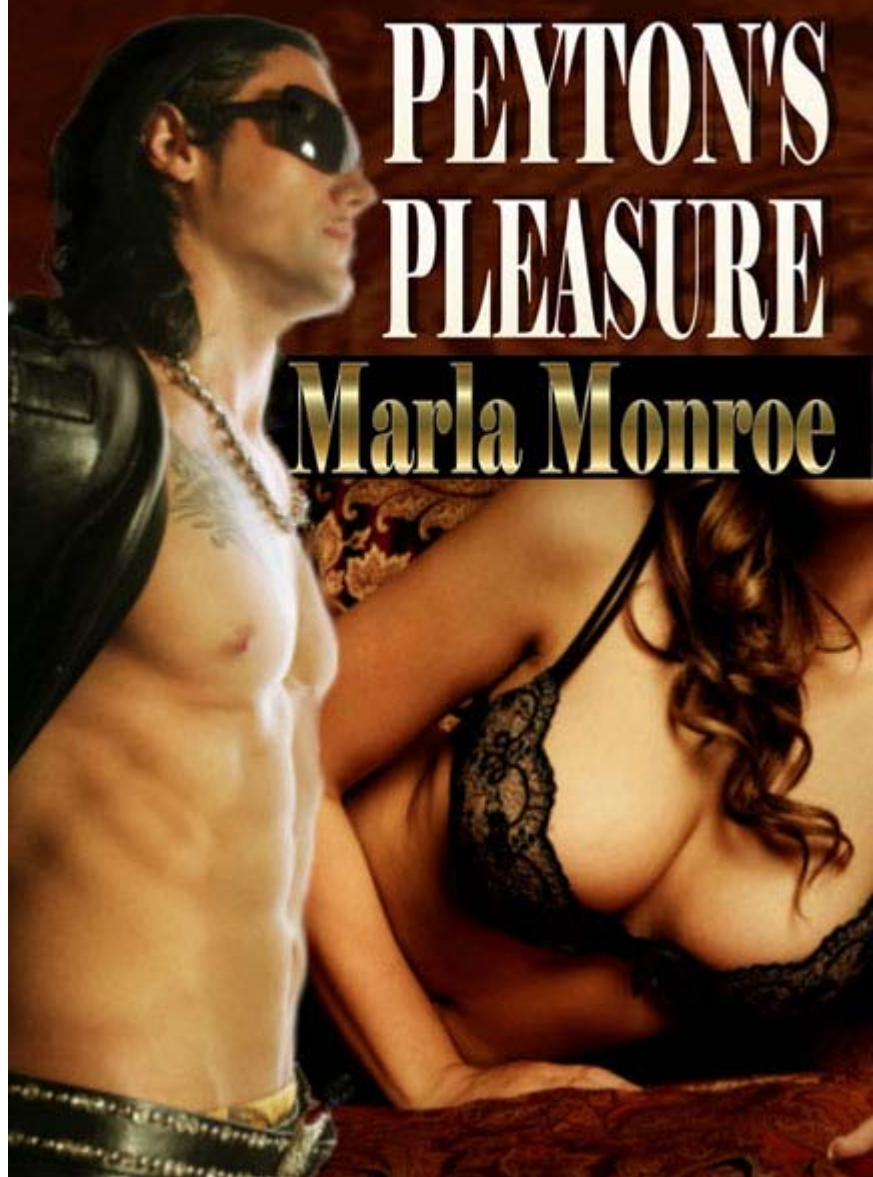


SIREN PUBLISHING *Classic*

# PEYTON'S PLEASURE

Marla Monroe



# Peyton's Pleasure

Peyton is burned out on love. After a controlling relationship, she is only looking for a little fun on the run. While she has plenty of friends who are men, she isn't attracted to any of them. When she meets Ryker, who instantly sets her body on overdrive, she thinks he just might be the perfect addition to her sexy daydreams—until he seems to be heading in the relationship direction.

She should have known he was too good to be true.

Ryker is ready to settle down, and he has his sights set on Peyton. But how can he win her love when she balks at everything he tries? If it's sex she wants, Ryker's going to make it all about Peyton's pleasure. But will that help him take over her heart as well as her body?

**Genre:** Contemporary

**Length:** 52,074 words

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**Marla Monroe**

**EROTIC ROMANCE**



**Siren Publishing, Inc.**  
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## **A SIREN PUBLISHING BOOK**

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### **PEYTON'S PLEASURE**

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# DEDICATION

For Tom

# **PEYTON'S PLEASURE**

**MARLA MONROE**

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## **Chapter One**

Peyton loved her job. She loved the people, the fast pace, and the excitement. She loved her apartment, the location, the rent, and the coziness of it. What was missing in her life? A man. Not just any man either. A sexy, hot, no-holds-barred sort of man, someone who liked it down and dirty. Someone who liked sex for sex and wasn't into all that relationship crap.

She thought he would be easy to find, but not in her experience. Every man she had entertained balked at the idea of sex without complications. So here she was, working another double at The Saloon just so she wouldn't be at home alone with her vibrator as company.

"Hey, Peyton. Need another round over here, honey." Grady McPherson waved a hand to encompass the table where he and three other guys sat.

She nodded and smiled. She liked Grady. His six foot frame housed a kind soul who wasn't cut out for her kind of love, though he'd tried often enough to convince her to take a chance on him. She loved his curly, fire-engine red hair and the way he filled out a pair of jeans, but he wasn't the one for her.

Ralph Gunnison sat to Grady's left. The big bull of a man wore close-cropped black hair and a closely shaved black beard as well. He

sported a little more fat than muscle, but she loved him like a brother. On Grady's right sat Herby Cooper. Herb was the wiry one of the bunch. All legs and arms attached to a thin body. He didn't have a mean bone in that body either. Peyton felt protective of him. He was so often the brunt of a joke, and sometimes it plain pissed her off. The three of them were often seen together, especially at The Saloon.

Then there was the stranger on the opposite end of the table from Grady. He stood a little over six feet, with broad shoulders and what could only be a muscular chest by the way he stretched the solid black T-shirt he wore. That wide chest tapered down to a narrow waist followed by a tight ass that instantly caught Peyton's attention when he walked by her on his way to Grady's table.

Of course, she hadn't missed out on the front view at all. His jeans were worn in all the right places, and if that nearly white patch at his groin was any indication, he would be hung like a horse. Just her kind of man.

It took effort to drag her gaze away from the handsome stranger. His long black hair pulled back at the nape of this neck added intrigue to those equally black eyes. The crooked nose didn't subtract from his rugged good looks one bit. Maybe the tats helped to give him that naughty look about him. Peyton wasn't sure, but she needed to stop staring like a randy teenager and get back to her job.

Sid nodded at her when she called out her orders. His shiny, bald head and the earring in his left ear always reminded her of the Spic and Span commercials. Speaking of tattoos, Sid had them in abundance all over his body. He'd shown off the ones on his chest and back to them one night after closing when Jane, one of the other waitresses, teased him about it. Peyton liked Sid. He didn't take any nonsense and ran the bar like the business it was, which was one of the reasons she loved her job.

Once Sid set up the beers, she arranged them on her tray and headed for the table where her hunky stranger sat. Maybe she could wrangle an introduction out of Grady. For some reason, Peyton had

the feeling that this man wouldn't be into relationships. He looked like he knew sex inside and out and put the dirty into it. Yeah, he'd be perfect.

"Here you go, guys." She handed each man his beer.

When she got to the stranger, he grabbed her wrist instead of the beer. She met his eyes without blinking.

"You missed," she teased.

"Nope, got what I was aiming for. What's your name?"

"Peyton. What's yours?"

"Ryker." He let go of her wrist to take the beer.

She smiled and gave Grady a playful hug before sauntering off to take another round of orders. The hairs on the back of her neck stood up all evening. She knew he watched her and the thought thrilled her. If he were with Grady and the others, he had to be safe—basically. Yeah, she wanted him.

His group broke up a little after midnight and began leaving. The bar didn't close till one, and it was usually two before she was off. No way would he still be hanging around at that time of morning. Maybe he would come back next week. She worked Thursday through Saturdays at the bar and waited tables on Sundays and Mondays. Maybe she should search Grady out and find out more about Ryker. But then again, she didn't want to appear too anxious. That would turn a man like him off in a second. No, she'd wait and see what happened.

By two that morning, Peyton's shoulders were killing her. They'd had a fairly busy night so there was a lot to clean up. With three of them working the floor, it didn't take as long as she feared it would. She was ready for a hot shower and some sleep. Her shift at the diner started at eleven the next morning. Well, that morning actually.

Peyton slung her purse over her shoulder and walked outside the back door with Jane and Lee Ann. They always walked outside together after closing. Sometimes Sid would watch them and sometimes he didn't. Tonight he was busy figuring up the till. They



made it to Jane's car first and left her once she was safely locked inside. Then Lee Ann was next. She waited while the other girl started her car. She used Lee Ann's headlights to make it to her car without a problem. Lee Ann waved at her and pulled out. Peyton started to slide into her car when someone walked out of the shadows toward her. She opened her mouth to scream.

"Don't scream, Peyton. It's Ryker." He walked out of the night and into the dim light of the street lamp.

"Hey, Ryker. What did you need?" Her heart slammed in her chest with unease.

"You." He smiled and her stomach did backflips.

God his smile was sexy, slow, and sensual.

"I think we might need to get to know each other a little, don't you?"

"Nope. I think you like it this way—anonymous sex. Only we know each other's names."

"I'm supposed to trust you?" she asked, a little breathless.

"That's part of the thrill isn't it?"

Peyton found herself nodding her head. She'd wanted to get up with him, but this soon? Like this? What should she do?

He took matters into his own hands. One hand reached out and caught hers, pulling her into his arms. The other one wrapped around her waist as he backed her up against the car. Before she knew what was happening, he'd bent his head and taken possession of her lips. His mouth ate at hers. Teeth nipped at her lower lip then licked the tiny stings. He sucked her lip into his mouth and tickled it with his tongue. Then he licked the seam of her mouth until she opened to him. It was like opening the door to a sensual feast. The taste of him on her tongue made her moan. His scent washed over her, all woodsy and male musk. Her senses were on overload as the hand holding her wrist left it to cup the back of her neck, holding her head still for his sensual assault.

As he deepened the kiss, both hands slid down her back to cup her ass. He lifted her, nudging between her legs until she wrapped them around his waist. His cock pressed into the V between her legs. The bulge, hard and long pressed against her core until she moaned into his mouth. She rode him as he shoved against her, over and over. She pressed her clit directly over the seams of their jeans and felt the rising need begin to build even as heat burned low in her belly. She was going to come. God, but he was going to make her come out in the open behind the bar.

One hand left her ass to grasp her breast. His thumb found her nipple as it poked hard through her bra and blouse. He pinched and pulled at it, sending hot tendrils of fire racing to her womb. He pushed harder against her pussy, grinding against her. Her breath came fast and harsh as she climbed the ladder to jump off at the top.

Ryker pulled away from her mouth to trail teeth down her jaw to her neck. He stopped and sucked on her earlobe before continuing down to where her neck met her shoulder. He nosed aside the collar of her blouse and before she knew what he had in mind, bit her. His fingers pinched her nipple and he slammed into her all at the same time. She threw her head back and cried out as she climaxed from the multipronged assault on her body and senses. He grunted and held her pinned against the car with his pelvis for long seconds before he let her slide slowly down his body until her feet touched the ground. She wasn't sure her legs would support her, but she managed to stand after all. He grabbed her hand and plastered it to the front of his jeans. They were wet from his release. She'd never known a man to come in his jeans before.

"I'd say we know each other a little better, wouldn't you?" he said in a deep, rough voice.

"Um, yeah. I guess we do."

"Good. I'll see you next weekend." He leaned down and pressed a rough kiss to her mouth and turning walked off.

A few seconds later, Peyton heard a motorcycle start up and roar off. Well, damn. She just might have found the answer to her prayers. She swallowed hard and climbed into her car. Her pants were just as wet as his jeans had been. She wondered what he thought about riding home like that. She sure as hell didn't mind.

\* \* \* \*

Ryker pulled up outside his rented condo and killed the engine. He took off his helmet and smiled. He hadn't come in his jeans since he'd been a virgin some twenty years before. He'd been right, she was all woman and not afraid to show it. His kind of woman. Ryker climbed off the bike and unlocked the door. He needed a shower. Considering he was hard again, he might need to make it a cold shower.

The condo consisted of a large open floor plan with the kitchen and living areas separated from the bedroom and master bath. The bedroom was large enough to hold a king-size bed, dresser, and chest of drawers, as well as a small sitting area. The master bath held a Jacuzzi and a very large walk-in shower composed of stone and glass blocks. He'd pretty much rented it for the bathroom alone. After living in rat holes for much of his life, Ryker liked a little luxury and, to him, this was it.

He set the water temperature to lukewarm and stepped in. He couldn't get Peyton out of his head, though, and it wasn't long before he was horny all over again. Her fiery red hair would probably reach just past her shoulders when not pulled back in a ponytail. Sky-blue eyes, the color of spring, darkened when she was aroused. She stood a little over five feet four inches since her head came to his chin. She would be considered heavy by some standards, but he preferred his women curvy and plush. He liked something to hold on to during sex.

Her fair skin would carry his mark on her neck for some time to come. That pleased him. He would make sure she was always marked

when he left her. He guessed he was a bit territorial in that way. His cock jumped at the thought of taking her the first time. Would she balk at anything he wanted? Again, he cursed his swollen member. He gritted his teeth and refused to take matters into his own hands after having climaxed in his jeans. Instead, he lowered the water temperature a few degrees and suffered through the consequences.

After drying off, he walked into the kitchen to set the coffee pot up for when he woke up. The entire time, his mind reeled with thoughts of Peyton. She was exactly what he was looking for in a woman, someone who was comfortable enough with her sexuality to handle challenges. He planned to challenge Peyton a lot. He wanted a mate who could handle his sexual appetites and make demands of her own.

Ryker wasn't looking for a one-night stand. He could get that anywhere he went. He was ready to settle down now. He had his business going strong, land picked out to build a dream house on, and now, a woman strong enough to handle him. All he had to do was convince her.

The way she reacted to his touch told him she was attracted to him. Now he needed to figure out how to deepen that attraction as his was deepening already.

He'd asked Grady about her as soon as he'd sat down earlier that night. According to his old friend, Peyton was an enigma of a woman. She wanted sex fast and hard and her way. She wasn't looking for a long-term commitment, just a good fuck buddy. Grady warned him to play it lose if he was serious about her. Otherwise, she was the perfect woman for a one-nighter.

"Just don't hurt her, Ryker. She's like family to us."

He had no plans to hurt her. If he had his way, she'd eventually marry him.

Grady told him she worked two jobs and never missed a day, which made her trustworthy and dependable to him. She didn't put on

airs and she believed in treating people equally. Everything about her sounded like the woman of his dreams.

The ringing of his cell phone roused him from his musings. He padded back into his bedroom and grabbed the offending plastic. He checked the number and gritted his teeth. If he didn't answer she'd only call back until he did. He would have changed his number, but all his business contacts had this number. Hissing out a breath, Ryker answered the call.

"Do you have any idea what time it is?"

"Hello to you, too, darling. Is that any way to answer your phone?"

"Sharon, I've told you to stop calling me. I'm getting tired of your games."

"I'm sorry about everything, Ryker. It's just that you took me by surprise."

"Not another word. Don't call me again."

"Ryker, please, just hear me out."

"There's nothing more to say, Sharon. We're through. We never should have started in the first place. Good night."

He disconnected the call then checked his messages. He'd turned his phone off while he'd been in the bar. His fucking message box was full. No doubt with *her* messages, but he couldn't take a chance there wouldn't be one concerning business. For the next half hour he waded through messages, most of which had been from Sharon. There had been two from his business manager and one from his attorney. He made notes on them and debated calling his business manager now or not. Finally, he decided it could wait. He checked his watch. It was only four in the morning.

With a half laugh, Ryker climbed into bed nude and set his cell to wake him by ten. He would need to take care of some business before too late in the day. Then he needed to talk to Grady again. He wanted to know everything there was to know about Peyton. Including what she ate for breakfast. He hoped to be cooking for her the next time he

had sex with her. He grinned again thinking about their mutual sexual release in the parking lot of the bar. He fell asleep thinking about what all he wanted to do to his Peyton.

## Chapter Two

Peyton couldn't get Ryker out of her mind. She had fallen asleep to thoughts of him and woken hot and needy to the sound of her alarm clock later that morning. The barest wisps of a dream still circled in her head, the details just out of reach.

Cutting off the alarm, she climbed out of bed with a groan. Her shoulders still ached from all the drinks she'd carried the night before. Would Grady be up, she wondered. Finding out more about Ryker might be a good idea since it looked like she was going to be seeing him again. She padded into the kitchen and turned on the coffee before jumping into the shower.

Unbidden, an image of what Ryker might look like nude appeared in her head. She moaned and tried to ignore the carnal thoughts slipping in and out of her mind as she bathed. Several times her fingers found her nipples and tugged on them. She stopped them from circling her clit another time. She didn't have time for even a quickie this morning. She only had an hour to get ready for work, or she would end up late again.

The tantalizing scent of coffee drew her back to the kitchen even as she continued to dry off. There was no way she was going to get dressed without at least a sip to sustain her. Peyton carried the cup across the room and set it on the dresser next to her cell phone. She really needed to make time to call Grady on her break and find out more about Ryker. Grady would give her a lot of flak, but he wouldn't let her see someone he didn't think was safe. She trusted him.

At five minutes till eleven, Peyton clocked in at the diner and hurried out into the crowd already filling the room. The other two

waitresses were busy taking and filling orders. She checked the schedule to locate her area and jumped in the fray. Naturally, she ended up with several of the same customers from the night before. It always amused her to see how they fared the next day. It became a game to see if she could out-smile them after only five hours of sleep. Usually, she won.

By quitting time that evening, Peyton wanted nothing more than to climb in a hot tub and soak for hours, then jump back into bed. It wasn't going to happen, though. She needed buy groceries and to do at least one load of laundry. Plus, she hadn't been able to catch up with Grady after all. As soon as she made it home, she called him again.

"Hey, Peyton. I'm on my way to your place now."

"I'm sure you know what I want to talk about," she said.

"Or who." He laughed.

"Okay, see you in a few." She hung up and began making out her grocery list while she waited on him to show up.

Less than twenty minutes later, the doorbell rang. Grady walked in with a huge smile on his face. She frowned at him.

"What's so funny?" she demanded.

"You two are," he said.

"What are you talking about? There's no one here but you and me."

Grady walked over to the fridge and pulled out a beer.

"I just left Ryker's place. He wanted to know all about you. Now you call and want to know all about him. Seems pretty funny to me." He smirked before taking a drink of the beer.

"Why do you think I want to know about him?"

"Because you were interested in him last night. I could see it in your eyes."

"You're full of shit, too," she said.

"He's a great guy, Peyton. But he's not going to be looking for forever. That's just not his style."



“Then he’s perfect for me. You know I’m not looking for anything permanent. Just a good fuck buddy.”

“I don’t get you. Why don’t you want to settle down? You’re not getting any younger, Peyton,” he said.

“Are you calling me old?” she teased.

This was old hat to her. He always urged her to pick someone and make a nest. She wasn’t the nesting type. She had never met anyone who brought it out in her either. Of course, she didn’t tend to date anyone looking for a relationship outside of sex.

“Well, as long as you know ahead of time.” Grady took another swig of the beer. “He just moved here from Dallas. Got tired of the rat race there and semi-retired here. Works out of his home some and makes a few trips back to Dallas now and then.”

“Sounds too good to be true to me, Grady.”

“Now don’t get me wrong. He’s hard core, but you seem to be, too.”

“Now where did you hear that?” Peyton frowned.

She was discreet in her sexual preferences. Or so she thought. Someone had talked out of turn.

“Don’t worry. Someone told me in confidence when I was whining that you wouldn’t take me up on my offer.”

“Grady, I told you why,” she said.

“I know. I’m too good for you. I’m looking for a forever type of girl, and you’re not that kind of girl. Doesn’t keep me from hoping one day you’ll change your mind.”

“You’ll find someone. Just give it some time.” Peyton leaned back against the kitchen island.

“Anyway,” Grady continued. “He’s right up your alley, so I say go for it.”

“You’re sure he’s safe? How long have you known him?” she asked.

“Since college. He’s always treated his dates well. I’ve never heard anything negative about him. I like him. I really don’t think you have anything to worry about.”

“Okay, thanks, Grady.”

He shook his head and smiled, taking another pull on the beer.

“What are you up to today?”

“Grocery shopping and a load or two of laundry. Then I’m going to sleep. I’m exhausted and still have to work tomorrow,” she said.

“What are you working?”

“Eleven to six again.”

“I’m sure I’ll see you for lunch.” He finished the beer and tossed it in her garbage can.

Grady was a lawyer and had his office down the street from the diner where Peyton worked. She saw him nearly every Monday and most weekends at the bar. She wasn’t sure how or why they were such good friends, considering his status in Hampton Creek, Texas, but they were.

After Grady left, she finished making out her grocery list and geared up for a busy evening. She wanted to be in bed by one at the latest. She would finish laundry and do the housekeeping on her two days off. Occasionally she would work extra at either the diner or the bar when asked, but she planned to say no if asked this week. She needed some “me” time this week.

By eleven thirty, Peyton was ready for her bath and a nice night’s sleep. She ran the tub full with some of her favorite lavender bath salts. The foamy water beckoned to her. When she stepped in, she sighed in bliss at the sheer decadence of spending an hour or so in the tub soaking. The warm, salty water lured her into a hazy dreamlike state and images of Ryker soon filled her head.

She imagined his hands caressing her breasts as he kissed her. He’d pluck at her nipples until she begged him to fuck her, but he wouldn’t. Instead he’d nip at her neck and shoulder before taking a nipple in his mouth to tease. His teeth would rake over it, then he

would suck as much of her breast into his mouth as he could get. All the while, his hand would be molding and pinching her other breast.

Even as she fantasized about it, her hands molded and grasped at her breasts. She pulled on and twisted her nipples, sending burning trails of fire to her groin. She imagined him moving down her body with his mouth, nipping and licking his way down all the while continuing his assault on her breasts. While he twisted her nipples until she writhed with pleasure, his mouth would seek out her shaved mound. He would nibble and nip at it.

Peyton moved one hand down her body to massage her pussy lips. She slid one finger down to her opening and rimmed it. She kept one hand on her breasts kneading them then pinching her nipples. The little bit of pain turned her on to the point she was close to riding the edge as she imagined Ryker's tongue delving into her creaming cunt. His tongue circled her clit then delved between her lips to reach more of her cream. Heat burned her from the inside out at the imagined feel of his mouth so near her clit. One finger would push inside her as she pumped her hips up to meet his mouth.

She bent her head to lick at her nipple, wishing it were his mouth on it. She delved two fingers inside her slit, pumping in time to her imagined lover's hand. He would slide two fingers deep and then tongue her clit just enough to send her soaring wanting to fly higher, needing more to erupt into volcanic fire.

He would pump his fingers inside her then suck her clit between his teeth and tongue it with just the tip of his tongue while she begged for more. Electricity jumped from clit to tit as she sucked her nipple into her mouth then let it go to blow over it. Her pussy gushed more cream, and she thumbed her clit, needing more. If only he were really there and could fuck her. She needed a hard cock in the worst way.

Peyton groaned with frustration. She pinched her clit between her thumb and forefinger at the same time she bit on her nipple. She exploded. Heat washed over her and she shook with the force of it. Water splashed up into her face, and she sighed as she slowly wound

down. It wasn't enough, but it would have to do. She sure hoped Ryker was better than her fantasy. Only five more days till she possibly found out. She grinned and finished bathing.

The water began to cool so she pulled the plug on the tub and climbed out. She dried off quickly and climbed nude into the bed. The cool sheets soon relaxed her into sleep. Her last thoughts were on whether he would actually show up at the bar the next weekend. Usually, when something seemed too good to be true, it was.

\* \* \* \*

Ryker finished polishing the chrome on his bike and straightened up. Friday afternoon, and he was looking forward to tomorrow night more than he would like to admit. Something about Peyton really got under his skin. He wanted to explore everything about her. Push her limits and see where she went.

The more he'd talked with Grady about her, the surer he was that she might be just the one he wanted in a mate and wife. His tastes tended to run more hard core than most women were willing to explore, much less live with, Sharon being one of those people. He had dated her off and on for months, thinking he could curb that side of himself, but in the end, he hadn't been able to, and she'd run screaming at the real him.

Now she wanted another chance. *Yeah, she wants another chance at your money and position in Dallas society.* Ryker had no intention of giving her another chance. He'd been stupid to think either of them could change what they were. Now if he could just convince Sharon of that. She was beginning to piss him off with her constant texts and phone messages.

He couldn't see Peyton being a clingy-type woman. She struck him as very independent and self-sufficient—a strong woman. He could already imagine bringing her to completion tied down to his bed. She would break with her need to come, and the release would be

all the sweeter. Some of the things he wanted to do with her would scare most people off, but he was sure Peyton could handle it. At least, according to Grady she could.

He couldn't wait to strip her down and find all her sensitive spots. He wanted to lick and tease each one until she was screaming for more. His cock ground tight against the zipper on his jeans. He didn't have any room to adjust it either. Since meeting Peyton, he had just about stayed in a constant state of arousal. He'd jacked off to thoughts of her more in the last few days than he had in months. He sure as hell hoped she was in the same state he was in. Right now, she would be lucky to make it in the condo before he had her naked and up against the door.

Just the thought of taking her outside his condo up against the door elicited a groan from him. His already hard cock was pulsing with need now. How in the hell was he going to survive the hard-on from hell until tomorrow night after she got off work? He refused to come by his hand one more time.

## Chapter Three

Thursday night proved to be a normal weekday night with just a hint of what to expect with the coming weekend. Friday proved to be the normal blue-collar after-work drinkers. They mostly snacked on the nachos or pizza the bar offered and talked about work over beer or pitchers of margaritas for the women. The women tended to talk clothes and men. The men talked more about work and women. They did very little dancing, leaving that to the rowdier crowd that descended later in the night.

Saturday night started out wild for Peyton. She made it to work thirty minutes early, wanting to catch up on the bull from the other waitresses. Instead, they all got pulled out into the melee. It was only five-thirty and already they had a gang of bikers and some of the locals sitting around the edge, watching the bikers a little uneasily. The gang wasn't causing any problems yet, just noisy as hell and thirsty.

Peyton waded in and began taking drink orders. Half were whisky drinkers and the other half preferred whatever was on tap. She spent the next hour handling rounds until they settled down to nurse their drinks. So much for catching up on gossip, she thought, smiling. Still, it meant better than usual tips tonight. She was all over that.

Somewhere around nine-thirty or ten she became aware of someone watching her. She glanced around absently as she waited on Sid to fill her drink order and found Ryker staring at her. He nodded at her. She nodded back. Then she was once again thrown into a frenzy of drink orders. By the time she had made it over to his table, nearly an hour had passed.

“Busy night.” He made it a statement.

“Yep. Started out that way and hasn’t lightened up since.”

“I’ll ride around after you get off and pick you up at your place,” he said.

“How do you know where I live?” she asked, brows furrowed.

“Grady told me.”

She laughed and shook her head. “So much for being friends if he tells just anyone where I live.”

“I’m not just anyone. I’m the man who’s going to make you scream in pleasure all morning.”

Her breath hitched in her throat at the matter-of-fact way he said it.

“You can stay with me if you want. I’ve got to work tomorrow.”

“That will work—this time. Next time you’re coming to my place,” he said.

“We’ll have to see if there will be a next time,” she said.

“Oh, there will be. And a time after that, too.” He grinned.

She started to say something when someone caught her attention, wanting another beer. She nodded then leaned in to whisper in Ryker’s ear.

“It all depends on just how much you make me scream.” She gave him a quick kiss on the lips and hurried off to gather drink orders.

The rest of the night went by in a busy blur. She managed to get out of the bar by a quarter of two despite how busy they had been. It was no surprise to see the motorcycle in the parking lot of her apartment building with Ryker leaning against it, waiting for her. She pulled into her spot and climbed out of the car.

“You been waiting long?” she asked.

“Just a few minutes. Gauged it by last weekend. You’re actually a little early.” He followed her to her apartment.

She unlocked the door and walked inside. She dropped her keys on the table by the door and turned to invite him in. She was immediately assaulted.

He pushed her up against the wall and took control of her mouth with his. His hands pinned hers above her head as he deepened the kiss. Her mouth opened to him without pressure. She wanted this—wanted him. He moved both her hands to one then captured her breast with his free hand. Molding it, his thumb brushed over her nipple through her blouse again and again. The only thought in her head was *more*.

Tongues tangled as each of them fought for control. Peyton knew he would win, but she enjoyed the battle. His teeth nipped at her lower lip then his tongue licked over the little sting. One knee pressed between her thighs then up and against her sex. It wasn't long before she rode him. Tendrils of fire began building in her womb—fire fed by the heat of his kiss and the touch of his hand on her breast. The fire built and built until she thought she would be consumed by it.

His mouth left hers to roam along her jaw, nipping and licking as he moved. He traced a line to her ear and sucked on her earlobe until she whimpered with need. He kissed her neck, then nuzzled her collar back to suck at the junction of her neck and shoulder. Fire blazed higher.

“Bedroom,” he said as he breathed against her neck.

“Doorway to the left.” She yelped when he suddenly picked her up in his arms.

He strode to the bedroom without hesitation, stopping only long enough to nudge the door open with his foot.

Her room was small, to say the least. There was barely enough room for the queen-size mattress and chest of drawers. As it was, he kneeled with one knee on the foot of the bed and all but threw her on the mattress.

Peyton laughed when she bounced and rolled to all fours. Looking up, she gave a sultry smile and licked her lips. His crotch was at eye level with her like that. He grinned back at her. Instead of undressing as she thought he would, he crooked his finger to call her over to him.



Thinking he wanted her to undress him herself, she crawled over with an exaggerated sway to her hips.

Ryker waited until she was directly in front of him and reaching for his pants, then took a step back.

“Strip.”

“What?” she asked, sure that she had misunderstood him.

“One thing at a time. Strip.” His eyes darkened.

It was an order if she ever heard one, Peyton realized. One she was only too happy to follow. She sat back on her knees and slowly unbuttoned her blouse until all that was holding it closed was where it was tucked into her jeans. She unsnapped them and pulled the blouse up and then slowly let it slide off her shoulders and onto the bed. She started to unhook her front closure bra but he stopped her.

“Not yet. Shoes next, then jeans.” He leaned against the doorjamb of her door to watch her.

Figuring it was a good idea anyway, she pulled off the tennis shoes and dropped them off the side of the bed. Then she unzipped her jeans and stood up, steadying herself with her arms raised to the ceiling. She turned her back to him. Once she had her balance, Peyton shimmied out of the jeans, wiggling her ass as she did. She threw them off to the side and waited for his next order in only her slut-red bra and panties.

“Now the bra,” he said.

She didn’t take her eyes off his as she slowly unhooked the clasp and peeled one cup off while holding the other one in place. She covered her breast with a hand and then peeled the other one off as well. She again covered her breast with her hand. The bra still clung to her arms from behind her. Peyton dropped her hands and the bra slid to the bed. She started to pull off her panties, but again, he stopped her.

“Don’t. Lay down for me. Legs bent at the knees and spread wide.” He didn’t move from the doorway.

Peyton frowned, but carefully crouched down on the bed then lay down. She spread her legs and bent them at the knee. She couldn't see him from where she lay with her head flat on the bed. She started to speak, then heard the rustle of clothes. Good, he was undressing. Finally. When he moved into view, she smiled and reached for him.

The slap on the outside of her thigh startled her, but didn't hurt. She frowned.

"Put your hands above your head and hold on to the mattress. Don't move."

Since she didn't have a headboard, she guessed he was making do. She clasped the mattress as best she could from that position and waited for his next move. She didn't have to wait long. He crawled up her body between her legs and kissed first one breast then the other. He licked around her areolas then licked each nipple over and over again like it was a lollipop. The sensation started out a soft tickle that soon sent shivers throughout her body, and still he didn't stop. Even when she started moving around restlessly on the bed, he licked.

Without warning, he sucked one nipple in his mouth and rubbed at it with his tongue, then moved to the other nipple to do the same thing. Her body itched all over, needing something that she couldn't figure out. His teeth latched on to one of her nipples and drew it away from her body until she whimpered with the first touch of pain. He released it with a plop and continued with the other breast until she again whimpered. He spread kisses between her breasts, in her cleavage, and down her belly.

It wasn't until he moved downward that she missed the weight on her stomach. His cock had been resting there. Now that it was gone, she realized how heavy it had felt. She started to raise her head to see, and he glared at her. With a sigh, Peyton lowered her head and began imagining how large he might be by that missing weight. Imagination left her when he nipped at her mound through her panties. Then the palm of his hands spread the inside of her thighs farther apart and held

her while he breathed on her cunt. Her pelvis moved up seeking something—anything.

Ryker released her thighs to scrape his nails down her pussy through the thin material. The sensation started a riot inside her womb. Sensitive nipples continued to send pulses of electricity throughout her body. God, she was going to climax without him even touching her skin. The ride grew wilder and higher until she stood on the precipice of a great fall, only to have him stop and scoot back off the bed. She cursed and slammed her head back against the bed.

He grabbed her ankles off the bed and brought her legs together again. Then he slid his hands up the outside of her legs and inside her panties to grasp them and pull them down and off her feet. The sudden coolness of the air hitting her pussy sent another round of shivers over her.

Lifting one of her legs, he massaged her instep then licked a line from her ankle up to her groin. He repeated the action on her other leg but this time he didn't stop at her groin, he continued around her mound. He seemed to like the fact that she waxed, because he paid close attention to that area, licking and mouthing it until she was sure she would have hickies there.

Fingers spread her pussy lips before a hot tongue delved deep inside her and continued all the way to her clit without touching it. The path continued around her clit and back down her slit until he reached the little rosette there. He licked her from there to her clit and back again before he settled into dining in earnest. The more he licked her burning pussy the more cream she leaked. He blew against her clit but still didn't touch it. It itched to be touched, but still, he only grazed it.

Desperate, she began to beg for him to touch her. He never stopped what he was doing, but he did begin reaming her pussy with one finger. He circled around and around then slowly inched it inside her. It was too slow. She needed more—faster. Her groans and whimpers and begging grew the more he teased her.

Once, she heard him growl when she began moving her pelvis in an attempt to capture more from his mouth. Finally, he began finger fucking her with the one finger. Soon he added another finger and she whimpered with relief as the itch was being scratched—lightly. After a few minutes, he added a third finger and the stretch added to the sensation of being scratched ever so lightly. It felt good, but there was more she wanted. She wanted it all. She wanted it now. She whined and thrust upward with her pelvis as he pushed into her with his fingers.

Ryker took one of her legs over his arm and lifted it slightly as he continued to lick and torture her with almost orgasms. His tongue suddenly swiped across her clit, sending shards of delight into her. He did it again and again, then pulled back to kneel over her. She had a moment to wonder what he would do next, then he pinched her clit and thrust into her all at the same time. She screamed at the pleasure coursing through her body.

As orgasms went, it was a ten plus on the Peyton scale of one to ten. Never had she experienced anything that intense before. That's when she realized he was only half inside her. He'd stopped to let her adjust and just maybe to catch his breath as well. She couldn't see his face to know for sure. Then he lifted his gaze and the white-hot intensity of his stare mesmerized her. He looked her in the eyes while he pulled almost all the way out and thrust forward again. This time he only lacked an inch or so, but he never stopped looking at her. His third thrust took him to her cervix. The bump sent a tingle of pain that she welcomed. Together with him filling her and the sizzling hot foreplay, Peyton climaxed again, clamping down on his giant cock.

\* \* \* \*

Ryker groaned as her tight, hot pussy clamped down on him. He fought to keep from coming. He'd been inside her less than sixty seconds, and he was already on the edge. He stilled and counted to

ten, drawing in breath through his nose to keep from moaning out loud. His balls were already on fire and the way her cunt was gripping him, they would explode soon.

The movement of her hips in an effort to capture more of him stirred him to action. He pulled out and slammed back into her. Over and over he pummeled her, listening to her groans and pleas of “faster” and “harder.” His cock delved between her luscious pussy lips, bumping her cervix with each thrust. All the while, he watched her face, waiting for that moment when she was once again on the edge. He’d be damned if he came before she got there. His cock moved in and out of her, over and over. The fire in his balls traveled upward, threatening with every thrust to erupt.

Finally, she began panting and pleading even as her pelvic muscles strained. Her face grew taut with the strain of reaching for the climax. Ryker shuttled in and out of her in long hard strokes and just as he began to come, he pinched her nipple between thumb and forefinger. She climaxed, screaming and bucking hard enough to unsaddle him if he hadn’t been gripped by her clinching cunt. Instead, he came so hard he curled his toes in the carpet as he pulsed inside of her.

The ringing in his ears slowly dissipated as he leaned over her, panting to catch his breath. He kept his weight off of her, but just barely. He swallowed, trying to wet his dry mouth, and realized his eyes were closed. When he opened them, he saw Peyton staring up into his face with a look of wonder. Her heavy breathing matched his as they watched each other in silence.

Finally, he bent over her and kissed her. It was a gentle kiss that quickly turned into a more passionate one. Her arms wrapped around him drawing him closer to her. Their bodies slid against each other from the sweat. It brought home the fact that they were soaked and the room’s air conditioner worked pretty well if you weren’t doing anything but lying in bed in a pool of sweat. It sent a shiver through his body that transferred over to hers.

“I think we both need a shower,” he said with a grin.

“A shower would be nice. You first. I’m just going to lay her for a few hours and rest.” She closed her eyes.

“I don’t think so. We can share the shower and save on the water bill.”

“My water bill is included in my rent,” she said with a smirk.

“Think of it as conserving water then.”

“If I join you in the shower, it will take longer and we won’t conserve anything.”

“Why do you think it would take longer? It might even be shorter if we bathe each other,” he said.

“Because you’re going to want to play,” she said and rocked her pelvis.

Before he could give his retort, her eyes got big. She jumped up, trying to dislodge him from her body.

“What the hell? Be still!” he yelled when she nearly elbowed him in the stomach in an effort to turn over.

“You didn’t fucking wear a condom!” she yelled.

## Chapter Four

“Yes, I did,” he said quietly.

Astonishment laced his voice as Peyton fought to catch her breath. He’d pulled out of her when she’d yelled at him and sure enough, he was wearing a condom.

“I didn’t see you put it on. But it doesn’t matter anyway. It must have leaked because I’m dripping,” she complained, sitting up.

He didn’t say anything at first. Instead he rolled off the condom and carried it to the bathroom. Since she had a night-light in the bathroom, it was obvious that it was a condom. She heard the commode flush, then water running in the sink. He returned a few minutes later with a wet bath cloth in his hand.

“Lay down. I’ll clean you up.” He waited for her to comply.

After a few seconds of staring up at him, she gave in and lay back on the bed. He quietly cleansed her legs and pussy until she felt squeaky clean. Then he took one finger and pushed it deep inside her cunt. Before withdrawing it, he swirled it around. Then he held it to her mouth.

“Taste,” was all he said.

Peyton hesitated at the command in his voice, not so much because she didn’t want to taste herself, but because he expected her to do it. She considered being insolent and shaking her head no, but in the end, she opened her mouth and accepted his finger. She tasted like a mixture of peaches and honey with an edge of lime. Funny, she’d never tasted herself before. She guessed she didn’t taste that bad.

“Do you taste me?” he asked.

Peyton's eyebrows drew together as she considered his question. Men, as a rule, had a musky, salty taste that often was a little bitter. She didn't taste that at all. She shook her head with a frown.

"That's because the condom didn't leak. You're just that wet when you come," he said, with a wry smile.

"And you came three times," he reminded her.

"Oh." Peyton didn't know what to say.

She'd all but attacked him over not wearing a condom and then because it leaked, and neither accusation had been correct. She owed him an apology but, for some reason, she had trouble saying it. As a last effort, she stood up and touched his chest just over his heart. With a small smile, she went up on tiptoes and kissed his lips.

"I'm sorry for yelling at you. I got scared," she admitted.

"I understand, but don't do it again or I'll spank that sweet ass of yours."

Peyton laughed. "You'll try."

She knew it was a challenge, but she didn't care. She already knew she liked a little spanking with her sex. It wouldn't be anything new or scary. Even with that dark, intense stare of his, Peyton wasn't worried it would be too much. Grady had vouched for him. Her best friend wouldn't have done that if he wasn't absolutely sure she would be safe.

"Oh, I don't know. I think I could manage to get you over my knee without a lot of trouble," he murmured, taking a step toward her.

Peyton jumped out of bed and raced for the door, but he was already there relying on her having anticipated his plan. He wrapped her in his arms so that she was pinned beneath them.

"Now what were you saying?"

"Nothing. I wasn't saying anything," she said, smiling brightly up at him.

Ryker grinned back and bend over to kiss her. His mouth brushed feather-light across her lips. Just that innocent touch ignited her libido. It was as if he'd fanned the embers of her arousal and they



began to spark. She leaned closer to him in an attempt to force a more solid touch from him. He nipped at her lip, then held his head back when she attempted to lick his.

"I want a shower," he said.

"A shower sounds good to me."

She tried pulling against him, but he didn't let go of her.

"We can't get in the shower if you keep holding me prisoner,"

"I'm almost afraid to let go of you. You tend to go off half-cocked."

She frowned. Was he teasing or being serious? She decided to take it as teasing and rotated her pelvis against his semierect penis, caught between them. He drew in a quick breath and shook his head. He took one step back at the same time he let go of her arms. He really hadn't completely trusted her.

Thinking about this, Peyton led the way to the bathroom, assuming he would follow if he wanted a shower. She was a little perturbed, but put it aside to turn on the shower. She adjusted the water temperature to not quite hot and pulled out two towels to place on the counter within easy reach. Then she handed him a bath cloth, and she took one for herself. She didn't say anything but stepped into the tub. The water pounded down on the back of her head. A few seconds later, Ryker joined her, shifting her toward the back of the tub so that his body shielded her from the shower's relentless spray.

"Wash your face then give me your cloth," he said.

Still a little put out over the trust issue, Peyton shrugged and grabbed a hair clip off the shower curtain to hold her hair up out of her way. She washed her face before relinquishing her bath cloth to him. She watched him lather it up then motion with his finger for her to twirl around. He started with her neck, massaging the soap over her skin, then where he treated her shoulders to the same massage. The cloth disappeared, and his bare hands took its place, kneading and squeezing her muscles until she needed to rest her hands against the ceramic tiled wall in order to remain standing.

Before her knees gave away, he stopped, and once again the bath cloth returned to wash her arms down to her hands. He applied the cloth to her lower back next, then, once again, massaged her with bare hands. She moaned, now unable to contain the pleasure that suffused her body. She heard him chuckle behind her. It didn't matter, she was too far gone to worry about what she sounded like—or looked like, for that matter.

Next, he nudged her legs apart and began bathing her legs one by one, paying close attention to her toes, much to her dismay. She was extremely ticklish there. He didn't take advantage of it, and she was eternally grateful. Much more and she would have ended up on her ass in the tub.

He stood up and turned her around to face him, then turned them both around so that her back faced the shower's spray. He helped to rinse her off then turned them both back around so that she now faced him but leaving his back to the spray. He looked her in the eyes as his hands used the cloth as an extension of himself. He lavished attention on each breast, plucking, pinching, and patting her nipples until they were super sensitive to everything including a breath of air. He moved downward to her belly and then skipped her mound and pussy to concentrate on her legs. He washed each leg vigorously, massaging her calves then her feet.

Once again she was reduced to using the shower wall to hold herself upright. Even that failed to help her when he began washing between her legs. He forwent the cloth to use his bare hands on her. As he massaged and manipulated her pussy to perfection, Peyton practically melted into a puddle at his feet. Only his strong arm kept her upright as the orgasm snuck up on her, sending her sailing into a sea of sensuality.

In all her sexual forays, Peyton had never climaxed this many times in one night. It was a record for her. One she would happily attempt to break, given the opportunity.

“What’s that silly grin on your face?” Ryker’s deep voice sent chills down her spine.

“Thinking about orgasms and how much fun they are.” She leaned into him, trusting him to keep her upright.

“It’s my turn, you know,” he said in a teasing voice.

“Hmmm, give me a second to recover. I won’t be able to concentrate.”

“You’ve got thirty seconds then I’m dropping you on the floor and bathing myself.” He started counting. “One, two, three.”

“Aw, come on. I’m still floating here,” she grouched.

“Five, six, seven.”

“Why can’t I enjoy it for just a little while?” she finally whined.

“Ten, eleven, twelve.”

“Ah, hell.” Peyton stood away from him, pulling out of his arms.

Reaching around him, she procured the other bath cloth and handed it to him.

“Wash your face,” she said.

He washed his face then handed the bath cloth back to her. She lathered it up, smiling when she realized it was her favorite vanilla-scented soap. He was going to smell like a vanilla-soaked orgasm on legs, she decided.

He presented her with his back without her having to ask. She began soaping him up with the cloth and soon had him rosy red from the cloth and covered in suds. She continued down to his fine-looking ass. She massaged the scented soap into his ass and ran the cloth down his crack. He wiggled a little, complaining that she was tickling him. She filed that away for future reference.

Next she washed his legs, marveling over the strength in his leg muscles. Even they started to quiver when she drew close to his balls or penis. She barely scraped them with the cloth a couple of times, not quite by accident. This left his feet to her tender ministrations. He absolutely drew the line when she started sliding the cloth between his toes.

“No way. I’m ticklish, so you’re not doing them. I’ll end up on the floor with a broken neck if you touch them,” he said with a serious look on his face.

Okay, no toes. *I’ll remember that for later, too.*

Standing back up, she turned him around to rinse and then began with his shoulders and ended with each finger, making sure she didn’t miss a spot as she went. Peyton swiped the cloth across his chest and abdomen several times until he was nice and soapy. Then she slung the cloth over his shoulder to hold it there while she played with the soap in his chest hair. It was funny that she had never noticed before how much fun it could be to draw soap faces and initials using his chest hair as a canvas and ink. She swirled and played for several minutes until Ryker warned her the water was beginning to get cold.

With a sigh, she abandoned her newfound hobby and concentrated on his abdomen and pelvis, keeping tabs of where he was sensitive. The next and last stop on her journey proved to be the best one. She ran her cloth-wrapped hand between his cock and balls, then between them and his legs. Once she had bathed the area, Peyton rinsed out the bath cloth and draped it over the shower rod. She grabbed his arm before he could turn around.

“Not yet, I’m not finished.”

This time she sank to her knees and massaged his stiffening cock to its full glory. She ran her thumb over the mushroom head and back down to the base. She repeated this two more times before changing tactics. A drop of pre-cum, nearly invisible in the soapy suds, eased from the slit on top and rolled slowly down his cock. She grasped him at the root but was not able to completely encircle him. If she hadn’t already had the monster inside of her, she would have said it wouldn’t fit and run for her life. But it had fit somehow inside of her. The idea of it thrilled her just thinking about it.

Rubbing up and down the long length of him with both hands, unable to reach around his thick cock on their own, she released his cock with one hand and reached through his legs to cup his balls.

Even as she worked them ever so carefully in her hand, she could feel them begin to draw up in preparation for ejaculation. Peyton couldn't stop now even if she wanted to. Everything inside of her wanted to taste him, though, so she stopped and turned him around to rinse off. He took care of it himself and turned off the shower before she could stop him.

"I'm not finished with you yet. Come back here," Peyton said.

With a slow grin he stopped and got into a more comfortable stance, legs slightly spread. The scent of vanilla sugar swirled around her when he moved closer. She smothered a laugh. If he was like most men, telling him he smelt good might not go over too well. Instead, she concentrated on two things—his cock and his balls. One hand teased and pleased the balls with nails and fingers. The other hand held firmly onto his cock at the base so he couldn't accidentally choke her with his massive size.

She licked just under the head of his penis, enough to soon have him up on his toes yelling out his own orgasm. Where for most men it was an erogenous zone, the spot under the cap and mushroom head held very little interest to her—unless it was a new way to tease and torment them into behaving.

It took very little to arouse him to his full potential. All it took was for her to swallow his cock to the hilt. She'd had to talk herself into trying it, but was glad she had. Although she hadn't been able to look up at his face, she felt his reaction nonetheless. His cock jumped like a jumping bean, his balls drew up, and his legs trembled. She flattened her tongue and drew a deep breath as she went down on him again. This time she breathed through her nose and took him to the back of her throat and swallowed.

He gave a horse shout and held on tightly to her head. She smiled around him at the knowledge she had done that to him. His fingers curled into her hair, pulling most of it from the clip to fall over her shoulders and into her face. She looked up at him and hummed.

“God, yes, baby. Just like that.” He pulled her hair back from her face, but held onto it like the reins of a horse.

Peyton continued sucking him to the back of her throat, swallowing every once in a while. It took her breath away to see this big man reduced to short sentences and some interesting noises. She knew the instant he began to gear up to come. His balls drew up inside his sac and his hands became more demanding in her hair, holding her down on his dick for longer periods of time. Just when she knew he would come, her taste buds ready, he pulled out of her mouth and grabbed her shoulder. His cock erupted, spewing his seed all over her chest. His hand continued pumping for a few seconds longer once he’d finished.

He leaned over her with his hands against the wall to hold him upright. His legs trembled with the effort. She started to stand up and he grabbed one of her arms to help her.

“You need another shower,” he said, laughing shakily.

“Yeah, but without you in the shower with me. We get sidetracked too easily.”

“I have plenty of willpower, it’s you who won’t behave,” he told her.

“Well, whoever it is needs to wait in the bedroom while I rinse off.” She pulled the shower curtain aside and gave him a little nudge.

Once he was out of the tub, he grabbed a towel and began to dry off. A bead of water ran down his chest, hitting his nipple and going around it to follow another path down to his pelvis, where it was promptly dried off. Peyton bit her lower lip and happened to look up, catching him looking down at her.

“What?”

“Nothing,” he said, grinning.

“Yeah, right. Nothing with you is something, and that something is always dangerous.”

She watched him out of the corner of her eye as she turned the water back on and adjusted the temperature once again. There wasn’t

much adjusting, though, since they'd used most of the hot water and the hot water heater hadn't finished warming up the new water to replace it yet. Still, it did the job and helped to *cool her off*, so to speak. She stepped out of the tub and grabbed a towel to dry off with. She risked a peek into the bedroom and was not surprised to see Ryker stretched out on the bed, sound asleep.

She toweled off quickly and quietly, hoping she wouldn't wake him up. Then she pulled back the covers as far as she could on her side and walked around to the other side. She nudged him awake enough so that she could get him in the bed and under the covers. He'd catch his death of a cold like this. With some creative cursing and a lot of luck, she roused him enough she was able to get him under the covers—on her side of the bed.

Peyton slid between the sheets and debated on whether to snuggle or just go to sleep. Since he was sprawled out on his stomach, she decided to forgo the snuggling this time. She was really too tired to stir anything up right now anyway. With that thought, she let sleep claim her, reminding herself she still had to go to work later that morning.

## Chapter Five

Something tickled her nose. With her eyes still closed, Peyton tried brushing it away but hit a brick wall instead. Groaning, she opened one eye and realized she was lying on Ryker's chest. It was his chest hair tickling her nose. She assessed her situation and found she was stretched across his chest with one leg over his and her head resting just below his chin. She also figured out during her self-assessment that she was sore all over, especially in a few key areas. Had she been able to sleep a full eight hours, Peyton was sure she would have felt great after the bouts of soul-searing sex. As it was, she felt rode hard and put up wet.

Careful to keep from rousing Ryker, she extracted herself from him and backed off the end of the bed. She nearly stumbled over his boots and barely managed to keep from yelling. The clock on the milk crate by her bed said 10:00 a.m. She had less than an hour to get ready. Thank goodness she'd taken her shower the night before. Unbidden, memories of that shower washed over her, sending tiny electrical orgasms quaking inside her. She had to put a hand on the wall to keep from toppling over. God, it had been one hell of a night.

Peyton opened her closet door and stepped inside, closing the door behind her. It was a nice size walk-in closet for someone with her limited supply of clothes. There was plenty of room for her and the clothes in it.

She grabbed a pair of jeans and a blouse and turned the light back off. Then she stepped out and located her shoes. After dropping it all off in the bathroom, she returned for underwear. Unfortunately, the drawers stuck on the chest and she knew they would make noises. She



managed to get them out about two inches without making much noise. Deciding that no one would see her in her underwear anyway, she reached in with two fingers and pulled out panties and a bra. They didn't match but who cared. She did the same thing with a pair of socks.

When she stepped out of the bathroom it was to find Ryker awake and staring at her from the bed. Sleep-tousled hair framed a pleasantly sleepy face with lids at half-mast.

"Morning," he said in a gruff voice.

"Morning. I'm off to work. You can stick around as long as you like, just remember to lock up when you leave."

He grunted an affirmative sound. At least she assumed it was affirmative. She started to walk to the living room when he stopped her again.

"Come here. I haven't had a good morning kiss." He scooted over a little and patted the mattress for her to sit down.

"I'm going to be late if I don't head out in a few minutes," she warned him as she complied and sat on the spot he'd made for her.

"Just a kiss." His hands came up and loosely gripped her face on either side, pulling her head down toward his.

His lips brushed hers then returned for a slightly deeper kiss. He ran his tongue along the seam of her lips, and she parted them. He delved in, licking at the inside of her mouth. He tickled along the roof of her mouth and then dueled with her tongue for dominance. The entire time he played with her mouth, his hands molded her to him until her chest was against his naked one. They kneaded her shoulders and back with strong fingers as his tongue caressed hers.

Finally, she came up for breath and broke away from him. They both panted, staring at each other. Peyton managed to stand after a few seconds. She continued to breathe heavily but managed to talk.

"I have to go to work. I really enjoyed last night." It sounded lame, but it was the best she could come up with. She'd never been very good at the morning-after stuff. Usually she managed to get her

things and leave before they woke up. Even with the few steady partners she'd had, Peyton always went home early to avoid the worried looks the next morning. Those insecure, guilty, measuring looks that would weigh heavily on her mind for days afterward.

"Leave me your cell number on something in the kitchen. I want to be able to call you. I'll leave you mine on my way out." Ryker's intense, dark eyes focused on her alone.

He watched her—measured her. It was unnerving. She nodded and escaped. Once in the living room, she hunted down a pen and some paper and wrote down her cell number. She left it and the pen on the countertop.

She locked the apartment on her way out and unlocked her car door. She climbed in for the short drive to work. When she arrived she found that she had all of five minutes till she had to clock in. She was starved for both food and coffee. Priorities in order, she poured herself a cup of coffee and grabbed a banana off the counter. Mike, the grill chef, glared at her but didn't say anything. Instead he started flipping eggs and bacon one right after another.

Peyton drank her coffee black with the occasional splash of cream when she was drinking it before going to bed. Waking up meant strong black coffee to her way of thinking. All the fancy stuff found at corner coffee shops like Starbucks were dessert and novelty coffees, not functional but to be enjoyed.

"Peyton, you clocked in yet?" Deborah Henderson, the owner, asked.

"Not yet, but I'm on my way." She turned around and hurried to the time clock to punch in.

"Cover Linda's side today. She's out sick and Kelly is working this morning. She can't handle the crowd that usually sits there." Deborah nodded toward the window side of the building and hurried back to the register to check someone out.

Sighing in resignation, Peyton tied the apron around her waist and picked up a pot of coffee to refill cups while she made the rounds.

At nearly one o'clock, Grady strode into the diner and took an empty seat in her section. She grabbed a coffee cup and filled it for him. He smiled and nodded at her.

"You're mighty chipper this morning. Would it have anything to do with the motorcycle I saw parked outside your apartment building all morning?" He sipped the coffee, not dropping his eyes from hers.

She held his gaze and propped one hand on her hip.

"Not that it is any of your business, but yes, that might have had something to do with it. Now, what would you like to eat?"

"Pancakes."

"Eggs and toast."

"No, an omelet."

Voices up and down the counter all advised him what to eat. He smiled and waved at the men. He knew each and every one of them.

"Think I'll have the omelet. Western, please."

She put in his order then made a round of her tables stopping to take another new order on the way. By the time she made it back to the window, Grady's order was up. She carried it and a bottle of Tabasco sauce to his table.

"Hope you enjoy," she said and turned to walk off.

"Hey, are you sure you're okay?" His hand snaked out to latch on to her arm.

His voice had taken on that big brother sound again. Something he'd probably started using to ease the pain of her rejection, but now just fell over him whenever he felt like she needed someone's shoulder to cry on. She hadn't needed it in a long time. Did she need it now? Why would she? She'd had stupendous sex several times, and Ryker had been the perfect gentleman outside of the sex. Really, who could ask for more?

Then why did she feel like crying? She still wanted him and wanted to see more of him. Maybe that was the problem—she wanted to know about him, know what made him tick. That was a no-no in her book. No personal attachments allowed. She'd written that rule,

she'd have to be the one to break it. But hell, hadn't she already done that by giving him her cell phone number?

Naw, fuck buddies had to have a way to get in touch with each other. It was cool. Then why was she standing there worrying about it when she should have been taking care of customers? *Because you're an idiot, Peyton. He's just a man. Someone to scratch that itch you get.* Though she wasn't picky on looks, she was picky in safety and preferred no one with baggage. She liked her men strictly baggage-free. No one to come into her apartment thinking they would stay awhile. No one to deal with at the least opportune times, such as ex-wives and girlfriends, or God forbid, an ex-bookie or supplier.

She didn't sense anything like that with Ryker, but she still believed that something too good to be true probably was. It had never let her down yet. She was waiting for the other shoe to drop. Watching for it as she was, Peyton would be ready for it this time.

\* \* \* \*

Ryker leaned back in his office chair, wiping a hand over his face in frustration. The business deal on his desk was ready to go. All it needed was his signature to put it in motion, but he hesitated. He never hesitated. If it felt right, he went with it. If it seemed off, he tabled the plan and started on a new one. What was different this time?

Peyton. It had been almost two days since he had seen her. One morning of basically tame sex for him and he was already thinking about her all the time. Not once in the years he had been dating had a woman ever interfered with his work. Not once—until now.

His cell phone rang and by the sound of the tone he knew who it was. Sharon. Why couldn't she get it through her thick skull that he wanted no part of her? He'd been as blunt as he knew how and that was saying something. He debated answering it, but decided a good

fight would clear his head of thoughts of Peyton and what he wanted to do with her once he had her there in his home.

“What part of no don’t you understand, Sharon?”

“You’re just mad at me is all, Ryker. You’ll get over it, and I’ll still be here waiting on you.”

“No, you’re wrong. I’m not moving back to Dallas, and I’m definitely not having a relationship of any kind with you. Do yourself a favor and find some other bottomless pocket to poke in. I’m not interested.”

“But I love you. It’s not about the money, Ryker. I can’t live without you,” she insisted.

Her whiney voice grated on his nerves. He bit back a curse and cut her off in mid-whine. Then he shoved the phone back into the holder on his belt and stood up. There was no reason to continue to stare at the business proposal put together by his best men when he couldn’t think of anything other than Peyton. With a sigh, he gave in and pulled out his phone once again. Only this time, he punched in her number.

He glanced at his watch. She should be off work by now, he thought. It was nearly seven, and she usually got off at six from the diner.

“Hello?”

“What are you wearing?”

She laughed and heard the rustling sound of material gliding against something.

“It’s more like what I’m not wearing,” she supplied.

“Which is?” he asked, his hand adjusting his stiffening cock.

“I’m not wearing pants or a blouse or a dress or shoes or socks.”

“Hmmm, what does that leave? A bra and a pair of panties.” His cock grew harder.

“Maybe.”

Her husky voice had dropped lower as she talked sending peaks of pleasure to his balls. Laughter tinged her words. He knew her eyes would be darkening with desire as they talked.

“Touch your breasts for me. Tell me what it feels like.”

The hitch in her breath let him know that she was doing it. He settled back on the couch with his legs spread out in front of him. Already the throbbing in his dick had him sweating.

“What are you doing?” he asked.

“I’m circling my nipples with my finger. Scratching over the top of it with my nails. It feels so good,” she said.

Her breathing sounded loud over the phone. She probably had it propped on her shoulder so she could use both hands on her hot tits.

“Take off your bra for me, Peyton. What color is it? Does it close in front or the back?” Need was beginning to make him impatient. He drew in a deep breath and forced his breathing to slow down.

“I’m wearing a lavender bra and panty set today. The bra closes in the front.” She grew silent for a few seconds then resumed talking again. “I just took off the bra and my breasts are aching to be touched.”

“Wet your fingers and play with your nipples. Get them wet for me.” Ryker released his cock from his jeans and sighed.

“Tell me how it feels to have your wet fingers on your hot breasts,” he demanded, in something close to a growl.

“Oh, it feels so good. I’m pinching my nipples and blowing across them. I need more though. It’s not enough,” she said in a husky voice.

Gritting his teeth, he gripped his shaft at the base and squeezed in an attempt to slow things down some. He hadn’t had phone sex since he got out of school. Here he was now well on his way to climaxing without touching the woman he was talking with.

“Push one hand down into your panties and pet that pussy for me.”

“I’m so wet, Ryker. I need your cock.”

"I want you to run your fingers around your clit for me then take two of them inside you." He visualized her doing it, and his balls burned in reaction.

He heard her moan over the phone and knew when she'd pushed her fingers inside her wet cunt. Her low hum of pleasure stirred him higher. He began to pump his cock, setting a slow rhythm designed to keep him under control.

"Oh, it feels so good. But my fingers aren't long enough to reach like yours are. I can't touch that special spot that makes me fly," she complained.

"I'll take care of that sweet spot for you later. Now take your fingers out of your pussy and taste them for me. Tell me what you taste like." He reached between his legs and cupped his balls, gently rolling them as he pulled on his cock with his other hand.

His rhythm faltered some when he heard her hum at the taste of herself. He swallowed hard and worked at remaining in control. He refused to come until she did.

"Mmmm, I taste like a mixture of honey and tangy syrup."

"Now rub on your clit for me. Not hard. Keep playing with your nipples, too. Tell me when you're getting close." Ryker pumped his cock as white-hot shards of heat flashed from the base of his spine into his balls. They grew tighter with each pump of his hand.

"God, I'm close. I need your cock inside me though. It's not enough. I can't do it."

"Yes you can. Make yourself come for me. I want to hear you scream."

"I'm so close, so close. I just can't," she cried out.

"Pinch your nipple and your clit right now and come for me," he demanded as his balls erupted, sending his seed up his shaft.

"Yes! Ryker!" She screamed her climax over the phone just as cum shot from his cock onto his abdomen.

He stopped running his hand up and down his shaft and fought instead to catch his breath. His ass muscles cramped from clenching

so hard. He hadn't jacked off like that in a long time. Maybe ever, he realized. Hell, it felt like his balls should be hanging out his cock, came so hard.

"Peyton? You still there, baby?" He swallowed, trying to wet his dry throat.

"Umhum. Can't catch my breath."

"That makes two of us." He laughed. "I need a nap now."

"That sounds good to me, too. I think I'll go take one." He heard the rustle of cloth again and imagined her putting her clothes back on.

He wasn't ready to hang up, but if he were going to get her over here at his place, he needed to let her go.

"Peyton. I want you to come over here tonight. You don't work tomorrow right?" he asked.

"No, I'm off tomorrow and Wednesday." She sounded hesitant when she confirmed it.

"Let me give you directions. Pack a small bag and come over for those two days. I'll take good care of you." He let his voice drop, knowing it would sound sexy to her.

"I-I need to be back home by three Thursday afternoon so I can get ready for work."

Ryker could tell by the strain in her voice that she was unsure of taking that step. He knew better than to push, so he said nothing and waited.

"Um, when did you want me to come over?" she finally asked.

"Take a quick nap and come on over around six-thirty or seven tonight." He held his breath, afraid he'd miss her answer if he breathed.

"I guess I'll see you then. Good-bye, Ryker."

He listened as she hung up. The dial tone jarred him back to the present and he closed his cell. Then he rolled off the couch to get cleaned up. He had a few things he wanted to do to get ready for Peyton coming over. Just the thought of some of the things he wanted to do to her had his cock stirring with interest. Shaking his head, he



straightened his clothes and set about making arrangements for dinner and dessert. Peyton, of course, would be the main course.

## Chapter Six

Massive armies of giant moths dive-bombed her insides, and her anxiety level shot up a notch with each minute, drawing her closer to six-thirty. This wasn't like her. She was always in control and never nervous. Maybe she should just call the whole thing off. For the third time, Peyton reached for her phone to call Ryker and cancel. And once again, just before she hit "send" she changed her mind and shoved the phone back into her purse.

It was just sex. Why was she so nervous and jittery about it? Trust wasn't the real issue, though she did have a bit of healthy fear of the unknown when it came to Ryker. No, what had her so on edge centered around her and how she felt about him—them. He had dominated her thoughts for the last several days, making it difficult to do her job, something she'd never had trouble with before.

Her personal life had never crossed her professional life before. She didn't like that it was doing that now. It meant she was losing focus, and when that happened, mistakes happened, hearts got involved, and that was a strict no-no in her book. Something had to be done. Unfortunately, the one thing that would solve the problem would be to back off and not see Ryker anymore, but she couldn't make herself do that yet. Her sexual side was stubborn when it came to pleasure, and Ryker was all about pleasure.

Frustrated with arguing with herself for the last hour, Peyton grabbed her purse and overnight bag. She tossed them into the passenger seat and locked up her apartment before heading over to Ryker's place. His directions took her to a side of town she'd never been in before. The houses here were large and spaced far enough

apart that you wouldn't know your neighbor's business without binoculars and an earpiece.

She turned down Truesdale Lane and pulled up in front of a set of condominiums that would easily fit her entire apartment building in one of them.

"Wow!" She couldn't keep it from popping out of her mouth.

Better now than when she was in Ryker's presence. She didn't want to embarrass herself. Forget that she'd never stepped foot in a place like the one Ryker obviously lived in. His bike stood in the drive right outside the door. There was no misunderstanding about where he resided. Peyton drew in deep breaths to keep from hyperventilating. Had she found him living in a dive she would have been able to take it in stride, but living in luxury? He was a freaking biker for crap sakes. What was a biker doing here?

The first thought that hit her was drugs. He was obviously some bigwig in a drug cartel. She had been right. He was too good to be true. The problem was, what would she do about it? Drugs meant police and more questions than she wanted to answer. So how did she back out of this without asking for a whole lot of trouble than she needed in her life? She was so going to kill Grady. He had promised her Ryker was legit. Hell, Grady was a damn lawyer. He had to know what his friend was into, didn't he?

So maybe there was another explanation, one that didn't involve jails, cops, or drugs. There was always the chance that he came from money and rebelled at society. Yeah, right, in another life maybe.

"Are you going to sit outside all night or come in?" Ryker's voice beside her window scared her to death.

She yelped at hearing him so close to her. Inside, she cringed that he might have heard her thoughts. It wouldn't have surprised her at this point to find out he could read minds. Everything else about him proved to be larger than life, instead of his cock.

"Um, I'm coming in." She unbuckled her seat belt and got out of the car.

Before she knew it, he'd grabbed both her purse and her overnight bag from the passenger seat. He grinned at her and jerked his head toward the door.

"Come on in. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes."

"Dinner? You cooked?" She popped her hand over her mouth at how it sounded when it came out.

"Actually, I can cook, but I didn't cook this. I'm warming it up," he said as he opened the door to usher her inside.

The entrance opened directly into the living area, where hardwood floors shown as if newly polished. A massive plasma TV took up most of one wall with the entertainment equipment surrounding it taking up the rest of the wall. In front of it sat two leather lounge chairs that looked soft as butter. Across from the TV a fireplace dominated another wall with a large sofa centered in front of it. Gas logs filled the fireplace and, despite it being summer, he had a fire going. It added an ambience to the room in general.

"Come on. I'll show you the kitchen and the bedroom. There were two bedrooms, but I use one as an office." He guided her with a hand at her elbow.

The living area flowed into a dining room, which opened into the kitchen. The hardwood floors continued throughout the entire house so far that Peyton had seen. She wouldn't be surprised if every room except maybe the bathroom had them. She loved wood floors. They were so much easier to keep clean. Shaking off the thought since the place wasn't hers, Peyton took in the state-of-the-art kitchen. A bar divided the workspace from the dining area. Wood cabinets complemented the granite counter tops and ceramic backsplash. The appliances were all stainless steel KitchenAid and looked to be brand new.

"The kitchen is a chef's wet dream," she managed to get out.

"Thanks, I like working in it. But the main reason I took the place is for the bathroom." He took her hand and pulled her along behind him.

He opened a set of French doors and led her into the master bedroom. She was right that the wood floors continued into the bedroom. They complimented the rich oak bedroom suite. The four-poster bed, its posts as wide in diameter as her waist, sat in the middle of the room. A maroon and gold comforter covered the bed and matching curtains hung at each of the three windows. The room was easily the size of her entire apartment. How could one person live alone in such a large space?

“Do you like it?” he asked, watching her face.

“I love it, but it’s so big.”

He laughed and after dropping her bag and purse on the bed he drew her into the master bath. Okay, she could live like this after all. One corner held a huge oval tub perfect for lounging. Ceramic tile in rich greens and golds surrounded the tub, with a shelf along one wall for towels, bath supplies and candles. Across from the tub was a vanity and mirror fit for a princess or a movie star. The lighting would be perfect for applying makeup. Any woman would appreciate it.

Ryker walked her around a glass block enclosure into a walk-in shower complete with six showerheads positioned in front and in back. A bench ran along the back wall. There were various handholds around the ceramic-tiled spa, along with shelves for shower gels and sponges. The toilet was housed in a small area away from the shower. The floor, he told her, was made with heated tiles, and a heated towel rack stood next to the shower. The entire room was overwhelming.

“It’s beautiful.”

“See why I wanted this particular condo?”

“Yeah. Between the kitchen and the bathroom you have a dream home. I still can’t imagine living here alone. It’s so...big.”

“I guess next to your apartment it must seem that way but it’s only eighteen-hundred square feet.” He stared down into her eyes as if searching for something.

Peyton licked her lips and pasted a smile on her face. This had been a mistake. How could she extract herself from him and go back home?

“Come on. Keep me company while I finish up dinner.”

She followed him back into the kitchen and took a seat on a barstool while he buttered toast with a garlic butter mixture he’d already prepared. He stuck the pan into the oven and set a timer. Then he pulled out two wineglasses and a bottle of wine from the fridge. After opening it, he poured them both a glass and handed one to her.

“Nothing fancy. Just Zinfandel.” He took a sip and waited for her to do the same.

“Mmm, it’s good,” she offered, after tasting the wine.

“If you’d rather have beer, I have that. I just thought the wine went better with lasagna.”

“I love lasagna and you’re right, wine does go better with it.” She took another sip and sat the glass down on the bar.

Ryker walked closer to her and pressed his chest to hers until she was fairly leaning back over the bar. He captured her mouth with his. His tongue teased along the seam of her lips until she opened to him. They slid their tongues against each other, vying for lead in the dance. He enticed hers inside his mouth then he sucked on it in a rhythm consistent with the thrust of his groin against hers.

Heat washed over her as his cock rubbed against her mound through their clothes. The touch of his hand at the nape of her neck sent chills down her spine even as fire raced through her veins. The contrast was overwhelming, and she moaned. Ryker withdrew from her mouth and nipped at her lips, licking away the slight sting.

“I want to rip your clothes off of you right here and now. I would set you up on the bar and spread you out as my own personal feast.” He nipped her chin, then licked along her jawline only to stop at her ear.

“I’d fuck you with my tongue until you screamed.” He stepped back after kissing her quickly on the lips. “Bet the bread is ready now.”

He checked it and pulled it out of the oven setting it on the stop next to the lasagna. When he turned to look at her, she caught her breath. His eyes were still dark and brooding.

“Hope you’re hungry. I thought we would eat here at the bar.”

All through dinner, Ryker watched her as if memorizing her movements. His intense stare unnerved her at first. He refilled her glass of wine once they had finished dinner. She tried to help him clear the dishes, but he wouldn’t let her help.

“I’m going to shove them into the dishwasher and the leftover lasagna into the fridge. Go look around. I’ll be finished in a few minutes.”

Peyton shrugged and went exploring. She found his office and walked around, not touching anything but trying to get an idea of what exactly he did. There were folders lined neatly along one side of his desk with names like Wilson Project and Hollings Prospectus. None of it made any sense to her.

Besides the laptop sitting on the desk, he had a phone and the line of folders. Nothing else lay on his desk, not even a pen. There were four filing cabinets lining one wall with labels starting with Addell and ending at Yolander on the last drawer of the fourth filing cabinet. She turned around and ran into Ryker.

“Oh! You scared me.” Her hand went to her throat.

“Not much in here other than paperwork. Let’s go back to the living room and dance.” He led her out of the room and closed the door behind him.

“I’ve never seen you dance at the bar,” she said.

“You were working. I didn’t have anyone I wanted to dance with.” He walked over to the entertainment equipment under the TV and fiddled with some switches until the haunting strains of “Nights in White Satin” by The Moody Blues seeped into the room. He pulled

her into his arms and danced her smoothly around the living room. He was an excellent dancer and easy to follow. He held her in his arms as if she were the most important person in the world.

When the song ended he didn't let go of her, merely pulled her in closer as another slow song came on. His hands roamed down her back to rest on her ass. She wrapped her arms around his neck and held on as he rubbed the hard length of his cock against her stomach. His hands kneaded her ass cheeks as he rocked her in place. By the time the song ended, she was so turned on she swore that all it would take was a good nudge on her clit and she would climax.

He let go of her ass and brought his hands around to unbutton her blouse. Each button that released left another inch of skin showing. By the time he had all of the buttons undone, an inch-wide line of flesh peeked through. Instead of pulling the blouse off, he moved to her jeans. He unbuttoned, then unzipped them. He walked around behind her and slowly slipped her blouse down her arms. She heard him behind her doing something, but it wasn't until his bare chest connected with her back that she realized he'd removed his shirt.

Hair from his chest tickled her back. The sparse sprinkling of hair across his chest was just enough to pull on. His hands wrapped around her to cup her breast through the lavender front-closure bra. He unclasped it and pulled it down her shoulders. He pulled her arms together behind her with it and wrapped it twice so that it held her arms crossed behind her. He left it like that and leaned into her. Her hands brushed against his lengthening cock and she scraped nails along him. He hissed but didn't step away from her.

Ryker ran the palm of his hands over her nipples until they stood up, painfully engorged. Her breasts were heavy with need, aching to be touched. He molded them with his hands, kneading them, weighing them. Her breath came in short gasps as he plucked at her nipples then rolled them between thumb and forefinger, pinching them until she moaned. He ran his hand down her abdomen and into her jeans. He delved beneath her panties to find her bare mound. When he dipped



his fingers into her cunt, where she was wet and needy, she ground her hips against his erection as he slipped two fingers inside her.

He circled her clit with his thumb and grazed over it before abandoning it once again. She begged him to make her come.

“Not until I’m ready for you to,” he said.

“Please, I need to come.”

“Just a little longer. Wait just a little longer and it will feel so much better,” he promised.

His fingers plucked at her nipple and her clit at the same time, sending pulsing streams of fire throughout her body. It was as if her nipples, pussy, and clit were all connected somewhere deep inside of her. When one area was stimulated, they all burned in need.

Peyton pushed first toward the fingers teasing her clit then back toward the thick cock nestled between her ass cheeks. Over and over, she bounced back and forth in a desperate attempt at finding relief from the terrible ache that soon turned into an itch she needed scratched.

“Fuck me!” She nearly screamed after he pulled away from her.

“Don’t worry. I’m going to fuck you. I’m going to take that pretty pussy of yours and make you scream my name. Then I’m going to fuck that delicious ass of yours,” he whispered in her ear.

“Have you even had a cock in your ass, Peyton?” he asked.

Her breath came so fast and hard she couldn’t talk. All she could do was shake her head. His dirty little words sent shivers down her spine and into her womb. The idea of taking him in her ass seemed so naughty somehow. It both thrilled her and terrified her.

Ryker steered her toward the bedroom. When she walked in, she realized he’d been busy while she had been snooping in his office. There were ropes on the bedposts with cuffs at one end of the ropes. He dropped the bra holding her hands captive.

“Sit on the edge of the bed.”

She complied without thinking about it. He knelt down and untied her shoes, then pulled them off. Then he stood up and had her stand as

well. He nipped at her chin with his teeth, then kissed it as his hands slid her jeans down her legs. He had her step out of each leg with his help. With a nudge of his foot, both jeans and bra slid toward the middle of the room, out of the way.

“Climb up on the bed and lie down on your back.” He watched her closely as she did as he said and lay on her back in the middle of the bed.

One by one, he secured her wrists and ankles, making sure there was plenty of room between her skin and the cuffs. Even though she knew they would hold, Peyton couldn’t help testing them. No matter how much she pulled or moved, the ropes held. Finally, a thread of panic began weaving into her thoughts. Adrenaline pumped through her blood that maybe she might have made a mistake trusting him.

## Chapter Seven

“Breathe deep, Peyton. You’re hyperventilating. Nothing bad is going to happen to you.” His voice came by her left ear. She tried to turn her head to see him, only to have a cloth cover her vision.

“No. Don’t do that,” she croaked out.

“Yes. It will intensify the feelings so much more. Concentrate on what you hear, feel, and smell.”

“What are you going to do?” she finally asked.

“I’m going to give you pleasure like you’ve never experienced before,” he said.

Her head whipped around to the right when it sounded like his voice came from by her right ear. She grasped the rope with her hands and tried grounding herself. The feeling of floating unnerved her. The feeling didn’t go away.

Something touched her inner arms. She jerked. It disappeared only to reappear at her waist where it drew circles along her pelvic bone from one side to the other. Her belly twittered in reaction to the subtle tickles. Lips teased her tits, suckling one moment then nipping the next. He sucked her into his mouth then drew her out away from her body until she whimpered with the first vestiges of pain. He released it and proceeded to repeat it with her other nipple. Once he had her nipples erect and sensitive she was sure he would move on to something else. Instead, a sharp pain caused her to gasp as something bit into her left nipple. Then she felt his tongue laving it. The pain lessened but didn’t go away.

Seconds later, the same thing happened to her right nipple. She realized he had applied nipple clamps to her sensitive breasts. The

stinging pain soon morphed into something more when he raked his fingers over her bare pussy. He licked a long, slow line from breast to her clit without actually touching her clit. Instead, he circled it with first his finger, then his tongue. She pushed her pelvis up over and over trying to find something to rub it on. Heat burned her insides with the need to climax.

The bed moved and she felt like he'd left. Where had he gone and why? She didn't have long to wait—the bed dipped and he was back. Her pussy contracted at the nearness of him. She needed his cock inside of her.

"Your pussy is turning red. You're wanting to come, aren't you?"

"Yes, please, I need to come." Peyton hadn't begged for anything in a long time, but she was begging now.

"Soon, baby. Soon," he crooned.

A fingernail scraped over each of her pulsing nipples. She moaned in reaction. Something teased at her clit, but it wasn't his finger. She strained to feel it again. It circled her clit then lightly rested over it. The only warning she got was the soft click of a switch and the vibrator took off. The little clit stimulator sent pulses of electricity through her womb and out into her body. Her whole body clenched as she prepared to come—and then he turned it off.

"No!"

"It's too soon. You're not ready yet," he said.

"I'm ready. I know my body and I'm ready," she complained.

With her legs spread as they were, she couldn't close them and get any relief. He had her totally at his mercy. Once again that thrill of fear fluttered in her stomach. Then she chased it away.

He turned on the clitoral stimulator again and again, and as she began to come he turned it off. She swore she was going to kill him when she got untied. If he valued his life, he would never untie her again. The fact that he chuckled only riled her more.

Suddenly her right hand was free, but soon tied off again above her head. The left side soon joined it. She couldn't spread her arms

now. It was a few minutes before she realized her legs were totally free. She bent her knees then hesitated before bending them more. His hands suddenly flipped her over on her stomach. That was why he'd changed how he had her tied, she decided.

The clitoral stimulator was pressed tight against her clit now. He turned it on and she nearly came right then and there. He swiftly cut it off again, laughing.

"That was close. I almost let you come. That would have been bad," he said.

"Why?" she asked.

"Because then we would have had to start all over again from scratch."

That bit of news strengthened her resolve to not interfere if she could help it. She wanted to come so badly now, she could taste it on her tongue.

Something cold landed on her ass and slid down between her ass cheeks. She squirmed. His warm hand rubbed it into the crack until he reached the little rosette. It puckered with the first touch of the cold liquid. He rubbed it around the tiny hole then slowly slipped a finger inside her ass up to the first knuckle. He pulled it out then slowly pushed it deeper until she took him all the way to his hand.

As long as she pushed out, it didn't hurt. Still, it was an odd sensation in and of itself. When he added more of the cold solution, she was ready this time and didn't jump. He fucked her with that one finger several times then a second finger joined the first. The bite of pain soon morphed into pleasure as he finger-fucked her, scissoring his fingers inside of her to widen her entrance. More of the sticky jelly and then he used three fingers in her. She panted through the burn and began backing into his thrusts, feeling the building of her orgasm once again.

When he pulled his fingers out, Peyton was sure he was going to fuck her ass now, but instead, he used a small dildo on her. It was just slightly larger than his three fingers but not as large as his cock would

be. The phallus-shaped instrument vibrated. As soon as he got it all the way inside of her, he turned it on and chuckled at her immediate reaction. She tried fucking back on something that wasn't there.

"Please, I need you inside of me," she begged again.

"Who do you belong to?" he asked, running a finger around her entrance.

"No." She moaned, shaking her head. She wasn't going to say it. She didn't belong to anyone but herself.

He teased her with his fingers at her pussy then turned the butterfly back on for a few seconds before turning it back off again.

"Who do you belong to?"

Again she refused to answer him. Her heart pounded in her throat as he once again teased her with the butterfly. Need burned hot inside her. Every new touch fed the fire. His cock teased at her cunt now, and still he held back. Wanting her to say the words.

"Tell me you belong to me, Peyton and I'll let you come."

Tears gathered at the corners of her eyes as the need finally overwhelmed her.

"You," she cried. "I belong to you."

He slammed into her at the same time that he turned on the butterfly. God, she was full. He slapped her ass once on each side as he pounded his cock inside her. The butterfly had her clit ready to explode, but it was as if all that time standing on the precipice had frozen her. She couldn't come.

Peyton met his thrust with a backward thrust of her own. The sound of his balls slapping her pussy added to her need. It wasn't until he reached around and removed the nipple clamps that she flew. Bright lights exploded behind her eyes as she came so hard she lost her breath in her scream. She wasn't even aware when or if he came. All she knew was she couldn't think, couldn't breathe. The bright lights turned to darkness.

Ryker held on to her hips with his fingers as he thrust into her over and over. The vibration of the dildo in her ass teased his cock with each thrust. When she exploded around him, he almost couldn't move, she held him so tight inside her hot pussy. Her climax brought his. He shafted into her twice more then erupted into the condom. He fell across her, taking them both to the bed. The dildo still vibrated, so he turned it off and slowly removed it, laying aside to be cleaned later. Right now all he could do was try to relearn how to breathe again.

He managed to roll to one side to keep from crushing her, but realized she wasn't moving at all. Dragging one lungful of air inside him after another, he turned her to face him. Her eyes were closed and she didn't seem to be breathing. Alarmed, he placed his ear to her mouth and sighed when he felt air move against his ear. Thank God, she had only passed out.

It took a lot of effort on his part, but he finally managed to drag his body to the headboard to untie her from the ropes. Then he removed the cuffs and massaged her wrists. They were slightly chaffed. He didn't like that. He got out of bed and stood on shaky legs, trying to get them to work before he walked to the bathroom for some lotion. Then he massaged the lotion into both her wrists and her ankles.

By the time he was finished, he was once again breathing normally and she had begun to rouse. When her eyelids fluttered open he smiled at her.

"You took a little nap," he said.

She blinked then smiled. "I don't think I've ever come that hard in my life."

"You were magnificent," he told her. "I've never seen anyone respond like you do to stimulation. I could have come just watching you climax."

"I think I need a shower," she said, without looking at him.

“How about a nice hot bath instead? I have the bath salts you like.”

“You do? Why do you have those?”

“Because you like them and I wanted you to be comfortable while you’re here.” Her suspicion bothered him.

“Thanks. A bath would be great.” She attempted to roll over and moaned when she managed to roll on her side.

“Let me help you.” He put an arm around her waist and helped her to sit up. “Better?”

“Yes, thanks.” She swallowed and watched his every move.

Something was bothering her, he decided. He would wait until she was in the tub relaxing before he tried to find out what it was. She couldn’t jump up and leave if she were in the tub, and maybe the warm water and salts would relax her enough to be truthful without getting upset. Maybe.

He left her sitting up on the edge of the bed to run the bath. He checked the temperature and added the bath salts, filling the tub enough that when she got in it would cover her to her neck. He placed the suction pillow at the back of the tub and went to get her. She hadn’t moved from the spot where he’d left her. She seemed almost dazed to him.

“Ready?”

“Yeah.” She started to slide off the bed to her feet and nearly fell.

If he hadn’t been there to catch her she would have sat on her ass. Her legs weren’t working just yet, it seemed. He bent and swung her up into his arms to carry her to the bathroom. Her arms twirled around his neck to hold on.

“What are you doing? I’m too heavy to be carrying around,” she fussed.

He let her feet slide into the water once he had her in the bathroom over the tub.

“Who said you were too heavy? You’re not heavy at all.” He steadied her until she started to kneel in the tub.



The long, low hiss that escaped her mouth made him smile. The glare he received wiped the smile off his face. He knew she would be tender in some spots. He shouldn't have been amused by it. He didn't want her in pain. Only that little bite of pain that brought pleasure. And she had responded so well to it.

Once she was completely covered by the sudsy water, he left her to soak while he cleaned up the bedroom. He put away the ropes and cuffs and washed off the dildo and butterfly before returning them to their packages. He laid them in the drawer next to several other purchases he'd made specifically for her. He could hardly wait to try them all on her. She was so responsive. She was truly the right woman for him. All he had to do was convince her of that and marry her.

Grady had warned him that she wouldn't be easy to capture. She had an open disdain for even semi-permanent arrangements. He had no idea why she was like she was, but she didn't form attachments at all outside her friendship with Grady and some of the other guys. None of whom she had ever dated.

He wondered at their relationship. He knew Grady to be a straitlaced sort of guy. How had he and Peyton gotten together in the first place? He had refrained from asking, not wanting to cause any strain between them. If he had dated Peyton, he hadn't acted like it bothered him to feed him information about her. It was obvious that he cared about her, but how much deeper that went, Ryker wasn't sure.

With everything put away, he pulled down the covers and went back to the bathroom to help Peyton out of the tub. He found her snoring quietly with one leg braced against the side of the tub. He reached into the water and pulled the plug. The noise awakened her with a start.

"What are you doing?"

"Letting the water out. You're turning into a raisin," he explained.

"Oh," She drew in a deep breath then stretched.

Watching how her body moved stirred his cock. *Down boy. You've had your fun for the night. Maybe later.* Ryker reached down and plucked her out of the dwindling water and sat her on the floor where he snagged a towel off the towel warmer. He dried her quickly then wrapped her in another dry towel to transfer her to the bed.

"Hey, I can walk, you know," she complained halfheartedly.

"But I like to carry you."

"I'm too heavy for you to carry around like that," she fussed.

"I don't know where you got the idea that you're heavy, because you aren't. I don't want to hear you say that again."

Scowling at him, Peyton crawled into the bed when he let her down. She curled on her side and pulled the covers up to her chin.

"Are you not coming to bed?" she asked.

"I'm going to take a quick shower, and then I'll be right back."

Peyton nodded and closed her eyes. He bet she would be sound asleep before he even made it back to the bathroom. Sure enough, when he paused at the bathroom door, soft snores reached his ears. He smiled and jumped into the shower. After adjusting the temperature, we washed then rinsed off and dried as quickly as possible. He didn't want to waste one minute of time with her. Even if it was while she was asleep.

\* \* \* \*

Twice during the night Peyton awakened to find Ryker either sucking on her pussy or pounding in it. Not that she was complaining by any means. He didn't seem to be able to get enough of her. She was a highly sexed woman, but he had her beat, she decided. Each time he made sure she was satisfied before he took his own satisfaction. And each time, he cleaned her up afterward.

Now she woke to find Ryker stretched across her, pinning her to the bed with one arm and one leg. Considering that his balls were in a dicey position, she decided against shoving him off of her. Depending

on his reaction it could go badly for either one or both of them. Instead she tried tapping him on the shoulder.

“Ryker. Wake up.” No dice.

“Ryker. I need to get up.” Still he didn’t move.

“Hey, Ryker, wake up.” She nudged him with her hand against his shoulder. He stirred but didn’t wake up.

“Dammit, Ryker, I’ve got to pee!” she finally yelled at him.

“Okay, okay.” He ran a hand over his face and scratched his chest.

The minute he’d moved off of her, she climbed out of bed and hurried to the bathroom shutting the door behind her. Once she had relieved herself, Peyton fond a bath cloth and washed her face. Then she went in search of her overnight bag so she could brush her teeth. It lay where he’d dropped it the night before. She tiptoed around their clothes and snagged her bag, taking it back in the bathroom with her.

She hoped he wouldn’t get up for awhile. She needed to think. Things hadn’t exactly gone like she had planned for them to. They were supposed to be fuck buddies and nothing more. Somehow he’d managed to breach her defenses, and she found that she really liked him, liked him a lot in fact. Add to that the fact that she’d succumbed to his manipulations and told him she belonged to him and everything had gone to hell fast after that.

Once dressed, Peyton escaped into the kitchen and figured out how to make coffee in the fancy coffeemaker. She needed coffee. Soon the rich aroma of freshly ground beans filled the kitchen. She winced at the possibility it would lure Ryker out of his sex-induced coma. When he didn’t appear by the time she’d poured her cup, she relaxed and moved into the living area to the fireplace. She sat cross-legged on the butter-soft sofa and sipped the coffee, appreciating the richness of the roast he seemed to like. Nothing like this would ever grace her poor hovel.

So what was her problem? He was obviously rich and out of her league, but then she wasn’t looking for a steady relationship so why did it matter? He insisted on getting personal and that did matter. She

couldn't get those words out of her mind. I belong to you. They haunted her. She belonged to no one but herself. Why had he wanted her to say it? Was it all part of some fantasy? She refused to let it mean anything to her.

No, it had all been part of the fun. Nothing serious would come of it. She could handle a little role-playing. It only made the game more intense. And fuck had it been intense last night. He knew right where to touch her and how hard. He could sense her pain threshold and gave her just enough to heighten the pleasure—pleasure that had blown her away. She didn't want this to end. Not so soon. There was still so much more to explore with him. Things she wanted to try because she realized she trusted him. Where that trust had come from so quickly after meeting him, Peyton wasn't sure. Yeah, there were questions. Like what did he do for a living?

She continued sipping her coffee and thinking about some of the men she'd been with through the years. All of them only lasted a few weeks, a month or two at the most. It always ended the same. They would get possessive and personal. She didn't do that and said good-bye. Many of them had called her cold and a slut, but she never let it bother her. She wasn't looking for complications, and true relationships always ended up with complications.

After dealing with such a relationship once, she vowed never to do it again. He'd been controlling to the point of telling her what to wear, who to be friends with and how to fix her hair. Anytime she tried to do something her way, he would remind her that she belonged to him. Now Ryker was telling her the same thing. Peyton sighed. Maybe she needed to gather her things and leave before they got any deeper. Putting a stop to things now would be far easier than trying to disentangle herself later on.

She carried her coffee cup back into the kitchen and rinsed it out in the sink. Her overnight bag and purse were still in the bedroom. Maybe she could sneak in and out without disturbing him. She really wanted to leave before he woke up and could stop her.

Slipping back into the bedroom, she snagged her bag and purse and eased back through the doors. She stopped long enough to shove her shoes on her feet. When she reached the door, a hand covered hers on the doorknob.

“Going somewhere?”

## Chapter Eight

Peyton yelped at the sudden appearance of Ryker behind her. His warm hand pulled hers away from the door.

“Um, I was going home,” she said.

“Why? Did I do something wrong last night?” He seemed genuinely confused by her sudden decision to go home.

“I think we’re going too fast. This was just supposed to be sex for fun.” She swallowed, watching his eyes darken.

“What makes you think it’s not?” he asked.

Peyton was at a loss of how to explain it to him. She opened her mouth then closed it again and just stared at him.

“I think we need to talk.” He didn’t let go of her hand, as if afraid she’d bolt if he did.

And maybe she would have, given the opportunity. Talking was one of the reasons she didn’t want to get friendly with her partner. You could talk something to death and never hit on the truth or solve the problem.

Ryker had pulled on his jeans but hadn’t bothered to button them or put on shoes or a shirt. He must have known she was on her way out the door and rushed to catch her. She should have left as soon as she had gotten dressed instead of debating.

“Look, things have gotten out of hand,” Peyton tried to explain.

“What do you mean? Did I do something to upset you last night? I would have stopped had you said anything. You do know that, don’t you?” He led her into the kitchen, where he dropped her hand and pulled out a cup for coffee.

“Yes. I know that.” She swallowed.

He picked her cup up out of the sink and poured another cup of coffee for her. Handing it to her, he waited for her to accept it before speaking again.

"If I didn't hurt you or scare you, then why in the hell are you sneaking out to leave?"

"You're making this into something it's not," she finally answered.

"And what is that?"

"A relationship."

"You're pissed because we have a relationship? Most women get all bent out of shape saying they don't have a relationship," he argued.

"I don't do relationships," she said. "This was supposed to be about sex and nothing else. I understood you weren't looking for one either. You changed the rules."

"I didn't change anything. We didn't have a set of rules to go by other than if you didn't say stop, I didn't stop. Don't put this on me because you're insecure."

"Me?" she yelped. "I'm not insecure. I know what I want from this."

"This what?" he demanded. "Relationship?"

"You know what I mean," she argued.

"No, I guess I don't. Why don't you explain it to me?" He growled.

Peyton ran her hands through her hair, jerking on the ends for a second trying to clear her head. Ryker stood across the bar from her sipping his coffee as if nothing was going on. Only the slight tick at the side of his face and the flashing black eyes alluded to his anger.

"I like sex. I like it a lot, but I don't want the emotional attachments that go with it. Most men say the same thing, but they don't really mean it. They still want the woman to belong to them on some level. I don't belong to anyone but myself. I make my own

decisions and go my own way when it's over with. I don't expect anything out of the situation other than good, safe sex."

He didn't say anything for a long time. Then he drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly. She could see the turmoil taking place inside him by the way his expressions kept changing.

"This is actually all about the fact that I made you tell me you belonged to me, isn't it," he finally said, quietly.

"Yeah. It is."

"Good sex is all about perceptions. Regardless of whether you want there to be emotions or not, there are. You perceive something as feeling good, then you're emotionally satisfied. You perceive that you're being dominated and it's something you like, you're satisfied. You like being dominated in bed. You like a little bit of pain with your sex. I gave you what you wanted to make you feel good. It stands to reason you would do the same thing for me. It doesn't mean it's real, Peyton." He sat his coffee cup down and leaned back against the cabinet and crossed his arms over his broad chest.

"So you're saying it's all just illusion? You don't expect me to belong to you because I said it last night. You're not going to expect me to do what you say from now on? Because it felt pretty damn real to me."

"I'm saying that it made me feel good to hear you say it, but I know you don't do relationships, so I don't expect it to be real. It's all part of role play." He sighed and ran a hand through his hair. "I sure as hell didn't expect to have this conversation with you of all people."

"What the hell is that supposed to mean?" she demanded.

"Grady and everyone I talked to here said you were the queen of uncomplicated sex. You've been more complicated in one night than a whole year of uncomplicated sex."

Peyton lifted her chin and glared at him. He was calling her a complication. The realization didn't sit well with her. She sat the cup down on the bar a little too hard and got off the barstool. She walked



around to the kitchen side and picked up her things to leave. This was going nowhere, and she wasn't in the mood to be insulted.

"You're not going anywhere. You agreed to stay for two days," Ryker said as he jerked her bag out of her hands.

"You can't make me stay here." She let go of the bag and turned to leave without it.

He followed her to the door and slapped a hand against it above her head. She jumped and turned to stare up at him. Before she could say anything, he had her pressed against the door with his mouth covering hers. One hand had a grip on her waist and the other was at the nape of her neck holding her head still for his assault of her mouth.

He nipped at her lip until she opened for him. His tongue slipped inside to slide sensually along hers until she was thrusting her own tongue into his mouth. He captured it and sucked, then fucked his tongue back inside of hers. His hand at her neck massaged until she felt jelly replace bone in her spine and she sank back against the door. Teeth grazed her chin then jawbone, followed by a trail of kisses along the small hurts until he reached her earlobe. He suckled it nipping and licking. Peyton moaned with appreciation of the sensual feast he was providing. He nipped her shoulder then laved it with his tongue. He marked her there at the juncture of her shoulder and neck.

His hands trailed down her arms to the hem of her T-shirt to run up beneath it. Before she knew what he was up to, her shirt was over her head and on the floor. He wasted no time unhooking her bra then tore it from her shoulders. He bent his dark head to her breast and began teasing her nipple with his tongue. His fingers plucked at the other nipple at the same time. It was so overwhelming. She couldn't catch up with the sensations pouring through her.

Ryker went to his knees at her feet and began unfastening her jeans to pull them off. He stopped only long enough to remove her shoes before having her step out of her jeans and then her panties. He didn't seem to want to waste time with more foreplay because as soon

as she was naked, he was pulling out a condom from his jeans pocket and sheathing himself.

She expected him to turn her around to bend over the couch or one of the lounge chairs but instead, he took her up against the door with one of her legs around his waist. His cock tunneled into her tight pussy with each thrust. Her body eagerly accepted each thrust until she was pushing back to meet him.

Pleasure built inside of her until she was sure she would explode with it. Ryker picked her other leg up, pinning her like an insect to the door with only his cock inside of her and his pelvis pushing against her holding her upright. His hands grasped her ass as he pounded into her tight sheath. Fire burned through her veins, beginning to boil at her clit and her nipples. It grew in heat and the rush from her womb to her pussy lips washed her along with it. When he reached between them to touch her clit, Peyton exploded around him.

Pulsing wave after pulsing wave blew through her and over her as she climaxed around Ryker's cock. He continued pushing past her quivering flesh until finally her climax led to his. His seed filled the condom as she flew apart around him. Peyton now knew the problem wasn't with him expecting more from her. It lay with her demanding more from herself. It was that she craved the personal pleasure that only an intimate relationship could grant her. Peyton wanted more.

\* \* \* \*

Ryker let Peyton's legs slide down his until her feet touched the floor. He didn't let go of her right away, though. She didn't seem quite steady on her feet yet. He hadn't meant to attack her when she strode toward the door, only stop her from leaving. Instead, he'd behaved like the caveman she accused him of being. Never mind that she had responded with enough heat for the both of them. He'd taken her choice then run over her like a Mack truck.

"Peyton?"

“Don’t say anything, Ryker. Just let me leave, okay?”

Ryker could hear the slight tremor in Peyton’s voice. He cursed, calling himself nine kinds of a fool.

“I won’t stop you from leaving, but I hope you’ll wait until you’ve calmed down some first.” Ryker stepped back away from her to give her room.

He watched her visibly shake herself before lifting her chin and turning around. Eyes swimming with tears, stared up at him. None had fallen, and he was sure that if she had any say over it, none would fall.

Peyton walked around him and picked up her bag and her purse, then turned and slowly marched to the door. She hesitated for just an instant before opening the door, but she still opened it wide and walked through, pulling it closed behind her. The fact that she hadn’t slammed it told him she was in total control right then so she would be safe to drive home, but it also told him that he had screwed up big time.

He was pissed at himself for handling it all wrong. He could have settled the entire situation without the fight and certainly without her leaving, so why had he goaded her instead? Hell if he knew why. Something about her kept him on edge. Some need deep within him demanded he master her. For a while, she’d reveled in it. It had been obvious that she loved it and wanted more. But later, she resented him for giving her what she wanted. It didn’t sit well with him that she was punishing them both because she couldn’t handle what she actually wanted.

Ryker refrained from throwing the empty coffee cup across the room. Instead, he took it and the one she’d left in the sink and added them to the dishwasher with the dishes from the night before. He added soap and turned the machine on. No reason to wait for more dishes since she had left. He wouldn’t be fixing anything for himself. It just wasn’t worth it.

After cleaning up and taking a shower, Ryker took a ride to help clear his head. He knew in his heart that Peyton was the woman of his dreams. He just had to figure out how to convince her to give them a chance. Letting her think it was all for fun and that he wasn't serious about her hadn't been a good idea. He was serious, and he did want to own her, body and her soul, but she already owned his body and soul. She'd secured both that first night when he'd come in his jeans like a virgin.

His first thought was to go to Grady and ask his friend for advice, since he knew Peyton so well, but he decided against that. In the first place, nothing had gone according to plan based on Grady's predictions. In the second place, he didn't want to use someone else's words or ideas to win Peyton for himself.

He finally turned around two hours later and headed back to town. He needed to figure out a way to get her to give them a chance. It wasn't going to be easy. She had her heart set against a relationship of any type or kind. He had to try, though. She was worth every bit of pain and sacrifice he made if, in the end, she were to belong to him. With that in mind, he drove by her apartment only to find her car wasn't there. He drove by the diner and the bar and still didn't find her. He began to worry now. Where could she be?

Ryker didn't know any of her friends except for Grady. Did she have girlfriends? Didn't every woman? The only option he had was to check with Grady, so he turned his bike around and headed in that direction. Jealousy bit deep in the bottom of his stomach. The idea that Peyton would have gone to Grady with a problem and not him pissed him off. Never mind that he was part of the problem. He turned his bike down Grady's street and sure enough, there was Peyton's car. He parked out at the curb and walked up the front steps to knock on the door.

“So why did you really come by? I know it wasn’t just to chat. You’re wired about something,” Grady said.

“Can’t I come over to see you sometime and visit?”

Grady frowned and leaned against the door, facing between the living room and the kitchen. His eyes narrowed in caution. He knew something wasn’t right.

“Yeah, sure you can. Anytime you want, but you don’t. So what’s up?”

Peyton clasped and unclasped her hands. What did she want? Why was she there? To see if Ryker’s kiss was as strong as she felt like it was or if anyone’s kiss would be equally potent and arousing. Finally she wiped her hands on her jeans and walked up close to Grady.

“Kiss me.”

“Do what?” His eyes grew large.

“Kiss me,” she said with more urgency.

“As much as I love hearing those words come from your mouth, they don’t ring true. What in the hell is going on, Peyton?” he demanded.

Peyton whimpered, then growled and grabbed him by the hair pulling him down for a kiss. He started to pull back away from her then groaned and wrapped his arms around her. Peyton felt nothing other than a mild sexual interest that wasn’t enough to act on—not when she’d had the real thing. There were no bells or fireworks or demand from her womb to get naked and hump his bones. Resigned, she pulled out of Grady’s arms and sighed.

The sound of a motorcycle roaring to life then squealing off down the road startled both of them.

“Ah fuck!” Grady yelled.

He ran over to the living room window and looked out. Then he turned and grabbed Peyton by the upper arms.

“What in the hell is going on? Where you just using me to get him riled up?”

“No. I had no idea he was even here. He must have seen us through the window.” Peyton hugged herself.

“Why in the hell did you kiss me when you had no intention of taking things any further?” Grady ran a hand through his hair.

“I wanted to see if there was any difference.”

“What do you mean a difference?”

“In how you kissed me, how it felt when you kissed me.” Peyton closed her eyes.

“You were comparing me to Ryker?” he asked, clearly astonished.

“Not like that. I just wanted to know if he was really that different.”

“And you thought it was okay to use me as a guinea pig,” he said in a quiet, controlled voice.

“No, it wasn’t right. I’m sorry, Grady. God, I’ve made such a mess of things.” She ran her hands over her face then pressed the heels of her palms in her eyes.

“I think you better leave now before I say something I might regret one day.”

Peyton searched his face. She knew she had hurt—possibly ruined—her friendship with Grady. With a strangled cry she turned and walked across the room. She hesitated at the door.

“I’m really sorry, Grady.” Then she opened the door and walked out of her best friend’s house.

There was no use in looking for Ryker. He wouldn’t listen to her anyway. Why did she want to find him in the first place? She didn’t want to get involved with him, did she? Wasn’t that the entire problem? Confused and depressed, she headed for home.

Once inside her apartment, Peyton paced the floor. Thoughts flitted in and out of her head as she tried to figure out what she really wanted. Everything had changed since meeting Ryker. She wanted to be independent and strong. Did it come with too high a price, though? Would relying on no one but herself hold her back from something more?

Finally, no closer to an answer than before, Peyton took a long shower, trying to wash away some of the pain, guilt, and loneliness. Even though it was a long way till time to go to bed, Peyton climbed beneath the covers and lay awake for a long time before sleep finally claimed her.

## Chapter Nine

Ryker slammed his fist into the punching bag over and over again. It jarred him all the way up his arm and into his shoulder. The pain and discomfort felt good to his nearly numb system. All he could see when he closed his eyes was Peyton in Grady's arms, kissing him—Grady with his arms around her. Pain hit him hard in the chest.

He glanced up and to his left at the clock on the wall. He'd been at the bag for nearly thirty minutes now. Time to move on. He gave the offending bag another barrage of punches and backed off, shaking off the burn in his arms and shoulders.

He selected an elliptical trainer and climbed on after doing some warm-up stretches. He set the pace and willed his mind to go blank. It didn't. Much to his aggravation, no matter what he did, he couldn't stop his mind from returning to Peyton. He'd been so sure she was the one, but if she could leave his bed and jump in bed with Grady, then he was wrong. She wasn't the one for him. He would accept nothing short of total loyalty, and she obviously didn't have any. Never mind that they hadn't discussed seeing each other exclusively. It was the principle of the matter.

Sweat poured off his chin to roll down his abdomen. He could feel the rivulets running down his back. Another glance at the clock assured him he still had another fifteen minutes to go. The popularity of these elliptical trainers was so high that time was limited to forty-five minutes each. As soon as his time was up, he grabbed the bottled cleanser and wiped down the machine for the next person.

He walked aimlessly around the building with his hands on his hips, stopping here and there to watch someone train. His mind really



wasn't in it, though. Visions of Peyton in exercise gear with sweat beading between her breasts took over, and he finally gave up and called it a day. After a hot shower, Ryker grabbed his gear and climbed on his bike to head home.

Two beers later, he still wasn't any closer to being able to sleep than he had been before his workout. Five fucking days of thinking about her and what she had come to mean to him in less than twenty-four hours—all of it a slap in the face when he saw her with Grady. Even now, knowing she had been with him, he still wanted her. His cock hadn't gone down since the last time he had jacked off, and it wasn't going to go down now by the feel of it.

Cursing, Ryker unzipped his pants and pulled out the offending organ. The minute he wrapped his hand around his dick, thoughts of her naked and wanting him burned through him. Her hot mouth opened, wanting his cock there. He pulled on his shaft as he imagined her hand wrapped around it, squeezing, tugging as she slowly bent over and took his cock head into her greedy mouth. Heat seared through him as she wrapped her tongue around beneath the rim and stroked him.

His balls began to tingle as she sucked hard on the mushroom cap then tongued the slit for that drop of pre-cum she loved to taste. He hissed at the feel of her tongue there. A soft, feminine hand took over his grip, squeezing him at the base and then pulling upward as her mouth sank slowly down, taking him to the back of her throat. She paused, then swallowed around him. Fuck, it felt good. She twisted his dick as she slid back up and then repeated it all again a little faster this time, then slow again. She raked her teeth along the edge of his cock then sucked hard enough he thought his toenails would curl up. Rubbing his cock head against the roof of her mouth, she applied even more suction to his aching dick. One of her hands slipped down between his legs and cupped his balls. She gently rolled them then raked her nails across them until he felt the cum begin to boil in them.

She moved up and down on his cock, sucking and licking and twirling her tongue around him faster and faster until he could feel his balls begin to explode. Cum barreled up his cock and into her mouth. She sucked and swallowed everything he gave her with moans of her own. He couldn't help thrusting in and out of her mouth as he climaxed harder than the last time he'd come.

Finally he settled and cursed. Nothing had changed. She still wasn't there with him and he was still jacking off to a damn illusion that wasn't even real.

\* \* \* \*

The next few nights passed in a blur. Peyton took every extra shift she could to stay busy. Each day after work, she fell into bed totally exhausted, but it did little to keep her from dreaming when she did manage to sleep. Her dreams centered on Ryker and how he made her feel. Sometimes it was all about sex. Hot, steamy, dirty sex. The dreams were so explicit she woke up wet from coming in her sleep. No matter how tired she was physically from the dreams, they still left her empty and needy—never sated.

Some nights she tossed and turned only to lay awake until time to get up again. Some nights she fell asleep and dreamed that he wanted her but she couldn't find him. She often woke crying the next morning. It was all taking a toll on her. She wasn't hungry and lost weight. She looked like a refugee with dark circles under her eyes. No amount of makeup seemed to help hide the devastation she felt at losing Ryker. Hell, she'd never had him to begin with. He wasn't looking for anything permanent. He had as much as told her so. Who was she kidding that even if she hadn't fucked things up he would even be interested in her in a long term relationship? Listen to her. She was actually thinking about more than a weekend romp. Her entire world had flipped on her. *Face it, Peyton. You've fallen for him.*

She needed to face it and deal with it now. She needed to be able to concentrate at work. You couldn't work in a bar, or a diner for that matter, if you're head wasn't in the job. During the next few weeks, she didn't see either Grady or Ryker. They didn't show up at the bar or the diner. They weren't frequenting their favorite places because of her. She'd screwed up all around, and she couldn't see how to fix any of it. Maybe there was no fixing it. Maybe she should just move and save them all the pain of living in the same town.

The nights became much cooler as September turned into October. Saturday night proved to be a burden she would much rather have not had to deal with. It seemed like everyone's tempers were on edge. Several mild disagreements broke out but were successfully handled before blows had been exchanged.

Around eleven, a group of guys walked in and took over a table near the back. Unfortunately, Peyton ended up waiting on them. They teased her and manhandled her as much as she let them without causing another fight. Normally, she didn't take anything off of the men trying to feel her up, but with the way things had been all night, she was trying to be cautious.

When she brought a second round of drinks back to them, one of the men, probably the leader, kept trying to pull her down onto his lap. She started out nice but soon moved to firm when he didn't take no for an answer. Nothing seemed to be making a difference to him, so when he finally got his hands on her breasts after dumping her in his lap, she resorted to good old-fashioned female outrage. She screamed at him to let go and slapped him.

The bastard immediately scooted his chair back and dumped her out of his lap. She caught herself on the edge of the table and managed to keep from landing on her ass. He raised his hand to slap her but someone restrained him and urged him to just drop it.

"Let it go, Carl."

Carl sneered at her. "Think you're too good for me or something? You flirt around with everyone in here and expect to just get a free

pass, don't you? Well just wait. Someone is going to call you on it one of these days."

He pulled away from the other man and headed toward the door. His two buddies followed behind him.

"You okay?" one of the other waitresses asked.

"Yeah, just a bruise or two maybe. Asshole." She wiped her hands on her jeans and looked around. "What happened to Ike? I expected a little help from him."

"He ended up breaking up another fight by the bar. What is it with everyone tonight? We haven't had this many fights and arguments since I've been here."

"Hell if I know. It isn't a full moon, so I don't have a clue," Peyton said. "Might as well get back to work."

The rest of the shift passed by without incident and by one-thirty in the morning, she was ready to get out of there. She waited impatiently for the other two girls to finish up their areas and walked with them outside to their cars. They had all parked under a light, but naturally the one she was under wasn't working. She waved to the others as they got in their cars and hit the unlock button on her car as she walked up. Reaching to open the door, she jumped when a hand came down hard on the roof near her head. For a split second she thought it might be Ryker. All it took was a sniff to realize it was the bastard from earlier who'd been mauling her. Panic eased a foot inside of her.

"Thought you'd get away with treating me like shit, didn't you?" he sneered behind her.

Peyton tried to turn around, but he pressed in close to her. His beer-laced breath blew over her face and she gagged.

"I think we need to have us a little understanding, bitch." He yanked her head back by her hair.

Peyton was so stunned she didn't scream at first. When she gathered her breath to, he banged her head into the car door. Stunned,

she lost her breath and dropped her keys. Carl grabbed her hands and jerked them behind her. He leaned in, grinding his groin into her ass.

“You think you’re too good for me or something?”

Peyton got out a yelp for a scream. He cut off the rest with a hand over her mouth.

“Don’t go inviting no one else to this party. It’s just you and me, bitch.”

She struggled and managed to bite the inside of his hand. He yanked his hand back then turned her around and backhanded her. She swayed and nearly lost her footing, but he kept a hand on her neck and began to squeeze. Ears ringing and her vision blurring, Peyton scratched and dug at his fingers on her neck until he let go. She started to push him with her hands to try and knock him down, but suddenly he had a knife in her face.

“One more stunt, one more noise out of you and I’ll cut you. Understand?” He held the knife at her throat and pressed in enough that Peyton could feel it bite into her skin. She nodded trying to keep the knife from cutting her. He pressed the knife into her neck just a little bit more.

“Now take off them jeans.”

Peyton hesitated, and he pricked her with the knife. She felt the blood as it trailed down her neck.

“Get them jeans down now,” he said with a growl.

She unbuttoned them then unzipped them as he held her by the hair with the knife tight against her throat. He laughed when she managed to get them down to her ankles.

“That’s far enough I think. Now them pretty panties you got on.”

Peyton refused to beg. She knew it would only excite him more. She struggled to pull her panties down while keeping the knife from digging in any deeper. He growled at her and quickly used the knife to cut one side of her underwear off. They fell to her knees without help. Then he whirled her around to face the car and slammed her head down on the roof. She hit it hard enough she saw stars.

“You just lean in there and we’ll have us some fun.” He kept the knife tight against her throat.

Peyton’s foot hit something as she tried to stay standing up. When she kicked at it again she recognized her keys. While he was distracted, trying to undo his jeans one-handed, she struggled to step on the keys just right to make the panic alarm go off.

“Stop your fucking wiggling.” The knife cut her again and the blood flowed faster.

Just as he started trying to fumble with himself, she managed to press the panic button and her car horn began blaring. He cursed and fumbled with his jeans. Peyton tried to get away from him while he was busy zipping up but with her clothes down around her ankles, she was trapped. He swung around with the knife aiming it at her. She braced for the stab, but the sound of a door slamming back against a wall startled both of them.

“Hey! What in the hell is going on out here?” Ike came running outside with his baseball bat.

Her attacker shoved past her and ran. Peyton was crying now, torn between holding her hand on her neck and pulling her clothes back up. She lost her balance and fell hard to the ground.

“Ah, shit, Peyton. Hold on girl.” Ike dropped the bat and helped her stand.

After pulling her jeans back up he studied her neck once he was able to pry her hands away from it.

“It’s okay. It’s not real deep but you might need stitches. Come on. Let’s get you inside and call the police.”

Peyton struggled to stop crying but didn’t let go of her throat. The shakes hit her next and she had trouble walking. Ike stopped and picked her up then settled her in his office while he called the police.

Ten minutes later, they arrived along with an ambulance. The police took their statements, and then insisted that she go to the hospital by ambulance. They would continue with their questions

after the doctor had taken care of her. Ike promised to see about her car and to check on her later.

As soon as they had her settled into one of the exam rooms, a nurse came in and helped her out of her clothes and into a gown. Her head was throbbing and her neck burned.

"I'm going to have to take your clothes and give them to the police for evidence. I'll get you something to put on once you're ready to go home," the nurse explained as she folded her clothes and placed them into a paper bag.

After what seemed like an hour, a doctor finally came in to see about her. He examined her throat and told the nurse to set her up for stitches.

"I also want an X-ray of her head. She might have a concussion by the looks of that knot on her forehead there," the doctor said. "Did he rape you? Do we need to do an exam?"

Peyton was sure he was trying to be matter of fact about it to keep her from getting so upset, but it didn't work. Tears began falling again. She swallowed and groaned because it hurt to swallow. She could still feel his hands around her neck.

"No, he didn't rape me. He didn't get the chance," she finally answered him.

"Okay, let's put a few stitches in and see about your head."

After a total of five stitches, a bandage, and an X-ray, they let the police back into her room. She went over what happened earlier in the bar and then later outside when he had attacked her.

"We have his information from the bartender and we have some names to contact for more information about him. We'll get him by the end of the day tomorrow," the older policeman said.

"You are going to press charges, right?" the second policeman asked.

"Hell, yes. The bastard doesn't need to be out where he can hurt someone else," she said.

They promised to let her know when they had him in custody.

The doctor returned with the nurse a few minutes later. “Looks like you have a mild concussion. I’m going to keep you overnight so we can monitor you. We’ll need to wake you up every two hours.

“I’ll set my alarm at home. I want to go home. I don’t want to stay here.”

“Unless you can come up with someone to stay with you, you’re staying here. You took a pretty good knock on your head, young lady,” the doctor insisted.

“If you’re sure she’ll be okay, you can send her home. I’ll watch her.” Ryker stood just inside the exam room door.

Grady pushed through next. “If you don’t want him to, I’ll stay with you,” he said.

Ryker glared at the other man but didn’t say a word. The two men stood blocking the door and the doctor looked a little aggravated.

“Peyton? Which is it going to be? Do I write orders for you to be observed here or discharge orders?”

Peyton drew in a deep breath and contemplated her options.

“Discharge orders. I want to go home,” she whispered.

Her head hurt, her throat hurt, and she felt dirty all over. She wanted a shower and to lie down.

“Okay, the nurse will be back with your paperwork in a little while. If you have any questions, be sure to call the number that will be at the bottom of the papers.” He looked pointedly at the two men blocking the door.

Ryker and Grady moved aside as the doctor left, shaking his head. The nurse followed behind him.

“Are you really okay?” Grady asked, walking over to the stretcher where she was sitting in a semi-reclined position. She clutched the sheet between her hands, though she was in a hospital gown.

“Yeah, I’m fine. Just sore all over.” Her voice came out a little hoarse.

“I hate to say it but you look like shit. You’re bound to have a hell of a headache by the looks of the knot on your head.”



“Gee thanks, Grady.” She sighed and lifted a hand to her throat.

“Did you tell them who it was?” Ryker finally spoke.

“I told them what he looked like and there were plenty of other witnesses in the bar from when he was causing trouble earlier.” She leaned back and closed her eyes.

A few minutes later, the nurse returned with a set of scrubs and her paperwork.

“Okay, guys. Out. I’ll let you know when she is ready to go.” She shooed the men out the door, and they didn’t protest.

The nurse helped her change into the scrubs then reviewed the paperwork and instructions with her. She reminded her she needed to be awakened every two hours for the next sixteen or so hours. Then she handed Peyton a business card.

“This is a rape counselor. I know you weren’t actually raped, but you might need someone to talk to later. I know her and she’s really nice.”

Peyton took the card and shoved it in the pocket of the scrubs. She thanked her before walking through the exam room door to find the two men staring at each other down the hall.

“You ready to go?” Ryker asked.

Grady stood back as if waiting on something. She smiled at both men in hopes of lightening the mood some. She felt like crying and didn’t want to cry anymore.

“Yes. I want to go home.” She hugged herself in the too-large scrubs.

Ryker started to help her down the hall when the nurse stopped them.

“Go get your car and bring it up to the door. I’ll bring her out in a wheelchair.”

Ryker froze. Grady grinned.

“Guess I’ll drop her off then. She doesn’t need to be riding on the back of a bike.”

Ryker frowned at him, then turned and walked away. The nurse turned and looked at Peyton with a raised eyebrow. Peyton just shrugged. She didn't know what was going on, either. The last she'd been aware, she had pissed both men off. So she was surprised to even see them there in the first place.

The nurse slipped out, then returned with a wheelchair. Peyton sat down and rode out of the emergency room and through the double doors outside. Grady stood beside his truck waiting for her. There was no sign of Ryker. Her heart sank, but she ignored it and plastered a smile on her face for Grady.

"Thanks, Grady. I really appreciate you're taking me home."

"No problem. Do you need anything on the way? Medicine?" he asked.

"The drug stores aren't open yet. I'll get it later today after I've had a nap."

"You're sure? The Walgreens is open across town."

Peyton shook her head no then regretted it. She really wanted a shower and her bed. Her head hurt, her throat hurt, and she was still shaky inside. Nothing like this had ever happened to her before. It had scared the hell out of her.

## Chapter Ten

“Okay, here we are. Ryker is already here waiting on you.” Grady put the truck in park and sat with his hands on the steering wheel. “If you don’t want him around, I’ll make him leave,” Grady offered without looking at her.

Peyton knew he would, too, but she wasn’t going to start anything between the two men again. She’d done enough to screw up that relationship as it was.

“No thanks. I’ll be fine.” She gave him a soft smile.

Grady just nodded and jumped out of the truck to run around to the passenger side to help her down. Ryker was there before him. He had the door open and was reaching for Peyton by the time Grady had made it around the truck. Instead of saying something smartass, Grady held the door, then closed it after Ryker had Peyton out of the cab and standing on solid ground.

“Thanks for bringing her home. I’ll take care of her from here,” Ryker said, looking Peyton in the eyes.

“Peyton, you need anything?” Grady asked again.

“No thanks. I’m fine. I’m going inside for a shower and then bed. Thank you both for seeing about me.” She turned to walk away, but Ryker’s hand stopped her.

“You’re not going in that apartment without me. I’ll just have to break in and there goes your security deposit when you move out,” he said.

Peyton’s patience ran out. She huffed out a breath and shook her finger in Ryker’s chest.

“One, you can’t tell me what I am and am not going to do. Two, you break in my door or a window and you’re paying for it, and three, I’m not moving anytime soon.” She stomped her foot on Ryker’s instep and walked up the walk to her apartment while he cursed behind her.

“I think you have your hands full with her, man. I’ll check with you tomorrow to see if you need anything.” Grady laughed, then turned and climbed back into the cab of his truck before driving off.

This left Peyton and Ryker alone at her door. She glared at him and he stared back without any obvious expression. She hated that she couldn’t read his mood.

“Are you going to unlock the door and go in or do I need to break in for you?” Ryker asked.

“I’ve got it,” she finally huffed out. Digging in her pocket, she came up with the apartment keys and unlocked the door for them to go in. Ryker bent over then stood up after slipping something in his pocket. Her place wasn’t much to look at, but it was hers and she had it fixed to her way of liking. Why this worried her now puzzled her. Was she worried about what he would think about her? Peyton didn’t have a clue.

“Beer in the fridge, munchies in the pantry cabinet. I’m going to take a shower and then go to bed.” She turned without another word and walked into her bedroom where she promptly closed and locked the bedroom door.

The shower felt wonderful to her bruised and battered body. A nice, long soak in the tub would be in order for later. Right now though, she wanted more to wash away the stench of the night and just maybe the memory etched in her mind. Even with the hot steam of the shower, Peyton shivered, nerves shaky as she couldn’t help but think about what had and nearly happened to her earlier. She could still feel the man’s hands roaming her breasts, squeezing and pinching her. She soaped up the cloth and scrubbed until she was nearly raw. Even as she washed away the soap, her tears began to fall in earnest.

More and more flooded her eyes until she couldn't see for them. She sank to the floor of the shower and sobbed, hugging herself and rocking.

She wasn't sure when, but at some point the water turned cool and Ryker was there turning it off and scooping her into his arms. He dried her off and wrapped her in a bath towel. Then he carried her to the bedroom.

Ryker gently laid her on the bed and ran the back of his hand over her cheek, using his thumb to wipe away the tears.

"Shhh. It's okay now. I won't let anyone hurt you, Peyton."

She couldn't stop shaking. Finally, he stood up and undressed to climb into bed next to her. He pulled her tight against his body to still her quaking and warm her up. Despite the warmth of the bed, she was still cold to the touch. Ryker rubbed his hands up and down her arm until she stopped shaking and drifted off to sleep.

\* \* \* \*

Ryker lay holding Peyton close to him staring up at the ceiling. She'd been raped. It was the only reason he could think of she would have a rape counselor's card in her pocket. She'd dropped it when she had pulled out her keys earlier. The bandage at her neck brought home the fact that she might have died if not for Ike showing up. The realization that he could have lost her put some things in perspective for him.

Grady had already told him that the kiss meant nothing to Peyton. Since she had accepted his help, albeit reluctantly, he was inclined to agree with Grady. It had, however, meant something to Grady. The man was half in love with her.

Still, none of it made a lot of sense to him. Why was she fighting her attraction to him? They were great together. He knew she had enjoyed the sex as much as he did. She didn't act like anything he'd

done had frightened or upset her. Something was wrong, though, and he would find out what it was before he let her go again.

Ryker relaxed, enjoying having her in his arms. Just as he dozed off, Peyton's scream startled him wide awake. She fought against him when he tried to calm her down.

"Easy, Peyton, baby. It's okay. You're safe," he kept murmuring to her over and over, his face buried in her hair. "Nothing's going to hurt you. You're safe."

After a few more minutes she began to relax against him and dozed off again. This time he didn't release her after she fell back asleep. He continued to hold her close to his body and prayed she would sleep awhile longer. He had to wake her up every two hours anyway. This would count as one of her two-hour wake-up calls. She needed the sleep. He needed to hold her.

\* \* \* \*

Peyton woke to the feeling of being warm and comfortable despite a headache and the pain to her throat. Tentatively she opened her eyes and sighed in relief. She was in her own bed. Everything was okay. Then she realized someone was wrapped around her sleeping nearly on top of her. She shifted slightly, and Ryker immediately lifted his head from where he'd had it buried in her hair.

"Hey, baby. How are you feeling?"

Peyton blinked her eyes and swallowed. Her throat hurt.

"I'm okay, I guess," she whispered.

She tried to pull out of his arms, but he didn't let her go.

"Take it easy. Move slow. You're bruised all over," he said.

"I need to get up—now."

At his questioning look, she let out a small breath. "I need to go to the bathroom."

He grunted and kissed her on the forehead before rolling off of her to let her get up.

“You need help getting there?” he asked as she eased into a sitting position.

“No thanks. I just need to take it slow. I didn’t realize I would be this sore all over.” She finally managed to stand up without sinking back to the bed.

The trip to the bathroom took a little time and a lot of leaning on the walls for balance. Still, once she was on her feet, it wasn’t as bad as she thought it would be. Unlike her face, though, as she noticed when she passed by the vanity mirror over the sink. A small bandage clung to the small cut over her left eye from where her head had hit the car. Purple bruising spread out around it and into her left eye area. Her right cheek was bruised from where he’d slapped her. She was lucky it hadn’t busted her lip. As it was, she had a colorful palette across her face. It was her neck that drew her attention now. Those white bandages represented how close she’d come to possibly dying. Had he gotten angry or even just jostled her, he might have slit her throat for real.

Peyton shuddered and washed her hands before heading back to bed. She realized as the cool air hit her that she was naked. She pulled open a drawer in the chest and pulled out a pair of underwear and a sleep shirt. She wanted something between her and Ryker. When she returned to the bed, he gathered her close to him once again but didn’t comment on her newly clothed status. Instead, he nuzzled her neck, his hot breath caressing her neck and cheek. Somehow the feeling was comforting, nothing like the memory of her attacker breathing down her neck as he tried to rape her. She shivered.

“You still cold? I’ll go turn up the heat,” Ryker offered.

“No, I’m fine. I’ll get too hot if you turn it up. Besides, I’m going to get up in a few minutes anyway. I need to take my antibiotic, which means I need to go get it and fix something to eat with it. Can’t take it on an empty stomach”

“I’ll fix you something to eat when you get ready to get up,” he offered.

Peyton nodded but didn't say anything. She struggled to figure out why he was there and what it all meant. He hadn't spoken to her once in the weeks since the incident with Grady. Now he was there holding her and telling her he wouldn't let anything happen to her. Then there was the biggest question of all. How did she really feel about him? How much was she willing to give up to be with him? Did he even want her now? Maybe this was all just blowing smoke and he only cared what happened to her, but didn't still want her the way she sensed he might have before. The questions kept circling in her head until her headache finally drove her to get up and see about getting her medications.

Ryker got up when she did and dressed before she had on more than her underwear. It took her a little longer to dress due to her stiff and sore muscles.

"I'll go get your medications filled. You can rest for a little longer after you finish getting dressed. I won't be long," he promised, as he pulled on his boots.

"I can go. You don't have to do it."

"No. You need to rest, and I'm sure driving will be too much on your head right now, I'm afraid." He walked over to where she stood holding a shirt in her hands.

He pulled her into his arms and gently hugged her. Then he kissed her lightly on the lips and left to see about her medications. Peyton finished dressing then sprawled on the little love seat in the living area of her apartment. She must have dozed again because the next thing she knew, Ryker was bent over her, handing her a glass of water and two pills to swallow.

"Here you go. One antibiotic and one pain pill. You can have two of the pain pills if you need to," he offered.

"Thanks, one should be plenty. It's just a bad headache, nothing more serious." She handed the empty glass back to Ryker.

"I've got breakfast started. It shouldn't be too much longer." He took the empty glass and went into the kitchen to finish cooking.



Now that she was awake, she could smell the scent of bacon and eggs. Oddly enough, her stomach growled at the thought of food. She would have thought for sure that she wouldn't have feel like eating. All through the meal, Ryker remained quiet so she did, too. It wasn't until she rose to rinse off her dishes that Ryker spoke again.

"I'll see about the dishes. You need to rest. The love seat or the bed, your pick," he said.

Peyton grimaced. He was treating her like a child again. Instead of stopping to think, she lashed out at him.

"I think I know how to take care of myself without you telling me what to do."

Ryker cocked his head and frowned. "I wasn't really telling you what to do. Just suggesting where you would be comfortable."

Peyton closed her eyes and covered her mouth before turning around to try and keep from crying again. What was wrong with her? She'd never been this emotional before.

"Peyton, baby. You had a terrible experience this morning and you haven't had time to deal with it. If you need to cry, go ahead. I'm right here." He walked up to her and rested his hands on her shoulders. He didn't pull her back against him or try and turn her around. He just stood there and waited.

"I don't know how to do this. I don't get sick, and I'm not use to feeling all weepy inside," Peyton admitted.

"Then you are way overdue. You're a woman, and you have feelings that aren't all happy and in charge all the time. Sometimes you have to give up control to the female side of yourself or to someone else. It doesn't make you any less of a woman or mean you're a weak person. It just means you're human," he said.

Peyton swallowed wincing when her throat ached. She hadn't realized the man had squeezed her neck that tightly, but she had bruises there and her throat muscles were—sore. Slowly, she turned around and looked up into Ryker's dark eyes searching for something

to tell her how he felt about her. She didn't want to risk everything only to have him laugh in her face.

"What is it?" he asked after a few seconds of eye contact.

"I'm sorry about Grady. I wasn't thinking straight and I used him. I never intended to come between you two. You were friends before we even knew the other existed."

"Grady and I have an understanding. We'll be okay."

"Well, I'm not okay. I don't know what in the hell is going on. Everything got to be so damn complicated almost overnight," Peyton said.

Ryker ran a hand over her hair then pulled her into his arms and hugged her.

"Everything will work out for the best, given time. We need to be honest with each other and take it one day at a time. I think we jumped into this thinking it would be the same as it always has been, only it's not the same this time. There's something more involved than just sex," he said.

"Don't get me wrong. The sex is un-fucking-believable, but there's more to it than that. I want to find out what it is. Do you?" he asked.

Peyton drew in a deep breath and held it for a couple of seconds before slowly letting it out through her nose. Did she want to know? Honestly? Yes. It scared the hell out of her, but she couldn't ignore the feeling that something big was just around the corner.

"Yes, I want to know. What if it *is* nothing but sex? How can we go back to just being sexual partners after delving into the emotional crap?" Peyton asked.

"I'm not worried about that right now. I'm concentrating on what is in front of us."

"And just what is in front of us?"

"Friendship, to begin with. I think learning to be friends outside of the sex is a good start."

Peyton licked her lips then pursed them together trying to think. Finally, she nodded.

“Okay, I guess you’re right. I’ve never had to consciously make a decision to be a friend before. It usually just happens.”

“You’ve spent so much time and energy on keeping everything separate that you’ve thrown away the chance of having good friends and possibly even falling in love,” Ryker said.

“Relationships are dangerous and can be a constant source of stress,” Peyton argued. “That’s why I try to keep out of them. I have, rather I had a good friendly relationship with Grady, but there wasn’t anything personal in it at all.”

“Nothing wrong with that either, but you need someone in your life you trust with all of you, not just the parts you want to share. Being vulnerable makes being happy and cared for all that much more precious.”

“Are you a shrink in disguise? ’Cause this is beginning to sound like a counselor intervention to me.” Peyton wasn’t sure how she felt about it, either.

She wasn’t crazy. She knew what she wanted out of life, or had wanted out of life. Had that changed in the last few days?

“All I’m asking you to do right now is think about it,” Ryker said. “Let me take care of you while you’re hurt and we can go from there.”

Peyton nodded and sighed. It looked like she would be laid up on the couch for a while. She should grab a pillow and a throw to put over her. It would get chilly as the night approached. She didn’t have to do anything, as it turned out. Ryker disappeared into her bedroom and came out with both the pillow and the blanket, as well as a book.

“This was turned over by your bed so I thought you might be reading it.”

She felt tears sting the back of her eyes once again. He was being so nice to her. She sure as hell didn’t deserve it after what she had done. How he could forget about it was beyond her. If she had caught

him kissing another woman his ass would be hamburger meat when she got through with him. And that thought stopped her. They didn't have an exclusive arrangement. They weren't even dating each other. Yet here she was jealous at the idea of another woman touching him. She cared. Now that she realized it, what was she going to do about it?

## Chapter Eleven

Ryker insisted on taking her to his house, where he promised she would be more comfortable in his big bed. She resisted at first, but he finally talked her into it. She gathered up her things and threw a book in with her clothes. He took the bag from her and carried it out to the car, then came back and helped her. She resisted telling him she could walk on her own since he was being so careful not to upset her. The entire morning had been too much for her. Maybe a change in scenery would work to help her relax.

Peyton settled on his loveseat and tried to lose herself in the book, but it wasn't holding her interest. Finally, she put it down and watched Ryker out of the corner of her eye. He was reading the paper. There were lines at his eyes and mouth today. Had they been there before? She didn't remember seeing them. Suddenly he looked up and caught her staring at him. He smiled.

"How are you feeling?"

"Fine."

"Headache? Do you need one of your pain pills?" he asked.

"No, thanks. It's not bad enough for one."

"Can't read?" he asked.

"No, can't get into it. I guess I'm not in the mood to read."

"Do you want to talk?" he asked.

"About what?"

"About what happened. It might help for you to talk about it."

"I don't know what to say. It scared the crap out of me. I don't want it to make me scared of everything now," she confessed.

"You're too strong of a woman to let it affect you that way."

“I hope so,” she whispered.

“You know nothing that happened affects how I feel about you, Peyton.”

“What if I can’t stand for you to touch me anymore?” she asked.

“I don’t believe that for a minute. You know I will never hurt you.”

Ryker stood up and stretched. “How about a massage?”

“Oh, um, that’s really nice of you to offer, but...”

“Come on. You’ll be more comfortable in the bed.” He helped her sit up and then stand.

She let him lead her by the hand back to her bedroom. She started to lie on the bed but he stopped her.

“Take off your clothes. I’m going to use some lotion. It will help you relax.”

Peyton hesitated as he walked off. She wasn’t so sure about taking off her clothes. Hell, they’d had wild monkey sex before. He’d seen her naked. What was the big deal? She shrugged to herself and removed the shirt despite her stiff muscles. She lay down on her stomach across the bed. A few seconds later, the bed dipped and Ryker climbed on beside her.

“The lotion isn’t very warm, so watch out.”

She heard the cap snap as he opened it then a few seconds later, it snapped closed again. She stiffened, waiting for the cold lotion to touch her skin. Evidently Ryker had rubbed it in his hands because when he laid his hands to her shoulders, the lotion wasn’t as cold as she’d expected. He applied the lotion in a circular motion from her shoulders and neck down her back working downward toward her ass.

Once he had the lotion all spread out he concentrated on her neck and shoulders. His hands kneaded and molded her flesh until she began to drift in and out of consciousness. His talented fingers manipulated her flesh until she lay limp and liquid all over. He made the art of massage into a sensual experience as his hands worked their magic over her exhausted and tense body.

Several times his fingers brushed the sides of her breasts and sparks ignited along a line reaching from her nipples to her clit. Heat began to build inside her with each near miss of his fingers at her breasts then lower as he traveled closer to her ass. He smoothed her skin at her waist dipping into the small of her back to rub the tension outward and away. When his hands finally touched her butt, she was as limp as a dishrag with a fire burning inside her barely under control.

“Can you hear me, Peyton?” Ryker asked quietly as he continued to massage the lotion into her ass cheeks.

“Hmmm.”.

“I’m going to roll you over now.” He didn’t wait for a reply, but slowly turned her body over to her back.

She didn’t bother opening her eyes. She felt too good, too well cared for to risk messing it up by panicking because she was naked and feeling more for Ryker than was healthy. His hands began at her shoulders and slowly made their way down her body without touching her breasts or any other erogenous zones. Now she ached for the touch, ached enough almost to ask him to touch her in those places, but she withstood the urge.

“I love the way your skin blushes when I touch it. Your breasts get such a gorgeous glow to them when I’ve massaged them. Do you want me to do that now?” he asked, leaning in so that his words whispered over her ear.

Peyton fought not to say anything, but she couldn’t. “Yes, touch me there.”

She nearly cried out when his fingers slide sensually down the sides of her breasts only to go back up and circle her nipples with one finger. He encased her breasts with his hands and molded them until she couldn’t stay still or quiet any longer. She moaned and moved about restlessly on the bed. Still, she didn’t open her eyes.

His fingers began plucking at her nipples, pinching and pulling and rolling them until she lifted off the bed, trying to follow his lead.

When his hot wet mouth finally drew one nipple inside it, she cried out.

“God, yes.”

He suckled it then moved to the other one and repeated the process until she was rocking her pelvis against thin air, searching for something more substantial.

“Does that feel good, Peyton? Tell me if it feels good to you,” Ryker said.

“Yes, it feels so good. Please, more.”

He nipped at her twin peaks now with his teeth then laved them with the flat of his tongue to soothe them. One hand rested at her waist and began to slowly slide down her torso to her mound where he gently massaged it as his mouth ravished her nipples. Her smooth mound was so sensitive to his touch, and when one of his fingers delved between her lips, she jerked and hissed in reaction, the feeling electrifying.

“Shhh,” he soothed. “Just relax. Let me take care of you.”

Peyton didn’t think there was any way she could remain relaxed as long as he touched her in those sensitive places. As if hearing her thoughts, he kissed a line down her abdomen to the outer edge of her mound. She shuddered as his tongue licked across her mound as if he were licking a lollipop. One of his hands gently nudged her legs apart. He pulled one leg up over his leg opening her for his pleasure.

He blew a warm breath over where he’d licked and chills raced down her spine. She could feel the edges of his breath at her sex. He slipped from the bed and knelt between her legs. His hands spread her pussy lips apart so that his mouth could explore. He licked a long line from her anus to her clit and back down again. His tongue delved deep, dragging out her cream as she wept around him. Heat pooled deep in her belly with each swipe of his tongue over her sex. He nipped at her pussy lips then sucked them in and teased them with his tongue.



The feel of his mouth on her most sensitive spots drew her breath hard from her lungs. She panted when he circled her clit but didn't touch it. Did that mewling sound come from her? She ached for him to take her now. She wanted him to fuck her so badly it almost hurt.

"I need you," she finally admitted in a raspy voice.

"Not yet. I want to pleasure you first. I want every bit of pleasure I can wring from you," Ryker told her, as his fingers began teasing at her opening.

"I won't live through much more. Please, fuck me."

Ryker didn't answer her this time. Instead he dove in and penetrated her pussy with his tongue. Licking and sucking until she writhed beneath him. His tongue twirled inside of her, tickling and teasing. Then he inserted two fingers and reached for that elusive spot that drove a woman wild when stimulated. He found it with ease. She bucked beneath him now. Twisting and turning, trying to get away from him, get closer to him. His mouth latched on to her clit and sucked as his fingers danced inside of her. The minute his teeth grazed the little bundle of nerves, Peyton exploded.

The fire burned through her until she was consumed by it. Heat rushed up her body to her face and sparks jumped from pussy to nipples and back again. She screamed as the climax took her higher than she'd ever been before. Ryker's teeth kept hold of her clit as his tongue rubbed it over and over until she could no longer make a noise. He gently let her down petting her body and soothing her tremors.

Need had been replaced by satisfaction, but she wanted something more. There was something lacking despite the massive climax she'd had. When Ryker climbed up on the bed beside her and pulled her back into his arms, she knew what had been missing. Touch. That little bit of creature comfort where two people touched. She tried to stay awake and think about it, but her body was too satiated. She snuggled into his embrace and fell asleep.

\* \* \* \*

He couldn't help watching her. The way her face relaxed in sleep when only minutes before she'd been wild with passion. Some of the pink still lingered in her cheeks. Ryker reached out and carefully moved a lock of hair stuck to her forehead with the cooling sweat of her release. She was so beautiful to him, especially when in the throes of pleasure. If he had his way, she would be that way as often as he could talk her into it.

His cock pleaded with him for ease. It didn't understand giving without taking. It bulged outward, imprinting his zipper on it. Much more and he'd be disfigured for life, he mused. He could take care of himself later if it came to that. Somehow, he didn't think it would. She just needed a breather. He tightened his hold on her and thought about his next steps in winning her love. He was determined to teach her that there was more pleasure to be had between friends and lovers than just sex buddies. He was going to make it all about Peyton's pleasure.

He lay there holding her for what seemed like hours but was probably only a matter of twenty or thirty minutes before she stirred again. He waited for her to rouse and recognize where she was and what had happened. If she panicked and tried to flee again, he would be ready this time. He wouldn't let her run from this, especially not from herself. She couldn't deny how she had responded to him.

He felt her stiffen beside him, then relax.

"You don't play fair," she said in a raspy voice.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"You seduced me into begging you for sex. That's not fair."

He almost said all is fair in love and war but stopped himself just in time.

"I thought it was very fair. We both got what we wanted," he reminded her.

“What did you get out of it? I don’t remember you coming,” she said.

Peyton rolled over to face him. Her eyes were still lazy from sleep.

“I’ll come later. It was all about you, Peyton. I wanted to make you feel good. That’s what you want out of this, isn’t it?” he asked.

“Uh, yeah. That’s what I want.” She rolled onto her back.

Ryker could almost hear the wheels turning in her head as she thought things over. When she sighed, he knew he had won the first round. She was thinking about their relationship. It was a good sign. He rolled over on top of her.

“How about a shower. I’d run you a bath, but I think you would fall asleep and drown,” he mused.

“I think you’re right. I’m tired and very relaxed. I’d be asleep in five minutes flat.”

“Come on then.” He sat up on the edge of the bed and reached back, holding out his hand.

She hesitated for a brief second then latched hold and let him pull her over to the side of the bed. He smiled and kissed her, just a quick smack before standing up and dragging her along with him to the bathroom. Things were looking up. Well, his dick was looking up, anyway.

## Chapter Twelve

From the moment Ryker turned on the shower until she stepped into the spray, Peyton knew she was in heaven. The multiple showerheads delivered a stinging spray to every body part. It immediately invigorated her. She noticed the shower seat along the back wall as well as the various handholds around the shower. She could easily speculate what those could be used for.

Ryker handed her a bath cloth and the soap.

“How about you bathe me and I’ll bathe you next.” He smiled.

She pursed her lips knowing what he was probably hoping for. Well, she would give him that and more. She could drive him crazy if she wanted to. And right now, she wanted to very much.

“Sounds like a fair exchange to me.” She motioned for him to turn around and face away from her.

When he complied, Peyton soaped up the cloth and began washing his back and shoulders. She used wide circular motions on his back, stopping just shy of his buttocks. She skipped them and continued down his legs. After soaping them up, Peyton returned to his low back and that delicious ass. She used the bath cloth to soap him up then turned him around.

“Time to rinse your back. Back up into the spray.”

He complied and smiled at her as if he had a secret. She bit her lower lip and scrunched up her eyebrows. He was up to something. Of course he expected a blowjob and she was all too happy to comply with that, but he had something else up his sleeve. Well, when he had sleeves on, that is. She would have to watch him close.

When he stepped out of the spray, she resumed her bathing him, paying close attention to his chest. She made rosettes, using the soap as her paint and the cloth as her brush. She ventured lower on his abdomen and smiled when he grabbed her wrists. She'd hit a ticklish spot. She filed that away for future use. With raised eyebrows, she smiled and dropped to her knees to see to his thighs and lower legs.

When she reached for his cock, it jumped at her touch. She rolled her lips inside her mouth to keep from smiling. He was long and hard and wanting. A drop of pre-cum appeared when she licked her lips. She looked up at him. He was staring down at her on her knees in front of him. No doubt he was thinking he had her right where he wanted her. Truth be told, she was where she wanted to be.

Peyton placed her hands on his thighs to hold herself still. She touched the tip of her tongue to his cock and licked the drop of cum from it. It jumped again. She swirled her tongue around the mushroom head, paying close attention underneath the cap. His cock was jumping with his pulse now, which had begun to beat faster. She took hold of him at the base and held the giant erection still for her exploring tongue. He shifted his weight and settled his hand against the tiled wall at her back.

"Stop dicking around and suck my cock," he demanded.

Smiling, Peyton looked up at him and slowly took the length of him into her mouth. She sucked him all the way down to where her hand curled around the thickness of him as far as it would go. He was more than a handful, that was for sure. No wonder she'd had such a hard time taking him at first.

When she swallowed around him, he growled in the back of his throat and stood up on tiptoes. She grinned around him. She was good at sucking cock, even if she said so herself. It was one of the things her past lovers always commented on. When she sucked back up to the cap, she applied tight suction to it then delved her tongue into the leaking slit and tasted another drop of the salty cum.

Since there was no way she could deep throat all of him, she concentrated on sucking him down fast then slow, over and over again until he was raising on tiptoes with every suck. She softly played with his balls then reached with her tongue to lick them. If he were lying down, she could suck on them. That would be for another time. She stopped in the process of licking around the root of him. She was thinking of there being a next time. Would there be? Maybe. He insisted he was only after the sex.

Swallowing hard around the sudden lump in her throat, she resumed her ministrations, placing sucking kisses all the way back up to the head. Then she rimmed around the mushroom cap with her tongue. He moaned. She got down to business. When he grabbed handfuls of her hair, she knew she was getting to him. He seemed to be fighting the need to hold her head still while he pumped his long cock in and out of her mouth. She grazed him with her teeth and he grabbed her head for real. She expected him to.

He began to fuck her mouth in short pumps, as if being careful not to choke her. She swallowed around him when he pushed in her mouth and he groaned holding it there for a few seconds. Then he pulled out. He slowly started powering in and out of her mouth while holding her head still. Soon his movements began to get jerky and she knew from the tightness of his balls that he was close.

“God, I’m going to come. Swallow it all.” He held his cock at the base and held her head with the other hand as he fucked in and out of her mouth. When his balls drew up she readied herself for his cum. He didn’t disappoint her. He shot long and hard down her throat as he held his cock there. Just before she thought she was going to have to pull away from him, he let her go.

“Fuck that was good. You’re damn good at that,” he said as he braced himself against the shower wall again.

Peyton stood up and had to catch herself using one of the handholds. Her knees were weak from kneeling on the hard tile for so long.

“Well, it was the least I could do considering the excellent oral sex earlier.”

He grinned and stood up straight again. “Let’s get you cleaned up and I’ll fix a snack for us.”

She was all for that. Her tummy rumbled and he laughed.

“Sounds as if you like that plan,” he said.

“I’m always good with food. I think I’ve worked up an appetite for more than your cum,” she said with a laugh.

She stood still as he soaped her up. He played with her breasts and diddled her with his fingers some before pushing her toward the shower spray to rinse off. He’d played with her just enough to start the burn, but not enough for her to grouse that he’d left her hanging. By the time she’d dried off, she was mellow again and ready for something to eat.

She sat on the barstool and watched him prepare a Southwestern omelet complete with green and red peppers and Tabasco sauce. When he sat hers in front of her, she dug in, moaning in appreciation.

“This is delicious. Thanks. I was hungrier than I thought,” she said.

“One of my specialties. I’ll have to cook you chicken parmesan one day. It’s pretty damn good even if I say so myself.”

He joined her at the bar and they finished up the omelets in silence. It was a comfortable silence. She didn’t feel the need to fill in the quiet with useless chatter. She thought about it and realized she felt at home around him. This was *not* good. She was becoming complacent around him. Peyton did not need to be this relaxed. It led to caring and relationships, which she didn’t want.

“What’s wrong? You have a weird look on your face. Did I put too much Tabasco sauce in the omelet?” he asked.

“No, just thought of something I need to do before I go back to work.”

“That’s not your way of saying you’re backing out of our couple of days, is it?”

“Uh, no.” She concentrated on finishing up her omelet.

When she rose and started gathering her plate and utensils up, he stopped her.

“I’ll put them in the dishwasher. You go on and get ready for bed. There are dark circles under your eyes. You need your rest.” He settled his hands on her shoulders and turned her in the direction of his bedroom.

“I need to call in at the diner first. I guess I shouldn’t work there this week.”

She pulled her cell phone from her pocket about the time it rang. She nearly dropped it. When she answered, it was the older policeman from the hospital.

“I thought you would want to know that we caught the guy. He has some scratches on him that I’m sure your nails made. We’ll have the lab confirm it though to add to your story.” He then told her she would need to come down to the office to press charges against him and pick him out of a line up. She made arrangements to go the next day.

She then dialed the diner to tell them she wouldn’t be coming in the rest of the week. She headed for the bedroom. The bed looked so inviting. She knew from earlier that it had a pillow top mattress and silky sheets. As far as beds went, it topped her experience list. When this relationship, if that was what it was going to be, ended, she would miss the bed.

Peyton climbed in and settled down. The soft sheets felt good against her naked skin. It was already over sensitized from the shower earlier. Stretching, she marveled at how much the massage from earlier had released her pent-up tension and the stiffness in her muscles.

She reached up and fingered the dressing on her neck. The doctor said she could remove it the next day. Would the sight of the stitches in her neck only upset her more? She should have asked if she could leave a bandage or something on it. Maybe she would call tomorrow



and ask, although she thought she remembered something about a bandage keeping it moist. She just couldn't remember if that was good or bad.

The bed dipped and Ryker joined her beneath the covers. He reached for her and gently pulled her into his arms. She rolled over and laid her head on his shoulder.

"Go to sleep, Peyton. You need the rest." Ryker tucked her hair behind her ear.

Peyton snuggled closer to him and let her mind relax. Soon she drifted off to sleep.

\* \* \* \*

Ryker lay there holding Peyton for over an hour, unable to sleep. She seemed relaxed and on board with the relationship thing one moment and resistant the next. With her struggling inside, he had the chance to sneak friendship up on her. Once that settled in, love would follow. He just needed to play his cards right.

Something had happened in her past to cause her to stay away from relationships. He didn't know what it was, but he would overcome it.

Peyton moaned in her sleep and turned over with her back to him. He rolled over and settled her back against him. She pushed, wiggled her hips against his groin and he had to suppress a moan of his own. Finally, she settled down and softly snored. He knew she was settled now. He let himself slip into sleep.

Early the next morning and elbow caught him just below the ribs as Peyton scooted out of the bed, seemingly in a hurry.

"Where you going?" he asked.

"Bathroom." She closed the door behind her.

Ryker smiled. He couldn't wait to see what the day would bring. Would she be in a good mood or edgy?

When the toilet flushed and then the water in the sink ran, he climbed out of bed and stretched. He could use a toothbrush, he figured, and when the door opened to the bathroom he exchanged places with her. He placed a kiss on her forehead and walked into the bathroom to relive himself. He didn't close the door. She closed it for him.

By the time he was finished, she had dressed for the day. Blue jeans hugged her hips and a pullover T-shirt with the logo for The Saloon on it. She was sitting on the bed now bending over to tie her shoes. As he dressed he heard her grouching to herself that she needed to lose a few pounds.

"No you don't. You're perfect like you are," he assured her.

"No, my butt is too big and my stomach has a roll on it."

"Where? I didn't see any roll yesterday, and your butt is perfect to me." He pulled her to her feet and lowered his head to kiss her.

The kiss turned from a warm good morning to a soft passion that had him panting when he released her. By the look on her face, she had felt it too. There was heat in the kiss bubbling just below the surface. He wanted to pursue it, but a part of him knew she needed time to regroup this morning.

"So, what do you want to do today?" he asked as he took her hand and pulled her through the bedroom door into the living area. "Go shopping maybe? I mean after you go by the police station."

"Shopping. You would go shopping with me? Why?"

"Because you want to, that is if you do. We can do anything you want or need to do."

"I've never met a man who didn't mind shopping with me." She shook her head.

"So, where do you need to go?"

"I need to get groceries for next week and pick up some laundry." She watched him as she said it.

“Sounds good to me. I could do with picking up a few things myself. We’ll get lunch while we are out.” He smiled at her look of incredulity.

“Okay.” She shrugged.

“Okay, now that is settled, how about a quick breakfast? I have cereal, oatmeal, bread for toast, or we can have eggs. What sounds good to you?”

“I’ll have some cereal. I’m not real hungry. That omelet from earlier this morning is still with me.”

Ryker nodded and pulled out two different brands of cereal for her to choose from. Then he reached into the cabinet and brought out the oatmeal. While he cooked his oatmeal, Peyton poured cereal in a bowl and added milk. She didn’t add sugar, he noticed. When he made coffee, she smiled and poured them both a cup. He was once again surprised when she drank it black. Most women doctored it until it didn’t look like coffee anymore.

“What?” she asked.

“I was noticing that you don’t put sugar or milk in your coffee. Most women do.”

“I’m not most women.” She smiled a brilliant smile and went back to eating her cereal.

His cell phone rang and he groaned when he saw that it was Sharon. He ignored it. When it rang again a few minutes later he resigned himself to either answer it or listen to it ring off and on for the next few hours. She didn’t give up easily.

“Your phone is ringing again.” She didn’t seem interested in who it might be.

“I’m ignoring it.” He scrolled through the menu and put it on silent.

He would know it was ringing by the vibrations, but she wouldn’t hear it. He didn’t need to explain Sharon to her right now. Their relationship wasn’t strong enough to admit he had an old lover

chasing him. He only hoped it developed quickly, before Sharon made herself known.

## Chapter Thirteen

They made the trip to the police station in silence, each in their own thoughts. Peyton wanted to get this over with so she could forget about it. She didn't want it hanging over the rest of her day or her life.

When she walked in, they immediately took her to an interview room to wait for them to arrange the line up for her. Ryker waited with her and held her hand. They came back in about thirty minutes to move her to the observation room.

At first, they weren't going to let Ryker go in with her, but she wouldn't go in without him there. They had to comply in order for her to go through with it.

As soon as the six men walked in, she picked out the second from the last. They didn't even have to settle in place before she was pointing him out.

"Are you absolutely sure about this?" one of the men in the room with them asked.

"Yes, that is him. I'll never forget his face."

"That's good enough for me," the other man said. "Thank you for giving us your time. You can sign your complaint on your way out."

The two policemen who'd been at the hospital escorted them back to the interview room and opened a folder with a typed page for her to read and approve before she signed it. It took her two minutes to read through it and agree with what they'd written. She signed it and heaved out a breath in relief.

"Is that all she needs to do now? Will she have to testify in court?" Ryker asked them.

“Yes, if it goes to trial, but I think he’ll take a deal and plead guilty,” the younger man said.

“So he’ll get out sooner than if he went to trial,” Peyton said.

“Yeah, but it save you from having to relive the entire experience again.”

“He better not come near her after he gets out. I’ll be waiting on him,” Ryker said with a growl.

“That’s enough, Ryker. Let’s go. I don’t want to be here anymore,” Peyton told him.

\* \* \* \*

Peyton had to admit that she was having a good time. Ryker really didn’t seem to mind shopping. Who would have thought a man could enjoy shopping. Of course, she wasn’t clothes shopping. Not that she really got into it like most women did, but she did occasionally have to buy them. No, he followed along behind her pushing the buggy while she gathered her groceries, occasionally adding something to his stack.

“That’s all I need,” she told him. “Do you have anything else on your list?”

“Nope, this will do me.” He pushed the buggy toward the front of the store and the checkout lines.

“I should have come in my car. Then I could have gone back to my apartment and put all of this up,” she said.

“Nonsense. I’ll be able to help you carry it all inside. Nothing I got is perishable, so it will be fine out in the truck until we get finished.”

Peyton had been surprised when he pulled out the Ford F-150 from the carport of his condo. The sleek black truck fit him as much as the motorcycle did. It rode comfortably and the backseat held all their groceries.

“Why don’t we pick up your laundry on the way?” he asked.

“That’s fine.” She climbed into the truck and waited while Ryker closed the door before putting on her seat belt.

She jumped out of the truck at the laundry and hurried inside to get her clothes. She washed all her own underwear and sleep shirts, but took her blouses and jeans to the laundry. Her mini washer and dryer just didn’t handle the larger items that well.

“Got it all?” Ryker asked when she returned with her clothes.

“Yep, this is it.” She fastened her seat belt as he pulled out into traffic.

Once they arrived at her house, he shooed her inside with her laundry and told her he would bring in all the groceries. She could work on putting them away. By the time he had them all inside, she had the majority of them put up. They worked well as a team. Then thought better of it and banished the idea from her mind. She didn’t need to be thinking of them as a couple or a team, for that matter.

“Need anything from here before we head back to the condo?” he asked.

“Nope, I have everything I need already there.”

“Let’s go then.”

He watched her as she locked the door then double-checked that it was secure. She led the way back to the truck then smiled at him when he opened the door for her. She couldn’t help comparing him to other men she’d taken as lovers. He, by far, beat the others hands down for manners. In addition, he spoiled her. She needed to think about this. It couldn’t be good in the grand scheme of things.

“You’re frowning again.” Ryker glanced over at her.

“Was I?” she asked.

“Yes, you were. What’s on your mind?”

“Nothing, really. Just thinking that you’re too good to be true and there has to be a catch somewhere in this...” She made a motion with her hand. “This relationship, for lack of a better word.”

“Why are you so against that word?” he asked.

“It means something more than just acquaintances,” she finally groused.

“So, do you fuck all of your acquaintances?”

“No!” She squirmed.

“Like it or not, when you enter into a sexual relationship, it is just that, a relationship. Doesn’t have to be permanent or even long-term, but it is still a relationship.”

Peyton squirmed in her seat. He was getting too good at this. She needed to put a stop to it now, before she ended up in trouble.

“Look, maybe spending all my days off together isn’t such a good idea,” she began.

“Uh-uh,” he said, shaking his head. “You’re not getting out of it. You agreed. I’m not letting you go back on your word.”

She licked her lips and looked out of the side window.

“Are you trying to tell me you’re getting too attached to me?”

Peyton jerked her head back around. “No!”

“Then what is the problem?” he asked.

“Just thinking that it’s risky to spend so much time together outside of the bedroom.”

“Well, I’m all for heading back to the bedroom as soon as we get back.” He wagged his eyebrows at her.

She couldn’t help but laugh at his crazy antics. He kept her guessing. She relaxed and told herself that everything was under control. She wasn’t getting too attached. She could leave right now and not miss anything but that pillow-top bed.

\* \* \* \*

Ryker could almost hear the wheels turning in her head as she looked out the passenger side window. She was trying to convince herself that there was nothing between them but sex. Already she seemed at ease around him except when she started thinking too



much. His job would be to keep her from thinking. And he knew how to do that, keep her occupied in bed.

He pulled into the driveway outside his condo and put it in park. Then he turned to Peyton and pulled her into his arms. He took her mouth and made it his. She didn't resist, but sank into him like a favorite pillow. Good, he wanted her comfortable with him.

His tongue teased along the seam of her lips until she opened to him. The taste of her fueled his need for her. He wanted to tear off her clothes right there and take her in the truck like some randy high school kid. She took away his control just by being her. He drew in her bottom lip and sucked on it. It tasted of honey. When he nipped at it, she hummed her approval. He pulled away but kept her tight in his embrace.

"Let me get these bags inside and we'll continue where this left off," he suggested.

"I'm thinking that might be a good idea."

He kissed her once more on the lips, a chaste kiss, and pulled back. Getting out of the truck proved to be an ordeal with his cock hard and caught in his jeans as it was. He had to adjust himself before he could climb down. She laughed as she watched him, then jumped out of the truck and walked toward the front door.

Ryker grabbed the two bags out of the backseat and followed her. She waited for him to unlock the door.

"Mind digging in my left pocket for the keys?" He turned his left hip toward her.

Peyton smiled a devilish smile and slipped her hand into his tight jeans. He cringed when she ran a nail along the length of his aching dick through the material of the pocket then fished around suggestively for the keys. When she slowly drew them out, he let out a breath he hadn't realized he'd been holding.

She licked her lips, then turned and unlocked the door. He walked in behind her and headed toward the kitchen to drop off the groceries. Putting them away could wait, he decided. Loving on Peyton

couldn't. When she started to unload one of the bags, he tapped her on the nose and shook his head.

"No, no, no. I have a better idea."

"Oh? What would that be?" Her eyes sparkled in understanding.

"I'm hungry for something different I think." Ryker walked her backward toward the bedroom.

With a light giggle, she grinned at him as he maneuvered her into position with her back to the bed. Nothing seemed to please her more than the knowledge that they were going to have sex. He planned to make it more than that this time. Not enough to scare her off, but enough to get under her skin. He needed to work faster than he was, though. She wasn't going to let him prolong their relationship for fear it would develop into something more.

When her legs hit the bed behind her, she sank down and crab-crawled backward to the middle of the bed before lying back. She rose up on her elbows and smiled at him from beneath her eyelashes.

"You're a little vixen, aren't you Peyton," he said.

"I'm a horny vixen." She dropped back to the bed and began to slowly unbutton her blouse as he watched standing over her.

He enjoyed the sight of her undressing for him. She wanted him as much as he wanted her. Eyes the color of blue flowers held his gaze. She spread her blouse then unhooked her bra and peeled back the cups. The sight of her fingering her nipples took his breath. Surely she was too good to be true. Even as he thought this, she reached down and unzipped her pants, slipping her hand inside to play with herself as he watched.

When she licked her lips and bit her lower lip, he lost it and covered her with his body. His mouth took hers in a soul-searing kiss that rocked his world. There was no way he would ever let her get away from him now. He needed her like he needed his next breath.

Ryker left her kiss-swollen lips to sample her beaded nipples. He played with them, teasing them with the tip of his tongue. He mounded one breast with his hand even as his mouth nipped at the

other one. She tasted of honey and spice. He would never get enough of her. She moaned as he plucked at her nipples with his fingers. Nothing pleased him so much as a woman who enjoyed sex. That he'd finally found one who not only enjoyed sex but enjoyed a little pain with her pleasure only proved that she was the one for him.

He sat up and drew her up with him. When she started to reach for him, he shook his head "no" and peeled her blouse and bra from her body. He eased off the bed and back up a step or two. He didn't trust that he wouldn't give in to his need for her and take her right then. No, he wanted to make this special.

"Pull off your jeans." His voice came out raspy, a testament to how little control he had.

Peyton smiled and pushed herself off the bed. She turned her back to him and slipped off her shoes, then slid her jeans down her body, bending over until her lace-covered ass was up in the air as she stepped out of her jeans.

"Now the panties."

Without blinking an eye, she slid her hands down inside her underwear and rolled them down her legs to pool at her feet. She looked at him from between spread legs then stood back up and turned around. One finger went into her mouth. She sucked it then let it out with an audible pop. When she began to let it glide downward toward her pussy, he drew in a shaky breath and grabbed her wrist to stop her progression.

"I didn't say you could play with yourself."

"I like playing with myself," she crooned.

"Not if I don't want you to."

"Make me stop."

## Chapter Fourteen

Peyton couldn't believe how daring she'd gotten. At her demand that he make her stop, she watched his eyes widen then narrow in challenge. Had she really thrown down the gauntlet like that? What would he do? A shiver ran down her spine at the possibilities.

His hand tightened on her wrist and he pulled it up then turned her around leaning her over the edge of the bed.

"I think you need to learn who is in charge in this relationship."

"I'm in charge of myself," she insisted.

His hand came down on her bare ass in a smart slap. She yelped at the sting. He rubbed the spot spreading the burn, then gave her an equally serious tap on her other ass cheek. When he rubbed that side, she couldn't help but moan and push backward into his hand.

"You like it, don't you, Peyton."

"More," she begged.

He whipped her around to face him. "Undress me."

She bit her lower lip in an effort to hide the smile. She could hardly wait. She'd have him eating out of her hand soon. With that thought in mind, she reached up and began unbuttoning his shirt. She looked into his eyes the entire time it took to unbutton the shirt. Then she sank to her knees and began unfastening his pants. She stopped and looked up at him.

"You need to take off your shoes first."

Ryker slipped them off without moving away from her. She continued pulling down his pants until he could step out of them. She immediately zeroed in on his bobbing cock, but the minute she took him in her hand he stopped her.

“No. Not yet,” he said, holding himself. “Bend over the foot of the bed and stretch your hands out above your head.”

She pouted but did as he said. Whatever he had in mind she was game. She hoped he would take her fast and hard. She needed it tonight to remind her of what this was all about—sex, pure and simple. She stretched her hands above her head after leaning over the foot of the bed. It put her ass at the perfect height to fuck her. She wiggled her ass, earning her a solid slap. The sting felt good.

Suddenly a velvet-lined leather cuff was fastened to her right wrist. It was quickly followed by another one to her left wrist. Then they were pulled taut until she was stretched out so that her face lay against the bed. Before she got comfortable he did the same thing to each ankle, spreading them until they were shoulder width apart tied to either post of the massive bed. Trussed up like a Thanksgiving turkey, she realized. The feel of helplessness overwhelmed her at first. Then she relaxed and sank into the rightness of it. She was completely at his mercy. It meant she trusted him. This realization didn't sit well with her at first. Then she wasn't thinking at all. The flogger slapped against her ass.

The sting sang along her nerve endings until she couldn't think of anything but the next swat. He was good. Each lick struck a different area until she could only feel the bite. She moaned and attempted to follow the flogger even as he drew back for another lick. Sweat broke out over her brow. The next lick didn't come. Instead, the wet glide of his tongue along each mark soothed her overheated skin. She moaned for him. He continued his assault with his mouth until every inch of her ass and back had been covered by his mouth. Then he backed away and left her for a few minutes.

She waited, wondering what he would do next. The anticipation was eating at her now. It wouldn't take much to push her over the edge. She was so close, never had she been this close during a scene just by the touch of a flogger. Briefly she wondered if he knew how to use the single tail. He was already too good to be true. She really

didn't need another reason to like him. Thinking about her increasing need for him backed her down from her high until she put it out of her head. She was going to enjoy this and nothing would put a damper on her pleasure tonight. She would worry about the rest tomorrow.

A movement behind her signaled he was back. Where had he gone and for what reason? A hand caressed the still-red lines along her ass. She lifted it up into his touch.

He leaned over and whispered into her ear. "I had to go and jack off so I wouldn't come too quickly when I take that sweet ass of yours."

"Oh, God." Peyton couldn't wait for anal sex with Ryker. She wanted him right now.

"Please, hurry up."

"Patience, Peyton. It's all about the pleasure and you haven't had nearly enough yet."

His hand eased between her and the bed. He found her nipples and pinched them. She squirmed and ground her hips against his body. She could feel his erection as if he'd never come. Good, she thought. He was just as needy as she was.

He twisted her nipples until she cried out at the pain/pleasure of it. Then he withdrew his hands and spread her ass. *Now*, she thought. *He'll fuck me now*. Only he didn't. Instead, he licked her from her little rosette to her clit and back again. He lapped at her pussy where she wept in need.

"You're so freaking wet," he said with a groan.

A single finger delved between her pussy lips to enter her vagina. One finger turned to two, then three. She pumped back against him as much as her restraints would allow. She heard the pop of a bottle. She knew it would be lube. Now he would fuck her. Even though she knew to expect it, the slightly cool gel plopped on her back hole, startling her. She wiggled her ass at him.

"Fuck me. I want to feel you inside me."

"When I get ready to, you'll feel me, Peyton. I'm not ready yet."

She furrowed her brow. What was he planning to do? She didn't have long to wait. One finger reached inside her pussy to locate that sweet spot. He stroked it until she was wild with need. Then as she was about to come, he pushed his thumb deep inside her ass. She exploded around him, milking his thumb like a cow's udder. Even as she panted through the orgasm, he was withdrawing his thumb, not allowing her that final release of tension.

Anger surfaced for the first time. What was he doing? Just when she was about to demand he release her, his sheathed cock probed her pussy lips. He surged forward and entered her in one long plunge. She screamed at the assault. It hurt so good. She thought she would never be able to take him all like that, but she did and he made sure of it. He pumped in and out of her until she was on the verge of another orgasm.

Ryker pulled all the way out then plunged in again. Over and over he withdrew until the tip of him barely breached her pussy, then he'd push forward rocking her up the bed pulling on her leg restraints.

Just when she thought she would explode. He withdrew and pushed at her ass with his pussy-drenched cock, breaching her back hole in one smooth plunge. The unexpectedness of it startled her and threw her for a minute. It took a few seconds for the sensations of his cock spreading her ass wide to reach her mind. She buried her head in the bed sheet and screamed. Pain and pleasure took her high and when he popped her ass cheeks with his open hand, she came even harder if that were possible.

She felt him stiffen behind her then shout and hold himself deep within her forbidden channel. Then he half collapsed across her back. As if realizing what he'd done, Ryker rolled off of her and over on to the bed. She turned her head toward him as she panted to catch her breath.

"Damn," he said after he finally slowed down his breathing.

"Damn," Peyton echoed.

"Was it my imagination or did you see stars, too?" he asked.

“I saw something,” she admitted.

Truth be told, she wasn’t sure it hadn’t been heaven.

“I’ll be right back,” he told her.

A few seconds later, he returned with a warm, wet bath cloth. He cleaned her up then released each of the four restraints, massaging her wrists and ankles when he did. She crawled up onto the bed and collapsed. She needed sleep. Just a little nap, she told herself. The bed dipped next to her and Ryker’s hand pulled her back against his warm body. She snuggled back without thinking and promptly fell asleep.

\* \* \* \*

Ryker woke in stages. First he became aware of himself, then he became aware of where he was and that someone was with him. Finally, he remembered and jerked awake. He hadn’t meant to wake her, but she groaned when he suddenly sat up.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“Nothing, sorry. I woke up a little confused I guess.”

“Hell, I’m a little confused myself. What time is it?” She rolled over toward the bedside table.

“Mmmm not sure.” Ryker blew out a breath and checked his watch. “Looks like we’ve been asleep for a couple of hours.”

Peyton groaned and rolled out of bed to her feet. He could feel her unease as she walked toward the bathroom. Best to give her some privacy, he decided. He’d feel her out and see what sort of mood she was in when she got back.

Ryker got up, grabbed his jeans and pulled them on without fastening them. He wandered into the kitchen and began putting away the groceries. After a few minutes, he heard her in the bedroom, probably getting dressed. When she didn’t immediately come out of the bedroom, he began to get worried. Just as he folded the last grocery bag, she emerged from the bedroom and climbed up on a barstool.



“Are you hungry now?” he asked.

“Not especially.”

“Good. I’ll cook something later. Let’s watch a movie.” He held out his hand.

“A movie sounds good.” She took his hand and let him pull her down from the stool.

Ryker watched her face as she smiled up into his. She seemed relaxed and less on guard at the moment. Good. He needed to work on her while she was in this mood. He wrapped his arms around her and hugged her, then let go and shoved her down on the couch.

“I’ll choose the movie this time,” he said with a smirk.

“Not much on emotional movies are you? Well neither am I, so you can’t intimidate me with action movies. They’re my favorite kind of movie.” She winked at him.

“A woman after my own heart.” He watched for her reaction and when she didn’t object, he continued, “I could get use to having you around.”

She rolled her eyes but didn’t say anything to the contrary. It was a step in the right direction. Now he had to get her hooked on the sex so she didn’t want to lose it. Once she realized she was getting too attached, he wanted it to be too late for her to back out. He picked out the *Die Hard* movies and set the first one up on the DVD. He hit play and returned to the couch. He had to scoot her over some to give him room to sit.

They watched all three of the DVDs he had before she yawned and stretched.

“I’ve got to go home tomorrow to get ready for work tomorrow night,” she said.

He wondered who she was talking to, him or herself. She didn’t look all that excited about leaving. Good. He hid his smile and stretched and stood up.

“Think I’ll cook some spaghetti. How does that sound to you?” he asked.

“Sounds great. I love it.” She smiled and then looked away.

Bingo. She was feeling down about needing to leave. It wouldn’t be long now. He needed to make it last because once she got home, she would begin to shore up her defenses again. He would treat her like a queen for a while.

“What can I do to help?” she surprised him by asking.

“Uh, nothing really. Why don’t you just watch and provide immoral support,” he suggested instead.

“Hmm, immoral, huh?” She climbed up on the stool and pulled off her blouse.

Riker closed his mouth and nodded. He didn’t trust his voice to work correctly. She surprised him all the time. Instead of staring at her with his mouth hanging open, he turned to the refrigerator and pulled out the ground beef he’d defrosted earlier. When he turned back around, he nearly dropped the package. She’d removed her bra and sat bare breasted at the bar with her arms crossed on the counter.

“Um, getting comfortable I see.” He opened the package and dumped the meat into the skillet to brown.

“Thought you wanted something to keep you going.” She grinned at him and wiggled her chest.

The sight of those beauties wiggling stirred his cock. Damn, he hadn’t fastened his jeans, now he wouldn’t be able to and eventually, the cat was going to wiggle right out of that bag. Stifling a moan, he grabbed an onion and rinsed it off before peeling it. Then he rinsed it again and began dicing it up.

Not to be ignored, Peyton leaned forward and squeezed her breasts together so that they protruded between her arms. Riker groaned, then, to cover it, began talking.

“Do you like spicy or mild?” he asked.

“I like everything spicy. The spicier the better.”

“Um-hm, I’ll remember that,” he promised.

“Good.” She tilted her head and stuck a finger in her mouth.

She made a big production of wetting it before she drew it out nice and slow and wiped the wet tip over each nipple. They puckered when she blew across them. She grinned a naughty grin when she caught him watching her instead of stirring the meat.

“You’re going to burn it if you don’t stir it.”

“You’re going to be in a lot of trouble once this is set on simmer.”

“Oh really? What am I doing wrong? You told me to give you some immoral support.” Peyton pouted.

“Right. Just wait and see what I have in store for you later.”

She licked her lips and smiled. “I’m looking forward to it.”

He laughed and quickly pulled together the ingredients for the sauce and set it to simmer. Now for turning on the simmer under Peyton.

As if realizing he had focused on her, Peyton squalled and jumped off the stool to run around the couch. He didn’t bother chasing her. He would have her where he wanted her, no matter how far she ran. All it would take was an order. She was a natural submissive. It was what she’d been seeking all the times she’d searched out her playmates for kicks. No, she didn’t want a permanent relationship for some reason, but she also wasn’t finding what she so desperately needed—a dominant—Him.

He arched his eyebrows at her and left her in the living room, waiting for him to chase her. He had things to do in the bedroom first. Let her stew for a little while, he decided. She would eventually give in to curiosity and come see what he was doing in the bedroom.

He pulled out his trunk of toys and the recent additions with Peyton in mind. He unwrapped the large butt plug and laid it on the pillow next to the tube of lube. Then he pulled out the spreader bar and the cotton rope. Ryker set up the rope on each of the posts at the head of the bed and positioned the spreader bar at the foot of the bed. Then he pulled out the wood paddle and a clit stimulator.

Just as he’d expected, Peyton slipped into the room to see what he was up to. He ignored her as he finished his preparations. She inched

further into the room and watched him. Finally, he turned to look at her. Her beautiful head of auburn hair lay mussed around her shoulders. She still didn't have on a bra or top and her jeans were zipped but not snapped, like his. He noted that she also wasn't wearing any shoes. Good. That would make pulling off the jeans that much easier.

"What are you doing with all of that stuff?" she finally asked.

"Getting it ready for you."

"Oh, no. You're not tying me up again. I learned my lesson there." She took a step back.

He took a step forward and crooked his finger. "Come here, Peyton."

She shook her head back and forth as she took another step back.

Ryker smiled and stopped. He stuck his finger down toward the floor.

"On your knees, Peyton. Now!"

She immediately sank to her knees without thinking. Yep, she was a natural submissive, all right. He quickly crossed the room and grabbed her by the hair before she realized what she'd done. He drew her to her feet and shoved her toward the bed.

"Get up on the bed." He watched as she fought herself before giving up and climbing up on the bed.

"Lie on your back and stretch your arms above your head for me." Ryker took each wrist and tied it with the soft cotton rope to the headboard.

Then he attached the spreader bar to her ankles after removing her jeans. She hadn't bothered with panties. Good. He ran his finger up her crack and dipped quickly inside her pussy to find it already wet for him. Yes, she was into this.

"What are you going to do to me?" she asked, a nervous tone in her voice.

"I'm going to make you come harder and longer than you've ever come before," he said.

He watched her shiver as he let his hand caress her ass. If he had his way, she would pass out from the pleasure. That was his plan, anyway.

Ryker ran a finger from her knee up to the juncture of her hip and pelvis. She jerked in reaction to the light touch in the sensitive place. He now knew every part of her and how she reacted when stimulated at each area. He knew how to bring her fast and hard and how to slow her down. He knew what got her hot and what cooled her off. He would use it all tonight to prove to her she belonged with him—forever, not just a few fun-filled nights.

A fine film of sweat appeared across her lower lip now. She was beginning to get aroused just from the bindings. Good. He bent over her chest and blew a breath across her nipples. They peaked with her quick indrawn breath. Their dusky pink shade complimented her pale skin. He ran the tip of his finger around the outside of each nipple but didn't touch the nipple. Then he leaned over and nipped at each of them. She shuddered.

"I love how your nipples stand up to be noticed. I think they want more attention than I'm able to give them when I'm busy with that delectable pussy of yours."

He reached over to the bedside table and pulled out the sliver nipple clamps he'd bought with her in mind. A thin chain connected them. There was a weight for when she was standing up that would pull on them nicely, but he didn't need it today. No, he'd do the tugging himself. He ran his tongue around and around on nipple then fastened the clamp to it and slowly adjusted the tightness until her quick indrawn breath let him know it was at the right tightness. He repeated this on the other nipple and when both were settled, he gently tugged on the chain that bound them together. She moaned for him, that deep sensual moan.

He checked her pussy and found her even wetter than before. He could hardly wait to bury himself in that hot, wet tunnel. There was still plenty to do before he could indulge himself in her sweet heat.

“I wish you could see how lovely your breasts look bound for me. I’d love to see you with a diamond drop between them,” he said.

Next he pulled out a hook and rope. He attached the hook to the spreader bar at her feet and walked to the head of the bed. He slowly pulled the rope until her feet were almost at her ears. Bent double, her ass and pussy were bare for his appreciation. He anchored the rope to the bed frame and returned to the foot of the bed where he could tease her to his heart’s content.

Ryker ran a finger through her escaping juices at her pussy and teased her clit for a few seconds before running his tongue from top to bottom in one quick swipe. She jerked and moaned for him.

“Oh, please, Ryker. That felt so good. Do it again.” She squirmed.

“Oh, I will. Just not right this minute. I have something else for you first.”

Once again he returned to the head of the bed and dug through his bag. He pulled out a brand-new, massive butt plug and unwrapped it. He’d already rinsed it off. Now he pulled out a bottle of lube and made sure she could see the plug before he returned to the foot of the bed to play.

“What are you doing with that?” A trace of real worry bled through in her voice this time.

“Relax, baby. I’ll make it feel really good for you. Trust me, Peyton.” He waited for her to agree.

“It’s too big, Ryker,” she said in almost a whisper.

“No it’s not. Trust me. I know your body like my own now.”

He opened the bottle of lube and covered the plug with it. Then he dropped a dollop onto her ass crack just above the lovely rosette. She shivered and squirmed on the bed. He used one finger to slowly work it into her until he was easily able to breach her back hole with two fingers. It wasn’t long before she was arching up into his fingers as he pumped them in and out of her ass. He withdrew and positioned the bottle of lubricant at her hole and squeezed a good amount inside of

her. Then he coated his fingers once again, adding a third one this time. She moaned when he pushed all three inside her.

“Feels good, doesn’t it, baby.”

“Oh, God. I’m close. Don’t stop. Please don’t stop,” she begged.

Ryker smiled but pulled out anyway. Her ass followed his fingers as far as the restraint would let her. She growled at him. He positioned the butt plug at her rosette and began to slowly push against the little hole. Peyton was so turned on at this point, she was pushing back against him. Slowly the plug disappeared inside of her until, with an audible pop, it seated itself. He tugged at it earning a moan and grunt.

“How are you doing? Does it fill you up?”

“Oh, God, yes. I need...”

“What do you need, baby?”

“I don’t know, something. I need something.” She began to pant.

Ryker smiled. He picked up one final prop and fastened it over her clit. The little butterfly would drive her over the edge, when he let her fly. First, he wanted to have some fun. Ryker lowered her legs to the foot of the bed and waited while she adjusted to the new sensation of the butt plug filling her backside. The end of it rubbed against the covers at her back.

He turned the plug on with the little remote and watched her begin to undulate on the bed. She made the cutest moans and groans as she began to pant. Just when she might have started to come, he turned it off. She cursed him.

“Not so fast, Peyton. I want you crazy in need. I want you to be so close that all it takes is one tug on your breasts or a whisper of air across your clit to send you flying.”

“I’m there now. Oh, God. Just touch me. I’m there now,” she begged.

“No, but you will be soon,” he told her.

Ryker bent over her and ran his tongue from butt plug to butterfly.

## Chapter Fifteen

Peyton nearly screamed with need when his hot tongue scorched a path from her ass to her clit without touching it. It was just one more turn of the screw. Every little thing he did was tightening her until she thought she would explode if she didn't climax soon. Sensations bombarded her. The weight of the chains at her nipples, the light bite of the clamps against them left an itch somewhere inside her that needed scratching something awful.

"Please, please, Ryker. I need to come."

"Soon, baby. Soon."

He reached below her line of vision and she felt his fingers at her pussy. Yes, maybe he would fuck her with them and she could come. It wouldn't take much stimulation to send her over. She was primed and ready. Oh, God, was she ready. She ached with the need to climax.

A single finger tickled along her opening. It delved inside for an instant then disappeared. She squirmed trying to find it again. Then another finger found her and began teasing at her entrance. This time, two fingers entered her for a few seconds only to disappear just as quickly. She felt the tears at the back of her eyes begin to build. She needed to come.

The butterfly surged to life and she nearly screamed at the sudden sensation to her clit. She undulated off the bed trying to get some pressure against it. She needed something to press against it for more contact. Finally, she began to feel that buzz just before she came. A low keening noise came out of her throat as she felt the first bursts of pleasure only to lose them when the stimulator was turned off again.



This time she did cry, begging for relief.

“Easy, baby. I promise I’ll let you come. I won’t leave you hanging, but I want it to be the best climax you’ve ever had. I want you to know that I can give that to you.” Ryker’s voice got through the haze of need, but it didn’t mean much to her at the time. All that registered with her was the need. The aching, itching, burning need she had to come. It consumed all of her thoughts at the moment.

“Please, please, please,” she chanted over and over again.

“Soon, baby. Soon.”

Ryker’s body soon appeared over her so that she could see his face. It looked almost as frustrated as she felt. Then he was releasing the spreader bar. She struggled to close her legs to get some pressure on her clit, but he positioned himself between them so she couldn’t. She growled her frustration then moaned in need again when he tugged on her nipple clamps by the chain.

“I’m going to fuck you now, Peyton. Me, Ryker. Do you hear me?” he asked.

“Yes, yes. Please, fuck me.” She squirmed beneath him.

She felt it when he began to slowly push against her pussy lips. She widened her legs and try to push back but couldn’t get any leverage with her hands still tied at the head of the bed. Frustration began to bring tears to her eyes again. She heard him chuckle above her then curse when she tightened her vaginal muscles around him. She could treat him to some of the same sensations she was being forced to endure.

Suddenly, he surged forward and filled her with one quick thrust. The butterfly came back on and he tugged at her nipple clamps all at one time. She exploded, screaming. There were no words for what she experienced. She screamed and gasped for breath to scream some more. His cock pounded into her, pushing at the giant plug in her back hole. All the pressure proved to be too much. She came until she couldn’t breathe around it and passed out.

\* \* \* \*

Ryker knew the minute she passed out. Her body spasmed then relaxed around him. He exploded inside of her and filled the condom he'd barely managed to remember to put on. Long seconds later he relaxed against her and slowly withdrew. Her body sucked at him. He belonged there. Somehow, he would make her his.

After dealing with the condom, he carefully removed the plug and butterfly then the nipple clamps. Their release elicited a moan and grunt, but nothing else. He smiled to himself. She'd be pleasantly sore tomorrow. Next he untied her hands and massaged them before slowly lowering them to the bed. Once he'd bathed her with a damp cloth and patted her dry, he climbed into bed next to her and began to softly kiss her eyelids and nose and cheeks until she opened her eyes.

Sexual release softened them as they gazed at him. He loved that look on her. She hummed and settled closer to his side. He remained propped on one elbow watching her, cataloguing each expression as his.

"Why are you staring at me like that?" she finally asked.

"Enjoying the way you look totally satisfied, and knowing I put that look there."

"Gloating?"

"Who me? Naw. You're just so beautiful like this. Almost as beautiful as when you're in the throes of coming."

He watched the blush creep from somewhere still able to find blood and suffuse her face and neck.

"I passed out."

"Yep, you did. How do you feel now?"

"Good, but tired. I think I'm going to take a little nap now." Peyton's eyes drifted close.

"You do that, baby. I'm right here to watch over you."

For long minutes, he watched the even rise and fall of her chest as she breathed in and out in sleep. As long as he watched, she never

appeared to dream. Maybe he had managed to wear her out too much to dream. That thought pleased him.

Now all that was left to do was see how she reacted in the morning once she woke up. He hoped she would be in the mindset that maybe they could have more than just the sex between them. He had shown her that he knew her body and how it worked. He knew her needs and met them. In order to prove he could meet her emotional needs, she needed to give that little inch to let him in. Hopefully now she would.

It was nearly noon before either of them roused enough to get out of bed the next morning. Somewhere in the early morning hours, Ryker had needed her again. He couldn't help himself. Knowing she would probably be a little sore, he'd been careful, but he couldn't *not* have her. She had more than met him halfway, though. Their lovemaking that time had been just that, slow, sweet lovemaking. He hoped she would remember that when she woke up.

He rubbed both hands over his face when she flung back the covers and climbed over him and out of the bed.

"You could have gone around," he grouched good-naturedly.

"No fun," she argued as she disappeared in the bathroom, shutting the door behind her.

"How about waffles for breakfast?" he called out to her as he rolled out of bed.

"Sounds good." Her muffled voice could barely be heard through the door and over the flush of the toilet.

Ryker waited for her to come out then took her place to relieve himself and wash his face. She shook her head at him and closed the door. He really wasn't that into exhibitionism, but it grated on her nerves, so he did it just to spite her.

"Why don't you get a shower while I cook breakfast," he said when he returned to the bedroom.

"Sounds like a good idea to me. I need to get my stuff together since I have to leave soon." She didn't look at him while she said it.

Ryker wondered if she was beginning to see that there was more between them now than just the sex. She acted less easy around him and that both worried him and gave him hope. If she was uncomfortable, she was thinking about it. He left her to the shower and hurried into the kitchen after pulling on a pair of jeans. He started coffee first, then set about whipping up waffle batter.

He had the waffle iron hot and ready when she reappeared some twenty minutes later. She'd dressed in dark blue jeans and her work T-shirt with The Saloon's logo across it. She was ready for work. He glanced at his watch and winced. It was nearly two in the afternoon. She'd be going to work in a couple more hours. His time was limited.

"Mmmm," she said. "It smells wonderful. Want me to man the waffle iron while you finish up the bacon?"

"Yeah, go ahead. It's primed and ready."

He turned the bacon over one more time and then began pulling them up and laying them out on the paper towel to finish draining. He much preferred them this way, in the oven, over frying them in a frying pan, less mess and less grease on the bacon.

"Okay, your waffle is ready, I've got mine on now." Peyton handed him a plate with a nicely browned waffle already melting a pat of butter on it.

"You should have had the first one," he fussed.

"I experimented on yours. Mine will be perfect." She laughed when he frowned and stuck a fork into his waffle as if to see if it were done or not.

"Mine looks okay." He poured syrup on it and cut a bit off before slipping it into his mouth.

"Hmmm, tastes good, too."

"Good." She smiled at him with a twinkle in her eye, then pulled her waffle off of the iron and slathered on the butter.

They ate in companionable silence, which cheered him as well. She didn't feel the need to fill the silence with useless chatter or small

talk. He liked that. They were compatible and made for each other in so many different ways. He just had to convince her of that.

\* \* \* \*

Everything had been perfect as far as Peyton was concerned. He hadn't pushed her into anything. He'd given her opportunities to back out of everything from the sex to the meal. He understood her needs and wants as both a woman and a sexual being. He had to be too good to be true. It was all she could think of. He wasn't looking for long term and neither was she when she'd gone into this...this, whatever it was. Now she wasn't so sure what she wanted. The idea of a long-term relationship scared her. The one time she'd succumbed and gone into one had turned into a disaster.

Every time after that, when things had gotten to that point and she'd let it go a little further than she was comfortable with, something happened to prove her right. She wasn't made for relationships. If it wasn't an estranged wife he'd forgotten to mention it was an ex-girlfriend intent on rekindling old flames, both of which led to unspeakable heartbreak and shattered friendships. No, she knew better than to let herself get involved, but this time, she really wanted to.

Ryker was everything she would want in a man, strong, confident, sensual, and self-sufficient. He didn't require her presence at every minute. He wasn't into controlling her. Sure, he controlled their sexual play, but she relinquished that control to him. He didn't try to tell her what to wear or not to cut her hair. He knew her body inside and out. He knew how to make her scream in pleasure and beg for release and he didn't use it against her.

What would it be like to be in a long-term relationship with him? It would never be boring, of that she was sure. But would it last longer than the sex?

Peyton looked up when Ryker ran a finger across her nose.

“What are you thinking so seriously about?”

“Nothing really. Just wondering what the world has been doing without us in it the last couple of days.”

“I expect it has gotten along just fine without us,” he said.

“You’re probably right.” She yawned, then stretched. “I better gather my things up. Come on, let’s rinse the dishes and put them in the dishwasher.”

“Leave them. I’ll do them later. Come on and I’ll help you pack.” He grabbed her wrist and tugged her toward the bedroom.

“Oh no, you’ll want sex and I have to get ready to go.” Peyton laughed and extracted her arm from him.

“I promise, no sex,” he said with a mischievous grin. “Even if you beg me to.”

Shaking her head, Peyton gathered her clothes, frowning when she couldn’t find her panties. By the time she had her bag packed, she still hadn’t located her underwear.

“Why are you frowning?” he asked.

“Have you seen my panties? The navy blue ones.”

“Hmmm, maybe. Don’t worry about them. They’ll show up. I’ll save them for you when I do laundry.”

“Pervert.” She laughed at him and pulled her pack on her back. “Okay, I’m ready.”

“It’s still three hours before you have to go to work. Why don’t you stay here and we’ll watch a movie. Then I’ll drop you off at your apartment so you can grab your car to go to work.”

She laughed and shook her head. He didn’t want to end their time together any more than she did. It made her feel good to know that. Still, she needed to get her head on straight before work and she couldn’t do that spending the last hours there next to him on a couch watching a movie.

“As much as I’d love to do just that, I need to go home for awhile and mentally get ready for work.” She willed him to understand.

He smiled and nodded. "Okay. I get it. What about your throat? Are you sure you feel up to dealing with the crowd tonight?"

Peyton fingered her neck next to where she had the stitches. Four more days till they could come out. She'd almost forgotten about them.

"Yeah, I'll be fine. That's another reason I need to go home. I need to do some patch work on the scratches and bruises so I don't look like the walking dead." She dropped her hand from her neck.

"You don't look that bad. Just wounded." He smiled at her and kissed her nose. "Okay, if you insist, I'll take you home. How about the bike? Looks like a good day out there."

"That sounds good to me." She settled her pack on her back and followed Ryker outside to where he had the bike stashed.

He strapped her helmet on, being careful of her neck, and then waited while she climbed on behind him before starting the bike up. He called back to her when he got ready to go.

"Hold on."

It took less than ten minutes to make it back to her place. Ten minutes and the difference between his condo and her apartment seemed a world apart. She shook her head, refusing to think about something as petty as her financial circumstances. She did okay. She managed to pay her bills. She didn't bounce checks and lived within her means. There was nothing embarrassing about that. Ryker didn't seem to mind her apartment—well, other than her mattress on the floor, she thought with a grin.

"What's so funny?" Ryker pulled his helmet off as she unfastened hers.

"Thinking about the difference between your bed and mine."

"You don't have a bed. You have a mattress on the floor. That isn't a bed," he informed her.

"Right." She handed him the helmet and leaned into him for a kiss. "Thanks for a great few days, and for saving me." She touched her neck again.

“Don’t thank me. I enjoyed it as much, if not more so, than you did. I’ll see you later tonight, too. I don’t plan on letting you sleep on that pallet on the floor alone tonight.”

This both excited her and worried her. She needed some room to think.

“Maybe that wouldn’t be such a good idea. Maybe later in the week...” She began to wince when he frowned.

“Tired of me already?”

“No! I...I wanted some time to think.”

“To think about what?” he asked, a strange look in his eyes.

“About us, I guess.”

“I thought there was no us, only you and me and sex.”

“You know it’s more than that now. After last night, I’m not sure what it is, but it’s more than just sex. Don’t tell me you don’t feel it.”

“Yeah, I feel it. I guess I’m just surprised that you do.” Ryker strapped the helmet on the back of the bike. “So are you saying you think there might be something a little more long-term for us?”

“Well, maybe, yes, I don’t know. I need to think about it,” she insisted.

“Fine. I’ll see you tonight though. I’m not going to bother you overly much.” He grinned at her frown.

“Go. I need to get myself ready for the work week.” She backed away from him and reached behind her for the doorknob.

“I’m leaving. After I get my good-bye kiss.” He reached for her and pulled her back into his arms.

As soon as his lips touched hers, sparks flew. Red-hot, Fourth of July fireworks exploded around her. How could she deny they had something going between them? How could she ignore it to go on with her life, knowing he was just a few blocks away?

When he let go of her and backed away, she turned and struggled with the key to unlock the door. She turned and smiled at him as he started the bike and pulled out of the parking lot. Immediately, an



emptiness filled her soul. Damn! She was already in over her head. What was she going to do now?

Peyton closed the door behind her and dropped her backpack full of dirty clothes to the floor by the clothes hamper. She needed to do a load of clothes and...she wasn't sure what else. Right then, all she could think about was Ryker and how he made her feel so needed, wanted. When she was with him, she felt like the only person in the room. He filled her full of good thoughts. Thoughts that now circled around relationships and what they meant to people—to her.

Could they have a sexual relationship only? Naw, that would never work. He already knew so much about her inside. If not a sexual one, then maybe a friends with benefits type one. She counted him as a good friend. He was considerate of her and they talked about important things...when they weren't fucking.

What was the next step above that? The only thing she could think about was boyfriend and girlfriend. That sounded so immature though. Maybe she could just call it a deep friendship. Nothing fancy, but straightforward and true.

How was Ryker going to feel about it, though? He didn't want a relationship any more than she had. Now she was changing her mind on him. That might not sit well with the man.

"Leave it to me to make a mess of a good thing," she mused to herself.

He wasn't as strict with the "no relationship at all" stand she had taken, so he might be okay with it for now. If he was, then she could work on him to get him to think more long-term. How long-term? Peyton wasn't all that certain herself at this point. She knew that she didn't want to walk away just yet. Maybe not ever.

## Chapter Sixteen

The week flew by, and by Tuesday night, she was ready for a break. The Saloon had been packed every night she worked. It was close to 3:00 a.m. before she made it to bed each morning. She guessed she was getting older because it seemed like it was getting harder and harder to get up on Sunday mornings to go to work at the diner.

“Hey, Peyton. How are you doing?” Grady grabbed an empty table in her area.

“Doing good. What about you? I didn’t see you this weekend.” She poured him a cup of coffee.

“Been out of town. Just got back in about midnight last night.” He started to say something then stopped and looked away.

“What is it, Grady?”

“I just wanted to know how you and Ryker are doing now. Wasn’t sure it was okay to ask or not.”

“We’re fine. I’m sorry about earlier. I screwed up and shouldn’t have used you like that.” She bit her lip and waited for him to say it was okay.

“No, you shouldn’t have. You knew how I felt about you. Not only that, but Ryker is my friend. It caused some trouble with us.”

Peyton swallowed around the knot in her throat. “I know. I’m sorry. I guess it just isn’t enough, though.”

“We’re friends too, Peyton. I don’t want to lose that, but don’t expect me to help if things go sour on the two of you.”

“I wouldn’t expect you to, Grady.”

“Hey! I need some coffee over here,” a voice to her left complained.

“Sorry, I’ve got to get back to work. You want the usual?”

“Yeah. That would be good.” He smiled at her and then took a sip of his coffee.

His words had hurt, but she’d deserved them. She’d almost screwed up a lot of things running from how she felt. Maybe it was time to give it another try. She nearly dropped the plate of eggs she was carrying to a customer when she realized she was talking about love. Not just a relationship, but full-out love. Now she had a lot to think about.

When she got off work later that day, she bypassed the grocery store to go straight home for a change. She was still reeling from the realization she might be talking about loving Ryker. Was she capable of loving someone else? Evidently so, because she loved Ryker.

Speak of the devil. He stood outside her apartment door, waiting on her when she drove up.

“What are you doing here?” she asked, climbing out of the car.

“Waiting on you. I thought I would help you do your chores today and maybe you would have time to spend with me tonight,” he said.

“Hmmm, sounds good to me.” She nearly laughed at the startled expression on his face. He’d been geared up for a fight over it, she could tell.

Without alluding to that knowledge, she unlocked her apartment and led him inside.

“What’s first?” he asked, rubbing his hands together.

“First, I need a Diet Coke. Then I’ll gather up the laundry.”

“Do you have a washer and dryer here?” He turned a complete circle as if looking for it.

Laughing she pointed down the hall behind the kitchen. “It’s down there, small double-decker that only holds a couple of things at a time.”

“Hmmm, we could gather all your stuff up and wash clothes at my place. I have a large capacity and it would mean fewer loads and less time wasted on laundry.”

She smirked at him. “And what, pray tell, would we do with the extra time?” She sashayed over to him and ran a finger down his shirt, flicking each button with her fingernail.

“Oh, I don’t know. We’ll think of something.”

“Okay, on one condition,” she said.

“What would that be?” he asked.

“When I say I need to go home and get ready for work, you don’t hassle me about it.”

“I won’t hassle you, but I’m going to whine about it,” he said, smiling.

Peyton sighed and nodded her head. “Okay, let’s get everything packed up in my car. I’ll take my own vehicle, that way I can come home when I need to.” She raised her brows at him when he started to say something. Evidently he thought better of it and clamped his mouth shut.

About the time they were getting ready to drive over to Ryker’s place, his cell phone rang. He checked the caller ID and frowned, then switched it to silence.

“Don’t you need to answer that?” she asked.

“Naw. It’s nothing important. I’ll check on it later.”

Peyton forgot about it until it happened several more times over the next couple of days. She couldn’t help but wonder if it were another woman. Could he be seeing someone else at the same time? She chastised herself. When would he have the time? He’d been with her most all of the time day and night, which was why they were calling. *Don’t go there, Peyton. Things are going well. It’s nothing.*

Thursday evening, Peyton sat cross-legged on the couch, folding towels at Ryker’s place while he worked on something in his office. She piled the towels up and got up to take them into the bedroom when she heard his cell phone go off again. It had rung several times

that night, but he never answered it. This time she heard him answer with a short, "What?"

She didn't mean to eavesdrop, but she was right outside the office door when he answered the phone.

"I told you I'm busy. I don't have time to talk about anything with you."

Peyton clamped her mouth closed and hurried out of the hall and into the bedroom. She didn't need to know what that was about. He was with her and they had an understanding of sorts. Didn't they? They had never really discussed not seeing other people. She just assumed they would be exclusive. Maybe she had been wrong to assume anything.

That night, she had just about worried herself into a tizzy about talking to him about their relationship when he brought of the subject himself. Relieved, she nearly cried.

"I know we originally only wanted a sexual relationship, but I feel like there's something between us, Peyton. I'd like to date you—take you out to eat or to a movie. I want to see where this will go."

He paused, seeming to wait on her to decide what she wanted. She knew what she wanted.

"I'd like that," she said without her voice breaking.

"Good," he said. "Great." Then he laughed and picked her up, swinging her around in a circle until she was laughing and hanging on with all her might.

\* \* \* \*

He reached for her and brushed his lips softly across hers before diving in for a more thorough exploration. He pulled back and watched her lust-filled eyes. His phone rang. He cursed and started to ignore it but thought better of it. If it was Sharon, she'd just keep calling.

"Hello?"

“You sound all out of breath, darling. When are you coming back?”

Ryker cringed. He turned away from Peyton and hissed into the phone. “I’m not coming back. I told you that already. And stop calling me.” He hung up then switched it to vibrate.

“Sounds important to me. Maybe you should have taken the phone call.” Her voice sounded a little distant, now. He wasn’t going to let her pull away from him.

“No one important,” he crooned. “You’re more important than any phone call I could receive.”

“You are incorrigible.”

“Only with you, baby. Only with you.”

She sighed and continued with a frown. “Let’s get the groceries and finish up the laundry. That way I have all day tomorrow free. No errands to run.”

“Sounds like a really good plan to me,” Ryker said.

They spent the rest of the day running her errands then returned to his condo for the evening. She would be going back to work day after tomorrow. He planned to spend all day Thursday spoiling her. He wanted her to miss him while she was at work, both at The Saloon and the diner. The more she missed him, the greater his hold on her would grow. Peyton didn’t realize it yet, but she was going to be married to him in less than six months, maybe even less than three.

They settled down to watch a movie after a dinner of grilled shrimp and steamed veggies. She still teased him about his being such a good cook. It pleases him to know he could make her happy with something as simple as a meal.

His phone vibrated off and on throughout the movie. He thought about turning it off on several occasions, but old habits were hard to break. He felt like he had to leave it on.

“You really should talk to whoever it is that keeps buzzing you. The phone has vibrated the couch for the last two hours.” Peyton sounded pissed about it, too.

“Sorry. I should have turned it off. I didn’t realize it was bothering you,” Ryker snapped before he could stop himself.

Peyton extracted herself from his arms and rolled off the couch to stand up.

“Look, if you don’t want me around when you talk to whoever it is, just say so. I can always go home.”

Ryker knew right then he should come clean with her about Sharon, but something stopped him. Some selfish need to control the situation urged him to keep quiet.

“It’s just work, and I refuse to let it interfere with our time together. I’ll deal with it when you go to work.” He stood up and pulled her into his arms.

“You need to fire whoever it is for harassing you, then. You’re supposed to be the boss, right?”

“Right. I’ll keep that in mind when I talk to them.” He grinned and kissed her.

The kiss led to more kisses, deeper kisses, and then naked kisses. Ryker’s need to control the situation jumped in. He held her hands above her head while he fucked her deep and hard against the wall in the living area. She didn’t complain, but it wasn’t as good as it should have been. Maybe because he was lying by omission to her. He needed to clear it all up instead of covering it up.

Later that night in the bed, Ryker buried his face in the softness of her hair and inhaled that warm scent that reminded him of home. She made him think of home and children and family. He wanted all of that with her. Things were going well and he didn’t want to risk upsetting anything by going over past mistakes. Everything would work out, he kept telling himself. It wouldn’t be long now before he could ask her to marry him. Everything would be fine then.

Friday evening came before she was ready for it. Peyton stretched and yawned, covering her mouth with the back of one hand while reaching out with the other one to locate Ryker. His side of the bed was empty and cold. How long had he been up, she wondered? She checked the clock and almost cursed. It was already four in the afternoon. She needed to get a move on in order to be ready to go in to work that night.

After rolling out of bed, Peyton pulled on Ryker's discarded T-shirt and padded into the living room to find him. He wasn't there, nor was he in the kitchen. That left the office. She was just about to knock on the door when she heard his voice raised in anger. She stopped and considered taking a shower first. He was obviously having a little trouble dealing with his business. His next words spurred her back toward the bedroom.

"I've already told you to stop calling me."

Peyton drew in a deep breath and headed to the bathroom and a nice, hot shower. She didn't need to hear anymore. It was none of her business.

Nearly an hour later, she was dressed and ready to walk out the door to head to work. It was a bit early, but she hadn't spent much time talking with the other girls since she'd been dating Ryker. It wouldn't hurt. She picked up her purse and dug around for her keys. Ryker met her coming out of the bedroom.

"Hey! I didn't know you were even up. You look like you are trying to sneak out of here without saying bye," he accused with a smile.

She reached up and kissed him on the lips then pinched his cheek. "I was coming to tell you bye. You've been busy working and I didn't want to disturb you until I was ready to go."

"You are never a disturbance, baby. Interrupt to your heart's content." He pulled her into his arms and wrestled her keys out of her hand.



“Hey, give those back. I want to get to work early and talk to some of my friends.”

“I’ll give them back after you’ve given me a proper good morning and good-bye kiss.” He puckered up and winked at her.

Peyton couldn’t help but laugh. She leaned up and kissed him. He took her kiss and turned it into much more than just a good-bye kiss. When he finally let her up for air, she was dizzy and more than a little bit turned on. The bastard had done it on purpose. She shimmied against him. His hard cock poked at her stomach. Good, he was in as bad a shape as he’d put her in. She grinned.

“Now you can go,” he said with a smirk.

“Sadist.” Peyton raked her nails over his shirt where his nipple would be and walked off toward the door.

“I’ll see you in the morning,” he called out.

“I thought I’d just go home tonight after work and come back tomorrow night after work.” She waited to see how he would take that.

She wanted to be with him pretty much all the time now, but needed some space to keep things in perspective.

“Sure, if you want to do that. I’ll miss you. At least call and let me know you got home okay. I’ll worry otherwise.” He opened the door for her and held it.

“I’ll do that. You get a good night’s rest. You just might need it tomorrow night when I get off work.” Peyton blew him a kiss and walked outside.

She waved at him as she left the drive and smiled all the way to The Saloon. Things were really going well. They fussed over small things, but nothing big, and he wasn’t condescending or a know-it-all. He didn’t insist she do things his way all the time but was a master in the bedroom. No one had ever understood her needs and wants as thoroughly as he seemed to. And still, he didn’t carry it over too far into their everyday life. He let her have her space and her ideas.

Maybe they could make things work for something a little more permanent, she thought as she parked behind the building.

Since her attack, more lights had been added, so she parked beneath one and locked the car door. Just as she reached the back door, it opened and one of the other waitresses walked out carrying a garbage bag that looked heavy.

“Hey, why are you carrying that out instead of one of the guys?”

“They are a bit busy right now with a situation. The Jones brothers are fighting over some new kid that can’t be more than twenty-one if she’s really legal.”

Peyton rolled her eyes and held the door until the other woman returned. It was going to be one of those nights if they were already fighting.

“Come on, we can talk while things are fairly quiet. They have the Joneses outside in front and there really isn’t anyone else to amount to much in the bar yet.”

Peyton enjoyed the next hour catching up on all the gossip around the bar while she waited until time for her shift to start. Nothing really had changed anywhere but in her life. Why she thought the world would have stopped was beyond her. She laughed it off and clocked in. The next several hours kept her on her toes, fielding drinks and come-ons like any other Friday night.

Saturday night would be rowdy so she was glad she’d told Ryker she wanted to go home after tonight. She could use an uninterrupted night’s sleep to get ready for the wild evening ahead. As the night sped by, she began to miss him though and had pretty much changed her mind about staying at her place for the night. Ryker wouldn’t mind if she showed up anyway. He’d probably be pretty damned pleased and give her that knowing look he had when he was sure of her.

It should have bothered her that he was that arrogant about her feelings for him, but she couldn’t work up any righteous indignation. He was right. She was smitten with him and knew it. There was no

need to try and hide it. She knew he was hooked on her as well. It was in his eyes, the way he looked at her when he thought she was sleeping. His eyes held a possessiveness to them that was tempered with something warmer and softer. She wasn't sure what it was, but maybe, just maybe, it could be love.

Love. Did she love him? Maybe. Probably. It was hard for her to be sure. She'd spent so much time making sure never to get emotionally involved with anyone that now she wasn't sure what it would feel like to be in love.

Peyton followed the other girls out to their cars and climbed in. She decided to go by her apartment anyway and pick up a change of clothes. She'd been washing hers over and over at Ryker's. It wouldn't hurt to have another change there.

"See you tomorrow night," one of the girls called out as she shut her door.

Peyton waved and climbed in her car, closing and locking the door, she put on her safety belt and headed for her apartment. Nothing looked out of place when she pulled up. After the attack, she'd been super observant of things around her. She didn't expect any further trouble, but she figured being cautious was a good thing.

After unlocking the door, Peyton walked in and switched on the lights. She'd been there the day before, but it felt like forever since she'd been there alone. Usually Ryker was with her when she came by now. She seemed to be spending all her time at his place. She wandered around the two rooms before sighing and sitting on the edge of her mattress. It didn't feel as much like home as it use to. Now she was beginning to get use to Ryker's condo. It felt like home. She grinned. That was a good thing, she decided, and jumped up to grab a change of clothes.

Peyton packed two more changes of clothes and a few bathroom items. There was no reason she couldn't be comfortable over there. It seemed she was going to be spending a lot more time there evidently.

With a smile, she loaded her bag into the car and locked the apartment behind her. She made a note to return and clean out her refrigerator Sunday, since the trash was picked up on Monday. There wouldn't be anything worth saving by then anyway.

All the way to Ryker's place she contemplated how to surprise him. She could knock on the door and let him find her on the doorstep. She had a ribbon in the backseat, she could tie into a bow and wrap around her. She giggled. That was plain silly, she decided.

When she pulled into his parking lot, the lights were out in the front so she figured he would be in bed already, maybe not asleep, but definitely in bed at nearly three in the morning. He had given her a key to the condo, so she decided to use it and surprise him in bed. She would leave her bag in the car and get it after they woke up later in the day.

Peyton unlocked the door and crept inside trying not to make any noise. She got as far as the entrance hall when she heard them. It didn't register at first what she was seeing when she turned around. When it did, she felt her heart drop to her feet.

Standing in the middle of the living area where Ryker and some blonde-headed bimbo kissing. She stood there for all of a few seconds, trying to catch her breath before she turned and ran out the door. Peyton didn't even bother to slam it behind her. She jumped into the car and nearly flooded it in an attempt to leave. She saw Ryker in the rearview mirror run outside trying to flag her down, but she didn't bother to stop. She ran. She drove and she kept on driving until she could see past the tears to find her way to the interstate and the wide open road she needed right then to clear her head. Nothing had prepared her for the pain that followed the tears.

## Chapter Seventeen

Ryker ran after her car for as far as he could then stopped and braced his hands on his knees in an effort to catch his breath. Fuck! Everything had gone to hell the minute he'd answered the door. Once he could breathe again, Ryker turned around and jogged back to the condo. Sharon was still standing in the middle of the living room.

"Get your shit and get out. Now!" He pointed toward the front door.

"Ryker. We belong together. Who was that barmaid and why would she have a key to your condo?" Sharon glided toward him.

He swallowed hard around the knot in his throat. He had never hit a woman before in his life outside of bedroom play, but he wanted to slap Sharon so badly he had to take a step back.

"I'm not kidding, Sharon." He drew in a deep breath to calm down enough to deal with her.

She took another step toward him and held out her arms. Ryker sidestepped her and grabbed one arm, twisting it behind her back. He shoved her at the door and then outside toward her car.

"Get out of here. Go home and don't ever come here or contact me again, or I will have you arrested for stalking. I'm getting a restraining order against you first thing Monday morning," Ryker said between clinched teeth.

She jerked her arm out of his hand and screamed at him. When that didn't do any good, she broke down into fake tears. Ryker opened her car door and shoved her inside behind the wheel.

“Get out of here, now, Sharon. You’re lucky as hell I’m not one to hit women because right now I’d like nothing more than to slap you senseless.”

She narrowed her eyes at him and started the car. She jammed it into reverse and peeled out of the lot. He was sure he hadn’t heard the last of her yet. He would be getting that restraining order come Monday morning. She’d screwed up the best thing he’d ever had. He wasn’t about to forget it.

Now he had to figure out how to get Peyton back. He should have told Peyton about Sharon to begin with. He never should have kept the entire situation a secret. She was bound to have found out eventually, anyway. He thought he could keep it in the past. Well, the past had come to bite him on the ass. Now he had to figure out how to explain it all to Peyton and promise that there was nothing going on between them. He had to make her believe that he had no feelings toward the other woman other than disgust. First, he had to find her, though.

Ryker grabbed his helmet and pulled out the bike. It would maneuver easier than the truck. He rode toward her apartment, not really expecting to find her there. Sure enough, the parking lot was empty. Next, he tried The Saloon. It was dark and the only vehicles parked in the front lot were dusty old trucks whose owners had probably had one too many to drive them home.

Next, he drove to Grady’s house. The place was dark and there was no sign of Peyton’s car in the drive or anywhere on the street. He sat there contemplating waking Grady up and telling him what had happened, but decided against it. This was between him and Peyton.

Ryker cruised all the parking lots of the motels and hotels around town and then randomly chose streets to drive through in hopes of finding her car parked somewhere. Finally, he gave up and parked his bike outside her apartment. He settled himself on the stoop and waited for her to show up. She would have to come back eventually, if for no other reason than to pack her stuff if she was going to leave.

Ryker shook his head. Right. She would be so heartbroken she would have to leave town to deal with it. *Get real Ryker. She's not that into you.*

He wasn't sure how long he waited there at her door, but the sun was peeking above the horizon when her car pulled into the parking to park in her spot. She didn't get out of the car immediately. Instead, he waited while she seemed to be deciding on whether to stay or leave again. Finally, she opened the car door and stepped out. She walked up to where he sat. She started talking to him without looking at him.

"What are you doing here?"

"I want to explain everything to you."

"I think I pretty much know everything I need to know." She dug in her pocket for something.

"There's nothing between Sharon and me anymore. Please let me explain." He watched the muscles along her jaw work as she clenched her teeth.

She still didn't look at him.

"I asked her to marry me a long time ago, but it didn't work out. I never loved her. I asked her because I thought it was the thing to do at that time in my life. Everything's changed now. She meant nothing to me then and she still means nothing to me now."

Ryker stood up. He ached to touch her but knew better. Instead, he shoved his hands into his jeans pockets and waited for her to say something. Anything—but she didn't. She continued to stare off into the distance.

"Peyton, baby. You mean everything to me. Please don't throw us away."

"You were kissing her. I know what I saw."

Her voice sounded so broken. Ryker winced.

"I know what it looked like, but I was trying to get her arms off of me. I wasn't kissing her back."

"I'm not what you need, Ryker. I'm a nobody. I'm poor, barely pay my bills, and work two jobs. Things never should have gone this

far. I was a fool to believe I could hold your interest for long. I'm not sophisticated or educated. I'm just me." She finally looked into his eyes and the pain he saw nearly brought him to his knees.

"Peyton, I left the old me behind when I moved here. I wanted to live life my way. Not the way it was back in Dallas. You're my way, Peyton. You're how I want to live. I want you in my life. I want to go to sleep with you in my arms every night and wake up with you there every morning. Give us a chance to work this out. Please."

Thoughts flicked across her face much like a picture show as she thought everything over. He knew when she had made up her mind. Her face relaxed, but she still looked defeated.

"If you didn't love her, why did you ask her to marry you and why didn't it work out?" she finally asked.

"Can we go inside and talk? It's not very private out here," Ryker said.

She sighed and nodded her head. He waited as she unlocked the door and walked inside before he followed her. She headed straight for the kitchen. When she pulled out the Jack Daniel's, he wanted to kick the chair. He'd driven her to drink. It was a sad day when he had driven a woman to drink.

\* \* \* \*

Peyton poured a generous amount of Jack into a glass then pulled out a diet cola and finished filling the glass. She took a healthy sip and swallowed, relishing the burn as it traveled down her throat. She needed something to make her feel right then. The whisky was a good start.

Grabbing the glass she carried it back to the love seat and sat down. She didn't invite him to sit next to her. If he did, she might have broken down and cried, but he seemed to know and settled himself on a straight chair he dragged from the kitchen area.



“I started my management consulting business about eight years ago. I never dreamed it would turn into the success it has in such a short period of time. By the end of the first three years, I was a millionaire and by the end of the next three years, I was a billionaire. It came with a steep price though. I found out I couldn’t trust anyone to be real around me. They told me what they thought I wanted to hear, did what they thought would make me happy, pretended to like me for me and not for my money.” Ryker drew in a deep breath and let it out in a soft whoosh.

“It didn’t take long for me to realize that everyone I dated went out with me for my money. They didn’t like the same things I did and weren’t into the same things I was into. Every time I got close to someone, I’d attempt to introduce them to my kind of kink and they balked. Even the ones who claimed they were into it weren’t really into the scene.”

Peyton took another sip of the warm liquid and nodded her head for him to continue. Why they had never gotten around to talking about their pasts she didn’t know, but clearly they needed to.

“Finally, I decided I would never find anyone who would share my love of the D/s lifestyle, so I picked Sharon as the best candidate for me in my business world and we set a date.” He stopped and looked down at his hands resting on his knees.

“What happened? You obviously didn’t get married, but Sharon seems to think you’re still fair game.”

“I couldn’t completely turn off my dominant nature. She resisted and freaked out the first time I spanked her. She had tried to manipulate me into something I didn’t want to do and I turned her over my knee and spanked her. She called me a pervert and ran. It didn’t take long for my lifestyle to become public knowledge. She had outed me, so to speak. The elite society didn’t approve of my choices despite many of them being members of the same clubs I was. You didn’t let your private perversions become public knowledge. I packed up my things and moved here. I didn’t need them and their

condescending friendships. I could run my business from here and keep busy without having to deal with the fallout from the Sharon incident.”

“The Sharon incident.” Peyton gave a half laugh. “Then why is she chasing you now?”

“She wants what I could give her—prestige, wealth, position in society. All the things she doesn’t have right now and probably will never have after her little stunt.” Ryker leaned forward.

“I moved here thinking to live out my life alone. Then I found you,” he said. “I took one look at you across that bar and thought I’d been kicked in the head by a mule. You floored me. I knew I wanted you from that minute on.”

“Just like that. You wanted me and figured I’d be a good sex toy?” Peyton crossed her arms over her chest and gritted her teeth.

“No, I found out you were a little kinky yourself and that was icing on the cake. I would have done anything to have you as my partner. I guess I did do anything,” he said. “I went and fell in love with you.”

“You planned to make me fall in love with you all along? You were never just about the sex at all, were you?” she asked.

“Nope. It was all designed to win your love. Dirty and underhanded of me, but I knew we were meant to be together and all is fair in love and war. I figured we were in for a little of both.” Ryker got on his knees in front of her.

“I’m not good with relationships, Ryker. I ruined the only one I ever tried to be in. I don’t like to be told what to wear or how long my hair can be or anything like that. I can’t change who I am. I can’t be someone’s plaything. The D/s relationship won’t work with me.”

“You don’t understand. It’s not my lifestyle either. I don’t want a full D/s life. I’m a dominant and will always be that way, but I don’t want the responsibility of a slave or a full-time submissive. I like a challenge and the variety that someone with their own mind brings to the table. That’s why I like you, why I fell in love with you. You keep

me on my toes, but you respond so well to me, too.” He took both her hands in his and held them.

“There’s not fight between us, and there’s no predictability that if I tell you to suck my dick that you will fall on your knees and do it every time.” He bent down and kissed her knuckles.

“I enjoy watching your face when you come and how you make those little kittenish noises when you’re close. I want to be the only man who ever hears that from you. I want to know you want me as much as I need you.”

Peyton closed her eyes. “What if I can’t give you all of that?”

“I believe you can. I think you’re scared right now, but give it some time. Just don’t shut me out. Let’s give it a try and see how it works, Peyton. At least give us a chance to find out.”

Peyton pulled her hands from his and climbed over him to stand by the wall. She turned her back and leaned against it. So much went through her mind. It all sounded so possible. She banged the back of her head against the wall twice, then sighed.

“I’ll try. That’s all I can promise. I’m not going to pretend. I’m still not convinced a permanent relationship will work, but I’ll try.”

Ryker climbed back to his feet and smiled. He grabbed her and twirled her around the room until she felt dizzy.

“That’s enough or I’m going to barf on you.”

“Don’t want that. I have a much better idea than barfing.” Ryker picked her up and threw her over his shoulder.

Peyton let out a startled yelp and grabbed hold of the back of his jeans. He carried her into the bedroom and dropped her ass first onto the mattress. He began pulling off his clothes.

“What are you doing?” she asked.

“Getting undressed, which is what you should be doing right about now.”

“Why would I want to do that?”

“Because you sleep better without clothes on if I remember correctly.” He toed off his boots.

“So we’re just going to go to sleep?” She began peeling off her clothes still standing on the mattress.

“This mattress isn’t up to much more than sleeping. It’s not really even good for that, but I figure it will do since we’re here.” He slipped out of his jeans and climbed up on the mattress with her.

He twirled her around and unfastened her bra before pulling it off and throwing it across the room followed closely by her panties. When she was completely nude, he pulled her down with him. He wrapped his arms around her and kissed her. She sighed. His kisses felt good, soft slow kisses that brought tears to her eyes.

“Okay, we have a lot to accomplish tomorrow. Sleep. You only have a few hours till you have to be back at work tonight.”

“Wait, what do you mean we have a lot to accomplish tomorrow?”

“I’m moving you in with me Sunday after work.”

She pulled back from his embrace. “Like hell you are! I’m not giving up my apartment.”

“I know you’re not. That’s why I bought the building and put it in your name. You’ll always have it, but you’re going to move in with me tomorrow.” Before she could object he bent over and kissed her, deepening the kiss when she started to pull away. When he finally lifted his head, she’d forgotten what they’d been talking about.

“What were we talking about?”

“Nothing, dear.”

\* \* \* \*

He leaned in and nipped at her lower lip then nibbled his way around to her ear which he sucked inside to tease with his tongue. He couldn’t help but sigh in satisfaction when she crooned for him. This was what he wanted, to be able to seduce her into silence and then drive her wild with sex until she screamed. Suddenly she rolled him over and sat on top of him.

“I’m on top this time, buddy.” She grinned at the surprised look he was sure was on his face.

She’d caught him unawares. She appeared to be completely pleased with herself, too. She scratched lightly over his nipples with her nails then bit her bottom lip when he pushed his cock against her bottom. He was horny and didn’t mind if she was on top. Then she began to torture him.

She slipped her finger into her mouth and sucked on it. She twirled her tongue around it making sure it was good and wet before slowly pulling it out and lowering it until she had it at her hot wet pussy. She slipped it inside and pumped it a few times before removing it and bringing it to his mouth. He immediately opened for her and sucked the juices from her finger. She laughed and snatched it back.

He groaned when she positioned her pussy over his straining cock. With no warning, she plunged down on top of him. It was too much, too soon. She yelled out and came up again, only to dip again seemingly determined to fit all of him inside of her. This time when she dropped down on him he met her halfway and bumped the back of her cervix.

He pumped up into her as she slammed down on top of him. Over and over again they pounded into each other. Ryker’s finger sought her clit and soon had her hanging on the precipice of ecstasy. He loved watching her face take on that distant look when she was about to come. He watched as she used one hand to pinch and pull on her nipples. She held herself up using the other hand on his chest.

When he shouted that he was coming, she ground her hips against his and he pinched her clit between his fingers. She fell over with him. It was exquisite, it was torture, it was right. They belonged together. He knew it. Deep down, she knew it. He was sure.

He looked up into her face and noticed a seriousness had replaced the look of contentment of only a second ago.

“What are you thinking so hard about?” Ryker asked still a little out of breath.

“That I want it to work. Us.”

“Just give us a chance, baby. We’ll work just fine.”

“How do you know that though?” she asked.

“Because the way to make any relationship work is for one partner to make everything about the other one. I plan on making it all about your pleasure, Peyton.”

She grinned and pulled him down for one last kiss before she closed her eyes to sleep.

Ryker watched sleep take her and knew he’d been right to make it all about her pleasure.

# THE END

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# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Marla Monroe lives in the southern part of the United States. She writes sexy romance from the heart and often puts a twist of suspense in her books. She is a nurse and works in a busy hospital but finds plenty of time to follow her two passions, reading and writing. You can find her in a bookstore or a library at any given time when she is not at work or writing. Marla would love for you to visit her at her blog, [thearlamonroe.blogspot.com](http://thearlamonroe.blogspot.com) and leave a comment, or visit her website [www.marlamonroe.com](http://www.marlamonroe.com).

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