

Irish Stories Collection

GREEN'S
Fees

JASMINE BLACK



Back Cover Copy

Who's your caddy?

Pro-golfer, Mallory "Birdie" Bird is in a slump. Financially cut off by her father, she's desperate to increase her winnings. Living with the guilt over a two-year old tragic event, she'll do whatever it takes to iron out her game...even hire a new caddy.

Caddy Green Sloan's the best in the business. He knows the game better than anyone, and he's never seen a green he couldn't read. But he's got a shady past he can't shake, and no one's willing to take a chance on him. That is, until a wee bird enters his clubhouse.

But she's snooty. And he's arrogant. Together, they spar nonstop. Driven by necessity and fueled by passion, they need each other on and off the course. But can they let go of the past and learn to trust again?

Highlight

“That feels great.” Birdie sighed and rolled her head forward, exposing her neck. Willing Green to kiss it, she tilted her head to the left. Still, he made no move.

“I’ll do this for you every night until the knots are gone. Tomorrow you need to drink plenty of water to flush away the toxins. Otherwise you’ll feel worse.”

She turned around and opened her mouth to speak, but he hushed her.

“Do what I tell ya...no arguments.”

A rebellious curl twisted over his forehead. His full mouth became impossible to resist. Holding her breath, she licked her lips, leaned in, and brushed them against his.

Green's Fees

by

Jasmine Black

Irish Stories Project

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Dedication

To my two best friends.

Acknowledgements

Thank you to my wonderful husband who answered all my golf questions and encouraged me to write a golf story. To Autumn Piper for lighting a fire under my chair to get this story done. To all my critique partners for pushing me to up my game. To my editor for just being great and all the wonderful work she does. And to all my readers who accept my characters with all their flaws.

Chapter 1

Anger rolled off her father in waves. When he slammed his hardened fists on the oak desk, papers flew across the room. Birdie jumped, afraid she'd pushed him too far.

"Mallory Bird, as of today, your free ride is over. You're going to have to support yourself." Sitting rigid in his designer suit, he pierced her with his cold blue gaze.

This couldn't be happening. She had people who counted on her. Panic fluttered in her chest. "Dad--"

"I won't listen to another word. Maybe if you were in college making something of your life, I'd be more inclined to listen. However, you are not. You're twenty-one, and I've catered to your whim for long enough. God knows what you're spending my money on."

"Dad, I'm on the women's pro-tour. I hardly call that a whim."

"Yes, but not by much. I check the leader status on each tournament you trot off to."

"The season just started. I haven't earned anything in a couple of months. I need a little time to get some more sponsors. Maybe some endorsements." Hell, a long shot didn't describe the ridiculousness of her statement. No one wanted an unknown female golfer to endorse their products.

"I'm sorry. If you can't make ends meet on your winnings then you're out of luck. Because I'm not floating you anymore."

"Does this have anything to do with you loathing Mom and her career?" She bit her lip, knowing she'd crossed the line.

He scratched his balding head and growled. "Mallory, this is about you growing up and standing on your own two feet. I love you, but as of today, you're on your own."

* * * *

Birdie looked over her budget once more as she waited for Jeannie to come home. *Home*. As of now, that consisted of an RV she still owed money on. No way could she pay rent. She'd have to let her apartment go for now. A small sacrifice to help in the long run never hurt anyone.

The numbers smirked at her. She'd never be able to continue on her meager winnings. Her lone sponsor, Harry's Bait and Tackle, provided her with a few visors and t-shirts. She donned the hats more as a favor to Harry than for herself. The t-shirts...she slept in them.

How would she pay the next entry fee, the note on the RV, and still eat without help from her father? The old man would freak if he knew where the money went. Things were easier if he thought she threw it away on clothes and shoes than to tell him the truth.

A slump. That's all it was. If she could work out her push, and cut down on her putting strokes, she'd move up in rank and take home more of the pot. Those plans had haunted her every waking hour for the last two years. Her heart sank.

The door opened and Jeannie bustled in. Her best friend and caddy, they'd been through it all. Friends since grade school. Sleepovers. Beauty tips. Discussions about boys. Everything.

"Hey girl." Jeannie set her suitcase down. "You ready for Mexico and tequila?" she asked, ready to hit the road again. "Why the long face? Bad visit with your dad?"

"The worst." She huffed. "How did your visit with family go?"

"Oh, the same. 'Great to see ya. Love ya. When are ya leavin'?' Gotta love Mom. She's got some new man, and she's afraid I'll steal him or some shit." Jeannie laughed and grabbed a soda, then sobered. "What gives? I've never seen you look so down."

"Dad. He's tired of me playing golf instead of being serious about life."

"Same ole, same ole Mr. Bird."

Birdie scratched her head. "Well, it's different this time. He's cutting off my allowance."

"What?" Jeannie stared at the books on the tiny table, her blue gaze intense, then slumped on the bench and pushed a blond curl off her forehead. "Oh, Birdie, what are we going to do?"

"Play better."

They both frowned. She'd been saying that ever since she'd turned pro, scrapping by at the bottom of the ranks. Enough to keep her in, but too low to make any real money or land an endorsement. Once she'd been the young amateur to watch out for. On the rise. Now she never got any air-time for Harry's Bait.

"I got enough money to pay the next entry fee and live until then, but not enough to pay the note on the RV." Not if she provided help for Mia this month. "Or, we could stop now, sell the RV and try to get real jobs." She drummed her nails on the Spanish tile. "What about you? Have you sold any stories or articles this month?"

"No. I've been reading how to straighten out a push."

Maybe they were saved. "Did you come up with anything?"

"Sadly, no, short of..."

"Short of what?" She leaned forward.

Jeannie licked her lips. "What you need is a caddy."

She laughed. "That's what I have you for."

"What do *I* know about golf or your push? Or how to read the green to help your putting. I'm a freelance writer."

"Yeah, for sports magazines."

"I write personal stories about the players. Not articles about the mechanics of the game. Although...I do know where to get you the best caddy possible. We need to make a detour before the next tournament."

Chapter 2

Green took a long drag of his Guinness. He missed the pubs of his beloved homeland. Americans didn't know how to drink.

Broke, he settled for what he could get, but he hadn't had a good caddy gig in years. And slaving for pennies at the club irritated him. He longed to return to Ireland, but refused to beg his parents for money. Or forgiveness.

Big screens blasted the latest news about the PGA. The winter holidays had passed, and the tournaments had started up again. While he didn't agree with things that had been happening with some of the big name players, he could sympathize with how the fucking media destroyed lives. One mistake. That's all it took. Fucking wankers.

Restless, he shifted on the bar stool. Two beautiful birds sat down, one on each side of him. One brunette. One blonde. Could make for a jolly ol' ride tonight.

He flashed his pearly whites. "Hello ladies, beautiful evening."

The blonde smiled back. Light-blue eyes, short, curly hair, and a flannel shirt stretched across her large tits. Nice.

"Evening, Mr. Sloan. You are Green Sloan, aren't you?" She quirked an eyebrow.

Shite! He loathed conversations that started this way. No matter how small the club, his past mistakes seemed to follow. He stiffened. So much for a threesome. "That's right."

"I'm Jeannie. And that's Birdie." She nodded to her friend, who smiled and said hello.

Her smile melted his heart, sweet and innocent. Bright-green eyes danced in the pub's soft lighting. Full lips. Small diddies; enough for a handful. *Wonder what her arse looked like in those jeans?* Yeah, he'd shag her any day. In truth, either one, but this one grabbed his attention and held it by the bollocks. "Cute name for a place like this." What a pair they'd make. Green and Birdie, names fit for the one true sport.

"It's a nickname. I'm Mallory, but everyone calls me Birdie."

"Nice to meet you." They shook hands. The left appeared pale and the right tanned. Glove wearer. "Can I buy you a drink?"

"No thanks, I don't drink too often."

American. He sighed. "Suit yourself."

Jeannie cleared her throat, and he swiveled his chair back. "We're here on business."

"Ach." He looked at the leader board. Not much had changed today. He could've made a fortune, and maybe he still should, but he hoped to get back on tour one day.

"You see, Birdie here has a push and some putting issues. She's in a slump. Bad."

"It's not that bad," Birdie murmured.

"Hmm." Jeannie rolled her eyes and shook her curls. "Don't listen to her. It is. And her current caddy--me--can't help her."

"So you want some pointers. Aye. Okay. I give private lessons." Golf lessons too. He shook his head. The club house manager must have passed on his name. He'd be happy to watch Birdie play for a few days. And nights too. Besides he needed the gig. She dressed like a princess, spending daddy's money. He could jack up the price with these two.

"I'm looking for a little more than a few lessons. I need a caddy for the tour."

"Tour? What are you, amateur?" He'd never heard of a Mallory or Birdie. Though, he'd let women's golf fall off his radar lately.

"No. I'm pro." She turned up her nose.

He grunted and furrowed his brow. "You shitting me?"

"Seriously." She huffed. "Oh, hell. I'm not *that* bad you've never heard the name Mallory Bird."

He shook his head. "Nah, sorry." How could he have never seen this vixen before?

Jeannie laughed. "You'll do it, right? Help her out of her slump?"

"Why can't you?"

"Because I'm not really a caddy. I'm a freelance writer along for the ride and a chance to grab a good interview. I also happen to carry her bag on game day."

Great! Just what he needed, the fucking media tagging along. "I'm not sure."

"Come on, Jeannie, we're wasting our time." Birdie stormed away, her tight arse wiggling in her even tighter jeans.

He licked his lips. What could it hurt? A few weeks and she'd start to play better, ay? Then he could quit, Jeannie could pick back up and maybe she'd be so grateful as to give him a complimentary shag. He watched Birdie through the window until she disappeared into an elaborate RV, then turned back to Jeannie, who waited for an answer. "Ten percent, she pays all expenses, and we do things my way."

"Done."

"If I'm correct, and I know I am, you're missing a tournament right now. Next one's in Mexico. We'll leave the day after tomorrow if we are to make it on time. Meet me here in the parking lot bright and early. Say five. We got a long bloody drive." And an even longer hill to climb.

Chapter 3

Birdie pulled the RV into the country club parking lot. How Jeannie ever found this guy at a rundown course in Arizona, she'd never know. Nor was she sure she wanted to.

Green stood under the front door awning as rain pelted down. Duffle bag in one hand and coffee in the other, he climbed in the passenger seat and shook his long, black hair. Water splattered on the dash and seat. A few wet curls plastered to his forehead.

Funny, she thought all Irish were redheads. Of course that screamed stereotype.

"How's the form? Where's Jeannie?"

"Sleeping in the loft." She nodded toward the roof of the cab.

"I don't seem to remember you driving this ol' hunk of shite the other day. What happened to the nice one?"

"Traded it in. Can't afford a better one until I get out of this slump." Glancing at Green one more time, she pulled out on the highway toward the Mexico border. "You do have a passport, don't you?"

"Aye. But I'm worried you won't be able to play if you can't make it out of the city."

"We'll get there. It might be old, but it runs."

"Fucking soft auld day to be traveling, aye?"

"What does that mean?" For crying out loud, this was never going to work if she couldn't understand a word he said.

"It's raining. Bad for traveling. Fucking cool, too." He took the lid off his coffee and produced a flask from inside his jacket.

"What are you doing?"

"Warming myself up a bit."

"You're not an alcoholic are you? That's the last thing I need right now." God, what would her father say? She frowned.

He laughed. "I'm Irish. We take a wee bit of whiskey in our coffee. No harm."

She didn't need a summary of his heritage. That accent said enough. Melted all over her like warm chocolate. Thick and rich. She envisioned what it sounded like in the midst of love making. Better yet when his orgasm overcame him. What a turn on. A shudder ran down her neck.

Cold and dreary outside, yet warm and toasty inside. The old heater still worked. Or maybe the heat came from the seat beside her. Lord, if he wasn't hot enough to melt iron. Dark brown eyes, strong jaw line and broad shoulders. Sexy smile and straight, white teeth. He had a slight crook in his nose, making his face more distinct. Dressed in dark jeans and a red slicker to block the rain, he qualified as the hottest man she'd ever laid eyes on. What would he look like naked?

She licked her dry lips and tried to concentrate on the road.

"I pulled some tapes yesterday to have a look at your swing. Jeannie's right, ya do have a push."

"Yes, I do. The question is, can you fix it? Are you as good as Jeannie thinks?"

"Better. When we get on down the road, I'd like to stop and have a look for myself though. It's a bit hard to judge from the footage I found. You were rather good a few years ago, aye. Once you improve on that putting you'll earn your nickname. It won't be so hard to find filmage of you either. Had to pull out all the stops, that I did."

"Now you're talking like Jeannie. I'm in a rough spot right now. I have media time. Plenty of it."

"Oh, for fuck's sake it was harder to find than a bear in winter. I've never even heard of ya."

"Well, I've never heard of you either. Have you ever caddied before? Better yet, who have you caddied for? No one big, that's for sure."

"Never heard of me. What bullshit. You're gonna to have to be better than that if ya want to spar with me. And don't you worry your pretty wee head about my credentials. If you trust your friend and do what I tell ya, we'll be riding in that fancy RV in no time."

Frustrated, she blew out a breath. They hadn't even made it to the course and they were all ready butting heads. This was why she dragged Jeannie around with her. She didn't need arrogant caddies telling her what to do. She could get that from her father. But, oh no, on top of his arrogance this man had to be downright gorgeous. Another thing to distract her from her game.

Distraction was a luxury of the past. Not now. Brian and Cassie depended on her to help with Mia's bills. Somehow, she had to bite her tongue and do what Green said. She had no other options. Jeannie better know what the hell she was talking about. Or things could get real nasty. Fast.

* * * *

"Are you sure about this guy?" Birdie asked Jeannie as she tugged her golf bag out of the storage compartment. "Damn, this is hard."

Jeannie helped shuffle some boxes around. "I'm positive. He's exactly what you need. And what the hell are all of these containers in here?"

Birdie ignored that last question and opted for more important things to discuss. "How did you even find out about him? Did you do a background check or anything? I swear I never should've trusted you." She gave once last yank. The bag popped out and the clubs flew all over the parking lot. "Shit!"

Jeannie laughed.

"I don't find anything funny about this."

"Calm down, Birdie. Would I steer you wrong? Look, I've read plenty of articles about Green Sloan. He's the best. And you don't have any other choice. I know you're freaking out about Mia's surgery and how your brother's going to pay for it. Without your father's bankroll you can't help unless you start pulling in your own big bucks. That's what Green's here for."

They both started picking up her Callaways.

“Okay, why haven’t I heard of him? And if he’s legendary, why are we at some podunk driving range? Why does he have to watch me? We’ve got a long way to Mexico.”

“Birdie.” Jeannie sighed. “If I answered all your questions you’d worry more, and you don’t need that right now. You need to clear your head and focus on your push.”

“What the hell have you gotten me into?”

Before she got her answer, Green strolled over. “You about done fooling around? I got us a bucket of balls. Come on before dark settles in.”

No way was he running the whole show. “Then get my bag, caddy.” She slapped her glove across her palm and walked by as snottily as she could remember from her rich upbringing. Why, she didn’t know. He’d gotten under her skin all day with his belittling of her abilities, and Jeannie made things worse, throwing herself at him. Too much damn drama in her life to deal with this jerk.

“Yes, ma’am. I’ll enjoy following your cute, wee arse around.”

Ugh!

He slung the bag over his shoulder like it weighed nothing and strutted one step behind her. If she didn’t stop watching him from her peripheral vision she’d trip and fall. When she stopped watching, she felt the burn of his stare on her ass the rest of the way. “Let’s get this over with. Driver, please.”

Smiling, he slid the big dog out and passed it to her. Lining up, knees slightly bent, head down, back straight, she swung, sending the ball straight and to the right. Damn! Just like every other drive in the last two years.

“Push, that it is.”

Asshole.

She swiped cigarette butts, coke cans and even a dirty diaper away from the concrete with her feet. “Why are we at this dump anyway? Couldn’t you have found a better place?”

“You got any money? Because last time I checked beggars can’t be choosers. I happen to know Bobby Joe, and he gave you that bucket of balls for free. He’ll also pay your entry fee to this next tournament as long as you wear his shirt next week. Don’t worry, I’ll get a few so your princess arse won’t stink.”

She ignored his last remark. “Seems like a bad deal on Bobby Joe’s part, since according to you, I don’t get any camera time.”

He frowned. “Don’t fucking worry about that. You’ll have plenty of airtime once they see me with ya.”

“You are one arrogant son-of-a-bitch, aren’t you?” She swung again; hit the first ball with the second.

“Don’t have to be arrogant to know what will happen when they see my name listed by yours. I hate to break it to ya, but they’ll be filming me more than you. I’m not too happy about it, ya know.”

“Could’ve fooled me.”

“Ach, get on with ye, we haven’t all day.”

Ball after ball, two hundred and fifty yards, straight and to the right. Nothing she did changed it or straightened it out. Green watched without saying another word, sometimes he’d wander off and come back. A lot of help he turned out to be. And Jeannie had disappeared altogether. Who needed her anyway? This was all her fault.

Well...maybe not all.

In reality...none. Birdie knew the blame rested on her shoulders. If she’d been closer to Mia, watched her better... She shook her head and tried to concentrate on her last swing.

“The bucket’s empty. Can we go now?” She handed Green her driver.

“Aye.” He slid it back into the bag. “Gather Jeannie while I put these up. We need to find an RV lot for the night. I’ve a mouth on me.”

“Yes, you do.” She took off her glove.

“I do what?”

“Have a mouth on you.”

He slung the bag over his shoulder and rolled his eyes. “Oh, for fuck’s sake. It means I’m famished.”

“Well, how should I know? Speak English, would you.”

“Don’t be acting the maggot!” He stalked away, long strides carrying his six-foot frame. Snug jeans hugging his tight ass.

“God!” Could he be any more annoying...arrogant...or...or...sexy? No! This was not happening. Jeannie could fawn all over him, but not her. Not today. Not ever.

Chapter 4

Birdie took off her shoes and threw on a pair of track pants while Jeannie and Green took care of the RV. She'd fuel it up in the morning while the two of them slept. Tonight didn't seem like the best time to break it to them it ran on vegetable oil. Lord, she hoped she'd crammed enough in the storage compartments to get them to Mexico and back. She had no clue how much this thing took, but she'd poured some into the conversion system thingy when they'd stopped earlier in the day. Neither one had noticed then, thank God.

"Hey, Birdie." Jeannie bounded up the steps. "There's a cookout going on with all the vacationers. Want to go grab a soda and hotdog with me and Green?"

"No, thanks." She needed some time alone with the books. Since BobbyJoe agreed to pay her entrance fee, she might be able to juggle the numbers to afford the next tournament and send Brian some money to help with Mia. Surgeries always brought additional bills, such as fuel, food and lodging while she stayed in the hospital and recovered. Then therapy followed.

"You want me to bring you something?"

Choking back a tear, she shook her head.

"I know you're worried, but it might do you some good to take your mind of things for a night."

"I'm fine Jeannie, go have some fun."

"Okay, but I wish you would too." Jeannie closed the door. Her laugh floated back inside as she walked away with Green. What was it with those two anyway? Not that it mattered. The two could fall in love and have a dozen babies. She didn't care.

Grabbing a diet coke and an apple, she sat down and opened her log book. It made more sense to sort out her finances on paper. Computer software boggled her mind. Jeannie had tried to show her many times. After numerous failed attempts, they'd both given up. Golf was her thing. Or...had always been in the past. With a bit of luck, she'd get her swing back. And it wasn't like she was terrible. Hell, she was pro after all. How many people dreamed of turning pro and never made it? Things could be a lot worse. Like working for her father. Now there was a laugh. Her, computer illiterate, and her father the CEO of a big software company.

Lost in her problems, she didn't notice Green had come in until he spoke. "Don't you want something to eat?"

She jumped. "You scared me." Heart pounding, she shook her head. "No, thank you. I had an apple. Where's Jeannie?"

"Talking to the others. Having a drink or two."

"Why aren't you? I thought you enjoyed drinking."

He sat down on the couch. "Ach, I do. But not that weak shit you Americans drink. Not a single black stuff in sight."

Closing the books, she turned to him. "Well, why don't you find some nice girl to talk to? Someone who can understand something you say." Heaven help her, but she couldn't.

"Because I want to talk to you instead of some nice girl."

"Ha, ha." She raised her eyebrows and huffed. "What could you possibly want to talk about?"

"Your push. I've observed ya, and I believe I've figured it out."

"Oh? And what have you come up with?" At last he'd sparked her interest in something from his sexy lips beside his accent. Never mind she couldn't understand the words, when he spoke, chills ran down her spine and his deep, warm tones seemed to rush over her skin.

"Come sit next to me." He tugged on her hand, drawing her next to him on the couch. "Turn around."

She twisted until her legs were on the sofa, back facing him. Unsure what he wanted, she tensed as her heart sped up.

He wrapped his long fingers around her shoulders and pressed. Heaven came to earth as he kneaded her sore, tight muscles. "Oh, man."

He snickered. Ass. She refused to become putty in his hands.

Moving lower, he pressed deep into her shoulder blades. "You are a ball of knots. And ya don't follow through with your swing because of it."

"I follow through." A weak protest slipped from her mouth while his fingers worked magic. Maybe the Irish were magical beings. God only knew where Green got his powers from. Her tense muscles released their grip under his control. Bowed to his command.

"Like fuck you do. I watched ya swing after swing, all the same. You favor your back pain. Now hush up and let me do my job here. Once these knots are gone, your push will be too. By the size of 'em it will take a few times. And no more driving for ya. Jeannie and I will take over, so we will."

"There's no need for that." Shit. They'd be pissed when they found out she'd dragged them hundreds of miles away from home in an RV that ran on WVO. "I'm fine."

"No arguments. If you want to improve your game, you need to listen to me and do what you're told. We can't afford one wasted stroke with your putting."

"What the hell does that mean?" She jerked away and glared at him.

"Ach, come back with ya. I'm not done. And don't get defensive, you hired me to help you."

"Not by insulting me."

"It wasn't an insult, just the truth." He turned her back around. "I can help with your putting too. Now settle down and relax. You've too much on the brain. Forget about your worries and concentrate on golf. Talent is not your problem. You're good enough, aye."

She smiled at his compliment and hoped he couldn't sense her satisfaction. Without another word, she let him rub her back. Years of stress seemed to float away. Within minutes her body relaxed, started responding to his touch. How long had it been since a man had touched her? Too long.

Seemed like she'd spent a lifetime dreaming...worrying about her first time. Once it happened, something broke loose and she couldn't go back. Desire took hold and she *needed* it like she never thought possible. Traveling around made a relationship unrealistic. Nevertheless her body still had needs. Ones her nipples wanted met right now. They puckered under Harry's t-shirt.

"That feels great." She sighed and rolled her head forward, exposing her neck. Willing him to kiss it, she tilted her head to the left. Still, he made no move.

"I'll do this for you every night until the knots are gone. Tomorrow you need to drink plenty of water to flush away the toxins. Otherwise you'll feel worse."

She turned around and opened her mouth to speak, but he hushed her.

"Do what I tell ya...no arguments."

A rebellious curl twisted over his forehead. His full mouth became impossible to resist. Holding her breath, she licked her lips, leaned in, and brushed them against his.

Pulling back, he grabbed her shoulders. "What are ye at? Five minutes ago ye hated me. Now yer throwing yerself at me." His words come rushed and his accent thickened.

Heat flooded to her cheeks as embarrassment consumed her. Words escaped her. What the hell had she been thinking? Stupid. "For-forgive me. I don't know what came over me there. It won't happen again." She jumped up and climbed the ladder to the upper bed.

"Come on, Birdie, don't do that."

Yanking the curtain closed, she refused to acknowledge him.

"Ach, Birdie. Come back. Can't we talk about it?"

Not on his life. No way in hell could she face him right now. Why had she thrown herself at him? Ten minutes in his arms and she'd lost her mind. Nothing had changed. He was still arrogant and pushy and, most of all, sexy as hell.

Throwing a pillow over her head, she gasped for air. Her lungs burned from holding back the sobs. God, she felt stupid. Never again would she throw herself at Green Sloan. He could rot in hell for all she cared.

Chapter 5

What the fuck just happened? Green scratched his head and grabbed his flask. Warm liquid slid down his dry throat.

One minute they were buttin' heads and the next she kissed him. And what was he thinking to refuse her?

His job.

Business and pleasure didn't mix. He'd learned that the hard way. It had cost him his career the first time. This was his second chance. Maybe it transpired on the women's tour and the payouts were smaller than the men's, but Birdie had potential. She could rake in a nice chunk.

She had what it took. Along with a killer body. Sweet diddies and a tight arse. Trim waist. Big beautiful eyes and soft lips. Hell, he could still feel his own tingle. With his erection aching more with each passing second, he'd never get any sleep tonight. Her willing body lay mere feet away, behind that thin curtain. He couldn't even wank off without her hearing. Not that he wanted to rid himself of his problem by those means.

The walls of the Coachman closed in on him, stifling the air. Stuck in this wee camper he'd go mad with want of her. She grated on his nerves, fussed at him and blathered on, but he loved to watch her lips move. And her hips too.

Focus! Get drunk or chase her up the ladder. He took another swig. Drunkenness seemed the better option. Building a reputation took hard work. Destroying it took one stupid mistake. The stakes were too high this time. She would be his one shot to rebuild his name. Why she took a chance on him he couldn't figure out, but she had. It was important to show his family he'd changed his ways, cared about the family name and the shame he'd caused them. He'd take it all back if he could. Since he couldn't change the past, he had to make the right decisions this time. Even if it meant he couldn't have Birdie.

He kicked off his shoes and threw his shirt in his bag.

"My, my." Jeannie bounced up the stairs and sized him up. "Where's Birdie?"

"Turned in for the night, she did."

"I see." Her gaze traveled over his chest and down to his trousers. "You should have stayed longer. Lenny brought out his guitar and sang. Everyone started dancing and having a good time."

"Work comes first, and I needed to discuss Birdie's push with her."

Jeannie took two steps closer. In the tiny space he could almost feel her breath on his naked chest. "Can you fix it?"

"Sure, no problem, but the two of us need to drive from now on so she can rest her back."

"You're the boss." Her voice came out sultry.

Two women throwing themselves at him in one night. His ego swelled along with his erection.

One more step and their bodies touched. "I need to get to the bathroom," she whispered.

"Right then." He turned sideways to let her by. Her large diddies pressed into him, slid across his chest.

Lord have mercy on his soul. Could he refuse her too? Should he even? There was no point. They didn't have a business deal and it would release his tension for Birdie. He needed to think with his mind and not his bollocks.

Focusing, his brain told him to leave Jeannie alone as well. But his mind became foggy as she stepped out of the loo in her black, silky panties and a wee shirt Americans called a baby tee. He bit his lip and swallowed hard.

"Excuse me." She slinked by, again pressing her soft body into his. Then she bent over to grab a soda from the mini-fridge. "Do you want something?"

A double edged question if he ever heard one. Best to let it slide. "No, thank you."

She popped the top and took a long drag. Smiling, she examined him. "Cause, I'd be happy to give you whatever you wanted."

"You're flirting with me, aye."

"Maybe."

"Maybe my arse. I'm not blind." Thank God for that. Her arse was a lovely vision he'd hate to miss out on. And what a set of funbags. All his for the taking. He would too, but there'd be no escape from her like a one-night stand. What would he say? Sorry I didn't call back. I've been out of town? Of course, he could shag her for a few months and then split. But then, how would that play into his plan to get Birdie in the end?

"Well, do you like what you see?" She ran her long, red fingernail down this chest.

"Aye, I do. But..." His gaze wandered to Birdie's sleeping quarters.

Jeannie rifled through the tall cupboard and pulled out some sheets and blankets. "Pull out the bed, would you? I'll be right back." She padded the few steps to the ladder and wiggled her panty-clad arse behind the curtain.

As thick as the two of them were, Jeannie would find out about Birdie trying to kiss him a few minutes ago. She'd probably stay in the loft until morning. Depressing a bit, but perhaps for the best.

He lowered the table, pulled out the sofa and adjusted the cushions until the two entities stretched across the entire RV to form a queen side bed. Tucking the sheet over the last corner, he glimpsed that hot pair of black, silky panties slink back down the ladder.

"Pretty good job." She nodded at the bed. "I'm not sure I could have figured it out. The other RV had a separate bedroom and we never altered the table. I'm not complaining about this dump heap. However, I miss the other one."

“What made ya come along anyway?” They worked together to make up the bed. “I mean, now that I’m caddying for Birdie.”

“Why not? I get to see the world, meet new people and, on occasion, grab a good story. I’ve interviewed a ton of people this way. Sometimes I talk to other caddies and get juicy gossip on players. Other times celebrities or politicians show up to watch. I’m sure you know what people will say once they’ve had a few beers at the nineteenth hole. But I got a great idea today for an article about golfing like a pro on a budget. Hit me while we were at BobbyJoe’s, so I slipped away to write. I figure it’ll sell with the economy and all. People want to continue with their hobbies even if they don’t have as much disposable income.” She crawled on the bed and smiled. “Come here.”

He glanced back up at the curtain before creeping next to her.

“What’s wrong?”

“She’ll hear.” Not that he’d care any other time if someone heard him shagging. Quite the opposite. However, this time he cared *who* would be hearing. She might not forgive him or have anything to do with him in a few months. He’d crushed her with his rejection and she hadn’t even waited for him to explain.

Maybe she didn’t care. The thought slammed into him as to why she hired him in the first place. If she didn’t care about his past and merely wanted a good time, then he didn’t think he wanted the job. Building his reputation meant more to him than a few shags.

“Don’t worry about her. She’s fine with it.”

“Are you sure?” He quirked his brow.

“Positive. I talked to her, and she’s okay with it.” Leaning in, she brushed a kiss across his lips. Not as nice as Birdie’s, but it would do. “Look, we need to discuss a couple things first.”

“Oh?”

She lowered her voice. “Birdie doesn’t know who you are. I mean...what you did.”

“But you know, aye.”

“Yes, I know. And I want to be certain you won’t do it to Birdie.”

“I have no intension of screwing up my one and only chance to rebuild my name. But damn it, Jeannie, she’ll find out the first time I step foot on the green. There’ll be cameras everywhere. Fuck, I’m surprised you haven’t leaked it to the press. Grabbed your moment of fame with a breaking story, so to speak. I mean, I know caddies aren’t as important as the golfer, but the story will still sell.”

“Yeah, it would sell. But Birdie is more important to me than a story. Besides, when everyone sees Green Sloan back in the game and they’re trying to get an exclusive, I figure I have the upper hand.” She kissed him again, worked her way to his neck. Shivers ran down his arm.

“You little vixen.”

She giggled. “Yeah, but I think you like it.”

Jaysus, he did. He hadn't been with a woman in ages. And this one was as hot as they came, but he hadn't got Birdie out of his mind yet. "If you care about her so much, why are you down here with me?"

"Why not? I told you she was okay with it. She said I should go for it."

"She said those words?" After what had happened between them?

Jeannie frowned. "Is there something I'm missing?"

"Nope. Nothing at all." He smiled and hoped his cracking voice hadn't given him away. If Birdie didn't care, then maybe she hadn't been as crushed as he thought. Maybe a wee bit embarrassed.

"Because you seem weirded out."

Silence fell between them. Should he shag her? His hormones warred with good sense. A live woman stood before him half-naked and he had to ask if he should? What was wrong with him?

"I'm not looking for anything other than a good time, if that's what you're worried about. Some laughs and a few nights together. Nothing more."

"No strings attached?" He trailed a finger under the curve of her full breast. No turning back now. His bollocks wouldn't let him if he tried.

"None. You do have condoms, don't you?"

"Plural?" He smiled, thinking about the promises of the night before him. "Yes, ma'am, I sure do."

Chapter 6

Birdie pulled the pillow over her head. She couldn't listen to them anymore, but the sack of feathers did little to muffle the sound. No wonder Green turned down *her* offer. She should've known he'd want Jeannie instead. Blond and curvy. Big boobs. Men liked those features. They always went after her best friend first.

She didn't blame them, just wished someone would choose her for once, instead of always being set up with one of Jeannie's friends. Jeannie's bubbly personality attracted people while she was the serious, irritable, workaholic with more muscles than curves.

"Oh yeah." Jeannie's moans floated up to her sleeping quarters.

Rotating her back to the curtain, she hoped to escape the sensual sounds filling the camper. However, there was nothing she could do about the rocking motion. Or the fact the noise turned her on.

Birdie spun back around. Knowing it was wrong, she took a peek anyway. They sat on the bed. Jeannie straddled his lap. Her big boobs with their puckered nipples rubbed up and down his chest as she rode him hard and fast. One of Green's hands gripped her hip and the other squeezed a breast.

Warmth spread through her own breasts as she dreamed of Green's hands cupping, massaging, and tugging on them. She'd never seen a man so hot naked. Her mouth went dry and moisture coated her panties. She couldn't stop watching their bodies join. His long, thick cock slid in and out of Jeannie's wetness, his shaft glistening with the juices. Lord, what would he feel like inside her? Heaven!

Their chests heaved as they fought for air, mouths open and eyes closed. The two together were hot, better than any porn she'd ever seen. This was real, hot passion and she had a front seat. But she wanted more than a seat. She wanted to feel his warm breath on her naked skin, smell his arousal and hear his groans in her ear.

She watched a few more thrusts before Jeannie threw her head back, ground her clit across his flat, low abs, and cried out. Sexy sounds filled the air, and her own nipples hardened. Her heart raced faster and her pussy throbbed with an unbearable ache when Green grabbed both of Jeannie's hips, pulled her down hard, stilling her, and released the sexiest, brogue laced growl of passion she'd ever heard.

God, he was sexy! She shook her head, tried to calm her breath, and focused on his jerk factor. Flings were not her thing. Jeannie had empty sex all the time, but she couldn't perform the act and walk away, and she and Green were not suited for a relationship. He irritated her, belittled her playing, and...and, damn him, he turned her on like no other.

Quietly, she slid back down in the bed. Clenching her legs tight, she willed the throb away as best she could. She'd almost had it under control when Jeannie moaned and the rocking started again. Damn, how many times could he get it up?

As much as she wanted to ignore them, she couldn't. This time when she looked, he loomed behind Jeannie, pumping inside her. His hands gripped her ass and his thigh muscles bulged with each fast stroke. Hearing their bodies slapping together, envy seized her and desire took over. She skimmed the edge of her lace panties with a fingernail and then slipped her hand inside to find her folds slick and hot. Biting her lip so they wouldn't hear, she pushed one finger inside her moist opening.

Matching Green's thrusts, she rocked her hips. Her nipples burned with the need to be tugged and squeezed. Sheer force couldn't make her release the curtain or tear her gaze away to grab a breast. Instead, she flicked her thumb across her clit as she forced her finger deeper, dreaming of Green's cock replacing it.

Maybe she needed to get laid and Green was the closest male in proximity. Or maybe the live porn played a factor. Whatever the reason, she hadn't been this turned on--ever. Fear of getting caught took a backseat to desire.

A thin layer of sweat formed on her skin. She tasted the saltiness on her upper lip. Grinding her palm against her clit, she bucked. Pressure built, her breasts grew heavy and the need to be filled consumed her. She slid a second finger inside and pressed deep, knowing the pleasure didn't compare to what Green could do to her. Eyes closed, head thrown back, sexy moans forming from her rounded lips--Jeannie's expression said it all.

Still, Green pumped harder, and Birdie increased her strokes to keep rhythm with him. Oh, how his cock would feel right now. How long had it been since a man filled her? But Green wasn't just a man. The way he moved, the length of his strokes and the sheer control he possessed took her over the top just watching him.

Finding release, she bit her lip to keep her scream inside as Jeannie and Green both cried out. He collapsed against her back, squeezed a breast one more time as they fought for breath.

After a few seconds, Birdie released the curtain and lay in post-climactic bliss. Endorphins raced through her, bringing complete relaxation even as her heart pounded in her chest. This time when she felt herself slip off to dream, the rocking had subsided and Jeannie's snores replaced the sexy moans.

* * * *

Birdie slipped down the ladder. The two lovers lay tangled in each other with a sheet covering their naked bodies from the waist down. Green's muscular chest, sprinkled with just enough hair, gleamed in a sliver of sunlight filtering through the curtains. Jeannie's tanned body was a tad darker than his light complexion. They looked beautiful together. Her heart dropped at the sight.

Trying not to wake them, she grabbed her bag, slipped out the door and made her way to the shower room. She needed to put some space between them and her. A nice, long hot shower might relax the desire raging inside. She'd dreamed all night long of Green making love. Sometimes it was to Jeannie. Other times it was to herself.

Quiet settled over the RV park. A few birds chirped in the trees. One robed couple sat outside sipping coffee in the cool morning air. The rest of the occupants were most likely sleeping off hangovers.

By the time she'd showered and dressed, a few more people stirred about. A couple trailers had packed away and moved along to their destinations. The shower had helped to calm her, but what she found in her bag set her blood boiling in anger. She stomped back inside with a beef to pick with Green.

The smell of bacon and eggs assaulted her nostrils. Green stood with his arms wrapped around Jeannie's waist, groping her breasts. He jumped and walked to the bathroom when Birdie bounced up the stairs.

"Morning, Birdie." Jeannie beamed as she flipped a slice of crispy meat. "You hungry? I'm famished."

Birdie bet she was, after that workout last night.

Before she could answer, Jeannie gazed down the hall and continued. "God, he's fab-u-lous."

Jealousy gripped her stomach. She ignored the remark. "No thanks. I'm feeling a bit ill right now," she snapped. What had come over her? Jeannie deserved happiness like anyone else, but she was pissed at Green.

He came back muttering about the size of the "loo", as he called it. "And fucking pink too. For fuck's sake, this is one shit heap. I can barely fit my arse in that tiny room."

Jeannie laughed and gave him a peck on the cheek. "It's not the best thing we've traveled in. By far the ugliest." She sat a plate on the table for Green.

"Thank you, darling. I swear I bumped my head three times in there."

Jeannie ran her fingers through his lush black locks. "You poor thing."

The sight of those two and what she'd found in her bag made Birdie snap. "Would you two stop! There is nothing wrong with this RV. Crap, Jeannie, you act like a spoiled brat. I did the best I could. It's never enough, is it?" She tossed her bag on the floor and turned to leave, but stopped. "Oh, by the way, I think you two should know this *shit heap* runs on WVO."

"What the hell is that?" Jeannie poured a glass of orange juice.

"Ach, friggin' waste vegetable oil."

"Birdie--"

"And another thing." She rounded on Green and poked him in the chest. "I'm not wearing that disgusting shirt in public. I don't care if he did pay my fee."

“Oh, yes you are! You agreed to it.” He moved her hand away. “I promised him publicity, and you’re getting a damn good deal. You’d be broke after this tournament without him or me, and you know it.”

“I agreed when I thought the shirt advertised Bobby Joe’s driving range. Not ‘BJ’s Half Price After Dark.’ That thing makes me look like a slut.”

“Well, are ya?”

“Green.” Jeannie frowned.

“Fuck you.” She slammed the door and went to fill up the converter system. How dare he call her a slut! *He* holed around last night. Ass. She let out a scream and kicked the tire.

A few seconds later the door slammed again. “Birdie, what’s wrong?” Jeannie came over and held the lower compartment door open while Birdie dug for a container of WVO.

“I found one of those shirts in my bag when I finished my shower. Would you wear a slutty saying in front of everybody? Christ, what if I happen to get on TV or in the newspaper? What will my father say?” She paced.

“I think he’s the reason you have to wear that shirt.”

She stopped moving. “Is he? I mean, I am an adult now. Shouldn’t I pay my own way?”

Jeannie shook her head and ignored her question. “Okay, I agree the shirt is tasteless. But that isn’t what you’re upset about. What’s really wrong?”

“Nothing.”

“I don’t believe you. I can’t remember the last time you blew up at me. Now spill it.”

She didn’t say anything as she pulled out gallons of oil.

“Does this have anything to do with me and Green? Because you said you were fine with it. If you’re not, tell me and I’ll back off.”

“Don’t be silly. Why should I care if the two of you hook up?”

“I don’t know. I thought maybe you liked him.”

She stormed to the converter system and poured a gallon in. “Good Lord, no! I find it hard enough to tolerate him. I’ve got a lot on my mind, and I didn’t get much sleep.”

Jeannie laughed and grabbed another gallon. “Sorry. Hey, look, Green and I’ll drive today. Why don’t you take a nap?”

“Maybe.”

“And stop thinking about Mia, huh? She’ll be fine.”

She shook her head. “There shouldn’t be another surgery. There never should have been a first one. It’s all my fault. Everything is.”

“Hey, you have to stop this. It’s not your fault the house caught on fire.”

“I should have watched the fireplace closer. I was in charge, and now *she* has to live with those nasty scars on her beautiful face.” She leaned against the camper.

“Sweetie, Mia isn’t the only one with scars.” Jeannie patted her arm and walked back inside.

She blinked the tears away. Surgery was a few days away still and she had to focus on the upcoming tournament. Maybe she should center her emotions on Green and Jeannie and try to forget everything else going on. At least until next week.

Chapter 7

Fresh clean scorecards called to Birdie. Something about the promise of a good round captivated her with the start of each tournament. As she assessed the first tee, Green walked up to her, bag over his shoulder. He'd have no trouble toting that around for four days. That was if she made the cut. If not, they'd play two days and end with no cash.

"The shirt looks good on you. Nice color." He smirked.

"Fuck you."

He laughed. "I see you understood. I thought maybe you wouldn't."

"I'm glad this is funny for you. Let's hope no one takes any pictures." Lord, she'd never hear the end of it from her father. And her brother would tease the hell out of her.

"No chance of that, sweetheart."

Arrogant ass. Although for a second, doubt flickered in his brown eyes.

"How's the back? Remember to follow through. This is a par four, four hundred and forty-three yards and pretty much a straight shot."

"Would you stop? I've played this course before."

"Is that what you call it? Because I pulled your stats. Didn't shoot par once. Sad really."

"Give me the driver and shut up." She held out her hand and frowned.

"Feisty." He smiled as he pulled out the club. "Look, if you're embarrassed about the other night when you kissed me--"

"I'm not embarrassed. It didn't mean anything. Besides, we're here to play golf, not socialize." She started to take the ball from him, but he hesitated, holding on to it a bit too long.

"Can't we agree to get along on the green? You know, smile for the cameras."

"Sure. When and if there are cameras."

Shaking off their conversation, she focused on her stance. Follow through. Green's voice echoed in her mind. She took a breath and let it out. This first shot would determine her day. Either the push was gone or not.

The whoosh of the club and the crack of the ball put a smile on her face. Holy hell! There it was. Straight and steady, the ball sailed through the air. The most beautiful sight she'd seen in a long time.

"Nice shot. At least two hundred and seventy yards. Guess I was right about that back."

She wanted to smack him, but she was too happy to care about the jab. "Come on, caddy. We got some distance to walk."

"Thank God." He arranged the bag and they set out in search of her ball.

It wasn't hard to find. Well placed on the fairway with a straight shot to the green. She'd left her competitor at least seventy or more yards behind.

Green handed her a six iron, his eyes gleaming with amusement. "One-sixty-eight to the pin. Nice clean shot to the green. Put it close to the hole, one putt, and you'll have a birdie."

"Thanks for the update." She growled and snatched the iron. "I do know how to play, thank you."

"Bugger, just doing my job."

She ignored him and walked away. Follow through. His voice echoed through her mind once again. She didn't want to admit he'd been right about her favoring her back and not swinging all the way through. How could she have played for the last two years and not discovered what he had in one hour? Damn him...right and sexy!

Another swing and she heard a spectacular crack, the sound all players dreamed of. Looking at Green's smug look, she shook her head. The urge to laugh grabbed her and she lost control. The sound rang out through the clearing.

"Come on, Tiger, let's get that birdie." He beamed.

Three strokes later, she walked off the green with a bogie.

"What the hell happened?" Green moaned. He must have been irate because when he was his brogue came through thick. And right now it was the thickest she'd ever heard. "Ye blew it! Three." He held up his fingers. "Count them, three damn putts."

"Stop reminding me." Things were going good and then came putting.

"For fuck's sake, ye can't putt worth shite. It's worse than I thought. Why didn't ya tell me it was that bad?"

"Look, Mr. Caddy, I didn't hear you offering any advice. That is your job, isn't it, to read the green."

"Damn, woman! As if you would listen to anything I say to ya. Let's hope you keep the ball on the fairway from now on. God knows ye need every spare stroke for putting." He stalked off in front of her muttering something about working for his cash.

Seventeen more holes with his temper and she'd kill Jeannie before the night ended. Even if she bogied a few holes, she figured she'd still make the cut. Of course she'd finish at the bottom of the ranks and bring in a meager couple of thousand. Then she wouldn't be able to send anything to Brian to help with Mia and make the next tournament in Alabama. Pride be damned, she needed Green.

Hole two--a par four, five hundred and forty-nine yards--passed the same as the first. A beautiful drive, one fairway wood and three damn putts.

At the third hole she noticed a small group of people. Green eyed the crowd. A worried look flashed across his face, then disappeared as he turned to her.

"It's a shorty. Par three, one hundred seventy-five yards. You can put it on the green in your sleep. Get it close to the hole and drop it in one stroke." He hesitated in handing her the wood and then lowered the edge to his voice. "You need to make up a stroke here. You don't freeze up with water, do ya?"

An argument rose in her throat, but she tamped it down. She'd never reacted so vehemently when Jeannie caddied. Because she wasn't attracted to her. Birdie shook her head. Now wasn't the time to examine her feelings.

"Water's no problem." Fire, on the other hand, scared the hell out of her. Without another word, she played the hole and walked away with a birdie, leaving her one over par.

First drive on hole four gave her confidence her push was gone. One more shot and she'd be on the green. Improve on putting and she'd be back in the game. Green pulled out the eight iron.

"No. Give me the six. I can't hit the eight that far."

"Trust me, use the eight."

She looked around. "Green, people are staring. Lord knows where they came from, but I don't want to fight. Just hand me the six."

"Keep it in the fairway." He left the eight iron, taking a few steps back with the bag.

Crap. What was his problem?

She swung. The crowd moaned as the ball dropped on the fringe, missing the green. If the TV crew had taped that stroke, she imagined the announcer moaned, saying "tough break."

"Damn it, Green. I told you I couldn't hit the eight that far. Give me the wedge and the putter."

He handed her the wedge.

"And the putter!" She waited.

"No."

"Stop being contrary and give me the damn putter." She stomped her foot. Ashamed he'd reduced her to the tactics of a spoiled teen, she took a breath and regained her control. With an even tone she added, "Now."

"Don't you think I know by now how far you can hit with each club? You're on the edge of the green, right where I wanted you. Take the wedge and chip the ball in the hole. No putting. Make the birdie and get yourself back to par."

"That's one hell of a gamble."

"Then you better make your best shot, because I ain't giving ye the bloody putter."

"Green--"

"Birdie...you got this. Believe in yourself and listen close, because I'm only gonna say this once. You're great. The best I've seen in a long time. But your putting is killing you."

"You're killing me." She grabbed the wedge and stalked away.

Anger boiled inside like she'd never experienced. Not even at her father. This man was incorrigible. She wanted to smack him every time he opened his infuriating mouth.

But when the clunk from the ball hitting the hole rang out, she wanted to do nothing more than to kiss his sexy lips.

With each hole the crowd grew larger. Some even yelled out to Green from time to time, making him more irritable. By the end of the round, she hadn't ever seen so many people watching her. She managed to finish two under par with a seventy-one.

"God, Birdie, you were great. I haven't seen you play that well since your amateur days." Jeannie beamed as they walked into the tent to sign her scorecard. "Those back rubs helped."

"Yeah... Did Brian call?" He tried to keep up with her score, and she wanted to know how Mia was. Surgery was planned for tomorrow.

"Not yet, but you know..."

Green walked over to her. "Everything appears to be in order to me, so it does. Sign and we can get out of here." A nervous look flickered through his eyes.

She couldn't figure out his moods, but shrugged the nagging thoughts aside and studied the card before signing it.

As they emerged from the tent, a flock of reporters surrounded them. She'd never experienced anything like it before. Usually they bombarded the top leaders. While she'd finished two under par, the leader was eight strokes under.

"Keep moving." Green nudged her from behind and Jeannie pushed a hole for them to walk forward.

"Mr. Sloan, what can you tell us about your return to golf?" One of the reporters yelled out.

It was hard to make out the questions as the voices mingled together, but they all seemed to be directed at Green.

"Ms. Bird, why would you allow Mr. Sloan to caddy for you? Is he your lover?"

"No, he's not." They asked some weird questions.

Jeannie kept pushing toward the RV. The media closed in around them, making it harder to move. They'd started with a late tee-time. Now the sun had begun to fade. She'd doubted Green before about the cameras, but they were out, snapping off pictures while the flashes about blinded her. She stumbled, but Green grabbed her around the waist.

"You all right?"

Though he spoke straight in her ear, she barely heard him over the roar of the mob. His warm breath floated across her skin. "Fine," she choked out.

When they neared the RV, Jeannie stopped and held up her hands. The crowd died down to hear what she had to say. "We have no comments right now."

"Aren't you Ms. Bird's former caddy?"

"Yes, that's right. I'm her PR rep now. Ms. Bird had a wonderful round. We hope she'll continue on the same path over the course of the next three days. She'll address any questions you have after the tournament. Thank you." Jeannie nodded toward Green. He grabbed Birdie's arm and led her away from the crowd.

The roar of questions started again, but one rang out louder.

"Ms. Bird, what makes you think Mr. Sloan won't betray you like he did his last golfer?" She stopped and looked at the guy holding a recorder out. The rest of the crowd quieted. "You are Green Sloan, are you not?"

"Ach, I am." He growled.

Birdie looked between the two. He held a dark secret.

“And you were banned from the men’s pro-tour when you were caught betting against your golfer, is that also not true?”

Oh. My. God. She stared at Green in disbelief. Her breath hitched. Shocked, she bit her lip and tried to hide her surprise from the reporters as the cameras renewed their assault. It couldn’t be true. Silently she begged him to deny the allegation. Her chest tightened and she held her breath.

His eyes, full of regret, searched her face. She didn’t need words to affirm the truth. It blazed across his entire face. His eyes. The frown lines and his ragged breath said it all--guilty.

Her heart plunged to the pavement and splattered across the parking lot. He’d betrayed his golfer. Lied and cheated. Thrown away his career. How could he? And more importantly, what was she going to do about it now?

Chapter 8

Green steered Birdie up the RV steps and closed the door behind them. Once they were within the safety of walls, he expected her to blast him. Instead she sat down on the sofa, eyes still wide and mouth hanging open.

“Birdie.” He sat down next to her. “Let me explain.”

She shook her head. “How could you? You’re supposed to be able to trust your caddy. What you did is just...just...” She groaned.

“Despicable. Disgraceful.” He looked down at his feet, ashamed to look her in the eyes. “It was the worst thing I’ve ever done.”

“Why? Why would you do it?”

“Envy. Pride. It was the lowest I’ve ever sunk, and I’m not proud of it.”

“I’m sorry, but you’re going to have to give me more of an explanation. And please, speak English.” No laughter rang in her voice.

He sucked in a breath trying to find the words to say. Memories he’d pushed out of his mind years ago resurfaced. “I grew up with nothing. Scrounging for a scrap of food. I’ve been carrying a golf bag since I could tote the bloody thing for eighteen holes--all so my sister and I could go to bed with a full stomach.”

“How old were you?”

“Ten. I watched the older boys, read whatever I could get my hands on and learned everything I could. I’ve toted every damn bag from Ireland to China and back. Made good money at it, so I have. All pennies, though, to the pros. I got tired of watching my family suffer in that shack.” He glanced at her.

“Is that all?”

“No, that’s not all. Da got sick and had to stop working. They lost the house and my sister was pregnant. The bastard knocked her up and hit the road, never seen him since. They were living on the street. I sent what I could, but it wasn’t enough. So I did it.” He shuffled his feet. “One time. I placed the bet and then I handed him the wrong club with a trust me line. He had more money than he’d ever spend. The loss wasn’t that big of a deal. He’d already sealed his slot in the Masters.”

“But you got caught?”

“That’s just it. I didn’t.” He grabbed her shoulders and stared into her beautiful, doubting eyes. “I set my parents up in nice house, four bedrooms with a wing for my sister and her wee one. They were so proud, spouting off to all their friends about their boy. It wasn’t enough for me. I wanted more. So I did it again...and again. Until it became obvious.”

She took his hands and held them. His heart lurched at the softness in her touch. He'd thought he'd put everything behind him, but his past had let down another person. Someone who'd grown important to him in a short amount of time.

"What happened?"

"My parents were shamed. They couldn't show their faces to their friends anymore. I was banned from the men's pro-tour for life. Didn't matter...no one's taken a chance on me until you." He pleaded with his eyes. "I won't ask you to trust me, but I swear to you, I've changed. I never knew how much I loved the game until it was stripped away from me. When I couldn't caddy anymore, things became clearer. A big gaping hole lay in my life. *Golf* is my life. It's all I've ever had. Please...give me a chance to prove myself worthy to caddy for you this tour. I've done this for eighteen years. I'm the best and I can help you rise to the top."

He swallowed hard as silence fell between them. Her gaze searched his. Every breath burned his lungs.

"I don't know what to say. Why didn't you tell me before?"

"You came to me. I thought you knew. You knew my name and where to find me. I told you the media would be all over us. It happened four years ago. What do you want me to say?" She stayed silent, and he dropped to his knee before her. "Tell me what you want me to do, Birdie, I'll do it." He'd do anything to stay next to her.

"I don't know what to do." Tears glistened in her eyes.

"Trust your instincts."

She sniffed. Closing her eyes, she shook her head, then let out a gasp. "I can't. My instinct lets me down every time."

Something more than his indiscretions troubled her. He wanted to wrap his arms around her and comfort her from the ghosts haunting her. Kiss away the pain glowing in her tears. Carry her to bed and make love. Sheer white-knuckle force restrained him.

"Birdie--"

"Don't. I need some time."

It killed him to retreat. "I understand." Though he didn't understand her pain, he'd respect her wishes. Testing his strength, he stared into her eyes again. "If you need to talk about anything, I'm here." He pushed a wayward strand of hair from her forehead. Soft and silky. He about lost control.

Her rosy lips pouted. "Green--"

Her cellphone rang out some crazy, bubble-gum-pop song, spoiling the moment.

"My mom. I need her advice right now." She grabbed the phone and disappeared up the ladder, leaving his heart teetering on the edge of the eighteenth hole while he wondered if he'd ever play again. Or worse--if his past mistakes had cost him the best thing that had ever happened in his life.

* * * *

"Hi, Mom. How's Mia?" Birdie hugged a fluffy pillow.

"She's fine. Don't worry, everything's on schedule for surgery tomorrow. How are you?"

"Oh, same-old, same-old." She bit her lip, trying to figure out how to ask about Green. Her mother had chased her own pro-golf dream. More times than not, she'd missed the cut by a few strokes. After a while, she gave up.

"Really? Nothing interesting, like maybe seventy-one today? Or that handsome new caddy of yours--Green Sloan?"

News traveled fast these days. "You saw."

"It's all over the news, internet, people tweeting me. Lord, child, I don't know if I should shake some sense into you or congratulate you on growing a spine."

"What do you mean? Mom...I'm confused about what to do, and I need your advice." She chewed on a nail. If there was ever a time she needed a parental figure it was now, and her father would give her the "grow up" speech.

"What for?" Her mother's voice rose and a chuckle rang out. "You played the best round of your pro career. I'd say you did the right thing. Shit...how did Jeannie take it?"

"Are you kidding? Jeannie's the one who dug him out of reclusiveness. I didn't even know about his past until the reporters mobbed me outside the tent. I've never seen so many camera flashes directed at me before. Then I find out they were aimed at *him*."

"Oh, dear. Didn't you do a background check on him before you hired him?"

"No. I trusted Jeannie. What can you tell me about him?"

"He's good, caddied for some of the best players. Arguably the best caddy out there, except for that gambling problem." She laughed.

Birdie shook her head and took a deep breath. "Mother, it's not funny. Can he legally caddy for me?"

"Sure. He was banned from men's golf, not women's. I guess they overlooked that technicality."

"But...should I trust him or not?"

"Follow your heart, dear. What's it telling you?"

She punched the pillow. This wasn't fair. Life wasn't fair. At last, someone came along to help her game and she had to deal with trusting her instincts.

"Birdie, I know you're still there. You have to let go of the past and move forward. Green Sloan worked wonders on your push--something I couldn't have done for you. God knows, I wish I could help, but you've always been a better golfer than I ever was. When you were ten and I dragged you and your brother along from course to course, I knew you'd beat me one day. That day is now, darling. Don't ruin your chance at your dream. Everyone deserves a second chance. Even you."

She sighed. "I love you, Mom."

"I know. Do what makes you happy. I'm proud of you, no matter who carries your bag. I'm hoping you'll let someone else carry it instead of you."

She closed the phone and tossed it on the bed. No matter what anyone said, she couldn't let go of the baggage she carried around. Not now. Maybe not ever. Though...Green did have broad shoulders and he handled her golf bag with expertise. He'd even said she could talk to him about anything. And her past was tearing her game apart.

But could she trust him to caddy? With her secrets? Or bigger yet...with her heart.

Chapter 9

“Hey, what are you doing up here?” Jeannie climbed next to Birdie on the loft bed. “I grabbed some dinner from the club. You hungry?”

Birdie shook her head. “Not right now.” Her stomach twisted in knots.

Jeannie bumped her shoulder and raised an eyebrow. “We cool?”

“I don’t know. You knew and you didn’t tell me. Why?” They never kept secrets.

“Because, I knew you would refuse. Damn it, Birdie, I can’t stand to watch you throw away your talent. Without your father’s money you’ll have to quit playing fulltime unless you start winning. Besides, it’s time for you to break loose and make those big names take notice of you. Make your father notice. Don’t you want that?”

“Of course I do...” She turned her head away and tossed the pillow in the corner.

“But what?”

“I don’t deserve it.” Her words came out choked through her tears.

Jeannie twisted Birdie’s chin to face her. “Why are you the only one who can’t see how special you are?” She bent and kissed her tears away from the corners of her eyes. “You’re the best friend I could ever have. All those different men my mother dragged home and all the times I needed a place to run to, you were always there for me. You would do whatever you had to, to help anyone.”

“I didn’t do enough.”

“Birdie, I don’t know how to help you anymore. At least let Green help your game. He’s sorry for what he did.”

“Don’t ask me to trust my instincts like my mom and Green did, because I can’t.” Her heart wanted to burst. She deserved it to drain dry--one drop at a time--for what she’d done to Mia. “But, I’ll trust yours. That’s the best I can do.”

Jeannie smiled. “I’ll take it. Now come on and grab something to eat. We’re celebrating your round and my article sale.”

“You sold an article.” She paused. “It’s not about me and Green, is it?”

“No silly.” Jeannie bumped her shoulder again. “It’s about golfing the pro way on a budget.” They both laughed as they looked around the loft bed.

“God, this RV *is* a shit heap.”

“Yes, it is,” Jeannie agreed.

“You go on. I’ll be there in a few.”

“All right. Don’t wait too long, or I’ll eat your steak too.”

* * * *

Green took a drag of the black stuff, washing down his last bite of steak and chips. Best damn meal he'd had in a long time. He hoped it wasn't his last good meal. What would it say being dropped after a single day of his new gig? The media would eat him alive again.

"What do ye think? Is she gonna drop my arse?" Anxiety settled in the pit of his stomach and weighed down his meal.

Jeannie shook her pretty curls. "I don't know. She's got a lot on her mind. I tried though."

The curtain rings screeched as Birdie appeared from the loft bed. Her sweet arse descended the ladder, making his throat dry. God, she was hot. Even with his job on the line, he wanted her. She, on the other hand, probably didn't want him. Not after today, anyway.

"Hey." Jeannie stood and let Birdie slide into the seat. "Do you want a soda?"

Birdie looked between the two of them, resting her gaze on the steak meal getting cold. "Sure, thanks."

Jeannie popped the top and set the cool drink on the table. "Well...um...I need to go see the restaurant manager. I figured I'd be the one begging for WVO anyway since I'm the diplomatic one. So I arranged a deal for a few containers while we're here. He told me to come back tonight and he'd have someone to help me cart it away."

"All right. Give us a snog."

She smiled and laid on one hell of a kiss, tasting like Guinness.

"See ya later?"

"Later." Before leaving, she looked at Birdie. "Be good."

He watched her toy with her food, avoiding his stare. Tension grew between them and his chest tightened. The walls of the Coachman closed in on him, as if there were any way of making the damn camper smaller. Stale air filled his lungs as he drew in a sharp breath. "Well, what's it going to be? Am I out of a job then?"

Wide, green eyes glared at him, making him squirm like a boy in primary school.

"I talked to my mother. She used to golf years ago. Never reached her dream. Always teetering on the edge of the cut, and wondering if someone would beat her out of a chance at a piece of the purse. Most of the time she went home, depressed. My brother and I in tow, watching her heart break. Green..." She licked her lips, sending blood racing to his cock.

How could he think about sex at a time like this? No...not sex...Birdie. "Aye."

"I don't want to end up like that. I mean...I love my mother, and she did the best she could for her kids. But I'm making the cut. I can do this. That is..." She hung her head and fidgeted with her nails. "If I have the right help to raise my game a couple of notches. Even Tiger had Steve Williams. My mother says you're as good as him, maybe even better."

He reached across the table and raised her chin to look into her sad eyes. "So what are ye about?"

"If I want to reach my goal, make my dreams come true, then I'm going to have to give you a chance." A tear slid down her cheek.

"I won't let you down. I swear it, darling."

"I hope not, because I want to start making some waves." She smiled.

"Well, not in the water, you won't. Not anymore." Relief flooded him. He stood up and took her hand, led her to the sofa. "Let's have a look at that back, shall we?"

A few moments later as he massaged her tight muscles, she leaned her head back onto his shoulder. Her brown silky hair fell across his face, exposing her long, slender neck. Closing his eyes, he worked his thumb over her shoulder blade. Breathing in her strawberry scented shampoo, he slipped his fingers around her side to rest the tips under the swell of her breast.

Her breath hitched, but she didn't jerk away. Still moving his thumb, he stalled. Fuck, her diddies were perfect. His already engorged cock throbbed.

He bent a fraction, lips a wee inch away from her neck. The voice inside his trousers screamed to lock the door and take her to heaven with him. God help him. Neither one moved as he warred with his emotions and good sense.

Is he your lover? The reporter's words rushed back to him. If he slept with her, no one would take him seriously. Right now, with Birdie in his arms, he wasn't sure how much he cared about what anyone thought of him. Just her. His wee golfer. She blathered on and annoyed him. Yet she kept him on his toes. Sparred with him and took no crap from anyone.

Light sensations traveled over his fingers, jarring him back to reality. Her hand settled on his.

He cleared his throat. Moving his hand away, he began to massage her knots again. "We'll play the course tomorrow the same as today." Putting some space between them, he continued. "Only, try to cut some strokes from the first two holes." God, talking shop sounded like dirty sex talk. More so when he fought the urge to strip her clothes off.

She ran her hand up his thigh and settled it right below his bollocks.

Jaysus! Reveling in the warmth of her hand, he struggled to gain control. "Birdie...I can't do this."

Tensing, she sat up straight and sniffed. "I understand. You're with Jeannie."

"Aye, I guess I am." But, she was just a fling to deal with his desire for what he couldn't have. Her. His beautiful Birdie. It hurt, but it was better to let her think he wanted Jeannie than to tell her the truth. Maybe she'd concentrate on her golf, and he'd be able to rebuild his name and call his parents. A trip home one day soon would be nice too--if they'd accept him. When Birdie was established, he'd get more offers. He'd take another gig, move on and try to put her behind him. Even if it killed him in the process.

Chapter 10

Friday's round went much like the first. This time Birdie shaved off a stroke from both holes one and two. Finishing the round with a sixty-nine, she'd made the cut with ease.

Excitement dashed through her veins. "God, what a day! Did you see the crowd? I've never had so many people following me around." She slapped Green's butt with her hand towel. "And they were following me, not Duplex. She didn't get anywhere near the cut." Duplex played as an amateur, though she'd been around the circuit longer.

Things had gone great with Mia's surgery according to her brother, but the poor little girl was still groggy from the sedative and wouldn't be able to talk for quite a long time.

Birdie sighed in relief. Today had been another small step toward total recovery.

"Aye, I did see the mob of bastards. Bloody wankers out to get a peek at the caddy with a gambling problem."

"You knew this would happen. Even begged me to keep you on, so don't piss on my parade."

"Fuck, you think you're in the clear now because you made the cut? You got to work your pretty wee arse off now. The pressure is on. Will he muck it up or can he pull her up from the shit hole she's been wallowing in?"

"Damn, you're in a foul mood."

"Bugger off. You got a hell of a lot of work to do if you want to make some real money."

"Well, I will be making something from this. Even if I get last place, I'll make a couple of thousand dollars. And since BJ paid this entry fee, we can afford the next one and eat. Plus, it's not like we have to pay for gas to get there."

"By the way." Green's tone changed to one more civilized. "BJ called, and he's willing to pay your next fee if you place half-way decent."

"That's great."

Green climbed in the driver's seat. "Buckle up, and let's go."

"Go where? Jeannie's not even here. We can't leave without her." She looked around the parking lot for a glimpse of her best friend.

"She's got a dinner date. We'll meet up with her later."

"Oh, I get it." She laughed. "Jeannie's out with some other guy and you're jealous."

"Ach, I am not. She wangled an interview with an actress whose career is dying. It's a win-win for both of them. I can make it one night without her, so I can." He pulled out into traffic.

"Geez, you're guaranteed to make money this weekend, you've a free trip to Mexico, and you're getting laid every night. What could possibly be wrong?"

"Your putting. That's what's wrong. I'm not happy with last place, and you shouldn't be either."

"Does anything make you happy? If you'd check the leader board, you'd see I'm in seventeenth place right now."

"Seventeenth right now, aye, but your putting can drop your arse right back to last place in a heartbeat. Don't lose focus on me now." His eyes blazed with fury.

She refused to back down. "You're the one having me take crazy shots to avoid putting. When are you going to help me iron it out, hot shot?"

"Tonight. That's where we're going."

He turned off the highway, drove down a bumpy dirt road and stopped at a rundown miniature golf course. One of those tacky places with cheesy rockets and windmills. Lord, there wasn't even a theme to this place.

"Here?"

"Aye, here. There's no one around. We'll have the place to ourselves and we can take things slow."

Slow. Long, slow strokes invaded her mind, and not the ones with a golf club either. She shook her head and took in the scenery. "Why didn't we go to a putting green? This place is creepy, especially that clown."

"Don't worry ya wee head. I'll protect ye from the plaster clown." He laughed.

"It's not funny. His eyes are red and glowing." She shivered.

Still laughing, he jumped out of the RV.

Ass!

After they'd paid and argued over who got stuck with the baby-poop green ball, they found the first hole. A straight shot with some dips and a faded armadillo in the middle with a tunnel through its belly. "Real classy place to bring me for our first date." She elbowed him in the stomach and then lined up her ball.

"Pain in the arse. Could you be any more childish? How old are you anyway?"

"Twenty-one, thank you very much." The ball rolled through the tunnel, stopping a tad short of the hole. "Damn it!"

"Not hard enough."

"Yeah, that's what she said."

His six-foot, broad frame hovered too close as he looked down on her five-foot-six inches. "Oh, I don't think so, honey. I'm plenty hard." His deep accent sent tingles down her spine and settled between her thighs.

Visions of his hard, thick cock pumping inside Jeannie rushed back. Need pulsed through her body. Damn it, she wanted him. Wanted him bad, but he'd refused her twice. Not to mention, he was her best friend's guy.

Without a word, she sunk her ball and stalked off to the next hole, leaving Green behind.

She played the next stupid obstacle and waited for him on a bench, still trying to shake her lust.

“Do you think you could wait? I’m supposed to be watching you.”

“Haven’t you watched me enough in the last two days? Really, Green, how is this going to help?”

He sat down beside her, their thighs pressed together. “It won’t if you don’t put some effort into this and concentrate.”

“Concentrate? How am I supposed to when there’s a donkey in a sombrero staring at us?” Or with his body nudged against her skin?

“Are you always this uptight?” He growled. “I’m not crazy. Look around and tell me what you see, besides the tacky statues.”

She shook her head. “I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Then come on.” He took her hand and led her to the next putting green. Heat radiated up her arm. “Forget about the stupid fish and look at the shape of the course. Notice the slopes and the runs?”

She didn’t notice anything but how strong his arm muscles were and his musky smell. “Green--”

“Wait.” He moved the fish onto the concrete walkway. “Now, look again.”

Something seemed a bit familiar to her. She crouched low, taking in the lay of the land. “You’re right. It’s a replica of the third green at Tres Marías.”

“The whole course is based on the Tres Marías. Every miniature green mirrors the real one. Now do you understand?”

“How do you know about this place?”

“It’s my job, darling.” He winked at her, a twinkle in the dark pools of his eyes. “Come on, let’s play.”

With each new hole, he pointed out dips and turns, described how the grass lay on the real course and arranged her ball where she’d landed on the green after a long drive. How he kept and arranged the information in his head amazed her. She’d never met someone so intelligent and hardworking in her life. Not even her father with all his millions could compare to Green and his immeasurable brain capacity.

Admiration for this man grew with each new detail he pointed out and described. Her heart swelled with pride. He was *her* caddy, thank God. With him at her side, she could overcome her putting issues in no time. What could she conquer with him at her side as her man?

No, that wasn’t possible. Still, she’d smiled and laughed more in those couple of hours than she had since...since...the fire. She frowned, remembering why she couldn’t have fun and enjoy herself when Mia was in the hospital recovering.

Between the fifteenth and sixteenth hole, Green stopped on the covered bridge and pulled her close. Too close. His minty breath skimmed her cheek.

“What’s wrong, darling? You’ve been having a blast. Now you look miserable and distant. Did I do something?” He brushed a stray hair behind her ear.

She willed him to brush his lips across hers just as tenderly. Jeannie! Looking at her feet she muttered, "No, I'm fine."

He lifted her chin and refused to let her look away. "Birdie, I can't make you trust me, but I wish you would. You're not fine. What's wrong?"

"A bit nervous." It wasn't a full lie. She was nervous, but not about the tournament. Mia's recovery would be long and painful this time. And there was no guarantee it would even work. They'd gone in to reconstruct her nose and give it a semblance of something normal. It also meant some more work on her cheeks, and her face still wouldn't be complete. A wayward tear escaped. She tried to hide it, but Green saw.

"Sweetheart, don't cry. Talk to me. You've nothing to be afraid of. Is this about my past?"

"No." She shook her head. "It's complicated."

Leaning against the rail, he drew her into a full embrace. His arms circled her waist and his hands worked magic on her back. Tears gushed as years of pain overflowed.

"Shh. I want to help ya. Let me make things better." He kissed the top of her head. His hand traveled low, stopping a fraction of an inch above her butt.

This was the part where she'd make a move and he'd reject her. Pride refused to let that scene play out again. If anything happened between them, he'd have to be the one to take the lead.

If he did, what would she tell Jeannie? Did she even deserve a small bit of happiness when Mia was sick? A whirlwind of emotions stirred inside her as she snuggled into his warmth.

Ever so lightly his fingers skimmed the curve of a butt cheek. She drew in a sharp breath as pulses rang through her core. His heartbeat pounded under her ear. They were on the verge of taking things further. Close to unleashing the passion cultivating between them. About to...to...

He pushed her back a step and she thought she heard him mutter "God, help me."

Reality hit. She wiped her eyes and sniffed. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be. Let's finish up and find Jeannie." He stormed off.

Clearly, he'd been thinking about the woman in his bed at night. A man doing the right thing even though another woman kept throwing herself at him was good, wasn't it? The two of them seemed happy, screwing every night, kissing every morning and teasing all day. Why would he possibly want to mess that up when all she did was nag at him?

But something plagued her about her best friend's relationship with Green. She'd seen it before, the laughing and playing and never getting serious. Jeannie was a heartbreaker. Oh, she didn't mean to be, just a young woman having fun. Sometimes the guys didn't see it her way and would cry on Birdie's shoulder after the breakup.

Maybe this time would be different. Green was a great guy. Jeannie was bound to break his heart and then she'd be there to pick up the pieces. He might not want her to though. She needed to talk to Jeannie, but what would she say? I'm falling for your guy and I was wondering when you'd be done with him so I can have him? No. She'd have to leave this one alone. No matter how much it hurt.

Chapter 11

Green nipped at Jeannie's neck, sending her into a wave of giggles. His cock pulsed from his closeness to Birdie earlier in the evening. He flipped Jeannie so he was on top and slammed into her. Thrust after thrust, she met each and every one, hungry for more.

"Wow, what's gotten into you?" she breathed the words while still engaged in their sexual pleasures.

He knew it was wrong to use her body. His mind refused to let the tactic work anyway. Nothing made him forget Birdie pressed against him on the bridge. Cruel circumstances had brought them together and, at the same time, kept them apart.

"I can't get enough." He kissed her hard, trying to take some of the edge off.

Jeannie twisted on top again. "You want it rough, do you?" Smiling, she wiggled her eyebrows.

Her large, round breasts bounced in his face. He squeezed one. Birdie's small diddies remained in his mind. He wanted to touch *her* tonight, soft and slow, tender and loving. Blood raced to his cock as images surfaced. Making love to her on the eighteenth hole, on the cool grass, under the full moon.

He grabbed Jeannie's hips and slowed her movements as he thought about moving inside Birdie. Would she feel silky smooth or be velvety warm? He bet she'd scream as he took her with precision and long, slow strokes. How many times could he bring her to climax before he lost control in her toned arms? Her smoking golfer body turned him on more than Jeannie's softer curves.

Eyes closed and few strokes later he heard curtain rings scrape the metal bar. They both startled and looked at the loft, to see Birdie duck behind the thin fabric.

"My, my." Jeannie giggled.

Jerked out of his fantasy into reality, he didn't see anything funny about it. Erection gone, he grunted and pushed her to the side of him. "Get off."

"That's what I was trying to do."

"Fuck, Jeannie, is everything a joke to ya?"

"Hey..." She rested her hand on his shoulder, but he brushed it away. "What's your problem? So what she looked. No big deal, we're just having fun." She tried again, this time tracing a finger down his chest. He pulled back.

"Well, the fun is over." He ran his hand through his hair.

Tugging the sheet around her naked chest, she huffed. "Why are you being a jerk about it? It's not like she can't hear us getting it on every night. Who cares if she took a peek?"

"Damn it, she's my boss. My career is in the palm of her hands. Maybe she doesn't like her best friend in my bed." Him shagging Jeannie had to be doing something to Birdie. She wanted him, didn't she? Or did she want a fun time, too? Because he wanted more than fun with Birdie. So much so it scared the hell out of him, induced the guilt washing over him for being too weak to tell Jeannie no.

Jeannie tilted her head and scrutinized him. "Are you sure that's what you're worried about? Because I think there's more to it."

"Why wouldn't I be worried about my job? This is my one shot to get back into the game." And good graces with his family. He missed them terribly. How old was his nephew now? Three... almost four?

"Okay." She stood up and threw on her thong.

"Where are ye going? Come back to bed and just sleep beside me."

"No. I don't want to worry about being the cause of you *losing* your *job*. Besides, Birdie and I share everything. I'll ask her if she's going to fire you because we're fucking."

"Ye can't do that." Birdie would tell her about him touching her arse tonight and her breast yesterday. Then they'd gang up on him. Hum...his mind wandered to the two of them in his bed together. His erection grew stiff again. He shook his head, trying to get the scene out of his mind. He wanted Birdie *alone* in his bed, the two of them building a relationship, not a fling.

She crossed her arms and tapped her foot. "Why not?"

"Because you just can't."

"Lame excuse for being a chicken shit." She stalked off and disappeared behind the curtain.

"I'm not a chicken." Fuck! He was in a mess now. They'd swap stories, and he'd lose both his job and Birdie. A knot formed in his stomach. He should've left Jeannie alone and found another way of dealing with his attraction to Birdie. No matter how painful, it couldn't have been worse than what he faced now.

* * * *

Busted! Birdie prayed Green wouldn't be pissed by her invasion. She knew Jeannie wouldn't be.

How much torture could one person take? Night after night their moans echoed in her ears as she tried to stop thinking about her burning desire for Green. The man she wanted lay, at most, twelve feet away in bed with her best friend. It ripped at her heart, more now since he'd held her tonight.

His strong arms had wrapped around her as she'd cried about Mia. He might not have known what her tears were for, but he cared nonetheless. The quick beat of his heart informed her he felt more than a boss-employee relationship.

"Hey. Turn over and look at me." Jeannie bounced on the bed, clad in a thong.

Heat rushed to her cheeks. "God, I am so sorry. Is he pissed?"

Jeannie giggled. "I'm not sure what he is. According to him, he's freaked about losing his job."

"What?" She had been the one to overstep the boundaries. As long as he didn't gamble, Green's off time was his own business.

"I told him you weren't going to fire him because of a little hanky-panky."

"A little?"

They both laughed.

"Okay, a lot. Heaven help me, the man knows what he's doing."

Her heart sank. These two might like each other for real. She'd have to deal with it. Yet... something nagged at her. "What about you? Do you know what you're doing?"

"Why, Birdie, are you getting deep on me, or was that a sexual remark?" Jeannie ran a finger over one of Birdie's nipples. "You're turned on."

Her cheeks flushed hotter, and she slapped Jeannie's hand away. "What do you expect? It's like live porn in my living room every night."

"I saw some wicked hot guys camped out in tents over on the grassy side of the park. Their legs are toned like mountain climbers. Throw on a mini and halter and you could have your pick."

"Why would I do that?"

"Because you want some. Need some. Girl, when was the last time you let your hair down and got some? You are as tense as you can be. Go release a few endorphins."

"I don't want to." A one night stand with a stranger appalled her. Mainly because she wanted a certain guy who happened to be taken.

Jeannie ran her fingertip over the crotch of Birdie's panties. "Yes, you do."

She slapped her hand away again, but her breath hitched. "Would you stop it? Freak."

Jeannie laughed. "I'm right, aren't I?" She paused and her eyes twinkled. "You looked. Do you think Green's hot?"

"Stop." She turned her head away.

"Oh, snap! You do. You're jealous." Jeannie elbowed her.

"I am not." She sighed. "Well, maybe you're right about *needing* some. It has been a long time."

"Want to give him a show?"

She sprang up to a sitting position. "What?"

"You know, you and me fool around and let Green hear. I bet he'll be beating off in no time."

"Are you crazy? Where do you come up with this shit?"

Jeannie laughed again. "I'm just kidding. Damn, you're uptight. Since you're not going after one of the guys in the tents--which is crazy, because they're hot--and Green's freaking out, move over so I can get some sleep.

Birdie squeezed over to make room.

"You know I love you right?" Jeannie wiggled under the sheet.

"I know...Jeannie?"

"Yeah?"

"I'm sorry I spied and messed up your night."

"Don't be. Green's acting weird anyway, like he's got something on his mind."

"Oh." She squeezed her eyes closed and took a deep breath. That could be her fault too. Why couldn't she keep her distance? She had to try from now on or else she might lose her best friend and her heart.

Chapter 12

Green tossed and turned. Stupid bugger! He lay alone while two sexy babes slept a few feet away. He could be shagging either one of them at this very minute. Had been shagging Jeannie for days now, but he wanted his wee bird to warm his bed.

She'd felt incredible...perfect in his arms tonight. What did he think she would do when he started banging Jeannie after their tender moment? She must think he was an ass. And he was, wasn't he?

With a heavy conscience, he drifted off to sleep, knowing Jeannie would be staying in the loft next to Birdie tonight.

Deep in dreaming, a squeak caught his attention and he strained to hear. What was he thinking? Of course they weren't sleeping. They were blathering on about how stupid he was.

Listening again, he did hear voices. Had that been a moan?

Bloody hell! It was a moan. Birdie's!

He let out a harsh breath, his mouth hanging open in shock. Feck, what were they doing? Was it what he thought--no hoped--two hot, gorgeous bodies making out? Was this his punishment or reward?

Birdie's moans grew louder. Listening became sweet torture. Blood drained from every vein and pooled in his aching cock. He licked his dry lips, but, not wanting to miss one sound, lay still as a board.

"Jeannie, no."

"Come on, Birdie. Let me do this for you."

Another moan and the camper rocked.

He jumped out of the bed. What? What was Jeannie doing? He wanted to know. Wanted to see. Wanted to take Jeannie's place.

His heart thundered in his chest. Did he want to watch or join? Would they even let him? Confusion swirled in his mind. A dream come true had fallen in his lap and he didn't know how to handle the situation. He needed to get a grip and seize the opportunity.

Frozen to the spot, he couldn't move, only listen, though he tried to lift his feet. Why couldn't he? What was happening to him?

The sweet sounds seemed to echo in his brain and turned him on beyond belief. This must be what Birdie heard every night. Had she been turned on for the last week with no escape, cramped in that loft bed?

"Damn, Jeannie, this is wrong." After more rocking, Birdie cried out again, "Okay, yes, just don't stop."

The curtain flew back to reveal the most brilliant scene ever. Jeannie lay between Birdie's naked legs, licking and sucking her pussy. Birdie's hands wove in Jeannie's hair. The only stitch of clothing was Jeannie's thong.

His erection became rock hard as he gaped wide mouthed at Birdie's beautiful diddies. Any trace of composure he'd had a few minutes ago fled. Naked, he leaned against the counter and watched the scene unfold, too weak in the knees to move.

Birdie raised her hips and ground her pussy across Jeannie's face. Still moaning and thrashing, Birdie arched her back as Jeannie cupped one breast.

On autopilot, he felt his hand grip his shaft and start to pump. Lost in carnal desires, neither girl looked at him. Had he won the lottery and not been told?

Desire raged inside to grab Birdie and make love to her, kiss her beautiful pink lips, and feel her warmth surround him. Again, he tried to move, but couldn't. Sweet torture if he'd ever felt it before.

Birdie twisted, stared him straight in the eyes, and cried out, "I want you inside me."

Frustrated at his lack of control over his lower limbs, he pumped faster and let a deep growl escape his throat. Sweat trickled down his temples. Pleasure built, but no way could it compare to being inside Birdie. She wanted him. He wanted her. Why couldn't he get to her? Why didn't she come down to him? They knew he was wanking off. They wanted him to, so they did, or they wouldn't have given him a front row seat to the best show in town. And it was the best thing he'd ever experienced, though he was jealous of Jeannie right now. Birdie should have her hands on his head while he licked her sweet pussy. Dryness closed off his throat as he longed for a taste, struggled with the emotions and desire raging within.

His moans grew louder with Birdie's. Release loomed in the wee distances for her, making his control slip. His balls coiled in painful pleasure. "Oh God," he breathed between clenched teeth. He wanted to fill her like she'd requested. Needed to be there, claiming her as his own.

As her body trembled in orgasmic ecstasy, he pumped harder and faster, never finding release. He struggled, wiggled and turned. Somehow he found himself back in the bed, sheets twisted around his hands, restraining him from finishing. The girl's faces drifted before him. They kissed each other, laughed, and giggled, teased him for not being able to reach them.

"How do you like being forced to watch from the sidelines?" Birdie's voice echoed in his mind. He grabbed her face and moved in to claim her lips. She laughed and pushed him away. "You're with Jeannie, remember?"

"Damn it, I want you though." He jerked and sat up in the bed. The sheets were tangled and sweat covered his skin. His breath came out choppy and ragged. Fuck. It was all a dream. He looked down, thankful he'd not found that release he desperately needed.

Grabbing his clothes, he slipped out to the bathhouse to cool down.

* * * *

Birdie struggled to concentrate on her game with Green looming over her shoulder. Each stroke challenged her more than the last, but she'd maintained her dignity. She smiled for the crowd and nodded to the cameras.

Every now and then her mind slipped back to last night. Green's moans echoed in her ears. Shivers ran down her neck. He knew she'd peeked at them. Jeannie claimed he'd been freaked out before they'd even started their nightly tryst. Had he been thinking about her as she thought about him? Heat rushed to her cheeks. Could she ever look him in the face after being caught?

Jeannie had been another issue. The girl had been bubblier than ever and laughed the whole thing off, saying Green had been an animal this morning. The two had sucked face every chance they'd gotten.

Green wasn't mad at Jeannie for leaving his bed last night so...he must just be mad at her for peeking. Sadness replaced embarrassment. She missed his sharp tongue and weird sayings. They were even starting to make some sense to her. Then he'd throw out a new one and get her flustered again.

She walked to her ball on the green. Confused, she waited for Green to step to her side. "What should I do here?" As she forced the words emotions clogged her throat, but she required his help.

He stood still, offering no advice.

"Green, I apologize if I upset you," she said, unable to look at him. "I don't know what came over me, and I don't go around spying on people--not that it matters to you what I do with other people--but I want you to know that it won't happen again. I'm ashamed of my actions, and I won't interfere in your relationship with Jeannie anymore. So, please, I need your help."

He shook his head as if he'd come out of a trance. His voice lacked emotion. "It's later in the day than when you played this hole yesterday. The lawns were mowed earlier this morning than they have been this week. So the grass is higher than the last two times you played this hole, but still leaning at the same angle. At any rate, you need to give it more power to get through the higher grass." He handed her the putter and stepped back.

Wonderment clouded her mind. How he could tell the grass was higher at this certain hole amazed her. Everything about him was amazing.

She made the putt and they moved through the day without another word. Defeated, she hoped the real Green would come back soon, because she missed him.

* * * *

Green slammed the camper door. Both girls jumped.

"You scared the crap out of me." Birdie clutched her heart and took a breath. "Can you believe I finished in twentieth place? I haven't ever placed that high." She smiled.

"You were great. And a nice check to boot." Jeannie beamed from ear to ear.

"Thank you."

"What the hell is wrong with you two? You fell from seventeenth." Sometime during the day he'd come out of the trance he'd been in since dreaming of Birdie's naked body. No matter how he looked at her the last two days, all he saw was her in the throes of passion. He couldn't concentrate on his job. Hell, he could barely control his erection. Thank God the caddy's bib hung low to cover his fly. Once, she'd jarred him to and he hoped he'd made sense, but he wasn't sure.

"Yeah, but it was only one stroke."

"I know that." He gritted his teeth, remembering the eleventh hole where he'd lost focus and thought about seeing Birdie's juices on Jeannie lips. After the show in his dream, he couldn't get enough kisses from Jeannie, hoping to taste Birdie on her mouth. Because he'd let his mind wander, he'd handed her the wrong iron and she'd dropped that one stroke. Damn, he'd caused her to lose ground, and still his cock stirred at this very moment. What was wrong with him?

"Why are you grumpy?" Jeannie asked.

"He's always grouchy. Seventeenth, twentieth, who cares? I'm thrilled with either, I got a nice check even after I have to pay grumpy pants, and I get to go home now."

"Like hell you do. We're on our way to Alabama, and you need to practice putting. That one stroke cost you five thousand dollars."

Their eyes widened in shock.

"I got over a week before the next tournament. I'm going home." She stared him right in the eyes, challenging him.

"And I said you're not. Extra practice will rank you in the top ten next time."

"Maybe, maybe not, but I'm going home." She placed her hands on her hips. Anger increased her sexiness.

He removed what little distance lay between them. "You agreed to do things my way and my way is to pull yer socks up." Could he survive a week without her to spar with? Being in the tiny camper with her drove him mad with need, but he didn't want to find out what would happen if she wasn't in the same room as him every night.

She rolled her eyes. "Whatever that means. Besides, I agreed before I knew you were a tyrant."

"Guys, let's compromise. We can each go home, then leave early, meet there and still get some practice in," Jeannie said.

"No. Birdie needs to stay focused. Breaks interfere with progress, and she just started playing well. I'll have to start all over." And sit in that small apartment by himself. God only knew how many times he'd wank off thinking about his wee bird. Sad and pitiful.

"This is so unfair." Her childish whine made him want to spank her. His cock stirred at the thought.

"Says the woman who acts like a babby. Damn it, grow up." He didn't mean the words, but he had to get some control back before he embarrassed himself.

“Fuck you. I don’t need this shit. I can get a lecture from my father about growing up, but I’ll not listen to my caddy rant like a madman.” Birdie stormed out.

“Why did you do that? She’s excited about seeing her niece.”

“She has to get serious if she wants to compete with the big girls. And I don’t have time for this shit if she doesn’t want to step up her game.” He stomped off to grab a beer from the nineteenth hole.

An eleven day stretch loomed between now and the next tournament. Without Birdie’s face to greet him each morning he’d go crazy. Putting practice offered an excuse to keep her close. He’d come to rely on their daily banter, and he feared how much he’d miss their word play. Plus, he loved to spout off Irish sayings to drive her crazy. He smiled. Her beautiful eyes would roll with each new phrase he threw at her. Then she’d stomp around, her diddies bouncing.

Guilt washed over him. He could’ve compromised. Missing family hurt. Too late now though. She was pissed. He’d stand his ground and hope she’d forgive him once she tripled her winnings.

Chapter 13

Smoke seared her lungs. Blinded, she couldn't see her hand in front of her face. She grabbed a towel, felt her way to the sink and soaked it. Covering her mouth, she dropped to the floor and dragged her way along the wall.

Fear consumed her. How would she get to Mia in time? Cries mingled with crackles. Heat from the fire singed her skin. Crawling closer to the blaze, she estimated how far she had left. Determined to reach her niece, she trudged forward.

A wall of fire blocked the hallway. She coughed as more smoke entered her lungs. The roomful of dense fog darkened. Even the red glow disappeared as she sank lower. Her limbs ached, and her head spun.

No. This time she had to stay conscious and reach Mia before the fire did. She struggled to her knees, but collapsed again as something slammed onto her back. Pain rocketed through her spine. Her head grew heavy. Everything faded.

Mia. She had to save her. "*Mia!*" Birdie screamed.

She sprang up in bed, breathing ragged and covered in sweat. The dream replayed, like a bad sports clip on ESPN. Throat dry, she licked her lips. Once, just once, she'd like to dream she'd reached Mia in time to stop the fire from destroying her face. If she'd been in the same room...or watched the fire closer. Maybe if she'd called 911 first instead of trying to put it out on her own, then things would be different.

Tears streamed down her face. No matter what she wished for or dreamed at night, she'd messed up and a five-year-old paid the price every day of her life.

* * * *

Jumping up and grabbing his pants, Green thought about the screams that had awakened him, heart pounding. He heard Jeannie fumble in the dark. "I'll go check on her."

"No, I'll do it." Her steady voice did little to calm him. "Go back to sleep."

"Are you sure? I'd be more than happy to check." He wanted to take Birdie in his arms and reassure her like he had playing miniature golf. Something was wrong with her and he wanted to know what.

"Trust me." Jeannie kissed him and disappeared.

How could he argue any further? And what would both girls think if he'd been the one to check? No way could he resist kissing away her fear. As much as he hated it, he'd have to wait for Jeannie to come back to ease his nerves.

After numerous ticks of his watch, he grabbed a Guinness and went outside. A cool night breeze refreshed him. Leaning against the camper, he took a drink of the black stuff.

Worried about Birdie, he started to pace. What had happened? It sounded like a horrific dream. The terror in her voice sent chills down his arms still. He shivered. Something scarred her deeply, yet she didn't trust him to open up.

"Hey." Jeannie stepped out with a beer in her hand. "I thought I heard you come out here."

"Everything okay?"

"Yeah, she's back asleep now."

"This happens a lot, aye it does. You weren't scared in the least."

She placed her hand on his shoulder. "Green--"

"What's wrong?"

She pulled back. "That's not for me to say."

Panic flickered through him. He wanted to be Birdie's protector, wanted to comfort her in the middle of the night. "Oh, yes it is. She's a ball of tension. It created her push, and I bet it's a mental block on her putting. I need to know what's bothering her."

"You'll have to ask her."

"Ach, I did. She cried on my shoulder, but refused to talk." Jeannie turned her back to him. "I can't help her if I don't know how to get through." He grabbed Jeannie's arm and spun her to him. "She's wasting her career. Please." And it was tearing him apart to see her in pain.

Wide-eyed, she searched around as if someone might be listening. "Okay. I'll tell you because I care about her."

He nodded, urging her to tell the story.

"Birdie's had a unique life. Her parents divorced a long time ago."

"Is that all? A lot of people go through the same thing."

She continued without answering his question. "She lived with her mom and step-dad, but it was hard on them. Her mother chased after a golf career that never materialized."

"Aye, Birdie told me about that."

"Yeah, well, her father was never happy with her mother while they were together. She stopped playing when she got pregnant with Birdie. It drove her crazy sitting at home with that man. So she went out on the road again when Birdie was a few weeks old. They'd always had problems, and well, Mrs. Harold slipped. She had an affair and got pregnant. Birdie's brother, Brian, was born about a year after her. Her parents split and her mom married Brian's father."

"So what's bad enough to give her nightmares?" Was she abused? Rage boiled at the thought. If so, he'd go home with her himself and crack some heads. People who abused children were fucking wankers and deserved a slow death.

"Her mother never had a lot. On the other hand, her father's filthy rich, billions. He used to set Birdie up with stupid classes like charm school."

He laughed, thinking of all their banter. "Charm school, huh. She flunked out, so I bet she did."

"That's not funny." Nevertheless Jeannie laughed too, and then grew serious again. "She's always felt bad for the things she got when Brian had to do without. He never seemed to care, saying he didn't want to ride a stinky horse anyway. Birdie would do anything for her brother." A tear glistened Jeannie's eye.

"Hey." He drew her close and rubbed her back. "Please, keep going."

Choked up, she continued. "At fifteen, Brian got his seventeen-year-old girlfriend, Cassie, pregnant. Cassie's parents threw her out and the Harolds took her in. The whole family helped raise that little girl, Mia."

Mia, the name Birdie cried out in her sleep.

"Right after Birdie turned pro, she offered to babysit for Mia and paid for her brother to take Cassie out. All three of them were young. Birdie was nineteen then and a late cold snap went through. Mia slept in her crib while Birdie went to the kitchen to fix something to eat. The music was blaring, and her back was turned...she never saw the sparks from the fireplace land on the old, worn carpet." She shook her head. "The neighbor saw the fire and pulled an unconscious Birdie out. They couldn't get to Mia."

Oh God, no! Blood rushed to his ears, making him strain to hear more. "What happened to Mia?"

"The firemen got her out, alive. Burns covered sixty percent of her body."

"Bloody hell!" He raked his hand through his hair and gasped for breath.

"She's been through a lot of reconstructive surgeries. The last one was three days ago."

The same day they'd played miniature golf. No wonder. And there he'd tried to steal a feel of her arse. Jackass.

"Birdie blames herself. The nightmares come when Mia's been sick or has surgery. It's harder for Brian and Cassie to afford everything Mia needs now. Mr. Bird used to give Birdie a substantial allowance. Right before we hired you, he cut that off. He wants her to give up on golf, go to college, and then work for him."

"And she gave Brian a large chunk of that money for Mia. Now she has to start winning to help them, aye? That's where I come in."

"Yes. I looked you up, and she liquidated everything she could."

"Including the nice RV. Hell, and I gave her shit about this thing." He felt like the ass she'd been calling him for the last week.

"Now do you see why she wants to go home? Mia's still in the hospital. She needs to see her."

"No."

"No?" Jeannie shook her head, closed her eyes and rubbed her temples with one hand. "But I just told you--"

“Aye, you did. But don’t you see why it is more important to keep her mind off of it? She needs to stay focused and going home will add more pressure and stress. They’re the reasons why she’s stinking it up on the course. How will she feel if she loses in Alabama and there’s no money to give Brian?”

“Worse. You’re right. She can’t go home. So, who’s going to enforce the sentence?”

“I’ll do it. If she’s set on going home, I’ll tell her I’ll quit. She’s not stupid. She knows she needs me to win.” He hoped she wouldn’t hate him for life. Maybe one day she’d forgive him.

Chapter 14

“Hey, Brian. How’s everyone?” Birdie forced a smile for her little brother, determined to hide the sadness in her voice.

“Good. Mom’s sitting with Mia right now so Cassie can get a few hours’ sleep.”

“How’d the surgery go?”

“Oh, fine. Dr. Powell feels confident it’ll take. She’s still on meds and sleeps a lot. You know the drill. Of course, it’ll be a few days before we are certain. Hey, Mom told me twentieth place.” Pride sounded in his voice.

“Yeah, Mr. Sloan’s helping me.” Right! Helping her stay away from home. Jerk. If she didn’t need him, she’d dump his ass. But then where would Mia be?

“Well, I always knew you could do it. I’m proud to be your brother. I was telling my buddies at work about you today.”

“Oh, Brian, I wish you wouldn’t.” She didn’t deserve his praise. Tears swelled behind her lids, but she forced them away. “I’ve got a long way to go.”

“I’m glad you’re still golfing, sis. I was worried you’d picked up a new profession. One with night hours.”

“So not funny. Sloan made me wear that trashy polo. BJ’s one of my sponsors now.”

“You don’t have to answer to me about your side job.” He laughed.

“Look, I wanted to tell you I won’t be coming home this time.”

“Why not? You always come home when you have a long stretch between matches.”

“I know, but Sloan’s being nice enough to stick around and help me with my putting so I can place higher in Alabama.” Ugh. The lie tasted heavy on her tongue.

“Okay...well...I understand.” Disappointment laced his voice.

“Tell Mia I love her, and I’ll send her a souvenir I picked up in Mexico.”

“Sure, no problem. I love you.”

“I love you, too.”

* * * *

“This year’s Bell Micro will be played on the The Crossings course. I don’t know if you’ve played it before. Even if you have, they renovated it recently.” Green spouted in his time-to-get-down-to-business tone.

“Uh huh.” Birdie wanted to be home, not stuck in the cramped space with Green and Jeannie. They were still chummy, and she longed to leave them behind for a few days.

“I think the toughest hole will be number three for you. It’s a par four. Not bad yardage at three hundred and forty-seven, but you need precision more than distance. Something you’ve been struggling with, and there’s a bunker to the right. If your push comes back, you’ll hit it.”

“Right.” Did she even care? Maybe she should quit and work for her father. She’d be closer to family to help with Mia, and he’d give her the allowance back.

“Are you listening to me?”

“Sure, bunker.” Or something to that affect.

He unbuckled from the passenger seat and climbed to the back. “Earth to Birdie.”

“What!” She fixed him with the nastiest stare possible.

“Ouch.” He covered his heart with his hand. “That pissed at me, are ya?”

“Yes, I am.”

“We can get there and spend days playing the course. I’ve already called and worked out some tee times. I wrangled different times of the day so we can gauge the sun’s pull on the grass as well as the ocean.”

“Whatever.” Reverting to childish behavior, she turned her back to him. Maybe she did need to grow up. Shame washed over her. He didn’t know about Mia and why her heart weighed a ton. “Sorry, I’m grateful for your help. I am, but maybe I’m not cut out for all this travel.”

In the vanity mirror, Jeannie peered at her, though she didn’t utter a sound.

“How can you say that? You finished last place in the Kia Classic and in the Kraft Nabisco Championship. I’ve instructed you for a little over a week and you placed twentieth. Think what you can do after I’ve mapped out The Crossings for you.”

She nodded, accepting his point. No one said dreams landed in one’s lap without hard work. “You’re right. Tell me more about the renovation.”

“Like I said, I think hole three will be your toughest. The fourteenth should be a breeze though, par three, one hundred seventy-two yards with the green behind a pond. Same with the green on the fifteenth. It’s longer, four hundred yards, par four, but the green is thin and protected by water. You thrive with water.” A gleam shone in the dark pools of his brown eyes.

Sadly, he was right, again. Water on the course calmed and relaxed her. “Okay, what else.”

“When everyone’s getting tired close to the end of the round, I think you can break out. The sixteenth is a par five, five hundred and thirty-five yards. I want to see an eagle.”

“Eagle?” Was he crazy?

“You can drive that wee ball like crazy. I want you to rip it. Two eighty to three hundred from the tee, a wood shot to the green and sink it in one putt.”

“Three hundred? God, I’m not Wie.”

“No, but you can drive as far.”

“I’ve never driven three hundred yards.”

“Not yet, but a wee bit more work on those knots in your back and I’ll have ya straightened out. You drove two eighty on Saturday.”

Yeah, she had, but she’d focused her sexual tension into her game after being caught spying. Heat crept to her cheeks thinking about Green’s naked body and his cock moving slow and tender inside Jeannie.

“Let me work out something. I think if you change your driver you’ll squeeze out twenty more yards.”

“I...I don’t...know.” She couldn’t afford to buy a new driver without her daddy’s cash. “I like the Big Bertha I have.” Big Berthas were top of the line clubs, too.

“Trust me on this. Besides, I said I’d work it out. I did get your fee paid, didn’t I? Bobby Joe’s business has exploded this last week. Someone will provide you with the clubs of my choice.”

She didn’t know how he did it, but he talked people into all kinds of things. The truth laughed at her. His sexy lips could talk her into anything and she knew it. Did he? As many times as she’d thrown herself at him, he had to.

He squeezed her thigh. “I’ll take care of everything.”

But would he? Because she wanted him to take care of the throb right above his hand, the one between her legs. And the one in her heart.

Chapter 15

Two weeks later with a nice check in her hand from a twelfth place finish, Birdie hugged Jeannie as they left her at the airport. “Say hi to Brian and Momma for me. Give Mia a giant hug and the stuffed sea otter from the coast, okay?” Sadness tugged at her heart.

“I will.” Jeannie turned to Green. “Thanks for the interview.”

“No problem. Thank you for being nice when you wrote it.”

“I’ll see you in Springfield in about a month.”

“Okay.”

Birdie watched as they hugged and kissed goodbye. Then it was her and Green, alone. “Well. I guess it’s time to head out to Gladstone.”

“Looks that way.”

Settled back in the RV, they pulled onto the interstate. They had four days before the Sybase Match Play in New Jersey. No time to spare to get there or play a round before the tournament. Wednesday the pro-am competition occupied the course and Thursday the bracket tournaments began. They would have needed to fly to get a round in, but she just couldn’t spare the fare.

“You ever play this course, Birdie?” Green asked as he checked the lanes and maneuvered in traffic. He’d insisted on driving the whole way to save her back.

“Never.”

“No cut this time. You win your match and go on or you’re out.”

Fear gripped her chest. “Do you think I played well enough with the new FT-iZs, or should I go back to the Berthas?” He’d managed to grab her a set of Callaway’s newest clubs. The heads sported tacky custom covers from Peter’s Putters, but they swung like a dream.

“I think the hybrids worked brilliantly. You increased yardage on your drives and picked up birdies. Plus you grabbed that eagle on the sixteenth. Why do you think they invited you to this match tournament?”

“Because someone dropped out at the last minute, and you’re my caddy.”

“Maybe, but you’re on a streak right now, so you are.”

“I am playing much better.” He’d drilled her every day for the past two weeks, morning and afternoon. At night rewards came in the form of back massages.

Night after night, his hands kneaded her tired muscles. The knots had grown smaller even though she played longer and harder. While she’d weighed her decision to keep him on ever since the day the reporters ambushed her, her improvement stemmed from Green’s advice. He enhanced her knowledge and ability. Without him, she’d be stuck in a classroom at some Ivy League college chosen by her father.

Her body still desired him, but Jeannie had been a buffer. Now that Jeannie was flying home to visit family and work on some articles, could her hormones be kept in check? Hours with Green on the course were hard enough. How could she manage being alone with him at night too?

On the course in khaki pants, a polo and his bib, he looked hot. But traveling in dark jeans and a tight t-shirt, he was sexy as hell. His eyes twinkled as he glanced at her.

"Don't be nervous, I'll have to put in overtime on your back." He smiled.

Heat seared her skin from the intensity of his gaze. She took a drink of her bottled water to moisten her dry mouth. One week alone with this man posed a challenge to her sanity. She had to put distance between them. Fast. "If you don't mind, I think I'll try to relax and get some sleep." And forget the ache between her legs.

"Great idea. I want you in top shape for Thursday's match."

"You should stop when you get tired." They'd already traveled to Birmingham after the day's round so Jeannie could catch a late flight.

"I'm good for a wee bit longer. Don't worry. I'll start looking for a campsite soon."

She scurried up the ladder hoping sleep would take her before he stopped. Else she feared she'd slip back down to seduce him.

* * * *

The first two days of the match play tournament blew by in a haze. Birdie soaked in the atmosphere as best she could with her nerves twittering in her stomach. Each stroke became better and better as she won hole after hole.

"I can't believe I'm still in the running," she murmured to Green as she ate her salad at dinner.

"Believe in yourself, aye, ya should. I do."

She smiled, until memories of Mia surfaced. The sad mood swept over her with rapid speed, too fast to hide from Green.

"Why do you do that?"

"Do what?" She tried to cover up her sadness with another weak smile.

He put down his Guinness. "Refuse to let yourself be happy."

"I'm happy." She was too. Sitting there with him, having dinner together alone made her skin tingle and her heart flip. But would Mia ever find someone to make her smile? Would a guy ever look at her scarred face like Green had at her a few minutes ago? Her heart stopped flopping, rolled over, and died. In a lower voice she repeated, "I'm happy."

"Then why the long face? You've beaten two competitors and are guaranteed at least sixteenth place with a bigger purse."

"Is everything golf to you?"

"Aye." He scratched his head. "Well...not everything, no. What's wrong?"

"Nothing." She gathered her take-out box and threw it in the trash. Then started to clean the counter.

Green slid behind her, wrapped his arms around her and stilled her hands. He whispered in her ear. "I don't believe you."

His breath skimmed her neck and ignited a flame in her core. Jeannie...Jeannie...Jeannie. If she repeated her best friend's name she might not betray her.

Mustering all the strength and hostility she could fake, she flipped around to stare him in the face. Bad idea with his mouth inches from hers. Stay strong. Heart pounding, she forced anger and snootiness into her voice. "Well, you should. And stop invading my space and privacy. I hired you to carry my golf bag, not be my therapist or friend."

Pain flashed across his face for a brief second then disappeared. "Drop the act, little missy." He pressed her body against the counter and crushed his frame to hers. "I'm not buying it."

She slapped at his chest and wiggled, fighting the desire sweeping through her. "Get off of me, you brute."

He grabbed her hands and stilled her movements. Damn if he wasn't strong. "Calm down. I thought we were getting along."

God, they were. Too well. So much she wanted him more than ever. "You thought wrong. Don't you know you're just the hired help, here to do my bidding?" She tried to keep the anger in her voice, but she failed.

"All right then." He let her hands go and stepped back, putting space between them. Hurt shone in his eyes.

"Green." Shame stung her. She'd gone too far. She placed her hand on his chest. "That was mean of me. You were only concerned. I apologize."

"Don't worry. I'm just the caddy anyway. What do I know?" He pushed her hand aside and turned to leave.

"No, stop!" She turned his face. "I...I...did say those mean things on purpose." The words spilled out of her mouth before she could stop herself. What was she doing? She had to think of her lifetime friendship with a great woman she didn't want to hurt. But she didn't want to hurt Green either.

Silence fell between them. His gaze darted to the floor. "Why?"

Too late to go back, she had to answer him. "To keep me from throwing myself at you. Again. It's terrible to want your best friend's guy." He gawked at her. "I'm sorry to be so blunt. And I'm sorry to feel like this. I should leave you alone."

She scurried to the ladder, hoping to disappear before humiliation melted her into a puddle at his feet.

His strong fingers gripped her hip. "Wait."

Chapter 16

“Come down, and let’s talk about this.” Green lifted Birdie off the ladder and slid her lithe body down his until her feet hit the ground.

“There’s nothing to talk about. You’re with Jeannie, and I made a fool of myself.” She hung her head.

“That’s not true.” His cock stirred with her so close. Strawberry scented shampoo filled his nostrils as he breathed in her scent. His heartbeat quickened and pure animal desire surged through this veins.

Damn it. She was killing him. He couldn’t fight this urge much longer. Even forgot why he was refusing her in the first place.

He shook himself to focus and remember. His job. His family. He wanted them to know someone had taken a chance on him, and he hadn’t slept his way back into the game. He took a step back. “Birdie, I think we need to discuss the tension between us.” Before it drove him mad.

“I’m sorry. This is embarrassing enough for me, and I feel terrible for what I want to do to Jeannie. Do I really have to talk about it?”

“We have to be adult about this and stop avoiding the subject.”

“Easy for you to say. I’m the one who’s making passes.” She kept blathering on, but he stopped listening.

What about the times he’d touched her, watched her bend over on the course and looked up her cute wee skirt? Then he’d sleep with Jeannie thinking about Birdie. His crimes were far worse than Birdie’s lust.

He couldn’t do this anymore. He’d finish this tournament, drop hints to other players, and by the end of the weekend, he’d have more offers. In a few weeks, he’d ask her out for real. But tonight...

Willpower lost to desire. “Birdie.” He hushed her with his finger over her sexy mouth. “Are you so blind you can’t see I want ya too? Madly.”

Before she could answer, he replaced his finger with his lips. Drawing her into his arms, he licked the crease of her mouth, begged her to open to him.

“Jeannie...”

“Isn’t the one I want,” he murmured between kisses.

Her body relaxed into his, arms wrapped around his waist, and her hands rested on his back.

Digging his hands in her hair, he tilted her head. The kiss seared his lips and turned his blood to molten lava, boiling under the surface. “I want you. I’ve wanted you from the first night I saw ya, but I didn’t want to blur the professional lines between us. Rejecting you is killing me, but I needed this job.”

“God, Green.” She slid her tongue across his, and his legs trembled from the passion.

He skimmed his fingertips over her backside. “Ah, baby. I’ve wanted to hold you for a long time.” Exploring the lush curves of her arse and hips, he stared at the sofa and table. Not good enough for his first time with Birdie. Tasteless to make love where he’d been banging Jeannie.

She kissed his neck hungrily, worked up to his ear as she tugged his shirt from his trousers. Chills ran down his neck. “You still got condoms, right?”

His head swam with need, and his pants grew tight, but he had to stay in control. “No, stop,” he panted.

“You don’t have condoms?” Eyes wild with desire, she searched his face. The passion began to fade as panic took over.

“No. Yes.” He shook his head. Taking her hand, he grabbed two blankets from the cupboard and led her outside.

“Where are we going?” She rushed to keep up with his long strides, but he couldn’t slow down. Not now, not when his needs were so close to being met.

He pulled her down a trail at the campsite until they came to the lake. Alone in the dark, he spread one blanket on the ground and urged her down with him.

With her next to him, he ran his finger down her jaw line to her chin. “I know you do the best you can, but, darling, that RV isn’t good enough for you. I want this to be special.” He licked his lips, then kissed her with uncontrollable desire.

Never breaking the kiss, he maneuvered until she lay beneath him. Her body molded into his and felt blissful. Her small diddies pressed into his chest. The impulse to rip her clothes off swept through him. Gasping for breath, he forced himself to take things slow.

The scent of new pine growth filled the air. Releasing her t-shirt from her shorts, he pushed it up her body and over her head, skimming her soft skin as he went. His cock jerked.

Moonlight danced across her bright-pink, lacy bra. He swallowed hard, looking at the two beautiful mounds of flesh pressed together by underwire. His dream hadn’t compared to the real thing. “God, you’re beautiful.” The words slipped out before he could get them back, but he knew he’d messed up.

She lowered her lids and trembled.

“Are you cold? I brought a second blanket just in case.” A light breeze blew in the cool May night. New Jersey was farther north than her Indiana roots. Though he knew fire had elicited her response, not wind.

She shook her head and shoved at his chest. “Let me go.”

He grabbed her wrists with one hand and pressed them to his chest. “Hey. Don’t push me away. Talk to me.” What he’d said had struck her to the bone. She wrestled with guilt over Mia.

“Don’t call me beautiful.”

“You are.”

She laughed, bitterness in her tone. "I'm not stupid. Jeannie's body's smoking hot. Guys always pick her first."

Great. He'd created insecurities at both angles for her--too pretty, but not pretty enough. "Jeannie knows we were only having fun. Baby, I swear. We never had any commitment. She didn't want one, and neither did I." He tugged her back and kissed her. "I want *you*."

Without another word, he unbuttoned her shorts and discarded them. Matching pink, lacy boy-shorts covered heaven. He traced a few nasty scars on her thigh he'd never seen before. She must have gotten them in the fire. Eyes squeezed shut, she turned her head away.

"I can't help but see you as anything less than a vision of loveliness. Damn, Birdie, do you know what you do to me?" He guided her hand to his erection. Pleasure charged through him at the touch of her hand gripping his aching cock.

Her tear-filled eyes opened. "The same as you do to me. I need you inside me." She placed small kisses down his neck, sending tingles through his arm.

"Not yet, baby. I want to touch you, feel your skin." He threw his clothes to the side and slipped her bra and panties off. Pert B cups with rosy peaked nipples took his breath away. He licked a circle around one before tugging it into his mouth. She cried out and arched her back, giving him room to slide his arm under her. When he pulled her close, their hot, sweaty skin pressed together.

She dug her hands into his hair and whimpered. "Green, this is torture." Her breaths came fast and choppy. "I need you. Please, just take me. We can go slower later."

Running his hand over her hip and down her thigh, he teased her before finding her slick folds. They both moaned. Her sexy cries echoed in his mind and almost sent him over the edge. "You're so wet and hot." All for him.

"Stop teasing me, and give me what I've been dreaming of for weeks. I know you can last forever. It was wrong, but I watched even before you caught me. I've seen what you can do, and I want you so bad."

"Fuck, darling. I don't know if I can with you, you make me so damn crazy with need." He kissed her as he fumbled with the condom package. She was everything he'd ever wanted in a woman. His fantasy come true. Once he was sure the protection was on correctly, he hovered over her. "Birdie, those times with Jeannie were just sex. I want more with you...I'm falling for you."

"Oh, Green." She kissed him, slow and tender. "I want more too. Make love to me."

One long thrust and he joined them. Her tight channel pulsed around his shaft. "Oh God, I'll never last with you feeling like this."

She sank her nails into his arse, raised her hips, and drew him in deeper.

He fought for control. Clearing his thoughts, he moved inside her, slow and gentle. Every inch took him to a paradise he'd never been to and never wanted to leave. Long and silky smooth, her legs wrapped around his. "You're too much for me. I'm losing control."

Thrust for slow thrust, she matched his pace, allowed him to drive with unhurried strokes. Her body trembled with need and her neck tasted salty from the thin layer of sweat between them.

Frogs croaked and an owl hooted in the distance. It wasn't a five star hotel, but it would be their memory, and he wanted to make it with all the love in his heart.

He laced his fingers with hers and held her hands above her head, their bodies as close as he could get them. Another time he'd angle her so they could see their bodies joining, but he didn't dare try that now or he'd fail to live up to her expectations. Best to stick to missionary.

"In the name of God, Green, are you trying to kill me with utter longing? Go faster, baby. My body needs you."

"Shh. You're too perfect. I swear, it'll be over in no time. I'm on the edge."

"So am I. Just take me over, please, Green. We'll play your way later. Right now I need this."

He drove harder and faster, feeling his balls coil. The pressure built and spilled over. "Fuck." He cried out and stilled as he emptied inside her. Well, as close to inside as he could get with protection on. Maybe someday he could fill her completely. Claim her as his alone.

She jerked and pulled him in as far as she could. Her climax took her. Spasms wracked through his semi-hard cock creating another small orgasm of his own. He collapsed onto her and they both fought for breath. His lungs burned and his muscles ached from his battle for control.

Reluctantly, he withdrew and gathered her close.

"That was perfect. Thank you." She kissed his chest and nuzzled in the crook of his arm.

"No, thank you." He hadn't felt this sated in years, if ever. So much so, he didn't know if he could do it again tonight. He'd need time to recover.

They made a great pair, and right now, he didn't give a damn what anyone thought of him. With Birdie next to him, nothing could go wrong.

* * * *

Birdie soaked up Green's warmth. His arms were around her and her head on his chest. His breathing was shallow, so he must be sleeping. So much for him lasting all night long. Maybe her scar had repulsed him. It disgusted her every time she undressed. Not only because it was ugly, but because she could hide it in public. No one had to look at it. Collapsing from the smoke, she'd fallen against the metal leg of a table during the fire. It had burned her skin, but nowhere near as bad as Mia's burns.

Uncomfortable sleeping naked next to Green with her scar exposed, she reached for her clothes. The last thing she wanted to do was remind him of it and have him ask questions.

"Where are you going?" His breathing was husky and deep after their tryst. "If you're cold, I'll grab the other blanket."

She shook her head while she turned her t-shirt right side out.

He sat up, wrapped his strong arms around her back and kissed her neck. "Don't get dressed."

Maybe he wanted to go another round after all. "Why?" She tried to make her voice sultry.

"Because I want you lying beside me naked."

"Just lying?" She tilted her head to expose her neck fully.

"Maybe not just lying." He moaned and kissed a line to her ear. "You little vixen. It was so hard to resist this move of yours, night after night as I massaged your back." His hand cupped a breast.

Heat flooded her core and she grew wet. Her pussy ached to feel him pound inside her from behind like she'd watched him do many times, his thick leg muscles clenched as he controlled every stroke. Her heart raced with anticipation, her ass burned with need to feel his hands grip her cheeks, and her nipples peaked.

"Take me from behind, hard and fast."

He stopped kissing her and spun her around to face him. His eyes filled with worry and his mouth drooped. "Am I just sex to you? If I am, I need to know now, before I lose myself to you any further."

"Why would you think that?"

"Because you act like you want me to use you."

"Green, it's just a position." Why did he sound so worried?

He cupped her cheeks with both hands. Fire blazed in his eyes and it scared the hell out of her. "No, it's not. It a position where you don't have to look at me, and I can't look at you."

Gripping her wrists, he forced her to her back, hands at her side as he used the rest of his body to still her legs. "Get off me. What are you doing?" She wiggled and bucked, but her efforts were no match for his weight.

Not able to move, she cringed when she felt his lips and tongue trace her scar, kissing and licking, taking his time as he went. Tears filled her eyes. She didn't deserve care and attention to her pitiful blemish. It should be viewed with disgust and contempt for what she'd done. She was a monster, plain and simple. Her heart ached for Mia, a child now, but she'd grow up one day and want to be loved by someone special. Would anyone look at her, touch her or kiss her like Green was doing right now? Probably not, and all because of Birdie's lack of supervision.

Gathering all her strength, she bucked again. "Get off me." The words came out through her tears and frustration.

"Stop it." He kissed her leg again and then settled above her, his lips inches from hers, anger in his eyes. "Stop whatever it is you're telling yourself right now, because it isn't true." Then he claimed her lips, slow and steady, and refused to increase the speed no matter how much she tried.

"Green, just take me from behind. I know you like it."

He pulled her lower lip between his teeth and lightly bit down. Once his breath calmed, he let go. "I. Don't. Want. Sex. With you." Still pinning her down, he fumbled with his pants until he'd retrieved another condom and slipped it on. Sitting up, he pulled her with him and positioned her to straddle his lap, his long, hard cock poised at her opening. "You promised I could have it my way."

"Green, please stop." She didn't want it tender. Didn't want his attentive care, nor did she deserve it.

"Look at me," he whispered.

She shook her head.

“Look at me, damn it.”

Raising her head, she complied though it ripped her heart to shreds.

“What do you see?”

“Want, need, desire.” She choked the words out as he slid his cock inside. “Ah.”

He stilled, deep within. “What else?”

A painful ache grew. She rocked her hips and ground her clit across his lower belly. “Just fuck me.”

With her wrists still firmly grasped in his hands, he pinned them to her hips and stilled her motions. “Stop it. Tell me what else you see.”

“Worry. Pain. And concern. So now you stop, because I don’t deserve it.”

“Yes.” He took one, long, slow stroke. “You.” Another stroke. “Do.” And another. “I want to love your body, worship it, not use it.” He moved within her in a sweet rhythm that brought tears to her eyes.

Guiding her body back at an angle, he filled her completely. She’d never made love before, only engaged in sexual fulfillment, but this...this was something entirely different. Her heart filled with love and she thought it would explode from the emotions. Each stroke took her to a place she’d never been. If she wasn’t careful, she’d be in love before the first ray of light glistened off the lake.

“Ah, God. I love the sight of my cock disappearing into your velvet heat. Look at it, Birdie. See how we fit, you and I, so we do. Come on, love, I know you like to watch.”

She looked at their joining bodies and juices seeped between her legs at the sight. All those times she’d seen him moving in another woman didn’t compare to what he looked like surrounded by her own pussy. “God, Green, why are you doing this to me?” She moaned with each stroke.

“Because it feels right, and you need it. Because you’re more to me than a quick shag.”

Giving in to his speed, she matched his rhythm, placed her hands on his shoulders, and took everything he gave. Puffs of air skimmed her skin as he labored to breathe. His hands roamed her backside, sending jolts of electricity through her nerve endings. The smell of their arousal mixed with the pine scent. The sound of his cock slipping through her wetness resonated through her and increased her pleasure.

Her orgasm built and she screamed out. Moving his hands with deliberate motions, he found her clit and flicked it with his thumb.

“That’s it, baby. Moan for me. Give in to the emotions tugging at you.”

Lost in ecstasy, she let him bring her to climax. Her heart swelled. White lights exploded behind her lids as his teeth sank into her shoulder. He halted his movements, deep inside, pressing against the walls of her soul, and cried out with her.

“I’ve never felt anything like that before, my wee bird. Don’t ever hold back from me again.” He captured her lips and took his time, plundering the depths. “Stay next me, naked.”

She nodded, too moved for words. When Green withdrew, she felt the loss of his warmth to the core. Lying down in his arms, she knew she never wanted to leave them again. And that scared the hell out of her.

Chapter 17

Birdie rushed through her morning routine so she could grab a cup of coffee at the clubhouse. The night had been long lying in Green's arms. Everything inside screamed how she'd wronged Jeannie. All but her heart. It danced with joy at waking in his arms as the sun rose.

She'd have to tell Jeannie and pray their friendship hadn't been destroyed. Green promised her the whole deal, claimed Jeannie was a fling. God help her, she wanted to know if they could survive for the long haul. She'd never been happier in her life.

With coffee in hand, she left the clubhouse through the back door. No sign of Green getting the clubs ready though. Today was a big day. Sixteen out of sixty-four players remained. She'd have to play two rounds if she won her first one this morning.

More relaxed than she'd been in years, hope flooded over her. She could win this tournament. Some of the bigger name players had opted out for a week off, which didn't hurt her feelings at all. More money for her.

She rounded the corner and froze. Hot coffee steamed from the cup in her hand, but her blood turned ice cold. Green stood by her bag. A wad of cash rolled up in a rubber band passed from his hand to a guy she'd never seen. The guy stuffed the money in his pocket, shook Green's hand, and left. Ducking back behind the corner, she struggled to regain her composure.

That mother fucker! All his sweet words about falling for her were a lie. She'd betrayed her best friend for a lying gambler. What had she done?

Taking deep breaths, she regained her composure. Her tee-time started in fifteen minutes. She had to get through the day with him as her caddy.

When her heartbeat calmed, she began to doubt what she'd seen. Maybe it hadn't been cash. Maybe she'd imagined the whole thing. Maybe...maybe...her ass! She knew what she'd seen and fury didn't begin to describe her feelings for Green Sloan.

"Hey, there you are. Give us a snog." He leaned down to kiss her, but she shied away. "Right, probably not a good thing for everyone to see. You ready?"

"More than you know." Ready to fire his ass.

"Stop worrying. You're doing great. The weather's beautiful today, like you, so it is. Although I wish you would've worn trousers or capris instead of that short skirt. I can almost see your arse, so I can."

"It's going to be a long, hot day." She strutted with her nose in the air. Damn him to hell, she refused to be nice.

"Okay, we can play it your way. Suits me fine."

She bet it did.

An hour later, standing on the fairway of the fourth hole, Green handed her the seven iron. "Nice straight shot to the green."

She stared at him, refusing to take the iron. Anger raged below the surface. She refused to give in to it or let him win so easily.

"Well, take the club, hit the green and make one putt. Hole's yours to win, you've out driven your competitor by fifty yards."

"And how far over the green do you think I'll go if I use that iron?"

"What?" He looked down at his hand. "Crap!" Stuffing the seven back into the bag, he shook his head then pulled out the eight. "Sorry. I told you you should've worn trousers. You're driving me crazy in that skirt. I can't stop thinking about those legs wrapped around me waist."

"Uh huh." She grabbed the iron and stalked away. Her heart plummeted. He'd bet against her. Now he used some lame excuse why he'd given her the wrong club. Well, it wouldn't work.

On hole seven--a par three--he gave her the driver instead of a wood. She could slam the driver two hundred and seventy to three hundred yards. All she needed was one hundred and ninety-three. The seven wood or four iron worked better for that distance. Not that he didn't know.

By the time they'd reached the tenth, when she needed advice on her putt, she didn't trust him anymore. Her game fell apart after that, because she wasn't listening to a word he said. When she lost the fifteenth hole, her opponent was four holes ahead and Birdie had no chance of winning. The game was called.

Being a good sportsman, she shook hands and smiled for the cameras. Then everyone was gone and she was alone with Green in the camper.

"What the hell was that? You stopped listening to me and putted any damn way you pleased."

"I thought you of all people would be happy about that." She pulled off her glove and threw it at him.

"Why would I be happy? You blew it."

She grabbed a pen, scribbled a check and tossed it at him "There."

"What the fuck is that?" He didn't pick it up off the floor.

"Your ten percent of my purse. Take it, call a cab, and catch a flight back to the hole you slithered out from."

He grabbed her arm. "Baby, what are you so mad at? What happened between last night and this morning that has you so riled?"

"Don't play that game with me." She shoved him away. "Oh, you had me. Had me good with all your 'I'm falling for you' crock-of-shit. Stupid."

"Are ye away in the head?" His puzzlement seemed sincere.

Had she been wrong? She shook her head. No. She knew what she saw and how he acted on the green. "I'm not falling for your smooth words again. I bet you're laughing your ass off at me and Jeannie. Do you feel proud you got us both in the sack?"

“Please tell me what’s wrong so I can fix it. Birdie, I’m sorry about Jeannie. I’ll tell her it’s over. It was over when I gave in and kissed you last night. Hell, we never had a start. I never wanted her like I want you.”

It about killed her to say it, but she had to. “No, what’s over is us. You’re fired!”

Chapter 18

Birdie startled. She'd dozed off in Mia's room. Jeannie stood next to her, with a hand on her shoulder. She gestured to be quiet with her finger to her lips and nodded to the door.

They walked to the kitchen in silence. Birdie hadn't seen Jeannie since she'd arrived home earlier that day. Dread washed over her. Somehow she had to tell her about the betrayal.

While starting a pot of coffee, she wondered what she'd say. The small room closed in on her. The air grew hot.

"You look tired. Did you drive straight through?" Jeannie took a sip of her cola and grabbed a cookie from the plate on the table.

"Yeah." Her tongue hung heavy in her mouth. "I wanted to see Mia first. How's your family?"

"Same as always. But I sold a couple more articles. Since Green gave me that interview, more places are willing to take a chance on my writing."

"I'm happy for you." She frowned. Two minutes into the conversation and she'd all ready mentioned Green. Gaze lowered, she spilled the horrid line. "We need to talk."

"This sounds serious."

"It is." She grabbed a mug from the cupboard.

"Okay."

"I fired Green."

Jeannie slumped on a stool. "You did what? Birdie, how could you?"

"I'm sorry. But I...I saw him hand a strange guy a wad of cash before Saturday's match. Then he kept giving me the wrong club. What was I supposed to do? He bet against me."

"You're wrong. As much as I love you, this time you have one hundred percent screwed up." Jeannie dropped her half-eaten cookie.

"No, I haven't. He's a dog who used you and me." She retrieved a spoon from the drawer.

"How can someone so smart be so dumb? Do you think you would be playing so well without him? What are you going to do in Illinois in two weeks?"

"I was hoping you would caddy for me again."

"Birdie--"

"Wait. Before you answer, there's more. I slept with him." Tears formed in her eyes, but she let them fall. "I'm so sorry. I know I can't take it back. I hope you can forgive me and we can still be friends. I'm willing to do anything you want me to. Anything."

She'd messed up. But her life would be over if she lost Jeannie's friendship. Green hadn't been worth her oldest and dearest relationship. At the time emotions had clouded her judgment, but now she knew how wrong she'd been. "Please say something. Yell at me. Something, but don't hate me. It's no excuse, but he used us both."

"Do you truly feel like that?"

She swallowed. "Yes."

"Why?"

"Because he seduced you, slept with you for weeks, and the moment you left us alone, he turned the charm on me. Then he bet against me. I saw him."

"No, you didn't." Jeannie pushed her chair back and started to pace, pointing as she talked. "And he didn't seduce me or use me. *I* seduced *him*. *He* didn't want to. *He* was afraid of what *you* would think. You're insane." She shook her head.

"So what, you came on to him. He still led you on, slept with me, and screwed me over."

Jeannie leaned on the kitchen island. "Damn you, Birdie. Don't you get it? It meant nothing to either one of us. The first night we slept together, we agreed it was just fun. Nothing more. Besides, I knew he wanted you."

"What? No." She shook her head, refused to listen to Jeannie defend him. "You two got along great."

"Yes, great sex. No strings attached and no need to worry about a noose around my neck. Come on, you know I don't get serious with guys."

"I thought this would be the one. Green seemed like the perfect guy." Pain rocked through her heart. How had she misjudged him? Been fooled by his charm? Trusting herself had been stupid.

"Yeah, he is--for you."

She shook her head, again. "No. He pretended to be concerned so he could secure his bets and get a little action on the side."

"Wake up. Do you wonder why I'm not shocked or surprised at your revelation?"

No. She hadn't been. Why wasn't Jeannie surprised? Confusion muddled her brain and caused her head to throb.

"Green called me. He told me he had feelings for you. I knew it from the start, and I told him so. We agreed to stop things if the two of you hooked up on the Jersey trip. It's no big deal. I got a couple of guys in town begging me to go out with them. I even said yes to one without knowing if you two were together. I'm not hurt. We didn't have a commitment."

"I'm still sorry. I'll never do that to you again."

"I know."

"How do you know that?"

"Because you're in love with Green, and the two of you have something special."

Tears flowed. "I was blinded. There's nothing there but lies."

Jeannie huffed and took a breath. "Did you see that thing next to Mia's bed that she has to wear in her mouth?"

Birdie didn't understand the change of conversation, but she welcomed it. "It's pretty bad, isn't it? I thought she had her nose done. I didn't know it included her lips. Mom said she has to use that thing to stretch her lips for like six to eight hours a day."

"How much you think it cost?"

She poured a cup of coffee and stirred in sugar. "I don't know." Medical devices for Mia racked up the bills. Brian worked hard, but with a GED, good paying jobs with health insurance were hard to get. Most places didn't want to take on Mia since she had pre-existing conditions.

"Where do you suppose Brian and Cassie got the money?"

"Damn, Jeannie, I don't know. Maybe Cassie's parents came through. Though I doubt it. I did send some money from Mexico and Alabama. I could have given him a bit more from Jersey."

"Yeah..."

"What are you getting at?"

"Mia had complications after her last surgery."

She slammed her mug on the counter. "Why didn't anyone tell me? I would have rushed home."

"*That's* why no one told you. Green is convinced--and your mom and I agree--that you've created your own mental block. Your push and putting issues stem from your guilt over the fire. The more you dwell on Mia, the worse you play. When he argued with you, and worked the knots out of your back, that's when you started playing more to your ability."

"Why are we back to Green? I thought we were talking about Mia's surgery."

"They had to go back and fix some problems last week and do some work on her lips. For that poor little girl to come home, Brian had to find a wad of cash for the mouth device."

"Wad of cash?" Her heart stopped. "Why did you use that phrase? Please tell me that's not what Green was doing?"

"Brian called to ask you for money. Green heard the message on your cell. I guess you didn't get it the night before. Anyway, he called me and told me the money would be FedExed to me. He couldn't do it himself, because you had a match in about a half hour, but he'd get someone he trusted to send it to me. The money came, and Mia got to come home."

No! She refused to believe her ears. "Where did the money come from? And what about him handing me the clubs? It can't be true." Had she fired him, driven him out of her life, over a misunderstanding?

"It was his cut from the last two tournaments. I'm sure there's a good reason for the wrong clubs. Did you even ask him?"

"He said my short skirt distracted him, especially after we'd..." she whispered.

"Maybe it did. It is short, and you do have nice tanned legs."

"Oh, no, what did I do?"

“Fucked up.”

Tears blurred her vision. “He did everything for me. How did he even know about Mia?”

Jeannie tossed her bottle in the plastics bin. “I told him.”

“What?” She dropped her mug in the sink.

“He needed to know. Your guilt is ruining your career.”

“Oh God, I’ve been a total bitch.”

“I won’t argue that point this time. Call him. Ask him to meet you in Illinois before someone else snags him.” Jeannie walked outside. Bogey, the family’s Yorkie, rushed to her for a few pets.

Birdie turned from the scene and rushed to her cell to dial Green’s number. She had to straighten out this misunderstanding before she lost the best thing in her life.

Chapter 19

Birdie snapped her phone shut and slammed the driver's door of the RV. Jeannie stood with the compartment door open as she yanked the golf bag out.

"No luck?"

"He won't take my calls." She huffed. "What am I going to do?"

"I don't know. I guess you'll have to figure it out." The compartment door dropped.

"Me? I've called and left messages. He refuses to acknowledge me. How can I apologize if he won't give me the chance?" She slipped on her sunglasses to cover eyes sore from crying last night. "Won't you try? He'll talk to you."

"No. It seems to me he's granting you the same courtesies you gave him."

"That's rude."

"And what you did was too. You're always arguing with your father about how grown up you are. Well, act like an adult and fix this problem yourself."

"But..." Before she could protest, Jeannie had lugged the bag away.

The drive to Illinois with Jeannie had been peaceful. They hadn't argued, yet they hadn't talked much either. Directions had been given now and then. Needs, like food and bathroom breaks, communicated, but no deep or profound subjects had been broached.

She screamed and stomped her foot. Why didn't Jeannie see Green was the one acting like a baby? He should pick up the phone and have a conversation like an adult. How many times had they argued in the past? Almost every day. He should know by now fighting encompassed their very relationship.

Kicking the tire, she screamed again. This time in pain. This was all his fault, sneaking around behind her back, lying to her and keeping Mia's progress a secret. She paced, anger rolling off her, then stomped her foot again.

How could he... Realization struck. Stomping, screaming, blaming--all childish behavior. She leaned against the camper. Lord, no wonder her father called her a child. Jeannie was right. Adult behavior required more, and Green required more from her. She'd slapped him where it hurt the most. His pride. His reputation. His motives. His heart.

She stood straight and smoothed down her clothes. Green deserved an adult apology and she was going to give him one. For her heart's sake, she hoped he'd listen.

* * * *

Green sat on a stool at his old hangout, the nineteenth hole at the run-down golf course where he gave private lessons. Beer in hand, he fiddled with a few slips of paper with names on them. Four offers made in the last two days. Plus, a schedule for lessons at the club overflowed, if he wanted his job back.

He didn't know. It all seemed hollow without Birdie. She'd called and asked for him to phone back. Called a few times, really. By now Jeannie had told her about the money. Birdie probably wanted to apologize, but that's not what it was about.

Trust--that's what it came down to. She didn't trust him. One misunderstanding and she'd turned on him with accusations. And after the night they'd shared...

"Tom, give me another one."

"You know I can't." Tom wiped down a glass.

"Can't or won't? My money's good, or do you think the worst of me too?"

The bartender shook his head. "It's ten in the morning, and you've had three in the last half-hour."

"Are you a bartender or my ma?"

Tom put a cup of Joe on the counter. "Drink this."

"Ach, for fuck's sake, I can hold me liquor." He wanted to get gee-eyed and forget about ever meeting that pretty wee bird. She held his heart and his pride by the bollocks. Damn her to hell.

"Hey, Green," a regular patron Doug called out as he entered the bar. "Isn't that your golfer on TV?"

Green noticed Birdie on the big screen above the bar.

"I'd like to hear this." Tom turned the volume up a few notches.

"I don't give a rat's arse. Turn it back down."

"Hush." Tom shooed him like a child.

Why was she on TV anyway? It was too early for her round to be over. Might not have even started yet.

Doug sat down beside him and opened the beer Tom had handed him.

He felt like ripping it out of Doug's hands and gulping it down.

"...announce that Green Sloan will not be caddying for me today. I wanted to address members of the media and fans of the LPGA before any rumors spread."

He watched her sexy lips move, unable to tear his gaze away. One night with her would never be enough. He ached to be near her now, hold her in his arms, and kiss that ill-tempered mouth. She'd let him too if he answered her calls. But she didn't trust him, and that hurt.

"Reasons for Mr. Sloan's absence have no bearing on his past actions. He acted in nothing less than a professional manner and was a complete asset to not only my improvement, but to the entire sport."

His breath caught in the base of his throat. Were her words sincere, or had Jeannie scripted it? He watched her. Never once did her eyes stray to note cards. Dare he dream she spoke from the heart?

"I owe a debt to Mr. Sloan, who showed me kindness and guidance when I didn't deserve it. He is not with me today because of my own selfish and childish behavior. And for that I apologize to the golfing community and my competitors. But mostly..." She looked down and bit her lip.

For a moment he saw the bottom one quiver before she continued. “Mostly I apologize to Green for my hurtful words and actions. That’s all, thank you.” She peered straight into the camera and mouthed the words “I’m sorry.” They were meant for him alone.

As she turned to leave, one tear slid down her cheek. His heart stopped. She’d swallowed her pride and given him a heartfelt apology in front of the entire world. No one had ever done that for him. Accusations he’d never admitted guilt to littered his past. Finally, someone believed in him, trusted him. He had to get to her and let her know how he felt. Simply telling her he’d fallen for her wasn’t enough. Nor could words describe the true depth of his emotions.

He loved her. Loved her with his whole heart. His reputation be damned, he wanted that woman whether his parents approved of his actions or not. Nothing mattered but Birdie.

He stood, not sure he had legs or where they were.

“Whoa.” Tom and Doug both grabbed him. “Slow down there, big guy.”

“I got to get to her before she comes to her senses and wants nothing to do with me.”

“I can’t let you drive. Were you drinking before you got here?” Tom asked.

“A wee bit from me flask.”

“Why don’t you drink some coffee?” Doug slid the mug closer.

“No time. I got to catch a flight to Springfield.”

“Okay.” Tom grabbed the phone. “I’ll call you a cab. Drink while you wait, and I’ll fix you one to go.”

Chapter 20

Birdie pulled off her glove, signed her scorecard and met Jeannie outside the tent. "Are you talking to me yet?"

"I don't know."

"What more do you want me to do? I apologized the best I could." They walked toward the RV, but her heart lagged behind on the course where she and Green had spent so much time together.

"Yes, you did. I guess it's up to Green to do with it as he chooses."

"I hope he accepts it."

Jeannie stopped. "Maybe you got your wish."

"What do you mean?" She followed Jeannie's gaze, and spotted Green standing by the RV. Her mouth dropped at the glorious sight.

Jeannie handed her the bag. "Here. I'll see you later."

Green rushed to her and grabbed the bag. "Let me do that."

She bit her lip and prayed for the right words to say as he put the clubs away. "Green, I am--"

"Shh. We both messed up. Let's put it behind us, aye."

"Then you forgive me?" She searched his expression, but found it hard to read.

"Aye, but I do need you to trust me from now on."

She nodded. Tears welled and her chest tightened. "I can do that."

He embraced her in his strong arms. "Oh, baby, I've missed you."

"I'm sorry. It was stupid and childish. I wanted you back the moment you left." Tears streamed down her face. "I'll never doubt you again."

"Can you promise me a couple of things?"

"Anything."

He kissed her head. "Promise me you'll only wear that short skirt in the bedroom with me. It drove me mad with need. I couldn't think straight. Not after our first night together. I couldn't think about anything but getting you in my arms again. You rattled my brains."

She laughed. "I promise."

Putting a little distance between them, he claimed her mouth. Hungry, he swept his tongue across hers and dug his hand in her hair. Strong and passionate, he held her for all the world to see.

"I don't care what the press does to me. I don't care if they think I slept my way back into golf. I want you. I want all of you."

"I don't care either. I need you, on and off the course."

"I didn't plan for this to happen, so I didn't. It just did. But I meant it when I said I wanted all of you. I need you to get some help with your guilt about Mia."

She pulled back. "Green--"

"Baby, don't. Did you ever plan to hurt that wee child?"

"God, no! I'd change places with her in a heartbeat, if I could."

He grabbed her and pulled her back in his arms. "I never thought you did. That means it was an accident. You have to let go. You're withholding a huge part of yourself from me when you refuse to let yourself be happy."

She nodded. "Okay. I'll talk to someone."

"So, are we together?" He pushed a strand of hair from her eyes. "Please, tell me we are."

"Yeah, I'd say that." She smiled.

"Birdie." The heat of his stare burned her soul. "I don't want to be without you ever again. I love you. Can I caddy for you anyway?"

"You have more than paid your dues. I love you, too. And I won't play with anyone else by my side, so I won't."

About Jasmine Black

http://www.lyricalpress.com/store/index.php?main_page=authors&authors_id=173

Jasmine Black poured her heart and soul into the writing of this story. It combines the mixture of her verbal relationship with her dearest Irish friend and her husband's love of golf. The combination mixed together produced Green and Birdie and their chemistry exploded in Jasmine's mind. Once they made their way on paper, they refused to be denied, no matter what the obstacle. Jasmine will forever remember writing their story, knowing bits and pieces of her heart lives on through the pages.

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