



One challenge. Two hours. Three
words that cannot be spoken...

Seven
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Seven

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The Wager

Amy peeked beyond a rack of romance novels so she could see whether Owen was flirting with the pretty blonde who always worked Saturdays at this used bookstore.

Owen charmed every woman he talked to—females from eight to eighty—but Amy decided he wasn't really flirting with the blonde. *She* was flirting with him. No doubt about that. But he was just being his normal, charming self.

Not only was Owen gorgeous, with his light-brown hair, blue eyes, classic features, and a body that could prompt drooling even in the coolest of

observers, but he also had a posh British accent that drove American women wild. His company had sent him from London to their Baltimore office just for the year. So, with his accent and his looks and his irresistible smile, Amy was used to women falling all over themselves to get his attention.

She'd had to resist the urge to do the same thing five months ago when she'd first met him in this very bookstore.

Amy read mostly on her ereader, but she'd been looking for a book that day that wasn't out in ebook version. Owen was a self-proclaimed Luddite who preferred to read from pages he

could touch. That afternoon, she'd noticed him, of course, as he'd been browsing the history section, but she would have just admired his broad shoulders and tight ass from afar had he not turned his head and caught her leering.

He'd gradually made his way over to her—moving from the biographies to the inspirational section to the mysteries. She'd kept shooting little glances at him, to verify that he was indeed approaching with only thinnest pretense of browsing. Every time she looked over, he'd grab a random book and peruse it with a barely suppressed smile. It turned into a game, with both of them sustaining the façade

of disinterest until they were side by side in the paranormal section.

She couldn't believe it was happening. Hot men didn't approach her in bookstores. Or anywhere else, for that matter.

But he'd finally made a dry, straight-faced comment about how he thought werewolves were overrated as lovers because of the inevitable wet-dog smell, and Amy had burst into surprised laughter.

They'd started to talk about books. Before she knew it, she was telling him about her small-town upbringing and her one visit to the U.K. She'd been powerless to resist his invitation for

coffee. They'd spent the whole day together and then the night together in a hotel.

Amy's life was neat, orderly, and under control. She liked it that way. Right now, she was focusing on her career, still being in the early stages of establishing her dental practice. Just living in the city was slightly overwhelming for her, after being raised in a rural area, so it took all the time and energy she had to do her work well and not feel like she'd get swept away in the chaos. Later, once she had her career well under control, she would get serious about relationships. Not right now, though.

So, when Owen said he'd like to keep seeing her but it couldn't be serious, she'd thought that sounded just about perfect.

For the last five months, they'd gotten together every weekend for hot sex and stimulating conversation. They'd set very clear ground rules for how the relationship would work, though. It was just sex and a good time. No feelings allowed. Owen was returning to London on a certain date, where his family, friends, and life were, and Amy wasn't about to move across the Atlantic and give up the career she was building here.

But six months of great sex?
Neither of them was about to refuse that.

So, for any number of reasons, Amy had no right to feel jealous or resentful of the little blonde, who was beaming up at Owen and now putting her hand on his arm—ostensibly to emphasize a point. Amy wasn't Owen's girlfriend, and she only had twenty-eight days left to be with him at all. If he wanted to fall in love with this blonde, he had every right to do so.

Amy wanted to claw her eyes out anyway.

She wished Owen would stop smiling at the blonde. Surely he knew how deadly his smile was. Humility had never been one of his character qualities. He should know it wasn't fair

of him to be flashing that smile around to hapless females and then expect them to go back to their days as if he hadn't left them as puddles of goo in his wake.

When Owen turned back toward her, with three books that the blonde had been “assisting” him to find, Amy quickly grabbed the first book she could lay her hand on and pretended to be reading it, so he wouldn't know she'd been spying on him and feeling irrationally jealous.

A few seconds later, an arm slid around her waist and a very male body pressed into her from behind. He'd placed his stack of books on an empty space on the shelf beside her. “Good

book?”

Shit. No man in the world had the right to make two simple words sound so achingly sexy.

“It’s okay,” she said, making herself scan the page quickly so she had some clue what the book was about. Leave it to Owen to ask her the content of her improvised prop. “It’s a little too much fantasy for my taste.”

“A hot billionaire sweeps in and rescues a sweet, selfless virgin from her life of mediocrity?” His hand was resting on her belly, and his mouth was right at her ear.

Despite the fact that they’d had quite good sex the night before, Amy’s

body suddenly started to hum with interest. “No. He’s a hot SEAL.” She’d figured that out from the title, so she was able to give at least a little authenticity to her pseudo-reading. “The fantasy material is his magic penis.”

“Really?” Owen took the book out of her hand and peered down at the page she’d had it opened to. “What does it do?”

She smothered helpless giggles as she realized he thought she was being literal. “The penis forks into ten heads so he can pleasure ten women at once. Hot SEALs sometimes need to do that, you know.” She was quite pleased with her attempt to keep a straight face.

His eyes widened dramatically. “*What?*” He was flipping back pages now, obviously trying to find the ten-women-magic-penis-orgy scene.

She burst into laughter and grabbed the book out of his hands. “That would be a *man*’s fantasy. This book is a woman’s fantasy. So it’s not *that* kind of magic penis.”

“Oh.” He looked rather disappointed, but he was still smiling her favorite smile—the private, almost intimate one, like she was the only important person in the world. But he’d given her that smile from the very beginning, so she reminded herself it wasn’t promising her anything other than

a good time. “So what does it do?”

“It evidently makes her come about seven times in one fuck.” Amy flipped back to the right page to verify. “Yep, that’s seven. In like an hour or something. Definitely, too much fantasy for my taste.”

He was frowning now as he picked up his books and put the fantasy paperback on top of the pile, evidently thinking she wanted to buy it. “It’s not impossible.”

“Seven orgasms? In an hour or two? And not from oral or anything. It’s all from regular intercourse. I’d say it’s highly unlikely.”

“I didn’t say it was a common

occurrence, but certainly within the realm of possibility.”

She snorted, exaggerating her disdain because the blonde was smiling at Owen from the cash register as they approached. “Right. Not any realm of possibility I’m familiar with. I’m lucky to come even once.” She did lower her voice so the blonde couldn’t hear what she’d said.

Owen’s eyes narrowed as he handed the blonde his card to pay for the books. “Is there a particular complaint you’d like to lodge?”

“Don’t get touchy. I’m not complaining. Just saying some things are realistic and some things are fantasy.

And that..." She nodded toward the book, which Owen had paid for with his collection of history and biography titles. "*That* is fantasy."

"Can I help you with anything else today?" the blonde asked with a hopeful smile. Her eyes had been darting between Amy and Owen, and she was clearly displeased that they were together. They'd come to this bookstore almost every Saturday for the last five months, so Amy didn't know why the blonde would be surprised by the fact that they were together.

"Not today." Owen flashed her one more smile as a parting gift. "Cheers."

“Cheers,” the blonde replied stupidly.

“Should we eat at Gerard’s?” Owen asked as they walked out onto the city sidewalk.

It was loud and crowded and chaotic, and Amy felt a familiar rush of anxiety. It dissipated almost immediately, but the fact that she still felt it bothered her. She’d lived in Baltimore for three years now. Surely, she’d get used to it eventually.

She liked to be in control of things, and it was hard to always feel like she wasn’t in control in this city.

She smiled at Owen and hoped he hadn’t seen her initial reaction. “Yeah.

That sounds good.”

He put his hand on her back as they walked, guiding her through the crowds on the sidewalk. She didn't like to think of herself as the kind of woman who needed a man, but she did feel more secure with him beside her.

Amy did her best not to think about the fact that, after today, she only had three more Saturdays with Owen before he left. Twenty-eight days from now he'd be on a plane back to London. For good.

She'd known this relationship had an established end-point from the very beginning, and that was the only reason she let herself indulge in it. Owen was

not a safe or a sensible choice for a serious relationship, since he was so far out of her league. Falling in love with him would be a huge mistake—she'd end up with nothing but a broken heart—so six months of fun was all she could allow herself.

She had three more weekends left with him, and she wasn't going to spoil them by getting upset about the fact that their time was ending.

“What's wrong, love?” he asked, adjusting his hand at the small of her back and guiding her away from the family approaching who was taking up the entire sidewalk.

“Nothing,” she said with a grin,

feeling better now that she'd given herself a mental lecture about reality. She'd always been good at giving herself mental lectures. "Just thinking about the magic penis of seven orgasms."

An elderly man who was walking past them gave a visible start and scandalized stare.

"I say again, if you have any particular complaints about our sex life, I'd prefer for you to state them outright."

Owen sounded so offended that Amy couldn't help but laugh. "Don't get all sensitive. You know the sex is fantastic. I'm just saying it's normal sex. We don't swing off the balcony or use

props and costumes. And I don't come a zillion times every time you fuck me."

"True." His face relaxed visibly and his shoulders became less tense. "A zillion might be an overly ambitious expectation from one fuck. Even with me."

She choked on another laugh. "Your arrogance knows no bounds. But, seriously, I'm willing to grant your sex-god status, but having seven orgasms at once seems to be stretching the bounds of plausibility."

The intensity of Owen's frown surprised her. "Why do you assume it's so remarkable?"

"Because it is! It's ridiculous. One

or two, sure. Maybe three if it's from oral. But seven? Uh-uh. There's no way. Not during one sexual encounter."

"I don't believe it's impossible."

She rolled her eyes, arguing partly because she believed it was true but mostly because it distracted her from a poignancy that rose up in strength as they entered the little lunch bistro, where they ate lunch at least every other week.

Only a couple more times to have lunch here with Owen. She couldn't even imagine Saturdays without him.

Shaking the feeling away, she said, "Okay, maybe it's not impossible for some hypothetical woman who can come at the drop of a hat. But it's sure as hell

impossible for *me*.”

Owen pulled out the chair for her at their table—he did that sort of thing unconsciously, which was just another thing to make him attractive—and then studied her soberly when he took the chair across from her. “I don’t think it’s impossible for you.”

“You really think you could make me come seven times?”

“I do.”

“In the space of an hour or two?”

“Yes.”

“With your cock, not your mouth?”

The middle-aged woman getting up from the table next to theirs gasped

and dropped her wallet.

“Yes. I could.”

Amy shook her head. “No way.”

“I’ll prove it.”

“Good luck.”

“I’m serious.”

“You can be serious until the cows come home. I’m not going to come seven times.”

He’d opened his mouth to reply, but the server came over to take their order, and they lost the thread of the conversation.

Amy assumed it was over. After all, Owen wouldn’t want to take on a challenge he would certainly lose.

Before she'd met Owen, she'd never thought she was particularly good at sex, but in the last five months she'd discovered she could be incredibly passionate and enthusiastic in bed. But she was the kind of person who worked hard and took life seriously and never expected silly fantasies to somehow become reality.

Seven orgasms in one go was definitely a silly fantasy.

As they ate lunch, they chatted about work and about the global economic situation and about the movie they'd watched last night and about Plato—a fairly typical conversational pattern for them—and they were just finishing

up when she noticed that Wes, one of her partners in the dental practice, was paying for his take-out order at the counter.

She called out to him, and he waved, coming over when he was through in line.

Wes was the same age as Amy—twenty-eight—and he was attractive in a quiet way, with brown hair and glasses. They'd gone through dental school together and even gone out for a couple of months until they'd mutually realized they could never work as a couple. They'd been friends ever since, though, and they'd both joined his father's practice here in Baltimore when they'd

gotten their degrees.

Owen stood up and shook hands with Wes. Then he gave Amy a kiss on the lips and said he was going to pay for their meals.

Amy frowned as he walked away. He'd only met Wes a couple of times, and he'd never seemed to like him.

Wes grinned at her. "So you're still going out with him? Doesn't he move back home pretty soon?"

"Next month," she said, swallowing hard as her eyes rested on Owen's back, strong and smooth beneath his gray shirt.

"So what are you all going to do? Try to do a long-distance thing?"

“Oh. No.” Amy’s eyes returned to Wes. “It will be over then. We decided that from the beginning. We’re just having fun. Nothing serious.”

“You’ve been going out a long time for it not to be serious.”

“It’s not about the length of time. It’s about the intentions. There’s just no future for us. His whole life is back in London, and I’ve worked too hard to build my career here to just pick up and move.”

“Yeah. It would be hard, I guess.” Wes was studying her face. “Maybe he could stay here.”

Owen was a rising star in corporate finance, and his company

worked him like an indentured servant. It was understood—by him and everyone he worked with—that he was only in Baltimore for a year.

There was no way in the world Amy could let herself think about any other possibilities. Those dreams would destroy any hope she had of staying in control of her life. “But why would he? I’m telling you, we set ground rules from the beginning. No feelings allowed.”

Wes gave her a characteristic half-smile. “How’s that working out for you?”

“Just fine.” She stuck out her chin to show she wasn’t happy about the implications. “Women are just as

capable of keeping their feelings under control as men.”

He chuckled. “I’m not talking about women. I’m talking about you. I know you pretty well, remember? And it’s obvious to me that you’re crazy about this guy.”

She sighed and glanced away. “I’m not crazy about him. Even if I were, it would be an exercise in futility.”

“Maybe he feels the same way about you.”

Occasionally, she was tempted to daydream about that, but she always stopped herself. In her years of dating and all the sensible advice she’d ever heard—from her mother, from her

friends, from best-selling dating books—she'd learned one thing for sure. If a man was interested in more, he would make it clear to you.

If Owen wanted a deeper, more emotional relationship with her, she would have known it by now.

“No, he doesn't. I would have seen some sign, if he did. He's planning to leave twenty-eight days from now, without looking back.”

“Well, maybe you could float the idea past him, just to see his reaction.”

“Why are you assuming I even want to? I'm a practical woman, remember? He's fun-for-six-months material. He's not husband material.”

She mentally clarified that he wasn't husband material for *her*. She had no doubt he'd be an amazing husband. She was just not the kind of woman a man like Owen would ever marry.

"If you say so," Wes murmured.

She'd been watching Owen as he paid for their food and turned around, but now she turned to give Wes a dirty look for his snide tone.

When she looked back at Owen, he didn't appear as charming and relaxed as normal. In fact, he was frowning as he started back toward them.

"I'm just saying that, if you want to

act like a grown-up and admit to him that feelings have developed, that wouldn't be entirely out of line," Wes added.

Amy scowled again at her friend, which just made him laugh. He leaned over and gave her a friendly kiss on the cheek as he said goodbye.

Owen completely ignored Wes's farewell and put his hand on Amy's back to urge her out of the restaurant.

She was annoyed by his high-handedness and his rudeness both. "What the hell is your problem?" she demanded, when they started down the block toward Amy's apartment building, where they were spending the weekend.

Owen raised his eyebrows. "My

problem with what?”

“With Wes or whatever that was back there.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about.”

She peered at his face, and it didn’t look anything but neutral and questioning. Maybe he hadn’t been as bad-tempered as she’d imagined back there. “I don’t know. It just seemed like you were kind of rude to Wes. He’s a good friend of mine, you know.”

“I am aware of that. You’ve mentioned it any number of times.”

She searched his expression. “You’re not jealous of him, are you?” she asked, noting that same underlying

tension again. Her heart leaped in hope at the idea—at the possibility that Owen might be jealous of her feelings for another man.

She shouldn't feel hopeful. She absolutely shouldn't feel hopeful.

But she did.

“Why would I be jealous? You can shag him, if you'd like. Just make sure you tell me, so we can go back to using condoms.”

That was another of their ground rules. They were exclusive unless they said otherwise, at which time they'd start using condoms again. Amy had no desire to sleep with anyone but Owen, and she doubted he'd have time to fuck

anyone else, between the long hours he spent at work and the time he spent with her.

She was sure, if he did, he would tell her about it. She trusted him at least that much.

“I don’t want to shag...to sleep with Wes,” she said, once she’d recovered from her surprise. “We’re just friends.”

“Are you sure that’s all *he* wants?”

“Yes, I’m sure that’s all he wants. So you *are* jealous?” That jumpy excitement started up in her chest again, even as she tried to stamp it down.

“Of course, I’m not jealous.

Unless he has one of those magic penises that fork into ten different heads.”

Amy couldn't quite hide a grin. “Or maybe he has one of those magic penises that can make me come seven times.”

This was evidently the wrong thing to say. Owen's hand, which was once more on the small of her back, clenched suddenly.

“I was joking,” Amy said, feeling rather hopeful again at the glower on his face. “I have no interest in Wes's penis, magic or not. Don't get all cranky.”

“I wasn't cranky, to use your unfortunate word, about *that*. I am still baffled by the fact that you think it would

take magic for you come seven times.”

“Are we back to that?” She groaned ironically, mostly to cover up that she was disappointed that he wasn’t really as jealous as she’d been hoping. She’d known it was stupid to hope for such a thing. “Unless you’d like to prove it, then I think you should give the subject up.”

They’d reached her building, and he pulled to an abrupt stop. She stopped too, by necessity.

His eyes had suddenly taken on a heat that made her heart race in excitement. “I will prove it.”

“Well, you’ll try anyway.”

“I’ll succeed.”

“With your cock, not your mouth or your fingers.”

“With my cock.”

One of Amy’s neighbors, who was leaving the building just then, gave Owen a quick, startled look.

“And you’ll only have a limited amount of time. Say an hour.”

“You said the scene in the book was an hour or two, so you’ll have to give me two hours.”

“Fine. Two hours. Seven orgasms. No cheating.”

“No cheating.” He stepped forward and leaned into her in a way that made her gulp. “I’m offended you

think I'll need to cheat to make this happen.

“Well,” she managed to say, feeling her cheeks start to warm from the heated look in his eyes. “I know you’re stubborn, and your skills in bed are impressive. But, seriously, I’ve never come more than twice at one time in my life. Some women can’t have multiple orgasms, so I hope you won’t take it as a slight to your manhood when I’m not able to make it to seven.”

He tilted his head down until his face was a breath away from hers. She shivered at his closeness, at the warmth she could feel radiating off his body. He murmured, “My manhood is functioning

just fine.”

Amy gulped again. “Never doubted it. But seven—”

He brushed her lips so lightly that it could have been the flutter of a feather. “What’s the victory prize?”

She hadn’t thought about that yet, but she never doubted her victory. She knew her own body, knew their history in bed—which was always amazing but always like real sex. Knew she’d never make it to seven. “I don’t know.” She wrinkled her forehead in reflection but lost the ability to think clearly when he started sliding his tongue across her lower lip. “What do you think? Got any ideas?”

“When I win,” Owen said, rubbing his hand lower on her back. “Then we’ll live out one of my fantasies.”

“That’s good.” She was starting to wonder what she’d gotten herself into and was darkly fascinated by the mysterious content of Owen’s sexual fantasies. “And when I win, the same thing applies.”

Seven orgasms would definitely qualify as fantasy sex. But her deepest fantasies didn’t involve sex. They’d always involved three little words.

Unfortunately, she’d always been a realist. In sex and in everything else. And she knew those three little words would never—*could* never—be said

between her and Owen.

“Deal. As soon as we get up to your flat, we’ll check the time. And two hours from then, you’ll have come seven times.”

“Only if you win the wager. You’re probably going to lose, you know.”

He gave her bottom a possessive squeeze, despite the fact that they were still standing on a public sidewalk. “I’ve never lost a wager in my life.”

“Well, there’s always a first.”

He gave her that grin that always took her breath away. “And a second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh.”

One

“Pompous asshole,” Amy murmured, not quite under her breath. The insult was purely a reflex. She had to do something to distract herself from how rapidly her heart was pounding and how hot she suddenly felt at the wager they’d just made.

Owen arched his eyebrows. “I should cry foul for trying to distract me by starting a fight. Beginning to lose your confidence?”

“Of course not. But, you’re right. I’ll try to avoid the name-calling. You have a lot to try to accomplish in only two hours. You can’t afford to lose any

time. We better get upstairs before you get too scared.”

He chuckled—such a fond expression on his face that she momentarily lost her breath—and started to walk inside.

They got onto the elevator but, instead of standing in the normal way, side by side with their backs to the wall, Owen maneuvered her into a corner.

“What are you doing?” she asked, as the doors slid closed. Quite without conscious volition, her hands lifted to hang onto his shirt.

“What do you mean?” His voice was low and thick, and his body was hard and hot as it pressed her into the corner. Very hard. Very hot.

Amy's already pulsing blood pulsed even more. "The two hours haven't started yet, so don't try to cheat by getting a head start."

His eyebrows lifted. "Are you having an orgasm at the moment?"

Torn between laughter and arousal, Amy said, "Well, no. Not just at the moment, but thanks for asking."

"Then there's no cheating. I'm just standing in the lift, minding my own business. The rules don't apply."

"The rules never seem to apply to you."

He gave her that same intimate smile. "If rules get in my way, then I work around them. You should try it

some time. You wouldn't always work yourself into knots trying to control the entire world."

She gazed up at him with a sudden swell of emotion. Owen wasn't just handsome, charming, and sexy as hell. He was so clever and so dryly funny and so completely attuned to who she really was. And he had a sweetness to his soul that none of his surface qualities—as remarkable as they were—could possibly hide.

The affection was so at the surface of her heart that, when he leaned down to kiss her, her response was hungrier, needier, than it would have been otherwise.

Owen must have recognized the

feeling in her and responded to it instinctively. His mouth seemed to devour hers as he pressed her back against the corner, the edges of the support bars poking into her ass. The kiss was deep—with more than just physical arousal—and Amy's head was spinning when their lips broke apart.

He leaned his forehead against hers and murmured, “Amy.”

Before either of them could say anything else, the elevator stopped. On the tenth floor, rather than the eighteenth.

By the time the doors opened and one of Amy's neighbors stepped on—obviously coming back from working out in the fully equipped gym on this floor—Owen had rearranged them in a less

intimate position. He was now in the corner and Amy was positioned in front of him, her back pressed against his front.

His arm rested lightly around her waist.

Amy smiled a greeting at her neighbor, hoping she didn't look like she'd just been making out on the elevator. Her cheeks were flushed, but hopefully she looked otherwise normal.

"Did you hear all the racket the other night from 1808?" her neighbor asked as the elevator started back up to their floor.

"No. Were they having a party or something?"

“It sounded more like an orgy. I mean, really. How long can a sex marathon last?”

Amy laughed, a little nervously, as Owen eased his groin into her back. He was hard, and the motion was an obvious taunt, a reminder of their wager, what they would do as soon as they got to her apartment. “Oh, no. I don’t share a wall with that unit. I didn’t hear anything. Maybe it was a one-time thing.”

“I hope so,” her neighbor grumbled, straightening up as the elevator reached the eighteenth floor. “Or I’m going to have to invest in some earplugs.”

Owen kept his arm around Amy

until her neighbor stepped into the hall, and they walked slowly until her neighbor disappeared into her apartment. When they reached Amy's door, though, Owen was on her again, kissing her hard and deep, pushing her back against the hallway wall.

“Wait until we get inside,” Amy gasped, fumbling unsuccessfully with her keys as her hands clung to his shoulders.

Owen took the keys out of her hand and unlocked the door for her. Then both of them stumbled inside.

He was kissing her again, his hands moving urgently over her body as she dropped her purse on the entryway floor.

Despite her growing anticipation,

a little thought threaded through her mind about how this was a good sign. If he was this urgent and impatient so early into the two hours, then there was no way he was going to make it long enough to get her to come seven times.

“Check the time,” she mumbled against his lips, wrapping her arms around his neck.

“Ten past two,” he said, after a quick look at his phone.

“All right. Two hours start now. Go to it.”

Instead of “going to it,” Owen straightened up and unexpectedly swung her up into his arms.

“Hey!” Her arms flew up around

his neck as he turned and walked toward her bedroom. “What the hell are you doing?” He wasn’t in the habit of carrying her, and she felt disoriented and kind of strange in his arms, especially since her body still throbbed from their embrace. “I didn’t even put my stuff up.”

“You won’t be using any of that stuff any time soon. And I think we better use the bed, rather than try to fuck in the entry hall.” He adjusted her in his arms, bouncing her up a little.

“Very smart,” she replied, with some girly satisfaction at being cradled in his arms. She wasn’t a small woman—average height and not a waif—so she’d never been carried all that much. Giving him a little kiss on his right

cheekbone, she murmured, “Always thinking ahead.” When he adjusted her body again, she added, “I could have walked, you know. You don’t need this kind of exertion before everything else you have to do. You’re not as young as you used to be.”

He was thirty-four. He sneered and dropped her onto the bed so hard it made her grunt.

Amy would have giggled at his obvious annoyance, but he’d kicked off his shoes, pulled off hers, and moved over her before she could get out the first giggle.

She lost all desire to giggle when he kissed her again—the kind of sensual, lingering kiss that always turned her into

mush. His tongue leisurely traced the line of her lips and then stroked along the roof of her mouth in a pattern she couldn't follow. Her own tongue fluttered frantically against his, trying to increase his speed and intensity. But he resisted her silent insistence, and soon his hands started to move over her body just as slowly as his tongue was exploring her mouth.

Amy hummed against his lips and grabbed the back of his head, pushing his face hard against her own. Then she felt his fingers at the bottom edge of her stretchy shirt, and she reached down to bunch up the fabric in her fists so she could help him pull it off.

She'd always been a go-getter—in

sex as in everything else.

Their mouths parted with a smacking sound, and Amy sucked in an urgent inhalation. She was already aroused and overly warm, and she grew more so when he tossed her shirt on the floor and then pulled off her jeans in an impressively smooth move. Then he kissed her again—just as leisurely—until he finally trailed a sensuous line down to one of her breasts.

He mouthed her over the satin of her bra, moistening the fabric as he flicked his tongue over her nipple. “Yeah,” she breathed, arching her back up toward the stimulation of his mouth. “Good.”

Continuing his attention to her

breast, Owen raised his eyes until they were focused on her face. She must be quite a sight: blazing red cheeks, half-closed eyes, and mouth hanging open in a wanton display of desire.

He lifted his head and moved back up to her mouth, kissing her long and deep and at the same time removing her bra. Her entire body writhing against his, Amy tried to gather his shirt in her hands so she could pull it off, but was foiled when Owen broke off the kiss to take her other breast in his mouth.

It wasn't long before Amy was desperately grinding her hips, trying to get friction against her aching arousal. But Owen must have been purposefully positioning his body in such a way that

she couldn't rub herself against him. She whimpered, "Owen, hurry up. I'm dying here, and you only have two hours."

He nipped at the hard peak of her nipple, causing Amy to give a sharp cry of pleasure. "We have plenty of time," he assured her, smiling against her breast. "What's your hurry?"

"You know my hurry."

Maneuvering until she could squeeze her thighs around one of his, she rubbed herself against his jeans, sighing in relief at the needed friction. "And you're not one to talk, anyway." As he raised his upper body, she reached out and grabbed the hard bulge in his jeans, squeezing gently in a way she knew drove him crazy.

“Fuck,” he rasped, staring down at her as she fondled his groin and humped his leg. His eyes were wild and ravenous, and he started visibly perspiring at the same time his pelvis began to thrust a little against her hand. With a helpless groan, he squeezed his eyes shut. Whispered, “Fuck, yeah.”

Feeling thrilled and victorious, Amy worked him over with one hand while she rubbed hard against his thigh. Panting and urgent, she quickly worked up toward a climax, the rough fabric of his jeans over the hard strength of his thigh creating lush friction against her clit.

And this orgasm Owen couldn't even take credit for. She was so going to

win this wager.

Then he released a strangled exclamation and jerked his body away from hers.

Amy sprawled out in only her panties on the bedcovers, gasping and trembling. She'd been so close to coming against his thigh that her arousal was now throbbing painfully.

When Owen had caught his breath, he narrowed his eyes at her. "You're going to pay for that bit of poor sportsmanship."

Amy couldn't summon up enough lucidity to say anything, so she just stuck out her tongue at him.

She could see him try to stifle a

grin, but he managed to hide it as he pulled off his shirt and jeans.

“I can hardly wait.” Since Owen was distracted by the removal of his clothing, she snuck her hand down to her clit and tried to finish the job she’d begun against his thigh.

She’d only just started when he let out an indignant sound and snatched her hand away. Holding her wrist in a ruthless grip, he grabbed her other one as well, raising her arms above her head and then holding both wrists firmly against the pillow with one hand.

Her body stretched out, completely vulnerable before him, Amy took a deep breath that made her breasts rise and fall. “I was just trying to help.

Seven is a pretty big number.”

He repositioned his naked body between her spread legs. “I don’t need any help.” A spark of a different kind entered the blue of his eyes. “Seven might be a big number, but I’m a big boy and I can handle it.”

Despite the urgency of her arousal, Amy dissolved into laughter at this. She struggled to free her hands since she wanted to cup his cheek. But when he refused to release her, she just smiled at him. “You’re adorable when you make bad jokes.”

Her tenderness appeared to distract him momentarily, and his hand relaxed on her wrists as he leaned down to kiss her softly. But when she tried to

pull her hands away, he tightened his grip.

“Are you going to trap my hands the whole time?” she asked, feeling vulnerable, which made her slightly anxious and strangely excited at the same time.

His eyes raked over her naked body stretched beneath him. “I’ll let you go if you promise to be good.”

“I’m always good.” She was. She’d been a good girl all her life.

“In this case, being good means letting me do what I want with you.”

Her lips parted and her pussy clenched at his textured voice. At what he’d said.

He met her eyes with an expression that looked unexpectedly significant. “Do you trust me?”

“Y—yes.”

“Baby, do you really trust me?” He leaned a little closer, and she was suddenly terrified that he could see into her soul.

“Yes. I do.” It was the truth, and there was no way she couldn’t admit it.

“You’ll trust me in this?”

She nodded, her voice catching in her throat.

His expression changed, but her vision was slightly blurred from the intensity of her emotions and arousal, so she couldn’t identify the nature of the

shift. But he released her wrists and adjusted so he wasn't trapping her so completely.

She moved her arms so they were more comfortable, but she remained stretched out beneath him, exposed to his view, his touch.

He leaned down to kiss her before trailing his lips down her body, teasing and fondling as he went. Soon, she was squirming and struggling not to grab his head and force him to move faster and give her some relief.

Finally, he straightened up and gazed down at her with a possessive smile.

“What is that smile for?” she asked, although she had a feeling she

knew.

“Now you’re exactly in the shape I want you,” he murmured thickly, erotically.

“Naked?”

“Hot and wet and ready for me.”

He was absolutely right, but she wasn’t in the habit of admitting such a thing. “Don’t flatter yourself.”

He cocked an eyebrow and trailed one finger from her lips down her neck, along the curves of her breasts, and then down her belly to her groin. The light touch was sensual torture, and she couldn’t keep her hips still as he got lower.

Then he slid off her panties and

finally used his finger to part her intimate folds and expose her to his view. The air against her arousal made her gasp.

“Definitely hot and wet,” he said with another smile. He pressed his finger lightly against her clit before sliding it away.

She whimpered. “Oh, God, Owen, please.”

“So you *are* ready for me?”

“Yes.” She arched up when he stroked her very lightly again. “Please.”

Finally, he lined his erect cock up at her entrance. “That’s what I thought. Now. I believe I have a challenge to fulfill.”

“Good luck,” she mumbled, mostly because she felt like she hadn’t been putting up a very good defense. She gasped in pleasure as he started pushing inside her. She felt her wet pussy cling and give way to the width and length of him, and she bent her legs up until her knees were high on either side of his hips. “You’re definitely going to need it.”

His face was tense and strained as he visibly tried to control whatever his need was—his need to thrust, to let go, to fall toward his own release.

She made herself hold still, because she knew he needed her to and because she did trust him—even though she hadn’t realized it to this extent

before.

After a minute, Owen was breathing evenly again, and he lowered himself over her body even more, one forearm resting beside her head and shoulder and his fingers occasionally playing with her brown hair. He tangled the fingers of his other hand into her hand, which was resting near her head, her arm bent up, and she tightened her fingers around his, holding his hand in an unexpectedly tender gesture.

When she felt his lower body come down on her pelvis, Amy sighed and pulled her knees up toward her chest. With little trouble, she positioned her legs so that her calves pushed against the outside of his upper thighs

and her heels just below his butt.

He pulled back slowly and thrust the first time, and Amy whimpered with pleasure in response. Her clit was rubbing against his pubic bone, and his cock penetrated her at exactly the right depth. Not deep enough to be uncomfortable, but enough to make her feel exquisitely tight and full.

“That’s perfect,” she whispered, gazing up into his hot eyes. Her face twisted as he thrust again. “Perfect.”

He always seemed to be really into their lovemaking, and often he was fast and hard and urgent. But today—although his eyes were intense, almost wild—his motion was steady and leisurely. Amy rocked beneath him,

trying to match his tempo. But as the pressure swelled up beneath her belly, the pumping of her hips became faster and more erratic.

“Soon,” she gasped, struggling to free her hand from his so she could claw at his shoulder. “God, Owen, soon.” When he wouldn’t release her hand, she gave up trying. Let him pin her down with his hand and the weight of his body. Let him give her this pleasure.

“Fuck, you’re gorgeous, love. You’re getting so tight. Tell me when.”

Her climax rising startlingly fast, Amy groaned and tossed her head. “Soon,” she breathed again. “Coming. God!” His thrusting never wavered in speed or depth and, combined with the

way his body was rubbing against her clit with every thrust, it took her right up to the edge.

About to fall over into release, Amy arched up and cried softly, “Yeah. Now, now!”

It happened. Just not what she wanted to happen.

At her breathless cry, Owen froze completely and then withdrew until his cock was barely inside her.

Amy wailed, “Owen!”

He was sweating and breathless, but he watched her with fiery possessiveness. “What?”

“I was coming.” She squirmed beneath him, trying to get friction in any

way she could. But he had withdrawn too far and she couldn't get close enough to rub against him. "I was almost there. What the hell are you doing?"

"Fulfilling the challenge," he answered succinctly, tightening his fingers around hers.

"I don't think the challenge was supposed to involve being mean."

He leaned down to kiss her, and the kiss was soft and sweet enough that it relaxed her a little. "Trust me. I'm not just being mean. It will be worth it. I promise."

She snarled but didn't argue. She did trust him, and she intended to be a good sport. That is, until she was convinced he was just being nasty, and

then she'd start being nasty back.

After another moment, he penetrated her fully again, lowering his weight back over hers, renewing the friction on her clit as he started moving his hips.

Amy moaned hoarsely as Owen began to thrust, trying to regain the momentum she had lost. She squeezed his hips between her thighs and gasped, "Damn it, Owen. Now I have to start over."

He'd straightened his body some, so his eyes could run over her body, from her face to her jiggling breasts. "I know. I'm sorry, baby."

She made a few helpless mewls of frustration as she felt her orgasm rising

again at her center. “You don’t look sorry. You look like you’re enjoying my misery.” On principle, she fought a little more against the grip on her hand, but she was beginning to feel a kind of unexpected thrill at being completely at his mercy.

And the truth was—she wasn’t actually miserable.

Although she was starting to lose the circulation in her fingers.

She supposed she should be impressed that Owen managed to scowl despite the situation. As he pumped into her steadily, he rasped, “You think this is easy?” He stifled a groan when Amy squeezed him hard with both her thighs and her inner muscles. “Fuck, Amy, you

feel incredible.”

Well, that was always nice to hear, and she wasn't too far gone to not feel a little mushy. But the mushiness quickly transformed into impatience as he lowered more of his weight against her pelvis, deepening the stimulation on her clit.

She bucked up involuntarily, although he was pressing her down too hard for her to get very high. “Oh, yeah. Like that.” She pumped her hips, feeling the sensations begin to crest once more. “Owen, please!”

With his jaw clenched so tightly she could see the muscles in his cheeks quiver, Owen sustained the steady, luscious rhythm. “Coming?” he asked in

strangled voice.

She tried to arch beneath him, stretching the line of her torso out even more. Her nipples were chafing against his chest, and her hips were thrashing desperately. “Oh, yeah,” she cried, her voice much louder than usual. “Oh, yeah!”

And then—damn it!—he withdrew again, halting her orgasm right at the last second.

He didn’t appear to be enjoying it either. He was practically wheezing from the effort it took to control himself. But Amy was in far worse shape than he was. She’d been so close to coming. So exquisitely close.

And now she wasn’t.

“Fuck you, Owen!” she raged, through clenched teeth, shuddering violently and pumping her pelvis up in a futile attempt to find release. “Mean, mean, and cruel.” It wasn’t her cleverest of insults, but her mind was barely functioning.

He lowered his face until it was burrowed against her neck. “It’ll be good,” he promised again, his voice muffled by her damp skin. “I promise, love, it will be good.”

“But why all the torture? You’re supposed to give me seven orgasms but you won’t even give me one.”

“I will,” he murmured, pressing little kisses now up and down her throat. “I will. This will make it easier later.

Trust me.”

The sweet kisses were almost as powerful as the sensation of his cock moving again inside her. Amy thought she would melt as he continued to nibble a line up her jaw and toward the side of her mouth. “Owen, please,” she begged, as the pleasure started building more quickly this time. “Please now. I want to come.”

His face hovering just above hers, he met her eyes and murmured again, “Trust me.”

She did. She trusted him in this. Wanted to trust him in everything. Just didn't know if he wanted that kind of trust. “Yeah,” she whispered. “Yeah.”

He kissed her, and it was wet and

clumsy on both sides, but it left Amy overwhelmed by more than just physical pleasure. When he pulled away, he accelerated his tempo, driving his cock into her with faster, shorter strokes.

Tossing her head back and forth on the pillow, she squeezed his hand, which she still held. “God, Owen, yeah. Please, this time.” She writhed between his body and the mattress, jolts of pleasure coalescing into one powerful force. Her breasts and clit were rubbing against his hard body, and her thighs were once again squeezing desperately around his hips. She cried out loudly. Wasn’t even embarrassed.

They were rocking the whole bed, banging the headboard against the wall,

and Amy was so close—just couldn't quite get there. Practically sobbing, she bucked up with frantic jerks of her pelvis, sweating collecting in the hollow of her neck and across her belly.

“Look at me, baby,” Owen said.

She couldn't immediately, she was so overwhelmed.

“Amy, love, look at me.” His voice was low but held unmistakable authority.

She met his eyes and then couldn't look away, trapped by the fire, the need, the passion in his expression.

The shift in focus left all the intense sensations out of her control. And, once out of her control, they took

on a life of their own. And a few more thrusts pushed her over the edge at last.

“Come now, love.”

She did.

She howled with it—there was no other word. It swept up from her center and overtook her body completely. All the pressure that had built up from the previous, half-finished orgasms combined and imploded with this one, leaving her helpless in the wake of it.

She knew Owen was watching her, but she couldn't be self-conscious. She was barely conscious of anything but the waves of sensation washing over her. It went on for a long time, her inner muscles clamping down brutally around Owen's hard cock.

Until she became conscious of one other thing. Owen was swearing under his breath, his face contorted with what looked like agony. His body had frozen completely still, and it was only her rocking body—riding him from below—that extended the long duration of the contractions.

Finally, the peak passed, and she gasped desperately as she started to come down, her body beginning to relax—contented, pleased, and exhausted.

Halfway through her orgasm, Owen had squeezed his eyes shut, but he opened them again as she fell limp onto the mattress.

“Wow!” she gasped. “It *was* worth it. That might be the best I’ve ever had.”

She thought he wanted to look pleased with himself. But he mostly just looked like he'd been through a war.

When her muscles had unclenched enough, he pulled out of her, his cock still hard and slick from her fluids. Instead of pulling her into a tight embrace and then collapsing beside her as he usually did, he cupped her groin with his palm. He wasn't in direct contact with her clit but he started applying pressure with the heel of his hand.

“Really going to try for more?” she inquired weakly, still far too pleased with the world to mind his arrogance.

“You didn't think I'd give up after one, did you?” His eyebrows elevated

just a little, but his breathing was erratic and sweat was pouring down the sides of his face.

Poor thing. He'd done really well. And he wasn't yet admitting defeat. She wanted to swallow him whole—to pull him inside her and never let him go. But what she said was, “Okay. Let's see what you've got.”

She wasn't worried. In fact, she was almost perfectly happy. Owen clearly wanted her so much that he could barely control himself. She had no doubts, especially now, that she would win the wager. She'd just had the best orgasm of her life. And Owen was looking at her with that tender possessiveness she so loved and so little

understood.

And he was going to try for another.

In fact, she was so lost in her pleasant haze that she failed to notice when Owen reached over and opened the drawer to the nightstand.

She only noticed when he pulled something out and turned it on.

She'd had it for quite a while, but didn't use it much anymore, since Owen more than satisfied her. She wasn't even sure how he'd known it was there.

But the sight and sound of the little device immediately snapped her out of her dazed languor. It actually made her a little bit nervous.

“Hey, you big cheater! I never said you could use a vibrator.”

Two, Three, and Four

Owen gave her an arrogant look. “You never said I *couldn't* use a vibrator.”

Amy's jaw fell open. She was feeling warm and sated and wasn't really in the psychological state to do much arguing. She'd never come more than twice with a vibrator anyway, so she didn't think this would end up being the thing to determine the victory, but it wouldn't do to let Owen have his way too easily. “These orgasms are supposed to be from you—not from some little mechanical device.”

He turned off the vibrator when he saw she was going to put up a fight. “Oh,

believe me, I'll be the one making you come." He pushed against her sensitive clit with the heel of his hand. "But my hand might get tired if I have to rely only on it for all seven orgasms."

"You have to use your cock." She gazed down at that particular body part as she spoke. It was still hard and coated with her fluids. It wasn't particularly beautiful—no cock she'd ever seen was—but she loved how it looked, how it felt, what it signified when it was erect. Loved the sight of it now, concrete evidence of their earlier lovemaking.

"I will," he murmured, holding her by the shoulders and pulling her up into a sitting position. "The vibrator will just be back up."

In spite of herself, Amy chuckled at this. Then leaned over and kissed him with slow tenderness. She loved how stubborn he was—how he'd never back down from a fight—even though it meant he would never back down from her.

So much of their relationship had been made up of this playful competitiveness, even from the first day they met in the bookstore, when neither one would break the pretense of indifference, when they were obviously interested in each other.

That was all she could hope for in a casual relationship like this—to be pleased and challenged and entertained.

Not loved.

She rubbed her breasts against his

chest as she explored the warm depths of his mouth with her tongue. He moaned against her lips and was suddenly more urgent, squeezing her tightly and sinking his fingers into the flesh of her ass.

Laughing softly as she pulled away from the kiss, she said, “Are you sure you’re going to be able to hold out long enough?” She reached down and stroked his erection. “What about your own happy ending?”

He shifted until he was kneeling on the bed and started to rearrange her body. Before he finished speaking, he had turned her over and positioned her on her hands and knees in front of him. “My happy ending isn’t about coming.” His fingers fondled deeper in the space

between her legs, where she was still wet and aroused from his continued, gentle massage of her clit.

She wiggled her bottom at the intensity of the stimulation, but more intense were the growing feelings in her chest. In her heart. “What is your happy ending?” she whispered, staying in the position he’d placed her but looking at him over her shoulder.

His suddenly soft eyes seemed to be speaking the answer. *Her*, they were saying. *She* was his happy ending.

Amy trembled, although she was overly warm, and felt goosebumps break out all over her flushed skin. She wasn’t sure which was more overwhelming—her sappiness or her renewed desire,

growing stronger at the knowledge that he was about to take her from behind.

Owen positioned himself behind her, lining his cock up with a hand that she couldn't help noticing shook a little. "My happy ending is winning," he said dryly.

She grunted in surprise. Then grunted again as he pushed his hard cock into her body.

Once again, he didn't go as deep as he could have, but the angle was perfect, and she felt him connect with her g-spot in a way that made her shudder.

He bent over at the waist until his chest was pressing into her back, bracing himself with one arm. He kissed

the back of her neck, which was bare because her hair had fallen over her shoulders. “Were you expecting me to say something else?”

She wasn't sure what to make of his tone, and she just couldn't think clearly enough to figure it out. Her first impression was that he was prompting her, coaxing her into revealing something. But she wasn't sure what he wanted to hear, and answering the question honestly would make her vulnerable to things she shouldn't feel. Things she was convinced she *didn't* really feel. So, instead of speaking her heart, she said, “Of course not. I know very well that competition brings out your most *demanding* attributes.” As she

said the last words, she pushed her hips back against him, drawing his most obvious attribute a little bit deeper inside her.

Owen straightened up and adjusted his legs to give himself more leverage as he began to thrust. He grabbed the flesh of her bottom with one hand, and in the other he still held the vibrator.

Watching him over her shoulder, she saw his features contort as she squeezed her inner muscles around his erection. He was starting to sweat again, and that wild look had returned to his eyes.

It was amazing really. That somehow he could be so clearly affected by a compelling need for her, but could

still resist his release long enough to give her more than one orgasm. He wasn't in control of this—but he hadn't yet lost control.

It was almost a paradox, and it was one she wished she could master.

He thrust into her slowly from behind, and Amy moaned at the resulting friction. Then she heard a buzzing noise. Assumed he'd turned on the vibrator.

Then she knew for sure. He'd wrapped his arm around her middle and was holding the vibrator to her clit, near where he was pumping slickly in and out of her.

“God!” she cried out, as she felt the intense vibrations hit her where she was already sensitive. “Oh, God!”

“Do you like that, love?” Owen asked breathlessly, clutching the side of her ass and stimulating her with the little device. His thrusts were short and choppy, but every drive hit her g-spot.

“Yeah,” she gasped, her arms already beginning to shake as she tried to hold up her body. “Oh, yeah. Don’t stop!” She turned her head to look back at him again, saw that his face was tense with concentration and effort.

His focused, determined expression made her even wilder—made her increasingly abandon an irresistible contrast to his rigid control. She rocked her body back against his thrusting and whimpered, her helpless sounds mingling with the hum of the

vibrator, the rocking of the bed, and the wet sound of him sliding inside her.

He grunted in time to their rhythm. “Do you like it when I take you like this?”

She had to straighten her neck and stare down at the pillow, no longer coordinated enough to look back at him. “Yeah,” she admitted, starting to pant from the effort. “Yeah. I like it.”

Her arms were shaking so much they would no longer support her upper body, so she bent them at the elbow and lowered her shoulders, folding her arms beneath her chest. Her bottom was now the only part of her body still elevated, and she thrust it up toward him.

Owen made a throaty sound and

tightened the fingers of one hand bruisingly on her hip. "Yes, Amy, yes. Let go. Show me how much you like it when I fuck you from behind." He didn't normally talk like that during sex, but for some reason it thrilled her, turned her on even more.

She didn't always like this position, but something about the raw nature of their fucking was pushing Amy completely out of control. She gasped frantically, sucking on the saliva that had pooled in her mouth. "Yeah. Fuck me," she begged, lost in the middle of the dueling sensations, caught between the vibrations on her clit and his rapid thrusting inside her. Her raw words sounded strange to her own ears, and

they made her feel kind of wild and dirty. But she liked the strangeness of it. A lot. So she panted, “Just. Like. That.”

The sensations were rising so uncontrollably that Amy grew dizzy, felt like she was falling. She bit down hard on the pillow while tears leaked from her closed eyes.

With a flick of his finger, Owen switched the vibrator to a higher setting, and Amy smothered a scream in the pillow as the intensity became overwhelming.

“No,” he rasped. “Don’t hide it. Let go, baby. Show me how good I make you feel.”

She wanted to show him. Wanted to let everything go and start falling.

Wanted to trust that Owen would catch her. But the stubborn part of her spirit resisted the free fall, and she tried to force out a response. “E—,” she began hoarsely, fisting her hands in the bedding in an attempt to hold onto something. “Eg—” Gasp. “Ego—” Another gasp. “Egotis—” Three harsh gasps in a row. Finally, she managed to pronounce the whole word. “Egotistical...” She had been going to add a few creative insults, but she decided against it as a deep pressure started to build below her belly. So she concluded on an exhale, “Jerk.”

He let out a rough burst of laughter. “True. But just this once... indulge me. Don’t try to control it. Let go

for me.”

She would have argued some more but was physically incapable of it. Mentally incapable of it. Didn't even want to be capable of it. She'd never felt so hot and primitive in her life. Never had imagined she could feel this way.

Turning her head so that her wet cheek was pressing down on the pillow, she cried out loudly, letting go of all restraint as she kept pressing her ass back into his pelvis, “God, Owen. Oh, God!”

“Yeah,” Owen echoed in a raspy voice, almost clawing at her hip now. “Just like that, baby.”

She cried out wordlessly as he pushed the vibrator against her even

harder. Then again as she felt the massive swell of her orgasm approaching to swallow her whole.

Drool was leaking from the side of her mouth, and her eyes and nose were running. She didn't care. Didn't care how she looked or sounded—only cared how she felt. How Owen was making her feel.

“Yeah,” Owen coaxed in a hoarse whisper. “Yeah, come for me again. Come hard.”

She was definitely going to come hard. So hard she started to panic. Suddenly the sensations were too much for her, as if there wouldn't be anything left of her once they passed.

Starting to shake uncontrollably,

she choked out, “God, Owen, help. Help me!” She wasn’t sure what she wanted him to do—only that she was drowning and he was her only lifeline.

He slowed his thrusting in response to her plea and flipped the vibrator to the lower setting. He didn’t stop fucking her, but the sensations plateaued a little, and for the first time Amy could take a real breath.

“Okay, love?” he asked, in a voice that managed to convey tenderness despite his obvious urgency.

“Yeah,” she gasped, still rocking against him—just more slowly now. “Sorry. Freaked out.”

He bent forward over her again so that his head was hovering at her

shoulder. “Look at me,” he whispered gently.

She found enough energy to turn her head, and he kissed her as soon as she did. His kiss was sweet and slow and needy and somehow soothing. Amy used her mouth to cling to his lips for as long as she could.

When he finally drew back and started pumping into her more rapidly, he said, “Try to take full breaths.”

She forced herself to steady her breathing, closing her eyes and trying not to whimper as she got closer and closer to the edge.

“Good. You don’t have to control it. Not with me. Just let go.” His words were encouraging and soothing, but she

could tell he had to struggle to keep the vibrator in position.

She breathed in and jerked against him frantically. Breathed out and came hard, before she knew it was coming.

She didn't scream this time, just released a long moan that was low, broken, and wild. Her body thrashed uncontrollably as the intense pleasure swept her up in a hot rush. Usually, at this point, Owen would freeze, cry out in release, and come with her.

But he didn't. He kept thrusting against her clenching muscles, kept pushing the vibrator against her with agonizing insistence. He did cry out—but it was from effort, not pleasure.

Before she could collect her

control, another orgasm rose directly on the heels of the first. The delicious spasms started anew. Pleasure that was only slightly less intense washed over her in another wave, and she bit her bottom lip so hard it hurt.

Amy saw bright spots of light, whether she closed her eyes or left them open, and she was making pathetic whines and moans that sounded like she was enduring torture. She couldn't keep her body still, couldn't keep from writhing as the second peak passed, and she began to come down again.

Owen had been practically roaring with his attempt to stop himself from coming but, as her muscle contractions eased up, he must have found enough

control to murmur thickly, “That’s right, baby. Once more. Come for me once more.”

It was perhaps the most erotic thing Amy had ever heard in her life.

And combined with the merciless vibrations against her throbbing clit and his ceaseless drives against her g-spot, it pushed her over one more time.

As the third orgasm slammed into her, her throat seemed to close up, and her mouth opened in a silent cry. He was leaning over her now, pushing her forward and down, and she thrashed helplessly beneath his weight and his strength.

He roared out again as her inner muscles clenched hard around his cock.

His fingers bit into her skin, and Amy thought for a moment that she might black out.

She didn't, but she couldn't take any more of this torturous ecstasy, so she summoned just enough energy to swat the vibrator away. He dropped it on the bed and held her body tightly with both arms.

She couldn't speak. Couldn't move. Couldn't think. Fell forward onto her stomach, and as she did Owen's cock slid out of her.

With an agonized groan, he rolled over and collapsed onto the bed beside her. When she managed to turn her head, she noticed that he was still erect, his cock bobbing slightly with his heavy breathing and dripping with her juices.

His lower belly and thighs were moist as well.

“Whoa!” she gasped, her voice cracking on the word. “That was some orgasm.”

“What do you mean some orgasm?” Owen demanded weakly. His eyes were closed and his features both drained and tense. “That was three of them.”

She tried to snort. “Nope,” she lied. “Just one.” She was starting to get seriously worried about the victory she’d been so sure of.

“I know perfectly well when you come. That was three in a row.” His voice was rough and fatigued, and he opened one eye to glare at her

unpleasantly.

“Just one really long one. Three in a row like that is impossible.”

He did a pretty good attempt at a sneer. “Just because you’ve never experienced something before doesn’t mean it’s impossible. I think we’ve just proven that it *is* possible.”

Amy huffed, but her body was limp, pleased, and sated. She couldn’t remember ever feeling so physically satisfied in her life. “Number two,” she insisted, without much conviction.

“You’re not convincing anyone. That was two, three, and four.”

Amy sighed. That was what she’d been afraid of.

Five

They both lay panting on the bed, taking a couple of minutes to catch their breath and recover their senses, but soon Amy had sunk into a state of blissfully sated fatigue. She didn't feel very sore yet—Owen, as promised, had been as careful as possible—and she was still throbbing pleasantly between her legs. Not from need or urgency now but with tingling little aftershocks.

She stretched leisurely and released a contented sigh. Then glanced over at Owen and tried not to snicker.

He didn't look nearly as happy or tranquil as she was. His naked body was

drenched in sweat. His features were tense—jaw clenched painfully and eyes tightly shut. And his still erect cock was resting against his belly. Not noticing her scrutiny, he moved his hand down to give a couple of rough squeezes to the base of his erection.

Despite her urge to gloat, she had to admire his strength of will. Clearly this was a concrete case of mind over matter. He was obviously close to the bounds of his restraint, barely reining himself in but not yet willing to let go.

She felt kind of sappy at how hard he was trying to hold back his release long enough to give her three more orgasms. He'd always been stubborn and strong—and had never yielded to

defeat without a fight. She loved that about him.

No. That was definitely the wrong word. Nothing in their relationship allowed her to love anything about him. She just *liked* that about him. A lot.

Plus, this was a wager. No matter how mushy she felt—and no matter how much pleasure he had given her—she wasn't about to let him win.

Which meant she had to encourage him to let go.

She also needed to remind herself that she was in control of her emotions, her decisions, her life—whether he was in it or not.

She took another minute to work

up enough energy and determine an appropriate strategy, but soon she felt both inspired and invigorated. She pulled herself up to her knees, scooted over until she was kneeling between his legs, and looked down at his gorgeous, supine body. Then reached out and took his cock gently in her hands.

He opened his eyes and watched her carefully. Very slowly, she brushed her fingers along his hard length with the faintest of touches. Because she was studying his face, she saw him swallow hard in response.

She started to change positions—leaning over to brace herself with her hands on the mattress so she could crawl up to straddle his pelvis—but in doing

so her face moved down toward his groin. Before she could register that this might look suspicious, Owen was gripping her firmly by the shoulders, heaving her up. "Oh, no," he warned. "Do not dare."

Giggling, she explained, "I wasn't going down on you. I promise. I've decided I'd be stupid to work against you in this. After all, seven orgasms are seven orgasms, and I'd be a fool to complain. I was just trying to get into position." It wasn't entirely the truth, but it was close enough to be convincing.

Still watching her warily, he asked, "What position?" He was acting like, at any second, she might ruthlessly assault him with her mouth and bring an

abrupt end to his ambitions. “No cheating.”

She was pretty sure they’d never agreed that her giving him oral sex was a form of cheating in this game, but she didn’t argue with his demand. Knew he’d oppose anything that would so easily make him come. She had a strategy already worked out. She would have to go about this in a much more discreet way if she wanted it to work. She had to get them far enough along before Owen realized what was happening. Otherwise she might not be able to make him come before he wanted to.

“I wanted to be on top this time.” She smiled at him innocently and

scooted her body forward until she was hovering over his pelvis, her legs folded on either side of his hips.

His face relaxed slightly. “In that case...” he murmured, moving his hands up to curve around her butt.

He was making this way too easy for her. She almost felt guilty about her underhanded intentions.

Almost. But this was a challenge, after all. This wasn't cheating by any rules they'd ever agreed to. And all she'd be doing was giving Owen an incredible orgasm.

And making sure she felt in control of the dangerous feelings lurking in the back of her mind.

Why should he possibly object to that?

She leaned over and lifted his cock so she could line it up at her entrance. Breathing out, she lowered herself over it, felt his hard flesh push inside her.

Owen squeezed his eyes closed as her tight pussy sheathed him, and he released a breathless little sound of tortured pleasure.

She chuckled huskily and brought her hands forward so she could cup his face. “You all right, baby?” she inquired in her throatiest voice. She had never called him “baby” before, but she thought it might sound extra sexy.

He opened his eyes, either at the

question or the endearment. Because she had poised herself appropriately, he was greeted by the sight of her gently swaying breasts and soft fall of hair.

Owen groaned and shifted his eyes away from her. “Fuck,” he muttered, “You’re killing me, love.” She could feel how tense he was in the muscles of his face, and then in his chest and belly as she ran her hands down over his body. “I hope you appreciate all the torture I’m going through for you.”

Despite her plan to move into things gradually, her body tightened involuntarily around him at the outrageousness of this remark. He’d spoken as if he was doing this for her—when he’d already told her straight out

that he wasn't. No matter how much he happened to please her along the way, he'd made it very clear he was doing this to win.

Which meant she didn't have to feel guilty for doing anything she had to do to keep him from winning.

He grunted harshly as her inner muscles clenched around him. "Watch it," he said, his entire body jerking at the sudden pressure. "Or this will be over before it's started."

"Before it's started? I thought we started at 2:10." Amy stroked playfully over the lower part of this damp stomach.

He was clearly trying to make his mind work at its normal speed and

acuteness, but his eyes were glazed over. “Right,” he mumbled, obviously unable to come up with a clever response. “I meant this time. You want to come again, don’t you? In case you hadn’t realized it, I’m rather close to losing it.”

“Really?” Amy breathed, hiding a smile. She slid her hands up to fondle his nipples. “You’re doing so well. I’m sure you can hold out for three more orgasms.”

She could tell he was getting suspicious—even desire this strong couldn’t turn off all of his mental faculties—so she didn’t give him time to think. Started rocking back and forth.

Owen released his breath with a

little moan and clutched at her hips.

Amy wasn't planning to come again—four orgasms were quite enough to satisfy her physical needs and to stroke his swollen ego—but she'd always loved being astride him so she relaxed her body and enjoyed the feelings.

“Good,” Owen said hoarsely, his neck arching back in a way that tilted his face away from her. “Good, baby. That’s it.” He was trying to guide her motion with his hands, and she decided he might lose control faster if she let him have his way. So she followed his urging, made circular movements with her hips. Moaned softly.

The pleasure was real and was

slowly building up into a deep pressure inside her. Her previous orgasms actually seemed to have made coming again easier—as if her body was now primed and ready, and the slightest stimulation could push her over the edge. She had to be careful or else she would beat Owen to climax.

It wasn't often that a woman would try her best not to orgasm, but these were unusual circumstances.

“Owen,” she gasped, straightening her spine and letting her head fall backwards. “God, Owen!” She told herself that these impassioned exclamations were purely to turn Owen on even more, but she couldn't quite convince herself. She hadn't intended to

say anything. Certainly not what she said next. “You feel so good.”

“Yes,” Owen hissed, staring at her hotly, directing the motion of her pelvis with his strong hands. “That’s right. Come, Amy. Come for me again.”

It wouldn’t take very much more of this erotic stimulation before she would, so she focused—not on her pleasure—but on what was most essential. Her victory. Decided she better speed things up before her priorities got rearranged.

Instead of rocking rhythmically and grinding over him, Amy started moving over his cock, using her thighs to lever herself up and down. In this way, she quickly developed a rapid pumping

motion.

“Fuck,” Owen choked, trying to hold her still. His tight grip was painful but failed to prevent her from riding him hard. “I can’t...” He sucked in a harsh breath and twisted his features with effort. She could feel that the muscles of his belly were rock hard as her hands pushed down on him for leverage. “Amy, wait. I can’t...”

His eyes were wild and desperate, and Amy knew exactly what he couldn’t do.

He couldn’t hold himself back anymore, and she didn’t want him to.

She was breathless now and not just from the renewed exertion. But fortunately the sudden change in

stimulation had interrupted her rising climax. She bounced over him, noticing with a naughty thrill how his eyes lowered from her blazing face to her shaking breasts. Her movements were growing sloppy and uncontrolled, but she knew precision didn't matter now as much as speed and intensity. Her thighs were starting to burn, but she knew she was driving Owen crazy.

“Amy,” he said in a thick voice. “Amy, love, I can’t...” He couldn’t finish the sentence because she started to squeeze her muscles around him.

Letting out an agonized burst of sound, Owen’s legs bent up involuntarily, his knees lifting and heels sliding toward his body as he tried to

maintain his control. “Amy. What...”

He didn't finish his question. He met her eyes and then understood exactly what she was doing.

She felt exhilarated, powerful, temporarily dominant, as she watched this strong, composed man totally lose it beneath her. She squeezed around him as steadily as she could, trying to coordinate that rhythm with the speed she was riding him. When he began to buck up into her, making helpless, grunting sounds, she knew she had won.

It wouldn't take him long now to come.

But one thing she hadn't counted on was the effect his thrusts had on her body. As his cock drove into her from

below, the rough friction on her sensitized flesh sent her spiraling past conscious intentions. The delicious pressure—briefly interrupted—started building again at the sight of his frantic desire and the lush sensations they were generating between them.

She moaned deeply and tried to remember to keep squeezing her muscles. Raised her hands to clutch her own breasts, which were slapping against her chest. “Your turn,” she gasped, desperately trying to think of anything but how close she was to coming. “Come, Owen. Come now.”

His entire body was rocking like a wave, his hips slamming up into hers without restraint. “You first,” he gritted

out, one hand gripping the flesh of her hip and the other fumbling in the general location of her clit.

She moved with his thrusts instinctively, her body having a will of its own—and that will rushing headlong toward her fifth climax. The only way to stop the momentum would be to stop moving entirely, but that would interrupt Owen's climax. And his release was what she needed.

So she met each of his thrusts. Erratically clenched around him whenever she could remember to use her intimate muscles purposefully. Felt perspiration forming in the hollow of her neck, the small of her back, and where her thighs were rubbing against his skin.

She made little whimpers of pleasure and frustration as she tried to hold back her impending climax.

“No,” she panted, her voice unconsciously synchronizing itself to the tempo of their slapping bodies. “You. Come, baby. Come.”

He choked on a strangled sound and fisted the bedding with one of his hands, pulling up the coverlet as his body thrashed helplessly.

Amy closed her eyes tightly. Couldn't watch him. It was too much, too overwhelming. She'd never seen him like this before. Never witnessed such tangible proof of how wild, how primitively desperate she could make this sophisticated man.

His hand fumbled again at her clit, and this time arrived at the right spot. He pushed into the swollen bit of flesh, and Amy cried out as a jolt of sharp pleasure shot through her.

The one part of her mind that could still focus on such things realized that Owen was about to win this little race. So in a last ditch effort to get him to come before she did, she arched her back as far she could, tightening her belly and breasts as she leaned backward.

She knew Owen was watching her with frantic intensity, and she reached behind her body to find and cup his balls.

It only took one squeeze of her

hand for Owen to roar out, “Fuck!”

He came with startling power. Amy saw his face transform in the sudden wash of pleasure. Heard his shouted cry of relief. Felt him swell and contract inside her tight muscles.

She was convinced she would have been able to hold back her orgasm, even though Owen continued to thrust wildly throughout the duration of his climax. Amy was all set to watch him come, to enjoy her victory. She was very close to orgasm but she hadn't fallen over the edge.

Except for one thing. After his initial loud vocal response, while his climax was still ripping through him, Owen closed his eyes and breathed in a

harsh whisper, “Yes, love. Amy.”

Her rational mind might tell her that it was just a normal endearment.

But her heart heard him say, “Love Amy.” And her body reacted to what her heart had heard.

She moaned deep in her throat as the rush of feeling slammed into her. His cock was still moving inside her, now firmly hitting her g-spot as she kept leaning backward. Her muscles started to spasm and familiar waves of sensation overtook her. “Owen,” she whimpered, her body clamping down on his and her fingernails breaking into the skin on his hard thighs.

It felt so rich, so hard, so deep. So good.

“Owen,” she choked out again, as her body shook through her orgasm.

She had to bite her lip to keep from saying anything else.

They froze in position for a minute, still rocking a little into the lingering contractions.

Then Amy opened her eyes and released her grip on Owen’s thighs. Before she could slump forward, Owen had pulled her down into a tight, needy embrace.

She shook a little against him—wondering if she was actually crying. He held her silently, desperately, and she burrowed into his heat and his strength.

She loved having sex. Loved the

touch of his hands, his lips, his cock, his hard body. Loved every orgasm she and Owen experienced together.

Loved this afterward even more.

“You all right?” Owen asked at last, his voice faint and breathless.

“Yeah,” she replied, pulling off him so that his sated cock slipped out of her. She curled up at his side and stroked a hand up his chest to cup his cheek. “Kind of tired. That was five.” She tilted her head up to scan his face, looking for signs of regret or disappointment. “You?”

“I can’t remember the last time I came that hard.” His tone should have been conversational but ended up sounding almost awed.

Amy felt a little awed herself but was too embarrassed to vocalize it. Certainly she was impressed by his physical prowess, but she had been more affected by the things that weren't physical. Their need for each other, their emotional connection, the way her heart had lurched and swelled when she'd heard him call her love.

She knew it didn't mean anything. He was British, after all. But still...

A warm feeling grew in her belly, a mingling of that silly hope, the incredible physical satisfaction, and the thrill of knowing she had won,

Caressing his cheek, she murmured, "I came pretty hard too. Five times. Neither one of us should be

disappointed.”

“Why would we be?” he asked, cocking an eyebrow and beginning to look a little more like himself.

“Well, *I* shouldn’t be,” Amy explained, trying to keep the pleased satisfaction out of her voice. “You made me come five times. It was amazing.” Her lips twitched irrepressibly. “Plus, I won our little wager.”

His brow lowered. “What are you talking about?”

“Well, the challenge was seven. And you managed five. And oral sex won’t count—your cock has to be in play.” She reached down to palm his damp, limp penis. Stroked it with her thumb. “You’re not going to get very far

at making me come two more times using this.”

He glanced to the side at the clock on the nightstand. “If I’m not mistaken, the challenge gave me two hours. That means I still have just over an hour left.”

Amy stared at him blankly, not following what he was saying. It should be obvious but she’d so set her mind on making Owen come that she hadn’t even considered anything that might happen afterwards.

He kissed her on the temple. Then on the side of her jaw. Then on the mouth. And his kisses were so sweet and gentle that Amy was temporarily distracted. As she sighed in delight, he murmured hoarsely, “Give me some

recovery time. Then we'll be back in business."

Amy blinked at him. Saw a smug kind of amusement flickering beyond the tenderness in his eyes.

She'd been so sure that making him come would mean she'd won. Foolishly, she hadn't even thought of this. "Oh," she mumbled, feeling a stream of their mingled fluids leaking down her inner thigh.

He chuckled and pulled her closer. "Amy, love, I told you not to underestimate me."

Interlude

Amy was starting to get scared. Not just nervous or vaguely anxious, but really scared—as in panicky.

She wasn't scared about losing the wager, although she knew enough to realize now that seven orgasms in two hours weren't quite as impossible as she'd originally believed. She didn't want to lose, but it wasn't something that she would actually panic over.

The terror came from something else. Something far more dangerous and something that meant so much more.

There was true peril in the way she was feeling now. Her body was

pleased and pliant, and she was draped over Owen like a throw. His soft kisses were making her melt, and his dry humor and familiar smugness caused her chest to clench with tenderness.

Her heart was starting to believe some things that her mind knew could never be true. And the more she nestled against him in sweet, sated languor, the more her common sense and rational control faded under a hot, thick rush of emotion.

Emotion she could never admit to, never say out loud. She loved having sex with Owen, but it had always, only been an outlet for her physical need since there was no future for them.

He was leaving the country in

twenty-eight days.

The only problem was that, at the moment, her body was saying she loved him. Her heart was saying she loved him. And her mouth was closer to saying it than she could allow.

It wasn't true. It couldn't be true. She wouldn't let it be true.

Because, if it was true, her heart would be shattered to pieces a month from now.

She rolled away from him abruptly when she felt stark fear roil in her gut. She had to be so careful. Had to avoid making him suspicious. If he started to think that she was about to profess her undying adoration, then he would feel trapped and try to escape as quickly as

possible.

To protect herself and try to get herself under control again, she rolled onto her side with her back to him. Screamed an urgent, mental lecture at herself.

Just a few hours ago, she'd be priding herself on having her life so under control. It was almost laughable now.

"Amy?" Owen asked, confusion evident in his tone. "Is something wrong?"

"No," she said lightly, pleased that her voice sounded so unaffected. "I just got hot and needed some space."

She heard a frown in his voice

when he replied, “It’s not very hot in here.”

Keeping her back to him would just raise his suspicions even more, so she flopped over and stared at the ceiling. “The room isn’t hot. *I’m* hot. Can you blame me? I just had five orgasms.”

He scooted over until he was pressing up against her side. His voice was irresistible, and she didn’t dare to look at his face. “I know you did,” he murmured, brushing his lips against her cheekbone. “They were beautiful. And you have two more to go.”

He slid his hand over to rub her belly slowly, his touch soft, gentle, and soothing. Amy closed her eyes, felt

tingles of enjoyment in her fingers and toes. Felt far more intense tingles in her heart.

This was stupid. She had to protect herself better than this. Why, oh why, didn't he just fuck the daylights out of her and then roll over and go to sleep like a normal man?

She swatted his hand away and shifted her body so that a few inches separated them. "Owen, stop. You're all hot and sweaty."

She saw him frowning when she glanced over to check his reaction. He said, "You've been perspiring rather heavily yourself." He flicked a finger over the dampness in the hollow of her neck.

“Not as much as you have. So stay on your side of the bed. I’m hot and I want some space.”

She didn’t want space. She wanted to burrow into Owen and never come out.

Still frowning, Owen eased a hand under her shoulders and pulled her toward him, until she was trapped between his arm and his chest. “Tough. You don’t get space after that kind of sex.”

Her cheek was now smashed up against his collarbone, and her hand had instinctively settled on the upper part of his free arm. “That seems rather selfish.” Best to sustain the characteristic banter that had always allowed them to avoid

the vulnerability of intimacy. “To completely disregard my preferences.”

Owen tightened his grip on her. “I don’t think they *are* your preferences. Since when have you not wanted to cuddle?”

It was a good question. She always wanted to cuddle. It was Owen who sometimes didn’t.

So why did he have to be in a cuddly mood today?

“Well,” she replied, thinking fast, “I don’t normally have five orgasms, do I? So you should expect things to be different than they usually are. I’m hotter than normal, and you’re sweatier than normal.”

Things *were* different. Her defenses were very, very weak at the moment. She was clinging to him, even as she told him she didn't want to be in his arms. She loved how their skin was sticking together with the slick dampness. Loved how every part of her body that was pressed up against him was warmer and meltier than the rest of her.

Loved the feel of his body—the brush of his fingers on her bottom, the hardening of his bicep under her hand, the faint caress of his lips in her hair.

He chuckled. “So I would have expected you to be cuddlier than normal.”

“Well, I'm not.” She was lying

through her teeth. She could barely tear herself away from him—he meant so very much to her—but she wasn't going to lose herself in the man she was just fucking on the weekends.

So she jerked out of his arms and rolled to the edge of the bed. “I told you I don't want to cuddle.”

Her tone was so biting that she glanced sideways to make sure he wasn't angry. And because she checked, she caught a flash of something that almost looked like pain.

Like she had hurt him.

“Sorry,” she said immediately, feeling like an ass. “Nothing personal.”

She was making a total mess of

everything, when all she'd wanted to do was win the damn bet.

Owen gave a half shrug. "If you're hot," he said matter-of-factly, "you're hot." His lips twitched and the fleeting, wounded expression disappeared.

Amy couldn't help but snort at his response, relief easing the anxiety. She gave him a slanting look. "Well? I'm waiting for the inevitable bad pun."

"You'll have to keep waiting," he said with exaggerated condescension. "If you don't want to cuddle, then I don't want to make bad puns."

"Stop pouting." Feeling more in control of her emotions, she shifted to her side so she was facing him. "Even up-and-coming corporate executives

sometimes don't get their way in everything and have to go cuddle-free.”

Narrowing his eyes, he glared at her arrogantly and didn't respond, but she could tell he was trying to hide a smile.

They lay in silence for about fifteen minutes—Amy on her side of the bed, Owen on his.

Eventually, Amy started to feel sappy again, this time just from gazing at him.

He was watching her constantly, and he had the focused, intent expression that he always wore when he was working. The incongruity between his cool concentration and his debauched nakedness was irresistible. And the little

details about him that she noticed so easily—the way the hairs in one of his eyebrows were ruffled, the faint red scratches from her fingernails on his right shoulder, the light smears of dried fluid on his lower belly, thighs, and cock—made him seem more real, more human, more loved.

Feeling heat rise in her cheeks as she realized what she'd just thought, she flipped over onto her back again and stared once more at the ceiling.

“Amy?” Owen murmured.

“Hmm?” she replied, swallowing hard.

Damn it, he'd moved over until he was right next to her again, his fingers tracing the curve of one shoulder. “Tell

me what's wrong."

Giving him a mildly exasperated look, she replied, "Nothing's wrong. I'm hot and tired. We've already covered this."

His lips lowered to where he'd been stroking her shoulder with heart-stopping gentleness. "I don't believe you," he said huskily, over her skin. His lips eased toward her neck. Settled on her throbbing pulse. "Tell me why you're acting so prickly."

"I'm not prickly." Her mouth fell open as his lips and tongue teased her deliciously. "I told you, I'm..." Her words transformed into a sigh of pleasure as the fingers of one of his hands started stroking her damp hair

back from her face.

“I thought you were enjoying this.” He trailed his kisses up to her jaw. “If you’re not, just tell me and we’ll stop.”

She breathed out a laugh. “Owen, I just had five orgasms. How can you doubt whether I’m enjoying it.”

“True. But you can enjoy something physically and not really be into it. I want this to be good for you in every way.”

A strange conflict was going on in her heart—between mushy affection and panicked desperation. “As much as you want to win?”

She regretted the words as soon as she’d spoken them. Couldn’t believe

she'd voiced something so petty, so revealing. Her defenses must be lowered farther than she'd imagined.

Maybe Owen would ignore the words or not read too much into them. Or maybe he wouldn't even notice them.

And maybe the sun would change its mind one day and start setting in the east. *Of course*, Owen would notice them.

His face tightened, and he lifted his head to peer at her closely. "Amy?"

She shook her head. "Never mind. That was stupid. I'm into this all the way." She managed a wobbly smile, mentally pleading with him to move on. "Forget I said that."

“I’m not going to forget you said that.” He took her face between his hands. “What did you mean?”

“Nothing. My mind is numb from all the orgasms. No use expecting me to talk sense.”

“Amy, tell me what’s wrong. If you want to say something—”

“I don’t. Stop trying to read into everything. Why can’t we just have great sex and leave it at that?”

His lips tightened abruptly, and she had no way of understanding what was going on behind his eyes.

She sighed. If she didn’t pull it together soon, the most important thing in her life would be destroyed. She raised

her hands to cup the back of his head.
“Owen, it’s really nothing. Don’t you ever say something that’s just silly, that doesn’t have any real meaning?”

He seemed to reflect on this a minute. “No. I don’t believe I do.”

“Well, normal people do. So let it go.”

Nodding, he lowered his face once more to her jaw line. Nibbled his way to her lips. “You know, don’t you,” he said huskily, his breath wafting over her skin irresistibly, “that pleasing you is more important to me than winning?”

She didn’t know anything of the kind, and he was probably just saying it to smooth over her ruffled feathers. But the words filled her heart until it

threatened to overflow. “Sure it is,” she managed to say, her hands caressing his thick hair.

Meeting her eyes deeply—as if he was trying to communicate something wordlessly—he sank into a kiss.

It was so sweet and so rich that Amy closed her eyes and moaned against his mouth. Not from erotic desire but from the overwhelming need in her heart. His lips brushed against hers with soft, tantalizing pressure, and his tongue traced her open lips and then dipped into her mouth to tease and soothe.

She gasped in relief when he finally pulled away, since she was almost weeping from the beauty of it, the depth of it, and what she wished it

meant. “Wow,” she drawled, trying to lighten her feelings by underestimating the kiss’s effect on her. “That was pretty good.”

He didn’t respond to her words. Just kept gazing into her eyes. And then lowered his mouth again, causing Amy to tense in preparation. He pressed little kisses into her cheek, her jaw, then down to her throat.

She’d thought she’d be safer when he moved away from her mouth, but every touch of his lips was purely tender.

He was demolishing every calculated barrier she’d built up around her heart. “Owen,” she breathed, because she couldn’t help but say his

name.

His face was buried in the crook between her neck and shoulder. “Hmm,” he murmured, tangling his fingers in her hair.

Her hands were clutching at him, as if they resisted ever letting him go. “Owen,” she said again, her voice wispy, needy.

“Hmm,” he hummed again, his mouth busy once again at the pulse in her neck.

His tongue was now stroking her heartbeat—and her heart was drumming the pulse of her love for him. Her mouth fell open and she arched up into him, the need in her heart far stronger than any need she’d ever felt between her legs.

“Oh, God, Owen,” she whispered, her fingers tightening on the hard muscles of his back. “I...”

She couldn't believe she was so close to saying something she wasn't supposed to even feel. Every nerve in her body was humming with the emotion, and her voice was aching to speak it.

“Hmm?” This time, his low murmur lifted at the end, making the sound a question. His lips had grown still, were pressed motionless against her pounding pulse.

Amy clenched her jaw. Didn't speak again. Her sense of self-preservation was still the strongest part of her soul.

Owen's body was suddenly tense,

and he raised his face from her neck to stare down at her. “You what?” he asked hoarsely.

She just looked at him, knowing she couldn’t tell him the truth but having no idea what to say.

It was too new. Too risky. She still didn’t think it could possibly be real—since it was wrong in every way. There was no possibility of letting go of her control enough to say it.

Terrified that she’d given something away, she made her voice light and casual. “I...think you’ve set a very dangerous precedent this afternoon.”

For just a moment, he looked almost disappointed, but then he smiled

dryly so she assumed the first impression was just wishful thinking on her part. “In what way?” he asked, both his expression and body relaxing.

“I’m going to expect this kind of performance from you regularly from now on.” There was safety in their teasing banter—so she clung to it.

“In that case, you’re going to be disappointed. This is not something that occurs every day. Lesser men wouldn’t have the stamina. And even I... Well, most days my will of iron is slightly less iron.”

Amy giggled, feeling a little better. “What a shame.”

He slid one hand up to stroke her breasts. “If seven orgasms was a

common occurrence, then this wouldn't be much of a challenge, would it?"

She closed her eyes as his mouth closed around the nipple he'd been fondling, but she was closing them in a pleasure that was only partly physical.

He shifted lower on her body, trailing his kisses down to her belly. She sucked in her stomach instinctively as he sweetly brushed his lips along her skin.

Her legs were already parting—her thighs spreading unconsciously to make room for his chest and shoulders. His hands slipped under her to cup her bottom. Raising her hips slightly, he poised his mouth over her sensitive flesh.

“Whatever you do down there,”

she said breathlessly. “It doesn’t count. Remember, your cock has to be in play.”

He arched an eyebrow. “I know the rules. I’m just killing time before my cock feels like playing again.”

She tried to stifle her amused grin but didn’t do a very good job.

Then she didn’t feel like grinning at all when he started to nuzzle her intimately.

Spreading her legs farther apart, she bent her knees up for leverage to hold her hips in position. She was rather wet and messy from their earlier lovemaking, but Owen didn’t seem to notice or to mind. He nudged her open and gave her one long stroke with his tongue, causing her to sigh in pleasure.

Then he used his lips and tongue to tease and stimulate—alternating between her entrance and her clit and occasionally making detours into the surrounding areas—until Amy was gasping and grinding her pelvis into his face.

She held his head firmly in place. The coiling pressure of an approaching orgasm was gathering slowly, despite all the times she'd already come. "You know this doesn't count. It's a freebie."

He chuckled, making her groan as the vibrations shook her and traveled in shudders up her spine. He shifted a hand so he could sink a finger into her wet pussy.

She arched dramatically on the

bed, clutching at his head and pushing it harder into her now throbbing arousal. “Fuck, Owen,” she gasped. “How are you doing this?”

It seemed like she should get to the point where her body would stop responding to him.

Another finger had joined the first, and he was pumping them quickly in and out, matching the rhythm his tongue had established as it fluttered over her clit. One of her legs jerked up suddenly and hooked itself over his shoulder. She couldn't help but clench her thighs together, squeezing his head in between them.

He made a strangled sound and used his free hand and his opposite

shoulder to force her legs apart. Then he closed his lips around her clit and started to suck hard—in retaliation, she supposed.

She cried out, as jolts of sensation overwhelmed her. Her arms flew up to grab at the headboard, and she clung to it desperately as her body started to quake.

He was giving her such pleasure, playing her body like an instrument. And he was Owen—the man who was so much more to her than the pleasure he could give her.

She felt his teeth chafe very gently against her hot flesh. “Owen,” she choked out. “God, Owen, I...”

She was so close. So close to coming. So close to speaking the words

that had always been so unspeakable.

She loved him. *Loved* him. There was no way to deny it was true. And now she desperately wanted to say it out loud.

Swallowed over the words as her climax started to crest because—pleasure or not—her feelings just weren't returned.

He hummed against her pulsing flesh. The hum sounded almost like a question.

She pressed her lips tightly together and released an urgent, helpless moan in lieu of the words she couldn't say. Thrashed beneath his mouth and fingers, frantically trying to reach another peak.

Then the stimulation was gone. Owen had lifted his head, his body. Removed his fingers from her pussy. Was kneeling over her, naked and gorgeous.

For a moment, she wasn't sure if she would scream or cry. She'd been so close. So close to everything. And he had stopped again, working her back up to the anguished frustration she'd experienced before.

Her eyes darted down his body and saw why he'd stopped. He still had a challenge to fulfill, after all.

And now his cock was once more very much in play.

"Damn it, Owen," she snarled, trying to think clearly enough to decide

what her strategy should be. No matter how much she loved him and wanted to be loved in return, she wasn't going to let him win so easily. "You have no idea how much I hate you."

He raised his eyebrows. Gave his hard, bobbing cock a few quick tugs.

Didn't appear to believe her.

Six

Amy should really be more upset that Owen was so close to winning this game.

It was the principle of the thing, after all. He was far too arrogant and presumptuous for his own good—actually thought he was invincible. And Amy had always believed it was her job to take the smug bastard down a notch or two.

Plus, she really hated losing. Owen had already produced five orgasms out of the seven required.

And he still had thirty-five minutes left.

All of this meant that Amy couldn't just let Owen have his way. She was throbbingly aware that her body was just waiting for Owen to do his thing. Oh, she could come twice more. No doubt about that. It wouldn't even take much work on his part.

So she had to do something drastic to keep it from happening.

Owen would stop her if she tried to go down on him, and he'd recognize any obvious attempt on her part to make him come prematurely.

She'd have to be more creative than that now. Even though she didn't really feel like being creative. Even though what she really wanted was for Owen to take her in his arms, find his

home in her body, and never let her go.

But that was irrelevant at the moment. The only relevant issue was which one of them was going to win. So all of Amy's sappy feelings for Owen—that had risen unbidden in her heart—would just have to be ignored so she could concentrate on essentials.

Owen was the one who had made this about winning. He was the one who'd always turned to banter whenever things had gotten too intimate between them. And he was the one who was leaving in twenty-eight days.

Amy wasn't going to lose.

"Fine. Give me another orgasm."
Scowling, she added under her breath,
"Cocky bastard."

His lips twitched irrepressibly.

Fighting an answering smile, she said, “But find a new position. You don’t get to loom over me like a caveman.”

He hadn’t really been caveman-esque before she’d spoken—he’d simply been kneeling between her legs with a very obvious erection. But at her words a familiar fire smoldered in his eyes.

“Was that a suggestion?”

“No.” Amy tried not to feel a thrill at certain possibilities. Owen going all caveman would definitely be counterproductive to her attempt at victory, so she’d best not encourage him. “I explicitly told you there would be no caveman act from you today.”

He raised his eyebrows. “Kind of bossy, aren’t you?”

“You’re the one who kept bossing me around earlier, so I don’t think you can complain about me.”

Owen grinned and flopped over on his back. He clearly was in better shape now that he’d come once. He looked turned on but not overly urgent. “No caveman, then. I guess you want to be on top again.”

“Yeah,” Amy agreed, although she was feeling pretty tired and wasn’t sure she was up to riding Owen into ecstasy once more. She really hoped her thighs were up to the challenge. But that position would at least give her some control over the situation while she

figured out how she was going to win.

Stalling, she rubbed her hands across his chest, feeling the gently rippling muscles and the hard planes and ridges. Staring at the contrast between her fair fingers and his tanned skin, she caressed him for a while in almost idle reflection.

When she glanced back at his face, she caught a soft look that made her belly clench, but it disappeared before she could name it.

She forced the fleeting hope away, since it would only distract her. A victory was hanging in the balance. Drastic measures were now necessary.

In fact, she might have to cheat a little.

Just a little. And no more than he'd already cheated. Turn-about, after all, was fair play.

Suddenly inspired, she lowered her face to kiss a line across his collarbone. She could feel his body tense up under the touch of her lips, and she slid her hands down to tease the sensitive skin on his side. That made him jerk a little, causing her to smile over his belly.

"Tickling is off limits," Owen said firmly, reaching up to tangle his fingers in her hair.

"Who says?" Her eyes darted up to his face. "You seem to be making up all the rules here. You can use a vibrator and you can go down on me. But I can't

go down on you and tickling isn't allowed. We didn't sign a contract, you know, so everything is negotiable. I'll tickle you if I want to."

She was only arguing to divert him from her real agenda. Tickling wasn't really her plan.

Looking very smug while keeping his arms tightly at his sides, Owen replied, "Well, the negotiations on this are over. No tickling."

Amy tickled him—starting at his lower sides and then squeezing her fingers up under his arms as he unconsciously relaxed his defensive pose.

He made a rough noise in his throat, one that Amy recognized as

stifled laughter, and tried to capture her hands. Giggling helplessly, Amy eluded his grasp for a little while as she danced her fingers all along the places she knew he was most sensitive. Saw his body twitch and his face set tightly in a frantic attempt at control.

Eventually, he managed to grab her hands and held them away from his body. “Okay,” he said gruffly. “We’ll reopen negotiations. What do you want in order to stop tickling me?”

This was working out better than she’d expected. “I want you to lie still this time. Number six is up to me. You just lie there like a good boy, and I’ll take care of everything.”

He narrowed his eyes. “Are you

planning something underhanded?”

She was. Very underhanded. But she opened her eyes innocently and said with exaggerated wonder, “Me? What do you mean? All I want is a nice little fuck.”

Owen obviously didn’t believe a word she said. “Are you planning to cheat and suck me off?”

“Nope. I’m not prepared to agree that that would be cheating, but there will be no sucking of any variety. I promise.”

“And you’re not going to just sit there on top of me, are you? In some sort of vindictive torture?” He looked decidedly wary as her growing excitement started to buzz silently at

every one of her nerve ends.

She chuckled. “Nope. I’ll be making some definite moves.”

“All right,” he agreed slowly. “But I’ll be watching for any cheating, so don’t try anything.”

“I’ll be watching too. I know perfectly well that you’re not above breaking rules if it means you get to win. Just because I’m the one getting the orgasms in this situation doesn’t mean I’m completely at your will.” She was acting like she was explaining her desire to take control, but she was really just trying to dispel any suspicions. “Plus, I like to be on top.”

He gave her a dry half-smile. “I know you do.” He relaxed his body and

linked his arms behind his head. “I’ll be a good boy. So it’s your turn to ‘go to it.’”

Suppressing her glee, she crawled over until she was straddling his hips once again.

She’d intended to just do the normal astride-thing while she put her plan in motion, but she was hit with another idea when she lifted his erection. She watched his face as she gently ran her fingers up and down the hard length of him.

He was watching her intently through half-closed lids, and his jaw clenched as she massaged him.

She played with the head a little. Saw when he winced very slightly. Then

she stroked down to cup his balls and felt a thrill of power when she heard him release a quiet, helpless groan.

After she'd caressed him gently for a few minutes, she decided he was in a suitably receptive and non-thinking state.

Levering her hips forward, she kept one hand on his cock and raised the other hand to her lips. She slid one of her fingers into her mouth, sucking on it hard—knowing that Owen was still watching her.

His eyes blazed as she slid her finger in and out of her tightened lips, and she heard him make a low, guttural sound.

Satisfied that he was paying

attention, she trailed that one finger back down her body—skating along her neck, making a detour to twirl around one nipple, skimming farther down her belly, and finally settling between her thighs.

His eyes had followed that one finger, and Amy felt a hot exhilaration flood her as she fingered her own arousal. Her flesh was warm and swollen and sticky and a little sore, but it astoundingly seemed to crave even more friction.

Leaning forward with one hand splayed on the mattress for support, she sunk that one finger all the way inside her and pumped it in and out, mimicking the motion she'd generated in her mouth.

Owen groaned again and closed

his eyes. “That’s incredibly hot, baby, but you’re not going to make me come like that. Even if you get yourself off with your finger.”

Amy wasn’t worried. This had still been a very encouraging start.

She pulled her finger out of her pussy and raised it again to her mouth. Saw Owen bite his lip when she slid the finger back into her mouth and tasted her own arousal—mixed with some lingering traces of Owen’s.

It wouldn’t have taken very much self-stimulation for Amy to come again. She was already very close from his mouth a few minutes earlier.

But her plan wasn’t to have another orgasm.

Her plan was to fake one.

It could certainly be considered cheating—although they'd never laid out definite rules, so cheating was purely subjective—but at this point she didn't mind stretching a bit to win the game. She figured if she faked one orgasm, Owen would be satisfied and would let his control slip on the last one, thinking he had won. Then she could inform him that she had faked one of the seven and that he hadn't won after all.

He would whine and complain about fairness and honesty, but the fact was that he would have lost.

Her brain was slightly befuddled from her previous orgasms, but all of this made perfect sense to Amy. She

couldn't be sure of making him come again unless he was lulled into thinking he'd already achieved the victory.

So fake one orgasm—win the game. She thought it was a very good plan.

Amy wasn't a fan of faking orgasms. In fact, she thought it was a very stupid thing for women to do. Why would they want to trick men into being satisfied with their shoddy techniques, instead of encouraging them to find different techniques that actually worked?

But this was a highly unusual situation, and she thought that womankind might forgive her for faking it this one time if it meant achieving

victory over one very arrogant specimen of masculinity.

But, as she pulled her finger out of her mouth—saw Owen's fiery expression—she realized that she'd have to be careful.

It would really suck to intend to fake an orgasm and end up coming for real.

She'd been holding Owen's cock lightly in one hand, and now she drew it up until it was flush against her arousal.

Eyeing him from under her lashes, she reached her free hand down to spread open her folds, and then she rubbed her heated flesh against his hard cock.

“Amy,” Owen choked, fisting his hands on either side of his body as he stared at her masturbating against his erection.

“You just lie there,” she told him in almost intoxicated delight. “That was our deal, remember?” His shaft was rubbing deliciously against her clit, and her hips started jerking a little as she started to really respond to the sensations.

The muscles in Owen’s arms and legs tightened even more, and he arched his back a bit, groaning from the sight of her and from the stimulation on his cock. “This one counts,” he gritted between clenched teeth. “My cock will have been in play when you come from this.”

"I suppose," she agreed, feigning reluctance. "I'll give you this one—but you really should be grateful I'm making it so easy on you."

"But don't think I'm going to come from this," Owen added, with a sudden burst of rough sound as she briefly tightened her grip on his cock.

"Uh huh," Amy agreed, really, really hoping he would come.

As she felt pressure well up quickly from the focused friction, she reminded herself that she wasn't supposed to come for real.

This one was fake. And faking it was going to win her this game.

"Yeah," she moaned throatily,

trying to position herself in the most flattering way but still allow him a good view of the proceedings. “Yeah, Owen, good.”

It *was* good, but she hammed up her pleasure a little in preparation for her fake orgasm.

Owen didn’t seem any the wiser. His whole body was damp and tense now as he watched her rub his cock insistently against her clit.

Her hips picked up speed—not all of it part of her strategy—and she reminded herself again that this orgasm wasn’t for real. “Yeah,” she gasped her head falling forward now and her hair spilling down over her shoulders. “Yeah, Owen, so good, so hard, so

hard.”

She saw that he now had squeezed his eyes shut and turned his head away from her. She felt a thrill of power that almost matched the thrill of pleasure and possession that was already washing over her.

If she got him far enough, maybe she could come for real—since, if he climaxed again before her seventh orgasm, she was pretty sure he wouldn’t be up for another go in time.

He definitely seemed to be losing control. And so was she. She had to work not to squeeze his erection too tightly, since her body had become demanding and urgent as she worked them both up toward orgasm.

“Owen,” she groaned, “God, Owen, I want to come like this.” It wasn’t really a lie, although she mostly said it for effect. For some reason, she couldn’t remember the kinds of things she normally said in the heat of passion so everything she said sounded slightly artificial—making her feel like a bad porn star.

But her erotic words had a very good effect. Owen’s arms flew up from the bedcovers, and his hands settled bruisingly on her hips. “Come,” he rasped, heat wafting in waves from his body, even though his hot gaze was now masked by his lids. “Come, love, come.”

The “love” almost distracted her. She almost leaned over to kiss him. But

she'd have a really hard time faking this so shamelessly if she was actually kissing him so she caught herself just in time.

She'd better step it up a notch and get to her fake orgasm more quickly.

“Yeah,” she gasped, starting to bounce over him as if she were fucking him, his cock sliding lusciously against her flesh. “Yeah, Owen, yeah. You’re so hard, so good.” She was panting now, from effort as much as growing desire. She tried to think of something creative and sexy to say. Couldn’t think of anything but porn. But that always turned men on—and Owen was certainly not immune to some blatant ego-boosting. Hoping the words wouldn’t make her

giggle, she continued. “So hard,” she panted, “So big. Your cock feels so good. So big.”

That actually helped her. The irony distracted her enough to keep control of her rising sensations.

Owen's eyes opened just slightly, and he was now watching her through the thin slits. For a moment, she was afraid she'd overdone the porn-speak and he'd caught on, but his hands were still grasping her hips tightly, urging their motion. And his body was still hot and tense.

Men were fooled into thinking their partners had climaxed all the time. It seemed to her like they should pay more attention, but she supposed if they

were excited enough, the artificial could easily be confused with the genuine.

And—despite his better qualities—Owen was still just a man.

Just to be safe, however, she gave his cock a few pumps with her hand, each time pushing it more firmly against her clit. When Owen moaned helplessly and tossed his head, she felt safe again, so she started up her routine once more.

Her arousal hadn't built back up—mostly because of her attempt to keep from giggling—so she was able to concentrate more on faking it than on keeping herself from coming. “Good,” she gasped erotically, “Yeah, baby, I want to come. You’re going to make me come so hard.”

Owen was still watching her and, although his eyes were too narrow for her to read their expression, she was pretty sure he was into this. He had managed to keep his body still, however, just as he'd promised so she finished up her fake orgasm with no interference. "Yeah," she cried, jerking her whole body the way she did when she came. "Yeah, yeah, yeah!"

On the last "yeah," she thrashed over him for an appropriate span of time. Then slumped to the side, releasing his still hard cock.

She'd been hoping he'd find her performance so sexy that he wouldn't be able to stop himself from coming but apparently she wasn't that good or he

wasn't that far gone yet.

He was holding himself rigidly still beside her, breathless and perspiring. But he hadn't lost control.

No problem. She'd still win. Because, with any luck, he would think she just had one more orgasm left before they reached seven.

But he would be wrong.

Owen continued to lie perfectly still for a few minutes, while Amy pretended to be recovering herself.

What she was really doing was trying not to sneak her hand between her legs and bring herself to the waiting orgasm that had been started and interrupted more than once now.

After a while, she sighed, trying to look defeated. “That was six. I guess it’s not as impossible as I thought.”

Owen’s head was turned to the side, and he was just watching her silently. It was an intense, assessing look that she had no way of interpreting, but it was starting to unnerve her.

And worry her.

“What?” she asked finally. Although if she did it again she'd rephrase a few of her passionate cries, she'd still done a really good job faking the orgasm.

He didn’t answer. Just eyed her closely.

Feeling uncomfortably self-

conscious and getting more and more sure that she hadn't fooled him, she rolled over to the other side of the bed. "Let me recover a few more minutes," she told him with a valiantly determined nonchalance. "Then I'll be ready for you to try for number seven." She glanced at his naked body, complete with new sweat and both old and new fluids from her body. "Maybe you can go get a damp towel or something, since you're not looking entirely fresh." She tried for her characteristic teasing tone, "If your erection doesn't keep you from walking to the bathroom, that is."

He didn't actually look as urgent as he had earlier—something must have distracted him—and Amy felt a

tightening in her chest at the knowledge of what that something might be. She prayed he'd do as she'd instructed. The stickiness was becoming excessive, and she needed some space to pull herself together.

And maybe while he was there she'd make quick use of her fingers so she wouldn't be quite so desperate when they got to number seven. No—six. Owen would only think it was seven.

Hopefully.

She turned onto her side with her back to him so she wouldn't have to look at his thoughtful face. Then she heard him roll off the bed and stride toward the bathroom.

She started to relax, hoping once

again that her plan was going to work. It wasn't a great plan—there were a few obvious drawbacks—but faking had been a longstanding practice that worked on most men much of the time. And since she'd never faked with Owen before, he would have no practice at sorting out the real from the pretend.

There was no reason why this wouldn't work. She could excuse the unusual porn-speak by saying she was just trying something new to see if it turned her on.

Smiling to herself, she imagined his face when she told him she'd cheated. He was going to be so incredibly mad. Furious. Seething.

Amy could hardly wait.

Then she let out a little squeal when his arm snaked around her waist without warning, as he lowered himself onto the mattress and moved to spoon her from behind.

“You can’t really think you would fool me like that,” he murmured, his lips at her ear.

All the tension left Amy’s body, and she slumped back against him. “Damn it,” she grumbled, knowing there was no use in arguing now. “You’re so obnoxious! Why can’t you be as gullible as other men? I thought I’d done so well.”

“You did,” he assured her, mouthing her shoulder and sliding the damp hand towel across her belly and

then down between her legs, giving her tantalizing little touches as he stroked the rough fabric across her skin. “You arched and shuddered and moaned exquisitely. And kudos for the creative use of my cock.”

Amy wrinkled her nose and tried not to shiver at the feel of the cool, wet towel against her heated flesh. “Well, it was worth a try, and I had a good shot at making it work. What did I do wrong?”

She suddenly felt Owen’s teeth against her skin, and it caused another shiver to start low in her spine. “I was already suspicious. And as soon as you started talking about how big and good my cock was, I knew it had to be fake.”

She huffed. “I do think your cock

is nice and big—and it does very good things to me,” she said matter-of-factly.

He chuckled, sending the vibrations throughout her body. “That’s nice to hear. But I know better than to believe you’d shout it out in the heat of passion. If only because you wouldn’t want me to get a swollen head.”

Faking had been a decent idea, but she hadn’t thought things through enough—it would have been better if she’d had some prep time and had been able to rehearse a little first.

Sighing, she admitted, “Your head is far too swollen as it is.” She tried to pull away from him, mostly because the sappy tenderness was returning in full force as he gently cleaned off her body,

despite her resolve to be mad at him for finding her out. “Well, since that was a flop, I think I’ll run to the bathroom and clean myself up a little bit more before we start up again.”

“Why bother?” he asked, refusing to let her get away from him. “You’re not going to stay clean, you know. You have two more orgasms left.”

She looked at him over her shoulder and got a little thrill from how possessive his expression was. “That’s your swollen head talking. I’m not holding my breath, though.”

He gave her nipple a teasing little tug between his finger and thumb, causing her to suck in her breath and hold it. “Aren’t you?” he murmured.

“Smug bastard,” she muttered.

“Thinks he can just...”

She never completed her mutter, because her mumbles transformed into a shocked squeal as Owen flipped her over onto her back, parting her legs until he was kneeling between them.

Gazing up in startled delight, she just about melted away at the sight of him. She loved him so much—no use to deny it any more—even when he was infuriatingly smug, presumptuous, and a know-it-all.

She particularly loved when he looked at her like this—as if he couldn’t get enough of her, as if everything she did made him want her even more, as if she was his.

She *was* his. And she wanted so much for him to be hers.

But that had never been in the cards for them. It had been off-limits from the very beginning.

Even though he might be kneeling between her thighs, erect and naked and hotly possessive, it didn't necessarily mean he felt anything like love for her.

She was so distracted by her thoughts that it took her a minute to realize that he had lifted up one of her legs until her foot was level with his face.

Feeling a little awkward with her leg in the air but also more aroused as the move stretched her completely open before him, Amy squirmed against the

mattress. She could feel the cool air of the room against her wet pussy. “Owen,” she said. “What do you think you’re doing?”

He practically scorched her with the intensity of his gaze. “Giving you another orgasm,” he answered hoarsely, his desire and urgency having evidently returned as the brief diversion was forgotten. “A real one, this time. Don’t you want another one?”

“Yeah,” she whispered truthfully, whimpering a little when he started to tongue the arch of her foot. “I want another one.”

She did want another one. More than she’d thought possible after coming five times already this afternoon. But

when she heard how tremulous and needy her voice sounded, she made herself continue, “But that doesn’t mean you’re actually up to giving me one.”

He chuckled warmly and edged forward, sinking down on folded legs until he was sitting on his ankles, and his cock was in the vicinity of her groin. “You’ll never give me even an inch, will you?”

“Nope,” she breathed, trying to keep her voice from shaking. Owen had lifted her other leg as well so her ankles were propped up against his shoulders. “Not even an inch. Everyone else gives you what you want, but I’ll never do that. My job is—”

She cut off the words abruptly—

not because Owen was fingering her deliciously but because she realized what she was saying. She had been about to say something stupid about what her role was in his life, as if she held a special place there.

"Your job is what?" he asked, splaying his thighs out a bit more as pulled her hips up into position.

She let out a soft whine as he held her legs apart, lined himself up, and then slid slowly inside her, her body starting to bend in half as he leaned forward. "Job," she gasped, trying to think clearly when all she was aware of was his hard substance filling her completely, then sinking in even deeper. "To...to..."

"To what?" he demanded, in quiet

insistence, pushing farther forward until her knees were nearing her shoulders.

To take care of him. To comfort and support him. To challenge his cool entitlement to the world. To share his life.

All of this she wanted to do. All of this felt like her job.

And only hers.

But he'd never agreed to give her such a role in his life, so she could hardly just announce it out loud. So she pulled together a few scrambled thoughts and choked, "To make sure you don't always get your way."

He stared at her intently for a few moments, as if he were trying to figure

out what she was thinking. Then gave an ironic half-smile. “Love, you certainly do a good job with that.”

She was feeling a mushy thrill from the endearment—which somehow sounded more real than it used to—when he leaned forward all the way, pressing her legs up against her chest.

The whine she gave this time wasn’t entirely from pleasure. She felt a little raw from all the times they’d had sex already in the last two hours, and he was now very, very deep. The pleasure was mingled with discomfort. “Owen.”

“Too deep?” he asked.

“A little,” she admitted. “Usually it’s good like this, but after all the...”

He pulled his weight off her and raised himself again until he was sitting once more on his ankles, thighs parted to make room for her hips. He was still fully sheathed inside her—her ass lifted slightly off the bed—but the penetration was decidedly more comfortable.

“Better?”

She nodded, and he raised her hips a little more, changing the angle of his entry.

“Good?” he asked hoarsely, holding himself rigidly in check.

“Good,” she assured him, squirming against him in an attempt to get some friction. Her muscles were already straining from trying to hold her lower body up, but this would definitely

be worth a few sore muscles. “Let’s see if you can manage number six.”

Recognizing a dare when he heard one, Owen began to thrust, letting out low little grunts with every slow lever of his hips.

Amy could feel his thrusts hitting her g-spot, and she felt the familiar shuddering pleasure spiraling out from the contact. Biting down on her lip, she gave a muffled moan and wriggled from the increasing intensity of the sensations.

She could feel Owen watching her, and her whole body burned with a hot flush. Partly from a mild self-consciousness and partly from very strong satisfaction in the fact that the focus of that particular gaze was only

her.

He was thrusting steadily and leisurely, pulling out as far as he could without losing the position, and then driving back in. On every upstroke, rich jolts of sensation would shoot out from her center, causing her to hum in her throat involuntarily.

Staring at his damp, ardent face, his hot, focused eyes, and his strong, graceful body, Amy was awed by the incongruity of actually having him in her life. Having him in her body. Doing these amazing things to her.

Even just for twenty-eight more days.

“Amy,” he gritted out, his thrusts becoming more rapid. One hand gripped

one of her ankles and the other was low on her opposite thigh. “Baby, can you come?”

She was about to choke out an immediate affirmative—the pressure, already interrupted more than once, had started to build quickly below her belly—but she clenched her jaw just in time. This was still a wager and she might not be able to cheat, but she wasn’t going to make it too easy for him.

Instead of answering, she made a silly, helpless noise of pleasure and reached above to grab the headboard. Since her head was tossing back and forth—making her hair fly around messily—and all the tension in her body was coiling up, she wasn’t sure her

refusal to answer was particularly effective.

He had to know that she was about to come—her whole body was screaming with it, even if she wasn't actually screaming.

She whimpered a little more as the pleasure started to crest, and she saw Owen gazing down at his slick cock sliding in and out of her body, a kind of primal heat taking over his face. He made a throaty sound of approval, picked up his speed, and started to grunt more urgently.

Swallowing over a cry of frustration, Amy couldn't keep her arms from moving. Releasing the headboard, her hands flew back and forth from

fisting the bedcovers to squeezing her breasts. She moaned harshly, her whole body tightening in preparation. She was jerking her hips as much as she could, but she didn't have much leverage to get a real motion going.

His eyes still raking over her, Owen slid his hand down her leg until he reached her groin. Then his fingers pressed firmly into her clit.

She came as soon as he did so. She choked on the burst of pleasure, her body shaking—for real, this time—beneath the waves of sensation. She was vaguely aware of Owen making a choked sound as her muscles clamped down around him ruthlessly.

Tears were streaming from her

eyes in her attempt to stifle everything she was feeling—the overwhelming pleasure and the deep emotion. She couldn't force back any of it. Couldn't keep her body and mind and heart from reacting to who this man was.

And soon he'd be out of her life for good.

Physical and emotional exhaustion had finally caught up to her, and Amy felt like she might shatter into pieces beneath him.

With a miserable groan, he pulled out of her, a little too soon for the move to be comfortable for either of them.

She turned over and buried her face in the pillow, needing to hide from him—hide her tears, hide how

completely he'd turned her inside out.

"Amy," he asked gently, his physical need apparently forgotten as real concern edged his voice. "Love, are you all right?"

"Yeah," she choked out, turning her head once she'd controlled herself. Her shoulders were shaking a little, but she wasn't really crying. "I guess this is what six orgasms do to a person." She gave him a smile that was almost sincere.

He drew his brows together as if he wasn't quite convinced. "Is that all it is? Say the word and we'll stop. If it's too much or if you're not liking it—"

She shook her head. She did kind of want to stop, but not because she

wasn't enjoying this. She was just so afraid that one more orgasm would be her complete undoing. Afraid all her defenses would then be leveled, that she wouldn't be able to hold anything back.

But stopping now would be cowardly, and she'd never been the kind of person who would run away when things got hard. So she grinned at him. "I knew you were afraid you couldn't do it. Trying to quit while you're ahead? Afraid you're not going to win?"

He stroked her cheek, where a just-fallen tear was lingering. "Love," he murmured, his voice so tender that she almost started crying again, "I think we're both winning."

She'd thought she had recovered

her determination and was ready for anything, but apparently that wasn't even close to being true.

Because the endearment sounded real. Like he really meant it. And it was all it took for Amy to lose it completely.

“Damn it, Owen.” The words came out of her mouth before she could stop them. “Why the hell do you have to keep calling me that?”

Seven

Amy couldn't believe she'd asked such a question, couldn't believe the words had actually slipped out between her lips.

And now she lay beside Owen waiting for his answer, trembling and tense and almost strangling on the terror that rose inexorably in her throat.

For a fleeting moment, she thought she saw something trapped in his expression as he reacted to her impulsive question, but she didn't even have time to consider or verify whether that was what she saw because the expression disappeared as soon as she registered it.

It was replaced by a look of blank surprise. “It’s a normal endearment, isn’t it?” he asked, eyeing her with casual curiosity. “Would you prefer honey or sweetie or pumpkin pie?”

And—as simple as that—the danger was deflected. Amy wasn’t sure if she was more relieved or crushed by how easily, how indifferently, Owen had avoided saying anything meaningful.

She couldn’t help but be a little disappointed, even as she was relieved that she hadn’t ruined everything. She gave a chuckle that was just a little forced. “Pumpkin pie?” she repeated, making her voice sound amused although a heavy weight had settled in her gut. “I think I’d laugh hysterically if you ever

called me that.”

He quirked his lips and wiped away the last trace of tears from her cheek. “Then I’ll see if I can work it into the repertoire, if only to see your reaction.” He was watching her face carefully as he added, his voice taking on a more earnest tone, “But, seriously, Amy, what would you prefer me to call you?”

She would prefer him to call her “love”—and mean it. Call her the most important person in his world. Call her his girlfriend, his partner—for the rest of their lives. Maybe someday even call her his wife.

But she wasn’t any of that. She was someone he fucked on the

weekends. And presuming any more than that basic truth would only keep breaking her heart.

Looking him straight in the eye, she teased, “Pumpkin pie definitely tops the list.”

It wasn't brief disappointment in his eyes, no matter how much she wanted to see it there.

She had to pull herself together. Had to accept what Owen was willing to offer her. It wasn't insignificant. Just this afternoon, he'd given her the most intensely pleasurable experience of her life. She could be satisfied with that. Accept it for what it was. Not ask for or expect things that only happened in silly fantasies.

Concentrate on the sex. Just on the sex. The sex was incredible. How many women would kill for what Amy had in bed?

She closed her eyes briefly, assessed how her body felt. She was tired and sore and still tingling and sensitive in a number of places.

But she was definitely up for one more orgasm.

“You ready for number seven?” Owen asked, his hand gently brushing her messy hair back from her face.

She was ready, and she was going to use her last orgasm to regain the reasonable control over her world she’d almost lost this afternoon.

So she gave up on their wager. She hated to lose, but winning just wasn't as important as saving her heart. And if it took coming one more time to make her appreciate what she had—and to not yearn for something more, something that could never be hers—then she was willing to suffer through one more orgasm.

But she couldn't make love to him. Couldn't do anything that would soften her, deepen her, make her want things that couldn't be hers.

What she needed was a good fuck.

A few random comments from earlier gave her the hint she needed. She knew exactly what kind of sex would distract her, would get her mind off love.

She scrambled out of the bed, her knees wobbling a little as she stood beside it. She saw Owen's eyes crawl greedily over her naked body, which was marked all over now from his hands, mouth, and teeth.

He wanted her. He had always wanted her. It was something—and something she should appreciate.

“What are you doing?” he asked, his eyes settling once more on her face. “What about number seven?”

She put her hands on her hips, stretching her breasts slightly and feeling a little smile at Owen's obvious reaction to the move. “What makes you think I'm going to make it easy for you?”

“You certainly haven't made it

easy for me yet. But I'm up for any challenge you throw my way."

Amy glanced at the clock. "We have sixteen minutes left," she said as a plan came together in her mind. Not a plan to win the wager, but a plan to make her focus purely on sex. To affirm what their relationship had always been about.

If Owen could do it, so could she.

"What your point? That's more than enough time for me to give you one more orgasm."

"Maybe." She shifted her stance in preparation. "But only if you're able to touch me." She saw momentary confusion on his face, so she cleared it up for him. "You'll have to catch me

first.”

As enlightenment dawned on his face, Owen moved, as quickly and dangerously as a predator. But Amy had been watching and, as soon as he pounced, she squealed and raced to the doorway.

He was on his feet and had taken two steps toward her. Then he called out, “Damn it, Amy. I have a raging hard-on! You’re not actually going to make me chase you around, are you?”

Giggling, Amy skittered down the hall and waited. Her plan was working. She was excited, aroused, and breathing heavily. Was indulging in absolutely no mushy feelings, despite how adorably aggrieved he had sounded.

He appeared out of the bedroom, took a step into the hall—scowling, naked, and very erect.

“You don’t have to chase me,” she taunted. “You could always just give up and admit defeat.”

Owen growled at her in a way that made her shiver. Then he paced toward her, not running, but each stride long and purposeful.

Amy turned around and hurried into the living room.

She wasn’t actually planning to elude him for long. She wanted to have sex but wanted to get them both in the proper mood before they fucked. Running over to the other side of the room, she planted herself behind a

leather armchair.

When Owen approached her, she darted away, leading him first into the kitchen. Then down the hall again. Back into the living room. And then finally where she had planned to end up all along.

In the corner near the window. Where she would accidentally get trapped.

He'd cornered her now, and he stood in front of her, looking impatient and aroused and dominant.

Amy lost her breath at the sight of him—but her reaction was definitely from lust and not from tenderness. She was flushed all over but she managed to throw out some teasing insults about

what a wuss he was, just so he'd know how he was supposed to act.

From the clock on the cable box, she saw that they'd only wasted three minutes on the chase, which still left them plenty of time for wild, primal fucking.

No love here. Just sex. Nothing in the world wrong with that.

Amy waited until Owen approached her.

"I believe I've caught you," Owen said in a silky voice, raking his gaze over her possessively. "I guess that means I can touch you now."

"Touch me all you want. You only have a few minutes left, and you've yet

to prove that you're man enough to make me come seven times."

She turned her back on him, giving him a hopefully tempting view of her ass. Waited.

Didn't have to wait long.

Amy squealed with real surprise when Owen grabbed her by the shoulders and whirled her around. Before she had time to react, he had heaved her up over his shoulder and was carrying her back to the bedroom.

"Hey!" she shouted, pummeling him on the back with very little force. This was working out even better than she'd imagined. "What do you think you're doing?"

“You’ve had your fun,” he rasped, in a voice she found absolutely thrilling. “Now it’s time for both of us to play.” He had her legs trapped with one arm or else she would have flailed her legs in a show of outrage.

But she squirmed enthusiastically until he gave her a swat on the bottom, the slapping sound of his palm on her flesh startling and strangely erotic.

As they approached the bedroom, she grabbed his sides for leverage and twisted her body until she could see around to the front of his body. She giggled in satisfaction as she saw his erection bobbing as he walked.

“You think that’s funny, do you?” he inquired, in a soft, dangerous tone. He

must have intuitively realized what she was giggling at.

“Hilarious,” she admitted.

Truthfully, it was more exhilarating than hilarious, but she wasn’t here to stroke his ego. “Poor Owen. Are you ever going to get to do anything with that thing?”

They’d reached the bedroom again, and he hauled her off of his shoulder and set her on her feet in front of him. She had to clutch at his shoulders to get her balance. “Oh, yes. I’m definitely going to do something with it. Exactly what you want me to do with it.” He pinned her with his eyes. “Ask me.”

She felt a deep jolt between her legs. “You know what I want.”

He turned her around until she was facing the mirror over the dresser and his hands skated over her curves with light, tantalizing stimulation. “Ask me anyway.” His fingers settled on her nipples and played with them in a way that made her stifle a groan. She stared at the mirror—mesmerized by the sight of his skillful fingers twirling her rosy nipples.

“Owen,” she said on an indrawn breath. Watched in the mirror as his hand dipped down to nudge at her intimate folds. Then they explored deeper. Found how hot and wet she still was. Despite all her earlier orgasms, she still wanted him again. “Fuck me.”

He grunted his approval, and she

felt his erection pushing into her from behind. Then his hand was pushing into her back, folding her at the waist until she was bent over the dresser. “Like this?” he asked hoarsely.

“Yeah.” She felt pulsing desire vie with something else inside her. She ignored that something else. This was working. This was just hot sex. This was meaningless fucking. Nothing else. “Fuck me like this.”

Since he’d already ascertained her readiness, Owen pulled the cheeks of her ass apart and found her pussy. Lifted her hips slightly as he pushed his hard cock inside her, making her suck in a breath at the familiar intrusion.

Amy was grabbing at the back of

the dresser and holding her head up so she could watch them in the mirror. The sharp edge of wood she bent over was poking her painfully in the belly but she ignored it. Focused only on the feel of Owen's cock inside her.

Holding onto her hips, he pulled out some and then plunged back inside—going deeper than he had all afternoon, filling her completely. Shudders of pleasure radiated out from the penetration, and she moaned deep in her throat. She felt his balls resting against her bottom. She wiggled in response.

He grunted and thrust again, once more making her shudder and moan.

She clung to the dresser desperately, her eyes never leaving his

face.

He was acting like the caveman she had teased him into—giving her what she'd asked for.

It was what she wanted. He was hot and primal and dominant, and he was fucking her like an animal. This was sex. Only sex. And it felt amazing.

Exquisite pressure started building inside her as Owen's thrusts become harder and faster. With each drive forward, he pushed her into the dresser and one of his hands slid forward on her back until it was fisted in her hair. She urged him on with her broken whimpers and pleas, trying to move with him as best she could in her helpless position.

It wouldn't take much longer for

her to come to the final of her seven orgasms.

Owen's face was damp again, and now he was staring down at where his cock was sliding in and out of her body. His hands were clutching hard at her hip and her hair. And the breathless grunts he made were rough and incoherent.

He wasn't watching her. Wasn't looking in her eyes. Wasn't holding her in his arms. Wasn't saying her name. Wasn't calling her "love."

Wasn't saying he loved her.

The pleasure was still building each time he slammed back into her, but she couldn't watch him anymore. She squeezed her eyes shut instead.

This was what she'd wanted, a reminder of the true nature of their coupling. Nothing deep, nothing intimate, nothing that was anything more than physical.

What it was was good. Amazing. Mind-blowing. Something other women could only fantasize about.

But it wasn't enough for Amy.

So she finally admitted it to herself. Maybe she was foolish and impossibly greedy, but she wanted—she needed—so much more.

And everything changed. The feel of Owen moving roughly inside her became painfully bittersweet. Her shoulders started shaking, and she could barely make them stop. Tears burned in

her eyes, so she squeezed them closed to keep the tears from falling.

This was supposed to be nothing more than hot caveman sex. It was wild. It was impersonal. It embodied the true nature of their relationship.

And it would probably be the last time she'd take Owen inside her body.

She'd lost control over her life, her heart, her world after all, and now she couldn't keep doing this. Even just for twenty-eight more days.

It would be an injustice to her heart.

She loved Owen. For good. No going back. And she needed to be loved in return. She couldn't settle anymore for

meaningless sex.

Couldn't give her body to a man when she wanted so much more. Even if that man happened to be Owen.

Even if she happened to love him.

She couldn't help but grieve over what it meant, even as he fucked her hard from behind.

The momentum of her orgasm faded completely, but she tried to hide it from him. This might be the end, but she wanted to feel him come inside her one more time. She kept her eyes shut and tried not to cry. Continued whimpering, although less from desire and more from heartbreak now.

Owen froze with a wrenching

groan, his cock inside her all the way.

Before she had time to process that he'd stopped, he'd leaned over her. Cupped her cheek with one hand. "Amy?"

"What...why..." she stuttered, trying to form a coherent question.

His breath was hot and damp on the side of her face, and she could feel his weight pushing her into the hard wood of the dresser. "I thought this was what you wanted," he said in a raspy whisper.

She wanted to look at his face, but she couldn't open her eyes. If she did, all the tears she was trying to hold back would overflow. "It is."

“No, it’s not.” He pulled his weight off her and then pulled out of her completely—leaving her feeling empty in more ways than one. His voice was uneven. He’d been on his way to climax and had to stop abruptly. “If it was, you wouldn’t be crying.”

“I’m not crying.” A tear leaked out of her tightly shut eyes, belying her words. One of his fingers found the tear and flicked it away. “That’s just because it feels so good. I’m just overwhelmed.”

She had to open her eyes so she could see Owen’s expression. He looked sober and intense and unreadable as he shook his head slowly. “No. That’s not what it is.” He pulled her up off the dresser and, before she knew what was

happening, he had lifted her off the floor, cradling her in his arms. “I thought I was giving you what you wanted. You should have told me you didn’t want me that way.”

“I did,” she said, instinctively twining her arms around his neck and nestling against his strong body. “I was the one who instigated it, remember?” When he didn’t respond, she continued, “What about number seven?”

He laid her gently on the bed and lowered himself beside her. Caressed her face with such tenderness that the lump in her throat threatened to suffocate her. “Fuck number seven,” he said hoarsely. “Amy, tell me what’s wrong.”

She just wasn’t brave enough to

tell him. She'd lost control of too much already. She couldn't lose control of everything. "Nothing," she mumbled, giving the lie one more try.

Owen felt warm and big beside her, and he was gazing at her with an intensity she didn't understand. "Amy, tell me what you want."

She wanted him to love her. Wanted him to stay with her and not go back to London. Wanted to spend the rest of her life with him.

"I want to try for number seven," she said at last, meaning it for one last time, reaching up to stroke his thick, damp hair.

He shifted his tense body and studied her carefully. "Are you sure?"

“Yeah,” she breathed, opening her legs as he moved over her and settled between them. “I’m sure, Owen.” She wrapped her arms around him and pulled him as close as she could make him. “I want you to make love to me.”

There was something too raw and naked in her last words, and she was afraid she had given too much away. But it was too late to take them back, and part of her didn’t even want to.

With a strange groan, Owen sank into her once more, and she tried to wrap her legs around his hips. It took her three attempts, since her muscles were tired and trembling, but she finally got her legs linked around him.

He didn’t move immediately. Just

buried his face in her neck. “Amy,” he said, his voice muffled and unspeakably dear. “I am. I always have. I’ve never done anything else.”

Something lurched in her chest as she tried to understand what he meant. “Owen? What do you—”

He raised his face and placed one finger on her lips, silencing her with the gesture. Meeting her eyes, he murmured, “Don’t talk. Don’t think. Don’t try to work it out. Some things we just can’t control.”

She was about to cry again. About to shatter. About to be completely overwhelmed. So she made one last-ditch effort to stop it. “There’s an appalling kind of irony to your telling

anyone in the world not to talk, think, and control.”

He smiled slightly in response but refused to lighten the mood. “Amy,” he said softly, his tone almost pleading. His hard length inside her felt familiar, felt complete, felt so incredibly right. “Why won’t you understand?”

Opening her mouth again, she would have asked another question, but he silenced her with a kiss. The lovely pressure of his mouth on hers was so sweet that the tears that had collected in her eyes streamed helplessly down her face.

“Owen,” she whispered against his lips, sniffing and hoping that her nose wouldn’t start running. “What—”

“Shh.” He continued pressing little kisses into her mouth, and then he started to move inside her.

Slowly, gently, with a lingering rhythm, Owen made love to her—just as she wanted. Her legs tightened around him with every deep thrust, and one of his arms edged under her shoulders so he could pull her chest toward his as they moved together. They were kissing constantly, his lips and tongue stroking her mouth as his hard cock stroked her most intimate self.

The pressure started building again with the rich friction of his motion inside her, and she angled her hips to get more stimulation on her clit. Moaning against his mouth, she arched beneath

him as the sensations continued to collect at her center.

Soon, her breathing became too urgent, and she tore her mouth away from his. Tossing her head on the pillow, her eyes happened to land on the clock. “Faster,” she urged him breathlessly. “Running out...time.”

“I don’t care.” His voice was a husky caress. He mouthed the sensitive spot beneath her ear. “Amy, it doesn’t matter.”

“Yeah...does,” she panted, arching her neck back and clawing at his shoulders as her orgasm approached too damn slowly. “You wanted...to win.”

He made a strange noise in the back of his throat and continued the

steady thrusting of his hips. “Amy, baby,” he said thickly, his face hidden because he was now nuzzling her neck. “That was never what this was about.”

“But,” she objected, hope flooding her chest at the implications of what was happening but reason trying to keep her joy in check. “You said—”

“I say a lot of things.” He found her throbbing pulse and kissed her there. “They’re not always what I mean.”

She wanted so much to believe him. Wanted so much to allow herself to believe that he was trying to express something without words.

She had to make sure. She breathed, “Why don’t...you say what you mean?”

He lifted his head up. Met her eyes. Told her everything she needed to know. “Why don’t you?”

Because she was afraid. Because she didn’t think he loved her back. Because she thought it would lead to heartbreak. Could his reasons be as simple as that?

His eyes, his mouth, his hands, his cock, his body was telling her the answer. All of him was loving her, adoring her, asking her to love him back.

She did. So much. Held him tightly with her arms and her legs. Squeezed him with her inner muscles. Moved her hips with the rhythm they were making, allowed it to push her toward release.

“Owen,” she cried, on a taken

breath—wondering how everything had been made right in such a short space of time. Her heart, her body was exploding with a fullness she'd never imagined before. "Owen."

"Amy," he choked out in response. His movements had taken on a new urgency, propelled by the change he must sense in her. He sped up his thrusting and kept giving her clumsy, loving kisses. "Love."

She arched beneath him again as she felt the delicious pressure coiling tightly inside her. She was sore, but it didn't matter. All that mattered was Owen inside her. All the way inside her. All the way to her heart.

And the unimaginable truth that

maybe she was in his heart too. She couldn't believe it was real, but he was silently communicating his feelings to her. Finally, she couldn't help but hear them.

“Amy.” The gentle rhythm of his motion disappeared as desire and need took over. “Amy, Amy.”

She was crying again. Tears falling down her face and sliding into her hair. Little sobs breaking out of her throat as she felt her final orgasm tighten, on the edge of releasing. “Owen,” she whispered, just before she came.

Her body froze, as if shocked by the shattering rush of pleasure. And then her whole body rocked with the

sensations.

She clawed lines down his back as she came. Felt Owen come too.

He grunted out her name one final time as his hips jerked against her, as he tightened and released with his climax.

They lay together breathlessly afterwards, making funny, helpless sounds as they tried to deal with the culmination of the entire afternoon.

Unthinkingly, Amy glanced at the clock. "4:10," she said hoarsely. "You win."

He kissed her again, leaving Amy a limp heap of mush and satisfaction. Her tingling legs had finally unwound themselves, and her exhausted body was

sprawled beneath him.

When he didn't reply in words, she added, "Seven orgasms. Who knew?" She briefly wondered if any sexual encounter she had in the future could possibly live up to this afternoon.

Then she looked up at Owen's tired, tender face. Thought about what both of them seemed to feel.

Decided the future might be even better than today.

"That means we get to live out one of my fantasies," Owen said in a textured voice. He couldn't seem to stop stroking her face, and his body was heavy on top of her.

"Right," Amy agreed, almost glad

she hadn't won because she was dying to know what he fantasized about. "But, just so you know, we're not going to be having sex again for a day or two."

He pulled his limp cock out of her with a wet sound. "Are you really sore? I tried to be careful." Then he looked a little guilty. "At least, until the end. Then I got a bit carried away." He pressed a little kiss on the side of her mouth. "You do that to me, you know."

"I know," she said, smiling at him fondly, tearing up again at the joy of knowing this was true. "It's not too bad. But no matter how careful you are, seven times is seven times."

He nodded. "Well, not to worry. This hasn't been entirely painless for

me. And I'm not sure I'm going to be particularly eager for a while myself." He smiled, something deep and intoxicating entering his eyes. "We can wait for my fantasy."

She sighed happily and nestled against him. "Okay. Hopefully I'll be recovered enough by whenever that is." They both really needed a shower, and she thought it must be a sign of how completely besotted she was that she didn't even care how sweaty and messy he was as she snuggled against him. Of course, she was a little sweaty and messy herself, and he didn't seem to mind either. "Owen, I—"

A sudden scratch in her throat made her cut off her words abruptly, her

head twitching to the side and her body jerking with each cough.

Owen loosened his hold on her and waited until she recovered herself. But when she stopped coughing, he grabbed her and scrutinized her face with a surprisingly hungry gaze.

She blinked up at him, still a little befuddled from all the sex, the exhaustion, the coughing, and the joy over the revelation of Owen's unspoken feelings.

“Yes?” he prompted impatiently. His gaze was so urgent and frustrated that Amy had to think back to what she'd been saying.

Then—in a hot rush—she understood. He thought she'd been about

to say something important. Something that started with “I.”

She was momentarily flooded with mushy feelings over this evidence of how much he wanted to hear her say it, and she almost babbled out the truth in a sappy haze.

But she bit the words back, her nature making itself known with a sudden clench. The selfish coward wouldn't say it himself. Wanted her to say it first. Actually expected her to cave before he did.

“You what?” Owen demanded, his arms like a vice around her.

Arrogant, spoiled asshole. Thought she would make it easy for him. Always used to getting everything

handed to him.

Well, not this. She might have lost the wager of the seven orgasms, but she wasn't going to let him win this other game.

This game that meant so much more.

Smiling at him tenderly, she patted his cheek. Gazed up at his handsome face, her heart in her eyes. Said sweetly what she'd originally intended to say, "I reserve the right to veto any of your fantasies if they make me too uncomfortable."

This time she was watching for it, and she recognized the disappointment that flickered briefly in his eyes at her words. Was impressed by how quickly

he was able to hide it as he murmured, “Agreed.” He relaxed beside her on the bed, looking as drained and exhausted and worn as if he’d been through a battle. Then his lips twitched. “I’ll think of something good for both of us.”

She was instantly intrigued and rolled over until she was draped on top of him. “What are thinking? Anything good?”

He narrowed his eyes and raised his eyebrows. “You’ll find out eventually,” he said snidely.

“Bastard,” she muttered. “Indulging in petty spite just because I wouldn’t tell you that...”

“That what?” His body tensed up beside her.

She sniffed, panicking a little over how close she'd come to slipping and saying what she was now stubbornly determined not to say first. Thinking quickly, she rephrased, "Just because I'm not swooning over your victory."

He smiled in tired amusement, the intensity fading once more. "It was quite a victory, wasn't it?"

"Pompous, bloody arse," she mumbled, exaggerating an accent vaguely similar to his.

He choked on a laugh.

Then she smiled fondly. "It was an amazing victory. No one would ever believe me if I told them."

He seemed to appreciate her

praise because his eyes grew soft. His voice, however, was typically smug as he added, “One might almost say it was worthy of a sex god.”

“While I certainly appreciate his occasional appearance, I’ve never really wanted the sex god.” She put her hand on his pounding heart and spoke words that were as close to the truth as she was willing to voice right now.

Said, “All I’ve ever wanted was the man.”

The Aftermath

They lay in limp, replete satisfaction for a while. But eventually Amy began to feel too icky, so she got up and limped to the bathroom. She turned on the shower and stepped under the hot spray.

The water felt incredible, invigorating, and deliciously indulgent.

She'd rinsed off and started soaping up when the curtain opened and Owen appeared. He gave her a nonchalant quirk of his lips and stepped under the shower with her.

“Don't hog all the water,” she grumbled, gently pushing him away from where he'd been blocking some of the

spray.

He chuckled and didn't resist her relocation of his body. Just grabbed the soap and started lathering up himself.

She was checking out the red marks on her hips and thighs, where she knew she'd have bruises in the morning, when Owen noticed her scrutiny.

"Did I hurt you?" he demanded, moving her hands away so he could look too.

"Don't get excited. Just a few bruises."

He frowned deeply. "You should have told me—"

"Don't be stupid, Owen. You didn't hurt me. We just made love. A lot.

There tends to be evidence on one's body." She blushed a little—to her annoyance—at saying “made love” rather than “have sex,” which was the way they normally referred to their carnal activities.

But she didn't regret saying it.

It was true. She knew it now.

His wet face still looked concerned as he turned her around and scrutinized every scratch, bruise, and mark on her body.

“I've got fair skin,” she said eventually, although she was touched by his obvious protectiveness. “Things show up more.”

“I suppose,” he agreed, his face

relaxing. Then a familiar heat flickered in his eyes.

“Don’t say it. I can see what you’re thinking. Some sort of caveman impulse it starting to emerge at seeing how you’ve marked me.”

He gave her a teasing growl and pulled her into a kiss.

She kissed him back leisurely, too worn out to be passionate or sexy. And then she sighed in pleasure as Owen pulled away, turned her around so that her back was to him, and started to give her a backrub.

She let him massage her neck and shoulders, closing her eyes and moaning softly as her sore muscles loosened up. Then she relaxed even more as he began

to shampoo her hair, his strong fingers against her scalp both sensual and soothing.

When he'd rinsed the shampoo from her hair, Amy turned around, prepared to give him the same treatment. But he didn't let her. Without a word, he just pulled her into an embrace.

They hugged for a long time, their wet skin slipping against each other's as the water pounded down on them.

Finally, Amy looked up at Owen's familiar face. "Thanks," she whispered.

"For what?"

She just smiled and reached up to press a kiss on his chin.

Out of habit more than anything

else, she glanced down toward his groin. He usually got hard when they showered together, although—had she thought about it—Amy would have known better to expect any physical response at the moment.

“Uh,” Owen began dryly, following her gaze to his lack of erection. “I hope you weren’t getting your hopes up.”

Amy laughed and slid one of her hands down to fondle his soft cock. “Nope. I’d already told you—remember?—there’s no way we’re having sex again this weekend.”

“Good. Because, no matter how nicely you touch it, it’s not going to be doing anything for a while.”

Repressing her giggles, Amy let him slip out of her fingers.

She wanted to hug Owen again. Wanted to squeeze him with all her might. Never wanted to let him go.

“I’m getting out,” she said at last, her voice changing back to normal. “Did you want to stay in here any longer?”

Owen shook his head and turned off the water. “No. I’m done.”

Stepping out and reaching for a thick, soft towel, Amy started to dry herself off. “I’m not sure how long I can stand up. I’m going to bed, and I’m not planning to move for a really long time.”

“Sounds like a good idea to me. We’ve got leftover Thai food from last

night. We can have that later.”

And that was what did it. His dry, prosaic comment about dinner.

Amy felt a wave of irresistible emotion rise up in her chest—made up of tenderness, familiarity, need, and absolute trust—and there was no way she could hold it back anymore.

She knew how she felt. Knew how he felt.

And it was stupid that both of them were still hesitant about saying it.

So she stopped towel-drying her hair and let the damp towel fall to the floor. Stood in the middle of the bathroom naked and told Owen, “I love you.”

Owen had been drying his legs, but he froze at her words. Naked, bent-over, and staring at her in astonishment, he looked as undignified as she'd ever seen him.

She hid a smile, not even nervous now that she'd finally said the words. "Did you know that?"

Owen's mouth fell open, and he finally managed to straighten up. It took him a moment, but he recovered enough to say in a semblance of his characteristic, ironic voice. "I was hoping maybe you did."

He was trying to act cool, but she could see both hot excitement and shattering relief, pulsing just beneath the surface of his composed face.

Amy reached for her bathrobe and pulled it on over her shoulders. She was feeling almost giddy, but she tried to hold herself back from dancing a jig of pure exhilaration. “Well, I do.” She held her breath to hear his response.

He didn’t answer immediately. He just kept staring at her with a blaze of joy in his blue eyes.

Finally, Amy frowned at him in annoyance. She wasn’t afraid of his not returning her feelings, but she certainly didn’t want to have her declaration left hanging in the air. “Well?” she demanded.

Finally, he broke into warm chuckles. “I love you too.”

Her whole body relaxed into a

near slump at hearing the words at last. “I don’t know what we’re going to do when you go back to London, but maybe we can work something out.”

His smile deepened. “I’m going to talk to my supervisor on Monday. Maybe I don’t have to go back.”

She gasped. “What?”

He arched his eyebrows. “They like me, you know. I think they might be able to find a longer-term position here for me.”

“You’d stay here?” Her voice broke on the last word.

“Of course.” He was frowning at her now, looking a little confused. “Didn’t we just admit we love each

other? I'd really rather not live on separate continents."

"But I thought..." She trailed off, so blown away she could barely speak. "Thank you."

He gave a half shrug. "I love you *a lot*. I thought you understood that."

"I do. I mean... Me too." She felt like she might cry again. Or maybe collapse to the floor. "Why didn't you say so before?"

His smile was soft and fond now. "I was waiting for you."

She straightened up suddenly with a sharp inhale. "What? What do you mean?"

"I was waiting for you. I was

trying to give you what you wanted and not pressure you into more. Until you were ready.”

“But...” Her mind whirled, trying to understand the last months of their relationship through this piece of information. “For how long?”

“For a while.” He stepped over and pulled her bathrobe closed more tightly. “You were a lot slower than I was.”

She sucked in another gasp. “Are you trying to imply that you beat me somehow because you figured out you loved me first?”

He laughed and pulled her into a tight hug. “Of course, I beat you, love.”

She was nearly strangling on a bizarre mingling of outrage and delight. She finally gave up and dissolved into half-laughter and half-tears.

When she raised her head, she was so happy and so exhausted she could barely support herself. “Do you think we can we go to bed now?”

“Sounds good to me.”

They returned to the bedroom and crawled into bed together. There, they shared a silly, fatuous embrace under the covers.

Amy really was exhausted after a long, draining, and emotional afternoon. Which was the only excuse for what happened next.

Owen had just pulled her backward into his arms so that he was spooning her from behind. His body felt warm and strong and solid, and the stressful uncertainty about their relationship was finally, blissfully ended.

She felt so full and happy that her eyes began to burn, and she choked on a few happy sobs.

“You aren’t crying, are you?” Owen held her tighter, even though his voice was both wry and aggrieved.

“Nope,” she lied.

“Good. Because, after the afternoon I’ve just had, that would be more than I could handle.”

“No crying here,” she snuffled.
“I’m just happy and ready for a nap.”

“Me too.”

Amy smiled.

“On both fronts,” he added, gently nuzzling her ear.

She choked up again—since he was letting her know, in his own Owen-like way, that he was as happy as she was.

Since he was clearly in an affection mood, Amy asked, “So what’s your fantasy?”

Owen cleared his throat.

“Well?” she demanded, curiosity buzzing through her chest. “You aren’t going to tell me?”

He didn't answer immediately. In fact, Amy was starting to resign herself to the fact that he wasn't going to spill his secret when he finally admitted, "To tell you the truth, it just happened."

Amy was really tired, and that might explain her slowness. "Oh. You mean you'd had a fantasy about making me come seven times."

His tone sounded like he was rolling his eyes as he spoke. "Not that."

Amy thought for a moment. Realized what had just happened, how their relationship—how everything—had just changed. "Oh."

Evidently, his deepest fantasy had been the same one that she'd had.

She felt such a thrill at the knowledge that she had to hug something. Since he was spooning her, the only part of him she could reach were his forearms, so she grabbed them and squeezed them to her chest.

But all she said was, “That’s pretty sappy. But at least it saves me the trouble of fulfilling some weird, creepy sexual fantasy.”

“Oh, no. I’m sure I’ll think of something else. I won’t be fair and square, after all.”

Amy laughed softly and hugged his forearms to her chest again. She was actually looking forward to whatever fantasy Owen managed to conjure up.

They were silent for a long time,

until Amy had a random thought.

She giggled out of the blue at the thought and turned her head to look at him over her shoulder.

Owen, who was still awake, eyed her warily. “What are you laughing about?” he asked, in a decidedly suspicious voice.

“Nothing.” She pulled up one of his hands so she could kiss it. “I was just thinking that I was totally wrongheaded about hesitating in the whole saying ‘I love you’ thing.”

“Okay. But why exactly does that make you so happy?”

“Well, you might think you beat me to the love-realization thing, but it

really takes far more strength and courage to confess your feelings first.”

He narrowed his eyes. “So?”

“So that means I won after all.”

About the Author

Claire has been writing romance novels since she was twelve years old. She has a PhD in British literature and, when she's not writing, she teaches English at the university level.

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