

ELLORA'S CAVE *Moderne*



# Love Doctor

MARI FREEMAN

## **Love Doctor**

*Mari Freeman*

*Love Doctor is a stand-alone sequel to Beware of the Cowboy.*

Just call Becky Cooper the Love Doctor. Everyone else does. What else would you call a woman who dates men, fixes their relationship issues then sends them off to find love and marriage? Her stellar record is nine for ten. Well, technically *ten* for ten...the tenth is in a relationship not yet recognized by the state of Texas. As far as Becky's concerned, she's providing a much-needed, super-fun service.

She's up for more fun and games during a business trip to New York, where she lets a sexy stranger control the remote to her vibrator. What follows is a night of heat to rival the Texas sun. Then she learns Craig, her nightlong stud, is actually E.C. Hill—attorney for the festival her company is hosting. Craig's reputation as a workaholic precedes him. He's precisely the sort of man in need of her services. It's Love Doctor to the rescue!

Craig, however, is less in need of therapy than Becky suspects...and has his own brand of medicine for the Love Doctor.

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Love Doctor

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# *LOVE DOCTOR*

**Mari Freeman**

### *Dedication*

Thank you, Kelli, for all your patience *and* all your pushing. This book wouldn't have been the same without you. (Just like all the rest.) I continue to learn and grow from your dedication. To Michael, for reading, caring, and nurturing the fun and the romance.

### *Acknowledgements*

My friend Holly endured “the spill” in real life. Her retelling of the tale made me laugh until I snorted and I was unable to do her actual experience justice in this book. She's let me use her humiliation to entertain you. And I shut down her email with my non-work-friendly stories. She's a good sport.

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## Chapter One

"You owe me an appletini, Becky." Tanisha snapped her cell phone closed. "I just got confirmation of the last payment from Mrs. Anderson. I told you I would collect from them. Now you pay up." She tipped her head to indicate the direction of the bar.

Becky huffed. "Do you see how crowded it is over there?" Everyone in the place was under twenty-five, she noted. The sight of all the super-skinny girls in ultra-short skirts was beginning to make her feel old. *One more reason to dislike this place.*

If the club hadn't been located inside their hotel, Becky wouldn't be here. She needed to keep it short tonight. A drink or two, a couple of dances and she needed to hit the hay. They had a big meeting in the morning.

"I'm getting thirsty and I'm starting to feel the need to shake my groove thing." Tanisha shooed Becky with her hands. "Go on. I want the good stuff too. None of that cheap vodka."

Becky shook her head. "Okay. Okay." Tanisha had collected an unpaid invoice, adding about six grand to the bottom line for the month. Becky definitely wouldn't skimp on her. And since Becky was now a full partner in Main Event Party Planning, she had a vested interest in the company's bottom line. Her partner, Liza, would be pleased.

As she headed in the direction of the nearest bartender, she realized the crowd had eased. A popular song must have coaxed many of the kids on to the dance floor. The drink retrieval wouldn't be such a difficult task after all.

She'd thought Dallas, her home base, was an expensive city, but the prices in this New York club made Becky swear. Out loud. She reached into her pocket to fish out enough cash to pay for the twenty-one-dollar martini, pulling out her bills, her driver's license—and a little remote fob. It was black with a bright pink heart on it.

Becky surreptitiously pushed the first button and the vibrator in her pussy started up on a smooth, low setting. A push of the second button and it added a very slow, pulsing sensation against her G-spot. *That's the ticket.* With her little friend, the bullet vibe, she could now handle the teenybopper bar and its distorted sound system.

Tanisha loved the retro-disco scene, but Becky looked around without much enthusiasm. To her, the atmosphere felt thick with desperation. It passed for a night of dancing with her friends, but the men crowded into the room all looked overeager, grungy and unappealing. Evidently, an eagle printed on a distressed T-shirt was cool. She guessed there weren't this many eagles left in the Pacific Northwest.

She spotted maybe two men in the room over twenty-five. And they were the lingerers you find in every dance club. Those slimy guys who were stuck desperately trying to live out their glory days. They wanted nothing more than to hang out in the hip clubs and chase twenty-something girls. Not the kind of man Becky was interested in. None of these guys even qualified for her fixer-upper program.

She was the Love Doctor at home. She dated guys long enough to find out what their relationship issues were then tried to help them break their bad habits. Once a guy remembered to pick up his dirty underwear from the bathroom floor and understood women need more from weekends than watching hockey games and sports news, she broke it off. Things were tidy that way. It had become her method of operation. Besides, Becky was only in her early thirties. She felt no need to rush into marriage.

The bartender reached over the line of multicolored drinks in front of her to hand back her change. Drink and remote in one hand, Becky attempted an ill-advised one-handed sort through the bills and coins in the other, trying to leave a tip. In the process, she dropped the remote control to her vibrator.

"Shit." Becky scattered her change in an attempt at a quick retrieval, but only managed to slide the fob off the wet, slippery bar. It hit the floor and both the pulse and the vibrations stopped. *Shit!*



Becky recovered her money, shoving it in her pocket. She reached for the fob—but it was no longer on the floor.

It was in a hand. A *male* hand.

Still crouching, she glanced up to see the owner of the hand and found herself nose-to-nose with a good-looking man crouching beside her, his eyes as green as hers. Becky smiled politely. He glanced down at the remote in his hand and back at her without straightening up. She could easily read the recognition on his face. He knew what he was holding. It wasn't as if her car remote would have a sparkly pink heart on it.

They straightened together and she found herself still looking him right in the eye.

"I would think you'd want to keep a good hold on something like this," he said, still not breaking eye contact. He was smiling. It was a genuine smile that reached his eyes, the kind of smile that reassured frightened puppies and old people. His hair wasn't standing up and spiky like that of most of the kids in the bar and his sideburns showed a hint of gray. In the sun, she was sure it would be almost salt-and-pepper.

Becky chanced a look down at his hand. It was gently holding the remote, his thumb brushing back and forth over the controls without applying enough pressure to change the settings. She felt herself tingling, wondering if he would push a button or not. Her heart was thumping as hard as the music. She wanted him to do it.

She squeezed her muscles in anticipation. There were several settings on the bullet vibe inside her. She wanted to be surprised when he pushed her buttons. The suspense of the moment made for a very sexy cocktail.

The man's expression changed. One eyebrow rose and a crooked little grin crossed his lips. Was he trying to determine what she wanted? She thought so. The stranger glanced down to his hand again. He tapped the bottom button with his thumb, but not hard enough to actually restart the vibrations. Slowly, his gaze shifted back to hers. Becky gave him a tiny shrug.

His eyes widened momentarily and he shifted his weight from one foot to the other. He wanted to play. But did he have the nerve? Did *she*, really? She watched several

expressions move over his handsome face as he seemed to be trying to decipher the situation. She wondered just how much was showing on her own face.

At some point she would enjoy spending time analyzing this moment, but not now. This guy was a complete stranger. She should in no way be tempted to let him control her vibrator. It would be outrageous, slutty.

*And it would be oh so much fun.*

She was out of town. No one here knew her from Eve. It would be a little game for an hour or so. No harm. Right?

She knew her answer. What would his be? She licked her lips before speaking.

"You have a license to use one of those things?" she asked without a hint of shame in her voice. She was doing her best to keep her cool. Her mind made up, her body was screaming for him to push the button. Any button. Now.

His eyes widened slightly once again and then he tilted his head to the side. "I let it expire last year. It's been awhile since I've had my finger on a trigger like this. Is it locked and loaded?"

"I like to keep one in the chamber. Always prepared, I say."

He gave her a satisfied grin and nodded a slight bit. He was willing to play. Becky stood firm, trying hard not to show the degree of excitement coursing through her. He had the next move. He took a sip from his glass and set it slowly back on the bar. No rush. A cool character, this one.

It was turning out to be a very interesting evening after all.

"Are you drinking that thing or are you just going to stand there holding it all night?"

He gestured to the martini glass in her hand. Tanisha's appletini. Becky had forgotten all about it. She'd spilled half of it as she'd fumbled to retrieve the remote and her change. Oh well. She'd buy her friend another one. Which reminded her...

She glanced across the room and, indeed, all the girls were watching.

Tanisha had spent her childhood summers in New York with her grandmother, and she'd called two of her cousins to join them tonight. All the women were several years younger than Becky, but she had needed to get out for a bit. She looked back at the green-eyed man holding her remote.

"I'm here with some friends. I should take Tanisha her drink." She looked over at the table and back to the guy again. He looked so smugly confident standing there with that remote, poised to fire.

"I suppose you should." He pushed the top button. "See you around," he said – and walked away with the remote.

Becky let out a small gasp as the vibe roared back to life. The burst of pleasure caused her to break her concentration for a slight moment and she lost her grip on the top-heavy martini glass. It bounced on stained flooring, but didn't break. She reached down to retrieve the glass and her mystery man was gone from view when she turned to order another drink.

If she had any reservations, it was too late. The vibrator was humming on the lowest speed. The whole situation had her so wet she could feel the slickness of her thong. The urge to reach down and rub her clit was almost overwhelming. The act of ordering and replacing the drink proved to be enough of a distraction to allow her to shake it off, gain a bit of composure.

That little incident made the drink in her hand a forty-two-dollar martini. *Worth every penny.*

She thought about the stranger again as she made her way back to the table. This could be a long night. She scanned the room, not finding him. He could have decided she was too much of a slut and left the building with her remote. Remembering the spark in his deep-green eyes, Becky was confident he was still around and it was merely a matter of time before she would feel his presence.

Or maybe she was certifiable.

"You can't pick one up here. You don't have time to *fix* him," Tanisha quipped when Becky reached the table, making bunny-ear quote marks in the air. "Even *you* can't fix one in two days."

"You never know." Becky handed her the drink. "I'm that good." And she was. She didn't mind Tanisha poking fun at her, either. She liked playing the Love Doctor role. Helping guys get over their relationship hang-ups and move on to find true love was just fine with her. She found 'em, fixed 'em and sent 'em on their happy little way.

Usually they landed directly in the arms of a wife. Her record was nine and one. Nine had gone on to happy marriages and one was, well...in a committed relationship the state of Texas did not yet recognize.

"Yeah. But two days?" Tanisha took a sip of her overpriced beverage.

Becky wiggled as she sat, adding to the pleasing hum of the vibrator. "Remember Paul?"

Tanisha rubbed her finger to her forehead. "I don't think so."

"The piano player with the inferiority complex."

Tanisha sighed. "Lord yes. You're right. One weekend with you in that dungeon place and he was a new man."

"Actually, it was less than two days. He thought no woman would ever look past his rather large nose. It only took one night before he realized his fingers were far more talented than even *he* knew. And I'll tell you what—those fingers could make any woman see past his nose. Those digits were a delight." She looked around for the gorgeous man with the green eyes. "But that guy at the bar was just a friendly flirt. We have work to do in the morning."

Becky thought of the *Peanuts* cartoon she had pinned up on the wall by her computer. It featured Lucy in her little wooden stand with the sign that reads, "The doctor is IN." Today, the Love Doctor was OUT. She had a festival to put on.

Craig watched from the shadows. He'd taken up residence in a dark corner that wasn't very far from her table of friends. She was still trying to get the bartender's attention to replace the drink she'd dropped. He hoped the remote had enough range to work from this position, at least to start with.

Questions rumbled through his mind. Who was this woman? What kind of sexual confidence must she have to give him control of her toy? How far did he think he could push this little game?

Very far. He hoped.

After adjusting his swelling cock so his jeans weren't mashing it, he decided he'd better calm down a bit. This beautiful woman may be inclined to play "surprise me" with the remote for a while, but that would probably be as far as it went. There was no sense in getting too worked up.

He told himself that a couple of times, but his cock and his imagination were still thinking about the vibrator in her pussy.

As the redhead left the bar, he realized he hadn't even asked her name. He watched her move and wondered how she managed to return to her table, second drink intact, with a vibrator humming away inside her. Her friends were chattering away – no doubt asking about him and why she had taken so long. She laughed, letting her head fall back. He loved to see a woman who enjoyed laughing. What an intriguing creature this lady was, and that long, curly hair was simply irresistible. He wanted to run his fingers through it.

She leaned forward to say something over the music, very close to the ear of the equally beautiful black woman sitting beside her. The woman's face lit up and she laughed.

No *way* had she told her friend about the game...

He pushed the top button on the remote once more, and then the bottom, looking for a reaction. His target closed her eyes, her hand slid under her hair and she rubbed the back of her neck. He held his breath as she squirmed in her seat a little.

He wished he had a better knowledge of the remote and the levels. He'd played with one of these at a party. His friend had bought one for his wife and had been showing it off. Craig knew that one of the buttons varied the speed and one varied the pattern of the vibrations. He had no clue which button had which effect—only that it appeared to be doing *something* to the woman at that table.

Whatever it did, it was working just as well for him as it was for her. The whole situation was driving him insane. He wanted to feel her pussy right now, wanted to know how wet he was making her, wanted to know how much she could take before she gave up or changed her mind and walked up and smacked his face.

He was expecting her to rush off to the ladies' room to take the thing out any second. Instead, she opened her eyes and looked around the room. She wasn't panicking at all. Her lips pulled back into a secret, sexy smile that was just for him. It didn't matter if she could find him or not. She knew he was close enough to watch her.

He pushed the bottom button, still not knowing if he was changing the speed or the variation of the blast. She straightened and reached for the drink she had given to her friend. She slammed down over half the martini. The woman protested but his little redhead laughed it off and leaned away to talk to one of the other women.

He scanned the room. Never would he normally have come to this place on his own. He'd met his cousin in the coffee shop in the lobby tonight and, for the third time, Tina had begged him to represent her animal-rights group. Craig had turned her down yet again. He'd managed to dance around the rejection without too much damage to his familial ties. He *was* a litigator after all. In the end, she seemed happy with the referrals he'd suggested but he'd sorely needed a drink.

He looked down at the device in his hand and stroked the buttons. If not for that meeting, he'd never have met this woman and he'd never have gotten hold of this little remote.

He needed to readjust himself again. From the looks of it, she was taking it all better than he was. Craig was ready to grab her, drag her out into the lobby and check them

into one of the hotel rooms. His imagination was running wild. He pushed the top button again.

The redhead jerked forward, almost coming off her stool. Whatever that did, it was a doozie.

She looked around the room again, but still didn't find him. She stretched her back, moving her shoulders in a circle as she sat upright. The black woman looked to be questioning her. She shook her head and took another sip of the shared martini. Maybe he should send her a drink of her own.

He flagged down a waitress, ordered what he'd heard her order earlier and asked that it be sent over. It didn't take the waitress long to deliver it—along with a note he'd scratched on a napkin.

*Enough?*

He watched her face light up as she read the note and then watched it grow determined as she penned her reply. She took the drink and returned the note to the tray. She leaned toward the waitress and said something to her over the music. The waitress laughed then turned to leave.

She came straight back to him and handed over the napkin. He opened it eagerly.

*No wonder you lost your license.*

He laughed and tipped the waitress.

"She said to tell you something too."

He loved playing with this woman, and not just because of the sexual tension it was building. "Yes?"

"She said, 'You turned it off, dork'."

Craig smiled and nodded to the waitress. Inside, he was chuckling to himself. That was about his luck. Here he'd thought that last one was a killer, and it turned out to be a big letdown. And how long had it been since anyone had called him a dork?

The other women were dragging his redhead on to the dance floor. This was his chance to get in closer and up the ante in this game.

He took a swig from his own drink and headed to the floor. He tried to remember the last time he'd danced. Two years ago, maybe three? He felt a little self-conscious. But at the same time, dancing his way toward a group of women he didn't know was a bit of an adventure.

Craig didn't hesitate. He moved right up behind her and matched the rhythm of her swinging, gorgeous hips. He made sure he didn't touch her but he leaned in close enough to speak.

"Dork?" he shouted, confident her friends couldn't hear the conversation over the thumping music.

She swung around, not missing a beat, dancing with him and not her friends. Maybe her friends *did* know the game they were playing. At this point, he wanted this woman and he didn't care what anyone knew. He just had to find a way to get her alone for a while so he could convince her to spend a little time with him.

Becky flashed him a very sensual smile. She knew the moment she hit the dance floor he would come out after her. If their places had been reversed, she would have done the same thing. Neither the sound of his voice nor the presence of his body behind hers startled her.

She was going crazy. The intensity of the vibrations had been one big turn-on. It had been hot and so good, but now that the vibrations were gone, the lack of sensation was making her want more, and not just the hum of the vibrator. She pictured herself with him in her mind as she felt the tingling between her legs.

Having his body this close to hers, moving with perfect rhythm as he danced, made her even more attracted to the man. She let her gaze travel his body as he seductively swung his hips from side to side. She could picture his hips moving like that with no



clothes on. The way she wanted this guy was primal. He was handsome and adventurous, two things she liked in a man. He even smelled appealing.

But the fact remained that she was in New York on business and it was her biggest event yet. Months of preparations were on the line this weekend. She didn't want to screw around with a one-night stand and not be sharp at the early-morning meeting for the ArtMania festival.

He slid his hand around her waist and pulled her a little closer. He leaned in enough that she could feel the heat of his breath on her neck. "I guess I need some lessons before I can get my license back. You a qualified instructor?" He pushed the top button again. His attention and playfulness were driving her crazy.

The revived vibrations caused Becky to shudder. Her body rocked so hard there was no way he didn't feel it. It didn't matter if he had. Her pussy was on fire. She was wet through her thong. Her shirt was thin, letting the heat from his hand warm her skin. Fantasies started rolling through her mind. She could have done him right there on the dance floor and not cared if everyone stopped their dancing to watch. Hell, she was turned on even *more* thinking about everyone watching. They seemed so physically suited as their bodies moved.

He pulled her body against his. "I guess you are. How about we get out of here and discuss the cause and effect of pushing each of these buttons? We can have a round of scientific experimentation." His voice was confident, hypnotic.

Her instinctual reaction was to scream "Yes!" and drag him up to her room. They were still swaying but losing the beat. The slowing motion was much more of a lap dance than what the fast rhythm demanded. She didn't care. He felt good.

"That would make me a guinea pig." Becky knew she needed to pull away from him. She needed to go to her own bed, alone, and get ready for her big day tomorrow. Spending a wild night with a stranger, no matter how hot, was not on her agenda. She pulled back enough that their bodies were no longer touching. He didn't resist and even lifted his hand from her hip.

"I have a soft spot for guinea pigs," he said with a disappointed smile. "But I presumed this was a spectator sport from the start. No problem." He wasn't going to push her. "Thanks for handing over the controls. You're simply irresistible. A beautiful diversion was just what I needed this evening."

He held out his hand to offer the remote. Becky wanted his thumb to brush across the button again, but she knew he was right. They were at the point of no return in their little adventure. It'd been fun. Becky knew if she let it go any further, they would end up naked and wrapped around each other in her room. He'd made it clear that naked and wrapped up would be perfectly fine with *him*. Her body was screaming at her to keep playing, the vibrator was screaming at her to keep playing, and she wanted to listen to both.

This man was a stranger. She didn't even know his name. It *was* almost irresistible, but she needed to be clearheaded and well rested tomorrow. *Damn*.

She reached out to take the remote with an unsteady hand. He gently caught it and pulled it to his lips. Without breaking eye contact, he turned her hand over and placed a light kiss on the pulse point of her wrist.

"Thanks again." He let the remote fall into her palm and walked off the dance floor without looking back. Her body protested her cowardly decision. She joined several women on the dance floor as they craned their heads to watch him go by. His confident strut was such a turn-on.

"You piss him off, sweets?" Tanisha's voice broke her attention and the trance she was in as she watched his tight little ass.

"Nope. The doctor is OUT for the evening." She shut off the vibrator and tucked the remote away, making sure this time to put it in the pocket opposite her money. The absence of vibrations actually made her want him even more. She started to dance with Tanisha again, trying to get her mind off him.

She never even learned his name. The man she would never get a chance with again. The man who'd driven her crazy with a simple look, and had enough chutzpa

and adventure to play with a total stranger's vibe remote. The man who had enough respect to walk away because she'd asked him to.

Becky stopped dancing. If she was going to change her mind, she had to do it now. If she wasn't, she was going to need a way to cool down a bit. She headed toward the hotel lobby, still unsure which plan she wanted to follow. She neared the exit to the lobby and stopped.

To her right, the lobby doors, and a chance she could catch up with him and have what she knew would be a great night of much-needed sexual attention. To her left, the elevators. Neither choice was a good one. Both options would leave her with a long night and little sleep. She could be tossing and turning alone, wondering what she had passed up and fantasizing about that man—or she could have him.

She looked to the right and saw him on the far side of the lobby, talking to the doorman. He ran his fingers over his forehead and through his hair. He looked as frustrated as she was.

"I cannot believe I'm about to do this," she said to herself as she stepped to the right—into the lobby.

Craig was about to lose his temper with the doorman. A scantily clad woman struggling with her bags seemed to be too much a distraction for him to multitask and hail a taxi for Craig. It was probably best if he walked anyway. The spring air would help quell the Herculean erection created by the redhead and her party games.

He'd known from the moment she gave him control of the remote it was all in fun. Nothing serious. No real connection. But, as he'd watched her, the way her face lit up, the sway of her hips against his, he'd let himself hope. She was incredibly sexy. Knowing she was responding to his commands had been the best foreplay he'd had since his divorce. Probably long before then. He ran his fingers through his hair and shook his head at his own state of affairs before turning toward the revolving glass doors.

Maybe he shouldn't have taken the remote. Then he wouldn't be haunted by the look in her eyes when he'd teased her at the bar or by the way her head fell back when he'd changed the settings. Her skin had flushed when he'd inadvertently turned it off.

Deciding he needed another drink before heading to his apartment, he stepped into the bustling New York City night. He loved the energy of the city, and tonight, in his heightened state of arousal, it seemed even more electric.

## **Chapter Two**

Craig felt a hand on his back. The sensation nearly made his heart stop. He smelled her, knew it was her. The thought of that woman would already be a distraction for days. He didn't know if he could take much more teasing and playing without it becoming overbearing. It had been hard enough to walk away on the dance floor. If she tormented him any further, he would lose his mind, but he turned anyway.

"Um...dork?" She gave him a confident smile, but he knew it had to have been hard to work herself up to coming after him. It took a brave, bold girl to chase down a total stranger in this city. Impressive. He was glad she'd done it though. Now he had a chance to kiss those lips. He needed to think fast before she lost her nerve, or he did.

He cupped her face in his palms and placed a sweet, chaste kiss on the side of her mouth, barely connecting with her lips. It was killing him not to be more aggressive.

"What's your name?" he whispered into her ear.

"Becky," she said, not pulling away.

"I can get us a room in the hotel, Becky." He knew he was shooting straight at the target, but he could sense that she wanted it as much as he did and there was no need to beat around the bush with a woman who had let him control her vibrator. At least he hoped there wasn't.

She pulled back with a sly grin and a flush of excitement. "I have one. A room. I mean, I'm staying here and I have a room."

"That's convenient." With his hands still on her face, he used his thumb to tilt her head, exposing her neck. He kissed a line along her chin and brushed his lips over her ear. She smelled like cherry blossoms and sex. "I'm Craig."

Her breathing was heavy. He felt his skin tingle as her hands slid around his waist. "Hi, Craig."

He turned her chin the other direction and kissed the other side of her neck. This time letting his tongue brush her skin after each kiss. Her fingers dug into his sides. He stopped his warm path of kisses at her collarbone. "Shall we go then?" He was almost breathless.

Becky looked into his eyes, seeking something. Craig was taken by the green hue. It was rimmed in black to make her face seem otherworldly in the streetlight. She smiled; evidently, she had reached some decision but she didn't speak before turning back to the hotel. Craig followed her, equally silent, letting the tension build. Not that he needed more sexual buildup. He'd probably come the moment she touched him.

Back inside the hotel, another couple was in the elevator, talking and laughing. Becky stood in front of him, facing the door. He could see her blurry reflection in the stainless steel doors. He pulled her body against his, her back to his chest. Her head leaned against his chin and he pressed his raging cock into her back, could feel the contour of her ass cheeks as she pressed her body to his. He groaned, hoping the other couple didn't hear.

The couple got off on the ninth floor and the doors closed. She reached back and pulled him closer, grinding her ass against his body. The anticipation she was creating, combined with the feel of her body and the smell of her hair, was an incredible elixir. The doors opened and she stepped out. She stopped him in the hall as he exited the elevator. A light fixture buzzed somewhere in the distance as she looked him over.

"I don't know you." She put her hand on his chest to give herself some space. "You could be a serial killer, a rapist." She looked up at him with a small shrug. "A taxi driver." She was fighting her own moral compass. He liked that. "And do you have condoms?"

Craig closed his eyes and concentrated. He needed to be careful here. She needed his reassurance, not his judgment on the decision to come after him. "I'm not a serial killer." He leaned forward and kissed her. This time it was square on the lips and

serious. He pushed his tongue into her luscious mouth and tasted her. She responded after only a second of hesitation. Her lips were so soft and her mouth so hot.

He pulled back, but just far enough to speak, his lips still brushing hers as he spoke. "I'm not a rapist. You came after *me*, remember?"

Craig pushed one hand through her hair and used the other to snake around her waist and pull her against his body, letting her feel his excitement once again. He nuzzled his face under her hair, his cheek against her neck, and took a deep, long breath, enjoying the smell of her skin. She was trembling under his touch. "And I'd never admit it if I were a taxi driver."

He pulled away so she could see his face, his eyes. "I won't hurt you. I'll stop or leave at any time. And yes, I have a condom." Her body shuddered. She looked down at his chest and backed up, nodding slightly.

When they reached her door, she fumbled getting the key card into the slot. He didn't dare try to help. His hands would have shaken like maracas. He leaned against the door and thought to offer verbal support. "You obviously don't have a license to operate *that*," he said, his tone light and teasing. Something had to be done to break the tension between them or they'd explode on impact.

She smirked at him and slid the card home, swiftly pushing down the handle before he had a chance to lift his weight from the door. Craig fell into the room, stumbling over a briefcase on the floor. He tried to catch his balance within a couple of steps, but failed. He landed on his knees at the end of the bed.

Becky barked out a laugh. "Smooth." She tried to walk past him but Craig reached out and grabbed her belt loop, pulling her down. Becky stumbled and attempted to scramble away from him and onto the bed. Her boisterous laugh was as intoxicating and exciting as anything else had been the entire evening. He loved that sound. Laughter.

"I'm not through with you yet. Now, where is that remote?" he asked, pinning her down as if he were going to spank her. Becky's upper body was pressed to the bed, facing the headboard, her legs hanging off the end. He started feeling the back pockets

of her jeans. She tried to escape, still laughing, but he managed to hold on to her to conduct his search. Her muscles flexed and released as she mockingly struggled against his efforts.

“Oh. No. You. Don’t,” she said, trying to get her knees under her to push away, but he just flipped her onto her back and started to search her front.

Since he had to pin her down with one hand, he had only the other to explore her breasts, searching each one with exaggerated fascination. “Hmm? Not here. Although you have very fine breasts. I’ll return to further examine those shortly.” His hand traveled down her belly, feeling the contour of her stomach as he went. “Maybe here?” he teased, wiggling his finger into her bellybutton. She squealed, laughing and struggling even harder.

One of her front pockets felt like it held coins. Craig slid his hand over the other and hit pay dirt. He’d found the remote and could barely make out the buttons through the denim, but pushed a button through the fabric anyway. She stopped struggling, her breathing erratic from the wrestling. He couldn’t resist the desire to kiss her again.

“Better? Or did the dork turn it off again?”

Becky closed her eyes as she felt the vibrator switch to a pulsing mode. The medium pulse was her favorite. Nope. Craig was no dork. She relaxed, laid back and let the sensation move through her. He crawled up her body and his mouth covered hers. His kiss felt needful, wanting, intense. She pushed her fingers through his hair and down to his shoulders. Becky pulled him closer, wanting to feel his body against hers, smell his skin. The urgent kiss drained away the humor of the previous moment.

Becky could feel the heat through his clothes. She tugged at his shirt, wanting to get to skin. Craig groaned in protest but pulled away from the deep kiss. He lingered to look into her eye, giving her another chance to stop the progression of the evening. *Ain’t gonna happen.* She’d pushed all in. She reached up and started to unbutton the shirt for him. He watched as she did, not moving, not speaking.



When the buttons were open, she let her fingers explore his chest and up around his shoulders. His muscles were tight and his skin was warm and smooth. The vibrator was humming away, creating an urgency that was stressing her ability to take her time and experience his body. She pushed the shirt open and he moved to slip it off.

He was beautifully proportioned, with strong shoulders and a muscular chest that tapered to a taut stomach. A sprinkle of chest hair showed the slightest hint of gray. Craig held still, letting her take her time to touch and feel his skin. His eyes closed in a long blink and he tightened his jaw as she explored her treasure.

Unable to resist, she reached for his buckle. He stopped that, ducking his head and nuzzling his face in her neck and hair. She heard him inhale deeply, taking in her scent. He moved lower, glancing kisses on her neck while his hands searched for the bottom of her blouse. The tickling brush of his breath on her neck sent an urgent message to the far reaches of her body. Her toes curled in her shoes. She gripped his shoulders, arched her body to his.

He found the end of her blouse and caressed her stomach, lightly dragging his fingers across her belly. He shoved her shirt up. "I need to feel your skin." The words were spoken with honest need.

Becky sat up and removed her own shirt to speed up the process and then she unhooked her bra. She watched his face as she dropped the garment and her breasts came into view. Man, his eyes were intense, determined to take it all in. Craig scooted her up the bed, back against the pillows, and pressed his chest to hers. The heat from his touch, the simple touch of his chest to hers, was electric.

Becky heard herself moan and reached between them to try again for his belt, to get his pants off. And hers. She wanted. Not just their chests touching, but she wanted their entire bodies touching and sharing heat. She wanted to feel him inside her. He got the message and reluctantly rolled off the bed. Becky did the same. They were standing on opposite sides, panting and looking at each other from the short distance. She watched his chest muscles flex and tighten with his quick breaths.

A sly grin lifted the corner of her mouth. "Race ya," she said, and held her hands out at her sides as if she were wearing a gun holster and had just challenged him to a duel.

Becky looked down to her jeans. They were both shirtless; Becky, also braless. But she had the advantage. No belt.

"Loser goes down on the winner," she added.

A sparkle lit up his deep green eyes. "I like my odds." He nodded and put his hands to his sides as well.

The duel was on. "I'll let you have the countdown. On one," Becky said as she took a step back from the bed to get a little more room. Craig followed suit. They stood face-to-face across the king-sized bed, both breathing hard, half-naked and ready for the shootout. Becky expected to see a tumbleweed roll down the comforter. Bad spaghetti western music played in her mind. *Waa...waa...waaaaa.*

"Three." Craig shook out his shoulders and wiggled his fingers. "Two."

Becky eased her hands a little closer to the top of her jeans. Knowing she had the least amount of fasteners to open. She had this. *You're mine, buddy.*

"One!" Craig reached for his slacks.

Becky looked down and made quick work of her button and zipper. She heard the metal of his buckle rattling. She didn't dare look up. She wanted to win. Her "going out" jeans were tight but she wiggled her hips and managed to shimmy them down pretty fast. The first foot came out of both denim and thong clean. No problem.

The second was another story.

Her thong caught on her ankle. She grumbled and stepped on the offending fabric with her other foot as she held the bed for balance, fighting to pull her tangled left foot out. When it finally pulled free, she straightened. "Hah!" Naked, she looked across the bed, confident in her victory.

Craig stood calmly on the far side of the bed with a very hungry look in his eye. His hands were holding the belt open, but beyond that, he'd made no further effort to drop his pants. "You win," he said.

"To the victor go the spoils," she teased.

He pulled his belt. The leather slipped through the loops, making a slight snapping sound. He dropped it to the floor. "Yes. They. Do. Crawl over here and let me spoil you."

The decision to chase him down in the street had been a good one. Becky got up on the bed. With exaggerated movements, she crawled on her hands and knees to the middle of the king-sized playground. He unbuttoned his slacks and unzipped them. Becky stopped all motion and watched as he let them fall. Her eyes feasted on his naked form for a moment.

The room was warm, the lights were low and his skin seemed to glow. Her body was on fire from all the tension they'd built. It was the most exciting night she'd had in years, maybe ever. The vibrator had been working on her for a while and she knew she was soaking wet.

Becky turned and lay back on the bed, spreading herself open to take her winnings.

"So beautiful," he whispered as he crawled up between her legs, kneeling over her. He leaned down and brushed his lips across her inner thigh. Becky could hear him inhale, taking in her scent once again. She could see his hard cock hanging between his legs. She reached for it and he turned so he could still reach her with his mouth, his lower body now close enough that she could grasp his cock. Her fingers stroked his head as his tongue touch her clit.

Becky gasped and spread her knees wider, tilting herself toward him, begging for more. The heat from his mouth, the vibration inside her and the feel of his cock in her hand was too much. She was going to come and it was happening now. Her body tightened. She pushed his head farther into her pussy, his tongue darted faster and faster over her clit and she felt the explosion building.

"I'm coming!" Her strained words were loud and Craig responded by tugging the vibrator's short string, pulling it out. The loss of both the vibration and the fullness of the toy inside her made the sensation of his tongue flicking over her clit even more intense. He gripped her thighs to keep her still and he groaned his excitement over making her come. Her body rocked and shook as wave after wave of intensity rolled over her.

Craig didn't let up. While she was writhing and enjoying the aftereffects of the orgasm, he straightened and reached for his pants. He stroked himself with one hand as he searched his wallet with the other. The thud the slim wallet made when it hit the floor echoed in the hotel room. He pushed his hips forward and looked down on her as he continued to stoke himself, teasing her, tempting her. His biceps flexed as he pumped but his eyes remained intent on hers.

Becky licked her lips as he rolled the condom over his cock. He stroked a few more times and then crawled over her, licking and kissing her belly. Each brush of lips or touch of tongue was exaggerated by the heightened state her body was experiencing. Becky was anticipating him reaching her breasts. They ached for his touch, his mouth. And finally he ran his tongue with agonizing slowness around one sensitive nipple.

Becky arched her body closer to his. His legs were intertwined with hers. His cock pressed against her inner thigh. She could feel the slickness of the condom, the roughness of the hair on his thighs, the heat of his breath as he moved to bite lightly on her other nipple. He teased and taunted her, rolling his hips, moving his cock up and down her thigh, inching ever closer to her heated core.

The sultry smell of aftershave lingered on his skin. His eyes darted from her face to her neck as if he didn't know where he wanted to go next. He decided on her mouth, and kissed her. She could taste her own juices on his lips. She reached around and ran her hands up the curves of the muscles in his back. He felt so good. They fit together perfectly.

He pushed his cock inside enough for her to feel the ridge of his head and then stopped. Becky tried to thrust against him, to take more of him inside her, but he held her tightly in place. She started to grind in slow circles. The motion caused more fabulous friction and pulled on her clit. Evidently, it did something for him as well because he let out a muffled groan and pushed all the way in. Becky grabbed his ass and returned the thrust.

“You feel so good.” His words were choppy and distorted from the clenching of his jaw. She could see the veins of his neck pulsing, the muscles of his jaw tightening. His breath was warm on her cheek. She loved the intimacy of his face being right there with hers. There was no way to hide anything. All his expressions, his feelings, were right there to be shared.

Sliding his hands under her arms, he wrapped them around her shoulders. He pulled her closer to his body, changing the tilt of her hips so they were even more deeply connected. He was reading her body movements and adjusting to match her need. Each change in angle felt better than the last. Her body was about ready to shatter again as he upped the speed of his thrusts.

He was pushing deeper and harder. She could tell he was close to his own climax. She clutched his lower back, wrapped her legs around his and used them to pull him closer with each thrust. He gave a deep, guttural groan and arched his back, the muscles flexing and straining under her grasp. His chest muscles were taut and the veins in his neck looked ready to burst. The sights and sounds of his arousal were so intimate that it all combined to usher in another orgasm.

Becky reveled in it as it hit, relaxing and letting him push in and out, letting him take. She could see his face as he came. She could feel his body respond to her pulsing muscles as she did.

There was no crushing feel of weight as he lingered. His tattered breathing and the smell of his skin were like an after-dinner drink, a satisfying end to a great meal. She didn't want him to move.

But he did move.

"I don't want to stop," he whispered as he slid in and out of her. The slick sensation felt like a wet kiss. He wasn't exactly hard, but yet, he wasn't exactly soft. "I wish I could do this all night."

Becky caressed his back with soft fingertip strokes. Craig moved with slow intent and with each gentle thrust, Becky felt him harden a bit. He kissed her forehead before looking into her eyes. "So good. You feel so good."

\* \* \* \* \*

The sound that jarred her awake was unfamiliar, the room also unfamiliar, but the warm skin next to hers was familiar right away. She stretched and lazily looked around the hotel room. Her clothes, his clothes and her briefcase were strewn around the bed and by the door.

The briefcase reminded her of why she was in the hotel room. And why she was in New York. She glanced at the clock. 8:15.

*ArtMania. Fuck!*

Becky shoved the snoring man on the shoulder. "You have to go. *I* have to go. Crap!" She crawled out of the bed and scampered to the bathroom. This was what she'd feared. Months and months of work on this project were now minutes from being down the drain. How could she have let herself do this? *No alarm? What was I thinking?*

She knew better. She glanced back to see Craig was moving as quickly as she was, but with much less desperation. He was seeking one of his shoes while trying to buckle his pants.

"Sorry, Becky. Looks like we both have something going on this morning." She was turning the shower on as he was pulling his shirt over his shoulders.

He followed her into the bathroom. "I don't want to rush away from you like this, but I have lots to do today. A client meeting and a brief to write." He looked at her through the mirror and shook his head. "I don't want to rush away from you at all."

He moved up behind her, kissing her shoulder and cupping her ass cheeks before letting his hands slide around her body and over her hips. The boyish expression in his eyes pleaded with her to play hooky from her meeting. His hands explored her stomach before coming to a stop on her breasts. He gently squeezed her large nipples.

He wasn't playing fair. She'd like nothing better than to crawl back into that big old bed and spend several more hours exploring every contour of his body. But today was Becky's big day. She'd worked for months to have everything ready for the art festival. Today was the day, the last presentation, meeting the benefactor and making sure Liza knew she had made the right decision when she'd given Becky the partnership. She hesitated a moment to enjoy his hands on her skin before pulling away and stepping into the shower. Warm water cascaded over Becky's body. She wished it were cold to help temper her desire.

Craig pulled the shower curtain open slightly. "How long is your meeting?" His smile had changed from boyish to scheming.

"A few hours."

He held out the vibrator. "Put this in. Wear it during your meeting and I'll meet you back here, downstairs, in the restaurant for lunch. Twelve thirty okay with you?" He pushed the hand with the vibe farther into the shower, making it more of an insistence than a request. "You made it through the night at the bar with it in. Can you make it through a business meeting?" The sexy challenge was made as water drenched his shirtsleeve.

Becky looked down at the silver bullet vibrator humming in his hand. Could she do it? Dare she do it? She looked from his hand to his face. The strong lines and green eyes were hard to resist. Why did this man turn her on so much? She watched his lips twitch, knowing she would accept his challenge. She wanted to play again...but while at work?

"I don't think so, Craig. Kind of an important meeting for me today."

"I understand." He rolled it around under the spray of water. "I guess that'd be hard to do. I couldn't do my job with someone rubbing my balls. I just wanted to think

of you wet and excited, all morning long, just like you were last night.” His words were as effective as his hands at arousing. “God, you were sexy. I’ve never felt so wanted, never had a woman want to touch me like that.” He waited a moment to see if she’d change her mind. When he was sure she wouldn’t, he said, “No problem. I still want to see you. I can make lunch. Twelve thirty?”

Becky huffed as he spoke of the inferno they’d managed to build. It’d been amazing. *He was amazing. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.* She held out her hand, palm up. “Fine. It won’t be vibrating through the meeting without you there to push buttons anyway. That’s just as well. I’d blather on like an idiot. When we meet for lunch, you can turn it on.” At that, Craig smiled and placed the toy in her hand.

She shut the curtain on him. “Oh. Another thing,” she said over the water. “The top button adjusts the speed, there are three settings and off. The bottom button is the pattern of vibration. Two to choose from. The first is a pulse and the third is a rotation of sorts. Can you remember that?”

He pulled the curtain back just enough to peek inside. “Is this the test for my operator’s license?”

“Yes, and it’s your last chance, bucko. You’d better get it right or you’ll forever remain the big dork.”

He leaned in farther, giving no worry to his head getting wet. The flat of his hand ran over her water-slicked stomach and he kissed her on the cheek. His fingertips then trailed over her wet curls and lightly brushed her pussy, making Becky reach for the wall of the shower to steady herself. “Until lunch then.” He winked and backed away.

Becky hesitated, looking at the white plastic shower curtain. After a moment, she heard him close the door to the room. She was clean and ready to get out of the shower before slipping the vibrator in. Even switched off, it was an immediate distraction. This was a big meeting and she was going to conduct it wearing a bullet vibrator.

*Hello, psychiatric hospital, it’s Becky Cooper. Is my committal scheduled for this Tuesday or next?*



## Chapter Three

Becky rushed to the second bank of elevators in the huge lobby, the wheels of her rolling briefcase clicking behind her, reminding her of the fact that she was late. Her hair was still damp, given she'd not taken the time to dry it. The mass of curls looked wild. She looked flustered and she knew it. It was not how she wanted to start the day. She cursed in the empty elevator.

The doors slid open and she stepped into a waiting area. Across the marble floor, behind a huge desk, a pretty, young receptionist eagerly greeted Becky.

"Ms. Cooper. Good morning." The woman seemed overly happy to see her. Before Becky could speak, a bark echoed across the marble floors of the reception area. She followed the blonde's flustered look as she rolled her eyes over to the seating area on the right.

"If I have to wait much longer, miss, Farrah will *not* be very happy."

*Salvation.* He—they—were the perfect distraction for her lateness and her appearance.

"Samuel." Becky smiled and walked quickly toward the artist and star of the weekend. His artwork was to be the centerpiece of the ArtMania festival. She never understood progressive art and had no intention of starting now, but this guy was popular and they knew he would bring in a large number of attendees spending an even larger number of dollars. That meant lots of income for the charity and a happy client. "It's so good to see you." She left the briefcase by the desk and gave the artist the exaggerated half-hug, fake kiss on the cheek that seemed to be the new handshake here in the city. "Is there a problem?"

"I requested a sparkling water for Farrah. Apparently, one must go all the way to Queens to acquire the stuff." His appearance and voice fit every stereotypical image ever imagined for both an artist and celebrity.

Samuel wore oversized glasses that made his blue eyes look even bigger than they were. The frames were bright teal to match the equally bright jacket he was wearing. His shoes were white and shiny. His slacks were skin-tight, super skinny and jet black. He wore his shirt collar open to expose a large amount of chest hair and a diamond the size of a June bug, which hung from a thick platinum chain.

The bundle tucked under his arm wiggled and snarffed out a half-sneeze, half-bark. Becky glanced down at the little beast. Farrah was a pug, and today she was dressed in a little pink beret with a matching floral sweater. Becky was quite sure the diamonds on her white leather collar were real. This guy *did* hang out with Paris, after all.

And what the hell was it with pugs, anyway? She'd met Samuel and Farrah before, but Becky hadn't bothered to tell Liza about the dog. Better to save that little surprise. She wanted to see Liza's expression.

"I'm sure that they —"

Samuel brushed by her in a streak of black-and-teal paisley, cutting off her sentence. His close-cropped hair and thick, pouty lips made him almost feminine. "Ah, thank you, my girl." Becky counted four large silver rings on his right hand as he took one of the green bottles from the woman who entered the lobby with a tray of Perrier. "Now." He looked back to the receptionist. "You may escort the wild-haired Ms. Becky and myself to see Mr. Tenfold."

And again, Samuel Saltz brushed past Becky in a huff of pug and bright teal fabric, leading the way for the receptionist and Becky to trot to catch up. Becky laughed to herself, glad she had Samuel to disguise her lateness and amuse her in the process. She couldn't wait to see Liza's face when the artist entered with the pug.

Liza and her husband, Blake, had met over the planning of a large pug wedding. Liza now had to deal with a wealthy, eccentric mother-in-law who was obsessed with

the pint-sized pooches. Liza would be just thrilled to have to do so here in New York. Becky was happy with the turn of events. She felt the vibe inside her as she walked and she was just as happy with the thought of meeting Craig between this meeting and the tour of the festival site.

The receptionist opened the door to a large conference room. Liza was already working with Mark, Mr. Tenfold's project coordinator, getting set up for the presentation. The room smelled of wood polish and old leather. The lighting was subtle—no humming overhead florescent lights here. This was the executive area, and it showed—from the marble floors to the big, soft leather chairs surrounding the long, polished table. Becky inhaled the scent, savoring the victory of making it to this point.

ArtMania was the next morning and today's wrap-up meeting was the last of many phone conversations and several trips to New York. They were ready. The festival was going to be a big success and a big boost to her career. She'd come a long way from small-town west Texas to a big boardroom in New York City.

Today, she and Liza would give the final details for the festivities, report on the progress of setting up the artwork and vendor booths, and discuss any final details or concerns. They would take a trip out to Central Park to see how the setup of the art and booths was progressing and assure Mr. Tenfold that his festival was a go.

Mr. Tenfold entered right behind them. He'd put all the funds and manpower on the line to sponsor the festival. The money raised Saturday would put a new wing on the Children's Hospital, dedicated to quality of life enhancement for terminally ill children. The new wing was going to be a wonderland for the kids, right there in the hospital. Mark had shown Becky the plans. Movies, arcade games and activities, all accessible to sick kids who couldn't leave the hospital. Even the sickest kids could have some fun without the danger of leaving the medical resources they needed.

Becky watched as Liza looked over her glasses at the pug draped over Samuel's arm. Her eyes widened and she dropped her pen, shook her head and barked out her own little laugh. This was Liza's first face-to-face meeting with Samuel.

"Did I forget to tell you about Farrah?" Becky pushed past the artist, his stance not changing much to let her by. She pulled the briefcase over to the seat next to her partner.

Samuel stopped and placed his hand over the pug's eyes to shield her from the offense. "Do you have an issue with Farrah attending this meeting, Miss Dean?" Samuel stood his ground next to the credenza holding water and a coffee urn, his shoulders squared, ready to battle Liza over the pug's rightful place at the table.

"Samuel, I assure you Liza's reaction was surprise. She's actually related to a couple of pugs. Her husband's mother has a pair of pugs that just had babies. That makes them her puggies-in-law, I believe. We even coordinated a posh wedding for the proud puggy parents."

His eyes widened. "Ohh! How fabulous! I should have you do the same for Farrah."

This time it was Becky who had to suppress her laughter. She wasn't interested in another pug wedding. "Give her a chance, Samuel. She just needs more coffee." He gave Liza an unsure glance as he situated Farrah on her own oversized leather chair before he nodded his approval.

"I need more coffee too," he said to Liza, but it was loud and obviously directed at the receptionist who was busy getting mints and writing tablets out of the credenza. "Do be a pookie and get us a round of decent bean juice, would you? This office swill won't do at all."

Becky doubted that the coffee in Mr. Tenfold's conference room would be swill.

Liza interrupted Becky's banter with the artist by leaning in. "Beck, you do have the presentation in that little bag of yours along with all those jokes?"

"Har, har," Becky said and turned to their client. "A pleasure to meet you, Mr. Tenfold. We're very excited about tomorrow. Everything's in place." She reached out and shook his hand as she spoke.

"No doubt, Becky. No doubt." His round, bearded face reminded Becky of her father. Tenfold was a rare combination of ruthless dealmaker and generous community

leader. He'd put up more than half of the money for the hospital wing himself. "My attorney called. He's running a few minutes late. We can start or wait. He just needs a couple of signatures from you and Samuel and we're all set, legally." He slid into the head chair and his receptionist placed a large mug in front of him.

"We can wait a few minutes so he'll get the entire presentation. Tanisha isn't here with breakfast either. Not much of a breakfast meeting without the breakfast," Liza said.

Becky shook her head. "You sent Tanisha to get the food?" *Oh, Lord help us.*

The projector was on and humming in front of her. All Becky needed to do was hook up her laptop and start talking. She pulled the computer out of her bag, dropping her pen in the process. She bent to get it as the door behind her opened.

"Mr. Hill," Mark said as she fished under the table. Becky could see the project coordinator's feet as he stood to greet the newcomer.

"Sorry I'm late."

Becky saw her pen just out of reach and crawled under the table to retrieve it. Farrah jumped off her chair to investigate, probably thinking a snack had fallen to the floor. The dog drooled on her hand as she retrieved both the pen and the pug. Crawling backward, she bumped her head as she tried to resurface from under the table. The pug yelped when she squeezed her too hard, trying not to yelp herself.

"Farrah?" Samuel called, oblivious to Becky's struggles under the wide conference table. "Where are you, baby?"

"Damn!" Becky bumped into someone with her butt and Farrah barked again. "Damn, *damn*," she muttered.

She turned to stand and saw what had to be two-hundred-dollar Italian leather dress shoes standing next to her. *Shit*. She assumed they belonged to Mr. Hill, the attorney. This was *not* how she wanted to meet him or start the presentation for Mr. Tenfold—on her knees, pen in her mouth like a bone and holding a drooling pug. All

she could do now was stand up and act like pulling a pug from under a conference table while cursing was a normal business activity. *Doesn't everybody do that?*

She stood. Their eyes met.

Brilliant green looking into brilliant green.

"Craig?" Becky coughed, spitting out the pen as Samuel dashed around the table to extract the squirming pug from her hands. The receptionist exchanged it for an overfilled coffee mug.

Becky didn't respond to either action. She had no words at the moment. How many people were there in New York City? How many men? Was this really possible? She flushed first with embarrassment—and then excitement.

"Well, Becky..." he stammered. His eyes darted around the room.

Becky couldn't believe her eyes or her ears. She'd been on this project for months, working with Mark. Mr. Hill—Mr. E.C. Hill—had been AWOL until today. He'd been in court during both meetings she'd flown in for last month.

She had to think fast. She had to ignore the fact that she'd slept with him last night and the fact she was wearing the vibrator again this morning, for *him*, and move on. She dragged in a steadying breath in an attempt not to laugh at the situation. Craig looked in no mood to laugh. "Mr. Hill. I'm happy to see you." *There. That was polite and vague.*

He was wearing a very brown suit with an olive green tie. He didn't seem the slightest bit fazed by the under-the-table activities, just the fact that she was there. He turned his attention to apologizing to Mr. Tenfold for his tardiness. As the two greeted each other, Becky took the opportunity to move toward her seat.

Liza was looking down at Becky's shaking hands. "Beck? Are you okay here?" She was a smart cookie and didn't delve into the unfolding events, although Becky could see that she was dying to know what was going on. Liza had a headache the night before and hadn't joined the girls at the bar. She was in the dark now, but her smiling eyes said she knew something was up and she wanted every detail as soon as possible.

Mark handed Craig some paperwork and began introductions. "Craig, I'd like to you to meet the team responsible for putting together the festival." He handed Liza and Becky a copy of the paperwork as well. "This is Liza Dean and Becky Cooper, of Main Events. I know you've seen many of their emails to me, but here they are in the flesh."

Craig's eyes danced with delight at Mark's words.

The Craig Hill she'd spent the night with was nothing like the lawyer she'd imagined meeting this morning. Mark was a bit of a gossip, and on more than one phone conversation he'd told her tales of a divorced, bitter, workaholic lawyer who spent most of his spare time doing *pro bono* work. Becky's contact with him had been a few very short, very direct emails. Even for an attorney, they were dry.

From everything Mark had said, Becky had pictured a Scrooge of a man with beady eyes and a balding head. Not the super-sexy guy she'd spent several hours rolling around the bed with the night before.

Becky shivered, knowing she had the vibrator in place and he had the control. Maybe not. Maybe he'd left it in his office. This was turning out to be more fun than even *she'd* expected.

Craig nodded across the table to Liza. "Nice to meet you, Mrs. Dean. I've been incredibly impressed with your company's work. I've told the hospital administrator to expect great things from this weekend." He was doing a very good job of pulling off "serious". This man was not playful. *This* man wouldn't have a who-can-get-naked-first showdown across a bed. This man was very much the attorney.

Liza returned his compliment. "Call me Liza. I've heard good things about you as well."

Craig turned to Becky. She felt her heart start to pound. What was he going to say?

"It was nice to have met you last night, Ms. Cooper. If I had known who you were, maybe we could have gone over some of these details then." She blushed. "Or maybe not. We had other things to..." He hesitated. Becky almost saw the man from last night, but his face quickly lost its playful grin. "Um...discuss."

“Oh goodness, Mr. Hill.” Samuel preened at the attorney and his attention mercifully shifted to the flamboyant pugmeister. “Mr. Hill, I want to tell you that your work with that lawsuit for PETA was amazing. Anyone who spends that much effort on animal rights is a hero in my eyes.” Farrah barked to emphasize his enthusiasm.

Becky dropped back into her seat, still trying to regain her senses. He was imposing and handsome in his suit and in his world. It seemed Mark was right. Craig was a powerful lawyer. He was a workaholic. But she’d seen a much more appealing side to him last night. *Love Doctor to the rescue.*

The images from her computer came up on the screen across the room and Becky started talking. She had a job to do as well, but she understood that life could be both work and fun. Maybe she could teach Mr. E.C. Hill.



## **Chapter Four**

Craig watched Becky's mouth as she spoke. His luck was never this good, but here she was. He was delighted to see her but in his surprise he'd acted like a squirrel, frozen in the middle of the road, unsure where to turn. For a moment she had a look of excitement in her eyes, but it quickly faded to apprehension over his reaction.

Fortunately, he was as intimate with the details of the event as he was the event planner, so he didn't really need to pay much attention to the presentation. That had always been part of his success, hiring the right people for the right jobs and letting them do those jobs. Becky had this festival planned to the tiniest detail. Instead of worrying about the event, he could watch her body move and listen to the lilt in her voice as she spoke. It was a pleasant, earthy tone that spoke to him in a very deep and very sexual way.

He had the remote in his pocket. He wanted to push one of those buttons to find out if she had put it in or not. That temptation, her Southern accent and her ass in those black slacks were all about to drive him insane. But he needed to maintain his professionalism while Mr. Tenfold was around. She probably wouldn't appreciate it if he turned it on while she was speaking in front of a group of peers.

It had been a very long time since a woman had moved him like this. What was it about her? The divorce had left him in a nebulous haze of uninspired dating. Little had been bright or stimulating for the past three years except his job. He had his work, his friends and his hobbies, but no one made him want to do silly, romantic things. She had changed that for him in one exciting night.

Becky continued her presentation. All seemed to be in order and the event should be a great success. He hoped it would be a success for him as well. The Children's Hospital would benefit greatly from the proceeds. He wanted to benefit greatly from

Becky Cooper's attention and affection. He just had to figure out how to get it. He ran his fingers over the lump in his pocket. He could feel the outline of the buttons. His fingers were itching to press one.

The side door to the meeting room opened and one of the other women he'd seen at the bar last night entered, carrying several bags with "2nd Ave. Deli" plastered on them. It was one of his favorite delis in the city.

Becky smiled when Tanisha glided into the room with the food. Now that the initial shock of Craig being the infamous E.C. Hill had worn off, she desperately wanted to play. It definitely wasn't the best decision for her career. Mr. Tenfold probably wouldn't like the idea of his event planner using his attorney as a sex toy in the middle of his meeting. *Too bad. Damn sense of adventure.* Her mother always warned her that it would get her into trouble one day, and today might be that day.

Throughout the presentation, Craig had looked at her with a host of expressions ranging from dripping lust to concern. The game was getting her excited again. She wanted to make sure he was heading in that direction as well.

"You made it." Mark needled Becky's assistant as he rushed out of his chair to help Tanisha with her mass of bags from 2nd Avenue. "I was beginning to wonder if we were going to have breakfast at this breakfast meeting."

"I love 2nd Avenue, but it's been awhile since I've been over there," Craig said.

Tanisha looked at Mark. "Me too. Years, actually, and it would have been nice if *someone* had told me they weren't *on* 2nd Avenue anymore. I was standing there looking up at a broken video-store sign when some nice soul stopped. He must have seen the tormented look on my face, because he was kind enough to tell me they'd moved. I thought for sure I was going to have to do without a decent babka this trip." She let Mark take two of the bags and placed the other two on the table herself.

She looked across the table to Liza and Becky. "You two are lucky though. I found it and I got us some of the best traditional deli delights in New York City. Your tongue is in for a treat."

"Great," Becky said, a little worried over just what a black Jewish girl from Texas considered New York tradition. She knew Tanisha had spent many summers in New York with her white Jewish grandmother, but the smells from the bags were making even a hearty Texas girl like Becky a little nervous. She could tell by the way Liza was digging around in her briefcase that she was as unsure about Tanisha's delicatessen treasures as Becky.

Tanisha gave an apologetic look to Liza. "Sorry it took so long. I'll pass this out and we can eat while you two finish." She then looked at Becky. "Not to worry. No tongue for you two."

Digging into one of the bags, Mark asked, "How about me?"

"You? I got you the smoked-turkey-and-tongue omelet you requested even after walking ten extra blocks on your account."

Samuel piped up. "I hope you found something vegetarian for me at that wretched place. I have to cross the street to avoid the smells." His nose crinkled in disgust and his shoulders shivered. "I always carry some snackers for Farrah, but I missed my smoothie this morning for this early meeting."

Farrah, who'd been drooling on the conference chair through most of the presentation, came awake at the mention of her name. She flung her little fat body onto the table and waddled toward the scent of meat. "Farrah, you bad little girl! No meat for you either. Your kibbies are all veggies."

Becky wondered if there was some pheromone pugs put off that caused uncontrollable baby talk among their owners.

Tanisha pulled out a container and passed it to Craig to hand to the artist. "One chicken-and-tongue bagel, hold the chicken, hold the tongue." She winked at him.

"Fabulous, my dear." Samuel's glee was evident. "I would have never thought of that. I hope I'll get some tongue another way." He winked back—at Craig, Becky thought—and Farrah barked.

"Jeez," Craig said as he handed the container over and looked down at the pug. "More than I needed to know about you and that dog." He passed another container to Mr. Tenfold, who had already taken the opportunity to make a call while there was an unintended break in the presentation.

Becky squirmed in her chair. Craig kept eyeing her and she wanted to play with the vibrator again. She raised her eyebrows to give him a hint. He didn't respond.

Tanisha placed a giant bagel covered in cream cheese, eggs and something slimy and pink in front of Becky. "Nova Scotia lox and eggs," Tanisha proclaimed. "With onions." She then handed another suspicious, overly brown platter to Liza. "Frankfurter omelet."

She dug back in the bag one last time. "And you must be Mr. Hill." Craig nodded. "Mark suggested a tongue omelet with Russian dressing for you. A man after my own heart."

Craig took the container. "Thank you. You must be Tanisha Townsend. Call me Craig."

Becky could see that Craig recognized Tanisha from last night. He looked like he wanted out of the room for a second. They were all professionals. She knew it wasn't going to turn into a bunch of sophomoric teasing at his expense, but she needed to reassure him of that fact.

"You're a brave man to take on the challenge of that monstrosity." Becky indicated his breakfast as he opened the lid.

He looked from Tanisha, who'd gone about setting the rest of the condiments out, back to Becky. "I like an occasional challenge."

Becky studied his eyes. He wasn't as concerned as she had thought. Maybe the man wasn't as stuffy and uptight as Mark had let on. Maybe with a little more fun time over the next day or so, Becky could help him loosen up even further.

Tanisha sat down across the table from Becky and opened her own breakfast. "Well, Doc, what do you think of the lox?"

Becky looked down to her plate. She'd not tried the stuff. She knew it was some sort of fish, but fish, cream cheese and eggs didn't cut it as breakfast food in the South.

"Doc?" Samuel asked.

Tanisha looked at Mr. Tenfold to see if he was paying attention to the conversation. He was looking out the window as he carried on his cell call. Craig was involved with his food, so Tanisha leaned toward Samuel. "We call our dear Becky the Love Doctor. She's got a knack for meeting men, finding their relationship weaknesses and fixin' 'em up before sending them on their way. Most end up married soon after."

"Soon after what?" Samuel's big eyes were wide open.

"Soon after she cuts them loose," she said with a finger snap.

So much for everyone being professional. Becky glanced from Tanisha to Craig. He was now paying plenty of attention to the conversation between her assistant and the artist.

Becky gave Tanisha a shut-your-mouth look. "We need to get back to the presentation so we can get out to the park and look around."

Samuel straightened in his chair. "Do you do gay guys? 'Cause I know a few who could really use that kind of service."

Becky rubbed her forehead. "No. Not yet anyway."

She stood. Mr. Tenfold hung up his call and Becky started talking again. She went over a few images that covered the financials and the expected profits for the day-long festival. When she came to the images applicable to insurance and liabilities, she spoke

directly to Craig. He nodded when appropriate. His tie was a little crooked. His face was stern and concentrating on her commentary. He was so hot.

She wanted him to play with the vibrator. She wanted him to push those buttons. She wanted him to want to play – but she wasn't sure how to make him realize it.

She could be creative, use some subtle hints. He was a lawyer after all; he should pick up on them. Shouldn't he?

"So, Craig. Do you need any further *licenses* to make the event a success?" Becky raised her eyebrows, crossed her arms and waited for his answer.

He gave her a confused look. "I don't think so. I believe your team has covered all the bases for liabilities." He leaned back and crossed *his* arms.

She looked him in eye. "Do *you* have need of a license for the event?"

He scrunched his brow. "Me?"

She was painting herself into a corner. Mr. Tenfold was scribbling on a pad on the desk. She couldn't play around much longer. "Forgive me. I must be a *dork*. I thought you needed a vendor's license or something to cover your liabilities as the attorney for the event." That made no sense even to her. She glanced at Liza, who was looking at her like she had a cheese head.

"Um. No..." Craig began, and then he straightened quickly. "I mean yes. Something like that. I've got it covered." He lowered his head as if to take his own notes, one hand sliding under the table.

A second later her vibrator roared to life.

"Oh," she said with too much intake of breath. She sounded as if she'd moaned. "I...um. Okay. Let's move on." She pressed the arrow button on the laptop and a new image appeared on the screen. The vendor list. "I've gotten only one dropout from our original participants. That's pretty good."

As she was talking, the vibe hummed away. She paused to change images again. Was she being overly paranoid or could she actually hear the vibrator? She'd never

thought about it before. Last night was the first time she'd worn it out in public and the music had been blaring. She meandered closer to Samuel while she was talking. If anyone was going to react to a strange noise, the over-the-top artist would.

Samuel was paying attention to her words as she neared. He took a drink of water. She stood right behind him. He picked up his screaming-yellow cell phone and glanced at the dark screen—most likely to see if it was vibrating.

Yep. He could hear it. He put the phone back down and looked up at the lights. No fluorescents.

Becky inwardly laughed. She could really mess with these people. If she kept standing near Samuel, how long would it be until he asked about that infernal buzzing? Would anyone ever suspect it was a vibrator? She glanced at Liza. *She* might figure it out, since she knew Becky so well. She stood next to her for a slight moment when it was time to change the slides. Liza made no sign of hearing it and she didn't want to press her luck. Liza would get a kick out of it but Becky really didn't want to start a game of What's That Noise? She wanted to get a chance at Craig as soon as possible.

She looked at Craig and all amusement over the situation flew out the window. He was looking at her like she was naked in a jury box. His hand slid back under the table. She braced herself. Now that he understood the proper operation of the toy, he wasn't likely to turn it off by accident. The vibrating changed to the medium pulse. Her favorite.

She gave him a sultry smile as she paced back to the laptop. She needed water. Her mouth was getting dry. The rest of her was getting moist, but she needed her voice to finish up. Three more images and the whole group would head out to Central Park. It felt good to be playing with Craig. He needed it too. If what Mark had told her was true, Craig needed a lot more fun in his life. She was just the Doc to show him how fun life could be.

\* \* \* \* \*

After the presentation, Craig watched as Becky tucked away the laptop. Samuel chattered on to Mr. Tenfold about a trendy new restaurant and the others all seemed involved in the conversation. He'd changed setting one other time before she'd finished the last couple of images. The vibrator was humming on high speed. She'd been so sexy as she'd described the percentage of games in relation to the interactive art booths and vendors selling products. She was as comfortable speaking to the group as he was speaking in court. She was smart. He inwardly chuckled. He was such a geek. Becky's facts and figures were turning him on as much as her ass was.

He glanced around the room at the group. The others didn't seem to notice how sexily her body moved as she spoke. No one else cared that she flipped her hair over her shoulder when she gestured to a figure on the screen. They didn't know her skin was flushed and warm because she was horny. Nope. All that was just for him and now he had a monster erection to deal with before he could stand. The woman was irresistible.

He'd planned on leaving as soon as the papers were signed and the meeting was over. He'd planned to spend the next two days working on a set of briefs for an upcoming case. He'd planned on life as normal.

Plans changed.

After she finished and everyone was gathering to leave for Central Park and the tour, Becky excused herself. Craig followed her into the hallway. He needed to speak to her.

"Becky," he said to her back as she made her way down the hall.

She stopped and he could tell she took in a large breath before turning to face him.

"I...um." He felt he needed to apologize for something, but he wasn't sure what. She'd played with him again. Neither had seemed to hurt the professional position of the other. "If I had known..."



She pushed the curls behind her ear on one side her face and looked him in the eye. "What? We wouldn't have had last night?" She gave him a sultry little grin. "That would have been a shame. Don't you think?"

She leaned toward him so her face was close to his, her lips at his ear. He could smell her skin. "Wait here. I'll be right back." She ducked into the ladies' room.

Craig adjusted his briefcase to the other arm and did as he was told.

Liza and Tanisha walked by him on their way to the restroom, both giving him questioning smiles as greetings as they passed. He took a few steps away so he didn't have that stalkerish feel from standing directly across from the ladies' room.

Becky was the first to emerge. She strode confidently toward him, stopping close again. She looked down the hallway in each direction as if to make sure they were alone. "Walk with me, Craig. If that is your real name."

He closed his eyes. He used E.C. Hill on all his correspondence. He stopped and turned to her. "Ebenezer Craigsen Hill. At your service." He waited to see her reaction.

She nodded. "Ah. Craigsen fits you. Ebenezer, not so much."

She took the crook of his elbow and started walking again. After one more look behind them, she slid the still-humming vibrator into his pants pocket. "Your turn, Mr. Hill. I'll take the controls, if you don't mind."

The little vibrator slid down in his pocket. His slacks were loose enough that it landed on his thigh. He was speechless for a moment.

She leaned in closer than she had before, her body pressed against his. It was *his* turn to look behind them to see if anyone had entered the hall. The vibration was distracting and his cock was hardening. He didn't know if the excitement was caused by the chance of getting caught, the toy or her body. Fuck. It was all three.

She licked the rim of his earlobe. "I'd rather it be in your undies, Craigsen, tucked close to your balls. If you would be so kind as to manage that for me, I'll go hail us a cab." She stepped back just before Samuel and Mr. Tenfold emerged from the meeting

room. She held out her hand as if to shake his, but she was actually demanding the remote. "Then we can discuss that last of the documentation."

He dug in his other pocket, hesitant, but he was in such a state of arousal at the moment he let any indecision melt away. He shook her hand, leaving the fob in her hot little palm.

He stood in a shocked state as Becky retrieved her rolling briefcase, winked and headed in the direction of the elevators. She never looked back. He'd lost control of the situation. He was out of his mind with desire and out of his league with this woman.

\* \* \* \* \*

Becky was satisfied that Craig had complied with her request as she watched him come down the few steps that led from the front of the building to the street. He was walking as if he'd just been on a long trail ride in an uncomfortable saddle. She bit on her upper lip in an effort not to giggle as he joined her by the waiting cab.

"Sent the others on. You took a long time with that." She raised an eyebrow to get a reaction.

He shifted his weight slightly from one side to the other. "There's not exactly a good place to situate that in there, you know. And it wasn't going where it would have had the best chance of staying in place."

"Not a backdoor kind of guy?" She crawled into the backseat of the waiting cab.

He followed, adjusting his pants once more after pulling the door closed. "No. I don't know how practical this is either." He tugged at his pant legs, trying to pull them down.

"Seems to be doing the job, if you ask me." She nodded to the erection that was in no way hidden.

"Yeah. I see your point. But I almost had to walk with my hand in my pocket all the way out here to keep it from falling down my pant leg. That is *not* something I want

rolling out of my pants and onto the floor of the elevator. It's bad enough that everyone could hear it."

Becky did giggle then. She'd forgotten how loud the thing was when she'd had it in her pussy. For Craig, the humming was muffled only by fairly thin fabric.

"Aww. Poor thing." She slid her hand down the inside of his thigh, resting it where she could feel the vibrator and his erection. She looked up and realized the driver was waiting on instructions with the meter running. "Central Park. Close to Tavern."

"You're killing me. I won't be able to walk around the park like this." He looked down to her hand and his bulge as he gripped the door handle.

"You'll be fine. You have a few blocks to get used to it." She held out the fob and ran her finger over the buttons as he had done in the bar. "You're on the highest speed." She pushed the top button twice to slow it down and then pushed the bottom button to give him some of the pulsing bursts she loved so much.

Even with the city noises and the loud engine in the old cab, she could hear the faint buzzing with each burst of vibration. She squeezed his balls.

Craig's head fell back.

"So. Mr. E.C. Hill, what do you do for fun?"

"Fun?" He tried to focus.

"Yes, when you're not in a courtroom or working on a case. You do have some life outside court, don't you?" She was probing. Getting the symptoms.

He sat up a bit more. "I...um." He lifted his hips as she massaged. "I bake."

Becky laughed. "You mean, like cookies? You *bake*?"

She had to admit the thought of being in a nice warm kitchen with him and the smell of baking bread sounded very alluring for some reason. But this did go along with what Mark had said about him. All work. No play. "Baking is not a very social activity."

He put his hand over hers. "You have to stop or I'm going to blow in this cab."

"Please, not," the cabbie begged in broken English.

They both looked at each other and then without a word, laughed. Becky hadn't even looked to see if the driver could see what she was doing. She hadn't really cared.

"Sorry, man," Craig said as he straightened in his seat. He put his hands in his lap to cover his erection and gave a deep sigh. "Becky, you are something else."

"You need to get out more." The cab pulled to the curb. Craig paid him as Becky got out and she heard him mutter another apology.

## Chapter Five

"They look like giant freaking penises!" The park was almost set up for the next morning's festivities. Becky turned in a circle, looking at the huge, colorful sculptures and the fabric that flowed from each one. There were twenty-two of them scattered throughout the ArtMania area, each representing the life of a child with a brain tumor who'd been saved by the hospital last year.

She rubbed her forehead. "Liza, is this what you got out of Samuel's drawings?"

"Nope. No. Not at all. I'm not sure what to think. They do have a very particular shape."

"Yeah. A particular *penis* shape." *Shit!* Becky sat weakly on a bench that was thankfully close by. It put her directly in front of a sculpture that should have resembled a tall pink-and-yellow pinwheel. The shaft that rose about twelve feet above the ground had yellow fabric draped around a wide base, spiraling up to the top of the sculpture. Capping the top were the spinning petals of the pinwheel. But instead of facing forward like a windmill, they were attached to a track of sorts that ran around the circumference of the pole, inches from the top. Each petal curved out from the track delicately before pointing straight up.

The optical illusion created when the track turned gave the top of the shaft a bright-pink head.

The sculpture sticking out of the ground looked more like a huge pink-and-yellow dildo and less like any pinwheel *she'd* ever seen. And twenty-two of them dotted the Sheep Meadow.

She looked around and could see four or five more brightly colored dildos protruding up amongst the artist and craft booths. She could see it now, frightened

children and offended parents. "Oh my God. I've turned Central Park into an oversized-adult-toy exhibit."

"It's not that bad. You're the only one who's going to see it that way." Liza sat beside her.

"Really? You think there is anyone over the age of eight who could walk through this meadow, see these things and not think to themselves, 'giant penises', 'epic phalluses' or 'mammoth, multicolored cocks'?" She shook her head. "Tenfold is going to have a conniption over this."

Craig was chuckling as he joined them. "No. He's not that uptight. He's a businessman, but he's also a man." He walked around the big yellow shaft. "I thought they were supposed to have streamers or something, like a maypole?"

"They will," Liza said. "The streamers are being installed now. They haven't gotten to those. It'll be fine, Becky. I'm sure colossal cocks help sell arts and crafts. I read it in a marketing article just last week. It's genius, really." She wasn't doing a very good job of even *trying* to sound sincere.

Becky huffed. "I'll find one with the streamers installed and see if that helps any. You two certainly aren't."

Craig followed her. "There's no need for help, Becky. They are what they are. We can't do much now."

She stopped at the end of a row of booths and tents. The idea in the layout of the festival was to have a few carnival rides in the center of the park for the kids. Curved rows of booths formed concentric circles surrounding the rides. The pinwheels were positioned so that several were visible from any given location. Each of the pinwheel sculptures had its own theme and school kids had decorated the fabrics before Samuel incorporated them into the sculptures.

The pinwheel Becky was currently facing was covered in large black and white splotches. "It's a cow dildo." She shook her head. *Oh. My. God.*

He laughed. "It's not. Let's find one that's got the streamers and see if that takes away from the, ah, *mannish* look." He grabbed her hand and pulled her farther into the festival grounds.

A few of the sculptures closest to the rides were complete. Samuel stood with Mr. Tenfold, directing the installation of the streamers. Becky hesitated to get close enough to Tenfold to hear his thoughts on the artwork.

"Don't worry. Chuck won't care if there's an underlying erotic theme to the festivities." He winked and left her standing by a booth that was being set up to sell large lizards and butterflies crafted from copper and steel. Considering their metallic construction, they were very lifelike.

There was a lot of activity going on around the park. Craig and Mr. Tenfold shook hands. He'd called him Chuck. There wasn't a chance Becky would get on a first-name basis with a client this huge. The man owned several multinational companies, a pharmaceutical company and God only knew what else.

She took a deep breath before responding to Craig waiving her over. If she stood there much longer studying the giant metal lizard, she'd look like an idiot. *Considering the situation...*

Samuel greeted her first. "Well, Becky-Boo, what do ya think of the masterpieces?" He held his hands out to the sculpture in a Vanna White, here's-your-prize manner. The streamers hanging from the top of the shaft did not change the visual.

She saw more masturbation than masterpiece, but she didn't say it. "They look a little different than I imagined. A little more..."

Mr. Tenfold broke in. "Pornographic?" He shook his head and chuckled.

Craig laughed. "Yep. That's the word." Both his hands were crammed in his pockets. Becky suspected with that vibrator going, everything seemed pornographic to Craig. She got her own thrill thinking about him fighting an erection. She was going to have to find a way to get him some relief. And herself at the same time.

She looked at her watch. Eleven thirty. "Samuel, how did they go from the kid-friendly pinwheels in your drawings to peniswheels?"

"You know the artistic mind can't always answer questions like that. It happens." He sighed. "The wire for the petals arrived late and it was cut wrong and misshapen. We liked the idea of turning them up instead of forward. I hadn't seen one completely assembled until today either. The posts were erected yesterday and the crew started installing the tops this morning." Farrah barked her agreement with his account of events.

"They're perfectly fine, Becky," Mr. Tenfold said, clapping her on the shoulder. "We're making more of it than is warranted."

"What's the worst that could happen? The media makes an insinuating comment. They'll say whatever they like anyway." Samuel comforted her with a pat to her arm. "No such thing as bad publicity, sweetie."

Becky looked to Mr. Tenfold. He was not concerned in the least. He'd moved toward a booth where kids could create bugs out of foam shapes, pipe cleaners and scraps of shiny fabric. She shook her head. Maybe she *was* overreacting. Tomorrow there would be loud music, thousands of people milling about and the rides would be running. The design of the sculptures would get lost in the mix. Right?

Craig leaned in close to her ear. "If I can't fuck you in the next five minutes..."

She gave him a stunned grin. "What's the matter, Craig? You ready to explode?"

He grabbed her hand and walked her toward the rides. His eyes scanned the options before him.

Becky brought them to screeching halt in front of the fun house. It was the biggest ride in the festival, at least size-wise. She was sure the Spinnaker would have the biggest draw. Kids seemed to love rides that spin them until they puke. The fun house, however, was closed in and, well, fun. For their immediate need, the fun house was looking like the best idea she'd had in a while. Oversized clowns smiled down on her from the façade of the attraction.



Craig shrugged. "Big Top Fun House." He glanced at the entrance. "Looks like no one's here to interrupt our inspection."

Becky pushed through the swinging doors that led inside. The lighting was awkward, as if still set for construction, brash and bright. The mechanics of the ride itself weren't currently running, of course. She continued over two sets of steps. If running, they would have been moving side to side to trip you up as you attempted to climb. Lingering scents of paint and oil permeated the air. Part of the contract with the carnival company had been to make sure all the attractions were clean and freshly painted. Bright blue walls and more clowns grinned down on her as she followed the crooked path of a hallway.

They stepped into a red tube with a bright yellow spiral painted around the inside. The barrel wasn't spinning, but the ground was rounded and she was ducking to get through. It made her feel a little off balance, maybe from the mental expectation that the tunnel should be moving but experiencing it standing still at the same time. She wasn't sure. Craig's hand cupped her ass as she walked behind her, slightly bent over.

On the far side of the tunnel was a walkway with bright yellow railings along the sides. From one side of the railing to the other, rollers had been installed on the walkway. Hundreds of them. When she put a foot on the rollers, it shot forward, interrupting her balance. She reached for the handrails to adjust her weight, only to have her feet roll out from under her backward. No mechanics needed for this part of the fun house. The only way to negotiate the path was to hold on to the rails and pull yourself along with your arms. Becky came close to busting her ass more than once.

She was giggling like a schoolgirl. Craig was laughing at his own endeavor. Once Becky hit solid ground, she had to struggle with her imbalance to prevent falling forward. Craig crashed into her, sending them both stumbling forward. His arms encircled her waist, trying to prevent landing in a pile on the ground. He managed to avoid the fall, but they'd landed with her leaning backward over yet another rail that was open to the outdoors. She looked down to the grass below. Squeaking, she shoved

against Craig. He held on as if ready to kiss her. Becky pushed against his chest, fighting to get away from the edge.

He let her loose. "Heights, huh? I'd never have guessed it. I can't picture you afraid of anything."

Becky didn't appreciate the implication of weakness and headed off to the next room. "'Afraid' is a strong word. 'Dislike' is more like it."

He looked over the rail. "It's only one story."

She huffed and went through the arch separating the rooms. "Yes, but to a pair as short as we are, it's more like two stories." She shot him a grin over her shoulder. When Craig lunged for her, Becky shoved through another set of doors to her right painted to look like a sixties hippie van converted into a clown car.

He caught her just inside the door. "Are you insinuating I'm short?"

Becky was immediately aware of the heat of his body pressed to her back. She spun in his arms and kissed him. It became a deep, needful kiss with his arms wrapped tightly around her, his fingers pulling at her blouse. Becky could feel the vibrator. Feel his cock. He pushed her backward as they continued to take in each other's lips, explore each other's bodies with their hands.

His heated kiss made her feel wanted in a very stirring way. His hands roamed and caressed as his mouth explored hers. Her back hit a wall.

Becky reached down and felt around his crotch until she found the vibrator. "Are you insinuating I'm a scaredy-cat?"

Craig ran his hands up her sides, digging his finger into the flesh just below her breasts. "Take that out of my pants. Please." The words were spoken through gritted teeth.

As she slid to her knees, Becky realized they were in the mirror room. Contorted images of their bodies reflected all around the harshly lit room. She smiled up at him. "Your ass looks huge in those pants."

He gave her a raised eyebrow. She indicated the mirror to their right with a tilt of her head and he glanced over. The mirror made them appear tall and freakishly thin, except for their midsections. Right then, with her kneeling before him, that meant his ass and her head were bulbous and distended. He barked out a laugh.

She looked back up. "Wonder how *this* looks," she said as she started to unbutton his pants.

He wiggled his hips and the bulge in his slacks got larger in the mirror. "Don't get your hopes up. It's only the reflection that's bigger."

She pulled his pants open and reached in, placing her cool hand against his warm skin, palm flat on his lower abdomen. It made him suck in his breath. "Cold hands, warm heart?" he asked.

Becky let her hand slide into his briefs and fished around to find the vibrator. She positioned her hand to cup the bullet against his shaft. He leaned forward, his hands hitting the wall behind her, elbows stiff to brace his body. "Don't get your hopes up," she said as she used her free hand and pushed the button to change the vibration to the pulsing setting she loved.

His hips moved with the pulses. His cock slid between her fingers and she gripped harder. "But you don't get to come just yet."

He looked at the ceiling. "I didn't figure I was getting off that easy."

He was so confident. No hang-ups about his body or his sexuality. She loved their playful banter. If he lived in Texas, she'd have to worry about getting too close to this "patient".

She looked up to watch his face as she stroked. His eyes were closed, his dark hair falling haphazardly out of place. Maybe Craig Hill didn't need as much fixing as she'd thought. But then again, he baked for a hobby. He needed to get out more. He needed to be this free all the time.

She looked back to his swollen cock. *Well, maybe not this free.*

"God, Becky, if you don't stop I'm going to make a mess of your blouse."

"Oops." She winked up at him and pulled both her hand and the little vibrator away. "Sorry. I was thinking."

"Okay." He chuckled. "Thinking is good. Is it something I need in on?"

She stuck out her tongue and ran it up the length of his shaft, stopping to let it twist and swirl around the bottom ridge of his head. She paused and looked up. "Nope."

He reached down and lifted her off her knees. It was a good thing too; the metal floors were not good for extended kneeling. When she was standing, he kissed her again, long and deep, his tongue exploring her mouth. "I could kiss you for hours." He looked in her eyes. She was close enough to smell his spicy aftershave over the fresh paint. "But, since we're in a kiddie ride at a client's charity festival, I think I'm going for something more..."

"Quickie?" she finished for him. The sound of the Spinnaker ride taking a test run almost drowned out her comment.

"Yes. Well, hopefully not too much of a quickie. But not so elaborate as wine, dinner and dancing. Drop your pants."

She looked at herself in the mirror to her left as she unbuttoned her pants. In this one, they both looked really short and wide.

"We'd make good dance partners."

He followed her glance and laughed again. "Woman..."

"Okay. Don't be so hasty."

He started pulling on her pants. "Hasty, you say? I was thinking about you in the cab on the way to the meeting this morning. You teased me all the way through the presentation while you were wearing the vibrator. I couldn't help but remember how juicy you were after wearing it last night. Drove me crazy. And now I've worn it for a while. Is that your idea of hasty?"

Even the harsh lighting didn't take away from the cute, questioning look on his face. "Fine." She let the pants fall and pulled her shirt over her head.

"Turn around." He grabbed her hips and physically turned her away from him. She obliged and placed her hands on the metal wall before wiggling one leg out of her pants to spread them wide. Craig fumbled to find another condom in his wallet.

Craig worked the condom on and then slid the head of his cock through her legs and right to her clit. He rubbed it back and forth, teasing her clit with enough pressure to make her squirm. She was as worked up as he was. The morning of secret playing had been as exciting to her as his serious kisses.

"That's your foreplay, baby." He slid into her. She was more than wet and willing. To prove it, Becky pushed back to meet his thrust.

"You're such a romantic."

Craig pushed into her with a fervor he'd never experienced. How long had the woman teased him? Hours. That's how long. If he'd had to wait much longer, his cock would have detonated and sent her through the wall. He almost laughed out loud at the mental image of shooting Becky's body through the brightly colored balloons painted in front of them. He felt lighthearted and happy and greedy all at once as he fucked her with intense urgency. How was that possible?

Her skin was warm under his fingers, her moans echoed off the metal walls and her body contorted and twisted in the mirrors surrounding them. Becky Cooper held nothing back. She gave. And right now he was happy to take. But he wanted to be able to give back. He knew he wanted more of this woman.

"A girl could get a bad self image if she had to look at these mirrors every time she was fucking." Craig followed her gaze to see which of the mirrors she was looking in. He leaned forward over her back to get close to the same visual angle.

"Nice. I look like a giraffe giving it to a bowling pin."

Becky tilted her hips and tightened the muscles currently wrapped around his shaft. Craig thought he would lose it right then.

"Can a bowling pin do this?" Her voice was light and spirited. The humor drained away as he drove in and out of her hot pussy. It wasn't long before he had no more restraint. He burst. He grabbed her hips and buried himself as deep as he could and held tight as he came.

"Strike." She giggled and pulled away from his body. It was a sad sight. He'd known he wasn't going to last as long as he would've liked. He wanted to fuck her all day, but given the location of their tryst, it was probably for the best.

He shook his head as he looked for a place to dispose of the condom. He had a receipt in his pocket. He wrapped it in that, hoping he'd find a nearby trashcan.

Becky pulled her blouse back over her head. "See what a little fun can do for you?"

Craig looked at her face. She suddenly looked victorious instead of satisfied. "Well, this qualifies as fun in my book." He wasn't sure what to say.

"And less time working." She kissed him lightly on the cheek. "You'd be surprised what that would do for you."

He tucked his shirt in and buckled his pants. It hit him as she walked out of the room. "Wait a minute." He caught her on the stairs leading back to the ground level. The floor here would be popping up and down if the fun house was fully engaged. "Is this one of the 'doctor' things? What did Tanisha call you? Is this a Love Doctor evaluation of my personality?"

Becky spun around and stopped. She tilted her head. "Not really an entire evaluation. I just met you last night. From what I understand, you have a crowded work schedule and very little social life. A little fun wouldn't hurt. So we're having a little fun."

Craig opened his mouth, a little shocked by the revelation. "How would you know about my social life? We've been at it like teenagers since the moment you handed me your remote control. What exactly makes you think I need more fun?"

"I don't mean to offend, Craig." She laid her hand on his arm. "I just wanted to help. Your reputation is that of an overworked lawyer who spends all his time in the office. And you said you *bake* for fun."

He couldn't believe it. She'd stopped thinking of him as a lover and decided he was a *project* once she'd found out his identity. He shook his head.

She tried to stop him as he passed to exit the fun house. She leaned in as if to kiss him. "I'm not a patient, Becky. I don't need *fixing*." He frowned at her. How many men had she "fixed"? It didn't matter. He liked his life. He liked his friends and his job *and* his baking. He was happy, if not occasionally lonely. "Goodbye."

"You're mad? Why? What were you looking for, Craig? We met last night. We stumbled upon a chance meeting and made it more. It's not been twenty-four hours."

He couldn't answer that one. He didn't know what he'd expected. But it wasn't this. All he knew was he felt empty and disappointed. It had only been one day. Of course she had no real expectations. Why would she? Did he?

Her eyes were darting from him to the bright walls and then to her shoes. She looked uncomfortable. He didn't want to make a scene. If he'd had a good answer, she didn't look like she really wanted to hear it anyway.

Craig turned and walked away. He'd imagined being used as a boy toy would be a lot more glamorous than this.

## Chapter Six

Becky watched from the exit door as Craig walked away. He was angry.

It *had* been less than twenty-four hours. They barely knew each other. He couldn't have real feelings this soon. Really. What was he thinking?

*He's just as hot for me as I am for him. That's it.* She took the few steps to the grass. *I mean, the sex is incredible.* She headed back toward the outskirts of the festival, passing the rings of booths and attractions. *I know his sense of humor matches mine perfectly.* She stopped to look over a display of blown-glass Christmas ornaments. *And he's smart, successful – and did I mention he has a really great smile?*

Becky intentionally shook her head and shoulders to get her thought train to change tracks. She did not need to make a mental list of all his positive attributes. It didn't matter what he was. For her, he was a weekend fling. She was merely trying to help the guy loosen up. Have some fun. Get out of his shell a bit. None of which had anything to do with feelings or relationships.

Luckily, she spotted Liza sitting on a bench at the end of the row of booths, talking on her cell. Becky plopped down beside her friend and partner. From the one-sided conversation, she knew Liza was saying goodbye to her husband Blake.

She watched Samuel arguing with someone over by one of the sculptures. He looked miffed. She should go over there and see if he needed her, but she didn't have the energy to deal with him at the moment.

Liza snapped the phone shut. "So." She looked at Becky. "What's wrong?"

"What do you mean? Nothing's wrong."

"Bullshit," Liza said and crossed her arms. She leaned back and threw Becky a smug look that said "you'd better spill it".



Becky waved her off. "Nothing."

"Becky, your hair is a bird's nest, your makeup is all fucked up and your shirt is on inside out. If you were grinning from ear to ear, I'd write it off as you finding some more time with our Mr. Hill, but you're not. So. Something is wrong."

Crap. There was no escape. "Fine," Becky snarfed. "Yes. I accidentally met him last night and we've been having a bit of fun today." It was just after noon and Becky was already tired after the long night and the highly charged morning. Not to mention the work.

Liza shook her head and looked up to the trees. "It was obvious something was going on during the meeting. Maybe not to everyone else, but I saw it."

Becky nodded. "The remote vibrator."

Liza laughed out loud. "Oh. Well. I didn't think *that* much was going on."

Becky would have blushed if it had been anyone else, but her friend understood her. "I wish Tanisha had realized it."

"Why?"

Becky shook her head. "He remembered her Love Doctor comments and kind of got pissed when he realized I was trying to help him understand life can be more than work."

Liza rolled her eyes away from Becky. "Imagine that."

"Stop it."

Liza resituated herself on the bench so she was facing Becky, one leg tucked beneath her. "Why wouldn't he be pissed? He's a nice, attractive man. Why would he want to be a project for you to 'fix' in your free time over a working weekend?"

"I guess when I'm in a bar and I give a stranger the remote to my vibrator, I'm not thinking long-term relationship. I wouldn't think *he* would either." God knows what he thought. She was the one who'd chased him down a New York City street. She was the one who'd invited him back to her room.

That was all before she knew he was the E.C. Hill who Mark had told her about. The stuffy workaholic attorney. *That was just me being horny.*

Liza shook her head. "And that stranger turned out to be Craig?" Becky shook her head. They both laughed for a moment. "Only you."

"Now, after less than a day of very fun, very erotic interaction, I pissed him off by trying to help him. What does he want after one day?"

Liza turned back to face the park. "Imagine that," she said sarcastically. "You just met him. How on earth could you make a connection that quickly?"

That wasn't fair. Liza had met her husband, Blake, and had a short, whirlwind courtship. It was Becky's prodding that had made Liza follow her feelings in the first place. *No, It's not the same*, Becky thought. *I'm not Liza. But I do really like him...*

They sat quietly for a moment, watching the few remaining vendors covering the booths and readying to leave for the day. The festival would start at eight the next morning.

"Why do you do it?" Liza asked without looking at her.

"Do what?"

She cocked her head. "I know I've never asked. I figure who you date, and why, is your business. But I *have* always wondered. Why all the short-term relationships? Why does the Love Doctor scenario always show up?"

She knew the answer. She'd not really shared it with anyone but this was Liza... "It sounds so cliché, but my mom. Of course."

"What do you mean?"

"Rebecca McGregor-Cooper-Tyler-Maddings-Hall-Whitworth-Briggs. Seven times. She'd bring them home, we'd all play nice-nice and before I knew it, I was in a bridesmaid dress...again. I had more fathers growing up than a Catholic diocese."

"Huh." Liza crossed her arms again. "So..."

"So." Becky crossed hers as well. She felt like she was using them as a shield. She'd been embarrassed by her mother's husbands. She'd liked some, she'd hated some, but none of her feelings mattered because she knew no matter what she thought, they were out the door before long. "I grew up knowing I didn't want to have a revolving last name. I didn't want to have twenty-seven marriages."

Liza sighed and put her hand on Becky's folded arms. "Sweetie, look back over your fixer-uppers. Those are *your* revolving relationships. All of them. All you're missing is the dresses, Beck."

The simple words hit Becky like a sucker punch. Liza might as well have reared back and hit her bare-fisted, square in the jaw. She blinked. Air seemed hard to come by. If she had been a cartoon, little birdies would be flying around her head.

She had done it after all. Become no different than her mom.

She'd managed a long trail of empty relationships with men who weren't right for her. She'd considered them fixer-uppers because they *were* fixer-uppers. Not one of them was the kind of man she wanted.

*Holy fuck.*

She was still struggling with her unexpected psychological breakthrough when Samuel approached them with Farrah, as always, tucked under his arm. Did he even let the dog down to poop? "Hey girls."

Leave it to Samuel to be her distraction again. His teal-and-white paisley jacket still looked straight-from-the-cleaners perfect. He looked her over. "What happened to you?"

Becky looked down at her inside-out blouse and closed her eyes. "Nothing."

"What-*evah*. You look like something Farrah yacked up."

"Were you having any trouble over there?" She changed the subject away from her disheveled appearance. "You were arguing with a couple of guys a little while ago."

He pressed his hand to his chest. "Oh, that. Not even a hiccup, honey. The pinwheels are all up and we are ready-Freddy." He tickled Farrah under the chin. "I'm famished. What time are we supposed to meet Tenfold at the Tavern?" Samuel looked at his watch and then to the restaurant through the trees.

No way was Becky up for Tavern on the Green. She'd just been sidelined. Injured reserve. Her phone rang. Even though she didn't recognize the number, she gave the universal index-finger-in-the-air signal. The one that says *I'm brushing off this conversation so I can have a more interesting conversation on my phone.*

She listened as the booking agent informed her one of the three bands scheduled for tomorrow had to cancel. Evidently, the young lead singer had a nasty skateboarding accident that involved steps, a handrail and his family jewels. No singing on key for him this weekend. *Great.*

At least the small emergency gave her an excuse to ditch the meal with Tenfold and go to her hotel instead. She needed a large dose of aspirin or a large glass of scotch. The latter was more likely.

\* \* \* \* \*

Becky flopped back on the bed that evening and changed the channels until she found CNN. The volume was low and the endless chatter would lull her active brain. The long, hot bath in the huge tub had done wonders for her sore feet but nothing for her racing mind.

She huffed at the news report, glad her day was over. The band situation had only taken a couple of phone calls to remedy. The other two bands lined up were happy to play a little longer to cover the time. Tanisha confirmed the contracts would allow the extra playing time without extra monies due. The media exposure of playing at one of Charles Tenfold's functions was more valuable than the money anyway.

Left with her own thoughts, she took a bite of a chicken strip. Room service had timed the delivery with the middle of her bath. She'd gotten out to answer the door but

the chicken and fries had waited on the bed until her toes were wrinkled from the long soak and her brain slowing down from the large scotch.

She forced down a couple of the cold, chewy strips and a few of the fries to give her just enough food so she could have another drink. Scotch and soda on an empty stomach was never a good idea.

At first she thought she'd imagined the knock at the door. But the second knock was louder and more demanding. She glanced at the clock. Eight.

"Liza," she said as she got up off the bed and straightened the towel around her body. "I told you I wasn't going." She reached for the door to confront her friend and reiterate her position. She was *not* going to dinner.

She swung the door open—and stumbled backward when she realized it wasn't Liza.

"Craig?" This time she was the one who stumbled, tripped and then fell, landing catawampus at the end of the bed with her towel askew. She struggled to right herself and the towel without completely exposing herself.

She wasn't ready to talk to him again. Didn't he know she'd had an Oprah moment this afternoon? *How could he, stupid? He wasn't involved with that conversation.* Not enough time had passed for her to understand what this little revelation meant to her and she didn't need his sexy ass standing there in low-slung jeans and a tight t-shirt, distracting or influencing her.

He tried not to smile at her fall. She righted herself and stood, holding the towel at her chest. "You're here. Why?"

"Ouch." He crinkled his nose and gritted his teeth. "Not the greeting I was hoping for." His body leaned against the doorframe, but he made no move to enter the room. He had a small white bag in his left hand. "I was a jerk today. I'm sorry. I needed to say it."

Becky knew she was the one who owed *him* the apology, but he'd offered one first. "You could have called." Wow, that sounded bitchy even to her.

"Woof. Tough crowd." He pulled on the neck of his shirt. "I brought these as well. I figured if my ability to negotiate an understanding between us faltered, I could resort to bribery." He lifted the bag a bit and shook it like a cat toy.

"What's that?" She knew she should tell him to go. She didn't want to talk about the Love Doctor thing again tonight. She needed time to sort out her reality.

"I need an invitation in to show you the riches contained in this simple paper bag."

His smile was so contagious. "Are you a modern-day vampire, bearing gifts to gain permission to enter the homes of unwitting victims?"

He straightened. "I doubt you have ever been unwitting."

Maybe it was the scotch. Maybe it was his charm. Either way, she was toast. "Come on in."

Craig stepped past her and headed to the table and chairs by the bed. He looked at the picked-over plate of cold chicken and fries then picked up the half-empty bottle of scotch. She'd only had two large shots. "It was Tanisha's bottle. I haven't had that much." *Okay, maybe two large glasses.*

"Good. Mind if we switch over to wine?" He stacked her dirty dishes and moved the tray out of the way. He set the bag on the table and grabbed the room-service menu, paging to the wine list before she could answer.

"I guess not," she said. He was intentionally playing out the situation. She liked the way he was teasing her even over something as simple as the contents of a paper bag. But two could play at that game.

Becky laid herself out on the bed, letting the towel fall where it may. She reached for the remote to turn the volume off, the loose towel pulling partially off, showing her ass.

Craig picked up the phone, watching her as he pushed the button for room service.

"I need a good, dry Malbec. I don't know the two you have on the list. I need something that will complement a variety of flavors."

"So it's food in that little bag." She spread her legs a bit more.

Craig licked his lips. "Yes. That will do nicely," he said into the phone.

"Thanks," Becky replied coyly.

He smiled. "Two, please," he answered with a lift of the eyebrows.

Becky rolled onto her back, spreading her legs completely. "My. You are a greedy boy." She was propped slightly on the pillows, her body an open invitation.

He smiled and said to Becky, "You have no idea." Then, back into the phone, "Sorry. No. That will be all. Could you get it up here as soon as possible, please? I have some chocolate that's warming quicker than I'd hoped." He waited for a response. "Thanks."

He hung up the phone. "You. Stay right where you are." Becky started to rise up farther. "No. Right there. Don't move." He ripped open the bag and removed bundles of colorful-paper-wrapped chocolates, each tied with a gold bow. He lined them up on the nightstand next to the bed before looking her over. "God. You are so beautiful." He ran his fingers over her heated skin.

He sat beside her and pressed his lips lightly to her belly. "I made these for a wine-and-chocolate party I'm having this week."

"You're having a party?"

"Why is that so surprising?" He unwrapped one of the candies.

She opened her mouth to speak but didn't have a good reply. *Because Mark said you were an overworked homebody without a life.* She heard it in her head and realized it didn't sound like the appropriate response to give aloud. Thank God her internal editor worked occasionally. She was getting the picture that Mark was very wrong about Craig. "I made some assumptions, I guess."

*And everyone knows what happens to those who assume...*

She had made an ass of herself. She knew better than to base her opinions on gossip, but who knew that they would take things from harmless fun to something, well...something else. Becky didn't know what to call this.

The Doctor was not sure how to proceed with this case. She was losing her professional objectivity.

She watched as Craig pulled the towel all the way off her body, leaving her naked. He then placed one of the chocolates in the middle of her upper abdomen, just below her breasts. "I brought four different kinds, all dark chocolate, each filled with exotic flavors."

Her nipples hardened in response to the cold chocolate. "Ah. The ice pack kept them cold. They were already pretty cold when I left the apartment. Your skin should bring them to the perfect temperature in a few moments." He tapped her ribs next to the truffle. "This one I call Fire. It's made with the finest Sri Lankan cinnamon and Mexican chipotle chilies."

"Wow." Being a Texas girl and having a love of all things hot, it sounded wonderful. "You weren't playing when you said you baked."

"Nope. I'm a very serious baker. Although, technically, you don't bake chocolate. It's still serious cooking," he said as he tossed the wrapper from the next one over his shoulder.

*If this was serious...* "Right. Serious."

He lined up the little round candy an inch or so below the last one, closer to her bellybutton. "This one is called Mardi Gras." His voice was lusty and sensual as he described his creations. "It's a blend of chicory coffee and almond liquor."

She smiled up at him, not knowing which she wanted more at the moment, the man or his chocolates. He was still dressed. He hadn't even taken his shoes off and she was completely nude, lying before him like some kind of ancient sacrifice. She'd never felt so sexy in her life.



He bent over and, with the lightest of pressure, ran the tip of his tongue over a nipple. Her tummy trembled with her need. He brushed his cheek across the tight nipple agonizingly slowly. His eyes were closed and she could hear him inhaling her scent as he moved. He brought his mouth back over the tight, aching nipple and bit down, hard enough to make her want to squirm.

"Don't move. You'll lose the truffles, baby."

Becky let out a whimper as she tried to remain still. The torture was exquisite. Her body was humming with need. "Craig," she whispered.

There was a knock at the door. She looked at it, slightly panicked. She was naked, decorated with chocolate and exposed.

He stood. "Ah. The wine has arrived." He walked to the door and opened it, blocking the waiter's view with his body.

He returned and made quick work of the cork and poured a glass. He still hadn't asked her to explain herself. He hadn't pressed her about treating him like a patient. Either he decided he didn't care and was just here for the sex or he wanted to sway her. *Win-win.*

His attention to her skin and the meticulous way he was lining up the chocolates was making her melt faster than the candies. He worked slowly, placing a truffle and then stopping to run his fingers up and down the length of each leg, not quite reaching her wet pussy, teasing her mercilessly.

He stopped and took a sip of the wine, letting a drop linger on his lips before he kissed her, letting her get a hint of the earthy plum flavor. He set the glass on the nightstand, Becky watching his body move as he pulled his shirt over his head. She reached out to touch his skin as he bent to remove his shoes, but he was too far away to touch without turning and dumping the truffles onto the white, silky sheets.

He unbuckled his belt and his jeans slid to the floor. He was hard and his balls were tight to his body. She let her gaze travel his torso, enjoying the way a light path of hair

highlighted the trail from his chest to his beautiful cock. She remembered what it had felt like inside her and groaned again.

He sat naked beside her. She ran her fingers up the length of his thigh, enjoying the thick muscles, the light dusting of hair and the warmth. "This one..." He held up one of the last little treats. The dark chocolate was covered in a light dusting of red powder. "I call this one the Hungarian. Its center is a mild paprika blended with a chocolate mousse." He placed it right over her bellybutton. A trace of paprika was left on his fingers and he touched one to her lips. Becky licked the spice off as she looked into his green eyes. His jaw clenched as she sucked the tip of his finger into her mouth and ran her tongue in a circle around it.

He offered a drink of the wine in place of the finger she was nibbling. She reluctantly let it go. He held her head and tipped the glass so she didn't upset the warming truffles.

"The last and most exotic flavor..." He set the glass down and picked up a candy wrapped in green foil and, like the others, tied with a gold bow. It looked more like a gift than a piece of chocolate. He pulled the ribbon. "The Green Fairy. Anise, cocoa powder, fennel and a secret ingredient give this little baby the flavor of the infamous Absinthe."

"Really?" Becky eyed the tempting treat displayed so nicely in this palm. "I've never tried it."

"And you shall have to wait on this for now. We have several others to try first."

Becky pouted.

"Not to worry. Nothing here will leave you unsatisfied." Craig stood and headed to the bathroom. The sound of water running and splashing gave her no hint what he was up to. As he walked back to her side of the bed, she watched his body move, loving the slight sway to his hips. "This might get messy." He'd brought a warm, damp towel.

"Close your eyes and open your mouth." She did as he asked. When she closed her eyes, the rest of her senses zealously took over. The sheets felt cool under her legs, air

tickled her skin as it moved through the room. She heard unrecognizable music strumming from a distant source and the heady mix of scents from Craig's chocolates was sweet-talking her sense of smell.

She felt the room-temperature chocolate brush her tongue. The sharp taste of paprika invaded her taste buds and her nose at the same time. "Bite," he whispered. She complied. As her lips met the soft treat and her teeth pierced it, all the flavors blended into something...amazing.

Her eyes flew open. "Oh. My. God." Becky chewed slowly. Craig popped the other half of the chocolate treasure into his mouth. "*Amazing*," she said as the complex combination seemed to change as she savored it.

He ran his fingers along her inner thigh again. Teasing, tempting her with his touch as well as the taste of his chocolate. *Great sex and dessert. I'm in so much trouble here.*

He reached for the one called Fire. When he lifted it, there was a small, round pool of melted chocolate left on her skin. "Are you ready to get hot?" He wriggled his eyebrows. "I mean *really* hot, baby," he said with a horribly mangled Ricardo Montalbán accent.

"Fantasy Island, here I come." He gave her a sip of the wine. The deep flavor cleansed her palate and readied her for the next truffle.

"Open up."

She did. She took a larger bite of this one since she could see it. The heat from the chipotle burned her lips, the sweet from the dark chocolate soothed. The combination was mouthwatering.

She watched his face as he fed her. His eyes hid nothing. Every move he made was with the intention of savoring the experience. E.C. Hill was not just here to get a quickie and move on. No way. This was clearly seduction with intent.

She savored his creations as he licked the little circles of chocolate from her stomach. Too soon the chocolates were gone and Craig handed her the almost-empty glass. "Hold it over your head," he said as he moved down her body. His hands, never

still, caressed as he moved his body between her legs. He nibbled at her thigh and Becky arched, trying to concentrate on keeping the glass upright and not spilling any wine while it was over her head.

As he moved closer to her pussy, Becky had a harder and harder time paying attention to the glass. She opted to set it on the pillow next to her, holding it upright one-handed with her fingers gripping the stem.

His tongue touched her pussy lips in a long, slow tease. She pulled her legs farther apart, attempting to push her aching clit closer, begging to have more contact. He moaned a little encouragement. "That's it. Open for me." Becky tilted even farther, opening herself, forgetting her concerns, longing only for his touch.

He slid a finger between her folds, a reward for her compliance, and continued to lick at her clit. She was thrusting against his finger and his tongue in a rhythm that suited her lust. Her body was strung tight, her toes curled, her free hand gripping the sheets. Worried she'd grip the glass so tight she'd break it, she was barely holding the stem. She was losing the ability to concentrate.

How he understood her body so well, she'd never know. He stroked her with his finger or moved his tongue just when and where she craved it. The groans and grunts escaping her mouth were loud and primal. She didn't care. She wanted. Wanted more. Wanted Craig. Wanted to come.

The feeling washed over. She let go of the glass and dug her fingers into his shoulders, crying his name, letting go of all her concerns and expressing and feeling like an animal. All her muscles tightened, the walls of her pussy gripped at his fingers as she shattered. Somewhere in her mind she knew she'd spilled the wine. She didn't care.

Craig didn't either. He rose up, grabbed a condom from the nightstand and turned her body onto her side. He got up on his knees and straddled Becky's bottom leg, holding her upper leg in a bent position, the back of her thigh against his stomach and her knee bent around his waist. Since she was on her side and he was kneeling with his cock right at her opening, she could reach out and touch his hips, his stomach, his thigh.

He rolled the condom over his cock without a word or a look at her. He scooted a little closer to her body and pushed all the way in on the first thrust and didn't hold back. The feel of his cock moving inside her in this position was explosive. Another orgasm was building quickly. He ran his hand over her hip, across her side and grabbed her breast. His face was creased with fierce need. He gave her nipple a tight pinch before soothing it with a gentle rub.

When she moaned he looked to her face. "I can't hold back," he said as he held onto her hip in an effort to pull her against his thrusts. She was about to come. She could barely reach his hip with her left hand but dug into his skin with her nails to hold on.

He stopped, leaving her panting and throbbing. He turned her again, over onto her knees and entered her from behind, picking up the pace immediately. Becky groaned at the depths he reached and pushed back, her body going rigid almost immediately, coming again, exploding from the friction.

Craig growled, his fingers gripping her hips as he buried himself in her body. She could feel his cock throb from his orgasm. She squeezed, trying to maximize his pleasure. He retreated and thrust one last time before letting his body go still.

After a few moments, he traced the length of her spine with his fingers. He was breathing hard. So was she. The room seemed to spin ever so slightly.

"You spilled the wine," he said.

Becky laughed. "I did. Main Events is paying for the room, so it's not a big deal." As soon as the words were out of her mouth, she regretted them. She'd wanted to linger for a moment before letting reality crash in on them again, and she had ruined it. She let her head hit the bed. "Sorry."

But Craig was laughing. "I put the wine on the room check too."

Nope. He didn't mind work coming back into it at all. She was the one who had the stupid hang-ups. Liza had illustrated that beautifully today. Maybe she'd known it all along. All this time she'd been clinging to the Love Doctor persona and it turned out *she* really needed someone to heal *her*.

He eased her down until she was lying flat on her belly and kissed his way down her back. He was whispering to her. "You make me feel like a man, Becky." His lips brushed the small of her back and he inhaled to catch her scent again. "At the same time, I get around you and I'm completely lost. I don't mean to sound so mushy. Honestly. I know you're not interested in something long-term," he whispered as he kissed his way back up her spine. "I mean, you just do it for me. I suppose it's just sexual, because that's all we know, but damn, it's good."

She lay there enjoying the attention he was lavishing on her body. She could get used to this kind of pampering. He was so tender and so fierce at the same time. His smile, his body, his confidence, his philanthropy and his sense of humor... Oh my goodness, his baking. Ebenezer Craigsen Hill was a *very* sexy man.

And now he was giving her permission to walk away if she needed to. *Holy shit!*  
*What do I do now?*

Her cell phone rang.

His cell phone rang.

## **Chapter Seven**

Becky rubbed her aching temples. This had to be the strangest day of her life. She wished she had a video camera. Then she realized she wouldn't need it as she looked over the festival grounds. The media was all over the place taking pictures and video.

"Ms. Cooper." The two police officers were doing their best to keep straight faces. But with Craig next to them, biting his lip to prevent a burst out of rolling laughter, Becky hardly expected the officers to maintain their composure. "Do you know who might want to do something..." The officer looked back over his shoulder to the closest sculpture. "Like this?"

At that, Craig did laugh. Becky had to bite her own lip. "No, Officer, I don't." Becky turned and looked at the windmill. The Sheep Meadow was sprinkled with twelve-foot cocks—many of which now had two giant, blue-cardboard balls glued to the fabric at the base. Not exactly the kind of art festival one wanted to bring the kiddies to.

"I can't imagine who'd want to do this. I mean, it's a charity event, for God's sake." She gestured to the giant pinwheel, which had already resembled a cock in its pristine condition. Now it was ridiculous.

"Yes, ma'am," the officer said. "Was there—" A yapping, pathetic bark—which sounded more like an injured pig than a dog—interrupted the officer's question.

Craig handed the officer some documents. "I've completed a statement for you. I'll forward a copy to the insurance company."

All conversation halted as Samuel came racing around a jewelry vendor's booth. The police officers backed up three feet as Samuel, wearing pajamas and flaming-orange glasses, came flailing into the night like a deranged Muppet. "My pinwheels have been violated!" He was still wearing his fuzzy slippers. The media did not miss his entrance.

An overly tight t-shirt stretched across his hairy stomach, leaving his bellybutton exposed. The pink material was printed with three pugs, one black, one tan and one white. The image was taken from the back, very clearly showing off the rear ends of the dogs. “Nothing Butt Pug” was printed below the puppy posteriors. The PJ bottoms were capri-length—also tight—and shocking lime green, with little yellow and pink pugs printed all over them.

Liza walked up and broke the stunned silence left in the wake of Samuel’s entrance. She looked at Becky. “Isn’t that the same outfit my mother-in-law had on the last time we saw her?” Everyone laughed. Even the older officer managed a small snort.

Well, everyone but Becky and Samuel. “Not funny, Liza,” Becky said with a straight face, but she was fighting it. *Do not laugh in Samuel’s face. Do not laugh in Samuel’s face.* Samuel was not as amused as the rest of the group. It was her job to calm him.

Samuel clutched the younger officer’s arm. “You have to find out who did this to my work. I bet it was *loco* Marcus Strawson! He has it *bad* for me, you know.” He pushed the orange glasses up his nose with one finger. “I keep turning his flaming ass away. But you know guys like him. They get *angry*.”

He spun to survey the damage and held his arms out in exaggerated frustration. “This looks like a jilted lover’s work. Doesn’t it? Marcus is wishy-washy gay. I need a dominant man in my life. You know what I mean?” Samuel turned back to wink at the young officer, who promptly tried to back out of Samuel’s range. Samuel reached for him again, seeking solace for his pain. Nothing doing. The officer tried to step back and stumbled. In the retreat, the kid dropped his notepad. Samuel reached for it and handed it back to the officer from a kneeling position.

*Looks like a proposal to me,* Becky thought.

Farrah started her gargled oink-bark again, this time at the feet of the officer. “Hush, Farrah. No need to be jealous. Daddy hasn’t even talked this one into coming over for drinkies yet.”

Becky snorted. *Ever heard of subtle, Samuel?*



The artist scooped up the pug and scratched her on the head, making her wiggle her curly tail. Her hassled breathing wasn't much better than the creepy bark.

"I have a girlfriend," the officer proclaimed as Samuel stood looking him over like he was the latest design by Calvin Klein. The officer backed toward two other policemen talking to workers still on the scene, his eyes filled with a combination of amusement and fear.

Craig coughed back another bout of laughter as the officer made his getaway. "About the vandalism?" He turned the attention back to the problem at hand.

The older officer sighed. "We'll look into it, Mr. Hill. But it's not likely we'll get anything out here. It's not a clean crime scene and it's pretty open for anyone to walk into. Your security guards said they didn't see anyone here they could distinguish from the setup crew. We'll dust for prints, but it's unlikely anything will come of it." He looked at Samuel. "Sorry, sir." He tipped his hat and started off toward the rest of the crime scene.

Becky called to the officer, "How long until we can start cleaning this mess up? The festival opens at eight a.m. I need all the time I can get to fix this."

"You can't just *fix* it, Becky," Samuel huffed in protest. "These are works of art. They have been violated in the most...!" He couldn't seem to find the words. He fanned himself and stepped closer to the sculpture behind them. The police were taking down the crime-scene tape and the local evening news was recording.

"Amusing way," Craig interjected. "If it wasn't a kids' festival, I'd say leave the blue balls."

Becky smacked his arm. "Stop it. You're not helping."

Blue balls weren't the only damage. There were posters glued to the fabric walls of some of the booths, homophobic slurs painted on them. All in all, it wasn't too bad, but it did need cleaning up.

Samuel was fussing at someone working to repair the damage. "You can't just rip the balls off! They've glued them on. You'll rip the fabric! Stop! Oh, for heaven's sake."

Becky raised her voice to be heard over the agitated artist. "I told them to figure out the best way to cut off the balls. Trust me, Samuel."

"It's too late to fix this. Just tear them all down. Having nothing up would be better than having these butchered pieces out here. It's Central Park, Becky! My biggest showing ever and it's all ruined! I'll have to move. The west coast is the only place far enough away to hide from the embarrassment of it all." He nuzzled Farrah for comfort. "Farrah understands Daddy's pain. Doesn't she?"

*Oh, the agony.* "Samuel. You're going to be on the news. Like *that*." She indicated his PJs. The last thing she wanted was the wild-assed artist in front of the cameras. "You should go home."

"I need to be here."

"No, Samuel. You need some rest. This has been a very trying experience for you. Maybe some brandy or a shot of that expensive tequila you like so much."

"That does sound lovely."

Craig watched as Becky expertly led Samuel away from the chaos. She was a natural with people and high-stress situations. She tucked Samuel and his mutt into a cab and headed back toward him.

"You handled that well." That and her performance in the meeting room told Craig a lot about this woman. "You should have been an attorney." He braced for a shark joke.

"My mom thought the same thing. Said I would argue over some useless fact until I was blue in the face, even when I knew I was wrong."

He smiled. "That does not surprise me."

She tucked her phone in her pocket. "I need to get a look at those big cocks. Wanna come?"

"There's an invitation I never imagined I'd get. How can I refuse?"

Liza joined them by the closest windmill. "I have extra security coming, but I figure we're done with the extracurricular activities for the night," she said, snapping her phone shut.

Becky walked around the shaft of the pinwheels. She wiggled the crudely painted cardboard circles that completed the phallic look of the sculpture then tugged at them. "Just a bit of glue but it's holding strong. Had to be some kind of instant glue. Fast-drying." She signaled to one of the crew helping to repair the damage. He handed her his pocketknife. Carefully she cut the cardboard, leaving two quarter-sized pieces of the blue board stuck to the fabric.

She looked at the crewman, whose long, unkempt hair looked greasy. "Are they all this easy to deal with?"

"Yep. These guys didn't know what they were doing." He gestured to one of the signs hanging on a booth. "That cardboard is even thinner. They're coming down without leavin' a mark."

"Is that so?" She handed him back the knife. "Thanks."

The crewman nodded to her. "Don't worry, we'll put it as right as we can. I mean, they still are what they are, but the balls'll be gone." Craig watched the guy head off to the next windmill.

Becky stood with her arms crossed and looked over the Sheep Meadow. "What are you thinking, young lady?" Liza asked.

She wrinkled her forehead in the cutest way and shook her head with a sigh. Her hair was even wilder than it had been this afternoon.

He needed to get a little more time with Becky Cooper. If she would get to know him a little better, she'd realize he wasn't in need of her peculiar doctoring. He suspected *she* was the one who needed healing. She looked over to see him eyeing her.

They stood there a few seconds just looking at each other. Craig wondered if she had the slightest idea how much he wanted her.

She looked at her watch. "Where's the closest open coffee shop?"

\* \* \* \* \*

In her mind's eye, it all happened in slow motion.

The cup dropping in a perfect upright position, hitting the floor with a muffled thud. She even had time to think of Newton's Law. *Here comes my equal and opposite reaction. Shit.* The impact blasted the lid off. And sure enough, it sent steaming-hot liquid back in the opposite direction with equal slow-mo speed. Up. She had no way of stopping it. No time to get out of the way. The coffee had a will of its own.

It showered her shirt and drenched the front of her pants. She stood like a Wall Street scarecrow, arms out to the sides, one now-empty hand and one hand struggling not to drop her briefcase.

"Dude!" This from a kid in a green shirt and khaki pants three sizes too big. He must have been cleaning up after someone else's spill because he already had a mop in hand. *How convenient.* He looked to the barista behind the register and back to her. "We rank spills, lady. And I must say that was the most awesome spill ever. Exploding red-eye. That rocked."

Becky spat out a laugh at the situation. "Thanks. I do my best." Hot, wet and sticky. Nice. She needed the caffeine more than ever now. "Can you make me another?"

"Nice look. But I think the silk does better if you don't pour coffee all over it. I'm no fashion plate, but..." Craig's smile was intoxicating as he returned from the restroom.

She shoved her briefcase into his chest. "Make yourself useful."

"Oh, I can be very useful, Becky." He took her bag and ushered her to a table. The barista handed them a towel.

"Not funny, Ebenezer," she quipped.

"Ouch." He bent over as if he'd been punched in the gut. "To the body."

He helped her finish dabbing the excess coffee off her clothes. There was no saving the silk blouse. At least it was right side out this time. The shirt had gone off and on several times today. She wanted to peel off the wet thing right now. She wanted to peel *his* shirt off too. This whole blue-balls mess had interrupted her night of sex and truffles. *Damn shame.*

Craig set her briefcase on the table. She gave her libido a mental rain check and cracked open her laptop. She clicked her nails on the table as she waited to get connected to the Internet. "I need to check my email and make sure there are no more disasters out there waiting for me."

Craig grabbed a rumpled newspaper from the next table. "Sure."

The barista replaced her red-eye. "Sorry about the commentary." He tilted his head toward the guy mopping on the other side of the room. The kid's pants had slid down far enough that Becky could see his red boxers. His head was bobbing to music only he heard. No sign of earbuds.

"When I make a mess, I make a good one. No problem."

The barista walked away and she glanced through her emails. Nothing else needed her attention. She took a sip, the coffee still very hot, as she pulled up Samuel's website. *Something is not adding up here.*

His site had lots of splashy color, revolving images of his work and pictures of himself. One whole page was dedicated to the pug and another referred links to other artists and gay and lesbian organizations. She looked up as Craig folded the paper so he could read a specific story. There, on the backside of the paper, was an article about the festival and Samuel.

Becky leaned in to read it. It would have been really great publicity if they had stuck to the festival and Samuel's art, instead of going off on a tangent about his "lifestyle". Shame. She glanced up to the date. Three days ago.

She pulled out a small pad.

Craig looked at her around the paper. "What's with all the brain churn?" He reached over and rubbed his thumb between her eyes and up her forehead. "You're all wrinkled."

She scribbled as she spoke. "First, this had to be an inside job." She was sure of it.

"Because?" He pushed the newspaper aside.

"In order for someone to know the pinwheels would look even more like penises with blue balls, they would first need to know ahead of time that they'd look like penises."

"All right, Nancy Drew. What else you got?"

"The sketches of the pinwheels were not pre-released anywhere. We didn't know they had turned out that way until after the meeting this morning. Samuel told me some of his parts came in misshapen at the last minute. I'm not sure I buy it anymore. The only person who knew what the final product would look like was Samuel. He had help putting all of them together, so maybe there were some others involved."

He leaned back in his chair and crossed his arms in serious contemplation of the situation. "You're saying Samuel Saltz, the famous artist, fashion plate extraordinaire, butchered his own art exhibit?"

"Yes." She mimicked his actions, but her blouse sticking to her wet belly made her shift a little, taking away from the effect.

His face made an exaggerated frown. "Your evidence is circumstantial. What motive would he have to do that? He's not getting any money out of it. There's not even enough damage to make an insurance claim."

"Motive?" She pouted. "I don't know. But the vandalism was bad enough that we called the police, and yet, it was done in a way that was very easy to fix. Too easy, if you ask me." She took another sip to increase the caffeine she already felt coursing through her body. "You work with some extremist groups. If they wanted to make a statement about something, would it be so easily remedied?"

She tapped the notepad and glanced back to the laptop. Not really giving him time to answer before continuing. "No. When people throw paint on rich ladies' fur coats, it's not washable paint. The act of vandalism is a very clear, very permanent statement. Our homophobic slurs weren't directly painted on the booths. They were posters that were neatly glued. Posters that could be easily removed." She pointed at him. "I submit, sir, this was all an intentional ploy by the artist himself."

Becky noticed his hair was in no better shape than hers. His shirt was unbuttoned and had lost its starch. They both looked like they'd spent the day in the back of a pickup truck roaring down Highway 80 on a hot Dallas day. Windblown, wrinkled and worn out. And still, he was adorable. His chin dipped in slight acceptance.

She slammed her hand on the table. All other occupants of the coffee shop turned and looked at them. "Ha! You agree. Don't you?"

"In theory, counselor. But it's a big accusation to make on a theory. Any evidence of this self-inflicted balling?"

She was already packing her laptop away. "Nope. But, we're gonna go get some."

"We are?" He stood when she did. "That's for the police, Becky. This is not a TV show." He reached and pulled her close. "How about we go get some much-needed sleep?"

Becky looked into his eyes. He was flirting and it was working. She needed a little more time to think about what she was feeling for Ebenezer Craigsen Hill. "Sure." She grabbed what was left of her coffee. "After I figure out what Samuel Saltz is up to here."

He let his shoulders fall in embellished defeat. "All right, Nancy Drew, lead the way." Grabbing the briefcase, he winked and got out of her way.

It was late. And she was tired too. Craig had been her constant companion for the last twenty-four hours. She looked at him as they waited to cross the street, finally admitting to herself this guy was obviously not in need of her Love Doctor services.

*Love Doctor. Pffft. More like Life Avoider.* Liza's zinging comment came back to her. She'd been avoiding that little realization too.

All she was missing was the stupid wedding dresses.

She glanced over at Craig again. He was looking at her, smiling. He still wanted her even after she'd treated him like a weekend gigolo. The problem here was, Craig was exactly her kind of man. There was no reason she couldn't try for something real with him. Well, other than he was a New Yorker, but she figured they could work around that.

He bumped against her as they stood waiting for the light. "Don't overthink it."

*Is he talking about Samuel...or us?*



## Chapter Eight

"Oh my. He came back." Becky stood looking at Samuel talking to the last of the reporters. The rest must have gotten their fill and moved on.

"Interesting," Craig said as they walked past the interview in progress and over to one of the sculptures that had been vandalized.

"Not really. The fact he went home, changed and came all the way back over here from SoHo tells me something too." She paced around the big dick-shaped sculpture, not really knowing what she was looking for.

Craig stood leaning against a nearby booth with his arms crossed and her briefcase at his feet. "What? That he'd rather be interviewed in a thousand-dollar designer jacket than puppy PJs?" He shook his head. "Not much evidence there, Beck."

Becky looked up at him. Only a few close friends called her Beck. It sounded natural coming from him as well. *Crap. Crap. Crap.*

"No, smarty. I mean the fact that he showed up in the puppy PJs and in hysterics to begin with. Now, an hour later, he's back here acting all businesslike. A tad off the chart—even for him, isn't it?"

Craig wrinkled his brow. "Yes. I believe you're correct." He straightened, grabbed her bag and reached for her hand.

"I haven't found anything," she meekly protested.

"We're not getting anywhere this way and at the rate you're going, it'll be dawn before I can get you into my bed. Come with me."

Becky gave him a sly little grin. "Are you going to go all lawyerly on him? Maybe put him under the bright light?"

"Cops use bright lights. Attorneys outwit people."

"Ah." The heat of his hand in hers reminded her how those particular hands felt all over her body. Maybe she should reconsider figuring this out tonight...

Nope. She needed to know if Samuel had done this. More importantly, she needed to know why. There was so much riding on it for the kids this event was supporting.

They reached the reporter and Samuel. The artist gave her an eyebrow wiggle at the sight of their clasped hands as he spoke to the local news team.

"I would imagine this was nothing more than some kids trying to impress their friends." He gestured over to Becky with the tilt of his head. "This is Becky Cooper. She's in charge of putting this whole shindig on. And she assured me," he put his hand to his chest as if there were an emotional bond between them, "my work would be preserved and everything would be fine in time for the gates to open."

The woman turned to Becky, looked her up and down and then gave her a cross frown. "Stay on her face," the highly made-up reporter said over her shoulder to her cameraman. Becky looked down at what once was a nice white silk blouse. Shout couldn't even blast those stains out. "Is that right, Ms. Cooper? Will the show go on?"

*How cliché.* "Yes, ma'am. The damage has already been repaired. The gates will open at eight as planned."

"That's a wrap," she barked to the cameraman, who immediately turned to start packing his gear. She handed him the microphone, gave Samuel a fake grin and headed off without a word.

"Parasites," Samuel grumbled when they were out of earshot.

Craig set the briefcase at Becky's feet and crossed his arms. He tilted his head slightly. Becky fought the urge to reach out and touch him. "But you came back to talk to them. Why?"

"The publicity, of course. The public needs to know the earlier hype made of the damage—and of me—was misleading. They needed to know everything was going to be fine tomorrow. I wanted to put a good image on the late news so those parents worried about bringing their little kiddies out tomorrow would be reassured."

"That was very honorable of you." Craig's voice was lowering slightly every time he spoke. "So you're okay with the repairs?"

"Of course. Becky was right. The permanent damage was teensy-weensy." Farrah barked and wriggled in his arms at the baby-talk tone.

"But earlier you were hysterical, threatening to move to the west coast to get away from the horror and emotional strain of having your work so...violated."

Samuel's mouth opened to respond but he snapped it shut.

"Why would you change your tune so quickly, Samuel?" Craig inquired.

Farrah wriggled again so Samuel let her down. She circled his feet and sat next to him, looking up as if waiting for an answer to the question herself. "Uh. Craig Hill, what are you insinuating here?" He propped his hands on his hips and tapped his foot.

*Back to flamboyant-boy again.* Becky rolled her eyes.

Craig shook his head. "No insinuations, just a question."

"If you must. I had a drink. I calmed down and I—"

Craig busted in. "Decided you'd better come back out here and make sure things wrapped up as planned."

Farrah started sniffing at Becky's coffee-covered shoes. Becky noticed something on her collar and picked her up.

"Planned? I have no idea what you mean." He reached for his pug. Becky stepped back.

"This is blue paint on Farrah's collar, Samuel." She was genuinely disappointed, even though she had suspected. She looked at him. "Why?"

"I have no clue what you..." He let out a huge, huffing sigh. "You wouldn't understand."

In a nanosecond, the flamboyant Samuel Saltz morphed into a wilted flower. His shoulders dropped, his face fell and his eyes suddenly looked as if he'd not slept in a month.

Becky pointed at the bench. "Sit. Talk."

Craig touched her shoulder. "Any paper in your bag?"

"Notepad in the main part by the laptop." She sat next to Samuel, putting the dog between them while Craig grabbed the pad.

She repeated, "Why?"

Samuel shook his head and let out a long breath. "Things get out of hand, Becky."

Craig remained unobtrusively off to the side to take his notes.

"Tell me," she whispered.

"I had no idea what to do for this show. I was in a rut, lost my muse, artist block, whatever you want to call it. So much of my work has been for the gay community, I didn't know if I could pull off a kids' exhibit." He rubbed his eyes. "When I was about to run out of time to get you the first drawings, a friend of mine suggested the pinwheels. I felt they were uninspired at best. I worried... No—I *knew* you and Tenfold would hate them.

"As it turns out, you didn't. But in my nervous state, I jokingly made a set of penis-pinwheel drawings with that same friend. When the time came to order the structural pieces, I sent the wrong set of drawings to the metallurgist and, well—there you have it. Giant cocks." He rested his elbows on his knees and let his head fall into his hands.

"I still don't understand why you had them vandalized to look even *more* phallic." Becky patted his back for support.

"You know. Things get out of hand." He looked back at her. "Last week, I did an interview for the paper. We talked about the festival for a long time. I worried my reputation in the gay community would keep people away. So I specifically kept to the kids, the hospital and the festival."

He looked up at her. "In the last few minutes we were together, the reporter asked me about my work in the gay community. I barely mentioned anything, intentionally trying to keep the content off my flaming-faggot persona."

"Ah," Becky said. "I read that article. It was way more about you and the life of a gay New York artist than the festival."

"Exactly." He stood. "I wanted to be taken seriously as an artist—not a gay man, not a gay artist. I just got mad!" He paced away and Farrah plopped off the bench with a grunt to follow. "I figured if it was a gay artist they wanted, that's what they'd get. In spades. So I let the mistake in the pinwheels go and put them up as they were. And I had some friends add the accoutrements to make it just that much more..."

"Gay," Craig chimed in as he sat next to Becky on the bench.

Samuel stood before them. "At that point I really knew it would only garner more publicity for the festival. No such thing as bad publicity, right?" He was looking for agreement from her. He looked as sad as the pug at his feet. When she didn't agree with him, he continued. "When I got home and saw one of the news reports, I freaked. They made it sound as if the festival would be all 'porno in the park' and I thought people would stay home." He hung his head. "That's why I came back out and called in a couple huge favors with a friend at the station to get another reporter or two out here so I could show everyone it was all fine."

Becky felt for the poor guy. "Jeez, Samuel." She didn't want to get him in a huge amount of trouble over this, even if she *was* furious at all the trouble *he'd* caused. How it would affect the festival, no one would know until tomorrow. And tomorrow was coming fast. "Go home."

"What?" He picked up Farrah. "Aren't you going to throw me in the clink?"

"No." She stood and looked to Craig for the okay. He nodded. "It's late. We'll figure this all out in the morning."

He stood quietly for a moment. "Okay then. Good night." He started toward the street, but turned back. "Becky?"

"Yeah?"

"I really didn't mean to do any damage. I just wanted to be judged for my art. I wanted the kids to benefit from my art, not my lifestyle. I'm sorry I completely lost it."

"I know that. I do. We'll figure it out in the morning, Samuel. Get some rest. I expect you here tomorrow."

Craig put his arm around her waist as Samuel walked away with a puggy tail wiggling under his arm. "Likely, all this *will* bring in more people."

She leaned her head on his shoulder. "You think?"

"Oh yeah. It's New York. We love our drama large and real." He turned her so they were facing one another. "Now. We are going to get some rest."

She was beat and she was hungry. His body pressed to hers felt delicious and she decided she was in no mood to argue. "Are there truffles still in the hotel room?"

"I believe there are." He kissed her forehead.

\* \* \* \* \*

An unfamiliar sound roused her. Becky opened her eyes in an offended squint. Morning light was pouring through open curtains. Why hadn't she remembered to close them before drifting off? Hell, she didn't remember going to sleep. She remembered a shower, a few bites of chocolate, a sip or two of wine and Craig offering to rub her back. *Bingo*.

His warm body was sleeping soundly next to hers. He was on his stomach with sheets pulled over him just enough to hide his ass. Becky rolled over, resting her chest on his back and her cheek on his shoulder. She caressed his other shoulder with lazy swirls of her fingers. The smooth feel of his sheet-buffed skin was heaven. Her nipples automatically hardened. He smelled wonderful. Spicy. Sexy. She let her fingers trail down to where his skin stopped and the sheets began. He moved his leg a bit.

She pushed the sheets down and tickled his cheeks with her fingertips.

Craig eased his legs apart. "Lower," he mumbled into the pillow. She followed his orders. Her fingers lightly caressed his inner thighs, brushing his balls every few strokes. He let out a groan and resituated again, moving his legs farther apart, inviting more interaction. "Lower."

She scooted down his body so she could reach all the way to the mattress through his spread legs. She continued to trace swirls and circles up his thighs, over his ass cheeks and down to tease his balls. She kissed his back where her head still rested, truly enjoying the intimate feel and the lazy nature of the experience.

Squirming of Craig's hips told her the laziness was about to come to a screeching halt. He turned a little to let her know he wanted to roll over and she reluctantly removed herself from the heat of his back and let him come face-to-face with her.

His hard cock throbbed against his belly. "Good morning." He brushed her curls off her face.

"Morning." She reached for his cock and continued stroking him.

His stomach had wrinkles from the sheets. He rolled all the way over onto his back.

Becky couldn't resist the tempting morning wood. She maneuvered over his body and took him into her mouth slowly, making him grasp the sheets. He pushed up and she let him fill her. He pulled back until his head was just inside her lips. Becky watched his face as she ran her tongue around the head. She ran her fingers up the inside of his thigh, feeling the strength there. She reached for his balls and cupped them in her hand. They were tight and close to his body. She fondled them, squeezing and massaging as she ran her tongue over the head of his cock. She knew the sensation was becoming too much when he grabbed her head and pushed farther into her mouth.

Again and again he thrust into her mouth, the muscles in his abdomen flexing. The view of his body and the sexy sound of his groans were turning her on. It wasn't long before she was sure he was going to come. She could feel the swelling and tightness of his cock.

She pulled away, breathing hard from the excitement of hearing him and seeing his body writhe in the pleasure she was providing.

She shook her head. "Nope. You're not getting away that quickly." She looked over to the nightstand. On it were the remnants of the last couple days. Two empty

wineglasses, crumpled wrappers from the truffles, a bottle of lotion from the backrub that had put her to sleep...and the thing she was looking for. A pack of condoms.

As she worked to tear one off the strip and open it, Craig caressed her back, ran his hands over her hips and down her outer thigh. Then, leaning up, traced his fingers up her inner thighs and through her wet pussy, his touch igniting her further. He found her clit immediately and flicked the tip of his finger back and forth across the swollen bundle. Distracted from her task, she dropped the package to the floor. *Shit*. She had to lean way over the edge of the bed to reach for it.

"What a view," he said. "Maybe the best in the city."

Becky managed to get the condom and glanced out the window as she straightened up. The view from this room was the side of another building. She laughed at herself for missing his meaning. "You like that? Ass in the air?"

"Oh. Yeah. You have no idea."

She pushed him back down and grabbed his cock again. "Too bad." She squeezed. "I want you this way." She leaned over him and continued opening the package.

"I object." He lifted his hips to hurry her along.

She rolled the condom over his shaft. "Overruled, counselor." She positioned his cock at her opening. "My court. My rules. My ride." She slid down, allowing him an inch or so of entry.

He closed his eyes and let his head fall back. "By all means. Your rules." His voice was strained.

She lifted, pulling him out before inching back down over him a little bit more. "No lifting. No pushing back. I do all the work. Got it?"

"Uh-huh." He gripped the bottom of the headboard—and it shifted precariously. Becky chuckled. She'd already discovered the thing looked like a standard headboard but it had no legs. Instead, it was mounted on the wall like a picture.

"Oops," Craig said and grabbed the sheet instead of the loose headboard.



She lowered herself all the way to the hilt. He filled her completely. She bent forward slightly and put her open hands on his chest, loving the sprinkling of hair, the rise and fall from his labored breathing and the smell of wine in the room. Her pussy was throbbing. Damn, the man felt good.

He was watching her face, really paying attention to her as she lifted up. His eyes, those eyes the same color green as hers, were open and caring. His heart was too. She knew it. She needed him. She needed to believe she could find something lasting. She needed to feel she could achieve that level of happiness.

Ebenezer Craigsen Hill made her want it, made her feel it was possible.

For the first time in a long time, Becky let her emotions be part of the lovemaking. She looked in his eyes as she rode him. She gripped his shoulders; let herself revel in her own moans and groans. She buried her face in his chest and had a mind-shattering orgasm.

He pulled the headboard from the wall.

Apparently Craig hadn't even realized he'd grasped it again.

They both froze as he attempted to hold the thing aloft, and prevent it from sliding between the head of the bed and the wall. Becky scrambled up his body to help hold it.

"Can you keep it there?" he asked as she pushed it against the wall to keep it in place.

She was already laughing. "Yep."

He scooted from beneath her straddling legs and rolled off the side of the bed, grabbing an end and taking most of the weight. He peeked behind it. "It hangs on a little ledge. I pushed up too hard."

"I'd say so."

He reattached the headboard to the wall and crawled back into bed, wrapping her in his arms and snuggling her to his chest. They avoided kisses since, in their haste,

neither had brushed their teeth yet. She just wanted to feel his body and get lost in his scent. To get lost in *him*.

After a few moments he broke the comfortable silence. "The festival started an hour ago. Do you need to be there?"

She did. She'd already thought about it. Everything was all set but she still needed to be there with him this morning, if only for a few minutes.

However, Becky the project manager would have to wait on Becky the woman to figure out her emotions. The festival would go on without her. "I do. We'll go in a bit. Besides, once we get there, we'll have to deal with Samuel's stunt." She looked up at his face. "What are the legal ramifications for Samuel if Mr. Tenfold doesn't press charges?"

He shrugged. "He'll still get slapped with a charge from the police for filing a false report. That's only a misdemeanor, but it comes with a pretty steep fine and some court costs." He kissed her shoulder. "If he has a good lawyer."

She snickered. "You think Tenfold could be talked out of charging him?"

"By you? Yes."

She snuggled even farther into the sheets and his warmth, content for the moment, feeling connected. "I'm sorry."

He rose and propped his head on his hand. "For?"

"The Love Doctor stuff. It was rather rude and unfeeling of me to presume anything about your life." She worried about what he thought of her, since he knew her history of empty relationships. She'd never worried about what *anyone* thought of her.

"Well, what has further investigation told you about me?"

She glanced at those green eyes. This was harder than she'd imagined, but it had to be done. "Look. I know *you* don't need fixing." She rolled onto her stomach. It was easier to study the painting on the wall than watch those eyes change from warm afterglow to dull disappointment. She had hoped he'd gotten over his hurt feeling and had come back to her for meaningless Love Doctor sex. If that was indeed the case, she

didn't want to see his face when she embarrassed herself. "I've figured out *I* was the one with the issues all along."

He didn't respond or move.

"I just needed to apologize for how I treated you. I can't believe you came back over last night. That's all."

"Someday, I want you to actually explain all that to me. I don't need the details, but I'm lost in this conversation." He ran his finger down the slope of her back.

Someday? She was leaving, going back to Texas in the morning. This was her only shot. "Craig, I...um..."

He pulled her shoulder, moving her until they were facing one another. "What is it?"

"You know I live in Dallas, right?" She had a hard time looking him in the eye, so she chose to watch his chest rise and fall with his breathing.

"Yes."

*So...he is done with me. Fine. I can deal.* Becky rolled away from him and out of the bed. "I need to get to the festival."

He rolled out and grabbed her shoulders, turning her again to face him. He was so freaking sexy, all naked with the morning light behind him. "Yes. I know you live in Dallas. I've been aware of the fact you're leaving since you handed me that vibrator remote. I've been dreading it." He took in a large breath. "Even knowing you were intending on a short fling, I had no intention of letting you get on a plane...of letting you leave for good. I was going to suggest you stay a few more days."

Becky felt her heart lighten in a way she'd not experienced in a long time. *Love?*

He kissed her jaw. "I was going to suggest you stay *with me* for a few more days."

Becky felt goose bumps rise across the skin on her back as he peppered tender kisses over her shoulder. "I was even going to suggest that the Love Doctor give me

some intensive therapy. But since you seem to think *you* need it more than I do... Doctor, heal thyself."

Becky wrapped her arms around his neck, pulling their bodies close. They felt good together. *I feel better already.*

## About the Author

Mari Freeman lives, disguised as a normal suburbanite, in central North Carolina. When not penning romantic erotica, she enjoys horses, hiking, traveling, good food and friends. An outdoors girl at heart, you can often find her at the lake with laptop fired up, fishing line in the water and her imagination running wild.

In her previous lives, she's held an interesting array of occupations. She's been a project manager, a software-testing manager, sold used cars, pumped gas at a truck stop and worked in a morgue.

Mari's favorite stories include Alpha females in love with even more Alpha males. She finds the clash of passionate, strong-willed personalities fascinating. She writes contemporary, paranormal and a little science fiction/fantasy.

Mari welcomes comments from readers. You can find her website and email address on her [author bio page](#) at [www.ellorascave.com](http://www.ellorascave.com).

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