

SAMHAIN publishing, LLC

ANNE RAINEY

*Tempting
Grace*

VAUGHN SERIES

A hard man is good to find...and impossible to resist.

The Vaughn Series, Book 4

Since a car accident left her unable to have children, Grace Vaughn has hidden her heart behind a wall. So far it's held strong, and no one complains much—except the few men she dates.

Now that fortress is crumbling thanks to Jackson Hill, an annoyingly attractive man who makes her imagination go wild just watching him in the office. He's practically bullied her into attending a Vegas conference with him. Three days alone with the delicious Jackson—in Sin City, no less—is sure to push her right over the edge.

With a loving family, a decent bank account, a nice set of clubs, Jackson's life is almost complete. Except for the missing piece. Grace. She sets a fire in his blood, and the conference is the perfect crowbar to get past her defense mechanisms. It's time to see if the bump-and-grind potential in that booty of hers can be channeled into something a little more satisfying than looking.

He's got just the tactic to get her to let down her guard—and hopefully her panties. A wicked bet. Because if there's one thing he knows about Grace, she can't resist a double-dog-dare...

Warning: This title contains graphic sex, rope bondage, anal sex, and a deliciously inventive hero who just happens to be really good with knots and doling out spankings.

**eBooks are *not* transferable.
They cannot be sold, shared or given away as it is an infringement on the copyright of this work.**

This book is a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the writer's imagination or have been used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, actual events, locale or organizations is entirely coincidental.

Samhain Publishing, Ltd.
577 Mulberry Street, Suite 1520
Macon GA 31201

Tempting Grace
Copyright © 2009 by Anne Rainey
ISBN: 978-1-60504-655-6
Edited by Linda Ingmanson
Cover by Scott Carpenter

All Rights Are Reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced in any manner whatsoever without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical articles and reviews.

First Samhain Publishing, Ltd. electronic publication: August 2009
www.samhainpublishing.com

Tempting Grace

Anne Rainey

Dedication

To Valerie, you see the things I don't and I'm so grateful for that! Thanks for being such a wonderful friend and for loving the Vaughn bunch as much as I do!

Prologue

Three years earlier

Grace looked in her rearview mirror and clutched the steering wheel tighter. The eighteen-wheeler was coming on her too fast. Damn it. She should have taken her sister's advice and stayed at the dinner party until it stopped snowing or at least slowed down a bit. She hated driving on icy roads, especially at night. The snow made visibility extremely poor, and the truck behind her seemed intent on driving her right off the road. She could kick herself for offering to work tomorrow, Christmas Eve. She would be getting paid double-time, though, and she needed the extra cash for books. College, she was learning, wasn't cheap.

Still, when she'd left her sister's house, she hadn't expected to deal with a road-raging truck driver. He blew his horn again, and she wanted to scream. She was already in the slow lane. What more did the asshole want? Her anger got the better of her and she blew her horn. She breathed a sigh of relief when she noticed him merging into the other lane.

"Couldn't have done that seven miles back, though, could you, jerk?" she mumbled as he came up alongside her.

She noticed the big rig out of her peripheral vision. Suddenly he beeped his horn again, and Grace forced herself to keep her eyes on the road. This was going beyond normal road rage. She suddenly felt as if she'd been tossed into a bad horror movie. She reached over and turned up her radio, attempting to shut out her fears of being on the road alone with a psycho wielding a really big truck as a weapon. Just as the cheerful notes of a Christmas classic filled the interior of the car, the truck driver swerved. Time seemed to stand still as she watched the scene unfold around her. The fear of being crushed under tons of metal had her slamming her foot into the brake pedal. Her car spun out of control. The sounds of breaking glass and metal connecting with metal mingled with the cheerful notes of the song still coming from the speakers. The last thing she heard before the world went black was Bing singing about a white Christmas.

"She should have waited. I told her to wait."

Grace heard the worry in her sister's voice and she wanted to reassure her, but she didn't quite understand what had her so upset to start with. It was almost like she was crying, but why?

“We know, Faith. She’ll be okay.”

Merrick? Why was Merrick in her dorm room? Come to think of it, why was her sister in her dorm room? And why the hell couldn’t she seem to get her eyelids to open?

“I should have made her stay,” Faith wailed. “This is all my fault. I insisted she come to the dinner party. She’s been studying so hard, and I thought the break would do her good. This is my fault.”

“No, it isn’t, now stop that or I’ll paddle your ass,” Merrick growled. “This is because of a drunk truck driver. No one else is to blame.”

“Merrick’s right, dear. Grace is a strong girl, she’ll be okay,” her mother said, her voice as soothing as ever. “Though I could kick myself for letting her drive that old Nova. I should’ve insisted on a car with airbags.”

Then Grace remembered. Oh, God, the truck, the icy roads. She remembered it all. Grace concentrated harder on opening her eyes. Finally the blurry outlines of her mother, sister and Merrick came into view. She blinked a few times and tried her voice. “Hey,” she muttered, though it sounded like someone had scraped her throat with sandpaper. Crap, it hurt worse than the time she’d had Mono.

“She’s coming around,” her mother announced. “Someone get the doctor.”

“Where am I?” Grace wheezed.

“It’ll be okay, kiddo,” her sister said, tears streaming down her cheeks. “You’re in the hospital. There was a car accident.”

Grace licked her lips and tried to move, but her entire body was one big ache. “There was a truck,” she said to the room at large. “He wouldn’t stay off my tail.”

“We know,” Merrick gritted out. “The asshole lived, but he’s in critical condition. He tested two times the legal limit for alcohol. He was drunk as hell. I don’t think he’s going to be driving again anytime soon.”

She wiggled her toes and was actually grateful they hurt. “My left leg feels like someone tried to massage it with a sledgehammer, and my stomach is on fire.”

“You suffered a few broken bones, sweetie,” her mother explained. “And there was some trauma to your abdomen, but you’ll be okay now. Everything will be okay, you’ll see. I love you.”

“I had my seatbelt on,” she said, as if anyone cared about that now.

“Of course you did,” her mother said. “You’re a smart girl, Grace, always have been.”

The door opened and her dad stepped in, doctor in tow. Her dad looked as if he’d aged ten years. She tried to smile, to reassure him she was okay, but it hurt too much.

“You just lie still, baby,” he said as he came to the side of the bed and took her hand. She relaxed instantly. Her dad could always take her pain away. When she was a kid, she used to think her dad was some kind of magician. She still wasn’t so sure he wasn’t.

She watched as the doctor checked her heart rate then began to palpitate her abdomen. She winced when he pushed on the area below the left side of ribs. He frowned and stepped back. "I want to run a few tests."

"What sort of tests?" her mother asked as she clutched onto her dad's hand. His arm came around her shoulders and he pulled her close. Faith stood on the other side, next to Merrick. Everyone in the room looked worried. Grace just wanted to go back to sleep. God, she was tired.

"They gave you some meds, that's why you're so groggy." Merrick answered her unspoken question.

"Must be some good stuff. I feel like I could sleep for a week."

"You've already been out for two days straight."

"No way." Merrick nodded, his expression serious. Grace sighed. "I totally screwed up Christmas, huh?"

Merrick chuckled. "We forgive you, brat."

Grace wanted to come back with something smart-alecky, but her voice wouldn't work. Her eyelids drifted closed, and suddenly she just didn't care about tests and crazy truck drivers. All she wanted to do was sleep.

"Are you telling me I'll never be able to have kids? Isn't there some sort of surgery or something?"

The doctor shook his head, his face kind and gentle. "That's not what I'm saying at all. The tear in your uterus will just make you a higher risk for miscarriage. With proper care there's every possibility for you to have plenty of healthy children."

Grace slumped against the back of the bed. "No airbags. I shouldn't have insisted on that stupid car. At the time it seemed cooler than some dumb, four-door sedan."

"True the airbags would have prevented this type of injury, but the truth is that muscle car probably saved your life, Grace. Cars were built a lot more solid back in the seventies. That tank of a car you were driving protected you."

She was glad to hear that, at least, though she thought the doctor was probably just trying to make her feel like less of an idiot. She'd been in the hospital for a week while the doctors ran their tests and took way too many vials of blood and basically drove her up the freaking wall. She thought all the hoopla was just nonsense. She felt fine, other than some muscle ache and the annoying cast on her leg. Then again, she never expected to hear the news that the trauma she'd suffered to her abdomen would somehow be permanent. Bruises, nothing more. Those hopes were dashed now. The news left her numb. She hadn't really thought a lot about having kids, what nineteen-year-old college freshman did? Still she hadn't expected the good doc to tell her about a tear in her uterus. Sometimes life had a way of really sucking.

Two Years Later

“You sure you won’t play at least one more game? I’ll be easy on you.”

Blade laughed and swiped at the sweat on his brow. “That competitive streak is going to get you in a world of trouble one of these days, Jackson.”

Grace watched her cousin and one of Merrick’s employees play a game of HORSE. She’d never seen anyone smoke Blade in basketball before. She eyed the newcomer, noting the tall frame and muscular body clad in nothing but a pair of khaki shorts. He’d taken off his shirt and currently used it as a sweat rag. He looked delicious. She wouldn’t mind being the sweat rag. Sliding over his chest and rock hard abs would be a delight.

“My competitive streak is nothing compared to yours. We both know I never would have gotten you to agree to three games if you hadn’t wanted to beat me so much.”

Blade guzzled his bottled water and swiped his hand over his mouth. “I figure someone needs to put you in your place. Might as well be me.”

“Yeah, too bad it didn’t work for you.” Jackson dribbled the ball a few times before throwing it in the vicinity of the basket.

Grace concentrated was on the way Jackson sucked down his own bottle of water. Geez, even that normal act seemed sexy as hell. Then it hit her. Literally. She’d been balanced on the edge of the rail of the porch. The momentum behind the ball knocked her off her precarious perch, and she fell right on her ass. Had she been paying any attention to the ball, she would have noticed it coming straight at her.

“Shit,” she mumbled.

Blade and Jackson both rushed to her side. Blade helped her up, concern on his face. “You okay, brat?”

She didn’t want to look at Jackson. She already felt like the biggest fool. “Fine, just bruised my ego a bit, I think.”

“Sorry about that,” Jackson said. “I wasn’t paying attention.”

She made a point of brushing off her jean shorts. “No big. I’ve taken worse playing football with this slug.” She pointed to Blade.

When she finally allowed herself to glance over at Jackson, she knew two things. One, he was way more of a hunk close up. Two, he was going to be really hard to ignore now that she’d gotten a good healthy look at him.

Jackson held out his hand. “Jackson Hill. I work for Merrick.”

Grace took it and smiled. “I know who you are. I’m Grace Vaughn, the annoying younger cousin.”

“And I’m out of here,” Blade grumbled. “I need to find some air conditioning.”

"You're getting old and soft. Better watch it, I think I see a pot belly in your future," she teased Blade, though it was the furthest thing from the truth. Blade was all muscle. She secretly thought fat cells were merely too afraid to venture anywhere near him.

"You like to play with fire, don't you, Gracie?"

Oh, hell, he had a really nice voice. Deep, mysterious, full of wicked promise. "It's Grace, and Blade's a big boy, he can handle some razzing."

"I agree," he murmured. He fell silent, staring at her as if imagining things. Naughty things. Grace had the urge to yank at the hem of her black tank top to cover her exposed abdomen. The tank and shorts had seemed like a good idea for a hot July family get together. The way Jackson licked his lips and kept glancing at her belly and legs made her wish she'd worn a sweatshirt and jeans.

"I've never seen you at one of the Vaughn picnics," she said in an attempt at normalcy. "Why is that?"

He sat on the edge of the porch and crossed his arms over his chest. "I wasn't invited until now. Merrick and I have gotten to be pretty good friends, though."

"Golf?"

He chuckled, which was oh-so-yummy. "Yeah. Merrick and I both love it."

"Male bonding, how cute," she said, hoping to shake his calm demeanor.

He looked over at the basketball sitting on the porch floor, bent and picked it up. "Do you like to play, Gracie?"

She refused to enjoy the way he said her name. No one called her Gracie. She'd always hated it. Jackson made it sound sinful. "I play some, yeah."

"Feel up to playing a game with me?"

The double-entendre wasn't lost on her or her libido. "Your timing is off. I was about to leave when you smacked me in the face with that thing."

He suddenly stood and cupped her chin. When he turned her head to the left and right, Grace was too stunned to move. Apparently satisfied, he smiled. "You're too pretty to be bruised."

"Thanks," she said. Escape. She had to escape. The man was lethal and way out of her league. She liked simple guys. Guys she could easily handle. Jackson was neither. She started around him. "It was nice meeting you," she tossed over her shoulder.

"Maybe one of these days you'll play with me, Gracie."

His words caught her, and she froze. It took all her strength to get her feet moving again. She didn't think she breathed until she sat behind the wheel. Grace looked down at her hands and they actually shook. "He's just a guy, quit acting like such a girl," she chastised herself.

It was a good five minutes before she could pull the keys out of her pocket and start the car. His words played over and over in her head.

Chapter One

Present day

“He’s driving me insane. I can’t work with him, Merrick. You have to do something.”

“Calm down, Grace, and tell me what the problem is...this time.”

Grace counted to ten and tried to concentrate on not losing her cool. It wasn’t easy. “He’s a Neanderthal,” she stated. “I want to work for you. Not him.”

“Tattle-telling again, Gracie?”

Every muscle in her body went rigid at that deep baritone. She turned around and had to brace herself when she saw Jackson lounging against the doorjamb to Merrick’s office. “Don’t you ever knock?”

He winked, which only infuriated her more. “The door wasn’t closed, and your voice tends to carry. I was curious what had you all in a tizzy.”

She stepped toward him and gritted out, “Call me Gracie one more time and I’ll—”

“Enough!” Merrick shouted. “Both of you, get in here and close the damn door.”

Grace recognized the tone. Merrick rarely got angry, but when he did it was wise not to push him. She stepped closer to his desk and sat in a chair facing him. She refused to look at Jackson, though she could hear the door close behind her.

“Sit down, Jackson,” Merrick said, his voice brooking no argument. Out of the corner of her eye, Grace saw Jackson taking the chair next to her. “Grace, I asked you to work with Jackson because that’s where you’re needed right now. I need a marketing rep, and that’s what you’re good at. With Chloe five months into her pregnancy, I need Jackson to pick up some of my slack. That means you need to pick up some of his slack. You knew this when you took the job.”

Grace drooped. It was all true. She had known what she was getting into. She’d wanted to work at her cousin’s company so badly she’d purposely squashed her concerns about working alongside the much too attractive Jackson Hill. The man put her on edge, and she’d never understood why. He simply rubbed her the wrong way. Or maybe the real problem was that he rubbed her just exactly right, which scared her. She didn’t like being scared. It pissed her off.

“I need to know if this is going to work,” Merrick said, his gaze bouncing from her to Jackson then back again. “You two have been going at it for the full two months you’ve been here. It’s driving me crazy, and I can’t afford to be any crazier than I already am right now. The baby will be here soon and I need to focus.”

"I don't see the problem," Jackson said, his voice full of confidence. "Grace is a good worker. I have no beef with her whatsoever."

She clasped her hands in her lap and just barely kept herself from saying something she'd regret. "The only problem I have is that you can't take no for an answer."

He chuckled. "Really? Because I don't recall asking a question."

Technically, it was true. He hadn't asked her on a date. But he'd hinted. At times it even seemed he took great pleasure in pushing her, making her imagine things she had no business imagining. Having sexual fantasies about her boss was surely a no-no. She peeked over at him and caught him staring at her. The heat in his gaze couldn't be missed. He wanted her. He might not have spelled it out, but the signals were there. She'd effectively evaded them too. Working every day with him was stealing her control, though. She'd snap soon, and then where would she be? Just another of Jackson Hill's conquests, she was sure of it. He hadn't tried to hide the fact that he wasn't into long term relationships. And she wasn't interested in being a notch on his belt. That left her with one solution. Quit working at Vaughn's Business Solutions. The thought made her gut clench.

"I want to talk to Jackson alone for a minute. Take a break, okay?"

She saw something in Merrick's expression that worried her. He'd had the same look the day Ronny Walsh had put a tack on her chair in her seventh grade science class. She'd made the mistake of crying about it in front of Merrick. She didn't know what Merrick did, but the next day Ronny had come to her with an apology. It hadn't been her intention to get Jackson in trouble, only convince Merrick to transfer her so she wasn't in such close proximity to the infernal man. She suddenly felt very guilty.

"I'm not sure that's a good idea," she said, unable to hide the worry in her voice.

Merrick looked down at his watch, then back at her. "It's noon, time for lunch anyway."

Merrick wasn't letting up. She would get nowhere with him now. Grace sighed and stood, but as she glanced over at Jackson, she was surprised to notice he didn't seem at all concerned. Did the man have no sense of self-preservation? When he winked, she wanted to throttle him. She threw her hands in the air. "I give up. I'm going job hunting. I'll be back in an hour."

As she yanked the door open, she wondered for the hundredth time why she'd thought she could handle working with Jackson Hill. Surely she'd been under some sort of spell when she'd accepted Merrick's job offer. There simply wasn't any other explanation.

It was all Jackson could do not to laugh as he watched Grace stalk out of Merrick's office. He'd gotten to her, and she was running scared. It was only a matter of time now. He'd been lusting after the little blonde imp from the moment he'd spotted her at one of Merrick's family's cookouts. He'd tried the subtle approach, but that had gotten him exactly nowhere. She'd shot him down like a clay pigeon. The

more he'd gotten to know her, the more he'd come to realize that Grace used sarcasm to keep people at arm's length. Especially him. She was damned good at holding him off. Jackson was getting desperate. If he didn't get her to submit soon, he'd explode.

"Quit thinking about her."

Merrick's voice dragged him back to reality. "I wasn't," Jackson lied.

Merrick rolled his eyes and sat back in his chair. "What the hell is it with you two? I can't figure it. It's as if you like fighting with her."

"The truth?"

"No, I'd rather you lied to me," Merrick ground out. "Yes, I want the truth."

"Just remember, you asked," he warned. "Fighting with Grace is like foreplay. It turns us both on. She wants me as much as I want her. She just can't seem to let her guard down long enough to let me in. I've yet to figure out why." He leaned forward in the chair and said, "Maybe you can help me with that one."

Merrick shook his head. "You are aware that I'm not only her cousin, but your boss, right?"

Jackson recognized Merrick in overprotective mode. But Jackson had no intention of staying away from Grace, now or ever. "Is this the part where you warn me away?"

"Grace is my employee, and I protect my employees. You're in dangerous territory, flirting with her. Sexual harassment isn't something I take lightly, Jackson."

Jackson went rigid. "Did she say I sexually harassed her?"

"That's not the point. The point is I protect what's mine."

"I would never hurt Grace."

"But you *are* making her uncomfortable, and I can't have that. Either back off or I'll move her to a different position."

Merrick had just tossed down the gauntlet. If Jackson pushed the issue he could lose Grace and probably his job, not to mention his friendship with Merrick. Still, he wasn't about to make a promise he knew damn well he couldn't keep. Jackson rubbed his jaw and decided to lay it all on the line.

"This isn't a game to me. I care about your cousin. You can fire me, pull Grace under your wing or whatever, but I won't stop pursuing her until *she* tells me to stop."

Merrick slammed his fist on the desk. "What the hell is up with you? I've never seen you act like this. You've never dated an employee. Why Grace?"

Jackson had wondered that himself. "She's the most annoying woman I've ever met. She tells me to go to hell and I get a fucking hard-on. She threatens to maim me and I start drooling. Damned if I can figure it out. But until I do, I won't let up. She wants me, she's just fighting it. I scare her." Jackson rubbed his jaw and thought for a second. "No, that's not right. I think the idea of being with me scares her."

"Grace doesn't scare easily," Merrick mused. "But you're right. She's been watching you like a caged lioness. If you aren't careful, she'll have you for lunch. Grace can be damned mean when cornered."

It was now or never. Time to make a deal with the devil. “I have a solution. One that will please everyone.”

Merrick drummed his fingers on the desk for several seconds before saying, “I’m listening.”

“The Interop Convention in Vegas is coming up,” Jackson stated, referring to the nation’s biggest information technology convention. Businesses from all over the world attended to view new cutting-edge technologies. It was May, and the convention was a week away. “I want to take Grace with me when I go. If she’s still resisting my irresistible charms after that, I’ll back off.”

“You and Grace in Las Vegas for a week? You think I’ll agree to this?”

“I think you want Grace to be happy. I think you want harmony back in your office. Let me take Grace to Vegas. Not the whole week. Three days, that’s all I’m asking, and I promise you’ll have both.”

Merrick got out of the chair and paced. Jackson was almost afraid he was going to fire his ass right then. He had every right too. Jackson was surprised when Merrick said, “If Grace wants to go, I won’t stop her. But it’s her choice, not yours. You won’t force her because you’re her boss. Understood?”

Jackson said a silent prayer that Grace wouldn’t fight him on this one. “Understood.”

Merrick came around the desk and leaned against the edge. “One more thing.”

Jackson stood, sensing a battle coming. “Yeah?”

“Grace is like a sister to me, to Blade and Lacey too. I’d be very careful with her if I were you.”

He nodded. “I know how close you all are, but this is between Grace and me.”

Merrick crossed his arms over his chest. “Grace is all grown up now. Chloe says she can take care of herself, but that doesn’t mean I won’t kick your ass if you make her cry. Remember that while you’re trying to sweet talk her into going to Sin City with you.”

Jackson laughed. “Hold off on buying the tar and feathers until after I get back, will ya? I wouldn’t want you to waste your money.”

Merrick shook his head. “You have to get her to agree to the trip first. I’m not so convinced you’ve got what it takes.”

“We’ll see.”

“Yeah, we will.”

Merrick called his name as Jackson started to leave. He stopped as he reached the door and turned. “Yeah?”

“Has Grace told you about her car accident?”

Jackson’s stomach bottomed out. “What car accident?”

“When she was nineteen, she was in a real bad wreck. We weren’t sure she was going to make it those first twenty-four hours. It was hard on all of us. The thing is, Grace is the youngest of the Vaughns. I guess you could say she’s sort of the baby we’d all like to wrap in cotton if she’d only let us.” Merrick paused

before adding, “If you really care about her, you should know the accident left a lasting impression on Grace.”

Jackson squeezed the doorknob. “In what way? Emotionally?”

“Ask her that.”

He nodded and opened the door. As he made his way down the hall to his own office, an image of a beat-up nineteen-year-old Gracie sprang to mind, and it nearly made Jackson throw up. He didn’t like thinking of her as fragile. She was usually so tough and she handled herself so well around him it was easy to forget just how delicate she really was.

Chapter Two

Grace sauntered back into the office, feeling better than she had in weeks. She'd taken a two hour lunch. The first hour had been spent sucking down a latté and devouring a grilled chicken Caesar salad while she attempted to make future lunch plans with some of her old business contacts. She wasn't convinced it would get her anywhere as far as a job offer, but it never hurt to try. The second hour she'd taken the time to go to her cousin Lacey's gym and get in a workout. It didn't quite take away all her frustrations, but it had helped.

Now as Grace moved through the office and spotted Candice, they both smiled a greeting. It still surprised Grace that Candice and Blade were married, much less soon-to-be parents of a baby boy. The marital bliss and pregnancies in the Vaughn family were enough to make a single woman envious.

As she approached her desk, Grace wrapped the strap of her purse around the back of the chair and sat. She tried to concentrate on the new software she'd been working on, but it wasn't any use. All she saw was Jackson's grin as she'd walked out of Merrick's office. It'd been juvenile of her to take her problems to her cousin. She should have known the way Merrick would react. He was always much too protective of her. She could go into Jackson's office and confront him, make him tell her what the two men had said after she'd left. Had Merrick fired him, punched him, or both?

"Stop frowning; your face will stick that way one of these days."

Grace looked up from the flat screen monitor to find Jackson grinning down at her, his hands in his pockets. God, the man was yummy. His close-cropped dark hair and chiseled cheekbones had always made her think of a tough guy from an action movie. His hard, muscular frame wasn't anything to overlook either. For the first time she wondered if he'd ever been in the military. He seemed ex-something. SEAL. Marine. Sniper. Dangerous and sexy, both of those words described Jackson Hill's powerful physique and hypnotic silver eyes.

"So, no black eye. Am I to assume you two didn't engage in a fist fight then?"

He tsked. "We're adults. We solve things like men, not prickly teenagers."

She let that one pass, though she had at least a dozen good comebacks on the tip of her tongue. "Still have a job?"

Jackson pulled his hands out of his pockets and braced himself against her desk. As he leaned down, she could smell his masculine scent, like the jungle, wild and untamed. "Hoping Merrick fired me?"

Her cheeks burned at his words. "I shouldn't have gone to Merrick. I'm sorry."

Jackson reached out and touched her cheek. “That almost seemed sincere, Gracie.”

She jerked backward, out of his reach, and growled, “Screw it, I’m not sorry.”

Jackson’s grin disappeared. “Come into my office. I need to talk to you.”

“Jackson, this isn’t—”

He cut her off with a hand in the air. “I need a little privacy. Please?”

Grace didn’t really have a choice at that point and she damn well knew it. Jackson was simply too adorable when he murmured please in that sexy baritone of his. She stood, but before she could follow him into his office, she asked, “Were you ever in the military?”

His head cocked to the side. “Yeah, the Marines. I did a four-year enlistment right out of high school. Why?”

She sighed. “Just curious.”

“Uh, okay.” He turned and started toward his office, Grace watched the way his ass moved beneath his black dress slacks. God, the man was delicious. A squeeze. Just one squeeze and she could live the rest of her life with a grin on her face.

As he closed the door to his office, panic welled up. Most men didn’t send her blood rushing through her veins, and she never felt panicky around them. With Jackson she was the helpless field mouse cornered by the hungry tom cat. Not a happy image.

Jackson moved around his desk and sat, indicating she should sit in one of the chairs across from him. She sat and braced herself, unsure what this new mood of his was all about. He seemed pensive, and she wasn’t used to that. Jackson was usually flirtatious or ribbing her until she wanted to pull out her hair, or his. Those were moods she could handle. This serious side had her fidgeting in her seat.

“I want to know why you went to Merrick. Is it so horrible working for me?”

Grace clutched the arm of the chair. He was asking for the truth. Since the moment she’d started at Merrick’s company, Jackson had never actually pushed her into dealing with their mutual attraction. He seemed content to let them dance around each other. Dodging him and suppressing her insane attraction to him had just become a thing of the past, though.

“It’s not so bad. You pissed me off and I reacted. I’m sorry.”

He glanced down at his desk and frowned, then moved a few files around. As he leaned back and crossed his arms over his chest, he said, “Yeah, that’s the part I’m fuzzy on, Gracie. What set you off? One minute I was talking to you like any other co-worker, just shooting the breeze, the next thing I know you’re growling and stomping off. What did I say?”

She would have to admit it now, or try to lie. She sucked at lying to Jackson. He always saw right through her, somehow. Another infuriating thing about the man. “You were talking about your night with Ginger,” she blurted.

“Ginger? What does she have to do with anything?”

She rolled her eyes and stood. "You know, for an educated man, you can be so dense." Grace started for the door, but she never managed more than a few feet before a pair of large, strong hands pulled her to a stop. She swung around and glared. "Let me go."

"You were jealous," he stated, as if she hadn't already figured out that part on her own.

"Hallelujah! Give the man a cigar."

"How do you think I felt when you threw Antonio in my face? And don't say you didn't mention him just to piss me off, because we both know the truth."

She'd gone out with Antonio, a cute guy from accounting, on the off chance she'd be able to forget about Jackson. It hadn't worked. She'd spent the entire evening comparing the two men, and she'd found Antonio lacking big time.

"I wasn't talking about Antonio like he was an all-you-can-eat buffet, though."

She watched a muscle in Jackson's jaw twitch angrily. It made her want to lean in and lick him. "Don't piss me off by lying. I respect the women I date. I don't expound on their *attributes* with friends and co-workers, and you know it. I mentioned going to dinner with her, that's all. You damn near shot out of my office like a cat that'd just gotten her tail stepped on."

His imagery stung her pride. "That's not true."

He leaned close and murmured, "Stop lying, sweetheart. You were jealous, same as I was when you mentioned Antonio."

She tugged her arm and got exactly nowhere. "Fine, I was jealous," she admitted. "Can I go now?"

"No. We need to fix this. We can't continue working together if you're going to run to Merrick every time you feel cornered."

She made a point of wiggling her arm. "Then stop cornering me."

He released her, and she stepped back. He stepped forward. Grace held her ground, though his nearness sent fire dancing through her veins and her pussy throbbed with need.

"You like it when I corner you," he said as he looked her over. "You're just too chicken to admit it."

Grace narrowed her eyes. "Take that back."

He grinned. "Nope. It's true. You're too chicken to take what you want, and we both know it."

"We work together. Getting involved is a bad idea." Crap, even she knew that was a lame excuse.

He pointed to the door. "Exhibit A: Chloe and Merrick."

Damn, she hated when he was right. "That's different. Merrick wasn't a stalker."

He laughed. "And I am?"

"You may as well be."

"How about you just prove you aren't a chicken. Put me in my place, Gracie."

She knew exactly where this was leading. "I suppose if I go out with you, it'll be proof. That's so pathetic."

He shook his head, looking entirely too sure of himself. “Go to the Interop Convention with me. Spend three days in Las Vegas by my side. Prove you can resist this chemistry arcing back and forth, and I’ll leave you alone.”

“You just want to get me drunk so you can take advantage of me. Perv.”

Jackson stepped closer and touched the tip of her nose. It was completely platonic, nothing flirtatious in the touch at all, and yet he might as well have touched her breast, she was so turned on. “You know better than that. I would want you alert for what I have in mind.” He paused before adding, “What do you say? Can you handle three days in Vegas with me? Or is it too much temptation for you?”

She should have walked out. *Turn around and walk away, don’t let him suck you in.* The inner voice was ignored. Instead, she stepped forward, barely grazing his hard body with the tips of her breasts. Even through the material of their shirts, Grace felt her nipples harden as if begging for more. Jackson tensed. His gaze narrowed. The atmosphere around them seemed to fairly spark.

Grace lifted on her toes and whispered, “Bring it on.”

Jackson licked his lips and cupped her chin in his palm. “You’re going to push me too far one of these days, little girl.”

Grace didn’t speak. She couldn’t if she’d wanted to. She just stood there, their bodies barely touching, Jackson staring at her gaping mouth. When he released her and stepped back, she nearly wilted. Had she wanted him to kiss her? Duh! Even the thought sent her temperature higher.

Three days. Three whole days of Jackson Hill in Sin City. Yep, it was official. She’d lost her mind.

Jackson watched Grace’s quiet exit, her cute ass capturing his attention. The black slacks she wore fit just right, displaying her ass like the work of art it was. He didn’t let himself smile until she’d pulled the door closed. He mentally started rearranging meetings. The convention was next week, and he had plenty to deal with between now and then. Thankfully he’d planned ahead and asked Candice to register him and Grace for the convention weeks ago. Candice had reserved two rooms and she’d also taken care of the flight details. The itinerary for the event sat on his desk for all to see. He’d been worried there for a minute, thinking Grace had spotted it. He’d covered it just in time.

Three days of Grace Vaughn. With any luck at all, they’d spend the entire time in bed, screw the convention. He imagined her naked, that sassy mouth wrapped around his cock as he licked her juicy pussy. Then Merrick’s words sprang to mind, and once more he saw a broken and bleeding Grace, barely clinging to life.

Why hadn’t she ever told him about it? Dumb question. They’d both been too busy verbally sparring, and Grace was particularly adept at keeping him at a distance. She guarded her emotions around him. He’d never been able to breach her defenses. A few times he’d come close, though. Once, when they’d gone to

lunch together after Grace had lost a bet, he'd nearly gotten a kiss from her. He'd taken her to a Chinese restaurant and he'd actually managed to get her to relax, even laugh. She'd been a breath away from kissing him that day. He'd been so shocked she'd let her guard down, he'd ended up blowing it. She hadn't let him take her to lunch again.

He'd been drawn to Grace since the day he'd accidentally hit her in the face with a basketball. Her spunky attitude and quick wit had sucked him in. Each time they came into contact, she pushed him to the very limits of control without even trying. She could pull emotions out of him he hadn't known he possessed. One minute she'd have him laughing over her particular brand of sarcasm, the next he was ready to take her to bed. Jackson couldn't help but wonder if it was his age that caused her to hold back. Did the gap bother her? He couldn't be sure, but he knew one thing for certain, Grace wasn't at all superficial. There were depths to the woman that he desperately wanted to explore. He had a feeling it'd take a lifetime to learn all of her secrets.

While some women filled their lives with meaningless bullshit like manicured fingernails and expensive clothes, Grace concerned herself with work and family. She had an understated beauty and a straightforward attitude that he admired. She wore very little make-up and simple clothes. From what he could tell, she rarely dated, which pleased the hell out of him. When she'd gone out with Antonio, Jackson had wanted to pound the little weasel for encroaching on his territory, but reality had set in and he'd known the truth. He had no right to Grace. She could date whomever she wanted. He only hoped that soon that person would be him.

Chapter Three

Grace read the same sentence three times before she finally gave up and put the book down. Her heart just wasn't in it. The only thing on her mind was how much trouble her big mouth had gotten her into this time. Las Vegas. Three days alone with Jackson. Could she be any denser? What had possessed her to agree? He'd challenged her, and she never could resist a challenge. He'd known exactly what she'd do when he'd called her chicken.

After she'd agreed to go to the convention, she'd gone back to her desk and finished out her day thinking of ways to wiggle out of the agreement. She'd come up with zero ideas, mostly because to back out would prove she couldn't handle being alone with Jackson. He'd win. She was much too competitive to lose. That left her staring at her muted television at seven o'clock at night, when she should be enjoying her new haul of romance novels. She picked up the book she'd been dying to read and tried to push Jackson out of her head. She managed three pages before her doorbell rang. "A distraction, thank God."

Grace stepped over the black heels she'd kicked off earlier, then rose on her toes to peek through the eyehole on her apartment door. *Jackson?* She flung the door wide and said, "What are you doing here?"

His lips quirked. "Nice to see you too, Gracie."

"How did you know where I lived?" Grace made a point of not checking out his hot body, even though she desperately wanted to. If she looked at the black t-shirt that was sure to be stretched across a muscular chest and tight jeans cupping his package, she'd start stuttering or something.

He propped his hand on her doorjamb. "Uh, I'm your boss, remember?"

"Right, dumb question."

"I don't suppose you're going to let me in," he said as his gaze took in the living room behind her.

She sighed and stepped back. "Come in."

"Thanks." Jackson moved around her, their bodies touching as he passed. Every nerve ending went to code red status, as if to say *Yippee! About damn time we got him alone.*

"Nice digs you have here."

Grace had taken great care in decorating her apartment, and it did her heart good to have Jackson's genuine approval. She'd gone with an Oriental flare. Sleek, modern lines and smooth surfaces. She liked the fresh, clean feel.

"Very Zen-like."

Grace looked around and realized he was right. The furniture had been expensive, but worth it.

Jackson walked over to her bookcase and picked out a paperback. "I like the bookcase. I don't think I've ever seen a round bookcase before. Cool."

He was looking at her romance books. She really hoped it wasn't an erotic romance. "It's teak. It was pricey, but I liked the design." *Please, please don't be an erotic romance.*

"How did you manage an entire living room suite on your pay?"

Her cheeks heated. "I'm sort of still paying it off. Credit card."

"Ah," he said as he sat on her hand-carved love seat.

"So, would you like something to drink?"

"Got a beer?"

"Yeah, but it's light beer. Will that work?"

"Yep," he said, then flipped the book open and started reading as if he'd been doing it for years. He looked entirely too at home in her apartment. Her gaze shot to his crotch and...damn. She shouldn't have looked. She'd be drooling soon. Grace stalked out of the room. The sooner he drank his beer, the sooner he'd leave. She could get back to sulking in peace.

As she entered the kitchen, a horrible thought struck her. He was looking at her things. Touching her shelves. Probably reading something very steamy while she piddled around. The man was too curious for his own good. What had she been thinking when she let him in? She should have slammed the door in his face. She'd been too stunned, knocked off her guard. Jackson was entirely too adept at surprise attacks.

Then again, he'd sought her out. This went beyond text messaging or corralling her in the break room. Jackson was ten years older than her and most likely way more experienced with the opposite sex. What did he see in her? As she grabbed two beers from the refrigerator she thought of what all that experience could mean for her if she did choose to sleep with him. She'd wanted to. Imagined it. It was obvious he wanted her just as much. Somehow she knew that if she ever let her guard down enough to sleep with Jackson, she'd quite possibly fall for the infernal man. She didn't want to fall in love with him. She didn't want to fall in love with any man, for that matter. Even though she knew she still had a lot to offer a man, the possibility that she may never be able to carry a baby to full-term left her feeling inadequate.

As Grace brought their ice cold beer into the living room, she stopped abruptly when she saw Jackson sitting on her couch, legs spread in front of him, reading. God, the man was hot. His long, muscular legs and flat abs made her wish she was bold enough to crawl up his body and plant one on him. As she moved closer and read the title of the book, her face burned with embarrassment. Jackson seemed to sense her arrival and looked at her over the top of the paperback.

He waved the book in the air and said, "Interesting reading material you have here, baby."

Grace handed him a beer. He took it, and she gave in to the need to suck down several swallows before she sat in the chair adjacent to him. She held out her hand. "Give it to me."

“Funny, that’s sort of what Libby said to Hunter. The exact phrase is, ‘Please, take me, Hunter.’” Jackson read, trying and failing to sound girly. “I need to feel you inside of me, my love.”

“It’s a very romantic adventure.” Why did she care what he thought of her reading material? It was none of his business.

He grinned and waved the book back and forth. “It’s smut. Good smut, but smut all the same.”

“*Hunter’s Pleasure* is not smut. It’s a beautiful tale of love. A romantic take on historic battles and lost treasures. The struggle the hero and heroine face is an emotional rollercoaster ride. The author won an award.”

“Oh, really?”

“Yes.”

“Then why are you so embarrassed?”

“Laugh all you want, but I notice it’s grabbed your attention.”

Jackson glanced up, his eyes hot with unmistakable arousal. “Have you read the part where Hunter rips Libby’s gown off and takes her against a tree?”

Grace licked her lips and willed her voice to sound steady and calm. “It’s my book, of course I read it.”

Jackson stood, and Grace instinctively sank back into the chair. He wouldn’t let her retreat. Suddenly he was bent over her, cupping her chin in his palm. “I think I’d like to take you against a tree. Under the moonlight, in the same rough, untamed way Hunter takes Libby.”

“That’s bound to get us arrested.”

Without warning, he kissed her. His soft lips lingered a few seconds, drawing a moan from her, before he lifted and whispered, “Hmm, it’d be worth a night in jail.”

The doorbell rang. Saved! She sped to the door and slung it open, so glad for the reprieve she didn’t bother checking the peephole.

“Oh, my God! Jordan!” She flung herself into the man’s arms. He laughed and wrapped himself around her, holding her tightly.

“What the hell?”

Grace winced and pulled out of Jordan’s embrace. As she turned back around she noticed Jackson standing with his fists clenched at his sides. He was not a happy camper. Well, too bad. She could hug whomever she wanted. Grabbing Jordan by the hand, Grace pulled him inside her apartment and shut the door. “Jackson, this is my neighbor and very dear friend, Jordan Davies.”

Jackson moved up beside her, close. As if to show the other man she was taken? She wasn’t pleased by that notion and tried to discreetly step away, but he only followed her. Before they managed to turn it into a dance, Grace kept still and opted to get him back later for his arrogance.

"It's nice to meet you, Jordan," he said as he held out his hand. Jordan took it with a smile. "I was just making plans with Grace. She's coming to Vegas with me for a few days."

Okay, maybe she wouldn't wait until later.

Jordan raised an eyebrow. "Damn, Grace, I didn't even know you were dating anyone. You could have said something."

"I'm not dating him. It's a business thing, not pleasure."

"We'll see," Jackson replied a good dose of humor lacing his words.

Grace elbowed him in the ribs, but the imbecile never even flinched. "Do you have to be so impossible?"

His knowing grin had the palm of her hand itching to smack him. "He called me a chicken," she explained to Jordan.

Jordan crossed his arms over his chest and said, "And going to Vegas is going to prove you're not?"

"It's complicated," she growled.

"Not really," Jackson inserted. "In fact, I think it's pretty simple."

She stared daggers at him. Why couldn't she have magical powers or something? She could zap him into a toad or something. Refusing to engage in yet more verbal warfare, she attempted to put the focus on Jordan instead. "So, out with it. How long before you're deployed again?"

"I'll be stateside for the next six months, then I'm back in Iraq."

"Jordan is a hero," Grace told Jackson.

Jordan flashed a sexy smile. "At least that's what I tell the ladies."

It was odd she'd never been attracted to Jordan. He really was handsome with his sandy-blond hair and dimples. And he had dreamy brown eyes. They were so dark you could barely make out the pupils. But in the two years she'd known him, Grace had never felt even the slightest bit turned-on by his flirtations. Jackson, on the other hand, had only to look at her to get her motor humming. Which was frustrating as hell, because she had the feeling Jordan would be way easier to handle.

She gave up thinking and headed for the kitchen, calling over her shoulder, "Your usual, Jordan?"

"Sounds great, hon," he answered in his normal laid-back way.

"Do you want another, Jackson?" Grace asked as she opened the refrigerator and grabbed a cold beer for her neighbor.

"No, thanks."

It wasn't the words, but the tone that had her biting her lip. Jackson sounded angry. In all the time she'd spent with him, she'd never heard that tone from him before. What had set it off?

She popped the top off the beer and went back into the room. Jordan was on her couch, legs spread, smiling at her. Jackson still stood, arms crossed over his massive chest and staring at Jordan as if he'd like to take him apart. One painful inch at a time.

She handed Jordan his drink, and he winked at her. She peeked at Jackson and saw his eyes narrow. He was jealous. Oh, now this could be fun. He deserved a little payback for his earlier comments about her romance books.

Grace went straight to the couch and sat next to Jordan. Not touching, but close enough. "I'm so glad you're back. I worry when you're away." Which was nothing but the truth. Being a U.S. Marine in this day and age wasn't anything to play around with.

The hand that wasn't holding the beer patted her thigh. "It's cool. I know to keep my head down."

Jackson came forward and sat on the other side of her, then slung an arm over her shoulders. Grace held back a grin and continued talking to Jordan.

"Of course you do. You're a very skilled man," she said.

Jordan cocked his head to the side and studied her a minute, then said, "Are you okay?"

"Of course, why wouldn't I be?"

Jordan shrugged and took a drink of his beer. "You look flushed, that's all."

Grace wanted to hide her head in the sand. Flushed, hell, she was damn near on fire with Jackson so close. She could smell that scent of his, and it drove her libido crazy. "I'm fine. I'm more interested in hearing about you."

"I'm thinking of asking Lisa to marry me. Think she'll say yes?"

Jordan and Lisa had been dating for two years, but the military life had taken its toll on their relationship. "I think she'd be crazy not to marry you."

Jordan leaned forward and murmured, "I would ask you, but you'd probably just drop-kick me."

She laughed, knowing he was full of it. "No, Lisa would drop-kick you."

He gave a mock shudder. "You're probably right. Lisa has a mean temper when she's riled."

"Oh, please, she's as sweet as a lamb."

He rolled his eyes. "You and Lisa both scare me."

She reared back. "Me?"

"I've seen your temper, Grace. You're not to be fooled with when you're pissed."

She smacked his chest. "Oh, yeah, I'm so scary to a big, strong Marine like yourself."

Jordan laughed. "Good to see you're still as mouthy as ever, hun."

He took one last swig of his beer and set it on the coffee table, then stood. "Thanks for the beer." He leaned down, presumably to peck her on the cheek, but Jackson was quicker.

"Don't even think about it, Davies," Jackson growled, his voice a cold bite of steel. "And you can quit with the hun shit too. She's not your *hun*."

"Damn it, Jackson," she scolded. "Jordan is from the south. To him everyone is hun or darlin'. It's like saying hello. He means nothing by it."

Jordan, being the goof, held out his hand and in a too-chipper voice teased, "It's been a very pleasant visit, Grace. Hope we can do this again sometime."

She wanted to throttle them both. And just to get under Jackson's skin, she ignored Jordan's hand, rose to her feet and quickly kissed his cheek.

"Grace," Jackson warned. He stood and towered over them both. "Paybacks are hell, baby."

And why that gave her a delicious shiver, Grace had no clue.

Chapter Four

Jackson stared at Grace as she closed and locked the apartment door. They were alone again, just the way he liked it. But first he had to know the truth. “You did that on purpose,” he stated. “You like to tease.”

She pointed at him. “You were being all territorial. I don’t belong to you, Jackson, so stop acting like I do.”

He moved toward her, watching closely as she stepped around him. She did that a lot whenever he was near. Always put distance between them. “Maybe not, but you can’t say my kiss didn’t affect you.”

She grabbed the empty bottles of beer and went to the kitchen. He followed her, as she no doubt knew he would. When she turned toward him, he saw a vulnerability he hadn’t noticed before. Jackson was suddenly reminded of her age. She was twenty-two. He shouldn’t even be in her apartment, much less planning a decadent three days in Vegas with her. While his mind knew the right thing to do, his body didn’t really care.

“So it affected me,” she finally admitted. “That doesn’t mean you get to act the jealous lover around my friends.”

“I’m in unfamiliar territory here, baby. I’m not your lover, not your friend. What the hell am I?”

“My boss.”

He dragged his fingers through his hair and counted to ten. “I’m more than your boss, admit that much at least.”

Grace bit her lip and stared at the floor. “You’re more than my boss.”

Jackson felt like shouting. It was a very tiny step, but at least he was getting somewhere. “Do you want me?”

She made an irritated sound. “You just don’t give up, do you?”

He moved closer until their bodies were separated by only a few feet of linoleum. “Hell, I probably have no business being here. I’m way too damned old for you. And your entire family would skin me alive if they knew what I was thinking right now. But I’m not giving up. Not until you tell me straight out that you aren’t attracted to me. If you can say that with total honesty, then I’ll leave you alone. I won’t bother you again. You have my word.” *I only pray I can keep it.*

“I don’t want you to leave me alone,” she whispered. It was so faint he barely heard her. He started forward, but she shook her head. “But I need time. I’m not ready.”

Jackson forced himself to stay still, to keep from spooking her. For whatever reason, Grace was afraid of being intimate with him. A crazy thought struck. "Are you a virgin?"

Her cheeks turned pink. "No! Geez, Jackson!"

He grinned. "A guy likes to know these things ahead of time."

"Can we please change the subject now?"

He thought of the reason he'd shown up at her apartment to begin with and said, "Actually I came here to ask you something."

"What?"

"I wanted to know about your accident."

Grace stood straighter and placed one hand on her hip. "Merrick told you, didn't he?" He let his silence speak for him. "I'm going to kill him."

"Kill him later. Right now I want to know what happened. Will you tell me?"

"I suppose if I don't you'll just ask Merrick."

He shrugged, neither confirming nor denying.

She sighed. "Fine. Let's go back out to the living room."

Grace sat in the chair again, which irritated the shit out of him. He wanted her closer. "Afraid I have cooties or something?"

"More like I'm afraid you'll try to molest me."

Jackson made a cross over his heart. "I promise to be a good boy. Come on, Gracie, sit next to me."

No one was more surprised than he when she stood and sat on the couch. Their bodies weren't touching, but it was progress. If he moved an inch he'd be able to feel her curves.

He really wanted to move an inch.

"Touch me and you'll be icing your crotch for a week."

The woman was psychic. And scary. "You warned me," he pointed out. "I must be growing on you."

She laughed, and Jackson felt triumphant. She rarely laughed. Snarled, cursed under her breath, but rarely laughed around him. A man could grow to enjoy Gracie's laughter. "So, tell me about the wreck. Merrick said it was pretty bad."

"It was the day before Christmas Eve. I was driving home from my sister's house. She'd been having a dinner party for some friends. It had snowed a lot that day. The roads were a mess. I should have stayed at my sister's place, but I'd promised to work the next day."

Since the day they'd met, he knew one truth, Grace was nothing if not loyal to her word. "Where'd you work?"

"At a grocery store. I needed the money for textbooks. I was a freshman in college at the time." She paused. "I thought the truck driver was just being annoying. I didn't know he'd been drinking. He swerved, I braked. Next thing I know I'm waking up in the hospital with broken bones and a headache."

“Damn.”

She nodded. “Yeah. I was out for two days. Totally missed Christmas.”

He sensed she was glossing over the worst of it. “What else, Grace?”

When she turned her head and their gazes met. “What do you mean?”

He put his arm around the back of the couch, careful not to touch her. “You’re not telling me everything. What else happened?”

“It’s not a big deal.”

“Then tell me,” he prompted. He wouldn’t let her hide from him, though she seemed to be really good at doing exactly that most days.

She smoothed a hand over her forehead and said, “Fine. The steering wheel pushed into my abdomen. The trauma caused some damage to my uterus. It’s not that I can’t have kids, but I’m high risk for miscarriages.”

He suddenly pictured Grace pregnant. She’d be beautiful. A woman like her would want kids, he thought. He could already picture her teaching a little blonde haired imp how to play chess and basketball and all the other games Grace excelled at. He thought of what she’d said about the steering wheel and frowned. “No air bags?”

“The car was old, it didn’t come equipped.”

He cupped her chin and stroked her jaw. “I’m sorry, sweetheart.”

She sat up straighter and moved away, forcing him to drop his hand. “I’m lucky to be alive.”

“But it bothers you, doesn’t it? You want kids.”

“Yeah, it bothers me. I would’ve liked being a mom.”

“You still can though, right? The option wasn’t taken from you completely.”

She nodded and started picking at some invisible spot on her black slacks. “The option is there, but with the scare of miscarriage hanging over my head,” she shrugged, “I don’t know. It seems like the odds are stacked against me.”

“With a good doctor, the right attitude and a little faith, a lot can happen.”

She smiled, and it warmed his heart. “Thanks for saying that.”

He winked and wrapped his arm around her shoulders, pulling her closer. “You’re too stubborn to let percentages keep you from having what you want. Even I know that much.”

“Thanks...I think,” she said.

He leaned toward her, noting the way her lips parted and her breathing increased. “You know what I think, Gracie?”

“W-What?”

"I think if I don't kiss you, I'll die," he murmured as he closed the gap between them and pressed his lips to hers. Jackson inhaled her gasp of surprise and pulled her close. As his tongue dipped inside her mouth, Jackson knew he'd been right about one thing: Grace's kiss was definitely potent.

Grace couldn't think, couldn't move. Jackson pressed his lips to hers. His tongue played and teased. Her body turned to liquid fire in two seconds flat. She should push him away, send him home. Instead, she lifted her arms and wrapped them around his neck. Jackson groaned as if pleased with her response, slid his arm beneath her knees and pulled her into his lap. Her body seemed so light against so much power and strength. It devastated her senses.

He lifted his mouth from hers and whispered something against her skin, then moved his lips downward, teasing her beyond measure. Grace leaned back, giving him permission to lick a fiery path along her chin and collarbone, before he zeroed in on the V of her ivory colored blouse. He kissed her cleavage and dipped his talented tongue beneath her white satin bra. She arched against him, desperate for more, so hungry for his touch all over.

Jackson chuckled and stopped long enough to murmur, "Easy, Gracie. We'll get there, I promise."

She didn't like that answer to her body's demands. "Faster or you can leave, damn it."

Jackson stopped his ministrations and stared at her in the brightly lit room. What went through his head in that moment was anyone's guess. When he touched her cheek, she practically melted at the tender caress.

"Is that what you really want, baby? Do you want me to leave?"

She hadn't expected him to take her seriously. She'd only been trying to get him moving along, to quit dawdling.

"No. I'm just..."

"Anxious?" he helpfully supplied.

She clenched her eyelids shut and admitted, "Yes."

Jackson's lips against her forehead forced her to open her eyes once more. His gaze held a wealth of tenderness. Butterflies came to life inside her. An entire swarm of them fluttered around in there.

"I like you like this. Anxious, wanting me. I've wanted you for months, but you were so damn good at evading me." He paused as if carefully choosing his next words. "Rushing isn't an option, baby. I like to take my time with a woman. A good, long time."

"You talk too much, Jackson. That's always been your downfall. All talk, no action."

"You're mean when you're horny." He grinned and let his gaze travel over her torso. "Fuck, you're a vision. I think I'd like to keep you for my pet."

She smacked him on the chest. "That's the most sexist thing I've ever—"

He effectively cut her off with a press of his lips to the pulse in her neck.

“Oh, my God,” Grace moaned as she dug her fingers into his closely cropped dark hair, holding him firmly while he suckled her skin. She ached to feel those lips and that tongue lower. Much lower.

As if she’d spoken the thought aloud, Jackson inched downward, touching off several spasms as he went. Air brushed against her stomach, and she realized he’d somehow managed to unbutton her blouse and pull it down her shoulders, exposing her torso. When his tongue flicked over one hard nipple through the soft material of her bra, Grace nearly shot off the couch. She forgot her misgivings. Her body craved his touch. It’d been so long since she’d had sex. So damn long since she’d derived any real pleasure from a man’s body.

As if afraid she would break, Jackson lightly ran his tongue back and forth over her areola seconds before sucking her nipple into his warm mouth, satin and all. He hummed in satisfaction, and the raspy vibration of his voice tormented her. Somehow Grace found herself sprawled, Jackson’s hands on either side of her body effectively pinning her to the cushions. He surrounded her. His lethal strength and intoxicating scent filled her vision and her senses.

While he switched to the other breast, Grace marveled at his patience. He sipped at her skin and toyed with erogenous zones she wasn’t aware she possessed. When he appeared to be settling in for a damned meal, Grace urged him lower with a tug on his hair. He obliged and moved his loving torture south. Her body reacted with a flow of moisture to her center. Every inch of her was ready for him to take her. To fuck her. He’d be hard and savage, she knew it in her bones.

“Please, Jackson.”

A grunt was the only indication he’d even heard her plea. By tiny increments, he tugged her slacks down, and with each piece of flesh he exposed he sprinkled her with kisses. By the time the material was all the way off, Grace’s pussy throbbed.

He sat back on his haunches, his gaze devouring her. “You don’t wear panties?”

Grace didn’t like embarrassment, and at that moment, she seemed to be swimming in it. “Wow, pretty observant. No wonder you’re the VP.”

“All night you sat here chatting with Jordan and you weren’t wearing panties.” He passed a hand over his face and grumbled, “Damn, Grace. You sure know how to drive a man crazy.”

“Oh, gee, such a sweet talker you are.”

He reached down and cupped her mound. “You’re a real smart ass. One of these days I’m going to spank you for it too.”

“Spanking my ass. Sounds kinky.”

“Who said anything about your ass?” he growled. “I think I’d rather tie up these pretty tits and spank those instead.”

His words brought an image to her mind, a totally forbidden image. Her clit swelled. She tried to maintain her cool composure, but when his middle finger found its way through her curls and sank all the way to the knuckle inside her heat, she gave up any pretense of control.

“Mmm, just look at you. Your cunt is ripe for the plucking. I think I’m going to really enjoy making you scream with pleasure.”

When a second finger joined the first, her hips began to move, matching his pumping rhythm. After thrusting several times, Jackson brought both fingers all the way out. She wanted to beg him to come back, but her words died on her tongue as she watched him suck her juices off each digit.

“Tangy, but I’m going to need a little more to be sure.” He spread her wide and dipped his head between her thighs and swept his tongue over her swollen clit.

She arched upwards, and he was there, holding her down with a hand splayed across her belly. She moaned and writhed under his assault. His tongue dipped in and out, tasting and sweeping her into a different realm. She went wild when he sucked her clit into his mouth and nibbled it. Once, twice, and she suddenly burst apart, shouting his name and flowing into his greedy mouth.

He stayed there for long seconds after her orgasm ended, relishing the little aftershocks. Then he lifted his head.

“Fucking beautiful,” he murmured. “So fucking beautiful, baby.”

Amen, was all she could think as she let her eyes drift closed. Then his weight lifted, and Grace opened them again, curious as to what he was about to do. She watched him standing beside the couch, an impressive erection tenting the front of his slacks and some unnamed emotion on his face.

He leaned down, kissed her forehead and murmured, “Sleep tight, pretty Grace.”

Shock and mortification filled her as he walked to her door. As he turned the knob, she found her voice. “That’s it?” She sat up and grabbed her blouse. “You’re leaving?”

He winked at her. “The rest will be waiting for you in Vegas. If you want it, you’ll have to come and get it.”

As he opened the door and walked out, Grace saw red. “Vegas.” Her mind was already churning with all the ways to make Jackson Hill squirm. “We’ll just see who caves first.”

Grace got up from the couch and went to the bedroom. She pulled on a pair of shorts and a tank top before heading to the phone. When she dialed her sister’s number, her fingers still shook with anger.

“Hello?”

“He makes me crazy!” Grace shouted.

“Uh, Grace, it might help if you start by telling me who you’re talking about.”

Her sister’s matter of fact tone never failed to calm her. “Jackson, He was just here.”

“Jackson from work who has the hots for you? That Jackson? What was he doing at your apartment?”

Grace went to the kitchen and grabbed her chocolate bar from the fridge. “He said Merrick told him about my car accident and he wanted to know more about it.”

“So he came to your apartment instead of waiting to ask you at work on Monday? There’s something missing here. What’s missing?”

Grace plopped onto the sofa and groaned. She could still smell his masculine scent. It was going to be a really long weekend. “Well, we sort of did more than talk.”

“Oh, my God. Did you sleep with him?”

She felt her cheeks heat. Faith always seemed to have a way of making her feel like an unruly teenager. She tore open the chocolate bar and bit off a piece. “No, I didn’t sleep with him. Although, I am a big girl. I’m allowed to have sex.”

“Yeah, I know, but you’re still my baby sister,” she reminded her. “Okay, so, you didn’t have sex. What exactly did you do?”

“We, uh, we sort of made out.”

“Was it horrible? Is he a crappy kisser?”

“He’s not horrible. In fact he’s so damn good my body is still humming.”

“I just don’t understand why you won’t go out with him. It’s clear you like him or you never would have let him touch you. Why are you holding back?”

There was the million-dollar question. “I don’t know. He’s smart, he works hard, he’s a genuinely nice guy. Overbearing and annoying, but he’s one of the good ones. Plus, he’s hot as hell. My God, the things that man can do with his hands...” her voice trailed off as she remembered just exactly how talented he was with his fingers.

“Okay, so he’s the best thing since Mom’s double fudge brownies. Then what’s wrong with him? Does he have like an extra nipple or something? What?”

Grace laughed. “No, he doesn’t have an extra nipple.”

“That’s a relief,” Faith said, her tone dripping with sarcasm.

Grace sobered as she thought over Faith’s question. “I don’t know, sis. He’s just so intense. When I’m around him I feel like he can see right into my soul. I’m not sure I’m ready for a guy like Jackson.”

“And yet you still made out with him. It seems to me like your body is tired of your brain holding back. Maybe you need to give him a chance. See where it goes.”

“I gave him a chance tonight and he left.” Grace got angry all over again as she remembered his parting words. “Do you know what he said? He said if I wanted the rest, I’d have to get it from him in Vegas. See what I mean? He’s so annoying.”

“Vegas? Since when did you decide to go to Vegas?”

“Since today. There’s a big IT convention there next week. Jackson invited me to come along and check out the latest technology for Vaughn’s. When I refused, he called me chicken. Can you believe that?”

“Ah, the magic word. Boy, he really knows how to push your buttons.”

Oh he’d pushed buttons all right. And she’d had a delicious orgasm as a result. “Yeah, don’t remind me.”

“So, maybe you go to Vegas. Maybe you see if you can’t make *him* squirm a little.”

Grace grinned. “I like the way you think.”

“Thanks. Now, can I get back to my book? Rafe just tied Kimberley to the bed.”

“Sure, but I want it when you’re done.”

“Of course.”

They said their goodbyes and hung up. Grace bit off another piece of her chocolate bar and thought about Faith’s words. Make him squirm. Now that’s something she could wrap her mind around.

Chapter Five

“I have nothing to say to you.”

Jackson was more confused than ever. He'd been going insane since he'd tasted her juices. Nothing in his life had prepared him for the sweet flavor of Grace Vaughn. The entire weekend had passed in a blur. His mind had lingered on the feel of Grace's soft curves, the intoxicating flavor of her arousal. He'd ached to take her, to drive his cock deep, fuck them both into the next damn century. Knowing she'd resent the hell out of him afterwards had caused him to hold back. He needed her to come to him.

As they sat on the plane at the Las Vegas airport waiting to exit, Jackson was at his wits end with Grace's refusal to speak to him. “What's your problem? You've been silent the entire plane ride.”

“You know what the problem is. Don't play dumb.”

“You're pissed I left you the other night, is that it? You think it was easy for me to walk away?”

“I think you're crazy if you think I'll ever let you so much as touch me again, much less do anything else on this trip.”

“You would've hated me if I'd taken you to bed. You would've run so fast in the opposite direction my head would've spun. Then where would we be?”

Her gaze remained on the window as she said, “Your biggest problem is that you think you know me so well. You don't, so stop acting like you do.”

“I know you well enough to know you weren't ready to sleep with me. You would've woken up cursing me. Don't deny it.”

She swiveled around to face him. At least she wasn't avoiding him. It was something. “You know what I think? I think you're the one who's afraid. I think you like it when I turn you down, because then you don't have to deal with a woman who can string two words together. It's easier to date bimbos. There's no real challenge there.”

“The women I date aren't bimbos, and you're purposely steering the conversation away from what's really bothering you. You wanted me, and I left.”

Grace leaned closer and growled, “I wanted you, yes, but you can't handle a real woman. You like women who drop at your feet and fawn all over you. I've seen them, so don't deny it. Don't play the martyr, either. It doesn't suit you. You left because you got scared.”

Jackson's anger rose. “You want it all out in the open? Fine, but don't blame me if it's more than what you wanted to hear.” He lifted his hand and cupped the back of her head. When she tried to pull away,

he held her firmly with a fist full of her soft blonde curls. His whisper was for her ears alone. "Fear isn't what has my cock rock hard right now. Fear isn't what rode me the other night, either, baby. I wanted to take you to the floor and fuck you. First I wanted to see you come again so I would have gotten on top of you and watched your pretty blue eyes dilate and your face flush with heat. But then I would have wanted to see your sexy ass. I would've flipped you over and fucked you from behind, maybe spanked you a few times for being so goddamn contrary. After we recovered a bit, I would have taken you to the shower and fucked you there too. I want my cock inside of you. Your mouth, your cunt, your ass. I want my come filling you. I left because I wanted you *too* much."

Her mouth dropped open and her face turned beet red.

Was she afraid of him now? Shit. This wasn't at all how things were supposed to go. "I'd never—" He never got to finish what he was about to say because the flight attendant came over the intercom and announced they could exit the plane. Their alone time had just disappeared.

Baggage claim and the cab ride seemed to take forever. When they arrived at the hotel, there wasn't any privacy to be had there, either. They checked in for the convention and retrieved their room keys. By the time they had a few minutes alone in the elevator, they'd arrived at their floor, and Grace scurried off to her suite, leaving him to wonder how things had gone from bad to worse.

He went to his own room, slid the keycard through the slot and pushed the door open. After tossing his suitcase on the bed, he looked around at the opulent room. A foyer led to a large living room. Off to his left was a little half-bath. The dark furniture, offset by bright carpeting and curtains, looked classy and comfortable. The big plasma flat screen was a nice touch. A mirrored wet-bar, cool. He made his way into the bedroom and noticed more mirrors, walls of them, in fact. Jackson stared at the bed and imagined making love to Grace on the luxurious linens. He groaned. He went around a corner and found the bathroom. Damn thing was fit for a king. The centerpiece was a deep Roman tub surrounded in black marble. Christ, he really wanted Grace in that tub. His cell phone rang, interrupting the X-rated movie playing in his head. He checked the caller ID, hoping it was Grace. His mom. Oh, yeah, he really wanted to talk to her. She'd see right through him, know something was wrong and want to help. It rang again. For a moment he thought of avoiding her. She'd only worry, though. Didn't matter that he was thirty-two.

"Hi, Mom."

"Hello, dear. Did your trip go okay?"

Just dandy if you consider alienating the one woman he was beginning to suspect he loved. "It was great."

"No problems checking in?"

"No, I'm good. How's Dad?"

"Apparently fine, considering he went golfing with your brother and hasn't been back all day."

He heard the disgust in his mother's voice. She wanted to coddle his dad now that he was beginning to slow down, but no one coddled Edgar Hill. The man thought he was indestructible. "Scott will see to it that Dad doesn't overdo." His brother, younger than him by two years, had always been able to get around their dad somehow. He was a little too good at manipulating people, which was probably what made him a really great sales rep.

"Enough about your stubborn father. How are you? You sound down. Is everything okay?"

And there it was, mother's intuition. He'd never been able to escape it, though he'd tried aplenty. "I think I may have wrecked things with Grace." He walked back into the bedroom and collapsed onto the bed.

"That girl you told me about the last time you were here visiting?"

He'd broken down and told his mother everything about Grace Vaughn. How beautiful she was when she smiled, how crazy she made him when she said something ornery to goad him. His mother had started to hear wedding bells, though, so he'd played it off.

"Yeah, that's the one."

"She went with you to the convention, right?"

What was his mother up to now? "Uh, right."

"You two will be there for three days?"

Jackson sat up. "We come back on Thursday. Why the twenty questions?"

"Well, seems to me you shouldn't be wasting time with me. Get off the phone and ask her to dinner."

"She pretty much hates my guts. I'm the last person she wants to break bread with, trust me."

His mother made a frustrated sound. "No she doesn't. She's just playing hard to get."

He laughed. "Women don't do that anymore."

"Some things may have changed over the years, but they haven't changed that much. Ask her to dinner. If she refuses, ask her again. And remember to be a gentleman about it, Jackson."

He chuckled as he stood. "Always."

"Don't be smart," she warned. "You aren't too old for me to box your ears."

They said their goodbyes, and Jackson went to the hotel phone and dialed Grace's room. She answered on the second ring.

"Hello?"

"Have dinner with me." He thought of his mother's advice and added, "Please?"

"I'm not hungry."

"Then watch me eat. Come on, Gracie, we need to talk."

Silence.

His gut knotted. "Grace?"

"Okay, give me twenty minutes to freshen up. I'll meet you in the lobby."

Jackson could have kissed his mother in that moment. "I'll come to your room," he said.

"The lobby, Jackson," she stated firmly.

Damn, the woman was too astute. If he'd picked her up at her room, he might have had a chance at another kiss...or more. "The lobby in twenty minutes," he confirmed.

They both hung up, and Jackson tried to figure out this new mood of Grace's. She'd been pensive, subdued. Wasn't that how murderers felt right before they cracked? Determination filled him. If Grace really was playing hard to get, then he'd just have to up the ante. After all, they were in Vegas and he had her away from her family, just as he'd wanted. Time to show his hand.

"No, thank you. I'm just waiting for a friend." Grace was getting damned tired of having men assume she was for sale. Good lord, did the men in Vegas think *everything* was so easily bought?

The middle-aged stranger with the pot belly and receding hairline glanced at her breasts yet again, then licked his lips. "Are you sure? It'd be my pleasure to show you around the casino."

She pasted a smile on her face and pointedly stared at his wedding ring. "No, really, I'm not interested in—"

"The lady's with me."

Grace turned to see Jackson behind her, a fierce frown marring his brow. He looked ready to brawl. She was never so glad to see him. "I was just about to come find you."

Jackson placed his hand at the small of her back and waited until the stranger took the hint and disappeared into the hotel bar. "What an ass."

"You can say that again. And that was ass number three. The first two offered money."

His eyebrows shot up. "Jesus, are you serious?"

"Deadly serious. I didn't think the dress was that revealing, but maybe I was wrong."

Jackson looked her over and hummed his approval. "You look beautiful. Some men just don't know a lady when they see one."

She liked hearing the compliment. "Thank you. You don't look half bad yourself."

Half bad, yeah right. He was drop-dead gorgeous. Black Armani slacks and a white dress shirt, sleeves rolled up and open at the collar. His cropped espresso hair and the dangerous aura that seemed to be such a part of him only completed the package. She wanted to climb him like a great big mountain. A hard, hot, sexy mountain.

Grace fidgeted in her heels. She had all of two dresses, one red, one black. She'd decided to wear the black dress. It was a simple design hitting just above the knees. She'd wrapped her hair into a French twist and put on a little blush and lipstick. The heels weren't too high that she risked breaking her neck, but they

weren't flats, either. The way Jackson kept looking at her legs, she figured she'd done okay with the clothes and shoes.

"So, where to?"

"I figured we'd keep it simple, eat here at the hotel. No worries about taxis that way."

"You called ahead and reserved a table?"

He nodded. "I've thought of everything," he murmured.

"Now why doesn't that surprise me?"

He chuckled and steered her toward a fancy restaurant. She was still so dazzled by all the glitter and lights. Vegas life and small town Ohio were not to be compared. It was as if she'd entered an entirely different world.

As the hostess seated them, Grace noticed they were tucked away in a private little alcove, away from the main part of the restaurant. She wondered if Jackson had planned that along with everything else. "Nicely secluded. Your idea?"

Jackson winked, and it did things to her. Wild things. Her pussy flooded with liquid heat and her heartbeat sped up. "I wanted to get you alone so we could talk. Is that a crime?"

Grace reached for her menu and held it in front of her, not bothering to answer. "The prices are outrageous."

"Everything in Vegas is outrageous," he said. "Answer me."

She dropped the menu and frowned. "No, it's not a crime. Happy now?"

He stayed silent, watchful and mysterious. Grace wished she had the ability to read Jackson's moods, but the only time she knew what went through his ornery mind was when he was turned on. In those heated moments when he teased, challenging her to take him up on his offer to push their relationship into more intimate territory, Jackson dropped his armor. Only then could she see into his soul. And what she observed made her nervous as hell. He wasn't an easy man. Jackson was hard, inside and out. He played hard, worked hard, and he expected everyone to do the same. Grace was very much afraid that he wanted things from her she didn't know how to give. The X-rated things he'd whispered to her on the plane had sent her straight to a cold shower. Well, a cold shower after she'd answered several phone calls from her family asking if she'd landed safely. Not just her mother, like normal people, but nearly the entire Vaughn bunch had called to make sure she hadn't crashed. She loved them, but there were times she was tempted to move to Alaska just to escape their coddling.

Crap. Three days in Vegas. Three days of denying Jackson and the needs he brought out in her. As if she was that strong. She'd be lucky to last one night before she came begging for him to fuck her.

When their waitress came around and started her spiel about the house specials, Grace glanced across the table. The wicked look Jackson shot her way told her two things really quick. He knew exactly what

she'd been thinking, and she'd be lucky if she could still walk by the time he finished with her. Excitement had her heart beating faster. Fear had her pretending an unusual interest in the menu.

Chapter Six

Jackson gritted his teeth in frustration. They'd long since finished their meals. Grace had eaten a damned grilled chicken Caesar salad, probably because it was the cheapest thing on the menu, while he'd devoured a succulent filet mignon. After the waitress had brought out the dessert cart, Jackson nearly came in his slacks as he watched Grace's deep blue eyes glaze over. She'd stared at the selection of rich culinary delights and licked her lips. He'd wanted to pull her out of her chair, slam her down on the table and have her pussy for dessert. But her refusal to pick anything from the cart was causing him to fast lose his patience.

"Get dessert," he ordered.

Grace played with her water glass and eyed the cart as if she wanted to steal away with the whole thing. "No, I can't. It's all just too expensive."

Christ, her cousin was the owner of the company she worked for and she still refused a simple slice of cake? "Merrick doesn't mind if we indulge ourselves a little when we're on business trips. He would insist if he were here, and you know it."

"I would feel like I was taking advantage of him. Just because we can turn in our expenses doesn't mean we should go hog wild."

Was she for real? Anyone else would be racking up the bill if they knew their boss was footing it. Damned irritant. "A slice of cake is not going hog wild. Having the entire cart would be hog wild." She shook her head and looked away. "Fine, then I'll pay for it. Just get the damned chocolate cake, Gracie."

Her lips thinned in anger. "I'm not poor. I don't need you buying me cake, Jackson Hill. I just don't want it. Let it go."

Jackson looked at the waitress and growled, "We'll take two slices of chocolate cake. Put it on my bill."

"Yes, sir," the waitress squeaked before rushing off.

He watched as Grace's nostrils flared with anger. "You did not just do that."

"Why do you refuse such a simple thing? There's no point, Gracie. And don't ever lie to me again. You want the fucking cake. Hell, you were damned near drooling over it."

"I decide what I want and don't want, Jackson, not you."

As the waitress came back carrying a tray filled with their cake, he was forced to silence. After she placed the decadent treats on the table then left, his gaze snagged on Grace. She licked her lips, but still didn't pick up her fork.

Jackson had had enough of her stubbornness to last a lifetime. He leaned across the table and whispered, "Baby, we can eat the cake here with forks and napkins like civilized adults, or we can lick it off each other back in my room. Your choice."

Grace didn't speak, but merely sat there, as if warring with herself. Was she imagining what he wanted her to imagine? Jackson desperately wanted an answer to that question. She shocked him when she picked up the fork and took a chunk out of the dark dessert. Her eyes were trained on him as she brought it to her mouth. The fork disappeared between her plump, ruby lips. She closed her eyes and moaned deep in her throat. When she went back for a second bite, Jackson spread his legs and sat back, content to watch Grace seduce him with chocolate. By the time she'd devoured the entire slice, his cock was hammer hard and ready to be buried deep inside Grace's pretty cunt. Tight and hot, right where he belonged for the next fifty years.

Grace sat back, dabbed her lips with the white linen napkin and murmured, "You're right. I did want the cake, but you were wrong about the other."

Jackson cleared his throat. "What other?" Hallelujah, he really could speak.

This time it was Grace's turn to lean across the table. "I never mix my two favorite vices. Chocolate is orgasmic all on its own. When I have sex, I prefer to leave the food out of it."

And again, Grace Vaughn takes the lead. Their verbal sparring matches were wearing him down. Jackson couldn't figure out why he didn't just forfeit, lay himself at her feet and beg her to put him out of his horny misery. He sure as hell wasn't getting anywhere by hoping she'd come to him on her own.

She smiled as the waitress brought their checks. Jackson could only sit there, staring like a horny teenager with his first nudie magazine. By the time they were headed out of the restaurant he had his voice back and his cock was only semi-erect. As they reached the elevator, he took her arm and turned her toward him. "Come up to my room for a drink."

"You aren't going to molest me, are you?"

Her soft smile as she looked up at him caused his gut to clench. Her sweet innocence was intoxicating. He could well understand why her family wanted to wrap her in cotton and set her on a shelf. On the other hand, he wanted nothing more than to show her all the dirty sex acts he'd learned over the years. Things that would leave them both gasping for air. The elevator dinged and opened. Another couple stood inside waiting for them to get on.

"Come on," he urged as he pulled her along beside him. The doors slid shut, sealing them in with the other two. The walls of the elevator were mirrored, and he was able to see the other couple behind them, kissing. Christ, that was all he needed, a visual aid.

Grace rose on her toes and whispered, “You’re blushing.”

Jackson’s patience snapped. He cupped her chin and ground out, “Keep pushing me and you’ll get more than a drink when we reach my room.”

She tried to step away from him, but he had his hand wrapped around her forearm, preventing her escape. “I know better than that, Jackson. The other night is proof I have nothing to fear from you.”

She just wouldn’t let it go that he’d left her. Couldn’t she see he’d done it for her own good? He could have stayed and made love to her the entire night. Hell, the entire weekend. He’d tried to give her time to accept him, to accept a relationship with him. All he’d done was make it worse. One step forward, ten steps back.

Jackson’s gaze took in the tight black dress that accentuated her small breasts and slender hips. He imagined slipping her out of it. Inch by delicious inch. Would she be wearing panties this time? “We’ll see,” he murmured.

As the elevator stopped on their floor, he looked in the mirrored wall again. The couple had practically climbed each other. The woman’s head was thrown back in rapture, and the man was in the process of nibbling his way down to the brunette’s cleavage. Jackson peeked over at Grace, gauging her reaction to the pair of exhibitionists. Her eyes were round as quarters, but she wasn’t looking away. He noticed her nipples were hard little pebbles beneath the black silk. She liked watching. Interesting.

He tugged on her arm to indicate the elevator had stopped. She cleared her throat and walked through the open doors, completely ignoring him. He ended up getting dragged along in her wake. Jackson couldn’t tell if she’d decided to go to his room for a drink or not. He’d never seen her act so damned mysterious. When she turned right down the hall, which would take her to his room instead of left toward her own, he let out a breath, thankful he wasn’t going to have to toss her over his shoulder and haul her cute ass to his suite by force. He was just desperate enough to do it.

He moved alongside her and let her pull her arm away. As they approached his suite, she stopped and adjusted her purse higher on her shoulder. “Drinks. Nothing more.”

He moved to close the gap between them and let his fingers trail down her cheek. “Unless you want more.”

“I don’t.”

Her voice wasn’t quite as steady as it had been in the restaurant. Jackson had to hold back a triumphant grin. “Little liar.”

She was about to say something more, something caustic, no doubt, but he took his keycard out of his pocket and slid it through the slot. He pushed the door open before stepping aside. “After you, Gracie.”

Her nose shot in the air as she walked past him. He took in the sway of her hips and her tight, slightly rounded ass. God in heaven, the woman was a gift. Her body made his every instinct kick in. He wanted to slam the door shut and fuck her into submission. Force her to accept him as her lover—her only lover.

Soon, he promised his overeager cock. Even in his lusty fog, he noticed there weren't any panty lines, but that wasn't enough proof. The only way he'd know for sure if she had anything on under the sexy dress was to get her out of it.

Jackson stepped inside the room and closed the door behind him, then flipped the security lock into place. As he hit the switch, illuminating the room, and moved toward her, Grace licked her lips, her posture stiff as a board. He could see the war going on inside her pretty head so clearly. She wanted him, but she wasn't happy about it. By the time they went back to Ohio, she would belong to him. The only other option was just too damned depressing to consider.

He went to the desk at the far side of the room and picked up the phone. "Champagne or wine?"

"Wine."

Jackson ordered a bottle of Merlot, then looked at Grace as an idea struck. "We're also going to need a deck of cards." He watched her frown at him from across the room. When he hung up, he said, "You've never played poker with me. Since we're in Vegas and all, I thought it seemed appropriate."

"Be warned. I've been playing poker since I was big enough to walk. My dad taught me. I'm not bragging when I say I'm good. In fact, poker helped pay for books and gas when I was in college."

"I know. I've seen you play with Blade and Merrick. You're very good. But so am I. What do you say to a few hands of five card stud?"

Grace went to the couch and sat. "Sure, why not? But you'd better not be a sore loser. I hate sore losers."

"Ditto, Gracie," he said. A knock on the door indicated room service. After taking the wine and cards, he tipped the guy and went to the chair next to the couch. He poured a glass of wine and held it out to Grace. When she took it, he poured another glass for himself. They were silent as they each took a sip. He set his on the coffee table and opened the box of cards. As he shuffled, he explained the rules. "Five card stud, nothing wild."

"Easy enough. Are we playing for money?"

"No, not money. Information."

"Huh?"

"If I win, you have to tell me three things about yourself. Good things, not like 'I like the color red.' If you win, I have to tell you three things about myself. What do you say?"

She grinned. "You're going to be doing a lot of talking."

He didn't speak as he dealt. He waited for her to look at her hand. When she discarded two, he slid two new cards across the coffee table. She picked them up, but Jackson couldn't tell if she was happy or not. She was good at not giving herself away. He looked at his own cards and discarded one, then waited for her to show her hand. She had two pair, kings and deuces. All he'd ended up with was a pair of nines.

He placed his own hand face up on the table and watched her expression change from blank to pure wickedness.

“Start talking,” she demanded.

Shit, he’d wanted to find out more about *her*. He’d been sure he could beat her. Next time, he vowed.

“Let’s see... I have a fondness for motorcycles. I always have. I have two that I keep at my brother’s place. I can’t stand movies with sad endings. They’re a complete waste of time to me. Also, my mom has always wanted to go to Ireland, so my brother and I are pitching in and sending my parents there for their wedding anniversary next year.”

“Ah, that’s so sweet,” she said, her face softening. “I bet she’ll be thrilled.”

“She’ll probably get on us for spending so much money, but, yeah, she’ll be pleased as hell too.”

“Okay, my turn to deal.” Grace scooped up the cards and started to shuffle. He’d seen her at work before, but her skill with a deck never failed to impress him. She dealt five cards each, then placed the deck in the center. He looked at his hand and had to stifle a grin. “I’ll stay.”

No expression from Grace as she picked up her cards and tossed one down and picked a new one up from the deck. She looked at him, and he laid his cards out face up. “Three aces.”

Grace showed her hand. “That beats my lousy pair of fours.”

“Three things. Start talking.”

“I’m not that exciting, but okay. I collect snow globes. All sizes. Expensive ones, cheap ones. I just love snow globes. I enjoy old black and white movies. In fact, Bette Davis is my favorite actress. Third fact. I hate food that’s yellow. Corn, squash, bananas, I can’t stand any of them.”

He laughed. “What do you have against the color yellow?”

She played with the cards, shuffling in various ways. “I don’t know, it’s the strangest thing. I’ve just always hated yellow food.”

Jackson held out his hand. “Give them over, my turn to deal.” She placed the cards in his hand. Their fingers touched. Sparks jumped between them. “One more hand to break the tie,” he murmured.

She cleared her throat and took a sip of her wine. “Just don’t pout when I win.”

Jackson dealt the cards. They both seemed to be on pins and needles, as if this last hand meant more to them both than merely breaking a tie. Or maybe he was just reading more into their game than what was there.

Grace threw away two cards, and he dealt her two more. He tossed down two of his own cards and took two more off the top of the deck. He watched as she showed her hand. Damn, a flush. He showed his own and growled, “Two pair. You win.”

“Come on, I get three more Jackson facts.”

“Yeah, yeah. Well, I’m a black belt in Karate. The only books I ever read are business related, though that dirty book in your apartment has me thinking I’ve been missing out on a lot.”

“It’s not dirty, it’s romance.”

He took a sip of his wine, draining the glass. “Last thing. I watch you walk when we’re at the office. Not a day goes by that I don’t stare at your ass.”

Grace shook her head. “I’m not sure that qualifies as a fact.”

He leaned across the table and whispered, “Do you care?”

Suddenly she stood and moved toward him, her steps precise. He couldn’t read her mood now. “Not really,” she stated, her voice so low he barely heard her.

Jackson stood too. His fingers stroked the baby-soft skin of her cheek. “What do you want?” Her mesmerizing gaze drifted over him, teasing him to full alert status. “Gracie?”

“This,” she whispered, before rising to her toes and pressing her lips to his. She was gentle, shy, as if unsure what to do with him. When her tongue slid over his bottom lip in a curious perusal, he gave up any pretense at control. He enfolded her in his arms, pulling her against his body, fitting her curves to him. He thrust his pelvis against her lower abs, saying without words what he would demand from her if she continued her little game. She moaned against his mouth and dug her fingers into his hair, then brought one leg up to wrap around his waist. Jackson cupped her ass and lifted her off the floor, forcing her to clutch onto him with both legs.

He pried his lips from hers and gave her one last chance to walk away. “Be sure, baby. Be damned sure this is what you want.”

Her breath came out in pants as she said, “You left me. I needed you, and you left me.”

“Never again,” he promised as he strode across the room. “I swear it.”

“I’ll knee you in the balls if you ever do that again, Jackson.”

It wasn’t until he entered the bedroom, flipped on the bedside lamp and sat on the end of the bed that her words registered. “I don’t doubt it for a second,” he murmured as he tasted her lips with his tongue. He coaxed her to open for him. When she surrendered, he delved inside, addicted to her sweetness. The flavor of her...there wasn’t another woman on earth who tasted as sinfully sweet as Grace.

With her straddling him, Jackson’s cock was so hard he was afraid he’d end up with an imprint of his damned zipper, but he was loath to let her up long enough to undress. She dipped her head and licked his neck, teasing and nibbling at his overheated skin. Her lower body gyrated against his. Jesus, the woman was hot. Sexy and hot and all his. He lifted away from her and grasped her waist, standing her in front of him. Grace’s cheeks were flushed, her lips swollen. Several locks of hair had come loose from her twist. She looked ready to fuck. “You make me crazy, baby. But why the change of heart? Why now?”

“I decided I didn’t want to deny myself anymore. I’ve wanted you for so long, Jackson. I don’t know if that’s a good thing or not, but I don’t feel like questioning it tonight. I just want you to touch me.”

"I'm going to do more than touch you, baby. A hell of a lot more." He smoothed his palms up her sides until he reached her breasts. He cupped them through the black silk of her dress. He let his thumbs tease the hard tips, and Grace swayed. He pulled his hands away and ordered, "Undress."

Grace didn't speak, though her expression conveyed all he needed to know. She was nervous. Excited, but still a little afraid of his sexual appetites. "Don't think so hard, baby."

"I'm not." They both knew she was lying, but he let it go and waited. She took a deep breath and moved her fingers to a hidden zipper along her right side. As she worked the straps off her shoulders, the dress fell free, landing in a black pool at her feet. His gaze went straight to her pussy. No panties. Oh, hell. His hand lifted, cupping her neatly trimmed mound. "Mmm, I missed this little pussy. I'm going to fuck it so hard."

"Jackson." His name came out as a pleading whisper, and it was music to his ears.

He leaned forward and placed a gentle kiss to her clit. "My dick is going to feel so good sliding inside of you." He reached behind her and unhooked her bra, his attention rapt as her breasts were bared for him. He leaned forward, unable to help himself, and tasted one turgid peak. Grace shuddered and tunneled her fingers in his hair. He swirled his tongue around the puffy areola before sucking as much as he could into his mouth.

"Yes, just like that," she breathed out. "Oh, God, that feels so good."

He pulled back and stared at her. "Take your hair down, Gracie," he commanded as he rose to his feet. He started unbuttoning and unzipping his slacks as Grace lifted her fingers to her hair. She pulled several pins free, letting them fall where they may. She shook the shiny strands out and finger combed them. In the dimly lit room, her hands now clasped together in front of her, Jackson thought she looked like a sweet angel. An innocent, untouchable being that he had no business breathing near, much less fucking. And if anyone would've attempted to keep him from her in that instant, he would've fought to the death to get to her. It didn't much matter that he was too old for her, too hard and too experienced. She was his, and he'd willingly shed blood to keep her.

Naked finally, he closed the few inches between them and cupped her cheek, her desire and trust clearly visible in her expression. His gut clenched. "I've wanted you here like this for so long. I have a lot of ideas. Dirty ideas. Things you've never considered doing, probably, but I won't hurt you. I'd never hurt you, Gracie."

She slid a hand between their bodies and wrapped it around his cock. "I may not be as experienced as you, but I'm not a little girl. I want to be here. It's my choice to be here with you."

The grasp she had on his dick seemed to prove her point rather well. "Have you ever played with bondage?"

She arched a brow. "You want to tie me to the bed?"

“Not quite, no.” He stepped away from her, forcing her to release her hold on him. He’d been too damn close to coming. He went to his suitcase and pulled out a length of rope, holding it out for her to see.

“I want to bind your breasts. Have you ever had a man bind you, baby?”

Grace’s eyes widened. “You want to do what?”

He chuckled. “Don’t look so scandalized. It doesn’t hurt, I promise. You do trust me, don’t you?”

She bit her lip and covered her breasts with her palms, as if to protect them from his evilness. “I-I trust you.”

“Prove it,” he growled. “Come here.”

Grace padded softly toward him, a frown creasing her brow. “I’m not into pain, so if you hurt me I’ll make you pay for it later.”

He tugged her hands away, then let his gaze take in the sight of her. Her nipples were pebble hard, her lips swollen from his kisses. “Pleasure, my pet, only pleasure.”

“There you go with the pet thing again.”

He leaned down and kissed the spot behind her ear, enjoying the little shudders his touch evoked. “You don’t want to be my pretty little pet, Gracie?” He licked the shell of her ear and nipped at the delicate lobe. “Are you so sure of that?”

“Please, Jackson, you’re making me crazy with this slow loving. I need you inside of me. Now, or I’ll take matters into my own hands.”

He lifted his head and smiled down at her. “First I’m going to bind you, *pet*, then I’m going to fuck you. After we’ve recovered, I’m going to show you something else I’ve been dying to do to you since the first time we met. Any objections?”

“Just one.”

Shit, he hadn’t expected that. “What?”

“Quit talking and fuck me,” she ordered.

The woman definitely had a way with words. He grinned. “Yes, ma’am.”

Chapter Seven

She'd let herself fall. It was that simple. She'd been so strong, resisting him, pretending to remain angry over his hasty departure in her apartment. The truth had smacked her in the face the instant she'd entered his suite. She'd known the only reason she'd let him talk her into a nightcap was because she knew where it would lead and she'd *wanted* it to lead there.

Jackson's fingers trailed over her nipples and she nearly came standing up. He moved around her until he was at her back, then he wrapped a length of the rope around her torso, just below her breasts. Grace grabbed his hand. "I'm not sure about this."

He cupped her breast as he held the rope in place with the other hand. "Don't be so suspicious, baby. You've known me a little over a year. I don't hurt women."

"But this is—"

"Different," he inserted as he pinched her nipple. Grace arched her back, unable to contain the whimpers. "So pretty. So soft and pretty. Let yourself experience something different, Gracie. If you hate it, I'll untie you."

Grace still didn't see the pleasure part of the whole binding thing, but Jackson seemed to think she'd enjoy it. Her sexual history wasn't extensive, not by a long shot, but neither was it dull. She'd enjoyed playing in the bedroom. Still...bondage? She'd never even fantasized about having her breasts bound. Tied to the bed and being ravished by Jackson, now that was a fantasy she could sink her teeth into.

"You're doing it again," he whispered against her ear a second before nipping the lobe with his teeth. She felt the little sting clear to her clit. "Sometimes sex doesn't make sense. There's not always a reason as to why it feels good. I know what I'm doing. I'm not a novice here."

When he slung both ends of the rope over her shoulders and they landed between her breasts, Grace clenched her hands at her sides to keep from yanking it away. Next Jackson ran both ends of the rope under her breasts, then brought them over her shoulders again. After he brought it around her once more, just above her breasts, creating a sort of crisscross harness with the rope, she started to understand why he wanted to do this with her. Her breasts were squeezed between the lengths of rope. It put them on display in a way she'd never seen. As Jackson tightened the rope, she had to clench her thighs together. Her pussy flooded with liquid warmth, and her breasts felt suddenly very swollen and sensitive. Jackson slid his thumb over one and her clit throbbed with need. "Oh, god," she groaned.

"Is it too tight?"

She could barely talk, she was so far gone. “No,” she breathed out.

Jackson moved around to her front. He was so big, so powerful, she felt dwarfed next to him. Small and vulnerable. She eyed his heavy erection, and her temperature spiked higher. He was huge, bigger than any man she’d ever been with. Grace licked her lips as she imagined sucking the round, purplish head into her mouth, teasing him to completion with her tongue, swallowing his hot come.

“Just look at you, baby. Your pale skin and hard, berry nipples.” He plucked one, and her legs shook. “Are you sensitive? Do they need my mouth, pet?”

She nodded, unable to concentrate on anything besides the need to feel Jackson covering her breasts with his lips and tongue.

He took her by the hand and brought her to the bed, then instructed her to sit on the edge. He knelt between her thighs and, with their gazes locked, leaned forward and licked her nipple. Grace moaned and grasped his broad shoulders a second before he sucked the tip into his mouth.

“Jackson, oh, god, that feels...” She couldn’t put her feelings into words. There were no words to describe what Jackson was doing to her.

He hummed against her skin as he plucked at her other turgid peak. Her body arched, needing him to fill her, to take her down and slide into her aching pussy. It was crazy to want another person so much. Later, she’d worry about what that meant, for now she couldn’t think, could barely hang on for the ride.

Suddenly Jackson pulled his lips away. She desperately wanted to beg him to come back, but he cupped her mound and stroked her slit with his middle finger, causing her to sink into oblivion a little more.

“Your pussy is so wet, I could feed on you for hours, baby. Would you like that? Do you want me to tongue-fuck you?”

Her answer was to place her hand over his and push his finger inside her a little more. She spread her thighs wider, giving him better access to her aching cunt. Jackson reached around her body with his other hand, grabbed the rope harness and tugged, squeezing her breasts tighter. He dipped his head and licked a lazy circle around her nipple. Several torturous circles, and she started to plead. “Jackson, please, suck it.”

He leaned back, his eyes glittering silver pools in the dimly lit room. “Are you my pet?”

She knew what he wanted. Total submission. For Jackson, nothing else would do. “I’m your lover,” she answered, unwilling to give him more power over her than he had already.

He grinned. “Soon you’ll let me *own* you. You’ll beg for it.”

Nothing. Not a single smart ass retort. Of course, when his mouth fastened onto her nipple and his teeth grazed it lightly, she forgot all about one-upsmanship and let herself enjoy Jackson’s passion. He pushed her back on the bed and rose over her, his entire length pressed against her. As his mouth journeyed down her body, Grace dug her fingers into his hair. When he reached her pussy, Grace propped her feet on the mattress and spread herself open for him. A muscle in his jaw jumped wildly, and she heard him emit a low groan before dipping between her thighs and suckling her clit.

“Jackson,” she cried out, her fingers digging deeper, holding him against her.

Jackson wrapped his arms around her thighs and speared her entrance with his tongue. Her lower body shot off the bed.

“Touch your pretty tits, baby. Let me see you play with your sensitive little nipples while I eat this juicy cunt.”

Grace was well beyond denying him. She forced herself to release his head and cupped her breasts in both hands. Her nipples were so sensitive, even her own touch had her rioting out of control. Jackson’s intense gaze stayed on her as he lapped up her cream.

He was so close to coming, he could barely restrain himself. He wanted to be snug inside Grace’s slim, delicate body, pounding deep. He wanted her to remember this trip. Every time he looked at her, she’d remember the rope around her breasts, the teasing torture of his tongue inside her cunt, the way their bodies fit so perfectly together as he knew they would.

As she played with her nipples, driving them both crazy, Jackson suckled her clitoris. Her plump nether lips and the slippery slit between made him hungry. “If I don’t get more of that honey, I’ll surely die, Gracie.”

He lowered his head and licked her from her clit to her dewy lips then in between, lapping up her delicate cream. Her legs started to close around his head, but his hands clutched her, holding her firmly in place. Jackson tasted her tangy flavor on his tongue and knew he’d never sampled anything sweeter. He inhaled her womanly scent, sucked her clit between his teeth and nibbled.

Grace’s hands flew to his head, clutching and grasping handfuls of his hair. The sting, had him releasing her and demanding, “Put your hands back on your tits. Don’t make me spank them.”

Her gaze narrowed on him. “You wouldn’t dare.”

He released one of her thighs and delivered a gentle slap to her breast. Grace arched off the bed.

“Fuck!”

Jackson took in her stunned expression. “Did that hurt, pet?” He knew it didn’t. Her breasts were overly sensitive because of the binding. The slap would only stimulate them more.

“N-no, not exactly.”

Jackson slapped her breast two more times, then switched to the other and paid the same attention to it. By the time he was through, Grace was writhing atop the mattress, her fingers clutching the bedspread above her head. Her juices soaked her thighs. He’d never seen a prettier sight.

“You’re the sweetest vision, baby. I could spend months fucking this body.”

When his tongue thrust between her folds this time, Grace lost it completely and pushed against his face, undulating as he tongued her. Pushing her shapely legs wide, he dipped his tongue into her hot opening several more times, luxuriating in the wild sounds coming from her throat. Grace’s hands went to his head, grasping at his scalp and pushing his face against her. This time he let her get away with the little

bit of insubordination. Jackson sucked at the tiny bundle of nerves and flicked back and forth, inciting another series of moans from Grace. When he used his teeth to tug on her clit, she flung her head back and came, shouting his name in untamed abandon.

A few more licks and she strained against the unyielding hold his hands had on her soft thighs. He reveled in her unrestrained passion as she seemed to try to hold onto the delirious feelings riding her body.

Jackson kept his tongue and lips against her sopping wet mound while she regained control. As she collapsed, the muscles in her thighs going slack and falling open, her hands dropped back to the mattress. Jackson lifted away and stood beside the bed, staring down at the tempting picture she presented. She appeared nearly asleep already, exhausted from her climax, but when he dipped his finger into her slippery cunt to gain her attention, her gaze flew to his. He pulled it out and brought it to her lips, rubbing her lube against them before he leaned down and kissed it off her. She whimpered and wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling him down until their bodies were aligned. As her breasts came into contact with his chest, he caught himself and stopped.

“This won’t be a one-nighter, baby,” he vowed.

“Don’t,” she warned. “I’m not promising forever.”

Her refusal to give them a chance at a relationship burned. Jackson pressed his cock against her entrance. “At least give me more than this one night.”

She arched a brow. “Negotiating?”

Jackson slid a finger over the rope binding her breasts. “I think you feel more than a passing attraction toward me, or you never would have let me tie your pretty tits. Admit it, pet.”

Grace bit her lip and wiggled her hips, teasing the head of his cock. “It’s more than a passing attraction. Now stop talking and put that cock where it can do us both some good.”

Jackson moved away and left the bed.

“Hey!” she shouted. “Where are you going?”

He chuckled as he picked up his pants.

Grace rose on one elbow and pointed at him. “I swear, if you leave me again I’ll strangle you in your damned sleep.”

He grabbed a condom out of his pocket and waved it in her direction.

“Oh,” she mumbled and fell back on the bed.

He quickly donned the condom, then placed his knee on the end of the mattress and crawled up her body. Stretched out on top of her, Jackson admitted, “Wild horses couldn’t pull me away from you right now.”

He rose to his knees between her thighs and hooked her legs over his arms. As he pushed his cock just inside her entrance, Grace groaned. It was just the smallest amount, but he watched closely as she chewed at her lower lip. She was so damned tight and small. He wanted to drive into her, slam his hips against hers

and fuck her into the damned mattress. But Grace was too soft for that sort of rough sex. He needed to loosen her up or he'd risk hurting her.

"Stop biting that pretty lip, baby." He let go of her thighs and leaned down to lick at the wound she'd created with her nipping teeth. Slowly, careful of her size, Jackson began rocking his hips back and forth. He controlled his every motion, waiting for her tight opening to accommodate his intimate invasion. It wasn't easy, not when all his instincts were screaming at him to thrust hard and fast and deep, to fuck her the way he'd always imagined. But for Grace, he would bring nothing but sweet pleasure. For her, he'd push his own desires down. He'd do anything if it meant hearing that sexy sigh of satisfaction coming from her sweet lips again.

"You're so fucking tight," he murmured. "You feel amazing hugging my cock."

"You're...big," she managed as she gripped his shoulders.

"Mmm, flattery, Gracie? I had no idea you were capable." He kissed his way over her face to her neck where he found that same jumping vein that he'd tasted before, and bit down. Grace groaned and began to move her hips, building a slow rhythm. Jackson was bigger and a whole lot stronger. He easily held her still, keeping her from hurting herself.

"Not so fast," he warned. "We have all the time in the world." He continued his assault on her tempting pulse.

"I want fast, Jackson. Fast is good."

The sound of her anxious voice made him draw back. He had to grit his teeth against her appeal, but he wouldn't be cajoled. "No. Slowly this first time, or I could hurt you." To his horror, he saw a tear trickle down the side of her cheek. He kissed it away. "Next time you can run the show. You can go as wild as you want, I swear to God."

"I'm holding you to that."

He leaned down and kissed her. She capitulated finally, relaxing her flexing hips. "Two can play the torture game, you know," she warned.

He pictured Grace teasing him into a horny stupor. He swore. "I'll never live through it."

He resumed his slow, torturous movements, taking his time, needing to make it as pleasurable as possible. He feasted at her gorgeous tits, intent on building her passion. Jackson's temperature spiked when her inner muscles relaxed for him and he moved into her another inch. Her pussy held him in the tightest fist, and it was too much. Jackson lost it.

He pushed inside of her hard, watching as Grace's eyes shot wide with pleasure-pain. His mouth came down on hers, swallowing her cries with his kisses, turning pain into desire in an instant. Soon, their bodies were fused together, moving in unison. Jackson braced himself on his elbows on either side of her head and watched as her breasts moved with each thrust, her neck arched, her mouth dropping open. He pushed as deep as he could possibly go, then pulled out all the way and drove into her again, hard and fast.

“Fuck me, please,” she begged him. “Harder, Jackson. Fuck me harder.”

She wrapped her sleek legs around his hips, holding him in her sweet embrace, sending him over the edge and straight into a wildfire. He drove into her pussy one last time and came, hot jets that he wished he could fill her with, mark her forever. In that moment he’d never resented a condom more. Her body pulsed all around his cock, sucking him in farther, milking him dry. Grace collapsed, sated and exhausted.

“Oh, god, that was so worth the wait,” she admitted, a dreamy smile curving her swollen lips.

He very nearly crumpled on top of her, but, mindful of her smaller size, he rolled to keep from crushing her. Jackson worried she’d be sore, it was clear she’d never been with anyone of his size. He had an overpowering need to comfort her, to ensure she had nothing but pretty memories of her first time with him.

Jackson slid out of her boneless body and went to the attached bathroom to dispose of the condom. He grabbed a washcloth, ran warm water over it and brought it to Grace. Her eyes were closed and she had a blissful smile on her lips. His body burned at the sight of her thorough exhaustion. As he bent down and pressed the cloth to the juncture of her thighs, her eyes flew open and her mouth formed a startled O. Neither of them spoke as he cleaned and soothed her sore flesh. Next he removed the rope and massaged her tender skin, paying special attention to the pink flesh of her breasts. As he slid into bed beside her and pulled her pliant body up against him, he felt her start to move. Jackson held her firm.

“Going somewhere?”

“I should get back to my own bed. We do have the conference to think about, you know.”

“Stay. Please.”

She hesitated a moment, but when she finally lay down next to him, his heart swelled. He pulled her close, wrapping his larger body protectively around her smaller one. She wiggled against him, pushing her soft, round bottom against his groin. The cleft of her ass created the perfect cradle for his dick, and he had to bite back a groan. She wiggled a little more, and he clutched her hip in one hand to hold her still. “There really are a lot of mirrors in these bedrooms, huh?” she mumbled, her voice drowsy, only half aware.

“Yeah. At first I thought it would be exciting to watch you in them while I fucked you, but I was too busy watching you to pay any attention to the mirrors.” She fidgeted some more, and Jackson growled, “Enough, or I’m going to fuck this hot little ass too.”

“Mmm, you don’t have it in you. You’re too old for that sort of exertion.”

He swatted one cheek. “I’m going to love it when you have to eat those words, *pet*.”

“Promises, promises,” she breathed. Seconds later, she was snoring.

Jackson smoothed her hair away from her cheek and kissed her. Damn, he couldn’t let her go now. Convincing her they belonged together wasn’t going to be easy, though. His cock stirred to life as she pushed more firmly against him. He had to bite back a curse. Sleeping wasn’t going to be easy, either. Somehow he’d have to figure out a way to do both.

Chapter Eight

As Grace came awake, her senses tuned into her surroundings and she frowned. A warm male body lay plastered against her back. Oh, no, Jackson. In a wave of images, the night before came crashing in on her. The nightcap. The sex. The rope. Oh God, the rope. Her breasts tingled as she thought about the sensation of being bound. She already wanted to do it again. How messed up was that?

One dinner together and she'd flung all her convictions to stay away from the handsome man right out the window. She could blame it on the city. Vegas was known as Sin City for a reason, right? Hell, she could even blame it on Jackson and his talented seduction. There wasn't a woman on the planet who would fault her. But it wouldn't be the truth. The truth smacked her in the face like a Mack truck. She'd fallen. Head over heels fallen. She wasn't even sure when it had happened. Probably the day her face had gotten in the way of his basketball game after they'd first met. His sexy grin and devilish good looks were enough to make any woman melt. Observing—and fighting—him this past year had sealed her fate. Still, he didn't have to know. Just because she was in love with the man didn't mean it needed to become public knowledge.

As delicately as possible, Grace lifted Jackson's arm from around her waist and slipped silently from the bed. She took two steps before he shifted, turned onto his stomach and started snoring. Grace watched him sleep, indulging in a rare moment of having Jackson off guard. Awake, he was a force to be reckoned with. Asleep, he seemed almost tender. He moved his leg, and the sheet fell away, giving her the perfect view of his naked ass. God, no wonder she'd fallen so fast. Who could possibly hold out against all that tanned, muscled flesh? *Move your butt, Grace, he'll be awake soon.* Her inner voice just didn't seem to understand the joys of looking at Jackson in repose.

Grace tiptoed to her dress, which was now a crumpled mess on the floor. She picked it up and slipped it on, then located her shoes. It took longer than expected to find both heels. She'd kicked one off at the end of the bed, but the other had slid beneath it. Shoes in hand, Grace sneaked out of the bedroom, grabbed her purse and rushed out the door, and smacked into a man in his pajamas. "Sorry," she muttered.

He grinned as he looked her over. "No problem. Really."

Grace grimaced as she imagined what she looked like. Sex, that's what. It was probably tattooed on her damned forehead. She tried to muster up some shame, but it just wasn't happening. The sex had simply been too good to wish it'd never happened. In fact, she was hoping the memories would sustain her for the

rest of her life, because she sure as hell wasn't going back for a repeat performance. It was too dangerous to her heart to go anywhere near Jackson Hill. He should come with a warning sign or something.

Grace quickly fled down the hall to her own room. When she came to her door, it took her a ridiculous amount of time to find her keycard. She finally located it beneath a pack of tissues and slid it into the lock. As she stepped inside her room, she finally let herself breathe. Then it all hit her at once, and she slumped to the floor. What had she been thinking? She should have known she wouldn't be able to go on this trip and still keep her heart intact. But he'd wanted a relationship. Hadn't he said that last night? He was offering more than sex, so why was she so afraid? Because she knew Jackson. He'd sleep with her for awhile, it'd be great, then he'd be ready to move on to his next conquest. Her constant refusal to go out with him had posed a challenge. He liked a challenge. As soon as he had her tied around his little finger, she'd be out the door faster than a video game at Christmas time.

Her phone rang. Right away she knew who would be on the other end. She stood and went to it, staring as it rang again. "You can't hide forever," Grace muttered. "Be an adult and answer the damn thing." She ordered her hand to pick up the receiver when it rang a third time.

"Hello?"

"Chicken."

That single word uttered in Jackson's sleepy morning voice had the power to push her out of her self-recrimination. "I needed a shower," she hedged.

"You were running," he teased. "Don't lie."

She went to the couch and plopped down. "I wasn't running, I was walking."

"Why are you so afraid of me? Am I so terrible, Gracie?"

For the first time since meeting the overbearing man, Jackson actually sounded unsure of himself. She didn't want that. She wasn't sure what she wanted, exactly, but she didn't want him thinking things that weren't true. "I'm not afraid of you," she told him. "I'm afraid of the way you make me feel. I'm afraid of a relationship with you."

"Why, baby?" Jackson asked, his voice as warm and tempting as fresh baked cookies. "I'd never hurt you. You must know that by now. There's nothing to fear."

Oh, god, this was too cruel. It was like standing a little girl outside the gates of Disney World then telling her she couldn't go in. "I'm just a simple woman with a smartass attitude. I'm not up to your speed, Jackson. We both know it. You just refuse to see it."

"Get real. You're smarter, sassier and sexier than any woman I've ever met. You've all but flayed me alive with that wicked tongue of yours, so don't act like we aren't in the same league."

"We have a conference to attend," she said, hoping to derail him. "This has to end. I enjoyed last night, but it won't happen again."

Silence greeted her. When a loud knock sounded on her door, she dropped the phone. She left the couch to peek through the hole in the door. Her heart nearly stopped beating and her hands shook. Jackson. She bit her lip and turned the knob, knowing she shouldn't. Knowing he would only turn her inside out all over again. Jackson moved faster than she expected, stepping inside her suite and shoving the door closed behind him. He slammed her against the wall with all the force of a man who was through being polite.

"Bullshit it won't happen again," he bit out. "It's going to happen, I can promise you that. Over and over, baby. So many times you'll want to stay in my bed just to make it easier on the both of us."

"In your dreams," she shot right back. A split second later, he captured her lips with his, effectively shutting out all else. Their tongues mated, and just that fast she went down in flames. Glorious, hot, wonderful flames. They engulfed her, and she forgot her reservations, her worries of never having his whole heart. Suddenly her body was reminded of just how truly wonderful it felt to be loved by Jackson Hill. She hadn't really needed the reminder, but as she slid her arms around his neck and sank into the kiss, she knew it didn't matter. Nothing mattered save for his taste. He picked her up and took her to the bedroom. They fell onto the bed together, rolling until she sprawled on top of him.

He broke the kiss and whispered, "I promised you could go wild, remember?"

"I remember." She wasn't sure what to do, though. She sat astride him, looking at him with his arms behind his head, a grin curving his sexy lips, and Grace suddenly felt vulnerable and unsure. Two things that usually had sarcastic comments spilling out of her mouth. For once, she had nothing to say. She could only stare at the male perfection stretched out beneath her.

Jackson reached up and cupped her cheek, sliding his thumb over her bottom lip. "Take off your dress, baby."

Right, lose the clothes, good idea. She forgot about the zipper this time and yanked the black material over her head. After tossing it to the floor, Grace cupped her breasts and squeezed. "I can still feel the rope against my skin. My nipples tingle when I think about it."

Jackson leaned forward and wrapped his powerful arms around her upper body. He placed a gentle kiss to each hardened tip. "I woke and you were gone, pet. The next time I bind you, I'm going to spank these pretty tits until they're nice and pink."

The use of that hated nickname should have doused her desire, but all it did was send her into a whirlwind of lust. God help her, she liked the idea of being his pet. At least in the bedroom.

"I think I'd rather tie you up instead. Have you ever been tied to the bed, Jackson?"

"No," he stated firmly. "The rope is for you, not me."

She frowned. "Speaking of rope... How did you manage to get that through airport security?"

He smoothed his palms over her ribcage, then down to her thighs. "I didn't want to chance it. I can just see explaining that one." They both laughed. "No, I bought it after we arrived."

Grace's blood ran hot in her veins when Jackson let his fingers journey toward her clit. He stopped short of touching her where she needed him the most, which made her crazy. As she braced herself on his chest, his words hit her. "Wait, you're telling me you went out and bought rope?"

"No, I called down to the desk."

"You can't be serious."

"This is Vegas, baby, they'll get you damn near anything for a price." He winked. "Now, can we please talk about the rope later?"

His fingers came dangerously close to her mound again, but not close enough. Grace wanted to beg him to touch her pussy, to put her out of her misery. She wouldn't, though, not this time. She was determined to make *him* plead a little for a change. Smoothing her fingertips over his muscular pecs and on down to his six-pack abs, Grace knew she'd never get enough of touching him. He was so big, so strong. She felt safe with him. As she came to the waistband of his black boxers, she laughed.

"What's so funny?"

"I can't believe you walked through the hotel in your underwear."

"It was only the hall, no one saw." He swatted her thigh and ordered, "Lift up so I can take them off. They're becoming a nuisance."

Who was she to say no? Grace lifted to her knees and let Jackson skim out of the only thing keeping her from her goal. He tossed them to the end of the bed and pulled her down until his cock was aligned with her pussy. "Mmm, much better." He started to move back and forth, rubbing against her swollen clit. She already wanted to feel him buried deep, but there was something else she craved even more.

She clenched her thighs tight. "Not so fast, big guy. I'm running this show, remember?"

He stopped and frowned up at her. "Just trying to move things along. You seem a bit slow this morning."

"I haven't had my coffee," she whispered as she licked his chest. The flavor of his warm, male skin had her suddenly ravenous for more. She trailed kisses down his torso, tasting and licking as she went. She lifted off him and lay down between his legs, eye level with his cock. It was huge. Veins traveled the engorged length, and a drop of moisture dripped from the slit in his tip. She dipped her head and lapped it up, tasting his salty male essence. "I've wanted to do this for so long. You have no idea how much I've wanted to do this."

She heard him emit a low growl in his chest, then his fingers grabbed handfuls of her hair. He pushed his hips upward and ordered, "Suck it, pet. Take me to heaven."

Grace wrapped a fist around the thick base. Her fingers weren't anywhere near touching. She opened her mouth and sucked the bulbous head into her mouth and swirled her tongue around once, twice, before teasing the tempting slit again. She heard him curse and push her head down a little more, as if determined

to fill her mouth with his cock. Grace opened wider, eager to suck him deep, but she could only take in half of him before she started to gag.

At once Jackson pulled back. "You don't have to, baby. It's okay."

Suddenly, Grace needed to please him. To show him she could match him, in bed and out. It seemed imperative to show him she was as capable of making him burn the same way he so easily sent fire licking through her veins. She let herself relax, enjoying his salty heat, licking and suckling the head. She opened again and sucked him in. His fingers flexed in her hair. His feral expression as she took another inch inside had shivers of awareness running down her spine. His jaw flexed as he watched her play with his cock, teasing and tasting. She pulled him out all the way and licked the entire length. He groaned, and his fingers tightened a little more, pulling almost painfully now. Grace took him deep again, this time swallowing his entire length.

"Fuck, yes," he growled. "That's the way. Swallow that cock, pet."

Grace hollowed her cheeks and sucked hard. Jackson cursed and pulled her head backward. She released him with an audible pop. He wrapped his own hand around hers at the base of his cock and rubbed the head back and forth over her lips.

"I've imagined you like this. You have no idea how many times I jacked off in the shower thinking of your pretty blonde head buried between my legs, baby."

Grace licked her lips, enjoying his sticky male fluid. She opened again, ready to suck him into her hungry mouth, but he held her away.

"Taste my balls. Let me watch you lick them, Gracie."

Grace's pussy flooded with liquid heat at the guttural words. As she dipped her head to the heavy sac beneath his rock hard length, Jackson hummed his approval. At the first swipe of her tongue his hips shot off the bed.

"Christ, yes."

Grace thrilled at the notion that she could drive him so completely wild. It fueled her desire to bring Jackson pleasure. She'd never been that into the act of fellatio, but with Jackson it was almost better than having him buried inside of her. Almost.

She cupped his balls and sucked as much of the tender orbs into her mouth as she could, licking and teasing, before she released them and drew his cock to her mouth again. She brought his tip between her lips and flicked it with her tongue.

"Damn, baby, that's enough," he said as he urged her off him. "I'm too close to filling that hot little mouth with my come."

"I wouldn't mind," she said softly.

He smiled at her and shook his head. "Soon, pet, but not now. Right now I have something else in mind." He lifted to a seated position, grasped her around the waist and pulled her onto the mattress beside him. "Turn over, on your stomach."

Grace didn't need to be asked twice. She turned and stretched out, waiting for him to make his next move. When he left the bed, she swiveled around. "Where are you going?"

"Stay put," he ordered as he leaned down and kissed the base of her spine. "I need supplies. I'll be right back."

He disappeared into the bathroom. Several seconds went by before he reappeared carrying a bottle. She knew that bottle. It was her hand lotion. Confused more than ever, she asked, "A massage?"

"No. Although I wouldn't mind giving you a full body massage." He waved the bottle in the air. "This is for lubricant. The best I could do on such short notice."

Her suspicions rose. "Uh, what are you planning to lubricate?"

He placed the bottle on the bed next to her, then sat on the edge. His hand smoothed over her ass, his gaze holding hers captive. "You can't guess?"

"You want to...back there?"

He dipped a single finger between her ass cheeks. "I want to fuck you back there, yeah."

"I don't know, Jackson."

"You've never been touched there, have you, baby?"

She snorted. "Of course not. Not all guys are as depraved as you."

His finger slid over her anus as he whispered, "You like my depravities, though."

"That's just what I let you think." It would have sounded better had her voice not quivered.

He dipped his finger inside the forbidden hole, and they both groaned. As he came over the top of her, pushing her legs apart and settling between them, Grace just barely had the presence of mind to put up a token protest. "This isn't something I'm comfortable with."

Jackson smoothed both hands over her buttocks. "You weren't sure about the rope, either, but that didn't turn out so bad, right?"

"The rope is different." His warm palms parted her, and she could well imagine him staring at her there. Her face heated. "Jackson, please don't."

"Ah, sweet Gracie, don't you know I only want to bring you pleasure? Let me have this virgin ass, baby. You'll see it's not as bad as you're imagining." He reached for the bottle, but she got to it first. She picked it up and held it out of his reach. "What is it? Are you afraid it'll hurt?"

"You only want to possess me. That's what this is about. Total submission."

"Yes, that's part of it. I want to make you mine, completely mine. The thought of other men touching you makes my gut burn as if I'd downed a bottle of acid. But there's more to it than that. I want you to surrender to me. Give me your trust, baby. You won't be sorry."

Grace knew she could be making the biggest mistake of her life. He could crush her heart as no one else could. She wouldn't be able to recover if Jackson destroyed her. But it was time to take a leap of faith. All this chemistry had to lead somewhere. Hell, he couldn't just be scratching an itch. She wouldn't believe that. She had to trust that he felt something for her.

She took a deep breath and handed him the lotion.

Chapter Nine

He'd known the instant he'd woken to find her gone that what he felt for Grace went deeper than lust. He was in love with her. The confounding woman damn near drove him to drink at times, but then she also made him feel whole, as if a piece of himself had been missing and he just hadn't known it. As he stared down at her stretched out on her stomach, trusting him with something precious, he wanted to howl it at the moon, shout from the highest mountain that Grace Vaughn belonged to him. No other had a right to touch her. Her soft cries and naughty glances were for him alone. He knew half the reason he was about to take her anally was because he wanted to fill every part of her, to imprint himself on her in a way that spoke of pure, animalistic ownership. He'd never needed another woman's total submission before. Hell, he'd never even asked. But with Grace, nothing less would do. He wanted her completely, with no barriers between them.

Jackson popped the top of the bottle of lotion and poured some into the palm of his hand. He smoothed his hands together, warming the fragrant liquid, before he stroked Grace's baby-soft skin. She moaned as he gently massaged her, readying her for the invasion of his cock where no man had ever been. The thought tore a growl from his chest.

He smoothed his fingertips over her lower back. "Your skin is so delicate, baby. I could bruise you so easily."

"Mmm, I don't think I care with you doing that. Oh, my, that feels so incredible. You are one talented man, Jackson. I think I've died and gone to heaven."

His chest swelled with pride. He let his fingers drift over the small indentations above her bottom and murmured, "You are being a very good little pet, Gracie. Shall I reward you?"

"Please reward me," she moaned.

Jackson let his slick fingers dip between her ass cheeks and slid one digit up and down her anus. Over and over again, making certain she was completely slick with the vanilla-scented cream before he wiggled it into the tight pucker a bare inch. Her startled intake of breath at the tiny invasion reminded him that she was new to anal sex. He forced his raging libido down, hoping to build the pleasure slowly.

"Will you beg for me, pet?" The need to fill her with his cock instead of his finger began to ride him hard.

Her body, once so pliant, now seemed strung tight. "I don't know what you want. Please, you're making me crazy."

Her husky voice nearly did him in. “You know exactly what I want. Admit you’re mine, baby, tell me now before I fuck this tight little ass.”

“Oh, god, this is so insane,” she cried out.

“Say it, Gracie.”

She turned her head and glared at him. “Fine, I’m yours, happy now?”

He grinned. “For now.” He pulled his finger free and poured more cream onto his fingers, then spread it around. “When my cock slides into this sexy little butt, it’ll feel so incredible you’ll come back for more. You’ll crave this type of lovemaking after I’m through, I promise you.” He slid two fingers into her this time, spreading her open, willing her muscles to relax. She writhed beneath him, and he had to hold her hip to keep her from hurting herself.

“Spread your legs a little more,” he ordered. When she complied, his entire body shot out of control. He could see everything. Her heart-shaped ass, the pink pucker of her anus and her wet, swollen cunt. She was completely on display.

“It feels forbidden, doesn’t it?” he asked. She replied with a jerky nod as she buried her face into the bedspread. “You’ve always been my forbidden pleasure, Gracie. Each time I looked at you, I knew I had no business thinking what I was thinking. You were too young, too innocent. But it never seemed to matter, because I still wanted you.”

She lifted her head and started to speak, but he slid his fingers in another inch and all that came out was a whimper. Jackson was buried clear to his knuckles inside Grace’s ass.

“There are a lot of sensitive nerve endings around your anus. When my cock fills you, it’s going to feel so damn good. Spreading you open and pumping into you. Tell me. Admit you want me there. Give me permission, baby.”

“Yes, Jackson.”

Just what he wanted to hear. “You will be able to feel every throb.” He leaned over her and whispered into her ear. “Every inch will feel like another taste of paradise. Then, when I come, you’ll feel the heat of it shooting through you. Would you like me to come inside of you? Right here—” he wiggled his fingers for emphasis “—in this tight little ass where no man has ever touched?”

“You make me want things. I’ve never felt so ready to come and you’ve not even touched my clit. Please don’t make me wait.”

Her passion equaled his, but he couldn’t take her, not just yet. “I want to make sure you’re ready for me.” He pulled his fingers free and added a third, then thrust inside, stretching her, pushing her beyond her comfort zone. He made every attempt to go slow, allowing her body to adjust to the invasion. She moaned and spread her legs further, pressed backward against his hand, as if anxious for more.

“Mmm, that’s it, pet,” he murmured. “Now you’re ready.” Jackson’s body was on fire and his dick ached for release. He couldn’t wait another second.

He reached for the bottle of lotion once more and poured a small amount over his aching cock, already swollen and dripping with pre-come at the thought of being buried deep. Gently, Jackson separated the round globes of Grace's backside and touched the head of his cock to her entrance. Alert to any sign of pain, he pushed the head of cock inside. It was such sweet torture to hold back from thrusting deeply. His body was desperate to fuck her hard and fast.

She cried out his name and clutched the bedspread above her head. As he slipped in another inch, she thrust backward.

He held her hips in place. "Easy, baby. Let me take you there slowly."

Another inch more and she tried to take control of their lovemaking by pushing herself onto him. He bit back a curse as the action caused his cock to slip in another inch. "Slow down or you'll hurt yourself," he commanded.

She was new to this type of sexual pleasure and didn't understand that they couldn't rush this first time. He refused to cause her even an ounce of pain—despite the way his primal instincts kept battering at him to fill her.

As he held her down, Jackson heard Grace let loose a needy little whimper. The yearning, delicate sound turned his heart to mush and he gave her another thick inch of his hard flesh. In the same instant, he took his right hand from her hip and toyed with the tempting little bud of her clitoris. He watched her back arch, her hands clutching the bedspread as she became a slave to her body's delicious sensations. With no warning she screamed his name and pushed against him as her orgasm took her. It was sheer ecstasy to bring her to all new heights of pleasure.

"Now," he snarled. "All of me."

"Yes!"

A rumbling growl escaped him at her feral response. He pushed himself the rest of the way inside her tightest opening, her muscles sucked him in and she immediately tensed.

Jackson swore, then swore again. The pleasure-pain of her body's clutch was the best sort of torment.

"Fuck, ease up, Grace."

"I-I can't," she cried.

Jackson reached up and stroked her sweat soaked hair away from her face, then covered her body with his larger frame, folding himself around her protectively. He kissed her upturned cheek and felt her inner muscles relax. He thanked the heavens above. Much more of her clenching and he would have embarrassed himself.

"Good girl." He bit the smooth line of her neck, pleased when she all but purred for him. He licked and suckled at her neck, knowing now how much she liked it, and began a gentle rhythm with his hips. Leisurely he built the pace until his overheated flesh was slapping against hers.

"You belong to me."

She didn't speak, only licked her lips and pushed against him, joining in the rhythm of their beautiful dance. Soon he felt himself swell and his balls drew up tight. One more thrust and he was there, his cock erupting inside her, hot fluid filling her. She shouted his name and joined him with her own climactic finish.

Jackson kissed Grace's cheek, then her neck. "You make me lose control."

"I know what you mean."

Jackson slipped his cock free of her tight opening, then sat back on his knees and stared down at the little blonde beauty who'd stolen his heart with a few sarcastic comments. It was unbelievable he'd gone his entire life keeping his heart safe, only to have it snatched away by a woman too sassy for her good. He moved off the bed and said, "Come on, shower time."

"I can't move, but you go ahead."

He shook his head, then swatted her ass. She jerked and glared at him. "What was that for?"

He held out his hand. "Get your cute ass in gear. We need a shower, then we need to see about the conference."

She muttered to herself and scooted across the bed. "I suppose I should spend at least a little time looking over the different software companies. Vaughn is due for some upgrades."

Jackson grabbed her as she started around him toward the bathroom. He pulled her in tight and took her mouth in a demanding mating of lips. As he felt her surrender, he dipped low, swung her into his arms and carried her to the bathroom. He licked at the seam of her lips before lifting his head. He looked at the huge tub and changed his mind about a quick shower. Leaving Grace standing in the middle of the room nibbling at her lower lip, Jackson turned on the faucets and adjusted the temperature of the water until it was just right.

"I thought you wanted to shower?"

He held out a hand and she took it willingly, a shy smile crossing her face. "Changed my mind." He let her step in first, before he moved in behind her and sat down. She settled between his legs before he grabbed the soap and washcloth.

"No bubble bath?"

He smoothed the cloth over her slick skin and felt his cock begin to stir. "It'd only detract from the view."

Grace was silent as he started to clean her. He made his way down over her torso, then massaged the washcloth between her thighs. It wasn't long before the washcloth became annoying. He dropped it in the water and let his fingers journey over Grace's smooth skin. When he moved upward, touching the plump flesh of her breasts, she quivered. He imagined what it might be like to have her this way every morning, soft, trusting, ready for his pleasure.

“You’re so pretty, baby,” Jackson murmured. “I love the way you react to my touch.” He pinched her nipple and Grace arched forward. “You make me lose my mind.”

“I love your touch,” Grace breathed out. She lifted her arm and clutched his forearm, as if afraid he’d disappear if she let go. He could’ve told her he wasn’t about to go anywhere.

Jackson’s skimmed his fingers back and forth over each puffy nipple, forcing them to tight peaks. He inched his way over her ribcage to her hips, before cupping her mound. “Mmm, my pretty little baby,” he whispered against her ear. “So soft and sweet.”

Grace spread her legs wider, giving him the advantage. He dipped his finger into her pussy, pulling another moan from her. He was slow and gentle, the need to savor each touch paramount in his mind. There would be no speeding to the finish line this time. He used his other hand to pinch her clitoris between his finger and thumb, rolling and squeezing the tight bundle of nerves. His blood ran hot as her pussy clenched around him.

“Oh, God, I want you,” she admitted. “I feel like I’ve wanted you forever.”

“Me too, sweetheart, but let me make love to you for a bit. There’s no hurry.”

He emphasized his words by letting another finger join the first inside her wet heat. His cock pressed against her bottom and he had to force back the need to plunge it deep inside her hot little ass. Grace pushed her lower body into his hand, working herself into a frenzy.

He kissed her neck and sucked at her pulse, giving her a small purple mark. “Mine,” he growled.

“Please,” Grace begged, her voice hoarse from her earlier shouts.

He placed a series of soft kisses down her shoulder and hummed against her wet skin, “You’re so sexy like this, baby. All slick and eager. I could drown in you.” Smoothing his fingers over Grace’s fleshy labia, he watched as she flung her head back and moaned deep, pushing against his hand. Her desperation fueled his hunger.

Moving his fingers inside her quicker, he found just the right rhythm, caressing her into a wild fervor. When she was nearly there, he pulled all the way out, then plunged deep. He pumped himself against the supple flesh of her ass while he finger-fucked her tight pussy, helpless to stop the firestorm raging inside him. Without warning Grace burst apart, her inner muscles holding his fingers tightly. Her bucking body pushed him over the edge and had him coming in hot spurts against her body, coating them both with his seed.

Jackson wrapped his other arm around her middle as her orgasm continued, holding her snug against him. After they both caught their breath, he cupped her face and forced to look at him. “No woman has ever made me lose control so easily.” He pressed his lips to hers, soft and easy, before coaxing her lips open. When she sighed and let him in, he sucked at her tongue, dying for a taste of her, aching to make the moment last forever. Slowly, he lifted his lips from hers.

She let out a shaky breath, then said, “I have no control with you. You speak and I melt. You smile and butterflies fill my stomach. You steal a woman’s sanity and it’s really not fair.”

He grinned down at her. “Then we’re on equal ground here, *pet*, because it’s the same for me.”

Neither of them said another word. They simply lingered in the tub until the water turned cold, enjoying the moment. As they toweled off, Jackson waited for Grace to say something, anything, about her feelings. To give him at least a hint at what she felt for him. As she started to dress for the conference, his frustration won out. He snatched her blouse out of her hand and held it above her head. “Whoa, that’s it? You don’t have anything to say?”

Her brows shot upward. “What do you mean?”

“Don’t play with me,” he gritted out. “You know what I’m talking about. We just shared something incredible and you’re going to go into work mode without a backward glance?”

She pushed her hair behind her ear. “I loved what we did, you know that. It was wonderful, but I don’t know what more you want from me.”

Jackson took her chin in his palm and forced her to meet his gaze. “I want a relationship with you. I want to belong to you and I want you to belong to me. I won’t accept anything less.”

She placed her hand against his cheek, her expression one of concern. “I’m not sure it’s smart, but I think I’m falling for you.” He started to lay his own feelings on the line, but she placed two fingers against his lips, forestalling any declarations of love everlasting.

“You should know that I didn’t want to care about you. I tried really hard not to, in fact. You aren’t the type to settle down. I’ve seen you with other women. You don’t stay with a woman for more than a few months. I’m not interested in being dumped once the newness wears off. If you can’t offer me more than a short term sexfest, then we end things now and be glad for what we had.” She took a deep breath and went on. “After the car accident, when I was told I’d have a hard time bringing a baby to full term, I sort of convinced myself I didn’t have much to offer a man. I’m still uncertain. There are a lot of *ifs* involved there, but I do know that I’m tired of worrying about what may never be.”

Jackson took her head in the palms of his hands. “First of all, if we have kids, great. If not, that’s okay too. Giving birth doesn’t make you more of a woman in my estimation. Second, I’ve not had a serious relationship because the only woman who could ever fill that spot is standing in front of me. I’ve watched you for over a year. We’ve been driving each other crazy dancing around the issue, but the truth is, I don’t think either of us was ready. I love you, Gracie. You and only you. I’m too damned old for you, and you deserve someone who can be sweet and gentle, but I won’t give you up. This isn’t a sexfest. Although that does sound intriguing.” She elbowed him in the ribs, and he chuckled. “Seriously, baby, this is the real deal.”

Jackson was horrified when Grace’s soft blue eyes welled up. He’d rather lie on a bed of nails than watch Grace cry. “This is the real deal for me too,” she admitted shyly.

He swiped at a tear that trickled down her cheek and whispered, “Good. Now, let’s get this damned conference out of the way so we can get back here and play with that rope a little more.”

Her cheeks turned pink. “You want to bind me again?”

Jackson reached around and smacked her ass, causing her to yelp, before handing her blouse back to her. “There’s twenty-five feet of rope there, pet, I can do a lot of tying with that much.”

She went up on her toes and whispered, “You are so depraved.”

Their lips touched, and suddenly the conference was forgotten again.

Epilogue

Three weeks later...

"Merrick, I'm not turning in my expenses, and if you suggest it one more time, I'm going to blow a gasket. I didn't do a lick of work the entire time I was in Vegas. It was more or less a vacation."

Grace was getting good and tired of having this conversation. From the time they'd arrived back in Ohio, Merrick had been all questions. When she'd finally relented and told him that Jackson and she were now an item, he'd started threatening Jackson to within an inch of his life if he so much as made her sad. Now he wouldn't let up about reimbursing her for the Vegas trip.

"You aren't taking advantage of me if I want to pay for the damned trip, so turn in your expenses."

"She won't change her mind, trust me. I should know."

Grace pivoted on her heel to find Jackson lounging against Merrick's office door, a devilish grin on his handsome face. His tan pants and black polo shirt showed off his muscular body. Her mouth watered as she remembered how they'd started out the day. She'd woken in Jackson's bed, his mouth between her thighs. She'd reciprocated, of course.

"Earth to Grace."

She turned at the sound of her cousin's annoyed voice. "What?"

Merrick waved her out of his office. "Go, it's no use trying to talk to you when you have that glazed-over look in your eyes."

Jackson stepped forward and wrapped an arm around her waist. "Ready to go home?"

She nodded. "I just need to grab my purse. I'll meet you by the elevators." She started to move away, but he was faster. His head descended, their lips met. It was too brief, and Grace badly needed more. "Tease," she muttered as she stalked from the office, his chuckle trailing after her.

As she approached her desk, one of the other female employees came up to her. Marty was it? No, Marly. She'd never cared much for the other woman. Her catty gossiping in the break room had grated on her nerves more than once.

"So, you and Jackson have been pretty hot and heavy for...what? Three weeks now?"

Grace had no idea where this conversation was leading, but knowing Marly, it wasn't going to make her happy. "Uh, yeah, I guess." Grace took her purse off the back of her chair and turned toward the woman.

"So, that means you have about a week left before he boots you out of his bed."

Ah, here it came. Envy, and it was never pretty. “You think?”

The woman looked down her nose at her. Grace had never actually seen someone physically do that, but Marly was quite capable, considering she was six-foot-three. “He never keeps a woman longer than a month,” she sneered. “Hope you didn’t give up your apartment. You’ll probably need it again soon, hun.”

Grace stepped forward and gave her anger free rein. “Be very careful what you say about Jackson. I don’t much care for people who trash my family.”

Marly stepped back. “He’s not even close to being your family.”

Grace stepped forward again, noting the way Marly paled. “He’s mine, remember that. I protect my own.”

“No need to get nasty. I’m just giving you a friendly warning. It’s no skin off my nose if you don’t heed it.”

She stomped off, leaving Grace in a predicament. She could clock the bitch, but then that wouldn’t be very professional. Or she could do the adult thing and let it go.

“She’s not worth it, baby.”

The deep baritone behind her had her pussy throbbing. She turned to find Jackson standing several feet away, his hands in his pockets. She couldn’t read his expression. Had he heard the woman’s caustic remarks? “She deserved a black eye for what she said about you.”

Jackson closed the distance separating them and took her in his arms. “I love you, Gracie. I’m not getting tired of you. Give me about fifty years and maybe that’ll change, but I highly doubt it will even then.”

“And I love you,” she said on a sigh as she wrapped her arms around his neck. “Now, let’s go home. It’s my turn with the rope.”

“Uh, baby, I thought we talked about that.”

Grace let her hand travel down his back to cup his ass. “Chicken?”

His grin lit her on fire. “Bring it on, *pet*.”

About the Author

To learn more about Anne Rainey, please visit www.annerainey.com. Send an email to Anne at anne@annerainey.com or join her Yahoo! group to join in the fun with other readers as well as <Anne>! <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/annerainey> Anne's Newsie

Look for these titles by Anne Rainey

Now Available:

Haley's Cabin
Touching Lace
Tasting Candy
Burn
Turbulent Passions
Taking Chloe

The only way to keep what he has...is to surrender everything.

Taking Chloe

© 2009 Anne Rainey

Vaughn Series, Book 3

Merrick Vaughn couldn't be happier with this life. His business is jumping and his marriage to the love of his life is about as good as it gets. At least, that's what he thinks...until Chloe announces she wants to separate.

Stunned doesn't begin to cover it, but it quickly becomes clear that's she's dead serious. And if he doesn't take action, as in now, he's going to lose the only woman he's ever loved.

The last thing Chloe wants is a divorce, but she can't go on living with a virtual stranger who spends all his time—and hers—behind a desk. It's tearing her apart, and taking a break to sort out her thoughts seems her only recourse.

Then Merrick offers a wicked proposition: go to Hawaii with him for one week's vacation. After that, if he hasn't successfully changed her mind, he'll let her go. No questions asked. There's only one caveat. She must agree to give him complete control.

Chloe's intrigued and scared. One week in paradise might bring them closer—or be their ultimate undoing.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Taking Chloe:

"Because I want to, damn it, that's why."

Chloe rolled her eyes at Merrick's reason for wanting to shower with her. "It would be faster if you'd just let me finish."

"I'm not leaving, so deal with it."

"We're never going to get to dinner if you don't leave, Merrick."

"Fuck dinner. I want to wash you, so scoot over. Besides, let's not forget the deal. I'm in charge."

"Yes, you're in charge...of our fun. This is a shower."

"And a shower can be mighty fun."

Chloe wasn't sure why she continued to resist. As husband and wife they'd showered together hundreds of times. This time it seemed so different, as if it were the first time. A virgin on prom night would be less jumpy, for crying out loud!

"Fine, but if we don't make our reservations, don't blame me."

His grin was one of pure male arrogance. "Duly noted."

Chloe tried not to drool when Merrick yanked his shirt off and tossed it to the bathroom floor. As he undid the fly of his jeans and slid them and his black boxers down his powerful thighs, she gave up on

maintaining control all together. God, he was gorgeous. His muscled behind faced her, and if she leaned toward him a few inches, she could take a bite out of his delicious flesh. He straightened and turned toward her. His cock was huge. As she watched, it seemed to get even bigger. As her gaze snared his, he grinned. She lit up like a Christmas tree.

“Those pretty eyes are devouring me right now, babe.”

She pushed her wet hair behind her shoulder and tried not to let his sweet, hard body get to her...too much. “I can’t help if I like what I see.”

“I like what I see, too. A lot,” he growled.

He stepped into the tub with her. Chloe moved to the side to give him room. He was twice her size and he took up most of the tub. Not that she was complaining. She couldn’t remember the last time her husband had taken the time to shower with her. Too long. Much too long.

“You’re so beautiful, Chloe. Inside and out.”

His words and the sincerity behind them filled her heart with warmth. “You haven’t told me that for a very long time. It’s nice to hear compliments from you.”

He slid the backs of his fingers down her wet arm, leaving little goose bumps in his wake. “You make me want to slay dragons and shower you with diamonds,” he murmured. “I’m sorry I’ve been so wrapped up in work. I need to explain about that, but first I want to show you how much I’ve missed you. May I?”

He’d melted her completely. She’d become a useless puddle of pudding at his feet.

“Yes,” she capitulated, “I think I’d like that very much.”

He placed two fingers against her lips. “Shh, it’s okay, baby. We’re going to take our time, go real slow. I have a need to experience my wife to the fullest tonight.”

She removed his fingers and asked, “What about dinner?” She didn’t really care about food, but she should at least ask, for his sake.

“Screw dinner,” he muttered.

As his mouth came crashing down on hers, Chloe fell against him, relishing the sensation of her nipples against the solid wall of his chest. At once he was everywhere, his arms sturdy and protective around her. He cupped her ass in his palms, lifted and pulled her tighter against his lethal strength. His hands squeezed, and she laughed. “Merrick, that tickles!”

“I know. Thought I’d forgotten, huh?”

Chloe feared he’d forgotten a lot of things about her, but she didn’t want to reveal so much of her inner turmoil. “Well, you must admit it’s not your typical ticklish spot.”

“There’s not a damn thing typical about your ass, Chloe. It’s sexy as hell.” He squeezed her flesh again, and she let loose a string of giggles. “When you giggle like that it turns me on like you wouldn’t believe.”

She liked the thought of Merrick turned on because of her. “What else turns you on?” she prompted.

“The cleft in your chin,” he easily answered. His tongue came out and touched the little indentation. Her body flooded with liquid heat.

“Is that all?” she managed between pants.

“The length of your neck. You have a regal bearing, and your neck just begs to be kissed and nibbled.”

He proceeded to prove his point by angling his head and teasing the side of her neck with his lips. He slid her wet hair out of the way and skimmed his tongue up and down her flesh, directly over her vein. He bit down and her pussy pulsed and swelled with need. Her hands clutched at his shoulders, fingernails biting into flesh and muscle. She closed her eyes and gave herself over to the moment. His mouth drifted lower, sliding over the tops of her breasts. When he kissed each nipple with tender affection, her legs shook with anticipation.

“The bellhop eyed your sweet tits like a mocha latte. Pissed me off,” he gritted out. “But I have to admit, the kid has a good eye. You do look delicious, baby.”

He cupped her left breast, brought it to his lips and sucked as much flesh as he could into his warm mouth. His tongue teased, his teeth grazed. She arched against him, mashing her other sensitive peak against his stubbled cheek. He cupped her right breast, flicked his thumb over the hard bud. Arrows of pleasure shot clear to her core. She hungered to make love to him. To feel him sinking deep inside her heat where she needed him so badly. The ache built and built until she whimpered and begged, shameless in her desire.

Merrick released her breast and pulled back. He stared up at her with such intensity her body vibrated as if stroked.

“Soon, baby, real soon, I promise. First, I need a taste. I’ve lived too long without your honey sliding over my tongue. I need to suck that tempting little pussy of mine.”

She was beyond denying either of them. “Oh, God, yes.”

Merrick’s hungry grin had her nerve endings rioting out of control. He slid slowly to his knees, his gaze holding her immobile. The hot spray from the shower pelted them both. Merrick’s body glistened, his muscles even more pronounced than before, his dark hair slicked back away from the harsh planes of his face.

Her husband. Her lover. Her everything.

Chloe became aware of the glaring truth in that moment. No matter what happened, her body would always be his to command, her heart his to hold.

He nudged her legs wider and clutched onto her thighs. Chloe sucked in a breath, knowing the pleasure only he could coax forth.

As his gaze snagged hers and held, she rested her palms on his shoulders and waited for that first delicious touch. He prolonged the moment and time seemed to stand still. Even in such a submissive

position, Merrick still held power like none other. As he leaned forward and kissed her clit, they both groaned.

“No one will ever take you from me.”

She wanted to protest, to let him know she had a mind of her own and would do what she had to do to keep her sanity, but his lips rubbing back and forth over her labia stopped her assertions. She couldn't think, couldn't grab onto a single skittering thought. She stopped trying to think and concentrated on feeling.

Merrick used his mouth with an expert's skill. His tongue dipped inside her heat, swirled around and came back out again.

“Fucking delicious,” he murmured.

He sat back and removed his hands from her thighs, then used his thumbs to open her. His eyes on her there always made her hyper-aware of her femininity. Merrick always seemed to take such pleasure in looking at her intimate flesh before he took a taste, as if enthralled by the shape and texture of her body.

“Why do you do that?”

He licked his lips and smiled. “Do what?”

Chloe's cheeks filled with heat. She hadn't meant to ask. “You always look at me there,” she explained. “It makes me nervous.”

“Because you're beautiful,” he admitted, his tone rough with arousal. “Every inch is beauty to me. God is surely an artist because you, my pretty wife, are a work of art.”

Chloe's heart swelled. His words made perfect sense because she felt the same about him.

As his head descended on her, she clutched more tightly onto his wide shoulders. She knew what to expect and she craved it. His hot breath touched her first. She moaned aloud, and he blew a draft of air over her clitoris. She widened her stance, which gave him better access. She thought she might've pleaded a little, but she couldn't be certain. His tongue touched, ignited a fire inside that had burned white-hot for months.

He flicked over her swollen nether lips several times then sucked her clit into his mouth. She went wild, bucking against his face, aching so badly for his touch, his burning touch. He doubled his assault on her body and slid his middle finger deep inside her tight sheath. Her inner muscles squeezed him tight, as if loath to let him go. He growled. The deep timbre of his voice traveled over her clit and went straight to her womb. He lifted away, slid a second finger inside her pussy and pushed her to the very limit of control.

“Come for me. Let me feel you go up in flames, Chloe.”

She'll make him finish what he started—if they live through the night.

Alaskan Heat

© 2009 Pam Champagne

Framed and on the run, FBI agent Joe “Hawk” Hawkins has only one chance to clear his name: hit the road for Eagle, Alaska. Things can’t get much worse, until a woman from his past steps into his path. Sophie’s a brilliant statistician, pissed off about their disastrous one night stand—and offering him a deal.

This is Sophie’s first field assignment, and the fact that it involves Hawk doesn’t make it any easier. She’s never forgotten or forgiven the night Hawk found his way to her bed and left her wanting more. Now she’s on a double mission to make Hawk finish what he started, and get them both to Eagle alive.

The long Alaska Highway stretches before them, and long nights of sexual fireworks that rival the Northern Lights. Caution turns to trust, and then to a love neither of them bargained for.

With two rogue agents in hot pursuit, though, the end of the road may be closer than they think...

Enjoy the following excerpt for Alaskan Heat:

Sophie forced a casual smile even though her body thrummed with the need to leap on Hawk. She didn’t want foreplay. Already the insides of her thighs were wet and sticky. She cleared her throat and reached for the robe hanging on the outside hook of the bathroom door. “Sounds tempting. As soon as I get back.”

The man of her dreams sat up and bumped his skull again. “Damn it,” he muttered. “Where are you going?”

Two steps brought her to the door. “To put Rueger in the cab for the night. Be right back.”

Once outside, Sophie breathed in the nippy air. More than likely there’d be a frost tomorrow morning. Unlocking the truck, she fished around the seat until her hand curled around her cell. The hard, packed gravel hid the sound of her footsteps as she sprinted toward the woods. As soon as she’d run far enough for privacy, she punched five on the speed dial.

“Clements here.”

“It’s Sophie.”

“Sophie, why haven’t you called? I told you—”

“Be quiet and listen. I only have a minute. Hawk’s with me. Call off your hounds.”

“What hounds?” Stan’s confusion sent a shard of fear through her.

She gripped the slim cell hard enough to break it. “Some feds stayed on our tail for several miles. I turned into a picnic area and they sped by.”

“Damn it. Has to be Blair and Reed. I had to put them on administrative leave, but I can’t restrict their movements. They’re on to us.”

“Isn’t this what you wanted?”

“Not this far from Eagle.”

Sophie whirled. The camper rocked. “Got to go.” She disconnected and slipped the phone in her robe pocket, making sure to shut it off in case Stan decided to call back. She whistled for Rueger and jogged back to the truck. “Up.” Once he jumped inside, she slammed and locked the door. Taking a deep breath, she prepared to face Hawk’s inquisition.

“Where the hell have you been?” he demanded the moment she stepped inside. He stood buck naked at the side of the bed.

More moisture lubed her thighs.

“Who’d you call?” He held up his hand. “No lies. I heard you talking.”

Christ. The man must have the ears of a wild animal. “Stan. Those weren’t his men following us.”

“Damn! Blair and Reed then.”

“Isn’t this what you wanted? A confrontation?”

Her lower belly cramped at Hawk’s face tight with lust.

“Sure is,” he purred. “But at a place and time of my choosing. There’s not much they’ll try tonight so close to the highway. You and I have unfinished business. I always pay my debts.”

Sophie trembled, imagining the pleasure she’d discover in Hawk’s bed tonight. Ever since she’d met Hawk, she’d waited for this moment. She wanted everything to be perfect. As she wiggled out of her robe, the fleece material slipped off her shoulders to pool at her feet. If only she owned a sexy, silk negligee.

Several moments passed before she realized Hawk wouldn’t make the first move. At least he’d given her the opportunity to change her mind. As if that would happen. She closed the short distance and stepped into his open arms. “This is only the first installment, you know. I’ll let you know when I’m totally satisfied.”

“You do that.” Callused fingers trailing across her nipples sent a jolt of desire to her core. Her stomach clenched when those same fingers dipped into her bellybutton only to slide lower. One finger, then two slid between her swollen folds. Reality was hotter than her imagination. She hadn’t burned with such need last Christmas. Now she had to keep her emotions under wraps. Hawk wanted hot sex, not love. She slumped and clung to his shoulders to keep from falling. Her groan came out of nowhere. “I’m on fire.” Was that her voice, hoarse with need?

“I can feel it.” Warm breath touched her skin while his tongue played with the lobe of her ear. His fingers pumped in and out of her sheath while his busy thumb made circular motions on her clit, nearly throwing her into climax.

She loved his playing, but right now she wanted release. No, she *needed* release. “Enough teasing. Fuck me.”

“Such language from the lips of a lady. I thought you wanted satisfaction? Let me do my job. Be patient. You won’t be sorry.”

Sophie squeezed her legs together, clenching her vaginal muscles on his fingers. The huge cock poking her belly didn’t lie. He, too, was fast losing control.

“Do you play with yourself, Sophie?”

The question intruded on her pleasure. “What?”

“Nights when you can’t sleep. Do you make yourself come? How do you do it? With your fingers? A vibrator?” The whispered words made her clit throb.

Unable to stand the torture, she pumped her hips on his fingers.

“Is that a yes?” He nibbled her lips, his tongue licking her mouth before pushing inside. She sucked hard.

His free hand curled around her hip, encouraging her to fuck his fingers faster and harder. “I’m going to—” He withdrew his hand, and the building climax waned. “Damn you, Hawk! Not again. I won’t let you leave me wanting more.”

“Got no intention of it.” He grasped her waist and lifted her onto the small table, pulling her butt to the very edge. “Put your hands behind you. Brace yourself,” he growled.

Hawk spread her thighs, stretching her wide. Muscle discomfort fled at the touch of his cock rubbing her clit. “I’m through playing, Sophie. I’m going to fuck you. How do you want it? Hard and fast? Slow and easy? A little at a time or all at once?”

Hawk scrutinized Sophie spread-eagled on the hard surface. She had a gorgeous body. One he’d thought about more times than he cared to remember. With her head back and her mouth slightly parted, she invited him to take what he wanted. Her body sent out rippling waves of heat. He pushed the head of his cock inside her wet opening.

The tremble in her legs fueled his self-torture. For a moment, a twinge of guilt held him back. Sophie was a good girl, not the kind who participated in sex games for the sheer pleasure. Not like him. Was she ready for sex for sex’s sake? In the game he played, emotional love had no part in the action. Pleasure and satisfaction were the end results. He should stop right now.

“Please, Hawk.” His cock swelled at the wanton tremor in her voice. “Fuck me. I can’t stand it.”

He shoved his guilt aside. “Talk dirty to me.”

Her eyes opened, and he drowned in the dazed passion of her usually alert gaze.

“What are you’re feeling? Tell me what you want. What makes you feel good?” He let go of her thighs. They stayed splayed. After one teasing pinch of her hardened nub, he cupped her breasts. He leaned forward to tongue a swollen nipple and pushed his cock deeper. So damn snug.

He quickly pulled out of her and sank to the floor and licked her clit. “Talk to me.”

Sophie gasped. "Yes! Your tongue feels so... Oh!"

Her panting voice urged him on. He tongue fucked her until he sensed her orgasm fast approaching. Grabbing her hips to stop her squirming, he blew on her opening.

"Damn you."

She yanked his hair. Despite her desperation, a perversity to let her know what kind of man he was drove him on. "What do you call your vagina? Pussy?"

"Bunny," she choked out.

Hawk chuckled and ran his tongue down the full length of her slit, sucking her clit. She lurched and flooded his mouth.

"I bet Bunny would like a big carrot."

"Stop tormenting me. Do you want me to beg?"

He came to his feet and pushed her flat on the table. Hooking his hands under her knees, he yanked her onto his aching cock. With one hard thrust, he was inside. Closing his eyes, he held her pussy tight against his pelvis. Her clenching vaginal muscles milked his cock. Like a stick of dynamite, his body was poised to explode.

He forced himself to loosen his grip. "Move, baby. Make yourself come. Hurry."



Samhain Publishing, Ltd.

It's all about the story...

Action/Adventure

Fantasy

Historical

Horror

Mainstream

Mystery/Suspense

Non-Fiction

Paranormal

Red Hots!

Romance

Science Fiction

Western

Young Adult

www.samhainpublishing.com