



Marilyn Lee Unleashed Presents

Marilyn Lee Sampler Two

Beauty Is Alisha Hoover?
Any Time Any Place
Large, Shy, And Beautiful

Marilyn Lee

© 2011 Marilyn Lee

All Rights reserved

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. All service marks, registered trademarks, and registered service marks are the property of their respective owners and are used herein for identification purposes only.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced electronically or in print without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews. Copyright laws prohibit trading, selling, and or giving away ebooks.

Beauty Is Alisha Hoover?

My mother used to say that beauty is as beauty does. But, being male, I never bought into it. A woman was either good to look at or she wasn't. If she wasn't, her chances of getting a man to stay around long enough to see how beautiful she was on the inside were slim to none.

Like most men, I like beautiful women. I like dating them, being seen with them, and making love to them. But my mom had also instilled a sense of fairness and compassion in me. My dad used to say that such qualities could easily plan a man in hot water.

I always thought I'd landed half-way between both my parents' viewpoints. I knew beauty wasn't everything or even the most important things in a serious relationship and I knew being too touchy-feeling could land my ass in romantic trouble with a woman I didn't want to get serious with.

But I tended to think mom had it more right than dad by a hair or two. That's how I landed in trouble with the last woman I ever expected to want to know personally. Alisha Hoover.

Mom would have been proud of me while dad would have thought I'd lost my mind. I probably had but by the time I realized it, I was in too deep with her with no way out that would allow me to keep my heart in one piece.

My date with Alisha Hoover was definitely going to be a one-shot deal, not to be repeated. Though she seemed nice enough, she wasn't exactly the type of woman that made a man want to see as much of her as he could. Although she had beautiful dark skin and eyes, it would take a ton of make-up before she could even be considered "cute." And after working with her for three years, I saw no evidence that she possessed any womanly guiles needed to attract and keep a man's interest.

Still, after listening to the guys at the canning plant where we all worked making bets on the odds of her having a date for the annual company picnic, I felt a little sorry for her.

So she didn't have many assets beyond her skin and her eyes. That was no reason to be unkind. I didn't join them in making fun of her but I didn't say anything in her defense either. But when I looked up to see her standing in the doorway, I realized that she'd heard everything they'd said.

I saw a hurt look in her dark brown eyes before she turned and rushed from the floor. I suppose that's when I decided to ask her to the company picnic. I was between girlfriends, having recently broken up with Debbie after three years of exclusive dating. Deb was pretty and witty, but

outside of great sex, we had very little in common. And I was getting to the point where I wanted more than that in a relationship.

I signaled the foreman that I wanted to take my afternoon break and followed her. I found her in the lunchroom. I entered slowly, trying to give her time to compose herself.

She sat at a table in the back, her head bent and her shoulders shaking with silent sobs.

Call me a sucker but I hate to see a woman cry. Especially one who's crying because someone has been unnecessarily unkind to her.

I walked over to the vending machine. I pretended not to notice her wiping furiously at her face as I got a soda.

I took several gulps from the can before turning and acting as if I were seeing her for the first time. "Hi, Alisha."

She sniffed, but didn't respond.

Why was she ignoring me? Damn, did she think I'd joined the rest of those knuckleheads making fun of her? To my surprise it bothered me that she might think I'd said unkind things about her behind her back. I tried again. "Hi, Alicia."

She sucked in a breath and finally answered. "Hi, Craig."

I sighed. Tears did nothing to improve her nondescript looks. I almost changed my mind, but I told myself one afternoon wouldn't kill me. And it might make amends for what she'd obviously heard said about her. "Going to the picnic next weekend?"

She gave me a hurt look that strengthened my resolve. "No!"

She spat the word out as if the company picnic was the last place she wanted to be.

"Why not?"

And she gave me a cool look. "You know why."

Of course I knew why, but it wouldn't do to admit it. "No, I don't."

She shrugged. "No one's asked me, not that I want to go anywhere with any of those so-called men on the floor."

Well, damn. She had a temper. Who knew? I didn't admit it then but looking back I realize that that slight show of spirit intrigued me somewhat. That and the sudden realization that she had a nice rack. It wasn't overly large or perfectly shaped like the store-bought brand but it was nonetheless pretty nice. A man with the ability to look beyond surface beauty could spend many a happy hour with his lips wrapped around one of those babies.

Trying to appear casual, I gave her a quick assessment. She was a few inches above average height which is to say she was about 5'5" or 5'6". She wasn't fat. But she also wasn't bone thin. Cuddling with her might not be too much of a trial. And not every woman could be supermodel pretty.

And though women had always seemed to find my wavy dark hair and blue eyes attractive I wasn't exactly George Clooney. But I kept myself in shape, I wasn't ugly, and I've never had a problem getting the woman of my choice to go out with me.

"What a coincidence, Alisha. No one's asked me, either." I shrugged, trying to look casual. "Maybe we could go together?"

She turned those dark beautiful eyes of yours on me. "Me and you? You mean on a date?"

I was annoyed by her attitude and the tone she asked the question in. I didn't stutter and I didn't think she was hard of hearing. So why did she have to sit there looking like little red riding hood being asked out by the big, bad wolf? Didn't she have any of the wiles that were so enticing in a woman?

"To the company picnic," I said slowly, hoping she understood that was as far as the invitation went. "It's more fun if you go with someone, don't you think?"

She shook her head. "I've never gone."

"No? It can be fun—if you have a partner. Why don't we go together?"

She shook her head. "Thanks, but no thanks."

I stared at her, wondering what the hell had possessed me to ask her in the first place. She didn't want to go out with me? Fine! I hadn't really wanted to go out with her either. I'd done my Boy Scout routine and had it thrown back in my face. No more Mr. Nice Guy for me.

"Suit yourself." I finished the soda and looked gratefully at my watch. "I'd better get back to work." And to sanity, which did not include asking Alisha out ever again. I stormed towards the door.

Before I reached it, she called out to me. "Craig?"

I stopped and turned slowly. I gave her a cold look. "What?" I knew I didn't sound very pleasant but at that point I didn't care. I'd had my efforts to be kind thrown back in my face and it pissed me off.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I shouldn't have taken out what they said on you."

That must mean she knew I hadn't been involved. Strangely, knowing that dissolved some of my anger. But I was not mellow enough to extend the invitation again.

I nodded curtly and remained silent.

She stared at me as if waiting to see what I would say. But I'd said all I intended to say.

After several moments she shrugged and gave me a surprisingly pretty smile. "I'd like to go. I mean if you were serious."

Damn. Just my luck she decided to accept as I realized taking her anywhere was the last thing I wanted to do. I was already sorry I'd allowed my sympathy to get out of hand. I briefly considered telling her

I'd changed my mind. That is until I looked into her eyes. They really were a very pretty brown – almost golden.

It was too late to back down. She wasn't pretty, or even cute, but she wasn't ugly either. No woman with skin that color and eyes that deep could be considered unattractive.

Since I couldn't back out I might as well make the best of it. I pasted a smile on my face and turned back to face her. "We'll go together then."

She gave me a slow, sweet smile that revealed pretty, even white teeth.

I just might not find spending a few hours with her totally unpleasant. "We can make arrangements later." I told her. "Right now I have to get back to work."

"Okay. Thanks, Craig."

I nodded and went back onto the plant floor.

* * * * *

"You're just in time, Craig," Ted, the man who worked next to me said as I got back to my workstation.

"What?" I asked.

"To get in on the bet."

I tensed and looked quickly around. Alisha hadn't yet returned to the floor. "What bet?" But I knew what he meant.

"The guys are taking bets on the odds of Alisha Hoover being able to get a date for the picnic. Do you want in?"

Shithead. "Ted, why don't you get a life?"

"Hey, what's wrong with you, Craig?"

"Wrong with me?" I thought of how upset Alisha was or had been. Hopefully she felt a little better now. "What business is it of mine or yours if she can or can't get a date?"

Ted looked surprised. "Hey, come on. Lighten up."

"Why don't you lighten up and give her a break? Do you have to make fun of her just because the other guys do?"

Ted threw up his hands. "All right, already. Sorry I asked. You don't need to take my head off! Anyone would think you were dating her the way you're behaving."

I stared at him. I think that's when the full magnitude of what I'd done hit me. I'd asked her out when I shouldn't have.

"If you don't want in, say so."

"I don't want in!"

"Fine."

Shithead!

* * * * *

I'm not quite sure why, but by the time I got home that night I felt irritated and unusually tired. I undressed, showered, and sat over dinner with a beer, brooding: I could have defended Alisha without having asked

her out. I wasn't a man who thought a woman's looks were everything, but I cringed when I thought of how the guys would react when I showed up at the picnic with Alisha.

You have screwed up royally and are going to be screwed at the picnic. Unless I didn't arrive at the picnic with her. And I couldn't figure out how I could rescind the invitation. But maybe if I gave her enough hints that I didn't want to go, she'd be gracious enough to give me an out. *I went to bed determined to get myself out of the mess I'd made.*

I decided the first step was to make it clear to her that I had no desire to take her out. So, I was careful to avoid her for the next eight days. If I saw her coming my way I veered off in another direction. On a few occasions she managed to sneak up on me, I gave her a cool smile, and hurried off.

Surely after such behavior she would allow me to weasel out of our date. After all, my feelings must have been clear when I hadn't approached her on the Friday before the picnic.

I felt like slime, but I was perfectly prepared to leave the plant without saying a word to her that night. I'd go to the picnic alone and make up some excuse for her for Monday when I had to face her. I was just about to leave the plant grounds when I heard my name. Of course I knew who was calling me. Who else but Alisha would sound so indecisive and so apologetic about calling my name?

I forced my lips into a smile before turning to find her hurrying toward me. "There you are, Alisha," I said as if she'd been the one doing her damndest to avoid me.

There was an unmistakable look of relief in her eyes as she smiled at me. "Were you looking for me, Craig?"

"Of course," I lied. "You know the picnic is tomorrow and I don't even know where you live or what time you want me to pick you up."

"Oh, then you still want to take me?"

She sounded so pleased that I could have kicked myself for trying to dump her. Why should I care what a bunch of shits thought? "Of course I do." I forced myself not to look around at the guys who were walking by, staring at us.

She gave me a look as if she were looking right through all my false pretenses. I felt almost stripped naked. I lowered my lids so I wouldn't have to maintain her intense stare.

"If you're not sure, Craig..."

I bristled at the suggestion that my mind was easily changed. "Of course I am." I glanced at my watch. "What time would you like me to pick you up tomorrow?"

"I could meet you somewhere, if you'd like."

I resisted the temptation to take her up on her offer. Since I was stuck with the fruits of my impulsiveness, there was no sense in being a heel. I'd

treat her just as I would any other woman I asked out on a date. That meant picking her up and taking her home. "What time shall I pick you up?"

"Eleven o'clock?"

"Fine. Where do you live?"

"420 Chestnut, apartment 2B. Do you want me to write it down for you?"

"No. I'll see you tomorrow."

She smiled up at me. Just for a moment she looked almost pretty with her eyes shining.

"I'll see you tomorrow, Craig."

I nodded and turned away. The following day was probably going to be the longest one in recorded history.

Chapter Two

The next morning, Deb showed up just as I was about to leave my apartment. She looked so good in a pair of tight jeans and a low cut blouse. I wanted to blow the picnic off, sweep her up in my arms, and spend the day fucking her. Though she'd wanted to get married, we'd parted as friends. So I knew I had a chance of doing that.

"This is a very nice surprise, Deb."

"I was hoping you'd think that, Craig."

I grinned at her. "Well, I do."

"I've missed you," she said.

"Same here," I said.

"What do you plan to do about it?"

"I think you know what I'd like to do about it, but I'm on my way out."

She slipped her arms around my neck and smiled up at me. "Can't it wait? I've been thinking that maybe being friends isn't such a bad idea. If you know what I mean."

Boy, did I know. I felt my libido kicking into overdrive just thinking about making love to her again. She had a body that was made to please a man with large firm breasts, long legs, and a tight pussy. And she definitely knew how to please a man.

I was a fraction of a second away from sweeping her into my apartment when common sense and decency prevailed. "It sounds great. Deb, but I'm on my way to the company picnic."

"Oh, then I'm just in time. We always did have a good time at the picnic."

I smiled. Last year we'd found an isolated spot away from the others and spent an hour making love before returning to the picnic and joining in a softball game. "We sure did."

She leaned up and kissed me on the corner of my mouth. "Then why don't I come with you?"

"Sure. Why not? I mean—"

She pressed her lips against mine and reached between our bodies to palm my cock and balls. She had a way of massaging them both at the same time that drove me wild.

I pushed her against the wall and pressed my cock against her hand.

Thrusting her tongue into my mouth, she unzipped my pants.

I inhaled with anticipation when I felt her soft, warm fingers close around my shaft.

As we kissed, she pumped me. It felt so good I was on the verge of pushing her dress up and spearing her pussy. I was fairly certain she wasn't wearing any panties. Within moments, I could be inside her.

Incredibly, a picture of Alisha flashed behind my closed eyes. After a futile effort to dismiss it, I groaned and stiffened. Then I pulled away from her, pushed my cock back inside my pants and shook my head.

She stared at me with a surprised look on her face. "What's the matter? Just remembered a date?"

I nodded slowly. "As a matter of fact I do have a date."

The confident smile left her pretty face. "I might not make this offer again, Craig. You'd better take it now."

Women. Why were they forever issuing ultimatums? I shook my head. "You have no idea how much I want to take you with me."

"Who's stopping you?"

The thought of the hurt look in a pair of beautiful golden brown eyes stopped me. "I can't blow her off, Deb. I'll see you around."

"Don't count on it. Craig," she said coldly and stormed down the hall.

I stared after her, not quite believing what I was giving up just to spend what I was sure would be a boring afternoon with Alisha. My mood was less than pleasant by the time I arrived at Alisha's apartment. I rapped on the door just hoping that she'd give me an excuse to blow up at her and stalk away without taking her with me.

She responded to my knock so quickly that I knew she must have been sitting by the door waiting for me. "Hi, Craig."

I'd never seen her in anything except the drab overalls she wore at the plant. A pretty white short set contrasted nicely with her beautiful golden skin tone. And damn she did have nicely shaped legs. It was like I was seeing her for the first time in a positive and attractive light.

Of course she still wasn't pretty, but she wasn't exactly plain either.

"Is something wrong, Craig?" She asked when I didn't answer her greeting.

"No. Nothing." I smiled at her. "Hi, Alisha. Are you ready?"

She nodded. "Yes. I'm ready."

I smiled at her and offered her my arm. "Your chariot awaits, milady."

She gave me a slow, warm smile that transformed her entire face. I stared at her. For the first time I noticed her lips. They were full and looked soft and kissable.

"Craig?" She frowned up at me. "Is something wrong?"

"No. Nothing's wrong." Except that I needed to get laid. Maybe if I sent her flowers and candy, Deb would forgive me and allow me to spend the night with her. "Let's go."

On the drive to Tacony Creek Park, where the annual company picnic was held, I was very aware of her seated next to me. She wore a soft, sensual perfume that teased at my senses and had me thinking of what it might be like to touch her warm bare, golden brown skin.

Get a grip Craig. You're not going to touch her with or without clothes.

We didn't talk, which was fine with me. I concentrated on driving and of keeping my hands on the steering wheel. Each time I glanced at her I found her looking straight ahead.

I suggest you do the same thing buddy.

The picnic was in full swing by the time we arrived. We found a spot under a big tree and spread out the blankets I'd brought. Seated there with her I noticed several of the guys staring in our direction. I ignored the shitheads. "Are you ready to eat, Alisha?"

"Are you?"

"Ladies choice."

She shook her head. "I'm not really hungry yet. Could we just talk for a while?"

She asked the question as if she expected me to bite off her head in response. She appeared to be about 22. What had she been through to make her so lacking in self-confidence? I generally have very little in common with women and wasn't inclined to waste time talking. But apparently she had a strange effect on me. "What would you like to talk about?" I asked.

"Well, I thought we could talk about you, Craig."

"Me? I'm not exactly my favorite topic of conversation but okay. What would you like to know?"

"Everything," she said.

Instead of annoying me, her answer flattered me. "Let's see. I'm, twenty-five, one of three children, and I've been at the plant for seven years." I glanced at her. "Your turn," I said, surprised to find that I was eager to learn more about her.

She immediately seemed to withdraw. The light left her eyes and she shrugged her shoulders. "There's very little to tell."

Her reluctance to talk made me determined to know what she didn't want to reveal. "Then tell me the little bit there is, Alisha."

She glanced down at her hands. "I'm twenty-one. I'm an only child. My mom died in child birth."

"Damn. That must have been rough."

She nodded. "It was."

"What about your father?"

She hunched her shoulders and seemed to withdraw even more. "He's alive."

"Do you have a stepmother?"

"No."

"Aunts?"

"None that I've ever met."

Double damn. So her father raised her alone. That father of hers must have something to do with her lack of self-confidence and womanly

guiles. Not that it was any of my business. I'd committed myself to one afternoon and maybe one evening with her. I didn't need to know her life story or to be overly concerned about her problems. She may have had a bad childhood, but she'd have to put it behind her.

Still I couldn't help feeling for her. She appeared to have been raised without any female influence in her life. Worse, her lack of self-confidence had probably made it difficult for her to make friends. But that wasn't my problem either. And I wasn't going to make it mine.

I decided we had had more than enough time alone. "Hey, want to join in the volleyball game?" I asked, trying to sound cheerful.

She had tears in her eyes when she looked up. "Do you think we'd – I'd – be welcome?"

What a gloomy Jane! No wonder she couldn't get a date. A guy could only take so much self-pity. And from what I've seen, not too many women could either. That might explain why she didn't appear to have any friends.

Nevertheless, I'd made her my problem – at least for the day. And if I wanted to enjoy some portion of it, I'd have to take her in hand. I smiled at her, hoping she couldn't tell how I was really feeling. "Of course." I got to my feet.

She stared up at me.

As she lifted her head, the long, dark curtain of hair fell away from her face. With the sunlight dancing over it, it was hard to tell if her hair was dark brown or closer to black. But I've read somewhere that very few people actually had black hair. So, it was probably dark brown. Which made it a few shades lighter than her golden skin?

Was that a dimple in her left cheek? Standing over her I could see into her blouse. I felt my cock stirring as I caught a glimpse of her breasts. Damn.

Get a grip, Craig. I reached down and pulled her to her feet. "Unless you can't play volleyball. Then we'll find something else to do." Like expose her breasts.

"Of course I can play volleyball. I'm very athletic."

And she had a nice, round ass. Walking beside her, I was hard pressed not to reach down and touch it. Caress it. Slap it. Of course, noticing how nice her breasts, legs, and ass were, made me wonder what her pussy was like.

As I said I was between girlfriends and wasn't much on beating my own meat. So, in a word I was horny as hell. Just the thought of pussy, threatened to make my cock hard. Damn. I was going to be in for a night of cold showers, if I couldn't sweet talk Deb into letting me spend the night with her.

As it turns out Alisha, was a great volleyball player. She did better than I did. She was focused, displaying high energy while it was all I could do to keep my eyes off her ass each time she jumped up into the air to spike the ball.

We played two games before returning to our tree to sit down and eat. She flashed her pretty white smile at me. "That was fun."

Not for me. Seated next to her, all I could think of was sex. She sat with her legs curled under her. That left her lower to mid-thigh exposed.

I looked at the curve of her hips and wondered what it would feel like to have her long legs wrapped around my body while I drove my cock as deep into her pussy as I could get it.

"Craig? Is something wrong?"

I shook my head silently.

"You're staring at me."

I blinked. "I'm sorry. My mind wandered," I lied.

"Were you thinking of your woman?"

"I don't have one at the moment," I told her. "Or I wouldn't be here with you." Because I didn't have one, I needed to get laid ASAP. I glanced at Alisha, wondering what my chances were for having sex with her.

Sex with Alisha Hoover? Get a grip, Craig! Even if she were willing, you are not having sex with her.

I gave myself a mental shake and we started to talk about the volleyball game. About 5 minutes into the conversation someone called my name. When I looked up, I saw several of our co-workers heading in our direction.

Other than exchanging several knowing winks when Alisha and I had joined the volleyball game, the guys' behavior had been fairly decent. But now I wondered what they wanted. I glanced at Alisha and saw that she'd tensed. I couldn't blame her. These were the same guys she'd heard talking about her at the plant.

"Hey, Hoover, good game," Bill Simmons said and the other guys nodded in agreement. "Where'd you learn to play like that?"

Alisha smiled shyly. "I just picked it up."

"We're getting a softball team ready. You interested, Hoover?"

She turned to me with sparkling eyes.

I found myself wondering just how deep those eyes of hers were.

"Craig? Do you want to play?"

"Who asked him?" Bill demanded before I could answer. "I was talking to you, Hoover. We've seen his pitiful attempts to play softball. They're as impressive as his attempts to play volleyball."

I laughed. "My talents lay in other areas."

That remark had an unintended consequence. They all looked quickly at Alisha and then looked back at me. I knew what they were thinking or

assuming. I gave a small shake of my head. That was the last thing I wanted them thinking about her.

And then I turned to glance at her. "Go ahead, Alisha. I'll be right here if you want me."

She hesitated. "You don't mind?"

I was tempted to be blunt and tell her I didn't care if we didn't spend any time together ever again, but of course I held my tongue. If she wanted to pretend that this was a normal date, then so be it. "I think I'll take a nap. You can wake me when you're done."

She smiled. "Okay, Craig."

Instead of stretching out to take a nap, I watched the game. She played softball as well as she played volleyball. I was still watching her when Ted joined me an hour later.

"What a dark horse Alisha turned out to be. She looks good in white. I'll bet she looks good in a lot of other colors, too." He winked at me. "But I guess you knew all along that she wasn't so bad. How long have you been seeing her, Craig?"

"I'm not seeing her, Ted."

"Then what do you call this afternoon? You two did come together, and you have spent nearly all afternoon under this tree with her. You don't have to be ashamed with me."

That did it. I blew my stack. "I'm not ashamed. Why should I be? There is absolutely nothing wrong with her." I knew that I was shouting and that everyone could hear me, but I didn't care. "The only problem here is shitheads like you. Get off of her case and mine, too, before I knock you on your ass!"

Ted jumped to his feet, looking embarrassed. "Hey, take it easy." He looked around at the disapproving faces. "I didn't mean anything and you damn well know it."

I sat back down without answering and he hurried away. Alisha came over half an hour later. I knew by the look on her face that she knew of the disagreement between me and Ted.

"I'm sorry, Craig."

I stared at her, wondering why I should put myself to so much trouble defending her. Ted and I had been friends for the last four years. Why should I risk that friendship for her, when she'd never mean anything to me? "What are you sorry about, Alisha?"

She shrugged. "I heard what you were saying to him. I guess this has been a rough day for you."

And so it had but not because of the words Ted and I exchanged. "I don't know what you mean, Alisha."

"Yes, you do. I know how the guys talk about me. I know I don't dress as well or flirt like the other girls at work."

"Girls? Don't you mean women?"

She shrugged. "What difference does it make what I mean? They all think I'm hopeless." Her lips trembled. "I suppose I am. I'm sorry. You must be a laughing stock for bringing me."

She looked so hurt that I wanted to take her in my arms and comfort her. "I'm not a laughing stock, and even if I were, I wouldn't care what they thought," I said hotly and realized that I meant it. "As I told that idiot, Ted, there's nothing wrong with you. You're just lacking in self-confidence."

"It's kind of you to say, Craig, but it's more than that." She stared down at her hands before looking up at me. "I guess you've noticed that I'm not pretty."

My first instinct was to contradict her, but she would know that I wasn't sincere. And that wouldn't really help either one of us. "Being pretty isn't everything, Alisha. Besides isn't beauty in the eye of the holder?" My common sense told me to be careful. I didn't want to mislead her into thinking that I was interested in her when I wasn't, but I couldn't quell the need to comfort her. "There are other things men are interested in."

"Are there? Even attractive men, like you?"

Though I wasn't vain, I'd known since I was a teenager that women found me attractive. Deb used to go on about my hair and blue eyes. Once we'd become lovers, she'd talked about how well built I was. So I wasn't surprised that Alisha found me attractive, but I was a little taken aback by her frankness. "Yes." I spoke sharply, hoping she would drop the subject.

"Do I have any of those other things, Craig?"

The situations that I got myself into. I decided to be truthful, rather than tactful. That way I'd have less of an opportunity to try to take advantage of her later that night. "I don't think so."

"So when you asked me to come with you, you were being kind?"

How the hell was I supposed to answer that without hurting her more? I spread my hands and shook my head.

"I should have known that was why you asked me. Now I feel like such a fool."

"There's no reason to feel bad, Alisha."

"That's easy for you to say!"

Oh, shit. So now there was something wrong with trying to be kind? The day just kept getting better and better. I extended a hand to her.

"Look, Alisha—"

"Forget it." She jumped to her feet and started folding the blankets with trembling hands. "I'm sure you feel you've wasted enough of your day and now want to get going. There's probably some pretty girl waiting for you to take her to dinner."

Damn. Now she was making my liking pretty girls sound unnatural. Although I knew I hadn't done anything wrong, and really had nothing to apologize for, I still tried to make amends. But she was on the warpath and wasn't having it.

She yanked the blankets trying to get them from under me until I stood up. Damn but her temper was on full display. And it would have been obvious to a blind man that nothing I said would convince her that I didn't have a date and had actually planned to take her to dinner.

"Do you want to go for a drive?" I asked on the drive back to her apartment.

"No thanks."

"Do you want to stop somewhere to grab a bite to eat?"

"We just came from a picnic, Craig. I'm not hungry."

Damn but she was a first class ball buster determined not to cut me the slightest break. So an hour later I found myself alone in my apartment wondering how my attempt to be kind had gone so wrong.

It was only eight o'clock. I wasn't about to spend a Saturday night sitting at home worrying about her. I should have called Deb, but for some reason I didn't. Instead, I showered, changed, and went down to Denton's Bar and Grille. Several women tried to pick me up, but even though I still felt horny as hell, I'd had enough of women for one day. I stayed until I had a nice buzz on, then I walked home, undressed and got in bed.

Two hours later I lay staring up at my bedroom ceiling. Every time I closed my eyes, I saw the devastated look on Alisha's face when I'd told her I wasn't interested in her. Why hadn't I been more tactful? If I had, I might even then have been with her...watching her eyes light up or seeing that warm smile turn her full lips upward and transform her face.

With each passing hour, I became more agitated. I hadn't lost sleep over a woman since I was sixteen. I decided that I'd apologize to her on Monday. I'd make her understand that the most we could be were friends. If she could accept that, there was no reason why we shouldn't see each other again.

Friends? I recalled the enticing glimpse of her breasts and her round ass and felt my cock stirring. Damn. I really had to get a grip. *Forget her. You tried to do your good deed and she slapped you down for it. When you see her on Monday, nod and pretend you were never dumb enough to ask her to the picnic.*

But Alisha didn't come to work on Monday or Tuesday. When I asked Rose, the girl who worked with her where she was, she gave me a cool look. "She's sick. Why did you do it, Craig?"

Before the picnic nearly everyone in the plant had made fun of Alisha, including Rose. But the picnic had changed all of that. They liked her now.

So for the last two days I'd been getting the evil eye from the guys who felt I'd mistreated Alisha.

"I didn't do anything, Rose. I felt sorry for her and I asked her to the picnic. What's so bad about that?"

"You made her think you liked her and then you just dumped her. You should have left her alone."

Those were my thoughts exactly. Whoever had said no good deed goes unpunished must have had my situation in mind. Damn if I'd let any of them make me think I'd done anything wrong. Live and learn and keep it moving.

Without giving myself time to think things through, I stopped by a flower shop after I left work that night. At home I showered, changed, and drove over to Alisha's apartment.

She came to the door dressed in an old shabby bathrobe with her hair pulled back into an untidy ponytail. Her eyes widened when she saw me. "Craig! What are you doing here?"

Her voice was hoarse and her nose showed signs of peeling. I was relieved to see that she was physically sick and not emotionally ill, as the guys down at the plant had implied. "I was worried about you," I admitted.

She stared at me. "You were?"

Nodding, I brought my left hand from behind my back and held the flowers out to her. "These are for you."

"Oh, Craig," she gasped and burst into tears.

Oh damn. Why the hell was she crying?

"I thought all women liked flowers. You don't like them?"

Still sobbing, she backed away from the door

After a brief hesitation, I followed her inside. I put the flowers on the table by the door and waited for her to stop sobbing. When she showed no signs of stopping, I thought I should do something to help the process. Even though I thought it was a bad idea, I did what came naturally. I put an arm around her shoulders.

At first she tried to pull away.

I tightened my arm.

She made one more attempt to pull away from me before she gave up and pressed her face against my shoulder.

I held her, stroking her thick, silky hair until her sobs subsided. It wasn't long before I realized that her shivering wasn't entirely due to the fact that she'd been crying.

I felt the change in her body. Without being conceited, I was having a physical effect on her. But then she was also having one on me. I put my other arm around her and she didn't protest. I was more than a little surprised to find that I didn't mind having her there.

"I'm sorry," she whispered, finally pulling away from me. "I don't want to give you my cold."

I studied her, wondering why I wasn't turned off by her complete lack of makeup. I wasn't sure how to handle my unexpected attraction to her. For the first time in a long time I felt a little gauche and a little unsure of myself. I tried not to show it. "Don't worry about me. I rarely catch colds."

She wrapped her arms around her body and stepped a little further away from me.

That certainly wasn't the reaction I was hoping for. "So do you like flowers?"

She nodded. "I love flowers, but no one's ever given me any."

No wonder she thought so little of herself. "There's always a first time for everything."

She nodded. "They're very nice. Thank you."

"You're welcome. How are you feeling?"

"Better. The doctor said I could go back to work on Thursday."

"Great." I admitted to myself that I was looking forward to seeing her.

"You almost sound as if you mean that."

"I do mean it," I told her.

She glanced away. "I'd offer you something to eat, but I have this cold, and you probably have a date." She was moving toward the door as she spoke.

Damn. What the hell was her problem? Why did she keep rolling my attempts to be friendly back in my face? What the hell was I doing wrong? And why was I wasting time with her when I could probably sweet talk Deb back into my bed?

I guess the bottom line was that my pride was a little injured because she clearly wanted me to go. I wasn't used to women trying to get rid of me. "I'll go, but I don't have a date, Alisha."

She held the door open. "Thanks for coming," she said like I hadn't spoken.

That was it. I'd had enough. I left. As I walked to my car, I called Deb. After a little cajoling, I went to pick her up and we spent the night at my apartment.

I knew I was in trouble when I thought of Alisha as I slid inside Deb. When I kissed her, I wondered what it would be like to kiss Alisha's lips.

Alisha seemed determined not to let me find out. When she returned to work, she avoided me. Although she was friendly enough to everyone else, I was lucky to get a curt good morning or a barely civil nod.

Deb was back in my life and my bed. I had nothing to complain about. Nevertheless, even as I told myself I didn't care how coolly Alisha behaved towards me, I knew I did. But hell would freeze over before I let her know she'd managed to get under my skin.

After spending the next two weeks trying to pretend I had no interest in her, I followed her out of the gates of the plant one Friday night. "Hey Alisha. Wait up."

She turned to smile at me. "Hi, Craig."

I stared at her, feeling agitated. Where the hell did she get off smiling at me like that when we both knew she was about to kick my ass to the curb?

"Hi." I bit back the urge to tell her she looked pretty. "Do you have a minute?"

"Just one or two."

I arched a brow. "What's your hurry? Got a date?"

She nodded. "As a matter of fact, I do."

Damn. Where the hell had that come from? "With who?" The words popped out before I could stop them.

"No one you know," she said, shrugging and not looking in the least offended as she probably had the right to be. "What can I do for you, Craig?"

You can tell me who the hell you're seeing. I shook my head. "Never mind."

"Okay." And she just walked away from me.

When I thought about it later, I was amazed. But I went running after her like a starving dog going after a steak. "Alisha, wait a minute."

She turned back to face me. "Yes?"

"Would you like to go on a date?"

"I already have one," she reminded me.

I clenched a fist at my side. "For tonight?"

She nodded. "Yes."

"What about for tomorrow night?"

"What about it? Are you asking me out, Craig?"

Her bluntness took some getting used to. "Yes, I am."

"Why? Feeling sorry for me again?"

Standing there staring down into her not so warm dark eyes, it was difficult to recall that I'd ever felt sorry for her. Or that I'd ever thought her plain. There was a world of exciting possibilities between plain and pretty. Alisha had cornered the market.

"I'm not feeling sorry for you, Alisha."

"Then why are you asking me out again, Craig?"

Why couldn't she just say yes or no like other women? "Isn't my asking you out enough? Do I have to have a reason?"

She nodded. "Considering I'm not your type? Yes, you do. Are you forgetting that you told me that I didn't have any of the other things you liked in a woman?"

Would I ever live down that careless remark? "Alisha —"

“There’s no point in going out with you. But it’s very sweet of you to have asked me, Craig.”

While I stood there trying to think of something to say to change her mind, she walked away.

Chapter Three

Oh, hell no! Overcoming the urge to storm after her, I went home instead. After a shower, I changed and left my apartment. I made a quick stop at the florist and then drove over to Alisha's place.

I was heartened by the pleased look on her face before she frowned when she opened the door for me. "What are you doing here?"

"I'm here to change your mind about your date." I stopped abruptly studying her. She wore a pair of baggy jeans and an oversized shirt. That was hardly an outfit worn to impress a man. I decided not to point that out to her.

She accepted the flowers and stepped away from the door.

Following her inside, I closed the door and leaned against it. I studied her in silence. How should I express my desire? Should I beat around the bush? Or should I be explicit? I wasn't sure which approach would work best with her.

My hunger guided me. I took the flowers from her and sat them on the hall table, and slipped an arm around her shoulders.

She stiffened, but made no effort to pull away from me.

Encouraged, I tipped up her chin.

She stared up at me with a wide-eyed look that I found totally captivating. I bent my head and pressed my lips against hers.

A soft sexy sound escaped her lips.

Excited and aroused, I touched my mouth to hers.

She immediately parted her lips and melted against me.

I kissed her hungrily, enjoying the taste and feel of her lips until I felt her nipples hardening. Then I lost it. I eased her against the wall near the door and pushed up her top.

To my delight, she wore no bra.

She lifted her hands to cover her breasts.

I gently removed her hands and allowed myself several moments to stare at her before I took her right nipple between my lips. Once I felt the hard, warm nipples between my lips, there was no going back and no stopping.

Rolling one nipple between my fingers, I drew the other one between my lips while I pushed her jeans down. It was apparently my lucky night because she wore no panties either.

Dragging my lips from her neck to capture her mouth, I fumbled with the zip of my pants. We broke apart long enough to apply a condom. Then I gripped my cock and slowly pushed inside her pussy. She felt so wet, tight and warm, I struggled not to come immediately.

When I was as deep inside her as I could get, I slid my palms over her ass. Damn but she had a nice ass. Feeling it in my palms got me hotter and made me need her more.

Sucking her tongue into my mouth, I pushed my cock in and out of her, fucking her sweet pussy with slow, deep strokes. Although shy, I was delighted to find she knew how to fuck a man back.

I loved the way she moved with me, as if my cock was her personal property. Her vaginal muscles cradled and caressed my cock with a maddening heat that made me want to explode deep within the confines of her bare pussy. I shuddered with lust at the thought.

In spite of my efforts to hold off coming so I could continue to enjoy the amazing fuck I'd had in years, I felt my climax building. Determined not to come and leave her unsatisfied, I groaned and pulled out of her sweet pussy.

She made a small dismayed sound.

I smiled. Clearly she liked having my cock in her as much as I did. "Don't worry. We're not finished yet," I whispered as I dropped to my knees in front of her.

I sat staring at her. Damn but she had a pretty pussy. I generally like a shaven, but reaching out to stroke her wet folds and slowly exposing the pink flesh inside the dark lips made my cock rock hard.

With a feeling of wonder, I gripped her hips and touched my mouth to her wet slit.

She moaned.

Encouraged, I dragged the tip of my tongue along it.

"Oooh."

"You like that?"

"Ohhh...yes. Yes."

I pushed and nibbled at her clit before I settled down to enjoy eating her.

I enjoyed the taste and smell of her scented pussy. I caressed her ass and finally parted her cheeks.

She shook with pleasure.

Her soft moans made me long to please her more. Sucking on her clit, I slipped a finger between her cheeks and up into her tight ass.

"Oh...God!" She gripped my hair and came.

Damn. Talk about sweet heat. I greedily lapped up her pussy juices before shooting to my feet. By then my cock felt like a piece of pipe protruding in front of my body.

She reached down and closed her fingers around it, while sliding the fingers of the other hand over my balls.

Holly shit! I had to fuck her again.

She pressed the head of my cock against her entrance.

Trembling with lust and need, I shoved my hips forward and slid back inside her.

She trailed her fingers down my back to my ass and slowly, sensuously fucked herself on my cock.

Burning with desire and need, I pounded her pussy wildly.

She encouraged me, whispering to me with soft words I was too far gone to understand.

After a few frantic strokes, I gripped her close, bit her shoulders, and exploded.

She held me after I had come, stroking her fingers through my hair and over my shoulders.

We spent several minutes kissing and caressing each other before she took my hand and led me into her bedroom. I sprawled on my back and drew her down into my arms and between my legs.

"Damn."

She smiled down at me. "Was it good?"

"I'm not sure. Let's do it again to be sure," I whispered.

"You're not sure if you liked my pussy?"

"No. Give me some more so I can make a decision."

"You can have as much as you want, Craig."

Holly shit. I don't think I'd ever heard anything sweeter or more alluring.

She rubbed her pussy against my cock until I was fully erect. Then she wrapped her arms around me.

I felt her pussy pressed against my cock. I pushed slowly up into her.

She gasped, holding me closer and offering her lips.

Claiming her warm, sweet lips, I slid slowly in and out of her until we found that perfect sensual rhythm. Once we had, each stroke felt like magic as we greedily fucked each other.

After our second go round, we fell asleep briefly before we got up to shower. In her stall, I fucked her for a third time.

Sex with her felt so good, we spent the rest of the night fucking until we finally fell asleep from sheer exhaustion.

In the morning I woke confident that our relationship had taken a turn for the better. I insisted on an early morning quickie, taking her while she lay on her belly. We both came quickly and I reluctantly slid off of her.

To my surprise, she rolled away from me and tried to climb out of the bed within a word.

"Oh, no you don't." I captured her hand and pulled her back against me.

I kissed her until she felt soft and warm in my arms. Then I rolled her onto her side, pushed my bare cock into her pussy, and gave her a slow,

sensuous fuck that had us both moaning and clinging to each other in minutes.

When I was about to come, she attempted to push me away.

I know I shouldn't have resisted but I was too far gone to think rationally. I held her still under me, sucked her tongue into my mouth, and blasted her sweet pussy full of my cum. Damn. What a rush that gave me.

My coming directly in her must have had a similar effect on her because she humped herself against me while squeezing her vaginal muscles around me as if determined to milk the last drop of cum from my cock and into her pussy.

With a last kiss, I rolled off her and positioned my body behind her.

She turned away without a word.

Lying on my side behind her, I kissed her neck and ear while stroking my fingers over her breasts and into the pussy I thought was no firmly mine. I lifted her top leg and pushed my semi-erect cock back into her.

She moaned, pushing her big ass against my groin.

I think having me still inside her turned her on as much as it did me. I cupped my hands over her breasts and settled my body against her back.

We drifted to sleep again.

When I woke, I was alone in the bed and the apartment. I found a note on the entrance door.

You got what you wanted. Please don't be here when I return.

I'm not sure how to describe the way I felt as I read the note but fury and resignation would be a good start.

Royally pissed off, I showered, dressed, and slammed out of her apartment. Fuck her! On the way home I decided it was time to play hard to get. In the coming days and weeks she wouldn't find me so eager to expose myself to her various whims.

Still, sleeping that night was difficult. I had to repeatedly resist the urge to call her and ask if I could spend the night with her. It would be a hold day in hell before I allowed her to make me beg.

I'd show her the new more restrained Craig when we met at work on Monday morning.

But I had not reckoned on her being a shameless tease.

On Monday when we came face to face, she pretended as if we were barely on speaking terms. No one looking at the cool smile she gave me would imagine I had spent all Saturday night buried nuts deep in her pussy. Forget even thinking that I had actually come inside her.

The problem was I couldn't forget it. Every time I looked at her, I longed to take her to one of the various dark corners of the plant, push her panties down, and slide my aching cock inside her. The thought of

fucking her with so many people around and then coming again in her bare pussy turned me on.

Not that I had a chance in hell of that happening.

I had planned to play hard to get for a week or two before I broke down and asked her out again. I fully intended that the next phase of our relationship would include proper courtship before I touched her again. Once I'd courted her, I planned to spend the rest of my nights fucking her silly.

But I never got a chance to put my plan into action.

The next thing I knew, she was going out with Ted. I'd never had to be jealous of any man because I rarely met a woman I couldn't charm. Nevertheless it wasn't long before I found myself wishing I was in Ted's shoes. No matter what I said or how many times I asked her, she wouldn't agree to go out with me.

"What the hell are you doing going out with him?" I demanded one night after I'd cornered her by her car after we left work.

"Why shouldn't I go out with him? Ted's a nice guy. He hasn't once tried to take advantage of me by sweet talking his way into my apartment and then fucking my unprotected pussy without protection!"

I'd never heard her use four-letter words before so at least that shocked me. Then I realized what she'd said. I blinked down at her. "Unprotected? You mean you weren't using any type of contraceptive?"

"What do you think unprotected means?"

I could only think of one reason you hadn't been on any type of contraceptive which also explained why she'd felt so tight. Damn. I'd taken her virginity without realizing it.

I touched her arm. "Look, I'm sorry —"

She moved away from me and jerked open her car door. "I'm going home. I have a date with Ted."

I leaned down to glare into her window. "If you go out with him one more time, I'll kick his ass!"

Without responding, she started her car, backed up, and drove away.

I got into my vehicle and followed her. I pulled into her second spot. When she parked, we got out and faced each other.

Before she could say anything, I jerked her into my arms and kissed her until she shuddered against me. Then I led her up to her apartment where I undressed us both.

She had such a beautiful body, I stood staring at her in awe before I slowly and repeatedly fucked her unprotected pussy with my bare cock.

With each addictive fuck, she drew me in deeper. But I didn't care. I couldn't get enough of her or her pussy.

When Ted arrived to pick her up, I had her pinned on the bed beneath my body, thrusting into her so far that she practically squealed each time my hips shot forward, driving my cock balls deep into the sweetest pussy I'd ever had the pleasure to fuck raw.

After he gave up ringing her bell, he called.

"Alisha? It's Ted. I'm in your lobby. Are you there?"

"Oh, she's here, all right," I said as I deliberately drove my cock balls deep inside the delicious pussy that was already filled with my cum.

She shuddered but pushed at my shoulders. "I should get up and —"

"The only thing you're going to do is stay impaled on my cock," I told her and fucked her until we both came.

After a brief nap, I took her doggy style so I could nip at her neck and ear and pinched and roll her nipples between my fingers.

She wiggled her big ass and pressed her breasts against my palms and encouraged me to thrust deeper by slamming herself onto my cock.

With her teasing and pleasing me like that it, didn't take long for me to orgasm. When I came, I drove her down onto her belly on the bed where I held her still as I pumped every last drop of cum into her.

She whimpered and moaned, reaching back to clutch my thighs. Damn. What an incredible rush.

When she rose to go to the bathroom the next morning, I lay in bed watching with a smile as my cum trickled down one dark, pretty thigh. What a beautiful sight and woman.

After a shower and breakfast, I lubed up her ass. I wanted to take her ass raw, but she insisted I wear a condom. So I slipped one on and slowly fed my cock into her tight ass.

That first time, she could only take half of it. But that was enough for me to come. The following night, I sat naked in a chair massaging my cock until she slowly lowered her ass onto it.

With a little coaching and encouragement, she finally allowed me to ease my entire shaft up her incredibly tight ass. Needless, I didn't last long. After a few strokes, I shuddered and came.

She gingerly climbed off my cock and holding her beautiful ass cheeks in her hands, she walked over to the bed.

I joined her and held her, whispered softly to her until she fell asleep.

That was one of the most exciting weekends of my life. After I assured her she was the first woman I'd had unprotected sex with in years, I woke Sunday morning to find her trying to push my semi-erect cock into her already wet pussy. That's when I knew she was mine.

Confident that the sizzling sex would ensure her body was mine alone, I set out to win her heart.

After breakfast and a quick anal, shower fuck, I allowed her to drag me to the mall, though I had to admit that I didn't protest too much. I really didn't care what we did or where we went, as long as we were together.

"Don't you want to buy anything, Alisha?" I asked after we'd spent hours window shopping.

She smiled up at me. "I like to take my time. Am I boring you, Craig?"

I caught her around her waist and pulled her close to me. "No, but we do have dinner reservations for seven." And I did want another fuck.

Well, actually, I wanted several.

"Okay, Craig, whatever you want."

I wanted to eat her pussy and then have her suck my cock, but decided that could wait. Her pussy and ass were more than enough to keep me happy and sexually sated.

We had dinner out before I took her home.

"Do you mind if we say goodnight?"

The question surprised and annoyed me. "Why?"

She glanced away. "I'm a little...sore."

"Oh. Hell." I slipped an arm around her. "I'm sorry. What if I just come in and hold you for awhile?"

"No more sex tonight, Craig. And no more unprotected sex at all," she warned.

Even as I nodded, I had no intentions of giving up fucking her raw. But that night I contented myself with a few kisses and caresses before she fell asleep in my arms.

I woke before dawn, kissed her lips, and quietly let myself out of the apartment. Back in my own place, I showered and got ready for work.

On the plant floor, we were polite to each other but were careful not to behave like the insatiable lovers we were. At break time when I saw her talking to Ted, I managed to resist the urge to go see what they were discussing.

That night after work we had dinner and went dancing. Then I took her home where we fucked once before we fell asleep in each other's arms.

That set the pattern for her courtship. At work we were polite to each other. After hours we usually had dinner out a few times a week before returning to her apartment to fuck at least once. Always raw. I still enjoyed it immensely, even though I knew she was now using protection.

On the weekends we fucked like bunnies, but I always made sure I took her out at least one weekend night. On Sundays we had breakfast and sex before we showered and then spent the day doing whatever she wanted to.

I didn't care how we spent the time as long as I got to sleep with her in my arms and fuck her often. I spent a lot of money on flowers, candy and wine for her. She repaid me with displays of affection that completely

enchanted me. I went from living to fuck her at every opportunity to slowly falling in love with her.

She sighed and her whole body shook. "My dad blamed me for my mother's death. I guess he must have loved her very much because he couldn't seem to stand me. He thought the least I could have done was be a boy."

She looked up at me and I saw tears glistening in her beautiful eyes.

I stroked her bare pussy. "I'm very glad you're not a boy."

Her smile was short-lived. "Did you know that Alisha isn't my real name?" And when I'd shaken my head, she went on. "He named me 'Al'. All my life I've been forced to dress like a boy and had my dad treat me as one."

She bit her lip before going on. "I didn't even own a dress until I left home just after I graduated from high school. That's why I have none of the social graces that other women have. He wouldn't let me be female. He said I was too unattractive to be a woman, and no man would ever want me. I thought he was right until you asked me out."

I drew her close and pressed the head of my cock into her pussy. "And the rest, as they say, is history. Boy meets girl. Boy falls head over heels for girl. They live happily ever after."

She looked up at me. "Happily ever after, Craig?"

I nodded. "At least it will be if you marry me."

She teared up and started to sob without answering.

I allowed her to cry for a minute or so before I took matters into my own hands. I eased her on her back and slipped my entire cock into her. Resisting the urge to give her a hard, rough fucking, I gently made love to her.

Moments before she was about to come, I withdrew from her and asked her to marry me again.

She clutched at me and bucked her hips, trying to drive my cock back into her body.

I held her off until she screamed an angry yes at me.

Only then did I plunge back into the paradise of her slit and resume the soft sweet fuck.

Once we'd both come, we cuddled together and I whispered that I loved her. When she admitted she loved me too, I felt as if I'd won the damned lottery.

My beautiful, sexy Alisha and I got married within six months. My mom said Alisha was the most beautiful bride she'd ever seen. And of course I wholeheartedly agreed with her. Alisha was pregnant inside of two years.

When we had our first child, we took him to Alisha's father. Eight years of silence from Alisha had helped him see the error of his ways. He and

Alisha are at peace with each other these days, and she tells me she's happier than she'd ever expected to be.

I too am very happy. In Alisha I have everything I need and want in a lover, friend, woman and a wife. I'm back to thinking mom was right. Beauty is as beauty does. And with Alisha I have the most beautiful woman as my wife. I can't imagine being happier with any other woman.

Being married to her has taught me that she's even more beautiful and giving on the inside than she is on the outside. She's born me a son and a daughter I love more than I can say. I have it all, including a wife who still enchants me after six years of marriage. What man could ask for and want more? Not this one. My life is complete and I'm very happy with my beautiful Alisha.

Marilyn Lee Unleashed Presents

Large, Shy, And Beautiful

An Inspirational Romance

By

Marilyn Lee

Copyright 2010 Marilyn Lee

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced electronically or in print without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews. To comply with copyright laws you cannot trade, sell or give any ebooks away.

"Here he comes," my best friend Betty hissed. "Go ahead. Ask him."

I turned a cool look on her. "When are you going to learn that I am not going to ask him or any other man out to dinner?" I demanded.

"Forget that old-fashioned nonsense and ask him! He's gorgeous!"

No doubt about that. "I don't care how good looking he is. I'm not asking him out!" I hissed back and deliberately looked away from the man heading in our direction in the small cafe.

"What?" Betty demanded.

"You heard me," I answered even as my heart raced.

"Are you nuts?" Betty's dark eyes narrowed and her mouth compressed into a tight line. She hated it when I refused to fall in with her plans for me.

I narrowed my own brown gaze and thinned my somewhat fuller lips. I hated it when she tried to mold me into something I could never be, so I figured we were even. "Am I nuts? No more than usual."

As we hissed and tried to stare each other down, the object of our debate, a tall, attractive man with thick dark hair, deep dark eyes and the high cheekbones and coloring indicative of a Native American male slowed his stride as he neared our table.

"Neida! He's coming this way and he's going to stop!" Betty whispered, squeezing my hand almost hard enough to cut off the blood flow.

I didn't answer. There was no time. He was nearly level with the small table we shared. We both held our breaths, expecting him to stop or at the very least speak to us. Well, me. He did neither.

We sighed in unison and turned to watch him walk out of the cafe and into the warm April sunshine.

"I suppose *you're* satisfied," Betty said coolly.

"Satisfied?" I frowned at her. "You're kidding. Right?"

"No, I am not kidding!"

"Then *you're* nuts!" She had to be. I could almost taste my disappointment. And surely anyone with a pair of eyes could see it all over my face. She, of all people, knew that I'd only allowed myself to be dragged back to that cafe in the hope of seeing the good looking stranger we had first noticed having breakfast there on Monday morning. It had taken her four days to get me back here and now she dared to make dumb statements? "And furthermore, your elevator is clearly not going to the top floor today!" I snapped.

She glared at me. "You just wait until I get you alone."

"Don't start with me," I warned. I was not in the mood to be intimidated.

"Don't you use that tone with me!" She snapped back, looking as if she'd like to give me a good, old-fashioned, teeth-rattling shake. Of course that would take some doing because I outweighed her by, well let's just say she's a shapely size eight and I'm not. Daddy always called me pleasingly plump.

"Neida, are you daydreaming again?" Betty demanded, interrupting my thoughts.

Resisting the urge to snap at her yet again, I sighed and decided to consider the source. Betty had been happily married for five years, the last two of which she'd spent in a determined effort to fix me up with "Mr. Right." This was fine since, at thirty, I was ready to settle down. We continually ran into trouble because we had very different ideas about how my search for Mr. Right should proceed. While I was content to wait on the Lord to send my soul mate my way, Betty thought I should take every opportunity to help the process along.

"Now, mind you, I'm not implying that the Good Lord needs any help," she was fond of saying.

And when I'd stare disapprovingly and demand, "But?"

She'd reply, "You know the old saying — 'The Lord helps those who help themselves.' So help yourself already. That's all I'm saying."

To which I would respond, "The Lord knows I'm not a go getter when it comes to men and he knows why."

"I didn't mean *that*, Neida."

That of course being my weight, which we no longer discussed. After fruitless attempts to trim down and endless long talks with The Lord, I'd decided to accept myself for who I was — all of me. I was confident that The Lord knew I'd dieted until I couldn't diet anymore.

"I know but the Good Lord knows I need a little more assistance than other women might need," I'd reply complacently.

Her usual response consisted of throwing up her hands and despairing of me for the rest of the day.

"We might as well go," Betty went on in the same aggrieved tone.

"We might as well," I agreed morosely.

I was grateful the school where we both taught was just three blocks away because I had to suffer through Betty's silent treatment as we headed to work. Anyone would think I'd injured her in some way.

As we paused outside my classroom door, Betty suddenly perked up. I knew that gleam in her eyes well. "I am not going back there on Monday," I said quickly, hoping to foil whatever scheme she was devising.

She tossed her long, blonde curls. "Neida Headstrong, you are nuts if you think I'm going to stand by while you let your dream brave slip through your fingers!"

"The name is Armstrong. And..." I tossed my head, sending my long, dark hair cascading around my shoulders. "Get this straight, I am not going back there and even if I do see him again, I am not asking him out."

"What?! Why do I waste my time with you, Neida Headstrong?" She shook her head and cast her gaze skyward in what I personally thought of as her Lord-give-me-the-strength-to-deal-with-this-lunatic look.

"I haven't a clue," I informed her coolly. "If the Lord wants us to meet again, we will. But I am not going to try to run him down."

"Fine. Be difficult," She shot back, looking for all the world as if I'd mortally wounded her. "See if I care."

Ignoring her woe-is-me routine, I escaped into my classroom and welcomed my students moments later. Betty was a bit much when she was on a mission. And she was on a big time mission with this guy. I would have loved to join her, but after the way he looked right through me, I knew it was hopeless. Big men like him always seemed to prefer tiny women.

Still I thought of him frequently on Saturday morning as I cleaned my apartment. But I knew I'd seen the last of him. Haldane was a small town. He was probably just passing through or visiting relatives. With my luck and track record with men, he was probably long gone by now. And even if he wasn't, there was bound to be some lucky tiny woman who'd already staked a claim on him.

The thought upset me more than it should, leaving me feeling unfairly deprived. I paused in my cleaning to offer a silent prayer of thanks for the things I already had. Among my blessings I included a close relationship with the Lord, good friends and a job I found enjoyable and rewarding. Okay, so I was not slender. Never had been and probably never would be. I'd probably never make much more money than I currently did.

Dwelling on what I didn't have: a slim, willowy frame and a husband who'd share my faith and my burdens was counter-productive. It also made me uneasy, as if I were beginning to doubt that the Lord did indeed provide for those who loved him.

So I was actually relieved when Betty called that afternoon.

"Come have dinner with us tonight."

"Thanks, but I think I'll spend the evening reading," I said. I actually intended to spend it feeling sorry for myself while I thought about the tall, dark stranger. But I was not about to admit that to Betty.

"You can read anytime, Neida. Tonight, you have to come to dinner."

"Betty, I told you —"

"No, really. You *have* to come," she insisted.

I wasn't in the mood to socialize but if anyone could lift me out of my current dark mood, it was Betty. "Okay. I'll come," I agreed.

A short silence ensued. I smiled, certain my quick acquiescence had caught her off guard.

"You will?"

"I believe I just said that."

"You will! Great. Good. Oh and Neida, wear something pretty."

I glanced down at my comfortable jeans and extra large tee shirt. One of the beauties of meals at her house was dressing casually. "Why?"

After another silence ensued.

I frowned. "Are you feeling okay, Bet?"

"What? Oh. I'm fine, but Jack's in the dumps. He needs cheering up. Wear that new pink dress. He likes you in pink."

"He likes you better in it," I said. "If he needs cheering up, why don't you wear something pink? And anyway —"

"Pastel colors look great against your dark skin tone and you know it."

"So Jack's into plus-sized black women instead of beautiful, blue-eyed slender blondes? Or —"

"Will you please just wear the pink dress?" She cut me off, sounding exasperated. "And wear some heels with a decent height to showcase your legs."

I arched a brow at her tone. "In case no one told you, Jack's already married," I teased.

"If that's supposed to be funny, it isn't!"

"Fine. No need to bite my head off. Me and the pink dress will be there."

"Oh, good," she said, and I knew she was smiling; no doubt pleased at having gotten her way. Yet again.

It was only after we'd said our goodbyes that I wondered what she was up to. When it came to finding my Mr. Right, Betty was always up to something. She was tireless and relentless in her efforts to fix me up.

"You'll find out soon enough what she's plotting," I told my reflection as I stood in front of my bedroom mirror. I smiled, pleased at how the dress flattered my plus-sized body and how the heels showcased one of my best assets—my legs.

I brushed my long, dark hair until it fell onto my shoulders. Satisfied I looked my best, I picked up my purse and left. Since it was a warm evening, I decided to walk to Betty and Jack's house.

Betty let out a piercing wolf whistle when she opened the door for me. "Now that's what I'm talking about. You look stunning. You'll be glad you wore this dress in a minute. You'll knock Jack right out of the doldrums."

Something about the gleam in her eyes set off an alarm. I frowned, backing away.

She reached out and gripped my hand. "You're going the wrong way."

"I suggest you tell me what you're up to or I'm going home."

"Up to?" She widened her eyes and tried to look innocent.

"Yes. What are you up to, Betty?"

"Neida, your paranoia is showing. I'm not up to anything. Come on in."

Despite her denials, I knew she wasn't being straight with me. We were, after all, best friends. I know her as well as she knows me. "Not until you tell me what's up," I insisted.

"God save me from overly suspicious friends."

"He's going to need to save you from me if you don't 'fess up quickly."

She laughed and practically snatched me into the house. "I don't know how or why I continue to put up with you."

"Because I'm so lovable?"

"Don't I wish," she muttered as she swept me down the hall.

Outside the living room, she released my hand and turned to stare at me.

I stared back, frowning. "What? Got food stuck between my teeth?"

I watched her eyes widen before she reached out and pushed my lips apart, revealing my teeth.

I jerked back. "Bet!"

"There's nothing between your teeth but your reckless tongue," she said and sighed with obvious relief.

"Don't you think you're going overboard for dinner?" I asked. "As I've already pointed out, Jack's married."

She gave me a cool look and then smiled suddenly, pushing me into the living room.

"Hey, Wait..." The rest of my protest died on my lips as I found myself gaping up at the handsome man from the cafe.

"Oneida Armstrong, this is Braden Elkhorn. Braden, this lovely, single, voluptuous creature is Oneida." Betty grinned at him but gave me her Don't-mess-with-me-cause-I-don't-take-any-prisoners look. "Neida, keep Braden company while Jack and I put the finishing touches on dinner." Grinning like the cat that ate the last tasty canary, she practically danced out the room.

My heart pounded and my legs shook. He was actually there. In Betty's house. Every tall, breathtaking inch of him. He was there—waiting for me. This must surely be a sign from the Lord. This was my chance to wow him with the charm and wit Betty and Jack always insisted I possessed in abundance.

I parted my lips to speak and drew a complete and total blank. I stared at him, silently praying for guidance and to have the locked muscles of my throat loosened.

"It's very nice to meet you, Oneida," he said after an awkward silence.

He had a nice voice. Low, warm, and well modulated. He smiled, as if he were delighted or at least not displeased to see me.

Watching his slow, warm smile spread from his lips to his dark eyes filled my head and heart with lustful desires. I glanced at his mouth and couldn't look away. Ashamed of the hunger coursing through me, I blushed like an inexperienced teenybopper.

Finally, I swallowed hard and found my voice. "I can't tell you how glad I am to see you again!" Of course I would gladly have given my life savings to have those awful words back the moment they left my lips. Now he was bound to think I was desperate and shameless.

Apparently chivalry wasn't dead.

He exhaled. "Thank God. I'm glad you feel that way because I'm delighted to see you again too."

But I felt sure he didn't really mean it. How could this well-built, handsome hunk who didn't appear to have an ounce of spare flesh on his big, sculptured body be delighted to see me again?

I shook my head. "I...I didn't mean to say that," I told him, making things worse.

"Didn't you?"

"No," I insisted, struggling to regain even a small measure of dignity.

His smile vanished. "I'm sorry to hear that."

It was all downhill after that. I spent the rest of the evening speaking only when I was spoken to directly and ignoring Betty's wrathful gaze. The worst part of the evening was the fact that Braden didn't seem to mind in the least that he and I weren't really getting to know each other. He skillfully thwarted all of Betty's efforts to leave us alone again.

I felt sick, knowing I'd blown my one chance with him.

"So Braden, did you know that you and Neida have a shared interest?" Betty asked. Although she smiled at him she sounded a little on the desperate side.

"Really?" He flashed a quick smile at Betty before giving me a brief, impersonal glance.

Betty shot me her most intimidating you'd-better-start-cooperating-or-else look. I moistened my lips and meekly turned to look at Braden. Of course I didn't have a clue what she was talking about. I paused and took a guess. "You collect vintage model trains?"

His dark brows rose and I wasn't the least bit surprised when he shook his head. "No, but I would if I had the time. I understand it's a...fascinating hobby."

Yeah and I was a sparkling conversationalist.

"I'm sure Braden would love to see your collection," Betty said quickly.

Tact had never been Betty's strong suit.

Jack gave me an encouraging smile.

When Braden didn't respond, I averted my gaze and remained silent. It was painfully obvious that Betty was wasting her time. I had no idea what Betty had said or done to lure Braden Elkhorn there, but it was clear he had no more interest in seeing my collection than I had in dragging out what had become an uncomfortable evening.

Finally, just after ten, he decided to put us both out of our misery when he rose from the living room sofa. "I have a long day after church tomorrow, so I'll say good night." The smile he gave Betty and Jack was much warmer than the one he turned on me. "It was nice meeting you, Oneida."

"Same here," I muttered and reluctantly put my hand in the big one he'd extended. I couldn't control a small gasp as a shock radiated up my whole arm when he took my hand in his.

Our gazes met and locked. For one crazy moment, I was tempted to burrow close and wrap my arms around his neck. He had wide shoulders. It would have been so nice to rest my cheek against his shoulder and ask him if he knew the Lord wanted us to be together.

I fought off the urge and tried to pull my hand from his.

His hands tightened around mine as he resisted my efforts to be free.

My heart thumped in my chest. I looked at his mouth and felt my cheeks burning as I imagined those firm, chiseled lips moving over mine. *Stop it, Neida! Stop it. You can not afford to wallow in lustful thoughts.* If he kept holding my hand, God only knew what sinful desires I'd lose myself in. I tugged at my hand.

He glanced at Betty.

"Didn't you say you'd be in town for a while longer, Braden?" She asked.

He inclined his head.

"Great. Then maybe you and Neida will have an opportunity to see each other again."

He released my hand and spoke after a noticeable pause. "That would be very nice."

Mortified at Betty's shameless behavior on my behalf, I blushed. Since he couldn't possibly want another repeat of the evening we'd just suffered through, I knew he was being polite again. While I appreciated his kindness, I could only take so much humiliation. I shook my head and looked away from him. "Unfortunately, I have a pretty busy schedule."

"Then I'll say goodbye."

I swallowed a lump of despair and forced myself to smile. "Goodbye."

He hesitated.

"Please see Braden to the door, Neida," Betty said. Without giving me a chance to refuse, she took Jack's hand and walked out of the room.

Great. That left me to walk him to the door or risk appearing as if I had no manners.

We walked down the hall in silence.

At the front door, he glanced down at me. "It really was nice to meet you, Oneida."

I forced myself not to look away from him. "It was nice to meet you as well."

He smiled a quick smile at me, opened the front door and walked out of my life.

I sucked in a breath and closed my eyes.

The door had barely closed behind him before Betty rushed down the hall to face me. "And just what was that nonsense all about? Do you know how much trouble Jack and I had finding him and getting him here to meet you?" She demanded.

"I'm sure it wasn't easy." I bit my lip. "And I'm grateful, but I'm not in the mood to be bullied, Betty." How did she think I felt after blowing the chance to dazzle him?

She took one look at my face and bit her own lip. "Oh, don't look like that, Neida. First impressions aren't everything."

The urge to have a good cry was difficult to overcome. "Aren't they?"

"No. Besides, who says you didn't make a good first impression?"

Had I done that, Betty, who was my biggest cheerleader after my parents, wouldn't have had to try so hard to make the evening successful. "We both know I did not shine tonight."

"Okay, he didn't see you at your best, but he did say he hoped to see you again."

"Well, I don't want to see him again," I said with a complete lack of truth. "Now I'm going home to forget him."

Betty started to speak, looked at me again and thought better of it. Sometimes, she actually knows when I need my space. "Hold on and I'll drive you home, Neida."

"Thanks, but it's a nice night. I'll walk."

"Jack and I'll walk with you."

I kissed her cheek. "Thanks, but I want to be alone. I'm fine. He's just a man, Betty."

"He's special, Neida. We both know that."

That probably explained why we were both depressed because we knew I'd blown the evening big time.

I nodded. "I know but he doesn't think I am."

"Neida—"

"I need to be alone, Bet. Please."

She compressed her lips and bent to kiss my cheek. "Don't worry, Neida. Things have a way of working out."

Not when it came to me and men. Either the men I met didn't believe in God or they wanted to be friends. A woman could only take so much of that before her confidence suffered.

As I started the fifteen-minute walk to my apartment, I promised myself I was not going to sink into despair. A minute into my walk, I noticed a dark car had slowed in front of me. As I drew level with the passenger side of the front door, the window glided down.

Thinking someone wanted directions, I smiled and bent down. The smile froze on my face. Braden sat in the car.

"Can I give you a lift?"

I shook my head. "Thanks, but it's a nice night. I don't live far and as you can see, I can use the exercise," I quipped.

He made a leisurely inspection of my body and I nearly squirmed. What was he thinking? Didn't big guys generally prefer slender women to full-figured ones?

"It is a nice night," he finally agreed.

I waited, but he didn't seem to have anything else to say. Neither did I. I smiled, nodded, and started away.

"Oneida?"

I turned back. "Yes?"

"Are you sure about the lift?"

I nodded. "Positive. Goodbye."

"Good night, Oneida."

I watched him drive off before I resumed walking. "Well that's that," I told myself. "You'll never see him again." *And you don't deserve to. Even Betty won't be able to trick him into another meeting after your lack of grace and charm tonight.*

Chapter Two

At home, I undressed, removed my makeup and slipped into a warm bubble bath. As I lay listening to soft, soothing jazz, I allowed myself the luxury of shedding a few tears before I got ready for bed.

I said a quick prayer and tried to sleep. I lay awake for what felt like hours before I drifted into a restless sleep.

In the morning, I woke feeling tired and depressed.

Instead of preparing for my morning service, I made myself a cup of coffee and sat on the balcony feeling sorry for myself. It was after ten before I got up to take off my pajamas and settled down to clean the bathroom.

Afterwards, I made myself a salad. Seated on the balcony, I ate it, promised myself I couldn't waste any more time thinking about Braden Elkhorn, and felt a sudden sense of calm serenity filling me. My prayers had been answered.

Sighing in relief, I got up as my apartment door bell rang. Expecting to find either Betty or Jack at my door, I was amazed to see Braden Elkhorn on the other side of the door. He had a large, colorful bouquet of flowers and a box of chocolates.

At first I was so happy to see him I nearly flung myself into his arms and kissed him. Then I realized that Betty had struck again. Only the Good Lord knew what she'd said to get him there.

"What are you doing here?" The words popped out before I could stop them. What can I say? When it came to men, I was hopeless. Even if Betty had connived to get him to come, I should have offered up a silent prayer for that second chance and made the best of his presence.

He was nothing if not patient. Instead of turning away, he smiled and extended the flowers. "These are for you. I hope you like them."

He had such a nice smile. A great smile. Having it turned on me, made me feel warm all over. "Thanks. I do. They're beautiful." I took them. "What are you doing here?"

"I was in the neighborhood and I thought you might need help. So here I am."

Who cared how he knew where I lived? He was there. That's all that mattered—unless Betty had said something really outrageous. "Help doing what?" I asked, uncertain if I wanted to hear the answer.

He shrugged his big shoulders, still smiling as if he were delighted to see me. I could really like him and his wonderful smile. "Whatever you happen to be doing. What are you doing and how can I help?"

His smile unnerved me but it was difficult to look away from him. "I'm just about to cook brunch," I stammered. What I wouldn't have given to have on something more attractive than shorts and an old tee-shirt. I cringed when I thought what I must look like to him.

"Great. I'm just in time. I haven't had lunch yet."

"Oh."

"That's your cue, you know." His amazing smile turned into a grin.

Call me crazy, but he managed to infuse such warmth into his smile and voice I suddenly envisioned cooking his breakfast for the rest of our lives. *Get a grip, Neida. It's a smile, not a proposal.*

I stared up at him. "That's my cue to do what?"

"To invite me in to help."

"Can you cook?"

He shook his head. "I can't even boil water without burning it."

"But you're handy in the kitchen?"

"I'm a complete klutz. I'm just as likely to knock all your china over and smash it as I am to be of any help."

"So what you're saying is that you're useless in a kitchen?"

"Absolutely."

Okay, granted, I wasn't always the brightest kid on the block, but I was not stupid. And I was not about to blow another chance with him. "Can't cook and you're likely to break my prize dishes?"

"That's about the size of it."

I smiled and stepped away from the door. "Then you'd better come in."

"Thank you." He stepped inside.

I took a quick breath as I closed the door. Then I turned to face him. "Can I get you anything? A cup of tea, coffee, or lemonade?"

"Homemade?"

"Yes."

"With freshly squeezed lemons?"

"Yes. Would you like a glass?"

"I'd love a glass with lots of ice, please."

I paused and nodded toward the living room. "Make yourself comfortable and I'll bring the lemonade in to you."

"If you don't mind, I'd like to keep you company in the kitchen."

Mind? Who could mind anything he suggested? "I'm kind of fond of my dishes," I said, feigning indecision.

"Oh, come on. I understand you live alone. So what do you need with a full set of dishes? I'll be very careful not to break more than a few of them at a time."

I laughed, surprised at how comfortable I felt flirting with him. Surely that and his presence was a sign from the Lord. "I'm a sucker for a kitchen klutz." I smiled at him.

Did his eyes actually twinkle? Or was I just so star struck I was imagining things? "This way."

I was very conscious of him walking behind me. My confidence built with each passing second. By the time we arrived in the kitchen, I'd decided he liked his view of my rear end.

I pointed to a stool at the island. "Sit and try not to break too many of my dishes."

"I'll do my best." He sat.

I put the flowers in water and the chocolates in the refrigerator before moving over to the range. As I scrambled egg whites and cooked turkey bacon, I could feel his eyes on me. Instead of unnerving me, it emboldened me. Finally, I turned to face him. "You're staring."

"I know." He went right on staring and smiling that smile that made my knees knock and my heart thump like a wild thing in my chest.

I maintained his gaze. "Betty sent you, didn't she?"

He shrugged.

I wondered what his shoulders looked like under his dark suit jacket.

"Does it matter why I'm here?"

Maybe it shouldn't, but it did. At least it did if Betty had tricked him. I nodded. "It might."

"Okay, she asked me to come," he admitted.

"I knew it!" I blushed. What had she said to entice him to come?

"Oh, don't look like that," he went on quickly. "Because it doesn't matter that she asked me to come. I wanted to come anyway."

He sounded so sincere. Surely he was. "Oh? Did you?"

"Look, Oneida, I know I didn't make a very good impression last night."

I stared at him, amazed at his statement. How could he possibly think he hadn't made a good impression? Clearly he didn't know that all he had to do to make a good impression was show up. And turn on that irresistible smile.

"I came here hoping you'd give me another chance," he went on quickly.

I struggled not to gape at him. Finally, I closed my mouth and spoke. "You can only make a first impression once, Braden."

He rose, a dazed look on his face. "Did I do that badly last night?"

That's when I realized he was as uncertain of me as I was of him. Maybe he really had intended to come see me. Maybe he liked his women with dark skin and full-figures. He sure gave that impression.

I smiled at him. "Actually, you made a very good impression."

"Yeah?"

"Yeah. Oooh, yeah." I probably sounded shameless but so what?

He grinned. "That's a relief. I'm not one of those guys who can wow a woman with just a look or a smile."

He'd done just that with me.

"I have to work really hard at getting women to notice me. I was afraid I'd blown it last night. I really meant it when I said I was happy to see you again."

Again. So he had noticed me at the cafe. *Thank you, Lord.* By then I was grinning so widely my lips were in danger of being permanently stretched. I forced myself back down to earth. "I didn't know you and Betty knew each other."

"We don't...didn't."

"Then..." I paused.

"How did we meet?"

I nodded.

"She and Jack came to the hotel where I'm staying and introduced themselves."

I felt the blood heating up my face. I could guess the rest, but I asked anyway. "What did she say to you?"

"She asked me if I believed in the Lord. I do. She also wanted to know if I were married or involved in a serious relationship."

"Are you?"

"No, I'm not."

"Do I dare ask again what she said to you?"

"She said she had a friend she wanted me to meet."

I bit my lip before I took the plunge. "Didn't she ask you if you like full-figured women?"

He nodded. "As a matter of fact she did."

"And you said?"

"That I didn't wish to discuss my preference in women with her." He smiled, but his words stung.

He didn't like large women after all. Which meant he'd probably come because Betty had badgered him or worse yet, he'd felt sorry for me. Still, I had to ask, "Why did you come?"

He looked surprised. "Don't you know?"

"No. That's why I'm asking."

"I had a feeling you were that friend and I wanted to meet you."

"You wanted to meet me or some anonymous friend of Betty's?"

"I wanted to meet you."

"Why?"

He shrugged. "I'd wanted to meet you since I saw you at that café on Monday."

"Why?"

"Why? Have you looked in the mirror lately? You're a beautiful woman, Oneida."

Those simple words were as welcome as any compliment I'd ever heard. But this guy was just too good to be true. No doubt he was on his way out of town. "How long are you in town?"

"Another two or three weeks."

I felt as if I've had the breath knocked out of me. "That's not very long." Did I sound whiney?

"I know. But that's just this go round."

"This go round?" I hesitated. "Is there going to be another go round?"

He nodded, his gaze catching and locking with mine. "My company is probably

going to open a frozen food plant here in a couple of months. Then I'll be relocating here."

"Permanently?"

He inclined his head. "Probably not actually in Haldane, but close enough."

"For what?"

"To break your dishes on a regular basis."

"Oh." I bit down on the inside of my bottom lip to keep from shouting with glee.

"I was hoping we could see each other while I'm breaking your dishes."

Which sure sounded like a plan to me. "That would be...I'd like that," I admitted.

He turned that delightful smile on his on me. "So would I."

I tilted my head to the side and smiled at him. "Are you really interested in vintage model trains?"

He shook his head. "Not really, but I have a feeling I could become quite fond of them. I just need some kind, beautiful person to share some of the finer points of vintage model trains."

"I have quite an extensive collection."

"I'd love to see it."

"It'll take several visits to show you the entire collection," I warned happily, emboldened by his unblinking stare.

"What a coincidence. I have several evenings free."

"Well, in that case, it will be a pleasure to show you my entire collection over the course of several evenings."

"I think that's a pleasure we can share."

I grinned, feeling warm, thankful, and happy. "So, Braden, there's an evening service at church tonight. Would you like to come with?"

"Yes. As a matter of fact, I was disappointed not to see you at service this morning."

The blood rushed to my cheeks. One of these days I'm to going to get a handle on the whole blushing routine. "I'm going tonight," I pointed out.

"And I'm coming with," he said, grinning.

I grinned back. Man is he going to look great in a white tux waiting for me at the end of my church aisle. Was I jumping way ahead? Yes. By miles and bounds. Were my fantasies going to become a reality? I didn't know, but I intended to enjoy them. Especially when I recognized the Lord's loving hand in my life. Was he my Mr. Right? I thought he was and his tender smile suggested he shared my belief.

The breath caught in my throat when he moved across the room to stand near me. He touched my cheek with a gentle finger. "Oneida. Lovely name. Even lovelier woman."

When I lifted my head to look at him, he bent his head and brushed his warm lips against mine. I tingled all the way down to my toes. Pausing only long enough to turn

off the burners, I trailed my hands up his wide chest. With my arms linked around his neck, I returned his warm kiss that stirred my passions in a way that wasn't exactly godly.

Wrapping his arms around me, he proceeded to kiss me breathless.

As I leaned against him, gasping for breath, he whispered something against my ear.

"What?" I murmured, feeling as if I were floating on a happy cloud.

He tipped up my chin and smiled down into my eyes. "I said in case you're wondering, I like my women large, shy and beautiful. Just like you, Oneida. The first time I saw you, I lost my heart."

As I offered him my mouth, eager to share another series of passionate kisses with him, I sent up another silent prayer of thanksgiving. Good things did indeed come to those who trusted in the Lord and followed the path he'd set before them. Good things like handsome, god-fearing Braden Elkhorn who liked his women large, shy and beautiful. I didn't know about beautiful and I wasn't always shy. But boy was I thankful I could do large.

Marilyn Lee Unleashed Presents

Any Time, Any Place

By

Marilyn Lee

Dedication: To the members of Love Bytes. Thanks for your support.

Copyright 2010 Marilyn Lee

All rights reserved

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously and are not to be construed as real. Any resemblance to actual events, locales, organizations, or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced electronically or in print without written permission, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in reviews. Due to copyright laws you cannot trade, sell or give any ebooks away.

She noticed him the moment she entered the condo association meeting. Tall, handsome, and with the distinct look of a Native American hunk, he invoked thoughts of capture romances. He was surrounded by several women whom she suspected were more interested in gazing up into his eyes than they were in discussing proposed changes in the condo fees.

Not that she blamed them. He was the type of man that made a woman very glad to be a female. In fact, if she were half as attractive as the women surrounding him, she'd flirt with him too. She sighed. What she wouldn't give to be tall and slender with mounds of flowing locks like the women vying for his attention. He wasn't likely to be impressed with her five-foot four-inch plump frame, with her brown eyes, dark skin and dark hair.

As if he felt her eyes on him, he turned and looked directly at her. Embarrassed at having been caught staring, she was nonetheless unable to look away. He had a warm dark gaze. He smiled. The corners of her mouth curved upward in response.

He looked briefly away to speak to the women around him. Then she watched in amazement as he came toward her with his hand extended.

"Hi. I'm Seneka Elkhorn."

Nice name. Nice voice. She could easily imagine him whispering sweet nothings in her ear in that deep, velvety voice.

"And you are?" he prompted.

Oh, no! She was staring again. "Autumn Walker."

His eyes lingered on her ringless fingers as they shook hands. "Ah. And is there a Mr. Autumn Walker?"

"No."

"Good."

They grinned at each other.

She was racking her brain for some witty remark that would titillate and entertain him when the association president went to the podium. "Good evening. If you'll find seats, we'll begin."

She bit her lip. "I guess I'd better find a seat."

His hand on her elbow sent a pleasant tingle through her and halted her movement away from him. "Yes, we'd better." He nodded toward two seats near the back of the room. "Join me."

She hesitated. Contemplating flirting with him as they waited for the meeting to start was one thing; but sitting with him might lead her somewhere she'd promised herself she wouldn't go again.

"I won't hurt you," he said softly. "You can trust me."

That was asking a lot. Unhappy high school and college romances had convinced her that love was overrated. Since then she had managed to remain romantically unscathed by channeling all her time and energy into preparing her students for careers in math and science.

Some of her students had done very well. Her work was satisfying. Her life wasn't exciting. It was safe. Safety was important.

His fingers tightened on her elbow. "You can trust me, Autumn."

The assurance sent a rush of excitement through her that made her feel like a daring teenager again. She suspected she could easily lose her heart to him if she wasn't careful. But she'd be careful. And one night wouldn't hurt.

She smiled up at him. "Okay."

He guided her towards the two seats.

Despite her best efforts, she spent the entire meeting wondering if he were as aware of her as she was of him. Each time she cast a quick glance at him, he appeared to be totally engrossed in the meeting. Just her luck. After the meeting, she didn't recall how she'd voted on the proposed condo fees. Who could think of condo business with a big, handsome, Native American hunk smiling down at her?

"Do you have any plans for the rest of the evening, Autumn?"

She shook her head.

"Great. Would you join me for a drink?"

Hell to the yes. She nodded. "I'd love to."

"Patty's all right?" He asked.

She often had coffee or a sandwich at Patty's, a small coffee shop a few blocks from their condo. "Yes."

At Patty, he propped his elbows on the table and fixed his gaze on her face. "How long have you been at Oak Gardens?"

She resisted the urge to smooth her hair and freshen her lipstick. "Six months."

"That long? Why haven't I seen you at any of the other meetings?"

"I'm usually too busy grading papers to attend."

"Grading papers? What does Autumn Walker do for a living?"

She liked the way he called her Autumn Walker. His steady regard allowed her to return his scrutiny without embarrassment. He was certainly worth looking at with sexy dark eyes and dark, silky looking hair? What she couldn't give to lean across the table to stroke her fingers through his hair. What would it look like with the sun shining on it?

"Autumn? What do you do for a living?"

She blinked, dragging her thoughts away from intimacy. "I teach math at community college."

"At last! A woman I can talk numbers to and have her really understand. What a find!" He smiled into her eyes.

She laughed. "What a wonderful man you must be."

His smile turned into a wide grin. "I am rather wonderful. But how did you know?"

"Only a natural born charmer could make the ability to understand numbers sound like a compliment."

"Oh, but it was a compliment."

She nodded, satisfied that he was serious. "What about you, Seneka? What do you do for a living?"

"Nothing as exciting or as rewarding as teaching. I'm a CPA. My partner and I—"

"Your partner? Are you married or involved with anyone?" The unasked question had plagued her from the moment she saw him.

He shook his head slowly. "No."

Thank God. "Why not?"

He shrugged. "For the usual reason."

"Which is what?"

"Don't you know?"

"I know what it would be for me, but not necessarily for a man."

"I haven't met anyone I want to be involved with."

She guessed he was in his early thirties. Surely that was long enough to have fallen in love. "Ever?"

"I married my high school sweetheart when we graduated from college."

"Oh. How sweet. Now you're divorced?"

He sighed, shaking his head. "No. She died two years ago from cancer."

"Oh, I'm sorry." Autumn hesitated. While she didn't want to appear to be insensitive, two years had passed since his wife's death. She hoped that was long enough to have eased his pain." And since then?" She asked gently.

If he were annoyed by her question, he concealed it. "I'm not interested in casual relationships, Autumn."

"Oh. Does that meanwhat does that mean, Seneka? You don't mind if I call you Seneka?"

He grinned. "You can call me anything you like, Autumn."

Including lover? "You haven't answered my question," she reminded him.

"It means that the next woman I ask out will be someone I'd like a serious relationship with."

She barely suppressed a shudder as she thought how exciting a serious relationship with him would be. *Don't read too much into this, girl.* "Oh."

He stared expectantly at her. "Oh? That's it? No more questions? You know, you can ask me anything you like."

But as she remembered all the supermodel type women he must attract, her courage deserted her. "That's very kind, but I'd better get back. I have an early class tomorrow."

His smile vanished and he turned to signal the waiter. "Then I won't keep you."

Twenty minutes later, she was alone in her apartment; telling herself she didn't mind that he hadn't asked her out. Nevertheless, she slept badly, woke late, and had to skip breakfast to make it to work on time.

Her spirits soared when she saw the roses on her desk. She read the card eagerly. "Thanks for lighting up my evening, Seneka."

The euphoria created by his flowers quickly dissipated when he didn't follow them up with a call or an invitation to dinner. Autumn, who'd practically been sitting by her phone for a week in the hope that he'd call, chided herself for being silly and promised to forget him.

Still two weeks later she was standing in the checkout line at the market thinking about him when she felt a tingling sensation along the back of her neck. She turned to find him grinning at her from two checkout aisles away.

Carefully guiding his cart through other shoppers, he joined her in her line. "Hi, Autumn."

"Hi, Seneka."

He smiled down at her. "Beautiful day, isn't it?"

She glanced out the market window at the steady downpour before smiling up at him. "Lovely." She had a feeling that any day spent in his company would be heavenly, regardless of the weather.

"It's a perfect day for a long walk."

"Perfect," she echoed.

"Great. Then you'll come for a walk with me?"

Even though she hated being out in the rain, she nodded eagerly. He made her feel winded and excited without even touching her. If he asked, she'd spend the rest of the week walking with him in the rain. "Oh, yes."

They walked miles in the rain, laughing and discussing everything from books and politics to baseball. She was pleasantly surprised at how similar their views were. They arrived back at the complex just before six. She had fifty papers to grade but she didn't want him to go. "Can I tempt you to come in for a hot cup of herbal tea?"

"Yes, you can." He smiled down at her.

Autumn tingled all over.

He looked very natural sitting in her favorite recliner, she thought as she came into the living room with the tea.

"Please, allow me." He reached for the tray. As he did, his fingers brushed hers. She trembled and blushed. She was annoyed that she couldn't control her involuntary reaction. Worse, she knew by the look in his eyes that he was aware of the affect he had on her.

She started to turn away, but his next words stopped her. "I won't hurt you."

She filled his cup without looking at him. "You keep saying that to me. I don't remember telling you that I was afraid of being hurt."

"You didn't."

She waited for him to continue. When he didn't, she looked up at him. "Then?"

His smile was gentle. "Autumn Walker, you have the most beautiful pair of expressive, brown eyes I've ever had the pleasure of gazing into. You didn't need to say so."

The exhilaration she'd felt since meeting him that day vanished. Looking up into his eyes, she was frightened by the sure knowledge that her feelings for him could easily expose her to the risk of being hurt again. Unless she protected herself in the only way she knew how.

"Are you really very thirsty? I know I asked you in, but I have an awful lot of papers to grade. And I really should get started."

He sighed, shook his head, and got to his feet. "No problem. I'll see myself out."

Now you've done it, she thought miserably, holding his cup against her chest. *You've seen the last of him*. He won't come within a mile of her again. And she had no one to blame but herself.

Her depression vanished the moment the dozen roses arrived just after dinner. "Thanks for a beautiful afternoon, Seneka."

She spent the rest of the evening feeling as if she walked on air. Up early the next morning, she made coffee. Then, eager to see him, she went to his apartment.

He looked perfect even in pajamas with a five o'clock shadow and mussed hair. Everything about him was perfect. Her life would be perfect if he'd only ask her out, she thought, finally admitting to herself that teaching wasn't enough anymore. She wanted this man in her life. Even if it meant exposing herself to the possibility of getting hurt again.

He seemed pleased to see her. "Autumn! What a delightful surprise! Would you like to come in?"

She shook her head. "I just came to thank you for the roses. And to bring you this peace offering." She held out a sixteen-ounce thermos.

He was careful not to touch her fingers as he took the thermos. "Thank you."

"It's fresh brewed coffee. I hope you like it."

He smiled. He did that a lot. "I'm sure I will."

"I'm sorry I was rude yesterday"

"Did you love him?"

She stared at him, confused. "Did I love who?"

"The man who hurt you," he said gently.

She bit her lip. She didn't enjoy having her pain on display for all to see. "I'd rather not talk about it."

"Does it still hurt?"

She shook her head. "No."

"I'm glad to hear that."

She opened her mouth to ask him to have dinner with her, but didn't. What if he said no? "Well, I'll see you around," she said instead. She walked quickly across the hall to the elevator.

She pushed the UP button, and then realized she was being foolish. What if he said yes? She turned to find him still standing in his doorway, watching her. "Was there something else, Autumn?"

"No. Yes."

His smile was encouraging. "You know, Autumn, I hardly ever bite anymore."

She laughed nervously. "It's nothing."

"Nothing?"

"Yes. Well, I just wondered if you'd like to have dinner with me. Nothing fancy. I thought maybe we could..."

"I'd love to have dinner with you. When?"

His smile and tone reassured her. "I meant tonight. At six. My place. Is that okay?"

"Yes."

"Great!" She blew her breath out in an audible sigh. "So I'll see you later then?"

"Count on it."

The elevator opened behind her. She backed onto it, still grinning at him.

After a quick breakfast, she spent the rest of the day cleaning the apartment, preparing dinner, and dressing. When she was satisfied with her efforts, she picked up the phone. "I'd like to send a dozen yellow roses to a Mr. Seneka Elkhorn. I'd like the card to say, 'I'm not afraid. Ask me out already. Autumn.'"

After she'd ordered the flowers she worried that he'd think her too bold. She was tempted to cancel them, but decided against it. After all, nothing ventured, nothing gained.

Nevertheless, she was nervous when he arrived that night. "I hope you don't think it was forward of me to send the flowers," she blurted out before he could speak.

"Forward?" His smile sent a jolt of warmth through her. "It was great. I've never had flowers from a woman. They were beautiful, Autumn. And so are you."

He took her hands in his and held them against his chest, making her heart beat so fast she was breathless. "You've filled my thoughts since the moment I saw you. Will you please go out with me?"

"Only if you'll promise to whisper sweet nothings in my ear," she said, emboldened by the adoring look in his eyes.

His response, murmured warm and low against her lips, was delightfully satisfying, "Any time, any place."

The End.

If you enjoy the sweet version and want to read the longer, erotic version, based on this sweet version, read, *Loving Large—Yours, Only And Always*, available in Kindle format, Adobe PDF, Microsoft Lit, and Mobipockets PRC. *Loving Large—Yours, Only And Always* is an erotic romance intended only for adults.

Marilyn Lee's Booklist:

[Marilyn Lee Unleashed](#)

Soul Mates

Falling For Sharde

Daughters of Takira II—Kyla's Awakening

Large, Shy And Beautiful

Where You Find It
Naughty Girls, Inc – No Commitment Required
Loving Large – Yours, Only And Always
The Quest – Hunter's Passion
Daughters of Takira – One Night In Vegas
Daughters of Takira II--Kyla's Awakening
Any Time Any Place

Red Rose Publishing

Betrayed By Love
Song of Desire
It Had To Be You
Tempting Neal
In Blood And Worth Loving
Eye of the Beholder
Night Heat
Summer Storm
Skin Deep

Ellora's Cave

Night of Sin

Bloodlust series:

Conquering Mikhel Dumont
The Talisman
The Taming Serge Dumont
Forbidden Desires
Nocturnal Heat
Midnight Shadows
All In The Family

Moonlight series:

Moonlight Desire
Moonlight Whispers

Long Line of Love series:

Night of Desires
Love Out Loud
Only One Love

Teacher's Pet
Trina's Afternoon Delight
Branded
Road To Rapture
The Fall of Troy
Full Bodied Charmer
Breathless In Black
Playing With Fire
White Christmas
Quest II – Divided Loyalties
Quest III – Return to Volter

Changeling Press

Moonlight Madness
Bloodlust – Nighttime Magic

Loose-id

Fantasy Knights
Fantasy Knights 2 – Endless Love
The Dare
Dream Lover
Nice Girls Do

Marilyn's homepage: <http://www.marilynlee.org>

Email: marilynlee@marilynlee.org

Marilyn's Bio:

Award winning author Marilyn Lee lives, works, and writes on the East Coast. In addition to thoroughly enjoying writing erotic romances, she enjoys roller-skating, spending time with her large, extended family, and rooting for all her hometown sports teams. Her other interests include collecting Doc Savage pulp novels from the thirties and forties and collecting Marvel comics from the seventies and eighties (particularly Thor and The Avengers). Her favorite TV shows are forensic shows, westerns (Gunsmoke and Have Gun, Will Travel are particular favorites), mysteries (loves the old Charlie Chan mysteries. Her all time favorite mystery movie is probably Dead,

Again), and nearly every vampire movie or television show ever made (Forever Knight and Count Yorga, Vampire are favorites).

Marilyn has won numerous writing accolades, including a CAPA award for Bloodlust: Conquering Mikhel Dumont and the following Lub-Dubs Awards for 2009: Lifetime Achievement Award, In Blood And Worth Loving (Best erotic novel and best sci-fi/fantasy/paranormal Award).

She loves to hear from readers who can email her at Mlee2057@AOL.com or who can visit her website, marilynlee.org. She has a Yahoo! Group called Love Bytes that readers can join by sending an email to: marilynlee-subscribe@yahoogroups.co