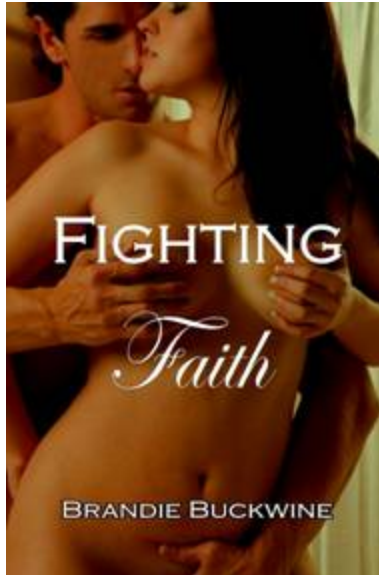




FIGHTING

Faith

BRANDIE BUCKWINE



Fighting Faith

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Chapter One

It was like being high. The band fed on the energy from the audience, and tonight, the audience was explosive. It was as if they knew this performance

was the beginning of something big. From the Soundgarden cover, *Blow Up the Outside World*, to his very own, *Losing Myself to You*, the crowd couldn't get enough Utopian Society. Neither could Eric. He tore up the stage, his lead guitar and vocals at their best. He wasn't in any hurry to sift through the rush of women that waited to pounce on him after the show, guaranteeing him a night of hot sex— always a bonus of playing live. No, if he could, he would keep playing all night tonight, just to keep the feeling alive.

At a table near the stage, Sarah, Jose's girlfriend —their biggest fan— sang along and blew kisses at the drummer. Eric had to laugh. The two were like teenagers, inseparable and constantly making out. Jose ignored Eric's warning that making it too obvious that he had a girlfriend could hurt the band, especially when Jose attracted more women than the rest of them. Even Tim and Daniel, the plainer of the foursome, had more women chasing them than they could handle. If the music industry rumors were true, the number of women would skyrocket once they released a real CD and began a real tour. No more local gigs after tonight. The next time they came to Rockabilly Hole, it would be to party and dance with the rest of the patrons.

Eric glanced toward Sarah's table again. A woman sat with her, a gorgeous woman. The woman looked to the stage and met his eye. Gorgeous was an understatement; she was a Goddess. She smiled and Eric missed a beat and forgot the lyrics to Default's, *Deny*. He looked away, determined to keep his groove and make this his best show ever. And to impress the hell out of Sarah's friend.

Seven songs later, they thanked the audience and made their way offstage, even as the crowd screamed for more. In an attempt to hide his eagerness, Eric did not follow the guys to the table. Instead, he headed to the bar. Women swarmed him, and he glanced to Sarah's friend to make sure she saw all the women clamoring to get his attention, hoping to take him home.

To his fan's dismay, he finished his drink, pecked a few of them on the cheek, and headed to join his friends. He pulled up a chair and sat. Sarah interrupted Daniel's story, about the black eye he received at the hands of an over-zealous groupie, to introduce her friend.

"Eric, this is Faith, the one I've been telling you about. Faith ran with the same crowd Jose and I did back in high school."

Faith smiled and extended her hand. His brain turned to mush as he grasped it within his own, but he kept it together, giving her a cool nod.

“She’s a videographer and she’s interested in doing the documentary of the band’s studio recordings,” Sarah said.

The record label suggested they document their sessions as a promotional tool, and right away, Sarah and Jose offered their friend’s services. Paying for it was the issue. They brought in a decent living, playing to larger crowds than in years past, but the kind of production they wanted would cost some serious bucks.

“Faith will work with us on the price, I’m sure of it,” Sarah told them when she first mentioned the idea. *Us?* Since when was she part of the band? Still, with the prospect of someone who would work cheap, Eric overlooked Sarah’s assumption.

“How long have you been in business, Faith?” he asked.

“I’ve been out on my own for about three years. Before that, I worked for Icon Productions.”

Up close, she was even more gorgeous, and she had the cutest dimples. “Judging from what you just saw, do you think you could work with us?” Eric asked.

“I do. I love your energy, but I have to ask, do you have any material with any original rhythm patterns for your album?” The blood drained from Eric’s face and his gut seized. “I mean, if you really hope to make an impact as an up-and-coming band, you can’t just copy what’s already out there.”

The table’s other occupants shifted nervously, all eyes on Eric. The blood that fled moments before raced back, his head pounding and his pulse racing. “I write all our songs,” he said through his teeth. “It’s all original.”

Faith took a drink of her beer, unaware of how close she was to being picked up and thrown out of the club. “I’m sure you did write them, and they’re good, but every riff and pattern is taken from another song. Eddie Van Halen says that, eventually, you have to put your own mark—”

“I know what Eddie says,” he slammed his drink to the table, now seeing the woman across from him for the bitch she truly was.

“Okay, you don’t have to get so mad. I was just making an observation.”

“Leave the song writing to me, and you can go make your little videos somewhere else.” He stood, “Yeah, that’s right, fuck you.” He stormed away, tossing “Bitch,” over his shoulder, satisfied he made his point. Who

the hell did she think she was, telling him how to write music? What kind of production princess went around quoting Eddie Van Halen?

Eric downed several drinks at the bar, reevaluating his plans for the night until he saw two men approach Faith and his friends. Both men fawned over the trollop, kissing her cheeks and rubbing her shoulders. She stood, took one on each arm, and the three exited the club together. *Slut!* How didn't he guess that about her? Usually a much better judge of character, he disappointed himself.

Last call and two drinks in his hands, he returned to the table. They all stared at him, but no one spoke.

"What?"

Sarah shrugged her shoulders and shook her head. "I can't believe you were such a dick to Faith. You do know it will be impossible to find anyone else who's decent for the job, don't you?"

"Yeah, you really blew it, man," Tim nodded.

"I'm sure we can find someone else. I don't want to work with that cunt."

"Eric!" Sarah squealed.

"I'm sorry, but that woman is the devil in disguise."

"She happens to be a very close friend, and she's one of the nicest people I know. It's not her fault you can't take a little constructive criticism."

"Constructive criticism? Is that what you think that was? She doesn't know shit! People love our songs."

"Love them or not, you're going to have to suck it up and work with her," Daniel said. "I've checked around, and anyone else will be so far beyond our budget, it just won't happen."

Jose nodded.

"You too, Jose? Am I the only one who can see this is a bad idea?"

"Sorry, Bro. I've seen her work, and she's an artist. Even if there is someone else out there as cheap, I bet she's ten times better."

Outnumbered, Eric conceded. It was only for a couple of weeks. He could survive it, but he determined to make her life hell until it was over.

~

Bundling the two tripods under her arm, Faith swung her camera bag over her shoulder. She was late, and she knew Eric would be a huge asshole about it. She lost track of time going over Mark and Patrick's civil union ceremony. They made such a sweet couple, and she owed them for rescuing her from Eric and his buddies the other night, after their show. Tripping across the parking lot to the studio, she promised herself she'd finish their video that night and drop it off at their house.

Sure enough, as soon as she walked into the studio, Eric started in.

"It's about time. You're supposed to run on our schedule, not the other way around."

She wanted to slap the sneer off his face. "Why? Did you have a quality moment of talent, and I missed it?" It was all she could do not to burst out laughing at the look on his face. *So easily ruffled. This is going to be fun.* The man *did* have talent, not that she'd ever tell him that, but there was a barrier between his current abilities and greatness. He was so close though. That was the only reason she accepted the job: she wanted to be around and involved when he finally jumped the hurdle and found his gift. Well, that and because Jose was an old friend. She'd do anything for him or Sarah.

There was also the fact that she felt like a bitch in heat whenever Eric was near. The first time he smiled at her, she creamed her pants. He was sexy beyond belief and chock full of charisma, but he had an ego as great as the pyramids, a huge turn-off. It was kind of a relief that he turned off the charm and turned on the asshole whenever she was around.

She set up her tripods and cameras in optimal locations, and checked her remotes while the band warmed up. Everything was ready. She started with her handheld, walking around, focusing in on each band member in succession.

Eric stopped playing mid-song. "What's the point of putting all that shit in our way if you aren't even going to use it?"

"It doesn't look like it's in your way, and how do you know I'm not using it?" She held up one of the small remotes.

A quick shake of his head, and Eric started them over from the beginning. After a few minutes, he told them all to stop. "Tim, stop trying to play with me on this. You're bass. You don't follow Daniel and me."

“I’m not. I’m trying to fill in the blanks, I just can’t tell where you’re going ‘cause you keep changing it up.”

Faith couldn’t resist. “I don’t play bass — I fill space.”

Eric’s head whipped around to look at her.

“That’s good, I like that,” Tim said. “How’d you come up with that?”

“She didn’t,” Eric growled. “It’s a quote from Rick Danko.”

“Who is Rick Danko?”

“Arguably one of the best bass players in history,” Eric said, just as Faith said, “The best bass player ever.” He scowled at her. “How do you know that?”

“I’m a student of rock and roll,” she shrugged. “I probably should have learned to play, but my parents didn’t want me to. They wanted me to go into law.”

“They must be so proud,” Eric said, rolling his eyes. He turned to Tim, “Seriously, how do you call yourself a bass player, but don’t know who Rick Danko is?”

“Sorry,” he shrugged. “I just play. It’s easier when I have something to play along with.”

Faith turned her head away to grin, but she could sense Eric’s rage.

Temper, temper!

She spent the next ten hours waiting for them to get it right. A quick dinner break to a burger joint around the corner proved Tim and Daniel to be nice guys. Thankfully, Eric stayed behind.

“So, seriously Faith, how do you know all these obscure quotes from famous guitarists?” Tim asked, sticking fry in his mouth. “I loved the Eddie Van Halen thing the other night.”

“I don’t know. I read a lot of interviews, watched MTV all the time growing up. In high school, I had almost all the back issues of Rolling Stone, read every one, cover to cover, but my mom threw them out.”

“You’re kidding. Why would she do that?” Daniel asked.

“She said I was becoming a packrat and wasting my time on crap. I cried for days,” she said, tears filling her eyes at the memory. “We don’t get along very well,” she added.

“I remember when she did that,” Jose said, nodding. “We took you out and got you shitfaced. Do you remember?”

“Not very well.” What she did remember from that night was her ex-boyfriend, Taylor, leaving her sitting on her front steps, too drunk to know she was home.

“So tell me another good one,” Tim said.

“What, a quote?”

“Yeah.”

She thought a moment, searching her mind for something memorable. “I don't want you to play me a riff that's going to impress Joe Satriani— give me a riff that makes a kid want to go out and buy a guitar and learn to play. Mr. Ozzy Osbourne”

“I've heard that one,” Daniel said. “I like it.”

Jose checked his cell phone. “Hey, it's getting late. We'd better get back.”

“Should we get something for Hitler?” They all laughed at her.

“You don't pull any punches, do you?” Daniel asked.

“I call 'em like I see 'em,” she said. “No sense lying to people just so they can feel better about themselves when they shouldn't.”

“He's really not that bad, in fact, I'd describe him as a nice guy,” Tim said. “I don't know why you bring out the worst in him.”

“Yeah, well, there're two sides to that coin: he brings out the worst in Faith, too,” said Jose.

She snorted. “I've seen enough to know that there isn't enough good side to make up for bad with that one. The guy's an asshole.”

“Well, I'm going to grab Hitler the asshole a burger and fries.” Jose stood and headed for the counter.

Chapter Two

Morning dew clung to the bushes and showered Eric as he brushed past them, descending the steps to Faith's deck. A pair of clippers would go a long way to clearing the place up. It was so thick with growth there was

almost no view left. It figured the stupid bitch preferred to be surrounded by flowers than the glory of the mountain vistas. Eric couldn't decide if his hostility to her shrubbery was based on the shrubbery itself, or his intense dislike for Faith. It didn't matter; he didn't want to be here, period.

Just give her the stupid bag and get the fuck out. The less time he spent around her, the better. Only a week in the studio with her stalking their every move had him at his wits end. He approached the sliding glass doors and raised his hand to knock, but Faith appeared from the side of the house. She jumped when she saw him and slapped her hand to her chest.

"Eric," she said, her head tilting to the side.

He started to raise the bag, but froze as she came into full view. The lacy black slip she wore hugged her curves, and he swallowed hard. He could make out her nipples clearly through the thin material, and his dick stiffened. He lowered the bag to conceal his growing erection, angry with himself for reacting to her this way— angry with Faith for parading around in something so skimpy.

"Something you wanted?" she asked, in that snotty tone that to him, sounded like nails on a chalkboard.

Looking anywhere but at her, he said, "Yeah, I had a bet with everyone. They said if I came over this early, I'd find the four guys you fucked last night still taking turns ramming your ass, but I told them that nobody would be caught dead with you, *sober*, in the light of day." Eric didn't know why he said it, for some reason it made him feel good to put her down.

With a sneer, she said, "Well, I guess, as always, you're the winner. Now, what do you want?"

With his dick back in its place, he reached out and handed her the bag. "Sarah asked me to bring these to you."

She took the bag and looked inside at the assortment of homegrown vegetables. "Anything else?"

Before he could stop himself, he blurted, "Yeah, before anyone else sees you, I should let you know, you look like a heifer in that get-up."

"Fuck you, Eric."

He could tell the comment stung. Women— always so hung up on their weight. "You wish you were lucky enough to fuck me." He laced the comment with as much conceit as he could muster. She rolled her eyes and turned to go inside. The beautiful shape of her rear as she wrestled the

stubborn sliding door open revived his hard-on. “Yeah, you best get that fat ass inside before it eclipses the sun.” She froze in the doorway, her body visibly tense. Why did he say shit like that? Why did he feel the need to be *that* guy when he was around her?

Faith whipped around. “What is your problem?” she asked, through gritted teeth. “Why the hell do you act like such an asshole?” She crept toward him, not stopping until she was just inches away, and glared up at him. Eric could see the fury in her eyes; he could also see the shape of her supple breasts as they heaved in anger. He hated that it turned him on as much as it did.

“I don’t like sluts and I think they should be treated like the trash they are.” He heard the words travel through the air, and was amazed that he would talk to a woman that way.

Without warning, Faith’s hand flew up and slapped him hard. “You’re a prick!”

“Whore,” he shot back, as the sting spread across his face. When her hand rose again, he was ready and grabbed her wrist before she could make contact, squeezing it harder than he knew he should. Her left hand shot up in the form of a fist and caught him on the jaw. The hard hit rattled his brain for a moment, but he still had the presence of mind to grab her other wrist. Glaring down at her, he asked, “Are we done now?”

She didn’t answer, but fire filled her narrowed eyes and perspiration spotted her brow as she tried to pull free. Not wanting to risk being hit again, Eric held her by her wrists until he saw her breathing begin to slow. When she seemed calm, he eased his hands away, but no sooner had he let go than she reached up and grabbed both his ears, pulling them as hard as she could.

“What the hell Faith?” The pain was immense. Eric grabbed at her hands to pull them away, but it only made her pull harder. He couldn’t help but lower his body, trying to follow the direction she pulled. His brain flashed white light; he couldn’t believe it hurt so bad. He squeezed her wrists to keep her from pulling any harder, but when he tried to pull her away, her nails bit into his skin.

He could see the hatred in her face. Did she think she could kill him this way? By now, the pain was so intense he wondered the same thing. Rage filled him, and he yanked her arm as hard as he could, but her grip was so

tight it did nothing but bring them both to their knees and send agonizing tendrils of pain through his body. Her expression changed to one of smug satisfaction. She held him there, not letting him move and threatening to rip off both of his ears if he struggled anymore.

In a deep voice, she carefully enunciated, “You don’t talk to me like that. Do you hear me?” By the end, she was almost shouting and her fingers dug into his ears even deeper. He didn’t answer, couldn’t answer as he fought for air through his pain. On their knees, she had him level with her chest, and Eric wondered that he had no hard on now as her nipples strained against the thin, silky fabric and stared him in the face.

Without thinking, he shoved his face to her breast and sucked her nipple into his mouth. He bit down as hard as he could. With a scream, Faith released his ears and Eric wrestled her to the ground. He sprawled on top of her, his hands still holding her wrists, and her nipple still between his teeth. He pinned her wrists to the damp boards of the deck, stretching her arms above her head, keeping them as far away from him as possible. Her breath came in short bursts as she strained against him and he bit harder until her struggling stopped. When tears filled her eyes, he released his bite.

“You son of a bitch, what the fuck?” she spit, fighting for air. “I swear I’m gonna kill you!” She wiggled under his weight, trying to free herself. As she squirmed, Eric felt his cock move, even though his ears still burned and throbbed.

“Good luck with that, Faith. You don’t seem to be in a position to do much of anything.”

Her eyes were dark with rage as she struggled to catch her breath. “You can’t keep me here all day; eventually, you have to let me up, and when you do...”

“You’ll do what?” he cut her off. “Trust me— I’m not letting you up until I’m sure it’s safe. I’ve got all day to lay here if I have to.” His dick was rock hard, and he knew she could feel it, especially when she writhed under his weight. Eric lifted himself slightly to find a more comfortable position, and although nearly imperceptible, she raised her hips with him. Glancing down, he saw her nipples hardened against the black slip, and he licked his lips.

“Yep,” he continued to look at her breasts, “I could entertain myself all day, right here.” Her body trembled. Hatred flashed in her eyes, and he

hoped she saw the same feeling reflected back, despite his erection. After the way she tortured his ears, he decided a little torturing of his own might be justifiable.

He looked back to her nipples and chose the one he hadn't bitten so viciously. Through the material, he gently circled it with his tongue. Faith gasped, and when he looked at her, there was confusion in her expression. He returned to her nipple, lightly licking it again, sucking it into his mouth. A moan escaped her lips as he flicked it with his tongue.

"Eric, you don't want to go there buddy. Not a good idea," she said, her voice still venomous.

"Don't I?" he asked. Using his teeth, he pulled the top of her slip down to reveal her breast and one very erect nipple. "I'm pretty sure I do," he said as he pulled the stiff bud into his mouth, teasing it with his tongue. This time, he could definitely feel her hips rise as she tried to stifle a moan. He released it and moved to the other side, pulling at the material with his teeth again. Her other nipple remained swollen from his abuse, so he gently made a ring around it with the tip of his tongue. Remembering what made him bite it in the first place, he sucked it into his mouth hard, creating as much pressure on it as he could without biting it again.

Faith cried out in pain, and tears came to her eyes, so he released it. "God damn you Eric, I swear, you are going down. I'll kick your ass myself!"

"Still think you have some kind of power here, don't you?" he said in a nasty tone, his pulse rate increasing. He could feel it from his throbbing cock clear up to his aching ears. "Sluts don't have power. They give it away every time they fuck someone." Slut or not, he was beyond turned-on and wanted her, now. He took both her wrists in one hand, keeping them pinned to the ground, and brought his other hand down to the bottom of her slip. Feeling around for the hem, he slipped his hand underneath and slowly slid it up her leg. He found nothing but smooth skin as far up as her hip.

"Just as I figured, sluts don't wear panties, either."

Through her teeth, barely able to control the danger in her voice, she said, "I'm at home, and I was alone. I didn't think there'd be anyone checking!"

Eric ran his hand up and back down her leg, lifting his weight off her to access her inner thigh. "I bet your pussy's wet too, just like a slut's."

She opened her mouth to protest, but his hand found its mark, and he slowly ran a finger up her flooded slit. Her mouth remained open, but no

words came out. He stopped when he reached her clit, and he could feel her tremble and her hips rise when he circled it with his finger. He pulled her nipple back into his mouth and swirled his tongue around it to match his finger circling her clit. When he flicked the bud of her nipple with his tongue, he let his finger brush across her swollen clit, making her gasp and thrust her hips.

As he pierced her with his finger, he said, “Yeah, just what I thought; soaking wet.” To him, she felt like heaven.

Faith shook her head at him, and her voice shook the same way, “You are so going down when this is over.”

“Am I going down, Faith?” he asked, pushing a second finger inside as he rubbed her clit with his thumb.

She was nearly panting, “Yes, yes you are.” Her face flushed and her eyes went from a burning fire to a smoldering haze, struggling to keep their focus.

Eric removed his fingers and brought them to his mouth. He stuck them between his lips and slowly sucked them clean. “I don’t think I can wait that long.” Goosebumps spread across her flesh and fire returned to her eyes, but the flame was one of desire and need.

In a flurry of movement, he released her arms and legs, put his hands under her hips while rising to his knees, and lifted her up until only her head and shoulders were on the ground and her cunt was in his face. She cried out in surprise, as her legs kicked in the air, not sure where to go. Her slip fell and gathered above her breasts.

“Oh my God Eric, what the hell are you doing?”

He wrapped his arm around her waist and pulled her against him to hold her up, and with his other hand, he spread her folds. Eric’s mouth watered as the musky scent of her desire filled his senses and made him dizzy.

“I’m going down.” His brain told him to stop and leave her there, but his lust cried louder, so he buried his tongue in her pussy, the taste and texture of her silencing the part of him that warned him to run. Faith’s eyes fluttered and closed, the fight in her draining away.

Slowly, his tongue travelled up one side of her slit, and then lazily circled her clit. As he sucked her labia into his mouth, Faith cried out and finally draped her legs over his shoulders. More juices rushed to the surface to urge him on, and Eric lapped them, careful not to make direct contact with her

swelling bud. He teased her, and she moaned as he ran his tongue up the other side and again, circled her clit.

Now that her hands were free, Faith reached up and entwined her fingers through his hair, clenching it into her hands. Eric was slightly shocked, afraid the battle would begin again, with her pulling his hair out, but with her firm grip, she pushed his head against her and dug her heels into his back.

He continued to tease her as she softly moaned, circumnavigating her opening with his tongue, then back up to barely brush her clit.

“Ah! Oh God, please,” she cried, and her whole body jerked in spasms.

Eric thrust his finger inside her, then two, as deep as he could. He felt her muscles contract around him as his tongue found her bud and he pushed against it, sucked it between his teeth, and ran his tongue over it again and again as Faith writhed in pleasure. He continued to sink his fingers into her, massaging her g-spot, licking and sucking her clit until she released his head and slapped her hands to the ground on either side of her.

“Oh! Oh my God! I’m gonna come!”

The surprise in her voice made him wonder if it was her first time, so he worked harder, until she screamed in ecstasy and juice gushed around his fingers. Her fists pounded the ground and her thighs locked around his head as he ran his tongue up her slit, sucking and licking all of the come her orgasm produced. He’d never tasted anything like her— it was intoxicating. Wanting more, Eric continued to suck and lick her clit between his lips until he felt her come again. While her body wracked in spasms of pleasure, he savored every drop her pussy squeezed out for him.

He eased her trembling hips to the ground and quickly removed his clothes before she could recover. Eric didn’t want to take the chance of her running before he got his turn. He kept his mouth shut, not trusting what he might say. At this point, the last thing he wanted to do was piss her off again, although, considering the state she was in, he didn’t think anything he said would have any effect. As he removed his shirt and jeans, Faith squeezed her legs together and twisted her hips from side to side, still riding the remaining waves of her orgasms.

Eric lay over the top of her and squeezed his knee between her legs. When she opened them slightly, he slipped his other knee in, and then using them both, he spread her legs wide. She tried to meet his gaze, but he could tell

she was only now regaining her focus and he couldn't read her expression. He reached down and ran his finger up her slit as it quickly flooded once again. Finding her still swollen clit, he brushed it and flicked it with his finger until she cried out. He licked her jaw line, stopping to nip at her chin, and continued on to her ear. He took her lobe into his mouth and tugged it gently with his lips.

Still moaning and gasping, Faith reached down and dug her nails into his ass. Taking it as a signal, he ran his dick up and down her pussy and then eased just the tip into her opening. He was so hard; nothing could have stopped him from fucking her right then. No one ever turned him on the way she did, and if the earth swallowed them up at that moment, he still would have found a way to bury his cock inside this woman.

Her mouth opened to gasp for air as he pulled the head out of her pussy, and he leaned down and bit her lip as he impaled her with the full length of his dick. She cried out as his flesh slammed against hers, her eyes widened and then squeezed shut.

“Ah, God you feel good,” he groaned, unable to stop himself. He didn't want her to know how much he was enjoying this, or how incredible it felt to be inside her. Deciding it was best to keep his mouth busy, he bent his head down and sucked one of her peaked nipples between his lips. Her walls tightened and pulled him in deeper with each stroke.

Arching her back, Faith wrapped her legs around him and squeezed him, driving him in, pulling him to her with every thrust. Releasing her swollen nipple, he took her chin between his lips, flicking his tongue back and forth, then moved to her earlobe. He released it as her moaning grew more fervent, and he watched her eyes lose their focus and roll back into her head. She squeezed them shut and cried out.

He took her hands and pinned them to the deck above her head once again as his own climax closed in on him. While the walls of her pussy contracted around his shaft, his head filled with bright explosions of light, keeping time with his racing heartbeat. When Faith screamed out, he covered her mouth with his own, not in a kiss, but to breathe in the energy of her orgasm. As her cries of passion entered his body, he couldn't contain his own voice, a loud moan escaped as an unfamiliar tidal wave of sensations overcame him. He'd never come so hard in his life— it felt like he might actually pass out.

The last of his seed escaped, and Eric's mind reeled. He collapsed onto her in exhaustion. They lay there, each trying to recover from the explosion of energy they just created. At last, Eric rolled off of her and onto the deck. His thoughts were still spinning, dozens of them, tangled in his brain. Had he just done what he thought he had? How in the hell was it so consuming and powerful? Why couldn't he stop himself? The questions flooded him as Faith breathlessly asked, "What the hell was that?"

With great effort, Eric slowed his thoughts and chose his answer carefully, needing to confirm that nothing between them had changed. "That," he said, "is how you fuck a slut." He rose to retrieve his clothes, careful not to meet her eye. He knew the bewilderment and hurt he would find waiting for him if he did, and he wasn't sure what she might see reflecting back to her. He hated himself; hated himself for what he'd done to her and for the way he was now acting, but it was like a wave he couldn't stop riding.

When he finished dressing, he pulled his wallet from his pocket and removed two crisp, hundred dollar bills. When he dropped them, they gracefully floated down, landing on her stomach. He didn't have to look at her to know there were tears in her eyes, but he couldn't stop himself. She looked pitiful, the money on her stomach and her slip still bunched above her breast. Beautiful. "I believe that's pretty close to the going rate for a good fuck," he said as he turned to leave, regretting he'd called it 'good.'

"Eric?" she called after him, almost in a whisper. He stopped. "Please don't tell anyone about this."

He stood, frozen to the spot and closed his eyes to try to weaken the pangs of regret he knew his reply would bring. "Like I'd want to brag to anyone about fucking you." He shook his head and didn't wait for a reply or turn to see her reaction. He bolted up the stairs and out of the gate as quickly as he could, anxious to leave the incident behind him. Deep down, he knew that would be impossible; with the sensations he'd just experienced, it would stay with him forever.

Chapter Three

Faith stepped into the hot spray of the shower, her mind still reeling from the bizarre morning spent laid out, almost bare ass naked, on her deck, *submitting*, to Eric of all people. The man was the only person in the entire world she could say she truly hated, yet he had just rocked that world in way she never imagined possible. She couldn't get her mind around it; it made no sense at all.

The minute she saw him, or the minute she saw him staring at her in that way, her knees went weak, and she was afraid her pussy would actually start weeping down her leg. Luckily, he opened his mouth and saved her the embarrassment, but Faith had to wonder if that humility might have been better than mortification she now felt, having given him all the control to hurt her, yet take her to a place she could never have imagined.

She lathered her body, noting the places he'd touched her, again, feeling the sensations as she imagined his lips, his hands sliding over her body. Her nipple still ached from his bite, but hardened of its own will when she recalled the feel of his lips around it. Her hand slipped between her legs to cleanse away the remains of their lust, and her own touch brought her pussy back to life, demanding the same attention he lavished on it.

Applying pressure to her clit, she imagined his mouth teasing her once more, and the waves of pleasure the memory brought were strong enough to make her fall against the wall of the shower stall as she continued to stimulate herself, gently circling the little button he'd pulled between his teeth to masterfully lick and suck. She could feel the sensations growing from deep within, needing little encouragement to rush to the surface and overcome her once again. It was all she could do to stay on her feet and keep her balance as her orgasm violently hit her, spreading tingling waves of pleasure through her body.

Four times now —four times in one day— she experienced what no one else, including herself, had ever been able to elicit from her body. Sure, she made herself come before, but nothing like the earth shattering orgasms he pulled from her. What she experienced in the past was just her body's knee-jerk reaction to stimulation. It came and went without much notice or excitement.

When she could, she straightened up and resumed her shower, determined to let the memory go. Like it or not, she would have to deal with Eric on a daily basis, and going weak at the knees and creaming her pants every time he was near would not do. Anger was the better emotion to retain, and she resolved to think of only that whenever he was near. *That should do the trick.*

They weren't working today, but she had agreed to meet everyone for supper in town that evening, and as she stepped out of the shower, she determined that acting as though nothing happened between them would be no problem at all; they could just continue on insulting each other, business as usual. If she worked it right, she wouldn't even have to listen to him at dinner. She'd choose her spot carefully.

Still, Faith couldn't keep herself from trying just a little harder to look her best as she dressed for the night. *No harm in giving him a good glimpse of what he won't be getting again.* She picked out a dress that gently hugged her curves and showed a little cleavage, yet wasn't too dressy. She styled her hair up, allowing just a few flimsy strands to fall in a whisper against her shoulders. The delicate necklace she chose draped over her collarbone, accentuating the path his mouth followed hours ago. *Perfect,* she thought as she studied her reflection. *Not overdone, just well stated.*

~

When she arrived at the restaurant, she smiled at the appreciative stares and nods she received from Tim and Daniel, not to mention the other patrons. Watching carefully out of the corner of her eye, she saw Eric's jaw drop a little, but he soon recovered and donned the usual scowl he wore in her presence. Faith made sure not to meet his gaze directly, but was left with a spot at the end of the table, facing him. She wouldn't have to listen to him, but whenever she looked up, there he was. Sarah sat beside her, making it easy to stay occupied with conversation.

The first thing out of Sarah's mouth was, "Did you get the bag of veggies?"

Faith couldn't stop the blush that spread across her cheeks at the question. "Yes, I did. Thank you."

"I'm sorry about sending Eric; I know that must have been a bit awkward." *You have no idea*, Faith thought. "Everyone else was tied up or sleeping and I promised you I'd get them to you right away this morning."

"It's no big deal," she replied, covering Sarah's hand with her own. She glanced up and found Eric looking at her, but he quickly looked away. "We exchanged our usual witty banter and he left."

"Good, I felt bad about it."

"No need," Faith said, smiling up at the waiter who handed her a menu, then took his time filling her glass with water. He seemed to take a special interest in looking down her dress, but Faith pretended not to notice.

From the other end of the table, Eric pounded his glass on the table. "We'd kinda like some water down here, if you're not too busy." The whole group looked at him in surprise, Faith included. Setting her glass back down on the table, the waiter quickly went to work filling the remaining glasses. As he listed off the specials of the evening, obviously flustered, he stammered, making one mistake after another. Faith worried that she'd perhaps gone overboard when choosing her attire.

When the man finished and left the group to look at their menus, Tim said, "They must not get many beautiful women in this place; the poor guy didn't even know how to act."

Faith smiled, grateful for the compliment that eased the awkwardness at the table, until she heard Eric's voice speak up. "He probably just recognized her as a regrettable one night stand, and hoped she didn't recognize him!" He laughed, but he laughed alone. Tim rolled his eyes and shook his head, very familiar by now with the "put down" game the two played. Faith had no comeback this time, however, and continued to study the menu.

When the waiter came back to take their order, he asked, "Is this all together, or do you need separate checks?"

"Put it all on one," Eric told him, "except for the lady at the end. She'll need her own ticket." He nodded toward Faith.

Sarah gasped at his rudeness, but Daniel spoke up first. “Eric! How can you be such an asshole?”

“What? I happen to know that Faith has plenty of money right now. She can pay for her own dinner.”

Daniel looked at Eric in disbelief, and turned to the waiter, “One ticket and I’ll take it.”

“Fine, all on one, but give it to me,” Eric said, shooting a nasty look in Faith’s direction. His behavior didn’t shock her; she was glad to see that nothing had changed, and Eric was being his usual rude and idiotic self, with just a tad more emphasis on the idiot part. She spent the rest of the dinner tied up in conversation with Sarah and Jose, relieved not to have to hear anymore from the dimwit at the end of the table.

When the meal was through, Sarah and Jose took to the dance floor. Faith danced a couple of dances with Tim and Daniel, but then excused herself to the ladies room. On her way back, their waiter cornered her in the hallway. The nervous man stammered through an awkward apology for his earlier behavior.

“I just, well...you’re really pretty, and I can’t help but be very attracted to you. I don’t suppose you’d consider going out with me sometime?” he bravely inquired just as Eric was passing by, having to squeeze past them in the narrow hallway to reach the men’s room. She had to think for a moment about just how far she was willing to go to get under his skin, but decided it was best to draw the line at accepting a date with some guy she didn’t even know and wasn’t attracted to, even though he was very nice looking.

“You’re sweet,” she told the young man, “but I have a boyfriend.”

The waiter nodded. “It’s a shame he’s not here. Maybe he could give that jerk at your table a lesson on manners.”

“It wouldn’t help,” she said as Eric re-entered the hallway a little too soon. “Some people are just assholes and can’t be helped.” She made sure to look directly at him as she said it, but he had no reaction as he passed.

“Well, if you change your mind, you know where to find me,” the waiter smiled at her as he took his leave.

Faith returned to the table to find it all but deserted. Only Eric sat at one end, watching the dance floor as though he didn’t see her. Determining that she was tired of the game, she decided to call it a night. After signaling to Sarah that she was leaving, she gathered her sweater from her chair. The

waiter returned to the table to ask if they needed anything else. Coldly, Eric told him they were fine.

Faith reached in her pocket and pulled out the two, one hundred dollar bills Eric dropped onto her that morning. Turning to Eric, she said, "Thanks for dinner Eric." When she was sure he was looking, she handed the money to the waiter, "I'll get the tip."

Both Eric's and the waiter's eyebrows shot up in surprise. She could have sworn that Eric's face turned a little grey with the exchange, while the waiter looked like he might faint from happiness.

"See you tomorrow," she said as she left the table, only slightly regretting the expensive message. She really needed the cash, but the look on Eric's face was worth it. *Money well spent*, she decided as she walked out the door.

~

"What the hell is your problem?" Sarah asked, taking the seat next to Eric's. "I've never seen you treat anyone that way, least of all, a woman. You're the 'nice guy,' or, at least, that's what I've always thought about you."

He was ashamed of his behavior, once again, and he could feel the blood rushing to his face as Sarah questioned him. *Yeah, dumbass, what is your problem?* He took a long swig of his beer and continued to hold it in his hand as he set it back on the table, tilting it in a circular motion so that the base of the bottle traced its future spot, the same way his tongue had teased Faith's clit earlier that day. Eric felt his dick go hard and begin to throb. He slammed the bottle into place.

"I don't know why. She just rubs me the wrong way, and don't act like I'm the only one to blame here; she's a nasty bitch to me too. You've seen it yourself, plenty of times."

Sarah narrowed her eyes and shook her head. "It's just weird. You're like a different person when she's around; your personality changes."

Eric was well aware of the bizarre transformation Faith brought about, and he was at a loss to explain it. And today, that transformation became even more bizarre. It wasn't just a change in his personality she caused; he now had a physical reaction to her that was beyond his control, and he hated her for it.

Jose moved from the opposite end of the table to sit next to Sarah, giving her a kiss as he sat. "What are you guys talking about?"

"Where discussing what an asshole Eric is to Faith," Sarah said.

"Yeah, what's up with that?"

"Nothing's up with that, there's nothing to talk about," Eric said as he stood. It was time to find someone to take his mind off the subject that had bothered him all day. "If you'll excuse me, I'm going to find someone to dance with and see if maybe I can get lucky tonight." He shot the two a wink as he wandered away from the table, in search of anyone that could occupy his mind, but more importantly, someone that could satisfy his suddenly insatiable lust. At the bar, he found a likely candidate and sidled up beside her.

"Are you here with anyone?" he bluntly asked the voluptuous blond.

The woman slowly looked him up and down. "No, no I'm not," she said, obviously liking what she saw.

"Good, neither am I. Can I buy you a drink?"

"That would be nice." She turned to him and extended her hand, and as she did, Eric caught a glimpse of her ample bosom that threatened escape from her low-cut, loose dress. "I'm Vivian."

"Nice to meet you Vivian, I'm Eric." When the sight of her braless nipples tenting the material around them did nothing to arouse him, Eric knew his quest would be more difficult than he thought. He left Vivian at the bar after a few drinks and many attempts to create a connection, and went home alone.

Chapter Four

The sun lit up the pavilion as it made its descent to the horizon, despite the rain that fell in torrents all around them. Eric wore a path around the protective structure, irritated that nature stopped what, up until now, had been an especially productive day. Faith told them a few scenes of the band playing outside in beautiful surroundings would break up the monotony of the studio recordings, and give some depth to the production. He knew she was right and he was increasingly impressed with her imaginative management of the film, but if they were in the studio, they would still be working instead of sitting around, waiting out the rain. Any break in a well flowing session pissed him off. It was hard to find the rhythm once things came to a halt, and he blamed her for the time lost.

Faith wouldn't look at him when his path led him past her. She focused on her book alone, and that made him angry too, as though she should be apologizing for the weather instead of taking advantage of the break.

"Eric, will you please sit down," Daniel said. "You're not doing anything but making us all antsy."

"I don't even know why we're still here. It's not like we'll be able to do anything, even when the rain stops. It's gonna be too wet."

Without looking up from her book, Faith said, "It will dry fast. It's warm enough and there's enough sun left. Some sunset shots will be great, especially with the air so crisp and clear."

Eric stormed toward her. Leaning against her chair, he growled, "Our equipment will get wet, you stupid bitch!" He pushed himself off the chair and continued his pacing. When he glanced her way, he saw her cheeks flushing, but her gaze was still fixed on her book.

"You know Eric, I know a thing or two about electronic equipment," she said without looking up. "The concrete will dry first, and that's where we'll set up. I won't let anything happen to your stuff. If we have to, we'll set up in here. In fact, it would make for some really good footage."

He was aware of her knowledge of electronics, and felt silly for his outburst, but he also felt better, now that Faith knew he was holding her responsible.

"Are all the windows in the van rolled up?" he asked no one in particular.

"Yes Eric," Sarah said, "I made sure they were all up." She stood and walked to the railing of the gazebo. "Hey look, a double rainbow!" she pointed at the colorful arc as the rain began to let up.

Eric watched Faith put her book down and join Sarah to look at the sky in awe. In just an old pair of jeans and an even older ZZ Top t-shirt, she still looked as sexy as hell. Although rainbows didn't impress him much, Eric took advantage of the distraction and made his way to the railing, careful to stand as far away from her as he could. When the rain first came, they were all drenched within a minute as they ran from storing the instruments and equipment in the van, to the gazebo. Faith's wet shirt left little to the imagination, and he was sure that was the reason she secluded herself from the group and immersed herself in her book. Thankfully, her shirt had since dried, but the damage was done; his impatient tirade was more about covering his physical reaction than any break in schedule.

"Holy shit, can you see? It's a triple rainbow!" Jose said, pointing at the massive bow.

"I should get my camera," Faith said, backing away from the railing.

"I'll get-" Eric caught himself before he ran to fetch her camera for her. She stopped and looked at him in surprise. "I'll get the van pulled up closer so we'll be ready to unload." He fumbled in his pocket for the keys and sprinted down the steps. *What the fuck is wrong with me? Next thing, I'll be offering to rub her feet!*

He darted through the raindrops and dove into the cover of the van. Once inside, he draped himself across the steering wheel and tried to ignore the throbbing in his pants. *I need to get laid, tonight. It's the only way I'm going to get her out of my head.* He pressed his hand against the stretched fabric of his jeans, willing his erection to go away. It didn't, so he unzipped and fisted himself, looking for relief. He pulled a tissue from the box on the dash to catch the evidence of his fantasy replay of his encounter with Faith on her deck the week before.

The memory turned him on more than anything, except Faith herself, but it also twisted his gut—the violence of it made him feel like a rapist, yet he had only been responding to her physical reaction to *him*. *I never would have done it if I didn't think she was into it, and she would have called the cops if she honestly felt like I raped her.* Eric decided then and there that

rough sex play was off limits in the future, even if a partner wanted it that way. The uneasy feelings left behind were too intense, too scary.

After a while he realized that his hand wasn't going to bring the release he needed. Frustrated, he started the van and pulled it closer to the gazebo. The rain had stopped.

"What took so long?" Jose asked when Eric rejoined the group.

"I think I dozed off for a few minutes." Everyone had retaken their seats around the open area. Faith was back to her reading. "Is the rainbow watch done?"

"Yeah," she answered. "We'll give it some time to dry up a little bit, and then we'll start to set up in here."

"You just love calling all the shots, don't you?" he sneered.

"Isn't that what you're paying me to do?" she looked up from her book.

"Sometimes, I have to wonder what the hell we *are* paying you to do. So far, it seems like we're paying you to fuck up our schedule." It was a difficult thing to say, especially since they were paying her less than half her going rate.

"Fuck you, Eric," she said, her eyes never leaving her lap.

"Anytime, bitch, anytime." He walked away in disbelief, wondering that he'd let himself do it again, as his friends stared at him, open-mouthed, once more.

~

Faith hesitated again as she turned the key in the ignition, unsure of what she was about to do. The idea played through her head all evening long as she paced her living room. Possible outcomes, repercussions, the craziness of the idea had her heart pounding out of control all night. Though it wasn't an outright invitation, she took it as one. "Anytime, bitch, anytime..." The words crashed around in her head since they left his mouth.

For over a week, she resisted the temptation to jump him if they were alone, to pull him to the ground by his ears if needed. The fire that burned

inside her blazed too hot to extinguish. She wanted to feel his touch again. To hell with what she thought of him- that didn't matter. All she could think about was his lips on her body, his rock hard cock breaking through to explore her depths.

She put the car in gear and sped off into the dark night, determined to make it happen. Before they left the shoot, Eric mentioned he was going out, so she knew he wouldn't be home. As she turned into the driveway, the house was dark, confirming his intentions. Not even a porch light lit the woods surrounding his home. Faith waited a moment and put the car in reverse. She backed out into the street, drove a block ahead, and parked the car. Ominous lightning flashed across the sky as she got out and headed back the way she came on foot.

The front door was unlocked and she let herself in, closing the door quietly behind her in case he was home and sleeping. She opened her cell phone to find her way through the great room that served as a living room and a bedroom. The bed was made and empty. Faith removed her clothes and slipped under the sheets. Then, she waited as her heart threatened to break free of her chest.

It was over an hour before headlights lit up the room and she heard a car door close. And then another. *Shit, he's got someone with him!* This was not a contingency she planned for. She listened close and heard a woman's laughter. The urge to grab her clothes and flee the scene came too late; she heard the doorknob turning. *I guess it's all or nothing. Here goes—*

She came up to her knees and perched with the sheet tightly clasped over her breasts, straddling it between her legs. Eric held the door open while the woman entered, and as he closed it behind them, he flipped on the lights. The woman at his side gasped in surprise.

Faith was no longer frightened; the woman looked like someone Eric picked up along the roadside. She wore platinum hair extensions over her own, obviously dyed-blond hair, and leopard print pants with a gold belt and matching shoes. The make-up on her face threatened to crack when her jaw dropped. Eric stood beside her in wide-eyed shock.

"Who the hell is that?" the woman demanded.

Faith didn't wait for Eric to reply. Instead, she plastered her own look of rage on her face and exclaimed, "His wife!"

Eric shook his head in disbelief, as though trying to make sure what he was seeing was real.

"Here I thought I'd come home early, and surprise you for our anniversary, and you come home, dragging this slut behind?"

"I...I wasn't expecting you...honey." Eric tried to hide the grin spreading across his face, eager, it seemed, to play along. "I mean, I'm sorry Babe. I remembered our anniversary and thought you might come back early, so I brought along Sally here for you. I know you love threesomes," he tried.

"Oh, fuck that! I'm outta here— you bastard!" Sally turned and wrestled with the doorknob, her long nails scraping the door as she frantically tried to escape. Without a word, Eric opened the door for her and her heels clacked down the wooden steps of his porch.

Faith's fear returned as she waited for Eric's reaction.

"So, what *are* you doing here, Faith?" he asked as he closed and locked the door.

"What do you think? You said 'anytime.' Remember?" She took a deep breath and dropped the sheet as lightning cracked overhead and the room grew bright around them. Silently, she thanked the heavens for the well-timed effect.

Eric approached the bed and licked his lips. "I did, but it was more a figure of speech. What makes you think I'd want to fuck you again?" He cocked his head to the side.

Faith mustered her best, seductive smile. "Maybe because you couldn't get Miss Fancy Pants out of here quick enough." She looked down, "Or maybe it's because your dick is about to burst through your jeans."

He reached out to touch her, but she yanked the sheet back up to cover herself. "I can leave if you'd like."

His head shook in reply as he pulled the sheet out of her hands. One hand slid around to squeeze her ass, the other hand cupped her breast as he leaned down and sucked her nipple into his mouth. Like the lightning outside, bolts of pleasure coursed through her body, and her breath caught in her chest. He climbed onto the bed to meet her, turning to attend to her other breast. She pulled his shirt over his head as he slid his hand between her thighs, inching along her sensitive flesh, but stopping just short of her aching sex. A cry of disappointment escaped her lips when his upward journey ended.

"Seems to me, you owe me," he said, his hot breath hitting her breast like an explosion with each syllable.

Faith's eyes shot open to stare at him. "Huh?"

"If I remember correctly," he removed his hand from the heat between her legs and circled around the back to squeeze her cheek again, "you're up three to my one." His tongue lazily circled her nipple as he looked up to meet her gaze.

"Excuse me?"

"How many times did I make you come last time?" He sucked her nipple into his mouth, flicking the tip with his tongue.

"Are we keeping score?" she asked, with a sharp inhale of breath.

"Yep," he said, releasing her bud from his lips to reveal a sly grin. His second hand found her other cheek, and he gently caressed her ass. "'Miss Fancy Pants,' as you like to call her, promised me a blow job, and because of you, she's gone."

She thought for a moment, and said, "Okay then, get down." Eric looked a little nervous as she commanded him off the bed, but he returned to his standing position, just the same.

Crawling on her knees, Faith worked her way to the edge of the bed and sat. Without taking her eyes from Eric's, she traced a line along the ridge of his bulging cock with her fingers. He sucked in a deep breath between his teeth. When she opened the button of his pants and unzipped them, his taut penis sprang out like a Jack-in-the-Box. She tugged his pants down over his hips, smoothing her hands along his outer thighs as the jeans fell to his knees. "Commando, that's sexy," she said. The hairs on his legs leapt to attention as goose bumps followed the path of her hands.

"I learned it from you. I have yet to see any panties on you."

The comment brought a smile to her lips as she studied his amazing form and rigid penis. During their last meeting, she'd not had the time to look at him closely; and now, she was mesmerized. Her fingers slid around to the inside of his thighs and inched up until she found his scrotum. She tugged and fondled him as her other hand ran along his length. She took the head of his cock into her mouth. The pre-cum hit her taste buds as she ran her tongue around his head, and she was surprised that the taste of him aroused her. Blowjobs were never something she enjoyed, but rather something she endured, and she knew she wasn't very good at them, but after the way Eric

made her come so violently and the way her body responded to his touch, she was determined to do her best to make it a blowjob he would remember.

Eric pulled Faith's hair away from her face as she eased his length into her mouth. Her tongue, it seemed, took on a life of its own, pressing along his sensitive flesh and swirling around to stimulate as much skin as it could reach. She took him in deep, and was shocked that she felt him hit the back of her throat, and she didn't gag. As his body shuddered and he moaned, Faith was emboldened. She grabbed his ass and pulled him to her forcefully. Eric cried out with a gasp, and she worked harder, twisting her mouth around his length. Her nails bit into his cheeks as she slammed him against her. She felt so powerful, in control, and hot. The sheet beneath her grew wet.

"Oh God, Faith!"

She knew he was close, as he reached out to brace himself on something, but his hands found nothing but her.

She sucked as hard as she could, squeezing her mouth tightly along his dick and forcing him to her one last time. There was no sensation but pleasure as she felt his seed shooting down her throat. Slowly, she eased him back as his body wracked with spasms. Before she released him, he dropped to his knees and his head fell to her lap. Pride filled her as she ran her fingers through his hair and a smile spread across her face. *Mission accomplished.*

It took several minutes before he could move, and even then, it was only to turn his head to look up at her through his panting. "That was fucking amazing," he finally managed.

~

It felt like she'd sucked every ounce of energy right out of him. He collapsed to the floor before the intense spasms of his climax ended, his head coming to rest in Faith's lap. Finding her naked in his bed was eerily similar to his recent fantasies, only those didn't include such an explosive

orgasm, one even more powerful than he experienced on their first encounter. Sally, he knew, was a wasted effort, but he felt he had to at least try to move beyond his recent obsession with this woman who had just left him powerless, and at the time, he didn't care who he drug home, as long as she was a woman.

Now, he had to deal with the embarrassment of Faith seeing that effort. Although he was grateful to end up feeling this way, with his head in her lap, it also pissed him off that she now knew how desperate he'd become. He also couldn't believe he'd come right out and demanded a blowjob! It made him feel like an arrogant prick. *What the hell do I care what she thinks? She's nothing more than a good lay, you idiot, and you're gonna keep it that way.*

A good lay he'd do anything to keep, he had to admit as her fingers wound through his hair and his strength returned. Jesus, just the smell of her turned him on. He rose to his knees and looked at her, but quickly looked away, afraid that she might see the need and desire in his eyes. As brief a glimpse as it was, he saw the same in hers. He focused, instead, on the luscious body in front of him, her supple breasts at his eye level, the same ones that hid beneath her wet t-shirt in the rain earlier that day. The moment he touched her, they puckered in response and Faith inhaled deeply. One nipple he pinched with his fingers and the other he pulled between his lips. With his hips and free hand, he spread her legs. He ran a finger along the inside of her thigh to her pussy; she was wet in anticipation of his touch. Faith shuddered, and expelled her breath in jagged increments as he found her clit and massaged it with his fingertip.

The lights of the room flickered as lightning cracked nearby. He pushed a finger inside her and watched in fascination as her clenching stomach muscles matched the constricting around his finger.

"Do you like that?" he asked when she gasped and writhed under his touch. She nodded, so he pushed a second finger inside and pressed his thumb against her clit. Her hips rocked against his hand and her insides tightly clamped around his fingers as he twisted them in and out. Eric was fully erect now as he stretched to suck her earlobe into his mouth. Faith grabbed the sheet on either side of her and pulled it taught in her fists.

"Ah, yes, I.. I'm coming!"

The contractions of her climax around his fingers kept time with her moans. Watching her come made him dizzy with his own need, but he couldn't get enough of the sight of her in ecstasy. He pressed her down to the bed with his open hand, then grabbed her hips and pulled her closer to the edge. With one hand on each of her thighs, he lifted and spread them wide. Saliva involuntarily flooded his mouth as her delicate folds opened before him. Her sex still throbbed from her orgasm when he pressed his tongue to her clit and returned his fingers into her depths.

Faith rose to her elbows and panted, "If we're keeping score, I don't think I can keep up."

"Fuck the score," he mumbled against her mound. She lay back down as the storm outside intensified and he worked his tongue over and around her engorged clitoris. The air was electric—he could feel it as her hips bucked and he sucked the little nub with more fervor, locking it between his teeth so that it couldn't escape his tonguing. Faith whimpered as his fingers arched and twisted inside her and he sucked her hard, her thighs slammed shut around his head and her eyes rolled back, her cry silenced as she struggled for breath. Eric pulled his fingers away and spread her legs wide again to lap the juices streaming from her pulsating opening.

Crawling out of the pants around his ankles and onto the bed, he circled around behind her, and reached under her arms to pull her up. Once she was on her knees, Eric guided her over the mattress to the head of the bed. From behind, he grabbed her hands and splayed them against the wall. He held her weakened body upright with his own. His dick throbbed against the crack of her ass as he kissed a path along her shoulders. A shudder rippled across her skin as his lips reached the nape of her neck. He released his hold on her hands to take her by the hips, and she let them drop to the headboard. Briefly releasing her hips, he grabbed her wrists and slammed them back up against the wall. When he let her go again, she kept her hands in place. "Good girl," he said, as he began a journey with his tongue from her neck, creeping down her back. Goosebumps covered her skin at the long, wet stroke down her spine.

He smoothed over the curves of her ass with his hands, wondering at the effect of her soft skin on his own body. The electricity in the air wasn't just from the storm raging outside, he knew. It was a power he could feel before he even touched her, like a magnetic force field pulling at him. The force

pulled his lips to the delicate flesh, and he covered the swell of her cheeks with soft kisses.

Faith whimpered at his light touch as he eased his hands to her midriff, brushing up and over her peaked nipples while his tongue retraced its path up her back. He couldn't hold himself back any longer. Lightning crashed nearby, and the lights flickered and died as he eased his fingers back down to her wet slit. He swirled his finger around her clit as his free hand guided his throbbing cock to her opening. It was all he could do not to slam into her full force, but he knew he'd come too fast, so he eased in, one blissfully painful inch at a time. He felt her hands drop from the wall as she gasped. His own hands reached for the headboard to find hers, and when he had them, he lifted them back to the wall and held them there. The room flashed white light through the window intermittently as he inched inside, and back away. Her hips bucked against him to speed up the pace. He released his hold from one of her hands and slapped her ass. "Stop," he whispered in her ear.

Her breath hitched, but she did stop, so he reached around, between her legs to tease her as his dick slowly pistoned in and out. When he thought he had the control, he increased his velocity. Her moan turned to a low growl as he established a solid rhythm. The steady sound of rain became thunderous as hail began to hammer the roof. He could barely hear her gasps as he plunged into her, over, and over, harder and harder. In his fervor, he slipped out. He quickly repositioned and rammed back inside.

That's when he heard her scream over the deafening hail. The grip of her around him was suddenly much tighter. He'd missed the mark, yet he kept pumping even as she cried out. He couldn't stop. He was so close, it felt so good, his heart raced. He couldn't stop. One hand continued to jack her clit while he used the other to impale her with his fingers. The room flashed white and he saw she still desperately clung to the wall. A tear rolled down her cheek as his orgasm hit him hard.

"Oh, oh, f-u-c-k!" he cried out. He felt her flesh begin to spasm and her nectar soon coated his fingers. She'd come as hard as he had, but when the light flashed again, he saw her tears still fell. It hit him that he'd pretty much just raped her again. He fell back onto the bed, wracked with guilt, yet melting in pleasure.

Faith scrambled off the bed as quickly as she could and started searching around for her clothes in the pitch black of the room. He could barely hear her soft sobbing. "Faith, I'm so sorry," he pleaded. He heard a crash in the corner and the room lit briefly enough for him to see her perched on the floor under a table, holding her head. Blindly, he crawled to the spot where she had been, but found only air and the table.

"Faith, please, I'm sorry— I don't know what came over me." He didn't hear or see the door open, but he heard it slam shut. He stumbled to the door and opened it behind her. The eerie sky lit up once more and he saw her running through the hail, naked and grasping her clothes. Eric closed the door and returned to his bed. He sat with his head in his hands and waited for the police.

~

The bath water cooled too quickly and the water heater couldn't keep up with her chills, or the bruises covering her body in need of the soothing heat. It was stupid, she knew, to run into the storm the way she did. Though the hailstones were only marble sized, they pounded her mercilessly as she ran to her car without protection. Her mind raced as she drove; part in prayer that she wouldn't get pulled over or wreck in the deep hail, only to get busted driving naked, and part trying to piece together the blazing encounter she fled with such haste.

Reluctantly, she pulled the stop on the tub and grabbed a towel from the rack. Her skin protested against the soft fabric as she dried herself. Despite the warmth of the air after the storm's passing, she wrapped herself into her comforter, and lay on her bed, hoping that sleep would soon take her and rescue her from her internal bafflement. *Think of something else, anything else. Think of the rainbow you saw earlier.* She thought of the rainbow, and Eric interrupted her scrutiny of the great arc to announce that he would get her camera for her; at least, that's how it played in her memory. *Okay,*

something else, a happy thought from the days before he came along. In here mind, she was suddenly on her head as he feasted on her flesh.

No matter what memory she conjured, Eric forced his way into her thoughts, just as he had forced his way into her virginal ass. Why had her body betrayed her? Through the searing pain of his attack, she had come anyway, and come hard. Did she suddenly have a fetish for rough sex and pain, or did it have more to do with the man who took his pleasure by causing her pain? *Stop it! It wasn't as if he meant to do it, at least, not at first.* Maybe he didn't hear her protest over the noise of the storm. *No, he knew, otherwise, why would he bother to apologize?* The only thing she knew for sure was that he was not good for her; in fact, he was dangerous. *I can't give into him anymore, no matter what. It was stupid to go there in the first place.* She knew, however, that she wouldn't change it, even if she could.

The sound of knocking woke her— someone at the door. It was early morning, judging the light. Slowly, she rose from her bed. Every movement brought the sting of pain to her senses. She grabbed her robe from its hook on the door and stumbled into the living room, but stopped short when she saw her reflection in the mirror over the couch. There was no way she would answer the door; bruises covered her and dark circles rimmed her puffy eyes. The knocking didn't stop.

"Faith?" It was Eric. "Faith, I know you're in there. You don't have to let me in, I don't expect you to."

She tiptoed to the window just down from the door and gently eased the curtain back to get a view of him. The same dark circles dressed his eyes, and he appeared disheveled.

"I just..." from the window, Faith heard and saw his forehead hit the door, "I need you to know how sorry I am. I don't know why I did that; I can't even imagine myself doing that." He rested his hands against the door on either side of his head. The position brought back a memory and her pulse raced. He stood there without speaking, his breathing labored.

Finally, he pushed himself away from the door and bent to the ground. "I'm leaving. I set your cell phone here by the door." He stood up straight

and added, "I think we should stay away from each other Faith, at least, as much as we can."

He turned to leave, but before he reached the steps, he stopped. Faith waited to see what he would do. His shoulders slumped forward, his head dropped, and he took a deep breath. "If you want to press charges...I wouldn't blame you. And I won't fight it." He ran up the steps and through the gate.

Press charges? Is he insane? The thought made her laugh out loud. *Oh my God, he's completely lost it.* She started to wonder; were there grounds for her to go to the police? *Okay, let's see if you can get your story straight: you broke into the man's house, planted yourself in his bed, naked, passed yourself off as his wife to a guest in his home, seduced him, and then got pissy when things got a little more rough than you're accustomed to.* Yeah, the cops would be all over that. She laughed again and went to the door to retrieve her phone.

The first thing she did was call Sarah. The call went to voicemail, and Faith remembered that it was still early. She waited for the beep: "Hey Sarah, I'm going to stay home today. I, uh, got caught in the storm last night and I think I might be coming down with something...anyway, I'll talk to you later."

The next thing she did was text Eric, "Ty." *Maybe that will save him from his crazy paranoia.* Then she went back to bed. Her mind was much clearer this morning, especially now that she knew how the prior evening's events affected him. Maybe it was clearer because she hadn't slammed her head against anything for the last few hours. Banging her head against the table with such force as she searched for her clothes made her drive home a dizzy one. She raised her hand to touch the soft, swollen lump left behind. It occurred to her that Eric hadn't returned her panties with the phone; the other thing she missed in her blind search. *They must be under his bed or something, or maybe he just threw them away, or maybe...* The idea of him hanging on to them as a keepsake made her blush, but it also made her wish she'd chosen nicer ones; they were never meant to be seen in the first place. It didn't matter; she was done with him.

Chapter Five

Two days of paranoia and no sight of Faith or any law enforcement had Eric almost back to feeling normal. It should have been good studio time with the guys, but he couldn't focus. Couldn't play, couldn't listen to what they already had down, and couldn't come up with any lyrics that didn't involve raunchy sex and selfish fantasies— they all involved sex with Faith.

“Alright, I'm ready to call it a day,” Tim said, turning off his amp and setting his guitar down. “Let's go get a beer or something. Maybe tomorrow will be better.”

Jose looked at his watch. “Sarah is meeting Faith at Bernie's Grill at six. We could meet up with them.”

Everyone agreed and then looked to Eric for an argument. He had none. It was as good a time as any to face the enemy— get it over and done with. “Sounds good,” he said, turning away from the soundboard. “I'll even buy the first round.”

“I would hope so,” Jose said. “You haven't been good for much else lately.”

“Yeah, like you've never had an 'off' day or anything.”

“We've all had off days, but you've been in more of a tailspin these last few days than *off*. Is it that time of the month?” Jose turned to receive his knuckle pound from Daniel for the burn.

“Screw you. All of you,” Eric said, wagging his middle finger as he walked to the door.

~

Bernie's was busy, but Sarah and Faith had secured a large booth. They all squeezed in. Eric peeked over at her, but thankfully, Faith wasn't looking in

his direction. She was wearing make-up, something she didn't normally do. Hoping to find some action, maybe? Something to take her mind off of their recent wet-dream-nightmare? He couldn't blame her for trying, but if she was in the same shape he was, it wouldn't work. No. She wouldn't be in the same state of mind. While he was in hellish turmoil, she was probably angry with him and full of self-loathing for coming to him in the first place. Was she wearing it for him?

It didn't take long to find out.

"You're looking really nice tonight, Faith," Daniel said. "I've never seen you wear make-up before. Got a hot date?"

Her face turned a deep shade of red, visible even through the heavy foundation she wore. She shook her head and dropped her gaze to the table.

Sarah spoke for her. "She got caught in that hail storm the other night and got some bruises on her face. When people see women with bruises, they assume someone's been beating on them."

The shame for his part in her storm damage didn't surprise him, but the relief that she wasn't out trying to get laid, did. He had to say something, something so that the others wouldn't be suspicious of their silence and something that didn't make it sound like anything changed between them. Had it? He wasn't sure where they stood with each other, but he wanted to find out.

"Who would ever want to beat on Faith?" He laced the comment with sarcasm, but when she looked up at him, he hoped his eyes conveyed a message of regret.

She grinned back. "Anyone who tried it would wind up a sorry puddle on the ground, so go ahead, give me your best shot. I dare you."

Eric held up his hands in surrender. "I have no doubt that you'd kick my ass in the end, but I would never even try to hurt a lady, or you."

"Don't you two even start that shit," Sarah said, her brow creased in frustration as she slammed her beer mug on the table. "Can we just enjoy a few drinks in peace?"

"Alright, we'll be good," said Faith, looking into her beer, attempting to hide a coy smile.

Eric nodded and scooted out from his end spot. "I'll grab us another pitcher." Things were back to normal, maybe even better, and as he

squeezed through the crowd to get to the bar, he couldn't conceal the smile that spread from his heart to his face.

~

After that night, Eric's muses returned with a full agenda. He couldn't get the songs down quick enough, and the long hours spent in the studio flew by. No one complained.

"If a few off days can lead you to this, you have my permission to take as many as you need," Jose said, his face glowing in exhilaration. He shook his head, "I think this is your best song yet. I can't believe we got it down so quick, just incredible."

"Yep, definitely, this is the one that's gonna put us on the map," Tim said.

Eric thought it was too, but he was reluctant to take full credit. It didn't even feel like he wrote it, more like something took him over and he was just the vessel used to transfer the message. "We'll see."

"Since we're going to be rich and famous, would it be okay to take a quick break and run over to the burger joint? The last thing I ate was a hardboiled egg this morning," Jose said.

Although his stomach rumbled too, Eric was reluctant to leave and lose the newfound groove. "Yeah, go ahead. Bring me back a burger and fries."

"You're not coming?"

"No, I want to listen to the track a few times and see if there's anything we need to add or lose."

"Faith, you coming?" Daniel asked.

"No, thanks. I want to review the footage I got."

Eric's pulse raced. He hadn't been alone with Faith since their encounter, and though she was never far from his mind, he'd been able to ignore the fact that throughout the week, she'd never been far from him physically. *Maybe I should go with them. What if she wants to talk? What if she rips me a new one while we're alone? No, we're past that now— she'll just act like I'm not here.*

“Want us to bring you something? A burger?”

Faith was focused on her video screen. “Huh?”

“Do you want anything?” Daniel repeated.

“Sure. A cheeseburger,” she said, never taking her eyes off her video.

They left and Eric sat at the soundboard, donned the headphones, and started the song from the beginning. There wasn't really anything he wanted to add or take away from the track. It was great as it was; he just wanted to listen to it a few more times. Had they really recorded such an incredible song? Everything was there— all the right percussion, the harmonies were soulful, the guitar riffs were solid, and the little bit of piano added in just the right places made it perfect. It had a heartfelt earnestness he never imagined they could achieve.

His eyes flew open and he grabbed at his headphones when his chair rolled away from the consol and he felt a hand slide up the inside of his thigh. Under the soundboard, Faith crouched with a wicked smile. She eased her fingers along his zipper, up to the button of his jeans. While she worked it loose, Eric looked around in a panic to make sure no one had come in while he was transfixed to the song.

“Faith, what are you doing? I thought we decided this wasn't such a good idea.”

She already had the head of his growing penis in her mouth, her tongue working around the ridge. He had no control over his physical reaction to her. “I thought you wanted to go through your video?” Had his voice just squeaked?

His dick bobbed as she released him. “Do you want me to stop?” Her eyes dared him to refuse.

Shaking his head, he drew in a jagged breath and gathered her hair in his hands. Strong lips locked around his cock, while her tongue explored the tip, swirled around the head, and worked its way down the length of him. The nerves in his core jumped as though experiencing a sudden drop in altitude as she took him deep into her throat. Her mouth twisted around him, up and down, gripping and loosening, gripping, loosening. Eric's hips moved of their own accord, bucking and pressing her to continue as waves of pleasure spread through his body. Her tongue flexed against his pulsing vein, and the building pressure moved from his core to his cock. His eyes squeezed shut as the eruption neared.

“Ohhh—” his breath exploded from his lungs in a moan, and Faith returned the cry, her mouth and tongue vibrating around him and sending him over the edge. Bursts of light filled his vision as the pressure released. He grasped the arms of the chair and pressed his feet to the floor as his seed fired into her mouth. Tingling waves pulsed through his body as the intensity of his orgasm subsided. He opened his eyes to find Faith wiping her mouth with the back of her hand. She winked at him and smiled, then, there were voices outside the door of the studio.

Eric pushed his dick back in his pants and zipped up while Faith crawled across the floor back toward her cameras. She didn't make it before the voices were upon them.

“If you take the Honda emblem off, it's a Toyota in disguise. Why bother painting flames on it?” Tim said, as he walked into the room. “Eric? What did you do with Faith while we were gone?”

Shit! They knew. Eric's face heated and his palms went clammy, before Tim added, “Did you kick her out?”

“I'm over here,” Faith's arm shot up in the air holding a lens cap. “I dropped my cap and it was rolling faster than I could chase it.”

“Damn, I thought I was gonna get your cheeseburger for a minute,” Jose said as he dumped three bags on the table. “We got it ‘to go’ so you guys wouldn't have to wait, so you owe us.” He turned to Eric, “Holy shit, buddy, did you just run a marathon? You're all sweaty and red faced.”

“No,” Eric rose and grabbed his stomach. “Cramps in my gut— I think I better visit the john.”

“Out with the old, in with the new,” Jose said. Faith voiced her distaste with the comment, and Jose grinned sheepishly. “Sorry, Faith.”

In the bathroom, Eric splashed his face with cold water. *Why?* He challenged his reflection in the mirror— *Why did you give in to her? Why didn't you push her away? Because you still want her more than anything, in spite of everything. Because you'd do anything to feel her, taste her, come at her mercy.* His reflection grinned back at him, though he didn't feel the smile. He ran his trembling fingers through his hair a few times. Why did she even want *him* after the last time? Surely, she was humiliated to the point of never coming near him again.

The last fifteen minutes proved that theory wrong. She obviously felt the same pull he did and had less control over it. Who was he kidding? He

would have caved soon himself, but as it was, it made things much easier now that she had taken the first step. He wouldn't have to crawl to her, on his knees, begging her to give him what he needed. Eric checked his appearance one last time, and went back to the studio in search of his burger and fries.

Chapter Six

Faith clicked the TV remote 'off' when the last of the credits rolled down the screen. The PBS documentary on Counting Crows was much like what she envisioned for her own documentary for Utopian Society. The last week in the studio sealed their fates— Eric was a man possessed as they cranked out the last three songs for the release. For all his sins of vanity and self-importance, this week, he finally earned the right to own those sins. Oddly, he showed more humility with his recent accomplishments than pride, almost as though he had little to do with it, even though they all watched in awe as he created and lifted the others to a level far above their norm.

Lightning flashed in the distance as she filled the coffee decanter for the next morning. A streak of lightning followed shortly by a low, rumbling sound of thunder made it clear— there was another storm coming. With the coffee maker set for six A.M., Faith checked the thermostat, turned off all but the hallway bath light, and went to bed.

Sleep was hard to find. Her mind replayed the events of the week and her own role in it. Eric's songs played in her head, background music to her fantasy of him taking her, taking her like a hungry savage, ripping her clothes off and hoisting her onto the soundboard to plunge into her over and over until she screamed in ecstasy. A sudden noise and her eyes flew open. The central air kicked in and lightning flashed through the window. She closed her eyes again, trying to pick up where she left off, screaming her

brains out while Eric slammed into her, even as the knobs of the soundboard bit into her ass.

The air in the room changed as Faith pulled her toy from the drawer of the bedside table and rolled to her back. She froze, vibrator in hand, when she saw his silhouette against the semi-darkness at the end of her bed.

Her breath hitched when he asked, “Can I help you with that?” It didn’t occur to ask how he got in—it didn’t matter—he was here and she was electrified. From his position, he eased the sheet away from her. The slow, sensual retreat of the sheet felt like his hands caressing her skin; her nipples reveled in sensation when the hem of the cover scraped across them. When it was gone, he knelt on the bed and slowly slid his hands up her thighs, spreading her legs as he went.

“Mmmm,” she tried to stifle her moan. Did he know how close she already was to coming? Her hand and vibrator fell to her side as tongue met pussy. Fingers probed inside her as he stabbed at her clit and pulled it between his lips. It took less than a minute of hard sucking, lapping, and finger pounding, and she was crying out her release.

Eric sat up and pulled his shirt over his head. “So, let me see your friend,” he said, as he tossed the shirt to the floor.

She didn’t know what he was talking about until he reached across and pulled the forgotten vibrator from her hand. He studied the object carefully, feeling its shape by sliding his fingers down and around it, smelling it, pushing the buttons that made it whir to life. “Is this supposed to be me?” he asked as he silenced the device and rubbed it against her cheek.

“Mm hmm.” Faith didn’t trust her voice to answer. Even her mumbled response shook with excitement.

He brought it to her lips. “Lick it.” She did. She licked the realistic phallus around its head while Eric leaned down to suck her nipple into his mouth, watching her tongue work. He never took his eyes off it as he eased the soft, plastic cock between her lips. His breath hissed through his teeth, as though it was his own penis entering her mouth. The cool air he pulled into his lungs swirled around the bud he held in his mouth, and she moaned as he pushed the toy deeper.

“Ooh. I think he’s ready.” He pulled it from her mouth and gave her nipple a kiss goodbye before maneuvering himself so that his head was over her hips and his knees grazed her headboard. He pried her bent knees apart

to make room for his games. When she was spread wide, he brought the toy to her folds, rubbing it up and down along her cleft.

Eric turned to face her. “He says you’re very wet and he can’t wait to fuck you.”

This playful side of Eric was quickly growing on her, and her heart raced as the object he pressed against her pussy buzzed to life. First, he held it to her clit, circling it lightly before easing it down to her opening and slipping it in part way. He removed it and brought it back to her clit. Faith gritted her teeth against the pleasure the vibrations sent through her body. In her peripheral vision, she saw the bulge in Eric’s jeans as he lay on his side. She reached over and undid the button and zipper, setting him free. As she grasped his erection in her hand, he shoved the vibrator inside her again. She tried to push against it, but he quickly removed it and sent it wandering again, on and around her clit, back to her opening, teasing it with a little circular motion, and then, he moved it back and pressed it against the rosette of her ass.

Faith gasped in surprise, but bursts of pleasure shot through her body and she involuntarily cried out. “Bad vibrator!” Eric said, bringing the humming device up to his face. “Bad boy! You don’t go there!”

“It felt good,” she said, giggling and fisting his shaft. Was that the message she wanted to give him? Permission to fuck her in the ass?

“Vibrators don’t go there,” he repeated. “Only Eric can go there, and only with permission.” He returned the humming phallus to her pussy, picking up where he left off.

Not long after, Faith couldn’t stand the teasing anymore, and her hips squirmed from side to side. Eric looked at her and cocked his head. “He wants to know if you’re ready?” Without waiting for a reply, he shoved it inside and switched the speed to ‘high.’ Shocked by the sudden change of gears, she yanked his cock, too hard she was afraid, but Eric thrust into her hands just as he thrust the vibrator back inside her. A flick of a switch and he activated the pulsating pearls at the base of the device. They ground around inside her, massaging the sensitive spot that would push her over the edge. Her scream caught in her throat as she felt lips and tongue return to her clit. When she found her voice, it was a mixture of shrieks of delight and laughter.

Every nerve in her body cried out— she was at a point of ecstasy she'd never experienced. It was almost too much to take, and Eric had to brace his forearm across her abdomen to keep her from bucking away. She felt like she was shot from a cannon, her body flying through the air, close to exploding as he sucked her and her walls strained against the gyrating beads. Then, the inevitable explosion came. Every spark of energy in her body converged in her vagina and burst out, into the universe.

Her mind was in a haze— the vibrator had to have shot across the room in the explosion, and Eric must have been injured because she heard wailing. As soon as she could move beyond her reverberations, she pushed herself up onto her elbows to survey the damage. Eric looked up from between her legs with a smug grin and lifted the lifeless vibrator for her to see. The echoing wails persisted, though it was now shorter bursts, much less like the shrieking howls of just moments before. Her consciousness and the room around her began to reconnect, and the closer they came, the more obvious it was that the noised belonged to her.

Eric tossed the toy over his shoulder and rose to remove his pants. “My turn.”

In the meantime, all Faith could do was knead the bed with her fingers and toes, her nerves still too raw to have any command over her body. Her knees knocked together of their own accord, forcing the remaining aftershocks to leave her body. With one hand on each knee, Eric spread her legs wide, running his hands down her thighs. Her sensitized skin ignited with his touch, every cell he brushed sending a searing message of need to her brain. His probing thumbs ran along her lips, pulling them apart in the slow passing, the gradual journey up her torso. *Why is he going so slow? Doesn't he know I'm on fire?*

He came to rest on his elbows, touching her breasts now, pushing them into peaked domes atop her chest. His gazed locked her eyes as his tongue circled a nipple before pulling it between his lips. Charged jolts shot through her core as he teased the bud, shortly abandoning it to lick down the steep decline of her breast his clutch created, and up to the other nipple, repeating the game until both stood erect, pointing at the ceiling, awaiting his next move. He blew the wet soldier and Faith released the air from her lungs. Gasping and panting, she begged him, “Please.”

He gave her one last lick before positioning himself between her legs. One hand slid under her ass to raise her hips. Her fingers found his erection and guided it to her, one of them escorting him inside at the top of her opening.

“Oh fuck, Faith,” he breathed as his length slid beyond the reach of her finger. She pressed the tip against her g-spot, so that with every thrust of his penis, it pressed hard against the sensitive tissue. It swelled beneath her finger as Eric sucked the flesh on her neck between his lips sliding up and down her vein, sucking, licking, kissing, then nipping at her ear. She removed her finger and grabbed his ass, feeling his muscles flex, and pulling him to her as he slammed away. Her legs joined in the assault, locking around him and forcing him deeper, harder, faster. Faith pulled his head to hers, their foreheads butting against one another, noses touching, eyes locked, stealing each other’s breath— straining to and away from each other until it hit.

Together they crested, their cries joining into one melodic ballad of rapture as Faith arched her body into his, encasing him in her arms for the first time. Sweat drenched them, and when Eric fell onto her in exhaustion, his body slipped through her arms, away to the side. He followed the momentum until he lay next to her on his back. Neither spoke, both panting to catch their breath.

After a time, Eric shook his head. “Oh. Fuck. Me.”

“I think I just did that,” Faith giggled and let her arm fall across his chest.

He grinned to the ceiling, and then turned his head to face her, his expression more serious. “I’m not staying the night.”

Rolling away from him, she smiled and said, “You weren’t invited.”

Chapter Seven

Squinting against the setting sun, Eric pulled his car onto the busy city thoroughfare. His passenger lit a cigarette, and asked, “So, explain to me why we can’t go out?”

“Van, don’t smoke in my car.” He rolled the window down, expecting Van to toss it.

“I’ll hold it out the window,” he said, stretching his arm as far outside as he could. When Eric scowled in reply, he said, “Come on. I couldn’t smoke on the plane, and I expected to have at least a few minutes in the parking lot. I didn’t think you’d be waiting for me right outside the damn terminal.” He pulled his arm inside, took a deep drag, then stuck his arm back out the window, followed by his head and upper torso. “See? You won’t even notice.”

Eric grabbed him by the pants and pulled him back inside. “I see you’re still a lunatic. Glad to see the city didn’t steal that away from you.”

“Never! Anyway, where the hell are we going?”

“We’re going to the videographer’s house to watch some of the footage she’s put together from the last few months.” He readjusted the visor, as though pulling on it would make it longer and block the low-lying sun. “Trust me— if I could get out of it, I would. Going out on the town with you is much more appealing than going to her house.”

“I take it you don’t like her?”

“Not especially,” Eric said with a sigh.

“Then why are you working with her?”

Eric shrugged his shoulders and shook his head. “Because she’s good at what she does and she cut us a deal. The fact that she’s the wicked witch of the west is just the price I have to pay.” A fancy German car cut in front of him, and he slammed on the brakes, honking his horn. “I’ll get us out of there as quick as I can. Then, we can go out.”

“Yeah,” Van said, taking a final drag from his cigarette before tossing it out the window. “I’ve been looking forward to getting some home-grown pussy again.”

Eric glanced at him and shook his head. Same old Van. The man resembled the singer he was named after— Van Morrison— short, chubby, and beginning to lose his hair, but damned if the guy couldn’t charm a girl into bed every time. “I don’t know how you do it.”

Van licked his fingers and smoothed the hair at his temples. “It’s a gift.”

“You got that right.”

They parked behind Jose’s little red box of a car. Eric led the way through the gate and down the steps to Faith’s deck. The patio door was open, and Sarah and the guys were standing around in the kitchen watching Faith set out bowls, spoons, and napkins for chili. The spicy aroma was heavy. Eric’s stomach growled.

Sarah squealed when she saw Van, and ran to him, her arms wide. “Oh my God! I was so happy when Eric told me you were coming home to visit.”

He rocked her from side to side. “Hey, sweetie. I’ve missed you too.”

Sarah kissed his cheek a few times before she released him to the rest of the group. When Van finished his rounds, he came to Faith.

“Well hello there, sweetness. And who might you be?”

She laughed at his corniness and offered her hand for him to shake. “I’m Faith. This is my house.”

He kissed the back of her hand and looked at Eric. “The videographer?”

“That’s me, and I *know* who you are. You’re trouble,” she said, blushing at Van’s smooches.

“The way Eric described you, I thought you were an old lady. And green.” Van and Faith both looked to Eric, whose face resembled a young beet. Van turned back to her. “But you are just a luscious piece of candy. I’d love to suck you between my lips and pet you with my tongue.”

Faith’s eyes increased in size as everyone snickered at his remark. Pushing Van away, Eric said, “And that’s why I told you she was an old lady and green— so you wouldn’t walk in here drooling with your tongue dragging on the ground.”

She eyed them both suspiciously, and then turned back to the kitchen. “There’s beer in the fridge if you guys want some.”

“I’d have one. Thank you, ma’am.” Van licked his lips as she walked away.

“I’ll grab it,” Eric said, crossing the kitchen and opening the door of the refrigerator. Faith grabbed a bowl of grated cheese from the counter behind him. When Eric stood and turned around, one of the two beers in his hand started to slip away. The can barely left his grasp when his other hand swiped it from the air, but his pendulum-like momentum kept his hand moving, until it reached Faith and her bowl of cheese. He hit it so hard, the bowl flipped into the air, showering them both with grated cheese.

She glared up at him as the bowl hit the side of the counter and shattered, sending glass everywhere. “Nice,” she said.

Eric squeezed his eyes shut, as though that might undo the damage.

“Did you just knock that out of her hands?” Sarah asked.

Eric shook his head vehemently. “I didn’t mean to.”

“Jeez Eric, way to go,” Tim said.

“I swear, it was an accident! Why would you tell me to get in the fridge, and then stand over the top of me when I do it?” He glared at her.

Faith shook her head and pushed him away, toward the others. “You guys go ahead and dish up. I’ll clean this up.”

“If you want help, I’ll help,” Eric said over his shoulder.

Faith still shook her head, obviously pissed. “Just go.”

Sarah walked over to where Faith squatted, picking up the larger pieces of glass. “At least let *me* help.”

“No, really. You guys dish up and go ahead into the living room.” She looked at Jose. “Will you get the DVD set up?”

He nodded as he sprinkled onions in his bowl. “Sure. Where is it?”

“It’s on top of the entertainment center, the case labeled Utopian.”

They left Faith alone to clean the mess. Eric was the last to go, hoping she’d command him to get down there with her, on his knees. Reluctantly, he followed the others into the living room, beer in one hand, chili in the other.

“In case you haven’t noticed, Faith and Eric don’t get along,” Sarah was telling Van, who sat next to her on the couch.

“Really?”

“I didn’t do it on purpose!”

“They fight every time we get together.” Sarah continued.

“Why?”

“Who knows?”

Eric didn’t say anything to refute the information. How could he? It was true.

Jose leaned over and yelled into the other room, “Should I go ahead and start it?”

“Yeah,” Faith called back. “Don’t wait for me. I’ll be there in a minute.”

Jose pointed the remote at the TV. Within a moment, the big screen came to life, and they all stared, open-mouthed as Faith’s naked ass appeared. She

sat atop a man, bouncing up and down on his dick. From the angle, it was impossible to see the man's face, but there was no mistaking Faith, with her long hair and the small owl tattoo at the base of her spine.

Sarah was the first to speak. "Oh my God!"

Daniel started laughing. "Holy shit! Now that's entertainment! Who is that?"

On screen, Faith arched her back and moaned, reaching back to brace herself on her heels. From the kitchen, Faith called out, "What do you guys think of the opening? Do you like it?"

"I love it," Van said, too low for her to hear.

Eric's first reaction was physical, an instant hard on. Then, jealousy of the man clouded his mind, followed by sudden panic as he realized *he* was the man. He'd never seen himself from that angle, but once his hands clutched her hips to lift her and pump, there was no doubt. His friends sat mesmerized as he impaled Faith repeatedly. Beads of sweat formed on his brow.

"Faith!" he yelled, heading for the kitchen, but Faith met him before he could get there.

"What?"

He moved to the side so she could see the TV.

"Oh fuck!" She shoved him away, racing for the remote, her feet barely touching the ground. She had to wrestle it from a dumbfounded Jose. Frantically, she pushed buttons, trying to make it go away. It didn't. It froze with her at the top of his penis, suspended midair. Between her legs, Eric could almost see his face. Faith pushed more buttons, and the picture reversed at a high speed. Just as the Faith on the screen was about to climb on, in reverse, the horrified Faith in front of the TV found the power button. Like a statue, she stood in front of the black screen, her back to the room, unwilling or unable to turn around.

"Well, that was fun," Van said, spooning some chili into his mouth.

"Shut up, Van," Tim shook his head.

"Um, Faith? Who was that with you?" Sarah asked.

Faith's head dropped. She still wouldn't turn around and face her guests. Eric kept to the back of the room, where no eyes could witness his horror. He prayed that no one recognized him. What he wanted to do was rant and

rave at Faith. What the hell was she doing, filming their trysts? Who did she think she was?

“It’s no one you know,” Faith finally answered. “It’s from a long time ago. An old boyfriend.” She turned around, her face painted crimson.

“That’s not old. I was with you when you bought those sheets two weeks ago,” Sarah said, then suddenly slapped her hand over her mouth.

There was a chorus of, “Ooooh.”

“A secret lover?” asked Jose.

“Yeah, a secret lover. Jose, I told you it was the case on top of the entertainment center.” She turned around and grabbed the correct DVD case. “See? *Utopian*, right there, in big letters!” She slammed the DVD back to its spot. “You know, could you guys just leave? All of you? Please?” She was close to tears.

“I haven’t finished my chili,” Daniel said.

“Out! Everyone, out!” Faith grabbed the bowl from Daniel’s hands.

They all nervously set their bowls down and stood. Faith didn’t move as they began to file out of the room. Eric held back, waiting for her to look at him. When she did, she grabbed a full beer can from the coffee table and hurled it at him. He ducked and it exploded against the wall behind him. “Go! Get the fuck out of here! Now!”

He followed the others outside and up to the street, still dizzy from having his dick publicly exposed, and from nearly having his secret exposed. They were discussing new supper arrangements when he caught up.

“Does Bernie’s still serve food?” Van asked.

“Yeah, they’ve got a pretty decent menu.”

“Well then let’s go! I’m sure I’ll see some familiar faces, though I doubt we’ll see as good a show. Maybe I’ll even get lucky— I need to after that. Ichee mama.” He fanned his face with his fingers.

Everyone agreed and headed for their cars. Eric stopped Daniel. “Can Van ride with you? I forgot my wallet so I need to swing by my place.”

“Yeah. Sure. We’ll meet you there.”

“That okay with you, Van?”

He shot Eric with his finger. “See you there.”

Eric got in his car and pulled away. He drove to the stop sign and turned left, as though he was heading home, but instead, he went around the block

and watched until everyone else left. When it was clear, he pulled his car up to Faith's house again, got out, and headed for her door.

It became apparent, when he knocked on the door, that she wasn't ready to stop screaming. "I said get the fuck out of here!"

"Yeah, well I think you need to talk to me," he yelled back.

"There is no way you are coming in, so just turn around and leave."

He wasn't leaving without that DVD. "Fine, I'll stand out here at your door and we can yell back and forth about the sex video you made."

The door unlatched. Faith grabbed his arm and yanked him inside. "It's not bad enough I'm humiliated in front of my friends? Now, you want to humiliate me in front of my neighbors?" Tears stained her face.

"What the fuck were you thinking?" He didn't want to yell at her and make things worse, but by this time, he'd worked himself into a frenzy. "Who does that? Who makes a record of something like that, without even asking the person they're recording? Where was the camera?"

She shook her head as fresh tears filled her eyes. "Haven't you heard? The world is full of perverts." She sat down at the kitchen table and dropped her head into her hands.

"Give me the DVD," he said, standing over her now.

"No!"

"Why did you even make it?"

"Because, I wanted to watch it. Why do you think?" She looked up at him, her face puffy from crying.

He shook his head. If he had the DVD, he'd watch it too. But would he have made it to begin with? He wasn't sure, and now that he knew of its existence, he had to have it.

"Faith, you have to give it to me."

"Absolutely not."

"I have every right to demand it! Do you know how this could affect my future, having this kind of thing out there? What if it ended up in the wrong hands?"

"And that's exactly why you can't have it," she stood to face him. "I can just see you sitting around, showing your friends and having a good laugh at my expense."

"You really think I'd do that? You don't trust me with it?"

She threw up her arms. “You don’t trust *me* with it. I’ll make you a copy. Then we can both have it.”

“That’s just what we need— two of them running around. Look, we have to destroy it. If you don’t trust me, and I don’t trust you, there’s no other solution.”

“No,” she shook her head. “I...I can’t lose it.”

“You can’t keep it,” he said, his tone more gentle now. “It’s not right. You know that.”

She didn’t say anything, didn’t look away, she just stared at him. Finally, her shoulders slumped. “Fine. We’ll destroy it.”

He waited while she went to the living room to retrieve the illicit DVD. This time, she averted her eyes from his as she handed him the silver disc.

“You don’t have it labeled?”

“What should it say? Faith and Eric’s Fuck-Fest?”

“What’s the best way to destroy these things?”

“Just snap it into pieces,” she shrugged her shoulders.

He held it with both hands, ready to break it, but couldn’t make his hands work. This was not the result he wanted. The plan was to get the recording and watch it later before doing anything rash, but Faith made it clear she wouldn’t let the DVD leave her house. She waited, impatient it seemed for him to get it over with. Finally, she pulled it from his hands and snapped it in three different places. She dropped the pieces into his hands.

“There.” She crossed her arms over her chest.

“Thank you,” Eric said, enunciating the words carefully. He nodded and left.

Chapter Eight

Faith locked both entrance doors to her house and pocketed the spare key. Next, she went through every room in the house, closing shades and drapes.

When the house was dark, and she was satisfied that no one could see or get in, she stripped to her underwear, took a wine glass from the cupboard and a bottle from the refrigerator. In the living room, she poured a tall glass and picked up the remote for the television. She eased back into the pillows of the couch, sipped her wine, and aimed the controller. The TV came to life.

The single DVD had hours of footage. After the first night Eric snuck into her house, she recorded every subsequent visit. She hadn't yet found a way to record her visits to his house, and now it was doubtful she'd ever have the chance. What she already had recorded would have to be enough.

When she first set it up, she tried to position the camera to get the best angle, and whenever she had Eric in her bed, she attempted to make sure their location suited the camera. The first round was always the best. After that, she forgot to care about positioning, luckily. Otherwise, her audience from the day before would have easily discovered the identity of her partner.

Even though she'd watched the footage numerous times, she still couldn't pinpoint what it was that made their sex so explosive. Others talked about their own sexual encounters, but none seemed to have the kind of experience she shared with Eric. What was it that ignited them both so intensely? Carefully, she studied the way his lips teased her nipples, her own fingers tracing her areolas through her bra as she watched. Her hand slid into her panties when on screen, Eric ran his tongue down her abdomen. Her sex flooded as she watched him spread her legs and open her lips with his tongue, running along her cleft, teasing her clit, and then moving back down. On the television, Faith opened her legs wider and looked at the camera. On the couch, she ran her finger along her slit, teasing her clit when Eric did, piercing herself with her fingers when he did.

Her other hand pulled her breast from its nest in her bra and pushed it up as high as she could. While her fingers worked her pussy, her tongue stretched, just able to lick her own nipple. On screen and off, Faith moaned as fingers massaged her g-spot and her clit swelled. Her orgasm on the couch met her porn-star double's, both of them writhing, one under Eric's tongue and the other under her own power.

For the next act, she'd need her vibrator, but when she rose to get it, the doorbell rang. *Shit!* She muted the TV, not quite believing there was someone at her door.

“Faith?” Sarah called. “Faith, are you in there?”

She was at once thrilled and disappointed it wasn't Eric. “Yeah. Give me a minute,” she yelled, turning off the television. It was best to face Sarah, she decided, here at home and in private, than at a later date with everyone else around. She quickly washed her hands and donned her clothes. When she was confident that no trace of her recent masturbation remained, she opened the door for Sarah.

Right away, Sarah embraced her. “I'm sorry,” she said over Faith's shoulder.

“What are *you* sorry for?”

“I'm sorry for yesterday. As your friend, I should have defended and protected you instead of trying to ‘out’ you.” She pulled away, looking intently into Faith's eyes. “I was just so caught off guard, and I reacted badly. I promise I won't push you to tell me who it was with you on the video. You don't ever have to tell me.”

“And you don't have to be sorry, Sarah. I'm sure it was a shock for everyone.”

“It was,” Sarah nodded. She sniffed the air, her eyes squinting. “Have you been drinking?”

“Just a little wine.”

“It's only one o'clock! Here, clean yourself up and come out to lunch with me and Van. You shouldn't be sitting around in the dark, alone, drinking in the middle of the day.”

Faith opened the curtains on the sliding door. “I'm not sure I'm ready to face everyone just yet.”

“It's just the two of us. The guys are down in the studio today.”

“I thought they were done.”

“So did they, but Eric has become this crazy perfectionist. He said they need to tighten up a few of the songs before they ship it out.”

“Okay, but honestly, I'm not sure I can even face Van yet.”

“Oh come on, you'll be fine. Van's pretty easy going— I don't think he'll hold it against you. Although he may tease you about it.”

“That's what I'm afraid of.”

“You can't hide forever. Come out with us. At least then you won't be drinking alone.”

“Alright, alright,” she said. “Give me a few minutes to get cleaned up. Okay?”

Sarah nodded in approval and sat at the table to wait.

~

Faith fumbled with her keys in the door, tipsy from hours spent cruising the town’s hot spots with Van, Sarah, and the guys. All the guys except Eric. Daniel reported that Eric wanted to make it an early night after a long week in the studio. Faith didn’t mind. Facing everyone else proved a big enough hurdle for one day. Only Van kept bringing it up. The rest took pity, and only acknowledged the incident by telling Van to shut up.

On the cab ride home, she made the decision to give Eric the DVD. Sure, the easy thing to do would be to destroy it now, and never let him know, but her guilt of lying weighed heavy. Before doing anything drastic, she had to watch it again. By four thirty the next morning, eyes burning from fatigue and too much TV, her buzz was long gone, and the resolution to hand over the video wavered several times throughout the night.

She grabbed her cell phone from the coffee table and typed, ‘I have to talk to you.’ Several minutes passed before she hit *send*. Nausea struck when the message showed as delivered. By the time she reached his doorstep, almost an hour later, her forehead glistened and the world around her was off kilter. A light in the kitchen told her he was waiting. She didn’t knock, but hesitated with her hand on the doorknob. The door opened from inside and the smell of coffee rushed to greet her.

Dressed in tattered jeans, he backed away and waited for her to enter. As she passed him, Faith handed him the cased DVD. His eyebrows rose and he bit his lip. “Is this what I think it is?”

She dropped into his recliner and gave him a solemn nod. Chills coursed through her body as she waited for his reaction. To her surprise, he took the disc out of the case and inserted it into the player. Without taking his eyes

from the screen, he backed up to his bed, crab crawling until he stretched out, leaning back on his elbows.

The show opened with Faith eagerly licking and taking his length into her mouth, followed by the scene all their friends saw two days earlier. Eric watched the video, and Faith watched Eric, her anxiety slowly subsiding as her attention turned to the massive bulge in his pants.

“Maybe we can work out joint custody,” he said, over his shoulder.

She tore her eyes from his erection and tried to smile at the back of his head. Careful to stay out of his vision, Faith rose, quietly shimmied out of her jeans and pulled off her t-shirt. As though he read her mind, Eric turned off the TV, unzipped, and shed his jeans— still going commando, to her delight. They met in the middle of his bed, each desperate for the other’s touch. He palmed her breast through the lace of her bra, his mouth attacking the flesh above the material. Faith’s hand pressed his head to her bosom as the other pulled at his hip until they were grinding against each other.

Wherever she craved his touch, his hands instinctively travelled, her need amplified with every inch he covered. She grasped his cock, trying to cover as much skin possible, and he squeezed her nipple. The gentle pinch sent waves of raw desire through her body. The fabric gave way to his forceful fingers, and he leant to tease the stiffened bud with his tongue. The waves became charged currents of electricity, racing to alert every nerve ending of the ecstasy to come.

He ripped her bra away, turned her by her waist, and shoved her head first into the bed. Straddling her legs, he took her panties between his teeth and pulled them over her ass. The thrill of his wet mouth and hot lips covering her cheeks made her grind her pelvis into the bed as his hands pulled her panties away from her legs. The insides of her thighs trembled when he ran his tongue along each one, stopping short of her wet core. He lifted her hips and guided her legs up until she was lying on her knees, ass in the air. Lips kissed and nipped at her bottom while his fingers stroked her pussy. Shortly, his hot tongue replaced his fingers, thrusting at her clit. What already had her writhing with pleasure soon had her panting with need. He licked around her opening, his hands kneading her cheeks, then spreading them as his tongue reached and bathed her rosette. Faith squealed in glee when one finger, then two, slipped into her cunt, followed by one easing into her back hole. Eric’s lips sucked the apex of her leg- where it gave way to her cheek.

She couldn't stop her contractions around his fingers as he slid in and out of her two holes.

Without removing his fingers, Eric rose to his knees. She could hear him rummaging in a drawer beside the bed. It took all she had not to turn her head to see what he was doing, but when she felt the cool moisture drip around her anus, she knew. He removed his fingers to spread the lubricant. Faith's heart raced in anticipation as the heavenly fingers returned. Then, there were two in the back.

"Do you like that?"

She nodded and moaned.

"Will you let me fuck you there?"

Again, she nodded. "Yes—" His fingers retreated and he raised her hips away from their perch between her ankles. Her breath hitched in fear and excitement, waiting for the unfamiliar sensation. She didn't wait long. The delicate skin stretched and gave way as he eased his head inside. Her eyes squeezed shut.

"Relax!" he commanded, giving her cheek a firm slap.

She gasped in response and tried to relax as he stole his way inside, sucking his breath between his teeth as he progressed. Both hands clutched the cushioned flesh of her butt when his groin came flush with her skin. It was so tight, she could tell, as though she had a white-knuckle grasp on his dick instead of the sheets. He didn't move at first, just waiting for her to relax and adjust. Faith couldn't believe it when she instinctively leaned forward and thrust back against him. Eric took the hint and gently started to pump. When his hand reached around to finger her slit, the slightly uncomfortable feeling became an incredible thrill.

Smack! His left hand slapped her ass and she nearly choked on her own breath and her muscles spasmed.

"You like that, don't you?" She grunted. *Smack!* Down came his hand on her already burning flesh. He sped up his pace and his fingers left her clit. The loss of their tantalizing warmth nearly made her cry out, but then, she felt something pressing at her vaginal opening, something larger than fingers. Her delicate flesh stretched and she *did* cry out as the foreign object forced its way inside her and hummed to life. Loud gasps echoed off the walls—hers and Eric's. Since when did he have a vibrator? The question

didn't linger for long as all coherent thought left her mind when he started pumping the buzzing phallus as his cock rammed into her ass.

His free hand returned to her clit, his weight heavy across her back while his hands worked. The thrill of his fingers, the burn of his cock and the quaking of the vibrator sent her consciousness spinning out of control. Harder and harder the three forces pushed her to the edge of the abyss. She whipped her head up in a scream, and was vaguely aware of Van staring at them through the window of the door. Her massive, quickly approaching orgasm had control. She was powerless to do anything but stare back at him until her eyes glazed over and squeezed shut to let the ecstasy overcome her. Pulsations from the machine between her legs, Eric's pounding dick and her own body combined into one enormous explosion.

Her body still rocked when Eric pulled the vibrator away and backed away from her. With both hands, he flipped her to her back, spread her legs, and slammed back into her. He pushed her knees to her ears, his thumb reaching over to push her breast up to his lips. The orgasm continued, along with her cries, losing no force as he released her legs and dug his arms under her shoulders, pulling himself against her. Instinctively, she wrapped her legs around him, her back arching so high that only her head touched the bed. Eric latched on to the vein on her neck like a vampire after blood when his crescendo reached hers, both of them crying out.

“Ah, ah, Faith! Oh my God, Faith!”

“Oh, fuck, Van! Van!” Faith finally managed between gasps. Eric looked at her in surprise until she pointed at the door, and he discovered their audience.

Chapter Nine

As soon as Eric opened the door to let Van in, Faith bounded out, stumbling down the dew covered steps, leaving behind a hasty ‘morning’ to

the grinning Van. This wasn't going to be easy to explain, but he couldn't just ignore it. If he did, Van would tell anyone who would listen, and considering the situation and the players, it wouldn't be good.

He left the door open and turned to the kitchen area. "It's a little early, don't you think? Do you want some coffee?" he asked as Van followed him in and closed the door.

"It's obviously not too early for you, and coffee would be good. Thanks." Van sat at the small table.

Eric refilled his cup from earlier and poured a fresh one. When he turned to hand it to Van, he found the man wearing an enormous grin. Eric shook his head and sat down across from him. Neither spoke, though Eric played various beginnings of explanations in his head. He kept his eyes on his cup, unable to bare the obnoxious smirk on Van's face that flashed between gulps of coffee.

Van broke the silence. "You wanna tell me what the hell that was all about?"

"It's not what you think," Eric shook his head.

"And what do I think it is?"

"It's not like we're together or anything."

"You sure looked together to me." Van pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket. "Mind if I smoke?"

"I do mind."

"Well, after what I just saw, I really need a smoke. Don't you?"

"I can't believe you just stood there watching. How long were you there?"

He plastered the grin back on his face. "Long enough that you should charge me money. You know I'm a pervert, and voyeurism is not beneath me. There's no way I'll turn away from two people engaging in...what the hell was that? I'm not even sure what to call it."

"Sex. It's just good clean fucking, and nothing more."

Van tapped his ring on his cup and shook his head. "Eric, my friend, I've seen plenty of people fuck, I've seen strangers fuck, I've seen lovers fuck, I've seen dogs fuck, but what I just saw through that window was anything but fucking. Jesus Christ— at one point, I thought you two levitated right off the bed!"

"Okay, it's really *good* fucking, but that's all it is. We don't even like each other."

“Could have fooled me. Seemed to be liking the hell out of each other a few minutes ago.” Van pushed his cup to Eric for a refill, and when Eric stood, he continued. “I know what you’re trying to tell me. You told me how much you hate her, and I’ve heard about the way you guys treat each other, how mean you both try to be, but now, I know it’s nothing more than perverse foreplay.”

Eric slammed the cup on the counter and turned from the coffee pot. “It is not foreplay! We seriously don’t get along. I can’t stand that bitch.”

“But?”

“But,” Eric shook his head, “but she does something to me, something out of this world— I can’t even describe it. The sex is... beyond mind blowing.”

“It looked like it. Why can’t you stand her? She seems amazing. I can’t imagine anyone *not* liking her.”

“I don’t know. The first time we met, it didn’t go well, and since then it’s just gone downhill. It’s like every little thing she says or does, irritates the shit out of me.” He handed the full cup to Van.

“What happened?”

Eric sat back down and shrugged his shoulders. “I don’t know. It’s stupid really. When I first saw her, I was really excited. I was sure it was a case of love at first sight, but then, when Sarah introduced us, Faith insulted my playing and song writing abilities, right off the bat, and I never got over it. It was like she ripped my heart out. After that, I found reasons to hate her, and made sure that everything she did somehow affected me in a negative way.”

“Mind if we take this outside?” Van lifted his coffee. “I really do need a smoke.”

“Sure.” Eric grabbed his own cup and led the way to the door.

They both settled on the steps, barely dried by the morning sun, and Van lit his cigarette. After a few deep drags, he chuckled and said, “So, she bruised your fragile ego, and you imploded. At least this explains Faith’s ‘secret lover’ mystery. I would ask that you to take your movie career in another direction, although,” he cleared his throat, “with your impressive build, I’m sure you’d do well.” He laughed at his joke while Eric rolled his eyes. “I knew something was different about you as soon as I saw you, and now I know.”

“You know what?”

“*You* are in love.”

“Bull-shit I’m ‘in love!’ Trust me— she killed that option.”

“So, if you’re not in love, and it’s just sex, you won’t mind if I go for her, right?”

Eric jumped to his feet. “You’re a prick. Why would you ask someone out that I’m sleeping with?”

“You’ve pretty much said you don’t care,” Van looked up at him. “I wouldn’t mind some mind blowing sex, myself. Faith is one *fine* specimen of a woman and after what I saw the other day and this morning, I’d love to sink my dick into that—”

Eric slapped the cup out of Van’s hand, showering them both with hot coffee. “You shut the fuck up!”

“See,” Van said, wiping his wet hand on his jeans. “*You are* in love with her.”

Eric’s mouth opened to argue, but nothing came out. Slowly, he sat back down. *Was* he in love? *Was* it all a sick game he and Faith played?

“Are you starting to come around now, or do I need to smack you upside the head?”

Eric combed through his hair with trembling fingers, finally bringing his head to rest between his hands. “How can I tell for sure?”

“What do you mean, how can you tell? Look how pissed you got when I talked about screwing her. How do you feel about her when you’re together? How does it feel when you kiss her?”

Eric covered his face with his hands. “I’ve never kissed her.”

Van shook his head. “How... Why... What the hell do you mean, you’ve never kissed her? How is that possible? Why wouldn’t you kiss her? How do you do what you two,” he motioned toward the house, “*do*, without kissing? What the fuck? Are you a hooker, and kissing is too personal?” Now, Van jumped to his feet. “That’s it! Kissing is too personal. If you’re just fucking, then you can say it’s ‘just sex,’ but, if you kissed her, that would change the game. You’d have to face your feelings.”

“Nah. Ya think?”

“I do, unless you can give me a better explanation.”

“Well, at first, I didn’t want to kiss her, but then, I really wanted to, but I didn’t want to give her the wrong idea about us, make her think there was

more to it than there was.”

“Has she ever tried to kiss you?”

“No.”

“And you’ve never wondered about that?” Van crushed his cigarette under his boot. “You’re both sick.”

“I mean, we kiss, just not on the lips.”

“Yeah, I saw some of the places you kissed her, and while it’s pretty fucking intimate, it doesn’t count.”

“Pervert,” Eric spit.

They sat in silence for a few minutes, then Eric shook his head and stood. “No, you’re getting all uppity about nothing. It’s just sex, and when it’s over, which will be soon, it’s over. I won’t pretend that I won’t miss it, but I’ll let it go when it’s time.”

“Whatever you say, Eric. Personally, I think you’re just a pussy.”

“And you can’t say anything to anyone about this, okay? Nobody knows, and I want to keep it that way.”

“I can’t believe Sarah doesn’t know. I thought her and Faith were tight.”

“They are, but this is just between me and her. Nobody else, okay?”

“My lips are sealed, but Eric?” Van stood and stretched.

“What?”

“Fifty bucks says you let the cat out of the bag here real soon.” He laughed as he headed up the steps and into the house.

~

Eric spent the day taking Van around to revisit old haunts and friends. Though the subject of what Van observed and what they discussed that morning never came up, Eric couldn’t shake it from his thoughts. Would he be able to let go when the time came? What would it feel like to kiss Faith? He had an intense urge to find out. No matter where they went or who they saw, he couldn’t get the thought of kissing her off his mind. The thought

came to an abrupt end, however, when they met up with Jose and Sarah at Rockabilly Hole for drinks that evening.

He barely sat down and had a drink of his beer when Sarah started squirming in her seat. “What’s wrong with you? Do you have to pee?” Eric asked.

Sarah bounced up and down a few times.

“She has gossip,” Jose explained, rolling his eyes.

“I do, really good gossip. I’m so excited, for Faith.”

“Excited for Faith how?” Eric asked, hoping not to show too much interest.

“Taylor’s back,” Jose said, “and the first thing he did was look for Faith. He came to my house this morning, woke me up, asking where she was, like I would know.”

Sarah punched his arm. “I wanted to tell!”

“Who’s Taylor?” Van asked before Eric could.

“Taylor is the love of her life!” Sarah told them. “At least, that’s what Faith always said.”

The room spun as a coat of sweat spread across Eric’s forehead. The love of her life? Impossible.

“Tell me more,” Van said.

“Well, Faith spent most of her high school and college years madly in love with Taylor. They dated for a while, even after college, but Taylor moved on and left her behind. He said he’d come back for her, but he never did, until now.”

Jose sat forward in his chair. “He’s not the love of her life, or, she’s not the love of his. All that time they were together, he was just using her, waiting for something better to come along. The guy’s a dick.”

Eric hung on every word, afraid to open his mouth, afraid he might be sick.

“That was the young Taylor. He’s more mature now, and he knows what he passed up,” Sarah said.

“How do you know?” Jose asked. “How do you know he’s not just going to walk all over her again?”

“Because he told me. He said he never realized how much he loved her until he had to live without her.”

“Four years it took him to realize that?”

“Oh hush! I think it’s romantic that he came back for her.”

“And I think she’s a fool if she listens to a word he says. She’s way too good for him.”

“Oh, here they are!” Sarah jumped up and started waving.

Just as he was about to make a break for the men’s room, Eric felt Van’s hand on his shoulder. He leaned close so only Eric could hear him. “Take a drink of your beer and breathe. Deep breaths. If you stand up, you’ll make a fool of yourself. Just breathe. Jesus, she’s trying to act like she can’t see Sarah. This is going to be so good.”

“Fuck you, Van.”

“Faith!” Sarah yelled, still waving her arms in the air. “Over here!”

From the corner of his eye, Eric watched as Faith and her man slowly made their way to the table. He tried to control his breathing and swallow his stomach back into place. As he got a closer look at Taylor, he realized they’d been in a few high school classes together, though Eric was a year ahead of him. He remembered him as an arrogant jock, always bragging about his exploits with freshman girls. Back then, he thought Taylor was a bit of a sicko. What the hell did Faith even see in that guy? He guzzled the last of his beer and signaled the barmaid when the happy couple joined their table.

Chapter Ten

Faith was not happy with her situation. At first, she was excited to see Taylor, but after only an hour with him, she began to wonder what had changed. She still felt butterflies at his smile, but his easy charm of old was now dull. Within twenty minutes of their reunion, he brought up marriage. There was no ring or proposal, but he made no secret of his intentions. The old Faith would have been doing cartwheels, but the Faith he found straggling home at seven that morning didn’t know what she wanted. When

Taylor mentioned he'd like to stay with her, she quickly pointed out all the false reasons it wouldn't work, and pressed him to stay with his folks—the painters coming, extreme plumbing problems— she stopped short of fleas.

After his animated confession to her friends that he missed her every minute for four years, and never intended to let her out of his sight again, Faith wanted to walk away. But why? He offered everything she ever wanted from him. Why did it feel like her life was closing in on her? Why was she more concerned with how Eric felt about the situation than with her own feelings? Like she needed his approval or blessing.

When they sat with the others, Taylor wrapped his arm around her waist. He didn't move it to drink his bourbon, his father's drink of choice, or to pull his wallet from his pocket to cover the next round. His touch should have felt warm and loving, but instead, it was cold and possessive. He squeezed her tighter and Faith looked at Eric, but he wouldn't even meet her gaze. He was much more interested in Van and every word that man said. If he wasn't looking at Van, the floor had his attention. No, Eric had nothing to offer her. She was nauseous.

"I'm going to the bathroom," she said in Taylor's ear, struggling to make herself heard over the band.

"Do you want me to come help?" He winked at her, his smile sexy and suggestive.

She returned the smile and shook her head. He stunned her when he stood and pulled her into his embrace. His lips encased hers in a sweet, sensual kiss. The nausea retreated and the butterflies returned, his passion and love more evident in those soft sweeps of his lips than any other time he kissed her. It was a long moment before she could tear herself away.

She squeezed his hand. "I'll be right back."

In the privacy of the restroom, Faith splashed her face and worked to slow her thoughts. What Taylor symbolized appealed to her, yet, what the hell took him so long to choose her? Why would he show up, unannounced, and expect that she'd be waiting for his return? It would be easy to slip back into the same old habits with him— waiting around for him to decide to come home, spending the day excited about their plans, only to have him cancel at the last minute, leaving her home to bear her disappointment alone.

Would he still think more of himself than those around him? Did she just admit that as one of his faults? It was true, though. Taylor always came first. A distant second was the most she ever hoped for, but now, she wanted more. Hell, she could be content on her own, using Eric to satisfy all her physical needs, as long as he was willing.

But, there was the matter of Taylor's kiss. It nearly had her weak at the knees. Eric's kisses didn't do that. In fact, she couldn't even think how Eric's kiss felt. *Taylor deserves a chance at least, a chance to show me that I'm important to him.* With the decision made, she left the bathroom and went back to the table.

Before she could sit, Van jumped up and took her hand.

"Dance with me, Faith," he said, pulling her toward the dance floor. She looked back to the table. Only Taylor, Eric, and Tim remained. Taylor smiled and waved her away, obviously not threatened by the short, agreeable man.

The band played an old Three Dog Night tune, and Van pulled her into a relaxed jitterbug-waltz cross. The way he glided around the floor and led her effortlessly was impressive, and Faith had to chuckle. How could men like Taylor not sense the danger of a man like Van, who, although not the most handsome man around, could likely have his pick of women in the room.

He wrapped his arm around her waist and spun them in a circle. Many couples danced, but Van maneuvered them through and around the others so that Faith never felt crowded.

"I guess congratulations are in order," he said, pulling her close.

"Congratulations? For what?"

"I hear wedding bells are in your future." He flung her to the end of his reach and pulled her back.

"Who told you that?"

"Sarah said something about Taylor coming back to lay claim to you."

"Taylor has no claim to me," she said, louder than she needed to.

"I'm glad to hear that. If he did, I might not get to see as much of you anymore, if you know what I mean." He raised his eyebrows, Groucho Marx style.

"Van!" Faith slapped his shoulder. "You are just rude. A gentlemen wouldn't have mentioned it."

“Have I done anything since we met to make you think I’m a gentleman?” He spun her so her back was to him then swung her around and into his arms.

“I don’t know what will happen with Taylor. I never really expected to see him again, at least, not with an interest in me.”

“I know Eric will be bummed.”

“Eric? How? Didn’t he explain that there isn’t anything between us?”

Van rolled his eyes. “Yeah, he told me all about it. You should ask him to dance.”

“Why would I do that?”

“Because you know you want to, and I think he’d like that.”

“Maybe, but I doubt Taylor would.”

“You said he had no claim to you, so who cares?”

Faith looked to see Eric still at the table with Tim, but Taylor was at the bar talking to a group of people she didn’t recognize, most of them women. “Maybe I will.”

“Do it. I’d love to see how well you two can move on the dance floor, but I don’t think there’s any way you can beat this morning.”

She laughed and shook her head. “You just don’t know when to quit, do you?”

“I’m serious, Faith. Dance with him.”

The idea made her pulse race, but what if he said no? He was in a foul mood already— that was clear. If he took it out on her, she wasn’t sure she could take it. Not tonight. As it was, tears hovered near the surface, ready, should the need arise.

“He won’t say no,” Van assured her as the song ended. “Just do it.” He led her back to the table by the hand, giving her a squeeze before letting go.

The sound of her heartbeat threatened to drown out everything around her. She stared at Eric until her eyes met his, their inviting depths pulling her away from her thoughts, silencing the deafening rhythm of her pulse and wiping away her reason for staring at him, until Van nudged her with his foot.

“Eric? Dance with me?”

His mouth dropped open and Tim’s eyebrows rose. Faith tried to smile.

“Uh, yeah,” he bumbled, slowly rising.

Faith checked the bar again to make sure Taylor was still occupied, then turned toward the dance floor with Eric at her heels. Once more, her pounding pulse replaced the rhythm of the band. After all the crazy things she and Eric had been through over the last few months, why did something as innocent as dancing have her so worked up? The band played The Rolling Stones, Wild Horses, as she turned and waited for him to touch her.

~

He pulled her body to his and held her close. She didn't resist and returned his embrace. The entire night was a blur at this point, a continuum of dizzy spells, panic, fear, and anger. Holding her in his arms gave him a new feeling, at once unfamiliar but welcome.

He sang along to the song in her ear, "Graceless lady, you know who I am. You know I can't let you, slide through my hands. Wild horses, couldn't drag me away."

After a few moments, she spoke— "We should probably start moving or people are going to wonder what's wrong with us. I know you know how to dance— I've seen you do it."

The words didn't sink in right away, but when they did, Eric realized he was standing in the middle of the dance floor hugging Faith as tight as he could, singing to her. He loosened his hold on her, began to sway to the song, and buried his face in her hair. His heart pushed at him to do something, say anything to convince her to be with him.

After a few minutes of silence, she said, "You're very quiet. I thought maybe you had something you wanted to say to me," Faith said.

Was there something he wanted to say? Should he tell her he wanted to kiss her, that he didn't want to let her go? Could he tell her to forget about Taylor and be with him? Did she want him to say something in particular? The more he thought about it, the more he realized, he didn't know how to talk to Faith. All they'd ever done was argue, exchange barbs, or tell each other how good something felt. They'd never had a normal conversation.

“No, I don’t,” he finally said.

She pulled her head away to look at him, but he couldn’t meet her eye. “Okay, I just keep thinking you’re on the verge of saying something.”

He pressed her head back to his shoulder. “I…” he started, but didn’t know how to continue.

“You what?” she mumbled into his shirt.

“I— I don’t know how to talk to you,” he finally spit out.

She looked up at him. “What do you mean?”

“I…we’ve never,” he shook his head in frustration, “we always—”

“Mind if I cut in?” Faith’s body jerked away from his as Taylor pulled on her arm.

The sudden loss of her warmth against his skin gave him chills, and he shook his head to clear the fog from his mind. He searched Faith’s eyes for some glimpse of what she felt, but he only found his confusion mirrored back.

“No, of course not,” he managed as he turned away, even though every bone in his body wanted to knock the bastard to the ground.

He passed by the bar and grabbed Van’s arm as he did. “I’m heading out. I’ll see you tomorrow.”

Van jumped off his stool and followed him. “Where are you going? It’s early?”

“I have a headache. Drinking and dancing isn’t going to make it any better.”

“Dude,” Van stepped in front of him. “Are you okay? Do you want me to come with you?”

“Not unless you can get rid of this headache for me.” Eric pushed past him and walked out the door, into the parking lot. Soon, footsteps sounded in the gravel behind him. Over his shoulder, he saw Van scurrying to catch him.

“Eric, slow down,” Van panted, out of breath after only fifty feet.

“What?” Eric turned on his heel.

“I don’t know what you’re so freaked out about.” Van stopped to wipe his brow, his face glowing pink. “She’s obviously not into him.”

“I’m not freaked out. And of course, she is. He’s ‘the love of her life.’” Eric turned and continued on his way.

“Well, for someone who’s so in love, Faith sure looked uncomfortable with him. In fact, she spent most of her time trying to sneak a peek at you.”

“Really?” Eric stopped again.

“Really.” Van pulled a cigarette from his shirt pocket and stuck it between his lips. His hand fished around for a lighter.

“No,” Eric shook his head and thumped Van’s shirt pocket, where his lighter showed through. “She’s probably just bummed that we won’t be able to screw around anymore.”

Van stomped his feet and spread his arms wide. “Well, duh! If she was that happy about him being back, she wouldn’t have any regrets about not being able to bump nasties with you anymore.” He lit his cigarette and dropped the lighter back in his pocket. “Maybe you haven’t won the hand, but you’d be an idiot to fold when you’ve got such good cards. Hell, that dickhead is betting and raising without even looking at his hole cards!”

“Yeah?” Eric cocked his head to the side.

“Yeah.”

“Well then,” he said with a grin. “I guess I’d better pretty up my poker face.”

“I’m not sure you’ll need it.” Van took a drag. “I think your best bet is to lay your cards on the table and go all-in.”

“Maybe” he nodded.

“Eric.”

“What?”

“Don’t dick around, or you’ll lose.”

“I know.”

Van turned and headed back toward the bar. Eric walked in uneven circles, stopping and looking at the building every few rotations. What if she said no? When Taylor kissed her, it looked like Faith might jump into his arms. Would she push him away if he tried? The daydream of their first kiss returned. His heart raced at the thought of tasting her. Feeling her smooth tongue against his. Hours kissing her might not be enough. Days would be nice, every waking moment spent in her arms, kissing. The one woman in the world he could imagine following everywhere, with his tongue hanging out.

With a deep breath, Eric straightened up, and strode back to the bar.

Chapter Eleven

Navigating the dance floor with Taylor was odd, even compared to Eric's near motionless style. He was the yin to her...yin, his toes constantly underfoot, turning into her, making her stumble around the floor. She pushed him away to dance on her own.

"Maybe we should just—"

"Yeah, maybe."

The song called for close contact, and they were the only couple on the floor dancing apart. Finding the slow rhythm and maintaining fluid movement was awkward. She felt like a displaced flower child.

"I need a drink. Do you mind?" she asked.

"No, a drink sounds great," he said, turning and nearly running to the bar. Faith followed.

A waving twenty got the bartenders attention. "Can I get a Wild Turkey and Coke, and a gin and tonic?"

"You know," Faith pulled at his sleeve, "will you just get me a water?"

"You don't want a water. How about a beer?" He turned to the bar, "Scratch the gin and tonic and make it a beer."

"I really just want some water."

Taylor handed her a can of beer. "Drink this. We are not celebrating my homecoming with water."

When he turned his back, Faith set the beer on the bar. The bartender handed her a glass of water and winked. She thanked him, took the glass, and followed Taylor back to their table. Sarah, Jose, Tim, and Daniel surrounded it, but there was no sign of Eric or Van.

No sooner had she settled into her seat than Taylor popped up from his chair. "Let's play some pool. We can play doubles, and you girls can watch." He grinned and looked back and forth between them all.

Sarah's face blanched at being called a 'girl,' but the guys stood, anxious to play.

"You guys go. Sarah and I are fine here."

Taylor pulled her up, into his arms. He nuzzled her ear. "I need a cheerleader, or I'll get my ass kicked."

She opened her mouth to tell him she was no cheerleader, but he grabbed her by the hand and pulled her along behind him to the poolroom. Why couldn't she tell him he was being an asshole? Why was she trying not to hurt the man's feelings? *Sleep. A little sleep and I won't care what he thinks about it.*

Sarah stood up and followed, shaking her head. Just as Faith decided to walk out, Van appeared at her side.

"What's the matter, sweetie? You look like you're about to burst."

"Nothing. It's just been a long day. As I'm sure you know, I didn't get much sleep last night."

He grinned and rubbed her shoulder. Taylor announced that Daniel was his partner and told Faith she had to cheer for them both.

"Do you want to dance again?"

"No, thanks. In fact, I think I'm going to head out pretty quick. I'm sure if you look around, you'll find plenty of willing partners."

"I'm not determined to dance; I just hate seeing you look so miserable."

She smiled, touched by his concern. He was more of a gentleman than he gave himself credit for. "I'm just tired. Nothing some sleep won't cure."

"Alright! We're stripes," Taylor said, banging his cue on the floor, like that was the object of the game and they won.

Across the room, Eric appeared, his eyes searching. He sighted Faith and came toward her, weaving around the rowdy patrons.

"Eric's back," Van said, but he received no acknowledgment. From the moment Eric's gaze found Faith's he held it, even as he dodged bodies in his path, until he stood in front of her. She held her breath when he stared down at her. Why was he looking at her that way? Did he want to dance again? No, there was something in his eyes, something Faith didn't recognize. Fear? Dread?

His open hand reached for her, palming her cheek and wrapping his fingers around the back of her neck. The world around her disappeared as his face drew near her own, his lips meeting hers, the tender touch sending

sparks through her body, each cell electrified by the feel of his tongue against her own. His other hand cradled her head from the other side as his kiss deepened. Vaguely, Faith perceived a commotion around her, but she refused to give it notice, focusing only on the lightning bolts coursing to each nerve in celebration of this magical experience. The sensation of falling consumed her, but a strong arm rushed to her waist and pulled her upright. Falling, falling, where? To the ground? Away from the earth? Falling in love, her mind told her. Yes. The fall was magnificent.

When his mouth let her go, to the sound of throats clearing and giggles, Faith studied his eyes and recognized the meaning they conveyed— love and devotion. She felt it too.

“Faith! What the fuck!” She tore her gaze away and looked beyond Eric to find Van and Jose restraining a red faced, sweating Taylor. One eye showed signs of swelling.

“I love you Faith,” Eric whispered in her ear. “I can’t promise you things are going to be perfect.” Eric ignored the chaos behind him and continued in a whisper. “We’re going to have to start touring soon, and that could mess things up. But, I promise to do my very best to make you happy and treat you like the incredible creature you are.”

Taylor broke free of his guards and lunged toward her. “You bitch! You can’t treat me like this!”

Eric spun around and met Taylor with his fist. The man staggered backward. Van and Jose stepped aside so he could land on his ass without interference.

A smile spread from her lips to her toes when Eric took her hand in his with a squeeze. “Now, let’s go dance, for real.”

“Wait just a minute,” Sarah stopped them. “I think you two have some explaining to do.”

“No kidding,” said Tim. Jose and Daniel nodded, coming to stand beside Sarah.

Eric put his hand on Van’s shoulder as they passed him. “You wanna fill them in?”

“Gladly,” Van grinned.

Her eyes followed this man she loved as he led them away from their friends, but her ears were on Van until she couldn’t hear him anymore.

“Well you see, all that fighting? It was just cover so you guys wouldn’t know they’ve been screwing each other’s brains out this whole time. That video we watched? Well...”

Once on the dance floor, Eric pulled her into his arms, and swayed to the song. Even though a crowd of people surrounded them, Faith pulled his head to hers. She had to kiss him again. Nothing compared to the feel of his lips on hers. Through several songs, they kissed. Ignoring calls of, “Get a room,” they continued. When she finally pulled away, tears filled her eyes.

“What’s wrong, Baby?”

She pulled him close. “Nothing, I’m just so amazed and in love with you. I’ve never felt this way before and I’m a little overwhelmed.”

He kissed her temple. “As someone who has been in love for a few more hours than you, I should warn you that it doesn’t go away.”

“Good.”

The End

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The Boathouse by Brandie Buckwine (Excerpt)

Becky

My view, the breeze, the sunlight—all were perfect— matching the picture I'd treasured in my mind for years. The cold beer in my hand made

the memories even sweeter, memories of a youth well spent and long gone. Grandpa's boathouse was just as I remembered it, though in need of fresh stain and some new boards. Long days I spent jumping off the dock, first with a life jacket, then into my father's arms, eventually on my own, and finally, trying to bomb and sink my cousins as we played in the crystal clear lake.

My cousins. I had five altogether, but only two that I remember with a special kind of fondness— Mark and Julian. It was with them I had the most fun at the boathouse. When we were younger, we played and splashed around the dock, had swimming races, and measured who could hold their breath under water the longest. After a few years, we were allowed to take the rowboat out on the lake, as long as Julian came with and we wore lifejackets.

It was they who dared me, at the age of twelve, to strip off my bikini and skinny dip, and even though they promised to do the same, their swim trunks remained in place. At thirteen, after a long day of swimming and diving, I let Mark get to first base in the back corner of the boathouse. It was a first for both of us. Our tongues mingled and played together, practicing for future sexual encounters. We practiced until we each felt confident that no one could mistake us for beginners.

At fifteen, Julian, my senior by two years, rounded first and was stranded at second. His hot lips around my taut nipples were almost more than I could bear. He was my first hand job, the first dick I ever saw up close and very personal.

The summer I was sixteen, Julian expertly slid into third. His deft and practiced fingers gave me my first orgasm, and his persuasive hands spurred me to give my first blowjob. Though the third base coach frantically jumped up and down, waving him home, Julian remained at third, perhaps knowing that a home run with a first cousin wasn't such a great idea. I didn't care, I'd never been so horny, and I wanted it all. He left me hungry.

That was the last time we'd all been together. Mark and I playing Scrabble on the back porch, and Julian and I in the boathouse, learning how to please the opposite sex. Now, ten years later, we would meet once again at the Stringer family reunion. I emptied my bottle of beer and smiled at the memories drifting around the old building.

The slam of a car door brought me back to reality, the titillating reality that the car door I heard was likely one of them. I stood, unable to conceal my excitement. Within a few moments, Mark emerged from Grandma and Grandpa's house, and descended the steps into the yard. The family all stood to greet him, and I waited as he hugged our grandparents, my parents, Aunt Susan, Uncle Joe, and finally his own parents. Then, he turned to me. His boyish good looks were intact, though maturity amplified all the little traits that once marked him as cute. They now made him gorgeous. I'm sure my mouth dropped open, as stunned as I was by his statuesque figure and features.

"There she is. Little Becky, all grown up, and grown up mighty fine I might add." He embraced me and kissed me full on the lips. I was so stunned it took me a moment to reply.

"Who are you calling little? We're the same age?" I held him close, sensing that the bond we once shared was still there.

"I'm four months older than you, and that makes you little," he said, holding me away to examine me. I felt naked as his eyes travelled up and down my body, and my face grew hot. He sucked his bottom lip, took a deep breath, and raised his eyebrows as he finished his inspection.

He took the chair next to mine and I sat back down. "So, little Becky, how have you been?"

I noticed that at some point, he had taken my hand and our fingers were entwined. "I've been really good," I said, very conscious of the fact that I was still blushing. "Glad to have some time off from work. I've been looking forward to this weekend for a while."

"Me too, even if we do have to share it with all the old fogies," he glanced over at the group of elders, but they took no notice of us. "Next time, we'll have to just get a room somewhere."

Before I could slap my dropped-jaw shut, he jumped up. "Let's go for a swim."

His cell phone rang as we headed for the house to change.

"Hello? Hey there," he stopped walking, so I waited for him on the steps. "Not much, just about to go for a swim with my knock-out cousin." He paused and winked at me. "Yeah, I wish you were here too."

My heart sank a bit.

"Yep, your loss. Love you too. Later." He snapped the phone shut.

“Your girlfriend?” I asked, hoping I didn’t sound too disappointed.

“Boyfriend.” He watched me for a reaction, and I’m sure I didn’t disappoint. I’m not good at covering my feeling, so I know he read the surprise on my face. How had I not heard through the grapevine that he was gay?

“It was Julian,” he said.

Not only was he gay, but his lover was his own cousin, Julian? I was beginning to get a little dizzy from all the new, crazy information.

“It was Julian, not a boyfriend, not a girlfriend, just messing with your head,” he said with a wicked smile. “God, you’re uptight.”

Mess with my head? Yeah, he sure did. It took me a moment to get my wits about me. “You and Julian say I love you on the phone?”

“I’ll say anything on the phone to get that kind of reaction from you. Come on.” He bounded up the steps, into the house.

We rowed out to the little island in the middle of the lake. As kids, we used to jump off the cliffs into the deep water below, play ‘shipwrecked,’ and any other game that came to mind.

Once we hauled the boat on shore, we took off running for the cliffs. “What did Julian say?” I panted, trying to keep up with him. “Is he coming?”

“Said he’d be here later tonight,” Mark said as he reached the highest point of the island. He turned to me and grinned. “Last one in’s a rotten egg!”

Together, we ran toward the ledge, letting our momentum carry us away from the jagged edges of the cliff. The exhilaration of falling so far, so fast, was something I missed from my childhood and needed in my present life, a life that had become much too serious and complicated. I waved my arms in the air, anticipating contact with the water. Mark, having the advantage of weight, broke the glasslike surface a few seconds before me.

“Looks like you’re the rotten egg, just like always.” He swam toward the shore and I followed.

After our third jump, we remained in the water, swimming leisurely in the late afternoon heat, floating on our backs as the sun kissed our exposed skin.

“Don’t you wish you could be a kid again some days?” he asked.

I nodded, but realized he wouldn't see if he was looking up at the sky, as I was. "Yes, I do. I always had so much fun here with you and Julian."

"Let's pretend it's the old days, and we're kids again." He was right beside me now, treading water. I nodded, eager to play along. We did handstands, summersaults, and jumped off each other's shoulders. After a while, I saw him doing something under the surface, then, his hand splashed out of the water holding his swimming trunks. "Let's skinny dip," he said, throwing his suit to the shore.

"Mark! What the hell are you doing?"

"Come on, I remember you skinny dipping as a kid. You were the first girl I ever saw naked."

"Yes, and I learned my lesson, thank you very much." I swam a few feet away from him. It didn't seem appropriate to be swimming naked with an adult, male cousin, no matter how hot he was.

"I know. That was mean, and I'm sorry. I chickened out on you, but now, my suit's already off—you know I won't cheat you." He did a summersault in the water and his white ass flashed across the surface. His face emerged and he grinned. "Come on, Becky. We're kids today."

I rolled my eyes and reached down to pull my bottoms off. Glancing toward the lake house, I reminded myself that a person would need a telescope to see us from there. Mark swam around behind me and untied my top. It didn't feel very childlike as he pulled my suit away from me—it felt...sensual, exciting, and naughty. He held out his hand for the rest of my suit, and threw it to shore when I surrendered it. His hands took my own from behind and stretched out to the side as he leaned back and we floated to the surface. Between my puckered nipples breaking the surface, his dick pressing against my ass, and his hot breath against my ear, I knew I would give in to any request he might have, but he said nothing. He just clasped our outstretched hands together as we floated in the sun. Every now and then, I could feel his leg reach down to the bottom to give us more lift, and every time his leg came back up, his full erection rubbed along my cheeks.

"You have beautiful breasts." How could he help but notice them as they bobbed on the surface?

"Um, thank you."

His right hand released mine and moved, hovering over one breast, lightly brushing my nipple before it passed to the next.

“Do you mind?” he asked.

What a ridiculous question. Of course I did. This was way too bizarre. I shook my head no. Each hand cupped a breast as we came to a standing position, and his fingers tweaked my nipples. I couldn't stop the moan that escaped my lips.

Taking it as encouragement, Mark slipped one hand between my legs as he sucked my earlobe into his mouth. The same rush I had jumping from the cliff took hold of me as he teased my clit with his fingers. My breast slapped the water each time he pressed his groin against my backside, his erection prodding me to lose myself to the sensations he gave me.

“Oh Becky,” he said as he slipped a finger inside me. “Let me make love to you, baby, just this once. Nobody has to know.”

I was well beyond arguing at this point. One well-timed gasp was my reply when a second finger joined the first and the knuckle of his thumb pressed against the little man in my boat. Mark lifted me off my toes and pressed his dick against my opening. One little poke, two little pokes, three — he slammed into me. The sudden pressure had me gasping for air and sent my mind spinning. He continued to work my clit with one hand and he clasped my breast with the other. I panted and moaned through my growing ardor as my cousin slowly fucked me from behind.

Ripples of water raced away from our exertions, intermittently catching the sun in their escape. I tried to focus on them and the light they cast as my climax neared. The pace of his pumping increased. I could tell he was getting close too— he pinched my nipple and rubbed my clit faster. Hot lips kissed my neck as it hit, sending explosions of pleasure through my body. I cried out.

So did he. “Oh God. Oh Becky, you feel so good,” he bit my shoulder. “I'm coming,” he burst as I reached behind me, around his neck, and pulled his head closer to mine.

After a few moments, he released me and turned me to face him. He leaned his forehead against mine and ran his fingers down my cheek. “Thank you. You've made one boy's dream of a lifetime come true.” Then, he kissed me. The years had made him an even better kisser than I remembered. I could have kissed him for hours, but the sun was setting and my libido was reviving, so I pulled away.

“We’d better be getting back,” I said, taking his hand and leading him toward the shore. “Grandma will keep supper waiting for us, and I don’t want her pissed off.”

We rowed back to shore in the fading light. He smiled at me the whole way, even though I dragged my hands in the lake and kept flicking water in his face. We didn’t speak. What could we say? I love you? That was the hottest sex of my life? I feel dirty, and wicked, and light? No, there were no words, so we rode in silence.

With the boat secured, we threw our towels over our shoulders and headed up to the house. The only person outside was Julian, slumped in his chair, head tilted to the side in sleep, his hand dragging the ground beside him. He was just as beautiful as I remembered, and my breath caught in my chest when he opened his eyes to look at me. Julian was dark, ever since we were kids, and not just dark haired and a darker complexion than Mark and I. He always seemed like there was something just under the surface that he could never share, something that often made him reflective and quiet. I tried so many times to dig deep and find the source of his troubles, but he would just smile and tousle my hair whenever I did.

Around his neck hung a strap for the pair of binoculars that sat on his firm stomach. I froze as he grinned at us and stood.

“My two favorite cousins! I wish I’d gotten here sooner— I could have joined you guys on the lake. Looked like you were having fun,” he said, raising the binoculars and giving Mark a dirty look. He locked me in a bear hug, so I don’t think he saw me blushing. Soon, he pulled me off the ground and swung me around. “So good to see you, Becky.”

“It’s great to see you too.” Regardless of what he saw us doing, he immediately put me at ease.

“Did you have a good day?” He kissed me on the forehead as he brought me back to the ground. At least here was one cousin I wouldn’t have to worry about slipping into an adolescent sexcapade with.

“We better get inside. Grandma is pissed at you guys.”

Mark winked at me as the three of us started up the steps to the house. I stayed two steps behind, admiring the two fine men my cousins had become, and their sexy asses as they took the steps. Damn!

Julian

I couldn't get to the lake house fast enough. Especially once I got off the phone with Mark. The minute he said, "Love you too," I knew he was fucking with Becky, and I didn't know how far he would take it. Turns out, he took it all the way.

By the time I got there, they were out on the island with the boat. That was okay—I got to catch up with Grandma, Grandpa, and my aunts and uncles. All the usual questions. How's work? Where are you living? When are you going to find a nice girl and settle down? You're almost thirty, you know. Of course I knew how fucking old I was! Sorry, but that shit gets to me after a while.

After our little chitchat, I sat down on the porch with a beer and stared at the lake. I saw two figures jump from the cliff in the distance. Damn! If I'd just gotten there a little earlier, I could have been jumping the cliff with them. I told Mark to wait for me—that I was almost there. Bastard.

I got up and went into the house. "Grandpa? Do you still have your binoculars?" After the lecture about putting the lens caps back on and putting them back in the case, I returned to my spot on the porch and worked on sighting in the island. Grandpa was nearly blind, so it was tricky getting them focused in. Now, I kind of wish I hadn't.

The two were in the water, bare ass naked. Fuck, she was so hot, just like I knew she'd be. I watched in shock as Mark touched our fair cousin all over. Some I could see, some I could only imagine. In only a few minutes, the two of them were fucking, right out in the open, right in front of God and Grandpa's binoculars. I had to beat it to the boathouse to, um, try and ease my frustration. I couldn't. And trust me, I tried hard. Couldn't get Mark's cocky grin out of my mind.

I thought Becky was gonna shit a brick when they came back to the house and she saw me with the binoculars. So funny, but we all lived through it, which is kind of surprising since it took everything I had not to break Mark's fucking neck.

Dinner was good, even though Grandma was pissed that Mark and Becky kept everyone waiting so long. If she and the rest of the family only knew what we were all waiting for the pair of them to do, we'd have had a long dirt road full of ambulances.

It was hard not to stare at Becky all night. I watched Shark Week on the Discovery Channel with Grandpa and kept a pillow in my lap to hide my boner. Mark and Becky played Scrabble on the floor, right in front of me. This little thing I had for Becky wasn't new. When we were kids, she was the pesky little shit that always wanted me to play, wanted to come with me wherever I went. By the time she hit her teens, she was developing very nicely and I had no trouble letting her tag along. By the time she let me feel her up in the boathouse, she was smokin'. Yes, I felt her up and she yanked on my pecker. Get over it. The next year, she nearly swallowed the damn thing. God, I wanted to fuck her so bad, but she was only sixteen, and, she was my cousin. Now that I'm older and know a lot more than I did back then, I'll admit that she was the girl I fantasized about whenever I beat off. Hell, even when I was with other women. I admit it. That's how amazing she is.

When the show was over and none of the divers got eaten by sharks, I tossed the pillow and grabbed another beer from the kitchen. It was time to go back to the boathouse. There's only so long a guy can lie around with a woody before he's got to do something about it. Mark and I were roomies for the weekend, so privacy would be hard to come by. To the boathouse.

Thanks for reading,
Brandie

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