

A romantic couple is shown in a close embrace, lying in bed. The woman is resting her head on the man's shoulder, and both have their eyes closed, suggesting a peaceful or intimate moment. The background is a soft-focus image of a rocky coastline with waves crashing against the shore. The overall mood is romantic and serene.

Loose Id

# *Sugar Rush*

LISSA  
MATTHEWS

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*Lissa Matthews*



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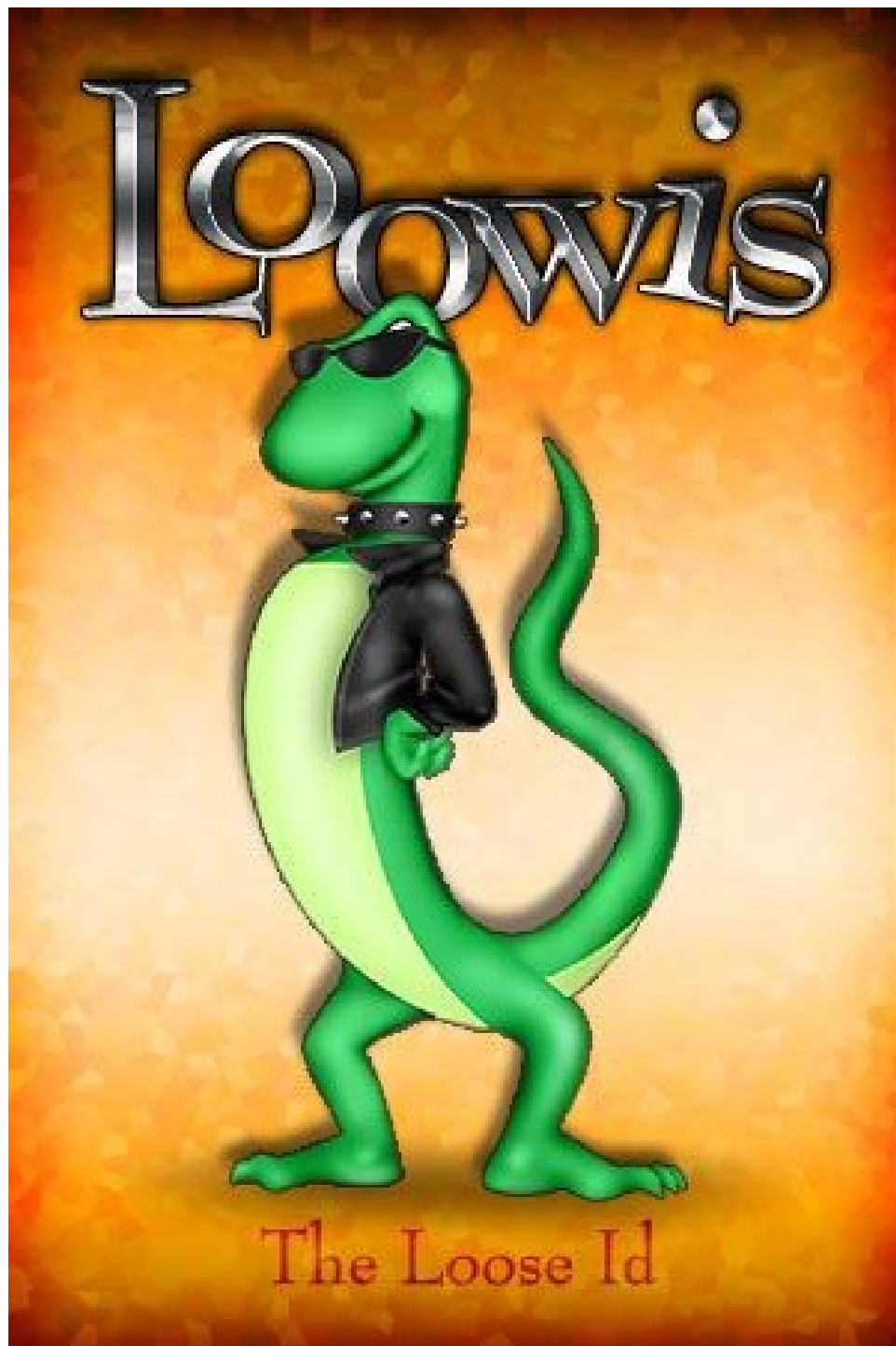
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## Chapter One

“I'm going to kill him.” It would be quick and painless too. He wouldn't know what hit him.

First though, she had to make it to the little cabin in the valley and deliver the truffles. And what the hell was Edward, her business partner, thinking anyway? Accepting an order—a small, one-box order at that—for someone way out here in the middle of nowhere? It was bad enough that it had snowed last night, but even worse was the fact she hated driving north through the mountains in winter. For that alone, Edward deserved to die.

What in the name of all that was warm and cozy was she doing here?

Edward usually made all the deliveries. He loved meeting their customers, loved to gab more than any woman Jane had ever met, and he always used it as an excuse to go shopping in some boutique he swore he'd never heard of before. Of course there were no boutiques where she was presently. There was nothing up here at all: only trees and mountains and snow. Lots and lots of snow.

A stop sign. Great. “What the hell do I do now?” She pressed ever so gently on the brake pedal and slowed to a stop. “This is why I live in the city,” she muttered. She could either walk or take public transportation. When it came to driving in the mountains, she drove like a little old lady: very slowly and very cautiously.

The bright red of the sign stood out like a beacon among the white snow and brown trees covering the landscape. She pulled out the written directions from the side pocket of her purse on the seat beside her. “At stop sign, turn right. Go a quarter of a mile to next stop sign, take a left. Follow road to cabin.' Should be easy enough.”

In truth, Jane loved the mountains. In spring and fall, especially with the rich colors, but even in winter they were gorgeous. The changing of the seasons seemed so effortless. She wished life's changes were as effortless. Especially where romance and men were concerned.

Ten more minutes, and she was driving down the winding trail leading to the cabin. The snow on the wood-lined drive was packed in, and she was grateful. Driving over a patch of ice would not be good right now. She might have a very boring life but wrapping her vehicle around a tree was something that really wouldn't improve things.

She pulled up and parked next to a nice black truck, brand-new from the looks of it, and one that she'd need a stepladder to climb into.

Jane put the small SUV in park and turned off the engine. After a quick glance in the rearview mirror to check her makeup and hair, she grabbed the box of truffles and got out. Hopefully, she could get back home before the streets started to ice over. She'd also like a few answers from Edward about why *she* was out delivering one and only one little four-truffle box so far from the city in the dead of winter, along with why he'd insisted she dress like a pink marshmallow in heels. He might be gay, but he knew absolutely nothing about heels and snow, but he'd been so earnest about her dressing a certain way that she'd found herself bundled up and out the door before she'd even realized how absurd her outfit was.

She stepped carefully, one foot in front of the other, not wanting to completely embarrass herself while she teetered precariously up the snow-covered walkway to their customer's front door. Did she look as comical as she imagined?

Yes, Edward was going to die for this. So help him, he'd better have DVR'd her television shows or his death would be slow and painful rather than the quick, painless way she'd been envisioning.

Lost in plotting the demise of her business partner, she slipped on a patch of ice masked as soft, powdery snow. She righted herself as she started to topple over and was able to recover her balance but not before her heart skidded to a halt in her chest. "Shit."

Standing still, she took a couple of deep breaths and glanced around. "Right, Jane. Who the hell is going to be around to witness your clumsiness in the middle of freakin' nowhere?" Well, unless the customer had seen it, and then she'd be completely mortified.

"Nothing to do about it now," she muttered, again putting one foot in front of the other.

\* \* \* \* \*

“What the...?” Graham stood with his arms braced against the window frame and watched the wobbling woman outside on his front walk. Dressed from head to toe in pink and white fluff, she carried a pink box with a dark brown bow and was wearing the most absurd shoes.

Snow had fallen the previous night, and the drive up the mountains would have been a little tricky. She looked like a ski bunny, albeit a rather curvy one. He didn't do ski bunnies. Much as he liked outdoorsy, adventurous women, something about the winter resort crowd had never appealed to him. He preferred privacy and solitary mountain escapes with roaring fires.

She stepped onto the porch and lowered the hood of her jacket. Her hair was a rich, dark brown wavy mass that stopped at her shoulders, and her cheeks were rosy from the cold. She was muttering something between barely moving lips, then pasted on a dazzling smile, shook her head, and knocked on the door.

Graham opened it, swung it wide, and grinned down at her. “My oh my.” He let his gaze travel leisurely from the top of her tousled mane to her pointed toes. She was a delectable, pink confection, crazy-ass footwear and all. From her mumbling on the porch and her scrunched-up face to the moment she shook it off and gave his door the most beautiful smile, his cock had stirred in his jeans and he'd had a funny feeling in the pit of his stomach.

“Oh. Wow. I, ummm...I have a delivery for...” She fumbled in her coat pocket then pulled out a card, stealing small glances up at him as her cheeks reddened further. He would bet his next paycheck it wasn't from the cold this time. “For a Mr. Graham Hall. Are you him?”

He gave it an exaggerated thought. “If I wasn't, I would certainly lie and say I was.” She frowned. He grinned. “What are you delivering?”

“Huh? Oh. Ummm, candy. Truffles, to be exact.”

She couldn't stop staring at him. Did she like what she saw? He sure as hell did. “I didn't order any truffles.”

“You didn't?”

“Nope. I don't even remember the last time I ate candy.”

Her frown deepened, and her brows furrowed. It was all he could do to keep from pulling her against him so he could taste those pouty lips. She was adorable. “I'm sorry for the mistake, Mr. Hall.”

“Quite all right. Would you like to come in and warm up for a bit? I can make some coffee or hot chocolate. I might even have some marshmallows around here.”

“I...uh, no, thank you. I should get back to town and see about clearing this up. I am so, so sorry for bothering you.”

She wasn't looking at him any longer. “You didn't. Bother me, that is, and I really must insist that you come in and get warm. Your feet have got to be cold in those...those shoes.” He grimaced as he said the word and took her by the arm, ushering her inside before she could say no again. Besides, it was damn cold out there, and he was glad to have the door closed.

She eased her arm out of his grip then backed up against the door. “Really, this isn't necessary. My car has a very good heater and...wait, what's wrong with my shoes?” she asked, looking down and wiggling her toes, lifting her feet off the ground one by one as if trying to see what he found so distasteful.

“They're nothing but two pieces of leather, a couple of strings, and a spike.” *And would be much better suited to digging into my ass while you were on your back.* He cleared his throat and tried his best to ignore the dirty thoughts running through his mind. He glared down at her feet rather than looking at her face, at her lush mouth, in her expressive eyes. “They are the most ridiculous things to be wearing while trudging through the snow. How in the hell do you even walk in those on a good day, much less when there's ice covering the streets and sidewalks?”

“I...well, it wasn't snowing in the city, and I didn't *know* I would have to trudge through the snow, and I park inside a garage, so I didn't have to walk on any icy streets or sidewalks. At least I didn't until I got here. You should really shovel your walkway. It's dangerous not knowing where one is walking.” Her mouth had tightened, and her eyes had narrowed in his direction. She was not happy with him or his comments, and he was falling all over it, seeing her spark. Her smile twisted him all up inside, and her irritation with him did too. He loved that she couldn't hide her emotions, that she showed everything she was feeling.

“Common sense should have told you that you wouldn't be taking a leisurely stroll once you got up here. We're in the mountains in winter. You need snow shoes, not *those*,” he offered with a dismissive wave of his hand in the direction of her feet.

He was rewarded with a huff. She crossed her arms over her chest, boosting what little of her cleavage he could see from the small opening at the top of the zipper in her jacket. Yum.



“You know what? You said I hadn't bothered you, but you're not being very nice and over a pair of... Look, just because you don't like them—”

“I don't like them because you're an accident waiting to happen. You wouldn't have slipped on the ice if you'd had *proper* shoes on.”

Embarrassment flooded her neck with heightened color. For a second, he felt bad at revealing that he'd seen her come close to falling on her face in his front yard, but the feeling didn't last long. She could have been seriously hurt had she fallen.

She set the box of chocolates on the table beside the door and depressed the latch behind her. “Have a nice afternoon, Mr. Hall. Keep the truffles. Give them to your neighbor, your girlfriend, or throw them out.”

She opened the door. He put his hand on it over her head and closed it back again. “Stop. Please. I'm sorry for insulting your choice of footwear.” She just looked at him over her shoulder, one brow lifted in a quizzical expression. “Come over to the fire. Take your...whatever they are off and warm yourself up before you go back out there.”

When he made to put his arm around her waist, she shrugged him off and moved out of reach, walking over to the couch. She wasn't lithe and skinny, his candy delivery girl. The ski bunny outfit couldn't hide the natural curves of her hips and ass.

She was all woman under that bundle of fabric.

She unlaced her shoes, and he heard her sigh with pleasure when she got them off. She stuck her feet out in front of her toward the fire and wiggled her pink-socked toes. There was nothing flirty or coquettish in her movements. He found that interesting. She wasn't trying to come on to him; she wasn't trying to entice him.

What a fun challenge she would be.

“I offered coffee or hot chocolate to you before. Would you like me to make some?”

“No, thanks. I'm fine.”

He joined her on the couch after picking up the box of chocolates and settled into the corner behind her. “Want one?” he asked, holding out the unopened box to her.

She shifted on the couch. “No, thanks.”

Graham shrugged to himself and untied the ribbon, lifting the lid. “Uh, honey? The—”

“My name is Jane.”

He grinned behind her. “All right. Well, *Jane*, there are no truffles in the box, there's only r—”

“What!” She turned around and took the box from him, looking inside it herself, finding only small pebbles glued to the bottom of the decorative paper cups. “I'm gonna *kill* him. I am going to wrap his tie around his gay little neck and strangle his gay ass,” she muttered.

She put her shoes back on and began to lace them up. He put a hand over hers to still her movements, but she shook him off again. He did his best to ignore the fire that licked through him when he touched her but couldn't. Setup or no setup, the woman lit him up from the inside out.

“I'm, ummm...I'm so sorry the box was empty, and I'm so sorry that he played this silly little game and that I intruded on your afternoon.” She stood then walked around the back of the sofa to the door.

Graham stood as well and hopped over the back of the couch. He landed in front of her, startling her to a stop. “You didn't intrude on my afternoon. I've told you that.”

“Still, this was an awful thing for him to do, and I just need to go.” She made to step around him, but he moved in the way. He didn't want her leaving like this. He was so attracted to her, so taken by her that he wasn't ready for her to go.

He didn't usually fall so hard for a woman. Hell, he usually didn't fall at all, but he couldn't help it with one. It was instantaneous the second he saw her from the window. He didn't know why and while he didn't have a “type” he preferred, she was unlike any woman he'd ever been drawn to. She was real and grounded. Her rounded body was unlike the tall lithe women that he'd found his eyes following if he saw them on the street but that never went anywhere because he couldn't find anything that interested him beyond their looks. No, he found this one to be just about perfect, and that she brought out some protective instincts in him, well, all the better. He hadn't felt protective of a woman in a long, long time.

“Him who?”

She sighed and cocked her hip, irritation lighting her eyes. “Edward.”

“Who is Edward?”

“He's my business partner. The one that sent me out here. The one that dr...” Her eyes widened as she looked at Graham, then narrowed until he could barely see the golden brown color. “Did you know about this?”

“Know about what?” he asked, keeping his voice neutral.

“He set me up. With you. He planned this. 'Oh, Jane. Can you run this delivery for me? I'm terribly late for a meeting.' He's never late for meetings. He never does anything last minute. He never misses an opportunity to meet clients. He's the front man. I'm the candy maker.”

“You think this is a setup and I was in on it?” Graham asked, stepping back a little as she pointed a finger at him in accusation. For every step he took backward, she took one forward, poking him in the chest.

“Yes. He can't leave well enough alone. It wouldn't surprise me at all if you were a setup and this was all a ruse to get me out of the house and alone with a man. Edward's worse than a woman sometimes, always sticking his nose where it doesn't belong. At least a woman would know when another woman was ready to try again, but a man—gay or not—doesn't have a clue.”

She sure was something when annoyed. Unwittingly, an image of her aroused and naked in front of the fire formed in his head. Her lush body all rosy and pink from the heat, her thighs spread wide, and her legs draped over his shoulders as he lowered his face to the warmth of her sex. His hand closed around her wrist, and he pulled her against him.

“What are you doing?” She tugged at his hold, but he just tightened his grip.

His hand smoothed her hair away from her face, his fingers tracing the softness of her lips before he stole a kiss from her. It was light and teasing, giving him just a taste. When he lifted his head, she was staring at him with wide, deer-in-the-headlights eyes. “Jane?”

She said nothing, just continued to look at him. After a moment, she blinked rapidly, her face scrunching up with what he perceived to be disdain, confusion, fear. He wasn't sure what she was trying to convey with that look but before he could say anything further, she shook her head and rushed out the front door.

## Chapter Two

“How did the delivery go, honey?”

“Honey”? What's with people today? That's the second time I've been called 'honey.' I wasn't his honey, and I'm not your honey.”

“People? Did something go wrong with the client?”

Jane snorted, quite unladylike, and agitatedly unzipped her snow jacket. “Right. As if you didn't know.” The drive back to the city had been better than the drive to the mountains. The roads were not quite as slick with the sun out, and she'd had ample time to fume not only about Edward sending her on a long-ass delivery but a bogus one at that.

However, if she were honest with herself, she'd admit that that wasn't what had her so on edge. It was that thoughts of the cowboy wouldn't go away. He was all tall, tanned skin, rugged hands, and sun-streaked, dark blond hair reminiscent of a surfer. She shook her head. Great, a cowboy surfer. Perfect. Neither of which would ever be interested in her.

She'd never wanted a man so much in her life as she had wanted him the moment he'd opened the door. His grin was cocky, and his eyes were dark and lustful. His skintight jeans had hugged his hips and hidden nothing, and his soft black sweater defined every muscle in his chest. His feet had been bare and while she'd never paid much attention to a man's feet before, his not being covered by socks or sneakers or boots had been so homey, so casual that she'd found it incredibly sexy. The thought then and now gave her pause. Sexy feet? She'd heard of men loving a woman's painted toenails, but she'd never thought about a man's feet before. God, is this how low she'd sunk? How long it had been for her without her having realized it that not only was she looking at his ass in a pair of jeans and his upper body in a sweater, but she was now thinking a man looked hot and sexy with bare feet?

She groaned and took off her snow jacket, then hung it up on the hook behind the door. She licked her lips, which brought to mind his kiss. His lips had been so soft and so rough at the

same time when he'd had the audacity to briefly touch them to hers. His fingers on her face had made her feel all warm and fuzzy inside, and she didn't like it. Not one little bit.

It meant that she was starting to feel again and soon she would start to want. In that moment though, she would ignore the fact that she already wanted him. A lot. In a very big way.

Besides, he was young. Way too young for her. No wrinkles creasing his face, no gray at his temples. He had the smooth edges of a younger man, and she had no business fantasizing about him, wanting him. But damn oh damn oh damn...

"What's wrong?"

She whirled toward Edward and planted her hands on her hips. "What's wrong? You sent me out there with an empty box of truffles. You sent me *way* the hell out there to a *gorgeous* hunk of man with an empty box of truffles. Why, Edward? Why on earth would you do that to me?"

He didn't even look chagrined. He didn't look surprised that she'd figured it out. He didn't even look at her with a hint of embarrassment at having been caught setting her up. He just gave her a straightforward look, and she knew she wasn't going to like his answer.

"Do you want the truth, Jane? Do you *really* want the truth?"

"Of course I want the truth." She did, didn't she? Yes, yes, yes. Truth was a good thing. Right? Right.

"All right, then. I did it because I am tired of you sitting in that chair, staring out at nothing, watching all those awful reality shows. You're eating truffles and junk food and, quite frankly, it's depressing. I am tired of it. Phillip's gone. He broke up with you and yet the world still goes round and round. Let it go. Move on with *your* young and wonderful life because he sure as hell moved on with his."

Dammit. She didn't like the truth. She'd have preferred he lie through his pearly whites. She didn't like the truth because he was right. Phillip had dumped her and moved on with his life and his lovers. What was her problem? It wasn't like Phillip was really worth pining over, not like, say, Cowboy Surfer would be. If ever there was a man worthy of moping and crying over, it was him, not some *GQ* cover model wannabe like Phillip who had the emotional depth of a shot glass and probably not even that deep.

But that was all beside the point. Edward was in the wrong here.

"You're not even going to deny trying to set me up with him? Jeez, Edward." Jane honestly didn't know if she should hit him or hug him. Deep down, she knew he had her best interests at heart. "Oh, and speaking of young lives...how young is he?"

Oh *now* his cheeks turned a little pink. Interesting. "I don't know."

He was trying to ignore her by busying himself with wiping the kitchen counters, tidying the canisters, fiddling with the edges of recipe pages. She wasn't buying it. "Don't give me that. You do know. How young is he?"

"In his twenties." It took a second, but when she didn't say anything, he looked up and was met with her stare. They both knew she could outstare him any day of the week, so she stood there with her hands on her hips, tapped her toe, and waited. "Oh fine. He's twenty-six."

Jane closed her eyes, hung her head, and groaned loud and long. "Twenty-six?" Oh God, she was robbing the cradle. "I can't believe you set me up with a...a...*kid*."

Edward sighed dramatically, and it brought her head up. "He's not a kid. He's an adult, barely ten years younger than you. A beautiful adult too, in case you hadn't noticed. Do you know how many women *and* men would just die for him to look in their direction? And he's interested in dating *you*."

"Well, he's too young, and I don't want to date. Don't you remember me swearing off men? And as for the interested in dating me comment...please," she scoffed. "He hadn't even seen me until today and for all you know, this little meeting you arranged could have gone horribly wrong and he's no longer interested in me."

She spun away and finished undressing. Her shoes; her lovely, sexy, Carrie Bradshaw-esque shoes were long gone and carelessly tossed into a corner with the word *ridiculous* echoing through their laces. The bottoms of the snowsuit were flung over the back of the chaise, and she walked across the loft into her bedroom in her long underwear. Self-consciousness and modesty were long gone between her and Edward, both knowing the other couldn't care less about being seen in underwear or naked. She stripped down to her pink cotton underwear, unhooked her matching pink bra and tossed it into a corner, then put on her most favorite outfit of late: gray sweats and purple wooly socks. "How did you meet him, anyway?" she called out, loud enough to be heard from the bedroom.

Once changed, she returned to the main room and curled up in her favorite, aforementioned chair. It, too, was purple. She had spent way too much time moping, pouting, and crying over a jerk that hadn't even had the decency to end their two-year relationship in person. He'd sent her an e-mail, of all things, the day after they'd gotten back from a Labor Day weekend trip. A day later, she'd found a box outside the loft door full of stuff given and shared between them. He wanted no reminders of their time together and for some dumbass reason thought she did.

Calling him a jerk was really far too generous.

"A bar."

Jane's attention was back on Edward. She swiveled around in the chair and knelt on the plush cushion, with her gaze riveted on her roommate, both her eyebrows lifted in surprise. "A bar? You were in a bar? A non-gay bar?"

"Yes," came his exasperated answer. "Why are you so surprised?"

"Are you serious? Edward, I've known you for a long time now and while I don't pretend to know everything about you, I do know that you don't go to straight bars."

"Very well. If you must know, I was there with a...friend."

Edward left the kitchen with a truffle in his hand and came toward her. She held hers out to receive the confection. "What kind of friend?"

"None of your business. I thought you wanted to know about my meeting with Mr. Hunky."

"I do, it's just... Okay, okay, you met him in a bar. And?"

She broke the truffle apart and slipped half of it in her mouth. Her eyes closed as the candy melted on her tongue and a small bit of heat kicked the back of her throat. She moaned in pleasure. They never got old, these truffles. She would bet her heart alone had healed because she had been consuming them in mass quantities every day for the last few months. What they were doing to her hips was a different story, one she would deal with later. Much, much later.

"And I thought that he might be good for you. He's a solitary guy, normal. He's new to the area, not looking for anything, not running away from anything either. He seemed nice enough that I had to try."

She popped the other half of the truffle into her mouth. Edward really did love her, but... “Did he know you were setting him up?”

“Yes, but he didn't know when. I didn't tell him anything about you. Except...well, except that you were getting over a breakup. Nothing else, though. I mean, at least not the humiliating way it happened, not even that you've been dragging out the recovery for months.” Another piece of candy was deposited in her hand as he walked by and into his bedroom. “Now, if you don't mind, I have a date tonight, and I'd prefer not to be late.”

So not only had he set her up with the Hunk of the Month, he'd also spilled how pathetic she'd been. Fabulous.

Wait a second. “A date? You have a date? Oh my God. Who else have you set me up with, Edward? And what time is he showing up?”

“No one,” he called from the other room.

Great. Just great. “I hope he doesn't mind sweats because I'm not changing clothes again. I might even go scrub the makeup off my face so he gets the *au naturel* vision,” she mumbled.

Edward walked back in, and she turned in her chair, snuggling down into its comfy plushness. “Did you record my show?”

He slipped into his black trench coat and wrapped a bright blue scarf around his neck. “No.”

“Why not? I asked you before I left. I said please and everything.”

“Those shows are awful, Jane. They have nothing to do with reality.”

“Exactly. Why do you think I watch them? They're stupid and funny and not at all like my life.”

“Your life is wonderful.”

“Right.”

“Take care of yourself tonight. No more sweets. Eat a salad. Drink some water. And don't wait up. I hope not to be back until morning.”

“Not until morning? Edward, no date of mine is going to last so long that you can't come home.”



“Jane, I *do* have a date. I *am* going out. I have not set you up with anyone else tonight.” He winked at her and blew her a kiss as he left.

She sighed and looked around the empty room. “Well damn, now what?”

\* \* \* \* \*

Graham glanced at the Weather Channel before turning off the television. No snow in the overnight forecast, and he was glad of that. He still wasn't used to driving in the stuff, or the ice, or up and down a mountain in either circumstance.

He grabbed his coat off the hook then walked out the front door, closing and locking it behind him. The night was very cold and very clear. Being from Texas, he was surprised his thin Southern blood hadn't frozen yet.

He trekked quickly through the snow to unlock his truck. As soon as he climbed inside, he cranked it up and sat there blowing into his hands for a few minutes before the heater kicked in, blasting him with a shot of hot air. If he made it through the winter up here in the Rockies, he swore he'd never take another hot summer day for granted.

He plugged his MP3 player in and turned up the volume on Toby Keith. It would help to pass the time on his way into town. He put the truck in gear and slowly drove out of the yard. “Time to go get her.”

The country setting and the country music suited him. The city had too much structure and was too enclosed. He preferred openness, stars at night, peace.

His cabin was idyllic too, with a creek running through the front of the property and a stone fireplace in nearly every room. He worked in the loft that overlooked the mountains and the pond along the back of the property.

It would be beautiful in the spring. The mountains with their snowcapped tops in the distance, the mountain streams thawed and flowing, the wildflowers in bloom. He hadn't planned to still be around then, but for the past few hours he'd been reconsidering.

He shifted in his seat to get a little more comfortable and turned up the music. Darkness had settled in completely and with only headlights lighting the way, the drive down into the city seemed as though he were going from one world into another. It was pitch-black outside his truck, and his reflection in the side window from the dashboard lights would be the only scenery for several more miles.

His thoughts drifted back to Jane. He didn't chase women, but man, there was something sweet about this one. Of course, it didn't hurt that she wanted him. It had been written all over her face for about three seconds after he'd kissed her. He couldn't stop thinking about her or get the feel of her body against his out of his mind.

The taste of her lips, her smile, her frown, and those damn shoes...he couldn't stop fantasizing about them gouging his flesh as she rode him.

From the moment he'd met her, Graham had come to the conclusion that she was his and that he owed Edward a bottle of wine, a six-pack, or whatever the man preferred. During their spat, he'd fallen headfirst into being smitten with her.

He had to admit that being set up with a woman by a gay man was a first for him and so far one that hadn't gone well. Not yet, anyway. He meant to change that in whatever way he could.

One of the downtown Denver exits let him out just a few streets from the loft Jane shared with Edward. After she'd left his place, he'd called Edward to find out about seeing her again, and the man had eagerly given their address, inviting Graham to come over that night since Jane would be alone. He'd left immediately after a shower and a few quick e-mail queries.

There was a parking garage instead of street parking for which he was thankful. If it snowed overnight, at least he wouldn't have to dig his truck out. Not to mention parallel parking was a pain in such a big vehicle. He pulled in and parked in a spot close to the stairwells and elevators. The twosome lived and worked on the top floor, and Graham decided that the elevator would be the way to go.

The garage was newly constructed, but the building it was attached to had once been a brewery. The offices and storage rooms had recently been converted into loft apartments. Exposed beams, brick, and ductwork gave the inside of the building a "something old" feel while the wall sconces and fancy scrollwork on the doors and fixtures lent it an air of modern elegance.

Six oh nine was the number he was looking for and when he finally stood in front of the door, he knocked.

No one answered.

He knocked again, and this time was rewarded by a very irritated female voice telling him to wait a damn minute. He waited, more excited than he could ever remember feeling about a woman on the other side of an unopened door. His dick swelled, and his heart kicked.

The wood panel swung open and there she was: the woman of his dreams, wearing a gray sweat suit with her hair in a messy ponytail, purple socks on her feet, and an expression that could have melted the snow outside.

He winked, and she snarled. He laughed, and she slammed the door in his face.

Jane.

## Chapter Three

“What are you doing here?”

Her back was to him when he opened the door and walked in. She stood at the stove stirring cream in a saucepan and refused to look at him. Maybe if she ignored him, he'd get the picture and go away.

“I came to see you.”

“Right. I knew it,” she ground out, shaking her head. “He said he hadn't, but I knew it. This is another setup that Edward coaxed you into, isn't it?”

“No. I came up with this one all on my own. Aren't you proud of me? And he didn't coax me into it the first time.”

She chanced a glance over her shoulder and found he was grinning at her like a loon. Jane couldn't believe he was actually standing there, in her loft, looking tall and gorgeous while she looked short and frumpy. It didn't help that she was in the kitchen making a batch of candy. Okay, add fat to short and frumpy. She hated thinking about herself that way. She wasn't skinny, but she wasn't fat either. She knew that; she just couldn't help it sometimes. Phillip's words kept coming back to her at the oddest moments and, coupled with the hot man now standing in her loft, the negativity glowed neon. Since the dumping, she'd taken to wearing nothing but sweats and loungewear and she rarely went out. How could she let one person affect her so? These small realizations and admissions did nothing but make her grumpy.

“All right, so, you've seen me. You can go now. I believe you know where the door is.”

“I appreciate the invitation to leave, but I was hoping we could have dinner together.”

“Nuh-uh. No, sorry. I'm not dating right now.” And she wasn't. She'd given two years to a guy who had sweet-talked her, who wasn't even in the same yummy ballpark as Cowboy Surfer, and look where that got her? Nowhere. She was safe like this, living vicariously through Edward's tireless, sex-filled search for “the one.”

“Fair enough, but just so you know, I don't believe you.”

“It doesn't matter what you don't believe.” She turned off the stove and poured the scalded cream over chopped bittersweet chocolate. The aroma filled the immediate air around her, and she inhaled deeply. The scent of excellent chocolate never got old.

“What are you making?”

He'd stepped close, standing just behind her shoulders. She could feel the heat coming off his body and if she leaned back, she'd be touching his chest. Instead of doing just that—because she so wanted to—she pressed herself closer into the edge of the counter, picked up a wooden spoon, and slowly started to stir the cream into the chocolate. “Truffles. Like the ones you didn't get this afternoon.”

“I smell chili peppers.”

“Mmm. Yes. We infuse the cream with them. It is a very delicate balance of flavor, the chocolate and the chili. It's sweet at first bite, but then a blast of heat erupts on your tongue, completely intoxicating your mouth with flavor.”

“You know they say that chili peppers are an aphrodisiac, stimulating the blood and nerve endings.” He leaned closer still, his breath blowing against her hair. “Maybe we should try it out.”

“Not on your life.” *Go away go away go away.*

“We'll see.” His breath brushed the edge of her ear, sending a shiver up her spine. What did she have to promise the universe to get him to leave and stop tempting her? “Is this your business then?”

“It's mine and Edward's. We started it after he went through a hard breakup with a guy he'd been dating at work. He quit shortly after and decided that the way to mend a broken heart was through chocolate.”

“I know many women that would agree with that. How did you meet? You and Edward, I mean.”

Many women? Of course there were many women in his life. Just look at him. She was nothing more to him than a blind date. It didn't really explain what he was doing in her kitchen though. Blind dates that didn't go right usually didn't get a second chance, and guys like him didn't chase after women like her either. “In a candy making class a little over a year ago.”

“And? I want the whole story.”

Jane sighed and fought against grinding her teeth in frustration. “He was taking the class to learn to make candy for Valentine's Day for his boyfriend. When they broke up, I made these for him one day to try and cheer him up and, well, here we are.” Having Graham so near made concentrating on anything difficult. It was a wonder she could think straight at all.

“So, are these what he was talking about when he said you were sitting around eating chocolate all the time?”

There was laughter in his voice. While not surprising, it stung that he was laughing at her, teasing her about it. “He said that?” Mortified, she whirled around and wished she hadn't. He was standing *right there*, her nose not even an inch from his chest. He was broad and solid, and she wanted to be wrapped in his arms. *Stop that*. She looked up at him. Something else she wished she hadn't done.

“Yes. And it turned me on immediately.”

“Don't say that. Don't say you were turned on because I eat chocolate. I swear I'm going to kill him.” She was struggling not to cry, but more from anger and humiliation than sadness. “He shouldn't be telling people that! Dammit!” She began to turn away, but Graham's hand on her arm stopped her movement and held her firmly between his body and the counter. She tried to move, tried to push against his grip on her, but he wouldn't let up. Fucking truth be told, she didn't want him to let go. She wanted him to really, really *want* her.

“Jane, it's okay. He's worried about you. And...” His gaze traveled up and down her body, heat flaring in eyes she shouldn't be looking into, voice dropping low. “It's true. I happen to like that you aren't afraid to indulge yourself in chocolate. I'd be lying if I said I didn't want to know what else you like to indulge in.”

She gave a self-depreciating snort and fought to keep the negative words on the tip of her tongue from spewing out her mouth.

“You're insufferable, and I still think you should leave. You know as well as I do nothing could ever work between us. All we've done is argue since we met earlier.” With a sharp tug, she broke free of his grasp and turned back to the chocolate. She pulled the spoon out and took the bowl to the refrigerator. Once she put it inside, she closed the door and leaned her head against it.

“No, I actually don't know that and neither do you. What's more, I don't believe it. We've only argued because you're too stubborn to admit you want to see me naked.”

She couldn't believe he just said that, that he'd come to that conclusion. “What?”

But, oh dear God, he was right. She wanted to see him naked. She wanted his hands all over her as he kissed her harder than he had at the cabin. She...she had to stop thinking like that. She didn't want to be hurt again, and man oh man could he hurt the hell out of her. “Then I'll believe it enough for the both of us.”

“Are you sure you want me to go?”

No. “Yes.” She closed her eyes and waited without turning around. A few heartbeats later, the door closed and when she looked up, he was gone. So, why didn't she feel better?

*Because you really didn't want him to leave.*

“Oh shut up,” she murmured.

He drove all the way into the city, and he left just like that? What the hell? All because she said she wanted him to go. He didn't have to give up so easily though.

She really was better off that he did and she knew that. There were just too many complications that came with being involved with a man like him. Life would be simpler without the want, the lust, the sheer hunger to crawl naked all over him.

Well, okay, simpler yes, but a little complication never hurt anyone, right? Didn't mean she had to give in to it. And she wasn't going to. Was she?

*Not now that you sent him away.*

If he were still there, could she have given in? Of course. She huffed out a frustrated sigh. She needed to shed the leftover shit from her relationship with Phillip. More than anything, reminders lingering in the house weren't helping her move on. What was that thing about writing a letter and then burning it being somehow cathartic? Would the same hold true if she burned all the stuff he'd left at her door? Most of it was what she'd given him as gifts, so perhaps that would count as sort of her “letter.” Indecision gnawed at her. Might be worth a shot. She didn't want to hold on to someone that had walked away without a backward glance. She didn't want to hold on to someone she had proved to herself she could live without, even if she had done so while consuming lots and lots of chocolate. With a nervous but determined stride, she went into her bedroom.

The closets in the loft were huge, walk-in style that more than one person at a time could occupy. It was one of the reasons she and Edward had bought it. He had more clothes and shoes than any woman she knew, and he used every inch of his closet, part of hers, and part of the one they used for storage.

She pulled the box out from the far back corner of her closet before she could change her mind. It was time to get over it and move on. There were days she forgot it was stashed in the back corner and there were other days when it tormented the crap out of her. And score another point for Edward. Dumping Cowboy Surfer into her lap, while deceptive, was very motivating.

Her relationship with Phillip had been the first long-term one she'd had since college. She had to admit that though it hadn't been all warm and fuzzy, there'd been a certain pleasantness that had worked for them, or so she thought. She didn't know she needed passion and heat, didn't know anything had been missing on her side. Now that she'd met Cowboy Surfer, she wanted to explore all those things his kiss brought to life. She wanted more of those tingles, more of those ripples through the deepest part of her.

His kiss had been brief—just a touch of his lips to hers—but the shot of heat between her legs and the triple-time thumping of her heart in her chest had been enough to send her running. She hadn't been able to shake it, either on the drive home or in the time since she'd arrived home. And him showing up...well, that just added sexual fuel to a fire she wasn't quite sure what to do with or how to put out.

Right now though, the box and its contents had to go. She hadn't opened it since the day Phillip had left it at her door, and she was ready to purge Phillip and the memories of him, her humiliation at his electronic dumping, everything associated with their relationship.

So, what was she supposed to do with it? There wasn't a fireplace for her to burn it all. There was the Dumpster behind the building she could toss it in. Would that be healing enough? In a poetic kind of way perhaps. Tossing away the material of their relationship as he'd tossed her away. Yes, that might work. Had he really tossed her away, though, or had he simply moved on to something that might work better for him? And why was she suddenly questioning everything?



She'd have to walk across the alley and...on second thought, no. She wasn't fond of the alley in the daytime, so no way was she going out there in the dark. What was she going to do? Put it back in the closet?

An image of Graham popped into her head, the heat from his body, the scent of him, the look in his eyes when he'd lifted his head from kissing her... "Oh hell no, the box has to go."

Her only other option was the roof. She and Edward had a patio set and one of those small outdoor fire pits, but she'd never used it on her own. Did they have any firewood? Or was the thing gas powered? Damn, she didn't know. She set the box on a barstool. In the kitchen, she started rummaging through the junk drawer looking for the instruction manual for the fire pit. Could she put the stuff in it without burning the whole building down?

"Now, about that dinner?"

Jane's head whipped around. Graham. Shit. "What are you doing here? I thought you left."

"I did. I went and got dinner." He emphasized his words with the lifting of a rather large pizza box in one hand and a two-liter bottle of soda in the other.

"Why are you insisting on having dinner? I told you, I'm not dating right now."

"I know, but you need to eat. And while you're not dating anyone, you, in fact, want to date me."

"Not a bit cocky, are we?"

He grinned, megawatt. "Nope."

She grumbled and continued to rifle through the drawer, intent on ignoring him. Looking anywhere, including in a drawer, was better than looking at him. The damn man was right, at least in the wanting him sense. Dating, though, had nothing to do with what she wanted to do with him.

*Not yet anyway.*

Where had Edward put the damn instructions? Could they be on the roof in the storage bench with all their outdoor eating supplies? It would be logical, much more so than them being stuck here in the kitchen. She slammed the drawer shut after she put everything back in then counted to a hundred. She didn't want to face Graham again yet and the truth of how much she did in fact want him. She didn't trust herself around him. Her heavily fortified defenses weren't

so strong when she was around him. Infatuation at first sight was something she'd never experienced before, at least not to this extent.

When she finally did turn toward him, he'd taken his coat off and laid it over the end of the counter. He still wore the black sweater from earlier in the day...and the same jeans that hugged his hips and thighs...and the boots... Oh God. He was impeccable, stylish, and she... Oh God.

"Ready to eat, or talk, or...?"

Jane lifted an eyebrow. "Or?"

"Mmm hmmm. Or."

Yeah, no. She so didn't need to know what he meant by "or." Maybe she could bore the shit out of him during dinner so he'd leave and she could dispose of the box o'crap in peace. But, if she did that, what were the chances he'd want to see her again? Which was the whole point; purging the past so she could have a fucking fantastic present with the Cowboy Surfer standing just over there looking smug and hot and more yummy than the pizza smelled.

"What are you looking for? Can I help?"

"Nothing and no."

She pulled a couple of plates from the cabinet beside the fridge and snagged clean glasses from the dish drain. "So, Graham, what do you do? For a living, that is, when you're not being set up on blind dates."

He took the glasses from her and laughed. Again. Though this time she was sure it wasn't *at* her. That was progress and a good thing. What wasn't a good thing was the thought she could listen to him laugh all day and night and never tire of it. It was rich and deep, matching the rest of him.

She watched him in her kitchen. He dwarfed everything, including her. He was so tall compared to her five feet four and some odd inches and if he stood in the middle of the small space, he could probably touch each surface without having to move. He depressed the button on the ice maker, filling the glasses with ice cubes. She should tell him she preferred crushed just to irritate him.

He turned toward her and put the glasses on the counter, then opened the bottle of soda. "I'm a freelance writer for travel magazines and other publications."

Well, she'd have never pegged him as the writing sort. He looked like he belonged on horseback, on a motorcycle, or on a surfboard, but not behind a desk writing articles. "Travel writing, huh? That's got to be interesting."

"It is." He set her glass up on the bar and opened the box of pizza. "I get to try a lot of new things and see a lot of new places. It keeps life fresh. I'll have to bring you with me sometime."

Oh, he didn't need to say something like that. She'd love to go with him, anywhere, *everywhere*, so long as there was a bed and a naked him. Funny things were going on inside her and between her legs, and yet all he was doing was putting pizza on both their plates while she stood gawking at him. She picked up one of the plates and glasses. "I think you need to leave right after dinner." *Before I tackle you to the floor, have my way with you, and believe every word out of your beautiful mouth.*

When she walked around to the barstools, her eyes lit on the box. Oh shit. The frustrating man had made her forget all about it. She didn't want to call attention to it and she didn't want him asking her about it, not that she thought he'd care, but still... Setting her food and drink on the bar, she reached for the box and dumped it haphazardly into her purple chair.

He slid onto a barstool. "No, you don't."

"Yes. Yes, I do."

Taking a bite of his pizza, he winked at her. The insufferable man winked at her. What the hell? She wasn't going to be able to resist him if he kept acting all hot and sexy and interested. And that's all it was, right, just an act? Right. But if that was so, then why had he come back?

She glared at him as he ate, seemingly unconcerned with their little disagreement, unlike her who was completely concerned with it. When he reached for another slice, she watched the movement of his hand, his long, tan fingers, and the way they gripped the crust to pull the piece away from the rest of the pie. What would it feel like to have those fingers pull on her nipples, wrap themselves in her hair and tug, dig deep between her legs? He had her all twisted up and wanting things she'd never really cared about wanting before, thinking things she'd never really thought about before.

Sex was just sex.

"Not going to eat?" He nodded toward the untouched food in front of her.

She had to admit the pizza smelled heavenly and man, did she love ooey-goey pepperoni and extra cheese pizza. She could have dinner with him and then she would usher him out the door. No harm, no foul.

She'd never eaten so fast in her life. She had a cursory taste of the cheese and the sauce, the pepperoni which had a slight spicy kick to it, and the crunchy but chewy crust. She gulped down her drink, too. "Done. Are you finished?"

"Not by a long shot." He glanced down at her plate, then started chewing slower. "So, what's in the box you were in such a hurry to move?"

She shrugged and feigned nonchalance. "Nothing."

"You sure? 'Cause you seemed pretty protective of it. Does it have all your naughty girl lingerie in it?"

"You wish." Jane got up and took her plate around to the sink and suddenly wished she had some naughty girl lingerie. Damn man was putting impractical ideas in her head. She wanted another piece of pizza, but...oh what the hell. She picked up another piece and ate it at a slower pace, savoring the deliciousness.

"Yes, I do wish. Very much so. If it's not naughty nighties, then what's in it?"

"Nothing I want to talk about."

He regarded her silently for a minute that almost had her squirming before nodding his head. "Okay. I won't ask again."

"Good."

"At least not tonight. I've got other plans."

The last was said as he reached over and wiped the tomato sauce from the side of her mouth. She was so tempted to lick it off his finger, but bit her tongue holding back a groan while watching him do it instead. "I've got other plans as well. So, thank you for dinner, but it's time for you to go. Again. For good this time. No coming back with dessert."

He got up off the barstool and followed her, but while she went to open the door for him, he kept going into the living area, his boots echoing on the wood floors. "What are you doing?" Then her gaze lowered to his ass in those denims and every nerve in her body came alive. It had to be illegal to look that hot.

As she stood there, resolved to usher him out despite the effect, he proceeded to move the box from her chair and take a seat.

“Why are you sitting down? I said you should leave.”

## Chapter Four

When he looked over at her, she emphasized her words by gesturing to the door with her thumb. His smile both irritated her and made her want to beg him to tie her to the bed and ravish her day in and day out. He was sin in real live, breathing color and too freakin' tempting. He *really* had to go because she didn't know how many more times she could say no and mean it.

*None and never.*

"You see, I don't give up like that. You can't tell me to go and expect me to do so when I know that's not what you want me to do at all."

Figured, but then, she already knew that, didn't she? The man was damn persistent, and it secretly made her smile. Blind date or not, he was charming. Full of himself but charming. "Well, since you know so much, tell me then, what do I want?"

"I answered that already. Come here, Jane, and stop trying to get rid of me. On the other hand, if you'd rather, I can come over there and get you. I won't bite hard, and you'll be glad you gave in."

She crossed her arms over her chest and leaned against the edge of the open door. "Let's say, for argument's sake, you're right. Let's say I do want you."

"I am, and you do."

"Uh-huh. I know Edward told you why I've been a pill for the last few months and maybe it doesn't make sense to you but, romantically, I've never been really successful. I have dated, but there's never been a lot of real interest, on either side. And when Phillip dumped me... I don't want to go through that kind of thing again. It was awful. I thought I'd found someone special, someone that I could maybe spend my life with, but I was just a stop along the way."

"I understand. I really do, but hiding away from your feelings and your desires isn't going to make the first step any easier no matter how long you wait, Jane. There's always going to be

an excuse not to move forward. You're too damn beautiful and sexy to just sit and let life pass you by.”

“You make me sound like an immature teenager that's still holding out hope her first crush will realize his mistake in letting me go.”

“No. You're just caught in a place between not wanting to be hurt again and let's get it on. I've dated women your age, my age, and younger, and no one is immune to hurt. We all just process it differently.”

“Wow. You're wise for twenty-six. Far more than I am at the ripe old age of *thirty*-six.”

“I told you I write for other publications. Well, one of the things I write about is relationships, usually from a romantic getaway perspective, but relationships just the same. Kind of like how to revive the spark stuff. I have a degree in creative writing and a minor in psychology.”

Jane was stunned. Really and truly stunned. So not only was Cowboy Surfer hot as hell, he was also a deep thinker, a pseudoexpert in relationships and travel. While she was just a candy maker sans formal college education. At the same time, she loved the company she and Edward had created for themselves. She might not have the degree, but she had solid business sense, creativity, and the ability to make decadent truffles that melted on the tongue. She truly loved her work. How many people could say that?

However, this thing between them had disaster written all over it.

He was right about one thing. No matter how long she waited to discover herself post-Phillip and let go of the past, it wasn't going to be an easy step. Phillip hadn't been the love of her life, but he had been special to her. If she were honest with herself, she'd admit that it had been more of a comfort thing with him. At first, at least. Toward the end, he'd begun to pressure her to lose weight, to change the way she dressed, to move the business out of the loft. It was then she'd begun to doubt herself. And now that she thought about it in those terms...

“I'm not leaving, and you have until the count of five to come over here, or I'm coming to get you. Naked. One.”

Those words brought her out of her little reverie. “What? Wait a second. You can't be serious.” But even as she said the words, he started pulling off his boots and socks. He then stood

and reached into his back pocket, took out a condom packet, and laid it on the table beside the chair. She inhaled sharply, and he looked up, smiling.

“You might want to close the door. You don't want any of your neighbors to happen by and get an eyeful. Two.”

His hands grasped the bottom of his sweater and pulled it up, giving her a glimpse of his tanned abs. She slammed the door the second his head was free and swallowed once then swallowed again. There was a smattering of chest hair and a flat, rock-hard stomach. There was the trail of dark hair that disappeared inside the waist of his jeans...*Oh God.*

“Jane? You okay, darlin'?”

She shook her head but never took her eyes off him. She was definitely not okay. He was perfect and beautiful and sexy as all get out. She took an unconscious step toward him.

“That's it. Come on. Three.”

She stopped moving and he shook his head, his fingers going to the button on his jeans, popping it free. She couldn't remember ever wanting a man as much as she wanted him. Actually, she'd *never* wanted a man in this all-consuming way. She'd already experienced the tingles from his kiss, tingles that had not been part of her life with any other man, including Phillip, most especially Phillip.

What would the rest of it be like? The thoughts she'd had about him, about the things she wanted him to do to her...well, she'd never admitted those things to anyone before, and she wasn't sure she could admit them to him now.

When had she gotten so close to him?

He reached out and grabbed hold of her before she could bolt backward. The contact of his skin, the feel of his arms around her shocked her with the intense need that bubbled to the surface. He held her tight and sat down in the chair again, pulling her across his lap.

“How do you know I want this?”

“I see it in your eyes. Right now. Just like I saw it this afternoon before you ran out. You didn't want to leave. You wanted more kisses.”

He was right, but she wouldn't admit it out loud. His lips trailed kisses down the side of her neck. “I'm so glad dinner is over. You definitely need the 'or.’”



He turned her head toward him and kissed her soundly, much more so than he had earlier in the day. For several moments, it was just lips, his insistent but patient lips on hers, and then, the tip of his tongue traced the seam of her lips, and she was lost. She sighed with longing, opening for him.

He slid his tongue into her mouth and her tongue tentatively followed his lead. He held her with one hand tangled in her hair, and tilted his head to deepen the kiss.

Just as she started to let herself go and fully relax into the kiss, he lifted his head and dropped his hands to the hem of her sweatshirt, pulling it up quickly and tugging it off her before she could form a protest, dropping it to the floor.

“Graham!” She was mortified and insanely turned on to be sitting topless in his lap, her pale skin a stark contrast to his golden, very toned body.

“No bra. Very nice.” He brushed the pad of his thumb over her nipple, and she groaned. When he did the same thing to her other nipple, her hips bucked and her pussy bumped up against the bulge in his jeans. This time, he groaned in reaction, and she was very glad she wasn't the only one affected this way.

“I wasn't expecting company.”

“A shame. You should have been expecting me and from now on, you will.”

Jane was stunned and momentarily speechless. When she did find her voice, it came out huskier than protesting should sound. Her body was going to betray her. “We're not...I mean, you don't think we're going to...”

He reached between them to unzip his jeans the rest of the way. “Oh yes, I think we're going to.”

“Not here in the chair.”

“Yes, right here in the chair. Now, get up and take those pants off.”

“Really, Graham, we shouldn't.”

There was not an ounce of conviction in her voice. Forget *going* to betray her. It already had. As she shifted to get closer to him, he nudged her off his lap but steadied her with his hands. She watched, helpless and mute, and more aroused than words or thoughts could convey, as he tugged her sweatpants down her hips and thighs, leaving them in a puddle around her ankles.

“We should. You just have to stop thinking about shouldn't and couldn't long enough to let it happen.” His hands slid up to her waist and down the sides of her legs, causing goose bumps to rise on her skin. His voice was soft and sincere and his eyes held a mix of lust and tender understanding.

Dammit. Falling for him then, now, or tomorrow would be just plain dumb, but she didn't know if she'd be able to stop herself. Besides, who was he to tell her what and how to think? He was a pain in the ass. She didn't know what was up or down with him. And why the hell was he grinning at her like that?

His fingers dug into the flesh of her ass and she squealed as he pulled her back across his thighs, this time with her straddling him. She looked over his shoulder, crossed her arms over her naked chest, and tried her best to be pissed. But the truth was, she wasn't pissed at him at all.

Truth was, she was hot for him. Aching, burning, scorching hot for him. She didn't know why he was able to do this to her when no other man in her life had. It was both confusing and enlightening. Something about being wanted as Graham wanted her was a freedom she'd never known. It was uplifting to her bruised heart. And she had no doubt Graham wanted her. Maybe just for sex and maybe just for this one night and maybe because he'd been set up and coaxed into it by Edward, but for the moment, he wanted her, and it gave her silent permission to want him in return.

But all of that still didn't mean she couldn't pretend to be mad at his audacity in telling her what she wanted.

\* \* \* \* \*

Graham bit back a grin. She wanted him and was trying everything she could to deny it. Even pretending to be mad at him. He knew better. Something about her was quickly driving him insane with want and a new type of hunger he wasn't sure he could sate.

Did she even realize that her meager attempt to hide her breasts from him wasn't working? They were big and round and oh so perfect for his hands. He thought about pointing out the fact that he could see her nipples peeking out from under her arms but figured that she'd likely take a swing at him, so he just kept it to himself.

“What are you smiling about?”

“Why shouldn't I be smiling? I have a beautiful, naked woman on my lap.”

“Beautiful? Right.”

“Yes. Beautiful.”

He slid his hands from her ass up to her waist, then down over her hips, and back around to her behind. She was soft and lush everywhere he touched. He'd dated full-figured women before, but this particular one astride his legs was different in all ways. She had an underlying confidence that she'd buried along with her bad experience with her ex. He could sense it, could feel it, could fucking see it when she looked him in the eye.

Then, there was her body... It drove him nuts thinking about it since he'd first seen her earlier in the day. She had an hourglass figure that just wouldn't quit. He loved that curve of her waist as it dipped inward then flared out to her hips and her beautiful, heart-shaped ass.

His fingers dipped down low, and he could feel the heat between her legs. She arched, which tilted her hips back, and his fingertips grazed the edges of her sex.

“Please.”

“Please what, Jane? Please touch you?” Her eyes were closed and her lips had parted.

“No. Yes. I...I don't know, just...”

“Look at me.” His fingers lightly teased her heated wetness. When she shook her head, he inserted the tip of one finger inside her. She moaned, and he smiled. “Look at me.”

She shook her head again but after a few seconds with his finger still inside her and neither of them moving, she opened her eyes. Need mixed with pleasure mixed with pleading. His whole being ached for this woman. He was everything she needed and she was everything he'd ever wanted.

“Good girl. You need someone to care for you, someone to want you, someone to come home and fuck you at the end of every day just because he couldn't go another second without his hands on you.”

“I do not. I can take care of myself.”

“Oh, I know you can take care of yourself in general, but you need someone to take care of your heart and body.”

“And you think you're the someone I need?”

The skepticism in her voice, combined with the curious hope in her eyes, told him more than any words ever would that he was correct. “Damn right. And it all starts with me fucking you, showing you how incredibly hot you are to me. It’ll help, I promise.” He punctuated his statement with a hard smacking kiss to her lips then picked up the condom packet. “Ever put one on a guy?”

She nodded, and pink tinted her cheeks again.

“Good,” he said, handing her the foil square. Slowly taking his finger from inside her, he slid his other hand from her ass and fished his cock out of his jeans. “Put it on me.”

Trembling fingers struggled until finally, the paper ripped apart, and Jane took the condom out. She was so intent on the task of rolling the rubber down his dick that she never looked at up at his face. He hated wearing condoms, hated the damn things period, but he was in the unfamiliar territory of having sex with someone he’d just met.

While he trusted that Jane was squeaky-clean like he was, he figured she would feel better about their encounter if they used one. Or twelve.

She kept smoothing her fingers over his cock, stroking him, and he didn’t think she even realized it. The corner of her bottom lip was pulled between her teeth and when he flexed his thighs, making his cock jump against her fingers, she started slightly and looked up at him.

“You’re killing me, sweetness, touching me like that.”

He gripped her around the waist and tugged her lower body closer until the head of his cock touched her. It was all he could do not to slam upward and impale himself fully. “Tell me. Say it. Just once, tell me you want me. Just once, don’t deny it.”

Her tongue licked at her lips, and her eyes cleared of the haze of arousal as she stared at him. Her ass wiggled slightly against his thighs. He almost bit his own tongue off to keep from begging *her* to fuck him. It was long moments—long, agonizing, held-in-limbo moments—before she spoke, but her voice was strong and steady, sultry and sexy. “Yes, I want you, Graham.”

Relief raced through his body. One, two, three deep breaths, and he found his own voice. “Don’t look away from me. See *me*, Jane. And lower your arms.” He winked. “I want at your boobs.”

He didn't usually say things like tits or boobs to the women he was intimate with, but Jane brought out a heated mix of possessiveness and crude fuck-now-and-fuck-hard hunger in him. Besides, any woman that liked a little heat with her chocolate would like a lot of heat with her sex. A little rough, a little naughty, and a lot hot. Even if she didn't quite know it yet.

The second her arms were out of the way, his hands were there, cupping the weight of her breasts as he'd been longing to do. She pushed herself into him when his thumbs rasped over her nipples again. His hips surged out of the chair, and he was inside her, all the way. She was wet, steamy, and tight—impossibly, deliciously, choke-the-hell-out-of-his-dick tight.

Sweat beaded on his forehead. Shit. When was the last time she'd been taken? She was so goddamn tight. Her muscles squeezed him, and every thought in his head stopped. He was just going to feel her, enjoy the intense vise grip her pussy had on his cock. If her sex was this tight, good God, her ass...

Fighting for focus, he looked at her as a lone tear leaked from the corner of her eye.

Holy hell. Had he hurt her? "Jane? Baby, did I hurt you?" Hands framed her face, and their gazes locked. "Tell me. Did I hurt you? Do you need me to pull out? Talk to me."

She shook her head. "No. No, I'm not hurt."

Again, relief swamped him. The woman was going to be the death of him. Keeping him on pins and needles like this. "What is it then? What's wrong?"

"Good. It feels so good. I haven't...I've never felt like this."

He grinned at that. "Like it? So good it makes you cry?"

He was trying to be lighthearted because he knew what it was to feel like no one wanted you, like no one saw you for who you really were, like no one gave a shit. And the give a shit she needed wasn't going to come from chocolate or friends or work. No, the give a shit she needed could only come from someone that actually cared about her as a woman...a beautiful, sexy, don't-stop-fucking-me woman.

Lucky for her, he'd come to town.

He was rewarded with a small smile, and his cock flexed inside the tight passage that was Jane's cunt. "Kiss me."

And she did. Fully and completely for the first time since they'd met that afternoon, she planted her lips against his and took his breath away. He pulled her close with one arm around her back and pressed his hand to the back of her head, tilting his own to deepen the kiss with his tongue dancing along hers.

When he needed to catch his breath, he tugged at her hair, and she lifted her mouth. Her heavy-lidded eyes were no longer filled with tears; her wavy hair was curled around his fingers. Combine those with her swollen lips, and she was the most delicious woman he'd ever met.

"Are you seeing it, feeling it?"

"No."

"No?"

"No."

"Damn. Well, why not?"

She laughed. She actually laughed while sitting naked in his lap, his cock crazy hard inside her.

Yes, the very damn death of him.

"You said fucking you would show me."

He grinned at her, a little confused. "Yes, ma'am, I did. But I don't understand the problem."

She leaned closer, and her voice dropped to the sexiest whisper he'd ever heard. "Well...there's been no fucking."

## Chapter Five

The stunned look on his face made her want to laugh some more. But the heat in his eyes and the hard cock in her pussy made her want his kisses and his body more than anything.

She'd been lying when she said she didn't see it. She saw it when he looked at her; she felt it when he touched her; she knew it when he kissed her. She just couldn't seem to get the feeling to stick around for more than a few seconds.

She wanted other things too, but she couldn't allow her mind to go there. He wanted her and she was melting against him at lightning speed. She didn't want to give in too easily, but...well, hell, she'd given in the moment he walked through the door.

“No fucking, huh? Well, let's see if we can remedy that. Ride me.”

Jane was the stunned one this time. Ride him? Was he serious? She'd never taken over in sex before. For a moment, she sat stock-still and dropped her gaze from him, worrying the corner of her bottom lip between her teeth.

“No. Don't look away.” He tilted her head back up with a finger under her chin. “Look at me. Ride me. Fuck me, Jane.”

His teasing manner had all but disappeared and what was left was...her, reflected out of his eyes. It was powerful and strange, this effect she had on him that she'd never had on anyone else. He really wanted her to fuck him, to take the reins, to take him. He was letting her have control now, give as much or as little as she wanted, as she was comfortable with. He'd gotten her this far and he was letting her have him, trusting her to take them the rest of the way. He was trusting her the way he wanted her to trust him.

“Wow,” was a whisper on her lips that barely made a sound. “I...I don't know if I can. I've never done it before. Like this.”

“I'll help you if you need it.”

With a nod, she placed her hands on his shoulders and raised herself up. His cock slid out of her until only the head was stretching her opening and he groaned, tightening his hold on her. Inch by measured inch, she took him inside her body again until she was seated across his thighs.

Graham groaned. "Yes, baby, just like that."

The sensations flowing through her as she repeated the process a few times, feeling him slide out and leaving her empty, to filling her again as she engulfed his length in smooth strokes, were intoxicating.

She pushed herself up once more, but this time sat down hard on his lap, her core swallowing him whole and making him clench his teeth. Was he in bliss or in agony?

"Oh shit, girl." His head dropped back to rest against the chair, and his eyes closed. "And I thought you said you'd never done it like this before."

Jane smiled. He really was so much more than she could handle. She knew he would be gone before she could take her next breath, but while he was here, in her chair, in her body, she would savor everything about him.

She leaned forward and buried her face in his neck, inhaling deeply and licking at the salt of his skin. It wasn't long before she started a slow, steady rise and fall on him. His hands never guided her and he never urged her, never did more than just hold her. He seemed to know what she needed most, seemed to know that she still had that feminine, innate part of her that drove a man crazy on the most elemental level. He'd offered to help her, but he knew she wouldn't need it.

She fucked herself on his cock, using him, taking him, taking *from* him. She lost herself in the heat of his body against hers, in the feel of his arms around her, in the hunger she saw when she lifted her head and looked into his open eyes.

"There you are. Are you okay? Do you need me to take over, let you just feel and let go?" He punctuated his words with kisses along her jaw down to her shoulder.

She nodded. How did he know her so well, so fast? He was reading her. How long had it been since she'd had that kind of connection with anyone?

Yes, Edward knew her, could read her, but this was different. This wasn't between best friends. No, this was between a man and woman. Between lovers.



It was a given that Phillip had never really known her, but this man, this virtual stranger knew her, could see inside her, could tell her things about herself that even she was afraid to admit to in the dark corners of her mind. She wanted love and kisses and hotter than hell sex. She wanted Graham for all the reasons she shouldn't even though at the moment she couldn't remember what those reasons were. She could only—

“God, woman,” he groaned, interrupting her wandering thoughts. “My cock is about to bust from being inside the most perfect pussy, and you're staring off into space. I must be losing my fucking touch. Literally.” He kissed the tip of her nose.

“I...” Heat suffused her cheeks as she guiltily ducked her head. She didn't have anything to say to that. What the hell was wrong with her? But she knew. She was overwhelmed at it all, at being so easy for him to get a handle on, to see everything about her. She didn't want it to stop though, either. She didn't want to go back to the shell of living. She wanted this, this feeling of light and color and purpose and lust... dear Lord she wanted the lust.

“Uh-huh. Sit up, let me look at you, let me watch you.”

“No, I...I'm...”

His hands tightened on her, and he slid farther down in the chair. Flexing his fingers on her hips, he rocked her back and forth on his thighs, the coarse hair rasping against the smooth rounded globes of her ass.

“Now. Sit up, Jane.”

He stopped rocking her and when she lifted her eyes, his gaze was patient. He would wait as long as it took. There was power in that for her too. She slowly sat up.

“You're beautiful. All woman. All curves and valleys. I want you.” Graham fisted a hand in her hair, holding her head firmly so she couldn't look away. “Damn, how I want you. And I don't ever want anyone, not like this, not like that either. But you... Fuck. I'll fight every shadow in your eyes until you climb on and fuck me like a little bitch in heat, screaming your need. You've got that fire, Jane. Share it with me.”

His kiss shocked her more than his words had. No man had ever talked to her like that, so raw and open. She wasn't offended by his crudeness but rather more turned on than she could ever remember being with any other man. He never shied away from speaking his mind, saying

what he wanted. She wanted that. She wanted to know he wanted her that much, needed to know it.

His tongue traced the edges of her teeth, and he moaned into her mouth as his hand slid around to the V between her legs. His thumb flicked back and forth against her clit, making it hard for her to concentrate. She wanted to lose herself again in the sensations, in the pressure that was building from everywhere he touched her.

“You're so...and I can't...”

“Yes, you can.” He pressed on her clit hard, drawing a moaning sigh from her. “Mmmm, yeah. That's what I want. Let me have all of it, all of you. I'll catch you, I swear.”

Jane shivered in need. Let him have her? Oh yes. He could have her. He could have her again and again so long as he didn't stop touching her, so long as his cock stayed embedded inside her, so long as the tingling in her body didn't go away. Not now, not ever. It was damn addicting, sitting on the edge, wanting to go over, but wanting to stay too. She wanted to keep it, this powerful, anything-for-pleasure feeling.

She convulsed and pleasure rippled through her. She came in an orgasm so hard it left her gasping for breath, her mouth opened to cry out, but no sound emerged. His hand was still fisted in her hair but his thumb never stopped rasping her clit, drawing the rapturous feeling out. His hips thrust up, fucking her deeply as she pulsed and quivered around his rock-hard penis.

“Oh yes, Jane. That's it. Don't stop. Don't. Ever. Fucking. Stop. Ride me. Oh yeah. *Jesus...*”

She watched him through the haze of her own orgasm. His jaw clenched, eyes tightly closed, his breathing ragged. She couldn't take her eyes off him. And then, he seized up under her. His cock throbbed inside her, and a groan erupted from his chest.

His eyes flew opened. He stared at her, his hand going slack in her hair, and he pulled her mouth down to his. The kiss was sweet and soft, lazy, the antithesis of their climaxes.

His bright smiled blinded her when their lips parted. “Now, if that didn't make it all better, then we will just have to fuck until it does.”

Jane's stomach chose that moment, that perfect moment, to start growling. Embarrassment made her drop her head down on his shoulder as warm arms enveloped her.

He nuzzled his face into her neck. “Nothing better than cold pizza.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“When was the last time you saw him?”

The pizza slice was halfway to her mouth when Graham asked the question. She didn't want to talk about Phillip. “Who?”

“Him. Boyfriend of the Year.”

“Months.”

“Hmm.” Graham took a bite of his pizza and washed it down with milk rather than soda. He reached over and snagged another slice from the box. It seemed she wasn't the only one hungry for a midnight snack.

Even when he was eating, the man was sexy as hell. But then, it seemed that everything about him was sexy. He probably snored too, which she'd likely find sexy too. “What?”

He shrugged. “Nothing. What kind of work did he do?”

Why did he care what Phillip did? “He owns a gourmet coffee company. Wholesale. We met through a small business trade show.”

“Why did he break things off?”

She *really* didn't want to go there, not with anyone but especially not with Graham, not after she'd just had the best sex of her life. The afterglow was still tangible between them. They were sharing leftover pizza and glasses of milk. She was dressed again in her sweats and he was just in his jeans, his legs spread across the stool at the counter. She so wanted to stand between those legs and be wrapped up in his body.

His eyes were soft. “Jane?”

Why couldn't he just let it go?

“He said he needed a different kind of woman for the image he was going for with his business. And he didn't feel like I would fit that.”

“Which was?”

She sighed and picked at the pepperoni on her slice of pizza. “Someone prettier, thinner...younger. I don't know. He never elaborated, but that was the type of woman he hired and the type of woman his friends dated or were married to, so I sort of put two and two together. He also tried talking me into leaving Edward and opening a storefront on my own and didn't

understand why Edward was so important to this company or why I wouldn't do anything without him. He wanted me to have a traditional candy store, not one that received its orders from brokenhearted women trying to ease their pain with chocolate. He used to tell me it's why I was..."

"So, basically he wanted you to change."

"Something like that, yes."

"Bastard."

Jane smiled, though it wasn't exactly a happy one. Bastard he may be, but it was no less true. She wasn't the kind of pretty or the kind of business-successful a woman needed to be to move in Phillip's uptown world. Then there were the subtle comments he used to make about her curves and her weight. Damn. She shoved the pizza aside and vowed to eat nothing but veggies and drink only water from now on. Thinking about Phillip always did this to her, made her feel less than she really was. Dating someone that thought they were better than you and that they were doing you a favor by going out with you...well, that was always a recipe for disaster.

She got up and went into the kitchen, tossing what was left of her pizza in the trash. She leaned against the counter and tried not to wallow in self-pity. Not in front of Graham. Phillip wasn't worth it.

"Jane? Look at me."

She did, and what she saw made her breath catch in her throat. Graham's eyes were full of lust, and he shoved his own pizza out of the way. "You're *absolutely* pretty enough. I love the concept of your company. Delivering chocolates and comfort to people that need a little pick-me-up, that need a little handmade touch, well, there's nothing better than that. You're curved and round, not thin, but your body is made for unimaginable pleasure at the hands of a man who can and does appreciate you. And as for young enough..." He licked his lips and got off his stool, rounding the corner to stand in front of her. He pulled her lower body flush to his, fitting himself against her. He nipped at her lips until she laughed. "I've got the younger part covered."

When he touched her, everything negative seemed to disappear, and a confidence she never knew she possessed flared to life. He didn't see her as Phillip had, as Phillip had *made* her see herself.

Graham saw her for who she had always wanted to be. It was a heady and very arousing realization too.

Before she could think twice about it, her lips slid down his chin and lingered against his throat. His pulse jumped. He groaned and flexed his hands in her hair, urging her farther down his body and stopping her descent all at the same time. A small smile crossed her lips. She loved the effect she had on him. It was a new thing for her to experience, but man, a girl could get used to it.

“Jane.” He tried to tug her back up.

She kept moving down until she was kneeling on the floor. She'd never taken this kind of aggressive action before. She rather liked it.

“Jane, if you don't stop...you don't have to...”

Her smile widened. He knew what she was planning, and his inability to complete his protests only added to her determination. She'd never wanted to taste a man, never wanted to go down on him and feel him in her mouth but with Graham, it was different. It was almost a compulsion, this desire to taste him, to touch him with her tongue, to make love to him that way.

She unzipped his jeans and pulled them down, exposing his lower body. She hadn't even realized he'd somehow turned them around so that he was the one now leaning against the counter.

And she forgot to breathe. His cock was the same color as the rest of his skin, tan and golden. Did he sunbathe in the nude? The hair trailing down his belly to surround his penis was the same streaked blond that was on his head.

“God...please...” His grip loosened, and he softly petted her hair, slowly drawing her mouth close, bringing her lips in contact with his hard, turgid heat. She tentatively licked at the head. Finding that she liked the taste, she did it again and again. She moved down the shaft with her tongue until she was licking him from tip to base and back again, wrapping her tongue around the head before engulfing it completely inside her mouth.

He moaned and thrust his hips, but his hands stayed gentle on her head.

He smelled like sex, like *her* sex, and his own unique scent. The taste was strong and the feel of him against her tongue, in her mouth, was a heady drug. She could see herself sucking on him every chance she got. The position of kneeling at his feet, his hands in her hair, his cock in

her mouth, was all at once submissive and empowering. She'd never thought herself submissive but maybe...

The edges of her teeth grazed the length of him as she lifted free and raised her gaze to his. His reactions left her speechless, wanting, feeling as though he couldn't get enough. He bit his tongue, his bottom lip, and he sucked in air through clenched teeth. The play of emotion and need across his face was as real as real gets. He wanted her.

A clear drop of liquid on the tip of his penis greeted her when she looked back down, and her tongue swiped at it. Thick, salty, slightly sweet. She tightened her hand on the shaft in her hand and stroked up, putting pressure on the underside of the head. Another clear drop appeared. Again, she licked it off. She liked the taste, wanted more of it, and dropped her mouth down him, engulfing the length of his cock. She sucked in her cheeks, as though she were drinking from a straw, and he cursed a blue streak like nothing she'd ever heard. Before she could stop herself, a giggle escaped the corners of her cock-stuffed mouth. She dared to look up at him.

His eyes flared then narrowed as the corner of his lips curled into a wicked smile that sent flames searing between her legs. She shifted on her knees and squeezed her thighs together against the scorching arousal.

"Something funny, Jane?"

With her mouth full, she could only shake her head.

"You sure?"

She nodded.

He bent his knees slightly, and his hands slid down to the back of her neck. His fingers locked together around the soft skin there. His ass tightened, rock-hard in her hands. "Do you want this?"

Jane nodded again and had about a second to wonder what he was going to do. He pulled her head in toward him at the same moment his hips flexed forward.

"Then keep your lips sealed to my dick. Don't let go."

He took the power from her just as she'd gotten comfortable with it, just as he had taken over in the chair. And, she liked it. No, she *loved* it. He had been so right before. She just wanted to feel. She wanted whatever he wanted, wanted to follow his lead, and enjoy his attentions, his sexy demands for more. He was teaching her about herself, and she'd learned so much tonight.

Graham pushed and pulled faster. Her fingernails dug into the flesh of his ass cheeks. He stiffened and ground out, "Have you ever tasted a man's cum?"

One small shake of her head was all she could manage with his steady surges in her mouth.

"Do you want to?" He loosed his hold on her slightly. "If not, goddammit, you better say so now."

In answer she clamped her hands around his wrists and was rewarded with a feral grin.

"Open your mouth."

She did, and he fucked her, hard and fast, until he spurted cum all over her tongue. It startled her, the jets of semen from the head of his cock, and when he pulled out, some of it dripped down her chin.

"Spit or swallow, then open wide again."

Never faced with such a thing before, she swallowed. She couldn't imagine spitting in front of him. She shuddered as it went down, the taste bitter but not unpleasant. There was just so much of it. And, she wanted more. She opened her mouth eagerly, and he slid back inside. "Clean me, Jane."

With her tongue and mouth, she licked and suckled him until he was semihard between her lips. He let go of her neck and eased her off his cock. After he pulled his jeans back up, he knelt on the floor in front of her, his hands cradling her face. His lips captured hers with his tongue wild inside her mouth, devouring her.

"Damn."

"What?" she whispered. "Was it...was I okay?" Outside the heat of the moment, her confidence faltered, and shyness filled her again.

"Are you serious? Yes. Fuck. A thousand times, yes. You were more than, better than okay." His fingers traced her cheek and the corner of her lips. "You haven't done it much?"

"No. Never cared to."

"And now?"

Jane hid her face against his shoulder unable to answer. His skin was so warm, and he smelled so good. She couldn't admit that she wanted to do it again, now, tomorrow, next month. He chuckled and tugged her closer, kissing the top of her head.

“That's okay. You'll get to do it a lot more from now on. Anytime you want.”



## Chapter Six

Graham opened his eyes, disoriented for just a moment before he remembered where he was. Turning his head, he looked at the naked woman lying half on him and grinned. Jane.

Her body was pressed against his side, one leg flung over his thigh, one arm draped over his stomach. Her head was on his chest, her breathing even, and she was drooling. It took all he had not to laugh, and while it wasn't the most romantic thing, it was adorable. She was so relaxed, so at peace in his arms that she was dead asleep and drooling.

The night before replayed itself in his mind. It wasn't like him to jump into bed with a girl. He never stayed in one place long enough for relationships, and one-night stands weren't his style. Yeah, he'd ask women out for dinner or something, but it was never more than that, nor did he ever let anyone believe it was. Then there was the whole “divorced at twenty” thing. It was in the past, *years* in the past, and though he didn't dwell on it, didn't think about it, that little bit of doubt had always been there in his mind. It was one of the reasons early on that he'd picked the travel writing gig. Being on the go every few weeks didn't allow for opportunity to get close to a woman. But, this one feisty, vulnerable, and incredibly bright woman moved him differently, compelling him to proceed quickly and take charge of the situation. He wanted her smile and her laugh. He wanted her soft, rounded body. He wanted every fantasy and every dream she had. And, dear God, he wanted the sweet heat between her thighs to gush only for him.

When Edward first told him about Jane, Graham decided in an instant he had to meet her and agreed to the setup. The genuine love and concern that her friend had for her touched him. He had a few friends, but he wouldn't necessarily call them close friends. It had been a long time since he'd had that with another person. His brothers and sister, along with his parents, were the only ones he really kept contact and close ties with. He missed friends, especially when faced with someone like Edward who would move heaven and earth to see his best friend smile again.

When he'd met Jane on his front porch just yesterday, he'd been a goner which, for a man that didn't lose himself with women...

He was certifiable where she was concerned.

He hadn't really wondered why it didn't bother him about falling so hard for her and, now that he was thinking about it, felt sure that some measure of panic or worry would set in, but there was nothing like that. All he could think about was being with her more, wanting her around him in his cabin, out at dinner, wet and writhing under him in his bed.

He ruffled her hair and slowly slipped his arm from under her. She sighed then snuggled deeper into the mattress where he had been. After covering her with the sheet, he headed for the bathroom. A piss and a shower would help wake his ass up and then he could set about waking hers.

Brown fluffy towels with pink and white trim hung on brass towel bars and a brown with pink polka dots shower curtain enclosed the tub. He was sensing a theme here.

The water took a little while to heat up after he'd turned it on, and he wished it would hurry the hell up. The remodeling of such old buildings was becoming standard in downtown areas all around the country. Instead of tearing them down and demolishing history, they were being turned into offices and living quarters. Had he cared at all for city living, he might have looked into one for himself. Most of the travel articles he proposed to magazines or wrote on his blog were on out-of-the-way places, off the beaten path, and rarely ever in large cities. And the city of Denver only held one real attraction for him: Jane.

The asshole that left her hadn't been worthy of her. Not by a long shot. Jane deserved to live happy, to get outside the four walls of her loft. For damn sure she deserved to bask in the hunger and lust of a man. She deserved to have a man kissing her lush mouth, and screwing her brains out every chance he got. She deserved more than she was giving herself the chance to have. All because some guy had told her she wasn't good enough the way she was and tried to change her to fit some other image. What a crock of shit that was and, self-appointed though it was, it would be Graham's job to make her see differently.

Graham scrubbed the pink bar of soap over his body. *Pink soap. God help him.* Ever since she'd wobbled, stomped, and trudged through the snow to his front door, she'd been in every thought he had. Forget blind date. He'd never had a blind date that socked him in the gut with

lust so strong he couldn't think beyond the object of his hunger. He couldn't let her think anything between them had been faked because of a setup though. Not that he could have ever faked the hard-ons from the night before or the one he had right now.

Her defiant, flashing eyes, her wavy hair that made his fingers itch, and her timid smile all snared him. Her irritation at a friend trying to help her, her unabashed pleasure in a fire warming her feet, and her surprised irritation and fear at an impromptu kiss had broken through and broken down any keep his distance barriers he'd erected over the years.

He wanted Jane. It was just that simple. He wanted her for himself and for keeps.

Graham turned off the water and stepped out of the tub. When he glanced again at the brown towels with the pink polka-dot trim, he thought more than once about just drip-drying.

\* \* \* \* \*

Someone was in the shower.

Jane opened her eyes and turned over. She was alone in the bed and wondered how long Graham had been in there. She tried not to laugh at the image of a very masculine man in her very feminine bathroom using her pink bar of soap. Thoughts of him brought a myriad of emotions: need, hunger, lust, confusion. She liked him—*really* liked—and yet, “like” was not the correct word for it. Like was too nice, too normal. She felt anything but normal; the two of them together was anything but normal for her.

In less than twenty-four hours, Cowboy Surfer had broken down her defenses and had wormed his way into her heart.

She flipped back the blankets to get up then immediately pulled them over her again. It was damn cold outside the warm bed, but she had to pee something fierce. Taking a deep breath, she scrambled out of the bed and wrapped the top blanket around her body and ran into Edward's bedroom. As she streaked through, she absently noticed the fact that he really hadn't come home last night. “Interesting,” she murmured and scurried into his private bathroom. Business taken care of, she washed her hands and tried desperately to avoid looking in the mirror.

She was unable to resist.

In her reflection, she saw tired eyes, rosy cheeks, tangled curls, and kiss-roughened lips with a shadow of whisker burn. There was a woman staring out at her that she'd never seen before. Damn. A well loved, morning-after woman.

Before she could contemplate her discovery, she heard the shower in the other bathroom turn off. She ran back into her room and crawled under the covers, sitting against the pillows with her knees drawn up.

Her wait wasn't long. Graham opened the bedroom door and stepped inside, naked. The man was so incredibly hot, and the uncertainty that came with daylight set in.

The safe intimacy of night was gone. Would he regret what they'd done last night? His grin told her he didn't. Why?

"Why what?"

*Oh God.* She'd spoken out loud and hadn't realized it. She shrugged and asked her question instead of being embarrassed about it. "Why don't you regret what we did last night?"

He moved like a jungle cat onto the bed beside her, all man, and every inch hard, golden, smooth, and graceful. It was all she could do not to stare at his cock and lie flat on her back with her legs spread in invitation.

"Why would I?"

He placed his hand on her back and caressed her lightly with his fingertips. She tried to ignore the melting inside her, but it was no use. She would never be immune to him. The way he'd introduced her to passion, the way he smiled and laughed, his southern accent. No, she would never be able to deny what he did to her, what he made her feel. Hot, bothered, sexy, and yes, even beautiful. Doubtful though she was about things with the sun up at the moment.

"Because it's daylight and you can see me."

"I saw you yesterday and last night. I saw every inch, felt every inch of you, inside and out. There is nothing at all to regret."

"It's different," she said softly.

"How? Show me."

"No, I..."

"I'm calling your bluff. Show me what I should regret."

He yanked the blankets from her, and she scrambled to get them back. He pulled until he could drop them on the floor until she was left with no choice. She rose to her knees and turned face to him. When she looked at herself in the mirror, she saw average features and big: big hips,

big ass, big boobs. She saw that she was not a size four or six or hell, even a twelve. She didn't see the beauty, or the sexy, or anything that should remotely entice Cowboy Surfer to look her way beyond their setup.

It didn't use to be that way. She used to think she was pretty, had even loved the rounded contours of her body. She'd never thought the word fat or even big before. When had she stopped loving herself? And why?

"Look at me," Graham said, even as he slid his hand under her hair and tugged lightly.

Jane slowly lifted her eyes to meet his.

"Do you know what I see when I look at you?"

"A 911 call to Weight Watchers?"

His eyes narrowed at her snarkiness and his oh-so-perfect lips tightened into a thin line. His face tensed and hardened. "Stop. Okay. Just stop. Those were Phillip's issues and personally, I don't give a shit. I don't see whatever it was that he saw. I don't see any flaws when I look at you." He shook his head as if to emphasize his words, and his look softened. "God, baby, you are lush and hot. I don't know how you can't see it." He tugged her closer until she fell into his chest, and they fell back together. "You have the best tits I've ever seen. They fill my hands, and the nipples are so responsive. Remember when I had them between my lips? You liked that. You weren't thinking you were too big then, were you? I know I sure as hell wasn't."

As if to prove a point, he rolled her onto her back and bent his head to her chest, lifted one of her breasts in his hand, and opened his lips over the tip. Her back arched almost immediately off the bed in response to the touch, to the suction.

When he lifted his head, he was grinning. He moved slowly down her body, kissing her skin as he went. "Spread your legs."

"No way."

"Spread them."

She shook her head, defying and denying him the place she most wanted him to be. She held on to the belief that she wasn't all those wonderful things he said he saw when he looked at her. She couldn't just let go so easily. His eyes told the truth, she knew that, had seen it all through the night, even a few minutes ago when he'd first come into the room, but believing it

was a different story when over the last months she'd convinced herself otherwise just because someone else had believed it to be true.

“Fine.”

His smirk told her she was in trouble now. Why was it that every little thing she tried backfired on her? She ought to know by now that telling Graham no was like offering him a challenge.

He tongued her belly button, pulling a reluctant giggle out of her, and kept doing it until she was twisting and turning trying to get away. The second her legs moved a fraction of an inch, he took advantage and lowered his head, swirling the tip of his tongue right onto her clit. She hadn't planned on that, but he seemed to know just how to get her to relax, to let her guard down, to tease her into giving in.

She tensed though, determined to resist. His lips closed over the flesh at the top of her mound, sucking with determination.

Fingers twisted her nipples, and his mouth sucked at her harder until she couldn't hold back any longer and spread her legs wide. She wanted—hell no—she *needed* him to have every inch of her sex. And just like that, she was wanton and hungry again. God, she was so wet she could feel it sliding down into the crease of her ass. As soon as her body began to sink into the pleasure he was so intent on bestowing, he stopped and lifted his head.

“Ah, good girl, Jane. Very good girl. Now, about your pussy. What do you think of the word pussy? Cunt? Sex? Slit? They are all perfectly sexy words, some more scandalous than others, but all wonderful in their own ways. I think, for you, for today the word is pussy. It's just naughty enough. You have such a beautiful and oh so lovely one.”

His breath against her as he spoke drove her as insane, almost as much as his tongue and lips had just moments before. And his words, oh damn, his words... “Graham, please...”

“Yes, I will please.” He drew his finger down from her clit to the opening of her sex. She involuntarily squeezed her muscles and was rewarded with a small lick and a heated murmur of appreciation.

When she let go and gave herself over to him, she believed in his desire. It was when she fought against, argued against it, that she faltered. She'd learned that words could easily mean

everything one minute and mean nothing the next. There had to be a lesson in that. Perhaps she needed the actions to speak louder than the actual words.

“You are so exquisite here. You are all woman; wet, delicious, and so willing. You just have to let your icy walls all...the...way...down.”

Hadn't she just come that same conclusion herself? At least, in a roundabout way?

His tongue replaced his finger, and she melted around him, her hands dropping to his head, holding his mouth firmly against her. It had been so long since a man had tasted her, eaten her. This man did it in the most provocative, dirty way. He kissed her pussy like he kissed her mouth—putting everything into it and driving her nuts with lust.

Teeth nipped at her clit and she sucked in her breath. His finger slid into her, then out, and back in again. She lifted her hips, and the harder she bucked, the harder he nibbled on her. When she got close to her orgasm, his mouth gentled, bringing her down from the brink. She groaned at the loss, her breathing heavy, her heart pounding so hard she was sure every person in the building could hear it.

Raising his head, his languid gaze traveled up her body, before finally settling on her face. Staring at her were dark eyes filled with a lust just as intense as what she knew was reflected back at him. The man was dangerous to every barrier she'd built up around her heart and soul.

He was going to crumble them all, and she was going to let him.

She couldn't resist him, fight him, and more to the point, she didn't want to. Whatever this had started out being, it had turned into a yearning she didn't want to continue denying. She'd decided to burn the box, to rid herself of Phillip once and for all, and that meant she had to let go of the things he had tried to get her to accept about herself.

Graham's body followed the same path his gaze had and when his lips reached hers, his tongue sank between them. She tasted herself completely in his kiss. Another of the most erotic things she'd ever experienced. Had he enjoyed tasting himself last night when he kissed her as much as she was enjoying the taste of herself on his lips and tongue? While she didn't consider herself a prude, there was a lot that she'd never done, but she wanted to explore and experience and try things, like lying with a beautiful hunk of a man in broad daylight outside the covers.

“You are beautiful,” he whispered against her lips. “Please don't ever say you're not. I love your curves, your size. You fit my hands and my body like you were made for me.” Graham

nuzzled her neck and buried his face in her hair. “I want to keep you in bed and fuck you until you can't walk, until you can't do anything but sleep, and then I want to fuck you again just to wake you up so you'll look at me with that incredible hunger. I want to see you flaunt your body, be proud of it, and flash your bright smile to make men drool.”

“You can't mean all that,” she said, tears threatening to spill over, even though she knew, saw that he did.

“I mean every word,” he said with a kiss to the tip of her nose. “Now, put your legs around me. I need to be inside you.”



## Chapter Seven

“You spent the night?”

Graham stood against the counter, pulling his sweater on over his head. Jane was still in her bedroom getting dressed after her shower. The temptation to join her was one he sincerely regretted not indulging as thoughts of her naked skin flooded his mind, but he needed to talk to Edward.

He was planning on taking her out to breakfast and then maybe up into the mountains. There was an amazing little town nestled in a valley he'd happened upon, and he wanted to spend the day up there with her exploring. They'd have to stop at his cabin so he could change into some other clothes first though. He needed to remember to pack a bag and keep it in the truck for overnight visits, quite sure there would be a number of them. Eventually, she would step further outside her comfort zone and spend nights at his place. Then they would move in together and...

“Graham?”

“Oh, sorry. Yeah, I did. You seem surprised by that.”

“She doesn't need to be hurt again.”

“She won't be. I want her, Edward. She's mine,” he said softly. He hadn't meant it to come out quite like the declaration it was, but he wouldn't take it back. It was way too damn soon to be feeling that way; however, too soon or not didn't make it any less true. The woman had him all tied in knots, and his dick was still aching, even though he'd fucked them both to near oblivion earlier. They'd snuggled and napped a little, until Edward had poked his head in her room, waking Graham.

Edward's stare almost made him squirm. Almost, but he wouldn't back down now.

“Yours? Does she *want* to be yours? Yesterday she didn't want to be anyone's. I'll be the last person to throw stones at someone else's glass house, but sex always makes things fuzzy.”

“It has nothing to do with sex. I knew this about her before we had sex. She simply needs to be cared for, wanted, and desired. I can give her those things.”

“You just met her yesterday.”

“I lay there beside her, held her in my arms, and let her drool on me in her sleep. So whatever 'just met her' means, it doesn't apply here.”

“You can't know that she'll be happy with you. I'm not sure you really understand what you'd be getting with her. I've known her for a few years, and she can be very hard on herself, about not being model thin or cover girl pretty, about not having a 'normal' job, about a lot of things. She knows she's beautiful, that she's special, but all that got lost somewhere after Phillip. She can also be a stubborn handful. I'm just not sure you want to deal with that kind of woman.”

“Look, Edward, I understand you care for her, that you love her, but you don't know that she *won't* be happy with me. You certainly don't know *me* well enough to know what I would and wouldn't want in a woman.”

“Very true. What about your work? You don't have relationships, you have dates. Do you even know what *you* want in a woman?”

“I want Jane; that's all I need to know. As for my job, I travel, yes. I believe I told you that when we met. I listened to you, and I agreed to meet her. That was all we agreed upon. You trusted me enough to set me up with her. Trust me enough to do something more. Trust me enough to love her. I swear, as fucking crazy as it sounds, I think I already do.”

Edward raised an eyebrow. Graham had to admit to a bit of an uncertainty himself. Could he love her? Did he love her? He hadn't believed in love at first sight, but he knew it was more than lust that drove him when it came to Jane. Just the thought of not seeing her every day made him feel not so good inside.

“I haven't dated a woman like I want to date Jane in a long, long time, not since my divorce. Hell, I haven't *wanted* a woman like I want Jane in even longer. I needed the travel and the casual, no strings attached dates. Without the women or me getting too close, I was able to relax, grow up, change, become a good man. I was able to become my own man. I want Jane to get close to me, and I want to get close to her, in all ways. I need you to trust me, Edward. If you don't, I have a feeling Jane won't either.”

Graham watched Edward watching him, assessing him, and still he fought the urge to squirm.

“Why Jane?”

Graham smiled. “Why not?”

Edward smiled back and nodded. Graham couldn't believe the relief he felt at that one small gesture. “You know, I'm a fairly decent judge of character. It's why I chose you to set her up with. I might have even been willing to pay you if your curiosity hadn't been piqued enough. Good thing I'm excellent at describing the damsel in distress.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“...willing to pay you if...”

Jane didn't want to hear anymore. She was numb, speechless. She'd heard Edward and Graham talking out in the kitchen while she'd been in her room getting dressed and wanted to know what they were saying. In hindsight, she wished she hadn't. Or at least a part of her wished that.

She stomped her way into the living room and glared at the two men that had turned stunned looks her way. She'd known better, but damn, all it had taken was his sexy voice, his even sexier kisses, and his... Best not to go there.

“Jane?”

“Oh don't you 'Jane' me, Edward. You would have paid him? Am I so hideous that you would consider paying a man to be set up with me?”

“You came in at the tail end of a conversation. And I've never said anything about you being hideous.”

She almost felt bad at catching them in their very enlightening conversation. “But, you would have. How could you, Edward? Do you have any idea how humiliating this is? Not only were you setting me up on a blind date, you were willing to pay him to date me if...”

“Jane...”

Graham no longer looked stunned at her entrance. No, he looked ready to take her up against the wall and fuck again. He was so beautiful she just wanted to stamp her feet in righteous anger. And hurt. She couldn't forget hurt. Anger she would get over; hurt had longer

and better staying power “And you!” She rounded on Graham. “Were you willing to take money to take me out?”

“I didn’t agree to anything beyond meeting you, but no, I wouldn’t have taken money. You’ve taken it out of context.”

She sighed and buried her face in her hands. When she looked back up, it took all she had not to cry, or scream, or run across the room and jump his bones. “I can’t believe this. You,” she said, looking at Edward, “set me up with him and were willing to *pay* him for it if you couldn’t get him to agree. A gorgeous, and God, he is gorgeous, isn’t he...younger man, by a good ten years and...this is almost laughable, this part...I fell for him.” His age really didn’t bother her. He didn’t seem as immature as a man in his midtwenties might, but she was grasping at straws, and the age argument was a damn good one for the moment.

“Jane...” Both men spoke her name together, and she just shook her head, not wanting to hear from either of them.

“No. I had almost gotten over the embarrassment of being set up in the first place, as though I couldn’t find a date on my own. But, that I was so pathetic as to have my best friend willing to shell out cash for a date for me... I need some time. I need to think about this.” She looked at Graham and had to steel herself against crawling across the floor to him and undoing his jeans. He was that potent a draw to her. “Thanks for the fuck, but you really need to leave this time. I may not have meant it last night when I kept telling you to go, but that was just to keep me from making a fool of myself because I wanted you so much. I guess I didn’t do a very good job. I made a fool of myself anyway.” She couldn’t look at him anymore. Not when all she really wanted was to look at him every hour of every day for as long as he’d let her. She turned around and went back into her bedroom.

“Jane, honey...”

She stopped in the doorway and drew a shaky breath. “No, Edward. I don’t want to talk anymore, not until later, maybe tomorrow.” She walked in and slammed the door to her room, turning the lock. She had never felt so alone, so... At least after Phillip dumped her, she’d had Edward to turn to, Edward’s shoulder to cry on. This time, she had no one, dammit.

Looking over at her bed and the rumpled sheets, she just wanted to cry. They would smell like him. They would smell like sex. She closed her eyes against the wave of anger that roared

through her body. Where in the hell was the hurt she was counting on? She needed the hurt, the pain... It would keep her safe. Anger would just...well, it would just piss her off and still allow her to want him, and want him she did. Naked and hard so they could have angry sex that would lead into makeup sex that would lead into the “let's fight more often so we can fuck and make up again and again” sex.

She didn't know what the hell to do with being mad.

She yanked the sheets from the bed. She wanted to toss them out the window onto the street below. She wanted to take them out into the living room and throw them at Graham. Humiliation still burned and tears still threatened to fall, but instead of what she wanted to do, she simply wrapped the sheet around her body and crawled onto the mattress, buried her head in the pillow he'd slept on, and screamed for all she was worth.

## Chapter Eight

Graham was shocked. They'd had a fabulous time together, and the sex had been fan-fucking-tastic. He scrubbed a hand through his hair then looked over at Edward.

"Give her the time she said she needed," the man offered helplessly, clearly at a loss himself.

"The hell I will."

"Look, she had a problem with me instigating this little setup from the second she figured it out. And though her perception is skewed a bit, I can sort of understand why she's so upset."

"And? She thinks all that was fake? All of it? Every word out of my mouth? Every stroke of my—" Graham stopped midsentence and stalked toward the door she'd slammed shut just moments ago. Women had shut doors in his face before, including this woman, but she was the only one he'd ever had the urge to go charging in after. She needed to learn that a slammed door wasn't going to deter him or keep him from what he wanted, which was her. What was wrong with him? What had this woman—Jane—done to him? And the fucked-up thing was that he had no interest in ever being right again if it meant being so without her. God, he was already whipped.

Out of courtesy, not patience, he knocked softly on the door. "Jane." Silence greeted him, and he had to clench his jaw shut to keep from shouting and pounding his chest caveman-style. After a few seconds, he tried again. "Can we talk, please?"

"No," came the muffled reply.

His patience slipped another notch. "Jane, open the door."

"Go away, Graham."

"Not until we talk. Please."

"No."

“Fine. I’ll open the door myself,” he said, jiggling the doorknob.

Scrambling and shuffling came from the other side, and he bit back a grin. “Don’t you dare!”

She was against the door. His cock twitched when his brain registered that there was only about an inch and a half piece of wood separating them.

“If you don’t open the door on your own...” He let the words hang in the air. Fighting with her didn’t make him want to go, didn’t make him feel as though she was too much trouble. Fighting with her just made him want her that much more. She had so much passion inside her and he wanted it all, ever last drop of it.

“Graham, please just go. I’ll call you in a few days.”

“Nope. I’m not going anywhere until we talk. Move away from the door, Jane.”

“Grah—”

“I mean it. Move back or unlock it.” He waited a few seconds and didn’t hear the click of metal. He took a step back then put all his weight against the door. It was no match for his strength, giving way from the jamb with little resistance.

And then he was standing in front her, looking down into her tear-stained face. There was no sadness in her eyes though, but damn, she was mad. Her eyes had darkened, and she was shooting daggers at him.

“Now then, we have some things to discuss.”

“We have nothing to talk about.”

He reached out to brush her mussed-up hair away from her face, but she backed against the bed, moving out of his range.

“You can’t get away, Jane. I’ll leave when I’m damn good and ready. We’re going to talk about this, and I’m going to make you understand. You didn’t hear the whole conversation, you didn’t hear all the important parts. You only heard one small snippet and that’s not enough for you to be judge and jury about.”

“I don’t *want* to talk about it.” She shook her head and turned away from him. She had to know that wouldn’t work. Nothing was going to keep her from him. She had to know that, too. Though, it was very likely he was going to have to force her to believe him.

When she looked back, she was nibbling on her bottom lip. Joining the anger was just barely concealed heat and goddamn uncertainty. Shit. His cock was still rock-hard. Damn thing had a mind of its own since they'd met Jane. He hated that Phillip had that kind of power over her still, to make her doubt herself and everything around her. If he ever met the son of a bitch, he would lay him out flat.

“Did it...did it mean anything at all?”

She was trying so hard to stay mad at him, and it was fine with him so long as she didn't shut him out. “Did what mean anything? Me wanting you? Me liking you?”

She closed her eyes and nodded.

“It meant everything, Jane.”

Her shoulders slumped, and she sat down on the end of the bed. “Why? What do you want? You don't have to do this. I understand why Edward did what he did. I even understand you agreeing to meet me, but we don't have to continue. The date is over.”

Graham pulled his sweater off over his head, and his fingers went to work on the enclosure of his jeans. Her eyes flew wide open just as he knew they would. He grinned when she scooted backward on the bed, pressing herself against the headboard, putting pillows in front of her body. The woman was trying to shield herself from him. It took all he had not to laugh.

“What are you doing?”

“I want you.”

“Well, pity sex is not on my list of enjoyable things. I'm fine. I just need some time.”

“Liar.” He shucked the denims and stood in front of her naked and hard. “This has nothing to do with pity, and what you need is me.”

“I didn't lie about that though. Needing you, wanting you.”

“Neither did I. Jane, if you didn't affect me, I wouldn't have come after you last night when you left my place. That's not how I am. I don't chase women. From the moment I realized who you were, everything discussed between Edward and I went right out the window.”

“Why are you naked? Please put your clothes back on.”

“No. I told you I want you and that means we're going to fuck.”

“Oh no, we're not.”



Her mouth said no, but the way she couldn't take her eyes off his dick said nothing but yes. "Oh yes, we are."

"You're too young for me."

Well, that came clear out of left field. Good thing he had excellent reach to catch it. "That's rich! You're grasping at straws, woman. What else ya got, 'cause that won't work."

"Well, you are."

"Well, no, I'm not." Graham crawled up on the bed and settled on top of her, straddling her hips, careful not to put all his weight on her, but holding her down just the same. She didn't have time to get away, nor did she make the effort to do so. "I wasn't too young for you in the chair last night or earlier this morning right here in this very bed."

"Get off me! What the hell do you think you're doing?" she screeched, pushing at him.

He gripped her wrists and pinned her arms down on either side of her head. "I'm convincing you. Now, settle down and stop squirming!"

"Get off me!"

"No."

"Ge—"

He cut her words off by slipping his tongue inside her open mouth, kissing her until she stopped moving under him and stopped trying to bite him; kissing her until she was moaning and straining for more. *That's more like it.* When he lifted his head, she was breathing heavily, and her skin was flushed with arousal.

"Are you going to cooperate now?"

"Are you going to kiss me again?"

Desire brightened her eyes, reminding him once again of the quick responsiveness she possessed. She wasn't immune to him. She wanted him as much as he wanted her. Graham smiled down at her. "Yes, in a few minutes. But I need you to listen to me."

"You have two minutes to talk."

He raised an eyebrow. "And then?"

"And then, you can kiss me some more."

"Jane..."

“You're wasting your two minutes.”

Shit. He should have known she wasn't that much of a pushover. “Fair enough.” He rolled off her body and let go of her wrists, lying beside her, holding one of her hands in his, glad when she didn't try to pull away. “I got married right out of high school. Cliché, right? We thought we were in love, thought we knew what forever meant, and neither one of us could wait to get out of Texas. We weren't ready for it, for real life, for marriage, but her less so than me. She still wanted to party every night, go out. She didn't want to grow up, and I had to do too much of it for the both of us. She left when we turned twenty. I was trying to finish college, and she headed out to California to visit some friends. I received divorce papers from her six months later.”

“I'm not crying for your marriage that didn't work out.”

He laughed. She could be a hardheaded brat. “I don't want you to cry, Jane.”

“Good, because I don't feel sorry for you. And it still doesn't explain why you're fucking me. Do you fuck every woman you get set up with?”

And crass. His Jane could be very crass. She might be somewhat innocent and dirty words may make her blush, but she wasn't a bit shy about using them when they suited her purpose. “You are the only one that I have ever been set up with.”

“Lovely. So, I'm your first pity date.”

“You're being difficult on purpose. This has nothing to do with pity, or charity, or any other term you'd care to come up with. It didn't start out like that when I was talking to Edward over beer, and it isn't like that now. Get over that kind of thinking, Jane. Somewhere inside you know better than that.”

She grimaced at his words and sighed. Some of the tension left her body, and he was able to pull her closer.

“My traveling doesn't really allow for a long-term relationship to develop. I've only dated in very short time frames. A couple of days here and there. I guess it doesn't sound too good. I'm not a womanizer or anything cheap and negative like that, and I never lie to anyone. I wasn't looking for anything more. I've always liked the travel, the freedom. Until I met you.”

“Why didn't you just, I don't know, get a guy to show you around?”

“Why, Jane, are you jealous?” He nipped at her nose.

She scoffed. “As if.”

“Right. Guys didn't offer to show me around. And I wasn't about to ask any to. Women did offer, and no one knew the areas better than locals.”

“What about here? Did you date someone here before you met Edward and got set up with me?”

Graham certainly hoped the truth would set him free. “Yes. Up in Estes. I took a woman out to dinner. She'd taken me on a trail through the national park, one that's rarely used but that is amazing in scenery. Afterward, she asked if I had dinner plans and when I said no, she said she would love to show me a little hole-in-the-wall tavern. Best buffalo burger I'd ever had and microbrewed beer. We sat and talked until they chased us out, and that was that.”

“Are...were they always older than you? These short-term dates?”

“Yes.”

“So, you're a boy toy?”

## Chapter Nine

Graham looked over at Jane, but her gaze was fixed on the ceiling. He'd love to be her toy, her boy, her anything and everything. He'd never felt with anyone the way he did with her. "I guess you could say that, but there was no sex. It was never about sex. It was just about not sitting in hotel rooms all the time, it was about learning the local lay of the land. I'm not a slut, Jane."

Jane was quiet for so long, Graham was deeply curious to know what she was thinking. The fact that older women had become his preference by accident only made his desire for Jane stronger. Though what she'd overheard of his conversation with Edward had angered and confused her, Graham couldn't regret the decisions that had led him to this woman.

"Your two minutes are up."

"Give me two more, Jane. Please." He'd grovel for her if he had to. It wouldn't be a pretty picture, but he'd do it if need be.

"Why?"

"Because you want me to kiss you and you want me inside you and I'm not done talking to you."

She looked over at him for the first time since he'd started trying to explain. "Are you done talking?"

"For now."

"Good. Please kiss me."

Graham turned on his side toward her, wrapped an arm across her midsection, and tugged her over until she was facing him. It wasn't close enough and he pulled her on top of him. One hand gripped the back of her neck, and she lowered her mouth to his, starting the kiss they both wanted.

It was slow and soft, one savoring the other, but built quickly into a hard, heated exchange of lust and need. Tongues dueled. Hands grasped. Legs tangled.

He tasted hunger and anger and passion on her mouth. When she lifted her head, her fingers replaced her lips on his. "I want you to go."

"Jane...please, no you don't."

"Yes, Graham, I do. I'll call you in a few days. I really just need some time."

"Why? What's a few days going to do?"

"A few days will allow me to think about things. It's all happened so fast. You're too much. You're too young. You're too gorgeous. You're too...everything. And I just don't know."

"You are incredibly beautiful, Jane, but you're such a bad liar."

She slid off his body and sat up, bringing her knees to her chest and the blankets up to her neck. "Please go."

One look at the set line of her jaw, and he knew that arguing with her anymore right then would be futile. "Fine. But this isn't over." He got off the bed, though he pressed a hand into the mattress and leaned toward her, gripping her chin in his other hand. Jane tried to jerk away, but his hold was too strong. She could do nothing but remain there, looking into his eyes. He hoped she saw his own anger and his reluctance to leave her. "You're lying to me, but more important, Jane, you're lying to yourself."

He let go of her, and she closed her eyes, lowering her forehead to rest on her knees. Once he was dressed, he looked over at her again.

"I don't believe in kismet or karma or love at first sight. I don't believe in things like fate or destiny. But, I do believe in the...in this between us. Whatever it is, I believe in it."

She looked up. "What is between us? We met yesterday. We had sex a couple of times. What could there possibly be between us that is worth all this tension and emotion?"

"Chemistry."

"No, chemistry is what takes place in my kitchen. What is between us was...was lust maybe. I don't know. You can't build anything on lust."

"The hell you can't. Lust is better than nothing, and it's more than some people ever get. You didn't have it with him, but you sure as shit have it with me. I feel a whole lot of it for you. I

can't explain it, but I want you, all of you. I told you last night what I wanted and what I was willing to do about those shadows in your eyes. If I have to fight some asshole that is still inside your head fucking with you, then I'll do that too. I want you, Jane."

"You're twenty-six. You don't know what you want."

"I'm so sick of that kind of narrow, stereotypical thinking. I bet I know better what I want than you know about yourself. At least I'm willing to fight for you, for the *lust*." His tone softened. "Try me. Nothing is ever as certain as you're looking for it to be, but try me, Jane. That's all I'm asking. Try me."

"Go home. We'll talk some other time."

"Jane..."

She didn't respond anymore and after a few minutes, he did his best to close the bedroom door behind him. He would give her some time, just as she'd asked him to. Perhaps an hour or so, but he'd been serious when he told her it wasn't over between them. He was going to win her. He'd never wanted another woman the way he wanted her, and he'd be damn if she was going to shut him out now that he'd found her.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Well, thank God you answered the phone this time. I was ready to send out a search party for you. I've been trying to reach you since yesterday afternoon."

"Sorry, Jack. I left the phone at the cabin." Graham settled himself on the couch, propping his feet up on the coffee table. God, what a day. He needed a good stiff drink or a good stiff bottle. Jane was going to drive him insane.

"You mean you were out all night?"

"I was. What's so urgent?"

"Well, Marcy Bersheer, the editor of *Travel Ink* magazine, is putting together a little shindig and has been trying to get in touch with you. She seems to think you're the greatest thing since...well, I don't know what, but she wants you there."

Graham closed his eyes and rubbed at the ache in his temples. He was tired and damn horny. "I'll give her a call later and get all the details."

"So, tell me, why were you out all night?" He heard the hint of amusement in Jack's voice.

"I met a woman."

"Just like that, you met a woman? Wish it were that easy for the rest of us. You went out there for a job, though, right? For Marcy's magazine too."

"Yes, and I've finished the article, even sent it in. Went out to a bar one night and met a guy, we had a couple of beers and started talking. Next thing I knew, I'd agreed to meet his business partner. I met her yesterday and..."

"And what? What happened?"

"Shit, Jack. I've never felt this for a woman. I think I could fall in love with her."

"What? Wait. You *think* you could fall in love? I wasn't even sure you believed in love."

"I know, and no one else is more surprised by this little revelation than me, but there it is."

"So, you're serious then? What are you going to do?"

"I'll keep writing, and I'll do whatever else I have to do. I'd pump gas if it keeps me close to her. She might travel with me, too." Yeah, he could hear that conversation in his head. He'd save bringing that up for a while.

"Wow."

The surprise in Jack's voice mirrored Graham's at his change of heart. "Yeah."

"Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Just make sure my bills are current, and I'll get you the address to forward my mail to."

"Are you going to be coming back to Baltimore at all?"

"Yeah. I need to pack up the rental and call the landlord."

"Well, call me when you do, let's grab lunch. I'd like to meet this woman that has you changing your life. When did you meet her again?"

"Yesterday."

"Yesterday? You're turning your life upside down for a woman you met yesterday? Are you nuts?"

"Without a doubt. Thanks, Jack. Take care, and call me if you need anything."

Jack was the closest thing to a male friend Graham had. He was Graham's assistant, taking care of mail, some of the research, travel arrangements, and other things. Graham tossed his cell

phone onto the coffee table and stared up at the beamed ceiling. What the hell was he going to do to get Jane to change her mind? He reached over, picked the phone back up, and dialed the number to the loft. Maybe he could at least hear her voice.

And it would be grand if his dick would cooperate too and realize that she likely wasn't going to engage them in phone sex.

"Hello?"

"Edward, it's Graham."

"She's locked in her room. Well, barricaded in there, what with the door and all."

"Shit. Has she come out at all?"

"A little bit here and there. It's unfortunate she didn't hear the whole conversation. Of all things for her to overhear."

That was an understatement. "So, what do I do? You know her best."

"It's hard to say. You might just want to give her a few more days."

Graham didn't want to give her a few days. He wanted to go back there now, pick her up off her ass, and kidnap her until he could convince her to give them a chance. "Will you tell her I called?"

"Of course. She'll come around."

"I know."

They hung up, and Graham stood, lit a fire in the fireplace, and made his way upstairs. If nothing else, he could keep himself busy with some work. He had an article to transcribe as well as calls to make. He could at least do that until he called Jane again. He'd give it an hour.



## Chapter Ten

Jane made her way out of her room and found the light on in the kitchen, the sink full of dirty dishes, and coffee still in the pot hardly touched. It was so unlike Edward to go to bed leaving a mess and lights on. Not that she cared in the least. She hadn't been much help lately nor had she been concerned with neat and tidy. She was a mess, both inside and out, and honestly for the life of her, she couldn't freakin' figure out why.

For the last three days, she'd avoided Edward and the constantly ringing phone. She'd been tempted to answer, to talk to Graham, but eventually had unplugged the handset in her room and tossed it in the closet. She wanted to hear his voice and feel his hands on her. She wanted to bury herself against him and feel him inside her body. What was it about him that she couldn't let go of? Yes, it had taken her months to get over Phillip, but that was more because of how he'd ended things, not because she couldn't stop thinking about him. She had thought of Graham every moment and the masturbating she'd done, the orgasms she'd had, the tears she'd shed over him were things that she'd never even considered in regard to Phillip.

So, what did it all mean?

She glanced over toward Edward's door and saw a light on under it. She wasn't sure what to think at the moment, but she would dearly love a cup of hot chocolate and a friend, even one that had betrayed her while trying to help her. Maybe he could shed some light on her confusion about her feelings.

She padded across the room and knocked once on Edward's door before opening it. What met her gaze was so unexpected, especially in her state of mind, that she could do little more than stare. She should definitely back out of the room but was rooted to the spot.

Edward and their one floor down neighbor, Frank, were naked in Edward's bed. Having sex.

She knew Frank had a nice ass in jeans, but nude, he was...WOW.

For a few minutes, she watched, telling herself more than once to turn away and give them privacy, but she didn't, couldn't.

Edward was up on his knees, his own tight ass clenched while he slid into and out of the other man. Surprisingly, she wasn't icked out, given that she'd never seen two men having sex and had never really thought much about it. After seeing it though, she was intrigued, to say the least.

Under his belly, she could see a hand jerking on Frank's cock. She wasn't sure if it was Edward's hand or Frank's or maybe both.

Edward groaned and jolted Jane to again realize she should turn and walk away. She shouldn't continue to stand there, voyeuristically taking it all in. It was naughty of her, but she didn't want to go before they finished. She'd stayed this long, what were a few more minutes, right?

“God, Edward, harder, please fuckin' fuck me harder.”

Watching and listening to the men together, she thought about her own sexual experiences, especially the most recent one. She'd never had a man say “fuck” or “pussy” to her, never had a boyfriend that spoke so graphically to her face. She had a newly discovered dirty side and she liked it and she wanted to explore it.

No man had ever explored her body so up close and personal like Graham had either. The memory of his hands spreading her legs, of his fingers pulling on her nipples, of his breath against her sex made her ache for him. The sex in the chair had been a first too. That memory made her clit twitch.

“I'm coming, Frank. Oh. My. God.”

Edward's movements stilled, his back muscles tensed, and he trembled with the orgasm that was flowing from his body. Frank shook beneath him from his own orgasm, and she had to stifle a giggle when both men groaned, “Fuck.”

Balling her hand up in a fist then biting down on it to keep from making any more sounds, she backed out, closed the door behind her, and tiptoed back into the kitchen wondering if she would ever be able say “fuck” or “pussy” or “cock” out loud without being embarrassed. Again, Graham's voice popped into her head, this time telling her how much he wanted to fuck her, to

watch her come, and her heart ached even while a throbbing began between her thighs. She was so aroused from what she'd just witnessed, she—

“Did you enjoy the show?”

Jane looked up from where she'd been tracing the edge of the counter to find Edward standing in front of her, a pair of jeans and a T-shirt on. He looked sated, rumped, and relaxed. She suddenly felt bad for having watched and at the same time very envious of his happiness all at once.

“How did you know I was there?”

“We've lived here long enough that I can tell when the air in the room changes because the door is open.”

“I'm sorry, Edward.”

He grinned suddenly. “Don't be. It was rather exciting to know you were watching and taking it all in. Did it live up to your expectations of gay sex?”

“I didn't have any expectations of gay sex.” Jane felt her cheeks heat just the same, and she spun away, to open the fridge, to pretend to look for something, anything, even a hole to open up and swallow her.

“Jane?”

“Hmmm?”

“He calls all the time, you know.”

She feigned innocence, shrugging her shoulders and closing the fridge. “Who?”

Edward's eye roll when she turned around had her smiling in spite of herself. “Oh don't do that. You know who. He really wants this, wants you.”

As if to prove her wrong, the phone rang at that exact moment.

“Answer it, Jane.”

“No.”

“Answer it.”

“Nope.”

“Don't ruin this for yourself.”

“There's nothing to ruin. I told him I needed some time, and I meant it. I don't know that we have anything between us to give real consideration to.”

Edward sighed and threw up his hands. “Stubborn woman. No wonder I'm gay.”

“What do you want me to do, Edward? Huh?”

“I want you to get over it. I set you up, yes. I sent you out into the middle of nowhere to meet a man I thought would be good for you. If for no other reason than to make you smile and realize that Phillip didn't see the real you, he only wanted to see you change for him. I'm sorry that I didn't check with you first before meeting Graham and telling him about my best friend in the world. It wouldn't have been much of a set-up or surprise if I had. But I'm not sorry that the two of you met. You will be though if you continue to lie to yourself every day about how much you want him. For just one night of sex, that man is trying like hell to get through to you. Why can't you see that?”

“It's too risky.”

“That's no excuse.”

“And he's just a baby, Edward. Geez, he's only twenty-six years old.”

“That's not a good enough reason, Jane. Twenty-six is not a baby. Honey, he's done more living in the last six years of his life than you've done in the last thirty-seven. You hide behind your hurt and these four walls. That's no way to live. It might just be a fling, an affair, but it might end up being more. You are never going to know if you keep being a coward. He's worth it, Jane. That man in that cabin is worth it. I've seen you happy, but not in a long, long time. You can't use the business or your fear of being brokenhearted again as a shield anymore. Phillip is not worth this. He's not worth losing the one man that *is* worth it.”

Edward turned and walked back to his room only to turn and look at her again. “By the way, I'm cutting you off from the truffles. No more eating them until you come to your senses.”

Her mouth dropped open as he went into his room and quietly shut the door.

Damn him. She knew he was right, and she dashed at the tears that fell from her eyes. He loved her and wanted the best for her, wanted her to be happy, so why couldn't she? Why couldn't she just take what Graham could give her and enjoy it?

She reached for the phone, and her heart fluttered, but then snatched her hand back. She wasn't ready yet. Maybe if she gave it a few more days.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Graham, are you sure this is what you want to do? Moving to the mountains? You hate winter and snow and ice. You hate the cold.”

Graham smiled at the soft and very concerned voice of his sister, Beth. “Yes, I’m sure. She’s special. She needs me.”

“Every woman needs you. Ever since you were a kid the female population has been throwing themselves at you. What makes this one so different?”

“She’s not throwing herself at me.” He’d never been with a woman that held him at arms’ length and he had to admit the challenge was quite fun. “She’s feisty, Beth. She’s strong and beautiful and you’d love her. I haven’t met anyone I’ve wanted in any real capacity since Cassie left. This is the right one, sis. I know it.”

“Well, what are you going to do? If she’s not throwing herself at you, that must mean she’s playing hard to get.”

Something like that. “I have to convince her that I’m serious.”

“What do you mean, you have to convince her?”

Graham sighed, turned his office chair toward the window, and looked out over the frozen pond and the mountains just beyond. “I didn’t exactly meet her on the street and ask her out. We were set up on a blind date by her business partner. She didn’t take it well.” Beth didn’t need to know all the gory details. “She’s been a pill ever since. She’s even slammed the door in my face.”

Laughter came from the other end of the line. “Losing your charm?”

“Not a chance. She’s just got some leftover baggage from an old relationship.” About three full size suitcases and a carry-on.

“Maybe you should go see her again. You said it’s been a few days, so...”

“No. She’d just slam the door in my face again.” He smiled at the memory of what happened after he opened that slammed door. Well, the first one at least. The second time she’d slammed a door hadn’t turned out quite as well.

“If you want her, sounds like you’re going to have to go and get her.”

“I know. I feel out of my element with her. I am not used to being rejected like that. Sounds cocky, huh? She’s always saying I’m cocky.”

“Not when it's the truth and when it comes to you, it is. Women come to you, come after you. Now you're the one having to go after a woman. The tables have been turned on you, but if you think she's worth it, then you have to give it all you've got.”

“Go see her, huh?”

“Yes. Despite what you're used to, women love to be chased, and this girl is no different, I promise you.”

“You're right.”

“Of course I am. And don't you show up empty-handed. Take her candy or flowers. I know it's old-fashioned, but trust me on this.”

“Talk about turning the tables on someone, Beth. I'm usually the one dispensing the advice.” She laughed, and Graham realized, not for the first time, just how much he missed his family. “You should come visit. It's very beautiful here.”

“I might just do that. The ranch doesn't need me all that much when summer comes around and without Tric here, well, it's just not the same.”

“So, no progress on that with Dad? I was hoping that things would cool down and that they'd be able to talk again.” Tric was his baby brother, his gay baby brother. Their small town in Texas seemed more okay with Tric's sexual orientation than their father, and it was tearing the family apart. They'd always been close, but ever since Tric came out of the closet last summer, the tension between everyone was so thick it could be cut with a knife.

“No, Dad is still pretty upset. He keeps asking Tric who the man is that he's seeing, but Tric won't budge on the answer. I don't think Dad and Tric have spoken in a month. It's driving Mom up the wall.”

“I bet. I haven't talked to him in a while either, but I need to call. As soon as I get back to Baltimore, I'll do it while I'm packing up.”

“So you're really gonna move to Denver? For a girl? Graham, are you really sure you want to upend your life like that?”

He smiled. Beth had always been a mother hen to him and Tric, even though Graham had always been the philosophical one when it came to people and relationships. “There's nothing really to upend. I travel more than I'm at my apartment, and there's nothing there, no reason for me to stay. But here, there's reason here.”

And it was true. He didn't have anyone back East. His family was in Texas and, if he really thought about it, the women he'd gone out with during his travels were the closest thing he had to friends. There had never been any pressure on either side, just casual fun. He'd seen some great places that the average traveler wouldn't have known about and had gotten to know some fantastic women. Serious relationship hadn't been in his vocabulary until he met Jane. Funny how things can happen in the blink of an eye like that.

"Well, okay. Hopefully, I've helped you some this time."

"You have, sis. Thank you."

"You're very welcome. Now, you take care of yourself, and go get your girl. Remember, flowers."

"I will. Love you, Beth."

"Love you too, Graham."

Graham snapped the phone shut and heaved himself out of his chair. He would make the call to the realtor in a bit after his accountant got back to him. He didn't have a lot of money, but there was enough to buy the cabin.

He was sure he should have been bothered by the ease with which he was ready to give up his freedom, but he wasn't. He wanted to set down roots. He'd never been sure he'd have them or even want them, as he hadn't been able to get out of Texas fast enough, but as with most things since meeting Jane, his preconceived notions about what he believed were being challenged and broken down in favor of some version of happily ever after.

Graham turned on the shower, then stepped into it, trying to decide what to do first. His cock flexed as though it had an idea all its own, but before either of them got close to her in a sexual way again, they were going to have to get through her mental and emotional defenses. He would take Beth's advice and get Jane flowers, though he'd have to call Edward for some hint of which were her favorites. He'd deliver them in person too. Beyond that though, he was going to have to wing it.

## Chapter Eleven

“Graham, there really is no point in you continuing to call. I said I'd call you when I was ready.” Jane dropped her head to the counter. His voice was like warm, smooth cream over chocolate.

“Of course there is. I'm trying to wear you down.”

“Well, it's not working.” *Liar liar, pants on fire.*

“If wasn't working just a little, you wouldn't have started answering the phone.”

The damn man had a point, but she couldn't stand it anymore. She wanted him so much but she just hadn't found the courage yet to call and talk things out. In all honesty, she kind of thought after a few days, he'd go away. She'd been ready for it, was prepared for it. He'd surprised her, though. Again. And hell, she found it easier to listen to his voice than to continue ignoring him. “I figured we might be missing business calls.” Graham laughed, and the sound shot straight down to her toes.

“Right. You keep telling yourself that if it makes you feel better. Incidentally, you miss me and I miss you too.” His voice dropped to a dark whisper. “Tell me, how's that sweet pussy of yours? Have you thought about touching it, playing with it while thinking about me?”

Damn him, how did he know? “No.”

“You're fibbing. You think about me all the time and while you might not be playing between your legs, you think about me playing there, touching you.”

She was not about to admit to him that she'd taken to masturbating nightly, sometimes more than once. He was all she had been thinking about and she'd awakened in the middle of the night having an orgasm because she was dreaming of him. He would never know such things. Not as long as she drew breath. “Graham, please...”



“Oh, I definitely want to please. What's wrong, baby? Embarrassed at being caught in a little lie? Here, if it'll make you feel better, I'll confess to playing with myself, all day sometimes too, thinking about you.”

“All day? It's a wonder the thing hasn't fallen off.”

“Nope, it's still in great working order. So, anyway, I'm calling to ask you out. I want to see you, Jane. If I just showed up you'd slam the door in my face. Of course, that's not stopped me from coming after you before, but I'd rather protect my fragile ego from that humiliation again.”

“Yes, I do recall doing that the other night, and it didn't seem to deter you.” Oh God, she'd just revealed that he was indeed wearing her down and that she was beginning to believe in his sincerity. It was so unfair. She couldn't think straight when it came to him.

He laughed again. The sound melted her just a little more. Each time he called and she heard his voice, she melted. Pretty damn soon she'd be nothing but a puddle of goo on the floor.

“You want me, Jane. I don't know why you won't just go ahead and admit it.”

“Because. I have to go for now, Graham. The chocolate is getting all gloppy because you've distracted me.” She hung up before he could say anything else.

“You know, he has been telling the truth,” Edward interjected quietly, looking up from the small desk in the corner of the room.

“I know.” She got out the wax paper and began lining the baking pans with it. Making the truffles, even though she did the same thing every day, was like therapy for her. She could get lost in what she was doing, lost in the scent of the chocolate, lost in the routine. It was calming and as long as she did everything in the correct order, the end result would be perfect. Life needed to take a lesson from candy making.

“It's something I shouldn't have done without talking to you first. I'm sorry for that. I thought I was helping, but honestly if I'd told you ahead of time, you wouldn't have ever gone out the door for fear that you'd have a date on the other side. This isn't his fault.”

“He could have told me the truth when I figured it out at the cabin instead of acting like he didn't know what I was talking about.” She pulled the cookie scoop through the chocolate to form a ball then dislodged it gently on the wax paper.

“Could he? Or should he have said it before or after the sex? Calling you and hanging out in that cabin to be as near as you'll let him be isn't because he doesn't have anything better to do.”

Jane didn't want to hear that. She was also definitely going to ignore the “when” comments. Edward was right. Hell, for that matter, Graham was right. The only one out of the three of them that wasn't right was her. “What am I supposed to do?”

“Whatever you feel is right, honey, but you better do it quick. He leaves on Friday for California.”

What? Her heart sank, but she was careful to keep her composure. One of them knowing it hurt was bad enough; she didn't need Edward seeing her face crumble. “See, I knew all along he'd leave.” Why didn't she feel all self-righteous? Why did she just feel like crap? It wasn't supposed to be this way.

Edward laughed. “Did you also foresee that he'd be coming back? He put in an offer to buy that little cabin he's been renting.”

In a breath and a half her heart had stopped beating, been broken, healed itself again, and started thumping wildly, excitedly. Her emotions were like being on a damn roller coaster. “How do you know that?”

“He calls here all the time. When you refuse to talk to him or aren't here, we end up chatting for a bit. One of those times he asked for the name of a real estate attorney. Frank knew of one right off, so Graham got it all set in motion.”

“California is his next assignment?”

“Yes, honey. And then he's going back East, to Baltimore, I think, to pack up his apartment. I don't think he's due to come back here for a few weeks.”

“Oh.” Jane couldn't explain and didn't want to acknowledge the huge black stone that had lodged itself in her chest. It made breathing hard. She didn't want him to leave. It was true she was dragging out the seeing him again part of things, but she did like knowing that he was still there in the vicinity if she changed her mind.

“Why so glum? I thought you wanted him to go away.”

“I did. I do.” Her voice was just a little too bright with that statement. “It's just...why didn't he tell *me* he was leaving?”

“He's right. You do lie and do so badly. And he probably didn't want to be on the phone to hear you hoot and holler in happiness.”

“I wouldn't do that. Besides, you said he's coming back.” Did she manage to disguise the relief in her voice at that statement? The look on Edward's face said she didn't. Crap.

“He is. Now, back to work.”

Edward returned his attention to the work on the desk, signaling a definite end to the conversation. He'd planted the seeds in her mind. There was no doubt that that had been his plan all along. Damn him, it worked. Graham was buying the cabin. That cute little piece of property with the stream and the mountain backdrop and that incredible stone fireplace? He was going away but coming back? All to be near her?

Thoughts that she didn't want to have flooded her and before she lost her concentration on work altogether, she forced herself to scoop more chocolate balls and fill the cookie sheet.

The intercom buzzed, interrupting her work. “Shit,” she muttered under her breath. “Yes?”

“Miss Connolly, this is Sam down at the desk. There's a package here for you.”

Yeah, and? They'd never called about packages before, just brought them up when they had a moment. “Okay, thanks. Can you bring it up?”

“Uh, no, ma'am.”

Jane looked up at the same moment Edward did and their eyes met across the room, a question of why hanging between them. “That's fine then. Just wait and someone will be down to get it soon.”

“Uh, ma'am, you might want to come and get this one now. It's...alive.”

What the...? “Alive? As in a plant?”

“Something like that.”

She sighed, hopefully loud enough that anyone down at the desk could hear her irritation. “Fine. I'll be right down. Sam is acting really weird. Maybe he's sick or something.”

“Maybe.”

Jane handed the cookie scoop to Edward at the desk and walked out the door to the elevator. When the double doors opened, she took a step inside only to stop in her tracks, one foot in one foot out. Graham. He'd sent her flowers. That had to be it. The schmuck.

She growled softly through her teeth and stepped the rest of the way into the car and pressed the L button for the lobby. Thankfully, the elevator didn't have to stop and pick up any other residents on the way down. She wasn't exactly dressed to be seen by anyone she might know. The face that wore no makeup, the jeans that were almost too tight, the faded sweatshirt, and the pink fluffy slippers did not a pretty picture make. She grinned. She loved owning her own business, working in the privacy of her own place. She could dress however she wanted, especially since Edward usually did all the meet and greets.

The elevator chime dinged when she reached the lobby, and the doors opened, revealing an empty space of gleaming marble, one man sitting behind the security desk, and another leaning against it. Cowboy Surfer. In his hand, he held the most beautiful bouquet of lavender roses she'd ever seen. Shit.

*What a goddamn jerk!*

His wide eyes connected with hers the moment the words passed through her lips. Oh God. She slapped a hand over her mouth. What was it about him that made her speak what was on her mind when she'd never had the guts to do it before with any man except Edward?

He grinned that infuriating grin that melted every inch of her.

"Terrible language from such a pretty girl." He tsked, shaking his head. "Might have to consider washing your mouth out with soap."

"I'd like to see you try. What are you doing here, Graham?"

"The phone calls weren't really getting me the results I wanted, so I decided to stop by."

"Uh-huh."

"Don't you want your flowers? If so, you'll have to come a little closer."

Yes. "No."

"You're lying again. Yes, definitely going to have to wash your mouth out."

"I'm not." Out of the corner of her eye, she saw Sam watching their exchange with rapt interest. Lovely. It would be all over the building by morning that mousy Jane was turning down flowers from the Hunk of the Month. "Please, Graham. I don't know what else to say. You don't take no for an answer very well."

“Thank you is usually appropriate when someone brings you a gift.” He held the roses out to her, totally ignoring her previous statements.

“Thank you.”

“Come and get them.”

Oh hell no. “Why don't you leave them down here? They'll brighten up the lobby.”

“Nope. Come get them, Jane. You know want to.”

She started to deny it. She even bit her tongue to keep from saying anything in the affirmative, but they both knew her well enough to know she wasn't going to walk away from roses. How he knew that, she didn't know and really didn't care, but, it was true. When was the last time anyone had given her roses? Well, other than Edward on her birthday and at Thanksgiving.

No man she'd ever been involved with had given her roses. They didn't give her candy. They didn't romance her or woo her, and honestly, she didn't know what to do about Graham because he did all those things. Well, except the candy part. She was pretty sure that was because she made candy for a living.

Concentrating on putting one foot in front of the other, she walked the twenty-three steps to where he stood, stopping just beyond his reach. She held out her hand for the roses, hoping against everything that told her otherwise, that he would be kind and just give her the flowers.

No such luck. Damn.

It was her last thought before he grabbed her hand and pulled her against him, his lips crashing down on her traitorous and willing ones.

The kiss was just long enough to knock her off balance but too short to satisfy the hunger raging through her blood. He lifted his head, and his tongue snaked out to lick his lips. “Mmm mmm mmm. I've missed kissing you, Jane.”

It was on the tip of her tongue to yet again deny, deny, deny, but she figured there was no time like the present to turn over a new leaf. “Me too,” she whispered.

Graham's look of surprise would have made her laugh had the moment of revelation not been such a serious one. She took the bouquet from his hand and lifted it up to her nose, burying her face in the soft petals and inhaling the sweet fragrance.

“How did you find lavender roses in February?”

“Let's just say I know people.”

She didn't want to know what people he knew that would be able to find lavender roses in the dead of winter. In Colorado. “Would you like to come upstairs?” The words flew out of her mouth before she had a second to think about them.

He smiled. She loved his smile. The crinkle of lines at his eyes, the dimples in his cheeks... He really was gorgeous, and she hoped like hell she wasn't making a huge mistake.

“I actually came to take you to dinner.”

“Really? You were coming to ask me out on a date?”

“Yes. You said no on the phone, so I figured I might have a better shot in person. Especially with flowers. If you still said no, I was going to resort to simply telling you I was taking you to dinner and if that didn't work, I was going to have to get naked and torment you until you either said yes or we ordered in.”

She couldn't believe he'd said he'd get naked in front of Sam. That little tidbit would definitely be all over the building by morning. “Oh, I uh...I would need to change, so, you should come up and we can finish talking about it.”

Graham winked and snagged her hand, dragging her toward the elevators. “Love the fuzzy slippers, by the way.”

The doors closed, and Jane was ravished before the elevator car began to move. Graham's hands were at her hips, sliding around to her ass and pulling her up into his body. His eyes never left hers and though his mouth was mere inches from kissing her, he never did. He just stared at her with lust, bright and hot in his eyes.

“Graham?”

“Want you, Jane. Hellish week and all of it has been your fault.”

His voice was like gravel, but his lips were soft as they caressed her temples, and his denim-covered cock thrust against the juncture of her thighs.

She was once again in awe. His cocky confidence was shaken and he wanted her. Nothing about him in that moment said fake or wrong. Everything screamed right to her.

And then it was her turn to smile. Talk about a revelation.

## Chapter Twelve

“Come with me.”

“What?”

“To California. Come with me. I'm going to a small town in the northern part of the state. It'll be cold, windy, we'll get to snuggle together and stay warm the old-fashioned way. I've got a room in a bed and breakfast, and we won't be too far from the coast.” Graham studied her, watched her. He knew she'd say no, find excuses that she couldn't go, but the offer was out there on the table, literally, and he wanted her to know that she belonged with him, wherever he was.

“I can't, Graham. Work, you know, and it's really too soon for any kind of trip together.”

Bingo. “Why?”

“Would either of you care for dessert?”

Both he and Jane looked up at the waitress they hadn't noticed standing at the side of their table with an expectant look on her face. Again, he knew Jane would say...

“No, thank you.”

Predictable. He smiled. “Yes, actually we would.”

The waitress beamed and Jane blushed.

“What would you like?”

“Your Molten Chocolate Cake and two scoops of ice cream.”

“Graham, we really shouldn't...”

The waitress walked away, and Graham returned his gaze to Jane. “I don't know why not. I hear it's delicious.”

“Very well. Enjoy. I don't need it.”

“Sure you do. You make candy for others. Let someone else make dessert for you. Why shouldn't you have it?”

“Have you forgotten that you've seen me naked?”

The last word was said in a hissed whisper as she leaned across the table giving him a delectable view of her cleavage. Her little black dress caressed every curve of her body. The long sleeves were as formfitting as the bodice. Her knee-high boots with their skinny heel drove him mad. He considered he might be developing a shoe fetish with all the thoughts of fucking her in heels that went through his mind on a near constant basis. Thinking about the melted chocolate in the center of the dessert cake, he had a brief flash of Jane laid out on the table, naked but for those boots, bound, and drizzled with the warm confection. “Nope. I haven't forgotten. But apparently you have.”

“Have what?”

“Forgotten that I happen to like you naked.” One day she'd realize just how spectacular and sexy she was, especially when she was in the buff.

“When are you coming back?”

Nice change of subject. She hadn't meant to ask either. He could tell by the way her mouth made an O and then clamped shut with her bottom lip between her teeth and her eyelids dropped down over her eyes.

“I have to go pack up my place in Baltimore. I planned on stopping through Denver before I head back East. So, I'll be gone roughly fourteen out of the next twenty-one days.”

Jane nodded. “You really did buy the cabin? You really are moving here?”

“Yep. The deed should be in my name within the next forty-five days or so.”

“That's a big step, Graham. We could have tried casual or long-distance. You didn't have to rearrange your life.”

Graham grinned across the table at her. He knew she meant it, not as an insult or that she didn't want him around, but still... “Somehow, I don't think long-distance would work for us. It would just give you an excuse to try and put *more* than the distance of miles between us. No, moving here is the best thing.”

The waitress picked that moment to clear the center of the table and set down their dessert. The chocolate smell hit him, and he couldn't help but smile as the image of Jane covered in it reappeared in his mind. Two spoons rested on the plate and cocoa powder covered the scoops of vanilla bean ice cream.



“Dig in.”

Her gaze shot up. “No. I can't.”

“Dig. In.”

“Graham, really, it's fine. I'm not hungry for it.”

“I will feed it to you myself unless you pick up a spoon.” She glared at him, and he grinned. “Remember what I told you in your loft the other night about climbing on and fucking me?”

A blush hit her cheeks full on. “Graham! Don't say that word so loud.”

“Say what word? Fucking? Would you rather I say something else? I could say pussy. Or I could say tits or...” God, he loved the effect he had on her. He loved being able to set her on edge because he knew it heightened her need for him in the way she'd moaned during sex, the way she'd gushed against his cock.

Her blush deepened, and she nervously glanced around from under her lashes. He'd raised his voice a bit, but no one looked their way. She was passionate and exploring her and exploring with her was going to be an amazing ride. “Do you remember, Jane?”

“Yes, I remember. What about it?”

“I like your curves. I think you're sexy as all hell. You're beautiful, hot, smoking, gorgeous, soft, wet, and you make my dick so hard I could pound nails. So stop with the 'I can't' bull. For the last time, that was someone else's opinion of you, someone that doesn't even matter anymore.”

He'd seen the temper flare in her eyes, saw it coming a mile away, but didn't care. He meant every word and one way or another she was going to start believing it. He hated that she didn't always see herself the way she should, that she couldn't see she was lush and erotic. “The next time I hear you say something negative about yourself, you're going to have to write on paper 'I am sexy and beautiful' a hundred times.”

Her mouth opened and closed, and when no sound came out, he shoved a big spoonful of cake and ice cream between her lips.

Once the shock left her eyes, delight filled them. She worked her mouth around the sweet decadence and swallowed, licking her lips with the tip of her tongue.

What she did next surprised him. She looked down at the cake then back up at him and opened up for another bite, so that's exactly what he gave her.

They shared the dessert one bite at a time until it was gone. She was smiling at him, her temper gone, her edges smooth and he was hard as a rock.

Damn, he had it bad for her.

"You weren't serious about making me write out those words a hundred times, were you?"

"Yes, I most certainly was serious. You're beautiful and you know it. I know you know it. It just got lost in translation somewhere along the way, but even if you don't see it in the mirror, you certainly feel it when you're working. You love what you do. You feel it when we're writhing together in bed, too." As they walked back to the loft from the downtown shopping and dining mecca of Denver, his hands were shoved into his pockets. He was afraid that if he touched her, he'd have her up against a building with her legs wrapped around him. He—

"Jane?"

At the sound of the voice, Graham turned at the same moment Jane did. A tall, dark-haired man approached them. The closer he got, the more Graham felt tension radiating from Jane. Despite his thoughts of not touching her for their own good out on the public street, he pulled his hands out of his pocket, slipping one around her fingers.

"Phillip."

Graham's hand tightened on Jane's. His gaze traveled up and down Phillip's form. He was shorter than Graham, but not by much. He had thick black hair, dark eyes, and his features appeared to be Latin in influence.

"I have not seen you in months. You look ravishing. Absolutely beautiful."

Phillip's gaze was decidedly approving as it raked Jane from head to toe. Was the man regretting his decision to let her go? His dark eyes slid sideways to give Graham the once-over as well. Was he...? No. He wasn't looking at Graham the same way he'd looked at Jane, but it very similar in appreciation. Was Phillip gay? Bi?

Suddenly, Phillip's ending things with Jane took on a whole new look, even though the man could have done it in a better way.

“Thank you. You look good too.” Her voice was stilted, measured, and Graham changed his hold on her hand by lacing his fingers through hers. He squeezed tightly. “Phillip, this is Graham. Graham, Phillip.” A couple of murmured hellos were exchanged along with a decidedly awkward handshake in which Phillip didn't seem to want to let go.

Phillip looked again at Jane, and his eyes lit up with excitement. “I am so glad I ran into you. I am opening a small coffee shop in Breckenridge and want to carry your truffles. They are truly the best ones in Colorado, and they're unique. People will really love them. I have some new coffees that I want to pair with them. We'll have a hit on our hands. I know how you feel about a storefront, but you wouldn't have to be there. I will have a staff run the store and—”

“That sounds great, Phillip. I'll talk to Edward about it and have him call you.”

The man deflated slightly and for some idiotic reason Graham felt sorry for him. But only a little. “Edward?”

The stiffness had left Jane's body, and she relaxed slightly into Graham, which he welcomed. His hand let go of hers, and he wrapped his arm around her back. She was handling herself beautifully in the face of the man that had caused her such doubt in herself. He couldn't have been more proud of her. “Yes. He handles the new clients and accounts, so it would only make sense for you to talk with him. It does sound like a great opportunity though.”

“It would be. The hint of heat in your truffles along with a rich dark coffee with a hint of chocolate and cinnamon would be fabulous together.”

“I can see that. I'll have Edward call you tomorrow about it. Same number?”

“Yes.”

“Okay, good. It was nice to see you, Phillip. Goodnight.”

“Yeah, you too.”

Phillip's eyes were trained on their backs as Graham led Jane back in the direction they'd been going before meeting up with him. “Are you okay?”

“Yes, I'm good. Better than I thought. I never knew how I'd handle seeing him again, talking to him, but... Graham? I think he's gay or something.”

Graham laughed. “I was thinking the same thing.”

"I couldn't believe the way he looked you up and down like that. I had never noticed that about him."

"Kind of sheds new light on your relationship."

"Yeah, maybe."

They walked in silence another block, and Graham slipped his hands back into his pockets. He wanted to fuck her. He'd wanted to fuck her before seeing Phillip, but now, he wanted to fuck her even more. He needed to stake that claim, needed to banish all thought of the other man from her mind, even if the thoughts weren't romantic.

"Do you ever date women your own age?"

"No."

"Why not?"

He shrugged. "I found women my age immature. Some of them thought about marriage all the time, and some thought about partying all night. I wasn't interested in either. I got to the point where I loved being me, being able to have a conversation over dinner that didn't revolve around three-hundred-dollar jeans, the latest club, or if I thought I'd be happy living in suburbia working at a normal nine-to-five job."

"Not all are like that."

"No, they're not. I found I was more comfortable with older women. I've always been a little more mature than most people my own age. I don't know why, but I'm okay with it. I like older women, and I'm not afraid to admit it. I'm not ashamed of it. They're open-minded, confident, and sure of themselves. I love that. It's sexy as hell."

They rounded the corner, a few feet from the building she lived in. She'd been so quiet the last few minutes that he wondered what was going on in that mind of hers. Was she analyzing and rationalizing her way through things? Or was part of her still trying to deny the heat between them? Maybe it was because she was scared that one of them wouldn't measure up to what the other wanted or needed. It could be that she was thinking about the encounter with Phillip.

He didn't know what was going through her pretty head but being able to read her just by the look on her face would come in very handy, likely more often than not.

Then, her soft voice drifted to him. "Maybe you just haven't found the right one yet."

“Oh but I have, Jane.” He waited for her rebuttal, for her to deny or lash out at him for making such a blanket statement, but what she actually said caught him unawares again. Maybe his intuition about her wasn't as sharp as he'd thought.

“Are you coming upstairs when we get back?”

“No. I'm not.” His own answer couldn't have surprised him more. It wasn't what he'd meant to say at all.

“Oh.”

He turned his head and looked down at the top of hers. “Disappointed?”

“No.”

“Liar. If you'd just tell the truth, you'd feel better sooner.” Her laugh was soft and if he hadn't been watching, he wouldn't have seen her nod.

“Why not?”

“Because it's time for you to come to me. It's time for you to take the next step, to make the choice. I've done all the work so far and while I don't mind, it's your turn to do some as well. You know I'm not going anywhere, or at least I think you know that so I'm going to wait for you to come to me.”

“What?” She'd stopped in the middle of the sidewalk and when he turned to see why, her hands were on her hips and she was glaring at him. “After all this, you're now leaving it up to me? Does this have anything to do with seeing Phillip?”

He walked back toward her and leaned against the lamppost. He wanted to sink his lips into hers. He wanted to open her shirt and play with her breasts. He wanted to lift her skirt and bury his face against her sex. He wanted to smear the lipstick that lingered on her beautiful mouth. “Not for me, but perhaps for you. He came at you out of nowhere, and you handled yourself beautifully. And he was right, you do look ravishing. He knows he was wrong about you, wrong to try and change you, and it seems he might have been wrong about himself too.”

“Talking business was never our problem until he wanted me to leave Edward.”

Graham leaned down and kissed the tip of her nose. “I have to say I'm quite proud of you, though. You didn't mention my age tonight until just a few minutes ago.”

“No. But I did notice curious glances at dinner. I can't imagine what people must have thought.”

He grinned. “I'm not that much younger than you. Ten years is nothing.”

“It's not nothing.”

“It is when it has nothing to do with how we feel about one another. I'm a grown man that knows exactly what he wants. And what I want more than anything else is you in my life, my house, my bed...but not necessarily in that order right this second.” He reached out and caressed her cheek, then slid his fingers into her hair, tilting her face up to his. Her breath smelled of their shared dessert; her skin smelled of cocoa butter, all warm and sweet. She had her short curls pulled back in little butterfly clips he wanted to put on her nipples, the teeth softly biting into the tender skin. “I am not leaving you, Jane. I just need you to come to me, meet me halfway. Take a step forward and trust me.”

“You *are* leaving.”

“It's not the same, and you know it. Stop being so damn stubborn. Your issues with us have nothing at all to do with me. It's all on you. You have to want to let go of what you think is still significant, which isn't, and move toward something you know is. Sometimes you have to take another chance, risk your heart...”

His lips brushed against hers before taking her hand and continuing down the sidewalk to the door of her building. He was leaving in two days, and he'd miss the hell out of her, but he'd be damned if he was going to be the only one working to get something going between them.

## Chapter Thirteen

“Jane, honey? I brought truffles. New ones for you to try.”

“I don't want any, Edward.” Which wasn't exactly true. She would love a truffle but not right now. She needed to find something to wear. And fast.

“Open the door, honey.”

“I'm not dressed, and I don't have time for truffles.”

“No time for truffles? Why not? What's wrong?”

She completely ignored his questions. “Besides, you said I was cut off.” She piled all her panties and bras back into their respective drawers. She would just go without.

“I said you couldn't have any more until you came to your senses. You've been on a roll the last few days. What happened on your date with Graham the other night? You haven't said much other than you had some thinking to do. C'mon, let me in. I don't want to have to talk to you through the door, and I need you to try these.”

Jane sighed. Oh, what the hell. It wasn't like Edward hadn't seen her naked before. “Fine.”

She turned her head at the gasp when the bedroom door opened. She caught a glimpse of Edward's mouth open and his eyes widen. “Whoa! Girl, put something on.”

His shock made her grin. “I told you I wasn't dressed.”

“Well, I figured you'd at least put on a robe. What are you in here doing anyway?”

“Trying to find something to wear.”

“Honey, you've got a closet full of clothes, albeit most of them are frumpy and dumpy and need to go out the window, but you do have plenty to wear.”

Edward sat on the end of the bed, a plate of delicate and different looking candies in his lap. He was right. Again.

She was finding the trend rather annoying—the men in her life always being right.

She did in fact need a new wardrobe. She needed a lot of new in a lot of areas of her life and clothes were the least of her worries. The absence of Graham's voice over the past thirty-six hours had served as a wake-up call.

When he'd called her after their date to tell her good night, he'd reminded her again that he wasn't going to chase her. Of course that was before he got her so hot and wet with his sinful suggestions of all the things he wanted to do to her. At first she'd been annoyed with him on the phone, just as she'd been on the street when he'd informed her of his decision, putting the ball in her court so to speak, but by morning she'd realized that him not calling would be a good thing. The silence would have given her time to reflect, to come to terms with pursuing a man, to clean out the bathroom cabinets and organize the kitchen ones. But the quiet turned out to be deafening. He consumed her thoughts, her dreams, and by the time she finally looked in the mirror and watched her eyes in the reflection as she said the words "I want him" to herself, the hundred watt mental lightbulb had come on.

She missed him, and his plane was going to leave in just under eight hours. She'd gotten used to his phone calls, his voice, him wearing her down. That she hadn't seen him nor heard from him since they'd had dinner and run into Phillip had her on edge, had her needy, aroused. He was waiting for her to come to him, to do some chasing of her own. He'd said so, but she didn't think he'd meant it. Evidently, he did.

She had to see him. Talk to him. Fuck him. Dear Lord, she had to fuck him or let him fuck her or something, anything. She was tired of being solely responsible for her own orgasms. The past day and a half had been awful. Ever since the first night with him, her sexual needs and desires and fantasies had increased until she thought she'd go nuts from lust and obsession. She'd never cared much for masturbation, but she couldn't stop herself. She couldn't deny her body the feelings and needs that Graham had awakened in her. Not to mention how the naughty words now rolled through her brain, his voice in her head talking dirty to her, and how she found herself saying "fuck" and "cock" and "pussy" and "tits" over and over as she fantasized about being with him again. She was turning into a sexual woman, a very hungry sexual woman.

She put on her robe and shut the closet door to lean back against it. She looked at Edward. "Did you talk to Phillip?"



“I did. We're going to give it a tentative go at the end of the month. I do think it's a good idea. He's got some great thoughts.”

“Yes, I thought so too. Whatever he might have done to me, he's always been smart with his business decisions.”

“You know, that observation you made of him that night? I don't think you're too far off. You might have gotten caught up in a tough time for him where he was trying to figure out who and what he was.”

She wouldn't deny the probability of that being true, but some things still galled her. “And the comments about my size and him wanting me to leave you and everything? What about all that?”

Edward crossed his legs and held the small silver tray on his knee. Her eyes were drawn to the pale pink colored candies on its surface. They were perfect little round balls and quite delicate looking. There was a small pink heart on the top of each. She couldn't wait to try one and stepped toward the bed to sit down, her mouth watering.

“Here,” Edward said, a smile in his voice, breaking one of the truffles in half. “Open. Try this, please. I've worked hard on getting it just perfect, and I think I've finally got it right.” He rubbed one of half of it against her lips until she opened and took it on her tongue. Oh good heavens, it was delicious. So soft and sweet, like the purest sugar. She'd never tasted anything quite like it. Smooth and creamy, it melted on her tongue almost before she had the chance to enjoy it. “Good girl. Oh that is just a very naughty picture, that cream on your bottom lip like that.”

Jane blushed and ducked her head. She couldn't believe Edward had just said that to her, but then she raised her head and winked at him, wiping the cream away slowly and sucking it off her finger. “Mmm. Oh Edward. Yes, oh yes, Edward.”

“Bad girl,” he said with a laugh. “And as for those things you asked about Phillip. The beautiful women, the changes he wanted to make in you, I think it was just because he himself was confused and trying to deny what was going on with him. It's easier to try and change things around us rather than look inside at truths we may not want to face about ourselves.”

Edward had a point, especially when it came to looking inside for truths. He was the most honest person she knew, inside and out. He didn't put on airs for people or try to pretend he was someone other than who he was. It was one of the things she admired most about him.

He held the other half of the truffle out to her, and she took it with her lips.

She fell back and moaned in bliss.

Edward turned and placed the tray between them. He leaned down and propped himself on his arm. "So, tell me, how's my new truffle?"

"My God, Edward, it's so rich and decadent. It's like...oral sex the way the cream melts all over the tongue." She liked the new leaf, or perhaps the new petals she was turning over. She liked the lighthearted, easy smiles, the flirty sexy banter that hadn't been part of her life before, but was beginning to be. She liked how it felt to let go.

"Yes. It is. Very wicked little candy, don't you think?"

"Positively orgasmic. And the pink ganache is...with the heart... Are we targeting a different market now?"

Edward laughed and popped another truffle in her mouth. "That cowboy really has a thing for you, you know. I know how much you want him too, by the way."

"I know. He's just so..." She didn't have the words for what Graham was. She just knew he was as close to happiness as she was going to get right now. Maybe what Edward had said was how it would be. Maybe it would just be a fling, but she owed it to herself to give it everything she had. She owed it to Graham too. He had pushed and pushed and pushed and when she'd begun to fall over the edge, he'd given her the choice of either trusting him to catch her or not.

"Oh my, yes, honey! He sure is! And I don't think he's got a gay bone in his body, more's the pity." He sobered and looked her straight in the face. "All teasing aside, I honestly wasn't sure how to get you out of the funk you were in. I'd have done almost anything to make you smile again."

"Almost?"

"Yes, honey, almost. I wasn't going to sleep with you."

She reached out and took Edward's hand in hers. He was her very best friend, and she was thankful he loved her so much. "I know. Speaking of Frank..."

“What about him?”

“Oh please! Are you and he together *together* or just having sex?”

The grin Edward bestowed on her told her everything she needed to know. Perhaps he'd found exactly what he'd been looking for. Perhaps Edward had been right all along about try and try again.

“Oh no, we're very much together. You know I've wanted him ever since he moved in. I never expected that he was even remotely interested in a gay man, but I just couldn't help it. Imagine my surprise when he knocked on the door a few days ago and said he wanted to give it a shot.”

No more surprised than she'd been at seeing them together in bed. “Lucky you.”

“Yes. You're rather lucky too, you know.”

Yes, she was, or at least she was hoping to be. The decision to go and see Graham had come in the middle of the night last night. He hadn't called her all day yesterday and hadn't called her to tell her good night. She didn't like it. She'd watched him walk away two nights before until he was out of sight and had promised herself that she'd give things between them the few weeks he'd be gone to make sure they still wanted one another. Obviously her resolve hadn't lasted because she was now trying to find something to put on to go see him, to tell him that she wanted him, that she wanted to try and make whatever was between them work. She wanted that voice first thing in the morning and last thing at night. She wanted those arms, that body, those lips, that cock. She wanted the whole man, ten years her junior and all.

“You're going to see him? Is that why the room is in such disarray?”

“Yes. I need to, before he leaves. I need him to know I'm willing to move forward and stop looking back.”

“Good girl. I'm proud of you.” He squeezed her hand and she squeezed back.

“Seeing Phillip helped, too. I don't know how exactly, but it helped. Graham held me up, warmed me from the outside in, gave me his strength when neither one of us knew how I was going to react. Phillip said I looked beautiful and I saw it in his eyes that he meant it. It shouldn't have mattered because Graham had been telling me that all night, but it did matter that Phillip said it.”

“Of course it mattered. He'd been the one to tell you you weren't good enough, and for him to turn around and change his words like that, yes, of course it mattered. I'm telling you, he was struggling with himself more than he ever struggled with you.”

Jane shrugged. “Maybe you're right.” She leaned close and kissed Edward on the cheek. “I need to get moving if I'm going to catch him before he leaves, but I have no idea what to wear.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Jane parked her small SUV in the drive of Graham's log cabin. She turned off the engine and grabbed the two boxes. One was full of truffles and the other...Phillip's box o'crap. Graham's cabin had that wonderful fireplace, and she hoped he would allow her to make use of it. It seemed rather fitting to her that she dump the box and shed the final pieces of baggage left over from that relationship into Graham's fire.

She wobbled up the walk in her ridiculous excuse for shoes and bit back a grin as she remembered Graham's reaction to them the day they met. It hadn't snowed since, but there was still quite a bit of the white powder covering the front of his property. She wasn't sure why Edward insisted she wear the same outfit to see him. Perhaps it was a way to start over.

Well, start over without forgetting the sex they'd had. The hottest sex she'd ever had. The hottest man she'd ever had too. Mercy, but the cowboy was incredible.

Stepping onto the porch, Jane took a couple of deep breaths before raising her hand to knock on the door. It opened before she made contact with the wood, and her jaw dropped. He was naked. Nothing but a cowboy hat on his head and boots on his feet...and an extremely hard cock stood out proudly from his body.

“Oh.” She couldn't say anything else, couldn't do anything other than stare at him. She thought she remembered what he looked like naked, but her memory didn't compare to the real thing. She wanted to jump his bones. Plain and simple. She wanted to crawl up on him and slide down until she was impaled fully and completely. The saying that floated around about saving a horse and riding a cowboy, oh yeah, she knew a cowboy she wanted to ride. “Y-you're...you have no clothes on.” Obvious.

“Nope.”

A sudden tendril of fear started to weave its way through her body. Was she too late? Had he found someone and was she inside the cabin right then waiting for him to come back to her?

“Have I come at a bad time? It looks as though I've interrupted something and ummm... Here.” She shoved the box of truffles toward him as best she could without dropping the other box that now felt like ten pounds of bricks in her arms. “I-I know you don't care much for candy, but these are special and...” She needed to shut up and get the hell out of Dodge.

She turned and had taken one step off the porch before he spoke. “Jane.”

She stopped and waited, her breath held, her back still to him.

“There's no one else. There's only you. Please turn around and look at me.”

Her heart started thundering, and she turned, slowly. The heat in his eyes seared her from across the porch, and the smile on his face could have—should have—melted the snow on the ground because it damn sure melted everything inside her. Then, there were his words.

“There is no one, Jane. Now, it's damn cold out here and you know what that means, right?”

He smirked, winked, and gestured for her to join him inside. Despite the cold, his cock was very hard and didn't look like it was going anywhere. Well, except for inside her, she hoped.

She didn't have to be told twice. She ran-slash-walked through the door and was pressed up against the wall next to the hinges while he slammed it shut. He took the bigger box from her and set it down on a table she hadn't realized was there. Then his mouth was on hers, his tongue forcing its way past her lips, and his fingers went to work on undressing her.

When he got her jacket unzipped, he lifted his head and lowered his eyes then lifted them again to meet hers. “No bra?”

She shook her head, a small, tremulous smile on her lips. He untied her snow pants and pushed them down. “No panties?”

Again, she shook her head.

“God, woman. What a change in you. And oh hell, what you do to me!”

The last was a growl, and it sent shivers down her spine. He took her in his arms and walked her backward toward the couch, bending her forward over the back of it. *Oh my*. In the distance she heard a tear of paper and a groan. His hands slid up the back of her legs, his fingers dug into her pussy, tugged on the lips, flirted with her clit and positioned his cock to enter her.

“One day soon, I'm gonna fuck you without a condom. I want to feel your walls around me with nothing between us. I want to feel your ass tighten around me with smothering heat.”

She whimpered, nodded her agreement, and spread her legs as far as the snow pants would allow. He slid inside her sex in one smooth stroke. He didn't bother going slow, and she was glad of that. No, he pumped her hard, one hand holding on to her shoulder, and the other stroking the flesh of her ass cheeks.

“Bend over, and hold on to the cushions tight.”

She did as he told her, lifting up on her toes and leaning down, grabbing the cushions in her fists. One hand slid around her hip to the front of her body, his finger coming to rest against her clit, teasing the little button. She gasped. In midbreath, she felt him slide a slick finger slowly into her ass.

“Breathe. That's all you need to do. Breathe. God, you are so fucking tight.”

She wasn't sure she actually let out the breath before she spasmed in an orgasm she hadn't been prepared for. She'd never had a finger or anything else in her ass, and she'd never had a harder orgasm than the one he'd just given her. The waves kept crashing over her, subsiding little by little until she was breathing somewhat normally again.

He pulled his finger and his cock out of her at the same time then helped her to stand on her not quite so steady legs. “Whoa.”

“Just a second, baby.” He knelt and pulled her pants off over her heels and turned her around, sliding his hands up the inside of her thighs, his thumbs lightly grazing the plump, wet lips. “There. That's so much better. I want you on the back of the couch.”

He held her by the waist and helped her up. Her legs went around his hips as soon as he stepped between them, and he was inside her again. She shuddered and clung to his shoulders, her ass resting on the very edge of the sofa. “Lean back a little. Yeah, that's it, baby.” His head came down, and he sucked one of her nipples between his lips, digging his teeth in. She arched and offered him more of her flesh.

“Like that, do you?” he whispered against her skin.

“Yeah. More. Please, Graham.” And she meant it. The little pain with the whole lot of pleasure sent her higher again. The conflicting sensations were new for her, and she wanted it again as much as she wanted that hard, powerful orgasm that everything he did promised her.

He shifted to her other breast, took that nipple between his teeth, and tugged, lifting it upward. He ground himself hard against her clit, and she nearly exploded.

“That's my girl. Come on. Come for me again.”

He pressed against her harder, pulled on her nipple harder, and she came harder. Everything shifted out of focus, and stars shimmered behind her closed eyelids. She lost the ability to think clearly or to feel anything beyond the immense pleasure coursing through her body.

Graham let go of her nipple and laved it gently with his tongue before lifting his head and kissing her, tenderly, then more insistently until there was no beginning and no ending of him or her. They fit together with such perfection, such intimate precision as though made specifically for one another. He was rough, strong, she was soft, giving, and he tasted like heaven on earth.

He came moments later, slamming hard up into her womb and groaning. His body shook in her arms and she tightened her legs around him.

“You're going to be the death of me, you know,” he said as he fought to catch his breath. “I can't stop wanting to fuck you. And I was so right about those shoes. Mmmm.”

Jane kissed his shoulder. She was relaxed and mildly sated, but her body still hummed, ready to go another round with him. “What about them this time?”

Graham laughed and untangled himself from her to discard the condom. He nudged her gently down onto the couch and crawled over the back to lie down on top of her. He kissed the tip of her nose and nuzzled against the hair around her face. “The first day I met you I thought they'd be perfect 'fuck me' shoes, and I was right.”

At least he had one positive thing to say about them. “Graham?”

He was nuzzling her neck now, making her feel all tingly. “Hmmm?”

“Were you expecting me today?”

“I was hoping. You don't think I'd answer the door like that for the mailman, do you?”

“No, I just... How did you know?”

“Just a hunch. And a little advance notice from a birdie. I wasn't wrong about you. I haven't been from the start. You wanted this, whether you were ready to admit it to yourself or

not. You don't care about my age and you really don't even care that Edward set us up. You weren't going to let me leave for the better part of a month without seeing me.”

He was right, but still... “Cocky,” she muttered.

“Nope. Is your luggage out in your car?”

“Why would I need luggage?”

“You're going with me on this trip.”

“Graham, I can't go. I have work and...I...”

The stern look he gave her caused her to laugh. She had no reasons and no more excuses left. She sighed and just accepted her fate. She was falling so hard for him and her heart stopped for a moment as the realization hit her, then picked up speed again at the pure and simple joy of it.

“You need to listen close and very carefully...” He touched her then, his hands in her hair, tugging. She stared up at him with wide eyes, her full focus and attention on him. “From the moment I met you, *I* would have *paid money* to have you. Do you understand that? Do you understand how much I am going to need you? How much I already crave everything about you from your hot body to your sexy mouth to your sweet smile? No one in my twenty-six years has ever affected me the way you do.” He winked at her and nipped at her nose. “I won't regret dating so many women before I met you because it taught me and helped me grow into the man I am. I don't care that you're older or that I'm younger. I only care that you try and let me in. I'll take care of the rest.”

Jane nodded, her head swimming, hardly able to believe the words coming out of his mouth. Her heart kicked. But, she did believe him, finally. She would try. She would give him as much of herself as she could and strive to give him even more. He not only kissed her and took her breath away, but he also breathed new life into her.

“Good girl.” He kissed her hard. “Now, about that box over there...is there candy in it this time?”

“Yes. Edward's new 'O' truffles.”

“Oh my. 'O' truffles? Dare I ask what the 'O' stands for?”

Jane giggled and whispered, “Orgasmic.”



“Damn. Guess I'm going to have to give them a try. What about the other box? Isn't it the one you were so protective of the other night? Is it a gift for me?”

“Sort of.”

“Hmmm. Well, tell me what it is.”

His fingertips traced the lines of her face. She could bask in the heat of him forever. “It's the rest of my past with Phillip. It's the box he left me after he ended things. It's full of memories and gifts we'd shared in the years we were together.” The more she talked about it, the freer she felt. “I want to burn it and let it all go: the hurt, the misconceptions, and doubts associated with it. It's time. I want to...I want to see where this thing between us can go.”

“Damn. Hot fucking damn! We'll light that fire, right after I kiss you.”

And his kiss was gentle this time, bringing her stomach fluttering to life. He stole all her thoughts and whatever reservations she might have had left when he kissed her. She forgot everything else too and simply allowed herself to melt under the heat that was her young, sexy Cowboy Surfer.

 THE END 

## Lissa Matthews

Lissa is thirty-eight and lives in the beautiful state of North Carolina.

Find out more about Lissa and what she's up to at <http://lissamattthews.com>.