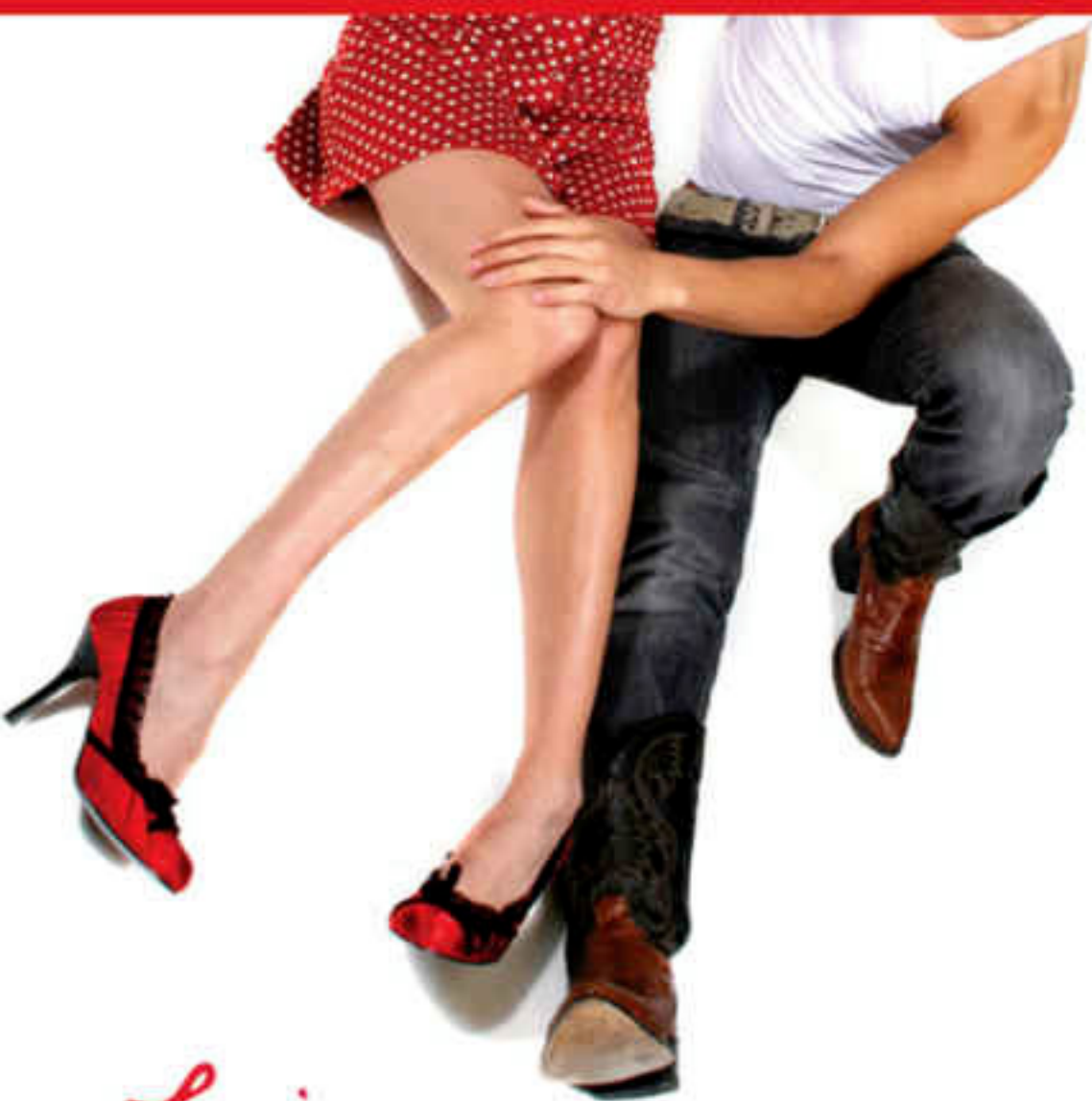


# ♡♡ DIBS



Lisa  
Wells

Dibs  
*by Lisa Wells*

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Was the doctor prescribing sex?

Lacey Valentine reclined on the leather couch in the swanky office of Dr. Sullivan and stared at the certificates hanging in expensive looking frames on the paneled walls. She could swear they were shouting loser at her.

She shifted and focused in on the woman billing her two hundred dollars an hour to mend her broken ego and deflated heart.

"Lacey, it's time you had sex with a man." The Doc said the words with a straight face and an arched brow, before sliding her glasses back on her nose.

Lacey sat up. "Do what?" Had she heard right? Was the doctor prescribing sex? Was that legal?

"You need to get back out there and have sex with a man." She held up her hand when Lacey started to interrupt. "It will help you move on. To get past this episode in your life."

Lacey couldn't believe it. Who was this woman who had invaded the Doc's body? "Do you have a man on retainer that comes when in you prescribe sex as a cure?" Lacey glanced at the door. Was a well-hung, great-looking man, standing on the other side just waiting for the signal to come on in and meet an easy lay?

Dibs  
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## **Dibs**

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This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously, and any resemblance to actual persons living or dead, business establishments, events, or locales, is entirely coincidental.

Dibs

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## **Dedication**

Thanks to my husband and my children

for giving me quiet time to write.

Thanks to my extended family for their support.

Thanks to Laura B. I dared her to run a marathon

and she dared me to write a book.

Thanks to Coyeatte E. who read my pages

even though the steam rising from the pages

took the curl out of her hair.

I love all of you.

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## Chapter 1

Lacey parked her cherry red, Mustang convertible quicker than a bride running late on her wedding day. She grabbed the necessities from the backseat: strawberries, whip cream, and condoms, then sprinted to her front door, coming to a teetering halt inches away from the newly painted frame. "Shoulders back, chest out, take a deep breath, and breathe in the fantasy," she told herself.

She grabbed the silver knob, twisted it, and gave the door a hardy push with her elbow. This was no fantasy, this was reality. A nooner with her fiancé. Afternoon sex, her favorite, rarely fit into their schedules.

The door didn't open. "What?"

*Why did Marty lock my front door? And why is the radio blaring?* It sounded like a Mardi Gras parade was marching through her house.

She shifted the bag of goodies and twisted the knob again. Definitely locked.

"Marty, you're here aren't you?" She turned and checked the driveway to make sure it was his car she'd seen. His Lincoln sat squarely in the center of it.

Lacey could understand locking her front door if she lived in downtown Kansas City, but not in a subdivision known for backyard barbeques and Christmas decorating contests. She lived in quiet little, no crime, Mistletoe, MO.

Lacey dug through her oversized purse for her house key. She found it, and a half-eaten chocolate bar, hiding in the pages of an erotica novel she was reading for research.

"We're losing precious time," she grumbled, as she unlocked the door. "Ready or not, here I come."

Marty wouldn't be ready. He wasn't expecting her. He'd be delightfully surprised.

As far as he knew, she was stuck in a meeting with a prospective couple. Lacey smiled in female anticipation. She loved surprises.

She gave the door a push and it opened. About one inch.

"Damn." Lacey stomped her foot. Her heel snapped and she lost her balance. She grabbed the doorframe for support.

"Marty, what are you doing?" She tried to slip her hand through the crack to dislodge the chain. "Are you hiding from the mob?" she muttered with a soft laugh.

*Her man and the mob? That would never happen.*

Her knuckles scraped plaster. "Ouch!" She couldn't dislodge the chain.

Of course, Marty wasn't hiding from the Mob. He was beige vanilla. Cute, but vanilla.

She rang the doorbell and shook her head in disbelief. "Who has to ring their own doorbell? The neighbors are going to think I've lost my marbles."

As if on cue, the neighbor's cat sauntered up and rubbed her leg with his face. "Sorry, Bedfellow, no time for you today," she said, and shoved the tabby cat away with her foot.

Marty didn't answer the door.

She wobbled to her car on her one good open-toe pump, grabbed the garage door opener, and entered the house through the back.

The house was sultry with jazz tunes; music to mate to. Lacey stood still and swayed rhythmically to a song she'd never heard. "Sounds like you've figured out I'm here," she murmured. "I could use this song in a harem fantasy." She glanced toward the stairs leading to her bedroom, hoping to see Marty standing there dressed for a fantasy. He enjoyed fantasies involving costumes.

The stairwell was vacant. "You must have seen me pull up and you're playing mysterious." It was the only way she could explain the music. Marty normally preferred the television to music. If he had music playing and the door locked, he *had* to be setting the mood for a sex game.

Games were a first-rate way to keep the sex alive in a relationship. Lacey dropped her keys on the laundry table, kicked off her shoes, and headed for the stairs.

Halfway up, the song ended, and before the next one could start, Lacey heard a sound. A moaning, breathy sound.

She stumbled. *Moaning, in my bedroom, and I'm not in there.*

Her knees buckled. She grabbed for the banister and sat next to her worthless dog who thought the third stair from the top was exclusively his territory.

Normally, Botox would growl at anyone who crowded his area. Today, he licked her arm, slobbering her out of her stupor. "What's the proper etiquette on interrupting someone jacking off?" she whispered.

The dog's attention span was zero-minus-fifty. Before the words coming out of her mouth could form a complete sentence, Botox returned his attention to his bone.

Lacey narrowed her eyes. "Who gave you a bone?" Botox was on a strict diet. Lately, he'd been accumulating wrinkles upon layers of wrinkles. *Marty must be sneaking you snacks. He's such a softy.*

Botox was a purebred English bulldog. Purebred didn't translate into immaculate manners. The damn dog left slobber on everything in his path.

Botox took his wet mystery bone and trotted down the stairs.

"Are you telling me to give Marty time to hide his bone?"

Lacey shook off the possibility. Botox wasn't smart enough to tell her he needed to go poop, let alone give her advice on men. The dumb dog had flunked out of obedience school three times before she taught him to sit.

He was probably being pissy because she smelled like Bedfellow.

*Focus.* "What am I going to do?" She strummed her fingers on the stairs.

*It'll embarrass both of us if I walk in on him. But, then again, if he's jacking off in my home, he has to know he could get caught.*

She looked toward her bedroom. *Does the thought of getting caught, turn you on?*

The thought of being caught aroused men. Lacey learned this early in her career as a sexual fantasy coordinator. Ask a man what they fantasize about and you hear, "Getting caught

with the maid; or getting caught in an elevator; or getting caught..." It always begins with getting caught.

She stood up straight and swallowed the lump in her throat. "Prepare to be caught." Living out fantasies helped her relate to customers who were often timid about acting on their desires to role play.

She tiptoed up the remaining steps to her bedroom door. "One, two, three," she whispered, before taking a deep breath and swinging the door open.

"Shit." The air in her lungs swooshed out, and she felt like someone kicked her in the abs.

Two people, not one, occupied her king-size bed, both in the throes of orgasm. Marty was on top; she recognized his rooster tail. She couldn't tell who was underneath him. But there was definitely someone underneath him.

Their mutual pleasure was loud; so loud, they didn't know she was there.

"You two-timing bastard. You're having great sex in my bed." Sweat popped out on her forehead and under her arms. The room started spinning. She grabbed the bedpost for support.

With her free hand, she grabbed the sheet twined around them and yanked it as hard as she could. The stupid sheet didn't budge. Four-hundred thread count tangled around their naked bodies and lodged solidly underneath the mystery body.

The vicious tug did manage to get their attention.

"What the hell?" Marty spat out. His mouth slammed shut when he noticed Lacey at the foot of the bed. "Lacey? What?

What are you doing here?" He reached over and turned off the CD player. He glanced at the blanket moving up and down over the area of his lower body. He placed his hand on the lump in an apparent attempt to still the movement.

A blonde emerged. "Did you say something? What's wrong Pooky Pooh?"

He didn't answer the blonde. He pushed her aside and out of Lacey's line of sight.

If he hoped Lacey hadn't gotten a good look, he was out of luck. Lacey saw the size of her boobs and the bleached highlights of her tangled hair. Neither were natural.

*Bitch.*

The woman wasn't willing to lay flat and pretend she wasn't there. Or, not smart enough to try. She pushed Marty's restraining arm away and sat up.

Was that him on her face?

*Oh God, it is him.*

Lacey doubled over and threw-up. She could've thrown up on the cozy rug at the end of the bed, but she didn't bother to move her head. Instead, she threw-up on their feet.

"Shit, Lacey. Did you have to do that?" Marty shouted in disgust.

Lacey's eyes dagged him. She picked his shirt up off the floor and wiped her mouth on it. She tossed the soiled shirt his way and stomped to her dresser. She picked up a brush, took careful aim, and flung it at them.

The damn brush flew past them both.

"Who is this woman?" the blonde asked. She pointed a shiny, green, fake nail at Lacey.

Marty gave the woman a terse shake of his head and turned beseeching eyes to Lacey. "Lacey, I'm sorry. I didn't mean for you to find out this way."

The dumb blonde cocked her head at him like a confused canine.

Lacey found her voice and took a step around the bed. "You didn't mean for me to find out this way? Who are you kidding? You're fucking in my bed." Her voice rose to a faint thread of hysteria.

"Yeah, but you had a meeting today. What are you doing home?" he whined.

Lacey made a low, guttural sound. She leaned toward him and poked her finger in his chest. "You are urinal scum. No, you're worse than urinal scum. You low-down, cheating bastard." She spat each word slowly and clearly. A war of emotions raged within her.

He blinked. Her language probably surprised the hell out of him. She snarled. Did he think she was going to react like a gentle lady?

Lacey fixed the bimbo with a killer stare and pointed at her. "You want to know who I am?" she asked coldly. "I'm his fiancé. Who the fuck are you?"

Marty didn't let the bimbo speak. "Lacey, this is Ms. January. Remember, darling, I judged that calendar competition last month? We met then."

*Oh, thank you so much for the formal introduction.*

Ms. January held out her hand.

*Unbelievable.* Does she really think I'm going shake her hand? Does her IQ even get out of the single digits?

Lacey took a step away from the bed and pointed toward the door. "Get out. Get out of my bed and out of my house." It was a good thing she didn't have a gun in the house. If she did, she would use it.

"Your house?" Ms. January asked. "This is your home? Marty, I thought you lived here." Ms. January looked from Lacey to Marty, cheeks red.

Marty shrugged his shoulders. "My house is in the country. It takes too long to drive out there for a quickie."

"Marty, you bad, bad boy." The blonde slapped at him and shrugged at Lacey as if to say, "my bad."

*Humor?* She's reacting with humor? Murderous impulses surged to Lacey's fingertips. If only she had a gun. Marty's dick wasn't that big, but she was confident she could nail it from close range.

"Does this mean the engagement is off?" Marty asked Lacey while sitting up and covering his vulnerable parts with his hands. "Honey, it doesn't have to be off. We can work through this."

The blonde gasped. "Marty? What are you saying?"

Lacey turned to leave. She had given this man two years of her life. And for what? Humiliation? She stopped and looked at the pair from over her shoulder. "You have five minutes to get out or I'm calling the cops."

Two minutes later, Lacey heard the click of the back door. They were gone. *Now what?*

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## Chapter 2

Covey James rubbed at the knot in the back of his neck and surveyed the audience from his vantage point behind the stage curtains.

He'd rather be shoveling cow manure on a hot summer day than waiting to appear on the *ToSay Show*. Unfortunately, he wasn't given the choice of shoveling shit. For about the fiftieth time in five minutes, he glanced over at the show's count-down clock. In five minutes, forty-eight seconds, he'd walk out on stage with his two brothers and grandmother. They'd take a seat in front of an audience and let the public, once again, pry into their private lives.

The audience contained several of his old girlfriends.

There were no valid reasons for any of them to be here. His life, his future, should be of no concern to them. What could they possibly care about today's show topic? Were they here to make a scene?

His jaw clenched and the knot grew tighter in his neck. He wasn't in the mood for drama. Rejected women, he knew all too well, could reek havoc in a man's life. Even one's who were rejected with diamonds as a goodbye gift.

Covey wasn't mentally prepared to handle havoc today. His mind was wrapped around his grandmother's health.

Two days ago, she dropped a bombshell on her family. They were still reeling from the shock. She had cancer.

The tabloid reports, she'd denied for a month, were true. Breast cancer. She was dying. The backbone of his family was

dying, and he was helpless to stop it. Just like he'd been helpless to stop the death of his parents when he was ten.

His grandmother was sitting to the side of the stage waiting to go on the show. Sitting beside her was one of his triplet brothers, Colton. His other triplet, Casp, had just barreled into the room. Covey looked at the clock. Four minutes, twenty-two seconds to go. Casp was thirty minutes late.

Covey watched him stop to say hello to their grandmother and then saunter toward him.

"Nice of you to show up on time," Covey said.

"Traffic was a bitch. I made it," Casp replied.

They both looked over at their grandmother.

"Do you think she looks pale?" Covey asked.

"Not really. I think she looks excited about something."

Covey shook his head in disagreement. "I think she looks pale." He motioned for Colton to join them. "How's Grandmother doing? Do you think she looks pale?"

Colton shrugged. "It's probably the lights making her look pale. Everyone looks pale under lights. She seems in good spirits."

Casp punched Covey in the arm and chuckled wickedly. "If you want to worry about someone, I'd worry about Alice. She's not looking too happy. What's up with her?"

Covey's focus shifted to the audience and he grimaced. The woman in question was sitting in the front row with a bored expression on her perfectly made-up face. She was damn good at looking bored. And being bored for that matter. "She's pissed I didn't drop everything to spend the weekend

with her." What was it about women and their unreasonable demands? If Alice wanted his undivided attention for the weekend, she could have called ahead.

Casp grabbed the curtain and pulled it a little further back. "Hey, isn't that Cathy and Deb out there?"

Covey didn't have to look. He'd already seen them. He nodded and sighed deep. "Yep."

Casp laughed. "Oh hell, Bro, don't look now. Isn't that the one-and-only-Sally, let's-get-married-Covey, sitting right next to Alice?"

A whispery thin blonde was sitting next to another whispery thin blonde. "The one and the same. They're coming out of the wood-work for this big interview," Covey muttered. "You'd think they were going to get a piece of the pie."

Casp's face lit up with amusement. "Wow, Alice is really going to be pissed if they say anything to her about you."

Covey let out another deep sigh. The knot in his neck was beginning to feel like a noose. He didn't care if Alice was pissed. The two of them had a good time when they were together, but if it wasn't good for her anymore, all she had to do was say so. No big deal to him.

He just hoped it wasn't going to be a big deal to her when they called it quits. He didn't want to hurt her. He was tired of the tears and woeful goodbyes when relationships ended.

He was always upfront with women about his limits. Permanent, marriage, commitment—those were all words he told them were not in his vocabulary. Women could call him a lot of things, but he never strung any of them along.

"I need to break things off with Alice," he said.

Casp looked slightly surprised. "Already. It's only been a month with this one. You usually keep them around for a couple of months. Is she talking aisle walking?"

Casp had hit the nail on the head. "Yes. I want a woman I can rely on to tell me the truth. One I can trust when they say they're not interested in marriage. Does that creature even exist?"

Casp didn't reply right away. He walked over to a mirror and combed his hair. He eventually looked over his shoulder at Covey. "You should date divorcees; they usually mean it. But, the virgin-aisle walkers, nope, they've got marriage in the back of their minds, no matter how much they deny it."

"I think you're right. It's like God programmed them with a wedding virus."

Casp strolled back over to Covey and clapped him on the back. "Problem with women is—you can't live with them, you can't live without them—so you've got to put up with them." He said the words as if he were the first person to ever voice the old saying.

Covey stepped back from the curtain. "I need some help. I've got a hot brunette I need you to take off my hands tonight. Can you get my back on this one?"

Casp gave him a calculating look. "Overbooked did you. What's in it for me?"

It was a fair question coming from most men. Not Casp. He was having a rough spell in the female department. An unfortunate break-up technique on his part recently landed him on some pretty nasty lists.

"Do you really think you're in a position to ask for more than a give-me date?" Covey inquired with raised eyebrows. Casp should be happy to have any possibilities pointed his way.

Colton glared their way. "Shush," he hissed.

Covey and Casp acknowledged his request, and then ignored it.

Colton was the appropriate one of the three. The one who actually used the manners he'd learned from their grandmother during all those Sunday afternoon formal lunches with coats and ties. Colton was a pain in the ass, stuffed shirt.

Casp was the partier of the three. Covey was the heart breaker.

"Oh, that's about to blow over," Casp assured Covey.

There wasn't enough time for Covey to debate the point. He took a direct approach to getting a yes out of his brother. "She has a friend with a pair of tits that won't stop. I'll set you two up later on down the road," he told Casp.

Covey didn't normally refer to a woman's body in such a frat-boy style. But, it was a language Casp understood. One he normally bought into very quickly.

Not today. Today, he looked out into the audience with a far away expression. "I'll think about it," he muttered.

Covey sighed. Alice and Sally were chatting. What could they possibly have in common? Besides him.

Part of him was sad to end his relationship with Alice. He hated ending relationships. She caught his eye, gave him a

curt nod followed by a full-lip pout. On the other hand, the woman was a bitch, she'd handle it.

Casp gave Covey a wily look. "Big tits aren't good enough. I want a favor in exchange."

Covey turned his attention back to Casp and the subject at hand. "Since when are boobs not a good payoff. I've done the same for you with less of a payoff."

"Yeah, and you went to bed with her and stole her from me."

They were talking about a high school cheerleader. "I told you, she was all over me. You didn't need that kind of gal in your life."

"And you did?" Casp asked, clearly irritated all over again at the memory of his brother taking his girl back in tenth grade.

Covey shrugged. He couldn't tell Casp the real reason behind his relationship with her. She promised to teach him about sex. Tenth grade and still a virgin, he was ready to learn. "What is it you want?" he asked his brother.

"I'm supposed to be on a game show next weekend. Take my place on the show; and I'll take yours on your date."

"What kind of game show?" Covey asked. At one time, he could hold his own with Casp, but not anymore. One or two women at a time were enough for him. Casp stilled juggled a half-dozen at once. Colton was the only one of them who stuck to a single woman at a time.

"A dating show," Casp answered.

Covey laughed. "Forget it. I don't need help getting a date." Game show, dating show. There was a difference. "Is

that how you've been restocking your supply now that the word is out all over the internet that you're a jerk?"

Casp's name had hit the Don't Date This Man Blog three months ago. At first, it was funny. But when women started turning him down because they'd seen his name listed there, it wasn't funny anymore.

Casp shrugged and leaned against a stage prop. "Suit yourself. Tell Alice you have plans. She's a big girl."

Covey knew he was bluffing. He wouldn't pass on female company. "Why don't you want to do the show? You love that stuff?" Covey questioned him.

The host walked onto the stage. "Audience, today's guests on the *ToSay Show* are sexy, they're triplets, and they were born and raised right here in our home state of Texas. Of course, y'all know who I'm speaking of; today we have the three James' brothers and their beautiful grandmother. Let's give them a hand and get them out here on stage."

"I have a gig. *Playgirl* spread," Casp whispered, before taking a step toward the stage curtain.

Covey glanced at his grandmother. She was frowning toward him and Casp. She wasn't big on whispering. She would be even less thrilled to know one of her grandsons was going to do a spread in *Playgirl*.

"Fine. I'll do it," Covey whispered. He knew better than to ask Colton for help. The man was into intellect and meaningful conversation in his women. The woman he dated could be totally flat-breasted, and Colton would think she was great as long as she was smart.

Today was their thirtieth birthday. A day designated as inheritance day by a court decision twenty-years ago. When the, *ToSay Show* contacted them asking for an exclusive interview, they'd accepted because their grandmother asked them to. She wanted the world to know she'd kept her promise.

She was to be the central focus of the interview. Their job was to sit and answer the questions at the end.

"Mrs. James, twenty-years ago, when your son and his wife died, you fought for custody of your three grandsons. Why did you have to fight for the right to raise them?" asked the male reporter.

The interviewer was too young to remember the media circus surrounding the court battle. Covey wasn't. He remembered all too clearly the months following the death of his parents. His mother died in a drowning accident. His father died less than a month later. His chute didn't open when he jumped out of the plane. There'd been a lot of tabloid speculation that he committed suicide because he couldn't bear to go on without his wife.

Covey glanced protectively at his grandmother. She sat stiff backed in the regal pose of a southern belle. A pose Covey had seen her use many times to handle the media. There had been a lot of media the first few years after their parents died. She'd grieved privately the loss of her son and daughter-in-law. The boys could hear her at night crying in her bedroom. As a result, they learned at an early age that love hurts. They vowed to love no one but each other and their grandmother.



"The court wanted to split my boys up. I wouldn't allow it. They deserved to be raised together as a family," she replied.

The journalist nodded his head. "Why did the court fight you on your request for custody?"

Mrs. James fixed him with a puckered brow. "My age was an issue. There were those who thought I was too old to successfully raise three rambunctious boys."

"I see."

"I'm sure you don't," Mrs. James said with a delicate sigh. "The boys were due to inherit a lot of money. Their distant relatives wanted a share of the money."

"How did you manage to win custody? After all, you were in retirement, weren't you?"

"I offered to put the boy's money in a trust fund they couldn't touch until they turned thirty. I swore I would raise them on my income. The court realized I was offering my grandson's my love. Much like the bible story of the babe claimed by two mothers. The mother who was willing to give up her child instead of losing half of him was the one who was given the babe."

"So, you used a bible story to win your boys?"

"I used the strategy of the woman in the bible story. It worked like a charm. Just like I told my lawyer it would."

"Are you saying you were after the money and tricked the courts into giving you custody?"

Covey, Casp, and Colton all jumped to their feet ready to defend the honor of their grandmother. How dare the idiot make such an accusation?

Their grandmother chuckled. "Sit down boys. I don't need you to defend me against this pup." She looked at the interviewer and frowned. "My grandsons are my world. I would have done whatever it took to keep them and raise them. Placing their money in trust funds was nothing compared to the lengths I was prepared to go to in order to keep them together and under my roof."

The interviewer looked at the boys and then at her. "How would you describe your income twenty years ago?"

"It was modest. I was a retired school teacher."

"But, wasn't your father very wealthy? Didn't you inherit when he died?"

"He left all of his money to the Humane Society. The boys and I obviously couldn't survive on my retirement. So, I continued drawing my teacher retirement and went back to work as a substitute to raise them."

"Why did your father leave all of his money to the Humane Society?"

"That is none of your business, young man."

"Okay. Did you touch any of your grandson's inheritance to help raise them? Money for essentials?"

"No."

"Do you think that was fair to them? I'm sure there were things they had to do without on your income. Things they would have been given if their parents were alive."

"They had love, and they had each other. That was more than money could buy. That was how my son was raised. He did okay. He made his fortune. It wasn't handed to him by his dad. Now, my grandsons have made their own way in life."

Colton is a journalist, Covey's a successful entertainer, and Casp is a much sought after model. If they had money handed to them when they were ten, they might never have found their own way in life."

"So, you gave up at least fifteen years of retirement for them. Do you have any regrets?"

"Absolutely not. I would do it all over again."

"Mrs. James, I know this is a sensitive subject, but the tabloids have reported you have breast cancer. Is it true?"

Covey, Casp, and Colton all jumped up, and Covey's chair fell over. "That is none of your business. We didn't come on this show to talk about health issues," he said, before bending over and picking up his chair.

Their grandmother raised her eyebrows delicately, and a small smile played at the corners of her lips. "Boys, behave. I'm a grown woman. I can take care of myself." She turned her attention to the reporter. "Yes. It's true. My days are numbered."

Covey looked at her in astonishment. *She answered the question.* She told the world what she'd just told them this week. Why? Why would she go public with her cancer? She was a private woman. She didn't share easily. He sat down and looked at his brothers for answers. They shrugged.

"Do you have any goals to accomplish in the short time you have left?" the reporter asked.

*Goals? What kind of damn question is that? Grandmother's going to tell him to move on to another line of questioning.*

"I want what every grandmother wants. I want to live to see my grandson's happily married. I had a long and happy

marriage. I can think of nothing greater than to see such for my grandsons. I want head-over-heels, can't live without you, love for them, like their parents had."

Covey, Colton, and Casp all sat up straight. Covey's stomach lurched.

His grandmother sat with a demure smile on her face and refused to look at them.

Covey felt sweat roll down his back. *Who can say no to a last public wish?* She had them over a barrel. *The cancer must be affecting her brain.* Was it possible for breast cancer to spread to the brain that quickly? The grandmother he knew would never pressure them into something they didn't want to do. How could they possibly grant her this final wish?

God, his grandmother was asking the impossible. Last wishes were serious business. How do you tell the woman who sacrificed everything for you, that you won't try to honor her last wish and start looking for the woman of your dreams? How do you tell the public you're not going to honor her wish and at least try to make it come true? You can't. It was as simple as that. Panic, like he'd never known, welled inside Covey's throat. Fear, worse than the first time he took the stage in front of a sold-out crowd, swept through him.

His grandmother had cancer because of him and his brothers. For over fifteen years, she'd spent all of her energy on them and didn't take the time, or the money, to care for herself. She didn't get her yearly mammograms. Exams, which would have caught the cancer when it was still curable. He felt as if his breath was cut off. They owed her.

Covey looked at his brothers. Shocked faces looked back at him. He didn't have to hear them say the words. They were triplets. It was time for all of them to go out on a search for wives. The one thing the three of them swore they'd always avoid was now unavoidable. How had it happen? As young boys, they'd developed a fool-proof, risk-management plan. The day after they buried their dad, they made a pact never to love another soul but each other and their grandmother.

"Are any of them engaged?" the reporter ask.

The three men squirmed in their seats. Covey wasn't against marriage. Especially for others. In fact, there was a part of him that longed for a happy, long-lasting relationship. His parents had been so happy and in love. He just suffered from a phobia to commitment. Not really commitment, to painful loss.

"No. Unfortunately, none of them have found the woman of their dreams. But, I've seen the future for Covey. I see love right around the corner for him." His grandmother looked his way and winked.

Covey gulped and tried to smile back at her.

The members of the audience began murmuring, and the reporter leaned forward. "That's right. You are something of a psychic. So, you're telling us you've seen the future for Covey James?"

"Yes. That's what I said. Now, I'm not saying anything else. It's none of your business."

The reporter looked into the camera. "Audience, the three bachelors in front of you have each just came into a very

large fortune. It sounds like they may be looking for wives. What questions do you have?"

\* \* \* \*

Two hours later, the men sat in Covey's living room.

"I say we fake it," Colton suggested.

Covey's mouth fell open, and he stared at his brother.

"What?" Colton asked him defensively.

"We can't fake love. Grandmother won't fall for it?" What had gotten into Colton? He was the sensible one. His role in the James' family was to be the voice of sensibility.

Colton shrugged. "Sure we can fake love? We'll hire women to play the part of our wives until Grandmother dies. It's the only answer. We can't really get married. We agreed. We're all staying single. It's the only way to avoid loss."

Covey wanted to agree with his suggestion. He wanted to find a fake wife, make his grandmother happy and then dump the fake wife. But, the honorable part of him wouldn't allow him to lie to his grandmother. She was too good for that. She'd raised them. Sacrificed for them. He wouldn't lie to get around making her final wish come true. "It's her dying wish. We can't tell her no."

"You're not really considering marriage are you?" Colton asked.

"I don't want to get married any more than either of you do. But, we can't fake it. Grandmother will do the ring test on any woman we bring home."

Both of his brothers groaned. The ring test was her specialty. She predicted the stability of an upcoming marriage

with a ring passed down to her for four-generations. Its original owner was a witch who was burned at the stake. She threw the ring to her granddaughter right before they set her aflame. If the ring swung side to side, your marriage wasn't meant to be. If it swung front to back, you were truly in love with one another. If it went in circles, the girl was knocked up and Grandmother would whack you with her walking stick.

Casp sighed. "You're right. God, we've got to really look for true love."

"I'm not looking for true love," Colton said firmly. "I'll find a fake wife, but I'm not looking for true love. I refuse to do that."

Covey wanted to echo Colton's sentiment. He couldn't. Avoiding love to avoid pain was a pact made when they were barely eleven. It was a childish solution to a complicated emotion. He'd known this for a while, but had refused to look too closely at the issue.

Casp punched Covey in the arm. "Well, I know the first place you're going to be looking?"

Covey gave him a blank look. What was he talking about? "You do? Where?"

"*The Dibs Dating Show*," Casp said.

Covey closed his eyes. He'd forgotten their deal. "How in the hell did you get on a dating show?" he asked, while massaging the knot in his neck.

Casp chuckled. "It sounded like fun. A weekend of sex with a desperate woman."

Covey had too many things on his mind to go on a dating show. He needed to sort out some things. "I've changed my mind. You go," Covey said.

"You have to. There's a contract. Besides, I've already called, and they agreed to let you take my place."

When had Casp made time to call the show and break his contract? "I'll break the contract. I can't go on the show and look for a wife at the same time. None of us know how much longer Grandmother has."

"You can't break the contract," Casp told him.

Covey sighed. He was the oldest of the three boys. He was born three minutes earlier than Casp and five minutes earlier than Colton. As the oldest, it was up to him to set a standard. To brave what they all feared most. "Fine, I'll find a wife first. Once I've found one, it's your turn Casp. Colton, if Grandmother is still alive after Casp finds one, you're going to have to bite the bullet and find one for yourself."

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## Chapter 3

Lacey Valentine reclined on the leather couch in the swanky office of Dr. Sullivan and stared at the credentials hanging in expensive looking frames on the paneled walls. She could swear they were shouting "you're a loser" at her.

She shifted her position and focused on the woman who was billing her two-hundred dollars an hour to mend her broken ego and deflated heart.

The Doc was sitting in a straight back chair with a pen and notepad. She was waiting for Lacey to speak. Two-hundred dollars a session and Lacey had to do all the work.

Dr. Sullivan radiated the classic shrink image. Dark suits, small eye glasses, and a tightly wound bun. If she had a body beneath the shapeless suits she wore, Lacey couldn't tell.

In the beginning stages of her therapy, eight sessions ago, Lacey would try to wait Dr. Sullivan out to see if she would cave and start the session. Dr. Sullivan never started. Silence was okay with her. The woman would be a barrel of laughs at a party. The woman's poor husband must not require a lot of excitement in his life.

Lacey, on the flipside, hated silence. She liked noise and people. She liked distractions, happiness. She abhorred the dark cloud covering her since she walked in on Marty. It was like living in a rainy day time warp.

Today, though, Lacey wasn't depressed; she was pissed. Rightfully, pissed. She looked at her therapist. "They're getting married. Their announcement is in the paper." *The*

*bimbo's such an unbelievable idiot for saying "I do" to Urinal Scum.*

Three months ago, she'd discovered Marty in bed with Ms. January, and now their engagement was plastered in the paper. They actually announced their engagement on the eve of what should have been her and Marty's wedding night. No way was this a coincidence. He was an ass; the bimbo was a dumbass.

Lacey was glad she'd given up any pretense of loving Marty. They were, she could now admit, a convenience couple. What bothered her was the whole issue of being cheated on.

*Who could you trust if you couldn't trust your fiancée? How could you ever believe in fidelity in marriage if you couldn't even keep a man happy sexually while you were dating? What had been wrong with her? Why had she been cheated on?* She kicked her heels off and threw her legs over the side of the couch as she rattled off the litany of questions to herself.

The Doc leaned toward her. "I saw their announcement. How does that make you feel?" No emotion marked her face.

Lacey snorted. "Like shit." Why did therapists ask dumb questions about how things make you feel, when it's obvious how they make you feel? If it made her feel good, she wouldn't be in therapy.

Dr. Sullivan stopped writing and looked at her thoughtfully. "How long are you going to let him make you feel like shit?"

Lacey groaned. Dr. Sullivan came highly recommended by Lacey's best friend, Maddison. Perhaps, she should have checked around for some other references. "Do you think I

have control over the way I feel? It's not like I bought a freakin' ticket to get on this wooden rollercoaster ride."

"Yes. I do think you have some control you're not exercising. You have a choice to enjoy life."

"How?" Lacey snapped and plopped her feet down on the couch cushions.

There was a long pause. The Doc took off her glasses, pulled a white silk hanky out of her suit pocket, and proceeded to clean her glasses with the exquisite piece of material.

Lacey drummed her fingers on the couch. *Is it my turn to say something? No, it's hers. God, she takes forever to answer. She's cleaning her freakin' glasses on my time.*

"Lacey, it's time you had sex with a man." The Doc said the words with a straight face and an arched brow, before sliding her glasses back on her nose.

Lacey sat up. "Do what?" Had she heard right?

Was the doctor prescribing sex? Was that legal?

"You need to get back out there and have sex with a man." She held up her hand when Lacey started to interrupt. "It will help you move on. To get past this episode in your life."

Lacey couldn't believe it. Who was this woman who had invaded the Doc's body? "Do you have a man on retainer that comes in to have sex with your patients when you prescribe sex as a cure?" Lacey glanced at the door. Was a well-hung, great-looking man standing on the other side just waiting for the signal to come on in and meet an easy lay?

Dr. Sullivan laughed. "No. I'm afraid I don't offer that service. You'll have to come up with your own man. But, I

think you need to take this step to put Marty, and his calendar girl, behind you. He's obviously placed you behind him."

The arousing image of an X-rated movie star coming through the doors flew from Lacey's mind. *Placed me behind him*. The doctor was hitting below the belt. There was no call, none whatsoever, to be so bloody blunt? "Oh, I'm over him. Don't worry your analytical mind about that. In fact, I don't even know why I'm still coming to see you." Lacey searched for more words that would salvage her pride. "I guess I come out of habit. I must be subconsciously trying to help you put your kids through college or something." *Take that you witchy woman*. She sat up and searched for her shoes. *What kind of doctor makes fun of her patients?*

A touch of a smile lifted the corners of Dr. Sullivan's lips. "I appreciate the help, Lacy, but I don't have children. I'm not married."

Lacey clenched her hands. She's having fun at my expense. "Go figure." Lacey sniffed loudly to add emphasis to her insult. The Doc was kind of old to be single wasn't she? Thirty, thirty-three. Past her prime.

Dr. Sullivan ignored her gnarly comment. "I do agree; you don't need to see me any longer. In fact, why don't we make this your graduation project?"

Lacey was being thrown in the snow and expected to swim instead of ski. Sex! She couldn't think of a man she wanted to have dinner with, let alone sex. "A graduation project? I have to grad-u-ate from therapy?" she questioned.

As a therapy rookie, Lacey had no idea if this was a normal assignment? *Normal?* When was the last time her life could be described as normal? *It does sound like a fun graduation project. Beats the hell out of the thesis I did on the male psyche for my Masters.*

"Yes. I think you need to get back in the saddle." The good doctor walked behind her desk and picked up a file.

Lacey leaned against the arm of the couch. "What happens if I don't? Do I flunk out of therapy?" *I've never flunked anything.*

Dr. Sullivan scribbled on a post-it and stuck it in the folder. "Think about it. It's your decision. But, I think it would help you move on. Remember, it's not what happens to you that matters..."

Lacey nodded her head and rolled her eyes. "It's how you react to what happens that makes you the person you become," Lacey finished the mantra.

Dr. Sullivan nodded, and the session ended.

\* \* \* \*

Lacey called Maddison as soon as the Doc's door shut behind her. "You are never going to believe my graduation assignment from therapy?"

"Graduation assignment?" Maddison was at the gym participating in a spinning class. Her labored breathing made it hard for Lacey to understand her.

"She wants me to have sex?" Lacey told her loudly. A gentlemen walking toward her gave her a startled look and

tripped on a non-existent obstacle. "Stop spinning and listen," Lacey shrieked, ignoring the raised eyebrows of the man.

"Who does?" Maddison asked.

"My therapist, Dr. Sullivan. The one you assured me was normal, even though she spends her day with abnormal people," Lacey whispered.

The whirring noise of the spin cycle ceased. "She wants you to have sex with her?" Maddison exclaimed.

"No. With a man," Lacey hissed into the phone.

"She hired a man to have sex with you?" Maddison screamed straight into Lacey's right eardrum.

Lacey jumped and held the phone away from her ear. *Finally, we're on the same wave length.* She walked out the doors of the office building and placed the phone to her left ear. "That's what I asked her. She acted like it was a weird question. Can you believe I have to come up with my own guy for sex?" The least the Doc could have done was supply a man for the job.

Maddison laughed, and then gave her signature purr. "You go girl. Do you have someone in mind?"

Lacey smiled. The two of them were opposites. The only thing they ever had in common was the purple crayon they both wanted in second grade. Which lead to a shoving match. Which lead to a time-out in the *I'm sorry chair*. Which lead to a decision to lie and say they liked each other so they could get out of the chair. Somehow, they just never got around to remembering they didn't really like each other, and they became the best of friends by the end of the day.

Lacey wiped the smile from her thoughts and tried to sound accusing. "You're not shocked at all, are you?"

"No, it sounds like a good idea. Do *you* have a man in mind?" Maddison demanded to know.

*Do I have a man in mind? Let's see. Elvis has left the building.* "What do you think?"

"Pleeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeease, tell me you do," Maddison screamed. "It's been months, and he was cheating on you."

"Kill the bastard pig," was shouted from someone in the background.

*She has me on speakerphone.* Lacey groaned. *Now the whole spinning class knows about my sex life.* "Silly me, while I was dating Marty exclusively for two years, I forgot to line up some what-ifs for get-over-him sex."

"May he die a terrible death," Maddison said.

She said these words every time Marty's name escaped Lacey's lips.

Lacey heard female cheers in the background. "Amen," she muttered.

A horrible death was too good for Marty. He deserved something really bad. Lacey just didn't know what would be bad enough to make them even.

"I have the perfect guy for you to do it with," Maddison cried out.

"Who?" Her idea of a perfect man and Maddison's idea of a perfect man weren't identical.

"My neverfailbootycall man." There were raucous cheers in the background.

"Do you really call him that?" Lacey tried to visualize how the words would look in writing.

"Yes. Do you want his number?" Maddison asked. The excitement in her voice crept through the cell and threatened to attach itself to Lacey.

"No ... Yes ... Oh, God. Maybe." Lacey wasn't at all sure about this assignment. Sex. Actual sex. Not, grab-a-vibrator sex. Sex with a stranger. *Could she do that? Would she do that?*

"Come on. He's terrific. If you're going to have sex to get over Marty, may he die a horrible death, you might as well have it with the best in the business."

Loud cheers erupted and blasted her eardrums. The class was getting much too involved in Lacey's business. "Amen," she responded and then snorted in disbelief. "Is he really the best?" What were the job criteria for the title of "the best?"

"We don't call him Neverfail for nothing."

*Okay, neverfail is a good criterion.*

Ego boosted by Maddison and under the peer pressure of her spin class cohorts, Lacey acted out of character. "Give me his number?" If having sex would get a new chapter started in her life, so be it.

*I'll do it for my business.* Fantasy Weekends was suffering. Her clients wanted new sexual-fantasies to live out with their spouses. They wanted never-before-handed-out fantasies. Who could blame them. That's what her company was famous for. The only problem was she couldn't think of any. All she could think of was ways to get even with Marty.



It was time to either get on with life or rename her business, Revenge Fantasies.

Maddison gave a whoop of glee and rattled off the number, "732-6969."

Lacey hung up and punched in Neverfail's number before she could think herself out of the graduation project. "Hi. Is this Neverfail?"

*I can't believe I just asked that question.*

"You got it baby. Who gave you the Luv Number?" The voice, on the other end, was a mixture of surfer-dude meets marijuana-dude. Heavy on the marijuana mix.

"Maddison gave me your number." Lacey felt three degrees of red burn her cheeks. She wasn't a hussy by nature. She was more first date equals first base kind of girl.

"How is the old girl doing? I haven't seen her, in like, a couple of months."

*I think Marty's bimbo might be smarter than you.* "She's fine. Listen. Are you interested in having sex?"

*What kind of girl asks a complete stranger that kind of question?* Is this what she had to look forward to? Begging guys to have sex with her?

"Sure, why not. I'm always interested in sex. Your place or mine?"

"Yours." Lacey set up the time and wrote down his address. She drove to Victoria's Secret for some courage in the form of sexy panties. She changed in the dressing room and threw her old underwear away. From there, she drove to his apartment. She sat in the parking lot long enough to get her breathing under control and then opened the door. Taking

a determined step out of the vehicle, she locked it and never looked back.

Time to think would kill the moment. Kill her courage. If she thought, she would never go through with it.

Neverfail answered on the second knock. He was tan, buff, semi-handsome, and mostly naked. The stability of a towel, riding low on his hips, appeared to totally hinge on a tiny piece of material tucked in between skin and more material right below a heart tattoo. It wasn't a large towel.

It was a piece of fabric that begged a woman to take a closer look. It was wanton, enticing a woman to view the long legs stretching miles from underneath it. It was scandalous in the way it begged a woman to yank it just to see the hidden parts. The towel was also damn thin. Not at all thick and fluffy. It was see-through, touch-me, forget-the-legs, thin.

A movement, originating behind the middle of the towel, brought her out of her trance. *Not bad.*

"Yo, you must be Lacey. Nice bod. I took a shower for you," he said, pointing to his towel.

*I bought new underwear for you. Was he expecting her to yank down her jeans and show him her purchase?*

No, not yet. *That will come later. Let's get the kiss out of the way, first.*

Lacey handed him a package of condoms and walked past him into the living room. "I've never done this before."

*I've never had sex with a stranger; I've never had to fight the urge to rip a towel off a man and have my way with him in his front door.*

Lacey's knees began to wobble. *Have I ever been so nervous about sex? I never should have agreed to this. Never.* She leaned a hip against the wall to keep upright.

Neverfail gave her a goofy look and grinned. "No problem. I like virgins. Totally groovy." He put two thumbs up in the air and winked.

"A virgin?" *He thinks I'm a virgin? Do I look like a virgin? I was going for sex goddess.*

He nodded. "It's okay. I get it. You've been saving yourself for Mr. Right, and now, you're tired of waiting. Right?"

Lacey opened her mouth to explain her experience, but quickly snapped it shut. This was sex. He was her studmuffin. *Is that what a gal calls a surfer dude?*

*Who cares? I want sex. Stop thinking...*

He snapped the towel away from his waist, and Lacey struggled for breath. If she wore dentures, they would have landed on his linoleum floor.

"Neverfail to the rescue," he exclaimed, with a boyish smile.

"Oh ... my." Words failed her. Her lungs failed her.

He gave her a look of amusement. "All right, the lady's impatient. I dig keen women," he said, giving her the thumbs up thing again. He widened his stance and pointed to his package. "Nice, uh?"

On a scale of one to ten, she'd have to admit his penis looked like a ten. Long, thin, straight up, no leaning. She nodded, and her finger did a twirly motion all on its own accord.

She couldn't stop it. She was treating the hunk of beef like a stripper. Like a meat market purchase. If she had any dollars handy, she would get them out, lick them, and stick them on him. *How gross is that, licking a dollar to get it to stick to a naked man's body.* But, lick it she would.

She was enthralled with this beautiful man in front of her. His ass was ... well it was perfectly formed. Tanned. *No tan lines.* Was he a regular at the tanning beds?

He gave her a look from over his shoulders. "Have I passed inspection?" he asked, with a funny laugh and a cocky lift to his eyebrows.

Lacey felt a weight lifted from her. She felt free. Alive. Horny. Her response flew out of her mouth. "I believe in making my decisions based on actions, not the scenery. Where are we doing this at?"

How could her voice sound so calm when her insides were a quivering bowl of excited oatmeal? Fantasies were her bread and butter, but you played them out with someone you know. You didn't calmly play them out with a man you met five minutes ago.

Who went to a stranger's house for sex? No one with a brain would do this. Yet, here she was? *Why?*

So what if she didn't graduate from therapy. She could be a dropout. So what if they forced her to go to basement meetings and say, "Hi. My name is Lacey. I'm a therapy dropout."

She turned to leave. This was a bad idea. She should sue her therapist for suggesting it.

Neverfail grabbed her by the waist. Pressing against her, he reached in front of her and flipped a switch on a stereo. A sultry tune invaded the room.

It was their song. Marty and the bimbo's.

"Turn it off," she hissed, and yanked out of his grip. Would she ever get past the humiliation of being cheated on? "I hate that song."

He smiled and pushed another button. "I've got more tunes we can ball to." Seventies music filtered into the room. "How's that? Better?"

She nodded her head.

"Are you coming?"

Perhaps he meant it literally. In her mind, he was asking if she was cuming. She needed this to move on. She was here to get over Marty.

Neverfail wasn't a stranger. He was Maddison's booty call man. He was safe ... as long as they used condoms.

She closed her eyes. *Desperate times call for desperate measures.* She made her decision and opened her eyes.

"Yes. Yes, I am. And, we're going to have wild, noisy sex." She sashayed out of his arms, slowly raised her shirt over her head, and tossed it on the floor.

He let out a war whoop. "My lady, you've a really bitchin' bod." He winked and walked into his bedroom where he executed a huge back flop onto the bed.

Lacey stood in his doorway. *He's an overgrown kid. I'm going to have sex with an overgrown kid who's as horny as a teenager.*

She gave an internal shrug. *This is going to be fun.*

He reached for her and pulled her onto the bed. With steady hands, *experienced hands*, he undid her bra and slipped her arms out of it.

Not sure what to do, she fixated on the main ingredient he had to offer. It was like a beacon in the night leading her to safety.

"Nice," she said with a smile. And, it was. The man was purely perfect to look at. She reached for the snap of her jeans and wiggled out of them, taking her panties at the same time. She lay before him naked and waited for his observation.

He leaned up on an elbow. A lock of long blonde hair fell over his face. "So, do you like the top, the bottom, sixty nine, what?" he asked.

*He could at least wax poetic over my body.* Lacey bit her lip and counted to three. She wasn't going to run away. She was going to do this. She hadn't traveled to his bedroom for romance. "What's wrong with trying all of them?" she asked.

"All right," he said, while grabbing for a condom.

\* \* \* \*

One hour later, Lacey left Neverfail's apartment and walked quickly to her car. They'd done all but sixty-nine. Sixty-nine, in her opinion, was best left for a man you cared about. She didn't bother to see if he was watching her from behind his beaded blinds. She could care less if he was watching. Let him watch. She wouldn't be back.

She peeled out of the parking lot on tires screeching only marginally louder than the screeching noise she was making inside the car.

She whipped her car into the first gas station she saw. With trembling hands, she called Maddison. "Maddison, he failed," she said accusingly. If she was a smoker, now would be a perfect time to smoke. She grabbed the gum out of her purse and popped a piece in her mouth.

"Who failed?"

Lacey refused to answer. There was no way she could put the humiliation into words? What was supposed to have gotten her past a humiliating time in her life had only created a new one.

She popped another piece of gum and chewed furiously. *I can't believe this is happening to me.*

There was a gasp from Maddison. "What do you mean he failed?" she demanded to know.

Lacey looked around to see if anyone was listening. "Neverfail, failed. That's who. I didn't have an orgasm," she hissed. She'd tried, she'd really tried. She'd put her all into the moment and nothing. Not even a tiny, *ohmygod*.

"You're kidding? He's the best. How can you not have an orgasm with him?" Maddison shrieked.

*Good fuckin' question.* "Dammit, Maddison. I don't know. I just didn't."

*It's me; I know it's me.* Lacey blew a bubble and popped it loudly.

"What did he say?" Maddison asked.

"He. Doesn't! Know." Lacey said, between clenched teeth. "I faked it and left." She'd actually faked it several times.

She'd closed her eyes and tried to relax. She'd pretended he was three different guys. All fantasies which usually tripped her trigger. None of them worked. Not even close.

Oh sure, she'd gotten wet. Who wouldn't get wet around him? But, there had been no build up, no explosion. Even after she told him to stop talking and just fuck her. *Who uses that kind of language on a first date?*

"Well, you should have told him. He would have kept trying till he'd rung your bell."

"Yeah, right. There's no way I was going to tell a guy, with a name like Neverfail, that I'm broken and apparently can't have an orgasm." *I should have shot Marty in the balls when I had a chance.* That would have been productive therapy.

It was obvious Neverfail knew what he was doing. He hadn't failed. She had. It was her fault. He'd been patient and creative and eager. It had definitely been her; she wasn't reaching orgasm.

Maddison purred. "He's use to being used. He wouldn't have cared. And, you're not broken. Don't you dare say that."

"What am I going to do?" Lacey asked. She wanted to go home, crawl into bed, and pull the covers over head.

She started the car's engine and headed toward her new sanctuary. It was a condo in Cozy Corners Estates. Complete with a new bed, new mattress, new curtains, and new rugs. Nothing of her life with Marty was left except for the memory.

"You know," Maddison said, in a thoughtful voice, "I'm not really that surprised you didn't have an orgasm."



Lacey jerked the steering wheel in surprise, and the car behind her started honking. She got the car back into her lane, gave the guy behind her a short little, so sorry wave, and fumed over Maddison's words. "You're not? Why would you say that?" she asked, in a voice one octave below outrage. She was not a sexual prude.

She was the girl who started a business that helped others enjoy married sex. Why would her best friend not be surprised she couldn't have an orgasm? She threw her gum out the window and jumped when the car behind her honked furiously. She resisted the impulse to flip him the bird. It wasn't his fault she'd just incurred the most humiliating sexual experience of her life. *Maybe not the first, but at least the second.*

Sure, she wasn't sexually promiscuous. Three lovers; four if you counted Neverfail. Which made her kind of a prude compared to Maddison's sexual adventures. But, she'd enjoyed hot sex with three of them. Not at the same time, of course. But, she'd had orgasmic sex with each one of them.

Maddison chuckled. "Don't get all touchy with me. You walked in on your fiancé having an orgasm with a kick-ass beautiful calendar girl. An orgasm might bring back memories of that mortifying experience. Your mind just isn't letting you go there. It's protecting you from pain."

Maddison grabbed for another piece of gum. "Don't, psychoanalyze me," she grounded out between clenched teeth. "I've had enough of that shit with Dr. Sullivan. What am I going to do?"

Having an orgasm wasn't supposed to bring back the memory of the humiliation Marty dumped on her. It was supposed to erase the memory. *God, what if Maddison's right? I might never have another orgasm.*

*Come to think of it, I haven't even had a self-induced orgasm since I walked in on Marty and Ms. January.* Of course that doesn't prove anything. She hadn't tried. She wasn't in the mood.

Maddison laughed. The cheerful sound grated against Lacey's heart. *What kind of friend laughs at a moment like this?*

Her best friend was showing absolutely no sympathy whatsoever for her. *I need to take applications for a new best friend.* One with a heart.

"You're going to find a man and have sex with him until he gives you an orgasm." Maddison told her, with all the confidence of a woman who wasn't having problems reaching orgasm.

In theory, she had a great idea. "And, where am I supposed to find another man who's willing to let me use him for sex?"

"Go back to Neverfail. He'll understand. What did you think of his sixty-nine technique?"

"We didn't do sixty-nine, and forget it. I'm not going back to Neverfail." She couldn't go back to him. He was under the impression they'd had a great time. There was no sense bursting his bubble. Or, her ego. The only thing he had going for him was his impression of himself as a ladies man. She would leave him with that.

"You didn't do sixty-nine? The guy's famous for his sixty-nine technique." Maddison's voice was squeaky with disbelief.

"I don't do sixty-nine with strangers." If she'd known he was famous for it, she might have made an exception. *Damn.*

Maddison sighed. "Fine, I have another idea. And, before you say no, just remember you promised you were going to do everything I told you from now on."

"That promise doesn't count. I'd just found my fiancé in bed with a bimbo. You know damn well I was drunk on cheap-ass wine." Cheap was all she could find in the house. The nice bottle of Chardonnay, she'd been saving for their wedding night, was missing along with the crystal flutes. They'd drunk what should have been her and Marty's toasting champagne.

"Oh, it counts. We spit shook on it."

The sacred handshake of their childhood was unbreakable. When two females rub spit together, they mean it. "Fine, I'm listening, and don't you dare tell me it involves standing on a street corner."

Lacey wasn't sure she wanted any more of Maddison's ideas. They never quite worked out. Like the time she'd talked her into mooning the football team from the backseat of the school bus. She received three days of detention for sexual harassment, and the whole school found out she had a tiny birthmark on her right cheek in the shape of a crescent moon.

"It doesn't involve a street corner. Actually, it's brilliant. Have you heard of the *Dibs Dating Show*?"

Lacey was vaguely familiar with it. "Isn't that the one where couples hook up for private weekends together?" It

was a trashy program on cable. Wildly popular with the twenty-something crowd. A crowd which appeared to have no problem hooking up for sexual weekends. A crowd who wasn't uptight, who could have orgasms with strangers. A crowd Lacey had never been a part of, but should. She was a twenty-something.

"Yes. You can go on it as a bachelorette and choose a bachelor to spend a weekend with."

The show was first-class trash. *Have I been reduced to picking through trash for a man?* "Don't you have anymore Neverfails I could do it with instead?" Neverfail was more like a thrift store find, not trashcan picking.

He was a tiny step above the kind of man she was going to find on the *Dibs Dating Show*.

"No."

"How am I supposed to get on this show?" *Am I really considering this?*

Faced with her choices, which were nonexistent, she knew she was.

"This is your lucky day. I know the promo secretary. She owes me a favor. It's all but a given that I can get you on the show. All you have to do is show up and pick a man to have sex with." She laughed and added. "All weekend long."

It was easy for her to say. She wasn't looking at a weekend of having to potentially fake orgasms. *Ooooh. Ahhhh. Ohmygodthatfeelsgood. Don't stop, please don't stop. God you're big. Oh yes. Yes. Yes.*

"Maddison, this is a ridiculous idea. I'll get a disease." Lacey didn't want to spend a weekend of faking. And fake it

she would, if necessary. There was no way she was going to tell the truth to a stranger. She just wasn't going to tell. There were some things a girl was allowed to keep to herself, and this was one of them. *That's why God gave us the ability to fake orgasms.*

"They're screened. Just take condoms. Lots of condoms. Do you have a better idea?"

"No." She sighed loudly. Unless, of course, she wanted to go from mental therapy into sexual therapy. *Where did one find a sex doctor?* "Okay. I'll do it." She took a deep breath. "Oh God, what kind of man am I going to find behind the red velvet curtain?"

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## Chapter 4

"Welcome back to the infamous *Dibs Dating Show*, where our motto is, what happens on your weekend, stays between you and your Dibs Man." The aging host waited for the clapping to die before he continued. "Tonight's bachelorette loves to read and enjoys running. She earns a living by teaching strip aerobics one night a week, and she is the sole proprietor of Fantasy Weekends. Her name is Lacey Valentine. Lacey, come on out."

*I can't do this.*

Lacey opened her mouth and sucked in air, blew it out noisily, and sucked in another. The double dose of oxygen failed to keep her erratic pulse from prancing around inside of her chest.

*It's not too late; I don't have to go out there. Maddison will have another plan. She's full of plans.*

Lacey spun around to run and came face-to-face with an immovable object.

*Damn, where'd you come from?*

"Are you going somewhere?" the hulk asked, in a tone devoid of humor.

"Uhhh, no." The guy belonged in the circus he was so big.

One long eyebrow shot up to frame his blank eyes. He leaned toward her and cupped his ear with his beefy hand.

"Sorry, I didn't catch that?"

Lacey took a step backward and tried not to breathe in the sour air he was breathing out. "I said, no."

She looked for the exit door. It was behind him. She was trapped. The ugly giant was purposely blocking her escape.

*Creep.*

She swallowed one last gulp of air before spinning back around and stepping out from behind the safety of the crushed red velvet curtain. Showtime.

Her legs trembled as she walked across the stage on her new MarVena pumps. *Do not fall. Do not throw-up.*

The audience did their part to encourage her by rattling the roof with their applause. Loud wolf-whistles punctuated the cheers. She paused to enjoy the moment. The piercing noise of male approval was a welcome sound. It made her feel like she was walking by a construction site on the wrong side of town.

Not that she did that very often. *Okay, ever.*

But, if she did, the whistles would make her feel good. There's nothing quite like a construction site fantasy to help boost a deteriorating ego. She would have to design a few new ones for her clients. *Perhaps, a construction site in front of a brothel fantasy would steam the sheets of the clients who called today.*

The show's host stood center stage waiting for her. From a distance, he looked like a distinguished gentleman with a head full of jet black hair.

It was an illusion. The hair was a wig. And, Lacey had found out moments earlier, he was no gentleman.

*He's a butt-pincher.*

She came to a stop in front of him, and he swung his arms open in invitation.

You've got to be kidding me. It wasn't her norm to hug guys who went for free gropes when her back was turned. Hell, she hadn't been around guys who groped since she was a high school cheerleader.

What's wrong with a handshake and a fresh start instead of a hug? *Now what?*

True to her recent nature, she caved like a hungry hooker and allowed the hug. Confrontation wasn't her specialty.

*Hell and damnation, here come his lips.* She moved her head a fraction to the left and managed to thwart his intentions into an air kiss.

When he didn't get the full frontal contact he'd been aiming for, he let his lips linger a moment too long on each of her flushed cheeks. Lacey caught a whiff of alcohol. Her stomach churned. Between nerves and the still fresh memory of her wine overload, it was quite possible she was going to lose her lunch on national television. *That'll help you get a man, Valentine.*

Lacey sank down onto the red velvet couch. The couch was known as the Love Divan. Butterflies took up residence in her stomach and started to dance on her nerves. They flew into a rowdy swing when the host opened his mouth to talk.

"Lacey, welcome." He sat down next to her and squeezed her left knee.

*Stop, touching me.*

Most people referred to him as Matchmaker. Lacey was beginning to think Horny Toad would be a better moniker.



She removed his hand and did her best to mask her thoughts with a courteous smile. "Thank you. I'm excited to be here."

*Liar, liar, pants on fire.*

Excited implied it was a no-baggage-attached decision to be on the show. *Girl in search of an orgasm has baggage written all over it.*

The Toad's smile was weak. "Lacey, I'm going to cut to the chase." His voice magically turned smooth and dramatic. "There is one question I know the audience is dying for me to ask you."

Lacey looked out at the audience. All eyes were on her. She scooted to the corner of the divan. "Just one?" she inquired, arching her eyebrows and trying to get into the mood of the game.

He leaned forward and wagged his finger in her face. "Do you indeed own a business called Fantasy Weekends?"

*Oooh. What an original line of questioning.*

Lacey reluctantly applied the brakes to her thoughts, before she uttered the words aloud. Cranky was not a mood setter for sex.

She breathed deeply through her nose and let the air escape through her lips. This was what Dr. Sullivan had suggested she do when she felt like she was about to spin out of control. It was one thing she suggested that actually worked. Unlike the "go have sex thing". It was the two-hundred dollars an hour suggestion.

Of course, Lacey would be the first to admit, three months of someone letting her bitch about Marty was money well

spent. She pulled her focus back to the Toad. Do you really own a fantasy business was always the first question asked by people she didn't know. A normal enough question. It wasn't like she was in a profession you grew up reading about on career interest surveys in school.

In her present frame of mind, such as it was, she wanted a new question. Like, "Is that your real hair color?" Or, even better, "Who did your boobs?"

*Actually, it's partially my color. There's a few highlights. Do you like the boobs? Here touch; they're mine, mostly.* That kind of answer would make her more like Maddison. A free-spirit type of gal. A woman that men didn't cheat on. One, they cheated with.

Lacey took another breath. "Yes, I do," she finally answered. Her voice was a little too high pitched to be understood; so, she cleared her throat and continued in a deeper, throatier voice. "It's a small, intimate business. You can find it on the web at [www.sexyes.com](http://www.sexyes.com)." She turned toward the audience to watch their reaction. *What am I thinking, I don't want to be an adulteress.*

A hum of excitement was snaking through the crowd. Lacey's fingers drum distractedly on her crossed knees as she pondered her morals and waited for the next inevitable question Toad would ask. It was another predictable question. It always followed the description of her business. She didn't have to wait long. Only, it wasn't the Horny Toad who asked it.

It was a man from the audience. "What services does Fantasy Weekends sell?" he hollered.

Lacey's fingers rested on her crossed knees. She searched for the owner of the voice. The bright lights shining down on her made it a difficult task. When she found him, she saturated him with an easy smile of humor. "I'm glad you asked, darling. It's a business dedicated to making sexual fantasies come true." She never minded answering this question.

A snowflake-hush descended. Lacey watched the audience member swallow hard. A glaring female, more than likely his date, was sitting next to him. She grabbed his hand possessively and cast a bitch eye at Lacey.

Lacey was use to being viewed as a threat to other females. And, it wasn't because she was gorgeous or sexy. *I wish*. It was because she was the owner of a sex business.

Men, Lacey discovered, loved the idea of being friends with a woman involved in the business of sex.

Men gravitated towards her at parties and other social functions like mosquitoes to young blood. Usually, they were hoping to learn her sexual secrets so they could put them to use. Their girlfriends, on the other hand, didn't want them talking sex with another woman. Who could blame them?

She gave the audience member a demure wink before turning back to the Horny Toad.

He leaned toward her. Lacey put out her hand to keep him from falling in her lap. His bushy-black-eyebrows lavished her with a double hitch. She recognized the move as his signature, "I want you, baby." It was one that, no doubt, got him babes twenty years ago when he started hosting the

show and she was a toddler. Now, it was just his signature look.

No way, could there be any results attached to it with her age group.

She settled with ignoring the Toad's signals just as he was ignoring hers. Someday, he'd probably find a young thing looking for a sugar daddy, and he'd be set to travel through his golden years in slime-ball style.

"Is that a great business or what?" the Toad asked.

The audience yelled agreement.

"Is it too late for me to be a contestant?" shouted the vocal man from the audience. Several male voices piped in saying they were interested, too.

Lacey smiled out at the audience, but refrained from offering a verbal response.

"You are such an ass!" a female screamed.

Lacey's gaze searched for the screecher.

She sympathized with the woman, who ever she was.

The screecher was the angry woman sitting beside the vocal man. The guy was being slapped upside the back of his head by her.

The Horny Toad held up his hand to silence the audience. The audience ignored him. They were laughing and talking. So, the Toad shouted over their noise. "I'm thinking it's too late for you, Son. You appear to be on a very short leash."

The audience laughed louder, and so did the man—despite the fact he was being pummeled with angry fists by his date.

Lacey looked around for the bouncer. *A big, ugly bouncer in the wings is beginning to make perfect sense.*

She watched the woman pull her date out of the room.

He was not a person to go easily. He twisted his head to look at Lacey and held up his free hand with the universal sign of call me.

Lacey shook her head. *Men are pigs.*

Sure, there are a few cute ones out there like Wilbur, in *Charlotte's Web*, and they are worthy of a special spider in their life to save them. But most, were better off as bacon. *Burnt bacon.*

She turned back to the Horny Toad, ready to get down to business. Her gaze drifted to the curtain hiding the three bachelors from her sight. I hope there's a Wilbur among you three little pigs.

The Horny Toad smiled at her.

Lacey bit her lip. It was time to stop thinking of him as a toad. Not because he wasn't. He definitely was a toad. She just didn't want to slip up and call him that aloud when she was answering one of his questions. She forced a smile to her lips.

His smile grew wider.

*He thinks I'm like all the other bachelorettes who come on this show.*

"Lacey, tell the audience how you became a sexual fantasy coordinator." The words rolled around on his tongue like a hard candy ball in the mouth of a drunken hooker.

*Oh God, I am like all the others. I'm here for sex. How many people have therapists who assign orgasm hunts?*

"Let me start by saying, Matchmaker—" she paused, pleased with herself for not calling him a toad. "—my

business could be thought of as a cover for legalized prostitution." She really, really, loved her business. She opened the doors three years ago on her twenty-third birthday. Since then, she had designed over one hundred unique fantasies for her customers. Since the incident with Marty, however, she had designed zero new fantasies.

How could a fantasy coordinator coordinate fantasies if she wasn't capable of enjoying sex herself? Not, that sex was everything—but, then again, it's a lot of things.

*Okay, it's damn close to being everything.*

What she wasn't expecting was for her words to catch Matchmaker off guard. He was so surprised by what she said, he jerked his head back. Instead of breaking his neck with such a movement, the action caused his jet-black hairpiece to noticeably shift.

Lacey gaped, bit her lip, and then laughed.

Why wasn't that thing glued down? Didn't it come with stickum spray or something? She looked over at one of the camera men who was making frantic motions with his hands to another cameraman.

*Oops.*

Would they spin them into a sudden commercial if the silly thing fell off?

Did he really think people didn't know he was old? Why did men try to hide the obvious?

Was this show really live or was there a tape delay? Could they edit this out before millions of viewers saw him?

Matchmaker raised his hand to his hair and began touching it frantically. The alcohol, he'd consumed before the show,

had clouded his ability to deal with the crisis with any sort of finesse.

Then again, how would one handle this situation with finesse?

Lacey willed the laughter-induced tears to stay put. The last thing she wanted was for a stream of mascara to run down her face. *I should have worn waterproof.*

Matchmaker closed his eyes and let out a long, audible breath of distress. "Lacey, did you just say legalized prostitution?" With a move that was anything but subtle, he moved his wig back into place.

Lacey blinked in surprise. He hadn't even tried to pretend it wasn't a wig. Would tomorrow be the day he'd give up drinking and the wig?

Lacey dug her nails into her palms to keep herself from laughing again. "Yes." It had been a long time since she'd felt such a need to laugh.

"You're going to have to explain that one. The last time I checked, prostitution was still illegal in New York and in your Midwestern, Missouri."

"You see, I set up extraordinary sexual experiences for married couples. They pay me for the experience. Isn't that what happens in brothels?"

"Well. Yes," he said. A frown burrowed his forehead. "I can see the ... the resemblance."

"I happened into this business because I've always been fascinated with sex, sex toys, and—" she paused to make sure everyone was listening and would hear the next part of her sentence, "—the key to a happy marriage."

Marriage was important to her. Or, it had been. When she got married, maybe in thirty-years, she wanted it to last. That was why she had chosen to work exclusively with married couples. Great sex led to longevity in marriage. Her parents were her proof. After twenty-five years of marriage, they were still head-over-heels in love with one another. And, they had sex like rabbits.

"I must say, you have this old man flustered, and there are very few who have managed to fluster the infamous Matchmaker on his own show."

Lacey leaned forward and picked up the miniature statue of a kissing couple sitting on the coffee table. She needed a distraction, and she was tired of taking deep breaths. Every time she breathed in, Matchmaker looked at her boobs.

Without looking at him, she continued talking.  
"Matchmaker, since I have an over-active imagination, I combine those two things and design weekends for couples that put the va-va-voom back into their marriages."

"Marriage? Really?" He choked on the surprise her words caused him, and his laughter came spewing out sounding like something that had just gone through a dull blender.

Lacey frowned and put the figurine down. She reached behind him and thumped him on the back. *Yes, marriage. I've mentioned that word several times, now.*

You are such a male dope.

He took a quick sip of water. Then he managed to say, in a mostly normal voice, "Gentlemen, your bachelorette is fascinated with sex and sex toys. She's also a feisty one; I think one of you is in for an entertaining weekend."



Lacey's eyebrows flew up into her hairline. That sounded cheap. *Oh, yeah, that's what I'm after.*

"Lacey dear, you can call me Mason. Or," he paused and did the double-hitch twitch again, "better yet, just call me." He pursed his lips together suggestively. "You've got my number, babe." The lines were spoken in a bad Groucho Marx impersonation.

Lacey softened a little and decided he was slightly charming and odd-ball funny in his own way. No wonder he'd been popular with the women for so long.

"I'll keep that invitation in mind." She bit her tongue to keep from saying something that would send him into another tailspin.

"Someone call the paramedics; she's giving this old man heart failure."

*Now what did I say? I did not say anything suggestive.*

Before she could recall her words, a thought she didn't want to have, popped into her brain. You probably haven't gotten it up in a decade.

She tried to shake loose the image of a penis at half-staff and Matchmaker working furiously to get a full hard on.

Her visual imagination was the key to her success in the fantasy business, but it was a blasted curse at moments like these. Of course, she'd had no imagination since Marty's betrayal, other than revenge plots; it was kind of nice to have a different visual pop into mind.

"Matchmaker, I didn't say I personally act on my fascinations." She willed her visual to shut off. She was

displacing her own inability to reach orgasm onto this helpless old man.

*If I have any more thoughts like that, I'm going to sue Dr. Sullivan for turning me into a dime store self-therapist.*

"No, but you are on the famous *Dibs Dating Show*." He looked at the audience. "And, what's our motto?"

"What happens on your weekend stays between you and your Dibs Man," the audience shouted the motto in unison with him. He stood up and gyrated his hips as he pumped his bent arms back and forth.

*When are we going to get around to the reason I'm here?*

She pictured the man who would be capable of getting her back on track.

He would be young, but not too young.

He would be old enough to have the experience to accomplish her goal, but young enough to have the stamina for her to reach her goal. He would not sound like a surfer or a pot head.

He would be blonde. She liked blondes. Marty was dark headed.

Matchmaker was still working his hips. She was definitely not here to have X-rated visions about someone old enough to be her grandfather. Yet, how could she focus on her date-to-be when he was moving his hips like a teenager?

What would happen if a bottle of Viagra popped out of his shirt pocket?

Breathe. She clutched her list of questions in her palm and willed her pulse to slow down.

Matchmaker finished his dance before any pills appeared. He sat down on the Love Divan. His breathing was heavy from the physical exertion. "Lacey," he panted, "are you ready to get started?"

"Yes." Her voice came out sounding like a deep throat porn star. *Was that me? Nice.*

"Gentlemen, you're going to have to help me out here. She's just too hot for one man to handle." The contestants on the other side of the screen made noises of approval.

The audience cheered loudly.

Matchmaker took a sip of something from a dark glass. "Lacey, it's time to get down to business."

*Finally.* Lacey sat up straighter.

"It's time to give each of our Dibs Bachelors a chance to introduce himself by telling us what he does for a living."

"LIVING. LIVING," was chanted by the audience.

Lacey laughed. She felt giddy with excitement. Okay, actually it was fear, but she was doing a decent job pretending it was excitement.

She turned her imagination to the three men hidden from sight on the other side of the heart-shaped curtain.

Which man would she choose? A thrill of nervous anticipation held her in its grip.

Normally, when choosing a man, her thoughts were all about was he marriage material. When talking in public places, the code word for marriage material was m2. A guy was either m2 or not m2. That is how she and Maddison referred to them.

Never, had she gone on a hunt for an orgasm man. Marriage material? Orgasm material? Hopefully orgasm material was easier to discover than marriage material. There were very few good m2s around.

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## **Chapter 5**

"Bachelor Number One, tell Lacey about yourself."

"Hi, Lacey. I'm a college professor. I teach physical education classes. If you pick me, we can educate each other."

His voice was silvery gentle with just a hint of strength. Lacey nodded her head in approval. She once designed a fantasy weekend for a couple around the theme of college instructor and struggling student.

The couple reported back with glowing comments. They had especially liked the fantasy wrapped around the bad girl referral process.

"Bachelor Number Two, tell Lacey about yourself."

"Lacey, I'm a renovator. I buy up old buildings and renovate them into livable space. If you choose me, we could renovate one of your sexual fantasies into one of our own."

There was a rich timbre to his voice. Lacey crossed her legs at the ankles and gave the audience a thumbs up sign. It was interesting that Bachelor Number Two had used the word renovation. She was, after all, on a mission to renovate her orgasm.

If she chose him, which one of her fantasies would he want to renovate? Perhaps the alibi-gone-awry fantasy would wet his appetite.

"And now, let's hear from Bachelor Number Three."

"Lacey, I'm a struggling country music singer. If you choose me, we can grab a beer and hang out on my back porch."

His voice was unbelievably sexy. It slid through her body like a shot of Jack Daniels on a cold winter day.

But his words tripped the redneck warning wire. They shouted out good ol' country boy. Which would be okay if she had one ounce of country girl in her blood. She didn't. She was a city girl right down to her three-inch, five hundred dollar-heels. With regret, Lacey shook her head and grimaced at the audience.

She had no problem giving Number Three a ten for presentation. Unfortunately, she could only give him five for content.

*Beer? Back porch? Redneck?*

*Sorry.*

*Of course, how important is content in the scheme of things?*

Lacey forced herself to think logically. *What are the chances of getting my orgasm back with a beer drinking redneck?*

*I can sink to lows.* But, there was low, and then there was low. Good ol' boy sounded like the bottom of low. A fantasy with him would probably entail a karaoke strip tease around a bonfire.

*That would be sinking to, "you just won the limbo contest," low.*

"Lacey, you've been introduced to each man. When we come back from station break, you will have a chance to ask each of them four questions."

Lacey nodded and waited until they were off the air. A feeling of satisfaction washed through her. At least, two of her Dibs choices had real potential. And, considering his voice, she was willing to give the third one the benefit of the doubt. Perhaps, he was just suffering from stage fright.

"Could I have a drink of water, please?" She fluttered her eyelashes in open flirtation when a college intern brought the water to her.

She was informed, by the young intern, she had two minutes. She zipped through each bachelor's voice in her head. She was about to choose a man who would soon be whispering sexual demands in her ears. She needed to make sure she liked the way he sounded.

*Kiss me.*

*Bite me.*

*Do me.*

Those were her favorite demands in the heat of the moment. What would his be?

*Who would he be?*

She had sent many a married couple off in pursuit of big O weekends. Now, it was her turn. She was going to be a free spirit and put "Urinal Scum" behind her forever. She was going to pursue sex without down-the-road commitment promises.

*Will I ever trust commitment promises again?*

*No.*

She wiped her sweaty palms on the fabric of her wide, flowing skirt. The skirt was a sex prop. She had worn it today with one purpose in mind. Its easy access design.

Access was an essential detail for her first fantasy. This fantasy was a favorite with her clients. Sex with a stranger—the fantasy for adventurous couples.

Her breath caught in her lungs as she contemplated having sex with yet another stranger. Neverfail had been the wrong stranger. If she chose the right stranger this time, what would happen? It was an erotic, yet disturbing, question.

The couples she arranged fantasies for did not actually have sex with strangers. They were just pretending to be strangers.

She, on the other hand, planned on pursuing the real thing.

A makeup artist came on stage, powdered her nose, and reminded her to sit up straight.

Lacey nodded and reminded herself to ooze an attitude of sexual confidence.

She shifted into an elegant pose and stuck out her 34 C's. Up until a month ago, when she was buying panties for Neverfail, she had been a 34 B. The pushy sale's clerk measured her and discovered she was actually a 34C. With the right bra, she could appear to be a 34D. *'Appear' being the operative word.*

Now, the sight of those 34 C's spilling ever so purposefully out of her scandalously low-cut, pink blouse gave her the needed boost to remind herself of the vamp she was acting



out. Or at least, the snarly-vamp she was going to be acting out for the next seventy-two hours.

When the clock struck hour seventy-three, she would morph back into a good girl with big boobs, looking for Mr. Right, marriage, and children. *Or perhaps, just a good girl with big appearing boobs.*

"Lacey in three." Matchmaker stopped talking to the audience and prepared for the cameras.

The director counted down and the lights and show went back into action.

Matchmaker turned to her and winked. "Lacey are you ready to ask your first round of questions?"

Lacey smiled into the camera. With a pulse-pounding fear, she spit out her first question. "Bachelor Number One, if you could compare your penis to a vegetable, what vegetable would it be?"

*I can't believe I just said penis on national TV.*

The audience exploded in laughter. The heat of embarrassment seared her cheeks. She faked sophistication and fanned herself with her fingertips. She couldn't afford to be distracted by embarrassment. Focus was needed.

"Lacey, every year I plant a small garden in my back yard. I love to grow zucchini. A good one is well shaped and firm. So, I'm going to go with zucchini. I don't suppose you're going to tell me which vegetable you would compare your breasts to in return are you?"

He answered her question with no sign of discomfiture. It was as if he agreed she had every right to know the size of his penis.

*Do guys care if a girl's boobs are Miracle Bra enhanced or God given?*

*Of course they do. Quit dreaming. Size matters in both sexes.*

"No. I get to ask the questions," Lacey replied while visualizing the size of a zucchini and mentally placing Bachelor Number One in the well-hung category.

"Bachelor Number Two, how about you? Which vegetable would you compare your penis to?" Her voice was practically purring the question. Who knew faking it could be so easy?

*Okay, she did. She had fooled Neverfail with no trouble.*

Bachelor Number Two cleared his throat noisily before replying. "Lacey dear, that's easy. A carrot. Long and hard." He put a lot of emphasis on the words long and hard.

Lacey arched her eyebrows and added another to the well-hung category. Men obviously liked talking about that part of their body.

"Bachelor Number Three, do you have an answer?"

"Darling, no matter which vegetable family you place it under, let's just say you wouldn't put me back in the vegetable bin to pick out a better one."

Lacey's eyes scrunched together in confusion. She wasn't sure how to categorize that noncommittal answer. "Bachelor Number Three, you do realize the best baby carrot in the bin is still just that—a baby carrot?"

The audience laughed.

Matchmaker interrupted before Bachelor Number Three could respond. "Bachelor Number Three, don't answer that. It's time for a break."

Lacey was disappointed. She wanted to hear his rebuttal. She found him to be vaguely disturbing. Even if he was a redneck.

Matchmaker turned to her. "Great question. Way to capture the audience and glue them to their television sets. I knew, when I read your bio, you would be a spitfire. If only I was twenty..."

She opened her mouth with a rebuttal and he held up his hand to stop her.

"Okay, forty years younger."

The break was short. Lacey resisted the urge to bite her nails. Strange and disquieting thoughts kept racing through her mind. She tangled her fingers in her hair and started twirling.

"3, 2, 1, and we're on."

Lacey looked into camera number four, as directed, and smiled seductively.

*Thank God Mom and Dad are out of the country.*

She was pretty sure they would not approve of her line of questioning. They were pretty open-minded, as parents went, but no parent could be expected to approve of their daughter asking a guy about the size of his penis in public.

"Lacey, your first question was intriguing. Are you ready for your second round of questions?" Matchmaker was very good at working the audience. Lacey decided that was why he was still hosting the *Dibs Dating Show*.

"Yes, I would like to start with Bachelor Number Two." She flipped a stray strand of hair out of her face as she recalled Number Two's answers.

*Mr. Carrot you arouse the bunny rabbit in me.*

The show should provide pen and paper so contestants could keep track of each bachelor's answers.

"Have at him." Matchmaker did a cornball gesture of cupid shooting a bow and arrow. The audience cheered.

"Bachelor Number Two, if you were going to renovate an old building to become a brothel, what elements would you be sure every bedroom had?"

"Lacey, a pole is a must. There is nothing sexier than watching a woman who knows how to dance a pole." He paused until the clapping died down. "Plus, I would make sure each room had an emergency button in case things got out of hand and the woman needed someone to come to her rescue."

Genuine sincerity was evident in the way he voiced the whole rescue issue. Lacey was intrigued. Pole dancing was doable as potential fantasy fling material. Her throaty laugh rippled through the air.

"Bachelor Number One, do you prefer your woman to be athletic since you are an athletic instructor?"

*Mr. Zucchini on Miracle Grow.*

"Lacey, I like my women to be like your name. One moment sweet and romantic, the next moment hot and steamy."

Lacey gave the audience a thumbs down gesture along with a grimace of displeasure. Bachelor Number One's answer had been a bunch of macho nonsense. It sounded like something Marty...

She halted the thought before it was transformed into a visual. "Bachelor Number Three, I love a man who can sing. If I asked you to sing me a song, what song would you sing?"

*Mr. Best Baby Carrot in the bin. Yawn.*

"There's a little ditty out there about liking my women on the trashy side. I always like to sing it to women on the first date. It sets the mood." His deep voice hypnotized her into fantasies of honey and white sheets.

The audience's laughter brought Lacey out of her visual fantasy. She frowned when his words sunk in.

"Lacey, are you getting a good feel for our bachelors?" asked Matchmaker.

All of the cameras swung toward her for a close-up shot of her expression. She quickly erased the frown creasing her forehead and replaced it with exasperation. "I'm not sure. I wish they were hooked up to lie detectors so I would know when they were stretching the truth."

*Or better yet, electric currents and I can zap them when I don't like their answers.*

"Bachelors, did you hear that? Lacey is in search of the truth."

"Always."

"Of course."

Lacey heard two responses. Who didn't respond?

And why didn't, whoever he was, respond?

*Of course, can I blame him? Matchmaker's, "in search of the truth," comment makes me sound like an Evangelist.*

"We've got time before our next commercial break for you to ask your third question of the bachelors."

Lacey looked over her list of questions. Her stomach was clenched. Which one would get an honest response? Panic was rioting through her. She clamped down on it with a great deal of difficulty. Question number eight popped out at her. It wasn't a flirtatious question.

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## Chapter 6

"Bachelor Number Three," Lacey paused and replayed his answers in her head. Not that she was ever likely to forget his answers. He was the baby carrot, I like my women trashy, man. She hoped his answer to this question would put him back in the running to be her Dibs man. "Did you graduate in the top half of your class or the bottom half?"

*I do like that voice of yours.*

Maddison had outlawed this question saying it didn't matter how smart the guy was. In the end, the two agreed to disagree.

Lacey liked a guy who could carry on a conversation. Sex could only take up so much time in a seventy-two hour period. And, they may have to talk it up during sex to help her find her orgasm.

"Baby doll, that's an easy one. Without a doubt, it was the bottom half." His tone suggested pride in his lack of educational success.

Baby doll? *You called me baby doll? When was the last time someone called me baby doll? That would be never.* And, definitely never by a smooth, whiskey voice.

"Bachelor Number One, how about you?"

*Forget Bachelor Number Three. Concentrate on the two doables. Literally.*

Bachelor Number One is Mr. Zucchini and Mr. Sweet and Steamy name nonsense. *Which leads me to ponder; does a big dick trump a shallow personality?*

"I was in the top ten percent of my graduating class."

Lacey gave that response a nod of approval.

"Bachelor Number Two?"

*Mr. Dance my pole and long hard carrots. What's not to like about you?*

"I was Valedictorian."

Valedictorian? Lacey had never had sex with a valedictorian. Was that reason enough to pick her Dibs date? Kamikaze butterflies began free-dives in her stomach.

"Well, we're down to your final question. Right after the next commercial break, you can try to narrow it down to just one guy."

When the cameras were off, Lacey stood up. The lights in the studio were hot. Sweat was threatening to break out. An image of herself hugging the contestants with sweat stains under her arms had her throwing her arms out wide to cool them off.

What she needed was a vision of herself having an orgasm with one of the bachelors. A visual would help her know which one to pick.

No visual came to mind.

It would be so nice to demand her imagination act upon her calling and not on its own calling.

She was down to the final question.

The one she was going to ask was an irrelevant question, considering she was just going to spend a weekend with the guy having sex. But still, she wanted to know their opinion.

It was question number ten, and it had a big black line drawn through it.



Maddison had done a last minute check of Lacey's questions and thrown a fit over it. She lectured Lacey all the way to the airport on all of the reasons she shouldn't ask it. Best friends were sometimes a real pain in the ass. The two of them couldn't even agree to disagree on this one.

"We're back. It's time for Lacey's final round of questioning. Lacey, are you ready?"

Lacey took a deep breath and nodded her head. She sat up straight, squared her shoulders, stuck out her boobs, glanced down at her boobs and smiled, and then asked, "Bachelor Number Two, how do you feel about marriage?"

*Does Mr. Valedictorian still translate into nerdville?*

"I'm all for it if the two people can't live without each other."

"Bachelor Number One?"

*Top ten percent is probably a better bet, smart but not too smart.*

"I think marriage is a natural extension of two people who love one another."

"Bachelor Number Three, how do you feel about marriage?" *Gutter half. Does gutter half have any place in my game plans? I could probably forego brains if his body is brick hard. Damn, I should have asked them all if their bodies were closer to putty or bricks.*

"Darling, I'm not much into it myself."

*Not much into what? What had she asked him?*

*Oh, yeah. Marriage.*

*Figures. You've given me nothing to work with Bachelor Three. Nada. Zilch.*

"Lacey, that's it," Matchmaker said, as all the cameras swung back toward Lacey. "You've asked your questions and heard their answers. You have three bachelors, and you can place your Dibs on only one of them. We're all wondering which one it's going to be?"

The audience shouted out responses at her.

Matchmaker held up his hand to stop her from responding. "We'll find out who Lacey Valentine picks after this commercial break. So, don't go away."

Lacey turned to the audience and tried to decipher what they were shouting.

Which bachelor thought it was a natural extension of love? Was it number one or two? Damn, she couldn't remember. She was finding it hard to remain coherent with all of the shouting from the audience.

Lacey panicked. All of their answers twirled like a tornado around in her head. How was she supposed to pick a guy based on four questions?

Matchmaker got her attention and cued that she was on far quicker than she was prepared for.

"We're back with Lacey Valentine, Fantasy Coordinator. Lacey, do you know who you would like to have Dibs on?"

Lacey was ready with her choice.

Her mouth opened to answer.

Nothing came out.

Silence screamed at her to make a sound.

*I wish that damn camera operator would stop waiving his arms so frantically. I can't concentrate.*

"Lacey, we're waiting."

"Matchmaker, can I take them all home for a trial run?" Lacey asked in an attempt to stall.

Which one was she going to pick? Her brain and gut were arguing ferociously with one another.

Matchmaker and the audience laughed. "Sorry, Lacey. Just one."

Lacey put on a pretty pout for the audience. "It is just so hard. I love guys who can sing. But then the thought of a penis that can be compared to a zucchini is intriguing. Of course, a man who is thoughtful enough to put an emergency button in his brothel obviously has a good heart."

"Audience, Lacey is struggling with her decision.

Regrettably, it's her job to make one."

Lacey closed her eyes and pictured her pick. The audience grew silent. Tension settled on her shoulders. "I would like Dibs on Bachelor Number..." Her eyes flew open. Clear of doubt. She knew which one she had to pick.

"Stop," yelled the camera operator. He held up his hand for Lacey to stop talking.

Lacey frowned in frustration. *I don't want to stop. I know who I want.*

Matchmaker was handed a card to read.

"Oops, my bad," he said to the audience and then turned back to Lacey. "Lacey, this week we have a surprise for you. We are now equipped to do an audience poll. So, before you tell us your choice, let's poll the audience to see who they would choose."

He turned to the audience. "Audience, your buttons are on the arm rest of your seat. Select your choice now. Will it be

Bachelor Number One, Two, or Three?" he asked dramatically.

The audience hummed with excitement as they made their choices.

"Lacey, here's how this is going to work. You can go with your pick or you can go with the bachelor the audience wants you to choose. Which will it be?"

"Who did the audience choose?" Lacey wasn't fond of surprises like this. This surprise was only going to make it that much more complicated to make a choice, considering her choice had changed three times in two minutes before settling on her choice.

"Ahh." He shook his head like a wise sage at her. "She wants to know whom the audience picked. Lacey, I'm sorry. I can't tell you that until after you make the decision."

Lacey frowned. She wasn't one to take chances. She knew her choice. Had stuck to it for at least 40 seconds. She would go with the guy she picked. "I'll go with my choice."

Matchmaker looked disappointed. "Okay Lacey, write it down on this piece of paper and hand it back to me."

Lacey took the paper and pen and wrote down her choice. Folding it neatly, she handed it back to him.

"Then let's see who the audience thought would be right for you."

There was a dramatic drum roll. "Lacey, the audience chose Bachelor ... Number ... Two."

Lacey didn't know whether she should be relieved or worried. *Bachelor Number Two?*

"Is Bachelor Number Two the one you picked?"

"No."

The audience groaned in disappointment.

"Very interesting, because seventy percent of the audience chose him. Tell us, which bachelor did you chose? Did you choose Bachelor Number One or Bachelor Number Three?"

Lacey's lashes fluttered closed on a quick second-guessing of her choice. Opening them slowly, she responded, "Three. I took dibs on Number Three."

There was silence. Silence so loud it hurt her ears.

A light came on indicating to the audience it was time to applaud.

They did. But, it was scattered, off-beat applause.

Matchmaker nodded at her as if he knew all along that Bachelor Number Three would be her pick. He quit nodding when his hair shifted to the right from the—I told you so head movement. "Are you ready to meet the two you didn't choose?"

Her breath was stuck in her throat. "Not because I didn't want to. You only allowed me one." Lacey made an attempt to will the fear into nonexistence.

*Not working.*

"Bachelor Number One, would you come on out please?"

Lacey watched a tall, dark haired man walk around the curtain. His bulky, muscular frame screamed weightlifting and muscle building products. Lacey held out her hand to shake his.

He ignored her hand and pulled her into a suffocating bear hug. The smell of cologne caused her to sneeze. He jumped in surprise, and she smiled apologetically at him.

"How about it audience, can we get a round of applause for Bachelor Number One?" Matchmaker encouraged the audience to clap as a lovely young assistance escorted the rejected bachelor off the stage.

"Bachelor Number Two. Would you please reveal yourself to Lacey?"

A guy bounded out and stopped half way to Lacey. "Honey, give me a call if things don't work out with the guy you chose." He held out his hand and shook hers warmly. Then he pulled her toward him and kissed her forehead.

*That was sweet.*

Lacey began second-guessing her choice. Okay, it couldn't really be called second-guessing. It was more like forty-third guessing. Bachelor Number Two looked like a man who had just stepped out of an underwear ad.

*Ohmigod, you're hot.*

*I should have chosen you. I should have never listened to Maddison. What does she know about picking a man out of a line-up?*

*Meow.*

He was everything a woman could want in a Dibs date. Plus, he looked quite capable of giving her back her orgasm.

Lacey watched with regret as a different young lady escorted him off the stage. The audience showed their appreciation with over-the-top applause.

"Well Lacey, the moment is here. Are you ready to meet your Dibs date?" Matchmaker's voice was laced with mystery.

Lacey clenched her hands. Her nails dug trenches into her palms. "Sugar, I've been ready since I found out I was going

to be on the show." She was impressed with the convincing way she managed to answer.

Matchmaker turned to invite the chosen bachelor to come out, but then stopped and turned back toward Lacey. "Before we reveal your pick, could you tell the audience why you chose Number Three?" Matchmaker looked at the audience. They were given a sign to cheer noisily.

Lacey nibbled on her bottom lip and contemplated her response.

What the hell, she'd tell them. "My best friend told me I should stop looking for Mr. Right and just have a great weekend with Mr. Wrong. I'm pretty sure Bachelor Number Three isn't Mr. Right. So, I plan on having some fun with Mr. Wrong. Bachelor Number Two would have been my choice had I been looking for Mr. Right. Which I'm not—right now."

"Well, I did ask didn't I? Let's hope Bachelor Number Three can handle that ego bruising response. Bachelor Number Three, come on out."

Matchmaker stepped back, allowing Lacey a clear view of Bachelor Number Three.

Lacey squeezed her eyes shut. She hadn't meant to insult him. Would a guy want to have sex with a gal who insulted him on national TV?

*I'm not going to get anything back if he's not willing to have sex with me.*

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## **Chapter 7**

Covey James listened in blindsided disbelief. This was the second woman, in less than a week, to drop a bombshell on him while a camera was around to catch his reaction. The first woman, his grandmother, he would forgive anything. This dame, who called herself Lacey Valentine, he cursed.

He shook his head. Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator actually chose him. Why didn't she choose Number Two? Even he would have chosen Number Two if he were a woman.

He looked at the two men he'd been competing with. Their sagging shoulders indicated their acute disappointment. Well, they were in good company; he was suffering from dissatisfaction himself.

What happened to the world he'd created where everything made sense? Or if not sense, there was logic behind its lack of sense.

Dammit, this woman had just destroyed his plans for the perfect weekend: go on the show; don't get picked; get drunk in the hotel room; stay drunk; sober up; and start the search for a wife to fulfill his grandmother's, before-I-depart-this-life, wish.

His grandmother had earned the right to change his plans for the future; Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator had not.

Now, thanks to her unbelievable decision to pick him, he was going to spend precious hours of his remaining unwedded status with a strumpet. He picked a piece of lint off his jeans



and flicked it to the floor with the same disdain he was feeling toward this show.

This was all Casp's fault. He had better stay out of his way when he got back home. He should be the one sitting on this stage. He'd be whooping and hollering in joy and lording it over the contestants that he was the chosen one.

Covey eyed his competition as they prepared to step around the curtain. The woman actually chose him over either of them. Who, in their right mind, would have chosen the man he portrayed himself to be? As far as she knew, he was a two-bit hick from the sticks.

He took off his hat and ran his hand through his hair. The female mind was God's greatest screw up. It could, and would, malfunction at the most inopportune time for men.

Covey shook his frustrations off and prepared to meet Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator. He'd made a commitment; he'd go through with it. *Like it or not*. He jammed his cowboy hat back on his head and straightened his shoulders. With the enthusiasm of a man who just received a life sentence, he stood up and listened to her rattle on about why she picked him.

Her words elicited a wicked chuckle from him. *Mr. Wrong?* She thought he was all wrong. His mind played, what if, with her announcement. What if he could work her opinion of him to his advantage?

He jammed his hands in his pockets. *Why in the hell did she choose me if I'm her Mr. Wrong?*

He didn't have to wait long for the answer. She was telling the audience how she came to her cockeyed decision to pick him.

"I chose him because he's not marriage material."

*Well, of course, I'm not marriage material.*

"There's nothing about him I like," she said with a voice full of derision.

*Like? No one had ever told him he wasn't likeable. I'm likeable. The woman's a certifiable dingbat. She's planning on having sex with a man she doesn't even like. Who does that?*

"If he was likeable, I wouldn't have chosen him."

*Why the hell not?* He looked out at the audience and nodded at them. It didn't really matter why? The harm was done. He'd been chosen. He was going to spend the last weekend of his single life with a dingbat.

And, the way his luck was running, she'd more than likely inform him she was a vegetarian who didn't drink beer, eat brats, or watch baseball. The three things he'd rather be doing while in New York than playing cowboy.

What had he expected the female contestant to be like? This type of show thrived on women wanting to prove their sexual freedom, and men wanting to get lucky. Which was, no doubt, why Casp signed up to be on it.

Well, Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator was in for one hell of a rude awakening. He was not happy to be picked; he was all but engaged. To whom, he didn't know. But someone, and damn quick like. He had no business appearing on this show.

To make it worse, the show wasn't going to air for six months. By then, he'd be married.

*A new wife is not going to like this at all.*

He dragged a hand across his face. *Shit*. This was not a minor detail he'd overlooked. He was going to be a happily married man when this show aired. The tabloids would explode with innuendo about the stability of his marriage and the other woman.

Perhaps, he could pay the station to have the show pulled. Or, at the very least, held until after his grandmother passed away. He didn't want her to know anything about his stupidity. She'd be appalled, horrified, and fit to be tied.

He didn't even have a clear idea on how long his grandmother had. She refused to talk about it and so did her doctors. They were all hung-up on patient confidentiality. There were too many damn lawyers making the rules these days.

Covey prepared to step out from behind the curtain. He paused. The woman was still babbling. He had no choice but to stand and listen to more of her responses.

"I just want to have a fun weekend, and then go home with no strings attached," she was saying in a thick, sultry voice.

He had to admit, he liked her voice. He wasn't going to like her, but the woman had one hell of a voice.

*So, she wants a fun weekend.* Was there anything wrong with him having a fun weekend with a woman before he took a wife?

His wife would just have to understand this happened before he met her.

He tried to visualize his wife for about the thousandth time in a week. Still *nothing*.

He wished it was possible to have a marriage, with no strings attached, the way Lacey wanted sex with no strings attached. And, it probably would be possible if it weren't for his grandmother and her damn ring.

A marriage of just sex and companionship sounded perfect. As long as he didn't give his heart away, or have children, he didn't have to worry about getting it wrenched out through his nipples if something went wrong. Like an untimely death.

God, he would do anything to avoid the feeling of the pain of loss. He'd had enough of it for a lifetime.

He had no idea what kind of woman he was going to settle down with; but the chance of finding one who wanted what he wanted in a marriage was about as likely as finding a daisy at the North Pole. What if he couldn't find someone to fall in love with before his grandmother died? What if he wasn't able to fulfill her last wish? It was an unthinkable thought. He had to make her happy. She deserved it.

"I'm sure we're not compatible beyond this weekend, let alone marriage," Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator said, and the audience burst out laughing.

He laughed with them. The gal was slamming him big time. He liked feisty women. The next three days were suddenly veiled in shadowy promise. She had courage and spunk.

Getting laid wasn't a bad replacement for getting drunk. Especially, since getting drunk wasn't nearly as much fun as it was when he was in his twenties.

Getting laid didn't leave you with a hangover or the taste of cotton in your mouth.

He looked thoughtfully at the curtain separating him from his date. *This might not be so bad after all.* He was still single. Perhaps, he'd go for it and enjoy what she was offering. They were both adults and they knew the score.

"Bachelor Number Three, come on out," said the Matchmaker.

Covey squared his shoulders and walked around the screen to get his first look at his weekend fling. He just hoped she wasn't a three-eyed pig.

When he saw her for the first time, a smile touched his lips and his steps faltered.

Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator was breathtaking. Whispery blonde tendrils escaped the curly mass of hair she wore pulled back from her face.

*And, what a face.* It was a display of feminine perfection. Seductress eyes, high cheekbones, pouty lips.

His eyes did a leisure drift down her voluptuous body. One look at her long, tanned legs and his body revved. When was the last time a woman impacted his desires so easily?

He boldly, if not quickly, brought his gaze up to her eyes. There was a momentary promise in their blue orbs. She tried to veil the message with mile-long lashes, but not before an electric current zapped him. If he took his cowboy hat off,

there was a good chance all of his hair would be standing on end from the electricity oozing out of her.

By God, this little gal had touchable curves. The kind of curves that makes a man put down his beer and stare. The kind of curves that makes a man spend his entire paycheck on an evening out. She was the kind of girl who leaves a man senseless and worse, leaves him thinking like a good ol' boy.

*Perhaps, I'll marry her.*

Covey stiffened. Where did that thought come from? Of course, he couldn't marry her.

His eyes traveled back to her legs. The way his heart beat skyrocketed at the sight, he knew he was going to enjoy tumbling her into bed. But, thinking in terms of marriage was absurd.

*Or was it?* Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator was a tall drink of spring water. Her legs gave new meaning to the word fantastic. Could he force himself to fall in love with her?

Covey grimaced and slammed the brakes on his thoughts. What was he doing? *Why am I thinking like this about a woman who just called me Mr. Wrong and says she doesn't like me?*

Taking off his cowboy hat, he stepped forward and gave her a Texas smile. For once, his 6'4" didn't dwarf his date. The tip of her head came to the bottom of his chin. She was the perfect height for standing sex. Bent over the kitchen table, sex. Up-against-the-wall, sex.

If she was a dingbat, you couldn't tell by looking at the package. She looked more like Rodeo Drive merchandise, hot off the runways of Paris.

*Why in hell is she on this show? Why in the hell am I on this show?*

She eyed him confidently and accepted the appreciation in his eyes with ease.

*There has to be something wrong with you or you wouldn't be on this show.* "Howdy," he drawled, in his best good ol' boy tone. A tone he never used in his daily life.

Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator flinched.

*It's the good ol' boy that turns her off.* Now, he knew what made him Mr. Wrong. *If I drop the drawl, will she like me?* It was probably best to continue down this path. When the weekend was over, he didn't want any messy endings. He'd had enough with Alice. How the woman had ever come to the conclusion she was the woman his grandmother saw in her vision was beyond him. She was skinny; Grandmother said she saw a woman with some meat on her bones.

He watched Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator bite her bottom lip. It was the kind of lip meant for a male to nibble on.

*So, you don't like good ol' boys.*

Standing before him was a well-built, knockout snob, and he was willing to bet his inheritance that she'd never had sex with a country boy.

Covey might not be a good ol' boy, but he was definitely a country boy. He had a three-thousand acre working ranch to prove it.

He held out his hand.

She paused briefly before reaching out and placing hers in his.

Sexual tension sizzled between them. He raised his eyebrows and searched her eyes. Was she feeling the sizzle?

Her slender brows arched, and he saw a sparkle of fear dancing a two-step in her eyes. *Fear, not lust.* He didn't want to scare her. He just wanted to keep her at a distance.

He looked out at the audience. It was time to get the show on the road. He needed to get her off this stage and alone so they could talk. With a cowboy whoop, he swung her into his arms.

*A good ol' boy would lay one on her;* he heard his inner-self say.

In the brief moment it took his lips to capture her pink glossy ones, he saw her eyes turn three shades of blue.

The kiss was quick but thorough as he tried to figure out what was going through her brain.

He pulled his head back, reluctant to do so, and their eyes locked. She didn't look too happy.

He hadn't planned on kissing her on stage. He shouldn't be happy about it, either. The kiss wasn't going to look good to his future wife.

But, no man could have resisted her lips. They were begging to be kissed.

"Put me down." The voice making the order was chunky with surprise.

He did as she asked. Only, he did it in a bad boy way. He made sure her body stayed in contact with his all the way down. He was rewarded with the feel of her heart thundering and a shiver sweeping through her. The combination spoke volumes to his male ego.



Smugness tugged the corners of his lips. She didn't like him, didn't want to marry him, but she was affected by him. It was time to test the package.

He slid his palms down her backside until they were cupping her ass. *The package was nice.*

*Behaving like a good ol' boy has its advantages.*

Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator sucked in her breath, placed her palms on his chest, and took a step backward. Her head snapped back and a scarlet stain outlined her cheeks. She flung a bone-piercing glare his way.

He lifted his shoulders in a shallow gesture of *couldn't help myself*. It might have worked if he hadn't followed it up with an arrogant smile.

"Hello," she said. Her voice had changed from the seductive purr she used when asking all of her questions, to a trembling growl of anger.

He swallowed hard on the desire it aroused. Everything about this little gal was hot.

Not that it mattered, but he couldn't help wondering what the hell she thought Mr. Right was all about?

Her Mr. Right would, no doubt, be some computer geek with a portable device bearing a fruit logo and carrying a large diamond encrusted engagement ring. A geek wearing brown leather loafers with no socks.

Covey looked down at his cowboy boots.

Little did she know, he had a device he would like to introduce her to. It sure as hell wasn't tattooed with a fruit logo, but it was currently housed in a fruit logo-bearing undergarment.

Matchmaker stepped between them and completely blocked Covey's view of Lacey.

"Move," Covey ordered him.

Matchmaker laughed and stayed put. "Lacey Valentine, what do you think of Bachelor Number Three? Did you make the right choice?"

*Good question, old man. How will she answer?* He waited for her response.

Nothing.

Matchmaker waited for her response.

Nothing.

The entire audience was waiting for her response.

Lacey frowned and looked at them all blankly. "What?" she asked.

Matchmaker rattled on. "Well audience, I would say by the way they're acting, there just might be some fireworks later on tonight between these two. Don't you agree?"

The audience cheered, and Covey heard men making rude comments.

Matchmaker placed two fingers on his tongue and then touched them to his butt and made a noise like a snake. "That is if they don't have sex right here on the stage," he said.

Covey resisted the urge to punch the man, and he witnessed Lacey rolling her eyes. She wasn't impressed with him either.

They had something in common, after all. Would there be anything else?

Matchmaker grabbed their arms and attempted to turn them toward the cameras.

Covey's body turned willingly toward the cameras, but his eyes stayed on Lacey. Her breasts were perfect. They were bobbing up and down in a hypnotic rhythm. The look she gave him, when he managed to look into her eyes, spoke volumes. She didn't enjoy having her breast ogled, and she knew he was trouble. He glanced back down at her breasts and heard her gasp.

"Audience, Bachelor Number Three is Covey James. Covey, are you glad you were chosen?"

Covey forced his eyes from her heaving boobs and looked at the audience. "What do you think?" He pointed towards Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator with his Stetson cowboy hat in his hand. "This pretty little filly says she wants a weekend with Mr. Wrong. I'm sure I can oblige." He turned on the cowboy charm and bowed to Lacey with a twisting flourish of his hat. "I might even get her to like me before the weekend is over."

Bent over in a bow, Covey naturally took the time to drink in the sight of Lacey once again. She was sex on stilettos waiting to happen.

His jeans were becoming very uncomfortable as his erection pushed for room.

When he turned back to the audience, the camera zeroed in on his obvious discomfort. The audience cheered, and the show was over. Covey wanted to strangle the cameraman. That was all he needed, a shot of his hard dick on TV. And

since this show was a cable show, there was little chance the shot would be edited out.

Covey and Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator were ushered off stage and placed in a tiny room, sparingly furnished with a table and three chairs.

A poker-face little man followed them in and shoved contracts and pens into their hands. "Sign these release forms."

"Okay," they replied in unison, taking the pens from him. They both paused, pens poised in midair, and waited for an explanation as to what they were signing.

He offered none as he shuffled through some more documents in his briefcase. "And for both of your protection, you must sign a gag order." He shoved another piece of paper at them. "Neither of you can sell your story to a magazine, nor talk to a reporter about your weekend," he droned on, through lips which barely moved.

"Really?"

"Good." Covey said. None of the details of their weekend would get back to his grandmother.

"Other than that, it's your weekend. Spend it how you choose. The show is no longer involved." The man took his glasses off, folded them gently, placed them in a leather container, slid them slowly in his shirt pocket, and then looked at them with the same bored expression he had entered the room wearing. "Do you have any questions?"

Covey looked at his date and shrugged his shoulders.

"I guess not," she answered.

There were no rules other than don't blame the show for anything that happens. Covey saw possibilities in the loose bylaws. He handed his signed forms over and watched the man walk out of the room without a backward glance at the couple.

Covey stuck his hat back on his head, scooted his chair back from the table, and propped his cowboy boots on top of it. He gave Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator a methodical inspection.

Twining his fingers behind his head, he spoke first. "You're not bad to look at, your figure is nice, and you're gainfully employed, so why do you need to come on this damn show to get a date?"

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## Chapter 8

Lacey inhaled sharply. *How dare he?* Who did he think he was to imply she had a problem? She leaned forward in her chair and blew out the air in her lungs in one noisy exhale. "That was a rude question. Are you always rude?" She glared and waited for a response. Why she even bothered to ask, she didn't know. She already knew the answer. Of course he was always rude. It was a character flaw no doubt. *That and his damn southern drawl.*

He didn't answer right away. A muscle quivered in his right jaw, highlighting a dimple. It should have unnerved her. Instead, her anger took a backseat to curiosity. She fixated on the dimple like a cat discovering a bowl of unattended cream.

She experienced an irresistibly, devastating desire to touch his cheek with her tongue. She licked her lips in anticipation.

What would the small indentation feel like under her tongue?

Better yet, what would the inside of his mouth feel like to her tongue?

What would he taste like? Peppermint? Spearmint?

What time of day did he develop a shadow?

Lacey curled her fingers into fists. *God, you're gorgeous.* Bachelor Number Two was hot, but Number Three was manly.

*Manly is a hell of a lot better than just a pretty face.* She felt her juices flow just looking at him.

When his mouth twisted in a wry grimace, Lacey realized she was staring like a lovesick puppy and snapped her mouth

shut. She'd asked him about being rude and then followed it up with her own rude behavior.

"Darling, you can call it what you like. I don't waste time on egos. Are you going to answer my question?" His eyes wandered down to her breasts as he spoke.

*This man goes from one rude behavior to another.* "Why are you staring at my breasts?" she snapped. She crossed her arms over them and was rewarded with an amused laugh. The mocking lift of his eyebrows made her wish she'd kept her mouth shut and her arms to her sides.

"Darling," he drawled, "they have this habit of moving in a very hypnotic fashion when you're mad. If I'm not careful, you'll have me in a trance."

She regarded him with frustration. Not, that he appeared to notice the frustration. How could he? He wasn't looking at her eyes.

She bent her head sideways and lowered it until she became eyelevel with him. "You really are a good ol' boy, right down to your cowboy boots." She sat up straight. When he continued to stare at her breasts, she swatted at his boots. "Which, I might point out, are rudely propped up on the table," she said, in an attempt to get his attention.

*What possessed me to take Maddison's advice and choose Mr. Wrong?* Once again, her friend's advice was tainted with pitfalls. Would she ever learn?

He removed his gaze from her breasts and smiled blandly into her eyes. She felt an urge to cuff him. To curl up her fist and give him a black eye.

Of course, it wasn't his fault she chose Mr. Wrong.

Choosing Mr. Wrong was simply a bad idea, and she had no one to blame but herself. *And Maddison*. Definitely, Maddison was at fault. When she got home, she was going to fix Maddison up with every conceivable loser she could find.

She pushed her best friend out of her mind. She needed to keep her eye on the prize. Would this man be able to trip her broken trigger?

Lacey closed her eyes and visualized her desires.

*If I can just tune out the actual words and listen to the voice, he can do it. I know he can.*

*I'm not a quitter. I'm going to take the ball and run with it.*

You can't make a touchdown if you're not headed toward the goal.

*I just have to hope his whiskey voice can make me drunk enough to forget his personality?*

*All I want is an orgasm, so I can get on with my life. That is a reasonable desire.*

She kept up with the pep talk until bits of her advice started to sink in.

When she opened her eyes, Covey was looking at her. "Sure, I'm a good ol' boy, Darling. Isn't that why you chose me? Because my drawl turns you on?"

Lacey wanted to pound her head on the table and shout: *all I want is an orgasm—is that too much to ask of the universe?* Instead, she put on her calm face. "I'm here because I believe in equal rights. Men can have flings, and so can women. I want a fling with you."



Covey's whole face lit up, and he settled his lanky frame lower in his chair. He laughed at her. The warm, happy sound was tainted with discernment.

Lacey snorted and clenched her fist. "What?" she demanded to know. Warm was good. Happy was good. But discernment was bad. What exactly was it he thought he knew? She resisted the urge to knock his boots off the table. *You are a first-class mistake. With an insufferable attitude.*

He gave her a smug smile and her spine stiffened.

*Your teeth may be beautiful, but you do not know shit about me.*

"You, my darling, are after a little revenge sex. I shall mark this down as a very lucky day for me," he drawled.

*Okay, so maybe he knew a little bit about her.* Sticking her nose in the air, she answered. "Of course, it's your lucky day." She added as much scorn as she was capable of to her voice. "I doubt you get many women like me interested in just having sex with you." Part of her was bothered by how much of a bitch she sounded, the other part of her was sure what she was saying was true.

His expression stilled. A pulse leapt to life in his neck.

It was an obvious warning if she chose to heed it. She chose to ignore it. She took a steadying breath and leaned her elbows on the table. "Just for your information, it's not revenge sex I'm after. It's an orgasm. I want a freakin orgasm." Lacey's voice had risen to a shout and could probably be heard by anyone within ten feet of the room. She sat back and refused to cringe. *Nothing like laying it all out on the table in front of an insufferable pig.*

He didn't laugh. He didn't mock her. Which should have made her happy. It didn't. It worried her. Why wasn't he giving her grief about wanting an orgasm? This was his chance to make fun of her. Instead, he got angry.

His eyes deepened to a cavernous shade of brown and narrowed to small slits. "Is there something special about you that make you untouchable to people like me?"

The word ominous popped into Lacey's mind. The drawl, which had been so pronounced up until this point, had slipped away. Its absence added to the alcoholic content of his voice. Lacey was torn between fear and desire.

Fear won out. The muscles in her shoulders tensed. "You know what I mean. I don't hang out in smoke-filled, two-bit, country bars," she muttered. She pushed her chair back, putting distance between them.

He looked her up slowly and down slowly.

She felt like a banana being peeled by a mad scientist.

"No, I don't suppose you do. Let me get this clear. All you want from me is a good time? More specifically, an orgasm or two. No strings allowed? None of that sappy, marriage stuff in the back of your mind?"

Lacey's brain stopped functioning the moment he mentioned two orgasms. *Two orgasms? He's talking two? Not one? God, what I'd give for two orgasms.* She stood up and stuck her hand in his face. She was going to broker this deal before he backed out. "Not at all, and I'm willing to shake on it." Each breath she took was traveling through an emotional kaleidoscope before escaping her lungs, making speech difficult. This man oozed confidence.

He wasn't intimidated by her request for an orgasm. *This man's going to deliver the goods.* She could feel it in her toes.

Covey's boots landed with a thud on the floor and he stood up. He took her outstretched hand and pulled her around the edge of the table. When she was standing in front of him, he placed her limp hand on his belt buckle. The heel of her palm could feel his arousal.

She jumped. She hadn't expected things to move so quickly. She hadn't meant to find out the size of his penis in such an unexpected way. Confidence was an understatement. He was practically wearing the notch on his belt already.

Should she retaliate and place his palm on her boob? Why not let him know right now they were average and not big.

*Why does that bother me so much?* She glanced down at the two girls. *They're just boobs for crying-out-loud.*

She did her best to ignore the voice ready to answer her question, but the voice won out. *You care because the bimbo had huge knockers. That's why you were cheated on.*

Covey's cutting smile did two things for Lacey. It brought her out of her pity party, and it cost him the opportunity for a free grope of the girls. Plus, it gave her the courage to leave her hand where he placed it.

She wasn't going to give him the satisfaction of seeing fear on her face. In fact, she'd do the opposite. She'd show him confidence. She ran her palm down the length of him and cupped him firmly. The action caused her knees to go weak and his to jerk straight. *Wow!* What she had beneath her hand was well worth the side affect of shaky limbs.

He had definite promise in the penis area. More than promise. This man had the necessary tools to give her an orgasm. With deliberate slowness, she moved her hand away from him and held it up for a handshake.

Her palm tingled, obviously branded from the heat of the touch. She told herself she wasn't behaving like a fool. This was how a worldly woman, about to embark on a sexual expedition for her orgasm, would act. Or, how a woman involved on the *Dibs Dating Show* would act.

There was nothing wrong with inspecting the merchandise. She wouldn't buy a pair of shoes without trying them on. A man was no different. Not, that he was one she wanted to buy. All she wanted was to lease him for a short time. Seventy-two hours to be exact. *A long, sexual weekend.*

*This is crazy. What am I thinking? I should have gone back to Neverfail. He didn't intimidate me.*

Before she could turn tail and run, Covey took her hand. He turned it over and inspected her palm. His finger rubbed the tiny scar just beneath her thumb, and she struggled to keep her knees from buckling.

The touch was unbelievably gentle. Almost as if he was trying to seduce her.

*He knows why I'm on the show. How about him? What's his story?*

A frown creased the corners of his eyes. "How'd you get the scar?" he asked.

Lacey trembled. "Doing back hand springs on a sharp rock." *This man makes me feel petite.* Was he already

initiating the seduction? *Does it matter?* It was, after all, what she was here for.

"I don't suppose you've ever ridden a horse or mucked a stall before have you?" Covey asked with a serious look in his eyes.

"Mucked a what?" She must really be drunk on his voice. Why else would she think he just asked her about mucking something when she was thinking about fucking? Were their thoughts that far apart?

The serious light disappeared, and he smiled. "Never mind, dumb question. I think I'm safe in saying you are definitely my Ms. Wrong. So darling, we're standing on equal ground. Neither one of us is the other's soul mate. I'm happy to oblige the no-strings-attached weekend rules."

Lacey sobered. He was still implying she wasn't good enough to be his wife?

*You ass. You think I am inferior to you. Where do you get off with that attitude? You're nothing more than a two-bit singer.* "Tell me you're not saying what I think you're saying?" she asked. He was an out-of-work, country singer. How could she ever be his Ms. Wrong? If she wanted him, which she didn't, she would have no problem making him see her as Ms. Right. *Couldn't she?*

"I'm simply saying you don't interest me beyond a couple of good lays. When I'm ready, I prefer a gal from back home to get seriously attached to."

Lacey blew a strand of hair out of her face. "Oh good grief, I'm not talking about the strings thing. You think I'm not good enough for you. Don't you? You sound like a jerk."

He placed a finger under her chin and lifted it. "You started it. You said I wasn't good enough for you. Can't you take what you dish out?"

Lacey jerked her face out of his hand. She decided to ignore his logic. "So, you have ladies waiting around for you to give them a call?"

"Sure."

"Are you in love with someone?" There was no way Lacey was going to sleep with a man if he was in love with someone else. She would not be a relationship wrecker.

"No, and I can't see how that is any of your business."

"I feel sorry for the woman you marry. Marriage is about love and nothing else. If you're not in love, you shouldn't be toying with the idea of getting married."

He ignored her statement. "Let's stop talking about marriage. What is it exactly you want to shake on?" he asked, before dropping his eyes back to her boobs.

She looked down at her breasts. This man was a boob man. Not a leg man, not a panties man, he was a boob man. The one thing she didn't have to offer. *Damn it to hell*. She could ask him his name right now, and he wouldn't have a clue what it was. She sighed. "I want to shake on no-strings-attached-sex, of course," she answered. "I'm going to use you for a weekend and then toss you aside like an empty fast food wrapper," she said with a half-hearted attempt at humor.

A smile tugged at his lips and his eyes crinkled in suspicion.

"Are you capable of casual sex?"

"Hell, yes." She held his eyes without blinking and asked, "You're not a baby carrot are you?"

Laughter exploded out of him.

The sound caused her to jump like the time she got caught cheating on a driver's test.

"You know I'm not, Darling. Your hand just measured my length and width. Would you like to feel it again just to make sure?"

She tossed her hair and eyed him with cold triumph. "No. But the thought did cross my mind that you might be using filler to make you appear bigger than you actually are."

A smile spread across his lips. "I can whip it out and let you see for yourself that there is nothing but me in these jeans," he responded.

She snapped her mouth shut. "That won't be necessary." She paused to look at his zipper. "Just yet, anyway." She enjoyed the sparring between them. It bordered on arousing.

"Then, you've got a deal. No-strings-attached-sex. Let me know when you want to check out my dick for yourself."

He was amused at her expense. She wanted to wipe the smile off his face. "Oh, it'll be soon. Very soon," she warned him.

He took a step toward her, hand on zipper.

Her heart jumped, and she took a step back. "Not yet." Her pulse was no doubt on speed. She lowered her eyes afraid he would read just how out of water she was feeling right now.

They both turned when the door opened. Lacey welcomed the interruption. It gave her time to work on a normal breathing pattern.

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

A chauffeur, with the same bored expression as the previous guy, announced, "If you're ready, your limo awaits."

Lacey forgot her breathing exercises and stifled a grin. The chauffeur's tone was bored. His posture was stiff. His uniform immaculate. This show certainly hired some real winning personalities. *How do they stay in business?*

Covey raised his eyebrows. "Lacey Valentine, where are you taking me to seduce me?" He threw the question out in a challenging tone.

"The river." She gave him one last look. How was it he excited and irritated the hell out of her all at the same time?

She turned and walked out the door. She could feel his eyes burning holes in her skirt. How would those eyes feel when they looked at her naked body? If they could cause such heat through the material, they were bound to leave her with a sunburn when the material was removed.

He was following close. Too close for comfort. She could feel his breath warm on her neck. She had the sensation of being a burning house. A house she had purposely caught on fire. Would she survive unscathed? Or would she come out of it scorched around the edges?

She forced herself to relax and to get into character for their first fantasy. *Oh, hell. The fantasy is in motion.*

Her breathing stopped and her step faltered.



Would she be able to do this? She had to be able to do this.

She coached her clients all the time on how to get into character for their fantasies. It's just play. Have fun.

*Put everything else out of your mind and picture yourself as a new person.*

*Right. Got it. New person.*

*I can't believe I'm twenty-two and still a virgin. Going to an all-girls college is the pits. Every girl I know has had sex. I'm going to have sex with the very next man I meet.*

Oblivious to the fact she was trying to get into character to have her way with him; Covey jarred her out of her thoughts and bullied her for a definition of a river. "The river? Do you mean one that has water, fish, snakes? Or a river as in the latest nightclub in New York?" he asked.

*Breathe in. Breathe Out.*

*Breathe your way into character.*

Once you are in character, never slip out of it.

Breathe in. You are a virgin looking for sex. You are a frustrated woman.

*Breathe out. You are a sexual woman.*

"Mmmm, the first. A moonlit float. I'm working on a fantasy for a new couple. I want to try it out before I include it in their package," she responded.

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

"Are you going to do a strip tease for me?"

She was never going to be able to stay in character if he kept badgering her for details. "If you're lucky, we might work that into our weekend," she snapped.

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

"Am I going to be research for your job?"

*Does DKNY sell perfume?* "Do you have a problem with me treating you as research? I'm great at multitasking." She liked how his voice got all cranky at the thought of being research. A college girl looking for sex would take it as a challenge.

"Multitasking?"

Even cranky, his voice was a turn on.

"Do you plan your grocery list when you're having sex?" he asked.

She stopped walking and looked at him. "Not if my partner's any good at what he's doing. Are you any good Covey James?" This was harder than she thought it would be. Perhaps, she should tell him what the fantasy was they were to play out.

"Oh, I'm good. I'm just wondering if you're going to be any good. One man let you go for better sex."

Lacey gasped and slapped him soundly. "You insufferable pig. That was mean." How did he know that? She hadn't told him that.

*Breathe in. Breathe out.*

*Breathe out. I mean in.*

*Damn him! I can't think.*

Covey shocked her by grabbing her hand in a steely grip. "I tend to be blunt. You'd better get use to it. Which river?" The smooth whiskey voice had turned into a moonshine tone. The kind that hurts as it goes down and leaves you staggering for balance immediately.

Lacey looked at him and yanked her hand out of his grasp. "I feel sorry for the woman you're going to bombard with a marriage proposal." She rubbed her wrist where his hands had held it with such power.

Masculinity flowed out of this man's pores. She tried to remember the last time she had dated a brawny, blue collar man. None came immediately to mind. What kind of woman would say yes to marriage to him?

She turned her back to him and started toward the limo. "The Buffalo River in Arkansas." Her legs trembled as she walked, but her voice was steady. Her mind refocused on her role. It didn't matter who the woman was he had in mind. For this weekend, he was hers.

He flanked her in silence.

The heat off the sidewalk was stifling. "The river is beautiful and peaceful. Not a lot of rapids to distract us from the setting. You can find out if I'm any good."

Covey's hand landed on her shoulder stopping her from getting into the limo. She turned around slowly to look at him. Perhaps she should abort this mission and run. Run as far as she could away from him.

They stood on the busy sidewalk of New York and inventoried each other's assets. Warmth, which had nothing to do with the sun, engulfed Lacey in a layer of desire. She saw a similar craving burning in his eyes. Thoughts of scrapping the weekend quickly disappeared.

It was all systems go. Time to launch her boosters.

Nodding her head, as if they had both just declared the other desirable, she gave him a saucy smile. One, she hoped, hid her unease.

Without warning, he pinned her against the limo. His lips sought hers in a savage attack. She struggled for air and pushed at his chest.

He let go of her and she nearly fell. "I don't plan on waiting until the river to find out if you're any good," he warned.

She didn't plan on waiting that long either. She nodded and bent her head to slide into the limo. Her skirt slid up. Although she hadn't planned it this way, she knew teasing him with glimpses of her upper thighs was a good beginning to her planned fantasy. She held the pose long enough for him to get a good look at all that was on display.

He surprised her by placing his palm on her ass.

"Oh," she said in surprise and then slid on into the limo. The little act of exhibitionism helped her to get into character.

She would use all of her assets this weekend and all of her acting ability. And, if this first encounter was anything to go by, she would be using up all of her courage as well.

When he was settled into the seat across from her, she slowly uncrossed her legs and left them open. *Breathe.*

His glance slid rapidly to her panties, and his mouth softened. Slowly, she crossed her legs again.

Covey's eyes eventually met hers. The smoldering flame burning in them warmed her. She acknowledged his silent message of hunger with a tilt of her lips and looked down at

his jeans. Her eyebrows rose in acknowledgement of his reaction.

This man was in pain. Her nerves told her to abort the mission, but the rest of her body refused to listen.

"Do you like what you see?" he asked, adjusting himself.

She didn't tear her attention away from his hand. "It appears you have potential. Did you like what you saw and felt?"

His large palm moved from his erection and reached out to touch her face. "Definitely. Why don't you slide out of those pink panties and get more comfortable?"

"Pink? Panties?" She wrinkled her forehead in confusion. "Did I wear panties today? Normally, I don't bother under my uniform." She surprised herself with how well she was in character.

Electricity crackled in the limo as she placed her hand under her skirt to check if she was indeed wearing panties. She raised an eyebrow in mock surprise. "You're right. I did. And they're damp."

His eyes remained glued to her every move as he settled back in his seat. She shifted sideways on the seat and leaned back until she was lying down. Her thumbs hooked underneath the tiny piece of material that held her panties together and she carefully wiggled them over her hips. Sitting up, she turned to face him again and slid them down her legs, over her MarVena Pumps. "Do you like pink?" she asked.

When he nodded, she tossed them to him.

He caught them and stuffed them in his shirt pocket.

Dibs  
by Lisa Wells

Lacey laughed in pretend delight. She leaned forward and handed the very stiff and proper, but no longer bored, chauffeur a piece of paper through the open window. *Shit. I was supposed to give this to you first.*

The man's eyes sparkled in amusement, before the glass partition slid close and automatic blinds hid them from his knowing eyes. He pulled the limo out into the heavy New York traffic leaving Lacey and Covey to finish what she'd started.

Lacey took a deep breath. *Breathe in. Breathe out. Stay in character.* Horns blasted outside and buildings glided by in a blur.

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## **Chapter 9**

The knot in the back of Covey's neck was gone. The headache he'd been plagued with for a week had disappeared. He felt alive. A smile tugged at his lips; he felt twenty-nine again.

The anticipation of having sex with Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator unsettled him. He felt like a teenager about to lose his virginity. He wanted to grab her, spread her, and do her without flowery words or gentle caresses.

If she was edgy about their adventure, he couldn't tell. An aura of relaxation surrounded her. He found her poise arousing and a bit unnerving. Here was a woman approaching a new situation with total abandonment. His cock hardened just thinking of her apparent uninhibited personality and imagining what sex with her was going to be like.

One look at her, and anyone could tell it was definitely a fantasy she intended to play during their limo ride to the airport. He'd never engaged in a sexual fantasy with a woman.

He glanced at Lacey. She'd closed her eyes, shutting out the sight of him. Her eyes were screwed shut so tight he could practically see the fantasy playing in her mind. He pressed his lips together in displeasure. He wanted her to open her eyes and fantasize about him. He wanted to be the one to get her off, not some imaginary fantasy man. Drawing in a deep breath, he realized he was jealous.

If she insisted on having a fantasy, he wanted her to fantasize about having sex with a guy she met on a dating show. He wanted the guy to look exactly like him. Act like him. Kiss like him. Sound like him.

Was this normal for her? Was sex always about a fantasy with her? Did she ever just crawl into bed and have ordinary sex with a man? Or did she need fantasies to get the cream flowing in her panties?

*She owns a sex business. She doesn't do boring sex. She creates sex.*

She'd made it clear she didn't want anything from him when the weekend was over. The whole weekend must be about making a fantasy come true for her.

She thought he was a blue-collar worker barely making a living. She thought the only thing he had to offer a woman was his body and a beer on the back porch.

She was getting her jollies by having sex with a loser? A weird fantasy to be sure, but the only plausible explanation for why she chose him.

He'd met a woman who truly didn't have strings in the back of her mind? The woman of his fantasies.

Why wasn't he okay with being used to fulfill one of her fantasies? Why did he have to fight the desire to open his mouth and tell her all of his secrets and impress her with his success? He didn't want her to think of him as a loser when she was having sex with him.

How in the hell was it possible for her not to have the faintest clue who he was? Sure he went by a stage name



when he sang, but hadn't she seen pictures of him in the tabloids?

He bit back the astonishment of realization. The tables were turned on him. Here was the woman of his selfish, let's-just-have-sex dreams, and he wasn't happy. He wanted her to want to get married. The admission was scoured from a place beyond judgment and rationale. If someone was going to say no to marriage, he wanted it to be him. What a hypocrite he was.

Setting his Stetson cowboy hat on the seat, he ran his fingers through his hair, stretched his legs out, and inventoried his options.

All she wanted was an orgasm. "Now what?"

His voice caused her eyes to fly open and she gave him a startled look. "I'm sorry, are you talking to me?" she asked, in a delicate voice with a tiny frown marring her forehead.

Covey resisted the urge to reach out and smooth the frown away. "I don't see anyone else back here with us."

She rested a long, slim finger thoughtfully on her puckered lips and tilted her head in a gesture of confusion. "Have we met?" she asked.

Covey's brows slammed together. Were there rules to this damn game? Did he get any clue as to what she expected of him?

*People actually pay her to come up with sex games? Why couldn't sex just be sex? Why make it into a game?* "I thought we had," he said gruffly.

Her eyes grew round. "Thanks for letting me share your limo to the airport," she said, before nibbling on her bottom

lip. "This car is so big." She reached for her purse and pulled a tube out.

He watched her slide pink gloss over her lips. His gaze riveted to them, and then he let his eyes slide slowly over her body. He was a goner. He'd play whatever sex game she wanted to play. The woman just twined him around her little finger with a tube of gloss. She disturbed him in every imaginable way.

He looked into her eyes. "It's not the only thing big around here," he replied, with a southern inflection. His cock felt like it would explode any moment. "Darling, allow me to introduce myself." He held out his hand. "Covey James at your service. And who might you be?" he drawled. His drawl was getting a good workout around her. His grandmother would cringe to hear him speak in such a way. She'd worked so hard to make sure none of them spoke with a drawl.

"Oh, your hand is big," Lacey gushed. "I've never seen such big hands. My name's Lacey."

"Lacey?" She wasn't going to assume a new name with her new identity. His gaze fell to the creamy expanse of her legs.

"Lacey Valentine," she said, in a voice that vibrated sex.

Covey swallowed hard. Acting wasn't his forte. He was used to black and white situations. He'd try for point blank and see if that worked. He wanted to cut to the chase. "Lacey, I'm a horny cowboy. Do you want to have sex? I have something bigger and harder than my hand that I could show you." He was acutely aware that the car was moving and time was slipping away. He didn't want to miss the sex by spending too much time on the fantasy build up.

She bit her lip and looked away. "I. Well. Mmm. This is kind of new to me. I guess we could have sex. You do have my panties in your shirt pocket."

He barely heard the words. His eyes were focused on her right hand sliding down over her breast, down her flat stomach, and stopping at the juncture of her legs.

He groaned in approval when she pulled the skirt up a tad and gave him a prim, virginal look.

So, her fantasy was to play steal my cherry in the back seat of a car. He could do that. "My mamma did teach me a woman is always right," he said.

She gave no indication she heard him. She was a much better actress than he was an actor.

How many times had she performed this particular act for men? He hoped none, but knew that was wishful thinking. No doubt about it, purebred or not, Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator knew about sex.

He swallowed hard and found his voice. "My friends call me a stud," he drawled, and felt immediately like a complete idiot. Determined to get to the good part, he continued. "Girls are constantly throwing their panties at me when I'm on stage." He patted the seat next to him. "Come here." He looked her over seductively.

She bristled and uncertainty clouded her eyes. Inch-by-painful-inch, she slid closer to him. She kept one finger in her mouth and the other hand resting on her womanhood. He resisted the urge to reach out and yank her onto his lap. The prolonged anticipation was almost unbearable.

He was primed and ready to milk the sex kitten. He was busting to devour the sex kitten, and now, the sex kitten was acting the naughty, innocent. He wasn't in the mood for an innocent. A sense of urgency drove him.

Reaching out, he tangled his fingers in her hair, and he released the barrette holding it away from her face. He tossed it to the floor. *Beautiful.*

Their eyes met and a vaguely sensuous glow passed between them. His fingers combed through the silky, blonde strands. Her hair felt like a fine pair of silk stockings against his skin. Without the restriction of the hair clasp, it fell around her shoulders and covered her breasts like satin sheets. His heart jerked and his pulse pounded. Every inch of her heavenly body would feel like satin sheets to his skin. His fingers closed around the back of her neck and he tugged her closer. He thought he detected a flicker of fear in her eyes. But, it quickly vanished.

He liked the way her skirt bunched up around the top of her legs where he could see her nakedness. The hair there was slightly darker and curly. A neatly trimmed V begged for exploration.

Her legs were long, golden, firm. They were the legs of a dancer. He recalled the introduction read by the host before she came out on stage. Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator was a *stripper*. Or at least, she taught women how to strip. The legs stretched out in front of him were made to be twined around a man. *Around him.*

His fingers journeyed from her neck downwards. He pushed her hand away and tugged on the tiny, blonde hairs

at the juncture of her legs. "You look like a wild child," he murmured.

She inched forward pressing into his hand; he cupped her gently. Her heat scorched him. He watched her scrape a knuckle across her mouth. The constricting pulse in her throat was the only indication she gave of being nervous.

He groaned when he felt moisture against the palm of his hand.

She tilted her head down shyly, successfully breaking eye contact. Her closeness was so female, so electric.

She was the living, breathing fantasy of any man with red blood running through his veins. She'd been smart going into the fantasy business. She was made for selling sex. She'd make a fortune as a hooker.

A thought popped into his head. He quickly shut it down as being ludicrous. Too far fetched for consideration. This was a weekend. An unexpected weekend of pleasure. It wasn't a long term possibility. Sure, he was looking for a wife. But, he'd made it clear to Lacey he wasn't. She chose to act out her fantasies based on his honesty. He always kept his word.

He couldn't remember a time he'd ever broken a promise. Lacey and he had shook hands on a no-strings-attached weekend. A man's handshake is his honor in Texas. The pit of his stomach churned. Had he shook hands on their deal too quickly? Would he regret the decision to grant her the stringless demand?

Although his heart kept giving off funny vibes, the only thing between him and Lacey was sex. Finding a sex partner

wasn't what he'd promised his grandmother. He'd promised her that he'd look for true love.

He watched Lacey tangle a strand of hair around her index finger and twirl it painfully slow. His gut knotted. She ignored the effect the act of innocence was having on him and licked her lips. Then, she brought up her index finger and slid it slowly into her mouth tilting her chin down slightly letting the finger slide out and in, out and in. She was demonstrating a blow job. His dick begged to replace her finger.

Desire slammed through him knocking him off balance. The thought of her sliding him deliciously in and out of her mouth was mind rattling. This was definitely a wild-virgin fantasy she was unveiling in front of him.

"I'm here," she murmured.

Her words were spoken so quietly he had to lean forward to catch them. Her breaths were quick, little gasps.

She was wearing perfume. He hadn't noticed it before. It had a summery smell. It enticed him to bury his face between her legs to see if she was one of those women who dabbed her fragrance in the crease between her legs and her mound.

You could tell a lot about a woman by where she placed her perfume.

With his head bent, he had a magnificent view down her blouse. Round globes were spilling out of a pink, lace bra.

Her brain freezing breasts were there for the taking. They had been getting in the way of his concentration since he walked out from behind the curtain to be introduced to her. He could see the rosy tops of her nipples straining to escape the restraint of lace. They were dark pink, thrusting pebbles.

He cocked his head sideways to look at her. She was staring at her breast with the same look of utter fascination they aroused in him. He gently touched one breast with his middle finger. "Beautiful," he whispered.

She gasped. "No one's ever touched my breasts before." Her eyelashes fluttered gently.

He explored the globe slowly with a stroking touch. The skin was soft. Sparkles rubbed off on his finger. Where else would he find sparkles? "I'm honored to be the first."

When he nudged the material of her bra slightly, he was rewarded with the sight of a tan line. A triangular outline gave bloom to visions of the bottoms. What would they look like? Minimal was his guess.

"Mmmm. That feels good. Are they big enough for you?" She tilted her head back and a soft sigh, originating somewhere deep in her throat, floated out sounding like a sexual invitation. Her back arched and his fingers, still cupping her mound, slipped between her delicate folds. She gasped.

"They're perfect," he whispered. His fingers dipped under the lace of her bra. It suddenly seemed quite normal to be seducing a woman in the back of a moving limousine? With one hand, he rubbed her sex while the other found a nipple, and he squeezed it gently letting his fingertips rub intimately against its hard nub. Her nipples were large. Perfect for suckling.

She groaned and closed her eyes. "What did you say your name was?" She kept her eyes squeezed shut.

The question startled him. Did she really forget his name or was this more of a game? He wanted her to open her eyes so he could read their sultry depths. Her hips shifted on the seat in another invitation of sex. He slid a second finger inside of her. Her creamy wetness enticed him to bury himself into her.

"It's Covey." His tongue found the temptation to taste her lips too tempting to ignore. Leaning forward, he licked the gloss off her full bottom lip. The light scent of her gloss filled his nostrils. Its glossy sweetness tempted his tongue to greedily take it all. "What flavor is this?" His voice sounded heavy to his own ears, thick and full of desire. Her eyes, her crystal blue eyes, blinked. A blanket of desire covered her face.

Her lips trembled under his tongue. He stamped down the desire to ravage with no thought to her pleasure. His tongue touched hers with tiny pushes of playful exploration. A gluttonous need goaded him to stop asking and take. He captured her mouth in a heated kiss. His tongue thrust past hers, igniting a groan from deep in her throat. He pulled back and his eyes locked with hers. He was ready to claim her; he needed to know if she was ready to be claimed.

She broke the eye contact. "Cherry. Do you like it? I have another cherry you can have." Her fingers came up and tangled in his hair as her body arched up to meet his in open invitation. Their lips touched again.

He opened her mouth with his tongue. He let it glide over the fleshy inside of her lips before tracing her teeth. Her tongue found his and demanded attention.



They fought for power using their tongues as weapons. The dance was intimate and fierce; her nails scraped his scalp as she struggled to win. He let her win; for now.

"Yes," he answered. Desire swam through his blood demanding he taste every inch of her. Her perfect white teeth begged for their own attention. Her nipples were calling his lips.

"Covey, I'm having the funniest sensation going through my body. I think it might be desire. Have you ever fantasized about having sex with a college virgin?"

Her voice was sexually inviting, while her eyes were shouting pure virtue at him. The mixed message was killing him. "Are you sure it's not triumph you're feeling?"

She laughed a perfect seductress laugh. Rich, throaty, inviting.

This woman had potential to hold his attention past the normal week or two most women held it. How was he going to get enough of her in just one weekend? "Let's just say, I've had my fair share of fantasies about bedding women," he responded honestly.

"I'd like to make your fantasy come true. I want you to be my first." Her fingers came up, and she slowly unbuttoned her blouse. The tip of her tongue was poking between her lips, and she was biting it with perfectly white teeth as she concentrated on the task.

Did she have any idea the fantasies he was wrapping around her tongue?

He reluctantly removed his fingers from their resting spot and pulled back into the plush cushions of the limo. He

watched her languid movements of disrobing. The tongue movement had him on the verge of a code blue.

Giving her oral sex was on his mind. He was heading south just as soon as she gave the go ahead. Before the weekend was over, she would be dependent on his tongue. She would beg for his long torturous strokes on her clit. She would beg him to enter her over and over again. She might know about fantasies, he knew about sex. Pleasing her was something he would enjoy.

When the shirt was no longer a barrier, he leaned forward and slid it off her shoulders. He buried his face between her breasts and inhaled the scent. His tongue explored the valley between them.

His groan of pleasure collided with hers. Sounds of sexual excitement filled the back of the limousine.

She arched her back and unsnapped her bra giving him full access to do with as he pleased. He had no problem plundering the bounty she was thrusting at him. He would take all she offered. And more. Much, much, more.

She grabbed his shirt roughly, their eyes locked in foreplay. Slowly, she pulled apart each snap. Her fingers raked down his chest with just enough pressure to leave their mark.

"Is this a research fantasy?" he asked while shrugging out of his shirt and pushing her back on the seat cushion.

She looked at him. A sexual glaze clouded her eyes.

Not waiting for an answer, he held her in place with one hand and shoved her skirt up around her waist with the other.

Sparkles highlighted the soft skin at the top of her inner thighs.

His eyes sought hers. "Lacey, I have to warn you, this is going to be ugly sex."

Her mouth formed a perfect O. "What do you mean?" She looked back at him with worried eyes.

"I mean..." He paused and rested his forehead against her abdomen, "you have me so aroused, I can't promise you a lot of foreplay." He raised his head to see how she would react. He wanted fast, hard sex. He wanted to ravish her.

The O melted. "But, I was hoping you would give me my first orgasm. I'm new at this, you know. I was told it was best if the man took his time."

He bit back the groan her words evoked. His lips brushed across her stomach. "I see." His fingers roamed over her and she jumped. With his index finger, he found her clit. He went down on his knees and bent forward.

Her hand came down to his forehead to stop him. "Wait," she pleaded, pushing him away.

He looked up at her and saw doubt in her eyes. "Why?" he asked. His tongue flicked out and touched her. She groaned.

Her mask crumbled away, and he saw, for the first time, what he was sure was the real Lacey.

"I'm scared you'll fail," she whispered.

She wasn't acting. He moved up. His lips recaptured hers, more demanding. It was ecstasy when he kissed her. He would give her ecstasy in return. "Trust me. Just relax." He'd never not given a woman an orgasm.

She shook her head vehemently. "It won't be your fault, if you don't. I'm a virgin. I hear they don't often have orgasms the first time. You should just know that up front."

"I promise, if you'll just try and relax, I can help you reach orgasm. I'll take my time. A girl should remember her first time," he whispered. There was more to Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator than met the eye. His lips slowly descended down her body.

She took a deep breath. "Okay."

She was wet, ready, willing. He just needed to give her contentment. "I'm going to taste you now."

"Yes, you do that." She exhaled sharply when he nudged her legs open with his head.

His tongue delighted in her as it pleased her. With the movements of a man who had a lifetime in front of him, he slowly tasted and teased. Nipped and tugged. Her body squirmed beneath his mouth. He played around with the length of the strokes, the direction, and the friction until he found the combination that made her hold her breath with anticipation. Then he kept it there, driving her toward the edge of no return.

"Oh, oh." She bucked wildly on the seat when his tongue finally dove into her. A moan of pleasure filled the limo. He didn't let up on the assault. His thumb found lubricant in the moisture along her lips. He used his thumb to trace her bottom, searching for other ways to take her over the edge. His fingers were busy caressing her swollen nub when another moan of pleasure exploded from her. The limo was filled with

the smell of her perfume mixed in with the musty smell of sex.

She was all woman, and he had just claimed her in the most intimate way a man could claim a woman.

Her fingers groped for his head, they tangled in his hair, and she pulled roughly, urging his face back up to hers. "God, you're good," she said with her eyes shut.

He moved his lips away from their haven. "Open your eyes," he ordered. He looked into them for evidence of success. He was startled by what he saw. She looked like a woman who had deep secrets. *Were those tears in her eyes?*

Her fingers shook as she unzipped his jeans. He quickly forgot about the tears. He forgot his name. His hard cock was sticking out of his briefs waiting for attention. Her eyes gazed dreamily at him. He guided her hand to himself. As her fingers enclosed around him he inhaled sharply.

"Does it matter?" she asked in a throaty voice.

*Does it matter?* Covey didn't recall asking her a question. "Does what matter?"

"Does it matter if this is research?"

"No." Had they mentioned research? "How long do we have?" he asked, while looking out the windows watching the crowded New York streets crawl by.

"Not very."

She watched him as he undressed. When he went to put the condom on, she took it from him and rolled it quickly down his cock like a woman who knew her way around a man's anatomy.

He raised his eyebrow in surprise. A surge of famished desire spiraled through him.

"I've been practicing in my dorm at night," she said with a laugh.

He groaned, roused to the peak of no return. When she turned her back to him and sat on her knees with her bottom temptingly swaying back and forth he wasted no time in following her lead. A moving vehicle and a naked woman asking to be entered through the back door. He was in heaven.

Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator was an enigma. Did she or didn't she need the traditional trappings of sex. She was a woman who wasn't afraid to ask for pleasure from a man. He found that hot.

She reached an arm back and pulled her skirt, very slowly up over her ass. Fireworks exploded in his head.

His thumb did a tour of its treasures. It was perfect. There were no tan lines down here. *Interesting*. He liked the way her breathing got ragged when he touched her in moist places. A moan slipped through her lips. "Are you ready?" he asked, in a voice he didn't recognize as his own. He was ready to enforce his will upon her, his desire upon her.

"Yes."

Not sure he could have waited had she said no, he spread her open and entered her from behind. It was a raw act of possession. Her soft gasp of pleasure encouraged him. He gently pushed in and out as his fingers explored her hidden treasures.

"Harder," she pleaded. She reached a finger between her legs and rubbed her sex in self-stimulation.

The knowledge that she was touching herself was erotic. The ardor of his passion mounted. He was lost. "Come with me," his growling demand was whispered hotly against her neck.

"Oh, oh my." Her gasping moan of pleasure occurred just seconds before his own sigh of release.

She collapsed on the seat and looked up at him. Her lips quivered and flames of passion burned in her eyes.

As if on cue, the car slowed to a stop. Covey reluctantly pulled away from her. He watched as she quickly pushed her clothes back into place. He cursed that there was no time for a gentle landing from the experience. Later, they would enjoy slow sex with one another. Later, he would ask her about the tears.

"We're here," the chauffeur warned them without opening the blinds and exposing them.

Lacey reached forward and grabbed tissues. She handed him several.

He raised an eyebrow.

"To dispose of the evidence," she said, grinning wickedly at him.

Gone was the innocent virgin. In her place, a vixen. He could feel her eyes upon him as he took his time taking the condom off and wrapping it in a tissue.

"Hurry," she urged him.

When he looked at her, he was glad to see her hands shaking slightly as she smoothed her hair back into the barrette.

Covey was glad to see she wasn't as calm as she would have him believe. He wanted to keep her off balance. It gave him clearer glimpses of the woman behind the act.

She leaned forward and knocked gently on the sliding window. It magically slid open. "Mac, I'll be getting out here. My friend, Tom, will be taking flight 2436 from gate 122, Northwestern."

Mac opened her door for her and she slid out fully clothed and outwardly composed.

Covey stared. Mouth dropped open.

Tom? She had called him Tom. Who in the hell was Tom? Was that the guy who had pushed her to a weekend of revenge sex?

*There's no way in hell she was thinking about some guy named Tom just now. Or was she? Of course she wasn't. Tom was an unwanted intrusion in his plans. Tom needed his ass kicked.*

She leaned back in. "When you get on your plane, there will be a letter waiting for you." She blew him a kiss with lips devoid of all gloss, swollen from his own. "It'll tell you what to do next. It was arousing, Tom."

"Who in the hell is Tom?" he barked.

She didn't answer. She just smiled sweetly at his own glaring frown.



She sure as hell had better not been fantasizing about some guy named Tom when she was with him. "The name's Covey," he said between clenched teeth.

She turned around and grinned at him. "Whatever." The word was flicked at him with a nonchalant attitude of indifference. "By the way, you might want to rub off the sparkles on your cheeks before you go out in public." Then she strolled slowly toward the entrance to JFK airport and disappeared into the crowd.

Covey looked at the chauffer who shrugged his shoulders and got back behind the wheel. "I'll drop you off next, Tom."

"It's Covey," he snapped. He grabbed for another tissue and dragged it roughly across his face.

When this weekend was over, his name would be permanently tattooed to all of Lacey Valentine's fantasies and maybe even her ass.

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## Chapter 10

Lacey walked through the revolving doors looking like a woman who just had sex in the back seat of a moving vehicle with a stranger.

A gusty sigh of frustration escaped her lips and tears pooled in the corners of her eyes. Words pushed at her lips, demanding she open her mouth and let them be heard.

The man was skilled. The sex was great. But, still not a damn thing. She was a woman without an orgasm.

*I'm the innocent party here. Why am I being punished? This is freakin' not fair.* The thoughts bounced around painfully inside her skull, giving her the start of a headache.

Her backseat experience wasn't a moment to write about in her Great Moment's journal. The experience should have consumed twenty pages in her Great Moment's journal.

Oh, she'd write about it in her daily journal. The one with the boring, day-to-day stories. Stories with no endings or bad endings. Or, so-so endings. The sex between her and Covey was *good*. It was everything she should have needed to be drenched in orgasmic energy. So, why wasn't she feeling the glow?

*My college virgin fantasy isn't going to make it into the Great Moment's journal.* It was a journal she'd started when she was twelve. Entry number one was all about being kissed on the mouth by a boy for the first time. The boy's name was Jeff Barns. It was a journal filled with the very best of the best moments in her life. Not a lot in it, yet. But, what was

there was juicy. Like the time she talked to a real spirit at a séance with Maddison and Maddison's mom. She had been fourteen. It scared her so much that she slept with her bedroom light on for a year.

Someday, she would write about the return of her orgasm. Just not today. That elusive catalyst, which had set her upon this particular pathway, was proving hard to catch. Not only wasn't it back, it was evidently very lost.

"Damn. Damn. Damn." Lacey said the words loudly. Without a doubt, Covey was good. He'd taken her right to the edge of the cliff. Closer than Neverfail by a long shot. But, still nothing. All of those nerve endings, in that one little pebble of flesh, and she'd experienced nothing.

She closed her eyes and tried to relive the moment. Tried to discover where it all went wrong. Was it because she felt rushed? Perhaps. If they'd had all the time in the world, she wouldn't have felt the pressure to pretend. She would have waited for it to happen. Made him work harder for it.

Had she fooled him? Did he think she was a satisfied woman or did he know she was broken?

*God, I hope he doesn't know I'm broken. That would be so humiliating.* The mere thought of him knowing left her feeling irritable and unhappy with herself.

She rubbed at her eyes with the back of her hand and pulled her cell out of her purse. It was time to call Maddison.

"Maddison, I did it; I had an orgasm. I just had sex with a stranger and I had an orgasm; three, actually. I had three orgasms." She blurted out the lie in one long breath. She couldn't tell Maddison the truth. If she did, Maddison would

get her involved with another stranger. Strangers weren't getting the job done. Covey, at least, was no longer a stranger. They'd had sex. Once you've had sex with a man, you can't count him as a stranger. Hopefully, the next carnal act she had with him would be more satisfying. She bit the inside of her lip to keep from blurting out the truth.

Fishing a tissue and a mirror out of her purse, she waited for Madison's response.

"Shut up," Maddison screamed into the phone. "Already? No, way. I told you not to worry. I knew you would get it back. Where did it happen? Aren't you happy I suggested this?" she demanded, in a piercing voice.

"Yes, I'm glad. It was in the limo." Lacey turned her back to a guy who was showing her undue interest and went to work on salvaging her makeup. She couldn't believe she'd started to cry when she realized he wasn't about to get her over the edge. What a pathetic sign of weakness on her part. She hadn't even cried in front of Marty and his bimbo. What had gotten into her in the limo?

Maddison whistled loudly into the phone receiver.

Lacey held the phone away from her ear and dabbed fiercely at the streaks of mascara.

"Now what?" Maddison asked eagerly.

She felt like a bum. "Now, he's got to find me. Can you believe I did it?" Lacey put her mirror up and went back to fanning herself. She hated lying to Maddison. Best friends were not supposed to lie to one another. The blood began to pound in her temples. This was all Marty's fault.

*Hell, it's hot in this airport. Didn't they pay their electric bill?*

Maddison was unusually quiet.

*Does she know I'm lying? Can she tell?* "Are you still there?"

"What do you mean, find you?" she asked hesitantly.

Lacey leaned back in her chair and rested her head on the cool vinyl of the back rest. She'd fooled her. Just like she'd fooled Neverfail and Covey. "He's being flown to Arkansas on a different flight, placed in a canoe, and has to find me on a river bank." Her voice rose in agitation as she outlined her plan. It sounded overly bizarre when said aloud. Fantasies never sounded normal, but this one might be pushing things a bit too far. A guy sitting three chairs down moved two chairs closer.

Lacey tilted her head sideways and stole a look at him. She wrinkled her nose and shook her head.

"Shut. Up," Maddison screamed. "What if he doesn't know how to paddle a canoe?"

Lacey dismissed the possibility with the flick of her hand and frowned at the guy who just winked at her. The strangest people could be found in airports. "I don't know. Doesn't everyone know how to paddle a canoe?" She was hanging by a thread attached to a cumulus cloud of doubt. She didn't need her best friend nipping at the thread with sharp words of skepticism.

If it wasn't for the fact Urinal Scum would get the last laugh, she'd abort the whole thing. She'd go home and forget about orgasms. She'd become a nun.

"No. Everyone does not know how to paddle a canoe." Maddison was laughing at her, and the sound brought Lacey out of her thoughts.

She bit her lip and started twirling her hair. "He's a cowboy—surely, he does." He knew how to ride her with the passion of a Latin dancer. *No, that's not it. Ride me with the passion of a bull rider.*

*My mind is as fuddled as my metaphors. Why couldn't I reach an orgasm with him? He was spectacular.*

Lacey's shoulders slumped. The torment of the past few months suddenly felt like heavy weights pulling her down. *I've gone from planning a wedding, to discovering my fiancé cheating on me, to faking orgasms.* A flash of loneliness stabbed at her, and a new anguish seared her heart. She didn't want no-strings-attached sex. She wanted love. But, not with Covey. He was Mr. Wrong.

"You picked a cowboy?" Disbelief spilled through the cell. Maddison pounded the receiver on the counter causing Lacey to jerk the phone from her ear in pain.

"Stop doing that," Lacey yelled.

"Sorry. I just, so, can't believe you and a cowboy. Does he have a beard or a mustache?"

Lacey frowned. Who asked that about a man you just had sex with? "Neither. I picked a cowboy, not a hairy beast." It shouldn't surprise her Maddison asked. The woman had a fetish for men with facial hair. Her eighth grade boyfriend was chosen based solely on the fact that he could prove he had a whisker.

Lacey had to admit she liked the way Covey's whiskers had gently scratched her skin. Marty could go a week at a time without shaving.

*Cowboys are great fantasy material. Why haven't I done a cowboy fantasy for a couple? The Hartley's need a cowboy fantasy for their weekend in Arizona. Finally, something useful was coming out of her despair. I can't believe she asked about hair and not if he's well-hung.*

Maddison interrupted her startling revelation. "Shut up! I can't believe you would do that. Lacey Valentine—shacking up with a cowboy. That's astonishing." Maddison was talking so loud; the guy beside Lacey overheard the comment and pointed to his own cowboy boots. They were tan, scuffed, and looked like cow poop had stained the toes.

Lacey wrinkled her nose and whispered to Maddison, "I totally agree." She scooted one chair down from the airport stranger.

"Why are you whispering? If I were there, I would tell everyone in the airport you just got laid by a cowboy."

Lacey shook her head in disbelief. Then, laughter began bubbling out of her. "I think you just did," she said, when she finally caught her breath. It felt good to laugh.

"Hey, I know. You can name a fantasy package after him and he can name some corny country song after you."

"How did you know he sings?"

"Honey, any cowboy worth his boots, sings."

Lacey's lips parted in surprise. "They do?" A singing cowboy? "Anyway, he has some great snakeskin boots." Lacey hadn't really ever thought about the possibility of

cowboys singing. Of course, it made sense. Cowboys tended to be loners. Songs would keep them company out on the trails. She wondered if Miles Hartley would know how to sing to his blushing bride in front of a campfire? If he couldn't sing, a cowboy fantasy wasn't going to work for them.

She would spend her time on the plane coming up with new fantasies by using cowboy themes for her clients. The Burdette's might enjoy a cowboy fantasy. If nothing else came out of this episode in her sex life, at least she appeared to be back on track for coming up with new fantasies for her customers.

"Of course, they sing," Maddison chastised her. "Where have you been living all of your life? Is he rugged looking? Did he have a gun?"

"A gun?" *She's on pins and needles wanting to know if he has a gun.*

"I know, a gun's too much to hope for. But, is he cute?"

*Still no thought to well-hung.* Maddison was going to have to get her priorities straight on what a stranger needed in this situation. Whiskers, guns and looks did not make the top of Lacey's list.

*What words would best describe Covey James?* He was tall, rawboned, broad shoulders. The muscles rippling under his white shirt had quickened her pulse long before she got to see them stripped of material. His ruggedly handsome face was framed with thick, black hair. His hands were...

A voice came over the intercom announcing her flight. "He's tall enough that I have to look up at him. He has dark hair that is so thick your fingers get lost in it. He has a dimple



that begs to be explored. His teeth are perfect, his body is simply masculine. He was wearing faded jeans that were snug in all the right places. His shoulders are broad and beg for a woman to lay her head on them."

"I think I might have an orgasm just hearing you describe him," Maddison said with a giggle.

There was another boarding call for her flight. "I've got to go. But Maddison, believe me when I say he's a hunk, a babe, a hottie, and any other corny description you want to give him." She swished her hand through the air and snapped her fingers for emphasis.

"Hot damn. You go girlfriend."

Lacey smiled and hung up the phone. With a lighter step, and a steady breathing pattern, she headed toward the ticket counter to pick up her boarding pass.

The weekend had just begun. There was still time for her to get her orgasm back. She just needed to get to know the guy a little better. That was all. And take her time during sex. She could look for someone more permanent in her life when their date was finished.

She wouldn't tell Covey the truth; she'd just keep trying with him. Once she reached orgasm, then she'd tell him the truth. Maybe.

An hour later and a notebook filled with twenty new ideas for fantasies based on cowboys, she was boarding the plane. She sat down in her window seat, closed her eyes, and grinned.

Cowboys were her new, favorite fantasy material. They had firmly replaced construction workers and pro football players. *Okay, so football players are still a close second.*

With so many new fantasies fresh in her mind, she had plenty to call upon during sex with Covey if she needed to. There was nothing wrong with fantasizing during sex.

A pinup centerfold of Covey wearing nothing but his cowboy boots and a cowboy hat pulled down low on his forehead kept popping into her active imagination. *Oh yeah. She was going to get her orgasm back; it was just a matter of her time and his technique.*

Little Lacey Valentine was going slumming. That's what they would say when the show was aired in December. All of her brand-spanking new neighbors would burn up the lines calling everyone they knew to tell them the sordid details of the show.

She didn't care. Let them use up their cell minutes gossiping about her. She took her mp3 player out and put her earplugs in. She didn't even know any of her new neighbors. She had no regrets, and her parents were out of the country. She opened up her classic rock music folder and prepared to enjoy mood tunes.

*Slumming. Slumming. Slumming.* The word bounced around in her head like a ball in a tennis game. It was a word full of naughty and dangerous worldliness.

She had always secretly wished for the courage to go to a hole-in-the-wall bar and pick up a guy. What luck. Covey was not only a guy who frequented those types of establishments,

he sang in them too. She was going to spend a weekend having fun with a guy who knew how to have fun.

He wasn't interested in marriage and she wasn't interested in marriage with him. There would be no messy endings. She'd get in and get out without an emotional entanglement. *Perfection.*

Maddison had actually hit the nail on the head when she told her to go after a Mr. Wrong for a change. Imagine that. Her friend had gotten it right. She would take her out to dinner as a thank you when she got home. *And, come clean on the orgasm in the limo lie.*

Lacey slipped her shoes off and made herself comfortable. It was time to mull over what she knew about her weekend lover. He said he liked his women a little on the trashy side; she was going to find out if she liked her men a little on the trashy side.

*Okay, the limo pretty much answered that question.* He was good with his tool. *Tool?* Lacey laughed. Who called it a tool? If she was going to slum, she should just call it a dick and forget the Victorian lingo. Or perhaps, she should refer to it as a cock. Or both. She didn't really like the word cock. It was harsh sounding. Dick wasn't any better. Penis? Yeah, penis would work. Covey James was good with his penis. And his tongue.

This was going to be a weekend of new beginnings.

She sighed and leaned her chair back. How would Covey feel about tents and gravel bars? She chewed on her lower lip and twirled a strand of hair. Would Covey play the river fantasy through? He was a struggling country music singer.

Were country music buffs adventurous? It was one thing having sex in a car, quite another having sex the way she envisioned in her next two fantasies.

*He'll go for it.* Of course, he'll go for it. He hadn't been faking his orgasm. His was the real thing.

*Wouldn't he go for it? Does he like adventures?*

He did have sex with her in the limo. That was surely an adventure for him. Struggling musicians probably didn't spend much time in limos making love. Scratch that, having sex. *Hell, he still has my panties.* She tugged her skirt over her knees. *No wonder I'm feeling a draft.*

She sat her seat back up. There was no way she was going to be able to relax. She needed to do something to occupy her mind. She whipped out her calculator and added up the cost of the weekend so far. The *Dibs Dating Show* gave her a \$5,000 budget—the limo cost \$400; two plane tickets to Arkansas \$700; transportation to the river, canoe rental, camping gear, and props \$1,000. Almost, half of her budget.

Never again would she get a chance to spend someone else's money on her sex life.

She closed her eyes and sent up a quick prayer. *Dear God, let Covey be able to paddle a canoe.*

Her eyes snapped open. Okay, so probably turning to God for help on this one wasn't going to pan out. Better off not to bring his attention to this matter at all. Yet, she had no desire to spend the night on a riverbank alone.

"Would you like a beverage?" asked a hassled looking flight attendant.

"I'll have a glass of champagne."

Lacey sipped the champagne and jotted some notes in her pink leather planner.

Thoughts of Covey teased her concentration. Without realizing it, her notes became doodles of Covey. The doodles evolved into a caricature of Covey in a sexual situation with her. It wasn't bad art work for a novice. Perhaps she'd frame it. She closed her eyes and let the daydreams take over.

Champagne and daydreams—a winning combination.

Her luggage for the weekend was packed full of fantasy props. She had the usual: whip cream, chocolate, whips, handcuffs, blindfolds. And, then there was the unusual: mood sensors, footballs, portable swings. *Will we get around to using all of them?* If they found one that got her off, they wouldn't. They'd just keep using it over and over.

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## Chapter 11

Covey couldn't wait to get his hands on Lacey Valentine—she *would* know his name.

*Why in hell are we taking separate planes to Arkansas? And why Arkansas? We're in New York, the most romantic city two people can be in, and she's dragging my ass to Arkansas.*  
"Shit."

"I'm sorry, did you say something?" a flight attendant asked.

"No. Just talking to myself," Covey admitted, with a rueful grin.

She smiled pleasantly and handed him an envelope. "I was told to give this to you."

Covey took the envelope and jammed it in his shirt pocket.  
"Thanks."

"Is there anything I can get for you?" she asked. "Anything at all?"

"No." The attendant was hot. Under normal circumstances, he'd be taking her up on the signals she was sending his way. Which is where his problem occurred. There was nothing normal about his current circumstances. He ignored the signals and closed his eyes against the temptation. His brain might be wrapped around another blonde, but enticement was hard to resist. He focused in on a blonde, whose slender neck he'd like to have his hands wrapped around.

"Let me know if you change your mind. I have a layover in Arkansas."

Covey nodded without opening his eyes. When she walked away, he turned his attention to the window. A faint smell of perfume drifted from his shirt pocket. He sniffed appreciatively. It was the same perfume Lacey wore in the limo. The same perfume she wore at the crease of her inner thighs. The same perfume she wore between the valley of her breasts. The same perfume that clung to his shirt. The smell of summer was sitting in his shirt pocket.

He couldn't wait to spend more time exploring all of Lacey Valentine. He wanted her naked, stretched out on satin sheets, and begging for him.

He wanted to make sure she hadn't been faking her orgasm. Never in his life had he doubted how satisfied he'd left a woman, until today. There was something about her pleasure that didn't ring true. Sonofabitch, he'd turned thirty and lost his touch with women. How in the hell did that happen? His technique was the same. Why hadn't his moves, moved her to orgasm? Covey growled and pulled the shade down on his window. He'd known her less than two-hours and he already doubted his manhood. *She's a witch*. If there was anyone with a problem, it was her. He was a master at what he did. Women had orgasms when they were with him. If she didn't have an orgasm, it was because she didn't want one. Dammit, he didn't have time for this complication in his life. He had a wife-hunt to go on. He didn't need to worry about helping some woman find her orgasm.

When he got his hands on her, he was going to give her an ultimatum, you either have an orgasm or you tell me the truth. None of this bullshit, everybody's happy drama.

If she wanted an orgasm, all she had to do was work with him to get it. If it meant her giving him instructions on what it took to make it happen, well, he'd listen. He wasn't too proud to ask for directions. The important thing was for them both to feel satisfied when it was over.

Curiosity nagged him to open the envelope. Maybe it held the clues to her needs.

Stubbornness caused him to ignore it. The damn woman had called him Tom, then stuck him on a separate plane, and made him doubt his manhood. Games weren't his idea of foreplay. Sex, was his idea of foreplay.

He'd get around to reading the letter. Just not yet. He would wait until the plane was air born. He was thirty years old, too old to be playing games. He should have told Lacey that upfront.

What was it about her and orgasms? Had she ever had one? Was she frigid?

"May I get you a beverage?"

Covey forced a smile. This flight attendant was as cute as the first. And by the looks of her ring finger, just as single.

"Have you ever faked an orgasm with a man?" he asked.

The smile on her face disappeared and she turned to the row beside her to take their beverage order.

Under normal circumstances, he would make it a point to get both attendant's names and phone numbers before he exited the plane. Today, however, he was making bad impressions with both of them. When she turned back to him, he smiled apologetically. "I'll have a Scotch, and I'm sorry. I was out of line asking you that."



"Every woman's faked an orgasm at least once," she said, as she handed him the drink.

"How can a man tell when a woman's faking it?" he asked.

"You can't," she said, and then pushed the cart down the aisle to the next row of seats.

"That's what I was afraid of," Covey muttered.

The seat next to him was empty. Lacey should be sitting in that seat. Then, he could just ask her about her sexual history. He tried to stretch his legs. Even in first class, his long legs were cramped. Since hitting the big-time in the music world, he'd become spoiled. If he was going to fly, he preferred flying his own jet. There was more room and more privacy. Had Lacey ever been done in a plane? He found it amusing she didn't recognize his name. It was a little bruising to the ego. Sure, there were other men named Covey James, and he'd done what he could to be as different from the real Covey James as possible.

"Sir, would you like me to hang your jacket up?"

Covey declined. "No, I'll just put it under the seat," he leaned down to stash the coat. When the plane landed, he wanted to make a quick exit. He didn't want to have to stop and get things out of the overhead bin.

Lying on the floor, under the seat directly in front of him, was another envelope. He picked it up. No name was written on the front of it, but it smelled of Lacey. Unable to resist this one, he opened it up.

*Tom,*

*Get some rest on the plane; you're going to need it.*

*Lacey V.*

Covey swore under his breath and crumbled up the note. If he never heard the name Tom again, it would be too soon.

He glared out the window and watched the clouds come and go. New York was one of his favorite cities to visit. Probably, because he could bring women here, show them a good time, and avoid all of the tabloid gossip that happened when he was spotted in his own state with women. Texas had spies everywhere. Most were hired by his grandmother. Or, that was his theory. She was always trying to keep tabs on her grandsons, and she wasn't above hiring a private eye to do it. None of them had ever been able to prove their theory, but that didn't mean it wasn't accurate.

Finally, giving in to curiosity, he fished the second letter out of his pocket and tore open the envelope. A flimsy sheet of green paper lay inside. He read:

*I was once floating lazily down the Buffalo River when the water rose unexpectedly. My canoe tipped over and went down the river without me. I floundered for dry ground.*

*Cold and scared, I sat on the riverbank for two hours waiting for someone to come by who would give me a lift down the river to my camp. A nice couple from Peculiar, Missouri rescued me that day.*

Ever since then, I have fantasized about how it would have been had I instead been rescued by a fun-loving hunk. Now, I've done it again. I'm stranded on a secluded riverbank, and I need you to rescue me.

Please hurry and be my hero.

*Lacey V.*

Covey stared at the note and shook his head. There was no way he was going to do *that*. He would contact her and let her know this fantasy was a no go.

She was crazy. Sexy, but crazy. Definitely, crazy.

He checked his watch. The plane couldn't land quick enough. He needed to find a way to contact Lacey from the airport.

Stranded on a riverbank? The fantasy sounded intriguing and fresh. And, with the right couple, it would work. Casp would have enjoyed being stranded on a riverbank with Lacey. He was a camping fool. Give him a tent and a campfire and he was happy.

Lacey could sell this fantasy to one of her customers. Just not to him. He didn't do canoes. Covey picked up his drink and pictured Lacey alone on a riverbank.

Alone and naked.

Alone and naked on a riverbank.

Alone and naked on a riverbank in the moonlight.

Alone and naked on a river bank in the moonlight with blonde strands of hair curling around her breasts.

He replayed that image several times. It was a good one. *Damn, he wished he could indulge her on this fantasy.*

He couldn't. It wasn't just because he preferred hotel rooms and chlorinated water. There was more to it than that. He didn't do canoes. He'd almost died when he was ten from the undertow of a river. His mother did die. He didn't do rivers.

It was imperative he reach her before she took off down the river. Leaving her stranded was not what he wanted to

do. A stranded, naked Lacey on a riverbank may not be willing to finish the weekend with him. He really wanted to see what other fantasies she had planned and to make her desire explode.

Who was going to rescue her if he didn't? How would they meet up again if he didn't rescue her? Dammit, she should have asked him if he did rivers. Some people are afraid of the dark, some spiders, some death, his thing was rivers. He could feel the fear lurking just waiting to jerk him under the water.

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## Chapter 12

Lacey hopped into her canoe and sat squarely in the center of the back bench. If all went according to plan, she'd have her orgasm back in a couple of hours.

She waved cheerfully to her cab driver who was standing with his thumbs hooked in the straps of his overhalls. His face covered in a protective scowl.

"Bye," she said, before sticking the tip of her paddle into the bank and pushing her canoe out into the flow of water.

"Are you sure this is a good idea? A man died this summer when he got trapped against a tree."

"Really? How?" Lacey asked, as she got the feel for the boat.

"Boat tipped, current sucked him under a tree where he got trapped."

"That's horrible." Lacey didn't want to think about it. The normal consequences of not knowing how to canoe was flipping the boat and getting wet. Once in a while, there'd be a tragedy and someone would die. Usually, the tragedies happened early in the spring when there was a lot of rain and the rivers were up.

The cab driver spat tobacco on the ground. He reminded her of Botox. All growl and no bite. "Hell, yeah, it's horrible," he said.

Lacey could tell he was genuinely worried, and she didn't want him to spend his night worrying about her. She did some back paddling to keep the canoe from moving and did

what she could to ease his mind. "The sun's still up, I can see, and I know how to swim if I dump. I grew up on the river."

He spat again. "Why don't you wait for your man friend? It'll be safer if the two of you float together?"

It was safer to float with two. But, he wasn't thinking safety in numbers, he was making the assumption Lacey was the beginner and her man would be the expert. He was another form of a good ol' boy. "Don't worry. I'll be fine; I grew up on this stretch of the river. Just go back and pick him up at the airport, drop him off here, and send him down the river to find me." Lacey stopped back paddling and let her canoe float into the current.

"Those rapids are serious, we've had a lot of rain" he barked.

"Okay," Lacey shouted back.

The rapids, in question, were upon her within moments. They were a little tricky, but they were short. On a scale of one to ten, they were only a seven. "Surely, anyone can manage to get through them unharmed," she said, while expertly maneuvering the paddle to allow the canoe to slide through the fast moving water without a hitch.

It was too bad someone had died on such a simple stretch of the river. He must have been a real novice. *Or, real drunk.*

When the sun disappeared, she looked up at the sky and grimaced. There were a lot of clouds moving in. The sun would be down soon; a cloudy night could hinder Covey's progress down the river. Hopefully, his plane was on time and he'd be on the river long before the moon was an issue. Even

a seasoned floater might find it difficult, or impossible, to maneuver in total darkness.

With the recent rains, the driver was right, the river was moving at a quick pace. Even the normally quiet parts of the river were bubbling with a spitfire attitude. She probably should have checked on the water level one last time before she embarked on the float trip.

What would happen if Covey knew nothing about paddling a canoe? Would the rapids flip him? Maybe. *Probably not.* Unless, of course, he panicked and tried to do something stupid.

If all went well, Covey would find her and they would enjoy a moonlit float down the river to the luxurious camp she had waiting.

Tonight, they would try out the duplicate to the new sex toy she had ordered for the Burdette's.

She had been saving it for her honeymoon. It was an invention that sent its designer into the multi-millionaire club. There was a current two-month waiting list to obtain the gismo. Lacey lucked out and got hers before they went on sale to the public. She knew the distributor.

Tonight, she would see first-hand if it delivered on all of its promises. Anticipation spread like warm chocolate syrup on ice cream through her body puddling in anticipation between her legs.

The riverbank she was going to be stranded on while waiting for Covey was a white sand bar. During the summer months, it was a hot spot of sunbathing college students. This

time of year, it would be deserted and the trees would be decked out in their early fall colors.

It took her about forty minutes of paddling to get to it. With ease, she lodged her canoe and hopped out.

She pulled her cell phone out of her dry bag to call Maddison with an update. "Damn, it's out of range." Maddison would have to wait.

She dropped her phone back into the water tight bag and went to work unloading the canoe. Then, she pushed the canoe back into the current and watched it float away.

Once again, she was stranded. A shiver ran through her. There was no backing out now.

She thought about Marty and his new wife. Were they happy? Would they be happier than her and Marty would have been? There were times when she wished she hadn't come home that day and everything could have stayed the same. Days when she wished her life could go back to an uncomplicated relationship and a sure future.

And then she'd remember the sound of them reaching orgasm together and the bimbo coming out from under the covers with him all over her face. It was the memory that always brought her out of her *what could have been* moods. There was no way she wanted to spend a lifetime with someone who would do that in his fiancé's house, his fiancé's bedroom, his fiancé's bed. The man was a loser. She was better off stranded on a riverbank looking for a man who could give her an orgasm. Even if she was searching it out with a good ol' boy that would probably do the same thing to his fiancé given the chance. Was there such a thing as a



trustworthy man? Were they all susceptible to big boobs and lips that'll pucker?

At least Covey was her Mr. Wrong and she knew it. There was no way he could hurt her. Shaking off the melancholy blues, she opened the cooler and checked its inventory: wine, beer, cheese, peanuts, coffee, and whip cream. In the dry bag were some clothes, a CD player, and several CDs. They would listen to 80s love songs as they floated down the river.

What if he only liked country songs? She hadn't brought any country music. *I don't own any country music.* They would just turn it off if they couldn't agree on music. They would listen to the crickets. The sounds of nature would go divinely with the bottle of wine she had chilling on ice.

Lacey allowed herself to think of the possibility she might really be stranded if Covey refused to come.

She would just sleep on the river bank if he didn't come. Tomorrow, she would figure out a solution. But, that wasn't going to happen. It wasn't going to be necessary. *Covey will come. He has to. He's the hero type.*

The thought of him naked in the moonlight filled her with memories of the limo ride. She was shocked she'd gone through with it. She was proud of herself for getting into character and hanging with it. It hadn't been easy. There were moments she dissolved back into Lacey Valentine, but ninety percent of the time she'd been a college virgin.

Covey should have been more specific with the vegetable he picked to describe himself. He was hung as well as any model she'd ever seen in *Playgirl*. Perhaps, that's why he

didn't mention a veggie. Which one would have really done him justice?

There was little wonder she'd almost gotten her O back. If she'd been a normal woman, he would have given her many orgasms during the short drive to the airport.

*With a penis like his, he could give a nun an orgasm. He'll manage to give a head case like me one.*

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## **Chapter 13**

Covey stared at the driver in disbelief. "What do you mean, she can't be contacted? We have to contact her." He pulled out a hundred dollar bill and held it out to the man.

The driver looked at him with exasperation. "Keep your money. I watched her float down the river over an hour ago. You can't contact her; you have to find her." The driver shook his head. "You damn kids and the games you play these days. It is damn dangerous for her to be out there stranded on a river bank in the dark." He took a can out of his back pocket and stuffed a wad of chewing tobacco in the corner of his mouth.

"Dangerous? How?" Covey snapped while putting the money away. He knew the answer. He just didn't want to believe he was in this situation.

"Well, anything could happen to her. Some idiot could float down the river and attack her. She could get bit by a snake. You'd better hurry up and go save your lady."

Covey felt a cold sweat break out on his brow. He hadn't even thought of those dangers. His mind was consumed with the danger of the currents hiding underneath the inky water. "Why did you let her take off on her own if it's so dangerous? Are there a lot of weirdoes on this river?"

"It's hard to say this time of year. Might have some out there doing illegal drugs and shit. She's bull-headed, that little gal of yours. Wouldn't listen to a word I said. I tried all the way from the airport to talk her out of it."

"Fucking great. I have no desire to get into that contraption and float down a river." He'd never been in a canoe.

The driver guffawed. "You're kidding right? A big strapping boy like you's afraid of the water."

Covey clenched his jaw and narrowed his eyes. "Do I look like I'm kidding?" His childhood nightmares weren't any of this man's business.

The driver's expressive face sobered. He spat on the ground and scratched his bald head. "Hell, what are you, some city boy dressed up like a cowboy?"

"What does being a cowboy have to do with canoes and rivers?"

"Well, if you're the real thing, you've got it in your genetics to float a river. Just hop in and start paddling. Paddle against the water when you want to turn. You'll get the hang of it in no time. You know how to swim don't you?"

"Yes," Covey answered. He preferred doing his swimming in chlorinated pools where there were no surprise twisters lurking, ready to grab you by the ankles, and suck you into oblivion.

"Then buck up and get going. It'll come natural to you after a while. If you flip your boat hang on to it and let it float you down the river. I'd go find her myself, but it's my anniversary. Promised the old lady I'd take her to town for the liver and onions special at Joes.

Covey couldn't believe he was taking river survival tips from a man who thought liver and onions were an anniversary dinner specialty. His doubt must have showed on

his face, because the driver's smile flipped upside down and he said something under his breath.

Covey couldn't hear which was probably just as well.

He was torn between dread and decency. Lucky for Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator, decency won out. "I'll figure it out. Like you said, it'll probably come naturally to me." He was a strong swimmer. What were the chances one person would get caught in an undertow twice in one lifetime? Lacey better hope the chance was zero.

When he got his hands on her, he was going to choke her. *Right after I have my way with her.* And, the damn woman had better not fake an orgasm on him. He wasn't the type of man women had to fake orgasms with. Never had been and he wasn't going to start now.

The driver chuckled. "Right, I'm sure it'll work out just like you said."

Covey watched him lumber back to his battered truck and drive away in a cloud of dust. "Dammit. The next fantasy you weave, I want information ahead of time."

He walked over to the canoe and glared at the boat. There were two paddles. How was one man supposed to use two paddles? He perked up when he saw a cooler. "Lacey, I hope like hell there's some beer in that thing." He flipped the lid open.

"Shit." Covey eyed the beverage with disgust. "Cola."

He bent down and took off his boots and socks. He stashed them in the yellow bag. Looking at the river, and then at his jeans, he stripped out of them and his T-shirt and stuffed them in the bag with his boots and socks. His boxers, he

figured, would be easier to swim in than his jeans should he end up under the canoe. His hat he left on. A man's hat was meant to go down with the ship. Hopefully, that wouldn't be necessary. If it was and he died, his hat floating on down the river would alert someone to his troubles. Would anyone see a black hat floating down a river at night?

Untying the canoe, he pulled it out into the water and got in. The boat tipped wildly. "Son of a bitch." He sat down with a bang and struggled to keep the boat upright. With a lot of effort, he managed to escape an immediate nosedive. "Dammit, Lacey. You have no idea how much you're asking of me."

He picked up a paddle, sat down in the middle of the boat, and tried his hand at paddling a canoe. He found, by paddling continuously on the same side, the canoe went in a perfect circle. So, he tried one stroke on each side of the canoe. That worked better.

Once he was in the current, he didn't really have to paddle much at all. The quick moving water acted like a tiny motor and powered him along.

He leaned back and relaxed. This wasn't so bad. He had a boat between himself and the currents underneath. There was a full moon rising in the sky and a lovely young lady was waiting for him out here in the solitude. Once he found her, they'd be alone. No interruptions.

The sound of the water, up ahead gathering speed, brought a broad smile to his face. He wasn't in the water. Nothing to be afraid of. *The quicker the water is moving, the quicker I'll find Lacey.*

He was glad he decided to go for it. It was a beautiful evening. A good night for marathon sex with a woman built for sex. Canoeing was a cinch. What had the old man been making so much fuss about? A child could do this. It was swimming in the river that was dangerous.

His thoughts, such as they were, didn't prepare him for the sudden tailspin his canoe went into the minute it hit the fast moving water. He grabbed the paddle and tried to get control. No matter which side he paddled on, it was the wrong side. The boat smacked into a tree and water gushed into the canoe. Memories of being pulled under and struggling for air flashed in front of his eyes. He saw his mother running into the river to rescue him. He fought against her efforts he was so scared. She kept yelling at him to calm down. He'd accidentally kicked her in the head. He hadn't meant too. It just happened. She let go of him and went under. He felt a shove on his back side and his feet found solid ground. She didn't resurface. No one was there to help him. He screamed and screamed. When his dad got to him, she was gone.

The rescue team found her tangled in the roots of a tree. Drowned because of him.

Covey protected himself from the tree with the end of his paddle. He wasn't going to die, tonight. His grandmother was depending on him to get married. He wouldn't let her down. He'd done enough damage to his family. He used his paddle to push against the tree in an attempt to get his canoe back out into the center of the river.

It was a mistake. Manhandling the canoe clearly pissed it off. It bucked hard, knocking him off the seat. Before he knew

it, the canoe rolled over. He was kissing the water. He grabbed his hat and the boat. He felt water swirling around his ankles and sucking at him.

Was he going to die? Was Lacey going to discover his demise when his empty boat floated pass her?

God there was so much he hadn't accomplished in life. In fact, he hadn't accomplished anything worthwhile.

Money? He'd made money. That was it. Who would care if he died? Other than his small family, no one cared about him. His fans would forget him. He was a loner. Nothing significant to be remembered by. Why hadn't he had children? Why hadn't he fallen in love and risked everything for everything?

With a strength he didn't know he possessed, he kicked hard. He wanted to get to know Lacey Valentine. He wanted to have children. He wanted someone besides family to care if he lived or died.

His hand slipped and he went under. He grabbed for a paddle and pushed away from the tree roots trying to trap him. His foot became tangled in them. He couldn't get loose. His lungs felt like they would explode.

He was going to die. This was justice. He'd killed his mother, now he would die the same watery death. He was closing his eyes to accept his fate when he saw something shining in the water. What was it? Was it his imagination? He tried to focus. It was an image. A white light.

*Covey hold still,* he heard a voice say. *I'll get your foot loose.*



*Mom?* Was he hallucinating? Was the ghost of his mother really speaking to him in the watery grave he was being held captive in?

*Mom, is that you?*

*Yes, dear. It's me. You're not going to die. You're going to live. Don't be afraid to love, love is why we live.*

Mom, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry. I was scared. I didn't mean to kick you.

*Darling, you have nothing to be sorry for. Now go and find love.*

Suddenly, his foot was free and he was floating to the top. He grabbed for the boat and held on with one arm.

He was alive. He'd survived his worse nightmare. His mother just rescued him from drowning for the second time in his life, and she forgave him. He was forgiven.

He floated with the canoe until the rapids were over and tried to come to grasp with what had happened while he was underwater. He felt lighter. He was no longer carrying the burden of his mother's death on his shoulders. He had Lacey to thank.

He pulled the canoe to a rocky bank and didn't even swear at the rocks that tore at his bare feet until he stumped his toe on one. "Shit."

What happened to him tonight? He looked around. He was on an ordinary river. Nothing mystical or spiritual about it. He ran his fingers through his hair. "Damn. What in the hell am I doing on a river talking to ghosts?" He felt like an idiot. "I almost died for a woman I barely know. Dammit, Lacey. This is a stupid plan."

Dibs  
by Lisa Wells

A shiver went down his spine and he twirled to see if someone was behind him. He could feel a presence, but there was nothing there.

*Go and find love.* The words echoed in his ears.

"Okay. I will." His brothers were never going to believe this story.

He looked at his canoe. The cooler and yellow bag were still there. A bungee cord held them in place. At least Lacey wouldn't see them floating down the river and start worrying about him. "Lacey, when I find you, I'm going to break your beautiful neck."

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## Chapter 14

Lacey stood on the river bank and checked her watch. According to her calculations, Covey should be floating around the bend in a couple of minutes.

It was time to get ready for her next fantasy. She stripped out of her clothes and slipped on her bikini bottoms. Her brain screamed at her to cover up her less than perfect body. She ignored the order. Tonight, she wasn't Lacey Valentine the Fantasy Coordinator. Tonight, she was the fantasy.

Blatant nudity was required for the fantasy at hand. When she got back to reality, she'd return to draping a sheer nighty over her body to help camouflage her weak spots. A little material here, a little material there, and suddenly an extra five pounds weren't noticeable.

When she felt a nibble of doubt gnawing at her self-esteem, she stuck her chin in the air. Covey James wasn't her Mr. Right. It didn't matter what he thought of her body. If she wanted to carry around an extra five pounds, she would.

*Dammit, who is he to criticize my body? My body's just fine for a Mr. Wrong to look at. If he doesn't like it, tough shit.*

She took her white bikini top and tied it to the end of a long stick. With white flag in hand, she waded out into the river and prepared to wait. The water caressed her skin like a warm bath and helped soothe away her frazzled nerves. She imagined it was Covey's tongue lapping at her skin and shivers ran through her.

She was ready to wave down her hero. Hopefully, her hero would arrive on time. She didn't want her extra five pounds puckered up from water overload when he saw her.

She heard his voice and turned. It wasn't a relaxed, happy voice. He was cursing like a sailor.

As soon as she saw him, she realized why he was cursing. Lacey stifled a giggle. He was floating backward and paddling like crazy. She was torn between wanting to help him and not wanting to hurt his ego. His ego won out. She stood motionless. *Be invisible. Be invisible.*

Lacey knew all about men and their pride. When she worked out fantasies for couples to explore, she always made sure there was nothing in the fantasy capable of wounding the male ego. If so, they wouldn't participate.

When she was sure Covey had the canoe under control and pointed in the right direction, she waved her makeshift flag to get his attention.

Covey noticed the flag first. When his eyes focused in on her, he glowered, threw down his paddle, and stood up in the boat.

If he'd asked, Lacey could have told him standing up in a canoe was a dumb idea. He didn't ask. Which was good. Really good. If he'd asked, she would have missed the full-length view of him. It was a view of a life-time.

Lacey sucked in a breath and stared with her mouth hanging open. She forgot the fantasy. She forgot her name. Covey was wearing wet boxers and a cowboy hat. A million dollars couldn't have bought her attention away from the view.

The boxers clung and outlined with great detail. The mangled, wet hat growled testosterone. Put him in a pair of boots and he could be her calendar pinup. Her fantasy man.

"Wow." The word popped out when she remembered her need to exhale the air in her lungs. She tried to get a handle on just how *smashing* he was. No vegetable could have possibly done him justice.

*Will I ever have sex with another man built as well as he is? Did God make more than one perfect male specimen? Thank you God. You outdid yourself with this one.*

"Why in the hell are you standing naked in the middle of a river?" he shouted angrily.

She'd been hoping for something like, "You are the beautiful river mermaid I've been searching for. I will make you mine." Reluctantly, she came out of her spiritual trance. "I'm not naked, I have on my bottoms. You're not exactly dressed modestly yourself," she pointed out with a wicked smile.

He tugged at the wet material. "You look naked from where I'm standing," he shouted back at her.

Lacey stood on tiptoes, allowing him the sight of her bottoms. It was time to slip into her fantasy. She closed her eyes and visualized the moment. When she opened her eyes, she bit her lip and pouted prettily. "I'm stranded could you give me a lift to my camp site?" Her gaze boldly traveled south before returning to his eyes. "It's not far from here."

"No." He snapped the one syllable word so quickly Lacey blinked in surprise.

"No?" That wasn't the response she expected. He wasn't really going to turn her down, was he?

"No," he repeated, sitting down quickly when his canoe went into another lurching turn. He managed to stop the turn before he tipped. From the look of his hat, he must have tipped several times on his way down the river. *Poor baby.*

"You really shouldn't try to stand in a canoe," she offered, helpfully.

His eyes found hers in the moonlight. Her knees buckled. His smoldering gaze was as seductive as any love letter she ever received. *My dearest love, Your beauty in the moonlight...*

Unfortunately, his lips had the opposite effect; they were drawn in anger. She hesitated, blinking with bafflement. It was important to stay in character. "How do you do that?" she asked. She needed to calm his ruffled feathers and get him in the mood for a fantasy.

"Do what?" he snapped.

"Smolder sex and anger at the same time." Lacey reached out and steadied the boat. "Have I mentioned I'm all by myself and need help?" A tingling in her heart made her feel like she'd just gone down a large mountain on snow skis.

His brooding look traveled over her. The moonlight highlighted his convulsing Adam's apple.

She let go of the boat and let one hand slide down over her breast before tracing lazy circles around her belly button. His eyes locked in on the tiny jewel she'd attached there. A tremble of desire swept through her as she recalled his mouth

intimately on her clit while in the limousine. Her body yearned for round two.

His eyes were glued to her fingers, so she slipped them into the top of her bikini bottom.

"Stop that," he ordered.

"Will you help me?" She fluttered her lashes flirtatiously at him.

His boxers betrayed the effect she was having on him. The sight gave her the courage to continue the charade. "Pretty please." Her fingers lazily stroked the skin right above her low cut bottoms.

"Lacey," he ground her name out between clenched teeth, "stop doing that."

He hadn't yet picked up on the fact she was in full fantasy mode. She opened her eyes wide. "Oh, how did you know my name? I don't remember telling you." Lacey leaned forward and let her breasts touch the edge of his canoe. The cold metal made their pink tips grow hard. "Are you one of those psychics who knows things? Things like what I'm thinking?" She fluttered her eyelashes at him and delighted in the way he was looking at her. Slightly puzzled, slightly hung over.

"I'm not playing this game with you. You almost killed me, putting me in this damn boat. I'm not in the mood for a hair-brain fantasy."

Lacey laughed softly. She was confident she could change his mind. "Oh, you're kidding. Your skillful maneuvering of the canoe was amazing. I was totally, and I do mean totally, turned on watching you play around doing those dangerous

turns." She allowed one hand to touch the loosely tied bow holding her bottoms in place.

His eyes jerked to her hand. She gave the bow a gentle tug. The bow slowly gave way. A rush of warm water caught her loosened bottoms. Lacey trembled. It was the closest thing she'd felt to an orgasm in a long time.

"What are you doing?" he asked, his eyes fixated on the remaining bow holding her bottoms together.

"Doing?" Lacey shrugged and slowly pulled on the remaining bow. Removing her loosened bottom, she held the white material up out of the water for him to see. "Do you mean this?" she asked, before tossing the garment into the current.

His eyes wrenched away from her and to the bottoms disappearing down the dark river. "Are you crazy?" he snapped.

Lacey placed her hand over her mouth. "Oops," she said, before turning to walk toward the riverbank.

Lacey wished the water would stay waist deep all the way to the shore. It didn't. She reminded herself she was a vamp and it was okay to have her bottom on display. *Moonlight is flattering*, she told herself.

"Where are you going?" Covey asked.

She paused, looked back at him, and shrugged her shoulders with an air of dismissal. "I guess I'll have to wait for the next canoe. Hopefully, it'll have someone in it willing to help me out of this predicament." She walked a little farther until only her ankles were in water. She turned to face him. He was frowning.



She casually leaned forward and picked up a small pebble in the shallow water. "Did you happen to see anyone else coming this direction?" she asked, while skipping the rock over the water's surface. "I hope someone else is coming this way. I did see some cans of cola float by earlier. Where they yours? Or, is someone else coming?" She paused before adding, "I hope they're nice."

"Dammit. Do you have other clothes?"

"No, that's all I had, everything floated down the river in my canoe." Lacey made her bottom lip tremble. It wasn't hard. Her whole body was trembling with need.

Covey swore again. He hopped out of the canoe, pulled it to shore, and pointed at it. "Get in." He tried to pull the wet material of his boxers away from his aroused body. The material went right back to clinging as soon as his hands let go.

Lacey didn't even try not to stare. *Only a fool would give you privacy when you're doing that.* "You are so kind for giving me a lift." *And the gift of you in wet boxers.* "I hope you'll let me pay you back." She climbed into the front of the canoe and purposely sat down where she was facing him. This was part of the fantasy. "Would you mind getting my things on the bank?"

"Things?" He looked past her and noticed her spot on the beach. He gave her an accusing glare. "I thought all of your things floated down the river."

"Well, not everything. I have wine; I'll share it with you."

Once her things were loaded, he pushed the canoe out into the current and sat down at the back of the boat. "How far to your camp site?"

Lacey watched him place a paddle in the water. His biceps were worthy of a hall-of-fame award. They were bulging. Cut. His pecs looked like large upside down saucers. And he had the clichéd abs that resembled a wash board. Cliché was fine with Lacey. She took the wine out of the cooler and carefully poured them both a glass. She leaned forward to hand it to him. She did a quick peak down south before she scooted back to her spot. He wasn't hard.

*The guy needs to relax so he'll play fantasy land with me.*

"Cheers," he said. He tossed it back in one gulp.

Tilting her wine to her lips, she closed her eyes and visualized the fantasy she was setting into motion.

It was time. Stretching her legs out, she propped them up on the middle seat. She'd visualized doing this many times in her private fantasies.

"Lacey, how far is it?" he repeated the question in a neutral voice.

Keeping her eyes closed, she let her legs fall slowly open. "Not far," she purred. She waited for a reaction.

*Nothing.*

*Hellooooo. I'm naked. My legs are freakin' spread open here. You think you might bother with words?*

*Nothing.*

Lacey counted to three. Perhaps he was speechless. Perhaps the sight sent him into cardiac arrest and he couldn't talk. She opened her eyes. Neither scenario was the problem.

He hadn't even seen her yet. He was busy paddling the damn boat. He was looking over her and down the river.

She was royally pissed until she noticed the look of fear on his face. This hunk with an attitude wasn't comfortable in a boat. *You've got to be kidding.* Her river rescuing hero wasn't supposed to be afraid.

It was her own fault. She shouldn't be shocked. She'd picked a freakin' Mr. Wrong to play her hero. What did she expect? Perfection? She could expect all she wanted, she hadn't gotten it. *Damn.*

"Covey," she said, trying to draw his attention to her pose.

Everything would be okay. She could work with this flaw. *Stay in character.*

"What?" he barked.

*Ouch.* That wasn't a pretty tone of voice. "Nothing." She started a lethargic exploration of her body.

The boat jerked.

Covey shifted on his seat and the boat shifted with him. He grabbed for the sides.

Lacey was on arousal overload. One touch in the right spot, and it was quite possible she'd have her orgasm back.

She didn't want it back this way; she wanted him to give it to her. But then again, could beggars be choosy?

She held her hand steady and stared at Covey between shuttered lashes. *Should she wait for him?*

With horror, she watched him let go of his death grip and make a move to stand.

"Don't sta..." Before she could finish the warning, the boat tipped. She tried to lean against the tip, but so did he. They

were tossed into the river before they had time to shut their mouths. *So, much for an orgasm*, she thought as water rushed into her open mouth.

Lacey came up sputtering and grabbed for the side of the canoe. Her arousal was cooled. "That was not part of the script," she managed to say with a laugh.

Covey gave her what could only be described as an evil eye. His wet cowboy hat was clutched in one fist.

She eyed the hat with wary concern.

"I'm sorry about your hat." Why was she apologizing? He just took away her chance at an orgasm. *Damn fool*.

He gave the hat a dismissive look. "It's lucky for you we're in shallow water. Are you okay?"

*Oh yeah. I feel really lucky right now.* "I'm fine."

She held onto his shoulder while he flipped the canoe upright.

"I'll hold it while you get in," he said.

Lacey let go and immediately went under. *Shallow? Maybe for you. Not for me.* She swam to the top.

"Get in," he said.

She held onto the side of the canoe and thought about what he was asking of her. She was to grab a rocking boat and use her arm strength to pull her wet butt into the canoe. She couldn't even do a pushup without cheating.

She wanted no part of him watching her trying to pull herself into the canoe in all her naked glory. "I'll just hang on and float down the river to the next gravel bar. It'll be easier there," she countered.

He tossed his soggy hat into the canoe and grabbed her waist. "I'll help you in. I don't want that pretty body of yours to get all bruised up from floating debris in the river."

"No, really. I'll be fine," she stammered.

"Lacey, don't argue with me," he ordered.

Lacey placed her feet on his bent legs. She felt ten shades of humiliation seep out of her pores. Hopefully, the darkness would help take the sting out of what he was about to view.

If she could stay in character, this wouldn't be so bad. She couldn't stay in character. The real Lacey was forced to deal with the situation.

She raised her butt out of the water, only to have her feet slip off his thighs. She plunked back down into the water. "Let's just float down the river until I can touch the bottom," she pleaded, while dog paddling.

Without warning, he grabbed her around the waist, lifted her, and gave a hearty push. She plopped down on the cold metal floor of the canoe.

*I'm laying here like a trophy size fish out of water.* Where would this fantasy go from here?

She shuddered and pushed up to all fours. Her ass was facing him. *Could there possibly be a more unromantic pose than this?*

She did a turn. Before she could say anything, Covey spoke.

"Why in the hell didn't you ask me if I could operate one of these things?" He smacked the side of the canoe with his hand, causing her to sit up quickly.

Lacey glared. *He has the audacity to act the injured party here.* "I thought everyone knew how to paddle a canoe. Don't they teach that in Texas schools?"

"No. They don't."

"Well, they did where I went to school. We did it in P.E."

"You went to a school that taught rivers and guns and said no to math and science, right?" His voice was thick with sarcasm.

Was he implying she was the hick, not him? "You don't have to be nasty. I said I was sorry." Lacey pushed her wet hair out of her eyes. Her finger tangled in her hair and she started twirling. It was a habit she'd picked up as a child whenever she was unsure of herself.

Covey tilted his head and sighed. "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to push so hard. We just weren't getting anywhere with your attempts to do it lady like. I don't like rivers. I've had a bad experience on one."

She ignored his apology. She couldn't ignore his other words. *What kind of bad experience?* She should ask. But, then she'd find out something about him. All she wanted was a no strings attached weekend.

His bad experience was none of her business and she was going to keep it that way. "There's a sandbar. We can pull over and trade spots. I'll take the back seat, you take the front," Lacey suggested.

"Why would we do that?" Covey asked.

"Because, I have no desire to be dumped out of the canoe again," she said between clenched teeth. "I know how to handle a damn canoe."

He laughed. A hard, cynical laugh. "I didn't come this far down the river to turn the driving over to a woman."

A woman. "You've got to be kidding." *Did he really just say that?* "You're a lousy driver. I'm not," she pointed out.

"I drive. I don't ride," he said stubbornly.

Lacey shook her head in disbelief. "Are you afraid you'll lose your dude's card if you let a woman drive?"

He didn't respond; unless you count the message his eyes were shouting. It went something like, *fuck you*.

Lacey sniffed and stuck her nose into the air. She made her way to the front of the boat. "You're ruining this fantasy for me," she muttered.

Covey surprised her by laughing. It was a delicious sound that brought up thoughts of puppies and hot fudge brownies. Her thoughts, of the hot oil torture he deserved, disappeared.

"Fantasy? This is your idea of a fantasy?" he questioned. Sarcasm laced each of his clipped off words.

How could he laugh and then speak so nastily? Lacey took a deep breath. Thoughts of hot oil torture came back. She'd tie him up to a stake, fill water guns with hot oil, and take target practice.

"Why don't we try enjoying the moonlight?" she said. *So much for a romantic float*. Lacey refused to let the threatening tears flow. She could do nothing about the sniffing noises she made.

Covey let out an exasperated sigh. "Are you crying?" he asked, accusingly.

*Asshole*. "No, I'm paddling a canoe. Try and help."

She felt the tip of his paddle pushing at her back. "Lacey, I didn't mean to ruin one of your fantasies. Why don't you put your paddle down and continue where you were earlier? I did enjoy what you were showing me. I promise not to stand up this time."

Lacey scowled and knocked the paddle away. "The mood is gone."

"That's my fault. What can I say to help you get it back?"

She turned in her seat to face him. "Nothing."

"Masturbate for me," he ordered, placing the tip of his paddle back in the water.

"Oh, like that is going to happen." She scooped up water with her hand and splashed it his way.

"Please." His dimple showed in the moonlight.

The sight caused her to soften like butter left out overnight. And just like butter, it went right to her inner-thighs. She closed her eyes and tried to guide her thoughts into the sexual moment she was in before he flipped the boat.

After several seconds of deep breathing, she opened her eyes. "Sorry, it's no use. The moment is gone. Let's just get to the campsite and take it from there."

"Pretty please," he pleaded.

"Why?" He was kind of cute when he was begging.

"You're naked and you're beautiful."

"Why did you go on the *Dibs Dating Show*?" Lacey asked.

"To find a beautiful woman to have sex with."

Lacey knew a line when she heard it. "I don't believe you. I think you can have sex with beautiful women any time you want to."



He gave her a speculative look. "Does that mean I can have sex with you anytime I want? I can just call you up and ask you to meet me at the nearest hotel?"

She turned around in the canoe so that her back was to him. "Our camp is just around this bend. Perhaps, you can get me in the mood for sex when we get there." Did he really think she was beautiful?

There was no way in hell she was meeting him for sex when their weekend was over. He was her Mr. Wrong.

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## Chapter 15

They floated in silence. Lacey watched for signs of their campsite and contemplated the situation.

She doubted they'd be able to continue with her fantasy theme. Covey was too pissed-off by the river part.

She had no one to blame but herself. She should have shared her fantasy ideas with him and asked if he was up for the challenge of a river escapade?

She needed to make it up to him. This was his weekend as well as hers. She was behaving selfishly. She wasn't normally a selfish person.

She had her reasons for being here, but surely, he had his reasons as well. He deserved to realize his desires for the weekend.

Lacey knew her next step would set the tone for the rest of their weekend. She was going to have to tread softly.

Tonight, they'd be camping on a riverbank. The clouds were beginning to cover the moon and it would be dangerous to keep going in total darkness. The exit point from the river, where she arranged to have a car waiting on them, was too far away to risk in darkness. Tomorrow, they could float on down the river and then go their separate ways.

Is that what Covey wanted? If so, she'd honor his wish. She could give him the remaining cash from their fantasy package and he could spend the rest of the weekend the way he chose.

*He could probably use the money.*

What did she want? Did she want to try again to set the stage for a weekend of audacious fantasies? They were really good fantasies.

Selfish or not, she wanted more of Covey James, more of her fantasies. She wanted him to give her an orgasm.

With the decision made on her part, she depicted an ease she didn't necessarily feel and said, "My camp is over there." She pointed to a gravel bar with a large tent setting squarely in the middle of it.

Outside the tent was a woodpile ready for a fire and an oversize lawn chair. A lantern hung in a tree branch. Everything appeared to be set up exactly as she ordered it done. "I hope you will let me repay you for rescuing me? Did you ever tell me your name?" she asked.

Her next question was going to set him on edge. But, it was part of the fantasy. "Is it Tom? You look like a Tom." Her voice died away when she saw the change in his face.

"It's Covey." The two words rang out loud and clear over the river. "Who in the hell is Tom?" he asked. There was a silken thread of warning in his voice.

Lacey wanted to play out her fantasy. She ignored the warning tone. "Covey? I like your name."

She was determined not to allow any shadows to cross her heart tonight. Tonight was operation fun rescue. It was all make believe.

Covey didn't respond. He hopped out and pulled the canoe to shore.

Lacey carefully got out and watched Covey shove the canoe onto the riverbank. He turned abruptly, grabbed her,

and hauled her into his arms. His movements were laced with a maddening hint of arrogance and they were damn sexy as a result. Lacey's knees wobbled and a shudder of excitement swept through her. Struggling for control, she placed her hands on his chest and pushed. Her character was supposed to play coy, she was supposed to play coy.

He let her pull back about two inches while leaving his hands around her waist. His eyes devoured her. "Where do you think you're going?" he whispered, before he applied pressure to the small of her back and closed the space between them. His lips touched hers softly. She touched his lips with the tip of her tongue. He growled and the kiss turned into a universe-rocking, adventure ride.

Lacey's world swayed and fell on its ass, smashing one whole side of it. The earth might not have been flat before, but it was now.

Lacey had no trouble deciding her character playing could wait. "Nowhere," she managed to say.

His tongue invaded her open mouth, and she groaned from the sheer pleasure of it. Her insides were clattering with anticipation of what was still to come. If a kiss could be this erotic, just think what the rest of the night would bring.

His hands wound feverishly in her hair. His level of desire met hers. Feverish kisses were showered all over her face and neck.

Lacey groaned. "More, please more."

The pressure changed. His kisses changed. The sudden contrast of gentle caresses along her body set her on fire.

"Hard, I want hard," she whispered.

"Be patient," he said. His hands slowly explored the line of her back, her hips. She let her hands roam freely. His were calm. Hers were shaking and impatient.

Without warning, his hands dropped away and he took a step away from her.

She wobbled and grabbed at his chest for support. He wasn't supposed to let her go. Letting go gave her time to think. She didn't really want to think.

The sound of water gurgling filled the silence but did nothing to fill the void she felt inside. Her breasts tingled in the moist, night air. She forced her eyes to open. "What happened?" she asked. Passion radiated from the center of her body and begged for more action.

Was it her imagination or was he taking an eternity to answer?

His tormented groan was a heady reassurance.

They were both feeling the fireworks. She opened her mouth to say she agreed and was surprised when no sound came out. She tried again. Nothing.

"I'm not sure," he said. "It just seemed like I should stop before something bad happened." He ran his hands through his hair.

"Bad?" she questioned. What could be bad about the sensations they were exploring? "I don't understand," she said, with a shake of her head.

He ran a hand down his face. "Neither do I. My gut's telling me to slow this down, but I can't think of anything bad that could come from kissing you," he admitted, before dragging her back to him.

She didn't care what he was rambling about as long as she was locked once again against his warm pulsing body.

This time when he raised his lips from her bruised ones, he whispered, "And, I'm not sure I would want to know if there is."

Lacey smiled into his eyes. Her body greedily begged for the velvet stroke of his tongue. This wasn't the fantasy she'd planned. It was better. It was impromptu.

Her body arched into his. She didn't want even the slightest bit of air to find the space between them. Her tent wasn't far from where they stood, but it seemed like miles away.

"Let's find some blankets to cuddle up in," he suggested. Instead of leading her toward the tent, he nibbled on her right earlobe.

Out of nowhere, Lacey heard her inner voice shouting something absurd into her left ear. Her inner voice was telling her to quit being real. She blocked the voice out. She didn't want to keep to the fantasy script. This was a pretty damn good fantasy just as it was.

Her inner voice wouldn't be silenced. It freakin' shouted the warning with a bullhorn causing her to jump in alarm. *Going with reality means letting him see the real you,* it said.

Lacey allowed the warning to filter into the edges of her brain. Would letting Covey see the real her be a bad thing? Probably. "*Who cares? Stop talking to me,*" she told her inner voice.

The voice wouldn't be silenced. "*Men are pigs, remember?*"

With a moan of regret, Lacey forced her palms to Covey's chest and pushed. "No."

"No?"

Her sex starved body shouted *YES*, and she bit her lip until it hurt. It was a struggle to slip into the character she intended to play tonight. But, she needed to do it. The charade was her emotional safety blanket. Besides, her charade would eventually lead to them having sex. Just not right at this moment.

Covey wasn't aware of her inner battle. He laughed and leaned forward. "You don't mean no," he teased. His lips captured hers again, and she indulged in the sensation for a moment.

When his lips shifted to her neck, she forced words out. "What are you doing? Why do you keep kissing me?" The words were spoken in a desperate tone.

"Because you're driving me crazy with this fantasy stuff," he whispered the words against her neck. He pulled her firmly against his hips.

*I'm driving myself crazy with it.* Was the protection of her heart worth the payoff? Her hips nestled willingly against his.

"You've got a really, great ass," he said, resting his chin on the top of her head.

"Not really," she corrected him. As fantasies go, it was the wrong response. It was out before she could filter it through the fantasy.

"You doubt my judgment?" he whispered, moving his lips to her earlobe where he nipped softly.

Lacey flattened her palms against his chest and pushed. "You're distracting me aren't you?" she accused. "You're expecting sex as repayment for rescuing me?"

Bemusement filled his eyes. "Yes," he said, with a slight tilt to his head.

She wagged her finger at him. "I can't do that; I'm not that kind of girl."

"Is this real or is this fantasy?" he asked. He grabbed her finger and sucked on it.

Lacey yanked it out of his mouth. "It's all in how you look at it," she admitted. She ran across the sandbar to the tent. Bending down, she unzipped the opening and crawled inside. When he didn't follow, she poked her head out and looked at him. "I'll share my tent with you."

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## Chapter 16

Covey scowled. "You're a lot of work," he yelled, loud enough for Lacey to hear.

"I'm worth it," she yelled back.

He chuckled. "I bet you are." He stripped out of his boxers, left them lying on the sand, and strolled to the tent. The woman was a curse of personalities. Who in the hell was she going to be when he entered the tent?

He lifted the flap, prepared for anything, and was rewarded with a lantern view of Lacey stretched out on a fur skin rug. He forgot his frustration and gawked. Tonight's sunset had been breathtaking, but it didn't hold a candle to the sight of Lacey.

She observed him through lowered lashes as he bent down and crawled into the tent with her.

Without warning, she sat up straight and her eyes flashed fire.

*What the hell?* He started to back carefully out of the tent, then he realized she was role playing. It was the tiny tilt to her lips as her glare faded that gave her away. Other than that, she was the perfect image of an outraged woman who'd just caught a man using a telescope to look into her bedroom.

"How dare you enter my dressing room. Close your eyes while I get dressed," she ordered.

Did she have any idea how sensuous her voice sounded when filled with anger? Or, what it did to him?

His eyes never waivered from her as he settled into the tent. Only a saint would follow her ridiculous order to close his eyes. Anyone who knew him, knew he was no saint. Not even close.

She dragged a white T-shirt out of a bag and slipped it over her head. It fit her snugly. It shouldn't have surprised him, but it did, to see a big pair of red lips on the front of the shirt. The curve of the lips outlined the curve of her tits.

She took out a large brush, frowned at him with full pouty lips, and began caressing her hair with long, firm strokes. "You didn't close your eyes," she accused.

He shrugged. "I'm not very good at following rules." He laid down on the rug beside her. *Who brings fur rugs to the river?*

Her nipples pushed against the cotton T-shirt. They were begging for male attention. He was more than willing to fulfill their request. Leaning up on one elbow, he reached out and touched a nipple.

She swatted his hand away and scooted into the corner of the tent. He rolled over and leaned up on both elbows to view her. She was looking at him with her eyes squeezed into a critical squint.

"No, I don't suppose you are any good at following rules," she said, with a sigh.

He laughed. They agreed on something. "Rules are for married guys," he said. He knew full well he was pressing his luck with the macho taunt.

Surprisingly, he didn't get an outraged reaction out of the sexist comment. Instead, the icy shell of an affronted woman

melted into one eager to please her man. He couldn't help but wonder how many acting classes she had to take to become so good at the chameleon act.

Lacey dropped her brush and looked at him with large, innocent eyes. "What do you want to do?" she asked huskily.

"You know what I want to do." He was naked. There was no hiding from her what was on his mind.

"We could play cards." She dug a deck of cards out of her bag. "I don't suppose you have a condom?"

Covey perked up. If she was asking about condoms, there must be sex involved in the fantasy they were enacting. "No. Do you?" he drawled, trying not to show his displeasure at the admission of being caught without protection.

His were packed away in his luggage, and he had no fucking idea where his luggage was. When he had attempted to retrieve his bags at the airport, he'd been told they were sent ahead. *Ahead where?*

A smile ruffled her mouth. "Of course, I do. I just wanted to know if you had any. If you did, I'd know you were the kind of guy who walked around thinking he was going to get lucky all the time." A satisfied look crossed her face and twinkled in her eyes.

She was obviously enjoying herself, keeping him off guard. Covey didn't respond. The woman was a minx. He wasn't going to tell her that any guy worth his cock carried condoms.

All guys walk around thinking that at any moment they're going to get lucky. He always carried a condom on him. He and Lacey made use of his last one in the limo; he hadn't had

time to replace it. The restrooms at the airport didn't have them. He tried.

He captured her eyes with his. "So, you think I'm safe, because I don't carry condoms with me?" If she did, she was incredibly naïve.

Lacey shrugged. "Do you want to play cards?"

He would have preferred, *do you want to have sex?* "What kind of cards?" He took the deck of cards from her and noticed how careful she was not to let her fingers touch his.

She lowered her thick black lashes and bit her bottom lip. "Well, promise you won't tell anyone?" Her voice drifted into a hushed whisper and her face clouded with doubt.

He hesitated, gauging her for a moment. Yep, there it was, the tilt to her lips that gave her away. The woman wouldn't make a good poker player. She had a tick. "Okay. I doubt anyone would believe me if I did," he replied, indulgently.

Her look of befuddlement caused him to laugh.

She leaned toward him. "I bought this new sex toy online," she whispered.

*Sex toy? Did she bring a vibrator with her to the woods?* "You don't say. That's an intriguing bit of information. What other dark secrets do you want to share?" Condoms and sex toys, things were looking up.

She shifted on the rug and crossed her legs.

Without warning, his world loss gravity and his heart came out of hiding. She wore no panties to block his view. Just pure, perfect pussy was on display.

How was he expected to keep his heart locked up around a gal who gave him a treat of such magnitude? Men had given

their heart away for far less reason. Hell, he just loss all ability for coherent thought.

*Unless, you count, 'I want to eat her,' as a coherent thought.*

He'd never felt so overwhelmed by a woman. "I think I love you," he blurted. He'd never said those words to a woman he wasn't related to. He felt the heat crawl up his neck. No woman had ever knocked him off his self-imposed throne where love wasn't allowed. It didn't matter to Covey that it was his cock playing with the words coming out of his mouth. This was the first gal who'd ever been able to cause those words to pop out. That was significant.

You could have heard a frog croak in the silence which followed. *Sonofabitch. What would she say? Do I really love her? Of course, I don't.*

"It just came today and I brought it with me. It has something to do with a card game," she said, ignoring his statement as if it'd never been made. "We could play it."

*Okay, it was a dumb thing to say. Sex and love are not the same.* He looked her over hotly, thankful she hadn't made a big deal over his slip. This weekend was about sex. "Do you or don't you have sex with strangers?" he asked.

She looked away. "Not as a norm. But, if we were playing a game, I would have to follow the rules. It's important to follow the rules don't you think?" Her eyelashes lifted very slowly, and she raised a questioning eyebrow. Her lips tilted slightly upward.

He looked down at his hard cock pushing into his stomach. He touched it and drew her attention there. "I'm beginning to

think some rules are good. Let me see the rules." He reached for them.

She held the rules behind her back, just out of his reach. A challenging smile covered her face.

Covey rose to his knees and gently pushed her onto her back. He placed tiny kisses on her bare neck causing her to giggle. When her arms came up to wrap around his neck, Covey reached down and grabbed the rules from where she dropped them.

"Cheater," she accused, as she removed her arms and started twirling her hair.

He shrugged. He'd been called far worse. "I do what I have to do to get my way." He picked the sex toy up out of its container and turned it on. It wasn't a vibrator. Or a dildo, or any other sex toy he'd ever come across in a woman's goody drawer.

Lacey leaned forward to touch the toy. "It's like a mood ring; only it's for the sexual organs," she explained.

Covey shook his head in bewilderment. *What in the hell is a mood ring?* "If you say so." Were mood rings more expensive than diamond rings?

"See, we would place it on your penis, and then wait to see what color it turns. If it turns pink, it means you're in the mood for a hand job from your opponent. Red means you want a glossy-lipped blowjob. Green means you get to do whatever you want to the one who's monitoring the color."

He sat speechless. A machine that could read a man and woman's sexual desires? "Anything?" he questioned, thinking of a dozen possibilities all of which ended up with her

underneath him. Why in the hell hadn't he ever heard about this tool? This was a gold mine.

"Yes, but we can't do green," her voice rose in alarm on the last word.

"You're kidding." She better be kidding.

Lacey didn't respond.

"Aren't you?" Green was the best color.

She merely bit her lip and shook her head no.

"And, why is that?" he asked. There was a tilt to her lips so he knew this was fantasy, but he didn't like this part of the fantasy.

She looked at him as if he had lost his mind. "I'm not that sort of lady," she replied. "I hope you don't mind," she finished in a breathless rush of worry. Her big blue eyes pleaded with him to understand.

"What kind of girl would that be? You owe me for saving you," he reminded her. Playing fair was for pussies. He wasn't a pussy. He wanted pussy. He would pull out whatever leverage he needed to bed her here beside the river. "If not for me, you could be spending the night on a riverbank. All alone."

"Yes, and I am most grateful you came along. But, please understand, I can't do that."

Grateful? What kind of man wanted gratitude, real or pretend, from a woman when he could be having sex with her instead? "It's part of the rules we do green if one of us is in the mood. You did say rules were important. You're not afraid of having an orgasm are you?" He placed the sex toy on his erect penis. The light went through a myriad of colors.

He hadn't really planned on bringing up the orgasm issue until she felt more comfortable around him. Somehow, it just popped out of his mouth. A lot of things were popping out of his mouth. Things he wouldn't normally say under severe torture.

She ignored the question and stared at his penis. Her mouth dropped open.

Covey puffed his chest out in pride. She was obviously a gal who had a good eye for a well-endowed man.

He looked down. The contraption had turned pink. Pink! *Pink isn't a manly color.* What the hell was it he got with pink? Who would design a sex toy with the color pink for a man? *Damn idiot.*

"Why would I be afraid of an orgasm?" Lacey removed it from his penis with shaking fingers. They brushed against him in the process.

He forgot what color the toy turned and reached for Lacey. She hadn't ignored the comment the way she did his declaration of love.

She drew back. "Not yet. There's more to the game. We draw cards; the person with the highest card gets to have the toy placed between their legs. If you place it between my legs and it turns pink, it means you get to watch while I touch ... myself."

"Like in the canoe?" he asked. He grimaced. Only a dumbass would dump a woman in the water while she was in the middle of masturbating for him. What was he thinking trying to stand up?



"If it turns red, I get a tongue job from you, and if it turns green, well, we won't do green."

Her tongue licking him was a visual capable of causing him to pop with no help from her. "A tongue job? Do you mean oral sex?" he teased. He did a few mental multiplication tables to get his desire under control.

Her tongue came out and she licked her bottom lip. "Mmmmm, well, yes. That's what it would mean."

"And do you enjoy oral sex?" he asked, and watched a blush run up her neck.

She tilted her head down shyly and looked at him through layered lashes. "I have been known to enjoy it on occasion."

"I see. Are there any other rules?" Covey asked. This game had some definite possibilities. He would get her to break her own rule of not doing green. No one brings this kind of game out of its box and then refuses to do green.

"There is one additional rule. There's a timer. Each turn lasts for thirty seconds."

Covey took the sex ring from her. "Open your legs," he demanded. The time restraint was going to be a problem. "Thirty seconds isn't enough time to take care of a woman's needs," he said. He preferred all night sex.

Lacey surprised him by lying back on the pallet and spreading her legs. She couldn't disguise her body's reaction to his when his fingers traced her soft flesh.

The sight of her, with her legs stretched wide, was ecstasy. He was on the peak of explosion. The multiplication tables weren't working.

Covey leaned forward and trailed his index finger from her belly button ring to the center of her vagina. He let his palm cup her intimately.

She raised her head up slightly. Astonishment lit up her face. "What are you doing?"

"I'm going to see what you are in the mood for." He placed the toy between her legs with deliberate slowness. The tilt to her lips turned into a full smile.

She laid her head back down and closed her eyes. "What color is it?" she asked. Her hips wriggled underneath the toy.

"Green. You want to have an orgasm."

Lacey sat up quickly and pushed the toy away. "I don't know what you're talking about. I told you, we can't do green. Stop talking about orgasms." Her voice was panicky.

"Why?" That reaction had nothing to do with the role play. The word orgasm had ruffled her feathers.

"Just stop," she pleaded.

"Are you sure you won't make an exception just this one time so we could do green." His fingers dipped between her folds causing her to gasp in surprise.

"That is an outrageous thing you're doing," she said. She pushed his hand away. "We didn't draw cards to see who goes first."

"You liked it though, didn't you? I can give you a real orgasm, not a fake one." Covey held out the deck of cards. "Draw one."

"What are you talking about? I don't fake orgasms?" she said hotly. "Do you drink liquor?" she said, not even attempting to hide the fact she was changing the subject.

Covey wasn't about to back off now. "A drink would be great. I think you fake orgasms?"

"If I do, and it's a big if, it's none of your business. I like liquor, but it goes right to my head. I loose my inhibitions, so I have to limit myself to one drink."

Covey laughed. An uninhibited Lacey would be a sight to see. She was already the most uninhibited woman he'd ever been around. A drink might help her relax and have an orgasm. "Do you have any beer?" Not that he would take advantage of a drunken woman.

"This is your lucky day. There's a cooler underneath the blanket." She pointed to the corner of the tent where a lantern was sitting on the blanket in question. "There's beer in it. I prefer a White Russian."

He pulled out the White Russian and handed it to her. "I knew you were one of those girly-drink girls?" He pulled out a beer for himself.

"If by that, you mean I'm a lady. You're right. I'm certainly not the kind of girl that drinks beer," Lacey responded, taking a sip.

"Why is that?" He popped the cap and took a swig.

"Because, when I'm not playing a fantasy role, I'm a very classy woman. Don't you think trashy girls drink beer and classy girls drink mixed drinks?"

"If this is an up-and-up question, and not one of your fantasy induced questions, then my answer is no, I don't." Covey patted the spot next to him. "Come here little river rat. Why exactly can't we do green?"

Lacey scooted next to him. "It's scandalous. What would you think of a girl who did green?"

He sighed. Her tick was back. "I'd think I'd died and gone to heaven. We did red in the limo."

She slapped at him. "We most certainly did not. I would never do such a thing, especially in a moving vehicle. Besides, single girls doing red would go straight to hell according to my mother."

Covey coughed in surprise. "Mmmmm. I think you are exaggerating. I've done red before, and I feel confident I'm not going to go to hell for it."

He pulled her back in his arms and kissed the top of her head. "Of course, I wouldn't want to be responsible for sending such a beauty to hell."

"Thank you for understanding," she said primly. "Let's play five questions."

"Five questions? What happened to the card game?"

"Pleeeeeease," she pleaded, in a full lip pout before taking a sip of her drink.

He couldn't tell her no. He wanted to tell her no, but he couldn't. "What are the rules? Is there any sex involved?" He wouldn't mind learning more about her, as long as sex was involved—soon.

"No sex. Yes rules. Each of us will ask the other person five questions. The rule is you have to answer no matter what the question is. You get one pass."

"Are the answers you give me going to be real or are they part of your fantasy character?"

She thought about it for a moment and then shrugged. "I'll give you five real ones."

"Okay, but my first question doesn't count as one of my five," he replied in full negotiation mode. In his career as a music mogul, he knew all about negotiating.

She took a slow drink of her White Russian before responding. "Why would I agree to that?"

"Because, it's an easy question. What's your real name?"

She tilted her head and looked at him with puzzled eyes. "It's Lacey Valentine."

"Seriously?"

"I am serious. Why? Don't you like my name?" Lacey pouted.

"Oh, I thoroughly like your name. I was just under the impression it was a stage name for your career as a fantasy coordinator." In his business, lots of singers had stage names. His was Covey Grant. Grant was his mother's maiden name.

He liked how Lacey's breasts moved up and down when she was agitated. He would have to make her angry more often. The benefits were great.

She sighed. "My parents are very romantic at heart."

"I can only imagine." He laid his chin on the top of her head.

"Are you ready to play five questions?" she asked.

"Sure, why not, as long as you stay here between my legs."

"I get to go first. How long have you been a struggling country singer?"

She really was caught up in his being poor. He was going to like getting to know someone who believed him a pauper. "Since I was about three, and my mom and dad let me go up on stage and sing. It gets in your blood. I earned a buck fifty that night." This was true.

"Have you ever been married?"

"No. That's two."

She shrugged at his count. "Why were you on the Dating Show?"

"Pass. That's three."

"Will you ever get married?"

*The all important marriage question.* "I'm beginning to consider the possibility."

"Why?"

"Because my grandmother is dying from cancer. She'd like to see my brothers and I married. At first, I resisted the idea, but lately, it doesn't sound so bad."

"What type of woman would you marry?"

"Sorry, you've used up your five questions."

"Yes, but you got a free one, I want a free one," she pressed him.

"Okay, I'll answer the question. I have no idea. When I find her, I'll know. Isn't that how love works? It hits you out of the blue."

She laughed. "It's a good thing you are my Mr. Wrong, and I don't have to be put out with your not even including me as a possible love interest. What do you want to know about me?" Lacey asked with easy humor.

Covey couldn't see her face. Couldn't tell what she was thinking. Did she want to be thought of as a love interest? "I don't know. Let me think about it."

"Think about it? Are you always so difficult to play games with? What's there to think about? Surely, I raise enough curiosity in you that you have some questions you want answered."

"I'm not being difficult. I just want to make sure I use my turns wisely. How is that being difficult?"

"It just is."

"Okay, I'll ask one of my questions now. Do you want me to think of you as a possible love interest?"

She jerked against him and her breathing seemed to stop. He held his breath. He didn't know why, but he wanted her to say yes. He wanted to change the rules of their weekend. He wanted the fantasy to end.

"That's a dumb question. We've already agreed not to get serious. Now, sing me a song if you're not going to let me talk anymore about me."

Covey didn't show his feelings. He was too smooth for that. But, he felt the bullet in his gut. "Okay. What would you like to hear?"

"Surprise me."

Covey shifted and grabbed the cooler bringing it closer to them. He handed her a White Russian and pulled out beer for himself. He needed another drink. What he'd like to do was get drunk and forget about this woman in his arms. "Let's go outside and sit under the moonlight. I'll build you a fire and

we'll see what comes to mind." Perhaps, the fresh air would help him refocus.

"There's a fire ready to go; you just have to light a match," she said.

Covey grinned. "I like your way of roughing it Lacey Valentine. Everything's ready to go. Nothing gets in the way of romance."

Covey lit the fire and together they settled into a double lounge chair.

"Close your eyes and I'll sing to you." Several songs came to mind. He contemplated which song would be a good starter song.

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## Chapter 17

Lacey laid her head on his shoulder and snuggled into his side. His deep bass voice caressed her with a series of country love songs. The words were too quirky for her taste, but his voice was like dark chocolate and caramel. Its sinful richness tempted her to gorge herself on all he had to offer and forget all about self-imposed boundaries.

Did she give him the answer he wanted to hear? Was he testing her when he asked if she wanted to be considered a love interest? Did he doubt her when she said she wanted a no-strings attached weekend? It was an underhanded way to try and catch her in a lie. It wasn't nice. What was worse, part of her wanted to shout *hell yes* I want to be considered a love interest. What was wrong with her? He was her freakin Mr. Wrong.

She blocked out her thoughts and forced herself to listen to his voice. Country songs actually sounded good coming out of his mouth. *He's a talented artist. Why's he singing in two-bit bars?* He could do better than that. He should join a reality show for singers. He could be the next poster boy for country music stars.

He paused to stretch and the feel of his warm, naked body pressed into her soft flesh caused all intelligible thought to disappear. He had no apparent problem with nudity. The contact went beyond tantalizing, it felt comfortable. She snuggled further into the crook of his arm. When she moved her palm and rested it lightly on his abs, his muscles tensed

and his words faltered. *Interesting*. She pulled her hand back. *My touch affects him*. Cautiously, she laid her hand back down where she had it with her fingers spread open this time. He jumped.

She giggled, picked her hand up, waited a second, and sat it back down. *What is it about you that causes me to giggle?*

He brought his hand up and laced his fingers into her wayward fingers. "It's hard for me to sing when you keep tempting me with your fingertips."

She pulled her fingers out of his grip and pushed them underneath his hand to his bare skin. "I have no idea what you're accusing me of." There was a certain feeling of security that came with the intimacy of darkness. She could tease much more openly.

He kissed the top of her head. "Witch," he muttered.

"A trashy witch," she agreed.

After another song, she slowly trailed her fingers along his thighs. A growl, originating deep in his throat, told her he was losing his concentration on the song. She allowed her fingertips to linger close to the top of his thighs taking the time to outline the muscles in a slow circular motion.

His voice disappeared altogether when she stretched her fingers and laid her palm flat on the inside of his inner thigh. The movement caused her nails to brush against his balls. They both jumped. His balls were huge.

His hand came up under her T-shirt to lie flat on her stomach. She grabbed his hand to move it to a firmer spot. Unlike his, her abs were not rock hard. They were more firm-pillow hard.

*He's my Mr. Wrong. I don't need to worry what he thinks about my body,* she reminded herself. She let go of his hand, stopped sucking in her stomach, and snuggled closer to him. "Are you going to sing the trashy song to me?" she asked.

"No."

"Why?" She twisted in his arms to look up at him.

He touched the tip of her nose with his lips. "No need. I'm your Mr. Wrong; I don't have to worry about you dreaming about commitment when the sun comes up. I sing the trashy song to women I want to scare away."

"Oh." Lacey felt oddly deflated. "You know, I don't walk on the trashy side in my daily life?" Now, why did she say that? *God, I'm losing my mind.* His opinion doesn't matter.

"Doll Face, I knew that the moment I saw you. I'm surprised you lasted this long on the trashy side." He was laughing at her again.

Lacey perked up as if he'd just paid her the highest compliment possible. "I have hung in there haven't I? And, you haven't made it easy. All things considered, I'm doing a pretty damn good job—don't you think?"

Covey ruffled her hair. "You're doing okay."

She sat up straight and stared him straight in the eye. "Okay? I'm doing much better than okay. What do you mean, okay? We had sex in a limo less than two hours after we met." Lacey thumped him on the chest with her finger. "Okay, would be letting you get to first base. Damn you, I was masturbating in a canoe in the middle of a river."

"Whoa, calm down Doll Face," he grabbed her hand and brought her fingers to his lips. "The limo was a good

beginning, and the canoe was enchanting. But, you've got a long way to go before you can wear the title of Trash Queen."

She growled. "By the end of this weekend, I'll be as trashy as any gal you've ever had." *Did I really just say that? I'm losing my freakin' mind.*

Covey laughed and pulled her forward. He kissed her nose. "Question number one."

Lacey looked at him expectantly and didn't correct him. This was not question number one.

He shot her a penetrating look, as if he was considering his words carefully, and then asked. "Why fake an orgasm?"

Lacey exhaled loudly. She didn't pretend she didn't understand. This was the third time he'd brought it up. *He knows.* How, she didn't know. But, he knew. As casually as she could manage, she replied, "I don't want to talk about why." It was her secret. She didn't have to share it with anyone.

He ran his fingers through her hair and massaged her scalp. "Is that a pass?"

She felt the tension ease away as his fingers worked their magic. It wasn't really a secret. Maddison knew and Dr. Sullivan knew. What did one more person matter? Especially, someone she'd never see again after this weekend. "No, it's not a pass. You'll just ask me something even worse if I pass. If you must know, I walked in on my fiancée with a bimbo. When I tried to get over him, I found I wasn't able to have an orgasm. I came on the show for a weekend of sex to get back my orgasm." Lacey waited for the grief and anger which usually accompanied her memory of that day. It didn't

appear. There was some blah there, but no extreme emotion. Was she healing?

"Mission not accomplished," Covey said. It was a statement, not a question.

She wrinkled her nose. "How could you tell?" Men were not supposed to be able to tell when a woman was faking an orgasm. Especially, the first time you're having sex together. There's nothing to compare the bogus act against. How did he know that wasn't exactly how she sounded when she was orgasmic?

*Is he a freakin' mind reader? He has to be.* Why couldn't she find a normal man?

"Gut feeling. Question number two, would you go back to him if he asked you?"

*When hell freezes over and trees dump cash.* "No."

"Are you sure that's not just anger talking?" He kissed her forehead, and then trailed the kisses down by her ear causing her to shiver.

"I don't want to talk about him."

"Did you love him a lot?" He asked, not letting her off the hook.

Lacey glared at him. He glared back. *Why do you care?* Lacey searched for the right words to describe her feelings toward Marty. She obviously thought she was in love with him at one point or she would have never said she'd marry him. She always thought when she got married, it would be forever.

Right now, she was having a hard time recalling Marty's face. Which didn't say much for ability to know love when she saw it. "I was going to marry him," she said lamely.

Covey snorted like an angry bull. "He's a fucking fool. You're better off without him."

Lacey stiffened. His words felt possessive. *This loser had better not be waffling on our no-strings-attached handshake?* "Coming from a man who doesn't jump for joy at the idea of falling in love and getting married, you'll forgive me for not getting a lot of comfort from your opinion," she snapped.

It was important for her to keep this casual, just as she told him she would. She planned on walking away, and into a new chapter of her life, when the weekend was over. After all, that was why she chose him.

He ruffled her hair. "I'm serious."

He didn't have the right to be serious about anything where she was concerned. What did he know about letting a woman go? Even a good one? Lacey's heart hurt and she tried to keep the tears at bay. "I've learned men will always be ruled by their penis. There's no such thing as a trustworthy Mr. Right. Fidelity is a myth." She wouldn't let him change his Mr. Wrong status. Being wrong was his strong point. She counted on his flaws to keep herself free of pain.

"Whoa. Slow down, Doll Face. You can't paint us all as sonofabitches just because one of us turned out bad."

"Are you saying you've never treated a woman like dirt?" she challenged.

"No. I've done my share of idiotic things. But, if I was in love with a woman, she wouldn't have to worry about me cheating on her. I don't break promises."

"So, you say. At least, if that's true, you won't disappoint me. I know you're Mr. Wrong and there will be other women after me."

He frowned and then sighed. "I'm glad I'm your Mr. Wrong. I get to enjoy your company without worrying about hurting you. I would never want to hurt you."

Lacey laughed quietly dispensing of the mood. "Let's stop talking about this and enjoy my weekend of wild abandonment."

He sat up suddenly, causing her hand to slip and cup him. She gasped, while he inhaled sharply.

"Shall we go skinny dipping?" he asked in a voice not nearly as low as it normally was.

"Of course," Lacey removed her hand. "What self-respecting, trashy woman, would turn down an opportunity to swim naked with a loser cowboy?"

She stood and stripped out of her nightshirt. She held out her hand and he engulfed it with his large one. Together, they made their way across the sandy bank and into the water. When the water was up to their waists, Covey released her hand and dove. He surfaced a few feet from her. Water glistened off of him in the moonlight.

She feasted on the sight of a Greek God and forgot to move or make a sound. She forgot to care that he was feasting on the sight of her body at the same time she was his.

"Has anyone ever told you that you have a beautiful body?" he asked. He playfully splashed water in her direction bringing her out of her reverie.

She sank into the water until it was up to her chin. "Are you just saying that because you hope to get lucky?" she demanded in a teasing tone.

"I thought it might make you decide we can do the green light deed."

"You're horrible. I can't do *that* with you." *And, I can't fall in love with you.*

"Then, my complimenting your body had nothing to do with buttering the pot."

"Buttering the pot?" she said, with a groan. "You really are a good ol' country boy aren't you? Here's a hint, not a good saying for the seduction scene. On a scale of one to ten, you're looking at a zero with that gem."

"Tough audience," he said, while floating on his back. "I was raised by my grandmother. I carry around a lot of her sayings in my vocabulary."

"What happened to your parents?" Lacey asked before she could stop herself. It was her plan to know very little about her Mr. Wrong this weekend. Yet, she kept asking questions. *Not good.*

"They died when I was ten." His gaze shifted toward hers as he spoke. The emotion on his face was raw. He walked toward her and placed his hands in the small of her back.

She rested her forehead on his chest. "I'm sorry." Somehow, that sad piece of news moved him a little out of



her Mr. Wrong category. Dammit, she wanted him to stay Mr. Wrong.

Working to distract her thoughts, she let her hand slide down his body to his soft penis and was impressed with its size, even when it wasn't aroused.

He stilled her hand. "Careful with that baby. You might want it to work after a while."

She looked at him coyly. "What? This?" She tugged on his penis to bring it to life, enjoying the heaviness of his pride and joy in her hand.

He gave her a sardonic look of amusement. "I think if you get me out of this water, you'll find it rather useful."

Lacey shook her head in disbelief. "I can't imagine *this* has anything to offer," she said, while tugging gently on his cock.

Covey grabbed her hand and pulled her out of the water. They stumbled across the sand to the tent. "You doubt my manhood?" he grumbled. "I am honor bound to prove to you that it is very good at what it does best."

Lacey dipped her head and went into the tent ahead of him. She turned and faced him. "I don't know. I really think you're in over your head," she teased. "Why don't we just go to sleep? I can probably find someone tomorrow at a gas station to fulfill my trashy weekend plans," Lacey said sweetly and then yawned loudly.

"Woman, you will not be sleeping anytime soon." He scooped her up and lowered her onto the pallet. His hands skimmed her breasts and pulled at her nipples. The heated plucking of his fingers on her breasts sent pleasant jolts through her. She writhed against his hands, eager to touch

more of his skin. His tormented groan was a heady invitation. "Hold still, I refuse to rush this."

"I can't hold still, I want more." She wanted a lot more. How much more, she didn't know? But, more than this.

His fingers lightly fluttered down her arms. "I'll give you more, eventually," he teased her.

"What if I want it fast?" she asked.

He laughed. Their lips found each other in the dark tent. "Too bad," he whispered. "You'll have to trust me on this." He pulled her into a sitting position, loving her with his mouth, his lips.

He was having no problem getting to first and second base with her, but he wasn't trying for third. She was ready for the homerun. In fact, she wanted a grand slam out of him.

"I don't trust m..." His kiss broke off the rest of her sentence.

He used his weight to push her into a reclining position. She fell on a pile of pillows. He leaned hard muscles against her and allowed them to personally introduce themselves to her soft curves. Her hands came up. She didn't know where to place them, so she caressed the strong tendons in the back of his neck.

Their bodies melted together in a tumble of caresses. He rolled, and she was on top, straddling him and skimming her fingers down his chest. Then, without warning, he was back on top, and he grabbed her hands. She waited, expectantly.

He guided one to his swollen shaft. "Recognize this?" he rumbled in her ear.

Her fingers wrapped around a rod of steel and her hips rose, grinding into him, of their own accord. "Sensational. It's like magic," she said in awe. "Just add kisses and it grows like a bean stalk." She held his penis in her hands and stroked slowly, enjoying the subtle textures. "That's the vegetable you should have chosen," she whispered.

He kissed her taut nipples, arousing a melting sweetness within her. Slowly, his hands moved downward, skimming either side of her body to her thighs. "How about your body? Do kisses cause it to do anything magical?" he asked, as his right hand slid between her thighs and he cupped her pussy.

She groaned. "Oh God, I need this." Pure blips of pleasure coursed through her.

He slid a finger into her while his thumb did a slow massage of her clit.

*I've died and gone to heaven*, thought Lacey. She shook her head yes in the dark, unable to speak. Passion pounded the blood through her heart, chest, and head. She felt ready to jump out of her skin with need. "Yes," she said breathing in deep soul-drenching drafts. "Please, don't stop."

"I want you to relax and enjoy the feeling of me touching you," he whispered. "I'm going to please you and there's no rush. We've got all night to find your release button."

His expert touch sent her to even higher levels of ecstasy. Waves of emotions rocked her. She struggled to think, to remember not to get her hopes too high. "What if you can't? Neverfail couldn't get me there." She paused and took a gulp of breath. "He was supposed to be the best. It won't be your fault. God, I can't believe we're talking about this." The words

tumbled out of their own accord while the real world spun and careened.

Covey savaged her lips with a bruising kiss. "I don't know who in the hell this Neverfail is, but you're going to find I can accomplish what he couldn't."

When he slid a finger inside of her, she gasped in sweet agony. "Let's just pretend you don't know about my problem," she suggested.

"I don't want to pretend. Why wouldn't we talk about it? You've got a problem. I'm going to help you fix it." He continued his rubbing of her clit as he spoke. "Sex isn't any fun if you're deceiving one another." He slid two fingers in and Lacey bit back a moan.

She forced her mouth to stay shut when all it wanted to do was drop open in awe. Covey sounded liked he actually cared about her needs. He knew the sordid facts, and he wasn't making fun of her.

He may merely be filling a moment of physical desire for himself, but he was willing to tear apart her soul and help her rebuild it so that it worked again.

*This sex isn't going to be trashy at all.* She felt her defenses weakening. How could she be having real sex with a total stranger? How could she be talking about her orgasm and searching for it with him?

His lips caressed her lower belly.

This was the most intimate moment she could ever remember having with a man. She was completely open, vulnerable, and he was handling her with care.

She was bonding with her Mr. Wrong.

Lacey waited for the panic to follow this realization. It wasn't there. She desperately needed more of him than he was giving. She wanted him to match a soul-for-a-soul.

She tried to visualize Marty in bed with Ms. January to give her the drive to be anti-man. To be a user of men. All she could see was Covey and herself making love. What did Marty look like? She couldn't remember.

"Kisses appear to make you wet and slippery. A great place, I think, to bury the magic beans from a magic bean stalk."

"Yes," she moaned, while squeezing her heart tight to keep it from filling with emotion. She couldn't control the rest of her body. It was reacting without her tempting it with fantasies. Covey was controlling her body. It was him. Not a make believe guy she saw behind closed eyes.

He laughed and paused in his administrations. "Not yet, though. I'm not done with you."

He leaned up on an elbow and started a slow massage at her temples. "Close your eyes and concentrate on my fingers," he demanded. He took his time, massaging her earlobes, her shoulders, her breasts. He spread her legs and massaged every intimate spot she had and some she didn't know she had. He continued down her legs and stopped at her toes where he kissed and stroked each one. "Roll over," he said.

Feeling once again like a stick of melted butter, she struggled to do as he said.

"I think you might be ready for the next level of seduction," he whispered.

His voice brought her back to him. "There are condoms underneath the pillow," she said. She rolled over. "Why don't you get one and slide on in my gentle giant," she urged him in a heated whisper.

Covey moved above her and handed her the condom. "Would you care to dress the giant?" he offered.

"I would love to." She opened the foil package and rolled the condom slowly onto him.

His body entered hers with urgent need. There was no gentle teasing, just heated movement. "I've wanted to do this since I saw you standing in the water topless," he whispered in her ear.

"My top was ... all I had to use ... as a ... flag to wave you ... down." Her hips thrust hard to meet his demanding movements.

"It was incredible taking you in the limo. Have you ever had sex in a limo before?"

"No. Have you?" Her voice asked the question in a tone of sexual tease.

"Baby are you ready? I can't hold it." He groaned the warning in her ear.

Lacey's answer was a sexual laugh of pleasure that echoed loudly down the riverbank. Her orgasm was back. His sounds of pleasure blended in with hers.

It took her a while to come down off the cloud he'd placed her on. When she did, she whispered. "Okay, so I've recently decided my next Mr. Right is going to have to be able to do that with his equip—," Lacey stopped mid-sentence and

grabbed her nose to pinch it shut. "Ohmigod, what's ... that ... smell?" Lacey pushed him off of her and sat up.

He rolled over on his elbow and looked at her with sardonic amusement. "My guess would be a skunk."

Their tent was filled with the horrific odor of a skunk.

"Ughh!" Lacey held her nose tighter causing her voice to sound nasal. "Make it go away."

"I think our sounds of mating must have aroused it." Covey leaned forward and kissed her left breast. "It must have recognized the sound of a woman having a real orgasm instead of a fake one."

"That's not the point. What are we going to do? I can't sleep with that smell in the tent."

He paused in his exploration and looked up at her. "Who says we have to sleep?"

"Go out there and run it off," she demanded. "I want another orgasm before it disappears again. I'll probably lose the damn thing all over again from this."

"Pardon me? You want me to take on a skunk?"

"You have to or it might spray all night," she whined.

"What if I get sprayed?" he asked. "That's not going to be conducive to you enjoying another orgasm."

"Just be careful."

"Forget it little lady, I'm not stepping foot outside of this tent. You wouldn't give me the time of day for the rest of the weekend if I got sprayed by a skunk." He leaned forward and kissed her right breast. "And, I, for one, am thoroughly enjoying your trashy behavior."

Lacey tangled her fingers in his hair and tugged hard.

"Ouch."

"I'll go with you. That way, if we get sprayed, it will be both of us," she offered.

"Let's just lie here very quietly and it will move on down the river."

"Coward," she muttered, as she lowered her head to his shoulder.

"Just practical."

She moved her toe very carefully toward the tent flap. With stealth-like movements, she pushed open the flap. There it stood looking in at them. His eyes glowing bright.

She gulped in surprise and pushed up against Covey, away from the knowing eyes of the skunk. "Did you see it," she whispered, snuggling closer to him.

Covey chuckled. "This would probably not be a good time to get out that sex toy of yours and give it a whirl would it?"

"Shhh." She slapped her palm over his mouth. "He'll hear you and want to come in." What would they do if the skunk came into their tent?

Covey's tongue flicked out and licked her palm. "If it's a him, you're the one he's after," he warned, through his muffled lips.

She removed her hand. "What do you think he's doing looking in our tent?"

"Probably, a skunk with a fetish. It likes to watch two people having sex," Covey answered.

Lacey narrowed her eyes and looked at him. Was he being serious? "Then, we'll just have to stop having sex, so it'll go away."



"I have a better idea. Let's ignore it."

"And how, exactly, would you propose to do that?"

"Well, it's a complicated plan. But it is going to involve green. It's the only way."

"I'm listening."

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## **Chapter 18**

Bits of daylight seeped through the seams of the tent waking Covey. Lacey's body was spooned into his, causing his morning hard-on to grow cement stiff. She was beautiful when in the throes of an orgasm. After the first, she couldn't decide rather to laugh or cry. So, she'd done both while he held her and smoothed her hair with his hand.

Lacey shifted, stretched, and settled on her back, her head resting on her own pillow, plus the one she'd stolen from him sometime during the night. He pushed up and rolled on top of her. She protested with a small grumble and went back to sleep.

She was a firecracker. Once they unleashed her orgasm and she got use to the idea it was back, she was unquenchable. He couldn't remember the last time he had so much fun having sex.

He leaned down and touched his lips to her perky nose, barely resisting the urge to bite it. She opened one eye and wiggled underneath him. He watched with admiration. Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator had curves in all the right places. Unlike his recent girlfriends who were sharp and thin, she was sensationally touchable. He found her curves to be a turn on last night, and they were having the same affect on him in the daylight.

He settled into her and enjoyed the feel of her smooth skin moving against his balls. His dick was ready for some appreciation from her.

"Good morning," she murmured, reaching out to stroke his cock.

He groaned in pleasure. An image of himself down on one knee, proposing to her zipped by his brain. He'd been seeing the same image off and on. Had woken up in the middle of the night with it.

There was no use going through the possible ways to make the vision come true. He couldn't justify proposing to Lacey.

She was into happy-ever-after endings. She deserved them. Only a first-class ass would offer her less than the whole ranch. He prided himself on not being an ass.

Having met her at this juncture in his life was going to make it really hard to go out and look for a woman to fall in love with. His lust for her was so deep, he had no desire to seek out love.

*Not her problem.*

He watched a grin spread across her face and both eyes opening. "What's the grin for?" he asked.

"It's for you," she arched her hips into him playfully.

"Me? Why?"

She cupped his balls and scratched gently along his scrotum. His elbows buckled and he fell against her.

He heard the breath whoosh out of her.

"Sorry," he mumbled. He pushed himself up. "You've got to warn a guy before you give them that kind of treatment. It's dangerous for your well-being to catch us off guard.

"You made two of my favorite fantasies come true," she purred.

He raised his eyebrows in mock disbelief and leaned down placing his mouth within inches of her ear. "You've fantasized about overturned canoes and horny skunks?" he whispered.

She giggled. "No, you idiot." She gave him a shove and pushed him off of her. "Why are you whispering, the skunk's gone?" she said, before sitting up.

"Yes, but I don't want the skunk to hear us and come back for scene three." He lay on his back and enjoyed the sights.

"He didn't slow us down too bad," she said, punching him in the arm.

He grabbed her and kissed her fingers. "You made some of my fantasies come true," he told her.

"I did. Which ones?"

"Meeting a girl who wanted me to teach her how to get off is a pretty great fantasy for a good ol' boy."

"Lucky for you then, I'd temporarily misplaced my orgasm and needed your assistance. Now, get up you big brute."

He sighed deeply and did what she asked. "I don't suppose you have a fantasy about cooking a man breakfast on a river bank?"

"Nope. Do you think I'm a tramp yet?"

"A tramp? Sorry, you're just not cut out of tramp cloth. I'll never think of you that way." He could think of her as the mother of his children, but not a tramp.

"Why not? I think you're a perfect Mr. Wrong for me." She frowned fiercely at him and then looked away when he returned the frown.

So much for the mother of his children. "How about you opt for me thinking of you as the best lay I ever had. Will that work?"

A grin lit up her face. "The best. Really?"

"Mmm mmm. The best by a long shot. And, you have the best body of any I've been with."

She sighed and her shoulders slumped. "Now, I know you're lying."

"Nope, God's honest truth, scouts honor," he said, and held up his fingers in the scouts symbol of truth.

She grimaced at him. "If all that was true, I wouldn't be here. But, thanks for trying to build my confidence."

He grabbed her by the elbow when she went to turn away. "I'll give you a penny for your thoughts. Why wouldn't you be here?" he asked the question softly, his lips, once again, millimeters away from her ear.

He was getting tired of being her Mr. Wrong. He didn't want to be her Mr. Right, but he wasn't happy with the wrong thing either. He wanted to be her Mr. Right Now.

She turned and looked into his eyes. "You have great eyes. They're a lovely shade of brown."

"My mom use to swear I had brownie colored stardust in my eyes."

"She was right. You do."

"Are you going to share your thoughts with me for a penny?"

"Nothing less than a million will get my thoughts out of me. I may be working on the title of trashy, but I'm not cheap."

He sat down on the cooler and pulled her down on his lap. "Are you sure they're worth a million? I'm a stickler for getting my money's worth. Especially, when it comes to spending that kind of money on a woman."

Lacey blinked and lowered her stare to his bare chest for a long drawn out moment. "I was thinking about men and why they make the choices they make. Is that worth a million?"

"I'll take it under consideration. You know, just because one man made a bad choice where you're concerned, doesn't mean every man will make a bad choice." He ran a finger down her arm. He liked the way it made her shiver.

"I can't think when you do that," Lacey said, and pushed his hand away. "You may be right, but it's going to be a very long time before I ever trust what a man says to me again."

He found her breathtakingly vulnerable when she wasn't acting the vamp. He promised himself he wouldn't break any promises to her. He'd be one man she could trust.

Lacey was destined to be his last fling. And nothing more.

"How did you sleep?" she asked, roughly interrupting his internal dilemma.

Covey ruffled her hair. "Let's just say, I'm too old to be sleeping on hard ground. Although, your breasts made a perfect pillow for my head." He cupped her breasts. "Has anyone ever told you they are the perfect size? Perfect for a weary head to rest upon." He squeezed her breasts and toyed with the nipples until they hardened.

Lacey rolled her eyes. "Well, I'm glad one of us was comfortable. While you were enjoying your pillow, I was flat on my back trying to breathe under your weight." She stood

up and pulled him off the cooler before opening it. "Orange juice?" she asked.

"Coffee," he countered. "You should have just pushed me off of you if I was heavy."

"Next time, I will. If you want coffee, you need to get your butt out there and stoke the fire."

*Next time.* He liked the sound of that. "Damn, we're not even married and you're bossing me around." He grimaced as he slowly rolled to his feet and stretched to get the kinks out. His exit from the tent was halted when she reached for a tiny pair of cutoff shorts and slipped them on. Sexual hunger engulfed him. "Come here," he ordered, and he sat back down.

She ignored his demand and slipped out of the tent before he could grab her.

Her shorts did little to cover the most beautiful set of cheeks he'd ever seen on a woman. She was so beautiful. A breathtaking sight. Would he ever be satisfied with size two women and all of their emaciated edges again? He slipped out of the tent and breathed in the fresh air.

"Isn't it beautiful?" she asked, with a husky edge to her voice.

Fog was rolling in and shrouding everything in mystery, including her. "Yes, you are."

She turned around and looked at him. "The river, silly. I'm talking about the river."

"Oh. Well, it's nice, but it is nothing compared to you." He picked up a stick and poked at the embers from last night's

fire. He watched her from the corner of his eye, so he knew to move when she threw a pebble at him.

"You are a very smooth Texan," she accused him.

"It comes with the territory of being a good ol' boy. We're born knowing how to be smooth."

"I bet you are." She walked back to the camp and poked at the embers with him. When they were going good, she stuck the coffee pot on the grate. A spark popped and caught her finger. "Ouch," she shrieked, and popped her finger in her mouth.

Covey couldn't have lost his air quicker had he been sucker punched by a sumo wrestler. The sight of her in pain caused pain in him, deep in his chest. He closed his eyes to calm his pulses. Opening them, he took her hand, pulled her finger out of her mouth, and reigned kisses all over the red spot. "Are you okay?" There was something about her which engaged his heart at every turn.

"Yeah, guess I'm just a little rattled this morning."

"Mmmm. You're capable of being rattled? That's nice to know." He was feeling pretty rattled himself.

"I only get rattled when I haven't had my coffee." She pulled her hand out of his and placed it behind her back.

"Where are the cups? I'll pour us some jo when it's ready," he said, in an attempt to regain his own composure.

Lacey pointed to a tub and inhaled the fragrant smell of coffee. "Coffee always tastes better on a riverbank don't you think?" she said.

"Mmm. Mmm. So, what's on the agenda for today?" he asked. He'd not had coffee on a riverbank since he was ten.



He poured them a cup. Come to think of it, he hadn't had coffee then either. He was too young. This was the first time he'd had coffee on a riverbank.

"Another fantasy, of course," Lacey told him.

He took a gulp of his coffee. "I'm not sure I'll survive any more of your fantasies." He gave her a teasing grin and rubbed his sore back.

"This one you'll like. It takes place at a lovely bed and breakfast. It could quite possibly involve a king-size bed."

Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator in a bed. She had his attention. "That doesn't sound too bad. How do we get to this joint?" Covey looked around at the campsite and saw no easy exit. Were they going to have to paddle out of this place?

"Why we float, of course. Not far, but far enough."

The river water was smooth as glass, at the moment. Would it stay still? "And then?" How many times would they be thrown into the water by his lack of paddling skills, before they arrived at their pick-up spot?

"Then, we'll drive about fifty miles up the road to a wonderful little cottage."

"If it has a shower and food, let's get going. I'm starved." He wasn't really starved. He just wanted to get the hard part of the day out of the way. If he was starved, it was for Lacey's body.

"Now? You want to leave now?" she asked.

*Is this a trick question?* She sounded a little grumpy all of a sudden. "Is there a problem with now?"

"Only, that it's before I've had two cups of coffee? And, it's before we've had a chance for some daylight action in our tent?"

Covey threw his head back and laughed. She knew how to embrace the moment and keep him on his toes.

Lacey placed her hands on her hips and glared.

He gave her a shrug. "I guess we could occupy ourselves in the tent while we wait for the sun to finish rising."

"You guess? You're not sure?" she asked, taking a step closer. "I thought you were a he-man," she taunted.

"Follow me, woman," he ordered. "I'm going to show you what I'm very sure of," he said, before turning and marching into the tent.

He heard her snort of affront, before she followed.

"I was thinking we might just try green again. You know, to see how it works and all, in the daylight," Lacey said behind him as she followed him into the tent.

"Green?" he asked, turning to watch her lips as she answered.

"If I'm going to recommend it to one of my clients for a fantasy, I really should make sure it works," she said, with an air of innocence.

"If you have more than one of these, I think you should hang on to it for when we wear this one out."

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## Chapter 19

"Ohmigod, I never knew green could be done like that." Lacey was exhausted. A master musician had played her body and it was still humming with the rhythm of his touch. Her orgasm was truly back. No more lying, no more worrying. *Ohmigod*, was it back.

"If you liked that position, just wait until I get you into a real bed. I'll show you my favorite," Covey said, in the voice that left her drunk.

She tried not to drool in pleasure as she looked at him. Her Mr. Wrong was a fraud. There was nothing about him that was a good ol' boy. His drawl was gone; his insufferable attitude was gone; his intellect was intact. The only thing that kept him in her Mr. Wrong category was his lack of ambition. He was happy playing in hole-in-the-wall bars and barely making ends meet. She was glad for that small favor. She was finally back to normal. Marty was in her past. Her mind was working in the normal range again. She planned on savoring every moment of this stolen weekend from reality, but when it was over, it was over.

Speaking of sex, he was talking as if it could get better than what they'd just had. "Favorite? You mean that wasn't your favorite? How could that not be your favorite?" She stretched in contentment. At least, very few of his partners would ever be able to compete with her on that move.

"You'll see. That was just an appetizer. If you're going to earn the title of trashy, Doll Face, you're going to need a few unconventional positions added to your repertoire."

Doll Face. Once in a while, he remembered his mask. Should she tell him she was on to him?

*Why do that?* Things were working well as they were. They'd both keep their secrets. Although, she couldn't think of any secrets she had left.

"Then, what are we waiting for?" She sat up straight and grabbed her dry bag. "Help me pack. I have some learning to do." She grabbed the sack of toys she'd brought with her and shoved them into the bottom of the bag. She paused and looked at him. "My repertoire, as you put it, needs expanding."

"Your wish is my pleasure." He grabbed the sack of toys out of her bag and peered inside. "Handcuffs? Why didn't you tell me you had handcuffs with you? Do you know what I can do with a woman and a pair of handcuffs?"

She eyed him warily. "I'm afraid to ask." This man was better at the fantasy stuff than she was. She was going to nickname him Covey Kinky James. CKJ for short.

She snatched the small bag out of his hands and stuffed it back into her larger bag without answering.

"You might have to hire me to work in your fantasy agency. I could be your idea man," he drawled.

Silence fell around them as they gathered up the items in the tent. *Is he serious?* Was he trying to get her to hire him? Was he after her money? Is that why he came on the show?

To find a woman to take care of him? Lacey felt physically sick just thinking it. Was she falling for a con man?

Covey tore down the tent and loaded it while she poured water on the campfire. She tried to shake off the feeling of doubt. He didn't seem like the type to live off a lady. But, why had he brought it up if he wasn't thinking along those lines? "Covey, we're still in tune about this weekend aren't we?" she asked. *Mr. Wrong, Mr. Wrong, Mr. Wrong. Got that Valentine?*

He stopped loading and looked at her with a frown. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"This is a no-strings-attached weekend. When it's over, we're over."

"Is that what you still want?" he asked evasively.

She shook her head. "Definitely."

He smiled and gave her a wink. "Then Doll Face I hope you can get enough of me, because I'm going to disappear on the stroke of midnight never to be seen again."

*That is exactly the right thing to say; damn if it doesn't piss me off that you said it.*

They floated down the river in harmony, both sipping on their steaming mugs of coffee and deep in private thoughts.

The float took thirty-five minutes. It was long enough for Lacey to daydream. Her daydreams, unfortunately, or fortunately depending on how you looked at it, starred Covey and herself.

*We are not a couple. Remember that. He is my Mr. Wrong, and he can never, never be my Mr. Right.*

Of course, the beauty of daydream lovers was there were no rules when choosing one. In fact, the more inappropriate your daydream lover was, the more fun it was to have him.

*Covey is definitely inappropriate.* Appropriate choices were only required for reality dating.

As long as she didn't confuse daydream material with reality material, this was a harmless excuse to live on the edge.

It wouldn't happen, her falling in love with Covey. He wasn't what she needed in a man. *At all.* But, to keep things crystal clear in her head, at the first opportunity, she would make a list of all the reasons he was Mr. Wrong.

It wouldn't do to get fantasy and reality confused. She tangled a finger in her hair and started to twirl. Her imagination often led her down the path to confusion.

"There it is." Lacey pointed to a riverbank that could barely be seen through the dense fog. There was a smell in the air of leisure and contentment. It was early fall and the trees were dressed in misty layers of multicolored rags. A million dollar painting was there for her and Covey's private viewing.

A friendly voice interrupted her thoughts. "Howdy. Glad to see you kids made it in one piece."

It was the same guy who dropped them both off at the river the evening before. Lacey waved at him. "I told you we'd make it," she announced proudly.

"I have to say, I woke with the roosters worrying about you two last night. Went against my grain, leaving you out there on the river, not knowing if you were okay." He waded out and pulled their canoe to shore. He was wearing

camouflaged bib waders and rubber boots. Under other circumstance, like a stormy night, he would scare the wits out of her.

Lacey hopped out first. He handed her a set of keys to the convertible sitting on the gravel road. She'd rented it ahead of time for this leg of their fantasy weekend.

"I get to drive; I called it first," Lacey said, holding the keys behind her when Covey grabbed for them.

Stroking his chin, he nodded at her. "You do like getting your dibs on things don't you?" He dropped an arm around her shoulder and turned her toward the car.

"I got you with dibs didn't I?" she answered pertly.

His hand slid down to her bottom where he cupped it with ownership. "That you did," he murmured, letting a finger slip under the ragged edge of her shorts. "If you're driving, I guess I'll just have to entertain myself by watching your hair blow in the wind."

Lacey nodded and slipped in behind the wheel. Her heartbeat was still trying to skitter to an appropriate pace after his casual touch just sent it out of control. "Buckle up," she warned.

He grabbed the strap. "I'm ready."

She leaned back and closed her eyes briefly before starting the car.

*Trashy women drive with wild abandonment,* she told herself.

For some reason, she was having a hard time staying in character this morning. "We'll need to leave the top up until we get off the dirt roads. Don't worry, though, I'm sure you

won't get bored without my hair blowing around to entertain you." She barely gave him time to buckle his seat belt, before she peeled out of the lot, sending gravel and dust into the morning breeze.

"Are you trying to get us killed?" he asked, over the loud rock music. His voice was sharp, cool, and not amused.

She looked over at him, her eyes wide in innocence. She bit back a smile when she saw his massive hand holding the handle strap tightly. "Don't you love this song?" Reaching with her right hand, she turned the music up. The car vibrated with the rhythm.

He leaned forward and turned the music down. "Not really."

She frowned over at him and made a series of twisting curves without ever hitting the brakes. "Don't you love the country side?" As they traveled out of the low lying areas, the fog lifted, giving her more freedom to push the limits of the car.

"Is your dad a race car driver?" he asked loudly.

"No. Why?"

"Then where do you get this crazy driving from?"

"My mom taught me to drive aggressively. She did a good job, don't you think?"

She could feel Covey's eyes on her. She let her lips twitch in amusement, but kept her eyes on the road.

"So, you were taught to drive like a maniac?" he asked, with a sardonic tone.

"Yip." She slowed the car and pulled to the side of road. "We can put the top down now."



Covey opened his car door. "My turn to drive."

*Damn. I shouldn't have stopped.* "Well, if you insist. But, really, I don't mind driving all the way." Lacey grinned and gave him a trampy wink. Her legs trembled as she walked around the car. Her driving scared the shit out of *her*.

"I'm sure. I want to." Covey walked around and got behind the wheel and waited for her to get into the passenger seat. He changed the channel to classic country and turned it down considerably.

"Classic country?" she said with a groan. *Mr. Wrong, Mr. Wrong, Mr. Wrong.*

He shrugged his shoulders.

*Oh no, that is not an answer.* "You can't just shrug your shoulders. That's not a response."

He grinned and shrugged them again.

"No words, nothing. As if a shrug is the entire defense you need as an excuse to listen to classic country music." *This man needs help.*

This time his eyebrows raised in answer. He checked the mirrors like an old man, buckled up, and slowly pulled onto the road.

Lacey groaned and threw her head back against the head rest. *Mr. Wrong is a driving teacher in drag.*

"Gee. I didn't take you for the boring, cautious driving type." Lacey was feeling major disappointment as she buckled her own seat belt. This was not what she expected of him. She was being Ms. Trashy; he needed to be Mr. Wild.

Finally, words came out of his mouth. "Normally, I'm much more energetic in my approach to driving."

"Yeah, right."

"But, after witnessing your antics, I suddenly find myself wondering how many more drivers like you are out on the road, driving like a maniac. I don't currently have a suicide wish. There are too many beautiful women out there I haven't had yet."

She sat up straight and glared at him. "Had? As in sex? No, don't answer. Of course, that would be it. Let me just tell you, after your weekend with me, they will all pale in comparison. And, my driving is just fine." Lacey reached forward and turned up the music.

Covey muttered something, but she didn't catch it. Was that a grin he was hiding? His dimple was twitching.

*He's laughing at me. Two can play at the irritation game.*

"You like me and you know it," she said childishly.

"Yes, I do. Now, be quiet."

Lacey's stomach did a flip flop at the admission. Was he teasing? Why did she find herself hoping he was serious?

*Lacey, wake up. He's Mr. Wrong.*

Her directions were easy to follow. They got to their destination in record speed. As they pulled into the long driveway, she announced, "We could have been here five minutes earlier if you'd let me keep driving."

"Or, we could be in the back of an ambulance." He brought the car to a stop in front of a lovely old country house set in the middle of a farm. The smell of hay hung fresh in the air.

It was a two-story, white farmhouse with a large wrap-around porch. Huge oak trees shaded it from the sun. It sat on acres and acres of land. No other houses could be seen for

miles around. Horses stood at the fence watching them, waiting for them to emerge.

"Will there be any others staying here with us? It looks empty," he asked.

"No. Sorry, my fantasies don't include threesomes." Lacey liked the way he showed appreciation for her sense of humor through the twinkle in his eye and the dimple in his jaw.

Covey's smile broadened. "Damn, I always wanted to bed two women at once. I guess that means you'll never join me at a swinger's club."

Lacey eyed him warily. "Do you go to swinger's clubs?"

Covey opened his door and got out.

She got out and looked at him with raised eyebrows. "Well, do you?"

"A gentleman never kisses and tells."

She snorted. "Yeah, but you're no gentleman. I find it hard to believe you haven't." Lacey walked to the trunk and waited for him to pop it. "I can get my cases if you can carry yours. You've been to a swinger's club haven't you?" She would bet money on it.

Covey grabbed his and then took hers from her. "I've never been. That's not to say I won't some day. Lead the way. You packed three bags for one weekend. How is that possible?"

"How is it possible you only packed one?"

The front door was unlocked and a note was taped to it. Lacey removed the note and read aloud. "Breakfast is in the oven staying warm." She barreled through the front door and looked around.

"Isn't this perfect?" she said with a sigh of appreciation. Antiques sat on polished wood floors. Threadbare throw rugs were scattered around. The walls were covered in wallpaper from decades gone by. It smelled like her grandmother's house when she was growing up. Both old and love clung to the air.

Covey scanned the surroundings. "I'm not sure. Perfect for what? You haven't clued me in to your latest fantasy." Covey leaned against the doorframe.

Usually, Hazel would be there to greet them, bustling them into the huge kitchen where she would feed them apple pie and hot tea and tell them the history of the Bass' Centennial farmhouse. Lacey knew because she stayed here as a child.

This weekend, Hazel would not be around. Lacey and Covey would be flying solo.

The aroma of French toast drifted through an open doorway. They both headed toward it.

"Let's eat and get settled in. Then I'll let you know my plans." Lacey pulled the French toast casserole out of the oven and placed it on the table as she talked.

The table was set for two with an eclectic collection of beautiful old dishes. A fresh pot of coffee sat warm on the stove.

"If we are not going to talk about the fantasy you have planned for us, let's talk some more about you as we eat."

"You've already had your five questions, plus some I'm pretty sure," she commented.

"Surely, not. I know nothing about you. I want five more." Charm oozed out of his pores.

"Okay, but I get five more," she pointed out.

"Deal."

"What do you want to know?" Lacey asked.

"Where do you live?" He took a bite of the toast and smiled his approval for it.

"I'm an Army brat without the military excuse. I've been all over. Currently, I live in Mistletoe, Missouri. My parents are gypsies in disguise."

"Currently? Are you planning on moving?"

"Yeah, I have a hard time staying in one place for more than one or two years. Which is the good thing about my business. I can do it from anywhere."

"That's convenient," he said, sipping his coffee.

"It really is. Most couples apply on-line. I design their fantasy package, set it up, and send them the details. If they want to meet, we do. Very seldom, do I ever see them face-to-face. Unless, of course, the woman wants to take the strip aerobics class I teach. A lot of women will take my class before their fantasy weekend takes place."

"Why? And, that's not one of my five questions."

"Men like to be stripped for."

"Has anyone ever asked you to set up a three-way for them?"

She laughed. "Yes, and that does count as one of your questions. You've got three more."

"What do your parents think of your career?"

"At first, they were appalled. When I explained I only arrange fantasies for married couples, and only teach strip

aerobics to my married customer base, they came to accept it as a legitimate moral business."

"Morals. Are they big on those?"

"They want them for me. They may behave like gypsies, but they've tried to raise me spiritually. It didn't completely take."

"A churchd gypsy, unique hybrid of qualities."

Lacey shrugged. "Once I was raised and out of the house, they pursued their passion to travel farther and farther away. And, they have recently decided to let me discover who I want to be."

The ringing of the phone interrupted their conversation. Lacey answered it. "Hello, Bass's Centennial Farm."

"Oh, hi Hazel. We're just getting settled in. The breakfast is delicious."

When Lacey hung up the phone, she found Covey busy on seconds.

"I'm going upstairs to take a shower. You can use the shower down here in the master bedroom. You'll find it down the hallway and on the right. I'll use the guest room upstairs."

"Separate rooms?"

"Of course." She gave him a look of dismay, "What kind of girl do you think I am? We just met." With that peek into their next fantasy, she turned and fled up the stairs.

Covey interrupted her departure. "Lacey, I'm too old to play these games."

She stopped midway up the stairwell. "Covey, you're never too old to play."

"We'll see about that."

With an airy wave, she continued up the stairs at a slower pace, giving him a delicious view of her bottom in her Daisy Dukes. At the top, she paused and bent over slowly to pick up a piece of nonexistent lent.

A low wolf whistle told her he was still watching from the bottom of the stairs.

With a little wiggle of her bottom, she straightened and headed down the hall. It was time to prepare for fantasy number three.

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## Chapter 20

Covey watched Lacey until she disappeared. His brain held an imbedded image of her body melting into his. Her soft curves pressing against him caused all of his blood to rush to his dick, which left him so light headed he couldn't focus on anything but her.

She used her mouth, her lips, her tongue to taste him with intimate detail, and her hands to explore their own paths. He'd fit so snug inside of her, he could swear she was new to sex. Except, she was so damn good, it was obvious she wasn't.

Her breathing patterns, moans, and whispered instructions brought an urgency to their union like nothing he'd ever experienced. The woman was a drug. A highly addictive, illegal drug.

She didn't even blink when he asked her to do a 125 with him. With his brain in his balls, he'd forgotten she was a dancer. Her body twisted into positions the average woman's body couldn't. She was the first woman ever to gracefully stand over him, bend backward, place her hands on either side of his hips and take his cock in her mouth. A classic 125 done with classic grace. She embraced the position with enthusiasm and promised him she would show off some of her own tricks at a more appropriate time.

Her eyes, when she talked, promised she knew tricks most men would only come across in a brothel. Part of him struggled with the knowledge that she knew so much. Had



she learned them during her extensive research for fantasy material for her customers? Or, did she come by them through extensive experience? Lacey Valentine was a fascinating mixture of innocence and experience.

She was wild and uninhibited, yet, somehow vulnerable all at the same time. The combination was erotic. He didn't know if he should pamper her or treat her like a vixen.

Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator was a smoldering mixture of incongruities. Yet, the incongruities, when added together, felt honest and real. He found himself accepting them as congruent. As a necessary part of his future existence.

Did Lacey really see him as a Mr. Wrong? And, if so, would she maintain that stance if she knew the real him? It didn't matter. A deal was a deal. If she asked him to stick around, he would. But, he wouldn't ask her.

He grabbed his cell and called to check on his grandmother.

"Covey, dear, is that you? How charming of you to think of your grandmother while out of town on business." His grandmother's voice was as refined and elegant as any southern belle.

*She sounds healthy as a horse.* "Grandmother, how are you feeling?" He knew so little about breast cancer. How did it treat its victims while snuffing out their life? He needed to find out.

There was hearty laughter on the other end of the line. The kind one saves for loved ones. "Darling, I'm well enough to see you settled down and happy. Which reminds me, I had another vision."

"Grandmother, stop seeing me in your visions. It creeps me out," he teased.

There was a deep sigh. "You are an ungrateful child. If I can't talk about my visions, tell me what it is that really prompted your call." There was another deep sigh to punctuate her capitulation.

Covey laughed. "Grandmother, you are an interfering, busybody, and it's a good thing I love you." He joked with her as he always did when she started in on his love life. Hearing her laughter was all he needed to maintain the course he had set for himself. He would search for love in earnest. He wouldn't lie to his grandmother. He couldn't do that. But, he could try to make her dreams come true by searching for love.

"I'm shocked you would call me a busybody. I told you last Tuesday I had a vision. I'm just helping you open your eyes to what I have already seen."

Covey grinned. His grandmother, the psychic.

"I know Grandmother. You saw me happily married in your vision?"

"Yes. She was tall and blonde. She was also very vulnerable, and she wasn't a stick. Are you, by chance, seeing a new woman?"

Covey groped for air and dropped the phone. His arms were covered in goose bumps and a chill went down his back. He leaned down and picked up the phone. "And if I am, does that mean she is the one and only for me?" He said the words with unease.

Lacey was vulnerable. Had his grandmother seen Lacey in a vision?

It wasn't possible. Of course, she didn't see Lacey.

God, his grandmother's visions were usually true. She'd seen more than her share of things that came true in Covey's life. Like her vision of him as a country music singer when he was a teenager and scoffed at everything but hard rock.

Could it be possible that Lacey was the woman he was meant to fall in love with? If so, how was he going to backtrack and make her see him as a viable husband?

"Covey, I could answer that, but you never believe my visions where you're concerned. All I'm saying is—I wouldn't be interfering quite so much if you weren't so damn stubborn when it comes to falling in love."

"What's wrong with not wanting to fall in love?" This wasn't the first time he'd asked her about the thrills of love.

"Darling, that is an answer you won't understand until you have experienced love for yourself. You made a foolish contract with your brothers to avoid love. It's a ludicrous agreement. My dying wish is for you to break the contract."

"Why can't you wish for something simple like world peace? I know you want what's best for us, but Grandmother you're asking a lot."

"Well, if it's too much for me to hope for..."

Covey couldn't stand the disappointment in her voice. "I'm going to try to find love Grandmother. That's the best I can promise you. Love doesn't just appear because I'm suddenly in the mood to feel it."

"Oh, you'd be surprised how quickly it appears once you let the universe know you're looking for it."

*Is that why the universe dropped Lacey in my lap?* "I'll just have to trust you on this."

"As well you should. Have I ever led you astray with one of my visions?"

"No."

"Covey, dear, I know you tease me about getting involved in your love life. But darling, you have no business being single for the rest of your life. You have too much to offer the world in the way of a family man. You didn't answer my question earlier. Are you seeing someone?"

*Shit, he wanted to lie; he couldn't.* "Grandmother, to you and to you only, I'll admit that I'm seeing someone who is unlike anyone I've ever been around before." He so wanted his grandmother to be happy in her final days on earth. He would give her hope if nothing else.

"Aha!"

"Don't you breathe a word of this to my brothers. They'll think it takes them off the hook. They can get their asses out there and search for love like I am."

"Darling, your secret is safe with me. Now, tell me more."

"Are you kidding? You know too much already with your visions."

"Just follow your heart. That's all I ask. Bring this woman home so I can do the ring test and we'll know if you're wasting your time."

"Grandmother, don't get your hopes up," he warned. "But, for you, I'll keep my options open with her. That is all I can promise."

"That's all I ask sweetheart. That's all I ask. And be careful darling, I see an accident."

"Grandmother, I love you."

"Of course you do dear, just as I love you." She paused and then said, "Covey?"

"Yes?"

"Love is not a business arrangement."

"Grandmother, I know that. Do me a favor. Tell my brothers, I'm going to kick their asses when I get home."

"Covey James, you leave those poor boys alone. They'll have to answer to me soon enough."

Covey was silent.

"Covey, I love you."

The line went dead before Covey could respond. He would miss her greatly when she was gone. He could always count on her to speak her mind and tell him when he was wrong. Just, as she never failed to encourage him and his brothers to follow their spirits, wherever that might take them.

Walking inside, he heard Lacey singing at the top of her lungs. The noise practically drowned out the sound of running water. He grimaced when she hit a high note that didn't quite come out the way the artist intended. She didn't waiver; she just continued belting out her song. He wondered if she knew he could hear. Did she care?

Picking up his luggage, he went in search of the downstairs bedroom. He was glad to find it a simple, yet comfortable

Dibs  
*by Lisa Wells*

room. No frills or girly stuff to deal with. A mirror on the dresser gave him a good view of himself. It was time for a shower and then more of Lacey naked and underneath him.

He was suddenly feeling like an addict going into withdraws. The woman certainly got into his blood in a very short amount of time.

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## Chapter 21

Lacey knocked shyly on the bedroom door, then draped herself brazenly against the frame and waited for it to be opened.

Nothing. *Damn.*

This wasn't how it was designed to unfold. What if he fell asleep? *He better not be asleep. He's supposed to be anxiously waiting for me to show up for our next fantasy.*

"Hello, anyone there?" Her voice was slightly higher than a whisper.

Nothing. *Shit.*

Could he actually be asleep? She would kill him if he was. Of course, she would have sex with him a few more times before she killed him. No sense in killing the hand that feeds the kitty until the kitty's full.

*Meow said the feline to the tom.*

Breathing in deeply, she twisted the wooden doorknob and slowly opened the door. She took care not to open it too wide. Just enough to peak in and scout out the room.

He wasn't there. The bed appeared empty from her vantage point and the room had a vacant feel. Was he still in the kitchen?

"Dammit," she said, and stepped inside the doorframe to see where her plan went wrong.

The view, without a man, made her scowl.

Not, that it wasn't a nice view. It consisted of a fairytale, four-poster bed dressed in shades of white. The walls were

painted in a lovely shade of blue. A good background color for her skin tone. Antiques were displayed sparsely throughout the room, and they gave the sleeping chamber a feel of intimate luxury. *Why isn't he here?*

It was a good room, scratch that, it was a great room for her next fantasy. *When did Hazel buy the bed?* Lacey didn't remember seeing it at Christmas. Walking over to the bed, she tugged on one of the posters to test for sturdiness. Satisfied it could hold her weight, should she decide to dance for him, she turned her attention to the connecting room.

*He's taking a shower.*

Damn, it would have been so much simpler if he'd just opened the door when she knocked.

She twisted her lips and tried to think. Thoughts were scarce. Obviously, she needed to improvise. But, how?

She did a mental check of her options. After discarding the first two, she settled on the third. It wasn't without flaws. *The steam is going to ruin my hair.* She allowed herself one more moment of vexation and then stomped to the door.

With another deep breath, she stepped into the room, ready to play the part of a new girl at Big Mama's Bawdy Brothel.

The nerves and excitement, of someone doing something naughty for the first time, engulfed her. Her hands were shaking and she almost dropped the goody bag of lotions and sex toys she was carrying. The bag should have been left on the bed. It would have been less to initially deal with.

It's hard to look sexy with your hands full of stuff. Even if it's very good stuff.



She slowly peeled back the shower curtain and sucked in her breath at the view. *A Playgirl Magazine will never impress me again.*

When he noticed her, she asked the question Big Mama made all of her clients ask when they were meeting a client for the first time. "Hi Stud. I'm Lacey. Do you come here often?" The question came out breathless, her nerves causing the words to shake ever so slightly. She held the bag of toys out of sight, behind her back.

Soapsuds ran down his tanned body in rivulets outlining his chest and rigid muscles. She marveled that a man who made a living singing in country bars was endowed with razor cut muscles.

*Where's his beer gut?*

Lacey thanked her lucky stars she'd discovered a Mr. Wrong so finely built.

For this fantasy, she wore a short silk robe—a trashy red one with fur trim at the hem and at the cuffs. She acquired it on-line. Her five-inch mules, purchased at the same time, were artistically embellished with matching fur along their tops.

She wore the robe cinched tightly at her waist to make it even shorter. She liked her legs. She wanted his attention on them as much as possible.

Her hair was pulled up in a loose ponytail; tendrils of hair fell softly around her face. A nice disparity to the rest of her appearance. Her lips were painted red, her blush was heavy, and her eyelashes had three healthy coats of mascara. *If I shut my eyes, I'll probably never get them back open.*

She wore a pair of black, fishnet stockings and a black garter belt for contrast underneath the robe. Her bra matched the garter. Underneath the push-up bra, were red rose petals pasted to her nipples. Her pubic hair was shaved—M.I.A. *Missing in action.*

*I hope I don't live to regret that decision.*

On her head, tilted at an angle, was Covey's tattered cowboy hat. The river drenching gave it character. He apparently didn't think so, because she found it in the trashcan. It was a sassy addition to her attire.

The effect of her hooker appearance on Covey was worth the effort. *Shaving and all.*

His eyes scanned her. All of her. And, air whooshed into his open mouth. He then let the air out in a low whistle of approval.

Lacey gave a silent sigh of relief; he didn't laugh at her. Her fantasy was still doable. She stood perfectly still and waited for him to answer her question.

When he didn't say anything, her heartbeat jumped to the conclusion there was something wrong. It began a frantic search for an exit from her chest.

Full of worry, she watched him step under the pulsing water and rinse the shampoo out of his hair. Was he going to ignore her?

*Is my mascara running in all this damn humidity?*

Lacey did her best to appear confident while her legs were hell bent on wobbling. What if he's trying to hold in the laughter? Is this fantasy too much?

With the soapsuds gone from his hair, he gave her another thorough look and said, "No, this is a first. And you?"

Tension ebbed out of her body. "Today is my first day on the job. Big Mama said you asked for me." She played coyly with the sash to her robe as she spoke the rehearsed words.

"Big Mama?" Covey asked. He tilted his head and waited for an explanation.

Lacey resisted the urge to reach up and wipe the soap out of his ear. He'd missed it during his hurried rinse. "Sure. She's in charge. She said you paid for The Special." Lacey undid her sash and let the robe fall open giving him a view of her decked out body.

She watched Covey's dick fill out like a balloon full of helium. The sight sent a surge of power through her.

She dropped her bag of tricks, placed one hand on the wall, and stuck out her hip in a seductive pose. Her body was on full display for him. She had no doubt he liked what he was seeing.

His eyes devoured her in heat. "I think I told her I might want you. I'm not sure." His voice was rough, rumbling the words throughout the humidity-laden room.

"Oh." She bit her bottom lip. "What can I do to convince you?" Her body leaned in toward him and she trailed a bright red nail down his chest. Hopefully, the damn thing wouldn't pop off. She used generic glue, because she'd forgotten the nail glue at home.

Covey placed his hands on her shoulders and pushed her back.

She pouted wide-eyed at the rejection.

His fingertip traced her pouty lips; she opened her mouth and sucked it in; he pulled it out slowly.

"Big Mama said she would send you in and let me get a good look. If I don't like what I see, I can send you back and choose another." His eyes gave her a critical once over.

"Do you like what you see?"

"Lean your head back and arch your back for me. There are certain things I'm very particular about."

Lacey closed her eyes and did as he demanded. *He damn well better not find anything wrong. I don't have a contingency plan.*

She waited and reminded herself she was an inexperienced call girl posing for inspection. When Covey's hands suddenly palmed both of her breasts, she jumped. His fingertips were tracing the valley beneath them.

"No scars, they're actually the real thing." His voice held a tinge of surprise.

"They're all mine." She opened her eyes and fluttered her heavy eyelashes in invitation. "Perhaps, if I'm really good, you'll pay for me to have them enlarged. Big Mama says I could make a ton more money if my boobs were bigger." Lacey had been contemplating a boob job. But, who wanted to pay \$4,000 for big ta ta's.

"You talk too much," Covey complained.

*I think too much, too.*

He reached out, unsnapped her bra, and removed the pasties covering her nipples. "Close your eyes again," he ordered.

Lacey tilted her head back and did as he ordered. Wet fingertips caressed her eyes. They traveled over her nose, across her lips, down her chin, to the hollow of her throat, before finally exploring her unencumbered breasts.

Her pulse was skittering in a frenzy of excitement. Could he feel it?

He cupped the back of her head and lifted it up. "Open your eyes," he ordered.

She opened her eyes dreamily and gazed passionately at him.

"I think they're perfect like they are," he said.

Lacey turned her head so that her lips could kiss his palm; she branded it with her tongue. "So, do you want me for an hour or for the night?" *He thinks they're perfect.*

"I'm not sure yet. Drop the robe and turn around."

She grinned wickedly at him and turned around, giving herself full frontal exposure in the bathroom's mirror.

*Not bad Valentine.*

The garter belt and stockings were peaking out from underneath the loosened robe. With unhurried moves, she dropped the robe to her hips.

Their eyes met in the mirror.

His narrowed. "I said drop the robe."

"All the way?" she said, in a silky voice.

"Of course." His voice broke with huskiness.

Lacey gave him a sultry pout and dropped the robe.

Covey stepped close enough to allow his cock to touch her. Lacey tensed when it aligned itself perfectly with the center of her bottom.

"Bend over," he demanded.

She raised her eyes and found him watching her in the mirror. Lacey gave him a startled look. Her breathing gathered speed. She was throbbing and ready for his entry.

"Do it." His commands were short and forceful.

Lacey did as she was told. She stood with her legs slightly apart and slowly bent forward, letting her hands rest on the sink counter.

"Now, touch yourself."

She blinked, feeling lightheaded. "Touch myself?"

"Yes."

She touched the tip of her finger to her tongue and ran it slowly down her body. She didn't stop until it rested at her vagina.

"Keep going."

She inserted her finger and played with herself for his viewing pleasure as well as her own.

"Do you like it when I do that?" she asked.

"Don't ask questions or I'll send you back to Big Mama. Just answer the ones I ask you." His hand reached out and unhooked one of her garters; slowly rolling a stocking down her leg. He removed it and placed her foot back into her high heel.

"Nice. But, I still need some convincing. Is there somewhere we could go that has comfortable accommodations?"

Lacey stood up, turned around and looked at his swollen cock. She swallowed tightly. She let her bra fall to the floor.

"There's a bed through that door." She motioned for him to lead the way.

With one stocking on and one off, it didn't feel sexy, but she went with the flow. Halfway to the door, she remembered the goody bag and hurried back to pick it up.

Covey stood by the bed and handed Lacey a towel. "Dry me off?"

Lacey took the thick, terrycloth towel. "If my drying you will give you pleasure, I would be happy to." She stepped close to him. Paused. And then, she stepped even closer. Her breasts pushed against him. She slowly brought the towel around to his back, never losing contact with his body.

Starting with his shoulders, she used tiny circular motions to dry him off. His back took a very long time to dry as she did each spot with care. The whole time she was drying, she made tiny pushes against him with her lower body. Not by design, her body had a fabulous mind of its own.

"My legs are wet." Covey grabbed one of the bed posters for support. "Dry them off."

Lacey slid her body down the length of his until she was on her knees. He smelled of soap. With care, she dried the back of his long, hard legs. Her mouth purposely brushed against his wet penis. Her tongue darted out and circled the tip. Teasing it with tiny flicks of her tongue, she let her lips close lightly around its head before quickly releasing.

Covey groaned and he gripped her hair.

Lacey made a move to stand up.

His hands held her in place. "Take me in your mouth," he demanded.

She didn't do as he said. "I have toys we could use to increase your pleasure. If you'll let me up, I could get a cock ring."

Covey's smiled broadened. "You have a cock ring in your bag of tricks?"

Lacey nodded. "Big Mama says we should always be prepared." Lacey reached for her bag and pulled out the device. With care, she slipped it over his penis.

She took him in her mouth and began stroking him rhythmically. Her hands dropped the towel so she could cup his balls with one hand and explore his buttocks with the other. Her fingertips were touching him in places he had previously explored on her. She ran her tongue up and down and twirled it around as she sucked. She paused and blew cool air where her mouth had been.

Covey tightened his grip on her hair.

On the brink of bringing him to orgasm, Lacey slowed down and then stopped. She looked up at him with regret and batted her eyelashes. "I don't swallow." *Which was true. She didn't.*

Covey looked down at her in astonishment. "What?" His eyes were wild with need.

Her cheeks colored under the heat of his gaze. With his hands on her shoulders, he took a deep, steadying breath and closed his eyes. He made no attempt to hide the fact he was on the edge. When he opened his eyes, he shook his head in wonderment. "Are you insane? That's something you should tell a guy up front."



She nodded. He was right. She should. *And, if I could think straight when I'm around you, I would have.* "I'll try to remember that with my next John."

He grabbed her and pulled her into a standing position so fast she wobbled on her heels. He pulled her roughly, almost violently, against him. Sweeping her into his arms, he dropped her on the bed and towered above her.

She looked at him with uncertainty. Had she gone too far?

He bent over her and assessed her body in a bold stare. "What exactly do I get from you?" His voice was as rough as his desire. His hands reached down and flipped her shoes off.

"I'll come with you," she said, tilting her head back and circling her hips in a rhythm of passion.

Covey came down on her and plunged inside her. Their eyes locked in lust. Her heart hammered wildly against her ribs.

His mouth covered hers in hungry greed and his hands boldly molded her to him. A hot ache in her loins, way past the simmering stage, demanded attention.

She lifted her arms and raked his back with her nails, urging him to quicken the pace. She wanted a one-two, one-two, one-two, pace. Not, one, two, and three.

He got the message. In fact, his answer was one, one, one, one.

Words weren't spoken. They couldn't be. Their mouths were busy tasting and biting. A strange inner excitement, stoked by the fantasy they were playing, filled Lacey with delicious heat. Feverish caresses could take the place of words any day as far as she was concerned. Especially, the

deafening ones of needs being spoken at this moment. Covey had a great way with sign language.

Lacey arched sharply when she could hold back no more. A primal scream of satisfaction punctuated the moment.

Covey's explosion was quick to follow.

Without pulling out, he rolled onto his back bringing her with him. Their eyes spoke the words their mouths refused to utter. Covey made no attempt to hide the fact he was just as dazed by the moment as she.

She waited for him to speak first.

He didn't say a word.

"Is that how The Special's supposed to be done?" Her breathing was still ragged, but she had to ask. She wanted to hear his praise of their mating. They were great together; she wanted him to confirm it.

*Fantasy be damned.*

Covey frowned and looked suspiciously disappointed "No."

"No?" Lacey sat up, still straddling him. "Didn't you enjoy what we just did? This particular cock ring is all the rage in sex circles." He wasn't singing her praises. Did she misread the glaze in his eyes?

"Next time, you'll swallow. I'm not paying until you get it right."

"You mean we have to do it again? Tonight?" She trailed her hand down the length of his torso.

"If you want to get paid, we do." His hand covered hers and held it still on his abs.

She shook her head. "I can't swallow. I'm saving that act for my future husband. Are you going to tell Big Mamma I did it wrong?"

*Is that why Marty turned to Ms. January. The bitch swallowed.*

"We'll see how well you make it up to me."

"It might take a while." She lay down beside him and curled into the crook of his arm.

"I've got time." His arms pulled her tightly against him. The flat of his hands splayed over her stomach. "I have you for the night."

"The night? Did you decide on the night?" She smiled in smug satisfaction. "Of course, I'll have to check. I may already have other customers since you didn't decide right away. If I do, we'll have to make it another night."

"Like hell we are. Until you get it right, you're not leaving this room." He bit her shoulder for emphasis.

Lacey stretched in contentment. "You know, I'm feeling pretty satisfied. If you'd come in my mouth, I wouldn't have gotten anything out of it. You're not the kind of man who's selfish when it comes to sex are you?"

"You work in a brothel; you're not supposed to get anything out of it," he countered.

Lacey's lip protruded, "Oh. Well then, perhaps I should quit." She turned to look at him.

Covey grinned at her. "You can't. What about my complete blowjob package? Swallowing will be good practice for your future husband."

"Sorry, Tom, you'll have to find another tart to fulfill that scandalous fantasy."

His brown eyes narrowed speculatively, but he ignored her taunting Tom barb. "I like the tart in my arms right now."

Her smile broadened. "Maybe, in another lifetime, you'll find the tart of your blowjob dreams."

Gently his hand outlined the circle of her breast. "Ms. Valentine, has anyone ever told you that you're a piece of work?"

Her breast surged at the intimacy of his touch, her emotions whirled and skidded. "Art work, yes. My daddy thinks I'm a masterpiece," she said breathlessly.

He eased her down onto her back. "He does?"

"Mmm mmm."

His tongue caressed her sensitive swollen nipples. "I see. You'll have to tell me about him someday."

"I am yours to command."

"You say that, yet you deny me a full blowjob?" His hand seared a path down her abdomen and onto her thigh.

"I could make it up to you by letting you pick out something from my goody bag for us to use during our next pleasure trip."

His hand searched her body for pleasure points. "Let's play Simon Says. You get to be Simon."

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## Chapter 22

Covey lay spooned against Lacey and listened to her breathing. She slept soundly.

The sight of her naked made it impossible for him to concentrate on the details of his plan.

His grandmother and her vision changed everything. Only a fool would let the love of his life walk away without a fight.

How was he going to have Lacey without breaking his promise to her? He couldn't just say, "by the way, Grams says you're my soul mate. Let's get married." She'd bail. There had to be another way.

He glanced up at the ceiling and sighed in frustration. This was a problem without a win-win answer. He was going to have to break a promise to someone. Would it be to his dying grandmother or Lacey, who might hold the key to his heart?

He was under no illusions she felt anything for him but sex. She'd made it abundantly clear, he was her Mr. Wrong. How could he use her view to his advantage?

Knowledge of the real Lacey Valentine was required. He needed information to convince her to spend time with him after the weekend. Once he got a go ahead ticket from her to spend more time together, he'd find a way to change her mind.

Hopefully, she'd be up to the idea of using him for sex for a little while longer. She couldn't deny they were good together.

He was more than willing to be used by this vixen while he worked out his feelings and she explored the possibility of hers.

What if Lacey didn't have a price? What if her heart wasn't for sale or rent and she needed her dream of love fulfilled more than she needed another orgasm? She'd tell him no and they'd never see each again.

What exactly was wrong with him in her eyes?

Lacey intrigued him with her air of mystery and spontaneous fun. He knew as little of her as she did of the real him.

He'd never been with a woman who liked to play out fantasies in the bedroom. Marriage to her would be interesting. What other roles would he play in the bedroom with her?

He wanted to know little things about Lacey like, did she drink milk straight out of carton? Did she have a cat or a dog? Things he'd never cared to find out about other women. Why did she bring these questions out in him?

He looked down at her. Golden hair, in a tumble of messiness, framed her in sleep. Her heavy makeup did nothing to distract from the natural beauty she possessed. Partially naked, her body called to him for contact.

*I've fallen in love with her in the time it takes the normal couple to get to first base.* It wasn't a realization he embraced with glee.

He watched as she lifted her arms above her head. She did a thorough head to toe stretch. His body stirred in response

and propelled him to help the process along. He leaned up on one elbow and showered tiny kisses on the side of her neck.

He let one hand rest on her hip, where he could caress her hipbone.

Her eyes gradually opened. There was a wistful, faraway look in them. She was still wearing her garter belt and one torn stocking. Not for the first time, he counted himself lucky to have been chosen her Mr. Wrong. And, to think, he'd done everything he could *not* to be chosen by her.

With a sleepy yawn, she stretched and rolled onto her side. "Hi, were those your lips on my neck or was that part of my dream?" she asked.

"Hi yourself, they were mine."

"Mmmm. You have great lips."

"Do you often take naps in the middle of the afternoon?" he asked teasingly.

"Only, when I've had really good midmorning sex."

Stabbing jealousy seared his gut. *Where did that emotion come from? Do jealousy and love travel in a rabid pack?*

He resisted the urge to ask her how often she had great sex in the afternoon. "I've been thinking about something," he said instead.

"You mean you didn't sleep?" Her eyes opened wider and she stared at him.

"No, you snore." He made a loud snoring noise to demonstrate for her what she sounded like.

"I do not. You're a beast for making that up." Lacey gave him an indignant look and then snorted air out her nose for emphasis.

"Oh, it's true. It was horrible. Just shocking. The dogs were howling outside from the sound of things in here. I'm surprised you were able to sleep yourself."

Lacey laughed and punched him.

"Ouch," he said in mock pain rubbing his arm. "Where did a city girl like you learn to punch like that?"

"I'm not talking to you," she said with a pout.

"In that case darling, I will apologize. I have a question, and I need you talking to answer it."

She narrowed her eyes in suspicion. "What?"

"Tell me what makes me your Mr. Wrong?"

Lacey shrugged her shoulders. "I don't know. I guess the main thing is you're country. I like city men."

"City men?"

"Yeah. You know, the kind of men who drink fancy coffees. The kind who, when invited to a formal affair, will show up wearing an expensive suit and tie, not a clean pair of jeans and boots with their Sunday best hat. The kind that would never listen to country music in a convertible," she ended in a shudder of disdain.

"So, it has nothing to do with my lack of finances? It has to do with your lack of taste in music?"

"My taste in music is just fine. And, it has nothing to do with money. I make more than enough money. I definitely don't need a man for money. Although, I would be less than honest if I didn't say money probably does play a role in my perfect man. But, it would be for other reasons."



Covey took a moment to digest that response. "So, this country thing, you're not the type who could ever be happy on a ranch, fifty miles from nowhere?"

"Oh, lord no. I would go crazy. Where would I get my daily latte? What would I do for entertainment? Why all the questions?" she asked with a yawn.

Covey considered her words. Other than the country bit, he could accommodate her on all her other desires for the perfect man. It was satisfying to know, he could be her Mr. Right, if he wanted to be. And, God help him, he wanted to be. "I have a proposition for you."

She leaned up on an elbow and looked at him in confusion. "A sexual proposition?" She crawled on top of him and purred. With her hands on either side of his face, she pinned him in place.

"No. Well, I'm sure sex would be part of it. The bonus part of it." He flipped her over on her back so that he was on top.

She lifted her head to look pointedly at his penis, which was pushing into her belly. "You've got my attention." She reached out and fingered his balls.

"I would like to hire you for a month."

Her fingers found a grip on one ball and tightened.

Those weren't the words he meant to say. Where did they come from? He carefully removed her hand and rolled off of her.

She rose and sat frozen beside him. "Hire me? For a month?" she finally questioned.

"Yes." He waved his hand in front of her face to see if she would blink. She did.

"Hire me how?" She undid the torn hose from its garter and rolled it off her leg. Tossing it on the floor, she looked at Covey.

Good question. *What do I want to hire you for?* "Well, this is the tricky part. I need to come clean on some things. I haven't been exactly honest with you." He was winging it. He never winged anything this important.

To his surprise, Lacey turned pale and jumped off the bed. What had he said?

"You're married aren't you? How could that freakin' happen?" She paced to the window and then swung around to glare at him. "They're supposed to screen everyone and conduct background checks to make sure everyone is single. God, I've slept with a married man. I'm going to burn in hell for sure." She picked up a figurine from the dressing table and threw it at him.

He caught it. "What in damnation are you jabbering about? Of course, I'm not married. Why would you think that?"

"You're not? Are you sure?" She walked back to the bed and collapsed on her back.

"No, I'm single."

"Then, what is it you want to tell me?" She turned her head sideways to look at him.

"I'm not a country music singer for a living." When Lacey opened her mouth to interrupt him, he quickly spit out the rest of the sentence afraid she would go on another tirade. "Let me finish. I do sing. I didn't lie about that. But, singing's not my only source of income."

Lacey surprised him by shrugging her shoulders in apparent indifference to that bit of information. "Well, I would hope not. I can't imagine you paying your bills on the income you'd make singing in tiny little bars."

Covey grinned and leaned forward to kiss her on her slightly swollen lips. "You're a snob Lacey Valentine."

"Guilty. I know."

"I'm wealthy," Covey blurted out. Again, not what he meant to say.

Lacey laughed and then sobered up when she realized he was serious. "How wealthy?"

"Wealthy enough."

She picked up a pillow and hugged it. "Why the poverty act?"

Covey leaned against the headboard. "I didn't want a lot of publicity from the show. I planned on going on a wife hunt afterward."

Lacey turned a murderous look at him.

He hurriedly continued in an effort to smooth the storm that was brewing inside of her. "I wasn't interested in a fling; so, I tried my best not to get picked."

"I'm a fling? You're using me to get your jollies before you settle down? How can you have sex with someone when you're in love with someone else?" Lacey shouted. "Is this what every man does?"

The storm gates had opened. "Calm down. You've got it wrong. I'm not in love with anyone," he lied.

"Wrong," she shouted. "Did I, or didn't I, just hear you say I'm a fling and you're getting married?" She tossed the pillow on her lap at him.

"Yes. That's what I said. But, you interpreted it wrong." Covey handed her the pillow back and she slapped his hand away.

"Then, by all means, please interpret that cryptic message for me." Her eyes narrowed to mere slits. "Have you ever walked in on someone you love having sex with someone else?"

No. He hadn't. "My grandmother saw a tall blonde in a vision. The blonde was my wife." He wanted to kill the man who broke her heart. What an asshole.

She rolled her eyes in disgust. "You don't believe in psychics do you?"

Covey felt a sadness wash over him. Yes, he did. "My grandmother's dying. It would make her happy to see me settled down before she dies. She has an old-fashion belief that a man needs a woman to be happy."

"So, you're going to get married to please your grandmother?"

He didn't answer right away. He'd been willing to do that. But, could he say that was his true motivation at this point? He weighed his words carefully. "Well, this is where it becomes even more complicated. I told my grandmother I'd met the woman in her vision. She's expecting a marriage."

"You think your grandmother saw *me* in a vision?" Shock was plastered across her face.

Covey regretted telling her. Now, she would turn him down for sure. You either believed or you didn't in psychics. Very few, left their options open on the possibility. If he wasn't already her Mr. Wrong in cement shoes, he would be now that he'd told her there were psychics in his family. "Well, she thinks she saw someone who was blonde and tall. You know what, let's just forget we've had this conversation. I'll explain to Grandmother that I met the wrong woman. There's lots of tall blondes in Texas."

Lacey groaned. "I believe in psychics, Covey?"

Covey's mouth dropped open. *So much, for Mr. Wrong in cement shoes.* "Why doesn't that surprise me?" he responded, while trying to hold back the laughter threatening to erupt.

"Don't laugh. I have a friend, Maddison, whose mom is a medium. Her mom's name is MarVeena. MarVeena can be translated into Goddess of the night. Isn't that the absolute best name? Anyway, it's her given birth-name. Swear. She designs shoes in a unique boutique in Kansas City. You can look it up. It's the name she was given before speaking to the dead was an acceptable career. Don't you get it? It's like her destiny, to speak to the dead," she babbled the incredible saga without taking a breath.

"Sure." Covey's face was carefully neutral; he hadn't really followed the whole MarVeena story. She'd lost him with the bit about speaking to the dead being fashionable. When had speaking to the dead become an acceptable career?

"Come on. Get excited. I have met some really cool people, through séances she guided."

This was the most animated he'd seen Lacey. Gone was the seductress. In her place, an energetic bundle of fun.

"People?" he questioned.

"You know. Those, who are on the other side. Someday, if you remind me, I'll tell you all about Jasper. He's a spirit. He's a hoot."

"Jasper? You have relationships with dead people?" This was going to be a problem. Lacey was the nut case. Lacey was crazy. Not his grandmother. She only had visions. As far as he knew, she never actually spoke to spirits. He didn't want to be in love with someone who went around building friendships with people who weren't there. His grandmother was bizarre enough for the whole family.

"No, I don't have relationships with them."

Whew. Relief started to relax his doubts. A little.

"I just have conversations with them," Lacey explained.

On the other hand, her view on the spirit world would make his grandmother happy. And, the sex between them was amazing. He could get her to fall in love, given enough time. Actually, now that he gave it some thought, what could be more perfect? His grandmother would not only be at peace to see him settled down, she'd have a friend to talk to about her visions. "Lacey, would you like to pretend we're getting married?" *Pretend. Damn, he'd meant to say, will you marry me.*

She didn't blink. She didn't pause to think. "No."

"Why the hell not?" God, did she know what it took out of him to ask?

She snorted. "Don't curse at me and wipe that snarl off your face. It makes you look dangerous."

Covey wiped the snarl off of his face.

"The answer's no, because it would be a dishonest arrangement."

He was willing to beg. "It would be dishonest for a good reason." Should he admit he was in love with her? When did a man make that type of verbal commitment? Too soon, and you'd scare her away. Too late, and she might find another.

Lacey shook her head no. "You're my Mr. Wrong. We could never be happy. It wouldn't work. Besides, you were going to fall in love. Why are you just offering me a pretend engagement instead of love and marriage?"

So, that was it. She felt like she was getting cheated. "I don't want to hurt you." Which was very true. He liked Lacey. He had no desire to cause her any pain. "Would you have said yes to getting married?"

She shrugged.

Her indifference pissed him off. "Do you want to get married?" he asked.

"That's not a proposal," she said accusingly.

Women. There was no pleasing them. And yes, it had been a damn proposal. "I own suits; I wouldn't embarrass you at a formal event. You and I have great sex. It wouldn't be so bad. And, if you want, we can have an arrangement."

Her eyes narrowed to slits of danger. "Arrangement?"

He realized his error too late. "Never mind, that was a bad idea. I have a home in the country and in the city. I love

country music, but that shouldn't be what keeps you from saying yes."

Her eyes popped open. "You own two homes? Wow."

Was that approval he saw on her face. "Say yes." Lord help him, but he really did want her to say yes. He was in over his head.

Lacey gave him a fond look, and he felt punched in the gut. She was giving him the kind of look you give a man you just want to be friends with.

"Covey, you're different. But, I see a real sweet side underneath the garbage coming out of your mouth. That's why I'm willing to consider this proposal."

"You are?" Joy jumped around inside of him. If she would just wipe that idiotic friendship look off her face. They were lovers; they were not friends. He didn't want to be her friend.

"Yes, but not exactly as you outlined."

That took the air of him. Here comes the let's just be friends' line. *Never*. Not even once, had he been given the let's just be friends speech. He braced himself and ran a quick interference. "I promised you a no-strings-attached weekend. We can just stick to that."

"So, now you're pulling out of your proposal?"

"No, I didn't say that. I just want you to know there's no pressure."

"You mean you can take me or leave me. No big whoop either way?"

"Dammit, you're blowing this out of proportion."

"Do you or don't you want to know my conditions?"

"Yes."



"It's simple. A long-term marriage is out. We're not in love. If I marry you, I'm not marrying you forever."

That's what she thought. Once he got her to say I do, he wasn't going to let her say, I don't. "I'm listening. Why not forever?"

"I'm only willing to do this because you're my Mr. Wrong. I know I can help you out without worrying about falling in love with you and getting hurt."

"You do?" God, she was brutal to his ego.

"Yes. I do. This is what I propose. We'll get married, and stay married, until your grandmother dies. Then, we'll get an annulment."

Worse than friends. Friends had friendly sex. "An annulment? Doesn't that require we don't consummate the marriage?"

"Yes. And that bites. But, if you're willing to make this sacrifice for your grandmother, then you need to do it in a way that doesn't ruin the rest of your life or mine."

Hell, she had a good point. How could he argue with common sense? Unless he was ready to declare his love, he was going to have to play along. "And, what do you get out of this situation? Other than an annulment?" This isn't what he wanted. Not by a long shot.

"I don't know; but it feels like the right thing to do. Call it a woman's intuition; but I feel pressed to help you out. Maybe, it's nothing more than you gave me back my orgasm; and I want to repay the deed. Or maybe, it's because of something Jasper told me at last month's séance."

"Jasper? Séance?" Annulment was still taking up space in his brain. Other words weren't filtering correctly.

"I told you about him. Weren't you listening?"

"Oh, I forgot about Jasper. What else is in it for you?"

She shrugged her shoulders as if this was nothing more than a decision to buy green bananas on the faith you'd be around to see them ripen. "It will get me out of town for a while. My ex got married. I really don't want to be around to run into the happy couple."

He narrowed his eyes. That wasn't a good enough reason. "Cut the crap. I'm not buying it. A vacation would solve your problem." Why did the man have to be the first to say I love you?

Lacey threw her hands in the air. "I offered to help, that's all."

He stared into her eyes, searching for signs of a lie. She didn't blink. "I'm not use to someone doing something unless there's something in it for them."

Lacey grabbed her shoes. "That's what I'm offering. Are you in or are you out?" She stood at the door and waited for an answer.

Covey ran his hands threw his hair. This was a bizarre proposal of marriage. "Calm down. I'm in. Thank you." *In?* He was in way over his head. That's what he was in.

"You're welcome." She did a small curtsey and left the room.

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## Chapter 23

Walking to her room, Lacey replayed their conversation. Her gut told her it was a mistake. Her gut was usually right. But, why was it telling her it was a mistake? Where was the mistake in the plan?

*Why did I say I'd do it? I'm such a sucker for a sob story.*

She knew why. Jasper told her last month, she'd be married by fall. It was fall.

Covey's heart was in the right place. How many men would be willing to go to such lengths to make their grandmother happy? Was her heart in the right place? Was she really doing this to leave town for a while and make a dying woman happy? Why did she come up with a solution that denied her sex with a man who made her toes curl backwards?

*I'm my own worse enemy.*

She had no one to explain her actions to. Her parents were away. They wouldn't be any the wiser to her good deed. On the one hand, she really couldn't see any flaws.

On a permanent basis, Covey and her were wrong for each other. He was her Mr. Wrong, nothing had changed there.

*Aren't we?*

*Yes, of course we are.*

But, on a short-term basis, this plan could work. When they got their annulment, they could go back to having friendly sex until one of them found a life partner.

With a sigh, she reached for a pen and paper off the nightstand. It was time for her to make a list of all the reasons he was wrong for her.

She needed to make sure she wasn't setting herself up for heartache. She survived one failed relationship and the ensuing heartache. She didn't think she was up for another heartbreak relationship.

She wasn't sure, but she bet there were a limited number of times one's heart could be broken before it became permanently disfigured.

What she told Covey about why he was her Mr. Wrong wasn't the whole truth. Not that she lied to deceive him. She just couldn't tell him the truth, because she had no clear idea what the truth was.

She declared him rather publicly to be her Mr. Wrong. It was time to put it in black and white—what made him wrong for her. She needed a visual of his faults to take the place of all of his finer, manly points.

Making a list took longer than she expected. Every flaw had a silver lining which tempted her to put it on the pro side.

On the pro side, she came up with many marriageable qualities—handsome, funny, sexually adept, intelligent, kind, sexually adept.

On the con side was his playboy persona and his views that marriage came with arrangements. He'd actually offered her an open marriage? That definitely had playboy written all over it. Twenty-four hours ago, the con's would have included his good ol' boy mentality. But, that had disappeared, and in its place was an intelligent man.

*Playboy?* There was no silver lining there. Definite con.

Money would have also been an issue in her original declaration of him being wrong. Not money exactly, but ambition. She needed a man with ambition. She thought when she chose him, he didn't have any. If he was wealthy, well he must have, unless he inherited the money. She wasn't sure where to place that on the list for now. Did he have ambition?

Country versus city life was nowhere on the list, yet. Did she really care where she lived?

Yes. No.

As long as she was with the man she loved, she could make it work anywhere. Except maybe Alaska. Cold weather wasn't her favorite thing.

With her list in hand, it was easy to see that the cons did outweigh the pros on paper. That should be comforting. That should make it easy to keep him away from her heart. She would have it laminated at the first opportunity and keep it close by during their entire marriage.

*Will it be enough to protect my heart?*

As long as she remembered that he hated marriage for himself, it should enable her to keep him at a distance.

*What kind of man hates marriage?* Definite character flaw. Did he also hate children?

Then, just to be sure, she did a list of the pros and cons for playing the part of his wife.

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## Chapter 24

Those who were in the audience and saw the two of them on stage wouldn't be surprised to hear news of Lacey and Covey extending their Dibs Date.

However, engagement ring shopping in Dallas, five days after meeting, would have surprised the majority of them. Lacey's public declaration that she chose her Mr. Wrong had been authentic. Believable.

Yet, that is exactly what Covey and Lacey were doing. It was Tuesday morning and they were sitting at an elegant table in Tiffany & Co. A jeweler laid before them a display of beautiful rings in all sizes and shapes, each elegantly displayed on black velvet. Cut, clarity, carat, and color were all exquisite in the selection presented to them.

"Do you have any mood rings?" Covey asked the jeweler bringing a smile to Lacey's face.

The man stood up and looked down his nose at Covey. "Excuse me. Did you say *mood* rings?"

Covey lifted an eyebrow. "Yes, that's what I said."

The man looked at him with horror on his face. "Sir, I'm sorry, but I do not know what a *mood* ring is."

Covey chuckled. "Well then, I guess that means you don't have any. That's too bad. I would have paid good money for one."

The man's face turned purple. "Would you like for me to check about getting you one?"

"No, thank you. Would you mind giving us some privacy?" Covey asked.

The man frowned, obviously quite perplexed by the request for a mood ring. "Certainly, Mr. James. What ever you wish."

"He knows your name," Lacey whispered. They hadn't given their names. Was Covey a regular at Tiffany's? It was a swanky shop. Not one she'd ever frequented.

Covey turned to Lacey and grabbed her left hand. He picked up a ring and slid it on. "Yes, he knows my name. What do you think of this one?"

Lacey looked at the two carat, square cut diamond. When she looked back up at Covey, he was wearing an *I want to please you puppy dog look on his face*.

She grimaced. "Well, it's not a mood ring, but it's quite beautiful. Unfortunately, it's not me. It's rather garish, don't you think?" Hideous was another word that came to mind.

"No?" He looked disappointed. "I thought you would want the largest one available?"

Lacey laughed. They knew so little of each other. How were they going to pull this scam off? "Then you thought wrong. We're not really getting married forever. Let's keep it simple," she whispered.

"That's nice of you to suggest, but my family would be instantly suspicious. They're well aware of my style when it comes to jewelry. And, we are really getting married, even if it's not forever."

Lacey groaned silently. "You have a jewelry style?" *No wonder the guy knows your name.*

"Actually, it's more of a jewelry history than a style."

"I'm listening."

"I like to buy women little trinkets as going away gifts when the party is over."

Lacey raised her eyebrows in disdain. The man really deserved disdain. Unfortunately, she couldn't keep the smile from twitching her lips at his boyish charm. *You are so wrong for me. What was I worried about my heart for?*

He picked up another ring to scrutinize. "It wouldn't be fitting for one of those trinkets to have been bigger than the ring I placed on my bride's hand." He put the ring back in its spot.

"You do have a point." Lacey looked at the rings for real. She wanted something completely different from the one Marty had given her. She'd hawked it and given the money to charity under his name. There was no way she was going to let him turn around and give it to the bimbo. She wished she'd been there to see his face when he got the thank you card for such a large donation to the humane society for cats. He hated cats.

"I'm glad you understand. You'll need to pick out a diamond that is befitting the bride of Covey Grant-James, III."

Lacey's head snapped up. "The third? Grant?" she replied in a low voice. That was a name she recognized. *You said rich. Not filthy, bastard rich.*

"Yes. Do you like this one?" He pointed to another garish ring.



Lacey ignored the question. "As in CJ III, the music mogul? As in, the man whose name appeared on the Forbes list of richest men in America the same week his album went to number one?" she asked.

He nodded and Lacey gasped. She swallowed with difficulty and found her voice. "You're kidding. No way are you that CJ."

He shrugged minimizing the whole announcement. "Way," he answered in a surfer's voice. "I'm glad to know you've actually heard of my music."

"Why are you just now telling me this?" Her voice rose causing the jeweler to look at them questioningly. She didn't care. She looked at Covey in dazed exasperation.

Covey placed a finger across her lips. "Shush, you're causing the jeweler undue concern. I told you I was wealthy."

Lacey resisted the urge to bite it off and removed the finger from her lips. "Well, that's a bit of an understatement don't you think."

"Not really. Does it change anything?" His brown eyes darkened as he held her gaze.

She stared at him in astonishment. "Dammit. Of course it does. You were on a dating show? The gossip columns will have a field day when the show airs. Our marriage, our annulment, nothing will be quiet."

"Yes, I'm well aware of the story headlines to come," he replied with heavy irony.

Lacey closed her eyes and shook her head to clear it. "This is ridiculous. Things like this do not happen to people like me." She stabbed a finger at his chest. "Why didn't you tell

me who you..." She suddenly stopped talking and visibly relaxed. She looked around the store. "Where are the cameras? This is a joke, right?"

"It's not a joke. And, I didn't tell you because I liked the fact you were enjoying my company with no idea if I had money or not. With no preconceived notion of the man you were seducing."

"This complicates everything." Lacey started twirling her hair with her finger. He didn't graduate in the bottom of his class. He was a freakin' Yale graduate.

"Why?" A shadow of annoyance crossed his face.

"Because when we divorce, it's going to make headline news. I'll never be able to keep it anonymous from my hometown. Every male I date in the future will find out I was married to you."

"So?"

"So?" she snapped. "So, when men find out I was married to the legendary CJ III, they won't ask me out."

He looked at her, eyes wide, mouth hanging open.

"Don't you get it? They will think that if you weren't good enough for me, no way will they be good enough for me with their average bank accounts and average reputation with the women."

"Are you saying I'm above average?"

"Shut up," she snapped.

Unperturbed by her rancor, he countered. "I'll make it worth your while. You can keep the rings, plus I'll pay you for your time."

"Covey these rings start at." She stopped talking and threw her hands up in the air. "I don't even know how much they are. There's no price on any of them. But, I can tell just by looking at them, each one of them could buy several homes. I can't accept that kind of gift. Besides, I'm doing this for your grandmother not your money. I don't even like you that much."

He ignored her words. "How about this ring? It's simple and yet elegant."

Lacey started twirling her hair again. It was a beautiful ring. The jeweler had called it the Etoile Solitaire. She bit her lip and tried to work through this latest bit of news.

"You're impossible to argue with." The engagement ring he was showing her had a wide silver band with a large solitaire diamond inlaid into its band. The wedding band was a smaller silver band with round diamonds set in an asymmetrical pattern all around the band. It was a breathtakingly beautiful combination of rings.

"I love it. Are you sure you want to spend that much?" *However that much is.* Lacey couldn't believe she was actually going to go through with the charade.

"Lacey, stop asking me about money. I have more than I know what to do with. This is the ring I would choose if left to my own devices to pick one out for you."

She sighed. "Me too. I love it."

Covey snapped his fingers and got the jeweler's attention. "Ron, we'll take this ring."

Ron nodded his head and gathered the discarded rings from the table. "It's a beautiful ring, Sir."

"I would like to see a selection of necklaces and earrings that would complement the ring."

The jeweler smiled. "Of course. I'll be but a moment."

Lacey started to protest. But, what would be the use?

She would leave all of the jewelry behind when she went back home, and he could return it or give it away to his next mistress.

\* \* \* \*

"Why do we need to go shopping for clothes?" Lacey asked when he later pulled into a parking lot of what looked like an exclusive woman's boutique. "I packed plenty of clothes. That is why we stopped by my place isn't it, Covey? For me to get my things. Or was that just a ploy on your part to do me in my own bed? I know you're trying to get all the sex you can out of me before we say 'I do' this afternoon."

Covey reached over and ruffled her hair. "There are two reasons why we need to shop for clothes. One, I want to spoil you."

"You mean other than sexually? Because, you definitely know how to spoil me sexually."

"Good. The other reason is, as my wife, you'll be attending several different formal functions."

"Formal, as in long gowns?" Lacey did her best to smooth her hair back into place as she digested this piece of information.

"Yes. Plus, I would like to buy you some riding gear so, if you want, I can teach you how to ride while we're married."

"I've always wanted to learn to ride horses. Can we start tomorrow with my first lesson?"

"Yes. And the formal functions? Are you comfortable with attending them?"

"Do we get to dance?"

"Yes."

"Then I'm there. I do dance you know?"

His smile warmed her insides. "So, I've heard. But, I must warn you. The dances are rather tame, no stripping allowed," he said, giving her a somber expression.

"Shoot, that's the kind of dance I do best."

"You say that, yet, you've never danced for me."

"I thought I'd save it for a wedding gift."

Covey sighed and shook his head in regret. "You're saving *that* and swallowing for your husband. He's going to be one lucky bastard."

By the end of the trip, she was the proud owner of several pairs of boots, a couple different cowboy hats, riding outfits, and three designer gowns, as well as gloves, jeans, and sweaters. Covey was the owner of a new cowboy hat.

"Are you ready to meet the family?" he asked. "We'll drive to my house after we get married, and I'll make arrangements for everyone to meet you."

"Not really. Are they going to like me?"

He looked at her as if he was trying to see her through the eyes of his family. "Yes. They're going to love you."

"How are we going to break the news?" They were sitting in a restaurant eating lunch. Lacey was exhausted. She glanced down at the ring on her hand and smiled. She held it

up and admired it in the sunlight. She imagined for a moment, standing in a church with him beside her saying their I do's.

For some reason, the image was clearer than she had expected it to be. Would his brothers and Grandmother approve of her?

"You like it, don't you," he stated, bringing her out of her daydream.

"Are you kidding, what girl wouldn't like it?"

"I'm glad it pleases you. You're beautiful when you smile that dreamy smile."

Lacey looked down at the table cloth to break the moment of intimacy. "When we're done, I'll give it back to you, and if you respect me as a person, you'll take it back."

"We'll talk about it when the time comes. For now, let's talk about our story."

"Okay. But, I'm serious about giving it back." He was so vague about how they would end their marriage.

He ignored her words. "Let's make up a falling in love story to tell my family when they ask us for a blow-by-blow on how this happened so suddenly?"

Lacey took a bite of her hamburger and chewed it slowly thinking about the question. "We'll say it was love at first sight," she replied, before taking another bite of the burger.

"Do you believe in love at first sight?"

*Hell* yes. "No," she mumbled with her mouth full.

A momentary frown crossed his face before it was erased. "Me either." He nodded his head like he was trying to convince himself of his own words. "We'll have to claim we

do. What do we say when they ask us why we jumped into marriage? I have to warn you, my grandmother's not shy. She'll ask you a hundred questions until she's satisfied that this is for real."

"Then, you'll tell her we did it for her. You wanted her to see you married to the woman of your dreams and that is why we are moving so fast."

"That just might work. Tell me you love me," Covey instructed.

"Excuse me?" Lacey took a sip of her soda to wash down the fries. Could she say 'I love you' to a man and not mean it?

"You've got to practice saying it!"

"Why?"

"So, it'll sound more natural when you do it in front of my family."

His reason was viable, but it was nerve racking to say those three words to him. "In that case, you go first," she countered.

"It's not a trick. You're safe." His hand reached out and wiped some ketchup from her lips. "We're in a no-strings-attached arrangement. Just like you wanted."

She raised her eyebrows and waited while her heart tried to jump out of her chest. "Just say it," she whispered.

"Lacey Valentine, your husky voice lassoed my heart, your incredible personality knocked me off my feet, and your superior lovemaking skills finished me off. I love you darling, for life and beyond."

Lacey couldn't control the tears that sprang, without warning, to her eyes. With the back of her hand, she wiped them away. "You idiot, that was beautiful. How could you waste it on a falsehood? You should have saved that for the woman who truly does steal your heart."

"How do you know I won't repeat it when the time's right?" Covey laughed at the evil expression she gave him. "Stop stalling. It's your turn."

"Covey James." She placed one hand over her heart to add emphasis to her speech. "You are the man I never knew I wanted. I love you for opening my eyes to the beauty of the things that are wrong with you. I love you." She ignored the taunt in her head. It was wrong. She didn't love him. He was her Mr. Wrong.

Covey tilted his head and raised his eyebrows. "That was pretty damn good yourself. I almost believed you," he said with a strange look in his eyes.

"Then, I'd say we're ready to try it on for size in front of your family." Of course, he almost believed her. She'd almost believed herself. *Damn, I'm a good actress.*

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## Chapter 25

Covey opened the truck door. "Mrs. James, when we get home, I'm going to devour you all night long. Do you have a problem with my plan?"

"Good try. You know we're not having sex. That was our agreement. Stop trying to trick me into forgetting it."

Covey slid into the truck and refused to analyze the lighthearted joy he'd felt since Lacey walked into his life and said I do. He told himself, he was enjoying the freedom of knowing if he was wrong and, it wasn't love, there was a built in escape? In the mean time, his grandmother would be happy. The world gave him the perfect marriage.

Lacey was sitting primly in his passenger seat. She was holding steadfast to her vow he was her Mr. Wrong. The money didn't sway her. His status, in life, didn't sway her. His charm and sexual skills didn't sway her.

What would it take to sway her? He had every intention of swaying her. Eventually.

He wasn't going to try until after his grandmother passed away and he knew his feelings were the real thing.

What were the odds he'd find a woman like her, willing to play house with him for a month or two to make his grandmother happy and give him the time to test out love?

Sex with her was something he wouldn't mind having on a permanent basis. And he would, just as soon as he had her settled comfortably into his life, and he found the perfect way to let her know they weren't really married.

She'd be upset. *Pissed-off upset*. After she calmed down, she'd see the beauty of his plan.

They could have sex. No annulment needed.

He'd hired a fake judge to marry them so they could continue to have sex. It wasn't an easy task to pull off at the last minute.

The cynic in him did it just in case things went terribly wrong and she was playing him for the fool. The optimist in him wanted their first marriage to be in a beautiful church. Not a court house.

"Hey, pull in there. I want to run into that store for a moment," Lacey said, startling him out of his guilty thoughts.

He pulled into a strip mall. "Where are we going?" he asked.

"You stay here, I'll be right back. It won't take but a moment."

"Okay, but hurry." He started missing her the moment the door slammed shut. He wasn't use to missing a woman. Out of sight, out of mind had always been his motto.

He watched her hurry into a store whose name he didn't recognize. While he waited, he tried to imagine the man she would some day say, "I Do," for real to. It wasn't an easy picture to come up with. He couldn't put a face on a man he thought would do her justice. Unless, of course, it was him.

With a shrug, he dropped the problem. He would live with now and worry about a month or two from now when it happened. For now, permanent was possibly numbered. Hopefully, it would be long enough to dull the effect she had

on him and allow his grandmother peace of mind in which to leave this earth.

*Who am I fooling, hopefully I'll be with her for eternity.*

Before he knew it, Lacey dashed out of the store with a tiny plastic bag in her hand.

She climbed in the truck and bubbled enthusiasm with her smile. "Close your eyes," she ordered.

"Okay, did you buy condoms?" he asked, closing his eyes.

"No. We're not having sex. Now, hold out your hand."

"Which one?" he asked.

"I don't care, just hold one out," she said, in exasperation.

He held out his right hand to her. He heard some paper rustling and then felt her sliding a ring onto his pinky.

"Okay, now open your eyes."

"What's this?" he asked.

"It's a mood ring. I got one for me, also." She took another ring out of the bag and slipped it on her pinky. Then, she pulled out a sheet of paper.

"Really, you bought me a mood ring," he stated in bemusement. No woman had ever purchased jewelry for him. He was touched.

"Yes." She looked at her watch. "Okay, it's been long enough; let me see what color yours turned."

He held up the ring for her to inspect. She peered closely at it before reading from a sheet of paper. A frown, creased her brow.

"What's wrong?" he asked.

She looked at him in horror. "Yours is broken."

"How can you tell?" It looked fine.

"Because, when it turns red like yours has, it means you're in love."

He coughed in surprise. "Damn right it's broken. What color is yours?" God, first his grandmother and now a damn psychic ring. A man should be allowed some privacy when it came to falling in love.

She held up her hand. "It's green."

"Green, as in the same green as your sex toy?" He could feel his cock thickening.

"No. Green as in, I'm uncertain about the direction my life is heading."

"At least yours isn't broken." He pulled her across the seat and kissed her soundly.

"Do you want me to take yours back in and get you a new one?" she asked.

"No. I think I'll keep this one. I'm glad you came back to Texas with me," he said, as he started the engine and shifted the truck into gear. He grabbed her palm and placed it on the gearshift. "Help me shift gears."

"I don't know how."

"You're kidding? You don't know how to drive a stick shift?"

"No. Is that bad?"

He sounded upset, but he was giving her a hard time. He couldn't remember the last time he dated a woman who could shift gears.

Covey forced himself to focus on her flaws. She couldn't ride horses and she couldn't drive a stick shift. Translation, she was not made out of the right material for a man who loved his ranch. The damn mood ring was definitely broken as

was his brain. She wasn't the right woman for him in the long haul. He needed to get past this thought of being in love with her. She'd never be happy raising horses.

If he were a typical business tycoon, who lived in a big city, she'd be great. But ranching was his first love and he wanted a wife who loved it as much as he did. "Nope, not a problem. Not a problem at all for what you and I have planned." His voice was tense. "I'll teach you about shifting gears." Just as well they weren't really married.

What happen to his promise to his grandmother to search for true love? Not to mention his promise to Lacey not to break his promise? He wasn't the man he thought he was.

Lacey placed her hand over his. "Okay."

He glanced at her wedding ring. "How do you like your ring?" His hand slid over hers, and together they shifted gears. "This is second gear."

"It's the most beautiful thing I've ever seen in my life." Lacey laid her head on his shoulder. They drove in silence for several miles.

"Love is important to you isn't it?" he said, not realizing he'd said it out loud until she responded.

"That's an odd question. Isn't love important to everyone? Even confirmed bachelors need to feel loved."

Covey turned the truck down a paved driveway. Trees flanked both sides of the road. At the end of the drive, a massive ranch sat surrounded by miles and miles of white fence. On the gate it said, Big Boys Ranch. His great granddad was the original Big Boy Owner.

"Big Boy?" she asked with a tilt of her eyebrow.

"Yeah, the owner is a big kid at heart."

"And, that would be you, right?"

"Yes."

The driveway was at least a mile long. He turned off of it and drove another mile down a gravel road that snaked through a forest of trees. When they came out of the trees, they were driving towards a picture perfect lake. Sitting across from the lake was a rugged log cabin.

"Wow."

Covey smiled at her reaction. "It's our guest cabin. I thought we'd freshen up here before we go up to the main house. Is that okay?"

"Yes."

"You know, Lacey, we could have sex and then swear we didn't and still get an annulment."

Lacey rolled her eyes at him. "Forget it. No sex." She leaned forward to look out the window.

"Damn."

"It's perfect."

The truck came to a stop and she jumped out of it. Without taking the time to shut her door, she ran toward the footbridge that led to the other side of the lake.

Covey jumped out as well. "Hey, don't run. The boards are slick," he hollered.

If she heard his words, she didn't hear them soon enough. Her foot came in contact with a wet board, and Covey watched her go down like a sacked quarterback. The sound of her head smacking against the wooden bridge sent him rushing toward her.

Dibs  
*by Lisa Wells*

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## Chapter 26

Covey knew the moment Lacey opened her eyes. He knew because he was standing there holding her hand and urging them to open with tiny little kisses placed all over her face.

Sheer black fright had swept through him when he saw her go down on the bridge. In the flash of a moment, his emotions became crystal clear to him. He didn't need to wait until his grandmother was gone to make sure his love was real and not manufactured to make Grandmother happy.

"Darling, how are you feeling?" he asked. His voice was horse with concern. He was head-over-hills in love with Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator. He wanted to scream it from the rooftop and to every reporter who'd listen. He wanted his feelings to be public knowledge.

Lacey turned her head slowly and looked at him. Puzzlement etched her face. "Why wouldn't I be feeling okay?" Her hand came up and tentatively touched the bandage around her head. "What's this?" She searched his face anxiously looking for answers.

"You fell and hit your head."

"I did?" Her voice was weak.

"You lost consciousness. It's a bandage. You were bleeding quite a bit." His voice was carefully colored in neutral shades. As much as he wanted to, now was not the time to declare his undying love. She wanted an annulment.

Lacey frowned. "Really?" She looked around the hospital room in confusion and then at him in confusion.



*She's going to be pissed about the fake marriage thing.* Maybe, he wouldn't tell her that part. Yet, anyway. "Yeah, you've got a bump the size of Texas to prove it."

Lacey touched the spot on the back of her head. Her face turned white. "Ouch."

Covey cringed. The memory of her feet going out from under her and the loud thump of her head hitting the slick boards, brought about a sickening lump in his chest. "Darling, be careful." He reached out and moved her hand away from the painful spot.

"Are we in Texas?" she asked. Her voice was one octave below hysteria.

"Yes. It's my fault. I should have warned you about those boards before you got out of the truck." A war was raging inside of him. She could be dead, and it would be his fault. His worse fear. People he loved died. The best thing he could do for Lacey was not to love her. He was a selfish bastard for falling in love with her.

She rushed to reassure him. "Don't worry. I feel fine. This will just postpone our wedding night for a few hours."

His expression clouded. She wasn't aware of his inner battles or his recent emotional discovery. He searched for a plausible explanation for why she would blurt that out.

He treaded carefully. "Darling, don't worry about our wedding night. You take all the time you need to recover. I was just telling Grandmother how we came to be married." He said the words slowly, cautiously.

His grandmother stepped forward. "Lacy dear, welcome to the family. You are such a blessing. I can't believe Covey got

married in a court house. We'll need to do it up right when you get to feeling better."

Lacey and Covey both looked over at his grandmother.

His grandmother patted Lacey on the hand. "I'm Lema James. I'm afraid Covey has completely forgotten his manners and failed to introduce us. I'm Covey's Grandmother."

Lacey held out her hand to his grandmother. "It's nice to meet you, Mrs. James."

Covey's grandmother beamed at Lacey and kissed her cheek. "Call me Lema. I'm afraid I have some rather bad news for you."

"Grandmother," Covey said the word in warning. He had no idea what she planned to say. If there was bad news, he wanted to know about it first. There was no need to hurt Lacey with news she didn't need to hear.

Before his grandmother could respond, his brother barreled through door wearing an ear-to-ear grin. "You must be Lacey. I'm Casp, Covey's triplet. If it wasn't for me giving up my spot on the *Dibs Dating Show*, you could have been my wife instead of this big lump of nothing." He pointed to Covey in disdain and walked over to Lacey's bed. Before she could respond, he laid a huge kiss on her parted lips. "You owe me a fix up with a really hot chick. You do have at least one hot friend, don't you?" he asked Lacey with his hands held together in a symbol of begging.

Lacey blinked. "Hello. It's nice to meet you. Maddison's hot."

"Asshole, get away from my woman or I'll break your face," Covey ordered Casp.

Casp moved aside and held out his hand to his brother. "Congrats big bro. You actually did it. I can't believe you did it."

"Casp, Lacey's not doing well. You might notice, she's in a hospital bed, not a poolside recliner. I think you should save your antics for later," Covey reprimanded.

Lacey waved his concern off with the flip of her wrist. "I want to know what your grandmother was talking about."

"Dear, your wedding is now public knowledge. Someone in the hospital leaked it to the press when Covey brought you in and claimed you as his wife."

Lacey looked at him with what looked like true love. "You did?"

*Hell.* Why couldn't people mind their own business? "The damn fools wouldn't let me stay with you unless we were related," he told Lacey and searched her eyes for signs of problems.

She was looking at him differently. Things weren't adding up; she was different. She wasn't giving him the, I-just-want-to-be-friend's look. The one she'd been giving him so much lately.

Lacey stunned him by giggling.

"The hospital staff leaked our marriage? Why would they do that?" She was looking at him for an answer.

His grandmother came to his aid. "That'll take a while to get use to. I'm afraid everything to do with a member of our

family is news worthy. It will help if you have thick skin. Do you have thick skin child?"

"I don't know if I do or not. I've never needed it before."

"Boy, you'll need it being married to him," Casp said from the doorway and pointing at Covey. "Got to go and spread the news. Lots of reporters wanting an exclusive out here. One of them is damn cute, so I'm going to let her have her way with me." With those words, he was gone.

"I will be more than happy to help you with your church wedding," his grandmother said, as if Casp had never even came into the room. She pulled her psychic ring out of her pocket. It hung from a delicate silver chain.

"You would? Your help would be fabulous." Lacey looked over at Covey. "Have we set a date for the real thing?" She turned back to his grandmother. "I'm sorry we got married without the family. We were in such a hurry to be legal, we didn't want to wait."

Covey frowned at her from behind his grandmother's back. "I didn't know we were planning a church wedding. We haven't talked about it, Darling." What was she saying? Had she changed her mind?

"Lacey, I'm going to do the ring test. It's a family tradition. A way of making sure you've chosen the right mate. It's better for it to be done before the marriage. But, if it shows you're not in love, then you haven't consummated the marriage or anything. You'd have time to annul it before any damage was done."

Covey stepped in. *What in the hell was it with the women in his life and the term annulment?* "Grandmother, put the

damn ring away. Lacey and I are in love, and we don't need a ring to prove it."

Lacey gasped. "Oh my." She looked at him strangely. "Let her do it, Dear. It'll be a hoot. When, my grandmother did the ring test, it was to tell if you were having a boy or a girl. I was supposed to be a boy."

His grandmother turned sharply and pinned Covey to the spot with one of her looks. One of her knowing looks.

He tried to give her a look of innocence, but she wasn't buying it.

"I'll save the ring for later. Covey's right. You're not feeling well." She put the ring away and patted Lacey's hand. She turned back to Covey. "It's too bad you're going to have to wait on your wedding night. I ... well never mind. I'm just thrilled you found the woman I told you about."

"Covey, what is she talking about?" Lacey pushed the button to raise her bed into a sitting position. She appeared oblivious to the undertones going on between him and his grandmother.

"Darling, remember, I told you she saw you in a vision?"

"Did you know me before I met Covey?" Lacey asked, looking at his grandmother for an explanation.

"My darling child, I saw you in a vision. Didn't Covey explain that I'm a psychic?"

Lacey tilted her head and squinted her eyes in bewilderment. "No. I don't think so."

"I have powers to see things. I knew you were the woman Covey was meant to spend his life with. I'm just happy he

had enough sense to see it. He can be quite stubborn when it comes to marriage."

Lacey shook her head in a noticeable attempt to clear it. "Covey loves me. Don't fret about that. He told me so in the most beautiful of speeches." She rearranged her pillows and took a sip of water. "Covey, I think we should go ahead and set a date for a proper wedding. Do you have a calendar?"

Covey clasped his hands behind his back and walked over to the windows. She didn't remember their arrangement. Did the bump on her head take away her memories? She was making it very hard for him to maintain control. "You rest, we'll talk at home about setting any more wedding dates. We're married in the eyes of the law," he said, turning to watch her reaction.

Lacey jerked in surprise. "At home? I haven't seen our home, have I?" Her voice was excited and her face brightened.

"No, you haven't seen it." He paused. "Lacey you're obviously confused about us." He faltered slightly when both women looked at him with open disapproval.

Lacey's eyes teared up. "Are we not really married? Is this a joke?"

The woman was insane. "Yes, we're married. You're just confused. Do you remember our wedding?" Was it possible she didn't remember?

"No. But, I'm sure I will when this headache goes away."

"I certainly hope so," he snapped. Now, what was he supposed to do?

She glared in response. "You don't sound like a man in love."

"I totally agree," his grandmother said. "What's going on here?"

Covey sighed. "Grandmother, nothing's going on. I love Lacey. I'm just thrown that she doesn't remember our wedding."

"Covey is that true? Do you love me?" Lacey asked quietly.  
"Yes."

"That settles it. Lacey, I'll move in with you and Covey until you get to feeling better. He is gone so much; you'll need someone around to help you. I'm not leaving your health to a servant. I've waited a long time to meet you."

"You have?"

"Yes, I've been seeing you in my visions for years. I just told Covey about it last week, because rumor got out he was going to do something totally asinine like get married just to make me happy."

Covey blustered. *Who'd told her that?*

"Thank God, his brothers spilled the beans on him. Damn fool man. Anyway, it's all worked out nicely. He's met you and you two have fallen in love at first sight."

*Did they tell her before or after the ToSay Show?*

"Dammit, Grandmother. Lacey will live with me without your help. I'll be there to keep a close eye on her recovery," he sputtered, bristling with indignation that these two women were managing to turn his world upside down.

"Covey James," Lacey exploded, "that's no way to speak to your grandmother. Shame on you." A shadow of anger swept across her face as she spoke.

He blinked in surprise.

"What?" She pulled the covers up over her hospital gown obviously finding no humor in the situation.

His grandmother broke in soothingly. "Lacey, dear, it's okay. I trust Covey. If he'll stay home and pamper you, I won't interfere. He probably thinks I'd have a heart attack if I heard the two of you having sex."

Covey came to stand beside Lacey. "I don't think you're feeling okay." He sure as hell didn't feel well. He felt like he was drowning in a lake of mystery.

"I'm not?" she asked.

"No. You're not." Covey paced the room, scared to death he was going to say the wrong thing.

"Okay. If you say so. I feel fine, though. My head just barely hurts."

"That's because you are doped up on medication." He stopped at the windows and looked out at the lights. It had to be the medication that was doing this to her.

Covey turned to his grandmother. "I think you should leave and let Lacey get some rest. I'll spend the night with her." He reached out and hugged his grandmother. "Thank you for coming."

"Of course, I came. You knew I would the minute I found out she was hurt. Now, don't you hurt this precious child, or I'll come back and haunt you when I'm dead," his grandmother warned him with a straight face.



Covey tried to look innocent. His grandmother's eyes told him clearly she wasn't buying it. She looked past him at Lacey.

"Lacey, take care of yourself. I love you already."

Covey walked his grandmother to the door. "It'll be fine. Stop worrying so."

"I don't know what's going on with you, but that child is in love with you. I would like to speak with you for a moment in private," she said.

Covey stepped outside the door and closed it.

"Covey there's a chance I don't have cancer," she said without warning.

Covey reeled from the shock of her words. He reached out and hugged her tight. "Thank God."

His grandmother pulled out of his arms and fiddled with the cuff of her blouse. "Now, don't get your hopes up, because I probably do. But, there's a chance I don't," she warned. "I just thought you should know."

"What do you mean? What's this all about?" Covey asked.

"Well, now, don't get mad. But, I was diagnosed by a friend of mine."

"A doctor friend?"

"No. A psychic friend."

Covey pounded his hand into the wall. "Dammit Grandmother, you've put us all through this by the word of a psychic?"

"Well, dear. I trust him. He's legit."

"Have you gone to a real doctor yet?"

"Yes, I'll know on Monday. I just don't want you to do something you'll regret with Lacey. I want you to be with her out of love, not worry about me. It was wrong of me to make my last wish known."

\* \* \* \*

When Covey came back in the room, his shoulders didn't know rather to droop or grow. His grandmother had a chance. He could set Lacey free and see if she came back to him.

It was time to settle some things with Lacey. He spoke before he could talk himself out of what had to be done. "This isn't funny. What do you think you're doing?" He didn't need any more fantasy play. He'd had enough. He wanted good, old-fashion, real life drama.

She returned his glare. "I agree. A head injury is a dangerous thing. I'm not doing anything to be funny." She shook her head like a wise sage.

"That's not what I mean and you know it."

She looked at him with eyes shadowed from fatigue.

He felt like a heel for forcing her into this discussion. Tension filled the room as he waited for her response.

"Are you mad because I told your grandmother she could help plan the real wedding?"

"Of course, that's why I'm mad. What were you thinking?" He ran his hand through his hair.

"I thought the two of you were close! Why wouldn't you like the idea of my including her in our big day? I've never planned a wedding. My mom's not even in the country to

help. I can't remember why we decided not to wait until she was back in the country?"

"Lacey this isn't funny. Knock it off." She was making him crazy. No way could he tell her it was time to get an annulment. Or a pretend annulment. She didn't even remember why they got married. If she didn't remember, he couldn't tell her he loved her. That would be taking advantage of her.

"Covey, you're causing my head to hurt. I don't understand why you're so mad."

*Because I love you and I can't tell you. Because you don't even remember I told you I didn't love you.*

He felt as confused as she was acting. He needed to say something to snap her out of it. "Lacey, you're just like all the other women. The minute you found out I was CJ the third, you decided to trap me into marriage didn't you?" The words felt like acid coming out of his mouth. Of course, Lacey wasn't trying to trap him. She was confused. "Lacey our marriage is a farce. It's in name only." He'd promised her no-strings-attached. She had to remember, before he could try to change her mind.

Lacey gasped.

When he reached for her, she slapped his hand away. Who could blame her?

She grabbed for a tissue and blew her nose loudly.

"Why are you crying? Dammit. Stop that." He took another tissue and wiped awkwardly at the tears running down her cheeks. He was making a mess of this.

Lacey snatched the tissue out of his hand. "You're no better than Urinal Scum."

"What the fuck. I'm nothing like your ex. You're the one behaving like Urinal Scum, trying to trap me into this marriage." Would he be able to remove the wedge he was driving between them when the time was right? Would the time ever be right?

Lacey flung the box of tissues at him. "Oh yeah? He asked me to marry him and then ran off with Ms. January. You, on the other hand, actually marry me and then tell me it's all a joke." She pulled the blanket over her head.

Covey jerked the covers off her head. "Stop that, you'll suffocate." He was nothing like her ex. He was honest. He hadn't cheated on her. He was letting her go to keep a fucking promise.

"What do you care if I live or die?" she asked. A tiny hiccup added emphasis to her pathetic question as she pulled the covers up beneath her eyeballs.

"Lacey are you telling me you don't remember what led up to our wedding?"

"Of course I do," Lacey, answered moving the covers enough to breathe through her nose.

"Good, then why the tears?"

"You asked me to marry you," she shouted in accusation. "You bought me a beautiful ring, you took me to the house we were going to live in. Now, you ask me why I'm sad." She looked at the ring on her finger.

"Lacey, that's not it at all. You and I are all about sex. I'm your Mr. Wrong. You're my Ms. Right, because you don't want

marriage with me. This is all a farce to give my grandmother happiness. She's dying of cancer."

"Get out of here. Why are you making up this awful story?"

"Lacey, what do I do for a living?"

"You're a musician and you're important."

"And what do you do for a living?"

"I plan weekends for married couples."

"How did we meet?"

"You asked me out on a date to meet your family."

"Before that?"

"I don't know. I don't remember. But, don't you dare tell me I married a guy just so I can have sex with him. I am not a tramp."

"We got married with the understanding that we weren't going to have sex." Just three days earlier, she'd been thrilled with the idea of convincing him she was a tramp. Now, it was an insult.

"How dare you! Are you saying I don't turn you on?" she exploded.

Where in the hell had she come up with that explanation? "I'm not saying that. I'm saying we've had sex. Great sex." Covey sat down on the bed beside her. "Listen. You needed to get away from your ex for a while, and I wanted to make my grandmother happy."

"That's the most ridiculous story I've ever heard."

"It's not a story, it's the truth." It did sound a little bizarre.

"Why don't you just grow some balls and tell me you have cold feet instead of making up this story that portrays me as, as, I don't even know what?"

"Lacey Valentine, you didn't listen to a word I said if you think that's what I said. I told you a story of a lovely young woman who agreed to bring happiness to an old woman's heart."

"That's not how I see it. You told a story about a girl who was good and went bad because of you. A girl with no morals. You've corrupted me and ruined me for another marriage, according to the story you're telling."

Was she right? "There's nothing bad about exploring your sexuality before you get married. I have not ruined you."

Her eyebrows shot up. "If we've really had casual sex, then you have definitely ruined me?"

"That's idiotic. Why on earth would you say such a thing?"

"Because men don't marry women who go around engaging in casual sex. Nor women who get involved in a sexless marriage. It makes me sound weird."

"That's not true. We've had casual sex and I'd marry you if I were going to marry someone. But, I don't believe in long-term marriage because it spells the death of sex in a man's life," he lied. He had to snap her out of this whole love thing.

"Unbelievable," she yelled.

"It's true. I've heard it all my life. I've yet to find a married man who has sex as often as he wants it. As a single man, I can say, I get it as often as I want it."

"You are an ass. I'm glad our marriage is a farce. I would never want to marry someone like you."

Pain tore at him. "Well good. I'm glad that's solved."

"Out. Get out of this room. I don't want to see you again," she yelled, while pointing to the door.

Lacey was screaming so loud a nurse came in and asked Covey to leave.

Covey agreed to leave. Not because the nurse told him to, but because he needed to regroup and come up with a new plan. He'd made a mess of things with Lacey. He didn't blame her for throwing him out of the room.

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## Chapter 27

Lacey wasn't sure what was going on, but she knew one thing. It was time for her to go home. She was in love with a man who just told her their whole relationship was based on a lie.

How could that be? Had she really made plans to live with a man as his wife with no real love between them?

Picking up the phone, she called the one person she knew she could depend on to tell her the truth.

"Maddison. I need your help," her voice broke on the last word.

"Lacey, what is it? What's happened?"

"I'm in Texas." She tried to remember getting to Texas. She couldn't remember any of the trip. Why could she remember Maddison and not what happened in the last week? "Do you know why I'm here?" she asked. She shuddered at the thought of Maddison confirming Covey's story.

"Yes. You and your Dibs date were going to get married to make his grandmother happy before she died."

Lacey swallowed the despair in her throat. "How do I feel about my Dibs date?"

"Are you okay?" Maddison asked, suspicion in her voice.

"Yes, just a bit confused." Lacey's throat ached with defeat.

"He's your Mr. Wrong. That's why you're doing it. He's your rebound man to get over Urinal Scum. You wrote all about him in your Great Moment's journal."



Lacey closed her eyes. A heaviness fell upon her shoulders as the words sunk in. The love she proclaimed to Covey just now wasn't real. It was a figment of her imagination. She wasn't in love with Covey. The feeling would go away when her memory returned. "Maddison, are you sure?" The feeling didn't feel fake.

"Lacey what's wrong? Are you okay? Why are you asking me these things? You don't sound okay."

"It's nothing. I'm just tired. I'll talk to you later." She shut her cell off before Maddison could ask her any more questions. There was no need to worry Maddison about something she hoped was going to be a short-term problem.

In the meantime, what was she supposed to do now? Covey wasn't lying. She'd given her word to be his temporary wife. How was she going to do that while her brain was telling her she was in love? She closed her eyes feeling utterly miserable.

Of course, it didn't matter how she did it. That much, she knew.

All that matter was that she keep her word. Her word, it would appear, was he would stay her Mr. Wrong—no matter what.

When Covey came back to visit her, she was ready with a smile. "I remember. Sorry about the scare. I'm not in love with you. I was just confused with the medication and all." The swell of pain was beyond tears as she uttered the words he was dying to hear.

An expression she didn't recognize replaced his smile.

"You did? So, you're not in love with me?" he questioned.

Lacey forced a laugh and rigidly held her tears in check.  
"No. Of course not. You are so wrong for me."

Covey walked over to the bed. Laying his lips on her forehead, he said, "I see you really are back. I'm glad."

"Me too. What are we going to do about the media circus?"  
Lacey asked flippantly, while her heart crumbled.

He shrugged. "We acknowledge the marriage."

He was seemingly unaware of the torment inside of her.  
"I'm kind of fuzzy on the sex part. Are we going to have sex in this marriage?"

He didn't answer. He leaned down and looked at her closely. "Are you sure you're okay?"

"Yes."

"Lacey, we weren't going to have sex so we could have our marriage annulled."

"Annulled?"

"Actually, I need to come clean on something. We're not really married. I hired a fake judge."

Lacey closed her eyes. How many more surprises was he going to throw at her? "Why?"

"I wanted to have sex with you."

"You put me through a fake marriage so you could have sex?" She turned her head away from him. "Why would you do that?"

"I'm a selfish bastard. I'm sorry."

Lacey rubbed her hands over her face. "I think not having sex is best for now." They weren't really married. There was nothing keeping them together.

Sex? How could she tell him she didn't even remember what having sex with him was like? She closed her eyes to keep her secrets from him.

He mistook her reaction as one of being tired. "You need your rest. Why don't you sleep?"

Lacey didn't want to be left alone, but she didn't want to be in the same room as him either. As soon as she was better, he was expecting something of her that was out of her reach to give him. He was expecting her to keep her heart to herself.

He was expecting her to play the part of a loving wife without being in love with him. Maybe someday, she really would have her memory back and this would all feel okay. Until then, it felt like shit.

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## Chapter 28

Covey spent the night sleeping in a chair beside her bed. He'd come back in as soon as she was asleep and stayed with her all night. The sight of her with a bandage wrapped around her head left him feeling raw inside.

Perhaps he should send her back to Mistletoe, before he did something foolish like tell her he loved her.

He could tell by the look in his grandmother's eyes that she knew they were up to something. He should just come clean with her and get Lacey as far away from his heart as was possible. She wasn't safe around him.

She woke up an hour ago when a nurse came in to check her vitals. She hadn't said a word to him.

"How long is the silent treatment going to go on?" Covey asked.

He was tired of his own thoughts. He wanted to listen to hers for a while.

"Where are we going when we leave here?"

"Back to the cabin. I like your hair down. It's like the sunlight is sprinkling gold dust at the tips of each strand." She stuck her finger in her mouth and pretended to gag. "What movie did you get that line out of?"

"I'm wounded. I was being sincere."

There were shadows in her eyes he didn't understand. "Are you sure you're okay?"

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## Chapter 29

Lacey stared straight ahead as the truck came to a stop in front of a beautiful cabin. She didn't recognize the cabin, but she knew she should.

*Did we make love in there before we got married?*

"This time, remember to walk across the bridge," Covey teased her while opening the door.

Lacey tried to smile to cover her turmoil. "Perhaps you should hold my hand and make sure I'm safe."

She was doing her best to flirt with him as if she remembered it all. As if their fantasy was still in place. How could she have fallen in love with him? He obviously never gave her any reason to feel it was okay to fall in love with him.

When he opened the cabin door, it all looked new to her. Nothing of the rugged furnishings jogged her memory.

"Lead the way," she said quietly. *I have no idea where the bed is.*

Covey looked at her strangely. "To where?" he asked.

"To bed."

His mouth dropped open and a light lit his eyes.

Realizing how her words sounded, she quickly explained. "I have a headache; I think I need to lie down."

The light left his eyes. She followed him up a set of stairs that led to a loft bedroom.

At the top of the stairs, Covey turned and swung her up into his arms. "You're so beautiful. Have I ever told you that?" His words were a husky whisper.

"I think so. But, it never hurts to hear again." Lacey laid her head on his chest. His heart was thudding. He wasn't indifferent to her. She aroused him as a man. If she couldn't have his heart, she at least had that much of him.

Who would be the girl who would someday make his heart thud with love and not lust?

He laid her on the bed and took her shoes off. She looked at her shoes trying to remember them. Nothing. *I like those shoes*. Why couldn't she remember a pair of shoes?

His hands went to the waistband of her jeans. She stiffened.

"What is it Lacey? I've seen you naked. I'm just going to help you get comfortable." His brown eyes bored into hers.

She tried to relax her body. "Nothing. It's nothing," she dropped her lashes quickly to hide the uncertainty.

He unsnapped her jeans and slid them down her thighs. Now, all she was wearing was an oversized, man's shirt and her panties.

She shivered and tried to swallow the lump forming in her throat. *Why didn't you fall in love me?* She wanted to scream the question in the silence of the cabin.

He quirked his eyebrow questioningly. "Are you cold?"

She hugged her arms around herself. "No." She choked on the word.

He walked over to the stereo and turned it on. "Some day will you dance for me Lacey?" His voice was heavy with desire.

Lacey stayed where she was and listened to the blues music. The tension between them was suffocating. Dancing was something she remembered how to do. Perhaps dancing would relax her.

She stood and swayed slowly. The beat of the music found its way inside her body. She dreamed she was dancing for him on their wedding night. She was wearing a white silk shirt and g-string panties.

Covey sat down in a chair to watch. She moved with deliberate slowness, building the tension in the room.

His stare was bold.

When she was ready, she moved in front of him and let her hands shift to her body. She traced her body with her hands while he traced her body with his eyes. Her emotions and needs were in control.

Her touch became more erotic. She let her hands skim down over her breasts and splay over her stomach. She did tiny turns as she ran her hands up and down her hips displaying quick glimpses of her panties. Her body felt heavy and warm with desire.

With her back to him, she placed her hands flat on the floor, her legs slightly spread. She rolled her hips suggestively. His hand came out and touched her. His touch was nearly overwhelming.

Slowly, very slowly, she slid her hands up her legs before smacking her butt playfully with one hand. She heard his groan in the background. His breathing was labored.

She turned toward him and placed one foot on his knee. Leaning in, she kissed him as she pulled the shirt up over her stomach. Her heart thumped erratically as she sat down on his lap.

Hooking her feet around the chair legs, she arched backward until her hair was touching the ground. With languid movements, she raised the shirt higher. At the last moment, she sat up straight.

"How was that?" She felt the electricity of his gaze. She'd just danced as intimately as she knew how for a man. It was her gift to him before this whole charade ended.

His dark eyes never left her for an instant. "Does your head hurt?"

"It did. Music and dancing relaxes me." Standing up she took a step back and turned toward the bed.

He grabbed her hand. "Lacey? I want you."

Lacey wanted to shout, I love you. But, she couldn't. She nodded her head. If this fantasy marriage was going to be short, she wanted to have a real memory of their lovemaking to take with her.

He groaned and pulled her tightly against him. His hands ran feverishly along her body. A delightful shiver of wanting ran through him. She undid the buttons of his jeans.

When there were no more buttons to release, her hand slid inside his jeans. The intoxicating musk of his body overwhelmed her as she stroked him.



Slowly, her own need climbed to a new height. A need she was sure he could satisfy. A need she was ready for him to satisfy. She was filled with anticipation.

"I need you," she said, on a groan.

"Lead the way," he whispered into her hair.

She helped him slip out of his jeans, and then he helped her slip out of her panties. She lay down on the bed and opened her legs in invitation. The magnificent man in front of her knelt down on the bed.

He dragged his face across her stomach up to her breasts. As he sucked on the tip of one, he fondled the other, squeezing it and rolling it between his fingertips. "God, I want you."

Lacey arched her back in need. She had no desire to back away from what she started. She fought back the urge to declare her love, and hoped the final act would erase the feeling completely. She'd give anything to think of him as her Mr. Wrong again. To remember everything leading up to their marriage of convenience.

Pulling on his hair, she urged him over her body. Their lips crushed into one another in hunger. Greedy tongues took turns exploring one another. The warmth of his hands on her body was so male, so erotic.

His hand went between her legs, where he found her tiny bud of sex and rubbed it lightly causing an exquisite torturous need to build. When his fingers slid into her, red lights exploded in her head as wave after wave of pure pleasure plummeted her into ecstasy. His fingers stayed until the

waves of pleasure passed, and then he started the torture all over.

"Come inside of me," she whispered.

"I thought you'd never ask," he growled, while straddling but not touching her.

She lifted her hips to make contact.

When he relented and lowered his body down to hers, she gasped in pleasure. It was flesh against flesh, man against woman. She nearly died with need when he placed his large cock at her opening. He teasingly went in and then pulled almost out before stroking her again in the same way.

Her hips buck wildly, wanting the feel of all of him inside of her hammering her with its length. She wrapped her legs around him to pull him closer. Her hands grabbed his head and forced him down on top of her.

He was unwilling to let her be in control. He grabbed her hands and pulled them over her head before he let go and pounded her with a speed and need that made her gasp for air.

The pleasure was pure and volatile. The degree to which she responded stunned her.

When they came, it was an explosion that rocked her to another planet, and the aftermath left her spiraling through space with no gravity to cushion the fall.

She lay there breathless, gasping for control.

Images of Covey and her spending time together flashed through her brain. She remembered. Her wish came true.

Warm tears traveled down her cheeks. The explosion had brought with it her memory. She remembered it all.

Unfortunately, the love in her heart was still there. She was in love with a man who didn't believe in love. She was in love with a man she promised she would never fall in love with.

She was in love with her Mr. Wrong and he was right for her in every way except one. He didn't believe in love. Those were the undeniable and dreadful facts.

When Covey opened his eyes and saw her tears, he frowned. "Why?" he asked simply, while wiping them away with his fingers.

Was he asking why sex, or why the tears? "I can't do this. I'm sorry." There was still a chance for her to grow whole again if she walked away from him now.

He shook his head. "We have a deal?" His voice was smooth but insistent.

She fought for words to push him away. It was a matter of her survival. "I'm sorry; I just realized I'm still in love with my ex. I need to go back and fight for him," she lied.

His face became a stone mask of disbelief. "That bastard? You would go back to him," he asked, spacing the words evenly.

"I need to see if he wants to give us another chance," she lied. She cringed at the fury she saw in his eyes.

"Are you still in love with him?" His words were as cold as his features.

Lacey grabbed at the excuse. "Yes, I'm in love." She couldn't force any other lies out of her lips, but that one word was enough.

Covey climbed off her and dressed without saying a word.

She wanted to reach out to him and tell him the truth. Tell him the love she felt was for him. Instead, she hardened her heart by erecting barriers of anger. It was his own fault. He was a coward. He could fight for her, he could give love a chance. But, he wouldn't. He was willing let her walk away. "Try to understand, I need love." *I need it with you.*

"You need love with a man who treated you like dirt? You would choose that over this?" He shot her a bitter glance and then without looking at her again, he headed toward the stairs.

Anger consumed her. "This? Is this so great? All you're doing is using me to make your grandmother happy."

He stumbled and then stopped. "That's how you said you wanted me to treat you. Remember, you said I was Mr. Wrong."

The fact he was right made her furious. "Well now, I want to be treated with love."

He stilled. His face a camouflage of control. "By whom?"

Lacey froze. *Is he offering me love?* She had to know. She was willing to forgo her pride to know. "Do you love me?"

His face contorted in anger. "Dammit. We had a deal. I never break a deal."

*I'm such an idiot. Of course, he doesn't love me.* "I'm sorry." Her thoughts fragmented as she tried to speak words that were in harmony with her heart.

"Forget it. There's plenty of women willing to take your place. It's just an inconvenience. My grandmother's going to be hurt by my foolishness." His voice was emotionless.

She felt chilled by the tone. "Your grandmother's smart. She wants what's best for you. If she's a psychic, you'd never be able to fool her with an unconsummated marriage."

Terrible regrets assailed Lacey. She'd made so many bad choices. She bit her lip until it throbbed like her pulse.

He looked at her with derision. "I would have ended this if you hadn't. I'm tired of the sex as it is. When you're ready, call the main house. I'll arrange for someone to take you to the airport." His words lashed her. "Have a nice life, Little Miss Fantasy Coordinator."

Trapped in her own lie, she was defeated. Deep sobs racked her insides. She pressed a hand over her face to smother them until she heard the door slam. Then, she wept aloud, rocking back and forth in pain. The sound of her heart breaking surely could be heard above her noisy sobs if anyone cared to listen.

She was a loser. Covey was the second man she couldn't keep happy in the bedroom.

She closed her eyes, reliving the pain of their final scene. It was senselessly and sickeningly familiar.

\* \* \* \*

She woke to the sound of roosters crowing. It was time to return to reality. She couldn't believe she'd actually fallen asleep.

Fresh tears welled in her eyes and she clamped her lips to imprison the sob pushing to come out. She was through with crying over men. A permanent sorrow might be weighing her

Dibs  
*by Lisa Wells*

down, but that didn't mean she had to cry as she packed her bags and called for a lift to the airport.

Looking out the window, she was startled to see Covey standing at a fence, feeding hay to horses. He looked up, as if he felt her stare, and she pulled back behind the curtain. He had every right to hate her. She'd broken every promise she'd ever made him. She hated herself. She hated him.

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## Chapter 30

Winter was here. Lacey stood at her bedroom window and watched the snow falling like goose down blankets from the sky. The old fashion streetlights lining the sidewalks outside her window highlighted the thick, falling blanket of frozen precipitation.

The glorious sight was sucking the life out of her. Suffocating her with despair. Her shoulders slumped and she traced Covey's name in the moisture for about the millionth time. Mute-wretchedness was the only emotion she seemed capable of feeling these days.

Trapped in her own lie, she was alone.

Marty was married to his calendar girl. *Whoopee!* And, Covey Grant-James III didn't have the decency to chase after her when she left his ranch.

Instead, he'd stood mutely by with his hat pulled down low on his brow and watched his foreman drive her away. She'd waved, but he didn't lift a hand to respond. The least he could have done was acknowledge her departure.

*Why didn't he follow me?*

In her reoccurring dream, he'd chased after her. Forced the truck to stop. Wrenched open the door and declared his love for her. Then, he'd wrestled her down on the seat for sex, while the driver disappeared down the road.

But, in real life, not a word.

She pulled her robe tightly around her. The frigid, early season blizzard matched her heart. No warmth, no peace to

be found. The streets were eerily quiet at a time when they were usually packed with holiday traffic.

Everyone, who didn't have to be out on the streets, had been told to stay home. A state of emergency was declared for Mistletoe. They were under a winter storm warning.

What happened to the girl who always got giddy when there was a winter storm warning? The girl who got furious when the weather people predicted snow that didn't materialize?

Today, the meteorologists were right. At least two feet of snow covered the ground. Another foot was forecasted. The blowing snow made driving hazardous. She was witnessing a blizzard. The last time she'd seen a blizzard, she was in seventh grade and infatuated with her best friend's brother.

Lacey Valentine loved blizzards. She loved being inside, warm and cozy and looking out the window at a world with a clean slate. Yet, this blizzard wasn't bringing her peace. She didn't want a clean slate. She wanted the slate that said Lacey loves Covey.

Lacey traced a heart on the foggy window and wiped it away. Her energies were wasted on what might have been.

She shrugged in resignation and redrew the heart. What would it hurt? *What else do I have?* Might-have-beens were her only company. Who cared if she was behaving in a pathetic way.

It had been months since she last saw Covey. Months since his foreman drove her all the way from Texas to her house in Mistletoe. He had been a talkative man, telling her



more about Covey than she really wanted to know. With every story he told, Lacey found herself falling further in love.

There were times, when she picked up the phone to call Covey and tell him she loved him. She wanted him to know the real reason she ran away. But, she couldn't.

It was her certainty in announcing how wrong he was for her that had given him the freedom to be himself around her. She couldn't go back on her word, no matter how much pain it brought her. She placed her hand on her belly and remembered all the times his hand had rested there. She'd tried so hard to resist the urge to move it. Would he like her belly now? Would he care? When would she tell him?

She covered her face with trembling hands and gave vent to tears. She was his Ms. Wrong. He may think bad things about her, but at least she didn't trap him in marriage.

She spent her nights wondering what it was about her that made her wrong for him. He never listed all her faults the way she listed his for him. If she knew what made her wrong, she could try to change them.

When the doorbell rang, she was happy for the intrusion. It was probably Maddison. The only one who would be calling on her tonight. No one else was insane enough to make house calls in the middle of a blizzard?

She prayed it wasn't a reporter wanting an interview. She was so sick and tired of the press hounding her for information on her brief, fake marriage to Covey James III.

Walking barefoot to the front door, she tried to look out the peephole. It was frozen and she couldn't see a thing.

"Who is it?" she asked, wiping the remaining tears from her cheeks.

The wind howling outside, kept her from hearing a response. If it wasn't Maddison, it was probably someone in need of help. Someone stranded from the blizzard. She opened the door and peeked around the chain. The first thing she noticed was a cowboy hat being held in a man's hands against his chest.

Her heartbeat skyrocketed. She tried to move her gaze from the hat to the face, but she couldn't. She was afraid. She counted to three and forced her eyes a fraction higher. She gasped. A pair of chocolate brownie eyes blinked at her.

"May I come in?" asked a smooth, whiskey voice.

Her toes curled in appreciation of the fabulous voice she hadn't heard in such a long time. She stepped back and opened the door. "What are you doing here?" She felt blood coursing through her veins like an awakened volcano. Her hand flew to her hair, and she frantically pushed it behind her ears. *God, I look like crap.*

"I was just in the neighborhood," he said with a tentative smile.

Her mind told her to resist the smile, but her heart refused. "On a night like tonight. What could you possibly be doing on my street on a night like tonight?"

"I lost something and I was looking for it."

She wanted so many things all at the same time; she couldn't act on any of them. "What's that?"

"I was told by my grandmother to get my ass in gear and come here to find it."

Lacey nodded. Her communication skills deserted her.

"May I come in?" he asked.

Finally, heat fused her body and she blushed. "Sorry, come in. Let me have your hat. Go stand by the fire and get warm."

Covey handed her his hat and walked toward the fire.

"What did you lose Covey that would be here?" she asked. Her hands trembled and she nearly dropped his hat before she tossed it on the couch.

Covey turned around slowly. His gaze traveled over her face and searched her eyes. She saw something in his eyes that had to be her imagination. She held her hands over her stomach in protection. She was afraid to put into words what his eyes were shouting.

He held out his right hand and pointed to the mood ring she placed on his pinky on their wedding day. "This damn thing keeps saying I'm in love; and I lost the receipt to take it back."

Disappointment gushed in. How could he be so cruel? "Oh," she let her gaze drop to his chest. Her body ached for his touch.

He unbuttoned his jacket and tossed it on the couch.

"I don't have the receipt. I..." With a start, she read the front of his T-shirt. Emblazoned in red were the words Mr. Wrong with a line drawn diagonally through them.

Her hope unlocked. "I don't understand."

"Lacey, I don't want to be your Mr. Wrong. I want to be your Mr. Right. Am I too late? Have you already moved on?"

She opened her mouth, but he stopped her from speaking.

"Even if you have, I want to interfere. I'm better for you than that scum you were engaged to. Marry me, be mine forever."

Lacey gasped in surprise. "But, you hate marriage. You said I don't turn you on," she reminded him as she studied his lean dark face. Was she dreaming? Was this another dream she'd wake up from and feel her heart break all over again?

"Lacey, I love you. I can't survive without you. I told you those things out of pain. I've never wanted someone as much as I want you. All of you. Your body, your soul, your heart." He dropped down on one knee and brought out her own mood ring she'd left on the bedside table in his cabin. "Lacey Valentine, your husky voice lassoed my heart, your incredible personality knocked me off my feet, and your superior lovemaking skills finished me off. I love you darling, forever. Will you marry me?"

Lacey's lip trembled in disbelief. She pinched herself to make sure she was awake. "Covey James, you are the man I never knew I wanted. I love you for opening my eyes to the beauty of the things that are wrong with you. I love you. I would be honored to marry you."

He slipped the ringer on her finger. They watched it turn yellow.

She smiled. "I'm pretty sure my ring is working," she said.

"What does yellow mean?" he asked.

Lacey glanced at her stomach and then at him. "I'm pregnant. We're pregnant."

Awe washed over his face and a tear rolled down his cheek. His hands trembled. He stood up and pulled her into his arms. "We're having a baby?"

"Yes. You're going to be a daddy."

He let out a cowboy holler. "Were you going to tell me? Lacey, I can't survive without you. I need you like nothing I've ever needed in my life. I love you."

Lacey bit her lip. "You really do?"

"Yes. When is the baby due?"

Lacey laughed. He wasn't upset about the baby. He was in love with her. He wanted her sexually. All of this pain for naught. "You're going to be a daddy in the spring." She wrapped her arms around his neck and whispered in his ear, "I love you."

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## Chapter 31

Lacey was propped up in the hospital bed with Covey James IV bundled in her arms. Covey James III stood beside her, his chest puffed out in macho pride.

"Nine pounds. I threw a strapping nine pound boy," he told his brother Casp, who'd just bounded into the room.

"Not bad for your first try. I'm sure you'll do better on the next," Casp teased him.

"Hey you two, I get some say if there's going to be a next one," Lacey said with a smile at both men.

They both looked at her and winked simultaneously.

Covey said, "You sure do sweetheart. Can we start tonight on number two?"

She frowned. "In your dreams, big boy." As much as she loved sex with her husband, tonight wasn't doable.

"I knew it, the sex is over. Just like I'd always feared," Covey said in mock horror.

"Hey you two, I'm still in here, could you hold off on the subject of sex." Casp said in a teasing tone.

"What's wrong, you still not getting any?" Covey asked him.

"Who's not getting any?" asked Maddison, as she came into the room like a whirlwind, her arms full of gift bags. She dumped everything in Casp's hands and moved Covey out of the way so she could get next to Lacey and little Covey. "Oh, he's so beautiful. Look at his tiny nose and little ears."

"They may be small, but there's one thing destined to be large. Just like his old man's," Covey said, while standing at the foot of the bed.

"Covey, stop that. We've got company," Lacey admonished.

"Honey, they know we have sex. We've got proof."

Maddison looked around the room. Her eyes stopped on Casp. "You look familiar. Have we met?" she asked.

"No, but we could have dinner and remedy that," Casp responded in a smarmy voice.

"No, really, I'm sure we've met somewhere."

Casp shrugged.

"Are you the one not getting any?" Maddison asked.

Casp coughed and glared at Lacey and Covey who were both laughing. "I'm getting plenty, thank you," he told Maddison.

Maddison's eyes grew wide. "I know why you look familiar." She gave him a head to toe look. "You're the centerfold in this month's *Playgirl Magazine*."

They were all so focused on one another, they didn't hear the hospital door open, until they heard Grandmother.

"*Playgirl Magazine*. What is she talking about Casp James?"

The occupants in the room looked wildly at each other. Lacey came to their rescue. "You know, I'm a little tired. Would all of you mind letting Covey and I have some time alone?"

Maddison and Casp went out first, arguing with one another as they did. Grandmother took a peak at her great grandson and then whispered, "I think I need to get my ring

ready for those two." She nodded her head toward the door. They could all hear Maddison and Casp quarrelling.

With everyone gone, Lacey gave Covey a suggestive look. "I've made a decision."

"What kind of decision?" Covey asked, while playing with his son's fingers.

"Well, the doctor told me sex was off limits for six weeks."

Covey's shoulders' slumped. "Surely, that's a myth."

"I don't think so. I'm pretty sore. But, listen. I promised you a wedding gift that we haven't gotten around to."

"You did? What?"

"I'm pretty sure I promised you that I'd give my husband a complete Big Mamma's Bawdy Brothel Special."

He swallowed the lump in his throat. "Are you saying what I think you're saying?"

"Mmmm mmmm."

"Now?"

She gave him an outlandish wink and patted the bed for him to come and sit down. "Maybe."

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### **A word about the author...**

LISA WELLS fell in love with the idea of writing books in the fourth grade during a year-long writing unit. After snagging a few romance novels out of a brown paper bag under her Granny Hazel's bed and reading them, she knew romance was the genre for her. Lisa lives in Southwest Missouri with her sexy husband and two, mostly-perfect children. She'd love to hear from, you so stop by her web site at [www.lisawellsauthor.com](http://www.lisawellsauthor.com).

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*by Lisa Wells*

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