

Loose Id

CANDY GIRL

Eve Vaughn

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About this Title

Genre: Multicultural Erotic Contemporary

A self-proclaimed pushover, Julie Bennett has been the office "Candy Girl," providing scrumptious treats for her co-workers and being thoroughly taken advantage of. A devastating betrayal sets her on a course of shedding her pushover image and into the arms of her hunky boss.

Gabriel Carland has secretly lusted after Julie Bennett since he'd first laid eyes on her. The problem? She barely knows he's alive. Used to keeping his feelings in check for her he sees his opportunity to be there for her after an emotional meltdown. One thing leads to another and finally gets her where he wants her: in his arms and in his bed. But one taste of her sweetness isn't enough.

Can Julie get over old insecurities and give herself completely over to the passion Gabe inspires within her and become his Candy Girl?

Publisher's Note: *This book contains explicit sexual content, graphic language, and situations that some readers may find objectionable: Anal play/intercourse.*

Chapter One

“Hey, Candy Girl, whatcha got today?” Rob Danford plopped onto the extra chair in Julie's cubicle and dug through the chocolate and caramel confections in the crystal candy dish. A frown suddenly pulled the corners of his lips down. “What? No peanut butter cups? I thought you said you were bringing them in today.”

It was difficult not to roll her eyes and to maintain the smile on her face, but somehow she managed. It wasn't that she minded the moniker “Candy Girl,” given to her by her coworkers because she usually kept her dish filled with candy. What bugged the hell out of her was being taken advantage of.

Rob had a lot of damn nerve to enter her space and complain about the treats, which she provided for free. He was the biggest mooch in the office. The only time he ever came by her desk was to dump some work on her or take handfuls of chocolate at a time. He was one of the reasons she had to fill her dish up more than once a week. It was becoming an expensive endeavor, and she didn't recall his offering to reimburse her.

She wanted so badly to tell him to kiss her black ass, but instead she sighed, feeling a knot form in her stomach. She hated confrontation of any kind. Really fucking hated it. “I'm sorry. I forgot to bring them in today. I had an early-morning doctor's appointment and was running late. I'm going home for lunch anyway, so I'll bring them when I come back.”

Rob poked out his lips and slumped in his seat, giving the appearance of a sullen child. “I suppose I'll have to wait until then.” Someone really needed to tell him pouting was not attractive for a forty-plus, balding man with a pronounced paunch. She might have pointed it out to him, but he wasn't the

type to take criticism well and would probably make her workdays miserable for weeks to come. It simply wasn't worth the aggravation.

She pointedly turned to her computer and focused on the screen, hoping he'd take the hint and leave. When he lingered, she realized he wouldn't go away until his presence was acknowledged. The smile she'd been holding on to was getting harder to maintain as she turned around to face him. Why couldn't he simply buy a clue and leave her alone as most people would have? "Is there anything else I can help you with?"

Rob crossed his thick arms over his chest. "Vivian wants to leave me. She says I'm an inconsiderate slouch. Can you believe that? I've given her the best fifteen years of her life. I don't ask for much. Just a hot meal when I get home, a clean house, and my children to be taken care of. I bust my ass in this office all day while she gets to stay home. I treat her like a queen. Most women would love to be a housewife and stay home and watch soap operas and talk shows all day. Hell, I remember getting off work early one day, and she was watching Oprah. Doesn't that woman realize how good she has it?"

Was this guy for real? Out of everyone in the office, why did she have to be the one people chose to unburden their problems on, especially when she never invited them to? If anything, she discouraged it, made a point not to ask anyone about their personal lives outside of work. Yet somehow a "how are you?" turned into: "*my husband is having an affair*"; "*my kids won't listen to me*"; or "*I have this rash on my genitals, and I don't know if I should go to the doctor.*" There were quite a few things she wished she didn't know about her coworkers. Most of them unloaded on her as if she were a trained psychologist; it was emotionally draining. She had her own problems and really wanted to tell them all to fuck off. But as always, she kept these thoughts inside, not wanting to hurt anyone's feelings. Julie had learned many years ago it was best to go with the flow, and continued on with this mantra through sheer force of habit.

She pinched the bridge of her nose to fight off the impending headache she felt coming on. “Do you help her around the house any, or maybe watch the kids to give her a break?”

Rob's look said it all. He crinkled his nose in apparent distaste, as if something as simple as helping his poor wife out every once in a while were beneath him. “Why the heck should I? Didn't you hear me? I bust my ass to make sure the bills are paid. Her job is to take care of our house and kids. How hard is that?”

Poor Vivian. Julie saw right then and there, trying to reason with Rob would be a wasted effort; besides, she had piles of work to get through. “Look, I'm sure things will work out for the two of you. There are the kids to consider, and I'm sure if you show her she's appreciated, she'll realize you care, and change her mind.”

“Hmm. I suppose I could take her someplace nice. Just me and her, let her order anything she wants. She likes those burgers at Jack in the Box.”

Was he for real? “You're going to spoil her, Rob.” This time she did roll her eyes. “Look, I really need to get this project finished before I head out to lunch. The sooner it's done, the faster I'll get home to get those peanut butter cups for you.”

“You're okay, Candy Girl.” Rob made a big production of standing and brushing the creases out of his pants. Before he left her cube, however, he took a fistful of candy, leaving her dish half-empty.

Jackass.

“Miss Bennett, I'd like a word with you in my office.”

She stiffened at the sound of the smooth baritone that greeted her ears. What now? This day was going from bad to worse. She could only imagine what her boss wanted to talk to her about. He'd already gotten on her case about the excessive amount of visitors going in and out of her cubicle. Seeing her talking to Rob probably hadn't helped.

With a resigned sigh, she pushed away from her desk and stood up, making no attempt at eye contact. Not that she could without nearly breaking her neck. He was a giant of a man, towering over her measly five-feet-four-inch frame by well over a foot.

Turning on his heels, he didn't wait to see if she followed him, because that bastard knew she would. He walked with the confidence of a leader, chest forward and long, purposeful strides. His movements were surprisingly graceful for one so large. She practically jogged to keep up with him. When inside his office, he leaned against his desk instead of taking the chair behind it. "Close the door, Miss Bennett."

Julie gulped. She was in trouble now. Her boss only called her by her surname when he was annoyed with her, which seemed to be a lot lately. When he wasn't snapping at her, he was sending her narrow-eyed stares. It was enough to make any woman a nervous wreck. Moistening her suddenly dry lips, she did as she was told, shutting the door with no little reluctance. Though he hadn't invited her to, she took a seat on his couch, unsure if her legs would hold her beneath the weight of his penetrating topaz gaze.

Deciding to cut him off before he went into his rant, Julie blurted out, "Before you say anything, let me first apologize. I know you've already spoken to me about the amount of traffic I get in my cubicle, but I'm honestly trying to limit my number of visitors. I'll do better next time." She couldn't look at him. She kept her head bowed, sure she'd see the disapproval in those all-seeing eyes. The man had a way of discomfoting her without even trying, and she had a feeling he knew it.

She'd never forget the day he started with the company five months ago. Julie had been late that morning due to some errands she needed to run. There'd been a buzz in the office for weeks about the hotshot upstate New Yorker who planned on infusing the company with new ideas and taking its marketing into a new direction. Not particularly excited about change, the marketing-department staff had dreaded Gabriel Carland's arrival.

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Breezing into her desk around midmorning, Julie wasn't surprised to see one of her coworkers in her cubicle digging through her candy dish. It was a rare day when she entered the office and didn't find someone standing beside her desk. "Morning, Doris. Did you meet the new director yet? Is he old and obnoxious like you were speculating the other day?" Julie greeted as she flopped in her chair and powered up her computer.

"No. Actually he isn't. As a matter of fact, he's nothing like I expected." The redhead pulled out a chocolate-covered toffee from the dish.

"What? You mean he's not short, fat, and bald?" Julie giggled, repeating what Doris had predicted their new boss would look like.

"Why don't you judge for yourself...Julie, isn't it?" A deep, melodic baritone with the hint of a cultured New York accent reached her ears, sending a shiver down her spine. She didn't need to look up to know she'd stuck her foot in her mouth.

Doris stood up. "Uh, I'll catch you later, Candy Girl—I mean, Julie. Hi, Mr. Carland."

"I thought we'd already agreed we wouldn't stand on formality around here. It's Gabriel, or Gabe if you'd like."

Doris grinned, showing all thirty-two of her teeth, and began to twirl an auburn lock around her index finger. "Thanks, Gabe. I'd better get back to work." She turned to Julie. "We'll talk about that project once you've settled in. Later, Gabe."

Julie wanted to be sick. It would have been nice to have a cup of coffee before being thrown under the bus. She stood and forced herself to look at her new boss. The moment her eyes locked with that hard light brown stare, her breath caught in her throat.

Not only was he far from short, fat, or bald, he was the living, breathing personification of sex in a business suit. Standing several inches over six feet, he

dwarfed her petite frame, appearing larger-than-life with incredibly broad shoulders. The guy seemed better suited to being a Mr. Universe contestant than a marketing director. With those sinister dark brows slashing over bedroom eyes, a full bottom lip, and chiseled, rough-hewn features, he was by far one of the most attractive men she'd ever laid eyes on. His only imperfection was a long nose that was slightly off center, as if it had been broken a time or two.

His clothing was impeccable—and obviously tailored—doing little to disguise his perfectly sculpted swimmer's body. Her mouth went dry, and her body tightened in instant awareness of his nearness. To her chagrin, her nipples hardened to tight tips, forcing her to cross her arms across her chest so he wouldn't notice. Remember Henry, remember Henry, she silently chanted.

With one raised brow, his gaze swept over her briefly before his eyes locked with hers, his mouth tightening briefly. Heat flamed her cheeks. He obviously found her wanting. “Candy Girl?”

Her tongue had cleaved to the roof of her mouth, and her lips moved, but no words would come.

“Cat got your tongue?”

“I, uh... It was a nickname given to me by one of my coworkers because I, uh...keep candy at my desk. It kind of stuck.” Nervous laughter trilled from her lips, and she wanted to kick herself. Did she have to sound like such an idiot?

Gabe stared at her as if she had two heads, and did little to hide his seemingly instant dislike of her. “I see. Well, Julie, let's keep the office gossip at a minimum, shall we? And I think we'll all get along just fine.”

** * * * **

By the time he'd walked away, she'd felt two inches tall. It had set the tone for their working relationship. He didn't approve of her and somehow managed to find Julie when she wasn't at her best, and now she stood here feeling like a child who'd been called to the principal's office.

As the uncomfortable silence stretched in his office, Julie shifted from side to side until finally she raised her head to meet his gaze. Gabe wordlessly appraised her, his expression giving nothing away. It wasn't fair for one man to look that damn good. The bastard. "Please don't," she croaked as she lowered her lids, unable to keep still under his scrutiny.

He raised a brow. "Don't what?"

"Look at me like that. Say what you have to say, write me up, or fire me. Just get this over with, please."

"Why would you think I'd write you up?"

She shrugged. "I've been warned, haven't I? Look, I'm a big girl; I can handle it."

"Hmm, I wonder. I'm not going to write you up, Julie, but I am curious about something."

She nibbled her bottom lip, as she gathered enough courage to meet his gaze again. Was it her imagination or had his eyes just darkened to a deep gold? "What?"

"Why do you let them do it?"

Julie frowned. "Do what?"

"You let them use you as a sounding board without a word of thanks. They don't even use your name. Doesn't that get annoying after a while? At the very least, shouldn't they compensate you for the treats you provide?"

This line of questioning was particularly uncomfortable because she'd been thinking the same thing earlier. As much as she wanted to agree, she was loath to tell him he was right. There was no point in stroking his already overinflated ego. "I don't mind. Look, I promise I'll keep the chitchat to a minimum, but I really have a lot of work to do. Is there anything else you wanted to discuss with me?"

"Actually there is. I have a special project I'd like you to help me out with, but it would require you to put in some late hours."

“That shouldn't be a problem.”

“Perhaps we can talk about it over lunch?”

Julie remembered she'd promised Rob she'd go home and get those peanut butter cups. It was either that or listen to some more bitching and moaning for the rest of the afternoon. “I actually planned on going home for lunch. I needed to get something I left behind.”

“Go now. You live a few minutes away, don't you? You have my permission to get whatever it is you need, and we'll have lunch when you return. I don't have time to go over it with you now, as I'll be in a meeting until twelve thirty.”

She gulped. Lunch alone with the boss? Julie might find the man sexy as hell, even though it would take Chinese water torture for her to admit it, but she could think of a thousand things she'd rather do than have lunch with Gabriel Carland. For one thing, the man saw way too much for his own good. And he got under her skin far more easily than anyone she'd ever met. Not that he'd be interested in her beyond work-related matters. “Will anyone else be joining us?”

He took a seat behind his massive oak desk and began rifling through files. Without bothering to look up again, he waved her off. “No. It'll just be us. I'll meet you out in the lobby at quarter to one. You can leave now.”

He didn't have to tell her twice. Turning on her heels, she scurried out of the room as fast as she dared. There was something about that man that wreaked havoc on her equilibrium. She had a perfectly fine boyfriend. A nice, safe boyfriend who didn't have half the female population drooling over him. Someone who wouldn't break her heart. Yep, that was Henry. True blue. He was faithful until the end. Kind of like a basset hound. As unflattering a description as that was, it pretty much summed up Henry White. Sure, their relationship would never inspire any of those sexy romance novels she read from time to time, but he was safe. And he'd never let her down.

However, as she gathered her purse and car keys to go home, the question remained in her mind: how in the world would she get through lunch with her hunky boss without making an ass of herself?

* * * * *

Out of all the women in his acquaintance, why did it have to be her? That awkward mouse of a woman with no claim to real beauty? No. That wasn't completely true. At first glance she was a little on the plain side, but upon closer inspection he realized she had a subtle prettiness that, once recognized, could take a man's breath away. There was nothing exceptional about her features separately, but together they presented a picture of serene loveliness. Her large dark eyes and pixie-style haircut gave her an almost gamine appearance. It made her look younger than the twenty-seven years he knew her to be. Her lips were full and well shaped and always sported a light coating of gloss. Just looking at them filled his head with fantasies of what they tasted like. He'd lost count of the many hours he daydreamed of what flavor she wore. It smelled fruity, but he couldn't pinpoint the exact scent.

Julie had lovely brown skin that reminded him of a dark-chocolate confection. Her body was a whole other story. Though she dressed conservatively, Julie's outfits couldn't disguise those curvy hips, a slender waist, and a high, rounded ass. Hot damn, she had an ass on her. And those tits. Shit. They were more than a handful. And he had big hands. At times he wanted nothing more than to free those bad girls from the restraint of her frumpy clothing—taking his time sucking on each nipple until she begged for mercy.

Gabe couldn't pinpoint the exact moment she'd managed to creep into nearly every single one of his waking thoughts, but somehow she had. He'd contemplated for long periods of time about her appeal. He'd, after all, dated some knockouts. After mulling it over, he'd finally come to the conclusion that it was simply her.

She probably didn't realize it, but Julie's serene aura attracted people to her like moths to flames. She didn't have to say a word to make a person feel better. From his observations, Julie was more than just the office sounding board; she was the glue that held the team together. Even people from other departments came to her desk to talk.

At first Gabe believed it was the candy, but was soon dissuaded when he too fell under her spell. There was something about her that made him want to be in her presence, if for nothing else than just to hear her voice or witness the way she nibbled on her bottom lip when she was nervous. Or the way her brows furrowed when she was in deep thought. He found himself detouring to her desk more than he could explain. She was a hard worker and a determined little thing when she needed to get something done. He couldn't fault her where her work was concerned, but there was one thing about her that bugged the fuck out of him.

Gabe absolutely despised the way the other employees seemed to take advantage of her goodwill. He wished she'd stand up for herself, and often wondered why she didn't. It wasn't because she was timid. Far from it, he'd long sensed the fire within her. No, it was something deeper.

Whenever he walked by, however, she tensed up and became defensive. He'd come down on her a few times for the number of visitors in her cubicle, but not for the reasons she thought. He was probably crazy for feeling this way, but he was jealous of the way she welcomed everyone else in her space except him. It wasn't rational, and it was probably best if he didn't feature her in every single one of his wild imaginings, but hell, he was hooked.

Many long nights he'd dreamed of what that body would look like without any clothing, her big brown eyes staring up at him, her head resting against a pristine white pillow while he plowed his dick into her pussy. He'd bet her cunt was tight. And sweet, just like the candy she provided for the masses. Would she be a silent lover, with soft little moans, or would she scream his name as he fucked her?

Now, as he stood in the middle of his office fighting a raging hard-on, Gabe could no longer deny what he'd been fighting for months. He wanted Julie Bennett more than he could stand, and the frustration was fucking killing him. The only problem was, she didn't seem to know he was alive outside of work. What the hell was wrong with this picture? He was usually on the receiving end of unreciprocated crushes. It wasn't that he was conceited, but he was lucky to have received more than his share of female attention since his adolescent acne had cleared up. Perhaps this was his punishment for being the bastard his last girlfriend had claimed him to be.

Whereas half the women in the office made excuses to come by his office or brush against him, Julie walked the other way when she saw him coming. What would it take for her to recognize him as a man and not just her boss? He'd kill for the day she didn't look at him as if he were a two-headed monster.

The image of her ass swaying back and forth in a skirt that hugged her curves beautifully as she'd hurried out of his office filtered through his mind, and he groaned. He took a few agonizing steps to his desk before taking a seat in his chair. His cock had grown painfully hard, and it wouldn't go down until there was relief.

Thankfully the office door was already closed; he shut his eyes and rubbed his aching hard-on. He inhaled sharply. Shit, he hadn't masturbated in years. There had never been a need to. Pussy had always been readily available to him, but after the last few unsatisfying encounters, Gabe realized any pussy wouldn't do. He wanted Julie's.

When rubbing his dick through the material of his slacks didn't cut it, he unbuckled his belt and unzipped his fly. His cock throbbed painfully, chafing against silk boxers. Easing his shaft from its prison, Gabe circled it with his fingers and brushed off the drop of precum on the tip. Licking his lips, he squeezed his eyes shut as he moved his fist along his dick, imagining soft feminine fingers on his member instead of his own.

Damn, if she were here right now, he'd have his desk cleared off with her on it. She'd be begging for mercy by the time he was through with her. He'd sample each of her sweet holes and savor the taste of those sweet, juicy lips he'd longed to kiss for God knows how long. Then he'd ease into her pussy and fuck her until she came. Finally he'd take that ass. Would she let him fuck her there? Had she ever done it before? The thought of taking her anal cherry sent him over the edge. Gripping his cock, he let out a loud grunt. Quickly grabbing some tissues on his desk, he placed them over the tip of his dick to catch his cum.

Fuck!

What had that woman done to him? Candy Girl, indeed. She had something much sweeter than candy, and he intended to get some.

Chapter Two

Could this day possibly get any worse? It was only ten thirty, and already the day bit the big one. It was bad enough that a routine annual pelvic examination had turned into probably one of the most horrible experiences of her life. It wasn't until she was undressed and in the stirrups that Julie learned her regular doctor had been called away to do an emergency C-section. But when her substitute—a physician who'd been practicing medicine since World War II—entered the room, she wanted to get the hell off the table.

Of course as always, she went along with the flow, not wanting to hurt the poor guy's feelings. Now she wished she had. He'd been rough. His bedside manner had left much to be desired, and a couple of times he'd gone so still, she'd thought he'd died. By the time the whole ordeal was over, she'd wanted to go home and take a hot shower to get the smell of mothballs off her, but decided against it. The last thing she wanted was to see Corinne sitting in front of the television watching Jerry Springer when she should have been looking for a job.

Then to have to listen to Rob's problems before she'd even got a chance to settle ticked her off a little. And finally being summoned to the boss's office had topped off her already rotten morning. Lunch was sure to be a disaster. Why her? She'd eaten all her vegetables when she was younger, brushed her teeth every morning and night, said her prayers, and even gave to charity. So what had she done to deserve the wrath of Carland? Ever since the man started, he'd been on her case. The bastard. The totally sexy, broad-shouldered, smoldering-eyed bastard.

She released a long sigh as she pulled up in her driveway. Corinne's totaled Jeep taunted her with its buckled metal and ruined paint job. It was the excuse her cousin used to not look for a job. When Julie had suggested Corinne take the bus, she was met with derisive laughter. "*Are you kidding me? Only degenerates take the bus.*"

Deciding not to argue the point, Julie let the subject go, figuring Corinne would ask to borrow her car regardless. And Julie would probably give in to her like she always did. It was like when they were little girls. Julie's parents had died in a car accident when she was eight, and she'd been bounced from one foster home to another until her aunt Rae took her in. She'd been so grateful to have a home finally that she didn't realize the real reason her aunt had given her a place to live until it was nearly time to move out.

With a sigh, Julie shook her head to rid herself of unpleasant memories. Hopefully her cousin would find gainful employment soon...as well as a place of her own. She should have said no when Corinne asked to stay with her temporarily, but there was no point in beating herself up over it now. Besides, her cousin wasn't one to stay in one place for too long anyway. Eventually she'd move on to leech off someone else. Julie's two-bedroom apartment that had been just right for her and her Pomeranian, Rufus, was getting quite cramped with the chaos Corinne brought to their lives. If only she'd stop being so stubborn and make up with Aunt Rae, she'd have somewhere else to go.

Getting out of her car, she noticed a familiar vehicle parked by the curb a few yards away from her building. That was strange. She tensed up, realizing it could mean a couple of things, neither of which she liked one bit. The instant she walked into the house, Julie sensed something wasn't right.

For one, the place smelled as if an entire can of her apple-scented air freshener had been sprayed, making it hard for her to breathe. Rufus ran out the door the second it was cracked, as if to escape the cloud of the overpowering scent. "Rufus! Come back."

Upon hearing his name, the little dog whimpered but turned around with his tail between his legs. When he reached the stoop, Julie scooped him up into her arms. "It's okay, sweetie. Mommy will open some windows for you."

Rufus's ears perked up as he growled, baring his sharp little teeth.

"What's wrong with you?" Julie frowned. Corinne wasn't lodged on the couch in her usual spot, where she'd created her own butt groove. The television wasn't on, and there were no empty containers of junk food strewn around the carpet.

Julie didn't want to believe her cousin was capable of what was going through her mind, but in her heart, all the clues were pointing to the fact that she was.

As she advanced farther down the hallway, she was greeted by the sound of two familiar voices.

"Oh God. Yes! Yes! Yes!" Either Corinne was having a serious religious experience or she was doing something she shouldn't be. Her heart pounding in her chest, Julie took hesitant steps toward the source of the moans. Her bedroom. Before she opened the door, she knew what she'd find. The car outside only backed up her supposition.

With trembling fingers, she turned the knob and pushed open the door. Lying in the middle of her bed in all their naked glory were Corinne and Henry. Henry lay flat on his back, while Corinne bounced up and down on his cock. He gripped Corinne's ample hips as he thrust into her as if his life depended on it.

"Ah yeah, baby. That's it. Give me that pussy." Henry was obviously in the throes of passion, but from where Julie was standing, he looked constipated. He was never like that with her. As a matter of fact, he insisted that they do it with the lights out. Half the time he didn't take all his clothes off. He never let her ride him as he was letting Corinne. Whenever Julie suggested they try something besides missionary, he'd tell her only sluts did the other things.

Obviously he had no problem trying new things with her cousin. Her stomach turned, and she literally wanted to throw up.

Corinne rode Henry as if she were on a mechanical bull, her bright red weave flying around her face. Julie's mouth fell open. Corinne had done some underhanded things to her throughout the years: pushed her off the swing when they were kids, blamed her for stealing money out of Aunt Rae's purse, and even stolen a few of her boyfriends right from under her. But this just took the cake, the icing, and the goddamn candles.

"That's it. Fuck me, lover. Tell me you never had it this good. This is what it's like to fuck a real woman." Corinne moaned, running her hands down the center of Henry's dark, hairless chest.

"Yes. You're the best I've ever had." Henry groaned.

"Better than my stick-in-the-mud cousin?"

Henry grinned. "Much."

Julie's heart plummeted to her feet. Not because she'd been madly in love with Henry. Their relationship had grown so comfortable, it felt more like a friendship than anything else. What bothered her was the blatant lack of respect either one of them had for her. To screw in her bed. Eww. She'd have to throw those sheets away and flip her mattress...and take a healthy dose of mind bleach.

When she would have backed away and closed the door behind her, Rufus growled, making their presence known. The lovers stopped and glanced in her direction. Henry's eyes practically bulged out of his skull, while a smile of smug satisfaction curved Corinne's full lips. "Hello, little cousin." There didn't seem to be a modicum of remorse about her.

Henry on the other hand pushed Corinne off, slid off the bed with rapid speed, and moved toward Julie. "It isn't what you think. I can explain everything."

Julie's eyes slid to his average-sized cock, coated in her cousin's juices, and the bile rose up her throat. He didn't even use a condom! Did he think she was an idiot? Wasn't that what she thought? They were obviously doing the horizontal hokey pokey, and his attempt to deny it underlined his true lack of respect for her. He obviously believed she really was stupid.

Rufus growled as Henry came closer.

He backed up, holding his hands up in a defensive gesture. "Put the dog down, and we'll talk like rational adults."

"What's to talk about? Your boyfriend prefers me. I told you to pay more attention to your man, but you wouldn't listen," Corinne taunted, not bothering to cover up. She rolled onto her side and propped her hand beneath her head as if she were Cleopatra.

What the hell? Did she step on a crack in the sidewalk? Break a mirror? Piss off a gypsy? Or had she stepped into some alternate universe where weird stuff happened just for the hell of it.

At a loss for words, Julie turned on her heel and left the room, the sound of her cousin's laughter following. When Rufus whined, she remembered she was still holding him. Going into autopilot, she placed the Pomeranian in his cage and threw in a couple of chew toys, a bowl of water, and food.

As she walked to her car, Henry called out to her. He came tearing out of the house with only a pair of jeans on. "Julie, wait! It's not what you think!"

She had slid into her vehicle by the time he reached her.

"Wait, Goddamn it. You can't walk away like this. At least not without letting me explain."

Julie slammed the car door and shoved her key into the ignition, ignoring him. Henry banged on the window. "Open the fucking door, Julie. Let's not be childish about this."

Resisting the temptation to run over his feet, she backed her car out of her space and sped out of the parking lot without a backward glance as she drove

back to the office, completely numb. When she finally parked in front of her office building, reaction finally set in. What the hell was wrong with her? She'd just found her cousin and her boyfriend in bed with each other, and she hadn't said anything to them?

Once again her kindness had been taken advantage of, and now she was suffering the consequences for it. Who was she kidding? She was a pushover, and if this incident didn't prove it, nothing would. Whoever said no good deed went unpunished wasn't kidding.

Julie couldn't get past the sick feeling making her gag. She was ashamed of herself for the lack of reaction. Her best friend, Sheridan, would probably have taken Corinne by the hair, dragged her out of the house, and given her what she dubbed a "West Philly-style beatdown." Then she would have probably taken something large and sharp and sliced off Henry's protruding parts. The thought brought a smile to Julie's face. What hurt the most was Corinne's lack of remorse. Ever since they'd been kids, when Julie went to live with her aunt, Corinne had treated her with mild contempt. But in adulthood it had only seemed to get worse.

It was her own damn fault.

There was no point sitting in the car moping about it. Work would take her mind off the fiasco she called her life. At least temporarily. There'd be plenty of time to deal with the mess she'd left behind when she got home.

By the time she made it back to her desk, her head was throbbing, and it felt as if something akin to a two-ton boulder rested on her chest. No sooner had she sat down at her desk and logged back on to her computer than Rob appeared. He eyed her candy dish with a huge frown. "I thought you said you were going to bring back peanut butter cups."

She sighed. Was he for real? Taking a deep breath, she turned around, pasting a smile on her face. "I'm sorry. I forgot them. Something came up, and I had to leave in a rush."

“What? I went to the cafeteria and bought milk to go with the peanut butter cups you promised you'd bring from home. What gives, Candy Girl?”

Julie tried desperately to hold on to her now-razor-thin temper. Her head was pounding. Her boyfriend was cheating with her skank cousin, and this jackass was asking about some damn peanut butter cups? She rubbed her temples and closed her eyes briefly, shutting out the light. “Don't they sell peanut butter cups in the vending machine in the cafeteria, the large ones?”

“Why should I pay for it when I can get it from you for free? It's simple economics, Candy Girl.”

“Julie,” she muttered irritably.

“Huh?”

“My name is Julie.” She forced the words out, tight-lipped.

Rob shrugged. “And my name is Rob. What's your point?”

Something within her snapped suddenly. “My fucking name is Julie! Use it!” She didn't realize how loud she'd been until the entire office went silent. Not even the sound of fingers pecking at a keyboard could be heard.

Rob's mouth gaped open like a fish on a hook, his face turning bright red. “Well, you don't have to get nasty about it.” As he walked away, she heard him mutter, “Guess it's someone's time of the month.”

Son of a bitch.

“Julie, is everything all right?” That soothing baritone broke through all the madness surrounding her.

She whirled around, fully expecting to see a look of disapproval. Instead the compassion she saw lurking within the depths of his penetrating gaze sent her over the edge. One fat tear escaped, sliding down her cheek. And then another. Followed by yet another. The dam was ready to burst, and she was seconds away from letting loose.

Gabe grabbed her purse and jacket before ushering her out the door. When they got outside, she burst into body-shaking sobs. Strong arms engulfed her, and she was pulled against a rock-solid chest.

When he'd heard the outburst from down the hallway, Gabe couldn't believe it had come from Julie. When he'd reached her desk, he saw Rob Danford walking away in a hurry and Julie looking as if she wanted to dismember him. What had happened to his mouse? The Candy Girl?

He held her in his arms, wondering what could possibly make her cry as if her heart was breaking. Gabe stroked the back of her head. "Shh. Everything will be all right." Gently pushing her away from him, he produced a handkerchief from the breast pocket of his suit jacket. "Here. Take this."

She accepted his offering and dabbed at the tears streaking her cheeks. "Th-thank you."

"Would you like to take a half day and go home?"

To his alarm, his suggestion made her sob even harder.

"Okay, maybe not." Shit. He wasn't used to dealing with these kinds of emotional freak-outs. Tears he could handle. God knows, he'd encountered a lot of women who used tears as a weapon. But this was different. Julie was genuinely upset. Gabe shifted his weight from one foot to the other as he waited for her tears to subside. Once she was down to sniffles, he wrapped his arms around her shoulders and led her to the parking lot. "Come on. I'll take you to lunch."

She sniffed, her bottom lip trembling. "I don't think I'll be very good company. My mind isn't really on work."

"We don't have to talk about work. We don't have to talk at all if you don't want to."

She offered no further argument as he guided her to his car, saw her seated, and got in. Gabe glanced over at her and something twitched within his

chest. Even with her puffy eyes, she still looked adorable. He wanted to find the source of her anguish and tear it apart. Where had this protectiveness come from? It was the first time he'd ever had these kinds of feelings toward any woman. It was a novelty. Yes...that was it. She presented a challenge he intended to conquer. No more no less.

With that in mind, he drove them off to the destination in silence, wondering if he'd lost his mind. Julie, for the duration of the ride, remained silent with her head pressed against the passenger-side window with a lost little puppy-dog look in her soulful eyes.

It was only when they pulled into his driveway that she spoke, straightening up in her seat. "Where are we? I thought we were going to lunch."

"We are."

Her brow furrowed in her apparent confusion. "But this is someone's house."

"No one can ever accuse you of not being bright." Gabe winked at her. "It's my house, actually. Now let's go."

She shook her head. "I'm not going in there with you."

"Why not? Do you think I'm leading you to a den of iniquity? I promised you lunch, and I'm going to grill us a couple of steaks."

"I'm not very hungry."

"Then I'll grill myself a steak, and you can watch me eat. Come on, Julie."

She crossed her arms over her chest and poked out her lip in the cutest pout he'd ever seen. Something so childish shouldn't have made his cock throb this way, but on her that pout looked damn sexy. It took every ounce of willpower not to lean over the seat and capture that tempting bottom lip between his teeth and suck on it. If the circumstances were different, that's exactly what he would have done. He shifted in his seat to adjust himself.

Down, boy.

He slid out of his car, careful to conceal his erection, and waited a few moments to get himself under control before walking to the passenger side to open her door. Holding his hand out to her, Gabe offered her what he hoped was a reassuring smile. “Come on, Candy Girl. I won't bite,” he teased.

Julie narrowed her eyes. “Don't you start with that too!”

Gabe raised a brow, liking the fire that had entered her eyes. “Start what?”

“Calling me that godforsaken nickname.”

“Is it my use of the moniker, or do you have an objection to it in general?”

She sighed. “I'd rather people used my name.”

“Then why do you continue to answer to Candy Girl?” He held his hand up when she opened her mouth to answer. “Hold that thought. Come inside, and we'll talk about it.”

Julie glanced at his hand, wariness lining her face. “Well...”

“I won't bite”—he grinned—“unless you want me to.”

She rolled her eyes heavenward. “That isn't even remotely funny.” Sweeping out of the car, ignoring his offer of assistance, Julie stood up and straightened the wrinkles from her skirt.

Gabe closed the car door, then placed his hand on the small of her back and guided her up the walkway. The scent of her perfume wafted to his nostrils, and his body tightened. How in the hell was he going to keep his hands off her during lunch? Even the innocent gesture of escorting her to the door was turning into a temptation he was fighting to resist. It wouldn't have taken much for him to slide his hand down a few inches to cup a luscious ass cheek just begging to be fondled. Shit. He felt like a perv. It wasn't going to be an easy feat getting through lunch without getting her beneath him and stuffing his dick so far up her pussy, she screamed his name.

Not easy at all.

Chapter Three

Julie didn't realize how hungry she was until she took a bite into her steak, which turned out to be cooked just right: well-done, while still maintaining its juice and tenderness. The last thing she remembered eating was a bowl of cereal the night before, because Corinne had eaten the leftover tuna and noodle casserole Julie had saved for herself. And because she'd been in a rush to get to the doctor's on time, she'd skipped breakfast.

She didn't know whether her lunch, which consisted of a grilled New York strip steak, new potatoes, and asparagus, was delicious because it really was or because she was hungry. It wasn't until most of the contents on her plate had been gobbled up that Julie raised her head to see Gabe staring at her with elbows on the table and a half smile curving sensual lips. "Not hungry, were you?"

Her cheeks grew warm, and she was thankful for her dark complexion, otherwise her face would have been beet red. "I guess I was hungrier than I thought. You're not a bad cook."

He leaned back in his seat. "I dabble a little. Glad you liked it."

"I never said you were a *good* cook, just not a bad one."

"You didn't have to. The way you licked the fork tells me you think I am."

Despite herself, a smile tugged on the corners of her lips, and she released a little laugh. "You're so full of yourself."

"There it is." His words flowed out in a soft whisper, as if he were in awe of something, sending a shiver down her spine.

Julie didn't want to be this aware of her boss—her nemesis over the past several months. She raised a brow. “There is what?”

“That smile. Did you know your entire face lights up when you flash those pearly whites?”

A blush crept up her neck and heated her cheeks again. Unable to meet his gaze, she lowered her lids. “Don't.”

“Give you a compliment?”

“Say things you don't mean.”

“I never say anything I don't mean. I think you're a very attractive woman.”

Julie snorted. “Go ahead and pull the other one.” It wasn't as if guys were lining up at her door to ask her out. She knew she wasn't ugly, but having grown up with a cousin who men fell over their feet to get to, she was well aware of her shortcomings.

“I have no reason to lie. I find you attractive.”

She shifted uncomfortably in her chair. Beneath the weight of that come-hither stare, a warmth spread throughout her body. He was teasing her. Men like Gabriel Carland didn't look twice at women like her. He was toying with her. If Henry could betray her so callously, there was no telling what Gabe was capable of. After her already shitty day, this was the last thing she needed. She pushed away from the table and stood up. “Shouldn't we be getting back to the office? We've been gone for more than an hour.”

“There's no need. I've called my assistant, and she's cleared my schedule for me. And you don't have to go back to the office today if you don't want to.”

“But I have to. I've got to finish that brochure. You're the one who assigned me to head that particular project. Remember?”

“It can wait. Besides, I told Madison to get Rob to help you on it.”

She groaned. He might as well have told her to finish it herself. Julie could picture it now. Rob would grumble and complain about having his own

workload, making her miserable to the point where she'd tell him she'd finish it herself. She could definitely do without the aggravation. "He won't like that."

"It's about time he pulled his weight around the department. He's been doing just enough to get by for far too long. Relax. Have a seat, and you can tell me what upset you earlier."

"It's nothing," she muttered, crossing her arms across her chest.

Gabe stood up and walked over to her, not stopping until he was only inches away. "Obviously it was. I'm sure I didn't imagine holding you in my arms while you cried your eyes out. And I'm pretty sure I heard you cursing at Rob. Actually I think the entire office heard you. I didn't know you had it in you...to be quite so honest."

"I didn't either, but he gets on my nerves sometimes."

"Don't feel bad about it. It seems your little outburst was a long time coming. You've been a ticking time bomb waiting to go off lately. I'm just grateful your meltdown only consisted of a cuss-out and some tears, and not an outbreak of gun violence." His lips tilted in a half grin that told her he was teasing her. She was still mortified about her behavior, nonetheless.

"Sheesh, go ahead and throw it in my face, why don't you?" Lowering her head to avoid that intense stare, she fought the tremor that threatened to move through her body. Julie had never dared to think of him in any way other than as her boss, despite having acknowledged him as an extremely attractive man. But if he continued to stand so close, talking to her as if he actually cared, his cologne tickling her nostrils, Gabe could very easily become the center of her every waking sexual fantasy.

He placed his hands on her shoulders. "Hey, look at me."

She shook her head.

"Julie. Please." Though he spoke softly, there was underlying steel in his voice.

Taking a deep breath, she raised her head and gasped as their eyes locked. The emotions raging within his topaz eyes took her breath away. Compassion was among them, but there was another indiscernible one she must have imagined. Passion? She moistened her lips, only to feel his grip tighten on her shoulders.

“Dammit, I should be hanged for doing this, but I can't help myself.” And before she realized what he was about to do, he lowered his head and brushed his lips against hers. It was a brief touching of lips at first, so fleeting she might have imagined it. Then he pushed his lips against hers again, this time dropping his hands from her shoulders to loop his arms around her waist and pull her closer.

Julie stiffened, unable to process what was happening. This couldn't be. Her and Gabriel Carland? Her boss? The very same boss who seemed to have a permanent scowl where she was concerned, and was constantly barking at her?

The man was a walking wet dream. The girls at the office called him “Gorgeous Gabe,” yet here she was standing in his house with his mouth plastered against hers.

Her body tingled all over, and it disconcerted Julie that she could respond to someone so soon after ending a relationship, but then again there hadn't been much passion between Henry and her. His kisses had never made her knees weak and stomach flutter as if it contained a thousand butterflies. Nor did he put forth the effort to do so. Truthfully, she couldn't remember why she'd remained with Henry for so long.

The persistent press of Gabe's tongue glided across the seam of her lips, and molten flames shot through her core, making Julie want to rip his shirt open and run her palms all over his bare flesh. Her pussy pulsed in need as she opened her mouth, allowing him the entrance he sought.

He pushed his tongue past her parted lips and grasped the sides of her face in his hands, while exploring her mouth like a conqueror who'd accept

nothing but total surrender. And more than anything, in that moment, she wanted to give in to him—to throw herself at his feet and offer herself up as his sex slave. Instinctively she knew this man would deliver what his lips promised: hours of carnal delight.

Her nipples hardened to painful tips as they pressed against the material of her bra. They ached, and she wanted him to touch them, squeeze them, and even bite them. She hadn't been this horny in...ever, and she needed more.

Why not? Being nice and playing by the rules hadn't gotten her anywhere except taken advantage of and cheated on. Why not give in to her body's needs and worry about the consequences later? Much later.

Throwing her arms around his neck, she pushed her tongue forward, tentatively at first, to meet his. He tasted of steak, wine, and a flavor uniquely his. It was wonderful. A woman could get high off Gabe Carland, and she fully intended to let it happen. Emboldened by the groans coming from the back of his throat, Julie captured his tongue in her mouth and sucked on it, not wanting to break contact with him. His hands tightened on her face as she became more aggressive. This kiss could go on all day and it still wouldn't be enough. Threading her fingers through his hair, she savored every second of their mouths fused together so erotically. Moisture pooled at the juncture of her thighs, and she pushed closer to him still, grabbing him by the collar to keep him near.

Gabe was the one to end the kiss with a breathless laugh. “Easy, baby. Let's slow down. I don't want us to take things too fast.”

But Julie was beyond reason. She wanted to erase the unpleasantness of earlier. That awakening she'd felt in Gabe's arms was exactly what she needed. Her body was on fire, and there was no way she would let him walk away until he doused the fire that he'd ignited. She cupped the back of his head, pulling it down toward hers. “More.” She moaned, placing a kiss at the corner of his mouth.

He frowned, furrowing his brows. "You don't know what you're saying. Something was obviously bothering you earlier, and I don't want to take advantage of your fragile emotional state."

"You're not taking advantage if this is what I really want. You can't leave me hanging like this. You started it, so you'd better finish it. Kiss me, Gabe; I need it."

"Lady, if we continue kissing that way, we're going to do considerably more than just kiss, if you know what I mean."

"So what?"

Gabe shook his head. "*So what?* You don't know what you're saying."

"I know my own mind, thank you very much. Now shut up and kiss me...or do I have to find someone else to do the job?" Julie surprised herself with that comment. She didn't realize she had it in her. There was no way she'd have the nerve to walk away and go to someone else. Besides, whom could she go to? But he didn't know that.

His eyes darkened as a scowl swept over his face. He slid his fingers through her hair and fisted a big clump and gave it a healthy tug, tilting her head back.

She gasped in surprise and anticipation. Moistening her lips with the tip of her tongue, she let out a small moan. "Do I?"

"You damn well better not," he growled, lowering his mouth to hers again. This time, however, there was no doubt about who was in charge. His kiss was rough, hungry, and a bit angry all at once. It was almost as if he was meting out some kind of punishment for pushing him to this point. But hell if Julie cared. She was so damned turned on, her panties grew damper by the second. Surely any minute now she'd explode into flames. She couldn't recall a time when a kiss sent her senses reeling to the point she couldn't remember her own name.

The desire to feel his naked flesh beneath her fingertips became too strong a temptation to resist. She broke the tight seal their mouths had created, her fingers flying to his shirt. Fumbling to undo all his buttons with shaky hands, Julie practically tore them off. Making short order of pushing the offending article of clothing out of the way, she worked on pulling his undershirt from the waistband of his pants.

Gabe raised his arms as she pulled it off and tossed it aside. When he stood bare-chested, she paused, her mouth going dry. He could have been the prototype for any painting or sculpture depicting the epitome of male beauty. It was obvious from the rock-hard wall of his frame, he worked out. She perused the broad expanse of his chest dusted with dark hair, and finally let her gaze rest on the ripples and valleys of his washboard stomach.

“Do you like what you see?” His voice was rough and hoarse.

Julie, unable to tear her gaze away from him, nodded wordlessly, not trusting herself to speak.

“Then touch me,” he whispered huskily.

He grasped her hand in his and guided it to his chest. The beating pulse of his heart beneath her hand was enough to jolt Julie out of her trance. She brought her other hand up to explore the contours of his chest, reveling in the feel of his hair-roughened skin beneath her touch. She slid her fingers over the flat disks of his nipples.

Gabe trembled and released a throaty moan. Stealing a quick glance at his face, she noticed his eyes were shut and his teeth were now clenched. She wondered what other reactions she could extract from him. His responses filled her with a sense of empowerment. Just knowing she could elicit these sensual emotions from him gave her a thrill beyond her wildest dreams. Dipping her head, she flicked her tongue over one tan tip.

He inhaled sharply, almost as if he were in pain. “Julie!” Grabbing her by the head, he held her against his chest as she took the turgid peak between her teeth and nipped playfully. Never had she been inspired to participate in the

sexual foreplay of exploring her partner's body. But then again, she'd never been with anyone who had a body like Gabe. She sucked his nipple gently at first, then harder, his groans egging her on. The way he trembled beneath her mouth emboldened her, and she loved it.

By the time she transferred her attention to his other nipple, his fingers were digging so tightly in her hair, it felt like he'd yank a chunk of it out. But she was so caught up in his sexy body, she barely noticed. Wanting to further explore more of him, she ran her tongue over the center of his chest and moved it down the line bisecting his midsection. Julie stopped at the dark tuft of hair peeking from his waistband. She slid her hands against the erection poking against his pants. It filled her with a sense of feminine pride that she was the cause of his desire.

He seemed so big. Or was it an illusion? There was only one way to find out. Dropping to her knees, she deftly undid his belt buckle and unzipped his pants. Just as she was about to yank his pants down, he caught her hands in his. "Julie, you don't have to do this."

She looked up at him, confused. Wasn't he the one who'd initiated this? Had she read too much into the situation? Perhaps he'd only intended to leave things at a kiss. "I want to. I-I thought you wanted this too."

"You have no idea how much I want to feel your mouth on my dick, but if we continue on this path, there'll be no turning back."

"I understood that to be the case before. Are you changing your mind?"

As the silence stretched between them, her nerves were slowly wearing thin. She'd never been this bold with any man before, let alone someone of Gabe's caliber. His rejection would be a beating to her already fragile self-esteem—a blow she wasn't sure she could handle after everything that had happened earlier.

Finally he nodded. "Okay, baby. If this is really what you want to do, and you promise you won't regret this afterward, then do it. Wrap those beautiful lips around my cock, baby, and suck me off."

Julie didn't realize she'd been holding her breath until her shoulders sagged with relief. His words were more graphic than she was used to, but oddly they turned her on. Did that make her depraved? Not that it mattered anyway; her pussy was wet, and she craved the taste of him.

She turned her attention back to the impressive bulge straining against his slacks. Wasting no time, she pulled his pants and boxers down lean hips, to reveal one of the thickest cocks she'd ever seen. He was a good length, eight inches at least, but it was his girth that made her mouth water. Never one to be impressed with a man's sexual organ, she couldn't tear her gaze away from Gabe's impressive appendage. She'd never been with a white man before and had no expectations one way or another in this direction, but if she did, he would have far surpassed them. Tentatively, Julie ran her fingertips along his length. He was hard and hot beneath her touch.

Hearing his sharp intake of breath emboldened her to cup his balls briefly and give them a light squeeze. She then slid her hand beneath his stiff member, holding it with reverence, testing its weight in her palm. Julie ran her fingers along the ridge, loving the texture of him. With each caress, she managed to elicit a shudder, a moan, or a gasp from him.

But apparently her gentle exploration was something he couldn't withstand. "For God's sake, stop fucking teasing me, woman, before I take you right here on the damn floor!" He practically roared the words.

Needing no further encouragement, Julie wrapped her fingers around his thickness and pressed a kiss against the purplish, helmet-shaped tip. A drop of precum glistened in its center, which she captured with her tongue. The salty flavor titillated her taste buds. It wasn't enough. Julie wouldn't be satisfied until she could taste all of him. She circled the satiny head with her tongue. Gabe jerked forward, inhaling sharply. "Julie!"

She licked his length, sliding her tongue up and down his shaft like a lollipop, and he was every bit as delicious. Her sweet tooth could very easily change from a craving for candy to one for his cock. Julie opened her mouth

wide and took him in, a bit at a time, savoring him inch by delectable inch. She sucked as much of his cock into her mouth as she could before pulling back to the head and finally repeating the process.

Cradling his balls in her palms, Julie moved her mouth along his rod with deliberate slowness, but with each word falling from his lips, she increased the pace until she bobbed her mouth around his cock in frenzied motions.

He dug his fingers through her hair and gripped to the point of near pain, but she didn't care. All she could think of was his delicious cock and how fucking hot it was to have him at her mercy. She didn't even mind when he pumped faster, fucking her mouth until the tip of his cock hit the back of her throat. Julie tightened her lips around his shaft, wanting to send him over the edge. The raw taste of him and the feel of him in her mouth sent waves of fire through her body. Her pussy flooded with juices.

If anyone had told her that today she'd end up sucking her boss's dick in the middle of his house, she would have laughed her ass off. But here she was doing exactly that and loving the hell out of it.

Suddenly, Gabe grabbed her by the forearms and hauled Julie to her feet and lifted her into his arms. "I'm sorry, but I couldn't take any more. You have no idea what you've started, Candy Girl."

As much as that nickname annoyed her, coming from him it sounded kind of sexy. She pouted. "But I wasn't finished."

"If you think I'm going to wait a minute longer before I fuck you, then you'd better think again. I've wanted you for far too long." If she weren't so damn horny, Julie might have had time to analyze his comment further, but she was too caught up in this thing they'd started. With panther-like strides, he carried her out of his dining room and up the stairs, not stopping until they reached a room she assumed was his bedroom.

Placing her on her feet, he tore at her blouse, not bothering with finesse. Buttons flew in all directions. Her top was now probably ruined beyond repair, but Julie didn't care. She was anxious to feel the heat of his skin against hers.

Gabe unhooked her bra to release her aching breasts and paused. His tiger like gaze focused intently on her chest, and a wave of uncertainty hit her.

She'd developed early and had the unwanted attention of adolescent boys since she was ten, which was one of the reasons she dressed conservatively. Julie had always been self-conscious of her large breasts, and even now, her first instinct was to cross her arms over them. When she made a move to do just that, Gabe yanked them back down. "Don't. Let me look at you."

Nervous laughter trickled out. "They're a bit...obscene, I know."

As he held her hands and stared at her body, he licked his lips. "They're perfect. High and round with blackberry-capped nipples, how could I not love them? I could play with these lovelies all day if you let me. Who made you feel so inadequate about your body?"

Julie shook her head.

"They're beautiful. And so are you. Do you know how many hours I used to sit in my office fantasizing about doing this?" He dipped his head and ran his tongue across one nipple. It hardened to life.

She gasped, her mouth falling open. Julie couldn't have answered him had her life depended on it. A tremble ran through her body, and her pussy was so wet, her juices dampened the insides of her thighs.

Gabe lifted his head and stroked her cheek with the back of his hand. "You have no idea how beautiful you are, do you?" When she didn't answer, he pinched her nipple. "It's okay. I fully intend to show you just how desirable I find you."

With slow ease, he removed the rest of her clothing, dropping a kiss on each inch of skin he exposed. By the time she was completely naked, her knees threatened to give out. He moved behind her and ran his hand over the curve of her butt. "You have a very nice ass, so full and round, meant just for riding—and fucking." He cupped her ass cheeks in his palms, sending shivers of fiery delight to the core. "I hope you'll let me fuck it, because, baby, I want

you in every way possible.” Wrapping his arms around her waist, he pulled her against him, his cock grinding against her bottom as he nuzzled her neck with his lips.

She'd never done anal before and had never contemplated letting anyone near that area, but the idea of trying it with Gabe wasn't completely unappealing. “I-I'm not sure if I'd like that.”

He ran his tongue along the shell of her ear. “We don't have to do anything you don't want to. For our first time, I'm going to acquaint myself with your pussy, and then we'll go from there.”

It was the “from there” part that made her nervous, but her hormones were raging out of control, to the point she didn't have time to contemplate anything beyond being taken by Gabe and allowing him to have her any way he wanted.

Chapter Four

When he'd brought Julie home, it was with the intention of getting her to relax and talk. Slowly earn her trust and show her he wasn't such a bad guy. But once Julie's big brown eyes connected with his, Gabe was lost. Not able to go another second without tasting her bow-shaped lips, he'd given in to temptation. Damn if one kiss had been enough. He'd wanted another, and one thing led to another. Before he realized what was happening, those very lips he'd spent many hours fantasizing over were lovingly wrapped around his cock.

He hadn't wanted things to go that far yet, at least not today, because he wanted to give her the time she deserved. She was distraught, and he felt as if he were taking advantage of her. Julie, however, seemed to have other ideas. In the back of his head, he knew he should stop and give her the time she deserved, but once she'd touched him, he threw his reservations out the window. Part of him said to stop her, but the other half told him to give in to those carnal longings only this woman had the capability of producing.

Her caresses were so innocent, and perhaps not as skilled as some of the more-seasoned lovers he'd had before her, but her sweet innocence and enthusiasm more than made up for her lack of experience. Besides, it pleased him to know he'd be the one who'd get to initiate her in all the delights of kinky sex. He wanted Julie in his bed, on the floor, on his kitchen table, the shower, outside on his hammock; the possibilities were infinite.

Maybe he'd be damned for going through with this when she was probably in a vulnerable state, but God help him, he was weak. Her gorgeous cocoa-tinted skin was soft beneath his hands, and he was in awe of the contrast of her body against his hardness. She was all soft brown curves. Everything

about her fascinated him. He was eager to slide into her cunt and fuck her bowlegged. This first time, however, he'd take things slow, for her sake. And then all bets were off.

Running his fingers over her hair, he dropped light kisses along the back of her neck and shoulders, loving the way she trembled beneath his gentle ministrations. Slipping his arm around her narrow waist, he splayed his fingers along her flat stomach, grinding his now-painfully hard erection against the curve of her ass. "Do you like this, Julie?"

She leaned her head against his shoulder with a sigh. "Mmm."

He moved his hand lower, grazing her neatly groomed pussy, and slid his finger along her cleft. "You're already wet for me, sweetheart. You want this, don't you?"

She whispered a breathy "yes."

"Do you want my fingers inside of your cunt?" As he whispered the words against her ear, he rubbed her slick pussy lips, making them even wetter than before. She was incredibly responsive to his touch.

"Yes, please." Her voice came out in an impassioned whisper. Julie moved her body against the rhythm of his strokes. Her ass rubbed against his cock, and he was hard-pressed not to come right then and there. Gabe was determined, however, to make sure she got off first, because God knew, once he was finally inside of her, there was no telling how long he'd last.

Giving her what she wanted, he pushed his middle finger into her tight, wet sheath. Goddamn, she was tight. Her cunt clung to his finger like a vise. A shudder shimmied up his spine as he imagined how her pussy would feel around his cock. Gabe shoved the dew-soaked digit deeper into her hungry channel before pulling it back out.

Julie moved her head from side to side against his chest. "Oh God!"

“No. Gabe. Remember that, baby.” He slipped another finger inside of her, marveled at how accommodating and juicy her pussy was. Oh, hell yeah. He couldn't wait to be inside of her.

“Gabe, this feels so good. Don't stop, please.” She clasped her hand over his, blatantly demanding he give her more.

He used his free hand to cup one blackberry-tipped breast. Gabe hadn't been lying when he said hers were perfect. They were so big and lickable, and he couldn't wait to suck on them as his cock worked in and out of her. Rolling the taut peak between his index finger and thumb, he gave it a squeeze, making her gasp. He didn't know how much longer he'd last before he threw her on the bed and fucked her senseless. His cock was so hard at the moment, he thought he'd explode.

Finger fucking wasn't enough. He needed to taste her cream, which produced the most delicious scent. Removing his fingers from her damp heat, Gabe slowly brought them to his mouth and licked off her juices, savoring the tangy flavor of her cunt. “Mmm. You're sweet, like candy...Candy Girl. From now on, I'm the only one who can call you that. Got it?”

Julie nodded, wiggling her bottom against his cock. “Please...” She groaned.

“Oh, I'm going to please you, all right, but I want to hear the words. Say 'Please fuck me, Gabe.'”

“Please fuck me, Gabe. You're driving me crazy.” She turned around in his arms and placed a hot, wet kiss against his collarbone. He'd dreamed of her saying those words to him for so long, he had to stop himself from giving his arm a pinch just to make sure this was real. He could have wept with joy to have her here with him like this.

A grin spread his lips. “Whatever the lady wants, the lady shall have. But just for the record, when I take you, you'll belong to me.”

She ran her tongue across her full lips. “Maybe I want to belong to you.”

“I didn't realize you were such a vixen. You're full of surprises, Julie Bennett.”

She laughed, throwing her head back. “Sometimes I surprise myself. Now are we going to keep talking, or are you going to fuck me?”

Gabe pushed her down onto the bed and covered her body with his. Nibbling on her neck, he cupped her breasts and ran his thumbs over her nipples. He reveled at the sensual contrast their skin made. He'd been with black women before, but he'd never noted anything this simplistic. With Julie, however, it added something to this already hot-as-fuck sexual escapade.

Julie arched her body against his, writhing against his caresses as if she couldn't get enough. He continued his sexual quest, sliding down her body and running his tongue across each nipple, teasing, nipping, and licking them in turn.

He circled her navel and went lower still, eager to sample more of her honey. Julie grasped his shoulders and gave him an aggressive shove. Gabe chuckled, raising his head. “Ready for me to eat this delectable pussy?”

Julie raised her hips until her cunt was only inches away from his mouth. “Stop teasing me.”

Gabe grinned. “I like a woman who knows exactly what she wants.” Parting her silky thighs, he separated her labia to look at her pretty, chocolate-coated pink pussy. Gorgeous. Just like the rest of her, from the tiny little button hidden within her folds, to the tight slit he knew would fit snugly around his cock. With a quick flick of his tongue, he teased her clit. “Like candy,” he whispered before capturing the tight bud between his lips and sucking it into his mouth.

She buried her fingers through his hair, mashing her pussy against his face. “Gabe. Oh, God yes. More.”

He loved the way she begged. It turned him on. Gabe had been complimented on his technique before, but never had he wanted to please a

woman as much as he did Julie. Again, he couldn't help wondering what it was about this woman that drove him to the heights of such earth-shattering passion. He hadn't even properly fucked her yet, and already he was near his climax. By the time he got inside of her, he could now confirm with absolute certainty he wouldn't last long. Not that it mattered, because he'd have her again. And again. Gabe had already determined that once wouldn't be enough with the sexy Miss Bennett. Maybe he never wanted to let her go, but it was a bridge they'd cross once they got to it.

As she wiggled and bucked against him, sensual little mewls emitting from her mouth, Gabe slipped two fingers into her cunt, his mouth never leaving her clit. Her pussy was like an aphrodisiac that he could easily become addicted to if he weren't already. Sucking and tugging that little jewel, he savored her taste. God, she was sweet.

“Yes!” she screamed, her body jerking in uncontrollable spasms. He could tell she was close to her peak from the way she shook and thrashed her head from side to side, and he was determined that she reach it. Gabe wanted her so weak and hungry for him, she'd have no other thoughts in her mind except him. Finally letting go of her clit, he eased his fingers out of her wet hole, only to replace his fingers with his tongue. This seemed to take her to the brink.

Julie stilled before she shouted his name. “Gabe! I'm coming.”

He raised his head briefly. “Let it happen, Candy Girl. Don't ever hold anything back from me,” he whispered before returning to the task of tongue fucking her. Her juice flowed forth like a dam bursting, and he greedily lapped the delicious nectar.

He bathed her pussy with his tongue, taking his time and stopping only when the need to slam his cock into her well-eaten pussy was too strong a temptation to fight. Finally. This was the moment he'd been waiting for.

Julie barely had time to catch her breath before Gabe slid next to her, covering her mouth with his in a kiss of total domination. She could taste her

juices on his mouth, and instead of being a turnoff, it was the exact opposite. It was a reminder of having her pussy thoroughly devoured.

The way he moved his body against hers, grinding and humping, sent her pulse racing. Her orgasm had been so intense, she saw stars. The couple of partners she'd had before him dulled in comparison. Neither had touched or looked at her with such reverence. As if she were the most precious gem they'd ever handled. Being in his arms like this finally made her realize why she'd been so wary of him from the beginning: she'd fallen for him just as hard as the rest of the women in her office. But because of stupid blind loyalty to the very undeserving Henry, and the belief that she was way out Gabe's league, she'd suppressed any thoughts in that direction. She'd put him in the role as the ogre boss in order to deal with these hidden feelings, not daring to dwell on them.

Maybe she was simply a novelty to him—a challenge: the one woman who hadn't made a fool of herself in his presence, which was why he'd initiated this in the first place. But she wasn't going to question the hows or whys. For once she didn't want to do the right thing or weigh things carefully like she always did. Julie wanted to live for the now. And right now she wanted some of Gabe's thick, hard cock.

Spreading her legs, she lifted her hips, silently pleading for his dick to enter her. “I want you. Please put that beautiful cock inside of me,” she murmured against his mouth.

Gabe lifted his head with obvious reluctance and rolled off her and slid off the bed. “Just one second, sweetheart. Gotta find a rubber.” He quickly dug through the drawer on his nightstand and produced a small silver square. With rapid speed, he tore the foil open and extracted the condom.

Julie shivered with anticipation, wishing he'd hurry up. She was on fire and wanted to have every single inch of him. Moving her hand between her legs, she fingered her clit to temper the burning heat raging along every single nerve ending in her body. “I need you. Hurry up and get over here, lover.”

With condom donned, Gabe moved onto the bed. "You don't have to tell me twice, Candy Girl."

She couldn't keep the smile off her face. He'd turned the name she dreaded into something positive. Something beautiful. Opening her arms wide, she accepted the press of his weight when he slid on top of her. "I love it when you say it, Gabe."

He chuckled lightly as he nudged her thighs farther apart. "Sure you won't blow up on me like you did in the office?"

Julie laughed. "Don't remind me." She circled his waist with her arms. "Fuck me, Gabe."

"With pleasure, Candy Girl." He guided his cock to her damp entrance and paused. "Are you sure this is what you want, Julie?"

She nodded. "No turning back. Remember?"

"Of course, but—"

She shook her head. "Shut up, Gabe." Julie raised her lips in silent demand.

"Oh, Julie." Gabe surged forward with a loud grunt of satisfaction. Driving balls-deep into her, he placed his arms on either side of her head, bracing himself. "So tight," he whispered through gritted teeth.

Julie had already imagined how it would feel to be so deliciously stretched by his thickness, but the reality far outweighed her fantasies. He was so deep inside of her, it felt as if they were one unit. She held on to him, wanting to savor this moment for as long as possible. Gabe was everything she'd imagined he'd be and then some.

"Are you ready, baby?"

"Oh yeah. Take me."

Gabe pushed forward, nearly touching her womb, and pulled back until he was almost completely out of her. Then he slammed back into her. A gasp

tore from her lips. "Gabe, what are you doing to me?" She groaned, tossing her head from side to side.

"Fucking you."

"Then keep on fucking me, lover." She gripped him tighter, digging her nails into his back.

The deliberate slowness of his movement drove Julie out of her mind. The man was pure magic to make her feel so many sensations at once: wonder, lust, passion she didn't realize herself capable of, sadness, and finally joy. It saddened her to realize she'd suppressed her voice for so many years that she'd lost who she was. But then the joy and happiness soon followed due to this epiphany. This was her awakening.

When Gabe had said there was no turning back, she never imagined it would mean so much to her.

Not content to let him have all the fun, she bucked against Gabe, meeting him thrust for every delicious thrust. Each time he drove into her, he went deeper and harder, filling her with the primitive need to be branded. Yes, she belonged to him.

They strained, grinded, and moved together in a syncopated dance of lust and desire. He made her soul sing with happiness and her body cry with hunger. As the intensity of their passionate motions increased, she dug her nails into his back, breaking skin.

"Gabe." The heat within her had reached a boiling point, threatening to scorch them both.

"That's it, baby; give me everything you got. Tell me this pussy is mine and only mine."

"It's yours, Gabe. No one else's. All of me."

"Damn right," he growled, plowing into her like a man gone berserk. The feral gleam in his topaz eyes excited her.

Her body was hurtling to another powerful climax. Instinctively, Julie knew it would be more potent than the one she'd already had. Raking her nails down his back, she let out a scream of pure ecstasy. A volcanic eruption-sized orgasm ripped through her being like nothing she'd ever experienced before. "Yes! Yes! Yes! Gabe. Oh God!"

The experience was so intense, Julie grew light-headed, and stars danced before her eyes.

Gabe thrust into her several more times before a look of sexual satisfaction crossed his face. His body shook and spasmed, signaling his own climax. He collapsed on top of her, his mouth merging with hers.

Their tongues dueled for supremacy until they both conceded their battle with an unspoken agreement for more to come later. Breaking the tight seal of their mouths, he rested his head within the crook of her shoulder, breathing ragged.

Julie loved the feel of his weight on top of her and was content to remain locked in his embrace for as long as possible. "That was...wonderful." She sighed, breaking the comfortable silence that had fallen between them.

"I'll say." He nuzzled her neck. "I was serious when I said this was only the beginning for us."

She stroked the back of his head. "Don't kill a beautiful moment by making promises you won't keep. Let's just enjoy each other's company."

He raised his head, a deep scowl lining his mouth and forehead. "What the hell is that supposed to mean?"

Julie moistened her lips with the tip of her tongue. There was no way she was going to read more into their situation than there actually was. She'd give herself to him as long as he wanted her, but she wouldn't put her hopes into a future for them. Gabriel Carland could have any woman he wanted, and the novelty of being with a plain Jane like herself would eventually wear off. As much as the thought bothered her more than she cared to admit, she would

simply enjoy what they had for now. Besides, putting too much trust in others only ended up hurting.

She traced his jawline with her fingertip. "What I meant was, let's just enjoy each other's company and not burden ourselves with unnecessary things."

His scowl deepened. "And what exactly do you deem unnecessary, Julie?"

Why did he sound offended? Wasn't he the office lothario? "Talk of relationships and a future."

"Are you saying this was just sex to you?" He spoke with such dead calm, it sent a chill down her spine, but not the good kind.

"I'm saying let's enjoy each other's company. Why are you getting so upset? Most men would kill for sex with no strings attached."

"Maybe I'm not most men."

She laughed. "Of course you are. Half the women at work are in love with you."

"What does that have to do with the price of tea in China? It doesn't mean I love them back."

That old uncertainty reared its head once again. What was he trying to say? That he actually wanted something more than sex? "Oh." She broke eye contact with him, at a loss for words.

He grasped her chin. "Look at me, Julie. I won't lie and say I'm in love with you, but I'm halfway there. I'd like to see where this goes. Give us a chance."

Her gaze flew to his, her mouth falling open. "Me?"

Gabe leaned forward to brush her lips against his. "Yes, you, silly. Haven't you ever wondered why I walk by your desk as much as I do?"

"I thought you were checking up on me to make sure I was doing my job. You've made it known you don't like the amount of visitors I get at my desk."

“I really don't care about that as long as you get your work done, and from what I've observed of your performance, you've done an excellent job. What annoyed me so much was the way you let people take advantage of you.”

Hearing someone else voice what she knew to be true was embarrassing. She was fully aware that most people took advantage of her good nature because she let them, but knowing Gabe knew it too made her feel pathetic. Besides, no one but Sheridan had ever said anything on the subject with this amount of concern. It was disconcerting. The man saw far too much. “Why should that bother you?”

“At first I didn't realize why it did either, until I realized I cared about you.”

Did she dare believe him after all the months of hostility?

“But you acted as if you hated me.”

“No. I was fighting my feelings for you. Besides, it was a defense mechanism. How do you think I felt when every time I walked by your desk you'd be talking and smiling with one of your coworkers, but the minute I stopped by you'd totally shut down? You looked as if I was something on the bottom of your shoe. And you can say you didn't, but I'd also point out how when you spotted me coming, you'd turn the other way.”

Her mouth fell open. There was really no point in denying it. “I didn't realize you'd noticed.”

He snorted. “Oh, I noticed all right. I felt like a big tool. How was I supposed to act around you?”

This was all new to her. She licked her lips. “I'll admit that when I saw you coming, I did switch directions, but as for the other accusation, I never meant to look at you in the way you say I did. I mean, half the time you were yelling at me for something I did, and I guess I was a little wary after a while.”

“And I might have overreacted because I was a bit jealous of how friendly you were with everyone else and not with me.”

“You, jealous? You don't seem like the type.”

“I didn't think I was either, until this little lady—with a smile that could light up any room—slowly eased her way into my every waking thought.”

How could she respond to that? “I don't know what to say.”

He kissed the tip of her nose. “Just say you'll give us a chance. I'll tell you what. It's Friday. Neither one of us has to go back to the office, so why don't we spend the rest of the weekend together—you know, getting to know each other better? We already know we're sexually compatible; let's see what we have beyond that.”

“And then what?”

“We'll play it by ear.”

Her heart and body screamed *yes*, but her mind told her it wasn't a good idea. Did she want to go back home and face Corinne, or spend a weekend in Gabe's arms, letting him touch, lick, and fuck her until she couldn't think straight?

When put in those terms, the decision wasn't so hard after all.

Chapter Five

“Favorite color?” Julie asked before popping another cherry in her mouth.

“Red.”

“Favorite animal?”

“Turtle.”

Julie raised a brow. “Turtle? I would have pegged you for a dog person.”

Gabe shrugged. “I like dogs just fine, but unfortunately my mother was allergic to everything furry, so I had to settle for a pet turtle. I had five.”

“And what happened to them?”

“When they got big, I set them free in my parents' pond.”

“What was your family life like?”

“There's nothing particularly exciting about my upbringing. I grew up in a small town in North Jersey with the typical family, one older brother and a younger sister. Mom was a homemaker, and Dad worked as a sanitation worker for thirty years before he retired. My brother is now a lieutenant commander in the navy, stationed in California, and my sister is a journalist in New York. Both are married with two children, and we all get together for the major holidays, but I talk to everyone at least once a week. Pretty boring stuff.”

Julie wished her upbringing was that *boring*. To have a proper family and a sense of belonging was what most people dreamed of. “So why are you still single? At thirty-six, most men would have settled down by now.”

He smiled, revealing strong white teeth. “I hadn't met the right woman...until now.”

He had to be teasing her. Refusing to fall into this trap by getting her hopes up, Julie quickly changed the subject. "What's your favorite food?"

Gabe chuckled as though seeing through her ploy. "Candy." The way his gaze swept over her, there was no doubt in Julie's mind of his meaning.

Heat flooded her cheeks, and she squirmed in her chair. Since their initial romp yesterday afternoon, Gabe had behaved like the perfect gentleman. They'd watched DVDs and ordered takeout as they got to know each other better. To her delight, they had more in common than she thought they would. They both loved old-school rap and hair-metal bands. They both liked campy movies and classic cartoons. And most importantly they both were in agreement that Sammy Hagar was the better front man of Van Halen.

Gabe, Julie found, not only had a great sense of humor, but he was also a wonderful conversationalist, keeping her enthralled with stories from his youth. He didn't take himself so seriously, like a lot of drop-dead gorgeous men did. He had a self-deprecating way about him at times that was adorable. That this hunk of a man had his own insecurities, and that he'd allowed her to see them, touched something deep within Julie.

They'd ended their Friday night by falling asleep, snuggled together on the couch watching the latest Ben Stiller flick. Gabe must have woken up sometime in the middle of the night and carried her to his bed, because that's where she'd woken up to the smell of fresh coffee and bacon. After a leisurely breakfast, Julie had called Sheridan, who had a spare key to her condo, to take Rufus and bring a change of clothes over. Then Gabe had taken her miniature golfing, followed by a trip to an ice-cream parlor he'd claimed served the best butter pecan ice cream on the East Coast. It was what they were currently enjoying.

Julie stuck her tongue out at him. "Don't tease me unless you intend to follow through."

He grinned, wiggling his brows suggestively. "Who says I won't?"

She shrugged. "What am I supposed to think? You haven't so much as kissed me since yesterday. Are you having second thoughts about this 'us' thing, and this is your way of letting me down gently?"

He froze with his spoon halfway to his mouth, his eyes flashing with a menacing emotion she couldn't quite discern. "What did you just say?"

Julie gulped. "Well, you haven't touched me since yesterday. What am I supposed to think?"

He raised a brow. "That perhaps I respect you? Look, Julie, yesterday was one of the most satisfying experiences in my life, yet I feel like we've rushed into something you might not be ready for."

"Don't you think it's up to me to decide what I'm ready for? Maybe what happened between us is exactly what I needed."

"You still haven't told me why you were so upset yesterday. Whenever I ask, you conveniently change the subject. I offered to take you home to get a change of clothes, but instead you called a friend. If you're not ready to share such minute parts of your life with me, how do you think I should proceed?"

She bit her bottom lip, lowering her lids so she wouldn't see the censure in his eyes. He had a point. He had been open about his life, so at the very least she could tell him the truth. Raking her fingers through her hair, she sighed. "I guess I didn't want go into details because it's pretty embarrassing actually."

Gabe reached across the table and captured her hand in his. "Julie, whatever it is, you can tell me. I'll listen with no judgment."

A lump formed in her throat as pain welled in her chest. It hurt to think of how much she'd lost of herself in order to make other people happy. "The truth is, I went home to pick up peanut butter cups because Rob was annoyed I'd forgotten to bring them in. Anyway, when I got home, I found my cousin, Corinne, in bed with my boyfriend."

Gabe dropped her hand and jerked away from the table as if he'd been scalded. "You have a boyfriend?" His brows flew together as his expression darkened. "Were you just using me, hence the vixen act?"

She shook her head furiously. "You said you'd listen without judgment."

"I'm not judging, but no guy likes to learn he was used as a stand-in."

"Gabe, would you shut up and listen to me? You were not a stand-in, and not once did I think of him when we were together. Honestly I haven't given him a single thought since we've been together."

Her words seemed to calm him, but his face still remained stony. He crossed his arms across her chest. "Out with the old, in with the new?"

She slammed her fist on the table, drawing stares from patrons at nearby tables. "It wasn't like that, Gabe. This is exactly why I didn't want to say anything." Her anger guiding her, Julie stood up and stormed out of the ice-cream shop.

She was barely out the door when two strong hands fell on her shoulders. Gabe turned her around within the circle of his arms and held her against him. Burying his face against her neck, he whispered, "I'm sorry. I was being an ass. You don't have to go into details until you're ready."

Julie didn't want to fight with Gabe and realized she owed him some sort of explanation. "I overreacted a little in there. I'm so used to keeping everything on the inside that I don't know how to properly express my thoughts."

He grasped her arm and led her to a nearby bench. Once they were seated, he placed his hand on her knee. "I'm the one who should apologize. I should have heard you out before I reacted. Julie, please go on. I'm listening."

There was no doubting his sincerity. If she didn't get the words out now, she never would. "I was saying before, I found my cousin and boyfriend in bed together. Yes, I had a boyfriend up until yesterday, but we hadn't been intimate for some time—months probably. Things were not going so well between us anyway. We didn't argue or anything like that, but we didn't act like a

boyfriend and girlfriend should. I mean, we went through the motions, but somewhere there was a disconnect.” She sighed. “I’m not sure if I’m explaining myself properly.”

Gabe placed his hand on her thigh and gave it a reassuring squeeze. “I understand. Please, continue.”

“Honestly, I’m not quite sure why we were together. We kind of drifted into a relationship. The sex was only mediocre at best. Anyway it was just another example of me going with the status quo.” She slumped against the bench. “I wasn’t always like this, though—such a pushover, I mean.”

“What happened?”

“My parents died when I was eight, and my only living relatives were my aunt Rae and her daughter, Corinne, but I think she and her husband were having problems at the time, so she couldn’t take me. So, I was in the foster care system for a few years. It was a pretty difficult adjustment. I’d always been on the shy side, but I kind of withdrew into myself. In that whole time the only friend I made was Sheridan. You met her this morning. Anyway, I was bounced from one home to the next, and each time I believed if I became what they wanted me to be, maybe they’d keep me. You see, my experiences in foster homes weren’t as horrific as some kids you hear about. Most of the homes I stayed in weren’t bad at all. In my need for a family unit, I became as amicable as possible. Never causing trouble or tattling when one of the other kids did something to me. But no matter how hard I tried to fit in and be what I believed they wanted me to be, for some reason I’d always end up receiving the talk.”

Tears burned the backs of her eyes. Even now her old childhood woes still cut deep. Pain welled within her chest as she remembered those lonely years, missing her parents but wanting desperately to belong to a family again.

“The talk?” Gabe asked gently.

“Yeah, the talk where they’d explain they’re getting rid of me. Oh, it was nothing I did, they’d tell me, but I never believed them of course. So then I vowed I’d try harder at my next home.”

“That's an awful big burden for a child to have.”

“I know that now, but at the time it made sense. Anyway, when I was thirteen, my aunt seemed to have a change of heart and took me in. It wasn't until later that I learned her main reason for taking me in was the stipend from the state. By the time I learned this, it didn't matter, because I would have done anything to please her. And I think she knew it. My cousin knew it too and never missed an opportunity to rub it in my face. Sometimes my cousin would take something of mine or break it deliberately, but every time I tried or even wanted to fight back, she'd tell me if I made trouble, my aunt would send me away. It always worked like a charm.”

“And this is the same cousin you have staying with you now?”

“The very same one. It wasn't like my aunt Rae was any better. Everything I had, the clothes on my back, the food that I ate, I was reminded that it was only by her largesse that I was provided those things. She was never affectionate toward me, and she never lifted a finger to clean or do anything menial while I was around, but I was so grateful to have some permanency in my life, I learned to bite my tongue and count my blessings.”

“Did she ever threaten to send you back to the foster homes if you didn't toe the line?”

Julie bit her lip and nodded. She didn't like to speak ill of her aunt. She had taken Julie in, even though it might not have been for altruistic reasons, but the bottom line was that she had. How she was with Aunt Rae and Corinne at home was how she was with her schoolmates, and everyone else she interacted with. It had simply become habit. “I don't like confrontation, and I don't like people to be angry with me. And as a result, I try to please them.”

“Everything makes sense now. It's why you spend so many late hours at the office picking up other people's slack. I often wondered if you were trying to earn brownie points or if you were just a big pushover. And the candy—you do it to make people happy.”

“Yes. That, and I have a sweet tooth, although half the time, I barely get any for myself, because it's usually gone by noon. When I first started the job, I had a candy dish at my desk. At first some people were nice enough to contribute to my candy fund, while others brought in candy to keep the dish filled. As new people came and others left, the responsibility of keeping it full became solely mine.”

“And who started calling you 'Candy Girl'?”

She shrugged. “I'm not really sure, but it caught on, and before I knew it, no one referred to me by my name. At first I thought it was cute, because I believed it to be a term of affection. But then I realized they no longer saw me as a person with feelings, but as an object to use.” To finally vocalize her emotions was like a cleansing.

Gabe stroked the side of her face. “And yet you said nothing?”

Julie closed her eyes briefly, leaning into his touch. She opened them again with a sigh. “No. Like I said, I'm so used to not saying what's on my mind, it's become an ingrained habit. For instance, my cousin, Corinne, lost her job and was unable to pay her rent. She didn't want to move back home with her mother because she claimed she and my aunt had some kind of falling out. So, I agreed to let her stay with me until she got back on her feet. She's now been with me for five months, and I don't think she has any intention of finding a job. Why should she when she's staying with me rent free and being waited on hand and foot?”

“And she repays you by sleeping with your boyfriend.”

A sharp, unexpected pain twisted in her chest. For as long as she could remember, Julie had wanted a close relationship with her beautiful and popular cousin. Now, as she replayed that scene she'd stumbled upon the day before, Julie realized it would never happen. For some reason Corinne hated her, and it was something she'd just have to accept, but at least now she no longer had to take her cousin's ill treatment. She caught her bottom lip between her teeth, nodding her head in answer to his question.

“Is the reason you didn't want me to take you home because you weren't ready for a confrontation with Corinne?”

“Yes. I didn't know what to say. My tongue got stuck to the roof of my mouth, and I was torn between tears and doing her and Henry bodily harm. I guess I'll eventually have to go home, but just not today.”

He scooted next to her and slung his arm around her shoulders. “You can stay with me for as long as you like.”

Julie leaned her head against his chest, enjoying the warmth emanating from his body. Sitting with him here like this just felt right. It was funny how things turned out. Yesterday she'd been going through the motions of her humdrum life, and now she was heavily involved with her sexy boss. “I appreciate the offer, but I'll have to go home eventually. Maybe tomorrow I'll be up to facing her.”

“What will you do?”

“I don't know yet. I guess I'll know what to do when I get there.”

“Would you like me to be there for the confrontation?”

“No. I need to do this on my own. I have to learn to assert myself more, and there's no better way than finally telling my cousin what she needs to hear.”

“And what about your coworkers? You know, you probably thought I was always on your case, but like I said before, I was annoyed on your behalf. I hated to see them take advantage of you. But you never complained, so there really wasn't much I could do about it. I was actually a little jealous, and not just for the reasons I gave earlier.”

She lifted her head to meet his topaz gaze. “Jealous? Really? Of what?”

He grasped her chin and brushed her lips with his. “Of the attention you gave everyone else. I wanted it for myself.”

“I still find it hard to believe you want me.” She was so in awe of this handsome, dynamic man. And he wanted her!

“Why wouldn't I? You're gorgeous.”

“Stop it.”

“I'm serious. Big brown eyes, cute button nose, and a mouth I'm obsessed with kissing. If that isn't beauty, I don't know what is. Yours is the kind of beauty that comes from within. Do you honestly think the candy is the only reason people visit your desk? Some of them don't even touch the dish. They go to you because you listen without judgment; you're a soothing influence. You have something inside of you that attracts others to you. It's definitely one of the reasons that attracted me to you. I only wish you knew how wonderful you are.”

Her cheeks warmed with a blush. “My friend Sheridan says that too.”

“Maybe you should listen to your friend.” He dropped another kiss on the tip of her nose. “So what would you like to do next? Would you like to go to the movies?”

Julie shook her head.

“A walk in the park?”

“No.”

“How about a trip to the museum?”

“No.”

“How about—”

She placed a finger over his lips, a sudden boldness coming over her. “If it doesn't involve your cock in my pussy, I'm not interested.”

Gabe stood up abruptly and pulled Julie with him. “Let's go.”

Chapter Six

All his good intentions had flown out the window the minute she'd issued that seductive invitation. Gabe had wanted to slow things down and give her the proper courtship a woman like Julie deserved. It had been hard to keep his hands off her, especially as he remembered how good she'd tasted, how right she'd felt in his arms, how her cunt muscles squeezed his cock until he'd nearly lost his mind.

The drive back to his house was excruciating. His dick was painfully hard, and he was desperate to free it from its confines. It didn't help matters to have Julie's hand running up and down his thigh. The little minx was driving him insane, and judging by the smug smile on her face, she knew exactly what she was doing. Getting home in record time, he hurried out of the car and pulled Julie out, barely giving her a chance to unbuckle her seat belt.

Julie giggled as he shoved her inside and slammed the door behind them. "Where's the fire?"

Gabe grabbed her hand and placed it over his erection. "Right here, baby."

"Oh I see. Maybe there's something I can do to put it out for you."

"Most definitely." Pulling her against him, he covered her lips with his, giving her the proper kiss he'd been fantasizing about since yesterday. Her lips were soft like flower petals, and he wanted to taste more of her. Gabe slid his tongue along the outline of her lips. He needed more. Craved it. "Open up for me, sweetheart. Let me taste you." He threaded his fingers through her hair and gave it a gentle tug.

Julie parted her lips on a sigh, wrapping her arms around his waist and arching her body against his. She tasted heavenly, so sweet and tangy, he'd quickly become addicted to her. Each time he kissed her, a new, exciting feeling coursed through him. Capturing her tongue between his lips, he sucked it into his mouth, unable to get enough of her.

Her nails dug into his back as he ground his cock against her pelvis. This fully clothed bumping and grinding was no longer enough. Releasing the grip he had in her hair, he quickly undid the buttons of her blouse. Julie began to unbuckle his belt, and the frantic undressing of each other began, she seeming as desperate to have him naked as he was for her.

The sight of those blackberry-tipped breasts with distended nipples practically begging to be sucked was enough to push him over the edge. Where the hell was a condom when he needed one? Remembering he kept a few in his bathroom down the hall, he gave Julie a quick, hard kiss. "Don't move."

With record speed, he rushed down the hall to his bathroom and ripped the medicine cabinet open. Nearly pulling it off the hinges, he found what he sought and made his way back to Julie.

He stopped in his tracks at the sight she presented. Julie leaned against the wall in her naked deliciousness, with eyes squeezed shut and her feet were placed shoulder distance apart, exposing her pretty pussy to his gaze—a pussy she had two fingers jammed inside. Hot damn, she was beautiful. He ran his tongue across his lips in anticipation. She had to be doing this for the purpose of driving him insane. If that was the plan, it was most certainly working. "Gorgeous."

Her eyes popped open, and a smile of pure mischief and wicked delight curved her kissable lips. "What took you so long?" She moved her fingers in and out of her wet hole, her hips gyrating as she fingered herself.

"Trying to tease me, Candy Girl?"

Her grin widened. "Maybe." Slipping her finger out, she walked toward him like a goddess bent on a mission of seduction. "Do you want to taste my

candy?” She placed her dew-soaked fingers against his mouth, wetting his bottom lip.

“You'd better believe it.” Holding her wrist, he licked her fingers up and down, getting every last drop of her juice. “Mmm. You're going to be the death of me, woman.”

“The good kind, I hope.” She took the condom from his hand. “Here, let me.” Julie opened the silver packet and tossed it aside, her eyes never leaving his face. She went down on one knee and placed the rubber over his cock with an excruciating slowness that had Gabe gritting his teeth.

Julie stroked his length in one hand while fondling his balls in another. Gabe couldn't take any more of her torture. He wanted some pussy right now! Bending over, he lifted her to her feet.

“Wrap your arms around me, sweetheart.”

She raised a brow. “Standing up?”

“Are you chickening out?” he taunted gently.

“Never. I'm always up for the challenge.”

“And I'm always *up* for you.”

She giggled, throwing her arms around his neck as he'd commanded. “You're so nasty. And I like it.”

He gripped her ass and lifted her against his hardness. “Only for you, Candy Girl.”

“Let's keep it that way.”

Reaching between their bodies, Gabe grasped his cock and guided it to her slick entrance. “Mmm, your pussy is nice and wet, just how I like it.” Thrusting his hips forward, he drove into her tightness to the hilt. He inhaled sharply. Even after having her, it still shocked Gabe how snugly her cunt fit around his cock as if it were made just for him. Even in his wildest dreams, he would never have believed she could feel this good. Her tight pussy walls squeezing

his dick, milking it, and sucking it deeper. He stilled simply to savor this moment of complete oneness with her.

Julie, however, didn't seem content to remain immobile. She writhed and bucked against him, sending his cock deeper up her wet channel. "Fuck me, Gabe. Please. Now!"

Tightening his hold on her ass, he slammed her against the wall as the savage need to possess her to the point where she'd think of no other man but him took over. She clawed his back, clinging tighter to him as he plowed deeper and harder into her. "My pussy."

She squeezed her vaginal muscles around him. "And this is my cock. Every single inch of it."

"You'd better believe it," he growled.

Her nipples rubbed against him, creating a sensational friction that had his body reeling. He lowered his gaze to her big, round titties. Her hard little nipples were practically taunting him, begging to be sucked on. Gabe was more than willing to oblige. Taking a hard little point between his teeth, he nibbled and teased the hardened tip before suckling it.

Julie moaned, tossing her head from side to side. Her nails tore into his back. They'd leave marks, but Gabe didn't care. He'd wear them proudly as a badge of honor, because he was just as much hers as she was his.

"Fuck me harder, Gabe," she begged as her legs tightened around him. She bucked back and forth, riding his cock like a woman gone mad. Releasing her nipple with a wet *pop*, he squeezed her against him and buried his face into her floral-scented hair. As the intensity of his thrusts increased, Gabe feared he might hurt her. Each time he attempted to slow down, however, Julie would have none of it.

"More!" she demanded.

"Damn, you're insatiable."

"Only for you, baby."

“If you keep this up, I won't be able to hold out for much longer.”

Julie nipped his shoulder playfully. “So?”

That was it. She wanted it rough and hard; he'd give it to her. Something within him let loose, and he held nothing back, releasing all his months of sexual frustration.

“Yes! Yes! Yes!” she screamed.

“So close.” He grunted. With a few more forceful thrusts, he came so hard, he nearly lost his balance.

“I'm coming!” Julie shouted her release. She shook violently before going completely limp in his arms. Breathing ragged, she whispered, “I needed that.”

He grinned. “So did I, Candy Girl. So did I.”

* * * * *

The most luscious sensations were whirling in her body. Something warm and wet tickled her clit and circled it. Wanting to touch the source of her pleasure, Julie frowned when she realized she couldn't move her arms. Something continued to probe her pussy with more insistence.

Her eyes popped open, and it took several seconds to realize she'd been sleeping but what she felt was definitely no dream. Gabe lay between her legs, lapping her pussy and fingering her with insistent strokes. Her arms were anchored to the bedpost, tied by some type of silken cloth. She yanked at her restraints, but the more she struggled, the tighter they became.

“Gabe, what do you think you're doing?” She'd meant for her words to sound stern, but instead they'd come out as a throaty whisper.

He raised his head, his eyes smoldering with passion. “Eating your pussy. I thought you'd never wake up, and I was hungry.”

“You have to untie me.”

He raised a brow. “Do I?”

“Yes, you do.”

“I can't do that, sweetheart.”

“Why the hell not?”

“Because you don't want me to.” Before she could reply, he dived face-first into her pussy, his fingers doing things to her she'd only read in X-rated books. Damn if he wasn't right. She didn't want to be set free from this brand of sensual torture. Besides, being tied up, left to a lover's tender mercies, totally vulnerable to his sexual desires, was so damn hot.

Raising her hips, she offered him complete surrender. “Gabe, your tongue feels amazing.”

He added another finger inside of her, thrusting deeper as he nibbled her clit. Julie knew by the end of the weekend, her pussy would be so sore, she probably wouldn't be comfortable for days. But it would serve as a sexy reminder of exactly whom she belonged to.

Gabe took his time, as if reveling in every second of his task. “Such a pretty pussy. I could stay between your soft thighs all day, but you know what I'd really like to do?”

“No,” she croaked.

Removing his fingers from her damp channel, he slipped them between the crack of her ass and massaged the tight ring of muscles guarding her rectum.

“Gabe!”

“Relax, Julie. If you don't want it to happen, I'll stop right now.” He parted her cheeks and licked the spot where his fingers had been.

She jerked against the feel of his tongue, torn between pleasure and surprise. She'd never been touched so intimately before. As he continued to lick her puckered bud, she gnawed on her bottom lip, not wanting to vocalize the pleasure his sexual ministrations caused.

She didn't have to. He raised his head with a knowing grin. “Do you want me to stop? Just say the words.”

Julie couldn't speak if her life depended on it. Damn him. She raised her hips in silent consent. He chuckled. "That's what I thought." He gave her asshole a long, broad lick with his tongue, sending shivers of delight from her head to toes. Gabe lifted his head. "I have something to make this easier for you." Rolling off the bed, he rummaged through his nightstand drawer and produced a little white tube.

Julie wet her lips with the tip of her tongue. "What's that?"

"Lubricant. As this is your first introduction to the art of anal sex, this will help."

"Oh," she answered lamely, not quite sure if it would or not. His cock was so thick, she wondered if she could take all of him.

As if sensing her fear, Gabe placed a light kiss on her belly. "Do you trust me?"

"Yes."

"If this gets too uncomfortable for you, tell me to stop, okay?"

Catching her bottom lip between her teeth, she nodded.

Carefully, he uncapped the little tube and squeezed a generous amount on his index and middle fingers.

Julie flinched at the contact of the cool gel against her skin. Closing her eyes, she willed herself to relax and let go. She knew Gabe wanted this, and she wanted to please him. When he said he wouldn't hurt her, she believed him, which allowed her to slowly give over to the stimulating pulses of pure delight threading through her body.

Gabe eased a slick finger into her tight hole, and she gasped. It was an odd feeling but not unpleasant. He pushed the digit deep, then pulled it out and pushed it back in again. Working up a slow, steady rhythm, he got her to a point where she was actually enjoying it. She clenched her muscles around that finger, loving the in-and-out motion.

"Are you ready for another one, baby?"

She opened her eyes. "Yes."

He added a second finger, a tighter squeeze. She was more than ready for him this time, moving her hips along with his questing movements. Her body was soon a quivering mass as he continued to finger her ass. Never would she have believed she could derive so much pleasure from an area she'd once considered off-limits.

"Do you like this, Julie?"

"Oh God, yes."

"Then I hope you're ready for my cock, because I think I'll combust if I don't get to sample some of this tight ass soon."

"Okay." Her uncertainty came back full force. His fingers were one thing, but his cock was another. Julie wished she could reach out and touch him, but her hands were still bound. The blood rushed to the surface of his skin. He was burning up. For her! Yet on the surface, he remained calm. This demonstration of patience was enough to convince her to continue. "Please, fuck my ass, Gabe."

He groaned. "You keep talking like that, and I doubt I'll be able to contain myself." Producing a condom and quickly donning it, he moved to his knees and placed his cock at her anal entrance. "Ready?"

"As ready as I'll ever be."

Gabe pushed forward, gently at first, getting the head past the tight ring, and then slowly eased an inch into her. She felt so thoroughly stretched, it took her breath away.

When he was completely inside of her, she was surprised that his entrance had been virtually pain free, besides a slight discomfort. He placed his hands on either side of her body. "As I move in and out of you, I want you to tell me exactly how I make you feel." He pulled back until he nearly slid out of her and then shoved forward again.

"Gabe, oh God!"

He halted. "Did I hurt you?"

"No. Please don't stop." She couldn't believe she was begging him for this. There was no turning back now. Every bit of her belonged to him.

Gabe thrust forward again.

"Yes, that's it, lover. Fuck my ass."

"Like it, huh?" He grinned. "Do you like my white cock in your beautiful black ass?"

His dirty words gave her a thrill like she couldn't believe. "Love it." She moaned. "Now shut up and keep fucking me."

"My pleasure, ma'am." He grasped her hips to lift her lower body, enabling him to drive deeper into her. "Oh yeah, baby. I was right. This ass was meant for fucking, and it's mine, isn't it? Just like your pussy."

"All of me belongs to you, Gabe. This is your ass and your pussy." She thrashed her head from side to side, tugging at her silk bonds. She wanted to pull him close and hold him against her.

"That's it, baby. Don't hold back. Don't ever hold anything back from me."

He pumped into her, pounding her ass and making it jiggle the deeper he went. Juices leaked from her pussy, and an incredible heat scorched her from the inside out. An orgasm was coming, and when it did, it would be a powerful one. As she moved with him, the slow, steady buildup of intense pleasure shimmied along every single nerve ending in her body.

Her climax was like a dam bursting forth from within. "Gabe! I'm coming."

Judging from his shut eyes and gritted teeth, he too had reached his peak. His body shook as he continued to thrust in and out of her ass before collapsing on top of her.

Gabe placed light kisses against her neck. "That was..." He broke off breathlessly.

"Fantastic. I know. Could it possibly get any better?"

He nuzzled her ear. "I don't know, but how about I untie you, and we'll find out together."

Julie definitely liked the sound of that.

Chapter Seven

At Julie's insistence, she went home Sunday night to get some sleep for work the next day, because as long as she and Gabe shared a bed, sleep was the last thing they were going to do. Plus it was time to reclaim her home. Of course Gabe had tried to get her to stay, but she needed the confrontation with Corinne. She didn't want it hanging over her head at the start of her workweek.

Gabe had taken her back to the office parking lot so that she could get her car. After picking up Rufus from Sheridan's house, she made her way back home, still coming down from the high of the weekend she'd shared with Gabe. When she parked, she must have sat in her car for a good five minutes before she moved. Rufus barked, getting restless. "Okay, boy. I know. I'm being a big chicken. It's now or never." Scooping up her dog, she slid out of the car and headed inside.

She didn't know what to expect when she walked inside, but she didn't think she'd find an empty house. A house that looked ransacked. *What the hell happened here?* There were beer and soda cans all over the place and empty bowls of chips. And what the hell was that smell? On top of sleeping with her boyfriend, Corinne obviously had the nerve to throw a party. That fucking bitch.

This was it. Not even their bond as cousins would repair this relationship. Corinne obviously had no respect for her and never would. Whenever she showed up, Julie fully intended to kick her ass out.

Rufus barked, reminding her that she was still holding him. She was almost scared to put him down on the floor out of fear he'd step on a dirty syringe. Julie wouldn't put anything past her skeezy cousin. With a resigned

sigh, she put her dog in his cage, which he wasn't too happy about, and went about the task of cleaning her house thoroughly. It took three hours to get the place in order. She'd save the carpet cleaning and scrubbing the floors for sometime later in the week, but she was exhausted by the time she was done. As she was cleaning, however, she'd discovered most of Corinne's belongings were gone. That saved her the trouble of kicking her out at least, but Julie was a bit disappointed for missing out on the opportunity to tell that bitch off. Instead, everything left behind by her errant cousin was gathered up, placed in a trash bag, and thrown out in the garbage can. Julie would like to have put Corinne in there, but there was nothing she could do about that. It was close to midnight when she finished; her muscles ached from the exertion. Though she was tired, she decided to treat herself by running a hot bubble bath for herself. Gabe had given her permission to come in a little late to the office the next day, so she figured she'd sleep in a few extra hours.

Just as she was about to step into her sudsy haven, the phone rang. Toying with the idea of not answering it, she figured whoever it was calling this late obviously had some kind of emergency. At least they'd better. The caller ID stated it was a private number. Everyone she knew had listed telephone numbers, but she answered anyway. "Hello?"

"Do you miss me?" Gabe's throaty voice greeted her ears.

She didn't expect to hear from him, at least not until she went to work tomorrow. A huge grin tugged the corners of her lips. Just the sound of his voice made her pussy wet. Their weekend together was still fresh in her mind, and now she almost wished she'd stayed with him tonight instead of coming back home. "Gabe. I didn't know you had my number. I mean...I forgot to give it to you."

"As your employer, I have to have access to all my employees' numbers."

"Ah, so isn't it a bit unethical to use said number for non-business-related calls?"

"Just as ethical as it is to fuck your boss."

Julie laughed out loud. "Touché."

"You never answered my question."

"And that was?"

"Do you miss me?"

She giggled. In truth, she really did, but she wasn't going to inflate his already healthy ego. "How can I miss you when we only saw each other a few hours ago?"

"Ouch."

Julie felt giddy like a teenage girl with her first boyfriend again. "Okay, maybe I missed you a bit."

"Only a little?"

"Okay, a lot. What are you still doing up, anyway? I thought you were going to have an early night because you have a series of meetings in the morning."

He sighed. "After I dropped you off to get your car, I went home, did my nightly routine, and went to bed, but I found it wasn't the same without you beside me. I spent the last couple of hours tossing and turning, and finally I decided to give you a call. I thought you'd be asleep by now and I'd have to content myself with simply hearing your voice on your answering machine."

Her heart pounded, beating a tattoo within her chest. No one had ever said anything so romantic to her before. "You're kidding me, right? You couldn't sleep because you were thinking about little ol' me?"

Gabe chuckled. "We're really going to have to work on that self-esteem issue of yours. And why wouldn't a man be lying in bed thinking about his woman?"

"Your woman?"

"That's what you are, aren't you?"

They hadn't officially put any labels on what they were to each other, but Julie liked the sound of that. Gabriel Carland's woman. "As long as I can call you my man."

"I think you have yourself a deal, little lady. So how did it go?"

"How did what go?"

"The confrontation with your cousin? Was it as bad as you thought it would be, or did she give in graciously?"

"Actually, she was already gone by the time I got here. Most of her stuff had been cleared out, along with a few of my items."

"Really? Do you plan on filing a police report?"

"It's not worth it. Besides, she didn't take anything of real value. Thankfully I had the foresight to put expensive jewelry and everything of real importance to me at Sheridan's place until she left."

"It's a shame you had to do that in the first place. But at least she's gone. I'd advise you to change your locks, just in case she tries to come back. From how you describe your cousin, I wouldn't put it past her."

"You're probably right." She really didn't want to talk about Corinne anymore, but she didn't want to end the conversation with him. "Guess what?"

"What?"

"I'm completely naked."

"What!"

She laughed. Even though he couldn't see her, she ran her finger along the tops of her breasts and released a moan. Before Friday she would never have had the nerve to do something like this, but there was just something about this man that brought the naughty out in her. "I don't have a stitch of clothing on right now. I was about to get into the bathtub before you called. It's too bad you're not here to do anything about it."

"Who says I'm not?"

She stopped touching herself. "You can't be."

“Take a look out your window.”

“You're pulling my leg.”

“What would you say if I told you I came over here with the intention of just being near you? If you were in bed, I would have sat out here until I was tired, and gone back home, but since you're up, and I'm also *up*...”

“You do realize this is stalkerish behavior, don't you?”

“Is it? I hadn't thought about that. Never done this with another woman before, but then again, I've never been with anyone like you. Go ahead, take a look out your window.”

He had to be teasing her, but when she peered out of her window to the parking lot, sure enough, leaning against his black BMW was Gabe, cell phone in hand. He waved in her direction.

“You're nuts!” She squawked.

“Only for you, baby. Are you going to let me in?”

“Okay, but let me grab a robe first.”

“That would be a waste of time. We both know the minute I step foot over your threshold, I'm just going to take it off.”

“Oh? Will you now?”

“Open the door wearing something other than your birthday suit, and you'll find out soon enough.” His threat made her tremble and her pussy clench.

When she opened the door, he was already standing on the other side. Their eyes connected, and without a word being spoken, Gabe pushed his way inside and shoved the door closed with his foot. Julie dropped her phone and wrapped her arms around his neck. The second her body made contact with his, her nipples pebbled to hardened tips and her body grew moist with unadulterated desire.

This man did things to her equilibrium that she couldn't quite explain, and she liked it. A lot.

“I couldn't stay away from you,” he murmured and leaned over to kiss her.

She was ready for him, her tongue meeting his. Julie couldn't fathom how much she wanted him, how much she'd missed him in such a short period of time. Her entire body sang to have him holding her against him so tightly.

Their tongues licked, swirled, and explored the other's. She could easily get intoxicated off the taste of him, but Julie didn't mind. Gabe carried her the short distance to the couch, dropped her on the cushions, and fell on top of her.

“I've had this goddamn hard-on since you left. Thank God you were awake, because I would have had a long, sleepless night ahead of me. Feel what you do to me.” He grasped her hand and guided it between their bodies, not stopping until it rested against his straining erection.

“Wow, you really did miss me.”

“I wasn't kidding. As much as I'd love to explore every inch of this delectable body, I need to be inside of you now. Do you mind?”

“No. See?” She took his hand, returning the favor, dragging it to her dripping-wet sex.

“Hot damn. You're already hot for me, aren't you?”

“Oh yeah. So are you going to keep talking, or are you going to fuck me?”

Gabe buried his face against her neck and sucked and nibbled on her flesh as he slid two fingers into her pussy. “You bet I am, Candy Girl. I just need a little taste first.” Slowly he eased his soaked digits out of her and licked all her cream off. “Mmm, just as sweet as I remembered.”

When Gabe slid off her, Julie whimpered, missing the feel of his weight pressing her into the sofa. “Get back over here.”

He tore off his clothes with a laugh. “You're insatiable.”

“For you. Here, let me help you with that.” She made a move to get up, but he held out his hand.

“No, don't. If you touch me again, I can't make any promises of being gentle.”

Julie ran her tongue suggestively over her lips. “Maybe I don't want you to. Now hurry up and bring that magnificent cock of yours back over here.”

“Vixen. Had I known you had such hidden depths, I would have made a move on you sooner. Your ex was crazy for not realizing what a gem he had in you.”

While his words did a world of good for her self-esteem, she didn't want to discuss Henry. In fact she didn't want to talk about anything that didn't involve Gabe's cock in her pussy. Dear God, when had she become addicted to his cock, because surely she was an addict?

Julie moaned, rubbing her clit to temper the fire burning within. If he didn't hurry up and get undressed, she vowed she'd rape the man. “Hurry!”

Once he was as naked as she was, he produced a condom and donned it over his burgeoning length. Gabe captured her hands and manacled both her wrists in one of his large hands and pinned them above her head as he slid over her.

“Open up for me, baby.”

She was too far gone to disobey him.

“That's it, just a little bit wider... Oh yeah, just like that.” He guided his cock against her slit, rubbing the bulbous head against her entrance, driving her insane with lust.

Julie lifted her hips. She would have thrown him on the floor and ridden him herself, if he didn't have her wrists pinned. “Stop teasing me. Please, Gabe, I need you.”

“And you will have me, baby, every single inch.” Surging forward with one powerful thrust, he drove into her strong and deep.

Julie was going to explode with passion. She was already so close to coming, but his cock nestled inside of her sent splinters of heat shooting to

every nerve in her body. She raised her hips as he began to move, meeting him thrust for decadent thrust.

“There was no way I could stay away from this pussy. You're an addiction.”

“Mmm, funny, because I was thinking the very same thing about you.” Julie wrapped her legs around his waist, and he sank even deeper inside of her. She clenched her muscles around him, reveling in the sensation of being so thoroughly stretched by his thickness.

The tighter she gripped his cock inside of her, the deeper he seemed to sink. The slow, steady pace he'd started with became harder and faster. He moved at a frenzied pace. “Oh yeah, Julie. That's it, baby. Move with me.”

An intense wave of feelings ripped through her body, and she came so hard, she screamed at the top of her lungs. “Gabe!” It seemed every time she came for him, her orgasm was more powerful than the one before it.

Gabe lowered his head, capturing that scream in his mouth as he stiffened and shuddered against her, signaling his own climax. Releasing her wrists, he fell against her, although their mouths remained melded together and their tongues danced.

He was the one to finally break the kiss, his breathing ragged. “That was fucking incredible.”

“I'll say. Mmm, at this rate we may as well stay awake and go to work.”

“You don't have to do that, Julie. You can call in sick tomorrow if you need to.”

She shook her head. “No. I won't take advantage of our relationship. I mean, what will everyone else say?”

“I never gave a damn what other people said about me, but for your sake, I'll make sure I keep things professional when other colleagues are around. You do great work, and I've seen you in action long enough to surmise that you'll maintain your same standard of excellence. So there shouldn't be any issues

where your coworkers are concerned. And if they do start talking, see me about it.”

She shook her head. “No. I need to stand up for myself. If someone says anything, I’ll deal with it. My personality isn’t going to change, but I do intend to assert myself more often.”

Gabe kissed the tip of her nose. “Good girl. Those are the kind of things I like to hear. I won’t give you special treatment at work.”

“And I wouldn’t want you too.”

He grinned. “But I can’t promise that I won’t push you on my desk and fuck you senseless. I’ve run that scene through my mind God knows how many times.”

“Sounds pretty kinky, but if we did that, people would know something was going on between us, because there’s no way I’d be able to not scream your name.”

“Maybe I’ll just have to find creative ways to keep the volume down.”

A yawn escaped her lips before she could stop it.

“Why don’t you take that bath you drew before I got here, and I’ll see you in the office tomorrow? Don’t come in until noon. You deserve it with all the extra hours you put in.”

She stretched. “No. I’d probably fall asleep in the tub. I think I’ll go to bed and have a bath in the morning. I’ll try to get to work as soon as I can tomorrow.”

“No rush.” He kissed her cheek.

Her eyelids grew heavy, and she fought to stay awake but sleep beckoned. She knew once she drifted off, Gabe would be gone. Too weak to fight sleep’s seductive pull, it barely registered when she was lifted into a pair of strong, corded arms and carried through her condo to her bedroom. Julie was barely cognizant when the covers were placed over her and lips brushed against her

forehead, but for some reason she was more content than she'd ever been before.

Chapter Eight

Gabe stared at his watch for the fifth time. The hand had only moved one minute since he last looked. Damn, how much longer would this blasted presentation be? The Ferdinand Project was one of the company's biggest moneymakers, and if his team screwed it up, it would be his ass on the line. Yet he couldn't concentrate on anything in front of him.

The speaker's words seemed to slur together, and the images projected on the large conference room screen were just a bunch of colored blotches to him. He should have been taking notes, or at the very least paying attention, but all he could think about was Julie and how good she'd felt and tasted the night before. Her cream was like wild honey on his tongue, and he must have spent at least an hour sucking her pretty little pussy, ramming his tongue into her tight hole, and nibbling on her clit.

He loved the way she moaned and writhed beneath him as his cock drove into her tight, wet sex. Five o'clock couldn't get here fast enough. Hell, this meeting couldn't get done fast enough.

Another half hour passed before the presenter wrapped up, and Gabe hadn't heard a single word. It was only when someone placed their hand on his shoulder that he was roused from his erotic musings.

"Gabe, meeting's over."

Startled, he looked up to see Jeff Spears, the marketing operations manager, hovering over him. The attendees were slowly filing out of the conference room. "Damn. I must have zoned out for a minute."

“More like for the entire hour. Your mind was clearly elsewhere. Is everything all right? This isn't like you.”

“I guess I have a lot on my mind to sort through. Tell you what, we'll have a quick meeting in my office in the morning when you have a minute and go over the finer points of this presentation. This is your baby, Jeff, and I trust your team can handle it.”

“That's not the problem, but I will need your approval for those requisitions I left with you earlier this week. I need them by noon tomorrow to get the proposal to our client on time.”

Gabe groaned inwardly, closing his eyes briefly. He'd forgotten all about them. Damn, that meant he'd need to stay late. He couldn't ask his assistant to stay and help him on such short notice. That wouldn't be fair to her. The thought of postponing his evening with Julie was disappointing, but he only had himself to blame. Hopefully she'd understand. “I'll have them to you first thing in the morning. Sorry for the delay. I guess things have been a little crazy for me lately.”

Jeff shot him a speculative look before nodding. “Thanks. I will catch up with you later.” When Gabe would have walked away, the other man paused. “I know this isn't any of my business, but if something's bothering you, I'm here to listen.”

Gabe smiled. Jeff was a nice guy. They'd gone out for beers a few times since Gabe had moved to the area, and were slowly becoming friends out of the office. Jeff reminded Gabe of some of his friends back home. “Thanks for the offer, but it's nothing serious. We can put it down to spring fever.”

“But it's summer. Let me guess. It's a woman, isn't it?”

Heat scorched his face, and he was sure it was probably beet red. There was no point in denying it now. Gabe shrugged. “I guess you can say there's someone special. I didn't realize it was so obvious.”

Jeff grinned. "It probably isn't to someone who doesn't know any better. But you remind me of myself when I first met my wife. My head was in the clouds twenty-four-seven."

"And how did you ever come off that cloud?"

"I never did, but I've managed to deal with it, and I'm sure you'll do the same eventually. Speaking of the wife, we'd love to have you for dinner one night. Bring your lady friend. We'll make it a foursome. Nothing formal, just a meal and maybe a board game afterward."

As cheesy as that sounded, the idea appealed to Gabe. Since moving away from family and friends to accept his current position, he'd neglected his social life. He hadn't even realized his life revolved around work until he began to spend time with Julie. He realized he missed having friends within a city's distance, someone to hang out with on occasion. Gabe wanted to do silly couple things with Julie, like meeting up with friends and having a night of charades and Scrabble. It was true since they'd been together all they ever did was fuck, not that he had a problem with that, but he wanted to take Julie out and introduce her to the world as his woman. By accepting Jeff's invitation, he would in essence be letting the entire company know that he and Julie were an item. Knowing some of the issues she already had with some of her colleagues, he didn't want to put her on the spot until he discussed things over with her.

"Thanks for the offer. I'll talk it over with her, and I'll let you know. But if that falls through, I have access to some club box seats if you'd like to go to a Phillies' game sometime."

"Sounds good. Let me know about dinner, okay?"

"Will do." Gabe waited until Jeff left the conference room before getting out of his seat and heading toward Julie's desk. Fuck it. He needed to see her smile to get through the rest of this maddening day.

As he neared her desk, he saw Doris Parker standing at Julie's cubicle. He couldn't see Julie, because she was sitting down, but whatever she was saying

to Doris was not what the redhead wanted to hear. His first instinct was to go over and see what the matter was, but something held him back.

Doris narrowed her eyes and glared at the object of her displeasure, which Gabe could only assume was Julie. “What do you mean, you can't do it? You've done it for me before. I don't see why this time is any different.”

“I have a project I need to finish this week, and I can't spare the time to go through your production reports as well.” Julie's voice drifted toward him, clear and firm.

That a girl.

Doris's frown deepened. “That's not the way to be a team player, you know, Candy Girl. I have a commitment tonight, and I can't possibly stay late. I don't understand what the big deal is. I'd return the favor. You know I would.”

“That's just it, Doris. You wouldn't. Anytime I've even asked, you always have an excuse. No. I can't help you this time. As a matter of fact, I have plans tonight as well, and working overtime to finish your work isn't part of them.”

Scarlet-painted lips thinned to an angry line as the redhead crossed her arms over her chest. “Oh. So that's how it's going to be? I guess you think you're pretty hot stuff since you've become *friends* with our director. Don't think I haven't noticed how you've been smiling and batting those big eyes of yours at him.”

Gabe had had enough. He wasn't going to stand by and let that harpy talk to Julie any way she wanted. Clearing his throat as he strode toward them to make his presence known, he halted in front of Julie's cubicle. It was quite clear she was upset. Red undertones colored her chocolate brown cheeks.

“Is there a problem, ladies?” His question was directed to both women, but he didn't look away from Julie. What he really wanted was to tell Doris to go take a flying leap, but remembering his position at the company—and not wanting to cause any further embarrassment to Julie—Gabe barely managed to bite his tongue.

Julie lowered her head. "Um, no. Doris and I were just discussing work."

Doris grinned and ran her finger down the side of his arm. By looking at her now, one would never have guessed she was pissed a few seconds ago. "That's right. Julie was just agreeing to help me out with my production reports, since I've been incredibly busy lately. Right, Julie? You did agree to help me, didn't you?"

Even though the bitch was lying through her capped teeth, Gabe waited for Julie's answer, perversely hoping she'd put the other woman in her place.

"Of course," Julie replied, barely above a whisper.

"What?" he practically shouted, not knowing which woman he wanted to strangle more.

"She's such a dear, our Julie is. Thanks, doll." Doris would have walked off as cool as she pleased if Gabe's sense of justice hadn't kick in.

"Doris, I think you're quite capable of doing your own production reports instead of throwing them off on Julie."

Her mouth gaped open like a fish. "B-but I'm working on two important projects, and we always help each other out in bind."

"And Julie is equally busy. Perhaps you should have a talk with Jeff to brainstorm ways to reprioritize your time."

All color drained from Doris's face. She nodded stiffly and walked away, but not before shooting Julie a malicious glare.

Gabe shot Julie a look of his own.

She sighed. "I know. You don't have to say it. In your office, right?"

"Damn right."

When they were behind the closed door in his office, he perched himself on the edge of his desk with folded arms. "Care to tell me what that was about? And before you lie to me, I heard every word. Why did you give in to her? You had every right to tell her to do her own damn work. Better still, you could report her for pawning her work off on you."

Julie wrapped arms around her body. Her head drooped and her lips were poked out, giving her the appearance of a wounded puppy. "I really wish you wouldn't yell."

He took a deep breath. "I'm sorry. I didn't realize I'd raised my voice. But I didn't appreciate hearing her talk to you like that. Come here, baby." He held out his arms to her. Gabe hated seeing her upset.

Julie walked into his embrace, positioning herself between his thighs. She rested her head against his shoulder. "I really wanted to tell her no. I was trying like hell to tell her no, but she kept pushing. And then when you came over, I didn't know what to say. I didn't want her to think I had to rely on you to fight my battles, so I caved. It's something I'm still trying to work on. You know how I told you a bit about my childhood."

"Yes." If he ever came across Julie's aunt and cousin, he'd probably choke them both.

"Well, I think every time someone pushes me in a corner, I get flashbacks of Corinne and Aunt Rae. I know it sounds silly, but that need to please pops up out of nowhere. I hate people not liking me."

Gabe caught her chin, forcing her to meet his gaze. "It's a fact of life, baby. Not everyone will like you, and those who only like you because of what you do for them aren't really your friends."

"You're probably right. Sheridan says the same things. I wish I could be more like her. She has absolutely no problem saying no to anyone. She has grown men three times her size afraid of her."

"Your friend sounds very wise. You should listen to her. Baby, what you have to realize is that you are a person to be valued. And no one has the right to take advantage of you."

A smile curved her pretty, plump lips. "Thank you for saying that. And you're right. I guess after a lifetime of conditioning, old habits are hard to break. I'm twenty-seven years old, and I don't want to be this way anymore."

“Then do something about it.”

“I've thought about that. I was thinking of seeing a counselor to sort myself out.”

“Sounds like an excellent idea. And if you need support, I'll be right there with you.”

She grazed the side of his face with her fingertips. “Thank you.”

“Words are meaningless. How about thanking me another way?”

“A kiss?” Her grin widened. “I think I can handle that.” Instead of moving closer so their lips would meet, she pulled out of his arms and slowly dropped to her knees.

The second she started working on his belt buckle, his dick shot to attention. This had to be a dream, because there was no way she was about to suck his cock in the middle of his office. He grasped her shoulders. “What are you doing?”

“What do you think I'm doing? I'm giving you the kiss you asked for. You never said where you wanted it.” She unzipped his pants and pushed them and his boxers down his hips.

He should have stopped her, told her they shouldn't do this in the office, but dear, sweet Lord, he was horny. Besides, he'd been thinking of exactly this all day long. So when he felt her warm breath against his dick, he nearly came right then and there.

Julie wrapped her fingers around his girth and gave him a light kiss on the head. “Mmm. It's crying. Look, a teardrop.”

Gabe looked down to see a drop of precum on the tip of his cock.

A pink tongue darted forward, capturing the dollop before returning to its owner's mouth. “Mmm.”

A wave of hot lust swept through his body, making it nearly impossible to stand. He was thankful for the support of his desk; otherwise he would have fallen over. Where was his sweet Julie, and who was this vixen in her place?

When she would have taken him into the warm cavern off her mouth, Gabe stopped her. His need for pussy was greater than his need for her to suck his dick. Hooking his hands beneath her arms, he lifted her to her feet. "Lift up your skirt and take off your panties."

"Right here?" Her brown eyes twinkled with excitement and lust.

"Fuck yeah. You didn't think you could get away with teasing me, did you? Now hurry up before I rip them off."

Julie's underwear was around her ankles and kicked to the side within seconds. Her breathing was ragged as she obeyed his command.

"Now lift up your skirt a little higher and show me that cunt."

She did.

Gabe licked his lips in anticipation. He liked that she was neatly trimmed. Her pussy lips were slightly puffy from her arousal. Lifting her against him with one arm, he aligned his cock to her sex and slowly guided it inside of her wetness with his free hand, thankful they'd decided to do away with condoms since she was on birth control.

He inhaled sharply as he slipped deeper into her tight cave. She was so fucking wet and tight, he could barely stand it. "That's it, baby. Wrap your arms around me just like that."

Julie locked her legs around his waist and her arms around his neck as she writhed against him, riding his cock as if her life depended on it. He loved the way she never held back anything. She was so open and honest in their lovemaking, it turned him on to the point where he wasn't sure how much longer he could last.

"Oh, Gabe. You feel so good inside of me."

"And it feels good being inside of my pussy. I don't know how I made it through the day without being close to you like this." He thrust harder into her to emphasize his words. "That's it, baby. Take it. Take this cock like you want it."

“I do.” She moaned.

Their bodies meshed together as they clung together, thrusting, bumping, and grinding into each other. No sound escaped their lips besides grunts of satisfaction and passion.

“I’m going to come.” Julie buried her face against his neck.

“Then let go, baby. Don’t hold back.”

The walls of her pussy tightened around him, holding his cock in such a vise that he exploded inside of her. “Ah shit. Julie!” He held her tight as he emptied himself into her.

Her body shook as if she was unable to stop, signaling her orgasm.

Their climax was swift and hard, leaving them both breathless. After several moments of panting and holding each other, Julie unlocked her legs and slid down the length of his body until her feet hit the floor.

Clutching a fistful of his shirt, she rested her head against his chest. “Wow.”

Gabe kissed the top of her head. “Wow is right. That was...intense.” No one had ever made him feel quite this way before, made him lose control like that. He prided himself on his professionalism, yet one touch from her and he was instantly driven insane. “I didn’t mean for that to happen in the office like that, but I have no regrets.”

“Me neither. I didn’t think I had it in me to be quite so honest. You bring out something in me, Gabe.”

He dropped another kiss on top of her head. “Perhaps it’s been there all along just waiting for the right time to come out. God help us all when you gain all your confidence, because you’ll certainly be a force to be reckoned with.”

She tilted her head to meet his gaze. “You think so?”

“Oh, I know so.” He held her for a few minutes more, reluctant to let her go. And then he remembered to tell her about canceling their plans. Gabe groaned. “Oh, I know this is bad timing, but I have to cancel on you tonight.

There are several requisitions I've neglected that I need to go over tonight before I leave.”

Julie pouted. “That's too bad. But we have the weekend.”

Gabe gave her a lingering kiss. “We do, at that.” Now was as good a time as any to bring up Jeff's invite. He mentioned the conversation he'd had with Jeff earlier. “So, what do you think?”

“Well...I don't know. If—I mean, what will people say? You and I will be out in the open.”

“You can't be concerned about what others say. We're two consenting adults. They'll find out about us sooner or later. Besides, we've been nothing but professional.”

She arched a brow at him. “Except for the time you screwed me senseless in your arms. You were so horny, you were standing the entire time.”

“Hmm, maybe I wouldn't have lost control if a certain someone didn't have her hands on my dick.”

She giggled. “Ouch.” Just as quickly as her mirth came, it disappeared. “Are you sure you're ready for us to go public with our relationship?”

“We have nothing to be ashamed of. I don't want this to be just a sexual thing. I care for you, and I don't want you to get the impression that I only want us to be together behind closed doors.”

She slowly licked her lips. “I guess I'm a bit worried that people will cry favoritism if you're nice to me. Or if you tell me I've done a good job. I take pride in my work, and I'm damn good at it. I just don't want anyone to think I'm slacking because of us.”

“And no one would dare, because you are good at what you do.”

“I'm sure Doris will have something to say.”

“Doris is an asshole. But you can't let every asshole in the world dictate your actions. We're in this together. What do you say, babe?”

She threw her arms around him and hugged him tight. “I say yes!”

* * * * *

"I'm really happy for you, girl. Gabe sounds like a real winner, unlike some of the duds I've been out with lately." Sheridan lamented on the phone later that night.

Since Gabe had to work late, Julie decided to have a relaxing night by taking a long, hot bath followed by a romantic comedy on cable with Rufus curled up on her lap. As she was dozing, Sheridan had given her a ring. "Oh no! What happened to Larry? Things were getting pretty hot and heavy with the two of you."

"Yeah, but he was getting on my nerves."

"What did he do?"

"He wouldn't stop talking about himself, and he wasn't interested in any conversation that didn't center around him. It got pretty boring after a while."

"Or maybe you were just bored with him."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"Let's be honest here; you're always finding fault with the men you date, no matter how insignificant."

"So you think I should be with an inconsiderate jerk?"

Julie sighed. "I'm not saying that. But you are kind of picky. What happened to that really nice guy, Michael?"

"Mama's boy."

"Keith?"

"His laugh was like nails on a chalkboard."

"Doug?"

"Don't remember."

"Uh, the guy you dated before Keith."

"Oh yeah. Him. Well...I can't really remember what it was about him. But I'm sure it was something annoying."

Julie chuckled. "Like I said before...you're picky."

Sheridan snorted. "No. I'm just someone who won't settle for just any man. But enough about my string of bad luck. Tell me more about Gabe. Do you think this guy is the one?"

Julie hadn't thought that far ahead. She wanted to be with him, and her feelings for him were deep, but she still had to work on herself before she could take the plunge into a serious commitment, to be the woman Gabe would be proud of and she herself deserved to be. "I don't know yet, but I do know I've never felt this way about anyone before. He makes me happy, and he sees me as the strong woman I'd like to be."

"Honey, you've always been strong; you just haven't figured it out yet. Julie, you are very special, and I'm glad this Gabe fellow sees it too. And hopefully one day you will as well."

"Actually, I intend to sign up for counseling. Maybe if I can iron my issues out with a professional, I can grow emotionally."

"That sounds like a terrific idea. I'm so proud of you, sweetie. Wow, so being with Gabe has brought these changes in you. I hope things work out for the two of you. Besides being rather yummy, if I do say so myself, any guy who makes you realize your worth, is okay by me."

"Everything is still so new right now, and I don't want to jinx it, nor do I want to rush things."

"That's a wise decision. Sounds like things are looking up for you."

Julie smiled. "Yes. You could say, I've decided to turn over a whole new leaf."

Chapter Nine

“Uh, Can—I mean, Julie, I thought you might want these to fill up your jar.” A hesitant voice spoke from behind her.

Julie finished typing the last line of the marketing strategy for a new project she was working on before turning around to see who had entered her cube. She silently congratulated herself for not immediately dropping what she was doing as she'd done in the past. Had it only been five months—since her life had been so thoroughly flipped upside down?

She was shocked to see Rob Danford holding a bag full of peanut butter cups. Ever since she'd blown up at him, he'd avoided her like the plague, but it made her realize she needed to make some changes in her life. With encouragement from Gabe and Sheridan, she'd signed up for counseling. She'd learned a lot about herself and how she could express herself in a healthy way without going too far.

Her coworkers were slowly changing the way they treated and viewed her. At first there had been a few of them who still called her Candy Girl, the name she now only allowed a certain someone to use. She'd had to set them straight. No longer would she let them relegate her to an unfeeling entity. There were still a couple of people who tried to get under her skin by calling her the forbidden name, but she usually ignored them, and if they wanted something badly enough, they called her Julie.

If she was busy, she told them so, and if she didn't have the time to help them with their work, she was firm in her assertion. It hadn't been easy in the beginning, and there were a couple of people who no longer spoke to her, Doris being one of them, but her days ran so much more smoothly.

Some habits were hard to break, however. Julie still kept her candy dish filled, but no longer took requests. If someone didn't like the sweets she provided, then it was up to them to get it themselves. Surprisingly a handful of people did. For the past couple of weeks she hadn't needed to buy any, because her dish was constantly being refilled. Word must have spread, and people realized Candy Girl was no longer taking anyone's shit.

“Rob, what a surprise. Thank you.” She took the offered candy and put it in her desk, as her dish was already full.

He rubbed the back of his head, shifting on his feet and looking embarrassed. “Well, uh...I just wanted to apologize.”

She raised a brow. “For what?”

“You know, for unloading all my problems on you and calling you Candy Girl. I didn't mean any harm by it. You were so nice and all—I mean, you still are, but I realize now that I took advantage of your good nature.”

Who was the pod person, and what had he done to the real Rob? “Umm, apology accepted. Think nothing of it.”

When he didn't leave, she wondered what he wanted, and she guessed it was to unload more of his issues on her. Glancing at her watch with a sigh, she saw that it was five minutes to lunch, at which time she'd be meeting Sheridan downtown. “If you need something, you'll have to make it quick. I'm leaving for lunch soon.”

“Actually, I wanted to say thank you.”

“For?”

“Well, you indirectly saved my marriage.”

“Oh?” She turned to log off her computer, only half listening.

“Vivian was going to leave me and take the kids with her. She said the only way she'd stay is if we went to counseling. She said I was inconsiderate of her feelings. And the day you blew up at me, I was pissed, but it got me to thinking. Maybe I have been taking advantage of you. If someone as laid-back

as you could lose patience with me, maybe there was something to what my wife was saying. I decided to give the therapy a shot, and well...Viv and I still have a long way to go, but things are getting better. And I just wanted to say thanks, Julie."

"Wow, thank you." This wasn't a confession she'd expected. Rob was known as the office slacker, but he was basically a good guy. She was happy to see him and his wife working out their issues. "I'm glad to hear that, and I appreciate your apology, and I owe you one of my own. I shouldn't have yelled at you the way I did."

"Thanks. Well, uh, I'll let you go. Enjoy your lunch." He ducked out of her cube in a hurry. It was obvious he wasn't used to apologizing, but at least he made the effort, and a little went a long way. As she walked toward the exit, she walked past Doris, who was standing at the reception desk and giving her the most ferocious frown.

Out of all her coworkers, Julie had considered Doris to be the closest thing to a friend she had in the office, but her true colors had come out once Julie started speaking up for herself. It didn't help matters that she and Gabe didn't hide their close relationship. They kept it professional during office hours, but often the two of them would go to lunch together when they could. And there were the times he'd stop by her cubicle to chat for a few minutes. They weren't blatant about their relationship, but it soon became obvious to some that they were on close terms. It seemed to drive Doris insane.

"Hi, Doris," Julie greeted, for the sake of being polite.

"Hmm. Enjoy your two-hour lunch," the redhead muttered sarcastically.

Julie halted midstep. "What's that supposed to mean?"

"Well, the boss is out today, and you'll do as you please since you're sleeping with him, right?"

Before she'd started counseling, Julie probably would have laughed off a comment like that or rushed off in embarrassment, but instead she looked

Doris dead in the eye with a smile. "I take an hour lunch just like everyone else. As for the sleeping with the boss, I do far more than sleep with him. Jealous?" With a wink, she turned on her heel and walked out the door with her head held high. As she made it to her car, she pumped her fist in the air.

Yes!

* * * * *

"I can't believe you said that, girl!" Sheridan threw her head back and laughed.

"She's been acting like a real pain in the ass lately, and why should I be ashamed of my relationship with Gabe? There's no rule against fraternizing at our company, and everything is kept very professional during office hours."

"Well, if it were me, I would trip that bitch when she was walking by." Sheridan shoved a forkful of salad in her mouth.

"Violence isn't the answer to everything. Besides, your legs are too short to stretch that far."

"Ha-ha, smart aleck. It's not like you're that much taller than me. And you're right, violence isn't the answer, but decking someone is a stress reliever. You should try it sometime."

"Uh, I think I'll pass. I'm going to try using my words instead. They've seemed to work for me so far."

"Hmm." Sheridan continued chewing with no real reply.

Julie could only shake her head. She often called Sheridan, Napoleon because of her short fuse and even shorter stature. Despite her propensity for violence, Sheridan's heart was in the right place, and she was loyal to a fault. She was the sister Julie had always wanted. "Things have been working out for me in therapy lately; maybe you should go."

Sheridan slung a braid over her shoulder. "No, thanks. I'm a woman of action. Not really a talker."

Her friend had a lot of anger issues stemming from the abandonment by her parents. And unlike Julie's foster care experience, Sheridan had had a rougher time. Being barely five feet tall, Sheridan scrapped quite a bit when they were younger, just to prove she was just as tough as anyone else. Even as an adult now, her friend was still a bit of a hothead, but Julie knew there was no point continuing this line of conversation. Sheridan would seek help when she was ready. Julie tactfully changed the subject. "Corinne still hasn't come back. I guess I've seen the last of her."

"And good riddance. She was a mooch anyway. I told you not to let her move in with you, but lesson learned, right?"

"Definitely." It still bothered the hell out of her that Corinne had disappeared the way she had, without so much as a word. She had obviously found another sucker to be with. Out of sight, out of mind. Someone else she hadn't heard from was Henry. He'd made a half-assed attempt to call and apologize, saying he was sorry for the way things had turned out and that he and Corinne were in love. Julie doubted that very much, because the only person Corinne loved was Corinne. Henry, on the other hand, was in the middle of an infatuation and would probably find out soon enough what his new "ladylove" was actually like.

"Sounds like things are going well for you. I'm glad one of us is enjoying life right now. My boss is a mega-asshole, and wouldn't you know it, I have to go away on a trip with him for two weeks next month."

"It won't be so bad, I'm sure."

"I'd rather swallow broken glass."

Julie stifled a giggle. Sheridan referred to her boss only as "the asshole" and always had the most amusing stories about how she'd kill him and dispose of the body. "Are things really that bad?"

Her friend shrugged. "He's just been on my case lately. I don't know what the hell his problem is, but I think it's probably time I start looking for another job. Hopefully something will pop up before I have to go on this stinking trip."

“Maybe he has a crush on you and doesn't know how to express himself. I remember when you first started your job and you gushed on and on about how sexy and fine he was.”

Sheridan snorted. “That was until I found out he has a new girlfriend every other day. He goes through them like normal folks do with underwear. He probably has hep C or something.” She scrunched up her nose. “No, thanks, girlfriend. And anyway, I didn't know then that he was such a fucking prick to work for. And if that bastard crowds my space one more damn time, I swear I'm going to knee him square in the balls. I don't give a shit if he'd built like a damn Viking. It's absolutely obscene how large that guy is.”

Julie grinned. The way her friend went on about her boss, the more she suspected Sheridan wasn't so averse to his charm after all. “Hmm, maybe he keeps crowding your space, as you put it, because he'd like to get closer to you.”

“Eww. Are you really trying to make me throw up here? I've seen the type of woman he dates: tall, blonde supermodel types. I haven't seen him with a short, curvy black woman before, and thank goodness for that. But enough about me and the asshole. How are things with you and Gabe? Sounds like things are heating up between the two of you.”

Julie couldn't keep the grin off her face. “Gabe is wonderful. Perfect. I have to keep pinching myself to make sure this is real. The sex is off the charts, but it isn't just the sex. He's considerate, passionate, and just an all-around great guy. He wants me to meet his parents the next time they're in town.”

“Are you nervous?”

“Of course. He's assured me they already know I'm black and they don't mind. He says they are just happy he's finally found someone nice—at least I hope they think I am. I talked to his mother on the phone once when she called Gabe while I was visiting. She seemed very sweet. But you never know”—Julie shrugged—“it could be a different story when I actually meet them face-to-face.”

"I'm sure everything will work out just fine, and you and Gabe's parents will get along fine. Ooh. You know what that means, don't you? He's ready to take that next step."

"But it's only been a few months."

"So. Do you really need to spend a year with someone to know they're the one?"

Her heart certainly couldn't argue with this point, but her head was full of doubt. Things were going so well for her right now, she was just waiting for the other shoe to drop. "I'm just scared. I've never felt like this about anyone before."

"Not even Henry?" Sheridan teased.

"Henry wasn't very exciting, and I never loved him. As far as I'm concerned, Corinne did me a favor on that front. That last phone conversation we had made me realize how lucky I truly am."

"Oh yeah? What's the little weasel up to?"

"It wasn't a really long talk. Gabe answered the phone when he called. I think he was a little surprised to see I'd moved on so quickly."

"Serves him right. I bet he probably thought he could worm his way back into your life once you got over your anger. I assume he and your cousin aren't together anymore?"

She shrugged. "Don't know. Didn't ask. He should have known I'd moved on when I didn't return any of his previous calls. Anyway, enough about him. Gabe is returning from his business trip today, and I wanted to surprise him with something special. I'm supposed to pick him up from the airport around eight. It's our five-month anniversary. What do you think I should do?"

"Do you have a key to his house?"

"Yes."

"How about you fix him a romantic dinner for two?"

"But that's so predictable."

“Not if you make yourself the dessert.”

Julie leaned forward, intrigued. “I’m listening.”

Sheridan grinned. “There’s a little shop I visit sometimes that sells exactly what you need.”

Good Lord, what was she getting herself into?

* * * * *

Julie pulled up in her driveway and was surprised to see a car already parked there. Henry’s. What the hell? Why was he coming by after all this time? She’d come back home to change, let Rufus out, and pick up her overnight bag before heading to the airport. She didn’t need the aggravation of dealing with Henry before her romantic evening.

As she got of her car, she noticed Henry’s car was empty. Was he already in her house, and how had he gotten a key? Annoyed beyond belief, she strode to her door, only to find it unlocked. That son of a bitch had a lot of damn nerve.

When she walked in, she was surprised to find Corinne lying on the couch, stuffing her mouth with bonbons, and randomly flipping through channels. She looked quite comfortable, as if she’d been there all afternoon. What the hell?

Seeing her cousin looking so at home after what she’d done made Julie’s blood boil. She slammed the door shut to get Corinne’s attention, but the other woman didn’t so much as flinch. Storming over to the couch, Julie yanked the remote control out of her cousin’s hand and flipped off the television.

Corinne shot up to a sitting position. “Hey, what the hell is your problem?”

Julie knew her cousin had no shame, but this took the cake and the candles. “You can ask me that after what you’ve done?”

Corinne shrugged. “You didn’t want Harvey anyway. He told me you’d moved on.”

“His name is Henry. Or have you forgotten already? You shouldn't have, considering you're driving his car.”

A smile curved Corinne's lips. “Actually it's my car now. He gifted it to me. It's a older model, but I'm sure I can trade up when I meet someone in a better financial position.”

“He gave you his car?” Julie asked incredulously.

“Of course.” Corinne fondled her breasts. “These babies can get me anything I want. Best investment I've ever made.”

“Has it gotten you a job?”

“Haven't you been listening? Why should I work when I have these?” She shook her breasts.

“Why aren't you still with Henry? I assume that's where you've been.”

Corinne rolled her eyes. “He thought I actually wanted to be exclusive with him. He was so pathetic. Poor thing. Besides, like I said, I'll find something better with the help of the girls.”

Julie had had enough. “Well, that's a good thing, because you and your fake tits can leave and find a place of your own. I'm going to take my dog out for a walk, and when I get back I want you out of here. And if any of my stuff is missing this time around, you'll be sorry.”

Corinne rolled her eyes. “You wouldn't kick me out. You don't have the guts.”

“I wouldn't test me, if I were you.”

Corinne glared. “Don't be an ungrateful bitch. My mother took you into her home when no one wanted your lame ass.”

“If I'm so lame, then you'll have no problem getting the hell out of my lame house, will you? And don't ever throw your mother taking me into her home in my face again. She only took me in because of the monthly check she received, which I saw not a dime of. Like I said, I'm taking Rufus for a walk. If you're still here when I get back, you'll find out exactly what kind of guts I have.”

Julie took her dog for a walk, making sure to take the longer route in order to give Corinne enough time to clear out. She was angry with herself for not changing her locks, but things had been going so well, it had completely slipped her mind. Just when she thought her cousin couldn't be any ballsier, she outdid herself. When she got back to see the car still parked in the same spot, something within her snapped. She patted Rufus on the head. "You're about to see Mommy get very angry."

She walked into the house to see Corinne lying in the same spot she'd been in earlier. Julie calmly took Rufus to her bedroom and closed him in, grabbed a rubber band to pull her hair into a ponytail, and rolled up her sleeves. She walked into the kitchen and pulled out a pasta pot and filled it with cold tap water, humming all the while.

After carrying the pot to the couch, she tipped it over and poured the contents on her cousin. Corinne shot up with a scream. "You fucking cunt! What the fuck is your problem?" Corinne raised her hand as if to strike, but Julie was ready. Julie took the pot and whacked the bitch in the face with it. When Corinne crumpled to the floor screaming, Julie took her by the weave and dragged her to the door with Corinne screaming obscenities the entire way.

She opened the door and shoved her cousin out. "If you ever come back, you'll get more of the same. If you see me on the street, pretend you don't know me, because as far as I'm concerned, you no longer exist!" And with that, she slammed the door. Julie sagged against the door for support, feeling emotionally drained. She couldn't believe she'd just done that. And it felt good. Damn good.

Glancing at her watch, she realized she only had a few minutes to get ready before heading off to the airport. There was one last thing she needed to do tonight.

Chapter Ten

Gabe had a serious headache, and all he wanted to do was relax on his couch with a glass of wine and snuggle with Julie. Damn, he'd missed her. Missed seeing her smile and the way those big brown eyes would light up when he walked into a room. He missed the way she gave herself to him so completely, she left no doubt in his mind that she belonged exclusively to him.

They'd only been together for five months, but there was no denying his feelings any longer. He was head over heels in love with Julie Bennett. Why else would she be his last waking thought at night and the first when he woke up? He'd told his mother all about her and was anxious to have them meet.

His mother had always said when he found that special someone, he'd know right away. Perhaps he'd always sensed Julie was the right one. She was a far cry from the leggy blondes and sultry, redheaded model types he used to date. It was probably one of the reasons why he loved her so much. She was so much more than just a pretty outer shell. She was the total package, and it warmed his heart to see her blossoming and asserting herself more.

Though he would like to take credit for her change, Gabe knew she'd had it in her all along, and he couldn't be more proud. But where was she now? He'd called earlier to say his plane would land around eight. It had arrived at the gate a half hour early, and he didn't mind the wait, but it was nearly nine. Had something happened to her? He had told her he'd meet her at the baggage claim area in terminal B at eight thirty.

He dug into his breast pocket for his cell phone and was about to punch her number in when he heard her call his name from across the other side of the terminal.

“Gabe!” she shrieked, running toward him.

He barely had enough time to brace himself for the collision when she tossed herself into his arms, nearly knocking him over. She placed kisses all over his face. “I missed you so much.”

He returned her enthusiastic kisses. “Whoa, sweetheart. Easy. Now calm down and give me a proper kiss.”

She smiled. “With pleasure.”

He lowered his head to kiss her parted lips. Damn, he'd nearly forgotten how sweet her mouth was. Like raw honey. He didn't know how he'd gone these past four days without his Candy Girl. He pressed his tongue forward to meet hers. Their tongues circled, tasted, and licked in a ravenous meeting of their mouths.

His cock sprang to immediate hardness, and he wanted nothing more than to rip her clothes off right then and there. The airport security probably wouldn't appreciate it, though. He needed to get her home, and quick. With reluctance, he pushed her away. “Hmm, that's more like it. How about we get home and finish what we started?”

“Yes. I have something special planned for you tonight.”

He groaned. All he wanted to do was fuck her senseless to make up for the four days he'd been away from her, but he didn't want to hurt her feelings. “Oh? What do you have planned?”

“It's a surprise.”

“Here, let me get this bag for you.” She picked up his carry-on.

He followed her out of the terminal. Walking with an erection was a painful ordeal.

In the car she drove at a breakneck speed as she explained why she was late.

“You did what?” he exclaimed.

“I poured—”

“I heard you; I guess I didn't believe what I'd heard. Wow, Julie. I didn't know you had it in you.”

She laughed. “Neither did I, but damn if it didn't feel good. I finally understand what Sheridan is always going on about. I mean, violence is usually the last resort, but I have no regrets.”

“I'm sure your cousin does, though.” Gabe couldn't help but laugh. His meek little mouse had turned out to be a tigress in disguise, and he found it sexy as hell.

“Does it sound bad to say I no longer think of her as a cousin? Since we were kids, she's done nothing but go out of her way to make me miserable. I remember once my aunt bought me a really nice sweater, one of the few nice gifts she'd ever given me. Corinne spilled grape juice on it and said it was an accident, even though there was no way it could have been by the way she tossed it at me. She's always been so spiteful.”

Gabe's heart went out to her. Though he didn't say so, he was secretly happy she'd gotten physical with her cousin. There were some people who wouldn't get a clue unless you did something drastic, and Corinne sounded like that kind of person. “Perhaps she was jealous of you. Like I said before, there's something about you that draws people to you like a moth to flame. Even after you started setting your coworkers straight, they still came to you for advice and someone to talk to. Not as often, granted, but face it, you have a gift.”

“I never minded people talking to me; it's the taking-advantage-of-me part I didn't like. Everyone has been more considerate lately. Even Rob apologized to me today.”

“Rob Danford?” She couldn't be talking about the same guy he was thinking of.

“Yes. Rob Danford. I think you're going to see a big change in him in the next several weeks.”

“Seeing is believing, I guess.”

He told her about his business trip the rest of the way to his house, and Gabe breathed a sigh of relief when Julie turned into his driveway.

Julie grabbed his carry-on and laptop, and he took his suitcase out of the car. The second he walked into his house, he raised his brow in awe. The room was lit with the warm glow of electric candles. He turned to Julie. “You did this?”

She nodded. “I have a special dinner waiting for you.”

He wasn't particularly hungry, but since she'd gone to so much trouble, he pretended enthusiasm. “Everything looks great.”

Julie led him to the dining room table. “Have a seat, and I'll bring you dinner.”

He didn't wait long before Julie returned. When he saw what she was serving, he laughed out loud: pizza from his favorite pizzeria and an ice-cold beer. “Ta-da!” She giggled, taking a seat.

“Looks like you outdid yourself.”

“If there had been more time, I would have made you something fancy. Besides, I put all my effort into dessert.”

He liked the sound of that. “And what's for dessert?”

“You'll only get dessert if you finish your dinner.”

Gabe chuckled. “Okay, you win.” He tore into the pizza, realizing he was hungrier than he'd thought. He noticed Julie barely touched her food, but she seemed to be waiting anxiously for him to finish. He took a swig of beer to wash down the pizza before placing the can on the table. “Now, tell me what's for dessert.”

Julie leaned across the table, her expression serious. Gabe wondered if he should be concerned. “Julie?”

She took his hand in hers. "I just wanted you to know how much these past few months together have meant to me. Because of you, I'm a different person."

He shook his head. "No. Not because of me. You had the power to change your life all along."

"I know, but you were the catalyst, and for that I thank you. You've made me happier than I ever thought I could be. And I just wanted you to know, I love you."

Gabe closed his eyes briefly and opened them again, in case he was dreaming. "Say that again."

"I love you, Gabe."

"Again."

"I love you!"

He got out of the chair and then pulled her out of her seat and hugged her close to him. "Aw, sweetheart. You have no idea how much I've wanted to hear those words from your sweet lips. I love you too."

She looked up at him with glistening eyes. "Do you mean it?"

"Yes. I do. I think I've been in love with you since I first laid eyes on you. Let's go upstairs." Grabbing her by the hand, he attempted to pull her along with him, but she wouldn't budge.

"No. Not yet. Not before you've had dessert."

"Dessert be damned. I haven't seen you in four days, and I'm going to go insane if I don't get some pussy."

"I promise it will be worth your while." She yanked her hand free and began to undress.

What was the woman doing to him? Didn't she realize being this close to her with a fucking hard-on was excruciating? As she undressed, revealing her cocoa skin to his gaze, his engorged cock strained on the inside of his pants. His mouth watered, and his fingers itched to get ahold of her.

When she was down to her bra and panties, his mouth fell open. Was that what he thought it was? “Is that...?”

She grinned. “Dessert.”

Julie had been a bit self-conscious when she'd purchased the candy bra and thong at the adult lingerie store Sheridan had suggested she visit. But it seemed so appropriate. Sheridan had suggested edible undies, but when Julie had seen this getup fashioned from the same type of ingredients candy necklaces and bracelets were made of, she had to get it.

The expression on Gabe's face told her she'd made the right choice. She turned around to give him the total view. Beneath the weight of his heated gaze, Julie had never felt more beautiful than she did in this moment.

“Mmm, you look good enough to eat, Candy Girl.”

“Then eat me all up.”

He strode toward her, then scooped her up in his arms and carried her to his bedroom in record time. Gabe ripped his clothes off, tearing fabric before sliding on the bed to join her.

“Oh God, you're beautiful. And you're all mine.” He ran his hand along the length of her body with a reverence that made Julie shiver. “I don't know where to begin.”

“Anywhere you want, lover.”

He nibbled at the sugary bra, slowly exposing her breasts. With each new inch of skin he revealed, he'd flick his tongue over it, creating the most delicious tingling sensation between her legs.

Gabe took his time alternating between nibbling on the candy bra and sucking and nipping her breasts. Her nipples came alive in his mouth as he sucked them each in turn. “Oh, Gabe. This feels wonderful.”

“And you taste wonderful, Candy Girl.”

His hands, lips, and tongue roamed over her breasts and belly. Gabe circled her navel with his forefinger and moved it lower still. He cupped his

palm over her pussy. “You're so hot. That's one of the things I love about you, Julie. Your pussy is always ready for sucking and fucking.”

Settling himself between her thighs, he went to work on the candy underwear. “This is a particularly favorite flavor of mine. Candy coated with pussy juice.”

Julie giggled. “You're being silly.”

“I'm being serious. The very taste of you is intoxicating.” To prove his point, he pushed her underwear aside and slipped his tongue into her channel.

“Gabe.” She groaned. The point of her wearing the sugar-coated underwear was for him to eat until he had her completely naked, but Julie wasn't sure she could last that long. She'd been without his cock for four days, and she needed him now.

As if he'd read her thoughts, his eyes locked with hers. “You can't wait either, can you?”

She smiled. “No.”

“Good. I was dying here.” He ripped off what was left of the panties and just as quickly eased into her.

She wrapped her arms and legs around him, sighing with the feeling of completeness. Loving him and knowing he loved her back was an awesome feeling. On a journey to find her voice and discover who she was, she'd found herself love and the answer to her question. She was Candy Girl.

Gabe's Candy Girl.

As he moved in and out of her, his breath brushing her ear, he whispered, “I love you.”

 THE END 

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Eve Vaughn

Eve Vaughn enjoys writing above all else. She began writing short stories to amuse herself when she could form letters. Mischievous as a child, she lost her television privileges quite often and found writing to be her outlet. Besides writing, Eve likes reading, baking, volunteering, traveling, and spending time with her family. She currently resides in the Philadelphia area with her husband and turtle.

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