



**Sexy Neighbor**

*Sandy Sullivan*

## Part 1 ~ 9/1/10

Jason pried his itchy eyelids open when the sunlight streamed through the window and pricked his face.

*Son of a bitch! I drank way too much last night.*

The guys had come over the night before to celebrate his divorce with way too much beer and Jack Daniels and pay for it today, he would.

A hearty groan slipped from between his lips when his stomach pitched and rolled.

*Shower. I need a hot shower.*

He flipped the sheet back and flung his naked legs over the side of the bed. Bile rose in his throat and he grabbed his aching head between his hands as he struggled not to throw up.

"Way too much alcohol," he grumbled while his world righted itself.

A heavy sigh escaped his lips.

"Okay. Up we go."

His head swam when he stood, but he managed to stay upright and not hurl all over his bed. A few steps and he'd be in the bathroom. His apartment wasn't all that big.

*Bang!*

The noise made his head throb.

"God, not now!"

A new neighbor had just moved in to the apartment next to him and it sounded like he or she was hanging pictures or moving furniture around.

*Scrape.*

*Squeak.*

The shower turned on with a flick of his wrist and the water came out in a thick spray. When he stepped under the stream, the hot water soothed the tight muscles across his shoulders.

*Ah. Heaven.*

Water dripped down his face and off his chin when he stuck his head under the heavy rivulets. His hair clung to his head and neck while he braced his hand on the tile.

*I need aspirin and food even if my stomach doesn't feel like it.*

He shut the water off and stepped out of the shower before he grabbed the large towel hanging next to the sink and wrapped it around his waist.

*Knock. Knock.*

"Crap. Who could that be?" he grumbled while he toweled his hair dry.

*Knock. Knock.*

"Maybe if I ignore them, they'll go away. I'm really not in the mood for company."

The knock came again and he cursed under his breath.

Not caring about his state of undress, he whipped open the door and came face to face with one gorgeous, brown-haired, green eyed siren.

"Oh my. I'm sorry," she murmured. Her gaze slid over his bare chest to the towel around his waist and stopped on his bare feet. "I...uh."

"Something I can help you with?" he asked, his hangover all but forgotten.

"Never mind," she whispered as her cheeks turned a pretty pink. Moments later, she disappeared inside the apartment next door.

"Well, well. My new neighbor, huh? Interesting."

A saucy whistle came from his lips and he felt twenty times better than he had only fifteen minutes ago.

"Food and coffee. I'll be fit as a fiddle in no time. And then I'll have to introduce myself to the beauty next door."

When he headed back into his bedroom, he found his jeans on the floor and a t-shirt lying across the end of his bed and slipped them on. *A bowl of cereal and some coffee would be perfect out on the balcony and who knows, maybe I'll get a treat and catch a glimpse of gorgeous next door.*

With a bowl of Captain Crunch and a cup of coffee in his hands, he slid open the balcony door and took a seat in the metal lawn chair. The second spoonful stopped half-way to his mouth and he about choked on the reminiscence of the first.

A purple thong lay draped over the small wrought iron railing between her apartment and his.

## Part 2 ~ 9/17/10

"Oh my God! I can't believe he opened the door in nothing but a towel around his waist," Stacey said as she slipped back through her apartment door and slammed it shut behind her.

The inside of her new apartment met her gaze when she scanned the boxes, newspaper and bubble wrap lying everywhere. Unpacking was a chore she hated, but the apartment made her smile. Totally hers. Her first place. Moving to downtown Seattle to make her own way felt good.

She pressed both palms to her flaming cheeks and then fanned her face with her hands to cool the heat racing through her.

*Damn, his chest is nice. Shesh!*

"Crap! I didn't even get a chance to ask about the screwdriver. I don't have one and I need it to put my bed together." Quick strides took her back and forth in front of her couch while she paced. "I can't go back over there. I'm too embarrassed already."

Her thumbnail disappeared between her teeth. Another bad habit to go along with chewing on her lips.

"Well, I'll just get some tea and sit out on the balcony for a bit. Maybe if I wait for a few hours to go back over there, the humiliation will be less and I won't feel like such an idiot."

The kitchen consisted of nothing more than a stove, refrigerator and a small island with stark white cabinets and off-white appliances. Shiny chrome accents reflected the light over the small dining room area where she'd placed her two-seater table and twin cane-backed chairs.

"Tea." The refrigerator opened with a tug of her hand and she grabbed the large container of sweet-tea she had made earlier. Two ice cubes tinkled against the side of the glass. The light brown liquid splashed over the ice until she filled it to the rim.

With glass in hand, she moved toward the sliding glass door and the bright sunshine outside. The weather would be warmer this afternoon, but for now, the cool breeze from the river nearby, kept the heat to a tolerable level.

The door slid open with a soft *whoosh*. A small table and wrought iron chairs sat in the middle of her balcony, enticing her with warm reflections and inviting colors. Although her apartment sat on the second floor, the back overlooked the park and its multitude of trees, in the distance. Leaves of every hue of yellow, brown and red graced the limbs stretching in several directions.

She sat in one of the chairs and placed her glass on the tabletop. A soft sigh escaped her lips as she tipped her head back on her shoulders and closed her eyes.

The rough clearing of a throat to her right opened her eyes with a start.

Standing next to the small bit of iron that separated her apartment from his, stood her sexy neighbor. All six foot something with soft looking dark hair, sexy brown orbs and full tempting lips, smiled from the other side while he dangled her purple thong from his fingertips.

## Part 3 ~ 9/22/10

Jason held the purple thong hooked over two fingers and watched the gorgeous woman from next door, flush with color. Her cheeks turned a pretty pink and he wondered how far the color extended. Her eyes widened and her mouth formed a small oh.

*How cute.*

“Does this belong to you?”

She jumped to her feet and snatched the sexy garment from his hand. “Give me that!”

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to embarrass you. I happen to love a woman in a thong.”

“Too bad you won’t be seeing me in one. Now, if you’ll excuse me,” she said as she stuffed the thong in her front jean pocket. Seconds later, she grabbed her glass from the table and spun around to go back into her apartment.

“Wait!”

Her hand hesitated on the handle of the glass doors, but she didn’t turn around.

“The least I can do is welcome you to the complex.”

“Thanks,” she murmured.

“I’m Jason. What’s your name?”

When she didn’t answer right away, he thought she wasn’t going to reveal her name and for some reason, he desperately wanted to know.

“Stacey.”

“Nice name.”

“Thanks,” she replied, finally turning to face him and he lost himself in her eyes. “I guess my mom thought so, too.”

“Sorry about earlier.”

“Earlier?”

“You know, answering the door in a towel.”

“Oh,” she said, color fusing her face again.

“I don’t usually do those kinds of things, but I was pretty hung over from last night and I had just got out of the shower.”

Her beautiful eyes dilated and he wondered if she might be imaging what mystery the towel had covered. A smile twitched at his lips and he covered a small laugh with a cough.

"I heard the party going on over there into the wee hours. I hope you don't do that a lot. I'm a quiet person and I don't care for living next to a partier."

"I'm not a partier either, well except for certain occasions."

"Yesterday was an occasion?"

"Yeah, my divorce was final yesterday."

"Oh. I'm sorry. Divorce isn't fun."

"No, it's not, but I'm glad it's done."

A frown scrunched the skin between her eyebrows. "I didn't mean to pry."

"You aren't. I volunteered the information." She still hadn't moved from the door and he wasn't afraid she'd bolt at the least provocation. It didn't sit well with him. She almost had a deer-in-the-headlights look like it terrified her to talk to a guy. "Are you new to Seattle?"

"Yes. I moved from Iowa to attend the University of Washington."

"Iowa, huh. A small town farm girl?"

"You could say that. My family owns a fairly large farm there, but I didn't want to work it for the rest of my life. I want to be a doctor."

He nodded. "Noble profession. What do you want to specialize in?"

"Pediatrics." She finally returned to her seat at the table. "I love kids."

His shoulder met the stucco wall next to him and he crossed his arms over his chest. The gym workouts lately had paid off. The pectorals of his chest seemed to have more bulk and his arms were more defined now even if he had used the time to work out the frustration and anger of his ex-wife's betrayal.

"What about you? I take it you're a native?"

"Yep. Born and raised here or close by anyway."

The phone in her apartment jingled.

"I'm sorry. I need to get that. I'm expecting a phone call."

"No problem," he said as he watched her back toward the door and the phone continued to trill. "How about I show you some of the town?"

Her eyes widened again. "You mean like a date?"

"Nothing so demanding, just a picnic on the Sound."

A quick glance over her shoulder and her focused returned to him like she had to get the phone, but she didn't want to leave.

## Part 4 ~ 9/29/10

Stacey captured her bottom lip between her teeth for a moment. His dark hair curled slight around his ears and the brown of his eyes mesmerized her. The fresh washed scent of his skin when he'd opened the door earlier, came back to haunt her in the most enticing way. The magnetism of the man, pulled at her libido and she exhaled in a rush that blew the hair off her forehead. "I'm not sure that's such a great idea."

"Why not?"

Her hands found their way to her hips in what she called her "mother" pose. "I don't know anything about you. You could be a serial killer or something."

A wicked grin spread across his face and she her stomach fluttered in response.

"I can give you references," he said, cocking one eyebrow.

The phone stopped ringing.

"Sorry. You missed your call."

"It's fine. I'll check the caller ID and ring them back."

"So? Will you have dinner with me?"

"Dinner? I thought you said a picnic?"

"A dinner picnic. Nothing fancy. The two of us with a blanket to sit on. A bottle of wine. Some friend chicken, potato salad and rolls. Sound good?"

She tapped one finger against her lips. Should she? They were neighbors after all. What would it hurt to get to know him a little?

"All right. What time?"

"How about five? I've got some errands to run today and I'm sure you still have some unpacking to do from the sounds coming out of over there."

"I'm sorry. Has it been really noisy? I didn't consider how thin these walls might be, but then again, your party got pretty loud last night too."

"Touché."

"Do I need to bring anything for our picnic?"

"Nope. Only you and your appetite."

"I'll see you at five then."

"Five it is," he replied as she backed into the house and closed the door.

*A date? I'm not here to date. I'm here to learn. I don't have time for a man in my life.*

"Great, Stacey," she said. Her palm met her forehead in a smack.

The phone trilled again and she shook her head. Boxes and papers went flying while she tried to find the phone receiver as it continued to ring.

"Damn it! Where did I put it?" The last box got tossed across the room. "Ah-ha!"

A quick hello and she heard, "It's your mother. Where have you been?"

"Right here, Mom. I couldn't find the phone."

"Why didn't you answer it when I called a few moments ago?"

"I...uh...I was in the shower."

"Don't lie to your mother, Stacey. It's not becoming of you."

"All right fine. There's a guy next door and we were talking on the balcony."

"You couldn't pull yourself away to talk to your mother?"

"He asked me out. We were discussing the details."

"Asked you out? On a date?"

"Usually asking one out constitutes a date, Mother, yes."

"You are there to learn, young lady, not get hooked up with some man."

"It's one date. He wants to show me Puget Sound. I've never been to Seattle and he's a native."

"Make sure it's one date. I'm not working two jobs to pay for you to be a doctor so you can get tangled up with some no good bum."

"I'm hanging up now."

"Don't hang up on me, Stacey Ann."

"Good-bye, Mother. I'll talk to you later." The phone disconnected with a resounding click.

## Part 5 ~ 10/6/10

The glass slid shut and he took several steps back to return to his cereal and coffee with what he figured was probably a silly grin on his face. Excitement zipped through him and he wasn't sure why. *It's only a date.*

"I haven't been on a date in years." Marriage to Sharon consisted of three years of hell and two years of bliss when they'd been dating. Once the ring went on, the gloves came off and she turned into Mr. Hyde or Mrs. Hyde as the case turned out to be. She's the one who decided she didn't want to be married to a computer programmer anymore. Unfortunately, she took everything they'd built between the two of them with the divorce—the house, the car, the boat and everything else worth anything. About all she'd left him was his clothes. "Thank God, we never had children."

The pretty thing next door was so opposite of Sharon, it made him laugh. Sharon had the build to go with the airheadedness. Her long blonde hair and big blue eyes gave her the air of the dumb blonde, but it didn't last. He found out real quick once they got married, how conniving and underhanded she could be. It didn't help her daddy was a divorce attorney. "Bitch."

Green eyes, long brown hair and a beguiling smile swam in front of him. Stacey wasn't even standing there anymore, but her pretty eyes returned to his mind. Curvy in all the right places, breasts big enough to fill a man's hands, hips made for grabbing and an ass to go along with everything, made up the entire package.

"Oh yeah," he said with a small laugh. He rubbed his palms together and whispered, "Yes. A little wine, something to eat, a pretty sunset and I'll have it made. I might even get lucky tonight."

He grabbed the bowl and coffee cup and moved toward the inside of his apartment with plans and preparations to be made.

Several moments later, his cell phone rang and when he picked it up, the screen showed the name of his ex.

"What the hell is she calling for?"

The phone opened and he answered with a sharp, "What do you want Sharon?"

"Hi to you too, sugar."

"I'm not up for playing you games today."

"I wanted to talk to you, Jason." He could hear the frustrated sigh on the other end. "You know our divorce finalized yesterday."

"Yes, I know. The guys and I had a party last night to commemorate."

"You celebrated our divorce?"

"Damn right! You're the one who chose this path, not me."

Several moments of silence met his ears and he wondered what she was up to now.

"Jason, honey, I want to see you."

*She can't be serious!*

"Why?"

"We need to talk. There's something I should have told you before our divorce finalized."

"What Sharon?"

"I can't tell you on the phone. We need to meet somewhere. Five o'clock?"

## Part 6 ~ 10/13/10

"I cannot believe my mother," Stacey grumbled. "It isn't enough she's always telling me who to date or not, where to live, what to study, but now she's telling me not to date anyone because it will interfere with my schooling."

She threw the phone across the room and watched as it bounced off the couch cushion and land on the floor. Her father would never have acted this way were he still alive.

One box lay open on the floor and she picked up a framed picture. The smiling face of her father stared back and she felt a small smile drift across her lips. She still missed him so much even though he passed away some five years earlier. Hit head on by a drunk driver on his way home from work, he died instantly the late fall day. Thankfully, he hadn't suffered.

Her finger traced the square jaw of the man she resembled so closely, it hurt to look in the mirror sometimes. She had the same bright green eyes and brown hair, but his dry wit was probably her biggest asset from him. From an earlier age, she wanted to follow in his footsteps caring for children. Doctor Jim, as everyone called him, came from old farm stock. Every man in the family was a doctor, from his great-great-grandfather on down. With no son to carry on the tradition, it fell on Stacey's shoulders. The challenge and institution of being the doctor of the current Miller branch to live Olive, Iowa came with a price. Her love life suffered the consequences. Oh sure, she dated, but the small town where she lived left little under the prospects column of future husband. Not that she wanted one, but it would have been nice to date without every guy looking at her for the money in trust. The inheritance she would come into when she turned twenty-five, would set her for life even if she didn't work another day. But money wasn't why she wanted to be a doctor.

Beautiful wasn't a word she associated with herself, although she didn't think ugly had a place either. Plain, came to mind. With no curl to her hair at all, it hung long, thick and straight to her waist. Her eyes seemed a little too wide to her, but they were her best feature.

"Well, whatever. It's not like I'm looking for a husband or even a permanent man in my life. I don't have time. These classes are going to kick my ass if I don't stay on the straight and narrow." Her steps took her back and forth in front of the coffee table. "Focus. I have to focus."

The thin walls of the apartments in the building reared their ugly head. The party last night had been loud, but she figured it was because of the music playing and the noisy laughter. Not so this morning.

The saucy tune Jason whistled could be heard loud and clear. Banging, clanging and slamming from what sounded like the kitchen in his apartment, bounced off the walls in her living room.

"Great. How in the hell am I supposed to study with all the noise? I certainly can't live here if I have to listen to this kind of crap every night and every day. What happens when I start doing residency rotations and I have to sleep when I can?"

## Part 7 ~ 10/20/10

"I can't meet you at five, Sharon."

"Why not, sugar?"

"I have a date for dinner."

"You're dating already?"

"Sharon, you dated while we were married. It's about damned time I caught up with you."

"Fine, Jason. What about four at the little corner market the street from your place?"

The whine in her voice made him grit his teeth. *God, the sound of her voice grates on my nerves.*

"Coffee Cat?"

"Yes."

"Be on time. I don't want to be late for my date." The phone snapped shut in his palm and he had to fight the urge to throw it across the room. "Man, she can ruin a good day in a heartbeat."

Beer bottles, pizza boxes, and every imaginable liquor bottle littered his apartment. Cigarette butts filled the ashtrays and trash lay everywhere.

"What a damned pig sty," he grumbled as he started to pick up the bottles and toss them in the trash.

An hour went by before he had the place cleaned up to his satisfaction and decided to head to the store for supplies.

Keys in hand, he shut and locked the door behind him. The saucy whistle on his lips and the anticipation running laps up and down his back, turned several heads on his way to his car.

The grocery wasn't too far away, but he cranked up the music on his stereo and rocked out to AC/DC for the short ten minute drive.

"Hey Jace," a pretty blonde called from her convertible when he stopped at the light.

"Hi, Maddie. How are ya, honey?"

"Good. You free this weekend? I need a date for a party."

"Sorry, babe. I'm working."

"Well damn. Maybe next time, huh?"

"You bet."

She sped away and he smiled. He knew he wasn't bad looking. In fact, a lot of women mentioned how pretty his eyes were and he didn't think he had a terrible build either. Even for a computer programmer, he had muscles in all the right places. His gym workouts paid off.

The parking lot of the grocery sat full of cars and trucks of every make and model you could think of. The area he lived in now wasn't the high-life side of town, but it fit his budget.

"Yeah, the budget I have to keep now to pay Sharon's damned alimony payments. I hope she finds herself a husband real fast. I should have made her sign a pre-nup."

"Well if it isn't Jason. How are you doin', sweetheart? I'm sorry to hear about your marriage," Mrs. Collingsworth said, stopping him near the door.

"Hi there, Mrs. Collingsworth. I'm doing fine. In fact, I have a date this evening. So if you'll excuse me, I have to get a few things."

"Good for you. I thought Sharon was all wrong for you anyway." The elderly woman patted his cheek. "You have a good time."

"I plan to. Thanks."

Up and down the aisles he went. Grabbing potato salad, wine, glasses since he didn't have any, and some food items he could warm up right before they left and pack in the small basket, his plans started to take shape.

"Hey, buddy. You look pretty chipper for being so drunk last night," Allen said when he walked up behind him.

"It's a wonder what a pretty woman, a hot shower and some sexy underwear will do for a hangover."

## Part 8 ~ 10/27/10

Within moments, the noises from his apartment stop and she sent up a silent thank you. She didn't know why her mother continued to harp on her the way she did. It wasn't like they needed money. Her father made sure he had a nice insurance policy to cover them should anything happen to them.

The phone rang again and she grumbled under her breath. *Now what?*

"Hello?"

"Hey sis."

"What's up Terri?"

"Nothing much. I wanted to find out how you are doing there in sunny Seattle?"

Stacey glanced out the window to see low hanging, gray clouds. The typical Seattle weather. Rain, rain and more rain. They should have named it the no-sunshine state. Well it wasn't completely true. The sun did shine in the summers. Today seemed to be one of those days where the weather matched her mood.

"I'm fine. Trying to get my stuff unpacked is a priority right now."

"When are you starting classes?"

"In a couple of weeks. I wanted to be here early to get settled in and look around some."

"Sounds like a great idea. Maybe you can find some nice friends to hang out with a maybe a great guy."

"I don't need a guy, Terri. I need to get through my studies and graduate."

"You still need to get laid once in a while. It will help loosen you up a bit. You are too uptight all the time."

"Having sex won't relax me."

"If it doesn't, Stacey, you're doing it all wrong."

"How in the hell would you know? You're only seventeen."

"I may only be seventeen, but I'm no virgin."

"I don't need to hear this," she replied as she resumed her pacing.

"Don't worry about it. I'm not sleeping with half the football team."

"Please tell me you are using condoms and birth control."

"Yes mother Stacey, I am. The last thing I want at seventeen is a baby or STD's."

A sigh of relief left her lips. "At least you have a good head on your shoulders, Terri."

"I had to. You and mom pounded it into my head from the time I was small. Never mind daddy."

Stacey sniffed and rubbed her nose. The itchy and burning in her eyes gave away the treat of tears.

"Stop, Stacey. I know you miss daddy and so do I. I wish every day he hadn't died. I want to see his smile and feel his arms around me, hugging me until I can't breathe. He'll never walk me down the aisle. He will never see his grandchildren."

"All right, stop. You're going to make me cry."

"Crying isn't bad. You might feel better if you do."

"I don't have time for sad tears. I've got a date."

*Shit! I should never have told her that.*

A high-pitched squeal met her ear through the phone and she had to pull it away from her ear before she went deaf.

"A date? You haven't been there even a week and you have a date? Spill it! I want details!"

"I haven't been on it yet, so I can't give you details. My neighbor asked me out for later tonight. Nothing big. A picnic is all."

"Is he cute?"

"I would say yes." Another squeal. "Would you stop doing that?"

"Sorry."

"He's about twenty-five I would guess. Dark hair and brown eyes. Nice chest, six-pack abs. Some hair on his chest, but not like a gorilla or anything."

"You saw his chest?"

*Oh shit!*

## Part 9 ~ 11/2/10

"Pretty woman, sexy underwear? What the hell are you talking about, man?"

"My brand new, sexy-as-hell next door neighbor. She knocked on my door this morning. When I answered in nothing more than a towel, she flushed all pretty like and disappeared into her apartment again. I went out on the balcony with some breakfast and low and behold, lying on the railing between her apartment and mine was sexiest pair of underwear I'd seen in a long time. A purple thong."

"No shit. Really?"

"Yep and after a few sweet words, I've got a date with her tonight for a picnic dinner out on the Sound." Jason tipped his basket so his buddy could see the contents. "Wine, food, nice scented candle and I'm all set for seduction."

"Do you really think she's going to fall for all of this," Allen asked waving his hand to indicate Jason's basket.

"I don't know, but I'm willing to try. She's hot, man and even if I have to settle for only a kiss, I'll be a happy man because it means they'll be more."

Allen shook his head. "You just got out of one relationship and here you are throwing yourself right into another one."

"I don't need a relationship, Allen. I'm only looking for a little sweetness between the sheets for a little while. Sharon made me think all women were like a block of ice in bed and I aim to remember they aren't."

"Don't get yourself all wrapped up in some new chick, Jas. It's a bad idea." Allen slapped him on the shoulder. "I'll see you around. I've got a few things to buy myself."

"Later, dude."

Jason paid for his purchases as he whistled a saucy tune. Nothing could bring him down today, not Sharon and her mysterious news, not Allen and his advice and not the grumpy cashier who rang up his purchases without even a smile.

He made it home in record time. A quick glance at Stacey's door revealed nothing. No sound came from her apartment and he almost stopped and knocked, but decided to wait until they met later to give her the flowers he bought as spur of the moment thing.

His whistle continued while he put away the groceries and pulled out the wicker basket hiding in the closet. Someone had given it to him and Sharon for their wedding, but they had never used it. After their marriage, she had done a complete one-eighty. She never wanted to go anywhere except high-end parties, clubs to mingle and hobnobbing with the bosses of the computer company he worked at. Things he hated.

A quick glance at the clock revealed three thirty. He didn't want to miss this so called meeting with Sharon. Something in his gut told him she didn't have good news to share. The walk to the coffee shop wouldn't take too long, but he figured it would be better to be there before she got there so she didn't catch him off guard.

The walk to the shop only took a few minutes and left him at least fifteen before Sharon showed if he knew his ex at all.

Sure enough, she arrived twenty minutes later, out of breath and looking nervous. A tentative smile spread across her lips as she approached the table he'd procured.

"Hi, sugar."

"Don't sugar me, Sharon. What the hell do you want now? You've already taken everything we owned and managed to snag alimony to boot until you get your ass remarried."

"Wow. Aren't you in a sour mood," she said, sliding into the chair across from him.

"You put me that way just being near me. Now. Spill whatever is on your mind so I can get on with my date."

She grasped his hand and squeezed his fingers before he could pull it away. "This isn't easy, Jason. I know how much I hurt you. It wasn't fair to you. I behaved terribly during our marriage and I really hoped you could forgive me."

"What? You can't be serious?"

"I *am* serious."

"Okay. What brought all this on?"

"I found out something about a month ago and I should have told you beforehand, but I was scared you'd hate me." She inhaled sharply and blurted out, "Jason. I'm pregnant."

## Part 10 ~ 11/10/10

"Does Mom know you have a date with the guy next door and you've already seen his chest?"

"Never mind, Terri."

"Come on, Stacey! You are no fun at all!"

She sighed and stared at the ceiling for a moment before she said, "It's not a big deal. I went over to borrow a screwdriver and he didn't have a shirt on."

*Never mind the little detail of his only wearing a towel.*

"Well, he sounds dreamy."

"You did *not* just say dreamy."

"Sounds pretty lame, huh?"

"Yes, Terri, it does. No one says dreamy anymore."

"All right. He sounds gorgeous and hot and sexy and—"

"Enough. Okay? I need to go. I've got things to do."

"Shower, shave your legs. Put on a pair of those thong underwear you like to wear..."

"Goodbye, Terri. I'll talk to you later."

"Call me! I want to know if you slept with him."

"You are impossible! I'm not having sex with a guy I just met!"

Stacey snapped the phone shut and sighed again. Her little sister could be impossible sometimes, but she loved her and would do almost anything for her. It worried Stacey that Terri had already had sex. Her sister was only seventeen.

Stacey had been so choosy about who she lost her virginity to, but it still didn't turn out the way she would have liked. David was her boyfriend for almost a year by the time they had sex and she thought she loved him. The scoff coming from her mouth sounded bitter. It should. Once he had managed to talk her out of her underwear, all of the sudden they weren't right for each other. He wanted to see other people. All the usual reasons guys give for breaking things off. Weasel was the word she had used to describe David. Within days of them having sex, all of his buddies knew about it and she assumed he had told them. Especially right after they broke up and her phone started ringing off the hook. His buddies called wanting dates.

The clock on the wall struck four. Only an hour before her date with Jason. She captured her bottom lip between her teeth and tried to decide how best to handle this *date*. The mirror over her couch reflected her flushed cheeks and small smile.

Terri knew her sister well. Shower, shave the legs, a sexy denim skirt and tank top would be just the ticket she needed. After all, once classes started, dating would be out for the most part. The rigorous schedule she had set up wouldn't allow time for dating.

The multiple years of school stretched in front of her like a low, depressing cloud. To be a physician like her father and his father before that wasn't something she took lightly. The noble field of medicine called to her like siren's song. She had never wanted to do anything else with

her life. When her friends were being cheerleaders, band members and did all the extracurricular activities she would have liked to do, she sat in her room studying for the SAT's. The studying paid off. Her score had come back amongst the highest in the nation.

Tonight she wouldn't think about those things. Tonight she could lose herself in the company of a guy who found her attractive and wanted to be with her for more than sex or at least she hoped Jason didn't just want sex.

## Part 11 ~ 11/17/10

"You're what!?" Jason exclaimed. "You can't be serious. Pregnant?"

Sharon wiped a tear from the corner of her eye, but he wasn't convinced. Manipulation came easily to her.

"I'm deadly serious. I didn't plan this. The last thing I want or need is a child."

"Well, of course not, Sharon." He raked his fingers through his hair. *There's no way. Her with a child?* "You never wanted children in the first place. They cramp your party lifestyle."

"Stop! All right?" Her blue eyes snapped fire when she focused on his face.

He sat back against the chair trying to gauge what she might be up to now. "So why are you telling me this?"

Another tear appeared and he ground his teeth together.

"Because it's yours."

"There is no fucking way your baby is mine, Sharon."

"It is, Jason. I got pregnant the last time we were together."

"Three months ago?" he asked.

"Yes," she whispered and dropped her gaze to where her hands strangled the napkin in her fingers.

"You were on the pill."

"Those aren't one hundred percent effective. You know that."

"And, you were sleeping with how many other men at the time?"

"I wasn't."

"Yes you were, Sharon. I have proof of your infidelity." He wasn't going to let her get away with this. The divorce decree already gave her a nice monthly alimony check and he'd be damned if he would pay child support on top of it, if the child didn't belong to him.

"All right fine, Jason, but I wasn't unfaithful to you around the time I got pregnant."

"A paternity test will prove it's not my child."

A gasp left her mouth and he knew she hadn't planned on him asking for one. He wasn't stupid and he didn't trust her.

"I can't have one of those while I'm pregnant."

"Then you'll be having one the minute the child is born, Sharon. I will not be paying for a child that doesn't not belong to me, so forget it." He jumped to his feet and tossed his now cold coffee into the trashcan behind him. "Now, if you will excuse me. I have a date."

Quick steps took him back toward his apartment complex. Frustration and anger drove his rapid retreat. The mental calculation in his mind of their last love making session, brought doubt and wonder. *I guess it's possible, but damn it! I do not need this!*

Sharon couldn't have shocked him more except if she would have told him she wanted him to move back into their house with her and her latest lover who happened to be a woman.

*No, not their house anymore. Hers.*

So lost in his thoughts, he didn't see Stacey until she called his name as he approached her door.

"Jason?"

He lifted his gaze and locked onto her pretty face. She looked almost shy and unsure of herself, standing in the doorway of her apartment dressed in a pair of white shorts, pink tank top, open-toed sandals and her pink polished toenails.

*Damn she's cute!*

## Part 12 ~ 11/23/10

The worried frown on his handsome face, made her uncertain. She really didn't know him very well at all and he looked almost pissed about something.

"Sorry, Stacey. My mind was on something. You look nice."

She glanced down at her clothes and shrugged. Originally she wanted to wear a jean skirt, but changed her mind half way through dressing. A skirt seemed so old fashioned. "Thanks, but it's nothing really."

"Are you ready to go?"

"Yeah. Let me grab my bag. I'm bringing some warmer clothes along since I'm not sure how cool it will be out on the water."

"Let me grab our picnic out of my place and I'll meet you in the hall here in a few minutes. Okay?"

"Perfect," she replied and then ran back inside her apartment. The tote bag she had planned to take, sat on the small table near her couch. A quick peek inside to make sure she had everything she would need, and she was ready to go.

The door of her apartment shut with a bang as she stepped out into the hall. Moments later, Jason appeared, took her hand in his and said, "Let's go. I can't wait to show you all there is down by the water." He stopped and looked at her with a concerned expression on his face. "You do like the water, right?"

A silly giggle bubbled from her lips and he smiled. "I love the water. Just don't go pushing me in it though. It's a bit cold to be trying to swim even in this weather. I understand the water in the sound is frigid."

He leaned closer and her heart sped up. His nose brushed against her ear and she forgot to breathe.

"I'm sure I can keep you warm."

Shivers rolled down her arms with the warmth of his breath against her ear and the sensitive skin of her neck. Her nipples puckered tight and tingled with awareness.

"I...uh."

He moved back and she could breathe again except the fire in his eyes scorched her from the inside out. "It's okay. I won't push. I want you to know I'm extremely attracted to you and I think you are one of the most beautiful women I've seen in a long time."

Not giving her a chance to respond, he tucked her hand through the bend in his elbow and escorted her to his car.

"Wow," she whispered when she caught a glimpse of his ride.

A cherry red, Mustang GT convertible sat in what she assumed to be his parking space.

"Nice car."

"Thanks. It's about the only thing my ex-wife didn't take."

"You sound a little bitter."

He opened the passenger side door for her and she slid inside. The conversation resumed when he slipped behind the wheel and backed out of the parking space. "I'm sorry. I guess I am a little bitter. She took everything we had other than my car, but then again, she had a Jag."

"Jag?"

"Jaguar. She liked the high life. I didn't."

"You must have a great job then to afford those kinds of luxuries. What do you do?"

"I'm one of Vice Presidents of Development for Microsoft."

"Really. That's cool. I bet it's an exciting job."

He glanced her direction and then back out the front window. "Sometimes, I guess."

"So what had you so upset when you came down the hall a little while ago? You looked pretty pissed off."

The frown on his face did nothing to calm the nervous fluttering in her stomach.

"If you don't want to tell me, it's fine."

A heavy sigh rushed from his lips and his next words sent her heart skittering almost to a stop.

"My ex-wife informed me this evening, she's pregnant."

## Part 13 ~ 12/2/10

*Why in the hell did I tell her about Sharon's pregnancy? Great. Now she'll think I jumped out of the marriage and left my ex high and dry carrying my child.*

"I didn't mean to burden you with my problems. She informed me about two hours ago and no, I didn't know she was pregnant before our divorce."

"I wasn't prying, Jason. It's none of my business."

He reached across the car and grasped her hand from where it lay in her lap. "I know you weren't, Stacey. The whole thing caught me by surprise, too." They drove in silence for another few minutes. "So, tell me about yourself."

"You know I moved here from Iowa. I have one sister and my mother. My father died a few years ago and I miss him like crazy. We were very close."

"What happened?" he asked, curious about this woman even though they had just met.

"He died in a car accident. Hit by a drunk driver."

"I'm sorry," he murmured, squeezing her fingers in comfort.

"It happened five years ago, but I still miss him terribly," she whispered, staring out the window.

"I can't even fathom what you must feel."

She sniffed and wiped the tear from the corner of her eye when she turned back toward him. The small wetness glistened like a rare diamond, on her cheek. "It's all right." She stared back out the windshield. "My sister is younger by a few years. My mother is overbearing as mothers will be. She didn't like the fact of our date this evening."

"Why?"

"In her words, 'I'm not working two jobs so you can hook up with some man.' Or something along those lines anyway. Don't worry though. She's not working two jobs. In fact, she doesn't work at all. My father's insurance policy left her well off."

"Not very nice of her to make you feel guilty for wanting to enjoy yourself occasionally."

"No, but I'm used to it."

"Well, I for one am glad you decided to come with me. We'll enjoy the setting sun, have a nice picnic and I'll get to know you a little better."

"Okay."

He turned right onto a long one-lane paved road toward the small park he knew of that sat on the water's edge of Puget Sound. This spot held a special place for him and he wanted to share it with her for some odd reason.

"This is very pretty," she said as he pulled into the empty parking spot.

"Thanks. I love it here. It's usually quiet, not very crowded and there are some great spots for a blanket." He shut the car off, popped open his door and walked around to her side to help her out. "I know the perfect spot," he said, grabbing the basket from the backseat. "Let's head down the walkway over there."

The feel of her palm in his, almost made him feel giddy and he wasn't sure why. He didn't normally react to a woman like this, but Stacey seemed special. She didn't appear to know how gorgeous she was with her big green eyes, soft looking lips, and long soft hair hanging to the middle of her back.

"Here we are."

"This is beautiful," she said, her gaze taking in the scenery around them.

Tall evergreens hugged the shoreline and a small sandy area meandered from the rocks near the parking area to stretch to the edge of the water. Several picnic benches were scattered around, but he chose to spread their blanket out on the sand. "Sit with me," he said, tugging her hand until she sat with her legs tucked under her. A soft breeze rustled the trees over their heads, sending the boughs moving back and forth in a gentle rocking motion. Water lapped at the sandy shore with a quiet slapping sound. Boats lined the water way to their right.

"Wow. There are tons of boats over there in the marina. There must be some really grand houses in the area and people park their boats nearby. Expensive houses, I'm sure."

"Yes they are. It's where mine used to be."

## Part 14 ~ 12/8/10

"You're place? You have a house over there?"

"Had. My ex took it in our divorce."

"I'm sorry," she replied, dropping her gaze to where her hands clasped tightly in her lap.

He took her hands between his. "Don't be. It made me realize having a big house and all the toys I could want won't make me happy."

She nervously pulled her hands from his grasp and cleared her throat. "Your job must pay really well."

"It keeps me eating." He pulled open the basket and started to empty out the food items. "Speaking of eating, let's see what we have here." Naming off the entire contents as he placed each one of the blanket, she noticed the strength of his hands, the fluid motion of his movements and the low, sexy rumble of his voice.

"Stacey?"

"Um, yeah, sorry. I spaced out there for a minute. What did you say?"

He held up two soda cans. "I asked which you preferred. Diet or regular."

"Diet, please." Next came the plate of food. A little dab of everything he brought, weighed the plastic plate down. "There is enough food here for three people."

"I don't want you leaving hungry."

"Hungry? Good grief, I won't be able to move after this."

"Naps in the setting sun are really romantic, you know." A flirty grin spread across his face. "We could curl up right here on the blanket. You could lay your head on my chest and we'll take a nice snooze."

"Um. No."

"No?"

"No." She stuck a fork full of potato salad into her mouth and chewed while she contemplated how to not encourage Jason, but still make sure he understood she couldn't have any kind of relationship with him. "Listen, Jason. You seem to be a really nice guy even though I've only known you for what could be counted in hours, not days. You need to understand, when my classes start, I won't have time for a relationship even if you live next door."

A chuckle passed his lips and then turned into more of a laugh. The sound got louder and louder the more he snickered.

Heat crawled up her neck and she dropped her gaze to the blanket beneath them. She set her plate down and bit her lip while he continued to laugh.

Now, she felt like slapping him. "What's so funny?"

"You. I really thought you were serious there for a second," he said, wiping his eyes of the tears brought on by the joke.

"I am serious, Jason. Deadly serious."

"Well, I hate to break it to you, Stacey, but I'm not. I'm not looking for a relationship either. It's the furthest thing from my mind. I don't want or need a girlfriend, wife or any kind of permanent fixture. All I'm looking for is a good time."

Anger zipped down her back and she straightened her spine. "A good time?"

"Yeah, you know. A girl to hang out with, go out sometimes—"

"And someone to warm your bed on occasion."

He shrugged his broad shoulders. "Yeah. That's kind of a given."

Her palm itched to slap the smug look right off his face. "Well too bad, Mr. I-Need-To-Get-Laid. You're barking up the wrong tree. I don't want or need a man in my life for a bed partner or otherwise. Take your proposition and shove it up your ass!"

## Part 15 ~ 12/15/10

Stacey jumped to her feet and walked toward the car—every step angry and determined and he so screwed.

*Man, I really fucked that up!*

He jammed his fingers through his hair and stood.

She irritably paced next to his car while she chewed her thumb nail, but didn't glance in his direction. With a heavy sigh, he walked toward her, ready to apologize for his stupid mouth.

With both hands stuffed in his front jeans pockets, he rocked back on his heels and dropped his gaze to the group beneath his feet.

"Stacey, listen. I'm sorry. For one, this dating thing is new to me again. I was with my ex for several years." He reached out and touched her arm, stopping her nervous pacing. "I'm an ass. Okay? I shouldn't have said those things and I shouldn't assume anything between you and me. When we finally do have sex—"

"If, Jason and that's a big if," she grumbled and stepped back.

"All right. If we have sex, it will happen when we are both ready for it to and not before. I won't assume anything."

"Good because if you do, she'll be making a bigger ass of yourself when you go to the emergency room with one of my high heels up your ass."

A small smile twitched at her lips and he knew she forgiven him, at least for now.

"Can we finish our picnic before the ants do?"

"Never eaten ants before? Chocolate covered ones are a delicacy, you know," she replied as they fell into step and walked back toward the blanket.

"Uh, no," he said, shivering from the thought. "I like chocolate and I don't mind it over strawberries, ice cream or several other things, but ants? No thank you."

"What about fish?"

"Chocolate covered fish?"

"No, silly. Do you like seafood? You know, lobster, crab, shrimp—those kinds of things."

"Oh. Yeah, I love seafood."

They sank down on the blanket together and she picked up her plate. The fork disappeared between those tempting lips with each bite she took, but all he could think about was how they would feel wrapped around his cock. Her lips look so soft, full and pouty. When her temper flared, like it had a short time ago, her eyes dilated and snapped, her bottom lip disappeared between her teeth and she would fold her arms across her chest, pushing those tempting breasts

up. The temptation to strip off the layers of clothes and bury his face between her breasts, came on so strong, he blinked in confusion when she said his name.

"Jason?"

"Sorry. I was thinking about something. What did you say?"

"I asked you if liked to do it from behind."

## Part 16 ~ 12/22/10

"Pardon?" he choked out.

His pupils were dilated into wide, round orbs of brown resembling a pool of dark chocolate—so rich and lovable, but with a slight bitterness to it.

"I said, do you like to do it from behind?" His eyes widened further and she realized what she'd said. "I didn't me *that*. I meant eat lobster tail first? On the east coast when you order lobster, you get the whole thing, not just the tail. It's really quite an experience."

*I'm babbling. Great. He's going to think I'm a first class dumb-ass blonde.*

"Uh, no. I don't think I've eaten a whole lobster," he replied, clearing his throat and dropping his napkin in his lap.

She swallowed hard and stuck another bite of food between her lips.

Leaves rustled overhead in the slight breeze. Dogs barked in the distance. The faint sound of water lapping at the shore reminded her of one of those relaxation tapes her mom used on occasion.

"It really is pretty here," she said, trying to change the momentum of the non-existent conversation. "Most of the trees are always green or should I say the pines."

"They don't call them evergreens for nothing."

"True. In Iowa we have four seasons. The piles of snow in the winter, the early leaves and flowers blooming in the spring, the heat of the summer sun in June and the gold, red, and yellow leaves as fall dawns."

"You should be a poet or writer. You have a way with words."

The heat of the blush rushing over her neck and cheeks made her drop her gaze to the plate on her lap. She never did take compliments well. "Thanks. I do like to write, but it's not a career choice for me. Doesn't pay the bills."

"What about some of the famous writers out there? They make a decent if not good living with their writing," he said, propping himself up on his elbow as he stretched out on the blanket.

"But they found a void, a niche you might say. They write something catchy or fun or imaginative, and it's thrust them into the limelight of fame. Even Stephen King got rejected tons of times before he became famous."

"Okay. So what kinds of things do you write?"

"I'm not telling you."

"Why not?"

"It's embarrassing. I only do it for myself. No one ever reads my ramblings." One more bite of food from her plate made it into her mouth. *God, I hope he lets this train of thought drop. There's no way I would ever let him read my writings.*

"I would like to."

"No."

"If you write like you talk, I can imagine your stuff is pretty poetic—light and fun kind of stuff." His fingers traced the back of her hand where it lay on the blanket near her knee.

*Oh yeah, fun all right. Fun. Edgy. Kinky, might be a better word.*

"Come on, Stacey. Tell me."

His voice dropped an octave in a coaxing, sing-song way, encouraging her to take the final step into trust with this stranger. A man she'd only met mere hours before, a man who turned her insides to mush with one look into his eyes or one touch of his hand. Should she trust him? She knew no one in this town so far from home. Having a friend would be great, but getting involved with him could lead to disaster. Getting too close, could cost her dearly. Maybe even her heart.

## Part 17 ~ 12/29/10

The sparkle in her eyes, made his heart thump in his chest. His breathing came out in short pants, like he'd run a twenty mile race or something.

*What is it about her? Yeah, she's gorgeous, funny, nice and her voice grabbed me by the balls, the moment she opened her mouth.*

"I'm not telling you, Jason. It's personal."

"Like a diary or something?" he asked, continuing the random pattern over the back of her hand.

"I guess," she said, pulling her hand back like his touch disturbed her.

The conversation was making her uncomfortable. She couldn't tell him she wrote erotic romance novels on the side, even if she'd never had one published.

"So tell me about your family. What made you want to be a doctor?"

"Several of my family members were doctors, including my father before he died."

"I'm sorry."

She shrugged and rubbed her nose. "He died in a car accident a few years ago."

"I can't imagine the pain you must have felt," he murmured, taking her hand again. "To lose a parent has to be about the hardest thing a person can go through."

"Do you still have both of your parents?"

"Yeah, although I don't see them a lot."

"Don't they live nearby?"

He nodded and said, "About an hour from my place, but we've been kind of at odds since my divorce. They really like my ex-wife."

"That must have been really rough on you."

"So far, it has been. My parents thought we should have worked it out and they couldn't understand why we couldn't." He sat up straighter and scooted closer. "What about siblings?"

"I have one sister. She's still in high school."

"And your mom?"

"Is giving me a hard time about paying for college and how she has to work two jobs to pay for it, which is a bunch of bull."

"Oh?"

"My father took good care of us in his insurance policy. It drives my mother nuts because she has to use part of the stipend he left her, to pay for my college."

"It sounds hard to deal with."

"It is. She about had a cow when I told her you and I were going out tonight," she replied with a small smile.

"You look like the cat who swallowed the canary. Do you enjoy giving your mom a hard time?"

Color flushed up her neck and across her cheeks. "I guess so. She likes to butt in too much into my life."

He trailed his thumb over her cheekbones. "Parents are like that sometimes," he whispered and leaned in to gently brush his lips over hers.

The softness beneath his mouth sucked him in. The need to drink deeper, drove him past the point of no return. A small whimper left her lips and he caught it inside his mouth when she opened for him and allowed his tongue inside. Their tongues sparred, licked and withdrew. One hand came up to grasp the back of her head and pull her closer. The touch of her palm on his chest sent his heart into overdrive and his dick pulsing behind the fly of his jeans. Want and need spiraled from his soul to zing through his body on a rush.

He broke the kiss and murmured against her lips, "I want you, Stacey."

## Part 18 ~ 01/05/11

The splash of his heated words washed over her like a cold shower. The hand on his chest pushed him away and she jumped to her feet. "Take me back to my apartment, Jason."

"Wait, what happened?"

"I can't get involved with you or anyone right now. I need to focus on getting myself situated with school. Besides, jumping into a relationship isn't a good idea for me or you."

He got to his feet slowly, a tolerating smirk on his lips. "Relationship? Who said anything about a relationship?"

"But you...but I..."

"Listen Stacey, I don't need a girlfriend, wife, or whatever. I'm thinking of nothing more than hot sex between the sheets. You know—friends with benefits kind of thing."

Feelings of indignation and anger washed over her. "Sex you mean."

"Well, yeah. What did you think I meant?"

Embarrassment speared her. Reading too much into what he said, had gotten her into a situation and she felt like an idiot. *Of course, all he meant was sex.* "Never mind. Just take me home," she murmured, reaching for the scattered remains of their picnic.

"No, listen. I'm sorry if I gave you the wrong impression. I told you my divorce finalized a few days ago. My ex and I were married for a few years and it's been some time since I've been in the dating pool." He took one of her hands in his. "The last thing I need right now is a relationship, but I do have needs."

She yanked her hand from his. "In another words, you're horny."

A flush of pink washed over his neck and raced up his face to color his cheeks. "Yeah. That's being a little crass, but I guess it's the best term for it. My ex and I hadn't slept together for several months before she left and I didn't run right out and find someone to take her place."

"But you've decided I'm good enough to break your self-imposed celibacy tonight?" Anger zipped through her body at the audacity of this guy. Men in general could fuck anything with the right equipment, but she had morals and values. Screwing a guy she met only hours before, wasn't within the neat little list she kept in her mind of how a girl was supposed to act. By the look on his face, he wasn't getting what she tried to tell him either. "Listen Jason, you can forget any thoughts you had about getting me into bed with you now or any time in the future. I will *not* screw a guy because he needs to get his rocks off. Making love comes with feelings and needs of both parties and I'm certainly not feeling the need to get naked with you."

It was probably a good thing the plates and silverware were plastic. The grip she held on each piece would have shattered them into tiny little pieces.

Without another word, Jason helped her clean up the remaining things on the blanket and toss what could be thrown away, into the receptacle.

On the drive back to their apartment complex, the silence enveloping them inside his car got thick enough to cut. Even the rock music coming from the radio in the dash, played loving and leaving kinds of songs and it made her realize no matter how cute and nice he seemed, Jason wanted to be a player and she wasn't about to become his toy.

## Part 19 ~ 1/12/11

Jason pulled the car into his normal parking spot and shut off the car. Stacey yanked on the door handle to escape, but he stopped her with a hand on her arm.

"Stacey, wait. I'm sorry if I came across like a jerk."

The gaze she turned on him spoke of her anger, frustration and sadness as she shot daggers at him with her eyes. He could read every emotion on her face and it made him feel like a first class asshole.

"You *are* a jerk, Jason. I understand you were hurt by your ex. I get it, but I'm not going to be a rebound lay for you. I don't have time for games and I don't have time for a relationship. Thank you for dinner and the lesson about men." She twisted her arm out of his grasp, stepped out of the car and slammed the door.

He hit his fist against the steering wheel while he watched her march across the parking lot and climb the small set of stairs leading to their apartments. Moments later, the light flicked on in her apartment window.

"Great...just great. I really blew that," he grumbled, pulling his keys from the ignition and popping open his door. "I bet she'll never talk to me again."

In minutes, he stood outside her apartment door and debated on whether to try to talk to her. Stubbornness and pride won out. No used groveling at her feet. Not tonight anyway. It would get him nowhere, he decided.

The phone on the end table started ringing just as he opened the door on his own apartment. Most people didn't use his home phone number. They called his cell.

He tossed his keys on the coffee table and grabbed the phone. "Hello?"

"Jason?"

"Yeah. Who is this?"

"Security at the office. We've had a breach and we need you here."

"What kind of breach?"

"We aren't sure. We found someone inside your office on your computer when we did rounds. I'm not a computer guru like you. I have no clue what he was doing."

"Sorry. I understand. I'll be right there."

Retrieving his keys, he checked to make sure he had his work identification badge and then locked the door again. He prayed this was some kind of misunderstanding and that the guy they caught wasn't doing what Jason thought he might be. Corporate sabotage had become almost an everyday occurrence anymore, with the competition for programs in the computer world. Microsoft was a huge player in the game and his job depending on him staying on top of what the consumer wanted, how to keep the competition from getting it out before they did and making the company grow as a whole. Being the youngest person to hold the title of Vice President of Development, came with a price. Millions of dollars in profits hung over his head daily along with the threat of losing his job, if things like this happened.

Luckily, the trip to the office didn't take long. It was the one reason he moved into the complex on Liberty Street.

"Hey Sam," Jason said after he swiped through the front doors and headed for the elevator.

"Go on up, Jason. They are holding the man in the conference room next to your office until you got here."

"Thanks."

Bright florescent lights bathed the entire department with a glaring white glow as he stepped off the elevator on the tenth floor. Eerie silence enveloped him with each step he took toward the door, until raised voices caught his attention. One voice stood out above the rest while it shouted its innocence, only to be interrupted by the deep baritone of the head of security.

Jason pushed open the door to be faced with the last person in the world he imagined would be responsible for a security breach.

## Part 20 ~ 1/19/11

Stacey felt like shit after leaving Jason so abruptly downstairs, but she didn't want him to get the wrong impression of her. Becoming his occasional fuck-buddy wasn't in her plans.

A heavy sigh left her lips as she braced her back against her apartment door. Dinner hadn't been what she expected at all. Yeah, she liked Jason, but rebound relationships didn't work.

"Oh well. It doesn't matter, I guess," she said, pushing away from the wooden panel behind her and walked into her tiny bedroom.

The room consisted of a small dresser, her full-sized bed and one night stand. Off-white carpet on the floor cushioned each step. The bright blue comforter looked almost out of place

next to the old quilt she had placed at the foot of the mattress, but it had been a gift from her grandmother. A going away gift, she'd said the day Stacey left for college. It had been passed down over the years to the eldest female grandchild. It made Stacey feel a little more connected to her family while she struggled to hold it together so far from home.

An even smaller bathroom sat tucked into the corner with only enough room for a toilet, small sink and a bathtub shower combination.

Stopping at the end of her bed, she stripped out of her clothes, and pulled on an old t-shirt and shorts. The unpacking she still needed to do, would keep her occupied enough and hopefully keep her thoughts off her disturbingly handsome neighbor.

She dropped to her knees at a spot near the mountain of boxes still needing to be unpacked and pulled the flaps aside to peer inside. Paperbacks and hard-bound novels stared back. Being an avid reader of almost anything she could get her hands on, started the collection several years ago and it had become almost an obsession.

The dream of becoming a writer had fallen by the wayside under the pressure of her family to carry on the legacy of being a physician.

A purple spiral notebook peeked out from beneath several paperbacks and Stacey reached inside the box to retrieve it, with shaking hands. This piece of her past brought tears to her eyes and she angrily brushed them away.

The first page caught her attention when she opened the paper cover carefully and began to read.

Page after page held the fantasies of a young girl's heart. She wrote about each cute guy she ever liked in high school, every class she didn't like and each new adventure she went through. Then, the stories changed. The first part of the notebook held entries like a diary, but the later pages began to shape into fictional pieces of couples meeting and finding love in places they never thought they would.

Stacey got to her feet and moved to the couch. She set the notebook on the makeshift coffee table and went into the kitchen for something to drink. This would be a long night. Reading the pages of this notebook would drag up old memories, old dreams and old fantasies—some that would take her back down a path she knew well—the path of creativity.

With soda in hand, she crossed her legs and tucked them beneath her before she picked up the notebook and began to read.

## Part 21 ~ 1/26/11

The man sitting in the chair looked up and Jason couldn't believe his eyes.

"Rick?"

"It's not what it looks like, Jas. I wasn't doing anything. I needed to update the server and I couldn't get in except on your computer," Rick stated, trying to come to his feet, but the security guard shoved him back into the chair.

Jason went around the back side of his desk and flipped open his planner on the computer. "There wasn't any update scheduled for today."

"I-I talked to Ben earlier and he asked me to do one since we installed that new program yesterday."

"All right. Let me call Ben then and ask him what's up. You know there aren't supposed to be any updates done without my knowledge."

"No!" Rick shifted nervously in the chair and looked at the floor. "I mean Ben told me he wouldn't be available tonight for any problems. He said he had an engagement to go to."

"I'll text him then. It won't bother him at his function."

The fear in Rick's eyes told Jason something wasn't right. He glanced at the computer screen on his right, flicked the mouse to bring up the screen and see exactly what Rick had tapped into. Shock and disappointment ripped through him. The screen showed a list of every new project the company was working on from new games to be marketed including the target market, projected release date and the schematic's of each program.

"What were you planning to do with this information, Rick, and how did you get the password to get into this? There are only a handful of people in this company who have one."

Rick wouldn't meet his gaze. This whole scenario hurt Jason. The two of them had been friends for a long time. They met during their college computer programming days and Jason considered them close friends. They'd spent weekends boating, camping, eating out with their wives until Jason's dumped on him and he would never have imagine Rick trying to sabotage the company like this.

The look on Rick's face turned ugly. His eyes sparkled with hate and his lips curled into almost a snarl as he spat, "The plan was to ruin you. Mr. Pretty Boy who has everything. I've worked for this company the same amount of time you have and I'm nothing but a lowly programmer where you—you're a Vice President of the fucking company! You with your big house, your boat, your fancy damned car! I'm driving around in an 80's station wagon."

"So this is about jealousy?"

"I'm not jealous of you. Everything you have is because of me, you asshole. I've covered your ass with every program you've written and screwed up. It was me who fixed your fucking mistakes yet you got the damned promotion before me. I deserved it. Not you!"

Jason glanced up to the security guard and said, "Get him out of here. Full charges will be pressed, I'm sure, and I'll be talking to Bill in the morning."

"Wait! Jason, come on. I didn't mean what I said. Bonnie left me last night. I got a little drunk and thought I'd take it out on you, man. I'm sorry."

"It doesn't matter now, Rick. You've made your bed. I can't fix this for you even if I wanted to. Corporate espionage is serious business." He nodded to the security guard and the man pulled Rick forcibly to his feet.

"Come on, Jas. You can't do this! I'll go to jail!"

"Yeah, you probably will, Rick."

Jason heard his friend screaming at the top of his lungs all the way to the elevator, threatening him and anyone close to him with every step.

Part 22 ~ 2/2/11

*The feel of his lips on hers, the briefest touch—almost like butterfly wings, had her sighing into his mouth. She never thought they would ever get to this point in their relationship. Friendship between the two of them started when they were small, but over time she'd realized she cared more for him, than just friends. Did he feel the same? She didn't know until this moment in time as he stopped and brought their lips together.*

Stacey read the passage over again, realizing it was one of her first attempts at romance writing.

"Not bad for a fifteen-year-old."

The pages of her journal gave way to more and more stories, each one a little more in depth than the one before it. One of her high-school teachers had read some of her pieces and encouraged her to continue to write. The dream of pursuing a career as an author stopped at her graduation. Her mother's terse words discouraging anything beyond medical school hit home when she brought her father's wishes into the equation.

The day after her graduation ceremony, the fierce, unrelenting pressure from her mother, came to a head.

"You know your father would have wanted you to follow in his footsteps. He never had a son to become the doctor of the family, so it falls on your shoulders, Stacey."

"I want to be a writer, Mom."

"Writer's don't make any money, Stacey. They are like painters. You've heard of starving artist? That's what you would be." Her mother paced across the kitchen, coffee cup in hand and dressing gown swishing around her bare legs.

The image faded from Stacey's mind as she came back to her bare living room in the small apartment. Seattle would be her home for the next several years and the thought brought tears to her eyes.

A soft knock on her door made her frown. She wasn't expecting anyone and in fact, she really didn't know anyone in Seattle, except Jason.

She quickly brushed the lone tear from her cheek as she got to her feet and walked to the door. The peephole revealed Jason on the other side.

For a moment, she debated on whether to open the door or let him think she'd gone to bed, but her curiosity got the better of her.

She slid the chain back and pulled the wooden panel open a crack. "What are you doing here?"

"I came to apologize and I brought you these," he replied, clutching a bright bouquet of mixed flowers in his hand.

Her heart melted just a little. Flowers. No one had given her flowers in a very long time. She tugged the door opened a little further as he thrust the bunch toward her. "Thank you. They're beautiful," she said, taking them from his hand.

"Can I come in for a minute?"

"I suppose. Just for a moment," she told him, stepping back from the door. "I'll be right back. I'm going to put these in some water."

"You haven't done much unpacking, have you?"

"Not really. It's taking me longer than I planned. It's a good thing I haven't started classes quite yet."

When she came back into the room, she noticed he now stood next to the couch with her spiral notebook in his hands.

No one read her writings and she wasn't about to let this—man, read her intimate ramblings, thoughts and desires.

"Give me that!"

## Part 23 ~ 2/9/11

The snarl coming from Stacey's mouth startled Jason as she grabbed at the notebook in his hands.

*Damn! She obviously doesn't want me reading this.*

"Easy, Stacey. I'm curious."

"I don't let anyone read my writings," she replied, managing to get the notebook. "It's private."

"From what I saw, it's pretty good. Do you write all the time?"

His compliment must have taken her off guard. Her eyes narrowed and her mouth thinned into an irritated slash across her face.

"No. I don't have time to."

"You should. A career as an author sounds fascinating."

"There is a reason they calling them starving artists, Jason. Most don't make enough money to eat on, much less live well." She dropped the notebook back inside a box sitting next to the coffee table.

"Yeah, but a good one can make money. Look at Stephen King, Stephanie Meyer, and Nora Roberts."

Stacey snorted. "It takes a hell of a good book to get that kind of attention and a great PR team."

Figuring he'd stay a while if she let him, Jason took a seat on the couch and smoothed out the wrinkled in his jeans with his hands. "How long have you been writing?"

"My whole life," she whispered.

Her eyes softened and he could see the longing in her gaze for something she couldn't have. He grasped her hand and pulled her down on the couch with him. "Tell me about your stories."

"No. They're silly ramblings of an overactive imagination. Teenage fantasy's."

"How long has it been since you wrote anything?"

"Several years. When my mother found out about them, she discouraged my writing in favor of a career in medicine."

"In another words, she made you feel guilty until you followed your father's footsteps and started school to be a doctor."

Her gaze shifted out the sliding glass door toward the city skyline in the distance. She didn't have to answer him. He could see it in her face.

"It doesn't matter. It's not like I hadn't thought about becoming a doctor anyway. I know it would mean a lot to my dad if he were here, for me to follow in his footsteps."

He shifted sideways, slipped his arm along the back of her couch and pulled her into his embrace.

Her gaze snagged his and held. Her eyes held him spellbound. Vulnerability stared back and he knew he wanted to kiss her, hold her and make all her problems go away.

One of her small hands rested on his chest. Surely she could feel the pounding of his heart beneath her palm. Blood rushed in his ears to the rapid beat. Her lips looked so soft. Kissing her became a need he couldn't ignore. His hand tangled in the hair at the back of her head. The strands wrapped around his fingers like they had a mind of their own.

She tilted her head and inched closer so their mouths hovered a hairsbreadth apart. The soft panting breaths escaping her lips, brushed over his, stirring his desire past the point of stopping.

Her fingers curled around the material of his shirt and tugged until their lips met and fused.

## Part 24 ~ 2/16/11

The feel of his lips against hers had her whimpering deep in her throat. She couldn't remember how long it had been since she'd had a guy kiss her. Too long.

His tongue brushed softly over her bottom lip, encouraging her to open for him and accept him into mouth. A groan spilled from him only to be captured in her mouth as he tilted his head and deepen the kiss. The broad strokes of his tongue over hers made her nipples pull into tight buds of desire and her pussy weep with need. The moment his palm cupped her breast through her shirt, she moaned and pressed further into his touch.

Rock hard flesh behind the fly of his jeans, pressed into her hip and there was no mistaking the fact of his need for her.

He ripped his mouth from hers and skimmed his lips across her cheek to her ear. The warmth of his breath against her flesh sent goose bumps skittering down her back and over her arms. His teeth nipped at her earlobe before his tongue found the sensitive spot below her ear.

"You are so hot," he whispered. "Your skin is so soft."

One hand worked its way under her shirt and unsnapped her bra. Within moments, his fingers brushed over her bare breast and she struggled to get closer, ignoring the clamoring in her brain telling her to stop this—push him away—don't let it go any further. She needed this, needed the connection with another person, a guy who found her attractive, more than anything on earth.

The heat of his mouth moved away from her long enough for him to work her shirt over her head and divest her body of her bra, before the scorching blaze of his tongue found her nipple.

"Ah, God!" she said in a rush.

The rough pad of his tongue rasped over her nipple and she bucked against the sensation. He tugged the turgid bud between his lips and nipped at the responsive flesh.

His dark hair slid through her fingers like silk as she grasped his head to hold it tighter to her. Soft whimpers spilled from her lips. Lordy, the guy knew how to ramp up the temperature.

The need to feel his hot skin, drove her to push him away and tug his shirt over his head.

*Holy shit!*

Ripped pecs and taunt six-pack abs met her gaze. Her fingers danced through the dark, springy chest hair and over the dusky nipples. She fought with herself over whether she wanted

to feel her own breasts against the hair or whether she wanted to lick and nibble on his chest. The soft moan coming from his lips as he tipped his head back against the couch cushion, gave her the answer.

Her lips closed over one tip and sucked.

His fingers wove themselves into her hair and held her head against him.

"Stacey, baby. God, honey. You're driving me crazy. I want you so bad, I feel like I'm ready to explode," he growled, pumping his hips slightly.

He forced her to abandon his nipple by bringing her up in front of him and capturing her lips again. With a quick twist, he had her flat on her back on the couch while he hovered over her and pressed his erection into the softness of her abdomen.

## Part 25 ~ 2/23/11

Rock hard and achy, described his cock to a T. He hadn't been this damned horny in a long time—years in fact. It blew his mind that the woman beneath him could send his thoughts and desires through the ceiling so easily.

Desire, need and a little bit of fear sparkled in the green of her eyes.

*Afraid of me?*

Wanting to calm her fears, he slowly dropped his head to claim her lips. The softness of her mouth moved over his almost hesitantly. He nipped at the corners of her mouth and slid his tongue along the seam of her lips, asking for permission to invade the warm cavern he knew waited.

Her lips parted on a sigh and her tongue came out to explore his. Both of her hands slid up his back and pulled him closer, pressing the hard nubs of her nipples into his chest.

Thoughts fled as she moaned into his mouth, taking him higher on the wings of raging desire. Tongue sparred, licked and retreated back and forth between her mouth and his. He slipped his palm up the small indentation of her waist until he reached the underside of her breast. Cupping the firm flesh in his palm, he molded it and teased it until she groaned and pushed it further into his hand.

His lips left hers to plunder and explore and long line of her neck until he reached her earlobe. With soft nips to the lobe, her breathing ratcheted higher and escaped her mouth in small pants. Slipping lower, he captured the spot below her earlobe between his teeth and bit the spot gently. He could feel her heartbeat double as it pounded hard enough against the walls of her chest, to be felt where they pressed together breast to breast and pelvis to pelvis.

Low whimpers escaped her mouth as he continued his assault on her senses. One palm snuck up the hem of her shirt until he could feel her warm skin against his hand, but his goal beacons. The need to feel her exposed breast drove him until finally cupped it. Her whimpers grew louder with each stroked.

Lifting his chest, he scooted further down until he could push her shirt up and reach her breast with his mouth.

The first touch of his tongue against her nipple made her lift her upper body off the couch and push the hardened nub between his lips.

"Oh God," she panted.

"Beautiful. Absolutely, beautiful," he murmured before sucking the turgid tip into his mouth.

The moans spilling from her mouth drove his need for this woman, ever higher. His cock pressed painfully into the zipper of his jeans, begging to be released and encased in the warmth of her body. Wanting to feel her wetness on his fingers, he reached for the button at her waist and released it. The zipper rasped down with an audible *zip*. He snaked his hand under the elastic of her underwear and through the crisp curls guarding her sex, only to find the tip of her clit swollen and hot.

Her hips bucked at the touch of his fingers, pushing them further down until he met the soaked lips of her pussy.

"So wet, so hot," he whispered against her breast.

"Please."

## Part 26 ~ 3/2/11

Each touch of his mouth and each brush of his fingers made Stacey want to experience it all. How and why he could make all logical flee, she wasn't sure.

Whimpers spilled from her mouth as she stroked her clit. His lips captured hers again before his tongue swept between her lips.

Never had a man brought her to the heights of pleasure this one had already and they barely knew each other.

*Barely knew each other?*

She ripped her lips away from his and stared into his passion-filled, heavily-lidded gaze.

"Let me love you, Stacey. I can feel your need on my fingers," he said, pushing two of the tormenting digits into her pussy.

"Jason, I—" All thought fled when the hot, wetness of his tongue rasped against her nipple. His fingers moved in and out of her pussy, bringing her to up and holding her on the edge of awareness, but refusing to allow her to fall over into the abyss of sexual release. She closed her eyes and arched her back.

Jason released her nipple from the tormenting suction of his mouth long to grasp her pants and underwear at the hips and drag them down her legs. Within seconds, he spread her thighs and held them open with his broad shoulders as he kissed his way from her breast, down her flat abdomen, stopping briefly to swirl his tongue in her belly button before continuing his mission. When his tongue slid over her clit, a hearty moan spilled from her mouth and she slipped her hands into his hair to hold his head and guide him to the exact spot.

Scorching desire raced from where his mouth played, up and then back down her spine in mind-numbing tingles that shot every coherent thought from her brain.

The torturous tongue danced over her flesh, down her slit and back to her clit in one long stroke before centering on the needy swollen nub.

Two of his fingers slid back inside her pussy while he continued to torment center of her desire until she begged.

"Please, Jason. I need..."

"Tell me what you need," he murmured, barely backing off on the pressure of his mouth.

"Make me come, please!"

"Mmm."

He stiffened his tongue and flicked it against her clit as he increased the pacing of his fingers, moving in and out of her pussy in a frantic pace.

"Oh, God." Each word was torn from her mouth in a breathless whisper as she reached for the ultimate fulfillment, only to continue to hang on the edge of the prepuce until he pulled his fingers from her and added a third digit, pressing against and then penetrating her ass. "Yeesss!" Heat curled up from her toes in a flash and burst through her pelvis when her climax finally spread through her body, releasing itself in a rush of blood through her veins.

Jason continued to softly flick his tongue against her clit until she could almost breathe again and her hips slowed their rocking rhythm. The hot, wet slid of his lips and tongue worked their way over her skin until he reached her nipple.

Stacey tangled her fingers in his hair and held his head in place. The sucking and licking he did at the turgid tip, brought desire screaming back into her body, making her wonder if she only imagine the mind-blowing orgasm she'd just had.

Lifting his head, his gaze captured hers as he slowly lowered his mouth inch by agonizing inch until his lips touched hers so softly, it felt like only the hint of a breeze instead of the hot needy kiss from before.

The annoying jingle of the ringtone she'd assigned to her mother brought her back down to earth in a shattering crash of guilt and embarrassment for allowing things to go this far. "Get off!"

## Part 27 ~ 3/9/11

"What the hell?" Jason said, as Stacey pushed him and he rolled off her and the couch, almost smacking his head on the coffee table.

"The phone. Where's my phone?" she yelled, scrambling for her cell phone.

"On the end table over there," he replied, dragging himself to his feet.

"Hello?"

She tugged her pants back on and threw her shirt over her head while she cradled the phone to her hear.

"What? No, Mom, I was in the bathroom—the shower, actually. You know I don't take my phone everywhere."

The murmurs of the voice on the other end and the pinched look around Stacey's lips and eyes, told him she didn't have a great relationship with her mother. He wanted to take the phone and toss it off the balcony of the apartment complex, gather her in his arms and take them back to where they were loving on each other.

"Please, Mom. I don't need this kind of pressure. I'm already stressed enough."

Stacey glanced at him and frowned before she moved off toward the kitchen. She lowered her voice so he couldn't quite catch the conversation. Unfortunately, he could still hear the worry and stress in her tone even if he couldn't hear the words.

"Fine," she snapped loud enough, he caught the one word. The phone snapped shut with an audible, irritated click.

One hand rubbed the skin across her forehead as she moved back toward him.

"Everything okay?"

"Yes...no. Shit, I don't know. She fucking drives me nuts. I can't handle her anymore."

"Would you like to talk about it?"

"I've already told you most of it," she replied with a heavy sigh and slid down on the couch next to him. "I wish she would leave me alone to live my own life."

Jason slid one arm around her and tugged her into his embrace. Her head rested on his shoulder and he tangled his fingers in her hair. "Parents can be such a pain in the ass, you know."

A small snort left her mouth and he grinned.

"All we can do is listen with one ear, take what they say with a grain of salt and decide on our own if we want to use any of it or not."

Her small hand rested on his chest and slid through the hair, slowly creeping toward his nipple.

*Touch it. Go on.*

"I'm sorry about pushing you off and onto the floor."

A chuckle left his mouth and he said, "It's okay. I wasn't prepared to land on my butt, but I understood."

He drifted his fingers down her spine and back up in a slow, comforting motion to try to ease her back into letting him continue where they left off. Goose bumps skittered across the flesh of her arms, making him smile. Her body responded to him, even if her mind wanted to stop everything right here. Tucking one finger under her chin, he raised her face so he could look into her eyes. Desire, hot and needy, reflected back.

"You know I want you, Stacey. Will you let me make love to you?"

## Part 28 ~ 3/16/11

*Make love? Have sex? Can I really let him do that? These are stupid thoughts. Good grief, you let him eat you out earlier.*

"Stacey?" The question in his voice brought her back from her wayward thoughts.

"I...uh. I'm not sure it's such a good idea."

"Let me make you feel good," he said, leaning over her and laying her down on the sofa.

Hot, soft lips slipped over her cheek until he reached her ear. Nips to the earlobe made her want to arch her neck and give into what he was doing, but her conscious thought said no.

"You are so beautiful, so soft," he murmured in her ear.

Her pussy clenched and need spiraled through her body. Blood rushed in her ears. Her skin heated like it had caught fire, especially where he touched and stroked.

His palm cupped her breast and kneaded the flesh. His lips continued their path to the spot between her collarbone and neck. A small bite to the skin left her wanting more. Cool air spread across her skin when he lifted the hem of her shirt and slipped his hand beneath the material. The small flick of his fingers at the bra clasp, released her breast into his hand.

"I love having you under me. Your skin feels like velvet."

The hard erection he sported behind the fly of his jeans, pressed against her thigh. It had been several months since she'd had sex—more like a year really, and the need this man brought out in her body, scared her.

"Jason," she moaned, arching her back into his touch.

His fingers rasped over her left nipple, bringing it to an aching point.

The wet slide of his tongue over the hardened nub, made her eyes pop open and her hands clasp his head. She wasn't sure if she planned to push him away or draw him closer. Either way, he wasn't releasing the slow suck.

"Oh, God. Oh, God." Her breath caught in her throat and she slipped her fingers into the hair at the nape of his neck.

His fingers undid the button at her waist and slowly slid the zipper down on her pants. Warm callused fingers pulled at the elastic band of her underwear. Hadn't they been here before? Oh yeah, before her mother called, he'd actually made her come with his mouth.

"You're still wet and hot."

He shifted down and pulled her pants and underwear off again and she almost laughed. "What's the smile for?"

"I was thinking we'd already got this far before."

His eyes sparkled and his lips twitched with a little grin from between her thighs. "Yes we did. I hope you turned your phone off so your mother can't call back."

"Actually, I did and since I already had one orgasm, I figured it's your turn," she said, throwing caution to the wind and letting herself enjoy this man and this moment. "Drop them jeans. I want some of what you're hiding behind the fly of those pants."

## Part 29 ~ 3/22/11

His dick throbbed and his balls ached with lust for this woman. They'd been dancing around this moment from the time he'd opened the door to her knock.

She forced him to retreat as she helped him with his jeans. The zipper rasped down with a tug of her fingers and within seconds, the pants were down around his ankles. Her warm fingers wrapped around his cock and he fought a whimper trying to escape his lips.

"Mmm. Commando, huh?"

"Yeah," he whispered, his voice coming out in a tortured hiss of air.

"Nice and hard."

"You bet, honey." He rocked his hips to the tempo of her hand. "God, that feels good."

"Glad you like it," she murmured against the head of his dick.

Warm lips wrapped around him and he trembled as he fought the urge to slam himself so deep in her mouth, he would be able to feel the back of her throat. Her tongue danced over his flesh, licking the underside of his dick until he started to move his hips with her tempo. The slide of her tongue and the friction of her hand had him ready to blow within moments.

*Damn, this is going to be a real short ride.*

"Stacey, honey, stop."

"Hmm," she hummed against his flesh.

"Stacey, please. I don't want to come in your mouth," he growled, pulling her up by her arms until she released him with a *pop*.

Wanting to make sure she still would be ready for him when he slid home, he dipped his fingers between her thighs. Good. Slick and wet.

The soft whimpers of her own need ratcheted his even higher while he continued to torment her clit with his fingers.

"Jason, please."

Her hips bucked against his hand, telling him she wanted more and he planned to give her more—much more.

"Easy, honey," he said.

He took her lips with his, sliding them over her softer ones until she opened for him. A low groan rushed from his mouth as he pushed his tongue between her lips and coaxed her tongue to dance with his own.

Removing his fingers made her whimper and moan, but he wanted to do this with her for the first time in a bed, not on the couch and not on the floor.

"Let's go into your room. A soft bed would be better than in here," he said, stepping back and taking her hand.

When he stepped through the doorway of her room, he flicked on the light switch, bathing the room in a harsh florescent glow.

"Wow, that's bright," she said, blinking several times.

"Yeah." He continued over to the night stand next to her bed and twisted the knob on the lamp. "Flick the light off now and we'll use the lamp. It's more romantic anyway."

*Romantic? What the hell? It's not like I'm trying to wine and dine her. This is for the sex and nothing more.*

Her eyes brightened at his words and she flipped off the light. The carpet on the floor muffled her footsteps as she approached and slipped her arms around his neck.

## Part 30 ~ 3/30/11

The silkiness of his hair between her fingers and across her palm heightened her awareness of the man. Being held like this—being loved like this—it had been way too long. The need and desire to have him hold her made her blood rush through her veins, humming through her body until all of her senses were acutely aware of every breath and every touch.

She brushed her lips over his chest and nipped at the tempting flesh with her teeth. Hard muscles rippled beneath her mouth and quivered at her touch. She needed him like no one else she'd ever been with. Not that there were hundreds on her list.

His fingers danced down her spine and back up. Shivers raced to catch up with the path of his hand. Nerve endings tingled and want spiked hard in her stomach.

Glancing up into his eyes from beneath her lashes revealed the white hot desire bright in his gaze. He wanted her—really wanted her. The hard length of his erection pressed against her belly and she could feel every glorious inch.

Both of his hands cupped her face and tilted her chin up. He nibbled at the corners of her lips and when she moaned, he slipped his tongue into her mouth to tangle with hers.

*God, the man can kiss.*

He gently laid her down on the bed and then hovered over her, bracing his forearms on the coverlet beside her head, never breaking the kiss. Moments later, the wet slide of his tongue moved over her cheek as he made his way to her ear.

"You're so beautiful. I want to eat you up," he whispered.

"Please, Jason," she murmured, her hands doing their own exploration of his magnificent body.

"Need to go slow. Make it good."

Her hands wandered down his sides, scraping with her fingernails lightly over his skin, until she reached his taut butt and grasped both cheeks.

His lips traveled south, forcing her to release her hold. The warm wet glide of his tongue over her breast had her gasping and arching her back. When he finally closed those tempting lips over her nipple, she almost came unglued from the inside out.

"Ah, God!"

Several quick flicks and she felt cream slip from between her pussy lips, wetting her and preparing her for the hardness of his cock.

One soft palm slipped down her stomach, through the curls at the juncture of her sex and settled over her mound. His finger swirled in her juices, painting her clit with every second stroke of those wonderful digits.

After he paid homage to her breasts for a number of minutes, he continued his downward trek, stopping only long enough to play with her belly button ring, before situating himself between her thighs. A nip to the inside of each thigh, brought her desire back to manageable for the moment, until the wicked scrape over her clit, sent it to boiling in two seconds flat.

*He wouldn't. He couldn't. Oh, fuck, yes he is!*

## Part 31 ~ 4/6/11

She tasted like honey, thick and creamy with a hint of sweetness. Had there ever been a woman who tasted like this? Not one he could think of at the moment, never mind the fact that thoughts of anything beyond right here and right now, cross circuited in his brain. Thinking about anything but Stacey meant using too many brain cells.

The sound of her needy whimpers and the small lift of her hips, gave away the passion rushing in her blood.

His dick filled to aching proportions. His balls wanted to explode. Getting inside her was a priority, but making it good for her came second nature to him. He couldn't be the selfish bastard and let it be all about him and his needs.

Her fingers gripped his hair and dug into his scalp. Her legs quivered and spread wider, seeking the relief he would give her.

The nub of nerve endings swelled and pulsed under his tongue with each swipe. He thrust two fingers into her pussy and finger fucked her while he drove her desire higher and higher.

With a scream on her lips, she flooded his mouth with her cum. He lapped it up until the tremors slowed and her hips relaxed.

He kissed the insides of her thighs and worked his way back up her stomach—stopped to nip at her breasts, bringing another moan to her lips, before he took her mouth in a desperate kiss.

Frantic for the feel of her pussy gripping him, he slipped the head of his cock into her tight warmth. Heaven. It was the only word he could think of to describe her pussy giving and enveloping him inside her.

Hot need wrapped around him, sucking him deeper until he buried himself balls deep in her waiting cunt.

"Jason, hurry," she begged, lifting her hips.

His cock throbbed with the desire to fuck her crazy and her words made him throw caution to the wind. He sat up, grabbed her legs and draped them over his forearms. No more foreplay. No more easy—he fucked her fast and hard, driving his cock deep into her pussy with each thrust of his hips. Her greedy cunt sucked him in and milked him until he exploded his cum deep inside her. The answering scream of climax from her lips eased him down from his high, knowing she came along for the ride and he hadn't left her behind like a selfish bastard.

Her hot channel trembled and squeezed while he eased his softening cock from her, rolled to his side and pulled her up next to him on the bed.

"Shit!" she yelled and sat up.

"What?"

"We forgot a condom, Jason." She jumped from the bed and sprinted for the bathroom and slammed the door.

"Oh hell."

## Part 32 ~ 4/13/11

"Shit, shit, shit! What the hell am I going to do?" She paced in the short distance from the toilet to the wall and back, chewing her thumb nail in a familiar nervous gesture. "God! I can't believe I forgot a condom. How stupid!"

The two small raps on the door stopped her in her tracks.

"Stacey?"

She stared at the door, her mouth working, but no sounds coming out.

"Are you okay?"

His question unstuck her tongue from the roof of her mouth as her temper flared. "No! I'm not fucking okay, Jason! We just had unprotected sex. I could be pregnant right now and that is so not in my plans."

"And you think it's in mine? I've got enough to deal with waiting to find out whether my ex-wife is pregnant with my child. I don't need another unwanted pregnancy hanging over my head."

"Get out! Just get out!" she screamed, slumped onto the toilet seat and buried her face in her hands.

*My mother will kill me if I'm pregnant. My life will end and I'll be nothing more than a pregnant, single woman with no man in sight and a baby to raise by myself.*

Several minutes passed and she wondered if he'd left until she heard his voice again through the door.

"I'm sorry, Stacey," he murmured, his voice sounding rough and low. "I shouldn't have lost my head like that. Protecting you should have been top priority, not seeing how fast I could get my dick inside you. I wanted you so badly; I couldn't keep from feeling your heat surround me."

His soft words and the remorseful tone in his voice melted her heart. After all, it wasn't *all* his responsibility to make sure they used protection.

Grasping the knob, she slowly turned it until the door swung inward and revealed him leaning against the door jam and the sorrowful look in his eyes.

"I...I'm sorry, too. It's not all your fault. I'm to blame as well." She inhaled sharply and exhaled forcibly. "I'll go to one of the clinics here in town and get the morning after pill."

He leaned on the wall so his spine rested flat to the drywall and tipped his head back.

"We'll have to play it by ear, I guess. Do you need a ride to the clinic?"

"No, I have my car. Don't worry about it. I'll take care of everything."

He turned his head and those intense eyes zeroed in on her face. "Do you always take care of everyone? Do you ever let someone take care of you for a change?"

Her shoulder lifted in a shrug as she took a seat on the edge of the bed. "I've always been a nurturer, I guess."

Moments later, he joined her and wrapped an arm around her to pull her to his side.

"You know, you might let someone else share the burden for a change. I'm a responsible adult and you weren't alone in the wild romping sex that happened on this bed a little while ago."

"Wild romping sex?"

A sexy grin spread across his lips and she couldn't help but return the smile.

"I thought so and I'd love to do it again, but next time we'll make sure you're on the pill and I have a large box of condoms close by."

"Next time?"

## Part 33 ~ 4/20/11

The wide-eyed look in her eyes almost made him laugh, but he figured laughing would be a bad move at the moment. "Of course, next time. I want to do make love to you over and over."

"I don't think that's a wise choice, do you?" she asked, pulling away from his side and turning to face him.

"Sure it is. There's nothing wrong with two people coming together for uncommitted sex."

"Uncommitted?"

Now he was getting worried. Her attempt to put words in his mouth and make more of their nonexistent relationship than there would be had him thinking of running and running fast.

"Casual sex, Stacey. You know. Friends with benefits kind of thing."

"I don't have friends with benefits relationships. I don't have sex with men I just met. This isn't normal behavior for me. I'm a good girl. I never got into trouble. I didn't have sex with a guy

before I turned eighteen and he and I were exclusive." Her voice rose to a deafening pitch and a wild look passed through her expression as she jumped to her feet and pulled on her clothes with jerky movements.

He grabbed her hand and pulled her back down on the bed. "We'll take things slow. You said you didn't want a relationship with your schooling and everything."

"I don't."

"Then let's not make this into some big production. Okay? Right now, I'm fine with you and I being exclusive on the sex thing. I don't want anyone else, but I can't promise I won't date anyone else."

"Do you plan on dating a lot?" she asked, stiffening her spine.

He raked his fingers through his hair and dropped his gaze to the carpet beneath their feet. "I don't know what I'm going to do. My marriage was hell and I'm not getting into the trap of it again for a long while. I want to date and have fun. You and I met at a bad time in my life."

"Keep it simple. I got it," she said with a heavy sigh.

"I guess I should go."

"Probably a good idea."

He stood and followed her into the other room. She left no doubt in his mind she wanted him to leave when she opened the front door and stood holding the handle with a death grip on the knob.

"I guess I'll see you around?"

"Yeah, I guess so. It's not hard when we live next door to each other."

"I'll call you in a couple of days."

"Whatever, Jason. I'm a big girl. I can handle this. Besides, I'm going to be very busy getting ready for classes and everything, so don't be surprised if I'm not available at your beck and call. I have better things to do than wait for you."

"But—"

She held up a hand and effectively cut off whatever he thought he wanted to say.

"Thanks for the quick lesson in casual sex."

He stepped into the hall outside her door and before he could utter another word, she slammed the wooden panel between them with a resounding *bang*.

## Part 34 ~ 4/27/2011

"Insufferable, pig-headed, egotistical, MAN!" she ranted as she stomped into the kitchen and grabbed a glass from the cupboard, poured some milk and drank it.

*I do not believe he blew this whole thing off.*

"Well, it doesn't matter. He can stay in his apartment. I'll stay in mine and he can date, sleep with, screw or whatever, whomever he wants. I don't care."

She walked back into her bedroom, stripped off the sheets on the bed and threw them on the floor. The smell of sex, sweat, and male permeated the room, mixed with a hint of her perfume.

"God! How could I be so stupid? I should never have had sex with him."

*Well, duh,* her heart whispered.

“All right. Enough of this feeling sorry for myself. It’s done. We had sex. Incredible sex, but just sex nonetheless.”

The feeling of overwhelming sadness engulfed her. She wanted to talk to someone. Unfortunately, the person she needed to talk to was gone. *Dad would have understood. I would have been able to tell him everything he wouldn’t have judged me or ridiculed me.*

Tears burned behind her eyes and instead of fighting them as she normally did, she embraced them and let them fall as she sank down on the edge of her bed.

“Daddy? God, I wish you were still here. I need to talk to you and I can’t. I want you to hold me in your arms and let you tell me everything will be okay. I’m doing the right thing by being here and going to medical school. You could kick Jason’s ass for me.” A watery chuckle left her lips and twin tears burned a path down her cheeks. “I miss you so much, Dad. Mom never understood me and never wanted to.”

She wrapped her arms around her waist, laid down on the bed and curled into a fetal position as she let the tears continue and the feeling of loss, surround her.

*I should have known Jason would use me. He said he’d recently gotten divorced. What could I expect?*

Her cell phone jingled in the other room and she slowly pulled herself up off the bed and shuffled toward where her purse lay on the coffee table. She didn’t want to talk to whomever was calling, but since the ringtone wasn’t a familiar one, she figured she’d better check it.

The call went to voicemail and the number on the caller idea said, “Unavailable.”

“Probably some telemarketer anyway,” she grumbled, tossing the phone back in her purse when it didn’t immediately reveal a voicemail.

She retreated back into her bedroom, intending on washing her sheets to remove the scent of sex and his cologne, from her bed before she went to sleep. With the empty clothes basket in her hand, she retrieved the linens from the floor and headed for the front door. The laundry room for the building sat in the basement and she had to walk by Jason’s door to get there.

“No use avoiding it,” she murmured, but froze with a familiar ring tone echoed from her purse, one she thought she’d never hear again.

*Daddy?*

## Part 35 ~ 5/12/11

“Okay. That was about the stupidest thing I could have done or said.” Jason pulled his dirty T-shirt over his head and threw it across the room toward the overflowing laundry basket in the corner. “Casual sex, she says. We’ll see about the casual sex thing. I mean, yeah. I don’t want to get involved with anyone on any kind of serious basis. Hell, my divorce finalized like a few days ago. I sure don’t need a steady girlfriend or anything.”

He grabbed some clean clothes and headed for the shower. The smell of her perfume surrounded him when he’d taken off his shirt and now he felt the need to wash it off his skin. He didn’t need the reminder of her pushing him away after the fantastic sex they’d had.

*But you’re the one who told her you would probably date other people.*

“Yeah, but not like a lot of other people or anything. I did say I would be okay with the exclusivity of only having sex with her.”

The jingle of his cell phone interrupted his thoughts and his trip to the shower. He knew the familiar ring and for a change, he was actually wanting to vent to his mother.

“Hi Mom. How are things at home?”

“Hi Jase. Good. You know. Some old thing. How are things with you?”

“Okay, I guess.”

“What’s wrong? I know that tone,” she said. “And don’t try to bullshit me, son. I know the tone in your voice. Woman problems? Or ex-wife problems?”

“A little of both, Mom. I don’t think I told you, but Sharon informed me she’s pregnant.”

“What? You can’t be serious, Jason.” The long pause on the line made him feel small. He hated disappointing his mother most of all. “Is there a possibility it’s yours?”

“Yeah. I guess. If she’s telling the truth, there is a small possibility, but she’d been with so many other people during that time, it’s hard to say. I’ve already insisted on a paternity test as soon as it’s possible.”

“Good. You know I never cared for Sharon anyway.”

“You’ve made that clear on a number of occasions, Mom.” He tucked the phone into the crook of his neck and walked back into the kitchen for something to drink. “How’s Dad?”

“Good. Same old, same old.”

“Great.”

“So have you started dating again?”

“I wouldn’t call it dating.”

“So you have met a new girl. What’s she like?”

“How come you can read so much into ‘I wouldn’t call it dating.’?”

“Spill it, son.”

“There’s this girl next door. I met her kind of by accident. Initially, she came over to borrow something and I answered the door in a towel.”

“Oh, do tell.”

“It wasn’t anything really.”

“It doesn’t sound like it to me.”

“Thanks, Mom.” He chuckled and continued, “Anyway, we’ve kind of been hanging out the last couple of days.”

“And?”

“We had sex.”

“Again, I say, and?”

“It was off the charts awesome, but I said something about keeping it casual and she blew a gasket.”

“I can understand way.”

“So explain it to this dumb kid because I certainly don’t.”

“Women don’t do casual very well, Jason. Men can have meaningless sex and it’s just sex—a physical thing. Women need the closeness and emotional connection before and after sex.”

“Wonderful,” he answered, letting the sarcastic tone of his voice come through.

“If you told her it would be nothing more than casual sex and you would continue to see other women, no wonder she’s upset.”

“I thought it was a mutual decision kind of thing to keep it friends with benefits.”

“Shit, Jason. You didn’t call it that, did you?”

“Well...”

“You better plan on either doing some major, heavy duty ass kissing, buster or plan on never getting any from her again. You never, ever call a sexual rendezvous with a girl, ‘friends with benefits’.”

“Why not? Isn’t that what it is if we aren’t seriously into a relationship but we want to continue to have sex?”

“Haven’t you been listening to me at all? Women don’t do casual sex.”

“But we just met, Mom, and after the shit with Sharon, I don’t want any kind of an exclusive thing with anyone.”

“Then you shouldn’t have had sex with her.”

## Part 36 ~ 5/18/11

The cell phone jingled again. Goose bumps exploded across Stacey's arms. The song it continuing to play was the one she'd assigned to her father the year before he died. George Strait's voice sang, "Love Without End, Amen."

She set her bag and the laundry basket on the table and slowly opened her purse. The phone continued to ring as she pulled it out and stared opened mouthed at the screen. Dad flashed brightly on the small phone in her palm.

With shaking hands, she opened it and held it to her ear. "Daddy?"

Silence met her ear for several long moments.

About the time she thought about shutting the phone, she heard a familiar voice rasping on the other end. "I love you, baby girl. Do what you think is right. I'll always stand beside you."

"It can't be," she whispered, pressing trembling fingers to her lips. "You died."

The sound coming from the speaker crackled. "I can't talk long. Takes too much energy. Follow your heart, honey."

The line went dead.

"Daddy?" She gawked at the phone in her palm. "No, wait! Please!"

Tears rolled down her cheeks as she sank to the floor. Choking sobs shook her body and she rocked back and forth, pressing the phone to her chest. Her heart ached for the love of one man she could never replace, but would hopefully see again someday. Father's weren't meant to be replaced. The love hers lavished on his daughter's would continue to help mold the relationships both her and her sister would find over time. She shivered and buried her face in her folded arms. She needed the cleansing the tears would bring. Grief choked her and squeezed, trapping the sobs in her throat only to release them in a long wail.

Two warm arms wrapped around her and held her to a hard muscled chest as a low rumbled of a voice said, "Sshh. It'll be okay."

How Jason got into her apartment she wasn't sure, but right now, she didn't care. She needed the comfort and strength he provided with his presence. Dissecting her feelings and retribution for invading her private time, could come later.

She lifted her head to meet his gaze. Nothing but compassion and understanding, stared back as he brushed the hair off her damp face. A soft kiss to her cheek and the quite hum of words dried the tears into an occasional hiccup, while he rocked her in his arms.

The words he murmured faded like the afternoon sun dipping behind the buildings of downtown, until nothing remained but the night sounds and the strength of the man holding her.

Cars honked and whizzed by. Voices and laughter reached her ears through the open balcony window. She wanted to shout and rant. They had no right to be so cheerful and happy when all she wanted to do was curl into a fetal position and hide.

The sun faded into the inky blackness only broken by the glare of streetlights and neon signs, but still they sat on the floor of her apartment. Wrapped in the security of this almost stranger's arms, he gave the comfort and understanding she so desperately needed to begin the healing process she thought she'd conquered months ago.

## Part 37 ~ 5/25/11

Once he hung up with his mother, Jason paced the floor of his apartment and thought about the words she'd said. Yeah, maybe he shouldn't have had sex with Stacey, but it happened and he wasn't sorry.

"Enough. I need to get some laundry done and get my shit together for work tomorrow. I've got to deal with the security breach with the boss' and it won't be pretty."

Jason grabbed the laundry basket full of clothes, threw the bottle of detergent into the pile, grabbed his house keys and headed for the door.

"Clothes, check. Quarter's, check. Soap, check. Okay, I think I have everything," he said, opening the door and letting it slam behind him. Several quick strides brought him in front of Stacey's door and without knowing really why, he stopped and stared.

*Sobs?*

He leaned closer to the door and listened hard.

*Definitely sobs. What the hell?*

He knocked softly and called her name, but the tortured sound continued unabated.

*Great. Now what?*

Staring at the door, he tried to figure out what to do. Should he stay and continue knocking, hoping she would answer or continue on his way to the laundry room in the basement and forget all about the agonizing sound of her tears.

"Shit," he said, dropping the basket on the ground and trying the door knob.

The knob turned easily under his hand, so he pushed open the wooden panel and softly called her name.

Her tears sliced him like a knife to the heart. Was she crying over their spat early? What if what his mom said was true and she'd gotten totally into him so quickly, he'd broke her heart with his callous words? Now he felt like a heal—worse than a heal—a worm under her shoe.

Figuring he could do no worse than the situation already entailed, he moved to her side, crouched down on the floor and wrapped his arms around her shoulders, drawing her into his embrace.

"Sshh. It'll be okay," he said against her hair.

They sat together on the floor while the afternoon sun faded into the inky blackness of the evening. She curled herself into him, taking comfort from his arms and he wasn't going to deny her this. If he could comfort her somehow and make it all right, he'd do it.

When her tears finally stopped, he leaned back enough to see her face and brushed the wet strands of hair from her cheek.

"I'm sorry."

"For what?"

"Your tears."

A small watery smile lifted the corners of her mouth. "You didn't cause my tears, Jason, but thank you for comforting me. I needed a shoulder."

"Anytime."

Her head went back down on his chest and he breathed in her scent like a drowning man. *I'm so screwed!*

## Part 38 ~ 6/1/11

Silence. The deafening silence surrounded her, but still she held on. Releasing Jason at this point seemed beyond what she could do. The strength beneath her cheek as she rested her head on his chest comforted like nothing else could.

It seemed like they sat on the floor forever. Finally, she lifted her head and said, "We need to get up off the floor."

"I don't know. I kinda like it like this."

A watery chuckle left her lips and she glanced up into his eyes. Understanding, compassion and lust stared back. Desire, hot and insistent rushed through her veins. She needed him—needed the comfort being with him would bring her so she could forget the loss of her dad.

"Jason?"

"Hmm?"

"Make love to me."

His eyes widened and he stared into hers for several moments before he climbed to his feet and then helped her to stand.

"Are you sure?"

Unable to answer or voice her wants now, she nodded.

He took her hand and led her into the bedroom.

*Crap! I forgot the sheets.*

"Doing laundry?"

"I'd planned to, yes, but obviously I didn't make it that far."

"Do you have another set or are we improvising?"

She chewed her bottom lip and wondered whether she should suggest something else, but Jason took the situation and ran with it.

"We can be spontaneous and adventurous," he replied with a smile, heading for the bathroom.

Within moments, they were naked and standing under the warm spray from the showerhead.

The muscles of his chest beckoned for her touch. She let the fingers of her right hand smooth over the muscles, feeling everything. His nipples begged for her mouth and she gave into the need to taste his flesh.

She ran her tongue from his collarbone down his chest until she hovered over the flat disk, and looked up. Jason's eyes were closed tight and his head was thrown back. With his hands clenched at his sides, he looked like a man lost in the throes of pleasure and she wasn't about to disappoint him. A deep moan escaped his lips when she slipped her tongue over his nipple and flicked the hard nub several times. His hands fisted in her hair and held her head hard against him. He released a high-pitched sound as she bit down gently.

"Fuck. Oh, yeah. Like that," he murmured.

Wanting to take it one step further, she trailed her hand down his flat, muscled abs until she could cup his cock in her hand, and began to stroke him from root to tip. Long and hard, his cock pulsed in her hand and pre-cum leaked from the tip. She palmed his balls and rolled them between her fingers. Her reward for the attention came with each small pump of his hips and every glide of his cock in her palm.

His body shuddered and broke out in goose bumps, but he finally took her hand and removed it from his cock.

"I want inside you, Stacey."

"I want that, too."

"But first, I need to take care of you," he said, guiding her to the corner seat inside the shower and kneeling between her splayed thighs.

The first swipe of his tongue and her need ratcheted up to explosive proportions, but the moment he started flicking his tongue over her clit, she dug her nails into his shoulders and hung on.

## Part 39 ~ 6/8/11

He loved going down on a woman. The scent of her arousal and the taste of her cream made his desire almost race out of control and Stacey's body had the sweetest flavor he'd ever experience.

The soft whimpers of need spilling from her lips with each brush of his tongue against her clit, had his dick harder than stone and he had to fight the urge to bury his cock in her heat until she exploded with at least one climax.

With two fingers buried in her hot depths, he could feel every vibration of her pussy and every time she squeezed the walls of her vagina as she tried to reach the crest of climax.

"Please," she begged, tossing her head on the pillow. "I need..."

He turned his fingers up and increased the pace of his thrusts. More cream spilled from her pussy as he pushed the full length of his fingers inside her and then sucked her clit between his lips.

"Jason!"

He loved watching her come apart with his name on her lips. The expression on her face, the flush of her skin and the heat in her eyes made him feel ten feet tall.

Once her climax cooled, he kissed his way up her stomach, stopping at her breasts to lick and nibble, until she wiggled beneath him. The head of his cock nudged at her opening and the heat of her pussy scorched him clear to his balls.

"Condom, Jason," she whispered.

"One second," he replied, rolling off her and grabbing his pants from the floor. With the condom in place, he returned to the cradle of her spread thighs and thrust inside her until he was buried so deep, he thought for sure he'd found heaven.

Her pussy gripped him and molded to his cock like they were made for each other, but the thought didn't scare him like it should have. Stacey felt right. Everything about her screamed forever to his heart, but his head continued to fight with every breath he took and every conscious thought he had.

His cock ached with the need to thrust fast and hard—to come so fast, it would be over in seconds, but he wanted it to last for hours—days—months.

*Think of something, man. Anything. Work. Computers. The dickhead who hacked into the system. Long walks. Sunset beaches. Stacey's heat.*

"Jason?"

"Yeah."

"Fuck me. Make me feel alive."

"Ah, hell," he groaned as he pulled his cock out so only the head remained inside her and thrust back in.

"Oh yeah," she whispered. "Hard, Jason. I want to feel every inch of you inside me. Make me forget."

*Forget?*

## Part 40 ~ 6/15/11

Dread filled her. *Did I just tell him I want to forget? Shit. He'll never understand.*

"What do you want to forget, Stacey?" he asked, refusing to be drawn into her frantic need as she lifted her hips and ground her pussy against him.

"Jason, please." She whimpered and squirmed beneath him, desperate for him to make the shadows disappear and right her world if only for a moment.

"Talk to me or I'll stop right now."

"Talk? You want to talk? This really isn't a good time," she asked, unable to believe he would stop the spiral of desire between them.

He pulled his cock from inside her and moved to roll to her side.

Her pussy quivered and throbbed with the need to feel something hard and long. She stared at the ceiling, almost in tears with the frustrated desire to climax. Debating on whether to reach down and finish the job herself, she glanced at Jason. His arm lay across his eyes, but his breathing still came out in painfully short pants. The length of his cock lay against his abdomen, still hard as steel and slick with her juices.

"Jason?"

"I'm not going to let you use me to forget another guy, Stacey."

"We all have things we want to forget," she snapped, sliding off the bed and grabbing her robe from the end. "I never said I wanted to forget another man."

"Then tell me."

"It's not your concern."

"The hell it's not! I'm not some damn gigolo you can pay to fuck your brains out and then shove out the door. I have feelings too, Stacey."

She watched as he pulled on his pants with jerking movements and then shoved his hands through his hair.

"We aren't a couple or anything, so why do you insist on me sharing everything?"

With a nonchalant shrug, he said, "Oh, I don't know. Maybe because I thought we had something going here even if we only met a few days ago. I don't know about you, but I don't go around randomly screwing a woman I just met."

"Oh really? Weren't you the one who said he didn't want any kind of a relationship since you just got out of a nasty marriage or did I imagine it?"

"Well, yes, but I..."

"Forget it, Jason. You don't have a damned clue about what you want. Yes, sex is good between us, but obviously being able to communicate on any level is beyond your capability with a woman. Is that real reason your marriage broke up? Did your ex fight and fight to talk to you and tell you what the problems were and you just ignored them?" She threw her hands up in the air and began to pace. "Were you being the typical man and listening with half an ear or dismissing her concerns all together? Did you bury yourself at work and come home late at night, never thinking she might be worried when you didn't call? What about anniversaries and birthdays? Did you blow those off too?"

The next thing she knew, he stood in front of her and grabbed her shoulders in both hands. His fingers bit into the flesh on her arms and the rage reflected in his eyes made her want to step back in fear, but he held her tight.

"My *wife* left me for another man," he snarled.

## Part 41 ~ 6/22/11

"I found out she'd been screwing around for some time. She didn't give a shit about me or our life together. She wanted prestige and money. Unfortunately, for a computer programmer, it comes in time. She didn't want to wait. I caught her in bed with someone I thought was my friend."

Stacey's eyes reflected the fear his anger made her feel, but the tears held him spellbound. From some strange reason, her tears did him in more than any other woman.

"I'm sorry," she whispered.

He removed his hands from her shoulders and let them drop to his side. Some guys might be able to hit a woman when they got angry, but not him. Only cowards hit women.

"I didn't mean to frighten you, Stacey."

"You didn't."

"Yes, I did. I can see it in your eyes. But you have to know even if you don't believe me. I would never hit you or any woman."

"I believe you."

"I should go."

"Stay with me," she murmured, stepping in so close, he could feel her hot breath on his chest.

"We can't keep going on like this. We fuck, we fight, we fuck, we fight. You'd think we were married or something with this cycle."

"Did you mean it when you said you thought we had something going on here?"

"Maybe."

"No maybe. Yes or no."

"All right, yes. I can't seem to stop thinking about you. You're driving me nuts. I've never had a woman take up my thoughts the way you do."

She smiled and wrapped her arms around him. "Good."

"Good?" he asked, lost in the feelings of holding her close. The softness of her skin under his hands reminded him of a rose petal. Her frame fit perfectly against his—like they were made for each other and the thought terrified him.

"I'm glad I'm not alone in this. From the moment you opened your door in nothing but I towel, I've been intrigued. When you said you didn't want any kind of relationship, I needed to guard my heart from falling in love with you."

Her words sent goose bumps along his skin. Fall in love? Shit. Can two people fall in love in two days?

"I don't really know much about you, Stacey."

"We don't know much about each other," she said, running her fingernail down his chest. "Can't we take it slow and learn about one another? I thought that's what dating was for."

"It is." *God, I can't think when she's standing in front of me in nothing but bare skin.* "I don't want you to be disappointed if things don't work out."

"Breakups happen. It's part of the finding love thing."

"True."

"You'll need to understand one thing. I won't have a ton of time to devote to dating. With my classes, homework, labs and everything, we might not see each other for days or weeks even. My career comes first."

Part 42 ~ 6/29/11

Her mother would kill her if she heard the conversation going on right now. Falling in love? Not on the agenda, but her heart wasn't listening.

"I know trying to see each other will be tough, Stacey. We'll just have to make the effort. If it's important enough to you—"

She pressed a finger to his lips. "It's important enough." Somehow, she felt tonight was an important step in their relationship such as is. Not much of one from the way they started, but some of the best began on rocky ground. "Will you stay tonight?"

"If you want me to."

"I do. But I'll warn you, I'm a bed hog."

He groaned playfully. "God, I hate women who hog the bed."

The smirk on his mouth gave away the lie of his words so she leaned toward him and ran her tongue down his neck. He smelled like man, musk and the slightest hint of aftershave, but what really turned her on? The salty mixture of his skin.

Goose bumps rose on his shoulder near her mouth and she smiled against his flesh. Seeing a man react to her touch like this, made her want to lick him all over.

"If you don't stop, baby, we'll be doing more than sleeping."

"I'm counting on it," she said, stepping back and taking his hand. "Are you coming?"

"Mmm. Not yet, but I want to. I want to so badly, my cock is screaming right now."

"Oh? Let's see." She dropped to her knees in front of him and pulled down his pants to reveal the silky, hard flesh of his cock bobbing against his stomach. "I don't hear anything. I think I need a closer look." A soft groan spilled from his lips when she licked from root to tip. "Hmm. I'm still not hearing much." With one hand wrapped around the base, she closed her mouth over the head of his cock and swirled her tongue around him. God, he tasted wonderful.

"Suck it, Stacey. Please."

She hummed softly as she drew him further into her mouth, sucking and swirling it, taking everything she could. Pre-cum coating her tongue with each pass of her mouth over the hard flesh. His groans got louder and longer. His hips rocked with the motion of her head. Soft fingers massaged her scalp and held her head in place while he fucked her mouth.

Faster and faster she bobbed her head, meeting her fingers along his length to give him the most pleasure she could. He needed this. She needed this. The give and take of pleasure between two people became the root of what she felt for this man. Defining it more, meant opening her heart and she wasn't quite ready for the depth of those feelings...yet.

## Part 43 ~ 7/6/11

The feel of her mouth on his cock drove him wild with need. Each slick slide of her tongue and mouth pulled desire from every pore of his body until blood hummed in his veins and he felt his balls draw up.

"Stacey, honey. If you keep..." His words trailed off into a tortured groan as he lost his train of thought in the raging cravings for her. "Oh, God," he whispered, grasping her head between his hands. Without stopping the unconscious rock of his hips, he closed his eyes and let everything she was doing to him, feed the feelings inside.

"Fuck," he groaned as spurt after spurt of cum shot to the back of her throat.

Never missing a beat, Stacey swallowed every drop until he pulled his softening cock from her mouth and stumbled back until he could fall onto the bed in a rumbled heap of jellied fleshed.

"You okay?" she asked, hovering over him.

"Yeah," he breathed, trying to pull air into his starving lungs. "Damn, woman. That had to be the best blowjob I've ever had."

She lay down beside him and propped herself up on her elbow. "Good."

He glanced at her face and caught the twinkle in her eyes. "Give me a couple of minutes and I'll take care of you."

"Mmm...I'll hold you do that promise, mister. I'm rather horny right now."

One fingernail trailed down his chest, stopping to encircle his nipple for a moment. She had to be the sexiest woman he'd ever met and he couldn't wait to see where this whole thing went. Even though he didn't want to get involved with anyone so soon after his divorce, he couldn't help but wonder if God had a large hand in his life. Who would have thought the most gorgeous woman in the world would move next door to him? Not him. Those kinds of things didn't happen in his life, but he wasn't going to question it.

"What are you thinking about?" she asked as her fingers slipped through the hair near his groin.

"You."

"What about me?"

"Just wondering how I got so lucky to have you move in next to me."

"Lucky, huh," she said, kissing his chest and swirling her tongue over the flesh.

"Oh yeah. And who would have thought we'd be right here right now. It's kind of ironic, don't you think?"

"Ironic how?"

"I think fate has a huge hand in how things happen. I mean if you hadn't moved here to go to school and just happened to move in my apartment building and next door no less, I probably would never have met you. Our paths wouldn't have crossed and I wouldn't be lying here next to one of the most beautiful women I've met in a long time."

"You know you don't have to flatter me, Jason, to get me in bed with you. I'm already there."

"It's not random flattery, Stacey. Even though I had no intentions of finding anyone to have a relationship with, here you are. I know we just met, but I can't see myself being with anyone else."

She sat up and pulled her knees to her chest as she rested her cheek on top of her knee.

"What's wrong?"

"I'm scared."

"Of what?"

"Of how fast this is all moving. I've had my whole life planned out for several years and being here with you is throwing a huge wrench in my plans."

Part 44 ~ 7/13/11

Stacey wasn't sure if Jason knew what she meant. Having a boyfriend wasn't something new to her. She'd been with a couple of guys during high school, but this serious stuff made her think of running.

"Let's not talk about all this right now. We've got a lifetime to learn about each other and decide if this is something permanent or temporary," he replied, pulling her back down beside him and pinning her to the bed with one leg over hers. "Now. I think someone mentioned being horny and I need to take care of it rather quickly. I don't want you to think you need to find someone else to take care of your problem."

His lips danced over hers in their own little erotic number as his tongue slid along the crease, teasing her by retreating when she opened her mouth. A frustrated whimper escaped her lips and he chuckled softly before moving his kisses to her jaw line and then down her neck. The small bite he left on her neck drove her passion skyward.

"Jason, please."

"Easy, babe. We'll take this slow."

"I hate you," she whispered without any venom in her words.

"Sure you do," he murmured against her breast as he nuzzled the curve and planted little kisses along the side.

Her nipple strained toward the warmth of his mouth when he blew a little stream of air over the tip. The need to have him suck, nibble, lick—something—had her begging under her breath.

The moment he closed his lips over the peak, her small whimpers turned into all out loud moans. She threaded her fingers through his hair and held his head in place, hoping the pressure she exerted on his scalp would communicate what she wanted since she didn't think she could form any coherent words.

Thank God, he pulled her nipple into his mouth and flicked the tip with his tongue.

"Yes, yes, yes."

His left hand tickled along her abdomen as he moved it closer and closer to her weeping pussy. She lifted her hips slightly off the bed, straining toward his seeking fingers.

He parted her pussy lips and moved one finger over her clit. The slow suck on her breast and the wicked pressure of his finger sent her spiraling into the heavens of climax on a tortured scream of release.

"Someone was a little horny," he said while she slowly came down from her invisible tight rope. "Better?"

Through the small slit of vision she gave herself, she could see the satisfied smirk on his mouth. "Mmm. A little. I still need something a bit thicker and longer. Got anything like that?"

"I'm sure I can rouse my big throbbing muscle of love for some—"

The long, sharp peal of laughter and the shaking of her shoulders stopped his words. "Throbbing—muscle—of love? You can't be serious?"

## Part 45 ~ 7/20/11

*Okay. Maybe throbbing muscle of love was a bit corny, but I don't think it deserved the gut-splitting laughter she's emitting.*

Stacey rolled away from him, holding her stomach as she giggled uncontrollably.

"I didn't think it was that damned funny, Stacey."

"I'm...sorry...Jason." Laughter still escaped her lips between words. "I've just never heard it referred to as *muscle of love*."

The way she laughed, holding her stomach and giggling until tears streamed down her face reminded him of his ex when he'd tried to be romantic one night. He bought flowers, set up a nice dinner at their house, and had the music down low and everything. The feelings of inadequacy stalled everything. Sharon laughed in his face when she saw the whole set up. It was the night she'd told him she wanted a divorce and he'd found out she'd been seeing other men.

Jason rolled off the bed and grabbed his pants from the floor. Indignation ripped through him at Stacey's continued hilarity. He jerked on his jeans and pulled his shirt over his head.

"Where are you going, Jason? I said I'm sorry."

"You know what...never mind, Stacey. I'm going on home. I'll see you around." He walked into the living room, grabbed his keys, shoes and wallet and slammed out of her apartment with her calling his name behind him.

Once he managed to get back into his own place, he tossed his stuff onto the coffee table and speared his fingers through his hair as her giggles echoed in his brain.

"It doesn't matter. Work comes early," he said out loud, heading for the bathroom and a hot shower.

After he finished in the bathroom, he grabbed some sweats, pulled them on and then crawled under the sheet. Silence. Not even sounds from the streets below reached his ears. Thoughts of what Stacey might be doing right at this moment, zipped across his mind and he frowned. "I'm not going to think about her. She's just like Sharon. I mean, yeah, so the saying was corny, but she didn't have to laugh hysterically. I swear, women don't want a guy who can be romantic these days. They all want the bad boy biker type who has no manners, no brain and all brawn." He rolled over and punched his pillow. "I don't want any kind of relationship anyway. She can find someone else to be her boy toy. I've got better things to do."

He finally fell into a fitful sleep two hours later as dreams of making love to Stacey stayed with him until morning.

## Part 46 ~ 7/27/11

"Okay. I totally screwed that up," she said out loud. "Damn. Now he's pissed at me. Oh well. He'll get over it. I mean come on. Throbbing muscle of love? Really?"

She shook her head and stood up to grab something to sleep in. There were things to do tomorrow. Class registration, straightening up her apartment, doing laundry, buying books...all the lovely household things and college student things didn't do themselves.

The sheets were cool to the touch when she slid beneath them and snuggled down to get some sleep, but Jason's hurt expression lingered in her mind. Apologizing didn't seem to do the trick. Maybe she would make him a nice dinner tomorrow night and see if a nice meal might smooth over his ruffled feathers. It had always worked for her mother when her dad was mad.

Her dad. God she missed him so much. The weird phone call came back to the front of her thoughts. *It couldn't have been him. I don't believe in ghosts, but man. Talk about weird.* "No way in hell I can ever tell anyone what happened. They'd throw me in the looney bin and toss away the key for sure."

But how could she explain the phone call? His voice seemed a bit scratchy but she knew it was him.

Shadows crept across the ceiling of her apartment, giving the room an eerie feeling. Goose bumps rose on her arms and she absently rubbed them to calm the puckered flesh. She glanced around the room, searching for what, she didn't know. It wasn't like she got frightened easily, but tonight seemed especially strained. Maybe it was the fight with Jason.

"The way we argued, you'd think we were married or something."

The thought of being married to Jason made her smile wistfully. Not that she was in love with him or anything. You can't fall in love in a few days. She shook her head at the silly idea, but her heart didn't seem to agree with her. Silly it may be, but intriguing nonetheless.

"Enough of this. I need to get some sleep otherwise my mind won't be on classes and stuff, it will be on the disturbingly attractive man next door."

She rolled onto her side and snuggled under the covers. A lone tear slid from the corner of her eye. *Daddy used to tuck me in at night and kiss me on the cheek.* Lord, what she wouldn't give for the soft brush of his lips against her cheek and the softly whispered words of goodnight, sleep well, and I love you.

Moments later, the whisper of warmth slipped over her cheek and the murmured words met her ear.

"Goodnight Stacey. Sleep well and always remember, I love you, honey."

## Part 47 ~ 8/3/11

The phone jerked Jason out of the pitiful sleep he managed to get. With his hand reaching toward the night stand, he smacked the phone several times until he managed to knock it off the cradle. Unfortunately, it didn't stop the annoying ringing.

"What?" he growled into the phone after he managed to answer it.

"Are you coming into work today?"

He shot upright in the bed and squinted at the clock. "Shit!"

Nine zero, zero glared at him in big bold numbers.

"I'll be there in fifteen minutes."

"Uh, Jason?"

"Yeah."

"Shower first, please and dress appropriately. Last time this happened you came in wearing wrinkled dress pants, two different shoes and a T-shirt. You have a meeting with the boss at ten."

"Thanks, Shirley."

"I take care of my guys and you're special even if you could be my grandson."

"I love you."

"Yeah, yeah. Save it for some cute twenty-something year old."

Shirley always brought a smile to his face with her light bantering. She'd been his administrative assistant since he hired on some five years ago and she'd been mothering him from day one.

"Get your ass to work, buddy, or there'll be hell to pay when the boss finds out I lied and told them you had an early meeting with a client."

"Yes, ma'am."

"Oh and Jason?"

"Yeah."

"I love you, too."

The click of the phone in his ear propelled him out of bed toward the bathroom and into the shower.

Hot water sprayed over his head, down his face and ran in rivulets across his chest. After a few moments of absorbing the heat, he quickly showered while he whistled a catchy tune. With his shower complete, he grabbed some clean clothes or what he thought was clean after the sniff test, slipped them on and glanced in the mirror. *Not too bad. The pants aren't wrinkled; I have a dress shirt on, a tie and two of the same shoes. I think I'll pass Shirley's inspection.*

Unfortunately, the coffee would have to wait until he got to work. He didn't have time to even make a cup to go.

As he headed for his car, his steps slowed when he reached Stacey's door. Did she sleep shitty like he did? Was she already up and gone?

Jason shook his head and continued out to the parking lot. Getting all caught up in his sexy neighbor only meant trouble with a capital T. *Then why do I feel like shit because I haven't talked to her this morning?*

A quick glance at her parking spot revealed an empty space with only her apartment number painted on the pavement.

*Already gone. Well, that's a relief. I won't be running into her.*

His heart decided to counter with its only fevered wish. *Don't fool yourself, buddyboy. You're in this with both feet and headfirst.*

## Part 48 ~ 8/10/11

Stacey woke the next morning feeling more rested and balanced than she had in some time. Classes need to be registered for, supplies needed to be bought—parking sticker, map of campus, and the list went on and on.

The moment she stepped onto the university grounds, her heart beat fast, her palms started to sweat and her body started to tremble. This was it. Her life would revolve around this campus for at least the next four years, probably longer if she got accepted into the medical school part.

People rushed here and there, from one building to another without even glancing in her direction. Sure, she was just another student, but she'd hope to make some friends here.

"Uh, excuse me," she said, stopping a girl walking quickly.

"Yeah?"

"Can you tell me where registration is?"

The girl looked her up and down and her eyebrow rose as she looked her Stacey's clothes and then said, "Around those trees, the first huge building." Without waiting for a thank you, the girl moved off toward a guy sitting on the low wall to her right.

"Thank you!" Stacey yelled anyway.

*Great. What a way to start my first day here. I hope not everyone is snotty.*

After she glanced at her watch and swore silently, she headed in the general direction the other woman told her hoping she'd find someone a little more helpful. Rounding the trees, Stacey stared at the four huge buildings in front of her and sighed.

"You look a little lost," a male voice said from behind her.

She spun around, coming face-to-face with a very handsome blond guy with big blue eyes. "Is it that obvious?"

"Actually, yeah. Can I help you find something?" he asked, hiking up his backpack onto his shoulder. "I'm Greg, by the way."

"Stacey and yes you could help me, if you don't mind. I'm looking for registration."

"Ah, no wonder you looked so lost. New student. Follow me and I'll take you there."

"Really?"

He laughed and the low sexy sound traveled down her back in a delicious wave.

"Yes, really. Not everyone around here is unhelpful although there are a few." They walked together toward the last building in the square. "I was you last year, so I know how you feel. This place is huge, so I hope you can read a map or you'll never find your classes."

"It's really sweet of you to help me like this."

"No problem. Besides, what better way to meet a pretty woman than to help her."

"Are you flirting with me?" she asked, with a small giggle.

"Of course. And I'm hoping if I play my cards right, I might even get to buy you coffee after you register."

They arrived at the registration building and he took her hand to show her where she needed to be.

"Stop at the table next to the wall and give them your name. They'll give you a registration packet with class schedules in it and a list of those you should be taking depending on your major. Are you okay from here?"

"I think so. Thank you so much for helping me, Greg. I really appreciate it."

"Tell you what, I have two classes to get to here shortly. You'll be doing this for a while. It can take a few hours to get registered. Would you meet me at the coffee shop on the corner when you're done? It's kind of student hang out."

## Part 49 ~ 8/17/11

Jason whipped into his parking spot at the huge building that houses the offices of his employer, grabbed his briefcase and jumped out. The main foyer of the building had glass from floor to ceiling, a huge reception desk and six elevators to take everyone to the upper floors. Each floor housed a different department of the corporation.

When the doors opened, he stepped inside the elevator, pushed seven and waited. Within moments, the elevator stopped on his floor and he rushed to his secretary's desk.

"Thanks for the phone call, Shirley. You saved my ass...again."

"Nothin' to it boss." She stood up and walked around her desk. "Mmm. I can see why you're late," she said, wiping the lipstick off his neck and showing him the smug on her thumb. "Hot date?"

"Crap. I took a shower last night too. I guess I missed that. Is it all off now?"

"Turn your head." Shirley looked him over thoroughly and nodded. "Yep, it's gone."

"Has Jackson asked where I am?"

"Not yet, but—" The buzz of her intercom announced an incoming call. "I bet he will now. You better move along, get settled and hit the boardroom in about five minutes. Otherwise, there'll be hell to pay. They're fired up about the security breach."

"I'm gone. See you at lunch."

Jason rushed down the hall and skidded into his office. After tossing his briefcase on the desk, he fired up his computer and got the scoop on everything, picked up his notes and headed for the executive meeting. He hated these things, but it came with the job. Sometimes he wished he'd stayed a plan 'ol computer programmer. They made good money and they didn't have the pressures of corporate American on their asses.

"It's about time you got here, Jason. We've been waiting for you," Mr. Jackson said from his position near the head of the table.

"I'm sorry. I had a meeting with a client this morning and I got delayed a little."

Mr. Jackson waved him off and motioned for him to take a seat. "Tell us about this security breach and how in the hell it happened? I'm not happy this clown got into our system."

"It really wasn't very hard, Mr. Jackson, since the man worked for us. He had enough access to get what he wanted and sell it to the highest bidder...our competition."

"And he got it by using your computer?"

"He logged into my computer, yes, but the safety measures we have on our system and the private security lock I have on my computer terminal kept him out long enough for our guards to get him. The police arrested him and apparently, he's still in jail."

"Luckily, he didn't manage to get any information. Heads would have rolled if he had, Jason, including yours and several others. This kind of breach is unacceptable and I hope you have some free time on your hands because I want a fool proof way of keeping these clowns out. Our Human Resources Department needs better background checks and whatever else we need to do to make sure this doesn't happen again. Espionage from inside is from sloppy work." Mr. Jackson rose to his feet. "Gentleman and ladies, this meeting is adjourned until tomorrow morning. At which time I want a full report on the measures we are putting in place."

The entire executive committee sat in stunned silence as Mr. Jackson walked out and shut the door behind him.

Part 50 ~ 8/24/11

Stacey watched Greg walk away with an appreciative eye. Blond hair brushed his shoulders in a straight cut, eyes the color of granite twinkled when he talked to her and the apparent strength in his chest and back looked like he'd be able to hold a woman tight and make her feel special.

A short sigh escaped her lips before she turned back toward the table.

"Can I help you?"

"Yes ma'am. I'm here to register for classes."

"Your name?"

Stacey gave her the information and the elderly woman handed her a large envelope.

"Everything you need is in there. Find a seat somewhere and go through the catalogue. You'll need to figure out which classes you want to take out of the list inside with the classes required for your major. I suggest you have at least three secondary choices in case the first ones are full."

"Thank you."

"You're welcome."

Several tables lined the huge hall. Students of every creed and color sat bent over their paperwork, jotting down things with the pens or pencils in their hands, their eyebrows drawn in concentration and their mouths set in straight lines. Stacey found an empty seat, laid her backpack on the table and got to work. As a pre-med student, she'd be required to take several basic courses before she took anything resembling a class like chemistry, biology, anatomy.

After Stacey wrote down class names, numbers and buildings, she headed for the windows set up along another wall that looked like teller windows. When one opened up, she stepped toward the glass and slipped her paperwork under into the slot.

She got lucky. All of her first choices were still open.

"You can find a list of books required for your classes at the bookstore. Classes begin next Monday."

"You mean I still have a week before I have classes?"

"Yeah. Use it to get to know the campus and where your classes will be held. I suggest you find someone who has been here for a year or two to help you."

"Already done."

"Great." The girl smiled and glanced behind her. "I saw you talking to Greg Baldwin earlier. He's a nice guy. He'll help you out."

"You know him?"

The girl blushed and chewed her bottom lip. "You could say that, yeah."

Stacey didn't know why, but the thought sort of bothered her. Why should she care who Greg went out with. They'd only just met.

"Don't get hung up on him though, honey. He'll break your heart. He sweet and sexy as hell, but he ain't one to settle down."

"I don't need a boyfriend. I'm here to study."

"I've heard that before and I thought the same way until he flashed those silver eyes and his killer smile." The girl shrugged and tapped her pen on the counter. "Like I said, if you can stay friends with him, you'll be better off and he's a great friend. Just don't get into the friends with benefits thing, although the guy is sex-on-a-stick."

## Part 51 ~ 8/31/11

"What the hell just happened?" Jason said, while the rest of the committee didn't make a sound. All eyes turned to him and he felt like a bug under a microscope. "So, what are we going to do about this?"

"We?" Jack Merriman replied. "The rest of us weren't involved in this Jason. It was one of your guys and your department."

Every other man and woman in the room nodded.

"Great. Just fucking great. Obviously, I don't have the friends I thought I did. I'm glad to know to watch my back. Don't forget I've bailed each and every one of you out of a jam before, but I guess loyalty doesn't amount for shit around here." Jason grabbed his notes and headed for the door. "Thanks for the support guys. I really appreciate it."

When he reached his office, he pushed the door open hard enough to bang it against the wall behind it and then slammed it shut, just for good measure.

"What a bunch of assholes!"

The phone on his desk rang several times before he realized he needed to answer it.

"Yeah, Shirley. What is it?" he snapped into the receiver.

"Meeting didn't go well?"

"No."

"I'll be right in."

Moments later, Shirley sailed into his office, coffee cup in hand. "Here. Now sit down and tell me what happened."

Jason lifted the cup to his lips and closed his eyes as he took one fortifying sip after another while Shirley took her normal spot across from him. "The whole fucking lot of them are going to let me take the fall for this. The old guy wants a total overhaul on our system to make sure this doesn't happen again, plus he wants the total HR plan for hiring redone, too. Thank God, that's not part of my department."

"So what's your plan?"

"Fuck if I know. I'm not even awake yet. This is my first cup of coffee and I'm going to need several pots, I think."

"Not a problem, boss. I'll keep the caffeine flowing. Just let me know what I can do to help."

"I'll probably be here tonight until the wee hours trying to figure out some way to keep these idiots from hacking into our system. I'm kind of in the dark at the moment and not thinking straight."

"It'll be fine, Jason. You're a smart cookie."

"Thanks, Shirley. I needed the pep talk."

"You probably need to get laid and calm those nerves out, too."

Jason felt the heat creeping up his neck, across his cheeks and to his ears.

"Is that a blush I see? Getting some regularly are we?" Shirley pulled her chair closer to the desk. "Do tell?"

"Not much to tell. I met a girl a few days ago."

"And?"

"She's my neighbor, Shirley."

"So what? If she's a female, she's fair game unless she's married."

"Not married except to her career plans. She's here to study medicine like her dad."

"Noble profession."

He sighed and leaned back in his soft, leather chair. "Yeah. We've had sex a couple of times, but nothing can come of it."

"Why the hell not? Is she ugly or something?"

"Hell no. She's gorgeous!"

Shirley sat back in the chair and one of her painted on eyebrows shot up to her hairline. "Me thinks he protests too much. Sounds like you're in pretty deep already, buddyboy."

## Part 52 ~ 9/7/11

The corner coffee shop Greg told her about came into view as she neared the corner. Several people sat at the tables outside, enjoying the warmer air so unusual for fall in Seattle. Wrought iron tables and chairs sat under a large green canopy with the logo of the shop scrawled from one corner to the other. Couples talked with heads bent together, some singles tapped away at their laptop keyboards, which others stared out into the street, watching the cars zip by.

Stacey spotted Greg sitting by himself at a small table in the corner with his back to the wall of the cafe. When he lifted his head and their gazes caught, he smiled and raised his hand to motion her over.

"Hey, there. I'm glad you found it," he said, getting to his feet and pulling out a chair for her.

"Yeah. It wasn't hard at all with your directions."

"Did you get your class schedule situated?"

"Yes, thankfully. I managed to get all of my first choices." She hung her purse on the raised backrest of the chair and glanced around. "This is a quaint place."

"It's pretty cool. A lot of the students hang out here to study or meet friends. They have free wi-fi and their coffee is pretty good. Espresso ala student! A must have for any college student."

Stacey laughed at his antics.

"You have a nice laugh."

"Thanks. I haven't had much to laugh about in the last several years."

"Why's that?" he asked, then took a drink of his coffee.

"Just stuff. You know." The door to the café sat to their left. "I'm going to go inside and get a coffee. I'll be right back."

Greg jumped to his feet and said, "Nonsense. I asked you for coffee, I'll spring. What would you like?"

"Uh, iced mocha please."

"Good choice. I'll be right back."

After Greg disappeared from sight, Stacey looked around her and noticed several people staring at her and she wondered why. She glanced down at her blouse, hoping she hadn't drooled on herself or something, but didn't see anything. Reaching up to fiddle with her hair, she gasped when she realized she had quite a few twigs and leaves in her hair from walking under the trees

on campus. "Damn. Greg should have told me I looked like Mother Nature. I must look like a mess and I don't even have my brush with me." The pile of debris on the table grew as she picked things out of her hair, grumbling the entire time about men who couldn't give a girl the common courtesy to tell her she's got shit in her hair.

"You're talking to yourself, Stacey," Greg said, returning to the table. "Do you do things like that often? You know they say you're crazy if you talk to yourself."

"No, you're crazy if you answer yourself. Why didn't you tell me I looked like a freak with all this crap in my hair? Are leaves and twigs the new fashion statement of the year?" she snapped.

"Whoa," Greg replied, holding up his hands. "Don't be pissed at me. I wasn't looking at your hair, Stacey."

"Oh? What were you looking at then?"

"Your tits."

## Part 53 ~ 9/14/11

After Shirley returned to her desk, Jason found his mind wandering to Stacey. Everything he told Shirley was the truth. Stacey wasn't just a roll in the hay. She affected him in ways no one else ever had, but people didn't fall in love in a few days—in lust, yeah, but love didn't enter into the equation.

"I need to get my mind off her anyway. I've got a hell of a lot of work to do today and thinking about her isn't going to help the matter."

He spun around in his chair and pulled up the program the hackers wanted. The program would make millions for the company when it released if they didn't lose it to the competition before then. It consisted of combining several household chores into one manageable application including everything from bill paying to keeping track of the kids. Important information had its own place. Something you could pull up from anywhere by cell phone. Things like medical history, medications someone might be on, mortgages, this month's electric bill and more.

The constant scream for new technology kept the company on its toes and as the head of the department, he kept the ideas flowing whether they came from programmers on the inside or people off the street. He constantly had his fingers on the pulse of new technology. If he didn't, he wouldn't have a job.

Hours flew by as he worked on the program trying to find a way to keep anyone from being able to use it if the information found its way into someone else's hands. Passwords—no. Security lock—no. Thumb print screening—possibly. Code scrambler—possibly.

The next thing he knew, Shirley walked through the door with a sandwich, soda and chips.

"I thought you might need a break. It is lunch time."

"Seriously?" Jason pulled his hand up over his head and stretched his back. "I hadn't realized the morning was gone already."

Shirley set everything on the desk and pulled up a chair. "How's it going?"

He shook his head. "I don't know, Shirley. I've got some possibilities on things, but every time I think I might have something, I realize there is a way around it. We need a fool proof way of keeping hackers out and I haven't figured it out yet."

"What about—"

His cell phone ring tone went off, interrupting Shirley's comment. "Hold the thought for a minute. I need to take this."

"Sure."

"Hello?"

The muffled, gravelly voice on the other end of the line sent chills down his spine. "We want the program and you're gonna get it for us. We'll be in touch."

## Part 54 ~ 9/21/11

"Excuse me? You were looking at what?" Stacey asked, indignation ruffling her feathers like a chicken caught in a wind tunnel. *What a jerk!*

"I'm being honest. You have a nice rack," he said with a shrug and a lift of his right eyebrow. "Most women are flattered when a man likes their tits."

"Well, I'm not most women. That is the most chauvinistic, egotistical, male thing you could have said."

"I'm sorry if it offends you, Stacey. I figured you'd like to know that I'm attracted to you."

"Attraction is fine, Greg."

"Would you be offended if I said I want to fuck your brains out?"

Stacey glanced around the coffee shop to see if anyone heard what he said. Several people at the next table looked their way and grinned. Embarrassment sent heat screaming across her chest and flushing her face bright red.

"But, you know, if you are with someone..."

"I'm not. Not really." Why the vulgar words didn't bother her, she wasn't sure. *Am I really attracted enough to Greg to want to have sex with him? And why in the hell does it always have to be about sex? Why can't a couple go out and have a good time without it all coming back to having sex?*

"Not really usually means you are, but you aren't sure where the situation is going," he replied, leaning back in his chair.

"I'm not in a relationship."

Greg leaned forward and put both elbows on the table. "So, are you interested in having some casual sexual playtime?" His fingers skimmed over the back of her hand and then entwined themselves with hers. Moments later, he kissed her fingertips and ran his tongue along the ridges of her knuckles. "I could definitely take you places you've never been, Stacey. Orgasmic paradise comes with extensive knowledge of the female body. Knowing what and where to touch or kiss or both brings about the best results for both parties involved."

Jason's face popped into her head. The way he'd held her when she cried—the way he brought her body to screaming orgasms with his mouth—how he seemed to care even though

they'd only known each other for a few days—those were the thing relationships were built on, not just how well someone made love.

*Greg wasn't talking making love. He's suggesting hot, sweaty sex.*

"So what's it gonna be, pretty lady? Do we go to your place and see what happens?"

The fight with Jason came back into sharp clarity. She hadn't meant to hurt Jason's feelings, but apparently she had. Laughing at his choice of words wasn't smart on her part. If he hadn't been so damned sensitive about it, they could have spent the good part of the night making the bed springs squeak.

"Hello? Stacey?" Greg waved a hand in front of her face. "Where'd you go, babe? Are we going back to your place or not?"

Maybe bringing Greg home would give Jason a bit of a wakeup call. She thought they had something pretty cool started, but they sure had a problem communicating, it seemed. *If I make Jason a little jealous by bringing another guy home with me, it wouldn't hurt, right?*

## Part 55 ~ 9/28/11

"What the hell?" Jason snapped, holding the phone away from his ear. *Who in the hell was that?*

"Jason?" Shirley asked, concern written all over her weathered face. "Something wrong?"

"Uh...no. Just a prank call, I guess." He set the phone down on the desktop and swung around in his chair so he faced his computer, forgetting completely about Shirley being in the office.

"Well, I'm going to go back to my desk then," she answered, getting to her feet.

"Oh. Sorry, Shirley. I'm a little distracted at the moment."

"It's no wonder with the hell going on around here, but I'm sure you'll figure something out."

"Thanks for the vote of confidence."

She walked around the desk and squeezed his shoulder with her hand.

Once Shirley had left the room, Jason sat back in his leather executive chair and smoothed his hand over his face. Something wasn't right. There had to be an internal leak, but he just wasn't sure. And now, someone was going to try to use him to get the information. No way would he ever divulge corporate secrets. It just wasn't in his nature to be dishonest and it didn't matter what these idiots threatened him with, he wouldn't crack.

A knock on his door brought his attention back to his surroundings.

"Come in." He looked up to see his top computer tech guy. "Hey, Jack. What's up?"

"I heard about the shit this weekend with the computer hacker."

"Yeah, not a great thing. Now the boss is insisting on some foolproof way to keep them out and I'm at a loss."

"You look like hell, man. I didn't think the celebration of your divorce took that much out of you."

He rubbed his hands over his face again and laughed. "It wasn't the party. I met this girl..."

"Well, spill it buddy. Where'd you meet her? What's she like?"

"She's actually my next door neighbor. She came over asking to borrow something, but ran back to her place when I answered the door in a towel."

Jack's eyebrow shot up over his eye and a smile creased his face. "Wow."

"More than wow. A few minutes later, I went outside on my patio and found a purple thong draped over the railing between her place and mine."

"A purple thong?"

"Yeah. Sexy as hell."

"What else happened?"

"It's been a whirlwind. We went out on a date the other night and I can't seem to keep my hands off her." He shook his head and smiled. "I've only known her a few days really, but it seems like we've known each other forever."

"Did you drill her yet?"

"Oh, hell yeah. More than once and let me tell you, she's hot with a capital h."

"Cool."

The company phone on his desk buzzed and he rolled his eyes. He couldn't catch a break today for anything. "Hang on. Let me get this." Punching the blinking button, he grabbed the phone and said, "Yes?"

"Jason, I need to see you in my office immediately. We have a problem."

"Of course, I'll be right there." After he hung up and he tipped his head back on his shoulders and sighed. What the hell else could go wrong?

## Part 56 ~ 10/5/11

Sweat rolled down her back, sending shivers along her spine as she stopped in front of her apartment door.

Greg propped his shoulder against the door jam and said, "Nice building."

"Thanks," she replied, slipping the key into the lock. "I haven't lived her long. I just got her from Iowa about a week ago."

"Iowa, huh? A farm girl?"

"No. My dad was a doctor." She pushed opened the door and flipped on the light. Several boxes were still stacked against the wall and piles of dishes lined the counters. "Excuse the mess. I'm still unpacking."

"You're lucky to have a place of your own. Most students don't." He tossed his backpack on the couch and glanced around. "Are there other students who live in the building?"

"I don't know. I haven't met anyone except the guy who lives next door."

"Ah," he replied, his eyes sparkling in the dim light. "Is he nice?"

Unable to stop the flush of heat rushing to her cheeks, she chewed her lip and said, "Uh...yeah."

"So, he's the relationship that's not really a relationship?"

"Why would you say that?"

Greg stopped next to her and ran his finger down her cheek. "Because of your blush whenever I asked you about him. Have you had sex with him?"

"I don't think it's any of your business." She spun around and walked to the sliding glass door. "What or who I've had sex with shouldn't matter, now should it?"

"Ah. A yes, then."

"Listen, Greg. I brought you back here for 'casual sexual playtime' if I remember your words correctly, not to be given the third degree about my relationship with my neighbor."

The warmth of his hands on her shoulders felt strange—uncomfortable, when he stepped behind her. "I'm all for giving you what you want, Stacey." His lips brushed against her shoulder and then up her neck. Teeth nibbled at her earlobe, sending goose bumps across her flesh. "But you need to be sure, babe, you want me and not him." Greg grabbed her both of her hands and pulled them behind her back, pinning them between one of his hands as the other palmed her breast in a fierce grip. "Do you want me?"

Stacey licked her lips and fought the urge to fight against his grip. She wanted this—didn't she? Yes, of course she did.

He pinched her nipple between his fingers, sending pain and heat straight to her pussy.

"Do you like a little pain with your sex, Stacey?"

Her throat went dry and her words came out in a rasp, "Pain?"

"Yeah. How did you feel when I just pinched your nipple?"

"It felt odd. I've never had anyone do that before."

"Did it make you hot?" he whispered in her ear. "Did your pussy cream? Is your clit throbbing for more?" Teeth nipped at her neck and then his tongue soothed the sting.

It was, but she wasn't sure if she wanted to admit such a thing to him—or anyone. What kind of weirdo was she?

## Part 57 ~ 10/12/11

Jason slipped the key into the lock on his apartment and pushed the door open. With a weary sigh, he pulled off his tie and tossed it on the back of the couch, toed off his shoes and unbuttoned the first two buttons on his shirt. Better.

*I need a beer. Today sucked bad and having to stay way past time to go home wasn't on my party list.*

The clock on his microwave read nine and he wondered what the hell he'd have to eat for dinner. Tonight, the only things he wanted were a beer, check, food—he glanced in the refrigerator and sighed. Okay, well food would need to be obtained. Several fast food menu's clung to the front of the frig from his several forays into cheap, single meals.

"Just pick one, Jason," he snapped, grabbing the first one his fingers touched. "Pizza. Sounds good to me." He picked up his cell phone from where he'd laid it when he came in and dialed. "Yeah, I need a large pepperoni pizza delivered to..." After he rattled off his address, he clicked the phone off and dropped onto the couch in an exhausted heap.

The day went from bad to worse with the final meeting at work. Come to find out, not only did the one employee try to hack into the system and steal their files, but someone in finance had funneled money out of the business accounts and off to only God knew where. He didn't usually get involved in the financial part of things at the company, however this seemed all too

coincidental to the higher ups and he feared they were right. Someone was hell-bent on destroying the company from within. Finances and development worked hand in hand. If development projects were pilfered and the backers found out, there would be a massive sell off of stock, dropping the prices in the toilet. Not only would the company suffer, but all the employees would too. Their 401k's held primarily company stock.

The back of the couch sat against the wall between his and Stacey's apartments and after several minutes, he could hear soft music and voices. One of them was obviously Stacey's. He could tell by the higher pitch and the little bit of lilt to it, but *what the hell?* The deeper rumble of a man's voice came through the overly thin walls.

"She brought another guy home?"

*Easy. She's not yours. She can date whomever she wants—sleep with whomever she wants.*

"Over my fucking dead body," he snarled, jumping to his feet and heading for the door.

## Part 58 ~ 10/19/11

*Bang, bang, bang!*

"What the fuck? Who in the hell is banging on your door?" Greg asked, pulling away from her.

"I...I'm not sure." Her whole body shook whether from what Greg was doing to her or the fright from the obnoxious sounds coming from her door, she wasn't sure. "I better get it."

More pounding. *Damn, this is nuts.* When she reached the door, the noise increase and she heard the voice.

"Stacey! Open the door!"

*Fuck. Jason.*

"Go away, Jason. I don't need you here."

"Open this damned door, right now."

Frustrated and angry now, she grabbed the lock, flipped the deadbolt open and yanked the door. "What the hell do you want?"

Jason zipped past her and stopped in the middle of the room, hands on his hips. "Who the hell are you?" he snapped facing Greg.

Stacey slammed the door and moved between the two men. "It's none of your business who is he, Jason. He's here as my guest."

"Your guest? Does he know you and I have been fucking around, Stacey. Huh?" Jason watched Greg over her shoulder, but she could see the rage in his eyes. *Rage? From what? He can't possibly care that I brought another guy home, right?*

"I don't rightly care, dude," Greg replied with a shrug. "Stacey's a free woman."

*Great! Thanks for fucking this up, Greg. I wanted Jason to think I was moving on with someone else.*

"Fucking around, Jason? Is that what you call it?" she asked, putting her hand in the middle of his chest to push him back toward the door.

"What would you call it? Making love? Having sex?" He grabbed her wrist in a fierce hold, but the warmth of his skin against hers sent heat straight up her arm to settle in her chest.

"I don't know. I thought maybe it might have been more than fucking!" Now, she was screaming. So not good. Totally out of control here. She yanked her hand out of his grasp and wiped her eyes, pissed off to realize there were tears brimming there.

"Listen, you two. I'm gonna go. Obviously, there is more going on between you two than just neighbors."

"Don't you dare leave!" she snapped, watching Greg inch towards the door.

"We can do this some other time, Stacey. No biggie, babe." Greg pulled open the front door and glanced back to say, "See you around campus."

The door shutting behind him sounded loud in the now silent apartment as she and Jason stared each other down.

Jason exhaled and tipped his head back on his shoulders for several moments. "I'm sorry."

"You should be," she whispered, her anger now dissipated.

When he looked at her again, she saw pain, anger and raw need reflected in his eyes.

"I heard voices over here and I knew you had a guy in your apartment. I went a little nuts."

She snorted and said, "No. Really?" *Okay, this is what I wanted, right?*

"I guess I should go," he whispered, but didn't move. "I've caused enough trouble for you."

As he turned to leave, she grabbed his hand and said, "Don't leave."

## Part 59 ~ 10/26/11

*What the hell am I doing? Getting involved with Stacey is a bad idea. My divorce only finalized last week.*

The grip of her hand on his warmed his soul. For some reason, she'd got to him...bad.

He let his fingers trailed down her cheek, relishing the softness of her skin and the heat in her eyes. "We shouldn't keep on like this."

"Why? What's wrong with what is happening between us?" she replied, her voice hush and low. "I really like you."

"I like you too, but I just got out of a nasty relationship and even worse divorce. My ex wife is pregnant and I don't know for sure if it's mine..." He shook his head and sighed.

Seconds later, her head rested on his shoulder and her arms wound around his waist. "It doesn't matter. I need you."

"Why?"

She glanced up and said, "I'm not sure. I feel empty inside when you aren't here. It's weird, I know. We've only known each other a few days, but it feels right."

The sweet fragrance of strawberries reached his nose and he sighed as he looked down into her eyes. She fit like a glove wrapped around him—all snug and warm. Her lips beckoned and he could do nothing but obey the call of her mouth.

A small sigh escaped when he touched his lips to hers. Soft, whimpering, hungry sounds escaped her with the touch of his tongue. Unable to help himself, he drove it between her lips and pulled her tighter against his chest. He could feel her tight nipples against his pecs as her arms went up around his neck and her head tipped to allow him deeper. God, she tasted good. How had she snuck under his defenses so easily, he'd never know. Right at this moment, he

wasn't about to question why she was in his arms. He deepened the kiss until his consumed her. His tongue lashed at hers, drawing more whimpers. The feel of her skin under his hands took his breath away. Soft, yet firm. Trim and lean, but curvy in all the right places—breasts plump and solid with nipples the color of berries, if he remembered right. Had it been that long since they made love?

He ripped his mouth from hers and stared down into her dazed, unfocused gaze. Her lips were swollen from his kisses and her cheeks were flushed pink with desire.

"I'm gonna fuck you, Stacey."

"Oh, yes, please."

He scooped her up in his arms and took a couple of steps toward the bedroom when the doorbell rang.

"Ignore it," she whispered, pressing her lips to the base of his throat.

He took two more steps and the bell went off again.

"Shit," he grumbled, letting her slide down his frame. "It might be important."

"Stacey! Open this door immediately!"

"Holy fuck! It's my mother!"

## Part 60 ~ 11/3/11

*Oh my God! Not her! If she finds Jason here, she'll flip.* Anger and fear raced down her spine. Her mother intimidated her. She knew that, but she didn't like it.

"Your mother?"

"Yes," she whispered, trying to keep her voice down. "Maybe if we're quiet, she'll go away and come back later."

"Stacey! I know you're in there. Your car is here, now open this door."

"Damn."

"You might as well open it, Stacey."

She exhaled forcibly and rolled her eyes. "Can I kill her before she leaves? I'm sure I could make it justifiable homicide somehow."

Jason smiled. At least he would be someone her mother would probably approve of if she thought about it. He has a steady job, nice to look at and sweet to boot. Her mother wouldn't approve of her having a boyfriend or whatever she wanted to call Jason. Not while she was supposed to be here to study.

The bell went off again, but this time it continued to ring like her mother held the button down.

Stacey headed for the door, turned the deadbolt and then yanked it open with an irritated snort. "Why mother. What are you doing here?"

Her mother swept through the doorway and stopped dead in her tracks. "Who are you and what in the hell are you doing in my daughter's apartment?" she asked, stopping in front of Jason.

"Hello. You must be Mrs. Miller." Jason held out his hand and smiled. "I'm Jason."

The perfect arched eyebrow over her left eye, shot up. "The neighbor."

"If you mean do I live next door...yes. I've been helping Stacey unpack."

"And took her out on a date when she should be focusing on her studies."

He flashed his disarming grin at her mother and Stacey saw her melt just a little. "Very true, ma'am, but we all need a little enjoyment in life and time to unwind. Her studies haven't started yet exactly and I wanted to show her a bit of the area." Jason led her mother to the couch and helped her sit. "How long will you be visiting?"

"I'm not sure. I came to check on Stacey and see what I could do to help her get settled."

*Yeah. Right.*

"I would love to take both you beautiful ladies to dinner. My treat, of course. There's a fantastic restaurant downtown and it has a gorgeous view of the Sound."

Her mother glanced at Stacey and then back to Jason. "Thank you. I think it would be lovely for you to take us to dinner. Where did you say you worked, Jason?"

"I didn't, but I'm one of the Vice Presidents of Development at Microsoft."

Blue eyes widened as her mother glanced at her with her he-might-be-worth-it look.

*Great! Just fucking great! I don't mind Jason disarming mother, but this charm shit is making me gag.*

## Part 61 ~ 11/9/11

Jason parked his car near the valet as one of the smartly dressed men opened the door for the ladies. Stacey dressed in a body hugging short black dress and sexy heels, while her mother attempted to look younger than her apparent age of what he guessed to be forty-five. The gold-shimmering way to short dress on her mother, almost made him laugh. Her mother was a pretty woman with her blonde hair and big green eyes, but he only had eyes for Stacey. Damn, she looked nice and he really liked how she looked on his arm.

The older woman had chattered away like a magpie the whole trip into town and he had to hold back his laughter when Stacey rolled her eyes. He knew how mothers could be, although he thought his was pretty cool.

"And Stacey did so well in high school, her counselors insisted she apply here for her education. We were thrilled when the acceptance letter arrived. Weren't we Stacey?"

"Yeah. Thrilled."

Jason grinned and squeezed her fingers as they made their way to the podium to be seated. The lights of Seattle gleamed off the water of Puget Sound, winking and bouncing when each ripple moved them from side to side.

"This is beautiful, Jason. Thank you for recommending it," Stacey's mother said.

"You're welcome." He grinned and rubbed his thumb over Stacey's knuckle. "This is one of my favorite places in the city, but I don't get to come here often."

"Oh?" her mother asked.

"Work takes up much of my time."

"I can imagine."

The waiter stopped by their table and took their drink order. He wasn't the least bit surprised when her mother ordered a martini.

"So. Have you been married before?"

"Mother!" Stacey snapped. "Jason's personal life is none of your business."

"I'm only asking because I'm curious, Stacey. The two of you are dating, are you not?" She swiped at a small spot of water on the tablecloth. "I'd like to know more about the man my daughter is dating."

"We aren't dating."

"You aren't?"

Stacey glanced at him with a help-me look.

"Not exactly, ma'am. We've been out a few times, but I'd hardly call it dating exclusively or anything. I'm sure we'll move onto that soon though." He brought Stacey's hand to his lips and placed a small kiss to the back. "I'm infatuated by your daughter. I've never met anyone like her."

"See? There you have it. So, there isn't any reason why I shouldn't ask about his personal life," her mother replied.

"Great," Stacey grumbled under her breath, but not low enough he didn't hear her.

"Actually, yes I have been married. My divorce finalized recently and my ex-wife might be pregnant with my child." Jason almost rolled on the floor at the shock on Stacey's mother's face.

## Part 62 ~ 11/16/11

*Ohmigod! He didn't just tell my mother his ex-wife is possibly pregnant with his child.*

Stacey glanced at her mother and knew her luck hadn't held. Jason indeed told her mother about his ex. "Really, mother. It's not what it sounds like. Jason is kidding. He did get recently divorced, but his ex..."

"Yo...your ex-wife is possibly pregnant with your child?" her mother stammered.

"Actually, yes, or so she tells me, but then again, she screwed around a lot while we were married, so I have no idea if it's mine or not." He sat back in his chair and sipped from the glass of water the waiter had set in front of him.

Stacey glanced at Jason and almost snarled while her mother placed her hand at her throat and murmured 'really.' *I'm going to fucking kill him!* "Jason, really. You should shock my mother like that. She has a weak heart, you know."

"I'm only telling her what she wanted to know, honey," Jason replied, kissing her fingertips.

She yanked her hand back and picked up her menu praying her mother would let the subject drop.

"How long were you married?"

*Shit.*

"Three years."

"Stacey's father and I were married thirty-six years."

"I understand he passed away unexpectedly. I'm very sorry," Jason said, real regret in his voice from what Stacey could tell.

"Thank you." Her mother sniffed and dabbed at her eyes before she asked, "Are your parents still alive?"

"Yes, ma'am. They live on the outskirts of town. They are retired now and spend a lot of time traveling." He glanced at Stacey and grinned. "I haven't introduced Stacey to them yet, but I'm sure they'll love her."

Real nausea churned in her stomach. This whole fiasco of meeting her mother was giving her a migraine from hell and all the only thing Stacey could hope for came with an early departure from dinner, a hot soak in the bathtub at home and lots and lots of alcohol. "Can we order please?"

"In a hurry, honey?" Jason asked, his voice so sweet her teeth hurt.

"Actually yes. I had a very long day and I'd like to get home and crawl into bed."

Jason leaned close and brushed her ear with his nose. "I know you missed me today and all, but you probably should spend time with your mother tonight after we finished eating rather than coming to my place."

## Part 63 ~ 11/23/11

If Jason thought Stacey would kill him when he told her mother his ex might be pregnant with his child, he knew she would after his comment about coming back to his place. Her eyes were about to pop out of her head and her mother? The look on her face was priceless. With her mouth hanging open and the startled look in her eyes, he could almost believe she might actually be speechless.

"Yes, Stacey. You really should spend time with me," her mother said, fanning herself with her napkin.

*Okay, obviously not speechless.*

Their dinner arrived, leaving long spells of silence as they ate and Jason wondered if he'd went too far with his talk and jabs. If looks could kill, Stacey would have not only killed him, but buried him six feet under about twenty minutes ago. He noticed she didn't really eat—just picked at her food.

"Not hungry, honey?"

"No, *darling*," she snarled. "I seemed to have lost my appetite."

"I'm sorry, sweetling. I hope you aren't coming down with something. The flu perhaps?"

"I doubt it. I'm rarely sick."

"She's always been a very active child and smart too. Her grades kept her at the top of her class during high school."

"Really. I'm surprised she didn't have a full-ride scholarship for the University of Washington then."

"They don't give many of those out," her mother replied.

"Very true," he said. "I'm sure with her father's background in medicine, she'll be a wonderful student here, too."

"I probably won't have a lot of time for us," Stacey replied. "Studying takes up so much time."

"I understand, baby. We'll squeeze in whatever time we can, like we have up until now."

Jason sipped his water watching Stacey's face turn so many shades of red, he wasn't sure her head wasn't about to explode. Teasing her and annoying her mother was almost too much fun. Surely, he needed to stop, but what the hell. He hadn't had this much fun in awhile.

"Are you sure you're feeling all right, honey? You look rather flush."

"I'm fine," Stacey said through gritted teeth. "I'm sure I'll feel much better once we get home and you go back to your own apartment."

"But you know how much I love holding you when we sleep."

Her mother choked on her food and Jason raced around the chair to slap her between the shoulder blades.

"Better?"

"I'm fine. Thank you," she rasped before swallowing more water and then putting the glass back down with shaking hands.

He sat back down next to Stacey and said, "Maybe we shouldn't linger, sweetie. Your mother is probably very tired and you look rather pale. Are you sure you're feeling all right?"

"I told you. I'm fine."

"I suppose we can save the pregnancy test we bought today for tomorrow morning. I mean one more day won't make any difference if you really are pregnant, right?"

## Part 64 ~ 11/30/11

Her mother spewed water across the table and Jason laughed so hard his sides had to have hurt. If they didn't, they were about to because Stacey was going to kill him.

"Mother..." she said, putting a hand on her shoulder.

"Pregnant? Stacey!"

"Mother, be serious. There is no possible way I could be pregnant. I've only been here a couple of weeks. Besides, Jason and I haven't known each other very long." She glared across the table, hoping to pierce his skin with the imaginary daggers she shot from her eyes.

"Well yes, but you know it only takes once, Stacey."

Stacey rolled her eyes and shook her head.

"Obviously, you two have been intimate and you *know* how babies are made."

"Can you explain it to me, ma'am. I think I missed that lecture in school," Jason replied between snickers.

"You are not worthy of my daughter."

"I think it's Stacey choice on who she dates and who she doesn't. Besides, we like each other and yes, we've had sex. It's not a crime, you know. Adults have sex. I'm sure you remember how it goes since you have a couple of children."

"Really," her mother huffed.

"Yes, really and being your husband was a physician, if you don't know how it works, he should have explained it better. For us, we've figured it out and we enjoy it and each other. I don't plan to stop any time soon and I hope Stacey doesn't either."

"But what about your ex-wife?"

"I will deal with her. Until the child is born, I won't know if it's mine or not. Yes, we still slept together shortly before our divorce, but she also slept with several other men during our marriage. I don't even know how many. So, is the baby mine? I don't know."

"Never mind, mom. It doesn't matter. Jason is making this sound much more serious than it is. We aren't a couple—we're neighbors. Nothing more."

"Neighbors who have had sex," her mother replied.

"Good sex, too," Jason said.

"Will you please shut up!" Stacey sat back in the chair and crossed her arms over her chest. "I'm sick of you insinuating crap with my mother. Yes, we had sex. Yes, it was good sex, but it won't be happening again mister can't-keep-my-mouth-shut." She glanced to her right and noticed several people staring. After a look to the left—more eyes. *Damn it!* The whole restaurant had gone quiet at her screaming revelation of sex between her and Jason. Heat rushed into her cheeks and she wanted to crawl under the table.

Jason grinned like a damned fool.

## Part 65 ~ 12/7/11

One thing Stacey would have to learn about him over time was it took a lot for him to be self-conscious and being uncomfortable about having sex with a gorgeous woman wasn't gonna do it. Hell, he didn't know a guy out there who would be embarrassed having sex with Stacey.

The color in her cheeks looked cute although she looked like she wanted to kill him. Maybe he should back off and behave himself for a bit...nah. "Aw, baby. Come on. I'm only kidding you. You know I enjoy our sexy romps, in the kitchen, in the bathroom, on the balcony with the lights of the city behind us or any other hard surface we can find."

If she looked like she was about to spit nails before, now she looked ready for murder...his.

"That's it!" She jumped to her feet and threw her napkin on the table. "We're leaving. Come on, mother."

Jason stood and said, "Stacey wait. I'm only teasing you."

"No. You've embarrassed me beyond my forgiveness. Half the damned town knows we've had sex."

"Not quite. Only a tiny portion," he replied taking her hand.

She yanked her palm from his grasp. "It doesn't matter! Don't you understand? I'm not like this. I don't sleep with strange men. I don't act irresponsibly. I do what I'm told. I get good grades and I don't want to see you again...ever!" With her purse in one hand and grasping her mother's arm to bring her to her feet as well, she wanted nothing more than to get the hell out of the restaurant.

"I'm sorry."

"No, you aren't. You don't know how to be. This is all a game to you, but I'm done playing. I'm finished with you. Do you understand me! Finished!"

"Stacey come on. I said I'm sorry."

"It doesn't matter. Don't call me. Don't come over. Nothing! Got it?"

"Yeah." He raked his fingers through his hair and sat back down in his chair as he watched her and her mother head for the exit. "I got it." Jason downed the rest of his drink and ordered another one. Maybe getting drunk tonight wasn't such a bad idea after all. He'd certain screwed up his date with Stacey and her mother. "Way to go, Jace. Piss off the lady *and* her mother. Nice way to get into the good graces of her family members." The waiter arrived with his next drink and he downed it in two gulps. "Bring me a whiskey."

"Certainly, sir. I do hope you're planning on taking a cab home."

"Yeah, I am. What's it to you?"

"We don't want to hear of any of our patrons ending up on the front page of the newspaper wrapped around a pole." The man didn't move. "Would you like a bit of advice, sir?"

"Advice?"

"Yes, sir. About the lady, sir."

"Sure. What the hell. Why not."

"Flowers and a nice apology will do wonders, sir."

"Flowers, huh?"

"Yes. Roses. Blue ones."

"They have blue roses?"

"Yes, sir, but they aren't cheap. Is she worth it?"

## Part 66 ~ 12/14/11

"I cannot believe the gall of him!" Stacey fumed as they stood outside the restaurant and waited for a cab. The valet had already called so it should take long.

"Did you really sleep with him?"

"Of course I did, mother. I wouldn't lie about something like that." She tapped her high heeled shoe in annoyance.

"He's kind of cute."

"Cute? Seriously?"

"If I were thirty years younger and not a widow..."

"Mother!"

"I'm sorry, Stacey. I'm a woman with a woman's needs and they aren't being met at the moment."

"I *really* don't need to hear this."

"Come now. Your father has been gone several years and I'm still a fairly good looking older woman. I do like a man's company now and again."

Stacey rolled her eyes as her face flushed with embarrassing heat. Thinking about her mother sleeping with a man, any man, was just wrong.

The cab pulled up to the curb and the valet opened the door so they could slide into the rear of the car. After she tipped the valet and gave the address to the driver, they pulled away from the curb and she settled back against the seat.

"How do you think you and your sister were conceived, immaculate conception?"

"I know how babies are made, thank you."

"Then stop acting like it's a sin to enjoy having a man's attention on you. Jason seems to be a very nice guy. A little odd with his sense of humor, but nothing too severe. I bet he's hot in bed."

"We aren't having this conversation. I'm not telling you how Jason makes love."

"Ah-ha! Makes love and has sex are two totally different things, sweetheart. One doesn't make love with a man she cares nothing for."

"I've known him a week!"

"Time is irrelevant when you are speaking of matters concerning the heart. Your father and I fell in love in two days."

"Two days?"

"I knew immediately I wanted to be with him forever. He took two days to figure it out. When he did, it was heaven. We were inseparable."

Tears burned Stacey's eyes and threatened to fall down her cheeks. Hearing about her father always made her miss him more and more every day he was gone, but to listen to her mother speak of their love—that hurt even more. He'd never see her fall in love and get married, nor would he be there to hold his grandchild one day.

Her mother patted her hand and then curled her fingers around Stacey's. "It's okay, honey. He looks out for you, your sister and me every day. I feel him with me all the time and I know he's watching. The day you marry and the day your children are born, he'll be there by your side every step of the way even if it's only in spirit."

## Part 67 ~ 12/21/11

"Blue Roses, huh?" Jason asked, tapping his fingers against the tabletop.

"Yes, sir. Women love them and if your lady friend is special enough to you, she deserves something extraordinary."

"She's worth it."

The waiter smiled. "I thought you might say so by the way you looked at her while you were all sitting here at the table. Your mouth got away from you, is all." With a sheepish bow of his head, the waiter apologized. "I didn't mean to overstep my bounds, sir."

"No...no. You're perfectly right. I didn't know when you shut up and I should have. I just hope she'll talk to me."

"You might give her a day or so to cool off. She looked pretty mad when she left."

"Yes, yes she did and I'm afraid I shocked her mother too."

"Maybe, but I think the older lady was amused more than shocked." The waiter slid the check on the table. "Whenever you're ready, sir. No rush."

Jason grabbed the bill and then handed the waiter his credit card. "I think we're finished here, but thank you for your advice. I'm sure I'll be taking you up on it."

The waiter bowed and disappeared with the bill only to return a few moments later for Jason to sign the receipt. After leaving a hefty tip for his service and his advice, Jason grabbed his keys and headed for the front doors and a cab. He'd been drinking at the last thing he needed in this lifetime was a DUI.

*Tomorrow, I'll pick up some flowers for both Stacey and her mother. I know it helps. Shesh! I thought I was done with all this romancing thing when I split from my ex.*

"Not so fast. Romancing? Wait a minute! I don't want another steady in my life."

The cab driver glanced in the rearview mirror and lifted one eyebrow.

"I don't. I've only been divorced for like 2 weeks."

"And you're arguing with yourself over romancing a new main squeeze? Dude, are you for real?"

"Yes! I don't want another steady woman. I need to play the field a bit. You know. Check out what's out there. Get laid a few dozen times."

"You ain't gettin' laid by the steady?"

"She's not my steady. She's my sexy-ass neighbor."

"And you're complaining why?"

"Well, I..."

"Listen man. You've got a pretty neighbor and you're getting laid regularly with her, what's your problem? You could be like us unlucky dudes and getting' nothin'. Not at home and not with anyone else because your old lady won't fess it up on a regular basis. Beggin' and pleadin' ain't manly, you know?"

"I'm not begging anyone."

"Then what are you bitchin' about fool? If she's willing, a few flowers and pretty words or apologize don't hurt nothin'. Suck it up and play nice and you'll keep gettin' it regular."

## Part 68 ~ 12/28/11

"Do you really feel that way, Mom?" she asked, stopping by the sliding glass door to look out over the city.

"Of course I do, Stacey," her mother said, walked up beside her and sliding her arms around her shoulders. "Your father loved you."

"I know he did. I wish he would never have died."

"Neither do I, honey, but it was God's will." Her mother's voice broke with a small sob. After a moment, she continued, "Apparently, your father was needed up there more than down here. I miss him every day."

"Me too," she whispered, fighting back the tears. "Sometimes I can almost hear his voice telling me not to give up—not to give into my insecurities or your nagging."

"I don't nag."

Stacey took a fortifying deep breath and said, "Yes you do, Mom. Why do you think you came out here?" Stacey stepped back out of her mother's embrace. "It wasn't to see how things were going here other than to find out about the Jason. You knew he and I planned a date the other day."

Her mother dropped her gaze to the carpeted floor. "All right. You caught me. I wanted to know what might be going on here. I didn't want you getting wrapped up with a man while you

are supposed to be studying. School has been your number one priority for so long and medical school especially..."

"No, it's not."

"What's not?"

"Medical school. I'm doing this for you and for dad—not for me."

"You don't want to be a doctor?"

"Oh, I think I'd like it well enough, but it's not where my heart lies."

"What would you rather be doing then?"

Stacey chewed her lips and contemplated whether to tell her mother her real dream. Writing didn't pay the bills. Writing full time was a pipe dream—a wander lust—something only fools did with their spare time. But no! There were people doing it full time and making a living at it. People who gave up their dreams and pursued something else until the gnawing, achy feeling of unfulfillment wouldn't leave them alone until they put fingers to keyboard. The story must be told. Her story. The one she started those many years ago. The one her father told her to keep working on. The one screaming to be read by someone other than herself.

"Stacey?"

"I want to be a writer, Mom."

## Part 69 ~ 1/5/12

The blue roses shook in his fist as he stood outside Stacey's door. Why he was so nervous, he didn't know. Never mind. Yes, he did. He cared and the thought of Stacey saying she never wanted to see him again had his stomach tied up in knots and his chest aching.

Jason exhaled quickly and raised his hand to knock.

Voices from inside the apartment reached his ear and he strained to hear.

"I want to be a writer, Mom."

"But Stacey, I thought you wanted to be a doctor?" he heard her mother answer.

"No, you wanted me to be a doctor and follow dad. I went along with it because I thought it's what dad would have wanted."

"You want to write?"

"Not just write, I want to be an author. I want to have my stories published and read by people who appreciate being able to lose themselves in one of my books. Can you understand that, Mom?"

"Yes, honey, I can. You see, I used to write myself. Nothing fancy and nothing I would even let someone see, but I wrote and saved all of those stories."

"Really?"

"Yes. I never thought you'd want write. I guess I passed on my passion, huh?"

"Yeah, Mom."

He heard the rustling of papers and wondered if Stacey was really going to show her mother her writing. The pieces he'd read were good—really good and he knew someone who could probably help Stacey get published, but she had to want his help.

Silence continued to reach his ear from the other side of the door for several minutes and he debated on whether to knock and disturb their mother/daughter time. He needed to talk to Stacey and he hoped she'd understand when he knocked softly on the door.

"Who's there?" she asked, the low whisper of her voice sent tingles down his spine.

He loved when she did that.

"It's me, Jason."

"What do you want?"

"I need to talk to you and apologize. Can you open the door, please?"

The sound of the chain sliding from the lock and then the click of the door opening made his heart race with anticipation. This was a good sign. She hadn't refused to see him and actually might listen to his pleas.

"What do you want, Jason?"

"I'm sorry for how I acted at the restaurant and the things I said. It was totally uncalled for and I'm hoping you can forgive me." He pushed the roses toward her and gave her a small smile.

"Wow. I've never seen blue roses before." Her shaking hand reached out to caress one of the petals. "They're beautiful. Thank you."

"You're welcome." He held out the other bouquet toward the door. "This mixed one is for your mom. Can I come in?"

"I don't know if that's such a good idea."

"Stacey, please. I want us to start over. Get to know each other outside of the amazing sex. We did a little of that before, but things kind of got in the way."

"You want to start over?"

"Yes. You mean a lot to me and I want to see if things can go anywhere with us."

Her eyes widened and she opened the door further. "I didn't think you wanted a relationship?"

"I didn't think I did, but you've change my mind on a lot of things since I met you."

## Part 70 ~ 1/11/12

*A relationship?* Things were happening so fast, she started to feel dizzy. First her Mom listening to her about what she really wanted in her life and now Jason wanting a relationship.

"Changed your mind?" she asked, still standing at the door with him as he clutched the mixed bouquet of flowers for her mother.

"Yeah. After what my ex-wife pulled, I didn't want anything to do with a serious type situation with anyone. Once we met, my thoughts have been going round and round about you. I can't seem to get you out of my mind."

She bit the inside of her lip and stared up into his eyes. The feelings were mutual. Jason had wound his way somewhere deep inside her in a very short time and the thought of not seeing him again soured her stomach or was it the dinner?

"I know you're unsure about things with a woman, but you can't judge everyone by how she treated you. It isn't fair to the rest of us."

He reached out and ran a finger down her cheek. "I know and I'm sorry for the way I've treated you. You aren't like her. You never were. I knew that from the beginning, but she made me so jaded, I couldn't see past the hurt and confusion I felt."

Her whole body came alive at his touch. Her stomach quivered, her nipple pulled into tight nubs and her clit throbbing, she wanted nothing more than to yank him inside her apartment, strip his clothes off and ride his hips into tomorrow. Not happening with her mother close by.

The jangle of keys behind her had her stepping away from his touch.

"I'm going to a hotel. I'll see you in the morning, sweetheart." Her mother kissed her cheek and then slid past her. "Good-night you two."

Before she knew it, her mother had disappeared out the front door of the apartment complex and she and Jason stood there watching her leave.

"I...uh. She left the apartment," she said, a slow smile lifting the corners of her mouth.

"Yeah."

"I guess that means we're alone."

"Guess so," he replied, stuffing one hand in his front pants pocket.

"Want to come inside?"

"I thought you'd never ask."

Within seconds, the bouquets of flowers were lying on the table, the door was shut and his mouth came crashing down on hers.

## Part 71 ~ 1/18/12

"Jason, I—" she said as his mouth left hers and trailed along the column of her neck. "Mmm. Nice."

"I've missed you. God, it's been crazy staying away and giving you space." He pressed his forehead to hers and looked deep into her eyes.

"I didn't want space. I wanted you."

"I thought you were mad at me."

"I still wanted you. That's never changed," she whispered.

"What about the guy who was over here?"

"I only asked him to come over because I didn't think you wanted me."

"Of course, I want you. Now." He kissed her eyelids. "Tomorrow." He kissed her nose. "Next week." He kissed her chin. "Forever." He pressed his lips to hers and when she sighed, he drove his tongue inside her mouth. He wouldn't make love to her tonight. Tonight would be talking, touching, and learning everything about her. He wanted to know what her favorite color is, where she went to high school, was she a straight A student or average, did she have lots of boyfriends and more. But for now, kissing her came first.

Their mouths fused as their tongues explored and re-familiarized themselves with the other again.

When he lifted his head he stepped back much to her chagrin.

"I'm not going to make love to you tonight."

"What? Why the hell not?"

"Because this is the beginning for us." He turned around and walked outside, shutting the door behind him. A moment later he knocked and waited for her to answer. When she opened the door, he said, "Hi, I'm Jason. I live next door and I saw you moving your stuff in. You must be new in the neighborhood. Can I help you unpack?"

She grinned and replied, "I'm Stacey. Thanks for the offer. I could use a strong back with a few of my bigger things. I hate unpacking and I sure could use some help hanging pictures. Might you have a hammer I can borrow?"

**\*The End\***