

HUSBANDS AND WIVES

(and lovers):

PAR 3

Anne Douglas



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Dedication

There once was a little author who went to two of her author friends and said, "I have an idea."

Amanda Young and Michelle Cary -- Thank you, ladies, for taking my idea about what happens to the romance years after the happily-ever-after, and making it a great little series.

And to Treva, the EIC willing to give my proposal a shot, thank you. (Even if you did cost me a fortune in late-night-burning candles to get it finished so fast!)

Chapter One

Aaron Howell placed his ball on the tee, stood back into position with his legs spread, rolled his shoulders to ease the tension he was carrying, and swung.

He felt it before he even was even halfway through the swing -- he didn't connect at all well -- and rather than a nice, clean shot down the fairway, his little white ball of frustration sliced at an angle and straight into the rough. *Gotta concentrate better*.

"Oh, for fuck's sake!" He'd progressed past polite outrage and into irate name calling a few holes back. It was obviously not his day to be out on the golf course.

"Damn, Aaron. Could your game get any worse?" Silas Worth sat on the edge of the seat of the golf cart, his legs firmly planted on the ground in front of him and his elbows on his knees. His gloved hands hung limply between his knees as he shook his head in amazement. "What the hell's wrong, man? Emma not put out last night or something?"

Aaron turned and stared daggers at his good friend and barely held back a snarl. "Nothing's wrong." He fingered the scorecard in his pocket that noted his many well-overpar scores for the day. "Abso-fucking-lutely nothing." He swore again under his breath, but said louder to Silas, "Just off my game today."

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"Off it? You've downright slaughtered the last eight holes -- and not in a good way." Silas sounded closer now, and as Aaron leaned on his club and pivoted down to collect his tee, he felt Silas's shadow fall over him and saw the tips of Silas's shoes as he stepped into view. "I'm here if you want to talk about it."

Aaron's leg swung down as he came back upright, and he glanced at Silas for a moment, taking in his loose, crossed arm stance as he offered a shoulder to offload onto.

"Nothing to talk about."

Silas raised one eyebrow and replied skeptically, "Yeah, sure."

Aaron strode back to the golf cart and watched Silas tee off. Only Silas's swing hit true and his ball flew cleanly down the fairway into a perfect position to chip up onto the green. *Fuck*.

It took five more shots -- one out of the rough and straight into the branches of an overhanging tree, another into the sand bunker, then three tries out of the bunker for the green -- for Aaron to give up on the game with a roar of disgust, throwing his sand wedge after his ball, which meant nowhere near the groomed and fragile green. Another nine holes to make up a full round would have him enraged and no doubt snapping every club he owned over his knee.

Silas stood to the side, out of the way of the flying sand, balls, and club, and watched him with a look that said "nothing to talk about, huh?" which infuriated Aaron even more. Silas wasn't who he was angry at, but he made a convenient target to vent his frustration.

Aaron stomped his way out of the bunker, snatched up his club, and slammed it into his golf bag as he snarled at Silas, "I think Emma's having an affair."

He was quite pleased to see the shock on Silas's face as his mouth dropped wide open. "You're kidding, right?"

"Do I look like I'm fucking kidding?"

Silas stared at him a moment, and then, looking confused, shook his head. "No. No, you don't."

Aaron, not daring to drive while he was this mad, threw himself down into the passenger seat of the golf cart. As he sat, his anger collapsed in on itself, leaving him feeling hollow and lost, and wondering if his great life wasn't really as great as he'd thought.

"Why do you think she's having an affair?" Silas's tall, lanky form slid into the golf cart and he turned the key. The cart hummed as he pressed on the pedal, but rather than taking the shorter route back to the clubhouse, he turned south and down the longer, winding path. Looked like he was going to get that shoulder to cry on, after all.

"Nothing specific really. Lots of things, all piling up one on top of the other." Aaron slumped, and his head lolled slightly before he pulled himself straight. *You've never been one to sulk; no point starting now.*

"Like what?"

"The way she looks at other men -- Joel Markim for one -- she's always looking his way. We hardly see one another lately; you'd think with the kids finally gone we'd have more time together." Silas tilted his head in a slight acknowledgement of Aaron's point. "Of course, then there's the kicker. Sex."

Silas only raised both his brows in question.

"The last time we had sex was three months ago, and before that, maybe once a month."

"Why would that make you different than half the other forty-something men on this golf course?"

"We used to have sex two, maybe three times a week."

"Oh."

"Yeah." Aaron fell silent and mentally poked and prodded at his problem.

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His eyes had never strayed to another woman, and after marrying Emma he'd never once looked back at the dating game with anything but happiness that he was well out of it. He worked hard to provide for his family and didn't begrudge the long hours it took to make his business successful enough so Emma didn't need to work and the kids had university educations. Yet here he was, considering the fact that the one woman he loved beyond all else might be having an affair.

Underneath all the anger and bewilderment, Aaron felt the foundation of his life -- his heart -- begin to crack.

Aaron wasn't usually a man to lash out; he was more the get-in-and-get-it-done type, a problem solver. So watching him progressively lose his cool over the course of their aborted round of golf was interesting to say the least. Unnerving, too, even if he'd laughed a little at the spectacle.

Then for Aaron to finally break down and tell Silas he thought Emma -- the kindest, most sweet-hearted, and, to his jaundiced eye at least, pretty damn sexy woman with her short ruffled hair, twinkling eyes and ultracurvy body -- was cheating on him was enough to knock him on his rear.

Aaron and Emma had been his close friends for a long time. Both of them had stood tall and strong through Joan's illness, and had been the ones holding him up when he'd broken down at her funeral. They'd lent him their strength to get through that horrible day. He couldn't -- believe that Emma was seeing another man. Aaron had to be wrong.

He could be kind of right though.

"Being married...*staying married* is tough. Joan and I went through something like this in our late thirties, before the cancer." Aaron turned toward him, still silent, but listening. "It wasn't easy, but we fixed it."

"How?"

"Well..." Here's where it got difficult. Though he and Joan had been best friends with Emma and Aaron for a long time, there had been something they'd kept from them. "We started swinging."

"What, from a vine?" Aaron almost cracked a smile despite his obvious unhappiness.

"No. Partner swapping." Silas concentrated on the pathway, keeping the golf cart out of the slightly rutted areas that had yet to be groomed after the rainstorms of the last week -- anything to avoid the scandalous look he was sure Aaron was flinging his way. After all, they'd shared a lot while Joan had fought the disease, the four...the three of them knew one another like family, but sex? Well, that was another thing entirely -- even friends as close as them discussed sex little more than as comic innuendo.

"What? You mean...?"

Silas's cheeks flushed as Aaron stuttered. He and Joan had always figured Aaron and Emma were pretty straitlaced -- not that they didn't enjoy themselves when it came to sex, but that they weren't all that adventurous. Although, who could really tell what went on behind closed doors?

"Yeah, we had sex with other couples."

From the corner of his eye, Silas caught Aaron rubbing his palm over his face before he swore. "Jesus, Silas."

Aaron stared out ahead of them, turning back after a minute or two to ask, "What was it like?"

"Fun and scary and exhilarating and nerve-racking all at the same time. But it worked; it got us over our hump and showed us that what we had together was perfect as it was." Silas paused and wondered how much to tell Aaron. "We did it for about two years. There was this...err...club we'd found -- but we didn't attend all that often. We ended up getting to know one couple a little more, and we decided that we'd prefer to get together with them occasionally rather than with strangers at the club. It might sound odd, but the whole

experience made us appreciate what we meant to one another -- so much so, that we stopped." Silas shrugged. A small wave of sorrow passed through him as he remembered his wife. "Maybe we might have done it again -- though more as something special than a regular thing -- but it wasn't long after we decided to stop that Joan was diagnosed."

He didn't need to say any more than that; Aaron knew just how hard they'd fought to beat the disease that had taken Joan's life fourteen months before.

It'd been a pretty dark and dim time for him since then, although the last six months had found him starting to move on. He'd not coped at all well with losing Joan, and even now he still felt like he was flapping in the wind a little. Some days he really wished they'd been able to have kids. He'd have found his feet a lot faster then, but their plans to adopt instead had been put on indefinite hold after the diagnosis. Even though he was well into the journey of healing after his loss, a new partner was the last thing on his mind...but sex? His libido had definitely begun to make itself known again.

"I don't know if I could even *think* about having sex with another man's wife, let alone do it." Aaron sounded perplexed.

Silas understood all too well what Aaron meant. He and Joan had thought long and hard before they'd gone to the club the first time. In the end, for them it came down to one thing: it wasn't so much a last ditch, extreme effort to save their marriage, but a way of kick-starting their stale sex life so there was no last ditch effort needed. Had it been the former, swinging would have only exacerbated their problems until they'd shattered the relationship entirely. "We took the view that we were cheating on the other with each other. We had our own rules -- we never separated or went into different rooms with another partner. If either one of us was uncomfortable with a person, we left. In fact, what we did with another person wasn't so much about finding our own release, as exciting each other. I'd never dreamed that watching Joan scream as she came with another man's mouth on her sex would be so damn arousing."

He took his eyes off the path a moment and looked directly at Aaron, whose wide, shocked eyes looked both horrified and fascinated.

"Didn't you get jealous?"

"Hell, yes! That was the whole point of it. We both got so damn jealous, aroused, pleased even at how satisfied the other one was we screwed like bunnies for weeks after. But it was a good jealous, not the eat-you-up-inside-and-turn-nasty type." He shrugged awkwardly again, trying to figure out how to explain how it had made him feel. "There was something kind of primitive about knowing that no matter how many times that other man made her come, at the end of the night, it was me who took Joan home and made love to her."

Aaron shook his head with a certain amount of distraction. "I don't know if I could do it. I think watching some stranger with Emma would kill me."

Swinging wasn't for everyone, and even though it'd worked for him and Joan, they'd not stuck with it for long. There was something to be said for knowing your partner well and being able to read what worked, and most importantly, what didn't. There was no learning curve for sex with strangers; it was either good, or so bad you couldn't wait for it to be over.

"Well, it's not a solution for everyone...hell, most people."

A sardonic laugh, bitten off before it could gain momentum, came from the other side of the golf cart, and a hand reached out no doubt to cuff him on the shoulder. "You and Joan never did things the way most people would -- most *normal* people would have gone to marriage counseling, not a sex club."

As the hit landed, he looked back at Aaron and saw the man was holding back a proper laugh. Silas felt his mouth twitch, and no matter how he tried not to, his smile broke free, and then he laughed. Aaron joined him, and Silas was glad that finally he was able to remember the good times with Joan with laughter not tears.

Chapter Two

God, being forty-five sucked -- and not in the good, rolling-around-on-the-bed-having-hot-sex way, either.

From her seat beside the patio bar, Emma Howell scanned around her...their...friends gathered in her backyard and wished she still had what they had. Her gaze snagged on Joel Markim and his date -- what *they* had. Or at least the attention he was giving to the woman he'd backed up against the patio wall.

The man was a first-class player. At thirty-nine, never been married, and with a new woman on his arm every week, Joel undeniably had some issues with permanency. Still, even though they might not be around long, the women he dated were treated like queens while he was with them. Joel had this way about him that said that although he'd send you on your way the next morning, you'd leave with a smile that would hang around for a week -- assuming, of course, that he did the morning after thing.

Aaron used to give her attention like that, the kind that told her he was the one in command and he'd make sure he catered to her every sexual need. The kind of attention that told a woman she was desired.

Emma lifted her wineglass and drank deeply. All around her their friends talked, laughed, held hands, or cradled their partners, but where was hers? Late again, and he was the damn host.

Aaron's late arrivals were becoming a constant. Since Monday, she'd eaten solo three times. The fourth evening Aaron had arrived home when she was halfway through eating, and tonight made the fifth night in a row he'd not been able to arrive home on time.

This time though, it wasn't just a carefully prepared dinner sitting in the oven going dry that he'd missed; she'd had to prepare everything for tonight by herself. Not just the food, but the patio and garden, even the damn barbeque that was supposed to be Aaron's manly domain. This was the first moment she'd had the whole day just to sit, and even now she wondered if taking a load off was the wrong thing to do -- she'd didn't know if her aching feet could take standing again.

She knew she shouldn't complain about Aaron's long hours. He'd worked damn hard to give her and the kids a wonderful life. Sarah was already done with university, and Darren was halfway through his studies -- but they'd been saving since the day the kids were born for that. Now that they were on their own, shouldn't this be Emma and Aaron's time?

If anything, she saw Aaron even less than when the kids were living at home. That was the really scary part of it all. Maybe now that the kids weren't here he just wasn't interested in being here, either.

Some days she didn't blame him. Emma swung a sideways glance at the woman with Joel -- after all, how could she compete with that? *She couldn't, not without a serious amount of extremely painful surgery*. Emma sighed into her drink, taking another swallow as she resigned herself to the fact a snowball had a better chance in hell than her hips did of fitting into a size twelve again. Baby weight be damned, she was way past being able to try to pass off the extra pounds to that cause these days. Twenty odd years on, she could no longer deny her extra padding was just plain old middle-aged spread.

Emma frowned a little as Joel and the girl with legs a mile long headed toward the garden gate. *Whatever happened to good manners?* Used to be you said good-bye to your host, even if you only stayed for a short time.

Annoyed, she didn't notice Joel had come back until he was standing in front of her saying, "Emma?" for what was obviously the second time.

"Oh, Joel. I thought you'd gone."

"No. Cathy just came by for a short time -- she had to head to work, so I was seeing her to her car."

Lord, when was the last time Aaron had thought to see her to her car when she was going somewhere? Not anytime lately, as far as she could recall.

"I noticed Aaron wasn't home yet, and I thought I'd see if you needed a hand with anything. I'll take a guess you've been on your feet all day getting things ready." Joel gave a nod to the buffet table, laden with the dishes she'd prepared ahead of time. "The food looks wonderful, as always, Emma."

Why was it that this man could take one look at her and know she'd been running around like a headless chook all day, yet her damned husband couldn't even show up to help for a party he'd wanted to give?

"I've started up the barbeque, but I really need someone to man it so the meat doesn't burn. Any chance I can rope you in for that? I'll even break out the 'sexy chef' apron so you don't get dirty." Emma didn't know why she offered that particular apron. It was the one Aaron always wore, and there were plenty of others. So her temper was getting the best of her, and she'd offered it in a fit of pique, but damn it, why the hell not? Wasn't like Aaron was here to use it anyway.

"Sounds great," Joel said with a slow, lazy smile. "If you're going to cook, you may as well be sexy while you're doing it in my book."

Emma heard herself make a coy, flirting laugh and gestured Joel to follow her inside.

What's a little fun flirting going to hurt, after all?

Aaron knew he was in trouble, B-I-G trouble. He'd planned to be home just after lunch to help Emma with preparations for the party, but a client emergency, teamed with two staff members who'd started vomiting after sharing leftovers that'd turned out to be bad, had put him way behind. So far behind his arse was hanging out the back door.

He didn't bother bringing his briefcase inside; he just left everything in the car — he was parked in the garage, after all. After a brief scramble through the basket of clean clothes sitting in front of the dryer, he replaced his stale, button-down work shirt with one of his golf shirts.

Looking moderately less businesslike, he slipped through the side door of the garage and out into the backyard to be greeted by a group of people circled around with wineglasses in their hands, discussing anything and everything. His and Emma's social group was nothing if not varied in their interests.

"Aaron. Good to see you!" Minelle Green stepped forward as she spoke and gave him a one-handed hug and a kiss on the cheek. "About time you showed up. She'd hate it that we noticed, but she's upset you're late," she whispered in his ear before she stood back.

Aaron swallowed hard and gave a slight nod to Minelle before he turned to greet the others in the circle. He plastered on a smile and laughed at their good-natured ribbing about being late to his own funeral, until he'd turned enough to get a glimpse of the barbeque and the person manning it. Aaron's eyes narrowed, and his smile tightened when he recognized the tall form of Joel Markim. *Bastard's even wearing my damn apron*.

"Joel was kind enough to step up and offer to watch over the barbeque when the masses started making rumblings about hungry stomachs," Minelle said.

Minelle and Emma had been friends since their late teens, and she was a perceptive sort. It didn't surprise Aaron that she noticed his reaction to seeing Joel in Aaron's usual position. "So I see. I'll make sure to thank him." While I try to remember not to pound his arse into the ground because I'm a forty-seven-year-old man who's not supposed to get into fistfights.

"Emma? Where shall I put this tray of meat?" Joel asked from behind her.

Caught in the last minute preparation of a warm salad, Emma didn't turn around, just called out where it needed to go. Footsteps tapped on the tile floor, and then plates clattered -- no doubt being rearranged -- followed by the thump of a heavy tray landing on the table.

The kitchen went quiet again. Well, semi-quiet with the noise of the party outside, and the *chop-chop-chop* of her knife breaking the silence. *Perfect for brooding over her missing husband*.

Emma felt the heat of a body behind her, not quite pressing against her, but encroaching on her personal space, and hands slid onto the bench, bracketing her.

"Another perfect spread, Emma. You're a wonderful...hostess."

Expecting her husband, not another man, Emma stiffened at the low drawl of Joel's voice as he leaned in close to her ear. Humid puffs of air brushed over the crook of her neck as he spoke.

Emma dropped the knife, and the *ting* as it hit the glass chopping board shocked her into moving. She twirled around in the cage of Joel's arms, but he stood his ground and didn't step back -- didn't close in the intimate positioning, either. She looked up and saw the question in his eyes and flushed -- he'd obviously seen her looking at him earlier and made some assumptions about what she wanted. Only he had everything backward. It wasn't Joel she wanted; she just wanted her loving, caring, take-charge-in-the-bedroom husband back.

"Joel, what are you doing?" she hissed, low and nearly under her breath.

"Thanking an attractive...maybe lonely woman for what is sure to be a tasty meal."

Emma couldn't miss the innuendo loaded into the sentence. Joel had decided she was a bored, lonely housewife ripe for an affair.

Bored and lonely, and a housewife she might be, but that didn't mean she didn't love her husband every bit as much now as she had when she'd said her vows. "I'm married, Joel. I don't want any part of what I think you're suggesting." Her cheeks heated with embarrassment. Lord, did she seem so dissatisfied that people thought she was willing to cheat on her husband?

Emma dropped her gaze and focused on the exposed indent of Joel's collarbone, unable to look the man in the eye for fear he might see just how unhappy she was and take advantage of it.

He leaned in a little, and she felt his mouth on her hair as he said, "I'm not suggesting anything you've not already thought about."

Her spine stiffened, and she spun back to face the bench as Joel hit much too close to the mark. She'd not thought about having an affair as such, but she had been green with envy over what other people seemed to have, and she'd wanted it for herself. But she wanted it with Aaron, not someone else.

Joel pressed closer, and she felt the bulge of his semi-aroused cock press into her backside. "I love my husband, Joel." Emma took a step to the side and ducked under the cage of Joel's arms. She turned back to him with her arms crossed and her stance rigid. "Besides, I don't even come close to comparing to your usual arm candy, so don't make a fool of you or me by going any further."

Joel looked at her oddly, as if she were a puzzle for him to solve, and then shrugged as he stuffed his hands in his pockets, reverting back to his usual casual stance as he leaned one hip against the bench top.

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"All right, then." He took a step back, and Emma let herself relax a little, only to stiffen back up as he said, "I'm not going to apologize, though. You're an attractive woman, Emma. You might not think you measure up to the younger women I date, but believe me, you have some attributes of your own they can't even begin to compete with." His eyes roamed her body, and she saw open admiration on his face that mimicked the momentary twinge of appreciation she'd felt when he'd pressed against her for that moment.

Disbelief shocked her into silence. She stared mutely at Joel and wondered if the man was cracked in the head.

A loud chorus of, "Aaron!" and, "You finally made it to your own party!" rang out close to one of the open windows in the dining area beside the kitchen.

"Looks like you won't need my barbequing skills for the rest of the night." Joel pushed off the bench with his hip and with a long stride moved past her, pausing briefly to quietly say, "I mean it, Emma. If he's dumb enough not to fix whatever's wrong between you two, I'll have you in my bed and a new ring on your finger so fast your head will spin. I know exactly what I am, Emma, and even I'd not be so stupid as to turn away a woman like you." Joel's mouth fairly snapped closed, and his eyes narrowed, as if he'd surprised and angered himself by what he'd just revealed.

She didn't know what to say to a declaration of that enormity, so said nothing, and Joel walked away, leaving the ranch slider she hadn't realized he'd closed open behind him.

She'd written off Joel as shallow and self-serving years ago, and even though he'd just hit on her -- she was still getting over the shock value of that -- she watched him walk away and wondered if there was hope for Joel Markim yet.

Caught up in a crowd of friends in his backyard, Aaron hadn't yet made it inside to find Emma, so he was perfectly situated to watch Joel Markim stride across his back deck and to the drinks table. With a bottle of beer in his hand and a strange smile on his face, Joel moved

back to the barbeque and checked it over -- all the things Aaron usually did to make sure it was safely turned off.

Aaron excused himself and made his way to the barbeque and his pseudo nemesis. "Thank you for helping Emma out." Had it been anyone else, he might have made his excuses, but not to this man. "I'm sure she appreciates it." Although Aaron knew he sure as hell didn't.

Joel nodded his acknowledgement as he piled the used utensils together on the tray that had held the raw meat. "She needed a hand. I was happy to help." There was a pause before he carried on, "She's not happy." Joel's gaze no longer wandered, and Aaron had a feeling they were no longer talking about Aaron being late to his own party. "You really should go find her; she was looking kind of tired and lonely earlier on."

Aaron felt the sting of Joel's backhanded chastisement, and his skin prickled. "I will. I --" Emma's voice chimed out from above them, and Aaron looked up to see his wife looking rosy and frazzled in a way that he was sure had nothing to do with her preparations in the kitchen. She sounded a little fragile as she announced that the buffet was ready to go, and Aaron knew he'd lost his chance to apologize to his wife before the evening got further out of his hands. His legendary calm and collected emotions took a hammering as he felt his control tug at its leash.

People moved toward the house at Emma's urging, leaving Aaron and Joel alone by the barbeque.

"Don't make me regret my decision, Aaron."

He didn't even have time to turn around to confront the man, demand he explain what he meant, before Joel pushed past Aaron's shoulder and into the midst of the partygoers.

Aaron's eyes narrowed. His gut twisted as he watched Joel slide easily into the conversations flowing around him, and he knew without a doubt that something had happened between his wife and Joel that night.

Chapter Three

"Talk to me, Emma."

Cutlery and crockery clanged, and the anger radiating from Emma's tense body language made Aaron wish he was cowardly enough to run. But he hadn't made it through twenty-five years of marriage by running from a confrontation -- and there'd been some doozies.

"Quite frankly, Aaron, I don't think I'm capable of talking right at this moment."

"Well, yell at me, then." Yelling was much better than the cool silence that had slipped between them. He'd let the strain in their relationship go on for long enough. He'd waited for Emma to broach the subject, believing she trusted him enough to come to him with her problems, but she'd said nothing. Their relationship was a partnership, and this time he wasn't letting their problems slide. It was time to deal with them head-on.

With sharp, angry movements and no regard for neatness, Emma shoved pots into their usual kitchen space before spinning around to face him, her hands on her hips and her jaw set.

"Yes, let's. It's not like we have to be quiet so the kids don't hear." Emma walked -- no stalked -- right up to him, pushing her face up confrontationally into his. "I don't think I've

ever been more embarrassed in my life than I was tonight. You couldn't even come in and apologize, hell, even say hello. You avoided me entirely."

"It wasn't intentional -- being late or avoiding you. Things came up, and I had to deal with them. Then, when I got here, I got trapped out in the back."

Emma's face twisted into an ugly visage of anger, one he'd never seen on her face before. "Does this thing that got things 'up' have a name? I'd like to know who my replacement is."

"What?" He had no clue what she was going on about.

"What's her goddamned name, Aaron? Do I have to spell it out?"

Totally confused, he questioned again, "Whose name?"

Emma took a stumbling step back, and her anger collapsed in on itself, leaving her face desolate as her hands crept up to cover her mouth, moving to press against her cheeks as she spoke. "Have you lost so much of your respect for me you'll deny it, even as I confront you with it? Am I really that gullible?" Tears, such a one-eighty from her anger of only a moment ago, pooled in her eyes and began to flow down her cheeks, only to be trapped in the web of her fingers as they splayed out over her face.

"Emma, you're scaring me." Aaron took a step forward to gather Emma in his arms, but she backed up against the wall and then slid down, burying her head between her knees and under her crossed arms as she cried. He went to his knees and pulled Emma toward him, curving himself around the huddled ball of her body. His mind was running double-time, going back over their conversation, trying to find a cause, some sort of reason beyond the obvious for the meltdown. His quietly feisty wife with her determination and drive was gone, leaving her uncertain and afraid. He'd never seen her doubt herself — or him — not even when he'd taken complete control in their sex play.

"Emma?" Aaron pulled back enough to tilt his wife's face up to his. Her makeup had run, and her eyes were going red. It wasn't a pretty sight, but it was his sight, the one he

intended to keep right beside him 'til they were no more. "Are you saying you think I'm having an affair?"

Emma sniffed and swiped her fingers across her face as she tried to pull herself back together. "Don't blame you, really. I mean, look at me: forty-five, fat, good at nothing besides cleaning the house and making dinners that you don't bother coming home to eat. That whole 'I'll lose the weight' thing's a crock of shit, by the way -- no wonder you don't want to have sex with me anymore."

"Jesus, Emma. What the hell are you talking about? You're beautiful. I don't count raising our children as good for nothing, and as for the sex, you're the one who doesn't seem to want sex anymore. You know it's not in me to force you into anything -- I'd make love to you every day given half a chance." He demanded control of their lovemaking, and yes, he was often the initiator, but he didn't have it in him to force his wife into a situation she really didn't want. He only demanded control of what she wished to give -- and until recently she'd given him everything.

"Yeah, right. That's why you arrive home late every night, and then fall asleep in your armchair so I go to bed alone. Just this week you've not been home for dinner, not once. Even tonight, for the party you asked me to organize, it wasn't worth the effort of you coming home on time."

"It's been hellishly busy, Emma. You know that."

"But why does it have to be you who stays late? Since the kids left, you stay even later. I thought when the kids were out on their own we'd finally get to spend more time together. But you just don't want to be here, do you? I bore you that much."

"Stop!" Enough was enough. "I'm not having this conversation on the kitchen floor." Aaron felt his knees creak a little as he rose to his feet. He held out his hand to Emma, and she looked at it truculently.

"As good a place as any, if you ask me."

Aaron waited. Anxiousness twisted in his gut when it looked like she wasn't going to take the offered hand up, but after a small pause, she put her hand in his. Something inside his chest that had gone tight as she'd hesitated eased. *She still trusted him, with this at least*.

"Well, I'm not asking. We are going to sit down, like the adults we are, and I'm going to tell you a few hard truths."

The house was in moderate disarray still from the party, so with her hand still in his, Aaron pulled Emma along behind him, through the house and to their master suite -- their private space. He led her to the bed and, with a hand on either shoulder, pushed her down to sit on the edge.

"Wait right there."

There was a decorative chair in the corner. It usually ended up covered in clothes, but today everything was neat and tidy in case a guest had decided to go wandering during the party -- guilt pinged again over not being home to help Emma prepare for the party. Aaron pulled the chair across the room and set it directly in front of Emma, close enough that when he sat their knees touched.

He and Emma stared at one another without speaking, really seeing the other person for the first time in an age.

Aaron broke the silence. "I love you."

Emma felt so stupid, breaking down like she had. She'd been so angry -- she still was -- but she couldn't keep a hold of it. Her despair overrode her anger about what'd happened that night.

"You love me." Despite the deadpan delivery, Aaron must have heard the question in her reply as he began a list.

"I love your body, I love your personality, and I love how you raised our children and the way you look after me. Yes, I love you. All of you, good and bad." Aaron leaned forward and took her hands in his, his eyes earnest as he carried on. "As for having an affair, the only woman I want is you, so what would be the point?"

"I don't know, but it's the only reason I can come up with as to why our sex life has dwindled to nothing." God, how she missed the way he had of taking control of her body, of wringing every last drop of pleasure from her as he insisted on her satisfaction.

Aaron sighed and leaned back in his chair, loosing her hands from his. One hand rested on his thigh while the other rubbed his belly, just like she'd seen him do over the years when he had a bellyache. "Wanna know something funny?"

Emma raised her brows to let him know she was listening, prompting him on.

"All those things you said in the kitchen -- I've been thinking almost those exact same things about you. I was certain you'd started an affair." He rubbed his belly harder, just under his ribs where she knew he felt acid burn when he got too stressed. "And tonight -- I know something happened tonight. You came out of the house right after that bastard Joel Markim, looking all flushed and unkempt, like you'd been in there doing something with him."

Aaron turned his gaze back on her with a sense of directness and purpose, and Emma felt her cheeks flush red with embarrassment.

"Something did happen, didn't it?" Pain bloomed in Aaron's eyes, and he'd unconsciously pressed his fist where his fingers had been absently rubbing. For all that Aaron was a confident man driven to take charge, he was sensitive, vulnerable -- even though he strove to hide it.

Emma licked her lips, scared, not sure how to tell her husband what'd happened. She'd not made a conscious choice not to tell Aaron, but it might have been something she would have kept to herself so as not to hurt him. "Nothing really happened. Yet, in a way, something did happen, but I have to take a large portion of the blame for that."

Aaron flinched. "Go on."

"Joel offered to help me with barbequing the meat since you weren't here, and I'll own up to satisfying a little petty vengeance by giving him your apron to wear. I shouldn't have, but I was feeling so damned angry at you." And truly, it had been a small-minded satisfaction.

"When Joel brought the cooked meat inside, I was in the kitchen prepping the last of the salads and desserts. I thought he'd gone, but then he came up behind me. He'd seen me watching him...and well, he made it known he was willing to take it a step further."

"Son of a fucking bitch." Aaron stood so fast the chair slid back, nearly toppling, and he began to pace, his hand still pressing under his ribs. "Then what?" he asked, his voice hoarse.

"Then I told him I loved my husband, and I wanted no part of what he was offering, and he backed off."

"And...?" He stopped in front of her, the tips of his toes touching hers.

"And on the way out, he said that if you were idiot enough to let me go, he'd be waiting." Her mouth ran on with a quasi excuse, and she wanted to cringe. "It wasn't all his fault, Aaron. I'd been watching him, envious of how he treated the women he dates. So --"

"Son of a --" Aaron reached out and grabbed her under her arms, yanking her up off the bed until her breasts pressed up against his chest. "If he so much as looks your way again, Emma, I swear --"

His arms came around her and pulled her in so tightly she doubted she'd ever get free. Warm, searching lips crashed down onto hers, and the rasp of his evening stubble over her cheeks was a pleasurable pain she relished. It had been so long since she'd felt desired like this by him, she nearly didn't feel guilty about how it came about. He still wanted her -- extra padding, middling years, and all -- and that was all that mattered.

Aaron's lips slipped away, and she arched her neck, giving him more room to play as he nibbled and gently bit his way down to the sensitive crook of her shoulder. Aaron's shoulder dipped, and she felt the palm of his hand and the rough, possessive touch of his fingers along

her leg as he scooped up and under the skirt of her dress. His palm spread along the back of her thigh, and with a quick movement, he pulled her leg up alongside his, upsetting her balance so she pressed intimately against him. Emma linked her fingers together behind Aaron's neck and held on for dear life.

A small, needy moan escaped her when his lips came back to hers. Changing her grip, she loosened her fingers so she could tangle them in her husband's dark, curly hair and hold him at her mouth. *This...this fervor...this need for one another, God, how I've missed it*.

Aaron's left hand moved from the near painful grip he had on her bottom to curve around and lift her higher. Emma was reminded that her husband was not a middle-aged layabout, but a strong, fit man -- the man she'd lusted after for twenty-five years, give or take a few for her fascination with Brad Pitt and Hugh Jackman. Encouraged by the broad palms behind her thighs that held her tightly against her husband, she wrapped her legs around his hips. His hands flexed on her bum as he held her, prompting her to grind against him. The scant coverage of her panties and the front of his trousers were all that kept them apart. From behind, fingertips ran along the damp fabric of her underwear, easily slipping underneath the elastic edge to dip into her center.

She tore her mouth from Aaron's with a gasp. "Yes! Aaron, please." Desperation and lust were clear in her voice.

She'd wanted this for too long. Wanted the heat and fire they'd lost years ago, before settling instead for silent, missionary acts rather than the blazing flame of sexy encounters grabbed in hasty moments that only left them eager for more.

Aaron tipped her, and she fell back, pulling him down to the bed on top of her when she kept her legs wrapped around him. He broke her hold and stepped back, reaching down to strip off her panties, pushing her legs open after he swept the scrap of fabric over and off her feet. He looked down at her, and the heat in his gaze made her skin prickle as his eyes traveled from one end of her body to the other.

Although her dress had ridden up on her hips and still covered her pussy, she felt his eyes there as if she were bare. Her nipples went tight and the chafe of her light, silky bra, still hidden behind the bodice of her dress, was suddenly too much.

She said nothing, but her hands went to the buttons that ran down the front of the lightweight summer dress she barely wore. Aaron's eyes followed, but his hands went to his belt. Her hands moved slowly, releasing each button and pulling back the fabric to expose her bra, teasing inch by teasing inch. With the restricting fabric gone, she reached for the front clasp of her bra. The click of the plastic fastener was loud in a room that echoed with their heavy, excited breaths. She peeled back the satin and lace and was pleased to see Aaron's nostrils flare.

Aaron half swallowed a groan; his desire ignited hers. "Don't you dare stop now, Emma. You know the punishment for teasing."

"I won't." Emma was surprised by the deep, husky timbre of her voice. Like her body, her voice had matured with age, but it had been so long since she'd heard herself while this turned on. She well knew Aaron wasn't above enforcing his rules about teasing — she'd bared herself to him, masturbating herself to a climax a number of times in the past as punishment — but not tonight, she didn't want that at all. She needed her husband more than anything else.

Her fingertips followed the curve of her hip down to where her dress rested high on her thighs. She walked her fingers along her legs, slowly pleating the fabric so her hem rose until she had it in her fists. Emma nearly laughed at the way Aaron's eyes stayed glued to the line that separated her bare flesh from covered.

After all her worrying, all her harebrained assumptions, maybe she should take what Aaron said at face value? She'd known and loved this man for over twenty-six years -- maybe it *was* her reasoning that was faulty, not his? After all, he'd never tried to control her life or make her decisions for her. Aaron had always been the perfect blend of command and

assistance, lending his support in public when she'd needed it and his control in private when she'd desired that, too.

Movement caught her eye, and Emma dropped her gaze down. Although he'd been watching her the whole time, Aaron had multitasked -- his belt was gone, and his slacks drooped, loose around his hips as his fly hung open. He'd shoved down his underwear, and he slowly worked his erection with one fist. His other hand reached out as she watched and gently stroked along her calf.

"You are so damn beautiful."

She shook her head, denying his declaration. "No, I'm not. I'm nothing like what I used to be."

Dark, turbulent eyes bored into her, and Aaron bullied his way back onto the bed, pushing his knees between her legs, spreading her sex wide. The cool wash of the late night air over her hot sex attested to just how aroused she was -- how she always was lately. Menopause just around the corner be damned, lately she was always horny. Maybe she'd just hit that female mid-thirties sexual prime a little on the late side?

"No, you're not." As he spoke, Aaron went to his hands and knees, looming over her.

Shocked by his agreement, Emma turned her head to the side, feeling her arousal begin to slide away as her disappointment took over. Aaron had never criticized her before.

"These wrinkles." A finger stroked across her cheekbone and flirted with the crow's feet at the corner of her eye that defied her expensive creams. Emma felt a light, fleeting kiss against her eyelid, then Aaron moved. His fingers caressed from her clavicle down the slope of her breast. "The way these sit lower than before, and these stretch marks." His fingers briefly touched the faded pregnancy marks on her breasts, then plucked at her nipples before he swept her skirt up to her waist. "And these ones, too." Aaron's fingers stopped their stroking pattern along the now silvery stretch marks on her belly, and his palm curved around her now generous hips. "Along with these extra curves here, tell me the same thing;

you're not the same woman you were." Strong fingers pressed against her chin, turning her face back toward his. "They all tell me you're the woman who's grown older, hopefully wiser -- certainly wiser than me most of the time -- and who bore me two wonderful children. I loved you then, and I love you now -- and you're still one sexy woman. You can't live through twenty-five years and two children and expect to be the same, my love."

She'd not looked at it that way before, not considered that she should wear the changes in her body proudly. His words rattled around in her brain, and she wondered why. How on earth had she missed this...this simple truth? Had she become so caught up in the marketing of what she should be that she'd forgotten everything she was, everything she'd achieved?

How ironic, that it'd taken a man -- her husband -- to point it out and make her see herself from a new point of view. Why on earth had I ever thought he was cheating? It seemed so stupid now that she'd been stewing over this for months, letting it invade and sour her life.

She'd not been as direct at putting her sexual wants and needs into words in the past, instead letting Aaron be the instigator, the aggressor. Her reticence was probably part of the reason their love life had dwindled right down to nothing -- but she needed to try harder, needed to show him how much his words meant to her.

"I miss our raunchy, sexy antics and the way we used to talk about all those far-fetched fantasies, and I do want those times back. I don't really know why we stopped, but right now I need you to make love to me, Aaron. Just you and me, no games...show me you really mean what you said."

The fierce look of desire on Aaron's face changed, softened. He moved from her body for a moment, and she watched him shuck his clothes. Everything landed on the floor in an untidy mess that wasn't at all typical of her husband.

Chapter Four

Naked and unashamed, Aaron stretched out his hand to his wife. When she placed her hand in his, he pulled her upright long enough to pull her dress and bra up and off.

How had he not realized his beautiful wife had become so disappointed in herself, in her body? *Have you actually been here to see, you dumb ass?* He'd not thought twice about his long hours, or how working so much might look to Emma. They were more than financially stable these days, and she was right -- he had plenty of staff who did their jobs with ease. But still, he owned the company, so when push came to shove he was the one ultimately responsible. If nothing else, today -- tonight -- had taught him one thing: he needed to learn to let go and delegate. Emma was right. It was their time, and they needed to enjoy it -- otherwise what was the point of doing all that work?

He'd adored her body through every moment they'd been together, but he'd been totally clueless to the fact that she'd thought his attraction was waning. Aaron figured he would still find her attractive at ninety-five; after all, it was the person inside he loved, not just the packaging she came in. He hadn't failed to take note of her comment about missing their raunchy, sexy antics, and the secret fantasies they'd spun under the covers as titillation, knowing they'd never be more than pure fantasy. With his conversation with Silas was still

fresh in his mind, he remembered nights where they had spoken of make-believe secret lovers smuggled into their bed, and how Emma had said she wanted to sate her curiosity about other men, though he wasn't sure if he dared to go to that sort of extreme outside of their make-believe.

When the last of the cloth whispered over her fingertips, Aaron flung the dress to the side and ran his fingers down her still upstretched arms, enjoying the way her breasts reacted as he stroked over the sensitive skin of her underarm. Her nipples, larger and longer than when they'd first made love all those years before, cinched tight, the dark skin of her areola crinkling up as his fingertip circled the sensitive area.

He dipped his head and, using his tongue, circled just as his fingertip had, before sucking Emma's nipple into his mouth. He hadn't lied. The changes in Emma's body didn't lessen his attraction to her, and in some ways the changes excited him. They'd practiced their fair share of positions over the years, and Emma on her knees before him, her rounded bum in the air, tempting him, was one of his favorite sights — one that with the addition of a few pounds had only gotten better.

But not tonight. Tonight he was going to make love to his wife for the first time in three very long months, face-to-face, and show her that she was everything he needed.

Emma's arms came down and she cupped her breasts, hiding behind her crossed arms. "What are you thinking?"

He pushed her arms away from her breasts and back down onto the bed, coming down beside her before pulling her onto her side to face him. Aaron lifted Emma's leg so it draped over his hip, opening her sex to him. His much too eager cock pressed against the heat of her pussy, and the liquid evidence that his wife was as ready as he made his cock slick.

"That I love you." He may have gotten many things wrong, but Emma's sigh as she pressed her mouth against his said this time he'd gotten it right.

Emma's hips rocked, and her pussy shifted along his cock until he sat at the entrance of her channel. Slowly, he pressed into her body and the sweet, slick heat of her pussy surrounded him. This wasn't the best position for maximum penetration or for the hard, pounding thrusts of missionary or doggy style; yet the slow, aching glide of their sexes was plenty enough when he could hold his wife in his arms and cradle her to him. For this moment he wanted them to face one another as equals, side by side, and the slow, aching rock of their hips moving together as they kissed was perfect.

He wasn't one to fool himself that he wouldn't go off like a rocket. No matter that his usual stamina was better than that, it *had* been three months. He moved Emma's arm from his waist up to his neck, looping her forearm around so she could wind her fingers in his hair -- he always liked that. It was like a gauge of how well he was doing; the more it stung when she pulled, the better her orgasm was going to be.

Now that his hand was free to roam, he began to stroke her body, down the more exaggerated curve of her hip, over the soft pooch of her belly, and through the curls covering her mound. He touched all those places he knew so well. The spots where just the edge of a fingernail drew a response, where a small circle of his thumb made her shake. The stroke of his fingertips along her clit made her moan.

Emma's body subtly tensed and she broke from their kiss. Her head burrowed under his chin as she panted against his skin.

"Come for me, love." His lips were still sensitive from their kiss, and as he spoke against her hair, the strands tickled.

Her gasped breaths became a light whimper, and Aaron felt the sting of her fingers curling in his hair. Emma's leg clamped around his hips, her thighs tightening as her muscles clenched in advance of her orgasm. Aaron hung on by the skin of his teeth, determined to see Emma through her orgasm before releasing his own.

A husky wail, the kind he hadn't heard for the longest time from his wife, rolled between them. Her back bowed, and her leg flexed, sandwiching his hand more tightly between them as her body shook.

Aaron lost himself in her orgasm, letting his own rush over him.

* * * * *

They lay together, still entwined, sated and quiet.

"Why's it been three months since we last did this, Em?" Aaron brushed an errant lock of damp hair from his wife's brow. "I've missed this. I've missed you, Em."

Having not moved apart, Emma still faced him, yet she tried to evade him. He'd only turned on a lamp when they'd come into the room, so the light was dim and Emma's face was in shadow, but he still saw the flush of red across her cheeks.

"Em?"

"Um..." Her tongue slicked across her lower lip, and then her front teeth followed behind before she sucked a small part of her lip into her mouth and worried it between her teeth. "The last couple of times, you didn't come -- you just sort of gave up halfway through and rolled over."

"Oh." Aaron remembered all too well. He'd felt humiliated that for the first time in his life he'd been unable to perform. "I never told you, but I went to the doctor right after that, and found out I had a urinary tract infection that was affecting my abilities, so to speak. He gave me some drugs, and a few weeks later I was as good as new, but then...well, by then we'd stopped speaking to one another like this in the bedroom." And Emma had obviously taken his inability to come as disinterest in her, when all along he'd been feeling the shame of not being able to fulfill his part of the act.

Emma's shoulders went tight and she tried to pull free of his embrace. "Damn you, Aaron. You don't get to keep that stuff from me; that's not fair, not after everything we went through with Joan." Her fist thrust out and into his shoulder, not quite able to punch him, but he got the point. She was angry, and now that everything had come out, he didn't blame her one bit.

He pulled Emma close, not letting her retreat. Emma's fists still pressed into his chest as if to compel him -- and her hurt -- away from her with brute force of will, but he didn't let her budge an inch. When she sniffed, Aaron wrapped his hand around her neck and pulled her lips to his, whispering against them, "I'm sorry, Em. I really, truly have learned my lesson. From now on, even if the doctor decides shoving a tractor up my arse is a good thing, you're going to be there with me, okay?"

He was cheating by resorting to humor, but he just couldn't handle it when Emma started crying -- especially when it was he who made her cry.

It took a few moments, but her lips softened against his, pressing against him with a small, not-quite-tear-filled sigh.

They kissed for long moments, their lips barely open -- chaste almost -- before Emma pulled back. "What about a Mack Truck -- you still want me there then?"

Chapter Five

Making love with Aaron had been wonderful. Falling asleep in his arms, reassured that he wasn't embroiled in an affair was even better; in fact, she'd walked around with a spring in her step for days after. Yet here it was, late Wednesday night, and she was in bed alone again. It seemed they'd fallen back into the patterns that had led her to believe her marriage was on the rocks.

The hours Aaron worked were only part of the problem. The other was that since Friday night, they'd only had sex once -- and that had been a perfunctory meeting of bodies after Aaron crept into bed late Monday night.

Just about every part of her body ached for her to find her husband, wrestle him to the ground, and make fast, bruising love to him. The total opposite of her usual desire to have Aaron be the one in control.

She felt a little uneasy in her skin, like it was about to burst open with the amount of sexual tension that flooded her system. It wasn't a case of wanting -- she *needed* more sex. She wondered idly if this was what it felt like for a teenage boy, all this sexual tension and desire just *there* at the drop of a hat, never really dissipating, just humming along in the

background waiting to be set loose. Nature really was a bitch to set men and women at their sexual peak at such differing ages.

All she wanted was to get back what they'd once had. Not the too comfortable, only-between-the-sheets, in the dark on Tuesdays, clockwork sex of the last few years.

Emma knew exactly when the change had started -- when Joan had been diagnosed with cancer. The four of them had been close; in fact, Joan and Silas had been closer to her kids than their real aunts and uncles were. So when the diagnosis had come down, it hadn't been just Joan's battle, it had been all of theirs.

What had started as an everyday mammogram had turned into a nightmare as the doctors found that her previous film had been misread. Being under forty, the doctors had only recommended Joan have a mammogram every two to three years; at forty-one, the cancer had been in her body well over three years, and it had been viciously invasive. At forty-three, Joan had lost her battle against the disease, and she, Aaron, and the kids had had to find a way to see Silas through losing the love of his life. It'd been a bittersweet time. While none of them wanted her gone, they'd all wanted her to find relief from the pain she'd suffered. What dignity the disease hadn't taken, the horrendous, hard-hitting treatments did their best to, and Joan hadn't deserved that.

It'd been around the time of her last round of chemotherapy and radiation when things had started to go south, sexually speaking, between her and Aaron. The three of them, Silas, Aaron, and Emma, had taken shifts with Joan, helping her get through the worst of the side effects. At the end of the day, sex had been the last thing on their minds, let alone getting it on in the shower, on the couch, or the washing machine.

Her cheeks flushed as she remembered the time they'd had sex on their old washing machine -- right before they'd gotten a new model. They'd had the old one since they'd gotten married -- in fact, it'd been a wedding gift from Aaron's parents. Although it'd been repaired many times over the years, the motor really needed replacing -- not an easy task on

a fifteen-year-old washing machine -- and it shook so much they felt it at the other end of the house.

The kids were both in school, and Aaron had come home for lunch. He'd had this look in his eye that said he was keen for another kind of main course than the one she'd prepared. He'd grabbed her from behind and turned her around, hoisting her up so she teetered on the edge of the kitchen bench, her bottom threatening to land in the sink full of soapy water she'd been washing dishes in. Then the washing machine had started into its spin cycle and Aaron broke away from their kiss with an evil, sexy little laugh. He'd pulled her down onto her feet, then tugged her into the laundry room where the washing machine was just getting into its shimmy shake with gusto.

"Up you go, love." Aaron had boosted her up onto the top of the machine then reached under her skirt to pull her panties down. Her skirt had been pushed up, along with her T-shirt, and he'd pulled her bra down to expose her breasts. Aaron's belt had clunked against the front of the machine as he'd unbuckled his pants, and the rasp of his zipper being pulled down had been extraordinarily loud over the whine of the appliance. The whole situation was as uncomfortable as hell, but then Aaron had pulled her forward and slid his cock, so hot and hard, deep inside her and she'd forgotten everything else.

It hadn't been a sweet, loving moment; it'd been all about the wham-bam-thank-you-ma'am. Other than her panties -- and even they'd still dangled from one foot -- they'd been fully dressed. Aaron's shirttails had hung loose, his tie skewed to the side, and his hair -- his one vanity that he wore a little long -- was all mussed up. The whole interlude had been... frantic. That was a good word to describe it, frantic, and hurried, and so damn satisfying. When the washing machine kicked into the last shimmying run of its spin cycle, vibrations had rung across her body, centered right where her bottom met the edge of the gyrating metal box. Aaron, with his thighs flush up along the front and his balls often pressing up against the cool metal, had groaned as the pitch of the vibrations changed, and

she'd moaned along with him. The washing machine was like a huge, body-sized vibrator that not only set her clit alight, but all the sensitive areas around her ass and thighs too.

Usually, Aaron got her off first, then sometimes as he was fucking her she came a second time, but it wasn't a regular occurrence. That day, they'd come together in a screaming crescendo, right as the machine had clicked to the "off" position and come to a juddering halt. Limply propping each other up, they'd been silent for a few moments. Then Emma had felt a rumble of laughter that Aaron had tried to hold in. She'd begun to giggle, and then their laughter had turned into all out guffaws. Neither of them had managed to get through Aaron's very hasty sandwich luncheon with a straight face, and when the machine was replaced a week later, they'd both watched it leave with a lustful sigh.

That was the sort of sex she missed. It wasn't even that it was particularly risqué, just that it was unexpected, lustful, and oh so very satisfying.

Emma reached for Aaron's pillow and pulled it against her body, then in a fit of anger and frustrated lust slammed her fist into the firm body of padding.

"Ouch! I hope that wasn't supposed to be me." Aaron's voice from behind her scared the bejeebers out of her. Totally immersed in her thoughts, she'd not even heard him enter the house, let alone the bedroom.

"Jesus, Aaron." Emma rolled onto her back, her hand pressing against her chest where her heart beat like she'd just finished a marathon. "Scare me to death, why don't you."

"Sorry, love." Aaron sat on the edge of the bed with a sigh, and she heard twin thuds on the floor as he kicked his shoes off. "I'm knackered. This week has been a killer, and it's only Wednesday."

Emma said nothing for fear of saying something she'd regret. Silhouetted by the light coming from the hallway, she saw him pause halfway through loosening his tie. All these years, and she still hadn't been able to convince him that it was perfectly fine to take his tie off in the car before he left the parking lot. She knew people thought him one of these

gentle, quiet types. If only they knew how wrong they were. Aaron was one of the most liberally proper people she'd ever known, quite an oxymoron. And she loved him for it.

He turned toward her. "Wanna turn the lamp on for me, honey? I've got something to show you." As little as three years ago she would have taken that request as a playful come on, and the something he had to show her would have been behind his zipper, but now? Now, she had no illusions that it meant anything more than he actually had something to show her. *How middle-aged adult they'd become*.

She rolled onto her side and reached for the lamp, clicking just once so it was on its lowest setting, and settled back onto the bed. Her husband looked tired, a little pale from too many days and nights spent inside his office, instead of outside enjoying the sunshine. He reached into the pocket of his jacket, which he must have laid on the bed before he sat down, and pulled out a hefty bundle of papers that had been tied with a red satin bow. "These are for you."

Now Aaron really had her curiosity going. But she knew what they said about that bad habit -- curiosity killed the cat. She fingered the bow a moment, feeling the soft satin against her fingers, before she tugged on the end. The slippery fabric slid apart easily, and the bundle of papers unfolded.

"What are they?"

"Just read." Aaron sounded tired, yet satisfied.

Emma picked up her reading glasses from where she'd left them beside the bed -- another thing that told her she wasn't as young as she used to be -- and glanced over the top page. Halfway down, she stopped and straightened the paper out better to catch the light, and started again from the top. This time she took her time, and really understood what these papers were.

Tears filled her eyes as exactly what Aaron had done sunk in.

"Em?"

Wonder, amazement, and gratitude even, all made her voice husky. "You really did it, didn't you? You made Grace a partner." She'd been trying to subtly hint to Aaron for nearly two years now that a partnership would be a good idea. Grace was in her early thirties, a powerhouse worker, and raring to take the next step in her life -- becoming partner, or starting up her own business. Although Emma didn't have a lot to do with Aaron's business in the day-to-day sense, she knew it well enough after twenty years, and Grace was good for business. Losing her would have been a blow.

"That's what I've been doing all week -- why I've been so late." Aaron stripped down to nothing as he spoke. He took the papers from her hands and left them on the dresser, before turning off the hall light then the lamp. Aaron pulled back the covers and slid in beside her, spooning in behind her as she turned onto her side. "I wanted to surprise you."

"You did."

"Good." Aaron's arm came up under her pillow and stretched out beside hers, while the other pulled her close into the shelter of his body. "I'd really like to make mad, passionate love to you right now." His voice was barely there; he was already more asleep than not.

Emma hugged Aaron's arm beneath her hers, cradling it between her breasts. His palm moved automatically to cup one breast, just as it always did, his response automatic. She felt the rhythmic puff of his breath against her neck as he succumbed to sleep, and smiled into the dark night. Sometimes what the mind and the body wanted were two different things.

Things had needed to change; Aaron had made sure they did.

He *had* taken what had happened between them on Friday to heart, and he'd set out to make changes happen. There would have been a lot to work through to have an agreement signed so quickly; no wonder he was tired. She only wished he'd told her. She felt a bit of a ninny for not believing in him as she should have. All her worrying had been for naught, stupid really, considering while she'd been in a snit, punching pillows, Aaron had been rearranging his life to an ultimate degree to give her what she...they needed.

She snuggled into the bed and the warm body behind her, and told her libido to take a hike for the rest of the night. Bringing Aaron's hand up to her mouth, she kissed his palm and whispered, "Tomorrow, love, tomorrow."

Chapter Six

He'd made the decision to offer Grace the partnership at some ungodly hour on Saturday morning, as he lay beside his wife, watching her sleep. For some reason, he'd woken up but not been able to drop straight back off again. It had been a pretty momentous evening, and he was still getting his head around the enormity of it all — Emma had thought *he* was having an affair. It was almost as shocking as her revelations about the way she saw herself.

He hadn't lied when he'd listed the things she saw as faults as some of the things he loved most about his wife. Maybe that made him some schmaltzy sap who should hand in his man card, but he didn't care. He loved every inch of his wife -- well, except for a few personal pet peeves, but she had some of those about him, too.

So far they'd had a very traditional relationship, for the most part. He'd worked while she'd raised their family, and they'd both done a great job of it. Their kids had their heads screwed on right; there had some been some teen up-and-down moments, sure, but once the hormones had settled they'd become productive members of the human race again. Had he and Emma swapped places, Aaron didn't think he would have succeeded anywhere near as

well. Why had he not thought about what Emma was doing with her days now that the kids were gone?

He'd felt like an idiot; even more so, now that he realized he could have nipped this all in the bud months ago, just by being truthful and not hiding his embarrassment over his sexual nonperformance.

Why the hell hadn't he told her about that doctor's appointment? He knew why, and it was a stupid reason -- his wife knowing someone had had their hand up his arse shouldn't have even rated as something to conceal. And look where it had gotten him: halfway to divorce and sexually frustrated -- both of them sexually frustrated.

As Aaron had stared into the darkness, he remembered little sound bites of conversations -- mainly from his talk with Silas and how Emma had missed their "raunchy, sexy antics."

Maybe Silas had given Aaron a way to bring him and Emma back together, sexually speaking -- a way of exploring their secret sexual desires. He couldn't deny being shocked at hearing what Silas and Joan had gotten up to, but really should he have been? There had been many times where he and Emma had whispered dirty little secrets to one another as foreplay, fantasies of whips and chains and faceless lovers that were safe because they knew none of what they discussed would ever come true.

He *would* fix their problems -- taking on a partner was only part of it. He needed to give Emma what she wanted when it came to their sex life; that was his job, part of his role in their partnership. They were only in their forties, for God's sake, not in their eighties. They were in their sexual prime, the kids were gone, and they had no great worries -- they should be shagging their way around the world. Except... *except he'd been an ass*.

He'd drifted back off to sleep making plans: first to offer Grace a partnership, and then to talk with Silas more about this whole swinging thing.

Aaron wasn't convinced it was the right thing to do, not after his reaction to Joel Markim just making a pass at his wife. But even if he didn't follow it up, maybe talking with Silas would expand his horizons a little and he'd find just the right something to set them back on the hot, raunchy sex track again -- which led him to today, standing at the top of the eighth hole again.

This time his game showed moments of inspiration, but was still a little wobbly -- his nervousness was showing. What was the man-etiquette for asking your best mate about swinging? Hell, until their game two weeks ago, they hadn't even discussed sex in anything more than the broadest terms, and he'd only readily coughed up about his problems because his anger had gotten the best of him.

Silas's shot flew true down the fairway, and he had a pleased smile on his face when he came back to the cart. He dropped his driver into his bag with a clunk, and took the passenger seat.

"So. I heard about Friday night." Silas had been caught out by a freak storm in Wellington, and his flight back to Auckland from New Zealand's capital city had ended up being rescheduled to Saturday morning.

Aaron was in the process of pulling out his club and didn't elaborate any further than an abstractedly questioning, "Oh?"

"Yeah, I hear that everyone was eating by the time you made it home."

"I was home before dinner was served...just." Aaron frowned as he spoke. "I was an idiot, and believe me, in a way I paid for it."

"Oh?" Silas was no fool. Asking Aaron outright what had happened was no way of getting his friend to open up -- that he'd given into his ribbing and opened up the last time they'd played still surprised him. It wasn't that Aaron was closed off; he was just a private

kind of guy -- half the reason why he and Joan had never said anything about their extracurricular swinging.

"We had a big dust up after everyone left." Aaron walked forward to his ball, and Silas waited.

"You'd never believe it." Aaron shook his head, sounding bemused. "She thought I was having an affair!"

The anger that had shortened Aaron's swing during their last game was missing -- although he wasn't quite back to normal; some tension still ran along his shoulders.

Silas waited until Aaron followed through on his swing before he replied, "She did?"

"Yeah. Turns out, while I was busy thinking she was having an affair, she was thinking the same of me. There were other things, too, but we've been working through them." Aaron slid his club home into the bag and sat back into the seat, before driving them up to where Silas's ball sat, smack dab center in the fairway.

"So the pair of you are back to square again?"

Aaron took his time answering, and looked as if he was forming his reply very carefully.

"Well, yes and no. Yesterday, Grace and I signed a partnership agreement, and besides my usual every second Thursday golf game where you pile drive me into the ground" -- there was a smile on his face as he waved at the ball perfectly placed in the fairway -- "I'll now be working only a collective four days a week. And starting today -- though Emma doesn't know it yet -- I've taken a solid three weeks off."

Silas turned to Aaron, surprised. "Hell! When you do it, you don't do it by halves, do you?" Aaron had worked long and hard over the years to make his business successful. Silas had known that, while it was a big part of who Aaron was, Emma and the kids took precedence. However, he was also a very responsible man, and sometimes needed reminding

he didn't have to be there, waiting to fix everything for everyone else. Finally acknowledging that he could let go and take on a partner was a big step.

"My priorities were fucked up. Emma's the one that keeps me warm at night, not my damn practice -- it just took me a while to remember that."

Silas extracted his chosen club and moved to his ball. Positioning his feet in an open stance, he flexed his knees slightly, settling into his body in preparation for his swing. He'd spent a lot of his free time on the course since Joan had died, finding solace in the mainly solitary sport. As he'd walked the fairways and greens, he'd contemplated his life and where it was now going.

Somewhere along the way he'd made peace with his life again. And while he wasn't ready to find someone else to share it with -- he wasn't sure he ever would be -- he wasn't averse to possibly having a sex life again. Which led him to thinking of something else he'd heard about Friday night: *Joel Markim*.

"But you said not everything got sorted out?" Silas swung, instinct taking over as his body followed through his stroke. The head of the club hit the ball with a satisfying *thunk* that proclaimed he'd hit it true, or damn close to it. Both he and Aaron watched the ball fly through the air and land with a small bounce before it rolled across the green.

"Damn it, Silas. Could you at least try not to show up my poor handicap?"

Silas turned to Aaron and saw his sarcastically raised brow and his smile. "Well, don't spend all fucking weekend in your office, then. You're an accountant, for fuck's sake; you're supposed to spend at least two days a week on the links. I thought it was a clause in the Chartered Accountants handbook or something."

Aaron laughed back at him. It was a long-standing joke between them. In fact, Aaron had done just that when Joan had been in the middle of her seemingly endless series of treatments. Emma had stayed with Joan, and the pair of them had sent them off for some

"guy time" on the golf course. Emma and Aaron truly had been his rocks in a storm over the last few years.

They pulled up adjacent to the manicured green, and Aaron chipped his shot in from the offside rough -- unlike their last game, the shot went true on the first try. Then they both putted -- the one part of his game Aaron did have a handle on.

As they walked back to the golf cart, there was a hitch in Aaron's step. Then he blurted out, "Can you tell me more about the swinging thing?"

Now it was Silas's turn for the hitch in his step. "Um, I guess so. Why?"

Aaron turned beet red before he answered. "One of the things that Emma said was that she missed the raunchy sex we used to have, and I want to do something to break us out of the only-in-bed-with-the-lights-off sex we've been having...or not having lately."

"Oh." *Aaron really was stepping out of his box lately, wasn't he*, Silas thought to himself. "About that not lately thing, was that part of the got sorted side of the equation?"

There was more than just embarrassment; there was chagrin on Aaron's face this time. "Yeah, I had a urinary infection, and I..." The rest came out in a rush. "A couple of times I couldn't seal the deal, and Emma thought I'd gone off her. I didn't tell her about it, you see, so she never knew about me seeing the doctor. Then, by the time I was back in fighting form...well, she wasn't really interested, and I didn't push it." Aaron shrugged then said quietly, "As for the other, Joan's passing affected us, too."

They both went quiet, reflective, as they moved onto the next hole, making their way down the fairway with only small talk about the game between them. After Aaron putted the ninth hole, Silas broke the silence.

"I don't mind telling you about it, but are you sure this is the right thing for you and Emma?"

"No, I'm not. But I didn't think it would hurt to find out more at least." Aaron paused a moment. "We used to do this thing, where we told each other our most outrageous fantasies,

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the ones we knew we'd never actually do. Emma once said that she was curious about sex with another man. I can't say I'm all gung ho for the idea, but maybe it will spark an idea for something else."

"Fair enough." Silas contemplated what to tell his friend, what information would be the most useful. After all, it wasn't like there was much to it when you came down to the nitty-gritty; it was just sex at the end of the day, right? Although, there were some protocols to be observed if they went the club route. The more he thought on what to say, the more uneasy he got about the whole thing.

Aaron was a private person. He never bragged to the guys, and he wasn't the man everyone thought was some sort of sex god. He was just Aaron, the guy you went to when you needed a shoulder. He was quiet and dependable, while at the same time still outgoing. The guy made acquaintances easily, but those who became his friends were friends for a lifetime, through thick and thin. He was the guy the leader of the pack went to for advice—that was one of the reasons his practice was so popular—people trusted him and so they recommended him.

Now Emma -- Emma was the epitome of the attractive, housewifely mother figure. But Silas had always thought there were hidden depths to Emma, a spark of wild sexiness waiting to be coaxed into a flame. He and Joan had wondered about telling Aaron and Emma about the partner swapping, but in the end, even though they felt somewhat attracted sexually to the other pair, they'd said nothing. Their friendship meant much more to he and Joan than a fleeting sexual encounter would have. Obviously they'd mistakenly judged Aaron and Emma's sex life as boringly vanilla, if Aaron was willing to at least contemplate swinging.

Damn, he missed sex. Not just sex, but good sex. Maybe...

"Can I suggest something? You can say no, and I won't be offended in the least."

"Sure."

Silas looked off into the distance. "I'm not ready for a new partner, let alone a wife, but to be frank, I really miss the sex -- it's been a while. Don't know if I'm really into the one-night stand thing, either." Silas looked down at his feet and futzed with the tip of his shoe with the putter he still had in his hand. "Instead of sex with a couple you barely know, what about having me as a third?"

"Seriously?" Aaron's surprise was understandable. "Why? Well, other than the sex."

"As your son would say, 'Dude, Emma's hot!"

Aaron looked confused and sort of outraged at the same time. "Well, yeah..."

"Your wife's a very sexy woman in her own quiet way, Aaron."

"She doesn't much think so at the moment. That was one of the things that came out during our big argument." Aaron tapped his putter up and down against the grass, his frustration and anger apparent. "I had no clue, no idea at all, that she felt so bad about her body -- that she thought *I* didn't like her body."

They stood there, speculating, standing awkwardly, neither one looking at the other.

"You think she's sexy?"

"Yeah, I've always thought so -- Joan knew." Silas rushed out a stuttering explanation.

"I-I mean...it wasn't like it was some deep, dark secret. She thought you were, too."

"What?"

"Your hair." Silas had been gray since his early thirties and kept his hair in a short buzz cut, the total opposite to Aaron's on the long side of short, curly, and still dark-as-night style. "She always liked your hair."

Aaron's posture took a turn for the really awkward, and now, of all the time during their conversation, he blushed. "I dye it."

"You dye it," Silas deadpanned, before he sniggered, trying to hold back his amusement. He failed, and gales of laughter burst free. He managed to choke out, "Destroy *all* my illusions, why don't you."

Aaron threw a punch out that landed on Silas's shoulder. "Shut the hell up, man."

Silas managed to get his wild laughter under control enough to take a seat on the golf cart. The course butted up against a farmer's property, so the ninth and tenth holes were spread apart more than usual, making the tenth hole the furthest from the front of the course. Both men were quiet during the five-minute drive.

Silas's suggestion had taken Aaron totally off guard. He was still only contemplating the concept, and he hadn't even gotten as far as the "who" part of the equation. Now that he'd had a chance to work his way around it and poke at it a few times, Silas made a lot more sense than some random hook up. He could trust his wife with Silas. No, that wasn't quite right -- he could trust Silas with his wife -- not like that bastard Joel Markim, who'd quite happily steal a man's wife out from under his nose.

"You know, it might just work."

"What?"

"You and Emma and me." Aaron paused as he negotiated around a fallen branch. He stopped beside it to reach out and pick it up. He threw it off the path and under one of the trees that shaded the area. "Even though I told her she had it all wrong, Emma doesn't think she's as sexy as she was when she was younger. What better way to show her, than with another man -- one that she trusts, not some stranger who might lie. Someone who thinks she's 'hot."

"You can trust me, Aaron."

"Let me think about it, okay?" He had to be sure about this. He needed more time -this was a big decision to make.

"No problem -- one thing to think about though."

"Mmm?"

"This isn't just about Emma -- well, it is, but it's about you, too, and me in a more minor way. If you want to put restrictions on things, I'm fine with that. In fact, in the scene it's encouraged to set out your limits ahead of time. One of the things you should think about is about you and me -- are you going to lose it if one of us touches the other?" Silas shrugged. "Look, I'm not saying I want to jump your bones or anything, but hands slip, and dangly bits have a habit of touching now and then."

"Oh." Aaron thought about it for a moment or two, and nearly laughed at his mental image of two men standing face-to-face, their dicks slapping up against one another, "cockfighting." He didn't think that was the direction Silas intended him to go with his warning. "I think I can deal -- just no sticking fingers where they don't belong."

With all the stuff Silas was throwing at him about swinging and offering to be the third if he decided to go ahead with it, it was kind of pleasing to watch him choke then go red in the face, and stutter out a rude exclamation in protest.

Chapter Seven

Emma was on cloud nine, and she doubted anything could knock her off her fluffy perch any time soon.

Thursday morning, Aaron had woken her with his mouth, her orgasm slowly rolling over her just as he slid inside her. She'd fallen back asleep, and found Aaron gone when she next woke. She hadn't been worried; it was his usual every second Thursday golf game with Silas, and they always took an early tee time. Silas and Aaron had a strong friendship she didn't begrudge either one for having. It had been built and made strong through births and deaths and everything that came in between.

She had been surprised though, when her husband arrived home at two in the afternoon looking all outdoorsy and invigorated from his game -- he usually changed at the club and went into the office.

But not Thursday. Thursday he'd stalked into the kitchen, swept her into his arms, and kissed her, not letting her up for air for what felt like hours. Emma smiled to herself as she remembered. Kissed wasn't nearly a good enough description; ravished was better. Then he'd carried her off to the bedroom and made love to her again, making sure to kiss and lick at every part of her body she thought looked bad. And after that? He told her he'd taken an

immediate three weeks off and to choose between Fiji, Tahiti, or Rarotonga, because they were going on holiday. In the end she'd panned the international travel in favor of renting a luxury house about four hours up North. The glass-fronted house fairly hung off a cliff above a wild and woolly western coast beach -- perfect for two people wanting time together to reconnect. She'd already started to pack the car with what they'd need -- even though they didn't leave until Monday morning.

"Why are you grinning like the Cheshire Cat, love?" Aaron's arm came around from behind and pulled her back into his body. His wineglass settled on the kitchen bench with a *clink* before his other arm looped around, creeping up to give her breast a covert squeeze.

"Aaron!" she hissed out under her breath, reminding him of their guest.

Aaron had been talking with Silas on Friday and had invited him for dinner the next night. Emma was up for entertaining Silas any night of the week, but for some strange reason tonight had been different. Bizarre even. It seemed every time she turned around there was either Aaron or Silas, being so very solicitous...and very touchy. She was all jittery waiting for the next time Aaron stroked her skin, and was it bad to admit Silas's sly touches were arousing her, too?

You took for granted around close friends all those little things that went by the wayside. Instead of just flopping in the chair, Silas had pulled hers out and seated her. Every time she reached for something from table, Aaron had stood up and served it to her, and God forbid her wineglass get lower than half full. That was half the reason cloud nine seemed so downy -- she tended toward being a happy drunk.

"What? Aren't I allowed to grope my wife?" That was one of their private jokes: who got to grope whom. Although, it was usually in private, not where someone -- even if that someone was their closest friend in the world -- could find them.

Aaron spun her around in his arms, reeling her in so her chest molded against his. Her head automatically went back, her face turning up to his, her lips waiting for his kiss. He didn't disappoint.

His lips brushed a small caress across hers before he pressed down firmly, his mouth moving over hers, coaxing her to open. His tongue dipped in and flicked along the inside of her lower lip, darting here and there as he tasted her. From long years of familiarity he knew she liked the gentle touch of his tongue, not to have it shoved halfway down her throat. She tasted the warm, fruity flavors of the wine they'd been drinking -- a Riesling that had pandered to her sweet-tooth palate. It mixed with the scent and tang that was Aaron's alone and made her insides all girlishly melty. That heat and excitement trickled outward, tickling at her clit, while her nipples pulled into tight little points that ached to be touched.

Aaron's mouth was firm, yet soft, stealing her breath away. As he wound one hand into her hair and hauled her tightly against his groin with the other, his hold on her wasn't just physical but ethereal, and it felt like his spirit embraced hers.

Emma threw what little she hadn't already into the kiss. Tunneling her fingers through the curls at the back of her husband's head, her leg came up and around his as she lifted onto her tiptoes to rub against the bulge that was so evident in his jeans. Who cared if they had a guest?

They moaned, almost in harmony. If Aaron felt anywhere near the level of greedy lust that she did, he'd have to be a very stoic man to hold in every sound.

A footstep echoed behind them, and they broke apart. Even though she'd already thrown away all her hostess politeness in favor of a hell-bent-for-leather, sexy-as-sin grope in the middle of her kitchen, her overt public display of affection senses kicked in.

"That was a pretty hot kiss. When you two get into it, you really get into it, don't you?"

Emma peered around Aaron and saw Silas leaning against the doorframe. An empty serving plate rested on the table -- she'd not even heard the clink of the china against the

wood when Silas had set it down. He appeared languidly alert as he nonchalantly leaned on his shoulder; his eyes looked slumberous, heavily lidded as he inspected them.

Emma buried her face in Aaron's chest, heartily embarrassed to have been caught in the moment. But as her cheeks flamed, so did her pride. Aaron was her husband, her lover, the man she'd chosen to spend the rest of her life with; why shouldn't she molest him in the middle of her kitchen? Why shouldn't she let her inner vixen out to play now and then? Why not be as brazen as those women she'd envied as they hung off of Joel's arm? Maybe all along she had wanted to let her missing sexy side out, instead of letting it get lost behind being a housewife and mother.

Emma's lips pursed, this time into a sexy little grin. She felt the transformation through every muscle in her face. Instead of the tension of embarrassment twisting her face into a frown, her forehead relaxed, and she felt those horrible crow's feet release. Her cheeks smoothed out as her eyelids went from wide with shock to a sexy droop.

She shifted and looked around Aaron's shoulder again. "I guess we do." She was pleased to see a little surprise flash across Silas's face as she bantered back. "What do you think? Surely at least an eight, maybe a nine, out of ten?" On her scale, the ten out of ten was reserved for the kiss Aaron had given her on their wedding day.

"Oh, I don't know, I think I've seen better." Silas's eyebrow went up, and his lips curled with mocking humor as his arms moved, crossing over his chest.

"You think you can do better?" Aaron's voice, slightly husky with arousal, challenged Silas to try. He moved behind Emma, taking her by surprise as he caught her arms behind her back so her breasts pushed up and out. Not quite moving at light speed, Emma registered the flare of desire in Silas's eyes, before her indignation at Aaron presenting her to their friend kicked in.

"Wha --" When Aaron cut her off, her eyes shot wide open again, her sexy little smirk gone in a flash.

"Why don't you give it your best shot?"

Silas was in front of her in an instant, his fingers cradling her cheeks, lifting her face up to his. "Don't mind if I do."

Her mouth was open, ready to protest, when Silas's mouth closed over hers. A totally new flavor of man burst over her tongue. There was the same sweet fruitiness of the wine, but the musky undertones were different, mellower than the sharper tang of Aaron's kiss. Silas's lips moved differently -- not as purposefully as Aaron's -- meandering over hers as he explored her mouth. He, too, dipped and dived with his tongue.

Emma studied all of this absently, her body still tense in reaction to the shock of Aaron offering her mouth to Silas. But there came a point where lust overtook her good sense, and she relaxed into it, letting her lips flow with Silas's, exploring him in turn. She'd leave the questioning until after and just enjoy it.

Aaron felt a heady mix of fear and a sense of control flood his system as he held his wife's hands in his.

Silas had filled him in on more of the swinging scene while they'd finished their game of golf on Thursday. After, he'd silently debated if it was the right thing to do. Once he'd made his decision late Friday afternoon, he'd contacted Silas.

They'd made an agreement that if Aaron wanted out before they made a move on Emma, Silas would back off, and that would be the end of it. If Emma showed more than token resistance -- after all, they were surprising her with this -- it was also an instant red light. As for how things went from there, they decided to be fluid. Aaron would look to Silas for any cues if he got lost, though Silas had reassured him that once they got past the initial stages, things would come naturally.

Aaron almost held his breath as he waited for the moment where Emma either panicked and fought loose or relaxed and went with the flow. When her arms went slack

and her fingers flexed beneath his and she moved a nearly imperceptible fraction toward Silas, he finally breathed deeply and then exhaled with a whoosh. *So far so good, now to let her in on the rest.*

Aaron scooped the hair off the nape of Emma's neck, exposing the delicate and sensitive flesh before he leaned over and whispered into her ear. "I don't know if that kiss was better than mine, but I'll have to agree with him that it's as hot as hell to watch."

Knowing it was one of the things she lovingly detested because of the way her body reacted, Aaron gently scraped his stubble along the sensitive nape of Emma's neck. He chuckled as her whole body shivered and she tried to edge away from him, only to come up hard against Silas, who still hadn't let her up for air.

Aaron nipped at her earlobe before he whispered, "Before the party" -- they all knew which one -- "I confided in Silas that I thought you were having an affair, and he told me something pretty surprising in return. Did you know that he and Joan played around with other couples? I didn't." His tongue curled around her lobe, tickling at the delicate skin behind her ear. "Every now and then, they fooled around with another couple to keep things fresh in bed, to keep all those raunchy, sexy antics you've been missing alive. I remembered that you'd whispered to me in the dark of the night how you wondered what another man might feel like, taste like, and I thought you might enjoy something similar.

"I know you've thought about it. It's only human to wonder about these sorts of things, but what if we made it real, Emma, just for one night?" He kept his mouth close to her ear, but moved his body, rubbing his groin against her bottom so she could feel his arousal. "Two men, there just to do your bidding. Two sets of fingers to stroke you, two tongues to tease you, two hard cocks...well, they might be a little more interested in pleasing themselves, but I think you get the idea." Aaron pulled Emma's hands down until he could press them against the bulge of his cock -- just in case she hadn't gotten his earlier message. "Imagine the strength of two lovers; one man to love you slow and sweet, the other to pound you until

you scream. And just in case you've forgotten, I know just how wicked your mouth is; there'll be no needy, empty feeling when you're being filled from both ends."

Dual moans came from the pair, and Aaron choked back one of his own as Emma, no matter that he held her hands behind her back, managed to slide his zipper down and reach into his pants and wrap her hand around the knit brief-covered hard length of his cock.

Silas broke away from his kiss with Emma, and she slumped back into Aaron's arms with a giant, spine-stealing rush of air. Silas took an uncertain step back; his breathing seemed to be working overtime too, as his chest heaved.

Aaron turned his wife back to face him again, holding her hands loosely in his. "Say no, and we'll forget the last ten minutes or so and go back to the lounge, finish our wine, and watch some bad, Saturday night, made-for-TV movie." He hoped she didn't say no, or he might, for the first time in decades, have to retreat to the bathroom for a quick wank to get comfortable again. "But if you think you might like to give it a try, we'll move it to the bedroom."

Emma stared at him -- goggled at him actually -- both her mouth and eyes wide and blinking as she searched for something to say.

"You..." She gulped. "We..." A finger pointed and gestured between the three of them. "Us?"

Silas had anticipated Emma perfectly, and as she stumbled back a little, fumbling as she reached for the table, he tucked one of the kitchen chairs behind her. She fell into it with a jumble of uncoordinated arms and legs, and an awestruck "Wow!"

Aaron adjusted himself somewhat so he could bend and went down into a crouch, hoping nothing embarrassing popped out when he did so. Sweeping Emma's hands into his, he massaged them slightly; not quite chafing them as he might with a person who'd had a shock, but more of a sensual press and glide that curled around her hands and fingers. "Have we shocked you?"

"Hell yes!" Emma was a contradiction of physically displayed emotion. On one hand, Aaron saw nipples that poked at her shirt, and her deliciously red, puffy lips, made so by both his and Silas's kisses; on the other, her cheeks were pale behind the bright flag of pink that colored the apples of her cheeks.

Silas hitched himself onto the edge of the table, sitting on one hip letting one leg dangle down while the opposite remained on the floor for balance. Emma licked her lips as if tasting them while her gaze flicked from him to Silas, then back again. Aaron let the silence ride.

"You..." Emma cleared her throat. "You want to share me with Silas?"

Aaron heard curiosity in her voice, but also it was laced with a tinge of hurt -- one thing he did not want Emma feeling. "Not that way, love. Think of it more as all of us sharing something with each other. Silas is giving a little of himself to us, and we are giving a little of ourselves to him."

Silas reached out and tucked a stray lock of hair behind Emma's ear, drawing her attention back to him. "It's not about Aaron 'giving' you to me. In fact, when Joan and I did swing -- and it wasn't something we did all the time, only once or twice a year at the most for a short time -- we found a totally new appreciation for what we had with each other. While most encounters were sexually satisfying, it was the way we came together afterward that made it so much more than just a sexual fling. Joan called it her extramarital affair with her husband; that we were cheating on each other with each other. It's not for everyone, Em. It worked for Joan and me because we did it together. It was just sex with the other people, but between just us, it was making love." Silas shrugged, and his smile was a little off kilter. "We would never have done it separately, but now..."

"We miss her, too." Emma's hand moved from Aaron's and rested on Silas's thigh, and though Aaron was sure she meant it to comfort Silas, a different kind of strain flickered on his face. Emma noticed as well, and a coy little smile slipped out. "But you also miss something else too, right?"

Aaron was finding it fascinating to watch the interplay between the two of them. Silas was so hopefully serious, while Emma was pushing free of her shock and finding that inner vixen he knew was inside, just hidden. She hadn't outright said yes -- Emma wasn't the kind of person to jump in feet first without looking -- but he could see she was edging toward a yes verdict versus a no. And he would never, ever presume to push her. That wasn't the way their sexual partnership worked.

"Well, it wasn't for totally altruistic reasons that I offered to be the person you explored with... I-I haven't..." Silas flushed. "Not for a while. Seriously, Em, you're a sexy woman -- absolutely no coercion or hesitancy involved."

"Oh." Emma looked at the floor and blushed.

Aaron almost felt jealous of his friend for being the one to give Emma the small insight that other men found her attractive, but he understood it was a matter of distance and perspective. He was her husband; the rules said he was supposed to find her attractive -- or at least give the illusion of it. Silas, while a close friend, hadn't seen her naked every day for the last twenty-five years. In other words, the gloss hadn't had a chance to wear off for him. Aaron could swear 'til he was blue in the face that he loved every inch of Emma's body, but it was the comments of friends and strangers that made an impact. He didn't feel angry about it; Emma was as human as the next person, and if nothing else, the human condition craved acceptance.

"Em? What do you think? Should I go get the blankets and get ready to sleep on the couch for being an ass, or are you going to take a risk on us two old guys to give you the night of your life right out of your fantasies?" Aaron's breath caught as he waited. *I really need to stop doing that; it's probably not good for me*. But his breathing stayed shallow anyway -- he hadn't realized until this moment that he wanted this not only for Emma, but for himself as well.

Emma's head tilted to the side. "And if I decide halfway through I want to stop?"

"Hopefully, you'll be so well satisfied you won't want to, but the moment you say no, all hands come off, clothes go on, and that's the end of it. The only thing I want you to feel is pleasure, Em. You make the rules. If Silas only gets to touch, or if you don't feel comfortable letting him into your body, then that's what happens. This is about me finding slightly kinky ways of keeping you satisfied, not scaring you or making you unhappy."

Aaron leaned in, his knees creaking a little from holding his crouch for so long, and cupped his hand behind his wife's head. She came easily when he pressed, and her lips met his with a sense of what he hoped was eagerness. He kissed her hard, asserting himself, wanting to assure her of how much he loved her -- would always love her -- before he pulled away to look right into her eyes. "This is pretty big and totally out of the blue, I know. I don't doubt I can keep you happy all on my lonesome, love, but there's this perverse little something inside me that thinks seeing you being worshipped by another man, while knowing you're all mine, might be kind of hot."

He saw the moment Emma stopped analyzing and took the leap. There was a glimmer in her eyes that became a full-blown sparkle.

"Only kind of hot? I'll have to work on that, then."

He kissed away the sly, sexy little grin on her face, and then rose to his feet with a little groan. Aaron reached out to his wife and pulled her into his arms. "Why do I have a feeling you might wear both of us out, Em?"

Chapter Eight

The men followed behind her as she walked to the bedroom; their bedroom -- hers and Aaron's. She couldn't quite believe that in a just few minutes, her bedroom would have not two, but three naked bodies rolling around on their big king-sized bed.

Thank God I tidied up in here today.

The totally inane thought made her giggle, though she tried to hide it behind her hand lest Aaron and Silas think she was becoming a little hysterical. *Too late*.

"Em?" Aaron was at her shoulder. "Having second thoughts?"

"No, not yet at least. Umm...I was just thinking that it was good I tidied up in here today. Then it hit me at how ridiculous a thought that was."

Silas approached her from the opposite side. "It's okay to be nervous, Emma. I'm pretty sure that Aaron and I are just as nervous as you. This is new for me, too."

That threw her for a second. Aaron had said he'd come up with idea based on Silas's suggestion, but then it clicked: it'd always been he and Joan. This time, he had a significantly different role than before.

The pair of them had thrown her into the deep end with their little sexual coup, so her brain was both stalled on the fact that she was about to have a threesome, and running a mile a minute as it assimilated it all. Sure, she and Aaron had shared kinky little fantasies with one another over the years, but she'd never thought they might ever become reality.

One thing that became clear after Silas's reassurance was that she had a much greater role to play than either man realized. There was so much she didn't know about swinging. The concept was so huge, and she didn't quite know how she felt about it, but she knew in her heart of hearts that this was a big moment for Silas. It was the first step in truly moving on after losing Joan. And if there was one thing she knew about the wonderful friend she'd lost, it was that she wouldn't begrudge Silas this.

She and Joan had many heart-to-hearts during the long days of recovering from her treatments. One of the secrets Joan had spilled was that there had been a time she and Silas had tried some kinky stuff, though she'd not really elaborated. She'd also made Emma swear to help Silas however she could to move on. *Don't know if this was quite what she had in mind, though*.

"So...what do we do now?" Emma first looked to the right, to Aaron, and then left to Silas, waiting for their guidance. Her deepest, darkest fantasies were one thing, but how they became a reality was another.

"I think a few less clothes might be in order."

Oh, yes, how silly of her to forget. "You're sure we can't do this clothed and in the dark?"

"Ohhh no. That's so not going to happen, Em." Emma decided Aaron's chuckle was kind of sinister.

Silas's wasn't far from evil, either. "Not in this lifetime."

Emma laughed, and she let it roll through her body, loosening her muscles. She knew when she was defeated -- not that she'd expected to get close to winning the lights-on-lights-off debate. Her low laughter bubbled to a stop as Aaron stepped in front of her and backed her into Silas, who'd stepped in behind her.

"Now...those clothes." Dark eyes looked down at her, and she saw the strong, take charge man of their younger years. Aaron was a fairly quiet man, introspective even, but he'd once had a totally take charge attitude in the bedroom. She'd missed the recklessness of the encounters of their youth as they'd aged, but they'd changed so much since those days when they'd gotten so carried away with one another. They weren't the same people, so why wouldn't their sexual selves change right along with their personalities?

There'd been flashes of that dominance over the more recent years, but not like in those first ten years or so. There was something to be said for a man who treated you as an equal, but once that bedroom door was closed turned into a bit of a Neanderthal, demanding this and that, and giving you the most splendid orgasms as he did. Just the thought of Aaron getting all dark and dominant on her again made her tummy stop tingling from nervousness and begin to burn with a heat that forced its way into her blood and rushed down into her pelvis.

Aaron made short work of the buttons on Emma's shirt, but it was Silas, who stood a good head and shoulders taller than her, who reached forward and pulled the fabric apart. He made his approval for what he'd just bared known.

"Now that's a view I wouldn't mind seeing every day." The appreciation in Silas's voice embarrassed her.

Silas quickly pulled the shirt down her arms and off. He spread his fingers wide as they came to rest on her shoulders. His hands sat heavy, as Silas let her get used to the feel of him. Then his fingers trickled down over the bare skin of her shoulders, fleeting little touches that left tingles in their wake. Aaron reached up and slid the straps of her bra down her arms while Silas released the catch at her back. The cotton and lace slid off easily, leaving her bare.

"How lucky for me; I *do* get to see it every day." Aaron leaned in and nuzzled at her neck, and goose bumps raced along behind the tingles as Silas's arms came around her ribs and under her breasts. Silas's touch was gentle as he caressed her, the weight of her breasts

full in his hands as his fingers gently kneaded them. She cried out at the sharp pinch as his fingers plucked at her nipples.

"That's a lovely sound, Emma. You need to make more of them just like that."

Aaron stepped away, and Silas pushed her toward the bed. She turned and sat on the edge, not sure what to do next.

Both men reached for their shirts and pants, and Emma wasn't sure where she should look. Aaron had been her only lover, so she was insanely curious about Silas's body, but it felt wrong to look her fill with her husband standing there. Aaron caught her furtive, fleeting glances to the side and smiled.

"It's okay to look, love." Aaron's shoulder jerked toward Silas. "But how about you get rid of those pants while you do it?"

Damn good idea, really. Emma leaned back onto the bed and wiggled her hips out of her pants and pushed them down, leaving her panties behind for the moment. Once she had her pants down to her knees, she absently kicked them off while she turned her attention back to Silas.

He was taller than Aaron, and it showed somewhat in his body shape. Silas was leaner, and she saw that it played out in other parts of his anatomy. He was very aroused. His cock was longer and narrower than Aaron's thicker width and had a slight upward curve to its length. Silas had a full head of gray hair, and his body hair followed suit color-wise. With only a smattering of hair that ran in a trail down his belly to finally meet the hair around his cock, Silas was much cleaner cut than Aaron with his thicker, darker chest hair.

Silas moved toward her, his cock bobbing slowly as he walked; when she licked her lips, he gave a soft groan. "You'll have to forgive me if I end up going off like a rocket; it's been a while...a *long* while."

She lay sprawled out over the bed, not feeling all that elegant as she tried to suck in her belly and keep her boobs up. Silas stepped between her knees as they dangled over the edge of the mattress and reached for the sides of her panties. Before he touched, he looked to Aaron, his brows raised in question. Aaron gave a brief nod as he granted permission for Silas to go ahead. The plain cotton was slowly stretched so Silas could ease them over her hips. He took a step back so he could work them over her feet, but quickly pushed back between her legs so they splayed wide, exposing her to his gaze.

His long fingers teased along her thighs, stroking up toward the crease of her hips and her exposed pussy with small, circling movements. He watched her the whole time, gauging her reactions from her eyes and face, repeating the strokes that affected her the most.

"May I touch you -- kiss you -- here?" His hand hovered over her mound, waiting for her permission to touch. She gave it with a small nod and a sigh, and his fingers stroked along the outer edges of her labia.

His fingers came away slick, and he raised one to his mouth and sucked the shine off it with a sexy smile. He wasn't so crass as to actually make an "mmm" sound, but the way his eyelids dipped, heavy and sexy, said it all for him. Silas's fingers dipped back into her sex, opening her wider, exposing her as intimately as he could. His hands moved, circled around to hold her hips as he knelt, going to the floor between her thighs. He tugged, and she slid along the silky coverlet until her pussy was only centimeters from his mouth. Hot pants of breath washed across her cropped curls -- she didn't shave, but she did like things neat -- before a tongue, long and lean like the rest of Silas, darted out and dipped into her core. She felt the rumble of a small growl as he closed right in, his tongue curling around her clit while his fingers coaxed her to relax with gentle movements.

Deep inside her belly the tension wound higher; the tender lap of Silas's tongue was similar to Aaron's, yet not. The way he moved, the places he touched felt new, invigorated.

Emma felt the spiral begin; her toes clenched and her fingers dug into the coverlet. It was amazingly arousing to have Silas perform an act so entirely intimate, but there was something missing. She looked behind Silas and saw her husband, his hand on his cock, stroking slowly and then twisting at the head as he completed every exact movement along

his penis. He watched her watching him, and she saw the stark arousal on his face and fell a little further into the spiral that circled her body, centering in her sex.

That was what was missing -- her connection with Aaron.

"Touch your breasts for me, Emma."

She did as Aaron asked, and his jaw went rigid, his eyes hard and full of lust.

"Pinch your nipples." She hesitated at the command. "I know you like it. Do it."

The authority she'd craved rang in his voice, skittering across her skin as it echoed in her ears. She dared him with her eyes, challenged him to come to her as her fingers reached for the hard tips of her breasts. He moved to the bed, kneeling on the mattress beside her before trapping her wrists in his hands.

Aaron pulled her hands above her head, and then angled in so his lips brushed hers. "Tease."

The hairs on Aaron's chest abraded her nipples, driving the tender ache she felt there higher. She needed his mouth on her breasts to ease the need that had begun to torment her. Aaron swapped his dual hold on her wrists to his left hand and slanted his body, dragging his chest along hers until his lips met her breasts. He kissed and tongued his way down the slope of her right breast, his free hand reaching out to plump and knead at the other as he did. She arched her back, eager to feel his mouth around her sensitive areola and nipple.

The heat of Aaron's mouth left her skin, and she cried out, missing it instantly. She tried to follow him with her body, twisting and arching, but Silas held her hips tightly, not letting her get away. Silas doubled his efforts against her clit with his talented tongue at the same moment Aaron sucked the tight flesh of her nipple into his mouth. He drew as much of her breast in as he could before releasing her. He then latched back onto her nipple with a fierce suction edged with the sharp but gentle rasp of his teeth along her skin.

The effect on her body was instantaneous. A path from Aaron's mouth on her breast to Silas's at her clit blazed bright and arced with intense pleasure as her back bowed. With bizarre synchronicity, Silas suckled her clit in time with the hollowing of Aaron's cheeks as he drew hard on her flesh.

Silas's fingers slipped into her, and she couldn't have cared less that her husband's fingers weren't the ones that crooked, catching the edge of a spot that sent a flame of sensation through her pussy.

"Oh, God!" The muscles in her sex tightened, but it still wasn't enough; her release sparkled on the horizon, just out of reach. A whimper escaped before a hoarse, whispered "more."

Her nipple popped from Aaron's mouth, and he blew a hard breath of air across the wet surface he'd left behind. Emma hadn't thought her nipple could get any tighter than it already was, but it somehow did as the air cooled the heat Aaron had generated.

"Fuck her, Silas; give my wife something to come on."

Aaron's body blocked her view, but she felt Silas's shoulders brush against her thighs as he got to his feet. The width of his hips pressed in, and his hands curved farther around, getting a hold on her bottom to lift and tilt her pelvis. She felt his length work along her cleft, sliding among her juices as he lubricated his length.

"Please, don't tease, Silas."

"I'm not. I just don't want to hurt you when I do this." Silas's hips moved, he thrust, and then he was *there. Oh, God, right there!* She yelled the words in her mind, not sure if they'd articulated as more than a scream of pleasure to Aaron and Silas. One hard stroke had forced Silas's length deep inside her, and it felt delicious. The sparkle on the horizon rushed toward her as she spun faster toward her peak.

Chapter Nine

Silas withdrew from the slick softness of Emma's pussy then thrust again, sparing no quarter as he let his usual tenderness drop away and exposed the desire that he'd long held in check. His cock was fit to burst as he shoved into her heat again; he was barely able to keep his rhythm together. He licked his lips and tasted Emma's musky essence once more; he was determined to hold out to feel her come on his cock.

Damn, it'd been a long time since he'd felt a woman like this. He'd known exactly what he'd been missing, but this really hit it home. Despite the burning sensation of his impending orgasm that centered in the small of his back, there was pang in his heart that Joan wasn't here to enjoy this as well. He didn't shove the memory away, but gently set it aside -- Emma deserved his full concentration.

Aaron still held his wife's hands above her head and she arched up to him again, her body begging him for more attention. Silas pumped his hips, relishing in the drag and release as Emma's pussy welcomed him, and then demanded he stay.

He'd totally underestimated Emma's and Aaron's sexualities. Aaron was a total wildcard. They'd walked through that bedroom door, and a switch had flicked -- Aaron, the quiet, reflective man was sloughed off, and Aaron, the imposing dominant took his place.

Silas wasn't into being dominated himself, but watching it play out between Aaron and Emma? Shit, talk about sexy and hot.

He'd had his face in Emma's pussy at the time, but her body had let him know the moment she'd made a connection with Aaron -- just as he'd hoped it would based on his and Joan's experiences. The sexual tension between them had ratcheted up a hundred percent when Aaron had starting throwing out orders and Emma had lobbed her silent challenge right back.

Emma's pussy worked along his length as it rhythmically constricted, tightening and releasing, driving him insane as he tried to hold his orgasm back. His balls pulled up tight to his body, and Silas wondered if he'd self-prophesized earlier when he said he would go off like a rocket.

Aaron, good old Aaron, saved him from embarrassment when he growled out, "Roll Emma over, Silas, I need to feel my wife's hot little mouth on my cock."

Jesus. For a guy who'd been so nervous that he might be doing the wrong thing, Aaron wasn't hesitant about embracing the reality of Emma's fantasy.

Emma was at the point where they could have moved her body to Timbuktu as long as they promised to keep fucking her on the way. Her body was flushed with color, her breasts red, scuffed from the slightly rough attention Aaron had paid them. She was liquid and tense all at once -- malleable from the attention she was being paid, yet wound tight as a spring as they brought her ever closer to her first climax. Silas was sure it would be only the first of many before the night was through.

The moment Silas withdrew, Aaron bodily lifted his limp wife, rearranging her on her belly. Emma gathered her knees under her and presented that fine bum of hers up for Silas, all the while greedily reaching for Aaron, who slapped her hands away gently. Silas didn't have to think twice before he fit himself back between Emma's legs. This new position gave

him greater depth, and he knew the slap of his balls against Emma's clit would make her feel good.

"No, baby. You know the rules."

For all his experience, Silas was taken aback when Emma allowed Aaron to rub the head of his cock over her mouth, then tap against her lips with his dick until she opened. Her tongue flicked out and over the head of Aaron's cock, making the man groan -- Silas didn't blame him.

Emma balanced on her hands and knees, and Aaron threaded his fingers through her hair as he guided himself into her mouth. With his hand on the back of her head, he directed her movements: small, shallow sucks interspersed with longer, deeper, slack-cheeked slides.

Goddamn! Emma sucked cock like a pro. He was shocked, yet titillated, and the sight made it doubly hard to rein in the orgasm that was determined as all hell to explode forth.

Silas looked away from the tableau and concentrated on what he had to do. He snaked a hand around Emma's hip, placing his fingers right on the little nub of flesh his mouth had been so recently teasing. A slightly choked wail sounded out as Emma bucked back onto his cock, her pussy clamping down around him as it had before they'd shifted positions.

"That's it, Em. Ride me, girl. Work my cock in that hot little snatch of yours." He thought she might balk at the dirty language, but she only redoubled her efforts. Aaron was doing little more than guiding his wife's mouth and making sure she didn't gag. He looked to be enjoying every minute of his wife's attentions.

"That's it, baby. Come for us." Aaron's fingers curled gently to stroke along Emma's cheek. "Silas needs to remember how good it is to have a woman come on his cock." Emma's body strained as she sought to do exactly that, though Silas held no illusions that it had anything to do with pleasing him. She was well past that point; it was all about her right at that moment. Hell, he didn't blame her.

Silas kept his hips pumping and his fingers playing along her clit to keep Emma on the edge, but it was when Aaron leaned in and laid a resounding slap on her arse that Emma finally fell over the crest she'd been riding. Her channel clamped down around the length of Silas's cock, and he fairly howled -- loving every satisfying moment of it -- tapering out to a stuttering groan as he finally let go and came so hard his knees collapsed beneath him.

Aaron watched his friend lose all control of his body and slump down onto his hands, bracketing Emma's hips. He felt a perverse satisfaction that Emma -- his wife -- had been the one to bring Silas so low...in a totally, sexually replete sense of the expression.

He concentrated on his own release now; the way Emma's mouth wrapped around his cock, the exquisite way she sucked, the way her tongue lashed, curled, poked, and lapped at his slit and the ultrasensitive underside of his cockhead. How beautifully she gave herself up to him, trusted in him. Why had he been denying this side of himself in the bedroom for so long?

The rasp of Emma's lower teeth, so gently applied along his shaft, was the final straw for his control. His hand, twisted in her hair, held her still so he could make those last few frantic strokes into her mouth. Cum fairly boiled down his shaft and into Emma's mouth where, despite still quaking from her orgasm, she took all his seed with ease, suckling his cockhead slightly until he pulled free with a replete groan.

Emma's arms wavered, surely aching from holding herself up on them throughout her own release. Aaron looped his forearms under her arms and pulled, dragging her away from Silas and along his body, so she draped over him when he fell back onto the bed.

He stroked her, his fingers dawdling over the areas he knew from years of loving her were most sensitive after she'd come. Her skin prickled as he lightly trailed his fingernail over her hip and felt a tiny shudder as the sensation sank deeper. Her nipples still poked at him; he felt their hard little points against his chest as she lay over him. Lethargy still hadn't

taken hold of her body, and he knew Emma was still keen for more -- although he had his doubts about his and Silas's stamina. He very nearly chuckled at the thought of his wife running rings around not one, but two men, but settled for a sated sigh instead. There was an echo from another satiated body that lay splayed over the end of the bed.

"You still feeling a little itchy, honey?"

"Mmhmm..." Emma's hummed agreement faded away to a hushed gasp as Aaron's fingers played lower, dipping into her slit where Silas had so recently been. Her clit was distended, and she jerked when he skated too close to the engorged flesh. But as he stroked around the swollen bud, her hips rolled and she pressed down against his thigh, capturing his hand between them.

There was a click -- a bottle top opening -- that made him look for Silas. He held a bottle of lotion he'd retrieved from the dresser, the brand that was Emma's favorite. Aaron bit back a smile when Silas sniffed the open cap and looked pleased that he'd managed to find the one that smelled the most like Emma on the first try.

As Aaron watched his friend, his fingers still fiddled in Emma's cunt, firm, but slow as they coaxed a certain tune from his wife. Silas bent one of Emma's legs so her calf and foot went up in the air. He held Emma's leg against his chest so he could squeeze a dollop of the cream onto his hands. He rubbed the lotion between his palms for a moment, then spread his slick hands out over Emma's foot, smoothing the cream, before digging into the tender soles of her feet with his thumbs.

Emma's whole body tensed for a moment, and then with a deep, almost tortured groan that sounded as if she'd just tasted the most delicious chocolate, she went boneless and her breathing became ragged.

"Oh, God!"

Aaron couldn't have orchestrated a more perfect move for Silas right at that moment. Emma had sworn in the past that a good foot rub had potential to be better than sex -- what could be more perfect than sex and having her feet rubbed?

Aaron left Silas to it, and concentrated on his wife.

"How does it feel, love?" Emma's reply was unintelligible, just a hoarse moan from deep down in her throat.

"You have no idea how beautiful you looked, lying there being worshipped by Silas's mouth. You looked like a goddess accepting a token from a supplicant, Silas down on his knees as he offered to you." He alternated the pattern he stroked on Emma's pussy. "I felt so damn jealous that he was the one getting to touch you there, just like I am now."

There had been a few brief touches along Aaron's legs indicating that Silas had moved from Emma's feet, and up to her calves and thighs. She whimpered and ground down on his fingers when Silas reached her ass. Silas pressed down hard, scooping and manipulating the flesh as he massaged firmly enough to press Emma's pussy down even harder onto Aaron's thigh. She squeaked as Silas spread her cheeks wide. His head ducked, and using Emma's squeak as a guide, Aaron figured his friend had either blown a cool puff of air over her back entrance, or licked her. Either way, that was as close as Silas would be getting to her arse—that was his, and his alone.

Emma's face tilted up to his, searching for his kiss, and he was happy to oblige. She moved up onto her hands, and came up over him, her lips not losing contact with his as she brought her legs up to straddle him. Her hips worked, rocking her back and forth over the underside of his cock.

Surprisingly -- he didn't fool himself, he was forty-seven, and things weren't as right-back-up-and-at-'em in the hard-on department as they once were -- his dick was still hard, and getting harder still as Emma worked her pussy up and down his length. She pushed up, her hands moving to his chest, and threw her head back, her eyes closed as she ground

against him. Her breasts thrust out between her stiff arms, and he curled up so he could pull a reddened nipple into his mouth. He sucked hard, pulling her nipple with him as he fell back to the bed, letting the little red berry go with a pop before he pulled too far back. There was a yelp, and his wife jerked her head back and stared down at him, looking put out. Slowly, as she watched, he did it again, knowing full well it was only just enough pain to be pleasurable.

His hands had moved to her hips when she'd risen over him — perfect for easily reaching around to lay a sharp slap to her buttock. She hissed at him, yet she didn't stop him when he left a matching print burning on her other cheek.

"If you're going to ride me, love, do it right." Emma gave a slight snort of indignation, but he chose to ignore it because she did as he asked and rose up. Her hand held his shaft in place as she slowly sank back down onto him. She fit around him so snug, so hot and slick -- perfect. She always had been.

He nearly didn't hear the click of the bedroom door closing. Other than he and Emma, the room was empty -- Silas had made a quiet exit, leaving the two of them to their moment. He'd been prepared to wake to Silas on the other side of their bed.

Aaron silently sent his thanks to his friend for his exquisite judgment of the moment as he rolled them, tucking his wife under him, enjoying the way her hips cradled him, and took control.

"It's just us, love." He bent his head down and nipped at her earlobe. "Now it's my turn to play."

Chapter Ten

Sunlight streamed through the wide dining room windows and warmed Silas's back as he sipped at his tea and contemplated the previous evening.

Now he knew why Aaron had been able to say so easily that a stray hand, limb, or brush of a hard cock wouldn't worry him too much -- he was so damn dominant in the bedroom he had no reason to get squicky over something that was just plain old inevitable. It was just part of the process, so why be scared of it? Aaron had no doubts whatsoever about his sexuality, Silas was sure. It also explained why he'd been so shocked about the swinging. Sharing just wasn't a dominant man's idea of fun, although Silas was positive Aaron had enjoyed it.

"Mornin'." Feet shuffled over the tiled kitchen floor, and Aaron reached for the switch of the electric jug. Fresh out of the shower, his hair dripped, and he wore a thick toweling robe.

"It's hot; I just made mine." Silas lifted his cup so Aaron could see the steam wafting up.

"Excellent." Aaron had been reaching for the electric jug of hot water, but changed his tack and reached for another mug instead. "I'll get one ready for Emma, too." He chuckled.

"It'll be a turnaround; she's usually handing me my tea and telling me it's time to wake up, not the other way around."

Someone was sure in a good mood. Come to think of it, so was he.

Aaron caught him smiling. "Enjoyed yourself, huh?"

"Damn straight." Slept like a baby after he'd spent a while remembering his wife and how much he'd loved her, knowing that she would've given him a kick in the arse for even thinking of feeling guilty.

Aaron dumped his teabag into the trash and came over to the table, taking a seat adjacent to him at the square table. They sipped in silence for a while, just enjoying the warm sun. Silas was warm and sated and could've happily curled up on the mat right beside the cat and basked in the sunshine.

"I hadn't thought it'd be as arousing as it turned out to be." Aaron's statement was out of the blue, but not unexpected, all things considered.

"I told you it could be...invigorating."

"Yeah, it was that." Aaron fingered the edge of his mug, and Silas waited, knowing more was coming, just unsure of the direction. He'd risked a pretty damn important friendship last night, and he hoped it wasn't about to turn sour.

"I'm going to do my best to make sure our communication doesn't break down like this again. You were right. Last night did help me remember all the things I love so much about my wife, and I won't be letting my own stupidity get the better of me in the future." Aaron gave a laid-back shrug that didn't fool Silas in the least. "Maybe not right away...but if Emma wanted to, I might let her convince me to do it again."

Relief flooded through him. "You have very sexy wife, Aaron. I'd feel privileged."

"And so you should, you greedy man." Emma's laugh made both men turn to the doorway. Her face glowed in the bright morning light. She looked renewed, happy, and not at all like she'd spent half the night awake being fucked three ways from Sunday.

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Aaron rose and went to his wife and wrapped her in his arms, kissing her long and hard. They broke apart, and Emma staggered a little, obviously overtaken by the depth of Aaron's passion.

"Wow, what do I have to do to get greeted that way every morning?" Things south had perked up a little as Silas had watched the two of them.

Aaron's eyebrow went up, and his smile turned to a leer. "Why, you offering?"

Silas's shock at the innuendo must have showed as both Emma and Aaron broke into laughter.

Emma came over and wiggled her way onto his lap. "I also enjoyed myself, Silas." She leaned in and rather than her usual peck to the cheek, she slid her lips over his in a sensual caress that said thank you and *hello, handsome* all at once.

"Mmmm, I won't complain about that for a good morning."

Emma's arm went around his shoulders and she snuggled into the crook of his neck. "You know, we don't have to say the evening's over, if you don't want to...we could have another hour or so."

Aaron stepped close, slid Emma's robe off her shoulder, and lowered his mouth to speak against her skin. "I could go for that."

Epilogue

Emma slumped face-first into the bed and wondered if this was it -- Aaron had finally killed her with great sex. Her heart thumped hard in her chest, and she took great gasping breaths as she fought to regain her equilibrium. Blood thundered in her ears, and she couldn't quite feel her fingers and toes over the exquisite, tender pain of the orgasm that still hummed in her belly. *Death by orgasm...what a way to go. I really hope Aaron remembers to take the scarf off my wrists before the ambulance gets here.*

Nimble fingers worked at her wrists and released the delicate scarf holding her hands at her back. Gentle hands massaged the tension along her arms before moving them to a more natural position, tucking them easily under her prone body. Her spineless flesh offered no resistance as her husband rearranged her to his satisfaction; he curled himself around her and held her close once he had her settled on her side.

"You okay, Em?"

She heard a little concern in Aaron's voice, but all that came out in reply was a clumsy "errk" that really didn't convey her extreme pleasure in the slightest.

A soft stroke trickled down her neck and along her shoulder as Aaron ran his fingertips over her skin. Lips pressed against the sensitive crook of her neck and a tongue swirled over her skin.

"Mmm, salty," whispered over the dampness Aaron's tongue left behind and raised goose bumps. "Was it too much, Em?"

"Oh, no...perfect." It wasn't stunning conversation, but it seemed to reassure Aaron well enough.

It hadn't been that they were doing anything way-out-there kinky -- Emma didn't think that a scarf and her husband's cunning tongue counted as heavy bondage -- it had just been a wondrous combination of many things. She'd woken at two a.m. to find herself spread facedown over a pile of pillows with her hands bound behind her back and her husband's tongue working magic between her thighs. With his wide shoulders between her legs, she'd had no way of moving; she'd been deliciously trapped.

Aaron had driven her nearly insane, working her clit over and over, his fingers stroking in and out of her pussy. Then his fingers were gone, his cock, so deliciously hard and hot, replacing them. But that hadn't been the end of it; Aaron's powerful thrusts had pressed her into the mattress, his balls slapping against her clit at just the right angle, and his oh so nimble fingers dancing at the rosette of her bottom. There was a momentary cool amongst the heat, and she heard the thump of the lube bottle dropping to the ground. His fingers played, making her hole slick as he slowly opened her, all the while keeping up his thrusts into her core. It always amazed her how coordinated Aaron could be, concentrating on the half a dozen things he did to her body at once, playing her like a fine instrument, all the while still finding his own explosive release.

Then came the moment when he'd pulled free of her pussy and shifted, pressing instead against her relaxed back passage, sliding in with care, making sure to go slow as he worked his cock back and forth, pressing ever deeper with each stroke. He'd tugged on the

binding around her wrists, lifting her chest and shoulders up off the bed as he pulled her back into his body, seating his cock fully.

The strain on her shoulders had been minimal, as Aaron had carefully placed the pillows she lay over, but the sensation of his cock in her bottom as she relaxed into his hold had been exquisite. Teamed with his rasped, dirty, sexy commentary of how she tasted and felt around his cock, how she teased him with her pink, juicy, plump sex and the tight rosette of her arse, she'd never really stood a chance. She'd gone from half asleep to orgasmic languor to heart-stopping, breath-stealing, scream-inducing orgasm with her mind half gone and no hope of finding it again before morning. If she couldn't remember how to count in the morning, Emma knew right where to place the blame -- her husband.

"Em?"

"Yeah?" She was more asleep than awake, but forced her eyes open as it sounded like Aaron wanted to talk about something.

"Will you miss it?"

"Yes and no."

"It" was Silas and the occasional threesomes they'd shared over the last fourteen months. Their shared evenings hadn't been regular or frequent, but they had been very enjoyable for all of them, and Emma had even gotten to experience the act of double penetration. Both men had laughed the next morning when she'd gingerly sat at the kitchen table and declared that while it had been pleasurable, once had been enough, thank you.

But tonight hadn't been one of those nights; in fact, they'd had two people to dinner -Minelle and Silas. A few months previously, Silas had surprised them all by asking Minelle,
Emma's good friend and confirmed gal-about-town, out on a date. Minelle couldn't be
classed as a spinster with two major relationships in her past, but she'd never married.

Something between the two had clicked, and since then they had often been in each other's company -- enough so that the previous night they'd declared they were moving in together. A pretty big step for Silas and Minelle both.

She and Aaron couldn't have been happier for their good friends; each really suited the person the other was at this point in their life. It would be a good, strong partnership as far as Emma could see, and there would be no way Silas would risk that relationship by continuing their occasional threesomes.

"Yes and no?"

Emma turned in her husband's arms to face him. She looked up from sleepy, hooded, satiated eyes to Aaron's face. She swept her fingers along his jaw and reached up to leave a soft kiss on his stubbled chin. "I'll miss the closeness with Silas, the excitement of wondering what the pair of you had planned for me, but then I won't miss it at all because I've got you. And our time with Silas, and what we just had between us tonight, it doesn't compare. It helped us find this again, but it's the connection between us that I want, what I need. Not two men in my bed, not Silas — though I love him to bits. Just you, Aaron, just us."

Her wonderful, commanding, generous husband looked back at her with his love shining in his eyes -- eyes that sparkled in the moonlight with the tears he valiantly blinked back before he kissed her, slow and sweet, just like he had the day they married. *The kiss worth a perfect ten*.

When they ran out of breath, her must-have-everything-just-so husband bodily rearranged her, and snuggled back into her body. Emma sighed with the weariness of an extremely, well-loved woman and relaxed back, letting her spine dissolve again in the warmth of Aaron's embrace.

Quiet, lighthearted words came out of the black of the night. "You know, Minelle has a certain something about her...she's got that *Sex in the City* thing going on. If Silas asked, I might be convinced into a foursome."

Emma snickered, even as her elbow landed softly in her husband's belly. "Only in your dreams, mister."



Anne Douglas

2006 was my break out year. Yup, I escaped from jail and the suckers haven't caught me yet.

Now wouldn't that make a great hook line for a novel?

Seriously, 2006 was the year I first put pen to paper, then sold those chicken scratchings to Loose Id, who was very wise and realized they had a winner on their hands! (Oy, ego! Back away from the chocolate jar). And that, as they say, was just the beginning.

I'm a transplant, like most of the rest of Florida, although I came to the Sunshine Peninsular via Auckland, New Zealand. Many people ask me why I left, which is a tricky question to answer. I'll blame it on my husband and Kiwi wanderlust — I think it's a living on an Island in the middle of nowhere thing.

I am an avid dedicated addicted a fast reader who has much too much time on her hands to read, and a fascination for stories with an erotic twist to them. My girlfriends all joked about how much I read and the smutty content, so in a way they dared me to take up a pen and write myself -- after all they were the ones who exclaimed I should be able to write the stuff out in my sleep as I read so much of it!

Now, of course, they get a kick out of the conversation stopper "I have this friend, she comes from New Zealand and has this cool accent, and she writes porn!" I've tried over and over to get them to replace porn with erotic romance, but it's not working -- though I do hear them bandying around "Chick Porn" now. *sigh* I guess that's closer at least.