

The Road Less Traveled

A gravel path leads from the bottom left towards the center of the frame, disappearing into a dense forest. The forest is composed of many tall, slender, light-colored tree trunks, likely spruce or fir, which rise vertically. The ground is covered with a thick layer of green undergrowth, including various leafy plants and moss. In the foreground, on the right side of the path, there are several fallen, weathered branches and logs lying on the forest floor. The lighting is soft and diffused, suggesting a canopy of green leaves above.

By Caliboy1991

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Chapter 1

I hit the wipers to clear the mist from the windshield as I kept both hands on the steering wheel of my motorcoach. Interstate 90 over Snoqualmie Pass was a breeze in my new Foretravel ih-45 as the Cummins diesel made easy work of the three-thousand-foot pass.

My mind was hard at work on what new escapes I could throw at Randy Tremaine, the billionaire bad boy who featured heavily in my new series of romance novels. As if thinking of the devil would conjure him, my cell phone rang. I grinned when I saw the caller ID. Bess Deveraux's name blinked across the screen. Pressing the answer button on the steering wheel, my voice was more chipper than I felt. "Hey Bess, what's my favorite agent got for me today?"

Bess came back at me in an affected foreign accent, "Favorite agent? How many more do you keep around? Write a few romance novels, sell some books on Amazon and you authors go through agents like your billionaire characters go through women."

Even though my stomach churned at her call, a grin split my face. Bess was no more French than I was a billionaire. The question that had been keeping me up for weeks bubbled from my lips, "What did Harlequin think of Give the Devil His Due?"

Bess dropped the accent, "What the fuck is wrong with you, Sydney? The guy was just arrested and your billionaire bad boy is a carbon copy of Jeffery Fucking Epstein?"

Worried by her tone, I played defensive, "Come on, Bess. Every woman who fancies herself a romance novelist is writing bad boy romance, billionaire romance, or billionaire bad boy romance. To stand above the slush, you've gotta make an impression."

Bess shot back, "I got news for you, Syd, whoever said there is no such thing as bad press was a sociopath. This story is too raw, too toxic right now. I'm not sure I'd publish this under your own imprint if I were you. A billionaire who seduces underage women, drugs them and brings them to his island as his sexual playthings, don't piss off your readers."

The nervous buzz in my stomach turned to nausea. Give the Devil His Due was supposed to be my entrance into the fabled halls of traditional publishing. The competition in the indie market was brutal and the publishing schedule to keep my pen-name visible to viewers was emptying my well of creativity. The previous year, I released twelve novels. And this year my sales were only slightly more than half of last year's.

I shifted back into drive once I was off the pass. I could drive and talk on the hands-free phone without being distracted. But Bess had thrown me for a loop. "If they don't want extreme billionaire bad boy, what the hell do they want?"

The snooty foreign accent was back, "Not this. I've been told by an editor at Harlequin they are thinning their stable of authors. The eBook market is enormous, but it is only growing more competitive each year. Too many authors flooding the market with knockoffs of the last best seller. Have you thought about retirement?"

A car in front of me was slowing. A quick glance in my driver's side mirror and I moved around the slowpoke. "I'm twenty-four years old, Bess. I haven't even hit my stride yet. But I really needed this contact."

An audible sigh came through the speakers, "You and me, both, Syd. I can try shopping it around to smaller publishers, if you really want."

I could hear the "but" in her voice. It was useless shaking my head; not like anyone could see me. "No. Let it lie for now. I may self publish it yet."

"It's your funeral, Syd. Ciao."

I killed the connection a split second before Bess, if only to work out some of my frustration. That's when I noticed I missed a call while talking with my agent. A quick check surprised me. It was my sister. What did she want? It was too early in the year to invite me to Thanksgiving; summer had yet to arrive in the Pacific Northwest. My mind immediately went to the worst-case scenario. Had something happened to my only nephew? It embarrassed me when I realize how long it had been since I thought about Abby and Gabriel. I reached for the phone to see if my sister left a message.

I played the recording. Abby's voice seemed off, "Hey, sis. Just wanted to talk, hear your voice. Gabe says hi. Call me back when you can."

If I didn't need to keep my eyes on the road, I would have stared at the phone. "What the fuck?"

Abby's my older sister, by five years. Because of our age differences, we're not very close. Since launching my writing career, I haven't exactly invested a lot of time in my family. Even less now, since our mom died last year. Come to think of it, that was the last time I'd spent any time with Abby and Gabe. I treated my family sort of like church; Thanksgiving and Christmas, if I could swing it. Writing was my life, and that's where I spent my time. Not that I didn't love Abby. Now that Mom was gone, she and my nephew were the only family I had left. It's just our lives revolved around different things. Since giving birth to my nephew at seventeen, Abby's life revolved around him and her job as a teacher's assistant. We're both passionate about our lives; just in different ways.

With more than a little trepidation, I tapped the screen on my phone to return the call. When she answered, Abby sounded tired, "Hey, sis. That was quick."

"Was on the phone with my agent. How're things with you and Gabriel?"

"It's Gabe now. You'd hardly recognize him. He's as tall as me now."

When I saw my nephew at our mom's funeral, he was short, like most kids. "Really, isn't he still ten?"

My sister's laughter was hollow, "Goodness, that's what comes of only coming for Thanksgiving and Christmas every few years, Syd. Gabe will be twelve at the start of July."

I felt guilty. It had been too long. "Save a place for me this Thanksgiving. I'll make sure to be there this time."

Silence filled the air. "You there, Abby?"

I could hear the tears in her voice, "If I'm still here, Syd. I went to the doctor last week and the news..."

When she faltered, I blurted, "What? What's wrong, sis?"

“It’s cancer.”

My eyes blurred, and I eased off the Cummins diesel engine. I saw a gas station in the distance and hit the blinker. Mom had died of cancer and my mind was a jumble of questions. “Give me a sec, Abby. I’m pulling over.”

Her quiet sobs pulled at my heart as I brought the RV to a stop on one side of the gas station. When I engaged the emergency brake, I said, “How far along is it?”

Abby’s voice shook, “Farther along than I’d like. Oh, hell, any amount is more than I’d want. I’m supposed to start an aggressive round of chemo in a few days.”

Never had I wanted to be closer to my sister than at that moment. Thoughts about my writing career fled my mind, “I can be there tomorrow, Sis. How’s Gabriel, I mean, Gabe handling it?”

A loud sigh filled the cab of the RV, “He knows I’m sick, but I haven’t told him how serious it is yet.”

Her humor wasn’t entirely gone, “At least school’s out, so I won’t have to burn any sick-time with the school district.”

My heart hurt as though squeezed in a vise grip. I wished I could take back the years spent on the road, writing, to have been with her over the past few years. Tears spilled across my cheeks, “When I get there, you just tell me what you want me to do and consider it done.”

Abby’s sob filled the speakers. I couldn’t hold back either and I cried with her. After a moment, she said, “They’re going to admit me to the hospital for the chemo. I don’t want Gabe to see me like this, Sydney.”

I was sure I could find a place to store the RV in Bakersfield, “I can stay with him all summer if you need. Not a problem.”

“Can you do me a solid, sis? Take him with you for the summer. Get him out of town, away from here for a couple of months. It’ll do him good.”

I could hear the unspoken words. It might do you some good too, Sydney. Abby didn’t begrudge me the success I found as a writer, but she loved her family and my absence always bothered her. Now that it was just to two of

us and her son, how could I possibly blame her. In that moment, I would have agreed to anything, “Sure, Sis.”

We talked for a while longer before she said she needed to rest. Once I disconnected the call, I stared out the windshield. The Cascade Mountains filled the vista. What had I just agreed to? Where would I put a ten, no—scratch that, an eleven-year-old kid in the RV?

My home on wheels was spacious for just me. But I hadn’t bought it intending to share the space. I swiveled the driver’s chair around. The slides were pulled in, compacting the space. A narrow space between the left and ride slide-outs left me a pathway to the toilet room halfway along the RV’s forty-five-foot-long chassis. When I passed by the sofa, I wondered how Gabe would enjoy sleeping on it. Since buying the RV with the proceeds of my earlier sales, I’d fallen asleep on the sofa more than a couple of times.

I slid into the toilet and closed the door before I bent over the toilet and threw up. I didn’t know where it came from, but dread filled me; I didn’t want to lose my sister. Compared to that, the rest of my dread was inconsequential. I didn’t know what to do with a kid for a couple of months. And God forbid, if something should happen to my sister, I had no idea what to do with Gabe.

Thirty minutes later, refueled and back in control of my emotions, I pulled back onto the highway with Bakersfield, California programmed into the GPS.

Chapter 2

If anything, Bakersfield was even more rundown than when I was there for Mom's funeral. Abby's little row-house was landscaped as well as one could expect on a teacher's aide's salary. But it beat the hell out of the overgrown yard next to hers, with plastic pink flamingos scattered about the lawn.

When I drew alongside the curb, I wondered how safe my motorhome would be. Even with skyrocketing property values hereabouts, my RV was easily worth twice the most expensive house in the neighborhood. I put the vehicle in park and set the emergency brake. For the first time since buying the luxury RV, I wished I'd splurged on an alarm. When you're writing a bodice ripper in Mt. Rainier National Park, you don't worry about someone stealing the hubcaps off your \$800,000 motorhome. I pressed the fob on the key chain and locked the door opposite the driver's chair and walked up the broken sidewalk toward my sister's house.

The door opened before I was halfway toward the house and my sister threw herself down the rickety stairs. A half-dozen steps and she nearly bowled me over, "You're a sight for sore eyes, Sis. You got here faster than I expected. You were in Washington yesterday."

I threw my arms around Abby, "Wild horses couldn't keep me away, Abby."

When she let go of my neck, the dark circles under Abby's eyes stood in stark contrast to my memories. She had always been vivacious and lively. Now she looked visibly sick. "I'm glad you came when you did. The specialist overseeing my care called last night, and she wants me to come on into the hospital tonight to start the treatment."

Until I laid eyes on Abby, I wouldn't have believed it. I had missed Mom's long decline last year. Was this how it had started for her? Her words were like a sledge hammer to my heart, "So soon. God, I thought we'd have a couple of days."

Abby's laughter was brittle, "Your wheels would walk off in this neighborhood if you left that here overnight, Sis."

She paused and looked at the motorcoach that took up the entire front of the postage stamp lot on which her modest home sat. "I knew you'd done well with your writing, Sydney, but damn, girl, you've done better than I thought."

I forced a grin, "Over a million copies sold over the past five years. Can't make me put down roots, but I like my comforts too."

Abby flashed a tired grin, "Gabe's gonna like his Aunt Sydney's digs."

"How is he?"

She turned away from the RV, hooked my arm and led me toward her home, "I told him last night. Kinda what you'd expect. Denial at first. Fear. Now he's angry that I'm going into the hospital. He feels like I'm abandoning him. It's just after what I went through with Mom last year, I'll be damned if I'm going to ask the same thing of my kid. Gabe deserves a real summer, not sitting in an uncomfortable chair in a dimly lit hospital room."

I was at the crossroads of my own career. For the first time since I told Abby I'd take Gabe for the summer, I decided the two of us getting away, clearing our heads really was the right thing to do. "I'm looking forward to finally getting to spend some time with my nephew."

Abby rested her hand on my arm, "You're a bit of a hero to him, Syd. He's been writing stories for the past year. Even won a creative writing contest at school this spring. Don't be surprised if he badgers you with a billion questions about writing. He wants to become a professional writer like you."

Even though it was the end of May, the weather was mild. Yet the heat on my face had nothing to do with the weather. My voice cracked, "Like me? Does he know the kind of stories I write?"

She chuckled, "I don't think so. I'm super proud of you, Sis, but I don't leave your books lying around the house."

I had images flashing through my mind of my nephew staring, mouth agape, at one of my racier novels. Since college, I've always lived alone. My books were part of my life. I had copies of all fifty-five in the RV. I was

rethinking my offer to watch Gabe right then. “You know, I’ve got deadlines and a couple of books to finish this summer, manuscripts around the RV that I’m editing, and my personal library. I’m not sure how to keep Gabe away from my stories.”

Abby shrugged, looking tired. “He’s almost twelve. He’s read most of the books in the school library. I was reading some pretty steamy books when I wasn’t much older than him. I remember some of that smut you were reading at twelve, so if your bodice rippers are the worst he reads this summer, I’d call that a win-win for all of us.”

I wasn’t sure I was ready to see my nephew reading my soft-core porn for middle-aged white women. I couldn’t figure out how to say that, so I pulled the front door open wider, “Come on, Abby. Let’s go enjoy some air conditioning.”

Abby’s house was small. Most of the houses in the neighborhood weren’t much bigger. But the living room was clean and well-lit. Light spilled in through the windows on the front of the house, giving it an airy ambiance. The furniture was well used, but clean. The only hint that a preteen lived in the house was a pair of sneakers and a spiral notebook with childish doodles on the cardboard backing.

From a hallway that led toward their bedrooms came a familiar voice, “Mom, I can’t find my shoes. Where’d you put them?”

Abby rolled her eyes, “It’s not where did I forget them, it’s where did you put them. In some ways, he’s still my little boy. In other ways, it’s like having a teenager in the house again.” She gave me a pointed look.

I knew the dig was directed at me. She had been 18 when I turned 13. She had just given birth the previous summer, and I had been less than magnanimous about sharing a house with a squalling baby. I didn’t take the bait. I just gave her a big grin, “Karma?”

She snorted, “Maybe. God knows I gave Mom plenty of crap when I was a kid. And I was the only daughter to get pregnant in high school.”

“After that, the bar was pretty low for me.”

A moment later, a boy I hardly recognized came from the hallway. Gabriel was shirtless, wearing just a pair of denim shorts, when he stumbled to a stop as his eyes fell on me. Then he shrieked, "Aunt Sydney! You're here!"

Unworried about being half dressed, the boy raced across the room. For the second time that day, I was nearly bowled over. When he threw his arms around my shoulders, I was stunned to find he was every inch as tall as me. I couldn't believe it. Even though Mom's funeral was eighteen months before, Gabriel had been a typical ten-year-old. Maybe a few inches over four feet.

Abby came to my rescue, "Your shoes are on the floor. Where you left them. Now, quit trying to squeeze your aunt and go put on a shirt."

Gabe blushed. I wasn't sure if his realization came from leaving his shoes scattered about or from clinging half-naked on me.

When the boy retreated, with sneakers in hand, Abby and I collapsed on the couch. "You weren't kidding, sis. He's as tall as me. When did that happen?"

Abby shrugged, "Who knows? One minute he was my little darling child. He's still my darling child, but he's grown a foot in the last year. He's taller than me."

I put my feet on top of the scuffed top of a coffee table, "He's taller than some teenagers. Maybe I need to give him lots of privacy. I know what I was like as a teen."

Despite the circles under Abby's eyes, her cheeks held a hint of scarlet, "I don't think you have to worry about that. There are no playboys under his bed, no pile of tissues in his trashcan, no strange stains in his underwear."

My sister wasn't the only woman in the room whose cheeks were hot. When I had volunteered to keep Gabe, I hadn't considered how awkward those tween years could be. Even at twenty-four, I'd done a good job of forgetting about them.

Gabe chose that moment to reenter the living room, "What's that about underwear? I remembered to pack them." He turned his attention to me, "Mom said your RV has a washing machine and dryer in it. Is that true?"

Abby traded a knowing glance with me, but I was glad Gabe hadn't heard all of our conversation. That would have been terribly awkward. Then I wondered, had Abby given her son the talk? That was definitely not on my list of things to discuss with my nephew. I nodded, "Yep. It's a self-contained house on wheels. Every creature comfort and then some."

The boy's eyes lit up, "Cool. I'm packed, can I go on and take my stuff and load it?"

I glanced over at Abby. As much as I wanted to spend the whole of the day with her, I could see our brief visit had already sapped her vitality. She offered me an apologetic smile, "Go on, show him the RV, get his stuff stored. I'm going to rest until you're ready to head out."

Gabe's eyes cut between me and his mom. There was pain behind his golden-brown eyes that wasn't there a moment before. What little I recalled of my nephew was that he was a smart kid, given more to reading than playing outside. I got a vibe he understood more than he was letting on.

I dipped my head to Gabe, "Sure thing. Go grab your first bag and I'll give you the grand tour."

By the time I climbed from the couch, Gabe was back with a duffle bag. It pulled on his right shoulder. How much of his wardrobe was he lugging in that bag? "Come on, let's get your stuff stowed away."

As I reached for the fob, Gabe gave an appreciative whistle, "Dang, Aunt Sydney, your ride is sweet."

I gave him a knowing smile, "You ain't seen nothing yet." And with that, I unlocked and opened the door. The steps were tiled in subtle shades of brown.

When he joined me at the top of the stairs, I pressed the fob and the door hissed shut. "Automatic. How sweet is that?"

The sadness in Gabe's eyes was replaced with excitement and buoyant curiosity. "Dude, the driver's seat looks like something out of Star Trek."

I gave him a playful jab to his shoulder, “Dude? Really. Come on, there’s more to see.”

I pressed a button along the huge dashboard, bathing the whole coach in soft ambient lighting. I ignored the passenger seat behind the stairs and pointed behind it to a table and booth with leather bench-seats big enough for two people at the table. When I needed to write and the weather outside proved uncooperative, I had sat at that table for countless hours, crafting dozens of stories over the past year. “I’ve done lots of writing here. But I imagine we can eat plenty of meals here.”

I pointed to the other side of the motorcoach. Behind the captain’s chair was a full-length sofa. At the far end of the sofa, we could pull it into an “L” shape when the slide-outs were open. “I’ve fallen asleep on the couch more than a few times. But it also folds out into a bed. Either way, I hope it’s comfortable enough for you.”

Gabe set the heavy duffle on the sofa and then plopped down now next to it, testing it out, “I’ve fallen asleep on the couch, in the living room. This is loads more comfortable than that.”

I moved along the narrow path between the two retracted slide-outs. Beyond the sofa and dining table was a kitchen, with the sink, countertop, and stove on one side and a big, residential style fridge on the other. “Here’s the kitchen. I guess I should learn to cook better, although I’m a bit addicted to Subway sandwiches.”

Gabe ran his hands over the smooth composite countertop, “Sweet, it’s almost as big as our kitchen.”

A pang shot through my chest at those words. Pregnant at sixteen, a mom at seventeen, Abby never really got out of the working-class neighborhood in which our mom had raised us, on the edge of poverty. I had fled as soon as I self-published my first successful book, while attending the local community college, and until now, hadn’t looked back.

I couldn’t deal with those thoughts, and pushed them aside, and moved past the slide-outs. I opened the door to the toilet, “Here’s the half-bath.”

I closed the door and turned to the other side of the coach and opened a cabinet. Racks of electronic devices were arrayed before us. “Here’s the audio-video setup for the RV. The DirecTV box is here as well as a stereo system. You know, I’ve had this RV for almost a year and I think I only got the satellite working once. Maybe you can figure it out for me.”

Gabe leaned forward, his chin touching the top of my shoulder, as he peered into the storage closet’s shadows, “Cool. Mom said I had to ask you if it’s okay for me to bring my laptop.”

He stood straight as though wanting my approval, adding, “Mom tell you I want to become a writer?” His voice faltered, and the soft overhead lights showed the crimson on his smooth cheeks as he finished, “Like you.”

It was my turn to feel flushed. I was pretty sure the last thing Abby wanted was for Gabe to write soft core porn for women. The earnest look in my nephew’s eyes took me back to when I was around his age and discovered how easy words came to me. “We’ll see. What’s your favorite types of stories?”

Gabe scrunched his eyebrows in thought, “I liked the Narnia books, like, forever. I just finished Tolkien’s *The Hobbit*. I guess mostly fantasy.”

Somewhere inside me, I breathed a sigh of relief. Fantasy didn’t stoke my engines, but I knew enough about the genre. I figured I could give him some pointers.

With the engine cut off, the coach was growing warm. The walkway in between the half-bath and electrical equipment was narrow and Gabe was so close to me I could see beads of sweat pearling above his upper lip. I could see what Abby meant about his development. Some boys have a sheen of peach fuzz over their upper lips; a hint of puberty on the way or already arrived. But Gabe’s face was baby-smooth. Even his vellus hairs were so fine as to blend against his smooth skin. Aware I was staring, I said, “Alright, come on. Just a bit more to go.”

What had sold me on this particular luxury coach were the last two rooms. The bedroom held a king-sized bed on one slide-out and a huge flat-screen TV on the other. There were spacious mini-closets on either side of the TV.

With the slide-outs retracted, there was no room to walk. I knelt on the edge of the bed and opened the nearest closet. I had a couple of shirts on hangers, which I pulled out and threw on the bed, “You can use this for clothes you need to hang up. There are some drawers down below that you can use for anything else.”

Gabe eyed the bed and then the closet next to the TV. The scarlet in his cheeks nearly reached his ears, “But this is your bedroom, Aunt Sydney.”

Clearly embarrassed at the thought of being in a place so intimate, Gabe reminded me of the little boy I still remembered. I shrugged and crawled across the bed toward the back of the coach, “So? This is an RV, not a house. There’s no place to store your clothes up front. Also,” I stood and walked over to the second reason I bought this model, “You’ll have to go through the bedroom to get to the shower and second bathroom.”

The bathroom was easily the largest I saw when I had been shopping for an RV. On the other side of the doorway was a second enclosed toilet. Just beyond the toilet, on the passenger side of the RV was a large, marble-tiled shower. A couple of feet wide and four feet deep, it was one of my guilty pleasures. The tankless water heater, fueled by propane, barely kept up with my long, luxurious showers.

Gabe opened the glass door and poked his head inside, “This thing is freaking huge.”

I smirked at my nephew, knowing how Abby complained about getting him to take a bath. “You know, my standards of hygiene are pretty high, kiddo. Once a week baths aren’t gonna cut it when you’re traveling with your Aunt Sydney.”

I’m not sure how it managed, but his blush spread to his neck as he mumbled, “I’m not that bad anymore.”

I patted him on the back, “Good.” Then I turned to the other side of the bathroom where we faced highly polished wood panel doors. “Then that means you won’t mind doing your own laundry either.”

I opened the rear-most door, revealing a washing machine stacked on top of a dryer. When I told him earlier it had all the comforts of home, I hadn’t

been lying.

The with the slide-outs retracted, the parts of the RV with the most room were the cockpit at the front and the bathroom at the rear. I was able to pirouette around, throwing my hands wide, “What do you think?”

The boy grinned, “It’s really nice, Aunt Sydney. All of this from writing books?”

After spinning around, I was none too steady on my feet. I reached out and grabbed his shoulder to keep from falling, “I guess those ballet lessons were a waste of money. Yeah, Gabe. I got lucky with my first book, and things have gone well since then.”

I collapsed on the bed to let my head stopped spinning. Once things stopped spinning, I looked up at my nephew. He had put his hands in his pockets and looked around the back half of the RV. “You okay, champ?”

His lips tried to curl into a smile, but the ends quivered until he sat next to me, “I’m scared. I know Mom is really sick, even though she’s trying to hide it. She wouldn’t be going into the hospital if it wasn’t serious.”

He bit his lower lip as his chin trembled. In that moment, even though he was about the same size as me, he was still that little boy I knew before I found success. I reached around and pulled him into a half-hug, “I know, Gabe. I’m worried too. But I love your mom and you and if what she needs right now is time to fight this illness, then that’s exactly what we’re going to give her—Space to fight it on her terms.”

A tear spilled down his cheek, “What if…”

He choked back a sob. He couldn’t finish the words. I squeezed his shoulders tight, “Let’s not go there. We’re going to do what she asks, and she’s going to fight this and get better.”

The look he gave me was enough for me to know he didn’t believe it. But I couldn’t think about losing Abby. She had to pull through. With no more comfort to give, I climbed across the bed and said, “Let’s go check on your mom and get the rest of your stuff.”

We found Abby resting on the couch. She was streaming some Clapton through the TV when we came in. Her eyes fluttered upon, resting on Gabe, "Did you get the grand tour?"

The boy came over and sat on the edge of the couch, "Yeah. It's really sick, Mom."

I shook my head; kids and their slang. Gabe rested a hand on Abby's shoulder, "You okay, Mom? Get you anything?"

Abby forced a smile onto her features. Her eyes winced at the effort, "Never better, sweetie. Why don't you get the rest of your stuff loaded up? A van from the hospital is supposed to pick me up by four."

Reflexively, I looked at my watch. Only thirty minutes. While Gabe hurried back to his room, I took his place next to my sister, "Are you sure you don't want us to stay here. We could come visit you."

Abby's hand shot out and gripped my wrist. "No. I had to watch our mom waste away. And hated every minute of it. I don't want Gabe or you to have to go through that. And when I'm better, and they're ready to send me home, I'll let you guys know and you guys can come and pamper me then."

The words were chipper, but her eyes told a different tale. Now that I could see Abby in the flesh, I knew the cancer was farther along than she had admitted. I wanted to be upset with her, but I couldn't find the anger; only the sadness. I went along with the lie, "I can hardly wait. After chemo is over, you and I, we'll go find you a beautiful wig. How does that sound?"

She smiled, and for a flash, the brightness of her smile lit her eyes. "That sounds like a wonderful plan." The spark fled, replaced by the pain and anguish. She glanced toward the hallway, where we could hear Gabe raising a ruckus in his room. In a voice so quiet, I had to strain to hear her, Abby said, "You guys will be back within a couple of months, and we'll look back on this and laugh. But," she sighed, her shoulders slumped, "if things don't go so well, you're the only family Gabe has. He's all you'd have."

A moment later, Gabe returned. He had a suitcase in each hand. "This is everything."

I rose and saw both suitcases bulged. He had to have sat on them to get them closed. "What all are you taking? Is that the kitchen sink in one of them?"

A ghost of a smile crossed his lips, "No. Just more clothes, some books, my collection of stories, and my laptop."

Abby rose, albeit much slower than I, "Did you check with your aunt about bringing a laptop? Maybe she doesn't want you hunched over trying to outdo that story from school."

Gabe shot me a pleading glance. I bobbed my head, "No problem, Abby. I told him I'd give him some pointers on writing."

She gave me a sly grin, "Oh, heaven help me. The last thing I need is Gabe submitting a bodice ripper for his seventh-grade creative writing class."

While the boy gave his mom a confused look, I tried my best to look innocent as I drawled in a faux Southern accent, "Why, I declare, I don't have any idea what you're talking about."

Gabe shook his head, "Women are weird." He hefted the suitcases, adding, "These are getting heavy. Where can I put them, Aunt Sydney?"

I dropped the Hollywoodish Southern accent, "We've got lots of storage under the RV. We'll get them stored there for now."

As Gabe headed out the front door, Abby rested her hand on my arm, "Just a sec, sis."

She leaned over and pulled an envelope from under the cushions and gave it to me, "There's some legal stuff, like power of attorney for Gabe in there, just in case you have to take him to the doctor. His birth certificate and CHIP card, too."

I slid the envelope into the back pocket of my jeans as Abby leaned in to hug me, "Thanks for keeping Gabe while I deal with this, sis. You're the best."

I returned the hug, "I'd do anything for you. I'm sorry to have been MIA for so long. It was selfish of me."

She let go my neck, “You always come through in the end, Syd. Let’s go outside. I bet there’s an eleven-year-old trying to picklock your storage bins.”

It was close. Gabe went from the first storage bin, trying the handle, then going from one to the next. There were five bins below the RV and even though I had plenty of stuff stored under there, two more suitcases wouldn’t be noticed.

I opened the middle bin and revealed an electric sliding cargo tray. The cargo tray rolled toward us. There were a few boxes already on the tray, but plenty of room for Gabe’s suitcases. Once he set them on the tray, he pulled the tab open on one of my cardboard boxes, “Oh, cool. Are these your books, Aunt Sydney?”

Sure, it was warm outside. But that had nothing to do with the heat spreading across my face as my nephew held up one of my first books. Flowing cursive script revealed the title; His forever. But my eyes didn’t pay any attention to that. The artwork on the cover showed a beautiful woman, whose naked back was partially covered by an equally handsome man’s naked torso. They stared at the reader; their lust carefully drawn on their faces. My voice was strangled, “Um, yeah. But why don’t you put it away?”

That’s when my nephew realized the scantily clad figures on the book’s cover and dropped it like a hot potato. The mirth in Abby’s eyes almost made me want to claw her eyes out, but those years were a decade gone. Instead, I just shrugged. Then, to make the matter worse, she leaned in and whispered, “He doesn’t really understand any of that stuff yet. Haven’t had an occasion to give him the talk.”

She chose that moment to give me a tight hug before drawing Gabe into a deeper hug. They were both crying by the time Abby stepped back. She sniffled, “Okay, you two. I love you both. My ride will be here soon. You should hit the road before rush hour hits.”

There were more hugs and when we finally managed to pull away from the curb, a glance through the driver’s side mirror showed a mini-bus pulling into the drive. Gabe strapped himself into the passenger seat. He wiped as

his eyes, trying to keep the tears from flowing. I was a mess too, but back behind the wheel, I did what I could to block those thoughts. There would be time enough later to cry.

The sun reflected in the driver's side rear-view mirror as I pulled off the highway in Barstow. Two hours of travel and I was hungry. I glanced at Gabe. He hadn't said more than a dozen words since leaving his mom's place. "You hungry?"

He ran a hand through auburn hair and seemed to come alive as we passed billboard advertisements, "Yeah. You?"

"I could eat a horse or two," I replied with a grin.

We found a place we could park outside of Barstow station. Decorated like an old style train-station, there were a handful of restaurants in the building. After paying for some imitation Chinese food at Panda Express, we sat by a window overlooking railroad tracks. After tearing into my General Tso's, I said, "There are a couple of RV parks nearby. I figured we could stay for the night, get a good night's rest."

Gabe stabbed a bit of battered chicken into a cup of sweet and sour sauce, "Where are we going?"

Since leaving Abby's, that thought weighed heavily on me. On one hand, I was now responsible for an eleven-year-old boy. On the other hand, even with the setback of my latest manuscript, I had several books plotted for my publishing business. "I was thinking of going someplace where I could get some writing done. Some places in Colorado come to mind. Maybe pick someplace where there's some cool shi-, um, stuff to see."

Barely gone for a couple of hours from Abby's and I was already falling back into my old habits. Gabe smirked. He was eleven, not seven. He knew what almost slipped out. "Show me how to write better?"

Abby hadn't even taken the time to tell my nephew about the birds and the bees, I sure didn't want his first awareness of those rights of passage to come from my soft porn for middle-aged women. Even so, I figured I could balance some instruction with my own writing schedule. "Sure, Gabe. You'll have to show me the story you wrote to win the contest at school."

He beamed; It was nice to see him forget his mom's unfortunate situation, if just for a bit.

Chapter 3

A click of a door opening and closing brought me out of my sleep. Light filtered through the curtains when I blinked my eyes open. We plugged the RV into the 50 Amp outlets at the camping site the previous night and the air conditioning ran off the city power, keeping the coach cool. Just the way I liked it. I pulled back the covers and rolled over, searching for my phone. When the back-light came on I groaned. It was a few minutes after seven.

Now that I knew I wanted to write, I was itching to be six hundred miles away, exploring ways my billionaire bad boy could seduce the heroine. Before, I would have grabbed some powdered donuts from the nearest convenience store, along with a cup of coffee and a twenty-ounce Coke. Even though I lacked any maternal instincts, I knew Gabe needed better than junk food.

The door to the half-bath opened right then. At least I wouldn't have to wake the boy up. I called out, "Good morning, sunshine."

His bare feet shuffled across the tiled floor until he stood in the opening between the bedroom and the kitchen area. Sunlight filtering into the RV behind him outlined his body. His hair was mused, and he yawned as he leaned against the wood-paneled wall. He was dressed in the same white briefs he slept in the previous night and nothing else. He yawned, "Good morning. What's for breakfast?"

As my eyes went to his tighy-whities, he seemed oblivious to his semi-naked state. That was the Gabe I remembered from when he was little. In between his legs, there was a slight bump outlined in the white fabric of his underwear. With only one truly horrible experience under my belt about men, I was hardly an expert. But he seemed soft to me, for which I was grateful.

Stunned at where my eyes had gone, I glanced away, ashamed I had chosen to gawk at my preteen nephew. "Um, probably McDonalds. You want an Egg McMuffin?"

He stretched, drawing my eyes back to him. He was definitely related to me. He wasn't simply slender. No, he was skinny and reminded me of when

I was his age. Mom had been on me all the time to eat more because I was just skin and bones. He nodded, "Yeah. Sounds good."

Glad I had slept in a t-shirt and pajama shorts, I rolled toward the other side of the bed, closest to the rear bathroom, "Cool. You should probably get dressed. You don't want any preteen girls spying you strutting your stuff."

Gabe gasped, as though only now realizing how little he had on. He was halfway back to the sofa when I heard a faint, "Right."

I grabbed my jeans from the previous night and a clean shirt and headed toward the rear toilet. While I sat there doing my business, I noticed the envelope Abby gave me. In all the hubbub of getting away from the house and the drive, it had skipped my mind.

I pulled it from the back pocket. It was heavier than I first realized. Abby hadn't sealed the envelop; she just folded the flap inside. There were folded sheets of paper, plastic cards, and a spare key to her place. And money. I sighed with exasperation. I was the successful writer, with a million copies of my books sold. The last thing she needed was to give me money.

I rifled past the money. One of the plastic cards was Gabe's insurance card. The other was the previous year's student ID. It must have been taken at the beginning of his sixth grade. Even though his face lacked the angular lines of adolescence, there was something still innocently boyish in his features. There was just a lot more of it in the school ID photo.

There were a couple of folded up sheets of paper. The first was a simply power of attorney Abby got notarized the same day she called me. The second was Gabe's birth certificate with his social security card stapled to it. The last set of pages was a will. It was simple. Like our Mom, Abby didn't have much. Even the house was a rental. The will reflected her simply lifestyle. Her one prized possession was getting dressed in the front of the RV at that moment. And she named me his guardian in the event of her death. She signed and notarized the will the same day as the power of attorney.

I bit my lip and blinked back tears. I still hoped she would call us after the chemo treatment, but seeing the will and other documents, I felt a sense of finality in the previous day's visit. As I dressed in the closed confine of the little room enclosing the toilet, I wondered for not the first time what I was getting myself into.

We ate breakfast in the parking lot behind the one-horse town's McDonald's. Even though we had retracted the RV's slide-outs when we pulled out of the RV park, we still squeezed into the dining table seats behind the passenger's seat. Thoughts of the contents of the envelop filling my mind. But the last thing Gabe needed was for me to confess my worries. I needed to be strong for him.

Halfway through his McMuffin, he asked, "Aunt Sydney, Mom said you write bodice rippers. What are those?"

The biscuit, already drier than most, seemed to stick in my throat. "Your mom said that?"

He rolled his eyes at me. I couldn't let the fact that his eyes were even with mine make me forget he was still a little boy, not a teenager. In the back of my mind, I really wished Abby hadn't sheltered him as much as she had. He deadpanned, "You're too young to be forgetting stuff."

I always thought kids my nephew's age thought everyone older than sixteen or seventeen was ancient. The few times I included children in my stories, that's how I played them. My voice was droll, "How old do you think I am?"

"Twenty-four. That's only twice as many years old as me. Mom's almost thirty," his eyes sparkled with mischief, "you know that's almost ancient."

My lips curled into a smile, "When we talk to your mom, I'll make sure to tell her that."

He crumpled the wrapping on his biscuit, "You getting forgetful, Aunt Sydney? You didn't tell me what a bodice ripper is."

So much for hoping he'd forgotten. My mind went into overdrive, wondering how to keep our conversation PG rated. "It's just a nickname for a type of romance novel."

Gabe's eyebrow furrowed, "I get that. Um, what's a bodice?"

Keep it PG, Syd. "It's an old-fashioned name for the part of a woman's dress, from the waist to the neckline, but excluding the sleeves."

The golden-brown eyes looking back at me were intelligent, and one wrong step would be more than my sister wanted her son to know. Slowly, those eyes grew round and his mouth formed a little oh. "The ripper part means the man tears her clothes off?"

I flushed. "Maybe we can talk about that later, okay?"

A smile slid across his features, "Your stories are sexy. That's what Mom meant. That's why that man and women were naked on the book cover. He ripped her bodice off."

Despite the air conditioner, I was hot. "Gabe, I don't think your mom wants me talking about this with you."

He leaned back in the booth, "I'm almost twelve. I know all about that stuff, I'm going to be in the seventh grade in the fall. Just because mom won't let me watch any sexy movies, doesn't mean I don't understand about it."

If there were a hell, I was risking damnation. But the smug look on his adorable face was too much. I leaned against the table, "Really? Like what?"

It was Gabe's turn to turn red. He stammered, "Well, um. A man, um, puts his, you know, thing, into a woman's, um, thing. That's how they have sex."

It was all I could do to not laugh at his description. "That seems so, ah, precise and scientific."

Gabe giggled. "I know the words. It's just mom would whip my butt if I used them around you."

It was my turn to smirk, "Best stay out of my books, they're full of language your mom wouldn't want you to say."

The smile remained on my nephew's face as he leaned forward. "You use words like, um, shit and fuck in your stories?"

Those words were scarcely out of his mouth when he bit his lip, as though trying to gauge my response. I just smirked and slid out of the booth and tousled his hair. The language he used reminded me he was his own person, developing his own identity. Parents are there to keep kids going the right direction. Grandparents are there to spoil them and give them presents. Young, single aunts, we're there to be a bad influence.

"Yeah. I use shit and fuck in my stories. Sometimes dick and pussy too."

The scandalized look on my nephew's face was priceless. I turned and said, "Come on, let's hit the road. We've got nine hours ahead of us."

The sign read another forty-five miles to Flagstaff. My stomach told me we'd be going through it just in time for an early dinner. The drive reminded me why I enjoyed heading north when leaving SoCal. Arizona was dry and dusty; all the more so along Interstate Forty. Gabe was quiet. He propped his laptop on his lap. The typing didn't bother me and he had been quiet, which let me do lots of thinking and praying.

I grew up lapsed Catholic and hadn't been inside a church for anything more than a wedding or funeral since high school. It's not that I didn't believe, just that I didn't think any of it mattered. But that didn't stop me from praying. Maybe prayer is like a lottery ticket. For the 99,999,999, it's a waste of time, but that one person with the lucky numbers, maybe God would hear that one prayer and answer it.

Not that I really believed, but I didn't want to lose my sister. I loved Gabe and if it came down to it, he could stay with me if something happened to Abby. But I knew I wasn't a proper role model for my young nephew. I mean, for God's sake, I write soft core porn for women. Not exactly conducive environment to raise a boy. All the same, he was more like me than his mom. Abby was the one with the feminine curves, although none of us Nelson women were going to win the Most Buxom contest. She had briefly flirted with a c-cup after giving birth to Gabe. It's not that I had a boyish figure, after all, my hips were wider than my shoulders, it's just I was lean, to the point of gauntness, and had been that way all my life. And Gabe's thin arms and legs, his narrow torso, those were traits we shared.

Even our hair was the same russet color, a genetic reminder of our Irish roots.

But whether he stayed for a couple of months, while his mom fought the “Big C” or whether he took up permanent residence on my sleeper sofa, bad influence or not, there was one thing I could teach him; something else he shared in common with me. Writing.

I lowered the volume on the radio, sending CCR fading into the background of road-noise, “So, tell me about that story contest you won at school.”

Gabe pulled his head up from the laptop. A smile danced across his preadolescent features and a spark lit in his eyes, as though pleased I bothered to ask. “It was about a boy who was picked on by bullies at school. One day, he discovered he had magical powers. And he used those powers to turn the things the bullies did to him and other students back on themselves.”

Tall for his age, the idea bullies would tease my nephew hadn’t crossed my mind. “Are there bullies at your school?”

Gabe shrugged, “There are bullies everywhere, Aunt Sydney.”

The maturity of his answer struck a chord in me. Even a dozen years before, in the same junior high, a couple of girls had tormented me almost every day for two years. It wasn’t that I had been a late bloomer, it’s just what tits nature had endowed on me and my sister had mostly gone to Abby. Even twelve years later, if I wanted to look even the slightest bit busty, I wore a padded bra.

“Yeah, I guess so. So, what’s your favorite scene in that story?”

His eyebrows furrowed in thought, “There’s this one time when a couple of bullies push the hero into a toilet stall, and they’re forcing his head into the toilet when he works his magic, and reverses their positions. Only their heads start out in the toilet. That was the first time when he stood up to them. But there are a couple of more times where he has to do similar things to the bullies to finally get them to stop.”

Something I learned later than Gabe seemed to have, for most of us, our stories come from our fantasies. “That’s a cool story. Turning the tables on

the bullies is an awesome idea. I know what those old kill-joys called teachers couldn't have approved of the idea, but you still won. That's something."

Gabe grinned. "The contest was voted on by all the students in the creative writing classes. The teacher took everyone's names off their stories, so that everyone would vote for their favorite story, not the one by the most popular student. And, well, a lot of kids get bullied. So, I won."

Hearing my nephew's enthusiasm was almost a window into my own youth. I didn't discover my passion for writing until high school, but I'll never forget the feeling as people raptly listened to my stories. More than that, though, getting him talking brightened both of our days. "What're you working on now?"

He glanced at his laptop, "Just an idea I've been playing with for a few days. It's a story about this kid who lives in a magical land. Kind of like England, but with magic."

I offered, "Like Harry Potter?"

He scowled, "That's der-, deriv-, a copy of stuff already done. More like Merlin and King Arthur. Anyway, he wants to become a knight because a fire-breathing dragon killed his parents. The dragon has everyone in the kingdom scared, so the king promises his daughter to whoever slays the dragon."

The idea intrigued me. The great thing about self-publishing is that you don't have to please some progressive moral busybody in New York or San Francisco with your own progressive ideas. If you write something appealing, people will read it, no matter how un-woke it may be. And the traditional gatekeepers would certainly think some young man slaying a dragon to win the hand of the princess was positively neanderthal. Of course, it sprang from the mind of an eleven-year-old boy, and they're hardly civilized; so, it's almost the same thing. More than that, I loved the idea for him.

"That sounds exciting, can you read to me the first chapter?"

If Gabe hadn't been buckled into the seatbelt, he would have floated away. A moment later, he read, "Jack snuck off and went fishing the day the dragon struck his parents' farm..."

Chapter 4

I pressed the key on my laptop, putting a period at the end of the sentence. Another chapter done. Leaning back against the leather seat at the dining table, I glanced outside. In the distance were the westernmost peaks of the San Juan Mountains. One pleasure of my nomadic lifestyle was a moment like this.

I saved my work and shut the laptop. Tomorrow, I would edit the completed chapter and begin work on the last chapter. This book had already been delayed by my experiment with *Give the Devil His Due*. This would be the fifth and final book in a particularly steamy billionaire romance series. I liked writing series; fans mostly seemed to enjoy binging every book in a series. Although there was a fall-off in readers between a fifth and sixth book. That's why the fifth book would wrap up all the loose ends.

A blanket was folded on the end of the sofa. We hadn't bothered unfolding the sleeper part of the sofa the previous night, and Gabe had slept on top of the leather cushions. His laptop rested atop the blanket. Gabe gave up writing by lunchtime and said he was going to explore the RV park. Getting out of the coach sounded like a good idea. This part of Colorado was arid and dry during the summer and when I opened the door, the dry heat slapped me in the face.

There were other diesel pushers near ours, but the way the park was set up, there were trees between each site, giving guests some measure of privacy. I expected to find Gabe wandering around the park. Imagine my surprise when I found him lying on a foldable lounge chair between the two slide-outs in nothing more than a pair of blue board shorts. He appeared to have fallen asleep while reading. My surprise was doubled when I saw the book he'd fallen asleep to. It was laying on his narrow chest, the front and back cover facing up. It was the book that launched my self-publishing career, *Can't Buy My Love*. Since its release five years ago, it sold over two-hundred-fifty thousand copies. The cover showed a young woman wearing an evening dress with a plunging neckline. Her breasts were all but revealed as they nearly spilled out of the dress. A man in a

tuxedo stood next to a Lear jet, his arm outstretched, as though begging her to come to him. I was proud of that cover.

But Abby would shit a brick if she knew I was letting her impressionably naïve eleven-year-old son read women's porn. I cleared my throat as I stood at the end of the lounge chair.

Gabe's eyes fluttered open. "You finished writing?"

I pointed to the book, "Your mom wouldn't approve of you reading that, Gabe."

His eyes shot open and instinctively, his hands shot to cover the book. A worried look crossed his face, "Come on, Aunt Sydney. It's just a book. I read lots of books. And you're a really good writer and I wanted to read your stuff."

My problem with him reading my smut had everything to do with my sister. Funny how our experiences form us. She was the one who got knocked up in high school. Yet, she treated Gabe like he was still a little child and not a near-teenager. Smothering is what it was. But she was my sister and even if I didn't share her views, I didn't want to disappoint her.

Unlike Abby, I didn't lose my virginity until college. Was the worst sex of my life. We were the same age, but he wasn't gentle or skilled. It hurt the entire time, and I was bruised and uncomfortable for a week. Since then, my sexual experiences extended no further than the sex toys secreted under my bed. Yet, I prided myself on the realistic sex scenes in my stories. Yeah, funny how different my sister and I are.

Trying to figure out how to explain to him about why it was bad for him to read my smut, I grabbed a second lounge chair from an open storage bin and set it up next to Gabe's. "What would your mom say about you reading my books?"

A spark of anger flashed in the boy's eyes, "She doesn't understand what it's like to want to write, Aunt Sydney. I've read books at the school library with stuff in them. People getting shot, people kissing and, um, doing stuff."

I doubted the school library had anything as explicit as what I wrote. I tried again, "But what about your mom?"

He glared at me, "She treats me like a little kid, Aunt Sydney. I'm not. I'm almost twelve. I'm as big as some of the eighth graders and I know what they talk about when no teachers are around."

My resistance crumbled. Gabe wasn't my child; just my nephew. But I found myself agreeing with him. He had more emotional maturity than some adults I knew. As much as I loved my sister, I also wanted to show Gabe I trusted him. And one way was to get off his back about reading my books. Writing under a pen-name, the only feedback I got were the piles of reviews on Amazon. My mom never approved of my writing career and Abby treated it as some guilty pleasure. She probably went to confession after reading each book. If Gabe wanted to read the books, maybe I could finally have someone with whom I could share my passion.

I raised my hands, "I surrender." Then, as I thought about some of the explicit scenes in *Can't Buy My Love*, I added, "You might want to skip some of the scenes. They get really mushy."

A splash of crimson rose on Gabe's cheeks, "Yeah. I-, I noticed."

Unconsciously, he reached down and adjusted his shorts. For a split second, I thought I saw a bulge pushing against the fabric between his legs. I tore my eyes away from his midsection, "I warned you."

The flush in my nephew's skin didn't go away, but he smiled, "Y-, yeah. But I'm old enough to read stuff like that now."

It would be wildly inappropriate, but I wanted to ask him what he thought of it. But no sooner had the thought materialized that I pushed it away. This was my nephew I was thinking about, for God's sake.

I pushed the back of my lounge chair back and closed my eyes, pretending to sleep. After a few minutes, Gabe said, "Aunt Sydney, does a woman really like it when a man, um, forces her to do stuff, um, like in this story?"

After more than fifty books, and countless steamy sex scenes, they ran together in my mind. But I would never forget that first sex scene I wrote. Rupert, my first billionaire bad boy, had forced himself onto Elizabeth, my

first heroine. For reasons I still don't understand, there's an enormous market for stories with dubious consent in them, and *Can't Buy My Love* tapped into that market in a way nothing since had done. But fiction wasn't fact.

I bit my lip, trying to figure out how to explain this in a way Abby would approve of. Not for the first time had I wished she had already had the talk with him. "There's stuff that happens in a story, Gabe, that touches our fantasies. Kind of like when your character in your story turned his magic on the bullies. Even though it's fiction and fun to think about, it probably wouldn't be near as fun in real life."

Gabe pursed his lips, "But there's no magic in real life. The bullies keep on bullying."

I dipped my head, "It sucks when they do. I guess it wasn't the best example. There are some women who like it when a man..."

The word failed me. There wasn't a way to explain this to Gabe that would carry the stamp of Abby's approval. I sighed and decided it's easier to be me instead of trying to toe my sister's line. Abby might kill me, but Gabe deserved a real answer, "... does things to control he. Even forces himself on her."

Gabe sat up straighter, "L-, like um, doing stuff together?"

Damn you, Abby, I thought. There was no getting around the fact that Gabe's education had been sadly lacking. I snorted, "You mean sex?"

He absentmindedly adjusted his shorts as the blush spread down his neck, "Yeah."

Maybe I'll burn in hell, but Gabe would learn about the birds and the bees from his Aunt Sydney, regardless of what my sister had planned. "Okay, sweetie, you're almost twelve. When I was your age, I called things what they were. Stuff usually has a name. Sex, penis, vagina, those are all nouns that describe stuff. You've got the makings of a talented writer, Gabe. So, let's call stuff by its name. You're not going to embarrass me if you say penis or dick, vagina or pussy, sex or fuck. We're writers and sometimes we make use of all of them. Just don't call them 'stuff' anymore. Okay?"

Maybe that was a mistake. Gabe giggled as he stared at me. When he stopped laughing, he said, "Okay, Aunt Sydney. So, in your story when Rupert, um, fucked Elizabeth, he forced her."

Now that the gloves were off, I said, "Lots of women fantasize about a powerful man forcing them to have sex. But that's just a fantasy for nearly all women. In the real world, that's not what they really want. They want agency."

Gabe cocked his head at how I used the word. He replied, "Agency? Like the Agents of SHIELD?"

I chuckled at his understanding, "Not quite. To have agency is to be in control of your life, able to do the things that are important to you."

Recognition flared to life in his eyes, "Oh. I get it. Kids don't have any agency, because we can't control our lives."

I reached over and patted his bare knee, "That's a good example of it. Adults, both men and women, want to be in control of our own lives and that means how we have sex. We might fantasize about someone forcing sex onto us, but would never want that in real life. We want it to be with someone we love, or at least with someone we like."

I had opened a whole new world for my nephew, and watched the gears in his mind spin, absorbing our conversation with growing awareness. "I guess that's why mom didn't have many second or third dates."

Abby never talked to me about her love life. The wild teen had become a bit of a prude in her twenties, as far as I was concerned. I said, "It could be more complicated than just about sex, Gabe. She may have thought none of those guys would have been a good father figure to you. Without asking her, we'll probably not know."

The light dimmed in his eyes, "Even if she wasn't really sick, I don't think I could ever ask her about that. You understand me and it's easier to talk about this stuff-, um, about sex with you."

I don't know why the praise from a nearly twelve-year-old made me feel so good, but it did. I grinned at him, "I'm glad. You're growing up and there ought to be someone you can talk to, and I'm glad I'm that person for you."

He smiled, picking up the book to continue reading it, "Me too."

We fell into silence; Gabe reading my smutty first novel and me closing my eyes and hoping I could figure out how to tell my sister she doesn't need to worry with the birds and the bees anymore. After a bit, he said, "Aunt Sydney, I know Mom never brought any men home, but what about you? Why don't you have a boyfriend?"

My stomach lurched; had I just unleashed Pandora's box? I opened my eyes, "That's a story for another time, Gabe. I think I'm going to head inside and start preparing dinner."

Chapter 5

“Dude!” I stared across the table at Gabe. I had no idea how messy an eater he was when spaghetti was on the table. Marinara streaked down his chest, where noodles now devoured, had landed. Even his chin was smeared in red. “You look like an extra in the Walking Dead, covered in blood.”

He giggled before stabbing another forkful of pasta into his mouth. Once Gabe swallowed the mouthful, he said, “Spaghetti’s my favorite. Mom fixed this at least once a week.”

I gave him a baleful stare, “Must’ve been when she needed you to take a shower. You’re a mess, you know.”

It didn’t help he looked so adorably cute, still in just his shorts. I took a napkin and rubbed at a drip of red on his bare, pale chest. He blushed as I scrubbed at the sauce. Finally, I licked my thumb and rubbed it directly on the stain until only pink skin remained. The flush on Gabe’s cheeks matched the heat on my face as I returned my attention to my plate.

While my stomach fluttered at the touch. Gabe glanced at his plate, then gave me a silly grin before shoveling more pasta into his gaping maw.

Afterwards, I showed him how to load the RV’s pint-sized dishwasher before finally tossing my arm around his bare shoulders, “Alright, Mr. Messy-eater, tonight you get a shower. Come on.”

Since leaving his mom’s, Gabe hadn’t come into my bedroom except once to grab a change of clothes. When I caught a flush on his cheeks as I guided him between the bed and the TV and cabinets, I wondered about how strict my sister had been about privacy issues.

“Come on through, Gabe. It’s not like you haven’t seen your mom’s bedroom or bathroom before. Right?”

He stopped at the doorway to the bathroom and glanced between the two spaces, “Mom made me knock before going into her bedroom. But the reason she rented our house was so I would have my own bathroom.”

More like so Abby could have her privacy. I shook my head and pulled a clean towel from a closet and tossed it to Gabe, "Well, that's not going to work around here, is it?"

More rose on his adorable cheeks as he shook his head, "There's only one shower."

I smirked, "That wouldn't work here. Otherwise, you'd smell like shit."

He giggled at my casual use of profanity. I continued, "It's just the two of us for the next couple of months, sharing a small space. There's not much room for privacy, is there?"

Gabe shook his head and glanced back into my bedroom, no doubt wondering how he was supposed to take a shower in full view of my room.

I stepped around him and pulled out a sliding door a few inches, which was built into the wall between the bedroom and the bathroom, "Here's a pocket door separating this bathroom from the bedroom. That's about the best we can do for respecting each other's privacy."

The wheels behind Gabe's eyes turned while his features remained guarded, "That's cool. Mom was always going on about respecting her privacy. Aunt Sydney, how much, um, privacy do you want?"

I thought I was clear. But the look on the boy's face said I hadn't. "Abby and I aren't the same person, Gabe. I don't know why she makes a big deal out of it. After all, we're family, and I want us to be comfortable around each other, and I don't really want to get worked up about a bunch of rules around privacy. Do you?"

He chewed on his lower lip as he shook his head, "N-, not really. They're her rules. She doesn't care that I sleep in my underwear; just that I respect her privacy and, um, her rules."

How the hell did Abby expect me to keep all her rules? I didn't want to spend the next couple of months walking around my nephew on pins and needles. Sure, we deserved enough privacy to bathe in privacy. But the rest of it seemed like a lot of trouble when we live in such close quarters. I pulled the pocket door closed. The bathroom was spacious for an RV, but

we were inside each other's personal space. I replied, "When this door is closed, I promise I'll leave you alone in here. I expect the same courtesy."

I slid the door open and gave Gabe more space, "On this side of the bathroom door, there's not much privacy. Wear what you want to bed. I don't care if you wear underwear or sleep naked. Before you moved in, that's what I did."

Gabe's eyes grew round, "You slept naked?"

I realized I'd said more than I intended, "I slept in my underwear."

I don't know why it bothered me, but that wasn't entirely the truth and I didn't want to lie to Gabe, even if it was a little white lie. I added, "Well, usually. Although a few times I slept in the buff."

Gabe draped the towel over the top of the shower door, "But you've slept in pajamas since you picked me up. Why?"

Aside from a pair of pajama shorts that barely covered my upper thighs, I'd been wearing t-shirts. Before that, it was panties and maybe a cami. Sometimes, just panties. That's one of the few perks of small-breasted women. The girls don't get in the way if they're uncovered. "Why? I wasn't sure how you'd react to seeing your aunt in her underwear."

My stomach fluttered at the way the red flooded back into Gabe's cheeks; there was something incredibly cute about it. He couldn't look me in the eye when he said, "It's, uh, okay. You're super cool, so whatever is fine with me."

I wanted to lean into him and plant a kiss on his rosy red cheek. Instead, I moved back into the bedroom and pulled the pocket door closed and let Gabe have his privacy. Before I could get comfortable, his unbroken voice came through the door, "Aunt Sydney! I can't get the water to flow. It's making a weird noise."

Damn. I hadn't considered all the buttons and knobs would confuse him. I hadn't even gotten comfortable on the bed when I jumped off and came over to the packet door, "There's a lever where you'd expect to find a knob. You see it?"

“Yeah. I tried it. That’s when the pipe started shaking. It’s not gonna break, is it?”

I couldn’t quite envision the problem, but didn’t want to pay to get something fixed if he broke it. “You need help?”

There was a long pause. His voice warbled, “Yeah.”

Sliding the door open, I went to the shower door. Gabe faced the outer wall, away from my prying eyes, but still giving me a perfect look at his boney rump. Skinny like me, he didn’t have enough meat back there to have a bubble butt, but to see him like that made the fluttering return in my stomach. I opened the door and realized my mistake. The last time I took a shower, when I shaved my legs, I hit a button that cut the flow of water. It was a water saving feature. I reached in and pushed the button.

Gabe squawked as water from the rainfall showerhead cascaded over him. He half-turned to adjust the hot/cold knob and in that moment, between pressing the button and closing the door, I glimpsed his midsection. It was but a fraction of a second. But enough to see his penis hanging down in front of a small ballsack. It was over too quickly to determine his size. But long enough to stir my curiosity and send the fluttering in my stomach into overdrive.

I settled back onto my bed and turned on the TV, eager to push that image from my mind. I found a mood station playing the best of pop music. I liked easy listening when I worked in bed. Evenings were for email. I had a few fan emails, which I ignored, focusing my attention on the latest art from my cover artist. The plot was about a hedge fund manager who used his wealth to seduce the heroine. The picture showed the two making out on a desk. Behind the desk was a window with a stylized New York skyline. The office was pirate themed to go with the bad boy image of a corporate raider.

I fired off an email to the artist, including the back matter I wanted to include on the book’s back cover. She did excellent work and her turnaround time made her a hit with other romance authors. If past experience was anything to go by, I’d have the finished cover before my editor gave me her final edits.

The water cut off, and Gabe moved around in the bathroom. I could imagine him, towel wrapped around his narrow waist, standing in front of the foggy mirror over the sink to comb his hair.

I swore under my breath; what the hell was going on with me, having sensual thoughts of my nephew? How weird was that? Gabe looked nothing like my college boyfriend, and neither of them looked anything like the gorgeous hunks in my novels. My favorite image of a hunk was a smooth chested man with wide shoulders and narrow hips, a thick cock and closely trimmed pubes. In my fantasies, I liked the idea of him taking me and having his way with me. Of course, in real life, that broke down to me using a vibrator while pinching my nipples to get me off.

The door rattled and Gabe stuck his head through the opening. An embarrassed smile creased his face, "I, um, forgot anything to change into, Aunt Sydney."

Thoughts of sexy hunks evaporated, I pointed to the drawers where he'd stored his clothes, "Go ahead, sweetie. Unless you want me to get them for you."

His face turned beat red and I couldn't help wondering what got into him. What's the big deal about going across my bedroom with a towel wrapped around his waist?

"Um, okay. But don't stare."

With that, he slid the pocket door wide. He had draped the towel across the door of the shower. And Gabe was naked. Involuntarily, I stared at my nephew for those few seconds before his hands cupped his genitals. My earlier rushed assessment was right. He was smooth, like a little boy. His penis was long enough to hang loosely in front of a ballsack nestled tightly against his pelvis. The last memories I had of Gabe naked were when he was still a little kid, maybe six or seven. Back then, his penis had been no bigger than a macaroni noodle. Now, with enough time to see it properly, I figured it to three flaccid inches.

He wasted no time hurrying across the room. He pulled a drawer out and retrieved a pair of white briefs. When Gabe moved to pull the fresh

underwear up, the reflection on the TV screen gave me another shot at his preadolescent cock. My stomach was a riot of fluttering butterflies by the time his waistband snapped into place.

He sent a baleful glance my way, "You looked, Aunt Sydney."

The whole thing seemed absurd. I pushed my feelings away and laughed, "Oh, sweetie, I thought you were going to come out with the towel wrapped around your waist. Why didn't you?"

Gabe's eyes bugged at that. "I-, I didn't think about that. Gosh, you must think I'm stupid."

I rolled to the edge of the bed and grabbed his hand, "Not at all. I guess I figured you wanted to see if I was serious about the whole naked thing."

He smiled through his blush, "Yeah, right. I'm an idiot."

I hated to see him beat himself up over something so trivial. "No, Gabe. That was really brave of you."

The doubt in his eyes was more than I could stand. No nephew of mine, especially one so cute, should feel like that. I ratcheted up compliment, "In fact, you've got a very nice body and you should be proud of it."

He squeaked, "Really?"

I did then what I'd thought about doing in the bathroom. I stood and gave him a kiss on his blushing cheek. "Yep. Now, go on and get ready for bed. It's my turn for my shower."

The lights were out up front by the time I closed the pocket door and undressed for my shower. My emotions were messed up. I told myself whatever I needed to convince myself that little kiss on Gabe's cheek was Aunt-like. But my unsettled stomach told a different story. I hadn't had nerves like this since college and that horrible night with Kyle.

I grabbed a clean towel from the closet and stepped into the shower and turned the water on. I took some bodywash and a loofa and was soon scrubbing breasts that could only charitably be called perky. They needed more breast tissue to rise to the level of perky. Still, my tits, such as they were, were what nature endowed me with. It wasn't long before I flicked

and rolled my nipples to an erect hardness. They were rubbery under my thumb and forefinger and around the same size as an eraser on the end of a pencil.

Like a thousand times before, I imagined being held by some romanticized version of Blackbeard. He held me close to his bare chest before ripping off my bodice. It was my fantasy, so my tits were fuller, truly perky in their perfection. And the object of Blackbeard's hands. It wasn't me squeezing my tits, but Blackbeard. It was my fantasy, so I relished how this idealized perfect man forced himself on me.

I sat on the tile bench and slid my finger into my slit, pushing through my labia. Instead of my finger, I imagined it was Blackbeard's enormous cock rubbing against my clit. Both my hands were working me toward an orgasm. It had been too long since my last release. One hand rubbed against the stubble of my shorn bush while flicking my clit. The other, my index finger pushed deep into my pussy.

I lost myself in the tremors working their way through my body. I pulled my index finger out and slowed the massage against my clit with the other. I loved to imagine Blackbeard whispering about the abuse he wanted to inflict on me.

Both hands sped up again, and I closed my eyes. I pretended to be limp, held in his powerful, calloused hands. The thrumming of my body told me I was closing in on an orgasm and I moved my fingers faster still. I bit my lower lip as I felt a moan come up my throat. I couldn't let Gabe hear.

Just his name was enough. Another spasm clenched my pussy, trapping my index finger inside. Blackbeard faded into the mist of my mind. In his place was Gabe, holding me close, rubbing his cock along the lips of my wet pussy, as another orgasm shook me. My eyes flew open even as I shook in the throes of another, more powerful orgasm. I was alone in the shower. Juices flowed from between my legs, washed away by the waterfall showerhead.

This was crazy. No, I was going crazy. I didn't have feelings for Gabe. For God's sake, he's my nephew. Sure, I loved him. But not like what I felt a moment before in the shower. No fucking way.

When I finished with my shower, I dried off. Whatever just happened was nothing. It couldn't be anything. I might write about women who enjoyed the rough treatment dished out by their bad boy billionaires, but that was pure fiction. There was no reality where I could possibly do anything sexual with Gabe.

I wrapped the towel around my chest as I muttered below my breath, "Get a grip, girl. You're just feeling compassion for what Gabe's going through. That's it, nothing more. Now, stop talking to yourself and get to bed."

The RV was dark when I opened the pocket door and left the bathroom. I had convinced myself the lapse was just momentary. It meant nothing. I grabbed a change of underwear and a pink cami and in the darkness, let the towel fall away. That I felt a little naughty standing beside my bed naked had nothing to do with Gabe. That's what I told myself.

The moment passed. I put my underwear and cami on and crawled under the covers. My mind was a riot of conflict. It didn't mean a thing. I was a long time falling asleep.

Chapter 6

It was a blessing and a curse; I decided as I tore my eyes away from the window over the dining table. I could lose myself, looking at the distant mountains. And the problem was, I had a deadline, even if it was self-imposed.

Focus, I told myself, as I returned to the red and yellow highlights from my editor. Time passes as I reviewed the suggested changes and I lost myself, accepting or rejecting each recommendation with practiced speed. My focus was laser-like, I barely felt Gabe's feet against my hip as he sat at one end of the sofa, with his legs stretched toward me, his laptop on his upper legs.

Over the past week, we had settled into a routine of writing during the morning. For me, writing and editing are part and parcel of the same creative process. Even though I ferociously edited my work, I still needed a skilled set of eyes to review and correct my work, which was why I sat on the sofa, going through the edits one last time. Gabe was blossoming as a writer. Already he was incorporating some tricks I'd passed on to him into his story. And just like me, he thought nothing of losing himself into his creative process for hours at a time.

We were more comfortable around each other too, after more than a week at the RV camp outside of Mesa Verde. I finished the final edit and hit the save button. I glanced over at him. He was wearing a pair of white shorts. Unlike the board shorts he seemed to favor, these were shorter, ending a few inches above his knees. When hanging around the RV, that was his preferred outfit. He was still in that state of childhood before puberty when boys often lack self-awareness of their bodies.

But that didn't extend to me. This morning, I awoke to him traipsing through my bedroom in nothing but his underwear, on his way to take a shower. I could hear the shower running as I finally talked myself into getting up, too. As was my habit, I needed a cup of coffee to start my day, so I got moving and brewed a cup in my Keurig before returning to my bed to enjoy the rich, nutty flavor of my favorite blend. For as long as I've had the RV, this was a favorite tradition, drinking coffee in bed in whatever I'd

slept in. This morning that meant a pair of mauve panties and a purple cami with spaghetti straps. It was my favorite cami, loose fitting, and cropped to end a few inches above my belly button.

Two sips into my coffee, the pocket door slid open. I glanced toward Gabe. Like the couple of other times he took a shower, he wore nothing. Freed from the strict confines Abby placed on him, Gabe found something liberating in going from the shower to the drawers naked. This time, though, he seemed to freeze in place as we stared at each other.

A few heartbeats passed before his instincts kicked in and his hands flew over his genitals. He went around the end of the bed to his drawers and covered his nakedness.

Even then, his eyes kept darting toward me. Finally, I said, "Yes, Gabe?"

He looked away, blushing, "I-, um, I thought you'd be asleep."

I slept under a bedspread. I felt a bit of heat in my cheeks then. "You thought I'd still be asleep?"

He nodded.

I took another sip of coffee, "Sorry to disappoint you, Gabe."

The way the crimson flushed through his face, along his ears and down his neck was something that drew me in. He cut another look at me, "That's not it, Aunt Sydney. It's... you're..."

He faltered, but he didn't look away. I wasn't certain what was going through his mind, but knowing my sister, I offered, "You've never seen a woman in her underwear until this week?"

He bobbed his head.

The warmth in my face traveled through my body as I thought about what it meant to him to see a woman in just her underwear. Gabe was going on twelve. And even though puberty hadn't laid its cruel mark on him yet, what boy wasn't curious about women at his age?

I doubt I was going to win best sister award with Abby. I said, "Well, by the end of the summer, you'll probably have seen me in my underwear so

much, you'll be telling me to cover myself up."

His flush deepened, and he deadpanned, "Yeah, right."

I felt some heat in my body as I blinked away the memory. I looked at the story on the screen. It was as complete as it would ever get, so I closed the file. Even though I have done it more than fifty times before, there was something heady about uploading a new story to the Kindle store.

"Hey, Gabe, my latest novel is ready for me to publish to Kindle. You want to see how it's done?"

The boy looked up from his screen, "Really? Cool"

He closed his laptop and slid over, leaning against me. My arm tingled where we touched. Ignoring it, I said, "I'm on the Kindle Direct Publishing screen. All these files are my existing books."

He pointed to the top of the screen, "Is that where you'll add the new one?"

My cursor slid over the space and I clicked on it, taking me to another screen, "Yep. Each book has a bunch of metadata that I use so that people who are searching for romance books will see my books."

Gabe glanced at me, "What's metadata?"

I kept filling in the blanks, "It's just a fancy way to say data about data. For instance, because the billionaire is a bit of a pirate, I'll actually assign the word pirate to the metadata."

"Why? Isn't he like a Wall Street guy?"

I cocked an eyebrow at him, "And those guys aren't a bunch of pirates."

He chuckled, "Okay. I guess so."

After more typing, I said, "Okay, so I've told the web portal that this is the fifth book in this series, that way people can see it's not a stand-alone book. I've also assigned the appropriate genres for the book as well as the metadata terms. Next, we're going to upload the file."

I searched my laptop's directory and clicked to start the upload. While the hourglass spun in the middle of the screen, I said, "Depending on the size of the book, it can take either a couple of minutes or a lot longer. My books tend to be fifty, sixty, maybe seventy thousand words. My readers love short books with lots of steamy action."

Gabe giggled, "Sexy stuff, you mean."

I shrugged, "Middle-aged women love this stuff. It sells."

Gabe giggled some more. The spinning hourglass went away. I pointed to the screen, "Sometimes, when there are formatting issues, there will be alerts here. Luckily, I've done this a few times, so we're ready for the next page, where it's time to upload the book's cover."

The website took a while longer to upload the image file and when it did, it was displayed in all its sensuous glory. The billionaire's placement covered up the heroine's naked body. There was a game we writers played with Amazon's censors, to see just how much skin we could get away with. This was probably as close to the edge as I could get away with. I didn't want to pay my artist to redesign the cover; that was expensive.

Still leaning against me, Gabe said, "That's sexy. You can't tell if they're doing stuff, but they're definitely about to."

I reached over and pinched his side, "Stuff?"

More giggles, "You can't tell if they're having sex."

It was my turn to laugh. While I wanted Abby to make a full recovery, she wouldn't get back the same shy, clueless boy she gave me. "Right. Now that we've uploaded the book and the cover art, we're ready to download a proof of the book."

Every step seemed to take forever. It probably wasn't helped by the less than perfect speed of the camp's Wi-Fi network. While I waited, I became more aware of Gabe's body leaning against mine. His auburn hair smells of strawberries. Just like mine. With a couple of minutes left to wait, I reached around with my right arm and drew him against my side. "You smell like strawberries, Gabe. Next time we hit a grocery store, you want me to buy you a different shampoo?"

Even though I wore a halter top, the material was thin and I could feel the heat from the skin over his ribs. He leaned his head against my shoulder, "If you want. But I kinda like it. It smells like you."

My heart raced at the thought he enjoyed my smell. In that moment, while we waited for the download, it was easy to forget Gabe was my still-eleven-year-old nephew. It wasn't like having a little kid leaning against you. No, when he leaned against me, his size matched my own. Without thinking too much, I pulled his shoulder, bringing him into a half-hug, "That's sweet of you, Gabe."

It was only when he absentmindedly adjusted his shorts that I realized I wasn't the only one who might be enjoying this closeness more than I should. Thankfully, before I could figure out what to do about this closeness, the screen refreshed and the proof was ready.

We spent the next thirty minutes going through the proof. I pointed out to him the format for the copyright material at the front of the book. I also showed him how the first page of each chapter differed from the rest of the pages because readers expected a break in the formatting. After finishing the review, I felt pleased with the book's formatting, "I think it's ready, Gabe. Now the fun part. It's time to hit the publish button"

I navigated back to the first page, where all the previous books were listed. Now the new book looked like all the others, save for the publish button on the right-hand side. I moved the laptop between us, "Go ahead, and klick on the publish button, sweetie, and book number fifty-six will go live."

A grin split his face, "Really?"

I nodded. He reached over and put his hand on the tracker pad and pressed it. A moment later, the screen refreshed and the publish button disappeared and the book was finished. The elation I felt was better than sex. A thrill shot through me, like a dopamine rush, and I reached both arms around Gabe and hugged him tight. "I live for moments like this."

Then, buoyed by the emotional high, I kissed him on the cheek again. Somewhere in the back of my mind, a warning bell went off. The thunder

in my heart, the furious fluttering in my stomach, the warmth washing over me. At some primordial level, I needed this.

A thrill shot through me when Gabe reached around my back with his left arm and around my front with his right, and hugged me back. I lost myself for a moment in the embrace. He was Blackbeard, holding me close. Were it not for the laptop between us, I would have melted into his hug.

I followed suit when he released me from the hug. The familiar crimson in his cheeks let me hear the warning bell going off in my mind's furthest recesses. I took the laptop and sat up, "Sorry, sweetie, I get emotional when I release a new book."

A smile that reached his golden-brown eyes crossed Gabe's scarlet features, "It's okay. I like your hugs. Maybe when I finish a real book, you can hit the publish button and I can give you lots of hugs too."

I powered down the computer. Those warnings in the back of my mind questioned my motives for hugging Gabe the way I had. Was I a bad influence on him? In the ten days since picking him up from Abby, I'd introduced him to smutty bodice rippers and conditioned him to coming out of the shower nude. None of those were behaviors Abby would have wanted.

I felt bad as we prepared sandwiches for lunch. Abby was fighting for her life and I was corrupting her little angel. Gabe joined me in the kitchen, fetching a tomato from the fridge. When he stood beside me, slicing the tomato, he stood even with me. And it was easy to forget we were related, and I was supposed to be the adult.

We ate lunch on the lounge chairs and after he finished, Gabe said, "It's been a couple of days since Mom called. Do you think she'd mind if we called her?"

I took the paper plate from him and handed him my cellphone, "No, I'm sure she'd love to hear your voice."

He had the phone on speaker as it dialed. After a few rings, I heard a click followed by my sister's sleepy voice, "Hello?"

Gabe practically squealed, "Mom!"

“Hi baby. You sound good. Is your Aunt Sydney taking care of you?”

“Yeah. She’s helping me to be a better writer, like her.”

I came back and sat next to Gabe on his lounge chair. Abby chuckled, “God help us all. Another romance writer in the family.”

Gabe giggled, “No way. I’m still writing about the guy who’s gonna slay the dragon.”

“That’s good sweetie. You minding your aunt and staying out of her way?”

Gabe gave me a furtive grin, “It’s an RV, Mom. There’s not a lot of space to stay out of Aunt Sydney’s way. But she hasn’t threatened to kill me more than once a day.”

I smacked his bare arm, “Lies, Sis. Gabe’s a pleasure to have around. You’ve raised a very nice young man.”

Gabe’s grin grew wider at the mention of him being a young man. Abby said, “That’s nice of you to say, Syd. It’s hard to remember he’s not a little kid anymore.”

Gabe gave a mock glare at the phone, “It’s not my fault I grew so fast over the past year.” Then, seeking to change the subject, he said, “Aunt Sydney just published another book, Mom. I even helped her by pushing the publish button on the website. It was cool!”

All the steps that went into publishing didn’t strike me as “cool.” It was hard work, but also rewarding.

Despite the exhaustion I heard in Abby’s voice, there was also humor, “Oh, heavens. Syd, did you cover my impressionable son’s eyes? I’ve seen the covers you put on your books. You show him stuff like that and he’ll go blind.”

I grinned at my sister’s ribald banter. I think the comment flew over Gabe’s head; I wasn’t eager to explain old wives’ tales about why a boy might go blind after reading women’s soft-core porn. She seemed mellower than I remember. Maybe when facing one’s mortality, priorities change. “I don’t think he’s at any risk of that, sis. How goes the treatments?”

There was a sigh, “Well enough. I’m tired all the time. The chemo has me throwing up a lot and I’m definitely going to take you up on that offer to get a wig when I’m done with this.”

I let Gabe and Abby talk for a bit. Eventually, she said, “Gabe, can you hand the phone to your aunt? I’d like to visit with her before I fall asleep.”

I took the phone off speaker and went around the front of the RV, “What’s on your mind, sis?”

She said, “The cancer is farther along than I expected, Syd.”

For the past ten days, I’d been expecting this. Maybe that’s why it didn’t hit me harder. “You know you can’t keep this from Gabe. He’s not a little boy anymore, Abby.”

Another painful sigh, “You’re right, Syd. It’s just not easy to see how he’s growing up. You’ve got a better handle on it than I ever did. And you’re just his aunt.”

Guilt washed over me. She had no idea how I was losing the battle to treat him like a little boy instead of the man he would eventually become. I could never admit to the confounding feelings he stirred inside me, but I still tried to speak truthfully, “He’s almost a teenager, sis. I try to treat him a like a friend and you know what? Most of the time, he acts like one.”

Her laughter was like tearing brittle paper, “The corrupting influence of my bad-girl sister, the soft-core porn writer.” She broke into a coughing fit. Her breath was ragged when she continued, “Seriously, I know I sheltered Gabe; treated him like a little kid, even when I should have trusted him with more. One thing’s for sure, you won’t repeat my mistakes.”

“Hey now, Abby,” I said more sharply than I intended, “you’re going to beat cancer and by the time school starts up in the fall, Gabe will be back home with you.”

I never put more passion into words I believed less. More raspy laughter greeted me, “That’s sweet, Sis. And God knows, I wish it were true. Maybe you’ll have better luck treating him like a friend than a parent. But I still feel so guilty abandoning him.”

My eyes stung as I blinked away a tear, "Don't, Abby. If anyone can beat this, you can." I choked back a sob, before continuing, "If not, Gabe will always have a place with me, I promise."

She told me she would call me in a few days and then she hung up. As I brushed away a tear, a familiar voice said, "She's dying."

Gabe stood by the door of the RV, staring at me. It wasn't in me to hide the truth from Gabe. He deserved better than that. I shrugged, "I really hope not, sweetie. But it doesn't look good for your mom."

He came over next to me and leaned against the chrome on the front of the motorcoach, "I knew she was ill, even before she called you. After watching Grandma get sick last year, I worried the same thing was happening to Mom."

I wanted to comfort Gabe; to tell him it was going to be okay. The problem was, his mom, my sister, was dying. Finally, I slid my arm around his shoulders and pulled him against my side. He leaned his head on my shoulder. I finally managed to say, "I hope she tells you herself, Gabe. But this is incredibly hard for your mom. I can't imagine what she's going through."

He heaved the saddest sigh I've ever heard from him, "I know. Did you really mean what you said about treating me like a friend instead of a little kid? That wasn't something you were just telling Mom because the two of you are so different?"

I hugged him to my side, "Hell no. I'm an absolutely shitty aunt, if you haven't already figured that out. Going around, flashing you in my panties and letting you go about naked. No self-respecting aunt would do that. But a friend who loves you more than anything else in the world... she might."

Gabe shocked me in that moment, he turned his head and kissed me on the cheek, "I love you too, Aunt Sydney. I'm glad you're my friend too."

Chapter 7

“How many sales so far?” Gabe asked as he put a pan into the dishwasher.

The laptop was open and on the dining table. I wagged a soapy finger at him from where I scrubbed a pot we’d used to cook some veggies in, “You’ve gotta give it some time, Gabe. The novel’s been live for less than four hours.”

He went around to the laptop, wiping his damp hands on his shorts, “Can I hit the refresh button?”

I set the rinsed pot on the counter, “If you want, then come back in here and finish loading.”

A moment later, he exclaimed, “Holy shit! You’ve already sold a hundred copies of the new book!”

I grabbed a hand towel and went and stood next to him. He was right. But this wasn’t my first rodeo. The first thirty days were critical to most books’ success. Rarely would they sell more books than right out of the gate. My problem was, book four in the series had only sold about eight-thousand copies since its release about six weeks ago. Book 5 would probably only sell six thousand copies over the same amount of time. The only saving grace is it was time to take on a new series and the only thing I had available was Give the Devil His Due, which my agent was convinced would kill my career.

I tousled his hair, “Not too bad. But I’m only as good as my last book.”

Once the dishwasher started, I said, “We’ve got a bit of light still left. Want to go lounge in the chairs and read for a bit?”

Gabe looked out the window, “Dunno. What about the pool? The sign says it’s open until ten.”

That gave us plenty of time. “I guess so. Go on and get changed.”

When we had stopped in town on our way to Mesa Verde, we went into a Walmart and picked him up some clothes. One of which was a swimsuit.

The way Gabe hurried to the bedroom and rooted around in the drawers told me he was ready to try out the pool.

He bolted into the bathroom area and closed the pocket door, and I could almost hear clothing flying about as he changed. I found my swimsuit in another drawer and placed the two pieces on the bed. I had bought the swimsuit last year. It had been on a lark after finishing an earlier book series. At that time, I had been fantasizing about my previous bad boy billionaire and had impulsively bought the purple string bikini. I used it a few times in my fantasies before moving on to the next fantasy. Since then, the swimsuit remained in the drawer. Was it too revealing to wear to the pool with Gabe? I wasn't sure.

The door slid open, and Gabe appeared. The swimsuit wasn't those horrid board-shorts that were only slightly less long than pants. No, he wore an honest-to-God swimsuit. The blue and red striped shorts ended about halfway above his knees. I hadn't noticed until now, but going around wearing just shorts, the boy was developing a nice tan across his shoulders and stomach.

He came over and looked at my swimsuit, "Is that yours?"

"I bought it last year. I'm not sure about it."

His eyes flitted between the swimsuit and my body, "Why not? I think you'd look nice in it."

Seeing the look in Gabe's eyes was enough, "Okay. Give me a moment and we can go."

The door safely closed behind me, I stripped down. I tied the bottoms into place and admired myself in the mirror. Really, it was just to wish my body had more definition to it. I didn't think skinny was sexy. The cups on the top were slightly larger than my breasts. If I had it to do over, I would have bought a top with padded breasts. The material was supposed to stretch a bit, make other women jealous and men take notice. Now, I was hoping we would have the pool to ourselves.

I sighed as I tore my eyes away from the reflection staring back at me and opened the door. Gabe sat on the end of my bed, lying back with his hands

folded under his head, waiting. When he turned, I could feel his eyes taking in the skimpy suit. Not content to give him the first word, I said, "Still think it looks nice on my boney bod?"

He sat up, not taking his eyes off me, "Y-, yeah. You look really pretty."

I felt myself smiling. I didn't get compliments about my body very often. I'd take all the compliments Gabe sent my way. "Okay. You look pretty handsome in your swimsuit, too. So, let's grab a towel and head over."

The pool was near the front of the park and surrounded by a wooden privacy fence. The sign on the gate said, "No children under 13 unless accompanied by an adult. No lifeguard on duty, swim at your own risk."

The pool area was empty, although there were lounge chairs scattered around the pool, enough for a dozen sunbathers. At either end of the pool area, a couple of security cameras were set up to cover the pool area. I ignored all that and dipped a toe in the crystal-clear water. It was almost warm after a whole day under the summer sun.

Gabe pulled his shoes off and came over and sat on the ledge, "When I was in the campgrounds office, the cameras weren't working."

I nudged his back, sending him into the water with a splash. When he came up, sputtering water, I said, "We don't want you to drown. Nobody would know who to blame."

He swam across the pool while I slid into the relaxing water. All the stress of the day ebbed away. From the stress of releasing my latest novel to the slow death of my sister, the water pushed all that aside for a while.

Gabe waited until I appeared relaxed, floating on my back in the middle of the pool. He came over. The water was chest deep on him. "You look comfortable, Aunt Sydney."

"This was a good idea. Relaxing in the water is therapeutic."

He grinned at me and I felt a moment of impending doom, "So is dunking your friends."

With that, he sank into the water and grabbed me around the waist, pulling me under. As soon as I began to struggle against his hold, he let go

and splashed toward the deep end. I ignored the tingle in my body in that too-brief moment when he wrapped his arms around me. There were more important things in life. Like revenge.

He was fast, I'll give him that. By the time I nearly reached him where the marker said the pool was nine-feet deep, he kicked away from me. I finally caught him near the shallow end. I came at him with my arms outstretched, the water didn't quite reach the tops of our swimsuits so there was less resistance as I grabbed onto his upper arms and pushed him over backwards.

My momentum kept me moving and as he gave way, I landed on top of him, driving him toward the bottom of the pool. I don't think his butt touched the bottom, because he was kicking away from me. He surfaced where the game started, in the middle of the pool. He wore a huge grin as he said, "I see how it is. You're going down, woman!"

To hear his unbroken, treble voice say those words sent a shiver through me. It was entirely inappropriate, but for the briefest of moments, I wanted Gabe to dominate me. So, when he charged me, I may not have been as quick to move out of the way. And when he threw his arms around my neck, pulling me under, I may have waited a few seconds before I wiggled myself free.

When our faces broke the surface, I splashed him in the face, "Is that all you've got, Mr. Nelson?"

If his howl of protest was muted, in awareness that we were playing in a public pool, who I was to say? In that moment of play, the look of pure joy on Gabe's face was proof I may not be a good aunt, but I was going to be the best friend possible to this boy. When he lunged at me, I back pedaled into deeper water. When he caught me, he threw his arms around my neck and pulled me toward him as he sank. Our faces were inches from each other. I responded to his feral grin with my own smile. Instead of wiggling my way free, I let us sink. Finally, when my butt brushed the bottom of the pool, I snaked my arms around his waist and pulled his body against mine long enough to lean in and kiss his cheek. Then I broke free and pushed toward the surface.

Gabe's head appeared a second or two later. The look of wonderment on his face made my heart melt. The alarm bells that should have been going off in my head were muted and I relished the thought I'd put that expression on his face. After a moment, with a silly grin on his face, he swam over to me. We stood on the concrete bottom's slope, our shoulders still above the water. Our bodies were nearly touching. His face was a few inches from mine. His voice matched the surprised expression on his face, "Did I do a good job taking you down?"

I knew the difference between reality and fantasy. The fantasies I served up to middle-aged women were about being dominated by a man worthy of their adoration. But those were just fantasies. Why did my nephew make me feel like I wanted to be dominated? I didn't know the answer, but I wanted my fantasy. I slid my arms around his neck, "Yeah, Mr. Nelson. You're stronger than me."

The grin that radiated from his lips was enough to set my heart on fire. For the second time, I pulled his body against mine and kissed his cheek. I let the kiss linger until I felt something against my bikini bottoms. Warmth spread across me as my entire body enjoyed the touch. Then, after far more time than I could ever explain away, I broke the kiss and let go of his neck, a look of worry creased my features. When I put an arm's length between us, I stopped, "You okay, Gabe?"

His hand was on his swimsuit, adjusting himself. He glanced toward the gate before saying, "I-, um, I'm sorry, Aunt Sydney. I don't know what happened."

I was to blame for making him hard and there he was, blaming himself. I loved him all the more for his innocence. "Please, Gabe. That wasn't your fault. That was just your body responding to something nice. I shouldn't have hugged you like that."

Gabe flushed, "Even though I liked it?"

We moved to the side of the pool, where we leaned against the concrete ribbon. He was on the shallower side, so appeared few inches taller than me. "I liked it too."

This was getting too weird. I knew we needed to talk, but not like this. "Can I ask you a favor, Gabe?"

He nodded, "Sure, Aunt Sydney."

I reached out and took his hand, "You know how I told your mom I wanted to be your friend, because I thought we got along well as friends?"

He squeezed my hand, "Yeah. It's even better than you being my aunt."

I smiled at that. "Definitely. For the rest of the evening, let's focus on our friendship. Just call me Syd. Not Aunt Sydney... just Syd. Okay. And you'll just be Gabe. Not my nephew Gabe."

He grinned, "You never call me that. It's always just Gabe. Okay... um, Syd."

I wasn't sure how to proceed. But I would not let myself be burdened by guilt. We needed a conversation between friends. "How much do you know about your, um, body? Like when you got hard?"

His cheeks flushed, "It happens sometimes. Sometimes when I get up in the morning, it's like that. But it goes away after I pee."

He looked at me out of the corner of his eyes, as though embarrassed to go on. "When I read your novels, sometimes, when the man and woman are doing stuff, I mean, having sex, I get hard."

He looked adorable, giving up what he probably thought was a big secret. I whispered, "Sometimes?"

An embarrassed giggle slipped out, "Okay. A lot. Then when we touched. Those were the best hugs in my life. After reading the stories, I thought it was normal for it to get hard like that."

I wanted to reach out and kiss him. He may have been incredibly naïve, but he understood more than most boys his age, more than a lot of men twice his age. But I also wanted to strangle my sister. She had kept him so sheltered; he didn't appear to know what to do with himself.

I realized as we shared that moment, I wanted to have him hold me again. To feel him against me. He was my fantasy come to life. But how could I

surrender myself to his power when he didn't know the power he held over me?

I let the water pull me closer to Gabe, but stopped about half a foot away and looked up at him. I liked the illusion of him being taller thanks to the steeply sloping pool floor. "It's completely normal, Gabe, to get hard when you read something sexy or when you touch someone you really like."

The tiny eddies and currents of the pool closed the distance a bit more until only a hand's width of space separated our chests. He breathed, "But what do I do when it happens?"

I rested my arm on his shoulder, "Have you touched yourself down there?"

He flushed as the current lightly brought our chests together. "Sometimes. But last year Mom told me not to put my hands down there."

Our chests parted, leaving a couple of inches of water between us again, "Did you ever hear any of the boys talking about jacking off?"

Gabe's cheeks flared crimson. He whispered, "Y-, yeah."

"Do you know what they meant?"

The tiny currents connected our chests again, "They touch themselves."

I wanted to cry inside. Every twelve-year-old boy should know how to masturbate. I knew Abby wouldn't approve of our conversation, but frankly, I didn't care. Gabe needed a friend a lot more than he needed an aunt. The hand on his shoulder slid around his neck, pulling our bodies gently together again, "It's a bit more involved than that, sweetie. Would you like to hold me again?"

He let go his purchase on the concrete ribbon and his arms slid around my back. Almost immediately, I felt his hardness against my abs. His voice shook, "Is this okay, Aunt Syd?"

"Please, Gabe. No more aunt. Just Syd."

"O-, okay. Is this okay, Syd?"

Perhaps it was wrong. But I didn't care. Gabe was my fantasy incarnate. I needed him. "Yeah, sweetie. That feels nice. Do you want to kiss me?"

His body trembled against mine, in a voice that squeaked with emotion, he gasped, "On the lips?"

I nodded, "That's the way we do it."

I tilted my neck and put my face within a hairsbreadth of Gabe's. I wanted this kiss. But more so, I wanted him to want it enough for him to put his lips on mine. When his soft lips pushed against mine, it felt like my heart skipped a beat; like a tiny electrical shock traveled between our lips. A heartbeat later he looked into my eyes, "Is that how it's done, Au-, um, Syd?"

I squeezed him against me and nodded, "Yeah, Gabe. That was nice. You can do it again, if you want."

The second kiss was even better. His lips melded to mine the way a kiss should be. A few seconds later, he grinned, "That feels really nice. Is that how men kiss women in your books?"

Baby steps, Sydney, I reminded myself. I nodded, "That's right. How do you feel, Gabe?"

Lips curling into a smile, Gabe said, "Kinda good. Kinda weird. My stomach feels like a million butterflies are flying around. My, uh, penis is hard... And it's... Um, Syd, should I move it?"

The heat radiating through his shorts against my abs was the best feeling I'd ever felt. The one time I'd had sex in college had nearly ruined it for me. This felt like a second lease on life. "No, sweetie. If it doesn't make you uncomfortable, it feels nice our bodies being so close."

The lights around the pool were weak; several of them needed to be replaced. We were more in the shadows now that the night was upon us. Still, I figured we had another hour until ten and I really didn't want to get out of the pool now. So, I leaned forward, planted a peck on his lips and then whispered in his ear, "You're the big, powerful billionaire. Catch me if you can!"

With that, I pushed away from the side of the pool and angled toward the deep end. Gabe stood, his mouth agape for a couple of seconds, before he chased after me. I splashed at him as he tried to close with me. I was

scared because if someone were to barge in on us, explaining what we were doing was impossible. I was scared because I didn't know what Gabe would do. I was scared for Gabe too; I didn't want to push him too far or too fast.

He finally caught up with me at the deepest part, wrapping his arms around my neck and pulling me tight against his chest. Neither of us fought as we sank below the water. Instead, he leaned into me until our lips touched, bubbles filling the water around our heads. He broke the kiss and the hold around my neck first and kicked to the surface. When I broke the surface, he was beaming at me, "Caught you, woman!"

Even though I was still breathless, I closed the narrow space between us and took his hand in mine, "You did. You conquered me, Mr. Nelson. I'm yours."

Despite the shadows, Gabe's eyes grew round in shock. He gasped, "Really?"

I was treading water in the deep end in more ways than one, "Yeah, if you kiss me again."

Gabe closed the distance, and we treaded water together as he leaned in and kissed me again.

The kiss had just ended when the gate rattled. A moment later, an old woman shuffled into the pool area. By the time she saw us, we were on opposite sides of the deep end. Her voice was a-pack-a-day rough, "You kids mind if I get in the shallow end? The water helps my arthritis."

I leaned against the side of the pool, "Not at all. I think we're about done here."

Gabe fell against the couch once the door to the RV closed behind us, "Oh, crap, I thought for sure we'd been busted," his laughter was fueled by the adrenaline we both felt after that near-scare.

I collapsed next to him, "No shit. Aside from some old woman scaring five years off our lives, how'd you enjoy the pool?"

His eyes gleamed as he leaned into me, his face inches from mine, "That was really cool, uh, Syd. I liked it."

I traced my finger from his lips, along his neck, down his sternum, not stopping until I reached his innie belly button. "Enough to kiss me again?"

The lights were out in the RV and the shades covered the windows. We wouldn't be bothered. His voice shook, "Here?"

Our bodies already touched. I moved, pressing my body against his, "Sure. You conquered me, Gabe."

I didn't want to spook him, but my body felt more alive than ever, and I wanted him to. If I was wrong, then so be it. I added, "You can do what you want to me, sweetie."

Again, I stopped just short of his face. A moment later, his lips pressed against mine as his arms wrapped around my back. The kiss ended after a few heartbeats, but we held on to each other. After a moment he said, "I never knew how much fun kissing would be."

He fell into silence for a bit longer. He was processing our evening so far, "Syd, was this real or was it a fantasy?"

The question surprised me. "Of course it was real, Gabe."

He grimaced, "Sorry. What I meant is that you pretended to be one of the women in your books. You treated me like I was like one of the powerful billionaires. That's a fantasy, right?"

Maybe Gabe was smarter than me. But that didn't change how I felt or what I wanted. It just gave me another reason to love the boy. "Yes, it is. But I still I enjoyed it when you were in control and kissed me."

He gave me a perplexed smile, "It was fun. I liked how it felt to kiss you. But I don't know what I'm doing."

I knew the feeling. I'd only been with one man on one night six years ago and it left me nearly as inexperienced, despite writing hundreds of steamy sex scenes into my novels. "Can I tell you a secret, Gabe?"

When he nodded, I continued, "I don't really know what I'm doing either. Almost everything in the books is just stuff I've read about or seen in videos. Before tonight, before you, I was with one guy when I was eighteen and it sucked. But it's like I said earlier, I want to be your friend."

He smiled through his confusion, "I like us being friends even more than being your nephew. I feel more like a grown up when you treat me like you did today. But..."

I finished for him, "You don't know what to do?"

Flushing again, he nodded.

Like Julius Caesar crossing the Rubicon, or more aptly, like Blackbeard hoisting the Jolly Roger, I leaned against him and brushed my lips across his, "Would you like for me to show you?"

The eagerness with which he nodded his head set my heart racing. I pulled my body away from his and stood, "Okay, sweetie, take my hand."

I pulled him to his feet and drew him to me. Our eyes were level, from our toes to our chests, our bodies touched. My arms went around his waist as I murmured, "Put your arms around my neck."

When he did so, I felt his breath hot on my lips. Once again, something hard poked against my pubic mound. I said, "Do you want to kiss me?"

Instead of nodding, Gabe closed the last inch, and our lips met. Although it was still two people learning how their lips worked together, I felt passion rising in my chest as our heartbeats thundered in our chest. When he finally broke the kiss, he grinned, "That was really hot, Syd."

I was breathing heavy, "Yeah, you're a natural. What would you like to do now?"

He glanced between us. My bikini top pressed against his chest. I gave him a welcoming grin, "You can touch them. I'd like that."

He retracted one arm and pulled it between us. He rested his palm against the flimsy fabric and despite the thin covering, my skin felt his fingers as they brushed against my tit. Tingly heat spread from his touch. "Wow, it feels so soft."

Nobody had ever touched me like that. Gabe understood me more at eleven than Kyle ever did at eighteen. "I like it. Your fingers are like a touch of heaven. Do you want to see them?"

He gave me a questioning look. I grabbed one of the cups and pulled it open, giving him a quick flash of nipple, "If you want to see my tits, I'll take my top off."

Gabe bit his lower lip and nodded. His eyes never leaving his hand over my chest. My body must have trembled at the idea of letting Gabe see my tits. I fiddled with the ties around my back and neck for a moment before finally loosening them. Then I grabbed the string and pulled. The material slid between his fingers and my skin until I was free of the top. I dropped it on the floor and enjoyed Gabe's admiring stare.

My nipple was hard under his delicate touch. "You can feel them, if you want."

His other hand retracted from my neck and soon he cupped them both over my tits. Despite his young age, or maybe because of my small boobs, my little half-lemon shaped tits fit comfortably in his palms as he squeezed them. He was making me feel wet between my legs, and he'd only touched my tits. Gabe didn't know what he was doing to me. "Whatcha think?"

His treble voice was full of worship, "They're incredible, Syd."

I took him by the hand and pulled him toward the bedroom, stopping only when we stood between the bed and the bathroom. I turned the light in the bathroom on, letting us see each other better. The first thing I noticed was the way his swimsuit poked out between his legs. For as long as I've looked at porn, I've known that men in videos are not normal men when it comes to the size of their cocks. Kyle had cured me of that belief. When he fucked me, it was as though he had something to prove, violently shoving his five inches into me. What little I knew of boys was they were much smaller versions of men. I dared not get my hopes up, reminding myself that even a three-inch cock was a thing of beauty.

I kissed him again and pressed my bare chest against his. The heat against my pubic mount drove me to say what I said next, "Gabe, can I see your

cock?”

Gabe’s cheeks seemed to inhabit a permanent state of crimson. He stared at my tits for a moment before he said, “Y-, you want to see my penis?”

Count on Abby to teach him the right words. Shame she hadn’t explained how to use it. I nodded, “Only if you don’t mind.”

A few heartbeats passed before he nodded, “O-, okay. You can see it.”

He took a step back and put his hands on the band of his swimsuit. I reached and grabbed one of his wrists, “Can I do it? Pull them down?”

“Y-, yeah. If you want,” he breathed.

Kneeling before him, as gently as possible, I pushed his hands aside and took hold of the elastic. Slowly, like unwrapping a birthday present, I tugged his shorts down his hips. I kept pulling them down until the milky-white base of his penis came into view when his shorts became caught on his boner. Not wanting to hurt him, I pulled the front of the swimsuit away, freeing him and giving me the first few of an erect penis in six years.

I don’t know what I was expecting. He had been three inches soft, so it was reasonable to assume he would be close to that when hard. On the other hand, I’ve read plenty of teen drama online while researching stories. And well-endowed boys tended to brag about their dicks being huge. But the reality was somewhere in between. Gabe’s erection was closer to five inches than four. And unlike his thin, little noodle from a few years before, he was at least an inch thick at the base. It was breathtaking in its perfection.

Time stood still as I studied the indentation above the base of his shaft. Unlike Kyle’s thick bush, Gabe didn’t have a hair anywhere. I wanted to touch it, to feel its heat under my fingers. Instead, I worshiped it. Finally, Gabe’s plaintive voice penetrated the fog, “I know it’s not very big, Syd. But is it okay?”

I turned my eyes upward and smiled, “Yeah, sweetie. Your cock is perfect. Do you want me to touch it?”

His eyes grew round, “You wanna?”

“Oh yeah. A lot.”

Much quicker than when I’d asked if I could see him, this time he nodded right away.

It was just my imagination, but when my index finger touched the soft, spongy skin of his shaft, I felt something like an electrical current shoot through my hand. For the first time in my life, I studied the paradox of a boy’s penis. Gabe’s penis looked younger than Kyle’s. And where Kyle’s penis, while hard, lacked the near absolute rigidity of Gabe’s erection, it was like feeling steel under Gabe’s soft skin.

I eased Gabe onto the side of the bed as I wrapped my fingers around his nail-like boner. Almost of its own volition, my hand stroked up and down on his cock. His eyes remained wide, staring at my hand on his erection. He stammered, “W-, wow. Is this what you meant earlier about jacking off?”

I nodded and kept my relaxed speed. Less than a minute passed when he said, “S-, Syd! It feels like I gotta pee.”

Thank God for a voracious literary appetite. I knew he was nearing his orgasm. Boys as young as Gabe were a mystery to me. Until he starts puberty, I figured his first orgasm would be dry. My fingers moved faster as he moaned again. A third moan and Gabe pushed his hip off the bed. How his cock managed it, I don’t know. But it grew even harder as it expanded slightly within my fingers. He grunted again when a drop of clear liquid fired out his piss slit. The drop hit me between my tits as both of us gasped in surprise.

I kept pumping him a few more times, but that was his only gift. He just stared at me in an orgasmic haze. I let go his boner and joined him on the edge of the bed. I looked down; this little bit of watery cum had slid down my chest, disappearing in my belly button. I chuckled as I slid my arm around his shoulders. My voice was shaky, “And that, my love, is how you jack off. What’d you think of your first orgasm?”

He lay his head on my shoulder, “Wow, Syd. Wow.”

Chapter 8

When you pay more than three-quarters of a million dollars for a luxury motorcoach, it comes with a lot of bells and whistles. Those I've enjoyed from the first day were the blackout shades in the bedroom. The first sign of morning was a delicate caress on my stomach. Fingers traced my microscopic vellus hairs around my belly button, circling the scar left by my umbilical cord over twenty-four years ago.

When Gabe reached my sternum, I felt the familiar fluttering in my stomach. He didn't stop; his fingers arced around, swooping to the right of my navel before curving below. He stopped when his index finger found the lacy waistband of my panties. I admired his bravery while I slept. Every journey one takes begins with a first step.

I murmured, "Good morning, sweetie. I don't think anyone's ever awakened me in such a pleasant way."

When his fingers retreated from my panties, I put my hand on top of his a few inches above my belly. He stammered, "G-, good morning, Syd. At first, I thought last night was a dream. Waking up next to you and, um, seeing your, ah, boobs, I knew it wasn't a dream."

Although my bedroom was dark, I could see Gabe's body just as he had been last night. Naked. And sporting his morning wood. I could hardly believe he could cum, even though he was still a few days shy of turning twelve. With my hand over his, I guided it upwards, along the pronounced ridges of my ribs. I had never put my bra back on before falling asleep, so there was nothing to push aside before resting his palm on one of my tits.

Warm tingles spread across my chest as his fingers played with a nipple. I moaned as pleasure ebbed and flowed through me. I moved closer to Gabe, and leaned in, "Kiss me!"

Our lips touched. Gabe's lips worked the kiss like a pro. He applied what he learned. I shifted in the bed until our bodies touched, although his hand kept playing with my tit.

With no underwear, his cock pressed against my pubic mound. When he came up for air, Gabe gasped, "This feels like we're more than just friends."

When I realized how badly I wanted this young boy to take me, to own me, the last thing I wanted was for him to see the aunt/nephew dynamic. He had to see me as a friend first. My greatest desire was for him to see us as more than that.

I nibbled on his lip before resting my head on his shoulder, "I feel it too. Gabe, have you ever had a girlfriend?"

"No. Mom says I can date when she's dead."

The words hung over us like a knife. He muttered an apology, "It's what she said, Syd. It's just knowing how sick she is, I feel bad about saying that."

I caressed his back, "It's alright, Gabe. Your mom just wants to hold on to your childhood after it's gone. But while you're with me, how would you feel about making up our own rules?"

He nuzzled his face against my neck, "Like last night?"

Heat poured through me, "Yeah. I feel the same way you do; like we're a lot more than just friends."

Gabe's lips sought mine. He kissed me and played with my chest until he ran out of breath. "So, we're more than friends?"

I squeezed him in my embrace, "You're so strong, Gabe. What did I tell you last night?"

"You said I conquered you. But I still don't understand what it means, Syd."

My lips brushed against his, and I slid my hand between our bodies and cupped it over his cock, "It means I want you to kiss me. To force your hands up my shirt and play with my tits, to take me and make me yours."

I felt his heart pounding against his chest. His voice shook, "Like sex?"

I gazed into his eyes and nodded, "Yes, Gabe. I want you to possess me like the men in my books."

His cock pulsed against my palm. His voice was raw with desire, "I, uh, I need to pee. I'll be right back, Syd."

Despite the blackout curtains, I enjoyed the sight of his ass before he disappeared into the toilet closet. I wanted to feel his nearly five inches slide into me. My panties were drenched with my juices. Were he to return and mount me and fuck me, I was wet enough.

It was a silly fantasy for sweet, adorable Gabe to play the role of asshole billionaires. Or for me to take whatever he dishes out. I hated every one of the five minutes Kyle fucked me when I was a college freshman. He was rough and unskilled and hurt me when he took my virginity. Yet, I was basically asking Gabe to play a similar role. Sometimes our psyches are fucked up. I won't deny it. Gabe wasn't like that one time before. He was the personification of my fantasies, of rough, capable men who knew what they wanted and knew how to take it and give the heroine what she needed too.

The sound of water being suctioned from the toilet alerted me that Gabe was done. A moment later, he came out and stood at the corner of the bed. His cock was limp. Absentmindedly, he toyed with it as he looked at me, indecision on his face. While I wanted him to take control, I knew I'd need to help him along, "What would you like to do first, sweetie?"

He glanced at his three soft inches, "Can you do what you did last night?"

I nodded, "Sure. Come here."

He climbed onto the bed and I took his hand and pulled him to me. As much as I wanted him inside me, that look on his face reminded me sex was something to work toward. I said, "Straddle my stomach, Gabe."

He slid his knee over my stomach and sat on my belly. Even though he weighed over a hundred pounds, it wasn't too much. I took him in my fingers and watched the three-inch limp noodle transform into almost five inches of boy-steel. Once he was hard, I slowly jacked him up and down a few times. Even though he sat on my stomach, I wished his cock was closer to me. I don't know why. Never in my life had I let a guy put his cock into my mouth, but Gabe's beautiful cock fascinated me.

I let go of him long enough to put my hands against his butt and pulled at him. Without a word exchanged, Gabe inched forward, moving from my belly to just below my tits. My fist wrapped around him and I jacked him up and down a few more times. With just a finger, I pushed his dick down until it lined up with my face. Six inches separated my mouth from that morsel of boy meat.

He couldn't help but notice, "Do you want to lick it?"

"If you don't mind."

He didn't. Gabe shifted his hips forward until his circumcised glans touched my lips. I kissed the tip. Unlike sex videos, or what I recalled from Kyle, there was nothing leaking from that little hole, although there was a hint of piss. A second lick and even that taste faded.

I took him by the base and bobbed forward, sliding his helmet shaped head through my lips. My tongue slid through his tiny piss slit, eliciting an excited hiss, "Oh, wow!"

I was ready to take more of him into my mouth when my phone rang. We both ignored it. He pushed his hips, and I pushed my face toward him. My lips slid past the perfect ring formed by his circumcision. The heat from the first inch of his pole plus his glans made me salivate. I wanted all of him.

The phone rang again. Gabe's hiss was one of frustration. I pulled back and grabbed the phone. It was from Bakersfield. Thoughts of Abby pushed through my horniness and I said, "Just a sec, sweetie. Maybe it's your mom."

I swiped the answer button, and tried to make my voice sound like I hadn't been giving my first blowjob to a nearly twelve-year-old, "Hello?"

A gravelly voice responded, "Ms. Nelson? Ms. Sydney Nelson?"

"Speaking."

"This is Father Sandoval, I'm a chaplain at Embracing Arms Hospice. Your sister has been our guest."

I felt confused. When Abby had called, she told us she was being treated at one of the local hospitals. When had she gone to a hospice? And why the

hell now? Even though I had Gabe's succulent meat inches from my face, icy dread clawed at my stomach. "Is there something wrong with Abby?"

"I'm sorry to say, your sister passed away this morning."

Gabe could hear the priest's every word, so close was he to me. He leaned back, a stunned expression on his face. I stammered, "Wha-, how? She called us last night from the hospital. Sure, she said it was worse than she feared, but this morning? Good God, what happened?"

Gabe slid from my chest, nestling against me, tears falling down his cheeks. One of my arms slid around his back, pulling him against my side. I turned the speaker on; He was already listening, there was no point in even trying to hide the call. Father Sandoval said, "So that's what she told you. She came to us about three weeks ago after receiving a terminal diagnosis for stage four breast cancer. She was terminal at that time."

Nothing about this conversation was going the way I expected. "But the treatment? She told me when I came to pick up Gabe that her doctors wanted her to undergo a couple of months' worth of chemo at the hospital. Why would she lie about that?"

"I think she wanted to spare her son the agony of watching her die over a protracted illness. Didn't your mother pass from cancer too?"

My voice was raw and ragged, "Y-, yeah. Abby was there for the whole thing. Mom lingered for a while."

There was compassion in the priest's voice, "I'm really sorry, Ms. Nelson. I doubt there's any consolation, but many of our guests linger until their bodies are all that remain. I heard your sister's confession last night and although she was in a lot of pain, she was also very much of sound mind."

He was right. I found little consolation. I looked at Gabe and through his tears he mouthed, "how?"

I asked the disembodied voice, "It sounds like you expected her to hang on longer. What changed?"

The priest said, "Abby went into cardiac arrest around five o'clock this morning. Like most of our guests, she had a Do Not Resuscitate order on

file. There was nothing to be done.”

I wanted to scream that he could bring back my sister. But I knew it wouldn’t help. Abby went out the way she wanted, even if she cut Gabe and me out of the process. I wanted to blame her, but after what she went through with our mom, it was hard to fault her.

Gabe looked at me with his tear-soaked eyes, “What’s going to happen now?”

The priest must have thought he was talking to the phone. “Young man, I’m sorry for your loss. Your mom told me how much she loved you. For now, she took care of her own arrangements. She wants to have a graveside mass once you guys are back in town.”

Bakersfield was a two-day drive in the RV. I couldn’t imagine putting Gabe through that. Not now. “We’re in Colorado at the moment. We can probably fly out later today and be there tonight.”

The priest said, “You’ve got a bit of time. If you’d like, you can have the vigil on Friday evening and interment at the cemetery on Saturday. Most of Abby’s friends aren’t Catholic and she asked to forego the funeral mass at church.”

As a lapsed Catholic, I didn’t care. But it meant a lot to Abby, “Yeah, that’s fine.”

Father Sandoval spoke with us for a few more minutes. When the call ended, Gabe wrapped his arms around my neck and cried. I held him close as my tears mixed with his. In one unexpected phone call, his world had been upended. The security he found in his mom was gone, crushed under the terrible weight of cancer. My world was upended. The uncertainty of Abby’s diagnosis and treatment was over. Her fight was over. There was no pretending that she would recover or that Gabe would return home.

For better or worse, we were going to be together until his eighteenth birthday. The part of me who was still his aunt knew I needed to do better; I was a horrible parental role model. The other part of me wanted something more. It was that part of me who saw Gabe’s potential as a

writer, as someone who made me feel alive and part of something wonderful.

I didn't know which of those two parts to give Gabe, so I cried with him until we could find no more tears. Eventually, he let go of me and wiped his nose with his elbow. He hiccupped, "Wh-, what am I supposed to do now, Syd?"

Drying my eyes, I said, "Can you google the nearest airport with commercial flights? I'm going to get dressed and start loading the RV. Today's going to be a long day, sweetie, and we best get moving."

Chapter 9

I pulled the key from the envelope. Looking back on that last fateful day, I spoke with her, she knew what was coming. Knew, or at least suspected Gabe and I would want to go into the house. With his hands stuck deep in the pockets of his jeans, he slouched beside me. It wasn't that he was silent. He was dealing with some deep anger at Abby for hiding her illness and depriving him of the right to be with her at the end.

I was torn by it. I remember how worn and, at the end, resentful Abby had become by the time our mom died. I didn't have it in me to condemn her decision to not put Gabe through that hell. If anything, the past couple of weeks had been some of the best in the boy's life. And while I had serious doubts Abby would approve of everything to which I introduced Gabe, he needed to grow up and spread his wings. And even as I slid the key into the lock, I remained convinced Abby had chosen me, even though she knew Gabe's life would spin away from my sister's sheltered world.

I pushed the door open and found the light-switch on the wall. The living room was empty. The walls were bare, the furniture gone. Even the vinyl floorboards were spotless. Except for one corner of the room. Over there were a dozen boxes of various sizes and shapes.

Gabe pushed past me and stared about him, "Where is everything? It's all gone, Syd!"

I was as taken aback at him as I crossed the threshold. As Gabe darted toward the hall to his bedroom, he muttered, "We've been fucking robbed!"

I moved past the boxes and passed through the small dining room. The plain table with wobbly chairs was gone. Even the kitchen was pristine. Thanks to the poor decisions our mom made when we were growing up, there weren't very many family heirlooms or favorite porcelain plates to pass down. Abby hadn't been able to add much to that very meager collection from a teacher's aide's salary. She had decorated her home from Walmart and Sears, with the occasional item from Goodwill thrown in to the mix.

Twenty-nine years on this earth and the sum total of everything she had was in a dozen boxes. When I returned to the living room, I noticed a manilla folder. Someone had written in cursive, "Gabriel Nelson" across the middle. Gabe burst into the living room, tears scalding his cheeks, "It's all gone. Everything."

He spun and ran through the dining room and into the kitchen, "They took everything! Even her angels!"

When I reached the kitchen, Gabe's eyes were round, wild with distraught. I spread my arms, and he ran to me, nearly barreling me over as fresh tears fell shamelessly onto the shoulder of my blouse. I patted him on the back as, through broken sobs, he continued, "Mom had the most beautiful collection of angels. She kept them on the mantle in the living room. They're gone too!"

I glanced through the doors. I could see the mantle against the outside wall. Seventy or eighty years ago, when the house was first built, it had included a fireplace. But somewhere between then and now, someone had bricked it up until the only reminder was the painted-over mantle. I hadn't thought about them at the time, but I recalled a small collection of angels from when I picked Gabe up. They were carved angels you might find at Hobby Lobby or other craft stores.

I ran my hand through his hair as he cried. When he finally stopped, he confessed, "Me and Grandma went to her hobby store and picked them out for Mom each Christmas."

I had no idea. No wonder Gabe was so distraught. I pulled him back into the living room and pointed to the envelope on the top box, "There's a letter on top of the boxes. It's addressed to you."

He glanced at his name before wiping tears from his face, "Can you read it, Syd?"

I opened the envelope. A lone sheet of paper was its only occupant. "You want me to read it aloud?"

He nodded, resting his head on my shoulder. I pulled it out and read, "Dear Gabriel, your mom asked a few of us from school to help her clean up the

house after she went into hospice care. She has been so supportive of other teachers over the years we couldn't possibly have refused. We know you'll be living with your aunt, so we boxed up everything from your room that we could and have set it in the front room. One of the boxes, labeled 'Gabriel's keepsakes,' are things your mom wanted to give to you. If there's anything we can do to help, please let us know."

There was a lump in my throat that I had to clear before I could add, "There are several names of her fellow teachers. Even phone numbers."

He released his hold and found the marked box and sat on the hardwood floor and opened it. Wrapped in bits of newspaper were the angels. When he got up, the tears were still there, but a smile played at his lips, "I thought I had lost them, Syd. But they're still here."

Gabe experienced something profound as he gently put the angel back in the box and closed it. While he was occupied with the box, the doorbell rang and a moment later the door cracked open, "Anyone here?" a voice called out, "I'm the landlord."

A plump man stood in the doorway. Gabe and I were taller than him. He peered into the room, which was lit only by light filtering through the windows. "Ms. Nelson?"

Gabe was on his feet, interposing himself between me and Mr. Roly-Poly. For an instant, I thought of him as my bad-boy billionaire, and I alone was his conquest. The moment passed, and I rested my hand on the boy's shoulder, "Yes?"

He eyed Gabe for a moment before nodding, "Sorry about your momma. I ain't had a tenant stay longer than her. She was one of the good ones."

Gabe relaxed a beat. "Thanks."

The landlord scanned the room, "She was good at her word, when she told me about her illness. This is cleaner than the day I leased it to her."

I marveled at how my older sister, facing her own mortality, wrapped everything up. Even now, I don't know if I could do it half as well. I slid my arm down Gabe's shoulder until I rested it on his upper arm, "We're here

for Abby's funeral. Maybe take a few days to confirm everything is in order. We'll get the boxes out before we leave."

"Take your time. The house is still hers through the end of the month." Roly-Poly reached for the door and paused. After a long moment, he reached into his back pocket and added, "I was going to inspect the house before deciding what to do about the deposit. But Abby was a woman of her word."

He crossed the room and handed an envelope to Gabe, "When your mom first rented from me, she paid a deposit. She kept up her end of the lease better than most. It's only right I do the same. Here's your momma's deposit back."

With that, he turned and left.

Gabe opened the envelope. There was a small stack of bills with Ben Franklin's face on them. I lived in a cashless world. Everything I earned was electronically deposited into my account. Every purchase I made was just as electronic. In Abby's world, with small rental houses and postage stamp sized yards, cash was king.

I squeezed Gabe's arm, "You ready to go? We should get checked into the hotel before the vigil. We can come back later and get the rest of your things."

Gabe bent over and grabbed the box of angels, "This is all I really want. I don't want the rest; it's just stuff I've outgrown."

Even though I've always resented my mom her choices, I couldn't find it within me to resent seeing Abby laid to rest beside her. The writer in me found closure in it. And in a moment of reflection, maybe my problem with my mom was mostly about growing up poor than anything else. That first novel was like bottling lightning, and I never looked back.

Despite the working poverty Abby lived, one thing she had over Mom was a stable of good friends. People who know Abby kept coming up to us, bombarding Gabe and me, and telling us how much Abby meant to them.

They were mostly teachers and teacher assistants at the school where she worked.

The tent over Abby's grave was big enough to hold a couple of dozen chairs. While we had reserved seats at the front, some of my sister's coworkers couldn't find space under the temporary enclosure and had to stand under the warm early summer sun.

While we waited for Father Sandoval to prepare the area between the seating and the casket, a woman of indeterminant years approached. She gave us a weak smile, as though anything other than a somber expression was against the rules, "Ms. Nelson?"

I nodded toward her as Gabe fidgeted next to me. "Yes?"

She offered me her hand, "We're all very sorry about Abby, and I felt called to come over and tell you how much we appreciated your sister. She was one-in-a-million."

I wondered how many people get to hear this kind of praise during their lives. Or is it the salve that people who yet remain salve their consciousnesses for saying too little before it's too late. I shook her hand, "My sister had a heart of gold, Ms....?"

"Fuentes. I'm the PE teacher. Your sister liked bragging about her kid sister, the writer."

I shrugged. "It pays the bills."

She gave me an appraising look, "She said you did better than that. When I asked what you wrote, she was evasive."

That was Abby. Proud of my success, but more than just a little embarrassed I made my living from soft-core smut for middle-aged women, like Mrs. Fuentes. "Lots of women enjoy a good romance novel."

Her eyes perked up, despite the setting, "Really? I like sweet romances." She listed off a few authors who played it safe with sweet romance.

I don't know why, but I felt like she was being nosy. For fuck's sake, we were there to bury my sister. I gave her a plastic grin, perfect for the

setting, “Oh, then you’ve probably read some of catalog.” I gave her my pen name, “Maybe you read my breakout novel, Can’t Buy My Love?”

Mrs. Fuentes’ nostrils flared and recognition flickered in her eyes. She licked her lips, “Ah, I don’t think I’ve heard the name.”

By this time, Gabe wasn’t fidgeting in his seat; he leaned against me, “You’re Ms. Fuentes, right?”

She nodded.

He said, “Mom thought you’d enjoy my aunt’s books.”

Mrs. Fuentes worked her jaw, but no words came out. Finally, she managed a squeak, “My condolences for your loss.”

She beat a hasty retreat. Gabe leaned in and whispered, “I bet she has every one of your books, Syd.”

I bit back a chuckle. Without hypocrites like Mrs. Fuentes, writers like me would have much smaller audiences; still the encounter galled me. Fortunately, that’s when Father Sandoval stepped up to a lectern provided by the cemetery.

He offered a sad smile to me and Gabe, before sweeping a gaze across the crowded tent. He cleared his throat and said, “Our sister Abby Nelson has gone to her rest in the peace of Christ. May the Lord now welcome her to the table of God’s children in heaven. With faith and hope in eternal life, let us assist her with our prayers. Let us pray to the Lord also for ourselves. May we who mourn be reunited one day with our sister, Abby; together may we meet Christ Jesus when He who is our life appears in glory.”

I fought Mom tooth and nail when I was a teen and refused to go to Confirmation, and hadn’t been to a confessional since I was Gabe’s age. Still, I couldn’t deny there’s a pageantry to the liturgy. Gabe leaned his head against my shoulder. A single tear streaked his cheek.

Father Sandoval added, “Amen.”

A smattering of Amens greeted him from the crowd of mourners. The priest opened a Bible and read, “We read in sacred Scripture, from the book of Saint Matthew, chapter twenty-five, verse thirty-four. Come, you

whom my Father has blessed, says the Lord; inherit the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world.”

From there, he took a flask containing holy water and sprinkled it over Abby’s casket. Another prayer followed, in which he prayed for Abby’s soul. I wondered if it was a waste of time. It seemed to me if there was a heaven, Abby would have been one of the first to get in.

The liturgy continued, where he explained the ashes to ashes and dust to dust. God or not, it dawned on me sitting there, staring at my sister’s casket, the whole thing wasn’t for her. She was either with the angels or she was only a memory. Were I to strip away the veneer of religion away from the priest’s words, this was all about making it easier for those of us still here to move on. After all, life is for the living.

For the first time in more than a dozen years, I bowed my head and tuned the priest out. If Abby was still around, I needed her to know I would always take care of Gabe. In the stillness of my mind, I said, “Hey Sis, I don’t know if you’re still around, or if I’m just talking to myself. But if you are up there, I just want you to know how much I miss you. If you’ve been watching from up there, you’re probably ready to kick my ass, but I want you to know I love Gabe and promise to take care of him. You knew when you asked me to watch him I’d be a shitty aunt, but you still asked me to do it. So, I figure you knew I’d do my best to be his friend.”

I sighed and looked up. Father Sandoval was still reciting liturgy. Gabe leaned forward, his lips pursed, listening to the priest. I wasn’t very good at this prayer thing, but I needed to unburden myself to my sister, I looked down at the grass, “And as you’re my witness, I’m doing the best I know how. I vow I’ll keep him by my side until he’s eighteen. And I hope for a lot longer. I hope you can forgive me for the things I’ve already done to him, and for the things I’m still hoping for. Just know, I’m going to do my best for him, teach him everything I know, and help him become a man we’d both be proud of.”

The priest said, “Amen,” and again there was a smattering of amens in response.

He blessed the casket, then turned and made the sign of the cross over me and Gabe, "Merciful Lord, you know the anguish of the sorrowful, you are attentive to the prayers of the humble. Hear your people who cry out to you in their need, and strengthen their hope in your lasting goodness; We ask this through Christ our Lord."

Again, that smattering of Catholics among the mourners responded, "Amen."

They were the first to get up. Some filed by the casket, but most started back toward their cars. It was surreal. My mom never took me to a church funeral. Of the two I'd attended in high school and college, one was secular and the other was a Protestant service. I wanted to grab Gabe by the hand and make toward our rental car, but that seemed in poor taste, so I stayed in the seat, accepting condolences and making small talk with Abby's friends. It was a shame Mrs. Fuentes beat a hasty retreat at the end of the service. I so wanted to suggest a reading list of other romance authors.

Finally, Father Sandoval came over, "You guys staying in town long?"

Gabe's hand found mine as we stood. He spoke, "Mom took care of everything. The house, her stuff. Everything. Not that we had much."

The priest said, "By the time Abby knew she was sick, the cancer was pretty far along. But she had enough time to make sure she didn't leave behind a mess to clean up. I can tell you for a fact, most people either don't get that kind of chance, or figure someone else will unravel the estate after they're gone. At least your mom made sure that you have your aunt."

Gabe shrugged, "I love my aunt. Some of me is glad Mom asked my aunt to come get me. But the rest of me is still upset she didn't let me know she was dying. This sucks as a goodbye."

The priest put a few items from the lectern into a satchel, "It's okay to be angry at your mom, Gabe. But don't let it turn to bitterness."

He took his leave, walking toward the cemetery's exit. I slid an arm around Gabe and we stared at the casket for a few minutes before eventually leaving.

The Holiday Inn Express was your typical hotel; two queen beds, a couple of chairs, and a table. When we returned after a painfully quiet meal at the Olive Garden, Gabe disappeared into the bathroom for a while. When he came out, he dressed like he'd been that first night he stayed with me, in just his underwear. He didn't say a word, he just lay down and rolled onto his side, facing the wall.

"You okay, sweetie?"

He didn't say anything. I let it alone for the time being. I tried to find something on TV, but after a bit, nothing struck my fancy. I turned it off and tried again. I crossed over and sat on the edge of Gabe's bed, "Sweetie, you okay?"

His voice was muffled, "Leave me alone."

When you love someone, you hate to see them hurt. Love can sometimes cloud our judgement. I reached out and touched Gabe's shoulder. He shrugged it away, "I said, go away."

I retreated to the other bed, "I'm sorry."

He must have been trying to hide it until that moment. But now I heard his sobs as his shoulders shook. It took every ounce of my will to not go back to him. Frustrated because I didn't know what to do, I went to the bathroom, where I tried to relax by taking a long bath.

As I lathered my legs and took my razor to them, I thought back to the last night, less than a week ago, when Gabe and I had fooled around in my bed. Since being back in Bakersfield, we had kept our distance from each other, at least sexually. He wore a shell of impenetrable grief. Although I had touched him, it had only been the way his mom might have. He hadn't responded even to those awkward maternal touches.

On a scale of one to ten, where one is a preteen girl with no hair and ten is the wife of sasquatch, I'm probably a three or so. If I were to let my hair grow out on my legs, it would be pretty sparse. Even at its thickest, around my ankles, there's not a lot. So, shaving my legs was a quick job. I'd been shaving my pubes since I found out several of the girls in high school

shaved theirs. Once I realized how nice it made it when I masturbated, I never stopped shaving between my legs. After more than a week since my last shave, the stubble was thick between my labia and pubic mound. Still, with practiced ease, I returned it to its preferred state.

It had been a week since I last touched myself down there and part of me, the part who was hurt by Gabe pushing me away, wanted to ravage my clit, work myself up into a powerful cum. I discarded the idea when I realized the water was cooling; I'd been in the bathroom long enough. I dried off and wrapped a towel around my torso and went back into the other room. Gabe lay on his back, staring at the ceiling. His eyes were puffy and his cheeks were wet.

I grabbed a clean pair of panties from my travel bag and turned away from Gabe. I let the towel fall and then slid the underwear up my legs until I lightly slapped the frilly band against my lower abs. I felt his eyes on me and once I slid into my cami, I turned around. "Yes?"

Gabe said, "I-, I'm sorry about earlier. That was a dick thing to do."

I wasn't sure if it was a good idea, but I crossed the room and sat on the edge of his bed, "No, I shouldn't have pushed. You take all the time you need, sweetie."

He scooted over, giving me a bit more room, "No. I'm really pissed off at Mom. She had no right to hide how sick she was. But she treated you the same way she treated me. It's stupid to take it out on you. The only thing I'm glad of was that you came and picked me up. I know that's crazy. Pissed at her because she made me go away. Happy it was with you because you... well, you love me even more than Mom."

I place my hand on his knee, "I wouldn't say more than your mom. She loved you like only a mother can. I love you, well, like a girlfriend, only more."

He wiped at his cheeks. "I-, I like that. Me too."

He yawned, and I looked at the alarm clock on the nightstand between the beds. It was almost ten. And the day had been one of the worst in both of

our lives. I stood and tugged at the covers, "Come on, Gabe, go on and get under the covers."

Once under the covers, he said, "Um, Syd, is it okay if you hold me tonight, even if I don't feel like being touched?"

"You want me to hold you, but not touch you?"

A ghost of a smile played at the corners of Gabe's lips. "You know what I mean. On my, um, dick."

I had to repress a smile. As I slid between the sheet and the cover, I hoped his lack of interest would not be long term. Even so, it felt nice once I shifted my body over to his back and snuggled against him. Just before Abby's passing, I wondered if he might have pushed past my height. And now, playing the big spoon to his small, I noticed he was now taller than me, if just by an inch or so.

He grabbed my hand and pulled it to his chest, "Mm, that's better."

Before long, his soft sonorous snores told me he was asleep. For me, I lay awake wondering what held. It was a long time before I finally drifted off.

Chapter 10

“How’s it feel being twelve,” I asked as Gabe and I walked from the Durango LaPlata County airfield to the parking lot where the RV was parked.

“About the same as yesterday when I was eleven,” Gabe said, carrying our travel bag over his shoulder.

I twirled the RV key fob on my finger, “There are plenty of restaurants in Durango. Let’s celebrate.”

We reached the RV, and the door swung open with the press of a button on the fob. Gabe stopped on the first step, “I guess we can go out to eat. But, Syd, I don’t feel like celebrating. Not yet.”

I watched him climb the other steps and followed. I had the Cummins diesel running a moment later, cooling the RV’s cockpit. “There’s an old timey train that runs from here to Silverton. Maybe when you’re ready, we can come back and celebrate by riding the train. It’s supposed to be a lot of fun.”

Gabe gave me a wan smile, “That’d be fun. Maybe soon.”

Because it was his birthday, we picked up to-go from McDonalds and drove to a nearby RV park for the night. Despite his melancholy, Gabe helped connect the water and sewer lines while I put the slide-outs out. Thank God for microwaves, otherwise we’d have eaten cold Micky Ds.

I settled into the bench across from Gabe, who was drowning a french fry in ketchup. “How’s it taste?”

He held the mangled strip of fried potato up, “Dunno. I’ll tell you in a sec.”

With that, he plopped it in his mouth. I unwrapped my burger and took a bite. Somewhere in between bites, I said, “I can’t really put myself in your shoes, Gabe, to know how you’re feeling. But I’m here for you when you want to talk.”

He shrugged, “You know the score. I’ll get over it.”

Gabe fell silent for a bit; Even though I was still learning some of his mannerisms, I could see he was working through a lot of things. “Syd, are there any other relatives of you and mom?”

I never knew my dad. He was splitsville before I was born. When I was growing up, Abby didn’t talk about him much, and Mom, not at all. Mom was an only child. I shook my head, “Not that I know of. It’s just you and me.”

He crumpled up his fry box and shoved it in the bag, “I knew a kid in school. His parents died. They put him in foster care. How do you know that won’t happen to me?”

I hadn’t given that much thought. I had power-of-attorney over him, and Abby named me guardian in her will. I took the bag of trash and slid from the bench seat and threw our trash into a trash bag under the sink. “They had a chance when we were in Bakersfield. I’d think that someone would have to report you to social services.”

“What about school?”

I sat on the sofa, and patted the spot next to me, “I’ve been thinking about that. I’ve done a bit of research about online schools. There are some private schools into which we could enroll you in the fall; everything is done online. Your school will get the request for records and they’ll figure out your where you’re supposed to be, send the records to the new school, and you will start the seventh grade in a couple of months from the comfort of the RV.”

He collapsed on the seat next to me, “You promise you won’t abandon me?”

The vehemence in his voice caught me by surprise, “Fuck yeah. You’re more than just my nephew, Gabe. You’re my best friend in the whole fucking world. I’ll fight like hell to keep you with me.”

Then I smirked and gave him a snide smile, “Plus, they’d have to find us and we can go anywhere we want. Our house is on wheels.”

It felt good to hear him laugh. He offered a grin, “So, you weren’t just being silly last week, about being friends?”

I snaked an arm around his shoulders, “No way. If you haven’t figured out, as aunts go, I’m fucked up. If you need a lot of parenting, we’re both going to be in deep shit. But I can be the best friend in the world. Probably be a huge fucking bad influence on you. Let you read all my smutty stories, be the woman you need me to be for you, let you fool around with me, that kind of friend and so much more.”

He rested his head against my shoulder, “No matter what, you’ll let me stay until I finish high school?”

I squeezed his shoulders into a hug, “Absolutely. But even then, this will always be home for you. Got it?”

He glanced at me out of the corner of his eye, “Yeah. So, you’re really gonna make me go to school in the fall?”

“Yep. You need to learn more about writing, math, history, all that stuff.”

He gave me a skeptical eye, “Really? Like I’m going to have to know algebra to be a writer?”

I laughed, “You’d be surprised by the things I’ve learned that I’ve worked into my stories, Gabe.”

He gave a mock huff, “Fine. That means we’ve got two months for you to teach me more writing and for me to finish my book. What about you? You decide what you’re going to write next?”

That was something else weighing on me. The only thing I had ready to go was Give the Devil His Due. But if Bess was right, releasing it under my pen name could blow up. Given what Gabe and I had already shared, there wasn’t any point in not telling him about it, “I have a book that makes most of my books feel like sweet romance for high schoolers. It’s called Give the Devil His Due.”

Gabe perked up at the name, “Cool name. What’s it about?”

I smirked, “Sex, power, and more sex.”

He returned the smirk, “I thought you said it was different.”

Jokingly, I smacked his arm, “Smart ass. It’s about a billionaire-”

Gabe poked me with his elbow, "You said it was going to be different? I'm waiting."

I gave a theatrical sigh, "Fine, I'll let you read it. But don't let me find you in the bathroom rubbing one out to it."

His eyes grew wide. Three weeks ago, he didn't even know how to masturbate. Now, at least, he understood. "I wouldn't do..."

His voice faded as his cheeks turned red. He had retreated since the morning we learned of Abby's death. I longed to pick things up where we left off. But so far, he'd shown no interest, and I was beginning to wonder if he regretted our brief time together. I pushed that aside and leaned over and kissed his cheek before getting to my feet, "I'll fetch it. You can read it if you want. I need to catch up on some work."

Amazon pays me commissions every month. About half the money comes from e-book sales. The other half comes from page-reads from Kindle Unlimited. Thrown in the mix are some paperback sales. But those never amounted to more than a couple of hundred copies a month. The money hits my business account around the end of the month. I pay an accountant to do my books, pay my estimated taxes, and the like. But that doesn't mean I get to ignore it. While Gabe sat quietly on the couch, flipping the pages of the manuscript every few minutes, I reviewed this month's sales report. Even though we were at the tail-end of June, the data was from April sales.

At first glance, the numbers were impressive. Between e-books and Kindle Unlimited, my fifty-four books, at that time, sold just under eleven thousand copies. And that translated to around twenty-six thousand dollars. Not bad for a twenty-four-year-old, you'd think.

I found March's report and opened the spreadsheet. Fifty-three books on the sold report that month. And a bit more than twelve thousand books. That was my problem. Over the past year, even though I've released ten books over the past twelve months, my sales were going south.

Too much competition diluted the market. There were content mills churning out a book a week, paying ghost writers to churn out fifty-, sixty-thousand-word romance novels. They were formulaic, write-by-the-numbers fluff pieces. And my target audience voraciously read them. But more titles were chasing the same number of readers and with Gabe living with me, I wasn't sure I could maintain my publishing schedule of ten books a year.

Thinking of the boy, I glanced over at him. He lay on the couch with the manuscript propped on his chest, his head inclined, reading. Absentmindedly, he reached down and adjusted himself. The board shorts were ugly things, and despite the way they bunched up at his crotch, I could see by the tent in his shorts, he enjoyed the story. The sight of the distended material was a pleasurable distraction. I didn't know if he'd ever want to pick up where things left off the previous week. But at least I could enjoy a furtive glance now and then at his budding sexuality.

Hoping he hadn't seen me, I cut my eyes away. I closed down the sales reports and opened up the most recent account statement from my accountant. The first page was a standard balance sheet. On one side, it showed the debits. On the other, the credits. Despite the fall-off in sales, the credits outweighed the debits by a wide margin. The biggest expenses were marketing campaigns. Just below that line item was another sizable expense. My virtual assistant ran my marketing campaigns. And she didn't come cheap, at twenty-five dollars an hour. The RV was even on there as an expense. I owned the motorcoach outright, paying cash for it over a year ago, when I traded up from a used Winnebago. Even so, there are plenty of expenses. The diesel engine was a gas guzzler, netting me six or seven miles to the gallon. It had to be serviced regularly to keep it in tip-top shape and those service calls weren't cheap.

Before long, the shadows were getting longer. The clock in the laptop's task bar showed most of the day was gone. I closed the laptop. Gabe turned another page as I said, "You haven't said much."

His cheeks flushed, "It's really great, Syd. I don't know why your agent said it wasn't."

I felt my own face grow warm as I thought about the many sexually explicit scenes in the book, “She didn’t say it wasn’t good, just that it was too controversial.”

An embarrassed smile creased Gabe’s face, “Oh. Um, yeah. Th-, they were good. Why not publish it yourself?”

I bit my lower lip, thinking of all the bad things that could happen if I were to ignore Bess. “You can tell a difference between this one and the others?”

The same flush—Gabe nodded, “Yeah, the, um, sex is hotter. And the girls are younger. The main girl the billionaire likes, he kidnaps her and, um, talks her into doing stuff and she’s only a few years older than me.”

“Yeah,” I said, “My agent thinks it’s too much like a story that just broke a few weeks ago about a guy named Jeffrey Epstein. And, yeah, I was kind of thinking about him when I created this billionaire, just figured he was above the law with too many powerful friends to protect him.”

Gabe shrugged, “Whatever. I think it’s fun. You’re always going on about books need to be in a series to be successful. I’m not finished yet, but it seems like the billionaire is going to win by the end of the book.”

My mind went through dozen different scenarios for a series. “No spoilers, young man.”

Gabe stuck his tongue at me. I grinned and flipped him off, making him laugh. “You’re a mean girlfr—” his voice caught in his throat before he looked down at the pages, and continued, “friend. I’ll read to the end.”

My stomach grumbled. I didn’t feel like fixing anything and the RV park was close enough to town, I figured we could get pizza delivered. When he heard me on the phone, Gabe’s voice reverberated through the RV, “No veggies! We’re not herbivores.”

When the pizza guy, who happened to be a pizza gal, showed up, Gabe finally closed the manuscript and grabbed some paper plates from the kitchen cabinets. As we ate, he said, “I really like Holly.”

Holly is the focal point of Give the Devil His Due. She's the kind of high school girl I wished I'd been when I was fifteen or sixteen. Gabe added, "She reminds me of you."

I shook my head as I wiped a stray string of cheese from my mouth, "How's that?"

The crimson returned, and he focused on devouring the rest of his first slice. When he reached for a second, I swatted his hand, "Come on, Gabe. How does she remind you of me?"

He glanced down at the pizza box, "Well, um, she's really pretty and outgoing, like you."

I wasn't sure I saw the connection, but it wasn't lost on me how Gabe saw me. I wondered if that was all, "Thanks, Gabe. I think. Anything else about her?"

Gabe's ears and neck grew red when he became really embarrassed; like now. "Um, her boobs, they reminded me of yours."

My eyebrows were arched, my eyes round, "Really?"

His voice was almost too low. "Y-, yeah. You described her boobs as perky and, um, petite."

Damned if he wasn't right. Without realizing I'd done it, Holly was me physically. "You think I'm pretty?"

More of that gorgeous flush. He wouldn't look at me as he nodded, "Duh."

"Boys," I muttered.

The day had been long. And even though it wasn't my normal bedtime, I said, "I'm going to bed. You going to be okay?"

He nodded, returning his gaze to me, "Yeah, Syd. I'm going to read your book for a bit longer."

I gave him a big grin, "Enjoy. But no beating off in the bathroom to my smut. Got it?"

He giggled; the crimson reached his collarbone, "Got it."

The past few nights had been rough on us. Gabe's mood about his mom had been worse when it had been just the two of us in the hotel room. I said, "Don't feel like you have to sleep up here, sweetie. There's plenty of room in my bed."

He grabbed the manuscript from next to where he sat on the couch, and fiddled with the pages for a moment, "If I do, um, you won't want me to pretend to be one of the billionaires in your stories, will you?"

Funny how he conceptualized our sex play. I desired him. Even while we'd been eating pizza, at least on a subconscious level, some part of me still wanted him to dominate me, to take me and make me his. But his desires mattered as much as mine, maybe even more; after all, he was the minor and I, the adult, who should know better. "No, sweetie. If you're feeling anything like me, you might not like sleeping alone right now. About the billionaire stuff, we don't have to do that again if you don't want."

He cracked open the manuscript as his lips curled at the corners, "It's not like that. It's just Mom's death still has me out of sorts. I gotta lot to work out, 'kay?"

Never have I wanted to hug and hold him more than that moment. But I used what little self-control I possessed and turned and retired to the bedroom.

Chapter 11

Something soft grazed my thigh as sleep fled from me. Gabe's fingers traced across my legs, sliding around to my inner thigh. I wondered what he would do if allowed to continue, so I kept my eyes closed and enjoyed the gentle touch.

His fingers sent tendrils of little jolts of pleasure through me, and he worked them up my leg until his touch grazed my panties. It was only the briefest of moments, but I loved what he was doing to me. His hand moved over my panties until his fingers caressed my lower abs. The thing about my panties, they were low cut and the top of my pubic mound was just above the waistband. I burned with desire to know his fingers were on at least part of my pubic mound. Gradually, his fingers played with my skin, working upward.

I wore a loose-fitting cami that didn't quite cover my navel. When his fingers reached it, they slid under the hem, gradually pushing it up, inch by agonizingly slow inch. God alone knows how I managed to avoid flinching when a finger grazed one of my modest swells. Keeping my breathing regular as his fingers crept forward was the hardest thing to do. When he reached my nipple, he cupped his hand and covered my breast, gently squeezing. My erect nipple poked against his palm. After squeezing it for a bit, he retreated down my stomach, leaving my breasts exposed, my cami pushed over them. His fingers didn't stop until he reached my panties' thin lacy band. He caressed the skin above it. Oh, how I wanted to just pull my panties and let him gawp at my shaven pussy. To tell him that it was his to do with as he pleased.

More tentatively than before, Gabe slid a finger under the lacy band. It was just to his first knuckle. I was wet between my legs. If he went much further down, he'd wonder why the front of my panties were wet. Of course, by now he'd read enough of my bodice rippers to know women get wet between their legs, so maybe it wouldn't be quite the surprise.

A second finger slid under the lacy elastic, then a third. He paused when he was halfway toward my slit. Was he trying to figure out where my pubic hair was? Good luck with that. Maybe it was a change in my breath, maybe

he just lost his nerve, but he pulled his hand back and rested it on my belly as he snuggled against me.

That intimacy didn't last. A few minutes later, he rolled out of bed and padded across the smooth tile to the toilet. When he opened the door, I was sitting up in bed, my cami pushed back into place. I smiled, "How'd you sleep?"

He seemed unaware of the lump in his underwear, "Okay. Thanks for letting me sleep in here. I tried to sleep on the sofa, but couldn't."

I moved across the bed and took his hand, "Oh, baby, I know that feeling. During the night, I woke up and felt you lying next to me and was really glad you did."

A touch of crimson on his cheeks made me wonder if he felt guilty about touching me while thinking I was asleep. I added, "I sleep so much better when you're next to me. You wouldn't hurt my feelings if you decided you wanted to stay in here with me full time."

"L-like as your boyfriend?"

I shrugged, "If you'd like. But even if you want to be friends, or even if we're only aunt and nephew. I just like sleeping next to you."

He surprised me with a smile, "Me too."

Gabe bounded up the stairs and handed me a bag with the golden arches' logo on it. I waited for him to settle into the passenger seat by the door before asking, "Where to now?"

He looked out the windshield. The day was nearly cloudless; a great day to move on down the road. "I like the weather here. I was reading how some people who live in their RV stay in the mountains in the summer and then go to places like Florida and Texas in the winter. Could we do something like that?"

I was about as nomadic as it came. Since buying the old Winnebago at twenty, I never looked back, traveling wherever the muse took me. "We can, if you want."

He smiled as he dug an Egg McMuffin from his bag, “Cool. Let’s find a place in the mountains to stay for a while. That’ll be fun.”

I pulled up a map on my phone and zoomed into the central part of the state, “You want a RV park similar to where we stayed last night?”

Gabe pursed his lips, “Dunno. I want you to teach me how to be a better writer. Plus, I really don’t want to be around lots of people.”

Colorado is the Mecca of boondocked camping. I’d only done it once before. The problem with boondocking is that you only have what the RV can carry. You’re dependent on your holding tanks for water and sewer, and your generator and diesel fuel for electricity. The benefit is that with few exceptions, you could park anywhere you want in a national park to camp. Sure, there are rules to follow, but it lets you stay at places you’d never get to stay normally.

“Your wish is my command, Gabe,” I said as I zoomed in. “What about the Rio Grande National Forest?”

He tore into a bite of his biscuit and nodded.

Durango was the largest town in the southwestern corner of the state. There were a handful of smaller towns and wide spots on the highway with pretensions of being a village between us and the national forest, so we stopped at the local Albertsons and picked up groceries enough for a couple of weeks. The nearest grocery store to our destination was in Creede.

A forty-five-foot diesel motorcoach has its moments of fun on the open road. My favorite is when I’m on the interstate with a long stretch of straight road ahead of me and no cars around. The road to the national forest was not like that at all. The first bit of “fun” was going over Wolf Creek Pass. The road over the pass twisted and turned. The best thing I could say was the road was two lanes in both directions, so when sporty little cars zipped past, I could stay in the right lane, my white knuckles gripping the steering wheel.

Once we crested the top of the pass, my voice was strained, “Look at the sign, Gabe. We’re crossing the continental divide.”

The entire time we'd been climbing, the boy ignored the manuscript in his lap and turned and gawked at the mountains all around. He grabbed my phone from the console between us and snapped a picture before we passed the sign. "Wow, Syd, look it, we're at ten-thousand-eight-hundred-and-fifty-seven feet."

The wonder on Gabe's face made the experience worth it. As we started down the eastern side of the pass, I downshifted into first and kept my foot on the brake. More than an hour after we started up the steep slope on the western side of the pass, we were finally off the eastern slope. The rest of the drive, through plenty more twists and turns, was child's play compared to Wolf Creek Pass.

We rolled into a small, unimproved camp ground about thirty minutes after passing through Creede. There was an RV spot for a camp guide, but it was empty. There were a dozen or so pull-through sites for RVs like ours and signs posted that no dumping was allowed, although each site came with its own spigot. At least we wouldn't have to use our water tank.

While I hit the button to roll out the slides, Gabe connected the water, and we were officially home; at least for the next two weeks. I'd read that the National Forestry Service only allows campers to stay in one spot for two weeks. The seclusion was exactly what we needed. Gabe would have the time to figure things out about us and I could figure out how if Give the Devil His Due was to be my next series. I took a nap on the sofa while Gabe explored the nearby area.

After a dinner of hotdogs, I sat on the sofa with the windows open, the clear mountain air cooled off fast once the sun was hidden by the mountains to our west. I split my attention between a TV show and emails with my virtual assistant about current marketing campaigns. Gabe lay next to me on the sofa. He propped his legs on the armrest and lay his head against my hip. Every couple of minutes, he flipped a page, reading my manuscript. There weren't many pages left, and he was too preoccupied with the story to realize he kept reaching down to adjust his shorts. Seeing the bulge in his shorts was confirmation that at least some parts of the story were doing what they were supposed to. I wanted middle-aged

women wearing down the batteries on their vibrators after reading my story.

I had closed the windows and lowered the blinds by the time Gabe closed the manuscript and said, "That was, um, fucking hot."

The profanity made him blush. Unlike Abby, I thought Gabe sounded cute when he swore. I grinned and muted the TV, "So, should I self-publish it?"

The blush spread to his ears and neck, "Mom would have loved it, I think."

The admission caught me off guard. Sure, I'd give Abby copies of all my books, and knew they were one of her few guilty pleasures. "You knew she had my books?"

He nodded. "Yeah. She kept them hidden in her room. I found them hidden in her room last Christmas when I was hunting for my presents."

I smirked, "Did you find the presents?"

He gave me an embarrassed grin and shook his head. "And no, I was too scared to read your books. Mom would have beat my ass if she'd caught me."

I reached down and rubbed his chest, "Now you're catching up on lost time."

He grinned and nodded. "I'm not reading it because of the sexy scenes. I'm trying to see how you write."

I chuckled at the transparent lie, "Um-hmm. Right. I bet every woman has heard her man use that excuse." I lowered my voice, trying to mimic a man, "No, honey, I wasn't reading the magazine with the nude pics for the naked women, I was reading it for the articles."

I'm not sure if the reference went over his head. Gabe just shrugged, "Whatever. I think you should publish this book. If my mom would've liked it, I bet lots of other women would too."

My curiosity piqued, I asked, "What did you think of Lucien? Too much the billionaire bad boy?"

He shook his head, “No. I mean, he does some pretty bad stuff to Holly and the other girls. Dunno, it’s weird, when I read the story from Lucien’s point of view, he didn’t seem like a villain. But when you switched over to Holly, she’s trying to figure out who she is and what she wants. I understand her and I think other people will to.”

He was only twelve, and he understood the story better than my agent. “What’d you think of the end?”

“You ended it on a cliff-hanger. When I finished it, all I wanted to do was pick up the next book. Have you written anything else?”

I sighed as my hand kept rubbing his chest, “Not yet. It was supposed to be my first traditionally published work.”

“What’s the difference?”

I explained, “What I’ve done is self-publishing. I write the book, find an editor to fix my typos, keep an eye out for continuity, and clean it up. I also have to hire an artist to design the book and someone else to manage my marketing campaign. A traditional book publisher does everything but the writing. Well, they used to. These days, authors are expected to do more and more marketing themselves, even if they have a traditional contract.”

Gabe cocked an eyebrow in surprise, “Why would you want a book contract? You’re really successful already.”

“I’m glad you think so. But Amazon is my only outlet. A traditional publishing contract would let me get my books into bookstores, even onto other online bookstores, like Barnes and Nobles. Also, it’s an ego thing. Getting a traditional book contract is a tremendous deal. It means the publishing gatekeepers think you’re good enough to support.”

Gabe sat up and leaned against me, resting his head on my shoulder, “But Amazon is huge, right?”

I dipped my head in agreement, “That’s true. In the US, Amazon is almost ninety percent of the e-book market. And if my books are traditionally published, I’d probably not get them enrolled in Kindle Unlimited.”

That was enough confirmation. The manuscript still required at least one final review before sending it off to my editor, but fuck it, I was sold. If a twelve-year-old boy could finish it and enjoy it, what little doubt I still had evaporated. I snaked an arm around him and pulled Gabe closer, “Thanks, sweetie. I’ll get started outlining the rest of the series tomorrow. What about you? You ready to start writing?”

He nestled himself closer and nodded, “Yeah. I want to finish my story about the boy who kills the dragon and rescues the princess.”

I gave him some pointers, sharing with him some of the things I learned along my journey as a writer. Eventually I yawned. A glance at my watch showed it wasn’t even ten in the evening yet. But the stress of the morning’s drive caught up with me; I could barely keep my eyes open. I leaned over to Gabe and brushed my lips against his cheek, “I’m off to bed. The offer still stands, sweetie. You don’t have to sleep in here if you don’t want.”

He flushed at my kiss. But he didn’t respond with one of his own. Neither did he pull away. I wished I understood what Gabe was going through. Frankly, I was confused, especially after waking up to his exploring fingers that morning. If that’s what he was comfortable with, then I’d have to accept it. That thought was on my mind as I stripped down to my panties. Only the uncertainty of how Gabe would think if he came in and I was in just my panties, kept me from sleeping that way. I found an old cotton cami in the bottom of my underwear drawer. I hadn’t worn it since cutting away the bottom half a few years ago. I checked myself out in the bathroom mirror and decided it was just about right. The jagged edges at the bottom ended an inch or two below where my breasts started.

I settled into bed, hoping Gabe wouldn’t leave me alone, but I fell asleep, dreaming of him taking me by force.

Chapter 12

My shoulder shook from a soft touch, "Syd?"

The hazy edges of a dream drifted away on the clouds of my subconsciousness. "Syd?"

I blinked a couple of times. Gabe sat on the edge of the bed, closest to me. He wore his standard nighttime attire; his white cotton briefs. I mumbled, "You okay, sweetie?"

He sighed, "I really tried to go to sleep on the sofa. I didn't want to wake you up like I did this morning, um. You know, ah, beside you."

Was that a hint of guilt about touching me when he thought I was asleep? Oh, if only he knew.

I found his hand and clasped it, "I enjoy waking up with you by my side, sweetie. I especially enjoyed this morning."

His voice squeaked, "You did?"

Had he known I was awake? I don't suppose it mattered. What mattered was he was sitting next to me, wanting to sleep by my side. I ignored his comment, "I know what I need now. Climb into bed and give me a hug."

Despite the darkness, Gabe's features softened as he came around the bed and crawled next to me. I turned my back to him, "Can you put your arms around me and hold me?"

His chest touched my back as his right arm slid around my stomach. His left hand slid between me and the bed until he could clasp them together. I closed my eyes and thought about how nice it felt to have him hold me, him the big spoon, me the small spoon. He topped me by an inch at the most, but I wondered how it would feel in a year or two when he would top me by four, maybe even six inches. But for now, I drifted back to sleep, basking in the warmth of his body against mine.

I woke to something warm on my chest. It was still dark outside as I realized one of Gabe's hands cupped one of my tits. His other hand rested against my stomach and his warm breath touched my neck. His familiar

deep breaths told me he was still asleep. That didn't bother me any. Some small part of my desire to be dominated by Gabe was fulfilled.

That's when I realized more than just his hand was on me. Something warm pushed against my butt. A thrill surged through me as realization hit. Gabe's erection was nestled between my butt cheeks. I snuggled against his body and moved his hand from my stomach to my other breast. Maybe it wasn't the same as my fantasies of being dominated, but I needed the intimacy.

I don't know how much time passed before Gabe stirred. There was a hitch in his breathing. The rhythmic pounding of his heart against my back changed; it beat faster. His fingers squeezed my tits. I felt a pulse between my cheeks. Thinking about how he felt guilty about touching me the previous morning, I flexed my body, pushing against his groin and moaning, like I was just awakening. My voice was tired, "Mmm, I don't think someone has ever awakened me in such a nice way."

Gabe gasped and moved his hands down, claspings them between my belly and my breast. Still, he hadn't let go. He stammered, "I-, I'm sorry, Syd. I woke up and my hands were already there."

I flexed my ass, hopefully sending chills along his body as I replied, "There's nothing to apologize for, sweetie. I feel so much better when you hold me like this. How did you sleep?"

He relaxed at the question, "Better. Sleeping next to you is so much better than sleeping by myself. I mean, I know you said it's okay. But are you sure?"

I took one of his hands and put it back on my chest, "Does this feel like a breast that's not sure?"

He giggled, his breath tickling my back, "No. It's really nice."

He fell silent. Less than a minute later, his other hand returned to my other breast. I melted against his body, enjoying the moment at least as much as he did. The sun crept over the mountains; feeble light drifted through the blackout curtains. But I didn't care. I could stay like this all day long, if it meant Gabe's hands on my tits and his cock against my ass.

He broke the silence, "Syd, c-, can we kiss?"

My heart fluttered in confusion. On one hand, I wanted him to force me around and for him to put his tongue into my mouth. On the other, I was simply happy he wanted me. I shifted around until my tits pressed against his chest. His boner no longer poked my butt. Now it poked at my pubic mound. Either way was fine with me. His arms were clasped together against my back. We moved our faces toward each other until our lips touched. A few heartbeats later, he pulled back, "I like how your lips feel."

My own breathing was rough, "Me too. Kiss me again."

His lips formed against mine, and as our lips pushed together, I slid my tongue out and touched his lips with it. He surprised me by how quickly he opened his lips and let my tongue inside. My stomach turned to butterflies, and I felt hot between my legs when his tongue met mine and they intertwined with one another.

When he broke the kiss, he gave me a silly grin, "Holy shit, that's even better than it sounded in your books."

I chuckled. It was only as I leaned in and kissed in again that I realized Gabe's kissing was much better than before. The little horn-dog was learning from my books!

I leaned into him and playfully nibbled on his lip, "Show me it wasn't a fluke, my love."

He pushed against me, our lips crushing together. His tongue was the first to bridge the divide. For six long years, I've wondered what it would feel like to be kissed by someone who knew what they were doing. Kyle had stuck his tongue in my mouth the same way he'd fucked me; badly. Now, Gabe's tongue darted around my mouth, tangling with mine, then running along my teeth, then sucking on my tongue. I was on fire with lust for this gorgeous twelve-year-old. If only he would take control.

When the kiss ended, his eyes were slightly glazed. We both said, "Wow," at the same time. For five years, I've written scenes of my heroines kissing their bad-boy lover, knowing that what they were experiencing on the page

was a hundred times better than that one horrible experience. Now, I would never have that handicap again.

His face was only inches away from mine. I hoped against hope that kiss would be enough to stir him to action, and to dominate me. He chewed on his lower lip until he figured out what he wanted to say, "You remember last week, Sid? When we were in here. That thing you did?"

My heart matched his, as it thundered in my chest, "You mean sucking on you?"

He flushed and nodded.

I didn't wait for him to say or do anything. As lightly as possible, I pushed him onto his back and took hold of his underwear and pulled them off, freeing his boner. Only a week had passed since last I'd seen it. As my fingers caressed his pale skin, he was as smooth as before. Maybe it was my longing, but it seemed slightly larger.

As badly as I wanted to take him in my mouth, to pleasure him in ways he's yet to imagine, some primal need overwhelmed me and I said, "You want me to give you a blowjob?"

He bobbed his head, "Yeah."

My face was inches away from his hard, smooth five inches, "Tell me, Gabe. I'm your slut, you're in charge. Tell me!"

His penis twitched, "Syd, y-, y-, you slut. S-, suck my d-, dick!"

His face was crimson, as though each word shamed him. All I cared about was that he had taken charge. I pushed my hair behind my ears and bent over until my tongue flicked across Gabe's glans. He hissed in pleasure, "Ahh!"

My tongue swirled around his bullet shaped head. A slight pungency touched my tastebuds. There was a faint hint of urine, but mostly just Gabe's musky essence. As I took his head in my mouth, even that faded to the taste of skin. My tongue teased his glans while my lips slid across the slight ridge of his circumcision scar. Those first two inches were amazing.

Gabe lay prone, his hands clasped under his head. The only sign he was awake were tiny mewling noises from his throat.

Gabe flexed his butt, sending another inch sliding through my lips. I did my part, taking more of him. My lips touched the base of his penis as the tip tickled the back of my throat. I'd watched dozens, maybe even hundreds of videos of girls sucking guys, but this was a first for me, and the sweet sounds coming from Gabe only made me hornier. I kept as much suction around my lips as possible and pulled back until I let his entire five inches pop free.

The soft mewling stopped until my tongue licked at the underside of his cock, licking and kissing along the urethra vein. I kissed the base of his shaft and moved down until I sucked at his balls, until I sucked both into my mouth. They were bigger than I expected. I kept one in and let the other slide free, sucking them gently. Finally, Gabe moaned, "That tickles, Syd. Suck my dick... please!"

His plaintive cry sent me back to his glans and this time, I pushed my face down, taking him all the way down, my lips touching his pubic bone and the tip of his cock grazing against my throat. My tongue slid and darted along Gabe's shaft, teasing out more mewling noises. I picked up the pace, pulling back and plunging down, again and again. His butt tremored and his hands, which had laid on my shoulders, now gripped them and pulled me down, pushing my lips against his pubic bone.

Gabe moaned as his cock spasmed in my mouth. A drop of his immature semen hit the back of my throat. He spasmed again and something sweet and tart hit my tongue. His penis shuddered several more times, trying to give up what his body wasn't quite ready to make. I pulled back, letting his erection slide through my lips. His five inches quivered when it slid out from between my lips.

His entire body shuddered one last time, "Oh! My! God!" he almost shouted. "That was a bazillion times better than when you jacked on me."

If ever I was glad we picked an isolated campsite, it was then.

The sun was as close to being overhead as it could be, and the shade provided by the high walls of the RV was gone. The clock in the taskbar showed I had been working for over three hours already and my stomach grumbled that was too long.

Gabe stretched, balancing his laptop on his legs. "It's almost twelve-thirty, Syd. I'm hungry enough to reenact the Donner Party."

I wished I had something to throw at him. Like me, he could go down rabbit holes of knowledge researching for a story. He had wanted to find out how far and fast wagons could go back in the Middle Ages. His research eventually took him to reading about the settlement of California in the nineteenth century. Really, mostly it was just reading the gruesome story of the Donner Party. And now I was left to pay the price. I set my laptop aside and rose, "If I hear one more word about the Donner Party, I'll be having you for dinner, you imp. Speaking of which, you want a sandwich for lunch?"

We were using food from the fridge that might spoil first, leaving frozen meals and boxed dinners until the fresh deli meat was gone. Gabe nodded, "Yeah. Sounds good."

We took our paper plates, loaded with sandwiches and potato chips, back to the lounge chairs and ate. Gabe had fallen back into his custom of wearing just a pair of shorts and sneakers. There was only one other RV in camp at the moment, so I wasn't much more modest. I wore a pair of shorts and a sports bra.

When we finished, Gabe took my plate, "I need a break from writing, Syd. Why don't we go exploring? There are trails nearby we can explore. Even creeks and lakes. I saw 'em on the GPS map."

I had nearly all the sequel to Give the Devil His Due outlined as well as a few notes for a couple of more books in the series. I wouldn't mind a break, but going hiking didn't sound like much fun. "I dunno, Gabe. Maybe we could find something on Netflix or something on Direct TV."

He threw the trash into a bag we kept outside during the day and came back over to me. He had a curious look in his eye when he leaned over,

resting his hands on the armrests, and let his lips touch mine. I wasn't worried about anyone seeing us. The other RV was on the other side of the campgrounds, but the brazen kiss was bolder than anything Gabe had done before. He leaned in, until his face was near my ear, "Did you really mean it, about being mine?"

A thrill ran through my body. What was Gabe going on about? He was asking me about my deepest fantasy. Nothing excited me more than imagining him having his way with me. Even though I knew we were alone, I glanced about before nodding, "Yeah, sweetie. I'm yours."

His lips brushed against mine again before he stood up. That look in his eyes was still there, "Cool. Then, woman, we're going hiking. Come along."

My eyebrows shot up in stunned surprise. Aside from the unbroken voice, he nearly had me convinced he was a billionaire bad boy. My body responded before my mind and I rose to my feet, "Are you ordering me to go hiking with you?"

His eyes darted to the ground and his face grew florid. His eyes twinkled, almost as if this were a joke. I expected him to relent. Gabe lacked the confidence to truly dominate me.

"Of course, Ms. Nelson. I'm the man and you're my woman. Get your shoes on and let's go."

I followed after him as we found the nearby trailhead. The trail meandered along, and despite the temperature never getting much over seventy, we were soon sweating as we went along. After a bit, the trail ran parallel to a creek, and we followed along as both creek and trail ran under a two-lane highway. We were nearly an hour into our hike when my legs tired. Gabe seemed energized.

"Gabe, I need to rest for a few."

He stopped, a concerned expression broke through the false bravado, "Just a bit further, Syd. I saw something on the GPS map, and we're close."

I groaned, "Five minutes. Okay."

His only response was to hurry along the dirt trail hugging the gurgling creek. Almost five minutes later (and yes, I was counting it on my phone), he paused again, looked around. There was an incline to our right. “Just a sec. I think we’re close.”

He scampered up the incline and disappeared from view. He shouted, “Holy shit, this is sweet!”

I sighed. At least there were no bears around at the moment, although I was tempted to one-up old man Donner and slather honey all over Gabe and let the bear have their own picnic. My calves hurt by the time I reached the top of the incline. And I stood in awe. We stood in a meadow, surrounded on all sides by tall aspens, save for a narrow break on the other side of the clearing where a service road cut through. A closer inspection showed tire tracks through the ankle high grass. This was the perfect place to boondock. It was as remote a place as you could imagine. Gabe summed up my thoughts, “I bet the forest rangers don’t come here very often.”

We’d only seen one drive through the campground once in the three days since we arrived. But that wasn’t what caught my attention. To both the east and west, the mountains seemed closer and more majestic than in our camp, even though only a couple of miles separated us from this slice of Eden.

I turned to Gabe, “What would you do here than you couldn’t do at our current site?”

He looked one way and then the other before a grin split his face. He unzipped his shorts and a moment later, both shorts and underwear were on the ground and he ran around the meadow in nothing but his sneakers. “This is what I’d do. Come on, Syd. You can too.”

I looked around. We were more alone than we’d ever been before. Normally, that would give me a sense of lonely isolation. But right then, Gabe’s infectious spirit chased away any loneliness. I shrugged and pulled my sports bra off and set it atop his discarded clothes. Feeling the tepid sun on my tits was a new thing. The characters in my books may cavort on pristine beaches in the nude. But me? This was a whole new experience. A moment later, I tossed my shorts to the side and felt even more liberated.

Gabe, still running and skipping about, called, "You're not doing it right, Syd. We're supposed to be naked."

He had yet to see me naked. To date, our nudity had only run one way. To let him see me as naked as I could see him, his soft penis bouncing about, was the one remaining line I hadn't crossed on the lead up to sex. And there was no denying, there wasn't even a pretense of not wanting him to fuck me. Still, I paused.

He finally stopped in front of me. The twinkle in his eyes and his mischievous grin would have been enough to know he was inhabiting my fantasy, but his three soft inches grew before my eyes into five erect inches. He puffed his chest out, as though proud of his body. I could scarcely blame him. His body aroused my own desire. "Come on, woman. How can you say you belong to me if you won't do what I say?"

At that moment, I was lost in my desire to be wholly his. I slipped the panties off. Gabe's bravado cracked again as his eyes stared at my body. For once in my life I felt like a woman whom men desired, instead of a too-skinny writing hack who lives vicariously through her characters. My hips were narrower than Abby's, but still wider than the rest of my skinny frame. But Gabe just stared at me like a starving man discovering a four-course meal. When it's the right man, or in my case, boy, women don't mind being objectified.

When he found his voice, Gabe was reverential, almost like being in a church, "Wow."

After a moment, he grabbed my hand and pulled me toward the tree line on the meadow's far side. The service road was wide enough for the RV and although the thicket of trees was dense, it wasn't particularly thick. About forty or fifty feet from the meadow was a dirt road running parallel with the river and trail. I threw my arm around Gabe's shoulders, "When we get back to camp, we're gonna top of the water tank and bring the RV over here."

Gabe flashed a smile, slipping back into my little fantasy, "You should always do what your man tells you."

I played along, "And what is your command, my love?"

His eyes widened. He was trying so hard to show me how he could fulfill my fantasy, yet he was still woefully inexperienced. "I thought that was obvious. We need to go back and move the RV over here."

With that, he took me by the hand and we ran back to our clothes. He reached for his underwear and then paused as he looked toward the tree line near the creek, "I gotta pee."

That glimmer returned, and he grinned at me again, "Can I watch you go, too?"

I chuckled at how quickly he broke character. I'd do anything for him. But I also wanted him to stay in charge, "Are you ordering me to pee in front of you?"

Like a lightbulb going off over his head, Gabe realized his mistake and nodded, "Of course. Woman, let me see you pee?"

Growing up in a poor part of Bakersfield, it's not like you can get out into nature, so I've never peed in public or in the middle of the wilderness. But there wasn't much to do except step away from the clothes and spread my feet apart. I reached out and pulled Gabe closer, "squat down, get a good look, my love."

Gabe obediently knelt. I felt sexy and dirty all in one. His eyes were even with my slit. He could have reached out and rubbed his fingers against my clit without stretching. My shy bladder took a moment, but finally a stream of yellow spattered the ground beneath me. When it dribbled to a stop, I stayed in place, letting him see the thin lips of my outer labia. "What'd you think?"

He was tongue tied and only managed a "Wow, that's cool," for a response.

I thought about asking him to touch me. After all, I wanted to feel more than just his hands exploring my body. But I chickened out as he rose to his feet, "I gotta pee. Check it out."

He turned, facing away from me, and grabbed his still rigid cock. After the better part of a minute of standing there, a dribble of pee appeared. It

grew more powerful and soon a yellow stream flowed. When it tapered off, he grinned with embarrassment, "It's hard to piss when stiff as a board."

It was all I could to stop myself from leaning down, flicking the piss off his slit and sucking him again. Instead, we returned to our clothes and were soon dressed. Instead of hiking back to our camp the way we came in, we followed the service road. About a mile down the service road, we found the highway and followed it back to the campground.

It was pushing dinnertime by the time we leveled the RV and rolled out the slide-outs in our new, secluded campsite. I threw a frozen casserole in the oven and set the alarm. Gabe was outside, setting up our lounge chairs in the shade. Was he still in the mood to play our sexualized game? "The casserole is in the oven. What is your command now?"

A smile played across his face at the realization I was still interested in being bent to his will. He grabbed my hand, "While you were leveling the RV, I discovered something cool."

We headed down the embankment, toward the creek. There, he pulled his shoes and socks off, "I saw it on the other side of the creek. Come on!"

I followed his lead and took my sneakers off. With his sneakers tied together around his neck, Gabe started across the creek. Even though the creek was only twenty feet wide, he yelped when he stepped into the creek, "Oh, fuck, it's cold."

I giggled as he practically danced in the mountain run-off. Worse for him, within three steps, the water hit the bottom hem of his shorts. He retreated, scowling at the water. I joked, "Looks like you're going to get your wish to go around naked."

He gave me a dirty look before finally laughing, "Yeah. I guess so."

He pulled his shorts and underwear off and shoved them into his sneakers. He waded back into the creek before turning to me, "Come on, woman. You get used to the cold."

I shook my head, marveling at how much I wanted him to dominate me sexually, that I was willing to let him dominate me completely. I pulled my shorts and panties off, and copied Gabe and put them into my sneakers, which were draped across my shoulder. I swore like a drunken sailor when my feet went into the water. No, it wasn't cold. It was ice cold.

Taking my hand, Gabe set off for the other side. There must have been some kind of channel in the creek. That fourth step, taking us more than halfway across, we went from being thigh deep to sinking to just below our chests. From there, the creek became shallow as we climbed to the other side. Once on dry land, I glared at him, "We've gotta go back across that when we're done, and that water's fucking cold."

I wasn't kidding. Gabe's penis seemed to shrink in on itself and his balls were nestled tight against his skin. At least my sports bra was still on, otherwise he'd have seen just how hard my nipples were from the icy water; and they hadn't even gotten wet.

Gabe put his sneakers on and said, "Come on, it should be on the other side of these trees."

Naked, Gabe pushed through a screen of trees. I followed behind, dodging branches and trying not to get scratched by the trees. He stopped after a couple of dozen paces, "Hurry up, Syd. This is cool."

When I reached him, I looked over his shoulder at a small lake. Although to call it a lake was to be generous. It stretched out maybe a hundred feet in length and was about half as wide. Like our campsite, trees ringed the shoreline.

Gabe crinkled his nose, "It sort of smells like sulfur."

It wasn't strong, but it was coming from the water. There were mineral hot springs all across Colorado. Maybe this was one such place. I knelt by the water and dipped my hand in it. Unlike the creek, it was nearly hot. "Feel it, Gabe. Once again, you were right."

He knelt beside me and stuck his hand in the water, "Ooh, that's nice. We can go swimming here."

I'm sure others have found the spot, but the place looked pristine, like something out of a Thomas Kincaid painting. "Do you want?"

The shoes came off and Gabe stepped into the water, "Oh, this is nice, Syd. You've gotta come in."

As he waded further from the shoreline, I said, "Are you commanding me, my love?"

He chuckled. His eyebrows furrowed as though aware that playing the bad-boy billionaire was harder than it looked. "Um, yeah. Get naked and get in."

I pulled my sports bra and sneakers off and stepped into the water. The further into the water I went, I realized it wasn't quite as hot as I originally thought. Not too far from where we entered the water, a tributary from the icy creek flowed into the hot springs, and at the other end, it flowed out. That explained why the smell wasn't stronger and why the water was clearer than most hot springs.

Gabe stood about ten paces from the shoreline, chest deep in the water, "Come on, Syd. It's warmer here and feels nice. Maybe we can bathe here and save our water for other stuff."

I surprised myself when I said, "If that's what you wish, my love. You're in charge."

Of course, boondocking meant we only had two-hundred-fifty gallons of fresh water. If we didn't shower and only used the water for cooking and flushing the toilet, we could easily stay here a couple of weeks before taking the RV to a dump station and refilling the fresh water tank. But it was more than that; even if his idea had been crap, I would have still agreed with Gabe. At least as long as we lived my fantasy.

I stopped when our faces were a hand's length apart, and gave him a smile, "This is really fucking cool, Gabe. I'm glad you showed it to me."

The smile that lit his face at my praise made me warm inside. Even more than my writing, nothing was more important to me than Gabe, and this little slice of Eden was perfect for us. I leaned in, "You brought me out here, my love. What now?"

He leaned in until our lips touched. His lips were warm and moist, and as the kiss lingered, he slid his arms around my waist and pulled our bodies together. My tits tingled when they touched Gabe's chest. My stomach fluttered when his cock, hard as a rock, poked my pubic mound. When the kiss ended, I lay my head on his shoulder and enjoyed the intimacy of his hug.

The rustling of the wind through the treetops, the music of the birds in the forest, the gentle lapping of the water on the shoreline, these things were like a warm blanket, making the moment even more special. Gabe said, "Sometimes, I wonder if there's a heaven. But then I see a place like this, and I can't help thinking it has to be real."

He let go and floated onto his back. His buoyancy was good enough that his erection bobbed in and out of the water as he did feathered his arms in the water, moving toward the middle of the pond. He stopped in the middle and let himself sink under the surface. Before I could worry about how long he was under, his auburn hair broke the surface. After spitting water out, he said, "It's only another four or five feet here, Syd." With that, he splashed a wavelet of water at me.

I pushed myself off the silty bottom and swam toward him. He splashed at me, moving away. "You're it, Syd. I bet you can't catch me!"

To punctuate it, he splashed me again. I yelped as the water splashed my face, and then I pursued him. I knew it wouldn't last long before for this brief season of our lives passed; for now, we were almost the same size. But even though he was barely twelve, with the rangy muscles of preadolescence, he was stronger and faster than me, if only by a smidgen. But I had more endurance. I finally caught him in the deepest part of the pond when I closed with him and threw my arms around his neck from behind. We sank under the water as he wrestled against my grip. The water was clear enough to see hot water bubbling from fissures in the pond's silty floor. I lost my focus, taken in by the natural beauty. Gabe took advantage and spun around, wrapping his arms around the back of my neck.

We held each other; our bodies tightly clasped together. His face was inches from mine when we simultaneously realized his penis, still erect, had slid between the lips of my labia. A shudder, almost like an orgasm, shook me as we let go of each other and swam to the surface. Gabe's face had never been redder, and I can only imagine it matched my own. As he treaded water, he sputtered, "I-, I'm s-, sorry, Syd."

In all my twenty-four years, I've never burned with desire like I did right then. I swam over to him, and put a finger over his lips, "Don't apologize, Gabe. Who's in charge here?"

His expression of worry and fear slowly ebbed away as he realized I hadn't let go of my fantasy. It was as much a question as a statement, "Me?"

I gave him a quick kiss and then swam to where I could stand with my head out of the water. A half-dozen paces separated us as I replied, "That's right."

He swam over to me until he stood in front of me. He was so close, his erection brushed against my pubic mound. "When you say I'm in charge, do you mean I'm in charge of everything?"

The naïve innocence in his voice only made me want him to dominate me all the more. I nodded, "Yes, my love. Just like in my stories."

His hands touched my hips as he inched forward, "Like with sex?"

As he pulled me in, I took hold of his erection enough to push it down so that he slid between my legs, "Yes."

Gabe's erection was trapped between my legs. The upper part splitting my outer labia, sending tendrils of pleasurable tickles through my body. I slid my arms around his neck as he locked his arms around my waist. The kiss was sweeter, lasted longer, and turned me on even more, as Gabe explored my mouth with his tongue. Although not our first French kiss, his tongue started out hesitantly as he pushed through my lips, but by the time the kiss ended, he had explored every part of my mouth with his tongue with growing confidence.

About that time, his stomach growled, and he giggled, "I guess I'm hungry."

I let my hands fall away, as I thought about the casserole in the oven back in the RV. Gabe's hands remained clasped around my waist. The smile hadn't left his face as he pushed his body against mine. The upper part of his cock slid along my slit, sending a jolt of pleasure radiating from between my legs. "I'm hungry for you."

My arms went around his neck again as his hips rocked back again, dragging his cock against my exposed labia. He groaned, "Oh, wow. This," he pushed his hips forward, sending shivers along my spine, "feels really good."

After Kyle, I'd contented myself with my sex toys. The way my emotions and my senses combined as he held me, rocking his hips, sliding his cock against my slit, were altogether new to me. Before, when I pleasured myself, sure it felt great, but until now I didn't know what was missing. I felt more alive than ever as the top of Gabe's erection dragged across my clitoral hood.

He rocked against me a couple of more times when I felt myself bump against my bliss. Again, he dragged his cock against my clit and a little dam burst within me, making me shudder in Gabe's embrace. It was just a small orgasm. But the emotional connection amplified it tenfold.

Gabe, still sliding against me, grunted, pulled me forward, as he moaned, "Ah, fuck!"

His cock pulsed against my pussy lips as I envisioned his little drop of spunk diluting into the hot springs. It took a moment for us to stop shaking, and we held each other close. I know I needed to let him stay in charge. But in the heat of the moment, my lips sought his, and I kissed him and invaded his mouth with my tongue, until breathless, I pulled back, "You were fucking awesome, sweetie."

A loopy grin spread across his face, "So were you."

His stomach chose that moment to announce again its hunger. I chuckled, "You ready for dinner?"

Gabe found my hand and entwined his fingers with mine, "Yeah."

When we reached the shore, we gathered our clothes and navigated our way through the trees toward the creek. There didn't seem to be much reason to get dressed again until we reached the other side. With our shoe around our necks, we braved the water, hand in hand. Gabe yelped when the icy water reached above his thighs. I felt bad for him as it assaulted his cutest part. I barely avoided my own frozen hell when the water nearly reached my tits before we started up the other side.

Back on dry land I pulled my panties from my shoes and as I bent to put them on, with chattering teeth, Gabe said, "H-, hold on, Sid. I'm still in charge, right?"

I set my leg down, one leg threaded through my panties. Where was he going with this? "Of course."

He flapped his arms, trying to warm up, "Cool. I think you're really sexy when you're naked. Let's stay like this for a while."

Even though the creek's icy water wilted Gabe's penis to well below his normal flaccid three inches, I could have sworn it twitched at his words. I stepped out of the panties again, "Okay, my love. You're in charge."

It felt strangely liberating going the last few yards to our RV. When I stepped into the meadow, I felt so exposed, but a quick look at the service road showed we were as alone as before. Even so, I hurried to the RV and practically raced up the stairs right as the timer-alarm in the kitchen went off. I couldn't have planned the afternoon better if I'd tried.

Sitting across from Gabe at the table, I could almost imagine we weren't naked. Almost. The table blocked out his most interesting parts. Being a woman certainly had its disadvantages; Gabe's eyes lingered on my tits while we ate the casserole and microwaved veggies. He finished before me and leaned his elbows against the faux marble tabletop.

After a bite, I said, "Take a picture, it'll last longer."

He flushed, realizing I'd caught him staring at me. Then a smile creased his features, "Who's in charge? You or me?"

The heat in my face traveled through a body that yearned for his domination. "You are, sweetie."

His hand stretched across the table and caressed one of my nipples, making it grow hard, "And if I'm in charge, I can do this. Right?"

I shuddered when his fingers gently pinched my nipple, sending a surge of pleasure through me. I nodded, my voice only a whisper, "Yes."

His other hand reached across and fondled my other breast, "And this?"

My voice shook, "Y-, yes. Anything."

He slid out of the bench across from me. His erection was back. He came over to my side and said, "If I told you to suck me, would you do it?"

That heat ran all the way from my face to between my legs as I dipped my head, "Yeah. Can I?"

He turned and sat on the sofa, "We'll see. For now, if you're finished, come over here and sit beside me."

Even though I still had a couple of bites left on my plate, I wasn't hungry. Or rather, I wasn't hungry for that. I hungered for what sat opposite me on the sofa. Ignoring my food, I came over and sat next to him, making sure my body touched his as I sat. "What now?"

Gabe's hand returned to my tit, massaging and tweaking it for a moment. I've played with my tits plenty of times when I pleased myself with one of my toys. But nothing felt better than his hand. Before long, he tired of the same motions and his fingers traced down my sternum, tickling my belly enough to pull laughter from me, before moving down. I prided myself on shaving down there and, as his fingers caressed my pubic mound, it was silky smooth. I spread my legs, giving him greater access, and a moment later, his index finger touched the hood over my clit.

"Ahh, that's nice," I purred.

Gabe rubbed it for a few seconds before the radial motion exposed my engorged clit. When he touched that, I bit my lower lip, "Oh, that's it, baby."

With a curious note in his voice, he asked, "Has anyone else touched you like this, Syd?"

As if I needed another reason to hate Kyle. Aside from clumsily sticking his average size cock in me, the college freshman hadn't bothered discovering my body. "No, baby. Just me, and I don't count."

His finger stopped massaging my clit as it explored the valley of my inner labia. "You're wet."

I shuddered at his velvety touch, "You're making me excited. I get wet when I'm excited like this."

He rubbed his slickened finger along my inner folds. Then his finger found my vagina. I sighed, "Look what you found."

His finger pressed in; I felt him inside me, at least to his first knuckle. "Is this what I think it is?"

I shuddered as another wave of pleasure washed over me, "Yeah. My pussy. You want to stick your cock inside it?"

The way his ears turned red only made me want him more. His nerves were a mess, "Y-, yeah."

While I wanted him to take and own me, Gabe's entire sexual experience was with me over the past few weeks. The last thing I wanted was for his first time to be as bad as mine. I reached over and caressed his inner thigh, moving closer to his cock with each heartbeat, "You're in charge, my love. Would you like to go back to the bedroom?"

He nodded as my finger lightly traced a vein on his shaft. I leaned in and kissed him, "Lead the way, my love."

He offered his hand, and I let him pull me off the couch and guide me back to the bedroom. I sat on the end of the bed and patted the space beside me. When he joined me, I put my arm around his shoulders and offered him my lips. He was nervous; his lips were dry, but he pressed them against mine as I slid my tongue into his mouth. With my free hand, I reached between his legs and brushed my fingers along his five delightful inches.

When the kiss ended, I scooted my way toward the headboard, "Come up here with me, sweetie."

No sooner had my head hit the pillow than Gabe landed beside me. He turned onto his side, propping his head with his hand, "What now?"

Looking between us, his erection was so close to touching me, I couldn't resist and shifted a couple of inches toward him, letting his boner poke my hip. I turned to meet him, pressing my body against his, making his erection lay flat between us, and kissed him. When we came up for breath, I moved my hand between us and took hold, "What we did in the hot springs is a great place to start."

I pushed his cock between my legs. He had length enough for his glans to reach beyond my labia. I adjusted myself too, spreading my lips around the upper part of his erection, "Start pushing, Gabe. Just like before."

He breathed a shallow giggle, "Except we were standing up, now we're lying down."

A dozen times, his hips rocked against my pubic bone. His cock was slick with my juices, but I wanted more. I wanted this to be more than just some sexy act between us. I would teach him to fuck me missionary style. But now wasn't the time for that. I needed to hold him close. I slid my left leg around his upper leg. His dick slid against my labia as I opened myself a bit to him. "Feel that? I want to slide my other leg around your other side."

Gabe moved, lifting his hip enough that I slid my other leg under him and wrapped them around his waist. Moving myself like this moved my body up just enough to feel his tip against my labia. I reached between us and took hold of him, "You ready, sweetie?"

He nodded as I lined him up. I shuddered from his glans resting against my opening. My voice shook, "Push, Gabe."

His flared head invaded me, stretching me as he slid a few inches inside me. He gasped, "Holy fuck! This feels awesome."

I squeezed my legs, taking him in until our pubic bones touched. My pussy was like a glove and Gabe fit perfectly. "Just wait. If you thought what you felt earlier was good, you ain't felt nothing yet. Push your hips."

We pushed against each other, and his five inches found every erogenous spot in my vagina. I felt my senses more than ever before. My hips trembled as he slid back, pulling his cock most of the way out. Some element of evolution kicked in and Gabe's instincts kicked in as he pushed against me again, sending him deep into me, driving me to the very edge, "Fuck me, Gabe. Fuck me, sweetie. Make me yours!"

He pushed in again. A dam I never knew existed broke somewhere deep inside me and I shuddered as somewhere inside me bolts of pleasure radiated outward as I came. I had been wet before, but with that shuddering cum, the squishing noise filled the bedroom as he slid in and out of me.

"Oh! Oh! Oh!" he cried, as his thrusts became more urgent. The cascading orgasm crashing over me was relentless as he thrust his hips forward. Then he shuddered, thrusting his hips forward at the same time I pushed down, taking everything he had as his cock spasmed inside me. How or from what well it came from, Gabe found something even deeper, more primordial than the cum currently rolling over me and I shook as a deeper cum slammed against me.

Unlike with Kyle, when I felt nothing when he came, a warmth radiated deep inside me where Gabe's immature, watery semen hit my pussy walls. He called my name over and over as his orgasm wracked his body. Once he finished cumming, he tilted his head forward until our lips met, and we kissed as lovers.

Chapter 13

Gabe leaned against the corner sofa-back, his legs stretched out lengthwise along the sofa. He perched a lap-desk on his legs where his laptop set. He set his lips in a slight frown as he studied the screen. It was his first day in the seventh grade and of home-schooling, although that was a bit misleading, because I enrolled him in an online private school.

I couldn't help but smile at him before returning to my screen. It was filled with characters; I was halfway through my first draft of book three of the Give the Devil His Due. Book two was with my editor and book one was nearly ready to publish. It was missing two key components still. I had commissioned cover art for four books, and the artist and I were still hammering out exactly how far to push the cover art and still stay on the good side of Amazon's notoriously fickle censors. The other missing component was book three finished and back from my editor. I was two weeks away from my first draft, another couple of weeks away from the draft I'd sent to the editor, and then up to a month to get it back from her. I planned a pre-Christmas launch.

Gabe pushed the earphones from his head and stretched. If that boy had a uniform, it was blue, white, or red shorts. Today it was red. He yawned, "Finished for the day. How's the book going?"

I saved my work. I'd been writing for the better part of six hours and needed a break. "Good. On track. What do you want to do for dinner?"

He came over and slid into the seat beside me, sliding an arm around me. After a deep kiss, he asked, "Is my book back from the editor yet?"

I smiled, whether from the kiss or because I'd seen it pop into my inbox earlier that afternoon, I couldn't say. "Yeah, sweetie. Now the fun part begins. You get to review the edits and figure out what you need to keep, change, or just throw away."

He grumbled, "You said it was really good. Do you think the editor will tell me I need to change things?"

I shrugged, “I don’t know. I went with Billie because she edited some of my earlier work and because she edits young adult fiction, so if anyone has their finger on the pulse of the teen market, she would. Whatever changes she recommends, you should consider them.”

Gabe’s fingers found my thigh, and he traced them under the hem of my shorts, “Whatever you think, Syd. Why don’t we go celebrate my book coming back from the editor?”

I sucked a breath in as his fingers touched my panties, “Feels like you’re ready to celebrate already, Gabe.”

He pulled his hand from my shorts, “Maybe later. Let’s go into town and eat at a real restaurant.”

I tried to hide my disappointment, “Fine. Which restaurant?”

He named one I had wanted to try when we were at Mesa Verde at the start of the summer. Now, with a rental car parked next to the RV, getting into town was a breeze. “Sure, sweetie. Why don’t you find a t-shirt and some sneakers and we can go?”

The drive into Durango took thirty-five minutes in the rental car. After spending the better part of two months boondocking in that little slice of heaven in the Rio Grande National Forest, I wanted plenty of creature comforts, including a rental car. When you have to roll in the slides and retract the levelers, to do anything, you really miss having a car. We had only been at the RV park outside of Mesa Verde for a couple of days, and already this was our third outing in the car rental.

Officially, Gabe and I have been dating for a bit more than two months. Of course, almost every bit of that had been in our secluded clothing-optional Garden of Eden. Now that we were around people, Gabe’s demeanor was much more mature than a typical twelve-year-old. It didn’t hurt that he was a bit more than an inch taller than me now. Instinctively, he seemed to understand our romance was for us, and us alone.

After we ordered our food, Gabe asked, “Every month this summer, your books are bringing in a bit less money. You could have published Give the

Devil His Due a month ago. But you're waiting. Wouldn't it be better to get the books out, each one when they're ready?"

While I had taught Gabe everything I could think to teach him about writing, we hadn't delved into the publishing side much yet. "I could have. Although my cover artist is still working on the series. Do you understand why I'm waiting?"

He took another sip of soda, "Not really. I'd think that every day your book isn't available, you'd be losing money."

I stirred some sweetener into my tea, "You'd think so, but that's not really how the online book market works. You see, I'm tapping into an audience who has a genuine hunger to plow through bodice rippers. These old gals will devour one book right after the other. They might give an author a month, maybe six weeks, to get the next book out. But that's if they really like the author. The best strategy is a rapid release of the books, two to four weeks apart."

Gabe shook his head, wide-eyed, "It took me all summer just to finish my story. I can't imagine writing a sixty or seventy thousand word book every month."

My ankle found his, and I slid it along his calf, "That's why I'll have book four mostly done by the time book one hits Amazon. The entire series will be out and available within three months."

A smile played across his face as he responded by rubbing against my leg, "That's still a lot of work. What did your editor think of Give the Devil His Due?"

Unlike most men, I admired Gabe's ability to multitask, playing footsies while talking craft. I picked well. "Unlike my agent, she liked it. No, loved it. Now that this Epstein fellow has been killed or committed suicide, a story with a similar billionaire may catch fire. Sometimes, it's just about hitting the market at the right time."

I heard something hit the floor and glanced under the table. One of Gabe's shoes lay there. I was grateful for the long tablecloth as his toe touched my

inner thigh. He was good, though; he didn't miss a beat, "I hope my book does well."

Since he started writing, I'd paid more attention to other markets than just the romance. I slid my sandal off and put my foot on the edge of his seat, "Just remember, the average book on Amazon only sells five hundred copies. And that includes people like JK Rowling, who sells hundreds of thousands of copies of her books even after all these years, to Joe Schmoe, who only sells a copy to his wife and mother."

Gabe wiggled his toe, sliding it inside the leg of my shorts, "But you said it was good. So, it should do well. Right?"

I sucked in a breath when his big toe touched my panties. Not to be outdone, my foot nudged his thigh, opening his legs a bit, and my toe slid against his inner thigh, "I loved it, sweetie. And you should consider it wildly successful if it sells five hundred copies. Do that, and you'll more than cover the cost of the editor and book cover."

Gabe's big toe played with the front of my panties. I wiggled my big toe and slipped it between his inner thigh and underwear until I found his erection straining against his shorts. A startled look crossed his face as a smile danced on the edge of his lips. Before we could continue our conversation further, the waitress returned with our steaks. We forgot about playing footsies with each other's crotches, although we left our feet where they ended up.

By the time I was halfway through my steak, I couldn't eat another bite. But Gabe was still cutting away on his. I moved my foot until my sole lined up with his boner. He kept flashing me looks, like I was distracting him from some Grade A USDA choice. The problem was, I hadn't had any Gabe A USDA choice today and fondling his cock with my foot was turning me on.

Once he finished his steak, he moved his toe around until he pushed my panties aside enough to find my slit. He had just managed to slide it between my labia lips when the waitress returned, "Can I get you anything else?"

She gave me the queerest look when I strangled my words, "Just the check, please."

I pulled my foot down, leaving Gabe's cock for later. Before I pulled out my debit card, I moved his foot away from my pussy. When the waitress returned, I settled the bill and worked my sandal onto my foot before scooting out from the booth. Gabe's head disappeared under the table as he put his sneaker on.

Back in the car, I asked, "You ready to head back to the RV park?"

He glanced at the sky; the sun was low in the western sky. "You wanna go swimming at the pool? Like we did the first time."

By the time we opened the gate to the pool area, even the purple hue on the horizon had turned black and stars were filling the night sky. And just like that first time, we had the pool to ourselves. Of course, with school back in session and the summer season officially over, the park was only at a fraction of capacity.

Gabe tossed our towel onto a chase lounge before dipping a foot in the water, "It's a lot warmer than that creek, but not as warm as our pond."

With that, he jumped into the deep end of the pool. For the first time in two months, he was swimming in a swimsuit. Even I felt overdressed in my bikini. Strange how two months of uninhibited living can leave a mark. The water was chillier than I liked, and I stood toward the shallow end to adjust. Gabe swam over to me and put his arms around my waist. Two months and not quite two inches. Still, I enjoyed looking up to him, however slight the difference. I put my arms around his neck and let him pull me to him. As we hugged, I whispered, "What would you have of me, my love?"

In a hoarse voice, reflecting a slight change to a voice that was starting to break, he said, "Let me show you."

His lips found my neck, and he kissed me, sending tendrils of pleasure rippling through my body. A hand cupped my bikini-clad tit as his lips worked their way along my neck, then along my throat. He stopped,

realized we were standing in the shallow end, the water not quite covering the bottoms of our swimsuits. He let go long enough to grab my hand and pull me toward the deep end. He stopped when the water reached our shoulders and we hugged and kissed.

As our kiss ended, Gabe pushed me toward the deeper water, "You're it, Syd. You know what'll happen if I catch you!"

I had a good idea, so I'm not sure why I swam away so fast. I circled around, back to the shallow end, where I could splash through thigh deep water with Gabe splashing behind me. From there, I pushed hard toward the deep end and finally to the middle, where he cornered me. As he closed with me, I threw my arms around his shoulders, "What are you going to do to me now, mister big, bad billionaire?"

A smile creased Gabe's features. One thing hadn't changed over the past couple of months. I loved being dominated by him. Gabe grabbed me around the waist and growled, "I'm gonna fuck you silly, Ms. Nelson. Show you who's the boss."

Two months ago, that would have turned my face scarlet to hear him become so assertive. Now, it just made me horny. I leaned in, pushing my modest bust against his chest. "Oh, really?"

We were just deep enough for us to stand and keep our heads above the water. He pushed at me until my back was against the wall. His hands slid under my bikini top, caressing my tits. Then he leaned down and kissed one of my nipples and then the other. "Take your top off, I wanna see them."

I was putty in Gabe's hands. A moment later, my top landed on the side of the pool. The risk of discovery only made me hornier. He fiddled with my bottoms until he untied the strings. He tossed them with the rest and I grabbed him and pulled him against me. His erection poked against my hip as my lips crushed against his. When we came up for air, he said, "Go ahead, pull my swimsuit off, slut."

I don't know why, but when we have sex, the dirtier he talks to me, the hornier I get. I kissed his chest as I slid below the surface. Then his navel. I

grabbed his swimsuit and pulled at the elastic waistband, sliding them down off his hip and freeing his erection. He was longer and thicker than when I first saw him like this toward the end of June. Just a smidgen below six inches, but still naturally smooth. I kissed his cock and slid his domed glans into my mouth before finally running out of air.

I broke the surface to, “Ah, that’s right, suck your big boy, baby!”

As I brushed the hair from my face, he grabbed me by one of my legs and pulled it against his hip. His erection grazed my slit, “Put your legs around me, Syd. You want what I’ve got!”

With the side of the pool at my back and my legs wrapped around his waist, Gabe reached down and guided himself into me. He filled me even more, and it felt magnificent as he slid all the way into me. One difference, now when he pushed all the way, he found more sensitive spots to stimulate with his cock.

The way he slid in and out of me in the water, I didn’t last long. I bit my lip as I felt my cum hit me like a giant tsunami wave. I shuddered and Gabe groaned, “Oh! Oh! I’m there!”

He pushed against me as his body shuddered and his cock jerked inside me. Heat drenched my insides as he coated me with his cum. As our bodies recovered, I felt more alive than ever. It was ballsy of Gabe to risk something in the RV campground’s public pool, even if it was after dark. I squeezed him to me, “I love you, Gabe. So fucking much!”

In the afterglow of his bliss, Gabe forgot about my fantasy. He grinned, “I love you too, Syd. That was fucking awesome!”

Unlike our first time, we were not disturbed while we climbed out of the pool and dressed. That was a good thing; we were as naked as Adam and Eve when we climbed from the pool. Walking hand in hand back to the RV along the gravel park road felt liberating, as I declared my love for my twelve-year-old lover to the birds in the trees, a stray cat or two, and the closed doors of the other RVs.

Gabe leaned into me, almost pushing me into the grass, his voice was low as he slipped back into my fantasy world, “You’re hot as fuck, Ms. Nelson.

Shame we don't have a hot-tub; I'd fuck you in there, too."

I giggled almost like a little girl. One of the sexier scenes from Give the Devil His Due was when the billionaire pushed himself on the heroine in a hot tub at the exclusive gym he owned. The public nature of the scene only fueled the eroticism I was going for. Despite the rough language, Gabe was sensitive to the forbidden nature of the love we shared.

I bumped my ass against his, pushing him toward the center of the road, "Oh, Mr. Nelson, you can have me anywhere, anytime you want."

We reached the RV before we could see who could get any dirtier in our conversation. Once the door was closed, Gabe rounded on me in the aisle and put his arms around my waist and kissed me. His hand slid down the front of my bikini bottoms, until his finger touched my clit. He rubbed it, "Now, Ms. Nelson, what were you saying?"

The curtains were up; I gasped, "Gabe. The windows!"

For the briefest of moments, a worried expression crossed his face. He slid around me and pulled me into the bedroom, where the blackout curtains were drawn. "What windows?" he growled as his finger returned to my slit.

Gabe's index finger slid through my juices until he found my vagina and slid into me, while his other hand pushed my bottoms down before going back to my clit. "That's right, my lovely slut, you're mine to do with as I wish."

He left my pussy alone long enough to pull my top off, leaving me naked, my legs backed against the bed. Pushing me back until I lay prone, Gabe soon sat on my lap, his legs spread on either side of my hips. He leaned forward and held my hands over my head, given me the sensation of being trapped. Oh, the things I would do for that boy.

If I had wanted to break free of his hold, I'm sure I could have, but the feeling of being dominated was too great. "Are you going to put that huge cock of yours down my throat?"

A gleam came into Gabe's eyes. Until then, I expected him to strip his swimsuit off and fuck me. Instead, he stood on the bed and stripped. Then he spread his legs on either side of my chest and sank until his bare ass

cheeks rested on my tits. His erection bobbed in front of my face as he resumed holding my hands over my head.

Gabe shifted his hips forward, and I opened my mouth until his glans brushed against the roof of my mouth, and I clamped my lips around the first couple of inches. My tongue ran along the underside of his urethra, making him shudder. He leaned over my face as he grabbed each of my wrists in his hands, holding them apart. His cock touched the back of my throat.

Although his hands were soft, there was iron in them, and when I flexed my wrists, I couldn't pull them away. While I trusted Gabe completely, in that moment that he pushed deeper, making me gag as his tip slid down my throat, I felt helpless; dominated. His hips rocked back, pulling his erection almost all the way out of my mouth, "That's it, slut. I'm gonna fuck your mouth!"

Rocking his hips forward, his cock again pushed into my mouth. I gagged again when his glans slid down my throat. For a moment, I panicked, pulling my arms. But Gabe's grip was firm and I couldn't move. The weight of his body on my chest left me with no way to shift. He lifted his hips and pushed deeper, his pubic bone pushed hard against my upper lip. I needed to cough, to push his cock out of me. Until I breathed through my nose and swallowed. I swallowed again, and the urgent need to gag actually went away, and with it, my panic.

He rocked back, resting his ass on my tits, his saliva-soaked cock pointing at my face. "That's right, slut, swallow my cock, like the good little slut you are."

He shifted forward and this time, when he pushed his cock into my mouth, I was ready and I swallowed, overcoming the urge to gag. I was no stranger to Gabe's cock, having sucked him off plenty of times over the past two months. But never like this, with no control over what he did to me.

Still holding my arms above my head, Gabe's groin was poised at my mouth. He rocked back and forth. My lips did what they could to stimulate his erection with every move in and out. My tongue darted and twisted about his fast-moving thrusts. Still, it hadn't been more than ten, maybe

fifteen minutes since his last cum. Sweat glistened on his body as he worked his hips back and forth, thrusting deep into my mouth. Was it five minutes? Maybe even ten when he noisily exhaled, "Fuck!"

A final thrust, his cock buried as deep in my throat as possible, and he shuddered. He grew harder, a bit bigger, and then his cock kicked about in my mouth and something hot hit my throat. Another spasm wracked my mouth as he pulled back a couple of inches. A third blast filled my mouth with his bitter-sweet nectar. And again, a fourth blast, smaller than the ones before, filled my mouth.

My jaws ached, but I still wrapped my lips around his still pulsing cock, licking at the pee hole, nursing another drop of his boy-juice into my hungry mouth. When he was spent, let go my arms and sat up, ass-cheeks still on my tits, His grin was loopy, which was common after his orgasm, "How was that, slut?"

With my hands free, I rolled him from me and wrapped my arms around his back and pulled him into a hug, "That's was some real power, sweetie. You actually had me feeling trapped and dominated."

We were face to face as we lay on our sides, catching our breaths, "I thought that's what you wanted."

It was. There were moments of pure adrenaline and then that brief moment of terror. Only my absolute trust in my lover made it something I could enjoy. "It was. It is. You can do that anytime you want, my love."

After a bit of cuddling, I noticed Gabe was still erect. He was like the energizer bunny. I reached between us, "Looks like someone still wants to play."

He giggled, "I can't help it. You make me horny, Syd."

I kissed his lips and then bent between us and licked his shaft, making it twitch, "You're not the only one."

I pushed him onto his back and crawled on top of him, straddling his pelvis. With hardly any work, I slid down onto his cock, sliding down until my outer labia pushed down on his pubic bone. He put his hands on my tits and massaged them, drawing out tiny jolts of pleasure. I flexed my hips and

knees, pulling, dragging his cock along my super-charged pussy walls until only his glans remained. Then I fell against Gabe's groin, his cock going as deep as ever. With only Kyle to compare to, Gabe had long blown the college freshman away in the way he made me feel, the orgasmic bliss he pushed me toward. And not even thirteen, he was already bigger, if just by a bit, than Kyle.

I shuddered as a small orgasm surged through me at the thought, Gabe still had a few years of growth. What would it be like taking in a monster eight inches? I could hardly wait. It was my turn to sweat as my hips and knees flexed and bent, sliding my pussy up and down his cock. We had never tried to fuck three times in less than an hour, and as my insides felt a bit sore, I understood why. But I was determined.

I didn't need to edge him, or work his cock a bit and let him relax. Thirty minutes passed before he tensed up and squeezed my tits hard, grunting as he came again. Where he stored his reserve of cum, I don't know. But as his cock spasmed, and he sprayed his semen deep inside my pussy, I felt that warmth that came from his cum as he filled my pussy.

That threw me over the edge and I came time after time until he stopped grunting and mewling from the intensity of his orgasm. I collapsed against his chest, both our hearts pounding erratically from some of the most mind-numbing sex I've ever experienced. His hands wrapped around my back as we lay connected there.

We fell asleep like that, not moving a muscle until the following morning.

Epilogue

I stared at the white plastic stick for what seemed an eternity, and bit my lower lip. Gabe was in the front of the RV, the TV playing some Christmas movie off of Direct TV. Knowing him, it was probably one of the Santa Clause movies with Tim Allen. I had no idea how to tell him about those two little pink lines staring remorselessly back at me.

With things became sexual in the middle of the summer, I made excuses for not getting on the pill; He's just twelve. His cum is clear and watery. He's not making any sperm yet. And maybe that was true for the first few months. But over the past couple of months, as he's added another inch in height and become a bit more endowed below the belt, the clear cum clouded up and grew thicker and apparently more potent.

I chuckled as I opened the cabinet under the sink and buried the stick in the trash can. I was so fucked up. But, if I had it to do all over again, I wouldn't have changed a thing. There was nothing I loved more than Gabe sliding his six inches into me, owning me, dominating me. Cumming in me. And even though I knew it was the height of idiocy, something stirred within me, knowing my twelve-year-old lover put life inside me.

Under my breath, I muttered, "I guess I'll need to get on birth control."

Then I realized I was already on nature's perfect birth control; I couldn't get any more pregnant than I was already. For the next eight months, Gabe and I could fuck until I couldn't any more. It's not like I could put the horse back in the stable. That's when I realized my Catholic upbringing was a real thing and some things had stuck. I couldn't kill the life growing inside me. The women in my books, when they faced similar crises, did whatever was expedient for the plot. Despite the fantasies Gabe and I lived almost nightly, I was a bit surprised I couldn't bring myself to do likewise. It felt wrong.

Of course, that brought another chuckle. What a tangled web I was weaving. I knew that society would judge me harshly for bedding a boy who, by birth and blood, was my nephew. But society didn't know the bond we shared. I couldn't predict the future, but I couldn't see a future

without him. I shook my head, maybe society would judge me harshly. But my research for my stories showed human history was filled with far worse ills than two people following their hearts.

I would tell Gabe. He deserved to know. But not now. There would be time enough later to let him know he was going to be a daddy. I flushed the toilet and joined him on the sofa.

His eyes lit up as sat next to him. His voice cracked as he spoke. It had been doing that a lot lately, "Check it, Syd. Have you seen Give the Devil His Due's ranking on Amazon today?"

He spun his laptop around. The sultry artwork showed less flesh than I liked, but compromise was necessary if I wanted to publish with Amazon, the prudes. He added, "Look at your rating!"

Just above the cover was that coveted Amazon Best Seller badge. I turned the laptop around and snuggled against Gabe as I scrolled down the screen to where Amazon displays a book's rating. The book was rated number one in women's romance fiction, and number five on the whole Kindle store. I swore, "Holy shit! That's incredible."

The book had only been out for a week, already it had amassed over a hundred reviews, most of them five stars. Gabe tabbed over to the kindle reports website and clicked on the sales of the past seven days.

Because of some strategic marketing on my virtual assistant's part, we had notified everyone on my mailing list the day the book went live. That strategic move brought in over fifteen thousand sales on the first day alone. Enrolled in Kindle Unlimited too, where I was paid by the page read, there were more than a million page reads just on day one. Of course, the book clocked in at just under four hundred pages based upon the wonky formula Kindle uses to count pages.

The rest of the week was just an upward trajectory of both sales and page reads. Gabe summed it up, "See, Syd. Seven days and over one-hundred-twenty-thousand sales. And in KU, you've got twelve million page reads."

I whistled appreciatively. My retail price for my books was just four bucks; well, technically, three dollars and ninety-nine cents. For the most part,

Amazon pays me seventy percent in royalties, with a download fee that amounts to about seven cents per book.

The nice thing about the kindle reports is that with the click of a button I could look at November's numbers. The slide had reduced my monthly sales to six thousand books and their Kindle Unlimited equivalent. Sure, lots of authors would give their ovaries for those numbers. But compared with where I started almost six years ago, it was discouraging.

Not any more. I bent Gabe's face around and kissed him, "And we still have three books to release in this series."

He grinned when the kiss ended. "You're rocking it. I wish my book had sold like yours."

I tousled his auburn hair, "You've got nothing to be ashamed of, Gabe. In one month, you've sold over two thousand copies. That puts you way ahead of most writers."

He leaned in and gave me a quick peck on the lips, "That's okay. I'm really glad your book is killing it."

Our chemistry was such that I could look into his eyes and see he meant every word. "Thanks, sweetie. Is that the baked alfredo I smell?"

He slipped away, and pulled a small casserole from the oven, "You looked tired earlier, so I put this in the oven."

I felt pampered as Gabe dished the fettuccini alfredo onto a couple of plates and carried them outside, "Let's watch the sun's reflection off the water before it goes down."

Our lounge chairs sat on a pristine golden beach, just a few dozen paces from the Gulf of Mexico. We packed up and left Colorado a few days after the first snow of the season, winding our way south and east. We were just about as far south as one could go and still be in the US; camping in a county park just outside of the town of South Padre Island. Sure, we were boondocking, but the county's rules were a lot less strict than any of the federal parks. We'd been there for a week already, and we had no plans to leave until after the new year.

Although the sun set to the west, which was landward, it still sent flashes of reds, yellows and oranges reflecting off the water as it slowly ebbed below the horizon. When the ocean water darkened as the sun disappeared, I said, "That was pretty. You want to walk on the sand?"

Gabe was out of his chair and came over and pulled me from mine, "Sure, Syd."

He disappeared into the RV with the plates and came out with a blanket we used at the hot springs draped over his shoulder. Even though it was Christmas time, the breeze off the water was just warm enough for him to go around in just his shorts. Although even this far south, the weather could change, forcing pants and a shirt on his gorgeous frame.

We were only a few yards into our walk when he said, "I still miss Mom. But, Syd, I'm really glad she picked you for me to live with. This has been so much fun."

I squeezed his fingers, "Even the schoolwork?"

He shrugged, "It's not that bad. And now that I know what to expect with it, the teacher thinks I can finish a year, maybe even two early if I work hard."

"If that's what you want, sweetie. You sure you don't miss your friends in school?"

He let go my hand and put his arm around my shoulders, "I've got my best friend in the world right here. And she's fucking hot!"

I chuckled. Would he still think so when I'm nine months pregnant? "You're biased, sweetie. You're just saying that because you love fucking me. You'll grow up and want to see if other women are as good a fuck."

Despite the darkness falling, I could tell his face was scarlet. He squeezed me, "When I turn eighteen, I was wondering, could I stay?"

Despite the deep well of feelings Gabe stirred inside me, I tried not to get my hopes up. There was just too much of a risk as he grew up, he would grow tired of what we had together. I tried to not dwell on that. I nodded, "Of course, Gabe. You can stay with me for as long as you want."

He pulled me along, our feet digging into the wet sand, "You always say that, Syd. I know you'll be thirty when I'm eighteen. Lots of people that age, um, they get married. Do you think..."

There was no pretense, no attempt to roleplay my fantasy. My twelve-and-a-half-year-old nephew had just asked me to marry him in less than six years. Stunned, I stammered, "You're asking me to marry you?"

He stopped, warm ocean water lapping at our feet, and turned to face me, "I know, I'm just a kid. And it's still a long way away. But I don't want you to meet some young, hunky George RR Martin novelist who steels you away from me."

I took both his hands in mine, "Oh, Gabe. You've just described yourself. You've published your own fantasy novel and you're young and hunky, if you haven't noticed."

I had to tilt my head slightly to reach his lips. I put everything I had into that kiss and when it ended, I whispered, "Yes."

His eyes shot open wide, "What?"

Louder, although we were alone on the beach, "Yes, I'll marry you."

He snaked his arms around me and kissed me, "I'm not going anywhere, Syd. I don't know how I can know it, because I'm still growing, but I know it."

I bubbled at the idea of being engaged to my lover. I was never more certain about my decision to have Gabe's baby than at that moment. I was certain as he grew, Gabe would make a fine husband. I hoped I could be half the wife he deserved.

Still holding me, he cautiously asked, "Do you think they'd let us get married, Syd? I mean, I don't think of you as my aunt. But if they knew, would they let us get married?"

You might think by reading my smut that I wasn't a big believer in marriage that followed all the social protocols. But thinking about being with Gabe, I realized marriage was a concept that was as old as humanity. Nobody could stop us from living as husband and wife. "If you want it, sweetie,

we'll get married. No fucking minister or judge is going to stop us. We could have our own private ceremony and nobody else could stop us or keep us apart."

Gabe's eyes sparkled under the rising moon, "Really? So, unlike in your story about the marriage license and the bride who was already married, you don't have to do all that legal stuff?"

"Plenty of people get married without bothering with a license from the state. It's just between them."

He pulled me deeper into his embrace, "I don't want to wait. Let's get married on our own. Have our own private ceremony. That way, you'll know I'm never leaving you."

Tears wet my face as I nodded, "That would make me so happy, baby."

We moved away from the water and Gabe spread out the blanket and then we lay next to each other under the starry skies. I still had a powerful need to be dominated by him, but now wasn't that time. Snuggling against his bare chest, I slid my hand to his shorts and unfastened them. I pushed my hand down his briefs and encountered a few short stray hairs at his base. I sighed; my boy was fast becoming a man.

Gabe responded by slipping his hand under my t-shirt and cupping a tit, caressing it. Brazenly, he raised his head and looked both ways down the beach, then pulled my shirt off and cast it aside. His tongue felt wet and hot on my nipple before he closed his lips over my areola and sucked it. For the first time, my body actually felt like I had something growing inside; the tingling surged through me just from the way his tongue and lips worked my tit, far more powerfully than ever before.

The past few months had been good to my young lover. I pushed his shorts to his knees and grabbed his cock. Not even thirteen, and already he was a full inch longer than Kyle. My fingers could still wrap around his shaft, closing around each other, but one day within the next year or two, they wouldn't. Another tingle surged through me at the thought of taking Gabe's seven or even eight-inch cock down my throat or into my pussy. For now, as I slid my hand up and down his shaft, I would enjoy his six inches.

Without ever missing a beat, working his mouth on my tit, Gabe's hands pushed at my elastic yoga pants, pushing them and my panties down. I shuddered again as his finger rubbed my clit. So young, yet so experienced.

My hips bucked as I got my first O of the evening and Gabe, sensing my need, sat up and stripped and then finished undressing me. He shifted, kneeling between my legs, and leaned forward until his glans pushed through my pussy lips. Slowly, he sank into me, sliding all the way in one long, slow thrust. Another little orgasm shook me. I groaned, "Fuck me! I've never been so horny."

I couldn't be more than six weeks along, but apparently my body's natural pregnancy hormones were at work, making little changes in my body for what was to come. And I loved it. Gabe settled over me, resting his torso, half on me, half on his elbows, "God, you feel so good."

Slowly, with an ease that came from several months of daily practice, he rocked his hips back, dragging his cock along the walls of my pussy, only stopping when his glans was halfway out of my sopping hole. He hissed in pleasure, sliding back in until gradually, his dozen little lonely strands of pubic hair pressed into my pubic bone.

That barrier to my big orgasm was usually much higher, but like water flowing over a dam, I felt my orgasm hit me hard when he slid into again. My body shook as I came. Gabe thrust into me again, and I came again, my pussy shaking and undulating around his cock. I moaned loud enough that I bit my lip to keep from drawing anyone's attention on the darkened beach.

Within a couple of minutes, Gabe's hips rocked back and forth, faster and faster, slamming his cock hard against me, making me cum anew with every thrust. Then he groaned and pushed me enough to make us move up on the blanket. When his cock seemed to expand and that magical warmth of his cum splattering my insides, it brought out the most powerful orgasm yet. I wrapped my legs around his backside as he pushed and pulled just enough to keep the friction along his shaft alive as he spasmed within me. Having jacked and sucked him, I knew what his cock was doing inside. That first blast shot a powerful jet of thick, white cream, hitting my cervix. Another spasm, another rope of cum, almost as powerful as the first,

covered the walls of my vagina. If it was like the last time I took him in my mouth, another smaller blast would accompany the next four spasms, before the last few dry spasms would finish Gabe's orgasm.

He collapsed on top of me. Although he was heavier than me, it wasn't uncomfortable. He grinned through his post orgasm haze, "I want to make love to you every day for the rest of my life."

He made me orgasm again when he flicked my sensitive nipple. After biting back another moan of pleasure, I said, "Your cock inside me feels amazing. When you cum inside me like now, it makes me cum even harder knowing you're putting your seed in me."

Gabe shifted his hips, sending more tingles through me, "Do you think I'm old enough yet for my sperms to make you pregnant?"

I leaned up and gave him a kiss, "About that, my love..."

The End.