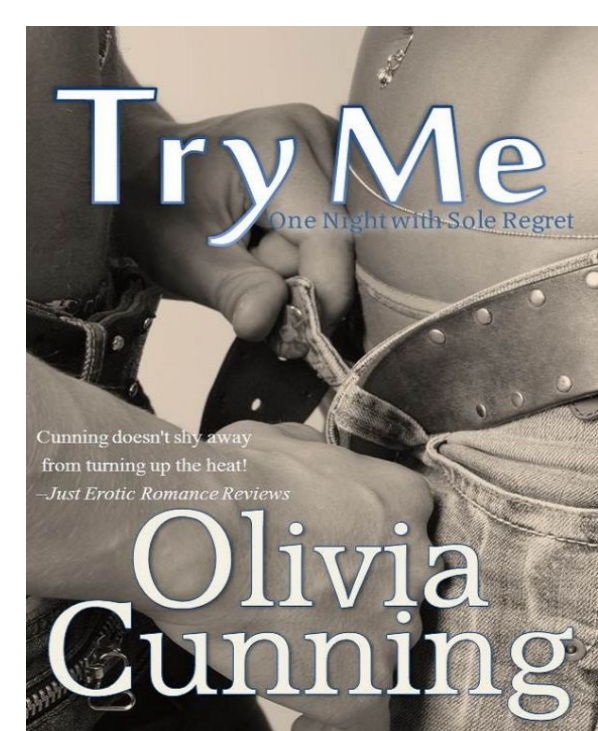




Try Me

One Night with Sole Regret

Cunning doesn't shy away
from turning up the heat!

—*Just Erotic Romance Reviews*

Olivia Cunning

Try Me

(One Night With Sole Regret #1)

by
Olivia Cunning

Copyright 2012 Olivia Cunning
Smashwords Edition

Edited by Beth Hill at <http://www.ANovelEdit.com>

Cover Art by Olivia Cunning
All Rights Reserved

Books by Olivia Cunning
Sinners on Tour Series:

Backstage Pass

Rock Hard

Coming Soon:

Double Time

Hot Ticket

One Night with Sole Regret Series:

Try Me

Coming Soon:

Take Me

Tempt Me

Lovers' Leap Series:

Loving on Borrowed Time
Twice Upon a Time

Writing as Olivia Downing
Defying Destiny

Chapter 1

Melanie caught the gleam in Nikki's eyes in the public restroom mirror they shared. Oh crap. She knew that look. What was the woman scheming now? Melanie was not in the mood to deal with her drama tonight.

The long drive to Tulsa, followed by a parking nightmare, overpaying a scalper for tickets, and standing in line through high winds for two hours had Melanie out of sorts. Okay, she admitted it; she was downright bitchy. Her hair looked like it had lost a fight with a raccoon—a rabid raccoon with a powerful nesting instinct, and her toes, crammed into highly insensible high-heeled, strappy sandals, felt like they'd were being whacked with tiny pickaxes wielded by miniature coalminers.

Nikki, on the other hand, looked her typical polished self, except for the unsettling extra dose of deviousness in her big blue eyes. Melanie paused with her tube of pink lipstick halfway to her lips, her Nikki-is-about-to-get-us-into-trouble alarm sounding in her head.

“What’s that look for?” Melanie asked.

“Tonight’s the night,” Nikki said. She tucked a strand of silky chestnut-brown hair behind one ear and turned to catch her good side in the mirror. Both sides were gorgeous, but Melanie had never convinced Nikki of that or that she was worth more than a string of one-night stands with losers.

“That’s what you said last night,” Melanie said and focused her attention back on her lipstick application.

Nikki wrinkled her nose at Melanie’s hair and yanked a brush from her purse to try to free the nest of raccoons from the tangled mass.

Good luck with that.

There was a reason Melanie wore it up most of the time. Only the sturdiest of hair clips kept the thick and wavy waist-length tresses under control. Nikki had talked her into keeping it down tonight, saying that it made her look gorgeous. Melanie never looked gorgeous when standing next to Nikki—a simple fact that she’d learn to live with when they’d attended college together. Men flocked to Nikki. Melanie faded into the

background. She was used to it.

Nikki went at Melanie's hair with determination and immediately caught the brush on a tangle of snags. With a sigh of defeat, she handed her brush to Melanie. Melanie supposed she should try to calm the mess into something less offensive. She didn't want to frighten the band.

"I mean it this time." Nikki rearranged her boobs in her push-up bra, unfastened another button on her skintight white blouse to show off more cleavage, and checked out her bad side. "I almost got back stage last night. If I'm lucky, that cute roadie I talked to in Wichita will remember me. The band had to leave right after the show, or I'm sure Jack would've introduced us to the guys last night."

And now they were in Tulsa, trailing after a band like a pair of desperate Sole Regret groupies. Melanie wasn't a serious fan, but she was positive the cute roadie would remember Nikki. Nikki was the kind of woman men drooled over. Wanted. Dumped.

Melanie guessed the roadie would ask Nikki for a sexual favor in exchange for introducing her to the members of her latest band obsession and Nikki would use sex to get what she wanted. It saddened Melanie. None of the men who used and discarded her friend knew how much they hurt her. Melanie already dreaded having to lift Nikki out of her cloud of self-doubt and despair in the morning. She didn't understand why Nikki continued to put herself in these situations. She was a sweet girl. A pretty girl. A *smart* girl. Until she found herself in the company of any asshole in the music business, then she acted as if she'd been lobotomized. With only ten lobes to utilize, Nikki had to be running low on parts by now.

"You are not bailing on me again," Melanie said, still trying to tame her hair. She was looking less like a lightning-strike victim already, though her scalp protested each tug. *Gorgeous, my ass. More like ridiculous.* "I'm not going to wait for you out in the car while you get laid by some guy who won't remember your name by the time he blows his load."

"Of course you're not going to wait out in the car."

Well, at least they agreed on something.

Nikki ran her tongue over her teeth and caught Melanie's gaze in the mirror. "You're coming with me."

"Oh no, I'm not. I don't even like musicians." Especially not the tattooed metal-head freaks Nikki lusted after. Nikki had a serious bad-boy complex. Maybe her father should have paid more attention to her as a child.

"Please." Nikki clasped her hands together in front of her chest and managed to make her already wide blue eyes appear even larger than usual.

"Why would you even ask? You know tattooed guys give me the creeps."

Nikki shook her head at her. "If you'd take the time to get to know them, you'd recognize how hot they are."

Doubtful. Just seeing men with tattoos made Melanie's heart race with fear. Her reaction wasn't intentional. She'd been scared by a group of

bikers when she was a teen. Had she been older, she probably would've recognized they were only teasing and meant her no harm. But they'd terrified her. Her parents had intensified her fear by saying she could've been kidnapped, raped, murdered, or worse. She hadn't even wanted to know what was worse than being raped and murdered. Her thirteen-year-old mind had associated her parents' warnings with men who looked a certain way. Men like those bikers who'd cornered her in the entryway of an abandoned storefront.

As she'd been too afraid to actually look at their faces, all she remembered was their body art and their words. The one with a skull tattoo had and told her all the lewd things he wanted to do to her pretty mouth. She hadn't understood what he'd meant at the time, but now that she was older, she knew she'd had a reason to be uneasy and disgusted.

One with a barbed-wire tattoo around his arm had touched her hair. She'd screamed, and they'd laughed at her, but ultimately had left her alone. She knew that tattoo didn't make a person bad

She *knew* that tattoos didn't make a person bad, but that incident had left a lasting impression. Attending rock concerts was an exercise in keeping her fear at bay. Unfortunately, going to concerts was Nikki's favorite thing to do, so Melanie's fears got a fairly regular workout.

"I don't want to get to know them; I just want to stay away from them."

Nikki wrapped an arm around Melanie's shoulders and assessed them in the mirror. "You'll be fine, Mel. I promise. Besides, I need you to help me pull off my ruse."

Melanie's inner alarm clanged even louder. "What ruse?"

The crowd in the stadium roared with enthusiasm.

"Sole Regret's set is starting!" Nikki scooped her cosmetics and hairbrush into her purse, grabbed Melanie by the wrist, and rushed from the bathroom, nearly knocking a tough-looking biker woman to the floor in her haste.

"Watch it, bitch."

"Sorry," Melanie said as she was yanked into the stadium's concourse, her heels clicking rapidly.

the stadium's causeway, her heels clicking rapidly on the cement.

There were many benefits of being friends with Nikki. She was fun. Afraid of nothing. Men liked her. So while they started out at the back of general admission, with several dozen coy looks, a bit of exposed cleavage, and some well-placed hands on the male metal-heads in the crowd, Nikki miraculously managed to work her way to the area just in front of the stage without being punched in the face. Melanie was allowed to join her only because Nikki refused to release her wrist. Along the barrier fence in front of the stage, Melanie purposely positioned herself between two women and turned away from the man hanging over the railing. The thrusting of his fist in the air drew attention to the skull tattoo on his forearm. One glimpse of that bit of body art had the hair on the back of her neck standing on end. Melanie forced her attention to the stage to keep her gaze from straying to the man's arm.

She supposed she should be excited to be so close to the stage, but Melanie much preferred stadium seats to the pit. She liked to listen to the

stadium seats to the pit. She liked to listen to the music, not defend herself from injury. The pit was hot and sweaty: crowded, loud, lewd, and dangerous. Nikki called it exciting. Melanie called it painful. Nikki spent the next forty-five minutes trying to get the attention of the band's lead singer; Melanie spent her time avoiding elbows in the face by two enthusiastic fangirls and keeping the guy behind her from squishing her against the metal bars of the barrier fence and prodding her in the ass with his junk. How could Nikki enjoy this?

Melanie watched the lead singer—the current object of Nikki's obsession—prowl the front of the stage. He could've been a gorgeous man. Tattoos ruined his otherwise good looks. Had he been dressed in a nice suit and discussing philosophy instead of wearing ripped denim and screaming something about descending into Hell, Melanie might have admired the wide cut of his shoulders and his strong, handsome profile. But, yeah, the ink completely turned her off. She wondered what color his eyes were. He had yet to take off his sunglasses. The stage lights were blinding but

shades. The stage lights were dimming, but she figured the shades were part of his image. He'd worn them onstage the night before, too, and by the way the two fangirls were screeching *Shaaaaade* every time he stalked in their direction, she assumed he'd been named after his fondness for eyewear. Melanie had a heck of a time keeping the names of the band members straight even though Nikki had gone on and on and *on* about them on the drive down from Wichita.

Melanie did enjoy watching Shade and the other band members interact with the crowd and each other. The bassist was surprisingly popular with the audience; Melanie found most bass players to be obscure by default. This one had a softer look than the two guitarists— handsome, even features, a *normal* haircut sans black dye, a perpetual smile, and gentle eyes. Had he not decorated his every inch of his hard-muscled arms with tattoos and bore piercings in his eyebrow and lip, Melanie might not have crossed the street if he'd approached her in public. Why did these men insist on destroying their looks with

and these men insist on destroying their looks with permanent accessories? It was a damn shame.

The lead guitarist, who had an inordinate fondness for black, was big on chains and trying to upstage the vocalist. They competed for the crowd's affection with an active rivalry. The rhythm guitarist, who had a gorgeous mane of long, straight hair and no shirt—much to the delight of any female who didn't mind a fully inked torso—mocked the competing stage hogs behind their backs. The bassist found his antics so hilarious that he had to pause a few times to catch his breath from laughing so hard. Melanie doubted she would've noticed the nuances of their dynamic from stadium seats, so at least she had something interesting to watch as she tried to convince the guy behind her that her ass was off limits and not designed as a pincushion for his boner.

Near the end of the final song of their set list—the same set list they'd played the night before—the lead singer hopped off the stage and walked the narrow path on the other side of the barrier fence, slapping hands with fans in the front row as

he passed them. Nikki used Melanie for leverage so she could stretch her body into Shade's path. She got a hand on his skintight T-shirt, but was unable to keep her hold as he blazed past. He returned to the stage just as the song ended on a long, wailing guitar note.

"I touched him," Nikki squealed excitedly and covered her mouth with her rock-god-blessed hand.

"Congratulations," Melanie said.

"God, I want him."

"What about the rest of the band? They're all totally your type."

"They're my backup plan, but Shade is the one I really want." Nikki's eyes rolled upward, and Melanie suspected she was in the throes of an orgasm. Melanie took a deep breath and shook her head at her friend. What was the appeal?

When the band pretended their set was over and the crowd began to chant for an encore, Nikki started tugging Melanie toward the side of the stage. Melanie accidentally stomped more than one toe in the darkness. She spouted a litany of

sorries as she was given no choice but to follow her determined friend, who had an iron grip on her wrist. The crowd was bathed in darkness to excite them for the final song as well as let them know the show wasn't actually over: Sole Regret's biggest hit was yet to come. Even Melanie had noticed they hadn't played "Instigator" and they'd blown the roof off the stadium with their high-energy rock anthem the night before.

Melanie had no idea how Nikki managed to see well enough to slip past security, but they were suddenly free from the crowd and standing next to the stage. They were so going to get caught. Melanie clung to Nikki's hand, hoping they didn't get chewed out too severely when one of the distracted security guards noticed them. In the darkness, Nikki managed to find the cute roadie she'd been talking to the night before. Melanie wondered if Nikki was wearing night vision goggles. Her own eyes were still trying to adjust to the lack of illumination after she'd stared up at bright stage lights for almost an hour.

"This is her," Nikki said. She tugged Melanie

against her and kissed her on the mouth with heated, seeking lips. It wasn't one of those *you're my bestie and I've had a too much to drink, so I'm feeling affectionate* kisses. It was more a *we go down on each other, wanna watch* kind of kiss. Melanie was too shocked to do anything but breathe. And even that was a struggle.

What the fuck? Was this the ruse Nikki had mentioned?

"Oh yeah," the cute roadie said when Nikki ended her plundering assault on Melanie's lips. "That's totally hot, tater tot." He reached into the front pocket of his mega-baggie jeans and pulled out a backstage pass on a lanyard. He draped it around Nikki's neck. "I only have one left."

"But what about my friend?" Nikki directed her morose-puppy look in his direction. The guy didn't stand a chance.

"Show Tony what you just showed me, and he'll let you both backstage. Trust me."

The stage lights flashed on and the band started their encore with a hard and heavy drum progression. Melanie covered her ears with both

hands.

"It's loud," she yelled.

Nikki grabbed Melanie's wrist again and led her behind the stage to where a man stood guarding a door. Nikki flashed her pass at him and he opened the door, but stuck out his arm to bar Melanie's entry.

"Jack said you'd let us both in," Nikki said. "He only had one pass for us to share."

"Why should I believe you?"

Melanie was secretly hoping he refused to let either of them in. What in the world was Nikki thinking? Kissing her on the mouth. Letting that guy think it was natural for them to make out. Just so she could meet some weird lead singer who called himself Shade, of all things.

"Because we want to see Shade," Nikki said. "Both of us."

And the next thing Melanie knew, her best friend had her tongue in her mouth and her hand on her ass. Melanie jerked away. She'd been shocked the first time. Now she was just pissed.

"What the fuck, Nikki?"

"She doesn't like to do it in public," Nikki explained to the security guard. She cupped Melanie's breast and gave it a squeeze. The guy groaned and shoved them both into the backstage area and shut the door behind them.

"What is wrong with you?" Melanie slapped Nikki's hand away from her breast.

"I knew you wouldn't agree with my plan if I asked." She shrugged. "Last night, I sorta told that roadie guy that I was into threesomes and I had this hot girlfriend I wanted to share with Shade."

"You *sorta* told him that?"

"Yeah, he thought it was sexy and knew Shade would be interested."

"But *I'm* not interested, Nikki."

"Duh. I know that. That's why it's a ruse. I didn't think you'd actually want to sleep with him. Or me."

Nikki's bottom lip jutted forward, and she gave Melanie her *please forgive me, bestest best bestie* look, her *I can't help but be impulsive* look, followed by her *you know you love me* look. The bitch. She knew Melanie would forgive her

because Melanie did love her and worried about her impulsiveness getting her into big trouble someday.

"I can't believe you'd use me just to meet some rock star, Nikki. I'm not sure why I'm friends with you. All you do is cause me grief."

"But I'm a good kisser, right?" Nikki winked at her and laughed. "I never realized what great tits you have, Mel." Nikki lifted both perfectly manicured hands and made squeezing motions in front of Melanie's boobs. "Can I suck on them?"

Melanie crossed her arms over her chest. Nikki was always making stupid remarks like that. Good thing Melanie didn't take her seriously.

"Don't be mad." Nikki dropped her hands and released a heavy sigh. "I got us backstage didn't I?"

"I didn't even want to come backstage."

"Sure you did. Let's go find some alcohol. I'm going to need a little liquid courage to approach Shade."

"Go by yourself. I'm going to go wait in the car." Melanie turned to find the nearest exit.

“No, you’re not.” Nikki wrapped an arm around her shoulders. “You’ll just end up worried about me in here with a bunch of—what do you call them again?”

“Freakish assholes?”

Nikki laughed. “Among other things. Just do this one thing for me, Mel, and I’ll never ask you for anything ever again.”

Melanie snorted. “Uh huh. Yeah. Sure.”

“I won’t.” Nikki hooked Melanie’s pinky finger with her own. “Pinky swear.”

Melanie released a frustrated sigh. “Where’s the booze?”

Chapter 2

Gabe climbed out from behind his drum kit, both thighs weary with fatigue. He stretched his aching back, wincing as he twisted to one side. Thirty years young and he could safely say he was getting too old for this shit. Jack tossed him a hand towel, and Gabe wiped the sweat off his face.

“Great show, man,” Jack said. He took the towel and offered Gabe a handful of used drumsticks to throw into the audience.

“Thanks.”

Gabe joined his band mates at the front of the stage. He flung a dozen sticks into the crowd, took a bow to the screaming fans, and made a beeline for the dressing room. He needed a beer, a nap, and a shower, not necessarily in that order.

“Don’t forget we have an after-party tonight,” Owen said as he handed off his bass guitar to one roadie while another disconnected his wireless transmitter.

Gabe had forgotten about the after-party. That meant the first thing on his agenda had to be a

shower. No one wanted to smell him after he'd been swimming in his own sweat for an hour. And maybe if a hot piece of ass caught his attention at the party, he'd add *get laid* to his list of priorities.

"See you there," Gabe said and headed for the dressing room to shower.

The steamy water felt like heaven against his weary flesh. He considered blowing the party and just hanging out in the shower by himself for the entire night. His bunk on the tour bus sang a siren's song to his exhausted body. Gabe was proud to be known as one of rock's fastest drummers, but his signature aggressive style wore his ass out at every live performance. Still, he knew the guys would give him hell if he didn't make an appearance at the party, so he'd show his face for five minutes, have a beer, and then catch that nap. Alone. He was much too exhausted to chase pussy tonight.

He found his bag among the pile of the band's overnight luggage and tossed on a pair of well-worn jeans, a T-shirt, and his favorite boots. He didn't bother spiking his still wet hair as he

planned to go to bed soon, so he tugged on a baseball cap and headed to the conference room at the end of the hall. The room was packed wall-to-wall with guests.

Gabe headed for the bar. One beer. That was all he needed to unwind, and then he could disappear. He made a concerted effort to greet everyone who recognized him. Shake hands. Pause for a photo. Smile and bullshit. Sign an autograph. Laugh at a joke. Accept praise. Enjoy the excitement. Seek out the familiar faces of his band mates in a sea of strangers and exchange a nod of recognition. Finally, he reached the bar.

“Corona?” Jordan asked.

He knew damned well that’s what Gabe wanted. He’d been with the crew all summer.

“Yeah.”

Jordan disappeared beneath the bar and emerged with a bottle. He popped the cap and handed it to Gabe, who took a long swallow. It went down smooth. Good stuff.

He caught movement out of the corner of his eye, and he turned his gaze on the sweet piece of

ass beside him at the bar. Long, brown curls fell to the middle of her back, and her jeans clung to her curvy backside in a most distracting fashion. High-heeled sandals accentuated her long legs, which would look perfect wrapped around his hips. If the front of her looked half as spectacular as the back, he was definitely interested in hanging around a while longer. He wasn't *that* exhausted.

Chapter 3

Melanie took the glass of whiskey out of Nikki's hand. "You've had enough." Even though they'd arrived in Nikki's car, Melanie realized she'd be the designated the driver tonight, so she'd stopped drinking after one apple martini. They had a three-hour drive just to get home. But while Melanie showed restraint, Nikki used the open bar to its full potential. She had yet to request one of everything, but each time Shade laughed or said something loud enough for her to hear, Nikki ordered another drink.

Nikki stole a glance over Melanie's shoulder at her current obsession, who had yet to notice her. Probably because she was standing out of his line of sight. His inattention had Nikki reliving her college party days—get drunk, sleep with some jerk, wake up not knowing where she was, call Melanie to come get her, cry on Melanie's shoulder, eat chocolate ice cream, rinse and repeat. Melanie had thought Nikki had finally outgrown the pattern. Apparently not.

Melanie's patience was at its limit. Nikki had

behaved like a lunatic to get backstage and now she was too chicken to even approach the guy. Maybe if Melanie introduced her to Shade before she was completely wasted, she wouldn't start throwing herself at the nearest dick, which happened to be attached to the greasy bartender. Determined that her friend would set her sights on more attractive man-meat, Melanie took her by the arm. She knew Nikki would lament for the next thirty years about how she'd missed her chance if she didn't at least talk to Shade.

"Wait, wait," Nikki pleaded as Melanie dragged her away from the bar. "I need to check my make-up first."

When Melanie stopped in front of the lead singer of Sole Regret, Nikki's elbow began to tremble uncontrollably in her hand. Shade paused in midsentence, his handsome face turned in their direction, and then he took a nonchalant swig of his beer. Melanie watched his Adam's apple move as he swallowed. She couldn't tell for sure if she had his full attention because he was still wearing sunglasses. Indoors. At night. He was

taller than she'd imagined—over six feet—and built. Between all the booze and women, Melanie wondered how he found the time to work out. But he had to. Black leather pants clung to muscular thighs, and his white T-shirt strained to contain his well-defined chest as he moved his beer bottle away from his sensual mouth.

“Hi,” Melanie gushed before she lost her nerve. She now understood why Nikki had needed copious liquid courage. Intimidating? That was an understatement. “I’m Melanie and this is my best friend, Nikki.” Melanie tugged Nikki forward. Nikki tripped over her own feet, and Shade took her by one shoulder to steady her.

Nikki swayed toward him and pressed the back of her hand to her mouth. "I don't feel so good."

The only thing worse than having Nikki miss her chance at talking to Shade would be Nikki throwing up all over him.

“Are you gonna be sick?” Shade asked, setting his beer down on the table he was leaning against and taking her by both shoulders.

"I think . . ." Nikki swallowed queasily. "I think I need to lie down for a bit."

"I'll take her home," Melanie said. She should have cut her off from the alcohol earlier.

"No," Nikki said and stomped on Melanie's foot. "I'll be okay. It's just a little loud in here." She glanced up at Shade, her long lashes obscuring her eyes, her body in a completely submissive stance. "Is there a place where I can lie down for a bit?" she asked. "With you on top of me?"

Melanie blinked and turned her head to mouth, *Wow*

"If you bring your friend with you," Shade said.

Melanie's head snapped up. Was he *serious*? "Having kinky sex with my best friend and some freak I don't even know is not my idea of a good time," she blurted.

A guy behind her burst out laughing.

Nikki elbowed her in the ribs.

Shade just smirked. One eyebrow appeared above the rim of his dark sunglasses. "Then what is your idea of a good time?"

She didn't think watching tear-jerkers in her

jammies would convince him of her fun-loving nature, so she settled for making a sound of incredulous frustration, turned in the opposite direction, and stalked off. Or *tried* to. She took precisely one angry step before crashing head-on into a hard body.

The man steadied her with both hands on her upper arms, his cold beer bottle pressing into the flesh of her biceps. She didn't lift her gaze to look at him, but stared at his green T-shirt, feeling like a complete tool.

"Where's the fire, baby?" he asked.

"In my pants," Shade said and laughed.

Melanie shoved away from the man and headed for a nice safe corner to collect her thoughts. She half-expected Nikki to come after her—to either berate her for calling Shade a freak to his face or because she'd ruined Nikki's chances with the egomaniac—but several minutes of staring at the wall convinced her that Nikki had deserted her for a guy she didn't even know. *Again*. A quick glance over her shoulder confirmed her suspicions. Nikki was laughing and

hanging all over Mr. Rock Star Jerk, who seemed to have his gaze trained on Melanie as he suckled a spot right behind Nikki's ear. When Melanie narrowed her eyes at him, he took Nikki's hand and led her out a back door.

Melanie scrubbed her forehead with two fingers and turned to stare at the wall again. She considered leaving, but she couldn't desert Nikki without backup. They'd arrived together, they'd leave together. Besides, the woman's love life was a disaster. What if she needed Melanie's help? Considering who she'd left with, the chances that she would need Melanie to bail her out of trouble were all but guaranteed. Melanie supposed attending an after-party alone with a crowd of tattooed metal-heads was better than waiting for Nikki in the car by herself, but not by much. Resigned to her fate, Melanie found the free end of a sofa and sat to wait, keeping her eyes diverted from the people milling about the room.

Her gaze trained on the door that Nikki had just exited, she didn't notice the man sitting next to her until he spoke. "I'm surprised you didn't go

her until he spoke. "I'm surprised you didn't go with them."

She tore her gaze from the door to look at him. His striking green eyes captured her attention from the shadow beneath the bill of his baseball cap. He was quite possibly the most attractive man who'd ever spoken to her without Nikki at her side. She recognized his T-shirt as the one belonging to the guy she'd careened into a few moments earlier. "Huh?"

"Jacob and your friend." He pointed the neck of his beer bottle toward the door that Melanie was so fixated on.

"Jacob?"

"More famously known as Shade."

"Oh." She settled her hands on her knees. "I didn't realize he had a normal name."

He laughed. "You didn't think his mother named him Shade, did you?"

She shrugged. "Never thought about it." Her attention moved to the door again. "What kind of a dork uses a lame stage name anyway? And why Shade? Because he wears sunglasses all the time?"

time:

"Yeah, he has to wear them. He has vision problems."

Melanie's stomach dropped and she covered her big, blabbering mouth with one hand. "He does? Shit. Now I feel bad."

The guy chuckled. "I'm just fucking with you. He wears them because he enjoys looking like a douche twenty-four seven."

Melanie laughed. It felt good. Her severe case of anxiety decreased substantially, and her bitchiness finally took its leave. "I'm not usually this disagreeable. I just really would rather be anywhere else than waiting for Nikki to finish her fun. I honestly don't understand why she thinks he's so hot. He looks like a prison inmate."

When the guy didn't speak, she turned her head to look at him again.

He traced his bottom lip with his middle finger as he assessed her. "You don't seem too enamored with the band. What brings you backstage?"

"A friend I can't tell *no*." She sighed. "I'm such an enabler."

an enabler.

“Or maybe you’re just a good friend.”

“More like a dumb friend. If I’d quit sticking my neck out for her, maybe she’d learn some responsibility.”

“But if something really bad happened to her, you’d feel responsible.”

She gawked at him, surprised he understood the truth behind her actions so easily.

He smiled, revealing a set of perfect white teeth. That simple expression transformed him from gorgeous to dazzling.

Melanie’s breath caught. Wow. Now *this* guy . . . She could understand wanting to jump in bed with him on short acquaintance. Please and thank you.

“Yeah, I totally get it. I’m one of those enabler types too,” he said.

“So you admit you’re as dumb as I am?”

He chuckled. “I guess so. Would you like a beer?”

She shook her head. “I have to drive and I’m already at my limit.” She was pretty sure her sudden lightheadedness was caused by the

sudden heightened awareness was caused by the company, not the alcohol.

“How about a Coke then?”

She smiled at his thoughtfulness. “Water?”

He nodded. “Jordan!” he yelled at the man at the bar. “Bring the lady a water.”

“Got it!”

He turned his attention to her again. “So are you going to tell me your name?”

She relaxed into the sofa cushions, glad she’d found a normal person to talk to. She’d thought she’d have to spend the entire night pretending to be invisible. “Melanie Anderson. Yours?”

He laughed. “You really aren’t enamored with the band, are you, Melanie?”

What did that have to do with telling her his name? “I like their music, but they’re not my favorite band or anything. A bit too heavy for my tastes. Nikki is the one obsessed with them. She dragged me here against my will.”

A glass of water was pressed into her hand. “Thanks,” she said to the bartender. She took a sip and waited for her gorgeous companion to speak again.

"I see. I'm Gabriel Banner." He grinned at her and suddenly overwarm, she wondered if someone had switched off the AC. "Call me Gabe."

A totally normal name for a totally normal guy. She would have felt uncomfortable talking to any of the other men in the room—tattooed, pierced, strange haircuts, chains and leather—but Gabe looked as normal as she did. His only notable flaw was the Texas Rangers ball cap he wore. The Angels' fan in her wanted to poke fun at his team loyalty, but she could forgive one little fault.

She smiled and offered her free hand in greeting. His hand slid into hers. Though he clasped her hand with a gentle grip, she could feel the strength in those long fingers. Her heart fluttered when his fingers brushed the back of her hand. "Nice to meet you, Gabe. How did a normal-looking guy like you end up backstage with all these, erm, *interesting* folks?"

He hesitated and then laughed as if he thought she was joking. "They're great, aren't they? Are you from Tulsa?"

She shook her head. "Kansas. Nikki wanted to meet Shade so badly that she made me drive here with her. She couldn't get backstage last night. I guess she got what she wanted tonight though. Where are you from?"

"Austin."

She did recognize a hint of a drawl in his speech, but she wouldn't have pegged him as a Texan—his jeans weren't tight enough to cut off the circulation to his balls. She supposed the Rangers ball cap should have given her a clue. "Did you drive all the way from Austin just to see Sole Regret?"

He laughed again and tugged on one earlobe. He was certainly easy to amuse. And the deep, rich sound of his amusement had her considering clown school to keep him laughing regularly.

"Yeah, I guess you could say that," he said.

Gabe took the final draw of his beer, extended the empty bottle, and gave it a little shake. Within twenty seconds it had been replaced with a fresh brew.

Sipping her water, she wondered why the

bartender was so eager to do Gabe's bidding.
"So, do you know the band?"

He smiled again and Melanie feared she'd melt. She was very interested in putting a permanent smile on his handsome face.

"We've met. What do you do with your time when you aren't enabling your friend?"

"I'm an accountant."

"That must be . . . " His eyebrows drew together. "Boring as shit."

She laughed. "It pays the bills. Besides, I like numbers. They're predictable."

"I suppose you don't have an unpredictable bone in your body."

She reached up and ran a finger down the side of his neck. His pulse leapt against her fingertip. "I wouldn't say that."

"Are you coming on to me, Melanie?"

Oh yes, yes, yes. "Maybe," she said. No sense in Nikki having all the fun tonight. Melanie was suddenly up for a little fun of her own.

"I hate to bother you," someone said from the other side of Gabe.

A stud piercing spanned the bridge of the guy's nose and a palm-sized black skull tattoo covered the side of his spindly neck. At the sight of the tattoo, Melanie's heart rate kicked up. Most tattoos made her feel uneasy, but skull and barbed-wire designs always freaked her out. Melanie took a huge gulp of water and returned her gaze to Gabe, wondering how he'd deal with a confrontation.

"I'm a huge fan of yours, Force," the fashion-nightmare gushed. "You're hands down the best drummer on the planet. Can I have your autograph?"

Perhaps Nikki hadn't thrown up all over Sole Regret's lead vocalist, but Melanie managed to spit water all over their drummer.

Chapter 4

Melanie jumped to her feet and searched for something to wipe the water from the side of Gabe's face. Chuckling, he lifted the hem of his T-shirt and rubbed the droplets from his skin. She couldn't help but gape at his washboard abs. It was bad enough that she'd spewed water all over a famous drummer; spitting all over a *hot* famous drummer with dreamy green eyes and a gorgeous smile was a tabloid-worthy disaster. Her gaze fixed on the hint of a tattoo peeking out above his wide, leather belt near one hipbone. She couldn't make out what it was before he dropped his shirt to cover his belly. She expected that feeling of unease to settle over her now that she knew he had a tattoo, but she only felt undeniable attraction when she looked at him.

Gabe took the CD from his excited fan and signed it before turning his attention back to Melanie.

"I am so sorry," she said. "I had no idea who you were." *And how much of an ass I was making of myself as I criticized your band.*

His eyes flipped skyward. "Yeah, I kinda figured that much."

"I recognized the other guys in the band because I saw them on stage, but you . . ."

"Were the blur behind the huge drum kit."

"Yeah." And he looked like a regular gorgeous guy, not a rock star. She touched her cheeks with her fingertips and found them hot. "I really am sorry I spit water on you. You must think I'm a psycho."

"Actually, I think you're charming," he said. "I've never met a woman with the balls to turn Shade down and call him a freak in the same breath."

Melanie groaned. "I can't believe I did that." She plopped down on the sofa beside Gabe again and buried her head in her hands. "I don't really think he's a freak. He's just so . . ."

"Arrogant?"

"Yeah." She turned her head to look at him. "But you don't seem to be."

"I'm just the drummer." He touched the center of her back, engulfing her in his body heat and the

clean fragrance of soap and hot-blooded male as he moved closer. "Do you have a boyfriend?" He stroked her left ring finger just above her first knuckle. "I know if you had a husband or a fiancé, he wouldn't let you out of his sight without a ring on your finger."

Her heart skipped a beat. Was he hitting on her? She was pretty sure he was. Did she mind? Hell no. Even though he was a musician *and* had a tattoo, she loved what she saw. And she wanted to do so much more than look.

"I'm currently single," she said. *Yay!* she added silently.

"I thought maybe that's why you rejected Shade, that you were madly in love with some lucky jackass. You honestly aren't attracted to him?"

She shook her head.

"Not even to his notoriety?"

"It doesn't make him any more special than any of us. So he's famous. Big whoop. It doesn't give him the right to behave like an ass. You're famous and you don't act like that."

"Are you sure about that?"

She nodded resolutely.

Gabe leaned closer still, his gaze so intense she felt frozen to the spot. He lifted a hand to brush his fingers across her cheek. Melanie's heart thundered in her chest.

"I'm going to kiss you," he said.

She couldn't drag her gaze from his. She'd never seen such green eyes. The contrast of those bright irises against his dark lashes was mesmerizing.

"You are?"

"Yes."

"But I'm not attracted to guys like you."

"Guys like me?"

"Guys with tattoos."

"Hmm," he murmured close to her ear.

Her eyelids drifted closed.

"What about guys with mohawks?"

She gasped and her eyes flew open. "Never."

Gabe pushed his ball cap off, revealing that the sides of his head were not only clean-shaven, but tattooed with black and red tribal patterns. The

strip of hair down the center of his head was a couple inches long and jet black with crimson tips. So not her type. Then why was her belly tightening with need and why were her panties uncomfortably damp?

“And I suppose you’d never be attracted to a guy with a body piercing.”

His warm breath caressed her ear. She stifled a groan. Why was everything about him turning her on? She really wasn’t attracted to these bad-boy types. She was likely to cringe in fear when confronted by someone who looked like him. Now, even though Gabe had her cornered against the arm of the sofa, she felt no fear at all. She wanted to touch him. Stroke his mohawk, rub his scalp, caress his tattoos with her lips. How had those desires been spawned? She should be flinching away from him, not swaying toward him. He was exactly the type of guy she avoided as a rule. Yet she wasn’t the least bit afraid of Gabe. She *wanted* him.

“My navel’s pierced,” she blurted. One moment of recklessness on her twenty-first

birthday.

"I don't believe you."

She lifted the hem of her top to show him the jewelry dangling from her belly button. His breath caught, and his fingers traced the slender chain around her waist. A pulse of pleasure converged between her thighs, and she clenched her legs together to ease the building ache.

"God, that's sexy." His pinky dipped beneath the waistband of her jeans as he traced the gold chain again. "What other secrets are you hiding, sweet Melanie? I want to discover them all."

Melanie covered Gabe's hand before he delved any deeper into her pants. "You have piercings?" she asked, staring up into his eyes. She didn't see any in his ears or face. It was one of the reasons she hadn't recognized that he was one of them. His clothes covered his body tattoos. His ball cap hid his unconventional hairstyle and the ink on his scalp. She'd let her guard down with him before she'd realized he was frightening. That had to be the difference. She'd talked to him before she'd known she should be afraid.

"A" "C" "I" "H" " " " "

"Where? I don't see any."

"You'll have to feel it." Gabe took her hand and directed it to his chest. Her fingers brushed against a hard ridge within his nipple.

"Oh!" She rubbed her tongue against the edge of her teeth, wondering what that bit of metal would feel like if she flicked her tongue over the barbell she fingered under his T-shirt. His muscles tensed beneath her touch and she silently prayed that he was as attracted to her as she was to him. She wanted him to fist her hair in both hands, drag her beneath his long, hard body and press himself firmly against the throbbing ache between her thighs.

"Melanie." Her whispered name was like a silken caress. "You're gorgeous."

The corners of her mouth turned up. "So are you."

Their gazes locked and everything resembling rational thought vacated her skull. Gabe shifted forward and claimed her mouth in a plundering kiss. Dear God, he had strong, demanding lips. Her fingers curled into his chest, and her breath caught in her throat. When his tongue brushed her

caught in her throat. When his tongue brushed her upper lip, her entire body ignited. The taste of beer. The scent of his body. The hard barbell of a nipple piercing against her fingertip. All so foreign. So dangerous. So fucking sexy. He tugged his mouth away and looked down at her. Her hand slid down his belly toward his hip.

"Show me your tattoo," she demanded breathlessly. Part of her wanted to prove to herself that she wasn't afraid. The other part just really wanted to get another eyeful of his great body.

"Which one?"

"The one on your hip. Are there more?"

He grinned. "I thought you didn't like tattoos."

She shook her head, her gaze moving to the design on the left side of Gabe's scalp. On closer inspection, the tribal pattern looked like a dragon. Not realistic. Artistic. The thick, black lines that made up its long, slender body arched along the edge of his hairline. Red fire spewed from the beast's terrible mouth inches from his temple. The dragon's claws seemed to be reaching for his ear. "I don't. I'm curious is all. It's not a skull design is it?" She gulped. What would she do if it

design, is it? She gulped. What would she do if it was?

“No. Not a skull.”

She went limp with relief. “Then what?”

“I’d be happy to show them to you. All of them. But not here.”

He turned his head to remind her that they were in a fairly secluded corner of a very crowded room. Melanie sat up abruptly and tugged her shirt down over her belly. Had anyone noticed what they were doing? She should be mortified by her reckless behavior, but it excited her instead.

“Force!” someone yelled from across the room and waved wildly at Gabe.

Gabe waved back.

“Why do they call you Force?” she asked.

“That’s my lame stage name.” He adopted a menacing expression—lip curled, brows drawn together—and cracked his knuckles. “I’m a force to be reckoned with.” He grinned and lifted her hand so he could capture her fingertips in sucking kisses.

“Oh.” An aching throb continued to build between her thighs and she knew there was only

between her thighs, and she knew there was only one thing that was going to alleviate it. And only one man she wanted to drive it away. The excitement of being with Gabe, of overcoming her ridiculous fears, was far too seductive for her to deny. "I'm not normally attracted to guys like you."

"So you said."

Her heart thudded faster and faster as she gathered courage. She wished she could be more like Nikki and make it perfectly clear what she wanted. "If I tell you that I want you, would you believe me?"

"Try me."

"I want you."

He caught her gaze and held it for a long moment. "Do you want to get out of here?"

"Will you show me your tattoos?"

"That would require me to get naked."

She grinned at him. "I'm okay with that."

Chapter 5

Gabe wasn't sure what it was about this woman that had him so fired up. Yes, she was attractive, but that didn't explain it. He knew innumerable attractive women. Maybe it was because she liked him despite him being a rock star and not because of it. Or maybe it was because she'd turned down Jacob—no one *ever* turned down Jacob. Or maybe it was because there was something naughty and wild just beneath her conventional exterior, and he very much wanted to unleash her inner vixen. Whatever it was, he was hooked. He never questioned his little head's instincts. His dick had excellent taste.

He followed Melanie out of the stadium to a convertible, melon-orange Volkswagen Beetle wedged between two gargantuan SUVs in a parking garage.

"Cute," he said when she pressed her key fob and the Bug's lights flashed. He'd hoped one of the gas guzzlers was hers. No such luck. Normally he wouldn't be caught dead in such a feminine car, but he wanted to show her more

than his tattoos. He had the pressing need to be alone with her. To figure out what made her so appealing. Yeah, that belly chain and navel piercing of hers had turned his thoughts thick with lust, but it was more than that.

"It's Nikki's. I should probably text her and let her know I took off without her. Or maybe I should let her worry about me for a change." She paused to squint at him with assessing eyes. "Does she have a reason to be worried?"

"Only if she plans to see you before morning."

"Just how many tattoos do you have? It shouldn't take you all night to show me."

She offered him a challenging smirk. It made him want to kiss the sass out of her.

"But it will take me that long to work you out of my system."

Her breath caught. After a moment she closed her gaping mouth and squeezed her tight little body between the SUV and the Bug on the driver's side of the car. "Are you hungry?" she asked as she inched open the door and sidled into the car. "I'm starving. I missed dinner so we

"You do realize I plan to fuck you, don't you?" No sense in pretending this was something it wasn't. "If you're playing games with me—"

"I'm not playing games, Gabe. I plan to fuck you until you can't move. I just thought we could get to know each other a little better first. I've never had a man seduce me this quickly. I feel kind of . . . um . . . slutty." She whispered that last word as if it had never applied to her before.

Heat flooded his groin. Fuck, yeah. She did want him after all. He was used to women coming on to him, making their intentions clear, and being blunt. He just wasn't used to women like Melanie doing so. Damn, his balls ached. There was no way in hell he'd make it through a polite dinner with her. He was perfectly fine with her feeling slutty. Especially because he didn't think she let herself feel that way often. Convincing her to do something she wouldn't normally do stroked his ego until an inferno of lust blazed inside him.

Melanie started the car while Gabe struggled to form coherent thoughts. They were pulling out of the parking garage before he managed to fire a

rational synapse.

“Um, where to?” she asked.

He gave her the name of the hotel and she searched for it on the car’s navigation system. It began to spout directions in a robotic voice.

“You have until we get to the hotel to get to know me,” he said. “It isn’t far. You’d better get started.”

“How often do you do this kind of thing?”

“What kind of thing?”

“Have women you don’t know drive you to your hotel room?”

“Less often than you think.”

Her full lips pursed skeptically, she lifted an eyebrow at him, before returning her attention to the road. It was mostly deserted at this hour, which meant the short trip to the hotel would be especially quick. A good thing. If he caught the scent of her fruity shampoo one more time, he was going to unzip his pants and show her the effect she had on him, indecent exposure laws be damned.

“I usually take them to the tour bus,” he said, forcing his mind to keep up with the thread of their

forcing his mind to keep up with the thread of their conversation. "It's easier to get rid of them that way."

She laughed. "At least you're honest."

"How often do *you* do this kind of thing?" he countered.

"Before or after I graduated college?"

There was a distinction? "After?"

"Not often."

"Before?"

"Whenever I felt like it," she said. "Which wasn't often."

"So why are you doing this now?"

"I figure I'm entitled to a little slutty fun every now and then."

She turned her head to smile at him. She had a great smile. It made his heart swell in his chest. And other things swell in his pants.

"And I really want to see that tattoo on your hip."

He didn't understand why a tattoo on his hip was such a big deal to her. It wasn't anything spectacular, just his astrological sign. "I think your idea of who I am and who I really am are entirely

idea of who I am and who I really am are entirely different things.”

“Duh. That’s why I wanted to get to know you first,” she said.

Maybe he was the one who was nervous. He didn’t know if she’d be impressed with the real him. Usually the rock star thing did all his work for him. Gabe ran his knuckles down her bare arm, and she shuddered. “And that’s why I’m in such a hurry to occupy you with other things.”

She glanced at him and asked, “So, do you have family?”

Well that topic definitely pulled the brakes on his libido. “Yeah. Doesn’t everyone?”

“I suppose most do. Are they huge fans of your music?”

He laughed. “Not especially. Hate isn’t a strong enough word to describe how they feel about my music. I had a strict, religious upbringing. My family is very conservative.”

“You don’t talk to your family then?”

“I didn’t say that. They don’t necessarily approve of how I live or the career I chose, but they love me. As long as I grow my hair out to

they love me. As long as I grow my hair out to cover the ink on my head before Thanksgiving, we get along just fine." And while he mostly did whatever he wanted to do, he respected his parents enough not to flaunt his liberal attitudes in their home. As far as he was concerned, it was a fair compromise. His family's comfort meant more to him than showing off his tattoos. He hadn't discovered his wild side until he'd gone off to college. He didn't have ink out of rebellion against his upbringing but because he'd legitimately liked all the designs enough to have them permanently etched on his skin. To him tattoos were art, not a statement.

Melanie pulled into the hotel drive and stopped the car near a waiting valet. Gabe tensed with anticipation.

"The ink looks good on you though," she said, her eyes fixed on his scalp. "I'm not sure why."

He knew exactly why. "Forbidden fruit."

"So you think the reason I want you so bad is because my father would shoot you on sight?"

"That sounds about right," he said. And he had no issue with exploiting her daddy issues.

“Well, seeing as he’d shoot any man I hooked up with before a wedding band strangled my finger, don’t think you’re so special.”

The door opened, and the valet offered Melanie a hand out of the car. She exchanged her keys for a valet ticket while Gabe mentally cursed himself for abandoning his manners and not being the one to open her door. When had he started sucking at impressing women? Around the time a sexy accountant had careened into his chest and didn’t even have the decency to be hot and bothered the instant he’d touched her.

“Charge that to my room,” Gabe said to the valet as he hurried around the car to claim Melanie’s elbow.

“Yes, Mr. Banner.”

Melanie managed to look impressed. “He knows you by name?”

“I’m a VIP,” he said, “it’s his job to kiss my ass.”

Unable to keep his hands to himself for another minute, Gabe draped an arm across Melanie’s lower back and drew her warmth

against his side. She allowed him to lead her toward the grand entrance of the hotel, but apparently she was still in get-to-know-you mode.

“So if your parents were against you becoming a musician—”

“I didn’t say that. They were never against me becoming a musician. It’s the type of music I chose that they don’t appreciate. They wouldn’t have minded if I’d become a gospel singer.” He winked at her.

“So how’d you become a drummer? It’s not exactly a church choir instrument.”

“I was the percussion geek in marching band; I’m not talented enough to play a real instrument.”

“Are you making that up?” she asked as they entered the lobby through a revolving door. She didn’t even gawk at the opulence. She was too busy sticking her cute nose into his business. And he was batting zero with dazzling her.

“Why would I make up embarrassing shit? If I was going to lie, I’d make myself out to be cool and irresistible, don’t you think?”

She tilted her head, appraising him as if he

were some column of numbers that didn't add up. He wondered if her limited view of the world served her well in Kansas. She seemed to like putting everything in a neat little box. And he was pretty sure she was still desperately searching for the right box to store him in.

As it was well after midnight, the lobby was empty except for the desk clerk smiling to himself indulgently as he pretended not to watch them. The elevator stood waiting.

"Tell me something else that makes you less cool," Melanie said.

"Gee, Mel, do you have all night? Don't you know that most rock stars began life as outcasts who didn't want to be weird but found a bunch of kindred outcasts to make music with? A few of us somehow manage to make a living off it. Most of us have to supplement our music habit by delivering pizzas."

"But being an outcast makes you normal."

He shook his head in confusion. "If you say so."

"What were you like in high school?"

He groaned inwardly and considered making shit up. He'd been a walking disaster. "Braces."

"That explains your perfect smile."

She thought his smile was perfect? Maybe all those painful visits to the orthodontist had been worth it.

"What else?" she pressed.

"Tall and skinny." Was she trying to talk herself out of sleeping with him or what?

She lifted the hem of his shirt to flash his belly. "Not an ounce of fat on those abs, but not skinny. Fit. And you are tall. I suppose that's a benefit for a drummer."

"I was so not attractive, Mel, I didn't touch my first boob until I was twenty."

"And how many boobs have you touched since?"

He grinned. "I don't grope and tell."

Inside the elevator, Gabe retrieved his room card from his wallet, glad that they'd checked in early and his belongings were already up in his room. He swiped the card over a panel to access the penthouse. The band had rented out the entire

upper floor for the night. He had hoped something like that would turn Melanie's head, yet she insisted on asking him to share secrets about his less than head-turning past.

As soon as the elevator door slid shut, she turned to face him. She rested both palms on his chest and gazed up at him with sultry, hazel eyes. He hadn't noticed the blue and green flecks in them earlier. He opened his mouth to compliment her, and she interrupted him by saying, "Just tell me one more personal thing about yourself. I'm much more comfortable with Gabe than I am with Force."

"Force equals mass times acceleration," he said.

"Huh?"

"The reason they call me Force is not because I bang things hard—though I do. It's because I planned to major in physics before I dropped out of college my sophomore year. I was going to become an engineer and invent things." Actually, he invented things despite his lack of degree. That was something he was definitely

keeping to himself, however. No one knew about his inventions. It was bad enough he'd shared the secret behind his nickname with her; only the band knew how he'd picked it up. So why was he telling Melanie? She had the strangest effect on him. He felt vulnerable. Exposed. She'd stripped away all of his cool. It wasn't a feeling he was accustomed to, and he wasn't sure he liked it.

She slapped him in the chest. "So *that's* why I'm so attracted to you," she said. "I knew it couldn't be the famous musician thing."

She raised up on tiptoe to kiss his neck. Every muscle in Gabe's body went taut.

"Melanie?" he whispered.

Her warm breath tickled his neck. "I do love a man with brains."

Brains that ceased to work when a certain sexy accountant suckled the pulse point in his throat. He didn't put the geek in "band geek" anymore. He'd hated being that awkward, meek guy. He no longer entertained dreams of building mechanical hearts and artificial limbs. He was a rock star. Success hadn't been handed to him on

a bronze cymbal. He'd earned it. Melanie had better get used to the idea that the thing she was trying so hard to reject was a huge part of who he was.

Gabe reached over and pressed every button from the first to the tenth floor. The elevator jolted as it stopped on the next floor and then the door slid open.

Melanie jerked away, her gaze nervously darting to the empty corridor. No one was there. She stared up at him with wide eyes. "Do you think there's something wrong with the elevator?"

"I pressed all the buttons."

"Why?"

"Because I don't march anymore."

The elevator doors slid shut and they started upward again.

Her eyebrows drew together and nose crinkled in confusion. Gabe moved his hands to her shoulders and slipped the spaghetti straps of her tank and her bra straps down her slender arms. He used the lightest of touches on her silky skin, watching for her reaction.

"What do you like?" he asked.

What do you like? He asked.

"Huh?"

"Do you like a gentle, easy touch?" He stroked her skin with a feather-light caress and then curled his fingers to apply more pressure as he moved his hands along the back of her shoulders. "Or something rougher?"

Eyes wide, she shook her head. "I don't know."

The elevator stopped, and the doors slid open again.

He slid his hands to her breasts and freed them from her bra.

"Wait," she gasped. "Someone might . . ."

He cupped one perfect mound of flesh and gently stroked her hardened nipple with his thumb.

"Gentle."

When no one joined them on the elevator, Melanie released a soft sigh, and her eyelids fluttered closed.

Gabe squeezed her other breast and pinched her nipple between his thumb and forefinger, rubbing the straining tip with an increasing pressure. "Rough."

pressure. Rough.

“Oh!”

As soon as the elevator doors closed again, he leaned forward and drew his tongue over her pretty pink nipple. “Gentle,” he said, blowing a slow breath over her puckered flesh before drawing it into his mouth and sucking with tender care.

Her fingers clung to his scalp. He still couldn't tell what she preferred; she seemed to enjoy both. He released her breast with a soft sucking sound and turned his attention to the other one. “Rough.” He nipped her reddened nipple and then sucked it into his mouth, flicking his tongue over the hard tip. He scraped her flesh with the edge of his teeth.

“Gabe!”

The elevator doors opened again. This time she didn't notice. Gabe smiled to himself. *That's better.*

He drew away and waited for her to open her eyes before he cupped her pussy through her jeans. When the heat coming off it registered in his addled thoughts, his cock began to throb in

His addicted thoughts, his cock began to throb in anticipation. He stared into her beautiful eyes as he slid his fingers between her legs and pressed the heel of his hand against her mound. He rubbed his palm against her, stimulating her clit with just enough pressure to remind her that it was there.

“Gentle?”

The doors shut again, and the elevator carried them closer to their destination.

“Can I have both?” she asked breathlessly.

He grinned and backed her into the wall. He grabbed her ass and pressed his cock against her mound, grinding with hard, rigorous thrusts of his hips. “Or rough?”

She clung to him, rubbing her heat against his throbbing cock. If she'd been wearing a skirt, he would have surged into her body right then. He could almost feel her slick heat engulfing him, imagine her gripping him as she clenched with release. Almost.

“Oh God, Gabe, fuck me,” she groaned.

His balls tightened with excitement. Drunk with desire he rubbed his open mouth over her

with desire, he rubbed his open mouth over her throat. "Did you decide what you want, Melanie?"

"Yes. You. I want you."

He gave the black lens of the surveillance camera a long hard stare and then bit his lower lip considering what it would mean for her if he went with his instincts and gave her what she wanted right there. Tempting as she was, she deserved better. He could wait. A couple minutes. Max. His gaze shifted to her eyes. "I like a woman who knows what she wants."

He stepped away and noted they still had five floor stops before they reached the very top, which promised him heaven. Melanie gawked at him for a moment and then struggled to cover her exquisite breasts before the elevator doors opened again. He nonchalantly pressed the button labeled "close doors" trying to hide his eagerness, trying to pretend he was in control and had maintained his cool.

Yes, he liked a woman who knew what she wanted. He also liked to leave a woman flustered and disoriented, craving his body the way an addict craves her next hit. He stole a glance at

secretaries not that he stole a glance at Melanie noting she was flushed, disheveled, and glowing with a delicate sheen of perspiration. Gabe ducked his head to hide a self-satisfied grin and focused his attention on his fingernails to curtail his urge to gloat. Yeah, mission accomplished.

Chapter 6

Melanie stole a glance at Gabe, who was leaning against the wall of the elevator car, inspecting his fingernails. She'd been ready to yank off her pants right there in the elevator so he could pound her with that big, hard cock he'd rubbed so vigorously against her mound. She hadn't even cared that the elevator doors kept opening. Thinking they might get caught had excited her even more. She'd known a few cock teases in her life, but she'd never met a pussy tease before. Maybe it was his way of teaching her a lesson for prying into his personal life. Why else would he suddenly start ignoring her? Had she been too needy? Too desperate? Had she done something to turn him off? Shit!

Melanie crossed her arms over her chest and turned her back to him to face the front of the elevator car. If he thought she was going to beg him to fuck her again, he would be sorely disappointed. She hoped he got a raging case of blue balls. She was going to take him up on that room service, take a look at his tattoos to prove to

herself that she was brave, and then leave him with nothing but his hand for company. Maybe next time he'd think twice about getting a woman all hot and bothered and then pretending she didn't exist.

By the time the elevator doors slid open on the top floor, Melanie had almost convinced herself that she really was going leave. What was she thinking anyway? Yes, Gabe was the sexiest thing on three legs and yes, her entire body was still throbbing with lust after encountering leg number three, but dammit, she wasn't going to beg him to put her out of her misery no matter how attractive she found him. She took a step forward and then stopped, blinking repeatedly as she took in what was going on in the hallway next to one of the guest room doors. A couple was going at it right there in front of God and everyone. Well, she and Gabe were the only mortal witnesses, but really . . . And then it dawned on her that the bare ass with a pair of leather pants lowered just beneath the rhythmically clenching and relaxing flanks belonged to Shade and the shameless slut

with her legs wrapped around his waist, her jeans dangling from one slender ankle and her back pressed against the wall, was none other than Nikki.

“Nikki,” Melanie sputtered. “What the hell are you doing?”

Shade turned his head. He was still wearing his sunglasses, for fuck’s sake. He didn’t even pause his deep, rigorous thrusts as he grinned at her. “Decide to join us after all?”

“Screw you,” she said. A hand settled against her lower back, and her nipples tightened as if her body couldn’t help but respond to a certain drummer. Dammit, anyway. She couldn’t deny that she wanted him, even though his inexplicable inattention in the elevator had pissed her off. She wasn’t going to leave him alone with his hand, because she didn’t want to be alone with hers.

“Don’t you think you should take this elsewhere, dude?” Gabe said. “There are security cameras in the halls, you know. And those surveillance videos tend to end up on the Internet when they catch a celebrity fucking a hot,

anonymous chick in public.”

“I couldn’t get my key to work,” Shade said.

“We couldn’t wait,” Nikki added. “I needed his tasty cock inside me.” She licked her lips and then trailed sucking kisses all along his jaw, as if it were completely natural to fuck a rock star in the hallway before a pair of witnesses. “He has the biggest, most beautiful cock I’ve ever sucked.”

“That’s not your room,” Gabe said. He pointed across the hall. “That’s your room.”

Shade glanced from the door labeled 1012 to the one across the hall, 1021. He actually flushed. “Oh. My bad.”

He grabbed Nikki’s ass and held her impaled on his cock as he shuffled across the hallway. She banged against the wall but made no protest as he searched the pocket of his leather jacket and eventually produced a white plastic card. He managed to insert it into the slot upside down. When the little light on the door flashed red, he groaned in protest and, as if unable to resist, began to thrust deep and hard into Nikki’s body. Gabe took pity on the pair of lust-crazed maniacs and opened the door for them.

and opened the door for them.

"Thanks," Shade said breathlessly as he hoisted Nikki off the wall.

"See you tomorrow," Nikki said and waved at Melanie. "Force is gonna rock your world."

Melanie caught her wink just before Shade kicked the door shut. A loud thud pounded on the inside of the door.

Gabe turned to offer her an apologetic grin. He rubbed a hand over the back of his head and stared at the carpet. "Sorry you had to see that. He's a horny bastard, but he has a good heart."

"Where's your room?" She would never admit it, but she was disappointed that Gabe wasn't so turned on by her that he needed to plow *her* in the hallway.

He diverted his gaze and tilted his chin, but she saw the smirk on his sensual lips. "In a hurry?"

Apparently he wasn't.

"You promised me room service." She wasn't cold, but she hugged herself and rubbed her hands up and down both arms. She still wasn't sure if he was even interested in continuing what they'd started. She'd never encountered a man

they'd started. She'd never encountered a man who could go from full throttle to full stop in three seconds flat. He'd seemed to want her when they'd first entered the elevator. She'd felt his excitement pressed against her and still felt the uncomfortable wetness of her panties. When she'd admitted she wanted him, he'd pushed her away. What game was he playing anyway? She didn't have enough experience with worldly men to figure out how to proceed. Should she play hard to get, tear her clothes off, or jump him? *Retreat?* She glanced at the elevator, weighing her options. If she was the one to call this off, it wouldn't be quite so devastating to her already wounded ego.

Gabe wrapped an arm around her back and directed her across the hall. He slipped his keycard into a slot and a tiny light turned green. "I think I'm gonna have to go back on that promise, Melanie," he said and opened the door.

Was he really going to tell her to get lost? Why had he even brought her here? She glared up at him. "Why? Do you think it's funny to—"

He pushed her into the room and closed the door. Her heart rate kicked up as he gazed at her

door. Her heart rate kicked up as he gazed at her in the soft lamplight. There was no mistaking the heat in his appreciative stare. He was back to full throttle. *Oh, thank God.*

"I usually have better control." He reached for the hem of her top and pulled it over her head. "But I can't wait any longer. If it wasn't for the security camera in the elevator, I would have done you right there." He traced the lacy edge of the cup of her bra, his gaze riveted on her chest. "When you asked me to fuck you, I almost came down my leg, Mel. Fuck, I'm hard for you."

And she'd thought he was either playing hard to get or not attracted to her. Her confidence surged. "Take off your pants, Gabe." She flipped on an overhead light with the wall switch. "I want to get a good look at that tattoo."

He grinned and stripped off his shirt. She could stare at him shirtless for an eon and never tire of the sight of his toned body. He was beautiful.

Two tattoos decorated his chest. The one on the right was an amazingly realistic image of a gray wolf. The one on his left pec was an equally

gray wolf. The one on his left pec was an equally realistic image of a cougar. Melanie's gaze slowly made its way down firm pecs, over chiseled abs, to rest on one sexy ridge at his hip. Again the hint of his tattoo above the waistband of his low-slung jeans caught her attention. Again she couldn't fathom what it was. She reached for his belt. He caught her hand.

"Maybe you should familiarize yourself with the ink on my back first. The one on my hip might be too much for you to handle."

She chuckled. "Oh really?"

"There's no way to show it to you and keep my cock in my pants."

She snorted with amusement. "Oh no, I definitely wouldn't want that."

Gabe turned slowly and faced the wall. When the gorgeous phoenix tattooed over the entire surface of his back came into view, Melanie's breath caught. Wow. The work was stunning. The skin it decorated, irresistible. Melanie approached him, splaying her hands over his enticing flesh. She didn't know what she expected tattooed skin to feel like. To find that it was as

warm and smooth as regular skin surprised her. Gabe's muscles twitched beneath her palms; an excited rasp laced each rapid breath. The scent of his body beckoned her and she stepped close, inhaling deeply. Her tongue begged to sample his flesh, to determine if he tasted as good as he smelled.

"I love it," she said. "The details in the feathers are amazing." She took a closer look. "The eyes look so realistic. Why a phoenix?"

"It's a symbol of my rebirth," he told her. "From the man that everyone wanted me to be into the one I was meant to be."

She pressed her lips to a shoulder blade decorated by an extended wing inked in red, orange, yellow, and black. "Nice choice," she said. She drew her tongue over his skin.

"Thanks, I had it custom drawn."

"Not the tattoo," she said, "though it is beautiful. Nice choice on choosing the man you were meant to be."

Melanie slid both hands around his body to stroke his chest. She couldn't detect his ink by

touch, but when her fingertip brushed the barbell piercing his nipple, a surge of liquid heat converged between her thighs. Engulfed by desire, Melanie pressed her lips to his spine and rubbed the bit of metal in a gentle circle with her thumb. She wondered what it would feel like to have her nipple pierced and Gabe's lips tugging at it. Would she be able to feel that pull inside and out? Her breasts suddenly heavy and aching, she crushed them into his back and ran her hands down his lean, hard stomach.

"So you're no longer lusting over the awkward band geek with braces?" he asked.

Unable to resist the temptation, she pushed her hand into his front pocket and shifted his cock in her palm. So long and hard and *huge*. Her pussy throbbed with longing. "I don't know. Was that guy as well hung as you are?"

His breath caught and his abs tightened beneath her other exploring hand. She trailed kisses over his back while gently stroking his cock through the soft cotton of his pocket lining.

"Yeah, but he didn't know how to use it." He

grabbed her wrist and pulled her hand out of his pocket before turning to face her. "Fortunately, I do."

As his heated gaze roamed her chest, her smart remark died on her tongue. His hand moved to her back to unfasten her bra with practiced ease. He removed the bit of pink lace and underwire and dropped it on the floor. "Beautiful," he murmured. His fingertips brushed over her taut nipples, and her back arched involuntarily. Gabe's hands slid down her belly and unfastened her belt. The button of her fly popped free. He tugged her zipper down, inch by inch.

Slowly.

Slowly.

Too fucking slowly.

She was on fire.

Melanie reached for his belt. She unfastened it and opened his fly. Before he could stop her, she jerked his pants down his thighs to reveal the tattoo on his hip. She squatted in front of him for a closer inspection—a *lion*?—but found the gorgeous hard cock in front of her far more

interesting than any artistic design. Veins bulged beneath the darkened skin of his dick. The tip curved upward pleasingly. Its swollen head glistened with a hint of pre-cum. Melanie's tongue darted out to sample a taste of him and Gabe groaned in torment. Smiling at his response, Melanie pressed her palm against his hip and used her other hand to direct his cock into her mouth. She rubbed her tongue against the thick ridge on the underside. Sucking hard, she pulled back until her lips bumped over the crown of its head, before surging forward to take him deep within her mouth.

Gabe drew a sharp breath through his teeth. "Melanie . . . Wait."

She tilted her head back to look up at him. He stroked her hair from her face with one hand.

"Don't get me anymore worked up than I already am; I have surprises for you." He glanced over his shoulder into the suite. "In my luggage."

She tugged her head back, releasing him from the tight suction of her mouth. "What kind of surprises?"

"I'll show you. Just . . . if you keep doing that, I'm gonna come and then I'll probably fall asleep afterward."

She stared up at him in disbelief. "I've never known a guy to turn down oral sex before."

"At least let me reciprocate."

He wrapped both arms around her, pressing her bare breasts firmly into his chest. The piercing in his nipple rubbed against her areola, and she thought she'd explode with lust. That forbidden piece of jewelry made her feel so naughty. So reckless. *He* made her feel that way. She loved all the unconventional things about him. She was starting to see why Nikki was so attracted to bad boys.

Belly-to-belly, Gabe walked her backward into the large open living area of the suite. When she turned her head to take in the lushly decorated room, he paused. She looked up at him in question and he caught her mouth in a deep kiss. Melanie wrapped her arms around his neck and kissed him in return, making no protest when he pushed her jeans down over her hips. He grabbed

her ass in both large hands and pressed her more securely against him, his thick cock prodding her in the belly.

He started moving her backward again. This time he didn't stop until her legs came in contact with the bed. He eased her down onto the mattress, still kissing her. When he had her where he wanted her, he lifted his weight onto his hands, tugged his mouth free of her eager lips, and stared down at her.

"Your pants are in my way," he murmured.

She tried to struggle out of them—they were in her way as well—but their bellies were plastered together and he had her jeans trapped against the edge of the bed with his lower body.

"Don't rush," he said. "I want to look at you first."

He shifted away and climbed to his feet, leaving her alone and disoriented with her legs dangling off the bed. He grabbed her jeans and pulled them off in one tug. He left her panties and her high-heeled sandals in place. She squirmed toward the middle of the bed, using her elbows

and heels to propel herself across the mattress. He seized one ankle just above the strap of her shoe, and she stopped.

“Show me how you like it,” he said.

“What?”

“I couldn’t tell if you like it gentle or rough, so show me.”

“How am I supposed to show you?”

“Touch your breasts.”

“Gabe, I’d like anythi—”

The look he gave her threatened to melt her panties right off her body. “Show me, Mel.”

She flopped onto her back and grabbed her breasts in both hands. Wasn’t the entire purpose of having a partner to get her off so *she* didn’t have to do it herself? She plucked at her nipples until they were sufficiently hard and then dropped her hands.

“Satisfied?”

He chuckled. “Not even. Take off your panties.”

“Gabe . . .”

“Take them off.”

She huffed and reached for her panties, jerking them off over her butt.

“Not like that.” He leaned across the bed and covered her hands with his to slow her motions into a leisurely, deliberate tease. “Look at me while you slip them off,” he said. “So I can’t decide if I want to stare into your eyes or catch my first glimpse of your swollen pussy. Is it wet?”

“Dripping.”

His gaze shifted down her body and he shuddered, his teeth worrying his bottom lip as if he was restraining it from seeking the heated flesh between her thighs.

How decidedly delicious that Gabe was telling her what he liked, telling her in the same way he’d asked her to tell him. She’d never been with a man who gave instructions, and she’d never bluntly told a lover exactly what she wanted from him in bed, but maybe with Gabe it wouldn’t be awkward. Maybe for once she wouldn’t have to fake her orgasm.

“I understand,” she whispered. “I’ll follow your instructions.”

T

Their eyes met, and she tried to hold his gaze as she slowly worked her panties down her legs. He glanced down to check her progress and took a stuttering breath before returning his gaze to her eyes.

"That's sexy," he whispered. "I want to look at your body, but denying myself makes me want you more."

She tugged her panties past her knees and wriggled to open her thighs, to bathe her heated flesh in the cool room air.

He inhaled deeply and then grabbed his thick cock in one hand. "Fuck," he said breathlessly, "your scent is driving me insane." He stroked his length slowly from base to tip. "Tell me what you like, baby. I want to please you."

Melanie closed her eyes. It made it easier to talk to him. "I liked it when you were gentle with one breast and rough with the other. It made me hot. Can you do it both ways at the same time?"

She cracked an eyelid open to see if he'd been paying attention. His gorgeous smile made an appearance.

"What else makes you hot?"

what else makes you hot?

You asking what makes me hot makes me hot.

She slowly slipped her panties off one foot and spread her legs wide. Trembling with a mixture of nervousness and excitement, she held herself open with one hand and traced the inner folds of her pussy with two fingers of her other hand. He watched her motion with his bottom lip trapped between his teeth, his breathing harsh and ragged.

"I like a man to stroke my lips until I'm dripping wet and I feel I'm going to die if he doesn't fuck me soon. Even if I'm begging for him, he just keeps teasing and teasing until I don't think he'll ever give me what I want. Then he slips a finger inside me." She traced her opening with her fingertip. Dipped the tip of her finger inside. Her pussy clenched, trying to draw it deeper within. "He keeps it buried deep while he strokes my clit." She slowly drew her finger to her clit and then rubbed it in circles. Pulsations of pleasure radiated from her core, begging for a more rigorous touch. Faster strokes. She denied herself

rigorous touch. Faster strokes. She denied herself the relief of a quick orgasm, keeping her motions deliberately slow and gentle. The mesmerized way Gabe watched her motions, while matching her pace as he stroked his length, spiked her lust into the stratosphere. She'd never been more turned on in her life and he'd scarcely touched her.

She didn't know what excited her more: her fingers on herself or Gabe watching her as if hypnotized. But she was lying about what a man did to make her hot. That's how she got herself off; she'd never had a man figure it out. But telling him. Showing him. There was no way he could get it wrong.

"Then," she said, her voice low and husky, "when I start coming and my pussy is clenching, he pounds two fingers into me over and over again, as hard as he can. Driving me higher and higher."

"I can smell how turned on you are, baby," Gabe said. "I want to taste you. What do you want me to do with my tongue?"

She never expected to *like* this openness in the bedroom. She'd imagined it would be

the bedroom. She'd imagined it would be embarrassing. It wasn't as hard to tell him what she enjoyed as she thought it would be. And showing him? It just made her even hotter.

"I want your tongue firm and writhing against my clit until my juices are dripping down my ass, and then I want you to lap up the hot mess you created." She captured her juices on the tips of her fingers and brought them to her mouth. "I want to taste myself on your lips when you kiss me afterwards." She licked the cum off her fingers. "Mmm. Dirty."

He dove onto the bed with her, catching her thighs on his shoulders as he buried his face between her legs. His tongue brushed against her clit, and she cried out. Talking was sexy, but doing it was so much better. He rubbed his tongue against her clit and shifted so he could trace her inner folds with two fingers the way she'd showed him.

"Oh yes, Gabe." she gasped. He pleased her so much better than she pleased herself. His lips latched onto her clit and he sucked. "I love that" she said. "No one's ever done that" Oh

God! Wait. I think . . . ”

He released her clit, leaving her orgasm just out of reach. “Don’t come yet,” he said. “You just told me you like to be teased.”

“Maybe I’m multi-orgasmic.”

“Are you?” His tongue brushed her clit, and he continued to trace her aching opening with two fingers.

“I don’t know. No guy has ever made me come before.”

His eyes widened. “Never?”

“Not unless I help him out by touching myself.”

“You’re kidding.”

She shook her head. “I wish I were. I usually just fake it.” Why had she told him that? Her face heated with embarrassment.

“Don’t fake it with me, Mel. If what I’m doing isn’t working for you, tell me.”

“It’s working for me. That sucking thing *really* worked for me.” She hoped he took her hint without making her beg him to suck her clit again.

“Do you like a finger in your ass when you come?” he asked before his tongue flicked her clit

again. Her entire body jerked in response.

"I don't think so."

"Have you ever tried it?"

"Well, no, but . . ."

"I'll do it. You tell me if you like it or not."

Her already thundering heart raced out of control. What in the world was she agreeing to?

"Okay."

He fell silent as he concentrated on pleasing the flesh between her legs with his lips. His tongue. His hands. The suckling sounds were almost as erotic as the feel of his mouth on her. He traced her slippery lips with his fingertips, teasing her until she bucked against his hand.

"Fuck me, Gabe. Please. Just . . . Just put it in and pound me. Pound me hard. I want you so bad."

His finger slid deep, and she took a strangled breath. She rocked against his hand, wanting him to thrust his fingers in and out of her though she knew damned well she'd just told him she'd like him to hold his hand still at this point. He sucked her clit into his mouth and rubbed it vigorously with

the flat of his tongue. *Ah. Wow Yes. Like that. Oh. Fuck. Gabe!*

Her womb clenched. Spasms of release coursed through her pelvis and spread through her body. Mouth open in ecstasy, Melanie forgot how to breathe. Gabe slid a second finger into her clenching pussy and the tip of a third finger into her ass. He pressed all three digits deep and then pulled them free and pounded them into her again and again and again as she came. And came. She was still shuddering with aftershocks of pleasure when he pulled his hand free and used his tongue to clean the come from her quivering pussy. Cleaning up the hot mess he'd made. She sucked a deep breath into her lungs.

She was completely limp by the time he moved up the bed to lie beside her. He kissed her, giving her a taste of her own cum on his lips. She suckled his tongue until she could no longer taste herself, though she could still smell her sex on his skin. She wasn't sure why it turned her on. Why she'd never admitted that fact to anyone. Not even to herself.

“You didn’t fake that did you?”

She chuckled weakly. “I wouldn’t know *how* to fake that.”

He smiled. “Well, now I know one thing you like.”

“That only counted as one thing?” It had felt like ten blissful experiences in one.

“Mmm-hmm.” He trailed gentle kisses along her jaw and throat. “Let’s figure out what else you like.”

“Let me catch my breath so I can figure out what *you* like.”

“I’m not finished with you yet.” He slid down her body and gently licked and suckled one nipple while he squeezed and tugged on the other. He continually stimulated her left breast with harsh, rough motions of his fingers and mouth until it was reddened, sore, and aroused, while her right breast was pampered with tender touches and kisses that left it yearning, achy, and excited. And her breasts weren’t the only parts of her body that were throbbing with need. Her pussy was wet and swollen again already. She had no doubt that he

could make her come a second time. This time she wanted him inside her when she came.

“Gabe,” she pleaded, “I want you inside me. I want to wrap my arms and legs around you as you thrust deep and grind against me.”

“We both want that, baby, but not yet. First, I want you to suck on my sac and tease my ass. Get me really worked up.”

Suck on his *whozit* and tease his *what*? “I don’t . . . know how.”

“That’s okay. I’ll tell you how I like it.”

Only fair, she supposed. He’d listened to how she liked it and hadn’t hesitated in pleasing her. He rolled onto his back, and her pussy throbbed when she saw how hard and swollen his cock was. She needed to hurry up and get him worked up so he would fill her with that monster. She’d never seen a cock that big, much less had one inside her. Her vibrator would have felt inadequate in its presence.

Gabe propped a few pillows beneath his shoulders and head, lay back, and spread his legs. “Gentle,” he said. “They’re really sensitive.”

She settled between his thighs and lowered her head to draw her tongue over the seam that ran between his nuts. His entire body jerked, and he clenched the covers beneath him in tight fists. She moved her head to suckle the skin over one ball and flick it with her tongue.

"Ah," he gasped. "I thought you said you didn't know how. That's perfect. I love it."

And she loved the way he was reacting to her unpracticed motions. She moved her mouth to the other side.

"Wet, um . . . wet your finger in your mouth and . . ."

When he didn't continue, she lifted her head and slipped her finger into her mouth. "Do what?"

"God, you're good," he whispered. "Don't stop. Wait. What was I . . . Um . . ." He pressed the heels of his hands against his eyes. "Not sure if I can take much more. Just rub your wet finger against my ass. Don't put it in. Just . . . rub."

His ass? Unsettled by his request, she tentatively stroked his sensitive hole with her fingertip. He sucked in a startled breath and

nearly leaped off the bed.

“Did I do it wrong?” she asked.

“No, baby. You almost made me explode. I can’t wait any longer.” He rolled off the bed and landed on his knees. He unzipped a suitcase and began searching through its contents. Clothes and toiletries went flying in all directions. “Need a condom. Where the fuck are they?”

Within seconds he’d found one, opened it, and unrolled it over his massive cock. He rejoined Melanie on the bed.

“Are you ready?” he asked.

She was tired of talking. She grabbed him by the arm, tossed him onto his back, and straddled his hips.

He grinned up at her, looking all dangerous and irresistible. Fuckable. “I’ll take that as a yes.”

Gabe grabbed his cock in one hand and directed it into her opening. She sank down with a relieved sigh, rising and falling over him in a slow, deliberate motion. Growing accustomed to his girth. His length. Oh God, how he filled her. Again. And again. And again.

His back arched off the bed. "Faster, Mel. Faster and harder."

When she didn't pick up her pace, he sat up, wrapped both arms around her, and flipped her onto her back. Still buried inside her, he began to move. She got a new perspective on his stage name. There was a hell of a lot of *force* behind each rhythmic thrust, and that was exactly what she needed: a rigorous, hard fuck.

Melanie wrapped her arms and legs around him, mindful to not gouge his thighs with her shoes, and hung on for the ride. A pressure built inside her. Pleasure. Need. Connection. Gabe lifted his head to stare into her eyes. He slowed his strokes, grinding his hips each time he plunged deep. Stimulating her clit. Bumping against her cervix deep inside. Rubbing her front wall in just the right spot. Her pleasure became bliss. Her need, desperation.

Her mouth fell open in disbelief as bliss became euphoria. Desperation became release. She clung to Gabe, crying out in ecstasy as she came.

In the same instant, his body went taut. She watched as he let go. His breath caught in his throat. Eyes squeezed shut. Face contorted in bliss. He shuddered, pulled back one last time, and thrust deep, rocking against her as if he longed to be buried even deeper. He cried out between hard, shaky gasps before collapsing on top of her. She pulled him close, holding him securely to her chest as she kissed his temple. He murmured the sexiest little sounds of contentment as he regained his bearings.

Or maybe that was her making all those noises of delight.

“Did you fake it?” he asked.

She chuckled and gave him an affectionate squeeze. “I didn’t have to. That was amazing.”

“Are you kidding? I didn’t even last very long. I told you that you had me too worked up.”

She grinned, as if getting him excited was some sort of accomplishment that deserved a trophy.

“I wish I wasn’t so tired,” he whispered. “I want to be with you longer, but I’m afraid I need some

sleep. I he shows wear me out."

"There's always tomorrow morning," she said, her heart thrumming. Maybe he was telling her to leave, to find her clothes and get lost.

He lifted his head and smiled down at her. "You wanna stay the night with me?"

She nodded and had to look away from his ear-to-ear smile. Why did her spending the night make him look so happy?

Gabe pulled out of her body and kissed the tip of her nose. "I'm glad. Don't go anywhere. I'll be right back."

Gabe disappeared into the bathroom, sliding the condom from his softening cock as he walked. Water rushed from a faucet.

Melanie struggled to find the strength to climb beneath the covers. She removed her shoes before she settled on the far side of the bed, leaving the sheets turned back on the other side of the expansive king-sized mattress. Gabe returned a moment later and smiled when he saw her waiting for him.

He joined her beneath the covers and despite the large area of empty bed immediately

the large area of empty bed, immediately spooned against her back and cocooned her in tranquil warmth. He kissed the edge of her ear. "I'm glad you decided to stay," he murmured. His deep voice sounded loud because he was so wonderfully close. "I hope you don't mind if I hold you all night."

Her heart warmed and felt as if it were enlarging in her chest. "I don't mind. I like it."

"If you get hungry, order room service," he said lethargically. "Just charge it to the room."

"What if I get horny?" she asked, threading her fingers through his and holding their combined hands against the center of her chest.

"Wake me up."

Chapter 7

Gabe blinked and lifted his head from the pillow. Something had woken him. His first thought was that Melanie, who was still cuddled against his body, had decided she was horny. Now that he'd caught some sleep, he was pretty damned horny himself.

When he shifted, she started awake.

"What time is it?" she grumbled, stretching her lithe body and rubbing her delicious rump against his interested cock.

There was a knock at the door. "Gabe! You up? We have to be on the road in a couple hours. You want breakfast?"

It was Shade. And no, he didn't want breakfast. He wanted more of Melanie.

Her belly rumbled, and he covered it with one hand. "Yeah, we'll meet you in half an hour," he called to Shade. Melanie wriggled her ass against him and while he might not have been out of bed yet, he was definitely up. "Make that an hour," he yelled.

"I'm starving," Melanie complained.

“So am I.” Hungry for her. And he was no longer tired. Not even a little.

He dove under the covers, delighting in the sound of her laugh as he cupped her breasts in both hands and kissed her flat belly. He caught her navel jewelry in his teeth and tugged gently. He wished they could spend all day in bed. Making love. Talking. Getting to know more about each other. Like a real couple. Always on the road, he never had time to get close to a woman. Different night. Different city. Different lover. Even if he found a woman he really liked—a woman like Melanie—he had to say goodbye to her before he could make a lasting connection. It had felt so good just to hold her through the night. He couldn't remember the last time a woman had stayed in his arms for more than a couple hours. Knowing that he'd have to let her go so soon left a raw achy feeling in his chest. Gabe wondered if she had any interest in trying something long distance. Unlike most of his one-night stands, Melanie was relationship material. And she didn't want him because he was a rock star; she wanted him for

that closet geek he worked so hard to conceal. It would be nice to share that part of himself. To be accepted for it. Dare he think cherished for it? Even so, Gabe was afraid to ask her to commit. It wouldn't be fair of him to keep her hanging on when he knew he wouldn't be able to see her more than a couple times a month. And that was if they were lucky.

"Is something wrong?" she asked, pushing the covers down to look at him.

He glanced up at her sheepishly. He hadn't meant to stop pleasuring her. Sometimes he thought too much with his big head, when he'd be better off just going with the instincts of his little head. Maybe she'd be willing to try a relationship. He'd never know until he asked. Or maybe he should start with something a little less confining.

"I was just thinking."

"Ah," she said. "You were so turned on by my body that you started thinking."

Was she teasing? He couldn't tell. "I was thinking about us, actually."

"Us?"

"I like you, Mel. I thought maybe we could stay in contact. Keep seeing each other when we can. Maybe try to make a go of it."

"You mean, like a relationship?"

"If you don't want—"

She covered his lips with two fingers. "I like you too, Gabe. I just didn't think anything lasting would come from this. Continuing what we've started here is much more than I bargained for."

"Oh."

She smiled. "But I'm glad you're opening up that possibility."

He couldn't help but smile in return. "You are?"

"Yeah. Sometimes you just know that you're compatible with someone."

"Would you have discovered that if you'd known who I was when you first started talking to me?"

"Probably not," she admitted. "And I would have missed out on getting to know a fascinating and complex man."

"Not to mention having two fantastic orgasms."

She laughed. "Well, yeah, that too."

She laughed. “Well yeah, that too.”

“Want to go for three this time?”

“I don’t think—”

He moved his hand to cover her lips with two fingers. “I do.”

He eyed his suitcase, wondering if he should treat her to one of the inventions he had stowed inside.

Her stomach rumbled again, and he paused. Maybe there were more important physical needs than sinking into her tight little body. He honestly couldn’t think of any.

“Gabe, can we eat first? Also, I need to go to the bathroom and brush my teeth. I feel gross.”

“There is nothing gross about you.”

“I can’t relax. At least let me pee.”

He sighed. “Okay. I’ll wait. I won’t like it, but I’ll wait. Might as well go get some breakfast. You’re going to need your strength.”

Chapter 8

Melanie wasn't sure why meeting the band made her body quake with nerves. She'd spent the night with their drummer; she couldn't imagine the rest of the guys would be much more intimidating than a man with a black and red mohawk and tattoos on his scalp. Sure, Gabe and his comrades looked like a group of thugs, but thanks to Gabe, she'd let her guard down and discovered that he wasn't so different from the regular Joes she usually dated. Well, that wasn't exactly true. Gabe was far sexier. Far more interesting. Far more tender. Loving. Wonderful. And the man knew how to rock a mattress.

"We could have breakfast in bed," Gabe said near her ear. "There's still time to turn back."

"I'm cool," she lied.

As the hostess directed them into a private dining room, Melanie prayed Nikki was already at the table for backup. No such luck.

Three members of the band and two other guys were seated in one of four enormous booths in the room. There were dozens of additional

square tables and chairs, each with neat white table cloths, forest green napkins, and silver-trimmed place settings. Even if the entire crew joined them, they wouldn't need this much space. A dance floor took up the far half of the room. She was pretty sure the place was used for wedding receptions. Melanie wondered if the hotel staff kept the rockers separate from the main dining room so people didn't trample them as they tried to get autographs or because said rockers were so noisy that they were sure to disturb the other, more conservative, hotel guests. Perhaps a little of both.

"Do you want to sit with them or on our own?" Gabe asked, nodding toward the occupied booth.

"We can sit with them." She wanted to prove to herself that the rest of his band didn't make her a nervous wreck.

So far, not so good. Her stomach was working on a new gymnastics routine.

Gabe rested a hand against her lower back as they stopped next to the table. "Did you already order?" he asked the guys.

“Not for you,” one member of Sole Regret said.

He had a shaggy, spiked arrangement of jet black hair that went quite well with his all-black attire. Melanie knew he was the lead guitarist, but could not for the life of her remember his name. His steel-gray eyes swept over Melanie’s rumpled clothes and tangled hair before settling on her face. “Your sexy sweetheart can sit next to me.” He scooted over in the booth and patted the seat beside him. Melanie hesitated before sliding in next to him.

Gabe sat on her opposite side, and she had to shift closer to the guitarist. He wore enough chains to tow a truck. His spicy aftershave had her wanting to bury her face against his neck and inhale repeatedly.

“Aren’t you going to introduce her?” the guitarist asked.

“Melanie,” Gabe said flatly.

She glanced at Gabe and found him examining a menu. He seemed to have lost all interest in her. Why? Was she not cool enough to

hang out with his rock-star buddies?

She turned her attention to the guitarist. "Hi," she said, "you would be . . ."

He laughed and slid a hand over his face. "Where in the hell did you find this one, Force? I didn't think there was a woman under sixty who didn't know my name."

Another rock-star type reached across the table to shake her hand. "I'm Owen," he said. "Don't judge the rest of us by Adam's giant ego."

"You play bass," Melanie said, as if she were on a quiz show and was pretty sure she was going home empty-handed.

He nodded. "That's right."

He had the prettiest blue eyes she'd ever seen. And the bone structure of a movie star. And the tattoos and face piercings of a side-show act.

"Most people know him as Tags," the ego named Adam informed her.

She vaguely remembered Nikki telling her that the band's pretty boy went by the nickname Tags. Though in all honesty, it was hard for her to look past the tough-guy accessories to the gorgeous face beneath. She was working on it. Her heart

face beneath. She was working on it. Her heart rate had almost returned to normal. She had almost convinced herself that she had nothing to fear from these guys.

"Do you prefer to be called Tags or Owen?" she asked, noticing the beat-up set of military dog tags on a slender chain around his neck. Was that how he'd picked up the nickname? She was much too intimidated to ask.

"He'll answer to anything," the other guitarist in the group said. He grinned at Owen and then turned his attention to Melanie. "Cuff," he said, shaking her hand. He was wearing a thick cuff on one wrist that looked like something out of a bondage convention. "Or Kellen," he added.

"Kelly," Owen corrected. He grinned as if he was in possession of some guarded secret. Again, Melanie was much too intimidated to pry.

"Chicks don't like the name Kelly," Kelly said. "I told you to start calling me Kellen in front of the ladies or just stick with Cuff."

"But she's with Gabe," Owen reminded him. "You don't have to impress her."

Melanie wasn't sure how anyone could tell she

Melanie wasn't sure how anyone could tell she was with Gabe. He'd started ignoring her the instant they'd sat down.

"I like the name Kelly for a guy," she said.

Kelly had long, brown hair and a raw sensuality that seemed to reach across the table and grab her by the womb. She definitely remembered him playing on stage the night before. And poking fun at Adam and Shade. She wondered if his hair felt as silky as it looked. It was definitely better kept than her own unruly tangle of locks.

"See, I told you that chick was just a bitch," Owen said. "Not everyone thinks your name is a girl name."

"You're the only one who still insists on calling me Kelly," he said.

"You'll always be Kelly to me," Owen said with a sweet smile.

"How did you end up with Gabe anyway?" one of the other guys interrupted.

Melanie recognized him as the cute roadie who'd given Nikki her backstage pass the night before. *lack*

before. Jack.

"I thought you and that other hot chick were both supposed to hook up with Shade last night. She said you two were in love but still liked to double-team a guy because even a double dildo is never as good as sharing one real dick."

Melanie chuckled nervously. All the band members were gazing at her with interest now. Even Gabe had lowered his menu. "Nikki made that up. We're not lovers, just friends."

"You sure? The way she kissed you . . ."

"I'm sure. She completely caught me off guard or I never would have allowed it. We've never double-teamed a guy. Or a dildo."

The roadie frowned. "But you two were so hot together. I walked around with a boner half the night just thinking about it."

Kelly reached over and slapped him in the arm. "Don't talk like that in front of a lady."

Melanie assessed Kelly a little more closely. She wasn't really attracted to men with long hair—or mohawks, until recently—but he was gorgeous too. Strong features. Dark mysterious eyes. A woman could get lost in those eyes for hours

Woman could get lost in those eyes for hours.

"So what do you want to eat, Mel?" Gabe asked. "I thought you were starving."

She settled her hand on his thigh and leaned closer to share his menu. When he planted a gentle kiss on her hair, she looked up at him hesitantly. He smiled. There was a longing in his gaze she didn't understand. It differed from the look of sexual longing that made her crave his body. This one made her want more than a single night with him. But that was stupid. She knew a relationship with him would never work out. Why would he even suggest it when he could have as many hot-and-heavy, no-strings-attached affairs as he wanted?

"What are you having?" she asked.

"Steak and eggs."

"That sounds good. Will you order for me too?"

"Of course. How do you like your steak?"

"Medium-well."

"Eggs?"

"Over medium."

"What do you want to drink?"

Gabe was still staring at Melanie as if this totally normal conversation meant the world to him. She cupped his strong jaw in one hand, delighting in the roughness of his beard stubble against her fingertips, and lured him closer for a tender kiss. When she drew away, she stared up into his green eyes and released a dreamy sigh. It took her a moment to remember he'd asked her a question.

"Cranberry juice, if they have it," she said.

"If they don't, I'll make sure they get it."

He ran a hand over her hair and twined one curl around his index finger. The dead silence around the table became noticeably uncomfortable. Melanie's face warmed when she realized everyone was watching them. Gabe's brow furrowed as he turned his gaze to the other men in the group. They were staring at him as if he were a pod person.

"What are you all lookin' at?" Gabe grumbled.

In unison, five pairs of eyes turned upward to gaze at the ceiling.

A waitress approached and set plates of food

in front of those who'd arrived before Melanie and Gabe.

"Force!" The waitress whipped a black Sole Regret T-shirt from her apron pocket and handed him a silver paint pen. "Will you please sign this for me? All I need is Shade and my collection of signatures will be complete."

"Sure," Gabe said.

"The concert last night was awesome! I was stoked when I found out you all were staying here."

"Glad you enjoyed the show." Gabe signed the T-shirt, and the waitress took his order while the ink of his autograph dried.

He ordered for Melanie first—which made her feel special, cherished even—and then for himself.

"And can I get some fresh fruit as well?" Melanie asked. She didn't usually eat such a heavy breakfast, but her stomach was up for it this morning.

"No problem," the waitress said. "What I wouldn't give to be in her shoes," she muttered under her breath as she walked away with her

autographed Sole Regret T-shirt draped over one shoulder.

Melanie was suddenly delighted to be sandwiched between two sexy rock stars and having breakfast with most of the members of Sole Regret. Thanks to Nikki's impulsiveness, she had an amazing story to tell her grandchildren. She'd skip the sex parts, of course.

Apparently, Melanie wasn't the only one who was starving. Everyone with food fell silent as they devoured their meals. Gabe held her hand under the table, stroking the sensitive skin below her knuckles with his thumb.

"I wonder where Nikki and Shade are," she said.

"Screwing in the sauna," Adam said.

Melanie turned her head to look at him.

"He took two security guards with him to ensure their privacy."

"Sounds hot," Melanie said. "And I don't mean sexy hot. Hyperthermia hot."

"I'm sure it's hella sexy hot," Adam said. "And I'm sure Shade will tell us all about it later when

we're bored on the tour bus."

"I'm sure Nikki would prefer he didn't," Melanie said, embarrassed for her friend. Yeah, Nikki could be slutty, but she made no excuses. If she wanted to fuck a guy in the sauna, she fucked him in the sauna. Melanie sometimes envied Nikki's lack of inhibition, but Melanie also pitied her, because she knew that what Nikki really wanted was for someone to love her. She was just going about it all wrong. Melanie recognized that she was going about it all wrong too, but then she'd never expected to feel anything for Gabe besides lust. She was feeling things for him that she had no business experiencing, much less expressing.

"I have some time after breakfast," Gabe whispered in her ear. "Are you planning on sticking around until the bus leaves?"

"Do you want me to?" she asked.

"That's a stupid question."

"You don't want to fuck in the sauna, do you?" She crinkled her nose.

Beside her, Adam inhaled sharply and then

started choking. The guy who was sitting on his opposite side pounded him on the back. Adam's chains rattled in time with the pounding.

"Are you okay?" Melanie asked.

He nodded, still coughing, and reached for a glass of water. He knocked it over when his attention diverted to Nikki, who danced into the room, positively glowing with happiness. Or maybe her face was rosy from all the time spent in the sauna. Everyone at the table stood in unison, piling fancy cloth napkins on the puddle of water spreading across the table. Nikki trotted across the room and wrapped her arms around Gabe's neck.

"Did you have fun with Mel?" she asked, giving him an affectionate squeeze. She tilted her head to the side, grinned at Melanie, and offered her a little wink.

Shade stopped behind her and cleared his throat. Nikki untangled her arms from Gabe's neck and hugged Shade around the waist, resting her head against his broad chest like a docile kitten. He cupped the back of her head in one

large hand.

"I suppose you thoughtless assholes didn't bother ordering for the rest of us," he said. Melanie couldn't tell who he was looking at, because he was wearing his damned sunglasses again. She wondered if he wore them to bed. And while fucking in the sauna.

"You're the only asshole I see here," Adam said and sat in the booth again. He tackled his omelet with vigor.

There was an uncomfortable moment where everyone stared at Shade, and then, when he didn't engage further with Adam, they all sat down again to continue their breakfast. Shade sat next to Owen, who shifted closer to Kelly to make room. Nikki perched herself on Shade's knee.

"Where are you heading next?" Nikki asked.

"Dallas," Shade answered.

"Can I come with?"

"Not this time, kitten."

Nikki's bottom lip jutted forward, but Shade squeezed her shoulder, and she smiled again. Though Melanie had told the guys that Nikki wouldn't want Shade to share all the dirty details

wouldn't want Shade to share all the dirty details of their night together, Melanie was sure she'd be getting an earful of naughtiness on their drive back to Wichita.

The waitress delivered Melanie's cranberry juice and Gabe's cup of coffee before insisting on an autograph from Shade. He obliged her and then ordered for Nikki without asking her what she wanted. Melanie watched her friend for signs of distress, but she looked as pleased as an honor roll student receiving a shiny gold star.

Gabe squeezed Melanie's knee. "She's a big girl," he whispered into her ear. "She can take care of herself."

Was her concern for her friend that obvious? Rather than deny that she was obsessing over Nikki's personal life, Melanie took a sip of cranberry juice. Gabe slid his hand up the inside of her thigh. When he brushed her mound with the side of his hand, she sucked juice down her windpipe.

Her hacking resulted in vigorous whacks on the back until she finally stopped coughing and her rescuers, Gabe and Adam, were satisfied

her rescuers—Gabe and Adam—were satisfied that she'd live.

"I'm fine," she assured them, fearing they'd fracture her ribs if they kept at it.

This time when Gabe's hand disappeared beneath the table she maintained her composure. At least outwardly.

Her breakfast arrived and though she was hungry enough to gnaw off her own arm, it meant that Gabe pulled his hand out from under the table to use his utensils. She instantly missed the feel of his fingers against her. Every touch delighted and unsettled her. She was going to have a difficult time saying goodbye to him.

Wanting to have him to herself for as long as possible, she made short work of her exquisite meal. The filet mignon practically melted on her tongue. Her eggs were covered with a hint of buttery sauce that delighted her taste buds with an explosion of flavor. Nikki stole her cup of fruit and began to eat it with her fingers. With rapt attention, the rest of the band watched Nikki suck and lick strawberry juice from her fingers. Shade cupped her breast and rubbed his thumb over the tin

“You’re getting me worked up again, kitten.”

“Good,” she said in a slow purr.

Melanie checked to make sure Gabe wasn’t gawking at Nikki—he wasn’t—and focused on her plate. Nikki had unintentionally gained the interest of Melanie’s dates in the past. At least, Melanie was pretty sure it had been unintentional. She didn’t want Gabe to be sucked in by Nikki’s blatant sexuality as well.

“Is your kitten up for a gang bang?” Adam asked.

Before Melanie could punch him in the mouth, Nikki shifted forward, giving Gabe, Melanie, and Adam a straight-line view down her shirt. She’d lost her bra at some point since Jack had given them that backstage pass.

“I’m getting all the banging I can handle from Shade,” she said. “Though I would be okay with Mel joining us. I’m craving taco.”

Melanie’s eyes widened, and she shook her head. “No thanks,” she squeaked. Was Nikki really into girls or was she playing at it for the sake of these rock stars and their perpetual hard-ons?

Nikki laughed and sat up straight on Shade's lap. "I tried, baby," she said to him. "She's too much of a goody-goody."

"What about that waitress?" he asked.

Melanie expected Nikki to refuse, at the very least. And if not that, to tell Shade what he could do with his suggestion. She sure as hell didn't expect Nikki to climb off Shade's lap and whisper, "I'll go ask her."

He slapped her on the ass as she trotted off toward the kitchen.

"Don't use her like that," Melanie sputtered as soon as Nikki was out of earshot. "She's going to get hurt again."

"She just wants to have a good time," Shade said.

"She wants someone to love her. Desperately. And I know that someone isn't you."

"How do you know that?"

"You just want her to fulfill your twisted fantasies."

He smirked at her. "Sweetheart, all my twisted fantasies have already been fulfilled."

Sweetheart? “Don’t patronize me,” Melanie growled.

“He pisses me off too,” Adam grumbled. “Thinks he’s hot shit.”

“Nikki knows we’re just having a good time,” Shade said. “You’re the one who can’t separate sex and love. Stop projecting that onto your friend.” He turned his head toward Gabe. “Tough luck, dude. She’s hot and all, but I’m glad she landed on your dick and not mine.”

Melanie’s jaw dropped. She didn’t even know what to say to that. Gabe’s body tensed. A muscle in jaw tightened as he clenched his teeth together. For a second Melanie thought he was going to punch Shade in his smug face.

“So am I,” he said. He tossed his silverware onto his plate with a loud clatter, chugged his glass of water in three long gulps, and then stood. He extended a hand toward Melanie. “I need to be alone with you right now.”

Stunned, she stared up at him. The intensity in his expression made her heart melt and her panties ignite. If she hadn’t been confusing sex

and love before, she sure as hell was now.

She placed her hand in his and rose to her feet, never taking her eyes off his.

He led her to the elevator and used his card to send them toward the top floor again.

"Something wrong?" she asked him.

"No. I just want to show you something."

"What kind of something?"

"The surprise I mentioned last night."

She racked her brain for memories of what he was talking about, but came up lacking. "I don't remember. What surprise?"

"I have a little hobby," he said. "It's sort of perverse."

Her muscles tensed. "Good perverse or bad perverse?"

"You'll have to tell me."

"Gabe . . ."

"Don't look so freaked out. If you like me enough to put up with my band mates' bullshit, this will be easy."

She wasn't so sure.

He took her hand and kissed her knuckles. "I

think you're going to find this to be a treat. Of course, it's still a prototype."

Her thoughts swirled with confusion. "A prototype?"

He flushed, and she had to stifle the urge to kiss him. She loved to see him flustered.

"I have this hobby," he said quietly. "I build things."

"What kind of things?" She was picturing some lifelike android or a drumstick polisher.

"Things that make a woman feel real good."

She was already feeling real good, but had to wonder what he thought would intensify her experience. "What? Like sex toys?"

"I guess that's what you'd call them. Does it weird you out? I've used my creations in the past, but I've never told a woman I designed them. I thought maybe . . . since you know I'm sort of a geek in wolf's clothing . . ."

And that's what she liked best about him—the geek hiding just beneath the surface that only she seemed to appreciate. "Are you just going to show me or are we going to actually use them?"

"I have a couple new ones I haven't tried out yet. How do you feel about being a test subject?"

"Your test subject?" She already knew he could make her come like no one else.

"You can say no," he said.

As if the thought of refusing had even crossed her mind. Gabe Banner brought out her adventurous side and she couldn't wait to see what he showed her next. She wrapped her arms around his neck and rubbed the tips of her nipples against his chest.

"Let's see what you've got, Dr. Kink E. Inventor."

He laughed and nuzzled her neck, making her giggle with ticklish delight. "I'm glad you're up for some experimentation. I promise you won't regret it."

She slid a hand up the soft strip of hair at the center of his head and tugged him closer, her throat closing off with unexpected emotion. Her sole regret was that her time with him would have to end far before she was ready to let him go.

Chapter 9

The elevator let them out on their floor. A mixture of anticipation and trepidation settled in Melanie's belly. She reminded herself that Gabe was a fantastic lover and that they didn't have much time left together. If these toys of his were important to him, she wanted to be open to them. Open to him.

Apparently her willingness to participate excited him. He had her shirt halfway off before they made it into the suite and all the way off by the time the door shut behind them. Her bra followed.

He cupped her breasts. "You have the perfect nipples for this," he said.

"For what?"

"I'll show you."

He shifted behind her and drew her back up against his belly, massaging her breasts and suckling the side of her neck as he slowly walked her toward the bed. His hands moved to her belt. He had her naked and sprawled across the mattress in less than a minute. He paused to stare

down at her.

“You’re beautiful,” he said.

She smiled at him. “You make me feel beautiful.”

Gabe watched her for a long moment. “I think we’ll try two things at once. I want you screaming my name. You’ll never have to fake an orgasm with me.”

He was practically grunting like a cave man.

She grinned up at him. “Is that some sort of macho vendetta against my girlie bits?”

“Damn straight.”

He opened his suitcase and rummaged around until he found two packages securely wrapped in thick canvas. He laid them on the bed beside her and unwrapped the first. Three thin chains formed a Y-shape. Each end of the chain had strange-looking clips attached—one clip was larger than the other two and had some sort of suction cup affixed to it. Melanie lifted her head to get a better look, but couldn’t even guess what the contraption was for.

“This is why you have perfect nipples,” he

said. "Exactly the nipples I had in mind when I dreamed this up."

"What is it?"

He didn't answer her. Still fully clothed, he climbed up onto the bed and straddled her thighs. He cupped her breasts in both hands, rubbing her nipples with his thumbs until they pebbled under his attention. He fastened one clip to her left nipple and the other to her right.

Her back arched off the bed. "Oh!"

"Are they tingling?" He tugged the chain.

"Aching."

"Must not have a good connection." He removed one of the clips and wet her swollen nipple with his tongue. She held the back of his head to keep him from moving away. While the clip on her nipple was stimulating, it in no way compared to the warm, wet pleasure his mouth gave her. He pulled back and returned the clip to her wet nipple. A delightful tingle swept through her flesh.

"Wow!"

"It's working?"

"... .."

"It feels sort of like when you stick your tongue on a nine-volt battery."

"Do you like it?"

It felt different from anything she'd ever experienced. "I think so."

He went to work on wetting her other nipple, tilting his head so he could hold her gaze as his tongue flicked against her sensitive skin. When he had both clips in place, they released rhythmic pulses to both breasts. He tugged the chain between them, and Melanie's womb tightened.

"Gabe! I think I'm almost there."

"I don't even have it all the way on yet," he said. "Try to hold back."

She'd never had a man tell her not to come. She tightened all the muscles between her legs, longing for something inside her to alleviate the throbbing ache, and clung to the covers in torment. She tried focusing on the top of Gabe's head instead of the maddeningly pleasurable flow running through her body, but it was no use. "Oh God," she cried.

He released the chain from his grip, allowing it to rest between her breasts. He stretched out

it to rest between her breasts. He stretched out the final chain, which was attached to the middle of the one connected to her nipples, so that it lay down the center of her belly.

“Hold really still, baby. I’ve got to get this just right.”

His head disappeared between her thighs. His mouth found her clit and began to suck until there was no way even a tranquilizer would keep her still. Her hips bucked involuntarily against his face. He lifted his head and pressed something over her clit. It tightened, gripping her excited flesh. She squeezed her eyes shut, the erotic look of him working between her thighs more than she could endure. He adjusted his contraption until it was held in place. It pulled a bit, as if the only thing keeping it attached was suction. Gabe then used his finger to move it around. Oh fuck, what was he trying to do to her? Drive her insane? Melanie bit her lip to keep from screaming in blissful torment.

“Does it have a good seal?” he asked. “I don’t want it to hurt you.”

“It doesn’t hurt,” she assured him breathlessly.

He shifted over her to kiss her sweet

He shifted over her to kiss her sweat-moistened belly worshipfully, tracing the chain resting against her stomach with his nose.

"When I first saw your belly chain, I immediately thought of how this invention would look against your skin. I knew you'd do it justice. I'll get the vibration going in a minute."

"Vibration?" Holy Hell, he *was* trying to drive her insane.

He grabbed the chain that was resting against her belly and gave it a firm tug. It pulled on both nipples and her clit simultaneously. Her breath caught as ripples of ecstasy radiated through her pussy in teasing spasms.

"I think it'll hold. Wait for me, baby. I have to get myself ready now."

Get himself ready? She had no idea what he meant. He reached for the second, smaller package but hid its contents from view. He offered her a crooked grin and her heart rate kicked up another notch, ready for whatever else he had in store for her. "Hurry, Gabe," she whispered. "Please."

He climbed from the bed and pulled his shirt

He climbed from the bed and pulled his shirt off over his head. She drank in the sight of his well-formed muscles contracting beneath his skin as he unfastened his jeans and removed the rest of his clothes. Her hand trailed to her belly to toy with the chain. If she pulled it just a bit, the pleasure intensified, making her breasts ache and muscles deep inside twitch uncontrollably. She couldn't imagine how amazing Gabe's invention would feel if it actually vibrated.

Admiring the ink on Gabe's hip, which now aroused her instead of frightening her, she watched him wrap a thin leather cuff around the base of his cock and snap it in place. He stroked himself until his cock was thick and erect. She longed to trace the torturous veins beneath its smooth skin with her tongue. To feel the swollen head rubbing against her inner walls and his tight balls bumping against her twitching ass as he fucked her deep. Deep and hard. She wanted dig her nails into his back, her heels into his ass, and take it as good as he was willing to give it. She groaned at her own thoughts, praying he hurried. She couldn't wait much longer. She feared she'd

She couldn't wait much longer. She feared she'd implode if he didn't fill her soon.

The raspy hitch of his breathing as he stroked himself had her dripping wet in an instant. She rhythmically tugged the chain in time with his hand as he rubbed his length. God, watching him make himself hard for her was such a turn-on. Everything. Everything about him was a turn-on.

He applied a condom and then attached a slender rod to the top of his modified leather cock ring. The attachment was several inches long, had a small knob on the end, and ran parallel to and a few inches above his cock. The small attachment appeared to be made of highly polished wood. She couldn't begin to guess what the hell it was for. Did it interact with the contraption on her clit? While she let her imagination run wild, Gabe crawled up on the end of the bed with something hidden in his hand that he wouldn't let her see. His intense gaze sent a trickle of apprehension down her spine. She'd never seen him look so serious. So determined.

He rolled her onto her belly and then lifted her up onto her knees. Before she could let him know

that doggy style was not her favorite position, he entered her several inches.

She whimpered.

"I just need to adjust this, baby. Hold still for me."

She felt the rod he'd attached to his cock ring press against her ass, and then something cold squirted against that bit of virginal territory. With the exception of his finger the night before, she'd never had anything in her back door. He rubbed the slippery substance over her tense opening, using his fingers to work it inside. Lube. If he rammed his enormous cock in her ass, it would probably kill her.

"Wait," she gasped.

He shifted forward, and the ball at the end of the slender rod popped into her ass while his cock pressed deeper into her pussy.

"Gabe, wait, I . . ."

"Does it hurt?"

No, actually it felt fucking amazing. But she didn't like things in her ass. At least that's what she'd anticipated. She wasn't exactly an expert at

anal play.

“Melanie?”

“I’m not sure,” she admitted, rubbing her hot face against the covers. She concentrated on what she was feeling back there. The rod was so slender and his cock was so thick, she couldn’t feel much of anything inside her ass at all. It felt cool and wet, but she felt no pressure inside. “I can’t really feel it much now.”

He pulled back and the knob at the end of his attachment popped out of her ass. She cried out in bliss.

“Did you feel *that*?” She could hear the smile in his voice.

“Y-yes.”

“And did it feel good or did it hurt?”

“Good.” It was the longest sentence she could manage.

“Okay, I’m going to turn on the vibration now. Are you ready?”

“Good.” She rocked backward, seeking double penetration again. “Feels good.”

He reached around her body and pressed

something between her legs. The device attached to her clit hummed to life. Her entire body went taut, and she moaned.

“My goal is to make you scream my name. Give me what I want, but make me work for it.”

He leaned against her back and reached under her, gathering the chain that was dangling from her belly into one fist. The pull tugged on her nipples and clit with just enough pressure to send jolts of pleasure through her breasts and womb, yet it put a stop to the vibration against her clit. Gabe then loosened his grip, which eased the pull on her sensitized flesh but buzzed her clit again. He alternated between pulling the chain and allowing it to loosen—between tug and vibration—over and over again. It brought her to orgasm in seconds. Before she recovered, he began to pump his hips, filling her clenching pussy with thick cock and popping that little knob in and out of her ass until tears were streaming from both eyes and she was begging for mercy. He tugged the chain with each thrust, pleasuring so many parts of her at the same time that her body was

lost to sensation and ecstasy.

God, she was coming hard, so hard, and she couldn't stop.

"Gabe," she cried. "Gabe! Gabe! Too much. Please." And then she really was screaming his name. Loud and repeatedly. The only other word she could manage to scream was "fuck".

When her voice grew hoarse and eventually failed her, she comprehended he was chuckling at her insanity. "You need to practice some orgasm delaying techniques, Mel," he said. At least that's what she thought he said. Her ears were still ringing with her own screams. She fought to catch her breath, whimpering now, still consumed with pleasure, but too drained to scream anymore.

He reached between her legs to shut off the vibrator and allowed the chain to sway beneath her with each of his powerful thrusts. He pounded against her cervix with each plunge inward and popped that maddening device out of her clenching ass with each outward stroke. She couldn't decide which motion gave her more pleasure.

She clung to the sheets beneath her face and closed her eyes, her entire body quivering. His concentration absolute, he didn't seem close to finding his own release at all. Apparently, that cock ring of his assisted him with orgasm delay. She moaned as her pleasure began to rebuild. It felt so good. *He* felt so good. Filling her. Pressing deep. She rocked against him, encouraging his steady strokes.

And as if his powerful thrusts weren't enough, that little knob popping in and out of her slickened ass was driving her insane. He rested one hand on her ass to make sure it plunged into her at just the right angle. It teased her. Made her crave something larger inside there. Something thicker. Deeper. Made her think maybe she'd like him to fuck her there, too. Ram his huge, thick cock in her ass. Would it hurt? Would she be able to take it? Just thinking about it made her pussy tighten and her ass strain for increased stimulation. Soon she was coming again and screaming his name even louder. When the quaking of her body began to subside and only the occasional aftershock of

pleasure pulsed through it, she lifted her face from the covers.

“Please, Gabe. I can’t take anymore.”

“Shh, baby. Almost. I’ll try to hurry for you.”

His fingers dug into her hips, and he fucked her harder. Harder. She rocked back to meet his thrusts, because despite what she said, she wanted more. More Gabe. More. More.

“More,” she sputtered, rubbing her sweaty face over the mattress. “Oh yes, please more.”

“That’s it. Take all the pleasure I give you, baby. Take it.”

He fisted his hand around the chain, yanking hard on her nipples and clit. Fuck. It hurt so good after all the pleasure he’d given her.

“Spank me,” she pleaded.

He landed one hard smack on the cheek of her ass and sent her flying over the edge again. She clung to the bedclothes and let the pleasure wash over her. She didn’t know if his name was echoing in her mind or if she was still screaming it aloud. One thing was for sure, she was unequivocally lost in the man and never wanted to

be found again.

Chapter 10

Watching Melanie get off so hard excited Gabe almost as much as the feel of her pussy clenching around his plunging cock. He couldn't believe she was coming again. He'd heard of multi-orgasmic women—he'd even fucked a few—but this was ridiculous. Of course, it was his devices that had her so overwhelmed with pleasure that her body was drenched in sweat, her words had become incoherent, and she was drooling all over the bed.

He had honestly thought his perversion would turn her away. What kind of guy thought about how to make a woman come so much and so hard that he not only imagined devices to get the job done, but designed and made them? He'd expected her to head for the hills in terror when he'd told her about his unusual hobby. He was sure most women would have freaked the fuck out. It was probably why he'd told her in the first place. His way of driving her away. But Hell, if she was okay with it, he was more than eager to share it with her.

Seeing her mingling with the band had scared the ever-loving shit out of him. It had made her real. Not just some nice girl he could remember fondly while whiling away the long lonely hours on the tour bus. Not some girl he'd spent one night with, hoping for more. She wasn't some fantasy in his overactive imagination; she was real. And not just to him, but to everyone.

And . . . Not only had she not called him a freak for inventing sex toys, she seemed to be perfectly okay with his hobby. She'd not only screamed his name, she'd screamed in pure, bone-deep pleasure. And when the pleasure became too much, he'd showed her how a little pain made it even better and she'd fucking liked it so much she'd erupted with another orgasm. She was perfect. He wanted to use every prototype in his collection on her. Wanted her trembling with pleasure again and again and again. Wanted to fuck her every which way he'd ever imagined.

He had to get her to visit him in Austin.

Gabe cringed as he unsnapped the leather band at the base of his cock. It would take him an

hour to come with that strap squeezing his dick closed at the base, and she really did seem to be at her limit. She shuddered as he tugged the knob free of her ass for the last time and set the gadget aside.

“Love that thing,” she whispered, her voice raw.

“I’ll use it again next time,” he promised. “I have them in all different shapes and sizes. We’ll figure out which one feels the best.”

“Next time . . . I hope there are many, many next times.”

He pulled out and encouraged her to roll onto her back. He wasn’t sure why, but he wanted to look into her eyes as he came. And he didn’t want any of his devices in the way. It had to be all him this time. He carefully removed the clips from each reddened nipple. Her body went limp beneath him.

“Are you finished?” she asked, her words slurred, as if she’d had too much to drink.

He shook his head. “I haven’t come yet. I need to take the suction off your clit now. It will probably

bruise."

"Worth it." Her eyelids fluttered. "Totally fucking worth it."

He grinned. "You liked it?"

She made a sound halfway between a laugh and a moan. "Where did you get it?"

"I told you; I made it."

"Fucking genius. You need to patent it. And that ass teaser too. Dear lord, it tugs just right. Makes me want you to fuck me in the ass."

He grinned. "And you were so hesitant at the beginning. I knew you'd like it."

"I'll never doubt your judgment again."

He moved down her sweat-slick body and released the suction on the cup attached to her clit. Her body jerked, and she sucked a breath through her teeth. He lowered his head and soothed the overstimulated flesh with soft caresses of his lips. "You're going to remember this for a few days," he said. He shouldn't have kept it attached for so long.

She laughed and covered her eyes with both hands, her elbows pointing toward the ceiling. "Come, I have no doubt that I'll remember this for

"Gabe, I have no doubt that I'll remember this for the rest of my life. You've ruined me for all other men."

"Good. I don't want other men touching you." He shifted his arm so he could stroke her red and swollen lips with his fingertips. "Kissing you." His pressed his lips to her heated flesh. "Tonguing you." He plunged his tongue inside her opening.

"Ohhh . . ."

He crawled up her body and used his hand to guide his cock into her receptive pussy. He sank deep and his balls throbbed with their need for release. "Fucking you."

She wrapped her arms and legs around him. "What about holding me?"

He drew her closer. "No. No other man can hold you either. Just me."

"Just you," she whispered. Their eyes met. Locked. He began to thrust into her gently. It felt so good, but he knew it could feel even better.

"I want to fuck you raw, Mel."

She smiled and clasped the sides of his head between both hands. "I think I've already been fucked raw, Mr. Denver."

sucked raw, Mr. Banner.

He grinned at her. "I mean without a condom. I'm clean. Are you?"

She nodded.

"Do you trust me to pull out in time?"

"You don't have to; I'm on the pill. Come inside me."

"Do you trust that I'm clean? I am, but if you're worried, I won't."

"I do trust you. You haven't lied to me yet. I want . . . to feel . . . closer."

He smiled and brushed the hair from her sweat-damp cheeks. Kissed her gently. "I'm crushing on you so hard, Melanie Anderson." In his adult life, he'd never asked a woman to have sex without a condom. Melanie was already special to him, but this, this trust, this flesh touching flesh, cemented their connection. He wanted nothing separating them.

He eased out of her body, removed the condom, and then slowly slipped inside again. He sucked a stuttering breath through his teeth. Her slick, tight heat was his own piece of heaven on earth.

can't.

He claimed her with slow, deep thrusts, delighting in each stroke. The skin along his spine began to tingle. The soles of his feet dampened. Every muscle in his body tightened. He never wanted it to end, this time with her. He never wanted it to fucking end.

There was a loud knock on the door.

"Force," Adam yelled from the hallway. "The bus is about to leave. Get your sorry ass downstairs!"

"Shit," Gabe muttered under his breath.

He lifted his head to look down at Melanie, stunned to see her lips trembling and her eyes watery. A lone tear slipped from the corner of her eye and glided down one smooth cheek. She hugged him and buried her face against his neck.

"Finish," she whispered.

"What's wrong?"

She shook her head. "I'm not ready to let you go. I'm sorry. I knew this was coming; I just didn't expect it to hurt."

He eased away so he could kiss her tears, kiss her lips, kiss her lovely face while he slowly

rise her hips, rise her lovely face while he slowly thrust into her welcoming warmth. He wasn't fucking her anymore, he realized, he was making love to her. He not only felt the pleasure her body provided, but the comfort her soul offered his.

"We'll see each other again," he promised.

She clung to his shoulders and nodded. "I want that. You. I want you. Gabe."

A hard spasm gripped the base of his cock, and his mouth dropped open in wonder as he claimed his release inside her. She stroked the skin of his back as he shuddered. Her touch was so tender. So loving. Exactly what he needed. Even if the sweetness of it did rip his heart in two.

His body went limp, and she wrapped both arms around him. He turned his face into her throat and inhaled deeply.

They lay like that for several moments, entwined in the aftermath of togetherness.

"Gabe?" she whispered.

"Hmm?"

"I think I want to get a tattoo. Will you go with me to get one?"

He lifted his head and looked down at her.

framing her lovely face with hands tangled in her thick curls. "I thought you didn't like tattoos."

She swallowed and avoided his gaze. "Actually, I was sort of afraid of them. I . . . when I was thirteen, these four bikers cornered me and said all sorts of suggestive things. I used to have nightmares about their tattooed bodies and gruff voices surrounding me. Trapping me against the wall. I couldn't get away."

He kissed her cheek. "You should have told me sooner. I would have kept my shirt on."

Her eyes flashed. "Like hell you would. I love your body." She bent her head to kiss his collar bone. "Including your tattoos." Her small hands glided over his back and the tattoo of the phoenix which decorated the skin there. "Why are they all animals?"

He frowned, not sure how to answer. "I don't know. No one's ever asked me that before."

"Are you a nature geek too?" she asked with a grin.

He laughed. "Maybe. You'd better keep that just between you and me."

She smiled. "I like learning all your secrets. Tell me more."

He kissed her. "Next time," he promised. "I want to keep you coming back to me."

Her arms tightened around him. "As long as you're sure there will be a next time."

"I guarantee it."

Chapter 11

Gabe climbed the tour bus steps, walked down the aisle, and tossed his overnight bag into his bunk. Owen and Kelly were already sprawled on the semicircular caramel-colored sectional in the seating area near the front of the bus, but there was no sign of Shade or Adam. Gabe pulled his cellphone out of his pocket and checked his messages. He had a few texts from friends in Austin and a voicemail from his mother asking him when he'd be in town. She said she had a nice girl she wanted to introduce him to. Gabe was pretty sure his mom thought it was her duty to find him a woman or she would never be a grandmother. He wondered what she would think of Melanie. Would Melanie count as a nice girl even though she had a deliciously naughty side?

"Don't you dare call her yet, dude," Shade said as he dropped his bag on the floor next to his bunk. "She'll know your balls belong to her."

"I wasn't going to call her," Gabe insisted. At least not for thirty minutes or so. He'd secretly been hoping she'd called him by now. He missed

her voice already. Shit, Shade was right. He hated when Shade was right.

Despite all of his talk about relationships, he hadn't really been sure if he'd ever call her. Hadn't been sure if the complications would be worth it for either of them, but especially for her. When he'd seen the tears in her eyes, he'd known he couldn't stay away. Until that moment, he hadn't been positive that she'd really want him to keep in touch. Now he was sure; she wanted him as much as he wanted her. He hoped she was strong enough to have him in her life. Few women had what it took to love a man married to the road and a music career.

"I don't believe you," Shade said as he snatched the phone out of Gabe's hand.

Gabe shrugged and sat next to Owen on the sofa. He knew how Shade ticked—you didn't spend ten years of your life living in close quarters with someone and not know how his mind worked. Well, *Gabe* understood Shade, but Adam was clueless and let Shade push all his buttons. Gabe knew Shade pretended to be cool so no one

figured out how insecure he was about certain things. Not about women. Not about his singing. Shade had absolute confidence in those arenas. Shade had become a master of hiding secrets about himself that he was not open to sharing, but Gabe saw through his façade of cool. And he knew the best way to deal with Shade was to never rise to his bait.

“Are you going to call that little hottie you hooked up with, Shade?” Owen asked. “What was her name? Nikki?”

“Darling Nikki,” Kelly said. He reached into the mini-fridge near his end of the sofa and hauled out two bottles of water. He handed one to Owen and kept one for himself.

“Maybe we should do a remake of that song,” Owen said. “It could be metal.”

“Been done,” Shade said.

“You’re not going to call her, are you?” Gabe asked. He didn’t want his newfound relationship with Melanie sabotaged by Shade fucking things up with her best friend.

Shade shook his head. “She didn’t want me

to.” He shrugged. “You know how it is.”

Gabe took a deep breath and nodded. Owen and Kelly exchanged knowing glances.

“Whatever,” Shade said. “She did say next time we come to Wichita she’d love to hook up again. Maybe she’ll get her stick-in-the-mud friend to open herself up to a little fun next time.”

“She’s not a stick in the mud,” Gabe said, a bit more perturbed by Shade’s taunt than he should be. He didn’t usually let Shade’s bullshit bother him.

Shade chuckled. “As if you would know the difference. You’re a dud in the bedroom yourself. Probably think doggie style is adventurous.”

Gabe forced a puzzled look on his face. “What’s doggie style?”

Owen laughed. Kelly just rolled his eyes. Adam came out of the bedroom at the back of the bus. “Are we going to hang around here all day? I need to get to Dallas. Like yesterday.”

“Just waiting for the driver,” Owen said.

Adam sat in one of the captain’s chairs across from the curved sofa.

“Can I have my phone back now?” Gabe

"Can I have my phone back now?" Gabe asked.

"Are you going to call your mommy?" Shade asked. He tossed Gabe's phone in the air and Gabe caught it in one hand.

"Later," Gabe said. "I need to call Melanie first."

Owen leaned across Gabe's body and snatched the phone out of Gabe's hand before he could find Melanie's picture and name in his long list of contacts.

"Twenty-four hour rule," Owen said.

"Rock stars live too fast for the twenty-four hour rule," Adam said. "Our average life expectancy is equal to one-half normal divided by number of addictions minus the number of small craft flights per month, the number of fast cars owned, and the number of miles driven on a motorcycle without a helmet. I'd say the three-second rule better applies to Gabe here."

Gabe chuckled. "See? I'm already late calling her."

"Nah," Owen said, "you have fewer addictions than Adam and don't own a motorcycle. You have

than Adam and don't own a motorcycle. You have at least twenty more minutes."

The bus driver, Tex, climbed up the steps and did a head count. "Y'all ready t'go?"

Most of the band and crew had lost their Texas drawls after traveling around the country and the world for ten years, but not Tex. Gabe figured he took refresher lessons. And when Gabe hung around with him too much, he started talking just like him.

"We're ready," Adam said. "Let's go. I so need to get laid."

Adam had a regular hook-up in Dallas. Not a girlfriend, exactly. None of them had girlfriends, exactly. Kind of depressing.

Shade headed for his bunk. "I guess I'll get some sleep. Sure didn't get any last night. Darling Nikki has some serious stamina." He took off his sunglasses, revealing weary ice blue eyes. He tucked his shades into the neckband of his T-shirt. "Don't let Force call that chick while I'm out."

"Why are you so worried about him calling her, Shade?" Kelly asked.

"He'll get all pussy-whipped on us if he lands

He'll get all pussy-whipped on us if he lands himself a steady girlfriend." Shade climbed into his bunk. "Besides who would want to be stuck with the same chick all the time when there is so much delicious variety available?"

"Me," Kelly said.

"Yep. Me too," Owen agreed with a nod.

"Fuck that. For once, I agree with Shade," Adam said. "The more variety, the better."

"Man whores," Owen said and shook his head at them. "Both of you."

Shade grunted and slid his bunk's curtain closed. An instant later his boots dropped out of his bunk onto the floor.

"You don't have room to talk," Kelly teased and punched Owen in the shoulder.

"You either."

"At least we're ashamed of our whorish ways," Kelly said, leveling his most serious look at Owen.

Gabe snorted and burst out laughing. "Yep, you're a regular pair of cloistered nuns."

"Nuns?" Kelly said. "I think you mean cloistered *monks*."

"I wouldn't mind being cloistered with a bunch

I wouldn't mind being cluttered with a bunch of horny nuns for a couple days," Owen said.

"As long as they were horny," Adam said with a thoughtful nod.

Kelly laughed. "They'd think you were possessed by demons and try to exorcise you."

"I'm more likely to exercise them." Adam slipped two fingers in and out of the loose fist in his opposite hand and smirked at Kelly.

Were they seriously discussing defiling nuns? Sometimes Gabe wondered why he hung around with these guys. Oh yeah, he had no choice.

"Owen might get some nun action," Kelly said. "He's the one with the angel face." Kelly grabbed Owen's face in one hand and squeezed. "They'd think he was cute."

"Until they saw how he's mutilated his junk," Adam said.

"Not mutilated," Owen protested through his squished mouth. "The ladies like it."

Gabe didn't care how much the ladies liked it; he'd never get his cock pierced. He could invent less painful ways to keep his woman satisfied.

"The ones who aren't terrified of it." Kelly said

and released Owen's face. He gave Owen a *thunk* on the side of the head as an afterthought.

Owen punched Kelly in the thigh and turned his attention to Gabe's cellphone.

"Owen?" Gabe said.

Owen's warm, blue eyes rose to meet Gabe's gaze. "Huh?"

"I think you should give my phone back now."

He looked down at the screen and started scrolling through Gabe's apps. "Why?"

"Because I have a lot of blackmail material on you and I'm not afraid to use it."

Owen found the game he wanted to play and started flinging birds at pigs. "Not half as much blackmail material as I have on you," he said calmly. "And you care what your mama thinks of you."

"You don't want me to call in a favor from Cuff, do you?" Gabe didn't have to explain what he meant. Owen knew if Gabe called Kelly *Cuff* in the privacy of the bus, it meant he wanted to use Kelly's special talents.

Kelly sat up straighter on the sofa. a devilish

glint in his dark eyes. "Do you want me to tie him up or tie him down?"

Owen glanced at Kelly as if Gabe's threat was reward rather than punishment. While he was distracted, Gabe snatched his phone out of his hand.

"I think I'll take this to the bathroom so you guys don't bother me," Gabe said.

"What?" Adam called after him. "Are you going to jerk off for her with video rolling?"

Gabe sighed heavily and rather than correct Adam's lewdness, he said, "Yep. Twice. So do not disturb."

Chapter 12

"Are you driving?" Nikki asked Melanie as they waited for the valet to retrieve Nikki's Bug.

"It's your car."

"I'm not sure if I can sit still for that long. I'm a bit tender down there." Nikki's eyes rolled southward. "Shade fucks like an animal."

"And you think Force doesn't? Why do you think they call him Force?" Melanie would never tell her the secret behind Gabe's nickname. She liked that there were things between them that were not widely known. She was sure half the planet knew more about his life than she did so what she alone knew, she'd keep to herself. Something to treasure. She couldn't wait to get to know him better. To learn all the nuances of his personality and history that weren't part of the public record.

They'd exchanged numbers and said their goodbyes in the hotel suite, mostly because she didn't want to cry in front of his band mates. She'd felt stupid enough crying in front of *him*.

"I'll take the wheel at the halfway mark," Nikki

promised.

“Fine.”

Before they were even out of the hotel’s drive, Nikki had her shoes off, her seat reclined, and her feet up on the dash.

“That was fun, but I don’t think I could handle more than one night with that man. I’m exhausted,” Nikki said.

“I figured you’d be sobbing by now,” Melanie said. She almost laughed at the irony. She was the one who was almost in tears, not Nikki. And Nikki didn’t even recognize that Melanie was upset.

Nikki rubbed her crotch through her jeans. “I’m tender, but I’m not that sore.”

“I mean like you used to in college. You’d call me to come pick you up, cry on my shoulder, and then we’d eat ice cream. Remember that?”

“God, don’t remind me. I was such an idiot, thinking the way to a guy’s heart was through his dick.” She rolled her eyes and shook her head. “I think I fell into that pattern just so we could do the ice cream thing together afterwards. You’ve

always been so good to me, Mel. I'd start missing you while you were spending all your time studying, so I'd get drunk and sleep with some loser because I knew you'd come rescue me. Anytime I just called and asked if you wanted to hang out, you were always too busy, but if I was upset over a guy, you'd be there for me in an instant."

Melanie stopped at a red light and looked at Nikki. She had that needy puppy look on her face and yeah, Melanie, liked it. She wanted Nikki to need her. She had never wanted Nikki to sleep with jerks just to gain her attention though.

"I had no idea, Nikki. I'm sorry I didn't make more time for you when you weren't in crisis."

Nikki shrugged. "It wasn't all bad. I had some great sex in college. And a lot of mediocre sex. Still, nothing compares to last night. *And* this morning." She fanned herself. "That man knows his way around a vagina. And no wonder he likes threesomes—he's too much for one pussy to handle."

"Did you really ask that waitress to double-

team him?"

Nikki grinned. "She was happy to join us. You missed out on some serious fun, Mel. Ever had a woman go down on you?"

Melanie flushed and her gaze automatically went to Nikki's lap. "Uh. No."

"You don't know what you're missing."

And Melanie was pretty sure she didn't want to know. She did want to change the subject. She'd known that Nikki was wild, but she'd had no idea she'd go to those kinds of extremes.

"So you don't want to be in a real relationship with Shade?" Melanie asked.

Nikki laughed. "Hell no. I just wanted to fuck him. Do you know how hard it is to maintain a relationship with a musician while he's on the road? With so many girls like *me* trying to get in his pants?"

Melanie turned her attention back to the road as she searched for a sign pointing the way to the interstate. "I guess I'm about to find out."

"What's that mean, Mel?"

Melanie shrugged. "Gabe wants to try a

.

relationship.”

Nikki slapped her on the thigh with the back of her hand. “Shut up. Are you serious?”

“Probably not. I doubt he’ll even call me.”

She couldn’t believe she’d become such an annoying, needy pest that she’d actually shed tears at the thought of leaving. He was probably glad to be rid of her. Ten more minutes in his presence and she’d have attempted to have herself surgically attached to him.

“If he breaks your heart, you know who to call for ice cream.”

Melanie smiled. “You know, even without the broken hearts, we can just hang out. Like this. Even have some ice cream.”

“Yeah?”

Melanie nodded.

Nikki sat quietly for a long moment, as if she were trying to get her courage up. “Um, Mel?”

“What?”

“Do you need a roommate?”

Melanie stifled a wince. “Not really. Why?”

“I sorta spent my rent money on scalped concert tickets.” She grinned sheepishly. “Again.”

concert tickets. She grinned sneepishly. Again.

Melanie released a frustrated huff of air. "I suppose you don't have anywhere to go?"

Nikki shook her head. "I could try to find some guy with low self-esteem to take me in. They're easy enough to find and manipulate."

"You can stay with me." I'll help you get your finances in order, she added silently.

Nikki launched herself across the car and hugged Melanie. Melanie swerved halfway into the left lane, earning a well-deserved blare of a horn from the truck she'd almost hit. "Hug me later!"

Nikki kissed her cheek and then slid over to her side of the car. "I do love you, Mel."

Melanie smiled. "I know."

"If that rock star hurts your feelings, I'll hurt him."

"He's a good guy," Melanie assured her.

After they'd traveled about twenty miles and Nikki had told her several shocking stories about her night with Shade, Melanie's ringtone played from inside her purse. "Will you see who that is?" she asked Nikki. "I wasn't planning to be out of

she asked Nikki. "I wasn't planning to be out of town all night. Someone might be worried about me."

Nikki fished the cellphone out of Melanie's purse and checked the screen. "Someone named Gabriel Banner."

Yes! Melanie almost cheered aloud.

Nikki chuckled and slapped Melanie's thigh. "Oh no, he's never going to call you. I can't believe he waited a whole half hour." She pushed a button. "Hi!" After a pause she said, "No, this is her friend, Nikki. She's driving. Do you want me to give her a message?" Nikki laughed. "You want to do *what* to her tits?"

Melanie snatched the phone out of her hand. "Hi. It's me. I'll call you when we get home, okay?"

"Okay," Gabe said. "And Mel?"

"Yeah?"

"Thanks for giving me your real number."

"Thanks for actually calling me."

"I missed your voice."

She smiled. Her heart fluttered and foolish tears prickled her eyes. He might not look like one on the outside, but on the inside, Gabe was a total

on the outside, but on the inside, Gabe was a total sweetheart. "I wish I could talk right now, but I'm a road hazard when I use the phone and drive."

"Drive safe," he said, "but call as soon as you can."

"I will. I can't wait to see you again."

"Me too, baby. Me too."

She hung up and knew she was grinning all goofy, but she couldn't help it. After only one night, she found herself falling hopelessly for a rock star. She was so glad she'd given him a chance, that her fear and ignorance hadn't gotten in the way of getting to know a remarkable man. A remarkably intelligent, talented, gorgeous, and inventive geek of a man.

Gabriel Banner was perfect: tattoos, piercing, mohawk and all.

Acknowledgements

I'd like to thank Wendy Christy for being the most faithful of beta readers and Beth Hill for her fabulous editing skills. Thanks ladies for helping me make this a better story.

I also want to offer a shout out to all of my fans for the encouragement. I hope you enjoy this new set of naughty rock stars. We're just getting started.

About the Author

Combining her love for romantic fiction and rock 'n roll, Olivia Cunning writes erotic romance centered around rock musicians. Raised on hard rock music from the cradle, she attended her first Styx concert at age six and fell instantly in love with live music. She's been known to travel over a thousand miles just to see a favorite band in concert. As a teen, she discovered her second love, romantic fiction -- first, voraciously reading steamy romance novels and then penning her own. She recently sold her snow shovel and

moved from Nebraska to Galveston, Texas. You'll soon be able to find her on the beach with her feet in the surf, writing about naughty rock stars.