



Loose Id

ARRESTED HOLIDAY

LISSA MATTHEWS

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www.loose-id.com

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Chapter One

This was about as fucked a Christmas as she'd ever had. The concrete walls were like blocks of ice, and the floor wasn't much better. The cot was hard, lumpy in a few places, and not really any warmer than the rest of her surroundings, even though Officer Hunky had brought her an extra blanket.

And he was...hunky.

Perhaps if she started thinking about him as Michael, the way he'd introduced himself a little while after he'd settled her in the cell, she wouldn't be so frustratingly attracted to him. The more she watched him though... Nah, he was Officer Hunky. Michael might be his given name, but hunky was what fit him best in her sleep-deprived, decent food-deprived mind.

Damn, but she'd never seen a more perfect-looking man and generally speaking, perfect men didn't appeal to her. Likewise, she didn't appeal to them either, so it was never an issue, but this one...with his perfect white teeth, his perfect rock-hard body, his perfect dark voice, and his perfect heated gaze every time he looked at her...well hell, she couldn't explain it.

Maybe he was just the right kind of perfect, *her* right kind of perfect. Maybe she was the only woman within a hundred miles and he was horny, but as she looked at him, watched him filling out what seemed to be an endless stack of paperwork, she doubted it.

His regret at having to arrest her was genuine, as was his apology that there wasn't a decent place open for food in his little hole-in-the-wall town in the middle of Pennsylvania over the Christmas weekend. His touch had been warm and lingering, and the smile he'd fixed on her from time to time, the look he sent her

way when he didn't think she saw it...no, Officer Hunky, with his sheer, unadulterated male perfection, wanted her.

And that little bit of knowledge, however unlikely in the real world outside the police department jail, made being locked up at Christmas almost tolerable.

Almost.

"You okay?"

Holli slowly refocused. Crap. Heat flooded her cheeks. Had she been staring at him this whole time? "Yes, why?"

"You were staring."

Was that a smile playing around his mouth? "Sorry. I was thinking."

"About what?"

You and me, naked and rockin' around the Christmas tree. "About how I'd like to get the hell out of here." She glanced up at the clock on the wall. Over twenty-four hours since she'd been brought in. Her gut had told her she could make it to Harrisburg and then stop there for gas, but no, she'd had to pee and needed a snack, some caffeine, and now, well, she was in jail. Had she not been speeding down the little two-lane road trying to get back on the interstate, her license wouldn't have been flagged on what they were finding out was a clerical error.

"I know. I've put in a call to the DA and explained the situation. Again. He owes me a favor, and unless he's gone to his in-laws, he should call me back soon."

"You're using your favor on me?" Dear Lord, that sounded so much dirtier than she'd intended. And judging by the smile on his face, he knew it too. Maybe when he'd frisked her earlier, she hadn't imagined that his hands lingered a bit longer on her hips and thighs than they should have. The idea made her tingle all over. "I mean, shouldn't you hold on to it for when you need something really big?"

"Yes, I am calling in my favor. This is something big. I'm not sure what you'd qualify as 'really big,' but things are kind of screwed up for you, and it's partly our fault. Our meaning the state of Pennsylvania. Over the holidays and on your

vacation no less. Derek will have to get in touch with one of the judges about an idea I have for this whole fiasco, but I'd need someone to sign off on it."

"What's your idea?"

He shook his head. "I don't want to jinx it. Let's just wait for the call to come in."

She shrugged. Not like she was going anywhere. "Sure. Whatever." She tried to play it off as no big deal, but if there was a season of perpetual hope, this was it. It might be the day after Christmas, but she could still have hopes and wishes.

"What were you and your friend planning to do in New York next week?"

"Hmm? Oh, shopping, sightseeing. You know, touristy stuff. Neither of us has ever been there. She's from the Midwest and owns a similar business to mine. We started planning it one night in a hotel bar at a trade show."

He put his pencil down and leaned back in his chair. "New York... It's beautiful, especially all decorated for the holidays. It's crowded. It's noisy. And right now, it's cold as hell, just like it is here. But it is beautiful, and you'd have loved it, I think."

"I'm sure, and I hope she's having fun without me. We were supposed to check in last night and in true tourist fashion, I was going to leave right after the New Year's Eve party in Times Square."

His eyes widened, and he smiled while shaking his head. Holli had no idea how old he was, but when he laughed or smiled, it made him look young, like college age young. She figured him to be close to her own age of thirty-five, though. He was gorgeous, in a rougher, younger Chris Noth sorta way.

"You'd be lucky to get out of there before four or five in the morning."

"I know. Charlotte's flight leaves at eight something on New Year's Day, and I have to start work again on the second. My first appointment is at one in the afternoon. I will get out of here in time to get to that appointment, right?"

It was the first time she'd thought about work. If she didn't make it home in time, she would need to make a few phone calls to arrange for someone else to take over for her until she got there. There were a few people she could count on, if they didn't stay out all night partying.

"I'm going to try to make sure you do."

And she knew he would. She had no reason not to trust that he was doing everything he could to get the clerical fiasco fixed and get her off on her merry way.

Get her off? Had she really thought those exact words? Oh dear God. Not that she'd meant them that way, but now that she was thinking of what way she could have thought them and how it would have sounded had she said it out loud... Hell, who was she kidding? She would love for him to get her off on her merry way. In *that* way.

"To be spending the week between Christmas and New Year's in New York, you'd have had to make those plans...what? At least a year ago?"

"Longer, and that was *only* to get on the waiting list, and *only* if there was a cancellation would we get a room. Lucky for...well, I guess lucky for her, there was." If she looked at Officer Hunky, she didn't feel quite so bad that she wasn't in New York, but when she looked around the box she was in, it was easy to feel sorry for herself.

He picked his pencil up and tapped it lightly against the papers on the desk. "Why were you traveling on Christmas Day?"

"I always do. I usually leave around five in the morning if I've had a night that's not so late. I try to get the maximum amount of time out of my vacation and not as many people are on the road on actual holidays."

"Makes sense. I prefer to travel in the early, early morning too."

"I guess that's why my speeding stood out. No one else around." She narrowed her eyes at him, then winked. "Or so I thought."

"I really am sorry."

“It’s all right. It’s not like you knew you were pulling over a criminal who isn’t actually a criminal. I just...” Holli stood and paced the confines of her small cell. “I just can’t believe one little clerical error, one little number out of place is the cause of all this. All of you know it’s a mistake, and no one can fix it because it’s the holiday weekend. I am missing New York City at Christmas because some little pip-squeak clerk transposed two numbers. I’m missing Rockefeller Center all decorated. I’m missing Bloomingdale’s after-Christmas sale. I’m missing ice-skating in Central Park, even though I don’t know how to ice-skate. I’m missing a plush, expensive-as-all-get-out hotel room in Manhattan because...” She slammed the flat of her hand against the bars, then immediately cradled it with her other hand. “Oww.” She pouted but wouldn’t give in to tears. “Guess this is what I get for driving instead of flying.”

Officer Hunky just nodded his dark, handsome head. He’d listened patiently to her rant and rave, curse worse than a sailor, even cry at one point over the ridiculousness of the whole situation. He knew it was a clerical error, could see it on the computer, had printed out the screenshot and faxed it to hell and back, but no, everyone who had any kind of power said she’d have to sit in jail until Monday at the earliest and Wednesday at the latest.

At least come Monday some decent food might be available. Her stomach growled in anticipation. She could sure go for a nice juicy steak, or maybe some Chinese from one of those awesome places in New York people were always talking about. She’d take a cheeseburger from one of those fast-food places at this point.

“You okay? Bleeding?”

“I’m okay, and no, there’s no blood, just a bruised palm and an even more bruised ego. A change of subject was in order. She needed to stop thinking about food, and she needed to stop making him feel worse than he already did about the fine circumstances she’d landed in.

So when do you get off the holiday shift?” “Eleven.”

“Tonight?” She glanced at the typical government office wall clock, white face and black rim. Nine thirty. Twenty-eight and a half hours she’d been in the slammer. She wasn’t in a hurry for him to leave. What if his replacement didn’t talk except in one-word sentences? What if he was grumpy and only grunted at her? She didn’t want to be left alone with someone else. If she had to stay there, which it appeared she did, she wanted Officer Hunky to stay with her.

“Yeah. I’ll go home, take a shower, and bring you something to eat. You like salads?”

He’d come back? Bring her food? Damn. He was really one of the good ones. She suddenly felt bad about being so tart tongued with him earlier. He didn’t deserve it. He’d been doing his job. Nothing more, nothing less. Except he was offering to do more, and warmth curled deep in her belly at his gesture. “You don’t have to do that,” she said softly. “I’m sure you’re very tired, and looking at this place again so soon—or looking at me again so soon, for that matter—can’t be high up on your list of ‘can’t wait to do’s.’”

He waved his hand in a dismissive gesture at her objection. “Don’t be silly. I’d be pissed if I were in your place too.”

“But still...don’t trouble yourself. I’m sure the next guy will be able to feed me something.”

Officer Hunky barked a laugh. “Don’t bet on it.”

Holli shrugged, her worst fears confirmed about whom she’d be spending the rest of her night with. “Oh well. I could stand to lose a few pounds anyway. Missing a couple meals won’t hurt.”

Who the hell was she kidding? She was starving. She was bored. She was cold. When she looked at him, though, bored and cold were the last thoughts on her mind. The starving part simply switched from the food kind of starving to the naked man flesh kind of starving.

She bet he could keep her warm as well, much warmer than the blankets. She doubted she'd even feel the cold at all if she were snuggled up against him, making use of that whole body heat thing.

Down, girl.

"Nothing wrong with the way you look."

Yeah, okay. So he wasn't perfect. He needed glasses. However, he had felt her body from top to bottom. It was part of his job, but as she'd observed earlier, his touch *had* lingered on some parts of her body. Maybe he didn't need glasses. Maybe he liked his women a little on the full side.

Right. In what universe? Perpetual hope didn't mean perpetual lunacy, Hol.

"You're staring at me again."

Holli smirked. What would he do if she let some of her thoughts about him out into the open? "Sure I am. You're prettier than the gray walls."

"Pretty? You think I'm pretty?"

He scowled, looking completely affronted, and she couldn't keep from laughing a little. He was pretty, but not in a feminine way. Oh no, he was pretty in the handsome, hot, sexy, let's-get-you-out-of-that-uniform way.

"Well, relatively speaking. I mean, I wouldn't ever say that these walls in here are anything close to handsome, so..." She tossed him a wink and, in a bold move, blew him a kiss.

He made a move, like he was intercepting it, and then he laughed. She found she liked the sound of it: warm, rich, full-bodied. It sent an invisible shiver through her. Flirting with him was a lot more fun and a lot better than pouting, spitting fire, and feeling sorry for herself.

Lust for the cop was more than she'd expected to feel on this trip. Hell, she hadn't expected to feel any kind of lust at all. She'd just wanted to get away, spend some downtime before she had to get back home and tear down the beautiful decorations she'd so painstakingly put up over the last month. Spending her

precious week off in a cinder block-walled room with iron bars was not what she'd expected either, though.

At the same time, Holli figured it could have been worse. She could have been arrested by someone less delicious, less sympathetic, less kind than Officer Hunky, and she should thank her lucky stars he was the one on duty.

"What are—"

He started to ask something, but the phone interrupted him. She watched the way his long fingers wrapped around the receiver, the way he cradled it between his ear and his broad, strong shoulder, the way his mouth moved as he talked, and her mouth went a little dry.

There was a slight bit of scruff on his face, and she wondered if he was normally clean shaven or if he was always a little scruffy. Personally she liked his current look. His eyes were hazel with light brown, thick lashes, and as he talked, he glanced up and pierced her with those eyes. More heat curled in her belly. She took a couple of steps back as if the movement would make his stare any less potent. It didn't. She was still just as affected by it.

His conversation consisted of a lot of "Yes sir, I understand" and "No sir, I won't let that happen." He reached up and scratched the back of his head. His brown hair was cut in a short style and was slightly spiked on top. He really was a good-looking *GQ* kind of man, but with the scruff, the spiked hair, and her own imagination, he was far from the boy next door. He was the good guy with bad boy written all over his smile, the charmer, the guy who all the mothers warned their daughters about. The one guy Holli would have had a crush on, but who wouldn't have looked twice in her direction.

"Holli?"

He was waving his hand at her in front of the bars. When had he gotten up? She blinked and shook herself out of her thoughts. The man completely stupefied her. "Yeah?"

“That was the DA and one of the local, very unhappy at the moment judges. They’ve been discussing this on and off.”

“Okay.” Were they going to let her go finally? Did they believe her? Could she get back to her vacation? “And?”

“I can release you, but there are conditions.”

Conditions? She could live with conditions if she could just get the hell out of dodge. “What are they?”

“You have to stay close by. I can’t let you go to New York.”

Damn. Damn damn damn. “What else?”

“You have to be watched. House arrest until the offices officially open on Tuesday.”

“So that means you’re going to put me up in a no-tell motel and station someone outside the door until Tuesday?”

“Not exactly.”

He was hedging around something, and she couldn’t put her finger on it. At the moment, she would have agreed to just about anything. “But I get to take a hot shower, put on some other clothes, get some food, and curl up in a bed?”

“Yes.”

“I can live with that.” And she really could. It wasn’t Manhattan. It wasn’t her posh, boutique hotel. But she could live with it if it meant she could get out from behind the gray, iron bars. “Just point me in the right direction.”

“I can put you in a motel, or...you can come home with me.”

Option one: a motel. Four walls that would essentially be another cell.

Option two: go home with Officer Hunky. She likely wouldn’t notice any walls at all if she were looking at him.

Was that heat she saw flare in his eyes when he suggested she go home with him? She may not celebrate Christmas the way others did, but man oh man, she

must have been a really good girl all year for Santa to give her a belated gift like this. To heck with New York...

“Holli? Are you okay with these conditions?”

As if he needed to ask. “Yeah, I’m good,” she said, trying hard to keep from jumping up and down and singing “Joy to the World.” Oh yes, she was really, really good with his conditions.

“Great. I’ll get the paperwork filled out, and when my replacement gets here, we’ll go.” He unlocked the cell and slid the door to the side. “Feel free to walk around and stretch your legs.”

“You didn’t ask me which of the two options I chose.”

One brow lifted as he looked down at her. “Do I need to?”

Holli grinned, no longer trying to play it cool. She wanted the man. “Not if you think you know me well enough.”

Officer Hunky leaned down and got right in her face. His breath smelled like coffee and mint. She remembered the gum he’d chewed after the two cups of coffee earlier. Up close like this, she could see the flecks of brown and gold in his eyes, and if she leaned toward him just a scant inch, her lips would be touching his.

“I know you well enough. I know your choice.”

Chapter Two

Michael's gaze followed his prisoner's movements out of the holding area. He'd never seen curves quite like that or heard such a sultry voice. Everything about her oozed sex. Yeah, she was sweetness personified, independent and confident too, but her unconscious sex appeal wrapped all the rest up in a pretty potent package. She was going to be hell on his libido for the next couple of days.

Taking her home with him was unconventional and not exactly kosher, but he wasn't going to lock her in another "cell," which is exactly what a motel room would be. She'd have walls and a door, nothing much different than the jail cell he'd just let her out of. No, taking her back to his place was better, and if there were any professional or personal consequences to be dealt with after she went home, well, he'd deal with them. She could relax, sleep, sit in front of the fire, and he could fix her some decent food. He wasn't too bad with a pair of tongs and a grill if it came to that. Besides, his argument had been that she wasn't a prisoner. Everyone knew it was nothing more than one number out of place. Well, that and an unfortunate speeding ticket.

However, just to be on the safe side, until all the government offices reopened Tuesday, they wanted her kept nearby.

"How do you stand the cold?"

She'd come back to the desk after a trip to the restroom and sat in the chair next to him. She'd sat in that same place when he'd first brought her in yesterday afternoon. "You don't get cold weather in Atlanta?"

"Yes, but this feels different. Colder."

Michael laughed. "You are quite a ways north, and the river is on the other side of the street, so yeah, I suppose it is a bit colder."

"I guess that's it. It could just be that I've been cold since I got here."

"I know, and we'll get you warmed up soon, I promise." In more ways than one, if he had anything to say about it. He'd seen interest in her eyes when she watched him. Catching her always brought a blush to her face, but she never backed away from it nor did it keep her from continuing. Her bravado might have come from the fact that bars separated them, but he didn't think so. She projected enough open confidence in herself to not need a safety net like that.

He wouldn't force himself on her. He'd let her come to him, make the first move, but even if she didn't, he would uphold his end of the deal and give her a place to stay, food, and a warm bed.

"Why Holiday?"

"What?"

He kept his smile out of sight. He'd caught her staring again. He couldn't remember the last time a woman had stared at him so much. It was nice, more than nice. It was hot, and it made his cock swell. Not for the first time in the last thirty hours either, give or take a few minutes. "Your name is Holiday. Why were you named that?"

"Oh. It was my dad's kooky idea that I be named Holiday to inspire joy all year round since I was conceived sometime between Thanksgiving and Christmas."

"You've told that story thousands of times, haven't you?"

"It seems like it. Why? Can you tell by the tone of my voice and my impatient huffing and puffing?"

She laughed, but she was right. Her tone reflected how she felt about it.

"Do you dislike the holiday season?"

"No. It's actually very profitable for me." She paused for a few moments before continuing. "I sound very cynical, I know. I loved the holidays as a child, and when I

grew up...it's not that they didn't mean anything anymore, it was just...I got tired of spending all but the actual day of or day before or day after alone."

"You don't now?"

"No. I don't. I am booked solid from the day after Thanksgiving through seven p.m. on Christmas Eve. I make roughly a third of my income in those four weeks. I'm always busy."

"What about after?"

"There're New Year's parties, Super Bowl parties, Valentine's Day parties. There are weddings and birthdays and all sorts of events that people hire decorators for. I have a business partner that works with me, and I hire people as I need them, usually college kids looking for a way to make a little extra money."

"So you're always working?"

"Yes. Always working. I take this one week between Christmas and New Year's Eve off. And this year, I hit the jackpot. I'm in jail."

Despite the fact that she seemed to enjoy what she'd chosen to do for a living, Michael got the distinct impression she wasn't exactly happy. He could understand that. He spent a lot of time alone. He was single, lived by himself, ate by himself. The only time he went out was when a few of his friends could get from under their wives' thumbs long enough to have a night out.

Oh, he knew not every married couple was like that, but most of his friends were. He didn't want to live like that and preferred being on his own as opposed to having a harp on his ass all the time.

Then again, meeting Holli—by fate or accident—talking to her, taking care of her as best as the circumstances would allow, he wondered if perhaps he hadn't grown a bit cynical as well over the last few years. He saw what his friends went through when they tried to go out, but he also saw their happiness when they were with their kids and—most of them—with their wives. They had someone to go home to, someone to share a bit about their day with, someone to sleep with.

“What’s the smirk for?”

Michael tried to school his features but ended up laughing instead. “I was just thinking about my friends and how they’re all married, and my family is scattered all over. I always volunteer to work the holidays because I don’t want to spend them alone and have nothing better to do. I’m tired of my friends’ wives trying to set me up with what’s left of their single friends.”

“You don’t want a girlfriend?”

Yeah, I actually think I might. Are you free? Do you have a boyfriend? Do you want a boyfriend? “I haven’t given it much thought lately. I guess I just want to meet someone on my own, as far as that goes, and even then...” He shook his head. “It’s more than about being alone during Thanksgiving and Christmas, you know? It’s more than just having a date with someone, and I’m far past the point of just settling for a semiwarm body. I’d rather be alone than—”

“Than to settle,” she said, nodding her agreement. “I know. Don’t get me wrong. I love my family and I still spend Thanksgiving with them every year, but...” She shrugged. “I don’t have a boyfriend. I haven’t had one in a couple of years. My family and friends try to set me up too. Quite unsuccessfully, I might add. Odd as it may seem, given my bit of cynicism, I’m the romantic. I don’t want a bunch of dates. I want one. One very long date with a guy I choose and connect with.” She shrugged again. “So I do know that it’s about more than spending the holidays alone.”

And he really believed she did. She blushed as she talked, and he found himself understanding, sympathizing, empathizing, and wanting her more by the second. She wanted a guy she chose. She wanted a very long date with a guy of her choosing. He could give her that, at least for a few days. He could give her the connection because there was something more between them than just police officer and speeder, more than just lust between a guy and a hot woman he’d picked up.

She reached out and touched his arm. The hairs on the back of his neck stood at attention—as did his cock—at the innocent contact. His eyes met hers, and she smiled. Michael was done for.

“Thank you, by the way.”

“For?”

“For taking me home with you.” Another flush of red crept up her neck. Any more and she was going to look like she had a sunburn in the middle of winter.” Well, what I mean is, for taking me... Crap. Just...thank you.”

She was cute when she stammered like that. He wondered if she blushed that same shade of red in other places.

The thought ought to have surprised him, but given that they'd spent virtually every minute together since he brought her in, it didn't. He was fairly easygoing and easy to accept things when they felt right. This with her, this desire and want, felt right.

“You're welcome.”

“When can we, uh...when can we go?”

And now she wouldn't look at him. Even more cute. For all her fire and staring and flirting, she was a bit shy making small talk. He liked the contrast and honestly hadn't seen it in a woman in a long time. Usually the ones he met up with were full of fire all the time, burning everything in their path, or they were too shy to even look him in the eyes. This one did both.

“Soon. C'mon. I'll take you to go get your coat and other belongings.” He got up and gestured for her to follow him.

“Where's my car?”

“The impound lot. I can't let you have it yet.”

“Oh.”

She shrugged as she caught up to him, and it lifted her breasts just a fraction of an inch. It was enough. They were full behind the bra and T-shirt she wore. He'd allowed her to change clothes yesterday. Once. And he'd turned his back, counted to a million forward and backward so he wouldn't think about the fact that the most

adorable, curvaceous woman, who made his palms itch and his dick ache, was naked. Behind bars and naked. Cold and naked. Naked and...naked.

He could only imagine what she looked like out of her jeans and sweaters and long-sleeved T-shirts. She hadn't dressed in the latest fashions but rather for a road trip. She'd dressed for comfort, and he wanted to do nothing more than sink into that comfort, into her soft, lush body and stay there for days, weeks, months... If he stocked the pantry, they could stay holed up for a year or so.

He laughed at his foolish thoughts. He was tired, hungry, and fucking horny for a woman he barely knew. He also felt bad for the predicament she was in. She was at fault for speeding, but someone else was at fault for the clerical error.

On one hand, Michael would like to wring the neck of that little twerp. On the other, he'd like to shake the man's hand and buy him a beer.

He opened the door to the storage closet that also doubled as a lost and found. It was dim and small, but he'd placed her belongings in there so he knew right where to find them. Unfortunately she tried to stand in the same place at the same time as him. Her breasts and his chest and her hips and his cock met. He didn't breathe after that. Didn't so much as move a muscle.

"Oh dear."

Her voice, though whisper soft, touched him like a wire, live and sparking. "Yeah."

"You're, um..."

"Yeah."

"Because of me?"

The question was innocent enough. It held a twinge of surprise, some shyness, and a hint of interest. He hoped. Dear God, he hoped. "Yeah. Look, I'm... I don't do this. Not like this, but if you don't slide back out of the doorway, I'm not sure I'll be able to stop myself."

"From?"

Damn, that question, that tone of voice, that... “From kissing you. From sliding my hands underneath your shirt. From figuring out a way to...” He didn’t want to finish the sentence. He didn’t want to complete the thought. He wanted to show her.

“Oh. I guess...” Her tongue snaked out to lick at her lower lip, and his cock pushed against her through his uniform. She looked down, then back up, raking every inch between his groin and his face, slowly. Hell... This was hell, and he supposed, by the heat in her gaze, he wasn’t the only inhabitant. “I guess that wouldn’t be a good thing to do here in the police station.”

Much to his dismay. “No, no, it wouldn’t.”

“Outside the police station though, you could, right? I mean, if you still wanted to?”

God above, she was going to kill him. He just hoped she was quick about it because he was already in pain below the waist.

He couldn’t remember the last time he’d had this kind of reaction to a woman. He’d had affairs with married women needing some spice, dated single women who couldn’t hold his attention beyond sex, but Holli, she was different. There was nothing else they could do except talk. And he’d learned in the past thirty or so hours that he liked hearing her voice. He liked seeing her eyes light up when she talked about things she enjoyed, seeing her smile and watching her mouth move when she was muttering to herself. He was pretty sure she didn’t know he was watching during those moments—because otherwise he doubted she’d do it—but there were candid visions of her etched in his mind, and he liked that.

It was part of the reason he was taking her home with him. He wanted to spend time with her, talk to her, learn more about her. And he wanted to do all sorts of naughty things to her. He just hadn’t known she’d want the same thing before. Now he did.

“Yes, outside the police station, I could.”

She moved just a fraction of an inch, and he sucked in a breath. She moved another small bit, though he knew she was trying to edge out of the doorway. He clamped his teeth around his tongue and lifted his gaze to the heavens, praying he didn't unload in his pants.

"Do you want to?"

Right now on every available surface, and I don't care if I get fired. He glanced down at her and swallowed hard, hoping he could speak in a somewhat normal tone of voice. "Yes."

She moved quickly, and he was able to breathe again. He reached in and grabbed her bags, then closed the door. Leaning against it, he took her in from head to toe. She wasn't looking at him anymore, but a pretty pink blush stained her cheeks and neck. He found it both amusing and arousing.

The longer he stared down at her, the longer the silence between them grew, the brighter the color became on her skin and the more she craned her neck to avoid his eyes.

"Y'all could've used some Christmas decorations in here."

Michael grinned. She was going to be fun. He wasn't going to know when she'd meet him head-on about something or when she'd skirt the issue at hand in favor of inane conversation. Like now. "Yes, I suppose we could have, and we generally do have stuff up. I don't know who was in charge of it this year."

"Well, clearly whoever it was, was a slacker."

He was trying not to smile and failed miserably. "Completely," he offered.

The pulse in her neck wasn't quite as pronounced as it had been when she'd first exited the close confines of the closet, and her chest wasn't rising and falling quite as rapidly. Her nipples were still pebbled and pushing against her T-shirt, and while he was willing to admit the station house was a bit chilly, he wasn't willing to accept it was the only reason for the buds trying to poke a hole through her shirt.

“I guess you still have work to do before we leave.”

“I have a little paperwork left, yes.” He shifted her bags to one hand and took her by the other and led her back to the desk. “Why don’t you sit with me while I do it? Time will go by faster if we’re together, and you can tell me about some of your eccentric clients. I’m sure you must have a few.”

Chapter Three

She was going home with him. She couldn't believe it. When was the last time she'd gone home with a man? Or had a man go home with her? Holli wasn't sure she could remember that far back. She wasn't quite sure this particular instance counted, but...

It was the second time since she'd been pulled over that she'd been in his squad car. This time, though, she was sitting up front and not in the back behind the cage. In all her thirty-five plus years, she'd never gotten so much as a speeding ticket and had never been arrested. If she wasn't so bone tired, so damned horny, or feeling so freakin' gross from not having had a shower in—how many hours had it been? Too many for her to remember without the clock in front of her. She knew there was some humor in this whole situation; she simply felt too much like shit to find it.

Just the thought of how tired she was and of curling up in a warm bed had her yawning. Would she be sleeping in a bed? Or on the couch? Did he have a second bedroom? Did it matter? She looked over at him. Yeah, it did matter. It would matter a lot more when she was rested and fed.

Then she'd see about feasting on him.

His profile was beautiful. *He* was beautiful. His face had that guy next door handsomeness that was just over the top, but his eyes were so bright and fun and compelling. He was easy to smile and laugh, open, and very kind.

And she wanted to fuck him. Officer Hunky indeed.

She wanted to be naughty with him. She wanted to get down and dirty with him. She wanted to snuggle into his arms and sleep with him. He was exactly the

kind of man she didn't let herself get involved with, but again, not that many that looked like him had ever been interested in her. He was the good, way-too-good-to-be-true-in-the-long-run kind—she didn't do short runs very well—so she stayed away from the sexy men that made her blood boil when it was ten below outside.

But just this once. During this season. On her vacation. She wanted to fuck him.

It wasn't often she met men she wanted to fuck either, but this one—oh hell yes. He wanted her too. That was a shock in and of itself. Just looking at him and knowing what she must look like right then, it was a wonder he even wanted her in the same car. In general, though, he wasn't usually the kind of man who would want her. He was toned and lean and perfect to look at, and she was curvy—like way, *way* curvy—a little pudgy in some areas, and truthfully pretty average looking. But she wasn't going to second-guess or question or bemoan the wonderfully good luck landing her in his lap, so to speak. She—

“Is everything okay?”

She'd been staring. She knew that. She'd been all but drooling while imagining him naked. “Yes.”

“You were yawning and looked kind of dazed.”

Dazed with lust. “I'm pretty tired.”

“I bet. You can shower and sleep when we get to my place. It's right up the road here.”

He pointed in the direction of “here.” Light snow was falling, but she could still see clearly through the windshield. A river flowed to the right, and small shops and businesses lined the left side of the road. It was a small, quaint town right outside Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. The kind you'd see in a magazine or something in a Norman Rockwell painting.

Up meant up a hill, and then he was turning into a drive that wound around to the back of a rather large, Victorian-style house complete with a wraparound porch. “You live here?”

"I live in one part of the house, yes. It was gutted and renovated some years ago and was divided into four apartments. I live in one of the upstairs ones."

"It's beautiful."

"Yeah. It was once a summer home for a Southern family that would spend, well, the summers up here. When the last descendent passed away and no one came forth to claim it, the city was going to demolish it. Instead a local businessman bought it to use as rental property. And here we are. C'mon. Let's get you inside."

He helped her out of the car and grabbed her bags from the trunk. With a hand holding her elbow, he guided her around ice patches and unsafe mounds of snow. The inside of the house was warm, and the smell of gingerbread assaulted her senses. Her stomach rumbled its approval of the aroma. Michael laughed, and she was starving again, still, for something other than food. She was starving for Officer Hunky.

She'd separated him in her mind. Michael was the one caring for her. Officer Hunky was the one inciting her lust and making her want to do naughty things so he'd be forced to "arrest" her.

"Mrs. Collins bakes gingerbread all the time. All year long. Even in the summer. She's one of those competitive bakers that you see traveling all over the country to participate in recipe contests."

"Has she ever won?"

He guided her up the stairs to the second-floor landing. "Yes. She's won a lot, and every time she comes home, she shows off her ribbons or asks me to come down to see her brand-new kitchen equipment."

Holli chuckled him on the chin and winked. "Well, aren't you a good neighbor?"

"It doesn't hurt that I'm pretty handy with basic installations either."

"Oh I'm quite sure it doesn't."

They were talking, bantering, sort of flirting. They'd had an easy enough rapport behind bars, and it seemed to be translating to the outside world as well.

She liked that they could relax and connect, that they could tease each other. She was fairly certain she could keep from throwing herself at him too. At least for a little while longer.

He unlocked the door to his apartment, and she immediately shivered as a cold gust of air hit her.

"Sorry about that," he said, wrapping an arm around her to usher her inside. He closed the door behind them, then moved to a fireplace in the center of the large wall running the length of the living space.

At least her teeth weren't chattering. "That's beautiful. The scrollwork on the mantel, I mean."

"Yeah it is. When I said the house was gutted, I mean gutted. All except the fireplaces. There are four total, all original to the house. One in each apartment, but there is gas heat as well. I generally don't have need to use it myself, but with you here, I'll be happy to turn it on so the bedroom gets warm."

"It's okay. I can sleep on the couch."

"No. You'll sleep in the bed."

There was no arguing with that tone of voice. She knew from experience. He'd used the same one with her when she'd tried to argue her way out of being arrested and booked for fraud. Until he'd seen the clerical error on her social security number, he'd given her that implacable, in-charge voice. If she hadn't been scared and pissed off, she'd have found it incredibly arousing. Kind of like she did now.

Remember Holli, no jumping Officer Hunky.

"Can I shower?"

"Of course. This way."

His tone was light again, easygoing, and she followed him into the one and only bathroom. "It'll take a few minutes for the water to heat up, but once it does, be sure to monitor it before you get in or it'll scald you."

"Okay. Temper the water."

“I’ll get some food started.”

He backed out of the room and closed the door behind him. He’d become formal, businesslike, and she wasn’t sure why. Was he nervous? Had he changed his mind about bringing her to his home? Had he changed his mind about wanting her? Should she have attacked him in the closet after all?

Holli sighed and reached behind the shower curtain to turn on the water. While she let it warm up, she unzipped her suitcase with a slight frown. She had nothing sexy to wear, not that it would really matter, but still... In her current circumstances, it would be nice to at least give the appearance that she had a feminine side. But since she’d planned on going shopping in New York, she hadn’t brought anything pretty or sexy. She opted for the gray lounge pants and the soft black sweater that was some sort of cross between sweatshirt and T-shirt. She grabbed the first pair of panties she saw, the plain white cotton, and promptly buried them at the bottom of her clothes. She found a somewhat girly pair of black ones with polka dots and a little bow at the waistband and decided they would have to do. Though if he was no longer interested in her—as she was beginning to suspect and resign herself to—her choice of panties wasn’t going to matter one bit.

She checked the water and found it to be the perfect temperature to thaw out her frozen skin, and she quickly undressed. She had the curtain pulled to the side for less than a second before she was ensconced behind it under the blessedly warm downpour.

There was a knock on the bathroom door just before she heard it open. There was only one person it would be. She thought briefly about inviting him to join her, but didn’t. For one, the tub was too small for two people, and two—well, she didn’t have a two.

“Holli?”

“Yeah?”

“I brought you a cup of coffee. I know you’re tired, but I thought something warm to drink might help warm you up.”

“Thanks.” She didn’t know what else to say. She wanted to ask him to stay and talk to her, to let her just listen to his voice, but she let him go and finished her shower.

To say it felt good to wash her hair, twice, and to wash her face, twice, and to wash her body, at least three times, would have been the wrong word choice. Heavenly was more appropriate and though both the shower and the coffee would help to wake her up a little, she knew it wouldn’t take long for exhaustion to take over once more.

She got out and dried off, then dressed, hung the towel back up, and took a couple of long swallows of coffee. The jolt to her system was almost immediate, but she didn’t want to be on a caffeine high either. After one more swallow, she brushed her teeth. Twice.

She folded her old clothes in a nice, neat stack and wondered if it would be considered a fire hazard to burn them in the fireplace.

Heat wrapped around her when she exited the bathroom, and the already potent exhaustion sank even deeper into her bones. She would be lucky to stay awake long enough to eat.

“Grilled cheese?” she asked, coming to stand at the edge of the kitchen.

Michael looked up at her and smiled. A different kind of heat enveloped her that had nothing at all to do with room temperature.

“Yes. Is that all right? It was quick, and I thought it might be just enough for you for a while.”

“It’s...it’s perfect.”

And it was. It was perfect. He was perfect. The coffee was perfect. The winter wonderland scene outside with the snow and the icy river not too far in the distance was perfect.

“Holli? What’s wrong?”

Nothing. Everything. She walked up to him without answering his question, stood on her tiptoes, and laid a kiss on his lips. Her intention was to pull away immediately, but his arms curved around her back and held her flush against his body. He angled his head one way and slid a hand into her hair and angled hers the other way to deepen the kiss. Mouths opened, breath mingled, tongues danced.

Holli clung to his big, solid body as desire swept through her. She responded to him taking charge of the kiss she'd started by sinking into him, molding against him. It should have been awkward, their difference in height, but it wasn't. It was a fit she couldn't have imagined, a feel so right it made her knees weak and her heart thump hard.

Slowly, very slowly, he raised his head and looked down at her with darkened eyes full of the same need that pulsed through her.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

"Don't you dare. I'm not. I've wanted you since you got out of the car on the side of the road. Thank God you want me too."

"I've never...I've never thrown myself at anyone." She was still clinging to him, still clutching his shirt in her hands, and it was only then that she realized he'd changed out of his uniform into a pair of jeans and a pullover. He was even more handsome, even more hunky in street clothes.

"You didn't throw yourself at me."

She lifted a brow. He tossed her a smirk.

"Okay, so maybe you did. I'd have made the first move, but you beat me to it. I was going to wait until you'd had some food, some sleep, before I ravished you. I didn't want to take advantage of you."

"No advantage taken. I...I..." She was at a loss for words, and she hoped he'd take pity on her. When he offered her a plate with the most incredible-smelling grilled ham-and-cheese sandwich on it, she could have kissed him. Again. But that would have only led to more kisses and the beginning of other things, and she

wanted to be fully awake for those. It was best they eat, and then best that she sleep. “Thank you.”

“You’re welcome.”

He led her over to the couch, and she curled into one corner of it, so tired she could barely keep her eyes open. He sat on the floor in front of her and leaned back, stretching his legs out. If he tilted his head back just a little, it would be laying against her leg, and the idea made her smile and tingle with warmth. It was the last thing she remembered feeling.

Chapter Four

Michael turned his head when he heard the deep, even breathing behind him. One partially eaten half of her sandwich hung limp in her hand, her eyes were closed, and her lips were parted just slightly when she exhaled. She was sound asleep.

He'd watched her sleep some while back at the station house. She was cute, and he wanted her so damn much. He didn't know where it came from, the clawing need to bury himself inside her, but it was there, and it didn't seem like it was going away anytime soon. Especially as long as she was in his home, in his bed, soft and warm and openly feeling the same way he was.

The clinging kiss in the kitchen was more solid proof, but he'd already known long before she'd emerged from the shower. The flirting at the jail, in the storage closet doorway while getting her bags, the way she'd curled into him when he slid his arm around her shoulder at the door to his apartment, the way she'd been unable to keep her eyes off him... Yeah, she wanted him as much as he wanted her, but first, the poor woman needed sleep.

He got to his feet and took the plate in her lap before reaching under her body and lifting her against his chest. She once again curled in, this time with her arms around his neck.

"Where are you taking me?"

"To bed," he whispered into her hair. She smelled soft, sweet, like vanilla and sugar. It was warm and tempting, and he had to force himself to keep moving toward the bedroom.

"Oh good. I want to go to bed with you."

His laugh rumbled through his chest as she yawned the words out. "I'm not going to bed with you yet."

"Oh. That's no fun."

"No, baby, I know, but you need some rest."

"But I want you to."

"Soon." He set her on the edge of the bed, letting her lean against his hip while he pulled the blanket and sheet down for her to climb under. It was a lesson in resistance, ignoring her warmth, the way she pressed so close to him and wrapped her arms around his thigh. Damn woman was under his skin, and he didn't know how it had happened or what to do about it. There was no plan here, only his gut instinct, but even that was a little muddled. He didn't want to take advantage of her, but he sure as hell wanted to bury himself inside her rather than settle her between his sheets alone. "In you go, Holli," he said, untangling her from his leg and helping her to lie down.

"It's a nice bed."

"Good. You get some sleep, and I'll check on you in a little bit." She opened her eyes and stared at him with such trust, such welcome, and some serious exhaustion that had her looking rather pitiful. At that moment, he simply wanted to care for her. "I tell you what. I'll lay here with you for a while until you fall asleep again. Okay?"

Her smile was all the answer he got as he climbed into the bed beside her. She snuggled close, and it was a damn good thing there were layers between them. A sheet, a blanket, her pants and probably panties, his jeans and his... Well, he hadn't put on anything under his jeans, but hopefully she'd put on panties, which gave them a good five layers separating his cock from her...

He needed to stop that line of thinking immediately, or there'd be nothing between them at all. Gathering her close again, he kissed the top of her head, and she moaned softly.

"I like you, Officer Hunky."

Officer Hunky? “I like you too.”

“I know. Who knew?”

Michael smirked and closed his eyes. Officer Hunky indeed. He’d stay where he was for the few minutes it would take her fall back to sleep then he’d get up and clean the kitchen, maybe watch the news. He had no idea how long he’d wait before he gave up the ghost and tried to sleep on the couch. She was too tempting by half for him to sleep with in the bed for the rest of the night.

So he’d hold her for a just a small amount of time until her breathing was deep and even again.

Just a little while longer.

* * *

Holli stretched and squinted at the sunlight beaming through the window. It was reflecting off the roof next door and was blinding in its brightness. For a few minutes, she just lay there, letting her eyes adjust to the light. The sudden clanging from the kitchen drew her gaze and attention to the doorway. The scent of bacon assaulted her. Dear Lord, he was making breakfast. For her.

She snuggled deeper into the bedcovers and grinned to herself. Officer Hunky was making breakfast for her. And him too, probably, but still...

“You awake?”

She peaked over the edge of the blanket. He was standing in the doorway with his hair all ruffled, his face a little scruffy, his sweatpants riding low on his hips, his shirt...gone. Her heart thumped, and had she not been lying down, it would have fallen to her feet.

A sprinkling of chest hair, flat, hard abs, long, lean, muscled arms... *Damn oh damn oh damn.*

“You hungry?”

“Starved.” Heat flared in his eyes for less than a second, but she saw it. Yeah, she was starved for him too and was sure there was an answering heat in her own

eyes as she looked at him. 'Cause there was some definite warmth starting to travel south from her chest to her belly.

He cleared his throat. "Scrambled eggs okay?"

"Yes."

"I'll be right back. Stay put."

"I can help."

"I got it. You stay there, and I'll bring it to you."

"Umm, mind if I call my friend and tell her I'm at least out of the jail?"

"Sure. Go for it. I'll be right back with some food."

He smiled at her, just a quirking up of the corner of his mouth, before he turned and walked away. *Damn oh damn oh damn*. She'd never had a man bring her breakfast in bed, not even lovers or boyfriends. She'd done it for them, but never had they done it for her. She was torn between crying at the sweetness of it and trying not to be moved by it.

She was only going to be here for a few days. Hopefully. And she shouldn't get involved, shouldn't get attached. She really shouldn't be giving in to the lust flowing between them, the attraction, but hell if she was going to turn him down.

She sat up, prepared to get out of the cozy bed to get her purse from the living room, but found it on the floor beside her. What a sweet guy. Picking it up, she searched through it for the small red cell phone. When she had it, she pressed the button for the contacts menu, scrolled down to find Charlotte's name, and pressed Send.

It was answered on the second ring. "Who the hell is this?"

Holli laughed. "Not a very pleasant way for you to answer the phone."

"Holli! Oh damn, girl. You okay? Where are you? Still behind bars? How's Officer Hunky?"

"I'm okay, and I'm not in jail but under some sort of house arrest until they can officially let me go."

“So they’ve got you stashed somewhere? Where? I’ll come stay with you.”

“No, it’s fine. I’m stashed away; yeah, you could say that. Officer Hunky is taking good care of me.”

“What kind of good care?”

There was a suggestive tone in her friend’s voice that Holli ignored. “He’s fed me, given me a warm bed to sleep in, and let me tell you, Char, I hadn’t been so happy to take a hot shower in all my life as I was last night.”

“I bet. You sleep with him?”

“Charlotte! How can you ask me that? After all I’ve been through?”

“Yeah right. If he’s half as hot as you say he is, I’d have that man’s pants down around his ankles the minute we got somewhere private.”

“Well, that’s you. Not me.” Holli touched the tip of her finger to the tip of her nose. She was sure she could feel it growing at the number of lies she told since getting on the phone.

“Sure. Okay. Are you going to be able to come up here at all?”

“I don’t know. He said things should be fixed by tomorrow or the day after at the latest, so I just don’t know.”

“You just take care of yourself, or...at least let that man take care of you. I’m glad you’re okay.”

“What about you? I hate that you’re there alone.”

“Not...exactly alone.”

“No?”

“I kinda went to a club the other night. I’d heard about it while I was out getting something to eat. I figured it couldn’t hurt to see what a real New York nightclub was like.”

“You were out partying in a club and bringing a guy back to the hotel while I’ve been suffering alone in jail?” Holli really wasn’t affronted, but she was going to

give the slight appearance of it. She would rather know her friend was having a good time instead of sitting alone in a New York hotel room being miserable.

“Oh stop. And...I didn’t pick up a guy.”

“Two guys?”

“A woman,” she whispered.

Holli was sure she’d heard that wrong. “Did you say you picked up a woman?”

Charlotte giggled on the other end of the line. “Actually she picked me up. I’m at her place. She kindly offered to keep me company until you got here.”

“I had no idea you—”

“Me neither, but oh damn, Hol, it was the best sex ever.”

“Wow. I think on that note, I’ll let you get back to her. I’m glad you’re having a good time. I was feeling awful about you being there alone.”

“I just wish you were here. It’s really beautiful. You would love the lights and the trees and all the decorations. They’re getting everything ready for the big New Year’s Eve party.”

Holli knew she should feel bad about not being there, and part of her did, but another part of her, the part that was enjoying the downtime, the relaxing in bed, the...normalcy of things in that very moment, didn’t. Not that anything about the last—what was it now? Two days?—had been normal, of course. She’d never had a man make breakfast for her, hold her while she slept and *just* held her. She’d never had a man arrest her either, for that matter, but...she’d be lying if she said she wasn’t enjoying her time with him. “I know I would. I’ll call you when I know something new.”

“Okay. Bye, Hol.”

“Bye.”

Holli pressed End and disconnected the call. She’d seriously had no idea that Charlotte was even curious about women. She was such a small-town girl, and it

had taken a while for her and Holli to become such good friends. This was to be their second vacation together but... Wow. Learn something new every day.

“Everything all right?” Officer Hunky called from the kitchen.

“Just peachy. She’s doing good. Made a friend to keep her company.”

“That’s good. Did you sleep okay?”

Did she? “I think so. I don’t really remember much after the shower.” She didn’t even remember how she’d got there. She barely remembered the grilled cheese sandwich. Did she eat it?

And where did he sleep? Crap. If he’d slept in the bed with her and she’d missed it, she was going to be really pissed.

“You okay? You’re scowling.”

Holli focused on him as he walked into the room with a tray. He really had brought her breakfast in bed. “Yeah. I just can’t remember much from last night. I must have been really tired.”

She fluffed the pillows behind her and scooted back against the headboard. It was really an odd piece. The top and sides were a dark reddish wood, but the center had metal, spiral rods in a vertical design.

He set the tray across her lap. Yeah, she wanted to cry. Scrambled eggs, bacon, toast with a little bit of jelly on the side, and hot chocolate. With marshmallows. And they looked like the real ones, not the round ones in the bag from the grocery store. She’d only had the square ones a few times in her life.

The way they melted across the top of the chocolate, the steam that rose up from the cup... She couldn’t remember the last time she’d had hot chocolate that wasn’t instant.

“It’s not going to bite you,” he said softly, climbing into the bed from the other side.

“No, I know, it’s just... Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. I figured I owed you.”

“Well, it was certainly not the way I’d intended to spend my vacation, but you’ve more than made up for it with a warm place to stay that isn’t concrete and a warm shower.”

He sat on the other side of the bed, finishing off a piece of bacon. “I know, but you haven’t had much in the way of decent food either. That’s one thing I can do.”

“You’re a bachelor. You’re supposed to be eating frozen pizzas and fast food, not fixing gourmet breakfast for damsels in distress.”

Michael laughed, and again, the sound traveled warmly from her chest to her belly. Just like his voice when he talked, she loved when he laughed. There was something very comforting in it, friendly. It wasn’t fake. It was real, and she liked that most of all.

“Is that what you are? A damsel in distress? Nice. Perhaps I’ll try to rescue you. Besides, I can’t very well eat junk and preservatives and run the marathon in the spring.”

Holli glanced over at him as she took a bite of her own piece of bacon. Slightly sweet, crunchy. Sugar? “Marathon? And did you put something on this bacon?”

He snagged a piece off her plate. “Yeah, brown sugar. The marathon is something I’ve been training for, for about seven months or so.”

He could cook. He was a cop who put his life on the line every day. He was a genuine person. He was training for a marathon. She couldn’t have been more impressed with him or more in lust. The man oozed dedication and confidence, and like a moth to a flame, she was addicted. “I’ve never done anything at all like that. Takes serious commitment, I imagine.”

“It does. I haven’t had fast food in so long I’m not sure I’d like it anymore, and I never developed a taste for frozen pizza. I prefer the piping hot delivery kind once in a while.”

His wink was sexy, and he was absolutely the hottest, sweetest, kindest man she’d met in a really, really long time. Too damn bad she was going to be leaving him in a few days.

She picked up her fork and took a bite of the eggs. “Oh my God.” She covered her mouth when she spoke, then chewed and swallowed before taking another bite. “These are... What’s in them?”

“A secret.”

“What do I have to do to get that secret? They’re delicious. So smooth and creamy and...herbs? Cheese? Garlic?”

“Very good. It’s from a local farm that makes a lot of artisan cheese.”

“I don’t cook, but maybe you’d give me their information before I leave.”

“Or you could come back to visit when it thaws outside, and I can take you.”

She stopped midmotion with the fork halfway to her mouth and turned her head toward him. He was serious. The look on his face—in his eyes—told her so, and she didn’t know what to say in response. She wanted to say yes. She wanted to say she’d just stay until the spring, but she couldn’t. She couldn’t say anything at all, so she just nodded and took the fork between her lips, used her teeth to pull the eggs off into her mouth, and looked down at her plate.

“I’m sorry. I guess I shouldn’t have said that.”

Holli shook her head and swallowed. “No, it’s just...”

“I know.”

She picked up the hot chocolate and took a small sip. She took another sip. And another. Holy God. “Okay. I’m staying. If you’ll make this for me to drink every morning, I’m staying.”

“Like it, do you?”

“No. I’m in love with it. I’m loving it a lot more than coffee at the moment, and I never say that. I’m so addicted to coffee.”

“Yes, I kind of figured that when you didn’t make a face drinking the coffee at the station.”

She smiled a little sheepishly. Her need for java embarrassed her, though she wasn't sure why. She didn't want to need it, but sometimes it was the only thing that hit the spot. "If it's caffeine and hot, I'll drink it."

"No sodas?"

"No, but I think your hot chocolate trumps coffee." She took another sip. "Mmm. Yeah, definitely trumps it."

"My mother's recipe."

"What about the marshmallows?" If he said he made them himself, she was going to marry him. A girl didn't pass up a man who could make his own marshmallows.

"A candy shop here in town."

Not a deal breaker. Officer Hunky was just about as perfect as perfect could be before she'd found out he could cook and make his mama's hot chocolate. She'd never wanted a man more.

"What's that look?"

Had his voice gotten deeper? And what was that buzzing in her ears?

"Holli?"

She shook her head and put the mug down. "Will you please take the tray away?" That didn't even sound like her voice. It was totally different and far sexier than she ever remembered her voice being. It was throaty and a little rough, and her southern accent was stronger. Who the hell was she?

"Sure. What's wrong?"

He looked so alarmed, and she didn't want him to be. She didn't want him to be concerned. She wanted him to be as turned on as she was right at that moment.

He picked up the tray and placed it on the floor, and then she was on him. The second he sat back, she crawled over him.

The kiss was arousing in an instant, much like it had been last night in the kitchen. She wanted to climb up and down his body, then do it again. She slid her

hands through the soft hairs on his chest, flicked over his stiff nipples, memorized the solid strength of his shoulders before coasting over his flat abs to his exposed hips.

He shuddered, and his belly fluttered under her touch. She felt it through the skin of her hands and fingers and in the kiss they shared. His tongue stroked and stabbed harder into her mouth, his lips matching hers for urgency and that undeniable inability to get enough. His groan answered her moan, and he flipped her over, sliding on top of her.

His hazel eyes were dark now, almost brown, with slight flecks of green when he lifted his head to look at her. “Who are you kissing now?”

Huh? “What do you mean?”

“Are you kissing me, Michael, or are you kissing him, Officer Hunky?”

The slight smile was the first clue to her lust-hazed brain that he was teasing her. Embarrassment filled her, but she refused to lower her gaze. “How did you know?”

He nipped at her nose. “You murmured it in your sleep last night when you curled up against me.”

They’d slept together? He slept with her? And she slept all the way through it? “You stayed all night in bed with me?”

“I did. I hadn’t meant to, but I fell asleep and...”

“You hadn’t meant to? Does that mean you don’t—”

“No, it doesn’t mean that. It simply means that my intentions were to sleep on the couch so I wouldn’t disturb you.”

“No disturbing. I evidently didn’t even know you were with me. The tension from the last few days must have kicked my ass harder than I realized.” She turned her head on the pillow and closed her eyes. Damn. In bed with the hottest man north of the Mason-Dixon, and she hadn’t even realized it. How embarrassing.

He tucked her chin between his thumb and forefinger, bringing her to face him again. "You didn't answer me, Holli."

"About what?"

"Who were you kissing?"

She answered with a smile. "You're Michael, Officer Hunky. One and the same, though honestly, Michael is a bit more serious and kind and caretaking. Officer Hunky, he's the one I want to be naked with, play with."

Michael laughed. "I don't think anyone has ever referred to me as Officer Hunky before. I kind of like it. Maybe I'll officially change my name."

"It would definitely make your job more interesting."

"More interesting than say, my holiday collar being all warm and cuddly in my bed from sleep?"

"Well, maybe not that kind of interesting."

"That's all right. I'd rather be Officer Hunky to only one woman. Makes it special." He leaned down, his mouth hovering just over hers. "Makes me special."

Holli reached for the kiss, but the next thing she knew, Michael had her up and out of the bed. "What are you doing?" She giggled and fell against him, her hand clasped tight in his.

"You have something warm to wear? Gloves? Heavy shoes?"

"My other shoes are back in my car and so are my gloves. I have some sweaters and such."

"Long underwear?"

"No. I hate it and didn't expect I'd need it. Why?"

"Hold on. Let me see what I can find for you."

He winked and moved away from her to rummage through a chest of drawers. He pulled out a few sweats and thick socks and tossed them on the bed. "What are we doing?"

“We’re going outside. You get dressed, and I’ll be right back.”

Holli was still standing there confused when he left the room and then left the apartment. “What the hell?”

Chapter Five

Still a little uncertain, she took off the clothes she'd slept in and grabbed the clothes he'd laid out and went into the bathroom. The least she could do with the loaned, too-long-in-the-leg and too-snug-in-the-hips-and-ass, ill-fitting sweats and pair of men's wooly socks was put on some deodorant. Brushing her teeth, washing her face, and combing her hair couldn't hurt either. She could make herself a little more presentable.

She was rummaging through her makeup bag for her moisturizer when she heard the door to the apartment shut again. After pulling the ends of the sweats up over her feet and ankles and grabbing the sweatshirt, she went to see where he'd been.

"Boots," he said, holding up a pair of galoshes. His gaze narrowed on her. "Everything fit okay?"

"Just peachy. It's snowing, and you want to go outside?"

"Have you ever played in the snow?"

"Not really, not this kind of snow."

"Well, put these on, and let's go. You've been cooped up inside for days, and some time outside will do you good."

Holli took the boots from him and sat down to put them on. "It's cold out."

"I know."

"Taking me outside to play in the snow isn't going to violate my house arrest agreement?" she asked as he was walking into the bedroom and she was tugging the sweatshirt on over her head. Layering clothes had never been her favorite thing

about winter, but at least it kept her warm. She reached up inside the arms and pulled the sleeves of the long-sleeved T-shirts down and smoothed everything into place as best she could. Everything she wore was black. She had to look like a charred marshmallow.

“No more than what was going on before in the bed and no more than the attraction between us.”

He was pulling on a sweater over a long-sleeved T-shirt as he walked back into the living room. The sweater being pulled over his head ruffled his hair, and the casual intimacy of the moment struck something deep inside her. Spending time with him alone, playing, laughing, talking as though they were friends, involved...it wasn't a good idea. She was going to fall for him, and it was going to be more than his good looks and his kindness that wormed its way under her skin. “Maybe you should have taken me to a hotel and had someone else guard me.”

He tweaked her nose as he passed her to get some boots sitting by the door. “No. Trust me; there's no one better for the job than me.”

“I'm not going to run.”

“That's not what I mean. C'mon. Put some of that lotion on your face and let's go.”

He was like a kid, and his excitement was contagious. Holli quickly put the moisturizer on and set the tube on the counter before letting him help her into her jacket. He shoved a baseball cap on her head and ushered her out into the cold hallway. She shivered.

“Oh damn. Here.” He handed her a pair of gloves he pulled from his pants pocket. “I forgot to give these to you. Mrs. Collins said you could hold on to them until you leave.”

“Nice of her.” Holli quickly put them on, and though it wasn't immediate or scalding warmth, they were wonderful against the bite of the wind as they stepped outside. “These her boots too?”

“Yep.”

The snow was even more blinding outside and even more beautiful. She stood there, looking up, letting it fall on her face. "This is real snow. We don't get this in Atlanta."

"What do you get?"

"It's not powder. It's wet and icy, but this is...this is delicate, and there are actual snowflakes."

"We get the icy stuff too, but we've gotten a lot more powder this year than normal."

Holli walked a little farther out into the small backyard but stopped short when a ball of snow hit her square in the chest. "Hey!" Michael's smile was all innocence. She didn't buy it for a second. "Weren't you ever taught not to hit girls?"

"Yes, but snowball fights don't count."

"How do they not count?" He was already rolling another ball between his hands, his eyes trained on her. "Oh I see. You're not gonna play fair."

"I always play fair."

"Right."

"Unless..."

He drew back his arm, his fingers... Wait. Were those his knuckles on top of the snowball? She squinted and tried her best to focus, to see clearly. Was he going to...? Oh hell no. He was going to send a knuckleball her way? Two could play that game. One of the greatest knuckleball pitchers of all time played for the Atlanta Braves, and Officer "Pretty Boy" Hunky wasn't about to show her up. "Unless what?"

Holli dropped down, shed her gloves for the time it took to mold the snow into the right size ball. Her fingers were so numb and cold she could hardly feel what she was doing, but it was going to be well worth it. She pinched off little bits of snow until she had the perfect size pile of powder sitting in her palm. "Unless what, Hunky?"

Carefully she laid the mock baseball down, then picked up the gloves again, making sure to pick a few pieces of fuzz off. After slipping her fingers back inside the blessed semiwarmth, she scooped up the snow baseball, packed the fuzz from the gloves into it so that it could be seen clearly, and took her stance.

“Unless it’s something I really want.”

He looked for all the world like he was waiting patiently, but she knew better. He was in competition mode, just like she was, and there was no patiently waiting about either of them.

“And then?”

“And then I stop at nothing until I get it.”

He let his snowball fly the second she drew her arm back, then shot it forward to let hers go. She moved as soon as it was out of her hand, narrowly missing getting tagged dead center of her chest. Officer Hunky wasn’t quite so fortunate.

He placed a hand over his heart. “Where’d you learn to throw like that?”

“My family, namely my grandpa and my dad, watch baseball religiously. I watch too. It’s what we do in our house every summer. Hot dogs, chips, sodas, baseball. If we aren’t at the games, we’re planted in front of the television watching them.”

“But that was a knuckleball.”

Holli grinned. “It was,” she said proudly. “How could you tell?”

“I saw the dark speck of something coming right at me.”

Her grin grew bigger. “My dad was a big Phil Neikro fan, and when he left the Braves, Dad kind of broke tradition and would watch Phil play wherever he was and when I was old enough, he taught me how to throw one. I can throw all kinds of pitches. My aim is generally way off, but well, you’re a pretty good-sized target.”

As she’d been talking, she’d been kneeling down in an ever-growing pile of snow, making snowballs. She kept her eyes on him for the most part, making sure she didn’t look like a threat, making it appear she was just playing in the snow.

"I'm a baseball fan too."

"I didn't see anything in your apartment for a team."

"I'm a Phillies fan. And you're wearing my Phillies hat."

She yanked the hat off her head. Sure enough she was. She hadn't noticed what was on the cap when he'd stuffed it on her. "Yuck." She tossed it at him, then made a sour face and stuck her tongue out as though she were spitting something out. "Terrible taste. I can't believe I had that on. If my family ever finds out, they'll skin me alive."

"Terrible?"

He looked so affronted she forgot her own distress, genuine though it was, and had to bite the inside of her cheek to keep from laughing out loud. "Yes, terrible. A Braves fan does not wear a Phillies hat, no matter the circumstances."

"You're just jealous."

"Oh yeah, that's exactly it." Sarcasm dripped from her tongue, and another snowball hit him square upside the head.

"Now you're playing dirty. I wasn't looking."

"Me? Play dirty? No." She shook her head. "I wouldn't do that." Two more snowballs flew at him, small ones that, when held together, were about the size of a regulation softball. Her aim had been his stomach but went a little south. "Oh God."

She ran toward him as fast as the cockamamy outfit and boots would let her. The piling snow didn't help either. He dropped to his knees and fell over, clutching his crotch. She dropped down beside him, wanting to touch him but afraid of hurting him. "Oh God, Michael. I am so sorry." And she was. She'd been hoping to play with that part of his anatomy later, and now she'd just drilled him with hard-packed snow. "How bad are you hurt? Do you need to go to the hospital? Talk to me, say something."

"You play dirty snowball fight," he croaked out. He followed that with a great deal of whimpering and rolling around.

“Michael?” When he didn’t answer her and just kept mewling like a wounded animal... “Well, I guess there’s nothing else to do but hide your body.”

Holli scooped up an armful of snow and dropped it over his hips and groin area.

“What the—”

She followed that with an armful dumped on his chest and then one over his face.

“Holli.”

“Yes?”

“What the hell are you doing?”

“Burying you.” She pushed snow up against his body and packed it in tight. “You’re evidently on death’s door, what with all the dramatics. Your body should keep for a few months as long as the temperature stays around freezing. In the spring they’ll find you, and I’ll be long gone.”

He blew snow out of his mouth and shook his head against the ground to dislodge even more from his face. “You’re a coldhearted woman, Holli. I was trying to show you a good time, and you insult my choice of baseball team and then fire shots below my belt. That’s just wrong.”

“And has the snow reduced the swelling and the pain?”

He laughed, low and dark. The sound made her shiver, and for once since she’d been in the north, she welcomed it.

“No. In fact, it’s even more swollen now, and the pain is excruciating.”

Holli clucked her tongue and shook her head sadly. “I guess the only decent thing for me to do then is to put you out of your misery.”

“Definitely. I think that’s your only recourse.”

Next thing she knew, she was flat on her back in the snow, and he was braced on his arms above her. They stared at one another for a few excruciatingly long

seconds before his mouth was on hers, his tongue in her mouth, his body heating hers from the inside out.

He tasted like chocolate, like a fantasy, and she kissed him with an urgency she absolutely felt. She only had him for a couple of days, just a small moment in time before life would return to normal again.

She started to cling to him, to wrap her arms tight around his neck, but he was up, gone from her for the second time that morning, and she had to wonder what she was doing wrong. “Why do you keep doing that?” she asked, still lying in the snow instead of taking his outstretched hand.

“Doing what?”

“You kiss me; then you pull away just as I start to get into it. What’s wrong with me?”

“Nothing. There is nothing wrong with you. I thought you might like to get out of the snow and cold, especially since you refuse to wear my hat. But if you’d rather stay”—he knelt on the ground and tugged her up to straddle his thighs—“we can stay.”

Chapter Six

She was really freezing. Michael even opened his jacket and wrapped it around her as best he could to keep her warm. Through their kisses, all their kisses in the last however many minutes, she'd grown colder by the second. She needed to get inside or at the very least put the damn hat back on, but she was stubborn and full of pride.

He couldn't blame her. He was too when it came to his ball club. He loved them when they sucked, and he loved them when they were on top of their game. It made the winning all the sweeter.

He nipped at her tongue, a little harder than he'd intended. When she lifted her head and eased her grip on the back of his hair, he smiled at the bright pink of her frozen face. "We need to get you inside."

"I know."

"And my legs are solid ice."

"Can you walk?" She slid off him as she spoke, the move slow as she unbent her own legs from their curled position.

He took her proffered hand, doing his level best to stand on his own as much as possible. If he held on to her too tightly and used her to pull himself up, he'd bring them both back down again. And shit, he wasn't kidding; his lower legs were numb and freezing. "Never let it be said I didn't give a lady what she wanted."

"And what did I want?"

Michael picked up his hat that was now soaked and half buried under snow and shook it off. "You wanted more of my awesome kisses."

“I don’t recall saying that exactly. I just wanted to know why you kept pulling away.”

“I didn’t this time.”

On shaking legs, filled with pins and needles as feeling began to return, he guided her up the back steps and into the furnace of what was once the mudroom. It wasn’t really hot in the hallways and stairway, but it sure as hell felt like it compared to the winter chill outside.

“Michael?”

He opened his apartment door to let her in ahead of him. He closed it behind them. “Hmm?”

“I’m sleepy again.”

“I know.” And she began stripping right there in his living room. Holy. Moly.

The jacket came off first, and she laid it over the arm of his couch. Next was the sweatshirt, followed by two long-sleeved T-shirts: the one he’d given her and one that must have been hers. He had to swallow a couple of times while he watched. He wasn’t trying to stare, it’s just... Okay, so maybe he was trying to stare. The damn woman was getting naked in front him and not batting an eyelash about it while he was sweating a river under his own clothes.

She left the bra on, a plain white cotton bra that shouldn’t have been sexy and probably wasn’t to most men, but on her, right there and then, it was the sexiest thing he’d ever seen.

She leaned over, using the couch for leverage, and pulled the boots off, then rolled both pairs of pants down her legs. She stood back up, all luscious curves, in bra, panties, and his wool socks.

“Have you ever been attracted to a woman like me?”

“Like you?”

She shrugged, and just like yesterday in the police station storage closet, it raised her chest barely an inch. It was enough. Oh damn, it was enough, but his

cock wasn't in agreement. No, his body, his cock wanted her to do so much more, like shrug the fabric covering her, off. He wanted to see her nipples, feel the heavy weight of her tits in his hands, taste them with his tongue. He—

“Michael?”

Shit. What was she talking about? Oh right. Like her? A girl like her? What did she mean by that? “What?”

“You know, a girl like me. A...big girl. Plus-sized? Full-figured? Double D's and double-digit sizes?”

She wasn't blushing or looking sad or trying to cover herself in any way beyond the scraps of clothing she still wore. She was serious.

He stalked up to her and tilted her face up so he could look into her pretty eyes. “A woman like you is my preference. I won't break you. I won't hurt you. I won't feel your bones under my fingers. I'll know you're there, soft and giving beneath me, against me. I prefer a healthy woman with curves.” He leaned down and kissed her lips, tasting her breath. “You're fit, strong, and you might actually like being cooked for, held, danced with, and”—he dipped his tongue between her lips then retreated—“fucked,” he whispered into her mouth.

“Yes. Now.” She reached between them and went to work on his belt, quickly dispensing of anything that was in her way, anything that kept her from touching his skin.

“Now?”

“Yes. Now,” she repeated, this time with telling emphasis.

He didn't need to be told three times. He shed his jacket and shirts as she unbuttoned and unzipped his jeans. “You ever been with someone like me?”

She paused. “Like you?”

“Yeah, like me. You know, an Officer Hunky.”

“No. I can honestly say I've never been with an Officer Hunky before, but I think it might be my new preference. That is if...”

“If? If what?”

Holli edged away from him, reached behind her, and unhooked her bra. She turned her back to him, then twitched her hips from side to side as she let the bra go. It dropped to the floor with a whisper of sound. “If you can...”

His jeans were around his ankles in less than a second, but his damn boots were still on. Shit. He hobbled to the side of the couch she’d just vacated and yanked them off, followed by his jeans and boxers.

She stood in the doorway to his bedroom, her back against the doorjamb, watching with a smile on her face. *Damn smooth, cowboy.* He told himself he’d been distracted by the sight of her breasts, full, more than a handful, and those nipples...

God, she was gorgeous.

Her gaze traveled from his head to his toes as he moved in her direction. She zeroed in on the one part of his body that was no longer stinging from the cold, and licked her lips.

“If I can what?”

She raised those eyes up to his again and hooked her thumbs in her black-with-white-polka-dot panties. She shimmied them off her hips and down her legs and backed into his room, crooking her finger at him to follow. As if she could keep him away.

“If I can what, Holli?”

The backs of her knees hit the edge of the bed, and she dropped back into the mess of covers with a laugh. Her legs spread, along with her arms, her tits bouncing, with nipples pointing to the ceiling. She was beautiful and sexy as hell. He could eat her alive, she was so delectable and unashamed of her curves, her arousal, her need.

“C’mon, Officer Hunky.” She dragged one of her fingers through her sex, parting the lips to tap at her clit. “Read me my rights.”

Rights? Oh yeah, the woman had rights to him and his body and anything she might want to do to it.

Her thumb replaced her finger, and her finger slid inside her. Michael groaned and reached for the basket on top of his chest of drawers, rummaging for a foil packet, his gaze never breaking contact with the action between her thighs.

She was masturbating in his bed. When was the last time a woman had done that? When was the last time he'd had a woman in his bed? He couldn't even remember. But this one with the small, trimmed tuft of hair resting just at the top of her pussy and smooth everywhere else. This one with the sultry, teasing Southern belle voice and trust-me-with-your-soul eyes. This one that he thanked the heavens for speeding in his district, on his holiday weekend, on his shift... No, he wouldn't be forgetting her. Ever.

He ripped at the foil with his teeth and pulled the condom out. "You have the right to scream at the top of your lungs. Anything you say, ask for, beg, or plead for may be used against you, inside you." He knelt on the bed and held himself above her with his arms locked at the side of her head, much like he had been earlier. "You have the right to ask for more. If you cannot speak, I will decide for you." Lowering one hand to join hers, he touched the wettest sex, the hottest juices... "Do you understand these rights as I have explained them to you?"

He lifted her fingers up to his mouth and sucked on the one that had been inside her. She was sweet, with a tangy aftertaste. He'd remember her taste every day for the rest of his life. It was smooth, sliding over his tongue, and he wanted more. But later.

He raised that arm over her head and brought the other to join it, holding her wrists in his fists. "Do you, Holli? Do you understand?"

Her feet braced on the bed, she angled her hips up, touching her opening to the head of his cock that was aimed directly at her. "Yes, Officer Hunky. I understand."

"Thank fucking God."

He thrust with his hips, and his ass tightened as he plunged fully inside her. Her thighs tightened on him, closed around him, and he sank down onto her. Her body gave, and his fit itself to her. And what a delicious fit it was too.

He kept hold of her wrists now with both of his hands, leveraging his upper body off hers, watching her move under him, feeling the give and take of her pussy as he pushed in and pulled out.

The softness of her socks slid up and down the backs of his thighs, and she planted her feet, lifting herself up into him, fucking herself on him. God, he'd never had a woman take so much, give so much, show him she was an equal participant. It was amazing.

Her sex sucked at his cock, her bottom lip drawn between her slightly imperfect teeth, her eyes stared into his, and he couldn't break away, didn't want to break away. He'd never had the pleasure of so much intimacy shared with a look that moved beyond what was going on with their bodies.

He was caught, held entranced, and the connection burned through him. His balls tightened, and sweat beaded on his forehead. It matched the sweat on hers. She was working him as hard as he was working her, driving herself up and down on his cock. Her breath came hot and heavy, her face flushed, and he couldn't resist her mouth anymore.

Lowering his head, he tugged at her bottom lip with his teeth, dragging it from between hers and into his mouth, sucking and licking before sliding his tongue into her mouth. The openmouthed, open-eyed kiss drained him of any resistance to her. He'd wanted her the moment he met her, wanted her more as he spent time with her and got to know her, but that was all surface, all cursory compared to this want flowing through him. Now he just wanted her, all of her, anything and everything he could get. He wanted to imprint himself on her, inside and out, and by any means necessary. He didn't want her to forget him when she left. He wanted her to come back.

The offer he'd made earlier this morning about her coming back in the spring hadn't been idly given, but it was different now with his cock tunneling through her cunt. He needed her to come back. He needed to see her after this. And he had to make sure she needed the same damn thing.

Their breath mingled, tongues tangled, gazes held, and his balls gave way, sending a rush of cum up through the end of his penis.

Michael groaned into her mouth, pumping his hips hard, meeting her thrusts as he emptied into the condom.

"Don't stop. Please. Don't. Stop. Please," she gasped.

"No. I won't."

"So...close. Yes. Harder. Just... God, Michael..." She strained against him, tensing under him, her body going rigid as she grasped for the orgasm.

He broke eye contact with her for just a moment, for as long as it took him to grip a nipple in his teeth. He worried it in his mouth, flicked his tongue over the tip and again lifted his gaze to hers. She was watching him tease her, and he loved it, loved the heat in her eyes.

He pulled upward and she bucked, shuddering beneath the weight of his body.

"Harder, Michael. Pull harder."

And so he did. The harder he bit and tugged, the harder and longer her orgasm, the harder and longer she trembled.

When she finally stilled, and when he could feel the tremors in the muscles of her thighs, in the fluttering of her belly, he let go, laving the nipple gently before pressing his mouth to hers again.

He let her wrists go, and she wrapped her arms around his shoulders, deepening their kiss, sliding her fingers into his hair, fisting the short strands.

"Wow."

"Yes. Wow." Michael pressed his lips to the pulse in her neck before extracting himself from her warmth. "I'll be right back."

“I’m not going anywhere.”

He certainly wished she wasn’t. He banished the thought from his mind and walked out of the bedroom to dispose of the condom. After washing his hands and cleaning up, he made sure the front door was locked and grabbed a bottle of water from the kitchen.

When he joined her again, she was curled on her side, her eyes closed and her breathing even. The woman had fallen asleep on him again. Oh well, he was going to join her. Again.

Smiling down at her slumbering form, he shifted her on the mattress before climbing in behind her. He pulled the sheet and blanket up over them and wrapped himself around her.

He fucking loved afternoon naps.

Chapter Seven

“I can’t believe I’m in handcuffs again.”

“You’re the one that said you wanted to try it, that you were curious.”

Holli tugged at the unforgiving and unyielding metal around her wrists. “I know, and I am.”

“How do you feel?”

“Good.” She turned her head to look at him over her shoulder. “I think I like it. Being your prisoner, unable to escape.”

And she did. She loved it, the inability to get free, to walk away from him. She’d never had bondage fantasies, but she liked being in his custody, under his control. The times he’d been over her, holding her down.

She wiggled and tugged and giggled. Who knew that being arrested would open a whole new side of her? She felt free. Free to be a different person. Maybe she’d been this person inside all along and just didn’t know it. No matter, she was there now, exploring and experiencing freely, asking for what she wanted.

“Why are you smiling like that?”

“No reason.”

“Uh-huh. For some reason, Ms. James, I don’t believe you.”

Holli produced the best pout she could. “Oh but Officer Hunky, I’m telling the truth.”

“Are you now? Let’s see about that.”

His large, warm hand smoothed over her butt, sliding from one side to the other, caressing her skin. She moaned, unable to stop the sound. His touch felt so good, and she wanted more.

More she got. In the form of a swat. She arched and twitched her hip to the side, surprised at the sting and the heat...and the desire for more.

“Holli? You okay?”

“Yeah. Do that again. Please.” Maybe it was an aberration, just a fluke. Maybe she really didn’t feel anything at all. Maybe she was affronted and offended that he would spank her. Whatever it was, the only way to figure it out was for him to do it again.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes. Please, Michael. Do it again.”

And he did. On her other cheek. Harder this time. Again she arched, and again she twitched to the side.

She still wanted more.

He slid his hand through her hair and massaged the back of her neck until she dropped her head forward, relaxing into it. His other hand rubbed the sting from the spansks away, which only served to make her want it again. She was horny for it. She was aroused by it.

She’d been aroused and excited before, but this was a different kind of aroused. This one was, as she’d decided earlier, heated, traveling from the surface of her flesh beneath to flow through her blood. She felt it between her legs, in her clit, up her belly, and into her breasts.

“You still okay?”

“I’ve...I’ve never been spanked before.”

“I won’t do it again. I thought you liked it, but—”

“No, please. I...” She shook her head. “I keep saying please. I’ve never said it so much in my life. I want you to do it again. I like it. At least I think I do.”

The hand caressing her behind dipped down and slid through the lips of her sex. Even without touching it herself, she knew she was incredibly wet. The cool air blew across her soaked center, and his fingers teased and toyed with her until she was ready to beg...for anything.

“I’d say you like it a lot, Ms. James.”

His voice was a whisper against her ear, and she shivered. “I’d have to agree with you.”

With exaggerated slowness, he removed his fingers, wiping her wetness along her inner thighs. “I want you to move. Wrap your hands around the metal rods you’re cuffed to, just like that, yes. Now walk backward on your knees until your hips are up and your nipples are just touching the sheet. Yes, yes. That’s beautiful.”

She couldn’t remember a time with any other lover that she’d been or felt so exposed. Sure, she’d been naked many times, and her favorite position was doggie-style, but this was different, new. With her ass in the air, with the inability to move her hands and cover herself if and when she wanted, the feeling of exposure was—

A slap landed right between her cheeks, up against her asshole, and before she could react to that one, another landed a little farther down, and still another even farther, this time against her clit. She uttered a grunt and pushed herself backward.

“More?”

“Yes.”

Three more strikes were gifted to each of her cheeks in rapid succession, hard and unforgiving, driving her to the brink of tears. His hands were there, gentle now, rubbing the burning tingles away. Her mouth was dry, her eyes were stinging, and her body was hungry and heavy with lust. Then his tongue was on her clit.

Oh, God...

Holli lifted her upper body enough that she could look down to see the top of his dark head between her legs. His tongue attacked her clit, licking, stabbing, prodding the little bundle of out-of-control nerves.

She tightened her hands on the headboard and tried to hold off the orgasm but failed miserably. She tried to lift off his tongue, to ease the rush taking over her body, but he wouldn't let her. His fingers squeezed her smarting ass and held her against his mouth, giving her no way out. She had no choice but to give in, to give him what they both wanted from her.

She felt it in her toes when it broke. The pressure escaped her in a gush of warmth from inside her pussy, in another unladylike grunt that turned into a whimpering shudder of breath.

Lost in her release, it took her a moment to realize he was sliding up, lifting her until his face was directly beneath hers, his chest hairs teasing her already sensitive nipples. "Please, Michael. Please..."

"I know, baby."

His fingers brushed against her sex, and she heard paper tearing then his cock was pushing into her again, stretching her, filling her still-pulsing core.

His hands returned to her ass, tightening, digging into her skin, forcing her body to accept him, to ride him. She had no objections and soon took over the job, raising herself up, then lowering back down. The pace wasn't slow once she adjusted her legs alongside him. His smile was pained and gorgeous as he lost himself in the fuck.

He gave her more power than she'd anticipated having, drove her to want more than she'd had before. It hit her that she wasn't the only one bound and unable to get away. She held him just as enthralled as he held her. Feminine power at its best.

And she loved it, reveled in it.

She lowered her mouth and dipped her tongue between his lips. She found his taste, the one she was coming to crave, and she found her own. The taste of her pleasure on his tongue was a heady mix, one she could get quite used to.

They moaned together, and his hands shifted to her hips. "How can I help you, Officer Hunky?" she whispered.

"You're doing just fine, Ms...James. Goddamn. You're so tight like this, hot. I want you bare though, no condom. Just once, sometime, somewhere, somehow, no condom. Promise me, someday, I'll feel nothing but your wet pussy surrounding me?"

She wanted the very same thing. "Promise."

"Sweet Jesus, I need to..."

He strained under her, and she watched the play of emotion on his face. His eyes were closed this time. It was a different kind of sexy than before. Darker.

He moved her forward off his cock, then backward hard to penetrate her again. She followed his rhythm and was soon using the headboard as a brace to pull and push against.

"Yes, Holli. God fucking yes..."

The last was a hiss between his teeth. He pressed his head into the bed beneath him, the pressure causing the tendons and muscles in his neck and shoulders to stand out. She wanted to lick him, taste his salty skin with her tongue, but she couldn't stop moving long enough to satisfy that bit of thirst just yet.

He raised his knees behind her, a flesh wall that she butted up against when she thrust onto his cock. His breath shuddered in his chest, his throat issued sounds she'd never heard from a man before, and he came hard, holding her down while he jerked and bucked through his orgasm.

Holli lowered her head and gave in to the desire to taste his skin, licking from the outer edge of his shoulder, along his collarbone, up the side of his neck, and nipped at his jaw, his chin, and finally at his full lower lip. She tugged on it with

both of hers, then slipped her tongue inside for another kiss. This time his arms wrapped around her, holding her to him, flush against his chest, belly, and groin, and it was the first time since he'd cuffed her wrists to the bed that she wished to be set free. She wanted to touch him with her fingers, hold and caress him with her hands.

His hands fisted in her hair and pulled her away. He gave a peck to the end of her nose that made her giggle, then looked into her eyes. There was still a good amount of hunger there for her to see, a great deal of lust, but it was all mixed with tenderness. She could literally stare into his eyes forever.

She smiled to herself. A little dramatic yes, but true nonetheless.

"Ms. James? Do you feel any remorse for the actions that led you to this place?"

She shook her head, lowering her eyes demurely. *As if*. "No, Officer Hunky. Sadly I do not."

"That's a shame. It seems I'll have to continue to interrogate you until you see and admit the error of your ways."

She'd take his brand of interrogation any day of the week and twice on Sundays. "Yes, sir."

"I can't allow you to leave without making sure you understand what breaking the law will get you."

She raised her gaze back up to his. There was a twinkle in his eyes. "If it gets me in bed with you over and over again, I'll break the law every time."

That earned her a swat on her still-smarting ass and a deep rumbling laugh from his chest. "Naughty girl."

* * *

"You need a bigger shower," Holli said from behind the curtain.

Michael nodded in agreement even though she couldn't see it. She was taking a shower first, and he would follow once she was done. It was the one thing in his apartment that he would change.

He loved the wood floors, the ornate mantel, the brick of the fireplace, the character that the historical attributes gave. He loved the open floor plan, the very modern kitchen, the spacious bedroom. The small bathroom, not so much, not when only one person could fit in it comfortably and two was just overcrowding to an almost fire code violation.

He was leaning against the doorjamb, waiting for her to finish. Still naked too and, by the looks of it below his waist, his dick was waiting just as eagerly as the rest of him, if not more so.

When had he wanted a woman this much that he could spend hours having sex with her? Or just spend hours with her? He and Holli, though, they just seemed to click, and that was okay by him.

"I'll be right out. Just getting the rest of the soap out of my hair."

"I'm here."

"Okay." She pulled the curtain to the side enough to step out but not enough to get water all over his floor. He was there, as he'd said, and wrapped a towel around her body. "Thank you."

Michael kissed the top of her head and stepped into the shower. He turned down the hot water just a tad, then doused himself under the spray. "You're welcome."

"So what are we going to do now?"

She was still in the bathroom with him. It was kind of cozy like that. Him in the shower. Her getting dressed or brushing her hair or putting on makeup. Whatever, really, just the fact they were there together. It was, again, one of those intimacies that couples and lovers shared. He wanted to be that with her. A couple. Lovers.

"What do you want to do?"

"Honestly? I'd like to eat. I'm starving. Again." She sighed. "I'm either sleepy or hungry. Is that what jail does to everyone?"

“I’m sure to some extent it is, but that shouldn’t be a problem. I’ll fix us something when I get done in here.” He squirted some of his combination shampoo/bodywash in the palm of his hand and scrubbed his hair then started working the lather over his body. At the moment, the head of his cock was still a little sensitive from the sex, but he was hoping that, given a few hours rest, it would be good to go for another round.

Stepping back under the spray, he tilted his head back to rinse the suds out and gave his body another once-over before shutting the water off and pulling the curtain back so he could get out.

Holli was dressed in another pair of soft knit pants, this time dark blue, with a white pullover. Her hair was all combed out, and she had a sated look on her pretty face. He’d like to have the chance to look at it for a few more weeks, maybe even a few more months. She was...she was getting to him, getting under his skin, and he wasn’t quite sure what to do about it. For the moment, though, she was standing there holding a towel out for him.

He reached for it, but she held it away from him.

“Come closer.”

He did, and she performed the very same act he had when she’d gotten out of the shower. She wrapped it around his body, then pulled his head down so she could kiss the top of it. “Thanks.”

“You’re welcome.”

She left the tiny room, and he finished drying off before padding naked to his bedroom for a pair of jeans and a T-shirt. He heard her rummaging through the kitchen cabinets, and after running his fingers through his hair, he went to see what she was up to.

He found her tit-deep in the fridge, her ass at the perfect height for... Damn, he had to stop thinking that way. At least for a few minutes, long enough to feed her. “What are you doing?”

Chapter Eight

Holli peered around the door. "Looking for something to eat."

"Uh-huh. You searching for anything in particular?"

"No, just thought I'd see what you have and see if there's something I can fix for us."

"If you'll move, I'll see what I have that's quick and would be good."

She backed out of the fridge and turned to him. "I can cook, you know."

He lifted his hands in an innocent gesture. "I didn't say you couldn't. I just know where everything is. But if you'd rather take the time to figure it all out, then figure out what we're going to eat, and then cook it...I'll wait."

Her brows scrunched down, and her lips pursed as though she were deep in thought. "Well, since you put it that way. I'll let you do it. I *can* cook though."

"Not arguing that point, and I'll happily let you make dinner if you want."

Her gaze darted away, then slowly returned to his. "Dinner?"

"Would you prefer to make breakfast?"

"Um...sure."

She didn't sound convincing, but he wasn't going to tell her that. He took her place in front of the fridge as she moved out of the way. Taking a cursory glance at the shelves, he said, "How about a BLT?"

"Okay. Sounds great. I can make one of those."

He looked over and smirked at her. "You don't say."

She stuck her tongue out at him and crossed her arms over her chest. "You're not going to make a normal BLT, are you?"

He ducked down and started gathering ingredients in his arms from the vegetable and meat bins. "What makes you say that?"

"There was something different about that grilled cheese last night."

"How would you know?" He stood and elbowed the refrigerator door closed, then laid everything out on the butcher-block breadboard. "You took one bite before you started snoring."

He hid the smile that was threatening his mouth at her indignant look.

"Yeah, well, it didn't taste like a normal one."

"There was a little Dijon, and the cheese was smoked gouda instead of American or cheddar."

"See? I knew there was something different."

He snagged the sourdough bread from the basket on the counter and started slicing it thinly. "It was good though, right? What you had of it, at least."

"Yes. I wish I hadn't been so tired and could have enjoyed it."

"Well, maybe you'll make it through this one." He turned back to the fridge and grabbed the pesto, then combined it in a small bowl with some mayonnaise. "I should have asked, do you like pesto? If not, I can just put mayo on yours."

"I love pesto. I'll have mine however you have yours."

"Adventurous girl. I like that." And he started slathering all four slices of bread with the pesto/mayo concoction.

"Can I help?"

"Can you slice tomatoes?"

She huffed. "Yes, I can slice tomatoes."

He opened a drawer and pulled out a knife, turning it over, handle first, in her direction. "Then you can help."

For a few minutes, they worked in silence. He prepped some arugula lettuce, and she sliced some roma tomatoes. When they each had a pile of vegetables, it was time to move on to the cheese and bacon.

“What kind of bacon is that?” she asked, pointing to the meat he’d placed on a silicone cutting board.

“Pancetta. Italian bacon.”

“Do you make anything the normal way?”

“When you don’t eat out but you like to eat good food, variety is key.”

“Where do you learn about all this? Are you a closet chef?”

“No.” He began cutting the pancetta into quarter-inch rounds. “I watch Food Network.”

“You watch Food Network?”

“I do. Along with the Discovery Channel, the History Channel, and *NCIS*.”

“Huh. Well, color me surprised.”

“Why? I’m sure a lot of men enjoy watching cooking shows if they like to cook. Besides, you’ve not complained about the food I make, just that it’s not what you normally eat.”

“True. I don’t know anything about you really, but cooking shows just didn’t cross my mind as something you’d like or watch.”

“It’s relaxing. I’m always learning something. And I eat really well.”

“I guess I can understand that. What kind of cheese are you putting on the sandwiches?”

“I took out both mozzarella and goat cheese.”

“Goat cheese?” She made a face. “I’ll take mozzarella. My simple, southern-fried palette can only take so much fanciness.”

He laughed and got out another knife so he could slice the ball of cheese. “What did you think you were going to be eating in New York?”

“Chinese,” she answered swiftly.

“That’s it?”

“No, but that’s what everyone is always talking about. I really hadn’t thought much about food, honestly. I was just excited about going to see everything, all the sights, the big and famous department stores, the landmarks.”

His smile dropped, and he paused to look at her. “I’m sorry, Holli.”

“I know, and it’s fine. I’m enjoying this, here with you. I can see New York next year. You, on the other hand, are once in a lifetime.”

He wanted to tell her he didn’t have to be just once or just right now. He didn’t though. He didn’t want to make her feel uncomfortable or pressured into feeling or saying something she didn’t want.

She turned back to the tomatoes and placed the slices on his end of the cutting board, then put her knife in the sink. “Besides, I think you’re right. I wouldn’t have been ready for the fancy schmancy cuisine of New York.”

He started to assemble the sandwiches. “I didn’t say that.” Cheese first, then bacon, followed by the tomato. The lettuce would be last.

“No, but it was implied.” She grinned. “And I heartily agree. I need to work up to that.”

“Why did you choose to drive? It’s what? Fourteen or fifteen hours? You could have flown.” He set the sandwiches on the griddle to warm the bread and melt the cheese slightly. When he was satisfied with the crusty edges, he slid a spatula beneath them and pulled them off the heat, then topped them with the lettuce and cut each in half.

“Yeah, but I like to drive. I wanted to see a part of the country that I don’t normally get to, so I drove. And I don’t like to fly.”

Michael brought her a plate in front of the fireplace where she was stretched out on the area rug. She’d piled the large pillows he usually kept under the window up on the floor in front of the fire and sat down. “But it’s winter. Snow and ice are everywhere.”

"I know. I didn't have any issues until I got here. I know how to use chains if necessary. I've driven through blizzards before. Driving up here has been a piece of cake compared to some places I've gone."

"Parking in New York is really pricey and a bitch to boot."

Holli picked a piece of her sandwich off and popped it in her mouth. "Oh my God," she moaned. "This is divine."

He watched her take another bite. She closed her eyes and fell backward on the rug, chewing slowly. All of the different flavors would mingle together on her tongue...creamy, salty, a little spicy, cool...

"Like it?"

His voice was at her ear, and she turned her head in its direction, opening her eyes as she swallowed. "It's the best damn sandwich I've ever had."

"Good. Here's the rest of that half."

He chuckled at her, and she took the proffered food. "Maybe I need to start watching cooking shows too."

"I'll cook for you anytime you're up this way."

"I'll keep that in mind." She finished off that part of her sandwich and took a drink of the milk he'd poured her. She didn't know the last time she'd been so pampered, so taken care of. As independent as she was, she couldn't deny how much she liked having someone to lean on, to depend on, to have take the reins for a bit. That's essentially what Michael had been doing since he'd arrested her. "Why don't you have any Christmas decorations up?"

"I knew I was working over the holiday, so I didn't see the point in it."

She scoffed and nudged him. "There's always a point in it. I might be a little cynical, but the decorations, the lights, a tree—there's a point. It makes things brighter, cheerier, a little less lonely."

"I guess, but then you're never home during Christmas yourself so..." He shrugged and took a bite of his sandwich.

“No, I know. I’m always gone, but did you take a look in my trunk?”

“A little when I stopped you and the flag came up on your license. Why?”

“There’s a box with a little three-foot tree. There’s a small hatbox with a few decorations and a strand of lights. I was going to put it up in the hotel room. I take it with me when I go on vacation.”

“Do you put a present for yourself under it?”

“I usually do, yes.”

“What did you get yourself this year?”

“I hadn’t yet. I wanted to get something in New York.” His jaw clenched, and he turned his head away to stare into the fire. She hated that he felt so bad for the chain of events the last few days. None of it had been his fault. He was just doing his job, and had she not been speeding, well... “Michael, please don’t let it bother you anymore. I’m fine and not mad. Besides, if you hadn’t pulled me over, I wouldn’t have met you. I wouldn’t have played in the snow, had great sex, or eaten at the best restaurant on the Eastern seaboard.”

He looked back toward her and winked. “Making the best of it, huh?”

“Yes and let me tell you, in all ways, you’re the best of it.”

“Even the sex?”

Holli laughed and leaned forward for a kiss. “Most definitely, even the sex.”

“Then I’ll try not to feel so awful about things.”

“I’d appreciate that. This house arrest thing isn’t so bad, but if you go around sulking, well, I just don’t know how I’m going to make it.”

“Brat.”

“Yeah, probably.” She polished off the rest of her food and milk, setting the plate and glass off to the side. Michael’s joined hers before he arranged a pillow and laid back, his feet pointing toward the fire. He tugged her sleeve, and she fell against him, snuggling into his arms. He really was special and more deeply

romantic than she'd have imagined. It was nice, though, that he saw her as a woman and not as his charge.

"What were you going to buy yourself?"

His hand smoothed her hair back, his fingers lifting and letting the strands flow through them. She tried not to purr at the heavenly feel, but the sound emanated from her anyway. At least she wasn't drooling. "I don't know."

"Well, what did you get for yourself last year?"

She held up her arm for him. The brushed-bronze watch had cost her a pretty penny, but the second she'd seen it in the jeweler's case, she knew at once they were meant to be together. "I've always collected watches. I have so many of them. I could wear two a month and never wear the same one twice in the same year."

"That's a lot of watches."

She nodded. "Yeah, I think I might have an addiction. What about you? What do you collect?"

"Nothing. I don't think I've ever collected anything."

"Nothing? Really? Baseball cards? Action figures? Matchbox cars?"

"Nope."

"Seems a little odd. Everyone collects something. Phillies stuff?"

"No. I only have a few T-shirts and the cap you ruined."

Holli pushed herself up on his chest, then looked down at him. "Ruined? If anyone ruined anything, it was you that ruined my head by shoving it on me. You realize I'd never live it down if my family ever found out I wore it."

"I'll be sure to send them a note about it as soon as you leave."

"What? Why would you do that?"

He leaned up and kissed her hard. "So you'll come back to me."

Chapter Nine

Well, hell. What was she supposed to say to that? As she was trying to figure it out, he fisted his fingers in her hair and held her head still for a kiss that stole any further thought from her mind.

And damn, he could kiss.

He put everything into it, answering each slide of her lips with a slide of his own, meeting each thrust of her tongue with a nibble and suck, then offering her his tongue in consolation.

The force of the kiss rocked her from the inside out. She melted against him, sinking into the lean muscles of his body, loving the way they fit together.

“How are you feeling?” he asked after he pulled away. She couldn’t stop staring at his lips, and she tried to lean back down for them again, but his grip on her hair was too tight. God, she loved that tight control he kept on her movements. It was something else she’d never experienced with anyone but him, and it turned her on. “Answer me, Holli.”

How was she feeling? Was that his question? “In-in what way?”

“Are you sore?”

“Some.”

“Too much?”

“No.”

“Good. Strip out of those clothes.” He kissed her hard again and sat up. The move pushed her to her knees, and still he hadn’t let go of her hair.

He tugged, and her head fell back, exposing her throat. His mouth was there, sucking at the skin, licking a trail up to her ear. "I want you naked when I get back."

He did let go then and stood to walk into the bedroom. Holli flew into action on her clothes, leaving them in a pile beside her.

She was back on her knees when he returned. He was naked and very hard, and he was carrying another little foil packet. "When did you put the one on earlier?"

"You mean when you were cuffed?"

"Yeah. I don't remember your hands leaving me long enough."

"It was while I was under you, just before..."

"Oh..." Holli nodded and flushed. "I felt your fingers touch... You were sliding it on."

"I was. Hate the damn things personally."

"Me too."

"I do happen to like you though. Like this. Something very sexy about a woman on her knees. And the way you're looking at me... Damn, Ms. James, I almost think you want me a little bit."

Holli laughed to herself. He was back to their little role-play. "Oh, Officer Hunky, it's a lot more than a little bit."

"Care to demonstrate just how much it is?"

"I can certainly try."

Michael stopped in front of her, and the flames from the fire flickered shadows over his skin. He reached for her at the same moment she leaned forward. His hand connected with her hair in a fist again as her mouth connected with his rock-hard penis.

He didn't try to control her movements or her speed; he just held her steady as she explored his taste—musk and soap—explored his texture, rough and rigid over

giving steel. She tested his length with her tongue and throat, which was almost too much for her to take comfortably. Almost. Then she tested his girth with her lips, spreading them wide over the shaft.

She dragged her mouth backward slowly, holding just the head between her teeth. The more pressure she applied, the tighter his hand in her hair became. When she let up, he did too.

“Ms. James, I wouldn’t bite down again if I were you.”

Their little game turned her on. She opened her jaws and let go of his cock, running her tongue around the crown, before pointing it and teasing the slit that was oozing sticky sweetness. Raising her gaze, she pulled her tongue back inside her mouth, but not before licking her lips in an exaggerated move meant to... Hell, she didn’t know what it was supposed to do other than turn him on, but he was already turned on, so...

“What will happen if I do bite down, Officer Hunky?” She loved the way his eyes darkened with hunger when she called him that.

He tore the condom wrapper open and held it out to her. “I’ll have to punish you. Put that on me.”

“Punish me?” Her eyes widened in simulated horror, and she gasped convincingly well, she thought. “How?”

“By not letting you touch it with your mouth anymore.”

She fitted the latex circle over the end of his cock and used the thumbs and forefingers of both hands to roll it tightly over his length. She wanted him to moan and was rewarded with one by the time she was finished with the condom.

Who was being punished here? Him or her? Likely both of them, judging by his fierce arousal and her soaking-wet pussy.

“Stand up and go over to the window. Bend over with your hands on the sill.”

Holli did as he told her. He talked to her in that commanding police officer voice that sent shivers of erotic excitement down her spine. She loved that tone, that implacable, no-nonsense aspect of him.

She bent forward, her breasts hanging under her, with her nipples stiff from the cold coming off the glass.

“Oh, that’s not going to work. Open the shutters.”

“But that would mean...”

“Yeah, people—if there are any out and looking up—could see you.”

Her breath hitched in lust. Damn, but did he read her right or what? Instead of being affronted by the thought of being watched, she was turned on even more.

She lifted the S hook holding the two sides of the shutters closed, then pulled them open. The cold was no longer cold. It was now freezing cold, but only on her upper body. Her lower body was still warmed by the fire that had been heating the floor area.

Bending forward again, she resumed her position.

“Now spread your legs, Ms. James. Yes, that’s it.” He slid a hand up the inside of her thighs. When he reached her sex, his questing fingers found her clit, plucking at the button and making her squirm. “You’re so beautiful like this: bent, wet, wanting.”

He kissed the back of her neck and trailed his lips down her spine. She shivered again, this time not from the cold. If anything, the cold was a welcome relief from the heat building inside her.

“You are wanting, yes?”

“Oh yes, Officer Hunky. Oh yes.”

“Very good. Let’s see if I can help ease your hunger, then, shall we?”

“Please...” Holli lifted up on her toes, offering herself. He chuckled behind her and teased her entrance with the head of his cock, circling it.

“Eager, are you?”

“Uh-huh.”

Michael shoved in, and her breath whooshed out, fogging the glass.

There was no slow thrusting, no more teasing. He placed one hand on the window, his fingers splayed wide, and the other hand on her hip. His grip was unyielding as he drove hard and quick into her.

She used to think she liked slow, soft, romantic lovemaking.

She was wrong.

She liked this kind much better. Rough, hard, hot. She liked the way his cock rubbed against the spot inside her that set off minifireworks throughout her body. She liked the way he held her possessively, like he couldn't bear to let her go. She liked the way he pulled her hair, spanked her ass, and made her come with his mouth. She liked that nothing was off-limits.

She loved sex with him.

Arching her back changed the angle of his thrust and freed her to lower her hand from the windowsill to her clit. His breathing was harsh, and when she touched her fingers to his cock as he pulled out of her, he moaned again.

She left her fingers there to feel him shudder.

“God...”

His hips bucked harder, picked up the pace. She spread her fingers, scissoring his cock between them. She pressed on the base, and his hand flexed at her hip.

“Love it, but...don't. I want to come. I want you to come with...me.”

Holli nodded. She circled her clit, rubbed it, tugged, and finally began flicking her fingers over it. That was it. The constant steady pressure built, giving her something else to focus on. She wanted the same thing he did. For her to come with him. She wanted her orgasm to cause his.

“Give it to me, baby. Right now. Give it to me.”

She frigged her clit until she thought she'd die of the tense sensations gathered in that one little knot of nerve endings.

“Give it to me, Holli.”

He withdrew, then snapped forward, once and again. Her belly tightened, and her nipples tingled. She stabbed her fingers against her clit until she cried out her release as it flowed through her body.

“Yes, baby. God, yes, that’s good...so good...”

He pistoned, and his balls slapped the fingers still working her clit, trying to pull another near impossible orgasm from her. She was tender there, sore to the point of pain, but she couldn’t stop. She could feel it coming again.

Pressing down with the heel of her hand, she rubbed herself into a frenzy until her body seized up before clamping down hard on the cock inside her.

“That’s it. That’s it, Holli. That’s...oh fuck yeah...”

Holli placed her hand back on the windowsill to keep from falling. His hand that rested on the window dropped to her other hip. He pushed her forward once as he pulled out, then brought her back when he pushed in again with a hard thrust that stretched her wide. The icy coldness touching her hot skin felt amazing, and she sighed, exhausted from the power of the two creaming orgasms she’d already had.

His cock pulsed and throbbed. His face was buried in her hair. His heart thundered against her back. And she couldn’t remember ever feeling so at peace and so happy.

“You’re gonna kill me, Ms. James,” he breathed.

She didn’t think it would be such a bad way to go.

* * *

“I don’t remember the last time I sat with someone on the couch like this and flipped through television channels.”

Holli snuggled deeper into his side. If she got any closer, she’d be in his lap. Not that he’d mind. She held onto the blanket that covered her from her neck to toes, but it didn’t help him any. She was still naked under it, and he couldn’t hide

the erection that sprang to life again the second she plopped down next to him. He at least had put his jeans back on.

“There doesn’t seem to be anything on TV, though, other than football,” she mused, looking through the on-screen program guide.

“I’m good with football. Who’s playing? Anyone good?” He had to wonder if she knew as much about football as she did baseball.

“I don’t know, and I don’t really care. This is my other love. College football. Bowl season.”

“Well, if you can find Penn State’s bowl game, we’ll watch.”

She tilted her head up to look at him. “And if I can’t find Penn State?”

He kissed the tip of her nose. She was all ruffled and looking well sexed from their play at the window. “Then we turn it off.”

“And do what?”

“Roast marshmallows? Talk? Play Yahtzee?”

“You’re kidding?” She turned to him with childlike enthusiasm. “You’ve got a Yahtzee game?”

“Sadly, yes.”

She laughed, and he knew he’d be hearing that laugh ringing through his apartment even when she was gone. It was a sad thought. He’d miss her. A lot. She was a real woman, a real person, a real lover. She was, so far, everything he’d wanted in a woman but hadn’t been able to find in the women his friends had tried setting him up with. Or with other women he’d met on his own. Holli was special.

“Oh my God. Where? I loved Yahtzee as a kid.”

“It’s in the bedroom closet. I’ll go get it. The marshmallows are in the cabinet next to the fridge, and the skewers are in the drawer next to the stove.”

“Okay.”

She was off the couch in a flash. Michael shook his head. There’d not been a dull moment with her around, and he didn’t think there ever would be. He got up

and went to the bedroom closet, shifting boxes until he found the little red one. He'd been joking about playing the game. Who played anymore? Who cared? But when she'd jumped on it, well, what was he to do? Besides...

His thoughts took a turn toward the naughty, and he left the bedroom to rejoin her in front of the fireplace.

"What's that look for?"

She was sitting on the floor still wrapped in the blanket and had set one of the large pillows in front of her. He set the game down on it and took a seat on the floor. Close enough that he could touch her.

"What look?"

"The smile when you came from the other room."

"Well, if we're going to play while sitting in front of the fire, you should drop the blanket."

Surprise registered briefly before she spoke. "And play naked?"

"Yeah." His answer was matter-of-fact.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "Then shouldn't you play naked too?"

Michael shook his head. "No. I don't have as many fun parts for you to touch as you have for me."

"Not true. You have at least one very fun part."

"Still, you have more, and you should let the blanket go."

After watching his face intently for a moment, she finally loosened her tight grip on the fleece and let it slide down her shoulders to pool around her hips and backside. Her nipples were pointed and hard, and he bet if he touched one, she'd moan. He'd wait, though, until she least expected it, because given the way she was still eyeing him, she expected it now.

It took everything in him to turn his head away from the way the flames danced on her skin. He opened the box, and together they took out the scoring pads,

dice, the red cup, and the yellow chips. “Damn. Let me get a pencil.” He was up and back in a matter of seconds. “You remember how to play?”

“Yes, I think so. We each roll to see who goes first?”

“Okay. Then roll.”

Holli picked up the die and put it in the cup. She covered the opening with her other hand and shook. It made a dreadful rattling noise, but the movement of her hands with the cup made her breasts bounce slightly. He couldn’t wait to feel them in his hands once more or against his chest. The thought had him stirring in his jeans.

She dumped the die out into the box lid. “Five. You’re going to have to roll a six.”

“Oh the pressure.” He winked and put the die in the cup, shook, dumped it out. “Three. You go first.”

“Yay me.” She grinned, and he laughed.

He loved that despite her hesitation to be naked a few minutes before, she was comfortable enough with him to not even try covering herself. She was playful, as playful as he was. It was a terrific trait in his mind and opened up an endless list of possibilities for naughty and not so naughty fun.

While she made her first play in the game, he picked up a skewer and threaded a couple of marshmallows onto the pointed tip. He pushed them down an inch or so, and by the time he was done, she’d added up her total. “Fives? Favorite number?”

“No, not my favorite number. I don’t have one. And hey, it’s not a bad start,” she said defensively.

He smiled indulgently. “No, baby, it’s not. Here”—he handed her the wooden handled metal stick with the marshmallows—“you roast while I take my turn. Don’t hold them in there too long though. They aren’t like the store-bought marshmallows. These will melt and turn to liquid sugar very quickly.”

“Kind of like when I think they haven’t been in long enough, it’s time to take them out?”

“Yep.”

“Okay, got it.” She turned away from him only to turn right back. “And Michael?” He looked up and met her eyes. “No cheating.”

He reached around her and pinched one of her nipples, enjoying the hiss of breath from behind her teeth. “Brat.”

“That was totally unfair,” she said a few minutes later when she turned back to him with warm, toasty marshmallows.

“What?”

“Using my nakedness against me.”

“You’re the one who brought up cheating. Dirty cop talk is not appreciated,” he scolded, trying his best to look stern. He’d been able to do it before, but right then, he was failing miserably. All he wanted was to lay her back and smear gooey marshmallow across her body, then suck it off.

As it was, he gingerly pulled the confection off the skewer as best he could. “Open.” She did, and he dropped it inside her mouth.

“Oh God,” she moaned.

“Good?”

“Amazing.” After she swallowed, she said, “I wasn’t implying anything about dirty cop either.”

“No? Damn. I am quite dirty.”

“Not as a cop. As a man, yes, probably.”

He pulled the other marshmallow off. “Not probably. Definitely.” He popped it in his mouth, letting it melt on his tongue. “C’mere,” he said, even as he reached out to cup the back of her neck in his hand and pull her forward.

Their lips met. She smelled like, tasted like warm vanilla and sugar. He teased the seam of her lips with his tongue and backed off when she started to part them. "Your turn."

"Huh?" She appeared confused for a moment, and he smiled, kissing the tip of her nose.

"The game. Your turn." He sat back and pushed two more marshmallows onto the skewer before edging closer to the fire.

"Oh. Right."

She picked up the cup to play. Her disappointed look was cute. He tried to feel bad about it but didn't. He found he loved teasing her, throwing her off-kilter just a little bit. It was his way of paying her back for keeping him hard and hot and wanting her more than he'd ever wanted any other woman he'd ever known. It didn't hurt that she always got him back for the teasing. He loved her aggressiveness toward him when she was aroused.

Michael kissed her in the center of her spine now that he was sitting somewhat behind her at the fireplace. He roasted the squares of fluff over the flames while she rolled the dice.

"Hmm."

The marshmallows done, he scooted on his ass back toward her. Her brow was scrunched down as she contemplated the results. "What'd you get?" he asked, looking over while blowing on the hot sugar to cool it enough to be handled.

"I think it's a small straight. Two twos, three, four, five."

"Yep. Small straight. You'd need a six or a one for it to be a large straight."

"Still, not a bad roll. Worth a lot." She glanced at the marshmallows. "One of those for me?"

"Maybe."

"Maybe? How can I get that up to a yes?"

"Hmmm..." He eyed the front of her body. "Lay back and bend your knees."

“And then I’ll get one?”

“Yes.”

Slowly she lowered herself to the floor beside him. Her nipples were still hard peaks, and he was unable to resist leaning down for a quick lick of one. “Let your legs fall open for me,” he whispered against the underside of the breast closest to him. Lifting his head and looking between her legs, he could see she was still wet from earlier. Or was she wet anew from this current state of play?

The skewers had a twisted wooden handle that was smooth and slender. There were no rough or sharp edges, so when he trailed it down her belly and lightly teased her clit with it, she barely made a sound beyond a whimper. He lowered his head to the nearest breast him again and sucked the erect tip between his lips, then tugged with his teeth.

Her back arched up off the floor, making for the perfect moment for him to slide the handle from her clit to her opening and inside her.

“Michael!”

He raised his head and moved to kiss her lips lightly. “Now put your hand where mine is... Yes, that’s good.” He slid his hand from under hers until only she was holding the marshmallow-topped stick. “I want you to gently, slowly move it in and out... Oh yes, Holli, that’s very good.”

Michael reached for the cup and the dice. “I’m going to take my turn while you make sure to keep the marshmallows from touching the floor and getting any dust or fuzz from the rug on them.”

“I’ve never... God, Michael...”

Her voice shook with her arousal, and his cock ached from not being what was inside her, sliding through her wet heat. “I know. I told you I was dirty.”

“Y-you weren’t joking.”

“No, baby, I don’t joke when it comes to this.” He shook the dice in the cup. “Hold still, except for the stick. Keep doing what you’re doing with it.” He rolled the

dice from the cup onto her belly, and she sucked in a breath. “Okay, let’s see... I think I’ve got... Oh look, that’s a full house. Excellent.”

He made like he was very serious and intent on writing his score down when he couldn’t really care less about it. All he cared about was her, getting inside her, fucking her until they both passed out.

Scooping the dice from her body, he laid them back on the pillow they’d been using as a table. “Still want your marshmallow?”

“Yeah.”

She was breathless, and her hips had begun moving in an upward motion. She really was enjoying being dirty, once more confirming for him that he’d met his match.

Taking the skewer from her, he licked her juices from the wooden hold and pulled the marshmallows off the pointed metal end. One he deposited in his own mouth; the other he dragged through her soaking wet pussy before offering it up to her.

“Open again,” he whispered.

Eagerly she did so. He painted her lips with her own wetness before pushing the melty confection between her teeth. She chewed, licked her lips, and still had her legs spread, though they were restless.

Michael dug into his pocket for the condom he’d picked up before he left the bedroom earlier and tore open the little envelope. She watched him with hooded eyes as he unzipped his jeans and lowered them enough to let his cock out.

He put the rubber on and crawled between her thighs. “Let’s see if we can’t get you a full house now.”

She giggled beneath him. “Wouldn’t that be a full box?”

Popping his hips forward until he sank deep into her, he groaned out a laugh. “Indeed it would, dirty girl.”

Chapter Ten

The phone was ringing. Michael looked at the clock. Six thirty in the morning. Why the hell was the phone ringing at six thirty in the morning? “Yeah,” he said by way of answering.

“It’s Derek.”

Michael was instantly awake. “Hey. What’s going on?”

“Sorry to call so early, but thought you’d want to know as soon as possible. Your girl can go. Everything checks out. It was exactly as it appeared and as we suspected: a clerical error, a transposed social or a fake one that sent up the flag when you ran the plate and the license. It’s still being looked into, but as far as Ms. James goes, she’s free to leave the county as soon as we get the papers signed.”

“That’s...great.” *That’s really fucking great.* Michael ran a hand through his hair and down his face before looking over at the woman asleep in his bed. He didn’t want her to go. He wasn’t ready for her to go. He wanted her to spend the rest of whatever time she had left before she had to go home with him. He wasn’t ready for her leave.

“You want to bring her in to my office later this morning, or should I have someone bring them to you?”

“Can you have someone run them over?” The words were out of his mouth before he thought about what he was saying.

“Yeah, sure. Everything okay?”

“Yeah, fine. She’s just still sleeping, and she’ll have a long drive ahead of her so...” Which had nothing at all to do with anything.

“Okay. Where’d you take her, and I’ll get Chuck to bring the papers by for signing in a couple hours.”

Shit. Maybe he needed to take her into Derek’s office instead. He wasn’t even sure why he didn’t want to do it in the first place. “I, uh, she’s here at my place.”

“Mike? Man, do you know what kind of trouble you could get into? I thought you were going to take her to motel.”

“Hold on a sec...” Michael rolled out of the bed as quietly and gently as he could so he didn’t wake her. He walked out of the room and closed the door behind him before continuing the conversation with the district attorney. “Okay.”

“What were you thinking?”

“I was going to take her to one of the normal places, but...” He hung his head and closed his eyes, sighing heavily. “Look, her vacation was screwed up enough. She needed a hot shower and decent place to stay. Taking her to a motel would have been no better than the jail cell she’d spent the night in. It was a technicality, and she’d done nothing wrong. All we were doing was waiting around for you all to get back to work and fix it.”

“I’m not even going to ask about anything else because I don’t want to know. Just... Dammit, Mike.”

There was frustration in his friend’s voice, which Michael understood well. If he’d been in Derek’s place, he’d have been frustrated too. But damn if he was going to regret choosing to bring her to his place or anything that had happened between them. “I know, but if it makes you feel better, I’d do it again.”

“You know damn well it doesn’t make me feel better. Look, I’ll bring the papers over in a few hours, then drop them off for filing. We don’t need some intern to know she was with you at your place.”

“I understand, but we both know there’s nothing on the books about not taking a noncriminal home with you. Shit, Derek. If she’d done something wrong, we wouldn’t be having this conversation. Because she didn’t do anything wrong, you’re busting my balls. Where’s the logic in that?” He did his best to keep his voice down

so he didn't wake Holli; however, the whole mess was getting to him, especially now that it was looking like she was going to be able to leave soon. That's what got him in the gut most of all.

"I hope she was worth it, because if anyone finds out..."

"I knew the risk before I brought her here, D. But it was worth it to me, and I'll defend it to anyone."

"There's no sense in me trying to argue with you about this. I know better than that once you've made your mind up. Okay, man, I'll see you in a while."

The called ended, and Michael flipped his cell phone shut. He closed his eyes and took a deep breath. His whole place smelled like her. Citrus. Coconut. Spice. Sex.

He—

"What was worth the risk?"

Michael spun at the sound of Holli's sleep-heavy voice. So much for not waking her. "Bringing you here," he said without hesitation. She was rumpled, and her eyes were still half-closed. Her hair was in complete disarray, and the doorjamb was holding her up.

"You shouldn't have?" She yawned as she spoke. "Sorry," she mumbled.

"No. It's against policy if we're not sure what else to do with you and unsure of your involvement in a crime. Procedure says I should take you to one of the local motels or a safe house in that case."

"Why didn't you? I would have been fine with that. This was so much more than I expected."

"I know, but I wasn't fine with that idea. You aren't a criminal. You aren't the one who committed fraud, and now that the error was corrected, hopefully the real one will be caught soon. I wanted to make it up to you, the whole being-in-jail thing. I wanted you to spend the last couple of days in a place that was warm and

comfortable, not some cold, impersonal motel with cheap bedding and drafty windows. I mean, Holli, it's bad enough—"

She was wide-eyed in an instant and stalking him within seconds of his last word. "If you apologize one more time about what happened, I'm gonna knuckleball you again." She pointed her finger at him and jabbed him in the chest for emphasis. "I'm fine. What happened is fine. It was a mistake. Well, part of it was, anyway. This wasn't your fault, and I owe you a lot. You risked your job, evidently. For me. I don't know what to say about that. You shouldn't have, clear-cut policy or not. I don't want that on my conscience because then I'd have to make it up to you, and I don't have anything to offer. Well, maybe I could offer you a job decorating Christmas trees."

"I—"

"Nope." She put a finger to his lips, and he watched her fight a smile when he licked the tip. "Not another word about it. You've apologized, and I've accepted. When will he be here?"

"A few hours."

"Okay. C'mon." She held out her hand to him. He didn't think about not taking it.

She led him back into the bedroom and climbed beneath the covers again. He slid in behind her and wrapped his arms around the soft warmth of her body. Her hair tickled his nose, and her delicious ass teased his already wide-awake penis. Damn thing hadn't left him alone for four and a half days.

"Michael?"

"Yeah?"

"I wish I wasn't leaving either."

He squeezed her and nuzzled his face into her neck, taking a deep breath. "Then don't. At least, don't leave for New York. I know you're supposed to meet your friend, and I..." He started to say he was sorry but stopped himself, afraid she

might kick her leg back and do some damage to his very personal person. "Stay here until you have to go home."

* * *

Holli sucked in her breath when she heard the knock on the door. She'd just finished brushing her teeth and was brushing out her hair. Michael walked through the apartment, his feet solid against the hardwood floors, and opened the door.

The deep male voice that joined his made her stomach tighten. And not in the hot, sexual way Michael's voice did. Trepidation filled her. What was she going to do? Even she didn't know yet. Michael wanted her to stay, and she wanted to stay, but...what about New York? Was he better than New Year's in the Big Apple?

She looked at herself in the mirror and couldn't believe she'd pondered that question. He was way better than seeing the ball drop. But what about Charlotte? Holli would have to call her to find out how things were going. If Char was still with her lady friend, she might not want Holli to show up. Nah, she'd still want to see her. At the same time, Charlotte would understand Holli wanting to spend every waking, breathing moment with Officer Hunky until she had to get in her car and head south again.

"Holli?" Michael poked his head into the bathroom.

She didn't know what the heck to do. "Yeah, I'm coming out."

She put her brush away in her bag, straightened her sweater, and smoothed her hands down her jeans. She didn't know why she was so nervous.

A few seconds later, she went to greet Michael's friend and colleague. She held out her hand to the tall, very good-looking black man. "Hi, I'm Holli."

His grip was firm, warm, and man oh man... "Hello, Holli. I'm Derek Masterson, assistant district attorney."

"It's nice to meet you, Mr. Masterson."

"Likewise. I wish it had been under different circumstances though."

"Yes, me too."

Small talk ensued until papers were produced for her. "I'll need you to sign the first two copies. They're your release papers. No bail was required, and as long as you pay the fine for speeding, you'll be free to go."

"I won't have to appear in court?"

"No, we don't require that of you. You can pay by certified check, cashier's check, or cash for the speeding ticket."

"Okay. Do you have a Wachovia up here where I can get the check? That's who I bank with."

Michael nodded. "We do. I'll take you on the way to pick up your car. That way we can drop it by the clerk of the court, which is very close to the impound lot."

"All right." It was almost over, this ordeal she'd been through. Looking at Michael, though, she didn't think *ordeal* was the right word. She liked him far too much to consider things between them that way. He'd shown her an amazing time, and she was sort of sad that it was coming to an end.

"Holli?"

She turned her head to see Derek offering her a pen and a smile. She took it from him and signed both pieces of paper. Pretty soon it would be official. She was free. Well, she was free once she paid her ticket. She could leave. She tried to ignore the ache inside at the thought.

She slid the papers and the pen across the coffee table.

"Thank you. I'll get these filed immediately. Holli, again, it was a pleasure. Maybe you'll come back and give our little city another try without the jail time and speeding."

Holli stood and laughed. "Yes, I would like that. Thank you for bringing the papers over."

She watched as Michael walked his friend to the door, and then they were alone, staring at one another.

"I guess we should go get the rest of your business taken care of."

Okay, where was her excitement? Where was her happiness over the fact that in a couple of hours at most, she could be on her way to New York? “I guess so,” she said, in a voice brighter than her mood inside, and went in search of her coat. “I’ll call Charlotte when we get back.”

He opened the door and followed her out. She’d forgotten how damn cold it was until it hit her square in the face, and she shivered.

“I’ll turn on the heater as soon as the engine is warm enough so that we won’t get a blast of freezing air.”

Their first stop was the bank. It was a slow drive through the icy streets. The longer they were out, the more she thought about what she was going to do. She already liked him so much, and she knew staying was only playing with fire.

The wait wasn’t long for her to get the cashier’s check from the teller, less than fifteen minutes from the time they got there. The car was still blessedly warm when they got back in.

Michael pulled out of the parking space, then shifted the cruiser into drive. “Do you need to stop anywhere for anything other than the bank and the courthouse?”

“No, I don’t think so. Though, do you need me to pay you back for any of the food? I can get some money out of the ATM here if you do.”

He shot her a look that said she had stepped into offensive territory. “I can’t believe you’re asking me that.”

“I didn’t mean anything by it, Michael. It’s just... You didn’t plan on having a houseguest for the last couple of days.”

His hands tightened on the steering wheel until the knuckles turned white. It was a minute or two before he spoke again. He was getting himself under control, and though it was really the wrong time for it, she was kinda turned on by it.

“No, I don’t need you to pay me back for the food.”

“Okay. What about for the condoms?”

He shot her another look, but it lightened quickly when he saw the smile on her face. She was teasing about that one.

Her libido had gone past haywire and straight into overdrive since meeting him. They hadn't been able to keep their hands off each other once they'd been alone. She couldn't remember the last time she'd been in a constant state of horniness like this. All her life, she'd thought it was only men that couldn't seem to control their lusts, but it appeared that impression had been wrong. She wanted in his pants every chance she got, and if he didn't need to recover between their sexcapades, she'd have been on him between breaths.

"Brat."

"So you keep saying."

"Are you doubting the word of an officer of the law?"

"I'm not going there."

"Chickenshit."

She laughed. "I don't want end up in jail again."

He winked. "I'd find a way to let you work off the charges."

She started to ask what kind of fine there would be for having sex in a police car, but decided against it, especially since they were pulling up in front of the courthouse.

The wait inside the clerk's office was a little longer than in the bank. There weren't very many people working, and Holli really couldn't blame them. It was a couple of days before New Year's. And it was freakin' damn cold out. She wasn't sure it was too much warmer inside the building either.

When a shiver shook her, Michael pulled her close. Public display of affection. Holli smiled and wondered if there would be any gossip about the unknown woman plastered against Officer Hunky's side while they waited in line at the courthouse. She secretly hoped there was. "You know, since we've spent so much time together,

I don't think we've discussed any kind of music. Isn't that what people are supposed to do on first dates?"

"Which day was the first date?"

"Hmm. All of them?"

"In that case, I'd have to say this has been the best first date I've had in years. Not to mention the longest."

"Same. So what kind of music do you like?"

"I'm a Parrothead."

"Jimmy Buffett?"

"The one and only. You?"

"Classics. Heart, Fleetwood Mac, Lynyrd Skynyrd, Eagles."

"Some really good stuff in there. I'm impressed."

She grinned up at him, kinda proud at having something that would impress him. She wasn't sure what most women her age listened to, but evidently if he was impressed, she guessed the ones he went out with listened to much different music. "Why? It's what my parents listened to, and I just kept on with it as I grew up. I like some newer stuff, but pretty much, I just like the way the classic music makes me feel."

"Agreed. If music doesn't make you feel good, then what's the point?"

She started to comment, but her number was called and they walked up to the counter. Derek had filed the papers, and the computer system had been updated with her release. The clerk took her check, and within seconds, she was free. All she had to do was get her car from the impound lot, which, according to Michael, was just down the street and around the corner.

"Would you like me to drive your car back to my place? I can leave my patrol car here in the lot and just pick it up when I go back to work on Friday."

"Yeah, if you don't mind. I'm not so sure about driving on the ice on these small streets. The highway I'm okay with, but..."

“I understand that. Don’t suppose you get this much ice down south.”

“We get some, but life kind of stops when there’s snow and ice. Southerners aren’t too good with it. When do you have to go back to work? Haven’t you been working?”

“Yes and no. I’ve been working having you under my watch, and I go back on patrol New Year’s Day. It’s usually four on, three off. But you let me worry how it all shakes out. We’ve talked about this, Holli. And why are you looking at me like that?”

“How am I looking at you?”

“Like you want to eat me for dinner. And given that I know how hungry you get...”

“Just thinking.”

“About?”

“Your watch isn’t the only thing I’ve been under.”

Chapter Eleven

Holli got in her car and closed the door before he could respond. She couldn't believe she's said it quite like that, but then again, she couldn't believe some of the things she'd done either.

They'd had some very naughty sex. And the spanking? Holy moly. She'd never been spanked before then, not even playfully. Most men she dated didn't get into that kind of thing, and she had always assumed she wasn't into it either, but damn...Michael's hands on her ass had done something to her insides. Then there were the handcuffs... Oh yeah, she really liked those. Being helpless and at his mercy. She could think of worse things.

"Can I ask you something?"

He slowed down at a traffic light. He was a big man in her little car. "Sure."

"Had you ever used handcuffs on someone during sex before?"

"Yes."

There was a slight smile crossing his lips. Was he thinking about someone else? Someone he'd bound before? She didn't like the idea of that. She usually wasn't the jealous sort, but hell, she usually wasn't the sort of woman she'd been the last few days. She was a levelheaded, think-before-she-made-a-move woman, not a plunge-lust-first-deal-with-heartache-later woman. "Had you ever spanked anyone during sex before?"

"Yes. Why?"

"I don't know. Curious, I guess."

He looked over at her for a second before turning his attention back to the road again. "Did you like it? Now that you've had time to think about it, I mean?"

"Honestly, yes. I really did. It was my first time, and when I suggested the handcuffs, I'd half been joking, but wow."

"Yes, it really was a wow moment."

Holli smiled to herself and gazed out the window for the rest of the short drive back to his place. It was a pretty little city, and she'd love to see it when it wasn't all snowed in.

He pulled up into the space he'd vacated when they left earlier. She stopped on the way up to the back door and stared back down the drive.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing. I'm just looking at the river. I bet it's gorgeous up here in the spring when everything is blooming and green. I mean, it's really beautiful now too, but well..."

"It is. And the invitation is an open one."

She nodded, not even sure he saw it before he turned to open the door, and she followed behind him, walking inside. "I'm going to call Charlotte. Do you mind if I use your bedroom?"

"Not at all. Help yourself."

"Thanks, Michael. For everything."

His smile was tight but genuine, and she certainly understood. He'd done a lot for her, taken a lot on himself to take care of her while she'd been sequestered in the middle of nowhere Pennsylvania. He'd made her laugh and come and uncover new desires she'd never known she had. He'd talked to her, shared with her, and a thank-you didn't seem enough for everything.

"My pleasure."

Holli grabbed her cell phone from her purse as soon as they got back inside his apartment. She went into the bedroom and closed the door behind her, scrolling

through her phone all the while looking for Charlotte's number in her contacts. She pressed Send and waited, thinking she'd figure out what to say as she went along.

"Hello?"

"Hey, it's me."

"Hey, girl. How are you? Everything cool?"

"Yeah, I am free again."

"Oh awesome. Are you coming then?"

"I... How's the weather over there?"

"Been snowing all day, supposed to freeze tonight. I don't know how far it is from wherever you are, but you better get a move on if you are coming."

Holli walked farther into the room and sat down on the bed. She took a deep breath, let it out, and just plunged forward with her question. "Would you...would you hate me if I didn't?"

"What? Why? You've been looking forward to this trip all year. I know you got waylaid in BFE, but you've still got a couple of days left. Why wouldn't you want to come?"

Michael paced the living room. It didn't take long to get from one side to the other and back. He would walk the length of the place from the front door to the bedroom door, but he didn't want Holli to think he was eavesdropping on her conversation. He knew she'd be able to hear his footsteps.

She was calling her friend. She was making arrangements to head on into New York for the next couple of days before she had to go home. He couldn't blame her. It was something spectacular to see the ball drop in Times Square. He even wished he could go with her. He probably could, provided they got back in time for his seven a.m. shift to begin on the first.

He couldn't get over how much he liked her, how well they'd fit, both in bed and out. Granted, they'd spent most of the time having sex, but they'd talked,

laughed, even worked in the kitchen a little bit together. She was special, and he was going to miss her when she left.

He ran his hands through his hair and sighed. "Shit."

Getting involved with her to the point of missing her hadn't been the plan. Hell, he wasn't sure he'd ever had a plan, but falling for a woman over the Christmas holiday hadn't been it. Though her landing in jail hadn't been her idea of the perfect holiday and he'd even be willing to bet it hadn't been in her plans to fall for anyone while on vacation either. He had no doubt, however, that she had.

He wasn't conceited or full of himself, but he knew she was feeling the same sort of anxiety at their parting that he was.

"Michael."

She'd called his name, right? "Yeah?"

"I need some help."

Was that panic in her voice? "I'm coming." He was at the bedroom door and had it opened within seconds. And then he stopped dead in his tracks. Holli was naked and kneeling on his bed. She looked over at him and grinned. She goddamn grinned.

He'd thought she was hurt or that something terrible had happened, but she was naked and grinning at him. "What's going on?"

Then he heard the clink of metal. He walked farther into the room and looked at the headboard. She'd cuffed herself to it.

She tugged. "I'm kind of stuck."

He shook his head, torn between laughing and spanking her ass for making him worry that something was wrong. "You think?"

"Uh-huh."

"How did you get that way?" He was already halfway undressed. He bent to take off his boots and socks; then he straightened and pulled at the buttons on his 501s.

“Well, I was on the phone, you see, and I happened to see the handcuffs in the drawer over there and—”

He shot her his best I-don't-believe-you look. “Happened to see them, Ms. James? They were in a drawer that was closed. The only way you could have see them was to open the drawer, and if you opened the drawer, well, that's called snooping.”

“Oh.”

Michael stalked around the bed to the other side. “Were you snooping, Ms. James?”

Holli hung her head and nodded. “Yes, Officer Hunky. I was snooping.”

“I am very disappointed.” He shucked his jeans all the way off.

“I know.”

“I'll have to punish you for this. I can't let you get away with snooping through things that don't belong to you. Why were you doing it?”

Hands on his hips and a scowl on his face, he knew he created the perfect disapproving cop image. Well, except for the rock-hard cock jutting from between his legs. Damn thing was going to be the death of him.

“I was trying to find... I was looking for... Crap. I'm staying. Well, at least until I have to go home, and I was trying to be cute.”

“You're staying and were trying to be cute by handcuffing yourself to my bed?”

“Yes.”

Michael did laugh then and crawled up on the bed until he was kneeling against the side of her body. With one hand, he trailed fingers down her back, through the crack of her ass, and slid them up inside her pussy until she moaned. He cupped her cheek with his other hand and turned her face toward him. “You are definitely cute in handcuffs, but you could have just told me.”

“I'm a decorator.” The last was said on a whimpering exhale as fingers brushed over her clit. “Creating effect is what I do.”

Her breath fanned his face, and her gaze drilled into him. Hungry and aroused and his...for two more days. He pressed his lips to hers for a quick taste, followed by another, and another that lingered longer than he'd intended. "And you're so good at what you do, Ms. James."

The smile that crossed her lips took his breath away. "You're pleased then?"

"Oh yes."

He plunged his fingers deep, making her gasp in pleasure, then withdrew quickly, making her groan in protest. "Your friend was okay with you staying here with me?"

"She was. Told her I'd make it up to her next year."

He used his pinky finger to rotate around her clit, not daring to touch it again, only just grazing the outer edges of it. She caught her breath, then released it in a rush. He loved the way she responded to him. "Good."

Holli bucked her hips, and his cock pulsed against her flesh. She jolted when his thumb flicked against the tight, puckered hole of her ass. "You're teasing me, Officer Hunky," she purred.

"It's my job, Ms. James. It's what I do," he whispered before trailing his tongue down her neck to the hollow at the base of her throat.

She gripped the headboard in her hands and bore down hard on the hand between her thighs, sighing as she began to flutter around his invasive, penetrating fingers. "And you're so very good at your job."

Epilogue

Five months later...

Holli pulled into the drive of the old Victorian. Flowers bloomed in flower boxes and gardens everywhere. The river sparkled in the midafternoon sunshine, and the light breeze was perfect.

The whole day was perfect. Wonderful for a ball game. Even if it included the Phillies, she thought sourly.

She parked beside the well-remembered patrol car and got out. He was home. Thank God. If they were going to make it to Philadelphia in time for the first pitch, they'd need to leave relatively soon. She just hoped he hadn't made other plans.

Leaning back inside, she picked up the box from the passenger seat and then closed the door. She took a deep breath and started walking.

"Holli?"

She turned and found him standing on the far side of his car. Officer Hunky. God, she'd missed him. She knew she had, but hadn't realized how much until this very moment.

"Hi."

They'd kept in touch. E-mails, text messages, phone calls. Promises had never been made, but she knew she was falling in love with him and being away from him was killing her. She missed his touch, his smell, his taste. Even though they talked in some form every day, she missed him.

He didn't move, so she did. She laid the box on the trunk and went to stand in front of him. For a few tense minutes, she simply drank in the sight of him. Old T-shirt, old faded jeans with holes in the knees and a ripped front pocket, old, ratty sneakers, sunglasses, and that scruff that gave him a really naughty countenance.

"What are you doing here?"

"Surprise?" she offered timidly.

His face broke into a grin. "I'll say."

He pulled her into his arms and kissed her hard, then kissed her long. Oh yeah, she'd missed that taste, that feel, that hard cock pressing against her. All too soon, he lifted his head. "Wow, I... Why didn't you tell me you were coming?"

"I wanted to surprise you. I've been talking to your captain, and he helped me arrange things so you'd be off duty this weekend."

"You succeeded. I was wondering why he kept insisting I needed a weekend off. Now I know. What's in the box back there?"

"A present for you."

"What is it?"

"A shirt and a cap."

"You brought me something to wear?"

He looked a little skeptical, and she winked, smiling slyly. "I did, and we'll need to leave soon if we're going to make it, but..."

"Where are we going?"

"Ball game. Phillies and Braves. Game starts at eight, and I had planned for us to get on the road soon so we'd make it in time for the first pitch..."

"But?"

She looked at the car, then back to him. "I don't think we're going to make it by then."

"Why not?"

By way of answering, Holli glanced around quickly, then grabbed the hem of her Braves shirt and pulled it off. "I've been thinking for months about sex in your cop car."

"Holli..."

She unsnapped and unzipped her jeans before backing herself into the backseat of the car. She slid in as she toed off her tennis shoes. "I suppose public nudity is against the law, Officer Hunky?"

"Very much so, Ms. James."

"Hmm... So you're saying I need to be covered up?" She pushed her jeans and panties down over her hips and legs until she could kick them off out the door.

"Yes. I am. You know I can't have you going around without your clothes on."

"Well, what if I had other covering?"

He tossed the rag in his hand onto the roof of the car and popped the buttons on his own jeans. "I suppose that might work. But we'll have to come up with something quickly because"—he waved a hand in her direction—"this is just unacceptable."

"I'm not totally naked. I do still have socks and a bra on."

Michael crawled into the car with her, sliding smoothly over her body and forcing her to lay back completely. "You're already wet," he whispered against her mouth before he stole a quick kiss.

"I have been for the last couple of hours."

"Thinking about me?"

"Yes. About you, us, this..."

"Good." He nudged her with his hips, shoving the head of his cock against her clit. "Damn," he breathed. "Baby, I don't have a condom out here."

Holli lifted one leg up over his hip to wrap around him, opening herself. "Don't need one."

"No?"

“No. And I’ve been with no one since I left here. Want you.” She lifted with her hips to touch him with her pussy again. “And I made you a promise.”

“No condom.” He lowered himself, sliding a fraction of an inch inside her. “Ms. James, you’re very naughty.”

“Yes, Officer Hunky, I am.” Breathlessness was setting in. “I just can’t seem to control myself when I get up into this part of the country.”

He slid in another fraction. He was trembling under her hands from the exertion, and she needed him to take her. She had been hard-pressed to think about anything but this—they together, naked, for the last two hundred miles or so, and damn if she wanted to wait another second for it.

“Seems you need round-the-clock watching.”

“More than anything else right now, I need you inside me. It’s been way too long.”

“You’re a demanding little thing, Ms. James.”

She dug her short nails into his shoulders and strained under him. “Please...”

“Can’t resist a please.” He pushed the rest of the way into her, and her breath shuddered out. When he pulled back, she tried to follow him so she wouldn’t lose him, but he dropped back down and filled her again.

“Oh yeah. This is what I’ve been missing.”

His mouth trailed kisses across her face, down her neck. “Me too, baby. You feel so damn good like this. Naughty. Wet. Hot. Tight. Damn. I knew I’d like your naked pussy. Hold on to me.”

His words turned her on. His scratchy scruff, his sex-roughened voice, him being inside her without a condom for the first time, sex in the back of his patrol car. It all turned her on, each thing feeding on the other. She held on to him with one hand on his shoulder, one leg still wrapped around his hip while grabbing with her other hand for the metal screen separating the front seat from the back.

He drove into her, drilled her with hard thrusts of his hips. He grabbed for her bra and pulled one cup down, exposing her nipple to his gaze, his mouth. Scraping his stubble over it made her moan. Taking it with his teeth made her quake. He tugged on it, teased just the tip and she started to shudder again.

Holli lifted and answered his pistoning moves with her own. Sex in the backseat of a car was something she hadn't done since high school. She didn't remember it being this hot. Maybe because this time it was with a cop in his car. Maybe it was because it was the car she'd been in after he'd arrested her. Maybe it was because it was with him, Michael, Officer Hunky. Maybe it was all of the above, but whatever pushed her higher toward the orgasm that was threatening to crash over her, she didn't care.

She was with him again.

"I need... Michael, I need, please..."

"Take it, baby. It's yours. I'm yours. Take it."

He ground into her, pushing against her mound with the edge of his pelvic bone. She met the grind, and then he tugged her nipple again, worrying it with his teeth, sucking it hard into his mouth, and she exploded, her cry echoing around the close confines of the car. "Oh yes oh yes oh yes..."

"Oh yes, Ms. James," he whispered, his mouth now hovering over hers. He drove his tongue between her lips, and she captured it, kissing him, drinking from him, taking his taste into her.

"I'm gonna come, Hol..."

"Yes, Michael," she breathed over his cheek. "Yes." He shuddered, emptying, spilling inside her. He pressed hard, pulled back, then pressed forward again. His cock pulsed and throbbed, and she sighed in bliss. "I think I love you."

He peered at her, the silence lengthening until he finally spoke. It was the longest span of silence she'd ever endured, even though not more than a few seconds could have passed.

“You think?”

She let go of the metal cage and slid her fingers through his short hair. “Well, I did come all the way up here to take you to a Phillies game. What else would you call it?”

“The Braves are playing too.”

“True, but I can see them anytime they’re in Atlanta. I didn’t need to drive hundreds of miles to see them play. But in order to see them with you...”

“I would consider that being more than thinking you love me.”

“Yeah?”

“Yeah. You need to tell the whole truth, Ms. James. You can’t lie to an officer of the law, even if it is only by omission.”

Holli made like she was thinking it over carefully before answering. She drew it out as long as she could without squirming under his intense stare. “I suppose you’re right. Very well. I don’t think I love you, Officer Hunky. I know I do.”

“Very good, Ms. James. See, that wasn’t all that hard.”

He brushed a kiss across her lips, then extracted himself from her and slowly backed out of the car, righting his jeans. She loved looking at him, but she missed the feel of him on top of her. And she wondered where the words from him were and why he hadn’t said them. “Don’t you have anything to say to me?”

Michael looked in at her. “You’re leaking on the backseat.”

Holli gasped and scrambled out until she was standing in front of him. She still had one breast hanging out, still had socks on, was still wet between her legs and getting wetter as the minutes passed. Her ass was still exposed too, but all she could think about was that she’d put herself out there for him, told him how she felt about him, and he hadn’t said anything in return except that she was leaking on the backseat.

Hands on her hips, she glared up at him.

“Can I have the stuff in the box now?”

Did she hear him right? “Michael?”

“Yeah?”

Her heart pounded, and her stomach was starting to hurt. “You don’t... I mean, you...”

He slid past her and opened the package she’d brought him. The red shirt and matching cap had told her in the sporting goods store that she needed to buy them for Michael. It went against everything she believed and felt as a Braves fan to buy anything Phillies, but for him, she’d do just about anything. And now that she’d laid her heart on the line...she was scared as shit that she’d made a mistake.

She watched as he donned the shirt and settled the cap on his head. When he still didn’t say anything and simply returned her stare, she sighed and turned to bend down and pick up her jeans and panties from the ground. The first smack caught her completely by surprise, but the second one followed too quickly for her to react.

“Wha—”

“For stealing, Ms. James.” Two more succinct slaps landed on each ass cheek. “For stealing from me.”

Now she was confused. “What did I steal?” She stood straight and turned toward him, only to have him take her face in his hands and kiss her hard.

“My heart. You completely and totally stole my heart.”

“Oh God,” she breathed. “I could kick you for making me think...for letting me believe... I could just kick you.”

He smiled ruefully. “I know. It was a bad tease. I’ve honestly never felt this way about anyone. You stole my heart when you were here at Christmas, and I just didn’t believe it could happen like that. All these months, though, of talking and writing, the feelings that started when we first met just continued and grew. I don’t know what we’ll do or how we’ll work this out, but I love you. And...I’ll make it up to you after the game for making you wonder.”

Holli hugged him tight. He felt so good, so right in her arms, against her body, in her life. “A very bad tease, Officer Hunky. And you’re right, you’ll make it up to me in a big way after the game.”

He kissed the top of her head. “In whatever way you want, Ms. James.”

“Oh I have plenty of wants.”

“Hmm. Well, as a civil servant, it’s my duty to make sure your wants are satisfied.”

“Are you good at your job then, Officer Hunky?”

“I’m very, very good at my job.”

Indeed he was, and Holli couldn’t wait to find out more about all the ways her arresting officer had to satisfy her.

 THE END 

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Lissa is thirty-eight and lives in the beautiful state of North Carolina.

Find out more about Lissa and what she's up to at <http://lissamatthews.com>.