

Satisfying Sophie Ava McKnight

Sophie has never had an orgasm. Too much guilt and a horrific teenage tragedy have left her self-conscious about her body. But her two roommates and best friends, Sam and Jordan, find Sophie beyond desirable. Together, they set a steamy seduction into play that awakens Sophie's passion...and her love for Sam.

Both men are more than willing to help satisfy her sexually. To finally free herself from the pains of the past and accept love in her life, Sophie must reveal her darkest secret to Sam. And hope he returns her love, even knowing her deepest flaws. An Ellora's Cave Romantica Publication



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Satisfying Sophie

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SATISFYING SOPHIE

Ava McKnight

Acknowledgements

We all have something about our bodies that we find imperfect. I was a competitive athlete in my youth and grew up with gymnasts' thighs. A necessary evil, because without the strong muscles, I wouldn't have won my meets. My mother, God bless her, used every opportunity presented to remind me of this. To tell me that, if I didn't have strong thighs, I wouldn't be the fastest runner in my class and wouldn't be able to execute the tumbling routines that won me first place every time I competed as a gymnast. She was always the champion of my thighs, and I am forever grateful to her for putting a positive spin on what I considered a huge body flaw.

In *Satisfying Sophie*, my heroine has an infinitely more horrific flaw than gymnasts' thighs. Unfortunately, Sophie didn't have a mother like mine, and so she's struggled with her imperfection in ways that have deeply impacted her life.

Facing and accepting your flaws is a powerful and courageous thing to do, made all the more beautiful when there's someone in your corner cheering you on, as Sam and Jordan do for Sophie.

I hope you find their friendship and love for each other as moving as I did. And special thanks to my mother for always being my biggest fan. I love you with all my heart.

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Chapter One

"I don't think this is going to work out between us, Sophie."

She wasn't surprised by Mark Holland's words, yet Sophie Jensen still crossed her arms over her chest in a defensive way. Or maybe it was plain old-fashioned insecurity. Squinting her eyes against the late-afternoon sun, she said, "Just like that, huh?"

Mark sighed. "Come on, Sophie. We've had some good times together, I'll admit. And there's no doubt you're great for my career. You're the perfect date for fundraisers and client dinners. You're smart and pretty and everyone adores you. But that's all surface stuff. If we were to stay together, I'd need...*more*."

Meaning sex. Obviously there was too much talking and not enough fucking in their relationship.

Okay, there wasn't *any* fucking in their relationship.

Sophie cringed, though she'd known this moment would inevitably come. She hated how familiar it was to her.

"I told you I'm not ready for more. Not yet." She needed additional time with him. Needed to know him better, trust him completely. Five weeks of intermittent dating wasn't enough for her to lose her inhibitions and share her secrets.

"Look, I'm not holding anything against you, Sophie. It's just that... I don't understand *why* you're not ready after all this time." He looked duly contrite as he added, "It may seem shallow to you, but physical intimacy is important to me. I need it in a relationship. Plain and simple."

"Of course." Most normal people felt the same way. Clearly she wasn't normal. But she understood where he was coming from even if she wasn't on the same page with him.

Mark wasn't the first man to tell her it was difficult to be romantically involved when she wouldn't let him touch her intimately. She'd never allowed anyone to see her naked or touch her lower back unless it was fully covered, for fear they'd discover the long, thin scars that ran along the lower portion. She couldn't bring herself to mention them, not even now, when it could potentially buy her more time with Mark. He was compassionate enough to listen to her and would likely understand her predicament. Be sensitive to her feelings and insecurities.

For a moment, she considered sharing this dark side of her. But then she feared he'd pity her and Sophie couldn't live with that. So she remained silent.

Continuing on, Mark said, "I don't see anything changing between us anytime soon. So..."

She fought back the sting of his words—his rejection—despite the fact that she'd already prepared herself for this moment. Hadn't expected it to come just yet, considering how well they'd gotten along these past several weeks, but still. She wasn't an idiot. She understood the male sex drive perfectly well. Her two roommates were men, and while Sam was relatively discreet about his affairs, Jordan wasn't the least bit shy when it came to his sexual exploits.

She wouldn't hold a grudge against Mark, yet she couldn't help but wonder when mere dating had gotten so complicated. In high school and college it had been easy to build relationships without the physical aspect coming into play so quickly. Nowadays, though, it was difficult to find a guy who didn't want sex right off the bat.

Admittedly, Sophie was surprised her relationship with Mark had lasted this long sans intercourse. However, as much as she enjoyed his company, she wasn't ready to make love to him—not even to salvage what had the potential to be a companionable relationship.

Accepting the inevitable, she unfolded her arms and gave a slight shrug of her shoulders. "Well, then. I guess this is the part where I tell you it was nice knowing you."

Satisfying Sophie

Really, there was no valid argument to pursue. No reason to try to change Mark's mind. Too bad he'd decided to drop this bombshell after a fun day of playing flag football with Sam and Jordan on the beach and just before dinner. Now she'd have to explain to her roommates why they were minus one this evening.

"Soph..." Mark said, his tone tinged with regret. He reached a hand out to her, but she stepped away from him. He shook his head at her. His voice was sharper as he said, "I'm sorry, Sophie. I just can't be with someone who doesn't like to be touched."

The pain his words inflicted on her psyche felt hypocritical. She couldn't blame him. *Wouldn't* blame him. He had a perfectly acceptable reason for dumping her. All of her past boyfriends did. Yet she continually held out hope that one of them would find something special about two-way witty banter and similar career goals and aspirations. Special enough to keep them together, at least a while longer. Long enough for her to discover if one of them was the right man with whom to share her secret.

But alas, all roads led to the bedroom. And that was a place Sophie felt wholly uncomfortable. For good reason, sure. But she was the only one who knew about that. Though she'd undergone counseling for the emotional scars, she was still self-conscious about the physical ones.

Watching as Mark backed his flashy silver Jag out of the driveway and sped off toward the Pacific Coast Highway, she acknowledged the slight while at the same time accepting responsibility for her role in the derailed romance. She'd known this day would come, had reached this outcome in enough relationships to accept it for what it was and move on.

Entering the beach house she shared with Sam Houston and Jordan Cooper, she tried to find that happy place within. Check the hurt feelings at the door and embrace the good vibes inside the beach house that she loved. Finding her two best friends out on the back deck, she put on a happy face, smiling cheerfully as she stepped through the patio doors. It wasn't difficult to feign indifference over another botched romance. She'd been doing it since she was eighteen years old. And the sight of Sam and Jordan bustling about as the sun set and the waves crashed on the beach reminded her of all the positive things in her life.

She had two of the best friends a girl could ever wish for and that helped to make up for the lack of intimacy in her life.

"Hey, Soph," Sam greeted her as he flipped burgers on the grill.

Jordan set the large wooden table. It was early summer and the breeze blowing off the ocean made the evenings cool enough for a lightweight sweater. Sophie slipped one over her head, covering her T-shirt. Then she poured three glasses of wine, handing one to Sam as he tended the grill. He and Jordan had become her closest friends years ago and she was accustomed to sharing just about everything with them. So when Sam asked where Mark had gone, Sophie told him the truth.

"We broke up. Apparently my sunny disposition and quick wit aren't enough to hold a man's interest for long." Sam looked at her askance, his pale green eyes glowing as warm as the setting sun. Sophie forced a light lilt to her voice. "What can I say? Turns out I'm a huge disappointment in the bedroom."

Sam nearly choked on his sip of wine. "Jesus, Soph." He set his glass down and went back to work on the burgers and chicken, coating the latter with a spicy sauce he'd concocted.

Jordan joined them. "Guy's an ass," he said simply.

Sophie smiled at Jordan, her biggest fan. They'd been friends since their first year at UCLA and he was now her business partner. He was fiercely protective of her, though no more so than Sam.

"It's not his fault," she admitted. It was only natural that Mark would want more than hand-holding as their relationship progressed. Yes, it would be nice if she could just fuck him, thereby breaking through all of the barriers that held her back. Clearly that wasn't something she was capable of doing. "Mark isn't to blame, so please don't hate him for breaking up with me."

Satisfying Sophie

Neither of her friends said anything and she knew why. Despite her words, they wanted to berate Mark for dumping her, but knew Sophie cared enough about him that it would make her feel worse if they trashed him.

Sam and Jordan were good friends. She trusted them implicitly. There was only one thing she wouldn't share with them and that was the scars on her back. If they knew, it would lead to questions and she'd have to provide an explanation she was still incapable of sharing with anyone. Not even her dearest friends.

When they sat down to dinner, Sam asked, "So, what? He didn't turn you on?"

Sophie knew what he was getting at. Sam was wondering why, after five weeks of amiable companionship, she and Mark wouldn't be having enough sex to keep the man happy. And he was too good a friend to think it was Mark who hadn't been interested.

She regarded Sam for a moment, grateful she had such wonderful, supportive people in her life. They were the reason Sophie didn't mind too much when her shortlived romances fizzled out. She always had Sam and Jordan waiting for her at home. An evening with either or both of them was infinitely more fulfilling than an evening with any other man she'd ever known.

Perhaps that was the real reason why she'd never confided in her boyfriends. She couldn't imagine telling anyone else about her scars before she'd shared her hellish past with her best friends. An interesting epiphany she contemplated as her gaze shifted from one man to the other.

To Sophie, Sam was simply too handsome for words, with black as night hair and mesmerizing light green eyes. Tall and athletic, he easily turned heads. Like she and Jordan, he had a perpetual tan because they lived on the beach in Malibu. He was brilliant and successful—owned the house in which they all lived, in fact—but what she found most appealing about Sam was his quiet, commanding presence. He had the innate ability to calm her nerves. Steady her. At the same time, one smile from Sam could light up her insides like a Fourth of July night sky.

Then there was Jordan, whose looks strongly contrasted Sam's. He could be a rock star, Sophie always thought, with his too-long sandy-brown hair that was perfectly mussed, as though he'd just taken a wild tumble in bed with one of his all-too-willing female admirers. He had a boyish charm and was lean-muscled with a chiseled visage and eyes that looked like melted dark chocolate.

As if all that weren't enough to make a girl weak in the knees, according to his many lovers, Jordan was very well-endowed. Given that each bedroom in the house had its own bathroom, Sophie had never had the opportunity to bump into him coming or going from the shower to "accidentally" see for herself if his cock really was a tribute to the Chrysler building. But the bulge in his Levi's hinted at the potential.

Shaking that thought from her head, she eyed Sam over the rim of her wineglass, not missing the consternation on his ruggedly handsome face. He had trouble masking his emotions as a rule, and Sophie could tell he was pissed about Mark—blamed him for the breakup even though she'd told him not to.

She said, "Whether or not Mark turned me on wasn't really the issue." Mark was an extremely attractive man, well-educated and refined. Of course he turned her on. "The problem was – *always is* – me. I'm just not into sex."

Both Sam and Jordan stared at her across the table, incredulous looks on their faces. Somehow Sophie knew this was a topic they weren't going to let drop, so she rushed on. "Okay, yes, I would like to enjoy a good fuck from time to time, like the rest of the human population. The problem is...I just don't get much satisfaction out of it. So I can't fault Mark. And I don't want you guys to, either."

Sophie never deluded herself when it came to romantic relationships. She didn't believe she'd ever find the kind of true love that would lead to marriage. Sex was a huge part of romance and if she wasn't able to give someone what they needed in the bedroom, well then... She suspected she didn't have much of a love life to look forward to.

Thank God Jordan was so dedicated to their graphic design and advertising business—and such a playboy—that he wasn't looking to settle down with one woman anytime soon. And Sam, three years their senior at age twenty-seven, was still set in his bachelor ways. The three of them could continue to be a happy little family a while longer before the guys paired up with wives and Sophie moved out on her own.

Jordan was still staring at her, shocked by the apparent bombshell she'd dropped on the table. "Sophie Jensen," he said in an almost chastising tone, "with a body like yours, how could you *not* enjoy fucking?"

She laughed. Leave it to Jordan to be so fixated with sex—and her body. "It's my Catholic upbringing," she told them. A partial truth. "Too much guilt associated with sex."

Jordan's jaw fell slack as he seemed to process this surprising revelation. But Sam looked deeply disturbed. "Come on, be serious," he said.

"I am. I'm not a virgin, but..."

"But what?" Sam demanded, clearly taken aback and...disappointed over her lack of sexual experience?

Her cheeks burned and she wondered how they'd gotten this far into the conversation. They'd never really talked about sex when it was directly related to her.

With a sigh and a huge amount of embarrassment, she told them, "I've never had an orgasm. When you don't know what you're missing out on, you really don't...miss it."

Sam set aside his wine. He leaned back in his chair and stared at her for a moment. Jordan's dark brown eyes seemed to roll into the back of his head. Sophie groaned. She'd just opened a very large can of worms.

"Not even, you know, alone?" Sam inquired.

Sophie shook her head. "Lord, no. Talk about guilt. That's the kind of selfindulgence that'll send you straight to hell."

"Oh come on!" Jordan snorted. "No one thinks like that anymore!"

"They do when they're raised by a small-town, narrow-minded minister who was a former Catholic priest."

"I forgot about that," Sam muttered, as though he were trying to put pieces of a puzzle together. "Still." He speared her with a serious look. "You're twenty-four and not a virgin. And Jordan's right. You've got a body that was made for sin. So what's the hang-up?"

She pulled in a deep breath. Not just because the subject matter was so damn uncomfortable. Mostly, Sam had her off-kilter with his assessment of her body. She really hadn't thought he'd ever noticed. It wasn't like she stood out in a crowd, particularly with her need to keep herself sufficiently covered up so no one saw or felt her scars. Apparently her roommates had seen enough of her, though, to draw their own conclusions.

While the compliments from both Sam and Jordan were flattering and a bit heartwarming, they made her all-too-aware of what else she'd been covering up. Her innate sensuality. It was buried deep, along with her childhood hopes and dreams of living a fairy-tale life. A happily-ever-after ending to a beautiful romance she'd never experience.

Sophie had packed away all the fantasies little girls had of finding their Prince Charming and being the star of a wedding that would make Cinderella green with envy. She didn't dress to catch men's attention. Didn't speak provocatively or flirt or bat her eyes. No, all of Sophie's dates had been won over by her intelligent conversation, knowledge of current events and quick wit. The men she dated were more apt to tell her she was amazingly funny, rather than drop-dead gorgeous. But now that Sam and Jordan had brought up her body...

Oh what does it matter?

She could be the hottest thing since Angelina Jolie. It wouldn't change who she was on the inside. It wouldn't change how messed up her emotions were when it came to the scars on her back, wouldn't take away her fear of them being revealed and her having to explain their presence.

"So what, you faked it with Mark?" Jordan persisted. "Or did he just not care enough to notice you weren't getting off?"

This time, it was Sophie's eyes that rolled. Leave it to Jordan to get into the weeds. Get down to the nitty-gritty that didn't even exist.

"I didn't have to fake it," she admitted. "We never had sex. Never even made it as far as foreplay."

"Wow." Sam whistled under his breath. He reached for his wine. Clearly she'd rendered him speechless. No easy feat.

"Christ, Soph," Jordan said. "That's too damn bad."

"Yeah," she agreed in a quiet voice. If she could just get past this massive insecurity, she might be able to keep a guy longer than five weeks. But the truth was, it was easier not to be intimately involved with a man than it was to explain her scars, both physical and emotional.

"I don't get it," Sam finally admitted with a shake of his head. "I mean, Jordan's right. You're a knockout, Soph. And passionate about everything you do. I'd never take you for the type to have a hang-up about sex."

She shrugged. "Everyone's got their issues. You fear commitment and Jordan fears Daddy Long Legs."

"Hey!" He gave her a playful punch on the arm. "That's supposed to be *our* secret. They are poisonous, you know?"

"They can't bite you, Jordan!" she said with a laugh.

"Yeah, but they're damn creepy."

"You're such a pussy!"

"Speaking of," Sam interjected.

Sophie's gaze snapped in his direction. "Sam!"

"Back to this sex issue and your inability to have an orgasm. I can't imagine – "

"Please." She groaned, sufficiently mortified. "Do we really have to talk about this?"

It wasn't like she hadn't tried a little self-fulfillment over the years. Lord, had she tried! Buried under the covers in her bed—rationalizing God would give her a little privacy and spare some of the shame that besieged the good little Catholic girl trying to masturbate—she'd fondle her breasts. Pinch the nipples until they were hard. Her cunt would ache with the need to be filled. She'd stroke her labia, caressing slowly until she was wet. Then she'd play with her clit, experimenting with a circular motion or a light pinch. As the tension increased and the tingly sensations spread throughout her body, she'd pick up the pace. Slide a finger deep into her wet cunt. All the while fantasizing in her mind that it was the boyfriend du jour who was working so hard to get her off.

Unfortunately, every time Sophie felt the pressure build and she got oh-so-close to releasing years' worth of pent-up sexual frustration, she simply shut down.

It was seriously depressing to know she couldn't bring pleasure to her own body. But so much of her past held her back in the present.

"Forget I mentioned any of this," she said, knowing it'd only get worse from here. "It's not something I want to talk about."

Sam eyed her for a moment and she would love to have been able to crawl inside his head and hear all the thoughts running rampant through his mind. Without having to answer any of his questions, of course.

She bit into her hamburger. They ate dinner in silence until Sam had the good grace to change the subject. Though she loved him just a little more for letting her off the hook, she knew the respite wouldn't last long.

When Sam and Jordan latched onto something, they rarely ever let it go...

Chapter Two

Sam had a date with Bridget Carlton two nights later. Not so much a date, really. They did what Mark and Sophie had done – take each other along on business functions because of amiable compatibility and social aptitude. Having a sophisticated, successful person on one's arm had the fantastic capability of increasing one's worth in the eyes of one's superiors.

Sophie was really just the princess of arm candy—Bridget was, hands down, the reigning queen. She was a real estate broker who represented multimillion-dollar properties. Since Sam was a real estate lawyer, Bridget was the perfect date when Sam encountered opportunities to advance his career.

"Hey, Bridge," Sophie said as she opened the front door. "Sam'll be down in a minute." Bridget liked it when Sam sent a car for her, then stopped by the house to pick him up. Sophie hadn't figured out the reason for this, but had a niggling suspicion it had something to do her wanting to see Jordan.

Bridget followed Sophie into the living room.

"Wine?" she offered.

"Champagne, if you've got a bottle open."

Of course Sophie didn't, but that was of little consequence. Bridget was Sam's date. Sophie wouldn't deny her a choice of beverage. Besides, she and Jordan could finish the bottle after Bridget and Sam left. She pulled out all the stops, popping the cork on an expensive bottle of Taittinger, knowing Bridget would appreciate it and Sam would reap the benefit. They were friends, after all.

Sophie handed Bridget a glass, then took a sip from hers.

Bridget towered over her by several inches. She was almost as tall as Sam, who crested six-two. Bridget's blonde hair was smooth and glossy and fell in a perfect

curtain over one shoulder. Her long, lean body had been made for haute couture. She wore a liquid gold Versace gown that dripped provocatively on her lithe frame, making Sophie feel like a little girl in her simple lavender summer dress and matching sandals.

She'd pulled her dark brown hair back in a sleek ponytail to keep it from becoming an unruly mess of wayward curls in the summer humidity. Though Sophie had picked up style tips from Bridget over the years, she still felt as though she blended into the woodwork when statuesque Bridget walked into the room.

"I heard you and Mark split," Bridget said after a sip of champagne.

"Bad news travels as fast as good, I see."

"Faster, I think. Really, it's unfortunate for Mark. I ran into Justin Davenport at the Yacht Club last weekend and he told me you were a riot at the Davenport Benefit and it helped Mark to land a few exclusive accounts. He said you were an 'absolute delight'. Quite the compliment coming from Justin."

"How nice of him," she said, though remembering the evening of the benefit made her breakup with Mark all the more real. And painful. Not because she was in love with him. Likely her melancholy was due to the fact that she was alone. Again.

Shaking off her glum, she said to Bridget, "Mark and I weren't compatible, that's all." She hated that she had to explain to yet another person why they were no longer a couple. She only hoped Bridget wouldn't press her and ask what happened. Sophie had no desire to get into the "no sex" issue with Bridget, a woman who had no qualms about dropping her panties and going at it on a moment's notice. She was reputed to have discerning taste, but she fucked without reservation. No regrets. No insecurities. No second thoughts. Bridget clearly lived for the moment and enjoyed her sexual prowess.

Sophie couldn't imagine sex without regret or guilt. Even more elusive was the idea of sex without her insecurities getting the best of her.

Christ, it was impossible not to stiffen up when someone hugged her.

Satisfying Sophie

Not that Sophie hadn't managed to find a few clever ways to keep her back protected – off limits, really – while having sex. But she'd only felt comfortable getting away with it a couple of times, with one-night stands. Unfortunately, she'd obsessed over whether or not the man she was with would touch her back and feel the soft rise of the scars through her lingerie, so she hadn't even enjoyed the interludes. Hence her misadventures in the Land of Orgasms.

Bridget eyed her over the rim of her champagne flute, as though wondering how much information she could pull from Sophie about her failed romance. "Sam didn't give me any particulars." She paused, waiting for Sophie to fill in the gaps. When no juicy details were forthcoming, Bridget forged on. "Quite frankly, I think you're better off without Mark. He's kind of dry, you know? You've got way too much personality for a guy like that."

Sophie accepted the compliment with a smile. She touched the rim of her Baccarat crystal flute to Bridget's.

Ever the knight in shining armor, Sam made his grand entrance before Bridget could dig any deeper. Sophie's breath caught at the sight of him, looking more handsome in a tux than any James Bond actor ever had. She watched how Bridget offered him her cheek in a regal fashion. She was good. Aloof, yet alluring. Coy, yet ohso available for the right man. Bridget was one of those women who looked as though she didn't want to be mussed up, but who was actually quite wild in the bedroom. Sophie knew this from personal experience. Sam's room was down the hall from hers, after all. Bridget could make the rafters quake when she came.

Sophie often wondered what it would be like to be so uninhibited and vocal. To let go completely and lose herself in the moment. Be so consumed by erotic sensations and electrifying feelings that she felt the overwhelming need to scream her pleasure at the top of her lungs.

But then she reminded herself she would never experience those things, would never be the person to let go of her inhibitions, so what was the point of fantasizing about it?

Making matters worse, she felt a hint of jealousy creep up her spine as Sam refreshed Bridget's glass and poured one for himself while they talked about the evening ahead of them. As much as Sophie liked Bridget, she knew Bridget wasn't the woman for Sam and, for a moment, Sophie kind of regretted he was going out with her. Not that it had anything to do with Sophie. Still, she hoped Sam wouldn't bring her home with him tonight. She wasn't in the mood to listen to rafter-shaking sex and she'd misplaced her headphones since the last time Bridget had spent the night.

She was relieved when Jordan joined them in the living room. He crossed to the wet bar to retrieve the bottle of champagne and another glass. Sophie was ready for a refill and he obliged her before tipping the bottle to his glass. She noticed that Bridget's eyes followed Jordan as he strolled back over to the bar to return the bottle to its chiller.

Interesting.

Sam engaged Bridget in conversation until they'd finished their cocktails. Sophie's envious feelings didn't dissipate and she knew why. Her breakup with Mark left her vulnerable to her insecurities, yes. But being single again forced her to, once more, face the crush she'd had on Sam since the day they'd met. It was much easier to ignore it – to tuck it away with all those little-girl fantasies – when she was involved with someone. Thoughts of how to keep a romance alive sans sex consumed her mind and being "on" nonstop to prove she was a laugh riot in hopes of distracting a boyfriend from wanting to get naked with her was practically a full-time job. Leaving little time to pine away over something that would never be.

Bummer that her attraction to Sam returned now that she and Mark had split.

Despite her better judgment-what was the point of torturing herself further anyway?-when Sam whisked Bridget off to this evening's gala, Sophie turned to Jordan and asked, "Do you think there's something serious between those two and they've just been downplaying it all these years?"

A loaded question because Sophie feared the answer.

Jordan's outrageous laughter surprised her. Panic gripped her as she considered whether or not he was on to her. Did he know about her secret crush?

"What's so funny?" she asked before draining her second glass of champagne.

Jordan returned to the wet bar and popped the cork on another bottle. "Let's get drunk," he said with a mischievous grin as he refilled her glass.

"Answer my question, please."

"Come on, Soph," he said with a twinkle in his chocolate-colored eyes. "This is Bridget we're talking about. Keeping a hairstylist for more than two sessions is too much of a commitment for her. She likes being on Sam's arm, he likes that she can carry on a conversation with his associates while also dazzling the pants off them. He lands clients because of her. It's a mutually beneficial partnership."

"Sort of like with Mark," she said as she plopped onto the leather sofa. "Only...without the added benefit at the end of the evening."

"Something like that," Jordan said.

She eyed him for a moment, noting the brief clenching of his jaw. Sophie was suddenly very curious about Bridget's interest in him. Feeling the beginning of a very promising champagne buzz, she had the nerve to ask, "Have you and Sam ever been with the same woman?"

"You mean dated one after the other did, or been with her at the same time?"

"The latter."

Jordan grinned, despite his earlier – albeit brief – consternation. "Once."

"Bridget?" Sophie ventured.

He nodded. "Last year. We were all out on Sam's boat. You were at some charity event or something with one of your boy toys."

"Ha, ha," she quipped. Then added, "Exactly how does a ménage a trios come about anyway?"

Jordan shrugged in apparent nonchalance. "It was Bridget's idea."

Of course it was. The woman had no shame.

"And how...?" Sophie waved a hand in the air, trying to pose the question casually without actually having to say words that would make her cheeks ignite again. When Jordan's brow crooked and the corner of his mouth lifted, she knew he wouldn't make this easy for her. With a sigh of resignation, she asked, "How did you...you know...do it?"

Jordan sat down on the couch next to her. "You really want to know about this?" His eyes challenged her. She didn't break the gaze as she nodded. Though she did swallow down a healthy lump of embarrassment over her prying—and the subject matter. It occurred to her this might be stepping over a boundary she ought to steer clear of. Would pursuing this line of conversation change things between all four of them?

She considered this as Jordan studied her, as though he knew her internal debate. Maybe wondered himself how divulging this dirty little secret he shared with Bridget and Sam would reflect upon them or impact their relationships.

Sophie wasn't one to judge. In fact, in many ways she envied those who had the ability to put their sexuality out there, to be uninhibited and unapologetic when making love. To enjoy sex without all the guilty, uptight feelings and physical distractions that plagued her.

Jordan was that way. And, true to form, he dove right into the ménage conversation. No one would ever accuse *him* of having hang-ups when it came to sex. Or even just talking about it.

"In this particular instance, it was a blatant setup. Bridget left no doubt as to what she wanted. She brought the Scotch and her thong bathing suit bottoms—and nothing

Satisfying Sophie

else. She spent most of the afternoon sprawled out on the deck, topless. I drank the Scotch. Sam sailed."

"Quite the temptress," Sophie whispered under her breath. She'd been out on Sam's boat a million times, always with a shirt on or a tankini that covered her back. It was impossible for her to go topless.

As the visual image of Bridget sunning herself on Sam's boat formed in her mind, she asked herself a very important question. *Would you do it if you could?*

Not the ménage, of course. Good Lord, she couldn't bring herself to have sex with one man, let alone two! And at the *same* time! *As if*!

But was she daring enough to go topless...if, hypothetically, she didn't have the scars. Or if, hypothetically, Sam knew about them and they didn't disgust him beyond all belief. Would she do something bold and sexy to capture his attention? To turn him on and let him know without doubt that Bridget wasn't the only one who wanted him?

She considered this as she sipped her champagne. She wanted to believe she'd strip down for Sam. Entice him with her bare breasts and a suggestive smile.

But knew it'd never happen.

She let out a sigh as reality blew in and swept away even a hint of fantasy. Leaving her a little cold and a lot frustrated.

"What happened next?" she asked Jordan.

This was what her life had come to – living vicariously through her roommates and the women they shared.

Terrific.

Jordan gave her a skeptical look. "This doesn't make you uncomfortable?"

"Why would it?" She downed a big gulp of champagne, forgetting it was fizzy. She spurted and coughed as the bubbles tickled her nose and throat. "Okay, yes it does," she said when she'd recovered. "But I'm...curious."

Why, she had no idea. It wasn't like hearing about Sam with another woman was going to propel her into action. If that were the case, she'd have faced this demon a long time ago.

What possessed her to continue down this path tonight was still a mystery to her.

Clearing her throat, she said, "Maybe this is good for research purposes. You know, I just might get laid again someday. It'll be helpful to know what the sexually active expect in these modern times."

Jordan laughed. "Missionary hasn't gone out of style, sweetheart."

"Maybe not, but who wants vanilla sex when they can have Neapolitan?"

Jordan grinned sweetly at her. "You're totally missing the point."

"There's a point here? Oh please, do tell."

"You're putting way too much emphasis on what you think you *should* be doing. You don't have to have wild sex or offer a threesome to please a guy, Soph. It's important that you enjoy yourself and you can't do that if you're trying to keep up with the Bridgets of the world."

"Dear God, please do not give me the 'there are girls you marry and there are girls you fuck' lecture. Because clearly I don't fit into either category."

"You're being melodramatic."

"I'm entitled."

He shook his head in apparent exasperation. "You don't have to change who you are to fit Mark's ideal of the perfect girlfriend."

She speared him with a look. "It's not just Mark and you know it." Nice that he was trying to spare her feelings, but it was a little late in the day for that. And besides, Jordan was her best friend. If he couldn't "tell her like it is", who could? "Be a pal," she said. "Humor me."

"And tell you what, Soph? That Bridget seduced us both? It's what she's good at, it's what she does. Some women need more than one man. Some women like it dirty and impersonal. You don't have to be that way, Soph. It's not who you are."

"How can it be impersonal when she's friends with you guys? I mean, there should be more to it than just sex."

"I love it when you prove my point for me, sweetheart." He leaned toward her to give her a quick peck on the cheek. "We're acquaintances to Bridget. You don't see us inviting her over to play flag football or have dinner on the deck, do you? The only time we really associate with her is when it benefits her, or Sam's business. Bridget decided she wanted us both and she had us both. That was it. One time. And we've never discussed it since. It was just sex, Sophie. Porn sex, to be honest."

She eyed him closely. "Why do I get the feeling this bugs you?"

"It doesn't bug me," he said as he reached for the bottle. "Well, okay, maybe a little. I mean, don't get me wrong. It was fucking hot!" He shot her an excited look. "But it was just sex. Sometimes that's all a person needs, but it's a temporary fix. Fleeting satisfaction."

"Because there was nothing intimate about it?"

He nodded. "Neither Sam nor I are interested in settling down just yet, but that doesn't mean we don't want to have a connection with whomever we take to bed. We're not man-whores, you know?" He winked at her and Sophie laughed.

"I'd never think about you that way. Although now I'm confused as to what it is that Sam's doing with Bridget. They have sex. If it's so impersonal, why does he do it?"

She fought hard to keep the jealousy from her voice, though her throat suddenly felt tight. Jordan didn't seem to notice anything out of the ordinary, which was a relief.

"You'll note that she hasn't spent the night since we were out on the boat with her. That was almost a year ago."

"Wow, has it been that long since she's shaken our rafters?"

He eyed her curiously, but didn't comment. Continuing on, he asked, "You've heard the term 'fuck buddies', right?"

"Sure."

"Well, there you go." He took one of Sophie's too-big gulps of champagne and suffered the same reaction. A telling sign? Was there more to Jordan's interest in Bridget than her being a great fuck? Did it bother him that she'd slept with Sam all these years and only him once? And with Sam at the same time, to boot?

No, of course not. Jordan was a playboy. Hell, he'd admitted to not wanting to settle down. Besides, Bridget was definitely not his type. Sam was the eloquent, sophisticated one. Jordan was the wild child of the family. Definitely not one who'd fit into Bridget's high-society world.

Sophie shook her head mentally to dislodge all thoughts of Bridget and Jordan. All of this sex talk and sex speculation and *sex, sex, sex*! was making her crazy in the head.

"You're right," she said. "We should get drunk. And not talk about anything."

"I think we already are drunk. And I thought you wanted to know what happened on the boat."

She had solicited that information, hadn't she? He was willing to tell her and she was dying to know.

Oh what the hell.

"So she was topless. Big deal."

He grinned at her. A very sexy, lascivious grin that told Sophie he remembered quite vividly how Bridget looked naked. "She wasn't shy about telling us what she wanted. Neither one of us backed down. When Sam anchored the boat and joined us on deck, Bridget made a big production out of rubbing tanning oil on her breasts, playing with her nipples. She enjoyed giving the show as much as we enjoyed watching it."

"I'm going to need another drink," Sophie said in a strained voice, knowing this story was going to push her Catholic-girl boundaries. But maybe that's what she

Satisfying Sophie

needed. Maybe hearing about someone else losing their inhibitions would inspire her. If she let her guard down, even just a little, maybe she'd feel all those erotically stimulating feelings she was supposed to experience and maybe that might open a new door for her...

Jordan poured the rest of the champagne into her glass. He settled in next to her and dropped a hand on Sophie's bare thigh, right below the hem of her skirt. It wasn't unlike him to be affectionate, but tonight, right now, his touch felt hot and intimate. Different than his usual friendly pat on the knee.

"I'll tell you, that woman loves being the center of attention," he mused as his fingers lightly grazed Sophie's skin along the top of her leg before dipping slightly to caress her inner thigh. "She came prepared too. After she stripped off her thong, she pulled out a mammoth-sized dildo from her beach bag and fucked herself right in front of us."

Sophie's mouth went dry as the Sahara. "She...masturbated...right in front of you?" *Oh good grief!*

Sophie could have died at her school-girl reaction to Jordan's words. So Bridget masturbated. Just about everyone masturbated. Big deal!

But right in front of Jordan and Sam?

Jordan bit back a laugh. "It was very hot, Soph, I assure you."

Setting her glass on the end table and then crossing her arms over her chest as the old insecurity crept up on her, she said, "Turned ya on, did it?"

"Oh yeah. Big-time." He gave her thigh a gentle squeeze. "You'd be surprised how erotic it can be. Watching a woman touch herself, work herself up, knowing she's going to want you to finish the job. Well, in this case, she was going to need both me *and* Sam."

"So how'd you, you know, satisfy her?" It was a wonder she could speak around the dust in her mouth. She'd convince herself later that she'd only asked for educational

purposes. That might lessen some of the guilt that would inevitably come when her buzz wore off.

Jordan's gaze locked with Sophie's. He shifted on the sofa, the hand on her thigh moving to the back of the couch, draping along her bare shoulders. His other hand resumed the gentle squeezing on the thigh.

If it'd been anyone else getting this close to her physically, she'd have jumped off the sofa and put some serious distance between them. Exactly what had driven Mark away. Along with all the others.

That realization made a lump of emotion swell in her throat. But she wouldn't let it get the best of her. She'd started this conversation. She'd wanted to know the story about her roommates and Bridget. There was absolutely no shame in listening, and she refused to turn tail and run off to her room. Nor would she brush Jordan's hand away. His touch was light and unassuming. Friendly. And to be perfectly honest, it'd been much too long since a man had touched her without making her flinch. Or making her panic, because he might want to do more than just touch her.

Sophie realized this intimacy was something she desperately needed. Jordan's hand on her leg felt particularly good this evening. Made her feel warm and sexy, even. A reaction she'd never anticipated experiencing with her best friend. Yet tonight, they weren't just best friends. Rather, it seemed to Sophie they were just a man and a woman having an erotic conversation that stimulated them both.

Though that thought *was* a tiny bit alarming to her.

Her eyes dropped to where his fingers stroked her inner thigh, inciting a riot of sensations inside her. Her stomach fluttered and between her legs... Good Lord, was that her clit tingling with sexual stimulation?

How had that happened?

She lifted her gaze. "Jordan..."

"Come on, Soph," he coaxed, his tone low and sexy. "It's more exciting to talk about it this way, don't you think?" The deep timbre of his voice was one she'd not heard before. The way his warm eyes glowed and his chest rose and fell a bit more quickly than usual made Sophie think –

"Oh for the love of God, Jordan," she said. "You have a hard-on, don't you?"

He grinned at her. "Telling you about this is really turning me on, Soph."

She rolled her eyes. But didn't move away. To be honest, it was turning her on too. How long had it been since she'd been swept away by a seductive smile and a light touch on her skin?

Forever, it seemed. Because she never allowed herself to be in this situation. Yet Jordan had moved in on her slowly and subtly. She hadn't even noticed what he was up to until... Oh yeah. Her clit was *definitely* tingling with sexual stimulation!

She nearly threw her arms around him to thank him for sparking life between her legs, but decided instead to sit back and see what happened next. Uncharacteristic of her though it was. Sophie's research was now turning into experimentation. She'd become a willing lab rat without even knowing it and figured she may as well stay the course. If she felt uncomfortable at any point or feared her secret would be revealed, she would tell Jordan to back off. And knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that he would. She trusted him in a way she'd never trusted Mark or any other boyfriend.

Besides, with her back pressed to the sofa there was no way on earth he could feel her scars.

Relaxing slightly so as to not chase off the sensations building inside her, she mentally conjured the sound of Bridget in the throes of passion. The moaning, the verbal encouragement and validation, the eventual screaming... In her mind, she pictured her two roommates with the buxom blonde, which wasn't difficult to do given Jordan's detailed account of how the ménage with Bridget had come about.

"So what'd she do next?" Sophie found herself asking. And couldn't help but notice that her voice had dropped an octave too.

"After she got herself off, she crawled on all fours across the deck, toward us, as Sam and I yanked our clothes off."

Sophie squirmed on the couch. Jordan's fingers pressed into her flesh, as though urging her to sit still. To stay. To fight the embarrassment rising within her and instead embrace the excitement that danced through her. He could see her reaction to his story on her face and in her eyes, she was sure.

"When we were all naked," Jordan continued, his fingers stroking a little higher, with just a little more pressure, "Bridget sucked Sam's cock while I fucked her from behind."

Sophie gasped as his words shot through her like a rocket. She nearly jumped out of her seat, but Jordan's hand seemed to keep her rooted. She bit down on her lower lip, fighting the natural urge to retreat. To admit she was in way over her head and couldn't possibly continue down this path. It had become a car wreck she really ought to look away from, yet she couldn't muster the good grace to do so.

Her eyelids dipped of their own accord. Her breathing was uneven as she asked, "Did she like it?"

"Oh yeah," Jordan said in a tight voice. His gaze dropped to Sophie's mouth as though he were envisioning her lips wrapped around Sam's cock instead of Bridget's. The thought was enough to make Sophie melt against the leather cushion.

"She begged me to fuck her pussy. Harder, faster. She begged me to make her come."

"Did you?"

His grin was a wicked one. "Three times."

Thank God they'd been out to sea, Sophie thought, or someone probably would've called the cops for the noise disturbance.

Swallowing down another lump—this one suspiciously close to excitement rather than embarrassment—she asked, "Did she make Sam come while she was…" Her voice trailed off. For all her bravado this evening, which she was quite proud of, she couldn't bring herself to use the same kind of terminology Jordan did. It wasn't part of her Catholic upbringing. Jordan wasn't about to let her off the hook, though. Clearly his intent tonight was to push her past her comfort zone. "Say the words, Soph."

Really, what was the big deal? She wasn't a sixteen-year-old whose mouth would be washed out with soap if she used the "C" word. Maybe it was time to shed some of those lingering prudish ways. Leave them with the past she wanted very much to put behind her and forget forever.

Perhaps this was her defining moment. Her chance to forge a new path and let bygones be bygones.

Drawing in a deep breath, holding it a spell, then letting it out slowly, she said, "Did Bridget make Sam come when she sucked his cock?"

Her entire face flushed. The prickly sensation along her labia and clit increased, accompanied by a welcome stirring in her pussy.

The corners of Jordan's mouth lifted. His melted-chocolate irises flared with an unmistakable look of lust. "Damn, Soph. That sounds hot when you say it."

She fought the mortification rising within her. Tamped it down with all her might. She would not lose this game. She'd come way too far tonight. Sure, all the champagne she'd consumed was helping her to stand her ground. Along with the fact that it was Jordan who was challenging her. This was how they'd become such good friends, the reason why they were excellent business partners. Neither let the other get away with anything. He'd no sooner let her take the easy way out of something than she would him.

"Bridget wanted Sam," he continued on, his fingers now reaching the apex of her thighs, still lightly teasing her skin as he caressed the crease between her leg and her mound. Such a soft, lazy touch, she barely felt it on her flesh. But holy cow did she feel it everywhere else! Her nipples turned into hard pebbles behind her bra. A hot flame flickered along her clit. Another grew hot and bright deep in her pussy.

"She straddled his lap," Jordan said as his head dipped and he whispered in Sophie's ear. "His cock was in her cunt, fucking her hard. She wanted me inside her too."

Sophie's breath caught. "Did you...?"

"Fuck her at the same time?" His eyes glimmered with excitement. "Yeah, I did, Soph. She was tight and it felt damn good. She said stuff that turned us all on, drove us all wild."

She swallowed hard. "Like what?"

Jordan paused a moment and she all but held her breath in anticipation. The tips of his fingers swept over the crotch of her satin panties, grazing her tingling clit. Sophie nearly jumped out of her skin. His touch was like heavy-duty starter cables to a dead battery. Though the urge to flee while she still had the chance rose within her, she couldn't deny that the erotic sensations Jordan evoked were ridiculously welcome. A wonderful change of pace, in fact. She wouldn't let her insecurity get the best of her tonight. Not when she was finally *— finally! —* beginning to feel something. To open up sexually. Thanks to Jordan.

As his fingertips lightly stroked her lips through the thin material covering her, a low groan slipped from his lips. Causing Sophie's pulse to race.

"You're wet," he said, his mouth brushing against her temple.

She could have easily cried tears of joy at that moment. She didn't. Instead, she remained focused, wanting to prove to herself she was brave enough to endure this, to embrace the sensuality of the moment.

"What'd she say, Jordan?" Sophie prompted.

His fingers continued to rub her labia as he said, "She told us how good it felt to have Sam's cock in her pussy and mine in her ass. Sam held her hips in place and I palmed her breasts, keeping her nipples tight. Her skin was slippery from the tanning oil and we were all hot and sweaty from the sun and the sex. When she came again, it was like she'd been struck by lightning. She screamed 'keep fucking me' over and over again. Her entire body shook and she squeezed us both so damn tight that we came with her."

Jordan's fingers had slipped past the band of Sophie's damp panties and she hadn't even noticed, so enrapt by his story was she. When one long finger pushed deep inside her, Sophie's head snapped back and her eyes rolled upward. A sharp cry fell from her parted lips at the erotic invasion, the fire that roared in her now-wet cunt.

"Jordan," she gasped as a second finger plunged into her.

"You're small and tight, Soph," he said on a low groan. "And so wet."

He stroked her quickly, making her heart pound in her chest and her breath come in ragged pulls.

"It'd feel so good to be inside you," he whispered. "To push my cock deep into your pussy and hit that one spot..." He hooked his fingertips just enough to reach said spot and he rubbed it with just the right amount of pressure. "Your G-spot, Soph. Feels good, doesn't it?"

"Jordan." Jesus, that was all she could say. Her mind had somehow gone blank. Her body had turned into a live wire that seemed to snap and crackle from head to toe. Her clit felt swollen and ultra-sensitive as the heel of Jordan's hand rubbed it while he continued to finger her. She parted her legs further, until one was draped over his jeanclad thighs, her flared skirt providing just the right amount of freedom.

"I like your pussy, Soph," he said. "It's hot and wet and tight. I want to fuck you. I want to pump my cock in and out of you until you beg me to fuck you harder. Say yes, Soph."

Yes!

That one word was a battle cry, a call to arms to place all her desires into Jordan's capable hands and let him free her from everything that held her back when it came to sex and passion and physical fulfillment. She trusted him. She cared for him, deeply. So it wasn't love – big deal! It was just as powerful, just as everlasting. Her best friend was doing the most amazing things to her body – wanted to do even more! – and Sophie

wanted to give in. She wanted to let him fuck her in any position he chose, because she knew she'd love it. How could she not? With just his fingers and the heel of his hand, he had her worked into such a sexual frenzy it was all she could do not to scream as loud as Bridget always did.

Never before had she gotten this close to coming. It was in her reach, so near that she refused to let it slip away. Emotion welled within her, but she fought it back. Concentrated only on the sensual feelings. The erotic sensations. The all-consuming fire Jordan had sparked with his wicked words and skilled hands.

"Don't stop," she finally managed to whisper. "Make me come, Jordan. Please."

She'd never wanted anything more. To *finally* experience an orgasm. It was exactly what she wanted. No, it was exactly what she *needed*.

His lips brushed over her neck. His tongue licked at her flesh, his teeth nipped. She squirmed against him, pressing her body against his palm, increasing the pressure of his hand on her clit.

"You like that, don't you, Soph? You like my fingers in your cunt."

She didn't get the chance to answer. He stroked her hard and fast, inside and out, stealing her breath. Her hand gripped his shoulder, holding him to her, holding herself steady. The explosion inside her body came quickly and almost unexpectedly. She wasn't at all prepared for the eruption of sensations, so she couldn't bite back the scream that tore from her lips.

"Oh God!" she cried as her body ignited and heat flooded every inch of her. She trembled and gasped for air as the most beautiful sensations consumed her.

"That's it, sweetheart," Jordan whispered in her ear. "Come all over my fingers, let it all go."

She shuddered from his words, turned on all the more by how sexy they sounded. Her hand moved from his shoulder to his neck and she wrapped both arms around him and hung on for dear life as she rode the wave of ecstasy, hating the moment it began to ebb.

Satisfying Sophie

"Jordan," she said as her inner walls squeezed the fingers still inside her body. "That was so unbelievably good. Oh my God, you made me come!" She laughed, a peculiar giddy feeling welling within her. "I didn't think about anything except what you were doing to me, what you were saying, and it felt so good!" She was breathless and lightheaded. Her body felt hot and molten, like magma. Like she was oozing liquid fire from every pore. It was a wonder she didn't slide right off the sofa.

Jordan whistled under his breath. "I gotta tell ya, Soph. That was hot." He slowly withdrew his fingers and moved her panties back into place. He disentangled himself from her and crossed to the wet bar, where he reached for a cocktail napkin.

Sophie watched him, knowing the grin on her face was a stupid one. She wanted to curl up on the sofa and purr like a cat. But when Jordan turned back to her, his handsome face alight with desire and the bulge in his jeans bigger than ever, she had to cross her legs and squeeze them together in order to combat the throbbing that started all over again in her pussy.

Jordan wanted her, she could see that plain as day. He wanted to have sex with her.

With *her*!

Her grin widened.

Jordan chuckled at her. "You look like the cat that ate the canary."

"That's exactly how I feel. Christ, Jordan. I seriously had no idea it'd feel this...amazing. My entire body is so relaxed. I'm Jell-O from head to toe!"

"It's about fucking time, sweetheart."

She laughed along with him, then reached for her glass of champagne, thrusting it toward him. "Open another bottle. Let's celebrate!"

A dubious look crossed his boyish features for a quick moment. "You're not mad at me for seducing you?"

She stared at him while she contemplated his question, giving it the consideration it was due. She knew that when she sobered up, she'd suffer a bout of guilt over doing something so shameless, so wanton.

On the other hand... It was Jordan who'd given her this unexpected gift. Her very best friend. One of the two people she trusted with her life. Jordan would never do anything to hurt her, would never do anything for selfish reasons. What he'd done this evening was take a seed she'd inadvertently planted the other night with her shocking admission and let it grow. His subtle seduction had been just the right approach, just the right amount of persuasion and excitement to help her shed some of her inhibitions and experience something wonderful with him.

To top it all off, she'd felt perfectly safe that her secret would remain intact. Sitting on the sofa, there was no chance Jordan would be able to feel her scars. In fact, she hadn't thought about them once because they'd never been in danger of being revealed. It truly had been the perfect seduction, the perfect introduction into something she was obviously interested in knowing more about. Sex and mind-blowing orgasms might not be completely out of her reach, after all!

And she had Jordan to thank for the initiation.

"I am definitely not mad at you," she told him. "Quite the opposite, actually. I'm glad you took the initiative. I never would have." She felt that tinge of insecurity return. "I wish I could reciprocate, but I'm not ready for that, Jordan."

"It's not a tit for tat kind of thing, Soph. An opportunity presented itself and it worked out."

"Yes, but..." Her gaze dropped unabashedly to his crotch. "You didn't get anything out of it."

"That's what you think," he said on a half-snort. He opened another bottle of bubbly and returned to the couch. "Let's see," he said as he poured. "I'm the first guy to make you come, I didn't shock you with my sex talk and now I get to fantasize about what it'd feel like to be inside you – with firsthand knowledge of how tight and wet you are. I'd say I got quite a lot out of this."

She smiled at him. "You're really the sweetest man on the planet, you know that?"

"Yes, I do." He winked at her as he tapped the rim of his glass against hers. "But let's keep that to ourselves. I don't want to ruin my bad boy image."

"Oh you have nothing to worry about there!"

They sipped in silence, until a thought occurred to Sophie and she frowned.

"What's wrong?" Jordan asked.

She shook her head, trying to dislodge the disconcerting thought, but it wouldn't budge. So she said, "I've always considered myself the luckiest girl in the world because you and Sam are my best friends and you both wanted me to live here with you. It's like...more important than being a girlfriend. More significant somehow."

"Given our track record with women, I'd say it's *much* more significant. You're a permanent fixture in our lives, Soph."

Her stomach fluttered and warmth flooded her veins. Not in a sexual way this time. More like an acknowledgement of their acceptance and love. "I've always considered myself extremely lucky to know you two. To be best friends with you."

"So what's the problem?"

She took a long sip, then said, "This is going to sound weird, but I've always had the most unique relationship with you guys. The one no other woman has ever had."

"Or will," he added.

She smiled at him. "Or will. Except...*we* used to be a threesome. And now, well...you guys have formed a different kind of threesome. With Bridget."

Jordan laughed. "It's hardly the same thing, Soph. That was sex. And not the romantic, hearts-on-fire kind of sex. The bond we share from our friendship is infinitely more solid than what we shared with Bridget."

37

"Yeah, I guess." She tried to latch onto what the true essence of the problem was. Jealousy that Bridget had fucked Sam and Jordan? Maybe a little. But it ran deeper than that, especially since Jordan had made the entire interlude sound as though it were impersonal and just...sex. Nothing emotional and deep like what she shared with the two men. "Maybe it's not so much about the sex as it is that the three of you have this secret-society connection between you now. Even if it never happens again, you're still a threesome because of that day on the boat. It's an experience another woman shared with you that I'll never be able to."

She waved a dismissive hand in the air and laughed at herself. "That sounds so territorial and envious. Forget I said anything."

"No," Jordan said. "I think I know what you mean. You just have to remember that with Bridget, it really didn't mean anything. So it's sort of a moot point."

"How can it be moot, Jordan? You got hard just by telling me the story!"

"No," he repeated. "I got hard because you wanted to *hear* the story. And because I liked touching you. And because your panties were wet and your breathing was hard and your eyes were glassed over like you were envisioning yourself in Bridget's place."

"I was," she said, holding his gaze.

She'd never imagined it possible, but Jordan's eyes flared brighter.

"No kidding," he mumbled, not making it a question.

"Oh never mind," she said as she stood, wobbling a bit because she was tipsy. And because her body was still warm and gooey. "It's never going to happen," she said of the unexpected fantasy she'd conjured. "I'm not the ménage type. And besides, sex with your roommates slash best friends...isn't that just a recipe for disaster?"

"Depends on the roommates slash best friends."

"No, it doesn't, Jordan. I can't believe we're even having this conversation. Just forget about it. I've had way too much champagne." She set her glass on the bar. "I'm going to bed. You and Sam can finish the bottle when he gets home."

Satisfying Sophie

She left the living room and retreated to her bedroom. In typical Catholic schoolgirl fashion, Sophie stripped off her clothes and stepped into a cleansing shower. Surprisingly, though, she didn't feel the least bit dirty over what had transpired this evening. She wasn't consumed with guilt over what she and Jordan had done. They were crazy about each other, even if it wasn't romantic love. And that made their interlude okay in her mind. He'd wanted to help her with a problem. He'd succeeded. Didn't that make him as great a friend as she'd always thought he was?

Accepting that they hadn't done anything wrong tonight, she towel-dried her hair and body and slipped into some sweats and one of Sam's old Yale jerseys. She was disappointed to find it smelled of fabric softener, not Sam's cologne and male heat.

That was the moment she realized what she'd so inadequately tried to relay to Jordan earlier. Bridget had a piece of them. For one night, they'd all been one. It was a connection Sophie would never share with her two best friends, a significant bond she'd never experience with them.

With Sam, in particular.

* * * * *

He woke her in the middle of the night. Sophie had wandered into the entertainment room, not wanting to be upstairs when Sam came home with Bridget. She'd fallen asleep on the sofa halfway through *The Bridges of Madison County*.

The mere thought of being within earshot of Bridget's screams of ecstasy had driven her from her room. That and the fact that, from the moment she'd left Jordan's arms, she'd wanted to be in Sam's.

Her secret crush was no longer tucked away with her happily-ever-after fantasies.

"Wake up, sweetheart," Sam said in a quiet voice as he pushed wayward curls from her face.

She opened an eye and peered at him. She was comfortable curled up on the leather couch and wasn't overly ecstatic at having been woken up. But in the soft glow from the

light on the far end table, Sam's handsome face was a welcome sight. She propped herself up on an elbow as best as she could with the thick blanket wrapped around her.

"What time is it?" she asked, her voice soft with sleep...and a post-arousal provocative hint she didn't miss. Wondered if he heard it too.

"It's after one," he said.

"Did you just get in?" His bow tie was unraveled and hung loose around his neck. He'd unbutton his shirt most of the way, and Sophie's eyes naturally drifted down the long, thick column of his throat to the pectoral muscles that rose high and tight on his chest, the inner swells revealed at the deep opening of his shirt.

For a moment, she simply stared. She was close enough to him that she could lean forward and place a kiss on his hard muscles. Sophie wanted very much to do just that. She knew his skin would be soft and warm and the thought sent an erotic thrill straight to the heart of her.

But then she remembered why she'd elected to sleep downstairs tonight.

"Shouldn't you be in bed with Bridget?"

Sam chuckled at her frankness. "The car service dropped her off first. Tonight wasn't about getting laid, Soph. We're not involved like that anymore."

"Oh." Relief washed over her.

"Come on," he said as his arms slid under her. "Let's get you to bed." He lifted her up and carried her out of the room. Sophie wrapped her arms around Sam's neck and inhaled his scent, having missed it so much this evening. She wanted to rub the heavy jersey she wore over his bare chest, just to steal some of his cologne so it'd linger in her room after he left her.

As Sam carried Sophie upstairs and she snuggled close to him, she realized this was the first time she felt like giving in to some of the feelings she had for him. It wasn't quite the same as what she'd experienced with Jordan earlier. It was impossible not to be attracted to Jordan. His sexy, bad boy looks were irresistible. He'd easily sparked her lust, but what Sam made her feel was something deeper. Something less spontaneous, less reckless. Something more substantial and...lasting.

When Sam gently placed her on the bed, Sophie wrapped a hand around his forearm, keeping him hovering over her. She wanted him to kiss her. Jordan had woken her desire earlier, but her passion was really for Sam.

He sank into the mattress beside her and her body rolled toward his, so that her pelvis pressed to his hip. Her nipples tightened at his closeness, and the soft rubbing of the shirt that covered them. That same stirring she'd felt earlier in the evening when Jordan had put his hand on her leg and stroked her inner thigh returned. She wanted Sam to touch her that way now. To slide his fingers along her skin until he reached the apex of her legs, slip his fingers behind the band of her panties and rub her clit with his strong fingers. She craved a fast pace and a lot more pressure than Jordan had applied. Sam's determination to get her off would make him more forceful. That thought made her cunt ache. She wanted him inside her, thrusting deep, making her come.

Sophie bit back a moan. Her pulse and her breathing had quickened at the thought of Sam fucking her. Maybe from behind, so he could really hammer into her and give her everything she needed.

"Sam." She wanted to tell him she'd thought about the two of them together. Naked and uninhibited. Going at it like bunnies.

But of course that was impossible. She didn't do naked bunny sex.

"What's up?" he asked as he ran a hand through her hair, pushing it all off her face the way he liked to do.

Sophie's bedroom was only dimly lit from the thin strips of moonlight that filtered in through the vertical blinds at the far end of the room. Maybe she wouldn't get naked with Sam, but they could still make love in this light. She had a great excuse for leaving the jersey on—it was Sam's, after all. Sophie could tell him it made her feel even closer to him.

41

She was groggy and still flying high from the success of her earlier "experiment" with Jordan. Perhaps that's what made her feel bold enough to sweep her hands up his arms to his neck and pull his head down to hers. His lips were warm and he kissed her slowly, sensuously. She felt different emotions than she had with Jordan, different sensations that manifested themselves deeper within her.

It occurred to her that she and Jordan had not kissed during their little tryst this evening. He'd kissed her neck, yes. But not her mouth. She wondered about that now. Wondered why it hadn't dawned on her earlier, wondered why neither of them had instigated that intimate part of their sexual encounter.

When Sam's lips pressed harder against hers, as though urging her to open her mouth and let him inside, she found her answer. As her lips parted and his tongue swept over hers, she moaned deep in her throat. It was the first time she and Sam had ever kissed like lovers and the significance of the moment did not escape her.

Had she experienced this with Jordan, it might have diminished the importance now. She wasn't the type to kiss two guys in one night. She'd saved this for Sam.

Her fingers threaded through his silky hair, her hand cupping the back of his head to hold him place. She never wanted their kiss to end. Was drowning in the euphoria it evoked. She felt ten times more turned-on than she had earlier in the evening and all Sam was doing was kissing her!

When he pulled away slightly, she protested with a small cry. "Don't go yet," she managed to say as her brain buzzed with erotic thoughts and her body snapped, crackled and popped with excitement.

She wanted his hands on her body. More than she'd ever wanted anything, she wanted to feel his large hands cupping her breasts, squeezing roughly. Her nipples ached with the need for attention. To be rolled between his thumb and forefinger. To be lightly pinched or, better yet, suckled.

She groaned. There was no stopping this runaway train. She wanted Sam in the worst way.

Satisfying Sophie

"Are you sure you want me to stay?" he asked in a low tone, eyeing her curiously. "Because if I do, I'm going to kiss you again."

"Stay," she said.

His mouth was on hers again in the next instant. He kissed her more boldly this time, as though they'd done this a hundred times before and he couldn't wait to taste her. It was a beautiful kiss. Passionate, yet sensual. Hot, yet meaningful. And very, very thorough.

This time when he pulled away, she was breathless. Speechless. Hopelessly lost.

"What brought this on?" he asked in a quiet voice, his head next to hers so that his warm breath caressed her cheek. He smelled like an after-dinner chocolate mint.

Sophie gave a slight shake of her head as she searched for her voice. Finally finding it, she said, "I'm not sure. Except...tonight I feel like I'm a little more awake in my life."

She'd borrowed the sentiment from Francesca in *Bridges* without even thinking about it. Was that another sign that it was time to face all her fears and find a way to move past them? Had she subconsciously selected that movie, having seen it dozens of times and never really getting, until tonight, what Meryl Streep's character had experienced when she'd met a man who'd awaken all the desires and passions hibernating within her for so long? Francesca had never admitted to what was missing in her life until Clint Eastwood's character, Robert, had come along, swept her off her feet and reminded her of the sensual side of herself that she'd abandoned and ignored in order to maintain a steady presence for her husband and children.

She'd been dead inside until one look, one touch, one kiss...

Every sexual emotion Francesca had kept tightly bound inside her had unraveled with Robert's arrival in Winterset. For four days, she'd lived the fairy-tale romance she'd dreamed of as a young girl and had never realized as a woman. Until Robert.

Tragically, though, she'd had to let her love for Robert go, along with him.

43

Sophie couldn't imagine putting her heart on the line the way Francesca had, knowing all along she'd lose it. Then again, as her eyes swept over Sam and her lips tingled from his kisses, she understood why Francesca had had no regrets over her brief affair with Robert. His love had reminded her of the woman she'd once been, of the love she'd once dreamed of, of the passionate and sensual side of herself that had been overridden by motherhood and wifely duties and household chores and civic responsibilities. What she'd shared with Robert was something special for herself that reconnected her to the woman she was. Not the mom, wife, teacher, friend, etc.

The woman.

Sophie was a woman. Not a little girl with fairy-tale dreams. A woman with bills and responsibilities and a business to run. Also a woman with physical wants and desires that had been suppressed because of emotional insecurity. It had been easy to ignore all of this before. But after Jordan's magical touch and Sam's breathless kisses...

How could she possibly go back to being "asleep in her life"?

"Soph?" Sam's low, deep voice drew her from her reverie as his fingertips swept along her temple and across her cheek. He tapped the end of her nose and asked, "Did you just confuse me with someone?"

"What?" she stared up at him, perplexed.

Sam grinned. "You were in a dead sleep when I came in. Were you dreaming about someone and thinking I was him when you kissed me?"

"Is that what you think?" she mused, finding it a particularly easy way out of all of this.

But she hadn't taken the easy way out at all tonight. Why start now?

"No," she quickly said before he had a chance to reply. "I wasn't dreaming about anyone or anything. I was out cold. Too much champagne. But...I was thinking about someone earlier. You."

He eyed her curiously. "What were you thinking?"

Satisfying Sophie

She resisted the urge to nibble her lower lip. A nervous habit. "Jordan and I… We… And then I…" She sighed. Being honest with him was necessary, but the words didn't quite come.

Sam saved her. "Yeah, I know. He told me when I came in. You hit the sauce pretty hard tonight."

"He told you we got drunk?"

Sam nodded.

"Was that all he said?"

"No," Sam admitted. "Congratulations, by the way." He sounded happy that she'd finally had an orgasm. But he frowned and that gave him away.

A sliver of hope ribboned through her, teasing her. Causing her to say, "There's nothing between us. We adore each other, of course. But it was just...a friend helping a friend. You know?"

"And what was our kiss?"

His question took her aback. She stared at him, her mind still a little hazy from the events of the evening, the champagne and her deep sleep. Not to mention Sam's wonderful kisses. Of them, she said, "You could probably kiss me like that again and I'd come. Without you even touching me. Although...I really would like you to touch me."

They were both quiet for a moment, her words lingering between them. Sophie sat up and said, "It's more than that. I want you to fuck me, Sam."

He groaned. "Soph... Be careful." His tone was lower, darker. Sexy and territorial.

Her insides lit up like a bonfire all over again. "Sam, I want you. Inside me." It was a wonder she could get the words out, so aroused was she.

Oh if Francesca had felt half this turned-on, had been half this turned inside out with little more than a kiss and a sexy voice, who could ever blame her for her infidelity with Robert?

45

Sam's jaw clenched as he stared down at her. Sophie's fingers were still twined in his hair. Their heads were still close enough that all she had to do was lean forward and brush her lips against his again. Feel the electricity and the euphoria he sparked and give into it.

That these sensations were different from what she'd experienced with Jordan told her all she needed to know about how she felt about Sam. It was different than with Jordan. More than friendship, of that she was now certain.

This wasn't a crush. It was love.

But this was still all so new to her that she warned herself to tread lightly. Understanding and accepting what she felt toward Sam did not make her want to confess all, whip off her shirt and show him her scars.

If anything, it made her more aware of them. More self-conscious about them. Because deep in her heart, Sophie wanted to be perfect for him.

Pushing that thought aside before she gave into a new insecurity, she said, "Jordan didn't kiss me. It wasn't like this. Not at all."

"What was it like?" Sam asked. Then quickly said, "No, wait. Don't tell me. I don't want to know." And then his mouth was on hers again, kissing her deeply and possessively, as if he meant to erase all thoughts of Jordan from her mind.

Whether or not that was his intention, he succeeded. When Sam's hand slid under the jersey and he palmed her bare breast, a whole new riot of sensations exploded inside Sophie like a festive carnival erupting within her. She held him tightly, mentally cataloging and memorizing every feeling he evoked, every emotion he brought to the surface. As the pad of his thumb rubbed her nipple tight, she truly did believe he could make her come with little effort on his part. Her pussy throbbed with a need she'd long denied. She wanted Sam's fingers inside her, stroking her the way Jordan had earlier.

No, she really did want more than that. She wanted Sam's cock inside her, making love to her, making her scream the way he did with Bridget.

Satisfying Sophie

Feeling the urgency and the passion rise within her, she kissed him hungrily, greedily, vaguely wondering if she'd ever get enough of him. If having him inside her would even be enough.

"Soph," he said on a ragged breath as he tore his mouth from hers. "You're doing crazy things to me, sweetheart."

"Crazy good?"

"Yes."

"So what's the problem?" she asked while trying to get her breath back.

"It makes me want to do crazy-good things to you."

"I'm not the one who keeps pulling away." Where this brazen Sophie Jensen had come from, she didn't know. All she knew was that she owed Jordan the world's biggest thank-you for getting the ball rolling for her tonight!

"I'm pulling away for a reason," he said as he stared down at her, his beautiful green eyes shimmering with lust and affection. It warmed her heart.

"It'd better be a good reason. I'm practically throwing myself at you."

He grinned at her. "This is out of control and I'm having a really hard time keeping it together."

"Be more specific, please. I'm new at this," she reminded him.

His eyes squeezed shut for a moment before they snapped open and his gaze locked with hers. "Apparently so am I."

"I don't follow," she said, frustration creeping in on her. "Either you want me or you don't. Isn't that the way it works?"

She'd conveniently forgotten that she'd have to devise some clever way to keep him from touching her back, but then she remembered Jordan's statement about missionary still being a hot position. Plus, she could likely keep Sam preoccupied with her breasts so he wouldn't try to wrap his arms around her and hold her. She could convince him

to focus on her front, right? She knew he was a breast man. It could work to her advantage.

"I do want you," he said. "I hadn't realized it until the other night, after Mark broke it off with you. I was angry for you, didn't want you to be hurt again. Yet at the same time...I was so relieved."

He shook his head and let out a sharp breath. "Maybe I've known it all along."

"I was thinking the same thing earlier," she admitted.

"The problem is," he continued on, "I'm probably more...intense...than what you're used to. Or what you're ready for."

"You have no idea what I'm ready for," she said and reached for him again.

"Soph," he said as he disentangled himself from her and stood. Raking a hand through his hair, he said, "Take a step back with me."

She stared at him, incredulous. Then she laughed. "Isn't that supposed to be my line?" Rolling her eyes, she rushed on, saying, "Since it's not, you really shouldn't worry about what I may or may not be ready for."

"I have to, Soph. Because it wouldn't be right if..."

"If what? You took advantage of me?" She grinned at him. "By all means, Sam. Take advantage of me."

He propped a hand on a hip and glared at her. "This isn't funny, Soph."

"I agree."

"So why are you laughing?"

"Because you are always so true to form. Christ," she said as she climbed off the bed, her body humming and buzzing like a beehive. Her nipples were still impossibly tight and her pussy felt swollen and wet and oh-so-ready for Sam. But she could appreciate the situation for what it was. "Always Mr. Valiant."

He frowned. "Trust me, I am not being valiant. I'm thinking about ten different ways to make love to you and hoping you'll come all night long. But," he said as he raised a hand in the air when she took an eager step toward him. "Be that as it may, I'm not laying another hand on you tonight."

She stared at him, dumbfounded. Then a thought dawned on her. "Is this some sort of plan you and Jordan worked out? He gets drunk with me and loosens the strings, then you sweep in and tie me all up in knots again so that, what? I'll be forced to face all of my issues with sex before you'll finish what you started?"

Sam's brows lifted. "That would be a really good plan. Wish I'd thought of it."

She laughed, despite the fact that he was holding his ground and not making love to her. "Fine. Kiss me like there's no tomorrow and then tell me there's a tomorrow and leave. Whatever. I can handle this." She waved her hands at him, shooing him out of her room. "Jordan seems perfectly willing and capable to walk me through this sexual exploration. I don't need you hemming and hawing."

He huffed a little and started to protest as though to call her bluff. She wished like hell he would.

But then he shook his head and grinned at her. "We'll talk about this in the morning."

"There's nothing to talk about. He flipped the switch tonight. Light bulb's on, Sam. For the first time in longer than I can remember, my body is actually having a sexual response. That has to mean *something*!"

"Look, I'm happy for you, Soph. But something tells me that whatever's going on with your body hasn't quite been reconciled in your mind. Not this quickly."

She let out a low groan, the wind instantly sapped from her sails. "You are such a buzz-kill sometimes." Turning away, she flapped her hands in the air and then dropped them to her sides in defeat. "Of course, you're right. As usual." Plopping down on the edge of the bed, she stared up at him and said, "Do you always have to be so sensible and conscientious? Can't you just override all your knight-in-shining-armor qualities for one night and do something you know you shouldn't do?"

He chuckled. "Knight in shining armor, huh? Is that what you think of me?"

She blushed. Had she really said that out loud? Well, not in quite that context, but the implication was certainly obvious. With a sigh, she said, "You are sort of Prince Charming-like."

Crossing his arms over his wide chest, he said, "You've never let on about any of this stuff, Soph. What brought it on tonight?"

"A very beautiful champagne buzz?"

He shook his head.

"A very beautiful orgasm?"

His head cocked to one side.

"Okay, fine," she said. "How about a very sexy tale of three incredibly uninhibited people who enjoyed hot and sweaty sex on a boat anchored in the middle of the ocean on a beautiful summer day?"

Sam's arms dropped to his sides. "Jordan told you about that?"

"Yes. And it was extremely arousing." She nibbled her lower lip a moment, her gaze dropping to the hands twined in her lap. "And extremely disconcerting."

"How so?" Sam asked, his tone full of surprise. Then he blew out a breath and said, "Because you'd never think Jordan and I would do something like that. Of course."

"No," her head snapped up. She shook it and rushed on. "Not 'no' as in I didn't think you'd ever do something like that. I meant 'no' as in that's not what was so disconcerting. If anything, I sort of...envy...the three of you for being able to put your sexuality out there like that. To enjoy each other's bodies and let go of any reservations so that you can truly and completely experience sexual pleasure." Her arms flew up in the air again as she said, "I would kill for that!"

"Soph!" He looked sufficiently mortified. "That is *not* the kind of sex you should be having! You're not like that. You're not...like Bridget. And thank God for it. Sweetheart," he said as he dropped to one knee beside her. "We love who you are. Don't think for a minute that you have to change anything about you. That you have to be someone else. Or like anyone else."

"Sam," she said, feeling frustrated all over again. Sexually and emotionally. "You have no idea how exasperating this is. I've shoved this under the rug for far too long. I haven't faced any of my insecurities. It's borderline cowardly. And then tonight, the most unexpected things have happened and it would just be so wrong of me to pretend I'm not feeling the things I'm feeling. To pretend that I'm not excited to have the breakthrough I've waited years to experience!"

He stared at her quizzically. As though trying to make sense of her rant. She didn't expect him to connect all of the dots. She hadn't provided all of the dots, after all.

"Soph," he said in a serious tone. "What is it that you're so insecure about? You said you don't get enjoyment out of sex, that you're not a sexual person. But that's not true. You're incredibly passionate. When you kissed me..." His voice trailed off as he seemed to search for the appropriate words. When he found them, he said, "You weren't holding anything back. I felt how much you wanted me."

"I do want you," she said on a rushed breath. "It's just that, well, I have...body issues." It was more than that, of course, but she didn't know how to adequately sum up her problem and wasn't ready to confront it. "I need to work them out, I know. And I will." She had a reason to now. Sam.

He studied her for endless moments, as though trying to reconcile what she was saying, read between the lines, find the hidden truths.

Sophie stood. "It's late. Maybe this is something we should talk about later."

He nodded. "Yeah, it's been a long night."

A strange one too, she thought. Though not in a bad way.

In a very gentle tone, Sam said, "You know you can tell me anything, Soph."

Tears instantly sprang to her eyes, taking her by surprise. She didn't mean to make him doubt her faith in their friendship or her trust in him. "It's not easy keeping something from you, Sam. But this is complicated."

"And you think I won't understand?"

She stared at him a moment. Of course he'd understand. She knew it to the depths of her soul. That wasn't the problem. "It's not you, Sam. It's me."

"You keep saying that. Yet you won't trust me with whatever secret it is you're harboring, Sophie. Whatever it is that holds you back sexually—*intimately*—is something you're holding close and not facing. Are you going to let me help you or not?"

Her breath caught as emotion rose within her, lodging itself in her throat like an immovable boulder. More tears welled in her eyes and spilled over the rims to trickle down her cheeks.

"Not," she said, on the verge of sobbing because she suddenly wanted to tell Sam. So desperately. Since she was sixteen years old, she'd kept her secret and never once had she considered revealing it, not even to Jordan, who was her longest, dearest friend.

But she wanted to tell Sam. She wanted to lift her shirt and let him run his fingers over the welts on her back. But that would change everything between them and Sam would never look at her the same way again, she was sure.

"Soph, come on," he urged.

She shook her head and squeezed her eyes shut. The evening had taken a very wayward turn. Reality had crashed down on her and she wasn't ready to face it. Especially not with Sam. No matter how much she wanted to confide in him, she just couldn't bring herself to do it.

"I'm sorry," was all she could say.

He waited a few minutes more, as if she'd change her mind. When silence ensued, he finally turned and left Sophie's room. When she heard his door slam shut at the end of the hall, she fell into bed and let the pain swallow her whole.

Chapter Three

On the Fourth of July, they went out on Sam's boat to watch the fireworks over the marina. The spray of water on Sophie's bare feet and legs felt wonderful. The wind blew through her hair and cooled her skin. When they found a good place to drop anchor, Sam joined Jordan and Sophie on deck. They drank wine and ate cheese and crackers. The fireworks started after dark and she sat on the bench seat with Sam and let him drape an arm around her shoulders.

They hadn't spoken about the night in her room. Sophie was glad he didn't press her on the issue, because every time she considered telling Sam about her scars, the words weighing heavy on her tongue, she felt the hot flash of tears build and she knew she'd never make it through her explanation without sobbing uncontrollably as she revealed her painful past.

She simply couldn't bring herself to tell him. Sophie liked the closeness she shared with Sam and she feared she'd lose it if he knew the truth.

It used to be she didn't think that much about the scars. Lately, though, she seemed to constantly be aware of them. When Sam or Jordan smiled at her or joked with her, she felt normal. Attractive to them, even. But when she was alone and naked, like in the shower, she felt hideous. Her fingers would slide over the crisscrossed scars as she washed and she'd shudder with revulsion. The wretched nightmare she'd lived through would threaten the fortress she'd built in her mind, which kept the past at bay for the most part.

She wouldn't let any of that spoil her holiday, though. For their day out on the boat, Sophie wore shorts and a tank top with a white cotton shirt over it, the hem of which was tucked up around her back. The front was tied in a tight knot at her waist. Jordan sat across from her and Sam. Occasionally his eyes twinkled in the bright light of the fireworks and Sophie wondered if he was thinking about the night he and Sam had had Bridget on the boat.

Was he thinking about engaging in some similar act with Sophie? Surprisingly, the thought make her shiver with excitement.

Sam tightened his arm around her. "Are you cold?"

"No." But she snuggled closer to him anyway as the fireworks exploded overhead. It was a perfect day spent with her best friends and Sophie was actually relieved it had been so casual and fun. No revisiting the sex issue. No facing skeletons. Just a relaxing day at sea with a great show to cap off the trip.

Exactly what she needed.

* * * * *

Later that evening, in the privacy of her bedroom, in the pitch darkness of night, Sophie lay completely naked beneath her crisp white sheets and lightweight comforter. It was something she'd never done before.

Even when going to bed—always alone—she wore something to cover her scars. It was an odd thing to do, she knew. Neither Sam nor Jordan would come in without knocking first and giving her a moment to get decent. Yet she had this insane fear of being caught without her back covered if there were a fire or she went into cardiac arrest and had to call 9-1-1 or some other disaster struck that incapacitated her and kept her from rushing to her bureau to grab a T-shirt or nightgown.

Tonight, however, she'd felt compelled to experience this uninhibited act. Sleeping in the nude was just one more defining moment for her. But it wasn't quite enough.

As Sophie lay in the dark, the sweeping blades of the ceiling fan filling the room with a wispy sound, she focused on the feeling of the cool sheets against her body and the soft breeze from the fan along her bare skin. She'd folded the sheet along the tops of her breasts and tucked it under her arms. No hiding this time. She lay perfectly still, staring up at the ceiling she couldn't even see because of the inky blackness

surrounding her. She'd pulled the blinds shut and dropped the drapes that she usually kept tied back. It was ridiculous, really, but somehow being shrouded in darkness made her nudity more acceptable.

Now if only God couldn't see her.

Nothing she could do about that, so she pushed Him from her thoughts and cleared her mind completely. She focused on her breathing, pulling in deep streams of oxygen and letting them out slowly. Only when she was fully relaxed did she allow her mind to wander.

First, thoughts of Jordan drifted through her head. Closing her eyes, she conjured a mental image of him and his boyish grin and rock-star good looks. She replayed their evening together in her head like she was in the audience of a movie. She pictured herself on the sofa with Jordan sitting next to her, seducing her with his sexy ménage story, his soft voice and his warm hands. She recalled how her body had responded to his touch, to the stroking between her legs. She visualized him pushing aside the material of her panties and rubbing her labia and clit, then pushing his finger deep inside her, making her moan and pant, silently demanding more.

As Sophie's fantasy flitted through her mind, she settled more comfortably in the bed. Her skin felt hot despite the air circulating from the fan. Folding the sheet down to her waist, she lay in the dark, fighting the tension that threatened to ruin this experiment. She was exposed to no one. Yet she felt vulnerable and self-conscious. Silly, yes. But that was the life she lived.

Forcing from her mind the idea of what good Catholic girls *don't* do, she went back to fantasizing about Jordan. Recalling the thrilling sensations he evoked, the pressure that had built in her pussy until release was imminent and undeniable.

God, it'd felt so good! Like nothing she'd ever known, nothing she'd ever dreamed of. It was a feeling she wanted to experience again. Only this time, she wanted Sam to make her come.

Satisfying Sophie

Thinking of him, her fantasy morphed into the early morning make-out session right here in her bedroom. She could almost smell him and feel him as she remembered his arms around her and his hot, intimate kisses. She'd wanted him the moment his lips had touched hers. Had wanted him in a way she'd never known before. The phrase "hot and bothered" hadn't done justice to what she'd felt with Sam. And even though Jordan's touch had brought her to orgasm, Sam's kiss had affected her on a much deeper level. Even now, thinking of his mouth on hers, his tongue engaging hers in an erotic dance, made her melt into the mattress. Her nipples tightened and that nowfamiliar pull deep inside her told her she would never be satisfied until Sam made love to her.

She imagined what it would have been like to unbutton his tuxedo shirt and strip it off his body. To have touched his magnificent chest and hot skin. To have dropped kisses on his pecs, teased his nipples with her tongue. To have run her fingers over his rigid abdomen and down to the waist of his pants. To have unfastened them and slid her hand behind the band of his briefs.

Sophie sighed into the quiet night as she thought of filling her palm with Sam's penis. Without even realizing it, she cupped her aching breasts and squeezed them the way Sam had. She pinched the nipples as she imagined he would have done had they gone that far. All the while, she saw herself, in her mind's eye, stroking Sam, making his breath ragged and his cock hard.

To have leaned forward and licked the tip... She shuddered at such a forbidden thought, though it turned her on even more. How she longed to feel his smooth skin against her tongue. Taste the pre-cum and hear him groan with pleasure as she took him fully in her mouth and sucked him hard. Sophie had never done such a thing, but it was perfectly easy to fantasize about it tonight. And fantasizing did outrageous things to her own body. Her hand slid down her stomach to the apex of her legs. Her fingers pressed against the tingling flesh that was slick with desire and swollen with need. She rubbed herself with all four fingers, covering her lips and her clit, pressing harder and

moving faster as she mentally cataloged the right pace, the most sensitive areas, the way she responded to a circular motion versus side to side and up and down.

She explored all the external erogenous zones as she continued to pleasure Sam in her fantasy. Then, when her imagination shifted gears and she pictured herself lying back on the mattress as Sam's cock pressed to her opening and then thrust deep inside her, she pushed two fingers into her wet pussy and matched the rhythm in her head, pretending it was Sam inside her, filling her, fucking her faster and harder.

In her fantasy, Sam spread her wide and hammered into her, making her writhe and moan and grip fistfuls of sheet while she thrashed on the bed, loving every thrust deep within her, every jolt of her body created by his aggressive lovemaking. She imagined him losing himself as she did until they were both urging the other to come, pushing each other to the precipice and then crying out loud as they climaxed together.

Sophie's orgasm came at that instant and she squeezed her eyes shut, holding onto the fantasy she'd created in her mind. Her fingers pumped inside her cunt, intensifying the sensations, prolonging her release a few precious seconds more. She'd had no idea that her body had bowed off the bed until the orgasm ebbed and she dropped back to the mattress. Her skin was damp from her excitement and her exertion. Her mind reeled from lack of oxygen. She wondered if the scream in her head had been mirrored in real life.

Lying still again in the dark, she waited for Jordan or Sam to rap on the door and ask if she was okay. When the night air remained quiet, she sighed in relief and relaxed again.

Then Sophie smiled. A big, ridiculous grin.

"I did it," she whispered to no one in particular. "I stopped obsessing and started feeling." Girlish laughter bubbled up in her throat and she gave in to it, pressing her face against the side of a pillow to cover the giggles.

The laughter eventually subsided, but the euphoria stayed with her.

In so many ways, this was the dawn of a new day for Sophie Jensen.

* * * * *

A week later, Jordan and Sophie landed a new client. A Fortune 500 company had hired them to design all their collateral materials for a huge PR and marketing blitz. Sam treated them to dinner at Sophie's favorite oceanside restaurant.

"To kicking ass and taking names," he said as he lifted his glass of champagne in a toast.

"To Soph's diligent pursuit of the account," Jordan added.

"And Jordan's brilliant design work," she threw in. When her gaze met Sam's, she said, "And to Sam for his unwavering support of our little joint venture."

"Little?" Sam scoffed as the rim of his glass touched hers. "According to the press release, P.K. Electronics is putting several million dollars behind this ad campaign and you guys are going to get a nice chunk of that change."

Sophie was giddy with excitement. "We are! I still can't believe it."

"You worked hard and you deserve this," he said to her and Jordan. "Don't forget the little people when you're rich and famous."

She laughed. "I don't think that'll ever be a problem." Then she turned to Jordan as a thought occurred to her. "Hey, we're going to have a shitload of work. Do you think we should hire a couple of interns like we used to talk about doing when we hit this mark?"

"Not a bad idea. You're still going to have to prospect for new business and you'll be tied up managing this account while I handle the artwork. It wouldn't hurt to have a couple extra sets of hands to take care of the administrative stuff and assist me with collateral development."

"Wow," Sophie said, the magnitude of their coup finally sinking in. "This is everything we'd hoped for, Jordan."

They'd conceptualized the business venture their sophomore year and had started doing design work for local companies the next year. By the time they'd graduated,

59

they'd had a steady enough stream of work to keep them in business. But they'd always waxed poetic about landing a big fish—one that would put them on the map and help them net even more business. Someday they'd open their own ad agency. In the meantime, they operated out of Sam's guesthouse, paying him additional rent for the space, though it was peanuts compared to commercial rates. In fact, it was highway robbery, but Sam had insisted there was no point in paying more, since the space had rarely been used anyway. They basically just covered the utilities and taxes.

After dinner, they returned to the house. Sophie had another champagne buzz, which was enhanced by her and Jordan's successful day. In her room, she flitted about excitedly, too jazzed to sleep. She was on top of the world. The big, fat cherry crowning a goopy hot fudge sundae.

Opening the patio doors let in a warm breeze and the sound of the waves crashing on the shore. It was a sultry, balmy night with a hint of humidity. She took a cool shower, then slipped into a tight-fitting cami top and a pair of boy shorts, both in a deep teal color that complemented her tan. Covering herself with a sheer black robe that hit mid-thigh, she curled up in the middle of her bed and opened a book. But the words didn't register in her mind. She read the opening paragraph three times before she realized she was too keyed up to concentrate. Closing the book, she considered checking her email, but didn't feel like going out to the guesthouse to fire up her laptop.

Sleep was clearly an impossibility and Sophie didn't have a TV in her room, so she went downstairs and milled about, thinking she should probably do a load of laundry and put the dishes away that were in the washer. Neither chore sounded appealing. She was still in the mood to celebrate. Wandering down the hall to the entertainment room, she paused when she heard soft moans coming from inside the room. Sophie's stomach did two very odd things. At first, it dropped to her knees at the thought of Sam or Jordan—or both!—snuggled on the couch with a woman, doing things to her that would evoke the pleasure-filled moans wafting toward her.

Satisfying Sophie

When she heard Jordan and Sam chatting softly above the whimpers of ecstasy, her stomach returned to its appropriate place and then fluttered with excitement as memories assaulted her mind, making her think of the orgasm Jordan had given her and the scorching-hot kisses Sam had delivered.

She understood why Sam hadn't brought up their night together. He was waiting for her to broach the subject. Clearly he didn't intend to engage in conversation about her sexual hang-ups until she was ready and willing to own up to them. To divulge all her ugly secrets and let the chips fall where they may.

In so many ways, what she'd experienced with Jordan and Sam that fateful night had opened a door for her. One she truly wanted to pass through. She trusted them and they had proven time and again that they were there for her, that they only wanted what was best for her.

So her only legitimate hang-up now was the fear of how Sam would react to her scars. She had realized the other night that she wanted to be perfect for him. That was impossible. And that was what she was most insecure about.

Pushing that thought aside, she walked into the room and forced a cheerful smile to her face. "A little late-night porn, boys?"

Jordan sat at the far end of the oversized leather couch, sipping a beer. Sam was on the opposite end. He had books spread out on the coffee table before him and a legal pad rested on his lap.

The flat screen mounted at the far end of the room above the enormous media credenza was on. A man and a woman stood on a balcony, embracing each other as they kissed.

"It's not porn," Jordan said as she plucked Sam's glass of Scotch from the end table. On her way past Jordan, he handed her his empty bottle. "It's *erotica*." He pronounced the word as if to say, "*bor-ing*."

She went to the wet bar to refill Sam's glass and get Jordan another beer. "There's a difference?"

"Yeah," Jordan said. "No visual penetration and there's a plot. Like an actual romance, not just hot-and-horny sex." He lifted an eyebrow suggestively as he added, "Total chick flick. You'll dig it."

"Bridget left it a while back," Sam commented. "She said women are more stimulated by this kind of thing than hard-core porn."

"Really? Bridget needs stimulation?"

Sam laughed. "Don't mistake 'uninhibited' for 'sex machine'. She's very in-tune with her sensual side."

"As opposed to me," Sophie muttered as she delivered drinks, then poured wine for herself. She stood in the corner of the room, watching as the handsome man on the big screen held the beautiful woman in his arms and told her how perfect she was.

"Utterly flawless," he murmured.

Great, Sophie thought with a twinge of envy and frustration. *Exactly what I need to hear.*

She lived in Malibu, for Christ's sake. She was surrounded by "utterly flawless" women. Which, in her mind, made her insecurity about her scars all the more valid. Now she was subjected to perfection on TV, in front of Sam and Jordan.

"Think I've seen enough," she said as she gripped the newly opened bottle of Chardonnay by the neck and started toward the archway. Her evening would be better spent in the guesthouse, working.

"Oh come on," Jordan said over his shoulder. "Stick around. He's trying to prove a point to her."

"Yeah," Sophie said on a bitter laugh. "And I'm sure his 'point' will be well received. I'm outta here."

"Actually," Sam chimed in again, "It's been a while since I've seen this movie, but...I agree with Jordan. I think you might appreciate it."

"Haven't we already established I'm not the sexual type?"

Sam and Jordan exchanged looks. Sam's gaze returned to her and he frowned.

Jordan said, "I thought we'd established the direct opposite."

She lifted her arms and shrugged. "Nothing's different in my life." *Except that I now know what I want – the very thing I can't have.* "How about you two?"

Sam turned away. He set aside his legal pad and propped his booted feet on the coffee table in front of him. "Everything's different, Soph. When are you going to own up to that?"

Her eyes shifted from the back of Sam's head to Jordan, who cocked a brow at her again. "Come sit with us," he said as he patted the space between them on the black leather sofa. "This could be educational for us all."

Sophie doubted it. Still, there was an annoyingly taunting word rattling around in her head that had revealed itself to her after Sam's phenomenally thrilling kisses and which continued to rear its ugly head, begging her to acknowledge and assuage it.

Coward. That was the word. The one she couldn't escape.

Sure, keeping her secret from Mark or any of her other short-term boyfriends was basically understandable and forgivable because she didn't know them all that well, didn't have a firm commitment with them. But when it came to Jordan and Sam especially Sam—she didn't have a valid excuse for keeping anything from them. Neither man had ever kept a secret from her. If there was something she wanted to know, she asked and they told. Hadn't Jordan proven that when he'd divulged the ménage with Bridget? He'd risked Sophie's shock and disgust. Had put his and Sam's reputations on the line to tell her what she wanted to know, despite the fact that it could have left a negative connotation in her mind. Revealing something like that could have backfired on him. She could have found the whole affair sordid and sleazy and thought a lot less of both of them. And Bridget.

He'd risked losing Sophie's respect for them all.

She felt the emotion well within in her again. Tears threatened her eyes, but she blinked them back. How hypocritical and selfish she was being. And with two people who loved her and wanted to *help* her.

"I'm sorry," she said as she returned the Chardonnay to the fridge under the wet bar. "I'm being ridiculous. Juvenile, even."

"No," Sam said in his studious lawyer voice. He didn't take his eyes from the TV, didn't look at her. "You're being human. Something's troubling you, Soph, and you'll tell us about it when you're ready. We shouldn't press." He shot Jordan a quick look, then returned his attention to the movie. "Whatever it is has clearly manifested itself into your emotions and even your sexuality. You think you're not a passionate person when, in fact, both Jordan and I know you are."

"Psychoanalyzing me, Sam? Really?"

"Nope. Just telling you that we're onto you. And that we're here for you."

His voice softened and that made Sophie's heart clench. "Look," she said as she came around the sofa and sank into the seat between them. Setting her glass of wine on the coffee table, she settled back against the plump cushion and said, "I wasn't raped or anything, so don't think something tragic happened to me."

Something tragic did happen to you.

She sighed in exasperation at the internal thought and amended her statement. "Okay, yes, something did happen. But it's not something I can talk about. Not yet anyway. And the truth is," she said before dragging in a big breath and then letting it out slowly, "it's always made me feel like damaged goods."

Both men were silent. Jordan looked as though he wanted to say something, but he seemed to catch a look from Sam over her head and clamped his mouth shut.

Sam said, "You'll talk when you're ready. Let's watch the movie."

Sophie rolled her eyes. Would she ever figure him out? He'd demanded an explanation the other night and she hadn't been able to say boo about her problem. Now she was finally saying something and he wanted to watch a movie?

Reaching for her wine, she took a long sip, then tried to focus on what she had yet to discern as a "chick flick". The room was dimly lit, only the light on Sam's end table glowed a soft yellow. On screen, the couple had moved inside to a bedroom, which was only illuminated by the light of the set's fake moon streaming in through the windows.

The man took the woman by the hand and led her further into the room. He said, "You're so much more beautiful than you know."

Oh for the love of God! They were back to *this*?

How was listening to a perfect man tell a perfect woman that she was, well, *perfect* something Sophie was going to "appreciate"?

"I think I'd prefer porn," she said in a dry tone.

"Shh," Sam countered. He reached for the light switch and turned the end table lamp off.

"Should I make popcorn?" she asked.

"No. Now shut up and listen." He pulled the pillow from behind him and settled it against his arm. Sophie took the bait. She curled up on the sofa and rested her head against the pillow, tucking her feet up on the couch by Jordan.

It didn't occur to her at first that Sam had said *listen* not *watch*. But when the man in the movie pulled the woman in front of a full-length mirror and stood behind her, saying over her shoulder, "Try to see what I see," Sophie took greater interest in the film.

The man's hands gently massaged her shoulders. Then he scooped up her long, silky-looking tresses, filling his palms with them. He caressed the strands with his fingers, rubbing them softly as though they were spun gold. Then he dipped his head and inhaled deeply.

"Fantastic," he said in his thick British accent, which Sophie had just noticed. It was damn sexy, adding an even more sensual element to what he was doing. "Like rainwater. Fresh and pure."

No man had ever said anything like to Sophie and she found it extremely romantic. "He's good," she whispered.

"Shh," Sam said again.

The British hottie gently dropped the woman's thick mass of hair and then ran his hands down her back to her waist. Suddenly, the woman's expression changed from fascination to discomfort. Like a deer caught in headlights, she stared in horror as the man's hands moved forward, smoothing over the soft rounding of her stomach. She pulled in a sharp breath and closed her eyes. Not in erotic bliss. In embarrassment. Shame. Sophie recognized the signs.

The woman flinched and tried to step away, but the man held her in his embrace.

"She doesn't want him to touch her stomach," Sophie said.

"She thinks she's fat," Jordan commented. "I think she's hot."

Sophie smiled. "You do love the female form. But you're also right. She's lovely. Extremely provocative."

"Stand still," the man on screen said. His hands lifted and he pulled the hem of the silk blouse from the waist of her skirt and then slowly unbuttoned it. When the material fell open, he cupped her full breasts as he kissed her behind the ear. She sighed softly as she melted against him, seemingly forgetting her earlier mortification. Sophie could relate. Jordan had made her forget her scars. So too had Sam's kisses.

But it'd only been a brief respite, as was the case with the woman in the movie they were watching.

When the man unclasped her bra and dragged the straps down her shoulders along with her blouse, her eyes were transfixed on the image in the mirror. And it wasn't a happy look that played on her face. Her wannabe lover, however, displayed a completely different emotion. Lust sparkled in his eyes as his hands reached around her to cup the full mounds once again. He squeezed them gently, then teased the nipples with his fingers as he rubbed his erection against her backside.

"So beautiful," he murmured in her ear. "The perfect size."

Indeed, her breasts filled his large hands perfectly and he seemed to take great pleasure in massaging them. She let out a soft sigh as he nibbled her earlobe. Then his hands moved down her sides to her waist again. He quickly slid the zipper down its track and her skirt fell to the floor, pooling at her high-heel-clad feet.

"Oh that's nice," Jordan said on a low sigh as they all stared at the garter belt, lacy panties and thigh-high stockings the woman wore under her conservative clothing.

"Not necessary," Sam was quick to add, "but nice."

Sophie lifted her head and stared up at him. "You go for that sort of thing?"

He grinned down at her. "Honey, all men like women in lingerie. Why do you think the sales are always over by the time the *Victoria's Secret* catalog makes it into *your* bathroom?"

"I'll be changing the delivery address to the business's post-office box on Monday."

Jordan snorted. "Guess we'd better not hire any male interns, then."

"Seriously, you guys are such...guys."

"And this is news?" Jordan quipped.

Turning her attention back to the movie, she said, "Shut up and watch."

Sam settled more comfortably in his seat and draped an arm over Sophie's shoulders. As the movie continued and the man on screen exposed every inch of the woman and kept her focused on the reflection in the mirror, all the while telling her exactly how *he* saw her, Sophie began to understand the lesson Sam was trying to subtly teach her.

"If you don't think this is beautiful," the on-screen lover said as he entered the woman from behind while palming her breasts and staring into her eyes, reflected in the mirror, "then you really don't see what I see."

"But—" she began to protest with hesitation and uncertainty in her voice. Her hands swept low to cover her slightly protruding belly.

"But nothing," he whispered in her ear. Then he reached for her wrists and thrust her hands forward, forcing her to clasp the posts of the wooden stand supporting the mirror. Bent forward, her breasts concealed her stomach and created an entirely different visual. "I love everything about you," he told her as he moved behind her. "To me, darling, you're absolutely flawless. Can't you see that?"

Her protests and discomfort gave way to sexy moans and gentle pleading for more. Not for more compliments. More fucking.

Jordan was right. One couldn't actually *see* the penetration, but the sounds of skin slapping skin and the lusty moans and heavy breaths were enough to paint a very erotically stimulating picture. The woman's breasts swayed with the couple's movements and their eyes locked in the mirror again as she continued to hold onto the posts and take what her lover gave her.

The TV room seemed deathly silent as Sophie watched in fascination and excitement, finding the whole seduction sexy and beautiful. And the lovemaking was significant unto itself, in front of the mirror where the woman had to face her fears, her insecurities, her lover and her desires all at once. No hiding from any of them.

She was so engrossed in the movie that she barely noticed Sam's fingers stroking her arm. Or the fact that her bare feet were in Jordan's lap and he was gently massaging them. Not a big deal, really. They worked long hours and gave each other massages all the time. But as the lovemaking kicked into high gear on TV and the woman became less inhibited and more vocal, the innocent touches on Sophie's skin turned more sensual. She felt every stroke to the core of her being. Her nipples tightened behind her cami top. Her clit zinged with electricity. That wonderful breathless feeling took hold of her as the realization of the advantageous situation in which she'd inadvertently found herself dawned on her.

Yes, Sam had set her up. Had clearly popped in this movie in hopes she'd learn something from it. Whether Jordan had played a part in this lesson was debatable. He was typically blissfully unaware, part of his boyish charm. Both men had to be a little bit turned-on by watching another couple make love, even if it wasn't hard-core porn. And here was Sophie, stretched out between the two of them in nothing more than her jammies and see-through robe.

She'd held her wineglass in both hands this entire time, not touching Sam. Now she moved forward slightly and set it on the coffee table. Moving back into place, she dropped a hand on his thigh and she felt his arm tighten around her in response.

A gesture of recognition and acceptance on her part answered by a confirmation on his?

Had she just silently acquiesced to the thing she'd thought only Bridget would ever share with her two best friends?

Sophie's chest pulled tight at the thought of what might have just been set in motion. What could have been set in motion the moment she'd agreed to stay and *listen* to the movie with them.

Although she was nowhere near letting go of her insecurities the way the woman on screen had, she did find herself concocting ways in which to keep her lower back off limits if, in fact, she'd just given the seal of approval on a non-verbally proffered threesome.

One of Jordan's hands slid from her foot to her ankle, up to her calf. He stroked her skin with his fingertips, moving higher until he grazed the back of her knee, sending an electrical bolt to the heart of her, making her pussy throb and her breath catch. His hand eased over her bare thigh in a slow, sensual motion, his fingers skimming the hem of her short robe.

69

Sophie froze, uncertain of what to do or how to react. Oddly, though, stopping Jordan wasn't an appealing option. But what the hell was she thinking? Could she really go through with this?

As she debated whether or not to let them proceed or to retreat to her room, Sam's hand swept over her neck, brushing the strands of hair off her skin. She lay mostly on her hip, her head resting against his chest, the pillow wedged between his side and her shoulder. Her back was pressed to the sofa cushion, so there was no real threat, nothing to fear at the moment. Except of course a potential ménage a trois!

While the couple in the film changed positions and continued to go at it, their moans and verbal encouragement bolder and louder now, Jordan's hand moved past the hem of her robe to cup a cheek. Sophie's head snapped in his direction. He was leaning over her legs, his other hand easing up her inner thigh since her legs were slightly parted. She thought of the night they'd gotten drunk together. The way he rubbed her labia with just the right amount of pressure. The way he'd stroked her clit, then played with her G-spot until she'd come.

Excitement danced through her like it had that wonderful night. Her breasts felt heavy in the tight top. Her insides buzzed with life. And she was sure the crotch of her boy shorts were damp, could almost feel the warm honey oozing from her pussy.

Jordan's eyelids were at half-mast as he drank her in. Didn't take a rocket scientist to figure out what he was thinking, what he wanted. Before she was able to process all of this, Sam's hand on her shoulder shifted forward, the warm pads of his fingers grazing her collarbone before trailing lower and caressing the inner swell of her breast, teasing the skin and tracing along the edge of the structured cup of the cami.

"You're in control," he whispered before placing a kiss on her temple.

Sophie didn't feel in control. At least, not in control of her riotous emotions and the parade of sensations that marched from the tips of her toes to the top of her head. Surely Sam didn't miss the quick rise and fall of her chest and the rapid breathing she couldn't slow. It was just a matter of seconds before Jordan's fingers would reach the apex of her legs and she knew at that point, there'd be no turning back. She wouldn't be able to stop him from doing what he'd done to her before – wouldn't *want* to stop him. And then there was Sam. What part did he intend to play in this seduction?

She had mere moments to make her decision. It came surprisingly easy to her. Shifting just so on the sofa, she ended up in Sam's arms, practically in his lap, the pillow propping her up and still protecting her back, though she doubted he could feel the scars behind the thick material of the cami. In moving, she offered Jordan a more advantageous position. And made her decision quite clear to both men. The silent invitation had been answered.

She stared up at Sam, whose green eyes flashed with heat and passion and emotion. She loved the message they conveyed. Understanding and acceptance. The desire to give her this one night. To let her experience this ultimate pleasure and take back what Bridget had inadvertently stolen from her.

She didn't need to say a word. Sam's head dipped and his mouth covered hers. He kissed her deeply. Tenderly at first, until one of her arms wrapped around his neck and pulled him even closer to her, urging him to let go completely. Her other hand gripped the rock-hard biceps of one arm like a life preserver she'd need in order to survive this experience. His kiss became hungrier, darker, greedier. Sophie gave herself over to the intense desire building within her. The dull ache between her legs spiked when Sam's hand cupped her breast and gave it a gentle squeeze.

Meanwhile, Jordan positioned himself between her parted legs, his mouth and tongue teasing her inner thigh just a breath away from her swollen clit. When his fingers slid over her crotch and massaged the sensitive nub through her shorts, she gripped Sam even tighter. The sensations growing inside her were raw and prickly and so damn hot. The internal heat radiated outward, flushing her skin, making her feel as though someone had turned the furnace on. She felt warm and tingly and restless. In desperate need of both men as the fear and uncertainty gave way to passion and desire.

When Jordan's mouth replaced his fingers, his tongue whisking over her damp crotch and targeting her clit, she broke Sam's kiss and gasped for air. Never before had she felt a man's hot breath, soft lips and probing tongue on such an intimate part of her. It was an explosive feeling—even with the nuisance of underwear in the way. What Sophie felt was a forbidden pleasure that was oh-so-beautiful and captivating.

"I want to taste you, Sophie." Jordan's words caused a shudder of excitement to ripple through her.

Her eyelids fluttered open and she stared up at Sam. His jaw was tight, his eyes burning with lust and longing. There was no doubt in her mind that he wanted to taste her too. But the choreography seemed to be predetermined and Sophie found it to be the perfect scenario. Laying in Sam's arms, enjoying his body and his kisses while Jordan pleasured her was erotically appealing to her.

"Is it all right, Soph?" Sam asked in his quiet, intimate voice.

She swallowed down a very large lump of desire. Her heart thumped hard and strong in her chest and her breath was scarce. Admittedly, she was a little freaked out and a lot turned-on. She let the latter rule her actions.

"Yes," she whispered.

Sam kissed her briefly, then his lips grazed her temple and he whispered, "Jordan wants to make you come again."

Sophie's stomach flipped and a sharp spear of desire pierced the heart of her, like an electrical jolt deep in her wet cunt. A low moan escaped her parted lips and her response seemed to heighten both men's arousal. Sam's eyes deepened in color. Jordan groaned as he hooked his fingers in the sides of her shorts and dragged the material down her legs. Returning to his post, he eyed her naked mound for a moment before his fingers slid along her lips, widening as he went, opening her more fully to him. His head dipped and her breath caught as his mouth pressed against her.

"Oh!" Sophie gasped. The fire raged inside her as Jordan's tongue lapped at her, then targeted her ultrasensitive clit, the tip teasing the swollen bud and sending a frenzy of sensations rocketing through her.

"Oh God. That's...so amazing." The words slipped from her mouth unbidden. Never before had she experienced anything so intense and wonderful and intimate. Her head fell back on her shoulders as wave after wave of ecstasy consumed her.

Sam took the opportunity presented to him and kissed her. One arm was wrapped around her shoulder as she twisted her torso so she was almost pressed against his chest. His other hand pushed aside the cup of her cami and the pad of his thumb rubbed her nipple tight. When Jordan pushed a finger deep into her aching cunt, while still licking and sucking her clit, her mouth tore away from Sam's and she sucked in a sharp breath of air.

Her heart seemed to beat in her throat, her pulse raged in her ears. She felt every sensation acutely and was too turned-on to even speak. As Jordan continued to pleasure her, pushing her closer and closer to orgasm, Sam's warm lips closed around her nipple and he sucked it hard, making everything inside her tighten to an almost unbearable degree. Her body trembled in Sam's arms and she pressed herself against Jordan's mouth, wanting more, wanting that explosive and beautiful release she'd found liberating and addictive that first time with him.

But it remained elusive. Though Sophie's body was definitely responding to Jordan's skillful ministrations, there was something holding her back. Frustration quickly set in because she didn't want roadblocks. She didn't want her usual mental obstacles to ruin this glorious experience.

Damn it, she wanted her orgasm!

"Sam," she said, her fingers all tangled in his hair, massaging his scalp as his tongue curled around her nipple. "I'm so close. But I can't...I just...I can't let go..." What the hell was wrong with her? Two of the most gorgeous men she'd ever laid eyes on were devoting their sole attention to her and she wasn't getting off on it? In what universe would this happen? Well, other than hers, of course?

Jordan heard her struggle likely as much as he felt it. His head lifted and he worked a second finger into her tight canal as he shot Sam a look. "Help her," he said in a low voice.

When Sam's large hand skimmed down her stomach to her legs, spread wide open with Jordan filling the V they created, Sophie bit back a cry of delight. His touch was different than Jordan's. Stronger, more determined, more...intense and electrifying. Dear Lord, he'd been right when he'd said she wasn't ready for him. Every nerve ending in her body jumped to attention as two fingers covered her clit, stroking it before they split apart and massaged the area on either side of the swollen bud, then targeted the ultra-sensitive nub again.

"Oh yes," Sophie whimpered as a whole new wave of euphoria washed over her. "Oh God, Sam. That's unbelievably good."

He continued his alternating technique, pushing her so close to the edge when he rubbed her clit, then pulling her back with the along-the-side action. Her body tightened with its need for release, but the prolonged pleasure was too fantastic to rush. She could have endured hours of this, she was sure. As Sam did his thing, Jordan slowly stroked her inner depths, finding that special spot in her pussy that he worked in time with Sam's massaging.

Her grip on Sam's arm was much stronger now. Her fingertips pressed into his hard muscles as she clutched at him, no longer reaching for an elusive orgasm. She knew it was just moments away, but now she wanted to savor the precursor to it. The sensations that shimmied through her from head to toe. The overwhelming stimulation that felt so incredibly good, she never wanted it to end.

This was sexual bliss.

She closed her eyes and whispered in his ear. "I had a fantasy about you the other night." Her voice was low and breathy. It was hard to talk with her heart and pulse raging the way they did, but she remembered how turned-on she'd gotten when Jordan had talked dirty to her. She wanted it to work on Sam.

"I imagined you in bed with me. I was on all fours and you fucked me from behind, thrusting harder and faster as I begged you for more."

Sam groaned. His fingers on her clit worked her more feverishly.

"I want to feel you inside me, Sam. I want your cock in my cunt, fucking me hard."

Her free hand covered Sam's as he stroked her quickly, pushing her toward the edge. Jordan's fingers were still inside her. His determination to make her climax as powerful as possible was unmistakable. Sophie's back arched and her body moved in rhythm with the hands working the most sensitive parts of her body until she felt herself cresting the hill that would lead to a breathtaking fall.

"Sam," she said on a sharp breath. "I'm going to come."

"Yes," he answered. "Just let go, Sophie."

She did. Like a flag unfurling in a stiff wind, sensations snapped in all different directions as Sophie climaxed. She cried out, hearing Sam's name on her lips, not thinking so much about Jordan, though she mentally gave credit to his effort. Yet it was Sam's arms that held her and it was Sam who'd pushed her to the edge and made her feel safe falling over it.

Erotic and exhilarating sensations ripped through her body making Sophie tremble and gasp for air.

Dear God! How wonderful it all felt! So sweet, yet decadent and so very liberating!

Eyes closed and her body crackling with life, she clung to Sam as the arm around her shoulders held her to him, steadying her. Jordan's fingers withdrew from her body and she felt him move off the couch. The sound of the TV died and she assumed he left the room because it was suddenly quiet, with only her ragged breaths mingling with Sam's. Sophie stayed curled up in his lap until the aftershocks of her orgasm fully abated and her breathing returned to normal.

Her fingers curled in strands of his hair as her head rested on his shoulder. The glorious feelings swirling around inside her were too overwhelming to process, so she simply reveled in them, letting the feelings and emotions take charge. There was so much beauty and significance in what she had shared with Sam and Jordan and she didn't want to miss a second of it. Wanted to catalog and savor every fiery sensation in her body, every heady emotion, every feeling of love and belonging.

They'd given her a gift. A key to free herself from the shackles. The bonus, of course, were the fantastic orgasms. But the true gift was the liberation she'd found. Sophie knew it was time to break free of her constraints. To face all her demons. To share them and let the chips fall where they may.

For better or for worse.

She considered what needed to be done. Sam and Jordan had given her their unique relationship back. It didn't matter that they'd done much more with Bridget as a threesome. She knew tonight carried more weight than the day they'd spent on the boat with Bridget. That had been about sex. Jordan and Sam had both admitted it. Tonight, though... Sophie knew tonight had been about friendship and love and healing. The bond she shared with her best friends was stronger than ever, because this subtle seduction they'd obviously put into play following Sophie and Mark's breakup wasn't just about sex. It was about letting go of everything that held Sophie back in life, relationships, friendships...even releasing what held her *heart* back.

Snuggled close to Sam, listening to his soft breathing and feeling his heat and strength made Sophie stronger. She felt protected and loved. And she'd been given these things with no strings attached, no personal agendas pushed. Sam and Jordan loved her, each in their own way.

They'd shown that more than ever these past several weeks. And now it was time for Sophie to reciprocate. To give something back to them. The weight of the situation did not escape her. In fact, a hint of fear crept up her spine as she mentally acknowledged what she needed to do. She loathed the coward that had controlled her for far too long and she knew it was time to step up to the plate and prove what Sophie Jensen was made of.

Relaxed and exhausted from both her physical release and her emotional reconciliation, she drifted off to sleep in the safety and comfort of Sam's arms, knowing exactly what she needed to do next. Come what may...

Chapter Four

"Here's your boarding pass, your hotel confirmation and the number to the car service in the event they're late picking you up at the airport," Sophie said as she handed a manila file folder to Jordan the next day. She'd spent the morning arranging his flight to New York so that he could meet with their new client's marketing team tomorrow. "I'll be on campus most of the day starting the intern recruiting process, but you can get me on the BlackBerry if any problems arise."

Jordan grinned at her. "I'll be in the air all day, Soph." He took the folder from her and kissed her on the cheek. "Try to relax. This meeting in New York is going to be great. I've got all the high-res graphics loaded onto your laptop for tomorrow's presentation. I'll give you a call on my way over to the office and then again after the meeting."

"You're going to knock their socks off," she said to him. And meant it. Jordan was a graphic design genius. Cutting-edge and progressive, precisely why P.K. Electronics had come knocking on their door after receiving a very bold proposal from Sophie. "You packed your suit carefully, right? Sealed in the bag I gave you? Sam says it keeps the wrinkles to a minimum."

"Yes, Mom. And I've got fresh underwear on too in case the plane goes down."

"Don't jinx this trip, smartass."

"Someone has to keep their sense of humor, Soph. And something tells me it's not going to be you." He secured the laptop bag and put the strap over his shoulder. "You should be at a dairy milking cows the way you're wringing your hands."

She dropped her arms to her sides. "I don't know why I'm so nervous. Sam's already had two conference calls with P.K.'s legal team and they've just about

completed negotiations. We'll have the contracts signed before you even land. This is *definitely* happening. Maybe that's what's so nerve-racking!"

Jordan chuckled. "You'd have been the one counting heads on the Ark and making sure everyone filed on two-by-two, Soph. Stop worrying! They love the concepts, just need to decide on one. And I've made mock-ups of the collateral material with all three proposed designs so whichever one they decide on, I can give them something to see and touch and talk about while I'm there. Then we'll get a move-on with the additional advertising. It's in the bag, Soph! Relax!"

She loved Jordan's confidence. And she knew he was right. P.K. Electronics had not hired them blindly. Sophie and Jordan had done an exceptional amount of front-end work to ensure everyone was on the same page. Tomorrow's meeting was a kickoff to the project. Which meant this was virtually a done deal.

Pulling in a deep breath, she willed her nerves to take a much-needed timeout. "This account is really important to us, Jordan. I know the marketing team is going to love you."

What wasn't to love about the man? Even with his too-long-for-Wall-Street locks, he looked red carpet worthy in a suit and could charm the knickers off the Queen of England. And when he got rolling about design work and ad campaigns...good Lord! The man would have everyone in the room eating out of the palm of his hand in a matter of minutes. Jordan was passionate about his work and his enthusiasm was infectious. Sophie had seen him work a crowd of uptight executives on more than one occasion. He'd always emerged the victor.

Giving him a quick hug, she said, "Knock 'em dead." Then she urged him toward the door. "Now get out of here before you miss your flight."

"I've got plenty of time, Soph." He collected his things, adding, "Good luck with the recruiting this week."

"And the two new proposals I'll be sending out on Thursday."

Jordan grinned again. "I think we are officially on fire."

"I think so too."

He headed to the door, but Sophie stopped him before he left. "Hey," she said, causing him to glance at her over his shoulder. "About last night. And that...other...night."

Jordan's grin widened. "Yeah?"

"Well," Sophie said. Her skin tingled at the remembrance of his fingers inside her, as his tongue pleasured her clit. Thinking of what he'd done to her turned her on, no doubt about it. But it was Sam's touch she really craved. Sam's cock she wanted inside her. "I just wanted to say, you know, thanks."

He nodded. "That's what friends are for, Soph."

"You're the best one a girl could ask for, Jordan."

He crossed the room, returning to where she stood, and gave her another peck on the cheek. A friendly kiss, not a romantic one. Because whatever had transpired between them, it had been between friends. She knew that and clearly so did he. "I love you, Soph. I want you to be happy. All you have to do is accept what it is that you want and go for it."

She knew innately that he was talking about Sam. "You know, don't you?"

"Saw it coming," he said with a wink. "I'm happy for you. For both of you."

"What if I—"

"You won't screw it up, sweetheart. Don't sabotage yourself."

She groaned. "You know me so well."

"It's all good, Soph. Just follow your heart." He reached out and squeezed her hand, then turned on his booted heels and sauntered out the door, leaving Sophie to stare after him, knowing she was the luckiest girl on the planet.

Now that one relationship had been securely defined and solidified, she had another one to contend with.

* * * * *

Sophie wrapped up her work and the P.K. Electronics contract negotiations by six. She talked to Jordan when he landed in New York and felt even more confident about their success when he told her the VP of Marketing and some of the other execs wanted to have drinks with him that night. A good sign that Jordan was being accepted as part of the team.

Pushing business from her mind, she soaked in a warm bubble bath and then wrapped a robe around her damp body and wandered down to the kitchen. On her way, she passed the laundry room and stepped inside. Sam's white button-down shirts hung on the rack, freshly pressed. She smiled as she pulled one from a hanger. Removing her robe, she slipped on his shirt and buttoned it up.

When she'd picked up the habit of wearing his clothes, she didn't know. It seemed that she'd always had something of his in her laundry basket. A T-shirt, a college jersey, a dress shirt. Whenever she came across an article of clothing that belonged to him, she put it on. Without even thinking about it. Sam had never mentioned the friendly pilfering either. She wondered now why he'd never made a comment about her wearing his clothes and smiled to herself as she drew a natural conclusion. This was just one more intimate connection they shared. Maybe one of the first they'd shared, now that she thought about it.

Leaving the laundry room with a smile on her face, she found Sam exactly where she'd expected him to be in the early evening. Out on the back deck, sitting comfortably in his favorite Adirondack chair, reading the paper and sipping hot tea.

The sun had set, but a few lights illuminated the deck with a glittery golden glow. The sound of the waves lapping on the shore was soothing. A gentle breeze blew off the ocean, ruffling the long strands of hair that escaped Sophie's messy up-do.

The sight of Sam and the soothing sounds surrounding them helped to calm her jangled nerves. But there was still a small knot in her stomach because of the conversation she had yet to have.

It was hugely comforting to be on solid ground with Jordan. And with such little effort on her part. But that was how Jordan was. He was a go-with-the-flow kind of guy and didn't like anything too heavy in his life to weigh him down. His participation in Sophie's seduction had, she knew now, been on a friendship basis. Obviously curiosity had played a role, but all in all, Jordan had been in it to help her out. To get her over the hump, so to speak.

She was over the physical hump, sure. The emotional one had a number of hurdles associated with it, each one taller than the last.

She geared up to tackle them one by one.

"About last night," she said to Sam without preamble. She propped a hip against the frame of the French doors that led to the back deck. "Did you two draw straws or something like that?" She was shooting for levity, hoping to keep the conversation on an even keel for as long as possible. The heavy stuff would come all too soon, she knew.

"Something like that." Sam regarded her for a moment as she lingered in the shadows, wearing his white button-down shirt and, unbeknownst to him, a pair of peach-colored lace panties. "I thought it'd be best if Jordan took the lead," he admitted. "I'm not sure I could've stopped if you'd asked me to."

The haunted look on his face made Sophie wonder how difficult it had been for him to let Jordan touch her so intimately. But surely he knew who held her heart...

She crossed to the railing and stood there for a few moments, staring out at the vast ocean, illuminated by silvery shimmers of moonlight. With her back to Sam, she said, "I wouldn't have stopped you."

She heard the rustle of papers as he set aside his reading material. "It wouldn't have been the same as with Jordan."

Glancing at him over her shoulder, she asked, "How would it have been?"

Sam groaned. He crossed one leg over the other, resting an ankle on the opposite knee. He wore jeans and a shirt that matched the one Sophie wore. He'd tucked his into the waist of his Levi's and had left the top few buttons undone, revealing the swell of

his pectoral muscles. His usually neatly cropped hair was mussed from either the breeze or his fingers.

Settling deeper into his chair, he said, "Jordan had a bit more self-control because he had less at stake. He wanted to restore balance to our friendship, in a manner of speaking. Following the Bridget thing."

She nodded. "Yeah, I got that part. He's a good friend. The best." Sam's mouth twisted into a strange frown. Sophie quickly added, "I don't think of you that way anymore." Turning to face him fully, she said, "What I mean is, I still think of you as one of my best friends, yes. But..."

Here comes the first hurdle!

"But what?" he asked as the crossed leg dropped and he leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees.

"I think of you as more than that."

He eyed her for a moment, seemingly acknowledging the sentiment, but still needing to probe deeper. "You gonna tell me what's going on with you, sweetheart?"

And now for hurdle number two!

Sophie could barely breathe as the weight of the admission that was about to come pressed down on her. She'd made it this far, though, and knew it would be cowardly to turn back. She refused to be cowardly one more day. Sam and Jordan had proven time and again their unconditional love. Their *un-judgmental*, unconditional love.

And if she'd learned anything these past few weeks, it was that she had a shot at something normal and healthy and real. Only a fool would pass that up.

"I'm not going to tell you, Sam," she said, gathering her strength and verve. "I'm going to *show* you."

Sophie felt a little sick to her stomach at her own words. Her nerves were tied in knots despite the calming environment. A month ago, the mere thought of revealing her darkest secret to Sam would have sent her running for cover, cowering in a corner. But

she'd come a long way in a short amount of time. That meant something. She knew in her heart that she could trust Sam and that it was time to lay her cards on the table.

With that ever-looming *for better or for worse* caveat hanging in the balance, sure. But Sophie truly felt as though her do or die moment had arrived. She wouldn't let it pass her by. *Couldn't* let it pass her by. Not when so much was at stake and her heart was on the line like never before.

Looking perplexed by her words and the intensity that had naturally besieged her, Sam started to get out of his chair. She stopped him with a hand in the air. "No, please," she said, panic rising within her. "Stay there. This is going to be difficult enough. Please don't come any closer. Not yet."

"Sophie," he said as he eyed her with concern. Thankfully, he slid back into the Adirondack. "I understand that there's something bothering you. Something I can't figure out. Whatever it is has always kept you on guard and made you self-conscious. If you think you're not beautiful, you're wrong."

She smiled at him. It came naturally and a little bit unexpectedly given the magnitude of what she was about to reveal and how disconcerting it was to her. "You've always been the champion of Sophie Jensen, Sam."

"Well, I kind of like you, kid," he said with a crooked grin, his eyes crinkling at the edges.

Emotion welled within Sophie and her heart tripped on a few beats. "I kind of like you too," she said as a tear pooled in her eye. "More than that, actually."

He nodded and she knew it was in acceptance as much as mutual sentiment. There was no missing the depth of his emotions as he gazed at her across the deck. Even if she weren't seeing it now, she'd felt it in his kisses, had discovered it in the selfless acts of the past few weeks. Letting Jordan touch her the way he had and bring her to orgasm twice had to have been difficult for Sam. She realized that now. But he'd found it necessary in his own mind to let the seduction unravel as it had and that had no doubt

tested his patience and his tolerance. He'd given her as much as Jordan had. Maybe more, considering his sacrifice.

Knowing all this helped her plight a little. Made her stronger and more determined to see through what needed to be done. She reached for the buttons on the shirt she wore and undid them one by one, her fingers trembling so bad it took an absurd amount of time. But then the shirt fell open and Sophie stood before Sam, who leaned forward in his chair again to watch her intently.

She saw him work down a hard swallow. "Jesus, Soph."

He took her in from head to toe and back up again. Her bare breasts felt the caress of his gaze as though it were a physical one and her nipples puckered at his heated look.

"You are so beautiful."

Tears sprang to her eyes again and the corners of her mouth quivered. It was all well and good now, but...

Final hurdle – the freak show…

She choked back the sob that rose in her throat. "I'm not beautiful, Sam," she whispered in response to a compliment she wanted to embrace wholeheartedly, but couldn't. Pushing the shirt off her shoulders, it dropped to the deck at her feet. "I'm not perfect or unflawed or anything else that I wish I were. For you."

She turned around slowly, with pains from the past and fears for the future twisting her stomach into a jumbled mess. It took all the strength she possessed to place her hands on the railing instead of scooping up her shirt and covering herself. She gripped the wood tightly to steady herself, wanting to cry at the horror she was unleashing.

Sophie heard Sam gasp sharply and she squeezed her eyes shut. Tears seeped out of the corners. She bit down on her lower lip when it began to tremble.

"Jesus Christ, Sophie," he said in a strained tone, all traces of desire vanishing in a heartbeat. "Goddamn it." His voice was low and dark, full of barely contained rage. Until that thread snapped. "*What the hell!*"

She heard him pace behind her, heard him move away from her. Sophie froze, thinking Sam had just walked away, never to return. Her heart constricted in her chest, feeling tight and crushed as though a fist squeezed it, wanting to make it burst wide open. She bit back another sob as a steady stream of tears flowed down her cheeks.

Sophie's worst nightmare was coming to fruition. Sam had taken one look at her back and had freaked out. He'd never look at her the way he had last night or just moments ago. She was terrified that the expression on his face and in his eyes when he looked at her from now on would be that of disgust. Revulsion. She couldn't bear the thought. It broke her heart, shredded her insides.

She heard a loud thump behind her and Sophie was certain Sam had just punched the wall. He winced and groaned and then she heard his footsteps again. Still, she couldn't turn around to face him. Not now. Maybe not ever.

She knew what he saw. The scars were burned on her brain as much as they were forever branded on her skin. A mess of long, overlapping hash signs that were sickening to look at, revolting to see, not just because of the way they marred her skin, but because of the violence they all but screamed.

"Sophie," he said through what sounded like clenched teeth. "Who did this to you?" She could hear the agony in his voice and it made it all the worse for her.

Sophie shook her head, unable to speak.

"Goddamn it, Sophie," he groaned, the pain he felt crystal clear in his voice. "Please tell me. I swear to God I'm going to kill him."

Sophie had never heard Sam talk like that before, had never known him to be so angry or borderline violent.

"You can't kill him," she finally spoke, her voice weak and strained. "He's already dead."

Sam came up behind her, placed his strong hands on her bare shoulders and turned her, forcing Sophie to face him. He pulled her into his arms and held her tightly. Sophie couldn't hold back the tears. She cried. Great big sobs that racked her body.

Sam held her close to him. "No one will ever do this to you again, Soph," he whispered in her ear. "No one will ever hurt you like this again. I won't let them."

His words and the conviction in his voice made her cry even harder. She clung to him, her fists curling around clumps of his shirt at his shoulders. Her face was buried in the opening of his shirt, her wet cheek pressed to his hard muscles as she released eight years of pain and agony and secrecy and insecurity. Sam held her through it all, as the demons were exorcised, the fear and shame expelled from her body, heart and soul.

When she was weak from the emotional exertion and had nothing left in her but sniffles and hiccups, Sam retrieved the discarded shirt and draped the soft material over her shoulders. He lifted her into his arms and carried her across the deck to his chair. With her settled in his lap, Sam's hand smoothed over her long hair and he kissed the top of her head.

"I still think you're beautiful, Sophie," he told her. "Inside and out. The most beautiful woman I've ever known."

Sophie's fingers clutched at the material of his shirt and she wanted to thank him for being so sweet and so wonderful, but she couldn't get the words past the enormous lump in her throat so she didn't say anything. Just stayed huddled in his lap, listening to the soothing sound of his heartbeat.

"Tell me what happened," he finally said, his emotions sounding more under control, though the way he held her so tightly suggested otherwise.

Sophie didn't have the heart to continue. Showing him the scars had been tragic enough. His reaction had been volatile and her exorcism had been draining, physically and emotionally. All she wanted to do now was stay curled up in Sam's lap, his arms wrapped around her. She wanted to drown in the scent of him and let his warmth and strength comfort and protect her.

Yet an explanation was in order. How could she reveal such a horrifying thing to him and not follow through with the reason behind the hideous scars?

"I've never told a soul about this," she said, her lips grazing his neck as she remained cuddled in his arms. "It's so awful, Sam."

His muscles tightened all around her, but he said, "I need to know, Sophie. And I think you need to tell me. For your own peace of mind."

She wondered if she'd ever have that, yet knew this had to be part of the healing process. To let it all out and then let it all go. Leave the past in the past and move on. It was what she wanted, what she was in desperate need of achieving.

Hating that she had such dirty laundry to air, she steeled herself for an admission she never thought she'd make. Until she'd realized her true feelings for the man who was holding her so carefully, so protectively. The man who had not walked away when he'd seen the horror displayed on her back.

Swiping a hand over her cheek to brush away the lingering tears, she said, "You know my father was a former priest, right?"

"Yeah, I remember. He left the church when he met your mother."

Sophie nodded. "He never got over the guilt of 'leaving God's side' to marry the woman he fell in love with." She knew her father's demons well, for he'd cast them on Sophie the day she was born. His guilt had multiplied that day and she'd felt the weight of it as far back as she could remember. She'd sensed his dark side even as a child and had always treaded lightly with him. "He insisted I attend only Catholic schools, even though he'd become a Methodist minister. He retained ties with the Catholic diocese and was still affiliated with a local parish. Clearly, though, he thought of himself as a fallen angel and used me to assuage his guilt and lessen his self-proclaimed disgrace."

"Hell of a lot to put on a kid," Sam said, his voice still steady, though the tension exuding from practically every pore belied his rage.

Sophie hadn't considered the turmoil she'd create for Sam by telling him the truth about her. Pulling away from him, she stared up at his handsome face and felt the tears well in her eyes once again. "I'm so sorry for what I'm doing to you. You're angry and..." She shook her head, not finding the word she sought.

"Borderline homicidal?" He provided the sentiment for her.

"Yes," she was hesitant to answer. She'd never seen Sam so close to violence, so on edge. His emotions were raw and real, she could see that in his eyes and in the tight set of his jaw. "I never thought I could be so furious, Sophie," he admitted. "I've never wanted to wrap my hands around someone's neck and squeeze the everlasting life out of them. The second I saw your scars...that's exactly what I wanted to do to whomever did this to you."

She lifted a hand to his face and smoothed her fingers over his cheek. He radiated fury and that unnerved her a little. Not that she was afraid of him. Not in the least. What unsettled Sophie was that something that had happened to her years ago had such a profound effect on Sam now.

"I'm sorry this is so awful," she told him.

He cupped her face with his warm palms and stared her deep in the eye. "None of this is your fault, Soph. You've got to stop treating it as some horrific crime you've committed."

"According to my father, I did commit a horrific crime. Against God."

Sam's hands fell away. "He laid a heap of guilt on you as a child, didn't he?"

Her laugh was short and hollow. "You have no idea. And to deal with all that guilt, he sent me to confession once a week, even when I had nothing to say. He sent me to Mass two times a week. Of course I had to attend his sermons as well. All of them."

"What did your mother have to say about all of this?"

Sophie shook her head. "Nothing, really. She lived in fear of his temper. The guilt made him meaner and uglier over the years. She was too terrified to leave him. Whether she was afraid God would strike her down for leaving her husband or she feared my father's wrath if he ever found her, I don't know. Likely a bit of both."

"I'm so sorry you suffered through this, honey," he said in a soft voice before kissing her temple.

Sophie snuggled back into his arms, resting her head on his chest. She let out a heavy sigh and said, "It's really hard to admit your own father was a monster. I don't blame my mother for being afraid of him. I just wish she'd found a way to stand up to him before..."

She closed her eyes and shook her head slightly.

"What happened, Soph?"

There was no turning back now, she knew it. Sophie said, "When I was sixteen, I started seeing the boy next door. I had to keep it a secret because my father wouldn't have approved. He wanted me to be a nun."

She let out a bitter laugh that did nothing to loosen the tightening in her chest.

"My father wanted me to serve God in his stead. So when he came home early from church one day and found my boyfriend in my room, he completely freaked out. We were on my bed, fully clothed, not disrespectful by any means. We were just kissing. My father stood there for a moment, dumbfounded. Then he just...went insane. Like something inside him snapped and this unrelenting rage was suddenly unleashed."

Sophie swallowed hard, hating to think about that fateful day. "He chased out the boy and then started screaming at me, asking me how I could have brought the devil into his house and yelling unfathomable things about my being under demonic possession, screeching at the top of his lungs that the evil needed to be exorcised from my soul."

Sam didn't say a word as her voice cracked. He simply stroked her hair, comforting her, and waited patiently and quietly for her to continue.

"My grandmother had given me a riding crop after I'd ridden my first horse," she said as her mind filled with the images of that day. Her father going mad in her bedroom while Sophie fought to escape his clutches and flee the room. "He took the riding crop off the wall and started to hit me with it. I tried to get away," she said,

remembering the moment true fear had struck her heart—when she'd suddenly realized he intended to kill her. "I tripped and fell on the floor, on my stomach. He beat me until I was bloody and swollen. Until I couldn't move. Could barely breathe."

Sam's muscles bunched again. "Sophie," he said on a harsh breath that sounded more like a low growl.

Tears streamed down her flushed cheeks again. She'd thought she'd wept all she could, but the hysterics were rising within her once more. She couldn't speak and Sam didn't press her. It took a long time before Sophie could continue without breaking out in body-racking sobs again.

"My mom found me later and wrapped a sheet around me. She put some antiseptic on the cuts, then said she had to take my father to church so he could confess his sins."

She thought about Father Michael's visit later that evening, when he came to tell Sophie her parents were dead.

She opened her eyes and stared off into the darkness, transported back in time as she said, "Everyone said it was a terrible accident. The roads were icy and treacherous in the middle of winter. But I know my mother drove them off that road on purpose. She was too ashamed and mortified over what my father had done to me. She never could have lived with the guilt. Nor could he."

Sam kissed her forehead then her lips. "I'm so sorry, sweetheart." Sophie felt his tears on her skin and it made her want to tell him, with all her heart, how much she loved him. But she didn't.

"Thank you, Sam." She let him hold her tightly, nearly squeezing the breath out of her. She didn't pull away because his embrace was exactly what she needed. "I've never told anyone about this, not even my aunt when I went to live with her."

"You can tell me anything, Sophie. From now on," he said, the pain clear in his voice. "You can say anything to me and I'll listen and support you."

She nodded. "I know, Sam. Now I know."

Chapter Five

The following morning, Sophie was up early and out of the house. Being so emotionally drained had helped her to sleep soundly once Sam had carried her into the living room. They'd curled up on the couch together, her face still buried in his chest because she hadn't been able to look him in the eye after her monstrous admission and unveiling.

It hadn't been any easier to face him in the morning, so she'd slipped away while he still slept, had taken a shower and then had headed up the coast to a restaurant that served a breakfast feast to satisfy even the heartiest of appetites. And did Sophie have a ravenous one!

Must be all the crying, she reasoned with herself. Not to mention the expulsion of years of guilt and shame and secrecy. She felt cleansed from the inside out. But not quite whole yet.

The trouble with confessing all was that it left her even more vulnerable and uncertain. Sam had been supportive and he'd comforted her, yes. She didn't regret showing him the scars or telling him how she'd gotten them. What Sophie regretted was this new wall she felt between them, of her own doing, she was sure.

As Sam had held her last night, stroking her hair and murmuring soothing words in her ear, she'd thought very seriously about what she'd just done to him. It was sort of like confessing an affair to a spouse. It was done to release one's guilt and to take responsibility for the action and clean the slate, so to speak. But what did that admission do to the faithful, unsuspecting spouse? Make them feel as horrible as the cheater, especially if they hadn't seen it coming?

The confession could hurt the one who'd remained true in the relationship, and Sophie knew she'd done something similar with Sam. His pain and anger had been

unmistakable. And while he'd been primarily concerned for her well-being, she had sensed his consternation. She'd upset him greatly, there was no denying it. Now she'd have to face him, look him in the eye, knowing he'd be thinking about her scars and what had happened to her.

Which brought up other insecurities on her part. Going forward, could she view his concern as sympathy or would it feel like pity? Would Sam forever be fixated on what had happened to her? Could he possibly look at her naked body and not conjure visions of her father beating her? Could he see past the revolting scars and make love to her?

As Sophie picked at her scrambled eggs, her appetite suddenly vanishing, she shook her head.

No, of course he'd never see past all of it. How could he when she still couldn't?

If they ever were to make love, Sophie would want it to be the intimate experience it was meant to be. No barriers, no obstacles, no inhibitions. She'd want to be completely naked with him, touch him everywhere, have him touch *her* everywhere. But as soon his fingers glided over her back...

She dropped her fork in the middle of her plate and pushed the food aside.

Was it wrong to have laid all of this at Sam's feet? Sure, she felt as though she'd had a monumental breakthrough. A huge weight had been lifted from her chest. But was it now weighing heavy on Sam's?

As she contemplated this, mentally kicking herself for not thinking through the repercussions of her actions, her cell rang. Expecting it to be Jordan with an update from New York, she rummaged around in her big bag until she found the BlackBerry. The house number appeared on the small screen and Sophie's heart burst with joy at the same time her stomach plummeted to her knees.

Sam was calling her. Likely wondering why she'd run off again. Steadying herself with a deep breath, she answered the call.

"Good morning," she said. Her voice was tight and raw from her emotional state and all the crying she'd done the night before.

"Where are you, Soph?" he asked, his concern for her well-being apparent all over again.

"I needed some fresh air so I drove up the coast to have breakfast."

And to run away from everything I told you and showed you last night.

As that thought ran rampant through her mind, Sophie sat up a little straighter in her booth. Good grief, she'd done it again! Let the coward within get the best of her.

No, Sophie thought. It couldn't be, because she'd kicked that coward into submission last night.

Then what are you doing here now when you should be at home with Sam?

"Sophie," his voice broke into her wayward thoughts. "This isn't going to work out between us - "

She hit the disconnect button and dropped the mobile device on the table as her fingers shook violently. Her entire body followed suit until she was trembling from head to toe and tears were filling her eyes.

No, no, no! Not this again! Not with Sam! She couldn't take it. Couldn't take his rejection. It was just too much.

She stared out at the ocean, biting back sobs. She waved off the waitress without even looking at her when she inquired if everything was all right.

No, everything was not all right! Sam was breaking up with her before they'd even become a couple. Damn it, she'd known the scars were too much. Even for him.

Her phone rang again and she ignored it. After the call went to voicemail, it rang again. And again. On Sam's fourth attempt to reach her, Sophie connected the call, but before she had a chance to say anything, his voice came over the line.

"Sophie Jensen, this isn't going to work between us if you keep pushing me away. I love you and I want you to come home *right now*!" This time *he* hung up *her*.

Sophie choked back an unexpected laugh as she stared at the BlackBerry, afraid giggling might lead to hysteria of the unstable variety. How uncharacteristic of Sam to do something so juvenile. Hanging up on her...she hadn't seen that one coming.

Then she thought of the words he'd said. *I love you*. The three little words no man had ever said to her. Not even her father.

Sam loved her. Her heart soared and more tears sprang to her eyes. This time, they were tears of joy.

She loved him too. So what the hell was she doing running away from him? Running away from *them*?

Swiping at her tears and collecting her belongings, Sophie prepared to leave. She flagged down the waitress and handed over an ample amount of cash to cover her tab and the tip. Leaving the restaurant, she walked briskly to her car, Sam's words looping through her mind and making her heart sing.

She'd pissed him off, but that didn't faze her. She'd recognized his tone of voice, the one he used when his patience had run out and he wanted his point taken seriously. Everything about that tone had told her he didn't need the space she'd given him to process last night's admission.

Had he really adjusted to the reality of the situation so quickly?

As she slid behind the wheel of her convertible, she rolled her eyes. Of course he had. Sam was not the one she doubted. All along, it had been her. This morning, in particular, had been all her.

When was she going to let him fully into her life?

Now, Sophie vowed to herself. Starting right now.

* * * * *

Sam was pacing on the back deck when she finally located him. She walked through the opened patio doors and he drew up short. He stared at her as though she were a teenager who'd taken the family car for a joyride and he was the worried parent who'd waited up all night for said teen to return.

"Have a nice breakfast?" he asked as he planted a hand on a hip. He wore the jeans and shirt from the night before, though the shirt was now fully unbuttoned, revealing a perfectly sculpted chest. One Sophie wanted to touch more than she wanted to breathe.

"I didn't actually get to it," she said as she dropped her bag on the seat of his Adirondack chair. "I was sort of sick to my stomach, wondering if I'd tormented you with my...secret."

He looked taken aback. "'Tormented me'?" He stared quizzically at her. "Sophie…" His hands dropped to his sides and he shook his head. "I'll admit I'm still really angry that something so inexcusable and unspeakable happened to you. But that doesn't mean I can't deal with the reality of the situation."

"You haven't really seen the full extent of the reality of the situation, Sam." Because she'd shown him her scars by the light of the moon. She knew in broad daylight—or full ambient light—that the stark-white lines looked atrociously bad.

"Then you need to show me, Sophie. For both of us. Because there's still an elephant in the room and we need to get it the hell out of here."

She crossed her arms over her chest, another bad habit because it was a defense mechanism, which meant she was about to hedge.

"Soph," he said, his tone softening. He took a step toward her and reached for her arms, pulling them apart and unfolding them from her chest. "You have no reason to hide from me."

His fingers twined with hers and Sophie drew strength from the warmth of his hands and the love in his eyes.

"You heard what I said on the phone, right?"

She nodded.

"I love you, Sophie. I have for a very long time."

Her lips pressed together as she fought to keep the emotion welling within her from spoiling this moment. She didn't want to cry anymore. Had had just about enough of the tears and the sobs for a lifetime. Now she wanted to be happy. To accept Sam's love and return it with her own.

"Your scars don't change who you are to me, Soph. If anything, they'll forever be a reminder to me of how strong you are."

"Strong?" she nearly choked on the word. "Sam, I've been a coward this whole time!" Despite her best efforts, fat drops pooled in her eyes and spilled down her cheeks. "Damn it," she said as she pulled her hands from his and began to pace the deck as he'd done earlier.

When she had a better grip on her emotions, she turned back to face him. "I hate that I'm not perfect for you. I hate knowing that every time you look at my scars or touch them, you'll be..." She shook her head, loathing what was truly the reality of the situation.

"That I'll be what, Soph?" he asked.

"That you'll be grossed out by them, Sam. Turned off. Disgusted."

He crossed to her in two long strides. His large hands cupped her face, forcing her to stare up at him. "Don't make assumptions about what I might or might not feel about your scars, Sophie. They're tragic, but they're not disgusting. They're a part of you." He whisked away tears with his thumbs. "I love everything about you, sweetheart. Scars and all."

Before she could say another word, his mouth was on hers. He kissed her exactly the way he always did – the way he had before he'd known her darkest secret, before he'd seen the hideous scars. He kissed her with all the passion and desire she'd known he'd felt for her that night in her room, when he'd carried her in and placed her gently on the bed. The night he'd told her that if she wanted him to stay, he was going to kiss her again. She remembered how thrilling and exciting his kiss was because of the

message it had conveyed. He'd wanted her. He wanted her now. Still. Even after he knew she was flawed. Physically as well as emotionally.

He loved her, regardless.

Sophie's arms flung around his neck and she returned Sam's kiss with every ounce of love that flowed through her veins. She flinched when he embraced her, but didn't pull away. Her lightweight sundress wouldn't conceal the soft rise of the scars. He'd feel them through the material. His kiss changed the moment his hands slid over her back, but not in a retreating way. Rather, it deepened as Sam crushed her body to his and he seemed to put every emotion he possessed into the intimate gesture.

Utterly swept away, Sophie held on tight and gave herself to him. Their kiss turned into a fiery one, leaving her burning with desire. When they finally broke for air, her heart was pounding so hard it was a wonder it didn't burst through her chest.

"That was so beautiful," she said.

Sam grinned at her. "Just like you, Soph."

"And you, Sam," she said as more tears filled her eyes. "You are a beautiful, beautiful man. I love you with all my heart and soul."

"You can trust me," he told her as his hands cupped her face again. "To always take care of you and protect you and love you. Soph, I'm always going to be here for you. No matter what."

"I know," she said. "I must have known it all along. I wouldn't have shown you my scars if I hadn't believed in you beyond all doubt, Sam."

"You don't have to hide them from me." He kissed her again, then said, "I want to make love to you. More than I've ever wanted anything. But I need you to trust me, Sophie."

"I do."

"I want to see you, Sophie. All of you. I want you naked with me," he said as his hands slid over her shoulders and down her bare arms.

She knew he wouldn't settle for a dark room. He'd want to see her in broad daylight, completely nude. And Sophie would do it for him, she loved him that much. Trusted him with her life and her heart.

Nodding, she said, "I want that too, Sam." Her palms splayed against the hard muscles of his chest. Her body tingled from that one simple touch. She stared up at him, determined to be as strong as he believed her to be. "Make love to me."

He scooped her up in his arms and carried her inside the house and up to his room. Sophie's excitement and happiness helped to dull her fear of showing herself completely to Sam in the light of day. When he stepped into the room, he put her gently on her feet and then slowly turned her around, so he could reach the zipper on her sundress. With her back to him, Sophie had to work extra hard to keep the tension from her body, the insecurity from her mind. She had to focus on the way Sam touched her and kissed and loved her.

He loved her, scars and all. She reminded herself over and over of that fact as the zipper slid down its track. Then his fingers hooked in the straps on her shoulders and he pulled them down her arms. Sophie's eyes closed as the material naturally slipped from her body and dropped at her feet.

"Open your eyes," he whispered in her ear.

She did. It was then that she realized they were standing in front of the large mirror that hung over Sam's dresser. Sophie stared at her reflection as Sam unhooked her strapless bra and it too fell to the floor. His gaze was locked on hers in the mirror for a few moments before it lowered to take in her full breasts and flat stomach. She tried to see exactly what he saw, the way the man in the movie they'd watched together had urged his lover to do.

The heated look in Sam's eyes made it easier to view herself as he might. It was impossible to miss the lust and desire and passion that flared in the pale green irises as he stared at her naked front. His hands moved over her hips and up her stomach to palm her breasts. Sophie hadn't realized she'd been holding her breath until it rushed

past her lips at Sam's electrifying touch. His warm, soft skin on her body felt heavenly. He squeezed her breasts gently, massaging them in a titillating way that made her ache all over for his touch.

"You're perfect in my eyes, Sophie," he told her.

She melted against him, loving his heat and strength. His lips glided over her neck, leaving kisses before he nipped gently at her skin. Her nerve endings jumped to attention and Sophie's body flooded with the molten sensation she'd experienced when Sam had rubbed her clit and made her come. The memory of that night, the beauty of his and Jordan's subtle seduction and the way he touched her now made her forget her fears. All Sophie wanted now was to release her inhibitions and give herself completely to Sam.

"Make love to me," she said to the reflection in the mirror.

He smiled back at her. "Soon."

His hands left her breasts to explore other parts of her body. They ran down the front of her to the apex of her legs, where his fingers skimmed over her lace-covered mound and made her shudder with anticipation. Sweeping over her hips to her ass, they cupped her cheeks and squeezed gently. Then Sam eased down on one knee behind her. He removed her panties. Sophie's breath caught again as his hands moved up her backside, his fingers gliding over her scars. She wanted to close her eyes, to hide from this moment. But she found the courage to keep her gaze locked with the reflection in the mirror.

Though she couldn't see Sam because the mirror wasn't a full-length one and he was behind her, she could gauge his reaction to seeing her scars this up-close-andpersonal by the way he touched her. His fingers smoothed over the ravaged flesh with a tender stroke. He took his time feeling each one, running the soft pads of his fingers over the full length of them. As though he were memorizing their placement and texture and the degree of each soft rise.

Sophie fought the urge to raise her arms and cross them over her chest to cover her bare breasts. She was naked in so many ways in front of Sam and it unnerved her. But then he leaned forward and placed several soft kisses on her back, right on her scars, and the urge to run died on her small cry of joy.

"Sam," she said, fighting back tears. "Please make love to me."

His acceptance of her was, in Sophie's mind, complete.

Rising to his full six-foot-two-inches, he towered over Sophie. His hands swept over her shoulders, down her arms. Then he held her waist as he kissed her neck. She leaned back against him, her shoulder blades pressing to his chest. When he palmed her breasts and squeezed them roughly, a jolt of excitement deep in her aching cunt made her gasp. As the fingers of one hand toyed with her nipple, rolling and pinching it until it was hard, his other hand disappeared between their bodies. His fingers slid up and down the cleft of her ass, teasing her anus and making her blush. But she didn't flinch, didn't protest. The forbidden touch was welcome. She'd deny Sam nothing. Wherever he wanted to touch her, whatever he wanted to do to her, she'd allow.

His hand eased down and forward until one long finger pushed deep into her cunt. He groaned. She knew she was wet. Knew that turned him on.

As he finger-fucked her from behind, he drove Sophie wild. She widened her stance a little. As she watched Sam's expression in the mirror, the hand that had teased her nipples tight swept over her stomach and went to work on her clit.

"Sam," she gasped. Leaning forward, she gripped the edge of dresser. The change in position gave him better access to her body. He continued to stroke her clit while pushing two fingers into her pussy, massaging her inner depths with a quick, forceful rhythm that pushed her right over the edge.

"Oh God!" she called out as she came, the glorious sensations colliding and exploding inside her.

"That's good, Soph." His voice was strained, his tone dark with desire. "You're so tight and wet. It's going to feel so good to have my cock inside you."

"Now, Sam."

He let out a low growl. "Not like this. I want you way too much. I don't want to hurt you."

He turned her again so she faced him. His head bent to hers and he kissed her slowly, sensuously, until she felt as though every bone in her body had been liquefied. Her limp body melded to his as his arms wrapped around her. He half dragged her to the bed and lay back on the mattress, pulling her down with him. He rolled over until he was on top of Sophie and then his mouth left hers and trailed down her neck to her breasts. One hand cupped a full mound as his tongue teased the nipple of the other one. Sophie squirmed beneath him, feeling hot and restless.

When Sam's free hand moved between her legs and began to stroke her, Sophie spread her thighs wider, opening herself to him. She wanted to experience every pleasure Sam could give her, no holds barred. No inhibitions.

He rubbed her clit in a slow, circular motion, then dipped a finger into her wet pussy again, causing Sophie to moan and writhe beneath him. He had so much more in store for her. Moving down her body, he settled between her parted legs, his head hovering a few inches over her clit. She closed her eyes and clamped down on her bottom lip in pure excitement. The mere thought of Sam's mouth making love to her was enough to make her giddy with anticipation. Feeling his warm breath on her skin and his thumbs on her labia as he spread her lips made her pulse race and her heart pound. When his tongue and lips touched her, she wanted to scream in sheer delight.

Sam licked her in one full stroke, then he toyed with her clit, flicking his tongue over it before he gently suckled it. Sophie had never been more turned inside out. She felt raw and prickly from head to toe. Every intimate caress from Sam's tongue pushed her to the edge. Faster than Jordan had that first time. Quicker than the night the three of them had shared together. It took little more than Sam's skilled tongue on her clit for mere seconds and one long finger pushing deep into her cunt to make Sophie come.

"Sam!" Her hands gripped his shoulders as her body bowed off the bed and she climaxed with such force she saw tiny white orbs burst behind her closed eyelids. "Jesus," she gasped.

Sam's kisses on her inner thighs as her orgasm dimmed did little to diminish the scorching heat that consumed her. Her fingers shifted to his thick hair as his tongue stroked her quivering flesh and she found her breath.

"If you'd have done that to me the other night..." She opened her eyes and stared up at the ceiling fan, trying to adjust her gaze. "Wow."

"I didn't want to do that to you the other night," he said as he shifted on the bed, dropping light kisses on her body along the way. He stretched out beside her and said, "I didn't want to share you the way we shared Bridget. I wanted to do this to you when we were alone and naked. Just you and me, Soph."

Her heart swelled with love. "I like the sound of that."

His fingers swept over her chin, then down her throat and across her collarbone. Lower still until he was playing with a tight nipple and making her tingle from head to toe all over again.

Sophie rolled onto her side so they were face to face. "I want to reciprocate."

He grinned at her. "I'm looking forward to that. But not right now."

"Why not?" She frowned.

Sam chuckled. He pulled her close to him and said, "Because I almost came making you come. One touch of your mouth on me, Soph... I won't last as long as you did."

"That wasn't very long at all," she said, ribbing herself.

"So you see my dilemma."

"Oh," she blushed, but held his gaze. "You intend to make love to me, after all." "Repeatedly."

She laughed. "Well, then. We need to get you naked." She wiggled out of his embrace and sat up. Sam followed suit. She pushed the material of his shirt over his shoulders and down his arms.

"I can't tell you how long I've waited to touch this chest," she mused as her hands pressed to his hard pectoral muscles, her fingers spread wide.

Sam groaned as his eyelids dipped. "Touch to your heart's content, sweetheart."

Sophie intended to. Her palms flattened against his warm skin as her hands moved lower, the pad of her fingers skimming over his small nipples, pebbling them tight. She worked her way over his rigid abdomen and then around to his back.

"You are so magnificent," she said as she leaned into him, her bare breasts pressing against his chest.

Sam's hands massaged her shoulders before sliding down her back. His hands clasped together over her scars and he toppled her. Sophie let out a playful shriek as she fell back onto the bed with Sam on top of her.

"You're driving me wild," he said into her ear, making Sophie shudder.

"Do something about it." She was ready for him. Ready for him to be inside her, filling her, completing her.

She wedged her hands between their bodies and unbuttoned his Levi's. Sam released her so she had room to work. She palmed his erection through the soft fabric of his briefs. He groaned again and Sophie felt a spark of feminine power ignite within her. Knowing she aroused Sam, that he wanted her as much as she wanted him, empowered her. Made her bold and courageous.

She pushed his jeans over his hips and down his legs. Sam worked them the rest of the way off. His briefs quickly followed. Stealing a peek at what awaited her, Sophie's eyes grew wide and she licked her lips.

"Oh my," she said on a half-breath.

Excitement shot through her at the heated look Sam gave her. With a cocky grin, he said, "You turn me on in ways you can't even imagine, Soph."

"I can't wait to find out."

"We'll be spending a lot of time in bed," he said as he reached for her legs and spread them wide.

Sophie lay back, sprawled across the king-size bed. He reached for a condom in the nightstand, tearing open the package and quickly rolling the latex down his thick shaft. Then Sam's body covered hers as he settled between her parted thighs. His weight on her felt heavenly. As his mouth explored her belly and her breasts, her fingers threaded through his lush hair. A strange calm oozed through her, mixed with a contradictory flash of exhilaration. She wasn't just physically ready for Sam. She'd found a happy place mentally where her past no longer mattered. It was her future that Sophie was focused on now. Her future as a new, sensual woman. Her future with Sam.

When he kissed her, it was exactly what she needed to solidify her confidence that all her dreams were about to come true. His mouth on hers was hot and demanding. His kiss was possessive and territorial. There would be no more threesomes, no experimenting with Jordan or any other man. She belonged to Sam. Body, heart and soul. And he belonged to her.

He pulled away, leaving her breathless. Shifting onto his knees, he lifted one of her legs and propped her calf against his broad shoulder. Sophie's insides fluttered with eagerness to take whatever Sam gave her. As he leaned forward, the tip of his cock pressed to her opening. He rubbed her slowly, teasing her as much as preparing her. Sophie grabbed a pillow and stuffed it behind her head, propping herself up so she could watch everything Sam did to her. She bent her free leg and dug her heel into the bedding, widening the space Sam filled.

"You're really tight, Sophie," he told her. "I don't want to hurt you."

She smiled at him. "You're not going to hurt me, Sam. I want you inside me. I *need* you inside me."

His jaw clenched for a moment. His gaze locked with hers and Sophie felt singed to the core of her being at the fire that flared in his green eyes. When he sank into her, she let out a small cry of joy. He pushed deep into her wet pussy and she welcomed every inch of him. Her inner walls stretched and adjusted, conforming to the length and width of him. Never before had she felt so thoroughly connected to another human being. Not even her close friendship with Jordan was this intense, this binding.

As Sam moved inside her, making love to her slowly, their gazes remained locked. He pulled almost all the way out of her, then sank deep into her cunt again, stealing her breath and making her tremble. He felt huge inside of her and he must have felt the snugness as acutely as she did, because when her muscles tightened around him as the excitement built within her, he let out a primal sound that almost mimicked a growl.

It drove Sophie wild and made her squeeze him again.

"Stop," he choked out on a harsh breath. His jaw was set in determination and concentration and his eyes burned with lust. "You're going to make me come, Soph."

"Then we'll have to start all over again," she said, hearing the wicked note in her voice. Sam thrust into her and she cried out. "Oh God!"

He'd just been teasing her with the slow movements. Warming her up. Or trying to keep himself in check.

"Sam," she said as she shifted her leg, dropping it from his shoulder. She realized now he'd been using the position to keep the lovemaking steady and sane. He was holding back. "Fuck me," she said, wanting everything he had to give her.

"Soph." He shook his head. "Not this time. Not this first time."

"Yes, this first time. And every time thereafter. Don't treat me like I'm fragile," she said. She lifted her hips and ground herself against him. "You said yourself that I'm strong. I want to feel all of you—" *Hammering into me* seemed like a completely inappropriate thing to say, but it was exactly what she felt. Exactly what she wanted. "I don't want sweet and tender, Sam. You already give that to me. I want...wild and reckless."

His eyes squeezed shut. "Soph," he said, his voice low and rough. Exactly how she wanted it to sound.

"Do it," she urged as her muscles contracted around him again, milking him and hopefully prompting him into action.

She wanted hot, sweaty sex with this man. Wanted to feel every erotic sensation known to woman because of his intense lovemaking. He'd warned her about it the night of their first kiss. He didn't scare her. If anything, he was taunting her. She knew there was a wild ride waiting for her and Sophie wanted to experience it.

When his strong wrists hooked under the backs of her knees and he spread her even wider, Sophie knew she was about to get her wish. Sam's eyes were still on her as he began to move inside her, thrusting deep.

"Oh yes," Sophie said. A low moan slipped through her parted teeth as she clutched at the down comforter beneath her, gripping fistfuls of it as Sam quickened the pace and pounded into her. Precisely what she'd been hoping for, though she hadn't had the verve to say the words out loud. "That feels so incredible, Sam. You inside me, doing crazy-good things to my body." She borrowed his term from their first night together.

He didn't respond verbally. Instead, he put a little more effort into driving her wild. His hips moved forward and back as he pushed into her than pulled out, only to drive a little further with his next thrust. His strokes were full and forceful, hitting all the right spots and making Sophie pant with excitement.

"You like when I tell you what you're doing to me, don't you?" she asked on a ragged breath. "You like hearing me tell you how you make me feel."

"I like knowing you want me, Sophie," he said, plain and simple.

"Oh do I ever!" Her hips lifted off the mattress as she met him stroke for stroke, her body naturally responding to his, moving in a quick rhythm with him. She remembered what Jordan had said about a woman touching herself in front of him being a huge turn-on, so Sophie released the bedding she clutched and boldly cupped her breasts,

squeezing them the way Sam had, then pinching her nipples. The small buds puckered tight and Sam's eyes deepened in color as he watched her.

"Jesus, Soph." He grunted. "You're making it really difficult for me to keep it together here, sweetheart."

"Just keep doing what you're doing," she told him. "I am so close to coming, Sam. I just want it to last a little longer."

"There's more to come, believe me."

He pumped a little harder, a little faster, until Sophie was drowning in blissful sensations she couldn't control. They converged inside her, igniting in a fiery collision that made her scream so loud she just may have shook the rafters herself! It was an exhilarating feeling and every inch of her seemed to sing harmoniously as though she'd finally found that one, special fit. That part of her that had missing all this time.

"Oh good Lord," she whispered. "That was the best one yet. So good, Sam. So unbelievably good."

He leaned forward and worked his arms around her. "We're not done yet, sweetheart."

In a swift move, he rolled them over so Sophie was on top of him. He was still inside her. She straddled him as his big hands gripped her hips and he rocked her against him so she matched his pace.

The way he'd filled her before was nothing compared to this. Sophie felt every inch of his length and width and he stimulated different erogenous zones she'd never known existed.

"Whoa," she gasped as her palms flattened against his wide chest. Bracing herself, she tried to find the rhythm herself, but Sam held her tightly and led her into a quick tempo that made her breasts jiggle and her stomach quiver. "Just when I thought it couldn't get any better..." Sam's gaze was locked on her chest, breast man that he was. "I've got quite a lot of tricks up my sleeve, sweetheart."

"I truly am the luckiest girl in the world."

He continued to fuck her and as Sophie grew accustomed to his intensity and aggressive style, she said, "Harder, Sam." She wanted more. There was nothing as exquisite as the feeling of him inside her, inciting a riot of sensations and emotions more powerful than anything she'd ever dreamed possible.

"Soph, you're kind of making me crazy," he said, that low growl escaping his lips again.

"Then come with me," she urged.

Another quick flip of positions and Sophie was on her back. Sam moved inside her with yet another different technique as his body covered hers. She wrapped her legs around his hips and held him tightly to her. He kissed her deeply as she surged toward another all-consuming orgasm. When she was on the verge, she broke the kiss.

"Now, Sam. I want to feel you come inside me. Please."

"Christ, Soph." He groaned.

His arms tightened around her until he was nearly crushing her. Nothing had ever felt so right to Sophie.

"You are so warm and tight," he told her. "You feel like heaven."

She smiled against the side of his neck. "Now, Sam. Come with me."

She couldn't hold back the euphoric sensations another second. Her climax was nothing short of earth-shattering. She cried out his name as the pleasure coursed through her. Her inner walls squeezed tight and she felt Sam's response.

"Oh Christ, Soph!" His release seemed to be just as powerful as hers when he came inside her.

Her body shuddered against his, both of them trembling from the intense pleasure. She wrapped her arms around his neck and held him tight. "This is so beautiful, Sam."

He pulled away from her slightly and stared down at her, his desire and love glowing in his pale green irises. "It's perfect, Soph. Everything about you and us is perfect."

In a heartbeat, Sophie Jensen was whole again.

About the Author

Multi-published and award-winning author Ava McKnight's love of romantic fiction began as a teenager. She holds degrees in General Studies and Communications and has worked on newspapers as an editor and reporter. Most recently, she worked in PR, writing speeches and Congressional testimonies.

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