspect anything?"

"I don't think so. I told her you ate a bad roast, and she seemed to have bought it. Where did you go in such a hurry?"

"I'll show you." She rummaged in her pocket, pulled out a pair of cream-colored mesh panties, and pushed them into Janet's hand.

Janet looked at the panties as though they were stolen diamonds. "Panties? You had to go out and buy panties?"

“They’re not for me. They’re for Gamble.” When Janet frowned, she realised how misleading her comment had been. “I mean, it’s to get Gamble. I set a trap where he will keep finding them everywhere he goes, but we’re not done yet.” She pulled out three more pair. “I still need your help.”

She added another pair to the ones Janet already held. “When you see Gamble, makes sure to drop these somewhere near him. He’ll think they’re yours.”

“But why would I want to do that?”

“To get him thinking about you wearing them, why else?” She licked her lips excited by the game. “When you get a chance, let him know you’ve got them.”

The light went on, and Janet slowly smiled.

Just as Desiree reached her till, a loud burst of laughter erupted from the offices upstairs.

Two minutes later and Gamble appeared by her till. He waited, politely fuming while she cheerfully received each customer, taking her time to make sure they were sent on their way with a positive image of Tergusson’s Foods.

Once the last customer left, he pounced. “I should have known,” he snarled through clenched teeth and leaned across the conveyor belt to get all up in her face. “I’m sure you are aware that there was lipstick on my cheek and a pair of unmentionables beneath my office chair.”

She held up two hands. “I swear I’m innocent.”

He gave her a tight smile. “There is nothing innocent about you, my horny little minx, and we both know it.”

“Well”—she laughed modestly—“I hate to disappoint.” She shrugged, and he wagged a finger playfully at her.

“The guys are having a heyday over this. They think I had a nooner.”

“Well, technically speaking, it wouldn’t truly have been a nooner. More like a bruncher seeing as it’s—”

"The point is, my boss now thinks I'm easy prey. She's been hinting heavily about something on the side for some time now, and I had her convinced that I wasn't a goer. You've ruined my reputation with one dirty trick."

He glanced up to see Janet watching nearby. She jumped a little then lifted up the pair of underwear so they covered the bottom half of her face, resembling a harem dancer.

He sucked in a deep calming breath, his irritation burning in his eyes. Janet pushed on coyly moving the delicate garment side to side.

"Great," he said with disgust. "Now you've corrupted an innocent."

For a moment, she wondered if she should flag Tina down, either for backup or to act as a witness, but then Gamble's lips curved into a smile. It was a wicked smile, one that might haunt her dreams for years to come. It was still an improvement to the demon he presented to her seconds ago. Before she could react, he slid gracefully over the counter and landed in the small cubicle next to her. He backed her against the till until she could go no farther. She felt his erection, hard and prominent, pressing into her hip. When her eyes went wide, he flashed her a wicked grin and seemed satisfied. He wanted her to know how she had made him react. Panties were one of his weaknesses, and she had warned him.

He brought his mouth against her ear and spoke in a deep, controlled voice. "Unless you plan on modeling them for me, I don't need you hijacking my libido."

She caught her breath and squirmed to free herself but that only made her more aware of his arousal. He groaned appreciatively as she rocked against him.

"Fair's fair, Gamble." She resumed her struggle, but it only left her flushed and breathing hard. She felt his hand reach down, grasped her bottom, and gave it a firm squeeze.

He held her for a moment, "Is that so?" he asked, his eyes boring into her. Rocking his hips slightly he reminded her of the fact that he

had her pinned. “Then you’ll get yours, sweetheart. This is war now.” He straightened, gave a firm nod, then turned his back to her and walked away.

Giving her head a defiant toss, she vowed she wasn’t about to be intimidated. “So, no porno tonight then?” she called out after him. Her words fell on deaf ears as Gamble kept on walking.

Moments after he’d gone, Janet rushed to her side. “Wow, that was hot.”

“I’ll say.” Desiree was still feeling the effects. She wondered how many other people had seen it go down.

“It didn’t quite go according to plan did it?” Janet asked wincing.

“No, it didn’t.” She lifted her gaze to the windows overlooking the sales floor. From where she stood at centre cash, she had a clear view of the office windows overlooking the floor. Just as she had anticipated, Gamble’s silhouette darkened the slightly tinted glass. She couldn’t see his expression but despite the glass and the distance, she could feel the intensity of his gaze. Knowing he was looking at her sent a shiver of heightened sexual tension through her like a bolt of electricity and she shuddered.

Taking a deep breath to clear her head, she said to Janet, “I’m going to need those knitting lessons after all.”

Chapter 7

Feigning interest in a stack of old magazines, Desiree loitered in the staffroom. Tully, impatient as usual, paced while Gamble gathered his clothes. A thump followed by a bang from around the corner where the lockers were announced that he was almost finished.

“Why does he have to be so particular?” Tully whined. No doubt hunger was driving his exasperation.

Desiree grimaced sympathetically. “Patience, my friend, this will be worth the wait.”

Gamble appeared around the corner at that moment. His street clothes slung over his arm on his way to change in the staff bathroom, and a frown marred his forehead. She suspected he had heard her.

“What are you up to, Desiree?” he asked with suspicion, shifting the bundle in his arms. When he jerked too fast, the large thong dropped to the floor. The off-duty baggers who had been standing nearest to him bent to retrieve the lost article of clothing.

“Hey, man, you lost your—” His eyes went wide as he got a look at what he was holding. “Oh!” He dropped the garment as though it had burned his fingers. “Dude!” He walked away in horror mingled with disgust.

Curious, Gamble bent to pick up the item, perplexed until he too saw what it was. “Oh for the love of—”

Desiree burst out laughing, just as Janet appeared in the doorway. As was planned, she’d come to collect her after her shift ended so they could go pick up knitting supplies. With a wary glance at a rather steamed Gamble, she gave an innocent shrug. “Like I said, fair’s fair.” She spun on one heel, took Janet by the arm, and led her away.

Janet looked at her with a bewildered expression on her face. “What was that all about?”

“Don’t worry about it,” she said with a dismissing wave of her hand. “I just like messing with their little minds.”

* * * *

Shopping with Janet was much like shopping with her mother. Janet was insistent on getting her opinion when all Desiree wanted to do was fuck the automotive salesman two aisles over. The last thing she wanted was to distract herself with a ball of yarn like a kitten. After finally agreeing to whatever Janet suggested, they headed back to Desiree’s small apartment.

She still hadn’t gotten used to the idea that she was hanging out, let alone picking up crafts with, Janet Lorry, knitting machine extraordinaire. If someone had suggested that was what she would be doing with her Wednesday night, she would have laughed until her ass dropped off.

Now the tall blonde stood in Desiree’s cramped bachelor suite like some shipwrecked heroine, no doubt taking in every speck of dust and mismatched piece of furniture. Desiree suspected Janet came from a better background than her own, one with refined tastes and the money to back them up. Janet’s sudden interest in securing a friendship with her made her suspicious. It could be one of Gamble’s tricks.

“Why don’t we start with something simple?” Janet suggested, ready to get started. She set her mug of tea down while Desiree practically chugged an entire beer. She needed something to take the edge off her current predicament.

“How about a scarf?”

“Sure.” She shrugged. “I don’t care. I just want to get my mind off of my libido.”

Janet looked stunned but she recovered gracefully. "Okay." She nodded and held up the two sticks she termed needles.

"Hold out your hands like this." She gave Desiree an example. "Now, grasp them loosely, like this." She took her fingers and positioned them on each thin needle. "No, that's too tight." She adjusted her again. "Loosen your hold. No, that is too loose." Her patience was admirable, unfortunately Desiree's wasn't. Instant gratification has always been her motto. Sighing, she did her best to mimic Janet's posture once more, then immediately gave up.

Cussing, she let the needles drop, "Who am I kidding? I can't concentrate."

"Patience," Janet tried to calm her. "You'll get it. You just need to give it longer than a two-second trial." Her smile was gentle and encouraging, but Desiree was certain she saw a hint of scepticism there as well.

"That's all I give anything. Why would knitting be any different?"

"Perhaps if we relate it to something you have knowledge about?"

"All I know is sex and what drinks not to mix if I still want to have a good time."

Janet blushed. "Okay," she said, blinking a lot. "Think of the needle as a penis then, a rather long, pointy, thin penis."

"Ick." Desiree made a face but tentatively reached out for the needles and miraculously held them correctly. "Oh, well I'll be," she exclaimed, brightening.

Taking the needles back, Janet made a few quick loops on one needle then proceeded to jab the other needle through over and over again until a narrow strip of red cloth appeared below. It was witchcraft, Desiree decided while watching Janet's hands move so fast they seemed to blur.

"Okay, I've started you off so you can see what it is supposed to look like. Now it is your turn. We'll go slow."

"I've heard that before," she said joking, but either Janet didn't hear or she didn't think it was funny and she was pretending not to hear. Sighing, Desiree concentrated on her thin penis needles.

Janet placed her hands over top of Desiree's, gently guiding them up and down, in and out. The contact was nice after a day of stimulation from the guys, if not a little distracting. All of her senses were heightened, and the sweet fragrance wafting from Janet's hair had Desiree leaning in to get a better whiff. She inhaled deeply, closing her eyes, as she soaked up Janet's feminine scent. Before she realised, Janet had paused in her lesson. Desiree opened her eyes to find herself inches away from Janet's puzzled face.

"Sorry," she muttered, blushing. "Raspberry, right?"

Janet, blushing as well, brought a hand to her hair. "Yes. I thought I'd try something new. I'm tired of all my usual stuff."

An awkward moment passed between them. Janet recovered first and brought the topic back to the task at hand. "Now, dip down, yes, that's right."

* * * *

The lesson proved arduous to say the least. Janet was strict, thorough, and persistent. If she were a coach for the knitting team, there wouldn't be a sexually frustrated one among them.

By the time she let up, Desiree was able to knit, purl, and curse all at the same time. Surprisingly, they managed to stay civil to one another throughout the process as well, more than civil to be precise, since Desiree found herself inviting Janet to stay for supper. It had been a long time since she'd had a female in her apartment, perhaps too long.

While Desiree busied herself with chopping vegetables, not without remorse for what she had actually intended to use them for, Janet wandered about the small room.

Desiree found her flipping through one of the racier magazines that were littered across the apartment. Her eyes were wide and wondrous as they skimmed each page.

Not sure how she would react, Desiree tentatively pushed a bowl of steaming stew under the other woman's nose. She had been sloppy when she agreed to host their little knitting party. If she had given it three seconds of thought, she would have made sure to tidy up a little first, hide the evidence as it were.

Janet looked up, her face shell-shocked and illuminated. Her cheeks flushed deep purple when she discovered she'd been caught.

"Good grief. Do people really do that?" Her eyes bulged at the picture on the front cover.

Desiree laughed, albeit somewhat nervously at having her fetishes on display, and took it out of her hands. "Yeah, and much worse, although you won't find *that* here. Much to some misconceptions, I do have some boundaries." Janet's gaze lingered on the front cover as it hung from Desiree's fingers. Amused, Desiree smiled. "You can take the magazine home if you want to. At this point, it's just a temptation for me."

Janet's eyes widened, and she tore her gaze away. "No, no, that's all right." But even in her refusal, her eyes strayed back to the cover.

It dawned on her then that Janet was strangely single. This sudden revelation perplexed her. She was a beautiful girl, presumably wealthy, kind, and generous. Unless she had some freakish tendency that Desiree had not yet heard about, then Janet truly was a catch. So what was the hold up? Perhaps she was a lesbian. It had been her idea to get together after all. Curious to get to the bottom of it, she decided the only way to get some answers was to ask the questions.

"Have you ever been in love, Janet?"

After a brief hesitation Janet shrugged, "Sure, twice," she replied, seeming unperturbed. Desiree waited expectantly and Janet saw that as her cue to keep going. "The first was with Owen Bernina, in grade three. He gave me the last of the cinnamon hearts and five valentines.

He had a wholesome little face,” she said, with a dreamy lilt to her voice. After a brief pause where it appeared she had been thinking back fondly, she continued. “Then there was Ian Gibbings. He was this superstar jock who I’d had a crush on ever since Owen and I broke up in grade four.”

“Oh God.” Desiree slapped her forehead. “That isn’t exactly what I meant, Jan. I’m talking hardcore, pain-in-the- chest, die-if-I-can’t-have-you kind of love. Those are just crushes, and innocent ones at that.”

“No.” Janet shook her head. “Ian was different. It was definitely love with him. He was gorgeous and kind and he had the most dreamy eyes you’d ever seen. When he finally asked me out, I was sure I was going to marry him.”

Janet had her attention now. Desiree leaned in, intrigued. “What did it feel like?”

Janet cocked her eyebrow quizzically at her. “Well, I’d get all clammy and nervous when he was around. I’d think about him all of the time, and I’d write our names in little hearts over everything I owned.”

Desiree nodded. Except for the heart graffiti, that about summed up how she felt about Gamble. There were days that she drank extra water just to make up for what she fretted away.

Twisting the yarn into little knots, Janet looked to the floor then. “It didn’t turn out to be love, though. Ian left me the night before prom for Jennifer Kyle.”

“Ouch.”

A frown creased her delicate features. “Why, Desiree, have you ever been in love?”

“I don’t know.”

“How could you not know? Reputation has you sleeping with everyone, including a few women, I might add,”

“I never slept with any women.” Desiree counteracted. “Sure, I’ve slept with plenty of men, but that doesn’t mean I loved any of them.”

“Oh.” She seemed disappointed.

“I’ll know when I feel it, right?” Desiree dared to ask. She was making herself vulnerable to a person she barely knew, but after spending an evening together, something about Janet made her trust her. Perhaps what she had been missing all this time was a female friend, not a bunch of guys she couldn’t expose her soft side to.

Janet gave her another strange look. “No, Desiree. None of us really know it until we lose it.”

Chapter 8

Janet's words echoed in Desiree's head long after she'd gone home. It was midnight by the time she'd left, and Desiree immediately missed her company. Curious, she picked up the long scraggly section of knitted cloth. It looked as though it had been dragged up the side of a mountain, eaten by a goat, and shat out off a cliff. There were irregular-sized holes throughout and somehow it had narrowed to a thin strip near the top.

"Ick," she said setting it down again.

Janet had been less than impressed with her progress, but she did feel calmer.

She went to the kitchen and opened the fridge door. There were the remains of the eclectic group of vegetables that Gamble had rightfully accused her of wanting for kinkier purposes. Not one of them had survived the stew pot in a condition that served any useful purpose to her now. Then, up on the next shelf, her keen eye caught sight of one forgotten veggie, the zucchini. Well, up until then she had felt calmer. Her mind quickly conjured up various sexual scenarios that played over in her mind, all involving the zucchini shoved into rather unmentionable locations.

She shut the door quickly, as though the vegetable could leap out with a will of its own and ravage her.

"Damn!" It was only day two and she was going stark raving mad. What would become of her if no one broke the bet? She went to the calendar and put a big red x through the square and the same for the current day. She circled the end of the week in red marker, then as an after thought, she drew a little stick figure with its head blown off.

She stepped back to admire her handy work. That was the point when she figured she was going to lose it.

* * * *

Gamble found her alone in the staff room the next morning. "Are you just about through?" he groaned, and grabbed her by the arm.

"Through? Through with what?" She feigned ignorance.

"The panty thing," he growled. "Seriously, Desiree. I was riding on the bus and I stuck my hand in my pocket. What did I pull out? I think you can guess, since you put them there."

She bit her lip to keep from smirking.

"At least three other passengers saw those hot pink panties, and one of them was an elderly woman, no doubt someone's sweet, old grandmother. Now she thinks I'm the scum of the universe."

"Sucks to be you, my friend." She shrugged and slipped away.

She didn't want to pull away from him. She liked being that close to him, especially with his mouth three inches from her own. He could have kissed her, and she would have responded. That in itself was a good reason to walk away. Let him think it was because she was indifferent. It worked in her favour.

"This isn't over," he called out over his shoulder as he left.

Moments later, when she finally walked out onto the sales floor, she spotted Gamble and Tully with their heads close together. As she watched, Tully nodded, looked her way, saw that she was watching them, and then looked away fearfully. They were up to something, no doubt a joint-effort retaliation. Great, now she had to be especially prudent.

Ten minutes later, Tully approached her till as she was setting up and waiting for her cash box to be counted. "You sure pulled a good one over on Gamble, huh?" He chuckled and shook his head.

"Is that what he told you?" she asked not buying his chummy guy routine.

Tully shrugged. "I heard his side of the story, naturally. Now I've come for yours." He grinned, his unconcealed hope burning in his eyes.

"Naturally you thought it was brilliant?"

"Something like that, yeah." He glanced over his shoulder as though he expected someone to be there. He leaned his chin on his knuckles as he slouched over her conveyor belt. He remained there, watching her intently until she finally caved. Rounding on him with impatient ferocity, she snarled, "I don't have time right now, Tully. I know you and Gamble are plotting something, and I can't afford to let my guard down."

"I should be offended," he said a cheerful lilt in his voice. He didn't seem upset in the least, rather more eager than offended, which cemented her fears of impending doom.

"What do you want, Tully?"

He perked up, seeming happy that she asked. "I've been wondering..."

"Uh-oh." She interrupted with her usual tease that implied whenever he has been thinking, disaster was soon to follow.

He made an impatient gesture. "No, hear me out. I was wondering if you're so horny all the time, and I'm possibly more so than you, why haven't we ever hooked up?"

She looked at him as though she hadn't actually heard him right. He blinked with what appeared to be practiced-innocence, and waited for her answer.

"Tully, you can't be serious. Obviously, all this Nark Frisking has gone to your head."

"Perhaps, but it *is* a valid question."

She studied him for a moment, deciding he was genuinely curious. It could still be a rouse, a distraction or cover for Gamble. Finally, she sighed and told him the truth. "Well, for starters, you're always eating, and it's a turn-off."

"I wouldn't eat during sex. Think of the crumbs." He rolled his eyes as though she were stupid.

"Tully, don't make me hurt you."

"Come on, seriously? I want to know. I like you, Desiree. I've always had a crush on you. You must know that by now. I don't want to mess up our friendship, but I'd be willing to put in a little more time if you were worried it was just for the sex."

She swallowed hard, knowing she was going to have to tread very carefully here.

"Tully, you like radishes, and I hate them. No, correction, I hate radish breath."

"I'd stop eating them, just for you."

"You use words like indictment and hubris, and after a short while of that, I'd have to kill you."

He frowned thinking this over. Then he shook his head. "No, that isn't it."

"Hey, who's telling who here?" Then, seeing he wasn't about to give up, she took a deep breath and let it out with a weary sigh. "Tully, I don't love you."

"No, I know," he conceded and looked to the floor. "Your heart is somewhere else."

Desiree's blood ran cold at his words. Was it that apparent? Could everyone see the turmoil over Gamble that acted like a wrecking ball on her insides?

"Hey." Janet cut in, interrupting what Desiree was about to ask Tully. He hadn't noticed the impact his last comment had taken on her and she looked up in a daze to greet Janet's chipper face. "Sounds pretty serious." She gave a little nervous laugh.

Tully grunted and Desiree just stared.

Janet's eyes went wide as she realised she was walking into a hornet's nest. "Right then." Her face over exaggerated her smile and she spun on one heel and exited as quickly as she had entered.

Tully watched her leave with mild interest.

“Tully,” Desiree started then realised she didn’t know what she wanted to say but it felt unfinished.

He turned his head back around to face her, his sad expression replaced with something far different. “Do you think she shaves?” he asked suddenly, throwing her a curveball.

Desiree blinked. “What?” She felt like she was a passenger riding shotgun during a conversation heist.

“Can I ask you a favour?”

“Sure,” she said stunned.

“You and Janet, you talk every once in a while, right?”

That was unexpected. “Only recently. Why?”

“I dunno. I just thought, after seeing the two of you together last night that you might know a few things.”

“We were knitting. Not doing the nasty.” God how she hated those rumours about her sleeping with other women. That was only for show and a part of her past that she’d rather forget.

He frowned as though he didn’t know what knitting was. He shook his head and continued on. “Sure, okay, but, do you think she’d ever...” He let his words trail off as though she might finish his sentence for her.

“Ever... Ever what Tully? Spit it out.” The sound of her cash tray bumping against the counter told her Tina was no doubt watching them chitchat from a distance and sent one of her office goons in with her tray to speed her up. Normally, she was supposed to go and get it, but Tully had delayed her. She turned to take it but Tully stopped her with a touch of his hand. His skin was soft, and as he leaned in, a wave of warm fragrant air washed over her. She liked his cologne. She always had.

His eyes pleaded with her to give him her full attention. He seemed genuinely distraught.

“Do you think she’d ever go out with a guy like me?” He glanced over to where Janet was organising her coupons into a little plastic pouch. “She sure is pretty.”

“Seriously? You want me to hook you up with Janet? You were here mere seconds ago asking me about...me, for Pete’s sake.” She put her hands on her hips. “Gamble sent you in undercover or to act as a decoy while I fall for your dependant charms, didn’t he?” Why Tully’s interest in Janet should bother her, she didn’t know, but for some reason, she felt like she’d been dropped off a cliff. She slid the tray into the cash machine with some effort.

He looked at her as though she were speaking gibberish, his attitude suddenly changed. “Chill out, girl. Not everything is about you okay?” He frowned and left in a huff.

Immediately, she felt bad. He had come to her because he was insecure, and she had done exactly what he had accused her of, made it all about her. Perhaps she’d gotten too competitive and had forgotten that these were her friends. She’d make it up to him. She’d make it up to both of them. Thinking about Gamble brought her eyes to the windows at the back of the store. Sometimes, if the sun was just right, she could see him, or rather his silhouette, hunched over his desk. This time he wasn’t there. She lowered her gaze to discover the very person she had been seeking, only, he wasn’t alone. There, halfway across the store, with his elbows leaning on the edge of the wooden vegetable stand, perched Gamble, and right next to him stood Janet, her wide, smiling mouth open in laughter. A pang of jealousy shot through her and for a second she unwittingly stepped forward. Stopping herself, she wondered at just what she thought she was going to do, break it up? The emotion surprised her a little. She and Gamble flirted and talked openly to each other about their conquests, so why should this be any different? She studied them again, the close proximity of their shoulders, the carefree, friendly pat on the back that Janet had just smoothly executed. It could just be the result of a friendship resulting in a year of working in the same building, but she highly doubted it.

Just then Gamble’s eyes rose, and his gaze met hers. Slate eyes that took on a hint of green under the bright fluorescent lights

narrowed to slits as he focused all of his attention on her. His smile fell away and he just stared into her as though something monumental had just dawned on him. After a long pause, he shook his head, and said something to Janet. Whatever he said brought her head around to see Desiree staring at them. Janet looked mildly guilty, which only confirmed they had been sharing a moment. With his eyes smiling, Gamble patted her on the shoulder, said something more, and then walked away, leaving Janet alone and seeming slightly puzzled.

Whatever their little exchange had been about, clearly it hadn't gone the way Janet had planned, and that was fine with Desiree.

"Excuse me, miss," a smooth masculine voice said behind her. Realizing she had completely neglected her post, she turned quickly. Her eyes went wide when she took in the beautiful specimen of a man waiting by her till. He was a fireman, a real-life fireman, slightly sooty, mostly dishevelled, with his jacket and shirt open to the middle of his chest. Some very hardcore fantasy material was standing no less than three feet from her. Rushing back to her post, she nearly tripped over her own feet in her haste to get a better look at him. When he saw he had her attention, he tipped his helmet and flashed her a brilliant white smile, a smile made whiter in contrast to his scorched skin.

"I realise this is probably against regulations, but I was wondering if you could give me change so I could buy a soda from that machine out there." He pointed to the upright vending machine out in the main lobby.

Her mouth hung open. She looked to the money he held. It seemed surreal to see her ultimate man, in flesh and blood, and not in a glossy magazine.

"No, no regulation." She blubbered and pulled the cash from between his fingers. "I'm sure if there are any such ridiculous rules they would be waived under the circumstances."

"Which circumstances are those?" He gave her a quirky smile.

“Well, I mean you are a hero obviously. You risk your life to save others. You haul heavy hoses; ride in fast, shiny red trucks; carry damsels in distress through burning buildings; and call it a day’s work. I think getting you a little change to quench your thirst is completely worth bending the rules a little.”

“Well, that is mighty noble of you, I must say.”

She blushed like an idiot and pressed the button that would open her till. As the drawer hit her in the gut, the first thing she saw in the fives section was a replica of what stood across the counter from her. A fireman, only more undressed. She looked up to see the fireman’s gaze also lingered on the picture.

“Uh, that’s not mine,” she stammered.

He laughed good-naturedly. “Don’t worry about it. A lot of women have the same reaction to a man in uniform.” He winked at her with an enthusiastic grin. She grabbed his change and whirled around to see another such picture had been posted against the short wall of her little cubicle.

“What the—”

“You apparently seem to have a big one.” He tried to hide his smirk.

“I swear it isn’t mine. I mean I do like firemen, I just—” She pursed her lips and searched the nearby area for signs of Gamble or Tully.

“Well, thank you anyway.” He rattled his fist full of change. “And don’t worry yourself about the pictures. On behalf of all firemen, we’re flattered.”

The second he was out of earshot, she growled, furious that she couldn’t leave her till to go hunt them down. In the time that she had made a complete idiot of herself, two more customers had gathered in line behind her ideal man. It had to be a set up. There was no way Gamble and Tully could have known a fireman would be coming into the store, let alone to her till, and Gamble was well aware that firemen were her weakness.

The pictures weren't there when she arrived that morning so that meant Tully had distracted her after all. When she got a spare minute she was going to give him her real opinion, she just had to crack her knuckles first.

The jingle of metal brought her head up just in time to see another fireman, soot smudges to boot, grin at her as he sauntered passed. He tipped his hat in a genteel gesture.

Not one minute later, yet another fireman passed in front of her. He, too, tipped his hat and winked suggestively. The last fireman had looked so stereotypical that she just had to laugh. She waved back and gave a little wolf whistle to send him on his way.

There was no doubt about it now. She had been set up.

It became busy after that, and she had to keep her head down so as not to mess up on her till. She'd been concentrating so hard that she hadn't noticed her last customer was Gamble himself. He circled around back, entered her cubicle, and surprised her with a picture of yet another scantily clad fireman.

"You seem a little distracted." He teased her with a mischievous glint in his eye. "Something got you all hot?"

She tore the picture out of his hands and called him a jackass, then laughed despite herself.

He chuckled and pulled yet another one out from his pocket. "This one is my favourite." He showed her the image of a man wearing nothing but a red helmet and a strategically placed hose.

"Tell me how you did it?" She groaned, accepting the fact that he had masterfully duped her. "He was an actor, wasn't he?"

"Who Jared? No. He's a real live fireman. He and I go way back, and it just happens that we went out for a couple of drinks last night, and I told him about your little underwear raid and about how much you like firemen. When I told him where you worked, it was his suggestion that he swing by and meet you. The soot was my suggestion. I also took the liberty to tell him you were a nymphomaniac who likes her guys in uniform."

Her mouth fell open. "You didn't."

"You might be getting a few more calls from the station once word gets around."

"If you did..." She moved to wrap her fingers around his throat and he chuckled as he backed away.

"What? You'll thank me in your own special way? I really can't blame you, Desiree, I mean look at these chiselled pecs, those well-defined thighs, and the grip he has on that monstrous hose. There's a look in his eye that tells you he wants to do nasty things to you."

"Oh yeah? Try me. What exactly does he want to do? I doubt your narrow little mind can come up with anything that I haven't tried at least twice."

He stepped closer until his chest pressed against her. She felt his hot breath against her cheek.

"If I were him, the first thing I'd do is find an excuse to start a small fire so I could climb through your window and catch a glimpse of you in nothing but your intimates. Naturally, the fire would make it very hot so I'd have to cool you down by tearing off what little clothing you would be wearing and bathe you with my tongue, head to toe, to cool you down. And the first place I'd start..."—he brought his mouth to her neck and dragged his tongue across the sensitive skin behind her ear—"is right here." He blazed a trail down from the tip of her ear lobe and ended at the hollow of her throat. He would have continued kissing her until her knees threatened to buckle underneath her, but she stopped him with a firm touch of her hand.

Tingling head to toe from the contact, she pushed him away with her hand flat against his chest. "Okay, okay," she said breathlessly.

He didn't advance but just watched her, his eyes dark with desire, and a sly smile on his lips. She could feel the fast pace of his heart beneath her palm, and she knew the effect his actions were having on him were just as intense. His gaze dropped to her own heaving chest, taking in the rapid rise and fall of her breasts with obvious appreciation. Her cheeks burned with an internal fire and she knew

everyone would be able to see how turn on she was, especially Gamble.

“Or I suppose I could bend you over this counter, haul your panties down, and we could take care of this right here, right now, in one glorious moment, if you want to forfeit the bet.”

That sobered her up. As though stretched tight and shot out of a slingshot, her body warred with the intense temptation to take him up on his offer and, at the same time, tell him to take his cocky attitude and shove it someplace else. Yes, she’d like it very much to feel him rutting like a wild beast behind her, but that was just not going to happen. Steadying herself, she let her hand drop and fixed him with a stern stare. “Not a chance Gamble. You can’t actually expect me to lay down that easy.”

He shrugged casually. “We could do it standing up if you’d prefer.”

Still flushed, she fought to catch her breath, and pointed to the offices behind her. “Go.” She commanded.

His grin spread wider yet, and before she could do anything to stop him, he grazed her cheek with his lips, one last time before slipping away. His triumphant laugh floated back to her ears, and he gave a youthful little skip to show he just how pleased he was with himself.

For someone who just got caught flirting with another woman, he seemed pretty into her. The man was a conundrum.

* * * *

Tully had really outdone himself, according to Gamble. He had no idea what he had told her to hold such a suspicious-natured woman’s attention, but whatever the hell it was, he was grateful. Never in a million years would he have imagined such a moment as he had just experienced, could actually have happened. Desiree, with her sprightly wild locks and her defiant attitude toward everything and

anything, was sure to be a handful no matter what a person did to deceive her. She was cunning and irritatingly alert, yet he had nearly unravelled her twice. Perhaps that meant she was relaxing her opinion of him and considered letting her damn rules slide. That girl had more cumbersome rules than any other person he'd ever met. The fact that she proclaimed to never sleep with one partner more than once was an outright lie. She didn't know he knew the truth of her after hour escapades, but then she had also forgotten she'd spent a night, or rather two with Jared, the fireman. It was hard at first to accept that he and Jared had Desiree in common, but after comparing notes, Gamble felt confident he had had the better time. The only thing bothering him was that Jared had managed to convince her to go out a second time. So, if it wasn't her duty to obey her own rules that was keeping her from sharing herself with him again and again, then what was it? She was getting desperate though, he noted. Siccing Janet on him was just a blatant attempt to throw him off. The only way Janet's attempt at flirting would have worked was if she had approached him completely naked. At least throw someone at him who knew which end of a man was up, or in the very least, a woman who could stir his desire as well as Desiree was capable of.

Chapter 9

After their steamy little exchange, lunch couldn't come soon enough. For some reason, she was distracted and, therefore, making mistakes. She had charged a customer three hundred dollars for a bag of bean sprouts instead of three dollars, and she was so horny that even the ugly customers were starting to look doable. She had to get out of there before one of them mistook her lusty leers for an invitation.

She found Tully, along with one other employee, already in the lunchroom. Wearing his Stetson, he sat, with his legs spread wide, his elbows on the table, and a monstrous-size hero sandwich a few centimetres away from his lips. It looked safe enough so she sat down across from him and started to pull out the leftover stew she had prepared late last night.

Seeing her stew, Tully momentarily became distracted from his own food and pulled away long enough to admire it. "That looks really good." He said and licked his lips. "Hot, yet creamy." His voice had a dreamy lilt to it that she found herself drawn to.

"Oh God, not you too," she moaned.

He looked at her, confused. "What did I say?"

She shook her head and, with her appetite suddenly gone, pulled out her knitting.

"What's with the granny gear?" He indicated to her clacking needles.

"It's my survival tactic."

"I can't see how that is going to help. Certainly their purpose isn't intended for the same use as your cucumber was."

She made a face and stuck out her tongue.

Tully resumed eating as if nothing had happened.

“Oh!” She remembered suddenly and reached into her pocket to pull out a knitted tube. So far, all she had mastered was straight pieces of cloth that she joined the ends of to make a tube. It was the only thing she could figure out what to do with all the knitted pieces she was accumulating. “I made you something.”

Taking it tentatively from her, he looked at it from a variety of angles. “Is this what I think it is?” He pointed to his crotch and looked appalled.

“What? No. It’s a beer can cozy you pervert,” she snapped, her raging hormones making her irritable. “Good grief. No man is *that* impressive.”

A lopsided grin creased his rugged features, and he wriggled his eyebrows suggestively.

“Prove it.” She folded her arms across her chest.

The elderly gentleman sharing their table nearly choked on his mouthful of food, which sent him into a coughing fit until he excused himself to go to the washroom.

His grin faded.

“Didn’t think so.” She gave a smug harrumph.

Sullen, Tully turned his attention once again to his meal, but within minutes, he moaned with pleasure, the sting of having been put in his place forgotten with every mammoth bite he chewed. The whole world seemed to fade away from him as he succumbed to his hero sandwich’s spell. He ate with such passion she couldn’t help speculate that he might be an attentive lover. Unaware she had stopped knitting, she stared mesmerized as his long tongue darted out to catch a stray crumb.

Tully shoved the last bite into his mouth and chewed with a satisfaction that made her envious. He licked his fingertips then hiccupped softly.

He looked over and noticed her watching him. His eyes dropped to the bowl of stew sitting cold and forgotten in front of her.

“Aren’t you going to eat that?”

Instead of answering him, she fixed him with a scowl. “You are tormenting me on purpose.”

“Tormenting you, how?”

“As if.” She snorted. “No one gets that much pleasure out of eating.” Grabbing her knitting, she stood and left.

* * * *

She returned to her post early, determined to figure out a way to get even with Tully and Gamble. Thankfully, it was slow. When Janet sauntered over, a sweet smile on her lips, her bright red lips, it dawned on Desiree. Janet was wearing lipstick. Somehow, she hadn’t noticed that earlier. How unusual. Hell, not only was she wearing lipstick, her hair was down, and she wore a V-neck top that was uncharacteristically daring. As Janet reached her side, a warm waft of perfume blew over Desiree, and she realized the fragrance had come from the ex-fuddy-duddy who was now pressing with an intense familiarity into her shoulder.

“Hey,” she said casually, and tickled her cheek with girly affection, which completely stunned Desiree. “You’re back early. What’s up?”

“You look different,” she said cutting to the chase.

Janet gave her head a toss, which sent her hair whipping around like a wave. “I felt like trying something different.” She shrugged. “Do you like it? It’s less conservative.”

“Especially your top.” She indicated to her exposed cleavage.

Janet gave an excited little hop, which set her breasts in motion. “I went shopping.”

"Mmm," she said, not very impressed. Her eye caught sight of a small tag poking up through Janet's fair hair. "I can tell." She snapped the plastic fastener and discreetly handed Janet the evidence.

"Oops." Janet blushed and pitched the tag in the small wastebasket under the counter.

"What's the occasion?"

"No occasion." She gave an innocent shrug and closed the small gap that Desiree had subtly created. With Janet breathing down her neck and her pale blue eyes round and imploring, Desiree got the distinct impression that Janet was hitting on her.

Thankfully, Tully, who was across the main aisle stocking shelves, chose that moment to cuss rather loudly. He had dropped a jar of what looked like spaghetti sauce, and it was now all over the floor and most of the way up his pant legs. They watched with mild interest as Tully made quick work of the mess with mop and bucket, then bent over, with his perfect round bottom stuck straight up in the air. A cool breeze touched Desiree's arm, and she realised it was because Janet had pulled away, her gaze fixed on Tully. Her eyes had a hungry look that told her it had nothing to do with the spaghetti sauce.

Tully's words echoed back to her and a plan, a self-serving, devious plan that would finally set her free of this self inflicted celibacy curse, developed in her mind.

Making a noise with her tongue, she drew Janet's attention away from Tully and gave her head a woeful shake. "It is really a shame," she said cryptically, her own eyes still staring at her male companion.

"What is?" Janet frowned, her eyes straying back to Tully.

"Some men are just too modest."

"Modest? You mean Josh, er, Tully?" She jerked her thumb in his direction. "Whatever do you mean?"

"Oh." She gave her head a violent shake. "I can't it's not... polite."

"What, Desiree, you have to tell me."

She made as though the very thought of what she was about to reveal made her very uncomfortable, then after some deliberating and inner turmoil she succumbed to Janet's peer pressure. "Well," she said in a hushed voice and leaned in, "the real reason I'm back so early from my lunch is because I just couldn't stand it."

"Couldn't stand what?"

"The teasing."

"What teasing?" she whispered hoarsely.

"The guys, in the staff room, they overheard us."

"Us?"

"Tully and I," she said in a hushed tone. "I'd made him a...gift, you know, I knitted him a..."

"A what?"

"A covering, you know for his..." She pointed to their feet.

"Socks?" Janet finished helpfully.

"No, his...you know..."

Her eyes went wide. "You knitted him a..."

Desiree nodded. "It was a gag gift, but unfortunately, Ed saw it."

"So?"

"So he knew what it was for and it's rather large."

"But you said it was a gag."

"Yes, it is. It's a willy warmer, but I mean, it still fits him." She rolled her eyes as though Janet were the lamest person on the face of the planet. "Unfortunately, Tully didn't react very well, and now they all tease him because they think he was embarrassed because he's so small. I feel terrible. I didn't mean to insult him. I just wasn't thinking."

"Wait," Janet stopped her, holding up a hand. "You mean to say he's actually..." She held her hands out in a grand gesture to signify something very large. It was rather well done for someone who previously had been a prude.

Putting on a shy face, she did her best to appear conservative. "Well, I mean I don't know from personal experience, but I've seen

glimpses of it.” She rotated her toe on the floor and chewed her bottom lip to cement the image.

“That big, really?” Her voice sounded dreamy, reminiscent even, and she stared off to where Tully was now sponging the red paste off his pants.

“Like I said...” She let her voice trail off when Janet pushed off the counter and headed in Tully’s direction.

“That was easy,” she muttered, pleased with herself. She leaned back against her magazine stand to watch the show.

Tully looked stunned at Janet’s sudden appearance. Desiree could see the other girl’s lips moving, and Tully nod or shake his head. She couldn’t make out what they were saying, though the body language was deafening. Janet, her newly discovered cleavage visible, flirted with outrageous confidence, as she flipped her hair away from her neck a half a dozen times. She licked her lips intending to be seductive when all she really accomplished was awkward. Clearly she was out of practice. She tilted her head to one side as though it helped her hear Tully better, and for all it was worth, it seemed to be working perfectly. It was overkill, but Tully didn’t seem to mind. It was clear they had come to some sort of conclusion as Janet reached out again and lightly glided her fingers across his bare arm as she woefully left his side and headed back to her till. No sooner than she had gone then Tully scooted over to Desiree’s side.

“Did you see that?” he whispered in a hoarse voice as though he were talking about a massive explosion that had occurred in the bakery.

Desiree just flashed him a knowing smile.

“Are you the one responsible for this?” he blathered and for a moment she wondered if she was actually in trouble. “Because if you are, I don’t know how I can ever thank you.”

Relief flooded through her, and she regained her earlier confidence. “No need to thank me, just doing a friend a favour. That is what you wanted, wasn’t it?”

Bowing dramatically, he made as though she were some goddess of relationships. "I am in your debt."

A dark flash passed by the corner of her eye, and she looked up to see Gamble coming down the main aisle, a grave expression of concern written all over him. At the last minute, he turned down a side aisle. Thankfully, the serious expression wasn't intended for her.

"Just do me a favour and keep this between you and me okay?" She brought his head up with the tips of her fingers. "We don't want Janet getting wind of our little setup now do we?"

"Oh, you're absolutely right," he replied, his eyes wide and serious.

As Tully walked away, another wicked thought came to her. Gamble's other weakness was lesbians. He liked nothing better than to watch two women get it on, and she'd like nothing more than to get him back for the firemen. Janet's odd behaviour would have been the ideal thing to get Gamble's number, but that ship had sailed, thanks to her own meddling. Thankfully, she had a backup. She knew just the person to help her do it too, the person responsible for all those misguided rumours.

Chapter 10

“Hey, Lisa, it’s Desiree,” she said as cheerfully as she could into the telephone, and then she waited for the sound of recognition. When nothing came, she added, “From school? Keggers, backyard pools, tube tops and then there were no tube tops?”

A sharp bark of a laugh sounded on the other end. “Dezzie!” Her old friend greeted her.

“I thought that would get you.”

“Man, I haven’t heard that old joke for a long time girl.”

“I can’t imagine why.” She teased her lightly, while a sudden pang for their old friendship made her chest ache. They’d had good times.

“Wow. This is so unexpected.”

“Yeah.” Desiree faltered, knowing she should just get to the point and tell her old school chum what she really wanted, but Lisa beat her to the punch.

“I’ve missed you. We used to have so much fun. We should do it again.”

There it was, her opening. “That is actually why I called. Something reminded me of you, and I remembered Sherri Hall told me you lived just on the edge of town, and I thought, ‘Oh my god, I have to give her a dingle.’” She heard herself slipping back into her ditzy-girl slang. It was impossible to stop once it started. She’d be talking like that for the rest of the day if not for two days.

“Well, I’m free, and I mean totally free. When were you thinking?”

“How about, like, tonight?”

“Yes!” Lisa nearly shouted. “I’ll come right now.”

“Wait. Lisa, I’m still at work, and I have to work again later tonight, but I have a gap in between, so if that is still okay, do you just want to meet me at the pub where I bartend?”

“You bartend? How sexy.” She made an excited sound like a car engine, and Desiree gritted her teeth. What had she done? Lisa was a handful at the best of times, and then she had gone and suggested they go to a bar where Lisa was no doubt going to get notoriously liquored up and rowdy. A rowdy Lisa meant a roving hands Lisa, but it was her tendency to be promiscuous that she was inviting her along for in the first place. She was a self-proclaimed pretendsbian and the guys loved it. It was a trick they’d discovered in first-year that got both of them laid every time. She’d always assumed that Lisa understood it was an act, one that they both got something out of, but there were times when she wasn’t sure where Lisa drew the line.

“Yeah, I get hit on a lot so I guess it is,” she said, thinking her reply sounded lame.

“Well obviously.” Lisa giggled.

Oh, this is going to be too easy, Desiree thought with a wicked smile.

* * * *

Gamble arrived late and alone. Where he left Tully she didn’t know. He looked great. He’d dressed up for the bar, or perhaps, she pondered hopefully, he’d dressed up for her. Their eyes met as he paused for a moment in the doorway, and he flashed her a radiant smile. Her heart fluttered at the sight. All eyes fell on him as he strode confidently through the room. He plunked himself down at the bar and unwittingly right next to Lisa.

She and Lisa had been getting reacquainted until he showed up, but now it was time to turn up the heat.

"Lisa." She leaned across the counter knowing full well that the low-cut top that she didn't usually wear to the bar, revealed enough bulging cleavage for both of them to get an eye full. Ironically enough, it was Lisa's gaze that lingered on the curvature of her breasts. Satisfied, she paused for effect. "This is Andrew Gamble. He works with me at Terguson's Foods." She turned to look at Gamble and for a moment regretted what she was about to do. "He's the big shot around there so hang on to your panties."

Gamble blushed adequately. "So how do you two know each other?" he asked diverting conversation politely. The fact that he enjoyed the role of authoritarian was just another secret of his that she enjoyed lording over him. Role-plays that involved spankings and rule breaking were his forte, and under the right circumstances, they were hers too.

She jumped in before Lisa could inadvertently ruin things. "Oh, Lisa and I go way back." She waved her hand as though it were common knowledge. "We went to college together."

He was picturing it already, white T-shirts and pillow fights, and all the other dirty things that the word college brings up when it is mentioned with a sly wink. "Really?" He leaned in with a grin.

"She makes it sound so tame," Lisa purred.

Oh, right on, sister! Without cue cards or anything, she silently praised Lisa for her natural tendency to flirt with strangers.

"What brings you by?" Lisa leaned in and cocked her head coyly at him.

"I've just come to keep an eye on her." He indicated toward Desiree.

She leaned in pretending to whisper to Lisa when really she intentionally kept her voice audible. "Later he'll shackle me to my bed so I don't try and slip out for some late night nookie."

Lisa looked momentarily alarmed. "Are you two dating then?"

Gamble grimaced. "Ask her."

"Only in his dreams. He knows my policies."

Sparing Gamble a sympathetic glance, Lisa sighed. “Half the city is familiar with her policies by now.” To Desiree’s horror, Lisa laughed and Gamble joined in. Somehow, they were suddenly on the same team. This wasn’t how she had planned it to go at all. Coming around to the other side of the bar, she slid onto the vacant seat next to Gamble.

“Can you believe we met as study partners?” Desiree said, trying to steer the topic in a direction that better suited her.

Lisa giggled. “Lot of good that did us.”

“There wasn’t much studying done, was there?” She threw herself forward, overacting her glee.

“Well.” Lisa drew tight circles on the counter with her finger, “It depends. Were you trying to get an A in sex education?”

Gamble nearly choked as he took a sip of his beer.

Rubbing his back, she laughed. “I thought I got an A+.” Desiree pretended to pout.

“As long as our audience was happy, then I was happy.” Lisa shrugged, appearing as the ever-forgiving lover.

“The two of you put on a show?” He gaped at them.

Desiree shrugged. “I guess you could call it that, but entertaining a whole rugby team didn’t require much acting skill.”

“No, too many head injuries.”

“As long as there were plenty of tits and ass they were happy.”

He shuddered with what she hoped was pleasure. “What exactly did you do? I mean—”

Lisa laughed and laid an arm around his shoulders. “Aren’t you a curious fellow?” She tugged his ear playfully and leaned her breast against him. It was one of her little tricks. Desiree had seen them all before. Just like the old days, the two of them tag teaming to get laid. Except back then, she had never felt jealous. Clearly, there was something about Gamble that Lisa admired, and if she wasn’t careful, her old friend might be going home with him instead.

Reaching her arm beneath the counter, Desiree grabbed the bulge at his crotch in hope of recapturing his attention. Gamble's knee jerked up, and he turned to her, his eyes round and full of surprise. "Oh, there's nothing *little* about him," she said with a wink. She felt Lisa's hand join hers but Lisa didn't stop there. She found his fly and had begun to worry with the little tag so she could zip it down.

Understanding exactly what was about to happen, Gamble untangled himself from their grasp and stood back at least three feet. His face appeared stressed as though he didn't trust he would be safe even at that distance.

"I should really be...I've got things I have to..." He faltered while they listened patiently. "Okay," he said with finality, turned on one heel, and nearly ran out the door.

Lisa frowned, her disappointment read clearly on her face. "How strange." She said clicking her tongue.

"That's my fault," Desiree heard herself admitting. "We have a little friendly wager, and I guess he didn't think it would be worth the money."

Lisa leaned in, touching her nose to Desiree's. "And do you?"

Desiree smiled tightly, unsure of how to answer, the close proximity making her uneasy. Without their target audience present any more, Desiree had no desire to continue their game of pretend. Lisa, it seemed, on the other hand, had grown fond of the idea. Thankfully, a customer appeared at the side of the bar, giving her an easy out, and she rushed away.

Any normal person would have eventually become bored with sitting at the edge of the bar all night, but not Lisa. Despite the awkwardness and the fact that it quickly became very busy, she never left. That was not according to plan either. Lisa wasn't supposed to linger, but she just sat there, waiting.

At two in the morning, she offered to drive her home, and then she walked her to her front door.

She stood under the stoop beaming. “I had a really good time tonight,” she said looking hopeful. “Your call was so unexpected. I had no idea you still thought of me.”

With ice-cold clarity, she realised Lisa was waiting to get invited up. Now she had to break it to her friend gently that this was where their night ended. The charade had gone on long enough.

“Oh hey, um...you know, I have a...a thing, in the morning, you know? But I had a really great time too.” She sounded pathetic, not unlike how Gamble sounded as he made his escape earlier.

A mildly surprised expression crossed Lisa’s pretty features. Then the puzzled look faded to be replaced with a frown. “Seriously?” She laughed in disbelief, but her eyes said there was nothing funny about the situation. “You aren’t giving me the brush-off, are you?”

“The brush-off? What?” She swallowed, fearful because she’d been caught. “No. I really do have to do something tomorrow.”

“Oh yeah? Like what?”

“The dentist.” Desiree blurted the first thing that came to her mind. “Really early too.”

“No problem. I’ll hold your hand if they decide to mine for gold.”

Desiree laughed, but it had sounded forced even to her own ears. Lisa was calling her bluff. So, she had grown a backbone after all. The old Lisa would have politely excused herself, gone home, and sulked and then waited by the phone for her next invite.

“Okay, you got me. I don’t have a dentist appointment.”

“So what is it? Was I right and you were just using me?”

Her silence answered for her.

Lisa threw her hands in the air then dropped them to slap against her thighs. “How could I have been so stupid? You were just using me to make that dark-haired guy jealous. You were never interested in me tonight or any other night. Just like college.” She took a deep breath to calm herself. When she spoke next, her voice held an edge. “You haven’t changed a bit, Dezzie. You’re still going through people like tissues, while denying the fact that it actually bothers you. You’re

a real piece of work, you know that?" She fought to control her quivering lip. "No, I take that back. What you are is a jerk." She had started to walk back to her car but turned to face Desiree again for one last shot. "Whoever does end up with you is getting a whole lot of heartache." She threw her hands in the air again. "At least I'm not the one who has to put up with you anymore." She turned her back with an air of finality and walked away.

"Geez, Lisa," Desiree said with a half-hearted effort, but Lisa just kept on walking. Like a slap across the face, the reality and depth of what she'd done sank into her conscience. Her words had stung because they had been true. She'd used her old friend and had led her current friends to believe more about her than was true. Lisa was right. She hadn't changed a bit since her college days. She was still the same shallow, greedy, fearful little victim telling herself that she could be happy living exactly the way she wanted to, consequences be damned. Well, if this is what damned consequences felt like, it wasn't pleasant. She felt like a complete ass.

Embarrassed and stunned, she turned to go inside. Her hand hovered over the handle. For the third night in a row, she was going to bed alone. It seemed ironic. At least her parents still had each other.

Chapter 11

Damp sheets woke her with a start. Her dreams, so vivid and erotic, lingered fresh in her mind. Her body tingled with the aftermath of what might have been an orgasm. After a pause she realised, no, it hadn't been. She was still maddeningly horny, perhaps even more so now. The dream had just been a teaser, her own mind trying to sabotage her. Gamble had really gotten to her with his dirty talk, and as the star of the most sensual dream she'd ever experienced, he filled her thoughts with lust and longing.

Like phantom fingers caressing her skin, she could still feel his touch, and yearned for the release he was about to give her. Just like he had described for her earlier that morning, they had been at work, her body pinned beneath him. Her skirt was up, her panties down, her round rump was in the air, and she could feel the conveyor belt beneath her ribs. That wasn't the only thing she could feel though. The rigid bulge of Gamble's cock nudged against her persistently, demanding admittance. Just as he was about to take her, a telephone rang somewhere within the store, and he'd stopped.

Now the telephone rang again and she realised the noise was coming from within her own apartment. It was what had woken her, cruelly cutting her fantasy short. She glanced at the alarm clock. It was just after four a.m., whoever it was that interrupted her was about to get an earful, or they had damned well start talking dirty to her.

Filled with the fury of *coitus interruptus*, she jerked the phone off the hook and nearly shouted hello.

"Whoa!" Gamble's alarmed greeting came over the line, sending her senses for yet another loop. Hearing his voice only added to her confusion.

"Is this real?" she heard herself ask.

After a long pause where neither of them said anything, he spoke up. "Everything all right?" His voice was soft with concern.

"Yeah," she breathed, "just a little dazed. What are you doing calling so late?"

"I couldn't sleep." There was a pause, and she was tempted to ask if he wanted something in particular, such as her, for a start.

"Are you alone?"

For some reason, the question perturbed her. "Of course I'm alone." Clearly, he didn't trust her. He'd said as much earlier that evening at the bar. "I was sleeping. Actually, I was in the middle of a fantastic dream, one which you interrupted."

He chuckled. "Then I guess you owe me one, don't you? We can't have you going off like a firecracker now, can we? Was it about me, or maybe that girlfriend of yours?"

"Lisa is not my girlfriend."

"So it was about me."

She realised she had basically admitted it without intending to. "You have some nerve calling me in the middle of the night just to torment me."

"Oh?" His voice sounded light. "Am I getting to you?"

Yes, she wanted to say.

He took her silence for a yes anyway. "Is the sound of my voice proving to be too much for you? Is it reminding you of—"

"Go to hell Gamble," she said irritated and hung up.

* * * *

Stretched out along his mattress, Gamble peered down the length of his body to gaze upon his raging hard-on. His proud cock lifted up

off his abdomen like a flagpole in the middle of a soccer field. Talking with Des almost always had that affect on him. For a split second, he was tempted to seek release, to picture her in his mind and get it over with. Instead, he contented himself with the knowledge that she had been thinking about him too. He had first heard it in her voice when she answered the phone. Before he had mocked her, she had a husky tone to her voice, one he'd tried so hard to summon time and time again. She had covered her lust with exasperation. Feeling confident that he was making progress, he let his head fall back against his pillow and enjoyed the dull ache that was his longing for her.

* * * *

Out of breath and with flushed cheeks, Tully arrived at her cash counter all in a fluster. His knitted brow and firm mouth told her all was not well in Tullyland.

"That was the worst date I've ever been on," he blurted the second he reached her side. "She was making all these suggestions, wanting me to do things to her, and I couldn't because of this stupid bet. All I could think about was diving my tongue deep into her most intimate places and just eating her out, but I bloody well couldn't now, could I?"

Desiree's eyes went wide and a surge of heat warmed in her belly at the images he had conjured up. She glanced around to see if anyone had heard his outburst, Janet in particular, and was satisfied to see they were alone.

"You went out with Janet last night?" she asked. It explained why he wasn't at the bar to defend poor Gamble.

"She slipped her hand along my inner thigh and pressed her tits against me, and I just sat there, like a zombie. I wanted to take her hand and shove it down my pants, wrap her fingers around my cock, and listen to her talk dirty to me." He groaned as though someone had

stabbed him with a lance and was now giving it one or two quick turns for fun.

She opened her mouth to speak, to console him, but she had no idea what to say. Seeing her stunned expression, he groaned again, taking it for disapproval rather than second-hand lust. He closed his eyes, dismally. "Don't get me wrong. She's a nice girl, and I'd like to get to know her, but I just can't concentrate right now." He thrust his fingers through his hair, and his bicep bulged. "I've had a hard-on all day."

Hearing that, she couldn't resist and glanced down at his groin. Sure enough he was sporting a full size erection. Either that or he was keeping a baseball bat down his trousers. She pulled her gaze away as the heat dropped to the junction of her thighs. Her panties hadn't been dry all week, but she wasn't about to tell him that. As far as she was concerned, sharing time was over.

"Tully, it's only eight forty-five in the morning."

"And I've been awake since two."

She grimaced sympathetically and watched him leave in disgust. She'd been no help at all, and for that, she felt guilty.

Minutes after Tully left Janet appeared at her side. She looked just as harried as Tully had.

"That was the worst date ever," she exclaimed, and Desiree closed her eyes, suddenly weary.

"What more could I have done to show him I was interested? I wore a 'next-to-nothing' dress, flirted my ass off like a two-bit you-know-what all evening, and he didn't even bother to kiss me good night." She looked as though she were ready to cry. "I'm at my wits end." She threw her hands up in the air, spun on one foot, and stormed back the way she came.

Gamble appeared minutes after Janet left. By now, she was starting to feel as though her counter were an emotional turnstile.

“You set Tully up with Janet to get him to cave, didn’t you?” he accused her, his face pinched with concern. Although his voice was soft, she could hear the steel beneath it.

Her shoulders sagged. Not everything was her fault. Really it wasn’t. “He asked me to,” she admitted truthfully. “What is with you people today?”

Gamble gave her an incredulous look then shook his head. “He’s going to explode.”

“Yeah, well, not if I do first,” she muttered miserably.

The next thing she knew he was beside her, his arms wrapped loosely around her waist. The fire that Tully had lit was now threatening to become a raging forest fire, the rush of arousal pooling on her panties threatening a flash flood.

“Really?” Gamble growled looking at her as though she were his next meal. “It’s that bad, is it?”

She jerked out of his reach. “Oh no, you don’t.” She continued to back away. “Not today, pal. I can’t be subjected to any more of your smooth moves. From now on, this cubicle is cock-free.”

“Why not?” He caught her by the hand before she could clear the counter in one desperate leap. She felt herself pulled back against him, the soft flesh of her buttocks greeted by the hard flesh of his cock. “Are you worried that you’ll want to go another round with me and break one of your imaginary rules?”

“No, I mean, yes,” she stuttered still struggling to get away. “And my rules are not imaginary.” She was spiralling out of control, and she might do something she regretted, like lay Gamble out on the floor and ravage him right then and there.

He pressed his face against her neck, his smooth baritone vibrating deliciously against her throat. “Not when it comes to Jared Souque or Nathan Withers for that matter. You’ve had both of them twice and Luke Simmons at least four times.” He gave his hips a quick jerk, sending his rigid shaft against her. “So what gives?”

She did. At least she wanted to. If she didn't get out of there and fast, they were going to do something very public that would result in them getting very fired. He was asking questions that she didn't want to answer, was forcing her to tell him things she didn't want to admit to. Either she had to lie or she had to hurt him. She opted for neither.

Not caring about what Tina would say, she launched off her counter and raced past the deli section and out the side doors. Once outside, she sucked in a lung full of fresh air in hope of clearing her head. Immediately, she felt better but she couldn't stand around in front of the windows. That would just attract unwanted attention, much like a duck in a skeet gallery at the circus where Tina was the hunter. She had to keep moving. Out of sight, out of Tina's mind, she hoped, and sprinted for the end of the brick building. She didn't stop once she rounded the corner either.

Gamble had her all tied up in knots. Somehow, he had figured out her rules were a sham, that the other guys were just extracurricular, and it wouldn't be long, if he hadn't already figured it out, that she didn't want to go any further with him because he mattered.

He mattered, and she didn't want to screw it up, she repeated the thought, amazed by the truth in it. She didn't want to ache for him and then someday not be able to stand him. It was the only thing that had kept their friendship in check. Sure they flirted like two blue-footed boobies, but that was as far as either of them had ever bothered to take it, until recently, until the bet. Why?

Frustrated, she came to a jerky halt and practically threw herself at the wall. Her back landed with an unhealthy thwack, and she let out a gust of air that was both from the impact and her frustration. She pressed the back of her head into the brick, her eyes to the sky.

She thought she was alone until a dark shadow crossed her path. Opening her eyes, she saw a pair of familiar slate eyes homing in on her and a crooked smile tugging at the corner of his mouth.

She sighed weightily. "Can't you tell when a woman wants to be alone?"

He pulled back for just a minute, and she thought she recognised true hesitation in his actions. Then, for whatever reason, he resumed his grin and closed the gap between them completely. He leaned one arm against the wall, just brushing against her shoulder. Trapped beneath his arm, she felt like prey, but strangely, she didn't object. Being that close to a man, to Gamble in particular, was exactly what her body was craving. If it wasn't going to cost her five hundred dollars, she might have suggested they test the wall's durability for real.

"I don't think you do want to be alone." He pressed in closer until she could feel his hip against her own. She inhaled deeply, taking comfort in the familiarity of his cologne.

"It doesn't have to be this way, Des. We could just tell Tully we'll cover the movie rentals for a couple of months and he'd be happy. He could go fuck Janet's silly little brains out, and we'd all get some peace."

She looked into his eyes and wished it were that easy. She ran from commitment, and she'd run from Gamble as well. He had to accept it was her nature. In fact, she'd run just now all the way out to the south parking lot but he'd followed her. She didn't want to lose him entirely, and that was just what would happen if they ever followed through. She'd be that bitchy, miserable woman he called the Ball-and-Chain.

Picturing him thinking of her that way fuelled her fear and spurred her on. Then, she did the worst thing possible. She laughed. It was a haughty laugh. Instead of telling him what was in her heart, she acted macho and called his bluff.

"I think you can't take the heat, Gamble. Am I right? You've got something nasty lined up for tonight and you'd like me to give you my blessing, is that it? Well, I'm not letting you off easy, Buster Boy. Oh no, because of you, I've missed out on Prince Charming, a lesbian romp, and a handful of firemen. I think I've proved enough that I'm no quitter."

He grimaced. The fun seemed to wither from him. His shoulders softened, and his features looked almost sad. "If you had been paying any attention at all, you'd have noticed by now that I haven't, no, I couldn't be with another woman after I'd been with you." He spiked his fingers through his hair in his frustration. "I fell in love with you that night, Desiree. You showed me what I'd been missing. You broke all my rules, and what did I get in return? You kicked me out at six in the morning. Yes, Desiree, you've shown me more than once you are no quitter, but you sure aren't a starter either."

With that, he turned and walked away.

* * * *

He had seen the struggle in her eyes as she battled her inner turmoil over what to tell him in regards to his offer. For a moment, he had hoped that pleading look meant she was willing to give him a try. He knew her reasons for avoiding him and he respected them. He just didn't agree with them. So her parents squabbled, everyone's did. So she liked to keep her independence and her freedom, great, so did he, but she just couldn't get past that one night. When she'd kicked him out the next morning, he'd been stunned, rejected, and somewhat turned on. It wasn't every day a woman tossed him out on his ass, but he never expected her to resist and reject him every time after that. He tried, oh how he had tried, to convince her it would just be sex, but she knew. Something cosmic had passed between them while they'd lain there in each other's arms. She had to have felt it too. The next morning she'd gotten scared, pulled away as though he were made of acid. Perhaps she had seen it in his eyes then. He was smitten. He was just as stunned that after one very memorable gymnastic romp through the sheets he'd fallen so hard. He'd tried to move on, but he could never go through with it when it came to the crunch time. Clearly, that was not the case for her. It had hurt. It still hurt, but he'd learned to cope. It was a running joke between them, and now Tully

was even in on it. He didn't mind that though. It was kind of exciting, the two of them chasing her, taking risks, and getting each other all worked up. He'd never been so bold, so raunchy, and so frustrated before in his life. The tantric exercises were just his way of managing his raging libido, but she never made the connection. It occurred to him then that maybe their teasing had gone too far. Maybe she wasn't ever going to let him in.

* * * *

The smell of Gamble's cologne lingered in the air. She breathed in deeper, trying to catch the last wisp of it before the wind blew it away completely. It was ridiculous of course, in light of the way she had just dismissed him. It was either that or press him against the wall and lose a lot more than money. The urge to kiss him had been so strong that it left her feeling hollow. He was a good kisser if she remembered right, light nips to her bottom lip, an expert with his tongue, sexy lingo, and thoughtful touches. She had been within minutes of throwing it all away when everything had spiralled in on them and then collapsed around her like a deflated balloon. Why couldn't he be satisfied with the way things were? Something he'd said stayed with her. He'd told her he hadn't been with any other woman since that night. What was with all those rumours that he was still the best lay around then? Was it possible he had made them up? It didn't make sense.

She'd hurt him, that was plain to see. He'd taken a risk, and she'd thrown it in his face yet again, but he would recover. He always did.

Blinking away tears, she wondered why she was still lying, lying to herself, to her friends to her one true love. Life had to be better than this, she decided, feeling a familiar ache in her chest. The way she felt now was exactly how she imagined her life would be if she ever gave in to love. It was kind of ironic, in a not so ha-ha way.

Cold and alone, she figured she'd been gone a while, and now she had bigger problems to worry about, Tina mainly.

Chapter 12

Tully was alone in the staff room at five. Gamble had apparently already gone, leaving Tully behind to pick up the broken pieces, if there were any.

“What went down between the two of you today?” He greeted her, a sour expression on his face.

She grimaced. “Same old, same old.”

“Huh,” was his reply, which spoke volumes. So, he didn’t approve, who cares anyway?

“You’re a real treasure, you know that right?” He said not sounding very flattering.

“Yeah, Tully, I’m aware.” She grimaced.

He stood then as though it pained him. “Then you won’t mind if I call it a night?”

He was referring to their usual draft night down at the pub where she worked.

“I guess not.” She shrugged.

He nodded and sauntered out the door. She watched his back until it disappeared from view. Clearly, he was taking Gamble’s side.

Great, she thought feeling uneasy. She had managed to blow off both of her closest friends, and now she didn’t have a ride home.

* * * *

Her feet were killing her by the time she reached her apartment. Kicking off her shoes, she ran a bath, and did the one thing that had been on her mind the whole walk home, she called her mother.

Her mother's chipper trademark salutation came on the line.

"Hi, Ma," she said, not caring that she sounded miserable. "Sorry it's been so long, but I need to talk."

There was a pause, and she knew her mother was standing there in her kitchen with her mouth open. Desiree never needed to talk. "Sure honey," she recovered quickly, "What do you need?"

"Do you love Dad?" she blurted.

There was another moment of silence, and then her mother laughed, a nervous laugh, but at least she wasn't mad.

"Of course I do, honey." She sounded flabbergasted. "I have always loved your father, perhaps more now than when I first married him."

Now it was her time to pause. No doubt her mother was lying so as not to upset her. "I don't get it," she said finding her voice. "You fight all the time. You both look so miserable in each other's company."

"You are only seeing one side of things, sweetheart. Life was pretty stressful for us while you were growing up. Money was tight, your grandfather was sick, you kids were a handful, and we were tired."

"Yeah, I know, but shouldn't you have leaned on each other, you know, drawn strength from each other?"

"We did, but we also didn't hide our true feelings. We didn't pretend like everything was hunky-dory. That doesn't solve anything."

She could visualise her mother shrugging impishly as she had seen her do many times before. She wasn't getting off that easy.

"Hiding it would have made me a more grounded individual though."

“You can’t blame all your dysfunctions on your father and I. It is important to communicate. Your father and I just happen to do it in high volume. As far as I’m concerned, we set a good example. Fighting is natural.” There was the shrug again. “I’m sure you don’t want to hear this, but make-up sex is some of the best a person can experience.”

Did she just say make-up sex? “Ugh, aw, Mom!”

Her mother laughed, stronger now. “Honey, sometimes I’d provoke him just to rile him up for some action.”

“You can stop now any time.”

“You’re the one asking all the questions.”

“Okay, okay.”

While she was attempting to get the image of her parents making up out of her mind, her mother spoke again. “I’m sorry you got the wrong impression, Dezzie.”

Now she felt bad. “You gave up so much to be together.”

“Yes, but that’s life. The gains far outweighed the losses, and I wouldn’t have it any other way. In fact, now that we have the house to ourselves, we’re making up for lost time.”

She winced and closed her eyes to block out the image. It didn’t help. Taking a deep breath, she realised she felt better hearing that despite how disturbing it was. “I wish I had asked sooner.”

“Why, honey?”

“Because I think I might have ruined something perfectly good based on my fears.”

“Oh? Is this perfectly good thing fixable with a wild bout of make-up sex?”

“Mom!” Just when she had a grip on her sanity, her mom had to go all Dr. Ruth on her.

Her mother’s bubbly laughter filled the phone, and she couldn’t help but grin.

“Loosen up. For a promiscuous girl you sure can be a prude.”

"Promiscuous." Her blood ran cold. "How—" She swallowed hard. "You know what, never mind. We're both adults. I can handle this."

"Good for you, sweetheart." The motherly tone had returned to her voice. "Now go and get that boy you've been pining for all this time."

She frowned wondering again how her mother could be so intuitive from two states away. "Okay, I'll try." She smiled and was truly relieved to have called. "I have a lot of thinking to do, and then maybe a phone call to make. Thanks for listening."

"So you don't want to hear the details about how your dad and I resolved the issue over the laundry then?"

"If it has anything to do with beating the sheets then, heaven help me, please, no."

* * * *

She stared at the phone for a while after she had hung up. She felt numb and dumbstruck. What she had just learned changed her perspective on relationships completely. Her folks were happy, had in fact always been happy. They just had a funny way of showing it.

All her rules were a sham. She wanted Gamble. She missed him, and she wanted to hear his voice. Acting upon her impulse, she reached for the phone and dialled his number. The phone rang once, twice, and she started to wonder if she had driven him off for real this time. On the third ring, she hung up. She was a chicken.

Not more than three heartbeats later, her phone rang, and she jumped. He has call display. It was probably him calling her back. What was she going to say? She hadn't given herself any time to prepare. That was part of her problem though. She was always controlling her actions. Snatching the phone off the base, she brought it to her ear.

"Hello?" she said anxious and tense.

“Hi, Des.” a female voice jarred her. She recognised the voice, but she knew of no women who called her Des. Then it hit her, this was Janet.

“Did I catch you at a bad time?”

“No.” She lied, trying to hide her disappointment.

“I tried to catch you after work but you were already gone. Then your phone was busy for the longest time.”

“Sorry,” she said without much enthusiasm.

“I know this is last minute, but I wanted to invite you over, nothing big, just me, the guys, and a hot tub.”

Hearing that, she was suddenly fully alert. Her blood was ripping through her veins like tiny little fire trucks with their sirens blaring. “The guys? A hot tub?” She sat bolt upright, gripping the hand set so hard her fingers threatened to snap the receiver. The image of Gamble, and even Tully, bucking rhythmically behind Janet sent her into a tizzy.

“You know, Tully and Gamble. They’re sitting on the couch like a couple of lawn statues. Please tell me you will come and break the ice.”

The sirens ceased their tirade, and she found momentary relief in the fact that they weren’t having a good time. It also explained why she couldn’t reach Gamble. She needed to talk to him, and if that was where he was, well then, that was where she had to go. “Should I bring anything, aside from a bathing suit?”

“No, just bring your sexy self.” She giggled and hung up.

Sexy self? How unusual. How out of character, she thought while moving about her apartment to pack things she’d need into a small bag. Shaking off the haze that hovered around her, she hurried fearing she was running out of time. Who knew what would happen if she dallied. Heart racing, Janet’s advice echoed in her head, “You never know until it’s gone.” She had to talk to Gamble. She had to tell him how she felt, before it was too late.

Chapter 13

The house Janet had directed her to was in an upper-class neighbourhood. It was a big white three-story Victorian home among others of its kind.

Ringling the doorbell, she felt impatient and fretful, not knowing how Gamble would receive her, if he would listen to her at all.

When the door opened and she saw Janet standing there, still dressed in a simple T-shirt and jeans, she took another moment of comfort that she had arrived before anything got too hot.

“Here.” She said thrusting a fuzzy knitted cozy into Janet’s hand. “I made you one. I have more than I could ever use.”

“Wow.” Janet laughed sounding nervous. “This craftsmanship is really, improving.” She laid it down on the side table where Desiree suspected it would soon be forgotten.

From the foyer, she could see that Janet’s home was beautiful. Desiree wondered how a mere cashier could afford such extravagance. Not only was the house enormous, it was well furnished and immaculately clean. The elegant walnut woodwork was turn-of-the-century original, and each room displayed some sort of characteristic charm of the era in which it was built. The ornately engraved and polished banister to Desiree’s immediate right shone under the light from the crystal chandelier hanging directly above it. Even the boot shelf upon which they had placed their sullied shoes was extravagant and old.

“Wow,” Desiree said, taking it all in. She couldn’t help but be amazed at the extravagance.

Janet laughed kindly. “Don’t judge me too harshly. This is my grandmother’s house. I live here with her until I get a better job.” She took her coat and hung it up on a coat rack behind her, then indicated for Desiree to follow with a grand sweep of her arm.

“It isn’t all it is cracked up to be, living with such exquisite surroundings. I have to be careful of everything I do for fear of scratching or breaking any one of the priceless heirlooms that you will notice litter every nook and cranny. My grandmother is a real sweetheart, but she can be very particular about whom I invite over. Perhaps that is why I never do.”

Desiree could see how it would be next to impossible to avoid the expensive clutter. The house was intimidating, to say the least. Vases and curio cabinets teetered on ancient pedestals and brass-tipped clawed feet. She developed a new sympathy for the girl.

As they ventured farther into the room, Desiree spotted the guys. They were perched on the edge of an ancient settee like two fledglings in a nest, with their knees together and their hands resting lightly in their laps. Their discomfort was apparent.

The last thing she wanted to do was get drunk and have a rocking party here. It seemed as though Janet had read her thoughts. She laughed softly again and led from the living room, through the kitchen, and into a small side room where a door hid a carpeted staircase leading into the basement.

“I’ll show you how I survive.” Her smile included Gamble and Tully, who had followed closely behind them and were now crowding around her like wayward orphans.

The décor of the house changed drastically as they descended the narrow stairway. Here, the walls were bare, exposed brick and mortar, as though they were peeping under the skirts of the house. There was a noticeable lack of fragile ornaments, hollow-eyed portraits, and woodwork of any kind. Their footsteps knocked loudly on the wooden landing as they rounded the corner and entered into a room with a claustrophobically low ceiling. A long rectangular space, housing a

pool table, dartboard, bar, couch and lounge chairs, as well as the aforementioned hot tub, awaited them. This space, so unlike the one above their heads, greeted them like an old college buddy, and instantly, her mood lifted. Desiree looked around her to see the same pleasantly surprised smile reflected on both of the guys' faces. Now this was more like it.

"My bedroom is just in here." Janet pushed open a door in the wall to their left, and they followed her in. The room wasn't very big, but it was exactly how Desiree pictured it would be. Her impression of Janet was that she would like flower print and lace, and just as she predicted, it covered every possible surface in the room. There was a trunk at the foot of the four-poster bed loaded with stuffed toys, and the antique dresser squished into a corner had Barbie dolls and an open jewellery box with a little ballerina poised to dance. Janet was a girly girl.

"You can change into your bathing suits in here or in the bathroom." She pointed to another small room adjoining the cozy little bedroom. "Or, I suppose, we could just go au natural." She giggled, then turned with a wink, and left them standing there stunned.

"Did she just suggest we all go in the buff?" Tully's eyes were wide as he asked the question.

It took Desiree a minute to respond. "I think so." Janet wasn't exactly the type to make such suggestions. Usually that was done by Tully. It seemed completely out of character for her and was therefore quickly dismissed as a mere joke in their eyes.

They stood there staring at each other, not knowing what else to do. Now faced with the reality of stripping down and exposing their bodies to one another, it seemed as none of them were any big hurry.

Finally, Gamble asked, "Did *you* bring a bathing suit?"

"Yes, of course I did. Didn't you?" she replied with a puzzled look.

He chewed his lip and stared at the floor.

“Didn’t you hear Janet say specifically that this was going to be a hot tub party?”

She turned to Tully. “Did you bring one?”

“I don’t even own a pair of trunks.”

“Seriously? Then what did you expect—” She paused finally catching on to their little game, to their mock surprise at Janet’s au natural suggestion. Not for the first time in the matter of a day had she been set up by these two, and now they had Janet in on it too. “Oh.” She shook her head dismayed at their eagerness.

Typical Tully, always ready with a sex joke, was the first to recover, “What’s wrong, Des, not up for a little dare-and-bare?”

“Dare and bare?” She laughed at Tully’s terminology.

“Come on, sugar.” Gamble reached over and pinched her bottom. “Let’s get naked.”

Unable to hide her smirk, she waved her hand at him. “You go right ahead.” She held up the little bag she brought that contained her change of clothes and jiggled it in front of his face. “I brought a bathing suit, remember?”

“What a pity,” Gamble pouted. “I didn’t know you were so shy.”

“What’s a little skin between friends?” Tully chimed in.

“The *skin* is the problem,” she muttered.

“So what you’re saying is you don’t think you can handle it?” Gamble jeered. “Or can you not handle *us*?”

“We have a bet, remember?” Her gaze strayed to Gamble’s groin. He was sporting a rather prominent erection. She’d have liked nothing more than to watch him do a very slow striptease just for her, but they still needed to talk.

“Maybe she just needs a little help,” Tully offered, while reaching around to pluck at the top button on her cotton top until he pried it free. Heat flared between her thighs as her collar loosened. She swallowed hard and tried to stay focused. Yet, when he proceeded with the next one, she still didn’t ask him to stop. She struggled to find her words as Gamble began to peel off the tight black T-shirt he

had been wearing. His tight abs rippled with sinewy muscle as he brought it up over his head, then tossed it aside. Remembering the first time she'd seen his well-defined, tanned chest, she decided he looked just as delicious now as he did then.

With her third button open, Gamble advanced on her, his hands giving the drawstring of her white cotton pants a playful test tug. Seeing that she hadn't objected, he followed through on his threat, hesitating for effect before giving a mighty jerk and exposed her bottom half. She had dressed for comfort and ease never once thinking she would be making it easier for them.

As Tully reached the last button her top fell open, and she saw Gamble's eyes widen, as he fixed on the swell of her breasts under her bra. Merciless, Tully tugged the shirt over her shoulders, but that was where he stopped. He had purposefully trapped her arms in the sleeves. In this position, her breasts jutted out, straining against the pink silk fabric. A groan escaped Gamble's lips, and his hands fell to his waist, where they fumbled to unfasten his belt. The rustling of fabric behind her told her that Tully was also stripping down, and with some speed, too. With her eyes glued to his every move, she watched as Gamble slid the leather away, followed by the zipper beneath. With intense precision, he pulled his underwear, jeans, and socks off in one fluid movement, leaving himself completely bare. Standing, uninhibited and proudly erect before her he smiled with satisfaction.

"Are we making it easier for you?" he asked, with a wicked glint in his eye. She couldn't find the words to describe how she felt. All she could do was stare at his cock and admire the way it protruded from his body like a battering ram. She longed to touch it. His smile widened as she pulled against her restraints, eager to have him in her mouth. As though sensing her need, he wrapped his fingers around it and gave it a few quick pumps, his efforts resulting in a droplet of clear liquid forming on the end.

The sound of Tully's jeans hitting the floor came to her ears but she did not dare take her eyes off Gamble. He was the one she longed to see, to touch, to taste, and she crooned like a hungry animal.

Gamble nodded over her head, a subtle movement that signalled something to Tully. What they were planning, she didn't know, but she certainly hoped it was devious.

She felt Tully's hands on her again, his fingers lacing into her bra. He tugged it down in one mighty pull and freed her breasts, his naked hips smacking against her as he did. She felt his erection, bare, hot, and hard against the back of her thigh.

"Oh, Des." Gamble groaned appreciatively his eyes wide as he openly appraised her naked body. Instantly, his fingers wrapped gently around one firm globe, giving it an appreciative squeeze. He closed in on her and then brought his mouth to her taut red nipple. He flicked the tip of his across it, pausing every so often to suck it to a harder point.

"I always knew you'd be hot, but this is spectacular," Tully said breathily from behind her, while roving his hands over her body.

She blushed under their praise. The bet was off as far as she was concerned, and if the boys gave her any argument, well, it would be worth whatever amount of money it cost her just to feel their bodies pressed against her own. Arching her back, she leaned into Tully's caresses, felt his fingers explore until they found the damp patch that had formed on her panties.

"I think she likes this, Gamble. What do you think?"

Gamble reached out, tentative at first, hovering over the wet spot Tully indicated.

"Do it," she said breathily, looking him straight in the eyes. "Don't make me wait one second more."

His hand dipped beneath the silk and lace, and his long fingers found her slick furrow and the prominent nub within. With gentle strokes, his fingers worked the sensitive spot until her mouth opened

with a silent cry. She couldn't speak. The pleasure was too intense. Seeing this, he pulled his hand out.

Jutting her buttocks toward Tully, she felt him act in accordance with his hands along her thigh and hip. His lips brushed against the back of her neck, which sent shivers along her spine. Using his teeth, he gently dragged them across her flesh, nipping here and there just enough to make the hair on her body stand up.

"I'm going to explode if I don't feel you, the both of you." She finally found her voice and cried out in protest.

Just then, Gamble pulled away and stood back from her seemingly to appraise her situation with a hunger she could only assume was echoed in her own eyes. A small smile tugged at the corners of his lips, and again, he nodded at Tully.

She allowed him to manoeuvre her until she was bent her over, her mouth only a few inches away from Gamble's prominent cock. With his cock held firmly in his fist, he stepped a little bit closer until the head grazed her lips.

"You want this?" he asked, his voice thick with lust.

She could almost feel his hardness at the back of her throat. An ache that was both pleasure and pain swelled within her belly, she longed for him so. "Yes," she croaked, her voice barely audible.

His hand left his cock to gently caress the side of her face. Then, he brought his other hand up and cradled her head between them, while stepping closer, closing the gap. She moaned as he slowly pushed himself into her waiting mouth.

Just as she had anticipated, the moment was everything she had imagined. The taste of him, a mixture of sweet and salty, brought another groan of pleasure from her as she began tonguing and caressing his rigid shaft. With small thrusts, he rocked his hips to her rhythm.

As Tully's fingers roved, they snagged on the black lacy trim of her panties, and before she knew it, he was tugging them down, but only as far as to her knees. With her buttocks exposed, she moaned

again as the blood rushed to the apex at her legs, pulsating there like a heartbeat. She was aware of their hindrance, and the feeling of restraints heightened her arousal. Trapped inside her clothing and pinned between two gorgeous men was one thing she had never experienced before. She'd had fantasies, but now it was actually happening.

A sudden warm sensation alerted her to Tully's presence behind her as he brought his mouth to her exposed pussy. She spared a glance down to see Tully's spread knees and his monstrous wide cock pointing up to where she most longed to feel it ramming inside of her. How ironic, she mused, that he really was big. His hot breath against her silky passage sent a shiver along her spine. As she had anticipated, the contact of his hot, wet tongue gliding along her swollen lips, the firm tip dipping in to her most vulnerable places proved too much for her, and she shuddered as her first orgasm tore through her.

Tully's efforts doubled when he realised what had just happened, and then, to her dismay the pressure lifted away.

She nearly lost her balance looking to see where he had gone, but Gamble remedied that by catching her. He stripped her shirt away, her bra following suit with as well.

Immediately, her hands went to his hips, and she pulled him into her mouth again. Now, with more control, she found she could give Gamble's cock the attention it deserved, and she bobbed up and down on it hungrily.

Tully shifted, and this time it was the head of his cock she felt brush against her entrance. He let the weight of it fall against her sensitive folds and used it like a club to spank her most sensitive parts. His cock landed with another profound thump as though he were testing her willingness. When she pushed back into him, he got his answer, and without another wasted second, she felt him nudge against her entrance. Parting her, his thick member strained against her tight cavity, until he was all of the way inside her. She vocalized

her appreciation with a guttural moan, the vibrations rolling over Gamble's skin. Gamble purred in turn.

Tully, holding her hips steady, humped her eagerly. After such a long absence, each thrust was a heightened experience. She tightened around him, greedy with lust, wanting more, wanting it harder, and deeper. She didn't want it to end and fought off the impending orgasm. When Tully's thrusting became too fierce Gamble pulled out of her mouth.

"Oh God don't stop, please," she pleaded with him. "This feels unbelievable." Now with her mouth free, she vocalised her pleasure with enthusiasm.

Hearing her words set Tully off. He grew hard as steel inside of her. "Oh, Des, I can't. I'm going to—" She felt his fingers dig into her flesh as he fought to stay in control.

Despite the fact that it was Tully who was fully imbedded by her, she gave all of her attention to Gamble, letting him know with earnest that he was the one she truly desired. His gaze locked with hers, his eyes dark with lust, as she implored him to sense what was in her heart. If he got the message, she wasn't sure. What she did know was that another climax was building in her, and she longed for it to be with Gamble.

"Do it, Tully. It's okay. Gamble's going to pick up where you left off, and then we're going to do this all over again, aren't we?"

Tully answered with a cross between a groan and a grunt as she felt his release spill into her.

The second Tully withdrew Gamble scooped her up and moved her to the bed. He laid her down gently on her back and adjusted her so her ass was hanging off the edge. She could feel Tully's recent efforts spilling out of her and knew that Gamble noticed too. Thankfully, the sight seemed to increase his desire rather than impede it. With ferocity of a hundred horny men, he grabbed each leg and, without any further delay, buried himself to the hilt in one smooth thrust.

She was aware of Tully's presence as he moved onto the bed with them. Leaning over her, he brought his mouth to the closest breast and sucked hungrily. She cupped his balls as Gamble slammed into her, but she could see Gamble would have preferred more room to move.

"Hold my arms, Tully," she whispered, raising her arms above her head. Tully quickly obliged and laced his fingers through hers. Happily restrained once again, she arched, raising her hips to meet Gamble's eager thrusts. She wasn't going to last long this way, she realised, and still tried to fight the building tension. It seemed as though Gamble realised this too, but instead of taking it easier on her, he drove into her with increased purpose. Each thrust answered a week's worth of longing, smoothed away the doubts and fears, and finally satisfied the craving that he had created within her on his regular cubicle raids.

Unable to hold off any longer, she cried out with her release, and Gamble soon followed. His spasms rocked through her with the intensity of a thunderstorm as he surged and filled her full.

Spent, Gamble partially collapsed on top of her, his lips inches away from hers. Tully still held her wrists, but she longed to hold Gamble. Just as she was about to explain this the door to the small room opened.

A sharp intake of breath shattered the moment. They had been discovered.

Janet stood in the doorway, her eyes wide with disbelief and her mouth half open as she took everything in. Limbs bumped and rubbed in their haste to untangle themselves.

Janet clutched tightly at a sarong that was loosely wrapped around her body. She had already changed and had, no doubt, been waiting for them to join her. Instead, they had gotten carried away and taken her hospitality for granted.

She came forward, her face stricken with disbelief. "Seriously. What does a girl have to do to get your attention?"

Desiree blinked, the euphoric rush she had just experienced rapidly melting away.

Janet's eyes swept over the heap her bed had become. "For an entire week, I tried all the ways I could think of to get invited into your little trio. I dressed slutty, I wore more perfume, I made sexual advances on each one of you, and still you don't even bother to include me." She waved her hand impatiently toward the bed where they had just defiled its youthful charm.

Desiree felt as though her ears weren't working right. There was something amiss with Janet's anger. "Include you?"

Janet bulldozed passed her in her haste to vent her rage. "There I was, out there"—she made a wide, sweeping gesture with her arm to indicate the other room—"reclining along the rim of the tub, buck naked, waiting for the three of you to get your horny asses out there, and what do I find? That you've started without me." She was livid, insulted, and hurt but not for the reasons Desiree expected.

"Started without you?" she echoed the other girl's words.

Janet made a disgusted sound, turned, and walked out of the room.

Even though she felt as though she had been broadsided by a truck, she knew she had to go after her. Wrapping the bedspread around herself, she tiptoed tentatively into the other room. She reached Janet as she threw herself down on the couch, her bottom lip quivering.

"Janet," she said kindly, laying a hand on the other girl's bare knee. "I'm so sorry. Honestly, we had no idea. What just happened has never happened before."

The guys came out of the room, each had a flower-print pillow in front of his middle and another pressing against his backside. With stunned expressions, they approached the couch cautiously.

"No, I suppose you wouldn't," she said "How could I expect the notorious trio to notice the likes of me?"

“Notorious?” It was Gamble who picked up on the implication of Janet’s word and echoed it back to her. Clearly, their little bet hadn’t gone unnoticed and to more than just keen-eyed Janet.

She rolled her eyes impatient and wallowing in self-pity. “I’m so tired of being the good girl. I’m sick of being seen as Grandma’s sidekick and the little angel who never gets into trouble.” She made a face and impersonated someone hoity-toity. “There goes reliable Janet.” She waved a hand through the air. “Oh no, here’s Janet, better stop swearing and acting out.” She dropped her hand into her lap with a smack. “I don’t want to be left out of all the fun anymore. I want to get dirty. I want to party like you guys do, throwing common sense and caution to the wind.”

Desiree opened her mouth to refute Janet’s innocent accusation, but Gamble shook his head. She understood. Janet was just ranting. Now was not the time.

“I feel like such a fool,” she continued, her voice full of anguish. “You make it look so inviting.”

“It certainly was starting to feel like fun.” Tully added wistfully and inclined his head back in the direction of the bedroom.

A dangerous look cross Desiree’s fine features. “Who says the fun is over?” She tugged on the loose knot at the top of Janet’s sarong. The silky fabric fell away with ease, revealing a perfect set of perky breasts and her slender torso. “We could make it a quadruple if you’d like.” With a jerk of her head she motioned to Tully. Unfortunately, he missed her subtle cue. Grasping him by the hand Desiree led him closer to where Janet sat, looking exposed and vulnerable.

A pillow, quickly followed by a second, hit the floor, and Desiree looked up to see that both of the guys had taken this as their cue to participate. Gamble was semi-hard but very quickly rising to the occasion.

“You heard the girl.” Desiree muttered and gave him a final nudge. “She wants to play.”

Tully dropped to his knees before Janet, his gaze locked on her face as he brought his hands to rest upon her knees. Janet watched him with a look of bewildered innocence.

Moving with slow, cautious movements, he raised his hand and took one tight red nipple between his fingers. He rolled it slowly until he heard Janet's soft gasp. She closed her eyes in pleasure, her head lolling across her shoulders, as he tongued the plump peaks into stiff points. "Oh that was good," she sighed. Immediately her fingers threaded into his hair, grabbed hold and drew his body in.

She guided his head between her thighs and planted his mouth against her now partially exposed pussy.

Desiree had to stifle a chuckle. It was obvious it had been a long time for the other girl, but by the looks of it, Janet was learning fast.

For a moment, they watched, awestruck and titillated, by what they were witnessing. Gamble stroked his cock absentmindedly as they watched Tully's tongue disappear into Janet time and time again, as he increased his tempo with each thrust.

Tully tugged the rest of the sarong out of the way, then gently parted her knees wider. Using his fingers, he probed gently, parting her tender folds until he found the swollen red bud he was seeking. Bringing his face between Janet's creamy thighs, he breathed deeply and inhaled. The instance his tongue grazed Janet's hot center the other girl twitched and gave a little gasp. "Easy," he cooed softly to sooth her.

Desiree knew full well the delicious vibrations he was sending tumbling over Janet's skin. Not letting up, he continued to lick at her with quick flicks of his tongue followed by long sensuous pulls with his teeth. With expert lashes and caresses of his tongue, he quickly worked her into a frenzy, bringing her close to climax then denying her release. Eventually, Janet arched into him, as the tension built to the point she craved release. It appeared that Tully wasn't about to let that happen, at least not yet. Janet gave a little impatient cry when he pulled away but was quick to oblige, when he was standing once

again, his cock ready to be sucked. She took him deep into her mouth, her passion fuelled with lust.

Desiree's hand dropped to the apex of her thighs, and her fingers slid along her petal-smooth center, slick with her arousal. Gamble's gaze turned from Tully and Janet to watch Desiree now as she circled the swollen bud throbbing beneath her fingertips.

Heat seared through her sex, and she felt the dampness against the inside of her thighs. She reached over and found Gamble's firm cock. Wrapping her hand around it, she marvelled at the impressive size it had already grown to, but she knew there was more to come. He helped the process along when he obligingly pressed into her hand. So, this was working for him too, she noted, and she gave his cock a gentle pump. A soft moan escaped his lips.

"I don't think you need any help, but I'd like to give it to you anyway." Desiree slid him a sly sideways glance. Using his cock as though it were a thick rope, she pulled him closer until the soft skin of his head brushed against her naked abdomen. Keeping her eyes locked on his, she lowered her body down, sliding it against his cock until the head bumped against her open mouth.

She nuzzled the end for a brief moment, her still eyes cast upward in hopes to show him the desire she was feeling. An unspoken bond had been established, and she knew anything she did would be all right by him. More than anything, she wanted to feel Gamble's cock filling her up once again, but first, she had a little fantasy she wanted to fulfill.

When he was fully erect, she urged Gamble forward again, as far as the edge of the couch would allow, until the taunt head of his cock was inches away from Janet's mouth. Hesitating, she looked up over Tully's cock, and met Desiree's eyes. Desiree flashed her a sly smile, in hopes the other girl would catch on and play along. Always the good girl, Janet leaned forward and opened her mouth. Her lips circled his swollen member, slick with saliva from Desiree's mouth, and her right hand grasped him at the base. The contrast of her

brightly painted lips against Gamble's skin sent a rush of blood between Desiree's thighs and she found herself longing to kiss them as they moved along Gamble's rigid shaft. Instead, she watched, strangely titillated, as Janet drew him further into her mouth, giving his bulging flesh a glistening sheen.

It occurred to her that, for the first time, she didn't feel jealous of another woman servicing Gamble. In fact, she was rather enjoying the moment. Here, in this instance, she felt as much a part of it as though she herself were performing the action.

A slight breeze alerted her to Tully's subtle movement. His prominent cock jutted into the tender scene like a car waiting to pull out of the pit stop. Without needing any coaching, Janet reached out and began jacking him gently, too. It was a beautiful sight to see, a woman with two cocks, and watching was just half the fun. Desiree felt herself grow wetter as she stood close by, taking in the erotic scene. This was what Janet had wanted, after all. Perhaps they were more alike than she had first thought. Desiree moved one finger back and forth over her raised clit as Janet's long, slender fingers coaxed the skin of Tully's uncircumcised cock up and down until he groaned with pleasure. After a few moments, she switched back again, sucking Tully's cock while she jacked Gamble.

Desiree watched for a moment longer before she moved down onto the floor, between the guys, opposite Janet. Taking hold of Gamble's cock, she took up where Janet left off, her lips wrapping around Gamble's rock hard shaft. The knowledge that Janet sucked Tully's cock no less than a foot away was such a turn on that Desiree struggled with the dilemma of whether to continue watching or participate. Gamble soon answered for her, grabbing her head with both hands, he began to thrust into her with his growing need. She matched his thrusts until, hard as iron, he pulled away. Teetering on the brink of losing control, Gamble steadied himself with his hands braced against her shoulders.

She could see the effort it took to remain in control. Desiree, herself, felt she could erupt at any given moment.

Gambled lowered his head closer to hers. "I want to fuck you while we both watch," he said giving his cock a firm squeeze. Then, guiding her, he positioned her so she was facing away from him, her arms braced against the couch.

She felt the pressure of his cock as he pushed against her, then rocked his hips until he was deep inside of her.

Leaning over her he murmured in her ear, "I'll have you know, this is my third time with you, Des." He gave her a few quick thrusts. "Do you mind me so much now?"

She groaned out her pleasure, liking the idea that he was keeping count. "Not a bit, Gamble. In fact, I'll be disappointed if we don't make it to five by morning."

As though in answer, he slammed his cock home.

Tully groaned again, an indication that he was getting close as well. It didn't surprise Desiree when he pulled Janet to her feet. No doubt he wanted to experience her, all of her, and that meant he wanted to sample another of Janet's openings.

He urged her into a kneeling position and wasted no time crawling on top of her. He covered her round bottom with his hips and guided the purple head of his cock into her hot, wet pink gash. He began with one long slow thrust, eliciting a groan out her. When he hesitated, Janet arched her back and pushed against him eager for him to continue.

He gave a feral groan then tilted her head up slightly to kiss her, his lips working over her neck with a gentle persistence as he bucked into her.

Gamble shifted again, this time turning Desiree around to face him. "I need to see you, to connect with you." He admitted, lowering his mouth down to hers. She felt his tongue part her lips, demand her attention. She gave him all of her, kissing him back as though he were nourishment she had been craving. They fell on to the now abandoned

couch in a tangle of limbs, never breaking their kiss. Desiree felt Gamble's hand reach in between their bodies and guide his cock home. She wrapped her legs around his waist, gripping his hips with her hands until her back lifted off the cushions.

"You're an animal tonight, Dezzie," he growled with appreciation.

"Just fuck me," she cried out.

"I could," he let his words hang for a moment, "or I could ride this out, see if we could break a new record."

She opened her eyes, astonished to see his familiar teasing grin.

"As nice as that sounds, I've got other plans."

Impatient, she prized herself out from under him, then pushed him to the floor in turn. Without another second wasted, she climbed on top of him and impaled herself upon his rigid pole. She sighed with satisfaction as he stretched the walls of her body and applied a pleasant pressure against her swollen clitoris. He drew her down deeper onto him and urged her to rock her hips against the intrusion. She didn't need any more encouragement than that. He wanted it hard as much as she did and she was going to give it to him. Bracing herself, she rose onto her haunches and slid back down onto him, working him like a piston. She had never felt a man so thick and hard inside of her before. Even the time with Tully, with his big cock stuffing her full, hadn't felt so intense, so satisfying. She glanced down at Gamble's face to see him watching her with the same amazed expression on his face that she assumed was written all over hers.

A laugh bubbled up out of her as her joy spilled to the surface, and she was overjoyed to hear it echoed by Gamble. Her laughter rose until it merged with her orgasm and broke off into a cry of ecstasy that threatened to wake the neighbours. A warm gush flooded over Gamble's cock as her arousal flowed out of her soaking the space where they were joined. More moisture flowed as Gamble reached his own release and pumped his load into her with strong throbbing spasms. He gripped the couch skirt between his fingers as though he were hanging on to it for dear life. She laughed again, and dropped

down along his chest. They lay there still joined and giggling every once in awhile.

Sounds of skin slapping against skin brought them out of their dreamy state to realise Janet and Tully were still going. They had switch positions so that Janet was now on her back, with Tully imbedded deep between her thighs. He gripped her legs tightly, drawing them up tight around his waist. By the looks of it, they were getting close to their own release, something Desiree longed to see.

As Janet's moans grew more insistent, Tully increased his efforts. Finally, she succumbed, taking Tully with her in an enthusiastic climax. They fell together against the carpet laughing at themselves, kissing and cuddling in the aftermath of what looked like a very good pairing. The room fell silent then, each of them in their own blessed out state, their heads full of thoughts.

Eventually Janet sat up, her expression dazed and happy. Tully caressed her thigh, and she ran her fingers through his hair, the gesture tender and sensual.

She looked over to Desiree, and her smile widened. "I could do that all over again." She sighed. "And after that, I'll still want more. I've never had such a wonderful time in my whole life."

Smiling, Gamble reached out to her. "You're not alone in that, Janet. I think we've got a good thing going here. It would be a waste not to explore it a little further."

"What are you suggesting?" Desiree asked with a mischievous smile.

"I'm completely open." He matched her smile and gave her nipple a gentle tweak.

Janet shifted slightly so as she faced them with her legs open. With her fingers fanning either side of her opening, she brazenly parted her lips to reveal her swollen pink cleft. "I'm ready when you are."

"Now that's impressive," Tully said, lifting his head from where it had rested on his arms. He reached over, a little weary from his recent

efforts but still managed to find the energy and interest to bring one long finger to the fiery furnace between her legs. Desiree and Gamble watched as his finger probed her, withdrew a little, and then delved deeper again. Janet moaned appreciatively and tilted her head back against her shoulders.

"I want to experience it all," she said and moaned again.

Gamble shifted slightly so he could reach Desiree's moist slit. "I think that could be arranged. Just keep doing what you are doing, and we'll all be willing and right behind you."

Janet chuckled. "I want you behind me, on top of me, beneath me."

Desiree laughed along with her. "She's not asking for much." Her hand went to Gamble's flaccid prick. "In that case, I better see to this end of things." Kneeling over him she brought her lips to Gamble's cock and drew him into her mouth. She felt a slight pressure at her entrance as Gamble parted her lips and pushed his finger into her. She was well aware of how visible she was to Tully and Janet, but it was because of that exposure that she was becoming aroused so quickly once again. She imagined what it must look like to watch his finger penetrate her most sensitive parts, exploring her in front of an audience.

It hadn't taken much to bring Gamble back to his former impressive self, and now Tully was sporting a full-on erection, too. He stood and offered Janet a hand up. With a little encouragement, Tully coaxed Janet into a straddling position over Gamble's face. Lowering him down onto the other man's hungry mouth, Tully sat back and watched as Gamble quickly embraced her sex with his lips, licking and sucking at her with pleasure. Janet's eyes closed as she revelled in his attentions. Using her knees to steady herself, she gently gyrated against him and pinched her nipples. Putting on quite the performance for Tully, she licked her lips whereas though he were about to be her next meal.

Tully encouraged her with raunchy commentary as his hand worked his cock.

“Ride me, Desiree,” she heard Gamble say from beneath Janet. “I want to feel what it’s like to please two women at the same time.”

Not needing any more encouragement Desiree turned around and lowered herself down onto Gamble’s cock for the second time. Again, she felt the euphoric pleasure of feeling him deep inside of her. She looked to Janet, who now sat facing her with a lustful gaze. Janet’s hands roved over her own breasts, fondling and pinching each taunt red nipple. Desiree’s gaze dropped between Janet’s legs where Gamble’s tongue lapped at her pussy hungrily. It was visible every once in a while as he teased the other woman’s clit. Desiree’s pussy clenched tighter around Gamble’s cock at the sight. At that moment Desiree experienced a strange epiphany. For years she had wondered if she was attracted to women, but even when she had played around, teasing all those college boys, she’d known in her heart, women weren’t what she craved. She wanted a cock, a nice-inch thick, hard cock to bring her off. Yet, here she was, admiring the way Janet responded to Gamble as he pressed his tongue into her sex. She was a voyeur, she realized. It was that simple. Watching Janet handle both Gamble and Tully had made her hotter than she’d ever been before. The fact that it was Gamble’s cock in her hand only meant she wanted to be the one to finish him off. Catching Janet’s eye, Desiree reached for her own breasts, tipping them up as she pinched her own nipples. She didn’t have to touch Janet to share this experience with her.

“Come on Tully.” Desiree’s voice was husky. “You’re missing out.”

Seeing his opportunity, Tully reached out to touch Janet’s plump breasts. Taking one in each hand, he massaged them gently, his thumbs making large round circles over her areoles. The combination of the two soon had Janet moaning with pleasure until Tully could bear to be a bystander no longer. Standing with a leg on each side of Gamble’s head he skilfully turned Janet around until her mouth found

his cock. She lapped at it hungrily, her newly awakened desire seemingly insatiable.

After a bit, Tully groaned and pulled out of Janet's mouth. "There's still something I want to try." He came around behind Desiree. She felt him moving behind her, and then she felt a sharp pinch against the entrance of her ass. He wetted one finger and brought it to the tiny puckered hole.

"Are you game?" he asked, testing her resistance. When she nodded, he inserted it in just a little. She stopped moving to allow him better access.

"I want to go all the way with this, Des." He sounded strained as he asked.

"Yes." She was both apprehensive excited by the idea. She'd had anal sex in the past, and she'd always been curious to try two guys at once.

"I'll go slow." She heard him spit and felt him rub more moisture along his shaft. When she felt the head of his cock, she braced for what she knew was a lot more to come.

Janet had turned back around again, no doubt curious to watch. She met the other woman's gaze with a wink. Tully's grunt was followed closely by intense pressure as he urged himself deeper inside of her. Desiree brought her fingers to her clit, the skin stretched tight between the two men, and began to fondle it with light pinches to the surrounding area. She was aware of Janet's intense scrutiny of everything she did and got yet another high off of being watched. Tully was now all the way inside of her. At times he remained motionless as though he was struggling to conquer his own urge to climax. The only motion was the steady throb of his cock. Gradually, he began rocking his hips, which created small thrusts, each one matched by Gamble who lifted his hips to the other man's rhythm. When Janet reached out and took a nipple between each finger, Desiree couldn't hold off any longer.

She felt the rush of her climax as it crashed over her, and wave after wave cascaded as Tully and Gamble began to pump her harder. Janet held her upright when her body threatened to crumple and kept her aloft with a firm grip on her nipples.

Tully was the next to come, his colossal eruption spurred on by Desiree's enthusiastic release. Thrown over the edge, Janet found her own release as Gamble's tongue worked her into a frenzy. Gasping for breath, she climbed off Gamble while Tully and Desiree disengaged. Gamble got to his knees and with a firm grip on the back of Janet's hair coaxed his cum-soaked cock into Janet's mouth only to be joined by Desiree as she helped Janet bring him to a close as well. Their two tongues crisscrossed up and down his length, sharing kisses intermittently. They playfully fought to take him into their mouths, giggling and slurping noisily. Just as he was about to shoot his load, both women held out their breasts to him, and he showered each of them until their tits glistened with his efforts.

Spent, they crumpled to the floor in a heap of entwined limbs. This time no one made mention of another round. It would have to wait until they rested, gathering their strength for more in the nearby future. With Gamble's head cradled in her arms, Desiree looked around them. Tully was soon snoring with Janet's head in his lap, and she too had her eyes closed. This was her opportunity to talk to Gamble, she realized. It was time.

"Can we talk?" she whispered to Gamble, whose eyes she could see were already half closed. He nodded and stood. He offered her his hand and led them to a quiet corner of the room, having sensed her need for privacy. They stood facing each other under the faint glow of the streetlight shining through the window.

"That was... nice," she stammered, suddenly shy and unsure of herself.

"Even though you broke your own rule?" He cocked one eyebrow at her. She could see by the glint in his eye that he was teasing her.

"Rules are for inhibited people. I'm a swinger, don't you know?"

He threw his head back and laughed softly. "I guess that makes me one, too."

She tucked her arm in his. "I suppose technically you're really only a swinger if you make a habit of it."

"So"—he cocked his head—"are you going to?"

She thought about that for a minute before answering. "I suppose I could include others in our leisurely activities. You know, maybe on the weekends after we've grown bored and tired of wowing one another."

His eyebrows arched. "We? Our?" His forehead creased as his doubt settled over his fine features. "I've never heard you use terms like that before."

"Well, that was the old Desiree, the one who hadn't just learned the sordid details of her mother's sex life, the one who hadn't yet had the best mind-blowing sex of her life, the one who didn't know what it felt like to lose her closest friend." There it was. She had said it, and he looked stunned. He continued to stare at her so she decided to keep going.

She worked her toe into the carpet, suddenly unable to look him in the eye anymore. "I wanted to start by saying I'm sorry."

"Don't be. This was fun." He shrugged easily.

"No." She laughed at his naivety. "I mean about being so difficult all this time."

"Oh." He grimaced. "I understand, Des. I always have. You want to preserve your independence." He shrugged again, and she could see he was starting to give up.

"No, Gamble, listen." She caught him by his hand. "It's not just that. I've been keeping myself from getting hurt, and I just realised I'm the one hurting myself. My shallow existence wasn't much of a life. Sure I have to do some re-evaluating in regard to how I view relationships, but for now, the most important thing I have discovered is that I love you. I always have." If she thought he had looked

stunned before, he was now three times that. His mouth hung open as though his heart had ceased beating.

“Wow,” he finally said and let out the breath he had been holding. “I’ve longed to hear you say that for so long that I can barely believe this moment is actually happening.”

She wrapped her arms around him, and pressed her face against his chest. “It is. I now know that I want to be with you, again and again, Gamble. I want to feel your presence in my life even if that means some days are hard.” She raised her head to meet his gaze. “I can give a few things up if they really bother you, and I know you’d do the same. It will just be hard.”

He stroked her hair. “We can make it whatever we want Desiree.” He looked softly down into her eyes. “And apparently what we want is to be kinky,” he added with a grin.

She snuggled up against him again, her relief making her knees weak. “Are you all right then?”

A laugh resonated in his chest. “You told me you love me. I feel like a million bucks.”

“Oh yeah?” She teased him, giving him little pinches. “You feel like a man to me.”

He spared her a brief smile but then sobered quickly, cupping her face in his hands. He brought his lips down to hers and kissed her deeply, a kiss so full of love and longing it made her want to cry with joy.

“I don’t want you to have to give up your way of life, Des.” He continued. “If you want to invite friends over once in awhile, you know, like Janet and Tully, I’m not against having a good time.” His cocky grin told her he was only half teasing. What they just experienced was incredible, and yes, she did want to do it again, as long as it was with him.

She smiled and caressed his cheek with the back of her hand. “I’m really glad to hear you say that because I think I owe Lisa and explanation.”

“Is this an explanation I can watch?” He wriggled his eyebrows. “You know how I feel about girl-on-girl.”

She thumped his chest playfully and was rewarded with his hand on her ass. He pulled her against him so she could feel the hardness of his cock telling her he was ready to go again. He was unbelievable and a perfect match for her own untamed libido.

“I guess there still is that matter of our bet.” She made a mock disapproving sound. “Shall we wake them or should we just make this a private party?”

A moan followed by a giggle came from the far wall.

“I think it’s only fair that we *all* work off our debt.” He gave her a sly wink and held out his hand. She slid her hand into his and allowed him to lead her across the room where her wildest dreams awaited her.

THE END

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Ever since Tara Nichols was a little girl, she has had an affinity for romantic adventures. With crushes on the likes of Tarzan and Hans Solo she grew up looking for the perfect gentleman rogue. When she is not writing about romance, erotica or paranormal fiction, she can be found tending her garden, keeping bees or reading a spy novel. Tara roams free on the flat prairie land in Manitoba Canada where she lives with her young son and husband.



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