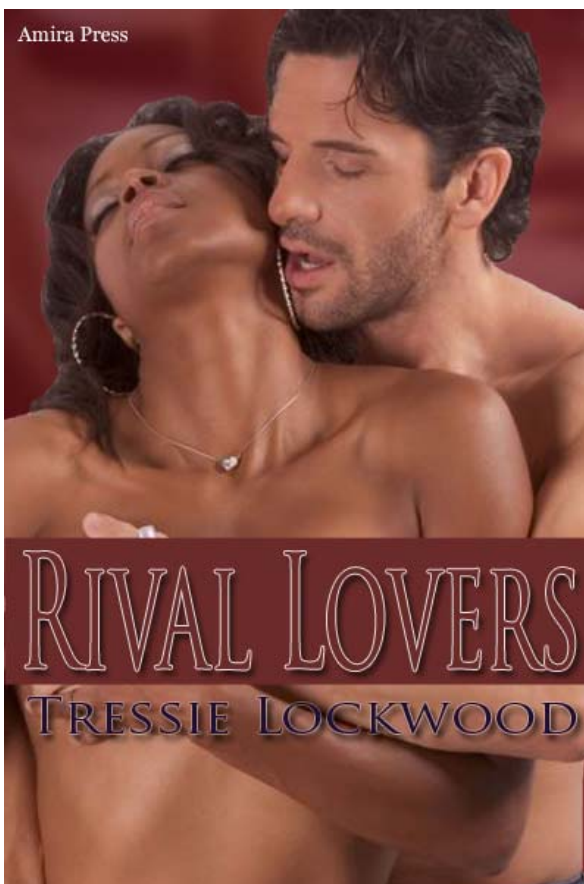


Amira Press



# *Rival Lovers*

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## Chapter One

*"What do you want, Sharon? Or should I say, who do you want?"*

*Who do I want?*

She couldn't count the number of romance novels she had read that featured best friends becoming lovers. The theme was tried and true for many an author. But this wasn't the same situation. She eyed the sexy man giving his presentation in front of the whiteboard. His manner, his bearing—his body—called out to everything that was base inside her. She wanted Jason Cole bad, but they had been rivals ever since he had been hired at McCullough Advertising.

Shifting her position so that her right ass cheek would have a chance to wake up after being sat on for the last hour and a half, she eyed the question on her laptop, an instant message from her buddy, Lisa. *"I don't know."*

*"Liar!"*

*"You tell me. Who do I want?"* She typed as quietly as she could. Everyone pounded out notes on their laptops, but somehow when one was goofing off, the action seemed more suspect. She glanced over her screen to Lisa, who had wanted to suck up to the new guy and their boss by sitting in the front. Sharon was confident enough in her abilities to take the rear. Besides, she didn't have to hulk over her screen to hide the fact that she was on Yahoo! Messenger.

*"Jason Cole!"* Lisa's message declared. *"And if you don't make a move soon on that choice piece of beef, I'm going to snatch him up."*

Sharon minimized her chat box. The taskbar slipped into invisibility. She tapped a nail against the glossy tabletop as she considered her options. Noticing chipped polish on her fingernail, she frowned.

"You have a problem with those figures, Sharon?"

She glanced up to find all eyes on her, chiefly Jason's. His blue eyes twinkled. The jerk knew she hadn't been paying attention. She hadn't missed the number of times his glance swept over her while he spoke. This was his chance to make her look bad in front of the boss. What the man who looked too damn good in those navy blue slacks didn't know was that she had poured over his presentation long before the meeting. *Called in a favor, dear Jason.*

"Now that you mention it, Jason"—she liked his name, very suitable to his boy next door looks—"yes, I do. Your projection of a fifteen percent increase is questionable, and here's why. . . ."

She proceeded to explain why his plan wouldn't work as well as he hoped. With each word she spoke, his handsome face reddened. When the meeting was over, he took her by the arm and kept her back while the others filed out of the conference room.

“Is it your goal in life to try to make me look bad?” He grumbled.

She widened her eyes and imagined she had a sweet little innocent look on her face. “I don’t know what you mean, but had I been trying to make you look bad, it’s only in retaliation to what you did to me last week. Or have you forgotten?”

“So we’re children now?” His blue eyes had flecks of gold in them. Was that common? She wanted to forget the rest of the day and just stare at him.

She glanced pointedly at his fingers biting into her arm, and he immediately let go. She pivoted on the ball of her foot to return to her seat. Before she could shut down her computer, Jason had moved up behind her, and his eagle eyes picked up on the chat box, which she had maximized to close. *Shit.*

“What’s this? My name?” He leaned closer to the screen. The heat of him behind her made her long to shove her butt back against him.

Covering the screen, she snapped, “None of your business.” She shoved his hand away and closed down the computer. She waited for him to make a comment about what he had just read, but he said nothing, which made her feel like even more of an idiot for getting caught. He apparently had no interest in a black woman, least of all her. Maybe Lisa would have better luck, being a Latina.

Jason strolled to the door and paused. She didn’t make eye contact with him, but instead focused on the urban scene paintings around the room. “Sharon, we can continue to butt heads, or we can work together. I think we would make a great team.”

With supreme effort, she met his gaze and smiled. “We’ll see.”

He nodded. “That’s all I want.”

After he had left, Lisa rushed in, her knowing look making Sharon’s stomach hurt. Twenty minutes ago, she had been longing for lunch. Now she just wanted to go find a rock and hide under it.

Lisa pumped her hand. “Oh, girl, I didn’t hear shouting, so you must have talked about something other than work, right? What did he say? What did you say? When are you two going out?”

Sharon forced a laugh. “Slow your roll, Lisa. We’re not going out.” She sighed. “He saw your note to me about making a move. He didn’t even blink. He’s not interested.”

“Oh, for real?” Lisa considered it. “Maybe he’s biding his time, thinking how to approach you.”

Sharon shook her head. “No, he had the perfect opportunity, and all he said was he wants us to work as a team. He said that’s *all* he wants.” She gathered the rest of her things and

headed for the door. “You know what, fuck him. I’m going out to the club tonight, have some fun. You coming?”

Lisa grinned. “When have I not? I’ll be there, and who knows, you might get lucky.”

“Yeah, I’ll find another choice piece of beef.” She could barely get the words out before she burst out laughing.

Her friend rolled her eyes and grabbed her hand to pull her out of the conference room. “Okay, chica, make fun. But I know the package I saw, and it was yummy!”

Sharon smirked. “Uh huh, I doubt Mr. Cole has all you say he does. Probably stuffed a sock down there.”

Lisa snorted. “Yeah, to impress McCullough.”

“To each his own.” Sharon chortled. “To each his own.”

## Chapter Two

He frowned watching her from across the room. She and her friend thought he might be gay just because he had rejected her. Like men should bow at her feet? And he had heard every word they said. Damn it, how he despised that type of woman.

A hand came down on his shoulder, and he turned to see his boss, John McCullough. What would she say if she knew their leader was his uncle? Something that would negate all his hard work making it on his own, he didn't doubt.

"What's that look for, Jason?" John asked. "You look like you want to rip her apart, and yet, from the time you started here, I thought I saw a spark between you two. She's an attractive woman."

Jason eyed Sharon's shapely figure. She was tall, a little heavier than the women he had dated in the past. But her luscious body, the curve of her ass, the fullness of her lips—and those breasts!—made him hard every time he was in her presence. That had been his reaction the day Lisa, the loud obnoxious one, had spotted his erection.

"I've never denied she's beautiful, but . . ."

"But?"

"I don't get involved with her type." He watched her flip long, straight black hair over her shoulder and park herself on the edge of his secretary's desk. The man practically salivated over her. "She'll do anything to get ahead, step on anyone. How much do you want to bet she coaxed Ted into giving her a copy of my presentation?"

His uncle shrugged. "Okay, don't date her. Fuck her."

Jason dragged his eyes from the hint of Sharon's smooth brown thigh beyond the slit in her skirt, to glance at his uncle. "What? You're kidding."

"Why not? You want her."

"I don't know."

"Jason." John's sympathetic look pissed him off. He didn't need pity. "Heather's not coming back, bud. Face it, she found what she was looking for, and it wasn't you. But that's not your fault."

"I know it's not my fault!" He strolled into his office with John following and closed the door. The lowered blinds blocked Sharon from his view. "You know what she's really interested in."

All show of sympathy from his uncle flew out the window. "You're kidding, right? Every woman is not like your ex-wife. I'm not suggesting you go out and marry Sharon, but ever since your marriage broke up, you've behaved like you have to conquer the world, forgotten

your personal life. That girl's got a sweet body. Have yourself a taste." John winked. "Then come back and tell me how it was."

After John left his office, Jason thought about what he had said. The man was right. He had been living as a hermit, letting his fears and his past humiliation stand in the way of moving forward. Thinking that Sharon's interest was only temporary, that she was more interested in Lisa, despite the lack of evidence of it, he had ignored the message he had read on her laptop. Both women were attracted to him. Any other man would have thought he had hit the jackpot.

"We're not talking about marriage here," he mused, tapping a pen on his desk. "Or even dating." With his decision made, he called John. Hopefully, he could be of more help. When he answered, Jason quizzed him. "Hey, do you know what club she likes to go to? I overheard her say she was hitting one tonight."

His uncle chuckled. "That's my boy. Try the Capital."

Jason shook his head. "Is there anything you don't know, old man?"

"Now that you mention it, no."

Laughing, Jason hung up the phone. No turning back now. Tonight, she would be his.

\* \* \* \*

Jason watched her dance to the music, her arms above her head, her hips gyrating. Desire nearly blinded him, he wanted her so badly. Her friend fended off the small crowd of men trying to get at her. At Lisa's protective stance, daring any man to touch Sharon, Jason thought about leaving. If that wasn't a warning to him, he didn't know what was.

Yet, her sensual call reached out to him, across the wriggling bodies, above the eardrum-busting music, and against his better judgment. He pushed through the crowd to the dance floor. The men sniffing around Sharon were more of a challenge.

"Hey, man, I was here first," one snapped.

He snarled at the guy, surprising himself. "She's already mine." Lisa spotting him, pushed the remainder of the guys away, and he was finally standing behind her. She hadn't yet seen him.

When she twirled around and faced him, her eyes were closed. Her breasts bounced beneath the thin material of her red dress, and he swore he could see the dark chocolate of her areolas through the material. He hardened painfully. What had she been thinking coming out here like that? No wonder the men had been barking at her heels.

Sensing his nearness, she opened big brown eyes and blushed. He saw her arms waver and guessed she felt self-conscious about the way she was dressed. *Too late now, baby.*

“You,” she murmured.

“Yes, me.”

Without another word, he turned her away from him. Before he moved too close, he eyed her ass, round and perfect. Her body was mesmerizing. With his hands around her waist, he pulled her back against him. Their bodies locked in a rhythm so swiftly that he fought not to come right there on the dance floor.

With a hand in her hair to tug her head to the side, he snaked his tongue along her neck and teased her earlobe with his teeth. He felt rather than heard her moan. “Tonight, I’m going to have you. Over and over again.”

He pushed his erection against her ass. Her lips parted. She rested her head on his shoulder. “Do I have a choice in the matter?”

He chuckled. “Do you want one?”

She didn’t answer, but he didn’t need an affirmation. He slid his hands down over her hips and felt the thin band of her panties through her dress. Praying she wore only a thong, he forgot where he was and reached toward her hot center. She stopped him. “Not here, baby. Your place?”

“Right now.”

### Chapter Three

They were so feverish to get at each other that Sharon didn't even know if she had told Lisa they were leaving. One minute, she was in the club, and the next, she was on Jason's lap in his sports car with him kissing her until her lips had gone numb.

She broke the connection, gasping for breath. "I admit I was surprised to see you tonight."

He regarded her with narrowed eyes. She noted how they had gone dark with his rising lust. "Really? And who were you wearing that dress for? You're aware that it's almost see-through?"

Leaning as far back as she could in the limited space without sounding the horn, she laughed. "You don't like it?"

"Oh, I like it all right." He lifted her off his lap and sat her in the adjoining seat. "The bulge in my pants is evidence enough."

Gratified that she had taken him to the brink before they got started good, she glanced down at his groin only to gasp. Lisa had been right. His package was enormous. She was almost afraid to see what he hid inside his pants, but she couldn't stop staring either way. "Damn."

Jason unbuttoned and then unzipped his pants. When he pulled his shaft free, Sharon's balance took a nose dive. She fanned her face and swallowed a few times. He was bigger than normal. His stiff rod had to be a good four inches around and stretched all the way up to his navel. A thick vein ran along the back, and the head looked too big to fit in her mouth.

"Does it scare you?" he asked hesitantly.

She mumbled, "Oh yeah, but I've never backed down from a challenge."

"Good. Seatbelt!" He started the car, shifted into gear, and peeled out of the club parking lot like his life depended on it.

All the way to Jason's home, Sharon thought about what they were about to do. She had had her share of men, black and white, even one Latino, Lisa's cousin. That had been fun. But Jason was huge. He defied them all. Her mouth watered just looking at him. She loved to suck a man until he came. The act gave her a sense of power. But Jason made her hotter than she'd ever been with any man. Oddly enough, the intensity of his desire for her made her feel like she was out of her league rather than giving her power over him.

Just like she had told him, she never backed down from a challenge. She had every intention of making this man quiver with longing for her, and beg to let him stick that pole she wanted to lick like a lollipop, as deep inside of her as he could fit.

\* \* \* \*

Sharon was surprised to find that Jason lived in an apartment and more so that the place consisted of little more than a couch, a TV, and a bedroom set. He tossed his keys on a tray on the floor near the door and guided her farther into the studio apartment.

“Would you like something to drink?” he asked.

“No, can I use your bathroom?”

He showed her the way. She closed herself in and took a deep breath while looking in the mirror. When it came to men, she and Lisa had maintained casual relationships. If the sex was good, he lasted longer. If not, there were more fish in the sea, as they say.

Having found a fresh washcloth on a shelf, she cleaned herself up and spritzed strawberry body spray over her belly. She shivered knowing his tongue would find its way there before long. Last, she debated whether to slip her thong panties into her purse and then decided not to. Jason looked like the type of man to appreciate the black lace disappearing between her ass cheeks. She couldn’t wait to make him salivate.

A knock sounded on the door. “Come on, beautiful. I want you now.”

She grinned and opened the door. “So impatient.” Making sure her ass brushed him, she squeeze past and sauntered into the living room.

Jason followed. “I can’t believe you went out in public in that dress. I’m glad I found you when I did.”

She pouted, a ploy to draw him in. “I’m starting to think you don’t like it. I guess I should take it off.” Jason went still, staring as she lowered the zipper on her dress. The soft material pooled at her feet, and she waited for his reaction.

“Damn!”

She tilted her head to the side and hooked her fingers in her panties. “You like my body, Jason?”

He stumbled toward her. “Woman, you’ve got to be kidding me. These”—he cupped her breasts—“are so firm and pert. Mmm.” He licked each hard peak. “I could come just looking at your skin.”

“Have you been with a black woman before?”

“Once, years ago. Come on. I’m not letting you out from under me before morning.” He lifted her in his arms. Startled, she squeaked. She had been the same or taller in height as most of the men she had been intimate with over the years. Jason stretched a good six inches higher, and his build and strength made her heart flutter. That worried her.

Once they entered his bedroom, she wiggled to get free of his hold. “Are we sure about this? We work together, and you did say you wanted us to be a team. Sex could complicate things.”

He smirked. “You’re not losing all that confidence, are you, Sharon? I thought you never backed down from a challenge.” She watched her plan of seduction fly out the window as he undid his pants and kicked them away, along with his boxers. Holding his shaft in one hand, he winked. “I promise I won’t hurt you.”

Sharon hesitated. Eight years ago, she had loved a man who had nearly destroyed her when she found him cheating. The experience was probably the story of most women’s lives, but she had found it impossible to recover from. Since then, she kept men at a distance, using them for sexual pleasure only.

Now here was Jason, a man she reluctantly enjoyed sparring with on a daily basis at work, a man whose intellect and wit matched her own. If their bodies meshed well in bed, she would have no recourse but to keep him on a permanent basis. She laughed at the thought, as if he had no choice in the matter.

“Okay, sexy. Show me what you’ve got.”

## Chapter Four

He pulled her up into his arms and laid her on the bed, pausing to examine her luscious frame before he joined her. Jason planted soft kisses along her neck, at her cleavage, and over her belly. *Mmm*. She smelled of strawberries and his preferred brand of soap. He braced a hand against her lower back and dipped his tongue into her navel. Her muscles quivered.

“Jason . . .” Her tone of voice shot up a few decibels at his caresses. He didn’t know whether to return to her sweet mouth to stroke her tongue with his again or to explore lower. Spreading her thighs, he saw her juices already flowing. She was wet for him, and him alone.

Unable to resist, he slid lower. Raining kisses over her nub, he squeezed her thighs. She rocked against his mouth, pleading for more. He sucked her erect bud, taking it into his mouth. She screamed and tangled fingers in his hair. A surge of power rushed through him. A woman as sexy as Sharon was at his mercy, and he would have none on her.

He parted her slick folds and eased a finger inside her channel. She whimpered. He couldn’t believe how her muscles cleaved to his finger. What would his staff feel like inside her? He couldn’t wait to find out, but he wanted to please his lover before that.

Switching his position to between her legs so that her legs rested on his shoulders, he peered up at her. “Are you ready to come, honey?”

She groaned. “Yes.”

He ran a hand to her breasts and flicked her nipples before plunging his tongue into her warm juice. She tasted heavenly. He parted her folds with one hand and thrust his tongue deeper and licked up every drop. Moving his mouth to her button, he stroked her breasts with both palms while sucking hard.

She bucked and cried out. He struggled not to come, feeling her, hearing her moans of ecstasy. Tugging at her nipples, rolling them between his fingers took her to the next level. He heard tears in her voice as she came moaning his name. Her thighs, her ass, even her nub quivered while more cream filled his mouth.

“Jason.” She sniffed. “I never cry when I have an orgasm. She sounded embarrassed, but he only grinned. She would be sniffing the rest of the night, if he had anything to say about it.

He climbed out from between her legs and poised himself over her body. He took in her perfect curves, reliving how she trembled for him. Rubbing a cheek against her breast, he closed his eyes. *Don’t fall for her*. Sharon Clemens meant pain, and that he would not allow. Just thinking of his past and of how she could bring it roaring back with little effort made him angry.

She seemed to sense him slipping away. Grasping his face in both hands, she stared into his eyes. “Let me please you.”

He hesitated.

“Jason, don’t resist. Enjoy.”

He allowed her to push him to the side so that they could switch positions, with her on top. She raised his arms above his head and curved his fingers around the spokes in the headboard. Despite his reservations, excitement built in his gut.

\* \* \* \*

Sharon took his member in her hands and stroked up and down its length. *Damn, how can a man be this big and not ruin every woman he sleeps with for other men?* She knew examining his beautiful shaft that he would stretch her, and she was looking forward to it. The entry would hurt so good, she’d probably cry all over again.

She slid her body alongside Jason’s with her ass facing him. She opened her legs to give him a pleasurable view while she sucked his head. His groan let her know he liked what he saw. At first, she teased him, dipping the tip of her tongue into his slit, capturing a bead of precome while she was at it. Jason squirmed.

“Gosh, you’re big, baby. I have a narrow mouth. I can’t get you inside,” she told him. He looked apologetic. “Don’t worry. I’ll please you.”

Slowly, she kissed down that thick vein, teasing it at intervals with the tip of her tongue. When she reached his balls, she grazed them gently with her teeth. Jason cursed and clutched the sheets in his fists. For some moments, she coiled her tongue around his balls, pulled one in and out and then the other into her mouth. She reached down lower to squeeze Jason’s ass while she worked her way back up his shaft.

Palming his balls, she moved her mouth over his tool, sucking hard. His balls tightened and rose. Jason began grunting and shifting his hips up and down. He was careful not to ram her mouth, but she knew the man was barely hanging on.

She drew back. “Let go, lover. I can take it.”

“Sharon.” He yelled her name once before he filled her mouth with his hot seed. She drank it, sucking for more. When she was as turned on as she was with Jason, a man’s come was like a dessert. She milked him dry, only stopping when he gently pulled her away and tucked her against his side. Brushing her hair back from her forehead, he stared down into her face. “Damn it, woman, what have you done to me?”

She offered an innocent look, one that hid how he had affected her. To cover, she wanted to utter some snappy remark, but instead, she buried her face into the hollow at the base of his neck. As they clung to one another, Sharon relieved that words weren’t necessary.

After a while, he drew back. “Well?”

“Well what?”

He held up two fingers. “Round two?”

She nodded. “And three through ten!”

## Chapter Five

He stood in his office having avoided her for most of the day. Their time together had been phenomenal, but when he saw her and Lisa standing close together giggling over something, he jumped to the same old conclusions. He couldn't handle it. Foolishly, somewhere midnight and five that morning, he had fallen for her—*too hard*.

With his forehead pressed against the window, he stared down at the people passing in the street below. He would be a blind fool if he hadn't picked up on the fact that she appeared to be just as lost as he was. That overpowering confidence she had always exuded had faded during the night. She curled into his arms and let him please her in so many ways. He closed his eyes, adjusting his crotch.

The door behind him opened and slammed shut. "So what, you're going to ignore me from now on? This is what I get for breaking the rule of no men from the office."

He said nothing, nor did he turn around. With shoulders stiffened against her assault, he waited for her to rail at him to curse him for using her. They had made no promises to each other, no declarations of love. Yet, he ached with his attraction to her, his need to hold her again.

"Jason." She had moved up behind him, laid her head on his back and wrapped her arms around his waist. "My fiancé borrowed my car the day before our wedding just so he could use it to pick up the girl who worked in the shop where I bought my wedding dress. Maybe it was his way of breaking it off with me, but they . . . had sex . . . in the back of my car. Right there in front of the shop knowing I was going to be there for a fitting. I could not believe a person could live through that level of humiliation, but here I am."

He took one of her hands in his and kissed it. She cared, no doubt about that. To share such a story took guts on her part.

"Now you," she coaxed him.

"Me?" He knew what she was getting at, but hedged.

"Yes." She squeezed him and kissed his shoulder blade. "I know you're afraid of something. People who give as much as you did to me last night can't possibly turn into a big jerk like you did without a reason. At least, that's what I've been telling myself all day. So don't make a liar out of me, Jason, or else." Her chuckle wavered.

He turned, flipped his chair around so that she could sit, and then he moved away. "Humiliation is the word of the day, I guess. After five years of marriage, my wife left me for a woman."

She didn't respond immediately, so he glanced back at her. Her beautiful eyes were wide with shock. She finally focused on the front of his pants, shaking her head. "She gave up *that* for a woman? Lover, she is not right in the head. Trust me."

He laughed. “Are you saying you wouldn’t want to sample another woman? Your friend Lisa is very pretty.”

He was surprised to see pain in her eyes. “If you think I’m sharing you with her, you can kiss my ass.” She started for the door, but he cut her off, taking her into his arms.

“We’ve both been hurt.” He kissed her soft lips. “And inside we’re both battling insecurities. However, I think we can give this a try. What do you say?”

“When you say *this* . . .”

“Lovers? Girlfriend, boyfriend?” He rolled his eyes, and she laughed.

“I say yes.”

\* \* \* \*

Sharon watched him as he gave his presentation, her attention never wavering except to respond briefly to Lisa’s quips over Yahoo! Messenger. He looked incredible in his charcoal suit today, as if there was ever a day he didn’t.

McCullough interrupted her thoughts. “Sharon, do you have any comments on Jason’s figures?”

She dragged her gaze from Jason to focus on her boss. “No, I defer to his expert research.”

One of the marketing execs snorted in disgust. “Oh, come on! Have you two lost your edge just because you’re fucking each other? Give us some real feedback here, for Pete’s sake!”

The room went silent. All typing fingers stilled, and one woman’s constant sniffles from a cold stopped dead. Sharon glanced down at her computer to see a message from Lisa.

*“Want me to mess him up for you, girl?”*

She swallowed a laugh and then looked at Jason. His expression said he would be at her place tonight no matter what her decision was. A grin spread across her face as she stood. “Well, in that case”—she strolled toward the front of the room—“here’s how to land this new account and have the client agreeing to all our terms . . .”

The End

## *About the Author*

Tressie Lockwood has always loved books. She writes straight from her heart, reaching out to those who find it hard to be completely themselves no matter what anyone else thinks. She hopes her readers will enjoy her short stories.