

DESIRE

Marie Rochelle



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Desire

A novella of sensual romance by

MARIE ROCHELLE

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To Jim:

Maybe I should have said *yes* to your question instead of *no*.

Marie

Chapter One

“Love is for fools. I don’t know why you even bother dealing with the way she treats you,” Nick Lavery complained, glaring at his best friend across the room. “Just dump her bossy ass and move on with your life.”

“Man, you shouldn’t let what Carrie did to you make you hate being in love,” Richie, his best friend of twelve years, told him. “Carrie was a gold-digger. You deserve better than that. Maybe if you leave this damn apartment more, you might find someone new. Anyways, Kristy doesn’t treat me badly. We are in a relationship. People in love fight, but it passes. It always does.”

“You keep that notion, and you will come home to find a note taped to your fridge saying ‘*I didn’t mean for this to happen, but I’ve fallen in love with someone else,*’ ” Nick bit out.

“Carrie left you for a personal trainer who owns a chain of workout gyms. How long do you think their relationship will last?”

“It will last as long as Kurt has the money to support Carrie. She loves to be pampered and taken care of. She’ll stay with him providing he has dollar signs around him,” Nick exclaimed then tossed back his shot of whiskery.

“Nick, you need to get over this. It happened eight months ago. Don’t waste anymore of your life on her. Move on and find someone else.”

Nick knew that Richie was giving him good advice, but he wasn’t ready to listen. He had given Carrie his heart, and she stomped on it. No, he wasn’t about to fall for another lying, cheating worthless woman. One was enough in his life time.

“Are you listening to me? Every time I talk to you about this, you blow me off. I miss us going out together on double dates,” Richie told him.

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Nick placed his glass down on the table. He hated how Carrie had tuned him into such a bitter person, but he couldn't help it. It was hard when he found out the person he had been in love with hadn't returned his feelings. It was a bitter pill to swallow.

"I understand what you're telling me. I'm working on getting Carrie out of my mind and heart, but I can't do it. Damn it, I was going to propose to her. I was such a fool," Nick growled. "I swear I'm not going to allow myself to be made a fool of again."

"Don't let your anger keep you from missing out on finding love again. It's out there for you. All you have to do is open up your heart again."

"Okay, Dr. Drew. I'll open up my heart again when the right woman comes along. Until then, I'm just going to have fun with women. No more trying to find 'the one'. I'm too old for that shit now."

"Are you sure about this? Do you really want to break some woman's heart the way Carrie did yours?" Richie asked, trying to reason with him. "It wouldn't be fair to her. You don't want her to feel the same pain as you are experiencing at the moment."

"Well, I guess it would be best for her if she didn't fall in love with me, because I'm not going to fall in love with her. I'm done with all of that love crap. It's a waste of time and energy."

"Don't date an oblivious woman so you can only break her heart. That would be so wrong, and you know it."

"Calm down," Nick grumbled. "I'm not planning to do that. God, you really get on my nerves sometimes. I'm only saying I won't fall in love with another woman as deeply as I did in my past relationship."

"Are you sure? You never know how you will react when real love hits you right between the eyes."

"I'm positive. I'm not looking for love, so it won't find me and that suits me just fine," Nick said, hoping Richie would just drop it."

"Whatever you say," Richie told him.

Chapter Two

Tasha Kelly stood in line and waited while the person in front of her gave their order before walking away. She was taking a break from purchasing some items off the internet at her job. If she stayed positioned at the computer a moment longer, she was going to get cross-eyed. However, she loved that new supply-chain software that Dylan installed. Her job was so much faster now. Instead of taking about six hours to place orders, it got knocked down to a little over three.

“Ma’am, may I take your order?” the young girl asked her.

“Coffee with cream and two sugars.” Tasha gave her order, walked away, and found a booth to sit in. She usually didn’t drink coffee this late in the afternoon, but she needed the caffeine to keep her going. She had a long day ahead of her with a lot of orders to fill.

Digging the romance book out of her purse, Tasha removed the bookmark and placed it on the table. She had only been reading for a few minutes when the sound of a man yelling made her stop and look towards the front of the coffee shop.

“I don’t have any cash on me. Why can’t I pay for it with my credit card? Damn it, I don’t have time for this,” the man snapped.

“Sir, our credit card machine is down. We can only take cash today,” the cashier informed him.

“Why didn’t you tell me this before I ordered my coffee? Is that anyway to run a business?”

Tasha watched at the girl struggled to think of an answer. The man’s temper wouldn’t be so bad if he wasn’t well over six feet tall and built like a god. The white t-shirt was clinging to the bulging muscles in his arms. Dark blue jeans cupped his tight ass and the black cowboy boots only added to his sexiness. The man’s presence was intimidating and hot all at the same time. She

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noticed everyone was waiting to see what was going to happen next.

“Are you going to answer me?”

“Sir, your order comes to \$8.75.”

“Haven’t I already told you that I don’t have any cash on me? How do you think I’m going to buy that coffee?”

Tasha knew this had to end. She grabbed her wallet out of her purse and went to the front counter. She almost fainted as she stood next to the man. He smelled so good, like he just stepped out of the shower and splashed on cologne to make a woman fall at his feet. Lord, she had a weakness for good-smelling men.

“I’ll pay for his coffee.” Taking a ten dollar bill out of her purse, she handed it to the nervous girl in front of her. “Don’t worry about the change,” she told the girl when she started to count out the change.

“I didn’t ask you to pay for my coffee,” the rude man growled at her.

Titling her head back, Tasha’s hazel eyes clashed with a pair of indigo eyes. Shit, the man’s face was just beautiful. A strong nose, firm lips, a dimple in his chin made him too dangerous looking to ever been consider model material, but he would certainly have a center stage in her dreams tonight.

“Sir, I know you didn’t; however, I got tired of listening to you scream at her, so I paid for your coffee.” Tasha gave the man a long look, hoping he was getting her meaning.

“Black coffee with cream and two sugars,” a guy yelled out his order before she could continue her conversation. She spun away from the gorgeous yet angry man. She picked up her drink and returned to her seat trying her best not to look at the man watching her.

* * * *

Nick couldn’t believe that woman had enough nerve to pay for his coffee and then gave him a lecture about his attitude. Moving away from the counter, he took a seat at the booth across the room from her. He sat facing her, so he could watch her.

The black shirt she was wearing stopped mid-thigh over a pair of blue jeans. It hugged her curvy body showing off her

perky breasts. The off-black heeled boots gave her some height to her smaller frame.

He watched as she took a sip of her coffee before sitting it back down and turning the page in her book. After giving her body a final appraisal, he let his gaze land on her face. Her skin reminded him of dark Dove chocolate, his favorite treat late at night. He liked how her black hair stopped at the nape of her neck and a piece kept falling in front of her glasses. He had to admit she was one hot little number.

Richie would have a good laugh at his expense when he told him about this. He was always telling him not to let the small stuff bother him. He really had no right screaming at the girl trying to take his money. It wasn't her fault that the machine was down.

"Sir, here's your coffee."

Nick glanced to his side and found the girl he yelled at earlier standing there next to him. "You didn't have to bring this to me. I could have come and gotten it."

"That's okay. We aren't that busy now. I think you scared most of our customers away with your tirade."

"I want to apologize for my behavior towards you. I shouldn't have lost my temper like that," he apologized.

"Oh, that's okay," she said, waving off his apology. "I'm used to grumpy people who are craving their caffeine. Enjoy your drink." The girl spun away from him and went back to work like she had already forgotten all about him.

Nick took a sip of his drink not flinching when the warm liquid hit his tongue. He had been through too much to let some coffee phase him. Now, he had already made one apology which meant that he only had one left. He looked back over at his coffee-paying woman and found she was gone.

How in the hell did she get past him without him noticing? Well, he wasn't about to give up on apologizing to her. She would probably be back here tomorrow. He would just come back and do it then.

Chapter Three

A week had past since the woman paid for his coffee, and he hadn't run into her again. He had gone back to that damn coffee shop to pay back her money, and she wasn't there.

Nick couldn't believe he was this interested in some nosey stranger, but he was. He wanted to hear the sound of her voice again and find out more about her. He wasn't looking for a meaningful relationship or anything, but she had peaked his interest a little. He wasn't afraid to admit that he was curious about her.

She was something different. He wasn't used to that much sassiness being in such a small body. He wondered what else she had going on about her. Nick played with his empty cup on the table and then glanced at his watch. This was about the same time that he came into *Mocha Treat* the last time for his cup of coffee.

This was the last time he going to try and find her. If she was a no-show tonight, he was going to give up. He would just keep the ten dollars and forget all about her. Nick eased his hand into the pocket of his jeans and ran his fingers over the money inside. It was burning a hole in his pocket to give back to his mystery paying woman.

"Tasha, where have you been?" the girl at the counter asked someone behind him. He didn't have a chance to turn around because the person came into view-it was her! The woman who he had been trying to hunt down for the past seven days finally she had shown up, and he was going to find a way to get her into a conversation.

"I have been busy with work," she said. "I haven't had a chance to do anything else. So while I had the free time, I decided to grab a cup of your delicious coffee. It usually gives me the boost that I need to finish the last of my work."

“Well, take a seat, and I’ll bring your drink over. It’s practically empty here tonight, so I can do it for you.”

“Thanks, Patti,” Tasha said, totally oblivious that he was listening to her.

Nick watched as Tasha went to a booth and sat down with her back to him. He saw that she pulled out the same book she had from before. Okay, now was his chance to catch her off guard like she did him. He wanted to see the look of surprise on her face. Getting out of his seat, Nick made his way over to Tasha. At least, he knew her name and he was going to see what else he could find about her.

He took the money out of his pocket and placed it in front of her. “I believe I owe you this.”

* * * *

Tasha tried to control the shiver that raked her body as she glanced down at the money. She wasn’t about to believe he was standing next to her. She had been trying to get him out of her mind since last week and nothing had worked.

Placing the book face down, she picked up the cash and looked at the man to her left. She swallowed down a moan as her eyes landed on the noticeable bulge in his pants before inching her way to his handsome face.

“Are you sure that you can afford to give this to me?” she inquired. “I don’t want you having another breakdown over not having any cash handy.”

“Tasha, I can promise you that I’m not going to have another yelling fit,” the guy told her.

How did he know her name?

“You seem to have me at a disadvantage,” Tasha said. “You know my name, but I’m clueless to who you are.”

The guy flashed a smile, and her heart skipped several beats. Of course, his smile would be just as amazing as the rest of him. “Sorry. I heard the girl behind the counter call you by your name. I’m Nick Lavery. Do you mind if I join you, unless you are waiting for someone?”

Hell, she wasn’t about to pass up on this opportunity to have this hunk sitting with her.

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“No, I’m alone,” she replied. “Have a seat.” Tasha waved toward the empty booth seat in front of her.

“Thank you,” Nick said as he slid into the seat. “I had almost given up at trying to return your money to you. I came in here a couple of times, but you never came in.”

Nick had been looking for her? Hot Damn! She liked the sound of that. How did she get so lucky? She must have been doing something right in her life to have this guy thinking about her.

“I have been swamped with work for the past couple of days. I hadn’t been able to get out that much,” Tasha replied.

“What kind of work do you do?”

She was about to answer Nick until she saw Patti coming towards them with her coffee. She decided to wait until she left before she answered him and then maybe she would ask a few questions of her own.

“Here you go. I hope you enjoy it,” Patti said placing the hot drink in front of her.

“Thanks again for bringing this over,” she told Patti. “Nick, do you want something?”

“No, I’m fine. I had my coffee limit for the day,” Nick replied.

“Okay, Patti, we’re good.”

“Wonderful. If you change your mind, just let me know.” Patti looked at her and then Nick before walking away.

“I think she’s over your bad attitude towards her,” Tasha exclaimed then took a drink of her coffee.

“Yeah, I apologized,” Nick admitted. “Enough about that. You were going to tell me what you did for a living.”

“That’s right.” Tasha sat her cup down and then leaned back in her seat. “I’m a purchasing specialist for several companies in town.”

“I’m not familiar with a purchasing specialist,” Nick frowned.

“Most people refer to my job as a supply chain manager. I love it so much. I can do most of my job from home and that works well for me.”

“What made you decide to get involve with something like that?” Nick asked her.

"I always had a good instincts when it was and wasn't worth my time to go after a bargain. My friends constantly told me I should make a career out of my skills, and I finally did."

"Sounds like you enjoy what you do. Most people don't talk about their job with the passion you just did. It was very refreshing to hear."

Tasha was enjoying talking to Nick, but she really needed to get back home and finish up those purchase orders. Nick was charming as hell, but work still had to come first with her. Play time would have to come later on, and she sure as hell would *love* to play with Nick Lavery any day or time of the week.

She slid out of her seat then grabbed her cup. She could drink the rest as she walked back to her apartment. "I'll guess I'll see you later."

"You're leaving?" Nick frowned, standing up and blocking her exit. "I thought you might stay a little longer. I wasn't done talking to you yet."

What am I doing? she thought to herself. *I'm already caught up with everything that needs to be done for today. I could spare a few minutes, but I won't. I don't want to come across as too available for him.*

"I wish I could, but I really do need to get going. Maybe we can have lunch sometime." She tried moving around Nick, but he wouldn't move out of her way. "You need to move so I can leave," Tasha laughed.

"How can I have lunch with you if you don't tell me your last name, give me your address, or at least give me a phone number so I can call you? I'm not a mind reader you know," Nick teased.

"You seem like a very smart man. I'm sure you will find a way to get me to have lunch with you." Tasha patted Nick in the middle of his chest before she made her way around him and out the door.

Outside the coffee shop, Tasha could barely make it back to her apartment without tripping over her own two feet. She saw how Nick's beautiful eyes lit up with interest at her challenge. Yeah, it was a good thing she turned him down to stay longer. Now he would be more determined to find out more about her.

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Wasn't the chase the best part of getting to know someone? She thought it was.

Chapter Four

“Let me get this straight. You’re interested in a woman? I can’t believe you’re telling me this. I thought you had sworn off of those double-crossing, backstabbing creatures. What’s so special about this particular woman?”

Nick didn’t think Richie would take his news like this. He never said that he was interested in a deeper relationship with Tasha. He only wanted to see her again. Love hadn’t even crossed his mind.

“I never said I was in love with her. I was thinking Tasha might make a good friend or someone to hang out with. I told you I wasn’t going down that love road gain.”

“You’re awful concerned about seeing a woman that you have no romantic interest in. I don’t think you need to lead her on. Just don’t go and see her again. I’m sure in a couple of days of not having you in her face she’ll forget all about you. Let things stay the way they are and neither one of you will get hurt.”

“Do you think I gave that Patti-girl at the coffee shop a fifty dollar tip not to see Tasha? I know where she lives, and I’m going to stop by there today.”

“Nick, I don’t know about this. Rebound relationships never lead to anything good. Don’t make Tasha fall for you and then you break her heart. From what little you have told me about her, she seems very sweet and a little forthright. Two things you usually run from in a woman.”

“What are you trying to say?” Nick questioned.

“Buddy, I have known you for years, and your choices in women have always been a little questionable. You pick the perfect looking ones, but they never had any substances to make them good people. Now, you might actually have met a woman who has more going on for her than just a pretty face. I don’t

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know how she looks because I haven't laid eyes on her. However, I know you and you have never dated a plain Jane."

"Tasha is cute, I guess," Nick shrugged. He wasn't here to talk about how attractive he found Tasha. She was only someone who had drawn his attention by confronting him the way she had. Yet, it was the first time a woman had ever stood up to him, and he liked it. Honestly, it turned him on more than he cared to admit to Richie at the moment.

"Sure, Tasha is just 'cute'. That's why you're paying people to find out where she lives. You're only wrapped up in being only friends with her," Richie snickered. "You're looking for a way to get over Carrie, and Tasha is it."

"Don't assume you know what is going on in my head. Furthermore, I don't see what is so funny about me wanting Tasha as a friend."

"Sorry. I apologize. You're a good guy and only want this woman as a friend." Richie got up from his seat and patted him on the shoulder. "I better hit the road so you won't be late for your lunch date."

"It's not really a date since Tasha doesn't know I'm coming," Nick corrected. He couldn't think of it as anything more than that. He wasn't ready to go involved with another woman so soon. Hell, he wasn't positive that Tasha was even interested in him like that. Sure, he knew she thought he was good-looking, but that didn't mean she wanted him as her man.

"Keep telling yourself that," Richie teased. "Just let me get a chance to meet her. I need to warn her about your bad habits."

"What bad habits?" He wasn't aware that he had any bad qualities about him.

Richie shook his head. "I'm not going to tell you about them. If I do, then you would try to change them. No, I want you thinking about what I'm referring to."

"I think you have worn out your welcome. Why don't you get back to that girlfriend you love so much?"

"Hey, stop being jealous of me. I can't help it if the women love me."

Nick wasn't going down this road at all. Richie's ego was already big enough to fill a football stadium. "Do I need to show you the door?"

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“No, I have been your house enough to find my own way out.” Richie strolled toward his front door like he didn’t have a care in the world. “Don’t forget to make a day so I can meet the woman who has made you forget about Carrie.” His best friend had opened the door and went out before he could say a word.

“Richie is wrong. I’m not looking for a new girlfriend.” Nick said the words to himself, but for some reason that didn’t ring true as he hoped they would.

Chapter Five

"I don't remember asking for your advice. Yeah, he's attractive, but I'm not going to let that make me lose my ability to think rationally. He probably has women dropping at his feet already. A man that good looking is never without a line of women behind him."

"I hear you talking a good game. Now, I wish you would say something that I believed," Dylan complained.

Tasha stared at her brother and fought down the urge to kick him out. She wanted him to be on her side. God, isn't that what an older brother is supposed to do? Hell, he hadn't even laid eyes on Nick and was taking his side. There was something really wrong about that in her humble opinion.

"I'm saying something. You aren't listening to me," she complained.

"Tash, you know how you are. I think you always over think everything. Just live in the moment and have some fun."

She tried to fight down the urge to snap at her brother, but it didn't work. "No, tell me how I am."

"Sis, you are a beautiful, loving woman. I want you to jump out there into the world. You spend entirely too much time working yourself into the ground. Get out there and live a little. You're only thirty-one and you act older than me."

Tasha knew her brother was speaking the truth, as much as she hated to hear it. She had really become much more involved in her business over the last two years, but she wanted to make it a success. Getting out there and finding a man to date wasn't in her top ten, and honestly it still wasn't until she saw Nick Lavery in the coffee shop. But she would have to been blind not to take a double take at him.

"So you think I need to go out on a date with Nick?"

"It's not what I want you to do, but what you are fighting not to do. Come on, what will one lunch date hurt? Are you the one always encouraging me to do stuff? Sometimes it's hard for me to remember that I'm the oldest," Dylan complained.

"Why do you always have to be so reasonable?" Tasha sighed.

"I guess I had to have more than my good looks to go on," Dylan laughed and then hugged her. "Come on and walk me to the door. I have to go and pick up the boys from football practice."

"Fine, I guess I could do that for your sorry ass." Tasha got up from the couch and walked with her brother towards the door. "I miss going to their football games. I really do need to get out of the house more."

"Trent and Joshua miss their aunt, too. They were asking me about you yesterday and why didn't you come anymore. Can I tell them that you will be at their next game?" Dylan asked as he cracked the door.

"I guess I can't disappoint the two handsome guys I love. So, yeah, tell them I'll be there."

"I'm hurt that you don't love me. I should be your favorite. You have known me longer, and you know they get their looks from me."

"Can you get anymore arrogant?" she questioned.

"No, I can't," Dylan said. "So, do you love me or not? You better say yes, or I'm not going to come over here in the middle of the night anymore and work on your computer for free. I should have at least gotten a tip."

"You got a tip. Didn't I let you have that left over pizza in the refrigerator? If that isn't love, then I don't know what is," Tasha laughed.

"I guess I have to agree with you about that. At least, I got one slice when I got home before the boys stole it from me. I swear they are going to eat me out of the house."

"They are teenagers. What else do you expect? Stop complaining and give me a hug."

Bending down, Dylan hugged her and planted a kiss on her cheek. "Does this mean you love me and I can bring the boys over next week for dinner? They were talking about your

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spaghetti and meatballs last night and how much they wanted some.”

Tasha cursed under her breath. She had so set herself up for that one. “Yes, I love you and, of course, you can bring Trent and Joshua over for dinner. Just give me enough time to buy enough food to feed the two of them,” she said ending the hug.

“You have a deal.” Dylan opened the door further and stopped in his tracks as his eyes landed on the person on the other side. “Do you know this guy?”

Tasha’s mouth fell opened as she looked at the man standing there with a bag in his hand. She hadn’t even sensed him out there. She swallowed a couple of times to regain her voice. “Yes, I know him. That’s Nick Lavery, the man I was telling you about.”

Dylan’s eyes swung over at her and then back at him. “Well, it looks like I’m leaving at the perfect time. I’ll call you later about a date and time for dinner.” Her brother brushed past Nick without saying a word, got in his car and drove off.

Nick was standing on her porch looking super hot in a pair of black jeans, matching shirt and his cowboy boots. Tasha blurted out the first thing that popped into her head.

“How did you find out where I lived?”

“Who in the hell was that man?” Nick growled at her instead of answering her question.

Chapter Six

“Hello, Nick. I’m surprised to see you here since I never told you where I lived. Do you want to tell me how you found that out?” Tasha asked him.

Several thoughts raced through Nick’s head as Tasha stared at him, and he didn’t like any of them, but he was most upset about asking her who that man was. God, they were still practically strangers. He shouldn’t care who that man was leaving her house. It honestly wasn’t any of his business, and she had every right to tell him that.

“I asked Patti and she told me,” Nick answered.

“Oh, she did,” Tasha said. “I find that hard to believe. Patti is pretty good at keeping secrets. Are you sure that you didn’t do anything else to get that information from her?”

“I might have given her a tip and she gave me the information, but I wasn’t having any luck at tracking you down. Now, I answered your question. Are you going to give me an answer to mine?”

“What was your question again?”

He knew that Tasha hadn’t forgotten what he asked her, but he would go ahead and play along with her. “I wanted to know who that guy was leaving a few minutes ago.”

“Are you talking about the tall, dark, and handsome man?”

“Yeah, him.”

“Oh, he is no one important. Don’t worry about him.”

“If he’s no one worth me worrying about, then why won’t you enlighten me to his identity?” He wasn’t going to play these games with her. He would find out who that guy was.

“Are you sure you want to know?” She teased.

“Yes. I wouldn’t have asked you if I hadn’t.”

“That was just Dylan,” she shrugged and then glanced down. “What is in the bag?”

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He had been so thrown at finding a man leaving her house that he forget all about the surprise lunch he brought over here for them to share. "It's something for us to eat. I wanted to surprise you with lunch."

"Oh, what did you bring?" She was starving and could go for just about anything right now. She reached for the bag, but Nick moved it behind his back.

"No food until I get an answer."

"What do you want an answer about?" She didn't have time for these games with Nick. He was the one who made a surprise appearance on her doorstep. It wasn't the other way around.

"Dylan." The one word hung in the air between them.

"Maybe I'm not hungry enough to tell you who he is," she threatened and then it was ruined by the sound of her stomach growling.

"I think your stomach disagrees with you," Nick laughed.

Sighing, Tasha rolled her eyes at Nick. Why was he being so demanding? It wasn't like he had any right to know about her personal life, but it was sort of interesting that he wanted to know so badly.

"He's the biggest pain the ass that I have ever known."

"Okay...that isn't the answer I wanted and you know it." Dark blue eyes narrowed in her direction and she thought about seeing how far she could push Nick, but decided after a few moments not to.

"Dylan is my brother."

A grin spilt across Nick's face so far that she thought it might stay like that. "I can tell my news made you happy for some reason. Would you like to share why?"

"How about you let me in, and I'll share what's in this bag with you instead?" Nick waved the bag back and forth in her face, tempting her.

"I'll let you inside if you tell me more about yourself along with you sharing what you have in the bag with me. Deal?"

"You have a deal."

Moving to the side, Tasha waved Nick inside her house. "Come on in."

Chapter Seven

“What did you say this was?” Tasha asked as she ate another piece of chicken out of her salad. “It’s *so* good. I never had it before. I might have to make this for myself.”

“It’s called Lebanese Chicken Pita Salad,” Nick replied. “I’m glad you like it.”

“No, I LOVE it,” she corrected. “However, I guess I need to start asking my questions since I have been eating for the past five minutes. I shouldn’t love food so much.”

“I don’t think you have a problem. Your body is sizzling hot. It’s one of the first things I noticed about you.”

“It was?” Tasha said as she stretched her feet out in front of her on the floor. She suggested that she and Nick relax in front of the couch and eat. So, she was sitting with her back against the couch, and he was across from her with his back against a chair. She was trying her best to stay calm and not drool, but it so hard when Nick looked so damn perfect.

“Thank you,” she smiled. “I think you look pretty good yourself. I love when a hot guy wears cowboy boots. It just does something to me.”

His blue eyes pierced the distance between them. “Care to share? I would love to know what my boots do to your sexy little body.”

Tasha grinned mischievously. “Sorry, I can’t do that. Remember, I only invited you in because you were going to share something about yourself with me.” She sat her plate down on the floor next to her and crossed her legs at the ankles. “Now get to it, Mr. Lavery. I’m waiting to hear all that you have to tell.”

“Personal or business?” he inquired.

“A mixture of both so it will be it will be interesting.”

DESIRE

"Let's start with the business first," Nick said. "For the past ten years, I have been working as a communication specialist. I help develop corporate images along with community standards. I can promote anyone from a rock star to a CEO for damage control if a situation may come up."

"Sounds like a job that will keep you in demand. What made you decide to do it?"

"I was always had the ability to come up with ideas pretty fast when my friends over the years needed help with something. God, I could pitch my thoughts better than them. A guy heard me and told me I could make a killing doing it as a career. I listened to him and the rest is history."

"So, that is where you get your arrogance from. You are used to people listening to you and when they don't, it upsets you," Tasha said.

"I'm not arrogant," Nick denied. "I call it being focused."

"I think you're wrong, but I'll let that slide. Tell me more."

Nick pulled one of his legs up and draped his left arm over it. It was a sexy move, and she knew that he wasn't clueless to the fact that it was. "I like being in my chosen field because it allows me to be self-sufficient."

"I don't like depending on anyone and it gives me a lot of time to be alone. Don't get me wrong. I don't mind being around people. But when I have a day or two to get my thoughts together, I love it."

"So, you try to avoid people unless they have something interesting to say. You don't enjoy talking just to hear the words. You want them to mean something?" A part of her knew how Nick felt. She was tired of dating men who were charming, attentive, and said everything she wanted to hear and in the end they ended up being world-class assholes.

"I wouldn't go that far, but I do appreciate people who know how to respect my boundaries. I have been called aloof in the past, but I'm always involved in what is going on around me. You just have to know me to see that I am."

"Have I crossed the boundaries with you yet? Are you ready to toss me in the no-friend category?"

"Sweetheart, you haven't even touched the boundaries that I'm hoping you will," Nick said flirting with her. "I can't

remember the last time I was on the floor with a woman and the only thing we did was talk.”

“Are you saying that anytime you have been on the floor with a woman sex has been the only reason?” She had never heard of that before. If it was true, Nick was a highly sexual man and she wondered how long it would be before he put the moves on her or even if he was thinking about it.

“What I’m saying is that we usually start standing up or sitting and then we end up on the floor. You know how it is. Sometimes stuff happens, and you just go with the flow.”

“I guess,” Tasha agreed, softly. She wasn’t about to admit her past boyfriends weren’t the best lovers.

“I’m getting the feeling you haven’t experienced the uncontrollable need to just rip off someone’s clothes in the heat of the moment.”

Tasha wasn’t fond of that Nick could read her so well. She wasn’t about to admit anything to him. “I never said that.”

“You didn’t have to. I can see it in your eyes.” Nick dropped his arm and slid across the floor until he was in front of her legs. He spread them apart and eased between them until she could feel his erection against her stomach.

“Do you want to see how it feels to make out on the floor?” Nick suggested staring into her eyes. “I always thought the first time was the most exciting.”

“I’m not a virgin when it comes to making out with a guy. I know what goes on when two people make out. I have made out with guys before.”

“I never thought you didn’t, but don’t you think it’s sexier when you first kiss someone?” Nick whispered as he planted a soft kiss at the side of her mouth and then pulled back. “Nothing else is on my mind but how good she’s going to taste.”

“So, what do I taste like?” Tasha didn’t want to ask, but she had to.

“Like something I have never had before,” he answered as his mouth moved back towards her.

“What is that?”

“Excitement,” Nick growled a second before he lips completely captured hers.

Chapter Eight

Tasha's calm was shattered by the hunger of Nick's kisses. She tried to fight off the heady sensation taking control of her body, but she ultimately lost the battle. His mouth was more persuasive than she cared to admit. Never had anyone dominated her just with a lip-lock the way he was doing.

His hands explored the soft lines of her back, her waist, and her hips. Instinctively her body arched toward him because she loved what Nick was making her feel. She tore her mouth away from his and gasped for air.

"This feels so good," Tasha whispered running her fingers through his soft hair.

"Sweetheart, it's only going to get better," Nick promised against the side of her swollen mouth.

Tasha moaned as he laid her body on the floor and covered it with his. "You feel so good beneath me." One of his hands slipped between their bodies and worked at the buttons on her sweater. Easing back some, Nick spread it open and his hand slid down her stomach until it hit the top button on her blue jeans.

She was more than ready for Nick to ease his fingers inside her pants and for him to touch her soaked panties. So, she was completely taken back when he moved off her and stood up.

"What's wrong?" she asked as she fixed her clothing and got up from the floor. "I was having a good time, weren't you?"

"Honey, I came over here to have a nice lunch with you, not to have sex on the floor. The situation was getting out of control way too fast."

Tasha was insult beyond belief. Yes, Nick was one hell of a kisser, but that didn't mean she was going to have sex with him. They were just making out, nothing more.

"You really shouldn't be so into yourself," Tasha flung back at Nick. "It was only a kiss. You aren't that great of a kisser to

have such a huge ego. I wasn't about to have sex with you on my living room floor. I never move that quickly with a man, especially one I just met in a coffee shop. Get over yourself, Nick."

"Is that right?" Nick questioned her in a low voice. "You weren't in the least turned on by my kiss?"

Tasha shrugged. "It was a kiss. Nothing to lose my mind over."

"I guess I need to prove what a liar you are. A very beautiful liar, but a liar nevertheless."

She was prepared for Nick to yank her hard against his muscular body and kiss her senseless to prove what a big fat liar she truly was. What she wasn't ready for was Nick to grab her by the elbow and slowly pull her towards him until the tips of her breasts brushed his chest.

The contact made an electric jolt go through her body. She looked at Nick to see if he felt it too, but his eyes were trained on her mouth. Tasha couldn't move as Nick placed his hand on her hips and his head descended towards her.

Instead of kissing her instantly, his tongue eased out and licked at the corner of her mouth. She let out a low moan. Over and over his tongue played with the seam of her lips until she thought she was going to lose her mind from want.

Just as she was about to end the kiss, Nick drew her fuller bottom lip into his mouth and sucked on it. Her knees bucked, and she would have fallen if Nick's grip hadn't tightened on her waist.

Her breasts started to tingle as her nipples rubbed against the hard planes of Nick's chest. Her body throbbed even more when more when a hard thigh was thrust between her thighs.

Tasha moaned when Nick captured her mouth in a full tongue dwelling kiss. Wrapping her arms around Nick's neck, she got lost in the feel of him taking control like he had wanted him to do earlier when they were on the floor.

With a low grunt, he cupped her ass in his hands lifting her up so she could latch her legs around his waist. Nick moved them backwards until her back hit the wall trapping her between the harder surface and his unyielding chest.

DESIRE

“You taste even better now than you did a few minutes ago.” Nick released her mouth long enough to say those words.

“So do you,” Tasha whispered. She didn’t have a chance to say anything else because Nick started drilling his rock hard erection against the part of her that was craving Nick the most. The thick ridge behind his zipper burned at her through his jeans. She could make out the outline of him through her thin slacks.

“Kiss me,” Tasha begged. She wasn’t about to give up on this kiss until she got what she deserved.

“I’m sorry. I can’t since I’m not that good of a kisser.” Nick slowly unwrapped her legs from around his body and stepped back from her.

Reality set in little by little as Tasha came down from her high as Nick stood there looking at her. “You bastard,” she yelled when she had regained her composure. She hit Nick in the shoulder and brushed past his good-smelling body.

“How dare you do that to me. I want you out of my house now!”

“Don’t be like that,” Nick laughed as he pulled her back into his waiting arms. “I wouldn’t have had something to prove if you hadn’t thrown that huge challenge out to me.”

“I’m serious,” Tasha exclaimed, wiggling out of Nick’s light grip. “I want you to leave.”

Nick moved back from her and went towards the front door. “Okay, I’m leaving, but I’ll be back tonight.”

Tasha was surprised to hear Nick tell her that he would be back later after she was tossing him out of her house. What was he up to now?”

“Why are you coming back here?” she questioned.

“I’m taking you out to dinner,” he replied, opening up her front door.

“I never said that I was going on a real date with you.”

“That’s right, but you never said that you wouldn’t, either. I’ll see you at six o’clock and wear something sexy,” he told her before going out the door and closing it behind him.

Chapter Nine

“Does Tasha know that she makes you this nervous? You’re acting like you’re going on your first date or something.”

Nick shot Richie a withering glance as he shoved the ends of his white shirt into his black slacks. He was getting ready for his date when Riche decided to surprise him with an unannounced visit.

“Shouldn’t you be at home talking about the flower arrangements for your wedding instead of here bothering me? I thought you wouldn’t be able to leave Kristy’s side now since she had agreed to marry your ugly ass.”

“Hey, I came over here to ask you to be best man at my wedding,” Richie said. “Don’t cop an attitude with me. It isn’t my fault you can’t get dressed on time. Tasha must be a hottie to have you this tied in knots and all out of sorts.”

“Richie, Tasha is cute. I have told you that before, but I’m not nervous because of her or any of the other crazy stuff that just came out of your mouth. Have you forgotten how long it has been since I was out on a date? I’m just a little rusty, that’s all.”

“If I hear the name Carrie come from your mouth, I’ll take away the offer to be my best man and ask my cousin Paul instead,” Richie threatened.

“You hate him. You wouldn’t do that,” Nick said as he put on his shoes and then grabbed his car keys off the stand by his bed.

“I would do it because I hate hearing about your ex-girlfriend all the time. Your focus should be on seeing how to make something happen with Tasha.”

“When did you become my therapist?” Nick questioned as he left his bedroom and headed for the living room. He could hear Richie following behind him and prayed that his friend would just drop whatever he was about to tell him.

DESIRE

“The night I came over here and found you with her letter. You put Carrie on a pedestal that she never deserved to be on in the first damn place. I told you time and time again that she wasn’t any good for you, but you didn’t listen and look where it got you. A broken heart over a woman who never cared about you, and I still don’t think you see it.”

Spinning around, Nick glared at the man standing behind him. Richie wasn’t helping him, so why was he still here giving him his unwanted opinion? He was such a thorn in his side. Richie knew that he was, but that still didn’t stop him from voicing his opinion anytime he wanted. It was time for his buddy to hit the pavement so he could leave for his date. He didn’t want to be late.

“Look, I’m really thrilled you’re getting married. I’d be honored to be your best man when your big day rolls around. However, you really need to go so I can make it on time to Tasha’s house. I hope she still isn’t mad at me.”

“What did you do to upset her?” Richie asked. “She hasn’t known you long enough to see all of your flaws,”

“It’s none of your business,” Nick stated. “Now let’s go. I have reservations at my favorite restaurant.”

* * * *

“How many times are you going to look out of that window for your date? He’s only a couple of minutes late. You know how traffic can be on the weekend.”

Moving away from the window, Tasha ran her hands over the white one-shoulder dress that she decided to wear at the last minute because of the bossy woman sitting not ten feet behind her on the couch.

If her cousin Raven hadn’t come over here to see her, she was going to teach Nick a lesson about assuming that she would jump when he told her to. However, Raven reminded her how long it had been since she went out on a date, so she change her mind and got dressed instead in this outfit.

This dress had been a present to herself three years ago when she got a raise from her job, and she hadn’t ever had a place to wear it until now. She hoped that she hadn’t made a

huge mistake by listening to Raven and her advice. She was doing pretty good with the way her life was going. Yet, she couldn't deny that Nick was a hottie!

However, she wasn't going to let him bark out orders to her again. He wasn't in that kind of relationship with her. The sooner she got that piece of information out in the open, the better off the both of them would be.

"Are you listening to me or are you in the little world of yours that you sometimes go in?" Raven inquired, teasing her.

"I'm listening to you," Tasha sighed walking over to her cousin. "I was just thinking about Nick and what his real agenda was with me. I know we are almost complete opposites, but I'm so attracted to him that it isn't even funny."

"It's hard for me to believe that someone like him is truly single. You know that guys like him always have another woman. They are usually hiding some where in their past waiting to jump and reclaim him as hers."

"Tasha, you need to stop selling yourself so short," Raven sighed. "You're gorgeous. Nick should be happy that you agreed to even get to know him, because I know how you can be very standoffish when it comes to guys."

"Raven, you are so spunky. I need to be more like you. I can't help that I spend most of my free time working and trying to get ahead. I don't mind doing that at all."

"God, don't do that. I shouldn't be anyone's role model. I can't keep a man for the life of me. I'm horrible at relationships. So whatever you have seen me do, please do the opposite."

"Now look who is being too hard on herself," Tasha laughed, joining Raven on the couch. "You are usually out on a date every Friday night. So don't give me that song and dance."

"How about we just worry about you and Nick right now and we can get into my drama of a life later on?" Raven suggested.

"You got a deal," Tasha said right before the doorbell rang. "Nick is here. I better get that."

She got up from the couch and was making her way towards the door. As she was about to open it, Raven's hand shot out and stopped her for doing it. "Wait, you can't answer that."

DESIRE

“Why not?” Tasha asked stepping back from the door. “It’s my house, and I’m ready to leave. He’s already late as it is.”

“You can’t let Nick think you were sitting here waiting for him to show up. Go into your bedroom and then make an entrance. The dress you are wearing is too stunning not to let Nick see you enter the room.”

Tasha didn’t feel like doing what Raven suggested, but she knew her cousin wouldn’t let it go unless she got her way. The doorbell rang again while she was thinking about what to do. It sounded like a good plan on one hand; however, on the other hand it was something she wasn’t used to doing.

“Hurry up and make up your mind, or Nick is going to leave,” Raven pointed out.

“Fine, I’ll do it your way. What could it hurt?” She hurried towards her bedroom at the end of the hallway as Raven opened the front door.

* * * *

Nick checked his watch again and noticed that he might miss out on having his date with Tasha. The lights were on in the house, so he was sure that she was at home. He didn’t think she would stand him up after he told her that he wanted a real date with her tonight.

Sure, he was ten minutes later, but he had a good reason for it. He glanced down at the roses inside his left hand. He was stunned how long it took him to get out of the florist shop. Things might have gone faster if the female worker there hadn’t spent all that time flirting with him.

He didn’t know how many ways that he could have told her he wasn’t interested in seeing her after she got off work. It took her a while to finally understand that he was honestly telling her the truth. Now since he had to deal with that nonsense, Tasha might have decided not to go out with him.

“I’m not going to let her avoid me. I will have dinner with her tonight even if we have to order in.” Nick was about to push the doorbell again, but it was opened before he could do it. He started to apologize to Tasha until he noticed that he wasn’t her standing on the other side of the door.

"Is Tasha here? We have a date."

"Wow. Tasha said you were handsome, but she wasn't telling me the entire truth. You're gorgeous," the woman told him.

"Hmmm...thank you," Nick answered, slightly embarrassed by the way Tasha's visitor was staring at him. "Is Tasha here? I know that I'm running a little late."

"You're almost fifteen minutes late. What is your excuse?"

Nick was taken back by the woman's bluntness and the way she was drilling him. She was about five feet six inches tall, with a medium brown complexion and a cute natural afro on her head. She was cute, but not as beautiful as his Tasha.

"I got held up at the florist," he answered holding up the fresh roses. He was afraid if his answers weren't good this woman wasn't going to let him see Tasha.

"Good answer, Nick." She moved back from the opened doorway and waved him in. "I'm Raven Terry, Tasha's older cousin," Raven told him as the door shut behind him.

"Nice to meet you," he said looking at Raven.

"Nick, it's nice to meet you, too," Raven answered. "Have a seat and I'll go and get Tasha for you." Raven gave him a look, before she left him alone.

Nick took a seat on the couch and placed the roses down on the seat next to him. He thought back to his earlier conversation with Richie while he waited for Tasha to come out. He wasn't about to admit to Richie back at his house, but he was nervous about tonight. It was the first real date he had even thought about going on in months. This was something new for him, and he hoped tonight turned out good for the both of them.

"I'm going to give this date a chance and not think about Carrie tonight," Nick mumbled to himself.

"Nick, are you okay?"

At the sound of Tasha's voice, Nick jumped up from the couch and spun around. He was stunned by the vision behind him. The white dress Tasha was wearing showed off her smooth chocolate skin to perfection. Her hair was all pulled up except for a little strand that was against her cheek. She looked breathtaking.

DESIRE

"You look amazing." Picking up the roses off the seat, Nick came around the couch stopping directly in front of her. "I'm really sorry that I'm late. Hopefully, the restaurant will still have our reservations. I'm friends with the owner."

"If not, I'm sure we can find somewhere else to eat," Tasha said, smiling at him. "By the way, you look very handsome."

"Thank you," Nick replied returning Tasha's smile. "These roses are for you. I hope you like them."

"Oh, I love roses. I can't remember the last time I got them." Taking the flowers from him, Tasha gave them a quick sniff. "They smell wonderful. Let me go and place these inside a vase and then we can leave."

"Okay, that is fine with me." Nick watched as Tasha walked past him and went inside the kitchen. He heard cabinets opening and closing then the sound of water running. A few minutes later, Tasha came back out with roses inside a vase.

"They are truly beautiful," she said placing them in the middle of her living room table.

"Not more beautiful than you are in that dress," Nick said right before he pulled Tasha into his arms and kissed her. He was dying to deepen the kiss, but at the last minute he remembered that Raven was in the house with them. So, instead he stepped back from her.

"Are you ready to go?" he asked.

"Yes. Let me grab my purse, and we can leave," Tasha answered.

"Where is your cousin?"

"Raven is going to stay here and close up the house for me. She's waiting for her boyfriend to get off work. He's going to pick her up here since her car is at the auto shop. She's in my room watching a Will Smith DVD." Picking up her purse off the end table, Tasha made her way to the front door.

"I liked him in *I am Legend*," Nick said as he followed Tasha outside. "I didn't think it would be as good as it was."

"Yes, that was an excellent movie," Tasha agreed as she walked next to him as they went to his car parked at the curb.

"Your car is amazing," she praised as he opened the door for her.

"Thanks. I'm just fond of my Mustang. I have always wanted a muscle car, and I finally broke down and got one a couple of years ago." Nick let Tasha get inside the car before he closed the door. He rushed around the front of the vehicle and got in on the driver's side.

"Was it to impress a girl?"

Nick wasn't prepared for that particular question to be thrown at him, and he paused from starting up the car. He was trying his best not to think about Carrie tonight, and Tasha just brought up the topic of his ex-girlfriend. What was he going to do about this?

"Why would you think I got this car for a girl?" he asked.

"I know most guys, especially ones as hot as you, love to have a fast car like this for the ladies," Tasha said looking at him. "Am I wrong?"

"Yes, you are wrong," Nick lied. "I got this baby here for myself and no one else."

"I apologize. I shouldn't have lumped you up with other guys I know in my past. I only know my nephews are dying to have cars like this one to impress the girls at their school."

"How old are you nephews?" Nick asked as he started his car and pull off from the curb.

"They will be turning sixteen next week, but they act like they're thirty. It totally drives my brother up the wall and I love it so much," Tasha laughed. "He's getting everything back that he deserves and more."

"Sounds like you're enjoying what your brother is going through. Was he that bad growing up?"

"Oh, he would drive our parents up one wall and back down the other one. He wasn't disrespectful or anything, but he did love hanging out with his friends, and the phone was always ringing with girls waiting to talk to him."

Nick continued to drive to the restaurant and listen to Tasha talk about her childhood with her brother. He found her company very relaxing. Not once had she asked where they were going or how long they had to stay there. Tasha was truly just enjoying his company, and that pleased him more than he wanted to admit at the moment.

Chapter Ten

“What did you think about my cousin?” Tasha asked Nick as the waiter walked away with their order. “I know she can be a little over protective sometimes.”

“She wasn’t that bad,” Nick replied.

“Come on, don’t lie to me. I have known Raven my entire life. She gave you the third degree, didn’t she?”

Tasha watched as Nick took a sip of his bourbon and coke. His gorgeous blue eyes studied her from across the beautiful decorated table. She was totally taken back when the waiter lead them out onto the secluded patio as soon as they got here. Despite the fact they were late, not a word was said to them. She was beginning to think Nick had a lot more going on for him than he was telling her.

“Okay, I have to admit Raven was very blunt when it came to you. She doesn’t want me to hurt you,” Nick finally confessed.

“I’m sorry about that,” Tasha apologized. “Raven has a way of giving her opinion even when it really isn’t needed. Most of the time it’s not even wanted, either. But what can I do? She’s family, and I love her crazy ass.”

“Raven is a lot like my best friend, Richie. He’s always giving me his advice even when I don’t want it. I try to stay mad at him, but I can’t,” Nick chuckled.

The masculine sound of Nick’s laughter sent a tingling feeling through her body that she hadn’t felt in a long time. She was surprised at how relaxed she was feeling tonight with Nick. She hadn’t been out on a date in such a long time. She thought she might be a little out of sorts. However, she was having the time of her life.

"I can't wait until I get to meet him. Richie sounds like someone I would get along with. Hell, I have a lot of practice after dealing with Raven."

"I'll try to see when I can get all of us together. He's busy right now working on his wedding plans," Nick said. "I have never seen a man more in love than him."

"Have you ever been in love?" Tasha didn't know why she asked the question, but she had a need to know about some of the women in Nick's past.

"I rather not talk about my ex-girlfriends on our date. This is about us and not them."

Whoa! If that wasn't directing avoiding her question, then she didn't know what was. Nick might have really gotten hurt in the past if he wouldn't even let her bring it up. She had no problem talking about her ex-boyfriends. They weren't in her life anymore, so they held no power over her.

"Did I hit a sore spot?" Tasha asked Nick watching his face very closely to see his reaction.

"No, you didn't hit a sore spot. I just think I shouldn't be discussing my past relationships while I'm trying to impress you on our date. What kind of man would that make me?"

"Okay, I'll let it go," she said. "Is there something else you would rather discuss instead?"

Leaning across the table, Nick placed his hand on top of hers. "I want to know how everything is going for you so far. When Raven answered your door, I thought you might be standing me up because of what happened on our lunch date."

Tasha placed her hand on top of Nick. "No, I got over that as soon as you left. I couldn't stay mad at you after a kiss like that. It was amazing."

"Thank you. I enjoyed it myself. I'm hoping that I might get a repeat tonight," Nick hinted.

"Well, it all depends on how this date goes. If I really enjoy myself, then you might get a replay of what occurred in my living room."

"If you don't have a good time, what will I get?" Nick asked.

DESIRE

“I don’t know because I’m not expecting you to let me down tonight,” Tasha flirted. “So far you’re doing a very good job.”

“Sweetheart, it’s only going to get better,” Nick said removing his hand as the waiter stopped at the table with their food.”

“I expect you to keep your promise.”

“Don’t worry. My word is my bond,” Nick assured her.

Chapter Eleven

The wind blew lightly around them as Tasha stood on the porch waiting for Nick to kiss her. She knew he wanted to by the way his body was moving closer to hers. All during dinner all she wanted was for him to lean over her plate and kiss her, but it never happened.

"I had a wonderful evening," Tasha admitted staring up at Nick. She was trying not to get lost in how good his cologne smelled as the air made it fill her already oversensitive senses. It was almost enough to make her break her rule and kiss him first.

"I have to agree with you," Nick said. "I don't know the last time I had that much fun just talking to a woman. It was refreshing and, not to mention, very nice. I was hoping I lived up to my word."

Nick kept stepping more into her personal space until he had her back pressed against the front door. Placing his hand above her head, he moved the last few steps that separated their bodies. The warmth from his body immediately soaked into her overheated body making her desire for him grow even hotter.

"I'm not sure I know what you're referring to. You might have to refresh my memory. You know how it can be when you get older," Tasha exclaimed.

One warm finger trailed down her bare shoulder making her tremble despite how hot her skin already was. "How old are you, by the way? I hope I didn't insult you by asking, but I know that I'm older than you."

Tasha wondered how old Nick was. He had a maturity about him, but that didn't mean he was older than her. "I turned thirty-one last month," she answered.

"Oh, you're still so young. I'm going to turn forty-one at the end of next month. I'm probably ancient in your young eyes."

Tasha shook. "No, I think you're perfect for me."

DESIRE

“Wonderful. Now let’s get back to what I was talking about. I thought if I was good at dinner, I was going to be treated with a good night kiss from your beautiful mouth.”

“I can’t say you were good all through our dinner, so I might not be able to live up to my end of the deal,” Tasha exclaimed.

Nick’s finger left her shoulder and it inched its way up the side of her neck. Tasha was desperately trying to fight the craving to kiss Nick, but she was losing that battle with every second that passed by.

“How did I fail to get on your good list? I thought I was being a perfect gentleman throughout the evening.”

“That’s the problem. You weren’t being yourself. I like that little bad boy side that you have. I don’t want you to change that for me,” Tasha stated.

Nick’s eyes left hers dropping down to her mouth. “You like it when I’m bad?”

“I think every woman loves a bad boy. She just doesn’t want to admit it.”

“Gorgeous, if you want to see my bad boy side, I’ll be more than happy to give him to you.” He leaned down and slanted his mouth over hers. He applied slow, drugging kisses to her mouth until she finally opened her lips like he wanted.

The second she gave in, Nick’s thick, warm, wet tongue invaded her mouth and started battling with hers. Tasha wrapped her arms around Nick’s broad shoulders so she could thoroughly get lost in his kiss. She didn’t move when his hands slid down her back cupping her ass. Their bodies were pressed so close together that Tasha was positive that she could feel Nick’s heartbeat against her chest.

“God, I better leave before I take you on your front porch,” Nick groaned as he released her mouth from the sensual prison he had it in.

“That was...” She was grasping for a word, but nothing was coming to mind.

“I know,” Nick agreed as he stepped back from her.

She couldn’t help but notice the huge bulge pressed against his zipper. Her underwear grew even more damp at the thought

of Nick buried deep inside of her. Maybe it would be for the best if Nick did leave before things got out of hand.

"Thanks for an outstanding evening," Tasha said as she dug her keys out of her purse. Spinning around, she unlocked the door and was about to open it when Nick's hand shot out and stopped her. She kept still as Nick planted a soft kiss on the back of her neck.

"I want to see you again," Nick whispered. "Are you free tomorrow night? We could have an early dinner at my house and then find something else to do for dessert."

Tasha wanted to jump and scream yes at the top of her lungs, but she couldn't. She had two supply orders that had to be done by tomorrow night. She had already spent too much time out with Nick tonight. This couldn't become a bad habit with her blowing off work to be out with a hot guy.

"I can't. I have to work."

"Are you sure that I can't change your mind? I know you can spare a couple of hours to have dinner and a little dessert tomorrow. Say yes," Nick breathed by her ear.

The weak temple she called her body pushed her to give in, but she honestly couldn't and get everything done on time for her clients. A deadline was a deadline.

"Nick, I really wish that I could; however, I can't tomorrow. I really have to get these supply orders into the computer and totaled up. I have several businesses depending on me." She felt Nick tense up behind her the second before he stepped away from her.

"I'm pleased that you're so dedicated to your job. I find that very attractive."

Twirling around, Tasha looked at Nick wondering if he was truly happy with her turning him down or just saying what he thought she wanted to hear. "I'm free all this weekend. How about we do something then?" she suggested.

"I can't." I'm helping my friend Richie with a surprise for his wedding day and then the next day I have an out of town speaking engagement. I won't be back until late Sunday night."

Tasha hated that they couldn't get a clear picture of when their next date would be.

DESIRE

“Okay. I suggested several options, but none of them worked for us. So, what do you think we should do? This could be a sign that we aren’t compatible.”

“Oh, you aren’t using this as an excuse to avoid me, Ms. Kelly. I’m positive we are more than compatible.” Nick gave her a long lingering look to make sure she got his message.

“Now, I need to go. I’ll call you Sunday night when I get back into town. Spinning around on his heel, Nick stepped off the porch, walked to his car, got in, and drove off leaving her alone wondering about what was going to be his next move when it came to her.

Chapter Twelve

Walking around the well-furnished home office, Tasha waited while her client went to get the next supply order he wanted her to work on for his home business. Tristan Davis was her best client, and she loved working with him. She considered him more of a friend than just a client now.

He didn't call her twice a week with changes to his orders or trying to find a way to cut cost on the shipping at the last minute. She never thought when she left West Virginia and moved here to Hartford, Connecticut that she would find her dream job.

She had moved here after her brother gained full custody of his sons after a nasty divorce from his ex-wife. Lynn's personality had started to change around the time the twins were turning thirteen years old.

She wouldn't have believed the transformation in her ex sister-in-law until she witnessed it herself first hand. After making a surprise visit to see her brother, Lynn had confronted her accusing her of spying on them and came after her.

She was totally taken back by the way Lynn had turned on her. They had always been so close and for Lynn to snap like that hurt her deeply, and she would never be able to forgive and forget.

After that incident, her brother filed for divorce and had Lynn removed from the house. The divorce was long and hard on both of them, plus the twins. When her brother won full-custody, Lynn just disappeared from their lives and no one in the family had heard from her since.

Her brother didn't talk about Lynn, and she knew better than to bring her up in conversation. He wanted her to stay in the past and she would respect his wishes. Everyone was doing well

DESIRE

now and she wasn't about to stir up any bad memories or feelings.

"Tasha, I apologize for keeping you here so long," Tristan told her as he reentered the room bringing her back from the past and her brother's problems.

Tristan reminded her of John Ritter from *Three's Company*. He was very nice man with two grown married children. He was a great client to work for, and she loved taking time out of her day to talk to him.

"I didn't mind waiting. I have to make another stop at one of my other clients before I head home," Tasha answered.

"Great. I hate to think I was keeping you from something," Tristan said as he paused in front of her. "Here's the itemized list of all the items I want for my personal business and other business I have in town. Please let me know if you aren't able to get any of the items on the list. I'll try to find replacements for them."

Tristan handed her the thick red folder and she slipped it underneath her arm. "I'm sure I won't have a problem. I never do when it comes to your orders. You are one of my easier clients to shop for."

"Thank you," he replied smiling at her. "How are things going with you? Are you still single? I know several of my friends would love to date you. I could give one of them a call and set something up for you. I know Cliff was asking about you just last night at our poker game."

Tasha loved how Tristan was always trying to fix her up. It was very sweet of him, but she wasn't interested in dating any of his friends. She knew who Cliff was and he was totally the type who would want a woman at his beck and call.

"Tristan, it's very sweet that you want to fix me up. However, I'm seeing someone now and he's a great guy."

"Do I need to have a talk with this man?" Tristan inquired crossing his arms over his chest. "I don't want you hurt."

Tasha was surprised by Tristan's concern; it was very reassuring and nice. She wasn't the type of person to bond easily with her clients, but she and Tristan had become great friends rather quickly.

MARIE ROCHELLE

“Nick is a nice guy. We have only been out on a couple of dates, but everything went amazingly well. I’m expecting another date sometime this week.”

“As long as you’re happy, I won’t say another word. However, if you need a friendly shoulder, I’ll be more than willingly to volunteer mine,” Tristan told her.

“Tristan, you need to stop flirting with me,” Tasha scolded as she made her way back towards the patio door.

“I can’t help flirting with you,” he yelled after her.” You’re just too cute not to.”

“Goodbye. I’ll call you if I run into any problems or see something else you might be interested in.” Tasha hurried out the door before Tristan tried to find a way to invite her to dinner tonight.

Chapter Thirteen

“Baby, you feel so good. I have missed you so much. How about we make up for the time that we were apart?”

Strong hands quickly worked the buttons opened on her shirt and slipped it off her shoulder. “God, you’re so fucking beautiful,” Nick complimented as he held her lace-covered breasts in his large palms. “You have no idea how long I have been dreaming about this.”

“Can you stop talking and get down to business?” Tasha complained, pulling Nick’s head towards hers. She was dying to feel his firm lips against her softer ones.

“Your wish is my command, beautiful,” Nick promised and finally gave her what she had been praying for. He crushed her to him and reclaimed her lips with his. Nick just didn’t kiss her. No! He made love to her mouth with the way he pulled her full bottom lip between his teeth and sucked it.

Her panties got wetter when Nick ran his tongue along the top of her upper lip. He was making her crazy with the way he was playing with her mouth. Tasha was going crazy and it was just from a simple kiss. She didn’t know why, but she couldn’t get enough. She needed more.

“Please...” Tasha whimpered, pulling at Nick’s hair.

“What is it, baby?” Nick asked, releasing her mouth. “What do you want from me? I can give you whatever you want. Just let me know what it is and how badly you need it.”

“I want to forget about everything else but us. Can you do that for me...for us?”

“Baby, I can do that and so much more,” Nick swore as he laid her down on the bed and slowly stripped the rest of her clothes off her body.

“I know that I have never laid my eyes on a more stunning woman than you.” Nick ran his hands across her semi-flat

stomach before trailing them down her legs. "When I first saw you, I couldn't get over how hot your body was. It was one of the first things that drew me to you."

"I thought you were drawn to me because I paid for your coffee," Tasha teased. "Are you sure that you didn't want me for my money?"

"Oh...your spunkiness turned me on, too," Nick confessed as he kissed her on the navel and worked his way down inch by inch. His sizzling kisses stopped right about her damp curls. "Open your legs honey. I'm dying to touch you and to learn the taste of you. Do you want me to do that?"

She slowly spread her legs as an answer to Nick's request. She didn't even have to think twice about it. "Touch me all you want," Tasha whispered.

"Oh, baby, that is so good. I promise you'll love it." One long finger ran down the side of her thigh up to her damp curls pausing at the part that wanted his touch the most. Just as Nick was about to touch her, a loud buzzing sound went off.

Tasha's eyes flew open as she glanced around her empty room. "No," she cried. "It couldn't have been another dream." She had been dreaming about Nick non-stop since he went away on his damn business trip.

"God, I can't take this much longer." She yanked the sheets over her head as she snuggled down deep into the bed. "I'm dying to make love to him. Maybe I need to make the first move, because the dreams aren't giving me what I needed. I'm waking up hotter and more sexually frustrated than when I went to sleep in the first damn place."

Tasha didn't know how long she lay in her bed before she realized that someone was knocking on her front door. Tossing the covers off her head, she glanced at the clock on the night stand by her bed and frowned.

"Who is bothering me at eight o'clock in the morning on a Sunday? If it's my brother, I'm going to kill him." Tasha climbed out of the bed and stormed towards the front door to get rid of who ever took her away from her Nick fantasy. Without bothering to look out of the peephole, she flung the door open.

DESIRE

“You better have a good reason for waking me up so early on a Sunday morning,” Tasha snapped before she knew who was on the other side.

Chapter Fourteen

Nick stood on the other side of the door looking tired and rumpled. His dress shirt was undone and hanging from his suit pants, a dark blue tie was hanging loosely from around his neck. Tasha didn't see the jacket to his suit anywhere in sight. Nick looked like he had traveled through hell and back to get to her.

"What happened to you?" she asked, waving Nick into her house closing the door behind them. "You really look like something someone ran over and left for dead."

"I was on the flight from the Twilight Zone with three crying babies. One in the front of me, the other was seated next to me and, of course, the last baby was behind me. I couldn't get away from them because the plane was packed."

"Do you want me to fix you something to eat? Would you like anything to drink?" Tasha asked. "Tell me what I can do for you."

"No, I don't need any of that," Nick answered, massaging his forehead. "I was hoping you would offer me something a little more personal."

"A little more, personal.....like what?"

"Your bed," he replied. "I'm so tired and since your house is only about a twenty minute drive from the airport, I came here."

"You want to sleep in my bed?" Tasha was already having a hard time with dreams about Nick being in her bed. Would she really be able to handle the reality of it?

"Hell, I'll take a guestroom. I just need some sleep," Nick said, rubbing the back of his hand across his eyes.

Her heart weakened at how pitiful Nick looked. Nick hadn't admitted it yet, but she was sure that he was falling for her as much as she was for him. Plus she would finally get to see how it would look to have Nick in her bed.

DESIRE

"Come on, I'll let you share my bed," Tasha said turning back in the direction of her bedroom. "I never get up this early in the morning unless I'm going to church. But I'm not going today. I stayed up too late last night working."

"Do you mind sleeping in the same bed as me? Nick asked following behind her. "I don't want to make you uncomfortable or anything."

"Well, you are the guy I'm dating at the moment, unless I'm reading the situation wrong. Maybe I should have taken Tristan up on his dinner invitation." Tasha wasn't able to take another step before she was spun back around to face a tired but angry Nick.

"Who in the hell in Tristan, and why was he asking my girlfriend out on a date?" Nick growled.

"Calm down," she laughed. "He's one of my clients. He's constantly flirting with me. Tristan is cute, but not my type. Why don't you take a shower? It's right through there." Tasha pointed to a closed door in her bedroom.

"I'm going to find you something to sleep in. You're about the same size as my brother. I think he left an extra pair of pajamas bottoms here. I'll go and get them for you." Tasha walked past Nick out of the room. She needed time to get herself calmed down or she would be on Nick's sexy ass as soon as he climbed into bed with her.

* * * *

He watched the beautiful woman next to him as she slept so peacefully like she didn't have a care in the world. Tasha had been taken back when he asked to crash at her place, but it only lasted for a mere minute and then she was offering him her bed without a second thought.

Tasha was so different from Carrie in every way that mattered. She was giving, loving, warm, and generous. Carrie never thought about incorporating those traits into her selfish personality.

Reaching out, he ran his finger down the side of Tasha's smooth cheek. Despite what he told Richie about not falling in

love with another woman, he was falling hard for Tasha faster than he ever did Carrie.

He had to find some time soon to tell Tasha how he felt about her, but it couldn't be right now. He had two speaking engagements coming up in the next couple of weeks. He wanted to get them out of the way first so he could book a romantic trip for the two of them. He wasn't going to allow any kind of interruptions when it came to revealing his true feeling to Tasha.

He remembered a while back when Richie first met and fell in love with Kristen. His friend went on and on about her like she was the best thing since the BlackBerry. He had thought Richie had been out of his mind, but now he was experiencing the same uncontrollable emotions when it came to Tasha.

She had made a difference in his life in such a very short period of time. All while he was on his trip, all he could think about was her and nothing else. Sure, women came up to him like they usually did, but this was the first time in a very long time he wasn't interested in taking one back to his room. He wasn't thinking about hooking up with a strange female, not when he had such a fantastic woman waiting for him back home.

Tasha was so likeable, upbeat, and attentive. He could tell that Tasha liked to be touched by him along with being close in a romantic way. He loved the chase Tasha had given him when they first met. It was so much hotter to chase after a woman instead of her finding a way to always be at his side being overly needy.

He wondered how long he could stay in bed with Tasha without giving in to what his body was asking for. His cock was already hard and straining against the front of the black pajamas bottom she had given him to sleep in.

Falling back down on the bed, he flung his arm over his head and ran the other hand down his chest slipping it inside the pajamas bottoms. He wrapped his hand around his raging erection stroking it up and down. Nick clenched his teeth to keep from moaning out loud so he wouldn't wake up Tasha. He was so lost in the sensation of pleasing himself that it took him a minute or two to realize that he had an audience.

Nick slowly removed his arm and found Tasha staring at him with clear lust in her big brown eyes. He didn't know if he

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should stop what he was doing or keep doing it. Tasha seemed so enthralled with it.

“How long have you been watching me?” he asked.

“Not that long,” she answered without taking her eyes off his erection. “Do you need some help? You look like you are in pain.” Tasha tossed the light sheet completely off the bed to get a better look at him.

Nick knew he was hearing things. He was just too much in a daze to have hearing Tasha correctly, so he was going to ask her. “You want to help me with this?” he asked, his eyes swinging between his cock and Tasha’s face. No, she wasn’t about to assist him with this problem. There was no way he could or would get that damn blessed.

Chapter Fifteen

“Yeah, I want to help you.” Tasha ran her thumb over the top of his throbbing cock making it jump at her touch. The warmth from her finger made his hips lift up off the bed. Any coherent thought he might had in his mind instantly disappeared.

His had craved Tasha’s touch like this for such a long time that he couldn’t believe it was finally happening and he wasn’t asleep. God, the reality of her was so much better than his late night dreams. He didn’t care how long it went on, because he was going to get lost in every second of this.

“You’re so hot and hard,” she whispered moving her hand up and down his erection. “Are you always like this, or did I just get really fortunate?”

“This is only for you, sweetheart.” Nick covered Tasha’s hand and showed her how he liked to be stroked. “Do it a little hard. It’s not going to hurt me.”

Tasha took his cue and tightened her grip on him. “Are you getting pleasure from this? Is it making you as hot as it’s making me?”

Nick stopped moving his hand at her questions and his eyes connected with Tasha’s inquisitive ones. “I like this a lot, baby, but I would love something more than this. Are you ready for it?”

“I want the same thing as you,” Tasha confessed as she let go of him and then leaned across his chest to kiss him.

Without breaking the kiss, Nick flipped them both over so Tasha was on her back. He gave her a few more kisses before he finally stopped to get himself to make sure they both were on the same page one final time.

“I love your skin. It’s so beautiful and smooth. I could just make a meal out of you for the rest of the night. Every time I get

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a taste of you, it gets better and better. I want to make love to you. Are you really ready for me?"

"Nick, I'm not going to change my mind. I wouldn't have shared my bed with you if I wasn't sexually attracted to you."

He had to get them out of their clothes. He was ready to feel Tasha's silky skin against his. Nick tugged at the lacy top Tasha was wearing until he was able to get it off her small curvy body. He tossed it on the floor and gave his attention back to her plump perky breasts.

Dropping his head, he sucked one hard nipple into his mouth falling in love with the warm sweet taste. "You taste better than the richest candy," he mumbled around the treat in his mouth and then let it go.

"Mmmm..." Tasha moaned as she ran her fingers through his hair. "You don't taste too bad yourself. She licked the corner of his mouth before slipping her tongue back into her mouth.

Nick recaptured Tasha's mouth with his as he ground his erection between her thighs making her panties cream even more. He loved how response Tasha's was to all of his touches. She was his equal on every level.

"We need to get you out of these," he pulled his mouth away from hers as he fingered her boy-cut underwear. "Come on, baby. Lift your hips."

Lifting her hips, Tasha let Nick remove the last article of her clothing and waited impatiently as he stripped out of his pajamas bottoms.

"How do you like it?"

"How do I like what?" Tasha panted as Nick ran the tip of his index finger around her navel.

"I want to make this good for you. Can you handle anything? Are you open to new things?"

She was so turned on that she would be willing to do anything that Nick suggested. His finger was driving her up the wall. She hadn't made love in a while, and she was ready for it.

"Yes, I'm open to anything. I just want you inside of me. I feel so empty. I need something thick and hard....*please* give it to me," she begged.

"Tasha, I'm going to give you that and so much more. Give me a minute to grab a few things for us."

Getting off the bed, Nick went over to his clothes piled up in a chair and Tasha watched as he removed his tie. Coming back over to the bed, he grabbed her underwear of the floor.

"Raise your arms above your head," Nick instructed in a low voice.

Tasha eyed him as she slowly did as she was told. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm not going to hurt you," Nick quickly tied her hands to the headboard with his underwear. "Is that too tight? I don't want you to feel any discomfort." She moved her hands and found the knot loose enough for her to get out of.

"No, it's fine."

"Are you ready for the next step?" Nick twisted his tie around his hands as he waited for her answer.

Tasha felt excitement tingling in the pit of her stomach as she wondered what Nick was going to do with his tie. She never thought of herself as a woman who might get a thrill out of being tied up to a bed, but she was getting hotter and hotter. She couldn't wait to see what Nick would do next.

"Yes, I'm ready," Tasha answered her eyes on the fabric in Nick's grasp instead of his face so she missed the flash of white-hot desire in his dark blue eyes.

"Baby, I swear that you're going to love this more than you could have ever imagined." The words left Nick's mouth and then a split second later he covered her eyes with his silk tie, securing it behind her head with a light knot.

Chapter Sixteen

“Sweetheart, are you okay?” Nick’s hot breath whispered into her ear. “Do you know how perfect you look like this?”

Tasha loved how Nick’s voice came out of nowhere. The unexpected husky sound of it made her shiver from want. Her senses were so much more heightened with her eyes being covered like this.

“Are you going to touch me?” she whispered, her body twisting around on the sheets. She had spent countless nights in her bed, but her sheets had never felt this pronounced against her skin before.

“Nick, are you still here?” Tasha strained to hear something coming from Nick, but she didn’t hear a peep out of him.

“Yes, I’m here, sweetheart.” The bed moved under Nick’s weight as he rejoined on the bed.

* * * *

Nick was so aroused that he was surprised that he didn’t thrust his entire eight inches deep inside Tasha and work her body for the rest of the night, but he calmed himself down. He had to take his time and slowly bring her body to the peak they both desired.

He was used to jumping from a different woman’s bed in his early twenties until he hit his thirties because he loved the non-commitment of everything. Even after Carrie dumped him, he slept with a woman he had picked up at a bar just to prove he still had it, but he had found that he wasn’t satisfied by the experience anymore. He was so pissed off at himself that he never even told Richie about it.

He found out his heart wasn’t getting filled by all of the empty sex he was getting from women he wasn’t interested in

for a long time relationship. He never thought he would want a woman who could make him feel whole until Tasha. She had always been the woman for him in his mind, but now she was going to be his in every way that mattered.

Taking the tip of his index finger, he ran it between Tasha's breasts. Her body jumped at his unexpected touch, and a smile pulled at the corners of his mouth.

"Did I surprise you?" Leaning forward, he licked at her hard nipples before drawing one into his mouth.

"Oh, hot damn," she hissed thrashing her body around on the mattress. "You aren't playing fair."

Nick toyed with her nipples a little more before he finally let it go. "Oh, I can play much more unfair than this," Nick promised as he spread Tasha's legs then ran his tongue across her tight wet curls. He held her thighs in place as he continued to lap at the juices pouring from her body.

Tasha screamed as her orgasm hit her. "Yes....God, yes!" she screamed loud enough for her neighbors to hear next door and probably the next street over.

Nick quickly removed his mouth, untied Tasha's wrists and uncovered her eyes before he entered her with one swift thrust of his hips. His eyes zoned in on Tasha's face and the sheer bliss on her face sent him over the edge that he had been perched on most the day. His cries mingled with Tasha's as they echoed in the bedroom until the both of them slowly started to come back down from their amazing high.

Nick moved around on the bed until he found a comfortable position and then turned Tasha's worn out body into the contours of his equally exhausted body. "Are you okay with what I did? Was it too much for you?"

"No, it was perfect. I have never been made love to like that. I feel so relaxed," the words practically purred from Tasha's mouth.

"Do you think you might be interested in trying it again?" Nick asked.

"I'm not against it, but I'm not up to it right now. I need some time to rest. I'm wiped out."

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He pushed down the urge to beat his chest and scream at the top of his lungs at his sexual ability to please his woman. He might do it later when Tasha wasn't around to scold him.

"Baby, you go ahead and get some sleep. I'll wake you up later for a late supper."

"Thank you," Tasha whispered before she snuggled closer to him and fell asleep.

"No, thank you for showing me what true love is." Nick whispered softly and then kissed the top of Tasha's head.

Chapter Seventeen

"I don't know if I'm ready to meet your best friend," Tasha glancing at Nick who was sitting across from her at the table. Nick had finally talked her into having lunch with him and Richie after much coaching on his part. "Richie seems like he would be very honest, and you know that I am so we might clash. I would hate to put you in the middle of a disagreement between us."

"I never had a disagreement with a gorgeous woman before and I don't plan on doing it now," a deep male voice said behind her.

Tasha spun around in her chair and her eyes widened at the handsome male behind her. Richie wasn't what she expected at all. He stood around six feet three inches tall. Dark gray eyes studied her from a model perfect face, but what surprised her most was the thick red hair pulled back into a ponytail.

"Hi, I'm Tasha Kelly," Tasha said, slightly embarrassed that Richie had walked up on her talking about him. "You must be Richie Davidson; Nick has told me so much about you."

"It's wonderful to meet you, Tasha," Richie said coming around her chair.

"Nice to finally meet you, too," Tasha extended her hand for a handshake and gasp when Richie kissed the back of it.

"Nick told me that you were beautiful, but he lied to me. You're stunning. I might rethink about getting married in a couple of weeks."

Laughing, Tasha took her hand back from Richie and placed it in her lap. "I like you." She grinned at Nick's best friend as he took a seat next to Nick. Tasha was thrilled she was getting along so well with Richie. This first meeting was going so much better than she imagined it would.

DESIRE

"I like you, too," Richie said returning her compliment. "Most of Nick's girlfriends in the past didn't know how to carry on a decent conversation. It's very refreshing to find him with someone who is attractive and intelligent."

A low growl coming from next to Richie made Tasha glance back at Nick. A dark expression was etched across his handsome face. He didn't look pleased at all. "What's wrong, honey?"

"I think the love connection between the two of you is getting on my nerves. I want you to like Richie, but not this much. It's getting a little overboard in my opinion," he complained.

"Nick, there's no need to be jealous," Tasha laughed.

Dark blue eyes narrowed at her. "I wouldn't be jealous if Richie stopped acting like he has never been around a good-looking woman before. Besides, he's engaged and is about to get married soon. He should know better than to be flirting with any woman, especially my girlfriend."

Tasha was going to make a joke about Nick's jealousy until she saw the seriousness in Nick's eyes and decided she shouldn't mess with him. It was wonderful to see the green-eyed monster bothering him. She thought he cared, but it was nice to see how much that he did. This was the first time he used the girlfriend card and she *liked* it a lot.

"Man, don't get all pissed off," Richie laughed. "You have found a good woman here. I can tell she really cares about you, so don't mess it up."

"I'm not going to do anything to lose her," Nick said. "Tasha has grown to mean so much to me."

"Oh, you're so sweet." Tasha was thrilled to hear those words coming from Nick's mouth. She was wondering if it was time to tell Nick that she was in love with him, and now she saw that the time had come.

She was about to say more when her cell phone went off inside her purse. "I'm sorry about this. Let me grab it real quick. It's probably something to do with work." Digging the phone out her purse, Tasha answered it quickly when she saw Tristan's phone number.

"Tristan, what happened? Did your order not arrive on time?"

"Tasha, I hate to bother you. I wasn't going to call, but I need your help with this. I called the phone number, but they wouldn't deal with me. I can't use these folders they sent me."

"Are you talking about the two pocket red folders with the business card slot on the inside? I ordered you five cases of them. What went wrong?"

"The supplier sent me three cases of red folders and two cases of purple folders. The red folders don't even have the slots for my business cards. I need these folders for my presentation next week, and the girl in customer service gave me the run around for the order slip. I told her I didn't have it and then I was told without the slip to prove what was ordered I couldn't get any replacements."

"Okay, I'm going to change them. I'll be right there to help you. I have the order slip on my desk at home. Give me a chance to get to your house. It might take me close to forty-five minutes or a little longer, but we will get this taken care of. Don't worry about it Tristan. I'll make sure that they ship it overnight free of charge."

Tasha disconnected the call and tossed the phone back into her purse. She glanced across the table and noticed the disappointed look Nick was giving to her. "Baby, I'm sorry, but I have to leave. Tristan didn't get the items he ordered, and I have to fix this."

"I'm not going to lie. I'm upset that our lunch date was cut short. I wanted you to get to know Richie a little more. After lunch I wanted to go for a walk with you in the park."

Tasha was crushed that she had ruined Nick's plans for their day. She had to make it up to him. "How about I come to your speaking seminar tomorrow? I would love to see you in action and afterwards, I'll treat you to a home-cooked meal at my house?"

"Hey, if Nick won't take it, I will," Richie joked, cutting in.

"Richie, shut up. You know that you wouldn't do that to Kristen," Nick said, giving his friend a stern look. "I would love that. Are you sure that you don't have to do anything else?"

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"I'll make sure to clear my calendar for you. I have to make up for leaving today. So, it's a date?"

"Are you saying I can't come over tonight?" Nick inquired.

"You're more than welcome to come over. You know where I keep the extra key outside. I might be running a little late from Tristan's. This supplier I use is a pain in the ass and hates to replace stuff when they get it wrong, but I'll be home as soon as I'm done with him."

"Okay. I'll order some take out and have it ready for you."

"Excellent...I knew that I loved you for a reason," Tasha said before turning her attention on his friend. "I hope we can do this again, Richie."

"Me too, Tasha," Richie answered.

"Bye, Nick."

"Bye, Sweetheart," Nick said before Tasha spun away and rushed out of the restaurant.

* * * *

Nick sat in shock for a few minutes after Tasha had left. He couldn't believe that she told him she loved him. He doubted she even knew the words had left her mouth. He had wanted to be the one that said the words first. God, he had never felt so good in his whole life. Everything was going perfect for him and nothing could ruin this high he was on.

"Nick, I didn't want to say anything in front of Tasha, but I have something to tell you," Richie said.

"What is it?" he asked.

"You aren't going to like this."

"I'm in too good of a mood for you to be able to ruin it, so just spit it out."

"Carrie is back in town. She dumped that gym owner, and she wants to see you. She came by my house yesterday looking for you," Richie informed him. "She wanted to know if you were dating anyone."

Everything around Nick seemed to stop in place after what Richie told him filled his head. *Carrie was back in town? She wanted to see him?* Did he want to see her after everything that

happened? If he did see her, would all of his buried emotions come rushing back to the surface?

What about Tasha? He was in love with her. He was planning to tell her that tonight. Should he wait until after he saw Carrie? God, he was too torn to be around Tasha tonight. He needed to spend some time alone and get his thoughts clear before he dealt with either woman.

“What did you tell her?” Nick asked Richie.

“It wasn’t my place to tell her anything. Carrie said she would find a way to get in touch with you. However, I don’t think you should get back with her. Carrie is bad news and will always think she owns you if you go back to her this time.” “Tasha is the real thing, and you would be a fool to let her go. I like Tasha a lot and if I had a choice between the two of them, it wouldn’t be a competition at all. Tasha would be the winner hands down in my book. Nick, are you listening to me?”

“I heard every word that came out of your mouth, but it’s my decision whether or not I want to see Carrie, not yours.”

“You don’t have to tell me the decision is yours. I already know that, smartass. All I’m telling you is don’t get blinded by the hot memories you may have of Carrie and lose sight of the good thing you have now with Tasha. Don’t let the devil on your shoulder lead you in the wrong direction.”

“Thanks for all of your advice, but I can’t move on with Tasha until I clear out all of these emotions that Carrie still brings up in me. I need to talk to her. I’ll know what I need to do after I see Carrie.”

Chapter Eighteen

“I learned early that being involved in Public Relations wasn’t easy. I had to get used to different clients personalities, and the one thing to remember is that not every person is going to be the same.”

“If you have a passion for advancing the profession, strengthening the society, and have a love for establishing global leadership, a career as a communications specialist or working in Public Relations office might be for you,” Nick said to the packed auditorium as they listened to his speech.

“Another thing you should know is that I love what I do and I wouldn’t trade it for anything in the world. I consider it a lifelong learning experience. I enjoy showing businesses how to welcome more professional jobs into their communities. Once you can go into any firm and show the employers how to recognize the capabilities and accomplishments of their employees, you are half way there.”

“I constantly tell anyone who comes to hear me speak about this is to strive for professional excellence in the following things. I think it works better if you divide all of these items into a two year goal for yourself. It will give you more time to work on each one to the best of your ability without feeling rush to get any of them done.”

“The things on my two year goal list are: Learning, community, thought through leadership, knowledge with sharing, advocacy/ethics, organization, and, lastly, excellence. Feel free to use all of mine or just some.”

“However, be sure that a career in Public Relations is the job you want more than anything in the world. If it is, you’re in for a very rewarding career. Thank you so much for coming today,” Nick said, ending his seminar.

* * * *

Tasha sat in the very back of the room as the crowd started to leave after Nick was done with his lecture. She couldn't be more proud of him than she was at this moment. She never realized how talented her boyfriend was. Sure he would talk to her about coming to some of his speeches, but she never had the time because she was always working late on supply orders.

She was so pleased that she took the day off and came here to see him. It was astonishing how he was able to draw the attention of a hundred plus people with his words. She really had to make something special tonight to show Nick how much she loved him and the speech he gave today.

As she was getting up from her seat, Tasha noticed a tall, dark-haired woman making her way up the steps towards Nick. She wondered if the woman was a fan and wanted to get some additional information from him. Oh well, she could wait while he talked to the woman.

Chapter Nineteen

“Nick, I still see you have the ability to draw in people with your words. I think that is what drew me to you in the first place.”

Nick laid the book back down on the table and slowly turned around to find Carrie standing not five feet behind him. She still looked as gorgeous as he remembered her. Her thick curly black hair was pulled back into a tight ponytail that stopped in the middle of her back; huge light-blue eyes stared back at him from an angelic face. She was even wearing the white t-shirt and black short vest he loved seeing her in when they were dating.

“Carrie, how are you doing?” Nick asked. “Richie told me that you where in town.”

“Now, is that anyway to greet me?” Carrie asked before she threw herself into his arms and planted a huge kiss on his mouth.

Nick waited for the sparks to fly like they used to when Carrie kissed him, but he felt absolutely nothing. He thought he was over Carrie, and now he knew that he was. Tasha was the woman he was in love with.

“Nick, what in the hell is going on? Why are you kissing that woman?”

At the sound of Tasha’s voice, Nick shoved Carrie away from him and found Tasha standing directly behind them with a crestfallen look on her beautiful face. Her eyes swung over to Carrie and then back at him like she didn’t quite know what to make of the situation.

“Oh, Nick, I’m sorry,” Carrie apologized. “I didn’t realize that someone was still here. I hope you don’t get in trouble for kissing your girlfriend at one of your seminars.”

“Girlfriend?” Tasha gasped hurt clear in her voice. “I didn’t know you had a girlfriend.”

“Tasha, listen to me.” Nick moved away from Carrie towards Tasha, but she stepped back away from him. “Carrie isn’t my girlfriend.”

“Nick, why are you telling this girl that?” Carrie cut in. “You know that we have been dating for a while now.”

“Carrie, shut up!”

“No, I’m not going to do that. I came all the way here to see you, and I’m not going anywhere until we talk.”

“Nick, you should go and spend time with your girlfriend. I don’t want to keep you from her.” Tasha hurried for the steps, but he caught up with her before she made it to the first one.

“Don’t you dare leave here. We need to talk about this.” He wasn’t going to let Carrie come back into his life and ruin what he had with Tasha.

Tasha looked at him and then back at Carrie over his shoulder. “I’m not going to play these games with you. Go out and have a good time with Carrie. I can tell you were happy to see her from the kiss the two of you shared.”

“She kissed me, damn it!” Nick snapped, pissed that Tasha wasn’t listening to him.

“Yes, she might have kissed you, but I didn’t see you pushing her away. You were into it as much as she was. Don’t you dare lie and tell me you weren’t. I’m done with you and whatever we might have been trying to build together.”

“I’m not going to let you leave like this,” Nick exclaimed. “I demand that you stay here and talk this out with me.”

Tasha gave him a sad look before she stepped away from him. “See, that’s where you’re wrong, Nick. You don’t have the right to tell me what to do at all. You have a girlfriend behind you to worry about, and she doesn’t look very happy at the moment. So, go to her and make everything better.”

Spinning on her heel, Tasha hurried down the steps and out of the door at the back of the building without ever looking back in Nick’s direction once.

Chapter Twenty

“Nick, I want us to get back together. I was a fool for leaving you like I did. I’m sorry,” Carrie apologized, staring at him as they sat outside of the restaurant. “I knew the second week I left you it was a mistake, but I was too proud to come running back.”

Nick studied Carrie as she twirled a piece of her hair around her finger and tilted her head to the side. He was beginning to realize that she did a lot of the same things over and over when she was nervous or lying about something. Carrie didn’t come back to him on her own like she was telling him. The guy she dumped him for probably wised up and toss her ass out of his house.

“No, I don’t want you back. I’m in love with Tasha. She’s the woman I want to be with,” he retorted.

“You’re lying. There is no way you’re interested in that little wallflower of a girl. You like a woman who knows what she’s doing. Tiffany is too meek to ever please you where it really matters.”

“My girlfriend’s name is Tasha, not Tiffany. Stop acting like you don’t know that,” Nick snapped. “You aren’t a stupid woman, so don’t start acting like you are now.”

“I believe you’re the stupid one if you think you can have a future with Tasha after the way she ran out on you earlier. She is done with you. So, what is the problem with us getting back together?”

“The problem is that I’m over you. I learned my lesson and moved on to someone who is better than you. Tasha is naturally everything that you pretend to be when you want to get your way.”

“I don’t believe you,” Carrie huffed, crossing her arms over her breasts. She leaned back in her chair and fixed him with a

hard stare. "You aren't capable of being with someone who is sugary sweet like her. Hell, I was only around her for a moment and my stomach started to hurt. You want and need a real woman like me."

"Shit, I never saw the real you, did I?" he questioned. "All those times Richie warned me about how much of a bitch you were. I never believed him because I was so blinded by the sex and your way with words. You knew how to work me so well, and I was too caught up in you to see it."

"Don't get all high and mighty of me now because you dating Little Miss Virginity," Carrie yelled at him. "I'll bet you'll be cheating on her before your six month anniversary."

Shaking his head at how pitiful Carrie was coming off, Nick stood up and felt sorry for the woman still seated at the table. "Carrie, you're wrong. I'm in love with Tasha. She's means everything to me. Yes, we haven't been together that long, but when you find the one, you know it. Now, I'm going to leave. I need to find Tasha and fix what you messed up, but before I go I want to leave you with this piece of advice."

"What is it?" Carrie hissed at him.

"Stay away from us. Go back to wherever you came from and find another man to use. I'm done with these games you like playing." Nick spun on his heel and left Carrie sitting alone staring after him with shock on her face.

Chapter Twenty-One

The next night after Nick had told Carrie to stay out of his life, Tasha stood in the middle of his living room staring at him like he was a complete stranger. There wasn't an ounce of love in her eyes for him. *Shit!* What in the fuck had he done by agreeing to have dinner with Carrie last night? That one mistake might have cost him the woman he was truly in love with.

It had taken him almost an hour before Tasha agreed to come over to his house so they could talk. He had quickly given her the directions before she changed her mind. However, tonight wasn't turning out like he had hoped it would.

"Baby, please stay and talk to me. We have so much to discuss," he pleaded, reaching out to touch her shoulder.

Tasha flinched away from him with wide tear-filled eyes. "Don't you dare touch me. Not after what you did to me yesterday. Do you think I want to be with you after you have spent yesterday with your precious Carrie? It was bad enough watching you kiss her."

Nick drew in a slow deep breath. "Tasha, I never meant to hurt you. If you would just give me a chance to explain, I can make things right between us."

"Are you crazy?" she laughed, backing away from him. "I'm through with you. I can't believe I let you into my heart so easily. I'm usually much more guarded, but not with you. I let my defenses down for you and look what it got me; a broken heart."

"I was just a stand-in for her, wasn't I? Was I the rebound sex girl? Tell me!" Tasha yelled at him.

"Tasha, damn it! I won't stand here and let you talk about yourself like this. You're the woman I'm in love with. You weren't any kind of rebound sex. Get that idea out of your head," he growled at her.

“Good one,” Tasha laughed, harshly. “How long did you practice that sweet little speech? You delivered it perfectly. All of those speaking seminars must pay you very well, because you’re so excellent with your words and delivery.”

“If I hadn’t known you were lying through your perfect white teeth, I might have fallen for you again. However, I’m too smart to be made a fool of twice by you.”

“Tasha, not like this. Don’t leave like this,” Nick yelled after her as she headed for the door. “I won’t let you break up with me. I can’t lose you.”

“It’s over,” Nick,” Tasha told him with her hand on the doorknob. “I’m not going to let you back into my life again. Goodbye. I wish you all the happiness in the world with Carrie.” Tasha hurried out the door for her car.

Nick raced after her. He couldn’t let her leave like this. “Tasha, wait,” he hollered, coming out of the door behind her. However, he was too late. Tasha was already in her car pulling out of his driveway, and there was nothing he could do to stop her.

Standing in the pathway of his house, Nick knew that he wasn’t going to be the same man unless he got Tasha back. When Carrie had left him for another man, he thought he had lost the love of his life. However, now he saw how stupid he had been about the whole situation. Carrie had never been his woman, let alone the love of his life. Tasha was and she wasn’t with him. Furthermore, she didn’t want a thing to do with him now.

He wasn’t going to let Tasha ignore his feelings or push him away. She was his woman, and he was going to do everything in his power to get her back into his life where she belonged.

Chapter Twenty-Two

“Richie, I don’t want to be out tonight,” Nick complained staring at the people inside the crowded club. He could barely hear himself think over the loud music and noise. He didn’t know why he agreed to do this. It had been over two weeks since Tasha broke up with him, and he still hadn’t gotten her to see him. She wouldn’t even open her front door when he went by her house a couple of times.

“I need to be at home thinking of a way to win Tasha back. I know she doesn’t hate me. She can’t. Not when I love her so much. We just need to find a quiet place to sit down and talk things out. Once she sees how much I love her, I know she’ll take me back.”

“Do you think you have given her enough time to get over what you did to her?” Richie questioned.

“I wasn’t trying to hurt Tasha. I love her for, God sakes,” Nick sighed. “I only went out with Carrie because I knew she wouldn’t let it go until I did. I told her the same night that I wasn’t interested in rekindling anything between us. Why would I after what she did to me? Tasha had shown me what true love can be, and I’m not going to let her slip away from me because I did some thing stupid.”

“How did she take it?” Richie questioned, taking a sip of his drink. “We both know that Carrie doesn’t like to hear the word ‘no’ or think she has come in second to any other woman.”

“Honestly, I didn’t wait around for her reaction. I left her at the restaurant and headed straight for Tasha’s house. I wanted to let her know how I felt about her, but she wouldn’t even open the door for me.”

“I had to beg her to come to see me at my house when I finally got her to talk to me. I thought for sure she came to my house to hear me out, but that wasn’t the reason. She dumped

me, and I'm totally purposeless without her. I can't work, eat, sleep, or drink. I need her in my life."

He wasn't able to concentrate on anything else because his mind was focused on ways on getting Tasha. He never thought he would feel this alone without her, but his pain was indescribable. He wouldn't think about how he might not be able to find a way to get Tasha to forgive him and his stupidity.

Yet, the thought was in the back of his mind. What is she was through with him and had already moved on? The question stabbed at his heart. Just thinking about it shattered him.

"Richie, I can't let Tasha just walk out of my life without a giving it a damn good fight to keep her. Not after I finally found out what true love is all about."

"Man, I don't know what to tell you. I can't believe you feel this away about Tasha. It's like you're a completely different man. Does she know you don't want to break up? Have you told her that?"

"Yes, I told her; however, she doesn't believe me. She's only thinks I went out with her because I was on the rebound from Carrie," Nick sighed.

"Isn't that the reason you told me that you started dating her? When did your feeling change?"

"I think I always felt a connection to her from the second that I saw her at the coffee shop, but I was too pissed to acknowledge it back then. Now, I want to pop the question and spend with rest of my life with Tasha. Yet, she doesn't want the same thing as I do. God, why does my life have to suck so fucking bad?"

Nick noticed how Richie glanced over his shoulder instead of answering his question. "What are you looking at?"

"I think you life has just gotten worse."

"What?"

"Tasha just walked up to the bar with some guy I don't know. She's looking super hot in a little black dress."

Spinning around in his seat, Nick's eyes zoomed in on Tasha as she leaned across the bar and gave the bartender her drink order. He noticed how the guy's eyes were drawn to the front of her dress instead of her face. He didn't miss how the

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man next to Tasha touched her on the elbow and then smiled at her.

“Who in the hell is he, and why is his hands all over my woman?” Nick snapped, jumping up from his seat.

Richie got up from his chair and tried to stop him. “Don’t go over there and cause any trouble. Tasha looks like she’s having a good time.”

“Tasha is my woman. I won’t allow another man’s hands to be on her body. She needs to talk to me and now is as good of time as any,” Nick answered before he rushed in the direction of his woman.

“Wait, Nick!” Richie hollered after him “You shouldn’t go over there.”

He ignored his friend and kept his eyes on the prize.

* * * *

“Tristan, you really didn’t have to bring me out for drinks after the banquet. I could have gone straight home and watched a movie on television. I’m not going to make very good company at a nightclub,” Tasha said as the cute bartender placed her pop in front of her.

“You seemed so upset,” Tristan said. “I couldn’t drop you off at home in the condition you were in. I hoped a night out on the town might get your mind off your problems.”

“I’m touched you were worried about me, but...”

“My girlfriend would rather be at my house instead of here you with,” Nick voice interrupted, cutting off the rest of her sentence.

Turning around, Tasha glared at Nick looking sexy as hell in all black. *Why was he here?* She was trying to forget about him, not run into him every place she went. “What are you doing here? Are you and Carrie out on a date?” She tried to step back so she could be closer to Tristan, but Nick wrapped his hand around her upper arm and tugged her to him.

“I’m not seeing Carrie. I’m not interested in her anymore,” Nick retorted. “You’re the only woman I want, Tasha. I’m in love with you, not *her*. Just give me a chance to explain, and

you'd see what a huge misunderstanding all of this turned out to be between us."

"Let go of my arm." Tasha wasn't going to repeat herself because she knew that Nick had heard her.

Nick slowly loosened his grip on her arm before he finally let it go. "I'm not leaving you here with this jerk," he snapped, pointing at Tristan standing behind her. "I don't even know who he is."

"I'm fine. You can leave. I'll get home safely with Tristan."

Tasha cursed her slip of tongue when she saw how Nick's eyes narrowed at Tristan's name. She knew that he remembered what she had told him about her client. Now she wished she had just kept her mouth shut because, without a doubt, there was going to be trouble.

"Is this the bastard who asked you out a couple of weeks ago?" Nick demanded. "I bet he's happy that you're here with him now. Well, it isn't going to last. There is no way in hell I'm going to leave you with a man who wants to sleep with you."

"Nick, stop it," Tasha hissed. "You have no right give me your opinion about my life. You are no longer a part of it."

"Yes, listen to what Tasha is telling you," Tristan chimed in behind her. "Why don't you go home, and I promise to take care of Tasha."

"The hell you are," Nick growled, shoving her out of the way he lunged for Tristan, grabbing him by the collar of his shirt. "You will stay the hell away from Tasha, or I'll make sure you do."

"Nick, let him go!" Tasha screamed, pulling at Nick's arm but he wasn't moving.

"Tasha, move. Let me handle this." A familiar voice said behind her.

Looking over her shoulder, she saw Richie behind her. "I might be able to get Nick to let him go, but you need to leave with him or this will go on all night long."

Tasha didn't want to hear anymore of Nick's lies, but she didn't want him attacking Tristan inside a pack nightclub when her friend was only trying to help her out.

"Okay, if you get him off of Tristan, I'll leave with him."

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“Great.” Richie moved away from her and went over to Nick. She watched as he whispered something in Nick’s ear. Nick looked at her and then back at Richie before he finally let go of Tristan.

“Give me the key,” she overheard Nick telling Richie. She observed Richie as he removed a keychain from his slack’s pocket, remove a key and then hand it to Nick. “You can come by my house tomorrow and pick up your car.”

Turning away from Richie, Nick looked at her. “Are you ready to go, sweetheart?”

“Tasha, you don’t have to go anywhere with him,” Tristan said, addressing her as he stepped around Richie and paused next to Nick. “I can take you back home. I know you have been trying to avoid Nick.”

“No, I’ll let Nick take me home. We need to talk about Carrie and other things,” Tasha interjected quickly, trying to stop a huge disagreement before it started.

“Nick, let’s go so we can get this out in the open.” She turned towards the exit and made her way through the crowd with Nick’s warm presence behind her.

Tasha didn’t say a word to Nick until they were outside the nightclub. She wasn’t going to get into an argument with him on the inside and get tossed out by one of the bouncers. She had taken enough embarrassment for one night.

“The only reason I left with you was for Tristan. I didn’t want you getting into another fight with him. We had already drawn enough attention from the two of you getting into it earlier. I’m surprised security didn’t throw us out then.”

“Are you sleeping with him” Nick tossed the question at her. He had totally blown off anything else she just told him and only latched onto the part about Tristan.

“How dare you ask me that?” Tasha snapped. She was already beginning to regret her decision to even go anywhere with him. Maybe she should have stayed inside the club with Tristan at least she knew what she would be getting with him.

“I have never cheated on you. I wish I could say the same thing about you.”

Nick’s entire body language changed at her accusation. His posture became less threatening and a lot more relaxed like he

couldn't believe she thought he had cheated on her. "Tasha, sweetheart, I didn't cheat on you with Carrie," he said. "I'm not attracted to her at all. She means nothing to me." He reached out to touch her, but she stepped away from him.

"Don't do that. You wanted to talk to me, not touch me."

Dropping his hand, Nick stared at her like he wanted to get something else out in the open, but didn't know how to do it. "Come on. Let's go. We can talk at your house instead of mine." Spinning away from her, he moved in the direction of Richie's car.

Chapter Twenty-Three

The short drive to Tasha's house was done in complete silence. Tasha was nervous about what Nick was going to bring up. He thought she wasn't in love with him, but he was so wrong. She was still head-over-heels in love with him.

However, she was hurt that he blew her off so easily to be with Carrie. He couldn't be in love with her as much as he told her. Instead of going off with Carrie like she told him to, Nick should have stayed with her; yet he didn't.

He still had to harbor some secret feelings for his ex-girlfriend and wanted to see if Carrie felt the same way about him. No, she wouldn't open her heart to him again to have him disregard it and her feelings.

"Are you really going to ignore me all the way to your house?" Nick asked as he stopped at a red light. "I thought you left with me so we could work things out."

Tasha glanced at Nick from the corner of her eye and found him watching her. "Can we really work things out? Do you truly still think that we have any kind of future with each other?" she asked, wanting them to be able to put all of the pieces back together.

"Honey, more than anything I want to work things out with you. I have kicked myself time and time again for what happened, but we have to get past this or we won't be able to get back the love we shared."

Tasha rode the rest of the way to her house in silence. She wanted to tell Nick that she still loved him, but now wasn't the time. Anyways, she wasn't the one who screwed up what they had in the first place.

It was him running off with his precious Carrie instead of staying with her. She stopped working early to surprise him at his speaking event, and he hadn't even cared she showed up. A

part of her wondered how she compared to his other conquests and how many ex-girlfriends had he given this same song-and-dance speech to in the past.

"We're here," Nick said, pulling up in front of her driveway. "I still want to come in and talk to you, but if you just want to me to leave, I will do it. I'll hate it, but I won't pressure you into being around me until you're good and ready."

"No, I want you to stay." Opening the passenger door, Tasha got out and looked back at Nick to make sure he was following her. It only took a few minutes for her to unlock the front door, let Nick come in behind her, and then lock it.

"Tasha, I..." Tasha held up her hand cutting off Nick. He had hogged the majority of the conversation since they left the nightclub. "It's time for me to talk and time for you to listen," she said calmly.

Walking over to the couch, Tasha tossed down her keys, purse, and kicked off her shoes. She wanted to say so much to Nick, but she didn't know where even to start with him. She had so many words rolling around in her head, and it was hard to get all of them into a sentence that Nick would understand.

"You keep telling me that you care about me."

"I don't care about you. I'm in love with you," Nick corrected instantly. "I know that I promised not to talk, but I can't stand here and let you say something about me that is not true. I can even tell you the moment I fell in love with you."

"You actually remember when you might have fallen in love with me?" Tasha asked doubtfully.

"Stop saying 'love' with such skepticism in your voice," he said moving closer to her. "There is no doubt in my mind the love I feel for you. I fell in love with you that day we had lunch in your living room on the floor."

"You were the perfect match for me, and I recognized that instantly. I knew it before we kissed. In my humble opinion, our kiss only sealed the deal."

"I'm not sure if I feel the same way anymore."

Tasha eyed Nick warily when he folded his arms over his wide chest. "If you don't think you aren't still in love with me, who in the hell do you think you're in love with now?" Nick demanded.

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She shook her head at Nick. She wasn't going to do this with him over something stupid. She was wrong about him. He wasn't worthy of her love if he couldn't admit his mistake.

"I'm not going down this road with you," Tasha sighed, blinking away a sudden tear. "I want you to leave and not come back."

Nick didn't say anything as he pulled her closer to him. He only stopped a second to kiss the tears from the corners of her eyes before he placed her head over his racing heart.

"I was a dumb ass for what I did to you, but I do love you more than life itself and I know that you still love me." Nick lowered his head and kissed her. She tried to fight it, but she ended up wrapping her arms around his neck and giving into the kiss.

He could go on being like this with Tasha forever, but he had to make sure of something first. It had to get out in the open or things would never be the same between the two of them.

"Baby, you believe me, don't you? I have to know that you realize how much I love you with everything I have in me. I still see the look you had in your eyes when you left me on that stage with Carrie."

"Your expression is burned into my memory and reappears every time I close my eyes at night. I swear I'll never do anything that selfish again. I can't lose you. Please tell me that I haven't lost you."

"You haven't lost me," Tasha jumped in, suddenly cutting him off.

"Do you still love me?" Nick asked the question, shocking her.

"I know you told me at the restaurant the day you met Richie, but is it still there? Or was my bad mistake the thing that wiped it out of your heart?"

She opened her mouth to give Nick an answer, but he held up his hand stopping her. "Don't answer that. Let me tell you how I feel about you first. I should have told you this a long time ago. It's my fault for keeping it to myself for so long."

"Nick, you don't have to do this."

"Yes, I do." Moving back from her, Nick cupped her face in his hands. "Tasha, I'm in love with you. You showed me that

there is more to love than having mind-blowing sex with another person. You opened my eyes to wanting to share my opinions, feelings, hopes, and even my dreams. Those emotions never came up with anyone else but you. You made me see what true love really is.”

“Oh, God, Nick I love you,” Tasha choked out.

“Enough to marry me?” Tasha had no clue how hard his heart was beating while he waited for her answer.

“Yes, enough to marry you.”

“I should let you know that I want to have a lot of babies with you.”

“How many do you consider a lot?” Tasha asked.

“Seven.”

Tasha moved Nick’s hands off her face. “You want to have seven kids?” she sputtered.

“No, sweetheart. I want to have seven beautiful babies with my gorgeous soon-to-be wife. Are you up for that? If not, I’ll take whatever you’re willingly to give me as long as you agree to spend the rest of your life with me.”

“Yes, I’m ready for that and everything else you have to offer me,” Tasha confessed as he pulled her back into his arms.

Nick silently thanked whoever sent him into the coffee shop that day without any cash in his wallet because he met the love of his life. Tasha truly didn’t know how much she had changed him, but he would spend each and every day showing her in every way that he could.

The End

About the Author

Marie Rochelle is an award-winning author of erotic, interracial romance, including the Phaze titles *All the Fixin'*, *My Deepest Love: Zack*, and *Caught*. Visit her online at <http://www.freewebs.com/irwriter/>.