

SAMHAIN publishing, Ltd.

KAREN ERICKSON

*My Favorite
Mistake*

TAHOE NIGHTS

Somebody's sleeping in her bed...

A Tahoe Nights Story

There's only one way for busy PR executive Julie Lancaster to get her mother off her back—cave in and take a weekend break at the family cabin in Tahoe. After all, Mom won't know she's sneaking her laptop along to get a little work done.

Not only the cabin is a blast from the past, so is the occupant of her bedroom. Tyler Nichols, a guy she remembers as quiet and nerdy..._nothing_ like the drop-dead-gorgeous hunk who knows how to fill out his underwear.

One look at all-grown-up Julie refuels Tyler's memories of long, lazy summer vacations, and the crush he was too shy to admit. It would be gentlemanly of him to leave, but the amazing woman in front of him elicits visions of the wickedly lusty things he'd like to do with her.

With work pushed to the back burner and a weekend indulging with Tyler on high simmer, Julie makes a startling discovery. Tyler is the real deal. And maybe, if he agrees, she might have time for a life after all...

Warning: Fresh mountain air and sultry Tahoe nights equals steamy hot sex with old friends turned lovers. Who knew the smell of pine could make you feel so lusty?

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My Favorite Mistake

Karen Erickson

Chapter One

The headlights cast beams of light across the cabin as Julie drove her SUV down the long, winding driveway. Relief filled her at the sight, and she pulled in front of the separate garage, cutting the engine. She thought about actually parking in the garage, but she didn't have an opener and it was late.

She'd do it tomorrow.

Luckily the drive wasn't too far from Sacramento to Lake Tahoe, but she'd stayed at work too long and got a late start. Her mother had called her on the way, nagging her about too much work and not enough relaxation and blah, blah, blah. Stress and ulcers and no life, no boyfriend, heaven forbid that's what her life was all about. That was her mother's biggest fear. Julie would die alone and unloved, with no husband by her side and no children at her feet. Grandchildren, the happy home life and picket fence, the works. She wanted it all for Julie.

And all Julie wanted was a successful career. Hell, she did have a successful career. She owned her own business. One of the most prominent public relations agencies in Northern California, she leased a large building right in downtown Sacramento, had twenty employees and sometimes even had to turn away jobs.

She didn't need a boyfriend to validate her life. Hell, she was only twenty-nine. Plenty of time for that later. Right now, she needed to grow her business.

And if all went as planned, she would soon open up another office. J.L. Public Relations Firm would have a Los Angeles location. She was on her way.

The mini-vacation had been forced upon her so she decided to go to one of her favorite childhood places. A long weekend at her parents' cabin along the edge of Lake Tahoe was perfect. Close to home with Internet and cell access. Everything a girl could ask for.

Julie slid out of her Honda Pilot and shut the door quietly, not wanting to disturb the neighbors. The quiet of the night was almost unnerving. The soft murmur of humming bugs, the gentle swish of the lake water as it lapped against the nearby shore and the breeze blowing through the branches of the pine trees that towered above were the only sounds. Breathing deep, the clean, pine-scented air filled her lungs. A little smile curved her lips as she went to the passenger door and pulled her overnight bag and purse off the seat then grabbed her laptop bag off the floorboard.

Hitting the silent alarm on her car, she trudged toward the wrap-around front porch, the key to the front door already clutched in her hand. She'd picked it up from her parents' house last night, her mother

trying to convince her to stay for dinner when she showed up. She'd begged off, claiming she had to pack. Lately she'd turned into such an avoider.

She unlocked the door and went into the dark house, shutting the door behind her. Set her purse and laptop bag on the couch, then headed down the short hall toward the master bedroom. The cabin was decently sized, three bedrooms and two full bathrooms, a gorgeous back deck that overlooked the lake and a spa. Just thinking about that spa made her skin tingle, and she sighed wistfully as she pushed open the half-closed door of the bedroom. Already she eagerly anticipated collapsing into bed and sleeping in till mid-morning.

A startled little scream escaped at the sight that greeted her.

The curtains on the windows that flanked either side of the bed were drawn wide open, the silvery light from the almost-full moon illuminating the shape of a very large man lying in the middle of the bed, the sheet wrapped low around his hips, revealing his bare upper body. Sound asleep from the looks of it since she could hear his soft snoring.

She'd screamed, and he hadn't woken up. He must've been so tired. Who the hell was he? Some sort of exhausted bum who'd broken into the house looking for a place to crash? God, she wished she had a baseball bat in her hand. Or a knife. Or a *gun*.

But what would she do with a knife or gun? She was being ridiculous. Not like she'd stab him or shoot him, she wasn't a violent person.

Trembling, she backed out of the room, her steps careful, holding her breath so she wouldn't make a sound. She turned on her heel, headed toward the kitchen so she could call the cops and then she heard him.

Rustling in the sheets, the mattress creaked as he shifted and a muttered, "what the hell" emanated from him.

Julie halted in her tracks. She swore she recognized that voice. But from where?

She didn't have time to figure it out.

Quickening her steps, she hustled down the hall, skidded into the kitchen and flicked on the light. When she saw the cordless phone sitting in the middle of the counter, she grabbed it and started punching in 9-1-1.

Eyeing the hallway, her mind whirled. No way could she take a chance. He might be a...serial killer. Or a rapist. Some creepy hobo-type guy that wandered from town to town, bunking down in semi-abandoned homes looking for some quick shut-eye.

No thank you. She wasn't going to stick around for that. The cops could escort his ass right out the door.

Deciding it best she head toward the front door herself, she grabbed her purse off the couch as she passed, her finger poised on the send button, her other hand wrapped around the door handle.

"Julie Lancaster? Is that you?"

She paused, the hairs on the back of her neck standing up on end. She *did* know that voice. A voice from her past. A voice she hadn't really thought of in years. Punching the off button on the phone, she slowly turned around.

Yep, it was him. Tyler Nichols in the flesh—well, showing plenty of flesh that was for sure. He wore boxer briefs. And nothing else. Her gaze wandered over his form—slyly of course, she didn't want him to know she was checking him out—and she had to admit he looked pretty damn good. He'd always been tall, but the last time she'd seen him he'd been skinny as a beanpole. And shy. A little on the nerdy side. He loved being outdoors. She remembered he'd always taken off on hikes in the mountains or around the lake.

"Uh, Tyler?" She gave him a little wave. "Hi. Um, what are you doing here?"

"I come here pretty much every other weekend during the summer. My parents moved across the country and told me I could go ahead and use the cabin as much as I want." He squinted at her, as if he couldn't quite make out her features, and she recalled he used to wear glasses. She wondered if he still did. "What are *you* doing here?"

"My mom suggested I come here and unwind for the weekend. She said the cabin would be empty." Both of their parents owned the cabin, along with one other couple they were friends with. The three families had gone in on it together and purchased the cabin years ago, when Julie had been a freshman in high school. She'd spent many a weekend with Tyler Nichols growing up.

But she hadn't seen him since before she graduated high school. And she certainly hadn't expected him to grow up so well...

"Yeah, it was supposed to be." He lifted an arm, biceps bulging she couldn't help but notice, and ran a hand through his already tousled dark brown hair. "We all keep a schedule and email each other what's going on through the summer with the cabin. At the last minute I had a change of plans and decided to head up here. I thought the cabin would be empty."

"Oh." She really didn't know what to say. "Um, well this is kind of awkward."

He chuckled, the warm sound sending a shiver of awareness down her spine. He'd become awfully hot these last few years. Well, more like ten-plus years. He'd been a year older than her so that would make him thirty. And single? Looking like that? If he were her boyfriend she certainly wouldn't let him go to Tahoe all by his little lonesome.

Ha, if he were her boyfriend. What possessed her to even think such a thing?

"It's too late for us to do anything about it tonight so we both might as well stay put. I can stay in the other bedroom, you can have the master," he offered, squinting at her again. She must've looked at him oddly because his expression became contrite. "Sorry. I don't have my glasses on, and you're kind of fuzzy."

"Well, how did you recognize me then?" She rested her hands on her hips, marveling at the absurdity of the entire situation. This was all just...strange.

“Your hair. It’s still pretty distinct you know.”

“Oh.” She ran a hand over her long, auburn-colored waves. Growing up she’d hated it. It had been brighter as a child and wild. Thank goodness for expensive hair products. They always seemed to do the trick in taming it.

“Yeah.” Now he appeared embarrassed. Which she thought was kind of strange. “Like I said, you take the master bedroom, I’ll take the other room and we’ll figure out what we’re going to do in the morning.”

“But you were already sleeping in the master bedroom,” she pointed out, feeling a little bit like a jerk. She didn’t want to kick him out of bed.

She already had though, hadn’t she? It was as if he wasn’t even conscious of the fact that he stood in front of her with just his underwear on. Giving her a delectable view of everything he had to offer. Like the wide shoulders, broad chest and flat stomach...narrow hips and muscular thighs and...well, not quite everything. Her imagination could certainly run wild though. And it was. It was coming up with all sorts of vivid scenarios.

“I don’t mind.” He smiled, and her breath caught in her throat. Oh man, he was handsome. His eyes were a twinkling light blue, and he had a kind face, a dazzling smile and a body that appeared carved from granite. “Come on. I’ll grab your bag for you.”

He went past her, his arm nudging against hers. The contact of his hot and hard flesh made her shiver, and she watched as he bent over and picked up her overnight bag. Her gaze zeroed in on his ass, and her brows rose.

Niiiiice. She wondered what he might do if she touched it. Slapped it. Cupped it.

As if.

Julie followed him back to the bedroom, and he flicked on the overhead light. The bed was a mess, the sheets and comforter haphazardly thrown to the side. He placed her bag on a chair that sat in the corner of the room, offering her a sheepish smile as he reached for his T-shirt slung on the arm of said chair and slipped it on.

Just like that, no more view of his rock hard abs and glorious pecs. Such a shame too.

“Sorry for the mess. And uh, the sheets are clean. Well, they were clean. I was only asleep for maybe an hour, maybe two.”

“It’s okay.” She paused, studied him carefully. Found that he watched her just as carefully, maybe even more so. “I’m sorry for putting you out. It’s just, I opened the door and there you were and I thought the place would be empty. It kind of freaked me out.”

“Hey, I understand. No worries.” He ran a hand through his hair again, as if it was some sort of nervous habit. “Well, I’ll see you in the morning.”

“See you in the morning,” she murmured as she watched him walk out of the room. He closed the door behind him with a quiet click.

Sighing, she grabbed her bag and threw it on the bed, unzipped the top and peered inside. Caught sight of her bright pink vibrator nestled discreetly in an inside side pocket. She'd thrown it in on a whim, had planned on using it as a sort of relaxing aide, but now with Mister Surprisingly Hot and Studly in the room next door, she wasn't so sure. Were the walls thin? She could be quiet but would he hear the distinct buzzing if she turned it on?

Using it right now certainly had its appeal. Her mind was going a mile a minute, especially at the surprising development of a guest for the weekend. Normally she would've been mad. No, not mad more like a little frustrated. Feeling intruded upon.

But now...now she was intrigued. Curious as to what made Tyler Nichols tick. Did he have a girlfriend? What did he do for a living? How'd he get so dang buff? Lickable abs and a squeezable butt, pretty blue eyes and a wide, smiling mouth...

Oh yeah, she wanted to use Mister Pinky tonight. Her fantasies were running rampant, fueled by new blood. It was late, he'd probably already fallen asleep. He wouldn't hear a thing.

Yanking her short nightgown out of her bag, she changed quickly, forgoing panties. She grabbed the vibrator and turned off the light, slipping beneath the covers. She'd forgotten to shut the curtains and decided the hell with it. It was kind of pleasant to have the light of the moon fill the room. It added to the mood as did Tyler's scent, which lingered on the soft pillow.

Julie breathed deeply, inhaling his essence. Woodsy and masculine, she recalled how he looked asleep in bed. Large and virile, the sheet draped about his hips as he lay on his side, bare, tanned skin exposed.

Her nipples hardened, and her legs became restless. Wow, it really had been a long time if she could become aroused by an old friend. An old friend who'd never really mattered to her much in the first place. Oh, she'd thought Tyler was nice and polite and all that jazz, but she never really gave him much credit. He'd always been quiet, shy, and dang skinny and awkward. When all the kids would hang out together he'd take off on his bike or go hang out by the lake. Alone.

Now she found him quite mysterious. And sexy. Just imagining those twinkling eyes and his smiling face was enough to make her pussy wet, and she touched herself, her already swollen clit sensitive. Turning the top, she brought the vibrator down to tease in between her legs, on its lowest setting.

She'd work up to the good stuff in a minute. First she wanted to relax and just enjoy the sensation.

With Tyler Nichols fueling her imagination.

Tyler still couldn't believe his luck. The girl of his teenage fantasies, the one he'd always wondered about still after all these years, was in the very next room. Lying in the very bed he'd occupied only moments before.

The one and only Julie Lancaster. Once he realized who she was, he realized she looked pretty damn amazing in black pants and a white button-down shirt, distinct dark red hair curling in wild abandon all about her face. Even without his glasses on he knew it was her, just by the color of her hair.

Her mother had mentioned in a mass email that she planned on sending Julie to the cabin soon, that she worked herself to death and she needed to relax. But he hadn't expected her to show up this particular weekend. He seriously thought he had the place all to himself.

If he could, he'd do whatever it took to keep her here for the entire weekend. So they could get to know each other again. Not that they ever really knew each other in the first place.

He rolled over on his side, gave his pillow a satisfying punch. He'd been such a nerd back then. Shy, reluctant to hang around the other kids for fear of making an ass of himself. He hadn't known how to behave around girls, that was for sure. Only when he was a senior in high school did he finally get it and grew balls big enough to ask them out. But by then he wasn't going to the cabin with his parents. And neither was Julie. When you're a teen, who wanted to hang out with their parents?

Well, he wasn't an awkward teenager anymore. He was a grown man with plenty of women under his belt. A respectable job—hell he owned a successful business that earned him a lot of money, and he had a nice house in Reno.

But he was lonely. He could admit it. His last steady relationship ended almost a year ago. He'd been busy at work. He hadn't met anyone new in a long time.

That's why this unexpected reunion with Julie upped his interest.

A sound drew his attention and he sat up, holding his breath. A low humming noise came from the other room. It almost sounded like a...

Vibrator?

No way.

He slid out of bed and approached the wall that separated their rooms, his head cocked. Yep, he heard it. A low, steady hum, the very distinct sound of a vibrator, which meant Julie was lying in bed getting off at this very moment.

His cock jerked, and he rested a hand over the front of his boxer briefs. *Down boy.* He couldn't freaking believe it. The thought of her possibly naked in the very bed he'd been sleeping in only minutes before, bringing herself to orgasm with a vibrator...holy shit.

His cock jerked again, lengthening and hardening. He swore he heard a low moan, and he stifled one of his own, slipping his hand beneath his underwear. Fisting his cock, he stroked himself, took another step closer so he was practically plastered to the wall.

Another soft, whispery moan, as if she was trying to be quiet. Damn, the walls were thin. He'd never realized just how much. The vibrator's buzzing kicked up a notch, and he realized she'd turned up the setting. Did that mean she was close? Most likely. He'd used a vibrator on a woman more than a few times.

He wasn't afraid of allowing a few sex toys into the bedroom. They could be fun, enhancing the experience when needed.

Drops of pre-come leaked from the slit at the tip of his cock, and he smeared it all over with his thumb, lubing himself. More soft moans from the other room fueled his thoughts, and he increased the speed of his strokes. He was going to come and quickly if he didn't watch it but he didn't care. He was too turned on to care.

"Yessss." He swore he heard her whisper, and he swallowed hard, pushing his underwear down so they rested around his thighs. His cock sprang free, his fingers wrapped tight around the length, and he continued to stroke himself. Images of Julie floated through his mind, sprawled and naked across the bed, the vibrator between her legs, her free hand touching her breasts. They appeared decent in size when he'd seen her earlier, or what he could make out considering he was half-blind without his glasses. She was pretty damn curvy from what he could tell, and he didn't remember her being quite as curvy when they were younger.

But everyone filled out eventually. He was living proof of that.

God, if anyone walked into his room at this very moment he'd look like an utter ass. Leaning against a wall, fingers wrapped tight around his dick, underwear falling almost to his knees. He didn't care. Encouraged by the increasingly louder moans he heard from the other side of the wall, he quickened his pace, knew that he was close to blowing.

And then he heard it. A low, keening wail, panting, frantic whimpers indicating she had indeed just come. What a sound. The sweetest sound he'd ever heard. Oh yeah, and if he didn't watch it soon he was gonna come himself...

Grunting, he felt the first splash of come on his fingers, and he held himself stiff, moaning as quietly as he could as his entire body jerked with his climax. Semen spilled all over his fingers, his body shuddered uncontrollably and when it was finally over he slid down the wall until his butt hit the carpet.

Tyler shook his head and leaned back, thumping it against the wall. Closing his eyes, he let go of his limp dick, wiped his hand on his underwear. Shit, he should go shower. At the very least clean himself up and put on a new pair of boxer briefs.

He really hoped she hadn't heard him. It was bad enough that he heard her.

It was going to be hard to face her in the morning. All he'd be able to think about was her. Naked. Writhing uncontrollably as she brought herself to orgasm with a vibrator.

He liked a woman who took control. He always had. Now he had even more reason to like her.

This weekend was going to be absolute torture.

Chapter Two

Julie stepped out of the connecting bathroom and went to her overnight bag, plucking out a pair of panties. Deciding she should unpack the entire bag into the awaiting empty dresser, she slipped on her underwear and went to work. Within minutes, she had everything put away, a few shirts hanging in the closet and her makeup bag resting on top of the mirrored dresser.

Admiring her handy work while still clad in just her panties, she slipped on a bra and then grabbed a T-shirt and a pair of shorts. She was going to take a walk around the lake this morning. Must've been the solid night's sleep or the fresh mountain air, but she felt downright invigorated. First, though, she needed a cup of coffee.

She could already smell it brewing, and she breathed deep, savoring the rich fragrant scent. Thank goodness for Tyler. There was nothing better than a man who prepared coffee in the morning.

Julie stopped short, silently chastising herself. If she had any brains at all she'd tell him to hightail it out of there. This weekend was supposed to be for her. Just her. She didn't need a man to muck it up. Despite the fact that said man was super handsome and an old acquaintance, the son of her parents' dearest friends which meant he was someone she could trust. Oh, and then there was the fact that while she fooled around with Mister Pinky last night it wasn't some hot hunky actor she fantasized about as usual, it was Tyler Nichols. In his underwear. In her mind, she'd curled her fingers around the waistband of his navy blue boxer briefs and slowly pulled them off, leaving him standing there in his full naked glory.

Oh, and it had been most pleasant in her fantasy. Would the real thing measure up?

As if I'm ever going to find out.

Rolling her eyes at herself, she tugged her still damp hair up into a ponytail and wound a band around it then deemed herself ready to face him. Emerging from the bedroom, she followed the wonderful scent of coffee and—oh my God was that bacon?—until she arrived in the kitchen. Found Tyler standing in front of the stove, frying up the crispiest bacon she'd ever seen.

Her mouth watered. Both at the sight of the handsome man in his T-shirt and low-hanging shorts and the sizzling bacon he prepared. He wore his glasses, and she found them mind-blowingly attractive. In that Clark-Kent-I-want-to-rip-them-off-your-face-and-reveal-Superman-sort-of-way.

"Good morning." His deep, velvety voice wrapped around her, making her tingle. "You want some breakfast? Coffee?"

"I'm not usually a big breakfast eater..." That was an understatement. She usually didn't have time to eat breakfast. Slug back a few cups of coffee and deal with a rumbling stomach until lunch. And normally it was a late lunch where she shoved a sandwich down her throat at her desk in about twenty minutes time. "But that bacon looks delicious."

He smiled at her, and her heart fluttered. "It melts in your mouth. What about some coffee? I have creamer too."

"You think of everything," she marveled as she went to the coffee maker. An empty cup sat in wait for her, and she poured the coffee, then added a few drops of vanilla creamer to lightly sweeten it.

"Like I said last night, I come here a lot during the summer so I like to keep stuff stashed here. We all do. It just makes the visits easier." He pushed the bacon around with a spatula, shot a quick glance in her direction. "You don't mind me being here do you? I can bail if you want after I finish breakfast. I don't want to intrude. I mean, for all I know you might've invited someone else up here to spend the weekend with..."

Was he fishing for information? It sounded like he was fishing. And she really didn't mind. "No, this was a weekend just for me. All by my little lonesome."

He was silent for a moment before he finally spoke. "Right. So I should leave. I really don't want to interfere with your plans." He continued to push the bacon around with the spatula, then scooped it up and set it on a plate lined with a paper towel. "I'll clean up, don't worry and then I'll be out of here."

"No." She spoke before she even thought, catching herself unaware, catching him unaware. His head jerked toward her, eyes narrowed, mouth firmed into a straight line. So, so serious, his expression was, reminding her of when he was a teen. Always looking as if he carried the weight of the world on his shoulders.

Talk about needing to ease some tension. Maybe they could both scratch each other's itch.

Ack, her train of thought was downright shocking her this morning.

"You don't have to leave," she said finally after she found her voice. "You can stay. I don't have a problem with it. It'll be like old times. We can catch up, hang out, whatever. What do you think?"

He smiled, and its appearance softened his serious expression of just a moment ago. She much preferred the smiling, handsome Tyler to the serious one. "If it's like old times then I need to run off and pretend I didn't want to hang out with you."

"What do you mean, pretend?" Unable to help herself she went to the other side of the stove and snatched a piece of bacon from the plate, biting off half of it. Chewing, she closed her eyes, a little moan escaped her at the delicious salty, crunchy taste. When was the last time she had bacon? God, it was good.

A stifled strangled sound came from Tyler, and her lids snapped open. He was watching her, his expression now tortured. His cheeks turned a ruddy color, and he glanced away, seemingly embarrassed. "I never felt comfortable around you when we were kids."

She frowned, finished off the bacon. She could eat ten more pieces of it at least. If he continued to cook like this she was going to gain ten pounds in two days. “You didn’t? Why not?”

“No, I didn’t.” He shook his head, pushed his glasses up the bridge of his nose with his index finger. “I can’t believe I’m confessing this but I had a major crush on you.”

“You did?” The words whooshed out of her on a single breath, making her chest hurt and she gaped at him. He’d had a crush on her? No way.

“Yeah, I did.” He smiled ruefully, ran his hand along his stubble-covered jaw. The sight of it made him look even more rugged and sexy if that was possible. “I had a major thing for you. But you never noticed me.”

“I did too. I mean, it’s not like I purposely ignored you or whatever. I just thought you were super shy. I thought maybe you didn’t even like me. All of us. I mean, I know my younger brother and sister were a pain in the ass so that’s why I thought you always took off. Since you’re an only child and not used to dealing with rotten siblings.” She was rambling, she could tell, but he’d blown her away with his confession. She didn’t know how to take it. Did he still have a crush on her?

Because she was quickly developing a major crush on him.

Crap, I sound like I’m sixteen years old again.

“It had nothing to do with your brother and sister.”

“So it was all me.” That made her feel kind of lame. That she had driven him away and made him spend a huge chunk of his summer isolated and all by himself.

“No, it was all because of *me*. Because I didn’t know how to deal with the crush I had on you when I should’ve just told you. At the very least, I should’ve spent time with you and gotten to know you better.” He shrugged those impossibly wide shoulders. “Live and learn right?”

She watched as he resumed his breakfast preparations. Pulling out a clean pan, then grabbing a few eggs from the fridge. He cracked them with quiet precision into a small bowl he’d pulled from the cupboard, then scrambled them with a few quick flicks of his wrist and a fork.

“I had no clue you had a crush on me,” she said, her voice low, shock coursing through her at the thought. God, she really had been clueless as a teen.

“You were beautiful.” He turned away from the stove to face her, his intense gaze locked on her face. “You are beautiful. Even more than you were when we were younger.”

Her heart stuttered to a complete stop. She couldn’t believe he said something so...sweetly earnest. Her skin warmed at his words, the look in his eyes. “I—I don’t know what to say.”

Tyler turned back to his eggs. “You want some eggs with your bacon?”

Julie blinked, startled by his abrupt change of subject. Okay, so maybe he didn’t want to deal with the sexual tension that suddenly vibrated between them. She could deal with that. “Okay, sure,” she answered with a shrug.

She tried to help but he wouldn't let her, telling her he had it handled. So she went to the small dinette table with her coffee and waited, surprised when he served her. A plate of steaming hot scrambling eggs and crunchy bacon was set in front of her, and she dived right into it, surprisingly famished. She couldn't remember the last time she was hungry at such an early hour.

Hey what happened to her sleeping away half the morning? It was barely eight o'clock.

"Good?" he asked as he watched her from across the table. He had an even fuller plate of eggs and bacon.

She nodded, her mouth full. "Delicious," she murmured after she swallowed. "Hey, I'm going for a walk after breakfast around the lake. How about I clean up and you come with me?"

His dark brows rose. He appeared genuinely surprised at her invitation. "You want me to go with you?"

"Sure." Julie shrugged. "We can catch up, check out the lake. It's been years since I've been up here."

"Really? Don't you live in Sacramento?"

"How do you know that?" She set her fork onto the empty plate. She should be embarrassed at how quick she'd stuffed her face.

"Your mom. I talk to her, well we email, mostly about the schedule and stuff regarding the cabin. She's mentioned before that you lived in Sacramento."

"Well, the Sacramento area. I live in Folsom. How about you? Where are you at these days?" She stood and gathered the empty plates and silverware, taking everything to the sink.

"Reno. I went to college there and never left."

"Oh, so you're close too." She opened the dishwasher and started to rinse the dishes in the sink before she set them in. "You like Reno?"

"I do." He started putting away stuff in the fridge, tossing napkins and other trash into the stainless steel garbage can that rested against the wall.

"Do you, uh, have a girlfriend?" It was a completely innocent question. And she was dying of curiosity to know if he was attached or not. Some men found a sort of courage in laying on the compliments when involved with another.

She sincerely hoped Tyler wasn't one of those types of guys.

"No, no girlfriend. Been single for about a year," he answered, deceptively casual. There was a glint in his eye though. She caught sight of it even with the glasses on. "How about you?"

"No, no girlfriend." She smiled innocently and batted her eyelashes.

He laughed. "How about a boyfriend?"

"No, I don't have one of those either." She slowly shook her head. "I work too much to consider taking the time for a steady relationship."

"So I've heard," he murmured. He took a rinsed dish from her and set it in the dishwasher.

Damn, she could appreciate a man who helped with boring kitchen chores without complaint. “Where did you hear about me? Oh, that’s right. My mom, I’m guessing.”

Hmm, should she find it creepy he’d discussed her life with her mom? No, more like it was her mother mentioning quick stuff via email to everyone and that was it. Why she focused so much energy on her love life, Julie would never know. It didn’t help that her younger brother and sister were already married.

He sure had a good memory though. Maybe because he’d always been curious and somehow wanted to keep tabs on her? Because he just might possibly be interested? In her?

The idea intrigued her. Excited her more than she cared to admit.

The walk ended up being almost two hours, with them stopping at a dock and sitting on the edge, watching the majestic sailboats as they glided across the crystal blue lake. The sun shone down on them, warmed their skin, the gentle breeze cooling when it almost got too hot, and Tyler realized he couldn’t remember a time when he’d felt so at ease. So comfortable, so happy to just...be in the moment.

He sounded like he was spouting some sort of spiritual mumbo jumbo but, damn it, it was a fine morning. Maybe he’d been hanging out too long with those live-off-the-land types who claimed they communicated with the mountain. Plenty of them came into the sporting goods store he owned on a daily basis.

“I can’t believe we both own our own businesses,” Julie said with a slight shake of her head, as if she read his mind. “I never thought I would be so ambitious, I have to admit. I barely made it into college. But once I got there and decided to major in communications, everything just...clicked.”

“When it feels right, it just feels right,” he agreed. And boy did this feel right, sitting next to her, watching the sunlight glint off her vibrant hair. She’d taken the band out of it once they sat, and it spilled past her shoulders. It wasn’t just red, it was a myriad of colors. The base was a rich, brownish-auburn, with shimmers of deep red, light red, an almost orange color interwoven and golden strands threaded throughout. He wondered if it was natural. If it was soft to the touch.

He was dying to find out.

She sighed and tilted her face up toward the sun. He watched as her eyes slid closed behind her sunglasses, and her lips parted invitingly.

Damn, she looked sexy. The sun warmed her skin, making it appear golden and creamy. She shifted her long, bare legs, the already-short shorts riding up her thighs and giving him a glimpse of pure heaven. Images of those shapely thighs wrapped around his waist as he pounded his cock deep inside her flashed through his mind, and he shifted. Afraid she might catch sight of his sudden erection.

"I could sit out here all day," she murmured, her voice so soft it almost got carried away with the breeze. "I can't remember the last time I sat outside and just did...nothing. I don't even have my Blackberry on me."

"Is it normally attached permanently to your hand?" He could relate. He thought his iPhone was the greatest invention ever created.

"Oh, yeah." She laughed, then paused. A look of panic crossed her face. "Maybe I should go back and check it. People are always emailing me, texting me, whatever. Clients, employees, I've always told them I'm on call twenty-four/seven."

Julie started to get up but he grabbed her hand, stopping her. "Relax. They can wait for a few hours. Nothing could be that urgent, could it? Especially on a weekend."

Her fingers flexed within his grip and she slowly sat back down next to him. "You're right. I think I just urged myself right into a panic attack."

"Over nothing," he agreed. They still hadn't let go of each other's hand, and he gave hers a gentle squeeze. "Just enjoy the day. The lake is the fullest it's been in years, you know."

She nodded, wisps of fiery hair brushing against her face. "From all the rain and snow we had this winter, I'm sure."

"Exactly. Imagine how cold that water is." He leaned in close, his mouth hovering just by her ear. The delicate shell dotted by a single pearl earring tempted him. To kiss, to nibble, to lick. "What do you think you'd do if I pushed you in?"

Julie turned toward him, eyes wide with surprise. "You wouldn't dare."

With a chuckle, Tyler shook his head. "Nah, I wouldn't. I'm afraid of what you might do to me if I did."

She laughed as well and released his hand, nudging his shoulder with the tips of her fingers. "You'd probably like to see me come out of the water all wet like a drowned rat."

All wet...wrong choice of words on her part. He immediately thought of her T-shirt clinging to her like a second skin, hard nipples poking against the soaked fabric, goose bumps dotting her flesh as the water dripped down her body.

Yeah, his dick was really getting eager now.

"You'd be in a lot of trouble," she agreed, the laughter dying on her lips as her gaze zeroed in on his mouth.

He was leaning in closer, as if he wanted to kiss her. Which he did. The past years of longing, the more recent years of curiosity, all of them came crashing down upon him at this very moment, and he decided he didn't want to wait any longer.

Tentatively, he set his lips upon hers, not wanting to push for fear she might not react the way he hoped. But she didn't pull away. She scooted closer, her lips parting from his for the briefest moment

before she returned. Soft and plump, damp and clinging to his, she kissed him, her mouth opening for his more and more until he teased her with his tongue.

A little groan escaped her, and he slipped his arm around her shoulders, hauling her to him. They sat on the edge of the dock, their legs swinging over the ledge, lips locked and arms around each other. Just as he'd envisioned so long ago in his teenage dreams.

He wasn't one to be sentimental but this was getting to him. Their tongues touched, danced against each other and he slipped a hand into her hair to anchor her close. The strands were silky soft, clinging to his fingers and he stroked her, reveled in the softness. The beauty of her.

Julie broke the kiss first, her breath accelerated, her eyes bright with what he hoped was lust. "Wow," she whispered.

"Is that a good wow or a bad wow?" He lifted his eyebrows in question.

"Definitely good." She withdrew from his hold, her fingers going to her mouth where she tentatively brushed them against her lips. "I just...didn't expect that."

He didn't know how to answer her. Was she upset? She didn't appear upset. No, she looked...jarred. Thrown for a loop maybe, but that was quite possibly a good thing since he felt the same way.

"Maybe we should head back to the cabin," he said as he checked his watch. He couldn't endure the silence any longer. "It's almost lunch time. Are you hungry?"

"Oh, yeah." She nodded, her gaze meeting his. "I suddenly find myself extremely hungry."

"Me, too," he agreed, not talking about food. And he doubted she was either.

Chapter Three

They practically ran back to the cabin, they didn't even bother to hide their eagerness, which Julie found extremely refreshing. The men she'd gone out with recently put on such airs. As if they were in complete control, had all the time in the world and didn't let pesky things such as emotion ever ruffle them.

She found it pathetically boring. What happened to the men who claimed what they wanted? Who didn't act as if they were too cool for everyone in the room? A bunch of pretentious bastards, that's all she'd been dealing with lately.

That's why Tyler Nichols was such a breath of fresh air.

The intensity in his gaze just after they kissed took her breath away. He looked like he wanted to devour her. And she'd been perfectly willing to lay herself out on that old dock full of splinters and offer herself up to him.

Luckily enough common sense overrode instant lust and he'd suggested going back to the cabin. Smart man. She had no idea she could move so fast. The cabin loomed ahead, quaint and welcoming, shrouded in shadow by the towering pines, and she wondered what he might do if she attacked him once the door slammed closed.

Or maybe he would attack her?

She smiled. Either option sounded perfect.

He bounded up the stairs of the front porch, taking two at a time, and she followed him. Watched as he pulled the key out of his shorts pocket and unlocked the door with the eagerness of a teenage boy just about to let a girl into his house for the first time.

She could relate. Everything about this felt young and innocent and fun. Oh yes, and also lusty and sexy and carnal. When was the last time she actually had sex with a man? A few months at least. Mister Pinky definitely didn't count. She'd had a pretty sweet little orgasm last night but nothing like what a real man could bring her. Not when he'd put his hands and fingers and mouth and tongue to good use. Oh yes, and also his cock...

Tyler held the door open for her and she slipped inside, nerves making her shaky. She rubbed her suddenly sweaty palms on the front of her shorts, flicked her hair behind her shoulders. Desperately wanting to look normal when she felt anything but.

He closed the door and flicked the lock. Slowly turned so that he faced her. The look of raw hunger on his handsome face stole her breath, and she braced herself as he approached her.

"I fantasized about this so many times when we were kids," he murmured as he slipped an arm around her waist and hauled her close.

She pressed her hands against the broad expanse of his chest, impressed with the hard muscle she encountered beneath her fingertips. "Really?"

"Oh, yeah." He kissed her, a hungry, quick melding of lips and tongue and then he pulled away. "Specific fantasies about me and you in this cabin, I might add."

"I think that's hot," she whispered, meaning every word. That they could act out all of his fantasies, right here and right now. She'd never been the object of a man's fantasy before. At least, not that she knew of.

She found it incredibly exciting.

"I think you're hot," he confessed just before he kissed her again. An even more intense kiss this time, his tongue and mouth were doing mysteriously wonderful things to her head, her body. She felt as if she was melting, and she clung to his shoulders, anchoring herself to him so she wouldn't fall to the floor in a heap of lust.

"Maybe..." she could barely get the words out what with the way he kept nibbling on her neck, licking and kissing and sucking the sensitive flesh. "Maybe we should take this to the bedroom."

"Good idea." He lifted his head, his eyes blazing with lust-filled intensity behind the glasses. Withdrawing from her, he took her hand and led her down the hall, swinging her into the room.

She went to the bed, not about to put up any sort of pretense. She wanted him, simple as that. And she wasn't going to deny herself for fear of what he might be thinking or whatever. Not like she didn't know he wanted her.

It was pretty obvious by the way he tore his T-shirt off with one simple grab at the back of his neck. Or how he kicked off his shoes, shucked his underwear and shorts with one quick tug, leaving him gloriously naked. She stood paralyzed by the end of the bed, her mouth hanging open as she drank him in.

Finely formed muscle and sinew, broad shoulders and chest, a light dusting of hair at the center, her gaze wandered down his flat stomach. Trim hips, thick thighs and a mouthwateringly perfect erect cock thrusting toward her.

He approached her in a rush, didn't even give her a chance to say a word. His hands were everywhere, tugging at the hem of her T-shirt, pulling at the waistband of her shorts. His mouth fused to hers, a little groan escaped him when his hands encountered bare flesh. They crept up her back to fiddle with the snaps of her bra and deftly undid them.

For all his talk and her memories of him being a nerd in the past, Tyler certainly knew his way around a woman's clothing, that was for sure.

“I’m rushing you, I know,” he said once he had her completely naked. He gave a gentle push at her shoulders with the tips of his fingers, and she fell to the mattress, a little smile on her face. “But I don’t want to wait. I need to be inside you.”

And she wanted him inside her. He went to the bedside table and pulled the top drawer all the way out, delving deep until he pulled out a small box of condoms. A secret stash, she was sure. He yanked a foil packet out and tore into it, sheathing his huge erection with intense urgency.

He collapsed on top of her, careful to not press his full weight upon her, and she found that endearingly considerate. Their mouths met again, locking into a dreamy, delicious kiss and she wondered if she would ever get tired of kissing him. Especially when he cupped her cheek with his broad palm, his fingers tangling in her hair. It was...sweet.

And sexy and hot.

His thick cock probed between her legs, and she spread wider, ready for him to slide inside. Despite his proclamation of wanting to rush her he moved down her body, leaving a burning path of kisses along her neck, the top of her chest, her breasts. He licked one nipple, bathing it with his tongue and she gasped with pleasure. When he drew her nipple deep into his mouth and sucked, she very nearly lifted off the bed.

Sliding her hands into his thick dark hair, she anchored him there, arching her body into his mouth, wanting more. He diverted his attention to her neglected nipple, offering it the same generous treatment and her belly clenched in anticipation. Already her orgasm came near, all from his overt attention to her breasts.

She’d never experienced anything like it before. The emotions that swirled within her as she watched him make love to her body were overwhelming. She was with Tyler Nichols—and they were actually naked. In bed together and about to have sex.

It was almost too momentous for her to wrap her head around.

He slid further down, his lips blazing a path of heat that lit her skin from within. She shivered when he nibbled along the inside of her thigh. Whimpered when he laved at the spot with his tongue as if to soothe it. She squeezed her eyes closed, almost embarrassed at what he was about to do.

Yeah, she owned her sexuality and all that, but this was Tyler Nichols and he was about to go down on her. Her last boyfriend hated doing it. Always thought it was too messy.

The miserable, selfish prick.

Tyler’s hair drifted across the inside of her thigh, soft and thrilling. She shivered, drew in a sharp breath when she felt his big hands spread her legs wider. His breath drifted across her pussy and a fresh gush of juices trickled.

She was so wet. And she wanted him so badly.

His lips grazed the very heart of her, light and fleeting. Her hips lifted as if she had no control of them, seeking his mouth. Oh God, hopefully his tongue. He nuzzled her there, breathed deep as if inhaling her, and her eyes flew open.

There was no need for her to act like a shy, untried girl. She was a woman. A more than capable woman who owned her sexuality and damn it, she needed to act like it.

His lids lifted. His intense gaze met hers, her lips parted but no sound came out. Not until his tongue flicked out and he licked her did she release a shuddering breath. A low moan followed quickly when he spread her lower lips with his fingers and sucked on her clit.

God. Her lids snapped shut, and she swore she saw stars. What a talented tongue he had. And lips. Oh yes, and fingers because they were definitely joining the party. First one, then two fingers slid deep within her, thrusting in and out and she moved against him. Seeking her orgasm as it hovered there, just barely out of reach. And he teased, drove her higher only to leave her panting, as if he wanted to drive her out of her mind.

It was working.

Her hips lifted, her entire body stiffened when Tyler paid close attention to her clit. And then he was gone. Moving back up her body, a wicked smile curving his lips when their gazes met again.

She wanted to smack him. She wanted to haul him close and demand he give her an orgasm. She just wanted him.

He adjusted himself, hovering just above her, his kind eyes gazing down upon her. She smiled up at him, arching against him when she felt his cock nudge her and then he was pushing just the tip into her body, teasing her.

“More,” she urged in a husky whisper, surprising herself. She was a take-charge sort of woman in her everyday life but when it came to being between the sheets, she usually deferred to the man.

He grinned, looking quite pleased with himself. “As you wish,” he said with a hint of arrogance as he slid a little deeper. Feeding himself to her inch by excruciatingly delicious inch.

God he was big. And thick. It was as if his cock touched every one of the sensitive spots within her body, even spots she didn’t know existed. Her skin tightened and tingled, and she wrapped her legs around his waist, her heels pressing into his firm ass, sending him deeper.

Just what she wanted.

Slowly, as if he had all the time in the world, he began to move. Pulling out, pushing back in, back and forth, keeping a steady, even rhythm, not rushing it.

Damn it, she wanted to rush it. She wanted to feel him pound inside her, hear the slap of their sweaty skin. Just the thought of it had her pussy growing wetter and she reached out, curled her hands around his shoulders. “Faster,” she said.

He increased his pace, his hips nudging against hers, his cock touching her deep. But she wanted more. “Harder.”

“You feel good,” he whispered. “So tight. So hot.”

His words melted her. Their gazes met, held and she slid her hands down his back to curve about his tight ass. The flex of his muscles beneath her palms thrilled her and she pressed, sending him deeper.

With a grunt he let his control slip a little as he slammed into her. She clung to him, losing herself to the delicious sensation of his cock gliding in and out of her body. She could hear the juicy sounds of her pussy as he moved within her and it turned her inside out, drove her crazy with wanting to come.

"I'm close," he suddenly muttered. His movements were frantic, completely out of control as he rammed deep. He reached between them, his index finger nimbly playing with her swollen clit. Circling and teasing, flicking the sensitive little bud of flesh, and she held her breath, prepared for the intensity that swelled, threatening to take over her body.

And just like that she shattered. The endless waves of her climax rolled over her again and again as she stiffened for the briefest moment before she became consumed with endless shudders beneath his thrusting body.

Tyler followed behind her, coming with a ferocious growl as he held himself still above her. His throbbing cock jerked within her clenching pussy, and she wondered idly if she'd ever come at the same time with another man.

She didn't think she had. Hell, she hadn't believed it even possible.

Funny how Tyler was showing her—and so quickly—that many things were possible.

Tyler pulled Julie into his arms, loving the way her body seemingly melted into his. Her breathing was still erratic from the after affects of her orgasm and that had been long minutes ago. He'd already gotten out of bed and disposed of the condom. Yet his body still trembled as well.

It had been pretty powerful, coming together with her. He felt more connected to her at this very moment than he'd ever felt with his previous girlfriend, and they'd gone out for almost a year.

A rather momentous—and if he thought about it too much, a very scary—thought.

"Hmm, I could go for a nap." She snuggled closer, her head tucked just under his chin, her hair brushing against his face. He pushed the wayward strands away from his mouth, allowing his fingers to tangle in the vibrant strands, stroking her much as if she were a cat.

Apt thought since she tilted her head back and practically purred, much like the cats he remembered having around the house when he was growing up. He gazed down at her, caught the contented smile curling her lips, her eyes closed in blissful rapture. An expression he found particularly arousing if his twitching cock had anything to say about it.

"That feels so good," she whispered as he continued to stroke.

His cock leapt to attention. "Does it?"

"Mmm, hmm." She stretched against him, leaning in and planting a lingering kiss in the center of his chest. "Don't stop."

“How about we take a shower?” Just the thought of her naked and wet, the water blasting all over her sleek body as he lathered bubbly soap over her sent his cock straight to throbbing.

“Sleep first.” She nudged closer if that was possible, her face smashed against his chest. He could feel the soft, warm drifts of her breaths against his skin. “Then shower. Then you must feed me.”

He chuckled. “I must feed you? Didn’t I do that this morning?”

“Yes and you did such a good job I think it shall be your permanent job of the weekend. Feeding me.” Tyler could actually hear the smile in her voice, she sounded so pleased with herself.

He immediately frowned. Her mentioning the word weekend brought everything to a crashing reality. This was just for a weekend, what they were indulging in. She probably didn’t want anything more. She’d pretty much made that clear on their walk around the lake. When she spoke of the endless hours she put in at her business, how much time it took up yet she didn’t mind, she told him. It was her business and thus her ass on the line. She wasn’t about to let it sink because of personal matters.

In other words, she didn’t have time for a relationship at all. She didn’t have much of a social life outside of networking with potential and current clients, and she liked it that way.

He owned his own business, had done so for years but he also had no problem separating it from his personal life. He hired competent managers who knew how to handle problems and run his store efficiently when he wasn’t there. He was a big believer in relaxing and taking time for himself. All work and no play definitely made Tyler a dull boy.

And he’d vowed long ago he’d never be considered dull ever again.

Julie’s breathing deepened, indicating that she’d already fallen asleep. Not that he could blame her. After the vigorous walk around the lake and the even more vigorous bout of amazing sex she had to be exhausted. He knew he was.

But he wanted to savor this moment, lying in bed with Julie in his arms. Her soft, supple body wrapped tight around his. He detached his hand from her abundant hair and touched her shoulder, his fingers sliding down her lean arm. He felt like a sentimental fool but damn it felt good, touching her. Smelling her. Holding her close. There was a sort of connection he had with her that was stronger than anything he’d experienced with another woman. Something he wanted to explore further.

The thought would normally scare the hell out of him. But not when it was with Julie. He didn’t want this connection to end come Monday. He wanted to see where this might go. If they had potential—real potential. He believed they did.

Now it might take some convincing for Julie to agree.

Tyler was more than up for the challenge.

Chapter Four

Julie stretched her arms above her head, her legs straight out in front of her before she relaxed fully in the overstuffed wicker chair she sat on. She was out on the redwood deck, staring at the beautiful lake as the twilight skies settled in. Deepening shades of blue streaked with pinks and oranges filled the sky, casting a lovely glow upon the calm lake. She could hear Tyler moving about within the cabin, and she wished he'd come back out soon.

She was eager to see him. Watch him. Talk to him.

Their first sexual encounter she'd been the aggressor but something had happened to him once they'd woken up from their nap. He'd practically pushed her into the bathroom and turned the water on, dragging her into the shower along with him. He'd given her a scorching kiss that seemed to last for hours, so intensely hot it weakened her knees. Then he'd soaped her up, her body sudsy and slick before she returned the favor. Their hands and mouths wandered everywhere until he'd finally hauled her up by the waist against the cold, hard tile wall and fucked her right there. With the secret condom he'd slipped into the shower as if that had been his plan all along.

Which it probably had and she couldn't fault him for that. She liked a man who had a specific plan of action. Especially when it involved her.

They'd slept so long it had been late afternoon when they woke up. Then they'd spent so much time in the shower they'd come out of it with their skin shriveled up like little old people. He'd taken her out to dinner, to one of the local restaurants that was a complete tourist trap but charming. It was filled to the brim with locals and out-of-towners, and they ate at the bar.

She'd had the best time. Talking and laughing, sharing all sorts of silly stories, it had been so easy to be with Tyler. To open up and be real and not feel the need to put on some sort of front and pretend she was someone else. It was hard to admit but that's exactly how she'd behaved with previous dates, even with a few boyfriends. She'd never been one to open up.

With Tyler, it was as if she couldn't help herself. As if she couldn't stop. When she thought about it too much, it actually kind of scared her.

So she decided not to worry at all. Just push her fears to the back of her mind. She'd worry about it later. Like on Sunday afternoon when she had to pack up all her stuff and head back home.

Alone.

Julie shuddered. That thought alone stopped her heart.

“Cold?”

She about jumped out of her skin when she heard his low, velvety voice behind her. Glancing over her shoulder, she curled her arms around herself and rubbed her hands along them as she watched him walk. “A little bit.”

“It gets pretty warm during the day but just as cool once the sun goes down.” He settled his long, lean body in the chair next to hers. “I come here not just for the beauty and the quiet but also just to escape the heat.”

“I totally understand,” she said with a nod, taking the glass of white wine he offered. “It gets so hot during the summer. Well, you know. You grew up in Sacramento too. But you don’t go there anymore do you?”

“Nah, my parents moved a few years ago. They live in Colorado now, and they don’t come this way too much. I usually go and visit them if I want to see them. Most of the time for Christmas, sometimes Thanksgiving.”

“And they didn’t give up this cabin? What with moving and all, I’m surprised they didn’t sell their share of it.”

“I wouldn’t let them.” He shook his head with a slight smile, took a sip from his glass of wine. “I’m going to buy them out and soon. I’m having the papers drawn up right now.”

“Looking for a deal?” she teased as she drank from her glass. The wine was sweet yet sharp, sparking her tongue before she swallowed. It was delicious, smooth. Yet again the man dazzled her, he even had good taste in wine.

Was he perfect or what?

No one is perfect, least of all a man I happen to be interested in.

“I’m going to offer them a fair market price,” he said with a knowing grin. “I’m not about to take advantage of a couple of old folks, especially when those old folks are my parents.”

She laughed and shook her head. “I always liked your parents.”

“And they liked you. They liked all of the Lancasters.”

“What did you think of the Lancasters?” she couldn’t help but ask.

“You know what I think about you. The crush I had on you.” He set his wineglass on the small wicker and glass-top table between them. “But I also gotta admit, I was...jealous.”

Her brows drew together. “Jealous? Of us? But why?” She remembered a lot of fighting between her and her younger brother and sister and a lot of yelling coming from her parents. She could certainly reflect now and realize what a bunch of pain in the asses they were. Talk about making a vacation miserable.

“I always wanted brothers and sisters and I never had any. My parents are pretty calm and quiet and rather intellectual. I love them more than anything, but their idea of fun when I was a kid was turning off the TV and spending the evening reading great works of non-fiction. Out loud to each other.” He grimaced.

She laughed at the way he said the last sentence but the laughter died on her lips when she realized just how serious he was. “My house was always really loud. The very last thing my mom wanted to hear was us reading out loud to each other. It would just turn into a yelling competition or something equally stupid.”

“Ha, I bet. I always liked how the cabin got really loud when your family showed up. I would wonder how my parents became such good friends with your parents. I still wonder. They were complete opposites in practically every way.”

“Sometimes opposites work,” she said quietly, thinking about the two of them. They were pretty opposite in their behaviors, their work ethics, the way they did things. And yet it felt as if the two of them just...worked.

Oh, jeez you’re being ridiculous. You’re taking this way too seriously and most likely he’s just looking for a fun, weekend reunion fling.

And you’re giving it to him, supposedly with no strings attached.

“Yeah, I loved spending time around your family. Your parents, your brother and sister, and you.” He studied her, his eyes glowing, intense behind the frames of his glasses. Glasses she suddenly wanted to rip from his face so she could grab his cheeks and steal a long, delicious kiss. “I so much wanted to be a part of that.”

“We’re still really loud.” Her brother had gotten married and already had one child, a rambunctious little two-year-old boy. Her sister had a boyfriend who played in a band, which meant he always had a guitar slung over his shoulder. Which also meant he was always playing his original songs whenever and wherever he could.

It was so damn loud at her parents’ house when everyone came over to visit that she could hardly think. Half of the reason she hadn’t been over there much lately. Well, that and she’d been consumed by work. She honestly couldn’t remember the last time she went for the traditional Sunday family dinner get-together.

No wonder her mother gave her so much grief.

“I bet you are,” he said with a fond smile. “I’m sure it’s a lot of fun.”

“Most of the time everyone drives me crazy. I don’t really see them that much.” She grew somber as she stared into the distance. She heard the faint murmurings of their neighbors next door who were having a small get-together. Music sounded in the distance, most likely coming from the very popular tavern that was just down the lake. Sound carried easily here at night, she’d learned long ago. She and her sister had giggled long into the night once when they’d heard a passionate outdoors-in-the-woods-encounter carry on along the breeze.

“But you don’t live that far from them, right? I mean, I know you said you’re in Folsom but...”

"Yeah, they aren't that far. And my sister and brother never really left the area either. It's just... I don't know." She shrugged, suddenly feeling kind of crappy. She wasn't the best daughter or sister in the world. And she definitely wasn't the best sort of girlfriend either. Her lack of recent boyfriends and hell, recent dates proved that. "I'm just always busy."

"You're too busy," he murmured.

God, hadn't she heard that one enough already? Surprisingly, it didn't upset her when it came from Tyler.

"I am way too busy," she agreed, knowing she just surprised him. "Maybe you should teach me how to relax more. I need to learn how to slow down and enjoy life."

"I could teach you," he agreed as he reached out his hand. She took it, watching with rapt attention as their fingers linked and intertwined so easily. Just like that. "Come here."

Without a word she went to him, secretly thrilling at his quiet command. She stood at the edge of his chair, their hands still linked. He stared up at her, the moonlight glinting on the edge of his glasses and he tugged the slightest bit. "Sit on my lap."

Her skin tingled as she settled herself upon him, straddling him as she rested on her knees, her thighs on either side of his hips. She could feel his thick erection through his khaki shorts already, and it thrilled her. That he could react so quickly because of her. Because of how she made him feel.

It was a powerful, heady thing, the reaction he had toward her.

"Have you enjoyed today?" he asked as he slipped his arms around her waist, pulling her so she hovered above him, her breasts practically in his face.

"Oh, yes." She couldn't deny that. If she'd been by herself at the cabin, she might've been climbing the walls by now. She certainly would've been sitting out on this deck with her laptop checking email that was for sure. Drawing up business plans, reviewing clients' needs, or maybe even just some mindless surfing. She was rarely away from her laptop at night and if the TV was on, it was mostly for background noise.

Since she'd arrived last night, she hadn't even turned her laptop on. The TV sat dark. She'd checked her Blackberry for messages twice. That was it.

It was downright liberating, living relatively tech-free.

"This is what I do every weekend, you know." Leaning in, he nuzzled his face against her cotton-covered breasts, a seemingly innocent gesture that made her nipples hard, her entire body sizzle with awareness. "Unless there's a special circumstance I take every single weekend off."

"Isn't your store open on the weekends?" She rested her hands on his shoulders, squeezing gently. God, he was hard. Firm. Big.

Big everywhere.

“My store is open seven days a week, but I know how to delegate. How to trust others, that they’ll run my business the way I want them to. You would benefit to do the same, you know.” He nuzzled again. She felt his hot breath fan against her breasts, even through the layers of her T-shirt and bra.

“I know. You’re right.” She sank her hands into the hair at the back of his head, tugging on the soft strands. He bit at the fabric of her shirt, his teeth scraping her flesh and she shuddered. “I should listen to you, take your advice. Because you’re so very, very wise.”

“I’m terribly wise.” He lifted his hips, his cock rubbing against her pussy, and she stifled a moan. “Take your shirt off, babe.”

She tugged it off at his gentle command and tossed it onto the chair she just vacated, revealing her pretty pale pink satin bra. His eyes widened in appreciation as they focused on her breasts. “Is getting naked part of my learning how to relax plan?”

“Hell, yes,” he practically growled. “I mean come on, don’t you feel pretty damn relaxed after a major orgasm?”

“I do have to admit they tend to relax me quite well,” she said with a giggle as he pressed his face between her breasts, his damp mouth like a blast of heat upon her skin. “I, uh, really like what you’re doing right now too.”

“I bet,” he mumbled against her skin. His hands went around to her back, his fingers nimbly undoing the clasp on her bra so it sprang free. She shrugged out of it, eager to bare her flesh to his seeking hands and mouth and tongue.

His hands came forward, palms cupping the sides of her breasts and bringing them close. An abundance of pale flesh with hard pink tips, he stared at them, his lips parted, his breathing accelerated. As if it aroused him to study her in such a close manner.

“Suck them,” she suddenly urged, her voice a harsh whisper. God, she didn’t think she could stand it, having him touch her yet not putting his mouth on her.

And she really enjoyed that mouth. It employed a rather high level of skill when it was drifting across her skin, licking and sucking her straight into oblivion.

Casting her a sly smile, he leaned in and breathed deep, his lids drifting closed as if he enjoyed inhaling her scent. He nuzzled her chest again, creating a scatter of goose bumps across her skin from the rasp of his stubble, the warmth of his breath. His lips were damp, a tease of sensation as they drifted along the valley between her breasts. Frustration filled her that he wouldn’t do her bidding. That he continued to tease and torment when all she wanted was instant gratification.

“Sshh,” he whispered as if he could feel her frustration building. She realized her body was tense, and she willed herself to relax. The grip of her fingers in his hair lessened, and she stroked his head, his hair drifting through her fingers. Her reward was a gentle lick along the underside of her left breast.

The agonized moan that escaped her sounded desperate even to her own ears.

"I love how responsive you are," he murmured against her skin, making her shiver. He licked again, up, up, coming close to her armpit before he veered off, his tongue running against her nipple for the briefest moment before it was gone. "Does this feel good? Are you relaxed now?"

"Yes and no," she said from between clenched teeth. She wasn't relaxed whatsoever. She was coiled tight, tense with anticipation and need and the bastard knew it. She could tell by the amusement lacing his deep voice.

"Relax, Jules." No one had called her Jules in years, not even her family anymore and that's where she'd gotten the nickname in the first place. "Enjoy this. I'm doing it all for you."

"You're driving me crazy," she admitted, a whimper slipping past her lips when he drew her nipple into his mouth and began sucking gently. The pull of his mouth worked a similar pull deep within her body. The sensation sizzled and pulsed in her veins, tingled along her flesh and when his teeth clamped down and bit, she about jumped out of her skin.

They'd been at this all day long. He'd been inside her three times, and they were going for moment number four. With her last relationship they'd had sex once a week, right on schedule, every Thursday night. All of the spontaneity taken out of it just to appease their heavy workloads so they could get a night of sex.

She'd just gained a month's worth of sex all in less than twenty-four hours.

The man might kill her if they were actually to become involved in a steady relationship.

Banishing the too-serious thought, she concentrated instead on the man who now sucked her other nipple, offering it the same attention as the first. Cool mountain air wafted across her skin and it made her damp-from-his-mouth nipple harden and chill to an almost painful sensation.

It was a good pain. A delicious pain and she tugged on his hair, pulled him away from her nipple. He let it go with an audible pop, gazing up at her as if she'd lost her mind for making him stop.

So handsome, his dark hair tousled from her hands, his pouty mouth damp from his attentions upon her flesh. Reaching up, she gently pulled his glasses from his face and set them on top of the table next to the chair. Meeting his gaze once more, she realized his eyes were the slightest bit unfocused, as if he couldn't quite make her out and she suddenly found him so sweet. Endearing.

Gorgeous. Sexy. Mouth-wateringly delicious. She had the sudden urge to taste him. To strip him of his clothing and run her mouth across his hard stomach and then lower. She wanted to tease at the sensitive flesh on the inside of each of his thighs, to run her tongue on the underside of his sac. To lick at the tip of his cock just before she drew him deep inside her mouth.

"Let's take this off." She grabbed the hem of his shirt, and he lifted his arms obediently, letting her tug the offending garment off. Then she went for the waistband of his khaki shorts, undoing the button, sliding down his zipper. Encountering warm, black cotton boxer briefs hiding a hard, long package just beneath.

She stroked him, just a gentle glide of her fingers down the firm length of him, and his cock jerked beneath her touch. She watched, fascinated with his body's reaction to her, the way his hips lifted subtly, asking for more. The tortured throaty groan as he leaned his head back against the edge of the chair.

Had she ever felt this sexy, this wanted, this needed?

Never.

She slipped off his lap, his hands grappling after her, as if he didn't want her to leave. A satisfied smile curled her lips, and she went down on her knees before him, saw the dawning light in his beautiful eyes. He wasn't about to protest, not with the gift she was about to offer him.

Wordlessly, she reached for his unbuttoned shorts and he lifted his hips, allowed her to take them off along with his boxer briefs. His cock sprang free as if relieved, long and thick as it rose from his body. She shucked his clothing, her gaze never straying from his erection and she admired it. She had to admit she'd never thought highly of the looks of a man's penis. Oh, they had their uses and were quite enjoyable but really to want to sit and study it? Appreciate its masculine beauty and actually anticipate having it in her mouth?

Nope, she couldn't ever admit to thinking like that. Not until now.

She reached for him, her fingers curled loosely about the base and his cock pulsed beneath her touch. Hot, velvety hardness lined with prominent veins, she traced them with her index finger, fascinated. He was built for her pleasure as well as his own. She circled the flared head of his cock, traced the underside, which earned a jerk of his hips. A pearl of creamy liquid formed at the very tip, and she leaned in. Her tongue snuck out and tasted, his salty essence dissolving slowly and she savored it.

Such an intimate act, taking this man's cock into her mouth. Tucking her hair behind her ears, she pursed her lips, leaving a sloppy wet kiss on the very tip. She heard his chuckle, just the reaction she was looking for and she relaxed her lips. Allowed them to slide over the bulbous head, tasting more of his pre-come.

"God, yeah." The two words were ripped from deep inside his throat, urging her on. She opened her mouth fully and drew him in, her lips offering the slightest pressure as she slowly slid down upon him. Until he was halfway in her mouth, the very fleshy life of him throbbing between her lips.

Julie had never liked taking a man so deep inside her mouth, but she did it for Tyler. Because she wanted to. Because she needed to. She needed to give him as much pleasure as she could. She wanted to make him happy. She wanted him to pass out in blissful ignorance when she was done with him. She wanted him to come down her throat shouting her name as she drank the very essence of him.

Yes, she wanted that. She wanted all of that. The image urged her on, and she took him deeper, until she swore she felt the head of his cock bump the back of her throat. Immediately she drew him out, not wanting to gag and embarrass herself.

She didn't want to look like a total pro, but she didn't want to look like an inexperienced imbecile either.

Giving her throat a break, she licked him. Up and down, slow and then fast, around and around as if he were a delicious ice cream treat and it was the height of a sizzling hot summer day. His musky rich scent filled her nostrils as she breathed deep, his equally musky taste filled her mouth and she drew him back between her lips, sucking just the head of him hard, harder, until he started to thrust.

As if he was fucking her mouth.

Damn that was sexy, she thought as she watched the lift of his hips, felt the shift of his cock as it filled her mouth and then withdrew. She kept up with his rhythm, allowed her gaze to drift upward so she could watch him.

And what a sight. He watched as well, his glittering gaze locked on her mouth, at his thick cock sliding in and out of it. Their gazes met, locked on each other, and he didn't look away. Neither did she. Slowly she withdrew him from her mouth, drew her tongue around his head once more, putting on an elaborate show just for his viewing enjoyment.

"Jesus, Julie." He touched her, his fingers slid along the side of her head, into her hair and her eyes briefly closed from the tactile pleasure. "I'm going to come."

"I want you to." She sucked him, her cheeks hollowing from the suction just before she released him from her mouth. Slipping her fingers around the base of him once more, she began to stroke, staring up at him. "I want you to come in my mouth."

The strangled groan he gave indicated he was barely holding onto his control and she drew him into her mouth once more, sucking him deep, sucking him hard. She bobbed up and down, her hand moving in tandem and he tensed beneath her, indicating he was close. So close.

One afternoon and evening with him intimately and already she recognized the signs that he was about to come. She held onto that, cherished the thought, cherished the man and she moaned with her own delight when she felt the first blast of semen hit the back of her throat.

He came with great, shuddering movements, his cock pulsing within her mouth, his come splashing upon her tongue. She drank him all, an act she'd never done before with any other man and when she finally swallowed the last drop and drew him from her mouth, she stared up at him in wonder.

His breathing was harsh, his chest rising and falling rapidly as his body slumped into the chair. "God, Julie. What you do to me. I don't know if I'll ever recover."

She felt exactly the same.

Chapter Five

This woman deserved more than a quick fuck on the deck outside after what she did for him. Granted, it had been an outrageous, fucking awesome blowjob on the deck outside in front of God and everybody, but he wanted to do more for her.

Tyler wanted to give Julie everything, anything she wanted.

Once he'd recovered from the intense orgasm brought on by her wondrous mouth, he led her back into the cabin, their clothes forgotten on the lounge chair. He was completely naked. She was topless, clad in only a pair of black cotton capri pants. Her breasts swayed deliciously as she walked, and he remembered the way they tasted. The way she smelled. How she'd arched into his mouth and whimpered her pleasure, her fingers tight in his hair, hurting him.

He'd taken the pain. He'd take whatever she'd give him just to have her like this. Naked and free with herself, so giving, so very, very generous.

Now it was his turn to be generous. To give her some of the same delicious treatment she'd given him.

He wanted her writhing beneath him on the bed. Naked and sprawled for his to take, he wanted to taste her again. Fuck her with his tongue and truly please her this time, not just tease. Lick her clit until she screamed with her orgasm.

Yeah, he wanted it all. And he knew he could give it to her. He was full of adrenaline, of emotion, all of it focused solely on her, he wouldn't do anything less but pleasure her completely.

"Take these off," he commanded with a low growl, like some sort of Neanderthal. His hands rested on her hips, pushing at the offending black pants she wore, and she slipped them off eagerly, revealing her gorgeous ass and long legs.

Taking a step back, he appreciated the sexy view. The sweet curve of her ass, shapely tan legs and delicate feet with bright pink painted toenails. She was a sexy, smart, beautiful package, everything he could ever want in a woman.

Not a surprise considering she'd been everything he wanted as a lust-filled, awkward teen. That she'd grown into this, smart, ambitious, damn confident—it didn't surprise him. Made him wish they could have something more, something real.

Could they? It had been only one day. One freaking day and he was thinking like this. Normally he'd wonder what the hell was wrong with him.

Now he wondered what the hell was wrong with him that he didn't try his hardest to make her his. Forever.

"Lay down," he said, his voice curt, a little sharp. She startled at the sound, glanced at him over her shoulder as she did as he bid. Going to the side of the bed, she crawled on top of the mattress and lay flat on her back. Her legs spread the slightest bit, giving him a teasing glimpse of glistening pink flesh.

His skin tightened, his heart hammered and already his cock hardened. He'd just experienced one of the most intense orgasms of his life and...yeah. He was ready for more.

This woman was making him fucking insatiable.

Crawling onto the mattress, he approached her like a predatory animal stalked its prey. She watched him, a mixture of wariness and arousal in her expression as he drew near. As if all of a sudden she didn't quite trust him or what he might do to her.

"You look scared." Reaching out, he grasped her ankle, caressed the soft skin of her calf. She shuddered beneath his touch as he arranged her foot so that it was planted on the mattress, knee bent.

"You just kind of snapped at me," she admitted, her voice small, her eyes wide as she stared at him.

"Sorry." Grabbing her other ankle, he put it in a similar position. "You drive me absolutely crazy."

Now her legs were spread and her knees bent, giving him a full look at her pretty pink pussy. He stared his fill, saw the shimmer of juices that coated her flesh, the delicate smattering of dark trimmed hair that covered her mound. Her scent reached his nostrils, fragrant, feminine, alluring. He'd licked her there. He'd touched her there too. Stroked her with his fingers, thrust his fingers deep, made her come when he'd played with her clit.

He'd fucked her there too. Pushed himself deep inside her, filled her with shallow strokes, drove them both crazy with powerful, mindless thrusts.

It was still hard for him to comprehend that it had only been one day. One freaking day. And he'd felt as if he'd experienced a lifetime of moments with her. Moments he wanted to continue.

He was thinking like a sentimental fool. Ideas of forever and relationships when he had a beautiful, naked woman sprawled directly in front of him like some sort of offering. A gift he needed to take full advantage of.

So he did.

Tyler slid his hands up her calves, over her knees, behind them. She shifted, a little giggle escaping her, and he realized she was ticklish. Good to know.

Scooting closer, his hands brushed the top of her thighs, then the inside of them. Her skin quivered beneath his touch, her accelerated breathing reached his ears and her scent grew muskier, sharper. As if her arousal had just ratcheted up a few notches from his nearness. He leaned in, rained kisses atop her knees, her thighs, his tongue darting out to lick. Salty sweet flesh, deliciously firm and yet soft, she had a woman's body he appreciated.

Hell, he worshipped. He teased. Her restless shifting and low whimpers indicated she wanted him to touch her between her legs, but he wouldn't. Not yet. He wanted her crazed with want. Wanted to see her fall apart beneath him, but more than anything he wanted to hear her beg.

Just for him.

Moving up, he heard her moan of disappointment and smiled. He kissed her soft belly, tongued the indent of her navel as he worked his way up her body. Her nipples were rock hard little points of pink flesh, and he licked first one, then the other. Offering them both equal time, he sucked and licked, nibbled and stroked until she was quivering beneath him. Her hands tugged at his hair, pushed at his shoulders, trying to guide him down to where she really wanted him.

He couldn't help but laugh.

"It's not funny," she gasped out, as if every word pained her while she spoke. "You're driving me insane."

"That's my plan," he said, casting a lecherous grin in her direction as he lifted himself away from her.

She glared at him, all fiery, tempting woman. "This isn't very relaxing I'll have you know."

"I'm working up to the good stuff. Tell me this doesn't feel good already." He licked her nipple again, slow and careful, tracing the delicate pink of her areola.

"Ooh, it does," she couldn't deny. Her eyelids slid closed, and she arched into his touch, into his mouth. He took her deep, sucking her nipple into his mouth, laving it with his tongue.

"And this is going to feel even better," he whispered against her belly as he slid down, settled himself between her legs.

The little whispered scream she gave indicated she was more than ready. And all he did was breathe on her. A gust of hot air against her most sensitive skin, he did it again, enjoyed watching her squirm.

And how she squirmed. Her legs grew restless, her inner thighs quivered and her hands slid down, one of them landing briefly on his shoulder.

"Tyler. Please," she whispered in seeming agony, and he knew he couldn't withstand her any longer.

Bending his head, he brushed his face against her pussy, breathing her in, kissing her there. Gentle, open-mouthed kisses that teased and tormented if her breathing was any indication. Finally he licked. His tongue flickered against her clit, then down, along her creamy folds, lingering at her entry. His tongue darted and traced, tasting her, learning her, wanting only to give her pleasure.

"Yes," she hissed, her legs spreading more, her fingers spearing into his hair. "Oh God, just like that."

He licked from the top of her slit all the way down, his tongue flattened and wide, not missing an inch. Her body trembled, her inner walls tried to draw him in when he slipped his tongue inside her. He replaced his tongue with his index finger, sliding in deep. Her body clutched at him, tight and strong and he fucked her with one finger, then two. In and out, in and out, feeling the need that swept through her, helping it grow stronger and stronger.

Amazing how well he knew her body already. How close she grew with his every thrust. He kept his gaze locked on her face, wanting to watch her come. It was a beautiful sight to behold, one he'd already seen before, but he wanted to experience it again.

Now.

He ate at her as if he was ravenous. His tongue and mouth were both greedy. His fingers slipped deep inside her. She worked against him, shifting her hips so that he paid more attention to her clit, and he gave her what she wanted. Drew the swollen little piece of flesh into his mouth and sucked. Hard.

Julie started to chant. Over and over again, first with her encouragement, then she said his name. Her entire body tensed, her legs grew tight, her thighs creeping closer until they clamped about his head. He fucked her vigorously with his fingers, licked at her clit fast and then slow, alternating his rhythm. Driving her closer and closer until she suddenly came undone beneath him.

She came against his mouth, her entire body racked with shudders. Her cream coated his fingers, and he gentled his thrusts, his tongue slowly lapping at her until finally she calmed. But it was long moments until she spoke.

"Oh my God," she finally said once she found her voice.

Tyler pressed a kiss on the inside of her thigh before he rolled away from her. "Are you all right?"

"I'm freaking fabulous." She exhaled loudly and then began to giggle. "That was ridiculously good."

"Yeah?" Male pride made him want to beat on his chest with both fists. "Glad I could oblige."

"Oh you obliged all right." Her fingers wrapped around his upper arm and drew him close so she could press a lingering kiss to his lips. "Thank you," she whispered.

Had a woman ever thanked him for giving her an orgasm before? He didn't think so. Pulling away slightly, he studied her. The wild cloud of her vibrant hair, the pink flush that colored her cheeks, covered her upper chest, the dazed look in her eyes...she had the look of a well-satisfied woman. *His* well-satisfied woman.

Damn, he felt possessive. Like some sort of primitive male who wanted to grasp his female by the hair and drag her back to his cave. Where he could brand her with his mark, let everyone know in the tribe that she belonged to him and only him.

Tyler scrubbed a hand over his face, banishing his ludicrous thoughts. What the hell was he doing, thinking like this? He'd straight lost his mind.

"It's late," she murmured, drawing lazy circles upon his upper arm. As if she didn't want to stop touching him. "We should get some sleep."

"Yeah," he agreed, reaching for her once more. She let him pull her body toward his, her back to his front, her head nestled in the crook of his neck and upon his shoulder. Her fragrant hair brushed against his face, and he pushed it away gently, savoring the silky feel.

She practically purred as he stroked her hair so he continued. “That feels good,” she murmured, her voice laced with lazy pleasure.

It felt good to make her feel good. He closed his eyes, allowed exhaustion to slowly take over. Only became alert when he heard her faded whisper.

“Wish this could last forever.”

Me too...

Chapter Six

She was having the best dream. Wrapped up in the arms of a muscular, warm man, her face nestled against his firm chest. Her legs tangled with his, she felt the light hair on his thighs abrade her smooth skin as she slid her thigh between his. She swore she felt the brush of his erection across her belly, and she reached between them, wrapped her fingers tight around the base.

Julie's eyes cracked open to find herself staring at Tyler's stubble-covered jaw, fingers clasped tight about his cock. This was no dream. It was gloriously, one hundred percent real, and she smiled. Just as she heard him groan.

God, she loved it when he groaned, moaned, called out her name. They'd made love twice in the middle of the night. As if they couldn't keep their hands off of each other, as if the both of them couldn't get enough. She was tender between her legs this morning, and she knew she should take it easy but she couldn't.

She wanted him too much.

"Mmm, faster," Tyler whispered, his hips lifting, his cock sliding through her fingers.

She increased her pace, glancing down between their bodies so she could watch. His cock was hard as a rock, the skin of the head tight and flushed a purplish red. He was so big, so hard and hot. She wanted him inside her, filling her, fucking her straight into oblivion and beyond.

It was becoming an addiction, her Tyler-induced orgasms. He was just so damn good at making them happen.

Tyler tensed at the moment her movements stilled and they looked at each other, their heads cocked toward the window. She swore she heard a car door slam, and he must've heard it too. It sounded awfully close. As if someone might've parked in the driveway.

"You heard that right?" he whispered.

She nodded, her grip relaxing on his cock. It sounded like someone was walking on the porch, their heavy footfalls echoing in her ears. At least two people from the sounds of it, she could hear muffled talking. A man and woman. She waited for the sound of a knock.

It didn't happen.

Tyler withdrew from her completely, grabbing his eyeglasses from the bedside table and slipping them on. He stood stock still, his gaze locked on hers, and she could only stare at him in return.

"Do you think they're gone?" she whispered.

He shook his head and went to the closed bedroom door, rested his head against it. "I swear to God they're inside the house."

"What?" Julie quietly shrieked, hopping out of bed. No way was she meeting her demise while naked in bed. That was the biggest cliché in all the horror movies.

"Sssh." Tyler pressed his index finger against his lips and resumed his listening at the door. "The voices sound familiar."

She heard them too. The murmur of conversation. The sound of footsteps as they came closer. She glanced wildly about the room, looking for an article of clothing, anything to cover her nakedness, and she found his shirt. Tugged the T-shirt on so it fell almost to her knees, covering her completely.

Thank God.

"It's your parents." Tyler's gaze met hers once more, his mouth drawn into a firm line, worry written over his face. "Did you invite them to come up here with you?"

"Of course not. I told you I never see them. Why would I ask them to come up on a Sunday? I'm leaving this afternoon." She threw herself on top of the bed, flung her arm over her eyes. "Holy crap, I can't believe this is happening."

"Julie? Julie, honey where are you?" she heard her mother call. Her arm dropped away from her eyes, and she scrambled off the bed, straightening her hair as best she could.

"Yeah, Mom. Hold on okay? Let me get dressed. I just woke up."

"No need to get out of bed, hon. We brought breakfast. McDonald's. Your favorite." Her mother's voice sounded from the hall.

Tyler shot her an amused glance, and she glared at him in return. So what if she loved the occasional sausage biscuit more than life itself?

"I'll meet you in the kitchen, okay?" Damn it, she needed some pants or shorts but she couldn't find anything. "Give me a minute."

"Oh stop fretting, Julie. We're coming in." The door swung open, obscuring Tyler from view since he stood behind it and her mother and father both stopped short at the sight of her standing by the side of the bed.

She most likely presented quite the picture. Disheveled hair, man's T-shirt hanging from her shoulders and nothing else on. Most likely she wore the just fucked glow too. Her cheeks heated with embarrassment, and she shuffled her bare feet. Her parents were going to know exactly what she was up to.

How fitting that she felt like a teenager just caught doing it with her snuck-in, hot high school boyfriend. "Hey." She gave a little wave, not knowing else what to do.

Her parents stared at her until finally her mother spoke. "Well. I believe we've...disturbed you, haven't we?"

Julie shrugged. "Kind of."

“You have company?” Her mother’s brows lifted almost to her hairline.

“Yes.” Julie’s cheeks heated with embarrassment.

“Oh my,” her mother murmured at the same time her father clasped her by the arm. Julie noticed the McDonald’s bag hanging from her father’s other hand.

“Come on, Clara. Let’s leave Julie alone for a moment while she collects herself. And her young man too.” Her father turned her mother around and led her out of the room.

Julie ran to the door and slammed it shut, leaned against it with panting, excitable breaths. That was close. If they’d come a few minutes later, she and Tyler might have been too far gone to hear them. And her parents could’ve walked in on them and...

Yeah. She didn’t want to go there with that particular image.

“You didn’t even tell them.”

Tyler’s tight, angry voice caused her to look up. “What? What’s wrong?”

He pushed away from the wall, his walk downright predatory as he approached her. “You didn’t tell them that your guest was me.”

“I—I didn’t get a chance to tell them.” She figured they could walk out together to the kitchen and explain themselves then. Her mother was going to be beside herself. Her father was going to be thrilled too. He’d always thought highly of Tyler Nichols.

But she needed to remember this was most likely nothing. Just a weekend fling, a way for the two of them to scratch each other’s itch for a few days before they went back to their busy lives.

He glared at her, the expression on his face almost as if he didn’t quite believe her. Which made her hackles rise because come on, when did she have the chance to tell them? It was bad enough what had been implied. The bed a mess, she a tousled mess and God, was that the scent of sex that lingered in the air?

She was beyond mortified that her parents had seen her this way.

“Listen, I’m not trying to hide you or whatever you’re implying,” she said, going to the dresser and yanking out a pair of pajama bottoms. She slipped them on, hopping around on one leg and most likely looking like a dork. She didn’t care. She wasn’t trying to impress him any longer. She was too pissed. “So stop glowering like that and come out with me.”

His dark brows furrowed. “Come out with you?”

“Yes, come out there with me, and we’ll greet them together. Let them wildly speculate and ask all the questions they want because I’m warning you, they’re going to ask a ton of questions. Especially my mother.” She rested her hands on her hips. “What do you say?”

He looked stunned. Did he really believe she’d be ashamed of him? That she would hide him away and not want her parents to know they’d been together. It was already too late, they’d figured out she’d brought some man up to the cabin. At least let them see it was Tyler.

That would earn their approval, no doubt. And Tyler already had her approval.

Even if he was pissed off. She studied him, realized he looked damn sexy when he was mad. The narrowed, glowing eyes, the tense stance that seemed to showcase every muscle in his very well muscled body. His arms were crossed in front of his bare chest, biceps bulging. One delicious hunk of man flesh that only moments ago she'd had her hands all over.

She wanted her hands all over him. Now. Again.

Hello! Parents waiting out in the kitchen.

Disappointment flooded her, but she went to him anyway. Smoothed her hands over his forearms, let them trail up to curve around his biceps. "Don't be mad."

His gaze softened the slightest bit as he looked down at her. "I'm not mad."

"You were." Her hands slid down his bare chest, and she shivered. God, he felt good. Solid and warm. "When they opened the door you were hidden behind it."

He nodded once. "True."

"And I couldn't just blurt out your name because it would've been...awkward. And this is awkward enough right?"

"Yeah, it is definitely awkward now that they're here." He nodded again.

Her hands slipped down to wrap around the waistband of the underwear he must've yanked on when she wasn't looking. "So go out there with me, we'll present a united front and entertain them. Please?" She dropped a kiss to the center of his chest, felt his rapidly beating heart beneath her lips.

"All right." He touched her, big hands wrapping about her shoulders and tugging her close. "Sorry I've been such an ass."

"It's okay," she whispered against his chest, pressing another kiss there. His skin was salty, delicious. Unable to stop herself she licked him.

Groaning, he tugged her away. "Stop. I can't walk into the kitchen greeting your parents with a hard on."

She giggled and stepped away, excitement bubbling up inside her. Normally she'd be full of dread. The very last thing she enjoyed doing was sharing her latest boyfriend with her parents. Their expectations were always high and her mother always had her married off to the poor guy immediately.

But she wanted to drag Tyler out to the kitchen. She wanted her parents to gasp their surprise. She wanted to see their pleased expressions when they realized she was actually with Tyler. That she wanted to be with him for a long time, to see where this would take them.

A sobering thought but true. Did he feel the same way? His angry reaction told her yes but he hadn't actually said anything. Of course, maybe he thought he'd look like a damn fool for proposing something more serious between them. After all, they'd been together a whopping two days.

They'd known each other for years. She felt so at ease with him. And the sex was good.

Beyond good.

Beyond amazing.

Smiling, she reached out a hand after he threw on an old T-shirt and shorts. "Ready?"

His hand landed in hers, fingers entwining and squeezing tight. "Absolutely."

To say that Julie's parents were thrilled to see him was an understatement.

Her mother practically threw herself at him. And her father, Lou, smiled broadly as he pumped his hand in a vigorous shake. Despite the fact that they knew he'd just been in bed with their daughter, they looked pleased as punch. Clara had fussed over him, making him sit as she poured them a cup of coffee. She'd even forced Julie to split her sausage biscuit though he saw the disappointment written over Julie's face when she reluctantly handed over his half.

It made him want to laugh. It made him want to pull Julie close and offer her a reassuring squeeze about the shoulders.

More than anything, the cozy domestic scene made him feel as if he belonged.

He hadn't been able to help the anger that swarmed him when her parents had burst into the room and she hadn't even mentioned his name. He knew he was being irrational. He knew he was an ass for acting that way. But the emotions had come anyway, intense and old, harbored from a long ago resentment that he guessed he'd never fully shaken.

When he'd been younger and felt like such an outsider. When he'd had such a terrible, agonizing crush on Julie that filled him with such longing his entire body ached. How he'd ached for her during those few summers. She'd been so elusive, almost like a dream that slipped through his fingers like sifting sand.

Now he realized he'd put her too high on a pedestal. That she was a flesh and blood woman, a woman who lived her life the best she could. A woman who wasn't as perfect and ideal as he'd believed she might be.

But he believed her perfect for him.

"So why did you guys come up here? Just for the day?" Julie asked. Her voice broke his reverie and he glanced at her parents who paused mid-eating.

"I was worried about you," Clara admitted, a grave expression on her face as she set down her breakfast sandwich. "I called and called but you never answered your cell, and you're always on your cell phone."

Julie immediately looked contrite though she didn't say a word.

"Then my imagination started to get the best of me. Maybe something terrible happened to you. Maybe you were lost. Or maybe a bear attacked you."

She burst out laughing at that one. "Are you serious?"

"Well, I wasn't sure what happened! Don't laugh. A mother's worry is never funny," Clara admonished.

Julie sent a skittering glance in his direction then focused on her mother. “I’m sorry, Mom. I’ve only checked my phone once since I got here and that was yesterday morning. I didn’t mean to make you worry.”

Her mother smiled and reached out to pat her hand. “It’s all right. Now that I know you were...otherwise occupied.”

Everyone laughed though a bit awkwardly. Tyler was thankful the Lancaster’s approved of him. That they didn’t mind he was spending such—intimate time with their daughter. He wanted their approval. He wanted to be part of Julie’s life on a permanent basis.

Did she want the same thing? He thought she might. But he wasn’t sure. And he was afraid to push, not wanting to get into too serious of a conversation and ruin the last remaining remnants of their weekend.

“You know what we should do? We should take a walk,” Clara suggested, nudging her husband in the ribs. He set down his second breakfast sandwich and gave her an accusing look. “Around the lake. It’s a gorgeous morning. And heaven knows it would do us all some good to get some fresh air.”

“I’ve gotten a lot of fresh air this weekend,” Julie said as she stood, gathering up all the garbage leftover from their breakfast and taking it to the trashcan. “But I think I’m up for a walk though I need to change first. How about you, Tyler?”

“Absolutely.” It didn’t matter where he was as long as he had Julie by his side. “Let me go get my shoes on.”

“Let me get changed first. I’ll be right back.” She cast a sweet smile at everyone sitting at the table then bounded out of the kitchen.

They made small talk while she was gone, and Tyler realized he missed her. Completely irrational since she was just in the next room and he knew she’d be back in minutes. In fact, she was back in minutes, looking fresh and clean. Clad in a vibrant green tank top and black shorts that emphasized the length of her tanned legs.

She was beautiful. And if he had his say, she would be his by the end of today.

He went into the bedroom next, casting an amused glance at the chaos. The room was normally neat and tidy and he wasn’t one for making a huge mess. He realized Julie was a little more on the messy side, surprising considering her success as a business owner.

Oh well, everyone had their faults.

After he finished tying his shoes he ambled down the hall, headed toward the front door when the quiet voice of Lou Lancaster stopped him in his tracks.

“Can I have a word with you, son?”

Tyler turned to find Lou sitting on the edge of the couch, his gaze focused directly on him.

“Sure,” Tyler said slowly as he looked about the room. “Where’re Julie and Mrs. Lancaster?”

“They’re outside waiting for us. It won’t take long, I promise.” Lou smiled up at him though it didn’t quite reach his eyes.

Tyler approached him, suddenly wary. Lou looked downright uncomfortable, and he wondered what the man wanted to speak to him about.

“What did you want to talk about Mr. Lancaster?”

“Call me Lou.” He patted the spot next to him on the couch. “Sit down, son.”

Tyler did as he asked, sitting on the opposite end of the couch. The two men stared each other down for a moment, as if they were having some sort of contest and finally Tyler looked away first, glancing down at his feet. He rested his elbows on his knees, clenched hands hanging in between them and damn it, he realized he was nervous.

“I know this may sound formal and a bit old-fashioned but what are your intentions for my daughter?”

Tyler cleared his throat, wanting to get it just right. “Well, I haven’t discussed it with her, but I’d like to continue our relationship. For the long term.”

“I see. And how long have you two been seeing each other? I’m surprised she kept it from us. You’re an old family friend, I’m sure she realizes how thrilled her mother would be at the idea of the two of you together.”

“We haven’t been seeing each very long, actually. And I think Julie was keeping it quiet in case...in case things didn’t work out.” Tyler shifted around, feeling bad for lying. He didn’t want to admit he’d only been with her for two days and it had been a non-stop sex fest since they pretty much set eyes on each other.

Tyler didn’t think her father would much appreciate hearing those sorts of details.

“I think you two make a fine couple.” Lou smiled and nodded, and Tyler swore he caught sight of a twinkle in the older man’s eye. “You best do right by her, Tyler. She’s a good girl, a hard worker and I’m proud of the woman she’s become. But she’s also vulnerable. She doesn’t allow a lot of people into her inner circle if you know what I mean. So if she’s allowed you entry, you best be grateful.”

Interesting. He had a feeling Julie was a private person who kept a tight circle of friends from bits and pieces of conversations they’d shared the last couple of days. Her father’s statement only confirmed it.

“Thank you, sir,” Tyler said solemnly. “Your approval means everything to me. I would never intentionally harm Julie in any way. I—care for her a lot.”

“That’s nice to hear,” Lou Lancaster said with nod. “Clara will be pleased too. She’s already pleased, but she has a way of getting ahead of herself.”

Both men chuckled, and Lou stood, as did Tyler. “We best go outside and take that walk Clara insists upon. I’d rather take a nap in the hammock out back, but she has other ideas.”

Tyler followed the man outside onto the front porch, where both women were sitting on the porch steps waiting for them. Julie leapt to her feet and went to him, seemingly oblivious to her parents standing right there watching them as she leaned up on tiptoe and brushed the quickest, softest kiss to his lips.

“Everything go okay in there?” she whispered, concern lingering in her eyes.

“Everything’s fine. Your dad is cool.” He reached for her hand and gave it a squeeze.

She smiled and kissed him again, this time on the cheek. “So are you.”

Clara Lancaster stared at the both of them agog. As if she couldn’t believe what she saw. Julie led the way, snapping her fingers as if to hurry everyone along. “Let’s take that walk. I need to burn some calories considering that sausage biscuit I just ate.”

“You only ate half of it,” Lou mumbled as he fell into step behind his daughter. “You don’t have to be such a drill sergeant.”

Clara laughed and slapped her husband on the butt. “You ate two so you need this walk more than anyone. You’re not getting any younger, you know.”

Tyler rounded up the end, shaking his head in amusement at the pleasant banter. A breeze hit him, strong and warm, carrying with it the scent of pine. The lake before them shimmered bright blue as the sun reflected upon the gentle waves. It was a fine Sunday morning, one he never wanted to forget.

He could only hope Julie would be agreeable to his suggestion later. That he would make once the Lancasters had left, since Clara declared they’d head back home later this afternoon.

He needed to get his emotions off his chest, tell Julie how he felt. He wanted to ask her if she wanted their relationship to become more serious, couldn’t allow her to return to Sacramento so she could forget him.

Now he just needed to get up the guts to actually ask her.

He had a feeling it might be harder than he thought.

Chapter Seven

Julie thought her parents would never leave. She was downright antsy by the time they walked out onto the porch, hugging their goodbyes and her mother offering sweet whispered words about Tyler. How much she liked him, how much her father liked him and she had both their full approval.

She'd hugged them both, practically pushed them off the porch toward their car and then slammed the door behind them, turning the lock so that it gave a satisfying click.

"You are one impatient woman," Tyler murmured when she launched herself upon him. His arms slid about her waist and pulled her close. Already she felt his growing erection rub against her.

"So are you by the feel of things." She ground against him, earning a soft groan from him.

"Hey, this is all your fault. You touched me. That's all it takes," he admitted, leaning down to give her a lingering kiss. "I had a good time with your parents by the way."

"It was nice, huh?" She meant it. After pushing them away for so long it felt good to relax and actually hang out with them. They were fun people, easy to get along with and she didn't give them enough credit.

It took good ol' Tyler Nichols to make her realize such a fact. Amazing.

But she really didn't want to talk about her parents anymore. She'd rather focus on Tyler. Fiddling with the neckline of his T-shirt, she snuggled close to him, noticing how well they fit together. She had to leave soon. It was already mid-afternoon, and her father had tried to gently encourage her to follow him back to Sacramento. She'd refused, wanting to spend at least one more stolen hour with Tyler before she returned home.

Returned back to reality.

She shuddered. Didn't want to return to her life, her job. It would all be so empty without Tyler.

God.

"Hey." He cupped her cheek, his palm warm, his fingers streaking along her cheek. "What's wrong?"

"I..." She didn't know how to approach him with this, didn't know how to blurt it out and just say it. She was a successful business owner who had no problem asking for what she wanted in her day-to-day life.

And yet she couldn't ask for this. The one thing she wanted more than anything.

A real, solid chance with Tyler.

"I want you," she finally whispered when he hadn't said a word. She looked up, met his blazing blue gaze, and she saw it all. Passion and want, tumultuous emotions he probably didn't know how to express either. Maybe, just maybe he felt the same way. He'd certainly been attentive the entire weekend. He'd been eager too, just as eager as she, maybe even more so.

There was something between them. If she would just be a realist, she could admit it. More than just a lusty weekend between old friends, this had potential. This had the chance to be something real.

First, she wanted to be with him. Experience him one more time without any emotional hang-ups or worry that he might reject her or turn her away.

"I want you too." His touch became firmer, his fingers drifting down her cheek, along her jaw, across her lower lip. She parted her lips, her tongue darting out to lick his lingering finger and he groaned.

"Take me, Tyler," she murmured, her hands tugging at his T-shirt. "Please."

He whipped it off for her, tossing it over his shoulder. "You don't need to ask twice."

Their mouths crashed upon each other, lips fused, tongues dancing, hands wandering all over each other's bodies. She didn't need much foreplay—the entire weekend had been foreplay and she was constantly aroused. Right now she just needed him. Buried deep inside her, filling her, making her feel complete.

Such a cliché but so, so appropriate for the moment.

Clothes fell off their bodies with practiced ease until they both stood in a naked embrace. He held her breasts in his hands, his thumbs straining up to flick across her nipples and her knees weakened at the delicious ache his touch roused. He barely had to touch her and he brought her close to orgasm within seconds. It was that easy between them. That good.

"Come on, babe." He grabbed her ass and hitched her up. She wrapped her legs about his waist as he carried her over to the couch. "I can't stand this much longer."

She knew the feeling. Her entire body trembled from wanting him, and he collapsed onto the couch, her sitting astride him, their faces so close. She carefully took off his glasses and set them on the end table. He smiled at her, the look on his face so tender, so sweet she almost burst into tears at the sudden emotion that threatened to overwhelm her.

"Sssh." He pushed the hair away from her face. As if he knew what she was feeling, how scary it was. "You're beautiful."

His words touched her deep and she touched him as well, her fingers drifting across the strong firm line of his jaw. "So are you."

They kissed, this one not as carnal but just as arousing. No, this was a sweet meeting of lips, a slow, almost torturous tangle of tongues. She gasped into his mouth, the corner of her eyes prickled with tears, and she leaned into him. Needing his strength, wanting him to absorb her and keep her forever.

His hands smoothed up and down her back, comforting her and sending sparks of sensation over her body at the same time. His cock rose between them, hard and seeking and damn it, she realized they didn't have a condom.

Withdrawing from him, she swallowed hard, her accelerated breaths making it difficult for her to get the words out. "We—need a..."

"Condom," he finished for her. He pointed toward the end table. "Open the little drawer."

Julie bent to her left and tugged on the drawer pull to find two condom packets nestled within. Casting him a suspicious glance, she pulled one out and waved it at him. "Secret stash for all of your weekend rendezvous with various women?"

Jealousy rose within her, ugly and unwanted but there just the same. She was being foolish. She had no claim on this man, and she certainly shouldn't be jealous over any of his previous encounters with other women. It was none of her business what he did prior to being with her.

The thought of him being with another woman after her was just too upsetting to even consider.

He started to laugh, caught one look at the expression on her face and he immediately stopped. "I snuck those in earlier when no one was in the room. I sprinkled a few throughout the house, to be honest. I wasn't sure where we'd be when we could finally be together."

Her heart actually expanded. She felt it. It welcomed him right on in and then closed up tight. As if never wanting to let him go. "Really?"

Tyler nodded slowly, his gaze never leaving hers. "Really."

"Oh, Tyler." She kissed him, allowed all of her emotion, her caring, oh God, her love for him flow straight into him. From her lips to his, she gave him everything she had. And he took it. Eagerly.

He grabbed the condom from her fingers and tore open the package, his mouth still attached to hers. Slipped the condom on with fumbling fingers, they brushed against her belly, her wet pussy and she ground against him. Couldn't wait for him to be inside her.

"Hurry," she whispered against his mouth just before he plunged deep, stealing the very breath from her. She couldn't speak, she couldn't think. All she could do was feel.

Feel him.

Tyler.

His hands wrapped tight about her hips, Tyler steadied her, slamming deep just as she came down hard. Not an inch separated them, they were completely and totally fused together, and he closed his eyes, bent his head so it rested on the back of the couch.

She just felt so damn good. Once she started to move, to grind those sweet hips down upon his body, driving his cock even deeper, he thought he'd explode. Explode into a million little pieces until there was nothing left, she was doing such a number on him.

Julie tilted her head, her hair spilling over him, brushing against his skin and driving him wild. Her mouth was close to his ear, he heard her panting breaths, felt her lips move against his ear lobe, and he shuddered in anticipation.

"I love how you feel inside me," she whispered just as she began to ride. She lifted herself completely upright, tiny hands settling upon his shoulders, her body moving up and down his cock, her knees braced on the couch cushion, resting on either side of his hips.

"I love how you feel, wrapped tight around my cock," he muttered, his hands upon her waist, eyes zeroed in on where they were joined. His cock glistened with her juices as he thrust in and out, the sight of their joining nearly undoing him. Fuck, it was beautiful. Mesmerizing.

She moaned at his words, at the way he sent himself a little deeper, hell he didn't know. He wanted to drive her out of her mind, much like she drove him out of his. He wanted to make her lose herself. Lose herself to him, to what they created when they were together. An overwhelming spark of emotion, it threatened to take him under at any second.

And damn, how much he wanted to be taken under. As long as she was by his side.

"I'm going to come," she panted, working atop him, her body grinding against his. "Don't stop, just like that, Tyler. Please. Please. Please."

He continued his rhythm, not wanting to break it, wanting to give her what she so desperately sought. Her head was tossed back, eyes tightly closed, hair cascading down her back. A fucking gorgeous vision of a woman just about to come all over his cock and he surged deep within her, wanting to give her everything he had.

"Tyler." She shuddered, her entire body taken over as she strained above him. Her hands squeezed his shoulders so hard it almost hurt and her inner walls clenched tight around his cock, pulsing and throbbing until he couldn't stand it any longer.

He exploded. He'd only been inside her for minutes and he'd lost control. Was coming like a damn fool when he'd wanted to savor her. Linger over her for as long as she allowed him to before she needed to get home.

But it was too late.

Julie collapsed on top of him in an exhausted heap, her hot, damp breath radiating against his throat. She snuggled close, her arms circling tight about his neck. Clinging to him as if she never wanted to let him go.

"I don't want to go home," she mumbled, her voice muffled against his neck.

"I don't either." He smoothed his hands up and down her back, loving the feel of her smooth, satiny soft skin.

She lifted her head to stare at him, eyes wide, lips swollen from his kisses. He actually saw her lower lip tremble, and he wondered at that. "Are you serious?"

His brows furrowed. "Yeah, I'm serious. I've had an...amazing time with you this weekend, Julie. I don't want it to end."

Studying him, she nibbled on her lower lip, looking very, very nervous. "It doesn't have to end. Not if we don't want it to."

They were silent for a moment, the words heavy between them. Hope grabbed hold of his heart and squeezed tight. She was saying exactly what he wanted to hear. Now he just needed to repeat it right back to her.

"I don't want it to end," he admitted, his voice raw with emotion. He cleared his throat. "I want to be with you, Jules. I don't want just a weekend."

"What do you want, Tyler?" Anticipation and nerves rang in her voice and he touched her again, stroked her back, wanting to calm her.

"I want you. And me. Together." He kissed her, felt her lips quiver beneath his. "If it has to be a long distance relationship at first then that's what it'll be. I'll come to you, you'll come to me, on the weekends, whatever. We can make this work. I know we can."

A tremulous smile curled her lips and she swiped at the corner of her eye as if she brushed away a tear. "Oh, Tyler."

He watched her, but she didn't say anything else. He gave her shoulders a little shake. She was starting to scare the hell out of him, and he wasn't one to scare easy. "That's it? That's all you have to say?"

"I want this. The two of us together. A long distance relationship will be hard, but I believe we can do it." She smiled at him.

"I know we can do it." He kissed her again, unable to stop himself. "You know, I've always wanted to open another store. I wonder if I could find a location somewhere in the Sacramento area."

Her mouth dropped open, and she gave a little slap to his chest. "You're joking."

"I'm dead serious. I need to do some marketing research first but...yeah." And he was serious. This was perfect. He could eventually open another store, be closer to Julie.

It was everything he wanted.

Her smile grew, and she slowly shook her head. "I think that sounds wonderful. I think all of this is too good to true."

"Believe it, baby." He nuzzled the side of her face, dropped a kiss at the top of her cheek. "It's happening."

"Tyler..." She breathed deep, as if she could breathe him in. "You're too good for me."

"You're perfect for me. We're perfect for each other."

Withdrawing from him, she stared deep into his eyes, as if she could look into his very soul. “Are you sure we’re not being stupid? Moving too fast? I mean, this was just one weekend together. It might not all be...”

“Real? This, what we share, is definitely real.” He pulled her close, not wanting to lose contact with her. She was starting to be too rational, and there was no room for rational in this situation. For once, rather than think it through like he usually did, he wanted to just go with his gut. “We’re not moving too fast. When things feel right, then they’re going to be right. I know this won’t be perfect, but I have a feeling it’s going to be pretty damn good.”

“You know what, Tyler?” Hope lit within him at the sound of her voice, and he kissed her temple, his lips lingering upon her soft skin. The fragrance of her hair enticed him beyond reason, and he closed his eyes, overwhelmed with emotion for this woman. “I have a feeling it’s going to be pretty damn good too.”

He never had a doubt.

About the Author

After leaving the crazy working world to become a stay at home mom, Karen realized she needed to get crackin' and pursue her lifelong dream of being a published writer. A busy mother of three, she fits her precious writing time in between chasing her children, hanging out with her wonderful husband and pretending she has a maid. She lives in California.

To learn more about Karen Erickson, please visit www.karenwritesromance.com. You can also send an email to Karen at <http://karenwritesromance.com/contact>.

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It'll take more than a fire hose to cool down this attraction...

Under My Umbrella

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Fated, Book 1

Rain, rain, go away. That's Jenna's mantra as she suffers through yet another rain-soaked walk home from work. At least the tight butt of the guy walking in front of her offers some distraction. When he turns around and asks to share her umbrella, she realizes his front view is as smokin' as the back. What better way to get up close and personal with the object of her ogling?

Brett noticed his hot little neighbor weeks ago, but until now hadn't worked up the nerve—or found the opportunity—to approach her. Too many hours at the fire station has left him longing for something more out of life. Like the company of a sweet, sexy woman. Maybe, if he's lucky, kindling a relationship.

Jenna surprises herself again when she offers to let him dry off in her apartment. One minute he's toweling off his hair, the next their chemistry explodes in the hottest sex either of them have ever experienced. And suddenly they're both wondering if he's the match to her tinder, or if it's too much, too fast...

Enjoy the following excerpt for Under My Umbrella:

Brett stood the moment he saw Jenna enter the restaurant, taking a few short steps to reach her since he waited in the lobby. He took her hands, unable to stop from planting a soft kiss to her upturned lips, and she smiled when they parted.

"Glad to see you too, stranger," she murmured.

The area was packed with people waiting for a table since the restaurant had been open only a few short months and seemed popular. One of his buddies at the station had told him about the place, raved on how good the food was. A steakhouse that also specialized in seafood, he figured it covered a broad range to satisfy both himself and Jenna.

"You look..." His voice trailed off as he eyed her up and down. Her hair was loose, silky brown waves tumbled just past her shoulders, and she wore some sort of clingy black dress that did amazing things to her already bangin' body.

"I look what?" she teased, her hazel eyes sparkling. She curled her arm around his, and he led her over to lean against the wall together while they waited.

"Beautiful." Hot, sexy and completely fuckable.

But Brett didn't want this to be just about sex. He liked this woman. Wanted to see if they could take this further.

“Thank you.” Pleasure lit her eyes, and he had the sudden urge to take her out of here. Take her back to his place or hers, strip that sexy dress from her body and touch her. Lick her. Bury himself inside her.

“Have you eaten here before?” Maybe if they talked about food it would distract him. Distract him from her delicious scent, the brownish pink color of her lipstick—the sultry glow in her eyes.

“No, but I’ve heard it’s good.” Her gaze dropped to his mouth, lingered there and he wanted to growl.

“Stop looking at me like that,” he admonished, his entire body tense. His cock throbbed beneath the fly of his jeans.

It was going to be a long night.

“Look at you like what?” Her expression was pure innocence though he spotted the mischief in her eyes.

“Like you want to kiss me,” he whispered close to her ear. A big mistake considering he could inhale her delicious scent, felt the silky soft brush of her hair against his cheek.

“I do want to kiss you,” she whispered back, her hand touching him, resting lightly against his chest. “I want to do a lot of things to you.”

Ah, God. He wasn’t hungry anymore, at least not for food. He wanted to get out of here. Couldn’t stand the thought of making small talk and pretending to have an appetite during what would end up being a two hour dinner.

More like two hours of torture. A torture he didn’t want to put himself through.

“You’re going to drive me crazy,” he admitted.

Her smile grew. “Then my plan is working.”

“You came here tonight with a plan?”

“Well, not really but just looking at you makes me wanna do...naughty things. To you,” she confessed.

That was it. He couldn’t take it anymore. Hooking his arm tighter around hers he started for the door, taking her with him. “Let’s go.”

“Wait a minute. You don’t want to have dinner?” She sounded truly shocked.

“Not with you looking at me like that and saying those things. Hell no. My apartment isn’t too far from here. Wanna come over?”

“Brett!” She stopped just in front of the doorway, and he stopped as well, wondering at her behavior. “We should at least have dinner first.”

He shrugged. “We’ll order a pizza after.”

She cocked a brow. “After what?”

“You know what.” He wagged his brows in return.

“You’re bad.” She gave a light slap to his shirtfront.

“And you like it.”

“You know it.” Jenna grinned.

“So is that a yes?” He was eager, ready for her to come to his place. His original plan to wine and dine her, get to know her fell by the wayside.

All he could think about was Jenna. Naked and in his arms, lips pliant, her body open and ready for him.

He shuddered in anticipation.

“Yes.” She leaned into him, pressed her soft, curvy body against his and he slid an arm around her shoulders, hauling her close. “I should say no. I should play hard to get.”

“Thank God you’re not,” he muttered as he steered her toward where he parked his freshly fixed pickup.

Jenna glanced up at him, a worried look on her pretty face. “Am I too easy?”

“Hell, no,” he growled. He didn’t want her thinking he found her easy, a quick lay—a woman he could care less about.

Damn it, he liked her. He was going about this all wrong showing it since well, he was treating her like a sex object but he couldn’t help himself. The attraction, the sexual heat between them was too strong to deny.

“I don’t like playing games,” he said after a pause as he led them into a city parking lot. “I’d rather we be honest with each other than you playing coy and me chasing after you. If you want me, you tell me.”

“I want you,” she admitted, her voice low.

Resistance is no longer an option...

A Little Bit Naughty

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A Tahoe Nights Story

Faced with the annual family reunion in Lake Tahoe, Amanda Harding cringes inwardly like the awkward teenager she used to be, not the successful bookstore owner she is now. Once again she'll be bombarded by questions about her dreadful status as a single woman. And, like always, she'll feel the weight of her parents' disappointment that their only child isn't happily married and pregnant with their first grandchild.

As she relates her troubles to her good friend, Leo, she's shocked to the core by his offer to pose as her soon-to-be fiancé. Then all she can think about getting tangled up in the sheets—and with Leo's deliciously hard body.

Leo Prentice has always wondered what his quiet, bookish Amanda looked like beneath the conservative suits, but the prospect of wrecking their friendship has kept his dirty mind in check. Until their first fake kiss. Playing Amanda's lover seemed like a win-win. But the little bookworm stirs a fire in him unlike any other woman.

Soon, the teasing touches and sensual looks are all too real...and not nearly enough.

Enjoy the following excerpt for A Little Bit Naughty:

He cupped her face in his palm. "You and I are going to share that bed, sweetheart. Are you okay with that?"

Forcing down the tremors his touch invoked, Amanda said, "There are two rooms."

"I know, but I don't want to sleep in an empty bed. Do you?"

Did she? What would happen if she slept next to Leo all night long? Could she keep her hands off him? She didn't know, but one thing was for certain. She didn't want to waste a single second of this trip. She had Leo to herself, and she wanted to know more about the sudden sparks flying back and forth between them. The only way to achieve that would be to act like a woman and not a silly teenager on prom night.

Feeling a little more confident, Amanda murmured, "I don't want to sleep alone."

One side of Leo's mouth kicked up into a crooked grin. "Good answer, sweets." He stepped back and dropped his hand. "Now, how about dinner? I don't know about you, but I'm starved."

He moved around her and headed toward the kitchen. Amanda took a few seconds to calm her racing heart. When she heard him call out to her, she smiled. For the first time in her life she was actually going to enjoy one of the Harding family reunions. Go figure.

Leaving the bedroom behind, Amanda went in search of Leo. She found him bent over, peering into the refrigerator. She licked her lips at the sight of his jean-covered ass. When he straightened and turned, Amanda's cheeks heated. Had he noticed where her gaze had been?

"Your mom thinks of everything doesn't she?"

Okay, so he hadn't seen her eyeballing his butt. Whew. "Uh, yeah, pretty much."

"She's left us hamburger meat, hot dogs and there's even potato salad in there. Looks homemade too."

At the mention of her mother, Amanda relaxed a little more. Moving toward a cupboard, Amanda found two plastic cups, took them out and placed them on the little table in the center of the room. "Mother wouldn't have us eating store-bought potato salad. In her opinion that'd be tacky."

Leo leaned against the counter, as if content to quietly watch as she took out plates, utensils and napkins. It wasn't until Amanda opened the refrigerator and took out two cans of pop that he finally spoke. "So, what are you in the mood for?"

You, she ached to admit. Instead she said, "How about hot dogs?"

"Sounds good to me."

"There's a grill out back, but that's a lot of work and we're both tired. How about we just nuke them?"

"That's fine by me." He pushed away from the counter and took her by the shoulders, turning her to face him. "In fact, how about you go take a nice long bath. I'll get this."

Amanda thought of the Jacuzzi and practically moaned. Massaging jets of hot water? Oh, yes, definitely what she needed to relax her frayed nerves. "Are you sure?"

Leo chuckled. "I'm not helpless, Amanda. I can microwave a few hotdogs without help." Leo reached around her body and swatted her on the bottom. "Go. Relax and enjoy. Let me take care of this."

Amanda stiffened. Leo had delivered a friendly little spank before. It didn't mean anything. Except this time his hand had lingered a second longer than usual. And, Amanda admitted, she liked it. Too much. Unable to speak without possibly revealing how easily his touch affected her, Amanda silently and swiftly left the room.

A bath. That's what she needed. A hot soak, some food to settle her rumbling stomach and a good night's rest. Tomorrow she'd feel more like herself. As she stepped inside the bedroom, Amanda's gaze strayed to their luggage. Why had she agreed to share the same bed? How in God's name was she supposed to actually sleep knowing Leo lay mere inches away?

Crap.

Leo's cock hardened. He'd knocked. Twice. He'd even called her name a few times. Entering the bathroom uninvited had been his only option. Hell, she could've drowned, right? What else could he do but

check on her? As he stared at the bubbling water, Amanda's head back, eyes closed, he knew a moment's guilt. He should look away. At the wall, the sink, the damn toilet, anywhere but at his friend's naked body, which, by the way, just happened to be barely covered by hot, bubbly water. He couldn't really make out anything, he told himself.

Liar.

Pink. Bubble gum pink to be more accurate. Now he knew what shade her nipples were. And there went his cock, again. More of that and he'd have a friggin' zipper print tattooed permanently on his dick.

"Amanda?" he called out, unwilling to wake the sleeping beauty, but much more of this and he wouldn't be able to keep from reaching out and stroking something. Anything. Everything.

A slow smile spread over her face. "Hmm?"

Christ, that was a sexy look. "Uh, sweetheart, you need to get out of the tub now."

Her eyelids shot wide, and she yelped. "Leo!" Slick, feminine hands covered round, firm breasts as water sloshed over the sides of the tub. "What are you doing in here?"

Quickly turning away, he rushed to say, "I'm sorry, but I tried knocking and you didn't answer. I was worried." *Yeah, look away now, asshole, after you've had a good eyeful.* "Uh, dinner's ready."

"I... You—"

"You'll be right out. Got it," he helpfully supplied.

"Yes," she squeaked. "Right out. Yes."

Leo left the room, and the slick, sleek goddess behind. It was no easy feat. In fact, he would have rather stood under a beehive covered in honey than leave Amanda in that moment. Damn, what he wouldn't give to go back in there. To watch her rising out of the water. Little droplets streaming down her voluptuous body. She wouldn't even need a towel—he could just lick her dry. Leo glanced down at his crotch and groaned. "Christ, you need to chill, bud. She needs time."

"What?"

The feminine voice had him stiffening, and not just his spine either. He sent up a silent prayer that Amanda was naked, that she'd decided to put him out of his misery after all. He turned slowly and then Leo's hopes fell. She wasn't nude. 'Course, the little pink tank top and black cotton shorts did wonders for her curves. His cock sure as hell approved. Large, round breasts and wide hips had his mouth watering. *A bite, a suck, that's all I'm asking. Is it so much?*

With her hair wrapped up in a towel and feet bare, she looked sweet, adorable, innocent. He was none of those things. And it didn't matter because she wasn't going anywhere. Before the weekend was over he'd have her naked and in that great big bed. And he'd finally get to taste all that creamy satin.

"Leo?"

In a world where everything's for sale, some things simply can't be bought.

Need You Now

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A Tahoe Nights Story

Janice hadn't planned to take her long-awaited getaway alone, but when a girl catches her boyfriend with his pants around his ankles...well, let's just say that at age thirty, there aren't many princes waiting in line to take the frog's place.

She arrives in Reno ready to break out of all the molds life has crammed her into. In short order she's not only getting lucky at the blackjack table, she's hit the jackpot with Mr. Sex-On-A-Stick. A man who seduces her with his eyes and shows her how a woman should be treated.

Aaron is living the dream. His gift for pleasuring women brings him everything a man could want: a home in the beautiful Lake Tahoe basin, money, gorgeous, rich ladies vying for his very expensive time. Yet there's a void that haunts him as he lies alone in bed at night. At first, Janice is just another empty job. Then she opens a door and fills his empty life with something he never dared to imagine, let alone want.

Enjoy the following excerpt for Need You Now:

She awoke to a loud thumping sound. She tried to open her eyes, but it hurt to even move. The thumping was her heart pumping blood to her painfully confused brain. Her head pounded with every beat of her heart.

"Oh fuck...this is horrible." She squinted enough to see she was in her bedroom. Doing a quick check, she noticed she wasn't wearing anything except a T-shirt. Her body was fine and nothing felt violated. The room appeared exactly as she had left it so nothing was stolen. "Oh my God, what did I do?"

She had a blurry memory of the three guys at the bar and a very large bear.

The only thing she knew for sure was she had to pee right away. Her bladder was filled like a water balloon and ready to burst.

After what seemed like a solid fifteen-minute pee, Janice walked out to the kitchen area. The scent of coffee filled the dark air. She took a cup from the small cupboard and poured some coffee. She figured having it black would clear her head of the foggy haze still looming in her mind. There was a flickering light in the living room area from a fire burning. She was puzzled because she didn't remember making coffee or starting a fire.

"How are you feeling?"

She nearly jumped out of her skin, hearing a voice speak from the darkness, and almost ended up wearing the hot coffee she'd just poured. The chair in front of the fireplace turned and there was Aaron, sitting in her bathrobe.

"You doing okay?"

"Well...I'm basically naked with a cup of coffee in a dark house and don't remember anything, so I'd have to say no. My head is pounding like a damn drum. What the hell happened?"

"I think my T-shirt looks good on you."

She sipped her coffee and looked at Aaron. "Why are you wearing my bathrobe?"

"Because you threw up on my Armani suit. I don't remember seeing anyone throw up that rainbow of colors quite like that before. By the way, cosmopolitans and roofies are a bad combination."

"*Roofies?*"

"Yep, those guys spiked your drink with a roofie. They could have taken everything from you and done anything they wanted to you. You wouldn't have remembered a thing."

"Jesus." She gulped. "All I remember is seeing you talking to a woman and getting a little jealous. Then there was one guy that was flirting with me and bought me a few drinks. No wonder they hit me so quick. I was feeling really woozy. Who was the bear I saw?"

"Bear? Oh, you mean Leslie." Aaron smiled. "He's a friend of mine. Used to be an All-Pro offensive lineman. He's as big as a house and stronger than a bull, but the nicest guy in the world unless you piss him off. He's gotten me out of a couple of jams before."

"Sounds like your *Mother*-person has a soft spot for football players."

Aaron turned and looked back at the fire. "Yes, she does. She helped Leslie out of a really bad pain killer drug habit, and he became her bodyguard. Everyone knows if they fuck with Mother, Leslie will come pay a visit. The man shows no mercy when it comes to people messing with her. A few people have ended up missing."

"Good guy to have in your corner."

"Oh yeah, but you don't want to be on his bad side. So, are you feeling a little better?"

"Actually things are getting less fuzzy and just blurred now."

Aaron moved over in the chair and motioned for Janice to sit with him.

She cuddled up to him comfortably, staring into the flickering flames and smiling. This was nice.

"I'm sorry you had to come be Prince Charming and rescue me. I saw you were working." She was too exhausted to feel much of anything.

"I was? Oh no, that was Mother. I was talking to her about a few things. It's okay."

“I can pay you if you want. I know you could be out working or whatever, and I had another run of luck today. It’s why I was out celebrating.”

Aaron sighed. “No, I came here on my own. For some reason I just wanted to relax tonight.” He paused. “Actually, I *am* going to charge you.”

“For what?”

“The cost of dry cleaning my suit and car upholstery.”

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