

A person wearing a dark suit jacket and a white shirt is holding a large, glossy red heart with both hands. The heart is the central focus of the image.

Sweet Mischief

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Chapter One

Cupid sneezed violently and fell back onto his pillow exhausted. "There's no bloody way I can make the party, Claire. I swear the top of my head is coming off and my eyes are watering so much I can't see to aim the arrows in the first place. I'm sorry, but you'll just have to have a regular Valentine's Day celebration without me."

Claire dragged a hand through her dark hair, the short curls bouncing around her face. Her first thought was a selfish one, she'd admit it. She wanted to scream in frustration and jump up and down like a child whose lollipop had been taken away. Her brother's timing couldn't have been worse.

"You poor dear. Can I get you anything?" she asked sweetly. "A hot toddy? A warm blanket?" *A noose for your neck?*

If Cupid didn't show up with his little bag of tricks it wouldn't be the Valentine's Party she'd planned. There were a dozen friends arriving who needed the little nudge Cupid's arrows provided. Two romances were on the edge of going sour, a few couples fell into the "I like them but just as a friend" category while the other person was seriously in love. One person was even teetering on the edge of opening the closet.

She needed that bow and quiver.

"That's sweet of you, sis, but no." Cupid dragged his eyes open for a second. "Hey, who are you going to the party with? You got a hot date lined up I don't know about?"

What was she supposed to say? Like she could tell Cue that the only one she wanted to get cozy with was his best friend, Troy. The "little sister from Hell" label seemed to have attached itself too permanently to her forehead as far as tall, hot and dreamy was concerned. The only time Troy even *looked* in her direction was if she carried snacks or made a fool of herself with her clumsy feet.

Claire mumbled something noncommittal while she flicked a glance to where Cupid stored his equipment when off-duty. Her brother had inherited the "Angel of Love" position from dear old dad three years earlier. She'd known *she* would never get tapped for the job since she couldn't hit the side of the barn with a truck.

If she played her cards right she could still get a little help from Cupid's bow for her friends. Valentine's Day was for lovers. She may have struck out in the sweetheart department herself but she was determined to do what she could to help those who were meant to be together.

The house was decorated to a T, food and drink ready and the music arranged with Sirius Satellite so she wouldn't have to fuss. In fact, she could leave the party and it would keep rolling without her.

When Cupid finally fell into a restless sleep she slipped the quiver of arrows and bow from his wall. She'd return it before he noticed anything missing, especially with him higher than a kite on Tylenol and Vick's Vapor Rub. She checked the color-coded arrows carefully against the master list and selected the proper potions for each of her friends' situations.

Claire glanced at her watch. Thirty minutes until the guests arrived. Just enough time to get in a little target practice. She couldn't have gotten any worse since the last time she tried to shoot.

Ten minutes later she realized she could.

"Gingersnaps." Another arrow buried itself in the wall, this time four feet lower than where she'd aimed. The wall was peppered with pockmarks and the paper bull's eye with the hand drawn heart she'd pinned up was clean and unpierced. Claire shook out her fingers and rotated her neck a few times. She could do this. Double-checking the tension, Claire bent low to triple check the alignment. Everything perfectly in place, she released the string and screamed as the arrow fell straight to the floor, narrowly missing her foot.

"I can't believe I'm such a klutz," she muttered, snatching up the arrow and checking the tip. "The fairies must have switched me at birth, there's no way I belong to this family."

The doorbell rang and she hurried to hide the evidence and welcome her guests. She'd just have to hope for the best when it came time for the actual shooting.

Troy straightened his collar and stepped in the doorway behind a group of giggling women. He nodded politely to them then dodged over to the snack table. Many familiar faces greeted him even after being gone for a couple of years.

The one person he didn't see was Claire. The only reason he'd taken time from his military leave to come to the party was to try to finally pin down the elusive little bombshell. He wasn't sure when the annoying little tag-along had turned sexy beyond belief. Her big brown eyes and flashing smile were enough to catch his interest, but the whole package?

Sweeter than Turkish Delight.

He'd cautiously dropped a few hints to Cupid about his interest, to make sure he wasn't going to get shot with a real arrow. Troy had even confessed that the nickname he'd given Claire, CC, didn't stand for Clumsy Child, but Cotton Candy. Luckily, Cupid was cool with the idea of his best friend with his sister but before Troy could act he'd gotten transferred to Hawaii.

Paradise sucked without Claire.

He was back on short-term leave and ready to woo her. He peeked into the dining room. Something whizzed past his ear and he brushed a hand at it. Bees in February? He looked around the room expecting to see Gaia wandering the room. A soft giggle rose from the nearby couch and Troy turned to see the Tooth Fairy chewing on a sweet young thing's neck. The rich scent of chocolate hung in the air, party music and laughter filled the house. Everywhere around him people paired up. Father Time was making time with his partner in the corner and Troy smiled. He'd heard those two were having problems but they'd obviously worked it out. One of the Claus girls clung to Jack Frost's son on the dance floor, wrapped together like a present.

Damn it, where was *his* woman? Troy paced across the room and heard another buzz and then another. He stopped and stared around but still couldn't see the noisemaker. A sudden sting hit him in the butt and he slapped a hand over it. Pulling out a sharp dart, Troy frowned.

What the hell?

Finally he spotted Claire. Tucked behind a giant hibiscus plant she stared into the room with deep concentration. She nibbled her lower lip and Troy had the sudden urge to do some nibbling of his own. Placing his drink on a nearby table, he slid slowly toward the plant.

"Troy!" someone called and he glanced away to wave at them. It only took a second, but it was long enough for Claire to disappear. Troy sighed and headed toward the back of the house. Maybe Cupid could help him out.

All the arrows were gone. Claire had no idea where more than half of them had landed because she discovered she closed her eyes when she shot. But she'd done the best she could and watching more than one pair of sweethearts embrace was all the reward she needed.

Sneaking into Cupid's room she returned the bow and quiver. By morning the auto-refill would kick in and no one would know she'd touched anything. She turned carefully to go and bumped into Cupid's drum set.

When the clattering died down she opened one eye a crack.

"Hey, Claire, how's the party going?" Cupid blinked at her from his bed.

Fake it, that's all she could do. "Brilliantly." She scooted around the cymbals on the floor and headed for the door. "The crowd is great and everyone is so happy. Are you feeling better?" *Please, don't feel better and find out your arrows are gone...*

"No" he croaked. "I'll just hit the can and crash again. Thanks for checking on me."

Disaster averted Claire fled his room. One last thing to do and she could sit and relax for the rest of the evening. She nabbed the bowl of fondue chocolate and raced down the hall. She took the corner a little too enthusiastically, the bowl teetering in front of her.

Right before she ran smack dab into Troy.

The chocolate hit first, flying from the bowl over his denim shirt. Claire made a frantic grab, her feet slipping from under her. Troy caught her and their bodies pressed together as she squealed in dismay.

"Oh fudge cakes, Troy, I'm sorry. Here, let me help you." She grabbed the serving towel off her shoulder and began dabbing at the mess, cleaning chocolate from his shirt, brushing the sticky goop from his belt.

She was wiping the front of his jeans when he grabbed her wrists and stopped her frantic movements.

"It's okay, CC, you can stop." His low and husky voice sent a tingle up her spine.

Claire swallowed hard as she realized she was rubbing over a solid ridge that grew more prominent the longer her fingers lingered. She couldn't stop staring, fascinating images racing through her mind. What if his jeans were gone? What if she had no towel?

A craving for chocolate overwhelmed her and she reached out to touch the sweet coating still clinging to him.

Firm fingers lifted her chin until their eyes met. "You keep looking at me like that, sugar, and we'll be attending our own private party."

Her heart leapt. The expression in his eyes matched the need in her body. Hot Tamales, he wanted her. She wanted him. Claire glanced down the hall toward the main room. Her little shooting spree seemed to have left lots of happy people in the party mood. Time to grab a little happiness for herself. Gathering her courage she tucked a finger into his belt loop and pulled herself into his arms. "Oops. We're far too messy for the party. Maybe we'd better go get cleaned up," she whispered. "I'll scrub your back if you scrub mine."

Oh please, let him say yes.

Troy paused for a minute. Claire's heart fluttered against her ribs where their bodies touched. The sexy smile he dropped on her turned the flutter to a pounding. He dropped his head and kissed her.

Chapter Two

Claire's lips were as soft and sweet as he'd imagined they would be and he took his time, savoring every moment. Troy nibbled along her lower lip, teasing until she opened to him. Her tongue slipped tentatively against his and a sugar high flashed through his body. Every inch of his body reacted to her warmth, her taste.

He was going to have trouble not inhaling her whole like a batch of cotton candy.

Scooping her up he paced to the guest room, never letting his mouth leave her skin. By the time he'd shouldered the door open and kicked it shut behind them his lips hovered over the pulse beating in the vee of her neck.

The sweet scent of cinnamon rose around them and he lapped gently. Another shiver shook her and his heart soared.

Finally.

Finally she was in his arms where she belonged.

Claire giggled, her big brown eyes staring at him as he ran a finger down the sticky front of her dress. "You have chocolate on your chin," she whispered, lifting her mouth to lap at his jaw like a kitten.

Troy's fingers trembled as he reached behind her. "Are you sure? Are you sure you want this? Because if we go any further there's no turning back, I'm not going to be able to stop."

Sweet lips brushed over his cheek as she leaned in close enough to lick the edge of his ear. "I've wanted this forever. Really I have, Troy."

Troy let out a long slow breath before slowly lowering the zipper of her dress. The red satin pooled on the floor. "Holy fuck, CC." Troy closed his eyes but it didn't help. The image of her standing before him in her scarlet boy-cut panties and a barely-there bra was burned on his retinas. He stepped back a pace to look her over, his mouth watering. The tips of her nipples peeked over the edge of the lace, firm and bright like licorice nibs.

One hand cupped her breast as he lowered his mouth again to her lips. It wasn't enough to touch, to taste. He needed to consume her. His thumb brushed over her nipple and she gave a little gasp of delight.

Troy kissed a trail down her body until his mouth hovered over her breast, his tongue tracing lazy circles over the firm mound. He managed to rid himself of his sticky clothing while he suckled through the lacy fabric of her bra, the sweetness of the chocolate fading in comparison with the taste of her skin.

Claire squirmed in his arms. "You want to crawl into the shower?" she asked, drawing a finger down his torso. "Or the bed?" She turned and teetered on her high heels and Troy caught her, their bodies slamming intimately together as they landed on the floor. There was no way she was unaware of just how much he wanted her now, his cock an iron rod pressed into her ass cheek.

"Oops." She giggled for a second. "Is that why they call you 'Mr. Big'?"

He laughed at her and carried her to the bed. Mouths met, hands caressed. Troy was fascinated with the way her breasts looked in the fancy bra and he licked over the fabric to tease her. "Hmm, it's like you're serving them to me on a platter, CC. You're so damn beautiful." He kissed her again, his hand sliding over her belly under the elastic waistband of her panties.

His fingers brushed over a small patch of soft curls before reaching smooth bare skin, wet with her juices. Claire's eyes brightened and he kissed her, his tongue stroking slowly into her mouth as he circled the hard nub of her clit with a finger. Her whole body shivered.

Everything about her made him smile. Her eager responses to his touch, the way she opened her legs to ease his way. The flush that came over her skin as he kissed down her belly to the top of her panties. He tugged them off, inch by inch until she lay naked except for the bra and a few bits of chocolate on her torso.

Troy laughed. She'd trimmed the curls on her mons into the shape of a heart, the rest of her pussy clean and bare and oh so wet. Troy traced around the heart slowly before dipping his head to lick the length of her slit. Caramel cream teased his tongue and he dove in enthusiastically, lapping again and again, his fingers dipping into her core as she squirmed under him.

The little noises she made only drove his desire higher and he held his cock in a tight fist, trying to hold off his need to come. Everything he loved about Claire made the moment even sweeter as she cried out his name, her sheath squeezing tight around his fingers as she came.

Troy rose over her, unable to wait any longer. He stroked over her cheek, his fingers soft on her smooth skin. His cock, harder than any rock candy, nudged her warm entrance; welcoming heat wrapped around him as he slowly pushed his way in. Claire opened her legs wider, her bright eyes staring into his, her pixie-like smile all for him. He rocked his hips as inch by inch each movement took him deeper, her cream covering him and easing his way until he was balls deep, fully connected.

They stilled for a second, Troy savoring the sensation of being buried in her body for the first time. Then the urge to move kicked into high gear and their bodies slipped into the timeless dance of lovemaking. Claire wrapped her legs around his hips, opening herself farther and pressing her heels into his ass. His cock hardened more, seemed to swell at each drag through her hot moisture, her passage squeezing him until there was nothing but his cock and her heat.

Troy dropped a hand to her clit, rubbing in time with his thrusts as they grew harder and quicker. "Come again, CC, come around my cock and let me feel you." Claire shuddered under him, her eyes popped wide open and she gasped. The convulsion of her pussy pushed him over the edge, his release exploding as her sheath trapped him in place and milked him dry.

When he finally relaxed enough to move it was to roll and cuddle her, spooned together on the bed. Stickiness from their lovemaking and the lingering bits of chocolate sauce covered them but he was as content as a kid in a candy factory. The night had just begun and the shower would be a fantastic place to continue their Valentine's Day adventure.

Troy kissed her temple and smiled as Claire gave a little contented sigh, snuggling in closer with her sweet ass tucked against his exhausted cock. The shower had been a wonderful. The hot tub, the loveseat and the coffee table fantastic as well.

He had no intention of ever stopping.

Nuzzling her neck he whispered, "I love you." She didn't move. Maybe she hadn't heard him. "I love you, CC. I want you to be with me always."

She rolled over, her bright eyes shining at him. He kissed her once more before slipping out of bed to use the bathroom.

When he returned, she was gone.

Chapter Three

"Claire, you've been miserable since the party. I thought you said things went brilliantly. Yet for the last week you've been dragging around like you have gum on the soles of your shoes. What gives?" Cupid expertly threw another paper airplane past her nose and Claire batted it aside with frustration.

"I screwed up royally, Cue. The only thing I ever really wanted in my whole life is out of reach because I was so *stupid*." She picked the plane off the table and started shredding it to ribbons.

He snorted. "Hey, I'm your brother. Like I'm going to argue with you about your IQ. But seriously, your whole life? You're planning to sit around and pout for the rest of eternity because, what, you didn't get laid?"

"I got laid, you Nerd. Twice. More than twice." Claire looked up and deflected away another dozen objects all flying inches away from her. "Will you fudge off with the throwing things? This is partly your fault. If you had been there I wouldn't have tried to shoot the—" She bit her lips together but it was too late.

He stared at her in disbelief and she wiggled uncomfortably in her chair. "Tell me you didn't try my bow and arrows. Damn it, Claire, you have the aim of a blindfolded drunk. I'm surprised I haven't heard complaints about 'random acts of a sexual nature' from the council. You *know* I get in shit every time there's an unauthorized Cupid Love match up." He stomped over to her, took a deep breath and started pacing the room. "Fine. Tell me the crisis situation so I can go fix it. Did you hit them too hard? Multiple arrows? Wrong gender combination for their preferences? Who's planning on killing me?"

Claire dropped her head into her hands. "No one's going to kill you. Everyone else is happy as pigs in blankets. But Troy says he's in love with me."

Cupid stopped in mid-pace. "Woohoo! About bloody time. I thought that asshole would never get his butt in gear and make a move on you." He wrinkled his face at her. "What does that have to do with anything?"

She slammed her hand on her thigh in frustration. "Because he's the one I hit with the damn arrow, alright? I was trying to help some friends and accidentally hit him instead." Claire glanced up to see him waiting expectantly, his eyebrows

flicking up and down. She glared at him. "If you think I'm going to share details about my sex life you've gone stark raving mad. I'll just say we had a wonderful night together and then all of a sudden he went overboard and started to make all kinds of commitments. Only it's not because he really loves me but because of the love potion! I saw the arrow mark on his butt when he went to the bathroom."

By the time Cupid controlled his laughter he was flat on the floor, clutching his stomach and wiping tears from his eyes. "You didn't pay attention when Mom and Dad gave us that lecture about the birds and the bees as it relates to our family, did you?" he hiccupped.

Claire took a deep breath to stop from screaming. "Spit it out, Cue," she hissed.

He sat up and touched her shoulder gently. "The arrows don't work on us or our lovers. The council added that little caveat so the current Cupid wouldn't be able to enjoy unauthorized orgies."

She sat back heavily in her chair. Tootsie Rolls, was it possible? "You mean...?"

He nodded, a bright smile covering his face. "Yup. If my buddy says he wants you it has nothing to do with the arrows." He flipped open his cell phone and handed it to her. "You want to call him? On my dime? Call it a late Valentine's present."

She smiled sheepishly before shaking her head. A phone call wasn't what they needed. "I have a better idea."

Troy opened the door to his apartment and sniffed. The aroma of burnt chocolate hung in the air and a pale haze of smoke lingered in the air. Soft coughing from the bathroom made him move cautiously into position, ready for anything.

Anything except the naked female who walked out, head covered with a towel. He knew who it was instantly.

The heart gave it away.

Claire stumbled down the hall, dragging the towel over her wet hair and Troy followed quietly behind, admiring the view of her ass as she approached his bedroom. A few steps past the doorway she tripped, belly flopping onto the bed and his cock stood up and saluted.

She wiggled to her hands and knees, cursing softly and Troy thought he'd die as she unknowingly presented the most wonderful sight to him. He couldn't wait any longer.

"Hello, CC."

She squealed and spun around, the towel flying off the bed leaving her a delightful pile of naked pink and red in the middle of his bed. "Hi Troy. I...umm...I hope it's okay if I'm here. I hitched a ride with the Tooth Fairy but the mouth rinse he uses clings to everything and then I tried to make you a treat but something went wrong and I think I burned the bottom of the pot and—"

"Claire, hush." Troy smiled at his little sweetheart, stuttering at him. "One question. Why did you come?"

"For you, of course." Claire tilted her head to the side. "Why are you looking at me like that?"

Troy stripped off his shirt and unbuckled his pants as he approached the bed. "Just getting ready to enjoy the sweet treats you brought me." He joined her on the bed and she shimmied closer, giggling as he rolled her on top of him and let their bodies fit together.

"Are you mad at me?" she whispered, dropping a light kiss on his nose. "I thought I'd shot you and—"

"You did, you little troublemaker."

"I'm sorry."

Troy kissed her harder, the pleasure in having her back overriding any of the hurt. "I love you, CC."

Claire pushed away from his chest. "Why do you keep calling me that? I may be clumsy but you know I'm not a child anymore."

Troy licked up the line of her neck, his hands cupping her ass cheeks intimately as he whispered in her ear.

Claire wrinkled her nose then giggled once more. "Cotton candy?"

Troy rolled her under him as he nibbled on her neck. "Hmm, my absolute favorite treat. Thank you for bringing me an endless supply."

She fluttered her eyelashes shyly at him. "I love you, Troy," she said before proceeding to show him how much.

Sweetly.

Biography

Vivian was playing hooky the day they taught about the importance of getting a “real” job; she was hiding out at the local library rereading everything for the fifth time. Since then she’s become a Jack-of-all-trades with a job experience list only slightly smaller than the average phone book.

She’s hiked, biked, canoed, kayaked and camped throughout Canada, seven European countries and twelve states, including Hawaii and Alaska. All these adventures have now become settings for her overactive muse to wander through.

Vivian lives in Western Canada with her longtime sweetie, two wonderful kids and a dog that looks like a stuffed toy.

Vivian’s first book with Samhain, *Wolf Signs*, is available March 24, 2009.

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