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## The Chocolate

Made Me Do It

By Dakota Trace

Annabelle stared longingly at the chocolate truffle sitting in the display case. She knew she shouldn't have one, but like a drug addict she craved the sweet flavor. She knew it was madness to come by here every day on her way home from work, but still she stopped. She wasn't sure if it was the creamy chocolate delights, or the man who had created those morsels that forced her return. Zephyrus Raincloud was just as tempting as the creamy chocolate delights he made.

"Good morning, Annabelle." Jerking her head up, her face flushed alarmingly at the sight of the object of her thoughts. He must have come out of the kitchen while she had been devouring the chocolates with her eyes. As usual, he had his long dark hair pulled back and tied. He was wearing a pair of faded jeans and a t-shirt that said, "I Melt For Chocolate."

"Hi," she said, trying not to show how she had been drooling over the delicious, hand-made chocolates arranged in front of her.

"So what can I tempt you with today?" he asked in his deep voice.

"A truffle," she said softly. "I'd really love to have one of those double chocolate truffles."

"A truffle, it is," Zephyrus agreed as he opened the display case and pulled the tray out. As he placed the variety of deliciously tempting morsels in front of her, his sister, Hestia, came out of the kitchen.

"Zephyr, you have a call from your supplier." She held the phone out to him and waited for him to disappear into the kitchen.

"Thanks, I'll take it. Can you get Annabelle her truffle?" he asked as he turned, heading towards the kitchen.

"Sure." Turning towards Annabelle, Hestia smiled. "Hello, Annabelle. How are you today?"

"Fine. Just craving your brother's chocolate." She laughed. "He has the best chocolates I've ever tasted."

"I know." Hestia placed Annabelle's truffle in a small chocolate box. "And just for being one of our most loyal customers, I'll throw in an extra for nothing." She winked.

"And my little brother doesn't need to know."

"Little brother?" Annabelle asked. "Have you looked at your brother lately, Hestia? He's twice your size."

Hestia laughed. "I know. But he'll always be my little brother." She placed the tray back in the display case. "Let's get this rung up for you."

\* \* \* \*

Zephyr smiled as he heard his sister laugh. It wasn't uncommon to hear the sound, but she always seem to laugh more when Annabelle came into the shop. A thoughtful smile crossed his dark face. Lately he couldn't help but dwell on his loyal and reliable customer. Like clockwork, every day, she came in and had one chocolate. In fact, he was always thinking of new delights to tempt her with. Hanging the phone up, he moved into to his small cramped office.

He stared at the paperwork that had piled up on the desk in front of him as he sat down. He hated doing paperwork, but Hestia had told him if he didn't put a dent in it today, she was going to call someone in to do it for him. Being a pragmatic man, he couldn't see paying someone else to do what he could do himself. He just didn't like it.

He'd rather be in his kitchen creating all kinds of new, delicious chocolates to tempt the very delightful Annabelle.

Somehow that tall, elegant, graceful woman had managed to catch his attention, which was a surprise, as he was usually drawn to delicate, petite women like his sister. The first time he met her, he'd been surprised at how nice it was to actually look directly into a woman's eyes. It had him wondering about other things that would be nice to do with her. His private thoughts were interrupted though when his sister entered his cluttered office.

"So when are you going to ask her out?" Hestia perched on the edge of his desk.

He stared blankly at her for a moment.

"What?" He looked as if he had choked on his tongue.

"You heard me, Zephyrus Raincloud. You crave her like she craves your chocolates."

"Sis, there's nothing going on between us. First, she's a customer; and second, she's white."

"A customer? Yeah, right, pull the other leg. It's shorter. And there is nothing wrong with her color." She stood up. "I do believe you protest too much, brother dear. Take my advice and ask her out. The worst thing she can say is 'no'." She headed towards the door and back into the shop.

\* \* \* \*

Annabelle gazed thoughtfully at the computer. Her job as a financial advisor was a rewarding one, but lately she hadn't found it challenging enough. It had been awhile since she'd been challenged at all. She was startled when the telephone rang, picking it

up and saying hello. She wasn't too surprised when she heard Hestia's voice on the other end of the phone, as they'd become true friends since she started visiting "The Delights" chocolate shop.

"Hey, Annie. Didn't you tell me you were some kind of financial wiz?"

"Well, I wouldn't call myself that," Annabelle chuckled. "But yes, finances are what I do for a living."

"Well, would you be willing to give me a hand? I'll even pay you."

"For what?" Annabelle asked cautiously, not sure about where this conversation was heading.

"Well, Zephyr will probably kill me for asking you, but we received a letter from the IRS. We're being audited, and well...Zephyr isn't the greatest of bookkeepers. He has a pile three feet high on his desk, so I told him if he didn't put a dent in it today, I was going to call for reinforcements. Anyway, he's gotten himself sidetracked by some new candy he's developing, and you can guess how much work he got done on the paper mess."

"Very little. So you want me to be the financial reinforcement?"

"Yes. I know you're busy, so that's why I offered to pay you." The eagerness in her voice was obvious.

"Well, considering all the freebies you've given me, I think I can let it go at that."

Looking down at her schedule book, she quickly scanned the entries.

"How about I come around tomorrow afternoon at four?"

"Sounds good to me," Hestia said quickly. "Zephyr will probably be out of the shop around that time. But I can get you started."

"All right then, I'll see you tomorrow." Annabelle hung up. "Well, maybe this will be the challenge I've been looking for," she said to no one in particular.

\* \* \* \*

Hestia smiled to herself as she hung up the phone. She couldn't have timed it better, she thought as she watched her brother come into the livingroom. He was wearing a pair of jogging shorts, briskly running a towel through his wet hair. She smiled up at him.

"What?" His head popped out from under the towel.

"Nothing." She motioned him to sit down. "Come here and let me help you." She took the comb from his hand. "Sit down."

"Hestia, I think I'm old enough to comb my own hair."

They had this conversation about once a week—so far he'd never won.

"I know. But I like combing your hair." That was her standard response to his protest.

Obediently, he sat down in front of her on the footstool. Due to his Native American descent, he clung to the tradition of having long hair, even though it wasn't practical in his line of work. Still, he knew it was time for a trim when he sat down and pulled his own hair—it had gotten too long again as, lifting up, he pulled it out from under him.

"Looks like it's definitely time for a trim again."

"Yeah, it snuck up on me," he said with a laugh.

"Where are you taking Joseph tomorrow?" She slowly worked her way through the long, soft damp strands.

"I thought I'd take him out to the Nature Center to walk the trails."

"That's a wonderful idea. I'm sure he'd love it. He loves doing anything with you."

"And I enjoy being the big brother for awhile."

"And I suppose it's hard being my little brother?" she joked.

"Yes, it is," he groused good-naturedly. "Such a bossy little thing you are."

Hestia just laughed.

\* \* \* \*

After her brother finally retired for the evening, Hestia took her cell phone outside and dialed their mother's number in Arizona. She wasn't surprised when their mother answered on the very first ring.

"Hi, Mom."

"How did it go?" her mother asked.

"She's coming over tomorrow while he's out with Joseph. I've told her about all the paperwork on his desk and she offered to help. She's a good woman. But you know Zephyr, he's so concerned about color." She sighed.

She could hear her mother's lack of surprise. "That boy of mine! When's he gonna learn color doesn't matter? Not to me, not to you—the only one it mattered to was your father. And God bless his soul, he's gone—but it still isn't right."

"I know, Mom. I wish you could see the two of them together. They dance around each other something fierce. But anyone could see the sparks between them."

"I wish I could. I'll be coming out to visit later next month, so maybe I'll see it then. And Hestia?" Her mother paused.

"What?"

"Be careful! This is a dangerous game you're playing with your brother.

Remember, there's a reason I named him Zephyrus."

"Aw, Mom. Not the 'god of the wind' thing again," she protested.

"Well, don't blame me, sweetheart, if you get caught in the backlash."

"I'll be careful, Mom, and he'll thank me in the end," she promised as she hung up the phone.

\* \* \* \*

The next afternoon, Annabelle showed up at "The Delights" promptly at four, where she met Hestia at the counter.

"I'm here. Feed me some chocolate, and I'll be ready to take on two feet of paperwork without a problem," Annabelle told her friend with a huge smile.

"Chocolates I can do. Paperwork on the other hand, I'll leave to you." Handing Annabelle a chocolate cluster from the display case, she shook her head. "That's a serious chocolate fetish you have there," she teased with an understanding giggle.

"Yep." Annabella nodded as she chewed and then followed Hestia around the counter and through the kitchen. "Yummy." She drew in a deep, lung-filling breath, breathing in the smell of chocolate and all sorts of other delectable scents. "So this is where he creates all those yummy, addicting, even maddening chocolate delights?"

"Yes." Hestia looked over her shoulder as she pushed open the door to Zephyr's office. "And this is where he avoids coming."

"Wow. You weren't kidding!" Annabelle whistled when she saw the awesome amount of paperwork, piled high. Setting her briefcase down, she picked up the nearest piece of paper and found what looked like a recipe for a new dessert. "Hey, Hestia. Are

you and your brother Apache by chance?"

"Yes, we are. I know our first names don't show it but the last name does."

"Raincloud's a very common name in the Apache Nation."

"Yes, it is. Do you think you can help us with this?" She gestured to the mounds of paperwork.

" I'm sure I'll get to the bottom of this – eventually—but it will take some serious time." Annabelle reached for another paper, totally unaware Hestia had left the tiny office.

\* \* \* \*

Hestia was at the front counter when Zephyr walked in early that evening just before closing time. She was busy waiting on some good customers. Glancing at his watch, he knew Annabelle would be coming in soon—he had a new treat he wanted to try out on her.

It was because of her he'd gotten an inspiration yesterday afternoon after she'd left. He'd worked for over two hours to get it just right and he was hoping she'd like it. Waving at his sister as he rounded the counter, he headed into the kitchen. Walking into the cooler, he pulled out a tray of fudge brownies he'd also made yesterday. Whistling softly, he started to cut them into squares. He'd noticed the display case was almost empty when he'd walked by and, turning, he started heating the special raspberry glaze, thinking, as he stirred—he couldn't imagine doing any other kind of work.

\* \* \* \*

Annabelle paused as the smell of warm raspberries drifted through the cracked door of Zephyr's office. Immediately her stomach grumbled in approval, and her mouth

started to water. That smelled just like Zephyr's trademark raspberry brownies—they were the reason she'd come into the shop the very first time. A friend had brought some into work and Annabelle had begged to know where she'd gotten them. Standing up, she decided it was time for a small break, and went out to con Hestia out of a brownie.

\* \* \* \*

Hestia smiled as she ushered the last customer out for the evening. She didn't know if Zephyr had found Annabelle in his office yet; but she knew he would eventually. Slipping through the door after the customers, a wicked grin lit up her face. Turning the key in the lock of the shop door, she effectively locked her younger brother in with her blonde friend. She'd come by later and let them out. Hopefully the time they were alone together would be enough to get through Zephyr's thick head that Annabelle's race didn't matter.

\* \* \* \*

Annabelle stopped and stared at the tight butt encased in well-worn jeans—the man had his back to her and was whistling softly. If the long hair hadn't given his identity away, the familiar tingle in her stomach would have. Zephyrus Raincloud was standing in front of her and wasn't even aware she was there. It gave her the unplanned opportunity to stare as much as she liked...and she liked...a lot.

\* \* \* \*

Zephyr couldn't be sure when he first felt it, but he knew someone was watching him. At first, he thought it was his sister, as it wasn't uncommon for her to come in and watch him work. But this time was different. Somehow he knew it wasn't her. The fact that it was coming from behind him wasn't the only thing that clued him—instead the

familiar tension pooling deep in his loins was a dead give away as to who was in his vicinity. Lifting his head, he stopped whistling before slowly turning around.

\* \* \* \*

Annabelle became aware of the moment Zephyr realized he wasn't alone. When he started to turn, she tried to paste a bright smile on face. If she didn't want him to realize she drooled over his chocolates, she certainly didn't want him to realize she had been drooling over *him* this time.

"Annabelle! What are you doing here?"

She lifted her head when she heard his deep voice.

"Well, your sister asked me to come in and help you." She felt her face redden.

"With your books," she explained quickly.

Zephyr looked at her, shocked, then he started to laugh.

"I know she wanted me to get through that hellish paperwork. But I didn't know she was so desperate she'd get a customer to help. I'm sorry she dragged you in here, Annabelle. I do believe my sister is trying her hand at matchmaking." He gently took her hand and pulled her out of the kitchen towards the shop's front counter.

"Hestia, you little minx, where are you hiding at?" he called out when he realized his sister was nowhere in sight.

Annabelle stared around her in dismay when she realized what had happened.

Gazing at the dry erase board on the counter, she was the first to see Hestia's scribbled note.

Walking closer, she saw her friend had indeed set her up. In her note, Hestia explained she was just trying to give them a push in the right direction, to make Zephyr

overcome his prejudice, she said, and to give them enough time together to come to their senses, she'd locked them in together until late tonight—or perhaps the next morning.

Sighing deeply, she knew she'd have to show Zephyr the message. Turning back around, she saw he was frowning as he futilely turned the doorknob on the front door.

"Zephyr."

"What?" He turned away from the door to look at her impatiently.

"She's locked us in."

"I know, but I don't understand."

"Here." She handed the dry erase board to him. She watched as he read the note. "I guess there's one good thing."

"What's that?" He looked at her warily.

"Well, two actually. One is that I'm locked in my favorite chocolate shop—that means you get to feed me all kinds of yummy things. And two, I'll have time to finish the rest of your paperwork."

"Wait a minute. What do you know about doing finances?" He frowned.

"Everything! Where you may be the master of chocolate, Zephyrus, I am the master of finance."

When he continued to look at her as if she had grown three heads, she frowned, "What? I'm a financial advisor, and yes, I am degreed and licensed."

"Okay." He watched her turn back towards the kitchen. "Where are you going?"

"To get my fee."

'What!" He reluctantly followed her into the kitchen, finding her at the work

counter where he'd just finished coating his raspberry brownies. She had one in her hand and had it halfway to her open mouth.

"What do you think you're doing?" He watched her take a bite out of the brownie. When she moaned softly, he stilled. Was this how she always reacted to his brownies? Annabelle turned towards the shocked man standing in the doorway, swallowing her little taste of heaven first before smiling broadly at him.

"You make the best brownies I've ever tasted. As for what I'm doing, well, your sister and I made an agreement. I do your books and get the financial details in order and she feeds me your chocolates."

"Is this how you always react to my brownies?" His eyes turned darker as desire flared in them.

"You mean, as if I've died and gone to heaven? I'm sure I'm not the first to tell you that. You know you're damn good at making chocolate delights and other yummies." She caught her breath in response to his heated stare.

"Well, I try." He watched her take another bite out of the brownie. When she moaned again, he felt himself harden behind the fly of his jeans.

Turning, he pulled his control around him like a shroud. He wasn't going to come on to a customer, no matter how sexy she looked eating his chocolates. He almost retreated back out to the front counter when he heard that sexy whimper again. His resolve was melting faster than his chocolate.

He wasn't going to hit on customer, he told himself again—especially a white one. He knew he had a prejudice against white women, but as he listened to her happy sound as she ate his confection, he wondered if it was a prejudice he might be willing to

conquer for Annabelle. But he didn't know how to combat the hurtful note Hestia had left—Annabelle surely thought he must be a prejudiced 'son of bitch'.

\* \* \* \*

Annabelle watched as he walked back out to the front counter. Damn, the man had a tight ass, she thought; then she sobered as she thought about the note Hestia had left. She wasn't sure she was up to changing a man's mind on something so ingrained. Propping herself on the edge of the work counter, she waited for him to return. Tonight, maybe, she should teach him about trust. It would take a special woman to show Zephyrus Raincloud that not all white women were untrustworthy and beneath him. It would be a huge undertaking—even more of a challenge than getting through his paperwork. But was she emotionally ready for the roller coaster ride that it was bound to take her on? No, she decided, she wasn't going to hit her head against that wall ever again. With a huge sigh, she turned around and walked back into his office toward the waiting mountain of papers.

\* \* \* :

Zephyr watched in amusement as the chocolate miniature slowly disappeared into Annabelle's mouth. She sighed with pleasure as she continued to pour over the diminishing pile of paperwork in front of her.

"You know, Zephyr, it wouldn't take that much to get all of this stuff organized."

She swallowed her mouthful of decadent chocolate and winked at him.

"Then you're hired!"

"What?" She looked up at him in disbelief.

"I've been thinking about it, the amount you've accomplished so far in just these

few hours is absolutely amazing. And if it's as easy as you say it is, then it will be even easier for me to hire you to do it. I'll even throw in all the chocolates you want." He winked at her as if he'd found the cure for the common cold.

"Zephyrus, I don't know if I can work for you." She stood up and started pacing across his office.

"Why?"

"Because..." She hesitated, and then just blurted it out. "Because, frankly, I find you very attractive, and I know you won't date me because I'm white. I can't be here eating my heart out everyday. As much as I love your chocolates, I can't afford to fall in love with you, and then have nothing come of it because of your beliefs."

He stared at her as if she'd lost her mind.

She sighed. "And I think it's now time for me to leave."

"I understand." He nodded. "I have a spare key. I'll let you out."

Her relief was visible— In her embarrassment, she had completely forgotten they were locked in.

"Will I see you in the shop, Annabelle?" He stared at her intensely as if he was willing her to answer yes.

"Let's just say, it's a good thing you have a delivery service, because I don't think I can keep coming in here and seeing you...but I know I can't stop eating your wonderful, delicious chocolates."

Zephyrus reluctantly went to the old filing cabinet in the office closet and dug out the spare key hidden with the other important documents. He unlocked the front door, and waited and watched as Annabelle silently left.

\* \* \* \*

Annabelle had barely made it home before the tears started to flow. She hadn't lied to Zephyr—she'd meant every word she said. She'd realized, when she faced the thought of not seeing him again, she'd lied to him by default. There was no falling in love with the man—she was already there, which to her seemed as illogical as rain falling on the moon. She hadn't known him in any way other than the occasional hello across the chocolate counter. They'd never even really talked together before this evening....so how could 'falling in love' have happened?

She'd heard plenty about him from Joseph, her cousin—Zephyr was his hero. But even being raised in her adopted family, the Whitebears, she knew what deeply held prejudices she'd be up against. They were the same ones she'd fought since she realized it hadn't mattered she lived almost her whole life with the Native Americans—they still saw only her white skin, inherited from her dead mother. They couldn't or wouldn't see the Indian blood running in her, from her Native American Apache father. To most Native Americans, she was simply an outsider.

\* \* \* \*

The next morning, Hestia hesitantly opened the front door. She wasn't sure what she expected to find; but her brother sitting in his office all by himself was a unexpected shock.

"Good morning, Hestia." He glanced up from his book.

"Zephyr." She looked quickly around his office.

"If you're looking for your friend, Annabelle, she's gone."

"How?"

"Do you think you're the only one with a key to the front door?" He took the key out of his pocket and showed it to her. "Remember the spare key in the filing cabinet?"

"Well, I..." She looked at him nervously. When he surged to his feet, she stepped back a quick step. She'd never been scared of her brother before, but her mother could be right. She might have pushed him a bit too far this time.

"I should shake you, Hestia – maybe even spank you! But instead I'm gonna give you a sound piece of my mind. Don't ever try to lock me in again. It wasn't fair to me or to Annabelle. Did you know, big sister, she actually came out and told me she found me attractive?"

"No." She backed up another step.

"Well, she did. I've had plenty of women come on to me; but never like tha. She was upset."

"I didn't mean for that to happen," she said quickly.

"I ended up hurting her. Without even doing anything—all because she saw your note." Stopping right in front of his sister, he pulled her chin up to look her straight in the eyes.

"I was damned before I even got out of the gate. If you'd have left it alone,
Hestia, I would've gone about it the old-fashioned way. I had plans for her yesterday,
big sister. When Annabelle came in – as she usually does—I was going to ask her if I
could court her."

"You were?" she squeaked. Nodding, he released her chin and turned reluctantly back towards his much neater desk.

"Yes. I decided I should take a chance on it. Dad's views have been clouding my

better judgment for so long. I had to decide if it was Dad's views—or my own feelings towards some whites that caused my distrust." He sat back down.

"So what are you going to do?"

"It's not what *I'm* going to do, Hestia. It's what *you're* going to do," he said firmly.

"You got me into this mess, and now, you're going to help me get out of it."

\* \* \* \*

Hestia stood in front of Annabelle's door, holding a large chocolate box from Zephyr. It had been about a week since the night she had so unsuccessfully tried her hand at matchmaking. Since then, she hadn't heard one word from Annabelle—her friend hadn't come to the shop even once. This morning when Hestia had come in to open the shop, she found her brother waiting for her. He had received an order via the Internet...which was no big deal, except the buyer asked that Hestia be the only one to deliver it.

When she saw the address, she realized why—it was Annabelle's home address. Taking a deep breath, she knocked on the door. She wasn't prepared for what she saw, as Annabelle answered wearing a soft rumpled robe, her blonde hair piled on top of her head. Annabelle's face lit up with a soft smile when she saw the box in Hestia's hands.

"My chocolates," she whispered.

"Yes. Just don't kill the messenger." Hestia handed the box to her friend and backed up a step.

"Why would I kill you?" Annabelle started slicing open the tape holding the top on the box. She found out why when she looked inside the box—there were no chocolates, only a folded piece of paper. Frowning, she picked it up and opened it. After scanning it, the chocolate box hit the floor. She looked up at her friend.

"Wait right there." Turning, she rushed back to her bedroom, and when she came back a few minutes later, she was dressed in casual clothes. "Let's go."

"What's wrong?" Hestia had to sprint to keep up with her fast walking, taller friend.

"That bastard is holding my chocolate hostage. Doesn't the man know *never* to come between a woman and her chocolate?!"

Hestia decided it was in her best interest not to answer.

\* \* \* :

Zephyr was in the kitchen when he heard the commotion from the front counter.

He wasn't surprised when Hestia came rushing into the kitchen.

"You deal with her," she told her brother. Smiling in anticipation, he dried his hands on the towel draped over his shoulder.

"With pleasure!" He headed towards the front. When he stopped behind the counter, he greedily drank in the sight of her.

"Raincloud, I don't know what you;re trying to pull, but I want my chocolates!" Annabelle said hotly.

"Of course, you do. And you also know what you need to do to get it." He grinned. She scowled at him first, and then reluctantly dug the badly crumpled note out of her pocket.

"Are you insane?" She threw his note back at him.

"Must be! I'm trying to take you out on a date." He winked at her.

"You don't date white women, remember? And I happen to be white."

He chuckled and walked around the counter. He took his own sweet time, looking her up and down, from her sneaker-clad feet to her pinned-up blonde hair; and Annabelle felt every second of his very heated gaze.

"That you are, Annabelle. But I still want to take you out." He stopped just a few inches from her.

"I don't care if you changed your mind, Raincloud. All I want is my chocolate."

She met him toe to toe, trying not to flinch.

"Oh, I think you want more than just 'chocolate' from me," he said softly. He blinked in surprise at her expression—if looks could kill, Annabelle would have a dead Indian at her feet. "If you want your chocolates, Annabelle, you know where to find me and when." He turned and escaped into the kitchen. He chuckled when he heard her soft, frustrated scream. Smiling, he winked at his sister and went back to his work counter, continuing what he'd been doing when Annabelle and Hestia had interrupted his work.

"Why do I have a feeling you didn't give her the chocolates?" Hestia looked warily at the door from the kitchen to the front of the chocolate shop.

"Because I didn't." Zephyr continued frosting the chocolate mousse cupcakes in front of him.

"Oh! Please tell me you didn't just deny my friend her chocolate? Do you have a serious death wish?" She bent her head and groaned.

"Well, if she wants my chocolate so bad, she'll meet me tonight," he stated with a

grin, even though he knew what he was doing could backfire. But Annabelle had been a very steady customer for almost two years; and he was willing to bet she'd meet him, even if it was just to get her chocolate fix.

\* \* \* \*

Annabelle couldn't believe she was giving into the man's bold demands. She'd gone as far as going to his competitor, but that was a mistake. Those other chocolates hadn't satisfied her cravings, and the caramel brownie she'd purchased hadn't tasted nearly as delicious as Zephyr's unique raspberry brownie. And part of her 'hijacked' order was two delicious slices of his raspberry brownies. The man had better have her chocolate, she fumed, or she was going to jump him, take his keys and help herself to a piece right out of his display case. Finishing with her hair, she grabbed the denim coat on the hook next to the door and let herself out of her apartment. It was time to go talk to a man about some chocolate.

\* \* \* \*

Zephyr waited patiently in the parking lot of the mini-golf course. He wasn't sure why he'd chosen this particular area to meet as he'd never played mini-golf in his entire life. It had to be because his sister had told him Annabelle loved playing it. Was this an example of the things he was going to do for this woman? He'd never seen an Indian play mini-golf before, but Joseph said his cousin, Belle, loved to play it. In fact, the little pipsqueak had even given him some hints how to play. He watched as Annabelle exited her car, excitement racing through his blood. He didn't care what they did, he thought, as long as they did it together. The waiting was almost over.

\* \* \* \*

Annabelle tried not to scowl as she walked towards Zephyr. She wasn't in the greatest of moods today—not only was she craving chocolate, but her traitorous body was calling out for the man waiting for her. And her heart was rejoicing at the thought of spending time with him. When she got close enough, she noticed he didn't have her chocolates with him. Her eyes narrowed and her bad mood intensified.

"Where's my chocolate?" She looked at him expectantly. When he shook his head, she growled uncompromisingly.

"Patience. I have it. At the end of our date, you'll get it." Taking a chance, he held out his hand. "Shall we go play some mini-golf?"

"Oh, you don't know what you are in for. I'll kick your butt all over this course."

"Care to make a wager on that?" They walked into the mini-golf's entrance building.

"A wager?" She whistled, turning towards him. "You sure are feeling awfully brave tonight."

"Must be. So what do you say? What's a small wager between two friends?" He took her hand as they walked towards the equipment counter.

"Shall we say, I get an extra piece of chocolate for each hole I win?" She an arched eyebrow and withdrew her hand from his.

"Hmmm." He tried to look as if he was thinking about it, but he'd come prepared, knowing she would want more chocolates. "Okay, that's fine. You want to do it hole-by-hole? For each hole I win, I get an hour of your financial services. For each hole you one, one piece of chocolate.."

"An hour? In exchange for a measly piece of chocolate?" Annabelle scoffed.

Picking out her club, she smiled at the teenaged boy behind the counter. After paying for their games, Zephyr picked out his own club.

"Okay, how about this – a half hour for each hole, and if I win the whole game—I get a kiss at the end of our date," he counter-offered.

"You really do believe in living dangerously. What do I get from you if I win the game?" She looked over at him as they entered the course. Setting her ball down, she lined it up for the first shot.

"What do you want?"

"I want you to make the dessert for a party I'm throwing next month."

"A party...Hmm, I can do that. But do you think a mere kiss is worth a dessert for a party? Talk about unequal!" He walked up behind her, close enough, but not quite touching her.

"Those are the stakes, Zephyr." She measured the distance between her ball and the hole.

" All right then. Do we have a wager?" He leaned over and softly whispered into her ear. Annabelle froze as pleasure ran down her spine. This man was becoming dangerous to her peace of mind.

"Yes." She quickly stepped away from him.

"All right then, lets start," he said with a big grin and a wink.

\* \* \* \*

By the time they'd reached the eighteenth hole, Annabelle was wondering what she'd gotten herself into. Either Zephyr had "beginners luck" or someone had coached

him on the pitfalls of each hole. She was only ahead of him by one stroke, and he had won seven of last seventeen holes.

It would be an even draw if he won this hole. Considering it was the most difficult hole in the entire course, she knew she had the better chance at winning. As long as he didn't sink this as a 'hole in one', she should be able to pull out the win.

As she lined up her shot, she was conscious of the fact he was standing close by. Telling herself not to get distracted, she swung the club back and hit the ball soundly. When it landed exactly where she wanted, she gave a little squeal of pleasure.

Moving aside, she watched as he lined up his shot. When he gave it a strong stroke that landed his ball right next to hers, she growled. He'd blocked her shot!

Turning, she glared at him. Her anger was totally lost on him, since he was already heading across the green toward the 18<sup>th</sup> hole's cup.

"You blocking my shot," she told him hotly.

"I'm just scoring up all kinds of points tonight."

"I'll show you scoring points," she elbowed him out of her way.

Rubbing his side where she had elbowed him, he smiled again. He decided he must be getting under her skin. The little vixen had squabbled the entire time they'd been playing. Hopefully the chocolates he had waiting would sweeten her disposition. Not that he didn't still find her as enchanting in this mood as he did in her 'groaning in ecstasy' mood, when she was eating his raspberry dhocolate brownie.

He smiled happily when she over-shot the cup by two feet. If he remembered correctly, Joseph had told him on the last hole – 'less was more'. The green leading up to the hole was inclining, but just six inches before the hole, it had a steep decline. Hit

the ball too hard and it flew over the cup. Just like Annabelle's had! Taking careful aim, he gave the ball just enough nudge to get it up the incline to the cup. It slowed as it reached the peak and then rolled quickly down the decline and landed with a thud, right in the cup.

"I can't believe you sank that!" Annabelle said fiercely.

"Beginners luck. But don't worry, Annabelle, if you sink it this time, you'll still win.

And get ten extra pieces of chocolate to boot." He stepped closer to her as she lined up her shot. Leaning in, he smiled wickedly. What he was about to do wasn't fair play at all.

But who ever said he played fair?

"Hmm, you smell good! I wonder if you'll taste just as good." He nuzzled her ear as she swung her club, and as he expected, her ball careened into the pole and bounced back, landing two inches from the hole.

"Zephyr Raincloud, that wasn't nice," she said as she walked back over to her ball.

"And you assumed I played fair." He picked her up and set her on the fence railing next to the course.

"And what exactly do you think you're doing?"

"Thinking about claiming my prize." He raised his eyebrows.

"But we're not done playing!" she protested.

"It won't matter if you sink the ball on this stroke. To win the game, you had to sink it on the first shot and I had to go over. Hell, to even tie the game up, you'd have had to sink that last shot." He lowered his head. Annabelle's dark eyes widened as she watched him come closer and closer.

"But the wager was at the end of the date!" she said wildly. Zephyr narrowed his eyes as he stopped, then smiled.

"So it was." He slowly released her.

\* \* \* \*

As they walked out of the building, Zephyr stared at the starry night. He had never had so much fun in his adult life.

"You know, I had a real good time tonight, Annabelle." He stuck his hands in his pockets as they approached her car.

"Not bad for a white girl, huh?" She leaned against her car. "So where's my chocolate?".

"I figured you'd start demanding it. It's at my shop."

"You didn't bring it with you?"

"No. I didn't want it to melt." He shrugged at her obvious look of disbelief.

"Then let's go to your shop, so I can get my chocolates and go home."

"I don't think so." He placed an arm on either side of her, effectively pinning her to the car.

"You promised!"

"You'll get your chocolate, but you won't be going home just yet. You owe me four hours of paperwork."

"I can't believe you're going to hold me to that tonight!" she wailed.

"Why did you agree to the wager then?" Zephyr nuzzled the side of her long neck.

"The chocolate made me do it!" she cried.

"And you thought you could whip the pants off me, right?" He drew ever closer to her ear.

"Yes," she moaned softly.

"Then next time, be careful what you wager." He dipped his tongue into her ear.

"Because I always collect!"

She gasped and lifted her hands to his shoulders as goose bumps ran across her flesh. Who would have ever thought her ear was that exquisitely sensitive?

\* \* \* \*

Annabelle sat down behind Zephyr's desk and looked at all the paperwork that had piled up again. How had she managed to land herself back here? Did the man ever do any of his paperwork? Zephyr leaned against the door frame and watched as she took the first paper she saw. He frowned, as it was one of his handwritten recipe cards. He watched as she placed it with similar cards. When she looked up, she saw his puzzled stare.

"What? You wanted me to do this."

"I know." He still couldn't place what bothered him. He brought over a piece of fudge to her. "Here you go." He watched as she snatched it up and hungrily devoured it.

\* \* \* \*

When she'd finally plowed through all the paperwork on his desk top, Annabelle realized she'd only worked off an hour of her lost wager. Sighing deeply, she decided she'd just have to grin and bear the other three hours, and firmly resolve *not* to wager against the man ever again. Speaking of...where had he run off to? She stood up and decided to go and investigate.

\* \* \* \*

Zephyr was waiting for Annabelle to finish the work in his office. Standing at his work counter, he mixed another batch of fudge. His double Dutch chocolate fudge had been selling well lately, flying off the shelves. Smiling broadly, he poured it into the waiting pan. And that's where Annabelle found him. Walking up behind him, she couldn't help but reach around his arm and run her finger slowly over the edge of the bowl. Zephyr stilled instantly, watching in amazement as the finger returned again and stole some more deep, rich fudge.

"Do you know what I do to little thieves?" He slowly turned around after setting the large steel bowl on the counter.

"What?" Annabelle sucked the rest of the chocolate off her finger. He growled low in his throat before yanking her into his arms.

"In your case, you have to kiss the cook," he said as he lowered his head towards hers.

She gasped when she felt the warmth of his lips settle on hers. Who would have ever dreamed he would be such a wonderful kisser? He obviously didn't adhere to the old Native American tradition of no kissing. When her lips parted with a sigh and she wrapped one arm around his neck, he thrust his tongue into her mouth to tangle with hers. She tasted of his best Dutch chocolate and that was one of his own personal favorite flavors. By the time they came up for air, they were both breathing raggedly.

"Zephyrus," she moaned softly.

"I know." He bent his head for more. She tasted of *his* chocolate and something even more tantalizing under it—her own unique flavor, he decided, as he delved further

into her mouth. Before long they were plastered against each other; and even knowing it was going too far, too fast, they couldn't stop the headlong rush of desire filling them both.

When he slid his hand down to her bottom to pull her closer to his need-filled loins, she arched into him. Pulling his head away for air, he looked down into her passion-filled eyes. Groaning, he turned and lifted her onto the long table behind him. "If you're going to stop me, Annabelle, you have to do it now." He gasped deeply as he fought with an intense desire he barely could control.

"Who said anything about stopping?" She reached for him again.

With a rumble, he snatched her up off the work counter and carried her into his office. Kicking the door shut behind him, he carried her over to his desk and, sitting her in the chair, he knelt between her feet. Leaning over intently, he captured her lips again. Annabelle moaned as pleasure shot through her once more.

Reaching behind his neck she toyed with the thong holding his long silky hair back. When she tugged on it, he stilled. Lifting his head, he stared deeply into her eyes. Zephyr had never made love before with his hair unbound—in his eyes, only his mate had the right to untie his hair. Not even Hestia had ever untied it. But after a moment, he closed his eyes, and made his decision.

"Go ahead. Untie it!" He groaned with pleasure as she did. Annabelle murmured her approval at the silkiness of his hair between her fingers. The man's hair was longer than her own waist-length hair.

"Oh my." She threaded her fingers through his hair. Zephyr groaned, low and long at the sensation of having his hair played with. Leaning in, he captured her mouth

under his once more. She gasped and tried to wriggle closer. Growling, he pushed her legs up and over the arms of the chair, spreading her totally open. He placed his hard bulge against her femininity and started to rub. Annabelle stilled and then grasped tightly at his shoulders.

"Zephyrus?" she gasped uncertainly.

"Shh. It'll be all right." He ran his mouth down her throat.

Pausing to suckle on her slender shoulder, he couldn't resist leaving a raspberry-colored love mark. Pulling back, he looked at it with special satisfaction—any man who saw it would realize at once, she was taken. He watched with pleasure as she arched under him as he continued to rub against her. Reaching down, he started to slowly peel her shirt upwards, revealing her luscious breasts. He rumbled deeply when he saw she wasn't wearing any undergarment.

"Pretty," he whispered.

"I'm small." She tried to pull her shirt back down. She stopped when she felt his hands on hers – holding her wrists lightly.

"No! Perfect." He leaned down to nuzzle one peak and then the other. Reaching behind him, he yanked his own shirt up and over his head. Tossing it on the floor, he leaned forward and rubbed his chest across hers. They both groaned at the sensual pleasure of skin meeting skin. Annabelle panted as Zephyr rubbed his golden copper skin against her pale cream—the contrast was erotic as hell. Pulling her legs off the arms of the chair, Zephyr coiled them around his hips.

As he continued to rub against her, he growled, "Damn it, Annabelle, I want you."

"Oh please! Yes, please." She rocked back against him.

"Oh yes," he whispered against her ear. "I want you to let go, Annabelle. It's too soon for total intimacy. But let me give you this?" He locked eyes with her as he continued to rub back and forth against her ardently aroused body.

"Zephyr, please," she whispered. "I ache."

"I know, let me take care of that." He bent back to her tight, hard, erect nipples. Toying with the button on her jeans, he briefly debated on stripping the clinging denim down her long legs, and decided he couldn't resist. Nothing said he had to complete their intimacy. Untangling her legs from his hips, he pulled them back to their previous position over the arms of his chair. Trailing his fingers over the damp denim at the junction of her thighs, he kept rubbing softly. Looking up at her, he captured her dazed, awestruck passionate eyes.

"Can I take these off, Annabelle?" He tugged on the brass closure of her jeans.

"Yes, please." She lifted her hips, bringing her long legs together to help him pull off her confining jeans and panties. When he finally had them down around her ankles, she kicked them off. Shoving her legs back up onto the arms of his chair, he huskily moaned before leaning forward and burying his face in her fragrant curls.

She went rigid when she felt the wet probe of his tongue. This was totally outside of her experience. Even though she'd been raised to be a modern woman, her family still valued chastity. She'd never even attempted to be this close to an aroused male, and she knew she'd never be this close again. She knew he didn't love her—but like her mother before her, she was going to give her body to the only man who had ever completely stirred her passions.

"Please?" She arched in his arms as the coil wound tighter inside of her. She knew it wouldn't take much to make her climax peak. She might have been a virgin, but she was far from unknowing or innocent.

Lifting his head, he smiled rakishly at her.

"I intend to." He reached down and loosened his jeans.

When his manhood sprang forward, Annabelle gasped. She'd never seen a man up close before, and pictures and videos were a pale comparison to the reality of Zephyrus Raincloud's aroused cock. It was swollen with passion, its tip gleaming with a bead of moisture. Taking his manhood in his hand, he gently rubbed it up and down against her.

When she cried out and arched into him, he gritted his teeth. He'd promised himself he wouldn't take advantage of her. His 'honor' demanded he court her properly, so total intimacy wasn't an option at this time. Resting his hips against hers, he slowly rubbed his erection through her curls and smiled savagely at her moan.

"That's right, Annabelle. Come for me," he whispered into her ear. She twisted helplessly against him as she felt the peak—her first real climax—coming.

\* \* \* \*

Damn, she felt like she was going to jump out of her sensitive skin.

Whimpering, she pulled his head back down to hers, fastening her mouth on his and burying her fingers in his tousled hair. Tensing, she fought her need to climax immediately. She didn't want to come alone. This would be the first time another person had made her come, and she didn't want to be alone. She needed him to be with her...in her.

"Zephyr, please. Not alone." She edged closer to climaxing.

"Shh, little one, it's all right." He rubbed against her and coaxed her ever closer to that unique precipice.

"Not without you," she protested unhesitatingly.

"Let go. I'll catch you." Moving back slightly, he ran his thumb through her drenched curls and pressed hard against her erect clitoris.

"Zephyrus!" She stiffened as her first real orgasm poured over her, her entire body quivering with the release.

"That's right, little one, it's me that's giving you this." Zephyr continued to rub himself against her thigh. He was so close he was unprepared for Annabelle to push him hard enough so he tumbled backwards under his desk and sprawled full length on the floor.

Gasping with excitement, Annabelle knew this was her opportunity to make love to Zephyr. Before he could sort himself out, she pounced on him, straddling his hips.

She raised up and slowly rubbed the head of his wet cock against her.

"No. Annabelle!" He grabbed her hips and protested anxiously.

"Let me!" She struggled to position him where she needed him the most – right at the entrance to her achingly wet folds.

Zephyr groaned as he felt her wet heat coat the head of his cock. Between being half under the desk and the fact his jeans had fallen down to his knees, he couldn't even crawl out from under.

"Little one, not yet." He felt her try and take him inside of her lush but slippery body.

"I want you, Zephyrus. I need you inside of me." Annabelle felt his cock butt up against the fragile barrier of her innocence.

"You're a virgin!" He shook his head in denial. "Oh no! Not like this, Annabelle."

"I have to." Annabelle jerked as his hands wrapped around her hips tightly.

Pushing uselessly at his strong hold, she wiggled, trying to get more of his length inside of her.

"I don't have a condom, Annabelle. You could end up pregnant—this way I can't protect you."

"I don't care!"

She slapped at his hands before she reached behind her and lightly cupped his semen-filled balls. Letting her fingers drift below them, she gently rubbed the area directly behind them. She had been told that it was the most sensitive spot on a man's entire body. It must be, she thought, as Zephyrus growled loudly and lifted her off him. Crying out in protest, she was unprepared for him to yank her back down as hard as he could. As he met her downward movement with an upward thrust, he broke cleanly though her fragile barrier. Her pain was nothing compared to her joy as he filled her completely.

"Fine! But be prepared for the consequences," he warned as he started raising and lowering her on him. He gasped as pleasure ran through him and Annabelle moaned happily as her body finally accepted the delicious length of him inside of her. Moving her hips slowly, she met the slow surge of Zephyr's hips. She could tell it wouldn't last long by the way that he was groaning under her. The thought of him

exploding inside of her fertile womb was enough to make her teeter on the edge of another orgasm. Whimpering, she started bouncing more forcibly on him.

"Annabelle, I'm gonna come." He jerked under her. "You need to stop, let me pull out," he pleaded with an definite rasp.

"Oh, I'm gonna come again!" She started to tremble and convulse on top of him.

"Yes, little one, come. Then pull off me." He fought to hang on long enough to let her finish.

"Yes!" she squealed as her orgasm raced through her lower body. Zephyr started tensing as he felt her warm sheath spasm around him. His own climax was eminent and he fought it off as hard as he could.

"Now, little one, now." He tried to push her off his close-to-exploding cock.

"No," she protested. "Fill me!" She hung onto him as he fought to control his body's immediate response to her strong orgasmic spasms.

"Annabelle, you don't know what you're asking." He squeezed her hips.

"Yes, I do. If I can't have anything else, please give me this." She locked eyes with him.

"Hell," he growled, unable to deny her. "Annabelle!" he roared as his seed exploded out of him.

"Yes. Oh yes!" She squirmed as she felt the warmth of his seed hit her waiting womb.

\* \* \* \*

Annabelle sat on the edge of her bed and watched as Zephyr paced back and forth. He was going to wear a path in her carpet if he didn't stop soon.

"Are you sure you are okay?" he asked for the millionth time.

"Yes."

"There's no choice, Annabelle. We have to get married." He came to a sudden stop in front of her.

"Do you love me, Zephyrus?" Annabelle asked softly.

"What does that have to do with us getting married?" He looked at her, puzzled.

"Everything." She shook her head sadly. "I won't marry you without it. So it's time for you to leave."

"We're not done here," Zephyr said hotly.

"Yes, we are. We were done before we even truly got started." She turned and walked over to the window, barely hearing the door open and then close.

\* \* \* \*

Annabelle watched the TV mindlessly. It had been about a month since she'd seen Zephyrus Raincloud, and she missed him like crazy. Not to mention that she'd started feeling nauseous in the mornings. Now she didn't know which way to turn. She'd taken a home pregnancy test and it had come back positive. If she didn't want to be married because he had taken her virginity; she definitely didn't want him to marry her just because she was pregnant.

So there she sat on a Saturday night, watching TV instead of sitting in her favorite chocolate shop with her best friend. She wanted so very desperately to talk to Hestia about it, but she knew Hestia would tell Zephyrus about the baby.

Well, that's what you get, she told herself, when you sleep with your best friend's younger brother. But she didn't regret her one night with Zephyr, or the fact that they

had created a child together. She just missed him and his luscious chocolates as well as her best friend.

She wasn't surprised when she heard the loud, insistent knock on her apartment door. Walking over, she looked through the peephole and saw the object of her thoughts standing in her hall, a chocolate box held in front of him. Damn, the man sure knew how to tempt her. She jumped when he knocked loudly yet again.

"Annabelle, I know you're home. Hestia told me she just got off the phone with you. Please open the door?" His voice muffled by the door. Sighing under her breath, she unlocked her door and pulled it open. "Can I come in?" His voice was as quiet as his knock had been loud.

"I don't know what good it will do, Zephyrus. We went over this last week."

Annabelle held the door open and let him enter her apartment.

"I'm not going to stop, Annabelle. I took your virginity, and to me, that means we must get married." He stepped in and closed the door behind him.

"And I told you I wasn't going to be married for that reason alone." She walked over to the couch and turned the TV off. Turning around, she expected him to still be by the door. Instead she found herself face to face with him, only inches separating their bodies. The very familiar burn filled her body at being so close to him. Meeting his eyes took all the will power she had, as his eyes were the same color as the delicious chocolates he made in his shop—a dark, deep, rich brown.

"I brought you something." He handed her the beribboned box.

"What?" she asked warily.

"Open it. It won't bite you, I promise." Placing the box in her hands, he waited for

her to open it. Slowly opening the lid, she peeked inside and saw many of her favorite chocolate goodies from his shop including those raspberry chocolate brownies.

"What's this?" She looked up at him. "A bribe?"

"No, your winnings from last month. You never got your chocolates." He stuck his hands in his pockets and waited for her response. Frowning, she looked again.

"You're short...the count is wrong."

"Really?" He stepped closer.

"Yes. Where's my extra chocolate at?" she asked defiantly.

"You'll get those when I get my three hours of paperwork. I figure for each hour you give me, I'll give you three pieces of chocolate."

"What? I won those pieces fair and square." She squared her shoulders and stood toe to toe with him.

"And I won those hours fair and square." He met her glare with a grin.

"The way I figure it, I only have two hours left on that wager."

"I said *paperwork*, Annabelle." He took the box from her. Pulling her up against him, he continued. "The loving we did in my office does not qualify as paperwork." He leaned in to capture her lips with his. She stilled and then moaned softly before returning his kiss. When he finally came back up for air, they were both breathing heavily. Their strong passions were truly mutual.

"Damn, woman, you don't realize what you do to me. You make me forgot who I am, who you are, and all I want to do is love you to death."

"Zephyrus," she whispered softly. "I can't do this. Please."

"The only thing you need to do is give yourself permission, Annabelle. I know I'm

Indian and it's a totally different culture than yours, but I'm still a man—one who wants desperately to make you mine." He explored her ear. When she pulled back from him, she smiled sadly.

"I wish I could just throw caution to the wind, Zephyr, but life doesn't work that way. Someone always ends up getting hurt in the end. What would happen if I did become pregnant after we got married? We would have a half-breed child, who wouldn't be accepted in your world. I won't put a child through that; and I won't put myself in my mother's shoes." She slipped away from his arms and paced back toward the door.

"What do you mean by that?" He grabbed her arm and spun her around to face him.

"Haven't you figured it out yet, Zephyr?" When she saw his blank stare, she just shook her head. Walking over to the mantle, she pulled down her favorite picture of Joseph, her beloved cousin. Handing it to him, she watched him gaze at it.

"How do you know this boy, Annabelle?" Zephyr asked as some very important questions whirled through his mind.

"He's my cousin. My father's sister's son."

"That means that you're ---?" Zephyr said slowly, as the truth started to dawn on him.

"I'm half Indian, Zephyrus. My mother loved my Indian father to a distraction. But unlike you, my father didn't want to marry my mother. He wanted to sleep with her well enough, but she wasn't the right race to become his wife. When my mother died, I was sent to my father, who didn't want me at all. He died shortly thereafter in a car accident on his way to the next rodeo. The Whitebears took me in and loved me like their own

daughter. But other children can be cruel—even vicious at times."

"I didn't know, Annabelle."

"I know you didn't know. I'm half Indian, and yet, I look like my mother. Not one ounce of my Indian blood shows. So do you see why this can't happen?"

"No. I'm sorry about how your father treated you, Annabelle, but I'm not him and you're not your mother. We're two different people in a totally different time. Take a chance on us, Annabelle. You won't regret trusting in me." He pulled her close to him, sighing as her body settled softly against his. The need to claim her was still there, but it had been pushed aside by the tenderness that had always consumed him when he was anywhere near her.

"I just don't know." She laid her head on his chest.

"Think about it." He slowly rubbed his hand across her back.

\* \* \* \*

Hestia waited until her brother had walked back into the house they shared before she pounced on him.

"How did it go?"

"A little better than I expected. Did you realize, Hestia, that Annabelle is half Indian?"

"Annabelle? Are you sure?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, she's Joseph's cousin." He slumped on the couch next to her.

"Well, maybe you can find help from her family. Surely they know her well and might have some insight into her that even I don't have," Hestia urged. "Just like if she

wanted to know anything about you, she could call me."

"If she wants to know anything about me, she can ask me, not my big sister!" He surged off the couch and began to pace.

"Just think about it, Zephyrus. It's worth a shot."

"Yeah, I'll think about it. Good night, Hestia." He left left the room and headed to his lonely bed.

\* \* \* \*

The next morning, Zephyr told his sister to go ahead and open the shop.

"You're not feeling good?" Hestia asked, immediately concerned.

"I'm feeling fine, Hestia. I just have a few things I want to do today before I come in. I got everything ready last night as usual, so all you have to do is put the merchandise in the cases and open the front doors." He leaned over and tied his walking shoes. Straightening, he brushed a kiss on his older sister's cheek.

"You aren't going to do anything rash, are you?" Hestia asked hesitantly.

"You mean like kidnap Annabelle until she says she'll marry me?" He stretched and smiled down at her.

"You've asked her to marry you?" Hestia squeaked. "You didn't tell me that!"

"Yes, I asked her—but before you say anything, she turned me down. She says she needs more than one reason to get married."

"What? She's crazy about you."

"But not enough to marry me." His discontentment showed on his rugged face, and then his look changed, a determined light entering his eyes. "But I'm going to

change her mind."

"That's the brother I know. Determined to the end."

\* \* \* \*

Zephyr walked up the sidewalk to Joseph's house. The young man would be at school, which was fine, as he wasn't here today to play the big brother, even as much as he enjoyed it. He was here to talk to Annabelle's aunt and uncle. He needed some way to get through to her, and perhaps her uncle and aunt knew by what means he could unlock Annabelle's heart and slip inside. Stepping onto the porch, he pasted a smile on his face before knocking gently on the door. When Joseph's mother answered, she was surprised to see her son's friend at the door.

"Zephyrus, hello. I'm sorry to say Joseph is at school right now."

"I know he is. As much as I enjoy his company, I'm not here about him. I've become involved with your niece and I came to talk to you both since I understand Annabelle's parents are both gone now."

"Come in, Zephyrus. This is quite startling to say the least." Joseph's mother, Kira, urged him in, standing aside.

"Thank you," He crossed the threshold.

"Let me get Christopher." Kira turned, looking for her husband.

Zephyrus kept the smile pasted on his face as Christopher and Kira joined him in the kitchen. They were sitting at the table and Kira served freshly brewed coffee.

"How's the chocolate business going?" Christopher asked.

"Quite well. Even better, since I turned my paperwork over to your niece." Zephyr sipped his coffee after blowing on the steaming brew.

"That Annabelle is a whiz with numbers."

"Yes, she is. But the reason I'm here is because I'm trying to court her, and she's being a bit resistant to me. Is there something I need to do or not do to make it easier for her to say yes?" He asked a carefully worded question. There was no way he was going to tell her adopted parents he'd slept with her, or that he was going to marry her the first chance he got.

"Are you sure that she wants to see you?" Christopher asked with genuine concern.

"Yes. I've already taken her out to a mini-golf course and we had a ball. But she closed up after that. She said something about her skin color, which I find nothing wrong with. She's a wonderful woman, no matter what color her skin is."

"It has to do with her childhood, Zephyrus. Her mother and father were never married."

"Yes, I know. She told me about them. But I want to convince her I'm not like that. I want to be with her, and I want to court her."

"And I see you're trying to sugar-coat it for my aunt and uncle." Annabelle stood in the open door, her back stiff.

"Annabelle." He quickly rose to his feet.

"What he isn't telling you, Aunt Kira and Uncle Christopher, is that I took advantage of him and now he feels honor bound to marry me." She walked farther into suddenly silent room.

"Please, Annabelle?" He pleaded with his eyes for her not to make a scene.

"I don't have secrets from my aunt, Zephyrus. She would have known as soon as she saw me." She turned and locked gazes with her aunt and uncle.

Uncle Christopher had a stunned on his face while Aunt Kira a satisfied one.

"It's about time, Annabelle, that someone came along and knocked you off that shelf where you've placed your heart."

"Your heart?" Zephyrus whispered as a few things snapped into place...and suddenly he understood several things.

"Don't worry about, Zephyrus. It's nothing of great concern." Annabelle opened the door to the 'fridge and walked over to the cupboard with a carton of juice. After pouring herself a glass, she turned to find her aunt and uncle gone, and she was left her alone with him. She drew a startled breath as he backed her against the kitchen counter.

"Don't worry, Annabelle, I won't take you here with your aunt and uncle so nearby. But I intend to have a kiss. Unless you can tell me you don't want it, I'm going to kiss you until you can't think about anything other than marrying me." He brushed his lips against her softly parted lips.

"No!" She gasped, fighting herself and him. Her body was claiming this man's arms were home and it didn't want to leave. Even though she wanted to agree with her body's response, her mind knew it was a dangerous path to begin any journey.

"Yeah right." He slowly thrust his tongue into her warm mouth to tangle with hers. When he finally lifted his head, he brushed a kiss across the tip of her nose. "Give us a chance," he coaxed. "I promise you won't regret it."

"I can't." She pulled out of his arms. Already she felt the disappointment of

leaving the warm haven of his arms. He looked and smelled so delicious –so 'chocolate-ty'.

"We can do this one of two ways, Annabelle—my way or your way. Which way will it be?" he finally asked her.

"Huh –what do you mean?"

"Doing it your way, we'll try the dating thing, and we take it one step at a time."

"Okay and what's your way?" She looked at him uncertainly.

"My way? Well that's easy, Annabelle. I'll just seduce you every chance I get until you give in and marry me. And I can tell you what my choice would be, so decide."

Annabelle gasped softly as he backed her up against the kitchen counter again.

"I don't know."

"Decide before I do." He braced his arms on either side of her.

"I can't," she whispered.

"Fine. My way it is!" He covered her mouth, giving her another kiss.

\* \* \* \*

Annabelle groaned softly. She could smell Zephyr's cologne and she was still sitting in his office working on his paperwork. She'd thought to come over when she knew he was going to be busy with Joseph. In fact, the last two times she'd come to the chocolate shop to work on his paperwork, the scheme had worked perfectly. She had Hestia time her comings and goings and give them to Zephyr. This was to be her last time, as she had put in three of the four hours she'd promised. Now if she could wrap this up, she could get out of here before Zephyr came back. It seemed Hestia had a million reasons to interrupt her today, and she had a feeling her best friend was trying to

stall her until Zephyr came back. No way in hell was she going to chance that happening. She'd been lucky so far, but she didn't want to push her luck.

\* \* \* \*

Zephyr put a finger to his lips to show his sister he wanted her to be silent.

Arching an eyebrow, Hestia silently asked her brother why. Standing close enough for just her ears to hear, he explained.

"I know she's here, and I don't want her running off. I want you to lock us in together again. I'm going to give you my key. Hopefully by the time tomorrow morning comes, we'll have worked all this out and you'll have a new sister."

"So now you *want* me to lock you in together?" She stared at him in horror. When he nodded, she shook her head. "Would you make up your freaking mind?" She took his keys from him, grabbing her purse and coat. Making her way to the front door, she shook her head again. Her brother was damn near impossible these days. So, if locking those two in together would fix what was ailing him, she'd lock them in for a night – for a week – even throw away the keys.

\* \* \* \*

Annabelle placed the last piece of paperwork in Zephyr's 'out box' and gave a sigh of relief. The end was in sight, as she'd just finished working on his books and everything was in place. Now it was time for her to escape.

Standing up, she pushed the chair away from his desk and grabbed her briefcase, purse and coat. Walking through the kitchen, she paused before going through the kitchen door. It was awfully quiet. Too quiet! Maybe Hestia had locked up already? When she came around the counter, she was enveloped in a pair of warm

arms—warm, naked arms, she corrected. And by the familiar tingle in her abdomen, she knew exactly who the culprit was. Inwardly she groaned. Damn it, she'd been too slow!

But maybe she still could escape. Glancing around, she looked for Hestia, but her heart began to beat faster when she saw the "open" sign had been switched off.

"Please tell me she didn't lock us in again." She looked around wildly.

"No-she didn't-I did. And we're not leaving until we get this settled for once and all, you little hothead." He pressed his mouth against her ear. "By the end of the night, you're going to tell me you love me, and you're going to marry me. Or we can stay locked in here for the rest of our lives. Because I won't live without you." He backed her up against the glass case holding his wonderful chocolate goodies.

"I won't! You can't make me!" She fought the natural rise of desire flodding her whenever they got within touching distance of each other.

"Yes, you will." His eyebrow lifted arrogantly.

"Yeah, right." She tried to squirm away from his powerful embrace. Sitting her on top of the large case, he spread her legs and stepped in between them. He smiled wickedly when he felt her squirm against him, her thighs clamping onto his shoulders.

"Untie my hair." He leaned against her. "I want to feel your hands running through it." He growled happily when she obeyed without thought. Annabelle tried unsuccessfully to keep herself from responding to his closeness because she didn't want him to know either her feelings or her passionate response to him.

Zephyrus trembled as he felt Annabelle's warm fingers run through his midnightcolored hair. Capturing her gaze, he slowly and methodically peeled off his clothes. By the time Annabelle realized what danger she was in, Zephyr was standing before her, naked as the day he was born, and reaching for her buttons.

"What?" She looked at him wildly and got an eyeful. She immediately looked away. It wouldn't matter she'd only gotten a brief look, for his true masculine beauty would be etched in her memory forever.

"Look at me, Annabelle! I want you to see me." He lifted her chin with his hand.

He looked eyes with her before continuing, "And my body's expression of my love for you."

"Love?"

"Yes." He kissed her gently on the lips. "I may have forgotten to mention this, Annabelle Whitebear, but I am head over heels in love with you."

If a joy-filled hug and deeply passionate kiss were what Zephyr was expecting when he finally declared his love for her, he was sadly mistaken.

"You idiot! You jerk!" Annabelle shoved at him. "You tell me you love me, now! Now!? What about all the weeks and times we've been together?"

"But, little one..." He was shocked at her response to his honest declaration.

"Don't you 'little one' me, Mr. Chocolate Man. I can't believe you've put me through hell these last few weeks, when a simple 'I love you' would have solved everything," she shouted at him despairingly.

"You mean to tell me you would have said yes, if I would have told you I loved you?" A growl rumbled out of his throat as his frustration built.

"Of course! Men!" Turning, she intended to stomp back into the kitchen. She was surprised when he grabbed her from behind and pinned her, face first, against the display case.

"What are you doing?" she exclaimed, not frightened in the least. Her Indian side loved the near savagery that lay under Zephyrus Raincloud's civilized veneer.

"I'm going to love you 'til you can't walk, and then in the morning we're going to fly to Vegas with our parents and get married." He nibbled on her ear silkily, as he hauled up her skirt.

"You're not serious?" She jerked and then squealed as she felt him strip her panties down her long legs.

"As a heart attack!" Zephyr toyed with her curly pubic hair. Sliding his fingers through it, he found her nubbin and slowly stroked and rubbed it. When she gasped in pleasure, he smiled wickedly. He was just beginning. Annabelle groaned softly as she saw the look on his face in the mirror behind the counter.

"We can't do this out here." She locked her eyes with his. "People will see." She tried persuasive reasoning with him.

"I don't care! Let them watch. They'll only see two people deeply in love. And I'm right, aren't I? You love me just as much as I love you, don't you, little one?"

"I can't believe you call me 'little one.'" She wiggled as he worked his other hand under her blouse and captured one of her stiff nipples between his thumb and forefinger. Giving it a tweaky little squeeze, he toyed with it until it became even harder and more sensitive to his touch.

"Don't you?" he asked again, then emphasized with a hard enough squeeze she moaned loudly and writhed against his restraining hold.

"Zephyrus." She squirmed and begged.

"Annabelle - answer me!" He slipped two of his calloused fingers inside her

dampening sheath and fluttered them back and forth rhythmically.

"Oh, yes, I..." she stuttered as she raced along the edge of an intense orgasm.

"That's it, little one, come all over my fingers." He pressed his mouth against her shoulder, before leaning in and fastening his mouth to the crook of her neck. Biting down hard enough for her to feel it, he also squeezed her hard clit between his thumb and the fingers inside of her, rubbing against her sensitive vaginal walls. His actions triggered her shattering orgasm.

"Oh my god!" She arched against him as her orgasm burst over her, long and hard.

"Damn it, yes!" He bent his legs slightly, pulled his wet fingers out, and replaced them with the tip of his engorged manhood. When she arched back against him to recapture his wonderful fingers, Annabelle was surprised, but could only moan even louder as she impaled herself on him. At least she wasn't the only one moaning, she thought with a small part of her awareness. Zephyr was behind her and buried deep inside of her clinging sheath. She could only continue to moan as he began the rhythmic thrusting designed to drive them both over the edge.

"Damn, little one, you're so hot and wet, I could stay inside of you all night." He surged in and out of her tight sheath. Annabelle heard the sound of their flesh slapping against each other, and feel the wetness leaking from between her thighs. She breathed raggedly as she drew closer to her next orgasm.

Pushing back against him, she tried to break his grasp, but found she couldn't.

Zephyr had resumed his pinning hold on her. With his mouth attached to her neck, one arm wrapped around her waist and the other squeezing her tight nipples, all she could

do was be used like a rag doll for his pleasure. And hers, she thought dimly, as she neared the precipice's edge again. When he felt her sheath tightening around him and her climax beginning, he growled. Moving the hand from her waist, he found her hard nubbin and started rubbing it firmly. That was all Annabelle needed to explode violently against him. Her muscles convulsed and triggered the beginning of his own climax.

"Oh my god!" she screamed and threw her head back.

"That's it!" He continued to pound in and out of her. Locking his knees, Zephyr knew it was only one sweep before he too exploded inside of her.

"Do you want me to pull out, little one?" he gasped harshly. "Or do you want my baby!" He fought to stop his movements against her.

"Yes." She started tensing for the third time.

"Yes, what?" he panted, still thrusting. "Baby or no baby...?" He skated dangerously close to his own point of no return.

"Baby...." Her eyes closed tight and her legs tensed, preparing for their mutual climax.

"Baby, it is," he growled as he let go.

Pushing her harder against the case, he pounded his way through one of the most intense orgasms of his life. Annabelle screamed as he pulled her over the cliff's edge with him. For the next few moments, the shop rang with their harsh cries, slapping flesh, and the sound of the display case squeaking as it protested its unintended use as a mating bed.

When the air finally cleared, Annabelle found herself draped over the display case she'd spent many hours salivating over, using her delectable chocolate man as a

blanket. Zephyrus was the first to break into their panting, gasping, almost sobbing gulps of air.

"I hope you meant it, little one."

"Meant what?" she whispered softly, not wanting to move.

"That you wanted to have my baby. I come from a long line of fertile men. I'm the youngest of eight."

"No one said anything about having a tribe." Her shoulders shook with silent laughter.

"Then why did you tell me to stay?" He lightly bit her shoulder in response.

"The chocolate made me do it." She looked down at the beautifully arranged pieces of chocolate under her in the display case and savored his weight against her.

### **Epilogue**

Annabelle stood beside her uncle and waited impatiently for the music to start.

She couldn't believe it had only been twenty-four hours since Zephyr had locked them in together. True to his word, as soon as his sister let them out the next morning, he'd packed both of them and her aunt and uncle on a plane to Las Vegas.

In route, he had called his mother and asked her to make the four hour drive from Sun City, Arizona to Las Vegas. She'd agreed immediately, so by the time their plane had touched down in Vegas, his mother had been waiting. She'd taken immediately to Annabelle.

"Are you ready, sweetheart?" Her uncle asked as the traditional wedding music filled the small but beautiful chapel.

"Yes." She tugged on his arm.

"You love him?" he asked.

"Yes. I do. Deeply...truly!"

"And he loves you?" he prompted, smiling when he noticed her tapping her foot.

"Yes."

"And are you going to give Kira and me some grandbabies to love on?" He asked.

"Yes." She gave him an impatient stare.

"When?"

"Eight months from now. Come on." She jerked on his arm again.

"What?" he exclaimed. "You're pregnant!" His shout echoed off the walls of the

chapel and found the stunned groom, who was standing and waiting with the preacher.

"Pregnant?" His mother's voice floated from the first pew.

Zephyrus stormed up the aisle towards them. He stopped in front of the furiously blushing Annabelle.

"Little One?" Zephyrus gently lifted her chin, so he could look into her wonderful warm eyes.

"I guess I come from a line of fertile women?" she explained, her voice quavering.

"The first time?"

"Yeah." She nodded as her cheeks warmed.

"I love you, Annabelle." He pressed his mouth against her lips. Then he turned to lead them both back to the altar.

"Grandbabies. I don't know what happened to her." Her uncle walked over and stood next to his wife.

"The chocolate made her do it." Zephyr grinned over his shoulder as they stopped in front of the smiling preacher.

#### The F.nd

## ABOUT DAKOTA TRACE

Dakota hails from the home state of the Hawkeyes, corn and pigs. Surrounded by children's laughter and the corn fields, she crafts her stories. She enjoys writing romances and sci-fi/fantasy stories. She is a romantic at heart, so even the sci-fi stories have an underlying romantic plot. She started writing at the tender age of fourteen and hasn't stopped since. Although it is a mystery to most where she finds the time to write. Aside from being a full time wife and mother, she also works the dreaded overnight shift at a clothing company.

To find out more about Dakota visit her at http://dakotatrace.wordpress.com/.

If you enjoyed <u>THE CHOCOLATE MADE ME DO IT</u>, you might also enjoy:



# FLAWED ANGEL By Mary Suzanne

Kelly Jackson awakens from a coma after a car accident disfigures her face to find her fiancé Derek has removed the engagement ring from her hand. Devastated to discover Derek's feelings for her were only superficial and he no longer wants her after discovering her scarred face, Kelly is overwhelmed when Dr. Mitchell Scott shows an interest in her. She can't believe he finds her attractive, but sizzling electricity quickly ignites between them. Will Dr. Scott be able to convince Kelly his interest runs deeper - that not all men are like her ex- or has Kelly's confidence been destroyed forever?

Warning: This title contains graphic language and sex.

## Excerpt From FLAWED ANGEL:

When Mitchell gently placed her on the thick mattress, she could only stare up at him with a wide-eyed expression. For the longest time they held eye contact. Kelly felt as if Mitchell was sending her a message, telling her how much he wanted her right

then. A fleeting thought swiftly passed through her head. How could he want such a disfigured woman? As quickly as the thought filled her head, it disappeared.

One of the reasons Kelly's thought process began to shut down was the way he kissed her. She strained toward him, needing to feel his possession. Kelly couldn't get enough of how his lips ravaged hers, his tender caresses.

When his hand slowly began removing her gown, she didn't make any protest.

Needing for him in that moment was the only thing filling her aroused thoughts. He was showing her in his own way that he needed to possess her and couldn't wait another moment to make love to her. The next thing she saw was how the filmy garment she'd worn came floating past them and landed quietly on the carpeted floor. Mitchell stood up and slowly began to remove his pajama bottoms. He stood for several moments with his gaze on her body outlined against the silky sheet.

Kelly couldn't get enough of his magnificent body. He looked so strong and virile, the sight made her feel breathless. When her gaze roamed down the length of him, she stopped purposely on his erection, filled with desire for her.

Slowly, he joined her on the bed and his lips began kissing her smooth skin, making their way down her body toward her open legs. When he reached her hair-covered mound, his tongue began flicking across her clitoris in rapid movements. The meaty part of her clit became rigid under his sensual assault. She was experiencing so much pleasure, her legs began to move wildly.

She realized the moaning sound filling the room was coming from her, spurred on by the wondrous sensations Mitchell was making her experience. She felt the juice beginning to flow from her pussy and she couldn't stop from reaching down and running

her fingers through his hair. Her exploring fingers kept up a steady movement until finding his broad shoulders. His skin felt so tight and firm beneath her fingers she felt an even more sensuous thrill sweep through her.

It wasn't long before Mitchell made his way up to her protruding nipples. He kissed one and then switched to the other, bringing heated charges racing through Kelly. As he captured a peaked nipple between his teeth and started nibbling gently, she felt on fire for him in that instant...

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